

A JOURNEY FROM CHESTERFIELD INLET TO GREAT SLAVE LAKE, 1898-9.*

By DAVID T. HANBURY.

WITH the object in view of crossing and exploring that portion of the Barren Northland of Canada which lies between the head of Chesterfield inlet and Great Slave lake, I left Winnipeg by first open water in the early part of May, 1898. The starting-point for this journey was Fort Churchill, on the west coast of Hudson bay, which was reached on July 6, after an easy canoe journey *via* Norway House, Oxford House, and York Factory. To my disgust, and very much to my surprise, I now learnt that it would not be possible to start north by open water until July 20, the earliest date, in average years, when navigation opens on Hudson bay. Two Cree lads, whom I had engaged at Oxford House to accompany me on the journey, and who had gone through the farce of signing contracts to remain in my service faithfully for the period of one year, now pleaded sickness as an excuse for wishing to return to their homes. The whole way along, I knew very well that by every one we met they had been dissuaded from undertaking the journey. Pictures of hordes of cannibal Eskimo devouring raw human flesh had been placed vividly before their imaginations by other Indians, one and all of whom have a dread of approaching "Husky" or Eskimo land. The lads were finally so overcome with horror and dismay at the mere prospect of getting anywhere near such terrible savages as the Eskimo, that I fancy they really were sick from sheer fright. Anyway, men in this condition would be of little service to me. The contract was off, and they returned in a hurry to their people at Oxford House. The Hudson Bay trading boat was to start north for Marble island about July 20. An average trip would take ten days. This would have landed me within 60 miles of the entrance to Chesterfield inlet about August 1—too late in the season, in my judgment, to commence a long journey into an altogether unexplored country. After due consideration, I decided to postpone the journey, and content myself with taking up the canoe, and leaving it in cache near Marble island till the following spring, for I intended to leave Churchill in the spring, and haul up as far as possible on the ice with dogs and sleighs.

The short summer was passed in taking a run up in the Company's trading boat, caching the canoe near Marble island, and in learning as much about the Eskimo—their language and the country to the north—as my time permitted. At the same time I managed to secure from them two trains of fine Eskimo dogs, as it now became necessary for me to take the winter trip to Winnipeg in order to refit and complete my outfit. Before leaving, arrangements were made for Eskimo (or

* Map, p. 140.

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