

The Reindeer Industry in Canada

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TOWARDS the end of October, 1921, there was landed at Amadjuak, Baffin Island, a herd of domesticated Norwegian reindeer. The shipment was made by the Hudson's Bay Reindeer Company, and marks the beginning of an enterprise worthy of the traditions of the great company of "Gentlemen Adventurers" who have figured so prominently in Canadian history and development for two hundred and fifty years.

Further importations of reindeer are expected to follow, the plans of the company being to establish reindeer depots at various points in the northern territories of Canada, and to develop an animal industry which will provide the means of subsistence to the native population and a new and increasing source of meat supply for southern markets.

Identical with the cariboo species, the reindeer does not figure in the popular mind as a domesticated animal and, in this country particularly, is regarded more or less as a wild creature to be hunted and shot down for food by prospectors, trappers, hunters, and explorers or as trophy for the man with a rifle who has just the desire to kill. Indigenous to this country, the cariboo at one time inhabited the wooded swamps from Newfoundland to the Pacific Coast. Further north the arctic variety roamed in vast herds over the barren lands and the territories in Canada and Alaska north of the tree line. But in recent years reports of the failing numbers of the cariboo, and in many districts their complete disappearance, have come in from all quarters, from Esquimo and Indian tribes and experienced hunters alike. It would appear that the story of the vanishing buffalo and the starving Indians is to repeat itself with the cariboo and the northern tribes.

In northern Europe and Asia the Laplanders and tribes of Mongolian descent, as far back as their history can be traced, have lived on the native reindeer. These animals have furnished them with meat and milk, skins and clothing, with the means of transportation and the material for barter and exchange—in fact with practically all that was needed in their simple nomadic style of life. For ages past these people have been domesticating wild deer and raising herds of trained animals. But with the fringe of civilization penetrating their territories, with the advent of missionaries, traders, tourists, collectors, and sportsmen, and with the accompanying ruthless slaughter of reindeer, the Laplanders saw their means of self-support and existence threatened. Realizing the danger in time, they built up their domesticated herds and firmly established their one and only industry. They now have reindeer in plenty for their own needs and export; and they furnish many of the Scandinavian and Russian cities with reindeer meat, which commands a price about equal with that of the best beef. To one not

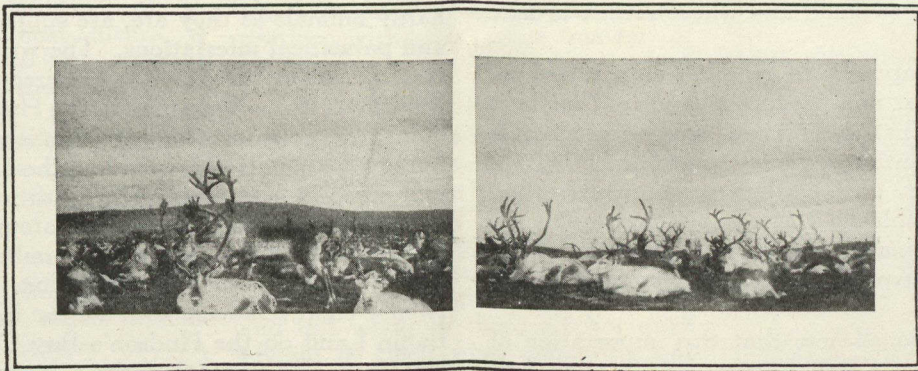
born to it, the Lappish life seems to be a hard one. But these people are of a hardy race and they love their mountainous plateaux, the great tundras, and the open life, whether it be in the treeless, snowy wastes of winter, when for three months the sun does not appear above the horizon, or during their sojourn on the fjord islands through the brief spring and the summer months of the midnight sun.

In April the flocks are brought from the interior of the coastal regions, and in many cases on to the islands. The deer enjoy the salt water and a swim of two miles or more across one of the fjords. They are carefully tended during the fawning season, and remain on the islands through the summer months to escape the plague of mosquitoes—the "grey terror" of Lapland—and grow fat.

A cold rainy season is best for the deer. There is then an abundance of the moss on which the animals feed and thrive so well, and in September when the return journey to the winter ranges in the interior is commenced, they should be in a sleek and well-rounded off condition

with a slab of back-fat which will be needed and used up during the long, lean months of winter. It is said that a full-grown male deer should have in September a slab of back-fat three inches or more in thickness.

In summer the Laps move with pack-reindeer; but in the winter time, when most of the overland travel and work is carried on, sledge-reindeer are used entirely. The flocks are then concentrated in the vicinity of the Lap villages, and the best and strongest male animals are broken to the harness. The sledge, called a pulka, is made of wood and shaped like a little narrow boat with pointed bow and square stern and with a rounded and keel-like bottom. It is usually made rather less than seven feet in length, though some measure up to nine feet, and is just wide enough for one person to sit in. A good draught reindeer will draw a load of from 250 to 300 pounds weight according to the condition of the snow. Winter transport and communication between the widely separated Lappish communities, to and from the coast with market produce and winter supplies across Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, and Russian Lapland, and the carrying of the overland mails, is done entirely with reindeer. The usual custom is to form a transport column of reindeer and pulka tied together in a single file. This is called a "radio." On October 1 of last year, after the first heavy snowfall, the writer met several of these "radio" proceeding from the coast to the interior with the first loads of winter supplies. The snow was soft and the going slow and difficult. But when the snow is packed hard, travel is easy and rapid, and it is possible to cover 65 to 70 miles a day. A great advantage of reindeer transport is that it is seldom necessary to carry food for the animals. They find it for themselves at the halting places en route, digging



Reindeer in Canada's North Land