

C H A P. I.

Of the Northern Part of the BRITISH AMERICAN Dominions, particularly of the Countries bordering on HUDSON'S-BAY; with the Islands of NEW-FOUNDLAND, CAPE BRETON, and St. JOHN.

S E C T. I.

Of the Countries bordering on Hudson's-bay; a particular Account of the Climate, Soil, Vegetables, and Minerals; with a Description of the Beaver.

THE most northern part of America subject to the English, particularly the countries bordering on Hudson's-bay, which are situated between the fiftieth and seventieth degree of north latitude, and extend between the fifty-first and one hundredth degree of west longitude, including Hudson's-bay; are bounded on the north by unknown lands and seas about the pole, on the east by the Atlantic ocean, on the south by the Gulph of St. Lawrence and Canada, and on the west by unknown lands. Were we to extend the country claimed by Great Britain as far as our mariners have discovered to the north, we might stretch it to eighty-one degrees thirty minutes north latitude; for so far captain Hudson and captain Baffin have sailed, and gave their names to the bays so called; but we are not solicitous to extend the bounds of the countries subject to Britain to regions where no Briton has ever settled, and which we have neither purchased nor conquered.

The knowledge we have obtained of these countries is owing to the repeated attempts that have been made to discover a north-west passage to the East Indies. But though these countries, which extend sixteen hundred miles in length, are claimed by Great Britain, and distinguished by English names, as the east coast by that of New Britain, and the west by that of New North Wales and New South Wales; yet very little advantage has been made of them, except by the Hudson's-bay company, who have several settlements on the coast of Hudson's-bay, and therefore an accurate and distinct account of them cannot be expected. With respect to the climate we shall give some account of it from Mr. Ellis, who sailed thither in 1746, and wintered in the country on the west side of the Bay.

This gentleman wintered in a creek about five miles above York Fort, in the fifty seventh degree thirty minutes latitude, a situation so far to the south, that the weather might be supposed to be tolerable; but fearing that they might be froze to death in their ships, they built a house of thick pieces of timber, with the spaces between stuffed with moss, and plastered over with clay: the door was low and small, the fire-place was in the middle, and over it a chimney to let out the smoke. It was placed on an eminence surrounded with trees; about a hundred and fifty yards from the front was a handsome baton of water, called the Beaver-creek; and they were protected from the north and north-east winds by thick and tall woods. On the second of November the cold was so intense, that all the bottled beer was froze solid, though packed up in tow near a good fire; and on the sixth the cold became insupportable abroad. About this time they put on their winter-dress, which consisted of a robe of beaver-skins that reached to their heels, two waistcoats under it, a cap and mittens of the same lined with flannel, a pair of Indian stockings over their yarn ones, with shoes of soft tanned moose or elk-skin, under which they wore two or three pair of blanket or thick duffal socks; and a pair of snow-shoes about five feet long and eighteen inches wide, to prevent their sinking in the snow, completed their dress. This, with some alterations, is the garb of the Indians, who have taught it the English. They usually put at least an horse-load of wood at a time into their stove, which was built of bricks six feet long, two wide, and three high. When the wood was near

burnt they beat off the embers, threw out the brands, and then stopped up the top of the chimney. This caused a sulphureous suffocating smell, and so great a heat, that, notwithstanding the severity of the weather, they often sweat; yet if a door or window was but opened, the cold air rushed in with great fury, turning the inclosed vapours into small snow; nor could all the heat they could raise keep the windows, the sides, and ceiling, free from ice: those whose bed-cloaths touched the wall were generally froze fast to it in the morning, and their breath settled in a white hoar frost upon the blankets. This happened soon after the fire went out. As the house cooled, the sap that had been thawed in the timbers with the heat froze, splitting the wood in cracks, with a noise resembling the report of a musket.

No liquid can here withstand the cold; brandy, and even spirits of wine, froze; but the latter only to a consistence like oil. All liquors under the proof of common spirits became perfectly solid, and burst the vessels that contained them, whether they were of wood, tin, or even copper. The ice in the river was above eight feet thick, and they could keep their provisions sweet as long as they pleased, without the assistance of salt; for their game froze the instant it was killed. The hairs, rabbits, and partridges, which in summer are brown and grey, change in winter to white. Every animal is here furnished by nature with extraordinary furs, to resist the cold, which fall off as the warm weather returns; and even this is the case with the dogs and cats brought hither from Europe. If the men touched iron, or any other solid surface, their fingers were froze fast to it; or if in drinking a dram of brandy out of a glass, they touched it with their tongue or lips, in pulling it away the skin was left upon it. They buried their beer twelve feet deep in the ground, on a bed of willow and grass, both under and over it; and then covered it twelve feet deep with a soapy earth; yet some of the casks of small beer next to the sides were frozen, and the strong iron-bound casks burst, though the spirituous part remained fluid in the heart of the ice, and was strong; but the ice, on being melted, tasted quite vapid; other casks were not burst.

From this account of the severity of the winter one would imagine, that it must be extremely uncomfortable, and its inhabitants very unhappy; but this is far from being the case, for though the weather is cold, they have abundance of furs to shelter them from its violence, and many other conveniences that in some measure put them on a level with those who live in a milder climate, and however extraordinary it may appear, there are Englishmen who have lived in the company's settlements for some years, who prefer that country to any other.

There are here frequently seen parhelia or mock suns, and halos about the sun and moon, which are very luminous, and beautifully tinged with all the colours of the rainbow. Our author observes, that he has seen six of these parhelia at a time. The true sun also rises and sets with a large cone of yellow light perpendicular to it; and no sooner does it disappear than the aurora borealis spreads a thousand different lights and colours over the whole concave of the sky, with such resplendent beauty, that even the full moon does not efface their lustre, though they are more apparent when she does not shine; for then one may distinctly read by them, and the shadows of objects are seen upon the snow tending to the south-east. The stars seem to burn with a fiery red, especially those near the horizon.

In the southern parts of this country the soil is fertile, the surface being a loose dark mould, under which are layers