

In High Latitudes.

Everyone, in Canada at least, has read Lord Dufferin's "Letters from High Latitudes," which made me familiar with his name and caused us to admire him as a graceful writer, long before he came among us as a Governor-General, and gave us occasion to admire those other traits of character, which, in the capacity of author, he had no opportunity of displaying. It is not the intention of the writer to review Lord Dufferin's book, but thinking that the readers of the *Gazette* would be interested in the account of a much earlier voyage to the same region, this article will be a resumé of a paper read before the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec by Dr. Douglas, who, in the year 1818, went as surgeon of a whaler, to the same seas which Lord Dufferin in the "Foam" visited in 1856.

On the 13th of March, 1818, the whaler "Trafalgar," Damatt, commander, sailed from Hull to penetrate to the whaling grounds, which were then far within the Arctic circle. On board was a crew of thirty-six men. "After having mustered them, the King's officers paid over the bounty of £300, and exempted the dutiable stores on board from the excise, and on their part, the owners engaged to carry and man seven boats carrying seven men each, the captain filling up the crew by the addition of 18 Shetlanders, when they arrived at Lerwick, seven days after leaving Hull. While here the ship was prepared for the hardships she was to undergo: royal masts were struck, studding-booms and gaff-topsails were added to her ordinary rigging, so that she could be handled by a few men when in the ice, and most significant of her future occupation, the "crow's nest," to protect the lookout when in high latitudes, was being prepared; when it was finished he says it looked very nice and cosy, but to landsmen the cosiness of a contrivance to sit on the top of the mainmast might not appear so obvious as to the writer. Here, too, while waiting for a fair wind, they had forced on their attention the dangers of their undertaking. The "Prescott," whaler, in attempting to beat out, went ashore in Brassia Sound and was totally wrecked.

On Sunday, the 1st of April, they started North with a fair wind, which held until the 7th; next day it blew a hurricane, but the "Trafalgar" staggered on until on Good Friday, the 9th, they fell in for the first time with ice,—at first only thin sheets, called by the sailors "pancakes," but gradually increasing in thickness as they "bored" into it, until they stopped at night among cakes too thick to allow of farther progress. At this time they were 72° N., but entangled in the ice, and the gale continuing with a heavy swell on, the ship laboured so hard, and was in such danger from beating against the ice, that on the 11th they beat out to sea to prevent her being crushed. About noon the sky cleared, and they found themselves close in to the island of Jan Mayen, discovered, according to Lord Dufferin, by Fotherby in 1614, but as other authorities say, by Jan Mayen, a Dutchman, in 1611. Lord Dufferin thus describes his approach to it: "A few minutes more, and slowly, silently, in a manner you could take no count of, its dusky hue first deepened to a violet tinge, then gradually lighting displayed a long line of coast—in reality, but the roots of Beerenberg—dyed of the darkest purple, while, obedient to a common impulse, the clouds that wrapt its summit gently disengaged themselves, and left the mountain standing in all the magnificence of its 6,870 feet girdled by a single zone of pearl vapour, from underneath whose floating folds seven enormous glaciers rolled down into the sea. Nature seemed to have turned scene-shifter, so artfully were the phases of this glorious spectacle successively developed. The glaciers were quite an unexpected element of beauty. Imagine a mighty river of as great a volume as the Thames—started down the side of a mountain—bursting over every impediment—whirled into a thousand eddies—tumbling and raging on from ledge to ledge in quivering cataracts of foam—then suddenly struck rigid by a power so instantaneous in its action, that even the froth and fleeting wreaths of spray have stiffened to the immutability of sculpture.

The "Trafalgar" was in search of whales, not of the picturesque, and before nightfall stood away from the dangerous vicinity of the island. The writer makes an allusion to the fate of the unfortunate Dutch sailors, seven in number, who in 1633, attempted to winter on Jan Mayen. Lord Dufferin gives a short sketch of how they passed the time, until about the 30th of April, more than a fortnight later in the season than when the "Trafalgar" was off its coasts, the last man gives way under the rigours of its inhospitable winter.

Three days later a gale from the N. E. drives the good ship two degrees southward, but on the 18th they are up to the island again, in company with some Dutch sealers, and on the 20th she bears away to the North with a good wind, and "boring" through

streams of light ice. On the 25th they are in lat. 76° 43' N., and as they are in the fishing ground, the boats are all ready and a man is stationed in the "crow's nest," but no whales in sight. Unicorns or narwhals, as they are now called (*Monodon Monoceros*), are in sight, but the crew are unsuccessful in their endeavors to harpoon them. They now see the sun during the entire twenty-four hours, but this advantage is counterbalanced by the severe cold. On the 28th they saw their first whale. Boats were sent out, but just as the harpoon was going to strike, it dived and was seen no more. Dr. Douglas adds: "When we saw it make off, I know that several lookers on distinctly broke the third commandment." On the 29th they were off Magdalena Bay, on the coast of Spitzbergen. "No vegetation, nothing but icebergs (glaciers?), bare black rocks, and a background of icy mountains," is how the author describes his impressions of the island. He speaks too of glaciers 1,200 feet high, presenting the same characteristics which Lord Dufferin describes in the passage we have quoted in connection with those of Jan Mayen. Here they are larger. In English Bay, where the "Foam" anchored, Lord Dufferin saw an enormous one 1,500 feet high, ten miles wide, and thirty or thirty-five long! He speaks, too, of another phenomenon: "On the left, a still more extraordinary sight presented itself. A kind of bay glacier actually hung suspended half-way on the hillside, like a tear in the act of rolling down the furrowed cheek of the mountain." Not even the attractions of the awful scenery of these islands, discovered by Barentz in 1596, and visited subsequently by all explorers, could keep our whalers there, and they still held on their course to the North, now through thick ice from which the ship receives severe blows. In it another whale is seen, but after a three hours' chase, is lost. We fancy, had the author been so inclined, he might here repeat his remark about the violation of the third commandment.

On the 1st of May the ship was hailed from immediately beneath her bows, and a moment afterwards Neptune, accompanied by his consort Amphitrite, came on board. They were received with due honours by the crew, and drawn on a gun-carriage to the stern; there they descended to the "tween-decks" and after a short speech Neptune, assisted by his Tritons, proceeded to initiate all on board who for the first time were then within the Arctic circle. All had to submit, and our author only escaped by using the key of the spirit-room, which, as the thermometer stood at 40° below zero, must have added considerably to the success of the festivities. In the afternoon two whales were lost. A gale from the North, with "insufferable cold," brings down the ice on the ship, and threatens to close her in. Sail is made to escape to the South. They pass a polar bear on the ice, but their minds are so occupied with their own peril that he is not molested. In the evening they think the ship is safe; but the next day they are again in danger of being caught, but again they escape. The only chance was between two huge masses of ice slowly approaching each other. Into the gap she goes, but when nearly through, the pieces catch her stern,—a moment more and she goes free, with the loss of both her quarter-boats, "extremely glad to get off so cheaply." On the 8th they again sailed North in lat. 79° 58m.—lost a whale. They struck a piece of ice, but only started a few planks. A ship in company was not so fortunate, and was seriously damaged. On the 11th they were still in the same neighbourhood, but no whales. The mate and the author visited a Dutch ship, and on leaving, the author with gratitude records, the captain presented them each with a bottle of very excellent gin. Still no whales fall to the lot of our ship, although one or two are taken by some ships in company.

On the 16th they were in lat. 80° 11m. N., and he adds: "The two discovery ships last year only reached nine miles further, being then stopped by the solid coating of ice." These discovery ships were those of Dr. Scoresby's expedition of 1817, in which, as the author states, he only reached about 80° 30m. N. On this expedition he explored Jan Mayen, and discovered a small volcano 1,500 feet high, on the north point of the island, which he named Esk. Two of the men fell overboard about this time, and in his journal for the next day, the author mentions that he had acute inflammation of the lungs. After an immersion in water when the temperature was 40°, it appears to us a wonder that the man was alive at all.

At last on the 20th, after six weeks of disappointment, they capture their first whale. Perhaps their lack of success before this will not be wondered at, when we read that six boats were sent after it, and it was five hours from the time that it was first struck until it finally yielded and was killed. The luck has now turned, and the next day another was killed close to the ship. He dived and ran out 950 fathoms of line; when he came up he was nearly dead. As some of us are fresh from hydrostatics,