

I N T R O D U C T I O N .

THE discovery of a passage to the East Indies and China round the Cape of Good Hope was attended with such important advantages to the Portuguese, who claimed, and for a long time exercised, an exclusive right to that navigation, as to excite a strong desire in other maritime countries of Europe of opening to themselves a communication with those countries by some other means.

The discovery of the American continent, which also owed its rise to the same desire of possessing the riches of the East, appeared at first to be an unsurmountable barrier to those attempts, while the limits of that continent remained unknown. Several eminent Philosophers and Navigators flattered themselves that passages might be found either round its northern or southern extremity, or by the North of Europe and Asia: we find therefore that different expeditions were undertaken by the English, Spaniards, and Dutch, by those different ways. The first, for the discovery of a North West Passage, was made in 1497, by John Cabot, a native of Venice, in a ship belonging to Henry VII. fitted out at Bristol. After him, by the Captains Forbisher, Davis, Weymouth, Hudson, Button, Gibbons, Bylot, Fox, James, Gillam, Middleton, More, Smith, and others. The danger and difficulty attending those that went ~~through the Straights of Magellan, or Cape Horn, to the South, and by Way-gats and Forbisher's Straights, to the North,~~ confined the prospect of any advantageous passage into the Pacific Ocean to the large opening made by Hudson's Bay; but the voyages of James and Fox in the middle of the last century, and of Middleton and Ellis in this, have given little hope of any such passage to be found leading out of that bay. During the endeavours of these later navigators, the Russians, in 1648, Dishneff, Ankudenoff, and Alexeeff sailed out of the River Kolyma; in the years 1734, 1735, 1736, 1737, and 1738, the Lieutenants Moronieff, Prontshiffheff, Malygin, Shuakoff, Offzin, Koskeleff, and others, made unsuccessful attempts from Archangel, and the rivers of Siberia; as did Shalaroff in the years 1761, 1762, and
1764,