

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

It having appeared, from the reports of some of the most intelligent masters of ships employed in the Greenland and Davis' Straits Whale Fisheries, that within these two years past, the Arctic Seas have been clearer of ice than they have been for some centuries; in consequence of this favourable change in these seas, and some other national motives, the British Government resolved to send out four vessels, for the purpose of exploring the Polar Seas, and of deciding, if possible, the long-agitated question—whether a passage exists between the Northern Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, through Behring's Straits? Although the principal object of the expedition was to discover the passage in question, several others, which were deemed important, were intended to be accomplished by it; such as that of finding where the magnetic pole is situated, and observing the difference in the vibrations of the pendulum in high latitudes. The latitudes and longitudes of places hitherto but imperfectly known were to be ascertained; coasts and harbours to be surveyed; and various other experiments and observations to be made, with a view of enlarging our geographical knowledge of the Polar regions. Any other facts which might be in any way useful to science, were to be collected; and, in order that these objects might be properly fulfilled, each of the ships was provided with some of the best instruments that could be constructed, for the purpose of making the necessary observations. As it was expected that Natural History might also benefit by the expedition, a box containing spirits and bottles, was supplied to each ship, from the Royal College of Surgeons, for the purpose of preserving any remarkable objects which might be met with in the course of the voyage.