

## SIR JOHN BARROW.

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Barrow had now completed his fourteenth year, and began seriously to reflect on his future prospects. His parents were very desirous that he should enter into holy orders, and offered, out of their scanty means, to support him as a *sizer* in one of the universities; but he did not think himself suited for that sacred profession, and begged to take his chance a little longer, in the hope that something might turn up to afford him employment more suitable to his feelings. About this time a lady from Liverpool called one day at the cottage, and said, without ceremony, that her husband was Mr. Walker, the proprietor of a large iron foundry in Liverpool; and that, in the course of her visit to the north, he had wished her to look out for an active intelligent youth to superintend the workmen, and keep the accounts of the factory, under the guidance and instruction of one who, from age and infirmity, could not long continue his employment; that the youth would live in the family; and that they had one son, of about ten years of age, who, being of a weakly habit, it was their object to give him instruction at home, at least for some time to come. 'Now,' she said, addressing young Barrow, 'from the character I have heard of you at Ulverstone. I think you would answer our purpose; and if you think that such an appointment would suit you, I will write to my husband on the subject.'

The proposal was not only most flattering, but otherwise welcome to a youth of fourteen, who longed for employment, and who was also desirous of relieving his parents from the expense of maintaining him at home. Accordingly, he was soon domesticated in Mr. Walker's family, where he spent two years in useful and honourable occupation; but the death of his employer was followed by the disposal of the iron foundry to another merchant, and once more Barrow found himself without employment. Just at this time he happened to meet a relative of Mrs. Walker's who was engaged in the Greenland whale-fishery, and who proposed that he should fill up a few months of his leisure time by taking a trip with him to frozen seas; saying that he would be glad to give him a berth in the ship, and that such as his table afforded he should share with him. This kind offer was embraced with eagerness, and shortly after, they embarked in the good ship 'Peggy,' and put to sea.

This northward voyage was full of interest to one possessing so inquisitive a turn of mind as Barrow. The plains of ice on the eastern coast of Greenland, with their immense herds of seals strewed on the surface; the jagged mountains of Spitzbergen, with their lower slopes clothed with lichens and saxifrage; the excitement of a whale chase and capture—such were the outward objects which captivated his attention, while at the same time he pursued the

study of nautical lore both in its practice and theory so successfully, that Captain Potts said another voyage would make him as good a seaman as any in his ship. He further attempted, by way of filling up the long day of perpetual sun, to write a poem on the arctic regions; but very soon discovered that poetry was not his forte: nor were the materials he had to work upon of the most inviting nature to the Muse; 'for,' as he truly says, 'the feats and fates of whales and narwhales, morses, seals, bears, and foxes, mal-monks, burgomasters, and strontjaggers, could afford but rugged materials for blank verse.'

After a few months' absence from England, he returned to his cottage home, bearing with him a couple of the jaw-bones of a whale, which he set up as gateposts to the entrance of a small croft close to his parents' dwelling. Here he was gladly welcomed by many; but from none did he receive a more cordial reception than from his respected master the Revd. Mr. Walker, and his old friend, the *wise man* of the hills, Mr. Gibson. The latter asked a thousand questions about navigating ships in an icy sea; and having ascertained what progress Barrow had made in nautical science, urged him to aim at further advance. 'No young man,' he observed, 'should stop short in any pursuit he undertakes till he has conquered the whole; for, without a profession, as you are, you cannot tell to what good use knowledge of any kind may be applied. Shut up in this retreat, the extent of my knowledge is of a very limited and unproductive kind; but it has been of use to my two sons in London, one of whom stands high in the Bank of England, and the other is manager of Calvert's brewery: it has also been sometimes of use to my neighbours.'

'The good old farmer encouraged me to persevere in my studies, and especially in mathematics, which were a sure foundation for astronomy, and all the rest. I took leave, and thanked him for all his kindness.'

At this time Barrow's mind was much perplexed concerning his future course in life; but he was too manly to indulge in despondency; and it was curious enough that, through one of the sons of this *wise man*, came the first opening of which he felt any desire to avail himself; for, owing to the recommendation of Mr. Gibson of the Bank, he obtained the situation of mathematical teacher in the academy of Dr. James at Greenwich. There he spent between two and three years, afterwards fixing himself in London, where he communicated instruction in mathematics to many persons among the higher classes of society. In the course of the year 1791 he became acquainted with Sir George Staunton, who called on him one day to inquire whether he could bestow a portion of his leisure in instructing his only son, a boy of ten or eleven years of age. To this proposal Barrow gladly acceded. 'I suppose,' said Sir George, 'you are practically acquainted with astronomy, and know the constellations and principal stars by name? I am a great advocate for practical knowledge!' Barrow answer-