

THE DISCOVERY OF THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE.

THE more we learn of the perils and the promise of Arctic navigation, the more unlikely does it appear that future generations will hazard valuable lives and property in the congeries of islands to the north of the American continent. It is possible that further discoveries may demonstrate the usefulness of following up the track of Dr. Kane through Smith's Sound, or—which is more likely—may instigate voyages to the "open sea," by the channel between Greenland and Norway. There may be something to learn there: geography may benefit by navigation of that unexplored region; possibly—who knows?—trade may find a return for consignments thither of ice-ships, furs, and pluck. But it seems as fully proved as any thing can be, that no adequate recompense awaits further expeditions to the scene of the labors of the late British Arctic discovery ships. One more party will probably be sent by the British Government to King William's Land, for the purpose of clearing up finally the mystery which yet overhangs the fate of Sir John Franklin, and his ships, the *Trebus* and *Terror*. The British public—the civilized world—can hardly remain satisfied with the cloudy and partial accounts brought from Fish River by Mr. Rae; and now that a voyage to Boothia is reduced to a mere question of time and endurance, men will not be wanting to pay this merited tribute to the memory of brave Sir John and his gallant companions. With this exception, we see no reason why there should be any more flying in the face of nature by explorations of the God-forsaken and man-forsaken region lying westward of 65°.

On this account, and also from the historical importance of the actual discovery of the northwest passage, some interest attaches to the account of the voyage of Captain McClure in the *Investigator*, now first published—an interest which the tedious and somewhat snobbish narrative of the historiographer, Captain Osborn, does not wholly succeed in extinguishing.

On the 20th January, 1850, the *Investigator* sailed from Plymouth, in company with the *Enterprise*, both bound for the Arctic regions, via Behring's Straits, to resume the search for Sir John Franklin's ships. Sir John Ross had just returned from an unsuccessful search on the side of Baffin's Bay, having been unable to penetrate further westward than Leopold's Island. Two other British expeditions had been equally fruitless. There only remained, in the

opinion of persons best qualified to judge, the chance of penetrating to Banks's Land and the adjoining archipelago, by the way of Behring's Straits. It was to test this chance that the *Investigator* and *Enterprise* were dispatched.

They took six months, in round numbers, to reach the Sandwich Islands, by way of the Horn; took in supplies there, and sailed northward at the very time the Grinnell expedition was clearing Newfoundland. By the close of July the *Investigator* (the *Enterprise* arrived too late, and took no part in the expedition) had safely passed through Behring's Straits, in a dense fog, and in a few days bade adieu to the world in the Arctic Ocean. They met with the first heavy ice early in August, in lat. 72°, and were much enlivened by the sight of the immense herds of walruses basking upon the loose masses. Ferocious-looking as these creatures are, it does not appear that the editors of Captain Cook's voyages are justified in representing them as formidable to man. Their tusks are useless out of the water. Captain McClure seems to have been rather prepossessed in their favor by the affection shown by the mothers for their young, and would not allow them to be shot.

The only chance of making easting enough to gain the scene of operations, was by creeping along the coast, in what Arctic navigators call the *landwater*. This is a narrow lane of water between the shore ice and the heavy sea ice, the latter being so thick as to ground in six, seven, and eight fathoms water. The *Investigator* worked her way into this lane shortly after sighting Cape Lisburne, and jogged on to Cape Barrow, and thence along the northern coast; keeping so close to the shore as to be in constant communication with the Esquimaux. These primitive people the *Investigators* cultivated with considerable success. They were somewhat addicted to stealing. A lady who visited the ship, actually stowed away under her petticoats two iron winch-handles, and an ice-anchor; and while Captain McClure was placing some presents in the right hand of a chief, in token of good-will, with an appropriate admonition, he felt the fellow's left in his pocket. The Esquimaux, however, laughed heartily when they were caught, and so the Englishmen thought best to do the same, and not allow peccadilloes to mar the harmony of their intercourse. It was perhaps well they did; for it was from these Esquimaux that Captain Maguire afterward discovered the traces of the *Investigator*. They told him that a ship had passed that way: when asked to describe her, they were unable; but they remembered that the sailors had given them twisted tobacco. From this simple fact Captain Maguire knew that the vessel must be the *Investigator*, as no other Arctic ship was supplied with negro-head.

After some narrow escapes from the ice, once running aground, and once meeting with a furious rain-storm with thunder and lightning