

CHAPTER FIRST.

ALTHOUGH such a length of time has elapsed since this truly interesting voyage was made, it hardly deserves to be lost sight of, and the only apology that can be offered for its appearance before the public, is that, not being by any means an ordinary one, there are facts connected with it that both the public in general, and the commanders and owners of our whaling fleet, would do well to read—the former, that they may see a little of the dangers and difficulties of the Arctic sailor, and those mentioned latterly that they may profit by the dear-bought experience we gained during the voyage, inasmuch as we trod on new ground, and saw it many ways that others are not privileged to do.

I will commence my narrative by briefly giving the reader the intention of our voyage. We sailed upon what might be called a “roving commission,” our orders being to pass a winter in the Arctic Seas, in some spot (to be left to the discretion of the Captain) where we could command the water late in the autumn and early in the spring, and our locality was to be one frequented by whales. Cumberland Straits had for several years yielded but poor produce, and, in addition to that, was much overrun with American and other vessels. Cognizant of this fact, it was looked upon with a doubtful eye, and put aside to be a “last resource.” The consequence was, we determined, if possible, to pass our winter somewhere in the vicinity of the entrance of Lancaster Sound, with a view of commanding that body of water (always found at the head of Davis’ Straits) known as the “North Water of the Whalers.” Although stationed, however, on the spot, and in the most advantageous position we could find, our efforts were unsuccessful, and our ultimate ends were defeated, as the sequel will show.

It was on the last day of March, 1865, the good ship “Queen,” that had not long arrived from an unsuccessful wintering voyage, sailed for another one in which she was doomed also to share even a more unlucky fate than before. The entrance to the north harbour was crowded with the parents, brothers, sisters, sweethearts, and friends of those on board, who cheered her on as she bounded