

“ At the earliest possible period consistent with the safety of the expedition you will push through the Straits, in order that to demonstrate the earliest date of opening navigation and the time required to pass through the ice, noting carefully all the incidents of the passage.

“ Unless necessity exists for visiting any of the stations, of which you will be advised by the system of signals agreed upon, you will not lose any time in visiting them during your outward voyage.

“ It would be well to delay your homeward voyage through the Straits to as late a period as is consistent with safety and the labour involved in gathering the men and plant of the observing stations, in order to gain whatever data you can as to the condition of the Straits at the latest period of navigation.

“ The observers, the houses and all portable and valuable articles at the stations you will take on board the *Alert* on your return voyage, and bring them with you to Halifax.

“ You will bear in mind that it is the wish of the department to demonstrate as far as possible the navigability of the Straits, for purposes of commerce, in point of time and facility, and anything that will conduce to that end the department relies upon you to do to the limit of the means placed at your disposal.

“ I am, Sir,

“ Your most obedient servant,

“ GEORGE E. FOSTER.”

As you see, Sir, the Government took every pains and every precaution to ascertain the truth and the proper condition of the “ Straits ” during these years. If, on examination of these reports, we find that these “ Straits ” are not navigable I submit it is the highest folly to grant any money towards the building of this road. In making this voyage the spring had every appearance of being favourable, and when they left Halifax it was supposed they would make an early voyage. They say :

“ We commenced this voyage with every hope of making an early and successful passage of Hudson Straits, as the news from Newfoundland was that the ice had left the Labrador coast, and that the season, so far as the movements of the ice were concerned, was an unusually early one. Our subsequent experience showed that certainly, all along the Labrador coast, and to a less extent in Hudson Straits, the season was earlier than last year.”

“ From the 11th to the 19th July the ice covered the Straits from ‘ Emma Island ’ to Cape Digges, and through this 200 miles we worked, every time the ice opened gaining something, if only half a mile. Much of this ice was heavy old ice, and of such a nature that no ordinary steamer which could be used as a freight-carrier, even if strengthened and sheathed for ice, could, in my opinion, have passed through at this time without injury.

“ On leaving harbour of Digges Island on the morning of the 25th the ship was again beset and only got clear on the following morning. After this date we met no ice which would in any way have interfered with navigation.

“ Captain Guy, of the steamer *Arctic*, one of the most powerful of the Dundee whaling fleet, has kindly furnished me with notes, from his experience in Hudson Straits this year, and the following is taken from his communication :—

“ The *Arctic* left St. John’s, Nfld., on 16th May, and proceeded northwards, making the ice at the south side of Cumberland Gulf on 25th May, intending to go into the gulf; the ship was, however, beset about ten miles from Monumental Island, wind being from the eastward, and drove from there around the south side of Resolution Island into Hudson Straits, still fast in the ice, and only got free at the Lower Savage Islands on 2nd June.”

“ Capt. Guy found the S.W. ice extending to the east of Resolution Island and Cape Chidley, about 40 to 50 miles tight, with from 10 to 20 miles of slack beyond that.

“ From the Lower Savage Islands to Ashe Inlet, Capt. Guy says they had no trouble, but the voyage occupied from 2nd to 5th June, and the distance is only 150 miles: we must admit that the progress of the *Arctic* was not very rapid.

“ After leaving Ashe Inlet, Capt. Guy states that he found the ice much heavier, being now from 15 to 20 feet thick; proceeding north-westward, he got up into Fox Channel as far as Cape Queen: here, however, he found an impassable barrier of ice, and tried to cross the channel to the westward: this was also impossible, and so the *Arctic* headed south, watching for a slack place to enter the barrier of ice. From the 20th June to the 25th July, the *Arctic* was steaming between Cape Queen and Charles

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Island, trying to get into Hudson Straits, and only reached the western end of the Straits on 26th July, or five days after the *Alert* had got through and into harbour at Port Laperrière.

“ A little loose ice was met with early on the morning of the 28th, but otherwise there was nothing of interest occurred, and we arrived and anchored in Churchill harbour at 5.15 p.m. on the 29th, having made the run from Cape Southampton in forty-six hours.

“ From 30th July to 3rd August, we were engaged in making a survey of Churchill harbour. A copy of this plan has been forwarded.

“ The harbour at Churchill is formed by the mouth of the Churchill River, which empties itself into Hudson’s Bay at that angle in the coast lying between Cape Churchill and Seal River. Between these points the older rock formations come right down to the sea.

“ We remained here till Friday, the 20th, at 3 a.m., on which day we left for Marble Island, steaming up the western shore of Hudson’s Bay.

“ 22nd. Arrived and anchored in outer harbor at 10 a.m. On the Deadman’s Island I found a letter from Capt. A. P. Benton, of the bark *Wave*, which read as follows:—

“ ‘ MARBLE ISLAND, 1st August, 1886.

“ ‘ Wintered in the outer harbour in company with the *George* and *Mary*. Had a mild winter, but cold and backward spring, the thermometer not reaching 30° till 19th May. Commenced cutting trenches 18th March, but did not get out till 16th day of June. The *G.* and *M.* got out 12th June.

“ ‘ Cruised all over Hudson’s Bay the rest of June and July. Saw only one cow and calf, got her, 145 bris. Spoke *George* and *Mary* 16th July, clean, bound to Repulse Bay; she saw one whale but did not get him.

“ ‘ Welcome full of ice; did not see a whale there. On 16th July the ice extended from Whale Point across to Cape Harding. The whale I saw was on the 2nd day of July; saw nothing in June.

“ ‘ In February scurvy began to come on the crew. First natives came to the ship 21st April; bought one deer, afterwards bought five more deer. In middle of May things looked blue. The 28th May we were sawing ice in nine fathoms of water, and the ice was on the bottom. We used between the two barques nearly forty bomb-lances to blow the bottom of the ice out. The pack was fast to the floe, 1½ miles, ever since January; could not do anything with it. The 1st of June the pack broke off from the end of Deadman’s Island and afterwards we got along quite well, sawing. The ice in the harbour was 7½ feet thick. Nearly one-half of the crew of both vessels were down with the scurvy and the remainder more or less afflicted with it; but we got along quite well after we got out. All are in good health now.

“ ‘ I leave here to-morrow for a short cruise and home.

“ ‘ ANTHONY BENTON,

“ ‘ Master of barque ‘ *Wave*,’ New Bedford, Mass.’

“ September 7th. At 5 p.m. left Port Laperrière for Nottingham Island, steaming dead slow. At 11 p.m. weather rather foggy; met a lot of loose ice, off the edge of which we lay till daylight.

“ September 8th. At daylight sighted Nottingham Island, and at 8 a.m. arrived in Port de Boucherville and anchored. All hands were immediately put to work getting off the stores and taking down the house, the whole work being completed and the ship at sea again at 6 p.m. the same evening.

“ About Nottingham Island there was a good deal of loose ice, which, though nothing to seriously affect navigation, was heavy old ice, and was undoubtedly the advance guard of the pack of old ice coming down from the north, but appearing somewhat earlier than in 1885.

“ September 9th. After leaving Nottingham Island the wind again began to freshen from the eastward, with a rapidly falling barometer; it blew fresh all day of the 9th, and before midnight it was blowing a whole gale. This continued all day.”

I now give the experience of Nottingham Island for 1885–86 :

“ PORT DE BOUCHERVILLE, NOTTINGHAM ISLAND.—ICE RECORD.

“ [September, 1885.]

“ 27th. Ice all round, and has come close to shore to the northward. No open water visible to north-east or east.

“ 28th. Ice formed on the harbour; field ice covering the Straits in every direction, with small spots of open water showing.