

PERSONAL NARRATIVE.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE region which is known on our maps as the Arctic Ocean is inclosed between the northern shores of Asia, Europe, and America. It has an area of about four and a half millions of square miles: its tributary waters exceed those of the Western Atlantic from Hudson's Bay to the Caribbean; and it girds the Pole with an ice-locked coast of nearly three thousand marine leagues: it is a mysterious sea, that has baffled for centuries the research of navigators. One of the more recent attempts to penetrate its recesses will form the subject of this volume.

About the year 1816, the notion of a northwestern passage, which had fallen for a time into the same category with the El Dorado and the Cathay of a less practical era, began to find favor with the British government. The spirit of private enterprise took the same direction. Year after year expedition followed expedition, under commanders of tried gallantry and intelligence. But they all came back without traversing the forbidden channel; bearing contributions, indeed, to our knowledge of its character and aspects, but accumulating proofs also of the hazards of exploring even its barrier.