

It is not proved, by any facts we are in possession of, that the party of white men who arrived with their large boat (the remains of which, with many articles belonging to it have been found) within the estuary of the Great Fish river, and who are said to have perished there, were the only survivors of the crews of the Erebus and Terror, and that no other remnant of the original ships' companies, amounting to about 135 men, took a different route.

And even as to this (known) boat party, it has not been traced back to the ships or to the wrecks from which it was equipped; nor have the ships been sought for at all, though there is much reason to conclude from the nature of the objects brought home by Dr. Rae, and of others seen by Mr. Anderson on Montreal Island and the adjacent shore, that they had been pillaged by the Esquimaux and were not far distant. What secrets may be hidden within those wrecked or stranded ships we know not—what may be buried in the graves of our unhappy countrymen or in caches not yet discovered we have yet to learn. The bodies and the graves which we were told of have not been found; the books (journals) said to be in the hands of the Esquimaux have not been recovered, and thus left in ignorance and darkness with so little obtained and so much yet to learn, can it be said and is it fitting to pronounce that the fate of the expedition is ascertained?

That your Lordships did not consider that this question was resolved by Dr. Rae's reports at the close of 1854, and by the relics which to a certain extent authenticated them, is shewn by your own proceedings when that tragic intelligence arrived, for it was immediately decided that steps must be taken to verify the truth of these reports which could not be accepted as conclusive, and that further intelligence must be sought for. There was but one feeling in the country on this sad occasion. No amount of expense would have been grudged to make a final expedition of search complete, for it was felt that after six long years of failure and disappointment, the clue which we had asked and prayed for was now in our hands, and that England's honour and credit were concerned in holding it fast and following it up till it led to the solution of the mystery.

My Lords, I shrink from recalling the pain and woful disappointment I felt, and which many others felt with me, when the response to this generous excitement in the public mind, and the sole result of your deliberations, was no more than a birch bark canoe expedition down the Great Fish River, confided to the Hudson Bay Company, but unsustained by any naval resources. In vain was it pleaded that a vessel might be sent to co-operate with this river party, who, if they ever reached the sea, could not venture to embark upon it in their frail canoes; and, if this were not granted, that at least a naval officer might accompany and direct the expedition, since it was well known that the Hudson's Bay Company, with all their zeal to accomplish the objects required of them in the most effectual manner, would not be able to supply to it an officer competent to make the indispensable observations for latitude and longitude. To the credit of Dr. Rae and of the Hudson's Bay Company's officers about to be employed, I may observe that he made a similar recommendation, being persuaded that those brave and right minded servants of the company would not hesitate to place themselves under the leadership of an officer in Her Majesty's Navy, provided he were one already tried and distinguished in Arctic service. To add to the original deficiencies of this over-land or river expedition, it failed to secure an interpreter, so that all the information it has brought back from the Esquimaux, and that derived chiefly from a few women, was transmitted only by signs.

Every praise is due to the exertions of the two zealous officers, who, under all these disadvantages, were able to accomplish anything: but it is scarcely to be wondered at if, after a rapid survey of 9 days only, within a very limited district, which did not extend even to King William Island where our fugitive countrymen were first seen, they were compelled by the state of the damaged boats hastily to return, and have thrown no new light upon the history of those whose fate they went to ascertain. Mr. Anderson has been able to confirm the evidences of a large party from the Erebus and Terror having arrived from the sea within the estuary of the Great Fish River; but his negative testimony on other matters, such as the bodies and the graves which were not to be found, tends rather to throw doubt upon than to confirm them.