

tions are now greatly lessened: and there is a strong probability that, at no distant day, the Pole will be reached. Hope begins to beat high, and the passion for Arctic exploration has of late revived with increased intensity.

A glance at a map of the world shows us that there are but three gateways to the Polar Sea, through which its waters mingle with those of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. These are Behring's Strait, Smith's Sound, at the head of Baffin's Bay, and the great opening between Greenland and Nova Zembla. Experience has shown that of these three openings, that through Behring's Strait is the least hopeful for advancing Pole-ward, the heavy polar pack being invariably found to bar all progress north in that direction.

In consequence, of late years, this route has been practically abandoned by Arctic explorers. The favourite route of late has been through the ice-belt to the west of Spitzbergen: and by this gateway ships have approached nearer the Pole than in any other, with the exception of Captain Hall's late voyage in the *Polaris*, by way of Smith's Sound, in which he reached lat.  $82^{\circ} 16'$  N. The Swedish expedition of 1868, in the iron steamer *Sophia*, attained the highest latitude by the Spitzbergen route,—namely,  $81^{\circ} 42'$  N.: and in 1871 Mr. Leigh Smith reached  $81^{\circ} 24'$  N., on the same meridian. By the same route, in 1806, Scoresby reached  $81^{\circ} 30' 19''$  N. These have been the nearest approaches to the Pole: and in every instance, they were arrested by the heavy northern ice-pack. That ships were enabled to penetrate so far, in a peculiarly favourable season, was probably owing to the fact that prevailing winds had broken a great mass off from the main pack and had driven it south very early in the spring, before the main pack began to move, thus leaving a broad open lane which would of course disappear when, later in the season, the main body began to move. This favourable condition of the ice, west of Spitzbergen, is exceptional, and occurs at distant and uncertain intervals. As a general rule, ships are stopped by the ice far short of the high latitudes already named, as having been reached by a few fortunate voyagers.

It is not difficult to discover the reason of vessels being able to attain a higher latitude by sailing up the west side of Spitzbergen rather than the east. The great Polar current, flowing from east to west along the coast of Siberia, sweeps round the north end of