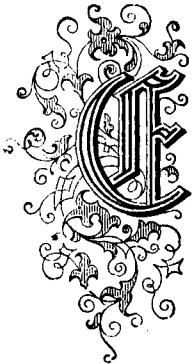


ARCTIC VOYAGES—PAST AND PRESENT.



VER since Columbus sailed across the Atlantic with the hope of discovering a shorter route to the East Indies, progressive navigators have been engaged in attempts to pass round this continent on the north and thus to reach Japan, China, and India. The importance which a short passage to the Orient once possessed is quite apparent, when we consider that commerce with the East has always enriched the nations which have carried it on; for the rich spices and other articles so much prized in Europe, were sold at very high prices, enabling the maritime nations to realize immense profits on the imported products. The Spaniards and Portuguese, three or four centuries ago monopolized this trade by jealously guarding the routes by way of the Cape of Good Hope and Magellan's Strait, which were the only ones available at that period. The other European nations, gradually realizing the importance of eastern trade, sent out expeditions to search for new and shorter ways of reaching China and the East Indies; thus originated the continued series of voyages to the Arctic regions. When the commercial object disappeared, expeditions continued to be made in the interest of science.

As early as 1576 Frobisher, an English navigator sailed across the Atlantic with a view of searching for a northern passage to China. On reaching this continent in the vicinity of Davis' Strait, he landed and collected some specimens of plants and stones which he observed along the shore. When he returned to London the gold-finders declared that some of the ores contained gold, and immediately the greatest enthusiasm was evinced. In the following years fifteen vessels were sent to bring home the precious metal,—but in the end what was supposed to be gold, turned out nothing else than a valueless stone.

A few years later John Davis, an able, scientific seaman, undertook a number of voyages in search of the north-west passage. He sailed up the strait which bears his name and examined the north-west coast of Greenland, which he called "The Land of Desolation." In a tract published by him on his return to England he ably sets forth his arguments in favor of the discovery of a north-west passage.

Whilst the English were engaged on the American side of the Arctic Sea, the Danes, under Willem Barents, were endeavoring to accomplish a north-east passage along the coast of Siberia. Their efforts resulted in the discovery of a great portion of the Russian coast, and in making known the nature of the Polar Sea in this direction; but as their ships were stopped by the ice pack and floes, they failed to make the passage.

Thus we see that before the dawn of the seventeenth century, bold seamen were gradually penetrating the northern regions to east and west, in order to further geographical discovery and, if possible, to find a new and shorter route to the rich oriental countries. The seventeenth century itself was marked by the still more energetic prosecution of the explorations which had been inaugurated by Frobisher, Davis and Barents.

Henry Hudson, in the employ of the Muscovy Company, made a number of voyages, between 1607 and 1610, in which he discovered a great portion of British North America, along with the strait, bay, and river which bears his name. A direct consequence of his explorations on the eastern coast of Greenland, were the flourishing whale fisheries established off Spitzbergen. The name of Baffin is also connected with the discoverers of this period. He sailed up Davis' Strait and into Baffin Bay, which he navigated to its northern extremity, Smith's Sound. In this voyage he made magnetic observations, which, even in our own time, have been utilized in scientific works. During the greater part of this century, private English merchants, as well as com-