

## ARCTIC EXPLORATION.

### REPORT OF THE HYDROGRAPHER OF THE NAVY ON THE PROPOSED ARCTIC EXPEDITION, 1875.

Hydrographic Office, Admiralty.

THE subject of a Government Expedition to examine the unknown area round the North Pole, as detailed in the accompanying papers addressed to the Prime Minister, is brought under their Lordships' notice for consideration.

The details attendant on such an application will be found in a letter dated December 6th, 1873, from Sir Bartle Frere, then President of the Royal Geographical Society, to Mr. Gladstone, and its four enclosures. Letter not printed.

Enclosure marked 1 gives the names of the eminent members of Council of the Royal and the Royal Geographical Societies, together with the British Association for the Advancement of Science, elected to represent by deputation the views of those bodies.

Enclosures 2 and 3 are printed Memoranda, and 4 a M.S. Memorandum (emanating from those members) giving in general, and, on some heads, in minute detail, the grounds for undertaking such an expedition, and the advantages that will result therefrom to science.

A subsequent letter, dated October 13th, 1874, from Sir Henry Rawlinson, President of the Royal Geographical Society, to Mr. Disraeli, draws attention to the success of the Austrian Polar Expedition, which has just returned, and to its achievements; expresses the hope that the above papers are under consideration, and urges despatch if the views of Her Majesty's Government are favourable to such an expedition, on account of securing suitable vessels for next spring. Not printed.

For a clear apprehension of the many details surrounding the question of Arctic exploration, as now urged on Her Majesty's Government in the foregoing papers, it is, perhaps, convenient to examine them under the following heads:—

1. The grounds for renewing Arctic exploration.
2. Objects to be obtained therefrom.
3. Best route to be adopted for such an expedition, if sanctioned.
4. Best means to be employed for a successful issue, and the attendant risks.

1. Under the 1st head, it is shown, in Memorandum 3, pages 12–13, that within the last century (1773–1845) Her Majesty's Government have despatched six scientific expeditions to explore the North Polar area;—that, consequent on the untimely fate of the Franklin Expedition in 1847, no less than 14 Government and private expeditions not exploratory or scientific, but devoted to search alone, proceeded to the Arctic area and returned between 1848 and 1861, making incidentally very large additions to its geography.

On the solution of the fate of Franklin's Expedition in 1859, Great Britain withdrew from the field of Arctic research. Not so other nations; emulous of the knowledge so honourably gained by British enterprise, America, Sweden, Germany, and Austria have from time to time since that period made efforts to reach the North Pole.

The area over which these several exploratory expeditions have been made, and the bearing of their collective results on the present application to Government, will be more clearly seen by reference to the annexed chart, where, by an arrangement of colour, the relative contributions of the several nations to our knowledge of Arctic geography are distinguished.

It will be seen by this chart that America has devoted all her labours to approach the North Pole by way of Smith Sound at the head of Baffin's Bay. These expeditions (two private and one Government), indifferently adapted for the service as events have proved, succeeded in exploring this Sound, and reaching so far as 82° 16' N., tracing beyond that position a continuity of land, several leagues in advance, in the direction of the Pole, with "water sky" and "every sign of the sea being navigable" further north at some period of the open season.

Germany, influenced by the opinions of continental geographers, attacked the Pole by the way of the eastern shore of Greenland; their expedition (1869–70) attained a latitude (77° 0'), but little beyond that reached by the present Sir E. Sabine in 1823.