

THE POLAR SEAS AND SIR JOHN FRANKLIN.

Insuetum per iter gelidas enavit ad Arctos.

SINCE the zealous attempts to recover the Holy Sepulchre, in the middle ages, the Christian world has not been so unanimously agreed on any thing as in the desire to recover Sir John Franklin, dead or alive, from the dread solitudes of death into which he has so fearlessly ventured. Near a score of ships have been sent, at a vast expense, from the two hemispheres, to explore and follow his traces, and satisfy, with whatever results, the universal interest in his fate; and the efforts of the English and Americans are as yet undissuaded by the failure of so many researches. Hearts of oak are still beating hopefully on that Northern quest, and signal guns are still heard booming round the gates of the indistinct and awful Polynya. The history of progress in the direction of the North-West or North-East Passage leaves no doubt at all that, as a sea-route across the world, it is not to be thought of; and that, even if a fortunately daring expedition should succeed in threading its way through the treacherous and hummocky labyrinths of the Polar Sea, nothing but the geographical theory would be the better for it. For all purposes of commerce or intercourse, in fact, the Croker Mountains that Sir John Ross saw, mirageously, one evening after dinner, in 1819, might in reality lie across the opening of Lancaster Sound, tracing "No Thoroughfare" along the formidable and repulsive horizon. Much has been said of the open sea round the Pole; but supposing it exists—and there is no reason to doubt it does—it is a place guarded against navigation by a circle of floes, hummocks, icebergs and so forth, eternally shifting, grinding, groaning and howling, and thus making all exits and entrances matters of desperate uncertainty.

From the first discovery of Northern America by Cabot, the Arctic passage engaged the attention of geographers and pilots who dreamed evermore of a short cut to India—

To Agra and Lahor of Great Mogul,
Down to the Golden Chersonese—

an achievement which, first and last, drew on the adventurous energies of Columbus

in another direction. The progress of Arctic discovery has always been attended by fatalities. The Portuguese brothers, Cortereal, in the beginning of the sixteenth century, passed away from the sight of men into the hyperborean latitudes, whence they returned no more. About half a century later, Sir Hugh Willoughby, looking for China beyond the coast of Labrador, perished with his crews; and his frozen body was found, some years after, by Russian or Eskimo fishermen, with the journal of his voyage crumbling by his side. Thirty years subsequently, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, proceeding to enter the Northern pass, went down off the coast of Newfoundland. Hudson perished among the icebergs in 1610; and now the world is leaning reluctantly to the opinion that the names of Franklin, Fitzjames, and Crozier must be added to this dreary roll of Polar catastrophes.

For a long time after Baffin, Frobisher and Hudson, the map of Arctic America received no new names or delineations. In 1741, Behring, the Russian, discovered the straits that bear his name. In 1771, Hearne, a servant of the Hudson's Bay Company, was the first who saw the Polar Sea flowing round this continent. In 1773, Captain Phipps with the *Seahorse* and *Carcass*, made some explorations in the North. Then came the great wars, in which a little lad who went with Phipps among the icebergs—Horatio Nelson—bore so famous a part, and, for over forty years, the scientific curiosity of man was absorbed in the thunder of the captains and the shouting that agitated the warmer seas of the world. It was not till a few years after the general peace, that Capt. John Ross renewed those more recent explorations which, within living memory, have been pretty continuously followed ever since, and which may be briefly alluded to before speaking of Sir John Franklin's last expedition and those set on foot for his rescue.

In 1818, Captain Ross proceeded to the North, with the ships *Isabella* and the *Alexander*, having under his command James C. Ross, his nephew, W. E. Perry,