

## CHAPTER XX

### BEECHEY ISLAND

On the 25th of June the Forward arrived in sight of Cape Dundas at the north-western extremity of Prince of Wales's Land. There the difficulty of navigating amongst the ice grew greater. The sea is narrower there, and the line made by Crozier, Young, Day, Lowther, and Garret Islands, like a chain of forts before a roadstead, forced the ice-streams to accumulate in this strait. The brig took from the 25th to the 30th of June to make as much way as she would have done in one day under any other circumstances; she stopped, retraced her steps, waiting for a favourable occasion so as not to miss Beechey Island, using a great deal of coal, as the fires were only moderated when she had to halt, but were never put out, so that she might be under pressure day and night. Hatteras knew the extent of his coal provision as well as Shandon, but as he was certain of getting his provision renewed at Beechey Island he would not lose a minute for the sake of economy; he had been much delayed by his forced march southward, and although he had taken the precaution of leaving England before the month of April, he did not find himself more advanced than preceding expeditions had been at the same epoch. On the 30th they sighted Cape Walker at the north-eastern extremity of Prince of Wales's Land; it was the extreme point that Kennedy and Bellot perceived on the 3rd of May, 1852, after an excursion across the whole of North Somerset. Before that, in 1851, Captain Ommaney, of the

Austin expedition, had the good luck to revictual his detachments there. This cape is very high, and remarkable for its reddish-brown colour; from there, when the weather is clear, the view stretches as far as the entrance to Wellington Channel. Towards evening they saw Cape Bellot, separated from Cape Walker by McLeon Bay. Cape Bellot was so named in the presence of the young French officer, for whom the English expedition gave three cheers. At this spot the coast is made of yellowish limestone, presenting a very rugged outline; it is defended by enormous icebergs which the north winds pile up there in a most imposing way. It was soon lost to sight by the Forward as she opened a passage amongst the ice to get to Beechey Island through Barrow Strait. Hatteras resolved to go straight on, and, so as not to be drifted further than the island, scarcely quitted his post during the following days; he often went to the masthead to look out for the most advantageous channels. All that pluck, skill, and genius could do he did while they were crossing the strait. Fortune did not favour him, for the sea is generally more open at this epoch. But at last, by dint of sparing neither his steam, his crew, nor himself, he attained his end.

On the 3rd of July, at 11 o'clock in the morning, the ice-master signalled land to the north. After taking an observation Hatteras recognised Beechey Island, that general meeting-place of Arctic navigators. Almost all ships that adventure in these seas stop there. Franklin wintered there for the first time before getting into Wellington Strait, and Creswell, with Lieutenant McClure, after having cleared 170 miles on the ice, rejoined the Phoenix and

returned to England. The last ship which anchored at Beechey Island before the Forward was the Fox; McClintock revictualled there the 11th of August, 1858, and repaired the habitations and magazines; only two years had elapsed since then, and Hatteras knew all these details. The boatswain's heart beat with emotion at the sight of this island; when he had visited it he was quartermaster on board the Phoenix; Hatteras questioned him about the coast line, the facilities for anchoring, how far they could go inland, &c.; the weather was magnificent, and the temperature kept at 57 degrees.

"Well, Johnson," said the captain, "do you know where you are?"

"Yes, sir, that is Beechey Island; only you must let us get further north--the coast is more easy of access."

"But where are the habitations and the magazines?" said Hatteras.

"Oh, you can't see them till you land; they are sheltered behind those little hills you see yonder."

"And is that where you transported a considerable quantity of provisions?"

"Yes, sir; the Admiralty sent us here in 1853, under the command of Captain Inglefield, with the steamer Phoenix and a transport ship, the Breadalbane, loaded with provisions; we brought enough with us to revictual a whole expedition."

"But the commander of the Fox took a lot of them in 1858," said Hatteras.

"That doesn't matter, sir; there'll be plenty left for you; the cold preserves them wonderfully, and we shall find them as fresh and in as good a state of preservation as the first day."

"What I want is coal," said Hatteras; "I have enough provisions for several years."

"We left more than a thousand tons there, so you can make your mind easy."

"Are we getting near?" said Hatteras, who, telescope in hand, was watching the coast.

"You see that point?" continued Johnson. "When we have doubled it we shall be very near where we drop anchor. It was from that place that we started for England with Lieutenant Creswell and the twelve invalids from the Investigator. We were fortunate enough to bring back McClure's lieutenant, but the officer Bellot, who accompanied us on board the Phoenix, never saw his country again! It is a painful thing to think about. But, captain, I think we ought to drop anchor here."

"Very well," answered Hatteras, and he gave his orders in consequence.

The Forward was in a little bay naturally sheltered on the north, east, and south, and at about a cable's length from the coast.

"Mr. Wall," said Hatteras, "have the long boat got ready to transport the coal on board. I shall land in the pirogue with the doctor and the boatswain. Will you accompany us, Mr. Shandon?"

"As you please," answered Shandon.

A few minutes later the doctor, armed as a sportsman and a savant, took his place in the pirogue along with his companions; in ten minutes they landed on a low and rocky coast.

"Lead the way, Johnson," said Hatteras. "You know it, I suppose?"

"Perfectly, sir; only there's a monument here that I did not expect to find!"

"That!" cried the doctor; "I know what it is; let us go up to it; the stone itself will tell us."

The four men advanced, and the doctor said, after taking off his hat--

"This, my friends, is a monument in memory of Franklin and his companions."

Lady Franklin had, in 1855, confided a black marble tablet to Doctor

Kane, and in 1858 she gave a second to McClintock to be raised on Beechey Island. McClintock accomplished this duty religiously, and placed the stone near a funeral monument erected to the memory of Bellot by Sir John Barrow.

The tablet bore the following inscription:

"TO THE MEMORY OF  
FRANKLIN, CROZIER, FITZ-JAMES,  
AND ALL THEIR VALIANT BRETHREN  
OFFICERS AND FAITHFUL COMPANIONS

who suffered for the cause of science and for their country's glory.

"This stone is erected near the place where they passed their first Arctic winter, and from whence they departed to conquer obstacles or to die.

"It perpetuates the regret of their countrymen and friends who admire them, and the anguish, conquered by Faith, of her who lost in the chief of the expedition the most devoted and most affectionate of husbands.

"It is thus that He led them to the supreme haven where all men take their rest.

"1855."

This stone, on a forlorn coast of these far-off regions, appealed mournfully to the heart; the doctor, in presence of these touching regrets, felt his eyes fill with tears. At the very same place which Franklin and his companions passed full of energy and hope, there only remained a block of marble in remembrance! And notwithstanding this sombre warning of destiny, the *Forward* was going to follow in the track of the *Erebus* and the *Terror*. Hatteras was the first to rouse himself from the perilous contemplation, and quickly climbed a rather steep hill, almost entirely bare of snow.

"Captain," said Johnson, following him, "we shall see the magazines from here."

Shandon and the doctor joined them on the summit. But from there the eye contemplated the vast plains, on which there remained no vestige of a habitation.

"That is singular!" cried the boatswain.

"Well, and where are the magazines?" said Hatteras quickly.

"I don't know--I don't see----" stammered Johnson.

"You have mistaken the way," said the doctor.

"It seemed to me that this was the very place," continued Johnson.

"Well," said Hatteras, impatiently "where are we to go now?"

"We had better go down, for I may be mistaken. I may have forgotten the exact locality in seven years!"

"Especially when the country is so uniformly monotonous!" added the doctor.

"And yet----" murmured Johnson.

Shandon had not spoken a word. After walking for a few minutes, Johnson stopped.

"But no," he cried, "I am not mistaken!"

"Well?" said Hatteras, looking round him.

"Do you see that swell of the ground?" asked the boatswain, pointing to a sort of mound with three distinct swells on it.

"What do you conclude from that?" asked the doctor.

"Those are the three graves of Franklin's sailors. I am sure now that I am not mistaken; the habitations ought to be about a hundred feet from here, and if they are not, they----"



He dared not finish his sentence; Hatteras had rushed forward, a prey to violent despair. There, where the wished-for stores on which he had counted ought to have been, there ruin, pillage and destruction had been before him. Who had done it? Animals would only have attacked the provisions, and there did not remain a single rag from the tent, a piece of wood or iron, and, more terrible still, not a fragment of coal! It was evident that the Esquimaux had learnt the value of these objects from their frequent relations with Europeans; since the departure of the Fox they had fetched everything away, and had not left a trace even of their passage. A slight coating of snow covered the ground. Hatteras was confounded. The doctor looked and shook his head. Shandon still said nothing, but an attentive observer would have noticed his lips curl with a cruel smile. At this moment the men sent by Lieutenant Wall came up; they soon saw the state of affairs. Shandon advanced towards the captain, and said:

"Mr. Hatteras, we need not despair; happily we are near the entrance to Barrow Strait, which will take us back to Baffin's Sea!"

"Mr. Shandon," answered Hatteras, "happily we are near the entrance to Wellington Strait, and that will take us north!"

"But how shall we get along, captain?"

"With the sails, sir. We have two months' firing left, and that is enough for our wintering."

"But allow me to tell you----" added Shandon.

"I will allow you to follow me on board my ship, sir," answered Hatteras, and turning his back on his second, he returned to the brig and shut himself up in his cabin. For the next two days the wind was contrary, and the captain did not show up on deck. The doctor profited by the forced sojourn to go over Beechey Island; he gathered some plants, which the temperature, relatively high, allowed to grow here and there on the rocks that the snow had left, some heaths, a few lichens, a sort of yellow ranunculus, a sort of plant something like sorrel, with wider leaves and more veins, and some pretty vigorous saxifrages. He found the fauna of this country much richer than the flora; he perceived long flocks of geese and cranes going northward, partridges, eider ducks of a bluish black, sandpipers, a sort of wading bird of the scolopax class, northern divers, plungers with very long bodies, numerous ptarmites, a sort of bird very good to eat, dovebies with black bodies, wings spotted with white, feet and beak red as coral; noisy bands of kittiwakes and fat loons with white breasts, represented the ornithology of the island. The doctor was fortunate enough to kill a few grey hares, which had not yet put on their white winter fur, and a blue fox which Dick ran down skilfully. Some bears, evidently accustomed to dread the presence of men, would not allow themselves to be got at, and the seals were extremely timid, doubtless for the same reason as their enemies the bears. The class of articulated animals was represented by a single mosquito, which the doctor caught to his great delight, though not till it had stung

him. As a conchologist he was less favoured, and only found a sort of mussel and some bivalve shells.