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978-1-108-01966-8 - The Voyage of the Prince Albert in Search of Sir John Franklin: A Narrative of Every-Day Life in the Arctic Seas

William Parker Snow

Excerpt

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VOYAGE  
OF  
THE PRINCE ALBERT.

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.—PUBLIC SYMPATHY FOR SIR JOHN FRANKLIN.—MEASURES ADOPTED FOR HIS RELIEF.—AUXILIARY EXPEDITION TO REGENT'S INLET. — THE "PRINCE ALBERT."—NATURE AND OBJECT OF HER VOYAGE.

IF Arctic affairs intensely occupy the public mind at this moment, it is not so much in connection with scientific research and increase of knowledge, as with the feelings and dictates of humanity. Attention to the former is all but obliterated in the absorbing interest called forth by the latter; and, to the honour of human nature, it must be said that this intense interest and sympathy have been proved to exist among all classes, and all kinds of persons. During the past year especially, thousands have been heard, as with

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one voice, urging for relief to be sent to some of their suffering brethren, supposed to be imprisoned in wild and unknown regions around the Northern Pole. With a like generous and noble impulse, hundreds rushed forward, ready to forsake their own loved homes, their domestic comforts, and their usual safe pursuits, eager to join the gallant few chosen to search those desolate and ice-clad seas, in the noble expeditions fitted out by government for that purpose.

But before I enter into any minor details of the voyage, it will be necessary to explain whence this more than usual expression of generous sympathy and noble disinterestedness has proceeded.

In the beginning of the year 1845, it was determined by the government of England, at the suggestion of Sir John Barrow, the great promoter of all arctic discovery, to make another attempt at discovering "an entry from the eastern side of America into the Polar Sea," and thence to proceed, through the straits which divide Asia from the New World, into the Pacific Ocean.

Captain Sir John Franklin, a naval officer previously well known to the world for his adventurous and daring spirit, evinced in two land journeys to the Arctic Seas, was appointed to the command of another expedition, consisting of two ships, "The

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Erebus" and "Terror." Both of these ships had already been engaged on similar service in the Antarctic Ocean; and, one of them, the Terror, had also made a fearful voyage under the command of Captain Back to the northern parts of Hudson's Bay, with a view to further discoveries in that quarter in connection with a north-west passage. On the 19th of May, 1845, both ships sailed from England.

The instructions which Sir John Franklin received were, "to proceed to Baffin Bay, and, as soon as the ice permitted, to enter Lancaster Sound, and proceed westward through Barrow Strait, in the latitude of about  $74\frac{1}{4}^{\circ}$ , until they reached the longitude of Cape Walker, or about  $98^{\circ}$  west. They were then to *use every effort to penetrate southward and westward* towards Behring Strait; and it was in this part that their greatest difficulties were apprehended. If these were proved to be insurmountable, they were next directed to return to Barrow Strait, and proceed northwards by the broad channel between North Devon and Cornwallis' Island, commonly called Wellington Channel, provided it appeared open and clear of ice." In pursuance of these instructions it appears that both vessels made their way together as far as latitude  $74^{\circ} 48'$ , longitude  $66^{\circ} 13' W.$  (a position approaching the middle

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of Baffin Bay, and about 210 miles from the entrance of Lancaster Sound). It was here that they were seen, moored to an iceberg, on the 26th of July, sixty-eight days after their departure from England.

It was not until the beginning of 1848 that anything like anxiety for their fate began to be felt by those most interested in their welfare at home. It was well known that the gallant leader of the expedition had himself intimated that possibly three years might elapse before they could return, and that they might be themselves the first bearers of intelligence concerning them. Nor were the fears of that estimable lady, Lady Franklin, aroused to any alarming extent prior to that period. Then, however, it was deemed necessary that some steps should be at once taken towards ascertaining what had become of Sir John Franklin and his missing companions; and, accordingly, "researches in three different quarters, and by three separate expeditions, were appointed to be undertaken by the government." Lady Franklin, also, with the true devotedness of a wife, offered in that year, from her private means, a reward of 2000*L.*, afterwards increased to 3000*L.*, "or a proportion thereof, according to services rendered, to any ship or ships, which, departing from the usual fishing grounds, might discover, and, if

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needed, afford effectual relief to the missing expedition, or any portion of it."

In the spring of 1848, government despatched two vessels, the "Enterprize" and "Investigator," under the command of that indefatigable arctic voyager Sir James Clark Ross, to discover, if possible, some traces of the lost ones. The result, however, proved a failure as to anything but negative information being gained.

It was, however, deemed possible, and indeed very probable, that, though the land of *North Somerset* had presented no traces of Sir John Franklin or any of his party, the land of *Boothia*, to the southward of, and connected by a neck of land with it, might do so. The arguments brought forward in support of this view of the question were not only sound in themselves, but derived additional strength from the opinions given in its favour by eminent arctic voyagers, as well as from Sir John Franklin's own words, expressed\* some years back, concerning

\* See Geographical Journal, vol. vi. p. 43. Sir John Richardson, also, in giving a report in 1847 concerning the best mode of sending relief to the missing expedition, observes, that it was part of Sir John Franklin's plan, should he fail in being able to get on in other quarters, "to descend Regent's Inlet, and seek the passage along the coast discovered by Messrs. Dease and Simpson."— Vide *Arctic Returns*, 1848, p. 24.

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the best and most likely mode of examining the northern coasts of America.

As the following chapters treat especially of an expedition intended to make a search in that quarter *only*, it may not be amiss to give, at the outset, some account of the precise nature of the objects it had in view.

The object of the expedition was the thorough search of the west coast of Regent Inlet to the bottom of the Gulf of Boothia, together with the western side of Boothia into James Ross Strait, and down to Simpson's Strait. The latter of these formed the passage into Regent's Inlet, which is laid down in the charts given to Sir John Franklin: the existence of interposing land being unknown until the return of Mr. Rae in 1847. Simpson's Strait would, therefore, appear to Sir John Franklin to offer a passage for his boats into Regent's Inlet; and it is believed by many that, if compelled to abandon his ships anywhere in the region S. W. of Cape Walker (to which he would proceed in the first instance), he might make for Regent's Inlet and the stores on Fury Beach. No one who carefully reads the arguments in favour of this expedition, when it was brought before the public eye with the view of obtaining assistance for its funds, can doubt its expediency or even its necessity.

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## OBJECTS OF THE EXPEDITION. 7

It was, therefore, determined by Lady Franklin to have a search of the land of Boothia simultaneously made with the other explorations, and she accordingly purchased the "Prince Albert" from Messrs. White and Co., of Cowes, and sent her to Aberdeen for the requisite fittings and strengthening to be put upon her for the service she was to be employed in. Mr. Wm. Hogarth, of Aberdeen, kindly superintended, as he had done Captain Penny's vessels, this part of the business, and indeed all that related to preparing the vessel for sea. Placing her at once in the hands of Mr. Duthie, the shipwright, she was speedily doubled and fortified for an arctic voyage, according to the same plan as Captain Penny's. Two splendid boats, the one a gutta percha, presented by the Messrs. Searle of Lambeth, and the other a noble mahogany, given by Messrs. White, were attached to her, besides a Halkett's Mackintosh Boat and a smaller kind of boat called a "dingey," sledges, and kites. The Board of Ordnance had the kindness to lend a howitzer and muskets, and to supply rockets, fire-balls, &c., and no expense was spared in furnishing her with everything else considered necessary for the particular service she was to be engaged upon. Provisions of excellent quality and full quantity were placed on board amply sufficient for two years.

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The especial service assigned to the "Prince Albert" was that of conveying a boat expedition to the best starting point for accomplishing the intended search of the land of Boothia and its vicinity; but she was also supplied with the necessary housing, (the same as in all the other ships,) in order to make her a suitable and sufficient shelter during the depth of winter, when neither walking parties nor boats could be despatched.\*

She was, as I have said, fortified in the same manner, and to the same extent, as the vessels of Captain Penny, which were equipped under his own eye. But the fact of the "Prince Albert" being intended, in the first place, simply as a means of transport to Prince Regent's Inlet; and, secondly, as a depot for the boat and travelling parties to fall back upon, must not be lost sight of by the reader.

Captain Forsyth, who had volunteered to command the "Prince Albert," had also the advantage of possessing the written suggestions of Sir E. Parry, Sir James Ross, Captain Beechey, Mr. Barrow, and Captain R. H. King. The wintering places suggested were various: Brentford Bay, Batty Bay, Port Bowen, and even Port Leopold, were severally pro-

\* Port Leopold, too, with its stores and steam launch, was deemed likely to be an excellent refuge in case of extremity.

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## COST OF EQUIPMENT.

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posed as fit places for putting the ship into, and thus forming the starting point. It was decidedly recommended that she should not proceed farther south than Brentford Bay; below which, the ice in Regent's Inlet is usually heavily packed.

And whilst some of the advisers thought a direct course to Simpson's Strait, along either the east or west coast of Boothia, the first and chief object; others considered it preferable to search, in the first instance, the east as well as the west sides of Regent's Inlet, and the passages leading out of it into Hudson's Bay.

Ample scope was thus afforded for the discretionary power necessarily placed in the hands of the commander, whilst it was very evident that instead of only *one*, half a dozen "Prince Alberts" might have been fully employed for the accomplishment of all these different objects.

Here a few words as to the means by which the equipment of the "Prince Albert" was effected, will not be out of place. Many of my readers are aware that Lady Franklin was aided by the subscriptions of her friends, her own funds being insufficient; and in the Appendix will be found a list of the contributors, the sums contributed amounting to about 1500*l*.

Not the least interesting of these names is that of

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the First Lord of the Admiralty, under whose auspices Sir John Franklin's expedition was sent forth—the good Lord Haddington. And I should also mention, that to the munificent donation of Benjamin Smith, Esq., must be added that of kites, constructed upon scientific principles, by which, if properly managed, very considerable propelling power would be applied to the vessels. This gentleman was at infinite pains in the manufacture of these enormous kites, of which he also presented a large number, with the necessary apparatus, to Captain Penny.

It is understood that Lady Franklin sold out of the funds, for the purposes of this expedition, all the money which she could legally touch; and that the remainder of the expenses of the expedition, which is said to have cost between 3000*l.* and 4000*l.*, have been made good by herself.

To this particular vessel, then, did many kind friends and well-wishers of the arctic expedition turn their eyes. By some it was doubted that she would ever be able to perform the voyage she was to undertake. Others, however, with better judgment, avowed their conviction that she was precisely the sort of craft that would answer best in the icy region whither she was bound.

It should have been mentioned that the Admiralty