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John Marshall

Excerpt

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ROYAL NAVAL BIOGRAPHY.

POST-CAPTAINS OF 1822.

(Continued).

—◆—
AVA,
SIR JOHN FRANKLIN, KNT.

Doctor of the Civil Law ; Fellow of the Royal Society, &c. &c. &c.

THIS officer is a brother to the late Sir Willingham Franklin, Knt., one of the Puisne Judges at Madras, and was born at Spilsby, co. Lincoln, in the year 1786. He entered the royal navy, at the age of fourteen years, as midshipman on board the *Polyphemus* 64, Captain (now Admiral) John Lawford, which ship was attached to Lord Nelson's division, and sustained a loss of five men killed and twenty-five wounded, at the daring and successful attack on the Danish line of defence before Copenhagen, April 2d, 1801*. We afterwards find him proceeding to New Holland, in the *Investigator* sloop, Captain Matthew Flinders, under whose command he continued until that vessel, proving unfit for further service, was laid up at Port Jackson, in July, 1803. He was then received as supernumerary master's-mate, on board the *Porpoise* store-ship, Lieutenant (now Captain) Robert Merrick Fowler, with whom he suffered shipwreck on a coral reef, in lat. 22° 11' S. long. 155° 13' E., Aug. 17th following. "His activity and perseverance in assisting to save the stores and provisions on that occasion, were truly praise-

* See Vol. I. pp. 365—371, and *id.* p. 498.

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worthy;” and his subsequent behaviour on board the *Earl Camden*, East Indiaman, where he had the superintendence of the signals in Captain Dance’s celebrated rencontre with Mons Linois, was such as to gain him the warmest commendations. The loss of the *Porpoise*, and the discomfiture of the French squadron, are described in pp. 367—378 of Suppl. Part. II.

Mr. Franklin next joined the *Bellerophon* 74, and “had charge of the signal department, the duties of which he performed with very conspicuous zeal and activity,” at the memorable battle of Trafalgar. The loss then sustained by that always highly distinguished ship amounted, according to the official returns, to 27 officers and men, including her captain (John Cooke) killed, and 123 wounded*; we are informed, however, that at least ten men received wounds, some of a severe nature, who did not report themselves injured. Of about forty persons stationed with Mr. Franklin on the poop, not more than eight escaped unhurt. Among the fortunate few was a veteran sailor, named Christopher Beaty, yeoman of the signals, who, seeing the ensign shot away a third time, mounted the mizen-rigging with the largest union-jack he could lay his hand upon, deliberately stopped the four corners of it, with as much spread as possible, to the shrouds, and regained the deck unhurt, the French riflemen in the tops, and on the poop of *l’Aigle* 74, seeing what he was about, and seemingly in admiration of such daring conduct, having suspended their fire for the few seconds that he remained aloft: this forbearance on the part of the enemy was the more noble, as they had previously picked off every man that appeared before the *Bellerophon*’s mizen-mast.

Mr. Franklin continued in the same ship until Oct. 1807, when he joined the *Bedford* 74, Captain (now Rear-Admiral) James Walker, of which latter he was appointed an acting lieutenant on the 5th of December following: his first commission bears date Feb. 11th, 1808.

* See Vol. II. Part II. p. 969

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The Bedford formed part of the squadron sent, by Sir W. Sidney Smith, to escort the royal family of Portugal from Lisbon to South America, where she was commanded for several months by the late Captain Adam Mackenzie, but latterly by Captain Walker. On her return to Europe, she was attached to the North Sea fleet; and principally employed in the blockade of Flushing, until the peace with France in 1814. She then assisted in escorting the allied sovereigns from Boulogne to England; and afterwards proceeded with the expedition against New Orleans. On the 14th Dec. in the same year, Lieutenant Franklin was slightly wounded, while leading the Bedford's boats to the attack of five large American gun-vessels, stationed in Lac Borgne, the capture of which force has been described at p. 4, *et seq.* of Suppl. Part IV.

The laborious exertions and great privations of the officers and seamen employed with the army during the subsequent operations against New Orleans, very few of whom ever slept one night on board their ships for a period of about seven weeks, have seldom been equalled: an outline of the services they performed is given at p. 637, *et seq.* of our first volume; but it is here necessary to add, that a party under Lieutenant Franklin assisted in cutting a canal across the entire neck of land between the Bayou Catalan and the Mississippi, of sufficient width and depth to admit of boats being brought up from Lac Borgne, for the purpose of transporting a military detachment, with 300 sailors and marines, to the right bank of the river, as a diversion in favor of the main attack upon the enemy's entrenched position. The fatigue undergone, in the prosecution of this work, no words can sufficiently describe; yet it was pursued without repining, and so far effected as to enable boats enough for the conveyance of 600 men to reach their destination: the soil through which the canal was dug being soft, parts of the bank gave way, and, choking up the channel, prevented the heaviest of the boats from getting forward: otherwise it was intended to have pushed over 1400 men. The brilliant result of the dash across the Mississippi, on the morning of

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Jan. 8th, 1815, is stated in our memoir of Captain Rowland Money, C. B., under whom Lieutenant Franklin was then serving, at the head of the Bedford's small arm men.

After the failure of the principal attack upon the enemy's lines, the armament proceeded to Isle Dauphine, where Sir John Lambert, who had succeeded to the command of the army on the fall of Sir Edward Pakenham, addressed the following letter to Vice-Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane :

"The operations on which the two services are engaged being interrupted for the present, and as there is some uncertainty whether they may again be resumed, I wish to take the opportunity, previous to your sailing, of expressing how much the army is indebted to the active co-operations and zealous services of the navy.

"It would be presumption in me to call to your notice the distinguished flag-officers and captains of the fleet under your command; but there are a few individuals of junior rank whose exertions and intelligence have so repeatedly been the admiration of the general and superior officers under whose orders they have been acting on shore, at every service, from the first arrival of the forces under the late Major-General Ross on the coast of America, that I feel I should be deficient in my duty if I did not lay those names before you, in the hope that they may be transmitted by you to my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, sanctioned by your approbation and recommendation for promotion, viz. ; Lieutenants Curzon and Haymes, who have each acted as aide-de-camp to general officers; Lieutenants Fletcher, of H. M. S. Norge; Franklin, of the Bedford; and Foster, of the Asia. Lieutenant Haymes received the last words of the much lamented Major-General Ross, and afterwards was attached to the late Major-General Gibbs. I have the honor to be, &c.

(Signed)

"JOHN LAMBERT."

A copy of this letter was transmitted by Sir Alexander Cochrane to the Admiralty.

Lieutenant Franklin's next appointments were,—Sept. 7th, 1815, to be first of the Forth 40, Captain Sir William Bolton, which ship was paid off after conveying the Duchess d'Angoulême from England to Dieppe;—and, Jan. 14th, 1818, to command the Trent hired brig, under the orders of Captain Edward Buchan, to whom was assigned the task of inquiring into the state of the Polar Sea, to the northward of Spitzbergen, while another expedition, under Captain John

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Ross, was directed to examine the unexplored part of the east coast of North America, within the Arctic circle, and to endeavour to pass along the northern shore of that continent to Behring's Strait.

On his return from the above service, of which an authentic account will be found in our memoir of the officer who conducted it, Lieutenant Franklin volunteered to attempt reaching the North Pole, from the shores of Spitzbergen, by travelling with sledge-boats over the ice, or through any spaces of open water that might occur. The plan which he then suggested was afterwards followed up, in its most essential particulars, by Captain Parry, whose proceedings we have related at pp. 365—374 of Suppl. Part IV.

In the beginning of 1819, Lieutenant Franklin was appointed by Earl Bathurst to the command of an expedition, destined to proceed over land from the shores of Hudson's Bay to the Arctic Ocean, in order to amend the very defective geography of the northern part of North America; but more particularly to ascertain the actual position of the mouth of the Copper mine River, and the exact trending of the shores of the Polar Sea to the eastward of that river. The gentlemen selected by the Admiralty to accompany him were Dr. John Richardson, a naval surgeon, well skilled in natural history, mineralogy, &c.; and Messrs. George Back and Richard Hood, midshipmen; with whom he embarked on board the ship *Prince of Wales*, at Gravesend, May 23d, and, after a narrow escape from being wrecked on Resolution Island, arrived in safety at York Factory, the principal depôt of the Hudson's Bay Company, Aug. 30th, 1819: he was also accompanied thither by two English sailors, and four Orkney boatmen, the latter of whom he had engaged at Stromness, to assist his progress as far as Lake Athabasca.

Having communicated to Mr. Williams, the governor of the Hudson's Bay Company's posts, the objects of the expedition, and that he had been directed to consult with him, and the several district masters, as to the best mode of proceeding, Lieutenant Franklin was gratified by his assurance that every possible assistance should be given to facilitate

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the execution of the service. The following particulars are extracted from the official narratives of the officers engaged in this extremely hazardous undertaking :

“It was suggested in my instructions,” says the commander, “that we might probably secure a schooner at this place, to proceed north as far as Wager Bay; but the vessel alluded to was lying at Moose Factory completely out of repair; independently of which, the route directly to the northward was rendered impracticable by the impossibility of procuring hunters and guides on the coast. The opinions of all the gentlemen (resident at York Factory) were so decidedly in favor of the route by Cumberland House, and through the chain of posts to the Great Slave Lake, that I determined on pursuing it, and immediately communicated my intention to the governor, with a request that he would furnish me with the means of conveyance as speedily as possible. He selected one of the Company’s largest boats for our use on the journey; but he was able to furnish us only with a steersman; and we were obliged to make up the rest of the crew with the men brought from Stromness, and our two attendants, John Hepburn and Samuel Wilks.”

This appears to have been occasioned by the arrival of the Prince of Wales and two other ships from England having given full occupation to the Company’s boatmen, the whole of whom were required to convey the necessary stores to the posts in the interior, before the commencement of winter.

On the 9th of September, our enterprising travellers commenced the laborious ascent of the different rapid streams between York Factory and Cumberland House, a distance by water of about 690 miles, which they were not able to accomplish before the 23d of the following month. The published charts of their route convey so correct a view of the numerous rivers, rapids, portages, and lakes, and the difficulties and impediments which occur in the long river-navigations of North America; and these obstructions have been so minutely detailed by Messrs. Hearne and Mackenzie, that it is unnecessary for us to extract more than one passage relative to them: the little space we can afford will be better appropriated to matters of higher interest.

“The whole of the 2d of October,” says Lieutenant Franklin, “was spent in carrying the cargoes over a portage of 1300 yards in length, and

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n launching the empty boats over three several ridges of rock which obstruct the channel of the White-Fall river, and produce as many cascades. I shall long remember the rude and characteristic wildness of the scenery which surrounded these falls; rocks piled on rocks, hung in rude and shapeless masses over the agitated torrents which swept their bases, whilst the bright and variegated tints of the mosses and lichens, that covered the face of the cliffs, contrasting with the dark green of the pines, which crowned their summits, added both beauty and grandeur to the general effect of the scene. In the afternoon, whilst on my way to superintend the operations of the men, a stratum of loose moss gave way under my feet, and I had the misfortune to slip from the summit of a rock into the river, betwixt two of the falls. My attempts to regain the bank were, for a time, ineffectual, owing to the rocks within my reach having been worn smooth by the action of the water; but after I had been carried a considerable distance down the stream, I caught hold of a willow, by which I held until two gentlemen of the Hudson's Bay Company came in a boat to my assistance. During the night the frost was severe, and at sun-rise, on the 3d, the thermometer stood at 25°."

On his arrival at Cumberland House, which is situated between Pine Island Lake and the Saskatchewan River, Lieutenant Franklin found it impracticable to advance farther by water, before the return of spring; but being soon convinced of the necessity of proceeding, during the winter, into the Athabasca district, the residents of which are best acquainted with the nature and resources of the country to the north of the Great Slave Lake, and from whence alone guides, hunters, and interpreters can be procured, he immediately resolved to set out for Carlton House, Isle à la Crosse, and Fort Chipewyan, where, by his presence, he hoped to prevent delay in the necessary preparations for his ulterior proceedings. The manner in which he performed this long and dreary journey, the following extracts will shew:—

"The general dress of the winter traveller in this region is a *capot*, having a hood to put up under the fur cap in windy weather, or in the woods, to keep the snow from his neck; leathern trowsers, and Indian stockings, which are closed at the ancles, round the upper part of his *mocassins*, or Indian shoes, to prevent the snow from getting into them. Over these he wears a blanket, or leathern coat, which is secured by a belt round his waist, to which his fire-bag, knife, and hatchet, are suspended.

"Mr. Back and I were accompanied by John Hepburn, and provided

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with two carioles and two sledges : their drivers and dogs were furnished in equal proportions by the two trading Companies *. Fifteen days' provisions so completely filled the sledges, that it was with difficulty we found room for a small sextant, one suit of clothes, and three changes of linen, together with our bedding. Notwithstanding we thus restricted ourselves, and even loaded the carioles with part of the baggage, instead of going in them ourselves, we did not set out without considerable grumbling from the drivers, respecting the overloading of their dogs. The weight usually placed upon a sledge, drawn by three dogs, cannot, at the commencement of a journey, be estimated at less than three hundred pounds, which, however, suffers a daily diminution from the consumption of provisions. The sledge itself weighs about thirty pounds. When the snow is hard frozen, or the track well trodden, the rate of travelling is about fifteen miles a day. If the snow is loose, the speed is necessarily much less, and the fatigue greater.

“At eight in the morning of the 13th Jan. 1820, we took leave of our hospitable friend, Governor Williams, whose kindness and attention I shall ever remember with gratitude. Dr. Richardson, Mr. Hood, and Mr. Connelly (the resident partner of the N. W. Company), accompanied us along the Saskatchewan until the snow became too deep for their walking without snow-shoes. We then parted from our associates, with sincere regret at the prospect of a long separation. Being accompanied by Mr. Mackenzie, of the Hudson's Bay Company, who was going to Isle à la Crosse, with four sledges under his charge, we formed quite a procession, keeping in an Indian file, in the track of the man who preceded the foremost dogs; but, as the snow was deep, we proceeded slowly on the surface of the river. At the place of our encampment we could scarcely find sufficient pine branches to floor 'the hut,' as the Orkneymen term the spot where travellers rest. Its preparation, however, consists only in clearing away the snow to the ground, and covering that space with pine branches, over which the party spread their blankets and coats, and sleep in warmth and comfort, by keeping a good fire at their feet, without any other canopy than the heaven, even though the thermometer should be far below zero.

“The arrival at the place of encampment gives immediate occupation to every one of the party; and it is not until the sleeping place has been arranged, and a sufficiency of wood collected as fuel for the night, that the fire is allowed to be kindled. The dogs alone remain inactive during this busy scene, being kept harnessed to their burdens until the men have leisure to unstow the sledges, and hang upon the trees every species of

* The cariole is merely a covering of leather for the lower part of the body, affixed to the common sledge, and painted and ornamented according to the taste of the proprietor.

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provision out of the reach of these rapacious animals. We had ample experience, before morning, of the necessity of this precaution, as they contrived to steal a considerable part of our stores, almost from underneath Hepburn's head, notwithstanding their having been well fed at supper.

"Jan. 19.—The task of beating the track for the dogs was so very fatiguing, that each of the men took the lead in turns, for an hour and a half. The termination of the next day's journey was a great relief to me, who had been suffering during the greater part of it, in consequence of my feet having been galled by the snow-shoes: this, however, is an evil which few escape on their initiation to winter travelling; it excites no pity from their more experienced companions, who travel on as fast as they can, regardless of the pain of the sufferers.

"On the 26th, after a fatiguing march, we halted at the Upper Nip-péween, a deserted establishment; and performed the comfortable operations of shaving and washing, for the first time since our departure from Cumberland, the weather hitherto having been too severe. We passed an uncomfortable and sleepless night, and agreed to encamp in future in the open air, as preferable to the imperfect shelter of a forsaken house without doors or windows. The wolves serenaded us through the night of the 27th with a chorus of their agreeable howling, but none of them ventured near the encampment. Mr. Back's repose was disturbed by a more serious evil; his buffalo robe caught fire, and the shoes on his feet, being contracted by the heat, gave him such pain, that he jumped up in the cold, and ran into the snow as the only means of obtaining relief.

"On the 28th, we had a strong and piercing wind in our faces, and much snow-drift. We were compelled to walk as quick as we could, and to keep constantly rubbing the exposed parts of the skin, to prevent their being frozen; but some of the party suffered in spite of every precaution. The night was miserably cold; our tea froze in the tin pots before we could drink it, and even a mixture of spirits and water became thick by congelation.

"Jan. 31st.—As soon as day-light permitted, the party commenced their march, in the expectation of reaching Carlton House; but we did not arrive until noon, although the track was good. We were received by Mr. Prudens, the gentleman in charge of the post, with that friendly attention which Governor Williams's circular was calculated to ensure at every station; and were soon afterwards regaled with a substantial dish of buffalo steaks, which would have been thought excellent under any circumstances, but were particularly relished by us, though eaten without either bread or vegetables. After this repast, we had the comfort of changing our travelling dresses, which had been worn for fourteen days."

On the 9th Feb., Lieutenant Franklin resumed his travels; and on the 23d, arrived at the Hudson's Bay Company's fort, near Isle à la Crosse, where he received much valuable

information respecting the country to the north of the Great Slave Lake, and was furnished by Mr. Clark, the superintendent, with a list of stores he supposed the expedition would require. At the neighbouring post, some letters were found which Lieutenant Franklin had addressed to the partners of the N. W. Company, in the Athabasca district, shortly after his arrival at Cumberland House—a circumstance which proved the necessity of his proceeding to Fort Chipewyan, where, on the 26th March, he terminated a journey of 857 statute miles, performed in the depth of winter, with a weight of between two and three pounds almost constantly attached to his feet and ancles.

“We had the pleasure,” continues Lieutenant Franklin, “of being received by Messrs. Keith and Black, the partners of the N. W. Company in charge of Fort Chipewyan, in the most kind and hospitable manner. Our first object was to obtain some certain information respecting our future route, and we received from one of their interpreters, named Beaulieu, a half-breed, who had been brought up amongst the Dog-ribbed and Copper Indians, some satisfactory intelligence, which we afterwards found tolerably correct, respecting the mode of reaching the Copper-mine River, which he had descended a considerable way; as well as of the course of that river to its mouth. The Copper Indians, however, he said, would be able to give us more accurate information as to the latter part of its course, as they occasionally pursue it to the sea. He sketched on the floor a representation of the river, and a line of coast according to his idea of it. Just as he had finished, an old Chipewyan Indian, named Black Meat, unexpectedly came in, and instantly recognized the plan. He then took the charcoal from Beaulieu, and inserted a track along the sea-coast, which he had followed in returning from a war excursion, made by his tribe against the Esquimaux. He detailed several particulars of the coast and the sea, which he represented as studded with well wooded islands, and free from ice close to the shore, but not to a great distance, in the month of July. He likewise described two other rivers to the eastward of the Copper-mine, which also fall into the Northern Ocean; but he represented them both as being shallow, and too much interrupted by barriers for being navigated in any other than small Indian canoes.

“Having received this intelligence, I wrote immediately to the gentlemen in charge of the posts at the Great Slave Lake, to communicate the object of the expedition, and our proposed route; and to solicit any information they possessed, or could collect from the Indians, relative to the countries we had to pass through, and the best manner of proceeding. As the Copper Indians frequent the establishment on the north side of the