

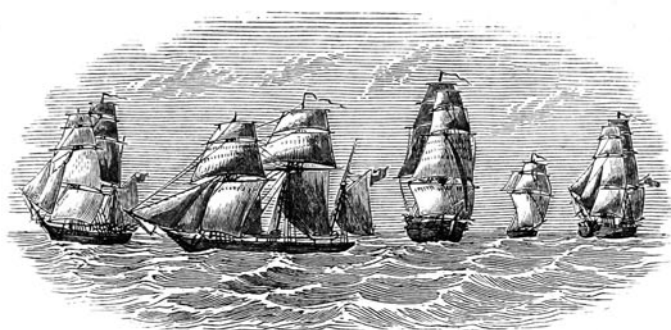
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978-1-108-07084-3 - The Eventful Voyage of H. M. Discovery Ship *Resolute* to the Arctic Regions: In Search of Sir John Franklin and the Missing Crews of H. M. Discovery Ships *Erebus* and *Terror*

George Frederick McDougall

Excerpt

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*Resolute.*

*Pioneer.*

*Assistance.*

*Intrepid.*

*North Star.*

ARCTIC SQUADRON, 1852.

## CHAPTER I.

Leave the Nore.—Proceed through North Sea.—Cross the Pentland Firth.—Arrive at Stromness.—Leave Stromness.—Letter of Sir E. Belcher.—Complete Arrangements for Towing.—Pass Cape Wrath.—Fishing Boats off the Butt of Lewis.—Last Letters written.—Commencement of Gale.—Gale in the North Atlantic.—A few Remarks thereon.—“Basilisk” and “Desperate” part Company.—The sunken Land of Bus.—Remarks on the Current.—Off Cape Farewell.—Danger of “Washing or Straggling Pieces.”—Loss of the “Shannon,” of Hull.—Loss of the “Shannon,” continued.

*WEDNESDAY, April 21st, 1852, at 5 A.M.* the Arctic Searching Expedition, consisting of H.M. Ships “Assistance,” “Resolute,” “North Star,” “Intrepid” and “Pioneer,” under the command of Captain Sir Edward Belcher, C.B., left Greenhithe

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and proceeded down the River; the three first in tow of the “Monkey,” “African,” and “Lightning;” the tenders were under steam.

A bright morning, an unclouded sky, a keen frost, and an easterly wind reminded many of us of those glorious daysprings which are only to be met with in Melville Bay. The Thames, as usual, was studded with vessels of every size and nation. On passing, their crews mechanically ceased their ordinary occupations, to gaze on us with an interest, expressive of the feelings which the peculiar nature of the service, on which we were about to be employed, would naturally suggest to the reflective mind.

As some of the vessels were in want of a few articles from the Dockyard to complete their equipment, we anchored at the Nore, where we found the “Basilisk” and “Desperate” (steamers) awaiting our arrival for the purpose of towing the squadron through the North Sea.

At 3.20 P.M. the squadron weighed and proceeded in the same order as before,—with the “Basilisk” and “Desperate” in company,—and anchored at 10 P.M. in the East Swin to await the change of tide.

*Thursday, 22nd*, at 5 A.M., wind moderate from S.E., weighed and proceeded in tow of the “Light-

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## PROCEED THROUGH NORTH SEA.

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ning,"—squadron in company. During the forenoon made all plain sail, which caused the old vessel to heel over considerably in consequence of having a heavy deck load.

At noon the "Lightning" cast off, and was succeeded by "Desperate," whose great power gave an increase to our former speed. In the course of the afternoon the wind freshened considerably, and at 5 P.M. we followed the motions of the "Assistance," and cast off from "Desperate." Shortening to moderate sail, we continued on our course to the northward.

*Friday, 23rd.*—During the night the wind increased to a strong breeze from S.E. with a cross sea, which rendered the vessel very uncomfortable the whole day.

*Sunday, 25th.*—On going on deck this morning I found we were becalmed and about to be taken in tow by the "Desperate," by whose aid we were soon ploughing our way through the mirror-like sea, at the rate of eight miles an hour.

The morning was beautifully fine, with a perfectly cloudless sky. Noss Head with its picturesque lighthouse was distinctly visible, as well as the bold promontory near which stands John o' Groat's house, whilst blue in the distance we

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could just distinguish the outline of the high land of Hoy.

Such a day was enjoyed by all on board, but I doubt if gazing on the pretty cottages, snugly ensconced in the recesses of deep bays, tended to reconcile us to the thoughts of leaving England, dear England! for a period which we all knew *must* be for years, and *might* be for ever!

Rounding Duncansby Head, the N.E. extremity of Great Britain, we encountered the tide of the Pentland Firth, which, during the springs runs at the rate of ten miles an hour. By the aid of steam we crossed the Firth in gallant style, and wended our way through circuitous, but noble channels, catching an occasional glimpse of deep bays and fiords, as well as a distant view of Kirkwall with its ancient cathedral, which was scanned with considerable interest by those amongst us who had perused Scott's *Pirate*.

At 1.30 P.M. we anchored off the town of Stromness, but as the sabbath is strictly observed, only a few people came on board. In the course of the evening all the vessels of the squadron arrived, filling the harbour, and imparting an air of gaiety to the town, which by the aid of telescopes appeared crowded with people of both sexes.

*Tuesday, 27th.*—Calm and fine. During the

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STROMNESS.

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forenoon we were honoured by the presence of several ladies, the clear red and white of whose complexions, combined with the brilliancy of their eyes, created quite a sensation on board.

In the evening I accompanied a messmate to the house of Dr. Hamilton, whose wife is a sister of Dr. Rae, the celebrated Arctic traveller. Here we were entertained with the hospitality of a second Magnus Troil, and passed a delightful evening, the reminiscences of which will ever be of the most pleasing description.

Stromness is built on the side of a hill facing to the eastward, and contains, according to the last census in 1851, about 2000 inhabitants. Kirkwall, the capital of the Orkneys, has a population of 3300 souls.

The harbour of Stromness is capable of affording shelter to a large fleet, and its natural formation renders it a place of perfect safety in the heaviest gale. A patent slip, on which were three vessels during our visit, affords great facilities to ships in want of repair.

*Wednesday, 28th.* — The wind during the night had increased to a strong breeze, with thick misty weather; this with the sickly appearance of the moon around, which we observed a well defined

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halo, led us to suppose we were to have a gale, an idea which was supported by the *savans* of Stromness.

At 2 P.M. weather very unpromising; weighed and proceeded out of Hoy Mouth in tow of the “Desperate,” squadron in company. Although the atmosphere was laden with moisture, hundreds of people congregated on the heights to witness our departure.

The following is an extract from the orders issued by Sir Edward Belcher, C.B., to Captain Kellett, C.B., the second in command of the expedition, under whom I had the happiness to serve on board the “Resolute:” —

“I wish it to be perfectly understood throughout the squadron, that I shall be at all times open to unreserved communication with all the officers, upon matters which are not already defined by the naval instructions to be transmitted through the commanding officer: and that upon any ideas which may occur to them upon scientific, theoretical, or other interesting matters, their remarks will find a place in the general Journal of the Voyage, which will be kept confidentially by myself.

“It is, I hope, from what I have seen (and from the feeling which I know brought the majority of officers together to support me in this arduous undertaking), unnecessary to say more, than that each will strive to maintain the general happiness of our community — that they

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LETTER OF SIR E. BELCHER, C.B.

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will see the necessity of avoiding any subjects which may cause irritation or difference of opinion; and that if any exciting discussions should arise between others, they will use their utmost endeavours to turn the conversation, or to soften irritable remarks, which may unfortunately have escaped.

“To carry out the important service in which we are all engaged, we should remember that *all must pull together*; that the success of the expedition is the *success of all*, and that according to the importance of the general result, so will they be entitled to ask for reward.

“One failure, one dark spot on the record, may not at the moment be thought important — but remember that the eyes of the whole civilised world are upon us! As those who preceded us have done well, let us strive to exhibit what can be achieved by discipline, good feeling, and that untiring zeal which is ever conspicuous in our noble profession.

“Given under my hand on board Her Majesty’s Ship ‘Assistance,’ at Stromness, Orkney Islands, the 28th of April, 1852.

“E. BELCHER.

“To Captain Henry Kellett, C. B., and the Officers commanding Her Majesty’s ships and vessels composing the Arctic Expedition.”

The departure of the squadron must have formed rather an imposing spectacle from the shore: the “Basilisk,” with “Assistance” in tow, took the lead, followed by the tenders, then came

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## 10 COMPLETE ARRANGEMENTS FOR TOWING.

the “Desperate” and “Resolute,” whilst the “North Star,” under sail, brought up the rear.

Although we all expected a gale, we were agreeably surprised on finding our supposition incorrect, for when outside Hoy Mouth we found the sea smooth, and wind (westerly) moderate.

It was not till 8 P.M. that the arrangements for towing were completed. We then proceeded in two divisions,—the “Basilisk,” towing the “Assistance,” “Intrepid” and Pioneer,” formed the first division, whilst the second was composed of the “Desperate,” “Resolute,” and “North Star.”

Steering so as to pass to the southward of the Nunbank; the light on Cape Wrath was observed at 3 A.M. on Thursday 29th, and the point passed at 8 A.M. within five miles, with a smooth sea and moderate easterly breeze.

The fine weather enabled us to determine the position of the ship by true bearings of Cape Wrath, which verified the rates of our chronometers.

During the day we had little or no wind, but towards evening a breeze sprang up from S.E. with misty weather. About 6 P.M. we were surprised to observe several fishing-boats, but did not pass within hail. The boats appeared small for



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PASS CAPE WRATH.

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the purpose on which they were employed so many miles from land, but were no doubt admirably adapted to contend with a strong breeze and heavy sea.

This little incident naturally enough caused the conversation to turn on the various styles of naval architecture adopted by the different countries we had visited. One gave a graphic account of the structure and capabilities of the catamaran, which is literally a rude raft of rough logs ; several of these I had frequently seen off the northern coast of South America, many leagues out of sight of land, and as often wondered at the recklessness of men who, to obtain what at the best must be a precarious livelihood, trusted themselves to the elements in such a primitive vessel.

For several days after we left the Orkneys the weather continued very unsettled, with variable winds, and a heavy westerly swell.

*Sunday, 2nd.* — At noon the signal was made to have letters for England ready by to-morrow, which caused postage stamps, signatures to wills, and extracts from journals, to be in great demand. A bag full of letters was completed in an almost incredibly short time, although the process at a gun-room table is at all times difficult, but parti-

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LAST LETTERS WRITTEN.

cularly so when, in addition to the usual noise, the motion of the vessel is rendered uneasy by a fresh breeze and cross sea.

And these were to be our last letters for a long, long period! and yet there was something pleasing in the feeling that they would be perused with greater pleasure, and prized infinitely more than their predecessors. With these thoughts and the hope of again enjoying the sight of the loved shores of Old England, the bag was closed, and the last link severed that bound us to our homes.

*Tuesday, 4th.*—Wind strong from S.W., with a cross sea. We scarcely knew what to make of the weather, for although appearances had for several days foretold a gale, the barometer had been gradually rising, and at 3 P.M. stood at 30·21.

It went no higher, however, but commenced falling rapidly, which one would have supposed to be the signal for the sea and wind to begin in earnest. We soon, to use a nautical phrase, had “fresh hands at the bellows,” and foamy crests to the waves; these causes combined compelled us at 10 P.M. to reduce our canvas to close-reefed topsails.

*Wednesday, 5th.*—At noon to-day the gale was violent indeed, and in the squalls blew a perfect