

THE THRESHOLD
OF THE
UNKNOWN REGION

BY

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FORMERLY OF H.M. ARCTIC SHIP 'ASSISTANCE'

FOURTH EDITION

WITH SUPPLEMENTARY CHAPTERS

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DEDICATION.



TO

ADMIRAL SIR GEORGE BACK, D.C.L., F.R.

*Chairman of the Arctic Committee of the
Royal Geographical Society.*

MY DEAR SIR GEORGE,—I am happy to be allowed to dedicate this book to you, because you are the surviving link which connects the former with the present generation of Arctic explorers. You served in the first Arctic exploring voyage of this century, and your name is connected with some of the noblest efforts of subsequent years. You also formed one of the Arctic Council when the searches for Sir John Franklin's expedition were arranged, and you have ever since been the staunch advocate of the renewal

of Arctic exploration. Your authority is based on the experience of fifty-seven years, during which time you have either been foremost in the ranks of the explorers, or have aided and encouraged a younger generation by wise advice and cheering words. You are the sole survivor of that gallant band which, under the lead of Buchan, made resolute efforts to pierce the Polar pack; as of that still more glorious party which, under Franklin, traversed the frozen lands of Arctic America. It was you who came to the front, when an arduous expedition was required for the relief of the Rosses; and no adventure of recent times can be compared with your wintering in the pack, and your voyage across the Atlantic in the sinking 'Terror.' When you pronounce that, with modern appliances and experience, the dangers of Arctic exploration are not of such a character as to make it foolhardy to encounter them, there is no other man living who can gainsay you; for there is none with the same knowledge and experience. We all know that you are intimately acquainted with the nature and character of the risks, and that you would be the last officer in the service to give imprudent advice;

and hence it is that we look to you as the mainstay of a good cause, which is also unanimously supported by your brother Arctic explorers, as well as by the most eminent living men of science.

The object of the present volume is to give the public a correct knowledge of the whole line of frontier separating the known from the unknown region round the North Pole, to recall the stories of early voyagers, to narrate the recent efforts of gallant adventurers of various nationalities to cross the threshold, to set forth the arguments in favour of a renewal of Arctic exploration by England, to enumerate the valuable and important results to be derived from North Polar discovery, and to give full details respecting the equipment of the Arctic Expedition of 1875, its progress as far as the Cary Islands, and the future operations, especially as regards sledge travelling. In the Appendices to this Fourth Edition will be found biographical notices of all the officers and men of the Expedition, and an account of the cruise of H.M.S. 'Valorous,' and of the voyage of the 'Pandora.' My hope is that the book will be of service, now that the people of

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England have revived their interest in maritime enterprise, and that it will continue to be useful for reference. I am very sure that such an object will always receive your hearty approval, and that you will continue to welcome the new editions of this little volume, for such good as it may do, how much soever the performance may fall short of the intention.

I am, DEAR SIR GEORGE,

Yours with much regard,

CLEMENTS R. MARKHAM.

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PREFACE
TO
THE FOURTH EDITION.

THE Arctic Expedition has gone forth, and our brave explorers are now enduring the hardships of an Arctic winter: where, we know not; under what circumstances we cannot guess.

Those who have from the first advocated the despatch of an Arctic Expedition by Smith Sound did so on the understanding that precautions sanctioned by former precedents would be taken. It has been demonstrated in the fourteenth chapter of this work¹ that there is no danger of a catastrophe such as that which befel Sir John Franklin's expedition, provided that communication is kept open every season. But if this is not done, if the

¹ See p. 285.

lessons taught by experience are neglected, there certainly is such danger.

The loss of the officers and crews of the 'Erebus' and 'Terror' was due to the neglect of necessary precautions. If a ship had been sent out in 1846, it would have been known in what direction the expedition was going, and fresh supplies would have been conveyed to it. If a ship had been sent out in 1847 with that knowledge, the officers and crews would have been saved.

This was felt when the Arctic Expedition of 1852-54 was absent. It sailed in 1852. In the spring of 1853 the 'Phoenix' and 'Breadalbane' were sent out to communicate, and in 1854 the 'Phoenix' and 'Talbot.' In the same way a frigate was sent up every year on the Pacific Station, to keep communications open with the 'Plover.' It is equally urgent that annual communication should be kept up with the present Arctic Expedition; and the Government could not fail to see the importance of this measure. It cannot be that the Expedition of 1875 should be treated with less consideration than that of 1852.

There are several reasons which make it incumbent on the Government to despatch a vessel in 1876. In the first place, the Admiralty contemplates the contingency of the 'Alert' having been drifted so far from the 'Discovery,' perhaps in the direction of Cape Bismarck, as to render communication between them impossible during the travelling season of 1876. If this should be the case it is obviously a matter of urgent necessity that the fact should be known to the Government in the following autumn. It is possible, as everyone who has served in the Arctic regions is aware, that one or both ships may be destroyed by the ice. In that event the presence of a vessel at the entrance of Smith Sound in 1876 is most important. Such a vessel may also be needed to bring home invalids, as the "Phoenix" did in 1853.

The vessel communicating in 1876 will not only bring home, it will also take out intelligence. With no news from home, no sign of carefulness or sympathy, the men will enter upon a second winter with very different feelings from those which will prevail if they know that they are not forgotten.

Arctic officers, like Captain Haswell, who have had experience of both, know that the moral effect of sending a vessel to communicate in 1876 will be incalculable.

Captain Nares, with wise foresight and sound judgment, has made the arrangements which experience and former precedents have proved to be necessary. A sledge will arrive at the entrance of Smith Sound on or about May 1, 1876; and a boat will be sent down later in the summer. On this side, the Admiralty has arranged with Captain Allen Young to proceed to the entrance of Smith Sound in the "Pandora," to meet the parties arriving there from the Expedition.

Captain Allen Young, in performing this great public service, will take with him the heartfelt gratitude of the relations of our absent explorers, and the cordial thanks and good wishes of all his countrymen.

A depôt ship should also have been permanently stationed at the entrance of Smith Sound, during the absence of the Expedition.