

THE GLEANER:

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Communications.

ON THE REGIONS OF THE NORTH,

In connexion with the causes now in activity in destroying the Animal and Vegetable Kingdom, or Animate and Inanimate Nature, from all that is well authenticated.

BY WILLIAM SMITH,
Shoemaker, Miramichi, New Brunswick.
TO MOSES N. GRINNELL, MERCHANT, NEW YORK.

The Arctic Expedition under the command of Sir John Franklin, which is at present attracting the attention of the public, has for its object the discovery of a North West passage to China, and to advance towards the Pole. The facts alleged respecting the vast Islands of ice separated and dispersed during the years 1817 and 1818, have again roused the spirit of adventure. Glowing anticipations are formed of the future amelioration of climate, which it is hoped will lead to a successful result. Every man possessing a slight tincture of physical science, conceives himself qualified to speculate concerning the phenomena of wealth, in which he feels a deep interest; and hence a very flimsy and spurious kind of philosophy, however trifling or despicable it may appear in the eyes of the few who are accustomed to think more profoundly, has gained currency among certain classes of men, and engendered no small share of conceit.

Meteorology is a complex science, depending on so many subordinate principles that require the union of accurate theory with a range of nice and various observations, as to have advanced slowly towards perfection; though little understood or generally cultivated, it has yet made a decided progress, and at last attained to such a degree of improvement as will enable the judicious inquirer to draw his conclusions with confidence.

The scheme of eventually reaching that northern point on the surface of our globe, which terminates its ideal axis of rotation, however interesting in a philosophical view, can only be regarded as an object of pure curiosity, and not likely to lead to any useful result. Yet it is an undertaking peculiar to a great nation, to embrace every chance of improving geographical knowledge, and extending the basis of natural science. Whether the Admiralty Board should be praised for its liberality in fitting out the expedition is a very delicate question, while so many failed in the attempt. Should the present expedition be ingulphed in the bosom of the Arctic sea, it will give every person infinite concern. Mr James Barrington, a man of learning and ingenuity, embraced with ardour the opinion of the possibility of approaching to the Pole. In successive papers communicated to the Geographical Society of London, he not only condensed the information furnished by the old voyagers, but exhibited the results of the numerous queries relating to the same object, which he had circulated among persons engaged in the Greenland Fishery. He thus proved that in certain seasons the Arctic seas are left for several weeks so open that intrepid navigators might safely penetrate to a very high latitude. In compliance with his sanguine representations, the Admiralty despatched, in 1773, Captain Phipps, afterwards Lord Mulgrave, to explore these regions. But this commander was unsuccessful in the attempt, having reached only the latitude of 80° degrees, when his ship was surrounded by a body of ice near Spitzbergen, and he escaped with much difficulty, though many of the whalers advanced much higher that summer. Mr Barrington, however, did not despair, and following out his views, he set Mr Nairn and Dr. Higgins to make experiments on the congelation of sea water. The various facts have been collected and published, to which Colonel Beaufoy has subjoined an appendix, containing the answers made to his queries by Russian hunters, who are accustomed to spend the whole year at Spitzbergen, relative to the probability of travelling from that island to the Pole during winter in sledges drawn by reindeer. The reports of these hardy men are sufficiently discouraging. They represent the winter at Spitzbergen as not only severe but extremely boisterous; the snow falling to the depth of three or five feet, and drifted so much along the shores by the violence of the wind, as often to block up all communication. The danger of their being surprised and overwhelmed by clouds of snow raised by sudden gusts of wind, is so great, that they never venture to undertake any long journeys on the ice, nor do they think it at all practicable to have loaded sledges drawn by reindeer to go over a surface so rough and hilly. If we compare the journals of former navigators, we should be convinced that all the changes of the polar ice are periodical,

and are again repeated at no very distant intervals of time. Without passing the pretensions of some Dutch navigators, who had been carried by winds and currents as far North as the latitude of 88, or even that of 89 40, and consequently only 20 miles from the Pole, Davies, in 1587, ascended in the Strait that deservedly bears his name, to the latitude of 72 12, where he found the variation of the compass to be 82 West, or nearly the same as at present. In 1616 Baffin advanced in the same quarter as high as the latitude of 78 degrees. The same skilful navigator had two years before penetrated in the Greenland seas to the latitude of 81, and seen land as high as 82, lying to the North East of Spitzbergen; but it is mortifying to think how little progress has been made in geographical discovery since those early and intrepid navigators explored the Arctic regions in their humble barques, which seldom exceeded the size of fifty tons. We must pass over a very long interval to obtain genuine information. In 1751, Captain Meallum, whom Mr Barrington calls a scientific navigator, sailed without obstruction from Hackluyt's headland as high as the latitude 82, where he found an open sea, and the weather being fine, nothing prevented him from going further but his responsibility to the owner for the safety of the ship. Captain Wilson, about the end of June, 1754, having traversed floating ice from the latitude of 74 to 81, at last found the sea quite clear as far as he could descry, but not meeting with any whales, and beginning to apprehend at the 83d degree some danger, he shaped his course back. At this very time Captain Guy, after four days of foggy weather, was likewise carried to the same point. The polar seas must at this point be very open, for one of the most extraordinary and best authenticated voyages was performed in 1751, by Mr Stephens, a very skilful and accurate observer, whose testimony is put beyond a doubt by the cool judgment of the late astronomer royal, Dr. Maskelyne.

This navigator informed him that about the end of May, he was driven off Spitzbergen by a southerly wind, which blew for several days, till he had reached the latitude of 81, and that in the whole of this run he met but little ice and no drift wood, and did not find the cold to be anywise severe. In different subsequent years the Greenland whalers have advanced to the latitude of 81 or 82 degrees. (This was accomplished in 1776, although according to Berguelin the whole space between Iceland and the opposite coast was then frozen over. The year 1773, or that in which Captain Phipps performed his voyage, was still more favorable for approaching towards the pole.) In 1806 the elder Mr Scoresby ascended to the latitude of 81 50, but in the following year he could not proceed further than the parallel of 76½. In 1811 the higher latitudes were again accessible, and after a short interval the summers of 1815, 1816, and 1817 are represented as open.

In this plain statement we certainly can perceive no decided symptoms of any general or progressive tendency towards a dissolution of the polar ice. The frozen border alters its position from one year to another, and in all probability returns again to the same limits, after a regular period of time. Such fluctuations are analogous to the incessant changes which affect the state of the weather in the more temperate regions. The complex system of winds moulds the climate, and varies the features of the seasons all over the globe. It is a common remark of those who frequent the polar seas, that they always find the least obstruction from ice when the preceding year had been very severe in the more southern latitudes. In the year 1766, when the frost had proved intense through the rest of Europe, the whalers, as we have seen, reached a very high latitude; and not to multiply instances, the years 1815, 1816, and 1817 were deemed very open, and were succeeded by notoriously cold and protracted winters. Nor is it difficult to divine the reason of this seeming paradox, for our severe winters are occasioned by the prevalence of northerly winds, which must arise at the polar seas from the south, and consequently transport so much warmth to them as may check the usual rigour of the winter. (It may be observed that icebergs are always formed in the bays of a rocky and indented coast, but these huge masses are seen floating only in Davies's Straits, and are very seldom met with in the Greenland sea, which is so much encumbered with the saline drift ice.) It seems probable, therefore, that this sea extends without any interruption of islands or continent from Spitzbergen northwards, perhaps even beyond the pole, as the cold increases but very little in advancing to the higher latitudes. The vast expanse of ice which generally covers that basin may be nearly dissolved at the close of every summer. If the intrepid navigator, therefore, could seize the short and fleeting interval, he might perhaps push onward to

the pole itself. But there in all probability he would be obliged to winter; nor could he expect the slightest chance of escaping till the following season should release him from his chains. What may be the fate of the expedition under Sir John Franklin, in exploring a North West Passage, is rather painful to surmise, and is at all events hazardous to conjecture. The chances of success, it must be observed, is exposed to a fearful odds. The bold plan suggested by Mr Scoresby for approaching to the pole over the very continent, though liable to very serious and formidable objections, affords perhaps after all the only tolerable prospect of accomplishing the design. Adopting the mode which the Russian hunters have employed with such advantage in exploring the frozen sea, from Nova Zembla to the shores of Kamschatka, he proposes to pass the winter in the island of Spitzbergen, and starting in the spring with sledges drawn by dogs, to pursue a journey direct to the pole of 6 or 700 miles. He might then expect to find a continuous sheet of ice stretching over his whole track. This ice being little exposed to irregular currents, would likewise, it seems probable, be on the whole smooth and level, or if any hillocks should be on its surface, they could probably be surmounted, or at least be avoided by the sledges. The successful traveller would, before the ice broke up, have sufficient time to return to his former quarters; but to undertake such a perilous journey would require exalted enthusiasm and the most unshaken and determined resolution. If an observatory could be placed at the pole we might expect to have some interesting experiments on the vibration of the pendulum. The appearance of the heavens would be nearly the same as at Spitzbergen; but the glory of standing on the terraqueous pole, where no mortal man ever stood before, would be an honor of the most exalted kind.

It is remarkable that all the great geographical discoveries achieved in modern times, have originated in the attempts to find out a short route to India—that land of wealth and brilliant promise. Columbus, deceived with regard to its real position, sought to abridge the length of the voyage by holding a westerly course, and thus discovered for Spain the American Archipelago; and the Portuguese navigators, in one of their first visits to India, wishing to avoid the dangers of sailing along the shores of the African continent, took a wider range, and were driven by the trade wind to the coast of Brazil. The other maritime powers of Europe now strained every nerve to reach India by the North. From England such attempts were made by associations of merchants, or private adventurers. Between the years 1553 and 1555, Sir Hugh Willoughby, Richard Chandler, and Stephen Burrows, performed three several voyages in quest of a North East Passage. They doubled the North Cape, and touched at Archangel, and reached Nova Zembla and the Strait of Waigats, but could proceed no further on account of immense shoals of ice. Their discoveries led to the establishment of the Russian Company.

The prospect of reaching India by the North East having thus failed, hopes were next entertained of discovering a communication by the North West. Sir Humphrey Gilbert, brother-in-law of the famous Sir Walter Raleigh, wrote a learned discourse to prove the existence of such a passage, from the reports of former voyagers, fortified by all the arguments which the physics of Aristotle and the tenets of the Schoolmen, could supply.

In the reign of Elizabeth, the native energy of the English shone forth with new lustre; and that able and politic princess, though sparing of the public treasure, encouraged the activity and enterprise of her subjects by zealous patronage, and the judicious distribution of honors. A company of adventurers having been formed to discover the North West Passage, it was, through the influence of Dudley, Earl of Warwick, recommended to the Queen's special protection.

On the 15th of June, 1576, Martin Frobisher, afterwards knighted for his courageous repulse of the Spanish Armada, sailed from Blackwall with two barques, the Gabriel, of 25 tons, and the Michael, of 20 tons, and a pinnace of only 10 tons. In ten days he reached the Shetland Islands, and in three or four days more he met with large quantities of floating ice and timber, chiefly fir. On the 11th of July, being then in the latitude of 61, he got sight of Rigeland, or Greenland, rising like pinnacles of steeples, and all covered with snow. The weather continued extremely foggy, and the drift ice prevented his approaching to the shore; the pinnace was lost in a storm, and the Michael, disheartened by the prospect, sailed home and reported that the Gabriel had foundered at sea.

[To be continued.]

REPLY TO PUNCH.

To the Editor of the Gleaner.

Sir,—I find that your correspondent Punch has appeared again in the columns of your paper, but his communication is like his first, void of truth; and I will give you one instance as a specimen of the whole. He says Murray was taken at a sale. By this I suppose he wishes to show that Murray did not come up and urged to be sent to gaol. Now Murray did come up as I stated, and remained in the office till the warrant was made out, and while I was writing it Mr Duncan the constable came in, and I gave the warrant to him in presence of Murray, and they left the office together; where they went I cannot say. The whole of his article is made up of mis-statements in the same way.

Now, for argument's sake, I will suppose James Coughlin what Punch calls him, a blackguard, and I suppose that he had beaten Punch, could there be a doubt as to Punch's right to prosecute. This, I think, Punch will admit. Then suppose on the trial that the blackguard should prove that Punch was the greatest blackguard of the two, then by Punch's reasoning the complaint would have to be dismissed, and that without costs. But such a case might raise a question; for on any complaint, during the investigation, it might turn out that the complainant was a blackguard, in the opinion of the defendant, then, it would be for the Justices first to try the complainant, as to whether he was or was not a blackguard, and decide accordingly. This I think would be departing from natural justice, as well as the law under which we have the privilege to live—laws that hold every man innocent till proved guilty. Taking this view of the case, I think a Magistrate would act contrary to every principle of justice to refuse redress to a person that he might suppose a blackguard; and to show how tenacious the law-givers have been, under the head of Assault and Battery it is laid down for the guidance of Magistrates and others, "that the least touching of another's person, wilfully or in anger, is a Battery; for the law cannot draw the line between different degrees of violence, and therefore totally prohibits the first and lowest stage of it, every man's person being sacred, and no other having a right to meddle with it, in any the slightest manner." I think Punch will find by the authority I have shown that there is equal protection for all.

As regards the wish of Punch that the Magistrates should be elected, I presume that he may put in his claim, and I think it would be urged that he would do the duty for nothing, and would keep a horse and sleigh always ready to bring witnesses, also for nothing. What a glorious time offenders would have should Punch ever succeed (which I think is not very probable he will, unless he possesses more knowledge and sound judgment than appears in the articles) to the office that he takes every opportunity to slander.

Now, Mr Pierce, I candidly ask you whether you think this the proper way of investigating matters of this kind. I at once admit that it is allowable to bring to public notice any grievance or nuisance, under an anonymous signature, that the proper persons may take notice, and if in their power to have it moved; but I think it is a very different matter in a case like that under consideration. In a case like the present I think, if either of the parties should feel aggrieved, or if any bystander should think that justice had not been done, that it would be proper to investigate the proceedings through the medium of newspapers, but in the respective parties' own names; otherwise a person might write as Punch has done, without being present at the trial, and not state one word of truth as he has done without detection; and nothing can show the soundness of the position I have taken, than Punch appearing a second time, although I had, for the information of the public, given the details of the trial, which I think should have satisfied; but no, as I said before, he has something else to gratify. If he had been a man of honor, and was writing for the good of his fellow man, he would have put his name to his communication, and then the subject could have been properly reviewed, and the public could have passed an impartial opinion on the matter. And I think, Mr Pierce, when you look at the matter, that you will admit that it is not a subject that should be treated as this has been.

Now, Mr Pierce, I have done with Punch. I have no desire to write against wind; but shall go on my usual way, and not be prevented from punishing when they deserve it all transgressors of the law on proper complaint and sufficient proof, whether gentlemen or blackguards.

I am, Sir,
Your most obedient servant,
JOHN T. WILLISTON.

Chatham, May 23, 1850.