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Expedition of Lieutenant F. Schwatka to King William Land.

By C. R. MARKHAM, C.B., Secretary R.G.S.

Map, p. 720.

THE publication of the interesting narrative of the expedition of Lieutenant Schwatka of the United States Army, in the 'New York Herald,' is of considerable geographical interest, while it once more draws attention to the fate of Sir John Franklin and his gallant companions.

The enterprise was undertaken in the hope of discovering the journals of the Franklin Expedition, and of throwing additional light on its sad history by examining the west coast of King William Island in the summer, when the snow is off the ground. The party consisted of four white men, namely, Lieutenant Schwatka, Colonel W. H. Gilder the author of the narrative, Harry Klutschek, and Frank Melms. They wintered at Camp Daly, near the entrance of Chesterfield Inlet, on the west shore of Hudson's Bay, adapting themselves to the mode of life of the Eskimo (or *Inuit*, as Colonel Gilder more correctly calls them), and making preliminary reconnoitring journeys.

It was Lieutenant Schwatka's intention to effect his purpose with the aid of natives and their dogs; and his plan was to march across the unknown land between Chesterfield Inlet and the estuary of the Back River, and thence to examine the western side of King William Island, a formidable enterprise, which would certainly occupy many months.

The expedition left Camp Daly on the 1st of April, 1879, with three sledges and a load of 5000 lbs. drawn by forty-two dogs. Besides walrus meat, the provisions consisted of biscuit, corn starch, pork, compressed corned beef, cheese, tea, and molasses. But these supplies were not calculated to last more than a fraction of the time, being one month's

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provisions for the whole party. The main reliance was upon the game afforded by the region to be traversed. The party was entirely deprived of vegetable diet, they took no lime-juice, and there was no scurvy; which is one more stubborn fact for the consideration of the English Scurvy Committee. Besides the four white men, the party consisted of Joe, the Eskimo interpreter, and his wife; a splendid hunter and dog driver named Toolooah with his wife and child; two other Inuit men with their wives and a child each, and two lads; altogether thirteen Inuit men, women, and children.

During the months of April and May the party marched across a high country of rolling hills, with much snow, and occasional deep drifts. The thermometer was above freezing, and the sun insufferably hot. Plenty of reindeer were seen nearly every day, the herds being often chased by wolves, which also prowled round the camp. The game indeed was so abundant that, besides bears and seals and four musk oxen, the party obtained, during the journeys out and home, no less than 522 reindeer. The landscape, though sombre and forbidding, was grand, and occasionally presented scenes of great beauty. At one place they came upon a frozen waterfall 25 feet high, which sparkled as if studded with myriads of gems. In the first week of May they crossed the Arctic Circle, and soon afterwards came upon a branch of the Back River, which they followed for 90 miles. It flows through a gorge with dark hills rising to 800 or 1000 feet on either side. On the 22nd of May they reached the estuary of the Back River, having travelled all the way through a country filled with game, and having seen two or three large herds of reindeer every day. The river which led them to the Back estuary was named after the President of the United States.

Lieutenant Schwatka visited Montreal Island, and then crossed the land to an inlet west of Richardson Point, collecting many stories from the Eskimo. In June he crossed over to Cape Herschel on King William Island, and examined the western shore with the greatest care, for relics of the Franklin Expedition, as far as Cape Felix, the northern extremity of the island. The summer travelling was extremely severe and difficult, the snow being converted into slush and water, and the country consisting either of morasses or of rocks and ridges formed of sharp-pointed stones. During the return journey in July they were pestered by dense fogs, had to wade through swamps, and in one place they were obliged to cross a river with the water up to their waists. But the game was still abundant. The reindeer began to move southwards in September, and at a camp, near Cape Gladman, the party shot as many as twenty-six in one day.

The return journey was commenced in November, by ascending the Back River for some distance, and then marching over the region intervening between that river and Hudson's Bay, by a route to the

westward of that taken on their outward journey. This line took them across the valley of the Quoiich River, which was explored by Dr. Rae in 1853, to their original starting-point at Camp Daly; whence they proceeded southwards to Marble Island, where a whaler was wintering. In December and January the land still abounded in game, and the breath of the reindeer could be seen on every hill-side, rising like clouds of steam.

The cold of the winter months, in this country, is intense, and in January the thermometer fell as low as 70° below zero (Fahr.). The lowest temperature registered on board H.M.S. *Alert*, at the most northern point ever reached by any vessel, was 73° below zero, being the mean of several thermometers. The difference between the climate of the Arctic Regions, and of the Hudson's Bay territory south of the Arctic Circle, consists in the much longer duration of intense cold in the extreme north, and in the fact that the minimum temperature is reached, not in mid-winter, but in the month of March. This is due to the long absence of the sun. The maximum cold is probably as great in the Hudson's Bay Company's territory as in any part of the world. But the mean cold of the year is much greater in the Arctic Regions.

The achievement of Lieutenant Schwatka and his companions is most remarkable, and in some respects his journey is without a parallel. It reflects the highest credit on the commander, and on those who served under him so admirably; and it is certain that the work could not have been done without natural qualities of a very high order, combined with careful training and the most thoughtful adaptation of the best attainable means to the end in view.

The English nation, and more especially its naval service and its geographers, have received the news of this noble effort to obtain more complete intelligence of our lost heroes with feelings of warm gratitude to Lieutenant Schwatka and his gallant companions, as well as to those who generously supplied the means and gave the instructions under which the explorers acted.

It is important that the information collected by Lieutenant Schwatka should be carefully compared with that which we already possessed, in order that it may be known whether he and his predecessor Captain Hall have materially supplemented the work of Sir Leopold M'Clintock, and to what extent. With this object in view, a very brief recapitulation of our former knowledge is necessary.

In the spring of 1854, when Dr. Rae was exploring a part of the coast of the Boothia Isthmus, he met some Eskimo in Pelly Bay, who told him that some years before, in the spring, a party of about forty white men were seen travelling over the ice and dragging a boat, along the coast of King William Land. Later in the season the bodies of about thirty were found on the continent, and five on an island, near

the mouth of the Great Fish River. The information was obtained at second-hand, none of the Eskimo with whom Dr. Rae conversed having seen the white men. Several relics of the Franklin Expedition were bought from the natives, and sent home.

With this clue as a guide, Lady Franklin despatched the *Fox* to discover the fate of Franklin and his brave companions, under the command of Sir Leopold M'Clintock, who did his work thoroughly and successfully. During April and May 1859, M'Clintock and Hobson, travelling from their winter quarters, examined part of the west coast of Boothia, the whole of the shores of King William Island, the mouth of the Back River, and Montreal Island. M'Clintock also collected information, with great diligence, from the Eskimo he met at various points, within eleven years of the catastrophe.

The main result of his search was the discovery of the record at Cape Victory, and with it the discovery of the fate of Franklin. This document, as is well known, gave an outline of the proceedings of the expedition up to the time of abandoning the ships, the date of Sir John Franklin's death on board, and approximately that of Commander Graham Gore, the exact number of deaths of officers and men; it incidentally mentioned that Lieutenant Irving, of H.M.S. *Terror*, was still alive, and stated the intention to commence a retreat to Back's Fish River with all the survivors—105 officers and men—on the following day, April 26th, 1848. The document was signed by Captain Crozier, of the *Terror*, and Captain Fitzjames, of the *Erebus*.

No scrap of writing has since been found. All exact information is derived from this document. There is nothing else but conjecture, based on the vague and unreliable stories of the Eskimo, and inference derived from relics and their positions. With these as a means of illustrating the facts of the record, M'Clintock pieced together the sad but heroic story. The ground at Cape Victory was strewn with great quantities of clothes and stores, pointing to the probability that the survivors had overrated their strength, and were obliged to lighten the boats which they were dragging on heavy sledges. The discovery of Lieutenant Hornby's sextant made it probable that he was among those who landed. Further on, in Erebus Bay, one of the boats was found on a sledge, with two bodies in it, and many relics of various kinds. Among them was a Bible, the 'Vicar of Wakefield,' and a little volume of private devotions which Sir George Back had presented to his old friend Graham Gore. Perhaps it was the thoughtful act of some messmate to bring away the little book for the relations of the deceased officer. The boat's head was pointed back to the ships, indicating that a portion of the retreating crews had broken down, and that an attempt was made to return to the ships and bring back fresh supplies of food. The rest pushed on, and M'Clintock found a skeleton beyond Cape Herschel, proving that they discovered the North-West Passage. But the great majority of the

bodies probably fell through the ice on which they walked, when the thaw came, and found a last resting place in the great deep.

The information, carefully collected from Eskimo by Mr. Petersen, M'Clintock's interpreter, was to the effect that many of the white men dropped by the way as they went to the Great Fish River; that some were buried and some were not, a fact discovered by the Eskimo during the following winter, and corroborated by the position of the skeleton which M'Clintock found beyond Cape Herschel. It was also ascertained that one ship had been seen to sink in deep water, and that the other was forced on shore by the ice. On board the latter, the body of a tall man was found, but there was little then left of the wreck, the position of which was indicated. At one time the natives had seen many books and papers, but they had all been thrown away or destroyed long before. It was clear that the record at Cape Victory would furnish the only certain intelligence we should ever receive.

Thus was the sad history brought to light by Sir Leopold M'Clintock. Nothing more of any consequence will ever be certainly known. Nor is it desirable. Sherard Osborn, the personal friend of many of the lost ones, gave expression to a feeling in which others shared. "Why attempt to lift the veil with which the All Merciful has been pleased to shut out from mortal ken the last sad hour of brave men battling with famine and disease?" We know that the surmises and assertions of savages are false, and we regret that they should have been unfeelingly repeated. It was not thus that our heroes died. "They passed from sight into the snow-storm which the warm south wind kindly sends to shroud the worn-out ones who gently lie down to die; and they died peacefully, calmly, with their minds sweetly wandering back to the homes and friends of their childhood, the well-remembered prayer upon their lips, and their last fleeting thoughts of long-treasured love for those they would one day meet in heaven."

But curiosity, with the best intentions, could not allow the matter to rest here, and some few minor details have been added to the painful story, by the efforts of Captain Hall and Lieutenant Schwatka. The stories which these explorers obtained from the Eskimo, the former ten, the latter twenty years after the date of M'Clintock's exhaustive investigation, and thirty years after the event, cannot for a moment be accepted when they in any way disagree with information carefully collected so many years nearer the time. Captain Hall, in May 1869, just touched the line of retreat at Todd's Island and Peffer River. He heard that seven bodies were buried at these places, and he brought home bones supposed to have been those of Lieutenant Le Vescomte, of H.M.S. *Erebus*. He heard the story of the wreck of the ship, and of one body of a tall man having been found on board, and he was also told that a boat and a tent full of bodies were seen by the Eskimo in Terror Bay, some miles south of the position where M'Clintock and Hobson found the boat. There is nothing

improbable in the latter story, but it is not corroborated by Lieutenant Schwatka who carefully searched the spot. This, however, does not disprove it, as all traces might easily have been obliterated, in the long lapse of time. Captain Hall also heard that the boat with the last survivors did not reach Montreal Island, but an inlet on the west side of the promontory which terminates at Point Richardson.

Lieutenant Schwatka confirms the accuracy of Hall's information on this last point. The natives told him that a boat and a number of skeletons were seen near the water-line in this inlet, and that books and papers were scattered among the rocks and long since lost. The boat was turned over, and the skeletons were beneath it. One body, perhaps that of the last survivor (not an officer), was found five miles inland. An old woman also told Lieutenant Schwatka that she saw the retreating party dragging a sledge with a boat on it, and she described the personal appearance of three of the officers. One seems to have been a doctor. She also alleged that she saw the tent and dead bodies, of which Hall heard, at the head of Terror Bay.

Lieutenant Schwatka's personal search along the west coast of King William Island was not rewarded by any important discovery. The work of M'Clintock and Hobson had been done too thoroughly. He, however, found the grave of an officer near Cape Victory. It was assumed to be that of Lieutenant Irving, of *H.M.S. Terror*, because a silver medal was picked up near it, which proved to be a mathematical prize won by that officer at the Royal Naval College in 1830. The grave of another officer was found near Point Le Vescomte, and some bones of five other different individuals. They were collected and buried. Near Cape Felix two cairns were met with, probably erected for taking bearings by parties which landed during the year before the ships were abandoned. These few details add very little to the history so well told by M'Clintock.

We already knew enough. We knew that our gallant countrymen died in discovering the North-West Passage, and that they fell in the performance of their duty. There could be no more glorious end. In Sherard Osborn's charming memoir, and in the admirable narrative of Sir Leopold M'Clintock, the heroic story of the Fate of Franklin will be read, with unfailing interest, by generation after generation. And Englishmen will, at the same time, always cherish a feeling of gratitude for the kindly deed of the brave Americans who tenderly collected and buried some of the bones of our heroes—a task which, we well know, entailed no small amount of peril and hardship.

KING WILLIAM LAND



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