

**SUFFERINGS OF THE ICE-BOUND
WHALERS: CONTAINING
COPIOUS EXTRACTS FROM A
JOURNAL TAKEN ON THE
VIEWFORTH OF KIRKALDY**

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Sufferings of the Ice-bound Whalers: Containing Copious Extracts from a Journal Taken on the viewforth of kirkaldy by Various

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VARIOUS

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SUFFERINGS
OF THE
ICE-BOUND WHALERS;

CONTAINING COPIOUS EXTRACTS

FROM A JOURNAL TAKEN ON THE SPOT BY AN OFFICER
OF THE VIEWFORTH OF KIRKALDY;

AND EMBRACING

FULL DETAILS OF THE JANE OF HULL, AND OF THE WRACK
OF THE MIDDLETON OF ABERDEEN.

The Lord maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters.—ISAIAH.

SECOND EDITION.

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THE season of 1835 will be long remembered as one of the most eventful and disastrous in the history of the Whale Fishery. Perilous as the occupation is at all times, we believe no one season can produce so many shipwrecks and detentions, accompanied with such loss of life and property, and extreme privations and sufferings. The sudden and extensive changes that take place in the Polar Seas, appear to depend on causes which we are as unable to foresee as to controul, and have often baffled the calculations of the most skilful and experienced navigators. Those acquainted with the many unsuccessful voyages which have been undertaken with a view to the discovery of north-east and west passages to India, will be at no loss to call up instances in confirmation of our statement, and the events of last season furnish a remarkable addition. It was the opinion of persons, the best acquainted with the navigation of those seas, that the vessels beset in the western parts of the Straits were moored in comparative safety, and that on account of their proximity to the shore the ensuing summer would be far advanced before the ice should so break up and divide, as to allow them to escape,—if the crews should succeed in preserving a precarious and miserable existence so long.

This might have been the case in the ordinary course of things, but the following pages will show it to have been in this instance quite the reverse. Instead of being moored in safety, they were driven in all directions by floating fields and bergs, obeying the winds and tides,—sustained fearful concussions that often obliged them to leave the vessels and betake themselves to the ice,—faced the most awful dangers,—and made many narrow and heart-stirring escapes. In perfect keeping with these apparent irregularities, they were liberated almost in the middle of winter, and returned unexpectedly to the joy of anxious friends, but, alas! in too many instances to the sorrow of the widow and fatherless.

There are now (2d March) only two vessels remaining in those seas, concerning whose fate an anxious uncertainty continues to be felt,—the *Lady Jane* of Newcastle and *William Torr* of Hull. The latest accounts received of the former were by the *Grenville Bay*, Captain Taylor, who saw her towards the central parts of the Straits, on the 17th December. The latter is understood to be near the western shore, and was supposed to have been in company with those embraced in our narrative; but it turns out that they neither saw nor heard of her, unless (and it is highly probable) she were the vessel descried from the mast-head the 15th October. The following journal is confined to the *Viewforth* of *Kirkaldy*, *Jane* of Hull, and *Middleton* of Aberdeen; and though taken by an officer in the first-named ship, they were so much in company during the whole period of their detention, and participated so often in the same privations and dangers, that it will be found to include every thing material in the history of the other two. An error has

found its way into nearly all the public prints regarding the place in which these ships were beset. Home Bay, where they are represented to have been inclosed, lies in lat. $68^{\circ} 37'$, but they never were beyond lat. 68° . To speak with as much accuracy as such a point ordinarily admits of, with vessels in those seas, they were first inclosed in the beginning of August, in Merchant Bay, in lat. $67^{\circ} 40'$, and notwithstanding unremitting and hazardous exertions, were seldom able to make their way to any great distance, but were continually drifted about, mainly to southward, till the period of their liberation.

The situation of these unfortunate vessels, during the past winter, excited an interest truly national, and we believe there is a general curiosity to know how the time was spent, and what befel them in a region seldom visited by man at such a season. That curiosity, we happen to be able to gratify to a very considerable extent. The following journal possesses all the advantages of being written on the spot as events occurred, and is highly creditable to the head and heart of its author, whose name is withheld merely in deference to his own excessive modesty. In giving the selections, we have been influenced chiefly by a regard to variety. The extracts from the journal will be easily distinguished from our occasional remarks by the monthly dates, and being marked as quotations.

The following brief notices of the passage outward, before they arrived at the scene of their perils, or even of their professional operations, may not be unacceptable to the reader.

April 30. "Exactly at noon, Neptune went through his exercise of shaving, and not fewer than a dozen went through his hands. It is almost the only amuse-

ment sailors have got, and then they join in it with such glee. And when at length, up goes the garland, how proud are we to see that our ship looks as well as any of her consorts.

May 20. "We are now among the Whale Fish Islands, and have six Esquimaux aboard of us. They brought a fiddle along with them, and in a shot all hands were out to get the 'tween decks cleared away, and there they lilted it in merry style for two whole hours. How happy the poor creatures were. I got a dart from them for some half dozen biscuits, and they went away as happy as if they had found a treasure.

June 11. "This day forty sail of us were lying at different bergs on the north side of Hare Island, when the ice suddenly opened, and we were immediately under weigh. We were among the first, the whole fleet following in beautiful style, but we were soon stopt again by the ice. Along with some others, we made fast to a berg at Four Island Point, when the Esquimaux immediately came off, and began to traffic with us in various small articles.

August 31. "These three weeks past we have been still using our endeavour to get to the north. We are now in Brodie's Bay, lying at the land ice, in company with the Jane and Middleton. I have been ashore on the top of a high hill, and saw nothing but ice. The sky, however, reflected the appearance of water in the distant north. Have seen many fish, but owing to the young ice setting in, could not get at them. We are now completely hemmed in, and cannot move to any great distance."

The above month exhibited the interesting phenomena, produced by refraction on a scale of grotesque magnificence, nowhere to be seen but in these high

latitudes, where an ever-changing atmosphere presents all sorts of media. The wild and fantastic forms which they beheld cannot be described, and exceeded in variety the powers of the kaleidoscope itself. Midway in air were mountains and icebergs of all sizes and shapes,—vessels suspended with their keels uppermost, and sometimes others beneath them, their topmasts meeting each other, and ten thousand other forms which the imagination readily identified with animate and inanimate objects, while others were such as the wildest fancy could never have devised. Another phenomenon which often presented itself during the period of their captivity, was the *corona* or *halo*, both of the sun and moon, and which consists of luminous circles usually two or three in number. The form most frequently observed presented the interior ring a bright red, the second a pale yellow, and the third reflecting all the prismatic colours in their utmost delicacy and beauty. These were frequently accompanied by a number of false suns or moons encircled with similar glories, the whole presenting some of the optical laws in their most exquisite combinations. But, perhaps, the most brilliant and cheerful (though sometimes terrifically grand) spectacle they beheld was the *aurora borealis*, or *northern lights*, which more than any other natural appearance tended to enliven the long and gloomy nights they had to spend in these desolate regions. These fire-works of nature, as we may call them, are nowhere to be seen in perfection but in the distant north. It was the misfortune of our brave seamen to witness the whole apparatus in full play in the dead of winter. Sometimes it was tranquil, but more frequently shifting and varying, presenting a luminous tract along the northern horizon—torches set up in different