

CHAPTER VII

SCOTTISH EXPLORERS IN THE ARCTIC

SCOTSMEN have in their native land a somewhat severe climate, a country which is partially unfitted for cultivation, and a soil which, even where arable, returns a reward only after much labour and pains. That a race so aggressive, enterprising, and courageous—so ambitious, determined, and adaptable as Scotsmen are—should have gone abroad and taken a large share in the development of Canada and other countries is surely not surprising. Dr. John Hill Burton, in his "Scot Abroad," shows that in the past centuries, even five hundred years ago and more, Scotsmen left their native land to push their fortunes in France, Germany, and even Russia, and gained distinction in the great fields of reward: those of the author and scholar, the soldier, the statesman, and the artist. It has thus become a byword that Scotsmen, finding their own land too "strait," went "furth of Scotland" and bravely struggled for the prizes open to them, so that it has been said that there are more wealthy Scotsmen in London than there are in Edinburgh, that if there is a bishopric or exalted Church

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position to be filled a Scotsman is usually near by, and that in Canada men of Scottish blood have had well-nigh a monopoly of college and University presidencies.

In connection with our subject, it may be said of Scotsmen that though of mixed origin they have in their island home the memories of seafaring ancestors. The Celtic people of Scotland—both Picts and Scots—skimmed over their waters in rude coracles, crossed the stormy seas that beset their native isles from the German Ocean, the fierce Pentland Firth, or the Atlantic spitting in fretful temper on the Hebrides, and ventured thus in rudely constructed boats and crazy shallops. The tempestuous Irish Sea was their playground. But to every "airt" of Scotland came the invaders, the Norsemen in their galleys, the Danes in their ships, and the Saxon tribes in hordes, and made settlements on every shore. Orkney was entirely Norse. Sutherland was the land south of Orkney and had a people of mixed Celtic and Norse blood. The Hebrides fared in the same way. Strathclyde, with Dumbarton for its capital, was the Western kingdom chiefly of Celts. Galloway even retained its Celtic name, but yet saw its people mixed up along the coast with settlers of Norse blood and speech, who took up their abode upon the land, saying, like the Lotus-eaters, "We will no longer roam."

Thus grew up a race of mixed Celtic, Norse, and Danish blood, as shown by the physical features of the people, and even by linguistic

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characters. But this was also the case with certain coasts of England. It was then in later days no wonder that the blood of the North, with its love of adventure and its familiarity with the sea, should lead to early voyages across the Atlantic.

The Great British Navigators.

The greater wealth of England and the need of defending herself from Continental invasion moved the British people to encourage her sea-going people and to begin the building of a fleet to defend her shores from Spaniard, French, or Dutch attacks upon her "tight little island." This led to voyages to the shores of the Canadian Northland before any Scottish captains thought of adventuring themselves across the Atlantic Ocean to American shores. To good Queen Bess of Scottish blood and her British captains will ever remain the glory of exploring the seas and coasts of the regions now known as Northern Canada. True, the great Queen's grandfather, Henry VII., had sent out the Italian navigators, John and Sebastian Cabot, to find Labrador, the Baccalaos (Newfoundland), Cape Breton, and Nova Scotia, but we have few details of their explorations. The Queen did mighty things for England by the encouragement she gave to her great sailor heroes. Her Devonian captains were the wonder of the world. Sir Humphrey Gilbert—half-brother of the celebrated Sir Walter Raleigh—was the first to make application for an expedition to undertake

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the search for the North-West Passage. These Devonshire men were kindred in race to the mixed communities of Celto-Norsemen that make up the sea-coast people of Scotland. Being a favourite of the Queen, Gilbert recommended for this hazardous journey a young seaman of little more than thirty years of age, of Celtic blood—as he was originally from Wales—Martin Frobisher, who made three voyages and left his name on Frobisher Strait. Frobisher afterwards became an Admiral of the Fleet, of which Sir Francis Drake was the chief. Drake was also a Devonshire man, and in his journey around the world went up the Pacific Coast and saw the mountains upon a spot which some declare to have been within the borders of our British Columbia. Whether this be true or not, it is certain that on his return from circumnavigating the globe Queen Elizabeth came on board his ship, the *Golden Hind*, and knighted the captain, who had succeeded “in first turning a furrow about the whole world.” Another of these Devonshire sea-dogs, born at Plymouth, was John Hawkins, who as a colleague of Sir Francis Drake raised high the banner of English seamanship. We have named these as being probably kindred in blood with those who from the shores of Scotland led the way to the northern shore of what is now the Arctic coast of Canada. After the death of Captain Cook, it is true that Captain Scoresby published an account of Greenland and called attention to Arctic America. Sir John Barrow, an English naval officer, was instru-

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mental in rousing the British Government to devise means of reaching the Arctic. Lieut. Edward Parry was among the officers of the *Isabella* and *Alexander* expeditions ; but in 1819 a man, afterward of world-wide fame, of Lincolnshire, on the East Coast of England—John Franklin—was sent upon a most important search. This was nothing else than making a land journey through Rupert's Land, which afterward became in 1870 a part of Canada. From this time on a succession of notable Scottish captains made their mark in exploring Northern Canada. Among these the man most interesting to Scotsmen was John, afterwards Sir John, Richardson. He was born in Nith Place, Dumfries, in 1787, being a son of a Provost of Dumfries. He was well acquainted with the poet Burns. Richardson passed through Edinburgh University as a physician, and was in 1819 appointed surgeon and naturalist to Franklin's first expedition through Northern Canada, travelling within it 5,500 miles. Six years afterwards he went on Franklin's second expedition, having with him a brilliant young Scottish botanist, Thomas Drummond, who spent six years in the Canadian Northland, but died on his way home to his native land. Richardson, in command of an expedition of his own in 1826, explored the coast of the Arctic Ocean for nine hundred miles from the mouth of the Mackenzie River to that of the Coppermine. He assisted on his return to Britain in making the celebrated "Fauna Boreali Americana," a biological account of the animals and

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plants of Northern Canada. Remaining at home, he was appointed Physician to the Royal Hospital, and had as one of his students Thomas Huxley. As all the world knows, Sir John Franklin went on his last voyage with his two ships the *Erebus* and *Terror* in 1845 and never returned. Three years later Richardson was appointed in charge of an overland expedition to find his old chief. Unsuccessful, he returned, and would probably have been appointed Director-General of the Medical Department of the Navy, but his age of sixty-two precluded this, and he retired to spend his life in great literary activity in the Lake Country of Cumberland. A Fellow of the Royal Society and knighted in 1846, he died at the ripe age of seventy-eight, an honour to science and a credit to his native Scotia.

Reference was made to the notable voyage of Captain Parry, afterward Sir Edward Parry. With him was John Ross, born in Galloway, Scotland, the region where Celtic and Norse blood are commingled. Born in 1777, the son of a parish minister in Wigtonshire, and his mother the daughter of a Provost of Dumfries, John Ross was placed in the Navy at the age of nine, and after rapid promotion was in 1818 appointed Commander of a ship designed to find the North-West Passage. Progressing well up through Davis Strait, the captain made a serious error in judgment in retiring, contrary to the opinion of his officers, on account of a reputed range of hills, called the Croker Mountains, which he imagined

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prevented the further progress of his expedition. On his return the sentiment of the Admiralty and of the British public was decidedly against him. With true Scottish pluck he persisted until he was allowed to make another trip to the Arctic, and the ship *Victory* was put in commission, under his command. This voyage in the ship was provided for him by Felix Booth, a rich gentleman of Stranraer. For four years he remained in the Arctic regions, was compelled to leave his ship, the *Victory*, in the ice, and return to Britain in his old ship, the *Isabella*. Four years spent in the ice was sufficient to allow the complete survey of the peninsula of Boothia, which was so called after his patron, and also the region named after King William IV., as well as to reach the presumption that the North-West Passage did not lie in that direction. After his return Ross was knighted and received the gold medals from the Geographical Societies of London and Paris. The last years of the life of Sir John Ross were spent in much controversy with the other Arctic captains; but his pluck, pertinacity, and assertiveness show him to have been possessed of that "perfervidum ingenium Scotorum," a well-known characteristic of his countrymen.

Along with Sir John Ross on his voyage in the *Victory* in 1829 was his nephew, James Clark Ross, who was afterward knighted and became a Rear-Admiral in the Royal Navy. Born in Wigtonshire in 1800, James Ross reached his rank of Commander in the Navy in 1827. On Sir John

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Ross's great voyage in 1829-33 the most marked event was the discovery in 1831 of the North Magnetic Pole. The immediate glory of this discovery belongs to James Clark Ross, who, leaving the ship, made in a four or five days' overland journey, facing a north-west wind, one of the greatest of world discoveries. This sledge journey reached its destination on June 1, 1831. The explorer's words are worth quoting:—

The land at this place is very low on this west side of Boothia Felix, but it rises into ridges of fifty or sixty feet high about a mile inland. We could have wished that a place so important had possessed more of mark or note. It was scarcely censurable to regret that there was not a mountain to indicate a spot to which so much interest must ever be attached; and I could even have pardoned any one among us who had been so romantic or absurd as to expect that the magnetic pole was an object as conspicuous and mysterious as the famous mountain of Sinbad, that it was even a mountain of iron, or a magnet as large as Mont Blanc. But Nature had here erected no monument to denote the spot which she had chosen as the centre of one of her great and dark powers; and where we could do little ourselves towards this end, it was our business to submit, and to be content in noting in mathematical numbers and signs, as with things of far more importance in the terrestrial system, what we could ill distinguish in any other manner.

The necessary observations were immediately commenced, and they were continued throughout this and the greater part of the following day. The amount of the dip, as indicated by my dipping needle, was $89^{\circ} 59'$, being thus within one minute of the vertical, while the proximity at least of this pole, if not its actual existence where we stood, was further confirmed by the action, or rather by the total inaction of several horizontal needles in my possession. There was not one which showed the slightest effort to move from the position in which it was placed.

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As soon as I had satisfied my own mind on this subject, I made known to the party this gratifying result of all our joint labours ; and it was then that, amidst mutual congratulations, we fixed the British flag on the spot, and took possession of the North Magnetic Pole and its adjoining territory in the name of Great Britain and King William the Fourth. We had abundance of material for building in the fragments of limestone that covered the beach ; and we therefore erected a cairn of some magnitude, under which we buried a cannister containing a record of the interesting fact, only regretting that we had not the means of constructing a pyramid of more importance and of strength sufficient to withstand the assaults of time and of the Esquimaux. Had it been a pyramid as large as that of Cheops I am not quite sure that it would have done more than satisfy our ambition under the feelings of that exciting day. The latitude of this spot is $70^{\circ} 5' 17''$ N. and its longitude is $96^{\circ} 46' 45''$ W.

Commander James Ross thus gained a distinction which led to his being appointed in 1838 to the head of a magnetic survey of the United Kingdom. In the following year he was sent on a magnetic and geographical survey in the Antarctic regions in command of two ships—the *Erebus* and *Terror*. In 1841 he discovered and named the great volcano of the Antarctic, calling it Mt. Erebus. On his return to Britain much honour was shown him ; not only was he knighted, but D.C.L. of Oxford, F.R.S., and gold medals of London and Paris Geographical Societies were bestowed upon him. He died at the age of sixty-two, leaving behind him an example of courage and perseverance equal to that of his uncle, Sir John, though possessed of a larger amount of Scottish shrewdness and adaptability than his celebrated relation had shown.

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It is jocularly remarked that when the North Geographic Pole is discovered a Scotsman will be found there; but what more need be said of Sir James Ross as a great Scotsman than that he discovered the Magnetic Pole in one end of the earth and the flaming Mt. Erebus in the other?

On Sir John Franklin's first journey over the frozen north of Rupert's Land he had as a lieutenant a young Orkney gentleman—John Rae—who had been in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company and thus knew the country. John Rae was born near Stromness in the Orkney Islands in 1813. He studied medicine in Edinburgh, and went to the Moose Factory on the Hudson's Bay Company ship from London, and was for a time the Company's surgeon at that fort. His twelve years at the quiet fort on Hudson Bay were spent largely in scientific study. The Hudson's Bay Company had been compelled by public opinion to take part in the northern exploration, and Dr. Rae was detailed to examine the coast between Parry's explorations and those of Ross. He and his party of ten men in two boats surveyed seven hundred miles of coast. It was in the following year that he joined the land expedition in search of Franklin. After being a short time in charge of Mackenzie River district under the Hudson's Bay Company he was again sent out to seek for the lost explorer, but his long journey of eleven or twelve hundred miles proved fruitless. Notwithstanding this failure, the young Orkney physician had by his daring and original sugges-

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tions gained the confidence of the British public. The plan he followed on his next attempt was, to use the language of Rupert's Land, "to go light"—*i.e.*, to take little baggage, but to be provided with firearms and fishing tackle, and to gain a living for the party from the game of the country through which they passed. Thus by canoe and boat, unhampered by supplies, they were able to travel much faster. Rae's expedition started up the west side of Hudson Bay in 1853 and wintered at Repulse Bay. In March, 1854, Dr. Rae and his party traced the west coast of Boothia, proved King William Land to be an island, obtained news of Franklin's party, purchased relics of Franklin from the Eskimos, and returned to his winter's quarters about the end of May. At Repulse Bay he succeeded in getting further information of the lost explorer from the Eskimos. He reached York Factory in the end of August following. This was rapid work, before unknown in Arctic exploration. On going to London Dr. Rae received £10,000—one half of the £20,000 reward offered by the Government for news of Captain Franklin. He was a scientist as well as an explorer, and made a collection of plants and animals in all his long journeys. It is said that in the course of his journeys of exploration he had walked 23,000 miles. The returned explorer was made a Fellow of the Royal Society, an LL.D. of Edinburgh, and even after the transfer of Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company to Canada, and his retirement from active service,

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while living in London, he took a part in Canadian business ; and the writer knew him as a vivacious, enterprising, and patriotic Scotsman. He died in London at the ripe age of eighty.

The Hudson's Bay Company had no title to what was known as the Indian territories lying north and west of Rupert's Land. In 1821 they had secured a monopoly of trade for twenty-one years among the Indian tribes. As the time of their monopoly was drawing to a close, they felt, in order to renew their privilege, the necessity of responding to the public demand for a thorough survey of the territories and for the settlement of the old question of a North-West passage. Accordingly the Company organised an expedition and placed in charge of it Thomas Simpson, a relative of the Hudson's Bay Company Governor, Sir George Simpson. Thomas Simpson had been in the Company's service at Fort Garry in the Red River and had fallen out with the French half-breeds there, and was now, in 1836, placed in charge of the proposed exploration of the Arctic Coast. He was born in 1808 in Dingwall, Ross-shire, Scotland, and graduated as M.A. in Aberdeen University, and was now dispatched to the Arctic Coast. As he was quite a junior employee of the Company the expedition was formally placed under an old officer—Peter Warren Dease—presumably a Scotsman. This appointment greatly displeased Simpson, who was ambitious and somewhat jealous in disposition. The partners, however, did a remarkable work, well-nigh completing the

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survey of the North coast, and returned to Red River Settlement to be heartily received. Soon afterward Simpson started for Britain across the plains of Minnesota. He was killed by a gunshot wound in the head at his prairie encampment. Some say it was a suicide, others that he was killed by some of his own party. His body was taken back to the Red River Settlement and was buried in St. John's Churchyard at Winnipeg. Thomas Simpson's ability has been challenged by no one, and his upright, inflexible, though somewhat imperious, character was of a type which many Scotsmen admire.

Among those who went on the great search for Franklin was a seaman born on the other side of the Channel from Scotland, but who, according to our principle of including the "Scoto-Irish" element, is entitled to notice in our history. This was Sir Robert John McClure, son of a captain of the 89th Regiment. McClure was an officer on the *Terror* on her voyage in 1836-37. He also served on the flagship *Niagara* on the Canadian lakes in 1838-39. He was appointed Captain of the *Investigator* to go to the Arctic in 1849. Going by way of the Pacific through Behring Straits he reached 125° W. long., and being hindered by ice turned on a journey along Banks' Land. Here, ascending a hill 600 feet high, and looking from the north-east extremity eastward to "Parry's Farthest" and Melville Island, he saw no land but continuous ice between them and him. McClure thus discovered the North-West Passage.

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It was not till four years later that it was found that the lost Franklin and his companions had discovered another similar passage, which entitled Sir John Franklin to be ranked as the first discoverer of the North-West Passage.

McClure, however, had the good fortune to be the first to announce his discovery, and he was voted in the British Parliament the sum of £10,000. McClure deserved his reward, for he had always shown a strong sense of duty to his country. He was knighted in 1850 for his services to Britain, and died at the age of sixty-six.

Among the captains who went in search of Franklin in Arctic Canada was William Kennedy, who was born of Orkney parents on the banks of the Saskatchewan River. He was in charge of the expedition sent out in the *Prince Albert* schooner (1851-52). Second in command was Lieut. Bellot, after whom Bellot Strait was named. Captain Kennedy was at one time in his voyage quite near the spot where the relics of Franklin's expedition were afterwards found. He was prevented from reaching the coveted Sound by reason of its being filled with islands. It had been his intention to go southward in the direction of King William's Island. Had he gone south he would in all likelihood have made the longed-for discovery and have received the reward. After returning from his voyage Captain Kennedy came to Canada, lived for a time in Upper Canada, and afterwards removed to Red River Settlement, where he took an important part in the affairs of

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early Manitoba. He was a kindly, high-minded, intelligent man. He lived to see Manitoba thoroughly established and to see philanthropic institutions, in which he was much interested, founded. He died at St. Andrew's Rapids on the Red River, bearing an honourable name as a Scotsman in the land of Scotsmen. A brass plate placed in St. Andrew's Church, on the banks of the river, by the Women's Canadian Society of Winnipeg, marks his memory.

Last and most successful among the captains who took part in the Franklin search was Sir Francis Leopold McClintock, born in 1819, also across the Irish Sea in Dundalk, Ireland, being the son of Henry McClintock of the Dragoon Guards. He served in four Arctic voyages. His efforts to ascertain the fate of Sir John Franklin became a passion with him. On the ship *Enterprise*, sent out in 1848, he had his introduction to the Franklin quest. On H.M. ship *Assistance* in 1850 his hopes were strengthened, and he saw during that summer traces of Franklin and his company. In 1857 McClintock made a sledge journey of seven hundred miles and reached the farthest west point yet explored in the Arctic. In that year he was promoted to be commander and in 1861 returned to the Arctic in the *Intrepid*, one of four vessels sent out during that year in search of Franklin. At this time he was out for two years and rescued McClure and his company. In 1851, as captain, he took charge of the second expedition, commanding the *Fox*, of which voyage he has left

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an interesting account. In that year he decided the matter of the fate of Franklin, his men, and his ships. He was knighted in 1859, received the freedom of the City of London, and in 1871 became Rear-Admiral. His death took place on November 17, 1907. Ireland and Scotland equally delighted to do him honour.