

## The Voyage of David Craigie to Davis Strait and Baffin Bay (1818)

Transcribed and edited by C. Ian Jackson

### CONTENTS

#### EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Provenance	1
David Craigie, the presumed author	2
The State of the Text	4
The State of Arctic Whaling in 1818	4
The Renewal of Naval Exploration of Arctic Seas	5
Craigie's Criticism of Whaling Practice	7
Craigie's Wider Interest in Science	8
Craigie's Prose Style	9
Editorial Practice	10

#### THE JOURNAL

Account of a Voyage towards Baffin's Bay. 1818	11–78
--	-------

#### Provenance

This manuscript was found in 2011 among the papers of a former president of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. Dr David Craigie (1793–1866) had bequeathed his collection of medical books to the College, and at the same time seems to have acquired Craigie's papers which are now preserved in its archives. When, in the course of her work, Ms Alison Scott, a professional archivist, came across the manuscript, she contacted the Hakluyt Society in search of information and to explore possible wider interest in the document. This request was referred to me because of my recent experience in editing William Scoresby's whaling journals from the same period, and also because I had a particular interest in the Royal Navy's exploration of Baffin Bay in 1818.<sup>1</sup>

Few whaling logs or journals from that period have survived, compared to the large number of vessels engaged in the trade. When I had the opportunity to read the manuscript in Edinburgh in March 2012, it also became immediately evident that the journal was of still greater interest because it was written as an independent commentary on the voyage and contained rare criticism of the overall British whaling trade in Davis Strait and Baffin Bay. Ms Scott and the Royal College's librarian, Iain Milne, supplied me with a copy of the manuscript, and I made a

---

<sup>1</sup> Jackson, C. Ian, ed., *The Arctic Whaling Journals of William Scoresby the Younger*, 3 vols, Hakluyt Society, 2003–11 (henceforth noted as *Scoresby's Arctic Whaling Journals*), and 'Three Puzzles from Early Nineteenth Century Arctic Exploration', *The Northern Mariner / Le marin du nord*, 17, 3, 2007, pp. 1–17.

further visit to Edinburgh in November 2012. Their continuing help and encouragement is much appreciated.

Although authorship and provenance of the document may appear to be well established, there is one caveat of some importance. Nowhere in the document is the author identified by name. There is no mention of the name of the ship on which he sailed, or of its captain's name, and even the home port of the vessel is never identified. These omissions seem clearly deliberate, enabling the author to be critical in his comments with minimum embarrassment to others, but it does mean that these important details can only be established to a high degree of probability, not certainty.

### David Craigie, the presumed author<sup>2</sup>

There seems little reason to doubt that Craigie was in fact the author of the journal found among his papers. His twenty-fifth birthday was on 6 June 1818 and he had graduated in medicine from the University of Edinburgh two years earlier. His obituary noted that in his youth 'He was not only an excellent Latin and Greek scholar, but he studied with success several Eastern languages, especially Hebrew and Persian'. This is evident in the journal, sometimes to excess. From other quotations in the manuscript, he also had a considerable knowledge of English literature, from Edmund Spenser and Shakespeare onwards. He appears to have had a particular liking for narrative poetry, up to Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, published in stages between 1812 and 1818.

Although the manuscript does not explicitly state that its author was employed as a ship's physician ('surgeon' in the contemporary usage), this was clear from his consultation with the surgeon of the Hull whaler *Brunswick* when both ships were frozen in the ice off Greenland. As a newly-qualified physician, Craigie faced a dilemma in treating the illness of one of his ship's crew. In his view, described in the long entry for 7 June, the patient was dying, and no treatment of his condition was likely to avert this. Therefore, only palliative actions seemed appropriate. In such a situation it is understandable that Craigie sought confirmation of this from a presumably more experienced colleague on the *Brunswick*.

The manuscript opens with the departure of his ship from Stromness in Orkney, but this was clearly not the home port. The document ends with the statement that it required a total of twelve days 'in proceeding from and returning to, the destined port', including the time spent in Stromness. Several North Sea ports in Scotland and northern England were within this range of Orkney, but the possibilities can be reduced from the data on whaling success published annually by Francis Devereux.<sup>3</sup> From the manuscript it appears that the voyage described brought a total

---

<sup>2</sup> There is a brief entry for Craigie in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and a lengthy obituary in the *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, vol. 12, Aug. 1868, pp. 188–92. Neither of these sources mention his participation in whaling voyages.

<sup>3</sup> 'An Account of the Number of FISH, with the produce of OIL & BONE, brought by each Ship from the Greenland

of only three whales. From the Devereux data, the following ships of the Davis Strait fleet each brought back three whales: Hull: *Alfred*, *Kiero*, and *Samuels*; Whitby: *James*; Newcastle: *Cove*; Leith: *Success* and *Thomas and Ann*; Kirkaldy: *Sisters*; Dundee: *Advice* and *Three Brothers*.<sup>4</sup>

If Craigie, born and raised in the parish of North Leith, which includes the docks and former whaling port, was indeed the author of the manuscript, then the probability is that either the *Success* (Captain Thompson) or the *Thomas and Ann* (Captain Davidson) was the vessel on which he sailed in 1818.

Although it will be assumed in the remainder of this Introduction that Craigie was the author of the manuscript, one further caveat needs to be mentioned. The manuscript implies that this may not have been the first arctic whaling voyage made by its author.<sup>5</sup> If Craigie had gone earlier as a qualified doctor, this would suggest 1817 or just possibly 1816, the year of his graduation. According to his obituary, however, ‘in 1817 he had a most severe attack of typhus, from which he very nearly died’.

From several explicit statements in the manuscript, it is clear that Craigie intended it for publication as a book. Why then did he leave it at an advanced state of revision? It would not be surprising if the principal reason was that two other books were published before Craigie’s text was ready that covered much of his subject-area. On the exploration side the *Journal of a Voyage of Discovery to the Arctic Regions* by an ‘Officer of the *Alexander*’, was published in London in 1819.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, on the whaling side, William Scoresby’s two volumes, *An Account of the Arctic Regions*, were published by Constable in Edinburgh in 1820. Craigie was aware of Scoresby’s earlier writing on the Arctic in the *Transactions of the Wernerian Society*, and quoted him in the manuscript. He may therefore have realized, or been advised by a potential publisher, that the prospects for yet another book on the same topic at that time were very limited. This however is again only speculation. Whether it is true or not, it is fortunate that Craigie retained the manuscript among his papers. It is written from a different perspective from that of a whaling captain, and about a different area from the Greenland Sea that Scoresby knew. Whereas Scoresby described, in his journals as well as in *The Arctic Regions*, a whaling fleet that operated through a set of rules, conventional practice, and a basic regard for the safety of the general enterprise, Craigie drew attention to the individual actions of whaling ships and their crews that sank sometimes to the level of selfishness and even lawlessness. Both authors provide convincing examples of their arguments, and maybe there was a significant difference between the behaviour of the fleets in the Greenland Sea and Davis Strait. In any case the literature on whaling would be the poorer without Craigie’s account.

---

and Davis’s Streights Whale Fisheries, for the year 1818’.

<sup>4</sup> Not to be confused with the *Three Brothers* of Hull, which was wrecked in Davis Strait on 3 July 1818, as the manuscript relates.

<sup>5</sup> For example, in regard to the visit of six Inuit to the ship on 20 May, he remarked that ‘I had seen a native of this quarter of the globe on a former occasion ...’ It is possible, however, that he had seen someone who had been brought back to Scotland from an earlier whaling voyage.

<sup>6</sup> See below. The *Alexander* was one of the Royal Navy’s exploring ships in Baffin Bay in 1818, and the ‘Officer’ was presumed to be, like Craigie, the ship’s surgeon Alexander Fisher.

## The State of the Text

Craigie abandoned work on his intended book at an advanced stage. More revision and polishing were clearly necessary, but the overall structure, as an expanded journal of the 1818 voyage, was clear. The most complete version, which forms the basis of the text published here, consists of pages numbered from 1 to 285, though with one important gap. This occurs at page 34 and the next numbered page is 43.<sup>7</sup> However, page 43 reverts to the text, in mid-page and mid-sentence, on page 22, and so there is overlap between this point and page 34. A comparison of the overlapping texts suggests that page 43 onwards is a later, revised version. For example, punctuation is much improved, and several short and unnecessary passages have been deleted. The present text therefore follows page 43 onwards, and the beginning and end of the overlap are indicated in footnotes.

A further complication is provided by the inclusion, in what Craigie apparently left as the working text (CRD/ 2/1/1 in the Royal College's archives), of an unnumbered segment of fifteen pages. This appears to be an earlier version of text that, considerably altered and expanded, occurs between pages 43 and 92 of the numbered version. It has not been used in producing the present text.

In short, the text that follows represents a work in progress, at an advanced stage in the author's revisions. Although dates are indicated only sporadically, it appears to be a continuous account of the 1818 voyage from the departure from Stromness to passing through Pentland Firth on the return.

## The State of Arctic Whaling in 1818

The years immediately following the end of both the Napoleonic wars and the War of 1812 were prosperous for the British, who dominated arctic whaling activity at that time. From the Devereux data, the British whaling fleet in 1818 numbered 157 ships from seventeen ports. Sixty-four of these ships sailed from Hull, more than three times the number from its nearest rival, London. The majority of ships (60%) sailed for the Greenland Sea, between Greenland and Svalbard; the remaining sixty-three ships headed for Davis Strait and Baffin Bay. Apart from the loss of the *Three Brothers* of Hull, the rest of the fleet returned from both areas with blubber and bone from 1208 whales, yielding 14,489 tons of oil and 666 tons of whalebone.

In his comprehensive 1993 account of 'Commercial Whaling in the North Atlantic Sector',<sup>8</sup> Ross noted that what Scoresby has termed the 'Whale Fisher's Bight' in the Greenland Sea – a tendency for open water to remain almost as far north as Svalbard – is replicated in Davis

---

<sup>7</sup> There is also one inadvertent and unimportant error at page 255 of the MS. This page number has been repeated on the following page, so that there is one more page than the numbering indicates.

<sup>8</sup> Chap. 13 in John J. Burns, et al., eds, *The Bowhead Whale*, Lawrence, Kansas, 1993, pp. 511–77.

Strait: ‘The open water area against the Greenland coast provides a route for whales and ships’. Summarizing Scoresby’s account in *The Arctic Regions* (which was itself necessarily based on information, not experience), Ross went on to describe a typical voyage pattern that is exemplified in Craigie’s manuscript:

The ships whaled at the “South West fishery” (the pack-ice margin off southwestern Baffin Island) in April, gradually working their way northward along the ice towards the coast of Greenland which they intersected around 67°N. They were usually at Disko Island and South East Bay (Disko Bay) in early May and north of Disko Island by early June.. As the whale fisher’s bight expanded, they continued north and sometimes probed westward towards Baffin Island in openings along the ice front. From their northernmost position in Baffin Bay, they returned through the middle of Davis Strait, gave Cape Farewell a wide berth, and headed east to Britain.

In 1818, that pattern was followed, but ships were icebound in what was normally the whale fisher’s bight for so long that Craigie commented in his journal: ‘August 1st A late period of the season this, to be knocking about in Latitude 75° North’.

Despite this apparent prosperity, the arctic whaling industry was on the verge of transformation. On the supply side, Ross saw 1820 as a dividing line for Davis Strait and Baffin Bay, and the same was true in the Greenland Sea. In the latter area the number of whales (2452) taken in the 1820–29 decade was much less than half the number in the preceding decade, and the decline continued: 346 in 1830–39 and fewer than 100 per decade after 1860. In Davis Strait and Baffin Bay, the west Greenland coastal area declined similarly due to over-hunting, but whaling after 1820 focused on the west side of the area, especially along the Baffin Island coast, and declined more gradually than in the Greenland Sea. On the demand side, the decade from 1820 to 1829 was also significant. In Britain, gas lighting was replacing oil lamps both domestically and in street lighting, and with the return of peacetime the use of whale oil in military uniforms and cheap clothing was also reduced. The government subsidy to whaling ships that had existed since 1733 expired in 1824 and was not renewed.<sup>9</sup>

Although Craigie’s voyage in 1818 was unsuccessful, it therefore took place at a high point in British arctic whaling, a few years before over-hunting and reduced demand initiated a long decline.

### **The Renewal of Naval Exploration of Arctic Seas**

One of the features of the Craigie manuscript is the mention, on several occasions, of the Royal Navy’s voyage of exploration in Baffin Bay under the command of John Ross, in the *Isabella* and *Alexander*.<sup>10</sup> Together with two similar ships, the *Dorothea* and *Trent*, sent to the Greenland

<sup>9</sup> For the later 19th-century history of British whaling, and the replacement of Hull and other English ports by Peterhead and Dundee, see Gordon Jackson, *The British Whaling Trade*, London, Black, 1978.

<sup>10</sup> These were not ships built for the Royal Navy, but were merchant vessels hired for the occasion, and strengthened

Sea under David Buchan, they represented an effort by the Royal Navy to find employment for some of the officers who were left with little or nothing to do after the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815.

To some extent, the expedition to Baffin Bay can be viewed as a renewal of the long search for a northwest passage to the Pacific Ocean. But it was complicated by the belief in an 'open polar sea', i.e. that sea-ice was to be found only in the vicinity of land and hence, if there was no land in polar latitudes, there would be little or no ice there. John Barrow, Secretary to the Admiralty, was a firm believer in this notion, and the sailing orders for the two expeditions were based on the assumption of an open polar sea.<sup>11</sup> The *Dorothea* and *Trent* were to sail directly across the North Pole, or close to it, while the *Isabella* and *Alexander* were expected to disprove what William Baffin had reported in 1616, that the area named for him was indeed a *bay*. Barrow anticipated that the explorers would find instead a broad channel extending into the arctic basin, through which these ships also could penetrate to Bering Strait and the Pacific Ocean. The orders gave much space to the way that the four ships would meet again in the North Pacific.

Seen in that context, both expeditions were failures, though their lack of success did not put an end to the belief in an open polar sea. From another standpoint, however, Ross's expedition led to two important developments in arctic navigation. The better-known was the exploration of Lancaster Sound as the main marine highway into the Canadian arctic islands, by Ross's second-in-command, William Edward Parry, in 1819–20.

The second development was the shift of whaling towards the west side of Davis Strait and Baffin Bay.

When the Northwest Passage expedition under John Ross, in 1818, showed the way from Melville Bay into the North Water and Lancaster Sound and returned southward along the coast of Baffin Island, whalers rapidly moved into the new territory and developed a new routine. Thereafter they followed a counterclockwise circuit of the Davis Strait-Baffin Bay region ... [returning] towards Davis Strait along the Baffin Island coast during August and September.<sup>12</sup>

That John Ross's expedition would have such a major influence on the future of whaling was quite unforeseen in 1818. If Craigie's journal represents the general attitude of the whaling fleet, as it probably does, the Royal Navy's exploration was seen with mild interest by the whalers, but as a search for a northwest passage that had no relevance to their own activities.

---

against ice.

<sup>11</sup> The sailing orders are included as an Annex in vol. 2 of Ross's *A Voyage of Discovery, ... for the purpose of exploring Baffin's Bay, and enquiring into the probability of a north-west passage* (2nd edn, 2 vols, London, 1819).

<sup>12</sup> Ross, W. Gillies, 'Commercial Whaling in the North Atlantic Sector', pp. 511–61, in Burns John J., J. Jerome Montague & Cleveland J. Cowles, eds, *The Bowhead Whale*, Special Publication No. 2, The Society for Marine Mammalogy, Lawrence, KS, 1993.

### Craigie's Criticism of Whaling Practice

Probably the main value of the Craigie manuscript is that it presents an unflattering view of the behaviour of the whaling fleet in Davis Strait and Baffin Bay. To some extent he criticized the fleet for adhering to a pattern of behaviour that seemed inherited from the past and that was no longer in the interests of the fleet as a whole. However, he also went much further and described a situation in which normal competition among ships and whaleboats was replaced by actions that were essentially selfish, designed to ensure that others were prevented from capturing a whale, even if there was no possibility that this could benefit the party taking the action.

The impression of a 'wild west' reaches its extreme in the account of crew members from the *Eagle* of Hull setting fire to an unoccupied house on the Greenland coast on 26 June, apparently for no reason other than they could do so without fear of retribution. They may have miscalculated, as the event came to the attention of the Royal Navy exploring expedition. The following is from Alexander Fisher's journal. Unlike Craigie he was not a witness to the event, but he describes the consequences.

This day, Lieutenant Parry, with four other officers, two from the *Isabella* and two from our ship, went, by order of Captain Ross, on board the *Eagle*, of Hull, to inquire into the conduct of a part of the crew of that ship, who had, in the course of the last week, committed an act of the most wanton barbarity on shore at Four Island Point. This was nothing less than burning the house belonging to the Danish factory at that place.

On enquiring into the manner in which this disgraceful outrage was committed, it appeared, that two of the men had gone onshore without the knowledge of the master, who was in bed at the time, and, as it would appear, purposely with an intention to set fire to the house, for they had provided themselves with a tinder-box. The only excuse they had to make, when questioned as to their motive for so shameful a conduct, was, that the house had been plundered, and partly torn down, by other persons before they went on shore, so that they thought it nothing more than a piece of amusement, or, to use their own words, a piece of frolic, to give the finishing stroke to it, which they did so effectually, that scarcely a vestige of it was left unconsumed. The entire fabric being of wood, rendered its destruction complete. Mr. Bruce,<sup>13</sup> the master of the *Eagle*, promised to acquaint the Danish Inspector-General, at Leifle Bay,<sup>14</sup> of the whole transaction, in order to have the loss sustained, estimated, and paid for by those who did the mischief. I suspect, however, that the wages of two men will go but a little way towards defraying the damage done, as the value of a house in this country is much enhanced by the difficulty of procuring the materials of which it is made, at least the wood. It is to be hoped, notwithstanding, that whatever may be the pecuniary means of those who were concerned in burning this house, the matter will not be passed over unnoticed, to the end

---

<sup>13</sup> Presumably a mishearing for William Brewis, who was only in his second voyage as master of the *Eagle*.

<sup>14</sup> Godhavn, on Disko Island.

that others may be deterred from being guilty of so unwarrantable an act on a friendly nation.<sup>15</sup>

Such lawlessness seems in sharp contrast to the image of whaling in the Greenland Sea portrayed in Scoresby's journals. He is, of course, by no means the independent witness that Craigie was, but Scoresby's strong moral sense is undeniable, and one would expect that irresponsible behaviour of the type described by Craigie would be alluded to somewhere in his journals. Instead, the image given is of a Greenland Sea fleet that was undoubtedly competitive, but was nevertheless aware of the dangers involved in arctic whaling and the consequent need for mutual respect and assistance. Disputes arose, and occasionally reached the British courts.<sup>16</sup> But that is precisely the point. Greenland whaling was based on a system of laws, originally formulated by the Dutch and extended by a series of agreements and understandings that were generally observed. Craigie's journal suggests that such a framework was much less evident in Davis Strait and Baffin Bay.

### **Craigie's Wider Interest in Science**

As noted already, the lengthy obituary notice on David Craigie rightly drew attention to his ability and interest in languages and cultures. However it failed to notice that, as his journal clearly shows, he had a similar interest in aspects of science that extended far beyond his medical training. His interest in weather patterns is understandable since sailing ships depended so much on winds, clouds, sea ice, etc., but he was also deeply interested in both geology and biology, to the point that he frequently expressed frustration about his inability to study the landscapes of the Arctic, or to draw general conclusions from what he did observe.

Craigie entered the University of Edinburgh in 1809, and therefore briefly overlapped with Scoresby's second period of study at that institution. The fundamental debate between uniformitarians and catastrophists was at its height in that period, and Edinburgh University was in the centre of that debate, with John Playfair and Robert Jameson as the leading protagonists.<sup>17</sup> If this is where Craigie's geological interest developed, it is scarcely surprising.

Although there is in Craigie's sole journal much less documentary evidence as compared to Scoresby, it does seem that Craigie kept an open mind and was determined to describe phenomena as he observed them, without preconceived theories as to their origin. Both he and Scoresby were strongly religious in outlook but, for example, there is no indication that he accepted (or rejected) Bishop Ussher's seventeenth-century calculation that the world had been

---

<sup>15</sup> Fisher, Alexander, *Journal of a Voyage of Discovery to the Arctic Regions*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 33–4. This facsimile reprint of the 1819 edition identifies Assistant Surgeon Fisher as the author, whereas in 1819 he was identified only as 'An Officer of the Alexander'.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Gale vs Wilkinson, summarized in Scoresby, *The Arctic Regions*, vol. 2, pp. 518–21.

<sup>17</sup> See Scoresby's *Arctic Whaling Journals*, vol. 1, pp. xxx–xxxiii.



created in 4004 BC, whereas Scoresby apparently did accept that date.<sup>18</sup>

Craigie's comments on the coal outcrops on Vaigat Island (called Wygah or Hare Island by Craigie, now Qeqertarsuatsiaq) are of particular interest because they represent a forward-looking vision that was rare at the time. Although Britain was still only on the verge of the age of steam power, coal as a fuel was well-established and Craigie ventured to suggest that, if the country's coal resources became depleted in a century or two, locations such as Vaigat might provide an alternative source. He then proceeded in his manuscript to provide advice on where they could be found. Granted, he was unaware either of the extent of Britain's coal resources, or the possibility that other fuels might in the future make them uneconomic, but he was not entirely mistaken or fanciful. On the nearby coast of Disko Island the town of Quillissat was founded in 1924 to develop the deep mining of coal from what was presumably a continuation of the same deposit. Most of it was for use in Greenland itself, but some was also exported to Denmark.<sup>19</sup> The mines operated for almost fifty years before they, and the town, were abandoned in 1972.

The most remarkable example of Craigie's scientific knowledge and interest, however, occurs in his lengthy journal entry for 7 June, in which he described his evening visit to the *Brunswick* of Hull. Captain Blyth took the opportunity to show Craigie a number of items of scientific or other interest collected on the current voyage, and Craigie focused on a petrified bean pod collected on the shore of Vaigat island. The present text, presumably prepared as Craigie endeavoured to convert his journal into a book intended for the general reader, includes an entirely relevant reference to similar bean pods found in Orkney (popularly known as Molucca beans), citing an article in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, written by the Society's Secretary, Hans Sloane, that appeared about 120 years before the 1818 voyage.

### Craigie's Prose Style

It would be unfair to judge Craigie's literary ability on the basis of a manuscript that was clearly left unfinished. One can, however, appreciate that he was doing his best to share with the general reader the hazards, rewards, and above all the excitement of life on a whaling ship in Davis Strait and Baffin Bay in the early nineteenth century. To the modern eye, the style sometimes approaches hyperbole, or 'purple prose', and the use of poetic and other allusions seems excessive. Nevertheless, in factual descriptions (such as the behaviour of polar bears), or his more impressionistic passages (such as the view from the masthead of a mist-covered seascape, occasionally clearing to provide a view of sailors laboriously cutting ice harbours for their ships), he clearly succeeds. His finished text might well have been the book that Scoresby's publishers were hoping for instead of *The Arctic Regions*.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 168, n. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Personal communication from Dr Henrik Stendal, Bureau of Mines and Petroleum, Greenland, January 2013.

<sup>20</sup> See Scoresby's *Arctic Whaling Journals*, vol. 3, p. xxxvi: '[T]he cost has greatly exceeded our original calculations ... We would much rather it had been a cheap book'. That was before publication. They subsequently expressed surprise and pleasure about the sales of *The Arctic Regions*.

## Editorial Practice

As in the editing of Scoresby's journals, asterisks in square brackets indicate unreadable words, and words in square brackets with a question mark indicate uncertain but probable readings. In a few places an alternative word has been written above another. They are shown, for example, as prominent/obvious.

Footnotes are those of the editor unless identified as those inserted by Craigie.

In two respects the editor has departed from normal practice in regard to accurate transcription of Craigie's text. His punctuation was often inexplicable, whether viewed as a literary text or an oral presentation. In the text as presented here, this editor has revised the punctuation, without comment, to what appears to be a logical format.

The second change is that in a number of places Craigie's quotations differ in minor respects from what are nowadays accepted as the accurate text. In almost all cases, Craigie's version makes no difference to the meaning, but in order not to perpetuate these differences, this editor has used the text accepted at the present day. In a few places, however, Craigie appears deliberately to have departed from the original quotations, and these instances are identified in footnotes.

In all but his shortest verse quotations, Craigie used a form of cursive which was different to his main text. This has been represented by the use of italics in the transcription below.

ACCOUNT  
of  
A VOYAGE  
towards  
BAFFIN'S BAY. 1818

On the 10th March 1818, having closed communications, and transacted all requisite matters, we sailed from the Orcades by that outlet to the Atlantic Ocean, which, for the most part is had recourse to, as an outward passage, by vessels bound for the Northern divisions of the American continent; and by many traders from our coasts to other parts of that extensive region.

The passage alluded to, situated on the north by the Town of Stromness, and on the South, by the mountainous country of Hoy, is considered advantageous, as a means out, and although, attended with considerable trouble on account of the uncontrollable violence of the tides, is nevertheless preferred by mariners to the more circuitous route by the northern boundary of these islands.<sup>1</sup>

The town I speak of, although, in common with the surrounding country, consecrated by classic memory, is yet by no means a place of considerable note, either in a physical, or moral point of view. Its prospects, in the perspective, being confused,<sup>2</sup> barbarous, and unattractive; its interior, to the visitor, appearing dirty and uninviting, constructed without any pretension to order, and of course setting taste at defiance – filled with lazy lounging men, and impudent staring women. The avenues all narrow, and unpaved or at best wretchedly covered with unpolished flagstone in a manner that affords much unstable footing.<sup>3</sup>

A number of little docks, scooped in the margin of the great natural basin called Stromness harbour, tend at once to render the neighbouring town damp and unwholesome and prove a source of momentous inconvenience and danger, for as they are not protected by chaining, or railways,<sup>4</sup> people are apt at every step to get immersed and run great hazard of thereby losing their lives. Children are frequently drowned and it is more owing to their natural hardiness, & perhaps presence of mind, than by reason of the real deficiency of dangers, that hundreds of young creatures are not annually lost from this absurd cause.

---

<sup>1</sup> 'If bound out of Hoy mouth, it is necessary in quitting Stromness, to be well clear of the harbour before the ebb makes, or should a calm occur, an anchor must be dropped at once, for the ebb stream sets right over the skerry of Ness at the rate of 6 or 7 knots.' Great Britain, Hydrographic Department, *North Sea Pilot*, 1876, p. 161, where the tidal range is given at 7½ to 10 feet.

<sup>2</sup> In the now obsolete sense of disordered or disorderly. *OED* cites a 1714 usage: 'Gravesend is a little confused Town ... always full of seamen.'

<sup>3</sup> 'The main street was rough, muddy and narrow. Measuring only 12 feet at its widest point, the street shrank to as little as four feet in places.' *Orkneyjar* online, 'The History of Stromness.'

<sup>4</sup> Railings is presumably meant: that word was in use at the period, and *OED* has no entry for this use of 'railway.'

It is with this, as in general with every thing else, among our amiable friends in the north, – if asked why they would not with means quite at convenience put an effectual stop to such dangerous consequences – the reply would be always, in the very words of the worthy dame M<sup>C</sup> Clarty's, characteristic strain, or as the honoured & venerable Deacon of the Glasgow weavers was so often in the habit of expressing himself “tis to us, as it was to our father's [*sic*] afore us!”<sup>5</sup>

It is probable, from so rigid an adherence to the manners and habits of past times, that the people have really some notion of their ancestors returning from the ‘undiscovered country,’<sup>6</sup> and eventually upbraiding their descendants with the heavy charge of impiety and want of veneration for the memory of those to whom they are so deeply indebted for existence, and the portion of good things they possessed, did they attempt to innovate, or reform, upon the antiquated customs of such worthies. It is difficult, unless we be obliged to state to this effect of mental and corporeal indolence, that which we would more willingly allow, to have its origin in a less opprobrious cause to account for the natural stubbornness of the people in departing from such habits and conquering such principles as are alone the property of the uninitiated savage.

At the doors of the houses (*vulgo sumus* [\*\*\*]) the men and women were to be seen, trifling with each other, in mode and posture at once indecent & highly displeasing to the eye of the stranger and disclosing a picture of happiness, in the midst of miserable apathy, that might vie with any of the joyous groups in the Castle of Indolence<sup>7</sup> and recal [*sic*] to the imagination of the spectator, views of society in the interior of the Cape of Good Hope.

At distant intervals indeed, a matron or two, or a small company of young girls (who

---

<sup>5</sup> A Scottish eponym of slovenly complacency, from Mrs MacClarty in the popular satirical novel by Elizabeth Hamilton, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808) The reference to the Glasgow weavers presumably refers to the Glasgow weavers' strike of 1787.

<sup>6</sup> I.e. Back from the dead. The allusion is to the ‘To be or not to be’ soliloquy in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: ‘The undiscover'd country from whose bourn / No traveller returns’.

<sup>7</sup> *The Castle of Indolence* is a long allegorical poem by James Thomson in the style of Edmund Spenser and first published in 1748. The theme is the failure of a life of ease and idleness to bring the lasting benefits of hard work, beside which ‘Loose Life, unruly Passions, and Diseases pale.’ It takes some effort to see 19th-century Stromness as comparable to Thomson's Castle of Indolence; the following stanza probably comes closest:

Here Freedom reign'd, without the least Alloy;  
Nor Gossip's Tale, nor ancient Maiden's Gall,  
Nor saintly Spleen durst murmur at our joy,  
And with envenom'd Tongue our Pleasures pall.  
For why? There was but One great Rule for All;  
To wit, That each should work his own Desire,  
And eat, drink, study, sleep, as it may fall,  
Or melt the Time in Love, or wake the Lyre,  
And carol what, unbid, the Muses might inspire.

were very apt to spoil the order of the loops<sup>8</sup> in leering at the young fisherman, or in doing honour to the rude spirit of his [jest?]) might be seen busied in a manner with the passive employment of stocking knitting or manufacturing hand-mitts, two chief articles of export in this part of the world.

In the heart of the town, there is an establishment for instructing & employing young females, in the art of straw-plaiting,<sup>9</sup> which if I judge tolerably, they execute in a very superior style.

These girls are by the community looked upon as the belles of the place, if we except the daughters of the more worthy lairds, who I believe do not mingle with those of the seminary in question.

The Town upon the whole, when we survey all things with candour, to do justice to the judgement and sagacity of the primitive founders, is perhaps as pleasantly & conveniently situated, as the physical nature of these regions may permit although, from the extreme contiguity with the great Ocean, it must truly afford a boisterous and uncomfortable winter residence.

I have found that scabies, or Scots Fiddle<sup>10</sup> here calls loudly for the sedative influence of some of those infallible compounds which our neighbours in the South are such adepts at providing – and I believe, if some of the London authors of the sublime quack-bills<sup>11</sup> would not charge too extravagantly, they might, with a lot of the famous article in question, perform an equally pleasant and profitable tour through the islands during the proper travelling season.

March 10<sup>th</sup>. I must now bid farewell to these rugged districts – with the less regret that I am by no means pleased, or greatly entertained, with their appearance.

At this season the whole of the Orcades presents to the eye of the traveller a barren, desolate & uninteresting spectacle. Even the memory of the Romans having once inhabited these northern limits of our country can have but slight influence in attaching one's affections to such places. In fact I am of opinion, that if Agricola, when he landed on these islands, found them in no better case than I do at present, he certainly had little reason to boast of this new acquisition to the great empire. He was the first of civilized men that discovered and subjected them to the dominion of his country – but if that past was not considered as preparatory to the future

---

<sup>8</sup> Presumably a suggestion that their behaviour caused errors in their knitting.

<sup>9</sup> For use in making, for example, straw hats and table mats.

<sup>10</sup> Another use of this term for scabies is in Sir John Carr, *Caledonian Sketches or A Tour through Scotland in 1807*, London, 1809: 'Letter Findley is a solitary inn, as dirty and miserable as any venta in Spain; and worse, with regard to cleanliness and accommodation, than any other in Scotland that I met with. The children belonging to the house appeared to be, as it is tenderly called, *smitten*, or devoured, with a cutaneous disease, called, from a false impression of its being almost peculiar to Scotland, the Caledonian Cremona, or Scottish Fiddle. This disorder is principally engendered by habits of filth...'

<sup>11</sup> Advertisements for quack medicines. See *OED* 'Quack', where quack-bill is included.

government of the parent country, it must rather be viewed in the light of a painful exile than, a distinguishing honour;<sup>12</sup>

... *praesens diuus habebitur*  
*Augustus, adiectis Britannis*  
*imperico ...*

*Hor: Flac: Ode V*<sup>13</sup>

After having passed through this narrow strait, and left behind us, on the one hand the town of Stromness and adjacent country; and on the opposite direction, the mountainous district of Hoy we enter at once into the wide Atlantic; and gradually, as we proceed, the lofty hills, at this season covered with snow, divest themselves of their stupendous outline and obtrusively sublime appearance, while the rugged outskirts of the western limits of Scotland develop [sic] themselves to view, rendered doubly impressive by the ceaseless contention of the billowing waves with their rough bases.

The whole coast bears lively traces of the previous element's<sup>14</sup> destructive inroads; every moment, as we leave the land, vast masses of detached rock start out to view, as if jutting from the sea; and so numerous that they appear to form a sort of vast *chevaux de frize*,<sup>15</sup> for the defence of the connecting coast.

It is not easy to fancy a more bleak and desolate scene, than that [struck?] off by the combined agency of these dark isolated groups; and the mingled influence of an incumbent stormy sky, and a sea whitened over by the foam of the thundering breaker.

One of these exterminated masses is sufficiently remarkable on account of the strong resemblance it bears to the person of a Highlander '*en costume*'. This, like all such natural objects of resemblance, is only to be noticed in certain situations. I saw it very distinctly & could not help admiring its vast bulk and correct similarities to the supposed object.<sup>16</sup>

March 11. Farewell at once to the naked Orcades! Our gallant ship glides gaily along the Atlantic, & no land is now to be seen, unless the brow of cape Wrath – which like a dense black cloud is seen at times, scarcely visible.

---

<sup>12</sup> Despite claims by Roman authors, two of whom are quoted (in Latin) by Craigie, 'There is no evidence of a Roman presence in Orkney' (*Orkneyjar*), either by Claudius in AD 43 or by Gnaeus Julius Agricola, Roman governor of Britain four decades later.

<sup>13</sup> From Book III, Ode V of Horace's Odes: 'Augustus is considered a god on earth, for adding the Britons to our empire'.

<sup>14</sup> I.e., the sea.

<sup>15</sup> More usually *chevaux de frise*: 'defensive structure consisting of a movable obstacle composed of barbed wire or spikes attached to a wooden frame; used to obstruct cavalry.' (*The Free Dictionary*).

<sup>16</sup> This is presumably the Old Man of Hoy, at 137 metres the tallest sea stack in the United Kingdom.

We have now no company on the wide waste, except that of the beautiful Solon,<sup>17</sup> now and then passing to and from Rona Island, in quest of prey.

These creatures feed entirely on marine productions, and the manner in which they usually attack a shoal of herring is truly characteristic & singular. They generally soar high, the more readily to discover the objects of prey. Often while the eye is watching their elevated quarry, half a score of them will descend with the rapidity of lightning, to spread terrible devastation amongst the playful tenants of the subjacent element.

When all have vanished except those that have become the victims of rapacious dexterity, they again rise speedily into their wonted tract, to continue the eager pursuit.

At intervals may be seen a solitary linnet or other small bird peculiar to the adjacent coasts, fluttering about, or at times, alighting on some part of the vessel – frequently the quick-eyed Gull screaming over head, and glancing downward, where the bright but evanescent scale of the nimble herring allures his gaze.

But these become of less & less frequent occurrence – nothing at length in sight except two ships, that had got the start of us and passed a few miles ahead, but like ourselves begin now to slacken in speed on account of the decay of the southeast breeze with which we set sail together from the islands, united with the heavings of the sea from the Westward, which of itself proved a cause of great impediment.

March 12. In the morning of this day, we by reckoning supposed ourselves to be [\*\*\*] four hundred miles from land – by no means an ill run considering the [slight?] breezes that have followed us [\*\*\* \*\*\*] favourable quarter, and the swell of the sea which has gradually increased during the last twenty four hours.

About 10 o'clock pm a dead calm intervened, but still the commotion of the waters seemed more and more augmenting. The sky, looking stormy and grim, likewise aggravated [*sic*] the wildness of its appearance as the night drew on. Accordingly, being in expectation of a blast, our experienced and quick sighted commander, directed all things to be forthwith put in due trim.

The ship now pitched and rolled at a terrible rate; the water each moment rushing in by the gunwale, and sweeping over the deck: it was frightful to stand clinging, and witness this sort of rotation; every moment anticipating that the masts should dip with this water, and render it matter of impossibility for the body of the vessel to recover itself – or dreading lest the tremendous billow should unhappily chance to undulate above her, and overwhelm us in its

---

<sup>17</sup> [Craigie's footnote]: 'This bird, is certainly much larger here than those which frequent the Bass & its neighbourhood, in the Firth of Forth. – the probable cause of this may be the greater field, and abundance of prey, than in the more inland situations.' 'Solon goose' was the traditional Scottish name for the northern gannet (*Sula bassana* or *Morus bassanus*); the Bass Rock is home to more than 150,000 gannets.

yawning volume.

Gracious Neptune – defend all my readers from sea-sickness!

It is rather a difficult task to depict, to the imagination of the uninitiated who have not passed much of their time in real sailing, the disagreeable and depressing state of circumstances at this juncture.

*Who life doth lothe and longs death to behold  
Before he die, already dead with feare,  
And yet would live, with heart half stony cold  
Let him to sea, and he will find it there.  
And yet as ghastly, dredfulle as it seems  
Bold men presuming, life, for gain to selle  
Dare tempt that golphe, and in those wandring streams  
Seek ways unknown, ways leading down to helle!*<sup>18</sup>

The picture of Spenser's shepherd [*sic*] at sea is beautiful, and in this view strikingly expressive of the feelings which such a situation tends to inspire. No one can be seasick in the extreme, without loathing existence and anxiously wishing the accession of the only means means [*sic*], of relieving his weary fabric, from a state of torture, that is only to be equalled by the pains of the rack. And while at certain lucid intervals, for such there are, although transient to a degree and thereby qualified to enhance the dreadful sensation in a more poignant extent, the whole train of horribilia and past calamities are for a moment lost in oblivion, and the worn out bosom clings to life "with heart half stony cold" indeed, yet enabled to receive many soothing sensations that serve to buoy up the shrinking spirit.

During the night till 12 o'clock this calm continued; with the dawn of the ensuing morning however, we had a new arrangement in the disposition of surrounding objects. A heavy swell falling in uniformly from the westward, with the wind at South West – strong and squally, with frequent drizzling [*sic*] showers, always indicated some minutes prior to accession by a dense black or smoky like cloud in the western hemisphere.

We had been caught by several of these and were at length obliged to take in all the lesser sails, for fear of carrying away the masts or attaching spars.

In due time, however, a [grand?] bluster arrived – a hideous dark cloud, that seemed to shut out the whole sky & surrounding horizon, and spread over the lurid the lurid [*sic*] surface of the water as it approached, a dusky steaming appearance, impressing every mind with foreboding & of something uncommon.

---

<sup>18</sup> An extract from the poem 'Colin Clouds Come Home Againe' by Edmund Spenser (1552–99).



Nothing was now to be heard but repeated cries of “up up, and reef the topsails” and as every individual became more eager than his fellows to execute the necessary duty, the whole was on the instant a scene of animated hurry that language can but feebly describe.

The wind already blew with the violence of a hurricane, and the tempestuous cloud discharging its ponderous burthen in every direction with irresistible fury, the sky exhibited an uninterrupted expanse of stormy clouds that appeared as if pregnant with fire, and ready to [evaluate?] the wild elements on the bosom of the oceans, still having undiminished tumult.

The men, drenched to the skin, having with much difficulty and imminent hazard succeeded in stowing in the sails and striking the smaller masts, began now to descend, starving with cold to receive the necessary allowance of spirituous liquor, or Grog, a most judicious and acceptable cordial in such instances.

We were now fairly trimmed for the storm, or as seamen term it **snugged** – that is, the whole of the sails (with the exception of the fore & main topsails) were taken in, and these together with a small sail on the bowsprit, were close reefed and turned in different directions; in such a way that the vessel became, as it were, wedged in upon the wind, and revolved fore and aft successively, as the wind pressing upon the one sail or the other had a greater or less power to bring her about.

All those vessels which had formerly been in sight were now entirely obscured, in the density of the fog and the heavy undulation of the Sea.

The storm meantime continued to [pour?] in with redoubled violence; at times the waves dashed against the side of the vessel, communicating inwardly a sound more like the shock of collision [*sic*] with a solid body than the percussion of a mere volume of fluid. So that often while in bed (happily for us, erroneously indeed) I have felt satisfied that such thundering vibrations were directly occasioned by the stroke of a great fishes tail, or by the bottom of the vessel having come in contact with a [\*\*\*] rock.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> the tempest had reached its acme, and by this time the conflicting elements seemed to have pushed their rage to the uttermost verge. The waves rose up to a tremendous height and at intervals disrupted their gigantic volumes, with a degree of over powering force, against which no production of human art or sagacity could possibly maintain.

It is a fortunate circumstance, indeed, that such sea-breaks rarely happen over the complicated & comparatively frail engine of the mariner. Instances have been, however, in which boats & other such bulky articles, attached firmly to the deck, have at once been swept off, breaking or tearing up the boards wherein the fastening bolts were infixed, and carrying along with them into the sea great portions of the ships side or gunwale.

After mid-day the atmosphere seemed much lightened, on the whole, and the storm

abating in violence at the same time gave us hope of a speedy improvement in the condition of the weather.

The Sun became visible the first time for nearly five days, but being past meridian ere a glimpse offered [such?], our latitude was not yet determined by observation.

Towards evening the sea appeared to have exhausted the whole of its fury, and we anxiously looked forward to a change of wind, fearing that we had already run down a great leeway.

Night came but, as yet, the wind held strongly in from the Westward and the appearance of the sky afford little or no prospect of a breeze spring [*sic*] up from the opposite quarter. On the contrary, about midnight a violent squall made its approach, which was like to have pitched the vessel on her side: some of the people were actually thrown out of bed, so forcibly had it struck at the first onset.

Gradually, however, as morning dawned the weather began to improve, & we had the satisfaction before midday to find the wind at South, but rather variable; we therefore set up top-gallant-sails, resolving to make the utmost of the shortest favourable change, which although for the present by no means good, was nevertheless Elysian in comparison with that we had lately enjoyed.

For several days, the wind continued mostly from Southward, but so variable and so [varying?] to the westerly point that it was almost impossible during at least three fourths of the day to sail course and we were therefore under the disagreeable necessity of “wearing Ship” repeatedly in a very brief space of time.<sup>19</sup>

But towards the latter end of March the westerly winds, that had predominated during so long a period, and often with so great violence, began at length, to flag in a more orderly & progressive manner; so that on the 30<sup>th</sup>, it being about change of moon,<sup>20</sup> a dead calm intervened; the whole atmosphere at the same time assuming a very different aspect.

The sky, settled and beautiful, bore no longer any trace of the late disastrous commotion – the water, smooth and still, reflected the<sup>21</sup> gay and inspiring beams of the rising Sun, as they gilded the fleecy clouds that hung over his exalted path.

We were, now in the situation where the sunk land of Bus is related to have stood. In its

---

<sup>19</sup> When it is impossible to change tack against the wind, a vessel will ‘wear’ by turning downwind, turning through 20 points of the compass instead of 12. Large ocean-going vessels would normally change tack at long intervals, but here this was not possible.

<sup>20</sup> Not really; the moon was in its last quarter on 29 March.

<sup>21</sup> As explained in the Introduction, this is the point on p. 22 of the MS where there is overlap with p. 43 onwards. The end of the overlap (p. 34) is indicated by a later footnote. The version followed here is that of p. 43 onwards.

day, if I am rightly informed, it was inhabited by the Danes; but is said to have been swallowed up a long while ago by some convulsion of the oceanic bed.

— — — — *Sic abit. Et redit,*  
*Et mutert facies* — — — —  
*Mundo daedata machina*

————— *Sic totiens versa est fortuna locorum*  
*Vidi ego, quod fuerat quondam solidissima tellus*  
*Efse fretum. Vidi factas ex aequore terras*

*Ovid*<sup>22</sup>

March 30<sup>th</sup> A fine gentle breeze now sprung up from the S.E., which freshened as the day advanced, and bore us onward with a degree of uniform swiftness & ease hitherto unexperienced.

All night, it kept up with equal spirit & when morning came it was most delightful to see the proud bark sweeping along, at the rate of nine knots an hour, every sail that the masts could bear expanded to the full & powerful breeze.

I shall never forget how different were the feelings that thrilled in the bosom divested of its late cares, – how wide a contrast between the present time; and those dreary hours, when oppressed by indisposition and a load of melancholy reflections, the heart was entirely “out of love” with a miserable existence!

*Oh, who can tell, save he whose heart hath tried?,*  
*And danced in rapture o'er the waters wide*  
*The exulting sense, the pulse's madd'ning play,*  
*That thrills the wand'rer of that trackless way.*<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> The latter part of this quotation is from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* XV. In the online translation by Ian Johnston, it reads:

many times the fortunes of a place  
 have been upended. I myself have seen  
 what once was solid earth turn into sea  
 and looked at land created from the waves.

The first part of the quotation is a garbled quotation from the metrical psalms of the 16th-century Scottish Humanist scholar George Buchanan, *Paraphrasis in quartum librum Psalmorum*, Psalm 102:

Ut detrita novis pallia vestibus  
 Permutat locuples, sic abit et redit  
 Et mutat facies imperio tuo  
 Mundi daedala machina.

<sup>23</sup> A quotation from the first canto of Byron's *The Corsair*, though Byron apparently wrote 'triumph', not 'rapture'.

March<sup>24</sup> 3<sup>d</sup> Today a beautiful eagle passed us from the Southward, and directing its flight towards the opposite quarter was soon lost to view. This would seem to indicate that land – probably Staaten hack, or Cape Farewell – bears at present in that direction.

We were the rather confirmed in the opinion of our proximity to land from the additional circumstance of a very small & pretty land bird, alighting on the side of the vessel in the afternoon in such a fatigued condition, that it was not able to rise up and resume its flight, after having rested for a few moments, permitting me without an effort to catch it in my hand.

This little visitant known by the name of Stone Chakker (*Fringilla. Lin.*)<sup>25</sup> must in all likelihood have been blown away from Cape Farewell or the adjacent coast, during some strong gale from that direction; it being less probable that the westerly storms could have borne it from the continent in that quarter because the time that has elapsed since the expense of these winds, would certainly be incompatible with the present existence of so trifling a creature.<sup>26</sup>

Durng the winter season at least, this fate is continually occurring to all kinds of the land feathered tribes indigenous to these latitudes; for notwithstanding the extremely acute sense of smell, with which Providence has in general gifted them in common with the more daring and hardy marine species, they are very apt to get lost in thick fogs, & thus be drifted out to seaward with the tempest, untill [*sic*] too far distant from the coast for the operation of this singular power to be of advantage to them in shaping back their flight to the peculiar element. The unfortunate victim, thus abandoned to certain fate, continues awhile fluttering about, like Noah's Dove in quest of a landing place to rest its weary wings, till at length emaciated, through long abstinence, and worn out by unceasing exertion – it drops into the water and becomes the sacrifice to its own blindness and stupidity.

For several nights past, we had been regaled with the beautiful atmospheric phenomenon denominated Aurora Borealis, or more commonly Northern Lights, descriptions of which have been so often presented to the public that I deem it almost needless, in this place, to consume the reader's time with any description of my own in relation to such a singular and unaccountable appearance. I would rather make reference to the Arctic Zoology of Pennant,<sup>27</sup> the late work of Mr. Scoresby and<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> *Sic*. Clearly an error for 'April'.

<sup>25</sup> This suggests that the bird was a chaffinch, but the latter's range does not extend to Greenland, though individuals are occasionally seen in eastern North America.

<sup>26</sup> The Greenland Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea ostrata*) is a member of the Fringillidae (finch) family. As a migrant, it may therefore have been heading *towards* the Greenland coast.

<sup>27</sup> The reference is to the author's 'Introduction' in volume 1 of Thomas Pennant's *Arctic Zoology*, 1784, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

<sup>28</sup> The sentence is not completed and the rest of the manuscript page is left blank. The reference to William Scoresby Jr is obscure. In his 1820 *The Arctic Regions*, which was probably published after Craigie was writing, Scoresby took the same view as Craigie: 'This phenomenon having been described by many authors, some of whom have exhausted the powers of language in the elegance of their representations, renders it unnecessary for me to attempt any general description of this interesting spectacle.' (Vol. 1, p. 416.)

No other remarkable occurrence took place till the 7<sup>th</sup> when by calculation, we had reached the mouth of Davis Strait. Lat<sup>de</sup> Obs 59°.

The sky to Eastward of us began now to exhibit a very different aspect from what it had hitherto shown, while vast flocks of birds of various descriptions occurred now & then, both in the water and on wing, every thing seeming to indicate the proximity of land.

At length the shrewd eye of the captain descried the Cape, or southern boundary of Greenland, bearing due East, distance about 45 or 50 miles; surrounded with gigantic mountains, of ice, and presenting one of the most romantic and desolate appearances in Nature.

The mountainous regions which mark, at so great a distance, the promontory in question, are of stupendous height, and exhibit a singularly wild contour, entirely novel to the eye of one accustomed to the agreeable champagne occasionally relieved by the single evergreen mountain, or the magnificently extensive chain stretched over the bosom of more favoured countries, rather, as one might suppose, with the view of embellishing than of horrifying, or like the eminences or spires of a tasteful edifice, with a reference to beauty & order, than to jumbling and barbarity.

As we proceeded onward in the Northerly direction, together with numerous detached masses of ice, we encountered a heavy & disagreeable swell, and a change of wind, with thick showers of snow & sleet; every thing becoming dreary & uncomfortable in the extreme.

The moisture froze so rapidly, on the wind shifting round to Northward, that it became requisite for stability of footing to strew the deck with fine sand, removing the accumulating mass of crumbled ice from time to time.

April 8<sup>th</sup>. The cold at this period became particularly intense, and excited painful sensations in the ears, nose, lips & other parts exposed to the moisture.

Of all places within the limits of navigation, there is none that holds out to the dauntless mariner a less inviting prospect that combines together more dangers & matters of extreme difficulty, than this passage from the Ocean into the strait of Davis.

The water is every where studded with sharp & heavy blocks of ice, to keep clear of which entirely is next to impossible, and to strike some of which, under certain circumstances, is inevitable destruction.

Let the reader conceive a ship in the gloom of night, under the pressure of a strong breeze, notwithstanding the utmost vigilance of the watchful mariner, running foul of an islet of ice extending probably not above a yard over the surface of the water. Let him fancy to himself the

immediate shock that must result from the sudden retrogression of several feet (which, if he happen to be standing below will most likely precipitate him to the floor); instantly he will be roused to a painful apprehension of danger by the confused and alarming hum of a multitude of voices, & rushing upon deck he quickly perceives ample cause for such fearful symptoms of terror. If the vessel be not actually sinking from a wound beneath water, she is at least thrown entirely out of the wind – the sails being ‘backed’ or, in the panic of the moment, incapable of being rectified by the immediate & necessary efforts of those on Deck, and thus rapidly falling out of the wind, she hurries with some fatal current or by the mere agency of attraction, to be grinded to atoms within the crushing precincts of a vast flock of such sharp bolts. Or perhaps ere with the most presence of mind it is possible to get her under the power of the helm, she may be running directly against the terrific side of an ice berg, the lowest pinnacles of which [beetling?] over her masts, ready on the slightest collision to unbind their gelid chains and descend with tremendous crash upon the offender below – to leave, perhaps, not a vestige on the bosom of the ocean, in memorial of the dreadful fate of the many that have perished.

As the night drew on, all around gradually assumed a more impressive & fearful aspect. The white breakers dashing over the smaller Ice-bergs, which now & then occurred, added to the mournful & monotonous sound occasioned by the fretting of the smaller waves, and the attrition of broken down or brash ice; with the now and then unwonted cry of the Snow Bunting, or the [\*\*\*]; gave rise to feelings of a particular kind which are more easily felt than described.

It is generally under the impression of analogous circumstances that the mind most forcibly recalls [*sic*] pictures of distress, the outlines & more prominent features of which are marked by similar traits.

It was, in fact, impossible, in such a state of mind, to hinder the obtrusion of a multitude of melancholy recollections, from recitals of Polar hardships which had else gone down the ‘stream of Time’, never to be recalled. It was not easy to drive away some chilling anticipations, when we brought to remembrance the<sup>29</sup> sad fate of the *Royalist*, the *London* and some others.<sup>30</sup>

The dangers that [await?] on this coast at the present season are unspeakable during a westerly gale, for then to all the horrors of a lee shore is united the circumstance of the ice-floats, extending in some places many miles off coast.

Some years since, our own Captain in passing to Northward of this place was suddenly caught by a heavy gale from the Westward, but being well up from the east land, his apprehensions of danger were less, as he had more in his [position?]. In the afternoon of that day he saw a Ship a long way to leeward beset with ice on every side. At Sunset, to the best of his recollection, she was still in sight, but when morning dawned, with a return of fair weather, she was no longer visible. The unfortunate vessel had gone to atoms during night, as innumerable

---

<sup>29</sup> This is where the overlap of texts ends (see footnote 21).

<sup>30</sup> The *Royalist* of Hull was wrecked in Davis Strait in 1814 with the loss of all hands. The *London* of Hull met the same fate in 1817.

melancholy proofs subsequently testified.

It is possible, while passing this dreary place, to form some faint idea, but no one who has not seen it can have any conception of the pitiable condition of these unfortunate people.

When we think of this coast, and its more inland inhabitants, if such there really are, we find all the woes of the hardy Byron, as reflected in his affecting narrative,<sup>31</sup> dwindle into nothing, in comparison with what these unhappy men must have been doomed to suffer, had they ever reached the inhospitable boundary of this sterile country.

Here the poetic imagination, at all times wide of the reality, & wandering in such cases to the uttermost limits of possibility, would indeed prove the naked language of truth:

\_\_\_\_\_ *to mourn misfortune's rudest shock*  
*Scourged by the winds, & cradled on the rock*  
*To wake each joyless morn, and search again*  
*The famished haunts of solitary men*  
*Whose race, unyielding as their native Storm*  
*Knows not a trace of Nature but the form!*<sup>32</sup>

In fact the physical character of these regions is such as would seem unequivocally to forbid the access of man, and to reward with destruction that dauntless being that, nursed under a more benignant sky, yet alike blind to peril by flood & by field, shall dare to approach their joyless territories, and disturb with his unlooked for presence that perfect solitude & unwearing apathy which broods over them, eternal as the snow that covers their cloud-capt summits.

April 10<sup>th</sup> was ushered in by a morning so strikingly beautiful that it would baffle the most ardent imagination which should vainly attempt its description. Conceive the ocean, as far as the eye could reach, calm as a mirror – no breath of wind, in the atmosphere cloudless without metaphor, & nothing to disturb the deep slumber of the elements, save the voice of human mirth or the movements of the playful tenant of the wave, occasionally ruffling the blue plain in beautiful circumgyrations.

Far away in the gloom of morning, which the level sun had not yet dispelled, appeared the vast form of an Ice Berg, fixed immovable as an island in reality on the bed of the Ocean and casting its long dark shadow with all the asperities of its snowy top in gloomy magnificence on the fair mirror, gloriously illuminated by long lines of light shot in from the ruddy horizon.

As the morning advances, conceive the Sun rising in the Eastern hemisphere which

---

<sup>31</sup> [Craigie's footnote]: 'Narrative'. He was presumably referring to the autobiographical narrative poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

<sup>32</sup> A quotation (though without the final exclamation mark) from 'The Pleasures of Hope', by the Scottish poet Thomas Campbell (1777-1844).

gradually changes its rosy hue to a resplendence of light no longer sufferable by the dazzled eye. The shadows of night melt away apace, and the whole visible creation seems swathed in the most perfect harmony.

Every moment the eye is delighted at the sudden appearance of some huge fish emerging from the water – the finner<sup>33</sup> of which there are many different species indigenous of these seas.

Immediately on coming to the surface, they give one short blow or breath, the smoke of which rises to the height of six or eight feet; they then instantaneously disappear, whirling their immense bulk over the water in such a manner as allows the whole of the creature to be seen, but not more than 8 or 9 feet at a time. They thus rise & dive away again in a twinkling, often in pairs and sometimes in countless flocks, in general moving off in a straight direction unless obstructed by ice, or suddenly scared by the unlooked for presence of some uncommon object.

This species of the cetacea the whalers never attempt taking, for three reasons.

1<sup>st</sup> & most prominent/obvious of these is the great difficulty of fastening on these with the harpoon. Next, the excessive danger of an attachment, as the nature of the animal is furious & mischievous in the extreme; and lastly, the small value of the fat or blubber which is at all times found to be trifling in quantity though by no means exceeding intrinsic worth that of the Balaena [mystitus?] or great northern whale, and for this reason an inadequate requital for the hazard and damage incurred in its pursuit.

The Ice began now to abound in all directions, while the appearance of the sky, filled with what is by seamen termed ‘Ice blink’,<sup>34</sup> presented a highly interesting spectacle.

The best way in which this appearance can be assimilated to the fancy is, by supposing the atmosphere studded, as it were, with immense sheets of pearl, of all different [forms?]<sup>35</sup>, by no means resembling any kind of cloud unless in point of hue, while the serene sky impressed with a darker ground by the black colour of the water beneath, when viewed in contrast with those silvery flakes, seems of as dark a blue as the moonless vault of a [clear?] winter sky.

At this time we had day light during eighteen hours of the day, & the absence of the sun only occasioned a very brief twilight – yet this transient night was nevertheless enough tedious & dreary to the lonely whaler breathing the intense breeze,

*From wastes that slumber in eternal snow*<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Here there is a space of half a line, in which the words ‘& other species of Balaena’ are lightly indicated in pencil.

<sup>34</sup> White glare seen on the underside of low clouds indicating the presence of ice in the distance.

<sup>35</sup> This word, appearing in earlier drafts, apparently omitted by mistake at the beginning of a new MS page.

<sup>36</sup> Another quotation from Campbell’s ‘*The Pleasures of Hope*’.



& anxiously guiding his precious bark amid the multiplied horrors of a perilous navigation.

Being now fairly beyond the Cape and within the range of Arctic climate, the weather became more severe, compelling every one to lay on additional raiment. On the 12<sup>th</sup>, at noon, my thermometer fell down several degrees of cold in the brief space of 15 minutes, and declined gradually from that time till the end of April, when the mercury congealed.<sup>37</sup>

Although cold in the extreme, the weather was fair and by no means unpleasant. It imparted a sensation not unlike that occasioned by the vacant festivity of a group of jovial reapers, to witness the ships company all busily engaged in preparation for their more fortuitous harvest. The open & disinterested countenance sharpened by the frost, and relaxed into a continued gaiety by the vivifying agency of the matin cheerer, the unceasing activity of person indispensable to the feeling of comfort, and the frequent appeal to the Goddess of Fortune as they pledged each other, in the oft repeated draught were prominent features of a scene animating in the highest degree. All were merry and jovial, oblivious of every past hardship and hard life of future toil, in the anticipation of a plentiful fishing as their final reward.

And how ill is the world divided – would Sterne have said – with a sigh raised to the God of sensibility – seeing that such generous, and simple hearted beings for all their toils – their unparalleled hardships – their thousand hairsbreadth 'scapes meet with but scanty encouragement at all times, & even when the distress is at the greatest extent return to their native land in beggary and nakedness – indebted to the benevolence and feeling duty of their fellow men, for the means of reaching a home – a wife – a family – anxiously looking forward to the auspicious period of his arrival for that subsistence which his hard wrung earnings are calculated to afford – a bare preservation from penury.

Some may blame the intrusion of the sentimental, but I do not think that the real feeling or well regulated mind can find any thing in this place whereat he may reasonably take umbrage when the hard terms (I do not say unjust) upon which the poor fellows engage in this arduous undertaking are ascertained [*sic*].

To pay/remunerate the people according to the rate of annual success is certainly quite fair and no one doubts its rationality – but in the event of losing the vessel, an incident which no human foresight or effort can in certain circumstances prevent, to cancel the wages of hard labour, atchieved [*sic*] justly & honourably according to all the laws of nature & equity even though such be the articles of prior engagement and sanctioned by virtue of Stamp and bond, savours surely too much of the justice of Shylock.<sup>38</sup>

We were now as far north as Lat<sup>de</sup> 61½°, a situation which is denominated by whalers the

---

<sup>37</sup> The freezing point (technically the melting point) of mercury is -38.8°C / -37.9°F.

<sup>38</sup> An allusion, of course, to Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.

South West Fishing.<sup>39</sup>

In some past seasons, whales were abundant throughout this latitude & the fishers made it their business to ply to the westward, amid numerous and heavy floes, even as far as the Continent.

From what cause it happens, however, no one can say, but in these days the fishing in question is not in general attended with the same prosperity to those who are in the habit of practising as it was wont to prove in those happy bygone times.

Most part of the Straitsmen therefore sail up into the higher latitudes, where taking them as a whole, they have certainly six chances to one on their side, in addition to a far milder climate, much less danger and half the “wear and tear” that the Southwesters undergo in the precarious acquisition of their object.<sup>40</sup>

In the higher divisions of Davis Strait the loss of a fish is not a frequent occurrence, unless through the chance of [drawing?] or breaking – the latter of which events must rather be stated to the ill quality of the harpoon or whale lines than to any other cause; the former event being greatly determined, of course, by the degree of rapidity with which the fish sets off, ‘post vulnus.’<sup>41</sup> The unfavourable position of the ice with its consequences to the whale boat must no doubt at all times be kept in view, and allowances must be made accordingly, since the existence of the vast profusion of ice is always indispensable to the presence of the object of pursuit.

In the open and unsheltered Southwest however, the case is widely different. Strong gales are excessively prevalent throughout the season, and nothing is more certain than the loss of a fish, even after the insertion of several harpoons, if they be caught by such a disaster; the roughness of the sea becoming incompatible with the continuance of the boats on its surface. They are of course hoisted in after the attaching lines have been cut asunder.

The Straitsmen have mostly fine agreeable weather, at least seldom or never experiencing the effects of stormy weather in an equal measure with those in the inferior latitudes.

It is obvious, consequently, that they can reckon on their success for the season, comparatively, with a deal more of certainty than the adventurous South westers can have the power of doing, always providing that fish are at all degree abundant or at least making their appearance now & then, in so far as the clemency of the weather is concerned, an object in itself

---

<sup>39</sup> This was also known (e.g. by Scoresby) as the Labrador Coast fishery, although the northernmost cape of Labrador (Cape Chidley) is only at 60°30'N.

<sup>40</sup> The Southwest fishery was dangerous for two principal reasons. W. Gillies Ross has pointed out that the principal ice margin in Davis Strait and Baffin Bay was meridional, not latitudinal, with ice on the western side, but relatively open conditions in the east, along the Greenland coast. Secondly, although the season for whaling in the southwest could begin in late March or early April, the nights were at that time still long and dark at that latitude.

<sup>41</sup> I.e. after being struck by the harpoon.

of the first importance.

Further, the straitsmen have before them a much wider field of action; so that if they fail at one place hope still remains that their toils shall be better rewarded at another. Thus, if the Whale island and Disco fishery should not prove altogether auspicious, in their season, the North East Bay, about the period when the first mentioned places are exhausted, opens a grand reservoir for their hardy exertions, and again when the objects of their pursuit evacuate this district they in general fall in with them about the Womans islands Latitude 72°, & so on, here and there, so far North as the enterprising navigator has hitherto penetrated.

On the other hand, when we turn to the comparative merits of the Southern latitudes, in point of importance to the whale fisher, we shall find that to the other distractions, there still remain to be added a few, no less weighty in their nature.

In the first place, the whole field of operation, is confined to little more than a degree, extending from 60° to 61½ at the very outstretch. Within the limits of this confined track, those vessels must ply upwards, in the westerly direction, at imminent hazard in time of storms from the huge Ice Islands which are here and there greatly abundant, amidst heavy floes and boundless packs, through which no production could force a passage, unless at the greatest risque of incurring irreparable damage, or perhaps being beset, *in situ periculoso*, for weeks together.

In such circumstances, although plenty of fish may be continually at hand, the tantalized whaler is compelled to forego all hope of appropriating any of them, the state of the ice being unfit for the passage of the boats<sup>42</sup> without danger of losing them or scaring the animal by the great noise which such a passage gives rise to, it being a paramount consideration to preserve the safety of the vessel amid so many hazardous contingencies.

Thus we shall find, if it were requisite to draw up from all circumstances, an idea of the comparative importance of these fishings, that upon the whole, allowing of course both to have their peculiar advantages & demerits, the strait in general obtains the preference.

For, waiving all considerations of peril, it is obvious that if eight or ten Ships can take up, *in all*, an hundred whales in the South west – or allowing that they should only be able to appropriate but half that number, this is decidedly so much gain to the country which would not otherwise have accrued to it, without in any degree whatever interfering with the success of those individuals who chuse to pursue their fortune in the more northern divisions of the strait. This, no one will deny, is an important object, one which in the eye of the hardy seamen bears down every other consideration of a disadvantageous character.

The chief deterioration to the up Strait fishing is the circumstance of its being badly conducted on the part of the whaler, and does not arise so much from the physical or natural

---

<sup>42</sup> I.e. the ship's whaleboats, which were much more vulnerable than the ship itself.

defects of ground. It will appear to some that by this I mean the trade to be overstocked;<sup>43</sup> but this not in reality the case, since there is plenty in the sea to enrich every one concerned if the fishing were conducted in a proper manner. As it is at present carried on, it certainly is somewhat overstocked, in one sense of the term, & so long as it continues to be practised in this way the merchant may cease to wonder at the ill returns of every season, although each voyage be commenced under the most promising auspices.

To enter into such an elaborate disquisition as this interesting subject would merit, the limits of this work cannot be supposed to admit of. I must content myself with suggesting a few observations in passing on the present economy of this great & inexhaustible source of public utility.

In the straits fishing it may be laid down as an axiom that he who keeps most apart will in the end prove the most successful. This will be found to gain strength from the accounts of every one concerned with the fishery and to this in great measure be attributed the general superiority in point of success of those who traverse the open and unsheltered South west. They ply about, during the whole season, at great distances from one another, every man (to use the whalers phrase) seeking out a hole for himself.

It is doubtless a certainty that the greater the number of the vessels is, or in other words, the more they are huddled together, by so much the more assuredly will the fish be scared from the ground and, if not effectively compelled to desert the banks, at least be kept in such a state of trepidation as almost entirely to hinder the approach of the Harpooners.

This takes place annually at the Whale islands, latitude 68° 57, 53 30., where the Ships crowd together at such a rate that one would be apt to think their object was rather not to separate from each other than to get laden with speed and return.

For this, there is no necessity whatever, because they might as easily spread off from each other on account of the Ice, as keep together, and certainly it were far more rational they should choose the former of these alternatives, if it were only to allow themselves sufficient space or sea-room for working the Ship, without the danger of running foul and materially damaging each other.

Instead of this however, as I have said, they industriously keep close, and the consequence is that, so soon as a fish makes its appearance, a score, nay sometimes double that number, of boats is let down the general noise of which, if the animal happen to rise near them, terrifies it to such a degree that it in general makes the utmost of its powers and takes leave of its pursuers, at least *pro tempore* & perhaps forever.

I have seen a whale lying still, while no less than thirty boats were in the act of pulling on

---

<sup>43</sup> I.e. that there are too many ships involved in the hunt for whales.

it, the nearest of which might be about twenty yards distant, the furthest fully half a mile, a score of others filling up the interspace at indeterminate distances; yet, notwithstanding the very short way that remained, to be run over by the first boat, not one of the more remote ones slackened an oar, while the creature taking alarm at the thundering sound of so many *Rameurs*<sup>44</sup> set off at full speed, just as the harpooner was preparing to inflict the wound.

Now such a transaction was evidently in the highest degree absurd, and void of policy because from the first outset it was clear that the nearest boat had the only chance, and would in all probability have got fast, if the spirit of opposition and rivalry had not blinded the eyes of the multitude.

It may be urged to us, in opposition to this fact, that all had an equal right, & consequently that a universal aim was natural because if the remotest should lose the chance this time, they might be the nearest on the next appearance of the game. But this is an absurdity the refutation of which scarce requires the expense of a single thought since, if it were so, it would be equally advisable for them to stand still in their present situation, in relation to such a view of fortune, waiting for the object of pursuit, as to tire themselves by racing on to no purpose, unless that of lessening the chance of the less distant boats by augmenting the noise.

Of course it would be unreasonable to think that all of them should not exert themselves to the uttermost for the acquisition of the desirable object, yet there is a wide difference between this & actually prejudicing the chance of each other individually, & so proving the direct means of hurting the interest of the whole as a body, a circumstance that is continually taking place to the disgrace of every one without discrimination; since he that is nearest to day & ill treated will, in his turn in a less favourable situation to morrow, throw the golden rule<sup>45</sup> to the dogs, and refund evil for evil with all his heart.

To so great a pitch has this malicious spirit been carried that the furthest of two boats has actually raised a halloo, for the direct purpose of scaring the fish and so preventing his nearer neighbour from reaping the advantage of his situation, and cases are recorded where a boat in the predicament of the first mentioned, although fathoms beyond shot, has discharged harpoon gun right athwart the bow of the preceding one, and thus by an act of the most culpable rashness, not only lost the fish to both, but at the same time risked the lives of a boat's crew, in an imminent degree. These however are petty offences – faults which, when put in the ballance [*sic*] with the more flagrant errors, are as the misconduct of the obscure citizen, compared with the ill management of the minister. The one operates upon the prosperity of the state, and saps it from the foundation – the other mars the fair appearance of the whole but still, in deranging its regularity, has no power of destroying the source of its vigour, or acts thereon with a comparatively remote & trivial influence.

Having said this much in regard to these abuses, it might not be improper further to lay

---

<sup>44</sup> Oarsmen.

<sup>45</sup> 'Do as you would be done by'.

down, in one view, a few observations on the means of preventing their bad effects, but I am aware that I have already trespassed on the limits of my plan in saying this much. It may be that I have even in this little, with my zeal for the public advantage, incurred the displeasure of not a few. The ultimate object however must be my general apology and I would rather be understood to claim the humble title of a recorder of facts, by candidly stating things as they are than by throwing out hints derogatory of corruptions sanctioned by time and the suffrage of custom, draw upon myself the more ambitious name of a reformist, or new modeller of old established systems, a set of people with which the world is at this day so greatly overrun, that as there would be surely as little chance of my limited talents being crowned with a greater portion of success than is daily falling to the lot of the multitude in question, so am I loth, single handed as I be and with such with tiny weapons, to risque my safety on such dangerous ground.

In concluding this circuitous digression it will readily be perceived, that in adverting thus transiently to these few particulars, I have guided myself by that caution which was consistent with my limited experience of connecting facts and at the same time with that degree of explicitness and interest which the importance of the subject demand.

In studiously avoiding all personal allusions, where such would necessarily have proved productive of reflections displeasing to the objects concerned, it may be seen that what I have said does not refer to any pointed individual or individuals in particular, but that my view throughout has been exclusively to hint at certain abuses, in their consequences unfavourable to the success and inconsistent with a rational mode of conducting the grand economy of this extensive concern.

It might reasonably be expected that as I have “set the stone a rolling” I should have entered on the discussion of the subject on a much wider & less succinct plan – for this reasons sufficient have already been alluded to, and it now only remains for me to state the unanimity, or at least the consistence, of my own observations with those of one of the most enlightened, and most liberal minded, of all that “large list” of gentlemen engaged in pursuits of this kind and who placing out of view his professional brethren has been long sitting in the assemblies of the learned, and awarded by the genius of his country to a high place in the intellectual range.

*That there is something (says Mr Scoresby) resembling chance, or luck, as it is called, in the fishery, cannot be disputed – but that the fishery is altogether a chain of casualties, is as false as it is derogatory to the credit of the persons employed in the enterprise.*

*For a person with a die to throw the highest point once in six times is what might be expected from chance – but for him to throw the highest point many times in succession, would afford a presumptive proof that he employed some art in casting the die. So it is with the fishery; the most skilful, from adventitious and unavoidable circumstances, may occasionally fail, & the unskilful may be successful; but mark the average of a number of years (that is where the means are equal) and a tolerable estimate may be formed of the adventurer’s fitness for his undertaking.*

Paper on the Polar Ice by W<sup>m</sup> Scoresby Jun<sup>r</sup> M.W.S. F.R.S.E. Printed at large, in the Transactions of the Wernerian Society, vol. II., pp. 304-5.

---

We traversed the 61<sup>st</sup> degree as far west as the Ice would permit for about ten days without perceiving a single blow<sup>46</sup>, and accordingly, after the example of a numerous fleet our Captain, although in past times a staunch South wester and a follower of no man, till cramped somewhat by his owners on account of his religious adherence to a rather forlorn hope, bore away up Strait in quest of better fortune.

A fair wind from these latitudes, in less than fortyeight hours carried us within sight of the East land, ie. the coast from Cape Farewell, prolonged to the Northward.

It is a horrid & frightful region, being composed entirely of tremendous cliffs which rise to an immense height above the level of the sea, and presenting a wild and awful contour.

The vast precipices, here and there divided by deep clefted ravines, are so extremely steep that, the snow will not rest on them; and on this account, as they burst upon the gaze entirely black, or at intervals tinted with a reddish or [any?] hue, they afford, in contrast with the whiter masses, an awfully grand & sublime spectacle.

Often, as the rapid progress of the ship varied these interesting groups, immediately, as some stupendous and clearly defined pinnacle or some chequered ridge opened for a moment to view, as speedily did the intervention of a dense cloud dissolve the accumulated series of asperities, and in the sudden transition from the wild landscape to the no less striking interposed curtain, [is?] the eye bewildered with the horrifying scene, felt mingled with a glow of instantaneous surprise, a pleasing sensation of relief.

It were easy, on recalling to mind the fascinating descriptions of a [\*\*\*] or some of the divine inspirations of a great poet of the day, to fancy one's self transported from these Borean regions, Winter's peculiar home, and exclaiming in the rapturous language of energetic feeling

*Above me are the Alps,  
The palaces of nature, whose vast walls  
Have pinnacled in clouds their snowy scalps,  
And throned Eternity in icy halls  
Of cold sublimity - where forms & falls  
The avalanche - the thunderbolt of snow!  
All that expands the spirit, yet appals,  
Gather around these summits, as to show*

---

<sup>46</sup> [Craigie's footnote]: Term used for the appearance of a fish.

*How Earth may pierce to Heaven, yet leave vain man below.*<sup>47</sup>

Nothing like stratification,<sup>48</sup> at the distance we passed was observable throughout the great extent of this dreary coast; in short the whole seemed, as it were, jumbled together by some infernal mechanism, or disaster of the elements.

April 17<sup>th</sup> We were now situated in the narrowest part of the Strait below the very high latitudes, where in clear weather the natives can see from one side to the other.<sup>49</sup> It is reported that a troop of Esquimaux Indians, migrated from the Western Continent over here on their sledges to [Riscol?]<sup>50</sup> or [Reefeal?], a place on the Greenland coast, which is famous for the abundance of whales, that resort near its vicinity, during great part of the season, and the innumerable flocks of seals, morses<sup>51</sup> &c. that infest it during all times of the year. It is not uncommon to find hundreds of sea horse, basking on the ice in this place, and the water is kept in a continuous state of animated motion by the multitudes of Phocae.<sup>52</sup>

In the evening, as we were traversing along the streams, we passed by a large [\*\*\*] of Ice, on which a very large seal was reposing apparently asleep, As it was the first we had crossed so closely in our passage hitherto, it was immediately resolved to make a capture. Accordingly having got ready a boat, we proceeded, (to use the whaler's nomenclature) to *amaze* him.

The whole of the people on deck, having come to the side of the vessel opposite which the animal was situated, a loud halloo was immediately set up and continued till the men in the boat, leaping out upon the ice and taking advantage of his stupidity, quickly destroyed and conveyed him off the field as booty.

It is not easy to describe the terrified and awkward condition into which the piercing salute above mentioned threw the poor astonished creature. Lifting up his drowsy head from the snowy pillow, and writhing about his huge carcass, he in vain made effort to burst the strong fetters which sudden trepidation had so effectually imposed on him. Then after a series of unavailing struggles, trembling all over, he fell down upon his back, and with a momentary convulsive motion of the flippers and a violent twist of the neck he consigned himself tamely to the dominion of horror, bringing full upon the spectator's remembrance his own dreadful sensations during a fit of that terrible bugbear of sleep – the night mare.

This method of our procuring the animal in question is in like manner made use of while

---

<sup>47</sup> Another quotation from Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

<sup>48</sup> I.e. the pattern of the geological strata.

<sup>49</sup> Although Craigie's punctuation confuses the meaning, it is *not* possible to see across Davis Strait at its narrowest part. This is feasible only in the 'very high latitudes' at the head of Baffin Bay. See Gad's *History of Greenland*, vol. 1, chaps 1-2, especially his mention of the migration from Baffin Island to the Thule district.

<sup>50</sup> Possibly Rifkol, 67°58'N. See Gad, vol. 1, p. 235.

<sup>51</sup> An archaic name for the walrus in English. Also in the past (as here) known as the sea-horse, but not to be confused with the genus *Hippocampus*, the far smaller sea horses of present terminology.

<sup>52</sup> Seals.



surprising the walruss [*sic*] and other wild creatures, and even the great whale himself, I believe, is sometimes divested of the power of retreat by the like artifice. It is easy to see how the human voice can have such a powerful influence over these strong & savage productions of nature, when we take into consideration the solitary and Siberian wilderness in which they exist – a silence which during great part of the year is as the stillness of the grave, unless where at times the hoarse murmur of the sweeping gale or the wild howl of the fasting bear, the foe of every created object, even to the fruit of its own procreation, may happen for a little to disturb the cold and gloomy sleep of chaotic desolation.

The same evening about half past 12 O'clock, having got in amongst an infinity of Ice Bergs, the floes suddenly closed and we were fairly beset in a very dangerous situation. No effort on our part however could afford the least hope of a speedy extrication, and we were compelled to clue up every sail without a moment's delay as the wind was exceedingly strong and a press of sail, obstructed by [perfect?] resistance, was certain of incurring serious damage.

The danger was ideally aggravated [*sic*], by the knowledge that sunk rocks were [prevalent?] to exist within the limits of our present latitude; and the circumstance of vessels having been caught time out of note and damaged to almost irremediable extent.

In the event of such a disaster, if at all possible, they generally haul into some natural harbour or indentation on the coast, there effecting such repairs as the limited opportunities of time and situation will admit.

We were thus, with several vessels, hemmed in amongst the Ice during the whole night. In the morning the current having taken/set in a different direction with change of tide, the floes began to slacken around, and by and by with the same breeze slightly abated we continued our course to the Northward struggling with vast streams and very heavy floes of ice, in a state of the most distressing inquietude for two long & dreary days. The south wind now took off and a strong breeze accompanied with unremitted snow and sleet succeeded from the opposite direction. Here came the severity of winter in an intense degree. The drift blowing upon the ropes & sails no sooner fell than it was congealed, increasing the bulk of every thing to thrice its natural dimensions, and freezing up the running blocks in such a manner that the ship could not be tacked without previously beating the rigging all over with hand spikes, broomsticks, &c., or shaking them violently from the deck upwards, when heavy crystals of ice fell down so fast that it was dangerous to stand in the way, and impossible to perambulate the boards rendered perfectly slippery by the continued dampness & the unremitted process of congelation.

Gradually, however, as the wind strengthened the snow abated, and in the course of other twenty four hours a severe gale prevailed from the Northward; which, in its turn again took off as rapidly, for it rarely happens that a polar blast of any violence outlasts twenty four or thirty hours. It is rapid in its accession – intense while it rages – but, fortunately for these perilous latitudes, short in duration, and almost to be reckoned on with precision.

To this weather succeeded bitter frost with the wind from North East – the clearness of the atmosphere allowing us to ascertain the Company of a great number of vessels, most of which we had not seen since the preceding season. These were from almost every port of any note in Britain, all like ourselves plying to northward.

April 19. To day we reached the vicinity of the whale-fish-islands, which is the first steady fishing post beyond the South West. The ice was here dreadfully abundant, and the floes generally thick and heavy, being but newly broke up entirely for the season.

These islands shake up the Ice and thus interrupting its progress to the Southward their impeding influence must be felt over a vast track. As the floes, however, are continually undergoing revolutions in situation and position, there is generally enough of room<sup>53</sup> for the purpose of the whale fisher; both in the immediate vicinity of the Islands, and to the Westward – in which direction of course, so far as related to this cause of obstruction, the further they proceed, the more liberty must necessarily be found.

No less than five ships besides our own vessel got altogether in so close company here that we could almost constantly speak such, in passing, and repassing, during the forenoon. The Larkins of Leith, one of these, had already seen five whales and informed us that several ships had got fish about the islands. We afterwards passed by a Hull vessel which had been fortunate enough to get hold of two.

Such appearances gave fresh stimulus to our anxiety of falling in with a little of the good-luck, and every one was steadily on the alert accordingly.

April 20<sup>th</sup> To day for the first time a Whale came up with a loud blow at no great distance from our Ship, all the others being a good way off, In fact there was scarce one in sight except the Majestic of London, and she fully a gunshot to leeward, so that we had here all the chance of the game to ourselves for once.

Three boats having immediately set out they dispersed themselves wide, forming a triangle over the place where the fish had made its appearance. A few minutes of anxious suspense now elapsed, and again the huge object of pursuit, by a long column of vapour and a peculiar sound announced its presence. One of the boats lay close by, and it seemed certain that the animal could not escape. Contrary to the sanguine expectation of every one present, however, she set off with a prodigious flounder, throwing up her great black tail and diving directly towards the bottom.

This was a good sign as it showed, she was not running from the ground, but more likely a lying fish.

---

<sup>53</sup> I.e. sea room: open water.

When she again came up, it was at a considerable distance from the boats & close by an Ice Berg, where she continued playing for many minutes until one of the boats had again come close upon her. She instantly perceived the foe, but before sufficient time elapsed for mustering force enough entirely to disappear, the Captain's son, a clever young fellow, with admirable dexterity and steadiness of aim discharged his harpoon upon the terrified creature – burying it to the shaft (a depth of four feet iron) in her quivering side.

The joy of calling a "Fall" had like to meet with a disagreeably awkward kind of interruption, for just at that moment it was observed by the quick eye of the Captain at the mast head that the vessel was on the top of a large white rock. Fortunately, however, as there was neither wind or swell she passed gently over the dangerous spot without incurring the slightest damage.

In the confusion of alarming the sleepers below to get out and man the remaining boats, our people took it to be Lively rock. As, however, that rock, per Chart is laid down in quite a different direction and no such object, according to our bearings, has been hitherto noticed, it could not be the same.

Our Captain, whose accuracy relative to such matters was not to be questioned, has no doubt ere now made public allusion to the circumstances, or at least sufficiently apprised those to whom such occurrences are matters of more immediate concern. It could be little more than two fathoms under surface at most, and perhaps not so much at some points during ebb of tide. In fact it seemed, on looking over the gunwale, to lie close under bottom, but the bright [*'yellow' deleted*] hue that distinguished it might induce us to believe the place much shallower than it was in reality.

A slight shock was felt at the mast head, [*but?*] from the vibratory powers of such a lengthened and slender pole the smallest possible collision against a firm and solid body would be noticed there, in a degree that might seem severely palpable.

It was evening ere our people got got [*sic*] their rich booty alongside, and in the meantime I was infinitely amused at the singularity of the event.

It would prove tiresome, were I to recount with prolixity all the circumstances attending a 'fall', as the sailors denominate the taking of a fish. It may be borne with however if I merely, mention the extraordinary character of the whole affair from first to last. The interesting scene which the boats present at a great distance among the white sheets of ice – now whirling away with alarming rapidity as the fish happens to take a start, or remaining stationary in waiting for the next appearance of the game. While the small flags, the signal of attachment, dance gladly in the breeze, to the uninitiated spectator like so many playthings, but looked on by the watchful whaler, from his observatory at the top, with a beating bosom.

Then conceive immense flights of birds collecting over the water, now floating with oil,

immediately on the animal receiving the first harpoon – hurrying on from every point of the compass, in straight lines to the field of action.

As the vessel, in tacking now and then, approaches nearer to the boats, an opportunity is at intervals afforded of witnessing the condition of the dying victim as it sweeps aloft its huge tail, to the imminent peril of all concerned, now lash lashing [*sic*] the wounded and [panting?] side with the powerful fin, or sinking with an ineffectual [*sic*] struggle at escape, to return less vigorous to the painful conflict; till at length, perhaps having received a wound in some large blood vessel, in the intensity of agony the vast creature renews every exertion, spouting up the blood in great columns which, in again falling down in broken cascades, fly off with the passing breeze in thick showers, sprinkling the unsullied white of the contiguous floes with a terribly contrasted hue.

The scene becomes now worthy the imitation of the artist: the immense creature expiring with rapidity; the purple fluid in which it welters; the last moments of agonized existence; the boats badged over with goutts of blood; and the rowers and harpooners deluged from head to foot with the gory fluid – with every other incident, too singular for conveying any idea of by dint of mere verbal description.

Finally, after surprising exertions on both sides, with the loss of a boat or two perhaps, or the *renversement*<sup>54</sup> of several during the fray, the powerful victim exhausted by fatigue and expense of blood loses all resistance and, rolling over on its back, reposes on the briny bed like an overturned vessel.

A few moments of portentous suspense now elapse, and three loud cheers from all on the spot give note that the bleeding whale has closed its resistance, when a reply from the ship to whom it pertains, in the like joyous strain as they lower down the ensign from the mizzen top, bent<sup>55</sup> on the insertion of the first harpoon, concludes the ceremonial of this arduous quarry.

The boats are now attached to each other in a series, and in this order

“singing merrily  
laughing cheerily”

They proceed to drag off their prize, tail foremost for sake of speed, in the direction of the fortunate vessel which, if the ice and wind permit, in general sails forward, to meet them and relieve them from the laborious task of “Tugging at the oars.”<sup>56</sup>

Having now got the fish securely fastened, by means of strong ropes, to the side of the vessel they proceed without delay to the arduous operation of flinching, or cutting off a layer of

---

<sup>54</sup> Overturning.

<sup>55</sup> Hoisted.

<sup>56</sup> An allusion to Candide’s conversation with Dr Pangloss in chapter 28 of Voltaire’s *Candide*.

adipose matter, denominated blubber; which invests the carcase of the animal in a variable measure of density according to the season of the year, the age, or sex of the fish, averaging in general from half a foot to one and a half or two feet; the last mentioned, if from a female that has just emitted her offspring without giving suck, turns out quite a treasure yielding twice or nearly three times as much oil as one oppositely circumstanced, or that has yielded suck for a few months.<sup>57</sup>

“Its maternal affection deserves notice. The young one is frequently struck for the sake of the sake of its mother, which will soon come up close by it, encourage it to swim off, assist it, by taking it under its fin, and seldom deserts it while life remains. It is then very dangerous to approach, as she loses all regard for her own safety in anxiety for the preservation of her cub, dashing about most violently, and not dreading to rise even amidst the boats.”<sup>58</sup>

When all the oleaginous substance has been taken away, the ropes attaching the fish to the vessel are loosed, and abandoning the huge carcase to the prey of the sea monsters all things are again set in readiness for a repetition of the like desirable operations.

---

I fear that this long extended view of a transaction, that may concern most part of my readers in a very sensible degree, and to all may in fact carry with it little of interest as a mere curiosity, has proved not entirely void of prolixity, that ‘bore of uninteresting descriptions’; however this may be, perhaps I will be excused in thrusting forward a detail of those things, considering two circumstances.

1<sup>st</sup> That my account of a polar voyage as connected with the process of Whale fishing - of which I have on a former occasion taken the liberty of hinting at certain defects in management would no doubt be [discerned?] glaringly incomplete without any notice of the mode of operation, which properly speaking comes in as a connecting and necessary sequel or appendage, to these critical remarks, and

2<sup>dly</sup> Because every one may, from such a view, form some idea that the acquisition of this indispensable article in the domestic and mechanical economy is by no means a matter of so great facility, nor so entirely exempted from hazard as is generally supposed, and the reflection, may for a while relieve the irritation of *ennui*, that at the very moment the reader is perusing my narrative – if it has afforded him any degree of useful entertainment, or helped in its turn to beguile the tedious winter night, offhand<sup>59</sup> – he is perhaps as highly indebted to the exertions of the enterprising whaler, for a large portion of convenience and comfort in the ordinary details of housekeeping, as to the unpretending narrator, for his humble mite, to the great stack of mental

---

<sup>57</sup> [Craigie’s footnote]: The whale is one of the mammalia, with paps, milk & blood warmer than the human.

<sup>58</sup> [Craigie’s footnote]: Account of the *Balaena Mysticetus* or great Greenland Whale. *Memoirs of the Wernerian Natural History Society*. Vol. I. 1808.9.10. [P. 585].

<sup>59</sup> Apparently in the sense of ‘without preliminary deliberation or preparation’ (*OED*).

recreation, and instruction.

---

In latitude 68° lies the extensive island of Disco, to the southward of which we are now plying.

In a physical point of view, this island differs entirely from the main<sup>60</sup>, in all such districts as we have hitherto had opportunity for observation. On the top in general flat and smooth, steep on its marginal aspect, it seems, at least towards the South to be composed of the most exact strata and from this circumstance exclusively, were its latitude undetermined, and every other mark of its situation effaced, it would at once be distinguished from every other district within this strait, from the cape to the 74<sup>th</sup> degree of Northern Latitude.

I refrain from all speculative notion in regard to the geognostic<sup>61</sup> [*sic*] characteristics of this extensive district, and can only express my regret that having never set foot within the precincts of the island, I can afford no satisfaction to the thirst after scientific enquiry, and that all I have from mere hearsay been able to gather relative to such interesting subjects will scarce amount to an iota in the eye of the [curious?].

From all accounts, the micaceous [or?] clay formations exist abundantly throughout the various coast departments (which alone have been traversed by the foot of the European). The last mentioned substance being applied, by the simple natives, to many purposes of domestic utility.

I am informed that about the South East of the Island there is found, to a degree of plenty, a species of clay; similar in appearance, consistence, and common properties to Soap, as a succedaneum<sup>62</sup> for which the natives make use of it. It must be of the same nature, undoubtedly, as the Terra Fulleric<sup>63</sup>, of this country, but if it be exactly the same as a specimen of this kind which subsequently fell in my way farther to northward, it is not decidedly analogous.

Into the body of the island open innumerable bays which, according as their windings and turnings become frequently obscured by lofty moles of land between whose whitened summits and the superincumbent clouds it is often impossible to trace a line of distinction, the whole presents an uncommonly interesting and extraordinary spectacle.

Disco is inhabited in several places but I believe the chief settlement<sup>64</sup> exists at the head

---

<sup>60</sup> I.e. the mainland of Greenland.

<sup>61</sup> 'Geognostic' presumably intended. From 'geogeny': 'the branch of geology which treats of the formation of the earth's crust' (*OED*, but now obsolete.)

<sup>62</sup> 'A substitute' (*OED*).

<sup>63</sup> Fuller's Earth. This naturally-occurring clay compound exists in many locations in different proportions of its main constituents.

<sup>64</sup> Godhavn (not to be confused with Godthåb, further south).

of South East bay, where the population is very extensive consisting in great part of aborigines or native Esquimeaux, and a numerous horde of Danes – all subjected to the Danish government & legislation.

How well these are enforced, & preserved I am not qualified to speak. It is confidently stated, however, that in order to crush the nourishment and thereby hinder the propagation of seditious carpings or reflections touching the oppressive yoke of the [directory?], with the policy of which it would be inconsistent, to allow of more than an absolute vital subsistence, the inspectors, or rulers, have now and then recourse to a means of suppressing and attenuating population that is shocking to humanity in its grossest condition.

It has for a long time been observed that an excessive malady at certain times rages among the wretched settlers who people this colony.

The smallpox is said lately to have made great ravages by its destructive prevalence. The pthisis<sup>65</sup> [*sic*], or pulmonary consumption, in like manner exerts its baneful influence, as would appear, even from the cradle to the grave. It being almost impossible to find an individual who is not in any stage of existence diseased in the chest to a greater or less extent.

But these awful visitants of a climate destitute of every comfort, although their ravages were no doubt great and could not reasonably be expected to be otherwise considering the habits of the people, it would seem, in the eyes of their annual visitors employed in the British Whale Fishery, did not satisfactorily account for the sudden way in which vast multitudes were at repeated intervals swept away and, though the evidence was, so far as I am acquainted with the story, vague and inconclusive, yet many are bold enough to assert that foul means have been, & now are, in use to check the increase of population, and thereby destroy the possibility of an insurrection, by taking away the most active and spirited of the natives.

Between these and the whale-fish islands, a communication is kept up – the distance between the two is twelve miles – the latter are almost continually covered with snow and during at least  $\frac{3}{4}$ <sup>ths</sup> of the year surrounded with ice.

May 18. The weather was now variable and undecided, having not infrequently thick fogs during three fourths of the day and the remainder, intense frost. Very few whales, of the many that were every now and then passing to and fro, falling to the lot of any vessel in our neighbourhood, and as little to ourselves, rendered the uninteresting sameness of ice and water and snow pinnacled mountains, tho' all objects sublime in their kind, rather irksome and tedious to the poor whaler, whose prospects of emolument, from the fatigues of a hazardous and inclement voyage, were of course daily becoming less and less promising in feature.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> May at half past 12 PM six Esquimeaux boarded us, in their canoes, from the

---

<sup>65</sup> 'Phthisis' (*OED*), the classical term for what was later termed pulmonary consumption, and nowadays tuberculosis.

point of land called Lively, abreast of which we were at that moment situated.

I had seen a native of this quarter of the globe on a former occasion, and of course being somewhat acquainted with their *costume* was prepared in a manner for the [‘singularly’ *deleted*] grotesque debut of these singular visitors.

I confess, to be present with so many of them (for the water was now covered with canoes every one more eager than another to get into our notice), to be in the vicinity of the humble abodes of these extraordinary beings around me those sterile regions where Nature never softens her horrid aspect, wrinkled with the withering blasts of eternal winter – to hold communion with her, as it were, in her wildest mood, bore with it something too strange to be expressed.

Certainly the appearance of these people was superior to the highest expectation I had formed of them. They were all young except one; I suppose the oldest of the other five had not yet numbered his 26<sup>th</sup> year. One of them, indeed, had a look of grandeur, being almost European in point of countenance; he however was of Danish extraction.

All of them coughed incessantly, as if quite consumptive; but truly it was rather to be wondered at that they lived at all than that they were so ill as they seemed, considering the abject state of wretchedness in which these miserable creatures pass their little span of existence, vegetating, or rather decaying (to speak more correctly) in dark loathsome caves, dug under ground which, rationally viewed by a civilized being, would so far from being accounted a preservation of existence be looked on as an efficient means of extinguishing vitality – or at least, stinting the natural progress of the animated fabric.

Take a single family, for as Sterne<sup>66</sup> observed when about to view the mass of misery contained within the prison walls, it would be overpowering to attempt a more general description, and thereby suppose so many of our fellow creatures born to no inheritance but wretchedness. Imagine the milder season exhausted – shut up the little [sallow?] group, having made provision for them against the long, ensuing season of lethargy. Creep in with them, and seat yourself on the carpet of skins – see the [Kuiea?] or female companion, her hair dishevelled and cast over her face and neck as she sits like a Sybil, in the first moments of interview impressing the mind with some fearful & unpleasant ideas of a supernatural presence. Then in the dusky and sombrous light of the glimmering taper take a survey of the apartment [*sic*] and its furniture.

---

<sup>66</sup> An allusion to Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* (1768). Yorick is in Paris:

‘I began to figure to myself the miseries of confinement. I was in a right frame for it, and so I gave full scope to my imagination.

‘I was going to begin with the millions of my fellow-creatures born to no inheritance but slavery: but finding, however affecting the picture was, that I could not bring it near me, and that the multitude of sad groups in it did but distract me. -

‘I took a single captive, and having first shut him up in his dungeon, I then look’d through the twilight of his grated door to take his picture.’



You are already [quivering?] at the ghostly appearance of the inhabitants of this [planned?] immurement – the dripping walls – the loathesome [*sic*] [factor?] exhaling from their persons, in common with [every?] other *bon à quelque chose de sauvage*, are in fact too much for European delicacy.

Did they set before you any of their whale skin bread – or their frozen Bear's flesh, or other savoury venison; did the hospitality of the *Padre del caverno* stir him up, to pledge you to a cup the sparkling oil – fresh drawn from the [fat?] of the whale? You were disgusted then with the sight of them and their dreary habitation; what then would a repetition of the ceremony prove to you, a few months hence, just as they emerge from the regions of Tartarean gloom to welcome the returning Sun?

It would be then, I fear, as fatal to you in effect, as the *Grotto del cano* [*sic*] to the dogs in Italy.<sup>67</sup>

We recede, with good will, from the grotto, and the reader may rest assured that in pursuing our endeavours, for his edification, we shall not again trespass on his patience, and the delicacy of his taste by introducing him to the interior of such a caverna [Trophanii?].

The Esquimeaux wear their hair very long and thick, wherever it grows, but Nature in the distribution of this article has not been so lavish under the [pale?] as one would have been led to believe, from the state of the climate, she might have been. They have consequently no use for razors or such like abrading instruments.

It would doubtless be bad economy in a shivering Esquimeaux to part with any little appurtenance of clothing – far more so with that which he may esteem himself fortunate in having received at the hands of the 'mighty mother'.

There is not however much [loss?], taking him as a whole, for when you look to his head you find that there the substance in question is fairly sufficient to have invested his whole frame, with a very decent [tunic?]. It is, in short, so thick and bushy that he is continually obliged to keep braiding it backwards, as it would otherwise fall down over his face, and veil him to the waist.

The hair of the males is in general black (perhaps by habit – and I think little science is requisite to decide this presumption) and very slightly finer than the mane of our common horse .

I could not help admiring the solicitous attention with which they regarded each other on leaving the ship to re embark [*sic*] in their slender canoes, which lay tossing upon the waves like

---

<sup>67</sup> An allusion to the Grotta del Cane (the Dog's Cave), Naples, where dogs were sent in to show visitors how the carbonic acid gas near the floor of the cave kills them.

so many bladders – rendering it matter of considerable difficulty for them to resume their seats in safety.

The first that got in held the shallop of his neighbour firm with his paddle untill he was fairly master of it after which, the [~~newly seated~~] first, having pushed off, the newly seated one performed the same friendly office to the next in waiting, and so on, one to another, till the whole were again independently placed upon the water.

These people live chiefly, I believe, on the provision which is annually transported thither from Denmark, & bartered from the produce of their summers labour in the fishing & hunting, on very unequal terms and to them of course disadvantageous [*sic*] in a high degree. From thence in like manner they are supplied in part with clothing of the mariner, and more valuable kind, viz. Frocks, hose, checks for shirting & such like, which must doubtless prove far more pleasant wearing than the seal-skin their sole resource withholding this. But it is evident that unless they are tolerably successful in the fishing, they must be at times badly served from that quarter. In case of such an event, they make use of the Bear's flesh, that of the Deer, birds of various descriptions, and the flesh of the seal – which, if caught young in these latitudes, is said to be not at all ungrateful.

In their traffic with our people (which was trifling in the extreme) these beings evince strong marks of avidity, and a sort of stupid cunning which is even disadvantageous to them, as it serves only to put the more intelligent European on his guard & hinders them, in these instances, from allowing the paltry wretch so much advantage as he otherwise would, the simple savage.

In some things, apparently from experience of past injury, they seem wonderfully knowing – and fastidiously watchful. Thus, in one instance where a sailor was in the act of bartering some ground Coffee, the Esquimaux looked steadily in the face of the impatient seaman, then at the Coffee – smelling it often – then gazed round about him, tasting the article and spitting it out again – exclaiming at the same time with singular emphasis & expressions of displeasure – “Coffee! – no good – no good – same as Biskee!” meaning of course that the sailor was imposing upon him by offering a spurious article, in exchange for his more valuable commodity.

Their passion for spirituous liquor is unlimited – one of the six offered to barter his whole canoe in exchange for a quantity of “Brandy wine! Jam Rum!”

The state of the weather during these last six weeks has been pretty uniformly agreeable, if alternations from haze to bitter clear frost can be said to bear any relation to that term. Taking it for all in all I think we can scarce say we have had above a few days of really bad weather during that considerable space of time. Ill fortune seems however to tread us close on the heels – multitudes of Whales – plenty of chances – but none to be caught, & every other one as badly off as ourselves.

It would seem as if the whales knew perfectly what we wanted, in hunting them up & down, for they just wait long enough to tempt the impatient harpooner & then while they have barely space [*'enough' deleted*] sufficient to whirl up their tails – off they set with a vengeance! – leaving the astonished pursuer with his lip between his teeth, to his own inward meditation – to muse as usual on the mutability & uncertainty of all worldly events, from the cradle to the grave, from the tropic to the pole.

It is difficult to depict the state of anxiety in which nearly two months of continued disappointments in the fishery had thrown the whole ships company, from the Captain to the scullion. Nothing but lamentation and sorrow, from the main-top to the galley – from the galley to the cabin, moody sadness and rueful melancholy was cast in every countenance; starvation & penury was the burthen of the song. But all the anxiety of heart – the lamentation and sorrow – the rueful and melancholy visages were of no avail, and the song of sadness was still only answered with sighs.

For a month we continued assiduously paying our respects to the Bay of Good Fortune over which the Goddess was said to have presided time out of mind, & to have annually lavished her favours on all who were blessed with sense enough to pay their court to her in that consecrated inlet. But alas! – such fleeting hour and day [*sic*] only answered our expectations with the cold certainty that the goddess in question no longer remained tutelary over the bay; or else that having turned misanthrope, like our fashionables of the beau monde at home, the poor votaries had disgusted her with their prayers and intreaties [*sic*].

Be that as it may, we continued also in the mob, and had the satisfaction to find that we were equally unblessed by her smiles as were the brethren devotees.

It was a fact however, somewhat strange of its kind, which I could not help taking notice of that some few vessels not so superstitiously attached to the bay in question, in contenting themselves at a greater distance, were in general more successful than ourselves; although (to use an allegorical simile) their nets had been let down in places where it was certain no fish inhabited. Two of these vessels I at present remember the Brunswick and one belonging to the Port of Leith. The former having got seven or eight whales before most of the fleet appropriated one or two, and several any.

Now the Brunswick, notwithstanding the great abundance of Ice on the ground had made shift, to reach [Wygah?] Island, & return to Disco Bay, several weeks ere any of the other ships made a single effort beyond Fortune Bay.

The Dexterity, (which if I mistake not was the name of the other) had courted the favour of the capricious deity off Riscol<sup>68</sup> while the rest were busily watching the bays – and

---

<sup>68</sup> [Craigie's footnote]: It is evident from daily experience in this fishing that the presence of the vessels has a considerable effect on the temper of the whale – it being uniformly fickle and impatient where many ships intrude & vice versa.

handsomely rewarded accordingly.<sup>69</sup>

One or two others, who had been wise enough to shun the buz [*sic*] of the multitude for some fifty miles to the westward, where the island is seen to dip with the water's edge, I remarked to have been uniformly more successful than ourselves, generally in the ratio of time that had elapsed since commencing their separation from the fleet.

We ourselves, one evening, in a propitious hour, bore away off to westward, and after running all night amid heavy, and extensive (fish like) floes, spied a blow early in the ensuing morning and had the creature for the trouble of taking, and an excellent one she turned out.

It was quite sufficient, however, that we got hold of this one, and it followed, as an *inductio ad certum*<sup>70</sup> – that having got her, no more were left; accordingly, instead of proceeding on towards the Northwest passage for a while, back again we hurried, and in a few hours had the pleasure of joining our patient friends, once more in the vicinity of South East Bay; where we waited till the beginning of June like Sir Giles Overreach<sup>71</sup> with a most “steady temper” but without grappling like him, much to our own small profit, or being likely in the end to render our beneficent owner's [*sic*] through our means “lands of acres” – or their daughters by dint of the near failing talisman “right honourable daughters”; having in fact during that long period, only got one fish more, which placed us on nearly equal footing with the majority.

June 5<sup>th</sup> It was now time to be looking to the northward, for some better fortune. Accordingly, together with the combined squadron, we bore away up Strait with a brisk fair wind, which in two days placed us under the lofty lee of [Wygah Hugen?], or Hare Island<sup>72</sup> – so called from the circumstance of its being abundantly infested with hares, and having been first noticed on the clearing away of a dense mist.

It would be but losing time, without affording much entertainment to the reader, were I to set about an elaborate geological description of this island, and I am well aware that it would be inconsistent with my attainments in that way to attempt the instruction or information of the critical naturalist.

I shall therefore confine myself in speaking of this place to such casual remarks as transient occasions give rise to, & these being interspersed, without any of the aridity peculiar to technical phraseology, & without forcing into the general account of my excursions, it is hoped

---

<sup>69</sup> According to the Devereux records, the *Brunswick* returned to Hull at the end of the season with 146 tuns of oil from eleven whales, while the *Dexterity* of Leith caught fourteen whales, for 161 tuns of oil.

<sup>70</sup> An undeniable consequence (presumably here used ironically by Craigie).

<sup>71</sup> The central and villainous character in Philip Massinger's play, *A New Way To Pay Old Debts* (1625), still popular in the 19th century.

<sup>72</sup> 70.4°N 54.9°W. This small island off the northern tip of Disko (Qeqertarsuaq), commonly named Vaigat or sometimes Waygat in early sources, was formerly Hareøen (Danish: Hare Island) and is now known as Qeqertarsuatsiaq. Craigie was inconsistent in his spelling of this placename, Wygah being the most frequent, both for the island and the strait in which it lies.

they will not prove pedantic or irksome to the plain reader, nor altogether unworthy the attention of the more deeply versed.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> June our Captain sent ashore a boat to [Wygah?] Island, for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not a passage were then practicable to the northward, and I readily embraced the opportunity for taking a survey of that bleak district. Accordingly having equipt [*sic*] myself for a snow march, I stepped into the boats and in a few minutes set foot on land, for the first time since leaving Britain.

It imparted an indescribable feeling of mingled delight and uneasiness (but the last only lasted for a moment) to tread upon the mossy land even within the arctic circle, after so long & close confinement within the wooden walled home, and I do not know that it could have afforded me a much higher gratification, had I been disembarking *vice versa* – *sub curru Solis nimium propinqui*.<sup>73</sup> So powerfully does that peculiar principle operate – the property of adapting our necessities and feelings to the various contingencies of fate, and of suiting our circumstances and affections, in the most singular manner, to the vicissitudes of climate.

I had not proceeded far from the coast ere I found desolation and sterility without much metaphor.

In no account of the misery of arctic climate have I ever met with any thing analytic of the extreme wretchedness of this district. In many interesting descriptions of such regions, we are told of the existence of different species of woody productions, even in those chilly dominions where winter can scarcely be said ever to suspend his reign, and that even when the existence of the more voluminous productions of the vegetative principle is no longer compatible with the proximity of such regions to the pole, there is still abundance of creeping shrubs of a less bulky and more hardy character. Here, nothing was discernible which could, properly speaking be said to have ever [\*\*\*] above the surface of the ground. A little [furze?] in some few sheltered places, interspersed with a dwarfish [straw coloured ?] plant of the genus [Papaver?] having a sort of pod at the summit filled with something not unsimilar to thistle down, and somewhat the consistence of the raw cotton, and this only existing in sheltered places, seemed the utmost efforts of vegetation. Some few weedy productions, nature's blighted dwarfs, which beggar'd clasification. Here and there creeping along the surface of the earth, a [reedy root?], terrified we might suppose to rise up from its parent mould, lest it should experience instant annihilation.

The Island, notwithstanding, abounds with Partridges, Peterels [*sic*], Larks &c. The first afford excellent eating, and are reckoned a treat when caught by the whalers. They are covered with a feather very similar to those in this country, but fully more beautiful.

Here also, as in other parts of the Strait, Linnets and some other kinds of small birds are

---

<sup>73</sup> A slightly rearranged quotation from Horace, Odes I, 22: *pone sub curru nimium propinqui / solis ...* 'place me under the chariot of the too-near sun ...' i.e. in a much warmer place.

met with in considerable abundance especially during the latter part of summer.

Hares, as we have said, are abundant in all places, and the arctic Fox has in like manner here made its habitation, but both animals are difficult to be got at on account of the particular inaccessibility of their burrows.

A colony of aborigines (from South East Bay it is supposed) had until a late period their residence on this island, but it said [*sic*] that on account of the extreme sterility of the place, they had either migrated to some other part of the strait, or entirely perished. In one lonely and dismal valley however during our excursion we perceived decided marks of recent [sepulture?], with many whitened bones strewed here & there.

Touching the mineral productions of this island, they are undoubtedly both various & abundant, and from what I can judge not a little interesting in kind. From the limited extent of our circuit at this time much was not ascertained – the ground being, unless in some few small patches thickly invested with snow, frozen to appearance a hundred times over. On such places as were exposed I found abundance of chalcedony in beautiful specimens, precisely the same in colour and consistence as that found by travellers in the vicinity of Hecla in Iceland. Many fair specimens of Jaspers of various shades and richness of fracture.

In the channel of a narrow streamlet<sup>74</sup>, I took up several masses of Quartz which, I afterwards found on [colision?] in the dark, emitted the mutual luminous glow or phosphorescent appearance, peculiar to the mineral in question, more vividly than any which have hitherto come under the scope of my observation.

The attention of the traveller is in one place particularly arrested by a terrible gulf, averaging about forty yards in width and at the deepest nearly double that space.

It was fearful to look down from the lofty and precipitous verge, over an infinity of beetling<sup>75</sup> cliffs, from the chinks of which the birds, in innumerable multitudes, at times caused the whole defile to murmur with the wild hum of their varied notes. But the feeling became painfully dizzy if the eye attempted to pursue the feathered denizen as it winged the “Midway air”<sup>76</sup> or, fluttering near some curious projection, disengaged a portion of crag, and sent it rattling down over a thousand impeding battlements, scattering like the thunderbolt in its irresistible course, each moment accumulating devastation.

This immense ravine, extended on the North West, from the waters edge to the distance of nearly a mile in the opposite direction, bending round in an arc towards the South South West,

---

<sup>74</sup> [Craigie’s footnote]: Occasioned by the liquefaction of the snow, from the [daily?] increasing heat of the sun. The water thus flows into the less elevated places, and there collecting streams forth by every surrounding means of egress.

<sup>75</sup> *OED*: ‘projecting, overhanging’.

<sup>76</sup> An allusion to Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, Act IV, scene 6: ‘The crows and choughs that wing the midway air’.

after which it seemed gradually to lose itself with a gentle declivity in the wide expanse of a snowy plain.

It is not easy to conceive what were the feelings, with which an Ulloa<sup>77</sup> or La Condamine<sup>78</sup>, as they journeyed over the chilly wildness of the Cordillera, surveyed such monuments of the terribly magnificent as the snowy heights of Chimboraco [*sic*]<sup>79</sup>, or Pichincha<sup>80</sup>, but for my own part, I believe, placing the object of such peregrinations out of view, I would scarce, with a reference to the wild sublimity characteristic of such scenery, have changed situations with them, while straying along the bleak summit of this hoary isle – the myriad *Snowy Alps of Polar seas*<sup>81</sup> scattered over the far extending Ocean [\*\*\*] one hand while on the other rose high, in indescribable abruptness, the whitened elevations of the frozen desert.

I attempted, but in vain, to descend into the floor of this gulf, for I had not proceeded above a few yards down a gently declining slope, when I was suddenly immersed in a bed of snow to the depth of no less than nine feet. I never reflect without horror on this fearful incident which in the most simple manner might have deprived one of existence without a moments warning, for had I made my “*facilis descensus*”<sup>82</sup> nearer to the northward, where the wall of this Borean Avernus was more precipitous in its declivity, I must inevitably have been buried alive – a fate which many idle wanderers like myself have experienced, in the same way within the desolate precincts of this very island.

---

Having failed therefore in my purpose of reaching the basis of these rocky walls, it was impossible for me otherwise decidedly to ascertain one of the most interesting objects in my whole route – the mineralogical characters, distinguishing the various departments of this precipitous defile. Its less abrupt flanks on the Southward being hid from sight by the snow, while the more accessible boundaries on the side where I stood forbade approach on account of the curious condition of its elevated verge – too great a space stretching, at the same time, between the opposite precipice and the spectator’s eye for it to distinguish in the brown of the weather-worn cliffs to which department of geognostic classification they most properly belonged, and I hazard it as rambling conjecture, they were entirely composed of the Granite.

Turning therefore from this rugged scene I proceeded to ascend what seemed the greatest elevation within view, but I do not remember, on any similar occasion, of performing so arduous a task. Many a fall I got upon the deep wet snow, many a false step I made and many a painful knock I suffered from the rumbling of the loosened stones which the preceding scrambler let

---

<sup>77</sup> The Spaniard Antonio de Ulloa (1716–95) was a member of the expedition sent to Ecuador by the French Academy of Sciences to measure a degree of meridian arc at the Equator. He remained there from 1736 to 1744.

<sup>78</sup> Charles Marie de La Condamine (1701–74) was a leading member of the same expedition.

<sup>79</sup> Chimborazo, the highest point of the Andes, in Ecuador.

<sup>80</sup> An active volcano near Quito, Ecuador.

<sup>81</sup> An allusion to the poem *Human Life* by Samuel Rogers (1763-1855): ‘Among the snowy Alps of Polar seas’.

<sup>82</sup> An allusion to Book 6 of Virgil’s *Aeneid*: ‘*facilis descensus Averno*’: the descent to Avernus (i.e. hell) is easy.

down upon his less robust and hardy companions, in heaps equally sharp and heavy.

When I had at length reached the summit however, and enjoyed a moment's repose from such severe toil, I confess that in the first glance over the wide-extending prospect before me, I felt amply repaid for every hardship.

To look down from this summit upon the Ocean beneath, is a treat of the wild which, not the most "barren heart" could fail admiring. Never was diversity of imagery more vividly pictured, and yet with such a rigid sameness of material never was sterility & desolation more forcibly delineated.

Far as the eye could pierce on the one hand extended a frozen sea, studded with innumerable ice Bergs, of whose variety and singularity it would be vain to attempt sketching any idea ... while, in another direction, were obtruded upon the gaze those stupendous monuments of dreariness the cliffs of old Groenland, menacing the incumbent sky with their snowy brows, or shrouding them entirely in its mist. Those pinnacles, around whose airy dominion the icy Sansar<sup>83</sup> howls with unceasing energy, on which the unremitting splendour of unsetting day continues in vain to dark its inspiring beams; for the hoary rigor moves not, nor is withdrawn, but still in obedience to the doom of irrevocable ordination continues barred by chains of eternal durance.

From these, every creature of the feathered race flies far aloof, as if instinctively conscious of the horror that broods over their chill [environs?], and even the daring Eagle, towering athwart their frozen summits with his broad & vigorous pinion,<sup>84</sup> preserves a wary distance, as if fearful lest by too near an approach he may disengage the overburthened avalanche, and buried in its shivering fragments be precipitated to the bottom of some dreadful gulf.<sup>85</sup>

While the eye of the wrapt [*sic*] spectator is earnestly poring upon such objects, suddenly his ear is astonished, by the dreadful explosion of an Ice Berg. When directing his attention to the spot he perceives several huge white masses, rolling on each other amid a boiling surf, while the sea, which for miles around where uncovered by ice had not been ruffled by a breath of wind, or agitated by the slightest motion, is in a moment hurried into tumult, as if by a hurricane.

---

<sup>83</sup> [Craigie's footnote: The icy wind of Death. See Caliph Vathek.] A quotation from the early Gothic novel by William Beckford, *The History of the Caliph Vathek*: '... where breathes the Sansar, or icy wind of death'.

<sup>84</sup> *OED*: '... a wing esp. of a bird (always with a reference to its use for flight.)'

<sup>85</sup> [Craigie's footnote: *Néanmoins c'est là qu'au milieu des horreurs d'un éternel hiver, la nature a encore des pompes magnifiques; c'est là que les aurores boréales sont fréquentes et majesteuses, et qu'embrassant l'horizon en forme d'arc tres-clairm d'où partent des colonnes de lumiere mobile, elle donnet à ces régions hyperborées des spectacles don't les merveilles sont inconnu aux peuple du midi [sic]. ELIZABETH, ou Exile de Sibirie, par Mme Cottin.*] 'But still, amidst the horror and gloom of an eternal winter, Nature displays some of her grandest spectacles — the aurora borealis, inclosing the horizon like a resplendent arch, emits columns of quivering light, and frequently offers to view sights which are unknown in a more southern hemisphere.' (Revised English translation, London, 1822, p. 6. Original French edition, 1806.)



The heat of the sun was at this time powerful, although an hour past midnight, when it had in like manner been shining forth in all the dazzling splendour of meridian glory. The sky serene and beautiful transmitted his slanting beams unsullied to the snowy surface of the ocean, from whence they were reflected upwards with a degree of brightness unsufferable by the naked eye.

The screams of the numerous birds inhabiting the less elevated of the mountainous parts were now and then heard mingled with the less harsh notes of the snow lark<sup>86</sup> – the Linnet – or the Peterel, while far below, exulting in the fresh wave, the sea tribes gave testimony of their joy, in their various characteristic tones, at the enlivening presence of that luminary whose smiles for so many months had forsaken them and the surrounding face of nature.

On our return we shot a few small birds, and wounded a large gull, from the boat. While on the wing, it immediately fluttered towards the brow of a precipice, thus pointing out to the view of its destroyers in like manner the habitation of its young. Accordingly one of the rowers volunteered to scale a height of not less than forty feet of curious granite, surmounted by loose masses of mica slate, which seemed ready, on the smallest disturbance, to fall down and crush the intruder. Every one advised the daring bird nester to desist from the apparently futile attempt, but he was too “[\*\*\*] sort of a soul” to be so easily daunted; to work therefore this indefatigable son of Nimrod<sup>87</sup> set on, and in a few minutes convinced all present that he was of the [true?] stem; a native of North Berwick, for where

*Tantallon’s dizzy steep  
Hung o’er the margin of the deep!*<sup>88</sup>

this nimble and dexterous scaler had drawn his earliest breath, and been accustomed to fledge the prolific Bass from infancy upward. It seemed truly impossible that the fellow could have risen higher than a few feet from the basis, but notwithstanding all our fears and protestations, with the bare help of a small boat hook he traversed with most surprising agility over every prominence or abrupt crag, till he had successfully reached the summit. When taking up the trifling quarry he held it forth as a trophy of his prowess, which it certainly was, deposited it safely within his hat; and in a moment, while all were conjecturing by which means he was to make as honourable a retreat (which is often in such sort of climbing more difficult than the access), he leapt upon the top of an Ice Berg, slid down in a twinkling from thence upon a piece of field ice, & next instant was at his oar.

---

<sup>86</sup> It is not clear whether Craigie is mentioning alternative names for one bird, or three different species. If the former, it may be the snow bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*), which breeds in the Arctic and was termed the Snow Lark-bunting in Audubon’s *The Birds of America* in the 1840s.

<sup>87</sup> In the sense of ‘Any daring or outstanding hunter’.

<sup>88</sup> A quotation from Canto VI of Walter Scott’s *Marmion*. Craigie is referring to the Bass Rock in the Firth of Forth, facing the ruins of Tantallon Castle near North Berwick, and home to about 150,000 gannets.

The nest was composed of furze externally, and artfully interwoven with a kind of dried sea weed which tended to give the whole a very compact & durable consistence & form. Internally it was lined with a profusion of the finest down, on which lay two eggs of a greenish colour speckled with black, fully larger than those of the same species in this country.

Thus terminated our afternoons excursion; and with these memorials of Wygah Island, we returned to our wooden walled home, in eager condition to besiege the department de l'homme de cuisson.<sup>89</sup>

In the evening I paid a visit to the Surgeon of a vessel belonging to Hull, regarding a young man who had been uniformly complaining from the time we left port. He was a bad subject, poor fellow, for struggling with the inclemencies and multivarious privations of comfort inseparable from such a voyage; and it was evident, all things taken into consideration, that he had as the saying goes; palmed a bad bargain upon the Captain and crew in entering himself at muster. That however, as matters stood, was no affair of our's – he laboured at present under a complication of painful and distressing affections;<sup>90</sup> it was our duty to relieve or alleviate these, in as far as our ability extended.

He had sailed in earlier years in the India trade; and between the Tropic and the more temperate zone, through irregularities of the grossest kind, had long since ingrafted, within a frame by no means the most favourable from the hands of nature, the seeds of a distemper fatal to most Europeans, subjected to such circumstances of excess in climate and living: hepatic derangement, which, united to the tetchy condition of a naturally scrophulous habit, weakened into general irritability by repeated salivary courses, had at length terminated in disease of the lungs.

To relieve a pressing attack of pneumonia occasioned by getting wet one night during watch he was let blood to the necessary extent, with the desired effect of doing away with the acute symptoms. But from that time forward, notwithstanding the systematic exhibition of the various remedies prescribed by the best practice of the day, he sunk under the united influence of painful disorder and deficiency of necessary aliments and other domestic comforts, with a slow but certain progress.

At the time when I consulted the young gentleman alluded to, his limbs were both swollen from the knees downwards, tongue foul and furred, pulse generally hectic; with all the symptoms of approaching dissolution, viz. loss of strength, and living substance, decreasing appetite, Hippocratic countenance,<sup>91</sup> hair falling away from the scalp in handfuls, curved nail,

---

<sup>89</sup> I.e. the kitchen; they were hungry.

<sup>90</sup> In the sense of 'An abnormal state of body; malady, disease' (*OED*).

<sup>91</sup> 'You should observe thus in acute diseases; first the countenance of the patient, if it be like those of persons in health, and especially if it be like its usual self, for this is best of all. But the opposite are the worst, such as these: a sharp nose, hollow eyes, sunken temples; the ears cold, contracted and their lobes turned outwards; the skin about

and so forth. What could be done? What could the highest medical skill united to the best and richest efforts of domestic care, with all its accompanying comforts at home avail the wretched sufferer in such a case? The question is easily answered – nothing. If nothing could be done at home, if possible less was in our power at sea, where the very climate in unison with every other detriment conspired against all the efforts of the medical attendant. Nothing therefore was the best that could be done; and accordingly this was our rationale of treatment; with the exception of an occasional anodyne draught, to relieve the intensity of present sufferings.

*consultatio peracta*<sup>92</sup> I dined with Captain Blyth and his surgeon Mr Cullen and experienced much pleasure from our short interview: the former being possessed of all those claims to interest which excellency in his profession, united to a warmth of attachment to the principles of devotion, that is rarely alas! to be met with among the generality of his brethren.

Good fortune had directed the helm of the Brunswick, from the earliest of the season. She had now taken up no less than twelve fish [i.e. whales], about double the number that any other individual in the fleet had yet been able to appropriate.

I hope I shall not incur the censure of the more knowing and sceptic, for having introduced this remark in its present place. For to those, I beg leave only to say that I believe it will be matter of difficulty to show at least what superiority, in point of destiny, the man who neglects his prayers can possibly have over the individual who makes the strict observance of the same a duty of primary importance; or to point out how far the practice of the one is likely to interfere with the skillful management of ordinary business. Habit in every instance renders the yoke imposed by regulation relatively light and easy of toleration; and stated attention to form among mixed bodies is no less of vital importance to the interests of religious discipline than the ceremonial of office is to the successful administration of judicial authority in every well ordered system of society.

The assurance would indeed be gratifying in a high degree, that sacred worship were as strictly observed in the ritual throughout this extensive department of the naval profession, as it is by the wise direction of our ministry in his majestys navy.

Here we have at once a great nursery for the youthful part of the sea faring body, and a fixed habitation for the more mature; a condition wherein, taking him at all in all, the professed whaler must of necessity spend one half of his existence and that, if we may be allowed to judge from various circumstances of fact, perhaps not the worst.

How pleasing a spectacle would it be to witness the sabbath day's assembly of those men whom destiny has placed in one of the most precarious of all earthly situations (the field of contention and blood not excepted); to see them uniting together for the laudable purpose of

---

the forehead rough, stretched and parched; the colour of the face greenish or livid ... be it known for certain that the end is at hand.' Translated from *The Book of Prognostics* (400 BC) by Hippocrates.

<sup>92</sup> The consultation completed.

soliciting, in due form & with becoming earnestness, the unfailing protection of that arm which alone is competent to their preservation or rescue from the awful abyss of peril and dismay.

It is in undeniable evidence that divine service, imperfectly as it is often attended to, is productive of effects highly beneficial on the moral discipline of our hardy tars in the navy, although all may not be alike operated on by its saving influence.

The nature of their employment in continually changing situations, and thus frequently touching at land, or else laying stationed in the immediate vicinity of large sea-port towns or other places, where from the usual nature of things all are constantly exposed to temptations of the grossest kind, & by which the weak-minded are too apt to be beset, to their ultimate ruin, must prove dreadfully unfavourable to the purposes of virtuous precept, or the inculcating of that becoming veneration which is above all things due to the attributes of divinity.

But the adage may be held true, in so far in relation to the disinterested son of Neptune: he is a devil on land, but a babe on the ocean; an observation which, although common, is by no means a bad one, for it is evidently no compliment to the subject it hints at; since it evinces at first sight that the sailor, like many of his fellow beings, becomes virtuous not so much by principle as by necessity, only ceasing to be tempted of evil when the temptation is itself withdrawn. Be that as it may, it shews clearly that the long absent whaler will have ten chances to one against his brother in the navy of profiting by such an arrangement, to his eternal welfare.

Before taking leave of my kind entertainers I was favoured with a sight of rather an extensive cabinet of interesting [\*\*\*], all of which had been selected in the country this season.

Among these was a production which attracted my attention in a particular degree on account of its extreme curiosity, both in point of origin & character in general. A petrification bean pod possessing all the appearance, and [consistent?] form of the original production. Captain Blyth and another gentleman had been so lucky as to fall in with several of these wonderful specimens, on going shore one day to ascertain the state of the ice from the highland.

I do not remember whether or not the situation was far distant from the sea, but however I think the following observations of Dr H. Sloane, in the *Philosophical Transactions* for the year 1700, may tend to throw some light upon a subject so unaccountable and interesting to the naturalist.<sup>93</sup>

‘I had several times heard of strange Beans was thrown up by the sea on the Islands, on

---

<sup>93</sup> Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753) was Secretary of the Royal Society of London from 1693 to 1713. The article to which Craigie refers was entitled ‘An Account of Four Sorts of Strange Beans, Frequently Cast on Shoar on the Orkney Isles, with Some Conjectures about the Way of Their Being Brought Thither from Jamaica, where Three Sorts of Them Grow’. It appeared in vol. 19 (1695–7) of the *Philosophical Transactions*, not 1700 as stated by Craigie, and differs in detail though not in substance from Craigie’s quotation. In the following extract, Sloane’s original text has been used.

the North-west parts of *Scotland*; especially those of them who are most exposed to the Waves of the great Ocean; they are thrown up pretty frequently in great Numbers, and are no otherwise regarded then as they serve to make Snuff-Boxes.’

Here the D<sup>r</sup> enumerated four different sorts

1<sup>st</sup> The Jamaica Cocoon. *Phaseolus maximus perennis* indigenous of both Indies – thrown up also on the coast of Kerry, in Ireland.

[2<sup>d</sup>]<sup>94</sup> what is called in Jamaica the Horse-eye Bean – indig. East and West Indies.

3<sup>d</sup> The ash coloured Nickar, of Jamaica and East Indies.

The 4<sup>th</sup> sort of these Beans he never saw grow but had observed several of them in collections of rare fruits. It is the *Fruitus exot. Orbicularis, suleis nervisque distinctus. 4 sei fructus alter splendens 4 Sulci distinctus*<sup>95</sup> – Where it grows no mention is made.

‘It is very easie to conceive’<sup>96</sup>, continues he, that the Beans, ‘growing in *Jamaica* in the Woods, they may either fall from the Trees into the Rivers, or be any other way conveyed by them into the Sea: It is likewise easie to believe that being got to Sea, and floating in it in the neighbourhood of that island; they may be carried from thence by the Wind and Current,<sup>97</sup> which meeting with a stop, on the main continent of *Am.* is forced through the Gulph of *Florida*, or Canal of *Bahama*, going there constantly *E.* and into the *N American* Sea: for the *Lenticula marina serratis foliis, Lob.* or *Sargasso* grows on the Rocks about *Jamaica*, and is carried by the Winds & Current (which, for the most part go impetuously the same way) towards the coast of *Florida* and thence into the Northern *Am.* Ocean ... where it lyes very thick on the Surface of the sea: But how they should come the rest of their Voyage I cannot tell, unless it be thought reasonable ... that the Beans being brought North by the Current from the Gulf of *Florida* are put into these Westerly Winds way, and may be supposed by this means at last to arrive in *Scotland*.’

Now it is not difficult to suppose that instead of falling in with the west winds as Dr Sloane observes, some of these productions may by the influence of current proceed, not in an Easterly direction but rather, having passed to the northward of Bermuda, Cape Breton and Newfoundland, come in with the coast of Labrador, and from thence, perhaps being transported yet further to the northward, be deposited at length, by the agency of some extraordinary property in the containing medium in this metamorphosed condition, here and there, along the desolate

---

<sup>94</sup> This numbering, and also possibly a word, missing because the page corner has been lost.

<sup>95</sup> This Latin description is close to Sloane’s original.

<sup>96</sup> Again, in order not to perpetuate transcription errors, Sloane’s original has been used in preference to Craigie’s transcription.

<sup>97</sup> Here Craigie inserts the words ‘which is here constant East, and’. The similar phrase in Sloane’s original occurs after the word *Bahama*.

coasts of this Strait.<sup>98</sup>

If on the contrary, we deny their existence in this situation from such an origin. it must be looked for in some other direction as it is evident that no such specimen of the vegetative principle could possibly have reached have reached such a degree of perfection, through any natural means, under such the state of climate which these regions are subject to.

‘It is reasonable to believe’,<sup>99</sup> continues the same author, ‘that by the same means that these Beans, were brought to Scotland; the winds, and currents, transported from America, towards the *Azores*, & *Porto Santo*, which are recorded by *Fernan Colon* in the Life of his Father *Christopher* ... to be some of the Reasons that moved the said *Christopher Columbus* to attempt the Discovery of the *W. Indies*.’ and it might be altogether unworthy<sup>100</sup> the attention of the scientific to set on foot some little investigation of the matter, which might in all probability [*sic*] decide whether these things be the produce of any of the countries above noticed, or rather indigenous of some district nearer to California or the Japanese Isles. Could such a question be ascertained beyond doubt, here would certainly be a more convincing proof than any that have hitherto occurred, that a passable communication by water does in reality exist, between the polar limits of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. For this information whatever may be its value, my readers are more indebted to the contribution of Capt<sup>n</sup> Blyth, than to any effort of my own; and it is to him that I must refer for any satisfaction that may be wished for regarding the curious matter in question, a liberty which I presume from the general known character of the gentleman he will by no means take offence at.

Day after day, meantime, passed in a state of most disagreeable suspense, in relation to the grand object of all our pursuit. Every now & then some party were in the act of scouting the state of the ice from the higher lands, but still no passage broke up for the blockaded fleet which lay moored to the ice Bergs around the northern base of the Island, presenting [an?] arena to the view of the spectators on land of a most interesting and desolate description.

There they lay, without a drop of water in view, unless here and there some little chink occasioned by the transient separation of the floes, according as the current shifted them in seeking its varied direction on the flood or ebb tide. Here, like so many exiles, doomed to await their annihilation at the mercy of elements, in which all that is dreadful & appalling are impressively concentrated.

Conceive all around still as death, no sound except the melancholy cries of the wild birds, all desolate

---

<sup>98</sup> The main objection to Craigie’s suggestion is that the Labrador Current is southward-flowing. One could suggest instead that the material moves east and north in the Atlantic until it is caught up in the East Greenland Current, and is carried by that part of the current that passes round Cape Farewell and then moves northward along the coast.

<sup>99</sup> What Sloane actually wrote was: ‘By the same means that these Beans come to *Scotland*, it is reasonable to believe, that the Winds and Currents brought from *America* those several things towards the *Azores* ...’

<sup>100</sup> Craigie surely means the opposite, i.e. that it might be worthwhile for scientists.

*Blind, boundless, mute & motionless  
a stagnant sea of idleness<sup>101</sup>*

unless where the sailor pacing his heartless vigil on the deck, gave spirit to the scene by associating with the present idea, the tale of hardship.<sup>102</sup>

Immortal bard of Hope! – it is impossible under such circumstances [‘as these’ *deleted*] to resist the delightful temptation of repeating such lovely verses as these, which while listening to the monotonous murmurs of the dreary ocean and gazing, on the “Polar Alps”, I have often recalled to mind with a degree of exultation approaching to rapture, for there we breathe at once the energetic language of nature and truth, rendered mystically fascinating by the glowing colours of poesy.

*But Hope can here, his moonlight vigils keep,  
And sing to charm the spirit of the deep.  
Swift as yon streamer lights the starry pole,  
Her visions warm the watchmans pensive soul  
His native hills, that rise in happier climes;  
The grot<sup>103</sup> that heard his song of other times;  
His cottage home, his bark of slender sail,  
His glassy lake, and broomwood-blossom’d vale,  
Rush in his thoughts; he sweeps before the wind  
Treads the loved shore he sigh’d to leave behind!*

*Meets at each step a friends familiar face  
And flies at last, to Helens long embrace!  
Wipes from her cheek, the rapture-speaking tear,  
And clasps with many a sigh his children dear!<sup>104</sup>*

*Campbell.*

As our prospects were so bleak and little or nothing occurred to take up the time, in

---

<sup>101</sup> An allusion to Byron’s *The Prisoner of Chillon*: ‘A sea of stagnant idleness, /Blind, boundless, mute, and motionless!’

<sup>102</sup> [Craigie’s footnote:

*Of some Norwegian, while the icy gale,  
Rings in the shrouds, & beats the iron sail  
Among the snowy Alps of Polar seas.  
Immoveable for ever, thee to freeze.*

Rogers.] See footnote 81.

<sup>103</sup> Grotto. ‘Now only poetic’ (*OED*).

<sup>104</sup> A quotation from Thomas Campbell’s *The Pleasures of Hope*. Craigie substituted ‘flies’ for Campbell’s ‘sweeps’.

consideration of the great likelihood of our having a long voyage it was deemed not an imprudent step to take on board some native mineral coal, from a mine discovered a long time past in the island in question.

Two boats were accordingly manned to this intent and I readily took the helm of one of them. It was requisite to sail round the island in an Easterly direction to the distance of about sixteen miles, untill [*sic*] we reached the exact situation where the mineral was deposited. Our passage was difficulty itself, having to sail continually traverse on account of the profusion of ice and the straitness of the water-lanes which, becoming constantly obliterated by the strength of the currents varying the position of the ice, and thereby repeatedly obstructing our progress, obliged us frequently to disembark upon the floes and pull the boats over them with considerable labour to the nearest water that opened in our course.

The Ice Bergs were all along prodigiously numerous, and it is owing to this cause, of course, that so great an obstruction is presented from the stagnation of the field ice.

The task could prove endless were I to undertake any description of these gelid masses, there being scarce a production of nature or of art, in tracing the visible contour of which some resemblance may be struck out, in the multifarious and striking outlines of shape in which this fragile element exists.

One Ice Berg was sufficiently remarkable, on account of the close resemblance it bore to a bridge. The columns on both sides of the arches presenting a wonderful specimen of rude beauty and gigantic solidity; the arch beneath seemed almost symmetrical [*sic*], as if cut after a model, and completely excavated, so that we passed through with the utmost ease under its roof, which measured precisely, from portal to portal, five boat's length, or ninety feet, being in height from the waters edge at some places not less than a third of that prodigious extent.

Looking back from the other side, after a sudden winding which completely threw the arch out of view, we beheld with renewed astonishment the singular disposition of the ice-work on the summit of the mountain. An infinity of cones stretched over the wide space in majestic confusion & flashing the light from their sunbright summits, rushed at once upon the gaze, like the glorious encampment of some eastern potentate, arrayed in all the splendour, of oriental magnificence. But the richly-wove produce of Indian handicraft, watered from the crystal brooks of Cashmire by the care of the persian maids, and whitened in the sun till no cloud is left to sully the brightness of its hue, would in vain be brought to vie with the tintless gossamer walls which nature, in the rigours of wildness, had reared into form from the purest of Earthly materials. Vainly the gold-tipped cupolas should attempt to outshine those flaming spires, which from the simplest combination of causes (the living radiation of prismatic colouring) she had contrived to make productive of an effect, the richness of which surpassed the most vivid description.

*The sman [*sic*] passing; in his shaggy cloak,*



*Points to the work of magic, and moves on.*<sup>105</sup>

Having now approached the North East boundary of [Wygah?] Island, we easily descried the object of our expedition.

It was a coal country of a horrible aspect which would baffle me entirely were I to attempt any verbal delineation of it. Suffice it to say that to all seeming it was a spot where, in consonance with our notions of such beings, fiends of the worst description might with propriety take up their abode.

Contiguous to the coal-bed, there existed a considerable quantity of limestone and at a very short distance from that an immense mass of native sulphur, vast abundance of a mineral, similar to whinstone,<sup>106</sup> but destitute of its [strict?] mineralogical characters; with great store of other productions, most of which however I was unacquainted with, in so far as regards their scientific distinctions. I therefore preserved a considerable lot from the whole.

At a particular part of this strangely compounded district, I observed a vast bed of red coloured earth, which it struck me at the moment might be found to suit some useful purpose in the arts. Its grain was remarkably subtile being almost soluble in water on trituration. Its taste seemed slightly astringent; and, when completely dried, was scarcely to be distinguished in appearance from the Bolus armena<sup>107</sup> of chemists.

As the argillaceous earths seemed to exist in considerable abundance where my observations were chiefly directed, in the immediate vicinity of this coloured material, I was the rather strengthened in the belief of the identity of this substance with the mineral alluded to, since we know that the latter is the result of an impregnation of these earths with the oxide of iron - a metal, of which, although in this place, I have not met with in modification; yet from having previously seen various forms of mineral combination throughout the island in which it decidedly held a constituent place, I would readily be inclined to suppose that, farther from the coast in this spot also, sufficient traces of its existence would be perceptible to warrant the production and identity of the substance in question as a satisfactory conclusion.

The whole of the geognostic characters distinctive of this quarter of the Island, so far as my limited observation can qualify the assertion, are directly opposite to those of the other parts - these being more or less closely allied to such substances of the mineral kingdom, the peculiar quality of which is combustibility and in which the influence of chemical in so far as related to their formation/production is more immediately and strikingly palpable to our observation.

The latter on the contrary, appearing to consist principally of granite, and the various

---

<sup>105</sup> A (possibly deliberate) misquotation from Samuel Rogers's long poem *Italy* 'The seaman, passing, gazes from the deck,/The buffalo driver, in his shaggy cloak, /Points to the work of magic and moves on.'

<sup>106</sup> *OED*: 'A name for various very hard dark-coloured rocks or stones ...'

<sup>107</sup> A red clay used in the past as an astringent, to counter diarrhoea, dysentery, hemorrhage, etc.

modifications of that extensively existing substance, rendered curious with age and exposure. The first mentioned place being remarkable on account of the coal-black or plumbago colour, & soft or crumbly consistence – while the latter possess all those features which decisively point out to our view that series of formations which constitute, as it were, the basis of our globe,<sup>108</sup> and which are too well known to exact any minute recapitulation of in this place.

The carbonaceous mineral<sup>109</sup> we found in sufficient abundance on digging into the side of a precipitous, hilly part of the coast, the very base of which was washed by the ocean; but in the meantime loaded by vast quantities of ice, which being squeezed up in some places to the height of no less than sixteen feet, evinces in a striking manner how prodigious the force must have been which could elevate those ponderous masses to so great a height.

It is not easy to determine what extent this mine occupies; there seemed to be little doubt, however, that it would, if properly wrought, turn out in a high degree productive, both from the rich quality of the fuel and the comparative facility of its elimination from the loose and open state of the soil.

It were rather an out of the way speculation, however, to think of loading coal in Davis' Strait Lat<sup>de</sup> 69°N when perhaps, by continued consumption, those vast reservoirs of wealth and utility at home have finally exhausted their subterranean stores; such a cold faced project may come to serve the purpose of posterity, when the world is some century or two further advanced towards its ultimatum. In case that our little book should be fortunate enough to prolong its date to so distant a period of futurity, we shall endeavour to communicate, in as few words as possible, a sketch of what they may chance to look for, and expect to find.

On the side of a mountainous district of the Island of Wygah - North East p<sup>f</sup> Compass and forming with the connecting land a portion of the Southern wall of Wygah Strait commonly called the Wygah there may be seen with facility by coast sailing, at the season when the snow has for the greatest part disappeared from the ground, abundance of a peculiar coallike mineral possessing the following distinct characters.

1<sup>st</sup> In most parts, the exact resemblance of well prepared charcoal, with this obvious distinction that it possesses several times the specific gravity of that substance.

2<sup>nd</sup> In every instance the mineral exhibits a laminated appearance which is more like the disposition of the ligneous fibre in the case of the grown fir (*abies*) than any other of the vegetable productions, its similitude in this instance being in general most unequivocal.

---

<sup>108</sup> This is an allusion to the Wernerian belief, supported at Edinburgh University by Professor Robert Jameson, that granite was the original rock of the earth, and therefore the oldest.

<sup>109</sup> I.e. coal.

3<sup>d</sup> Imbedded, or chased<sup>110</sup> in the substance of the mineral, to a greater or less degree of abundance in precisely the same manner as we find the Pyrites studded [*sic*] throughout the laminated substance of our common blue slate, may be found particles of resinous substance, quite analogous in appearance and mode of burning to the finest Resin; but having a very rich colour, and fracture. similar to the best Amber, which it equals in transparency and beauty of hue, existing for the most part in isolated portions, but here and there in masses of minute aggregated granules; totally divested of the transparency and brilliant appearance of the smaller bodies & exhibiting a dirty gamboge yellow.

4<sup>th</sup> So far as my observation permits me to determine, the mineral seems not to obtain in vast or continuous deposits but to be quite imbedded in the earth, it being quite impossible to disengage any quantity of the one without at the same time bringing away abundance of the other.

5<sup>th</sup> When burnt as fuel, a strong disagreeable odour, is set forth similar to the heavy...<sup>111</sup> but fully more penetrating.

6<sup>th</sup> When well burnt through, a strong heat is given out, having fully double the intensity of that disengaged by common coal, and being likewise more uniform in the duration of this high temperature so far bears a resemblance to the common furnace charcoal.

7<sup>th</sup> The product of combustion is a copious white and fine ash, occupying nearly a moiety of the integral bulk.

8<sup>th</sup> Although, from what has been said, a pretty close affinity may be traced [between?] the substance in question and ... of Iceland – a product ... has given rise to so much philosophical conjecture and disquisition we do not think, from what Sir George M<sup>C</sup>Kenzie says in relation to that substance, that we are warranted to infer a strict analogy, not having hitherto seen any specimen of what he describes, and therefore having had no opportunity of comparing it with the substance in my own possession.<sup>112</sup>

Lastly. If (as is not unlikely from the ambiguity of language in attempting to trace the character of such anomalies) it shall be found on a close examination of both that they are of the same nature, we think we shall be [born?] out in stating, that it ... difficult, to set at rest ... of the mineral ... for the origin of this singular substance, at least in as satisfactory a way as can be

---

<sup>110</sup> A technical term, equivalent to 'embedded'. See *OED*.

<sup>111</sup> Pages 204–10 of the MS each have a page corner missing, leading to the loss of a few words. These gaps are indicated by ellipsis marks.

<sup>112</sup> Craigie is clearly referring to Sir George Steuart Mackenzie's *Travels in the island of Iceland during the summer of the year MDCCX*, published in 1811, and specifically to chap. IX, 'Mineralogy'. His description of the carbonaceous material is at pp. 373–4.

employed for explaining the nature and properties of any other object in the material world.<sup>113</sup>

The mind which is accustomed to survey all objects that come within the range of its observation through the cool medium of unprejudiced and dispassionate reflection, can with difficulty conceive any thing to be more unfavourable to the successful enquiry after truth – and at the same time better calculated to overshadow with obscurity the facts which it comes forward for the purpose of explaining, than the ... habit, of deciding by vague ... whatever abstruse point of ... particular, may, at first or second glance appear concealed from the penetration of our imperfect faculties.

It is an error to imagine that such a mode of decision is accessory to the progress of mind, by filling up those chasms which must constantly be occurring in our route over the dimly lighted walks of science. The truth is it does much harm, and we may rest assured that in nine instances out of ten utter ignorance of the matter so hypothetically explained will prove less hurtful to the successful investigation of nature, and the apparently occult means through the agency of which she goes on affecting, behind the veil, her manifold and wonderful purposes.

While we only presume upon the ... of objects in as far as analytical means ... be made use of, without any ... of misleading us from the reality and relinquish every thing in the comparative classification of which such instruments of reasoning are no longer compatible with opinion, to rest in its original obscurity; we [chance?] render a most essential service and relief to the student, while we eventually, however remote the degree, further the progress of the science, the mysteries of which he has devoted his faculties to the investigation of.

In consonance with such rational views it must be evident to every one, that the classifier will afford us but a barren display of his genius, when he attempts to assign to such a production as that now under consideration a place within the precincts of the vegetable kingdom... as much as he shall imagine ...<sup>114</sup> to be answered when he informs us that such a production, however much different now, has been decidedly at one time a living vegetable waving in the breeze, and [\*\*\*] with the [\*\*\*] verdure of Summer. Like it too, the laws by which this universal system is sustained and directed must have been widely metamorphosed in their general arrangement, when we consider what the arctic circle must have been when its meanest island could give birth and nourishment to those voluminous developments of the vegetative principle, whose primary existence, (say such philosophers) and subsequent partial destruction, must necessarily have all in [their?] course taken place ere the petrified ligneous fibre could have sprung from its parent mould under circumstances of a second nature, and the accomplishment a new and more wonderful birth than the former.

It would surely be as correct a conclusion to affirm that, because the branch of sea weed

---

<sup>113</sup> At the end of this paragraph, Craigie indicates a footnote, which begins with the next paragraph. As, however, his discussion extends over several manuscript pages, it seems more appropriate to incorporate the 'footnote' into the main text.

<sup>114</sup> The MS is intact from this point onwards.

or coral exhibit unequivocal marks of [\*\*\*], they must necessarily have been torn from the trunk of the willow as it hung over the gliding river, or that, the general inundation, in its universal [rush?] had scattered these productions – petrefactions, or what you chuse to denominate them over the bottom of the indian ocean, or the far spreading bed of the Atlantic.

The truth is, it will not do on the principle of petrefaction, a process certainly miraculous in the extreme, but which while it accounts for many singular changes in the primitive constitution of bodies of various descriptions, must here doubtless be looked on as a convenient means of [unbending?] the fertile imagination of the generaliser – a sort of *facilis descensus* – and I may well add *Averni*<sup>115</sup> – from the injudicious warping of mental capacity to the absolute nothingness of ignorance. In such an attempt, the mind becomes necessarily involved amid a labyrinth of error and uncertainty, however plausible the theory to appearance may be.

It is racking the imagination in a manner to account, by a most inconclusive and illogical method of decision, for what may be otherwise far more rationally explained by a direct appeal to the circumstances in statu quo, rejecting every idle vagary of fancy as useless and unprofitable. In fact we see no cause why a body decidedly mineral in every character, except that of its [similarity?] in one respect to a production, whose grosser characteristics rank it in the [number?] of a distinctly opposite class, should for this reason be denied its existence from a source to which, in preference to all others, resting exclusively on the evidence of the senses, we should be inclined to trace it. That the laminated arrangement, which obtains throughout the disposition of particles composing this substance, is very similar to the arrangement of any particular species of ligneous fibre can not be denied but to affirm, on this account, that it once was the same is but a narrow minded conception of the power of deity which as an unfailing cause is competent in itself at all times, and by agents however dissimilar, to produce effects at once analogous in [an?]<sup>116</sup> astonishing degree, or differing constitutionally from each other to the utmost level of variation.

---

On the 23<sup>d</sup> June, at half past three oclock am. we were suddenly roused from sleep by an accident equally hazardous and terrifying.

Our vessel had been lying moored to an ice Berg of no inconsiderable magnitude for several days, in company with two others belonging to Hull. As the Berg was low, destitute of abrupt prominences, and upon the whole by no means mischievous like, we were under no apprehensions of danger from any sudden *evenement d'esprit facheux*<sup>117</sup> on its part, for if any suspicion or fear had previously existed, the long uninterrupted state of quiet and safety which we had hitherto enjoyed under its lee tended completely to efface every such impression.

---

<sup>115</sup> Descent into ... the underworld.

<sup>116</sup> There is a small tear in the MS page, and the probable loss of this word.

<sup>117</sup> Unfortunate behaviour.

Our surprise, of course, was the more heightened when, at the moment alluded to, a dreadful alarm was given which upon the immediate impulse seemed predictive of instantaneous destruction.

Every one was upon deck in the twinkling of an eye, and there the petrifying sense of danger seemed for a time to have overpowered any other energy.

The ice Berg had upset, and was now raking us, for and aft, sweeping every thing to atoms that came within the range of its destructive vibration. This moment grinding the main rigging as high as the top, and the next instant fifty yards off and again rolling back upon us, threatening on each accession to crush our bark in pieces, without the slightest hope of escape.

At length our perturbed spirits became calmer by degrees, as the awful mass, dripping in a thousand rills, appeared to regain its equilibrium. This desirable consummation, however, did not take place till considerable damage had been occasioned to our vessel in particular; indeed it was matter of renewed astonishment to every one that she had not incurred irretrievable loss, which must have been the case had the Ice Berg, instead of receding from us on the first movement, taken the opposite direction.

Shortly after this accident, from the continuance of still weather the ice began sensibly to slacken around, and as it seemed practicable to get farther to northward we cast loose on the succeeding day, and after towing & tracking amid heavy floes with the most indefatigable industry, succeeded in reaching Four-island-point about midnight, having thus taken in all fifteen hours to pass over a space, the limits of which, from the first being distinctly visible, did not exceed twenty miles.

This place has received its singular name from the circumstance of four small islands, running out in succession from the coast. They afford refuge to thousands of wild birds, of many different descriptions, and are covered at the present season with eggs, barely deposited on the mossy soil in a sort of depression which is excavated exactly as if to fit the egg, without any kind of nest, or other defense [*sic*], during the absence of the mother, from the hostile and uncherishing elements.

The parent perhaps incubates, mostly during the colder hours of the night<sup>118</sup> and abandons its offspring, in search of nourishment, while the greater warmth of the meridian sun prevails at the earth's surface.

The whole coast in this district is low and shelving, and on this account is rather precarious to the navigator, from the numerous such reefs or ledges of rock, which are in many places found to run out considerably underwater.

---

<sup>118</sup> [Craigie's footnote]: It was still day-light continually during the twenty four hours, although midnight was distinguishable by the great declension of the favouring luminary in the horizon, and the consequent diminution of temperature.

Prompted by curiosity again to exercise my limbs on their natural element, I went ashore about a mile to the northward of these islands, but Alas! “*hic labor, hic opus*”.<sup>119</sup> I am sure that Hannibal, during his nine days pilgrimage through the Alps, could scarcely have suffered more savage usage from the innumerable obstacles occurring in those footsteps, than that which fell to our lot in this painful expedition over the ravaged coast of East Greenland<sup>120</sup>, in a spot perhaps hitherto untravelled by the foot of a human being [*sic*].

Often did I sigh for an Esquimaux sledge. Often did I think, of the vinegar and the fire of the Carthaginian general.<sup>121</sup> Often, with one of my legs immersed within a freezing mixture of mud & snow and my corresponding one pointing in the direction of the clouds (so as to fix me for a time in one of the most uncouth situations that can well be conceived), did I howl for aid, but without experiencing any relief, or at a time entirely buried beneath a deceitful & devouring snow trap an unfortunate wight would invoke his panting comrades in distress to lend their assistance towards his [\*\*\*]<sup>122</sup> from the disastrous precincts of a living grave. In short the land, unless where covered with a deep investment of snow, was wholly composed of that unstable material mentioned by Ovid,<sup>123</sup> to consist of the four elements blended in one, with the difference that there was no fire in our<sup>124</sup> but in its stead, a dreadful excess of the opposite element,<sup>125</sup> strongly impregnated with cold.

We observed the footprints of a Bear in the snow, till arrived at the mouth of a vast cavern which, judging to be the refuge of more than one of these fierce creatures, and having besides under our present circumstances of [\*\*\*] no stomach for the fight, we deemed it prudent to forbear risking our safety at a fearful odds.

Two white eagles passed over head, both being unluckily far beyond the power of our fire-arms, we were reluctantly forced to content ourselves with a transient view.

Early on the morning of the 26<sup>th</sup> June while lying icebound, a little to the northward of Four-island point the watch on deck were alarmed at the sudden appearance of a [\*\*\*] flame close in shore, accompanied by dense & extensive volumes of smoke; and it was soon discovered by reconnoitering [*sic*] from the mast-head that the fire proceeded from the roof of a small edifice,

---

<sup>119</sup> A quotation from Book 6 of Virgil's *Aeneid*, in which Aeneas says that although it is easy to descend into the underworld, to climb back up is much more difficult: 'this is the hard work, this is the toil'.

<sup>120</sup> The mariner was accustomed to describing the west Greenland coast as 'East Greenland', and vice versa, because that was the direction in which they observed those coasts.

<sup>121</sup> An allusion to the claim (by Livy and Pliny) that Hannibal used vinegar and fire to split rocks impeding his Alpine crossing.

<sup>122</sup> The word is lengthy and illegible, but 'disinterment' appears to be the intended meaning.

<sup>123</sup> Apparently a reference to the opening lines of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which he describes the primal Chaos: 'Nothing retained its shape, one thing obstructed another, because in the one body, cold fought with heat, moist with dry, soft with hard, and weight with weightless things'.

<sup>124</sup> The rest of this line in the MS is blank.

<sup>125</sup> Water.

situated in the direction specified, now rapidly falling a prey to the devouring element. The building being slender in the extreme, and mostly composed of wood, the whole was consumed, literally, before it could have been practicable to use an effort in favour of its preservation. A boat was shortly afterwards observed to push off from that part of the coast & to pull directly to the Eagle of Hull.

In the afternoon I visited the scene of desolation. The Governor's house, an edifice of no little taste so far as we could judge from its remains and considering the place where it stood, though level with its foundation, was still burning with considerable violence. The glass of the windows, was melted and broken, and the brickwork which composed a considerable part of the simple structure was in many places perfectly reduced to ashes.

Such was the means which some of our jovial English lads had adopted for the purpose of impressing of impressing [*sic*] upon the untutored minds of these harmless tribes an idea of the properties and privileges of a civilized being; such the praise-worthy plan they had hit upon to evince, in the most striking manner, how comparatively small is the difference that in reality subsists between the last link of the human chain and the absolute savage.

It is the custom of these poor beings, like the peoples nomadic of Siberia, to wander about in the brief season of summer, in quest of that provision which of course is intended to supply the ensuing winter's store, and these had in like manner for the same purpose deserted their sad abodes, probably at no very distant period back; leaving behind them such articles of property as were unportable in journeying the bleak desert, with the hope that no one would maliciously embezzle or destroy them.

Not far from the burning pile was situated the store house, which more through fear of observation than want of inclination on the part of the incendiaries (as it was entirely built of fir plank & would have afforded a glorious bonfire), had escaped the barbarous and inconsiderate temerity of these inhuman creatures.

In it lay the casks piled in great rows piled in great rows [*sic*] by the careful hands of the absent natives to be in readiness against their next whaling expedition. About a gunshot distance from the colony we perceived the burying ground which, from the numerous mounds that marked its barren surface, gave ample reason for belief that the little troop had inhabited the place for a long time. There was only one monument within its narrow precincts, and that was a small piece of deal, stuck into the earth, with these characters engraved thereon, and grooved with black pencil "Thos Piercy – Carpenter. Ship Everthorpe. Hull . died June 18<sup>th</sup> 1816."

The short and simple annals of the poor.<sup>126</sup>

From this dreary scene we returned to our boat and after viewing the skeleton of a whale,

---

<sup>126</sup> A line from *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* by Thomas Gray (1716–71).



and a vast profusion of bones, and passing a short interval in shooting wild Ducks and Dovekeys, the unfurling of the ships sails, the sure signal of getting under weigh, summoned us on board; and we left the Neighbourhood of the four Islands, and the scene of this pitiful outrage the same afternoon.

While ratching<sup>127</sup> along the coast between Four-Island-Point, and North East Bay or Jacobs bight, I remarked a very singular phenomenon, yet a thing of no infrequent occurrence in these latitudes. At the distance of about half a mile ahead, I perceived several vessels laying along under close reefed topsails, with a pressing gale off land, while three or four others not above a gunshot from these were fixed in a dead calm, our selves running at the rate of three or four miles an hour, wind fair and steady.

In a few minutes however we likewise fell in with the blast, and were instinctively compelled to take in the whole of the small sails, to hinder the occurrence of damage.<sup>128</sup> It was only doing and undoing nevertheless, as we were no sooner finished with this operation than the fickle breeze at once flagged – became still calm – and was again succeeded after a very short interval by a fine steady wind which bore us into the mouth of the Bay in a few hours.

This is, without exception, the strangest looking place ever was seen. The whole Bay is surrounded with lofty ridges of land, which although here & there divided by deep sulci<sup>129</sup>, appears to the transient glance as if entire; but continually changing and becoming more fully developed, according as the eye of the spectator ranges over this dusky outline with a greater or less degree of attention; while the huge & phantastic shapes of the ice-bergs, reposing on the calm basin below, afford a strikingly antithetical combination only to be pourtrayed [*sic*] by the hand of the painter.

Pursuing the picture to a greater limit, one after another arise lofty groups of mountainous pinnacles, having all the wildness and wintry sublimity without any of the beauty or softness of alpine scenery. Here the isolated brow of a dark precipice, by the sudden dispersion of a cloud, thrust itself at once upon the astonished gaze, as if dropped or suspended from the incumbent sky; while, at a greater distance, the spherical and snow white summit of a still more elevated ridge, receiving the intense glare of the noontide blaze, compared with the surrounding darker and often obscure scenery, shone down with the dazzling similitude of a great meteor.

The state of the ice on all sides, and particularly towards the north, mean time seemed again to have taken an unfavourable turn for our every day declining prospects. In fact it was now evident that, if we had wished it, there could have been for the present as little certainty of our getting back by the way we came, as of proceeding onward in the direction of Baffin's Bay.

---

<sup>127</sup> *OED*: 'To sail on a tack, to 'reach''.

<sup>128</sup> This was presumably what is known as a 'glacier wind' from the Greenland icecap: a shallow but often strong gravity wind.

<sup>129</sup> *OED*: '**Sulcus** ... 1b. A trench. c. A hollow or depression in the land. *rare*'.

The latter was impossible; there was now, therefore, no remaining alternative but to content ourselves in the present idle situation, waiting for better tidings. This was doubly aggravating [*sic*], as a strong run of fish had evacuated the bay only a day or two prior to our arrival, and there was now no hope of any thing of the kind recurring. We received this disheartening intelligence from the Esquimeaux in the vicinity, who had been fortunate enough to appropriate to themselves a few in the hurry.

Here we again fell in with the discovery ships under the conduct of Captain Ross whom we had only once or twice seen since their first appearance at Wygah Island.

They seemed to work well, and to be extremely well cut out for this dangerous kind of navigation which demands the utmost stretch of human ingenuity to guard against the many hazardous contingencies, which are at all times awaiting.

From the report of some of our people who had paid them a visit we understood that the Commodore's discipline was excellent in all respects, and admirably adapted to the comfort and well being of every one under his charge, and that all of them were in the highest degree sanguine in regard to the consummation of the grand enterprise.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> June, I saw many natives skimming about at the distance of no less than sixteen miles from land.

Eight or ten of the female sex had some before [*sic*] taken possession of a luggage boat<sup>130</sup>, and in order, to be on equal footing with their more active helpmates, were proceeding to do honour to the [long?] [\*\*\*] by paying their savage respects to the Commodore.

This was the first time I had seen any of the sex, but unluckily they were too far off from our vessel for us to have an exact view of their *amiable personnes*. They seemed to be all beauties of their kind however, and to have their own pride and affectation in common with the generality of their less dingy sisters of the civilized world.

They wear their hair long and thick, to a disgusting degree, and to keep it under a sort of *bonne grace* management, they have it pinnacled up on the crown of their head – in a [tiaraform?] method, which makes them look as odd and ridiculous as we can well conceive, from the famous description of Addison, our grandams did under the reign of Queen Anne, to the lasting fame of which tiaræ that gentleman has judiciously devoted a whole paper of his *Spectator*.<sup>131</sup>

---

<sup>130</sup> An alternative name for the *umiak*, the flat-bottomed skin boat normally rowed by women.

<sup>131</sup> [Craigie's footnote: 'See paper ... On the headdress of the ladies.'] Craigie was referring to *The Spectator*, 98, 22 Jun. 1711, in which Addison welcomed the end of the fashion of building women's hair high above the head. 'About ten Years ago it shot up to a very great Height, insomuch that the Female Part of our Species were much taller than the Men... . For my own part, as I do not love to be insulted by Women who are taller than my self, I admire the Sex much more in their present Humiliation, which has reduced them to their natural Dimensions, than

In the afternoon the enlivening sound of the fiddle and Esquimeaux humstrum<sup>132</sup> announced some forthcoming mirth, and as we passed close under the lee of the commodore, we discovered them vigourously liltin<sup>133</sup> and dancing with extreme festivity. They are fond of the musical species of entertainment to an astonishing degree.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> July, after inconceivable difficulty we passed an extensive barrier of ice which had kept the fleet back for nearly a month, and by the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> we were running rapidly to northward, a clear sea before us and a fair wind behind.

Nothing can be imagined more truly enlivening, next to a glistening assembly of lovely women, than a large fleet of ships under full sail with a fair wind. Such a heart stirring spectacle I had now the infinite delight of witnessing as we proceeded to the northward, with the rapidity of nine miles an hour in a calm sea, set out as usual with ice islands innumerable.

The appearance of the land after passing Unknown Island Lat<sup>de</sup> 71° 00<sup>m</sup> Lon. 53° 45<sup>m</sup> is much more hospitable like, and pleasing to the eye, (if it be in the power of any thing within these dreary latitudes to afford it pleasure) than any other part we have hitherto observed, till the Frew or woman islands<sup>134</sup> 72° 45<sup>m</sup> lo. 56°.20 present themselves. In their vicinity the mainland exhibits a very unsightly and irregular contour.

Thither, the Esquimeaux come from the main, and pass the Summer, in slender tents or huts, constructed for the occasion of Seal fishing, catching of narwhals and other marine animals.

The natives are here rather numerous, and dispose of their merchandise on much cheaper terms than those inhabiting nearer the South.

They are all greedy in the extreme however, having the strongest propensity to theft; without any of the cunning, sharpness, or foresight so necessary for its successful practise.

July 5<sup>th</sup> Bad weather – slight snow with occasional high winds, the fogs becoming hourly more & more protracted in densation.

Hazy weather is a complete knock up to Polar Navigation; and thus we find that two great physical obstacles (the one as it were exhausting itself to give birth to the second)<sup>135</sup> seem, in the general order and distribution of Nature, so disposed as to hinder those distant & secluded

when they had extended their Persons and lengthened themselves out into formidable and gigantick Figures.’

<sup>132</sup> *OED*: ‘A musical instrument of rude construction or out of tune’.

<sup>133</sup> *OED*: ‘cheerful or merry singing’.

<sup>134</sup> Nowadays Upernavik Island, but formerly known as Woman’s or Women’s Island. Part of the Upernavik archipelago, to which Craigie is presumably referring.

<sup>135</sup> Parentheses inserted by editor.

corners of our globe from ever being, traversed with security by the penetrating and scientific navigator. For although the chart lays down the sand-bank or sunk rock, it can give no assistance towards elucidating the situation of the floe, or the perilous hold of a group of ice-bergs; the former continually changing its position, and of course in relation the expansive body breaking out new openings or veins, & obstructing others, in unremitting succession; the latter perhaps so numerous and so disposed, that even in clear weather, “with all appliances & means to boot”,<sup>136</sup> it is almost impossible to avoid one without running foul of another.

We have certainly been blessed with a most delightful season, as to the matter of weather; indeed the oldest sailor in the trade present did not remember of having seen such a summer in the country during a very long series of years.

But it is all over now, nothing but snow and sleet and frost & haze to fill up the tedious hours of our dreary pilgrimage. And the Sun too, our long faithful and heart cheering friend, begins to show but a sickly nightwatch, descending hourly lower & lower towards the horizon.

The atmosphere continuing to become more and more obscure, it was out of the question to think of sailing any thing nearer the right direction in this state of things; therefore, as we could not lie still with more safety than proceed, we often run on for days together the best way we could, with the loss frequently of several points course, and at the long account had in general the chagrin of finding ourselves cooped into the bad end of a *cul de sac* from whence there was no possibility of getting extricate [*sic*] unless by going back again and exploring the next outlet that existed, which to our infinite vexation was oftener labour in vain than perseverance crowned with success.

The Discovery ships could not now keep company, as the unanswered signals repeatedly testified.

With so much profusion of ice on the ground, and thick strong and evidently recently broke up, this state of affairs could not long continue without rendering our sailing matter [*sic*] of extreme hazard, or in fact entirely impeding it.

Accordingly, notwithstanding our utmost endeavour to the contrary, on the 16<sup>th</sup> July the latter of these events took place and we were blockaded in the tightest possible way.

One vessel having been cut to pieces by the awful effect of the currents upon the floes,<sup>137</sup> at a very short distance past, it became an object of the highest consideration to use effort for security against such perilous contingencies; for, although danger & destruction seemed imprinted in appalling characters upon every object yet, when men are familiarised by custom,

---

<sup>136</sup> A quotation from Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 2, Act III, Scene 1*.

<sup>137</sup> '[T]he *Three Brothers* [Hull] ... was crushed between two floes during a heavy gale of wind on July 3 in North-east Bay. In the space of an hour not a bit of the ship was left, but the crew managed to make their escape in boats' . Lubbock, *The Arctic Whalers*, p. 209.

the mind is unbent from anxiety and dread, and is thereby induced to regard even the elements of all that is fearful or impressive of ruin with no feeling of uncommon concern till aroused by some signal and touching protestation of this conflictive violence to a painful sense of its precarious situation.

The distressing accident alluded to was yet fresh in the recollection of the fleet and tended at once to unveil the eyes of every one who might carelessly claim himself secure, by thrusting the picture upon his gaze in its truest lights.

Our final object of consideration, accordingly, on the actual consummation of this event, which from a transient glance at the mast head we judged rightly to be conducting on a grand scale, was to set every thing in readiness towards effecting the painful and laborious operation of cutting out ice harbours.

The difficulty attendant on this undertaking may easily be estimated when it is understood that the ice cut through by saws of large & heavy construction averages from four to six feet in thickness and sometimes even more.

It is notwithstanding a melancholy consideration that, with all the prolixity, and excessive trouble attendant on this effort at preservation, a very imperfect succour can at best be attained: the dock in question having merely the effect of defending the ship from the first squeeze resulting from the meeting of the ice; and yielding little or no resource from destruction in account of a floe overlapping the gateway or a weak-side. In which case, if the floe happen to be large, & to rush on with considerable force, it is more certain than problematical that the Ship, the immediate obstructing object, will, if not at once be reduced to atoms, at least incur irreparable damage.

As, however, it generally happens that when danger is greatest we have the least choice of resource left to [\*\*\*] with, the ship's company were at all events in united power applied to this work without delay, and the progress of Ice-Dock making, though tardy and laborious to a degree, went on nevertheless with steadiness & uniformity.

While these great things were going forward it is not easy to depict the dreary state of surrounding objects.

As the vaporous expanse did not at some times ascend to a great height in the atmosphere, while yet nothing could be seen from below, it afforded a strange and novel spectacle to cast ones glance upon from the observatory at the mast-head.

The eye roamed free and unrestrained over a boundless ocean, but how unlike the ocean we in reality traversed! Something wildly supernatural seemed to pervade the wide space. Abstracting entirely from the operations of human industry below, and fixing the attention for a moment on the boundless immensity of this cloudy tract, the awful silence seemed particularly

striking, but wildness was wrought up to a pitch of ecstasy, if at a time the confused hum of voices escaped upward from the people on the surface, mingled with the jingling sound of the ice cutting, or the occasional crushing of the drift ice: heard all in a deafened and indescribable tone on account of the loaded state of the atmosphere.

Here and there, at indeterminate distances, frequently as the vaporous undulations rose or fell without disclosing the surface of the sea or the bodies of the ships themselves, the blackened masts of the neighbouring vessels sprung for a moment upon the view like so many dimly discovered spectres. If at a time the mist happened to clear away for a few seconds to any considerable extent, there at once opened to view the comparatively enlivening prospect of a series of little groups, actively employed in conducting the sawing machines, whose pyramidal outlines stretched along the ice in extended ranks; and thus, filling up a considerable expanse of the bleak horizon relieved the eye in a great degree from the uninteresting & painful sameness of absolute vacuity.

In such a lack lustre condition one dreadful week passed by, which to every one seemed the longest of his life.

Taking by the whole, every blink of clear weather that occurred in the course of that joyless term, we did not reckon upon more than half a day in which it was possible to see, literally, from stem to stern; every discomfort of course being aggravated [*sic*] tenfold by the uncertainty of the wished for change that should relieve in a propitious hour from such an unhappy immurement, for the sea was completely covered with compacted ice as far as the eye, aided by the perspective, was enabled to penetrate.

The temperature of the surrounding medium had risen with rapidity during the last few days to a higher degree than it hitherto reached; the consequence was that the fogs became greatly more heavy, and as the vapour collected on the numerous nuclei exposed to it, in the form of masts, sail yards, and ropes of various descriptions, we were in a short time like to be inundated, without knowing in a manner from whence the flood was approaching.

This was a condition of a particularly annoying and uncomfortable nature, for the sudden accession of heat, in unison with the loaded state of the atmosphere, had the immediate effect of impairing the vigour of the digestive organs, in a manner which not even half allowance, by this time set on, had the power of obviating. This was probably occasioned by sympathy of the internal organs with the cutaneous texture which as a necessary consequence must have become greatly relaxed.

The energy of mind, so difficult to quell in this hardy class of men, by the influence of any moral agent, began sensibly to give way under the pernicious operation of a physical evil. It was evident in fact that the [tough saws?] of the [\*\*\*] [were?] the worse for the inclemency of the season, and the [united?] privations of comfort; and although in reality the present allowance of diet was simply sufficient for the easy sustenance of health & strength where little bodily

exertion was exacted, yet the gloomy prospect of surrounding things, in addition to this single circumstance, was productive of an effect immediately the reverse of what was intended by it. “If” said they “we are already on short commons, and the fogs set in, why continue to prosecute a useless & unprofitable speculation till our last ration is served out?”<sup>138</sup>

The cook, a strange old fellow who had been many trades in his day, from a motive of self interest tended to foment the indignation of the querulous. By way of perquisite, the whole fat of the ships provision falls by right to his share, and greedy as the generality of his class are, he contrived to make the meat throw out a deal more of the nutritious part of its consistence, by longer boiling than it behoved honestly to have done, by which mode of proceeding each of the [messes?] was in reality contracted to little more than a half of its bulk. The captains penetration was the first to perceive this trick and it was well that he was aware of it, for the men eager for redress and glad at finding a subject to lay hold upon for the purpose of kicking up a bravado, one day after dinner had been fairly served out seized each their platters and lifting in a body marched up to the main-deck, and with the utmost economy and coolness deposited their tiny morsels in smoking array before the cabin hatch, requesting the commander to compear without delay at the tribunal of justice, for reform was the cry.

But the skill of their leader, united to a masterly degree of cool intrepidity in the highest degree, commanding and respectable in its possessor, had the immediate effect of blunting the malignant shafts of the mutinous and by three words of mingled authority and softness – the one reflecting on their [unmanly?] impertinence, and irritability under the dispensations of providence – the latter in consideration for their present untoward circumstances, with the heartfelt hope<sup>139</sup> of a speedy change for the better, artfully at the same time hinting at the proximate cause of dissatisfaction, he [remitted?] the grumbling mariners back to their [respective?] assignations, with the sole difference of dining that day on cold beef and biscuits, instead of hot.

Such, where matters might have turned out infinitely the reverse, was the excellent effect of decision, set off by a commanding and eloquent deportment.

July 22<sup>d</sup> At length, the wind changed, and blowing from a colder quarter the vapours becoming partially condensed, and thereby precipitated to the subjacent surface, the blessing of clear weather was the joyful consequence. Latterly, the ice feeling the immediate pressure of the northerly breeze, began with rapidity to give way to the Southward; and fain would we have turned in that direction and gone with it, every one having now become tired of the hopeless voyage we had for so many months been engaged in.

It was not a little galling to observe some of the neighbouring vessels fill sail, and drop

---

<sup>138</sup> Several lines of text in the MS have been deleted at this point.

<sup>139</sup> The following page in the MS is numbered 255, like its predecessor. This error is not corrected on the following page, which is numbered 256.

away snugly down strait, just as we might conceive a care worn, and now exhausted minister who had spent his best days amid struggles for preeminence in the business of the state dismissed from the labours of office, and [cooly? (*sic*)] retiring to the ease of purer air – while we, like so many exiles or, to preserve an unison with the above simile, after the manner of the sweating, dusty faced, and unsuccessful Pettifogger<sup>140</sup> kept boring in the opposite direction.

We were now, in bearing with the Devil's Thumb. Lat<sup>de</sup> 74° 16. Lon. 57° 56.<sup>141</sup> A prominence which of itself has perhaps been better named than any thing hitherto met with in our whole route. It is fully as ugly as that uncouth term could be thought to impart. Its shape is very similar to the thumb of a human being, and it is so perpendicular that the snow even cannot rest on it unless during a strong drift. In short, it excels in characteristic wildness almost every other production of the like nature in this surprising country.

In the evening of the 23<sup>d</sup> we saw many whales sporting about but were unable to appropriate any of them, on account of the dead calmness of the water and the perfect stillness of the atmosphere, which allow them to take alarm at the slightest unusual noise.

The boats being out on what is called the Bran watch,<sup>142</sup> for want of better game four Bears were taken and killed, and a cub preserved alive. The largest of the defunct was as big as a Cow, and presented a truly terrific spectacle even when dead.

The young one although most of its teeth had not yet penetrated the gums, was nevertheless vicious to a surprising degree, and as he seemed in his present [carriage?] to possess small appearance of becoming social or civil, it was judged expedient to abridge his liberty by temporary imprisonment.

The malecontent [*sic*] was accordingly thrust into a very large cask the open end of which, was immediately fortified by strong bars of iron.

It was terrifying in the extreme to witness the fierceness of his gestures and the menacing growl that was instantly set up on the approach of anyone to his place of confinement, or on the disturbance of his rest by any uncommon sound. On such occasions he would spring forward, rearing on his hind legs while with the paws of the other two he struck upon the grating; and on feeling the resistance, with a renewal of rage, he would instantly grasp and tear the bars, darting his prominent eyes with striking rapidity, and roaring all the while in a tone that almost deafened the spectators.

Such wild movements were increased ten fold on the approach of a cat or dog, but these

---

<sup>140</sup> 'An inferior legal practitioner, especially one who deals with petty cases or employs dubious practices' (*OED*).

<sup>141</sup> Wikipedia gives the coordinates as 74°36'N, 57°08'W, but the MS may be indicating the ship's position.

<sup>142</sup> [Craigie's footnote]: 'This watch is set on whenever fish make their appearance suddenly and unexpectedly, or where the vessel is beset at a short distance from open water – by it the people are kept continually in the boats, relieving each other every two hours'.



never came forward to his couch of their own accord; and on all occasions, if brought near, evinced the most unequivocal marks of terror & uneasiness, even when the savage creature was asleep or did not for a few seconds observe the intruder.

On being presented with the feet and flesh of the dam, cut warm from the bones and yet smoking before his eyes, he tore it with horrible voracity, devouring it in a twinkling, nor did he seem to have the slightest instinct regarding the nature of such hideous diet

But when the skin that had enveloped the head and face of the same were brought to him, he exhibited signs of the warmest indignation: seized and dragged it to his den & latterly licked it all over the mouth and nostrils, growling mournfully and using such action as could leave no doubt on the mind of any one present but that the savage being was conscious of the fate of his dam, and that he now had in his grasp those lips which from the moment of his existence had oft times expressed in their own rude fashion the yearnings of maternal regard.

These two had been chased from the ice into the water, where the pursuers after great difficulty succeeded in fixing a rope round the neck of the Cub whereby it was towed off in the boats wake. The dam meantime followed it, howling most bitterly, till one of the seamen plunged a lance deep in her side, immediately on which she rushed towards the boat, and bit the young one in the back, retreating a few yards as swiftly as she was able to swim through the water; but when she looked back & saw no appearance of liberation for her cub, she once more assailed the boat making a desperate effort to get on board but here reckoning wide of certainty, she received the finishing stroke.

Such marks of affectionate feeling exerted wonder, seeing the animal in whose breast they are cherished, for assuredly, there cannot be [even] within the feverish lap of the [*ohidu nortrix bonum?*], a living creature, in which the elements of all that is savage, are more strongly concentrated, than in the *Ursus Maritimus* or Polar Bear.

This part of the country swarms with the ferocious species in question, and it is by no means uncommon to see forty or fifty of them prowling with avidity over the putrid carcase of a whale, the horrid exhalation of which will even taint the atmosphere for five miles to leeward.

They may likewise at times be seen wandering in droves upon the ice many miles distant from land, presenting the most consummate picture of famine and desperation; growling continually with a murmur which one would be apt to mistake for the monotony of distant thunder.

The Polar Bear is endowed with a far greater portion of strength than most animals with which we are acquainted, and to this he unites a property, most wonderful in itself and of all others most indispensable in such a climate, viz, the principle through which he is enable [*sic*] to resist the effects of abstinence for almost any length of time. When he does come to feast, however, if circumstances will in any way admit, the gluttonous brute never on any account

desists till he has finally gorged himself to the throat.

It often enough happens, that the Bear is compelled to travel for four or five weeks on a stretch without breaking his fast and this, together with the extreme rigour in other respects to which he is at all times exposed, set at rest our admiration at the untameable savageness of his nature.

He will sit for a whole day watching a little aperture<sup>143</sup> in the ice, in expectation of a seal emerging from below, and the instant the latter protrudes his head, the awaiting clutches of destruction receive him in the embrace of death. On the contrary, if (which seldom or never happens) he misses his prey through the quick observation and dexterity of the Seal, or from deficiency of alertness on his part, his resentment is horrible. Tearing the ice with his paws, he roars tremendously, and taking one of his limbs in his mouth he will squeeze it in the convulsive agony of rage till his murderous tusks are died [*sic*] with blood. He then stalks off [sniffing?] at the snow and growling incessantly, in pursuit of some other prey on which he may prove more successful in the exercise of his talents and dexterity.

Owing to the thickness of the fogs we had not been able to take an observation of latitude during many days, but by supposition were now half a degree to Northward of the Devils Thumb, somewhat farther from the Equator than I believe many navigators have hitherto departed in this region.

Here the coast exhibits an entire new & more wonderful appearance than we have yet witnessed. It seems in short to be an uninterrupted continent of ice, which has perhaps lain undisturbed since the creation of the world, at least for longer time than it is by any means possible for human sagacity to surmise.

We believe that in great part proceed from this quarter those islands of ice which are every where abundant within this district of the Arctic circle.

At the present season, these icy mountains afford a beautifully desolate spectacle, when contrasted with the many coloured sky which overhangs their dreary summits.

I looked one evening for two hours from the observatory at the mast head, and on no occasion do I ever remember of being so highly delighted with the passive magnificence of the great, the solitary, and the wild.

Above the blackened cliffy ridges which now and then started to view as the vapours thinned off, [gleaming?] over the glassy continent in forms so numerous & grotesque that Nature seemed, in heaping them together, to have exhausted the whole store of her phantasies, extended a sky, which in some places seemed a deep red edged with a more lively crimson, here & there

---

<sup>143</sup> [Craigie's footnote: 'A seal hole, by which that animal comes upon the floe to sleep, or bask in the Sun']. Mainly, however, the holes are used to enable a seal to breathe.

divided by [wavering?] streaks of fading violet; while in others, it streamed out in vast [oceans?] of emerald again divided and broken, by tints of azure or glistening pearl.

While the eye, bewildered with diversity and brightness, for a moment sought relief upon the dusk of the blue [mirror mirror? (*sic*)] that reposed [beneath?] portraying on its still and calm bosom, every object of reality, and once more turned to the pleasing contemplation of the former enchanting prospect; as if by the agency of some supernatural power the intervention of a lazy mass of vapour seemed in the momentary astonishment of the spectator to have cast a veil of mystical obscurity over the evanescent spell of a dream.

August 1<sup>st</sup> A late period of the season this, to be knocking about in Latitude 75° North.

For several days past we had been hemmed in and bewildered amongst a world of ice. It is very wonderful and seems to afford both a chilling prospect to the explorers of falling in with a North West Passage, [that?] the floes should, notwithstanding the intense heat and the advanced time of the year, be comparatively yet so little acted upon. They are abundant strong and not at all marked upon the surface by the penetration of the [superincumbent?] fluid. They possess in fact all the appearance of having but very recently broke up, and seem to have passed the season in some sheltered bay, unacted on either by heat or weather.

Shall we persist in seeking Northward? said our “fido Capitano”, tired with the untoward bleakness of surrounding prospects and finding no hope of further success in the fishery. Shall we persist in the temptation of providence, or at once bear up ere our remaining store of provision be at length exhausted? The proposition did not require long consideration; the unequivocal wish of every one was to return without farther [*sic*] loss of time, to his respective home *si fatu sinunt*.<sup>144</sup>

Accordingly, as the phrase goes, we put the helm up, and turning our backs upon the North, made all sail to get clear of the ice which hampered us on all sides to a degree of perplexity.

Gradually the sea became less and less encumbered, and on the 5<sup>th</sup> we bore away in an open water. The wind from the Northwest, powerful and steady, proved likewise highly favourable to our views, and as it did not flag on us for several days we reached the parallel of 68° in safety, and in good time.

Here meeting with several extensive streams of ice, we were compelled to haul up, often and in various directions; expending as usual a good deal of time and laborious exertion, and to try our patience a degree farther, no sooner were we rid of the icy impediment than the fair wind died away, and left us [raiking?],<sup>145</sup> in the midst of an infinity of Ice-Bergs.

---

<sup>144</sup> If fate allows.

<sup>145</sup> The *OED* includes ‘raik’ as an obsolete verb meaning ‘to wander’, but has no citation later than the 16th century.

Notwithstanding the fogs were most prevalent, and a good deal of apprehension existed for the general safety in the bosoms of the experienced, no perilous consequence took place; and a breeze springing up from the southward, as we could not possibly do better we kept beating in the face of it as long as it lasted; *en passant*, this is a species of sailing which, of all others to those who understand it, is the most displeasing in kind.

The weather was every day increasing in warmth, however, notwithstanding the slow progress we were actually making from the North. This might be influenced, certainly in a great degree, by the prevalence of the Southerly & Westerly winds; for out of ten that blow in a given space of time, seven are always at this season of the year from thence, in preference to the other quarters of the globe.

The nights, in like manner were now drawing on with amazing rapidity, and it exerted a strange feeling to remember the very short space elapsed in which no darkness [came over?] the sky, when the Sun was never below the horizon; and to contrast that period with the now gloomy nights and sunless vault – the twinkling planets, and the phantom like streams of the Aurora Borealis.

The sudden change of climate from cold to comparatively excessive heat was by no means favourably taken with on the part of the Ships Company. Sickness and headache prevailed with oppressive influence during the day, and want of sleep while in bed generally seemed to aggravate [*sic*] the misery of such affections.<sup>146</sup> Those in particular who had not been previously employed in the trade were found to be invariably weakened, while loss of appetite, a general cause of weakness, was in them reduced to a wretched extreme.

As these symptoms continued, loss of substance necessarily ensued; and by the time we were fairly within the Atlantic our fine plump, fleshy [\*\*\*] had degenerated into another sort of beings. A kind of diarrhoea, or flux, [produced?] a particularly distressing affection, and an admirable attenuation of the system; which to say the least was apt to become grossly loaded with obesity, under the [twin?] influence of cold on the one hand and a highly nutritious diet on the other.

Must we not look upon these grievous symptoms of indisposition as a salutary effort of the Medicatrix Naturae to throw off what is indispensable to the healthy performance of the animal functions under one particular condition of climate, but no longer necessary or suitable mutatis mutandis, under an opposite qualification of circumstances and consequently prejudicially inconsistent with the laws of organized being?

We had but a beating passage, down from the parallel of Disco as far as 60° where the wind entirely fell off, and as the breezes which had hitherto blown from that quarter were strong

---

<sup>146</sup> See footnote 90.

in their duration, a very heavy swell ensued from the same direction, immediately on the expenditure of the winds.

Here we had likewise oppressive showers which, united with the rolling of the vessel, produced a situation of the most disagreeable kind.

There was no being on deck, without getting in a few minutes drenched to the skin; there was no sitting below on account of the close heat and the qualmish motion of the ship, and it was impossible at all times to lie in bed. The pleasantest way in which for my own part I could pass the time during this heart sickening state of things;

*Unseen to drop, by dull decay,  
In sullen calm -----<sup>147</sup>*

was by standing in the cabin trap or stair, which being covered on the top, kept off the rain, while on one side it allowed me to see around all that was to be seen – an atmosphere filled with vapour, and pouring down an uninterrupted torrent, a sea wrought up into an indescribable state of undulation, yet not a breath of wind.

It often reminded me of some, of Spenser's emphatic views of despair and I believe I shall never part with existence on terms of greater indifference than I often thought I could have done during our exposure to the Cape [\*\*\*].

At length, a breeze sprung up from the Northward, and continuing steadily to increase we soon got round to the Eastward of Cape Farewell, without any kind of damage unless that of some few small ropes giving way, having been destroyed by the bad effect of continued moisture, and the loss of a foretopmast, which sprung on a Saturday night by reason of the sudden concussion of a wave on the ships after parts with so tremendous a shock that every one on board believed her to be going. It was what the sailor terms a fair weather sea – meaning of course, that it is ominous of good weather to come. I myself have often observed them mark such things, though not exactly, previous to the accession of fair weather after foul. The truth is, the sailor, like Moore<sup>148</sup> in his prognostications, takes a great latitude, and failing not to mark every thing of the kind when it takes place with its usual appendage of predestination, it would be strange indeed if sometimes he did not turn out prophetic.

On the present occasion it seemed to bring good luck, with ill [loss?] for the same evening we had a fair wind.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> August, at six O'clock pm I observed a beautiful meteorological phenomenon in the western hemisphere just as the Sun was about to set. It is termed, by seamen and those

---

<sup>147</sup> An allusion to Byron's *The Giaour*; the actual couplet is 'Mid sullen calm, and silent bay /Unseen to drop by dull decay'.

<sup>148</sup> *Old Moore's Almanac* was first published in 1697.

accustomed to such sights a Sun-dog. I am unable to give any thing like a description of this curious appearance; unless by conceiving a red flash of lightning, mingled with green & white, arrested in its progress, and remaining stationary a long time to view.

It doubtless must depend upon prismatic refraction, and is of course so far similar/analogous to the spectral appearance of the Rain-bow When the sun set entirely the sun-dog vanished and the place where it appeared was immediately filled up by a dense bank of clouds, as dark as the blue ocean that rolled under their shadow.

By the watchful mariner, this appearance is at all times looked upon as predictive of stormy weather. In this particular instance we found it so in truth, for at midnight a dreadful squall came on, which gathered into a severe gale lasting nearly two days.

After this we had the good fortune to get a fair wind, which in the course of ten days brought us within a hundred miles of the land's end.

Here upon the weather became very bad, with contrary winds, for a continuance of many days. We might notwithstanding have made the land, but the uninterrupted prevalence of hazy weather deterred us from risking the vessel, too nigh the coast.

In a fortunate hour however we passed the Island of Rona<sup>149</sup> and shaping a course from there sailed close to the wind with a stiff breeze from the Southward.

In the afternoon our surprise was exerted in no comon degree, at finding the Stack and Skerry<sup>150</sup> under our lee-bow in a thick fog. This seemed unaccountable, since if we had kept even [\*\*\*] in the wind, we would undoubtedly<sup>151</sup> the ordinary laws of naval tactics and the sanction of experience have brought up Cape Wrath, after skirting the Lewis.

The witchery of this stumbling block was only to be explained by allowing for the influence of current or tide, which must indeed be great to bring about so striking an effect as that alluded to in the present instance.

On the morning of the 6<sup>th</sup> September we passed through the Pentland Firth, and thence without stopping, between the Islands, having been absent in all, from the time of our departure at the Orkneys, six full months – other twelve days being necessarily concerned in proceeding from, and returning to, the destined port.

FINIS.

---

<sup>149</sup> Also known as North Rona, 59.1° 5.8'W.

<sup>150</sup> Sule Stack and Sule Skerry, two small islands west of Orkney, 59°05'N 4°24'W.

<sup>151</sup> 'by' omitted unintentionally from MS?