

that it seemed unlikely they could have escaped us if they lay where Nordenskiöld's sketch-map places them. On the other hand, we saw several islands in the offing. These, however, lay so far out that it is not probable that Nordenskiöld saw them, as the weather was thick when he was here; and, besides, it is impossible that islands lying many miles out at sea could have been mapped as close to land, with only a narrow sound separating them from it. Farther south we found a narrow open strait or fjord, which we steamed into, in order if possible to get some better idea of the lay of the land. I sat up in the crow's-nest, hoping for a general clearing up of matters; but the prospect of this seemed to recede farther and farther. What we now had to the north of us, and what I had taken to be a projection of the mainland, proved to be an island; but the fjord wound on farther inland. Now it got narrower—presently it widened out again. The mystery thickened. Could this be Taimur Strait, after all? A dead calm on the sea. Fog everywhere over the land. It was wellnigh impossible to distinguish the smooth surface of the water from the ice, and the ice from the snow-covered land. Everything is so strangely still and dead. The sea rises and falls with each twist of the fjord through the silent land of mists. Now we have open water ahead, now more ice, and it is impossible to make sure which it is. *Is this Taimur Strait? Are we getting through? A whole year is at stake! . . . No! here we stop—nothing*