

rate of nearly four and a half miles per hour. The temperature of its waters is about 86° F. From the American shores it directs itself to the north-east, towards Spitzbergen, its speed and its depth diminishing while it increases in width. Towards the 43rd parallel of north latitude, it divides into two branches, one of which strikes against the coasts of Ireland and Norway—whither it frequently conveys the vegetable seeds and grains it has borne from far Tropical regions—and warms the glacial waters of the Arctic Sea. The other inflects in the neighbourhood of the Azores towards the south, and makes for the African coast, whence it returns to the Caribbean Sea. In the midst of this vast circuit it collects the plants, and driftwood, and floating wreck, and the débris whirled hither and thither by a restless ocean. Thus originates the *Sargasso*, or *Weedy Sea*, that immense bank of marine plants (*Fucus natans*) which so powerfully affected the imagination of Columbus. These ever-verdant masses serve as an asylum for a multitude of molluscs and crustaceans. The waters occupy three years in traversing the oceanic current which embraces *the Weedy Sea*.

[The Gulf Stream led to the discovery of the New World by the quantities of bamboo tubes, fragments of carved wood, and trunks of trees which it flung upon the shores of the islands of Fayal, Flores, and Corvo, thus confirming Columbus in his idea that on the other side of the great ocean lay the Lands of Gold—the auriferous Indies. And during the perilous prolongation of his adventurous voyage, they cheered the sinking hearts of his followers with hopes of eventual success. The poet, therefore, represents them as inquiring of one another,—*

“ Oh, whence, as wafted from Elysium, whence
 These perfumes, strangers to the raptured sense?
 These boughs of gold, and fruits of heavenly hue,
 Tinging with vermeil light the billows blue?
 And (thrice, thrice blessèd is the eye that spied,
 The hand that snatched it in the sparkling tide)
 Whose cunning carved this vegetable bowl,
 Symbol of social rites, and intercourse of soul!”

In the economy of the Atlantic the Gulf Stream plays an important part. It carries the genial waters of the equinoctial regions into the high latitudes. Beyond the 40th parallel it possesses a temperature of 75° F. Propelled by the south-western winds which prevail in this zone, they mingle with the cold waves of the Northern Sea, and in its bleak regions mitigate the rigour of an unfriendly climate.

* Rogers, “ Poetical Works : ”— *Voyage of Columbus*.