


CHAPTER V.

THE POLAR SEAS.

HE Pillars of Hercules of the modern world are the Parry Mountains, situated within eight degrees of the North Pole, and the Ross Mountains, within twelve degrees of the South. Beyond these limits our maps and charts are blank ; a *terra incognita* marks the area of each extremity of the terrestrial axis. Will man ever succeed in crossing these icy boundaries ? Will he justify the prediction of the Latin poet, Seneca ?—*

“ Venient annis
Sæcula seris quibus Oceanus
Vincula rerum laxit, et ingens
Pateat tellus, Tethysque novos
Detegat orbes, nec sit terris
Ultima Thule.”

Imitated:—

[The day will come, though yet 'tis far remote,
When Ocean shall its fixèd thrall unloose,
When all the wide Earth's space shall be revealed,
And Tethys to man's wondering gaze lay bare
Orbs long unknown, nor frozen Thule be
The Earth's extremest limit.]

To these questions we can offer no reply. Each step that man has made in the direction of the Poles has cost him dear ; and it is not without reason that navigators have bestowed on the southern point of inhospitable Greenland the melancholy name of *Cape Farewell*.

The number of expeditions, for the most part English, which have explored the Frozen Seas, is estimated at one hundred and thirty. About twenty of these had for their special object the discovery of the fate of Sir John Franklin, in which they were finally successful.

* Seneca, Tragedy of “ Medea,” Act ii., line 376.