

CHAPTER I

ARCTIC DISCOVERIES PRIOR TO 1800

THE most remarkable Arctic discoveries of recorded history are those made by the Norsemen, in or before the ninth century, which are summarized in the chapters on Greenland and Iceland. The extent of knowledge as to arctic geography at the commencement of the eighteenth century is shown by the map (page 1) of G. Delisle: "Voyages au Nord" (Amsterdam, 1715). Hudson Bay, Iceland, Jan Mayen and the archipelago of Spitsbergen are known and charted. While the southern half of Greenland was mapped, yet it was thought to be bisected by Frobisher Strait. Barely two centuries ago, more than one half of the arctic coasts were unknown to geographers. Novaya Zemlya was yet believed to be a part of the mainland of Asia. The great Siberian rivers, the Lena and Yenisei, are charted, as the delta of the Lena had been reached by Elisha Busa in one of his three voyages (1636-1639) to explore the Lena, Olenek and Yana. Deshnef's strait (Bering) and the Amur River valley are mapped under Yecco Land, an isolated province of Asia. Thence eastward to Baffin Bay is an uncharted area.