

CHAPTER II

THE NORTHEAST PASSAGE

THE series of voyages in lower latitudes that followed the discovery of the New World by Columbus had their parallel during the following centuries in the persistent efforts of adventurous navigators to solve the problem of establishing communication with Cathay via the arctic seas.

A spirit of trade and commerce animated the original promoters of the search for either a Northeast or Northwest Passage, — a somewhat berated spirit which, nevertheless, is the basis of the material prosperity of the civilized nations. Desirous of participating in the great profits of the oriental trade carried on by their southern rivals, the enterprising merchants of England sought a northern route when debarred from the southern.

The European waters of the Northeast Passage must have been known by the Norse and Russian mariners from the earlier centuries, though the northern shore lines of the Scandinavian peninsula were not definitely mapped until 1539, reproduced by Olaus Magnus in "*Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus*," Rome, 1555. (See page 15.) Yet others had rounded the North Cape in the ninth