INTRODUCTION, BY FRIDTJOF NANSEN

AN EXCERPT FROM

The South Pole: An Account of the Norwegian Antarctic Expedition in the Fram, 1910–1912

BY

ROALD AMUNDSEN

WHEN the explorer comes home victorious, everyone goes out to cheer him. We are all proud of his achievement -- proud on behalf of the nation and of humanity. We think it is a new feather in our cap, and one we have come by cheaply.

How many of those who join in the cheering were there when the expedition was fitting out, when it was short of bare necessities, when support and assistance were most urgently wanted? Was there then any race to be first? At such a time the leader has usually found himself almost alone; too often he has had to confess that his greatest difficulties were those he had to overcome at home before he could set sail. So it was with Columbus, and so it has been with many since his time.

So it was, too, with Roald Amundsen -- not only the first time, when he sailed in the Gjöa with the double object of discovering the Magnetic North Pole and of making the North-West Passage, but this time again, when in 1910 he left the fjord on his great expedition in the Fram, to drift right across the North Polar Sea. What anxieties that man has gone through, which might have been spared him if there had been more appreciation on the part of those who had it in their power to make things easier! And Amundsen had then shown what stuff he was made of: both the great objects of the Gjöa's expedition were achieved. He has always reached the goal he has aimed at, this man who sailed his little yacht over the whole Arctic Ocean, round the north of America, on the course that had been sought in vain for four hundred years. If he staked his life and abilities, would it not have been natural if we had been proud of having such a man to support?

But was it so?

For a long time he struggled to complete his equipment. Money was still lacking, and little interest was shown in him and his work, outside the few who have always helped so far as was in their power. He himself gave everything he possessed in the world. But this time, as last, he nevertheless had to put to sea loaded with anxieties and debts, and, as before, he sailed out quietly on a summer night.

Autumn was drawing on. One day there came a letter from him. In order to raise the money he could not get at home for his North Polar expedition he was going to the South Pole first. People stood still -- did not know what to say. This was an unheard-of thing, to make for the North Pole by way of the South Pole! To make such an immense and entirely new addition to his plans without asking leave! Some thought it grand; more thought it doubtful; but there were many who cried out that it was inadmissible, disloyal -- nay, there were some who wanted to have him stopped. But nothing of this reached him. He had steered his

course as he himself had set it, without looking back.

Then by degrees it was forgotten, and everyone went on with his own affairs. The mists were upon us day after day, week after week -- the mists that are kind to little men and swallow up all that is great and towers above them.

Suddenly a bright spring day cuts through the bank of fog. There is a new message. People stop again and look up. High above them shines a deed, a man. A wave of joy runs through the souls of men; their eyes are bright as the flags that wave about them.

Why? On account of the great geographical discoveries, the important scientific results? Oh no; that will come later, for the few specialists. This is something all can understand. **A victory of human mind and human strength over the dominion and powers of Nature; a deed that lifts us above the grey monotony of daily life; a view over shining plains, with lofty mountains against the cold blue sky, and lands covered by ice-sheets of inconceivable extent; a vision of long-vanished glacial times; the triumph of the living over the stiffened realm of death. There is a ring of steeled, purposeful human will -- through icy frosts, snowstorms, and death.**

For the victory is not due to the great inventions of the present day and the many new appliances of every kind. The means used are of immense antiquity, the same as were known to the nomad thousands of years ago, when he pushed forward across the snow-covered plains of Siberia and Northern Europe. But everything, great and small, was thoroughly thought out, and the plan was splendidly executed. It is the man that matters, here as everywhere.

Like everything great, it all looks so plain and simple. Of course, that is just as it had to be, we think.

Apart from the discoveries and experiences of earlier explorers -- which, of course, were a necessary condition of success -- both the plan and its execution are the ripe fruit of Norwegian life and experience in ancient and modern times. The Norwegians' daily winter life in snow and frost, our peasants' constant use of ski and ski-sledge in forest and mountain, our sailors' yearly whaling and sealing life in the Polar Sea, our explorers' journeys in the Arctic regions -- it was all this, with the dog as a draught animal borrowed from the primitive races, that formed the foundation of the plan and rendered its execution possible -- when the man appeared.

Therefore, when the man is there, it carries him through all difficulties as if they did not exist; every one of them has been foreseen and encountered in advance. Let no one come and prate about luck and chance. Amundsen's luck is that of the strong man who looks ahead.

How like him and the whole expedition is his telegram home -- as simple and straightforward as if it concerned a holiday tour in the mountains. It speaks of what is achieved, not of their hardships. Every word a manly one. That is the mark of the right man, quiet and strong.

It is still too early to measure the extent of the new discoveries, but the cablegram has already dispersed the mists so far that the outlines are beginning to shape themselves. That fairyland of ice, so different from all other lands, is gradually rising out of the clouds.

In this wonderful world of ice Amundsen has found his own way. From first to last he and his companions have traversed entirely unknown regions on their ski, and there are not many

expeditions in history that have brought under the foot of man so long a range of country hitherto unseen by human eye. People thought it a matter of course that he would make for Beardmore Glacier, which Shackleton had discovered, and by that route come out on to the high snow plateau near the Pole, since there he would be sure of getting forward. We who knew Amundsen thought it would be more like him to avoid a place for the very reason that it had been trodden by others. Happily we were right. Not at any point does his route touch that of the Englishmen -- except by the Pole itself.

This is a great gain to research. When in a year's time we have Captain Scott back safe and sound with all his discoveries and observations on the other route, Amundsen's results will greatly increase in value, since the conditions will then be illuminated from two sides. The simultaneous advance towards the Pole from two separate points was precisely the most fortunate thing that could happen for science. The region investigated becomes so much greater, the discoveries so many more, and the importance of the observations is more than doubled, often multiplied many times. Take, for instance, the meteorological conditions: a single series of observations from one spot no doubt has its value, but if we get a simultaneous series from another spot in the same region, the value of both becomes very much greater, because we then have an opportunity of understanding the movements of the atmosphere. And so with other investigations. Scott's expedition will certainly bring back rich and important results in many departments, but the value of his observations will also be enhanced when placed side by side with Amundsen's.

An important addition to Amundsen's expedition to the Pole is the sledge journey of Lieutenant Prestrud and his two companions eastward to the unknown King Edward VII. Land, which Scott discovered in 1902. It looks rather as if this land was connected with the masses of land and immense mountain-chains that Amundsen found near the Pole. We see new problems looming up.

But it was not only these journeys over ice-sheets and mountain-ranges that were carried out in masterly fashion. Our gratitude is also due to Captain Nilsen and his men. They brought the Fram backwards and forwards, twice each way, through those ice-filled southern waters that many experts even held to be so dangerous that the Fram would not be able to come through them, and on both trips this was done with the speed and punctuality of a ship on her regular route. The Fram's builder, the excellent Colin Archer, has reason to be proud of the way in which his "child" has performed her latest task -- this vessel that has been farthest north and farthest south on our globe. But Captain Nilsen and the crew of the Fram have done more than this; they have carried out a work of research which in scientific value may be compared with what their comrades have accomplished in the unknown world of ice, although most people will not be able to recognize this. While Amundsen and his companions were passing the winter in the South, Captain Nilsen, in the Fram, investigated the ocean between South America and Africa. At no fewer than sixty stations they took a number of temperatures, samples of water, and specimens of the plankton in this little-known region, to a depth of 2,000 fathoms and more. They thus made the first two sections that have ever been taken of the South Atlantic, and added new regions of the unknown ocean depths to human knowledge. The Fram's sections are the longest and most complete that are known in any part of the ocean.

Would it be unreasonable if those who have endured and achieved so much had now come home to rest? But Amundsen points onward. So much for that; now for the real object. Next year his course will be through Behring Strait into the ice and frost and darkness of the North, to drift right

across the North Polar Sea -- five years, at least. It seems almost superhuman; but he is the man for that, too. Fram is his ship, ”forward” is his motto, and he will come through. He will carry out his main expedition, the one that is now before him, as surely and steadily as that he has just come from.

But while we are waiting, let us rejoice over what has already been achieved. Let us follow the narrow sledge-tracks that the little black dots of dogs and men have drawn across the endless white surface down there in the South -- like a railroad of exploration into the heart of the unknown. The wind in its everlasting flight sweeps over these tracks in the desert of snow. Soon all will be blotted out.

But the rails of science are laid; our knowledge is richer than before.

And the light of the achievement shines for all time.

Fridtjof Nansen.

Lysaker,

May 3, 1912.

Oscar Wisting, Olav Bjaaland, Sverre Hassel, and Roald Amundsen at the South Pole, Dec. 14, 1911.