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Fridtjof Nansen Translated by Arthur G. Chater  
Excerpt  
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## CHAPTER I

### FROM NORWAY TO THE KARA SEA

Departure : Object of the Voyage : Shipmates : At Tromsø : Captain Ritscher and the unfortunate expedition to Spitsbergen : Captain Samuelsen and the *Correct* : Johansen, the ice-pilot : Leaving Norway : The Barents Sea, a sunken continent : Our prospects : The wireless ; no connexion : Through the Kara Strait in fog, ugly shoals and rapid current : The Kara Sea open : In and along the ice : Yamal

**I**T was already 3.20 on August 2, 1913; the train was due to start at 3.25 from the Eastern Station in Christiania, and still there was no sign of the others. I can't deny that I was beginning to get rather impatient.

At last a man appeared, carefully prepared for travelling, accompanied by a servant carrying various traps. He introduced himself as Loris-Melikov, Secretary of the Russian Legation, and my shipmate on the trip. He had seen nothing of the others either.

Now there were only a few minutes left. Then Mr. Lied came up and said he did not think we could start to-day, as Vostrotin's things were still lying at the Grand Hotel; by some mistake they had not been brought down. He was going to look for Vostrotin, and would see whether the station-master could keep the train a few minutes. Then he disappeared.

As I stood there, uncertain whether to wait till next day or to start at once, Vostrotin arrived, out of breath, hot and flustered, and got into the train. He said he

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was going on ; his luggage would have to be sent after him ; he had not seen Lied at the station—and with that he went off to find a seat.

Consul-General Lorentzen and Mr. Whist, both directors of the Siberian Company, came to say good-bye to us. Whist declared he had faith in my lucky star, and his insurance company had therefore underwritten the ship. At that moment the whistle sounded, and with a jerk the train began to move. Was the luggage on board ? And Lied ? Nobody knew. But there he was, calmly walking up and shouting that he was going to wait till next day and would bring Vostrotin's things with him. Then we might just as well have waited too, and there were several things I wanted to clear up before starting. But there we were, and we should have to put in a day at Trondhjem for nothing.

At Eidsvold I had a telegram from Mr. Whist, saying they were sending Lied and the luggage after us by special train to Hamar. And by the time we had had a good dinner there, Lied rolled into the station, calm as usual, with his special train and the luggage.

Then everything was in order, and all four of us were able to go on happily together to Trondhjem, and from there by the steamer northward to Tromsö along the coast of Nordland, whose wonderful beauty we had to imagine behind the drizzling rain and grey weather at sea, and above the low bank of fog in which every blue peak and white glacier was hidden.

The object of the trip was nothing less than to make another serious attempt to open up a regular trade connexion with the interior of Siberia, via the Kara Sea and the mouth of the Yenisei. Mainly with this object in view the Siberian Company had been formed, through the enterprise of Mr. Jonas Lied and with him as manager.

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The Company had already made an attempt the year before to reach the mouth of the Yenisei by the Kara Sea, and had chartered a Norwegian steamer, the *Tulla*, which was specially built for the ice and therefore seemed suitable. But the attempt proved a failure; the *Tulla* met with a great quantity of ice in the Kara Sea and came home disheartened as early as the beginning of September.

Lied himself had voyaged down the Yenisei from Krasnoyarsk to its mouth with some laden lighters, to meet the ship and provide her with a cargo, never doubting that she would come through. In fact, he went as far as Dickson Harbour, north of the estuary, in a little steamboat, to look out for the ship that was coming.

A custom-house officer and two custom-house soldiers had come all the way from Irkutsk to the mouth of the Yenisei to examine the *Tulla's* cargo—a journey of 1800 miles, or as far as from Rome to Lofoten. And, no doubt, a lot of police and gendarmes had also arrived, including the Chief of Police himself.

Men and lighters had lain there waiting till far on in September, but then they were obliged to go up the Yenisei again in order to reach Krasnoyarsk before the river was frozen over.

This year a more serious attempt was to be made; the steamer *Correct* had been chartered and lay waiting for us at Tromsö; this time Lied was going to make the voyage from Norway. The boat was laden chiefly with cement from Stettin, which was to be delivered to the Siberian Railway.

The question now was, whether we should get through or not. If the attempt failed again this year, it was thought that the Company would have to give up the idea of going on. If, on the other hand, it was

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successful, it would perhaps inaugurate a new line of annual sailings to the mouth of the Yenisei. Considerable interests were therefore involved in this trip.

In Siberia itself the development of this sea route has long been regarded as a vital question.

The future possibilities of Siberia may almost be called unlimited; but their development is attended with difficulties, which are mainly due to the great distances. In Central Siberia the railway route—whether westward to the Baltic or eastward to the Pacific—is so long as to render the freight on the chief products of the country, such as grain, timber, &c., prohibitive, since the cost of carriage to the markets may easily equal the value of the goods.

But immense districts of this country, from Minusinsk, Northern Mongolia, eastward to beyond Lake Baikal, possess in the Yenisei and its tributaries the most excellent of waterways, which are available at comparatively small cost northward to the mouth of the Yenisei. These are fertile agricultural districts, far larger than France and Germany together. But unfortunately the Yenisei falls into the Arctic Ocean, where all navigation has the ice to reckon with.

If regular annual sailings could be established, in spite of the ice, between the Yenisei estuary and Europe, so that in future the immense quantities of produce could be sent by this cheaper route, it would naturally be of the greatest importance to the future development of the whole of Central Siberia. Therefore the people of that country are keenly interested in anything that may promote this affair. And without our being aware of it—speaking for myself, in any case—many eyes were doubtless fixed upon our voyage and what it might lead to.

As I have said, there were four of us who travelled

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north together. First there was the Director of the Company, Jonas Lied, to whom this expedition was due. A man of a little over thirty, who had spent some years in Russia and Siberia and had studied their conditions with an eye to the vast possibilities of this great country of the future, he had succeeded in forming his company with Norwegian, English, Russian and Siberian capital. He had made himself thoroughly acquainted with everything bearing on the navigation of the Yenisei, and had planned and prepared this undertaking with great care and knowledge.

Then there were we three who had been invited to take part in the voyage as guests.

There was Stephan Vasilievitch Vostrotin, a gold-mine proprietor from Yeniseisk, formerly mayor of that town and now member of the Duma for Yeniseisk province; he was the sole representative of a district of about a million inhabitants. An enviable country; just imagine if our Storthing could be constituted on the same scale, it would then contain two and a quarter members, who would certainly be a great deal easier to get on with than the 123 we now have.

A better companion for a voyage to Siberia it would be impossible to find. He had already sailed through the Kara Sea once, on his wedding trip in 1894, and he had been up and down the Yenisei several times. He knew his country and his million people inside and out, and was like a walking guide-book to everything one wanted to know about their life and work. But in addition to this he was himself for a long time part-owner, in the nineties, of vessels trading in the Kara Sea and on the Yenisei; he had himself bought steamers for this trade and lost a lot of money in it. So there again he could speak from great personal experience.

The second passenger was Joseph Gregorievitch

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Loris-Melikov, who for many years has been Secretary of the Russian Legation in Christiania. By birth he is an Armenian from the Caucasus ; he was educated for some years in Germany, studied at a German university, and, besides Russian and German, speaks excellent Norwegian, French and English. And on this trip he had opportunities of picking up some words of Yurak, Samoyede and Yenisei-Ostiak. As a man whose business it is to look after Russo-Norwegian relations, he was naturally much interested in an undertaking which was to open up a new trade route from North Norway to the heart of the eastern division of the great Russian Empire, and thus we had the pleasure of his company on the trip. Always friendly and obliging, always the well-groomed and elegant diplomat, always an amiable and entertaining companion, he was just as ready to make as to appreciate a quiet joke, and always had the same immutable faith in the Russian system of government and its excellence.

Then there was myself. How and why I was of the party is still a riddle to me. I am very far from being a business man, and I have never had anything to do with Siberia beyond once sailing along its northern coast. But of course this does not prevent my having always taken a lively interest in that immense country and being very desirous of making its acquaintance. Nor do I know of any other qualification which would make it desirable to include me, except that I once sailed through the Kara Sea, and that I have had some little experience of going through the ice.

But however that may be, Lied had been to see me once or twice to hear what I thought of the possibilities of annual navigation through the Kara Sea. Thus he probably got the impression that I was interested in the question, and one fine day an invitation arrived

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from the Company to take part as a guest in the voyage of the steamer *Correct* to the mouth of the Yenisei; and at the same time I received a very kind invitation from Mr. Wourtzel, the engineer at the head of all Imperial Russian railway construction, to go on with him up the Yenisei and by rail to Eastern Siberia and the Amur district, to see the new railway in course of construction there. And through him the Russian Traffic Minister sent a message that I should be welcome as the guest of Russia on this journey.

Why not? It was a temptingly easy way of making a trip through the Arctic Ocean to the Yenisei, and then seeing the whole of Siberia to the farthest east, without any trouble or preparation. I wanted a holiday; there could not be a better way of spending it, and I accepted with thanks.

Mr. Wourtzel was also to have been on the *Correct* as a guest of the Company; but as the wireless telegraph stations on the Kara Sea were not yet ready, he could not cut himself off from communication with the world and with his work for so long, and therefore had to give it up. But he sent a message through Lied that he would meet me at Krasnoyarsk and would wait for me there till September 25.

It was about midday on August 5 that we reached Tromsö in dull, drizzly weather. There the gallant captain of the *Correct*, Johan Samuelsen, gave us a friendly reception. All was ready on board, they were only waiting for us to weigh anchor. But reports from the east were not favourable; a few days before a steamer had arrived from the Pechora; she had found the sea full of ice between the Pechora estuary and Kolguev, had stuck fast, and had drifted for several days with the ice so far north that they had sighted Novaya Zemlya. This did not sound encouraging, he thought.



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In this, our last town, there were a good many things to be seen to. Telegrams and letters had to be sent off, and our outfit for the Polar Sea completed; mits, leather caps and mufflers bought—indeed, Loris-Melikov bought a complete costume in elegant brown leather, like a chauffeur's, to make sure of being able to face the severity of the Arctic Ocean.

Then came a message that I must really come and see Captain Alfred Ritscher, who was lying in the Catholic hospital at Tromsø. He was the master of the ship on the unfortunate Schröder-Stranz expedition to Spitsbergen, which had gone north the summer before, and in aid of which I had assisted the German committee in sending a relief expedition under Captain Staxrud in the following spring.

I went to him, and found a pleasant, smart young German sailor lying in bed, who greeted me with a smile. Poor fellow, it was more than seven months since he had at last reached Advent Bay in Spitsbergen in an exhausted state after his adventurous journey. There he lay still in bed, with the loss of a foot.

He told me of all the difficulties they had met with, which, he said, were in great measure due to the fact that none of them had any previous experience of voyages of this kind. None of them had been in the Arctic or in the ice. He told me what outfit they had had, and then of his own terrible walk from Treurenberg Bay on the north-east side of Spitsbergen, where the ship was shut in the ice, down to Advent Bay in the Ice Fjord.

There were seven men with him to begin with on that walk, but two left them to go another way, and they were never heard of again. Two more were left lying in a hut, as one of them could go no farther. Finally three more stayed at a hut farther south, and



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MR. JONAS LIED, DIRECTOR OF THE  
SIBERIAN COMPANY



CAPTAIN HANS JOHANSEN, THE ICE-PILOT

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THE "CORRECT" IN THE ICE



THE BOW OF THE "CORRECT," SHOWING ICE-SKIN NEAR THE WATER