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Robert F. Scott

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CHAPTER XIII

JOURNEY TO THE FARTHEST SOUTH

Future Plans Modified by Reconnaissance Journeys—Trip to Cape Crozier—Start of the Southern Journey—Depot 'A'—Description of the Dog Team—Equipment of Sledges—Return of Supporting Party—Failure of the Dogs—Relay Work—Dog-driving—Dog-food—Atmospheric Phenomenon—Cracking of the Surface Crust—New Land in Sight—Beautiful Effects Produced by Snow-crystals—Dogs Weakening—Slow Progress—Depot 'B'—The Chasm—Pushing Southward—Increase of Hunger—Further Land—Scurvy Appearing—Cooking-arrangements—Soft Snow—Experiences with the Dogs—Christmas Day and its Good Cheer.

Hold hard the breath and bend up every spirit
To his full height. . . .

. . . Shew us here

That you are worth your breeding, which I doubt not,
For there is none so mean or base
That have not noble lustre in your eyes.
I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
Straining upon the start.—SHAKESPEARE.

ALTHOUGH the gravity of our outbreak of scurvy was not underrated, and we had been busied in measures for the prevention of its recurrence, it must not be supposed that we had allowed it in any way to interfere with our plans for the future. Our preparations were pushed on as vigorously as though no such cloud had come to overshadow the brightness of our outlook.

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The general results of the spring journeys had enabled us to lay our plans for the summer with greater definition. Our reconnaissance to the south had indicated that the main party, after leaving the Bluff, would have to travel directly over the snow-plain at a long distance from, and possibly out of sight of, land; the probability was that no further depots could be established, and hence it was desirable that the party should be supported as far as possible on their route. This theory added another object for our sledging efforts, for if the coast ran sharply to the west after rounding the Bluff it was evidently desirable that we should gain some information concerning it. To meet these requirements it was decided that Barne, with a party of twelve men, should accompany the dog-team until the weights were reduced to an amount which the latter could drag without assistance. He was then to return to the ship, and, after a short rest, to start again, with a party of six, and endeavour to follow the coastline west of the Bluff. With such a plan as I have outlined it was hoped that there would be a good chance of solving the mysteries in a southerly direction; and as soon as this was in train Armitage was to have at his disposal all the resources of men and material in the ship for his attack on the western region.

In considering his earlier observations, Armitage had come to the conclusion that it was impossible to force a way through the entrance to New Harbour, where for so many miles he had seemed to see a chaos of ice and morainic material, and he thought his best chance lay in ascending to the foothill plateau, in the neighbourhood of

the so-called 'Eskers,' as from this he hoped to find a pass which would lead him over the main ridge of mountains.

In busily preparing for this programme we did not forget the advantage we possessed in the fact that our surfaces and general travelling conditions were likely to improve rather than otherwise as the summer advanced ; we should have little of the sea-ice to cross, and we knew that with our cold summer this would not develop into the same treacherous condition that it does in the North, whilst the surfaces to the south or inland could not possibly grow moist and sludgy. With these conditions we could arrange our movements to take advantage of what we hoped to find the warmest and finest summer months ; and since there was no chance of the ship being released from the ice until February, there was little object in our sledge parties being back much before that date, while we should travel during the time that the sun was circling at its greatest altitude.

As a further result of our reconnaissance journeys, we were now better able to judge of the requirements of each individual party as far as smaller matters of equipment were concerned. It was evident that the western travellers would have to be provided with ice-axes, crampons, ropes, and other necessaries for climbing ; but it seemed that in going to the south we should be safe in omitting these accessories, and in preparing for a journey in which there was no formidable obstruction. As we proposed to begin our journey to the south at the end of October, it can be imagined that, with so many minor

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details to be attended to, the last weeks of the month were not a slack season for any of us.

On Friday, October 24, Royds and his party returned to the ship, having achieved the object of communicating with our 'Record' post at Cape Crozier. We now had the satisfaction of knowing that we had done all in our power to guide a possible relief ship to our winter quarters; should she make a diligent search on the northern slopes of Terror, as had been arranged, she would at least have a good prospect of receiving the latest information concerning us. It was also a very great source of satisfaction to find that the party returned in excellent health, for they had left us almost immediately after the outbreak of scurvy, and that they should have come back safe and well went far to show that hard sledging work would not necessarily cause a return of the disease.

From our experience of the previous season we had concluded that Terror Point, as the eastern extremity of the land mass was called, was an extremely windy region, and the adventures of this party left the matter beyond much doubt. Skirting the large bay south of Erebus to avoid the deeper snow, they had carried fine but cold weather with them on the outward march, and until October 10, when they were able to make their most advanced camp, ready to proceed over the bare rocks towards the rookery. The 11th proved a beautifully calm, bright day, and Royds, having injured his ankle, deputed the task of reaching the 'Record' to Skelton. The latter left the camp at noon with Evans, and by 6 P.M. returned, having accomplished his errand in the

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JUNCTION OF THE BARRIER WITH THE LAND AT CAPE CROZIER.

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TRIP TO CAPE CROZIER

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bright, clear afternoon he had little difficulty in finding the spot, and came to the conclusion that they must have been within a very short distance of it in their autumn wanderings.

On the 12th Skelton set out again, with two companions, this time intent on photographing the immense ice disturbance caused by the barrier pushing around the land. After taking several photographs he returned, and the homeward route brought him close to the edge of the Crozier cliffs, where they rise with magnificent grandeur and form a frowning precipice more than 800 feet sheer above the sea; from this point of vantage he looked down directly on the barrier edge and into the small bay which breaks its outline near the land. Whilst he was admiring the beauty of the scene, his quick eye caught sight of numerous small dots on the sea-ice far below; it was not long before he decided that they must be Emperor penguins. He asked himself what they could be doing here in such numbers, and wondered if it were possible that at last the breeding-place of these mysterious birds had been discovered—it seemed almost too good to be true. Assurance must wait for some future occasion, and in the meanwhile he returned to the camp in no small state of excitement.

To-morrow the mystery must be cleared up; but to-morrow brought the wind, and not a yard from their tents could the party stir. This was the 13th. On the 14th the weather proved equally bad, save for a short lull when they were able to prepare a hot meal; directly afterwards, the blizzard swept down on them again and

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continued without intermission throughout the 15th, 16th, and 17th.

Before the gale they had built elaborate protecting snow walls to windward of the tents, and these almost proved their undoing; for the never-ceasing drift collected deeper and deeper behind these walls, and the occupants of the tents were conscious that the snow was gradually accumulating around them and that they were now powerless to prevent it. It soon reduced the light within to a mere glimmer, and then, becoming heavier and heavier on every fold of canvas, it diminished their interior space to such an extent that all were obliged to lie with their knees bent double. In the end they were practically buried in the heart of a snowdrift; but whilst the stout bamboos bent under the load and still further narrowed the space within, they luckily withstood the strain to the end.

It was now only by observing the extreme summit of their tents that the prisoners had any indication of what was happening without. Though in some respects this was a relief, yet for want of space they were unable to cook any food, they could barely turn from side to side, and they suffered a martyrdom from cramp. Their enclosed position brought them comparative warmth, but what advantage they gained in this way was largely discounted by the sodden dampness of articles which had thawed.

On the 17th the snow ceased to drift. The occupants of one tent were able to free themselves after some difficulty, but the other tent had literally to be dug out before

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TENT SNOWED UP.



PREPARED FOR CLIMBING OVER ROUGH ICE.

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