

## The Romance of the Antarctic.

At half-past three in the morning of January 6th, 1923, in the cabin of the tiny Quest, which was lying at anchor off Grytviken, a whaling station of South Georgia, Sir Ernest Shackleton died in an attack of angina pectoris following on influenza. Thus, with something of an anti-climax, the cur-



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June 5, 29

tain fell on one of the most exciting lives of our time. It was a profoundly disappointing close of a career whose chief characteristic was, indeed, disappointment. Shackleton had written, long previously, that he seemed fated to "strive for the things that are out of reach." It is literally the case that all his expeditions failed of their professed object. But each was a glorious failure. Not Scott himself, who discovered the South Pole (1912), and gave his life at the moment of triumph, looms so gallant a figure of romance as Shackleton—who had to abandon the struggle when only 97 geographical miles distant from this consummation of his dearest hopes.

It was in 1908 that Shackleton, after incredible sufferings, was compelled to turn back from his dash to the South Pole. But what mysterious urge was it that, in later years, drove him to taste again of those agonies of the Antarctic although the Pole had been reached in the meantime by his rivals? As I turn the pages of Dr. R. H. Mill's "The Life of Sir Ernest Shackleton" (Heinemann, 71s. 6d.) I find myself asking this question in bewilderment. It is an unanswerable question. The psychology of the born explorer is beyond the comprehension of the stay-at-home. Who, for the love of it, could seek this kind of thing?

One or another was now always suffering from that intense inflammation of the eyes euphemistically termed "snow blindness," and one day in a fog they blindly crossed a tremendously deep crevasse without seeing it, though the snow bridge which carried them was the only narrow crossing place in its whole length. Hunger was constant. "We always dream of something to eat when asleep. . . . My general dream is that fine, three-cornered tarts are flying past me upstairs, but I never seem able to stop them. Billy dreams that he is cutting huge sandwiches, for somebody else always. The captain—lucky man—thinks 'he is eating stuff, but the joy only lasts in the dreams, for he is just as hungry when he wakes up.'"

This is from a description not of Shackleton's last Antarctic trip but of his first—the one he made with Scott in the Discovery. Shackleton might have remained at home, in comfort, after these experiences. He took to journalism and became sub-editor of the Royal Magazine; then he obtained the secretaryship of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, and, having married, lived very happily in Edinburgh. He stood—unsuccessfully—for Parliament. He dabbled in business enterprises. All manner of doors were opening to him. But that strange lure, the lure of the Far South, impelled him to leave home, wife, and children and vanish once more into the wastes of snow and ice to a realm with "cold so extreme that the paraffin used for heating the cooker was of the consistency of cream," and across a continent with scenery as melodramatic as a nightmare.

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Before him rose great bare mountains with prodigious cliffs falling sheer for thousands of feet to a stupendous glacier which descended between them from a high snowfield far to the south and lay like a road to the Pole, smooth and straight and gently sloping. Distance made nothing of details of structure which were soon to assume gigantic proportions.

On the return journey, when the attempt to reach the Pole had failed, an incident occurred which shows us how it was that Shackleton for the worship of all who worked for him—Wild, who had been the first to be stricken with dysentery, was unable to eat the horse-flesh, and suffered horribly from hunger. At breakfast-time a biscuit was served out to each, which could be eaten at the time or kept till later in the day. On 31st January Wild finished his at once, and as he was starting on the march he found Shackleton's hand slipping a biscuit into his pocket. "What's

that, Boss?" he asked, and the answer was, "Your need is greater than mine." He resisted, but Shackleton was irresistible and fought in silence with his hunger, for he knew his friend was more hardy put to it than himself. The other two men never knew of the incident. No one could say that Shackleton was acting the part of Sid Philip Sidney for his own glory, for until now the facts were written only in Wild's private diary. There he says, "I privately forced upon me his one breakfast biscuit and would have given me another tonight had I allowed him. I do not suppose anyone else in the world can thoroughly realize how much generosity and sympathy was shown by this; I do, and by God I shall never forget it." He never did, as the record of their great friendship abundantly history—the escape to Elephant Is- proves.

"The wreck of the Endurance was the wreck of all Shackleton's dreams of a second polar triumph," writes his biographer, but the end of the Endurance was only the beginning of one of the finest episodes in maritime land and the voyage in the James, a boat only twenty-two feet long, over 800 miles of tempestuous sea to South Georgia.

Life on the James Caird can hardly be described, and it cannot even be imagined by those who have seen the huge waves of the Southern Ocean only from the deck of a liner. Those on board the little craft were already exhausted with the dreadful year of winter they had come through, their clothes were worn and battered, their skin flayed at every joint with the horrible sea-blisters, which salt water, cold, and the friction of rough cloth produce.

They could not stand up, except for a moment or so, holding on to the mast or stays; they could not lie down except on the rough angles of the ballast and the cases under the dripping canvas "deck"; they could not even sit except in the open well of the stern, where the steersman on his four-hours' turn at the helm was often so cramped that he could not unbend his knees or lift his hands when relieved. Cooking was, sometimes possible, one man holding the Primus lamp, two squatting, one on each side, holding the cooking pot and lifting it clear when the worst lurches of the distracted boat threatened disaster.

Down in the hollow of the waves the little boat would lie a while, shut into an illusive calm between two hills of water, from the summits of which the spume flew far overhead; a moment later she would rise on the crest and be flung forward by the shrieking wind in a smother of spray, rushing down into the next still hollow only to be hurled again into the tempest. The sea-birds kept, then company, little "Cape pigeons" which Shackleton could not shoot (he had his double-barrelled gun with him) because they looked so friendly. Great albatrosses, whose span of wing almost equalled the length of the little boat, swooped so low over

it that the expression of impersonal interest in their hard, bright eyes could be seen, and it aroused a feeling akin to that of the Ancient Mariner after he fired the fatal shot, so they, too, passed immune.

A Lonely Grave.

The conclusion of that epic story is known to all. But the mystery remains as to why Shackleton yet again went south. He was, as his first skipper said of him when, fresh from school, he went to sea as an apprentice, "the most pig-headed, obstinate boy I have ever come across"; and this obstinacy remained with him to the last and took him to a lonely grave on a barren island near the rim land assembled to do honour to the Antarctic Circle. On March 2nd, 1922, a memorial service was held in St. Paul's, where the highest in the Shackleton the obstinate. Old comrades who had sailed with him on various expeditions came from far, and the moving and magnificent service concluded with the sounding of the "Last Post," but "the minds of many present were away in the grander scene at South Georgia under the dome of heaven, with the wash of the waves and the wailing of the sea-birds as the most plaintive of all funeral music."

Lady Shackleton was right when she decided that her husband's burial should take place not in England but under the shadow of those mountains in South Georgia which he had



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been the first to cross in a march described as "a miracle of mountain-climbing without guides or maps or resting-places. The risks run were almost incalculably great, the toll enough to cloud their consciousness, and it is little wonder that more than one of the party felt as if they were accompanied by a Presence not of this world."

**Salmon School Along Cape Breton Coast.**

CATCHES ARE REPORTED AT L'ARDOISE AND LOUISBURG.

Salmon have recently struck in all along the coast from L'Ardoise to Louisbourg. Fair catches have been made off the former port, but nothing much has been done at the historic town. Patches of drift ice still hover off the shores here, with the result fishermen are chary of setting their nets, fearful of losing them. A ready market in Boston is available for shipments of these fish.

Fishermen near Margaree report a strange happening a short time ago. They were setting a trap, and finished work for the night after assisting the leader to the shore. In the morning they found over a hundred had-dock meshed in the twine.

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From Cape Race.

CAPE RACE, To-day. Special to Evening Telegram. Wind light and variable; weather dull; the Norwegian steamer Otto Sverdrup passed yesterday and American steamer Advance passed in at 10.10 a.m. Bar. 29.84; ther 55.

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