

Their escapes were almost miraculous, and danger constantly stared them in the face. On one occasion, while dragging their sledges along a narrow path, the travellers were suddenly confronted by a polar bear, but Johansen, who is a man of exceptional physical strength, caught the intruder by the throat and held him at arm's length while Dr. Nansen despatched him with his rifle. On another occasion, after an excursion inland, they returned to see their canoes drifting from land with all their necessities on board. To reach the boats was a matter of life or death, but without a moment's hesitation Dr. Nansen sprang into the ice-cold water and swam after the drifting canoes. He was chilled to the bone, but he succeeded in his object, and brought the canoes safely to the spot where his anxious comrade stood watching the incident.

I cannot conceive a more daring act of courage than that of Nansen's and Johansen's in leaving the *Fram* with the certainty of remaining in the inhospitable region for a year, perhaps two, and of never regaining the ship. They had no winter clothing, and provisions only for one hundred days. Yet they departed cheerfully, laden with an exhaustless stock of hope and charged with loving messages to wives and to friends if those on board the vessel should perish in the far north. The numerous messages which Dr. Nansen brought back to Norway from those on board the *Fram* were written on a single sheet of paper in a microscopic hand, so as to economise weight and space. Day after day, month after month passed, and still they toiled on. The little stock of food was almost exhausted and the