

An Arctic Expedition

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The Voyage North

ON THE evening of July 17th, 1934, a Norwegian sealing schooner left St. Catherine's Dock, just below London Bridge, and headed down the River Thames towards the open sea and the far North, amid the cheers of a host of friends and well-wishers. On board were five members of the Oxford University Exploration Club, eight hardy Norwegian seamen, and myself, representing the Canadian Government, and acting in the capacity of technical advisor to these ambitious Explorers who were embarking on a strenuous expedition, which would take them to the extreme limits of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. Great interest centred around the departure of this Expedition due to the fact that one of its members was Edward Shackleton, son of a famous father, whose last voyage to the Antarctic started from this same dock. Although the *Signalhorn* was a very small boat for such an undertaking, our Captain, who was the only English speaking member of the crew, had no fears for her safety, either in the gales of the North Atlantic or in the heavy ice of the Arctic, which we were bound to encounter before the termination of our outward voyage.

The Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Nottingham were represented on this Arctic Expedition. Dr. Humphreys, the Leader, is a Surveyor, Botanist and Medical Doctor. One of his most notable achievements was his recent successful ascent of Mount Ruwenzori, the highest snow-capped peak in the mountain range of Central Africa, for which he was awarded the Murchison Grant by the Royal Geographical Society. On this expedition he was particularly interested in the opportunity to make a complete Botanical survey of Ellesmere Island. Edward Shackleton, Organizer, had previously been on an expedition to British North Borneo, where he climbed Mount Mulu, the highest peak in Sarawak. A. W. Moore, Biologist and Photographer, had also been a member of the Borneo Expedition. To Robert Bentham, Geologist, and youngest member of the party, Ellesmere Island presented a rich field for investigation. David Haig-Thomas, Ornithologist, had recently returned from hunting big game in Abyssinia, and was looking forward to hunting the big sea mammals to be found in Arctic waters. His scientific interest in the Expedition was the study of bird life. But apart from all these individual scientific interests, they were all looking forward to the main objective of the Expedition, namely, the crossing, mapping, and geological survey of Grant Land (Northern Ellesmere Island), the interior of which had not, at that time, been explored.

The Expedition had received the full support and some financial assistance from the Royal Geographical Society, the Oxford University and the Canadian Government. Other financial assistance came from many Educational organizations and private individuals interested in exploration and its scientific results. Many prominent British manufacturing firms presented equipment, provisions and fuel. Although most of the members had travelled in various parts of the world, none of them had previously ventured into the