

PEOPLE AND PLACES

Little Stories by Land and Sea, concerning the folk who move hither and thither across the face of a Big Land.

THE YEAR OF POLES.

THEY say the North Pole has been discovered. In the language of an obscure poet, now editorial writer on a Toronto daily—"Who would have thought it?" All the geography books of our youth taught that the Pole was inaccessible. All the newspaper stories since have corroborated the statement. Books have been written describing the attempts made to discover the Pole. Some of these are books of fact; some of fiction. Dr. Nansen devoted a volume or two to his voyages in that country. Ten years ago Dr. Nansen and Lieut. Peary were almost neck and neck in the race for the Pole. Dr. Nansen was for a while a world-famous figure. He was almost fabulous. Nine years ago a bachelor thirty miles north of Edmonton gave the writer a very circumstantial account of a nocturnal visit paid by the great explorer to his shack. He said it was without a doubt the only and original Nansen, the Pole-finder. But he was perhaps labouring under a delusion that he got from the trek of the overlanders to the Klondike; for the northern part of Canada was lively ten years ago last winter with pack-trains of people pushing northward towards the Pole.

Lieut. Peary tried the dash for the Pole oftener, stuck to it longer and got no nearer than Nansen. He made several trips, his last starting a year after that of Dr. Cook, the alleged discoverer of the Pole, and from the same point in Canada—Sydney, C. B. He is still up in the land of the northern lights, quite unconscious that his old surgeon, Dr. Cook, has discovered the Pole. Ten years ago or more he lectured in Canada on his first voyage. The talk was highly interesting and delivered to a large crowd. In spots it was even dramatic—as for instance when after describing some of the superhuman sufferings and privations such as are spoken of by Dr. Cook he said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, you will perhaps ask yourselves why men should undergo such things for the sake of discovering a place which so far exists only in the imagination and"—the rest was much of the same character, till he burst out amid a ripple of applause to say that for the sake of such an illusive object he and his men would do it again and again till they found the Pole or died in the attempt; and they all knew he meant it.

But the Pole is said to have been discovered and Peary is still alive. Walter Wellman's balloon, which was to have dropped upon the Pole, is still "in the air." Poor Andree, who about five years ago tried to locate the Pole by means of a balloon, is still in the balloon and the balloon heaven knows where so far as any precise knowledge of him goes. Dr. Cook, the hitherto unknown, is on his way back to Brooklyn, N. Y. He was surgeon to Peary on one of his earlier voyages; born in New York state forty-four years ago. He has been on two polar expeditions before this one. Why a doctor should have discovered the Pole when eminent geographers and naval lieutenants and life-long explorers failed is a mystery. According to his own statement he found no signs of life at the Pole. No doctor will ever be induced to go there and hang out his shingle. No undertaker will ever flourish there. No railway will ever be built there. The route to the North Pole will never become popular with tourists. If Dr. Cook has found the Pole and did not plant on the spot the Stars and Stripes the question still arises—who owns the Pole anyway? If it belongs to the United States what use will they make of it? If a railway is ever built to it the shortest route must run through Canadian territory. Shall it be said in future geographies that Canada is bounded on the south by the United States and on the north by the Arctic Ocean and the United States?

All sorts of international complications are likely to arise. Norway and Sweden, Siberia and Canada, are all contiguous to the new *terra nova*, which for want of a better name must be called "Polandia." Robert Service will be expected to write another book—"Sonnets of the Dog-Eaters," or something of the kind. But when all is said and done there must be a feeling of disappointment that Dr. Cook did not discover the source of the *aurora borealis*. Mankind will continue to be mystified by the northern lights. Canadians will be kept busy enough for the next hundred years or so hanging electric lights in the far north. We shall still regard the musk-ox as the beast of *ultima thule*. If airships become as common in the near future as they promise to be, some of us may take an occasional summer spin over the land of the midnight sun till we get to the spot where as Dr. Cook says: "He found that by shifting the position of his feet on the tip of the world he could throw himself across a span of longitudinal lines that the swiftest train and steamer could not cover in 40 days." But so far the whole story smacks rather too much of Jules Verne's trip to the moon to convince Peary or Nansen that Dr. Cook had more than a mid-winter night's dream when he discovered the Pole.

Since the above was written—almost before the ink was dry—Peary has discovered the North Pole. This seems to be a good summer for discovering poles. Commander Peary states clearly that he nailed the Stars and

Stripes to the Pole. This quite corroborates our earliest geographical notions concerning the Pole—that it is a real pole made of wood. In his laconic despatch to the New York Times and the Governor of Newfoundland Peary says nothing of Dr. Cook. Evidently the Doctor's footprints in the sands of time were all obliterated. For a whole year had passed between the date of Dr. Cook's discovery and that of Lieut. Peary. But of course merely by running round the Pole 365 times to keep his feet warm either Peary or Cook could have put in a year. *Tempus fugit*. Perhaps before this goes to press Capt. Bernier will also have located the Pole. He is going up that way to see that Canadian territory is not encroached upon.

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THE REVIVAL OF FERNIE.

A YEAR ago—plus a few days—Ferne was a firepot.

On the anniversary of the fire the citizens of Fernie took a holiday and had a quiet observance with a banquet in the evening at one of the hotels, given by the Board of Trade. It was a festival with a sad tinge yet full of hope and optimism. Fernie folk are the real pioneering sort. They told each other a good many things that anniversary night; and they remembered a lot of lurid pictures. The event of a year ago still lives in their imagination. Fire is always a big spectacular thing to forget. Plague and pestilence and earthquake and cyclone may be undramatic at times; but when a town like Fernie gets licked up by red flames at night it makes a picture that can never be obliterated from the memory. Chicagoans still speak of the great fire; Hull, P. Q., recalls a great fire—ten years ago; Toronto remembers the great fire—five years ago; Vancouver and St. John both remember the great fires best part of a generation ago. But Fernie's fire was more spectacular and more tragic than most of these. So says the scribe chronicling the event:

"We are proud of the material progress made during the first year after what seemed to many a bewildered denizen of the ash-carpeted, smoke-curtained hollow between the fire-wrapped hills, to have been the hopeless ending of everything, instead of the hopeful beginning of a newer and Greater Fernie. And why do we rejoice? Not because nearly a score of lives were lost. Nor yet is it because thousands were made homeless in those never-to-be-forgotten three hours of one year ago. Nor was it because more than \$5,000,000 worth of the goods of this world has so suddenly been turned into useless ash heaps, and all the beauty of the eternal hills had been turned into one vast graveyard of limbless tree trunks."

The new and greater Fernie has completed and in course of construction over one million dollars worth of fireproof buildings. A new postoffice and court-house costing sixty-five thousand dollars is almost ready to occupy. The provincial court-house costing a hundred thousand dollars is under way. The city hall is done. The new school will be open in the fall. An electric light plant owned by the city is being built at a cost of fifty thousand dollars. Last but no least the contract has been let to build a new fire hall to cost twenty thousand dollars.

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RELIQUES OF CAPT. KIDD.

GETTING money from a hole in the ground is a modern pastime not all confined to miners. Down at Oak Island off the coast of Nova Scotia there has been buried for centuries a legendary treasure which for more than a hundred years has been searched for with shovel and pick, auger and dynamite, crib and shaft and tunnel. It is one of the treasures of Capt. Kidd. Poe, in his story, "The Gold-Bug," probably reckoned that he had told one of the most fascinating stories of underground gold ever penned by mortal man; and so he had. But this of Oak Island is quite as queer; and it looks as though the services of some such wizard as Poe will have to be enlisted before the treasure is unearthed. It is about a hundred and ten years since the spot was located; when three men wandering on the island discovered an oak tree growing over a circular depression. In that hole under the oak for a hundred years people have been trying to find the gold and jewels of Capt. Kidd, who seems to have been something of an Andrew Carnegie, bestowing his surplus on lands and peoples in all parts of the earth. As yet, however, after more than a hundred feet of boring and shafting, with cave-ins and flood-outs, and all sorts of engineering setbacks worthy of a better cause, the gold hunters have not found the iron box of Capt. Kidd. For the devil himself seems to have been in league with the pirate; and it will probably take the devil himself to dig up that box concerning which the inscription on a slab deciphered last century ninety feet down read—"Ten feet below are two million pounds buried." But they went ten feet below and found that the pirate had lied. They went nearly a hundred feet and found more evasions. When they find this ten million dollars and compute what it would have been worth to civilisation at compound interest.

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