

Fridtjof Nansen King of the North

A Career of Achievement in Many Fields Lies Behind Fridtjof Nansen, the Famous Explorer, Who is Now Visiting America and Who, Instead of Resting on His Laurels, Plans, at the Age of 67, New Conquests in the Polar Regions

By Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Noted Arctic Explorer, Scientist and Author, in New York Herald-Tribune.

Several travelers, including myself, are used to being presented to audiences (where no other well known traveler is present) as the "greatest living explorer." But when no potentially jealous explorer is present and when men of information and judgment in the matter are gathered together, the name is always the same—that of Fridtjof Nansen, that citizen of the world, born in Norway, who has just landed in New York for a tour through the United States.

There are several explorers living who are great in their own fields, if you concede greatness at all to a craft of this nature. But Nansen, so far as we can judge, would have been a great, or at least a distinguished and outstanding man, had he followed almost any other congenial occupation.

And many occupations are congenial to him, for he is a man of varied tastes and numerous talents. He did not win the Nobel Prize, for instance, through any achievement in the line of exploration or through work where his previous distinctions helped him materially. He won it in the humanitarian task of marshaling the relief forces of the world against that Russian famine which has been made, in our eyes, even more terrible than it was by the propagandists who were trying to blame it exclusively on Bolshevism. It was terrible enough in reality, even if you believed it to be wholly or chiefly the result of deficient rainfall and of other natural and at present uncontrollable conditions.

Nansen started in life as a biologist. He had already won recognition in this field and was curator of the Bergen Natural History Museum when only twenty-one years old. His interest in human life on the sea was natural, for he was a descendant of those lords of the northern oceans, the Vikings, who had dominated Europe through their shipcraft a thousand years before.

His interest in the animal life of the sea was equally natural, for the wealth of Norway to-day and her leading occupations are dependent to a great extent on fisheries. The plants of the sea would interest him too, for it is on them that the animals live, which give occupation and wealth to the people.

The temperatures and currents and other physical conditions of the water must interest him as well, for upon these in the last analysis the plants depend.

Bergen has been a seaport of consequence from the beginning of history. Everything conspired to interest Nansen in the ocean when once he had entered the biological field and had settled on Bergen as the place of his work.

It was interest in the sea and knowledge of it that led Nansen to contribute eventually a new idea to the thought of the world. To develop a really new idea is greatness, or the foundation of greatness.

Men who can succeed in routine work are numerous. There are several, no doubt, who could have handled the Russian famine as well as Nansen, though he did handle it well enough to deserve the Nobel Prize. But there were few in Europe or anywhere, probably none, who had at once the information upon which Nansen based his new idea and the originality to synthesize that information and bring out an idea from it.

Somewhat the public is usually unable to perceive greatness in an explorer or imagine greatness in him unless he has really or supposedly performed some deed of physical prowess. Nansen began his career with that sort of prowess, which may have been accident or diplomacy. No one had crossed Greenland. Ordinarily human reasoning goes no farther than to assume that what has not yet been done is either impossible, or at the least, very difficult.

About Greenland, indeed, many had said specifically that it could not be crossed. Peary had climbed the western slopes; and it is easy to see now from analysis of his testimony that he foreshadowed the crossing. Moreover, he understood that it could be done and wanted to do it. No one doubts to-day that he could have done it. There is even some reason to believe that Peary would have done it more easily than Nansen, for certainly he showed in his career a genius for organization and for the development of new and good methods of snow and ice travel which Nansen hardly approached. Indeed, the technique of cold weather living and the method of sledge travel were always Nansen's weakest points.

The fact was, however, that Nansen startled the world by crossing Greenland. Thereby incidentally, certainly without premeditating it, probably without realizing it, he broke, or would have broken had it been breakable, the heart of the other great explorer, the only serious competitor of

his active life, the American Peary. Peary had built so many hopes around crossing Greenland that he actually felt his life in ruins about him when he read in the papers one morning that Nansen had done this "impossible" thing.

There are, perhaps, on the whole, few royal roads to greatness; but they are comparatively numerous in the field of exploration. For where else do you discover so many achievements which the public believes to be impossible or superhuman but which those on the inside know to be easy the public but who, as Cicero tells us, used to wink at each other in passing.

On this fortunate peculiarity of exploration, the ease of its "difficult" achievements, is based, too, that system of ethics which makes it the unforgivable sin for an explorer to take the public into his confidence about how easy some of the heralded feats really were. It is safe by now, however, to tell the truth about the crossing of Greenland, for both of the contenders, Peary and Nansen, have since risen to unassailable heights, recognized as leaders in their craft by explorers as well as by the public. Their reputations now rest safely on the doing of really great and fundamentally important as well as difficult things.

It is the mood of children to kick at obstructions. The small and petulant try to conquer nature and to bend her forces to their will. They are driven to magic and make-believe and to thwarted struggles against the impossible. On the part of such children of a larger growth there had been, before Nansen's time, many high expressions of lofty but ineffectual purpose about "conquering the Arctic." There had been, too, advances by a few men of genius—by Eric the Red, by Peary, Rae, McClintock, and perhaps as many others as you can count on the fingers of two hands.

Still none, even of these great ones, had done more than to stop fighting natural obstacles, to adapt themselves to conditions as they found them and to go ahead with their work on that basis. Nansen was the first to formulate and carry out a plan by which the so-called hostility of the Arctic could be actually made to co-operate in a plan for its own subjugation.

Even Peary had been outright defeated by the circumstances that the polar sea is not covered with one vast expanse of ice which you can treat as if it were solid land, but with multitudes of cakes of ice which offer a constant alternation between solid and liquid, and which are, moreover, in constant drift—constant only in that they are moving, but not in the direction of their motion. Nansen was the first to make planned use of this "difficulty."

There are predecessors to every inventor, there are steps in every discovery, even in such great ones as Nansen's. The Tegethof, under the Austrians, had drifted with the ice in 1872-74, showing that it could be done for a time at least with comparative safety and comfort. The Jeannette, financed by Bennett, of "The New York Herald," had drifted northwestward through what was really water, although it had been supposed to be land, and her commander, the American naval lieutenant DeLong, had even formulated some plans that could be based on that kind of drift.

Perhaps had DeLong lived he might have been the originator of the rounded-out Nansen plan of building a ship that was peculiarly adapted to resisting ice pressures, stocking her with wholesome food, planning to live aboard or near her an active open-air life through year after year, counting on fresh meat secured by hunting to maintain the health of the crew, and thus, as a well manned scientific laboratory, drifting across the Arctic basin by setting the vessel fast in the ice on the side from which the drift appeared to come and expecting her, when enough years had passed, to emerge at the opposite side.

Nansen studied all the facts and concluded that the drift across the

Happy in the Wilderness of Mid-Canada



SNOW-BATHED WOODLANDS, KEEN AIR AND HEALTH

The jolly week-end party, in the depths of the Muskoka woods, is in high spirits with every nerve a-tingle to the air's exhilaration. Neither are their four-legged companions wasting time.

Arctic basin was from the side of Alaska, Bering Strait and eastern Siberia toward the side of the Atlantic, Norway and Iceland.

He built the Fram and put her in the ice in 1893. She emerged in 1896 with complete vindication of a theory and of a method that were not only demonstrably new from the historical point of view but were so new from the scientific or logical point of view that most of the highest authorities in the world had called them everything from impractical through visionary and suicidal to insane.

Nansen is a man of rounded character and balanced genius. His drift, accordingly, was no mere triumph of one theory but carried with it the gathering of the largest body of accurate and important knowledge that has ever been brought together by a single Arctic expedition.

One sample from many will show how novel the conclusions were in some cases. Before that time even scientists had commonly believed that the Arctic was particularly stormy. Nansen accumulated a mass of data which enabled him to show that in no area of equal size in the world are storms so few and mild on the average.

How novel this view was when he set it forth in 1897 you can convince yourself if you look over the various popular books about the Arctic. For it is doubtful that you will find more than one or two of them, even thirty years later, that do not express or imply the old belief in the prevalence of violent storms, ignoring not only Nansen's conclusion, itself based upon sufficient evidence, but all the mass of corroborative testimony that has been published since then including, for instance, the reports of my own expeditions which have covered an aggregate of more than eleven years within the Arctic Circle.

The time is just coming when the world is to make practical use of this Nansen finding. The rarity and average mildness of storms in the Arctic is one of the cornerstones in the program for use of the Arctic as an aerial highway to fly by the shortest routes between such populous centres of the north temperate zone as lie on opposite sides of the Arctic from each other, as, for instance, Chicago and Stockholm, Seattle and Berlin, New

York and Peking, London and Tokio.

Nansen does not retire, nor rest on his laurels. After becoming foremost among explorers, he took part in winning for Norway her independence from Sweden, and later represented Norway as Minister to London. He carried on his oceanographic work while he was a politician and diplomat. He carried it on, too, while as a statesman representing the League of Nations, he administered the famine relief in Russia.

He is carrying on oceanography still and at sixty-seven is about to re-enter polar exploration, though on a basis entirely different from his pioneer work of thirty-five years ago. He is doing now nothing that is revolutionary, but instead, everything that authorities agree is feasible and comparatively easy, but rich in promise of results. There is a broad scientific foundation for his plan to engage the German airship Graf Zeppelin and to make with it several crossings of the Arctic during the latter part of next winter.

Whatever the scientific results of this journey may really prove to be, no one now expects them to be revolutionary, but merely the continuation of logical development. But if not revolutionary in science, these flights will be revolutionary in the popularization of that real knowledge of the Arctic which Nansen has done more than any one else to develop, but which he has been powerless, as all others have been, to get the public to accept.

Perhaps because the Arctic is the home of Santa Claus, we seem nationally and internationally unwilling that any realities shall prevail in our thoughts of the Far North. Personally fond of Santa Claus, I would be the last to desire that any one should handicap that benevolent saint materially. It seems to me I have found a way around the apparent dilemma. I have proposed it before, but want to propose it afresh in connection with the visit of the greatest of explorers to the western side of the Atlantic.

Why not transfer the residence of Santa Claus to the moon, and most of our folklore interest of the Arctic to the moon along with him? Then we would be free to promote the Arctic by truly modern methods and to begin using it in line with current aro-

nautical development as a thoroughfare between Old World and New World commercial centres. Santa Claus, being the crystallization of an idealistic dream, could as easily visit our kiddies from the moon as from Lapland or Alaska.

The importance of the coming Nansen flights is essentially one of publicity, or as we now euphemistically say, public relations. He should, therefore, employ the best of public relations counsel. There must be a liberal appropriation for an "educational" campaign and the publicists must study every angle, especially, I suggest, the personnel of the expedition. Girl Scouts or debutantes should accompany the flight, if the real interest of the public is to be enlisted in the venture.

At the very least we must know that several of the members have gray-haired mothers who are fond of them. Cats should be taken, dogs and pigeons. Some of the crew should be handsome, and others pleasantly homely with warts on their noses. There might be a chaplain so broadminded that we could be informed that he secretly enjoyed the terrific oaths of some sea-dog who might be taken along with the flyers to do the swearing. For on expeditions the public would really notice, Queen Marie of Rumania should be induced to go along.

If some such program is followed, the Nansen flight of 1930 will be likely to succeed in calling to the attention of the public some of the outstanding conclusions of his drift voyage in 1893-96. The facts he gathered then and the principles he established would begin after thirty years to fill the press dispatches if those methods were followed, and might even succeed in getting a footing as low down as our common school textbooks. Nansen's ideas might begin to move the world.

But whether or not the public decides to find out and understand what Nansen has done, let's treat him well in any case, now that he is among us. For the Nobel Prize and the gold medals of scores of learned societies certify that he is a great man. And we are used to worshipping great men, even if we do not understand them—men like Einstein, for instance. It does us lots of good; the thrill has a tonic effect.

Royal Road to Learning

Reading Aloud to Boys and Girls Called Easy Road to Culture

Recently Charles F. D. Belden, director of the Boston Public Library, told the secretary of the Harry E. Burroughs Newsboys' Foundation in Boston that it would give him pleasure to come down and read aloud one evening to a group of boys in the Foundation Library. "How many will be there?" Mr. Belden inquired. "As many as you like, from a dozen to 300," the secretary said. "Eight hundred is too many," said Mr. Belden. "I am not going to make a speech. I am going to read a story. Stories are best read to small groups."

So, on a certain evening, Mr. Belden read Conrad's story called "Youth" to about 30 boys. Later, in his room at the library, Mr. Belden explained what he had in mind in reading aloud to the boys himself, and arranging for others to do so, too, at intervals. He is a tall, spare man, of precise speech; his room is small and dark, with a long, black table set diagonally on its scarlet carpet and the vaulting in the low ceiling is picked out in the turquoise blue that ancient Egyptian princesses loved. Two doors of the room stood open; between these Mr. Belden walked, back and forth, back and forth, leaning against the door for a moment when he had turned, before crossing the floor again.

"I took Conrad's story," Mr. Belden said, "because my own four children had been happy, hearing it read aloud. At the time their ages were between eight and seventeen; I believed the ages of the boys at the Foundation, might vary. It was a long story to try them on, but a good one; it shows that there are beauties in literature beyond the printed word. One would not read it, and thereafter, find reading unattractive. . . ."

Subsequently Mr. Belden arranged for others to take turns at the readings. Professor Ross of the Emerson College of Oratory, Mr. and Mrs. John Cronin, the library's own story tellers, and others. Mr. Belden spoke of Professor Copeland, the famous "Copey" as the ideal of all readers.

Mr. Belden, asked what he believed lay in reading aloud that was more provocative to boys and girls, said:

"Well, in my house the children say 'And now Mother, will you read us a chapter after supper.' Mrs. Belden does, 'Wind in the Willows' or 'Huckleberry Finn.' Then it is bedtime and she says 'We will go on with this another time.' I am certain that the children will not wait for someone to 'go on with it another time,' but that they will go on with it for themselves. It takes very little of that, you know, to establish a reading habit that has nothing to do with compulsion and everything to do with the pure joy of investigating good books."

Will We Have What We Want

Points to Be Considered in Selecting Your Motor Boat

A number of qualities should be considered when buying motor boat says Henry Clay Foster in the March issue of "Filed and Stream." The boat selected will probably not come up to the ideal standards you have been thinking about but bear in mind, writes this boat editor, that no one boat is built to perform the duties of all other kinds.

"When you want a boat for one kind of use mainly," he writes, "you get a boat which simply isn't suited admirably for every other use. A good, stoutly built fishing boat with a fish well in it, and otherwise equipped for rough usage, simply isn't a sleek mahogany runabout for social purposes.

"There are certain qualities, like seaworthiness in choppy water, speed in rough water, speed in smooth water, comfort at anchor in rough water, maneuverability under various conditions, etc., which are paramount in certain types of models, but when these are sought by the designer in unusual degree he sacrifices other things for it. We must recognize that specialized models have their drawbacks as well as their strong points.

"If you want a boat which folds up," continues Foster, "do not expect it to be as stout or capable of absorbing as much abuse as a common old white pine rowboat about a commercial anchorage. It won't stand it. And that's no fault of the maker, either. If you really want a boat which folds up and is easily transportable, you want it bad enough to take care of it, use it within its limitations, and keep it in good shape for the next trip. If you don't, give up the idea.

"If it is seaworthiness, that you want, stop and think: Seaworthiness where? If it is speed, what kind of speed? and where. If it is comfort, remember that is also a comparative term. How much comfort? You can't have the comforts of a 30-foot cruiser in a 10-foot rowboat."

Love is an art that must be learned. Once learned, it is a very pleasant thing, though there are dangers. —Sherwood Edge.



Something in Siamese Sampanes or a Big War Canoe
SIAMESE CLAIM RECORD LENGTH FOR THE CLASS OF WAR CANOES

Siamese paddlers, in picturesque traditional garb, paddling the world's longest craft of its kind at the water carnival at Nondapuri, near Bangkok, the capital of Siam. It carried gifts for the temple.