
The Franklin Commemoration: Discussion

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of the polar regions, north and south, seems to me to have received a fresh impetus, and scarcely a year has passed without some good Arctic work being done.

At this moment there are at least three expeditions at work within the polar circle, Peary in northern Greenland, Nansen crossing the pole, and our countryman Jackson exploring Franz Josef Land. But we are now looking with greatest hope to the southern polar region, where the extent of unknown land is largest, and the scientific results most important. Antarctic work brings back to us fresh memories of those whose achievements we are now assembled to commemorate. It is more than fifty years since the last Antarctic Expedition returned, and then Sir John Franklin, as Governor of Tasmania, was doing his utmost to assist its gallant leader, Sir James Ross, while Crozier of the *Terror* was second in command. Such memories incite us to fresh and renewed efforts in advocating the great cause to which England mainly owes her high position among the nations, the cause of maritime enterprise and discovery. For to look back on the past strengthens and invigorates us in our labours for the present and for the future. We look back then at Greenhithe, and at those two brave ships moving down the river just half a century ago, as the starting-point whence we trace a continuous stream of high-souled effort, and of magnificent results, down to this present day, when we strive to make an Antarctic Expedition, or at least a renewed effort to obtain its despatch, the chief and the most practical outcome of our Franklin Commemoration to-night.

Admiral Sir LEOPOLD M'CLINTOCK : Our President has very kindly invited me to say a few words. I am glad to do so ; but I feel that I *must* preface them with what is uppermost in my thoughts. I therefore take the liberty of offering him my most hearty congratulations on the able and eloquent address which he has just delivered. I also wish to say how deeply I sympathize with one sentiment he has uttered ; which is, that we should remember the labours of the men as well as of the officers. I beg to emphasize that sentiment ; it is never absent from my mind. My success in Arctic service is mainly due to the willing work of the fine fellows I have had the honour to command. I gladly avail myself of so appropriate an opportunity to mention *one or two conclusions* which my long searching experience has led up to. In order to do so accurately, I have put my ideas on paper.

It fell to my lot, in the month of May, 1859, to trace the footsteps of Franklin's retreating crews along a most inhospitable shore, for about 150 miles. In this most anxious duty I was very ably assisted by Lieutenant Hobson, who led a separate search-party from the *Fox*, and who twice sledged over most of this same ground. Having very closely examined the numerous traces left there by the lost crews, I was, of course, most deeply impressed. Let me remind you that the effect of extreme cold is to arrest decay, insomuch that all the relics, which had lain there for eleven years when I saw them, seemed as if they had only been exposed for so many months. The impression I then received, and which I still retain, was that the most careful and most anxious consideration had been given to the preparations for that terrible retreat towards the Hudson Bay Territories. Its nature was clearly understood by its leaders.

On landing from their ships on April 24 or 25, 1848, everything which was not

absolutely necessary for the contemplated journey was thrown away; only boats on sledges, food, clothing, and three or four guns were retained. The route adopted was the shortest possible; there was no straggling away from it. Evidently they all worked together, the strong helping the weak. It was plain that able leaders had faithful followers, and that the most perfect order prevailed. But the task was far too great for men already exhausted by three years of hardship and much privation; both their strength and their supplies failed, and at *that season* the snow-covered land afforded no sustenance whatever. To the last moment of their lives this heroic band of Christian men proved themselves worthy of the land which gave them birth, of the noble profession in which they had been trained, and of the past fame of their veteran leader—a gallant war officer and a Godfearing seaman, as were so many of our renowned Arctic worthies. *Once*, we are told by the Esquimaux, they came across a few natives, and encamped close to them; but the natives, seeing that the white men were almost destitute, feared to remain, and went away. They *need not* have feared, for those starving white men were under discipline. We have strong proof of this in the fact that the natives were not despoiled of their food, nor molested by them in any way whatever.

In laying down their lives at the call of duty, our countrymen bequeathed to us a rich gift—another of those noble examples not *very rare* in our history, and of which we are all so justly proud, one more beacon light to guide our sons to deeds of heroism in the future. These examples of unflinching courage, devotion to duty, and endurance of hardship, are as life-blood to naval enterprise.

The natural sequel came, namely, the long-continued “Franklin search,” persistently followed up to its completion. Being one of the searchers, I must not allude to it further than to say that it will serve the purpose of showing to future generations that England never abandons those whom she sends forth in her service.

Still, it was hoped that some further records or documents of the lost expedition might yet be found buried under some cairn. With this hope strong in his mind, Lieutenant Frederick Schwatka, U.S.A., explored King William Island in 1879. He carried out an exhaustive search during the summer months, when the ground was entirely free from snow; he found numerous relics still strewed about; but during the twenty years which had elapsed since my visit in 1859, the Esquimaux had been over the ground, had carried away whatever was useful to them, had pulled down the cairns, and had even opened the graves. We must all feel the greatest regret that Lieutenant Schwatka’s exhaustive search was unrewarded beyond the finding of four despoiled graves, and portions of six skeletons. His researches were, however, very valuable for the many interesting details which they supplied in confirmation of previous statements, and for dispelling many illusory reports at one time in circulation. The various interesting conversations held between him and the Esquimaux are given at some length in the published account of his unique journey.

And here I feel bound to remark that the generous and sympathetic help of our American kinsmen, throughout the whole period of the Franklin search, marked the beginning of that drawing together of the two great Anglo-Saxon nations, which is so striking a feature of the present day, and of which our children may reap the full fruition.

The PRESIDENT: I have just received a telegram from the survivors of the Arctic and Antarctic Expeditions residing at Chatham, expressing their cordial sympathy with the objects of to-night’s meeting, sent by John Parry, Royal Marines, of Sir James Ross’s ship *Erebus*.* I will now ask the American Ambassador whether he will be so kind as to address the meeting.

* A letter was also received from eleven resident pensioners in Sir John Hawkins’s Hospital for old seamen in the Royal Navy, Chatham, offering hearty congratulations and good wishes.

Hon. THOMAS F. BAYARD: It is quite impossible, upon such an occasion as this, that the voice of my country should be inarticulate in the presence of the partakers in the glory of advancing geographical exploration, as I have heard the men themselves in the voices of your President and of Sir Leopold M'Clintock. I wish that some of my own countrymen who have assisted in the great work could be here in visible presence to speak words of fellowship and sympathy. I must, for want of better, say one word for them. This map and the wonderful thoughts it generates appeal to our feeling and our imagination. It seems—I can scarcely call it ghosts—but it seems to be the realities of those who have done so much to make that map full of meaning to us. If there shall stand the names of Franklin, of Ross, of M'Clintock and of Austin, and a great list of their peers and associates, —if they shall be found keeping guard over the secrets of nature in that remote region, they will not be found alone; the names of Grinnell, and of Hayes, and of Kane, and of Peary, and of Holland and Melville and Hall, will be found with them. If the noble *ardor Britannicus* shall plant your banner at the North Pole, it will not be solitary, for the *animus Americanus* will be there also. Go where you will, my kindred people, you will not be without the hearts and souls of Americans to accompany you in the noble endeavour to advance knowledge of the world we live in.

The PRESIDENT: Captain le Clerc has been deputed to come to this meeting to represent the French Geographical Society, and express its sympathy.

Captain LE CLERC: It is a great honour for me to have to answer for the Society of Geography of Paris. It is very kind of the President to have associated the name of Bellot in such a touching manner with the name of the glorious and venerated Sir John Franklin which is to-day commemorated. It is a great honour that his countrymen will certainly feel. England is a country which is second to none for hospitality; but there are two kinds—the material and the moral hospitality. The material hospitality, we all know how England is celebrated for that; the moral hospitality, which is the most precious one, England never grudges it to anybody who may work for science, civilization, and over all to those who plough the main to snatch from it the mysteries of nature. This last hospitality England has bestowed on Bellot's name and memory in a manner which I have most keenly felt to-day as a Frenchman and an officer in the French navy—I allude to the monument on the banks of the Thames, which has been erected by English care near the relics of Sir John Franklin. I think every countryman of mine should feel proud that the ships going up and down the Thames every day, when they ask, "What is this monument?" are answered, "It has been erected to a French officer—to Lieut. Bellot, by England." In him England wished to honour those qualities which are so dear to her, and of which you may have a just idea if you have read the admirable letters he wrote to the noble lady, the companion of Sir John Franklin. Also did England wish to honour one of our officers, who I won't say devoted his life to England, but devoted it to an enterprise which emanated from England on behalf of one of her sons who perished for the interests of human kind.

Admiral Sir EDMUND COMMERE: I am called upon by the President, as a pure outsider, to give you a little bit of opinion on Arctic Expeditions, because I have never been there, though I have been very near there. I volunteered to go with Sir John Franklin in 1845. Lieutenant le Visconte, whom I was serving with at that time, and Captain Fitzjames, whom I served with in a ship previously, did the best they could with Sir John to give me a chance of going; but, ladies and gentlemen, I am happy to tell you that I was too young at that time. My experience of over fifty years in the service has taught me that you can look nowhere for better officers, in the ordinary run of duty, and better seamen, than in these Arctic Expeditions. We know very well that it has been an excellent

school in every way: an excellent school in hardihood, I may say almost of life, because I believe men who serve for two or three years, and survive an Arctic Expedition, are pretty certain to live, according to the survival of the fittest. I had for my coxswain a man who is alive now, and I am very sorry to see he is not here to-night. This is a man called Palmer, who was coxswain with Captain Markham on the Nares' expedition, and I believe he went further towards the North Pole almost than Captain Markham; and I know this much, that that man was as hard as nails. I thought myself I was pretty tough, certainly I was a few years older, but when we had been on the water together for three hours he beat me into fits. Well now, gentlemen, there are one or two celebrated officers whose names we must not forget, because they have not been forgotten by the President—one Sherard Osborn. I had the honour of serving with that noble man for a long time in the Crimea: a more able, energetic, earnest, gallant man I never came across in all my life; he was always forward in Arctic Expeditions, and untiring; so when it came to war, there was Sherard Osborn in the forefront. We remember him afterwards in China, as a leader of an expedition which was to do great good for China, and if he had been left to himself, I have no doubt it would have done great good; but unfortunately China did in those days what she has done now—when they have good men, instead of using them, they put them on one side to make way for their own very foolish leaders. Now, having made these remarks, and as it is getting late, I will say this: I believe in the future that neither Arctic nor Antarctic work will cease, as I am perfectly certain it is the best school we have for our navy.

Dr. TOMS, R.N.: I was the last man who saw Bellot alive. I accompanied him when he got on the iceberg that overturned and lost him his life. I was a messmate of Sherard Osborn for more than two years, and I maintain what the last speaker said—that he was the bravest and most courageous man in the service.

The PRESIDENT: As it is getting late, I think we must wind up this very interesting discussion. We have to thank the American Ambassador and the representative of the French Geographical Society for the kind words of sympathy they have spoken to us. We have great pleasure in welcoming here to-night both old and young.* As I said before, we have with us representatives of officers and ships' companies of the search expeditions; we have several relations of Sir John Franklin, and of his officers; we have other explorers who have been in the north; we have many officers who took a deep interest in the work being done during the search for Franklin; we have young officers from Greenwich; and I am happy to say we have six young cadets from the *Worcester*, who, I hope, will distinguish themselves in years to come. I feel sure that this celebration of the sailing of Sir John Franklin, this commemoration of his work, will not soon be forgotten by those who have taken part in it. Our knowledge has been improved and refreshed by a renewed study of former achievements, and we have contemplated the noble work done by our predecessors through devotion to duty, through desire to do well, and determination to succeed. All these are lessons which have been taught to us by this commemoration, and I trust, therefore, that it has been not only interesting, but also that it has served for our edification in many ways. We have to thank H.R.H. the Duke of York for his kindness in coming: he naturally takes a deep interest in the work of naval officers and also of the men of the navy. I hope that you will now adjourn to the other room, and examine the portraits of our Arctic officers collected there, and many relics of the Franklin and other expeditions.

* Mr. John Franklin Wiseman, the eldest great-grandson of Sir John Franklin, wrote to the President to express his warm sympathy with the feelings which led to the commemoration, and his regret that his engagements at Clifton College prevented him from being present.