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On the Next Great Arctic Discovery: Discussion

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If land is found, we shall only carry out a rough survey, and devote our time to ascertain how big in extent it is, in order to judge the importance of the discovery, so as, on our return to civilization, to organize a more efficient expedition. Even if land is not encountered, the results of the expedition will by no means be negative, as we shall be able to ascertain approximately the extent of the continental shelf, and so, if the theory still is held that land exists to the north of the Alaskan coast, to have restricted the area of search.

Besides the sledge journey, we shall achieve results in the following branches: *Geology* and *zoology* at Mackenzie river and Banks Land, and the place where we strike land after the sledge journey; *ethnographical* investigations, wherever Eskimo or remains of them are found; *hydrographical* observations in and about Bering strait; and *meteorological*, *magnetical*, and *tidal* series during the winter stay on Banks Land.

EINAR MIKKELSEN.

Before the paper, the CHAIRMAN (Sir THOMAS HOLDICH) said: I think I shall be echoing your sentiments as well as my own when I say that we greet Sir Clements Markham here this afternoon with great cordiality. We are exceedingly glad to see him amongst us; not that any of us have the least doubt about his undying interest in the affairs of the Society, but that we are glad to see him well enough to come out on a day like this to address us on this the first meeting of this session; and as he is on ground which we may call peculiarly his own, I think he cannot fail to give us a paper which certainly will be full of interest, and which will, I hope, lead to valuable discussion afterwards. I will ask Sir Clements Markham to read his paper.

After the paper, Admiral PARR: As Sir Clements Markham has mentioned the subject of driftwood, and referred especially to the driftwood in the expedition of 1875-76 with Sir George Nares, I thought it might be of interest if I brought up a specimen, which I think is one of the most interesting specimens that were obtained, and why it arrived at the position it occupied we were never able to ascertain, and I have had no explanation up to the present of how it got to the position in which it was found. Perhaps I might just read what Sir George Nares said in his official report, when he first came back, with regard to driftwood—

“The few pieces of driftwood, all of the fir or pine species, that have been obtained on the shores of the Polar sea, have evidently drifted into the position in which they were found from the westward. One piece was obtained lying on the surface of the sea-ice itself, 2 miles distant from the land; the rest were found on the shore at different heights above the sea-level of 150 feet. The former was perfectly fresh, with the bark on; the latter in all stages of decay, usually embedded in the mud of dry ancient lakes, evidently formed by the rising of the land, and of very great age.”

It seemed to me that the reason why so little comparatively fresh driftwood was found in our expedition was that the bays between the *Alert's* winter quarters and Cape Josef Henry were all practically blocked by permanent ice, and in the front of many of them were floes similar to those referred to by Sir Clements Markham as existing at Banks island, namely, those domed floes which it was almost impossible to walk over, the domes being formed of hard slippery blue ice; and if it were blowing, you had to get across them as best you could, crawling along, because it was impossible to walk. All the bays being closed by this permanent ice, the driftwood would have had difficulty in getting in. But this particular piece, which Sir George Nares referred to as being picked up 2 miles from land, was found by my sledge crew on one of the first journeys that we took,

lying on the surface on one of the very thick floes. The floe must have been, I suppose, 80 feet thick at the very least, and this was lying on the surface without being sunk in at all, and towards the middle of it. I was not with my crew when they picked it up, but, following them afterwards, I came to the spot, and picked up the bark, which they had not thought necessary to take with them; and here is a portion of the wood. It was perfectly fresh at the time it was found, with the bark on it, and about 2 feet long, probably a bit of branch not quite straight. Well, how that piece of driftwood got into that position has been a mystery to me ever since. We never were able to find out.

Sir CLEMENTS MARKHAM: How far was it from land?

Admiral PARR: Two miles, and on one of those very old floes which could never have got close to land unless there was deep water, and, of course, it could not have got that piece of wood on it anywhere within hundreds of miles of where we found it. Then, in addition to that, Sir Clements has mentioned the migration of the Eskimo, and I thought it might also be interesting if I brought here an Eskimo relic, which I think is the most northern that has ever been obtained. It was picked up just to the south of Cape Beechey, in $81^{\circ} 52'$, and at that spot we found Eskimo summer encampments, while further south we found their winter ones; but that was the most northern point at which any traces of Eskimo were discovered. These are other pieces of wood which were picked up on shore.

Sir CLEMENTS MARKHAM: Is that driftwood or pieces of wood belonging to the Eskimo?

Admiral PARR: They were picked up on shore, where I cannot say definitely, but somewhere near the winter quarters. But they are all very extensively withered, while this which was picked up on the floe was perfectly fresh.

The CHAIRMAN: Is that poplar or pine?

Admiral PARR: This, I imagine, is poplar—I think it is one of the poplar specimens, but I am sorry I have not any bark. Colonel Feilden had it cut up after he returned home, and he sent me this piece to keep.

The CHAIRMAN: Perhaps Mr. Mikkelsen will say a few words.

Mr. MIKKELSEN: I think I have already told you all I have to say. I have decided to take one pony instead of going with dogs alone.

The CHAIRMAN: Where are you going to get your pony?

Mr. MIKKELSEN: Siberia. In addition to the food we carry ourselves—we have at least 250 lbs. of meat—the pony can draw at least 800 lbs., and it eats in 20 days about 250 lbs.; that leaves 550 lbs. clear after we have been out 20 days. I have tried ponies in Franz Josef Land, and found them very good indeed. And then, instead of going down to Mackenzie river, I intend to go with a whaler, and try and do some work in the Bering strait. It seems desirable to get some work done there. I don't think I can say any more.

The CHAIRMAN: I am sure all the company here wish you every success.

The CHAIRMAN: We have a letter written to Sir Clements Markham by Admiral Markham, which you might like to hear.

“I have read your paper with the greatest interest. It is an admirable and well-thought-out plan of campaign, and I am thoroughly in accord with all you have put forward. It is, as you state, quite time that we interested ourselves in a renewal of Arctic research, for it is just thirty years ago since we sent out our last expedition! Other nations have, however, not been idle during that long period, and much good work has been done. It is now time to take a broad and general view of what has been accomplished, to dovetail together the results that have been achieved, and then, as you say, to see exactly what remains to be done in

order to increase our geographical knowledge of the North Polar Regions. If Arctic research is to be renewed, then comes the important question as to the best locality for an expedition to be sent in order to obtain the most valuable and the most important results. I am certainly in favour of the scheme which you suggest, namely, to that large unknown area lying to the north and the north-west of the Beaufort sea. We all know that ice—and very heavy ice—will be encountered in that neighbourhood, but a sailing ship has already successfully forced her way through it, and I see no reason why a steamer should not meet with equal success. And we will, of course, hope that, unlike the sailing ship, the steamer will have a better opportunity of extricating herself when the work is accomplished. The theory that you have raised regarding the continental shelves of polar lands is exceedingly interesting, and may, or may not, be evidence of the existence of a large polar basin to the north, a basin in which no land is to be found. I must candidly confess that my own view was that if we could penetrate into the unknown area, we should, in all probability, find an archipelago, of islands, similar to those further south, extending towards and across the north pole. This opinion of mine—long formed—was somewhat rudely shaken by the report brought home by Nansen of the discovery of the large polar basin in which the *Fram* drifted for so long. You refer, in your paper, to the soundings I obtained in my highest latitude; that was, to my mind, at the time, conclusive evidence of the existence of land to the northward, and it was only Nansen's discovery that temporarily shook my faith regarding the existence of an archipelago. I was also much puzzled by the difference—the very great difference—of the conditions of the ice met with by me and by Nansen, for, whereas the ice over which I sledged varied in thickness from 80 to 120 feet, Nansen never encountered ice of a greater thickness than from 15 to 25 feet! I conjectured that the ice over which I travelled had been formed and held for long years in channels between islands to the north. I am, therefore, inclined to adhere to my original views that land, not continental, but in the shape of many islands, will be found to the north and north-west of Greenland. You have warned us not to be over-positive in geographical speculations, and I put forward this view with all due reserve. An expedition, however, such as you have suggested in your excellent paper will very materially assist in solving this interesting question."

Mr. RAVENSTEIN: I have never made the Arctic Regions a subject of special study, but I may say that I have listened with great pleasure to Sir Clements' paper, and am very glad to see that he comes back to his first love in his old days. If we look at a map like the one before us and see the immense space which is there covered by the Beaufort sea, we must see that this is a region which ought to attract explorers, and I am very glad to hear that two gentlemen are going to try their luck, and I do hope Sir Clements Markham will live long enough to induce the British Government to send out an expedition, and if not the British Government, perhaps the Japanese will.

The CHAIRMAN: Before asking you to join in thanking Sir Clements for his very able paper, I should like to ask one comprehensive question. As he has taken a very comprehensive view of the whole of the North Polar Regions, I should like to know whether—gathered from the evidence of all the different explorers, ancient and modern, who have wandered across those northern seas—it can be said distinctly that the ice of the North Polar Regions is diminishing. So far as I gather from the results of the *Discovery's* voyage towards the south pole, the glacier ice there is distinctly receding, and the volume of the ice generally appears to be diminishing. One would imagine that the Southern Polar Regions are in process more or less of desiccation. It would, therefore, be exceedingly interesting

to know—especially with reference to what Sir Clements has said about the migration of tribes up in the north and the existence of driftwood, which seems to point to a somewhat different climate in past times—whether the ice there is increasing, balancing, as it were, the decrease of the ice in the south. Beyond that, I fear that my knowledge of North Polar Regions does not justify me in making further remarks on so very able a paper as the one that our late President has given us.

Sir CLEMENTS MARKHAM: In the Arctic Regions we only have very small areas comparatively of inland ice. We have Greenland, some portions of the land opposite Greenland, and some portions of Franz Josef Land, but all very small areas compared with the Antarctic Regions, and the Parry archipelago is not laden with ice, so that it would be difficult to say whether the ice is receding. I believe it is not receding, so far as Greenland is concerned. But there seems to be evidence that the land is rising. In Banks island the wood was found at a very considerable height above the sea; I think, more than 100 feet. What was the height, Admiral Parr?

Admiral PARR: 150 feet above the sea.

Sir CLEMENTS MARKHAM: So that there seems to be evidence that the land is rising round the shelf, although Nansen discovered an immense depth more in the centre of the region.

Admiral PARR: I think the glaciers in Ellesmere Land, if I remember rightly, were decidedly receding. There were two glaciers which came down glacier valley, and there were moraines some distance below where the glaciers extended then.

Sir CLEMENTS MARKHAM: In south Greenland the ice comes down and it breaks off in bergs. But I do not know of any direct evidence of the ice having receded.

Admiral PARR: I think at Foulkner fiord the glacier was also receding; that was on the Greenland side, but it was some distance from the sea, and had not discharged into the sea for some time. But further north the Humboldt glacier and Peterman glacier were still discharging into the sea.

Sir CLEMENTS MARKHAM: They are still discharging, but they may possibly be receding.

Admiral PARR: They may be.

The CHAIRMAN: The land of permanent ice is not coming southward?

Sir CLEMENTS MARKHAM: I think not. The most puzzling point connected with the paper I have been reading is certainly the driftwood—where it comes from. If it is not Siberian, it must come from that American coast, and how it can possibly get round to Grant Land is a most puzzling question. It probably may find some currents round the Polar Regions, but there is an enormous quantity in Banks island, and in Prince Patrick island especially there is a great deal of wood.

The CHAIRMAN: But none of the wood shows signs of an axe?

Sir CLEMENTS MARKHAM: I have never heard. After the migration of those people along the coast of Parry islands, they appear to have separated on the entrance of Wellington channel—one set went down Lancaster sound and established themselves on the west side of Baffin's bay, and the other went up the channel, crossed Greely fiord, and were found by Admiral Parr and his shipmates far up Smith sound; then they appear to have followed down Smith sound. It is quite certain that the people, who were called Arctic highlanders, always had a tradition that they came from the north. For instance, they had no musk oxen, but they had the name, and they knew they had once had them. And there was certainly no communication between those people and the Eskimo in South

Greenland, none whatever, so that that is a distinct proof that they have come some great distance from the north and west.

The CHAIRMAN: That leads to the presumption that the north was warmer than it is now.

Mr. MIKKELSEN: I should like, if any gentleman present can tell me, to know where all that ice goes. If the polar ocean is like what it looks on the chart, where all that ice is going to seems to be a puzzle.

The CHAIRMAN: I have only to ask you to join in a hearty vote of thanks to Sir Clements Markham for his paper this afternoon.

THE LATE BARON VON RICHTHOFEN ON ANTARCTIC EXPLORATION.*

THIS is a memoir on the objects of south polar exploration by the late Baron Richthofen, which was left unfinished at the time of his lamented death. The great geographer stood in the very first rank among living cultivators of our science, and any words that come from his pen, more especially when they are practically his last words, will carry great weight. We find him, then, in these last words, in eloquent sentences which, alas! remain unfinished, dwelling upon the great importance of Antarctic research, not only from a scientific point of view, as adding to the sum of human knowledge, but also from a practical point of view. His interesting remarks will serve as a reminder that much work still remains to be done, and that for researches to be complete they must be continuous. It is discreditable that this country should be contented to see one great success achieved, and then drop the subject for half a century. If the great and important work which Baron Richthofen was engaged in describing when he was called away is to be completed (and it ought to be completed) there must be continuity—continuity of purpose and continuity of aim.

After describing the great difficulties and the results of the German Antarctic Expedition, Baron Richthofen offers a generous tribute of praise to Captain Scott and his fellow-explorers. He then refers to other expeditions. But the important part of his memoir is devoted to the results of Antarctic exploration, and this remains unfinished. The completed portion is well deserving of close attention, because it points to the necessity for continuity of effort. The following extracts will justify this conclusion.

C. R. M.

“The desire to seek out and to understand the scientific causes of phenomena, and to increase the sum of human knowledge, is a great aim. This is what led to the despatch of the German and English

* ‘Ergebnisse und Ziele der Südpolarforschung,’ von Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen (Berlin, 1905).