

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



The Worst Journey in the World

Apsley Cherry-Garrard

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About the Book

The Worst Journey in the World is a gripping account of an expedition gone disastrously wrong. One of the youngest members of Scott's team, Apsley Cherry-Garrard was later part of the rescue party that found the frozen bodies of Scott and the three men who had accompanied him on the final push to the Pole. Despite the horrors that Scott and his men eventually faced, Cherry-Garrard's account is filled with details of scientific discovery and anecdotes of human resilience in a harsh environment, supported by diary excerpts and accounts from other explorers. A masterpiece of travel writing, *The Worst Journey in the World* is the most celebrated and compelling of all the books on Antarctic exploration.

About the Author

Apsley Cherry-Garrard (1886-1959) was one of the youngest members of Captain Scott's final expedition to the Antarctic which he joined to collect the eggs of the Emperor penguin. After the expedition, Cherry-Garrard served in the First World War and was invalided home. With the zealous encouragement of his neighbour, George Bernard Shaw, Cherry-Garrard wrote *The Worst Journey in the World* (1922) in an attempt to overcome the horror of the journey. He died in 1959.

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APSLEY CHERRY-GARRARD

The Worst Journey in the World

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
Sara Wheeler

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Introduction by Sara Wheeler

The Worst Journey in the World is a masterpiece and its author is a hero – a true hero, I mean, not one of those tinpot adventurers who crowd the front pages in our own gruesomely unheroic age. He was a vital protagonist in an epic feat of exploration, survived against what seemed like insuperable odds in the middle of heartbreaking beauty and crucifying hardship, lost his two best friends, his health and his peace of mind to boot – then he went and redeemed those losses by transforming them, on the page, into an allegory of hope that will uplift the human spirit till the next ice age. What more can you ask of a hero?

He was born Apsley Cherry in 1886, still a sunlit era for the English landed classes. The roar of the now fabled technological progress of nineteenth-century Britain could barely be heard in genteel Bedford: the streets were lit by gas, the cabs were drawn by horses, the swollen tribes of domestic servants had not yet shrunk, even in the red-brick street where baby Apsley mewled. His father, another Apsley, was a solid and upstanding member of the officer class, but in fact he was not yet landed: all that was to come.

Fifty-three-year-old Colonel Cherry had recently returned from more than twenty years soldiering in India and Africa^{[fn1](#)}. The walrus-whiskered veteran was enjoying a peacetime post in command of Kempston Barracks on the outskirts of Bedford, and there he had met and married Evelyn Sharpin, the young daughter of an eminent local

doctor. Apsley senior was descended from a prosperous line of lawyers and colonial civil servants who had lately settled in Berkshire. When, in 1887, his elder brother died unexpectedly without issue, the startled colonel found himself the owner of Denford Manor, near Newbury, and other properties besides. He promptly retired from the regiment with the rank of honorary major-general and shifted his family - Apsley junior already had a sister - down to leafy Berkshire. Five years later, when the general's aunt, Honora Drake Garrard, also died without issue, he inherited a much bigger estate up in Hertfordshire, and a minor fortune to go with it. As a condition of the inheritance he was obliged to take his aunt's name in addition to his own. And so, in 1892, the name Cherry-Garrard came into existence.

The burgeoning family - two more girls had arrived - duly installed themselves in their new home, Lamer Park, just outside Wheathampstead. The house was a model of eighteenth-century architectural chastity (it was always said, in the family, that Robert Adam had been employed there), with well-stocked parkland landscaped by Humphry Repton in the golden age of the English country house estate. Apsley junior shortly submitted to the rigours of prep school in the bracing air of Folkestone, and after that seven modestly unhappy years at Winchester College were followed by a slightly more satisfactory stint as an undergraduate at Christ Church, Oxford, where his father and grandfather had preceded him. His eyesight was very poor, and the difficulties this caused him were compounded by his shyness, and by his paralysing anxiety. He read Classics at first, but soon switched to Modern History. He was not an especially gifted scholar, and was awarded a third-class degree.

Sisters persisted, and Cherry, as he came to be known, was finally outnumbered by five to one. When his father died in 1907 he became a substantial landowner and head

of the family, a responsibility he took seriously, but did not enjoy. After graduating, he went off round the world on a cargo ship. He was five feet ten, slim and handsome, with glossy dark brown hair, chocolate-brown eyes and well-proportioned features. The trouble was, he didn't know what to do with himself. When he travelled up to Scotland in the early autumn of 1908 for a spot of shooting at a lodge owned by his cousin Reginald Smith, he was at a loose end. But there he met Edward 'Bill' Wilson, the doctor and naturalist who had accompanied Scott to the Antarctic on his first journey, in 1901. A committed Christian with marble-blue eyes and a raking stride, Wilson walked with his new friend through the purple mists of the grouse moors and told him stories about long marches and lonely camps in the bloodless snowfields of the south. Cherry had grown up with his father's tales of bivvying on the veldt, and, like all schoolboys, he had pored over images of little wooden ships in the pincers of ice floes inching their way up the north-west passage, or of stout-hearted Britons battling their way through the broiling, malarial heart of Africa. He determined to apply for a position on Scott's second expedition.

Here *The Worst Journey in the World* takes up the baton. Cherry explains how he came to be appointed zoological assistant, and how the *Terra Nova* steamed out of Cardiff in June 1910 among a flotilla of flag-bedecked tugs. He was twenty-four when he sailed south, and, two-and-a-half years later, he came back a different man. England was different too. Those years - 1910 to 1913 - turned out to be the most tumultuous of the twentieth century for Britain. The comfy certainties of Cherry's youth ('God in his heaven,'¹ as his exact contemporary Siegfried Sassoon put it, 'and sausages for breakfast') had vanished as if in, it seemed to the young polar explorer in his bewilderment, a single national gulp.

In the first weeks of 1914 the doughty denizens of the Committee in charge of Scott's expedition, busily ensuring

that its reputation was moulded by their hands alone, asked Cherry if he would write the official narrative, setting down for posterity the story of the whole show (as Scott's deputy, Teddy Evans was first in line for the job, but he was too busy). Cherry was delighted, and with characteristic diligence began interviewing scientists and seamen, writing to firms which had supplied equipment and amassing piles of paper listing exactly what had gone south with the *Terra Nova*. Essentially, he was at that stage planning to compile a guide for future explorers. Then the war came, and he hurried off to command a battalion of armoured cars in Flanders. After a few months, having seen little action, Cherry was invalided home with ulcerative colitis, a debilitating condition often associated with anxiety and one for which there was no sure cure. His convalescence was long, and painful, but through it, his thoughts on his book matured. In his attitude to writing he was influenced in no small measure by a friendly neighbour whose land abutted his own - George Bernard Shaw, the most famous author in the world.

A fogleman for those out of step with the times, Shaw was an ideal companion and mentor for Cherry. I do not think *The Worst Journey* would be so wonderful had the two men never met. Shaw helped Cherry realise that he did not want to write the standard expedition narrative, some wooden affair lacking any psychological light and shade. By the start of 1920, Cherry had severed his links with the expedition committee and turned himself into an independent author. His working title was now 'Never Again: Scott, Some Penguins and the Pole' (he had briefly considered calling the book, 'To Hell: With Scott'²). Although 'Never Again' survived at the top of his powerful final chapter, Cherry realised that the title was a weak one for a whole book. In a letter drafted (but never sent) to the Arctic explorer Vilhjalmur Steffansson, Cherry later

revealed, 'it was objected that it [the title] was too much like, "Christ, Some Coppers and the Cross".'³ This last has a Shavian ring.

In December 1922 *The Worst Journey in the World* appeared in a two-volume edition financed by the author and distributed by the publishing firm Constable. Together the books tell the story of the expedition from beginning to end: but Cherry draws a landscape, not a map. The Winter Journey to Cape Crozier lies at the heart of the narrative, both literally and emotionally; this is the journey that was the worst in the world. In the tar blackness of a polar winter Cherry and his friends Bill Wilson and Henry 'Birdie' Bowers trekked across Ross Island to the Cape Crozier rookery to collect the eggs of the Emperor penguin. At that time it was thought that Emperor embryos, if examined at a sufficiently early stage of development, would provide a vital link in the evolutionary chain (a theory subsequently disproved). The three men did not take dogs: they pulled their own sledges for five weeks, often over ice ridges that were six feet high. The temperature fell to minus seventy-six degrees Fahrenheit, their teeth shattered in the cold and the tent blew away. But they were still friends when they staggered back to the hut. 'In civilisation',⁴ Cherry wrote, 'men are taken at their own valuation because there are so many ways of concealment, and there is so little time, perhaps even so little understanding. Not so down South. These two men . . . were gold, pure, shining, unalloyed.'

The following February, after marching more than half way to the Pole earlier in the season, Cherry took a team of dogs out from the hut as winter shouldered in across the polar plateau. He drove them 130 miles south to a food depôt in order to wait for Captain Scott and his four companions, expected home from the Pole any day. Cherry tells the story, in *The Worst Journey*, of the decisions he made on this abortive trip, and why he made them. But he

could have made other decisions, and they might have led to other outcomes. He could never forget it. In November of that same year he pushed back the cambric flap of a small tent buried in drift fewer than thirteen miles from where he had made his last camp on that dog journey – the last camp, that is, before turning back. In the stygian gloom he made out Birdie and Bill, frozen solid, like wood, and lying on either side of Scott. All three had perished on the return march from the Pole. ‘That scene,’⁵ Cherry wrote, ‘can never leave my memory.’ Many years later he said that his book – this book – was in fact a memorial to Bill and Birdie. ‘It is hard’,⁶ Cherry wrote, ‘that often such men must go first when others far less worthy remain.’

So what about the book? It is a graceful blend of narrative, reflection and anecdote threaded with literary reference and allusion and the occasional historical digression. Cherry is a very English writer, his prose characterised by quizzical detachment, a fine sense of irony and an infinite capacity for gloom tempered with elegiac melancholy. The bitter brilliance of his sentences glimmers with dignified scepticism. As a stylist he is Mozart rather than Wagner, eschewing sonorous tempests in favour of harmonious quadrilles and sonatas. No writer is a more faithful adherent to Flaubert’s dictum prescribing clarity, clarity, clarity: the words of *The Worst Journey* are as plain as crotchets on a stave.

It was instantly recognised as a modern classic, a few dissenting voices notwithstanding. The London *Evening Standard* reviewer called it ‘the most wonderful story in the world’,⁷ and Shaw announced that its success, ‘has exceeded all expectations’. As the double-decker cost three guineas, the price of a weekend at the seaside, the books hardly raced off the shelves; but to Cherry, the thought that he had put the record straight was more important. ‘It has done what I specifically wanted it to do’,⁸ he wrote to his printer, ‘– get the business into some kind of perspective

and proportion'. But he did want the book read, and to his unending delight, throughout his lifetime many other editions followed the Constable original, both overseas and in Britain. (The work first appeared as a single volume in 1937.) After a hesitant start in the United States, a country Cherry profoundly mistrusted, in the spring of 1930 the Dial Press finally brought out a successful edition. 'Where shall the likes of it',⁹ asked the *New York Times* reviewer, 'be read for sheer strength, clarity and beauty of phrase in the literature of polar exploration?' Dial's timing was flawless: Antarctica had not been off the front pages for months, as the young Virginian naval pilot Richard Byrd had just claimed to have flown over the South Pole in an aluminium aeroplane - the first man there since Scott. But the *Bookman* was far more impressed with Cherry's story. 'It makes Byrd's journey',¹⁰ the review read, '. . . seem no more harassing than a train trip from Albany to Troy.' 'He [Cherry] is plainly far more intelligent than most explorers',¹¹ wrote H. L. Mencken in the *American Mercury*, though this was not a hotly contested field. Back at home, in June 1937, two smart sixpenny volumes appeared as numbers 99 and 100 in Allen Lane's revolutionary Penguin series. A poster was printed depicting a penguin with a cricket bat tucked under one flipper bowing to a distant crowd. 'We celebrate our centenary', read the caption, 'with Mr Cherry-Garrard's *Worst Journey in the World*'.

Many officers and scientists on Scott's team also wrote books about the expedition. None has lasted: all take a factual approach that ignores a whole layer of emotional and imaginative experience. The Antarctic committee rushed out an edited version of Scott's diary in 1913, and it is rightly recognised as a significant contribution to the literature of exploration. But Scott has lost his mythic status, and the diary reads now more like a historical document than a work of art. (In our own tawdry times,

Scott has come in for the usual wallop of historical revisionism – it is, for heroes, after all, as unavoidable as the grave. Shackleton has risen up to challenge the hegemony of Scott as the Antarctic explorer par excellence. Sir Ernest was a showman. He drank too much, smoked too much and slept with other men’s wives: that’s why we like him. He’s like we’d like to be. Poor old Scott, on the other hand, was shy, and discreet, and prone to depression – like we are.) And of course, the world has shrunk: even young women writers find their way to the South Pole these days, and the bookshelves are jammed with tales of contemporary polar derring-do. But *The Worst Journey in the World* has endured. Why? Because, like all great writers (and he is a great writer), Cherry frees his story from the shackles of time and place and ushers it into the immortal zone. Yes, he conjures a specific landscape (who can forget his descriptions of the pleated, blue-shadowed cliffs of a glacier, the patter of dogs whooshing across the snowcrust and the friendly smell of tobacco at the end of a long day on the trail?) Yes, he writes about crampons and snowgoggles. But his description and detail are a means to an end. The book is a parable, which is what he most wanted it to be. It is about not the winning or the losing (or being the fastest or the first without oxygen or any other superlative); it is about ‘the response of the spirit’:¹² a notion as valid today as it was in 1922 or in 1322. ‘We did not forget the please and the thank you’,¹³ Cherry noted in his account of the trek to Cape Crozier. ‘And we kept our tempers, even with God.’ And so the book is not just about what happened at the South Pole in 1912. It is about me and you and here and now; it is about leaky taps and finding the money to pay the gas bill and discovering that perhaps one isn’t quite the person one thought one was. You could say the same about the *Iliad*, or the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale*. After all, as Cherry acknowledged, we all have our winter journeys, sooner or later. And if you march

them, he concluded (you see there really is hope there, at the bottom of it all), 'you will have your reward, so long as all you want is a penguin's egg.'¹⁴

The book was published in the same year as *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*, works that epitomised the new wave of literary modernism. Both Cherry and *The Worst Journey* are at first glance deeply traditional. Yet a central preoccupation of each, the notion of the sterility and fragmentation of post-war western culture, is also a vital modernist theme - as in Eliot's 'heap of broken images'. So Cherry wasn't entirely out of step.

Cherry married Angela Turner in September 1939 (it was a popular time to get married). She was a land agent's daughter from Ipswich, and thirty years his junior. Theirs was a happy union, though there were desperately bleak periods when Cherry submitted to catastrophic nervous breakdowns and what would today be diagnosed as clinical depression. As Cherry's biographer I am often asked whether his experiences in the south, above all his loss of his most loved friends and the vague sense that he might have been able to save them, 'caused' his mental collapse. Of course, I do not know. I think Cherry was genetically predisposed to depression, and he might well have entered his dark tunnels if he had never been south of Brighton. After all, many do. But events in the Antarctic did not help him cope with his anxiety. In short, a toxic combination of genes and events set off a dysfunctional reaction in his neurotransmitters that brought him down.

He died in 1959 at the age of seventy-three, of congestive heart failure and bronchopneumonia.

Who was Cherry? He was a cynic, and a committed pessimist. He responded deeply to literature, and was not very interested in God. Like many authors, he found writing easier than speaking. He liked ice cream and strong coffee, enjoyed birdwatching and book collecting. In middle age he

was, in many ways, a curmudgeonly reactionary: he complained a lot, he had an obsessive hatred of vicars and income tax, and he was convinced that the world was going – had gone, rather – to the dogs ('This post-war business is inartistic',¹⁵ he wrote in the little-read preface to the second edition of *The Worst Journey*, 'for it is seldom that anyone does anything well for the sake of doing it well.') But in his heart he was a romantic: he believed in the redemptive powers of both nature and art. How can you resist a man who wrote of the Antarctic photographs taken by Scott's 'camera artist' Herbert Ponting, 'Here in these pictures is beauty linked to tragedy'¹⁶ – one of the great tragedies – and the beauty is inconceivable for it is endless and runs through eternity.' Somewhere in the deeper recesses of his consciousness, Cherry believed (I believe) in the perfectibility of the human spirit. In an introduction to George Seaver's 1938 biography of Bowers, Cherry wrote of Birdie's 'spirit without boundaries.'¹⁷ He went on to say that Birdie and his companions 'have left something behind in men's minds; it is shadowy and intangible and perhaps a little fanciful, but it is something greater than all the pyramids in the world, and much more important.' Indeed.

Cherry was thirty-six when *The Worst Journey* was published. In many places his book – he only wrote one, as he had nothing further to say – reads like a restless threnody for lost youth; the disquiet of a man approaching middle-age sings through the clear prose. There are moments of pure Chekhovian longing as he contemplates the good gone days ('And the good times were such as the Gods might have envied us'¹⁸) and mourns the grubby superficiality of the present ('For we are a nation of shopkeepers'¹⁹). It is this strand of lyricism that gives the book its poetry – and it is profoundly poetic. As a writer Cherry had flawless instincts, however, and he recognised that the tone of wistful recollection and sorrow had to be

leavened with humour. 'Polar exploration',²⁰ he began robustly, 'is at once the cleanest and most isolated way of having a bad time which has been devised.' He smuggled in a lot of jokes.

The greatest adventure book of all time? I think so. None other combines such a thrillingly gripping story with such heartbreaking prose: no, I cannot think of a single one that comes close. *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*? As a writer, Lawrence is a lightweight next to Cherry. Maurice Herzog's *Annapurna*? Fabulous, but in the end, it's just about mountains. *Arabian Sands*? A classic, but it lacks the Homeric touch. From the crucible of suffering, Cherry fashioned a great work of art. Like all writers, he goes on talking after his death - and we should listen. *The Worst Journey*, as its author wrote, 'is a story about human minds with all kinds of ideas and questions involved, which stretch beyond the furthest horizons.'²¹

Sara Wheeler, 2003

[fn1](#). More detailed biographical information follows in George Seaver's Foreword to the 1965 edition.

Introduction by the author

POLAR EXPLORATION IS at once the cleanest and most isolated way of having a bad time which has been devised. It is the only form of adventure in which you put on your clothes at Michaelmas and keep them on until Christmas, and, save for a layer of the natural grease of the body, find them as clean as though they were new. It is more lonely than London, more secluded than any monastery, and the post comes but once a year. As men will compare the hardships of France, Palestine, or Mesopotamia, so it would be interesting to contrast the rival claims of the Antarctic as a medium of discomfort. A member of Campbell's party tells me that the trenches at Ypres were a comparative picnic. But until somebody can evolve a standard of endurance I am unable to see how it can be done. Take it all in all, I do not believe anybody on earth has a worse time than an Emperor penguin.

Even now the Antarctic is to the rest of the earth as the Abode of the Gods was to the ancient Chaldees, a precipitous and mammoth land lying far beyond the seas which encircled man's habitation, and nothing is more striking about the exploration of the Southern Polar regions than its absence, for when King Alfred reigned in England the Vikings were navigating the ice-fields of the North; yet when Wellington fought the battle of Waterloo there was still an undiscovered continent in the South.

For those who wish to read an account of the history of Antarctic exploration there is an excellent chapter in Scott's *Voyage of the Discovery* and elsewhere. I do not

propose to give any general survey of this kind here but complaints have been made to me that *Scott's Last Expedition* plunges the general reader into a neighbourhood which he is supposed to know all about, while actually he is lost, having no idea what the *Discovery* was, or where Castle Rock or Hut Point stand. For the better understanding of the references to particular expeditions to the lands discovered by them and the traces left by them, which must occur in this book I give the following brief introduction.

From the earliest days of the making of maps of the Southern Hemisphere it was supposed that there was a great continent called Terra Australis. As explorers penetrated round the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Horn, and found nothing but stormy oceans beyond, and as, later, they discovered Australia and New Zealand, the belief in this continent weakened, but was not abandoned. During the latter half of the eighteenth century eagerness for scientific knowledge was added to the former striving after individual or State aggrandizement.

Cook, Ross and Scott; these are the aristocrats of the South.

It was the great English navigator James Cook who laid the foundations of our knowledge. In 1772 he sailed from Deptford in the *Resolution*, 462 tons, and the *Adventure*, 336 tons, ships which had been built at Whitby for the coal trade. He was, like Nansen, a believer in a varied diet as one of the preventives of scurvy, and mentions that he had among his provisions 'besides Saur Krout, Portable Broth, Marmalade of Carrots and Suspissated Juice of Wort and Beer.' Medals were struck 'to be given to the natives of new discovered countries, and left there as testimonies of our being the first discoverers.'^{fn1} It would be interesting to know whether any exist now.

After calling at the Cape of Good Hope Cook started to make his Easting down to New Zealand, purposing to sail

as far south as possible in search of a southern continent. He sighted his first 'ice island' or iceberg in latitude 50° 40' S., longitude 2° 0' E., on December 10, 1772. The next day he 'saw some white birds about the size of pigeons with blackish bills and feet. I never saw any such before.'^{fn2} These must have been Snowy petrel. Passing through many bergs, where he notices how the albatross left them and penguins appeared, he was brought up by thick pack ice along which he coasted. Under the supposition that this ice was formed in bays and rivers Cook was led to believe that land was not far distant. Incidentally he remarks that in order to enable his men to support the colder weather he 'caused the sleeves of their jackets (which were so short as to expose their arms) to be lengthened with baize; and had a cap made for each man of the same stuff, together with canvas; which proved of great service to them.'^{fn3}

For more than a month Cook sailed the Southern Ocean, always among bergs and often among pack. The weather was consistently bad and generally thick; he mentions that he had only seen the moon once since leaving the Cape.

It was on Sunday, January 17, 1773, that the Antarctic Circle was crossed for the first time, in longitude 39° 35' E. After proceeding to latitude 67° 15' S. he was stopped by an immense field of pack. From this point he turned back and made his way to New Zealand.

Leaving New Zealand at the end of 1773 without his second ship, the *Adventure*, from which he had been parted, he judged from the great swell that 'there can be no land to the southward, under the meridian of New Zealand, but what must lie very far to the south.' In latitude 62° 10' S. he sighted the first ice island on December 12, and was stopped by thick pack ice three days later. On the 20th he again crossed the Antarctic Circle in longitude 147° 46' W. and penetrated in this neighbourhood to a latitude of 67° 31' S. Here he found a drift towards the north-east.

On January 26, 1774, in longitude 109° 31' W., he crossed the Antarctic Circle for the third time, after meeting no pack and only a few icebergs. In latitude 71° 10' S. he was finally turned back by an immense field of pack, and wrote:

'I will not say it was impossible anywhere to get farther to the south; but the attempting it would have been a dangerous and rash enterprise, and what, I believe, no man in my situation would have thought of. It was indeed, my opinion, as well as the opinion of most on board that this ice extended quite to the Pole, or perhaps joined to some land, to which it had been fixed from the earliest time; and that it is here, that is to the south of this parallel, where all the ice we find scattered up and down to the north is first formed, and afterwards broken off by gales of wind, or other causes, and brought to the north by the currents, which are always found to set in that direction in the high latitudes. As we drew near this ice some penguins were heard, but none seen; and but a few other birds, or any other thing that could induce us to think any land was near. And yet I think there must be some to the south beyond this ice, but if there is it can afford no better retreat for birds, or any other animals, than the ice itself, with which it must be wholly covered. I, who had ambition not only to go farther than any one had been before, but as far as it was possible for man to go, was not sorry at meeting with this interruption, as it, in some measure, relieved us; at least, shortened the dangers and hardships inseparable from the navigation of the Southern Polar regions.'^{fn4}

And so he turned northwards, when, being 'taken ill of the bilious colic,' a favourite dog belonging to one of the officers (Mr Forster, after whom *Aptenodytes forsteri*, the Emperor penguin, is named) 'fell a sacrifice to my tender stomach. . . . Thus I received nourishment and strength, from food which would have made most people in Europe sick; so true it is that necessity is governed by no law.'^{fn5}

‘Once and for all the idea of a populous fertile southern continent was proved to be a myth, and it was clearly shown that whatever land might exist to the South must be a region of desolation hidden beneath a mantle of ice and snow. The vast extent of the tempestuous southern seas was revealed, and the limits of the habitable globe were made known. Incidentally it may be remarked that Cook was the first to describe the peculiarities of the Antarctic icebergs and floe-ice.’[fn6](#)

A Russian expedition under Bellingshausen discovered the first certain land in the Antarctic in 1819, and called it Alexander land, which lies nearly due south of Cape Horn.

Whatever may have been the rule in other parts of the world, the flag followed trade in the southern seas during the first part of the nineteenth century. The discovery of large numbers of seals and whales attracted many hundreds of ships, and it is to the enlightened instructions of such firms as Messrs Enderby, and the pluck and enterprise of such commanders as Weddell, Biscoe and Balleny, that we owe much of our small knowledge of the outline of the Antarctic continent.

‘In the smallest and craziest ships they plunged boldly into stormy ice-strewn seas; again and again they narrowly missed disaster; their vessels were racked and strained and leaked badly, their crews were worn out with unceasing toil and decimated with scurvy. Yet in spite of inconceivable discomforts they struggled on, and it does not appear that any one of them ever turned his course until he was driven to do so by hard necessity. One cannot read the simple, unaffected narratives of these voyages without being assured of their veracity, and without being struck by the wonderful pertinacity and courage which they displayed.’[fn7](#)

The position in 1840 was that the Antarctic land had been sighted at a few points all round its coasts. On the whole the boundaries which had been seen lay on or close to the Antarctic Circle, and it appeared probable that the

continent, if continent it was, consisted of a great circular mass of land with the South Pole at its centre, and its coasts more or less equidistant from this point.

Two exceptions only to this had been found. Cook and Bellingshausen had indicated a dip towards the Pole south of the Pacific; Weddell a still more pronounced dip to the south of the Atlantic, having sailed to a latitude of $74^{\circ} 15'$ S. longitude $34^{\circ} 16'$ W.

Had there been a Tetrahedronal Theory in those days, someone might have suggested the probability of a third indentation beneath the Indian Ocean, probably to be laughed at for his pains. When James Clark Ross started from England in 1839 there was no particular reason for him to suppose that the Antarctic coast-line in the region of the magnetic Pole, which he was to try to reach, did not continue to follow the Antarctic Circle.

Ross left England in September 1839 under instructions from the Admiralty. He had under his command two of Her Majesty's sailing ships, the *Erebus*, 370 tons, and the *Terror*, 340 tons. Arriving in Hobart, Tasmania, in August 1840, he was met by news of discoveries made during the previous summer by the French Expedition under Dumont D'Urville and the United States Expedition under Charles Wilkes. The former had coasted along Adélie Land, and sixty miles of ice cliff to the west of it. He brought back an egg now at Drayton which Scott's Discovery Expedition definitely proved to be that of an Emperor penguin.

All these discoveries were somewhere about the latitude of the Antarctic Circle ($66^{\circ} 32'$ S.) and roughly in that part of the world which lies to the south of Australia. Ross, 'impressed with the feeling that England had ever *led* the way of discovery in the southern as well as in the northern region, . . . resolved at once to avoid all interference with their discoveries, and selected a much more easterly meridian (170° E.), on which to penetrate to the southward, and if possible reach the magnetic Pole.'^{fn8}

The outlines of the expedition in which an unknown and unexpected sea was found, stretching 500 miles southwards towards the Pole, are well known to students of Antarctic history. After passing through the pack he stood towards the supposed position of the magnetic Pole, 'steering as nearly south by the compass as the wind admitted,' and on January 11, 1841, in latitude 71° 15' S., he sighted the white peaks of Mount Sabine and shortly afterwards Cape Adare. Foiled by the presence of land from gaining the magnetic Pole, he turned southwards (true) into what is now called the Ross Sea, and, after spending many days in travelling down this coast-line with the mountains on his right hand, the Ross Sea on his left, he discovered and named the great line of mountains which here for some five hundred miles divides the sea from the Antarctic plateau. On January 27, 'with a favourable breeze and very clear weather, we stood to the southward, close to some land which had been in sight since the preceding noon, and which we then called the High Island; it proved to be a mountain twelve thousand four hundred feet of elevation above the level of the sea, emitting flame and smoke in great profusion; at first the smoke appeared like snowdrift, but as we drew nearer its true character became manifest. . . . I named it Mount Erebus and an extinct volcano to the eastward, little inferior in height, being by measurement ten thousand nine hundred feet high, was called Mount Terror.' That is the first we hear of our two old friends, and Ross Island is the land upon which they stand.

'As we approached the land under all studding-sails we perceived a low white line extending from its eastern extreme point as far as the eye could discern to the eastward. It presented an extraordinary appearance, gradually increasing in height as we got nearer to it, and proving at length to be a perpendicular cliff of ice, between one hundred and fifty and two hundred feet above the level

of the sea, perfectly flat and level at the top, and without any fissures or promontories on its even seaward face.'^{fn9}

Ross coasted along the Barrier for some 250 miles from Cape Crozier, as he called the eastern extremity of Ross Island, after the commander of the *Terror*. This point where land, sea and moving Barrier meet will be constantly mentioned in this narrative. Returning, he looked into the South which divides Ross Island from the western mountains. On February 16 'Mount Erebus was seen at 2.30 A.M., and the weather becoming very clear, we had splendid view of the whole line of coast, to all appearance connecting it with the mainland, which we had not before suspected to be the case.' The reader will understand that Ross makes a mistake here, since Mounts Erebus and Terror are upon an island connected to the mainland only by a sheet of ice. He continues: 'A very deep bight was observed to extend far to the south-west from Cape Bird (Bird was the senior lieutenant of the *Erebus*), in which a line of low land might be seen; but its determination was too uncertain to be left unexplored; and as the wind blowing feebly from the west prevented our making any way in that direction through the young ice that now covered the surface of the ocean in every part, as far as we could see from the mast-head, I determined to steer towards the bight to give it a closer examination, and to learn with more certainty its continuity or otherwise. At noon we were in latitude 87° 32' S., longitude 166° 12' E., dip 88° 24' and variation 107° 18' E.

'During the afternoon we were nearly becalmed, and witnessed some magnificent eruptions of Mount Erebus, the flame and smoke being projected to a great height; but we could not, as on a former occasion, discover any lava issuing from the crater, although the exhibitions of to-day were upon a much grander scale. . . .

'Soon after midnight (February 16-17) a breeze sprang up from the eastward and we made all sail to the

southward until 4 A.M., although we had an hour before distinctly traced the land entirely round the bay connecting Mount Erebus with the mainland. I named it McMurdo Bay, after the senior lieutenant of the *Terror*, a compliment that his zeal and skill well merited.’^{fn10} It is now called McMurdo Sound.

In making the mistake of connecting Erebus with the mainland Ross was looking at a distance upon the Hut Point Peninsula running out from the S. W. corner of Erebus towards the west. He probably saw Minna Bluff, which juts out from the mainland towards the east. Between them and in front of the Bluff, lie White Island, Black Island and Brown Island. To suppose them to be part of a line of continuous land was a very natural mistake.

Ross broke through the pack ice into an unknown sea; he laid down many hundreds of miles of mountainous coastline, and (with further work completed in 1842) some 400 miles of the Great Ice Barrier; he penetrated in his ships to the extraordinarily high latitude of 78° 11' S., four degrees farther than Weddell. The scientific work of the expedition was no less worthy of praise. The South Magnetic Pole was fixed with comparative accuracy, though Ross was disappointed in his natural but ‘perhaps too ambitious hope I had so long cherished of being permitted to plant the flag of my country on both the magnetic Poles of our globe.’

Before all things he was at great pains to be accurate, both in his geographical and scientific observations, and his records of meteorology, water temperatures, soundings, as also those concerning the life in the oceans through which he passed, were not only frequent but trustworthy.

When Ross returned to England in 1843 it was impossible not to believe that the case of those who advocated the existence of a South Pole continent was considerably strengthened. At the same time there was no proof that the various blocks of land which had been

discovered were connected with one another. Even now in 1921, after twenty years of determined exploration aided by the most modern appliances, the interior of this supposed continent is entirely unknown and uncharted except in the Ross Sea area, while the fringes of the land are only discovered in perhaps a dozen places on a circumference of about eleven thousand miles.

In his *Life of Sir Joseph Hooker*, Dr Leonard Huxley has given us some interesting sidelights on this expedition under Ross. Hooker was the botanist of the expedition and assistant surgeon to the *Erebus*, being twenty-two years old when he left England in 1839. Natural history came off very badly in the matter of equipment from the Government, who provided twenty-five reams of paper, two botanizing vascula and two cases for bringing home live plants; that was all, not an instrument, nor a book, nor a bottle, and rum from the ship's stores was the only preservative. And when they returned, the rich collections which they brought back were never fully worked out. Ross's special branch of science was terrestrial magnetism, but he was greatly interested in natural history, and gave up part of his cabin for Hooker to work in. 'Almost every day I draw, sometimes all day long and till two and three in the morning, the Captain directing me; he sits on one side of the table, writing and figuring at night, and I on the other, drawing. Every now and then he breaks off and comes to my side to see what I am after . . .' and, 'as you may suppose, we have had one or two little tiffs, neither of us perhaps being helped by the best of tempers, but nothing can exceed the liberality with which he has thrown open his cabin to me and made it my workroom at no little inconvenience to himself.'

Another extract from Hooker's letters after the first voyage runs as follows:

'The success of the Expedition in Geographical discovery is really wonderful, and only shows what a little

perseverance will do, for we have been in no dangerous predicaments, and have suffered no hardships whatever; there has been a sort of freemasonry among Polar voyagers to keep up the credit they have acquired as having done wonders, and accordingly, such of us as were new to the ice made up our minds for frostbites, and attached a most undue importance to the simple operation of boring packs, etc., which have now vanished, though I am not going to tell everybody so; I do not here refer to travellers, who do indeed undergo unheard-of hardships, but to voyagers who have a snug ship, a little knowledge of the Ice, and due caution is all that is required.'

In the light of Scott's leading of the expedition of which I am about to tell, and the extraordinary scientific activity of Pennell in command of the *Terra Nova* after Scott was landed, Hooker would have to qualify a later extract, 'nor is it probable that any future collector will have a Captain so devoted to the cause of Marine Zoology and so constantly on the alert to snatch the most trifling opportunities of adding to the collection. . . .'

Finally, we have a picture of the secrecy which was imposed upon all with regard to the news they should write home and the precautions against any leakage of scientific results. And we see Hooker jumping down the main hatch with a penguin skin in his hand which he was preparing for himself, when Ross came up the after hatch unexpectedly. That *has* happened on the *Terra Nova*!

Ross had a cold reception upon his return, and Scott wrote to Hooker in 1905:

'At first it seems inexplicable when one considers how highly his work is now appreciated. From the point of view of the general public, however, I have always thought that Ross was neglected, and as you once said he is very far from doing himself justice in his book. I did not know that Barrow was the *bête noire* who did so much to discount

Ross's results. It is an interesting sidelight on such a venture.'^{fn11}

In discussing and urging the importance of the Antarctic Expedition which was finally sent under Scott in the *Discovery*, Hooker urged the importance of work in the South Polar Ocean, which swarms with animal and vegetable life. Commenting upon the fact that the large collections made chiefly by himself had never been worked out, except the diatoms, he writes:

'A better fate, I trust, awaits the treasures that the hoped-for Expedition will bring back, for so prolific is the ocean that the naturalist need never be idle, no, not even for one of the twenty-four hours of daylight during a whole Antarctic summer, and I look to the results of a comparison of the oceanic life of the Arctic and Antarctic regions as the heralding of an epoch in the history of biology.'^{fn12}

When Ross went to the Antarctic it was generally thought that there was neither food nor oxygen nor light in the depths of the ocean, and that therefore there was no life. Among other things the investigations of Ross gave ground for thinking this was not the case. Later still, in 1873, the possibility of laying submarine cables made it necessary to investigate the nature of the abyssal depths, and the *Challenger* proved that not only does life, and in quite high forms, exist there, but that there are fish which can see. It is now almost certain that there is a great oxidized northward-creeping current which flows out of the Antarctic Ocean and under the waters of the other great oceans of the world.

It was the good fortune of Ross, at a time when the fringes of the great Antarctic continent were being discovered in comparatively low latitudes of 66° and thereabouts, sometimes not even within the Antarctic Circle, to find to the south of New Zealand a deep inlet in which he could sail to the high latitude of 78°. This inlet, which is now known as the Ross Sea, has formed the