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Canada's Arctic Regions

BY MR. GEORGE P. MACKENZIE.*

PRESIDENT SEDGEWICK: Back in the nineteenth century in the year 1895 I was a callow, exceedingly callow, youth starting out to teach school in a little hamlet in Nova Scotia. In the next section to me, a much more advanced teacher at that time was our guest of today. A person of the name of Mackenzie, whose ancestors had come to Nova Scotia in the early days, was likely to be affected by such a thing as the Klondike rush in 1898 or thereabouts. At any rate he gave up teaching and cleared out with the pioneers to the Klondike. Since then he has been living almost continuously in the land of the midnight sun and his experiences, I am sure, will be interesting to all who are here. During the last year or two he has had charge of expeditions to the far North on the eastern side of the Dominion and it is of these chiefly that he will speak today.

MR. GEORGE P. MACKENZIE: Mr. President and gentlemen of the Canadian Club of Toronto, I greatly appreciate the privilege of being here today as your guest. It is an honor to be asked to speak to any Canadian Club and a very signal one indeed when it is the club of the Queen City where, because of your size and importance, men of affairs gravitate sooner or later and I know you are privileged to entertain as your guests, perhaps beyond other clubs, men who play leading roles in the world affairs.

It is my purpose today to tell you something of our expedition to the Arctic this year and of what the Government is doing there, and in order to marshal my thoughts into some form of order I have the difficulty of deciding just what bit of our experiences and observations to give

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you. It is the abundance of the material rather than the poverty of it that is the trouble. I have here a map for the purpose of refreshing your geography of the north country. It indicates the Northwest Territories of Canada and the Canadian Arctic archipelago. The red line indicates the course of the ship this year and the various ports are shown of Government activity in the north.

These islands and particularly the forbidding seas that surround them have a history, but I may not go into that at length. Suffice it to say that deeds have been done here as great in valor as any that led to the conquest of Mexico or Peru or the occupation of the better known portions of Canada. But unlike the captains and conquerors of the south explorers have come and gone leaving behind them little trace of their passage and the only treasure they brought back was an incomparable record of human courage and endurance. They had a vision of another sea route round the world and to have any appreciation of that vision we must turn back the clock a few centuries and visualise the world when Elizabeth sat on the throne of England, and Western Europe, Britain, France and Spain were rising from the confusion of the Middle Ages to national greatness. They knew this to be a continent or island lying midway between the empires of the west and those of the east. It is true they had found a way round the base to Africa, but it was long and arduous beyond description, and even more so the passage round Cape Horn. It was a tremendous undertaking. They knew of the existence of Greenland and Labrador. Fishermen had forged west to the cod banks of Newfoundland and witnessed the silent procession of huge bergs swinging out from the north; and in seeking to explain the Elizabethan sailors we must also dismiss from our minds our present knowledge of the hopelessness of the task to which they directed their efforts. To Frobisher, Davis, Hudson, there seemed to be no reason why there should not be a short passage through these troublesome seas to the broad bosom of the Pacific. The Queen herself had given approval to the expeditions and it is on record that as Frobisher was leaving on his first voyage she waved the ships good-bye. It was from such

acts that there sprung up such devotion to the Queen and the cause she espoused and it is due to the efforts of these men that most of the islands of the archipelago were discovered.

Canada's title to this vast area is based on an Imperial Order-in-Council passed in 1882 under which all the British possessions in America, not included in Canada, with the exception of Newfoundland, became part of the Dominion. That gave a holding title which to be rendered secure must be followed up by occupation and government. And so in the years that have intervened certain surveys have been taken and certain expeditions have visited some of the islands and some new islands have been placed on the map. In 1922 after a careful review of the situation it was felt that in the interests of our sovereignty in the north, in the economic development of the islands and particularly in the interests of the native Eskimo, the time had arrived when direct and permanent contact should be maintained. So in 1922 we find a well-equipped expedition leaving Quebec and in the years that followed, 1923, 1924 and 1925, posts were established at Pond Inlet and Dundas Harbor, and this year we were able to establish a post on the Bache peninsula.

Having decided on this policy the Dominion, I think, was fortunate in having in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police an organization which, because of the high character of the personnel, was admirably fitted to act for the various departments of the Government in many difficult and complex problems in connection with the occupation of these remote areas.

A former expedition which had left Quebec disclosed that there were certain structural weaknesses in the "Arctic" and it was no longer suitable for the work. The "Beothic" was therefore chartered, a 2,700 ton sealer of good power and well adapted to the work. We sailed from North Sidney on the fifteenth of July. On board we had forty-six persons; eight were police going north to replace others; Dr. Weeks and Mr. Haycock of the geological survey; Dr. L. D. Livingstone and W. Q. Ketchum, my secretary and thirty-two officers and crew. Captain Falk, an experienced navigator, was master of the ship.

As there are no coaling stations in the north you are obliged to carry all the fuel and provisions you need for the ship and we had one year's extra provisions because there is always the possibility of being tied up in the north for a year, and there were also supplies to replenish the stores of the various detachments.

We put out through the Gulf of St. Lawrence into the Atlantic and on the twenty-first of July we crossed the Arctic Circle. On the twenty-second we arrived at Godhaven where there is a small, but good harbor and a few vagrant bergs. It is the headquarters of the Danish Government in North Greenland and the Governor for North Greenland resides here, on Disko Island, with a staff of scientists doing work in the various departments for their Government. We have much in common with the Danes and this port is always made and this year I had the honor of having Governor Rosendahl and Dr. Porsild on board. The Eskimos here call themselves Greenlanders and they have advanced to the point of local government. At that time the local parliament was in session and members of the expedition were invited to visit it. Quite to my surprise I was asked if I would say a few words. I did so, and I think they have a sense of humor there because my few simple sentences when interpreted turned out to be quite an oration as it reached the audience. Afterwards we received a party on board ship and they saw a picture show.

We left Godhaven on the twenty-second and our next port of call was Pond Inlet. We did not make a direct course, the reason being that the main pack was moving south and we followed along the eastern portion until we found an opening and then got across. We crossed about the seventy-fourth parallel. We encountered dense fog during the entire passage of one hundred and fifty miles, so dense that the man on the lookout could not be seen from the bridge. With many bergs in sight this task is difficult in clear weather, but with a combination of fog and ice it required seamanship of a high order. We could get no observations. Not even the compasses were reliable. We would get as much deviation as eleven degrees in these latitudes and it was only by constantly tapping them that

you would get any result from the needle at all. With two compasses of the same type side by side even, there would often be a difference of five points.

In any case we emerged from the ice on the third day almost opposite Pond Inlet. Here we picked up Inspector Wilcox, the officer commanding the police in the northern areas. Goods were unloaded and we left. The next port of call was Dundas Harbor on Devon Island. We encountered the usual trouble with fog and ice and went on to Craig Harbor. Here we had a great deal of trouble unloading supplies. The anchorage was very poor and we had to lie off a big distance from the shore and had to move many times. However, the supplies were eventually unloaded. About this time we received an S.O.S. from the schooner Morrissey, carrying a scientific expedition. It was aground on the Greenland coast and in difficulties. We started out to assist her and had been six hours on her course when we got in direct touch with her, the previous message having been relayed, and she stated that they were out of immediate difficulty.

We were now in the region about latitude 76 degrees north where icebergs are born. The coastline both on the Greenland and Ellesmere side is, as you will see by the map, deeply indented. The interior at both points is ice-capped and every valley or ravine is an arm of the huge glacier of the interior. Immense masses of ice are continually breaking off into the ocean and a new iceberg is formed. They drift out down here and interfere with the trade routes of the Atlantic. Many of the bergs flow fifteen hundred feet submerged and two and three hundred feet in height—about seven-eighths submerged. They are tremendously affected by the ocean currents and it is not an unusual sight to see a field of ice, which is more affected by the wind, moving with the wind in one direction and bergs moving in the opposite direction. You can see hundreds on the skyline at one time and with the sun low on the horizon, reflecting the different colors, it is one of the most impressive sights I have ever seen.

In clear weather we made our way to Etah which we reached on the third of the month and the same afternoon

we crossed Smith Sound to Rice Strait. There is always heavy ice here and we had difficulty getting into the strait. However in due time we did it and there was then a short trip to Fram Havn, about a mile from the north end of the strait. This, we all agreed was the most desolate place in the entire Arctic. The glaciers and the formation of the coastline cause heavy winds to come whistling down the strait; you are surrounded by high, rugged hills, cold, dark and forbidding, with no sign of vegetation or life. On Pim Island is the starvation camp where Greely's expedition of 1883 starved to death. This was a good place to get away from. On the last expedition in 1925 we had been unable to get away from here and had landed a hundred tons of coal and supplies and we decided to load these supplies on the ship and be ready for getting away when the ice opened. On the sixth of August the opening came. The harbor is so small that you have to be careful you don't get on the rocks on one side and the glacier on the other. We found a great deal of ice, but we were able to force our way through past Cape Rutherford and Alexandra Haven. I suppose these names don't mean much to you. Alexandra Haven was where Admiral Nares fifty-one years before had anchored his ships, the *Alert* and *Discovery*, and from the description of his report of ice conditions we found that they were very similar to what he had found.

We had no positive place where we wished to establish a base on the Bache peninsula, but we thought the best place would be on the south of the peninsula from which all the areas to the north and west could be patrolled, and the best information we had was that there was no anchorage along the shore. We found that was not true, as we came into a fine harbor two miles across and a mile deep.

We went ashore and there was an admirable place to erect a base. There was a southern exposure and a stream of water by the door (when we got the door up), and plenty of game in the vicinity. Where the means of transport is dogs it is necessary to have meat for the dogs and there was plenty of walrus and seal about. We stayed three days, with perfect weather all the time, the sun shining continuously, of course, and everything as well as you could

expect in those latitudes. We landed here Sergeant Joy and constables Bain and Garrett and three families of natives. They are well equipped for this winter and their duty will consist of patrolling those areas.

On the seventh of August this year a post office was established on the Bache peninsula, the most northerly government office in the world, so that today, if you can get there you may drop a letter in the box and for a two cent stamp you will have the same assurance of delivery as if you posted it here. It is true the mail man comes only once a year, but he is reliable.

The police at this post take over all the departments of the government. They act for the customs department. You may enter and clear a ship there. You may wish to take up a homestead and they will arrange that for you and perform any other acts necessary in a government way in those areas.

Just a word of tribute to those men who are maintaining their lonely vigil at these outposts of civilization. As you know they are picked men; picked not only for physical, but for temperamental fitness, for a man with a gloomy outlook on life has no place in the Arctic. And these boys persist in seeing the silver lining of every cloud, in fact they don't believe there is any cloud at all. Their duty is to act for the various departments of government, but their main duty is in the patrols. I have no time to go into it at length but I might mention one or two. Sergeant Joy, now at Bache, when he was at Lake Harbor last year patrolled from Jones Sound, Devon Island to Dundas Harbor, a feat never before accomplished. Later on in the season, with one native he patrolled up the west coast of Ellesmere round to Axel Heiberg and back, over a thousand miles. From Pond Inlet Inspector Wilcox patrolled 900 miles and back and Sergeant White went across Baffin Land, a distance of 1,300 miles. I may say that Major Burwash last year went along the entire north coast of the mainland and wintered here at King William Island and came out on the Hudson Bay at Chesterfield and returned on the Hudson Bay boat from that point. He traversed 2,800 miles, winter travel, alone; no other white man with him and many of

the natives he saw had never seen a white man before. He had a most interesting experience and gathered much information for the government.

With regard to the patrols I think I may say with safety that if any similar ones had been made to those I have mentioned by people looking for publicity the story would have been told in block letters across the newspapers. But they are buried in official reports. Some enterprising journalist may dig up a story from them now and then, but these men don't seek or desire publicity. They range the Arctic day by day with dauntless courage and efficiency. They have completely won the confidence of the natives and worthily uphold the fame of the force to which they belong.

On the return trip, on the ninth of August, as soon as we got out of the harbor we saw that conditions had changed tremendously. The year's ice was still holding, although we could force the ship through and managed to get an anchorage to wait for a suitable opening. While considering the question it was decided for us. The ice swung in behind the ship and we had to go on. We got about five miles to the entrance to Rice strait when the vessel was completely blocked. About a mile away was the first of a row of icebergs and our immediate object was to get by the line of those icebergs. We eventually made it, but the ship suffered considerable damage, being pinched once or twice and some of the one and a half inch plates were bent and we naturally had some leaks. We were able to handle the situation, however. We worked from one berg to another until we were within two and a half miles off the strait and here the main pack itself had taken the ground. Looking to the north and east at that time there was not a drop of water to be seen; nothing but ice twenty-five to thirty feet thick. It was like going along a concrete pier and no ship could resist it. Along the shore where the ice had grounded there was a small passage and we walked over the pack to look at the possibility of making the channel. It was six and a half fathoms and the captain thought it deep enough and began to work for position behind a berg, but there was an increasing wind and we abandoned the possibility for the time. There seemed to

be no way of getting through but after further consideration it was decided to take another look at it. Seamen are happy when there is plenty of water under the ship. As the ship worked into the position of the day before there was a tense moment. We came to the six and a half fathoms, forced the ship a little further and found that the water shoaled very rapidly—five and a half, five, four and a half, until we got to three and a half fathoms. Our ship drew three fathoms and there might be rocks about. It was a question of going back to our position or trying the passage. We realised this of course, there was to be no turning back; there was no room to swing the ship and once we were in we could not back out. We had three and a half fathoms for ten ships' lengths and then the water slowly deepened. It was a fine bit of seamanship. We emerged finally into open water at Rice Strait and then we found that the ice had blocked the strait. Twice we had to break through, but we had plenty of explosives and it presented very little trouble so in a short time we were in comparatively open water again.

We had on the ship a barometer; not the kind Mr. Stupart uses, but that indicated the feeling of the members of the expedition. It was an eiderdown bed that the doctor had and as conditions changed the doctor's bed would be offered for bidding. When things looked gloomy the price went up and when things were all right the price went down. This morning the doctor was asked the price of the bed and he said he had taken it off the market that day. A little later he could not give the bed away.

We had many interesting experiences on the way back and we made various ports of call as we went south. At Pagnirtung we left the two geologists and Dr. Livingstone who remains north this year to make a study of the native Eskimo. On the twenty-third we left for home and arrived back forty-five days after leaving, on the twenty-ninth of August. We had traversed seven thousand miles of Arctic waters, reaching our objective in record time. One thing, I think, is worthy of note; that is the success of our wireless. Last year for one reason or another our wireless was not a success. We were out of touch for two months and

grave fears were entertained for the safety of the ship. This year we were in two-way communication every day. The Canadian Marconi company had placed equipment on the ship that they thought suitable and provided one of their best radio engineers and I think we established a record in that regard for Arctic communication.

Now, gentlemen, if my rambling narrative has in any way claimed your interest, no doubt some of you as you have looked at the map have been saying to yourselves, "Well, after all, is it worth while?" I know that is a question that is frequently asked, and as I think it is worth while and as I think the inquiry is an honest one, I try to answer it something like this: "What we have we hold" is a doctrine to which I think most red-blooded Canadians still subscribe, especially if it is come by honestly. It is now recognised as a principle of international law that to make a clear title you must exercise jurisdiction. A nation may no longer play dog-in-the-manger. If she is not prepared to do all that she reasonably can do she can with ill grace complain if some more aggressive nation wishes to relieve her of responsibility.

These islands and the seas that surround them have no considerable wealth. The polar seas abound with life of great economic value. We have rare species of game that must be protected. There are valuable furs and those in a position to know say that it may not be far distant when regular air routes will be established across the sub-Arctic, because the distance is tremendously less between, say, London and Tokyo, and these islands, as landing bases will become valuable. And though we know very little about the land the indications are that it is favorable to mineralization and what may develop is unknown, though steps are being taken to find out. Pessimistic views were entertained by millions in the United States when Alaska was picked up from the Russian bargain counter and it is a matter of regret that Canadian and British statesmen did not have vision to take advantage of the opportunity of purchasing Alaska when it was open to them, for by every natural law it should be part of Canada. And the annual value of Alaska today is twelve times what the purchase price was and it is but on

the threshold of its development. It is dangerous to generalise and say that what has happened there will happen on these islands but the matter is worth considering in that light.

I don't think I could be termed a dreamer or sentimentalist, but even in this materialistic age sentiment does play an important part. In the first place we, as a nation, have a sacred duty to this sterling race of native Eskimo that inhabit the islands. In every way they are worth while. As a people they are superior to the Indians and the government has done much for the Indians. They have admirable traditions and such a philosophy of life that the gloomiest pessimist here would bend his head in shame if he knew how little would make these people happy.

Many historians have said that the story of the conquest of the Arctic is the most glorious in all history. Certainly there is romance without parallel. For centuries these undaunted sailors, inadequately equipped, have dared the dangers of the uncharted seas. Nothing that has ever happened can compare with the search for the Northwest passage, in human interest, in naked heroism, in pursuit of idealism, under circumstances of dread peril. Expedition after expedition, in whole or in part, suffered hunger, starvation, death; but those that followed learned to neutralize the hazards and traced the charts of the Canadian Arctic archipelago. And the hands that traced these charts were overwhelmingly British as is abundantly evident in the record of the names of the Arctic: Davis Strait, Smith Sound, Jones Sound, Lancaster Sound, Baffin Land, Ellesmere, North Devon, Pond Inlet, Cumberland Gulf, King William Land, Victoria Land, and other names reminiscent of the Union Jack.

As they were the first in exploration and discovery so they were in gifts of money, from Sir John Franklin down a long list, illustrious with glory. Is it not a worthy heritage, made sacred by their sacrifices? They fought the good fight. They kept the faith and they pass the torch to us. In justice to their memory we cannot do other than carry it on.