

A Talk with Dr. Nansen.

BY J. ARTHUR BAIN.



N the 9th of September last, I was one of the foremost of the vast assemblage at the picturesque capital of Norway which welcomed back Dr. Nansen after his long absence in the Polar regions. The reason why I, an Englishman living far away from the coast, took a journey to Christiania to mingle with the enthusiastic crowd, may be stated in a couple of sentences. I was in Christiania in June, 1893, and had a long and pleasant chat with Dr. Nansen a week before the *Fram* started. My wife and I stayed with Mrs. Nansen at Lysaker for a few days after the Doctor had set sail. I heard the Norwegian people express their grave doubts concerning the return of the *Fram*, and stating their opinion that Nansen was foolish to the verge of insanity; so when the news came of Dr. Nansen's return, I hastily packed my traps and set out for Christiania, determined to be amongst those who welcomed the intrepid traveller to his native land. I arrived at the capital in time to take part in the brilliant reception that was accorded to Dr. Nansen and his twelve brave companions, and was fortunate immediately afterwards in securing an interview with Dr. Nansen and obtaining from him, not merely an account of his voyage, but also his opinions regarding the results of his Arctic discoveries, which can hardly fail to be of interest at this moment.

Lysaker, where the celebrated Norwegian traveller resides, is a suburb of Christiania, situated on the edge of the fiord, six miles distant from the capital. On arriving at Lysaker Station I walked through the green meadows and odorous pine woods, thinking, by the way, of how deeply Dr. Nansen must have been

impressed by the call of duty to leave such fair and pleasant scenes for the inhospitable Arctic regions. I noted the remains of the torches and other lights which had blazed along this path as Nansen drove home on the night of his landing. I recalled the picture of the returned explorer, standing in the doorway with bared head, surrounded by his wife and friends, replying to the enthusiastic plaudits of the crowd of admiring countrymen who had followed him from the capital to his very door.

Some English men and women have written and talked as if Nansen's expedition was more or less in the nature of a failure, but those who have followed the matter more closely will hold a very different opinion, and I hope that what I am about to write will



DR. NANSEN AND HIS WIFE ON "SKI."
From a Photograph.

remove the last trace of the feeling that the long and arduous voyage was taken in vain.

When I arrived at the Nansen home I knocked boldly at the door, and put the question, "Is Dr. Nansen in?"

"Yes," replied the servant, but at this moment the Doctor appeared, and after a hearty hand-shake led me into his drawing-room, a most interesting and artistically furnished apartment, filled with curios gathered from all parts of the globe. The Doctor appeared in perfect health, despite his three years' sojourn in the icy north. He was a trifle paler than when I saw him last. He assured me that the trials and dangers he had gone through had but strengthened his physique. Around him, mingled with the luxuries of civilization, were many mementos of the home of the seal and the walrus and the bear, but these he explained were all relics of his Greenland trips, the trophies of his recent Arctic journey being still on board the *Fram*.

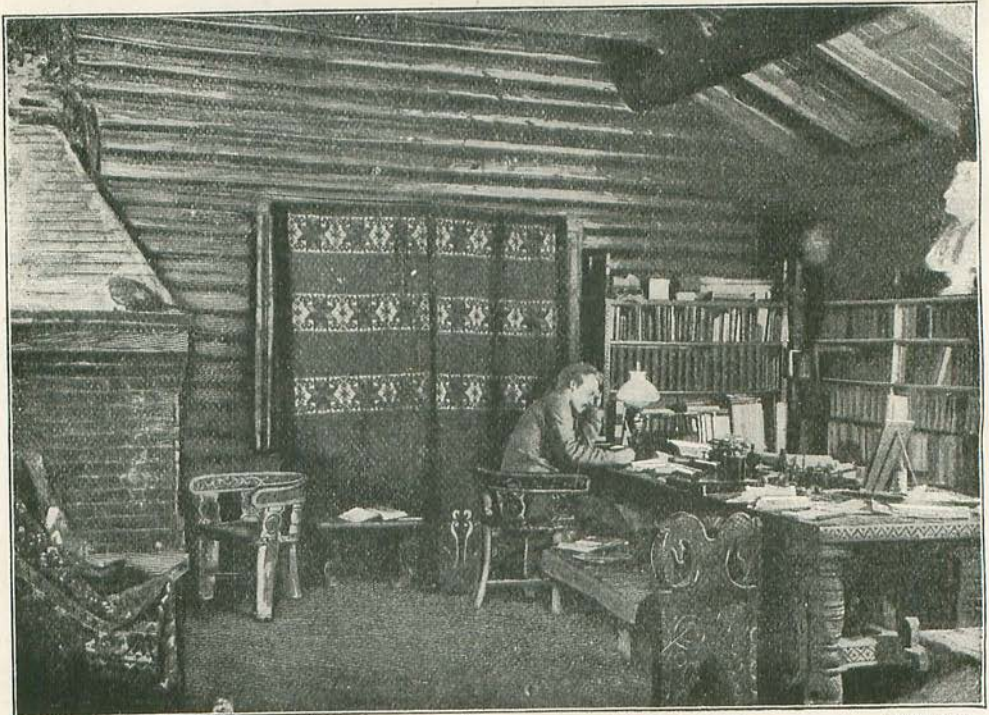
It is impossible to look into Dr. Nansen's face without something of the feeling of hero-worship. A personal association with some men whose record we have admired is frequently followed by a sense of disappointment. There is no such risk in coming in

contact with Dr. Nansen. One feels insensibly that he is of the type of men fitted for herculean tasks, and his physical form in no degree contradicts the record that he can bear fatigue and exposure, and is one of the most accomplished skilobers in Norway. The key of his life can be found in the answer he once made to a hostile critic—an answer that deserves to ring through the ages to comfort the doubters and faint-hearted: "Man wants to know; when man no longer wants to know, he will no longer be man."

Leading the way into his study, we arranged ourselves for a comfortable chat.

"Are you pleased with the results of your journey?" was the first question I put.

"Oh, yes," he replied, with a smile. "The scientific results, I believe, will be acknowledged of great value. Professor Mohn and other scientific friends who are at work tabulating my material are quite enthusiastic over the observations made during our three years' wanderings." Dr. Nansen then proceeded to talk with me on the main features of the voyage of the *Fram*, and of his walk when he left the ship and, accompanied only by Lieutenant Johansen, attempted to penetrate farther north. There can be no doubt that, in comparison with the



From a

DR. NANSEN'S STUDY, IN WHICH THE INTERVIEW TOOK PLACE.

(Photograph.)

journeys of other Arctic explorers, Nansen's voyage places all recent attempts in the shade. No explorer since Franklin has gained so great a hold upon the imagination of his contemporaries. No journey in this generation has been so full of results which promise to be of permanent interest to the geographical world. Before starting out, Dr. Nansen, admitting the impossibility of accurately forecasting his voyage, expressed the opinion that he could not in any case return home in less than three years, but his ability to return he never for a moment doubted.

In our conversation Dr. Nansen sketched the early part of his voyage, alluding at the outset to the interesting meeting off Melo, in longitude 13°20 east and latitude 64°48, with the Wilson liner *Rollo*, outward bound to the North Cape. As the *Rollo* got even with the *Fram*, rockets were fired and the passengers from all parts of the ship cheered lustily. Dr. Nansen acknowledged these salutations, and was much gratified by this hearty farewell, expressed some distance from the port of embarkation. After leaving Vardo the *Fram* had a good passage to Nova Zembla. The *Fram* first met the ice in latitude 69°50 N., longitude 50 E., about ten miles north of Kolgueff Island, but forced its way through in splendid style and arrived at Jugor Strait on July 29th.

"Are you superstitious?" I interrupted.

"No, not a bit of it; but why do you ask?" he said.

"Well," I replied, "there are thirteen in your crew all told, and people look upon that as an ill omen, and some superstitious folk prophesied ill of your expedition because it consisted of thirteen."

"It certainly was a *lucky* number for us," he replied. "None of my men were ill at any stage of the voyage, none of them gave me a moment's anxiety; besides, I arrived home on the 13th August, 1896, and it was upon the

13th (August, '96) that my ship escaped from the clutches of the ice. So, you see, thirteen has no perils for me."

"Has any photograph of the thirteen men been published?" I asked.

"No, not yet," he replied. "The thirteenth man, Bernstsen, joined us at the last moment, and he is superstitious to the extent that he manifests a strong aversion to having his photograph taken."

I was, however, able afterwards to obtain a photograph of the whole crew, but it is singular to note that, though Bernstsen consented to be one of the group, he did his best to prevent the photographer from securing his features.

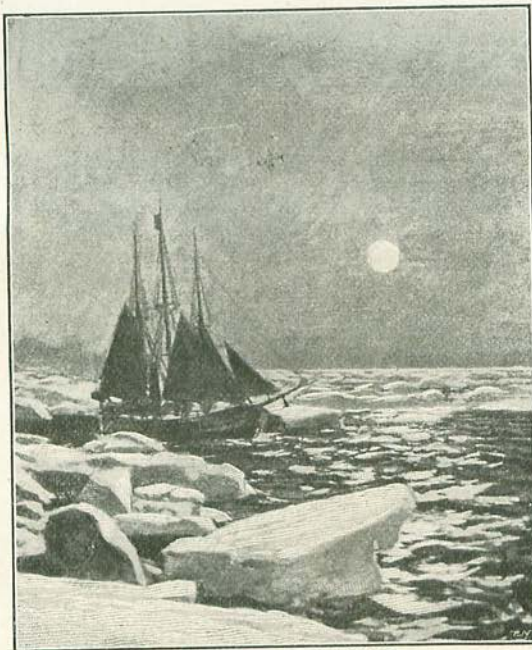
"The three years' hardships seem to have told but little on you or your companions," I said.

"No," the Doctor replied. "They are fine, strong men, accustomed to ice work, and all have returned home in perfect health; some, indeed, being stouter than when they left

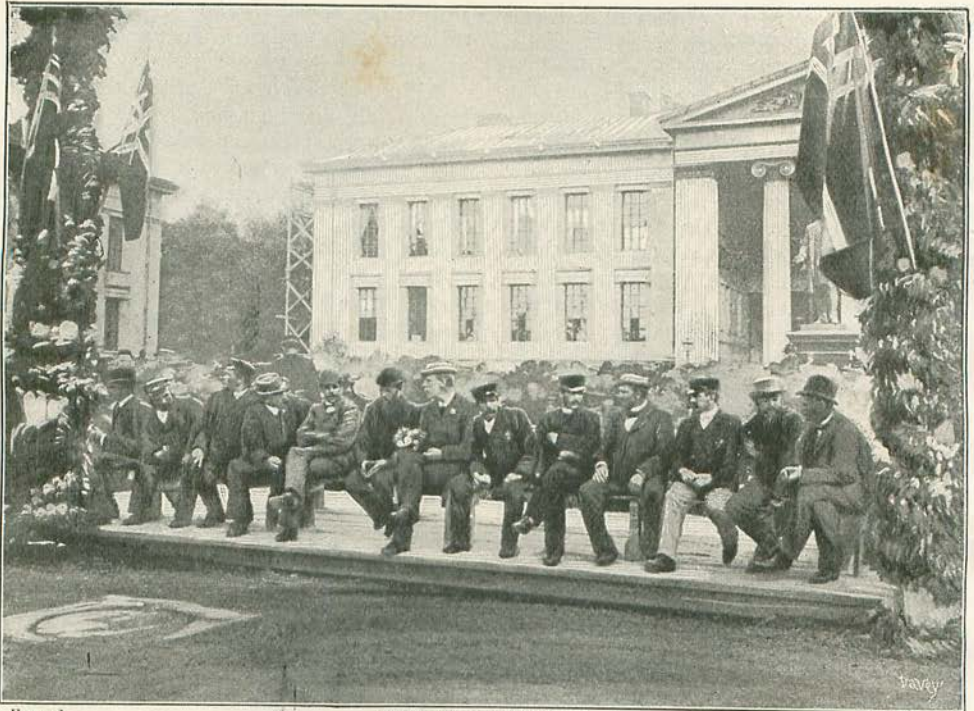
home. We owe our thanks, however, to Dr. Blessing for his patient skill and care, especially in the winter months of darkness."

In response to further questions, Dr. Nansen said he was busily occupied in writing an account of the voyage, which would be issued in parts in Norway. The earlier numbers would be published before Christmas, but it would not be completed before the spring ('97), and an English translation could hardly be ready before 1897 had advanced some distance. The scien-

tific results are to be published separately in Norwegian and English by the Norwegian Government, but as they are to be thoroughly edited by specialists, it may be two or even three years before they are issued from the press. I hinted to the Doctor that his popular account of the journey was awaited with great interest in England, and would doubtless



FIRST MEETING WITH THE ICE.
From a Drawing.



From a]

"THE LUCKY THIRTEEN."

[Photograph.

prove a financial success, to which he replied, with a smile, "I hope so; yes, I hope so."

There can be little doubt that the record of the three years spent on the *Fram* by Dr. Nansen, Sverdrup, and their companions will prove a treasure-house of scientific facts and thrilling adventure. All Europe is awaiting the publication of Dr. Nansen's book, for then only will the world know the full story of the heroic journey of these devotees of science, and the account of their doings will doubtless prove one of the most interesting as well as one of the most valuable chapters in the annals of Arctic exploration.

"What will become of the *Fram*?" I asked the Doctor.

"She will probably be kept at Horten. I may require her again soon, and cannot possibly have a better ship for Arctic or Antarctic work."

"Will you again attempt to reach the North Pole?" I queried.

"I cannot possibly say yet," he replied; "I think so. But perhaps I shall endeavour to discover the South Pole first, and then make a renewed attack on the North Pole on my return from Antarctic regions. I must, however, finish my work in connection with the records of my recent expedition before making definite plans for another voyage."

I have little hesitation in expressing the opinion that the Doctor will undoubtedly make another attempt to reach the North Pole. There is a weird attraction in these Arctic regions; there is a splendour in the heavens, and a magnetic mystery which hovers over a large portion of these unexplored seas and lands. There can be no doubt that the powerful fascination has taken a firm hold of the adventurous spirit of Dr. Nansen and over those who have once entered the Arctic world. No fear of suffering is sufficient to subdue the desire to solve the great problem. The only cure for the Arctic fever is the discovery of the North Pole, and it is my opinion that Dr. Nansen will either solve the problem or perish in the attempt.

Continuing his narrative of the voyage, Dr. Nansen spoke of the journey from Jugor Strait through the Kara Sea—in the northern portion of which they were fortunate in discovering an island on their eastern voyage—to the mouth of the Olenek River.

They reached this point on September 15th, but, as the winter was rapidly approaching, decided not to call for the sledge-dogs as arranged, lest the ice should close in and imprison them for the whole winter. Three days later they were steaming along the west

of the New Siberian Islands, and on September 22nd they "took a ticket with the ice," or, in other words, made the *Fram* fast to a floe in latitude 78°50' N., longitude 133°37' E., and a few days later the ice closed round, and the *Fram* was frozen in for the winter for failure or success.

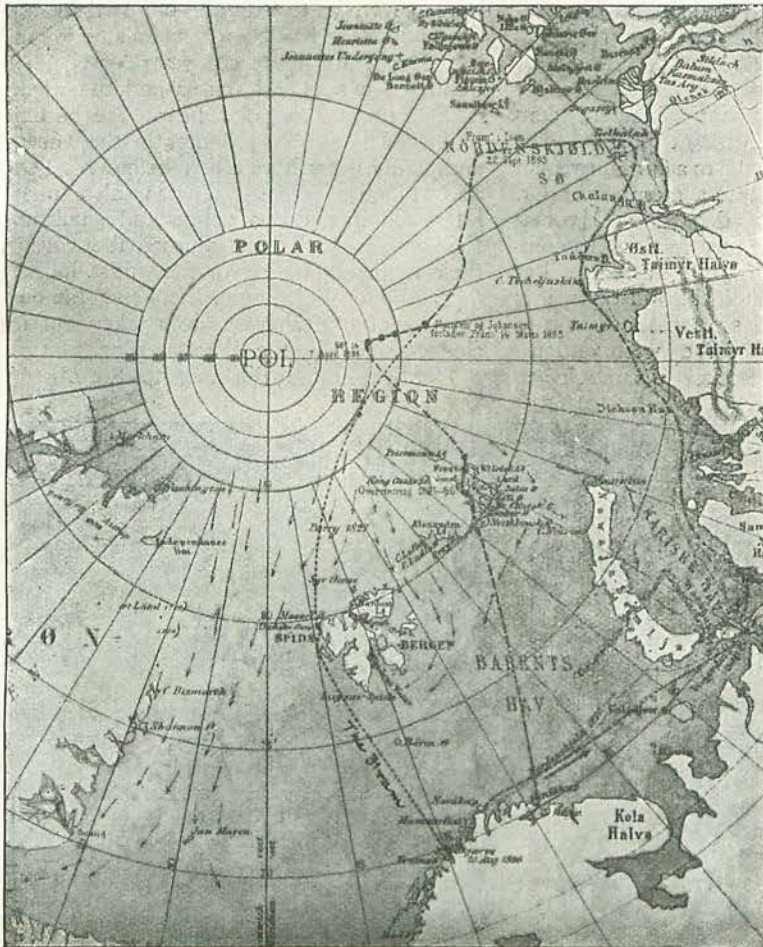
They saw no land after leaving the New Siberian Islands, but drifted north and north-west during the autumn and winter. It was during this drift that Dr. Nansen made his greatest discovery of the voyage—the existence of a wide *deep* sea towards the North Pole, having a relatively warm temperature in its depth; a continuation of the Arctic Sea situated between Greenland on the one hand and Norway and Spitzbergen on the other. It was previously supposed that the North Polar Sea was a shallow basin with icy cold water from top to bottom. Dr. Nansen's voyage has not only upset this theory, but has

astonished the scientific world by the remarkable discovery regarding its depth and temperature.

The pressure upon the *Fram* during this drifting was most severe, but I was allowed by a special permit from Dr. Nansen, who had refused scores of applications from curious sightseers, to make a close examination of the ship as she lay in the Piperviken, and can testify to the fact that she looks little the worse for the expedition, except that the paint upon her hull is now an unknown quantity. The way in which she successfully encountered the ice pressure has naturally delighted the heart both of Dr. Nansen and her designer and builder. Twice only were the crew alarmed: once before Dr. Nansen left, and again a short time after his departure. On the first occasion the ice pressure was most severe; to use Dr. Nansen's words: "She was firmly

frozen in ice of more than 30ft. measured thickness. This floe was over-ridden by great ice masses, which were pressed against her port-side with a force which threatened to bury and crush her."

Boats, sledges, kayaks, and provisions were placed upon a neighbouring floe in readiness for the worst; but the *Fram* did not fail, and, after an interval of anxiety, officers and crew returned to the ship more confident than ever in her ability to resist the ice. The only disagreeable experience was the crashing, creaking, and grinding of the ice as it closed in around the ship. The *Fram*, it may be explained, was so constructed as to rise in resistance to the ice pressure and thus escape damage, and it so successfully accomplished



MAP OF THE POLAR REGIONS—THE DOTTED LINE SHOWING THE COURSE TAKEN.
Vol. xii.—88.

this work that at times the crew came on deck to find the *Fram* lifted from 9ft. to 12ft., and her bottom to be distinctly seen resting upon the ice.

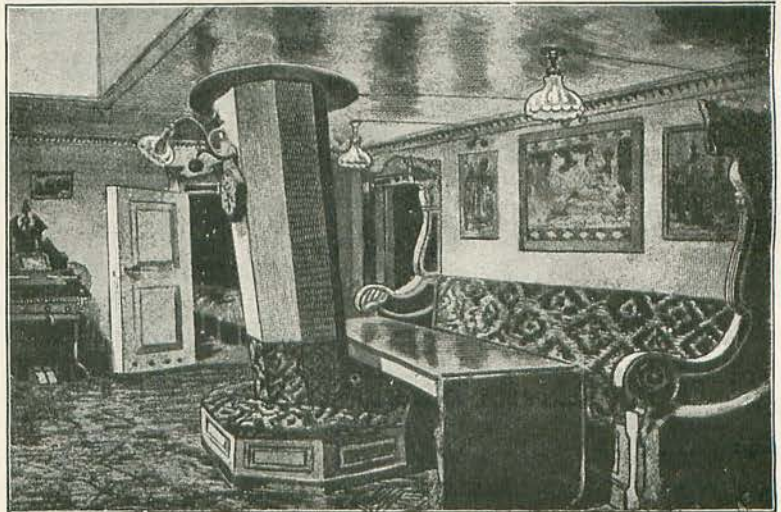
In my visits to the *Fram* I was fortunate enough to meet several members of the crew, and I had a long chat with the gallant skipper, Sverdrup, and with Lieutenant Johansen, a fair-haired, clean-shaven man, with a brightly good-humoured face. As Johansen recounted Dr. Nansen's and his own ice tramp, his comrades crowded round and listened with interest to all he told me; one and all envied him for being the chosen companion of Dr. Nansen for that daring excursion. I also met Lieutenant Scott Hansen, who had charge of the meteorological, astronomical, magnetic, and geodetic observations, and with Dr. Blessing, who told me that, apart from his medical duties, which were fortunately light, he aided Dr. Nansen and Scott Hansen in the scientific work, and took some part in observing the Aurora and deep-sea observations. Dr. Blessing, who is a young man, is a capital scientist and botanist of no mean order. He was the only unmarried member of the crew, and a romantic incident connected with him is not without interest. Dr. Blessing had been engaged to a fair Norwegian maiden before he became a member of Dr. Nansen's party; after his departure the young lady naturally became very anxious to communicate with her future husband, but although love laughs at locks and bolts, it is not easy for Cupid to send his messages to the ice-bound regions of the north, and for a time even feminine resource was unequal to the task of dispatching a letter to Dr. Blessing somewhere near the North Pole.

One day, however, the lady read of M. Andrée's proposition for a balloon voyage to the Pole, and she approached him with a request that he would take a love missive, in the hope that it would reach the object of her choice. Though every ounce of additional weight was a serious matter, gallantry prevented

M. Andrée from refusing the request of the young girl, and he took charge of the letter, in the full belief that he would meet the *Fram* and be able to deliver the note to Dr. Blessing. When, finally, the projected balloon voyage had to be given up in consequence of the failure of favourable southerly winds, M. Andrée handed the letter to the captain of a whaling vessel that was going northwards, on the off-chance that it might fall in with the *Fram*. Singularly enough, the vessel did encounter the *Fram*, with Dr. Blessing on board; the letter was delivered, and thus some time before reaching the Norwegian coast the young doctor saw the handwriting of his fiancée, and read her written protestations of love.

I spent one afternoon on the *Fram* in company with Henricksen, a veritable giant, with broad shoulders and a pleasant, round, determined-looking face, the harpooner of the expedition. His exceptional physical powers were severely tested on more than one occasion. He had been, previous to joining the *Fram*, for fourteen years engaged in hunting the seal and walrus and the whale, and at times the Polar bear. He became renowned as the best hunter in the "fleet," and eighty bears have fallen before his keen and practised rifle. I was also much interested in a dozen young and handsome Eskimo dogs, all born during the voyage, their mother standing in the midst, looking a proud and fond parent, she being the only survivor of the thirty-six dogs taken out for sledge-hauling by the *Fram* in 1893.

Henricksen led the way to the *Fram's*



From a

THE SALOON OF THE "FRAM."

!Drawing.



From a

DR. NANSEN'S WORK-ROOM ON BOARD THE "FRAM."

[Drawing.]

saloon, and showed me through the cabins where the explorers slept during the voyage. All the crew shared the saloon in common. An excellent library was provided on board, and for their recreation, cards, chess, draughts, and other games had been provided, while there was also an organ, a violin, and other musical instruments. Henricksen displayed to my wondering gaze the rifles, hunting-knives, harpoons, and other implements, and I was somewhat amused at the number of empty medicine bottles in the doctor's berth, showing that he had not spared physic to the crew on the least sign of indisposition. Ascending past the galley upstairs, we entered Dr. Nansen's and Captain Sverdrup's work-rooms, furnished with an elaborate stock of scientific and other instruments, and looked into the forehold, yet filled with provisions. Here (in the forehold) Henricksen also showed me the sledges, kayaks, ski, and cooking apparatus used by Dr. Nansen and

having been severely tested in actual use. The sledges especially bore traces of hard pulling, being patched with much care in many places.

Captain Sverdrup, like Dr. Nansen, seems a born leader of men, and he was the Doctor's trusted companion in the memorable first crossing of Greenland. I had some conversation with him on the bridge of the *Fram*, and he assured me that the three years he spent on board their "Arctic home" were comparatively comfortable ones.

"Nansen and Johansen," he added, parenthetically, "had the worst of it. An expedition like ours," he said, "is never free from excitement or grave danger, and we had our share. Our principal duties were to take regular scientific observations, and this was an onerous and responsible task, and we found plenty of physical exercise in endeavouring to keep the ship free from ice. That the dread Arctic disease (scurvy) did not show itself, is attributed to the nutritious food we had,



CAPTAIN SVERDRUP.

From a Photo. by L. Szacinski, Christiania.



From a Photo. by] KEEPING THE SHIP FREE FROM ICE. [L. Szaciński.

and the readiness of all to partake of bear and seal flesh when caught."

I left the *Fram* and her gallant crew behind with deep regret. As I stepped into my small boat alongside I felt that I was leaving hallowed ground.

Dr. Nansen is a photographer of considerable ability, and he was much interested in the photographs I had taken of his birthplace at Froen, $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile from Christiania (where he was born on the 10th October, 1861), and he kindly signed for me several of his latest portraits. In reply to a question as to the photographic equipment of the *Fram*, Dr. Nansen said, "We had a full-plate camera, half-plate, quarter-plate, and many hand cameras, with a large stock of plates for each."

"Were your results satisfactory?" I asked.

"They were most satisfactory," he replied. "We exposed over 1,000 plates of one size or another, and few turned out failures. We took scenic photographs

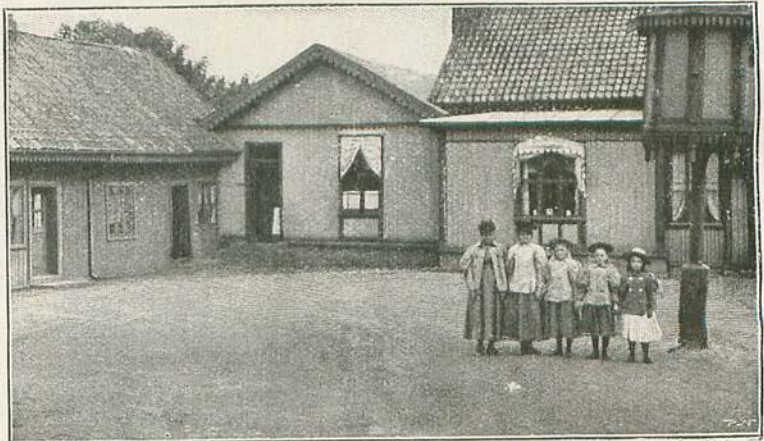
along our route, besides snap-shots of Polar bears, walruses, seals, and other animals and birds we met from time to time. I hope to insert a large selection in my book."

"In what did your scientific work consist?" I asked.

"That requires a little consideration," said the Doctor; then, after a pause: "It consisted of exact observations, and my expedition will be chiefly a gain to meteorology and oceanography. We had to take magnetic and meteorological observations on sea and land, when we found any land. We had to observe the temperature of the ocean at all depths and seasons of the year, to sound, trawl, and dredge, and to study the character and distribution of marine organism. Yes, I hope our expedition will enrich the records of astronomy, geology, botany, and kindred subjects. During the whole drift I spent most of my time in taking a series of exact obser-

ervations in the above subjects, but I was ably seconded in the work by Lieutenant Scott Hansen and Dr. Blessing, and when I left the *Fram* the former took charge of the scientific work. The depth of the sea along the track of the ship ranged between 2,000 and 2,500 fathoms. The lowest temperature observed on the *Fram* was 62deg. below zero (Fahr.), testifying to the theory that the coldest spots on earth are south of the Polar circle."

Dr. Nansen added that his favourite subject was biology, which he studied earnestly during the first series of Arctic voyages, for he



DR. NANSEN'S BIRTHPLACE, FROEN, CHRISTIANIA.
From a Photo. by J. A. Bain.

loved science first and exploration second. He did not, however, have much chance of biological research during the recent voyage.

It is a popular fallacy that Dr. Nansen started out solely to reach the North Pole. If this had been so, no doubt the criticisms of those who say that the voyage was a failure would be justified. But that view is inaccurate and unjust to Nansen. What he went out to do was to explore the Arctic basin, and, if possible, settle certain problems connected with it. He said this, in so many words, in his addresses to the Norwegian and English Geographical Societies, in 1892. Here is a typical sentence: "It may be possible that the current will not carry us across the Pole, but *the principal thing is to explore the unknown Polar regions*, not to reach exactly that mathematical point in

those who maintained that in trusting to what they styled "supposed currents" he was throwing away the lives of himself and his party. All other performances pale in comparison with this feat of the Norwegian explorer. It is not merely that he has gone some 200 miles nearer the Pole than any of his predecessors; it is not merely that he has made one of the most heroic journeys on record; but it is that he has established the truth of his theory of Arctic currents, and has brought back an enormous amount of valuable scientific information. The expedition has been a great geographical triumph. Its organizer passed over an enormous part of the girth of the eastern Polar Sea—covered almost the widest area of the earth's surface that can be covered in a like voyage, and they travelled at a pace which



From a

COOKING UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

[Photograph.]

permitted them to mark upon the chart accurately all the districts traversed. There was no line of retreat, no going back and covering the same ground twice, as has been the case in nearly every previous Arctic voyage. The effect of this constant forward movement was obviously to save time, and the value of this will be apparent when Dr. Nansen's record is fully disclosed.

which the axis of our globe has its northern termination." Bearing this in mind, it is impossible to pronounce the expedition a failure, even if there were no other discovery than that of the deep sea in the Polar regions.

Before leaving Norway in 1893, Dr. Nansen made three predictions regarding his venture. The first was that 1896 would probably be the first year in which it would be heard of. The second was that, if the *Fram* were deserted, the party would come home by Franz Josef Land and Nova Zembla. The third was that if they stuck to the ship she would, by the aid of the drift, bring them out between Spitzbergen and East Greenland. This is precisely what has happened. Dr. Nansen has vindicated his theory of the Polar drift, and discomfited

Lieutenant Johansen told me in regard to their ice journey, when it was decided that the Doctor himself should leave the *Fram* to explore the north of their route, that they tried to start three times. The first time the sledge broke down at a short distance; the second start occupied three days, after which they had to return and complete their stock of necessary provisions. Their final start was on March 14th, 1895, when the *Fram* was at 83°59' N. latitude and 102°27' E. longitude, and after this they never turned till it became impossible, when at 86deg. 14min. N. latitude, to proceed further, because of the impassable hummocky ice, and therefore they decided to go south to Spitzbergen *via* Franz Josef Land, where there was every possibility of a ship being found, but if not they would winter on Franz Josef

Land, there being every likelihood of finding game for food. Of that memorable journey much has been written. Their escapes were almost miraculous, and danger constantly stared them in the face. On one occasion, while dragging their sledges along a narrow path, the travellers were suddenly confronted by a Polar bear, but Johansen, who is a man of exceptional physical strength, caught the intruder by the throat and held him at arms' length, while Dr. Nansen quickly dispatched him with his rifle.

On another occasion, after an excursion inland, they returned to see their canoes drifting from land, with all their necessaries on board. To reach the boats was a matter of life or death, but, without a moment's hesitation, Dr. Nansen sprang into the ice-cold water and swam after the drifting canoes. He was chilled to the bone, but he succeeded in his object, and brought the canoes safely to the spot where his anxious comrade stood watching the incident. I cannot conceive a more daring act of courage than that of Dr. Nansen and Lieutenant Johansen's in leaving the *Fram*, with the certainty of remaining in the inhospitable regions for a year, perhaps two, and of never regaining the ship. They had no winter clothing, and provisions only for a hundred days. Yet they departed cheerfully, laden with an exhaustless stock of hope and charged with loving messages to wives and to friends if those on board the *Fram* should perish in the far north. Day after day, month after month passed, and still they toiled on. The little stock of food was almost exhausted and the dogs were starving. And here a touching trait of Dr. Nansen's character shows itself. He dared not expend a cartridge in shooting one of the poor beasts to make food for the other

dogs, and sometimes for his companion and himself, and as he could not bring himself to kill his own faithful dumb followers in cold blood, he killed Johansen's sledge dogs whilst Johansen killed his. In this manner they struggled on until the dogs were all slaughtered. On the question of their food, a point which Dr. Nansen specially mentioned to me may be worth notice. Most Europeans manifest a strong aversion to feed upon seal or walrus, but Dr. Nansen and Johansen had previously proved the value of adaptation in the matter of diet to environment, and the Doctor believes that he and his companions largely owe their lives to the fact that they adopted a mode of life corresponding closely to that of the Eskimos and Samoyades, in subsisting mainly on the blubber of the seal, walrus, and the bear.

Fortunately open water was reached soon after the dogs had been slaughtered, and thereafter bears, seals, walrus, and at times Arctic birds were found, and furnished food until Dr. Nansen and his colleagues met Mr. Jackson, who placed the ss. *Windward* at their disposal to proceed direct to Norway.

The story of how Nansen and his comrades met Mr. Jackson is one of the most dramatic incidents recorded in the romance of history, but it is now a matter of common knowledge, and although Dr. Nansen spoke with gratitude of the kindness shown to him, there is no need here to enlarge on the point. It was a fortunate meeting, which Dr. Nansen declares he shall ever regard with feelings of gratitude; but it must, in fairness to him, be stated that, had he not come across Mr. Jackson, his original plan of proceeding to Spitzbergen would probably have been carried out with nothing more than a few more hardships and a little longer delay.



From a]

DR. NANSEN IN HIS KAYAK.

[Photograph.