

WITH NANSEN IN THE NORTH:

A CHAT WITH LIEUT. JOHANSEN.

BY ARCHIBALD CROMWELL.



AS the readers of the WINDSOR MAGAZINE will have an opportunity of reading in successive issues the story of Lieut. Johansen's experiences on the Nansen Expedition, I

sought an interview with the intrepid Norwegian who was Nansen's sole companion "Farthest North," for fifteen months after leaving the *Fram*.

Lieutenant Johansen is a fine type of the sturdy, strong Norwegian. He is thirty-one years of age, and is a native of Skien, a town in Norway which derives its name from "Ski." No one who has read Dr. Nansen's book will forget the constant reference to "ski-running" among the experiences of the explorer. There were only two younger members in the expedition than Johansen. He had joined the Norwegian Military School only three or four years before he offered his services to Dr. Nansen. He has always had a big reputation as an athlete in his own land, from his youth upwards, and had read with avidity every book that came within

his reach dealing with travel. When I asked him what led to his joining Dr. Nansen's expedition, he replied—

"I had been hearing and reading a good deal about Dr. Nansen's plans, and the thought came to me that this was just the sort of work I should like. I posted off to

his house and laid my wishes before him. 'But,' said Dr. Nansen, 'every place in the *Fram* is filled already, and fresh applicants keep on arriving. I can do nothing for you.' However, he relented so far as to allow me to visit the medical man who was examining all the candidates for the expedition. As it happened, one vacancy remained unfilled—that of a stoker—and I gladly accepted that post. I did not mind what sort of work I had, so long as I managed to go on the *Fram*. I can tell you, stoking was rather hot work during the two months before we got fixed in the ice. After that time I was meteorological assistant, and kept a very careful log-book. People have often asked me how we managed to keep our journals up to date. That is



LIEUTENANT JOHANSEN.

(From a special photo by Percy Lankester, Tunbridge Wells.)

always Ibsen's question when I see him in Christiania. But the fact is, we were delighted to do anything that varied the monotony,



LIEUT. JOHANSEN IN HIS SKI DRESS.
(From a sketch by A. Bloch.)

and we used to anticipate our writing quite keenly."

As our readers will have an opportunity of learning, it happened that the strength of mind and body which belonged to Johansen stood him in such good stead that when the time came for Nansen to press forward, and leave behind the vessel and crew, the dauntless explorer chose Johansen as his sole companion. These two men braved the rigour of great cold, faced fifteen months' loneliness, remote from their fellow men, and reached the point "Farthest North" attained up to this time by any human being. No wonder that Dr. Nansen has paid his friend and colleague such generous tribute in his book; no wonder that Johansen is second in interest only to Dr. Nansen, and that great audiences have given him enthusiastic receptions, and learned geographers have been delighted to make his acquaintance.

"Now, Lieutenant, tell me a little of your doings since you *came south*, as one must call it."

"Well, I have been home and received my lieutenancy in the Army from the King of Norway. I was previously in the Reserve,

but now I am appointed to be stationed at Tromsø, so that this visit to England ends my leave."

"What has been the most pleasant impression you have received from your visit to London?"

The Lieutenant paused for a little while, and then replied, "Your club life, with its hospitality, its generous interest in a stranger, its opportunities of meeting with interesting people, has delighted me; but I have had so many pleasant experiences. I accompanied Dr. Nansen to see Mr. Gladstone before he went to Bournemouth, just after his return from Cannes. That wonderful man was not quite well on the day we called, so we saw him in his bedroom. He was very kind, and took a great interest in all that Dr. Nansen said about his journey."

"You must have been glad to get back to civilisation after so many months of inability to use soap?"

"Well, no one can tell, for one thing, what a pleasure it was once more to get a good wash. Before we arrived at Jackson's quarters, Nansen and I looked like negroes. I esteemed it a great honour to accompany Dr. Nansen on the famous sledge journey. It had, of course, the charm of uncertainty, and, as it proved, we were out in our reckoning in the time which would elapse before we came into contact with

Jackson's party. I may tell you that we both gained considerably in weight on the expedition. I suppose that was due to the fact that in the hut life we had little chance of exercise."

This concluded our conversation, which

had been conducted mainly by means of the courteous interpretation of his friend Mr. Brækstad. For, although Johansen speaks English, he is a little nervous of using our language.



Photo by

[Lankester.

MR. H. L. BRÆKSTAD.