SCOTT MET PERILS AMUNDSEN ESCAPED

Comparison of Their Reports Shows That the Elements Doomed British Party.

ONCE ONLY 130 MILES APART

Even Then Fortune Was Frowning on Scott, While Amundsen Was Meeting Most Favorable Conditions.

Capt. Roald Amundsen and Capt. Robert F. Scott passed each other in the antarctic some time during Christmas week of 1911. Amundsen, jubilant in his victory, was speeding away from the pole, with good fortune attending each day's journey. Scott, still hopeful, was forging stubbornly toward his goal, passing from the 86th to the 87th parallel and fixing his records and supplies so that when the last auxiliary detachment of his party started back under the guidance of Lieut. Evans he would be ready for the final dash.

Amundsen was returning, confident that he had been the first man to stand at the south pole. It was conceivable that another had been before him and that storms had destroyed any unsubstantial memorial that might have been left to mark the conquest. But this seemed improbable, for when he was at the pole the weather was calm, and he believed that this was the prevalent condition above the last level plains of snow. So while Scott was pushing on Amundsen was sweeping back to Winter quarters, happy in the attainment of his goal.

That was the spirit in which the two rival explorers passed each other in that Christmas week now a little more than a year ago. The exact hour and the position of their passing cannot be determined, but from the story which Capt. Amundsen cabled to THE TIMES upon his return to Tasmania and the story which Capt. Scott sent back in the first week of 1912 by the hand of Lieut. Evans, it can be roughly calculated that they were nearest together on Dec. 28, 1911, when they were a little more than 200 miles from the pole and about 130 miles apart. At the rate of Amundsen's returning speed he could have crossed the intervening ice and snow and met Scott in less than five days' traveling.

Each had just experienced a Christmas spent in the polar snows. To each the marking of the day was a ceremony. Each noted it in the story he sent to the world. They had eaten their Christmas dinners, these explorers, not much more than 150 miles apart. To one it was a feast of celebration, to the other, perhaps, a dedication.

Shackleton's Vision of the Race.

Thousands of miles away, amid the comfort of very different surroundings, another explorer was eating his Christmas dinner and thinking of them. Sir Ernest Shackleton, who had experienced two antarctic Christmases, spoke of them on Christmas Eve in London, when all England was wondering whether Scott had achieved the fulfillment of his hope—to spend Christmas Day at the most southerly point of the globe.

"I picture to myself," Shackleton said, "Scott and Amundsen on the big plateau, about 10,000 feet above the level of the sea, close to the pole, but whether fighting their way toward it or on their way back after discovery, who can say? I imagine a strong, biting, and southerly wind, with a temperature of about 40 degrees below zero, warm clothes, frozen sleeping bags, and a thin tent, which just serves to keep out the wind, but not the cold. Food will be short, but I am sure, from my experience, that little bits of biscuit and bacon have been hoarded up for the great day and a diminutive plum pudding will be produced from the place where it has lain hidden, though talked and thought about for at least a couple of months. Inspired by that succulent delicacy, so different from the ordinary sledging fare, the thoughts of the explorers will come very close to home.

"If either of the main expeditions has already planted its country's flag at the pole, the day will be one of pure joy in that camp, however scanty may be the fare and however frostbitten may be the limbs and faces of the explorers."

The Two Christmas Dinners.

Shackleton had prophesied aright. This was Amundsen's story of Christmas, 1911, as it was cabled from Hobart in the following March:

"I and my four companions on the pole party kept the Christmas festival in the high mountains, not a great distance from the pole. The feast consisted of an extra allowance of biscuits cooked in a porridge, a poor substitute for the abundance of the Norwegian Christmas, but we enjoyed it heartily."

Yet for Amundsen's party the day was celebrated by no resting, but was devoted, like the other days of that stretch, to a vigorous advance toward the Winter quarters. Scott's narrative is more terse at this point and leaves filling by the imagination. There were eight in the party then, for it was a week before Evans and the other two turned toward the north.

"On Christmas Day," Scott wrote in that next to the last communication to civilization, "we were close up to the eighty-sixth parallel, and the prospect of *Christmas fare gave us an excellent* march of seventeen miles, but the effect was not so happy the following day."

From comparisons of the stories told by Scott and Amundsen it is possible to fix where each one was when the other was passing through some noteworthy period of his undertaking.

When Scott started from Hut Point, with high hopes for his ultimate success, November was already two days old and Amundsen had moved well on his way toward the pole. By that time Amundsen was advancing from 81 degrees to 82 degrees, a latitude that Scott did not reach till Thanksgiving Day.

Amundsen the Favorite of Fortune.

On the day of Amundsen's triumph, Dec. 14, 1911, when he and his men reached the south pole, Scott was still struggling toward the goal under the most discouraging conditions overhead and underfoot. Amundsen's narrative of those days, when he turned from the pole and started on the long journey to Winter quarters, is a story of serenity. Scott's is one of disheartening circumstance. While Amundsen was at the goal, where all hands took hold of the silken flag of Norway to place it in position, Scott was meeting these conditions:

"Largely as a result of the snowstorm the lower reaches of the glacier were filled with terribly soft snow. Men on foot sank to the knee at each step. It would have been quite impossible to advance had we not pulled on skis. As it was the runner surface of the sledges proved inadequate. They frequently sank to the crossbars, requiring to be extracted with standing pulls. For four days we struggled in this morass, scarcely advancing five miles a day, although working ten to eleven hours. We did not get abreast of Cloudbreaker Mountain until the 17th, [the day that Amundsen started home,] so that the snow cost us a week's advance."

In his final message to the public, which was found with Scott's body in his tent, he speaks at the outset of this period of high wind and soft snow as one of the big misfortunes of the endeavor.

Probably, next to that hour of 3 P. M. Dec. 14, when Amundsen reached the south pole, his greatest triumph was when the cable carried the news of his victory to his King and to the world. That was on March 8 last, and at that time Capt. Scott and his three companions were experiencing the bitterest disappointments and suffering. Evans had died, and already Oates was enduring *pain almost beyond human strength.*

"I do not think human beings ever came through such a month as we have come through," the dying Scott wrote of that very period when the Fram put into port at Hobart, and the news of Amundsen's success was flashed around the world. The stories, genuine or pirated, were still fresh in the minds of all the civilized world when, in the far southern ice fields, Capt. Oates of the Inniskillen Dragoons, determined that he should never be a drag on the chances of the others, said to them, 'I am just going outside,' and walked into the teeth of the raging blizzard to die, as Scott said he died, like a "brave man and an English gentleman." Those were the things that Scott and his men knew at the very time when the first plaudits for Amundsen's achievement were coming from every land. By March 29, when Scott and the other two survivors of the party were probably overcome, the Fram had started on her way from Hobart to Buenos Aires.

There is one last comparison to make. On that day, Nov. 12, when Wright's searching party, scouring the antarctic snows for the lost leader and companions, same upon Scott's tent and the three dead men within, Amundsen had tasted the triumph of a reception in Christiania, and was headed for London, where he was to address the Royal Geographical Society.

Amundsen Never Short of Food.

Perhaps the most striking contrast between the two narratives is in the descriptions of the return trips. Scott's brief story of that final halt eleven miles from the supplies that might have saved them, with food almost gone and the blizzard making further advance out of the question—this brief story following the account of the fearful cold and the strong head winds during the return trip when they did not know what it was to have one completely fine day—must be read side by side with the story of Amundsen's return, which was brief, not because he was weak from hunger and exposure when he wrote it, but because it was too placidly uneventful to be worth telling. Witness the paragraph he gave to it:

"On the return journey we had not a single day's rest. We did not even rest on Christmas Day, but passed on, day after day, through all weathers. There was little that was adventurous about the trip, but it was very hard work."

The ineffaceable picture of Scott and Wilson and Bowers dead from starvation in the tent must be kept, historically beside Amundsen's graphic account.

"Of real hardships in the way of food on the pole journey there were none. Rather the reverse, for when my companions reached the ship they were almost fat, and could not eat as much as when they started. The dogs, too, were fat and that they had lived well during the last part of the journey was shown by the fact that they would hardly touch the seal meat, which was lying in large quantities about the base camp."

The matter of food differs markedly in the two stories. Throughout Scott's story that he sent back on Jan. 3, 1912 by Lieut. Evans runs a constant note of concern about the supplies, which would probably not have appeared in Amundsen's story, even had his been written when the pole was still some 150 miles ahead of him. Scott wrote on Dec. 21, after the loss of a week due to the soft snow and fearful winds:

"By programme I arranged to push on from the 85th parallel with eight men and 12 units of provisions, but I hope to reserve a margin over this. As we stand, we are only half a day's food short on programme and should have a good chance of getting through."

It was with a month's provisions that the party of five started south from 87.32 degrees on Jan. 3, with the pole then only a fortnight's distance off. Even despite his earlier anxiety, Scott calculated later that the advance party would have returned to the glacier with a surplus of food had it not been for the sickness and injury to Evans. He gave as one of the three fatal misfortunes the sickening of Oates, the delaying storm and the "shortage of fuel in our depots"—the fuel so necessary for the preparation of food that might have saved them. When that final message was written, there was "fuel for one hot meal and food for two days."

Dogs at the Food Reserve.

Scott set down in his message that he could not account for the shortage at the depots. Amundsen, however, foresaw and feared a tampering with his depots and approached each one of them on the return with apprehension. He gave this account:

"Three of the best dogs deserted the party at 83 degrees. He had killed a female dog at 82½ degrees and the dogs went back, searching for her. This caused us great anxiety, for it was feared that the dogs would pillage the depots, on which the party depended. When we returned to 83 degrees, after being at the pole, we saw fresh dog tracks around the large snow cairn used as a depot there. Curiously enough, the pemmican in the depot was untouched. Traces of the dogs were followed to 82½ degrees, where the female dog had been killed. They had found the body, which was placed on a heap of snow as a food reserve for the party, and, having eaten it, the dogs had gone to the depot at 82 degrees, where a large number of cases were piled up. They had got at one of the cases of pemmican and had not only eaten that, but had also eaten the leather straps and other indigestible articles. They had also eaten two dogs which we had killed and *left for food* at this depot."

How different was Amundsen's food experience from Scott's is recorded in this paragraph cabled by the Norwegian explorer:

"In regard to food, we had full rations all the way, but in that climate full rations are a very different thing to having as much as a man can eat. There seems little limit to one's eating powers when doing a hard sledging journey. However, on the return journey, we had not merely full rations, but as much as we could eat from the depots after passing 86 degrees."

Altogether Amundsen's return journey was far easier than his trip to *the pole, for the latter* had been accomplished on an average march of 25 kilometers a day. They came home at a rate of 36 kilometers a day. This Amundsen explained by "unusually favorable weather." Much of his good fortune and Scott's tragedy may be written in terms of weather—and his unusually favorable return weather must be contrasted with Scott's return weather—not one entirely fine day in all and then the final storm.

The weather contrast holds from the start. Take the outward passage from 82 degrees to 83. Each explorer made a record of that distance. Scott wrote:

"The weather grew worse, some storms were frequent, the sky continually overcast, and land very rarely visible. Under these circumstances, it was most difficult to keep a straight course and maintain steady marches."

Amundsen, who crossed the same latitude about a month earlier, reports:

"The trip from 82 degrees to 83 degrees became a pleasure trip—excellent ground, fine sledging and an even temperature. Everything went like a dance."

The blizzard which made Scott's advance so difficult at this point was probably the same storm which afflicted Amundsen at the same time, while he was passing from 85 to 86 degrees. A stop of four days was forced by a blizzard, and then, "tired of this," as he said in his own account, he and his men pushed on in a furious blizzard, through drifting snow so dense that there was no seeing ahead. Badly frozen faces paid the penalty for the distance covered in the gale of Nov. 27. It was not until the 29th that the sun shone again, and the wind died down.

Seaman Evans of the Scott party died on Feb. 17 at the foot of Beardmore Glacier. Some time before he had suffered a brain concussion while traveling over rough ice—"frightfully rough ice," Scott called it, traversed when the weather was unspeakable. Amundsen experienced rough ice, too. Roughest of all was the "Devil's Glacier," with its lower part much broken and dangerous. The snow bridges very often burst. There were holes and crevices without number. Then came the frozen sea, and the most unpleasant stretch of all. Amundsen called that stretch the "Devil's Dancing Place." It sounded hollow, as though they were walking on empty barrels, and there a man and a dog fell through.

The Elements Doomed Scott.

Altogether, however, Amundsen was blessed with good weather. The very elements doomed Scott. But in comparing their own accounts it must be remembered that Amundsen penned his when he announced his victory, and when a minimizing of the difficulties may have seemed the part of modesty and of chivalry to the yet unheard-from Scott. Scott wrote the most vivid part of his story when it fell to him to explain to the world his death, and the deaths of his four companions. The most striking chapter begins:

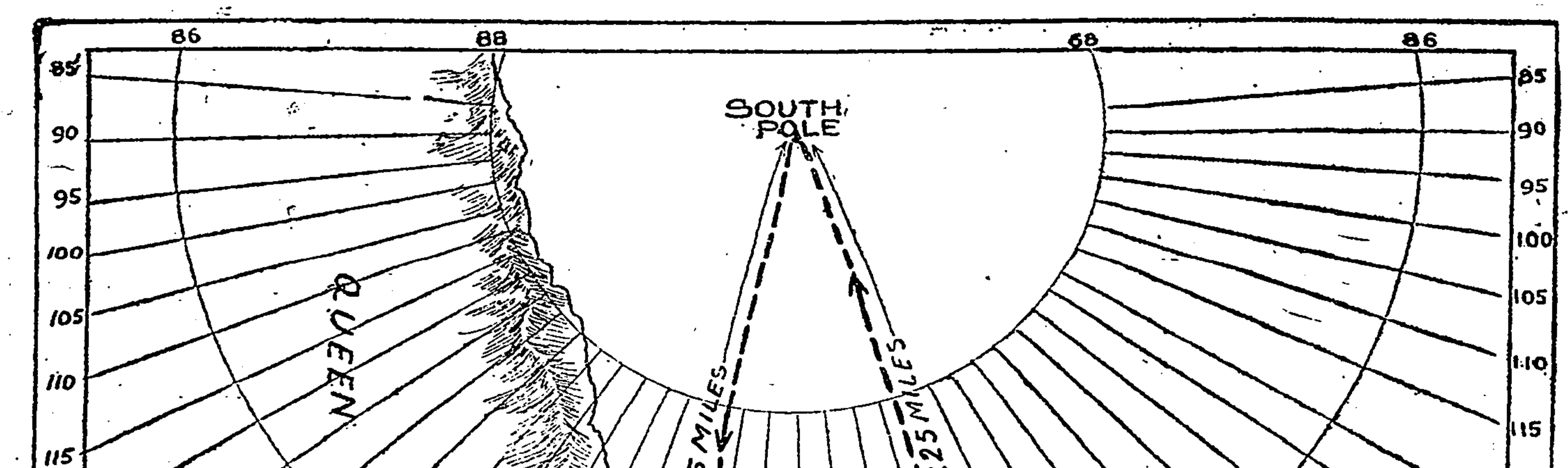
"The causes of this disaster—"

Amundsen's story is one of great fortitude, and great good fortune. Scott's story is one of great fortitude—of heroic fortitude—and misfortunes innumerable.

The Widow and the Fatherless.

(PHOTO © BY BROWN BROS.)

Mrs. Scott, now on the Pacific going to seek her dead husband, and their son, aged 3 years. Mrs. Scott ranks high as a sculptress.



When Scott and Amundsen Passed.