

Frank Hurley's iconic image from Mawson's Australasian Antarctic Expedition, 1911-14.
"In the Blizzard: Getting Ice for Domestic Purposes from the Glacier adjacent to the Hut."



**Some
'Heroic Age'
Verses**

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Scott (*Discovery*) 1901-04

A POEM from *The Blizzard*, a newspaper produced aboard the *Discovery*. Only one issue appeared. *The South Polar Times* was its better known and more impressive successor.

A SEALING TOUR.

Four stalwart hearty seamen bold
Around Seal Bay they went,
Across the ice and snow so cold.
Upon some sealing bent.

+++++

Now these four seamen "Oh" so bold
A sledge and dog team took
With a pick and shovel, so I am told
From the ship that laid in the brook

+++++

Now when they got to Seal Bay
This marine animal got in their way
They hit it with a broken oar
That they had found upon the shore.

+++++

This seal jumped up and gave a roar
Which made its head so very sore,
They then stabbed it to the heart,
Its life from this world did then depart.

+++++

Then these four seamen quick and smart
Had their knives so keen and sharp,
They took that skin from off that seal
As if each one did an orange peel.

+++++

Upon the sledge these seals were placed
As hard as rock and stiff as paste,
Then back to the ship these sailors went
Thinking of the pleasure they had spent.

+++++

When to the ship they arrived
To the seals meat the crew did dive
With open mouths and staring eyes
Like cannibals waiting for human lives.

+++++

The cooks arm began to ache
Whilst turning this seal meat into steak,
With onion sauce he did make
And made it taste just first rate.

EMOS-DAH



Shackleton (*Nimrod*) 1907-09

SOUTHWARD BOUND, a poem from the *Aurora Australis*, the first book written, edited, illustrated, printed, bound and issued in the Antarctic. LAPSUS LINGUÆ was the *nom de plume* of Eric Marshall.

The Nimrod sailed for the Southern Seas,
On her voyage of venture bent;
She left the Heads with a westerly breeze
As the Flagship's cheers grew faint.

She was taken in tow by the "Koonya",
With seven score fathoms of wire,
And for twelve long days and nights she strove
With a southerly buster's ire.

Watch by watch for two hours at a stretch
To the pony stalls we clung,
With the water knee-deep on the for'ard hatch,
And the decks a'swimming with dung.

"Doctor" was down on the third night out,
And eight hours later was dead;
For the efforts of man in a gale were 'nowt,'
So his end was an ounce of lead.

We slept in our sodden bunks by night,
Abaft the after hold;
And wished for the day to bring in the light
And the tale that was yet to be told.

On the fifteenth day we sighted the ice;
So the "Koonya" cast us free;
With ten of Boyle's sheep aboard in a trice,
And another ten lost in the sea.

With all sail set and a following breeze
Toward that distant land we sped;
And crept through a field of a thousand bergs
Which guarded a virgin bed.

To the Great Ice Barrier's edge we come
And search on that lonely shore,
For the spot we should make our winter home,
Which was known to be there of yore.

Not a sign was there of the Bight we sought,
But ten miles south sailed we
Of a place that was marked by a skipper named Scott,
In a ship called "Discovery".

So east we turned to the land of our King,
For there we would plant our flag;
But the heavy ice pack on our starboard tack
Prevented us landing our swag.

Then westward toward the setting sun
Along the Barrier's edge.
As a last resource, to land our force
On a place from which we could sledge.

In a solitary hut on a lonely isle
Beneath a smoke capped height,
Hemmed in by the ice that grips us awhile
We wait in the long dark night.

When the sun returns from his tropical home,
And smiles on these desolate quarters,
May the ice hold fast till sledging is past,
ãThen 'What Ho'! for our wives and daughters.

LAPSUS LINGUÆ.

Scott (*Terra Nova*) 1910-13

A POEM from *The Adelie Mail & Cape Adare Times*, the newsletter of the Northern Party, Scott's Terra Nova expedition. BLUEBELL was the *nom de plume* of G. Murray Levick. The hut in question was at Cape Adare and it didn't 'last out'—only remnants remain to be seen.

TO LET.

The late inhabitants with much regret
Beg to announce this hut is now to let.
They grieve exceedingly they cannot stay,
But urgent business calls them away.
The hut and furniture, thus on the market,
Remains for anyone who cares to shark it,
And if you care to walk in, I dare say Gents,
You wont be worried by no dashed house agents
There'll be no rent to pay, no tax nor poor rate,
You wont be fussed, or called on by the curate,
Whilst duns will leave you quiet for a space,
Being positively strangers to this place.
A place, in short, a prince might well inhabit;
Look! What a chance! And no one here to grab it.
Each time the wind blows plates rain off the shelves,
For, with the hut, we put them up ourselves,
And consequently we're prepared to state
Each plank is split and not a nail's in straight.
This latter dodge was ours, and quite a great one,
(A crooked nail sticks faster than a straight one)
It's all yours for the asking, every splinter,
But, hurry up! it won't last out next winter.

BLUEBELL.



Amundsen 1910-12

A POEM from *The South Pole*, Amundsen's account of his expedition. It was actually a song performed at an entertainment by a singer imitating a gramophone using a megaphone from behind a curtain in Captain Nilsen's cabin.

Well, here we are assembled to jollity once more,
Some from off the ocean and the rest from off the shore.
A year has passed since last we met and all are safe and sound,
Then let us banish all our cares and join our hands all round.

Christmas, happy Christmas! let us pass the flowing bowl,
Fill your glasses all, and let's make "Sails" a wee bit full.
For all I'll say is this—that it's in his country's cause;
If he staggers just a little, it is in his country's cause.

Now you sailor boys shall hear about the time we have gone through:
The winter—well, it wasn't long, we had so much to do.
There was digging snow, and sleeping—you can bet we're good at that—
And eating, too—no wonder that we're all a little fat.
We had hot cakes for our breakfast and "hermetik" each day,
Mutton pies, ragouts and curries, for that is Lindström's way.
But all I'll say is this—that 'twas in our country's cause,
If we stuffed ourselves with dainties, it was in our country's cause.

September came and off we went—that trip was pretty tough;
Our compasses all went on strike, they thought it cold enough.
The brandy in the Captain's flask froze to a lump of ice;
We all agreed, both men and dogs, such weather wasn't nice.
So back we went to Framheim to thaw our heels and toes;
It could not be quite healthy when our feet and fingers froze.
But all I say is this—that 'twas in our country's cause,
And we did not mind a frost-bite when 'twas in our country's cause.

The sun came up and warmed us then a little day by day;
Five men went out again and toiled along the southern way.
This time they conquered snow and ice, and all the world may hear
That Norway's flag flies at the Pole. Now, boys, a ringing cheer
For him who led them forward through the mountains and the plain,
Up to the goal they aimed at, and safely back again.
But all I'll say is this—that 'twas in his country's cause;
If he went through and won the Pole, 'twas in his country's cause. 🍀

Mawson 1911-14

From *South With Mawson; Reminiscences of the Australasian Antarctic Expedition, 1911-1914* by Charles Francis Laseron, 1947. Each chapter is headed by a verse thought to have been composed by Laseron.

With youth at the helm and youth at the prow,
And the spirit of youth within,
What matter the shadows of after years
When ours is the world to win.

CHAPTER I
Southwards Bound

A lonely island in a distant sea;
Upon its reef the endless combers roar;
While writhes and twists the brown kelp in their lee,
And bones of ships lie rotting on the shore.

CHAPTER II
Macquarie Island

From sapphire caves, where surged the lifting swell,
The echoes came to speak the parting knell
Of dying bergs which drifted slowly by,
Their wave-worn sides uptilted to the sky.
And still beyond, the cohorts of the Pack,
With flanks far-stretched, would turn invaders back,
Until the ice floes, parted by the breeze,
Their portals opened to uncharted seas.

CHAPTER III
Polar Seas

The white untrodden hills in lonely splendour lay
Beyond the cliffs of ice which girt the azure bay,
Through clouds of silken mist by fairy fingers spun,
The snowy slopes reached up and kissed the midnight sun.

CHAPTER IV
*Early Days in
Adelie Land*

Snow-laden from the south, from sunless waste
Which girds the pole, and frozen plateau bare,
There came a wall of wind in angry haste
To merge in spume the shattered wave and air.

CHAPTER V
*The Coming
of Winter*

A day in a life, the spendthrift said,
There is time for nothing but play.
But a day to the wise is twenty-four hours,
And enough for a life in each day.

CHAPTER VI
*Twenty-four Hours
in the Hut*

The dark and dreary night of winter goes,
Each day the sun its glowing disc uplifts
A little higher over hinter snows,
And gleams more brightly through the lessening drifts.

CHAPTER VII
The Passing of
Winter

Methought I hung a-dangling
Upon a slender rope,
The azure depths beneath me,
Above my only hope.
'Twas then that I remembered,
Through moments ages long,
When I had sewed my canvas belt,
I'd made the stitches strong.

CHAPTER VIII
Preparations for
Sledging

There comes an interlude. Forgotten then
The long grey months which lie behind.
It is enough, though grey days come again,
Contentment in the hour to find.

CHAPTER IX
Four Calm Days

We have travelled afar for nearly a year
By the bergs and the drifting pack;
But a message is borne on a gale from the land,
And the mating call hurries us back.

CHAPTER X
The Coming of
the Penguins

Back from the cool green depths of the seas,
Back from the edge of the floe,
Where we rested awhile with never a thought
Of the killer whale waiting below.

We have gambolled and flashed through the curling waves,
Through the drift and the driving spray,
To the ice-bound rock we call our home
In the land of the nightless day.

Pull with a will
For the way's uphill,
In our teeth the wind and the drift.
It is ten below,
And we stick in the snow,
So our journey is not swift.
But every foot which goes to a yard,
And every yard to a mile
Is distance run

CHAPTER XI
Sledging on
the Plateau

And a bit that's won,
Which allows us to rest awhile;
To rest awhile in the lee of the sledge
Ere the cold drives us on again,
 With the going hard,
 We must fight each year,
To conquer a new terrain.

Ours is a tale
Of an endless gale,
And a sledge that drags behind.
 We are passing through
 A country new,
To see what we can find.
To see what we can find, my lads,
On a plateau bare and vast,
 While the meter shows
 How each long mile goes,
Till three hundred miles are passed.
Three hundred miles and back, my lads,
 Of a depot missed
 In the blinding mist,
And a bitter race for life.

Adown the hills, the glacier's icy mass
 Forever grinds its slow resistless way,
The riven slopes, where hides the deep crevasse,
 Plunge down at last into the rock-strewn bay.

From off a land where peaceful rivers flow,
Where hills are green, and bright-hued flowers grow,
The scent of gum-trees came afar to me,
Borne by a ship from out the northern sea.

In the passing years it is good to know
 The ties of a friendship won,
To have lived in full for an hour or so,
 To have shared in a task well done.

CHAPTER XII
To the
Magnetic Pole

CHAPTER XIII
Sledging to
the Coast

CHAPTER XIV
Last Days in
Adelie Land

CHAPTER XV
Homeward
Bound

When the brooding spectre of the snows
Sends a death blast from the Pole,
To jealously cloak its mysteries,
Then the Plateau takes its toll.

CHAPTER XVI
The Toll of
the Plateau



Charles Francis Laseron

Shackleton (*Endurance*) 1914-17

IN MY ARMS was written by Samantha Wynne-Rhydderch and published by Picador in 2012 in her poetry collection *Banjo* which was shortlisted for Wales Book of The Year 2013. It appears here with her permission. www.rhydderch.com

IN MY ARMS

You must hold her for ten minutes
every night for a week, embrace
the weight of her head, slide your hand
the length of her neck, let her rest
between your legs, counting

each fret down to the flick
of her tailpiece before you even
pluck a note so you and your banjo
become one, in tune for life.
Hey, don't strum. Only a year before

the Antarctic trip I'd been serenading
cannibals in the Sudan. That's where I learnt
three-finger picking and Minstrel Hits:
Swanee River, Massa's in De Cold
Cold Ground. After six months'

floating on ice floes we upturned
two rowing boats to pitch our home
on Elephant Island. A chronometer case
doubled as window. Evenings round the stove
with Mick faking the trombone:

Old Dan Tucker, the Rannee Hooley Blues.
The photograph shows
the most motley crew of troubadours
that ever was projected on a plate.
A two-gallon petrol can played urinal.

*For many a mile it's the most
palatial dwelling place you'll find
on Hell-of-an-Isle. Toasts with meths
most nights in July till that supply
dwindled too. All the boys inscribed*

their names on my banjo's skin.
Back in London I hung her above the desk
in my practice so I could treasure
her stretch marks for ever, cherish
those five strings that made me sing.



Hussey's banjo, now
in the National Maritime
Museum at Greenwich.

Shackleton (*Quest*) 1921-22

SHACKLETON wrote this poem, a parody of Kipling's IF, aboard *Quest*. This may have been The Boss's final poetic effort.

IF

If you can stand the *Quest* and all her antics
When all around you turn somersaults upon her deck;
And go aloft when no one has told you
And not fall down and break your blooming neck;
If you can work like Wild and also like Wuzzles
Spend a convivial night with some old bean,
And then come down and meet the Boss at breakfast
And never breathe a word of where you've been.
If you can fill the port and starboard bunkers
With fourteen tons of coal; and call it fun;
Yours is the ship and everything that's in it
And you're a marvel; not a man my son.

Shackleton and Wild on *Quest*.



Notes

THE HEROIC ERA. A term of convenience, nothing more, implying the first two decades of the 20th century as applied to Antarctic exploration. Author James Gordon Hayes reckons 1895 to be the first year of the Heroic Age of exploration, land traverses, and epic endurance, when great scientific and geographic inroads were made on the southern continent. These were the voyages of Scott and Amundsen, Shackleton and Mawson, Nordenskjöld, Borchgrevink, de Gerlache and von Drygalski, Filchner, Shirase, Bruce, and Bull, national heroes most of them, who boldly went where no man had gone before. Rather than the ship versus the elements, it was now man against the unknown and the inhospitable. It was the Edwardian era, when the gentleman was role model, and nobility and purity of spirit were applied to exploration and captured the attention of the civilized world. Author Charles Neider puts Shackleton's death, on Jan. 5, 1922, as the end of the Heroic Era, but that date is too dependant on one man.

—From *Antarctica: An Encyclopedia* by John Stewart (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2011, 2nd edition.)

The photograph on p. 7 was taken at Cape Adare by Robert Stephenson in 1991. Although the earlier *Southern Cross* hut still stands, the adjacent Northern Party hut is nothing more than shambles.

The photograph on p. 12 is of Charles Laseron, taken by Frank Hurley.

“...Laseron joined the Australasian Antarctic Expedition under (Sir) Douglas Mawson, officially as taxidermist and biological collector but in fact as general scientific assistant. He spent from January 1912 to February 1913 in Adelie Land, taking part in two major sledging journeys and making discoveries in geology as well as biology.”

—From *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

The photograph on p. 14 of Hussey's banjo is courtesy of the National Maritime Museum.

“Leonard Duncan Albert Hussey OBE, MRCS, LRCP (6 June 1891 – 25 February 1964) was an English meteorologist, archeologist, explorer, medical doctor and member of Ernest Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic and Shackleton–Rowett Expeditions. During the latter, he was with Shackleton at his death, and transported the body part-way back to England.

Hussey was also a member of the armed forces during World War I, serving in France and with Shackleton in Russia. After returning to private practice, Hussey rejoined the war effort in 1940 and became a decorated medical officer with the Royal Air Force during the Second World War. Returning once again to civilian practice in 1946, he was a member of the Royal College of Physicians, a lecturer, author, and Boy Scouts leader prior to retirement.”

—From *Wikipedia*.