

Shackleton was always interested in mechanical aids to human effort, and within the limits of his funds he collected for his expedition as much up-to-date equipment as he could. In addition to the latest photographic and cinematographic apparatus, he also took a complete printing-press. This was presented to him by Messrs. Joseph Causton and Sons, and the firm undertook to give two members of the expedition, Frank Wild and Ernest Joyce, some instruction in the art of printing and type-setting. In planning to produce a magazine during the winter Shackleton was following Scott's example, but he was determined to go one better, and in fact he became editor in chief of the first volume ever to be published in the Antarctic.*

* Technically this description is incorrect, since the *Aurora Australis* was never actually offered for sale at a place of business in the Antarctic: it is however, an exceedingly interesting and rare volume, bibliographically.

Fisher, *Shackleton*, 1957. Page 121

The duties of messman, if less agreeable, were done cheerfully, and inspired, incidentally, one of the best pieces of humorous writing that ever came out of the Antarctic.

Priestley's 'Trials of a Messman'⁴ was one of the pieces written under persuasion for use in the expedition magazine. Like the *South Polar Times*, this was to be at once a pastime and a memento of the expedition. With a party so very much smaller than Scott's, it was obvious that it could not be a periodical; and so Shackleton planned that the one volume should have at least technical advantages over its predecessor. It was to be a printed volume, and it was originally intended that it should be sold on their return to England. The *South Polar Times* had been printed by Smith, Elder & Co. in 1907* and had brought in some money for the funds of the National Antarctic Expedition; Shackleton wanted to do the same but with the expedition as publishers. However, some difficulty arose over the exact compensation to be given to the four people most concerned in the production of the book—Wild, Joyce, Marston and Day—and in the end, although a hundred copies were printed at Cape Royds, they were not sold.† Presumably some were presented to benefactors of the expedition, and each

member of the expedition received a copy. It is possible that some of the copies were never bound up.

Aurora Australis, which was at first to be called *Antarctic Ice-Flowers*, is a very different volume from the *South Polar Times*. Although it has its humorous items, there are none of the jokes or topical features of the *Discovery* production. It is an anthology rather than a magazine. That Shackleton took it very seriously may be seen in the two prefaces he wrote for it, each of which ends by apologising for the shortcomings of the book. He explains at some length that Wild and Joyce, instead

* This was a limited edition of 250 copies for private circulation; it was a facsimile of the original magazine.

† In 1909 Messrs. Heinemann brought out a limited edition of 300 copies of *The Antarctic Book*, as a third volume of the *de luxe* edition of *The Heart of the Antarctic*.¹³ The two fore-titles, each headed 'The British Antarctic Expedition 1907', bear the signatures of the whole party. The book contains two of the contributions to the expedition magazine we are discussing, namely, Shackleton's poem 'Erebus' and Mawson's fantasy 'Bathybia'. There are five of Marston's drawings from the book, two of them illustrating 'Bathybia' and two showing aspects of Erebus; the last is a drawing of *Nimrod* on her journey south, which was perhaps Marston's best contribution to *Aurora Australis*. There are also five coloured lithographs, portraits of Shackleton, Adams, Marshall, Wild and Joyce. Decorative capital letters and the sign of the penguin are reproduced from the original book.

of serving an apprenticeship of seven years, had had to learn the art of printing and type-setting in three weeks, and that Marston had had to do the same with the process of lithography. He enlarges on the physical difficulties of producing the book—the size of the Rogues' Retreat, where the press was kept, and the fact that a candle had to be kept burning under the ink to keep it fluid.

His prefaces are most valuable, for *Aurora Australis* cannot be read like an ordinary book: it must be read with imagination. The reader must picture the various members of the party squaring up to their literary task in cubicles 6 x 7, with constant interruptions from work or idle friends, must picture the artist and the printers squaring up to *their* work in conditions still more adverse,

'It was winter' (wrote Marston later)¹³ 'and dark, and cold. The work

had to be done, in the intervals of more serious occupations, in a small room occupied by fifteen men, all of them following their own avocations, with whatever of noise, vibration and dirt might be incidental to these.

The inevitable state of such a hut, after doing all possible for cleanliness, can be imagined. Fifteen men shut up together, say during a blizzard which lasts a week. Nobody goes out unless on business; everybody who goes out brings in snow on his feet and clothes. Seal-blubber is burned, mixed with coal, for economy; the blubber melts and runs out on the floor, the ordinary unsweepable soil of the place is a rich compost of all filth, cemented with blubber, more nearly resembling the soil of a whaling-station than anything else I know.

Dust from the stove fills the air and settles on the paper as it is being printed. If anything falls on the floor it is done for; if somebody jogs the compositor's elbow as he is setting up matter, and upsets the type into the mire, I can only leave the reader to imagine the result.'

Read like this, *Aurora Australis*, unique as an experiment in publishing, is seen also to be unique as a book. The *South Polar Times* expressed the mood of an expedition, intelligent and cheerful. *Aurora Australis* crystallises the temperaments of the writers.

There is the title-page, with Marston's lithograph of the Aurora, framed in an elaborate scroll, topped with two sailing ships. The workmanlike, pleasing design, the flamboyant colours are each characteristic of Marston. As an artist, he was not in the same class as Wilson, but his natural exuberance and his sense of wonder at the Antarctic scene come out in his paintings, just as his skill with his hands can be seen everywhere in the book, in the neat line-drawings and the good plain lay-out (see illustrations on p, 192 and opposite).

There is 'The Ascent of Mount Erebus', a flowing, romantic, forceful piece of writing as typical of Professor David as his fine despatches to the press written on the journey down, There is 'Trials of a Messman', a gay piece of irony in which the young geologist Priestley compensated himself for the dirt and discomfort of kitchen chores by describing the 'privileges' of the slave for the day; because of the keen eye of the writer, the piece gives a vivid picture of the interior of the hut and the organisation of the wintering party. There is 'A Pony Watch', in which Marston, under the name of Putty, gives an excitable, somewhat turgid impression of the storm on the journey down in the *Nimrod*, when Doctor had to be shot. There is 'Southward Bound', a nostalgic, patriotic poem by Marshall (under the name of Lapsus Linguae), again surveying the voyage to the South. There is 'An Interview

with an Emperor', an odd little nightmare in Scottish idiom by the excitable Mackay; and 'Life under Difficulties', in which Murray dryly discussed the life-history of the Rotifer (a lowly, worm-like creature), his principal find in the biological world.

There is 'An Ancient Manuscript', in which Wild, calling himself Shellback, as he had done in the *South Polar Times*, described the beginnings of the expedition, and made some shrewd comments on his leader's exploring temperament. There is 'Bathybia', a curious and compelling fantasy beginning with an ordinary sledge journey into Victoria Land and eventually mixing the young Mawson's impressions of volcanic mountains, rotifers and the bare Antarctic plain into one extraordinary picture with a strange logic of its own.

And finally there are Shackleton's own contributions, signed with his pseudonym of *Discovery* days, Nemo. For his own Polar book, as for Scott's, he wrote a long descriptive poem. 'Erebus' (p. 502) is full of echoes of Swinburne and Longfellow, and full of the ardent resolve of the explorer. Very different was his second contribution, a piece of doggerel (p. 501) called 'Midwinter Night',* in which the nightwatchman listens to the random mutterings of the sleepers and imagines their dreams. It is not distinguished poetry, but it reveals the rumbustious, joke-loving side of Shackleton's nature.

Just as the entries reflect the character of each writer, so the production of the book reflects the Antarctic scene. There is the neat trademark of the Penguins, executed in red and used at intervals through the book as a decoration. There are the board covers, made from Venesta packing cases, many with the legend 'British Antarctic Expedition' clearly to be read on the inside-covers which were thoroughly smoothed and sand-papered by Day, who also thonged the pages and made a thick leather spine to hold the covers. There is the title-page, with its amateurish but attractive type-setting, and the dedication to the Misses Dawson-Lambton, two generous benefactors. If this little volume provided occupation for many dark winter hours, it must since then

* Against this poem in the Contents list is the name *Nemo*, though it is signed *Veritas*. Marshall's *Diary*¹⁴ makes it clear that the verses *were* Shackleton's.

have given pleasure and occupation to connoisseurs of the printed word.

Marston was officially editor, or editor in charge of *Aurora Australis*, but Shackleton, as editor-in-chief, no doubt did much to stimulate people to send in entries. He had many other devices with which to while away the time. He himself greatly enjoyed games of chess or poker, and like most Antarctic explorers before and after him, he seized every excuse for a party. There was Marston's birthday on 20 March, when they enjoyed turtle soup, blackcock and Christmas pudding, washed down with cider and beer; there was Marshall's on 23 May, when Roberts made a splendid cake; there was Day's, on 18 August, celebrated moderately, with a sing-song in the evening. There was Midwinter Day, too, traditional day of celebration in the Antarctic. For this occasion a four-page leaflet was printed, with a title-page, elegantly laid out, two drawings by Marston, and a menu both impressive and amusing.

Fisher, *Shackleton*, 1957. Pp 188-91.