

The 855th Meeting of the Society was held in the Free Trade Hall on Friday, June 3rd, 1910, at 8-0 p.m., when Commander R. E. Peary, U.S.N., F.R.G.S., gave a Lecture entitled "How I Reached the Pole." The Lecture was illustrated with lantern slides shown by Mr. E. W. Mellor, J.P., F.R.G.S., by means of his powerful electric lantern.

A full account of the proceedings in connection with the visit of Commander Peary to Manchester is given below:—

Introducing the Lecturer, the Lord Mayor said that during his term of office it had fallen to his lot to welcome several renowned travellers by land, by sea, and lastly, by air. Their visits, he thought, were a complete answer to many unkind accusations levelled against Manchester that its one aim and ambition was simply to make money. At any rate, the visitors he spoke of would not endorse this allegation, because no one coming among them in Manchester, whether bearing the laurels of great achievement, or setting out to win them, failed to receive the most hearty sympathy, and often the most practical kind of encouragement. From the Seventeenth Century, when Henry Hudson started out to find the Pole, many others had devoted their energies to the task, and some of England's greatest had given their lives. But now the task of centuries was done, and Commander Peary had reached the goal and planted the stars and stripes at the North Pole. He was sure the Commander would excuse a little natural chagrin on their part than an Englishman was not the first, but, next to a Briton, there was no one whose success would have given them more pleasure than one of their American cousins. (*Manchester Courier*).

Commander Peary who was warmly welcomed on rising to give his lecture said: "I very deeply appreciate the kindly expressions of your Lord Mayor. I thank you for your generous welcome, and I congratulate Manchester upon its courage in inviting here those who have explored to the South and to the North Pole and also the denizens of the air. I am sorry that I cannot interest Manchester in the Arctic regions in the way of business. I do not think there will be much cotton grown there. But in regard to what the Lord Mayor said as to the feeling of Great Britain about the final attainment of the North Pole by men of another nationality than theirs

no people will be more delighted than we of the United States when the British ensign flies at the South Pole.

Commander Peary then plunged into the subject of his lecture, recalling the days of two years ago when the Peary Arctic Club was fitting out the expedition to the North Pole. He had time in this lecture neither for the details of those preparations nor for the earlier stages of the northern voyage. It was necessary to plunge "into the midst of things," and this Commander Peary proceeded to do, giving only a brief lesson in the geography of the Arctic regions with two historical dates—July 6th, 1908, when the expedition left New York, and April 8th, 1909, when the North Pole was reached. The first of the many vivid photographs were those of Far Northern Esquimaux, with their facial characteristics indicating an oriental origin. An Esquimaux girl whom Mrs. Peary took to Washington, saw some Chinese people in the street and ran across the road to them, taking them and being taken by them in return, for fellow-countrymen. Then there were the Esquimaux dogs, capable of working at high pressure on almost nothing to eat. Nothing was more warmly cheered in the Lecture than Commander Peary's insistence on the good condition of these dogs to the end of the expedition, a state of things due to the double rations which he was able to give them, this again being due to the speed of the journey there and back.

Before the last stage of the voyage across the ice of the Polar Sea, Commander Peary made many observations of animal life and he showed photographs, some taken by flashlight, of birds and animals, including one of a polar-bear held up by the Esquimaux a few minutes after it was shot, "sitting up for its photograph after it was dead," as Commander Peary said. (*Manchester Guardian*).

Taking up the trail from Cape Columbia on the final march of over 400 miles to the Pole, there were many fascinating touches about the explorer's description of the arduous achievement. It was to his system of supporting parties, left behind at stated intervals as he gradually advanced, that he owed the rapidity of his return. It was a march of difficulty in many ways. The Central Polar Sea is not fixed and immovable. In 24 hours a strong wind will set the great fields of ice slightly sagging, and an expedition, picking up their road home, find strange faults and twists in the trail, though

not sufficient to confuse them seriously. However, Commander Peary emphasised the point that it was only by means of his elaborate system of supports that he was able to return to his base at the unusual speed with which he travelled. He spoke of the leads—the open stretches of water which break the long monotony of the ice—as an ever-present nightmare to the Polar traveller. They were the main obstacle on the journey north and, coming back, they might at any moment cut him off from land and life itself. There were several ways of crossing these lanes of water. One was to make a detour, another to wait for the ice to close, and a third to find a piece of ice which could be used as a kind of ferry boat. Regarding the temperature in which all this work of travelling and observation was done, the lecturer said the lowest they had was 59 degrees below zero, Fahrenheit, and the highest 11 degrees below zero. Their clothing was the outcome of generations of Esquimaux experience: “A fur coat with no opening, front, back, or side, pulled down like a sweater, with a hood forming part of the garment. Trousers made of bear skin, stockings of hareskin and boots of sealskin.” The whole costume weighed 12½ lb., and attired in it he could lie down in the snow, so long as there was no wind, with the thermometer at 55 degrees below zero, and sleep with tolerable comfort.

Commander Peary attached much importance to the alcohol stoves which were used by the parties. In twenty minutes ice was transformed by the stoves into boiling tea, whereas the meal of the Arctic explorer used to take two hours to cook—a valuable saving of time.

The picture which elicited from the audience the heartiest round of applause was the last marching party at the Polar degree itself, with the Stars and Stripes floating from a convenient ice hummock. Commander Peary himself must have taken the view, for the picture shows only a group of five under the flag—four Esquimaux and the coloured man who was with him to the end of the journey. “What were my sensations at this moment?” He had often been asked that question. “I had spent,” said the explorer, “23 years of my life in trying to reach this point. It had been an object of endeavour for men of every civilised nation for almost four centuries. If it were possible to reach that point without exhaustion, if it were possible to have leisure to work oneself into a state of mental hysteria, one would undoubtedly have the sensation of a lifetime. We were over

tired. My only sensation was one of intense satisfaction, of intense gratification, that at last, in spite of every obstacle the Arctic region could interpose, I had ‘made good’ to myself and my friends.’

After a few miles’ progress on the return journey from the latitude which marks the situation of the Pole, Commander Peary took a sounding through the ice, which he described as of the utmost interest to the scientist and geologist. The wire snapped when they were drawing up, but it had run out 9,000 feet without touching bottom, and this attempt to plumb the depths practically at the Pole itself proved that the Polar Sea was not a shallow one. It was probably more than two miles deep. Back to land once more after long days of arduous marches. Free of the strain of constant travel, with no further fear of the treacherous leads, the Esquimaux of his party went almost crazy with delight. They were dancing and singing, and he overheard one of them give a comforting little assurance to another member of the tribe, which Commander Peary freely translated as follows: “I am sure the devil has been asleep while we’ve been gone, or else he has been having a family discussion with Mrs. Devil.”

On April 23rd the returning expedition saw the vertical face of the land ice. “We were not hungry when we got back; we had not been on half rations. But the men and the dogs were literally lifeless from loss of sleep,” and Commander Peary told how his party slept for nearly forty-eight hours now that the critical part of the journey back was safely done.

Views of the faces of the Esquimaux, “before and after,” were eloquent proof of the terrible strain imposed by the expedition. After looking, first on round smiling faces and then on gaunt sunken cheeks, it needed not the lecturer’s comments that “it took all the fierce energy and grim determination of these iron men of the frozen North to carry through those 400 miles from Cape Columbia to the Pole and back again.” Finally, he said: “We have been waiting nearly 400 years to hear this story. Now it is told, it happens that we of the United States feel a special interest in it, but it has meanings for everyone. It is another step in man’s certain conquest of the globe on which we live. For the young it may stand as the inevitable victory of perseverance over every obstacle, and as the

removal of a four-hundred-year-old challenge to our manhood and our civilisation."

Mr. F. Zimmern moved a vote of thanks to Commander Peary "for his fascinating narrative so vividly told and so beautifully illustrated." In connection with the vote he presented to the explorer a document enrolling him as an honorary member of the Manchester Geographical Society.

Mr. J. Howard Reed seconded the vote of thanks and also expressed the indebtedness of the meeting to Mr. Mellor for his valuable assistance with the lantern. The resolution was carried unanimously.

Commander Peary briefly acknowledged the vote of thanks, and also what he described as the entirely unexpected honour paid him by the Geographical Society. He moved the thanks of the meeting to the Lord Mayor for presiding.

This was seconded by Bishop Welldon, and, after it had been carried and responded to by his Lordship, the proceedings terminated. (*Manchester Courier*).

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