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# MONTHLY MEETING OF THE SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY, LIMITED, 11th OF APRIL, 1934.

Three men : one who had well deserved of his Society, another, who had been knighted for his services to a great people, and a third, a member of an expedition that had made history, provided Swiss House with a very distinguished atmosphere. The President, in opening the monthly meeting, had pleasure in welcoming Mr. Schaerer, under whose supervision the architectural alterations of Swiss House were carried out, and Sir Arnold Theiler, the Swiss veterinary surgeon, who had earned the gratitude of South Africa for stamping out the cattle plague. Once the business part of the Meeting was over, the President further introduced Dr. L. D. A. Hussey, who was a member of Sir Ernest Shackleton's expeditions to the South Pole. Middle-sized, of slight build, with unassuming manners, rosy cheeks and a pleasant accent, Dr. Hussey reminded one of a jolly country doctor, rather than of one of those brave men whose heroic work had for ever gained them a place in the annals of history. In a way that revealed a great sense of humour, Dr. Hussey told us and illustrated with over 200 magnificent lantern slides :—

## THE STORY OF SIR ERNEST SHACKLETON "The Story of Sir Ernest Shackleton's 1914-16 Expeditions to the Antarctic."

By the end of 1913, Sir Ernest had received enough money and promises to enable him to form an expedition, the object of which was to explore as much coastline as possible, and eventually reach the South Pole. Whereas both Amundson in December, 1911, and Scott in January, 1912, had reached this destination by way of Australia, Shackleton was the first to approach this region from South America. Five thousand people had applied to become members of Sir Ernest's expedition, fifty-six of whom were selected and divided up into two parties of twenty-eight members each. One way to reach the Antarctic on board the s.s. Aurora, in order to lay a chain of food depôts, whereas the other, under the leadership of Sir Ernest, was to sail by the s.s. Endurance, and do the actual exploring. Dr. Hussey, who had offered his services by wire from South America, was accepted at once and joined Sir Ernest's party.

On the 1st of August, 1914, the expedition left England. Its members had previously put themselves at the disposal of His Majesty, who, presenting them with a Union Jack, had declined their offer, exclaiming : "The war will only last six months." They reached Cape Horn on the 26th of October, 1914, and from then till the 31st of August, 1916, they lost complete touch with the outside world. From the tiny island of South Georgia, which was reached on the 6th of December, they proceeded towards the Antarctic. Pack ice was now surrounding them. A man in the crow's-nest was constantly on the lookout for thin fields of ice, towards which they would then steam at full speed, and breaking them, thus gain another stretch of clear water. On reaching the Antarctic circle, on the 14th of February, 1915, the temperature changed from 30 deg. above to 30 deg. below zero within a few minutes. Soon their ship, the Endurance, was completely surrounded by a thick layer of ice, which held it in a firm grip, thus giving them the impression that they were completely stationary. However, measurements soon revealed that, as the ice was continuously on the move, they kept on changing their position.

Several scientific excursions were now carried out. The sledges were drawn by the dogs they had taken with them, and which were half dog and half wolf. Some of them, the lecturer thought, were more than half wolf. They had over one hundred of them. After a day's hard work, during which fifteen to twenty miles might have been covered, these animals were quite satisfied with a pound of raw whale meat each. For a time that seemed an eternity, they had been frozen in hard. No sun had been shining for more than a hundred days — thirty yards away from the ship one was completely surrounded by darkness. So that nobody should get lost, the members of the expedition erected pylons, which were connected with wire, so that, by keeping to this sort of railing, everybody should be able to find his way back to the ship.

During the whole time the vessel and the equipment of the party was kept spotlessly clean and in good repair, the work being done by all the members, irrespective of their position. The cook was able to prepare whale meat in 48 different ways. They became so used to doing all sorts of different jobs that, when they were back again, a lady thought that they would make model husbands. As, however, they had forgotten the meaning of the word "model," they looked it up in the dictionary, to find that it meant "a small imitation of a real thing." Now they knew what they really were.

Towards the beginning of May, 1915, they heard a certain peculiar noise. Nobody knew what it was except Sir Ernest, but he kept quiet. Soon, however, the others also became aware of

its significance. The great break had come, and with it the light. On the 1st of August, 1915, a terrific blizzard sprang up, and in the course of a few seconds the ship was lifted ahead of the ice and left again, with a great list to port. The food that had been stored in that part was quickly transferred to the peak. This should have caused the damaged part of the ship to get free of the ice, to enable the carpenter to repair the leak. Hardly had they completed the shifting of the stores, than a new storm broke over the ship and overwhelmed her with pieces of ice. By now she had suffered great damage, water having found its way into the hold. The men tried to pump it out, but the more they pumped, the quicker the water got in. Finally they had to abandon the ship. No sooner had they done so, than a wave of ice completely smothered her.

As a result of this catastrophe, Sir Ernest called together the men, and after explaining the position to them, they decided to take the two lifeboats of the ship and begin to march. But after six days and six nights, they realised that the whole distance they had covered was 6½ miles. The moving ice drove them back as fast as they went forward. They gave up marching and resolved to save from the ship whatever they could. The fore-part of the vessel, in which a five years' supply of food had been stored, was covered with a layer of ice 15 feet deep. With ice-picks, pocket-knives, spoons and whatever implements they could lay hands on, they began to break it away. After two days' hard work, they succeeded in digging out over a hundred cases of food. After another attempt at marching had failed, during which they progressed 2½ miles in four days, they resolved to settle down and, by erecting walls with ice-blocks and covering them with the two boats, they put up "Patients' Camp," in which they were to spend January, February, March, and the first part of April, 1916.

It was then that they found that their food supplies were giving out, and, after many a heart-breaking struggle, were forced to kill some of their dogs. A work that was started with great reluctance ended up with gladness and confidence — they had succeeded in getting enough supplies for another six weeks. But, no sooner had they finished storing all the meat on one big block of ice, than it broke and drifted away. Luckily enough for them, the breaking of the ice caused some whales to come to the surface, and thus provided them with the necessary means of existence. One night, when Sir Ernest was making a round, he discovered that a portion of the ice on which the camp was built had broken away. With horror he discovered that a man, in his sleeping bag, had fallen into the water. It was only with a superhuman effort that Shackleton saved him, just in time before the two parts of ice closed in again. All that the man remarked was : "Now I have lost my b—— tobacco pouch." After this experience they decided not to build on ice again.

They set their two lifeboats afloat, packed their belongings into them, and drifted along the ice until, after many an unpleasant experience, they finally reached Elephant Island. They were again on solid land, that could not break. However, no sooner had they erected their camp, than a blizzard broke out, and, sweeping over them with a speed of 100 to 120 miles per hour, left them, after fourteen days, in a state of complete exhaustion. The men were by now in a very deplorable condition. For weeks they had not had either water or a warm meal. Some were badly frost-bitten, others had gone off their heads.

Shackleton, realising that some could not last much longer, called for volunteers, and selected five of the most skilful and experienced sailors. In one of the tiny little boats, Sir Ernest and his companions set out on a journey that amazed the whole world. Drifting sixteen days and sixteen nights 850 miles south of Cape Horn, they finally reached the Island of South Georgia, which the skipper had seen only once in the far distance. Having climbed over glaciers and crevasses for 26 hours, Shackleton and two friends encountered the first signs of civilisation. Three men

had been left behind, two of whom were so frost-bitten and tired out that they could not even move.

When an old whaler and two children saw Shackleton and his two comrades, they were so shocked with their appearance that they ran away. However, the manager of the colony of whalers proved more hospitable. He fed them, put them to bed and sent out to the world the good news that Shackleton and his companions were still alive.

Shackleton immediately organised rescue parties, which, unfortunately, failed to reach the 22 members who were still on Elephant Island. To his great chagrin, the Commission, which had in the meantime been set up by the English Parliament, decided to abandon further attempts. But, at last, Shackleton succeeded in finding a suitable boat in Chili. His plans to rescue his friends found keen support among the population, and, since according to the Chilean law only a citizen of that country could become a skipper, he was made a citizen of Chili. The 15 sailors, with whom he finally manned a boat, spoke 13 different languages, none of which he understood.

On the 31st of August, 1916, just as the men on Elephant Island were preparing a meal, the man on watch saw a boat approaching the island. It was Sir Ernest's Chilean rescue party. The men were so overwhelmed with joy that they could only wave their arms; no sound came from their lips. While still wading in water, Shackleton threw a few cigarettes to them, thus relieving one of the most urgent wants. One of the first questions was : "Is the War still on?" to which he replied : "The war is mad and the world is mad."

In Chili the people went mad with joy over the successful rescue of the men. A national holiday was proclaimed, new medals, commemorating the occasion, were struck, the bells rang and a thanksgiving service was held. The Chilean ate a lot of rice, got drunk, and did not do a stroke of work. When, at last, Shackleton and his companions left, another thanksgiving service was held!

On the 7th of November, 1916, they arrived back home in England, and on the 1st of January, 1917, the men put their services at the disposal of His Majesty, whose forces were still fighting the most maddening war the world had ever beheld. In the meantime, the 28 men who had set out in the s.s. Aurora to lay a chain of food depôts, had completed their task. In so doing they had the misfortune of losing three men : Captain Mackintosh, their leader, the Rev. Spencer-Smith and Hayward, who, in the words of the King, had died serving their country.

After the War was over, which had brought glory and death to many a man of Sir Ernest's expedition, this explorer, undaunted by failure, set out again for the South Pole. In 1921 he and his men, among whom were eight of his old companions, sailed for South Georgia in the s.s. Quest, in a new attempt to explore the Antarctic regions. However, before they reached this island, Shackleton had a heart attack, from which he never recovered. He died on board his ship on the 5th of January, 1922, 48 years old. The world lost in him one of the greatest explorers, who had succeeded in getting within ninety miles of the South Pole. His comrades lost in him, not only their leader, but their truest friend.

Loud applause expressed how much the audience had appreciated this lecture, which, as the President rightly pointed out, was one of the most remarkable that had ever been heard at Swiss House. After taking leave of Dr. Hussey, we returned his friendly "Auf Wiedersehen!"—and meant it. M. O. H.....

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- 7 h. — M. R. Hoffmann-de Visme, Prédication.
- 8 h. — Répétition du chœur.

Attention au Changement d'heure!

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(Deutschsprachige Gemeinde).

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Sonntag, den 22. April 1934 :

- 11 Uhr morgens, Gottesdienst und Sonntagsschule.
- 7 Uhr abends, Gottesdienst.
- 8 Uhr, Chorprobe.

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## FORTHCOMING EVENTS.

Sunday, April 22nd — London Swiss Rifle Team — Shooting Practice at Bisley.

Tuesday, April 24th — Unione Ticinese — Annual Banquet and Ball — at Pagani's Restaurant, Great Portland Street, W.