Extract from Scott’s diary

February 2nd, 1911

Impressions

The seductive folds of the sleeping-bag.

The hiss of the primus and the fragrant steam of the cooker issuing from the tent ventilator.

The small green tent and the great white road.

The whine of a dog and the neigh of our steeds.

The driving cloud of powdered snow.

The crunch of footsteps which break the surface crust.

The wind blown furrows.

The blue arch beneath the smoky cloud.

The crisp ring of the ponies’ hoofs and the swish of the following sledge.

The droning conversation of the march as the driver encourages or chides his horse.

The patter of dog pads.

The gentle flutter of our canvas shelter.

Its deep booming sound under the full force of a blizzard.

The drift snow like finest flour penetrating every hole and corner – flickering up beneath one’s head covering, pricking sharply as a sand blast.

The sun with blurred image peeping shyly through the wreathing drift giving pale shadowless light.

The eternal silence of the great white desert. Cloudy columns of snow drift advancing from the south, pale yellow wraiths, heralding the coming storm, blotting out one by one the sharp-cut lines of the land.

The blizzard, Nature’s protest – the crevasse, Nature’s pitfall – that grim trap for the unwary – no hunter could conceal his snare so perfectly – the light rippled snow bridge gives no hint or sign of the hidden danger, its position unguessable till man or beast is floundering, clawing and struggling for foothold on the brink.

The vast silence broken only by the mellow sounds of the marching column.

Saturday, March 25th, 1911

We have had two days of surprisingly warm weather, the sky overcast, snow falling, wind only in light airs. Last night the sky was clearing, with a southerly wind, and this morning the sea was open all about us. It is disappointing to find the ice so reluctant to hold; at the same time one supposes that the cooling of the water is proceeding and therefore that each day makes it easier for the ice to form – the sun seems to have lost all power, but I imagine its rays still tend to warm the surface water about the noon hours. It is only a week now to the date which I thought would see us all at Cape Evans.

The warmth of the air has produced a comparatively uncomfortable state of affairs in the hut. The ice on the inner roof is melting fast, dripping on the floor and streaming down the sides. The increasing cold is checking the evil even as I write. Comfort could only be ensured in the hut either by making a clean sweep of all the ceiling ice or by keeping the interior at a critical temperature little above freezing-point.

Sunday, March 17th, 1912

Lost track of dates, but think the last correct. Tragedy all along the line. At lunch, the day before yesterday, poor Titus Oates said he couldn’t go on; he proposed we should leave him in his sleeping-bag. That we could not do, and induced him to come on, on the afternoon march. In spite of its awful nature for him he struggled on and we made a few miles. At night he was worse and we knew the end had come.

Should this be found I want these facts recorded. Oates’ last thoughts were of his Mother, but immediately before he took pride in thinking that his regiment would be pleased with the bold way in which he met his death. We can testify to 18

his bravery. He has borne intense suffering for weeks without complaint, and to the very last was able and willing to discuss outside subjects. He did not – would not – give up hope to the very end. He was a brave soul. This was the end. He slept through the night before last, hoping not to wake; but he woke in the morning – yesterday. It was blowing a blizzard. He said, ‘I am just going outside and may be some time.’ He went out into the blizzard and we have not seen him since.

I take this opportunity of saying that we have stuck to our sick companions to the last. In case of Edgar Evans, when absolutely out of food and he lay insensible, the safety of the remainder seemed to demand his abandonment, but Providence mercifully removed him at this critical moment. He died a natural death, and we did not leave him till two hours after his death. We knew that poor Oates was walking to his death, but though we tried to dissuade him, we knew it was the act of a brave man and an English gentleman. We all hope to meet the end with a similar spirit, and assuredly the end is not far.

I can only write at lunch and then only occasionally. The cold is intense, -40º at midday. My companions are unendingly cheerful, but we are all on the verge of serious frostbites, and though we constantly talk of fetching through I don’t think anyone of us believes it in his heart.

R. SCOTT.