

CHAPTER VII.

INCIDENTS IN THE CAREER OF DR. COOK.

"Who is This Wonderful Cook?—Born in New York State—Filled with Spirit of Conquest—Sought Pole with Peary—Was Alaskan Explorer—Another Expedition Organized—Scales Mount McKinley—Loss of the *Miranda*—Privations Amid the Ice—Arctic Club Organized—South with the Belgica—His Last Great Feat—Surgeon On the *Eric*.

THE message which flashed mysteriously out of the frozen North on the 1st day of September, 1909, telling of the latest and greatest achievement of American dash and pluck, created a sensation as profound as any announcement to which the world has ever listened.

As with other men whose conquests have written their names large in history, Dr. Cook's message of victory was spare of words.

"I have discovered the North Pole."

The words which first flashed from the North said little more than that. But they echoed in every civilized corner of the world. Paris, at her coffee and rolls, gasped as the morning paper was unfolded. New York, San Francisco, Tokio, Bombay, Rome and London heard the news as the cables flashed it under the seas and over the mountains.

The world read, only half believing. Then, from every corner of civilization, the question flashed back:

"Who is this man Cook?"

There was no other way to verify the epoch-making news than by that simple query. A statement had been made. No proof could be found, perhaps never can be found, to support it. Its acceptance as truth depended on the reputation of the man who made it. Investigation was made and America answered the query proudly.

Dr. Cook is a citizen of the United States, native born, native bred and a descendant from the old stock of the Pennsylvania Germans, who for the last 200 years have been the pioneers of Western civilization.

The history of even his early childhood shows him filled with the spirit of conquest and adventure.

A lifetime of polar research under Peary and others has

proved him of indomitable courage, determination and physical strength.

After years of failure he surmounted difficulties that seemed insurmountable and planted the American flag on the summit of Mount McKinley, the highest point on the continent.

In the Antarctic he has carried the same banner to points never before reached by Americans, and his work has helped to give the Government a claim to vast bodies of land in the South polar seas.

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS OF DR. COOK.

These were only the major achievements of the man who has given his life to the work of pushing back, mile by mile, the limits of the unknown world. Courage, determination and accuracy have marked each of his exploits. When once his heart was set upon a goal nothing has suffered to turn him back. Friends might desert him, food run low, physical energy become exhausted; but each time he pushed on alone and got there.

Such is the answer that has been given to the world—a record of fearless battles against great odds, of victories won over the marshaled armies of nature herself, the story of a fighting American.

It was the accident of birth that first made possible the final conquest of the goal which over seven hundred men have given their lives in the effort to reach. The task demanded a man of greater mental and physical stamina than that of the army that had tried and failed.

The sturdy stock of the Pennsylvania Germans, the race that first pushed the frontiers of the United States across the Alleghenies and from there through the untracked wilderness to the Pacific Ocean, supplied the man who was to conquer the North.

The family name of the discoverer was originally Koch, and its early pioneers were among the first of the German settlers in Pennsylvania. Nearly a hundred years ago a branch of the family drifted into New York, and the family name was changed to Cook.

As elsewhere related, when Peary was preparing for his first attempt to reach the Pole he visited the university in

the attempt to find a young man suited to accompany the expedition as surgeon, and among the members of the graduating class a young man was found who seemed to have been fashioned for the purpose of defying the worst that the North could do in the way of hardship or discouragement.

A FINE SPECIMEN OF VIGOROUS MANHOOD.

He was only of medium height, but the unusual depth and breadth of chest spoke of strength and endurance beyond the ordinary. The jaw was square, the nose prominent, the whole outline of the face incisive and determined. And the eye was of the kind that has always looked at danger unflinching. They were prominent, wide opened and with a hard greenish glint, flashing occasionally in the gray of the iris. The selection was clinched when Peary spoke to him and found that he had a complete knowledge of previous Polar exploration, gained from books out of pure love for adventure.

The young medical student, Dr. Frederick A. Cook, was chosen surgeon for the Peary expedition of 1891. He started on his first voyage of exploration with high hopes—hopes that were shattered rudely enough to have discouraged another man, for the party returned a failure, with only the chart of the north coast of Greenland to its permanent credit. Accepting the disappointment for the time being, Dr. Cook settled down to the building of a medical practice in Brooklyn. But he had not given up. He was only waiting. The mystery of the frozen seas had gripped his imagination. The call of "come and find me" was to keep ringing in his ears, drawing him away from wife, children and home in fresh attempts to win the secrets guarded by the ice fields and bitter winds of the North.

Dr. Cook was married in Brooklyn in 1902, shortly after the return from the Peary expedition. His wife was a Philadelphian, and the city whose name has long been linked with that of Polar research can, through her, claim some credit for the discovery of the Pole itself. It was her self-sacrifice and devotion that enabled her husband to go on his long journeys of exploration, leaving her to shift for herself as best she could. As Miss Marie Fidell Mrs. Cook lived in this city for many years and later in Camden, at Second and

Linden streets. Since her marriage she has accompanied her husband on as many of his journeys as were practicable for a woman, and, in his absence, she worked even harder to aid him. During his last triumphant trip of exploration it is said that she was forced to sell her home to support herself and her two children, although this has been denied, as is natural.

In 1893 the opportunity he had been awaiting to revisit the North came knocking at his door. He was offered the command of the steamer Zeta and the leadership of an expedition to be called after his name. During the following year he was given command of the *Miranda*. But the equipment proved inadequate, and the dash for the Pole, by force of circumstance, turned into prosaic expedition for scientific research along the coast of Labrador.

A HIGH REPUTATION IN POLAR RESEARCH.

The work done was, however, of such high order and accuracy that Dr. Cook's reputation in Polar research grew to international proportions, and in 1897, when the Belgian Antarctic expedition was organized, he was chosen as surgeon. The trip was a terrible one. Nothing was heard of the ship or the explorers for two years, and, as on his last trip, Dr. Cook's life was despaired of. However, the vessel was again sighted on March 13, 1899, and the first American Dr. Cook talked to on his return, the captain of the steamship *Coya*, tells an anecdote of the meeting which throws a strong sidelight on the personality of the explorer.

Beer and liquors, the captain said, were furnished in unlimited quantities by his ship to celebrate the safe return of the Belgian vessel. Dr. Cook was the only member of the party who did not make use of the proffered hospitality. He had no scruples, he said, against its use, but believed that it impaired a man's physical powers of endurance, and that he intended to do nothing that might even remotely injure the chances of reaching the goal he had always in mind.

The Belgian Antarctic expedition drifted in the ice for more than 2,000 miles, and much of the credit for its successful outcome was attributed to Dr. Cook's familiarity with ice floes and jams. He was decorated for his services with

the Order of Leopold by the King of Belgium.

In 1901 he acted as surgeon of the *Eric* on Peary's auxiliary Polar expedition. But it was in his own country in 1903-1906 that the almost impossible exploit was accomplished which stamped him beyond doubt as the man from whom the final conquering of the North might be expected.

He turned his attention from Polar research to geographical exploration in Alaska, and there his imagination was fired by a task which had challenged and defeated every effort. Rising to a height of over 20,000 feet and clearly visible from the open sea, though it lay far in the interior, the snow-capped peak of Mount McKinley, the highest point on the American Continent, defied the attempts of the bravest and strongest men to reach its summit.

SCALES THE LOFTY SIDES OF MOUNT MCKINLEY.

Around the foot of the giant mountain was stretched a network of canyons which rushing glacial torrents made almost impassible. Promising trails ended in blank, unscalable precipices. The path had to be retraced and the torrents forded again at the danger each time of losing life, or the almost equally important outfit. But Dr. Cook in the expedition of 1903 met each of these difficulties and overcame them, leading the party safely to the base of the mountain late in the Fall. An heroic attempt to scale the peak was made. The doctor, leaving his companions behind him, ascended alone to an altitude of over 11,000 feet; but the season was too late for further effort and a forced retreat was made by boat and raft to the open sea.

Three years passed before another opportunity to complete the task on which he had set his mind presented itself again. Then another expedition was organized and Dr. Cook again plunged into the chart of unexplored Alaska. This party, like the one that had gone before it, exhausted its strength in battling with the difficulties which lay along the route to the mountain, and when, after hardships and exposure, the full story of which has never been written, the base was reached at last the party by popular vote decided to turn back without attempting to scale the 20,000 feet of jagged granite and overhanging precipices of ice which reared its barrier in their path.

By raft and boat the party reached the open sea in safety, but in crossing Cook Inlet a terrific storm was encountered, which threatened disaster at the very end of the journey. It was only through the heroic efforts of Dr. Cook, who held the tiller of the frail boat that carried the party while the storm for twelve consecutive hours tossed it about like a cockle shell, that a safe landing was eventually made at Tyonek.

After seeing the party that had intrusted itself to his care safely returned to their starting point, the doctor turned, and, though the season was already far advanced, plunged once more into the wilderness. In all the history of exploration not one deed is told that shows a more dogged determination, such headstrong, indomitable resolution to reach the goal in spite of obstacles—in spite even of sound common sense. He had found the spirit of his companions pitched in too low a key for the supreme effort. So he retraced the long journey with them patiently, turned and for the third time went back to the attack, taking with him only one companion, Edward Barill, who had proved almost as fearless and tireless as himself.

OVERCOMES INSURMOUNTABLE OBSTACLES.

Again the terrible journey was traveled, step by step. Torrents were forded, the two men clinging to the manes of their horses as they swam across. Camps were made night after night in a steady downpour of rain. For weeks at a time not a dry stitch of cloth was to be found in the entire outfit. At last they reached a glacier which swept the eastern slope of Mount McKinley. Mile after mile, each step hewed from the solid ice, they followed this glacier to its source. Here a smooth, black granite cliff reared a barrier 4,000 feet high across their path. The two men skirted its base, cutting steps in cornices of ice, and on the fifth day of almost continuous climbing the way lay open before them again.

A climb of 2,000 feet was made, and the sixth and seventh days each saw a like distance cut from the few thousand feet which now separated them from their goal. The altitude, the highest, with one exception, ever reached by man, began to tell on them heavily. They gasped painfully in breathing.

Blood ran from ear and nose. They were so exhausted from their terrific labor that they staggered as they raised a foot for the next step—and a misstep meant at times an air-line fall to where, two miles straight below, the glacier lay, its wrinkles all smoothed out by distance.

On the eighth day of the climb the summit was sighted, and on the morning of September 16 the top was reached and the flag planted by Dr. Frederick A. Cook on the highest spot of land on the American Continent.

Such is the record of the man who has crowned a career of romance and adventure by winning the greatest honor that advancing civilization has left to the explorer, the discovery of the Pole, a goal which men have been giving their lives in the attempt to reach for the last two hundred years.

DISCOVERY OF POLE A BOON TO DR. COOK.

Whatever material benefit his discovery may prove to the world at large, it will mean fortune for him at least. The Government will unquestionably make handsome recognition of his services. The book in which he tells of his experiences will be translated into a dozen foreign tongues and will outsell any recent publication. As a lecturer he will be in greater demand than Senators or Presidents, and his wife, who has struggled bravely against poverty, will be given all the luxuries that imagination could picture.

But to a man like Dr. Cook, a man to whom the incentive has always been the glory of conquest, fame and world-wide recognition will be the greatest reward. Foreign countries have already tendered him their congratulations, and when he reaches his own land once more he will find himself welcomed as the greatest of living Americans.

At the risk of repetition, it may be well to give the opinion of Doctor Cook as expressed by Henry Cothus Walsh, secretary of the Explorers' Club.

Mr. Walsh says:

"My first meeting with Dr. Frederick A. Cook was in the spring of 1904, when he had organized our expedition to make a summer trip into the Arctic regions and for which he had chartered the ill-fated steamer, the *Miranda*. I became a member of this expedition and was its historian.

"The *Miranda*, it will be recalled, had many mishaps, col-

liding with an iceberg off the coast of Labrador, which necessitated a return to St. John's, N. F., where the ship was repaired, and later to run on some hidden reefs off the coast of Sukkertoppen, South Greenland. In this encounter the bottom was torn off the *Miranda*, but its ballast tank saved it from sinking.

"We arranged to steam back to Sukkertoppen, an Eskimo settlement with a Danish Governor, and from here Doctor Cook, with a small party, set out to look for assistance. He finally got in touch with a Gloucester fishing schooner, the *Rigel*, commanded by Captain Dixon. The big-hearted captain gave up his fishing trip, the first that he had attempted off the coast of Greenland, and came to the rescue of the *Miranda* and her party of stranded explorers. The *Miranda* and the *Rigel* were connected by cable and, the steamer towing the schooner, started for home.

EXPLORER AND PARTY ON THE RIGEL.

"Doctor Cook and the rest of us took up our quarters on the *Rigel*, the officers and crew of the *Miranda* alone remaining on that ship. On the second night out, however, a stormy one, the ballast tank of the *Miranda* began to give way and a signal of distress went up from the *Miranda*, and dories manned by the *Rigel*'s crew went over to the *Miranda* and brought over the officers and crew of that ship. The cable connecting the two vessels was cut and the *Miranda* was abandoned to her fate upon the high seas.

"She contained all the worldly collections we had brought with us, our extra clothes, outfits, guns, ammunition, stores, etc., and all the collections that various members had made in Labrador and Greenland, probably rather undigestible food, even for Arctic fishes. After dodging for a time among icebergs, the little *Rigel* finally landed seventeen days later at Sydney, Cape Breton Island, from whence the wrecked party had no trouble in making its way back to New York.

"This is a very brief summary of a quite exciting and varied Arctic excursion, the complete story of which I subsequently published in a book, 'The Last Cruise of the *Miranda*,' to which Doctor Cook, Prof. William H. Brewer, Prof. Frederick Wright, Dr. R. O. Stebbins, Rudolf Kersting and other members of the expedition contributed articles.

"It was on the way home that the Arctic Club was formed. The idea of this club at first was to keep the members of 'Doctor Cook's Arctic Expedition of 1894' in touch with each other after the disbandment that was soon to come, and to get as many of them together as possible at an annual dinner. Afterward the club was enlarged in its scope so as to admit others who had been engaged or were interested in Arctic work, so that it now numbers among its members almost all the Arctic explorers in America, as well as many from abroad.

ORGANIZATION OF EXPLORERS' CLUB.

"Later in the year 1903 I organized, together with Doctor Cook, General A. W. Greely, Prof. M. H. Saville, Caspar Whitney, Colonel D. L. Brainard, Dr. William H. Furness, Frank W. Chapman, Anthony Fiala, Prof. H. C. Parker and others, the Explorers' Club. The objects of this club are to aid and abet by every means in its power exploration all over the world, and to bind explorers in the bonds of good fellowship. The first president of the club was General A. W. Greely, who was succeeded by Doctor Cook, who in turn was succeeded by Commander Robert E. Peary.

"Naturally, at the meetings of both these clubs and at the meetings of their officers and directors, I was thrown in much with Doctor Cook, and also had the pleasure at times of visiting him in his own home. I always found him a delightful and hospitable host, and it was pleasant to see the kindly domestic side of this man who spent so many years in wild and far-away places, where the gentler and domestic side of a man has little chance of development.

"I was reminded of Bayard Taylor's well-known couplet:

"The bravest are the tenderest,
The loving are the daring."

"I have been asked to tell something about Doctor Cook's pastimes and favorite amusements, but as far as I know he seems to care but little for the ordinary pastimes and amusements. I have never seen him play any game of cards, but in one of the upper rooms of his Brooklyn home he had a pool table, around which he occasionally took relaxation. We had some games of pool together, but as neither of us was at all

expert at the game nothing remarkable can be recorded, except perhaps some remarkable scratches.

"I remember that on one occasion, after the doctor had made a remarkable shot, aided by Providence, I put up my cue and remarked that I could not play against the combination of the Almighty and a polar explorer.

"I do not think that Doctor Cook was ever much given to outdoor sports, either; at least, I never heard him dilate upon any of his own experiences along these lines, though he was, however, very fond of automobiling. At his home he had many relics of his various exploring trips, and naturally our talks ran much to the channels of exploration, and it gave me great pleasure when I was able to draw him out in regard to some of his own remarkable experiences, for I doubt if any man living has had more.

"One of Doctor Cook's most remarkable characteristics in this age of self-advertising is his modesty. If he talks of his exploits at all, he does it in a manner so simple, so direct and matter-of-fact that one comprehends the wonder of it all only by the mental images that are conjured up.

SUMMARY OF DR. COOK'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

"Though I must attempt it here, it is really impossible to sum up briefly all that this extraordinary man has accomplished in the field of exploration, labors that he has capped with the most wonderful feat of all—the discovery of the North Pole—the dream and goal of numberless great explorers throughout the centuries. Those who wish to know of part of his work in detail should read his 'Through the First Antarctic Night' and 'To the Top of the Continent,' records of his experiences as surgeon of the Belgian Antarctic expedition of 1897-9, and of his exploration and conquest of Mount McKinley, 1903-1906.

"Previously to the Miranda expedition of which I have spoken Doctor Cook had gone north as surgeon of the Peary Arctic expedition of 1891-2, and had commanded the yacht *Leta* on a northern cruise in 1893.

"After his return from the Miranda expedition Doctor Cook devoted himself to medical practice in Brooklyn for three years, but the call of the wild was strong within him, and in 1897 he started on the *Belgica* for the Antarctic regions and a quest for the South Pole.

"The Belgica was a bark fitted out partly by the Belgian Government and partly by private subscription. The expedition was under the command of Captain Adrain de Gerlache. The ship sailed from Belgium in August, 1897, and was joined by Doctor Cook at Rio de Janeiro in the capacity of surgeon and anthropologist. This expedition was the first Antarctic expedition which had been fitted out with modern scientific appliances and the first to enter the southern realm of ice in more than fifty years.

"The main results of this expedition were: The discovery of a new strait nearly as large as the Strait of Magellan; the discovery of about 500 miles of new coast; the discovery of a submarine plateau west of Graham Land; a complete series of meteorological and magnetic observations throughout one year. The Belgica was caught in the heavy ice pack and carried with the drift for 2,000 miles. For a year she was frozen in the centre of an ice field two miles square. The Belgica returned in March, 1899.

SURGEON ABOARD THE ERIC.

"In 1901 Doctor Cook was again in northern Arctic seas as surgeon of the Peary auxiliary expedition on the Eric. Upon his return from this expedition and after a period of rest, his still restless spirit led him to begin his attempts to scale Mount McKinley, the highest mountain in North America and the most conspicuous of the Alaskan range. Failing in his first attempt in 1903, he made a second and successful attack in 1906. His observations showed that the mountain is 20,360 feet in height.

"And now, like a bolt out of the blue sky, comes the news that Doctor Cook has broken all records in the centuries' long and wonderful race for the North Pole. No one but a man of indomitable energy, of extraordinary endurance and reserve force could win out in such a race as this. He had trained himself well and kept himself in training for this last great undertaking. A man of most temperate habits, he has always kept himself, even amid the exacting life of a city, in the most perfect trim.

"His march over the polar ice is the most extraordinary ever recorded; how he made that long journey to and from the pole, back to his quarters at Anatoak, and then the long

march to Upernavick—well, the details of this wonderful journey remain yet for him to tell. What he has already given out has been so repeated and voluminously commented upon that it would be a work of supererogation for one to attempt to add anything to all that has been said.

"A wealth of knowledge, of scientific data, of new lands and novel conditions, of new wonders of the universe, it remains for Doctor Cook to give to the world in the more extended accounts to come of all the knowledge he has gained and all the wonders he has seen in his last two long years of conquest over the polar pack, and over the tremendous forces of nature. He alone has stood on that lone spot in the universe

"Where no man comes,
Or has come since the making of the world."

"Often there has been repeated a cry of Cui bono from the unthinking as to the value of polar explorations in general. 'Of what use is polar explorations?' says Nansen. 'You might as well ask of what use is science?'

"And this is true, for there is hardly a department of science which has not been benefited by polar exploration. Geology, paleontology, meteorology and kindred sciences all owe a deep debt to the polar explorer. In the bleak polar regions nature conceals many secrets, and the key that will unlock them must be sought over ice pack and tundru. Here nature's mightiest forces reveal themselves, and here alone can they be adequately studied.

"In a purely material sense also the polar explorers have added greatly to the wealth of the world. The great whale and seal fisheries have followed in the wake of explorers, and their value has been estimated by General Greely as amounting to over \$100,000,000. Not alone to the victor belong the spoils of the explorer; he brings them back in the shape of valuable collections and observations as a rich heritage for all mankind. The explorer is fighting in the greatest battle of expansion of all, the expansion of the realms of human knowledge and of science."