

The Story of Captain Scott

Mary MacGregor



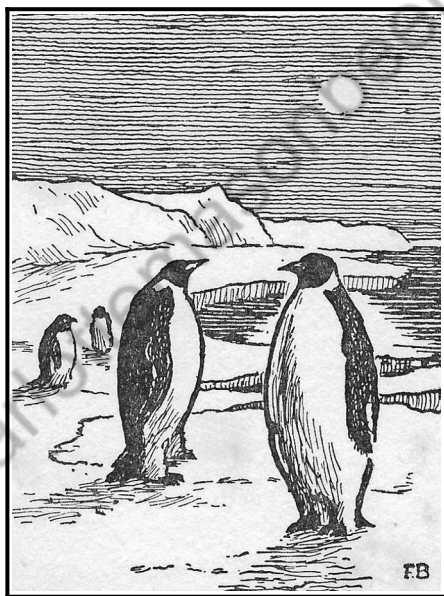
THE STORY OF CAPTAIN SCOTT

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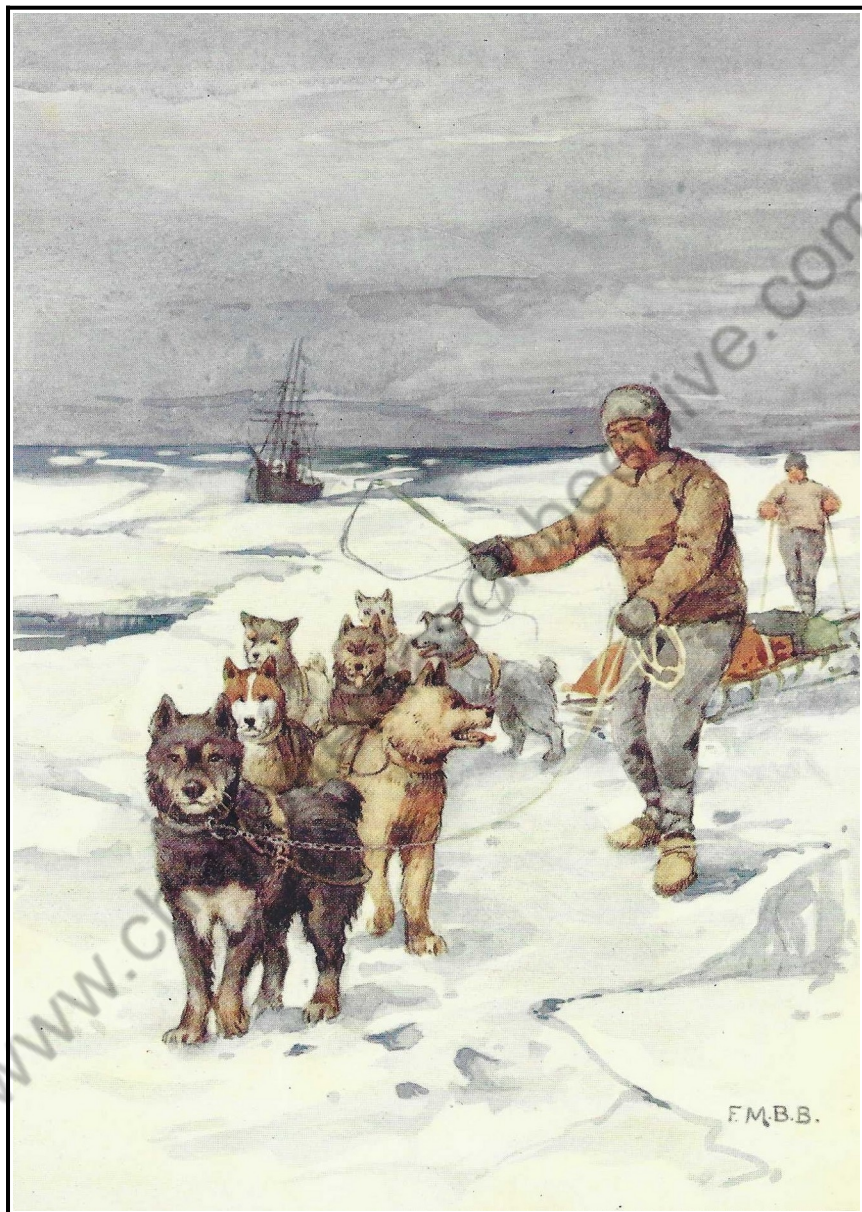
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The dogs were taken out and harnessed to a sledge (page 15)

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THE STORY OF CAPTAIN SCOTT

CHAPTER I

THE *TERRA NOVA* LEAVES LYTTLETON

“HAD we lived,” wrote Captain Scott, in his last message to the public, “I should have had a tale to tell of the hardihood, endurance, and courage of my companions which would have stirred the heart of every Englishman.”

Although Scott did not live to tell the tale of the heroism of those who followed him so loyally, he wrote in his journal enough to fill the heart not only of every Englishman, but of everyone who reads. And the journal which records the bravery and the endurance of his companions, tells us unawares of the strength, the unwavering courage of their leader.

It is the story of Scott's expedition to the South Pole which I am going to tell in this little book. It is a sad story of a brave adventure.

First of all you will wish to know something about Scott before he became one of our greatest explorers.

Robert Falcon Scott was born in Devonport in June 1868. When he was thirteen years old he became a naval cadet on board the *Britannia*. Two years afterwards he was a midshipman and served on different ships and at different stations until he was nineteen. In 1889 he reached the rank of lieutenant. A year or two later he entered a schoolship to study the duties of a torpedo lieutenant. Soon after this he was made its staff-officer on the *Defiance*, a torpedo schoolship stationed at Devonport, his own early home.

When Scott was twenty-eight years old he went to sea as torpedo lieutenant of a battleship. In about a year he was removed to the *Majestic*, the flagship of the Channel Squadron. One of the admirals under whom he served on the flagship was Sir Henry Stephenson, who had been an explorer in the Arctic regions when his lieutenant was seven years of age.

In June 1900 Scott was promoted to the rank of Commander. It was now that he left the Royal Navy for a time, to become an explorer in the Antarctic regions.

The voyage of the *Discovery*, in which ship he sailed on his first expedition, has been told by Scott in a book which you will read for yourself some day.

His return to England in 1904 was a great event. The gallant explorer was fêted by societies, honoured by universities. King Edward created him C.V.O., which letters stand for the words Commander of the Victorian Order. In London a great meeting was held by the Royal Geographical Society at which he was awarded a Royal medal, and also a special one to commemorate the expedition.

In 1906 Scott was again at sea, but three years later he resigned his appointment that he might prepare for his last great expedition to the South Pole. His object was not only to reach the Pole, but to carry farther the scientific work which had been begun on his first voyage.

In November 1910, the *Terra Nova*, the ship which had been fitted out for the expedition, reached New Zealand. She was leaking badly, so as soon as she arrived at Lyttleton Harbour she was overhauled. The leak which was found in the stern of the vessel was repaired. Water still made its way into the ship, but to keep it under it was necessary now to use only a hand pump for a short time twice a day.

Meanwhile the stores had been taken out of the ship, and were being marked plainly and repacked, so that no time would be wasted when the South was reached.

The men packed with skill gained by practice. Tents, sledges, provisions, scientific instruments were stowed away. When this was done no small part of the men's quarters had been invaded. But the men were so eager for the success of the expedition they were ready to endure any discomfort.

To provide stalls for the nineteen ponies, to find space for the thirty-three dogs that were going South, was no easy task.

Fifteen stalls were built under the forecastle, while four more were placed on the port side of the vessel.

The dogs were perhaps better off than the ponies, for they were chained on deck. All the dogs were Siberian, except two, and they were Esquimaux. Most of the animals had been given to the expedition by schools in England and Scotland. They had been brought across Siberia by Meares, who was to have charge of them on the southern journey. Demetri Gerof had been engaged as dog driver, and had helped Meares in his task, which had been no easy one.

There was an ice-house on board in which large stores of mutton and beef, sweetbreads and kidney were packed. Scott wished to supply his men with fresh meat as long as possible, as that would help to keep them strong. Bags of coal, cases of petrol, bales of fodder, as well as the things of which I have already told you, and many more would I have not mentioned, were packed away, until every corner of the ship was loaded.

On the 26th November, 1910 all was ready, and the *Terra Nova* set sail from Lyttleton Harbour, followed by tugs crowded with friends and well-wishers.

Three days later Scott joined the ship at Port Chalmers. The sun was shining as she left the harbour, surrounded by even more boats and tugs than at Lyttleton. For about two hours they followed the vessel, then slowly and sadly the boats turned back, while the ship sailed on alone.

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CHAPTER II

THE STORM

BEFORE a week was over the *Terra Nova* was tossing on a stormy sea. The ponies in their cramped stalls suffered more than the men, as the ship rolled and pitched before the wind. Again and again in his journal Scott wrote of what the ponies and the dogs had to endure. He told how by looking through a hole in the bulkhead one could see “a row of heads with sad, patient eyes come swinging up together from the starboard side, whilst those on the port swing back then up come the port heads, while the starboard recede.”

But although they suffered, the ponies still ate well. They slept standing, for there was not room to lie down. This was not a hardship, as horses have in each leg a ligament which supports their weight.

The dogs, as I told you, were chained on deck, and during the storm the waves which were constantly breaking over the ship drenched them until they looked poor, miserable creatures. While the storm raged, Oates and Atkinson, two of the officers, did all they could for the comfort of the beasts. A strange thing befell one of the ponies, for a wave of unusual strength snapped his chain and swept him overboard, while the next wave lifted the animal and dropped him again on deck. He must have been a hardy little pony for he recovered from the shock in a very short time.

Forage cases, petrol cases, instrument cases—all were in danger of serious damage from loose bags of coals which the waves lifted and dashed heedlessly down among them. The men were ordered to the