CLASSICS TO GO

SHACKLETON IN THE ANTARCTIC

BEING THE STORY OF THE BRITISH ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION, 1907-1909

SIR ERNEST HENRY SHAKLETON

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Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton

The Commander of the Expedition

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CHAPTER I
THE EXPEDITION

MEN go out into the void spaces of the world for various reasons. Some are incited simply by a love of adventure, some have a keen thirst for scientific knowledge, and others are drawn away from trodden paths by the mysterious fascination of the unknown. I think that in my own case it was a combination of these factors that determined me to try my fortune once again in the frozen south.

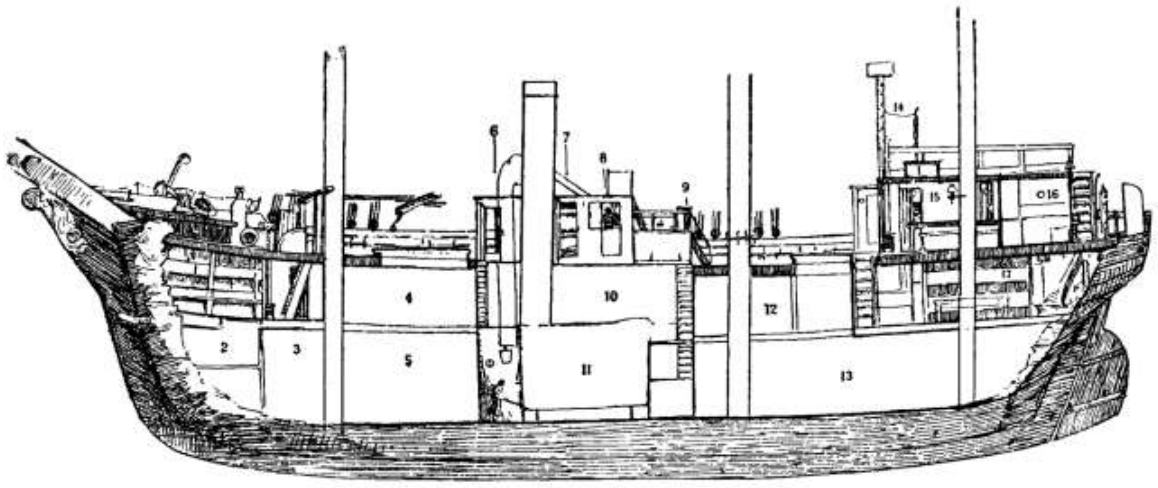
I had been invalided home before the conclusion of the *Discovery* expedition, and I had the keenest desire to see more of the vast continent that lies amid the Antarctic snows and glaciers. Indeed the stark polar lands grip the hearts of men who have lived on them in a manner that can hardly be understood by people who have never got outside the pale of civilisation. I was convinced, moreover, that an expedition on the lines I had in view could justify itself by the results of its scientific work.

The *Discovery* expedition had performed splendid service in several important branches of science, and I believed that a second expedition could carry the work still further. For instance, the southern limits of the Great Ice Barrier had not been defined, and it was important to the scientific world that information should be gained regarding the movement of the ice-sheet that forms the barrier. I also wanted to discover what lay beyond the mountains to the south of latitude 82° 17′ and whether the Antarctic continent rose to a plateau similar to the one found by Captain Scott beyond the western mountains.

There was much also to be done in the fields of meteorology, zoology, biology, mineralogy and general geology, so much in fact that apart from the wish to gain a higher latitude the expedition seemed to be justified on scientific grounds alone.

The difficulty that confronts most men who wish to undertake exploration work is that of finance, and for some time I was faced by financial problems; but when the governments of Australia and New Zealand came to my assistance, the position became more satisfactory.

In the *Geographical Journal* for March 1907, I outlined my plan of campaign, but this had materially to be changed later on owing to circumstances. "The shore-party of nine or twelve men will winter with sufficient equipment to enable three separate parties to start out in the spring," I announced. "One party will go east, and, if possible, across the Barrier to the new land known as King Edward VII Land, the second party will proceed south over the same route as that of the southern sledge-party of the *Discovery*, the third party will possibly proceed westward over the mountains, and, instead of crossing in a line due west, will strike towards the magnetic pole. The main changes in equipment will be that Siberian ponies will be taken for the sledge journeys both east and south, and also a specially designed motor-car for the southern journey. I do not intend to sacrifice the scientific utility of the expedition to a mere record-breaking journey, but say frankly, all the same, that one of my great efforts will be to reach the southern geographical pole."



SECTION, SHOWING INTERIOR OF "NIMROD"
1. Forecastle. 2. Stores. 3. Chain locker. 4. Fore hold. 5. Lower hold. 6. Stoke hold. 7. Carpenters' shop. 8. Cook's Galley. 9. Engine room. 10. Engine room. 11. Boiler. 12. After hold. 13. Lower hold. 14. After bridge. 15. Officer's quarters. 16 Captain's quarters. 17. Oyster alley. (*See page 19.*)

My intention was that the expedition should leave New Zealand at the beginning of 1908, and proceed to winter quarters on the Antarctic continent, the ship to land men and stores and then return. By avoiding the ship being frozen in, the use of a relief ship would be unnecessary, as the same vessel could come south again the following summer and take us off.

Before we finally left England I had decided that if possible I would establish my base on King Edward VII Land instead of at the *Discovery* winter quarters in McMurdo Sound, so that we might break entirely new ground. The narrative will show how, as far as this particular matter was concerned, my plans were upset by the demands of the situation. Owing largely to the unexpected loss of ponies before the winter, the journey to King Edward VII Land over the Barrier was not attempted.

As the expedition was entirely my own venture I decided that I would have no committee, and thus I avoided delays that are inevitable when a group of men have to arrive at a decision on points of detail. The aim of one who undertakes

to organise such an expedition must be to provide for every contingency, and in dealing with this Work I was fortunate enough to secure the assistance of Mr. Alfred Reid, who had already gained considerable experience in connection with previous polar ventures, and who—as manager of the expedition—was invaluable to me.

CHAPTER II
I—SUPPLIES

FOR a polar expedition the food must in the first place be wholesome and nourishing in the highest possible degree. Scurvy—that dread disease—was once regarded as the inevitable result of a prolonged stay in ice-bound regions, but by selecting food-stuffs which had been prepared on scientific lines we entirely avoided any sickness attributable directly or indirectly to the foods we took with us.

In the second place the food taken on the sledging expeditions must be as light as possible, always remembering that in very low temperatures the heat of the body can be maintained only by use of fatty and farinaceous foods in fairly large quantities. The sledging-foods must also be such as do not require prolonged cooking, for the amount of fuel that can be carried is limited. It must even be possible to eat these foods without any cooking, because the fuel may be lost or exhausted.

As regards foods for use at the winter quarters of the expedition a greater variety was possible, for the ship might be expected to reach that point and weight was consequently of less importance. My aim was to get a large variety of foods for the winter night, when the long months of darkness severely strain men unaccustomed to the conditions.

I based my estimates on the requirements of twelve men for two years, but this was added to in New Zealand when the staff was increased.

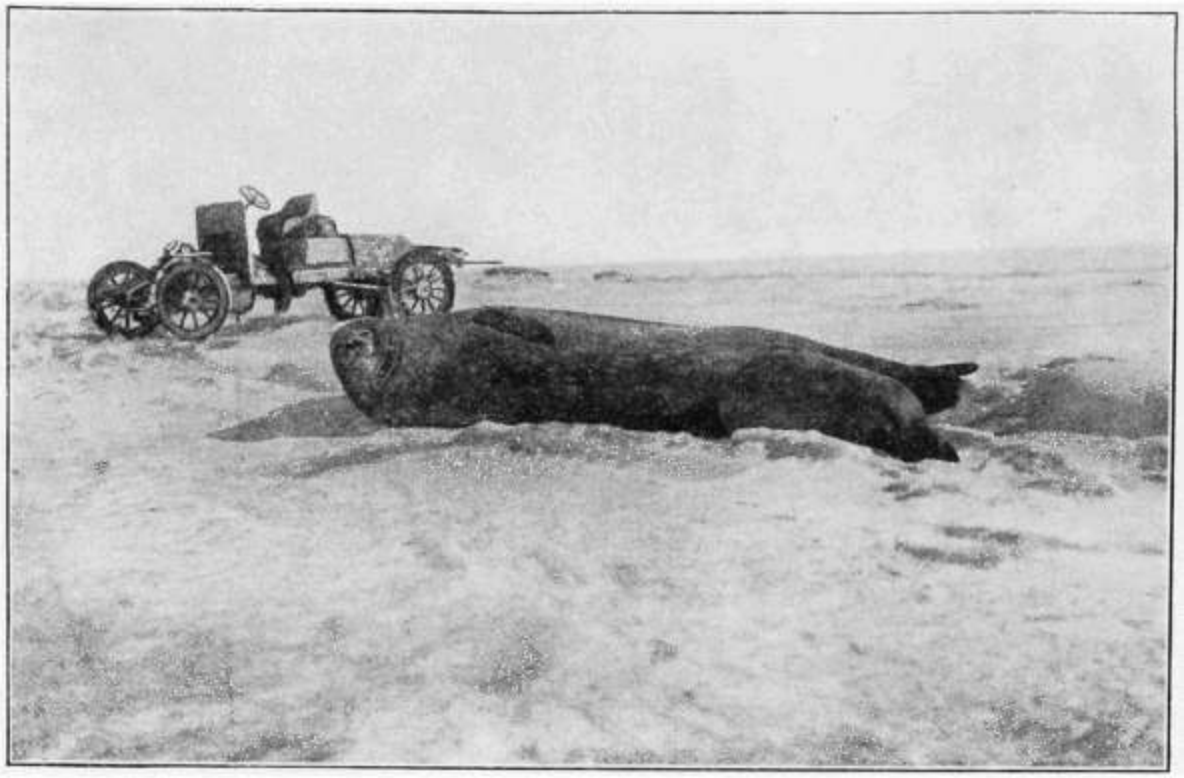
At first the question of packing presented difficulties, but at last I decided to use "Venesta" cases both for food-stuffs

and as much as possible for equipment. These cases are manufactured from composite boards prepared by uniting three layers of birch or other hard wood with water-proof cement. They were eminently suited to our purpose, and the saving of weight, as compared with an ordinary packing-case, was about four pounds per case. In spite of the rough handling our stores received in the process of being landed at Cape Royds, after the expedition had reached the Antarctic we had no trouble with breakages.

II—EQUIPMENT

After placing orders for the principal food supplies I went to Norway with Mr. Reid to secure sledges, fur boots and mits, sleeping bags, ski, &c. The sledges were to be of the Nansen pattern, built of specially selected timber and of the best workmanship. I ordered ten twelve-foot sledges, eighteen eleven-foot sledges and two seven-foot sledges, the largest being suitable for pony-haulage. The sledges were made by Messrs. Hagen and Company of Christiania and proved to be all that I desired.

The next step was to secure furs, but this was not a very large order as after the experience of the *Discovery* expedition I decided to use fur only for the feet and hands and for the sleeping-bags, relying otherwise on woollen garments with an outer covering of windproof material. I ordered three large sleeping-bags, to hold three men each, and twelve one-man bags. Each bag had the reindeer fur inside, and the seams were covered with leather strongly sewn.



SEAL SUCKLING YOUNG, AND TAKING NO NOTICE OF THE MOTOR-CAR

The foot-gear I ordered consisted of eighty pairs of ordinary finnesko or reindeer-fur boots, twelve pairs of special finnesko and sixty pairs of ski boots of various sizes. The ordinary finnesko is made from the skin of the reindeer stag's head, with the fur outside, and its shape is roughly that of a very large boot without any laces. It is large enough to hold the foot, several pairs of socks, and a supply of sennegrass, and it is a wonderfully warm and comfortable foot-gear. This sennegrass is a dried grass of long fibre with a special quality of absorbing moisture and I bought fifty kilos (110.25 lb.) of it in Norway.

The sixty pairs of wolfskin and dogskin mits which I ordered from Mr. Möller were made with the fur outside, were long enough to protect the wrists, and had one compartment for the four fingers and another for the thumb. They were worn over woollen gloves and were hung round

the neck with lamp-wick when the use of the fingers was required.

CHAPTER III
THE SHIP, THE HUT AND OTHER NECESSITIES

BEFORE I left Norway I visited Sandyfjord to see whether I could come to terms with Mr. C. Christiansen, the owner of the *Bjorn*, a ship specially built for polar work; but much as I wished to try her I could not afford to pay the price.

So when I returned to London I purchased the *Nimrod*. She was small and old, and her maximum speed under steam was hardly more than six knots, but on the other hand she was able to face rough treatment in the ice. I confess that I was disappointed when I first examined the little ship, to which I was about to commit the hopes and aspirations of many years, but I had not then become acquainted with her many good qualities, and my first impression scarcely did justice to the plucky old ship. She was at once put into the hands of Messrs. R. & H. Green of Blackwall, the famous firm that had built so many of Britain's "wooden walls," and that had done fitting and repairing work for several other polar expeditions, and day by day she assumed a more satisfactory appearance. Quarters were provided for the scientific staff of the expedition by enclosing a portion of the after-hold and constructing cabins which were entered by a steep ladder from the deck-house. For some reason not on record these small quarters were known later as "Oyster Alley."

As however the *Nimrod*, after landing the shore-party with stores and equipment, would return to New Zealand, it was necessary that we should have a reliable hut in which to live during the Antarctic night, and until the sledging journeys began in the following spring.

THE HUT

I ordered a hut (which was to be our only refuge from furious blizzards) measuring externally 33 ft. by 19 ft. by 8 ft. to the eaves from Messrs. Humphreys of Knightsbridge. It was specially constructed to my order, and after being erected and inspected in London was shipped in sections.

It was made of stout fir timbering of best quality in walls, roofs and floors, and the parts were all morticed and tenoned to make erection easy in the Antarctic. Great precautions were taken against the extreme cold, and the hut was to be erected on wooden piles let into the ground or ice, and rings were fixed to the top of the roof so that guy-ropes might be used to give additional resistance to the gales. The hut had two doors, connected by a small porch, so that ingress or egress would not cause a draught of cold air, and the windows were double so that the warmth of the hut might be retained. We took little furniture as I proposed to use cases for the construction of benches, beds, and other necessary articles of internal equipment. The hut was to be lighted with acetylene gas, and we took a generator, the necessary piping and a supply of carbide.

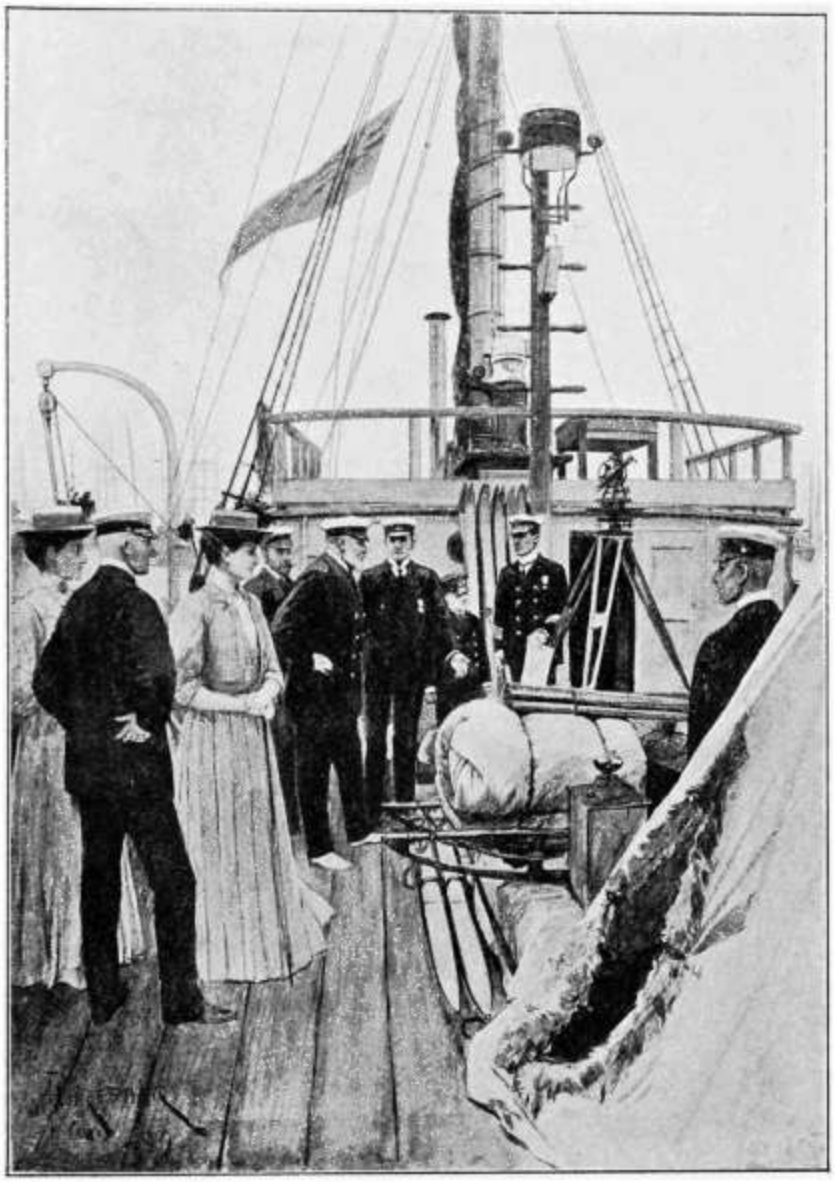
We also took a cooking-range, manufactured by Messrs. Smith and Wellstrood, of London, which had a fire chamber designed to burn anthracite coal continuously day and night.

CLOTHING

Each member of the expedition was supplied with two winter suits made of heavy blue pilot cloth, lined with Jaeger fleece. An outer suit of windproof material is necessary in the polar regions, and I secured twenty-four suits of Burberry gabardine. The underclothing was obtained from the Dr. Jaeger Sanitary Woollen Company.

PONIES, DOGS, AND MOTOR-CAR

I decided to take ponies, dogs, and a car to assist in hauling our sledges on long journeys, but my hopes were mainly based on the ponies. Dogs had not proved satisfactory on the Barrier surface, but I was sure that the hardy ponies used in Northern China and Manchuria would be useful if landed in good condition on the ice. They had done good work both on the Jackson-Harmsworth expedition and in the Russo-Japanese War. Fifteen of these ponies, practically unbroken and about fourteen hands high, were selected and ultimately transferred to Quail Island in Port Lyttelton, where they were free to feed in luxury until they were required.



THEIR MAJESTIES KING EDWARD AND QUEEN ALEXANDRA INSPECTING THE EQUIPMENT ON THE "NIMROD" AT COWES, (*See page 26*)

As I thought it possible, from my previous experience, that we might find a hard surface on the Great Ice Barrier, I resolved to take a motor-car, so I selected a 12-15 horse-power New Arrol-Johnston car, fitted with a specially designed air-cooled four-cylinder engine and Simms Bosch magneto ignition. A non-freezing oil was prepared for me by Messrs. Price and Company. I placed, as I have suggested, but small reliance on dogs; I did however order forty of the descendants of the Siberian dogs used on the Newnes-

Borchgrevink expedition. The breeder was only able to let me have nine, but this team proved sufficient for my purposes.

SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENTS

On the scientific side the equipment of a polar expedition is very costly, and I felt the pinch of necessary economies in this branch. I was, however, greatly assisted by loans of instruments and charts from the Admiralty; the Royal Geographical Society lent me three chronometer watches, and three wardens of the Skinners' Company gave me one chronometer watch which accompanied me on my journey to the Pole and which proved to be the most accurate of all. We also took with us a photographic equipment which included nine cameras, and a cinematograph machine in order that we might place on record the curious movements of seals and penguins.

For the rest I had tried to provide for every contingency, and the gear ranged from needles and nails to a Remington typewriter and two Singer sewing machines. There was also a gramophone and a complete printing-press; and even hockey-sticks and a football were not forgotten.

CHAPTER IV
THE STAFF AND THE ROYAL VISIT

It was no easy matter for me to select the staff from the large number (over 400) of applicants who wished to join the expedition.

After much consideration I selected eleven men for the shore-party, only three of whom—Adams, Wild and Joyce—had been known to me previously, while only Wild and Joyce, having been members of the *Discovery* expedition, had previous experience of polar work. Every man, however, was highly recommended, and this was also the case with the officers whom I chose for the *Nimrod*. Before leaving New Zealand I was able to increase the number of the expedition, which ultimately consisted of:

THE SHORE-PARTY

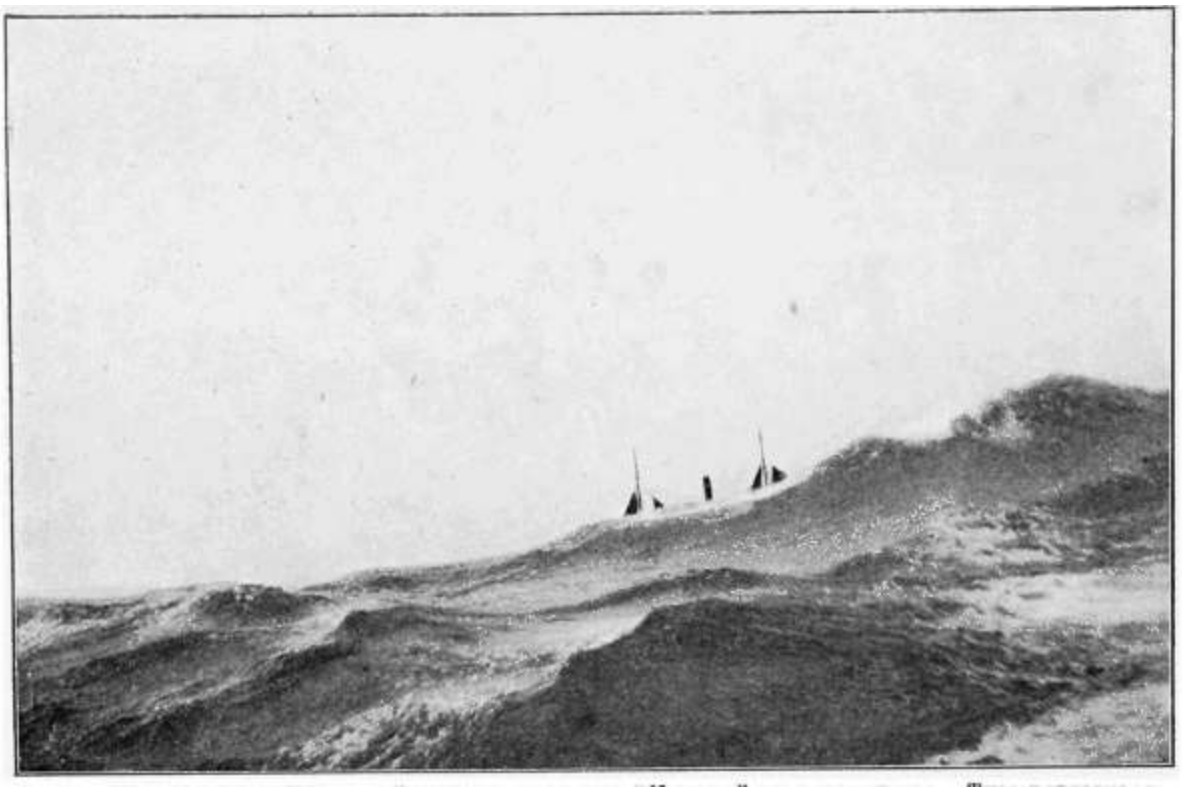
Ernest H. Shackleton, Commander.
Professor T. W. Edgeworth David, F.R.S., Director of the scientific staff.
Lieutenant J. B. Adams, R.N.R., Meteorologist.
Sir Philip Brocklehurst, Bart., Assistant geologist.
Bernard Day, Motor expert.
Ernest Joyce, in charge of dogs, sledges, &c.
Dr. A. F. Mackay, Surgeon.
Douglas Mawson, D.Sc., B.E., Physicist.
Bertram Armytage, in charge of ponies.
Dr. E. Marshall, Surgeon, cartographer.
G. E. Marston, Artist.
J. Murray, Biologist.
Raymond Priestley, Geologist.

W. Roberts, Cook.
F. Wild, in charge of provisions.

THE SHIP'S STAFF

Lieutenant R. G. England, R.N.R., Captain.
John K. Davis, Chief officer, later captain.
A. L. A. Mackintosh, Second officer.
A. E. Harbord, Auxiliary second officer.
H. J. L. Dunlop, Chief engineer.
W. A. R. Michell, Surgeon.
Alfred Cheetham, Third officer and boatswain.
W. D. Ansell, Steward.
J. Montague, Cook.
E. Ellis } A.B.'s.
H. Bull }
S. Riches }
J. Paton }
W. Williams }
G. Bilsby, Carpenter.
[Lieutenant F. P. Evans, R.N.R., was appointed captain for the second voyage to the Antarctic.]

The work of preparation progressed rapidly, and on July 30, 1907, the *Nimrod* sailed from the East India Docks on the first stage of the long journey to New Zealand. On the following day Mr. Reid received a telegram from the King's equerry, commanding the Nimrod to visit Cowes in order that the King and Queen might inspect the ship on August 4, and consequently we proceeded to the Solent, where we anchored.



THE TOWING STEAMER "KOONYA" AS SEEN FROM THE "NIMROD" IN A HEAVY SEA. THIS PARTICULAR WAVE CAME ABOARD THE "NIMROD" AND DID CONSIDERABLE DAMAGE. (*See page 31*)

ROYAL VISIT TO THE NIMROD

Their Majesties King Edward and Queen Alexandra, their Royal Highnesses the Prince of Wales, the Princess Victoria, Prince Edward and the Duke of Connaught, came on board and inspected the ship, an honour which was greatly appreciated by the members of the expedition. Her Majesty graciously entrusted me with a Union Jack to be carried on the southern journey, and His Majesty graciously conferred on me the Victorian Order.

On Wednesday August 7, the ship sailed for New Zealand, and arrived at Lyttelton—from whence the final departure for the south was to be made—on November 23.