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SIX YEARS IN THE ARCTIC

The six years in the Arctic which form the background for my address today were spent on an expedition which was organized and partly conducted by the late Roald Amundsen in an attempt to repeat the famous drift of the FRAM, Fridtjof Nansen's vessel, across the Polar Sea.

Before starting on this expedition Amundsen had already achieved world fame as an Arctic explorer. After years of preparation he succeeded, in 1903-06, in sailing through the Northwest Passage following the northern sea route along the American Continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. His small vessel, the GJØa, stands now in Golden Gate Park. In 1908 Amundsen advanced his plan for crossing the Polar Sea, but as he could not obtain the necessary funds he changed his plans and went to the Antarctic where he reached the South Pole on the 14th of December, 1911. He had, however, not abandoned his hope to repeat the drift across the Polar Sea, although many circumstances had delayed his plans. Finally, in 1916 during the world war he decided to build a new vessel which was completed in 1917 and was given the name MAUD after the Queen of Norway.

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The MAUD was built along the same lines as the FRAM, broad and round. She had a length of 120 feet and a beam of 40 feet, and the amount of wood used in constructing the vessel was large enough to construct at least three other vessels of ordinary strength. She received her round shape in order to be lifted when jammed by the ice and not crushed.

Slide 2.

The MAUD left Norway in July, 1918, with a total party of ten men on board. She carried no special crew. When we were sailing every one had to act as a sailor, and during the years spent on board the MAUD I have, besides being in charge of the scientific work, performed every duty on board a ship from cook's mate to navigator.

Slide 3

Amundsen intended to follow the coast of Siberia to the vicinity of the new Siberian Islands penetrating into the drift ice in this region and, if possible, be carried by the ice fields across the Polar Sea to the vicinity of Spitzbergen. However, we met unfavorable ice conditions there and in September 1918 were stopped at Cape Chelyuskin, the northernmost point of the Asiatic Continent where we spent the winter of 1918-19. A great number of scientific observations were taken during this winter and the most northerly peninsula of the continent was surveyed and explored.

In the summer of 1919 the ice broke up very slowly and for a long time it looked as if we would have to stay for one more year in the same place. Finally, on September 12, we got under way and proceeded to the east to enter the drift ice if possible. At that time we had no wireless station on board. Two men were therefore left behind with instructions to carry the observations of the winter and information as to the fate of the expedition back to Port Dickson where a Russian wireless station was located. The journey which these two were to undertake appeared less risky and dangerous than the one we thought we had ahead of us. But on the journey one of them took ill and died, and the other was unable to finish the journey alone. Their bodies and the records which they were to take home we found years later.

It soon became apparent that it had not been necessary to send these men off, since we did not succeed in entering the drift ice. The season was too far advanced and we had again to establish winter quarters at the coast, this time at Ayon Island 800 miles from Bergen Strait. Arriving here we met, to our surprise, a number of natives of the Chukchi tribe, in a region which on our maps was indicated as uninhabited. We soon found out that these Chukchi were nomads who had great herds of domesticated reindeer and used to spend the spring and summer on the barren tundra near the coast and the winter in the inland forests.

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The Chukchi represent one of the so-called old Siberian tribes, their appearance is slightly Mongolian, but widely different from that of the Eskimos. Their language is more closely related to languages of Indians in northwestern America than any of the Siberian languages. It has been dealt with in the Handbook of Languages of the American Indians published by the Smithsonian Institution but this publication had not appeared at the time we encountered the Chukchi, and even if had we should not have known it, since we had not anticipated getting in touch with any of the Siberian natives. Some of them understood a few Russian words and since one in our party knew Russian it was possible for us to communicate with them.

The group which we met appeared to be very primitive and to have very little knowledge of the outside world. We had left Norway, as I have already said, in July, 1918 before the war had ended and had been without communication. In September, 1919, we were naturally anxious to learn whether or not the war was over, but when we asked the natives if they had had any news concerning