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The Bravest Deed I know in the Story of the British Empire Overseas.

To find the greatest deed in the glorious history of the British Empire, I think that the eyes should not be turned to the mighty volumes concerning the golden India of Clive, the dark Africa of Rhodes, or the rugged heights of Abraham, but to a slender and quite modern publication, telling of a certain explorer, Courtauld, who spent a long winter snowed up and alone amid the snowy wastes of the Greenland Icecap.

He did so not for personal fame, but to take meteorological observations, so that aeroplanes could be flown direct from Great Britain over the icecap to Canada, to form a still closer link between the mother country and her great dominion.

In mid-1930 the expedition's base on the coast established a tiny outpost on the icecap, where observations were taken of maximum and minimum temperatures, kinds of cloud, regularity of storms, and other all-important data from the point of view of prospective fliers. It was the intention of the explorers to keep two men always in the station, but the third relay had been delayed for three weeks by snow and blizzard, and there remained only enough provisions for a single observer. Although his friends counselled evacuation, Courtauld insisted on staying, and on December the sixth, 1930, he was left alone.

In the first week of March, when the gales at last began to abate, a relief party was sent out, but on reaching the neighbourhood of the station the food was very short, and as there was no time for a prolonged search for the hut, they had to hurry back to the base. Immediately on their

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return another expedition was sent up, eventually finding Courtald completely buried in the snow.

The experiences of this solitary explorer must indeed have been unpleasant, but in spite of all, his diary shows that he kept up his spirits wonderfully. When first left by himself he was very comfortable, having plenty to amuse him in the way of literature, and having the meteorological observations to make every hour from 9 am. to 9 pm. The taking of these readings served to brighten up his dull life, but he found that it was not necessary to force himself up during the night, as little escaped the notice of the maximum and minimum thermometers.

Before the arrival of the gales, all went well, but on their bursting Courtald found it almost impossible to keep his entrance clear. It was blocked up for good in a blizzard of early January. To provide himself with an exit, the hermit-like Courtald cut through the snow roof of one of his two igloos, keeping the aperture closed with a ration box. He could thus still take the observations, and amuse himself by watching for one of the expedition's two aeroplanes, which he thought might fly over to drop luxuries.

There was no need to worry about the food supply. His needs were few, due to his sedentary existence, and indeed, at the rate he was using them, would have lasted two months longer. The fuel, however, was a problem. Four gallons of paraffin, comprising a large proportion of his stock, had leaked away. Early in March he gave up all his cooked meals except his morning porridge, and at the same time had to decide to spend half the day in total darkness. Later on, when the fuel supply would only run to the melting of snow for drinking purposes, he had to make meals of raw oatmeal with cocoa and snow, and chewed pemmican and margarine together.

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To add to his tribulations he was, in the middle of March, completely snowed up. This meant that he could no longer take the observations, and the one light relief of his tedious life was removed.

Shut in a tiny space by himself, without room to stretch his legs or fuel to cook his meals, and deprived of all amusement by the lack of light, Courtauld's must have been a dreary life. Tobacco was one of his few comforts, but, like his fuel, it soon vanished in smoke. He could just distinguish between night and day, as a feeble shaft of light came down the ventilator, but the clock was no object to him, as he could only sleep for a few minutes at a time.

Luxuries were few, but and on finishing his tobacco he tried to smoke tea, but his experiments met with no distinct success. He must have felt that the last straw had been reached when, on opening some of the ration boxes, he found nearly all of his last luxury, chocolate, had been stolen on the way from England.

Living in the midst of ice, with the biting winter winds howling round him, Courtauld must have felt the lack of fuel terribly, because not only could he not warm his food, except for his tepid porridge, but nearly all the heat in the tent was supplied by his own body. He took no exercise and ate but little, so he must often have felt the intense cold.

On May the fourth, the relieving party was a mile and a half to the North West of the station. Waiting for fine weather to fix their position, they skied about in different directions, but found nothing. The next day was clearer, and, knowing their position, they set out on ski, to see the tattered remnants of a Union Jack and a foot or two of pole standing out of the

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snow. They raced towards it, and quickly dug through to Courtald. He lit the primus preparatory to making them some tea, but before the water boiled, the primus spluttered and went out. All the oil was finished.

Six days later, they were back at the base.

Soldiers in battles may do mighty deeds in the excitement of the moment, but few acts are braver than that of Courtald, who, knowing well the dangers of his task, stayed a whole winter alone on the Greenland icecap, the first man to do so. The information which he gathered is making us still nearer to our great dominion of Canada - he risked his life for us.