

## Arctic Vicissitudes

THE ADVENTURE OF WRANGEL ISLAND. By VILHJALMUR STEFANSSON, with the Collaboration of JOHN IRVINE KNIGHT, upon the Diary of Whose Son, ERROL LORNE KNIGHT, the Narrative is Mainly Based. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1925. \$5.

Reviewed by RAYMOND HOLDEN

A BOOK about an exploit in colonization north of the Arctic Circle by the most brilliant living explorer, who is also a writer of distinguished force, advertises itself immediately as being important and interesting reading. Yet Mr. Vilhjalmur Stefansson's story of Wrangel Island's recent history will be a mystery to many who are not familiar with the developments of the last fifteen years in the field study as well as the theory of Polar geography.

Since the late Admiral Peary trod the ice of 90° North Latitude in April 1909, an event which everyone but the geographer seems to have assumed must put an end to Arctic exploration, there has been a complete revaluation of human ideas about the North Polar regions. The will-o'-the-wisp vision of an Arctic continent, toyed with for a century and a half and kept alive by Peary, has troubled the minds of many, it is true. Even more than hope of new land, however, a desire for scientific information has been the important factor in keeping the "frozen north" besieged. It has become clear, for instance, that a greater knowledge of the unknown top of the world might very well provide a key to the agricultural prosperity of both the United States and Canada by providing a key to the prediction of North American weather. It has also become clear that if there is anything in the business of aerial transportation between the continents, the Arctic, which lies midway between the continents, is going to be subject, one of these days, to a considerable advance in real estate values. For Arctic lands are, with the exception of Greenland and a part of one of the large islands to the west of it, entirely devoid of glaciers, are subject to very light snowfall, are warm and equable in Summer, and offer large expanses of plain suitable for landing fields. In addition to this fact, it is evident that food supply is going to be more and more an important consideration in the future of the human race. What more logical then, than that the Arctic, which provides possible open grazing land for millions of reindeer, should offer the solution of at least a part of the problem of human sustenance.

The development of these ideas, which to many in this civilized realm of ours, in which the daily distress of subway and street is a greater hardship than most explorers worthy of the name have ever had to face, is due in very large measure to the activity and shrewdness of Mr. Stefansson. By the use of methods which to him seemed from the first perfectly logical, but which seemed radical to many even among those with considerable knowledge of the Arctic, he brought about a revolution in human behavior in the far north which was quite as definite as the revolution in ideas. It is not strange, then, that the first plan for actual colonization of the so-called uninhabitable lands north of the continents, should have originated with Mr. Stefansson, a Canadian by birth, who believed that the British Empire as a whole and Canada in particular, had the most valid claim to the possession of Wrangel Island. This piece of land, containing about twenty-five hundred square miles, was first sighted by a British officer in 1849, but first trod upon and explored by an American. It was first actually inhabited by Canadians, however, a party from Mr. Stefansson's unlucky Karluk having spent six months upon it in 1914.

In 1923 news was given to the world that a relief ship sent to support a colony established by Mr. Stefansson on Wrangel Island, eighty-five miles north of Siberia, had found four out of five members of the party dead, only the Eskimo woman who served as a seamstress having survived. Public interest in the Arctic is something like the public's interest in the bull at a bullfight. It likes to see the human attack worsted. It is true that Stefansson's expedition had come to grief, just as the battle of Bull Run was a disaster for the army which eventually won the American Civil War. It is true that Lorne Knight, Allan Crawford, Fred Maurer and Milton Galle, all experienced men, had not survived their attempt to live for two years upon what Wrangel Island had to offer the human stomach.

But unfortunately the leader of the relief party of 1923, in an article which he published, conveyed the impression that Knight had died of starvation, and that the other three men who were never found had also slowly frozen to death as a result of starvation. In short he gave the impression that instead of heroism and patience in the face of public neglect there was mutiny and mismanagement, and that the death of the four colonists had been inevitable from the start. Fortunately Mr. Stefansson in "The Adventure of Wrangel Island" is able to adduce not only contrary evidence but even a signed retraction from his critic which is conclusive as to facts.

There is, however, no retraction nor contradiction of the fatal neglect and indifference of both the British and Canadian governments, which Mr. Stefansson spent two years trying vainly to convince of the value of his island and the validity of the claim to its title which he was supporting. The colonizing expedition was financed at Mr. Stefansson's own expense and its support, when his private resources were exhausted, became precarious. By private subscription enough money was raised to send the relief ship of 1923, but the two governments concerned spent all their time talking and did nothing.

This book, while it is written with more care to preserve the facts as they are known than to present them with literary grace, and while it thus loses some of the touch of personal vividness which it would have had had it been a narrative of Mr. Stefansson's own experience, is none the less one of the most interesting and tragic documents in Arctic history. It will be remembered when the Arctic has become our friend instead of the enemy it is commonly supposed to be, and the men who played their parts in it will be honored for their courage and their faith.

## The Great Desert

THE EDGE OF THE DESERT. By IANTHE DUNBAR. Boston: Small, Maynard & Co. 1924. \$4.50.

ACROSS THE SAHARA BY MOTOR CAR FROM TOUGGOURT TO TIMBUCTOO.

By GEORGES MARIE HAARDT and LOUIS AUDUIN-DUBRIEL. New York: D. Appleton & Co. 1924. \$4.

Reviewed by C. E. ANDREWS.

THERE have been many books about northern Africa in the last few years by artists, impressionists, and mere casual travellers, for it is the easiest and most comfortable place in the world to visit now. Miss Dunbar's book is another of these casual impressions, very charming and very readable and most attractive in form. She is an open-eyed observer with a feeling for significant detail. She gives us the color and movement of Tunisian life as a painter on a vacation would see it. The dozen or so crayon sketches show the same point of view as the text, the charm of an oriental crowd, the grace of flowing garments and the poise of attitudes, and the romance of strange street corners and market places.

This is a pleasant book for one who loves palms and minarets and marabout shrines, the glints of a coppersmith's shop and the flash of a spahi's cloak in the sun. But this is not the book for one looking for a new impression of Arab life, an original point of view, or even unusual phases of the world that every tourist sees without going off the railroad. It would have been a better book if Miss Dunbar had omitted all of the commonplace information about Arabs that she seems to think ought to go in, and had just given her painter's impression of what she finds delightful to look at. I should have liked more stories like that of the death of the Englishman who had turned native.

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"Across the Sahara by Motor Car" is a finely written journal of a memorable achievement that will have far reaching consequences. The tank, which was developed during the War, had been modified by M. Citroën, the great French automobile manufacturer, into a vehicle for transport which has conquered the stubborn obstacles of Saharan travel. The great expedition was entrusted to M. Haardt, the general manager of the Citroën factories, and M. Audoin-Dubreuil, a former cavalry officer thoroughly familiar with the problems of the country. Besides being practical men of affairs these two authors have an interesting,

colorful style and a sense of imagination. It took imagination as well as scientific skill to accomplish this great project. And the authors are most fortunate in having a clever and understanding translator in M. Fournier d'Albe.

The special pleasure one has in reading the story of this voyage across the desert is that the trip has significance beyond itself. The adventurers had not merely a geographical goal in view, but in reaching that goal, they accomplished something that will undoubtedly change the history of Africa. The route followed was from Touggourt, which is some four hundred miles by rail south of Algiers, through the oasis of Ouargla to In Salah, a French oasis outpost five hundred miles further south. After this stage of the journey which was through the desert of shifting sands, the real difficulties and dangers were to be encountered. The next stage was the route of ancient wells through the stony desert to the region of the Hoggar, past dead mountains that rise to a height of eight thousand feet. Then they crossed the Tanezrouft, the "Region of Thirst" where are no wells, the most dangerous part of the crossing for either caravan or tanks. After striking the route that again passes water stations, the party reached the Niger and soon made its triumphal entry into Timbuctoo. The whole raid occupied twenty days, fifteen of which were actual stages of the journey and five were for necessary rests. The distance covered was about two thousand miles, which the fastest camels could make in eight to ten weeks; loaded caravans usually take from six to seven months.

The second half of the book describes the strange Saharan city of Timbuctoo, so long a place of mystery, inhospitable to all foreigners, but now for twenty years a French outpost governed from Senegal. This curious mud-built place and its four races of inhabitants do not sound as romantic as imaginations have pictured them. The glory of its wealth and life in the Middle Ages have long since shrunk to little measure.

After a two weeks' rest at Timbuctoo the members of the expedition started back, stopping for a short hunting trip along the Niger which is marvelously rich in big game. Even more interesting than the hippos and crocodiles were the wild tribesmen who entertained the party in their villages. Many curious incidents of the trip are related, and the narrative is interspersed with translations of legends and songs, extremely interesting documents on the imaginative and emotional life of these little known peoples. With the pride in their accomplishment and the constant vision before them of the conquest of the Sahara of which this is but the beginning, the authors express at the same time a regret for the fate of these people soon to be invaded by civilization.

## Shaw en Deshabille

TABLE-TALK OF G. B. S. Conversations on Things in General between George Bernard Shaw and his Biographer. By ARCHIBALD HENDERSON. New York: Harper and Brothers. 1925. \$2.

Reviewed by ERNEST BOYD

FOURTEEN years ago Fabian circles in England were perturbed by the appearance of a stout volume entitled "George Bernard Shaw: His Life and Works. A Critical Biography (Authorized)," to which Professor Henderson owes the proud distinction mentioned in the subtitle of this book. There have been many critical and biographical studies of Shaw, but only one of them is by "his Biographer." Reviewing that monument of industry at the time, I remember pointing out that it was a sepulchral monument, for beneath it was buried the Shaw of our early twentieth century illusions, when it seemed as if radical ideas had at last been combined with a sense of humor. Almost simultaneously more evidence of a distressing character was furnished by the selection of Augustin Hamon to translate Shaw into what purported to be French. It became apparent that G. B. S. confined his sense of humor and his intelligence to matters unrelated to himself. Whenever the abominable mess made of his work in French or German was pointed out, he retorted by the amiable insinuation that these criticisms were inspired by disappointed translators who wanted the rights for themselves. Like most people with no linguistic education, he could not realize that when M. Hamon wrote "on ne peut jamais dire" he was



giving a literal version of "You never can tell," but he was not writing idiomatic French.

It is well to recall these facts before discussing this second appearance of Mr. Shaw and Mr. Henderson, because the point to be emphasized is, not that M. Hamon did not do the best he could, or Professor Henderson the best *he* could, but that George Bernard Shaw has shown a consistent predilection for the inappropriate and incongruous in matters of this kind. M. Hamon was a Belgian Socialist without any literary qualifications whatever. Professor Henderson was a mathematician in North Carolina; the one had to translate some of the wittiest dialogue in English for people already handicapped by complete unfamiliarity with the circumstances of Shaw's plays, the other had to write the life of a man who was the centre of an economic and intellectual movement utterly remote from American life, and for which the teaching of mathematics in a Southern University was no preparation. In both cases it was *tu Pas voulu*, *Georges Dandin*, and George declared himself satisfied. The utter failure of his work and influence in France he regards as just an example of the intellectual stagnation of that country, and not as a proof that he is unreadable in what Robert d'Humières called the *bas-breton* of Augustin Hamon.

So far as Professor Henderson is concerned, it is surely no fault of his that his mentality is so unattuned to Bernard Shaw's that their table-talk is something of a joke, and—once more—a joke at Shaw's expense. His mental furniture is not of the kind that would stimulate G. B. S. to the point of making him talk well. Consequently, whatever is characteristic in these conversations is a few Shavian truisms; the topical subjects raised by the Biographer simply produce *non sequiturs* or commonplaces. Unlike George Moore, on such occasions, Mr. Shaw does not reduce his interlocutor to the subsidiary rôle of the disciple of Socrates. Professor Henderson holds the floor at regular and lengthy intervals, but his eloquence, I suspect, did not, in its turn, hold Shaw. Thus he launches out into a sort of after-dinner oration about "the extraordinary material progress of the United States" leading up to the question: "What unmistakable contributions to the world of art . . . has my country made, in your opinion?" Whereupon Shaw replies that he has never been in America, that his information, such as it is, must be out of date, and that he never reads books, American or others, if he can help it. He has never read "Ulysses," being unable to afford the price of it—£3/3— but all this does not prevent the Biographer from asking for Shaw's opinion of Mencken, Cabell, Dreiser, Willa Cather and so forth, nor from rehashing all the arguments about the filthiness of "Ulysses" and the dreadful state of modern sex fiction. And so we get a chapter, supposed to be talk about literature by Shaw, which consists of a list of the authors he has not read and never intends to read, evasions of Mr. Henderson's discourses about matters that apparently do not interest Mr. Shaw, and finally a restatement of all that one knew Shaw thought on the subject of censorship and pornography.

When the chapter on the drama opens, there is an irrelevant speech by Mr. Henderson at the outset, describing to Shaw himself how Shaw slipped away from the theatre at the first night of "Saint Joan" in order not to be present when the call for "Author!" came. Whereupon a conversation about the movies begins, Shaw making no comment whatever on the detailed description of how he did not make a first night speech. His views on the cinema present no divergence from what has been said repeatedly by lesser men: that money is wasted, that plays should be written for the screen and not for the theatre, that Charlie Chaplin is a great comedian. Mr. Shaw reiterates that he does not go to American plays, that he has never been in America, but yet, the tireless Professor Henderson plies him with questions and introductory exhortations upon these unanswerable topics. He asks: "What do you think of sky-scrapers—which the French attractively call *frotteurs du ciel*?" This piece of information, being thrown in to make it harder, evidently so impressed Shaw that he did not at once correct Mr. Henderson by telling him that the word he was looking for was "*gratte-ciel*." Instead he argues that the space wasted on elevators must make the rents of skyscrapers high, and suggests that such buildings shut out the sun from the streets and should be isolated.

The final chapter is taken up with a discussion

of the War, of Shaw's attitude towards it, of Wilson's part in the Versailles Treaty, and the problem of Germany today. It has, in common with the rest of the table-talk, the quality of irrelevance and one-sidedness. Shaw delivers a sharp comment on Wilson, but he is not challenged to enlarge upon his reasons. His Biographer just sings Wilson's praises, in that tone of deep reverence which usually exasperates Shaw when other people employ it. Professor Henderson reviews the treatment of Shaw during the war and listens to the statement that the authorities did not arrest G. B. S. for his heresies because they were not so stupid as the patriots who reviled him. The fact that men of less prominence were pursued and persecuted is omitted from the discussion. The financial manipulations of the Dawes plan are acutely analyzed, obviously in a manner quite over the head of the listener, but Shaw does not enlighten him. And so the table-talk meanders to its close. At no point has one the impression of two minds that can stimulate and understand each other, nor is there any vivid picture of Bernard Shaw's personality, such as Paul Gsell and J. J. Brousson have given in their records of the conversations of Anatole France. A facsimile shows that the answers to some, at least, of Mr. Henderson's questions were written down by Shaw—a strange kind of "table-talk." However, the mechanics of such a book as this are of no importance. Such records depend for their success on the clash of two personalities. Here there is no clash. George Bernard Shaw and Professor Archibald Shaw, A. M., Ph.D. are two parallel lines, they have met only socially.

## Geographical Notions

THE GEOGRAPHICAL LORE OF THE TIME OF THE CRUSADES. By JOHN KIRTLAND WRIGHT. New York: American Geographical Society. 1925.

Reviewed by CHARLES H. HASKINS  
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IN all the history of science there is nothing more fascinating to the general reader than the history of geography. Even the least travelled now retain enough of their school geography to read the illustrated supplements with interest; even the least imaginative can see the results of exploration and discovery and perhaps catch something of the spirit which bade the seamen of Columbus "sail on." Probably no other large subject in science keeps so near to average mentality.

Dr. Wright has chosen a period when the traditional ideas of antiquity were first becoming enlarged by exploration and observation, the age of the Crusades. Men's geographical notions were still shaped by Pliny and Isidore, yet they had reached a new world to the West and were on the eve of Marco Polo and the new cartography. They had a good acquaintance with the shores of the Mediterranean and with Europe west of the Elbe, a fair amount of information respecting Western Asia and North Africa. "Beyond lay the third group of regions known only through the vaguest of rumors—the domains of fabulous monsters and legendary men. To some writers India was such a land, to others Russia and northern Scandinavia, to still others the legendary isles that lay concealed in the Western Ocean," while the antipodes were in the zone of complete ignorance.

Besides reviewing these regions one by one, the author treats of cosmology and physiography and the characteristic ideas of an epoch when the geography of observation was subordinate to the geography of authority and tradition. As the use of the word "lore" implies, there is much on popular beliefs as well as on the sterner side of science. "The errors of an age are as characteristic as the accurate knowledge which it possesses—and often more so." Again and again we touch the fringes of romance, as in the voyages of St. Brandan, with their strange combination of actual icebergs and glowing images from Ezekiel and the Apocalypse, and that vivid picture of Judas let loose annually from his volcano to cool him on the floe of the western ocean, theme of Matthew Arnold and of Kipling.

The volume rests on a broad basis of scholarship, while the material is attractively presented; it is creditable both to the author and to the Research Series in which it appears.

## California Vignettes

By CHRISTINE TURNER CURTIS  
CAPISTRANO

"Jan Juan Capistrano," said our toothless guide in the Norfolk jacket. Descending from the bus we picked our way sedulously to a luncheon spot of fine dry grass, backed by a little picturesque adobe. We quartered the loaf we had guiltily concealed under a coat, and spread it thickly with tomato and cheese. By that time the perfect lunch spot had exhausted its excellences. We spent the rest of the day removing excruciating long prickles from garments—outer and nether. It was our first experience with the wild oat.

Then the mission with its white walls, its bells, its bright yard clotted with flower heads, its seductive pepper-tree,—that rainy sprinkled green, the red littering berries, the simpering soft curves, the gnarled trunk, bulged with knots!

Within, the long dim Mission chancel like a tunnel of darkness, the gold and blue altar at its mouth, Spanish oils with saints and waxy angels:—we passed more quietly into the courtyard and lingered by the pepper-tree, recapitulating, revisualizing, reliving the Mission's sad and simple past.

### SANTA CATALINA

I held in mind a picture of the glass-bottomed boats as we should see them,—small pointed pyrex row-boats, with glittering glass oars, semi-translucent. My visualization was foredoomed to defeat.

At Avalon we stepped from the pier into the hold of a small steamer, divided into neat white pews like "King's Chapel." Bending our foreheads as for prayer on the seat in front, we stared down into a rectangular box floored with a thick pane of glass.

The sea lay robin's egg blue under us,—we slid over an ocean bed of wrinkled white sand. Above the submarine gardens we idled,—saw the long dark gelatinous sea-cucumbers moored to the rocks, blue sea bass with wide bulbous eyes staring like the whales in the "Forsaken Mermen."

Great forests of brown kelp swung softly in the ebb, the dull rough backs of abalones humped among the rocks, little orange fish dove like arrows of light into the crevices. The uncanny slumbers of the sea bred strange languors in our bones, and we breathed in unison with long soughings of the tide.

### MUIR WOODS

After the climb from Mill Valley we walked on the shoulders of the world, on the humped ridges of the coastal mountains, pale and crinkled like an elephant's hide. We moved in the upland wind that whisked us briskly along the slopes. Looking back we saw the delicious folds and hollows of those fawn-colored hills, lovely bisque mounds, and interstices of faint bluebell water, almost as blanced as the sky. We saw Mill Valley like a Swiss village perched in the pointed firs. Tamalpais, green and rugged, cut across the horizon, with deer-brown paths winding up and down. On we tramped till ahead of us rose the thin steeples of the redwoods, tiering sharp and jade-green from the valley. At last clear of the dusty road, and we stand under the roof of those heroic trees.

Trunks grouped in great circles,—chestnut-spindling into the unseen sky. The fine-needed leaves let in flickers and splashes of light that fall into those deep glades and sow pink lashes about the redwoods, so the great trees under their thatched green towers swim in layers of rose light. The silence engulfs one in those brown glades, the darks, the thick mats underfoot, the sense of ancient, world-old imperturbability, where men walk and their footsteps die unechoing to the distant tops.

### GOLDEN OPHIR

Now and then in this flat new-sprung city of Salinas I walk by a dooryard and see a delectable little rose-tree, as prim and perfect as if it had sprung from a gilt and purple illumination of the Middle Ages. A slim little trunk, and above it the domed bouquet of blossoms, leaves, dust-green with the long drought, flower colors pale and exquisite, round thick-petalled heads, and buds pursed deliciously in the clear silver-pale peachy bloom.

Sometimes I stand before the Golden Ophir, pink outer-edged, with inside petals of the faintest buff. A tint of angels, that sheer fainting from