

Claims to Polar Discovery

RETURN FROM THE POLE. By Frederick A. Cook. Edited with an Introduction by Frederick J. Pohl. New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy. 355 pp. \$4.50.

By VILHJALMUR STEFANSSON

WHEN Dr. Frederick A. Cook arrived at Copenhagen in 1909 announcing that he had discovered the North Pole there was at first little disposition to question his assertion. But soon his accuracy was questioned, then his veracity. Within a year the expression "another Dr. Cook" was as readily and widely understood as "another Quisling" was later, or "another McCarthy." Forty-two years after, in muted and echo form, appears this book which says on its jacket that it is a "new chapter in the Cook-Peary controversy"; for there was much to dispute about, and the facts behind the issues were nearly as elusive as if they had been religious, thus the awakeners of the strongest of loyalties and passions.

In the first decade of our century wars seemed a thing of the past; and it looked as if the greatest physical thing still to do was to reach the North Pole. Many expeditions from many nations had been trying through more than four centuries, including several that were American; the hopes of our nation were centered in 1907 on Commander Robert E. Peary of the U. S. Navy, who had made seven Northern expeditions, had tried desperately for the Pole on two of them, 1902 and 1906, and who was outfitting his eighth voyage to sail by midsummer. But he was delayed by labor and other troubles. Then, in what is called a surprise move if done by our side and a sneak move if done by the opposition, Dr. Cook, a surgeon of Peary's on a former expedition, slipped quietly out of port on a friend's yacht. When too late in the season for Peary to sail, it became known that Cook had been landed in Peary's customary wintering region, Smith Sound, northwestern Greenland. It was then surmised that he would return next year with a story of having reached the North Pole, some basing that opinion on a rumor



Frederick A. Cook—"much to dispute."

from Alaska that he had faked an ascent of Mount McKinley. The whisperers asked whether a man who would fake a mountain climb, among tens of thousands of watchful whites in Alaska, would not likely fake a polar dash in the Arctic, when the only people around were Eskimos. Peary told this reviewer, the autumn of 1907, that he considered the Alaska gossip malicious, that he liked and trusted Cook, and that in any case nobody, literally nobody, could fake the attainment of the North Pole.

This book, "Return from the Pole," which claims not to be fiction, starts its narrative with Cook already at the North Pole; so the first question will have to be whether there is reason to believe he ever got there. This will have to be answered on the basis of a previous book which tells how he allegedly got there, Cook's 1911 volume, "My Attainment of the Pole." If that book was fiction, insofar as the attainment of the Pole is concerned, then the current one is fiction too.

Peary's story of his attainment of the Pole, eventually told in his "The North Pole" of 1910, was at first widely doubted, was gradually more and more successful in winning adherents, and was finally accepted by nearly everybody. His account sounded the more adequate the more it was studied. Besides, Peary's character was never seriously questioned, and his men supported him on the main points, though differing with Peary and with each other on details, as honest witnesses usually do.

Cook's story varied from Peary's in matters that count. The gist of it was

that he and two Eskimos, all of them inexperienced in travel over the moving pack of the Arctic Sea, had made, without benefit of a relay system and without finding game, a distance of about 1,200 miles, nearly 400 miles more than Peary made by the skin of his teeth on the Cape Columbia round trip. This tale contrasts with Peary's in that the more you study it, the less able you are to believe it.

It was on such considerations, and on many more of a like sort, that the North Pole attainment section of Cook's book of 1911 was written down in most minds as fiction of the Robinson Crusoe type, its facts, local color, and theorizing borrowed from other men's published works or from his own experience elsewhere. Discredited, Cook faded from the exploration picture, reappeared in oil land promotion, went to prison in 1923 for using the mails to defraud, and was paroled in 1930.

That pathetic sequence brings us to this pathetic book, which began in the year of parole. For the editor tells us that "Dr. Cook wrote 'Return from the Pole' in longhand, beginning it in 1930 and completing it in 1935 when he was seventy years of age." He died in 1940.

The question arises whether "Return from the Pole" is less fictitious than Cook's 1911 book. It is not, so far as Cook's own part in it is concerned. As an attempted rehabilitation, it is pathetic; but its very pathos brings to mind the possibility that it may possibly be literature, like the "Ballad of Reading Gaol," which few read without having their judgment to an extent swayed by the feeling that through it a guilty man is fumbling for sympathy. And Cook, by most accounts, was easier to sympathize with, more likable, than Wilde.

The "Return" has been sympathetically edited by Frederick J. Pohl, who does his loyal best for Cook through a skilful if hopeless attack on Peary, as if discrediting the Admiral would somehow elevate the Doctor. But, like previous critics, Mr. Pohl finds nothing against Peary except certain contradictions between different passages in "The North Pole" and between that book and others; but these are only signs of that haste and confusion, in editing and proof reading, which resulted from the bedlam created by the Cook onslaught and from the hurry the publishers were in to get Peary's volume on the market while the furor was still near its height.

One of the merits of the present "Return" is its excellent bibliography, less slanted in Cook's favor than you would expect.

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Jungle Adventure

QUEST FOR THE LOST CITY. By Dana and Ginger Lamb. New York: Harper & Bros. 340 pp. \$4.

By ANNE FREMANTLE

THE CAPACITY most essential to any book is its power to arouse the "and then—and then" reaction. First, as Mrs. Beeton would say, catch your reader—and then, keep him. This capacity for playing and landing the poor fish is the oldest and subtlest trick of the writing trade. Anyone who read Dana and Ginger Lamb's earlier "Enchanted Vagabonds," their account of a sixteen-thousand-mile trip from San Diego to Panama in a canoe of their own design and make, knows that this "and-then-ness" is a paramount quality of their kind of writing.

Their new tale, of a two-thousand-mile hike down the west coast of Mexico to a blank spot on the map, the Forbidden Land, where Chiapa points into Guatemala, has all the indications of a true classic of adventure. Here, in the vicinity of the Usmacinta River, some of the Maya leaders found their last home, and founded their last—and now lost—city. Which, after astonishing adventures, the Lambs found.

But their joy and their story were of their quest, not in their quarry; the Lost City, once found, they left once more alone. This is no archeological nor anthropological expedition's log although much in it is of value historically and humanly: it is the profoundly personal narrative of near-failure and of ultimate success.

A good saga should communicate on many levels: of intimacy, of information, of excitement. Never, since the "Swiss Family Robinson," has so much information about how to live in and with the jungle been imparted with such loving, intimate detail. How to unroll a tent and pitch it; how to light fires *sans* tinder; how to cut *bejucos* for water; how to cure venison for jerky; how to splice vines for a cable—never was there such a "how-to" travel book. We feel Ginger's ghastly toothache and wince while the native dentist pulls out four impacted wisdom teeth without anesthetic; we rejoice with Dana in his triumph over Kintun in staying longer under water; we frolic with both Lambs and their pet squirrel on

the shores of the twelve jewelled Mayan paradisiacal lakes. But the minutiae of incident and personality—never more droll since Borrow's "Bible in Spain"—would not by themselves be enough.

For the test of a great adventure book is that the writer can communicate the disaster as well as the glory. This the Lambs do best of all. Their feast with El Gitano and his fellow-bandits, in their lair south of Mazatlán, when only Ginger's superb target-shooting saves the day; the terrifying trips across uncharted mountain ranges in Wheezele-britches, the impossible plane made from crashed spare parts (Curtis Robin fuselage, Stinson wings, Wright engine) which Dana flew himself and finally had to junk; the days upon days of groping through the total darkness of the caves that were the only, and unknown, way through the Barrier Cliffs rising fifteen hundred feet of sheer limestone between the Lambs and their lost city; and the last final storm which turned their lost city into a moated island from which they only escaped by cutting down a tree and making a canoe; all these are unforgettably set forth and shared.

Most memorable of all is the Lambs' meeting with the "people out of time," the pre-Columbian, Mayan Lacandons, from whom they learned the elaborate life of ritual and with whom they shared in pre-Christian worship. For the most important of the book's many lessons is that of courtesy; by it, time and again, the Lambs prevented bloodshed and saved their own and countless other lives. By their large intent of courtesy they were humanly safe among all primitive people.



Dana and Ginger Lamb—"intimate detail."

Strange Lands Notes

WASA-WASA: A Tale of Trails and Treasure in the Far North. By Harry Macfie. Translated by F. H. Lyon. Norton. \$3. Tales of adventure in faraway places may be like alcohol in that they are able to make a man, even without becoming any different from what he is, identify himself with what he is not. Here is adventure for the armchair.

Harry Macfie was born and raised in Sweden, although of Scottish descent. In 1897, seized with a passion for life in the American Northwest, he emigrated to Canada and apparently took up his residence in southwestern Ontario just north of the United States boundary, near the Lake of the Woods. Many years later he returned to Sweden and supported himself by lecturing and writing and, at his home in Lyckorna, by manufacturing Canadian-type canoes for the Swedes.

A Swedish newspaperman, Hans Westerlund, who bought one of Macfie's canoes asked him to gather his recollections of his life in Canada and Alaska, expecting that Macfie would simply talk and Westerlund would do the writing. By the time the two got together, some six months later, Macfie had written the whole book himself, and there was nothing for Westerlund to do but polish it up into good Swedish, removing the Americanisms.

"Wasa-wasa" is a translation of these memoirs. Here we have a series of pictures of the great Northwest as it seemed in the early years of the twentieth century when Harry Macfie and his inseparable friend, Sam Kilburn, dashed about it, trapping, hunting, and looking for gold.

Macfie's memory for mood and color is better than his recollection of details. He tells in a smooth, poetic prose of sunrises and sunsets, of summer, spring, and snow, and of occasional situations among the mining camps and bars and Indian lodges which would delight Hollywood, Robert W. Service, and Charles Wakefield Cadman. Yet of three almost incredible journeys which Macfie took he gives only very sketchy accounts. Of a trip from Circle City, Alaska, down the Yukon to its mouth and thence north to the Seward Peninsula he says: "Of the long voyage down to the sea there is not much to tell. We had over a thousand miles to go, but the current was strong, and through days of sunshine, as well as in rain and wind, our canoe sped toward its distant goal." Never a word on topography.

Perhaps the trouble is that Harry
(Continued on page 43)

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