

REVIEW

ABANDONED. THE STORY OF THE GREELY ARCTIC EXPEDITION, 1881-1884.

By A. L. Todd. Introduction by Vilhjalmur Stefansson. *New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc.* 1961. 8½ x 5¼ inches. xx + 323 pages, 2 maps, numerous illustrations. \$5.95.

Among polar expeditions that were marred by tragedy, Greely's Lady Franklin Bay expedition occupies a peculiar position. It seems to have left a weaker impression than many others, yet it ranks as one of the most remarkable in the annals of polar exploration. There is also more firsthand information about it; in almost no other case, in fact, is the story so complete. By way of contrast, there were no survivors of the last Franklin expedition, and only the sketchiest of records and remains were ever found. Similarly none of Scott's polar party lived to tell the tale. No one knows, even today, what happened to some of those aboard the "Jeannette" and the "Karluk"; and the fate of Andrée's party, whose bodies were found after a lapse of 33 years, can only be surmised. Among the older tragedies, there are similar elements of uncertainty or incompleteness in the accounts of such as Willoughby, Barents, Knight, and Hudson. But the story of Greely and his men is known quite thoroughly from start to finish. They recorded their activities in copious detail, and these records, both public and private, have been preserved. No member of the expedition died in circumstances not reasonably well accounted for, since survivors and doomed were together until the end; and the relief expedition brought back not only the former but also the bodies of most of the latter.

It is perhaps this abundance of information, and the relative absence of

the unexplained, that has induced the apparent feeling that the curtain has been finally rung down on the Greely story. One may concede that original diaries and journals do speak with a special vitality, and even finality — at least for those who read them. But few people do read them, and thus it is well that occasionally efforts are made to resurrect and reconstruct such stirring tales for the interest of the reading public. During the past year two notable attempts have been made to revive the Greely story, first "The Long Rescue", by Theodore Powell, and more recently "Abandoned", by A. L. Todd.

In "Abandoned" Mr. Todd draws heavily on the voluminous records mentioned above, but he has also had the benefit of access to previously unavailable material in private hands, including papers of several members of the expedition, notably Greely, Brainard, Pavy, and Rice. He has also attempted to do what diaries and records cannot do — namely to incorporate in his narrative the story of the expedition from the point of view of the world outside, principally the efforts to organize relief expeditions and the reactions of press and public when the survivors returned. At the beginning there is a brief description of the background of the expedition and its personnel, and at the end he tells briefly what happened to the survivors afterwards. It seems to me that considering the scope of his undertaking the author has succeeded about as well as one can expect within the confines of a single volume of moderate size.

The Lady Franklin Bay expedition was the principal American contribution to the First International Polar Year of 1882-3, in which eleven nations established fifteen observatory stations in the polar regions, two or three in the

Antarctic and the rest in the Arctic. Thirty-four permanent observatories also took part. The project was the realization of a vast concept of co-operative international scientific research in these regions, initially presented by Karl Weyprecht in 1875 to a scientific conference at Graz, and adopted and developed in later conferences at Rome and Hamburg in 1879 and Bern in 1880. This pioneer effort provided a great deal of useful information and served as a model for the Second International Polar Year in 1932-3 and the International Geophysical Year in 1957-8. The Lady Franklin Bay expedition had the most northerly location ($81^{\circ} 44'N.$), and was the most interesting, since it had the additional appeal of an attempt to reach a new "farthest north". As events turned out, it was also the most unfortunate.

Initially a semi-private project, it was officially taken over by the American government early in 1881. The officer appointed to command, First Lieutenant A. W. Greely, was a strait-laced New Englander with some twenty years of service in the Cavalry and Signal Corps, including experience in the Civil War and later in establishing telegraphic communications in the West. He lacked firsthand knowledge of the Arctic, as, for that matter, did almost all the men chosen to accompany him. Nevertheless for two years success attended the expedition and a great deal was accomplished. At Discovery Harbour in Lady Franklin Bay, which was reached with relative ease in August 1881, the party of twenty-five (three officers, one contract surgeon, two Greenland Eskimos, the rest army N.C.O.'s and privates) established Fort Conger, and from this base a series of sledging expeditions reached a new "farthest north" at $83^{\circ} 24'N.$, revealed new stretches of the north Greenland and Ellesmere Island coasts, and examined large parts of the Ellesmere Island interior. All the while a great amount of scientific data was being gathered in accordance with the original plan.

Since expected relief did not arrive

in the summer of 1882, a second winter had to be spent at Fort Conger in complete isolation but relative comfort, and then, in August 1883, when it seemed apparent that again no ship would reach them, Greely somewhat doubtfully gave the order to retreat. This was in accordance with instructions that he should abandon Fort Conger no later than September 1, 1883, and retire to the southern extremity of Kane Basin, where either a relief ship or supplies would be found. It meant leaving a good building and considerable food supplies, supplemented by natural resources of fuel and game animals, for a difficult retreat by boat and ice floe, late in the season and over a dangerous route, to an uncertain rendezvous in a vaguely defined place. Their worst fears were realized, and when they finally managed to complete their wearing journey, it was only to learn that the 1882 relief ship had turned back, the 1883 ship had been crushed in the ice and sunk, the two expeditions together had left them only some 1,000 rations out of 50,000 carried, and with winter upon them they were left to their own resources with rations for only about 45 days.

At Camp Clay, on the north shore of Pim Island, they set up a winter shelter as best they could, husbanded their scanty food supply with drastic economy, and in increasingly desperate circumstances struggled to survive the winter. Miraculously there was only one death before April, but then, with supplies virtually exhausted, the hunt a failure except for a polar bear, a seal, a few foxes, and birds, and otherwise nothing to sustain life but shrimps, seaweed, tripe-de-roche, saxifrage, and sealskin, death finally took its toll. When Commander Schley arrived with two relief ships on June 22, 1884, after a determined struggle to reach them, only Greely and six others remained alive in their ghastly death hole west of Cape Sabine. All the rest had died of starvation and exposure, except two — an Eskimo who had drowned and a private who had been shot, at Greely's order, for persistently stealing food.

This is the substance of Mr. Todd's

story, and it is extremely well told, showing obvious effects of thorough research and being liberally fortified with quotations from the diaries of members of the expedition and from contemporary records. He concentrates on the final disastrous ten months after the abandonment of Fort Conger, giving only about 65 of 315 pages to the more than two years preceding. Little attempt is made, as he frankly admits, to describe in detail the scientific work of the expedition, or even the more exciting sledge journeys into hitherto unknown regions. It is essentially the record of "the physical and moral courage displayed by a small group of men abandoned to hunger and cold". As the narrative unfolds heroes emerge, notably Sergeant Brainard and Private Frederick, two of the survivors, whose behaviour was impeccable throughout, and who strove unselfishly to the last to provide for their comrades. Another was the Canadian George W. Rice, who was from the start the inspiration of the group, and who came into his own, after a somewhat irresponsible beginning, as a natural leader and the expedition's indispensable man, until he met his end trying to recover a small cache from Baird Inlet. Inevitably, too, there were lesser men, and at least one downright scoundrel. The result was a certain amount of dissension and insubordination, although Greely always maintained afterwards that considering the horrors they faced the typical atmosphere was one of remarkable co-operation, mutual sympathy, and good will. Greely himself is revealed as an intelligent, meticulous, resourceful commander, doubtless lacking in tact and judgment upon occasion, but always alive to his responsibilities and demonstrating remarkable qualities of moral leadership and stubborn determination during the last dreadful months at Camp Clay.

The author's presentation is detached and fair, and while maintaining throughout a restrained approach, he makes no attempt to gloss over unpleasant aspects of the expedition, or those that reflect unfavourably upon

particular individuals. Conspicuous here are the running disagreements between Greely on the one side and Dr. Pavy and Lt. Kislisbury on the other, and also the touchy subject of cannibalism during the final stages, which was revealed all too plainly when some of the dead bodies were discovered and, of course, proved publicly and conclusively when they were taken home. Mr. Todd indulges in little direct criticism of the men for weakness or wrongdoing, preferring to rely upon their comments about each other in their diaries. But he is less inhibited when he speaks of the blundering and politicking in Congress and elsewhere in connection with the dispatch of relief expeditions; and he pours vituperation upon the contemporary press for its sensational reaction to the rumours of cannibalism before any facts had been confirmed—a display of journalistic irresponsibility and shallowness that would, judging by his account, be hard to surpass.

Serious flaws are hard to find. It would be unreasonable to ask for thorough documentation in a book of this kind, no doubt, but all the same I think the author would have done well to identify more clearly the new material he has incorporated in his work. There are a few minor slips in fact and perhaps in judgment, e.g., on page 21 "land of two hemispheres" is hardly correct for Greenland and Ellesmere Island; there is evidently some confusion on page 293, where three different versions, apparently emanating from the same source, are given of Dr. Pavy's death; and it does not seem worthwhile or relevant to take note (page 288) of the thief who followed the Greely parades. But such things are of small importance, and it would be uncharitable, to say the least, to pretend that they detract seriously from the overall great merit of the book. Personally I do not think that full justice can be done to the Greely story in 300 pages, but insofar as it can be, Mr. Todd has done it exceptionally well.

GORDON W. SMITH