

REVIEWS

THE WHITE ROAD

By L. P. KIRWAN. London: Hollis and Carter. $8\frac{3}{4} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ inches, 374 pages, frontispiece, 17 plates, 5 text maps and diagrams, 2 end-paper maps; distributed in Canada by Palm Publishers, Montreal, P.Q., \$6.00.

Published in the United States as

A HISTORY OF POLAR EXPLORATION

New York: W. W. Norton and Company. \$5.95.

Mr. Kirwan, Director of the Royal Geographical Society, and a former director of the Scott Polar Research Institute, begins his history of polar exploration by disclaiming all personal experience of the Arctic and the Antarctic. Polar exploration is a subject that is open to controversy, and one that makes any reviewer prone to pedantry. It is a tribute to the author that in his factual, crammed pages, covering the whole scope of polar exploration, he makes a few errors, stirs a few controversies, shows some biases, but on the whole manages to do justice to practically every explorer who crossed the Arctic or Antarctic Circle.

Mr. Kirwan had access to much original material from the files of the Royal Geographical Society and of the Scott Polar Research Institute, and this, with his stated intent of writing on "the evolution of polar exploration in its historical and social context" has biased him towards an emphasis on the British approach to the poles. This approach adds fascinating detail to the sagas of Scott and Shackleton, and provides continuity as the author shows the motives behind British expeditions from the time of the Elizabethans to the present. At times this weighting in favour of the British endeavours leads to an unbalanced picture. Constantine Phipps gets one page; only four and a half are devoted to the great Russian expeditions in the eighteenth century. Nor is Mr.

Kirwan prone to traditional understatement when the role of the Royal Navy is discussed. Much has been done recently to show the real nature of the achievements of men like M'Clintock, Ross, and Parry, but Mr. Kirwan, introducing the Royal Navy's part in arctic exploration says the following.

"But despite their stubborn adherence to traditional ways in most unsuitable conditions, despite their inadequate equipment, their ignorance of how best to live, and how best to travel in the polar regions, the achievements of these expeditions, now to be described, are among the most remarkable in polar history. At sea their supreme skill in the handling of cumbrous sailing ships, turning and twisting through the pack at the mercy of the winds and the ice, was a miracle of navigation. On land, their heroic journeys hauling, officers and Jack Tars alike, heavy sledge boats across the tumbling and shifting Arctic floes, were for generations the inspiration of British polar explorers." (p. 80).

When the fate of Franklin's crews is recalled this assessment may sound a little exaggerated.

At times Mr. Kirwan is a little cursory in his judgements ("The expedition [De Long's] was in itself a total failure", p. 187), but he discusses fully the feats of such non-British explorers as Bellingshausen, Wilkes, Nansen, and Sverdrup, and accords them full and fair credit for their discoveries and exploits.

Writing from the viewpoint of men whose ideas rather than whose actions stirred interest in the polar regions, the author sometimes spends too much time on people such as Byron, Dalrymple, Wallis, and de Bougainville. But his discussion of the influence of men like Sir Clements Markham and Alfred Harmsworth is extremely valuable, and helps to fill in the background on polar exploration. By paying less attention to details of field work and techniques, and concentrating on the driving forces behind polar exploration, the writer

presents a fascinating and original point of view on the reasons why men went where they did in the Arctic and Antarctic.

The author's literary style, however, may prove a stumbling block to the enjoyment of his book. At its best it is delightful and vivid. The sentence on page 240, describing the experience of Scott's men with sledge dogs — "At the merest touch of their inexperienced hands, it seemed, an apparently docile dog-team would be transformed into a welter of snarling animals and tangled harness, exhausting their patience and defying their most ingenious efforts to restore discipline and peace." — not only helps to explain the tragedy of the South Pole party, but also strikes a responsive chord in anyone who has ever attempted to handle sledge dogs. At times, however, the prose becomes too heavy and involved. Long, cumbersome sentences with many clauses tend to confuse the reader. On page 42 one sentence reads "Meanwhile, on land, the men of the Hudson's Bay Company, trappers and hunters, guides and voyageurs, who lived off the country and were learning from the Eskimo and the Indian how best to travel and survive, had already started, as they laid the foundations of a great industry, to push the Canadian frontiers towards the north". The writer has been badly served by his printers on occasion when punctuation marks have been missed out. Page 100 has a sentence that reads "In Montevideo Smith was tracked down by a group of American merchants who proved a good deal less sceptical of his discovery than John Miers and the British merchants in Valparaiso and Smith gives an entertaining picture of his meeting with them in a report he sent to the British Admiralty of 31st December 1821". It would be a great pity if this invaluable book were to be used only as a reference source; it deserves to be read through from cover to cover.

There are some errors — almost inevitable in a work of this scope and range. Robert Juet, mate of Hudson's ship the *Hopewell*, was not tried for mutiny (p. 34); he died before the ship reached

Ireland. Barents died after falling "sicke" according to Gerrit de Veer, and not of "cold and exposure" (p. 32). Mackenzie and Hearne are described as "men of the Hudson's Bay Company" (p. 82); Mackenzie worked for the North West Company. Wilkes's ships, the *Vincennes* and the *Peacock* were not "sloops of 700 tons" (p. 130). One ship displaced 780 tons, the other 650 tons. Hall died on the *Polaris*, not "before reaching the ship" (p. 183). All the crew of the *Jeannette* did not reach the Lena estuary (p. 187); one boatload disappeared after the ship had been crushed. Brönlund's body was found in Lambert's Land, not "on the ice sheet" (p. 298). Courtauld was isolated in a tent, not in hut (p. 324). "Bob" Bartlett is described on page 259 as "the British captain of the *Roosevelt*" — true in a way, but not a statement that would endear the writer to a native of Newfoundland.

The most serious error of fact is found on page 257. "In July 1905 Peary, now fifty, sailed from New York City in the *Roosevelt* which, after some damage to her bows, reached Cape Colombia (sic) on the north-east coast of Grant Land within ninety miles of the advance base at Cape Hecla." One error of opinion lies in Mr. Kirwan's statement "Nor has the Canadian claim to ownership of the Arctic mainland and the islands between Greenland and 141°W. longitude ever been disputed." On p. 185 a sentence begins "Because of a branching of the warm waters of the Gulf Stream north of the Bering Strait. . ."

Mr. Kirwan is at times vague in his details of distance and location. It would have been better to use either statute or nautical miles throughout the text rather than to mix them. Fort Conger is not "at the north-east coast of Ellesmere Island" (p. 254), though very near it.

Misprints include "1871" for "1891" as the year of Peary's journey across the Greenland icecap (p. 197), "Cape Colombia" for the northernmost point in Canada (p. 259), "Croker Land" for Peary's mythical island (p. 326), and "Canada's northwest territory" (p. 340).

There is an excellent bibliography, and the work is carefully indexed. The

map showing the Northwest Passage is outstanding, but the endpaper maps are inadequate and badly out-of-date.

The White Road as it stands has considerable merit, both as a reference book and as an exciting narrative. It throws new, interesting and unusual light on the problems of polar exploration. If Mr. Kirwan can eradicate on the occasion of preparing a second edition the annoying errors and shorten his over-long comma-strewn sentences, the result will be the best book by far on the history of polar exploration.

JIM LOTZ

DICTIONARY OF DISCOVERIES

By J. A. LANGNAS. *Preface by J. Salwyn Schapiro. New York: Philosophical Library, 1959. 9¼ x 6 inches, vi + 201 pages. \$5.00.*

Mr. I. A. Langnas has undertaken a commendable task, but he has performed it badly. So many inconsistencies in dates and spellings can be found that no entry should be relied on as being perfectly factual. Whereas it is clear that the selection of whom to include in a limited space must be arbitrary, still the selections and omissions are frequently surprising. Included in the dictionary are not only explorers, but also pioneers, travelers, cartographers, empire builders, and scholars.

Professor Schapiro, who contributed the preface, should have examined the text more closely. To Professor Schapiro, making lands "known to the civilized world" is the meaning of "discovery", with the result that he judges Columbus to be the discoverer of the New World, not the Norsemen. Mr. Langnas has made no such distinction. For example, in the Carl Christian Rafn entry he speaks of a publication that "conclusively proved the discovery of America by the Norsemen, five centuries before Columbus", and the entries for Leif Ericson and Bjarne Herjulfsson also speak of "discovery" by the Norse. Anyway, few now deny that after 1000 A.D. the civilized world knew a good deal about Iceland, Greenland, and the northeastern coast of America.

The proper names of at least seven explorers (Cunninghame-Graham, Saint Isaac Joques, Thorfinn Karlsefni, Sir Francis MacClintock, Sir Robert McClure, Baron Adolf Nordenskiöld, Joseph Bush Tyrrell; which should be Cunninghame-Graham, Jogues, Karlsefni, M'Clintock, M'Clure, Nordenskiöld, and Joseph Burr Tyrrell) for whom entries are made have been misspelled, as well as a dozen or so more names occurring in the text. A few comments on what is said concerning some of the polar explorers may be of interest to readers of *Arctic*.

Those connected with the Northwest Passage are particularly troublesome for Mr. Langnas. Roald Amundsen, he claims, "was the second to manage the Northwest Passage", whereas most school children know that Amundsen was the first to negotiate the entire passage. He credits Sir William Parry, in 1819, with "discovering — after more than 300 years of vain attempts — the Northwest Passage". However, Sir Robert M'Clure, we read, in 1850-4, "completed discovery of the Northwest Passage". How he contrived to do this, when it was already discovered, is difficult to imagine. However, the honour and the reward were M'Clure's. Parry had not discovered a passage, although he did penetrate so far west as to leave the existence of such a route in no reasonable doubt. (Brown, R. N. R. Sir William Edward Parry. *Arctic* 12:104). Confusion is also abundant concerning the Northeast Passage. Amundsen, Mr. Langnas states, set out in 1918 to make this trip, "which failed after two years, as did another attempt in 1922-4". In fact, Amundsen arrived at Nome, Alaska in July 1920 after a successful passage on his initial attempt.

To say of Frederick A. Cook that "the kind of people who bought his old stock continued to believe that he had discovered the North Pole" is inaccurate journalism. In the sentences about Dr. Jean Charcot no mention whatever is made of his many visits to East Greenland and of his important work there. Dr. Hugo Eckener is described as using "heavier-than-air ships", whereas his fame rests