

REVIEWS

Modern Arctic Exploration, by GUNNAR SEIDENFADEN. Translated from Danish by NAOMI WALFORD and with an introduction by PETER FREUCHEN. London: Jonathan Cape, Ltd., 1939, pp. 189. 12s. 6d.

Arctic exploration has now reached a stage when a statement of its aims and an explanation of its methods are imperative. This book fulfils this demand. The author sets out to show the great advances which improvements in equipment and technique have made possible in Arctic exploration, and to point to the role which this work plays in the forward march of man towards a better understanding of the world in which he lives.

The first chapter, which is merely an introduction to the main theme of the book, traces the stages through which Arctic exploration has passed from the unrecorded efforts of early man to obtain a living in these inhospitable regions to the present-day activities and detailed scientific research by experts.

The next six chapters, in which the author discusses the work of the various branches of science, form the main substance of the book. First comes a chapter on the expedition as a whole. Transport, winter quarters, the invaluable assistance rendered by the aeroplane, and the inestimable importance of wireless both for maintaining communications between separate working parties of the expedition and for keeping the expedition in contact with the outside world are all discussed fully. Moreover, the need for meticulous planning before the expedition sets out and for co-ordination in the working out and publication of results after the return, is made abundantly clear.

Then follows a chapter on survey, mainly taken up with a description of stereo-plotting from oblique air photographs, a chapter on the work of the geologist and palaeontologist, a chapter on biology and one on marine research. Finally, the author gives an interesting account of the investigations with regard to the Eskimo, into their history and place of origin, into their betterment and enlightenment to-day. In all these chapters the latest technique is lucidly described, and the reader is not left in doubt as to the nature and value of the results obtained. In the next chapter are mentioned the most important of recent polar flights,

and in the conclusion the author looks to the future in which he envisages a remunerative development of the resources of the Arctic lands.

One of the things which strike one about the book is that the author can say in one sentence what many require a whole text-book to set forth. It is hardly a criticism to say that the book gives so much information that it is a pity it does not give more. Thus a word on the use of the plane table and the photo-theodolite for the survey of small areas on a large scale would have been welcome. A fuller account of the work of the Danish Administration in East Greenland would have been enlightening. Finally, some mention might have been made of the Arctic from a purely aesthetic point of view. The work of the artist and photographer is not unimportant.

The only general criticism that one can level against the book is that there is a tendency to make scientific work in the Arctic appear easier than it is. But this in no way detracts from the value of the book. Its *motif* is clear and admirable, the information which it gives sound and accurate, the exposition brief and lucid. It is well illustrated and written in a style which does credit to the translator. It should appeal to the scientist and the geographer as well as to those who are not directly interested in these subjects.

The book fills a wide gap in Arctic literature both in describing the present work in the Arctic regions and in pointing to the end to which this work tends. Throughout the whole the author conveys to the reader his own enthusiasm for and excitement in this work, and we are made to realise that the modern scientific worker in the Arctic is animated as much by that high spirit of adventure as were the early explorers and pioneers in these regions.

L. H. M.

Polar Exploration, by ANDREW CROFT. London: A. and C. Black, 1939, pp. x+268. 7s. 6d.

This book is one of the "Epics of the XX Century" series, and as such it "aims at showing that the Elizabethan spirit lives to-day, and that the present century has produced endeavours, which in daring, excitement and interest are unsurpassed in the history of the human race". In addition the author has aimed at describing all the more prominent expeditions of this country, and in doing so has striven to give a "true and impartial" account, with due consideration to the results of chance and modesty.