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Beyond the Horizon

By H. E. Bates

BYOND the horizon!—the words are almost mocking in their fascination. To travel, to explore, to sleep in distant beds, to sail hot oceans, to eat godless foods, to be bathed by lovely ladies, to put one's own girdle about the earth—these must be the secret aspirations of half of us. But if it is true that to travel hopefully is better than to arrive then it is equally true that it is sometimes better to listen to a man's tale of his own travels than to bother to travel one's-self.

It is certainly better to read of Klengenburg's thirty years in the Arctic than to have done it one's-self, even if it were possible for any other man to have done what he did at all.

Klengenburg, a Dane, began life as a sea-cook at fourteen, and after seven years of it went to the Arctic, where as a trader and trapper, and also as an explorer and a student of Arctic life, he lived for over thirty years. He married an Eskimo and brought up an Eskimo family. He lived for long periods as primitive man must have lived, solely by the quickness of his hand and eye, by colossal fortitude and patience, by the cruelty born of necessity. His life was as raw as perhaps life can still possibly be. He died with a swift unexpectedness that was characteristic of that life, leaving his book unfinished.

Fortunately, it lacks one chapter only, so that except for a page or two we possess the record of his mature life as told to another by his own lips. It has been set down as he wished it, frozen, as it were, with his own approval. From these pages one gathers that he was not an easy man to please, and that he was an unpleasant man to thwart. Not that he was vicious or vindictive—he forgives some despicable enemies—but it is as though his originally stern individuality became harder and fiercer as his contact with the Arctic lengthened.

Southern notions of conduct and thought were of no use in a life which was not only primitive physically but

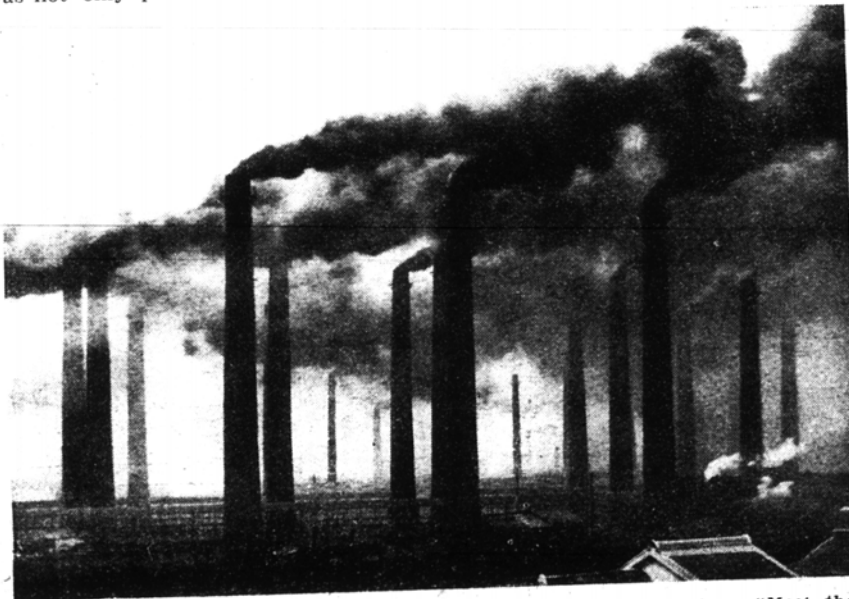
morally, too. After the simple creeds of the Eskimo he naturally found the intricate, subtle, treacherous, dollar-worshipping mind of civilised man a little difficult to bear.

His relations with civilization were generally unfortunate, but his book is not bitter. He is content to comment acidly and pass on to some account of a harsh winter, a bear-fight, an epic journey, a blizzard, a whale-hunt. Writing of such things he is far from modest. He exults in his own cleverness and cunning, in his mightiness as an explorer and a whale-hunter. Contact with primitive life drove any false humility completely out of him. The lack of it made him difficult, perhaps, but how individual and arresting!

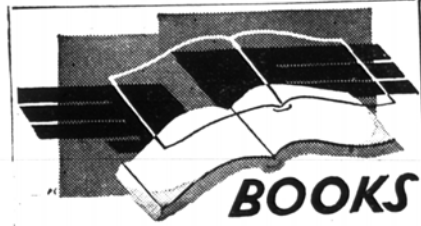
Klengenburg's book is really a great epic made up of many smaller epics. Its subject, next to human love, is the most fascinating on earth—the conflict between man and nature, involving the conflict between man and man. It is an enthralling narrative. There is nothing pretentious, second-hand, or superior about it. It has none of the senile romanticism of *Trader Horn* or the half-baked note-bookish sophistication of *Meet the Japanese*.

It says much for Mr. Murchie's book that it can stand honourably side by side with Klengenburg's. Its title is hopefully virile, and when the book itself opens in the foc'sle of an army transport-ship bound for the canal zone one feels, at any rate, that one will not be expected to accompany the author to effete tea-parties.

"I've finished this year," says Murchie in explanation of his wanderings, "an education supposed to prepare me for life in a world of which I know, definitely, almost nothing. . . . I know only that it is made up of masses of men grouped in races and classes. I must find out for myself whether it is not ignorance, and ignorance alone, that prevents friendship and understanding between these races of human beings."



This is not Sheffield, but the industrial district of New Japan—from "Meet the Japanese" (Lippincott, \$3.00.)



Reviewed On This Page

KLENGENBURG OF THE ARCTIC: An Autobiography. Edited by Tom MacInnes (Cape, 10/6).

MEN ON THE HORIZON. By Guy Murchie (Cape, 10/6).

MEET THE JAPANESE. By Henry Albert Phillips (Lippincott, \$3.00).

And finally, the whole spirit of the book:—

"I cannot commit myself to doubt or distrust of other men on hearsay. I want to come to some workable conclusion about this variegated world of men, and I can't do it until I have encountered it at first hand, and in the raw."

In the raw! Murchie began well by choosing a transport ship and, gaining zest, improved by drifting 800 miles down the Yukon river alone in a boat, which recalls those classic words of Stephen Crane: "Many a man ought to have a bath-tub larger than the boat which here rode upon the sea." Murchie, six feet four or so, must unconsciously have felt this too, since one of the greatest difficulties of his journey was to be the bath-tub, always too short for his stork-like limbs.

After that barbarous journey down the Yukon, in the course of which he slept and ate and worked always according to his maxim—in the raw—Murchie drifted across the world to Honolulu and so to Japan. He worked wherever possible, knocking off the effects of "an education supposed to prepare me for life" by working in engine-rooms and loading the unkindest sort of cargoes, like scrap-iron.

From Japan he went to China, and from China inevitably to Russia, always seeing life in the raw, travelling primitively, a nonentity, a nobody, as unprivileged as the humblest peasant. Wherever he went he made friends, and whatever he saw of men or places he recorded at once, as he rolled over the Steppes in the train or down the Yukon in his boat, not giving his impressions a chance to become blurred or warped by the vapours of a civilisation to which he had reluctantly to return.

The notes he then jotted down now form this book—untouched, one hopes, by the hand of civilisation. As a result, here is a most fascinating document, authentic, fresh, racy, full of humour and adorned with some of the wittiest illustrations that a book could have. Murchie, mistrusting the hand of civilisation again perhaps, has done these drawings himself.

If you feel disinclined to go with Murchie and see life—and the life of the Japanese especially—in the raw, it is possible to meet the Japanese for a moderate three dollars with Henry Albert Phillips, whose book is to Murchie's as velvet is to sackcloth, smooth, comfortable, civilised stuff. It reminds one of those half-baked travel films in which each shot is explained in bastard English with facetious comments by a not always invisible half-wit. Not that "Meet the Japanese" is wholly as bad as this, but it belongs to the breed, and as such must be distrusted, if not avoided. It is redeemed by forty excellent pictures.