

## BOOKS

# A WHALER'S LOG

LOGBOOK FOR GRACE. By Robert Cushman Murphy. Macmillan, New York, 1947.

(Reviewed by Dr. R. A. Falla)

THE hunting of the sperm whale, an industry that flourished for rather less than a century, has provided a background for at least one literary classic in Melville's *Moby Dick* and made a steady best-seller of Bullen's *Cruise of the Cachalot*. And now R. Cushman Murphy, writing of the declining years of the sperm whaler under the modest title *Logbook for Grace*, has made another contribution to literature of a rather different kind. *Moby Dick* is a skilful blend of allegory, fact, and fiction: *The Cruise of the Cachalot* is also fictional to the extent that it is compounded from stories gathered during a short cruise by Bullen in the New Zealand whaler *Splendid*, out of Dunedin. Murphy's account of his cruise in the *Daisy* is simply narrative, enlivened by a literary gift and rare enthusiasm, and readers with an appreciation

of the viewpoint of a scientifically trained and cultured author will be grateful to him for allowing this graphic and intimate record of experiences to be published.

The original "logbook" was written for his wife, without any idea of publication, wherein lies much of its charm. As the author says in his preface the events are factual, the thoughts contemporary, and if the emotional or intellectual content of the book seems boyish, that is as it should be. No reader is likely to find it either dull or "dated." Moods and scenes change too quickly for that as the whaling brig and her crew pass from Caribbean summer and the Sargasso Sea, into the South-east trades that carry them, through Cape Horn weather, to South Georgia, an outpost of the Antarctic. The story of the outward voyage is packed with vivid description of life on a whaler and details of the hunt, and the young scientist, astonishingly well prepared and suited for his work, manages to convey the essence of his research in racy and absorbing narrative which never flags.

The same holds for his account of man and nature in South Georgia, and by the time the homeward voyage begins the reader has become absorbed in interest in the personalities and fortunes of the *Daisy's* mixed crew. It is hard to realise that such conditions as those described existed as late as 1913, but the ship, the human types, and the technique of sperm whaling and sealing were the last survivors of an era, already a century old, that had reached its end. Next to the wife who inspired this buoyant logbook the author acknowledges inspiration for his scientific record to the journal of Charles Darwin of the *Beagle*.

## CLIMBING HIGHER

TARARUA (Annual Magazine of the Tararua Tramping Club), No. 1.

IN this interesting first number of what is to be an annual magazine, most of the articles deal with South Island mountains and valleys; it is evidently intended to chronicle primarily the mountaineering side of the club's widening activities. First ascents and other good climbs are recorded, but the strongest impulse is exploration, and the delight in nature which shows itself everywhere in these pages contrasts with the dreary sophistication of some insatiably ambitious climbers. These Tararua expeditions are remarkable for their

thorough organisation and planning; the outlook of their members is remarkable for its maturity and balance.

—D.O.W.H.

## PLEASANT FAMILY CHRONICLE

KIT CARMICHAEL. By Nelle M. Scanlan. Robert Hale Ltd., London; Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd., New Zealand.

MISS SCANLAN should hold her considerable public with her new novel, and possibly enlarge it. When a charming and intelligent young woman (Elizabeth) takes the risk of marrying an occupationless and self-centred man younger than herself (Kit) there are obviously the makings of trouble, though she has known him well for a long while. This situation some novelists would certainly exploit in a fashion different from Miss Scanlan. For here, no trouble comes. Kit makes an admirable husband plus man about the place, and Elizabeth an adoring wife. New baby and all, there is a happy ending in a syrup of sentiment—but on the eve of the war, which may make the reader wonder if Miss Scanlan has a sequel in mind, Kit Carmichael, cursed with private means, yet frequently in debt and ready to cadge, blest with taste but not with application, selfish, irresponsible, and able to talk himself out of any situation, is a type some men may long to kick and some

(continued on next page)



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