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Books

WILSON OF BULLS

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SIR JAMES WILSON, by L. J. Wild; Whitcombe and Tombs, 21/-.

(Reviewed by R. M. Burdon)

BORN in 1849, the son of a Scottish woollen manufacturer, James Glenny Wilson emigrated as a young man to Victoria, where he stayed only a short time before coming on to New Zealand in 1873 and buying the Ngaio estate at Bulls, beside the Rangitikei River. There he spent the rest of his life, converting his property "from a state of nature to a state of grace," continually harassed and frustrated by financial difficulties created by the long drawn-out slump, and periodically children for alleged mismanagement by a censorious father who, though resident in Scotland, appears to have believed himself capable of directing the affairs of a farm in New Zealand—a country he had never even visited.

Wilson was in every respect an exemplary citizen. He was a useful though by no means a talkative member of Parliament for fifteen years, always showing special interest in the advancement of education. First President of the Farmers' Union, and later first President of the Board of Agriculture, his activities also embraced almost every form of local politics. But a man's life may be as useful and meritorious as that of Sir James Wilson without necessarily forming a suitable subject for a full-length biography, and I cannot but think that this book might with advantage have been shorter. Many of the letters included, which fill more than one hundred pages, are extremely well written and delightful to read; it is perhaps inevitable that the collection should contain a fair number that are merely comments on the routine of farm management. The purely biographical section shows signs of rather superfluous building up, and two long chapters headed, respectively, "The Board of Agriculture" and "Rural Education," though in themselves scholarly essays on the subjects in question, contain very little about Wilson, while both, being crammed with facts and thickly sown with little known names, are a heavy load for any biography to carry.

COLD HELL

SEVENTH CONTINENT, by Arthur Scholes; Allen and Unwin, English price 21/-.

ALTHOUGH this book is sub-titled "Saga of Australasian Exploration in Antarctica," and similarly described in the author's foreword, it is also a summary of the whole of Antarctic exploration. This gives the reader a perspective view, often with plentiful detail, of progress from Captain Cook to the aeroplane age, so that he can see the procession of victories and defeats, and how man has learnt to tackle the most formidable of the continents. High courage was there from the first;

knowledge had to be won. One of the reasons why Amundsen beat Scott to the South Pole was that he knew more about dogs. The contrast between the rate of Amundsen's march and that of Scott, as set forth by Mr. Scholes, is startling.

Traditionally, hell is a very hot place; but might it not be very cold? Perhaps because so much Antarctic experience is concentrated here, this book seems to convey a particularly terrifying effect. No other part of the world has tried man so high. Yet, as Mr. Scholes points out, the fascination of this hell has brought many men back to it, some of them more than once. The bed-roll of explorers from Australia is long and glowing: Borchgrevink, Bernacchi, David, Mawson, Wilkins and others. Mr. Scholes puts Mawson at the top; in his four journeys to Antarctica, "he has achieved a reputation which is equalled by few others in this world." Besides its part in the organisation of expeditions, New Zealand has produced one outstanding figure—Frank Worsley, a true Elizabethan of the 20th Century.

Another point brought out clearly is the work of scientists in building up a great body of knowledge, often under terrible conditions. This has been less spectacular than dashes for the Pole, but like the labour of the coral insect it raises a reef of knowledge. In a chapter ominously entitled "The Nations Quarrel," Mr. Scholes closes with a consideration of Antarctica today, still largely an unknown continent, but drawn into the arena of international rivalry by thoughts of global strategy and atom bombs. His survey is a reminder that a quadrant of the Antarctic is a New Zealand dependency, and naturally it is being asked what we are doing about it.

—A.M.

BITTER DRAUGHT

THE TRUMAN ERA, by I. F. Stone; Turnstile Press, English price 12 6.

SENATOR JOE MCCARTHY'S assaults upon human dignity have now reached a point where the voicing of criticism of governmental action in foreign affairs, so necessary to health in any democracy, has been inhibited to



"The most formidable of the continents"