

THE NEWEST BOOKS.

Earthquake and Fire in 'Frisco

New Adventure Book, "Destination Unknown," Gives Vivid Description of the Catastrophic 'Quake in San Francisco—Travels on the American Continent—A Novel on Greenland.

FRED WALKER, the author of "Destination Unknown," is one of those people who "oughter take a ticket in Tatts." Since the beginning of the century he has been roaming the world, getting into scrapes about as often as the average man gets into his bath. By the laws of averages and nature he should be under six foot of earth, but he is still sound enough in wind and limb to write a book and look forward to starting his travels once more.

In 1905 he was a 17-year-old youth at the famous Westminster School. Although he was brought up in one of the best homes in England the wanderlust seized him and he ran away from home—to America via Euston station. He was lucky enough to be able to work his passage across the Atlantic, and he landed in the United States at a time when the people of that great continent were pushing public works ahead at great speed—and there was more work available than there was workmen.

However, Walker wanted to see something of the Wild West. By "riding the freights" he managed to get into the heart of America's cattle country, and here he learned many little tricks that stood him in good stead in his later wanderings in South America. He had a ghastly experience in a goods train bound from Seattle to California. The vans used were for carrying fruit and were refrigerated. The journey lasted several days, and there were several other occupants of the vans—"on the bum," like Walker and Carlos, the latter an Italian with whom the Englishman had made friends. The weather turned bitterly cold with the result that fourteen men froze to death on the train!

The two men arrived in San Francisco on the day of the great earthquake. Carlos wanted to go to bed,

but Walker was determined to see the sights. It was this determination that saved their lives, for the hotel at which they were staying collapsed and everyone in it was killed. They were in Chinatown when the 'quake started.

Without warning the earth began to shake beneath our feet. I staggered like a drunken man, and pitched violently into a wall. From all around us came the sound of heavy objects crashing and breaking, of cries and panic, of people beginning to run, while the earth writhed beneath our feet. . . . Instinctively Carlos and I made for a more open space, where we should be clear of the flying debris, and it was just as we reached Grant Avenue again that the second shock occurred. . . . It was impossible to keep one's balance, and we were thrown about like ninepins. . . . The third shock occurred as we were running with the crowd down the hill, and it was the worst of all. With my own eyes I saw the street split open, and a horse and cart disappear in the yawning crevice, to be filled by dozens of panic-stricken people, who were pushed forward to their death by crowds that followed at their heels. Their screams ring in my ears to this day. . . . At the ferry buildings frenzied people crowded into boats, and most of the overburdened craft that attempted to ride the heavy seas capsized. Many, many lives were lost in the harbour on that never-to-be-forgotten morning.

From 'Frisco Walker went on to the Arctic, and spent a year in the Klon-dyke at a time when that wild place was at its busiest and fiercest. And then he made south once more and eventually found himself as one of Pancho Villa's lieutenants when the bandit was riding over Mexico. The talking picture version of Villa's life (screened in New Zealand a few months ago under the title of "Vive Villa!") and Walker's story differ in many respects, but one is inclined to believe more readily the latter.

From Mexico he went to the Great War, returning after the conflict to South America. Here he spent many years—in the nitrate fields, in the big cities, in the jungle; always meeting adventure, making enough money to live on, getting into plenty of tight corners (how he hung from a high bridge while a train roared across a few inches away is a super-thrill!), but leading, nevertheless, the life he loved.

The book is eminently readable. Mr. Walker has a good style—easy, cultured and interesting. "Destination Unknown" is strongly recommended for holiday reading—and it's the sort of book all one's friends will want to borrow.

"Destination Unknown," Fred Walker, George G. Harrap and Company. Our copy from the publishers.

ROGER VERCEL, the French author, has written a story that one remembers long after reading it. "Jealous Waters" is a tale that is vastly different from the ordinary run of novels. Rochard, the hero, a man of forty odd years, sets out from Brittany with his friend, Ferrier, in another ship to catch cod on the great cod-

banks off Greenland, which are almost unknown to most people. As Greenland is guarded by the Danes to prevent drink and disease being brought to the simple Esquimaux, it is illegal to fish within a certain distance of this country or to land there. The Danish torpedo-boat is on a constant look-out for trespassers, and any boats found violating the law are liable to confiscation. When fishing conditions are bad, Ferrier, despite his friend's implorings, dares to enter the forbidden waters and land. From then on matters take a dramatic turn, but not indeed as the reader expects. The power that lies behind this book is not apparent until the first few chapters are past. Then is seen a tragedy of a man's struggle with not only the elements of Nature, but his own.

It is Othello, one feels who paces the deck of the ship, forcing his suspicions to harden into facts while he remembers the past and the words of his wife, which his lonely obsession misrepresents. In this book of stark realities, where a man's power over his mutinous crew is told with deft phrases and crisp dialogue, there is a rare beauty pervading many of the passages. Here is an instance—"The captain drew out a heavy knife and pried open the lid. A smooth cake of ice appeared, the fish frozen into it, laid in rows and gleaming like silver knives behind a jeweller's showcase." And afterwards, ". . . She resembled a fruit miraculously ripened by the cold . . . he could not help thinking of the flesh and rosy reflections of the fish he had recently admired, frozen in their blocks of ice." And, ". . . the birches seemed like round candles of virgin wax. The aspens rustled and pairs of lovers embraced in the quivering shade of the trees." From insignificance the humble, frightened baker, through the brusque kindness of Rochard, rises to something which approaches greatness. It is he who saves the situation in the dramatic climax, which makes "Jealous Waters" a memorable book.

"Jealous Waters," Roger Vercel; Constable. Our copy from the publishers.

MONETARY devaluation is a bad joke.—*The French Minister of Finance.*

JUSTICE and Hitler's will are one and the same thing.—*General Goering.*

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