

## BOOK RECORD

Conducted by ANTAR

## OVER THE NORTH POLE

Soviet Flier's Memorable Account Of  
Non-Stop Flight From Moscow

**R**ECORD-BREAKING aviators are a singularly literary lot. But, for all the reams written by, for and about them, I had not come across a really balanced, detailed, well-coloured account of what happens on a long-distance flight until I read George Baidukov's "Over the North Pole."

However voluminous the literature of aviation, this "Over the North Pole"—a brief, concise, simple account of Soviet airmen's conquest of the Arctic—must rank as one of the most interesting human documents of its kind yet published.

## Book "Got" Me

To be frank, I find it a trifle difficult to marshal arguments behind so enthusiastic a statement. Looking back on the absorbed two or three hours I spent with the book, I can only say that "Over the North Pole" "got" me completely.

For those with strong political "rightist" convictions there may be much in Baidukov's story that will be irritating and distracting. The airman-author betrays all too clearly and naively the fact that he is a propagandist, and that propaganda capital was to be made out of the amazing flight from Moscow to Portland. But that is not the point. The point is that Baidukov relates with a happy lack of imagination, but a remarkable and sensitive faculty of observation, exactly what happened from the time ANT-25 took off from Moscow until it landed in the United States sixty hours later.

**T**HE man tells his story with the simple directness of a child. Translator Jessica Smith has apparently done a singularly fine job of work, retaining the terse spirit of the Russian and giving at the same time an impression of the author's idiosyncracies.

I found the first chapters, dealing with the planning of the flight and the preparation of the aeroplane possibly a little too shorn of technical detail and a little too full of happy faith in Father Stalin to be quite satisfying. Nevertheless, the spirit of adventure—and something, indeed, of the queer, indefinable tragedy of the individual in a totalitarian State—is straightly and convincingly expressed.

Then, from the moment the giant single-engined monoplane took the air till it turned back in fog and alighted at Portland, only a major earthquake could have distracted my attention.

The story gives an indelible impression of hazardous progress—of the foggy steppes of Northern Russia, the menace of storms, the ever-present,

terrible danger of ice; but also an impression of the characters of the three men—Sacha, who could always sleep, anywhere and any time—Chkalov, the skilful coxer of aircraft—Baidukov himself, eager and nervous and observant.

**O**NE follows rapt as the great mechanical bird noses over Arctic ice, twists and wheels to avoid storms, plunges into grey, tenuous banks of vapour, swoops up and down, away from wet air where ice may form on wings and control surfaces—may bring the adventure to a sudden, tragic end.

There are moments of almost unbearable suspense when the oil line begins leaking, when the de-icer fluid begins to run low before the Pole is crossed. And so skilfully is the crossing of the Pole itself described that the reader feels almost as confused as the aviators when it is suddenly discovered that the course is changed from due north and due south without the plane having deviated as much as an inch!

Little or no endeavour is made to describe "scenery"—but a word here and a word there make the awful barrenness of the Pole of Inaccessibility more vivid in the reader's mind than a whole dictionary of adjectives.

As the publishers of this remarkable little work say, people who are convinced that Russians are not mechanically-minded and that creative writing is dead in Russia will have to revise their opinions. In a preface, Vilhjalmur Stefansson explains the scientific importance of that amazing and eventful flight.

"Over the North Pole," by George Baidukov (Harrap, London). Our copy from the publisher.

MOUNTAIN MURDER  
WELL SPICED

**T**HERE'S nothing I like better than a shocker after my own taste—a preposterous, bloody story with the preposterousness adequately concealed by a smooth style and a specious way of thinking, and the blood vivid enough to be convincing but not disturbing.

Into such category falls Newton Gale's "Sinister Crag." In this instance, however, I am probably a little biased because "Sinister Crag" is a story with a mountaineering background and there is—to my mind, at least—no background better suited for really foolproof murder. If, by any chance, you are interested in climbing, buy "Sinister Crag" for the climbing descriptions in it alone. It is as light as a V.S. leader's foot on a rotten



GEORGE BAIDUKOV.

ledge, as exciting as an exposed pitch near the top, and as well thought out as a first ascent on basalt!

Shocker lovers should add "Sinister Crag" to their library list. "Sinister Crag," by Newton Gale (Gollancz, London). Our copy from the publisher.

REAL STORY BUT  
POOR STYLE

**L**OVERS of sea books will welcome E. Keble Chatterton's latest publication "Valiant Sailormen," since lovers of sea books seldom require literary skill. Mr. Chatterton undoubtedly has a story to tell—a story crammed with red-blooded incident—but he tells it in a species of journalistic jargon that is at the best irritating and at the worst utterly maddening. Nevertheless, the story has the stamp of authenticity. It leaves the impression that truth—history with all its unexpected twists—is indeed stranger than fiction. In spite of the modern machine age there is still romance in seafaring. Some of the incidents related in the book are well-nigh incredible. Up to the present they have been hidden away in private records, but Mr. Chatterton's patient research for material has disclosed them to the very considerable enrichment of romantic literature. I found the short history of the Q ships incorporated in the book, one of the most revealing and thought-provoking documents of its kind.

"Valiant Sailormen" is the type of book that should appeal to young and old alike—provided, of course, the young and the old have an initial interest in adventures and the sea.

"Valiant Sailormen," by E. Keble Chatterton (Hurst and Blackett, London.) Our copy from the publisher.

(More reviews next page.)