

BOOK RECORD

Men Who Court Risks in India's Forbidding Mountains

What is it leads a man to test his puny form against the great strength of Himalaya Mountains, in spite of failure and death? "Blank on the Map," tale of adventure among high peaks, gives the answer.

I AM always in two minds about books like Eric Shipton's "Blank on the Map."

Not concerning the contents (about which there can be only one opinion), but about the method of presentation.

As Hodder and Stoughton have produced it, the book has two sketch maps, a comprehensive colour map and well over 50 fine photographic illustrations; chapters are begun and ended with sketches by Bip Pares, and altogether it is a superlative affair.

Now the result is a volume which will add lustre to any bookshelf, but I am half inclined to wish that the publishers had not bothered about the frills and furbelows, and had kept it to a price within the reach of the average bibliophile.

Among High Peaks

For there is fine stuff in "Blank on the Map," and those who have enjoyed, as I have, previous records

of adventure among the high peaks of the Himalaya, will enjoy Shipton's latest book.

There is less mountaineering than exploration in "Blank on the Map." It tells of six months' arduous travelling in the almost unknown fastnesses of the north-west Himalaya, in the forbidding Karakoram country.

One or two explorers had previously penetrated into the hidden valleys of the Karakoram, including that famous traveller Sir Francis Younghusband, but little useful information had been brought back. Shipton's party brought back much that should prove of value for future geologists and surveyors.

Few peaks were conquered. The primary aim of the expedition was to map, topographically and geologically, a vast area of high alpine country. Chief point on which the topographical survey was fixed was K2, second highest mountain in the world, a majestic, impregnable peak soaring to a height of 28,250 feet. And Shipton and his colleagues, H. W. Tilman, Michael Spender and J. B. Auden, surveyed 1800 square miles of this difficult country.

Great Climber

Shipton was well qualified to lead a party such as this. He has twice tackled Everest—in 1933 he reached 28,000 feet—and more recently he was responsible for a great feat of mountaineering on Nandar Devi.

Above all, he has the true philosophy of mountaineering.

"Let us approach this great heritage (the Himalaya country) in the right spirit, not impelled by ambition," he says. "Let us study its people and their culture. Let us explore its vast tangle of mountains and glaciers, penetrating the deep sunless gorges to find the hidden beauty which lies beyond, crossing unknown passes which lead us from one region of mystery to another. Let us climb peaks by all means, because their beauty attracts us; not because others have failed; nor because their summits stand 28,000 feet above the sea; nor in patriotic fervour for the honour of the nation; nor for cheap publicity..."

"There is something fine," Shipton observes later, "in the desire to test human endurance against the deadening power of altitude, the difficulties of steep ice and rock and the searching rigours of intense cold and wind; but the greatest value of the art of climbing, with its perfect co-ordination of mind and muscle, is that it teaches man a way of living in the beauty and solitude of high remote places."

The Snowman

Incidentally, Shipton has some more to say about that intriguing Himalayan phenomenon, the Abominable Snowman. The party encountered the Snowman's spoor, great footprints eight inches in diameter, almost circular, and a foot and more deep in the snow.

Shipton dismisses the bear theory in a few lines, and comes to the conclusion that until science has satisfactorily solved the mystery of the Abominable Snowman, it is much more pleasant to leave him the fantastic, terrifying tradition he still is.

I can recommend "Blank on the Map." It is a fascinating tale of the trials of a particularly difficult trip, told good-humouredly and very readably. The photographs are magnificent.

—J.G.M.

"Blank on the Map," by Eric Shipton. Hodder and Stoughton. Our copy from the publishers.

"Unimportant" Novel That Had Grip

MOST writers of talent these days use up their energies writing "important" books—books with a message, books that expose rackets, or postulate obscure psychological dicta, or preach, or sneer, or moan.

In a flood of "important" releases I have found one "unimportant" book. Strangely enough, that unimportant book comes nearer my conception of lasting literature than all the others, or all the good points of the others put together.

John de Meyer has written "Village Tale" in a fashion long gone from shelves of contemporary books. Apparently he has written it for the love of creation, with utter—almost tricky—simplicity; and he has achieved something notable because he has ignored with a grave, perhaps unconscious, courage the modes, situations, subjects, shibboleths and distortions upon which successful writing today so often depends.

"VILLAGE TALE" is the story of Michael, son of a Maine village parson—and of the village. Its portraiture is remarkable and memorable because it is portraiture stripped of every unessential; completely recognisable, typical.

Admirers of Flaubert and the Flaubert school will do well to read it. A book for students—and epicures.—ANTAR.

"Village Tale," by John de Meyer. Gallancz, London. Our copy from the publishers.



★ K2.—Second highest mountain in the world, 28,250 feet above the sea, is the leading character in "Blank on the Map," reviewed on this page today.

Soldier Turned Traitor To Save His Country

He Was Despised And Rejected

"NOT UNDERSTOOD" . . . that, in short, is the theme of "Renown," a biography of Benedict Arnold, one of the most picturesque characters in British-American history.

Considered by General Washington to have been America's most valued general in the War of Independence, Arnold became involved in petty quarrels with civic authorities, and, after a court-martial, began treasonable correspondence with the British commander, eventually undertaking to betray his command at West Point for a large sum of money. As brigadier-general in the British Army, he turned his hair for military tactics against his own people.

In setting out to prove that Benedict Arnold was not a traitor, but a man who visualised an early ending to a fruitless war—a war being drawn out by inept civilian authorities who were impeding the progress of the military officers—Mr. Hough faces a difficult task: with courage and reveals Arnold as a patriot and not a traitor.

Not understood, pilloried by office-seeking Americans, held to ridicule by those not fit to shine his boots, seriously wounded in action against the British and considering that France's support to the struggling colonists would not bring independence, but merely a change in masters, Arnold crosses over to the British side, only to discover that his motives have been misunderstood.

Soul Torment

Arnold's farewell message to his American comrades tells of the torment in his soul:

"The heart which is conscious of its own rectitude cannot attempt to palliate a step which the world may censure as wrong. I have ever acted from a principle of love to my country since the commencement of the present unhappy contest between Great Britain and the Colonies. The same principle of love to my country actuated my present conduct, however it may appear inconsistent to the world, who very seldom judge right of any man's action."

Despised by the British—it would seem he had been "betrayed" into "betraying his country," Arnold's life was full of misery and misfortune. At times his undoubted brilliancy raised him to great heights, but soon he would see his castles crashing to the ground.

He left no heritage of renown—only debts and lawsuits. His sons served in the British Army, two died on service and another was knighted and became Lieut.-General Sir James Robertson Arnold.



FRANK O. HOUGH . . . Tells a tragedy of the War of Independence

History seldom evaluates men correctly; tradition never. It is in tradition that Benedict Arnold lives. Historically, all that commemorates him today in the country he so nearly died to make free are a couple of ambiguous place-names, a few obscure historic spot-markers, a curious monument "to the most brilliant soldier in the Continental Army" (unnamed) where once the Hessian redoubt stood and an empty niche in the Saratoga battle monument, which awaits a statue that will never be carved.

These things—and, in the hearts of his countrymen, a place at the right hand of Judas Iscariot.—W.F.I.

"Renown," by Frank O. Hough. George G. Harrap and Co., Ltd., London. Our copy from the publishers.

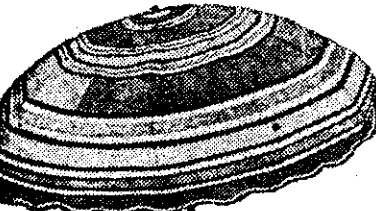
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Eileen Duggan's Poems Win Highest Praise

HIGHEST praise won by a New Zealand writer since Katherine Mansfield's days has come to Eileen Duggan for her recent book "Poems."

Noted critic Egerton Clarke, writing in the "Dublin Review" says: "Here is something; here, possibly, is the very poet for whom we have all been waiting. If only she will now attempt to use her multitudinous gifts towards some epic of her native New Zealand, in sustained imagery, there can be little doubt but that she will rank at least as the greatest woman poet of this age."

