

REVIEWS

GRØNLANDS FLORA [THE FLORA OF GREENLAND]

By TYGE W. BÖCHER, KJELD HOLMAN, and KNUD JAKOBSON, illustrated by INGEBORG FREDERIKSEN. *Copenhagen: P. Haase & Søns Forlag, 1957. 7½ x 4¾ inches; 314 pages; 54 figures, 2 colour plates. 28.00 kroner (\$4.00).*

Few visitors to Greenland, coming from countries more favoured by nature, have failed to express surprise and delight over the beauty and relative abundance of wild flowers in that island. Not a few have been much disappointed that no guide or manual was available to help them in naming the flowers that greeted them on landing there. This lack is the more surprising as, botanically speaking, the flora of Greenland has been studied longer and more intensely than that of any other arctic land. The need for a guide to the flora of Greenland was recognized by the late Morten P. Porsild, who in 1901 prepared a "Flora Excursoria Groenlandica", intended mainly for his own use during his second visit to Greenland, when plans matured that later led to the establishment of a permanent scientific research station on Disko Island. At least four later "editions" of Porsild's flora are known to the reviewer, some even profusely illustrated by pen drawings. Of several there were handwritten copies that were freely lent to visitors to the Disko Station. However, despite much encouragement from friends and colleagues Porsild apparently never seriously considered publication of his guide to the flora of Greenland.

The urgent need for such a manual has at last been met and henceforth visitors to that island will have in "Grønlands Flora" a modern and convenient pocket guide to the flowering plants and ferns, complete with simple keys and

descriptions that will satisfy the amateur as well as the professional collector. The book is attractively printed and profusely illustrated with excellent line drawings and two colour plates. It is also intended for use in the schools in Greenland and for this reason the synoptical part is preceded by a short introduction to the morphology of Greenland plants as well as by notes on their ecology and distribution. Present and future Greenland botanists will probably wish that space had permitted the inclusion of somewhat more detailed notes on the local distribution of the less common species. For the benefit of users not familiar with Danish, English equivalents are given for the abbreviations commonly used, besides an explanation in English and Greenlandic of the rather ingenious system of symbols by which plant distribution has been handled. These symbols together with the map at the end of the book on which the floristic provinces of Greenland are shown should prove quite adequate to all but local botanists. Those not familiar with Danish plant names would wish that Latin names had been inserted along with the Danish names in the main keys to families and genera on pages 34-5, 55-60, and 218-21. Danish plant names, accompanied by Latin binomials and trinomials are given throughout the text. Since many Greenland plants are North American and hence have no common Danish names, the authors of "Grønlands Flora" have been faced with the need for "inventing" plant names where none existed. To the reviewer the need for such "new" names sometimes seems questionable, particularly in the case of critical species that at best will remain fleeting acquaintances of Greenland schoolboys. However, many of the

"new" names are descriptive and well chosen; a few are redundant because common Danish names were available; and for the North American and East Asiatic subarctic *Anemone richardsonii*, which is in Greenland known only from a few stations in the central part of the west coast, the retention of Richardson's name would have seemed preferable to the new and misleading Danish "Sne [snow] anemone".

These, however, are all minor criticisms and the authors of "Grønlands Flora" are to be congratulated on having produced a most attractive and useful guide to the flora of Greenland.

A. E. PORSILD

AN HISTORICAL EVALUATION OF THE COOK-PEARY CONTROVERSY

By RUSSELL W. GIBBONS. 1956. 10½ x 8 inches; 129 pp.; mimeographed. Available through: V. C. B. Co., P.O. Box 145, Hamburg, N.Y.; \$1.00 postpaid.

"The discovery of the North Pole has been delayed too long." So wrote R. M. Ballantyne in 1881, in the introduction to a novel in which he proceeded to rectify the situation by sending out an expedition equipped in his own fertile imagination. In view of the furore and generation of hot air and bad blood that resulted when the matter in fact reached its climax it is perhaps a pity that Mr. Ballantyne's discovery was not recognized. The question of whether Cook or Peary, or neither, or both, actually reached this theoretical point on the moving pack ice has always seemed to me of minor importance, and the vulgar brawl that followed their respective announcements one of the most dismal and undignified episodes in the history of exploration. Nevertheless a great number of people felt strongly on the subject, and apparently still do, as the controversy, though dormant, is by no means dead. And that is as it should be, because although the attainment of the pole in itself may be unimportant, an unfair judgement is something else, and there is little doubt that, whether he

reached the pole or not, Cook was unfairly judged.

The latest blow to be struck in defence of Cook is by a young man who started off to write an undergraduate paper in the orthodox belief that Peary was a hero and Cook a liar, and became so impressed with the evidence to the contrary that he changed horses in mid-stream and wrote an impassioned plea for Cook. In doing so, however, he went to the opposite extreme, so that Peary emerges from his monograph as a fire-breathing monster whose horns are almost visible through his parka hood, while Cook wears the halo of the true martyr. The paper, revised and mimeographed, has now been distributed to "selected universities, libraries and geographic and historical societies".

I have no quarrel with Mr. Gibbons' basic theme: there is a good case for Cook, and there is little doubt he got a dirty deal. Peary had all the influential backing and big guns on his side and his supporters did not hesitate to use them. But all this has been said before, and it is questionable whether it is of any service to Cook's cause to repeat it unless there is new evidence to present or new and startling conclusions to be drawn from the old. Mr. Gibbons has no valid new evidence, and although some of his conclusions are startling they are not based on sound premises. The sad result is that his well-meaning and painstaking work is likely to do more harm than good to the cause that he so wholeheartedly and sincerely supports.

Mr. Gibbons loses our support in the introduction, before he even starts, by claiming that he will offer "incontrovertible proof" that Peary did not reach the pole. There are only two ways of proving incontrovertibly that anyone went anywhere—the evidence of a number of impartial witnesses, or evidence left at the place in question. To prove that someone did not go somewhere is even more difficult. At the North Pole there were no impartial witnesses and only moving ice on which to leave a record; there is not, therefore, and never can be,