

"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.

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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,

incontrovertible proof that either explorer did or did not get there. All there can be is an analysis of the accounts of how they got there, so as to estimate their probable accuracy. The details of travel distances and observations for position have been thoroughly thrashed over already (but with widely differing interpretations) and only the appearance of new contemporary documents can greatly add to this line of investigation. There is another factor concerned, however: the ice conditions over which the two explorers claimed to have travelled. In this respect the state of our knowledge is growing rapidly, and in time may well produce important new evidence.

An attempt to introduce such evidence is made by Mr. Gibbons in a discussion of ice islands, which is unfortunately full of inaccuracies and misconceptions. He quotes this reviewer's contention (*Arctic*, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 89) that Cook describes passing over what may have been an ice island on his polar journey. He goes overboard here as elsewhere, however, turning what is at best a good possibility into a certainty. "There can be no doubt that it was one of these fabulous floating fresh-water ice islands which Dr. Cook saw and wrote about forty years ago." That is obvious nonsense; there is room for all kinds of doubt. And even if we accept the ice island without question it still does not prove that Cook found it between 87° and 88°N as he states. (The fact that the position given is on what is now known to be the course of the ice islands' drift is however a good point, which may one

day be of value, *in conjunction with other information*, in building up an intelligent case for Cook). Mr. Gibbons goes on to say that the recent explorations of ice islands "proved without a doubt one fact that cannot be disputed: the first explorer to observe one of these islands was Dr. Frederick Cook . . .". This kind of wild leaping at untenable conclusions does nothing to inspire confidence in the author's methods.

It is to be hoped and expected that the next few years will see a further increase in our knowledge of the Arctic pack ice, and of the Ellesmere Ice Shelf from which the ice islands come. When we have more information on present ice conditions and are better able to estimate conditions pertaining in 1908-9, we shall be in a position to re-evaluate the accounts of Cook and Peary. Until then it seems a waste of time to issue rehashes of old evidence, which can add nothing, and which, if badly presented, can only drive another nail in the coffin of Cook's reputation. Mr. Gibbons might have been well advised to hold his fire until there was something to say, by which time, with luck, he will have matured sufficiently to be able to present it more logically, and to live up to his often repeated claim to analytical objectivity.

A formidable bibliography, listing not only books but also magazine and newspaper articles, shows that the writer has not skimmed his research. This list is the most useful part of the well-intentioned but ill-timed monograph.

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