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Oxford in the Arctic

Book News of the Day

DURING recent years many interesting and invaluable journeys have been undertaken by young men into arctic countries, and some captivating books have resulted. Oxford in 1921, 1923 and 1924 sent successful expeditions to northeast and central Spitzbergen, and Cambridge during the last ten years has done much interesting work in Greenland, Iceland, San Mayen and Spitzbergen also.

In 1927 the Oxford University Exploration Club was founded. It has since done exploration work in Hudson Bay, Lapland and, through the 1934 expedition, in Spitzbergen. It has seemed less inclined, however, than the Cambridge expeditions, says Mr. A. R. Glen in *YOUNG MEN IN THE ARCTIC* (London: Faber & Faber, 15s.), to adapt its technique to that of the native, and has been, in his words, less enterprising in that direction.



What it seems really to have lacked, however, is a genius, a Watkins. There is a peculiar quality about the expeditions led by Watkins—an indefinable feeling of intensity and inevitability, which makes the least of them epic. The Oxford Club seems to have accomplished no such journeys as will compare with Watkins Labrador Expedition or the Arctic Air Route Expedition.

Certainly the expedition described in Mr. Glen's book is not epic, though it is fascinating and may be scientifically as valuable as anything accomplished by Cambridge or Watkins. By a curious irony no fewer than six of its eighteen members were Cambridge men—"and lucky we were to have them," says their leader. And as the appendices to this book show—appendices on geology, geomorphology, glaciology, meteorology, and the working of the geophysical seismograph—they were a party of scientists primarily.



Mr. Glen's account is indeed very lighthearted, as, though the expedition had been a kind of scientific busman's holiday. His account of his second and much less ambitious journey to Spitzbergen in 1934, accompanied by Mr. Lygon and Mr. Evelyn Waugh, is even more so. Mr. Waugh, contrary to his literary reputation, turned out to be a prophet of the gloomiest kind. Where is his own account? There seems to have been in this journey much of that comic material dear, one supposes, to his own heart. Perhaps he will give us "Arctic Antics"? Meanwhile, it is good to have Mr. Glen's account, decently written, of journeys which were valuable if unepic, and to travel with him on his excellent maps, to see in his many charming photographs something of what he saw and to ponder on the ologies in the appendices.

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