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And MacIntyre complains :

There's buttons all around our knees  
And buckles closely fastening,  
And now the breeks are doubled close  
Round the backside of every man.

The Gaelic texts are printed conveniently opposite the poems, and in an appendix are given some of the original airs to which these long poems, with their secret symbolism, were sung around the winter fire and in remote corries. Mr. Campbell has taken elaborate pains in editing and preparing texts and must be congratulated on his book.

AUSTIN CLARKE

## ARCTIC BISMARCK

**The Quest for Polar Treasures.** By JAN WELZL. Translated by M. and R. WEATHERALL. *Allen and Unwin.* 10s. 6d.

*The Quest for Polar Treasures* is a continuation of *Thirty Years in the Golden North*. Jan Welzl is what the Americans call an old-timer, one of those fatalistic old adventurers, tough as pig-skin but as full of wonder as a boy, whose type used to be common in the early prospecting, covered-wagon kind of films, in which he often seemed to stand out as the only flesh-and-blood figure among a crowd of made-up studio artists parading against a background of fake Alaskan snow. There has been some suggestion that Welzl himself is a fake and that he never "after years and years of dreadful suffering and privation, from a simple locksmith, sailor and tramp, became a hunter of note and an established trader; proprietor of a splendid boat and chief judge of New Siberia." It is possible; and perhaps Welzl, like Defoe, is really hoodwinking us, and has simply read it all up in text-books or seen it all on some forgotten film, and has never been farther North than Nova Scotia: oh, yes! as he himself would say, it is possible. But if it is a fake then there isn't an author who won't envy Welzl the fecundity of his imagination, his magnificent powers of description, his shrewd feeling for both animals and his fellow-men; for, fake or no fake, take it which way you like, *The Quest for Polar Treasures* is a remarkable book, and I for one am ready to accept every word of it: not as hard, bald gospel truth, for no man of Welzl's age can be expected to tell the truth about the size of a sea-elephant or a catch of salmon, or anything else that he saw thirty or forty years ago. Welzl is now an old man, and all old men's tales are the same—little snowballs of memory which roll over and over in their minds gathering the snow of more memories, always getting larger, the little tales rolling into each other and then into the larger tales, until, if the man is remarkable enough, like Welzl, the tale becomes an epic. This is exactly what Welzl's book is: a series of incidents, tales and adventures all rolled together into one great narrative of life in the frozen North: a tale peopled by gold-maniacs, hunters, explorers, Eskimos, trappers, with Welzl himself as the unconscious hero. It is often a disjointed tale; often it seems to be chronologically upside down. Often Welzl forgets and breaks off to remember, and confesses it difficult. Often it reads like a Wild West blood-and-thunder; but it is all fresh and vivid and fascinating, its wildest improbabilities tempered by the shrewdness and scepticism of Welzl's old mind, so that sometimes its most extraordinary passages are its most credible, as in the description of the mad rush to dig gold from the bed of the sea:

As soon as the hour of the regular ebb tide approached the sea began to recede and recede and left its bed exposed. Just then—but I had never seen before anything like what happened at that moment. Everybody dashed away, people like flies rushed for the sea-bottom; and when I saw them I ran to see their madness at close quarters. It was tremendous fun, if only one looked on. They immediately threw themselves on the spots which they fancied most, and they worked as if they had lost their senses. Here two worked together; one poured water into the little machine, the other threw in the sand; some worked with mercury; many stood in the water and had boats with them. A feeling of horror fell on me as I watched this human struggle, and dreadful scramble. . . . I stood by one man, and for a while I watched him in amazement. He had such amazing luck; on his shovel he took up perhaps a thousand dollars at a time. It was pure gold, as fine as oatmeal gruel. "God bless you, man, you are lucky!" said I, trying to talk with him. But he kept on shovelling as if unconscious of anything else.

Primarily a hunter and trader, Welzl had no use for gold; he had seen the fever too often and knew its tragic consequences too well. Yet his whole life in the North was spent in pursuit of riches—"It was a wild chase after money, a quest for Polar treasures." And all in order to buy a boat, "to be able to paint

her blue, yellow, red or piebald, anything I fancied, without asking anyone." The boat's name was *Laura* and Welzl's nickname was Arctic Bismarck, and there is really a kind of tragic love-story in Welzl's longing for that boat, his struggles for it, his privations, the final irony of his possession of it. He has now returned to the North, "where I shall not die of hunger while my old hands can get me a living . . . telling the Eskimos about the things which I have seen while with you in Europe. And just as you would not believe me when I told you about even the most ordinary things in the North, they will shake their heads, and quietly whisper, 'Arctic Bismarck is pulling our legs.'" And like us, no doubt, they will be absolutely fascinated, too.

H. E. BATES

## ETERNAL VERITIES

**All Men Are Enemies.** By RICHARD ALDINGTON. *Chatto and Windus.* 8s. 6d.

The public does not feel easy about a new writer of great talents until it has succeeded in explaining him in terms of what already exists—in pigeon-holing him, in fact. A particularly inexorable pigeon-hole or category is waiting to engulf Richard Aldington. He is to be known, it seems, as a slashing-attack man. Specifically as an exponent of the horrors of war and its consequences and a derider of County, highbrows, the world of business and golf, etc.—a particularly misleading summary, since it places him with our modern floggers of dead horses, with our plucky neo-Shavians who crusade against the prejudices and convictions held only by their least enlightened aunts, and with their disciples our gummy school of journalists. The gulf between *All Men Are Enemies* and this sort of world is particularly obvious.

The novel is a kind of prologue and epilogue to *Death of a Hero*, with Winterbourne now changed to Tony Clarendon. The pre-war Tony is described in his boyhood, beautifully indolent and able to employ his senses as a poet should, in haphazard perception and enjoyment. Then the novel jumps straight to 1919, and Tony, after the war, is described with his elaborate and subtle sensibilities poisoned by the undigested horrors of his experience, as fully a victim of the guns as ever Winterbourne was, except that he still exists as a "half-demented crock," his clear apprehensions turned to nervous reactions. A familiar Aldington situation, readers will say. But as if he were conscious of an obligation to add a positive to his many negatives—the one factor which conscious effort cannot produce—the author brings the hero finally to life again, and he finds redemption, after escaping from the business world and a post-war wife, in reunion with his first love, an Austrian girl from whom he had been separated by the war.

It is possible to respect and to admire the attempt, and yet say that there is no conviction about it as a new expression of fulfilment. Perhaps in some way the war is Aldington's fulfilment, and though the actual war years are omitted from the book, it is chiefly in relation to them that the book lives. In the beginning, the calm before the storm is the controlling element in the sensitive description of the boy's first love thoughts, and first sensuous enjoyment of poetry and of nature: the 1919 chapter describing Tony ill with "delayed shock," as the doctors coolly put it, and then the frenzied search in Vienna for the girl, the desire to cool his still festering nerves in contact with this woman he had known so happily before—these are the parts of the book which have the authenticity, the sense of uncontainable experience, the dignity even, of *Death of a Hero*.

Conversely there are pages which are correspondingly dead, where Tony is not seen in relation to the war, or, indeed, to any experience, but where he triumphantly maintains opinions. Here the slashing attacks come in, and there are a series of really incredibly flat characters whose unhappy function it is to engage in arguments with the hero and come off worst: Henry Clarendon, the father, hard and scientific—Crang, who starts by being hard and Bolshevik, and ends by being hard and successful; Julian, Waterton—one forgets which is which. Is it carelessness which makes the author set these impossibilities beside the much-alive reality of Tony? Is it indifference to the undoubtedly highbrow art of character drawing, or impatience with the minute dissection of human traits in which so many modern novelists succeed? This is when the anger becomes nervous exasperation, and the crude satire which is the result does not seem to be invalidated, as somehow it is in the case of D. H. Lawrence, by the force of his poetic apprehension of the object attacked.

Half-way through the novel there is a certain incident, a