

# THE COMFORTS OF EXPLORING

By Will H. Solle

AS the "armchair explorer" discovers the new north described by Stefansson, he has to sit tight and restrain his impulsive desires to visit the Arctic and learn of its friendliness for himself. After the first disheartening chapters that rob the imagination of the old stock ideas of glamorous perils, the reader longs to go out and build himself a snowhouse, hunt seals and caribou, avoid the dense swarms of mosquitoes, or tramp over the prairies covered with wild flowers and teeming with insect life. The imagination, in giving up the old conception of heroic adventure, substitutes visions of glorious hunting trips, unique holidays in the open, and release from the tyranny of civilization with its complex menus, its nerve-racking mechanical conveniences, and its formalities. The heroics, however, that Stefansson seems to have removed from arctic exploration, are replaced with records of fortitude and achievement under handicaps that will always characterize life in the Far North.

After living many years with the Eskimos and taking part in several arctic explorations, Stefansson became convinced that earlier explorers had gone forward with mistaken theories,

or at least with theories that retarded their progress and weakened their usefulness. Instead of conveying provisions sufficient to reach a given point and return, why not make a living from the natural resources of the country? Why not kill seals, or bears, as one went along and use them for food, fuel, and clothing? Why not adopt Eskimo habits of dress and revive the old-time Eskimo snowhouse? The Eskimos as well as the white men believed the arctic ice fields and islands to be barren, they laughed at the idea of conducting an exploratory trip into the Far North depending for its success upon hunting. Now, of course, the world knows that it can be done; but when Stefansson set out on his first trip in 1913 and disappeared on an ice floe the first night, the newspapers reported his death and the failure of his theories. A year later he appeared on schedule at the place where he had designated a party under his command to meet him. He was very much alive, well fed, well clothed, and in abounding health, when he walked into the camp on Banks Island. For four succeeding winters he pursued the same policy of living from the land, and his explorations, unimpeded by enormous caravans of supplies, discovered new lands, surveyed old lands, and studied the islands visited. The scientific results of these studies are to appear in twenty-odd volumes, while the romance of the expedition appears in this fascinating volume of the Friendly Arctic. According to Stefansson, "it is chiefly our unwillingness to change our minds which prevents the north from changing into a country to be used and lived in just like the rest of the world".

The narrator of these exhilarating experiences and the commander of the

expedition is more modest than the customary writer of travel books. Among the scores of illustrations his picture never appears. In the records of discoveries and journeys into unknown regions his companions are given full credit for their share in the work. Even in the various accounts of insubordination that might easily have ruined the work undertaken, Stefansson does no more than state the facts and leaves inferences or judgments to the reader. Yet despite his modesty, his personality stands out as the central figure in an adventure that has revolutionized the methods of arctic exploration, and robbed romanticists (whether in literature or the movies) of many stock accessories for thrilling their audiences.

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The Friendly Arctic. By Vilhjalmur Stefansson. The Macmillan Co.