

over strange documents issued as travel books, not the least enthralling being the story of how that intrepid young Anglo-American, William Montgomery McGovern, succeeded in getting into the Forbidden City, the attic of the world, whither my letter followed him. But of that anon. . . .

It may have been a chance selection that threw such a wide range of travel books in my direction, but it was a lucky stroke. Tibet, Abyssinia, Indo-China, South America, the South Seas, and Australia — I had to get out my geography again. The Australia book did not come to me from the editor, but I am throwing it in for good luck. It is so unique, so exquisitely written, that I can think of no better flavoring for this cosmic potpourri. If the reader cannot find time for all these books, let him limit himself to "Kanga Creek, An Australian Idyll" by Havlock Ellis and "To Lhasa in Disguise" by McGovern. Most ordinary travel books are really what in culinary lingo is called "stock". What else can one possibly say (to pick at random from "Angkor, the Magnificent") of writing like the following:

At Saigon one may gain pleasure by intimacy with the cocoanut. Here it is found in its tenderest mood. It is a nut that plays a varied part in the commerce of the world. . . . But here in the tropics in midwinter, it is a nectar and a poem. . . . But such skill has produced not a hard globe of our Western ken, but a tender flexible orb which yields soft and pliant to the touch . . . a disc which reveals a white purity within, unequalled in the world. And this pure chalice holds your drink, a soothing draught, cool, poetic, fragrant. Not from a cup, mind. Drink straight from that pure well and receive the balm to your spirit that lies in the hidden chamber of the big brown cup. But to know the joy to the full, one must know first the tropic heat and that heat's thirst.

Here is another Old Oaken Bucket lost to the world. If she can write so well about copra (the odor of which only

## IS THERE ROMANCE IN TRAVEL?

By Sydney Greenbie

THIS is still the strangest of strange worlds, railroads and radio notwithstanding. Some time ago I sent a letter to a young man in London, but it reached him in Lhasa, Tibet, where he was a prisoner of state. There it is still confiscate, a rare document over which curious monks are vainly poring. And with all my thousands of miles of traveling, I am just as curiously poring

a visitor to the tropics can appreciate), how unfortunate that the author can't orientate herself enough to make the scent of Chicago's glue industry a little less real?

But if one has to go to Saigon to appreciate the cocoanut, where shall one go to rid oneself of romance? From the appearance of things, romance is everywhere to be found except in one's own country. For truth to tell, even an ordinary ride up a strange, unknown river is more romantic than a similar journey at home. However, there is always pleasure in records of sport and hunting, when at the same time the explorer has to guard himself against sudden savage visitations. It is too bad we have become so civilized. Such a record is "The River of Seven Stars", a story of six thousand miles of prying into South American wilderness.

Just as the manly sport will always have its appeal, so will the sentimental. In fact, we are bringing our boys up to the taste of it. Mr. Nordhoff, having satisfied the taste of grown ups for South Sea sweets, has dished them up in juvenile form in "The Pearl Lagoon".

Of a more serious and engaging brand are "The Sea Gypsy" and "Heirs of the Incas". The authors of the former have the journalist's sense of reality. They make things seem romantic by telling us that they are not. When they take us into an Abyssinian hovel in which black ladies disport in alleged dances, they are honest enough to say that the sight was not exciting. One doesn't exactly believe them, but then . . . When these "spiders" turn their little yacht to another line on their web and reach Fiji, as they have reached Borneo, the Solomon Islands, etc., and tell us that in Fiji the chief had instituted a

betrothal dance in order to get his young people married but that the maidens refused to "lift the betrothal fruit from the ground", then we know for certain that the masculine world of romance has completely collapsed. Unfortunately for us men, the authors do not prophesy the exact date on which the world is coming to an end — or romance, either.

The reader to whom the world is more than a Futuristic painting seeks for the concrete in his vicarious wanderings. In this respect "Heirs of the Incas" is infinitely more satisfying. Michener can not only write vividly, but he thinks deeply. There is a quality in his thinking that gives importance to what would otherwise seem trivial. Few writers have the gift of seeing strange things without belittling them. Michener neither insults with his praise nor offends with his blame. One does not lay down a book like that with a feeling of having read it — one knows that one never finishes reading it, but will do so over and over again.

Having climbed so high in this literary heap, who could turn back without scaling Everest? I do not believe that in the history of adventure a more all around achievement has ever been accomplished than McGovern's penetration into the sacred heart of Tibet. Not even John Ledyard, who, in 1783, wished to cross this continent with a dog, a hatchet and a pipe, was as daring. Every other story pales before the difficulties that McGovern had to overcome. The physical triumphs are the least of his merits. He had to employ constantly every tactful device to achieve his end. He had to be a linguist of the most complex kind, for he had to keep his European tongue from giving him away, not in the easier, because refined, upper class dialect,

but in the vulgarities of the Tibetan coolie. He had to maintain a physical disguise even in such functions as with us are most private, and which almost cost him dearly. He had to exercise diplomatic skill in retaining the services of natives who would just as soon have sold him for a meal, to goad them gently into enduring terrible hardships, preserve peace among them, and all the while to keep them playing a part no stage director could have achieved. He had to fool shrewd officials and to win the favor of the most sacrosanct ruler in the world in the face of an intoxicated fanaticism murderous in the extreme. And he was only a young man of twenty five. This statement requires a bit of biographical gossip. I first heard of McGovern in Japan. I was trying to gain admission into a monastery, but learned that because a young American had left it, after several years as a novice, they were averse to repeating the experiment. Nevertheless the Nishi Hongwanji faculty of priests gave McGovern an honorary degree as a priest. His knowledge of Buddhism gained from three years' study (before he was 19), his fluent use of Japanese and other oriental languages, gave him his first successful disguise for this undertaking. Add iodine and walnut juice to his white skin, and lemon and glue to his

blue eyes, and black dye to his beard, and you have the rest — except sheer wit. Here then we have a book that is a travel book to be sure, but that for insight and judgment and daring and success sets a new standard for the rest of us. Withal, the story is so simply told, so utterly unembellished, that one again marvels at the power of this young man who walks away with achievements laborious and arduous to ordinary mortals.

One word more. Isn't it about time that travel writers ceased dwelling upon the wonder of human differentiation, padding it with adjectives, and contributed something to the interpretation of all this variation? Are we still thinking in terms of Marco Polo and Columbus, or have we now a new concept of the world after so much touring and penetrating and reporting? Michener, McGovern, and Ellis point the way.

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Kanga Creek, An Australian Idyll. By Havelock Ellis. Brentano's.  
Angkor, the Magnificent. By Helen Churchill Candee. Frederick A. Stokes Co.  
The Sea Gypsy. By E. A. Salisbury and M. C. Cooper. G. P. Putnam's Sons.  
The River of Seven Stars. By Arthur O. Friel. Harper and Bros.  
The Pearl Lagoon. By Charles Nordhoff. Atlantic Monthly Press.  
Heirs of the Incas. By Carroll K. Michener. Minton, Balch and Co.  
To Lhasa in Disguise. By William Montgomery McGovern. The Century Co.