

cumstances. For half a century the Outside has been mystified by weird and strange stories of this tropical valley which had escaped the hand of time "where living dinosaurs and mammoths of a forgotten age disport themselves in steaming pools rich with luxuriant vegetation". Charles Bedeaux's fantastic invasion in 1934 of the region traversed by the Alaska Highway—an experiment that cost him close to a million dollars—is told in graphic detail.

Of the forlorn Mounted Police road-building attempts, the wilderness has reclaimed its own. The raised houses built every 30 miles have fallen in; fire, frost and landslips have eaten up the grades; muskegs have swallowed the rotting corduroy, and rivers have long since effaced the bridges. Godsell ponders these things. Will history, he wonders, repeat itself? Will the majestic artery recently rushed to completion be left to languish and revert to nature when the excitement of this war is over and peace returns?

A book of history and exploration, of adventure and indomitable courage, *The Romance of the Alaska Highway* like the terrain it covers is dotted with the names of trappers, fur traders and Mounted Policemen too numerous for individual mention here. Impressive, breathing the flamboyancy of the frontier, it is typical Godsell stuff. Those who enjoyed his earlier books, are assured of a treat in this tasty slice of Canadiana. G.S.H.

PLOWING THE ARCTIC, by G. J. Tranter. Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd., London, Eng. 256 pp. Illustrated. 12/6 net.

This is the story of the *St. Roch's* first trip through the North-west Passage, 1940-42. Magazines, newspapers and radio broadcasts have acquainted the public with the general outline of Sub-Inspector Larsen's west-to-east voyage, and the man on the street now knows that the tiny vessel and her crew ventured into little-known places, had to contend with fog, ice and cold, were locked for months in isolation and loneliness, often in danger of being crunched in the jaws of the polar ice pack, and that eventually they won their way through a vast ice-infested wilderness known as the North-west Passage—in a vague sort of way many of us know the feat was an epic one.

But in *Plowing the Arctic* there is no vagueness. This full-length story calls up the harsh realities of the every-day life experienced by the handful of sailor-police-men during the voyage, captures something of their loneliness and imaginings while couped up during the long "wintering in" periods. The reader is given every detail as the ship crept for days on end along the invisible fog-bound coast, and is swept along from the beginning right up to the exultance of journey's end.

In gripping prose, the author tells of the crew at work, their gallantry under every trial, their desperate danger amid mountainous barriers, and vividly describes the travail of the vessel itself:

"Huge icy boulders were hurtling themselves against her in a desperate endeavour to crush her. Some of the smaller pieces she was able to force under her belly, but they growled their way beneath her and hurried on. But the larger pieces were too big for her to ride, and they battered her, head on, until it seemed as if she must surrender; and when they tired of their individual attack upon her, they joined forces into a mighty army that surrounded her until, when she could endure no more and was on the point of giving up, a merciful wind came, driving the enemy ice before it, and the *St. Roch* was left free to creak her gratitude."

When Amundsen, the first and only other person to traverse the North-west Passage, accomplished his east-to-west voyage through the southern route he was credited with having a charmed life. The author recalls that seamen at the western entrance to the passage were convinced the undertaking would be impossible in the opposite direction—a conviction strengthened by the fact that 63 vessels and hundreds of men had been lost in the Western Arctic within the brief span of eight years.

The whole drama of the *St. Roch's* achievement is drawn against a background of police work and arduous patrols, for the crew combined their constabulary duties with their struggles against the elements. The resulting picture is an impressive, thrilling one, too big to pull into focus within the confines of a short review.

The book is especially timely in view of the vessel's more recent 86-day trip from Halifax through the passage to Vancouver.

G.S.H.