

Stefansson, Apostle of the North

Canada's "Native Son" Explorer Preaches Gospel of the Arctic

By George A. Mackie

MR. Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Arctic explorer, author, and public speaker, has recently revisited Canada on a brief lecture tour which concentrated, for the most part, in Toronto, although he made a side trip to Ottawa for a conference with the Federal Government authorities in connection with the continued occupation of Wrangel Island as a Canadian possession. Mr. Stefansson devoted a few twenty-hour working days to the city of Toronto where, in the course of hourly lectures before various educational, fraternal, and popular audiences, he delivered himself of a series of lectures, illustrated and otherwise, along the line of his chosen life's work. In addition to the mental nourishment which he disbursed among his Toronto auditors, Canada's native son explorer, through the medium of Toronto hotels and restaurants, familiarized many Ontarians with the possibilities of reindeer meat as a possible substitute for Canada's British-bound beef exports. Mr. Stefansson later filled a lecture date in Ottawa where he had a receptive audience but encountered some press hostility. His Toronto visit, however, can scarcely be described otherwise than as a triumphal tour from one crowded and enthusiastic audience to another. He explained his visit to Toronto as being undertaken with the object of focusing Canadian attention on the immediate problems and possibilities of Canada's Far North. He expressed himself to the writer, during the course of an interview, as being hopeful of a new statesmanship and a progressive public policy in connection with Canadian Arctic development. Mr. Stefansson makes no claims to preeminence as a writer or speaker although, for one of such modest claims in this regard, he surely obtains very gratifying press notices and popular recognition.

"I am a missionary by temperament, a Polar explorer by profession, not a speaker or a writer," he explains, "but I have written and spoken a great deal and corrected erroneous notions concerning the North and these lectures and articles serve



VILHJALMUR STEFANSSON
Canada's Arctic Explorer Dressed in
Conventional Attire.

AND AS HE APPEARED WHILE



"Bringing home the (Seal) 'bacon'" on His Arctic
Exploration Trip.

to provide me with funds for the extension of my work."

One of the most important tasks which Mr. Stefansson has set himself is that of correcting the false impressions general in Canada and elsewhere, concerning living conditions in the North. He particularly takes to task those people or organizations who are in a position to know better but still persist in disseminating misleading information. A case in point is his criticism of the Ontario School Geography now in use in the

public schools of that province. In this connection he relates that on his first trip North, with Mr. Elihu Stewart, at a point 300 miles north of Great Bear Lake they reported having found magnificent forests containing trees as high as 90 feet and of proportionate circumference. This information was published in a government report of 1907.

"And yet," said Mr. Stefansson, "we find the statement in the Ontario Geography in present use describing Great Bear Lake, 300 miles further south than the point we had reported on, in these inaccurate and misleading words:

"In this desolate region trees no more than six feet high and no bigger around than your wrist require four hundred years to grow."

"At that rate," commented Mr. Stefansson, "B. C. Red Pine would make the tombs of the Pharaohs seem like an affair of yesterday."

This instance was merely one of many of the mis-representations concerning Arctic conditions which Mr. Stefansson laid low in the course of

his numerous addresses. Lacking time to favor the interviewer with the data for an article on Canada's resources in the Arctic, Mr. Stefansson authorized the publication of some extensive extracts from his copyright work, "The Northward Course of Empire." With acknowledgments to Mr. Stefansson and his publishers some of the extracts thus authorized are herewith appended:

Mr. Stefansson A Canadian

Under the title, "The North that Never Was," Mr. Stefansson refutes many of the popularly held conceptions concerning Northern conditions and possibilities. In his opening remarks, under this heading, Mr. Stefansson removes all doubt as to the land of his birth. Many people were under the impression that he was of Scandinavian nationality and others that he was of United States origin. As a matter of fact Mr. Stefansson was born in the province of Manitoba, and although his parents, who came originally from Iceland, only