

itself and to its dark side: the triumphs and thrills of Soviet achievements in the Arctic were paid for by the repressions and forced labour on which they depended. Ultimately, these successes in turn became a justification for the immense sufferings of the Soviet people. But the author goes beyond this to claim that what he calls Stalinist attitudes persist to this day and that this is likely to remain the case so long as the country remains proud of its achievements in the Arctic. He is concerned with the lingering difficulty of 'destalinising' Soviet (as it was in 1991) Arctic activity. But there is a theoretical problem. He acknowledges terror as integral to the Stalinist enterprise. So what kind of Stalinism remains when this terror is removed? The answer is ultimately unclear, because the author's approach lacks the sociological or cultural analysis that would allow him to delve into the abstract essence of Stalinism itself, or to discuss whether an essentialist approach is justified at all (a fundamental problem with -isms). He acknowledges that Conquest's understanding in the late 1960s is inadequate (in fact, it was itself a form of anti-Soviet propaganda), but does not use the sophisticated and enlightening new literature of the 1980s.

In the last few pages, the author speculates on the continuing nationalist and conservative bent of the collective culture of the Soviet Arctic world under *perestroika*, and here his analytically unrefined concept of Stalinism truly flags, as it is drawn in to explain even this. There may be something in it, but one does not have to look to Russia or to Stalin to find a combination of nationalism and conservatism in the Arctic. A theory of empire, both eastern and western — and of its decline — might have allowed him a broader interpretation. Here, the polar regions appear as the only parts of the Earth that allow a relatively unchallenged fantasy of a landscape without people of its own (significantly, Siberian peoples do not appear in this book at all), a fantasy that is not brought up short by the radicalism of large, complex local populations as happened in the British tropics or in Soviet central Asia.

The bibliography is astonishing, amounting to 40 pages. Most of the references are to works in Russian, so that it serves as a valuable source. However, it falls between two stools. It surely far outstrips the number of works actually cited in the text, but would be hard to use for any wider purpose because it is not annotated. The seven-page index has no chance of living up to this list of sources. Thus, the bibliography lists Russian translations of books by or about 'Shaklton,' 'Piri,' and 'Scott' (spelt unaccountably with a 'c' rather than a 'k'); but nothing in the index helps the reader to find the discussion of these books in the text. (Piers Vitebsky, Scott Polar Research Institute, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.)

**CATCHERS AND CORVETTES: THE STEAM WHALECATCHER IN PEACE AND WAR 1860–1960.** John H. Harland. 1992. Rotherfield: Jean Boudriot Publications. 448 p, illustrated with 380 line drawings and 200 photographs, hard cover. ISBN 0-948864-09-5. £65.00.

A book for shipping buffs, this must surely become the

definitive account of the history and evolution of steam whalecatchers — the sturdy little steamships that for a century and more hunted whales in the world's oceans. Replacing sailing ships, they served the industry almost until its demise, being overtaken in the final years by motor vessels. This is also a book for whaling enthusiasts and for anyone else who is interested in how a mobile, inventive workforce met and solved a succession of day-by-day technical problems in engineering. The simplicity and ingenuity of many of the solutions are quite extraordinary; had the industry been devoted to anything other than killing whales, we would be hailing the engineers responsible as industrial pioneers of a high order.

The author is impartial and very thorough. Well-illustrated chapters cover the origins of steam whalers, development of hull shape, engines, armament, deck layout, accommodation, power, steering, accumulators, winching, and radio. Some catchers went to war, where their speed and manoeuvrability were appreciated: World War II corvettes owe points of their design to them, and were equally uncomfortable in rough seas. There is also a useful account of the development of whaling itself in the post-sailing period. If the same author could now be persuaded to turn his attention to the evolution and development of whale factory ships, he would most usefully close another gap in the history of a modern industry.

There is only one note of caution: check when buying, because in the review copy a printing fault left several pages blank. (Bernard Stonehouse, Scott Polar Research Institute, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.)

**DARWIN'S DESOLATE ISLANDS.** Patrick Armstrong. 1992. Chippenham: Picton Publishing Limited. 147p, illustrated, maps, hard cover. ISBN 0-948251-55-7.

This work is one of several in which an author has reconciled the observations of Charles Darwin about a particular place with its present circumstances. This has required a familiarity with Darwin's published and manuscript notes for the theoretical aspects, and a visit to the place in question for the practical ones. In March–April 1833 and the same months in 1834, Darwin made visits to the Falkland Islands while aboard HMS *Beagle* during a circumnavigation and surveying voyage from 1831 to 1836; the author visited in the autumn of 1989. As well as his scientific observations, Darwin was present during, and recorded many elements in, a period of special interest in the islands' history.

Regarding natural history — an old but useful concept including geology, biology, and meteorology — the author has carefully followed much of Darwin's travels from Port Louis and elsewhere on East Falkland; this is well indicated by contemporary and modern maps. Many of the problems considered by Darwin, such as the origin of stone runs with some rocks 'as big as churches,' the development of the deep peat beds, and plutonist and neptunist theories about the islands' geology, are commented upon in the light of modern knowledge (although