

THE ECOLOGICAL APPROACH TO GEOGRAPHY

GEOGRAPHY AS HUMAN ECOLOGY. Edited by S. R. EYRE AND G. R. J. JONES. xii, 308 pp. London: Arnold. 1966. U.K. price 45s.

ECOLOGY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN TROPICAL AFRICA. Edited by D. BROKENSHA vi, 268 pp. Berkeley, University of California, International Studies. Research Series No. 9, 1965. U.S. price \$ 2.95.

ANIMAL ECOLOGY IN TROPICAL AFRICA. D. F. OWEN. viii, 122 pp. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd. 1966. U.K. price 17/6.

The use of the vogue-word ecology in the three titles under review is an indication of the current popularity of inter-disciplinary environmental studies. Two of the works are collections of essays by various authors, one solely by geographers, the other by scholars from a variety of sciences. The first purports to concern human ecology; the second, though its nominal concern is with economic development, is by implication about human ecology and the third contains a chapter on the ecology of man. Nevertheless, there is lack of a common approach not only between the three books, but even between the essays or chapters within each book.

In spite of a pretentious introduction to the first volume which claims the contrary, it is a miscellany of geographical essays, primarily from the standpoint of geomorphology or biogeography with the works of man introduced as after-thoughts. Only the essays on New Guinea, New Zealand and Asia Minor are exceptions to this. Most essays have a strongly historical treatment so that for the most part the book can be regarded as a collection of regional studies in historical geography related to the physical environment. Undoubtedly all essays are examples of good geographical writing and are models of geographical research; criticism concerns only the failure of them to cohere under the name "ecology" — a word which seldom, if ever, appears in the text of any of the essays.

In the second volume under review one might expect to find studies on the limitations upon economic development posed by the physical environment and social conditions, but this is only occasionally achieved. Some of the essays are overburdened with generalisations and platitudes and one has little to do with Africa. Undoubtedly the most valuable essays are those dealing with small areas or confined topics such as the water resources of Nigeria and the land resources of the Haya. For the East African reader there is a useful summary of otherwise unobtainable work by H. F. Heady on the range resources of East Africa. Another successful essay concerns the evolution of the cultivated Kapok tree and this also provides an example of a different problem in historical geography from those posed in the first volume but is rather out of place in the second. Also on an historical theme J. Desmond Clark gives a succinct summary of environmental changes and archaeology in Africa.

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The third volume is by a zoologist; but for schools in East Africa it affords a useful encouragement for the combined study of zoology and geography. In no other area of the world can such a combination of subjects be more rewarding. Much of the material concerns East Africa and much of it is understandable to a non-specialist; nevertheless in its concern for speciation and genetics it adopts a peculiar approach to ecology.

Some indication of the variety of material included under the name ecology may already be apparent. None of the authors presents a definition of human ecology, nor even of ecology. One becomes vaguely aware that ecology involves an interdisciplinary approach to studies on the environment. Hardly ever is one introduced to the concept that ecology involves the study of living phenomena in relation to the environment and only very occasionally is the information conveyed that living phenomena may create their own environment. Plant life is extremely well dealt with in a study of the plant ecology of the Pennines, by S. G. Eyre; but although human influence upon vegetation is considered, the significance of the vegetation to human life is ignored. Even the bearing of the environment upon animal life is hardly touched upon in the book by Owen. More particularly, since so many of these studies purport to concern human ecology, human life is ignored. Even the bearing of the environment upon animal life is hardly touched upon in the book by Owen. More particularly, since so many of these studies is seldom mentioned. In the first book named, human settlements are seen in relation to land forms and soil (by K. Walton in Aberdeenshire; J. Palmer in the Vale of York; and G. Jones on Anglesey); the effect of man's activity in changing landscape or the conditions for plant growth are examined (in the Pennines by Eyre; in the Gippsland area of Australia by E. Bird; and in the Colorado delta by H. Aschmann) and there is the recognition of need for economic development plans to pay heed to the principles of ecology (in the essay on Gippsland). But in at least two essays the works of man get exceptionally scant treatment (O. Franzle on the Cologne area, and R. L. Wright on north Australia). Man only comes to the fore in three of these essays. M. C. Brookfield on the Chimbu of New Guinea presents a study in human geography but mentions little of the social environment. X de Planhol presents some regional contrasts in human geography in Turkey and Iran, but the physical environment and especially the climate is poorly treated. As a study in the changing attitudes of man to different elements of the physical environment M. McCaskill on the Westland area of New Zealand is excellent.

Unexpectedly, however, it is to the second book that one must turn for the sole example of a study of man's social customs in relation to his physical environment. In an unfortunately abbreviated style P. C. Reining attempts this in a study of the land resources of the Haya. Against a clear portrayal of the geography of the area west of Lake Victoria in Tanzania she examines for a single village "the relationship between the plant life and the social community". This essay is a good example of the contribution that a social anthropologist can make to human ecology.

In view of the fact that in some circles human ecology is closely associated with medical problems, and in view of the growing interest of the preventive medicine expert in environmental problems, there is a surprising absence of health factors in human ecology in the books under review. L. P. Gerlach in the second volume deals with some nutritional problems amongst the Digo of coastal Kenya, but primarily it is an analysis of the social customs which limit agricultural production, and the environment is poorly treated. In the final chapter of the third

work D. F. Owen briefly introduces certain human disease problems of tropical Africa, but it is far too brief to be satisfying. The geographer still awaits the study of man as an animal in relation to a tropical environment.

It may appear that the present reviewer would wish to be too restrictive in the use of the term human ecology, but it is his contention that geography has advanced sufficiently since 1922 for Barrow's approach to human ecology as the relation between human activity and natural circumstances to be inadequate. Human ecology has come to concern itself much more closely with the life of man; and in order to see human life in association with the physical and biological environment geographers need to come to a closer understanding with their fellow scientists in biology, medicine and social anthropology. Such an approach to human ecology can equally well be enhanced by an historical perspective, and its bearing upon economic development may also be significant. In these ways, studies in human ecology may be seen as a means of enlivening regional geography and of preventing geographical study from becoming moribund in the miasma of encyclopedic data which befogs so much current work in our subject and which is especially manifest in so-called regional geographies of Africa.

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