

BOOK REVIEWS

AFRICA: A 'GEOGRAPHICAL STUDY. A. B. MOUNTJOY and C. EMBLETON. London, Hutchinson, Second Edition, 1967. 666 pp., 16 photos., 117 figs.

This book contains no less than 56 chapters, contained in 13 parts, and with a brief conclusion. The first three deal with the continent as a whole, under Physical, Historical and Human headings. This could be regarded as a traditional approach but much of the material includes ventures into controversial fields, erosion surfaces, climatic regions or vegetational and soil divisions. Much is stimulating here. In particular, the recentness of river courses printed on all maps is well brought out. We are unaccustomed to call the Nile a 'baby' (in age) instead of being spoken as being the 'Father' to the crowded settlement along its Egyptian banks; yet a 'baby' it is in time, as it flows now from Burundi to the Delta. The Nile is an amalgamation of three former entirely separate river systems. Then also the Congo Basin overflow makes exciting reading. The climatology too, attracts attention, though, to designate the dry southerly air stream crossing inland East Africa in July as 'mT', is unconvincing. Then follows a Historical section, which is straight forward, though there is no hesitation in mentioning some of the less fortunate results of the 1880-1914 'scramble', or, for that matter, the 'unscrambling' process that has swept across the continent since 1956.

The Human section deals with some of the basic problems affecting much of the continent. Its aridity, or excessive rain, disease, traditions, lengthy communications, to mention some, have all contributed to the relative emptiness of Africa. These are familiar enough to any who have worked in the continent, but often are not realised sufficiently by new-comers. The great puzzle as to why there has been an apparent lag in development is appraised, but no clear cut answer is, (or can be) given. The authors conclude this chapter with reference to there being a long period ahead of uneasy transition, while new administrations evolve to deal with loosening and lessening tribal bonds. The fearlessness of the authors to look at these problems is commendable.

Then follows the regional studies of countries. These proceed from the Atlas lands clockwise round the continent, to end with West Africa. So instead of proceeding from north to south, or from South Africa northwards, one finds the great industrial growth of that Republic coming just over half way through, whereas West Africa comes a long way after East Africa, though both are nearly Equatorial. But there are good reasons for the authors' way round they have chosen. No matter, most of the coverage is thorough, especially Northern Africa, the details of the Nile flow, and Saharan oil fields. East, Central and South Africa all have the detailed treatment, as well as an appraisal of the implications of what is described. The relative smallness of the Bantu Reserves areas in the Republic is striking, and when one reads the summary of the Tomlinson Commission 1955 report on the previous page, (523) one wonders just how the system will work. The South Africa section rightly stresses both the commercial farming development, partly for export, and the even greater industrial growth. South Africa has become the 'workshop' of southern Africa but had as its leaping off point for rapid economic growth the tremendous investment in mining. However, most of the South African born 'Bantu' no longer work in the mines. Much of the labour is now drawn in from Malawi on 13 month contracts and are paid 100/- a week, while the indigenous Bantu South African is moving into small scale commerce on the edge or within the 'Native' locations.