Book Notice

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This volume, written by a number of authors of whom many have Canadian and English backgrounds, attempts a survey of the status of geography as a physical and social science in the first half of the twentieth century. The book is divided into three parts. The first part consists of a summary of the evolution of geography and its philosophical basis. The second chapter, "Geography in the Nineteenth Century" by George Tatham, is a well-packed summary of the history of the subject in the last century. There follows two brief chapters in which the work of the French, German, and West Slav geographers is described and their contributions evaluated. This section of the book ends with a chapter by Tatham on environmentalism and possibilism.

Part Two concerns itself with "the Environment as a Factor" (minor comment by the reviewer: a factor in what?) The chapters herein cover the present status of research in geomorphology, meteorology, the influence of climatic conditions on human affairs, soils, pioneer settlement, the Arctic and Antarctic regions, and the tropics. This part of the book concludes with a discussion of geography and regionalism by E. W. Gilbert, and a brief description of the British Land Use Survey.

Part Three, "Special Fields of Geography" includes the chapters on the practical aspects of the subject: political, racial, social, and urban geography; aviation; and chapters on geographical societies and employment of geographers in the federal branches in Washington. The final chapter is a glossary of geographical terms, so condensed and abridged that it has relatively little meaning. One might wonder why the so-called geographical terms "cephalic index," "couvade," and "Hittite," should appear in such a compilation.

The reader of the volume will probably find himself stimulated by the aspects of the theory presented, and he will find himself annoyed at times by minor contradictions, many of which have grown out of the fact that the chapters have been written by different individuals. To cite one instance: Tatham states on Page 148, "Doubts about the simple environmental explanation of racial differentiation are raised by the persistence of people in Amazonia for several thousand years without the development of those negroid features that we generally assume to be physiological adjustments to a tropical climate." Visher, on page 216, states, "there is a rough correlation between the amount of sunshine and human skin colour. The blond people are found in regions of inadequate sunshine, and the dark-skinned people in regions of sunshine." Such conflicts in opinion would have been avoided by greater attention to the editing of the volume. Other evidence of inadequate editing appear in minor details; Oscar Schmieder appears as Otto Schmieder; New Compass of the World is cited as Compass of the North.

On the whole, however, the professional geographer will find this volume helpful as a mid-century summary of his subject. It should prove particularly useful for advanced students who are interested in the development of geography and the lines along which it is progressing.  

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