Asian Geography

Monsoon Asia. E. H. G. Dobby. Quadrangle Books, Chicago, Ill., 1961. 381 pp. Illus. $5.95.

Dobby's small volume grew out of his years at the University of Malaya; it thus has the advantage of viewing Asia from within. Monsoon Asia covers the area from West Pakistan to Japan, including Indonesia and the Philippines. The volume opens with nine chapters on the area as a whole: the physical, human, and economic aspects; continues with a series of chapters on eastern, southeastern, and southern Asia; and ends with five chapters on economic and political problems. The volume lacks documentation, and the bibliography covers but two pages; but there are 29 photographic plates and 100 maps and diagrams.

Dobby emphasizes agriculture, since the area contains half the world's cultivated land and because "farming . . . is the dominant activity of Asians, is critical in their way of thinking, in their relation with one another and the rest of the world, and in the foundation of what they hope to make of their future." He further points out "Japan, as might be expected, is the greatest consumer of fertilizers—at the rate of 77 lbs. *per capita* in 1957 when by the same standard Taiwan used 45 lbs., Ceylon 6 lbs., China 3 lbs., and India barely one pound. Expressed in relation to farmland, Japan was then using 515 lbs., Taiwan 130 lbs., Ceylon 181 lbs., and China 9 lbs. per cultivated acre."

This is a good volume, but if one were to be critical: there seems to be little awareness of social or political change; communism is mentioned in only two sentences, and there is no description of current provincial organization in China or India. The description of monsoons and typhoons seems unduly brief, and there is no reference to the jet stream.

Although the "monsoon crescent" forms a logical geographic entity, it cannot be understood apart from the great land mass of the interior, nor can China be discussed without its western half. The statement that "the major air routes run almost coastwise . . . and there is little sign of them pressing overland into the continent" should be supplemented by reference to the growing links between the Soviet Union and both India and China.

While it is true that "Mining and industry make little mark on the Asian landscape," Dobby should have noted that China now ranks as the world's third largest producer of coal and stands seventh in the production of iron and steel, and that Jamshedpur in India has probably the largest single steel plant in the British Commonwealth. His undocumented statement, "Monsoon Asia appears to contain scarcely 7% of the world's exploitable coal," seems much too low in view of recent Chinese estimates.

Monsoon Asia is well balanced although Dobby's British background leads him to devote 50 percent more space to the regional description of Pakistan-India than to China. One might characterize the volume as British-style geography, with a trace of Lyde's thoughtful interpretation, possibly written for Malayan students with a limited geographic background, and enlivened by the author's American experience as visiting professor at the University of Washington.

GEORGE B. CRESSEY
Department of Geography,
Syracuse University

South American Indians

Tristes Tropiques. Claude Lévi-Strauss. Translated by John Russell. Criterion Books, New York, 1961. 404 pp. Illus. + plates. $12.50.

This book, first published in France in 1955, is now brought out in a very readable English translation. In the 1930's, the author did anthropological field work among the Kaingang, Caduveo, Nambikwara, Bororo, and Tupi-Kawahib of Brazil. In beautiful prose and with the aid of some very good pictures, he here recounts and reanalyzes his personal reaction to his encounter with "the outcasts of humanity." Elsewhere, Lévi-Strauss has written of how the social anthropologist must both treat social facts as things and also "guarantee" his objective analysis by relating it to the subjective but mutual experience of a common humanity between observer and observed. In this book, he shares his subjective experience with the reader. We taste maté, prepared *à la chimarrão*; we listen to the sound of Nambikwara flutes; we watch the Tupi-Kawahib story-teller acting out the adventures of the *Japim* oriole. Yet these are not the tatters of memory in which some people wrap themselves to gather warmth against the approaching winter. They are rather the precipitates of a memorable mind, wholly masculine in its confrontation of the world and in its preoccupation with one's proper place in it. The positivistically inclined reader will be both baffled and enchanted by Lévi-Strauss' juxtaposition of data, as when he interprets the play of symmetry and asymmetry of Caduveo facial paintings as a symbolic attempt to resolve the contradictions of their asymmetrical and hierarchical social organization, depicting a state of balance, "a Golden Age that they would never know in reality" (page 180). Thus also the Bororo portray, in the symmetrical layout of their villages, a similar fantasy of reciprocity in a society stratified into three superpositioned, endogamous divisions (pages 230 and 231). Indeed, Lévi-Strauss is tough precisely where many of his colleagues on this side of the Atlantic are tender-minded. All too often these colleagues question their ability to render reality objectively, while he has no doubt that "true reality is never the most obvious of realities" and that "the goal we are looking for is a sort of *super-rationalism* in which sense-perceptions will be integrated into reasoning and yet lose none of their properties" (page 61). His preoccupations and questioning concern rather the dilemma faced by the anthropologist whose professional role appears to contradict his social role: "making himself over" to societies other than his own, he yet exiles himself from the traditional acceptances of his own society.

Were one not forewarned by one's scientific training against facile generalizations, one would be tempted to call this faith in logical models "typically" French; and one also finds alien the message implicit in much of this book that Caduveo, Bororo, and Nambikwara —naked, or covered with facial paint and penis sheath—are, in fact, human, in spite of these trappings. One senses that the author has at some time asked this question, either of himself or of his audience, and one must pause to wonder. An American anthropologist would not have called into question the humanity of his informants. Prompted perhaps by the mass culture into which they were born (or transferred), it has been rather the question of culture diversity—and the inference of cultural relativism—that has engaged Americans—or the problems of "making a living" and "getting things done"—as if human life were forever lived in a