

BOOK REVIEWS

GENERAL

En los trópicos. By KARL FERDINAND APPUN. Translated by FEDERICA DE RITTER. Caracas, 1961. Ediciones de la Biblioteca, Universidad Central de Venezuela. Maps. Charts. Notes. Indices. Pp. 519.

The nineteenth century truly can be thought of as the golden age for literature pertaining to exploration and travel. For lack of any other mass media of communication which could convey the drama and excitement of seeing strange lands, people read voraciously of the adventures of others. That Latin America caught the imagination of the armchair adventurer is illustrated in the popularity of books by Tomlinson, Bates, Darwin, and Humboldt, which have gone through many editions in many languages.

It is perhaps due to the profundity of one of these early writers, Alexander von Humboldt, that the work under review has remained so obscure. Karl Ferdinand Appun went to the New World in 1849, armed with a letter from his illustrious compatriot Humboldt, who at the time was being lionized all over Europe for his magnificent work on the tropics of Latin America. Over a period of nineteen years Appun traveled widely throughout Venezuela, the Guianas, and Amazônia, collecting zoological and botanical specimens for the scientific institutions of Europe. Upon his return to Germany he edited his travel journal into a two volume work entitled *Under Den Tropen*. That the book had small success in Europe is illustrated by the fact that it apparently went through only one printing. This modern Spanish edition is mainly a translation of the first volume, which treats Venezuela, though there is a short appendix with selections from the second.

It is almost inevitable that one would compare *En los trópicos* with Humboldt's *Voyages aux régions équinoxiales*. Both authors were from the same educational mold, and both followed the same style in their books. Unfortunately Appun lacked the perception of Humboldt, and his book suffers from it. However, to compare the work of Appun with that of so gifted a scholar as von Humboldt is doing Appun an injustice. Put in the context of more humble writings, the book stands up well, and the Universidad Central de Venezuela is to be commended for undertaking this partial translation of it.

Essentially the book is a travel narrative of the author's trips throughout Venezuela. This includes excursions onto the Llanos, the Cordillera, to the mouth of the Orinoco, and the Coastal Range. At times his approach is extremely scientific, and we are subjected to a long catalog of plants and animals. At other times, which fortunately become increasingly more frequent as the book progresses, he paints beautiful word pictures of the landscape. Much to Appun's discredit, he also indulges in the habit, so common among nineteenth-century European travel narrators, of deprecating the local population. He is particularly abusive toward the Negro, but on occasion Indians, and even white Venezuelans suffer under his condemnations. Though these outbursts of European arrogance detract greatly from the quality of the book, it has merit for those who are interested in an account of rural life in nineteenth-century Venezuela.

A word should be said in praise of the Universidad Central and the book's translator, Federica de Ritter. Appun's work was not easy to translate. His frequent use of English, German, and French, and his ungrammatical and misspelled quotations in Spanish required innumerable footnotes. The book itself is a handsome edition, with three indexes, one each for flora, fauna, and geographical names. Supplemented by the author's own line drawings from the original edition, and provided with a hard cover, it ranks beside the best books from the university presses of the U.S.

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MORTON WINSBERG

British Guiana. By RAYMOND T. SMITH. London, 1962. Oxford University Press. Royal Institute of International Affairs. Notes. Tables. Bibliography. Index. Map. Pp. 218. \$4.00.

This volume is the first comprehensive treatment of modern British Guiana by a social scientist, and it is a very satisfying one. Having spent over two years in Guiana covering four separate visits between 1951 and 1958, Professor Smith reflects his experience through his writing in such a way that the reader, or at least this reader, is willing to place a large measure of confidence in the accuracy of his judgments.

Unlike many of the books that have been written on British Guiana, this one is concerned not with the primitive interior and the spectacles that nature presents but rather with the coastal people (93% of the total), their social structure, their economy, their history, and their present problems. Since the Guianese people include East Indians (both Hindu and Moslem), whites (both Catholic and