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AFRICA

The Secret of the Sahara : Kufara.— **Rosita Forbes.** London : Cassell & Company. 1921. *Map and Illustrations.* 25s. net.

This book will surprise, even disappoint, an avid public worked up by the limelights directed of late upon Mrs. Forbes. It is not conceived sensationally, and conveys hardly an echo of the brass bands which have blared before, behind, and on either hand its authoress ever since she emerged from the desert. There is a note of exaggeration, but not more pronounced than is expected of desert travellers. Hillocks must swell to mountains, hamlets to cities, and the meagre palm-garden to a luxuriant paradise when one has trudged for a week towards a receding limit of monochrome horizon. Mrs. Forbes is to be commended for refusing to play up to the fantastic claims made for her achievement and herself. She sought and went through a gallant adventure, and she tells the story of it very well.

She and Ahmed Mohammed Bey Hassanein took bold advantage of a change of Senussi heart, due equally to certain events in an obscure side show of the Great War, and to the decay of the Order's original spirit of ascetic exclusiveness. It has followed the usual psychic curve of such Orders, and is now on a downward path towards luxury and mendicancy. Mrs. Forbes notes that the Akhwan have fallen away from the ideals of El Mahdi, but does not see apparently (or will not allow) that when the head of a Moslem Confraternity, having failed to cadge a temporal title from one Christian Power, begs it of another, the end of his religious importance is in sight. Under the circumstances the two adventurers had comparatively little to fear from man in making for the once forbidden sanctuary of the Senussis, under guarantee from chiefs who knew perfectly well who they were. But they had much to fear from what Mohammed Idris could not control—forces of singularly ill-conditioned Nature. If they availed themselves with courageous decision of a favourable psychological opportunity (and Mrs. Forbes especially deserves credit for foreseeing and preparing for her opportunity), they faced with even more decisive courage the waterless and virtually uncharted desert, under conditions of travel that repel even Bedawins. Mrs. Forbes manages to convey to her readers, not only the discomfort and danger of crossing some of the emptiest tracts on the globe, but also the hideous monotony of it. Not merely does she describe admirably her daily wayfaring over limitless flats, but throws their dreariness into relief by bursts of enthusiasm for blessed apparitions of sand-dunes, stunted brushwood, sand-choked palms. It is the outstanding merit of her book that the thoughts and feelings it records convince one that they were thought and felt under stress of events, and not during subsequent reflection in an armchair.

The geographical information which Mrs. Forbes gives is about as much as could reasonably be expected to result from a journey taken under such conditions by two pioneers who were not expert surveyors or even trained geographers. They had no surveying equipment, nor could they have ventured to use it had they taken one along. They could, and did, keep notes of general direction, determined by furtive reference to a concealed compass ; of times of marching and halting ; and of mileage doubtfully estimated by a meter bound to a camel's knee. The last device involved them in too much risk to be consistently employed. The map that has been produced of their tracks is, therefore, a precarious sketch, which cannot be expected to displace the chart of their predecessor, Rohlf's. So far as it is inconsistent with the latter (as in regard to the principal oasis of Kufara) judgment must be suspended, till the

Italians open up the country sufficiently for a triangulation to be made. For the rest, surveying apart, there is little for a geographer to do in a region so singularly destitute of features, animate or inanimate; and the descriptions of what these two travellers, ill equipped though they were, saw with their eyes will go far to satisfy any curiosity that has been felt about this desolate bit of the world. Its secret is out, and there really seems little else to be done about it. In revealing it Mrs. Forbes has pricked a bubble. The mystic retreat of the Senussiya proved a very small place of no actual economic importance, and unlikely to acquire any under the present and probable conditions of African trade. Mrs. Forbes does not always admit conclusions which follow on her own premises; and she foretells a more momentous future for Senussism than her facts warrant. But few sins of omission can be laid to her charge. As she has been at pains to collect all her facts and set them out honestly, her book will probably remain in current use by geographers longer than most records of travel, written quickly for immediate consumption. For Kufara, once visited and described, is not likely soon to draw another European across its forbidding ring of deserts. D. G. H.

A Vanished Dynasty: Ashanti.— Sir Francis Fuller. London: John Murray. 1921. Pp. xi. and 241. *Illustrations and Map.* 16s. net.

Sir Francis Fuller would have done meritorious work if he had simply disentangled the history of Ashanti, and in particular the record of its kings, from the mass of material dealing with the Gold Coast and other parts of West Africa. But he has done more. Profiting by his position as Chief Commissioner of Ashanti, and inspired by genuine admiration for the people over whom he has exercised authority, he has sought and found new material and woven old and new into one narrative. Modestly, he does not distinguish between what was known and what is new, but the student of Ashanti history and tradition should be grateful for the light thrown on obscure points. To the general reader the book is confidently commended as telling the story of an African race and dynasty which evolved a system of government possessing several good points, and warrior kings who also had claims to statesmanship. Perempe (Prempeh), the last of their line, is now an exile in the Seychelles, and the Ashanti, contented under British rule, are devoting themselves to the arts of peace.

The closing chapter deals with this change in the Ashanti outlook under British administration, and is full of interest and suggestive of big possibilities. Sir Francis Fuller has here a subject worthy of treatment at length, and no one has better qualification than he for giving us an account of the Ashanti of to-day. "Valiant, clever, and lovable," the Ashanti, alive to the benefit of education, opposed to Islam, but not unresponsive to Christian teaching, are one of the big assets of the British Colonial Empire. F. R. C.

The Life and Explorations of Frederick Stanley Arnot.— Ernest Baker. London: Seeley, Service & Co. 1921. *Illustrations and Sketch-map.* Pp. 334. 12s. 6d. net.

If Frederick Stanley Arnot was not a great explorer he did much valuable pioneer work in South Central Africa. As a missionary traveller he takes high rank. Born in Glasgow in 1856, young Arnot at the age of six met Livingstone, then home from his Zambezi expedition, and became a playmate of his children. The lad was enthralled by the story of Africa, and was fired with the ambition to go out and help Livingstone. Arnot did not reach Africa till 1881, when his hero's life had ended, but he was his true disciple in respect of the regions in which he travelled and (largely) in the methods he adopted in mission work.