

de fertilité fondée sur des données analytiques qui ne manquera pas d'être utile aux planteurs et aux fonctionnaires chargés de trouver de nouvelles possibilités pour les cultures tropicales — ils ne le seront pas moins au point de vue de l'étude du régime alimentaire de l'indigène, étant donnée le vaste problème des rapports qui existent entre la nature chimique de la nourriture consommée et la nature chimique du sol. (*Communication du PROFESSEUR N. DE CLEENE.*)

The Sherbro of Sierra Leone

THE ethnography of West Africa is notoriously defective compared with that of East and South Africa. One of the worst gaps concerns our knowledge of the coastal cultures from Liberia northwards. It is safe to say that little of value has been added to the literature of this region since Westermann's *Kpelle*. The Hailey Survey cites only one recent publication referring to this region, a paper on one of the Sierra Leone tribes which appeared in this journal. Ethnologists will therefore welcome, as an earnest of further contributions to the ethnography of Sierra Leone, a brochure which has just appeared.

Published by the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania, *The Sherbro of Sierra Leone*, by H. U. Hall, is a preliminary report of this museum's expedition to West Africa in 1937. Brief as it is—there are only 15 pages of text, 17 pages of illustrations, and a map—this report will be of interest to every student of West African ethnography. The author, who spent about six months among the Sherbro or Bolom as they call themselves, gives us a summary of the main features of their culture. Much of his information covers familiar ground. It is none the less valuable to have such confirmatory observations.

Mr. Hall devoted attention mainly to Sherbro Island and to Shenge, where the old Sherbro culture is best preserved. Mende and Temne influences have begun to filter in. Normally, for instance, the ruling houses of the chiefdoms are exogamous matrilineal kinship groups (*ram*), but in some parts patrilineal descent is gaining the upper hand. The secret societies—*Poro* for men and *Bundu* for women—still flourish vigorously among the Sherbro, though *Poro* has lost its governmental functions. It can still, however, ban the overfishing of certain waters and impose penalties for gathering unripe nuts of communally owned palm trees. *Poro* also has charge of all burials. The ritual and esoteric features of these societies are briefly described. In some parts another society, *Thoma*, has replaced *Poro* and *Bundu*, and yet other secret societies principally concerned with 'medicines' flourish. *Hobatoke*, the Supreme Being, appears to be no more precisely conceived than elsewhere in West Africa, and the Earth as a mother goddess is a shadowy figure, says the author. The Sherbro notions of 'bad' and 'good' medicines and of witchcraft are equally characteristic of the Guinea Coast.

cultures. The procedure of modern native courts and the constitution of the Tribal Authority under the British Administration are briefly indicated. Land, we are told, may not be sold. Its ownership is vested ultimately in the chief. Mr. Hall also describes briefly the main productive activities, which are well illustrated by several pages of photographs.

Mr. Hall's brochure is yet another proof of the tremendous vitality of West African cultures under culture contact and the detailed publication of his field-work will be awaited with impatience. (*Communicated by* DR. M. FORTES.)

Economic Conditions in the Cameroons

IN recent years a number of persons have visited Nigeria to study local conditions. In some instances there has been an overlapping of work. In case any one is contemplating research work in West Africa and is casting about for an area and/or a subject that has not been the subject of research, the following may be of interest.

Attention is drawn to an economic condition which has not been adequately studied and which is rapidly disappearing, so that in a few years the possibility of investigating it will have gone for ever. I am referring to the transition from a purely local barter economy to a money economy and especially to the development of local markets.

I have recently done a tour of over two years in the British Mandated Territory of the Cameroons at Bamenda, which is as large as the Principality of Wales and contains about 250,000 persons composed of some twenty-three tribes. If this area is bisected by a line running east and west it may roughly be said that north of it there are no native markets, no trade, and no money in circulation. A direct tax of 1s. to 2s. 6d. per annum is imposed upon each adult male only, and, as the area becomes more and more closely administered, so more and more men are unable to evade tax payments, with the result that money is beginning to circulate. Thus, in the last eighteen months, with Government's approval, £2,500 in nickel pennies, half-pennies, and tenths of a penny were put into circulation. Markets are beginning to appear, yet it is still not unusual for a native, after catching a couple of his fowls, to remark that he is going to buy a shilling. (*Communicated by* DR. M. D. W. JEFFREYS.)

School of Oriental and African Studies.

THIS is the new title of the School of Oriental Studies in London. The University of London has thus shown the value it places on African Studies in London. A short time ago the continued existence of part of the African Department of the School was threatened owing to the expiration of a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, by means of which the work had been