

Notes and News

Erosion and the Cinema.

IN *An African Survey* Lord Hailey, when summarizing his conclusions with regard to soil erosion, writes that certain facts clearly emerge: 'The first is the widespread nature of the problem. Hardly a territory is free from the threat or the reality of erosion in one form or another.' And later: 'The main obstacles to the solution of these problems are two in number: lack of money and lack of African co-operation. . . . The second is one of the most difficult problems in the complex question of soil conservation. . . . If a remedy is to be found for widespread mischief such as the deterioration of soil or pasture, a vast mass of individuals must co-operate in the work, and their share in it will often involve them in much additional labour and the sacrifice of immediate profits. Governments will seek by various methods to obtain this co-operation.'

It is mentioned that one method of arousing interest among the natives of Kenya in what is to them a very serious menace has been the showing of a film on soil erosion made by the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment. Actually two 16-mm. films on erosion were made in the course of this experiment. The first, a 400 foot film, was made near Moshi. This was shown during a tour in Kenya at the beginning of 1936 with sound-commentary on disk, and though technically of poor quality, it proved on most occasions in Kenya, especially among the Kikuyu, to be one of the most popular films in the programme.

In March 1936 a second film on the same subject was made by Major Notcutt in the Wakamba reserve with the collaboration of Kenya Government officials. This film was approximately 600 feet. It began by showing an Agricultural Officer talking to some natives on the subject of soil erosion and then taking them to see a demonstration. This included a well-illustrated explanation of the loss of top soil caused by the removal of grass and other covering; also a graphic illustration of the beginning and rapid growth of gully erosion. The latter part of the film showed the various measures which are being taken to check erosion and to restore fertility to some of the already badly eroded areas near Machakos.

The writer has had no information as to what use, if any, has been made of this film in Kenya, but it has aroused considerable interest in England among people who know something about the subject in Africa or in India, and who realize the possibilities of the film as a means of education and propaganda. It seems worth while to follow up a promising lead and to try using films on a more considerable scale as a means of obtaining the co-operation of the African in combating soil erosion.

Clearly the first step in obtaining this co-operation is to convince the African that prompt action is necessary in his own immediate interests. Nothing less than this will pierce the crust of the tribesman's conservatism. The first and perhaps the main use of films in regard to erosion will be to create interest in the subject and to put across to the natives firstly the fact, at present little realized, that their land, on which their very existence depends, is from various causes losing its fertility with disastrous results to themselves, and secondly that they can by united efforts do much to save the land.

Once interest has been aroused it will be much easier to institute an effective campaign against soil erosion in a given area, using all the means at the disposal of Governments, such as lectures, demonstrations, exhibits such as are shown at agricultural shows, lantern slides, gramophone records, broadcasting and films of a more instructional type.

To create initial interest among ordinary villagers, especially among the women who do not often get other opportunities of hearing of the existence of the problem, and to get the matter talked about in villages and round camp fires, there is nothing so effective as a story film. A film of this kind must represent conditions of life that are familiar to the tribes among which a campaign against erosion is to be conducted. To be really effective most of it will probably have to be taken in the area where it is to be exhibited, and there must be no blunder in the portrayal of local custom, costume and ways of living which will distract the attention of the audience or give the old die-hards the opportunity of pouring ridicule on the whole idea. What has been written of the peasant of Malaya¹ is true of the tribesman in Africa: 'Their ways are not our ways, and their standards are not our standards, and in an attempt to win the sympathetic and whole-hearted support of a peasant an offence to his susceptibilities or to his sense of the probabilities would rank as a major disaster. The sympathetic understanding and respect of a naturally shy and reserved rural population have to be obtained before its customs can be modified. Any departure from the normal is welcome to none, and to get the most conservative portion of a conservative race to abandon ancient methods is a delicate task.'

As part of the campaign following the display of such a 'story' film, further short films of a more instructional nature might be used. These could deal with special aspects of the problem such as the chief local causes respectively of sheet and gully erosion; the results of overstocking and of cultivating steep slopes without terracing; the depredations of goats preventing the regeneration of the forest; the various methods appropriate to different areas of fighting erosion and of reclaiming eroded land, and so on.

For illustrating lectures lantern slides are often more useful than films, and they are more cheaply and easily made and shown. If slides were made from

¹ Article on 'A Travelling Cinema in Malaya', by Gerald Hawkins, *Oversea Education*, July 1937.

stills taken during the making of the films this might add to the interest of both.

Films have been successfully used for some years for agricultural propaganda in Malaya and for health propaganda in Nigeria, and it cannot any longer be objected that their value is problematical or that the expense of making and exhibiting them is prohibitive. Agricultural Departments could have one of their own officers trained to take the films and send them to be processed by the trade. Obviously, however, much better films could be obtained if a qualified producer, who might be his own camera-man, were employed. Such a man could serve several colonies in turn and all would benefit by his accumulated experience.

Cinema equipment for silent 16-mm. films complete with projector, screen, engine and dynamo, microphone and loud-speakers, all easily transported by lorry or car, could be obtained for less than £100. (*Communicated by MR. G. C. LATHAM.*)

Le Royaume Hamite de l'Urundi (à propos d'une récente étude de Son Excellence Monseigneur Gorju¹).

L'ILLUSTRE auteur peut se passer d'une présentation au public. Il s'est fait remarquer surtout par un travail approfondi sur les dynasties de l'Uganda (entre le Victoria, l'Albert et l'Édouard, origines, histoire, religion, coutumes).

Le thème principal de la présente publication, une thèse, est celui-ci: 'Notre dynastie est hamite' (p. 11). L'Auteur ouvre ses pages à tous ceux de ses missionnaires qui ont leur contribution à apporter en fait de récits et de légendes. Son informateur principal, au point de vue de la thèse, est un jeune prince, Pierre Nkunzimana, porte-parole du grand chef Pierre Baranyanka, son cousin germain, 'le chef le plus évolué à coup sûr de l'Urundi'. La thèse est solidement établie.

En juin 1936, lors d'une enquête scientifique dont je fus chargé par le présent Institut, j'eus l'occasion, à Astrida (Ruanda), de faire la connaissance de Baranyanka Rumonge (au Ruanda: Barányānga Rumōngi), prince Ganwa se réclamant de 'Ntare Rubogora comme grand-père. Il s'est spécialisé dans les recherches historiques et fait preuve d'un sens critique très prononcé. Durant quatre jours, je pus assister aux discussions ardentes qu'il eut avec trois de mes informateurs; *l'angustia loci* des 'Notes and News' ne me permet pas d'exposer en détail les dissertations de ces spécialistes, tous compétents dans la matière. J'en condense les résultats, avec d'austres notes antérieures, dans un tableau de synchronisation. Les migrations des Gallas suivant une direction du nord-est au sud-ouest, il est évident d'emblée que l'établissement de royaumes plus méridionaux ne peut être que

¹ *Face au royaume hamite du Ruanda le royaume frère de l'Urundi. Essai de reconstitution historique. Mœurs pastorales. Folklore. Bibliothèque Congo, nouvelle série. N° 3. 118 pp. 6 planches. 2 cartes. Bruxelles 1938. Vromant et Cie.*