

MUHAMMAD: PROPHET AND STATESMAN, by W. Montgomery Watt;  
Oxford University Press; 25s.

This brief, careful and dignified exposition of the life of the Prophet of Islam and the circumstances of his teaching and leadership is a welcome addition to the author's two more lengthy works, *Muhammad at Mecca* and *Muhammad at Medina*. Without acquaintance with these, however, the authority with which this author handles his theme is clear from the smaller work, obviously intended for a wider class of reader. He writes as one dealing with a subject of which practically every ascertainable detail is now within his familiar reach. It is perhaps for this reason that *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* is such a convincing book: essential reading, not only for the more casual student of Muslim problems, but also, as a kind of illuminating revision of facts and ideas, for the serious student who has read the larger volumes.

The objectivity of approach is a conspicuous quality in this book, which is completely untainted by the faintest hint of 'comparative religionism': the author deals with Islam's beginnings as one clearly outside it, in fact as one who must be an adherent of a religion he believes to be the only true one and in the theology of which he might be suspected of being soundly versed; but he succeeds in treating Islam with a sort of compassion which is the product of the familiarity with it which scholarship has conferred upon him.

The first chapter is a skilful résumé of the political and intellectual climate into which Muhammad was born, albeit on the fringes of the civilized world of his time, a world which trade ensured he would hear of, be it only remotely. The continuance in the following chapters of this presentation, not only of Muhammad's immediate environment, but of the impact on this of the wider world, is one of the book's most enlightening features. Thus, without any polemic, the author shows the influences, Christian and Judaic, which it is impossible to dissociate from the dawning of Islam. No axe is ground: the simple geographical, economic and political facts of Muhammad's time are given and statements like the following suffice to point the moral without impairing the respect with which a religious institution like Islam must be treated. 'The Meccan merchants . . . were certainly aware of the rivalry of the Persians and Byzantines, and of the understanding between the latter and the Abyssinians; and the connections between religion and politics cannot have escaped their notice. This is an important point to keep in mind in trying to understand the career of Muhammad' (p. 7). 'In other words, the Meccans, under Judaeo-Christian influence, must have been moving towards monotheism' (p. 26). 'The essential situation out of which Islam emerged was the contrast and conflict between the Meccans' nomadic outlook and attitudes and the new material (or economic) environment in which they found themselves' (p. 49).

There is insight as well as scholarship in a book in which such a fundamental issue as 'the contrast and conflict' between the nomadic way of life and the urban is exposed as a main factor in the emergence of Islam. It has continued a

significant essential of Near Eastern society: although this book is concerned only with the beginnings, and ends with the Prophet's death on 8th June, 632 A.D., it is pregnant with details which throw light on Muslim and Near Eastern problems to the present-day. Often in trying to understand a Near Eastern situation it is necessary to go right back to the beginning of a long historical process. Gratitude is due to Dr Montgomery Watt for having done this so successfully in the case of Islam, that way of life which, for better or for worse, has dominated the Near East since the seventh century, so that without some understanding of it the whole area's history since that time cannot ever be adequately explained. He has not omitted, particularly in the later chapters, to indicate those personal relationships in Muhammad's circle which later crystallized into bitter alignments and gave rise to sanguine affrays. His manual is perhaps more suggestive than even he intended, for his is a scrupulosity which achieves its effects almost as if they were incidental to the main purpose, of weighing and stating the facts. Thus he is a good historian.

P. W. AVERY

**WHITE TO MOVE?** *a portrait of East Africa today*, by Paul Foster; Eyre and Spottiswoode; 25s.

Fr Paul Foster's picture is less a portrait than a composition in the manner of Frith. In the foreground, a class of students at Makerere are reading *The Laws* of Plato and being introduced to the concepts of Perception and Power; around and behind them are the diverse tribes from which they come, clothed and unclothed, the primitive Masai and Karamajong, the progressive Baganda, the tragic Kikuyu; administrators and missionaries thread their way through the crowd, with their failures and successes. On the whole the author is fair both to the African and the European. His assessment of the colonial achievement is just, but in blaming its failure to make the African into a friend on the Anglican public school mentality one feels that an element of caricature has crept in: East Africa seventy years ago needed ruling with some kind of justice and it was ruled with justice—with the result, as the author tells us, that in a town in central Uganda a white woman can shop entirely alone in a crowd of Africans without anyone thinking this strange. That the firmness of the administrators who made this possible made it also impossible for them to unbend in a social context is sad but could hardly have been avoided. This is not to deny that there have been stupid Europeans who made things worse than they might be, but there is still surely a hope that, as in India, the unease of the period when independence is gained or granted will be followed by an increase in friendship.

Perception and Power run through the book as a double theme—the strangeness of the African mind, trying briefly at university level to acquire modes of reasoning developed in Europe, but liable always to relapse into the lunatic logic which is the despair of Europeans; the drive for power spawning political