

Geographical Influences.

The Great Capitals: an Historical Geography. By Dr. Vaughan Cornish. Pp. xii + 296. (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1923.) 12s. 6d. net.

IT may be said at once that we regard this as one of the most important and original works in geography that have appeared within a generation. The volume should be looked upon by teachers of geography as essential to their studies. It cannot be denied that the book is not easy reading; it must have cost an immense amount of pains to write. The result is, however, worth the pains, and though readers who will follow every page with the aid of a good atlas may indeed find that they make but slow progress, they will be well rewarded for their labour and lose all desire to hurry through the interest roused by tracing the author's line of thought. There are no doubt many who, with the best will in the world, cannot find the necessary time to complete the study of the whole work. We would advise these first, if they must read the volume piecemeal, to keep it always at hand, and, second, at least to find the time to master the author's account, say, of the situation of Moscow (pp. 181-91) or London (pp. 211 and onwards). If one of these has been read with the necessary care, the reader, if he has been hitherto unfamiliar with the geographical point of view, can scarcely fail thenceforth to understand what geography means, and even professed geographers will be warned against one danger now rather prevalent arising from a too narrow study of "natural regions." Dr. Cornish never fails to take into account the wide-reaching influences on the rise and growth of towns.

The author's views on the special subject of his volume are set forth in his preface as follows:

"An historical examination of imperial capitals shows that their district is usually either a Storehouse, or a far-reaching Crossways near a Storehouse, seldom a Stronghold. Their political geography has one outstanding character, a forward, as distinguished from a central, site. The Great Power both of ancient and modern times has always been an incorporation of several States, and the characteristic site of the imperial capital is in or adjacent to that Storehouse of the dominant community of the empire which is nearest to the principal foreign neighbour."

This position the author endeavours to make good by ranging over all recorded time and the greater part of the world, examining his thesis in the light of the earlier and later history and geography of China, Japan, India, Persia, Mesopotamia, Italy and the Roman Empire of the West and East, Trans-Alpine Europe, North and South America, taking every opportunity presenting itself in the course of his investigation to show the infinite variety of ways in which geographical factors

affect history and the course of events brings about changes in geographical values. On the whole, he may be said to have made out his case, and at any rate he has always something ingenious and interesting to say in support of it, not least when he is applying his theory to certain minor illustrations, as in dealing with the capitals of the "heptarchy" or the Iroquois capitals in the neighbourhood of the great lakes of North America. But he is not dogmatic. He will sometimes qualify his averments by an "I think" or "I suppose," and the very fulness with which he brings forward his arguments is an invitation to the student to judge before accepting, in Bacon's language "to weigh and consider."

If here and there are found some rather broad and questionable historical statements, the student should note that the validity of the geographical exposition is not necessarily affected thereby. The present reviewer lays no claim to any intimate knowledge of Indian history, but was rather startled on meeting with the statement (p. 28) that "twice in the course of history has a government seated and independent of foreign control, ruled the whole, or nearly the whole, peninsula," and he cannot find that it is fairly justified; but that does not affect the value of the author's geographical considerations as to Patna, the capital of "the Aryan Empire," or Delhi, that of "the Empire of the Mohammedan Moghuls."

The volume is illustrated by two maps, one showing "The Isothermal Frontier of Ancient Cities," the other "The Marmora Metropolitan Region." A few more maps of the latter kind would have assisted the student greatly.

GEO. G. CHISHOLM.

Our Bookshelf.

Atoms. By T. C. Wignall and G. D. Knox. Pp. 288. (London: Mills and Boon, Ltd., 1923.) 7s. 6d. net.
White Lightning. By Edwin Herbert Lewis. Pp. iv + 354. (Chicago: Covici-McGee, 1923.) n.p.

THESE two scientific novels both centre around the idea of liberating the energy of the atom—a theme first explored by Mr. H. G. Wells in "The World Set Free." They may be taken as indicative of the interest being taken by the public in the recent developments of physical science.

The first, "Atoms," a highly imaginative romance, reflects strongly some of the most cherished popular conceptions or misconceptions about the growth of science. Super-financiers contend with one another and with or through the regular international anarchist associations in an atmosphere of dynamite plots, assassinations, and impersonations, in order to corner the world's supplies of energy. A colossal plant for producing power from coal and distributing it by wireless springs up at the word of command, and is converted during erection into an atomic energy plant by the discovery of *sublimium*. Sublimium dis-