BOOK REVIEWS

Classless Education

Resources for Learning. By L. C. Taylor. (Penguin Education Special.) Pp. 277. (Penguin: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, January 1971.) £2.00.

A FASCINATING browse through possible recipes for learning forms the best parts of this book, another valuable contribution from the Penguin "Education Special" series. Past attempts in Britain, current ones in America, Russia and Sweden—Taylor has a sure touch for the concrete details that keep the reader on firm ground among the treacherous terminologies of comparative education, and he writes with a *brio* that makes for compulsive reading. But the serious purpose is never far below the surface. Taylor is urging us to explore seriously alternatives to teacher-based class teaching which might allow more scope for independent learning.

The need arises from a variety of pressures, chief among them those that result from comprehensive reorganization. (He calls it "comprehension"—but if so, why not "progression" for "progressivism"?) Out of the chaotic profusion of patterns elicited by Circular 10/65, all-through eleven-to-eighteen comprehensives have been the commonest single choice, regardless of the apparent impossibility of supplying all their sixth forms with graduate specialist teachers. In the lower forms, unstreaming is no longer outrageously avant-garde. The time-honoured chalk-and-talk technology can hardly be expected to withstand the resulting conflict between liberty and equality. Somehow we will have to find ways of breaking the lockstep in which a teacher holds a group of thirty or so pupils when he teaches them as a class.

So Taylor looks abroad to see if they have managed to order these things better elsewhere. In America, team teaching—with time divided among large group instruction, small group seminars and individual study—has made some impact. At junior college level, there are attempts to add variety

to programmed learning by equipping learning laboratories. In Russian schools, Taylor found not experimental methods, but the old ones being made to work. When the short school day in the unstreamed comprehensive ends, however, the Pioneer Palace takes over; there volunteer learners stream themselves by choice and ability, and docility is replaced by zest.

Sweden, with its recent experience of going comprehensive, offers a closer parallel. Voluntary setting having proved unworkable and given way to a commitment to unstreaming, the need for individualized work has become urgent. The natural basis for developing it was found in the correspondence courses, already of high repute. Nothing elsewhere, according to Taylor, is as sophisticated and well tested as the IMU maths course for 13 to 16 year olds.

One waits impatiently to see what positive prescriptions for here and now will emerge from so sane an appreciation of the ideals and foibles of others. The end of the book turns out, however, to be something of a disappointment; the sparkle of the writing becomes dimmed by that tinge of pious aspiration which educational innovators cannot avoid when they come to talk about their own innovations rather than other people's. Of course one accepts that this is in no sense a full report of the Nuffield Resources for Learning Project, of which the author is a co-director. But the bare list of the names of the members of the Consultative Committee and the staff feels like a snub to the expectant reader.

Taylor suggests that the secondary sector lags behind both primary and post-school education in independent learning. In some ways he is over-optimistic. Science in higher and further education suffers, by comparison with non-scientific subjects, from the relative lack of independent work. As university teachers face pressures to re-structure their teaching efforts, they too could find useful reading here.

F. R. JEVONS

Advent of Domestication

Geography of Domestication. By Erich Isaac. (Foundations of Cultural Geography Series.) Pp. viii + 132. (Prentice-Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ, December 1970.) \$6.50 boards; \$2.95 paper.

WITH the benefit of hindsight we can see the domestication of plants and animals as the most significant achievement in the history of our species. It has enabled mankind to develop some independence of his environment unparalleled in any other species, and allowed that other unique human attribute, intellect, to operate in a manner which would not have been possible without such independence. Yet, in spite of much attention to the question, the processes of domestication and the factors which led to them are still not understood.

Domestication does not fall tidily into any one discipline, but ranges over, *inter alia*, anthropology, archaeology, biology, ethology, history and religion. Consequently, research has produced a wealth of evidence coming from many difference angles, often uncoordinated across disciplinary boundaries. There therefore arises a dual need in publication: the restricted technical paper and the coordinating review. A modern development, brought about by the very extensiveness of new work, is the symposium volume, and in this field there has recently been at least one major publication of this type. Such a volume, however, inevitably lacks the coordination and synthesis possible in a review such as the one by Professor Erich Isaac entitled *Geography of Domestication*.

The book is short enough to read quickly and coherently (though the wealth of footnote references makes detailed study possible), and when this is done, the problems, contradictions and hypotheses of greater or less substance are seen in valuable perspective. The evidence of archaeology, man's implements, plants and animals is examined in the book's six chapters, and arguments developed about the