

FIRST PRIZE

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(B) Name:

FRANK CLIFFORD GERMAN.

Address:

92, RIDGEWAY,
WESTON FAVELL,
NORTHAMPTON.

Excellent.
Aware of
current
problems.

Date of Birth:

[REDACTED]

School Attended:

NORTHAMPTON GRAMMAR SCHOOL
(TOWN AND COUNTY)

A GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL
SURVEY OF SOUTHERN RHODESIA

Rhodesia! An illustrious name is immediately brought to the mind of everyone who hears the word Rhodesia. For once, the greatest benefactor of a country is fittingly commemorated by the incorporation of his name within that of the country itself. But for the enterprise, resource and foresight of Cecil Rhodes, this area, 150,333 square miles of rich country, which he made secure for Britain in spite of the wariness of the British Government in taking on added Colonial responsibilities, would have been annexed by the Germans or the Portuguese, who claimed the area in 1887. In 1888, Rhodes formed a syndicate and obtained mineral concessions from Chief Lobengula, and in 1889 set up the British South Africa Company, to develop and trade with the new territories.

The country had a turbulent history in its early days, for in 1893, the Matabele rebellion broke out, but the insurrection was quelled through the heroism of

such men as Major Alan Wilson and the Shangani River Patrol. By 1894, the company had consolidated its hold on this immense area and, interrupted only by the Mashona rebellion in 1896, progress went on steadily, the number of white settlers swelling slowly. The first attraction was of course, gold, bringing the railway, which, financed by Rhodes, reached Bulawayo in 1897 and Salisbury in 1902. Cattle-rearing, native maize growing and gold mining were soon supplemented by coal, chrome and asbestos mining and by tobacco growing, which was introduced commercially in 1910. In 1911, the area was divided into Northern and Southern Rhodesia, the latter containing the bulk of the whites, who, in spite of their small numbers to form an efficient legislature, continually pressed for self-government, which they were finally granted in 1923, when the British Government supplanted the Company.

✓ And so, the dream of Cecil Rhodes was achieved. A new nation had arisen in 35 years, in the centre of the Dark Continent, and had entered the British Commonwealth as a self-governing colony, governing itself with the exception of the mineral rights, the railways and native affairs, which remained in the hands of the Imperial power until 1948, when the first two were acquired by the Southern Rhodesian government.

No survey of Southern Rhodesia would be complete without mention of the economic resources, present and future. Mining forms the basis of the country's economy. Indeed, gold is the leading export (63%), but is widely along the main railway. Asbestos is the second mineral mined in quantity, production, totalling about 7% of the country's exports. Chrome, particularly important at present as a dollar-earner, is third in importance, providing 2% by value of exports. The ore occurs in a narrow belt of intrusive rocks running through Selukwe from Sinoia

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to West Nicholson. Since about 1936, Southern Rhodesia has been the world's largest producer. Copper production has declined considerably since the discovery of vast deposits in the Katanga and Northern Rhodesia. Coal of good quality is found at Wankie, in the West, and could easily be exported via Beira if facilities there were improved, as it is more than sufficient for local needs, some being already exported to the Katanga, to smelt copper. (2%)

Agricultural production is centred on maize, the chief native subsistence crop, and tobacco, the chief commercial crop (11% exports). Maize is widely grown, especially in the native reserves, but yields are low and vary greatly. Tobacco grows well in the light sandy soils, especially in the neighbourhood of the granite kopjes. Southern Rhodesia is under contract to send 60,000 tons of tobacco every year to Great Britain, and tobacco production will probably increase in the future, as the Mother Country will wish to be less dependent upon dollar sources. Cotton is not yet well established, but is encouraged and production broke all records last year (1949). Sunflowers, citrus fruits, groundnuts and vegetables such as beans complete the picture. Much of the country is however, not under cultivation, and is given over to cattle ranching, meat being supplied to the Katanga mining areas.

Industries are comparatively undeveloped, but at Queque, important steel works, producing machinery, have been set up, and 30,000 tons of steel are scheduled to be produced this year. The cost of pig iron production per ton (37/-) affords an interesting comparison with that of Sheffield (66/-). The acute shortage of building materials is offset by the production of 50,000 tons of cement per year. The Government has sponsored another enterprise, at Gatooma, where one cotton mill is working and another is to come into production during this

year. Other industries, processing agricultural products, have been in existence for some time. Bulawayo, Gwelo and Salisbury have creameries and West Nicholson a meatcanning factory. Refrigerating plants, biscuit, bacon and cigarette factories and flour mills also exist.

An important agricultural development to take place in the near future is that in the lower, more tropical Sabi valley in the Southeast, where sugar will be introduced in addition to cotton and maize. Coal and phosphates, the latter important for fertilizers, have been discovered in this area, where 5,000 acres are to be developed in the next five years. Gold, lead, zinc and copper production will be increased shortly when deposits in the Northwest are made accessible by the construction of the Siniora - Kafue railway. A large hydro-electric scheme, to provide electricity for Rhodesia's expanding industries, and involving the construction of a £2,000,000 dam across the Zambesi is proposed, to be completed in 1953. Further development of subsidiary industries, particularly cotton and steel, will doubtless take place, as will greater railway construction. Another development scheme should be completed in 1951, on the Hunyani river, 20 miles from Salisbury, where a large reservoir, also to irrigate several thousand acres is under construction. Development is not likely to lack white fertilizers, as the country is receiving an average of 15,000 British immigrants every year. White occupation may extend beyond its present limits into more fertile areas so far incapable of development.

This however raises a serious problem. European expansion will mean recession of native reserves, causing economic upheaval there, and an aggravation of the native question. Even now, the inalienable reserves are supporting as many natives in their old way of life as possible. Restriction

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✓ of space would cause the natives to choose between famine, overstocking and consequent soil erosion, or drifting into the mines and towns, swelling the already deplorably large numbers of depressed, detribalised natives, dependent upon wages, and living a low kind of European life in the town slums, with no hope for themselves or their dependents of elevation from the squalor and drudgery of lowpaid, unskilled manual labour under the supervision of possibly inferior whites. It is among this already large class of detribalised, disenfranchised dependents and embittered natives, that the seeds of dissension might be fruitfully sown by a native Hitler or by Communist agitators, giving rise to a native problem as serious as that of South Africa, where native riots and ill-feeling between blacks and whites are rife. A similar crisis could also be precipitated by the probable extension of industry, which would require additional unskilled and lowpaid native labour. Even now, by legislating against native competition, and removing the benefits of civilisation, such as education, equal opportunity and a voice in government, from them, a curious reversal of outlook from the missionary days, with their ideal of converting and aiding the native, the whites have formed an aristocracy claiming all the better positions. Emancipation of the native would however remove the white's dominance, an undesirable occurrence from the white's point of view.

A second problem is that of food supply. Southern Rhodesia even now cannot feed her people. Maize and meat (2% each of exports) are the only foodstuffs of which she can regularly produce even a small surplus. The balance is more than made up for by minerals (75%) But minerals are produced on the principle of "Robber Economy"

and will not last for ever. This is combatted by the expansion of crop acreage, dependent upon railway facilities, and by the increased yield per acre through the use of fertilisers, and secondly by the development of industry, a course already commenced in the towns.

Another problem is that of communications. The railway from Cape Town to Salisbury was built to tap the mineral resources, and for this reason, and to avoid the expense of bridge building, it passed along the watershed of mineralised crystalline rocks, naturally not the best agricultural land. Thus European agriculture is confined to a narrow strip of land, within 30 miles of the railway, on the Zambesi - Limpopo watershed, where soil erosion is most prevalent. A closer railway network is required thus, as is an additional outlet to the sea, as, at present, the only exit is the overworked line to the congested and inadequate Portuguese port of Beira on the Indian Ocean. £10,000,000 worth of copper and chrome have already accumulated at Beira, and production is retarded. The additional route to the coast will probably be an all-British one to Walvis Bay, requiring the construction of 600 miles of track from Wankie to Gobabis, the railhead from Walvis Bay. Several other linkups are proposed for the future. One is the much needed Sinia-Kafue cutoff of 120 miles, entailing a bridge over the Zambesi. The 100 mile gap between Beitbridge and West Nicholson, is another needed addition to railway mileage, as is a new line to tap the rich resources of the Sabi valley in the South-west. These lines will develop previously mentioned economic resources.

The climate sets another problem, which especially affects agriculture, the mainstay of any nation's economy. Southern Rhodesia's rainfall, brought mainly in summer from the

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Indian Ocean, decreases towards the Southwest, where the rainfall is only 15 inches per year. Consequently, irrigation is needed as a safeguard against drought and for winter cultivation. Apart from the low quantity of the rainfall in this area, it has a major defect throughout the country. The annual total is irregular, markedly seasonal in distribution and torrential in character, three factors which facilitate the scourge of soil erosion, which is proving a serious problem, as fertile surface soil is washed away and lost. Also, much rain immediately runs off the soil and is lost instead of soaking in. Through these peculiarities of rainfall, agriculture is greatly hampered, especially in the drier Southwest, and only 10% of Southern Rhodesia could ever be cultivated.

Well, what can we say of the future? It is certainly beset with problems, but is there anywhere without them? And possibilities are unbounded, not only in the economic but in the social sphere. The material is there to fashion ~~Southern Rhodesia~~ into a perfect model democracy, with a well balanced economy and a troublefree but hardworking energetic and enterprising community. But, though development is in its infancy, it will proceed apace, as the populace consists of many of the younger, more intelligent and enterprising people of British stock, and assurance has been given only recently, that D.P's, and people without a job or £1500 capital, will not be admitted, to avoid the development of a "Poor white" problem. But indeed, no more fitting description can be found to sum up the position of Southern Rhodesia, the land of opportunity in the future, than the dying words of Cecil Rhodes "So little done, so much to do"

Cecil Rhodes:

P.T.O.

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