

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

WORLD RESOURCES

Furon, Raymond. Trs. **Paul Barnes.** *The Problem of Water; A World Study.* London, 1967. Faber. Pp. xvi + 207. Price 42s.

THE AUTHOR OF a popular book must consider carefully the knowledge its intended readers are assumed to have. Professor Furon has not done this. No one who will need the general information on the chemical and biological properties of water that is contained in his first few chapters, will find them very helpful because of the liberal and undefined use of such terms as karst, hypotonic, osmotic, epeirogenic and peridinean. After this bad beginning the book improves but it is marred throughout by its ancestry. The book was published in France in 1963 and has not been brought up to date. Thus projects such as the Kariba dam and the Rance tidal power installation are spoken of in the future tense. It is reasonable that most of the examples of water needs and use should deal with France and French Africa, but translation has rendered the units unwieldy. Instead of having one table of conversion factors, the translator has chosen to add the inch and gallon (in brackets) equivalents of metric units throughout: this adds several pages to the length of the book. The author has not helped by constantly switching units. Sentences like "Flow calculations gave 60 litres (13 gall.) per second, and this was insufficient to supply the Basle Canton, which required at least 100,000 cu. m. (about 25 million gall.) per day" could easily have been phrased more helpfully. The author stresses the ultimate necessity for large-scale desalination of sea water but his readers are not likely to get much illumination from the sketchy descriptions of the various methods that may be used.

So much for criticism. On the subjects in which he is really interested, Professor Furon is informative. He deals comprehensively with the methods used in antiquity to collect and control water in what are now deserts and discusses the distinction between deserts that could be made productive again by the restoration of something like the old systems, and those that could be made productive only by vast works such as the High Aswan Dam. In this connection he gives several valuable analyses of the reasons for the success or failure of irrigation projects. He may be right, and no one would dispute the necessity for a careful study of the nature of the soil, the value of the product that will be grown, and the readiness of people to move into a new irrigated area to work the land, but it is easy to be wise after the event. It is legitimate to wonder whether, with a little more luck or skill, some of the failures might have been successful. Enough evidence is however marshalled here to dispel the widespread idea that, as soon as nuclear power cheapens desalinated sea water, vast populations will live and work in the deserts.

Like most writers with experience of North Africa, Professor Furon has an obsession about goats—like people, they are admirable creatures if there are not too many of them in one place.

N. W. PIRIE

ABORTION

Guttmacher, Alan F. (Editor). *The Case for Legalized Abortion Now.* Berkeley, Cal., 1967. Diablo. Pp. i + 154. Price \$1.95 Paperback.

NEARLY FOUR MILLION babies are born in America each year. And each year there are claimed to be about one million criminal abortions—and 8,000 legal abortions.

The law that maintains this absurd state of affairs falls increasingly into contempt, and is evaded, as these estimates suggest, by one pregnant American woman in every five. It is also estimated that "one out of every five women will have an out-of-hospital abortion by the time she is forty-five". In America, as in Britain, the well-off purchase their pseudo-legal, or frankly illegal, abortions on the open market from qualified doctors. The poor