

Kenya Becomes Independent

BRTAIN'S last colony in East Africa, Kenya, achieved independence within the Commonwealth on December 12.

Location

Kenya, which is slightly larger than France, is situated on the east coast of Africa astride the equator. Inadequate rainfall and unfavourable topography make three quarters of the country unfit for permanent cultivation. The remaining land is in the better-watered highlands, where the majority of the population lives. Nairobi, the capital and largest city, has an estimated population of more than 300,000. Mombasa is East Africa's most important deep-water port.

Early Colonization

Although the east coast of Africa has been known to Europeans for more than 2,000 years, it was not until the beginning of the sixteenth century that they began to take an active interest in the area. In 1498, Vasco da Gama landed on the coast of present-day Kenya on his way to India. In the years that followed, the Portuguese established a number of posts along the coast, where they conducted a profitable trade for almost 200 years, before they were forced to withdraw in the face of Arab attacks. The Arabs subsequently fought among themselves for control of the East African coast and the very profitable slave trade of the interior, until the Sultan of Zanzibar emerged as the most powerful figure in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The Sultan granted concessions to British traders and the Imperial British East Africa Company was formed in 1888 to develop trade with Uganda. When financial difficulties forced the company to withdraw, the British Government took over its responsibilities and established protectorates over Uganda and Kenya. Difficulties in communication with Uganda and a desire to stamp out the slave trade persuaded the British to begin construction of a railway from Mombasa to Kampala in 1896. Indian labourers were imported to build the railroad, which was completed in 1901. In order to make the line pay its way, the Government encouraged white settlement in the adjoining highlands.

Population

In 1961 the estimated population of Kenya was 7,290,000, including 7,000,000 Africans, 178,000 Indians, 66,000 Europeans, 39,000 Arabs and 6,000 others.

Economy

Kenya's economy is basically agricultural and relies heavily on three major exports — coffee, tea and sisal. These were originally developed by European farmers, and most of the export crops are still produced on European farms.