

Letters to the Editor

AMERICAN INDIAN AGRICULTURE

SIR,—In his article on neolithic agriculture Dr Steensberg unaccountably fails to make any reference to North American Indian agriculture. This is possibly no great flaw in a short paper, but Dr Steensberg should certainly not overlook the many studies of Indian life and agriculture. The climate of North America is and was similar to much of Europe, and the North American Indian was just entering late neolithic agricultural development when Europeans arrived.

Forest-burning, practised in Germany in the eighteenth century, continued in Canada and the United States in the nineteenth. Tree girdling, not chopping, was the usual American neolithic technique of forest clearance. As for the periodic migrations of neolithic farmers, the moving about of the relatively settled Choctaw, Creek, and Cherokee may be relevant. Stone-age cultures still exist comparatively unspoiled today, and I believe that those of the recent past of North America may be useful for comparison with Europe. Few accessible Stone-age peoples of a north temperate climate are now available for study.

Although the Indian is mongoloid rather than caucasoid, he was, for the most part, a neolithic farmer when first encountered. Perhaps because the culture of maize is different from the culture of wheat or barley, the techniques of the Indian may not be exactly transferable to prehistoric European settlers. Still, Indian farming could well be considered in any study of neolithic agriculture.

Yours, etc.,

JOHN T. SCHLEBECKER

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and Mechanic Arts,
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THE PLOUGH IN WALES

SIR,—It was a disappointment to find at the end of F. G. Payne's most admirable article on the British plough such a prejudicial state-

ment concerning the non-usage of the single-furrow plough in Wales.

It was the coming of the speedier tractor during the war of 1914-18 that finally displaced the horse teams and the single-furrow ploughs from our fields.

Not all the fields have gone out of cultivation, because arable crops are still popular throughout Wales, particularly in Pembrokeshire. The small acreages handed over to the artillery range are of no consequence and surely it is untrue to state that lands growing timber are the "endless lifeless domain of the Forestry Commission." Most of the Commission's two hundred thousand acres of forest in Wales occupy upland areas which have never been under the plough. Not by any stretch of the imagination can it be said that a growing forest is an endless lifeless domain.

Yours faithfully,

R. PHILLIPS

Argoed,

Llangwryfyon, Aberystwyth.

SHOOTING ON HILL PASTURES

SIR,—Captain Sir Hugh Rhys-Rankin has certainly raised a point of some interest, but I feel he has tended to generalization on Scottish and Derbyshire experience. In this area, i.e. Weardale in west Durham, there would seem to have been little conflict between shooting and sheep-farming.

This valley, a part of the Palatinate of Durham, was from medieval times largely game reserve, for great deer-parks were maintained by the bishops. Considerable parts of the ancient walls still exist, and much more is traceable. Thus from early days the preservation of game was a major part of the economy of the district. Grouse appear to have been preserved also, and in the early nineteenth century this precipitated the so-called Battle of Stanhope, when reputedly large numbers of the lead-miner-farmers marched to Stanhope to release two of their number who had

been taken into custody for poaching grouse. The affray is celebrated in our local ballad, *The Bonny Moor Hen*. I take this as reasonable evidence of preservation long before Sir Hugh's date of 1870-5.

While the passing of the mature wether was responsible for a drop in sheep numbers, I cannot see that this can properly be laid at the door of shooting tenants. The development of the public taste for lamb, coincident with the rise of refrigeration and imports from the antipodes, seems a more satisfactory explanation. Let us also remember that in many cases the drop in overall numbers was accompanied by a rise in the number of ewes, and the hill concentrated on store lamb production.

Where there has been a decline in numbers I think there is another explanation: the deterioration of many hill grazings. Until comparatively recent years our fells carried large herds of ponies, partly no doubt because of the demand for pack ponies for the lead mines, many of which were completely inaccessible to any other form of transport. These ponies, locally called Caraway Gallows, did much to keep the fell in order, and I am sure that the menace of bracken in the district over late years is largely due to the fact that their hooves no longer tread and bruise the bracken. In the last fifty years, according to the best evidence I can get, bracken has spread from fairly small patches on the commons, which were eagerly cut for bedding as soon as hay-time was done, to its present sprawl over many hundreds of acres. In passing I find it surprising that these herds were allowed to vanish when the potential market of the Durham coalfield was so close by.

I very much doubt that game preservation has had any part at all in causing a decline in

sheep numbers in this area. There is no real conflict between grouse-preserving and sheep farming, apart from occasional friction of personalities between the custodians. Indeed I can only see good resulting from the proper keeping of a sheep heft or the proper shepherding of a grouse moor. Either usually results in an improvement in the standard of heather management, and there is no more popular figure among shepherds than a really active keeper.

Yours truly,

JOHN NEWRICK

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Ireshopeburn,
via Bishop Auckland.*

SHEPHERDS' STAVES

SIR,—I have read with great interest the notes on *Shepherds' Staves* by Mr L. F. Salzman. I feel, however, that the information is incomplete without the Scriptural references, especially the 23rd Psalm. "Thy rod and thy staff comfort me." This phrase used to be a bit of a puzzle until I had direct evidence from Palestine. The "rod" is the club thonged to the shepherd's waist, distinctively a weapon of protection against adders, wild beasts, etc. I have one in my farm Museum here, little more than two feet long with an iron spike. The "staff," from which has sprung the shepherd's crook, was in Palestine a straight longish stick, an instrument of guidance and discipline as applied to the straying sheep. It was also useful there for fording a river (like a boy-scout pole); there were no bridges in Palestine in those days.

Yours faithfully,

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