

Book Reviews

CLIFFORD GEERTZ, *Agricultural Involution: the process of ecological change in Indonesia*.

University of California Press (Cambridge University Press), 1963. xx+176 pp. 32s.

This book is a significant contribution to the methodology of agricultural history and an answer to those who scorn interdisciplinary research, quite apart from being a fresh view of the problems of underdeveloped tropical economies. Dr Geertz has written a compelling, beautifully integrated ecological and economic history of Indonesian agriculture, which he conceives as two ecosystems, slash-and-burn and paddy cultivation. Early last century the Dutch drafted seasonally unemployed local labour to create social overhead capital such as roads and dams, producing external economies of advantage to local entrepreneurs. Economic 'take-off' seemed nearer than today. But unprocessed cash crops were drained away to the Netherlands, largely from the enclaves of plantation agriculture which were breeding Indonesian coolies, not factory workers. The expansion of output from native agricultures was mopped up by the growing number of hands which produced it. The Dutch grew rich, the Javanese numerous.

Both paddy and slash-and-burn coped with increasing population and Dutch colonial requirements by 'involution', the perpetual elaboration of tenures and labour organization within existing farming systems. Constantly intensified hand labour raised yields per acre in the paddy areas, but never achieved the technical breakthrough needed to raise output per man. Today there are signs that even this 'static expansion' is ending, since both *per capita* food consumption and the average size of holding are falling. The ecological limits to slash-and-burn are narrower still, for, when over-exploited, the vegetational succession diverges from a tropical forest climax to one of agriculturally sterile *imperata* savannah. From the standpoint of economic growth ever more involved forms of

labour-intensive agriculture are sick responses to population pressure. Java seems much like pre-famine Ireland. Her experience becomes the more poignant when Dr Geertz contrasts it with that of Japan, which achieved economic growth and a capital-intensive agriculture.

The bulk of the book traces the different but equally stultifying steps with which the paddy terraces of Java and the slash-and-burn forests of outer Indonesia retreated from external pressures. This is an illuminating path along which to approach the problems of regional imbalance within low, nearly stagnant *per capita* national income which currently face and shape the Indonesian polity. But besides its intrinsic interest as a case study, *Agricultural Involution* can profitably be read as an example of a novel and purposeful kind of agricultural history.

E. L. JONES

Folk Life, Journal of the Society for Folk Life Studies. Vol. I, 1963. 112 pp. 24 plates.

Published by the Folk Life Society, c/o St Fagan's Castle, Cardiff, Wales.

The first volume of *Folk Life*, published by the Society for Folk Life Studies, is well presented and provides for a wide range of interests. Articles on the countryman's smock, bowl turners and spoon carvers, 'knur and spell' and allied games, and the hand craftsman in the wool textile trade are followed by an account of oral tradition and belief in an industrial region (Bradford) and disguise in English folk drama. There are notes and reviews of books. Those agricultural historians who have explored so many features of the material culture of past rural life will welcome this new journal. Others may think its title calls for some further explanation.

The name *folklivsforskning* (folk-life research) was coined in Sweden in 1909 where it has been regarded as a branch of general anthropology. Western or European regional ethnology rather than folk-life studies

might equally well have been used in Britain as terms to cover, umbrella fashion, a diversity of historically orientated investigations of regional communities and the relationships between their needs, resources, and traditions. So broad a subject might seem to be very much within the historian's field, particularly in England where the existence of a wealth of documentary material has overshadowed other sources of information such as the material evidence, oral tradition, and the more intimate details of landscape.

As compared with much of England, it is hardly surprising to find that in Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, where there are many gaps in the written records and where the elements of traditional folk cultures have survived more obviously to the present day, the methods of anthropology, archaeology, and the study of dialect, among other techniques, have been used to a proportionately greater extent. But what is still held precariously in the memory of old people, or is fast vanishing from homes and work places under the tide of industrialism, calls for systematic field work at a pace and on a scale which today may seem to be beyond the best endeavours of the half-dozen institutions in these islands devoted to folk-life studies.

To make known the urgent need to collect, record, and process information and to gain substantial support from all quarters must be one of the main aims of the Folk Life Society. It is to be hoped therefore that *Folk Life* will follow up Dr Buchanan's paper on Geography and Folk Life given at the Society's 1962 conference by printing other contributions on the scope and methods of closely related disciplines. It is unfortunate that another and important paper on Folk Life Research read at the same conference by Dr Sigurd Erixon, one-time Professor of Nordic and Comparative Ethnology at Stockholm University, could not also have been included in this volume. It was printed, however, in the last and final copy of *Gwerin* (Vol. 3, no. 6, 1962) and should be read by all who are concerned in any way with the study of folk-life.

C. A. JEWELL

HELEN M. CAM, *Liberties and Communities in Medieval England*. Merlin Press, 2nd edn., 1963. xiv+266 pp. 25s.

Readers will welcome this reprint of a collection of sixteen essays from such a distinguished pen. There is always a strong demand for Dr Cam's writings, and this book, first published by Cambridge University Press in 1944, has long been unobtainable. Most of the essays are of only marginal relevance to agricultural history, but it is useful to be reminded of the villein pedigrees by which Dr Cam established that in eastern England in the thirteenth century there were no class barriers at village level along the line of legal freedom and legal serfdom. At the other end of the social scale, the paper on 'The Early Burgesses of Cambridge in relation to the surrounding country-side' is fundamental for an appreciation of the interdependence of town and country in the early medieval period.

CYRIL HART

DAVID THOMAS, *Agriculture in Wales during the Napoleonic Wars*. University of Wales Press, 1963. xiv+196 pp. 30s.

An account of what happened to agriculture in Wales during the Napoleonic wars would be a valuable case study in agricultural history. But it is not to be found in this book which is, in essence, an inflated study of the 1801 crop returns on which Mr Thomas has been usefully and critically engaged in recent years. This analysis he has now supplemented by a discussion of other readily available material—the pre-1801 returns, the population censuses of 1801 and 1811, estate and farm plans, enclosure awards, and the literary evidence of the two sets of reports of the Board of Agriculture together with the topographical writings of the period. The range of material is not unpromising but Mr Thomas's method of procedure is most disappointing. Instead of using these sources as the basis of an account of the course of agriculture in Wales between 1793 and 1815, he discusses each type of evidence in isolation. The source material is merely summarized and not digested. This process is left to the

reader. In this he is little helped by the author who is, in the main, reticent of judgement. In addition, the absence of a bibliography makes it difficult to assess how much material lies behind some of the chapters. But an analysis of the footnotes suggests that, apart from the series of agricultural returns in the Public Record Office, Mr Thomas has made remarkably little use of manuscript material. Are there no farmers' diaries or accounts, no estate papers or manuscript topographical writings which could have been drawn upon to enrich the discussion? As if the segregation of the material were not enough, Mr Thomas has allowed the contents of his particular range of sources to dictate his description of the agriculture of Wales in this period. Wales is now, as it has always been, a predominantly pastoral country. Nevertheless, blinkered by his sources, Mr Thomas has performed the not inconsiderable feat of portraying Wales as a predominantly arable land. It is perhaps characteristic of the book that the frontispiece illustration is of an 1801 crop return for Coity (Glam.) which contains no mention of animals. We emerge from this book no wiser about pastoral husbandry in Wales between 1793 and 1815 than when we began. His discussion of enclosure awards, too, is lacking in precision. There is no discussion of timing or of extent in statistical terms. And his chapter on this subject ends with the limp sentence: "The result of parliamentary enclosure in Wales was that large parts of the agricultural area of the country were modified" though his map (Fig. 8) scarcely supports this contention. So confined, also, is Mr Thomas that he refrains from using material outside his time span, even where it might illuminate the forces at work within his period. Thus, his discussion of the population censuses is restricted to the first two and does not take account of the 1821 census. Finally, even as a geographer in the E. C. Bentley sense, he is less than first class. Considerable effort has obviously gone into the making of the maps but the usefulness of all of them is not immediately clear. And what is one to make of a

map, without relief, labelled whimsically "shires and streams," especially when only thirteen named rivers are given whereas the map of the river systems in Wales in *Wales*, edited by Professor E. G. Bowen (London, 1957), gives twenty-five main catchment areas? Mr Thomas usefully argues that the agriculture of Wales can be discussed under three main headings which he calls highland, peripheral, and ingressive; but he would have been well-advised to present his main discussion under these heads so that the effect of the course of economic events on each area during the Napoleonic wars could be clearly seen. That he has not done so severely limits the usefulness of this volume. If this is, as the sub-title avers, a study in the geographical interpretation of historical sources, then a historical interpretation of these sources would be more than welcome.

W. E. MINCHINTON

GAIUS CARLEY, *The Memoirs of a Sussex Blacksmith*, edited by Francis W. Steer.

Moore and Tillyer Ltd, 1963. viii+74 pp. "The head or coachman almost told some of the owners when they could ride their own horses. How different today, when owners sometimes look after their own horses, grooming them and riding them to the forge to be shod." The social gap between blacksmith and owner has narrowed, and many of us have stood listening to the observations and anecdotes of the craftsman who, as he works, may be holding our life in his hands.

This book reads as a smith speaks, bent grumbling over the hoof. "The silly men or riders who often used to say make the shoe thicker where he wears it most. This is wrong as the horse is finding its bearing and the metal could make him uncomfortable unless put there for surgical reasons by a vet's order." "The owner who told me to lower his horse's heels because he stumbled. Wrong he was. The shoe should be rounded off a bit and the heels raised to help the foot over." The smith's independence and pride dictated his reply: "I will shoe him my way."

Patient with horses, albeit firm when neces-

sary, smiths are often short-tempered with their fellow men. As with cooks and stokers, it is perhaps the intense heat near which they work that engenders a choleric disposition. Gaius Carley, as he moved from one village to another, from job to job, had often to fight with his fists to establish himself and his independence.

Horse-shoeing was not Carley's only trade. In accordance with the ancient Sussex tradition he worked in wrought iron. The intimate knowledge acquired of various villages, their inhabitants and houses, makes this book a valuable source of information to the local historian.

H. A. BEECHAM

W. H. BARRETT, *Tales from the Fens*, edited by Enid Porter. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963. xiii+204 pp., illus. 28s.

This book consists of a collection of traditional tales, in some cases handed down through many generations. Attempts to date the events narrated have been made, sometimes with curious effect: as when the setting of an old woman to break stones on the roads, when she had had to "go on the parish," is said to have taken place *circa* 1870. The descriptions of the Littleport Rising of 1816, and of the events of 1845, the hungriest year of all the Hungry Forties, have the freshness and authenticity of eye-witness accounts.

The old flood laws, said by a local lawyer to have been "kept since long before Ely Cathedral was built," were just, though harsh. Breach of them, and of many fen customs and traditions, met with deadly reprisal. Murder was safe and easy when bogs were everywhere to obliterate the evidence.

Through these tales, often sinister and sometimes macabre, there flits a succession of Cambridge scholars. These were gentle and generous, well-liked, and a little laughed at by the hard-living fenlanders. The scholars fished, questioned, explored, and, indeed, expropriated: a mantelshelf carved on by Alfred Lord Tennyson to a college room; a pointed arch built of clunch stones to a

Cambridge garden. Bone fish-hooks made by French prisoners of the Napoleonic wars were identified as thousands of years old, and an implement for catching rats, made by the local blacksmith, was later displayed in a glass case at Cambridge, labelled: "Fish trident of the Iron Age, dug from Feltwell Fen."

This is a book which social and economic historians will find stimulating and informative. To those who study folk tales and legends, it is an essential purchase.

H. A. BEECHAM

NORMAN POLLACK, *The Populist Response to Industrial America*. Harvard University Press, 1962. 166 pp.

A great deal of scholarly dust is being raised in America about the real character and significance of the Populist movement at the end of last century. While there is agreement that it was an agrarian protest against industrial capitalism, the debate turns on whether its nature was progressive or retrogressive. Many young scholars with an urban and recent-immigrant background suspect the white Protestant Populists on grounds of race and religion, thus neatly reversing older prejudices.

The author squarely challenges this view and argues forcibly by the method of copious illustration from the original sources that Populism was truly progressive, separated from socialism only by "a fine line." Despite a neat methodological frame backed up by the ebullient self-confidence of the author, it does not really convince. Campaign orators and small-town newspapers can be violent enough in their language in a time of crisis, but it is important to remember that they rarely understand the full implications of the radical phrases they use and have no intention of following them out to their logical ends. The hard fact remains that the Populist farmers were maddened by material sufferings and quickly recovered their sanity when better times came round.

E. R. R. GREEN