

Book Reviews

DAVID WILLIAMS, *The Rebecca Riots*. Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1955. viii+378 pp. 25s.

This is a book which should be read by all those interested in the history of agriculture. It is a pity, therefore, that Professor Williams has chosen to call it *The Rebecca Riots*; his sub-title, 'A study in agrarian discontent', gives a far clearer impression of what the book is about and would perhaps find for it a wider public. It is true that it might be argued that the very purpose of the book is to tell something of the mysterious outburst of rioting which stole across areas of south-west Wales in 1839 and 1842, but in fact only three of the ten chapters are devoted to a direct discussion of the riots. The remaining seven give a lucid and penetrating picture of the social, economic, and agricultural background of the times.

The great virtue of *The Rebecca Riots* is that it provides an important and carefully prepared study of a community during the critical years when industrial Britain was arising and submerging rural Britain. Professor Williams has achieved this in a very readable manner and with an unerring eye for detail. He shows us clearly the suffering and sadness that characterized the life of the Welsh peasant, for Wales unlike England still had her peasantry in these fateful years.

In his description of the farming of the area he mentions many points of interest, and among them are several unusual survivals of custom and tenure: for example, the survival of food rents on a Cardiganshire farm in 1833, and the carting of turf and lime for the owner. Many other sidelights are shed on agricultural affairs. It is, for instance, of interest to learn that the first county agricultural society in Britain was founded in Brecknock in 1755.

At a time when agricultural historians are very conscious of the dangers of generalizing about agricultural conditions at any given period, the book comes as a timely reminder that farming in many parts of these islands

has never conformed to what has become the accepted norm. For example, Professor Williams is wise to remind us that the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836, which did so much to allay ill feeling about tithes in many parts of the country, actually increased the tithes of south Wales by 7 per cent.

One criticism which should be made is that no map of the area is provided. It is true that there are a number of maps showing the various road trusts, but although these may be sufficient for the Welsh reader they are totally inadequate for others. In order to follow many of the references a large map of the area is indispensable. It is also unfortunate that Professor Williams insists on referring to west Wales as the general area of the Rebecca risings; in fact the risings were geographically rather restricted, and many of his generalizations lead the reader to believe that they were wider in scope.

The description of the activities of the Rebecca rioters is stimulating. As each toll-gate is attacked Professor Williams is at pains to find reason and cause, and as he does so he leads us along exciting paths—even to secret midnight meetings attended by, of all people, the special correspondent of *The Times*. He takes us with vivid colour to the actual scenes of rioting and draws thumbnail sketches of the characters present with a freshness which makes it difficult to believe that he was not there. All the time we expect, over the page, or as the case may be at the next toll-gate, to be told directly who Rebecca was and why she acted as she did, but as the book draws to a close we are disappointed. Always on the brink of revelation, the author withdraws and in effect says: this is what happened, draw your own conclusions if you can! With his detailed knowledge of the Riots it seems surprising that Professor Williams does not know more of the answers. Time and again one senses a degree of reticence which suggests that he knows more than he will tell. It may indeed be that over

a hundred years afterwards the secrets of Rebecca have died with those who created her, either on the small farms in Australia to which they made their way after deportation, or in the remote hills of the west. But we must not discount the possibility, and it is pleasing to believe, that the secret is carried by all true Welshmen still. It would at least explain why the book concludes somewhat unsatisfactorily and why we are left with many questions and few answers. Perhaps Wales is still for the Welsh and Professor Williams will no more turn traitor now than his ancestors to whom the book is dedicated, the sons and daughters of Rebecca.

J. W. Y. HIGGS

The Making of the English Landscape: Cornwall, by W. G. V. BALCHIN (1954); *Gloucestershire*, by H. P. R. FINBERG (1955); *Lancashire*, by ROY MILLWARD (1955). Hodder & Stoughton. 16s. each.

These are the first three volumes of a series surveying the whole of England by counties, under the general editorship of Dr W. G. Hoskins. The object of the survey is to study the mutual influence and interaction of Man and Nature in producing the landscape, using that word in its widest sense, of England. Proverbially "God made the country, and man made the towns;" but the country as we see it is nearly as much man-made as the towns. Of Lancashire we are here told: "Above Conistone the Borrowdale Volcanics form the mountain group of Wetherham and the Old Man. . . On these few acres of true mountain summit one reaches the only natural landscape in the county apart from the coastal strips of empty saltmarsh and mudflats." Similarly in Gloucestershire: "Forty centuries of human handiwork have left their imprint on the face of the land, and marked it so deeply that it would be difficult now to find twenty acres together which remain in their natural state." In both counties the forests, far from being primeval, have been formed by comparatively recent planting; new hills have been built up with the waste from mines; the 'pool' of Liverpool has

been filled and built upon, Martin Mere has been drained, but by way of compensation the subsidence of mined land has produced new lakes, or 'flashes'. The stubborn soil of Cornwall has been slightly more successful in repelling human attacks; but here too mines and quarries of slate, granite, and china-clay have made new valleys and hills.

Of the three counties Cornwall alone is a natural unit; Gloucestershire is a Saxon creation with arbitrary boundaries; Lancashire is a territorial amalgamation of Norman times. In Cornwall emphasis is on the prehistoric periods, and groups of small fields have in places remained unchanged from Celtic times, and for the most part the settlements were isolated farms and hamlets. Here Rome left little mark; but in Gloucestershire the Romans built roads and forts, towns and country houses, particularly in the Cotswolds. This civilization fell before the Saxon invaders, who occupied the whole district, but the towns survived, or revived. In Lancashire neither Celt nor Roman left much mark on the landscape; Saxons and Angles, and Scandinavian invaders from Ireland, settled the district but sparsely, gradually clearing the forest, but it was not until the sixteenth century that industry began to set its stamp seriously upon the scenery of the county. It was the Industrial Revolution that completed the stamping. "As sure as God's in Gloucestershire," Mammon was in Lancashire, and if wool had produced Chipping Campden cotton produced Oldham.

These monographs make fascinating reading; to learn of the development of the country scenes—the clearance of the woods to form open fields (*Gloucestershire*, p. 65), and the enclosure of these fields and their conversion to pasture for the all-important sheep. One sees the great country houses, such as Badminton, starting with formal gardens, which in turn were ravaged by a change of fashion for the naturalistic grounds of 'Capability' Brown, while the native Cotswold architecture gave way in the new spa of Cheltenham to classic, in less fortunate

towns to 'Gothic Revival', and in Gloucester to hugger-mugger. One can trace the development of the roads, the rise and fall of the canals, and later see how "Romance brought up the 9.15" over Chat Moss, or across the viaducts of Cornwall or the Severn Bridge. The books are lavishly illustrated with maps and relevant views; and it is some satisfaction that in the two later volumes these views are distinctly better reproduced than in *Cornwall*, where they tend to be muddy almost to invisibility.

L. F. SALZMAN

KEITH A. H. MURRAY, *History of the Second World War: Agriculture*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, and Longmans, Green, & Co., 1955. xii+422 pp. 30s. This further volume in the Civil Series of histories of the Second World War fully maintains the high standard set by its predecessors. It possesses all the qualities one would expect to find in such a work, coming from the pen of so distinguished an economist and administrator, particularly when based—as its author generously acknowledges—on the preliminary research carried out by Miss Edith Whetham, Gilbey Lecturer at Cambridge University.

The achievements of British agriculture during the war are well enough known in broad outline. Here for the first time the detailed narrative of that achievement is presented against the background of war strategy and national planning. We are shown the failures as well as the accomplishment. Thus, milk supplies were not always fully maintained. The price policy adopted was unnecessarily extravagant and gave some producers too high profits. The machinery for formulating policy creaked a little in the early war years. But the author can rightly claim that the performance was "successful far beyond the calculations and estimates of the pre-war planners" in spite of the fact that the war took a much more difficult course than was ever anticipated. Who, in 1939, could have forecast, for example, that within less than a year this country would be cut off

from nearly all European sources of food, and within little more than two years also from its Far Eastern supplies of such staple foods as sugar and oilseeds?

The book falls into four parts, the first three of which are mainly narrative while the last critically reviews what was done and achieved. Many readers will find this last section of greatest interest. The narrative sections, so far as the war-time period is concerned, are divided into chapters on a yearly basis, each chapter following a uniform plan. After describing the state of the food supply in each year, the author shows how the home production programme was worked out in the light of imports, and then proceeds to recount the measures taken to implement that programme through such means as price control, regulation of raw materials, labour supplies, and so on. Though the arrangement is logical, this method of treatment does perhaps tend to become a little monotonous by the time the last year of war is reached.

The student of Government administration will find much of interest in the account, given in Chapter XII, of the evolution of machinery for co-ordinating the formulation and execution of policy. It will be no surprise to most people that there were sometimes differences of view on important issues between the various Departments concerned, especially in the earlier years. On price policy, for example, the Ministry of Food took the view that prices should be increased for those commodities whose production it was desired to encourage, while others might be positively discouraged through price reductions. The Ministry of Agriculture, on the other hand, favoured all-round price increases and reliance on methods such as persuasion or direction to secure the type of production required. Again, the Ministry of Food would undoubtedly have taken a rather tougher line with farmers both in limiting livestock numbers in the light of the much reduced supplies of feeding-stuffs and in taking control, for human consumption, of coarse grain supplies grown for livestock feeding. The view of the Ministry of Agriculture prevailed

in all these matters, and whatever the logical merits of the case it can at least be argued that the decisions made helped to retain the full co-operation of the farming industry, without which the food production campaign could not have succeeded.

Of the war-time developments which have become more or less permanent features of the agricultural scene, the economist tends to focus his attention upon the policy of guaranteed prices and its attendant problem of maintaining an adequate level of economic efficiency. The agricultural historian, however, may well think that the most important permanent results of the war for British farming are the changes in technique which it stimulated, e.g. the greatly increased use of fertilizers, the improvement of grassland husbandry, and the mechanical revolution, none of which, it is probably true to say, would have proceeded so far or so fast under normal peace-time conditions.

C. H. BLAGBURN

Ulster Folklife. Issued by the Committee on Ulster Folklife and Traditions. Belfast, 1955. 56 pp. and 6 plates. Subscription 5s. 6d.

This well-produced first issue of *Ulster Folklife* is an introduction to the work and activities of a committee established in 1952 to survey the folk way of life in Northern Ireland.

Folklore is dealt with in three papers. The first, on the vexed question of definitions and methods, is a restatement of what is already known amongst experts, but the subject is

given a new emphasis in this clear and well balanced account. The second points out the pitfalls to be avoided in the regional collection of folklore, and the third discusses Harvest-knots and Brigid's Crosses. The suggestion here that the cult of the saint is in some way connected with the harvest, is new.

Perhaps the most original and individual contribution is that on the people of the Irish 'forths' or primitive farmsteads. The skilful handling of the evidence presents a convincing picture of the successive stages in Irish rural economy. A concise and valuable survey of the typical small Ulster farmhouse follows. The next paper discusses the influence of topography, roads, and a local economy based on subsistence agriculture, in relation to farm vehicles. The Irish slide-car, essentially a cart without wheels, dates from the Bronze Age and is still found in some remote hilly areas. Various reasons are given for its continued use, but surely the cost ("in 1802 slide-cars cost 3s. 9½d. . . . wheel cars, £4 4s.") and simplicity were the main contributing factors.

Agrarian historians are well served by the study of place names. In *The Legends of Place Names* the folklorist and social historian are offered a careful and thorough study of the mythological and pseudo-historical elements in the legends.

The paper *Ordnance Survey Memoirs* is little more than a catalogue of short and unrelated snippets. Finally, in *Notes on the Parish of Carrumoney*, a third of the material, on churches, schools, and transport, is interesting. The remainder is made up of stereotyped tales of witches and fairies.

T. D. DAVIDSON

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Mrs Margaret Davies, M.A., Ph.D., F.S.A., was formerly a Lecturer in Geography in the University of Manchester. She has published *Wales in Maps* and papers on the prehistory and field systems of Wales.

Cyril Tyler, B.Sc., Ph.D., F.R.I.C., is Professor and Head of the Department of

Agricultural Chemistry in the University of Reading.

G. E. Mingay, a graduate of Nottingham University, is Lecturer in Economics and Economic History at Woolwich Polytechnic. He is making a special study of agrarian trends in the eighteenth century.