

Book Reviews

FRANSIS PAYNE, *Yr Aradr Gymreig*. University of Wales Press, 1954. 206 pp. with 24 plates and 17 line drawings. 12s. 6d.

Mr Payne's book is the first important study of the plough in Britain since the publication of J. B. Passmore's *The English Plough* in 1930. It is a comprehensive study of great merit, for the author not only describes the development of the plough in Wales from prehistoric times to the end of the nineteenth century, but he also throws new light on the development of Welsh society. He clarifies some of the controversies that have raged for years among writers on agricultural history, and although one may not always agree with his theories, they are nevertheless supported by weighty arguments.

In the first chapter Mr Payne describes the ploughs of prehistoric Europe. Although the evidence from Wales is negligible, the author supposes that the continental types were used by primitive Welsh agriculturists. Many writers have described the ploughs of the Bronze Age as poor implements designed to scratch the surface of the soil. The narrowness of the share explains in part why the Celtic fields were square and small, while the fact that these light ploughs were drawn by two oxen contributed further to the shape of the fields. Mr Payne disagrees with this, and suggests that the dry nature of the climate made it necessary to plough and replough the land at frequent intervals. The best way to do this, he says, was by cross ploughing. The Celtic fields were therefore the result of an agricultural technique, and were not brought into existence either by a deficiency in plough design or by a deficiency in the draught power of the oxen. In the same way the author regards the change of climate in the Late Bronze Age as a turning-point in agricultural practice. Something more substantial than the light plough which scratched the surface of a dry land was now required, and so the heavy mouldboard plough was developed to deal with the new environmental

conditions. With the appearance of this heavier implement the Celtic fields were replaced by the elongated Belgic fields. In some ways this first chapter is the most enlightening in the whole book, for although the author has little direct evidence on which to draw, he throws a new light on old controversies, and propounds a number of plausible theories on the character of prehistoric agriculture.

Though evidence on plough design in prehistory is scanty, it is scantier still in the Dark Ages, which is the subject of the second chapter. At the beginning of the chapter Mr Payne makes it clear that neither the Romans nor the Anglo-Saxons influenced the methods or the implements of agriculture in Wales. Archaeological evidence is almost completely absent, and although the songs of Aneirin and Llywarch Hên throw some light on the agriculture of the period, the picture that emerges is by no means a clear one.

In the laws of Hywel Dda, the various parts of the plough are named, and although on the face of it the laws might be expected to provide vital information on plough design in the tenth century, the fact that the earliest copies of the laws are several centuries later, means that they do not provide contemporary information. The basis of this chapter is of course literary, but Mr Payne confesses that pathetically little is known about the ploughs of early medieval Wales. There is no conclusive evidence, he says, that the medieval plough was a heavy two-handled, two-wheeled implement; indeed he believes that both a wheeled and a swing plough were common in north-western Europe at the time.

Many fourteenth- and fifteenth-century bards described in detail the ploughs of their own districts, and Mr Payne uses for instance the descriptions of Lewis Glyn Cothi and Iolo Gôch. From such sources he provides a clear picture of the later medieval plough and its regional variations.

From the early eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century Mr Payne is on much surer ground, and speculation is far less necessary. There is a profusion of documentary evidence, in addition to actual ploughs that have been preserved. He describes in detail many varieties of plough made by local ploughwrights, and gives a very clear picture of the regional variations that existed. This is well supported by photographs and diagrams.

A final chapter is devoted to draught animals and harness, and here Mr Payne gives an interesting picture of the development of oxen and horses as plough beasts. The evidence ranges from the rock engravings of Liguria to the nineteenth century, and there is a special section of the chapter on mixed teams.

The book is well illustrated with photographs and drawings, and the author is to be congratulated on a significant contribution to our knowledge of the plough. The only serious criticism to be levelled at it is that it is written in a language that will be understood by less than a dozen members of the British Agricultural History Society and which is only spoken by three-quarters of a million people. There is certainly a case for the production of more books in the Welsh language, but it is seriously open to question whether such a medium is suitable for a scholarly work of this kind. Mr Payne's book is a study of international importance, and deserves a wider market than that provided by his and my fellow-countrymen. It is to be hoped that he will lose no time in preparing an edition or at least a summary in a language more widely understood.

J. GERAINT JENKINS

NIGEL HARVEY, *The Farming Kingdom*.

Turnstile Press, 1955. 178 pp. 15s.

Mr Harvey's book is an analysis of the "tools" of modern British farming, with a preliminary section contributing the perspective of history to the current agrarian scene and making the whole a survey in four dimensions. In it he describes the development and

modern uses of livestock, crops, fertilizers, machinery, and implements.

The historical prelude, which occupies 74 out of the 171 pages of text, is by far the less satisfactory of the two parts of the book. The author takes us on a saunter through the centuries hand in hand with those convenient but treacherous companions, Personification and Generalization. Peering first into the medieval thickets, he expounds the gospel according to St Ernle; and nearly every page cries aloud for qualification. When he emerges into the open, well-trodden country of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, he becomes a shrewder and more skilful guide, and enlivens his narrative with short détours along such less frequented paths as the improvement of grasses and the search for new fertilizers and feeding stuffs.

Arrived in the twentieth century, Mr Harvey reveals himself to be—as indeed he has long shown himself in his *New Statesman* articles on rural themes—a brilliant expounder of the contemporary agricultural scene. He marshals his facts comprehensively and accurately, and analyses them shrewdly. The result is, unfortunately, not always easy to read. Mr Harvey's prose is chromium-plated in the best Turnstile Street manner, and his sentences are tightly packed with relevant information. But his arguments are well worth the effort that is needed to keep pace with them. Here and there are statements with which one can quarrel. For instance, "rainfall is in all counties adequate for most crops" (p. 77): in about half of England and Wales there are crop droughts in at least five years out of ten. The emphasis upon a high yield from the national dairy herd (p. 133) is somewhat outdated: the need today is for more cheaply got yields, not necessarily large ones. The electric fence is an unreliable means of controlling sheep (p. 139): it can, in fact, be fully effective.

There are also a few, but important, omissions. For example, Mr Harvey dismisses kale in one non-committal sentence: its acreage, with some other minor green forage

crops, in England and Wales for stock-feed rose from 84,500 in 1938 to 297,000 in 1954, which indicates its current significance. But these are minor blemishes upon an otherwise brilliant exposition of modern farming.

It remains to ask what purpose *The Farming Kingdom* will serve. It is intended, as Sir James Scott Watson implies in his introduction, to inform the 94 per cent of British people who follow other walks of life, of the work and the problems of the 6 per cent who provide half their daily food. It has come, I think, a decade too late for that. Nearly all that 94 per cent now acquire their agricultural education Archer-wise, or not at all. And this book is a far thornier path to rural knowledge than that daily quarter-of-an-hour before seven o'clock. There remain the agricultural historians who, as Mr Maurice Beresford has said in another place, have not yet talked to a plowman—they will find the second part of *The Farming Kingdom* a convenient and reliable guide to the farming tools and techniques of 1955, but the first part will tell them nothing they do not know already, and a good deal they no longer accept. And there also remain the serious-minded inquirers from outside upon agricultural affairs—but they, heaven knows, will today hardly give Mr Harvey a worthwhile sale.

R. TROW-SMITH

H. P. R. FINBERG, *Roman and Saxon Withington: a Study in Continuity*. University College, Leicester (Dept of English Local History, Occasional Papers, No. 8), 1955. 40 pp., 2 maps, paper covers. 6s.

In their discussions of Old English society and landlordship, historians have not often descended from the general to the particular, from the laws, literature, and charters to actual villages and fields. To have done this, to have applied here the discipline and technique of local history, makes Mr Finberg's paper something of a landmark in Anglo-Saxon historiography. Merely to look at the two excellent maps is to realize how far one is from the almost abstract approach of, say, Vinogradoff's *Growth of the Manor*; how far,

too, from the more regional treatment of later writers. It is not the way of local history to yield general conclusions either easily or quickly; many villages and small groups of villages must be examined before we can distinguish the norm from the exception. But Mr Finberg's study firmly points the way. And it is not only for what it says, but for its invitation to a new and ultimately more conclusive method, that it appears as one of the most stimulating and original contributions to early English history for a long time.

The value of a local approach is evident throughout. In searching for the origins of this Gloucestershire village, Mr Finberg unearths much of later interest: for instance, the creation of new settlements (e.g. Pegglesworth, probably datable to 759-950; p. 17), and the steady expansion of the arable by piecemeal assarting in response to a growing population (pp. 19-20); the tenacity of local custom and organization, shown in the persistence of the separate identity of Withington east and west of the River Coln for centuries after their union under one landlord (§3, 4); the early nineteenth-century origin of the road north from Withington (p. 11) whose straightness has most recently deceived even Mr Margary in his book on *Roman Roads in Britain* (1, p. 134).

But all this is almost by the way. The crux of the paper is, having demonstrated the probable nature of early Saxon Withington, to pose the question of its relation to the Roman settlement there in detail. At its fullest extent, the bishop of Worcester's Withington estate included several villages once separate. But in the seventh century, before it came under episcopal lordship, Withington seems to have covered approximately the area of the modern parish, less certain lands beyond the River Coln to the east and the Hilcot Brook to the west. The only two settlements then existing in this area seem to have been the village itself with its two great fields just to the north, and the hamlet of Foxcote. Beyond the seventh century, when Withington appears as a prosperous estate, the Saxon evidence will not

take us. However, approaching it from the other, the Roman end, Mr Finberg suggests that this Saxon lordship was no new creation, but a direct continuation of a Roman and Romano-British estate of essentially similar layout and organization. The villa, about a quarter of a mile from the village, was the centre of an estate whose boundaries, to judge from the position of nearby villas, were very like the Saxon ones; like other villas, it had its dependent *coloni*, perhaps in the ancient site of Foxcote, but also in the village of Withington itself; and its economy, like that of the neighbourhood, was predominantly pastoral, with its arable in the best available place, just where the Saxon fields are later found. Such elements of physical continuity provide Mr Finberg with a starting-point for some most incisive and telling blows against the apostles of a free Anglo-Saxon society, and in favour of a fully developed manorialism at an early date over much of England. I am in no doubt that on the predominant servility of Old English society he is right, as I hope to show elsewhere; and if so, his other arguments in favour of continuity between Roman and Saxon Withington receive considerable support.

But it remains true, as Mr Finberg admits, that in this fundamental and ill recorded matter of continuity there can hardly be absolute proof, and the more sceptical will not have undue trouble in raising difficulties. Whereas it may be true that Roman and Saxon Withington betray great similarities, had the same fields and even many workers of the same race, does it follow that they represent significant continuity of settlement and social organization? Between the latest proved occupation of the Withington villa (admittedly never scientifically excavated) or its better excavated neighbours, and the Saxon conquest (577) or the final establishment of Mercian overlordship (628), there is a long, politically confused interval during which it is not easy to believe the Roman estate held together. If squatters took over the villa, as is

almost certain, how much of the villa-estate economy, with its oppressive and unpopular servility, can have long survived? In the end, must not estates follow country houses, then as now? So that the Saxons, finding only the bare remains of the villa-estate—men, fields, and so on—would fashion another estate which, however like its predecessor, was institutionally new; and rightly, they would call it by a new name. Again, although late Roman and perhaps early Saxon occupation of Foxcote is suggested by archaeology, there is no evidence for any settlement at Withington itself earlier than that under the Widia immortalized in the name; to postulate, and then to argue from a Roman colonate settlement there, however plausible by continental analogy, is injudicious when the place of the *coloni* in Britain is so dimly known. Or, thirdly, though it is possible that Christianity had a continuous history in Withington, the dedication of the village church to St Michael the Archangel is hardly a sign of native influence; for, according to the latest authority, "It is probable that the Roman missionaries in England introduced Michael into England as the patron of cemeteries."¹

How valid such scepticism is, it is impossible to say in the present state of knowledge. But the fact that it arises more readily over Mr Finberg's thesis of the continuity of Roman and Saxon Withington, than over his criticism of the accepted ideas on Anglo-Saxon society, at least emphasizes a point which, however obvious now, needs to be kept firmly in view. Mr Finberg is discussing two questions, not one. Early Anglo-Saxon England could easily have been manorial without the Roman villas having contributed anything very significantly or directly towards this. It is to be hoped that in the revaluations and discussions to which this admirable and searching paper must surely give rise, the separateness of these two points will not be forgotten, as they were in the arguments following Seebohm's *English Village Community*.

T. H. ASTON

¹ *Studies in Early British History*, ed. N. K. Chadwick, C.U.P., 1954, p. 183.

ARTHUR RAISTRICK, *The Role of the Yorkshire Cistercian Monasteries in the History of the Wool Trade in England*. International Wool Secretariat, 18-20 Regent Street, S.W.1. 1953. 24 pp. (No price stated.)

By the thirteenth century Kilnsey, a grange of Fountains Abbey, was fully organized as the administrative centre of an area of ninety square miles devoted to sheep-farming. Dr Raistrick has made a careful study of the running of the estate, based mainly on the accounts of Thomas Synton for 1446-58. As a geologist, however, he has not been content to leave the matter there. He reminds us that the picture can never be complete without tramping the countryside, considering rocks and soils, and tracing out the boundary crosses. This brings a vivid and refreshing quality to his work. He shows us something of the difficulties, and the possibilities, which faced the monks in these upland pastures, and reminds us that success was due not to organization alone but to "the shepherds and farmers who were native to the district, and who really understood it and felt the country in their bones." With only 6,000 words of text, supplemented by excellent maps and photographs, Dr Raistrick has given us a model of the way in which a short sketch of the history and organization of an estate may be presented to the best advantage.

E. A. L. MOIR

ALLAN FRASER, *Sheep Husbandry and Wool Growing in Britain*. International Wool Secretariat. 14 pp. (No price stated.)

In turning his attention to the sheep industry Dr Fraser is performing a most useful task. It is a pity however that since he is obviously competent to deal with the more technical sides of the subject, he should devote so much space in this short paper to a historical introduction that will leave the historian not only dissatisfied but disquieted. Is Cobbett to be taken as an authority on the effects of enclosure? Are we really to believe that the landowners after the Reformation "were apt to carry sheep-farming further than the monks, with the Fear of God upon them, had

ever dared to do"? The lack of diagrams and photographs is perhaps less serious than the absence of a single reference. Who was the "Elizabethan writer" who is quoted on p. 3? How is one to trace the fascinating Dr Parry who apparently knew as much about sheep as about the fashionable ailments of eighteenth-century Bath? Dr Fraser is more at home in discussing the contemporary situation, and his readers will join with him in deploring the official silence on the future of our good friend the sheep, giver "of red meat and white wool."

E. A. L. MOIR

SIR CYRIL FOX and LORD RAGLAN, *Monmouthshire Houses*. National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, 1951-4. Parts I and II, 17s. 6d. each; Part III, 21s.

The present time has sometimes been called "the era of the Little Man;" architecturally it might be termed the era of the discovery of the Little House. In the past the title 'Country Houses' has almost invariably referred to the dwellings of the nobility and gentry, ranging from such palaces as Haddon Hall and Blenheim down to the larger manor houses. This generation has discovered the interest and importance of the houses of the farmers and yeomen. But no study of that subject has hitherto appeared comparable in intensity to these three volumes, published by and for the National Museum of Wales.

The district selected for study is not the whole of the county of Monmouth, but the lowlands, below the 600-foot contour, and omitting the few towns. This area, one of intensive agricultural industry, is shown by the authors to possess a regional style of its own, influenced but not dictated by its neighbours, Herefordshire on the north and, later, Bristol and England generally. Part I, 'Medieval', treats of buildings dated from the fifteenth century to, roughly, 1560. None of these can safely be put earlier than 1450 and most of them are of timber, based on cruck construction, but often combining this with the sturdy walling usually associated with trussed-timber framing. Almost all

were originally of one storey, open to the roof, divided by a stud-and-panel partition into a hall and inner room—'parlour' or chamber. It is noteworthy that until well into the seventeenth century the kitchen seems almost always to have been a separate building detached from the house.

Part II covers the period from *c.* 1550 to *c.* 1610 and is therefore historically Tudor, though stylistically the title adopted, 'Sub-medieval', is justified. The main change, presumably due to the sudden great rise in wheat prices and agricultural prosperity, is the complete replacement of timber construction by stone (a phenomenon found in contemporary Yorkshire). Of the houses dealt with in this part a few link up with the 'long-house' of parts of Wales, where men and cattle are housed under the same roof; but here, instead of one common entrance passage for both, the byre, or cow-house, is separated from the dwelling by a solid wall and has its own door; and sometimes this end room was clearly used not for cattle but for storing wool or other dead stock.

In Part III, 'Renaissance', *c.* 1590-1714, the advance in comfort and aesthetic enrichment is notable. With the cheapening of glass, glazed windows replace the mullioned openings from which the wind was excluded only by shutters. It is possible, however, that some of the early examples with wider inter-

spaces (Part III, p. 17, n. 1) may have had unrebated casements, practically glazed shutters; for in the sixteenth century 'glass windows' were tenants' fixtures and removable. The porch, another protection from draughts, also makes its appearance. And an interesting local feature is due to the prevalence of cider-making and the need for cellarage at this time. This final period naturally provides the largest number of examples surviving, as there would always be a tendency to discard the less comfortable types of dwelling. This helps to explain the absence of ancient labourers' dwellings, which must have been hovels of flimsy construction, to be abandoned as soon as a rise in the standard of living permitted.

In addition to 480 houses, quite a number of barns and other farm buildings are dealt with in this great survey, in which the numerous ground plans and drawings of details, in addition to photographs, constitute its outstanding value as a model for others to follow. The one lack is documentary evidence; possibly the probate inventories, of which Mr F. W. Steer has made such good use in Essex, are lacking for Monmouthshire; but teams for similar local surveys—and team-work is essential—should include at least one member to undertake documentary research.

L. F. SALZMAN