

may expect scholars to develop some categories other than class to explain the consciousness of those who resisted industrial capitalism in the countryside.

The creators of this book sought to give it continuity by encouraging authors to deal with common issues of family, economic change, and community that grew fairly comfortably from questions that have intrigued historians of industrial life. We can expect that future social historians of rural life will extend the terrain further by positioning the new environmental history somewhat more centrally. They will include things like weather and disease, animals and crops, that do not detain many of the present authors. They will probably include agencies like schools and agricultural colleges that were central to the objective transformation of agriculture.

The most remarkable omission from this book—speaking generally—is religion, and that omission reflects difficulties in applying approaches from urban and industrial life to rural and agricultural experiences and problems that are showing up at the core of the model. With vital exceptions like Strickland and Conzen, who show how Minnesota Germans and South Carolina freedmen drew on values to create new realities, many of the authors tend to assume that the objective circumstances in which their subjects found themselves predicted or explained the values they held. Small wonder, then, that religion should be a hard response to fit into the story. Descriptions of objective demographic and economic circumstances are unlikely to predict why and when people have turned to specific forms of religion to shape their consciousness. Nor will descriptions of circumstances explain when and how people have used religion to guide their demands to change those circumstances. The problem of models that cannot explain religion clearly transcends this book. Religion, unfortunately, does not disappear like habitat for game or common land. It even crops up at times and places that developmental models don't predict. Social history will become rigid and academic until we come up with explanations for mentalities that include religion. And those explanations are likely to lead away from objective studies of development and toward categories like memory, values, and invention of tradition. Perhaps the difficulties of transplanting models from city to countryside will force us to confront the unresolved issues at the core.

The caveat is not aimed toward this book. The book itself is a splendid collection that reflects the kind of careful research, attention to everyday life, and imaginative interpretation that have naturally put social history at the centre of this generation's scholarly agenda.

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J.F.C. Harrison — *The Common People of Great Britain: A History from the Norman Conquest to the Present*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1985. Pp. 445.

In *The Common People of Great Britain*, J.F.C. Harrison makes a very intelligent and entertaining survey of the social history of the English common people from medieval times to the 1980s. His main thesis is that, from the common people's point of view, the history of England is a very different story than that traditionally told by historians. Because, as he argues, most events important to the ruling classes rarely claimed the attention of the common people, an interpretation of English social history from below must be a history elites probably would not have recognized as their own.

This book, consequently, excludes many historical events, issues, or movements familiar to the general reader. For example, there is no mention of the murder of Thomas Becket, the Wars of the Roses, five of the six wives of Henry VIII, the Spanish Armada, the Battle of Waterloo, the Boer War and the abdication of King Edward VIII. Harrison does discuss, however, events which might be unfamiliar, such as, Doomsday Book, the Black Death, commutation of labor services, copyhold

tenure, the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, the Reformation in village churches, the Elizabethan Poor Law, the Industrial Revolution, Peterloo, Methodism, socialism, and the unprecedented rise in the overall standard of living in the 1960s and 1970s. From the common people's point of view, the latter list, rather than the former, were among the important facts of English history. This was because these events had a fundamental impact on their lives. The question for them, at least until the 1960s, was not who would win a crown or who would win an empire, but whether or not they could continue to make a living.

Harrison divides his survey into three parts. First, he focuses on the medieval period, when most commoners, excluding a small minority of urban artisans, were peasants tied to the soil. Then, he moves on to the early modern period, when religious heterodoxy and commercialism destabilized both town and country. Finally, he describes the astonishingly complex world of the modern English working class. The reader perhaps will be surprised to discover that, in 1851, less than one quarter of working people were occupied in the factory system (p. 226). Always, Harrison is careful to emphasize continuity along with change, showing through the medium of his interpretative passages, that the history of the common people is not so much punctuated by change as illustrative of it. For example, he carefully prepares the reader, with background information, to understand how labor shortages following the Black Death years permanently raised the personal status of English peasants over the course of two centuries.

Throughout the book also, Harrison emphasizes three other themes which he argues run consistently through the history of the common people. These are first, poverty, the basic cause of which he attributes to the overall poverty of the nation; second, powerlessness, a constant condition of the poor until the rise of labor unions and the Labour Party; and third, separateness, a condition of thought and behavior which always has made the common people very different from the middle and upper classes. As Harrison puts it, the laboring classes "developed their own consciousness and aspirations, which were different from their rulers'." (p. 399) Proletarian "class-consciousness" in England, he argues, was this sense of separateness, an attitude that could take many forms: us-versus-them populism, Methodism, village occultism, political apathy, socialism, football, male-dominated public houses, and xenophobia. This, of course, is not a Romantic vision of the common folk nor is it a Marxian analysis. It is, however, an insightful and accurate description.

The most important problem with Harrison's book is that it leaves out the important element of crime and punishment. Until Sir Robert Peel reformed the criminal law in the early 1820s, theft was a capital offence, a fact few of the common people safely could ignore. Harrison often quotes laborers who complained they could not earn a "respectable" living. What they meant was they were just one step away from the gallows. Gerrard Winstanley, an early modern spokesman for the poor, considered the threat of hanging an important instrument of control over the common people. The indigent poor, he believed, always were tempted to steal and thus constantly under a sentence of death. It is true that, by Peel's day, judges were mitigating severe sentences in cases of petty theft, but Quarter Sessions records from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries prove this was a late development. If a man like Winstanley considered this issue important, then social historians probably ought to as well. In addition, Harrison makes no mention of prostitution, an oversight which is puzzling in a book of this scope.

On the positive side, this study is about as useful a general history of the English common people as any student could desire, and ought to be used as an educational tool. With the exception of the criminal topics mentioned in the preceding paragraph, there is no important event or issue Harrison does not discuss. Also, his treatment of each issue is thorough and displays a confidence born of familiarity both with basic sources and with the most recent secondary revisions. This book takes very few risks, but it makes very few mistakes either.

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