

Book Reviews

'Scotland As It Was and Is*'

The Historical Geography of Scotland Since 1707 by David Turnock. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1982. xi + 352 pp. £25; and *An Historical Geography of Scotland*, edited by G. Whittington and I. D. Whyte. Academic Press, London and New York 1983. xiii + 282 pp. £9.80 and \$17.50

Attempts at the examination of Scotland's past geographies must always be exercises in caution and compromise; the first because more is known about certain topics and places than others, and the second because individual works cannot easily do justice to the complexity of Scotland's past. In one way or another, the Scottish landscape has been in an almost constant state of becoming something different, although important regional distinctions, differences between social groups, and variations in the nature and rate of the processes making for change in the past, must all be borne in mind. Understanding these processes and patterns in the past is rather like walking in the Scottish countryside itself: where you stop or start and what you look at determines the view you get.

Turnock's principal concern is with the making of modern Scotland: he takes 1707 and the Act of Union as his starting point and pays scant attention to earlier events as a result. The opening chapters in the edited work by Whittington and Whyte, however, deal with prehistoric and dark-age Scotland. Four other chapters follow—on medieval rural Scotland; urban development from 1100 to 1700; population patterns and processes from c. 1600; and on early modern Scotland—before our attention is drawn to the modern period. Scotland since the eighteenth century is dealt with thematically: agriculture and lowland society since 1750; industrial development 1750-1870; a chapter on the regional development of the Highlands; rural land use from 1870; and urbanisation since 1750. The attention given in the edited volume to pre-industrial Scotland allows a better understanding of the elements of divergence and continuity in the geography of Scotland before 1700. Turnock, however, examines in greater detail several of the more important elements behind the transformation of Scotland's geography since the early eighteenth century. The book is divided into three chronological sections: 1707 to 1821; 1821 to 1914; and since 1914. Each of these sections begins with a review intended to highlight significant trends, or point to regional differences, in the period. Then in each section this is

* This title comes from *Scotland As It Was and Is* by George Douglas Campbell, Seventh Duke of Argyll. 2 vols. Edinburgh 1887.

followed by three thematic studies. The review of Scotland from 1707 to 1821 is followed by chapters on agricultural improvement, planned villages, and the whisky industry; that from 1821 to 1914 by chapters on Glasgow and the Clyde, iron and steel, and crofting; and Scotland since 1914, by chapters on planning for the Central Belt, on forestry, and on island perspectives. A concluding chapter draws together the several reviews and themes.

Both works have, understandably, compromised in places. What is surprising is the degree of caution exercised. The Whittington and Whyte volume in particular presents a number of what may perhaps be called 'standard accounts': the mechanisms, results and importance of agricultural change from the late eighteenth century, for example, or industrial development from the late 1700s and its concentration in the Central Lowlands. Much is already known of these topics, and has been written upon by social and economic historians as well as geographers—most of which work is referenced at the end of each chapter. Given this familiarity, one might have hoped for new insights into such topics, or even, the consideration of different ones. This view is, of course, open to debate: it is perfectly reasonable to claim, for example, that agricultural improvement and related changes in the rural way of life from the mid-eighteenth century were particularly crucial elements in the evolution of a different Scotland, both on the land and in society, and that, as such, our attention should be drawn to them. From one point of view, this is undeniable; but from another, it is curious that little attempt has been made to go beyond established approaches and themes: to consider the inclusion in greater detail of the geography of rural protest as part of 'the social fabric', for example, or the Highlanders' reaction through poetry and land-war to agricultural change and tenurial oppression. The relative emphasis given to the countryside is perhaps surprising given the view expressed by Whittington and Whyte in their preface that there is still in Scottish historical geography 'too unbalanced an involvement with agrarian and rural settlement features to the exclusion of most other topics'. The shortcomings apparent in regard to the feelings and attitudes of Scotland's population are equally surprising given the same author's feeling that 'There has also been scant concern to explain the role of the general populace in the creation of Scotland's past geographies'. All this is not to deny that what is covered is, to one degree or another, a good overview of the topic, but rather to express a certain disappointment that a book intended as 'a springboard' to 'a more adventurous exploration of Scotland's past geographies' should not itself have been more venturesome in content and structure.

Turnock's volume has a more evident central focus. His work deals with 'the *modernisation* of Scotland, involving the change from a traditional, largely subsistence economy to one that is highly integrated with a wider trading system'. The model that is chosen to explore the geography of Scotland's modernisation is taken from W. W. Rostow's *The Stages of Economic Growth: a non-communist*

manifesto (Cambridge 1971). Rostow identified five elements in the modernisation process: *traditional society*; *precondition* to change (involving changes in attitudes as much as in economy); a *take-off* stage where growth is the normal state of affairs; the *maturity* stage where the original industries which 'powered the take-off' are replaced by an increasing technological capacity for growth; and a final stage of *high mass-consumption* in which these resources are more and more directed to social welfare. Using this framework as a starting point, Turnock considers also the ideas of regional development theory and the threefold distinction between a *pre-industrial* phase (embracing the traditional and pre-conditional phases mentioned above), an *industrial* phase (covering the take-off and maturity stages of Rostow's model) and a *post-industrial* stage of high mass-consumption. Turnock considers these three stages more useful as an heuristic device since they allow 'a framework for the analysis of change in a particular area and a useful vehicle for the integration of specific evolutionary themes'.

Several points may be worth making in regard to the adoption of this model. It is, at one level—the chronologically descriptive—an attractive model. Certain periods in the past can be fitted into the pre-industrial stage—the emergence and consolidation of Scotland's market economy in the central Lowlands in the sixteenth century, for example, or the contours of Scotland's historical demography before the onset of industrialisation and large-scale urbanisation. Events could likewise be found to fit into the second and third stages. And this hints at the first danger in interpreting the emergence of Scotland's geographies through a sequence of stages: that chronological breaks are somehow held to be indicative of important geographical and social changes. Of course particular dates and events may have lent a certain impetus, but on the whole growth in the industrial base was slow and change in the countryside evolutionary rather than revolutionary. A second danger is in underplaying what might be called the 'processes of becoming', to be content with description and not analysis. Turnock is aware of this danger and has sought to counter it through his structure of general review followed by thematic study: the first sets the scene for the period (or stage) under discussion and outlines the mechanisms making for change in Scotland's geography at that time, and the second, the thematic studies, are used to illustrate how general changes in the past affected particular elements of that geography more than others. To a great degree he is successful and the topics chosen are suited to his general theme. A chapter on the whisky industry was included, although as Turnock himself admits, 'the whisky industry is probably not the greatest of Scotland's eighteenth-century industries', because it was felt to reflect what he terms the 'adjustment to new values and opportunities' then operating to one degree or another throughout Scotland. A chapter on demographic adjustment to these new values and opportunities might have served better in this first section, but this is a relatively minor point since much information on population is interspersed throughout the text. What the thematic chapters indirectly do, however, is draw

attention away from our understanding of regional differences in the adoption of change and in the making of Scotland's past geographies. Turnock's work succeeds better in the 'integration of specific evolutionary themes' than it does in 'the analysis of change in a particular area'.

Scotland is more than one country. It is a rich tapestry of particular landscapes, perhaps sharing general features, but each also exhibiting local responses to soil, the impress of certain cultural groups and ways of life, and is characterised by often very localised regional identities. Major themes of importance in the past such as the geography of heavy industry, agricultural enclosure, and the growth of towns were, of course, not sudden in their coming. But at least as important to examine as the impact and rate of change of certain elements is their varied geographical expression. At one level, there is the distinction to be made between Highlands and Lowlands. At a time when, in the Lowlands, population was recovering from periods of crisis, when industry was becoming increasingly centralised, mechanised and capitalised and when towns were growing as a result of these and related agrarian changes, the Highlands were largely tribal in society and Gaelic in language and thought, with their economy one of subsistence. And when change in the Highland way of life did come, it is through a regional perspective that we may best understand it. The question of scale is perhaps all-important. Highland counties have areas and parishes of high agricultural productivity, just as parts of the Lowlands have barren lands. The question of scale can be taken too far of course—knowing, for example, that one family of a certain social and occupational background lived in one part of a town in the 1800s and another family of different status lived in another part of the same town will not tell us much about the general experience of nineteenth-century urban life. But an understanding of what makes a place as it is or what agencies have modified a landscape in one *locale* and not in another is important to an appreciation of so varied a countryside as Scotland. The balance between theme or region is not easily achieved, especially as the question of *why* is one place different from another is usually more difficult to answer than *when* did it change.

Historical geography has a longer tradition in England than Scotland. W. R. Kermack's *Historical Geography of Scotland*, written in 1913, is the only work to carry such a title before the present two volumes, although other works have given some direction. O'Dell's *Historical Geography of the Shetland Islands* (1939), O'Dell and Walton's *Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (1962), Millman's *The Making of the Scottish Landscape* (1975), Adams' *The Making of Urban Scotland* (1978), and Parry and Slater's edited work *The Making of the Scottish Countryside* (1980), are all important in this regard. Given, as Whittington and Whyte note, however, that Scottish historical geography lacks 'comparable milestones to those erected by H. C. Darby in England', it is strange to note the subject north of the border taking the same road in regard to the treatment of the Scottish people as Darby did for the bulk of the English population: to treat them (if at all) largely as passive respondents. In

fairness, Whittington and Whyte and their various contributors, and, to a lesser extent Turnock, are not alone amongst Scottish or British historical geographers in this weakness with regard to the treatment of contemporary attitudes towards social and geographical change. It is not that such work has not or cannot be done. Consideration of such things as oral tradition, bothy ballads, popular protest, the relationships between literature and social change might all have been used to cast light on the people's past. The image of the land presented in the works of artists like Alexander Nasmyth, or John Knox, and even the Highland settings of Edwin Landseer's paintings, have a certain value in understanding how Scots in the past viewed their countryside. Culture is a difficult word to interpret. Turnock does illustrate the importance of the Scottish Enlightenment to the re-ordering of attitudes in late-eighteenth-century society and hints at the important links between cultivation in society and new methods of cultivation on the land. But some consideration of the place of contemporary moral sentiment, the role played by festival and feeling fair in the lives of ordinary folk, or the extent of literacy, might have lent a roundedness to several of the sections in both works.

Whittington and Whyte began their volume in the hope that it would provide a basis to the shedding of parochial perspectives and to the placing of things Scottish in a wider context. Almost without exception, the various contributors end their chapters with a list of topics still to be researched and themes to be considered. Turnock's work is more a synthesis, with thematic emphasis, of what is known than a pointer to future research areas. It is too much to expect either work to meet its intended aims fully. Both are well-written and superbly illustrated. Both will be used in undergraduate teaching and provide ideas for further discussion and research on a number of topics. Their emphasis, good as it is, however, is on Scottish historical geography as it was and is rather than what it might become. They will be thought of as milestones when it might have been better to be remembered as signposts.

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Books Received

Some of these books may be reviewed later in *Scottish Studies*

- Scottish Rural Society in the 16th Century* by Margaret H. B. Sanderson. John Donald, Edinburgh 1982. 286 pp. £15.
- The Decline of the Celtic Languages. A Study of Linguistic and Cultural Conflict in Scotland, Wales and Ireland from the Reformation to the Twentieth Century* by Victor Edward Durkacz. John Donald, Edinburgh 1983. 258 pp. £18.
- Gaelic in Scotland 1698-1981. The Geographical History of a Language* by Charles W. J. Withers. Foreword by Derick S. Thomson. John Donald, Edinburgh 1984. 352 pp. Maps and Tables throughout. £18.
- All the Queen's Men. Power and Politics in Mary Stewart's Scotland* by Gordon Donaldson. Batsford, London 1983. 193 pp. £14.95.
- The Renaissance and Reformation in Scotland. Essays in Honour of Gordon Donaldson*, edited by Ian B. Cowan and Duncan Shaw. Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh 1983. 261 pp. [No price stated].
- The Companion to Gaelic Scotland*, edited by Derick S. Thomson. Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1983. 363 pp. Illustrated throughout. £25.
- The Scottish Reformation. Church and Society in Sixteenth Century Scotland* by Ian B. Cowan. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1982. 244 pp. £11.95.
- St Kilda. A Photographic Album* by Margaret Buchanan. William Blackwood, Edinburgh 1983. 80 pp. £4.95. 76 plates [with informative captions and a thorough, concise essay on the geography of the island, the social history and the lives of the St Kildans].
- Jeffrey's Criticism*, edited, with an introduction, by Peter Morgan. Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh 1983. 182 pp. £8.25. [Selections of the contributions to the *Edinburgh Review* of the critic Francis Jeffrey, 1773-1850].
- Literary Critics and Reviewers in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* by Peter Morgan. Croom Helm, Beckenham 1983. 182 pp. £14.95.
- British Literary Magazines (Historical Guides to the World's Periodical Magazines and Newspapers)*, edited by Alvin Sullivan. Greenwood Press, Westport (Connecticut) and London 1983:
- (1) *The Augustan Age and the Age of Johnson, 1698-1788*. 428 pp. £50.95.
 - (2) *The Romantic Age, 1789-1836*. 492 pp. £53.95.
- Scottish Urban History*, edited by George Gordon and Brian Dicks. Aberdeen University Press, 1983. 282 pp. £11.
- Scottish Gaelic Studies* XIV pt. I, edited by Donald MacAulay. University of Aberdeen, 1983. 142 pp. £7.
- Ideology, Art and Commerce. Aspects of Literary Sociology in the Late Victorian Scottish Kailyard* by Thomas D. Knowles. Gothenburg Studies in English 54. Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis. Goteborg, Sweden, 1983. 278 pp. SEK 100.