Book Reviews

WHITHER THE BRITISH LANDSCAPE?

New Lives, New Landscapes

By Nan Fairbrother. Pp. viii + 397. (Architectural Press: London, February 1970.) 75*s*.

THIS book is about the changing environment, though chiefly about the countryside. In it, the author projects a mass of information about ecology, geology, sociology, geography, agriculture, land economics, planning and associated law, and a few other disciplines. Some of this is relevant and in context, some not. Some is accurate, some probably accurate, and some not so. The information supports a pragmatic and socially orientated plea for better landscape planning, and, as such, is more persuasive than aesthetic arguments only. The style of writing is varied. Some passages are scholarly and thought provoking, some casual and entertaining, some chatty and irritating. The mass of information, and the presentation, tend to obscure the essentials of the argument: certainly from the point of view of the professional and the administrator.

The text is interwoven (usually in bracketed asides) with a synopsis of the author's life history, presumably designed to demonstrate that she knows how most of the groups in society think about the environment. Poor little girl from urban slum goes to university, and holidays pre-war in the remoter hills and coastal regions of the UK. Wartime evacuee mum lived in uncomfortable muddy countryside, but now has a house in London, one in the country, and fits in holidays in the United States with the widening interests of a professional, but not practising, landscape architect. This may of course be more typical of modern society than I suspect. She is certainly methodical. Her card index of suitable quotes from other writers must be voluminous, and if she does not keep an index of "ideas about the countryside, and so on" (her style, not mine), she must have an excellent memory, for nearly everybody I have ever heard, good, bad or madcap, appears somewhere. Some sentences are positively arresting. "In popular (recreation) areas, however, the natural vegetation is no longer forest but people and cars. . . ."

In part one, "A New Society in an Old Setting", the history of our changing environment is reviewed extremely well. Though this lacks the scholarship of writers like W. G. Hoskins, the interpretation is rewarding in its simplicity, its realism and a freedom from nostalgia. As an explanation of why the environment is like it is and how we, the people of Britain, have made it so, it provides excellent background reading for those developing an interest in the environment.

Part two, "Landscapes for an Industrial Democracy", reiterates some of the arguments of the first part. It presents a thesis that in Britain we have moved into an era where there are four basic environments: "Built-Up Urban", "The Green-Urban", "The New Farming", and "The Man-Made Wild". Will this classification make an impact and come into general use? Has it the merit of more simplicity than "Urban", "Rural" and "Urban–Rural Fringe"?

Part three, however, "A Four-Point Plan for a New Landscape Framework", presumably the essence of the sermon, is unconvincing and naïve. Our exploding cities are to have an aesthetic "cordon sanitaire" of tree belts used chiefly for recreation. Elsewhere, in landscape regions identified on ecological criteria, we are to convince all those concerned with managing land to plant the truly native tree and shrub species, thereby achieving beauty and regional character. Of course, states Miss Fairbrother, this will not cost very much.

I find this an irritating book. Perhaps because this is European Conservation Year when interest in the environment should stimulate the market for books about it, the Architectural Press, or the author, or both, hurried too much. Whatever the intended market, the book would have been better if half the length, and with the chatter, repetition and biography edited out.

I also find it a disturbing book. The simplicity of the ideas is such that they do not leave the mind. Presumably few authors would ask for more, but the feeling remains that the book fails. Without part three and with a slight redraft of part two, it could be accepted as a popular interpretative work. With some ruthless editing, enrichment of the nature conservation content, a deeper understanding of land use and recreation planning and its organization (particularly in the context of new legislation and the proposed reorganization of local government), it could have been a more challenging and influential work.

Nevertheless it makes interesting reading. Nan Fairbrother quotes Frank Fraser Darling: "We can be of little service to our fellows until we become disillusioned without being embittered". Nobody reading this book can conceive that she is disillusioned; optimism and hope so dominate the presentation that she may be criticized for being too ready to accept change. Moreover, when a writer has sufficient humour, imagination, and indeed commonsense, to propose a society "For enjoying the countryside without feeling virtuous", readers may be sure that there is no evidence of bitterness in her work.

R. J. S. HOOKWAY

CHOICE IN EDUCATION

Decision Models for Educational Planning

By Peter Armitage, Cyril Smith and Paul Alper. (LSE Studies on Education, from the Higher Education Research Unit of the London School of Economics and Political Science.) Pp. ix + 124. (Allen Lane (The Penguin Press): London, December 1969.) 75*s*.

EDUCATIONAL planning is a fashionable exercise. It arises from the fact that education takes a big part of the national income—roughly 6 per cent of the gross national product in the United Kingdom—and all the signs suggest that it will continue to take a rising proportion of the GNP. This large and rising proportion of the GNP ought to be allocated in order to get the best results. In some ways, in the private sector, gross profit rates are the criterion that can be used for such allocation; in some public sectors, of which roads are an instance, an approximation to gross profit rates can be reached by the use of so called cost–benefit techniques. In other areas, of which education and health are instances, the criteria are far less quantitative. It is difficult to see why £100 million should go to universities rather than to primary schools.

In actual fact, big decisions like that rarely have to be taken. In any one fiscal year most expenditure is predetermined because the teachers and buildings are there and have to be paid for. Such margins as there are tend to be committed to certain overwhelming objectives of which the most important is extra pupils who just turn up and have to be taught.

But over the longer term strategic planning is possible. It is not necessarily inevitable to raise the school-leaving

age. We are not obliged by ineluctable forces to offer a place in higher education to all who ask for one. These are, to some extent, affective choices.

On what basis, other than sheer whim or preference, can these choices be made? This book does not answer that question. What it does is to show how interrelated the educational system is and the range of choices that are restricted by making any one decision. They offer a range of choices to those who are seeking to influence policy.

The trouble is that our political processes do not favour ranges of choice. As I have said elsewhere, in connexion with this excellent book, which is clearly written and helpful, in a system where the Department chooses the highest figure and the Treasury picks the lowest figure, rational decision is hindered. But the techniques suggested here will be used more and more and ultimately will prove their own case. JOHN VAIZEY

EDUCATION MANIFESTO

Education for Democracy

Edited by David Rubinstein and Colin Stoneman. (Penguin Education Special.) Pp. 220. (Penguin Books: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, February 1970.) 6*s*.

EVERYBODY, it seems, wants to hear how new techniques in education are producing a generation of illiterates. The Black Papers, arguing for a return to an unashamedly élitist education system, to preserve the standards which they allege are fast slipping away, have had most of the press coverage while publications defending progressive techniques have passed almost without comment. Such a fate is, however, unlikely to befall this book. If the impressive list of contributors does not ensure a wide audience for this manifesto on progressive education, its sheer readability should do so.

The book is a collection of essays bound together by the common belief that education should be designed to cater for all children, and that a system designed to produce élites is both socially unacceptable and educationally unsound. Most of the contributors make no secret of the fact that they see education as a means of reforming society. Arthur Rowe, for example, makes the point that the present education system, being closely tied to class structure, can only perpetuate a class ridden society, and this theme is constantly echoed in other essays. Another fundamental belief that keeps cropping up is a rejection of the Black Papers' thesis of innate intelligence. Lewis Cohen and Colin Stoneman, in a carefully argued essay, outline a theory of intelligence based on several independent factors, some, if not all, of which may be genetically determined but which need to be developed to their full. They argue that labelling 80 per cent of British children failures, and treating them as if they are unlikely ever to excel in anything, will certainly not develop their potential.

In the essays on primary education, the contributors closely follow the progressive themes of freedom and of learning through experience rather than through formalized teaching methods. John Mitchell argues that traditional authoritarian teaching methods are likely to suppress any desire in the child to find out things for himself. The child will consequently lack any originality of expression, and the whole learning process will become a chore.

The section devoted to secondary education is, of course, bitterly opposed to selection of any sort at eleven-plus. In particular, Peter Mauger argues that the present system came into being based on pseudo-psychological grounds that were not even held at the time it was introduced, and, because middle class children have an overwhelming advantage in the selection process, the system is class biased, élitist and anti-democratic. But, although Brian Simon presents a good, rational argument against streaming, this section lacks any thorough discussion of alternatives.

Higher education does not fare so well in this book. Although there is a plea for higher education for all who want it, and various allusions are made to the educational absurdity of the binary system, little direct discussion of the structure of the present system is given. But this may be more a product of the length of the essays than their intention. Throughout the book, brevity occasionally takes precedence over depth of argument, with the result that the essays sometimes seem rather superficial. But loss of depth is matched by readability and immediate assimilation, which should ensure that the progressive message should get across to a wide cross-section of people. In any case, it is a book which every serving or aspiring teacher can ill afford to miss.

COLIN NORMAN

BOYLE'S LIFE

The Life of the Honourable Robert Boyle, F.R.S.

By R. E. W. Maddison. Pp. xxii + 332 + 40 plates. (Taylor and Francis: London, October 1969.) 190*s*.

NOTED for his law of which he was not sole discoverer, and associated with an apparatus he did not invent, Robert Boyle is among the few scientists of the seventeenth century still popularly known. Having connexions in both of the warring parties in the Civil War, but of an apolitical cast of mind, he quickly became absorbed in the philosophical and utilitarian designs of the circle of men which revolved about Samuel Hartlib. This was not, however, to be his single absorbing interest; charitable work and religious contemplation were of equal, if not greater, importance, and should not be forgotten in the assessment of his scientific work.

His life divides conveniently into the three periods of prolonged residence at Stalbridge, Oxford and London; it was largely uneventful. In spite of the reduction of his time by persistent ill-health, by the demands for entertainment of a stream of foreign visitors (he seems to have been considered a scientific sight of London), and by a number of public appointments, Boyle produced a stream of religious and philosophical works which were constantly esteemed and acclaimed. He could usually be relied on by the Royal Society for an entertaining experiment and, with John Ray, was one of the most frequent contributors to early numbers of the *Philosophical Transactions*.

Of Boyle's importance there is no doubt. As John Freind put it in 1712, it rests in the fact that he "has not so much laid a new foundation of Chymistry, as he has thrown down the old". It would be foolish, however, to look to this book for an explication of this, for this is not Maddison's purpose. This is strictly and limitedly defined. In the absence of any study of Boyle based on the original sources since Thomas Birch published his in 1744, and from which all others derive, Maddison has set out to recount accurately the events of Boyle's life as a supplement to Birch, and to offer a guide to his diverse interests. The book is scholarly and antiquarian and is, as such, an unfortunate rarity in the history of science. It draws together a great amount of esoteric information on various aspects, and sets out the state of discussion, together with the available facts, at controversial points.

It is a pity the publishers have not bothered to attain the standards of printing accuracy, illustration reproduction and typographical design of many cheaper works. Ugly is the only word appropriate to its physical appearance. This, of course, does not affect its value as a quarry for other scholars (and not simply those interested in science), but illustrations properly integrated with the text would have increased its usefulness considerably. The general reader may well find it heavy going, especially