

essays deal with the social changes in Merioneth, Cardiganshire, and Merthyr Tydfil that paved the ways for the success of the radicals in the general election of 1868 which brought Gladstone to power. The last essays examine religious, social and political developments in Wales as a whole and not merely in a single county or town. The author rightly emphasises the significance of the twenty years between 1850 and 1870 as marking an important period transition both in the social and in the political development of Wales. His essays provide invaluable background information for any study of the history of Wales after 1870.

W. O. Henderson

Thea Thompson, *Edwardian Childhoods*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London/Boston/Henley 1981, pp. XIV, 232, Hardback, £ 9.75.

The invention of the tape recorder provided historians and sociologists with a new tool with which to record the reminiscences of the elderly. So active have the practitioners of the new technique been that there is now an Oral History Society with a journal of its own. Indeed any senior citizen is now in danger of being chased down the high street by an earnest researcher armed with a tape recorder. No doubt the memories of those who grew up immediately before the first World War throw some light on childhood and family life in the early years of the nineteenth century. But it would be a mistake to attach too much importance to the evidence provided by old ladies and gentlemen talking to a tape recorder. Memory can play strange tricks on the elderly and statements made by old people need to be carefully checked by evidence from other sources. And it may be doubted whether »oral history« can do much more than confirm conclusions already reached by historians who have examined more traditional printed and manuscript sources.

Since 1967 Thea Thompson and her colleagues have interviewed 560 old people and the childhood memories of nine of them have been recorded, in their own words, in this book. The persons interviewed range from Thomas Morgan who was brought up in a London slum to Jock Yorke, son of a substantial landowner, and Joan Poynder, whose wealthy father and husband were both distinguished public servants. They have vivid memories of their upbringing but their accounts of childhood in Edwardian England add little to what we already know. Time and time again we are given a glimpse of the obvious. If a street urchin has shiftless drunken parents his childhood is one of misery and deprivation while a girl brought up in the lap of luxury by a nanny and governesses has much more agreeable childhood memories. If a man fails in business his family's standard of living falls and his son loses his chance of a university education and becomes an office boy. There may be a paucity of new information in this book but the inclusion of many excellent illustrations is to be warmly welcomed.

W. O. Henderson

David Blackbourn, *Class, Religion and Local Politics in Wilhelmine Germany. The Centre Party in Württemberg before 1914* (= Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz, Abt. Universalgeschichte, Beiheft 9), Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden 1980, XVI, 267 S., engl. brosch., 50 DM.

Die Untersuchung ist die überarbeitete Fassung der Cambridger Dissertation des Verfassers, der sich hierzulande bereits einen Namen als Kenner des Kaiserreichs gemacht hat. Zwar liegt das Schwergewicht des Buches auf einer regionalen Parteistudie, der die Bestände des württembergischen Hauptstaatsarchivs, etliche Nachlässe von Zentrumsabgeordneten — darunter auch weniger bekannter Personen — und umfangreiche gedruckte Quellen zugrun-