

## REVIEWS

THE HISTORY AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE OF THE POTATO. Redcliffe N. Salaman. C.U.P., 1949. Reprinted 1970. Pp. 685. £8.

It is a pleasure to see that R. N. Salaman's classic work on the *History and Social Influence of the Potato* has stood the test of time and has been reprinted after a period of twenty-one years.

Of all the sections, those dealing with the economic and social influence of the potato in Ireland and Scotland make perhaps the most fascinating reading and are of the greatest value to the economic historian. Indeed, the historical and economic development of Ireland in the nineteenth century cannot be studied adequately without recourse to Salaman's work. The later chapters, tracing the cultivation and consumption of the potato in Britain as a whole and following its influence on agriculture and rural economy, are equally important.

The earlier chapters in this book, which concern themselves with the archaeological record of the potato in South America, have not stood the test of time so well as the later ones, since archaeological research has produced so many new facts during the last twenty years that Salaman's chapters in this field are now somewhat out of date. In any case, chapters 1 to 5 were always the weakest in the book, for Salaman had never visited South America and some of his anthropological hypotheses have by many been considered as somewhat fanciful. In this early section of the book a number of textual errors still remain, which have unfortunately not been corrected by the publishers in this reprinting.

These are minor points, however. On re-reading the book one experiences the same pleasure as one did twenty years ago from its brilliant literary style, of which Salaman was a great master. This book stands as the high achievement of an erudite and humane person of wide knowledge and even wider understanding. Cambridge University Press are to be congratulated on their decision to reprint it.

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MOLECULAR GENETICS: AN INTRODUCTORY NARRATIVE. Gunther S. Stent. W. H. Freeman, 1971. Pp. 650. £5.10.

In his Preface, Gunther Stent explains that this book, which grew out of a lecture course which he had been giving for a number of years in Berkeley, was almost stopped at its inception by the appearance of James Watson's *Molecular Biology of the Gene*. It is true that Watson's book, the second edition of which more or less coincides with Stent's first, covers very much the same ground and, in its own style, would be very hard to better. Yet I am sure that Dr Stent was right to conclude that there would be room for his own rather different treatment of molecular biology. The two books make an interesting comparison. Watson's tends to present rather more detailed information in a more concise manner—he states in plain terms what is known and then goes on to explain *how* it is known, the viewpoint being that