Book Reviews

SILKS, CRAPES AND RAYONS

Courtaulds

An Economic and Social History. By D. C. Coleman. Vol. 1: The Nineteenth Century—Silk and Crape. Pp. xx+283+20 plates. Vol. 2: Rayon. Pp. xxii+521+33 plates. (Clarendon Press (Oxford University Press): Oxford and London, May 1969.) 150s the set.

COURTAULDS are to be congratulated in securing the services of Dr D. C. Coleman to write their history. They must now be congratulating themselves on their wise choice, because he has produced one of the finest business histories written to date. The scholarship is of very high standard, the writing clear, crisp, always lively and often humorous, while the text is well illustrated by many tables, charts and plates. Throughout the study Coleman takes great care to set the company's development within the context of the trends in the economy at large. It is difficult to conceive of how anyone could have done better.

The company's development has been based on a very narrow product structure. Real silk and increasingly mourning crape was the basis of success in the nineteenth century: rayon that of the first half of the twentieth. The fashion for prolonged mourning rituals among the upper crust of society in the nineteenth century did much to make the company's fortune. When fashion faltered or changed, a new artificial fibre, rayon, "a vital ingredient in a social 'revolution' in clothing", proved to be the company's life-saver. Courtaulds abandoned their former staple product, exploited the new, and became the largest rayon producers in the world.

Like most firms, Courtaulds have had their anxious moments. In fact, the concern very nearly failed to get off the ground. Samuel Courtauld III almost gave up the struggle to establish a viable silk business in the early 1820s to join his father in America. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the firm was again in quite serious difficulties. Profits were declining, the market for mourning crape was becoming exhausted and there were management problems. Fortunately, Henry Greenwood Tetley came to the rescue. He revamped the management structure and in 1904 secured the viscose patent rights for Courtaulds. But it was touch and go whether they got them. The acquisition of the rights depended on the success of the impending public flotation of Samuel Courtauld and Co. Luckily the result was favourable.

During the twentieth century Courtaulds not only increased rapidly in size but also established subsidiary companies and branches in many countries, and since the Second World War the product structure of the company has been considerably diversified. Unfortunately, Coleman's study ends with the forced sale of the American subsidiary (A.V.C.) in 1941. There is promise of a further volume covering the more recent history of the firm, but in the meantime economic and business historians will find some rich pickings in these two volumes. It is to be hoped, however, that they do not pillage the contents too hard to prove their pet theories about business behaviour.

Perhaps I might be allowed to add one small note of reservation. The number of tables and graphs is perhaps a little excessive and I think the reader's progress would have been easier had some of these been concentrated in a more compact form. Occasionally I felt that the

tables were left to stand by themselves and lacked sufficient textual comment. For example, the figures on employment and capacity on pages 163-4 of volume one seemed to tell much more than Coleman indicated in the text. The comparison of profitability made between Courtaulds and Carron Company also struck me as rather odd in view of the very different product structures of the two companies. But these are very minor points and in no way mar these two splendid volumes.

DEREK H. ALDCROFT

PLANNING FOR LEISURE

Designed for Recreation

A Practical Handbook for all Concerned with Providing Leisure Facilities in the Countryside. By Elisabeth Beazley. Pp. 217+134 plates. (Faber: London, July 1969.) 100s.

MISS BEAZLEY has produced a handbook of generous proportions for all those concerned with the provision of recreation in the countryside. She shows a complete mastery of the subject, for she has travelled widely and herself pursued in many places the open air activities about which she writes. She shows a psychological insight into behaviour in the countryside which forms a sound basis for what she recommends. It is, of course, important that people's natural instincts should be given attention in the provision made for leisure, and one of the strongest of these is the attraction to water, in particular to river banks, lakes and sea shores. The general disinclination of the motorist to go out of sight of his car, or little further, has also a dominant influence on planning.

This is a book which will give the planner numerous ideas for providing and improving leisure facilities in the countryside while at the same time preserving its natural beauty. There are sections dealing with information centres, signs and notices, self-guided trails (nature trails and the like), car parks, walls, fences, stiles and bridges, shelters and hides, picnicking, camping and all the provisions for camp sites. There are sections on the construction of small lakes and swimming pools (the latter particularly for camp and caravan sites), and on the use of colour and texture in the countryside.

The book is well and appropriately illustrated; almost every photograph is referred to in the text. There are also numerous line drawings to clarify construction details and give measurements of such things as picnic site layout, stile and footbridge design, shelters, and outdoor furniture. Miss Beazley has a strong sympathy for the use of timber for buildings and other constructions in the countryside and she refers with obvious expertise to the attributes of the various species and their treatment for outdoor purposes. She is, of course, an advocate of tree planting and tree and shrub screening, but she says that this should none the less be done thoughtfully to integrate with the scene and blend with the existing species and plantations.

The man concerned with catering for the public in the countryside will find advice and guidance on almost any problem with which he is likely to be confronted, from the making of a causeway over boggy ground to the provision of tables for bathing babies on a camp or caravan site. There is an index, but it could be more complete than it is.

"Everything considered in this book might be looked upon as a service building (artefact) whose function is simply to provide for the basic needs of those going into the country for informal recreation. The visitor wants to find the country as country uncluttered by things put there for his benefit". Miss Beazley points out that the traditional buildings of the countryside are unostentatious; on the other hand there are the mansion houses, windmills and parish churches which punctuate the countryside,