Reviews.

THE MAKING OF WILLIAM PENN. By M. R. BRAILSFORD. LONGMANS GREEN. 12/6 net.

William Penn will always have more than ordinary interest for Berkshire folk from the facts that not a little of his time and energy in the Quaker cause was spent in the town of Reading and its neighbourhood, and that in his declining years he lived at Ruscombe, a village about five miles away, and attended the meetings of the Quakers in the County town.

In her preface Miss Brailsford says : " I have tried, from a non-Quaker standpoint, to form an estimate of the influence which helped to mould his character, and to show him, not as the outstanding figure of Quaker history, but as the greatest Englishman and the greatest European of his time." We have no fault to find with such an opinion, all-embracing as it is, if the relevant evidence supported it ; but we cannot entirely subscribe to such a comprehensive estimate and would incline to be more cautious and regard Penn as " *one* of the *great* Englishmen of his age." With this reservation we may proceed.

The title of the book makes it necessary to give considerable notice to William's father, Admiral Penn—who in some respects may certainly be ranked for greatness with his more widely known son—and the troubled conditions of England and Ireland during the usurpation and the reign of Charles II. The details of the Admiral's naval and social career show how difficult it was for the father to acquiesce in the rather revolutionary proposals which his son brought to him. There have been some who see in William Penn a touch of the academic Carolean mingled with the more sober elements of the " plain folk " ; who still maintain that he hunted with the hounds and ran with the hare in this connexion, and was, in this respect, only wearing a political complexion which has persisted, and probably will continue to persist, through all ages. Miss Brailsford, however,

is certainly under no illusions of this kind. But greatness, in a great cause, takes its toll and does not run to longevity. Intense spiritual application wears down the fabric of the mind and the body and the Quaker records of the time are strewn with examples of early dissolution as the result of fiery eloquence, burning zeal and an utter disregard for even the primal necessities of the physical frame. There does not seem to have been latent in William Penn, at least in the same prodigal measure, the consuming spiritual fevers of Loe and Coale, and there is a touch of scholarly reticence in his early acceptance of the creed and all the sacrifice for which it stood. He appears at times to have been annoyed that when haled before the justices for his part in illegal meetings, his judges should persist in regarding him as on a higher and a different plane from that of the rest of those in whose company he had been apprehended. It was some time before he cast his sword. "Wear it as long as thou canst" he was told; a wondrous injunction by a great man.

Miss Brailsford's chapter upon the Reading Quakers and their persecution under Sir William Armorer, Equerry to King Charles II., whom Penn describes as "the Reading knight-errant and always in armour for the devil," is interesting and informative; but on page 237 she has confused the buildings of the Greyfriars Church, which after the Suppression became a prison where Quakers and others were incarcerated, with those of the Benedictine Abbey a quarter of a mile away. It was not in the former, but in the latter, that Edward IV. of Lancaster acknowledged Elizabeth Woodville with great pomp to the assembled nobility, so that the context is shorn of much of its significance.

The founding of Pennsylvania is only very briefly touched upon here: the title of the book is self explanatory. Miss Brailsford's volume is a valuable addition to the literature which has grown up around William Penn and she has studied deeply the social and political history of the period.

E.W.D.

JOURNAL OF A SOMERSET RECTOR, JOHN SKINNER, 1772-1839. Edited by HAROLD COOMBS and the REV. ARTHUR N. BAX, M.A. JOHN MURRAY. 15/- net.

We have very pleasant recollections of reading some time since "The Diary of a Country Parson," being the journal of the Rev. James Woodforde, dealing with events and happenings as viewed by a clerical mind in the middle and later years of the 18th century. The present volume is a series of extracts from a clerical diary which deals with the world in Somerset in the latter part of the Georgian era up to the brink of the Reform Bill and the days immediately preceding the High Church revival. The expression "the religious torpor of the Georgian days" can be more thoroughly understood and appreciated when the pages of this book have been read.

John Skinner was born in 1772, the son of Russell Skinner of Newtown House, Lymington, who was a descendant of Robert Skinner, successively Bishop of Bristol, Oxford and Worcester. Educated at Cheam, under Gilpin, and at Trinity College, Oxford, where he graduated B.A. in 1794 and M.A. in 1797, John Skinner first elected to follow the law at Lincoln's Inn, but soon left it to enter the Church. The Rev. Richard Graves, Rector of Claverton, near Bath, gave him his title and he was ordained Priest in 1799 by Dr. Moss, Bishop of Bath and Wells.

In the autumn of this year he resigned his curacy at Claverton to take up one at South Brent, but did not remain here long for in 1800 his uncle, the Rev. John Haggard, Rector of Bennington, Herts, assured him "a comfortable independence by purchasing" for him the living of Camerton and there he removed in the spring and remained until his death.

The outstanding value of the journals of John Skinner is the stark truth it reveals of conditions in a picturesque Somerset village a century and a half ago. Camerton is about six miles from Bath, on the edge of the Somerset coalfield, and during the period of Skinner's residence the population was trebled as the result of the development of mining in the district. His duties he seems to have performed in a thoroughly sincere manner. His visitation

of the sick, his endeavour to establish a national school in the village, his gifts of food, wine and money to supplement the meagre and irregular contributions of the poor-law overseers—whom he soundly rated on several occasions for their neglect—are all evidences of a thoroughly efficient parish priest; but unfortunately these admirable qualities were seasoned by a large admixture of querulousness, ill-temper and suspicion. With the best possible intentions John Skinner could not hold a friend after the death of his wife. Even in his own family there was constant discord and often he retired to his room, without meat or drink, because he had had to complain of the outrageous treatment of his two sons and in a lesser measure of his only daughter. He even threatened his mother that he would never again visit her house unless she rid herself of a female companion whom he suspected was endeavouring to profit financially by a closer attachment than he considered warrantable. Wherever he went he found things awry. An enemy was ever at the gate. Squire, squireen, churchwarden, overseer, farmer, publican, constable, bailiff, collier, man, woman and child—in all, at times, he saw the undesirable and the deceptive. And in his pages he makes his readers feel that Camerton was a veritable bed of vicious instincts. His description of the prevailing conditions in his village home are painted with a lurid brush. But they bear the impress of truth. Drunkenness, immorality, neglect, prostitution, profanity, theft, were the daily menu served up to one who looked for probity and truth where it never could be found. He frequently laments the age, and he refers in one place to the fact that his people were as "bad as the people of Sodom and Gomorrah." Such an indictment is clear evidence of the failure of his mission and yet our sympathy goes out to him in his endeavour to grapple with something beyond his power.

It is odd that his hostility should be so pronounced when Catholic Emancipation and Reform were on the tapis, and he had some biting comments to make upon the Methodists whom he found poaching upon his preserves. He hints that they brought

consolation to the dying, but not the more material comforts at a time when the object of their concern was some way removed from the first stages of dissolution. His dislike of cant and humbug was an obsession and the lady of the manor was not free from his caustic pen in this connexion. He died by his own hand in a beech wood near his home, to the very last troubled no doubt by the ills of a world which would not respond to his ministrations.

He was an antiquarian of some note in his day and by his Will left to the British Museum " one hundred and fifty volumes, chiefly on the subject of antiquities . . . . for the sole use and benefit of the Museum and the public in general."

The editors have carried out their task of making selections from a voluminous journal with great care and we are indebted to them for an almost photographic picture of the social, political and clerical world in which John Skinner lived and moved and had his being.

E.W.D.