



★ Remembering Peasants: A Personal History of a Vanished World

Patrick Joyce. Scribner, \$30 (400p) ISBN 978-1-668-03108-7

Historian Joyce (*The Rule of Freedom*) draws on his family's background in Ireland to provide an insightful and evocative homage to the peasant way of life, which has been the dominant human experience for the past several millennia but is rapidly vanishing as agrarian lifestyles around the world give way to urbanization. Focusing mainly on Ireland, Italy, and Poland, Joyce depicts peasant culture from the perspective of those who lived it, meticulously detailing the houses in which peasants resided, their family norms, their work and tools, and their reverence for the land. He paints a sympathetic view of traditional societies, but also emphasizes the degree to which peasant life was one of suffering and pain; the daily work injured and wore down bodies, while fears of famine and the possibility of being conscripted to war were ever present. In poetic prose ("this way of understanding the Earth and the heavens is part of a past we have now lost, lost in less than a single lifetime, lost with barely a sign of its losing"), Joyce hauntingly conveys his perspective that the ramifications of the shift away from an agricultural way of life have been and will continue to be significant ("if we are cut

off from the past, we are also cut off from ourselves”). Readers will be enthralled. (*Feb.*)