

PREJUDICE AND TOLERANCE IN ULSTER: A STUDY OF NEIGHBOURS AND 'STRANGERS' IN A BORDER COMMUNITY. By Rosemary Harris. Pp xvi, 234. Manchester: University Press; Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield. 1972. £3 (Studies in Sociology, ed. Max Gluckman 1)

THERE is an obvious historical sense in which the subject matter of this excellent book is historical: it is an analysis of attitudes, behaviour, and relationships in a small Northern Ireland community, in a border area of west Ulster in which Dr Harris spent ten months in 1952-3—that is, some twenty years ago. But such has been the static character of the situation studied by Dr Harris that material collected for sociological purposes relatively so long ago has been judged, very properly, to be of immediate contemporary relevance now. An identical judgement may be made to operate in the opposite chronological direction, to apply the insights and conclusions of this book to much earlier periods of Ulster society than the one it studies explicitly: though its applicability extends, at least in part, back much further, it would be safe to say that Dr Harris's work should be of central value to historians of the last fifty years in Ulster.

Its importance is all the greater for the remarkable neglect by historians of detailed study of Dr Harris's main concern, sectarian prejudice. Historians have been afflicted, apparently, by just that care which Dr Harris noted in the community she studied, to avoid subjects likely to cause controversy and hostility; an avoidance which, as she points out, perpetuated and confirmed contentious issues. It was possible, at least until very recently, to find historical treatments of Northern Ireland written as if the social realities of catholic-protestant prejudice and tension did not exist. More frequently, historians have adverted to these unpleasant realities in discreet, vague and polite generalities. This book offers a model to future social historians. It is an in-depth analysis of a small community in which a major social problem is embodied. Thus, mastery of a manageable and limited factual situation can produce conclusions of the widest social application. The very particularity of the source material strengthens these conclusions, because the generalities are seen to be operative in the actual lives of real people. The characteristics of a society take on the flesh and bones of living men and women; clichés and stereotypes are revealed against reality. Dr Harris's method of case studies of households shows sociology at its best, shorn of questionnaires and jargon, intimately concerned with matters of basic importance in human lives.

The lesson for historians lies not only in this method, where source materials can sustain it, but also in Dr Harris's use of the method. It would be a wise historian indeed who could learn nothing of the analytic aspects of his craft from this book. Here is scholarship which is humane, compassionate, yet detached and tough-minded in analysing motivation and drawing conclusions. The poise and integrity of this book command respect both for its author and its conclusions.

Nor is its historical value confined to the context of Ulster. This reviewer, familiar with mixed protestant-catholic communities in Australia and New Zealand, was reminded and enlightened frequently, and often with startling closeness, about his own experience. This book should extend the understanding of, and stimulate enquiry into, societies very distant in place and time from the one with which it explicitly deals.

PATRICK O'FARRELL