

## Book Reviews

**The Falkland Island**, by Ian J. Strange. David & Charles, £3.50.

*The Falkland Islands* looks like a guide book with all the headings and coverage in depth a good guide book should have; but there is something rather different and special about it. For one thing the author lives there.

Now that I have read it I am not sure whether this derives from the fascination of the place itself, its bloody past, its solitude, its link with great men of the explorer/naturalist ilk or whether it is just that the author wrote a good and readable book.

The Falklands are spread over some 15,000 square miles of the South Atlantic at 52 degrees S, yet the population is only about 2000 with half of those living in the capital city—Port Stanley. The aspect of the islands is much that of the windy Hebrides. Shackleton claimed that his guest room at Government House was the coldest spot on earth. The elements dominate the scene and the scene is very beautiful.

Because *Homo sapiens* is so rare an animal, he is warm-hearted, resourceful and honest. One could pin a £5 note to the gatepost in Stanley and expect it still to be there in six months—unless it has been blown away or shredded by hail—but it was not always like this. The rowdy influx of sealers, whale men and near pirates in the days of sail have given it a violent background, and this Ian Strange has researched and revealed in a way that keeps one reading on, Geography and geology, climate, settlements, discovery, police, religion, navigation and shipwreck, sociology, and sealing take up three quarters of the book.

It is in the final chapters that the naturalist can enjoy the part that has been left, like all good things, to the end. Endemic species are plentiful in the Falklands. Birds offer a new dimension in tameness and trust. Elephant seals and sea-lions haul out on the beaches. Dolphins, the 'puffing pigs', leap and roll offshore. Albatrosses in thousands nest with the penguins in the grand alliance of the sub-Antarctic—master flyers in air and swimmers in water in a liaison of harmonious extremes. And the photographs of all this are as good as photographs can be. The only drawback I can find is that there are none of the author's line drawings to decorate the text.

KEITH SHACKLETON

**The Life and Death of Whales**, by Robert Burton. A. Deutsch, £2.50.

Close on fifty years ago I was in a whale-catcher on the whale feeding grounds off the coast of South Georgia, the island where Antarctic whaling began in 1904. It was a fine clear day with a fresh breeze, and as the catcher crested the swells we saw whales, or rather their blows, on all sides—in whatever direction we looked there were whales as far as the eye could see, certainly hundreds, probably thousands. Today you would be lucky to see half-a-dozen at one time.

The near extermination of the large whales in the Antarctic, and the drastic reduction of their numbers elsewhere, is an almost unbelievable example of human folly. Although a levy on the industry that was over-killing whales paid for scientific investigations into whale biology to discover the sustainable yield of the stocks, the information produced was consistently disregarded for decades. Now, at the last minute of the eleventh hour, the International Whaling Commission has got the remnant of a ruined industry to agree to regulations that will probably save the great whales from extermination and perhaps allow their numbers to recover.

Robert Burton discusses in some detail this sorry tale of commercial