



## Wisdom from a man of the soil

John James

### THREE ACRES & A COW

The life & works of Eli Hamshire  
by David Stemp  
£12.50\*

**W**HEN I saw this title on the bookshelf I guessed it would contain at least some kind of reference to land reform and poverty; I reached for my wallet; and I've not been disappointed. The book, written by the subject's great great grandson, is an ideal purchase for anyone interested in mid- to late-19th century history.

The book begins with some of the Hampshire family background and genealogy and is itself full of interesting anecdotes such as "had to pay sixpence for the redemption of English captives taken by the Turkish pyrates".

It's Eli and his works, however, that really interested me. Eli was born on Christmas Day 1834, at Ewhurst in Surrey into a family of yeoman farmers who, it appears, were down on their luck. Eli was largely self-educated and became a carrier, amongst other things. He was a thrifty chap, he was renting a field at the age of 14, and if he came upon a toll bridge he would unhitch the horse, lead it over and then pull the cart across himself to save a

penny. At the age of 29 he married Rebecca, who brought a modest fortune with her. It wasn't squandered. He also brewed his own beer, after falling out with the local publican, eventually teaching his daughter to brew it before she left for school in the morning.

Eli was acutely aware of the disparity of wealth and the problems it caused, his greatest criticism being reserved for the clergy who, he thought, cared for the shepherd (themselves) more than the flock. There is no mention of any books that may have guided his thinking except for the Bible. Perhaps the Bible was all he needed.

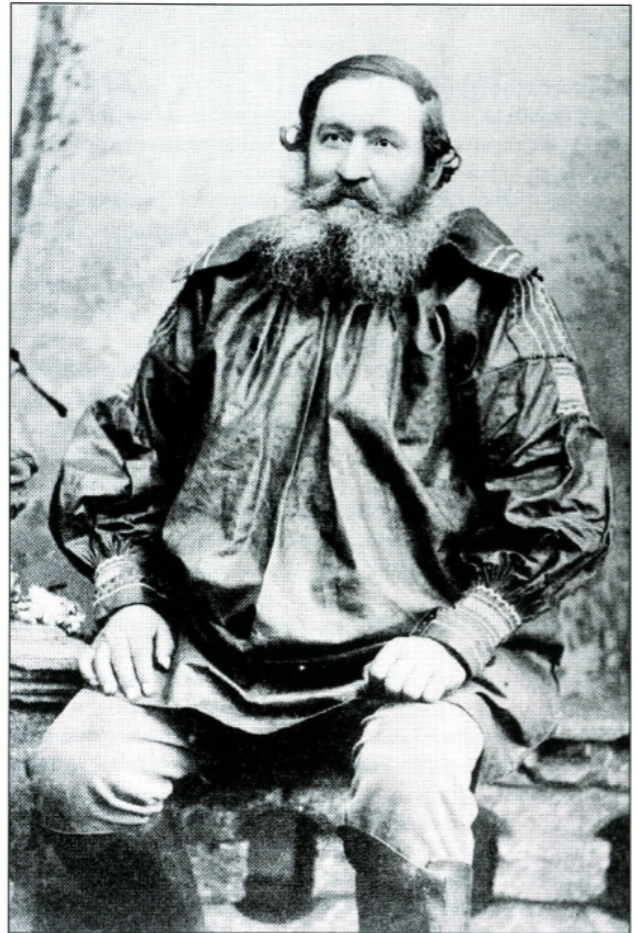
In his late forties he wrote *The Source of England's Greatness and the Source of England's Poverty* under the pen name of "a Carrier's Boy". The book was intended as an autobiography but is more a collection of his thoughts, events in his life,

anecdotes, articles and correspondence. He sent copies to leading figures and eventually met one of his heroes, Gladstone himself.

He claimed he was a Radical and a Liberal and also claimed title to the idea and phrase of "three acres and a cow" which is often attributed to Jesse Collings MP. He complains greatly of underused and vacant farmland and he detested the system of the workhouse and poor relief. He even states that if the govern-

ment held land in trust the rental income would permit reduced taxation. He was also aware that taxing land would make sure it was put to use. He didn't restrict himself, he offered ranging from poverty, inhumanity, hunting, the clergy, magistrates, pollution and even the price of fish!

His next book, *The Three Great Locusts*, is almost a continuation of the first. The "locusts" are the Tories, the Church and Lawyers. There are also more stories of empty stomachs and shoeless feet in a community that misused land. His proposal to cel-



brate the jubilee of Queen Victoria is worth mentioning. He quotes Leviticus XXV, demands restoration of half the common lands for the poor and suggests most humbly that the Queen give a million pounds to provide the cottages the poor would need.

You can also read his views on war, an international army and court of law. You can read about the meetings he attended, you can learn the legend of "Dog Smith".

**I**f Eli lived today I think he would have been active in local if not national politics. He lived in a time of great social, economic and industrial change, a period of reform, in which Eli represents the common man's growing awareness of his rights as a citizen who could help mould his own and other people's lives. He was a son of the soil and thus more aware than most are today of man's need of access to land and the connection between land use and poverty. It's not all politics and poverty, however, for he offers thoughts on manure, the fashion of women pinching their waists and warnings against smoking.

The book is well produced and as entertaining as it is interesting. The author published it himself after waiting years for his agent to find a publisher. He has done his great great grandfather proud.

\* Obtainable from David Stemp, 27 Netley Close, Surrey SM3 8DN, UK. 246 pages.

### Statesman of the Enlightenment: a new appraisal

THE POLITICAL philosophy of one of the leading statesmen of the 18th century will be published in the Spring.

Two books will offer a comprehensive treatment of the life and times of Anne-Robert Jacques Turgot (1727-81). As France's Comptroller of General Finance he sought to reform the corrupt system of taxation: he wanted to draw revenue from the produit net - the Single Tax on the rent of land.

Rent was the revenue which the Physiocrats had identified as the correct source for public revenue, but Turgot's determination to turn philosophy into practical politics was to be defeated by the landowning aristocracy. The story unfolds in a new biography written by Malcolm Hill, to be published by Othila Press.

A companion volume offers a new translation by Sir Kenneth Jupp of Turgot's major essay, *Reflections on the formation and distribution of wealth (1766)*, which was a major influence on the thinking of Adam Smith.