

CHAPTER III

AGRICULTURE

Book II. of Tucker's great work was to contain "certain polities for the extension and improvement of commerce."¹ He uses the phrase "commercial employment"² to include obtaining food, which is "husbandry,"² and securing raiment and shelter, which is "manufactures."² These two are complementary. They are "mutual consumers of each other's wares and real exaltation or depression of either similarly effects the other."² He goes further and classes agriculture under manufactures:

"Agriculture is nothing else but a distinct phase of manufactures, in relating to which the ground or soil is properly the raw material and the landowner or farmer is the head manufacturer. This being the case, it must necessarily follow that every *general* principle of commerce which tends to establish and promote other manufactures must likewise be productive of good effects in husbandry."³

Believing in this close interdependence of husbandry and manufactures, he steers a course midway between the Mercantile and Physiocratic rocks, declaring:

"How wrong must have been that system of polities which endeavored to set husbandry and manufactures at variance."⁴

¹ See *Skeleton* in *Appendix* of this volume.

² *Elements*, p. 42.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

He thus maps out the field of "commerce," embracing all productive activity, broadly into agriculture and manufactures. He turns his attention first to agriculture. Here he carefully distinguishes between the economics and the technology of husbandry for he aims

"not to tell how to cultivate, . . . but to show that the universal mover in human nature, self-love, may receive such a direction in this case, as in all others, as to promote the public interest by those efforts it shall make towards pursuing its own."¹

To accomplish this aim he suggests several polities for the encouragement and improvement of agriculture. These are:

I. "A POLITY FOR DIVIDING GREAT ESTATES"

He objects to the English system of primogeniture and great estates. These great estates are veritable monopolies:

"A farm of four or five hundred, not to mention seven or eight hundred, pounds a year, is certainly a monopoly of its kind, because it would have afforded a comfortable subsistence to three or four families if divided into so many distinct farms. And, indeed, it is attended with all the bad effects which other monopolies are, such as dispeopling a country and preventing the increase of inhabitants, raising one set of persons too high and depressing others too low. All which must be greatly injurious to national industry, good husbandry and extensive commerce."²

He objects to a "Gothic baronage landed estate"³ which

¹ *Elements*, p. 43.

² *Ibid.*, p. 62.

³ Quoted phrases and ideas here are in *Elements*, pp. 43-47.

he believes to be in conflict with the trading interests. The landed lords keep their vassals poor that they may appear the greater by comparison. Such a system also "impedes improvements in husbandry"¹ for it gives no incentives to industry. In the feudal days there may have been a need for these great estates and of primogeniture but now it would be more just, and make more for the public good, to divide say one half² of the estate among the younger children. Such a plan would avoid the class of estateless younger sons, Will Wimbles, "too proud to be mechanics and too poor to be high class traders." If the "unwieldy estates" were broken up they "would be far better cultivated."

II. "A POLITY FOR ENCLOSING COMMONS AND COMMON FIELDS"

Tucker was a strong advocate of enclosure. He states³ that commons originated in the feudal day when common lands attached to every manor and the kings "kept prodigious tracts in almost every county waste and desolate as chase and forests." He thinks that although the British have perpetuated these commons in their original state of desolation "there is not one reason now remaining for their continuance."

To the various objections against enclosure he submits answers, a brief digest of which follows:

To enclosure it is objected: (1) That sheep walks will be

¹ Quoted phrases and ideas here are in *Elements*, pp. 43-47.

² Tucker's exact suggestion is that the elder son receive one-half of the landed estate and one child's share of the other half, the personalty to be equally shared by the children. *Elements*, p. 45.

³ The digest and quotations that follow are from *Elements*, pp. 48-55.

destroyed. But "this assumes that all enclosed lands will be tilled." But the fact is that enclosed lands are pastured frequently, and that "in counties where enclosures have occurred the number of sheep has increased."

(2) That enclosure destroys the fineness of the wool. But "English export woollens are made of coarser wool anyhow." No one knows certainly what does make wools vary. Probably it is the warmer housing of the sheep.

(3) That enclosure will lessen arable lands, for it is so easy to enclose pastures. This is the very reverse of (1) "So long as people want mutton and woollen goods, sheep will be raised, whether lands be in commons or enclosed."

(4) That enclosure deprives many poor people "of their great privileges." "But enclosure is the very means that gives the poor employment and enables the farmer to pay them better wages." . . . "But in regard to their right or privilege of common, that ought not to be taken from them without a full and ample compensation. Nor, on the other hand, ought either poor or rich to be indulged in a petulance of humor to obstruct the public good, merely because they are resolved to adhere obstinately to the absurd and foolish prejudice of their forefathers."¹

(5) That enclosure prevents the rearing of young cattle. Rather it should be said that unlimited commons afford "a place for rearing stunted cattle, . . . for too many are put there for any to thrive."¹

Having thus dealt with the argumentative phases of the subject, Tucker, in his usual way, suggests a practical "polity," providing in detail for the methods of determining when a given common should be enclosed and how the claimants to it should adjust their several claims.

¹ *Elements*, p. 52.

III. A POLITY FOR CHANGING TITHES INTO GLEBE

The tithing plan, instituted by Moses, is suited to a theocracy, in Tucker's judgment. His historical sense is clearly evidenced here when he charges unclear thinking against the church fathers:

"Origen, St. Ambrose, St. Austin, &c., &c., who maintained that tithes were of Divine right under the gospel because they were so under the law, must have had very imperfect notions both of law and of gospel."¹

He objects to the tithe because it is a tax which burdens industry and involves the clergy in difficulties with their parishioners. He therefore suggests that tithes be exchanged for small pieces of land (glebe) and these re-exchanged until there is a "compact estate in each parish." This will give the clergy a living income which will rise and fall with the prosperity or decline of general business (and is therefore, in his judgment preferable to a fixed recompense) and will remove all friction between clergy and parishioners. It will be well also to interest men of letters in agriculture for they will improve the science.

IV. A POLITY FOR RECLAIMING MARSHES, ETC

This polity² plans for increasing "buildings in low, fenny, marshy grounds and rendering them healthy." It suggests buildings with foundations arched above the ground. The first story is to be used as a store room thus putting the living quarters "sixteen feet above the ground and therefore above the animalcula or poisonous particles in marshy places." He cites the successful experiences of Venice, Marseilles and Bordeaux and closes with an outline of tax

¹ *Elements*, p. 57.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 62-68.

exemptions and special privileges to be granted for a decade to those who should so reclaim waste lands.¹

V. A POLITY FOR CREATING TIMBER

Tucker declares here for compulsory forestry. After a disquisition showing the "vulgar error" of thinking that English oak is the best of all ship-building timbers, he puts the interesting question as to the need of any stimulus to self-interest in the increase of timber land since "timber is a raw material whose demand is increasing and whose uses are multiplying every day." His answer to this query shows that he had noted man's tendency to discount the future:

"In timber, he who plants cannot expect to reap the benefit. . . . We must take human nature as we find it, and make the best uses of it we can. . . . If we really expect a growth of timber equal to the demands of maritime, &c., . . . we must render it the present and immediate self-interest of every landowner in the kingdom to make plantations."²

To compass this end he suggests that the state compel every holder of above 400 acres in one parish to have at least 20 acres of timber under penalty of doubled land, window and poor taxes.

VI. A POLITY³ FOR REGISTERING DEEDS

Tucker asks for registry, hereafter,⁴ of the titles involved

¹ In *Reflections upon . . . Causes . . . of Price . . . Wools*, Tucker outlines a plan for placing militiamen upon waste lands to reclaim them in small individual holdings. See pp. 31 to 46. The plan is minutely detailed.

² *Elements*, p. 74.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁴ An illustration of the sagacity of Tucker the politician, aiming to so shape his plan that it will meet approval.

in marriage settlements, in sales and in mortgages under penalty that such transactions be invalid unless duly registered. Men oppose such a plan only because either they fear their titles are not good or they desire to secure excessive loans by double mortgages. These are the very reasons why a registry should be required.

TUCKER ON RENT

In connection with his polities for agriculture his treatment of rent may be presented.

Tucker touches incidentally only upon the rent of land. Wherever he offers any explanation of rent it is given in terms of population. The fullest treatment which he gives to this subject occurs in the second part of his *Reflections on Naturalization*. The passage reads:

“Lands near London rent for 40 times as much as lands of equal goodness in remote parts of England, Wales and Scotland. What is this difference in the rent owing to but to the superior number of inhabitants? And that these distant lands pay any rent at all, is it not (because of) the carrying of the produce of them to distant places? If the city of Bristol could be removed 40 miles off, would not all the estates around it sink in value? . . . How can tenants pay rent if there is not a market? and what is a market but a number of inhabitants.”¹ He sees that “good roads have the same effect as having “the lands contiguous to the towns.”²

The very few and brief references³ to rent made by

¹ *Reflect. Nat. For. Prot. Part II*, pp. 21 and 22.

² *Elements*, p. 51.

³ For other references see *Reflect. Nat. For. Prot. Part I*, p. 64, and *Part II*, p. 19, and *Elements*, p. 32. This passage in the *Elements* reads, “The rent of land depends on the number of people, for land is quite useless without a market for its produce.”

Tucker seem to indicate that he had given this subject but little consideration. His slight thought upon it, as the above passage shows, had shown him one factor in its explanation, viz., location. He had also noted¹ the relative fertility of different pieces of land but he does not at any time connect this fact with an explanation of rent.

Ideas are contained in passing remarks which show that he had some material which might have led him to a concept of diminishing returns from land, had he but analyzed it. In his frequent appeals to the landed interest he sometimes argues that "every decay in trade must ultimately fall upon the land"² and that the development of commerce and manufactures "consumes the produce of lands and raises rent."³ But nowhere in his writing does he make any attempt to formulate the law of diminishing returns from land nor does he give the slightest evidence that he had any knowledge of the fact of diminishing returns from land.

¹In *Tract II*, p. 75, he mentions "different soils," and in *Reflect. Nat. For. Prot. Part II*, p. 23, he barely mentions that fertilized lands are more productive.

²*Spirit. Liq.*, p. 31.

³*Reflect. Nat. For. Prot. Part I*, p. 54.