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Review

Reviewed Work(s): The Enclosure and Redistribution of our Land by W. H. R. Curtler

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received. Again, as regards the famous "jaghire," Mr. Dodwell says somewhat airily, "Sykes's evidence completely proves the voluntary nature of the grant." We cannot agree. Sykes's evidence is to the effect that in July 1758 the Nawab of Bengal proposed to him spontaneously that Clive should receive a jaghire. Now Sykes had been one of Clive's colleagues on the Select Committee in Bengal, and he had every reason for withholding anything derogatory to his former chief. His evidence is extremely confused; he speaks only "to the best of his remembrance"; he is not certain of the date; no Englishman was present at his interview with the Nawab; "the conversation was in the Moorish language, which he thought he understood sufficient for most conversations." Could anything be less convincing? But, above all, this account is in direct conflict with a letter from Clive himself of January 1759 to the Nawab's financial minister, printed in the same Parliamentary Report as Sykes's evidence—a letter which probably escaped Mr. Dodwell's notice. Clive writes that he had always supposed that he would receive a jaghire to support his rank as Omrah, "but to this day I have not heard a word from him [the Nawab] concerning it. . . . I beg leave to give you the trouble to apply to the Nawab concerning this affair and that I may have a jaghire equal to my rank." Here we have the testimony of a confused or partial witness, speaking from memory twelve years after the event, opposed to the text of a written document penned at the time of the transaction. Clive received the jaghire in July 1759. It is surely clear that Sykes, granting he was an honest witness, had confused his dates; it was no doubt in July 1759, not 1758, that the Nawab, after Clive's prompting letter of the preceding January, made tardy proposals to satisfy his demand. It is surely inconceivable, if the Nawab had really made an unsolicited offer in 1758 and Clive had been informed of it, that Clive should not have referred to the offer in his letter of January 1759. It might, of course, be argued that Sykes did receive an offer from the Nawab in July 1758, and failed to report it to Clive—there is some such suggestion in his evidence. But then obviously Clive cannot be acquitted of the indelicacy, to use no harsher word, of suggesting for himself a further grant in addition to the large donations he had already received. As far as he knew, his own letter was a direct and original application to the Nawab.

P. E. ROBERTS.

The Enclosure and Redistribution of our Land. By W. H. R. CURTLER. 1920. viii + 334 pp. Clarendon Press. 16s.

A GOOD deal more has been written about the "enclosures" (ambiguous word!) than about any other aspect of English economic history. But the book of Mr. Curtler, whose *Short History of English Agriculture* is well known as one of the best text-books on the subject, is not superfluous. It brings together in a manageable form matter scattered through a number of different specialist studies. It has a good account of the procedure of enclosure by Private Act. And it carries the history of the movement to a somewhat later date than most other books on the subject. "The Agrarian Revolution," like "The Industrial Revolution," has suffered from being confined to the period between 1760 and 1832. It is convenient to have even a summary account of the later developments.

The first 137 pages of Mr. Curtler's book are concerned with

enclosures before the eighteenth century, and present a readable, sane, and trustworthy summary of what is known on the subject. The *lacunæ* are those common to most previous writers. Thus, (i) ought not more to be said about that important and obscure matter, the development of leasehold tenure? The growth of leasehold certainly helped to undermine customary tenures, and it was usually the lessee of the demesnes who began agricultural innovations in the sixteenth century. (ii) The condition of the peasantry between the Peasant's Revolt and the reign of Henry VII is still a puzzle. A good deal of evidence points to a multiplication of the substantial small holder ("the yeomen"), and to a growth in the prosperity of the rural middle class. On the other hand, the latest theory—that of Professor Simkhovitch, Miss Bradley, and, apparently, Lord Ernle—implies that their condition was one—to use Marxian language—of "increasing misery." The fact is, it may be suggested, that most writers have taken "the yeomanry" for granted, and have not studied their growth in any detail. (iii) The agrarian history of the period 1640–1688 is still extremely obscure. Apart from Miss Leonard's well-known essay, and some useful allusions in Prof. Gonner's book, the seventeenth century is largely, in fact, an unworked field. This is unfortunate, because (a) the sale of ecclesiastical, Crown, and malignants' estates under the Commonwealth must have meant an immense dislocation, comparable to that accompanying the dissolution of the monasteries a century before. The latter has been studied by Dr. Savine. With the exception of a useful monograph by Mr. R. V. Lennard, hardly anything has been written on the former. (b) The movement towards scientific farming, which was to be so important later, begins, or at any rate receives a great impetus, in the middle of the seventeenth century.

Since all previous writers have treated these points rather lightly, it would perhaps not be reasonable to criticise Mr. Curtler for doing the same. He deserves gratitude for summarising the results of previous research and giving a sound perspective. There are certain points on which the reviewer would venture to enter a demurrer to his conclusions. Thus (i) (quoting Lord Ernle), "open illegality was, at least, rare" in the evictions of the sixteenth century. If this means that freeholders were not often forcibly ejected from their holdings the statement is probably correct. But (a) conversion of arable to pasture and decaying of houses of husbandry were illegal, being forbidden by a long series of Acts of Parliament, beginning in 1487, and frequently took place. (b) Eviction of copyholders (or increasing of copyholder's fines) was illegal, whenever (as fairly often) "contrary to the custom." Lord Ernle's statement that illegal evictions must have been rare because they "are not included among the grievances alleged by the leaders in any of the risings of the peasants" is surely not felicitous. The peasants, like sensible men, complained of the particular steps used to force them out of their holdings, viz. excessive fines and conversion to pasture. As a matter of fact, there are also plenty of specific complaints (see the Calendar of Chancery Proceedings) against illegal evictions. (ii) One of the puzzles of sixteenth-century agrarian history is to determine the respective weights to be assigned to the literary evidence and to that of the statistics worked up (by Dr. Gay and others) from the reports of the various Royal Commissions. No doubt there was exaggeration. But it appears to the reviewer to make nonsense of history if one is to dismiss the opinion of three generations

of contemporaries, including More, Cromwell, both the Cecils and Bacon—not to mention a score of divines and men of letters—as mainly rhetoric. In face of contemporary verdicts Mr. Curtler's remark that "enclosure at this date was largely a smallholders' movement" seems a hard saying. Certainly small holders enclosed. But were some ten Statutes passed and six Royal Commissions issued to deal with a non-existent grievance?

The eighteenth century is dealt with by Mr. Curtler in greater detail than the sixteenth and seventeenth, and his treatment of the subject is in several respects excellent. Thus (i) his account of the procedure of enclosure by Private Act, and of the stages through which it passed, is valuable. (ii) His description of the actual work of the enclosure commissioners is admirably concrete and detailed. In this matter everything depended on the details—in particular details as to cost. It is most useful to have evidence as to the expense involved in enclosing, set out in cold figures from the reports of the Board of Agriculture. (As would be expected, the legal expenses appear to have been monstrous.) (iii) He gives a very instructive summary of the reports made between 1792 and 1815 by the surveyors employed by the Board of Agriculture. (iv) His examination of the effects of enclosure on different sections of the rural population sets the problem on the right plane. There has been, perhaps, too common a habit of talking as though the village before enclosure was more or less homogeneous, and as though enclosure affected all elements in it in much the same manner. Mr. Curtler's attempt to distinguish between the results of enclosure for the large landowner, tenant farmer, small holder and cottager is on the right lines. On the other hand, these are somewhat general conceptions, and a more rigorous classification is needed. It may be suggested that, before any final verdict is passed, what is required is a more exact analysis of the village population in respect (a) of tenure, (b) of acreage, (c) of rights of common. Until one knows with some accuracy how land was distributed and held *before* enclosure, it is really little more than guess-work to discuss what happened *after* it.

Enough has been said to show that Mr. Curtler's book possesses several solid and genuine merits. One general (and gentle) criticism may be permitted. Has he not occasionally felt a somewhat excessive anxiety to defend the proceedings of the larger land-owners? There has, of course, been partisanship on the other side, and it is natural that a writer with different views should try to take one kind of curve out of the stick by putting the opposite curve in. But are the following passages quite adequate?

"Now these proceedings were high-handed without a doubt; but they were quite possible without inflicting any distinct hardship on anyone, great or small, who had any legal claim under an Enclosure Act. All persons in the parish who were interested in the enclosure should have been consulted, but the larger proprietors and farmers were perfectly convinced that enclosure was indispensable to agricultural progress, and knew well, too, that there was a strong, and for the most part, factious and ignorant, opposition to the desired improvement. But they were determined to carry their point, and at the same time deal fairly (as the Acts and awards show) with all who had any legal claims." "Again, the small holder . . . was specially hard hit by the pernicious allowance system introduced by the Speenhamland 'Act' of 1795, which . . . created an army of

paupers supported by the rates": "it is to be noticed that among the many surveyors [employed by the Board of Agriculture] there is no landlord, so that it cannot be said that reports are biased in favour of that much-abused class."

Mr. Curtler is so candid in supplying elsewhere the materials for testing his generalisations, that the careful reader runs no great danger of being misled. But the above-quoted sentences seem to the reviewer to lack—to speak mildly—something of the detachment to be found in most other parts of his book. As to the surveyors: is it likely that the Board of Agriculture between 1793 and 1815 would employ men biased *against* the larger landowners? As to the poor, hear Arthur Young (I quote from memory): "Go to the ale-house of any old enclosed village: it is there that you will see the origin of pauperism and poor-rates. For whom are they to be sober? For whom are they to save?" As to the method of enclosure, hear Young again: "By nineteen Enclosure Acts out of twenty, the poor are wronged, and sometimes grossly wronged. The poor man may say with justice, 'Parliament may be tender of property. All I know is, I had a cow, and Parliament took it from me.'"

Surely the time has come when the truth can be stated without regard to twentieth-century politics and without considering the susceptibilities of either the big man or the small. Is it not fairly simple—that agricultural reconstruction was eminently desirable and often opposed by what seemed irrational obstructiveness among the smaller farmers, but that the particular method by which it was carried out was sometimes (possibly often) odiously partial and one-sided? That verdict seems to have behind it, at any rate, the respectable authority of Arthur Young, who was certainly not biased against the large landowner.

R. H. TAWNEY.

England in Transition, 1789-1832: a Study of Movements. By W. L. MATHIESON. 1920. xiv + 285 pp. Longmans. 15s.

Lord Grey of the Reform Bill: the Life of Charles, second Earl Grey. By G. M. TREVELYAN. 1920. xiv + 413 pp. Longmans. 21s.

Twenty Years: a Study in the Development of the Party System between 1815 and 1835. By CYRIL ALINGTON. 1921. 206 pp. Clarendon Press. 12s. 6d.

BLANKS in the formative period of our domestic history between the outbreak of the Revolutionary Wars in 1793 and the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835, long undeservedly neglected, are at last being rapidly filled. Each of the three books before us has its own peculiar value for historical students.

Dr. Mathieson's title, at first sight a good one, has done his work some injustice, for it arouses expectations which his book does not fulfil; and, indeed, could not fulfil within the modest limits of 280 pages. It does not provide us with the continuation of Lecky from 1793 which even the least ardent admirer of that historian would, in his heart, be grateful to find on his shelves. It is not in the strictest sense a work of research; yet it is a very useful attempt to arrange and clarify the knowledge established by the researches of others, and is best described by its sub-title, "A Study of Movements,"—the movements of political and religious thought, the movements