

BOOK REVIEWS.

THE AGRARIAN PROBLEM IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.*

"If we must talk of social evolution, we ought to remember that it takes place through the action of human beings, that such action is constantly violent, or merely short-sighted, or deliberately selfish, and that a form of social organisation which appears to us now to be inevitable, once hung in the balance as one of several competing possibilities."—(p. 178.)

At the time of the Great Migration (die Völkerwanderung) of the fifth century, the free "barbarian" nations which overran Europe, and who were destined to overthrow the blighting dominion of the all-powerful, predatory Roman Empire, were organised on a tribal or village basis. The political and economic unit was the independent, self-supporting and self-governed village, or township, worked co-operatively, or rather on principles of co-aration.† All its inhabitants were assumed to be of common blood, and strangers, "foreigners," were not readily or easily admitted. Every freeman had definite rights to the use of land, and the whole community had common pasture and common woods, the one for pasturing their cattle, the other for fuel and for building purposes. The landed man was the freeman, the landless man was the slave.

By the end of the tenth century, however, owing to causes we can more easily imagine than we can trace, the aristocratic Feudal System, based on inequality and producing inequality, had displaced the democratic Village System, based on equality and maintaining equality. "No Land without a Lord," was the underlying principle of the whole Feudal System. By force or by chicanery, by more or less compulsory voluntary agreement, the primitive free communities had been brought under the dominion of the Lords, temporal or spiritual, claiming suzerainty over the territory in which they were situated. The claims of the Feudal Lords seem ever to have been more or less vague and arbitrary; their original demands, partaking rather of the nature of a tax than of a rent, were comparatively light, and may well have been regarded and excused as a return for services rendered, mainly, perhaps, for protection from outside enemies. The universal tendency, however, was for the power of the Feudal Magnates to extend itself, at the cost and to the detriment of the rural communities, and for their demands steadily to increase and to become more burdensome, eventually resulting in almost every country, when the patience and endurance of the peasants were exhausted, in uprisings and revolts—uprisings and revolts put down in a sea of blood by the mercenary soldiers in the pay of the Feudal Magnates.

It is an interesting fact, which should not be overlooked by the historical student, a fact almost daily receiving increased confirmation, that the further back we push our historical researches the more free and independent do we find the peasantry of the village communities, the lesser the limitations on their industrial freedom, and the lighter the dues demanded of them. As Vinogradoff, an accepted

authority, well emphasises (VILLAINAGE IN ENGLAND p. 298): "An attentive and extended study of the documents will easily show that, save in exceptional cases, the earlier records are by no means harder in their treatment of the peasantry than the later. The eleventh century is, if anything, more favourable to the subjected class as regards the imposition of labour services than the thirteenth, and the observation applies even more to Saxon times."

During the Middle Ages England was in the main a country of rural villages, or townships, and the foundation of the whole life of the village, as the author of the admirable volume now before us well expresses it (p. 99), "is the possession by the majority of households of holdings of land. Land is so widely distributed that the household, all of whose members are entirely dependent for their living upon work for wages, is the exception." The bulk of the landholding population of England, as well as of those substantial yeoman, the pride of their times, whose free and prosperous condition was so often contrasted with that of the downtrodden peasantry of the Continent, were "customary tenants" or copyholders of various degrees (see p. 40). The fourteenth and fifteenth century had been specially favourable to the development and prosperity of the small cultivator. And, as Thorold Rogers repeatedly emphasises (see his SIX CENTURIES OF WORK AND WAGES, p. 326), during the fifteenth and the first quarter of the sixteenth century the condition of the English worker was better than it had ever been before, or, what is even more remarkable, than it has ever been since. As our author expresses it (p. 136): "Before the great agrarian changes of the sixteenth century begin, there had been a period—one may date it roughly from 1391 to 1489—of increased prosperity for the small cultivator."

The custom of the manor still acts as a dyke to defend them against encroachments, and to concentrate in their hands a large part of the fruits of economic progress." And, as he a few pages later (p. 140) philosophically remarks, "The wealth which under a regime of great estates and leasehold tenure, accrues to a tiny body of landlords, is, in a community of small freeholders, retained by the cultivating tenant, and, when the tenure of land is such that custom sets a barrier to a rise in rents, is divided between owner and occupier in a way which prevents the former from absorbing the whole advantage of superior sites, or the latter from being reduced to working for bare wages of management. The causes which determine the allocation of rents must always be of crucial importance for an understanding of economic conditions, and any change which augments them, diminishes them, or varies the degree to which different classes participate in them, is likely in time to produce a substantial alteration both in the economic configuration of society and in the possession of social privileges and political power."

In his book Mr. Tawney indicates how even before the sixteenth century the power of custom was weakening, to the detriment of the cultivators; how by different means the landlords were managing to appropriate to themselves an ever increasing share of the fruits of economic progress; and how, first on the Lord's demesne lands, competitive rents, based on the uttermost ability of the cultivator to pay rather than be displaced, and absorbing for the benefit of the owner more than the fruits of economic progress, displaced customary rents, which divided such fruits between the owner and the cultivator. He shows how during the time of the Tudors, and despite the efforts of the centralised State, the once prosperous peasantry were dispossessed and ruthlessly evicted from their holdings, to become—despite all the provisions of the Elizabethan Poor Law called into existence by the powerful Tudor State to palliate the social disorder caused by such action—the homeless, helpless, stalwart vagrants, the characteristic products of sixteenth century agrarian changes.

* THE AGRARIAN PROBLEM IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY. By R. H. Tawney. Publishers—Longmans, Green & Co. London. 1912. Price 9s. net.

† Co-aration explains many of the anomalies and peculiarities of the old English open-field system of agriculture. As Vinogradoff, VILLAINAGE IN ENGLAND, p. 403, well says, "The principles of co-aration give an insight into the nature of English village communities. They did not aim at absolute equality; they subordinated the personal element to the agricultural one, if we may use that expression. Not so much an apportionment of individual claims was effected as an apportionment of the land to the forces at work on it."

He depicts the means by which the Tudors vainly endeavoured to protect the small copyholders and tenant farmers from the merciless encroachments of their superior landlords; how the power of the King's Courts, later put by the Stuarts to such very different uses, was exercised on their behalf; and how such statesmen as Cardinal Wolsey and the Duke of Somerset incurred the vindictive hatred of the arrogant Tudor aristocracy by their endeavours to protect the vested interests of the poorer classes, the "common people." Finally, he shows how "the good side of the absolute monarchy was swept away with the bad"; how (p. 394) "the victory of the Parliamentary forces over the Crown meant the triumph of the landed gentry over the only power which was strong enough to enforce the administration of (amongst them) unpopular Statutes in the teeth of their opposition"; how (p. 404) "the destruction of the absolute monarchy entrenched the great landlords inexpressably at the heart of government, both central and local, and made their power as great as their ambitions," and gave them "for a century and a half after the Revolution what power a Government can have to make or to ruin England as they please." And so prepared the way for the era of Enclosure Acts, for "those good old times," so dear to the heart of modern Tories, when, again to use our author's words (p. 400), "To the upper classes in the eighteenth century the possession of landed property by a poor man seemed in itself a surprising impertinence which it was the duty of Parliament to correct, and Parliament responded to the call of its relatives outside the House with the pious zeal of family affection."

Altogether, Mr. Tawney is to be congratulated on having produced a book no serious student of English history can afford to ignore, a book, moreover, of special interest to every student of the Land Question. L. H. B.

THE STANDARD OF VALUE.*

Many students and writers otherwise well versed in economic problems, seem to us to become hopelessly confused when confronted with the Money Question or Currency Question. Some, for instance, find it difficult to understand why a diminished supply of gold should accompany an era of low prices, curtailed production, and a low rate of discount ("cheap money") whilst an increased supply of "the universal money," gold, should accompany an era of high prices, expanding production, and a high rate of discount ("dear money"). All such students would be well advised to read this book, which deals with such questions in a clear and understandable manner. The chapters on "The Quantity Theory of Money," "The Relation between Prices and the Volume of Trade," and on "The Relation between Money, Credit and Prices," are perhaps the most instructive in the book. Our author's conclusion concerning the relation between Prices, the Quantity of Money and the Volume of Trade (p. 52) seem to us abundantly demonstrated; but he certainly weakens his position by including wages under prices, and arguing as if the general principles determining prices also determined "wages," the price of labour. This is not so. They might determine the selling price, or money value, of slaves, in countries where human beings are bought and sold as commodities, but not "the price of labour" nor the general level of wages in a free community. This will be determined by very different principles, by very different conditions, as the majority of our readers will be well aware. Apart from this error, so prevalent amongst economists of the orthodox school, the book is to be highly commended to every student of the Money Question. L. H. B.

*THE STANDARD OF VALUE. By Sir David Barbour. Publishers, Macmillan & Co., Ltd., London. Price, 6s. net.

THE EDWIN BURGESS LETTERS ON TAXATION.*

Some few years ago we reproduced in our columns the main portion of a series of letters on taxation written by a Mr. Edwin Burgess and published in the RACINE ADVOCATE (Racine, Wisconsin, U.S.A.) during the year 1859-60. In this series of letters written some twenty years before Henry George sat down to write PROGRESS AND POVERTY, the author strongly and brilliantly advocates the sterling democratic policy, known as the Taxation of Land Values, so honourably associated with the name of Henry George, which to-day is influencing, if not dominating, the advanced political thought of the world. Thanks to the public spirit of two Racine citizens, Messrs. Hyland Raymond and Wm. S. Buffham, these letters have been re-issued in pamphlet form, together with a short account of the history of the writer, and a selection of his poetry, which, however, is by no means so good as his prose. Apart from the value of the original arguments by which Mr. Burgess supports his case, the pamphlet will be welcomed as an historical document by all living Single Taxers. Burgess was an original pioneer in the realms of political thought, whose work and memory will be cherished by future generations of his fellow-countrymen in Great Britain and of his fellow-citizens in the United States of America.

THE ROAD TO FREEDOM.†

"It is not necessary to make elaborate provision for the continuance of the present civilisation in a way more tolerable to the masses; for this civilisation is based on monopoly of the sources of life, and on industrial and governmental slavery. The one thing needful is to remove the monopoly and the slavery which are corrupting the souls and bodies of both rich and poor right through the social scale. These being gone, we can leave it to a regenerated society to express itself in its own way in a suitable form—(p. 125).

The key-note to the book our friends Josiah and Ethel Wedgwood have contributed to the literature of our movement is to be found in the above words. Unlike the majority of social and political reformers of to-day, their desire is not to patch up the present civilisation so as to make it more tolerable to the masses and more in accordance with the amiable and humane feelings of some of the privileged classes, but rather to ascertain the cause or causes, the primary wrong-doing, that vitiates it throughout, with the view of removing these with as little shock to society as it exists as may be, so as to clear the ground for the development of a civilisation, of a social life, more in accordance with the demands of reason and the dictates of morality. Hence it is that the title of their book is well chosen. For they evidently realise, as we realise, that the one reliable compass humanity possesses to direct the course of social life—which is civilisation—is the principle of Justice; and that Justice involves and leads to Freedom. For there can be no Justice without Freedom, no Freedom without Justice. To use Henry George's inspiring words—"Justice is the natural law—the law of health and symmetry and strength, of fraternity and co-operation."

The first chapter is, perhaps, the most original and most suggestive. Our authors' comments on the tendencies of modern society, and on the function and claims of "the New Priesthood," the sociological expert, with its rooted objection and contemptuous rejection of any consideration

*THE EDWIN BURGESS LETTERS ON TAXATION: FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE RACINE ADVOCATE, RACINE, WISCONSIN, 1859-1860." Published by Wm. S. Buffham, Racine, Wis. A few copies can be had from these offices, price 3d. post paid.

†THE ROAD TO FREEDOM: AND WHAT LIES BEYOND. By Josiah and Ethel Wedgwood. Publishers, C. W. Daniel, Ltd., 3, Amen Corner, London, E.C. Price, cloth bound, 1s. net. From Land Values Publication Department, 376-377 Strand, London, W.C., 1s. 3d. post free.