

ENIGMATIC ENOCH

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WHEN ENOCH POWELL decided to nail his colours to the mast in advocating a policy to halt all immigration, even suggesting a Ministry of Repatriation, it was inevitable—and as an astute politician he must surely have known this—that he would be termed a racist. An examination of his actual speeches and writings, however,—not the extracts taken out of context and given so much publicity by the press—does not bear this out. However, his now famous utterings opened a Pandora's Box of emotions and in the social atmosphere of today, beset with the myths that surround the whole question of race and the prejudices of the past, it is difficult to make an objective assessment of his opinions without one's readers almost waiting for the immigration question to crop up.

Nevertheless it is Mr. Powell's views on current politics that are the subject of a new collection of his speeches and writings.* Much of it is stimulating, amusing, irrefutable and provoking. What the reader will not discover is a coherent political philosophy. Enoch Powell is no Cobden, with the latter's passionate pursuit of peace and free trade and a concern to ultimately solve the land question. And unlike Henry George and many others of his time who swam against the tide of economic orthodoxy, Powell is not moved by an overwhelming desire to attack and solve the inequitable distribution of wealth and to eliminate poverty; while compassionate toward the poor and the deprived, his imagination has nothing more radical to offer than that poor laws should be selectively applied to those in need—which takes us back to Speemhamland and the Enclosures!

Powell is devastatingly logical in his approach to the economics of the market place, and then, the politician reasserting himself, he quite illogically wishes to halt immigration, ignoring the essential requirement that labour, as well as capital, must be free to move where it can be most effectively employed. As one of Enoch Powell's admirers, Professor Milton Friedman of Chicago pointed out, "What has happened to Enoch Powell? His position on labour migration to Britain is quite inconsistent with free market principles." This is equally true in the field of international trade where the existence of tariffs, quotas, etc., and all other forms of economic protection, have failed to enlist Mr. Powell in the cause of free trade and leaves in doubt the point at which his advocacy of the free market ends.

Although this highest of high Tories has such a

**Freedom and Reality*, Batsford, 35s.

stimulating approach to liberal economics, Powell should not be viewed as the new apostle of liberty and freedom. His views on education and the state are more akin to classical Greece and Rome than to the libertarian philosophy of classical liberalism. In other words, Bastiat, Cobden, John Stuart Mill and Lord Acton would not have seen in Powell a kindred spirit. To these great liberals, liberty was all of a piece; frontiers were geographical entities to be freely crossed by men seeking markets in which to buy and sell with as little interference as was deemed necessary to protect the liberties of all. Nationalism is largely a twentieth century disease, and one which is completely alien to the traditions of true liberalism. The free market, important as it is, is only one facet of the free society in which free men seek their own salvation in their own manner, with the sole proviso that their actions do not interfere with the equal freedom of others.

In Enoch Powell's world a hereditary peerage is viewed with a romantic attachment which is completely alien to libertarian principles, and such a class is often sustained in its hereditary privileged position only by the acceptance of a hereditary monopoly of land. It is at this point that true libertarianism and Powellism would clash, and it is as well that those of us who may be temporarily infatuated with the economic sayings of Mr. Powell should be made fully aware of the great divide which separates us from the sage from Wolverhampton.

The book contains a collection of selected speeches (and writings) made by Mr. Powell to various bodies such as the Institute of Office Management, London and District Society of Chartered Accountants, various functions of the Conservative Party, Rotary Clubs, etc., and covers such topics as trade union practice (and abuses) and the need for reform, the absurdities and anachronisms of the Prices and Incomes Policy and the inevitable nonsense of trying to square such inflationary circles, the iniquities visited upon a hapless citizen from government sponsored and implemented monetary inflation and its natural propensity for heaping obloquy and abuse on that same citizen for reacting to inflation—as though it were his fault and not that of his elected representatives.

Much of what Mr. Powell has to say on such topics as defence and foreign affairs seems unexceptional, and sensible for a country no longer the centre of an empire but which still stubbornly clings to its illusions of imperial splendour.

A fair summing up of this book would be to say

that it is good in parts and that some of these parts are superbly argued and in the best traditions of the art of the politics of commonsense and reality. Mr. Powell is right in taking to task his countrymen for their almost neurotic lack of confidence in themselves and their future, but there are too many options left

open in his own case and too many hedged buts for me to accept that he is the man to show us the way. Freedom is the only way, but real freedom is something a good deal more precise and coherent than that offered by J. Enoch Powell, M.P. The new Cobden has yet to appear.