WILEY

Review

Author(s): H. Dendy

Review by: H. Dendy

Source: *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 20 (Dec., 1895), pp. 596-597

Published by: Wiley on behalf of the Royal Economic Society

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2956647>

Accessed: 27-06-2016 21:34 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Wiley, Royal Economic Society are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Economic Journal*

The frontispiece is an engraving of the head of Turgot from the medal in joint honour of Turgot and Adam Smith struck by the Société d'Économie Politique, Paris, in 1876.

HENRY HIGGS

La Loi des Pauvres et la Société Anglaise. Par ÉMILE CHEVALIER.
Paris. Pp. 412.

IT is always interesting to see how the institutions of one's own country strike a foreign critic, and when the critic approaches his subject with a careful and impartial judgment, it should be also instructive. We are apt to regard as inevitable or indispensable those institutions amongst which we have been brought up, and it can hardly fail to modify our views about them when we find outsiders treating them as merely local peculiarities, or experiments which may or may not have proved successful. It is this point of view which M. Chevalier brings before us in his essay on the English Poor Law: he asks the twofold question whether the system either diminishes poverty or alleviates it, and his investigation leads him to the conclusion that it does neither.

The first part of the book is historical, and deals with the origin and history of the Poor Law; and a brief but useful sketch is given of the legislation prior to 1834, with its subsequent modifications. The provisions of the Act of 1601, and its relation to previous acts, are carefully explained; and the conditions shown in which the policy of compulsory aid to the poor had its origin. But in his conclusions as to the way in which the law was carried out, and its effect upon the position of the working classes, M. Chevalier is, we think, somewhat hasty. He apparently takes it for granted that the law was in full force for the whole period between 1601 and 1760, and attributes the diminution in poverty at the latter date to its beneficent working. Now, though history tells us as yet comparatively little of the Poor Law and its working during this period, it is at least certain that for a considerable time it was in almost total abeyance, and that within half a century of its institution the very machinery by which it was worked had fallen to pieces and had to be entirely reconstituted. It has even been suggested that any improvement in this period was due rather to the neglect than to the action of the Poor Law, and this view would, we think, be more in accordance with M. Chevalier's own conclusions as to the working of our modern system.

In describing the present organisation and the state of English society our author is handicapped by the fact that he could not rely upon the information given him by Englishmen; only three people could he find to give unprejudiced answers to his questions (an Englishman living in Paris, 'quelque peu francisé,' a Jewish philanthropist, and Cardinal Manning), all the others were too much concerned in hiding the inferiority of England to speak frankly. This mistrust

seems especially unfortunate in any one who is trying to understand an alien society; but it is characteristic of the whole book, in which by far the greater number of authorities cited are French. It is only when M. Chevalier describes what he has himself seen that we are in touch with reality, and even then his interpretations of what he saw frequently show misunderstandings which could easily have been averted by consultation with any intelligent Englishman versed in the facts. For instance, in the discussion of the poor rate we are told that there is a sharp distinction between those who pay the tax, and those who benefit from it; the former class losing all sympathy with the latter, and the latter becoming a class of pariahs (p. 123). As a matter of fact those familiar with poor neighbourhoods know that if there can be said to be any line between the two classes at all, it is a continually shifting one—that ratepayers are constantly becoming recipients of Poor Law relief, and that one of the commonest pleas of the pauper applicant is that he has been a ratepayer for so long as to have a right to relief. Chapter xxviii., again, is full of misunderstandings due to imperfect experience, and, amongst others, repeats the well-worn fallacy that a strict administration of the Poor Law merely reduces the number of those in receipt of official relief, and that a diminution in the returns does not indicate any diminution in pauperism.

The essay is a comprehensive one, and besides dealing very fully with the financial and administrative aspects of the Poor Law, contains chapters on such varied subjects as emigration, saving, employers and workmen, wages, benefit societies, private charity, &c. Its conclusions are carefully summed up at the end, and are on the whole adverse to the system, of which the sole merits are that it has given an impulse to emigration, and has succeeded in organising medical relief. The dangers involved in ensuring a maintenance to all who are destitute, from whatever cause, are wisely and clearly pointed out.

H. DENDY

Leitfaden der Währungsfrage. Von DR. OTTO ARENDT, Mitglied des Hauses der Abgeordneten. Siebenzehnte neuarbeitete Auflage. (Berlin: Hermann Walther. 1895.)

WHEN a foreign book reaches a seventeenth edition, even the most insular among us will admit that it deserves, at any rate, a passing notice on this side the Channel. Indeed, this anti-monometallist sketch bids fair to rival in its popularity with the German-reading public the famous anti-socialist *Zukunftsbilder* of Herr Eugen Richter. It may, however, at once be stated that Dr. Arendt's work can hardly be admitted as a text-book on the currency question (except for the critical student), owing to its very strong party character. But this very controversial element, which gives a warmth of colouring to the historical chapters almost worthy of Macaulay, and which makes the theoretical part appear like a case for the prosecution.