

### Book Reviews

London to walk the wards in the summer. Contrary to Turner's interpretation, it was, I would suggest, a feature of little importance in the early days. These examples are all evidences from a different historiographic tradition to which Turner, writing in the 1930s, could not address himself; a not altogether unfortunate thing perhaps, for otherwise the *great* might never have appeared in his title.

RAYMOND S. COWHERD, *Political economists and the English poor laws: a historical study of the influence of classical economics on the formation of social welfare policy*, Athens, Ohio, Ohio University Press, 1978, 8vo, pp. xviii, 300, \$15.00.

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Professor Cowherd's book examines the chorus of protest over mounting poverty, and especially over the soaring costs of poor relief, in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England, leading up to the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, arguably the most radical break ever in English administrative policy. He discusses schemes for the moral regeneration of the lower orders, advocated in the 1790s by Evangelicals, such as Wilberforce, and the philanthropically minded, such as George Rose. These bore fruit in, for example, the Rose Act of 1793 which gave protection to the funds of Friendly Societies, with a view to encouraging lower-class thrift (Professor Cowherd deems this "humanitarian", but does not point out that one main aim of the Act was to compile a register of workers' clubs). Professor Cowherd then charts the rise of *laissez-faire* opposition to such humanitarian schemes. Arguing that charity bred, rather than relieved, poverty, the followers of Smith and Malthus deplored government intervention in the workings of the market place, contrary to the "laws of nature". In the 1834 Act, with its doctrine of "less eligibility" and the workhouse, the Classical Economists won the day.

Professor Cowherd's technique is largely to provide a narrative account of the success of the *laissez-faire* lobby. His book is a useful digest of detail, though the main lines of the story have been familiar at least since the magisterial work of Halévy and the Webbs, and J. R. Poynter's *Society and pauperism* (1969) has a much sharper analytic edge. For, beyond his narrative, Professor Cowherd's categories and judgments are simplistic and moralizing: Poor Law interventionists routinely receive the epithet "benevolent" and *laissez-faire* advocates "doctrinaire". There is a deep failure of vision when Professor Cowherd writes (p. xiii): "When the war was resumed against Napoleon in 1803 the nation was no longer divided by ideologies" – as though lower-class opposition had simply been spirited away! And finally the book is vitiated by errors. Some are mistakes of fact (Professor Cowherd thinks that the Isle of Man is one of the Channel Isles, p. 77), but typographical errors and miscitations are plentiful (the bibliography is especially untrustworthy). Edwin Cannan is misspelt in several different ways, and (p. 103) we have Namier editing the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (*recte* Napier)!