The English Landed Estate in the Nineteeth Century

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The administration of English landed estates in the nineteenth century had two aspects, a private and a public one. The first has received no systematic treatment apart from an essay by Professor Edward Hughes on the eighteenth-century land agent which provides an introduction to the subject.\textsuperscript{1} The second, which concerns the role of the state in English agriculture, has also received little attention apart from some contemporary accounts of the functions of the Inclosure Commissioners.\textsuperscript{2} It is hoped, therefore, that a useful purpose will be served by discussing at length both of these aspects of estate administration.

English landed estates were of many sizes, ranging from roughly 1,000 acres to 100,000 acres and more. Although the administration of the small estate will not go unmentioned here, it is with the administration (and the administrators) of the large estate that this study will chiefly deal. This emphasis is in part determined by the important role played by the large estate in the economy of the landed society. In part it is determined by the nature of the historical evidence, for in the course


of its history the large estate is likely to have provided, and to have preserved, an ample archive of accounts and correspondence, thus disposing the historian to lean heavily on its experience.

This study will also tend to be limited chronologically. For the most part it will fall within the period of high farming, the period between the agricultural depression of the 1830's and that of the 1870's. This was the last age—and a great age—of the landowner's predominance in English agriculture. Much of the initiative came from the landowner. State intervention was intended less to supplant him than to assist him. After the 1880's the landowner declined in importance, as the state gradually limited the sphere of his operations, giving its support to the tenant farmer and removing him from the landowner's tutelage.

This book will begin with a sketch of the administrative arrangements found on a number of estates, small and large. This sample of estates will not include all possible arrangements, but it may be representative enough to provide a general framework or anatomy of estate administration. The next three chapters will deal with the activities of the several administrators—landowner, lawyer, and land agent. It is hoped both to discuss the role of each as a class and to provide detailed portraits of a number of individuals. The final chapter will describe something of how the English state in the mid-nineteenth century entered the world of the landed society, making use of its administrators, and seeking to promote agricultural prosperity and efficiency.

Although recent research suggests that the word "depression" conveys too much, the traditional outlines of English agrarian history in the nineteenth century will be adhered to in this study.