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W. E. Vaughan. *Landlords and Tenants in Mid-Victorian Ireland.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994. xxiii + 339 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-820356-8.

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W. E. Vaughan's study of landlord and tenant relations during the period between the Famine and the Land War is the fruit of extraordinary labors. Aside from the voluminous Parliamentary accounts, contemporary pamphlets and treatises that formed the foundation for earlier writers, Vaughan has delved through the records of more than fifty Irish estates as well as the numerous unpublished reports gathered by government departments. From this mountain of data Vaughan outlines the basic themes of Irish agriculture: evictions, rents, tenant-right, estate management, agrarian outrages and politics. The shades of rackrenting landlordism and a desperate tenantry laid by Barbara Solow and James Donnelly, Jr., are not reconjured here (*The Land Question and the Irish Economy, 1870-1903*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971, and The Land and the People of Nineteenth-Century Cork: The Rural Economy and the Land Question_, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975). Vaughan reaffirms the generally accepted view among historians that this was a period of prosperity for Irish agriculture as a whole and tenants in particular.

Vaughan's work is, however, much more than reiteration. Vaughan deserves a wide readership because of his efforts to place the arcana of rent and price movements firmly in the wider context of Irish society. Landlords and tenants are not confined to theoretical models but portrayed within complex human relationships. Having examined those relationships during this period Vaughan concludes that "far from seeing landlords as central to the land system, it is difficult not to see them as peripheral" (p. 218) Overall the power of landlords declined in the face of economic forces which they could not control, political developments which they could not resist, and their own failures and follies which they could not overcome.

The basic themes of landlord and tenant relations are clearly summarized and explained. From the beginning Vaughan emphasizes the public nature of tenurial relationships. The burgeoning government statistics concerning evictions, agrarian crimes, legal transactions and valuation were reported and, more importantly, commented upon by an increasing number of local newspapers. As landlords and tenants formed "the pivots on which a large number of transactions turned," in an agricultural economy this focus is not surprising, but in some ways has probably resulted in an exaggerated perception of landlord power (p. 9.) Through his unparalleled careful examination of estate management and the intricate legal and administrative machinery that arose around the land system, Vaughan discerns considerable constraints on landlord behavior.

In the case of evictions, for example, Vaughan recognizes that before the Land Act of 1870 the singular ability to serve notices to quit (the essential details of which he explains with unmatched clarity), that were all but certain to result in eviction, seemed to be a powerful tool for settling disputes on an estate. Landlords could "threaten poachers, trespassers, drunkards, bad farmers, wife-beaters, and undutiful children," without going to the courts, sometimes for offences that were not punishable under law. Issues other than profit were often involved in evictions and Vaughan cites instances in which landlords put themselves in the invidious position of using their powers to arbitrate in family disputes. This considerable power did not, however, result in large numbers of evictions. Evictions were infrequent between the Famine and the Land War. The evictions that did occur were rarely capricious clearances of solvent tenants but rather the final blow to insolvent tenants who were as likely to be hard-pressed by shopkeepers as the lord of the manor.

Vaughan does not ascribe the infrequency of evictions to either the virtuous nature or the enlightened self-interest of landlords. Evictions were difficult affairs. There were significant legal strictures to be observed and the assistance of an often unwilling constabulary controlled by the central government rather than the local magistracy, was required. The sordid dramas of evictions

were recounted in local newspapers and discussed in Parliament. To make matters worse, with all of these difficulties evictions were not profitable. Not only did the landlord forego any hope of regaining the arrears due from an evicted tenant but it was also often difficult to find suitable new tenants. Vaughan concludes that, "the management of an estate was not the exercise of absolute legal rights." (Vaughan, LANDLORDS AND TENANTS, p. 34)

In general, Vaughan believes that landlords made poor use of the privilege and powers they possessed. They did not compare well with English farmers. They did not improve their estates as they could and should have. Rather than understanding that "uneconomic estate spending" on such things as improved tenant housing "was or should have been the tax that landed property paid for its continued existence" (p. 130), landlords too readily adopted laissez-faire economics. Vaughan believes their only chance of surviving would have been "to pose as conservatives in a rural society and to shelter the tenants from the disruptions of a market economy." (p. 223). There was little room for their privileges in the market system that developed. If landlords were no longer to be, in theory at least, a paternalistic aristocracy, there was little or no reason to maintain singular privileges. Landlords could easily be deprived of these privileges without endangering the market system. In a sense the debts of landlords were to become no different from those of shopkeepers. In fact, they might have become less important.

As far as politics are concerned Vaughan considers two questions. First, he ponders the failure of any significant, organized mass movement against landlordism to emerge between the Famine and the Land War. Not only were tenants satiated by the general prosperity of the period and divided by a number of other issues and concerns, but more fundamentally they also lacked any practical organizational experience. They had only a limited role in local government and few voluntary organizations. There were no schools "for teaching the rudimentary arts of government" (p. 203). Lacking organization is it possible that agrarian violence might represent evidence of widespread, sustained opposition to landlordism? Vaughan carefully considers the evidence and demonstrates that the number of outrages between the Famine and the Land War has been somewhat exaggerated. Furthermore many of the outrages were directed against other tenants and family members rather than landlords and agents. More interesting for Vaughan is the decreasing role of landlords in law enforcement. Landlords went from being "practically the only law enforcement agency during the eighteenth century" to "merely an ancillary of the nineteenth-century constabulary" that was controlled by the central government (p. 165).

Second, Vaughan examines the causes of the Land War. He evaluates previous explanations and concludes that while a number of authors have described important factors in the development of the Land War, there is the real danger that "if the land war is seen as the culmination of this period, its teleological force will draw everything into its ambit" (p. 211). For Vaughan, the two most significant factors in the Land War were the emergence of a capable leadership in the persons of Charles Parnell and Michael Davitt and, most importantly, the relative decline of landlord power. Few landlords were the local despots of popular imagination. Their role in society had been limited by a centrally-controlled constabulary, stipendiary magistrates and the Land Act of 1870. In addition, economic developments, particularly the distribution of agricultural income, made tenants more prosperous. In short, "the land war demonstrated what had already happened – landlords had lost control of their tenants" (p. 163).

With all of its usefulness, particularly its explanation and evaluation of estate management, Vaughan's study has two obvious weaknesses. First, Vaughan has used a wide variety of sources that richly document the landlord and government perspectives but has somewhat neglected those that might cast more light on the attitudes of tenants. Vaughan's oversight is perhaps mitigated by the thorough representation of the tenants' perspective in the works of earlier writers like Pomfret, and the practical fact that it is easier to consider the management of an estate through the central records of the landlord than the many more numerous tenants whose accounts unfortunately have not been extensively collected (John E. Pomfret, *The Struggle for Land in Ireland, 1800-1923*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1930). Yet it would have been interesting to read Vaughan's evaluation of the theories and programmes of activists such as James McKnight, the editor at different times of both the *Banner of Ulster* and *Londonderry Standard* newspapers, whose influential pamphlet *The Ulster Tenants' Claim of Right* (Dublin: James McGlashan, 1848) is not mentioned in the discussion of tenant right or cited in Vaughan's bibliography.

The second weakness is Vaughan's occasional tendency to draw conclusions not borne out by his evidence. For example, Vaughan's speculation that nationalism might have died out had it not been for the land question, did not seem convincing to this reviewer. Surely social

and cultural factors outside Vaughan's stated purview, such as the curricula of primary and secondary schools, would have to be considered (a fine example of such an analysis is Barry Coldrey's *Faith and Fatherland: The Christian Brothers and the Development of Irish Nationalism, 1838-1921*, Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1988). With that said, Vaughan's work is indispensable reading and, it is to be hoped, will prove a lever with which to move the study of land tenure in Ireland beyond unedifying polemics and somewhat sterile economic models.

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