

R E V I E W S

THE PARISH CHEST. By W. E. Tate. (Cambridge University Press; 21s.)

From his experience as a tutor of the Workers' Educational Association, and with his vast enthusiasm for village life and history, Mr Tate has set out to write a textbook to help students in their search for, and study of, local records. There are chapters on Parish registers, Churchwardens' Accounts, Charity Accounts, Glebe Terriers, Vestry Minutes, Petty Constable Accounts, Records of Poor Law, Highways and Enclosures etc. There is a valuable introduction on the organisation of parish life, an uncritical bibliography, a glossary, appendices, and notes.

Mr Tate is more at home in the 18th and 19th centuries, and he has collected his material with care and industry, and presented them in a readable form. But the earlier period is treated with less knowledge and sympathy and some bias. He gives the impression (p. 43) that the only records kept before the Reformation were odd names jotted in the margins of service books. Hume considered the medieval carelessness about parish registers a 'barbarous deficiency'. Mr Tate thinks Hume too lenient, but he does not explain why the keeping of local records should be made the touchstone of civilisation. There was little need of baptismal registers where everyone was baptised at birth, and scarcely ever left his village. Registers of death were considered more important in an age that believed in prayers for the dead, and the obit books were kept with considerable care. There is nothing in later registers to compare, for minuteness of detail, with the account of the burial of the Lancastrian warriors at Tewkesbury in 1471. (cf. Kingsford's *English Literature in the 15th Century*). If such documents are now fragmentary and exceptional, it is not the monks who made them so, but the Tudor despots who used them as salvage and ballast.

More careless and misleading is the treatment of vagrancy (p. 189). Here the impression is given that all the vile laws were made before the Reformation, and that the infamous 'Act concerning punishment of beggars and vagabonds' of 22 Hen. VIII (1530-1) was a step towards more humane legislation. Yet it was this act which first ordered the vagrant 'to be tied to the end of a cart naked, and to be beaten with whips . . . till his body be bloody' etc., and the laws continued to grow harsher for nearly a hundred years.

But Mr Tate's shortcomings are even more evident on the previous page. While he acknowledges the almsgiving of the clergy, he finds instances of 'wholesale and indiscriminate charity being a positive harm to the population, deadening the sense of personal responsibility, sapping the moral fibre of the labouring population' etc. His only authority is Thomas Fuller, who was born in 1654. Nor is Fuller's

argument (that beggars abound where abbeys once stood) particularly impressive. As well argue that weeds in a deserted garden prove that gardening encourages weeds.

It is a pity that a book so full of good things should betray this unscholarly prejudice. There is so much of interest: some of it is merely curious, but some of real historical value, like the table on p. 296, showing the incidence of illegitimacy, that should give one furiously to think. And how many people know that within two years of the excommunication of Elizabeth, the church bells of England were rung to celebrate the victory of Lepanto?

GODFREY ANSTRUTHER, O.P.

THE SPIRIT OF CATALONIA. By J. Trueta. (Cumberlege, Oxford University Press; 8s. 6d.)

The revival of a national consciousness among the Catalans a century ago coincided with the final attempt to unify and centralise Spain on the model of France. Since then the 'Catalan question' has been almost comparable in Spain to the Irish question in Britain before the Treaty. Failure to solve the problem—the settlement of 1932 was not a national but a party solution, and was therefore short-lived—has aggravated intransigence on both sides to such an extent that the choice may soon lie between two extremes: either the maintenance of national unity by the total repression of regionalist aspirations or the disintegration of Spain into separate states. Catalonia is sufficiently different from the rest of Spain to justify the desire for some measure of self-government, and it is therefore fitting that a sympathetic account of these aspirations should be presented to English readers. Though this book, by a distinguished Catalan surgeon, comes to fill a definite need it cannot, unfortunately, be recommended either as a fair statement of the problem or as a reliable historical guide. It is not easy for a nationalist feeling that considers itself thwarted by an alien domination to view itself dispassionately: there is the danger that a legitimate bias may become so disproportionate as to magnify insignificant points and, in all sincerity, to distort its very basis.

Dr Trueta's survey of Catalonia's history and of her contribution to civilisation is based on the initial assumption that nationality and a distinctive culture are conterminous with a language. One need instance only Switzerland and Great Britain (or, within Britain, Scotland) to point out that this is highly questionable. From this assumption certain political and historical distortions follow.

The present Catalan linguistic area comprises Catalonia proper, the region of Valencia and the Balearic Islands. It is implied throughout the book that all three regions constitute 'Catalonia'. But separatist feeling is confined to the first-named only: Valencia and the Balearics refused to share in the 1932 Statute of Autonomy. This fact, which Dr Trueta ignores, very considerably weakens his 'anti-Spanish' case. While the political frontiers of Catalonia are thus enlarged, its