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A Reprint of Economic Tracts

Edited by

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on

Several Queries Proposed to the Public

1735-37

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INTRODUCTION

In the development of economic thought as in the history of philosophy, Berkeley may be described as "the successor of Locke and the predecessor of Hume."¹ The continuity is less apparent with respect to specific doctrines than in the matter of that common sense rationalism which distinguishes the best English economic thought of the eighteenth century. Berkeley sought to formulate no system—in his economic very much less even than in his philosophical writings: "What I have done," he wrote to a friend, "was rather with a view of giving hints to thinking men who have leisure and curiosity to go to the bottom of things and pursue them in their own minds."² It was this quality in the most important of Berkeley's economic writings which led Sir James Mackintosh, in an oft-quoted passage, to declare: "Perhaps the *Querist* contains more hints, than original, still unapplied in legislation and political economy, than are to be found in any equal space."³

Professor Fraser's scholarly studies⁴ have made accessible the details of Berkeley's remarkable career. Born in 1685 in Ireland of English extraction, he was educated at Trinity College, Dublin. He remained at Trinity in various academic offices until he was twenty-eight, before which time he had written his three important philosophical works. He came to England in 1713, was warmly received in literary and political circles and spent the next seven years in travel on the continent and residence in London. In 1721 he returned to Ireland, receiving preferment in the church, and developing that curious religious-educational enthusiasm which culminated in the project of a college, to be located in the Bermudas, for the training of missionaries to convert "the savage Americans." In vain pursuit of this fantasy he spent three years, 1728-1831 in America, living in and near

¹ Balfour, "Biographical Introduction" to "The Works of George Berkeley," edited by George Sampson (London, 1897-8).

² See "Preface" (ix) to the 1901 (Oxford) edition of Professor Fraser's "The Works of George Berkeley."

³ *Ibid.*, vol. iv, p. 420.

⁴ "Life and Letters of George Berkeley" (Oxford, 1871), being vol. 4 of "Works."

Newport, Rhode Island, and finding some solace in domestic calm and philosophical study for the bitterness of disappointment as to his major aspiration. Two unhappy years in London followed, but in 1734 he was given the bishopric of Cloyne in the south of Ireland, and there for the next eighteen years he flourished as theologian, metaphysician, social philosopher and idealist. In 1752 he left Ireland to spend his closing days, in accordance with a long cherished dream, in Oxford; but only a few months remained, for the end came with unexpected suddenness early in 1753.

The "Querist" was probably written very soon after Berkeley came to Ireland as Bishop of Cloyne, while his impressions of social and economic conditions were still vivid and clear cut. The peculiar stylistic device employed—terse, trenchant interrogations—was not entirely new in economic writing. Petty had used it, notably in "Quantulumcunque" in 1682, and Bellers in "Essays about the Poor" in 1690. Berkeley himself had appended some sixty-seven "Queries" to the "Analyst," published in 1734, "to the end that you may more clearly comprehend the force and design of the foregoing remarks, and pursue them still farther in your own meditations."⁵ It was doubtless the success attending this polemic that led Berkeley again to make use of the interrogative form the following year when, newcomer and keen observer, he was fairly tingling with impressions as to the causes of Ireland's distress and the possibilities of improvement.⁶

The "Querist" originally appeared in 1735 as an anonymous contribution. A continuation, designated as "Part II," was issued in 1736, and a further installment, "Part III," in 1737. Berkeley records that his old friend, Dr. Samuel Madden of Dublin—himself a considerable influence in the economic improvement of Ireland—"edited" the work;⁷ but the extent of the service is not determinable. The brochures although attracting very considerable attention, seemed to have been issued in small editions and soon became scarce. In 1746 Dean Gervais "could not find one in the shops, for my Lord Lieutenant [Lord Chesterfield],

⁵ "Works" (ed. Fraser; 1871), vol. iii, p. 290.

⁶ The literary form of the "Querist" was frequently followed or imitated in Irish and English economic writing of the eighteenth century; see, for example, "Answers to the Queries in defense of the Malt Distillery" (London, 1760), and "A Volunteer's Queries, in Spring, 1780; humbly offered to the Consideration of all Descriptions of Men in Ireland" (Dublin, 1780).

⁷ "Works" (ed. Fraser; 1871), vol. iv, p. 247.

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at his desire," and the want could only be supplied by Berkeley's direct intervention.⁸

It is possible that this circumstance encouraged Berkeley to print a second edition of the "Querist" in 1750, distinguished rather inadequately as with "some few queries added, and many omitted," and with his name on the title page. A recrudescence of interest followed, Foulis in 1751 adding it to the economic reprints—Law, Child, Gee—which had been issued by his Glasgow press, and Berkeley in 1752 including it in the "Miscellany" of his own writings. Various reprints of these 1750-52 editions have since appeared.

The first edition of the "Querist—the significance of which is thus very much more than of bibliophilic interest—has always been one of the rarest economic tracts. Massie's "Catalogue" only refers to "Part I," and in 1871, in editing Berkeley's "Works," Professor Fraser was unable to come upon a copy until the virtual completion of his labor, when the discovery of a copy in the library of the Royal Irish Academy permitted a *variorum* reference thereto in the Appendix, made more ample in the second and revised edition published in 1901.⁹ An exact reprint of the "Querist" as originally issued was included in Mr. George Sampson's excellent three-volume edition of Berkeley's writings published in 1897-8.

In the present reprint the title-pages of the original edition have been reproduced in facsimile and the original pagination indicated.

BALTIMORE, July, 1910.

⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. iv, p. 307.

⁹ Other copies are of course extant, at least two such being in the United States. One of these is in the "Wagner Collection" in the library of Yale University, and this copy has been, with very great courtesy, made available for the present reprint. Another copy, very recently acquired, is in the private library of Professor Seligman of Columbia University.