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A N
E S S A Y,

Proving, That

Inclosing *Commons*,

A N D

Common-field-Lands,

Is contrary to the INTEREST of the

N A T I O N :

In which some Passages in the *New System of Agriculture*, by J. Laurence M. A. and in the *Duty and Office of a Land-Steward*, by E. Laurence, *Land-Surveyor*, are examined.

Dedicated to *James Oglethorpe Esq;* Member of Parliament for *Haslemere* in the County of *Surrey*.

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M A 223

1871
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Member of PARLIAMENT for
HASLEMERE in the County of *Surrey*.

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versation with him,

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Humbly presented

By John Cowper.

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and of the Georgia Colony
in 1733

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London

by John Oglethorpe

A N
E S S A Y

ON INCLOSING

Commons, &c.

TH E Numbers of industrious People are the Riches of a Nation, and therefore whatever tends to discourage their Industry, and reduce their Number, is detrimental to the Publick. Let us consider, if *Inclosing Commons*, and *Common-field Lands*; has not such a Tendency.

IN those *Parishes* that have *Commons* belonging to them, the Poor and the Rich have a Right of *Commonage* one with another. But when these *Commons* come to be inclosed and converted into *Pasture*, the Ruin of the
Poor

Poor is a natural Consequence; they being bought out by the Lord of the *Manor*, or some other Person of Substance. For when a *Common*, that has been the main Support of perhaps forty or fifty poor Families, and some of them large ones too, is thus taken from them, they will certainly be thereby render'd incapable of maintaining themselves as usual in that *Parish*: This will put them under a Necessity of forsaking their old Habitations; (which in their mean Circumstances must be a great Loss and Hardship) and wandring about till they can find some other Place, where they may enjoy their former Priviledges, without which they cannot subsist. But if these *Inclosures* become general, whither must they go? Where will they find a resting Place? Or how will they get their Bread? They must become Vagabonds, be driven from one County to another; be reduced to Beggary or Starving; or be forced to leave their native Land, in Hopes of meeting with better Treatment in a strange Country.

IN most *Open-field Parishes* there are, I believe, taking them at a medium, forty *Farmers* and double the Number of *Cottagers*, who hold their Lands in common, and have Right of *Commonage* one with another. Let us suppose that each *Farmer* employs six labouring Persons besides himself and his Wife; and allow four Persons to each *Cottage*, which in all is six Hundred and forty Persons, Men, Women and Children: These make up a *Country-Town* or *Village*, and besides their Employment in *Husbandry*, carry on large Branches of the *Woollen* and *Linnen Manufactories*, and are in general the Consumers of our own Produce; for they hardly ever come to *London* to buy Commodities of a *Foreign Growth* and *Manufacture*, they are no Customers for *French Brocades*, or *Flanders Lace*, or the unmeaning *Aires* and *Recitativo's* of an *Italian Eunuch*: And shall so many honest useful Subjects, so many industrious pains-taking Families be driven from their Settlements, and sent to beg their Bread among Strangers, meerly to humour

the insatiate Avarice, the Pride or the Luxury of a few, whose Fortunes are already too large for their Souls?

WE have been told, *That though a Parish is inclosed, yet the Poor are under no Necessity of removing for Want of Work, when Hedging and ditching will employ so many Hands.*

BUT this is so contrary to constant Experience, that it hardly deserves to be taken Notice of. I my self, within these thirty Years past, have seen above twenty Lordships or Parishes inclosed, and every one of them has thereby been in a Manner depopulated. If we take all the inclosed *Parishes* one with another, we shall hardly find ten Inhabitants remaining, where there were an Hundred before the Inclosures were made. And in some *Parishes*, a Hundred and twenty Families of *Farmers* and *Cottagers*, have in a few Years been reduced to Four, to Two, nay, and sometimes to but one Family.

ly. And if this Practice of *Inclosing* continues much longer, we may expect to see all the great Estates ingross'd by a few Hands; and the industrious *Farmers* and *Cottagers* almost intirely rooted out of the Kingdom. Raising *Hedges*, and Sinking *Ditches* may indeed employ several Hands for a Year, or hardly so long, but when that is once over, the Work is at an End; for three or four old Men in a *Parish*, are sufficient to keep them in Repair, and the rest must remove to *Open-field Parishes* if they hope for farther Employment. Hence it is, that the Owners of inclosed Lands, if they have but a little Corn to get in, are already forced to send several Miles to those *Parishes* for Harvest-Men: But whither will they send if all the *Commons* and *Open-fields* come to be inclosed? And how will their Lands be cultivated, when they know not where to find Husbandmen?

IT has been said too, *That in Open-fields, there is little left to be seen but a few Shepherds, which is no great Sign of Industry.*

IN an *Open-field* Parish where forty *Farmers* have dwelt, I have seen no less than forty Plows, and to every Plow there has been two Servants, and a Team of four Horses: Nay, some of the *Farmers* have had two Plows and two Teams; so that my Computation is very moderate, if I reckon Employment for but Eighty Servants, and a hundred and sixty Horses, and this in the Winter Time too; and when they are not at Plow, they carry Dung, and other Sorts of *Manure*: Besides which, there are usually about forty Flocks of *Sheep*, with a Shepherd and sometimes a Boy too, to attend each Flock: I may therefore allow sixty Persons at least, to look after these *Sheep*, which with the Plowmen, make up a hundred and forty *Servants*, all employed in one *Open-field Parish*.— I have been informed by an eminent *Surveyor*, that one third of all the Land of *England*, has been inclosed within these Eighty Years. And if this be true, as I believe it is, then at a moderate Computation we have Twenty Thousand *Farmers*,
and

and as many *Cottagers* less now than we had so many Years ago.

It is farther objected, *That we have so great Plenty of Corn, that it is reduced to an extream low Price, which is a Sign we have too much Arable already, and that therefore there ought to be less Tillage and more Pasture:*

I answer, It does not appear, that we have more Corn now, than we had some Years ago; but it may be remembred, that we formerly exported large Quantities to Foreign-Markets, which are now chiefly supply'd by others, while we are discouraging the Growth of it, to the Ruin of our own laborious Husbandmen.

IN *Open Countries*, where there is so much Employment for Husbandmen and other industrious Poor, the Wear and Tear and Consumption must be very great: So when these Lands are inclosed, and these poor Working People

People are forc'd to seek some other Place of Residence, it must be a great Loss to *Carpenters, Wheelwrights, Millwrights, Smiths, Shoemakers, Taylors,* and other Handicraftsmen, as well as to *Shopkeepers* and others; not only in the *Towns* and *Villages* where these Husbandmen dwelt, but in the *Market-Towns* adjacent: and this makes the Country People complain so of the Times, and the Badness of their *Markets*.

Dr. *John Laurence* in his *New System of Agriculture*, says pag. 45. " I cannot but admire, the People of *England* should be so backward to inclose; which would be worth more to us, than the *Mines* of the *Indies* to the King of *Spain*. *Inclosure* increases the Rent of Land sometimes ten fold; and yet it is believed, that almost one half Part of the Kingdom are *Commons*: But to be sure, a third of all the Kingdom is what we call *Common-fields*; and if so, then the raising the Rent of *these*, will
 " vastly

“ vastly enrich the Kingdom, though we
 “ abate eight of the ten fold.”

THE Good of the Whole ought constantly to be preferr'd to that of a Part, and the private Interest of a few, give Way to the publick Advantage: *Inclosures* are a present Benefit to some particular Persons; but then a great Number of Families must be ruin'd, which will be a prodigious Loss to the Kingdom; whatever Improvement is made while the *Parish* continues to be an *Open-field*, a hundred Families may partake of the Advantage; but when inclosed, the Benefit is confin'd to two or three. Let us suppose, that six *Open-field Farms*, let to as many *Farmers* at 50*l.* a Year each, come to be inclosed, we will allow this 300*l.* a Year may be thus made 600*l.* This indeed will be a great Advance, but then the Labour of 6 *Farmers* and 12 *Cottagers*, who with their Wives, Children and Servants, (as before computed) make ninety six Persons, will be certainly lost; and
 such

such a Loss it will be to the Publick, that the 300*l.* gain'd by one Family, will never make it up.

BUT farther, if the *Farmer* who rents 50*l.* a Year, does not make 150*l.* a Year of it, with his Stock and Labour, he cannot maintain his Family, and pay his Labourers, his Tradesmen and his Landlord. Thus the six *Farmers* will make 900*l.* a Year of their *Open-field Farms*, which is 300*l.* a Year more (to the Kingdom) than is likely to be made of it when inclosed; besides 100*l.* a Year to the *Excise*, if a considerable Part of it is Barly-Land, which we may well allow. Thus the King and the Subject will lose 400*l.* a Year in 600*l.* by these *Inclosures*; and at the same Time, a great Number of industrious People will be rendered utterly useles, and from being an unspeakable Advantage to the Nation, must either be driven out of it, or become an intolerable Charge to it.

THE *Poor* will be the immediate Sufferers by such proceeding; but the Time must come, when the *Rich* will feel the Effects of it: For however Self-sufficient these Gentlemen may think themselves, they will inevitably find, that their Grandure cannot be supported without the Assistance of the *Farmers* and *Cottagers*: Many have already had their Farms thrown upon their own Hands, and not a few have thereby been necessitated to sell their Estates to a great Disadvantage. Suffer me to add, that the *inclosing* more Lands, will naturally sink the Value of those already inclosed, and this perhaps may be a prevailing Argument with some who are not extremely zealous for the publick Good, when they think their own private Interest is not concerned. Thus will Estates, that were so much improved by *Inclosures*, be unavoidably reduced in a few Years to their former Value, and perhaps much less.

THE Dr. proceeds. “ If some (says he in pag. 46.) “ should urge, that the Product
 “ will be Grass, but no Corn for the *Poor*,
 “ the contrary is notorious in all inclosed
 “ Counties: For we see plowed Land in In-
 “ closures almost every where. But if *Pa-
 “ sture* should be thereby increased, will
 “ not Wool and Skins produced by an Acre
 “ of *Pasture*, make greater Employment for
 “ the *Poor*, than the Tillage of such an Acre
 “ can do? ”

IF the Product is not Grass, to what Purpose do they inclose? Certainly their Design is (as he tells us) to make more Rent of their Land, and this is done, not by letting it to be plowed, but by laying it down for Grass; for the *Grasser* or the *Dairy-man* will give an advanced Price for it; whereas if it was let for plow'd Land, it would not fetch above half so much.

As to *Wool* in the inclosed *Pasture*, it is commonly almost all sent up to *London-Market*,

ket, where it comes into the Hands of the *Butchers*, and affords no more Employment for the *Poor*, than the *Wool* of the *Open-field* Lands; for here, though the Flocks of *Sheep* are smaller, they are sheared several Times; so that in the whole, there is rather more *Wool* produced here, than in those *Parishes* that are inclosed. Let us now consider the Difference betwixt *Arable* and *Pasture*. On an Acre of good inclosed *Pasture Land*, we will allow the Beast to be in a Year twenty five Shillings the better in Fat, and this without any Labour to the Grasier or Landlord. And that on an Acre of *Arable*, twenty Bushels of *Wheat* may be produced, which valued at 3s. a Bushel, comes to 3*l*. The same Acre, which was let at 6*s*. and 8*d*. when for Corn, is let for 20*s*. when inclosed. Not that the Land brings more, but because the Charge of getting in the Crop is less: For the Charge of plowing three Times, harrowing and dunging, is 50*s*. or more, which is earned by the Labour of several poor People, and divided among them: But in *Pa-*

slave, 255. goes all to one Man who is the Landlord or Grasier, and this without any Labour at all.

THE Dr. adds in the same page, “ With-
 “ out all Question, Improvements, of what
 “ Kind soever, make Riches and Plenty :
 “ And Plenty calls together Inhabitants,
 “ and People to consume it : And even the
 “ Overplus is demanded in *Foreign Trade* ;
 “ which naturally tends to maintain the
 “ Grandure and Magnificence of some, and
 “ the Luxury and Intemperance of others.”

I think the Dr. might have excepted those Improvements that are not for, but against the General Good of the Nation, such as may bring a present Profit to one Man, and at the same Time ruin a hundred Families !

PLENTY indeed call together Inhabitants, but how must this be produced without *Farmers* and their *Servants*, who by their continual

nual Labour provide those Necessaries, without which we cannot subsist. Therefore if these are still discouraged, by continuing this Practice of making *Inclosures*; we may in Time be obliged to send for Corn from abroad, instead of having an Overplus of our own to export.

IN pag. 47. the Doctor says farther, “ So plain is it, that *Inclosure* is the greatest Encouragement to good *Husbandry*, and a Remedy for *Beggary*, the *Poor* being employ’d by the continual Labour that is bestowed thereon; which is doubly repaid, as I have observed, by the fruitful Crop it annually yields.”

INCLOSURE is so far from being the greatest Encouragement to good Husbandry, that on the contrary, nothing is a greater Encouragement to *Idleness* and *Sloth*; for who among the Country People live lazier Lives than the *Grasier* and the *Dairy-man*?

What

What has the *Grasfer* to do, but to go about the inclosed Grounds, and look at his *Sheep*, or feel on his *Bullocks*, and then saunter Home again? And what is the *Dairy-man's* Labour, but to call his *Cows* together to be milked? He keeps a couple of Men, or Maids to milk these Cows, and to churn his *Butter* and press his *Cheese*: He employs one or two Horses and a little Cart to carry his *Hay* in the Summer. As to their *Hay-making*, they hardly ever have Hands enough of their own to make it, but are forced to send to the *Open-field Parishes* for Help, and what *Hay* they do make, is to fodder their Cattle in Winter. These are Facts that are well known in most Counties, though perhaps not in all. But as to the *Poor's* being employed in the inclosed Pasture Fields, no Man living ever saw any such Thing; and therefore it is not *Pasture*, but *Arable*, that must keep them from begging and starving too. I might add, that the large Hedges generally surround the Grass near them, so that the

Cattle

Cattle dont care to eat it, and the annual Crop is more than lost this Way.

EDWARD LAWRENCE in his *Duty and Office of a Land Steward*, under *Article XIV.* says, "A Steward should not forget to make
 " the best Enquiry into the Disposition of
 " any of the *Freeholders*, within or near any
 " of his Lord's Manors, to sell their Lands,
 " that he may use his best Endeavours to
 " purchase them at as reasonable a Price as
 " may be, for his Lord's Advantage and
 " Convenience.—— Still persuading the
 " vigilant Steward to be zealous for his Lord's
 " Sake, in purchasing all the *Freeholders* out
 " as soon as possible, especially in such Ma-
 " nors where Improvements are to be made by
 " inclosing Commons and common Fields."

Is not this telling us, that a trusty Steward ought to be divested of all Humanity? That he must be zealous to take Advantage of the Weakness, the Misfortunes, the Distress,

itrefs, the Necessity of the poor *Freeholders*; that so he may purchase their Lands at a Price below their real Value, in Order to promote the separate Interest of his wealthy Lord? Sure Christianity teaches us better Things! Christianity teaches us Compassion and universal Benevolence; and not to watch, to seek for, and to take all Opportunities of supplanting and ruining the *Poor*. I know no Set of Men, that toil and labour so hard as the smaller Farmers and Freeholders, none who are more industrious to encrease the Product of the Earth; none who are more serviceable to the Commonwealth; and consequently none who better deserve Encouragement: And yet these are the Men that are to be sent a starving as soon as possible. Thus *Industry* is discountenanced, *Parishes* are depopulated, and many Families reduced to One.

THIS Author under the same Article says.
 “ If the Steward be a Man of good Sense,
 “ he

“ he will find a Necessity of making Use of
 “ it all, in rooting out *Superstition* from a-
 “ mongst them, as what is so great a Hin-
 “ drance to all *Noble Improvements*.”

By *Superstition*, I suppose he means that general Observation which is made in several Counties, that *He who incloses a Common or Common-field, either seldom lives to see the Hedges grow up, or at most, that the Estate seldom remains in the Family's Name many Years.* This has indeed frequently been seen, but whether it is constantly the Case or not, I don't see what Harm such an Opinion of poor innocent People (who have grounded their Belief on common Observation) can be of to any Person whatever, and if it any Way contributes towards preventing Inclosures, (which our Author seems conscious of) I think it is of great Benefit to the Publick.—These busy Surveyors seem to value themselves much upon their Vigilance, to discover all the little Advantages that Tenants have gained by their honest Endeavours to live, and save a small Matter to bring up
 D their

their Families. But if the Methods they prescribe were always followed, the Tenants would be render'd incapable of getting their Bread: Nor would the Case be otherwise with Tradefmen, if a Surveyor was suffer'd to lay open the Secret of their Business.

THE last Quotation I shall make from this Author, is under Article xxiv, where he says, “ The Steward should ever be upon his Watch, to prevent (if possible) the Freeholder’s inclosing any Part of their Land in the Common Fields, which commonly ends in lessening the Tillage and increasing the Pasture.”

I am afraid this Gentleman’s Zeal against the poor Freeholders, is so great, that it makes him forget himself: He would have them debarr’d from having a little more Priviledge than heretofore: and in giving his Reason for it, the Truth comes out unawares, for he tells us, that *Inclosing commonly ends in lessening*

lessening the Tillage and encreasing the Pasture. And is not this the very Thing that I am contending for? Have I not insisted on it, that if any Person goes about inclosing *Commons*, or *Common-field Lands*, it is with a View of converting *Tillage* into *Pasture*, or else it would never answer the End propos'd? Now if inclosing a small Part by the *Freeholder*, is a Damage to the Publick; will inclosing the whole be an Advantage, because it is done by a *Lord*? But some Persons are fond of placing a pleasing Prospect of Profit before the Eyes of the Great, in Order to gain upon them some other Way.

IT is to be hoped, if we suffer no more of our *Open-field Land* and *Commons* to be inclosed, we may keep what People we have, and encourage them in their Industry to maintain our own *Manufactures*, which of late have been too much neglected. The Decay of our *Woolen Manufactory* has been greatly owing to our discouraging the industrious *Poor*; for *Wool* was never at so low a

Price in the Memory of Man, as it now is, and has been for three Years past: I have heard some Gentlemen say, that the Price of *Wool* would hardly pay for Washing and Shearing; but this is of the smaller Sort of *Sheep*: And the Price of Spinning, which employs two thirds of the *Poor* of this Kingdom, is proportionably low. It is allowed by all, that the Encrease of the *Woolen Manufacture* is for the Good and Welfare of the Kingdom; and I believe it will not be denied, that the Encrease of Corn is of great Benefit too. But if this Method of Inclosing goes on, the *Poor* will not only be depriv'd of immediate Employment in *Husbandry*, but likewise of Work in the *Staple Manufactury* of this Nation. Where there are great Numbers of laborious *Husbandmen*, there you will find great Numbers of *Spinners*; and there it is worth the *Woolcomber's* while to supply them with constant Work: There they enjoy a mutual Help and Conveniency, and encourage one another in Industry. In some Counties the Women and Children are continually employ'd in spinning and carding

Wool;

Wool; but in others, where they have great Quantities of *Wool*, there is little or no Manufacture going forward, but they send their *Wool* to be manufactur'd at large Towns and *Open-field Parishes*, where the People are numerous,

THUS I think I have made it evident, that if we continue to inclose, it must end in the Ruin of the Kingdom: I foresee with Sorrow, what a miserable Condition we must be in, when all our Inland Towns and Villages are deserted, the *Markets* reduced to almost nothing, *Handicraft Trades* at a Stand, our *Manufactures* rejected, and our *Wool* become of little Use or Worth, and lie dead on our Hands. This will give Encouragement to that vile Practice of Running it to other Nations that are more populous; and we may stand amazed to see them carry on a prodigious Trade, when they have but little *Wool* of their own, while we with the greatest Plenty of it, have little or nothing to do,

To

To conclude, If any one can shew me, where an Inclosure of a *Common* or *Open-field Parish* has been made, and not at least half the Inhabitants gone, then I will throw up the Argument: For in those few Instances that I have seen, which may be about twenty or thirty Inclosures, the Case has been as I have before related; for the Truth of which I can appeal to several Thousands in this Nation. Some may imagine it an Advantage to keep the *Poor* out of their Parish; but where there are many Labourers, Day-work is cheapest, so that what they think is lost one Way is gained another: I take it to be more for the Advantage of the Publick, for three Men to work for six Pence a Day each, than for one Man to have Eighteen Pence.

It is the Constancy of Employment that is the Pleasure of Life, and the poor labouring People are as cheerful in the Enjoyment of their little, as the Rich in the Possession of all their Affluence.

F I N I S.

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