

of why this should have been the case. Furthermore, although the European nobility as a whole was organized in a hierarchical fashion, it evolved in an exceptional manner in Russia because of the concept of service, in Poland because of the concept of noble equality, and in England because the gentry, though noble [sic], was easily confused with the bourgeoisie. Labatut also believes that the position of the French nobility of the robe was at variance with the European norm. To resolve the dispute between Bluche, who asserted the equality of all nobles whether of the robe or the sword, and Mousnier, who saw a marked difference between the two based on social condition and *mentalité* (though not legal status), he suggests that in addition to robe and sword families there was a third group of families that embraced both robe and sword. He seems to regard this as a 17th and 18th century phenomenon, but I suspect that a significant percentage of the more important offices were held by men of noble ancestry as early as the 15th century.

In the second part of the book Labatut deals with the fundamental values of the European nobility. Here he stresses the pride of birth and the pursuit of glory that characterized the class. Though there were individual exceptions he sees the nobility as being endogamous. In Eastern countries the crown protected the nobles' property, but even in the West where it did not, he believes that their financial difficulties have been exaggerated. He also quite properly attacks the cliché that the nobility managed their estates in an incompetent fashion. In the third part of the book Labatut argues that as time passed there was a tendency for the most marked differences between nobles to be effaced and for the order as a whole to become a closed caste except in England. This rejection of the leading members of the third estate at a time when there was a growing egalitarianism among the intellectuals, he sees as one of the causes of the French Revolution. Before this happened, however, the nobility had become a truly international institution whose leading members shared a French-inspired common culture and were welcome in the various courts of Europe.

Perhaps the most severe criticism that one can level at the author is that he centres too much on the upper nobility when he deals with the values and relative unity of that order. It is my impression that minor nobles were less wedded to the pursuit of glory, less inclined to engage in affairs of honour, and more certainly less cultured. His almost total unwillingness to explain why the nobility of the various countries differed and why the nature of the order changed is annoying to say the least. The economic and other changes that were taking place in Europe during the period are largely ignored.

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PETER CLARK. — *English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution; Religion, Politics, and Society in Kent, 1500-1640*. Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1977. Pp. xiii, 504.

Peter Clark's *English Provincial Society* is one of the first in the well established genre of shire studies to treat the early sixteenth century as well as the latter part. Equally rare is its analysis of the role of the towns within the shire. Even if it had not been well done, Clark's work would have had to be considered as important; happily for us all, he has written a good book as well as an important one.

Clark traces for us the development of politics, religion, and society in Kent from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the sitting of the Long Parliament, and appends a tantalizing epilogue suggesting lines of development up to 1720. He writes throughout with an awareness of the traditions and controversies which line his chosen path, and this appears to account for the few breaks in chronological narrative taken for discursive chapters on education and on the legal profession.

In Clark's view, the political consensus of the shire in the opening years of the century favoured at almost any cost a return to political stability under an established dynasty. With Wolsey's accomplishments, and even more with his fall, came the establishment of the desired order, and of the viable political infrastructure — both formal and informal — which had been sought. So strong was this desire for stability, Clark assures us, that it withstood both the "lack of political imagination and sheer incompetence" (p. 86) of Edwardian rule and the communications gap between court and country wrought by the unpopularity of Marian policy. In the end, the return of bipartisan stability was encouraged rather than prevented by the perceived dangers of extremism between 1548 and 1554. Harmony and prosperity returned and continued almost unabated from Elizabeth's accession to the 1590s, and links between court and the officials of the shire — to the detriment of municipal and other franchises — reached their greatest point of development. But when the Elizabethan system began to crack under the strains of patronage, inflation, and the costs of war in the last decade of the century, the county began to suffer discord, deprivation, and disruption of established patterns of authority. Though temporarily repaired in the early years of James, the final disruption of harmony within the county community, and between it and the court, came in the late 1610s. By the 1620s the radical elements in the county displayed widespread opposition to the crown, and the rule of crown-supported oligarchies came under direct fire in the towns. Shire officials found themselves in the nutcracker of pressures and conflicting loyalties which Professor Barnes described for Somerset some years ago.

Clark's discussion has been carried out with an obvious caution in regard to the historiographical traditions relating to the period, and says little of recent inroads which have been made upon them. The judgements of Pollard on the unpopularity of Wolsey, of Dickens on the origins of the English Reformation, of everyone from Pollard to Elton on the tumult and sterility of the mid-century, and of Neale, Read, and others on the patronage-induced equilibrium of Elizabethan politics, have generally been confirmed rather than questioned. When novelty does appear, and it is not altogether absent, we are frequently enjoined not to make too much of it. Such respect for those who have written before is entirely legitimate and even praiseworthy, but there are moments in Clark's work when one wishes for some more vivid sign of creative doubt.

One ought not be too critical of such a rare event as the treatment of a particular shire in the opening years of the sixteenth century, but this chapter provides several occasions upon which reverence for traditional interpretations may have gotten the better of the objective use of evidence. Thomas Hendley's *failure* to note signs of instability between 1547 and 1558 is ingeniously employed to support the implication that there *was* such turmoil (p. 69); Kent is alleged to suffer from contraction of its cloth industry *despite* the acknowledgement of "no direct evidence" (p. 71); despite their dubious value for such purposes, testamentary preambles are used almost exclusively as indications of personal religious conviction (p. 76); and a single, quite partial, source attesting to "about 10,000" peasants rioting at Sittingbourne in 1550 is accepted without any question (p. 79)

when such a serious rising as Wyatt's had less than 3,000 followers (p. 88). With such frequent lapses in the judicious use of evidence in a single chapter, one may well question the interpretations built upon it. In the case of this chapter, Clark's treatment does little to dispel the growing suspicion that the "mid-Tudor crisis" may have been more apparent than real after all.

Despite patches such as this, however, and the unavailability to Clark of such very recent works as Hoak on the Edwardian Council, Hirst on the electorate, and Guy on Wolsey, the breadth of this work, and new ground which it breaks, will make *English Provincial Society* a required starting point for future attempts to examine either provincial society itself, or trends of national politics from the provincial point of view.

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MURRAY TOLMIE. — *The Triumph of the Saints: The Separate Churches of London 1616-1649*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977. Pp. xii, 251.

Murray Tolmie has illuminated an important aspect of the English Revolution. Clearly and comprehensively, he has described the morphology of the religious separatists in the earlier seventeenth century, and he has also provided a thought-provoking re-interpretation of the failure of the Leveller movement.

The separatists were those English Protestants who boycotted the parochial system of the Established Anglican Church. Beginning with Henry Jacob in 1616 they founded voluntary, 'gathered' churches in which the congregation normally chose, ordained and paid its own pastor, unless he supported himself by working at a secular occupation. The following groups come within the purview of Tolmie's study: Independents, Particular and General Baptists, and Separatist churches with lay pastors. The more exotic sects — the Fifth Monarchy Men, the Seekers, Ranters, Quakers and Socianians — fall outside the scope of the book. How historically significant were the separatists? Numerically, not very. In 1641 there were perhaps 1,000 or so of them in London, though they multiplied rapidly in the next few years. Most of them were drawn from the 'industrious sort of people', to use Christopher Hill's phrase, hardworking artisans and shopkeepers. It must be noted, however, that the Independents were accused of having 'scummed the parish congregations of most of their wealthy and zealous members' (p. 102).

The crisis of the spring of 1647 forged the unity of London radicals, when political Independents and radical sectaries found themselves driven together by a resurgent, socially conservative Presbyterianism. The anchor of their support was the New Model Army. Late in 1646, fearing an intolerant Presbyterian church settlement, sectaries had flocked to join the Army, at the very time that it was being denounced (correctly) as a haven of sectarianism by the conservative London Common Council. With the departure of the Presbyterian officers in May and June of 1647, the religious radicals were promoted to positions of power within the Army. Tolmie points out that the political organization of the lower ranks from March 1647 onwards had been essentially a sectarian, not a Leveller achievement. It was not till the summer of that year that the Levellers, under John Lilburne,