

POLICY AND POLICE, by G. R. Elton. Cambridge, 1972. 447 pp. £5.80.

Professor Elton has argued for the best part of twenty years that there was a Tudor Revolution and that Thomas Cromwell did it. His latest book continues the argument, this time following up two particular themes. He takes first the country's reception of the royal supremacy and secondly the question of how that reception was turned so quickly into a secure acceptance. He rejects Pollard's thesis that the reception was an easy one because of a general harmony of King, Country, and Parliament. He will not have the view of the *Oxford History of England* that 'it was a revolution easily made'. In consequence he has no time at all for the arguments put forward by those working on the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that there was an inexorable move towards an erastian and national church of England long before Henry VIII came to the throne. He then takes up his second thesis and argues that the revolution, though not easily made, was largely effected by traditional procedures ultimately dependent on local opinion expressed through voluntary tale-bearing to the government, and local juries sitting in the shires. There was no police force behind the revolution, no army of paid spies, comparatively few victims and little persecution. It is a symptom of the times we live in that a book with this agenda should have such a title.

I do not think Dr Elton fully grasps some of the criticisms levelled against his earlier work made by medievalists. He dismisses them as 'this medievalist interpretation', and begs the question. What his critics are getting at is that the conventional frontiers between the medieval and modern periods are seriously misleading. Professor Roskell has shown how dangerous it is to assume that the history of Parliament begins with the Tudors, and a perusal of some of the essays in the recent *Festschrift* for May McKisack ought to make Dr Elton pause, at least for a moment. Even if we take Dr Elton's book on its own terms, doubts still persist. His third chapter, of nearly 100 pages, retails the evidence of treasons and dissent from 'every part of the realm'. Drawn from contemporary sources it makes solid, if at times tedious, reading. But numerous as Dr Elton's *exempla* are, we must still ask whether this is the tip of an iceberg; were these people typical of a much wider stratum of opinion, or are we dealing with the isolated murmurings of

conservative minds faced with innovation? Grumbling is not government—or revolution either. It seems to me that Dr Elton inadvertently establishes the second alternative when he moves on to his second thesis.

He shows that his 'revolution' was effected by mainly traditional means. Due legal process—as then understood and naturally rougher than would have pleased Mr Gladstone—stiffened by some new but still traditional statutes, resting on the accusations of local loyalists and in many cases the verdicts of local juries. He admits: 'The break with Rome had found a good deal of willing acceptance'. He cites evidence that condemnation and acquittal depended time and time again on: 'the undercurrents of local opinion'. The Government tolerated a higher rate of acquittals than revolutionary governments usually do and altogether behaved much more fair-mindedly than is usually assumed. It is hard not to draw the inference, though Dr Elton does not, that this was a government very sure of its constituency as they say in the US. Dr Elton observes, from a study of Cromwell's correspondence: '. . . nothing is more striking than the calm assumption that people will, of course, do their loyal duty in reporting cases of disaffection'. He goes on to argue that this assumption was largely justified. He even admits that: 'the government could do little without effective support'. It seems to me that Dr Elton's evidence suggests the government always had this support, at any rate so far as the royal supremacy was at issue: the general opinion remained that Queen Anne was a whore. As the King soon came to share this view it did not separate him from his people for long. It is at the grassroots of government—in Tudor terms in the shires, in the assemblies of the better-off sort of people—that revolutions are made, not in the cabinets of ministers, still less in the preambles of official documents, as Dr Elton seems to think. Altogether we may think that Dr Elton has established his second thesis—which is in itself well worth doing and very well done, but only at the cost of destroying his first. The second half of his book seems to me to set out a process exactly described as 'a revolution easily made'.

Of course there was revolution in the offing. The men of court and country in early Tudor

England were mistaken in thinking that the rejection of the papal supremacy, and the substitution of a parliamentary for a papal process of legitimating the law of succession, were of minor consequence. There were great consequences, but they were not intended by any of the participants: certainly not by Henry VIII and I do not think even by Cromwell. Dr Elton thinks Cromwell's eight years of office controlled the developments of the next century, as though that momentous era was merely a coda to a bureaucratic symphony composed by Thomas Cromwell, with occasional noises off supplied by Henry VIII. What I think Henry and Cromwell did was to offer an opportunity to the much more radical and penetrating revolutionaries associated with Calvin, at the same time as the stresses and strains inherent in the English social structure of their day were increasing. We may agree with Dr Elton that Cromwell was a sincere Protestant with a genuine interest in reform, just as we may doubt that the King's first minister would have cared for what the Calvinists did to France or Scotland in the name of reform. In the matter of structural change, which most would now agree is at the bottom of some of the most important developments of 'Cromwell's century', Cromwell can have understood it as little as Henry VIII.

In his final chapter, the best, I think, in the book, Dr Elton looks anew at the trial of Thomas More and Cromwell's part in it. He seeks, successfully, to acquit Cromwell of malice and cruelty towards More and in the process opposes the two men's related but utterly opposed principles. It is well to remember that the casualty rate amongst Henry's ministers was only slightly less than that amongst his wives: Cromwell can have had no illusions as

to the dangers of his own position and yet, in this instance, we must agree with Dr Elton he behaved well. This More is not the plaster saint beloved of the English middle-class: he is a lawyer-politician, an ambitious one, who took the top job within his reach when it was offered to him. He was probably right, though certainly foolish, to accept the chancellorship. It was this that sent him to his death. He resigned and took a posture of silence when he could no longer speak anything but treason. But because of who he was and what he did—great ministers resigned rather less frequently over questions of principle in the sixteenth century than they do today—his refusal to speak made his position, and his total disagreement with the King, clear. Dr Elton brings out the power and dangers of this silence: this is why More was tried, and also why the government, working within the limits of a body of law that did not recognize dumb insolence as an offence, found it so difficult to condemn him. In the event More defended himself as a man of principle and a clever lawyer, and Dr Elton is very good on just how skilful More's defence was. He also points out that More was not at all concerned with a right of the individual conscience in the abstract, but a right to recognize, a duty for himself—and by implications one incumbent upon all including the King—'to accept a vision granted to the great body of Christians'. This More was a lawyer on the make, who found himself facing a real question of law and principle. He did not evade this question but fought for it and his survival with courage, cunning, and a kind of skill, that makes for a politics at once serious and decent. In contemporary terms More would I think have got on with the Kennedys a deal better than with Jo Grimond or Roy Jenkins.

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MYSTICS AND MILITANTS, by Adam Curle. *Tavistock Publications*. London, 1972. 121 pp. £2.00.

Adam Curle is a Professor of Education at Harvard, an educational psychologist, author of several earlier books and a part-time conciliator in a number of significant international disputes in recent years. He has held academic appointments in England, America and several countries of the third world and has also spent time at the Richardson Institute for Conflict and Peace Research in London. His book was written during the last-mentioned period, and is a sequel to an earlier work, entitled *Making Peace*. The latter is briefly

summarized at the beginning of *Mystics and Militants*, and this is useful for readers like myself who have not come across the earlier book and need to know something of the background against which the present thesis is presented. Professor Curle defines peace, or rather peaceful relationships (peace for him seems to be a quality of a relationship rather than a state of things in its own right) as the absence of conflict; conflict itself being any situation in which A's advantage is B's disadvantage. This definition is useful, since it