

*An Industrious Mind: The Worlds of Sir Simonds D'Ewes.* By J. Sears McGee. Stanford University Press. 2015. xx + 511 pp. £50.00.

This book is a major achievement. Reading it is rather like becoming much better acquainted with a person whom one has known superficially for many years. Sir Simonds D'Ewes composed by far the fullest surviving private journal of the proceedings of the Long Parliament, and historians working on the 1640s have naturally drawn extensively on it, especially those published sections which cover the years 1640-2. Yet until now the journal's author has remained a relatively shadowy figure, despite the fact that at his death in April 1650 D'Ewes left behind more than seventy volumes of papers containing correspondence, sermon notes, historical works, an autobiography, and diaries. This prodigious output leads McGee to suggest plausibly that D'Ewes was 'the individual whose life is more fully documented than any other individual in Britain (and perhaps even Europe as a whole) in the first half of the seventeenth century' (p. 6). McGee's painstaking reconstruction of D'Ewes's diverse interests and activities offers a wonderfully rich insight into the beliefs and values of an early seventeenth-century English Puritan, and as we journey through his mental worlds, the categories of political, religious, legal, social and cultural history blend into each other in a very satisfying manner.

The bedrock of D'Ewes's life lay in his profound Calvinist piety. A fervent belief in a providentialist God decisively shaped his understanding of his own life and experiences, and McGee pinpoints July 1624 as the key moment at which D'Ewes moved, in R.T. Kendall's terms, from being a 'credal' to an 'experimental' predestinarian. Conversely, D'Ewes loathed what he called 'damnable ... poperie' (p. 128), and he watched with growing disquiet the rise of Arminianism, which he perceived as a resurgence of Pelagianism. D'Ewes interpreted such developments within a continental context, and he saw events in

England as part of the wider ebb and flow of the Calvinist cause during the Thirty Years' War.

Among the most fascinating sections of the book are those that reconstruct D'Ewes's reactions to the policies of Charles I. He was deeply hostile towards Laudianism which he saw as threatening 'a speedie ruine to the power of Godlines' and as 'the highest stepp of wickednes'. He attacked Matthew Wren's regime as Bishop of Norwich as 'a prelaticall tyrannie' and denounced Wren himself as a man of 'a most damned life' (p. 261). D'Ewes was equally hostile to Ship Money, which he regarded as 'the most deadlie and fatall blow' to 'the libertie of the subjects of England' to have occurred for five centuries. He was convinced that the liberties of Englishmen would be 'at one dash utterlie ruined, if the king might at his pleasure lay what vnlimited taxes hee pleased on his subjects; and then imprison them when they refused to pay' (p. 285). This certainly helps to explain why D'Ewes was so reluctant to encourage the collection of Ship Money during his time as Sheriff of Suffolk in 1639-40.

McGee argues persuasively that D'Ewes 'had always been deeply concerned about constitutional questions such as Ship Money and impositions, but behind that concern, religious matters always lurked' (p. 336). Certainly D'Ewes's devout Puritanism was crucial in accounting for his allegiance to Parliament in the Civil Wars. He argued that 'the Church is yet full of wrinkles amongst us and needs a great deal of Reformation which I hope we shall shortly see effected' (p. 352), and Conrad Russell once described D'Ewes's comment that Elizabeth I had 'settled a beginning of a reformation rather than a reformation' as 'the diagnostic sign of a Parliamentarian' (pp. 341, 432). D'Ewes felt that Charles I's 'infelicity was that he did too vehemently and obstinately stick to the wicked prelates and the other the looser and corrupter sort of the clergy of this kingdom' (p. 383). D'Ewes nevertheless took every opportunity to promote an accommodation with the King, and from the summer of

1642 he felt increasingly alienated from those members – such as John Pym, Denzil Holles, William Strode and Henry Marten – whom he dubbed ‘fiery spirits’ or ‘violent spirits’. The rise of the ‘political Independents’ in the mid-1640s disturbed D’Ewes, and although he was a ‘political Presbyterian’ he was not a ‘religious Presbyterian’ for he ‘was an enemy of clerical pretensions to power from either the Laudian or the Presbyterian direction’ (p. 411). He continued to compile his parliamentary journal until November 1645, and he remained an active member of the Commons until his exclusion at Pride’s Purge on 6 December 1648.

Exactly how active he was as a parliamentary speaker has been the subject of some controversy. McGee challenges John Morrill’s view of D’Ewes as a ‘Walter Mitty’ figure who did not in fact deliver many of the speeches that he presented as his own in his journal. Against Morrill’s contention that D’Ewes did not speak as frequently as his journal suggests, McGee offers three objections: that D’Ewes carefully marked any of his speeches that were ‘not spoken’; that other diarists mention quite a few of his speeches; and that if the same objection of the unique source were applied more widely it would discredit many other speeches by prominent political figures (pp. 309-12). That said, however, it is still the case that there is no way of knowing how closely the texts of D’Ewes’s speeches in his own journal resembled the words that he actually uttered, and that even if he did speak on most if not all the occasions indicated, the degree to which he subsequently extended and polished his remarks remains largely irrecoverable.

Considering the scale and complexity of this book, the number of errors is remarkably small. A reference to Richard Sackville, third Earl of Dorset is misidentified as Edward Sackville, the fourth Earl (pp. 28, 452, 499); and some interesting references to John Milton (pp. 215-16) escape the index. Charles and Buckingham’s trip to Spain in 1623 is misdated to 1622 (p. 140); and there is inconsistency in the spelling of ‘Habsburg’, with the incorrect ‘Hapsburg’ appearing several times (for example at pp. 155, 161, 206, 208). But these are

very minor slips in an otherwise immaculate volume. McGee deserves our profound gratitude for recapturing the ‘industrious mind’ of so remarkable an exemplar of early seventeenth-century English Puritanism, and for bringing to life so compellingly the individual to whom we owe so much of our knowledge of the Long Parliament.

*Selwyn College, Cambridge*

DAVID L. SMITH