

Conrad Russell, edited by Richard Cust and Andrew Thrush. *King James VI and I and his English Parliaments: The Trevelyan Lectures Delivered at the University of Cambridge 1995*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. 195. \$99.00 (cloth).

This book is a revised and extended version of the six Trevelyan Lectures which Conrad Russell delivered at Cambridge University in the Lent Term of 1995.

Between then and his death in October 2004, Russell developed the lectures into a much longer typescript which was approaching its final form when he died. Scholars of early seventeenth-century England owe Richard Cust and Andrew Thrush a great debt of gratitude for sensitively editing this manuscript and bringing it to publication.

This new book ranks alongside Russell's earlier works, *Parliaments and English Politics, 1621-1629* (Oxford, 1979) and *The Fall of the British Monarchies, 1637-1642* (Oxford, 1991), and together they offer a sustained and detailed account of early Stuart parliaments.

For those of us who attended the original Trevelyan Lectures, and can hear Russell's distinctive voice behind the prose, reading this book is inevitably a poignant as well as an illuminating experience. The style is utterly characteristic, as for example in aphorisms such as these: 'if [Peter Lake] says Elizabeth's parliaments did not see a crisis, I answer that that was the crisis' (2); 'nobody wrecked the [Addled Parliament]: it was never afloat' (103); 'James did not like learning on a dual-control car' (178). Then there is the impressive sweep of Russell's command of English history which allows him to make telling comparisons and contrasts with the Middle Ages. He argues, for example, that the demilitarization of the nobility gave the monarch the power of dissolving a parliament in anger: 'barons no longer came to parliament, as Thomas of Lancaster had done under Edward II, with 2,000 armed

retainers' (122). Russell traces the reasons why the idea of an imperfect union proved so problematic back to 'the rejection of foreign jurisdiction implicit in the Reformation': before that, 'from the union with Normandy in 1066 to the loss of Gascony in 1453, kings of England had ruled without great conceptual difficulty over imperfect unions' (125). Russell's perspective extends forwards as well as backwards: 'that the Scots found a perfect union politically unacceptable, and the English an imperfect union intellectually incomprehensible, provides the basis of the odd mixture of the two which was set up in 1707' (126). Such insights offer a genuinely original perspective on the problems that faced early Stuart parliaments.

Russell's style is sometimes playfully allusive, as for example when he describes the contributions of Nicholas Fuller and Thomas Wentworth as 'an example of the Bolsover tendency in politics' (65; an allusion to the Labour M.P. for Bolsover, Dennis Skinner), or when he writes that Ellesmere's tract on the absolute prerogative 'could have been written by Portia and Humphrey Appleby in committee' (152), or when he labels Sir Edward Hext 'the Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells of Elizabethan and Jacobean state papers' (168). There are places also where Russell's interpretation is illuminated by his own parliamentary experience as a member of the House of Lords from 1987 until his death. Without such direct personal experience of parliament it is hard to see how he could have reached conclusions such as this: 'The seventeenth-century House of Commons ... suffered from the identical weakness of the twentieth-century House of Lords: it was attempting to change the minds of those from whom its power was derived' (143).

Throughout the book, Russell's eye for apt quotations and James's talent for uttering them make a powerful combination. I especially enjoyed James's comment in May 1610 that 'in time of peace it is fit to provide for war you will all agree, and

provision after time is like mustard after dinner' (18). James was a master of the striking image or simile, as when he remarked on 2 May 1607 that the union was 'no more unperfect, as now it is projected, than a child that is born without a beard' (67). Russell shows a very thoughtful and sensitive understanding of James's personality, as in his view that 'James's tendency to feel unloved, while very natural in one of his childhood experience, was a great nuisance in politics' (84). He argues that 'it was always the sense of personal hurt which drove James into arbitrary positions, and the sense of personal hurt he felt at English hatred of his race was very deep indeed' (137). In analysing James's financial problems, Russell finds that the traditional criticism of James's extravagance 'is largely true' (162), and concludes that his 'inability to say "no" was a psychological weakness in a king who was always asking whether his people loved him' (163).

Russell's discussion of the central problems that beset Jacobean parliaments – the union with Scotland, and the weaknesses of royal finances – is subtle and penetrating. There is an excellent section on the reasons for the failure of the Great Contract in 1610, and a fine chapter on the Addled Parliament which complements Russell's Stenton Lecture, published in 1992. Russell's interpretation emphasises the success of the Parliaments of the early 1620s. He discerns a 'much more relaxed atmosphere at Westminster in 1621 and 1624' and sees this as 'a mark of a more stable polity, not of impending crisis' (185): these were, in Russell's view, 'low-temperature parliaments which did not feel themselves to be under exceptional pressure' (186).

I have only a few very small quibbles. On pages vii and 140, chapter 8 is identified as 'Trevelyan VIII' when it should read 'Trevelyan V'. It seems slightly strange that chapter 6 on the Addled Parliament precedes chapter 7 on the union,

contrary to the natural chronological order of these chapters. Perhaps we might also have heard more about issues relating to religion and the Church of England, although admittedly in Jacobean parliaments this was the dog that did not bark in the night (in contrast to the parliaments of Elizabeth I and Charles I). These are, however, very minor criticisms. Overall, the book makes an important contribution to early Stuart studies, and it is a fitting conclusion to Russell's remarkable career as an historian.

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