



Review: [untitled] of The Revolt of Silken Thomas: A Challenge to Henry VIII by Laurence McCorristine

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repeal, electioneering and land problems. All of these issues are viewed from the perspective of catholic-protestant interrelations and show that sectarian mentalities pervaded pre-Famine Tipperary society, erupting into violence whenever political issues became acute. The evangelical crusade, in particular, not only polarised these divisions but ultimately, he argues, actually strengthened the Roman Catholic church by making emancipation politically necessary to prevent rebellion. R.V. Comerford also stresses the polarisation of attitudes along religious lines, particularly by repeal, in his study of Tipperary representation at Westminster, 1801-1918, with the result that catholics from small-gentry backgrounds became the M.P.s. In addition to the detailed information on local elections and politics, the essay provides a useful survey of national electoral practice and the effect on it of the various reform measures throughout the nineteenth century.

There is, inevitably, a priest-in-politics essay. Fr David Humphreys, a particularly intractable example of the species deeply involved in, predictably, the land war, receives sympathetic treatment from Denis G. Marnane. Nancy Murphy sheds interesting light on the hitherto largely ignored career of J.K. Bracken, founder of the Gaelic Athletic Association, Fenian and father of Brendan Bracken. D.R. O'Connor Lysaght presents a rather unconvincing argument for the betrayal by their leaders of radical Tipperary workers seeking class power in the 1916-24 period, while Eamon McLoughlin assesses the impact of the 1963 planning act on the south riding.

As befits a work edited and published by a geographer, there are excellent maps and plates accompanying and elucidating the articles. Tipperary, rather surprisingly, has lacked a history of the whole county, a deficiency which this volume helps to remedy. It is also merely the first of a planned series of Irish county histories, a project, to judge from this admirable initial venture, to be warmly welcomed by Irish historians.

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THE REVOLT OF SILKEN THOMAS: A CHALLENGE TO HENRY VIII. By Laurence McCorry. Pp 176. Dublin: Wolfhound Press. 1987. IR£15 hardback. IR£8.95 paperback.

THE Kildare rebellion of 1534-5 has strong claims on the historian's attention, both because of its importance in shaping the character of early modern Ireland and for the insights it offers into the nature of Tudor government. In an Irish context, the revolt precipitated fundamental changes in the structure of politics and power in the early Tudor lordship and transformed the problems of crown government there. Viewed as an example of conflict between a Tudor magnate and the Tudor state, the revolt and its surrounding evidence provide unusual insights both into the organisation of an armed uprising and into the constraints on government in responding to the challenge. For Tudor rebellions in England, who the rebels were and what their aims and grievances were can often be determined with some precision from the articles and demands which they drew up and from the lists of participants, and the confessions, depositions and examinations which the government collected. For the Kildare rebellion, disappointingly little of this kind of material survives. On the other hand, in part because of the need to work through a dependent central administration in Dublin, the revolt is especially informative concerning the government's military response and the judicial punishment meted out to rebels. Finally, the surviving documentation concerning the revolt is, by the standards of Tudor Ireland, particularly rich and varied.

For these reasons a comprehensive analysis of the Kildare rebellion is a major *desideratum* of Tudor Ireland. Over the past dozen years a number of articles have appeared which bear on particular aspects of the revolt, but Laurence McCorristine's book is the first attempt at an overall survey. McCorristine portrays an Anglo-Irish magnate controlling the office of lord deputy and defending his patrimony against a centralising English crown. Whenever the Tudors attempt an alternative method of government, Kildare utilises his influence with the Gaelic Irish to make the lordship ungovernable. And since Henry VIII was basically uninterested in Ireland and unwilling to contemplate a more expensive method of government, sooner or later the earl had to be restored. Yet this deadlock was broken in 1533-4 when Thomas Cromwell launched a direct attack on Geraldine power at a time when the earl was incurably ill. Kildare's son, Lord Thomas, responded by a rebellion which, in default of Spanish assistance, was doomed to failure. And the resulting forfeiture of this major Anglo-Irish earldom which had hitherto acted as 'a bulwark against Tudor expansion beyond the Pale' (p. 142) opened up Gaelic Ireland to English conquest. Nevertheless, both in his resistance to these first steps in Tudor expansion and his appeals for continental support against English heresy, 'Lord Thomas Fitzgerald was a man ahead of his time', 'the precursor of later rebels like James Fitzmaurice in Munster and Hugh O'Neill in Ulster' (p. 152). McCorristine thus offers a factual account of the revolt in its Irish context posited on the premise of a basic incompatibility between magnate power and royal authority. And by exposing old traditions and myths based on Richard Stanyhurst's propagandist account of the revolt, the book marks a major advance on what was known before the completion of two M.A. theses on the subject in the mid-1970s (his, National University of Ireland, 1975; mine, Manchester, 1974).

In a Tudor context, however, the book is disappointing. The reader looks in vain for an extended discussion of such topics as the Kildare connexion in English Ireland, the organisation of the king's relief army, and treason trials and retribution. Nor is it clear what lessons the revolt offers concerning Tudor dissent more generally and Henry VIII's relations with the nobility. The absence from the bibliography of the work of Mervyn James and C.S.L. Davies may partly account for this, but the basic difficulty seems to be the old-fashioned approach to sources. The author relies solely on printed material, chiefly the state papers, and ignores the more formal administrative records of the Westminster and Dublin administrations, which inevitably colours his understanding of events. Moreover, his quotations are not always accurate, are frequently to the *L. & P. Hen. VIII* calendar, and the text includes many unsubstantiated remarks. It is also less than reliable on points where *L. & P. Hen. VIII* misdate documents (e.g., pp 67, 94, citing *L. & P. Hen. VIII*, vii, nos 681, 229 as the authority for statements about Lord Thomas's contacts with O'Brien and Desmond in May 1534 (*recte* 1535) and for Charles V's encouragement of rebellion in Ireland in February 1534 (*recte* 1535) through a Spanish agent resident there). On the power and estates of the Kildare earls, McCorristine is content to rely on the various printed extracts from the Kildare Rental (B.L., Harl. MS 3756), which he describes as 'a precise compilation of their lands, possessions and sources of income' (p. 23), while ignoring the Kildare estate material in P.R.O.N.I. or T.C.D., or J.T. Gilbert's calendar of some of it in N.L.I. Four of this reviewer's papers rate a mention in the bibliography, but others are overlooked which might have corrected mistakes and misapprehensions concerning the liberty of Kildare, Lord Thomas's correspondence and the king's ordnance.

Overall, therefore, the book's primary value is its contribution to the extensive literature concerning the relationship between rebellion and the development of an Irish sense of national identity. And undoubtedly this theme and the book's generally lucid prose and numerous illustrations will commend it to a wider audience.

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