

David Higgs — *Nobles in Nineteenth-Century France. The Practice of Inegalitarianism*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987. Pp. xvii, 287.

David Higgs' study is primarily a portrait of a social group seen against the background of a changing society. The first several chapters give an overview of the nobility, including its numbers, wealth, and relative position in agricultural society. Except for an excruciatingly detailed chapter on three sample families' genealogies and pecuniary habits, Higgs provides a measured, sober and useful account. The final seven chapters on political life, the church and the family are more descriptive and impressionistic in quality.

Higgs' introduction announces several analytical approaches. Two deserve particular attention. First, he draws a curious analogy between the nobility and an American ethnic group, emphasizing the sense of self-identity and tradition that strengthens bonds among members of both types of groups (xii, xvi). It is not clear why this is an appropriate analogy for the study of a social elite, nor is the analogy pursued. A second interpretive choice, Higgs' stated intention to ignore a consideration of the nobility's own sense of itself (xvi), has sadder consequences. Higgs' wish to concentrate on the observable actions of his subjects and not what is going on in their minds and hearts would be entirely defensible if his goal were limited to drawing a kind of statistical portrait. It becomes a real liability, however, in an analysis that seeks to understand how, exactly, the nobility differed from everyone else.

Higgs' examination of the nobility's size, wealth and relative position in French society up to 1870 includes interesting material on its relation to successive political regimes. The Second Empire, for example, long known as the social climber's nirvana, is shown to have been a regime quite stingy in conferring new titles. His chapter on landholding reveals the relatively small impact of the revolution in wresting land from the majority of noble landholders. Indeed, they appear to have been as successful as the merely wealthy in maintaining and extending their wealth in land in an increasingly commercialized agricultural world, at least up to 1870. Higgs notes a persistence of the nobility's preference for urban living, even while they gained the bulk of their income from the land. Although the French nobility had a solid and successful experience with economic activity in both the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, Higgs shows that their nineteenth-century record was weaker. Many nobles stayed wealthy or got wealthier in the course of the century, but not primarily as the result of either direct participation or heavy investment in industry.

These early chapters emphasize the nobility's lack of distinctiveness. Noblemen appear in Higgs' portrait of the political and economic life of the nation with little to distinguish them from other wealthy notables. Even their reluctance to take up certain industrial and commercial pursuits fails to differentiate them from the majority of nineteenth-century Frenchmen. Higgs hints at questions of "attitudes" and values that may have deepened such reluctance, but offers little sense of their particular substance. These chapters also fail to provide evidence of a cohesive "ethnic" kind of group acting in society in a coherent or conscious sort of way.

Later chapters of the book reinforce this theme almost to the end. Higgs argues that nobles did not consider government service any differently than others and that they failed to develop a common political program — a fact that is unsurprising given the heterogeneity of the group that Higgs is studying. His nobility includes not only the *noblesse* — descendants of the Old Regime nobility — but the Napoleonic nobility as well.

The final two chapters, on the church and the family, maintain the author's focus on outward behavior, but bring the reader closer to issues of values and mentality that seem essential to figuring out whether the nobility differed from anyone else. We learn that nobles preferred regular orders to participation in the secular clergy, that they were pious laymen but not avid churchmen, that they continued to dominate the upper echelons of the church, but had no recognizably "noble outlook" on policies pursued by different regimes towards the church.

Higgs' chapter on the family brings us closest to a sense of what made the nobility different and at the same time exposes the irony of the nobility's position. The author argues that the noble family became increasingly privatized in the course of the nineteenth century, yet a privileged place for the reinforcement of the noble identity. While the public prestige of one's pedigree remained key to the nobility's self-esteem, its members increasingly sought a sense of their own identity among themselves in a cozy domestic world formerly despised as dull and bourgeois. The irony of this situation is clear to any reader of Hegel on the principles of lordship and domination. Noblemen who are recognized as such only or mainly by fellow members of the nobility in private are not noblemen at all in any practical or fully rewarding sense. They are like masters without slaves.

In order to be a real nobleman, one needs commoners around to acknowledge one's nobility publicly. There were, of course, arenas in which nobles and their social inferiors met to play their parts in the "practice of inegalitarianism". Higgs shows that one of the most comfortable, sheltered venues for such practice was the world of local politics until the 1870s. Here and in the departmental *conseils*, members of the nobility could enjoy the deference of their inferiors and experience at least faintly what nobility was meant to be. The larger political world, however, remained fraught with dangers for men who required stronger confirmation of their standing.

The complex irony of the nineteenth-century nobleman's position is exemplified in a quotation Higgs offers from General Alphonse d'Hautpoul, looking back on his experience under the Second Republic. He wrote:

As a result of the Revolution, I lost at one blow my qualities of peer of France, of general councillor of the Aude, and of lieutenant general: I could not even use my title of hereditary *noblesse*. I was just citizen d'Hautpoul but surrounded, it is true, with the esteem of the public (23).

Higgs emphasizes the word "even". The most revealing aspect of the text, however, lies in the tension here between the general's list of martyrdoms suffered and the text's final clause. Despite the vagaries of French political life, which was based on the practice of egalitarianism, despite the humiliation his experiences entailed for someone of his background, the general still remembered that amidst the chaos, he had still received public *considération* from those around him. One senses that these and other marvellous texts Higgs cites would have provided a sure route into the mentality of men such as the general.

By the end of his book, Higgs concludes that members of the nobility were distinguishable from others by subtle differences of mentality, of values, of tone and bearing. His decision not to study these issues, however, nor to probe the fascinating, sometimes delusionary world of the nobility's own image of themselves leaves the reader with little sense of how this resilient group actually worked. The infrequent appearance in the text of situations in which members of the nobility come face to face

with those from other social groups gives the reader little sense of the actual “practice” of inegalitarianism — a practice that required two sorts of parties joined in an unequal relationship.

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William Kaplan — *State and Salvation: The Jehovah's Witnesses and Their Fight for Civil Rights*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989. Pp. xii, 340.

The immediate future of this book is clear. It will be included in all university courses in history, political science and law that are concerned with the development of civil rights in Canada. During the twenty years after 1939, politicians and courts dealt with (or failed to deal with) several situations involving what we now think of as the fundamental rights of Canadian citizens. Among them were the ramifications of Quebec's Padlock Law, the legal prohibition on membership in the Communist Party, the treatment of Japanese-Canadians and the secret trials consequent on the Gouzenko case. But none of these — important as they were — illuminated quite as dramatically or for so long the deficiencies in the jurisprudential basis of Canadian civil rights as did the legal battles over the prosecutions of the Witnesses of Jehovah; nor did any of them contribute quite as much as the Witnesses to repairing those deficiencies. It needs scarcely to be added that the Jehovah's Witnesses made their contribution not by being champions of freedom of religion and speech, but because in the face of prosecution and persecution mainly by the state, they were fanatical in demanding of politicians and courts alike every last *quantum* of their own liberties. The arguments of their lawyers, especially Jacob L. Cohen and W. Glen How, forced the development of new law and what the Witnesses won for themselves was extended to all Canadians.

That is the subject matter of *State and Salvation*. Parts of the story have been told before, but Mr. Kaplan has added new material and given us a much deeper and fuller account. It is organized into four inter-related sections, the first of which concerns the ban itself. In July 1940, in the Defence of Canada Regulations (drafted by a committee of senior civil servants under the authority of the *War Measures Act*), the Jehovah's Witnesses were declared to be members of an illegal organization. There will be no disagreement with the author's judgment on that prohibition:

This ban ranks as the single most serious interference with religious liberties by the state in all of modern Canada's history (xi).

Proclamation of the ban — it was done by order-in-council without parliamentary debate — resulted in about 500 prosecutions and despite growing opposition after 1942, it remained in force until the summer of 1944, albeit in an amended form.

The second section covers the absurd attempt to force Witness school children to express loyalty to the secular state by saluting the flag and singing the national anthem. That was very much against their wills and the wishes of their parents since Jehovah's Witnesses believed that all human organizations (except their's) were instruments of satan. Vigorous prosecution of those who refused, Mr. Kaplan tells us, was confined to the City of Hamilton. But there, the Board of Education conducted