

adjectives, “considerable” and “significant”, superior to Caron’s broad-brush estimate? At least we can inspect Caron’s calculations, question his assumptions, and factor in more data if we can dig them up. But how can you argue with “considerable” or “significant”?

Many questions of this type could be cited, but they all turn round the central issue of treating transport as the independent variable pushing rural France into the modern world. Price knows that other factors were at work (notably autonomous increases in real consumer income), but his analysis is not constructed in such a way as to allow a relative weight to be assigned to the particular contribution made by improved transport. Instead, we are left with accurate but not very helpful conclusions like “the reduction of transport costs substantially modified the conditions for economic activity” (pp. 314-16).

The Modernization of Rural France is a big and expensive book. Its richness of detail and breadth of documentation stand as a tribute to Roger Price’s extraordinary powers of research. As a descriptive work it constitutes an important contribution to our understanding of the slow transformation of agriculture and agrarian society in modern France. Social historians in particular will appreciate the sheer mass of information about the rural world which Price has assembled. Economic historians, however, may well feel that this could have been a better, more persuasive book if the author had matched his capacity for research with the discipline of a more rigorously specified economic analysis.

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BARNETT SINGER — *Village Notables in Nineteenth-Century France: Priests, Mayors, Schoolmasters*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983. Pp. viii, 199.

Barnett Singer’s recent study of priests, mayors, and schoolmasters — the “village notables” of rural France — is an interesting little book. The author’s own modesty in the introduction makes it seem as though the book is intended to be an appendix to Eugen Weber’s classic and controversial *Peasants into Frenchmen*. Singer writes that his study “lies under the huge shadow” (p. 1) of Weber’s book. He sees his book as “attributing more of an active role to rural notables than (Weber) does by stressing the in-betweenness of their function in rural society” (pp. 1-2). Like Weber, Singer has an eye for significant detail, and his study is brimming with stories lovingly culled from archives of the *département* of France. Unlike Weber, Singer does not really have a major thesis about social change; he asserts that the roles of priests, mayors, and schoolmasters in rural France have been insufficiently studied, and that they were important and sometimes unappreciated figures in the dramas of the century, often caught between the superiors they were responsible to and the villagers they were supposed to serve. Singer sees, correctly, I think, “no village of the nineteenth century as a perfectly cutoff entity, perfectly virginal, untouched by national trends” (p. 2). Yet his view of rural France before the Third Republic is not far from Weber’s; he describes it as “a largely dependent world, a world deprived of mass media, mobility, or the economic independence that would also have permitted independence from the local ‘guides,’ the local notables who had their position because of the nature of rural society as a whole” (p. 3). He discusses how mayors and schoolteachers contributed to the rooting of republican institutions in rural France, and accepts the interpretation that anti-clericalism in the villages, more than occasionally orchestrated by the two non-clerical members of the eternal village triangle, accentuated and at the same time reflected the diminished status of the priest as a notable. Few would quibble with this, but perhaps his conclusion that all notables have disappeared from rural France is more questionable.

Village Notables, despite its solid base in the archives, is anything but a systematic study. It is impressionistic, ranging across virtually the entire century, with scant attention to the chronology of succeeding regimes. The exception is the last chapter, by far the book's finest, on the village schoolmaster of the Third Republic, 1880-1914. One wonders if this study would not have profited from a focus on the *départments* Singer studied in greatest detail — the Gironde, the Vaucluse, and several of the Breton *départments* — with supplementary evidence drawn from other *départments* (Michael Burns' recent *Rural Society and French Politics: Boulangism and the Dreyfus Affair* is an excellent example of this kind of approach).

Indeed, the impressionistic quality of *Village Notables* is also part of its charm. The struggles of mayors, priests, and schoolteachers with their superiors, each other, and their clients are evocatively presented. These interesting and significant tales might be called mini-history or what the author once refers to as *petite histoire*. There is nothing wrong with that. Singer is at his best when speculating on aspects of life in rural communes that historians have not sufficiently considered: the sexuality of schoolteachers and even of *curés*, why schoolteachers remained outsiders in the communes in which they lived (too poorly paid to be accepted by the bourgeoisie, yet separated from the world of their charges by language — their use of French in communes where most people preferred Breton, Provençal or patois), the necessity of maintaining a suitable distance, and so on. He notes what schoolteachers contributed to their communities beyond their teaching (besides serving as secretary for the *mairie*, some helped with vaccinations, others surveyed land, offered advice to farmers, encouraged them to cooperate with their neighbours). We pity the poor teacher whose salary, like most, was too low to allow him to buy books. Singer empathizes with his subjects: the schoolteacher in Gouesnou in the Finistère unjustly accused of improper conduct with the girls from the church school; the priest whose poor hearing meant that he had to insist that his parishioners shout out their confessions (and with the poor people whose darkest secrets could be heard by virtually everyone else in the church); schoolteachers who contracted T.B. in dank schoolhouses; the unmarried schoolteacher eager to find a mate, yet constantly sensing the lack of opportunity inherent in her position (unable to dress up, or, for that matter, dress down), caught between the village élite and the ranks of ordinary people. It is that difficult position of being an "in-betweener" that Singer captures so nicely. At times, he belabours the very obvious, as when, discussing the attachment of teachers to their native regions, he notes that the thoughts of a teacher caught in a World War I no-man's land, his comrades lying dead around him, turned to his Breton village. The material is rich and the writing generally evocative, although its tone sometimes is excessively informal and chatty. References to the American baseball player Roger Hornsby, and to Groucho Marx (who would have loved some of the stories Singer tells) will certainly confuse many European readers, and perhaps North American and English ones as well. Yet Singer's lively prose inevitably carries the day; he writes very well, elegantly in places. He occasionally falls into the old modernization trap ("hastened the advent of modernity", "grew modern", etc.), but his sketches of rural notables and interpretation of their roles are valuable. *Village Notables in Nineteenth-Century France* will not cast a long shadow like the study by Eugen Weber, but it is a book worth reading.

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CAROLYN STEEDMAN — *Policing the Victorian Community: The Formation of English Provincial Police Forces, 1856-80*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984. Pp. x, 215.

Steedman's concern in this work is to probe the silence surrounding the formation and operation of rural police forces in mid-Victorian England. She examines the relations between central authorities