

Andrew Bradstock. *Radical Religion in Cromwell's England: A Concise History from the English Civil War to the End of the Commonwealth.*

International Library of Historical Studies 58. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011. xxvi + 190 pp. + 12 b/w pls. £52.50. ISBN: 978-1-84511-764-1.

The question that immediately came to mind upon receiving this book to review was, how does Andrew Bradstock's *Radical Religion in Cromwell's England* relate to Christopher Hill's *The World Turned Upside Down*, published over forty years ago? The answer came quickly. In his preface, Bradstock acknowledges the influence of Hill's writings in inspiring his interest in radical religious groups of mid-seventeenth-century England and, as he later notes, his purpose is to reaffirm the importance of studying those movements and their ideas. The homage to Hill's importance notwithstanding, in many ways the present book proves a worthy successor to that seminal study: what Christopher Hill did for a previous generation (or two) of historians and students of history, Bradstock sets out to do for those of the early twenty-first century.

The volume is divided into chapters on Baptists, Levellers, Diggers, Ranters, Quakers, Fifth Monarchists, and the Muggletonians, summarizing the key people and views of each group. The work is written in an accessible style; though not ignoring important historiographical issues, these concerns do not dominate the discussion. Instead, Bradstock's intent is to introduce readers to these movements by highlighting their significance and continued relevance to specialists and nonspecialists in the period.

The chapter on the Levellers demonstrates what is best about this book, and what the author does so effectively. The various figures prominent in the movement, the complexity of their religious and political ideas, and some of the key historiographical issues concerning their study are all discussed. This type of comprehensive explanation is not easy to accomplish in twenty-four pages. Bradstock's overview not only provides a basic understanding of the movement, but also draws readers into wanting to read more. The discussion and the illustrative passages from primary texts simply whet the appetite. Bradstock emphasizes not only the inseparability of religious and political ideas in the mid-seventeenth century, but also the important influence of those ideas upon their much later modern expressions and implementation. In addition, useful, more contemporary references are sprinkled throughout the work. For example, chapter 4 opens with a correlation between how "right-thinking folk" of the mid-seventeenth century felt about Ranters and "how the punks were received in the 1970s, or the hippies the decade before" (75). Such comparisons serve the author's purpose of reinforcing the pertinence of the study of seventeenth-century radicals and making them seem not so unfamiliar and distant as initial impressions might suggest.

This book will be especially useful for those who teach and those who take courses and seminars in early modern British history. Its succinct and effective synopses of early modern ideas and their religious, political, and social contexts will

be extremely valuable for students new to the period, as well as others who want to find efficient summaries of the main radical movements of the Civil War and interregnum periods.

There is one difficulty with the work for this reader, however. The only formal citations included in the book are of secondary studies. While understandable to attain the readability of the work noted above, it is still frustrating, as the quotations used to illustrate the ideas of each movement, as well as the reactions to them, entice the reader to read more. This will prove challenging to all but the most determined. An example of this lack of citation of sources is found in the analysis of the response to the Quakers, where a seventeenth-century commentator stated “since ‘the whole world is governed by superiority and distance in relations,’ said one of their critics, ‘when that’s taken away, unavoidably anarchy is ushered in’” (108): no information about the origins of this comment, not even a textual mention of the source or the author, is given. Still, this should not prevent the assignment of this work as a worthwhile and valuable text. Perhaps it will simply allow, and encourage, classroom discussion of academic citation and the effectiveness of different ways to present and discuss the past.

Radical Religion in Cromwell’s England is an enjoyable and informative book and should become a staple resource for teaching about mid-seventeenth-century England. Not only does it provide a very good introduction to that period, but it also explains why those ideas remain pertinent to historians in the early twenty-first century.

WARREN JOHNSTON
Algoma University