recognized his own shortcomings and refused high office when he felt it beyond his experience or personal capacities. Furthermore, he was an able and clear-sighted administrator whose advice was sought eagerly on national, imperial and maritime affairs, even after his retirement from active service.

But this portrait is gained almost exclusively through inference. Although Pierson explicitly evaluates the duke’s military or naval and administrative talents, he rarely deals with the intimate man, his personal outlook or motivations, leaving the reader with an incomplete impression of the duke. Instead, Pierson’s admitted focus is on Medina Sidonia’s official career. The problem with this approach is, however, that at times the duke seems only to be an incidental figure in the drama and not the principal actor. In Chapter VI, for example, he almost entirely disappears in the welter of detail over the final preparations for the Armada. As a result, some ideal opportunities to probe deeply the duke’s mind are missed, especially his reluctance to accept the Armada’s command. This seems to suggest that Medina Sidonia is important only in relation to the background of great events and is therefore not worthy of study beyond his official life.

But it is easy to criticize. The fact remains that Pierson’s book is an important one. In reconstructing Medina Sidonia’s career, the author provides extensive details on the organization of sixteenth-century Spain’s coastal defence. Also valuable are Pierson’s brief sketches of the men associated with Medina Sidonia and the internal workings of Philip II’s government through connections of family and clientage. As for Pierson’s reinterpretation of the Armada campaign, it is exciting and fresh. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, he restores the reputation of the commander of that failed “Enterprise of England,” giving him his just due.

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Office maketh man. Most of Starkey’s years were spent in preparation for a brief period “in the kingis familye” (p. 211). This was not sufficient to support the ambition of a shining vita activa, and his was “not a life of outstanding accomplish-ment” (p.3). He is remembered not for his dashed hopes but by an intended instrument of their fulfilment, the unfinished Dialogue (see Professor Mayer’s edition, Camden 4th ser. vol. 37, 1989), the bulk of which is assigned to 1529–32, not a little later as many have thought. The implication of that alone gives us a new Starkey, but there is much more in this splendid book, a skilfully constructed study of the man and his thought, which manages to be positive despite the author’s
description of his arguments as being negative, designed to clear away fifty years of "unhelpful" interpretation. Right from the beginning, the cards are dealt face up: Starkey was not a follower in the footsteps of Marsilio, not any kind of Protestant, and not a particular enthusiast for, or companion of, Thomas Cromwell. His anti-clericalism and taste for church reform are placed in their English context, with due appreciation of Colet and Whittinton; his intellectual apparatus is largely consigned to an European tradition, particularly that of the north Italian towns; his social ideas are mostly left to A.B. Ferguson's The Articulate Citizen (1965). Throughout, but especially in response to the question of what it was like to be a humanist, attention is directed to "his 'civicism'..., his 'classicism' in both history and rhetoric and the religious tension these helped to induce in him" (p. 278).

The phenomenon of humanism (there are excellent historiographical discussions), it is agreed, was essentially aristocratic, but the author is a bit heavy handed with Starkey's fixation about the nobility. His conception, perhaps more interesting for this time, was that of "gret lordys & gentylmen" (Camden vol., p. 118), essentially that of nobilitas maior and nobilitas minor, later common currency to Thomas Wilson. Born a second son between 1495 and 1500, his Cheshire family was one of decent gentry, neither magnatial nor patrician, origins which in a county lacking peers placed him in the top segment of society with respect to responsibility, opportunity and education. Grammar school led to Oxford and ordination. University training in disputation and the study of Aristotle and Cicero provided not just the images of classical Greece and republican Rome but something out of their vocabulary which first helped to shape Starkey's distinctive language of the commonwealth. Oxford might have shifted the scales towards a vita contemplativa but it also produced an insidious antithesis in the person of Reginald Pole, in whose circle and service, largely in Italy but including two visits to England and a separation in Avignon, Starkey was to spend most of his time up to the end of 1534. In Padua, he sucked up Italian thought (Bembo, Bonamico, Contarini, Gabriele, Giamoti, Leonico), Peter Martyr was a fellow student, and there would be the influence of Kampen, the evangelical who arrived in May 1534. The troubles of Florence and Venice were spawning an aristocratic solution, something translatable to English conditions.

Professor Mayer explores the all important delicacies of language, whether later in Starkey's dealings with Cromwell, the superficiality of similarity being a snare, or earlier as he began to stretch "the parlous English vernacular to cover the much more sophisticated coinage of Italian political discourse" (pp. 3–4). The argument is that this would produce the first writer of a humanist political dialogue in English, his conceptual vocabulary helping to establish "a new literary tradition" (pp. 4, 280). St. German's structure receives short shrift: "using dialogue as an excuse to break treatises into smaller pieces" (p. 63). The King's great matter, the vacuum left by Wolsey, and Pole's triumph with the theologians in Paris, flanked
by trips to England, hastened composition of Starkey's masterpiece. Diversely intended to attract Henry VIII and to advance Pole, he designed a programme which envisaged the patrician accepting office as leader of a reformed and reforming "nobility." Yet he must have had doubts about Pole, from whom he separated for 18 months at Avignon in pursuit of civil law and theological studies, but switching as a practical measure to Padua where he took both degrees.

Returning to England, Starkey was set to work by Cromwell on intelligence reports from Padua and Venice, then to correspond with Pole. Having become a preacher, although it is not quite clear if he was a royal chaplain, his lengthy sermon, _An Exhortation_, became his only publication. Recalling one description, "the cornerstone of the Anglian _via media_" (p.218), Professor Mayer does a rescue job, exposing this religious treatise as something distinct from the Dialogue. Alas, in 1536, Strakey was getting nowhere with Pole, whose _De Unitate_, with its "frantic" attack on the head of a church of Satan, was a sickening but not fatal blow. At this point, the biographer has to be confronted by the fact that Starkey's one distinctive qualification was not learning but his presumed connection with Pole. Otherwise, there was nothing special in an intellectual who allowed the supremacy and whose anticlericalism did not envisage lay interference touching doctrine. In an Henrician twinkling of an eye, trust evaporated. The King wondered if he had been deceived about Pole's attitudes and Cromwell concluded that this conservative was religiously suspect. In a way, both men of power were correct, yet hope remained and Henry, at least, could be assuaged. Starkey acquired a good London benefice at the end of 1536, preached before the King early in 1538, and began notes for a refutation of Albert Pighe who had salvaged royal thinking. In reality, he had nowhere to go.

Starkey's positions were not a substitute for the political moorings which he is described as having lost (p. 282). One wonders if he ever had any. He reminds me of Uriah who was sent forth by David to be killed. His fluctuating inclinations - the Pope's authority, a general council, and a remarkable balancing act on salvation - can give a milk-and-water impression of this conservative who, as in the joke about Henry VIII, seems repeatedly to have come of age. Constant until 1538 to his framework of leadership by the King in conjunction with a worthy nobility, he lost hope in them after he had lost hope in Pole. Bad rulers, once blamed on men, were now portrayed as divine punishment. It is a telling passage. His hopes for penance and the newness of life were as painfully feeble as his association with the conspirators of 1538, almost as though he could not free himself from the glue of conservatism. Lacking an alternative, he embraced "the faction with which he had flirted almost from the beginning" (p. 283). Had he not fled to Somerset and died, probably from the plague, in August 1538, he would almost certainly have been indicted and executed.

This book has much to say on the ambivalence of humanists, but that was not Starkey's problem. His standing in learning, amply acknowledged by contemporar-
ies, was not matched by a commensurate consequence during his brief moment of political possibility. Ambitious, but weightless, he had found the wrong patron, and when Starkey was settled in England the elusive Pole was elsewhere. Just one of a crowd, as far as Henry VIII and his ministers were concerned but for that one talent, he is pertinently described as being among the Secretary's tame intellectuals. In fact, and contrary to this author's hesitation, it was no small distinction to be 'a high-powered clerk' of Cromwell, nor was Starkey above boasting, but to describe him as "junior minister... with portfolio for defending the new religious order" (pp. 201, 204) is bizarre, except to remind us that the Dialogue - and who actually saw it? - is as imaginative as Bagehot's *Constitution* was to be in the nineteenth century. Starkey was one to be maintained or let go at pleasure. In the summer of 1536, he sent Henry a manifesto containing proposals for religion and the monasteries, but none of his points "had any impact, either positive or negative..." (Camden vol., p.ix). He shaped his career around Henry and Pole, perhaps around the aristocracy, but would support neither unless they answered his call for reform (p.4). One doubts whether they cared greatly. He probably did see himself as spokesman for a potential party of the high nobility, but who was he so to think? Whatever may be said about Cheshire gentry, he did not belong to those ranks, and his association with titled riff-raff in 1538 was singularly pathetic. There was something wrong about Starkey. I even suspect the quality which urges the blurb to tell us that he was "the most Italianate Englishman of his generation." Expatriates in an exotic society can become more native than the natives, and one is uneasy about one who made Paduan and Venetian culture his own and "fitted in quickly" (p. 279). Politically, he seems so naive as to attract sympathy. One blinks on reading that his little hopeful, before the Pilgrimage of Grace, was "trying to put together a grand coalition between Cromwell, Henry and Pole for the reform of England” (p. 282). It is at this point that Professor Mayer pulls himself together with a reminder that he was "regarded of small consequence by Pole..." (p. 282). Precisely! However, for the last 18 months of his life, it is only Starkey's insignificance which reconciles threatening contradictions in descriptions of him as being in opposition and a man in the middle. A small man has to be a time-server or serve in another way. He did try, as over monasticism, but he was too little to make himself noticeable by opposing Anne, which most did, or by supporting Mary, which most did not. Even Professor Mayer finds that hard to explain, but he manages a wry line on Starkey's thoughts about history; "he had little more success sticking to one view of it than he did in the case of anything which offered alternatives:" and, with respect to the 1537 Notes on the Old Testament, there is a nice quip about "the humanist difficulty of keeping one eye cocked on past and present at the same time" (pp. 285–86).

Lacking stature in a political world, flitting around intellectually but sticking to some fundamentals, the value of Starkey's sophisticated ideas ran out when he was exposed as a conservative and the wrong kind of evangelical. Even so, he did
not have to get involved with conspirators in 1538, and so there is little romantic nobility in this man who himself failed to fulfil the extremes of aristocratic performance, for he brought up neither good hounds nor wise heirs.

Starkey, a fine scholar, had no substance behind his dreams of being an assistant director, perhaps more, in a theatre controlled by men more powerful, more clever, and at least as intelligent as himself. The elements of influence always remain the same. Without them, Starkey was a failure. With them, would his ideas have had any more immediate impact and would he have been more successful? I doubt it. His Dialogue is a mine for quotation, and there are lovely things about entail, wardship, and William the Conqueror, and he tells us that there was most virtue in the countryside, most vice in the towns, something which might be corrected if the gentry managed more often to live in an urban residence. There is only a feeble glimmer of understanding about the mechanics and institutions of England, and I doubt if he had the slightest conception of what was beginning to happen to his native county and its greater frame, the county palatine. Cromwell was not out of touch with reality, but Starkey’s Dialogue was. There is too much in it of an expatriate dreaming of return to revitalised fields that never were. His, in part, was the fantasy of a Merry England which had gone wrong, and yet there is a niggling thought that there was, despite everything, some mental association between his language and the understanding of the great Secretary. An abiding memory from this book, often brilliant, sometimes weighed down by an over-earnest intensity of discussion, is that Starkey used “cuntry” to mean the whole of England.

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