

J. F. C. Harrison, *The Common People. A History from the Norman Conquest to the Present*, Croom Helm, London/Barnes & Noble Books, Totowa, N.J., 1984, pp. 445, clothbound, £ 12.95.

There is some substance in the criticism that in the nineteenth century many English historians concentrated their attention upon domestic politics, international diplomacy, warfare and overseas expansion rather than upon the fortunes of the working classes. In the twentieth century, on the other hand, the working classes have not been neglected. The bibliography of Professor Harrison's *The Common People* shows how detailed has been the research on various aspects of social history. The great merit of this book is that – apart from the author's own researches – Professor Harrison has summarised the work of countless scholars who have contributed to our knowledge of the history of the working classes.

It is no easy matter to attempt to cover in a single volume the history of the common people of England over a period of 900 years. It is inevitable that parts of this survey are summaries of the researches and conclusions of other historians. Professor Harrison, however, offers his readers something more than this. In each period he deals with at least one major topic in depth. Part I on the middle ages includes a detailed survey of the Black Death and an assessment of its consequences. Part II, which deals with the period 1500–1780, includes accounts of the way in which the common people were affected first by the reformation and then by the civil war. Parts III and IV, covering the two hundred years 1780–1980, are inevitably dominated by the industrial revolution, by Britain as the workshop of the world, and by Britain's decline as a manufacturing country in the twentieth century. Professor Harrison's book is an accurate, fair and well balanced survey and it can be recommended as an excellent introduction to a study of the English workers. *W. O. Henderson, Hemel Hempstead*

Catherine B. A. Behrens, *Society, Government and the Enlightenment. The Experiences of Eighteenth-Century France and Prussia*, Thames & Hudson, London 1985, pp. 247, hardback, £ 16.00.

In this important work the author compares the structure of society and the administration of the state in France and Prussia in the eighteenth century. She points out that although there were obvious differences between the two countries there were also significant resemblances. In both states an absolute monarch presided over a society which was divided into separate »estates« each having its rights and its duties. In France the estates general consisted of three houses – nobles, clergy and commons while in Prussia the legal code of 1794 listed three principal estates – the nobility, the middle class, and the peasants. The author endeavours to explain why the transition from the *ancien régime* to a modern constitution should have occurred in very different ways in France and in Prussia. In France the *société des ordres* came to a sudden end in the revolutionary period of the 1790s while in Prussia the *Ständegesellschaft* was gradually changed by the Hohenzollerns in the eighteenth century and then by the Stein-Hardenberg reforms.

It will come as no surprise to the reader to be told that one aspect of the situation was the fact that France and Prussia were ruled by very different dynasties in the eighteenth century. No French monarch could be compared with Frederick the Great whose relatively efficient civil service, legal and administrative reforms and economic developments paved the way for the modernisation of the Prussian state. No student of European history can afford to neglect this detailed examination of the social and political structure of France and Prussia in the age of the enlightenment. *W. O. Henderson, Hemel Hempstead*