

now in the Lords, needed information on the Commons' proceedings. It is surely no coincidence that, at the same time as his elevation, his clients Norton, Fleetwood, and Fulk Onslow were appointed to the offices of Lord Mayor's Secretary, City Recorder, and Clerk of the Commons respectively, and that, in 1572, Bell was 'elected' speaker of the lower house. It is from 1571 onwards that parliamentary diaries, reports and advices have survived. Speaker Bell reported to him on the progress of bills. Onslow described proceedings in 1572, 1581 and 1586-7. Fleetwood and others sent accounts to Burghley in 1581 and 1584. These men were not only clients of a peerless patron. They were also the parliamentary aides of the chief minister of state.³⁹

The operation of the patron client mechanism and of faction in the parliamentary context draws attention to several significant points about Tudor parliaments. Continental assemblies, such as the French estates-general and provincial estates, the various Spanish cortes, the Sicilian parlimento and the Swedish riksdag, reflected the 'estate structure' of those societies. They were structurally organised in estates or social orders: those who prayed (the clergy), those who fought (the nobility), and those who toiled (the third estate). That concept crumbled in fourteenth century English parliaments. The lower clergy withdrew to their own assembly, convocation. The rural gentry and urban élites formed their own chamber, the Commons. This left the bishops, abbots and peers in possession of the parliament house—the future 'House of Lords'. By the sixteenth century, the English parliaments did not constitute a tiered institution of three competing estates, each sitting separately, but a bicameral assembly.

Homogeneity, not separateness, was the essence of English parliaments. They were the microcosm of the governing class, which consisted of those social groups entitled to a legitimate, active political role. Bishops (and until 1540 some abbots and priors), peers and gentry, merchants and lawyers—the membership of parliaments—were part of a lattice-work of various and varied relationships within that class. The patron client mechanism and faction were expressions of the essential social homogeneity which crossed the artificial barrier of the bicameral organisation of parliament. It is true that, within that context, there were divisive forces and disagreements: between localities, economic lobbies and the factions of courtier-politicians and other great men. The City of London in particular promoted its interests in parliaments. So too did smaller urban communities, such as Exeter, York and Yarmouth. They sponsored bills, opposed others and sought out influential ministers, councillors and courtiers to advance their causes. Families, individuals and