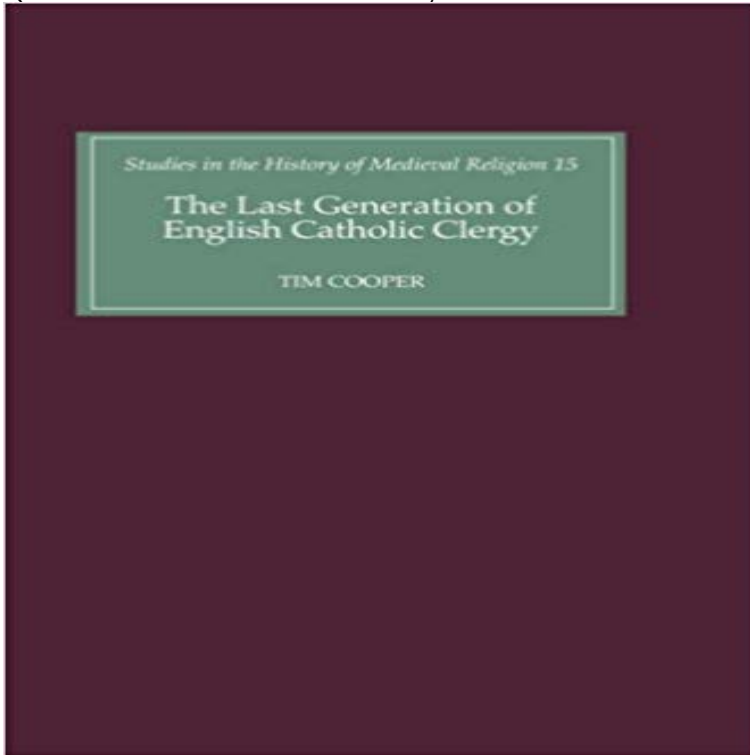


The Last Generation of English Catholic Clergy: Parish Priests in the Diocese of Coventry and Lichfield in the Early Sixteenth Century (Studies in the History of Medieval Religion)



A central paradox of the English reformation is that the call to the Catholic priesthood was never more eagerly answered than on the very eve of religious upheaval. In this important new study, based on the records of the third largest diocese in the country, covering six counties of the midlands and north-west, Dr Cooper traces the careers of the pastoral clergy from their preparatory education, through ordination and job-hunting, to the writing of their wills, often in ripe old age and having served a single parish through the entirety of the main period of reform. In this highly `clericalised society, in which ten new priests were ordained each year for every arising vacancy, it was those priests without livings who were the main point of contact between the church and its people. This `clerical proletariat, and, indeed, the majority of parochial incumbents, emerge as conscientious servants of their native communities, distinguishable from their neighbours by virtue of their sacramental function rather than their social backgrounds and general concerns. Throughout, the book argues that the parish clergy, whose services were in greater demand than ever before, were remarkably well integrated into the communities they served and that popular anticlericalism as an explanatory factor of the English reformation is difficult to sustain. Dr TIM COOPER has taught history at the universities of Sheffield, Manchester and Hull.

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