solutions open to them were to enrol in the army, to enter the religious orders, or to resign themselves to a life on the margin of society. The inarticulate masses of the sixteenth century had few spokesmen, but the hordes of vagabonds, beggars and unemployed who infested the roads of Spain, especially those leading to the court, were eloquent testimony of the increase of destitution in a society where the aristocracy monopolised the ownership of land.

This was the situation in Castile. In eastern Spain poverty had a different origin. The pressure of population on a mountainous region which could not sustain it forced highlanders in the Catalan Pyrenees to descend towards the neighbouring plains of Ampurian and Lerida. But in their search for a living on the land or pasture for their herds they came up against the Catalan peasants who were already in possession, often sustained by wealthy speculators in Barcelona. Unable to find a living either in the mountains from which they came or in the plains to which they were drawn, they became outlaws and lived by contraband or brigandage; highland raiders, in search of loot, terrorised the lowland villages and lay in wait to rob travellers and couriers in a frontier district where the king’s writ hardly ran yet near which passed one of the vital routes of imperial Spain, linking her to Italy via Barcelona. But Aragonese and Catalan adventurers were to be found in all parts of Spain and the empire and they were drawn to any war. In 1570, during the war of Granada, they flocked in hundreds to the camp of Don John of Austria; and Philip II himself raised a tercio from Catalan brigands for the war in Flanders. Their homeland, moreover, was adjacent to France and presented a political and religious problem which took many years to liquidate.

Spanish society in the sixteenth century was permeated at every level by the church. The religious estate comprised about 100,000 members in the sixteenth century and was said to take half the national income. In spite of their privileges and wealth, however, the Spanish clergy could hardly be considered as a separate social class. The vocation and the composition of the church transcended class distinctions: its ranks included sons of artisans and peasants as well as representatives of the gentry and nobility, while its mission was shared by aristocrats like St. Teresa of Avila and commoners like St. John of the Cross. Yet it would be surprising if the church did not reflect in some degree the aristocratic structure of Spanish society. With rare exceptions, the most important dioceses, as well as the best benefices, were in the hands of men from aristocratic families; a tendency which was due not only to social prejudice and influence but also to

20 See below, pp. 198–204.
21 See also below, pp. 236–70.