

Cromwelliana



The Cromwell Association

P. Barnes

The Cromwell Association

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THE CROMWELL ASSOCIATION was founded in 1935 by the late Rt. Hon. Isaac Foot and others to help to preserve the memory of Oliver Cromwell the great puritan statesman, and to encourage study of the history of the Commonwealth protectorate and its leaders. It is not a political organisation and its aims are principally historical and antiquarian. The Association has at present over 300 members. It is anxious to extend its membership in order to widen its influence and increase its work.

Since the Association has come into existence it has:

1. Put up commemorative tablets at Dunbar, Edgehill, Naseby, Preston, Worcester, the Huntingdon Grammar School, and elsewhere, to mark the sites of Cromwell's victories or famous episodes in his career.
2. Helped to constitute a Cromwellian Museum at present housed in the Old Grammar School, Huntingdon. It arranges for lectures to be given, leaflets issued, etc., as required on Cromwellian subjects.
3. Established an Annual Service held on September 3rd each year, by Cromwell's Statue outside the Houses of Parliament, when the address is given by a distinguished Cromwellian.
4. The Association has also formed a small reference library from which books can be borrowed on written application, enclosing postage, from the Hon. Secretary, to whom communications and enquiries can be made.

Cromwell: Military Dictator Or Constitutionalist?

by Frederick L. Borch III

(Awarded First Prize in the Cromwell Association Essay Competition 1975)

The Great Rebellion reversed decisively the Tudor initiated policy of monarchical absolutism. But any hope for a swift return to the 'good old days' when the 'fundamental constitutions of this kingdom were reserved on the people's behalf in the right and power of frequent and successive Parliaments' was ephemeral.

The military triumphs of Parliament neither ended the Revolution nor ushered in a tranquil settlement. Rather, relations with the Army became increasingly tense, and eventually the latter was wrestling with Parliament for the reins of government.

But the calling of Charles Stuart, that Man of Blood, to account for the 'mischief he had done to his utmost against the Lord's cause' was scarcely a pivot point in the revolution either; the tide may have turned against excessive radicalism, but the fervent quest for settlement continued in the subsequent decade – the 1650's were neither years of decline or stagnation in this respect, nor those of reaction that would inevitably culminate in a restoration.

The powerful figure of Oliver Cromwell, the Cambridge MP whose military genius had brought a meteoric rise to national prominence, sought to fashion, with God's help, the shape the settlement would take. But was the Lord General a man of such military inclinations that he saw the quest for settlement in military terms? Or did he instead, as a civilian, a soldier by chance, envisage a solution as a constitutionalist and consummate politician?

The fact that Cromwell gained renown not as a politician, but as a soldier, lends credence to the assertion that his thoughts and actions were those of a military man. Baldock, himself an army officer, saw Cromwell as 'gifted with a marvellous military genius,' a 'combination of nerve, decision and military insight' who 'stands out as the first great exponent of the modern method of war.' Baldock is not alone in his praise; Cromwell's modern biographers are unanimous in their praise of his generalship, even going so far as to give him credit where it is not merited.

What accounts more for his success in this period was the personal emphasis Oliver placed on recruiting 'godly precious men' and on organisation and discipline. Cromwell wrote to his cousin Oliver St John in September 1643 that he had 'a lovely cumpane, you would respect them did you know them . . . they are honest sober Christians.' Indeed numerous hagiographers praised them as 'constantly active and zealously disciplined.'

'No man swears but he pays his twelve-pence; if he be drunk, he is set in the stocks or worse; if one calls the other Roundhead he is cashiered: in so much that the counties where they come leap for joy of them and come in and join with them. How happy were it if all the forces were thus disciplined.'

Cromwell was a first-rate military commander, but he was no professional in the modern sense. He was forty-three when he mustered his first troop of horse at Huntingdon, and he had had little if any theoretical instruction in military science.

A professional soldier spends his life as an apprentice to the martial arts. In comparison, Cromwell was an amateur, active for less than a decade. 'By birth a gentleman, living neither in any considerable height nor yet in obscurity,' he had been a civilian for many years. He did more than farm flat fields in the south-east Midlands though. An active and prominent force in local politics, he served first as justice of the peace and then as MP for Huntingdon. These years were Oliver's political apprenticeship – conflicts with elements who favoured a close oligarchy and royal control of his borough's corporation, disputes over religious lectureships, and his more famous activities as 'Lord of the Fens.'

He suffered political defeat, but it was a temporary setback; though ousted from his Huntingdon seat he was later able to represent his 'country' as MP for Cambridge. By 1640 Cromwell definitely 'fell into the category of the established politician.' His educational record at Sidney Sussex College and the law courts, and his membership with a political faction based on 'cousinry' and geographical grouping made him in many respects 'a very typical member' of Parliament.

The building-blocks of Oliver's psyche were therefore both military and civil. They shaped him, he in turn acted upon them, through service as Army general and parliamentary politician. Consequently an examination of Cromwell and his quest for settlement vis-a-vis Army and Parliament enables the nature of his character to be discerned.

As an officer and commander, Oliver looked upon military ineptitude and inefficiency as anathema, and in view of this, the impetus for Cromwell's bitter attack on his commanding officer, the Earl of Manchester, in the Commons on 25 November 1644 was due to his desire to 'have this warre prosecuted unto full victory.'

The ramifications of the Earl's radical transformation in his attitude towards the war extended beyond the sphere of the military into the realm of politics. The Independent party had seen Manchester and his Association 'as a weapon providentially forged for the defence of liberty of conscience,' and consequently the army received more favour than the other parliamentary forces. But Manchester's dilatoriness and Cromwell's harsh criticisms coupled with the Eastern Association's lack of military success altered the attitude of the war party and the middle group; the enthusiastic support St. John, Vane and their Parliamentary allies had once given Manchester and his army began to wane, and they became increasingly receptive to ideas 'to put the army into a new method.' Oliver's impressive December 9th speech along with the Self-Denying Ordinance were the creating impetus for the New Model.

The evidence, moreover, reveals the quarrel as more than the orthodox version of military inefficiency versus incompetence. Indeed, the struggle between the two officers was reflective of the military in politics and politics in the military. Clive Holmes has argued effectively that the military debacles of the Association offered the discredited Essex not only an opportunity to heap scorn upon Manchester and his general staff, but more importantly a chance to create, in the words of the Venetian ambassador, 'an opening for

himself and a way to employment,' at the head of a new national army. If the responsibility for the disasters of the autumn were to be collectively shared, the political strength of the Earl of Essex would be greatly enhanced. This would pose a substantial threat to the future careers of Cromwell and the other generals, and 'explains their desperate efforts to defend themselves, a process culminating in their attempt to cast the Earl of Manchester as the scapegoat for the failures of the campaign.'

The introduction of the Self-Denying Ordinance and the Oliverian proposal for a New Model Army was a brilliant solution. Not only did it alleviate the quarrel between Manchester and himself, which would have opened 'a wide gap and a door of reproach unto the enemy against ourselves [Parliament],' and tarnish the reputations of all concerned, but it removed the threat from Essex as well.

Oliver's actions do not appear to have been a political stratagem designed to further selfish ends; though future events would enable him to retain his commission, he seems to have fully expected that he would have to relinquish command. If Cromwell 'was prepared to wait, and watch for His sign,' then his actions must be seen as altruistic: the New Model was a single, powerful structure better designed to execute the MP's policies and further the parliamentary cause.

The eleven regiments of Horse and twelve of Foot that formed the New Model had a consciousness unlike contemporary armies.

Its belief that it too had a role in the quest for settlement made the relationship between the New Model and its civilian commanders uneasy and tension-filled. Indeed the years between the end of the First Civil War and the execution of the king, were a period of conflict between Parliament and Army, and much is revealed about Oliver Cromwell in an examination of his position vis-a-vis this struggle.

In 1646, at the close of the war, the predominant political force was the middle-group-radical alliance, which, with the support of the Army grandees, held in check the revolutionary radicals and their militant allies among the Army and sectarian congregations. The events of the next year strained the alliance greatly. The alarming spread of revolutionary and religious radicalism in and outside the Army, and demands to alleviate high taxes and quartering, resulted in efforts to disband the New Model and negotiate a settlement, that, with Scottish assistance would restore Charles Stuart to former power.

This foolish move served only to unite the Army and radicalize the rank-and-file further; the soldiers in fact, began to push Fairfax, Cromwell and the other officers into adopting a militant posture in order to preserve the unity of the army.

Though the middle-group-radical alliance survived the crisis, the ramifications were profoundly significant. 'All wise men may see,' declared the army, 'that Parliament privileges as well as royal prerogative may be perverted or abused to the destruction . . . of the rights and privileges of the people and the safety of the whole.' Suspicious of its civilian commanders, and wary of a repeat of the Presbyterian-Scottish betrayal the Army officers began to interfere directly in the political settlement of the kingdom. Thus the seizure of the king by Cornet Joyce from Holmby House, though probably not Cromwell's stratagem, was treated as a *fait accompli*: no attempt was made to reverse the act for both Cromwell and Ireton realised that a

settlement could now be obtained on the Army's terms.

The course the settlement should take was discussed repeatedly at the debates held at Putney, and Oliver Cromwell disclosed the direction he believed should be taken. The man revealed in the meeting of the General Council is hesitant, if not unwilling, to embrace the assertion that he and his fellow officers must measure the Way by a Wisdom of their own. Instead,

for the actions that are now to be done, and those that must do them, I think it is their proper place to conform to the Parliament, that first gave them their being . . . Either they are a Parliament or no Parliament. If they be no Parliament, they are nothing, and we are nothing likewise. If they be a Parliament, we are not to proceed without them in our plan for settlement, but to offer it to them . . . Therefore the considering of what is fit for the kingdom does belong to the Parliament.'

The Cromwell who had served as a soldier for the previous five years hardly envisaged a military solution to their problems. The end or goal, he agrees with his brother officers, 'is to deliver this nation from oppression and slavery, and to accomplish that work that God hath carried us on in, to establish our hopes of an end of justice and righteousness in it.' The objective is clear, but which path must they follow to attain it? Cromwell asks them to 'wait upon God for such a way when the thing may be done without sin, and without scandal too. Surely what God would have us do, he does not desire we should step out of the way for it.'

Cromwell was a man of conservative instincts, drawn from the landowning class, as were Fairfax, Ireton and most of the colonels. Yet he was 'one of those whose heart God hath drawn out for some extraordinary dispensations.' In a clearly Hegelian sense, Cromwell sees God's unfolding plan of history being made manifest through him. His own success in war was ample proof of this. In his victory at Marston Moor, he saw divine approval of the religious doctrine he espoused; the conclusive victory was evidence of the Lord's blessing upon the godly party. 'We never charged, but we routed the enemy.'

He is willing to innovate or alter the status quo, provided this is God's design. He would not hesitate to agree with his son-in-law, Henry Ireton, that 'if I saw the hand of God leading so far as to destroy King and destroy Lords, and destroy property, and leave no such thing at all amongst us, I should acquiesce in it.'

This view of Cromwell as both conservative and innovator substantiates no dichotomy of character; the conservative, after all, is not opposed to change, but rather questions the speed, degree and sagacity of innovation. For Cromwell, the omniscience of God in his autobiographical plan of history satisfies all three of these points. Cromwell at the end of 1647 envisages a constitutional, civilian settlement rather than one along military lines. This much he so clearly knows to be the mind of God.

Events from 1648 to the execution of Charles corroborate this view of Oliver. The Army continued to take the initiative in politics; the June 14 *Representations*, which outlined its programme, was consolidated in the *Heads of Proposals*. Mainly the work of Ireton, this

series of propositions put forth the type of settlement the Army leaders thought should be implemented. It aimed at permanently curtailing not only the king's authority, but the power of Parliament as well; naturally it found favour with neither.

Cromwell's continued unwillingness to act against constitutional authority meant he remained steadfastly opposed to any army coup as long as there was hope of obtaining a restoration through Charles' consent to the *Heads of Proposals*. His three-hour speech in the Commons on the 20th of October was an eloquent defence of the monarchy, and elucidates his desire for a constitutional settlement.

The King's escape from Army custody and his reliance on the Scots destroyed hopes for any such settlement. With war imminent, thoughts of self-preservation dominated the minds of the officers. After several days together in prayer at Windsor, the Army agreed that their predicament was due to 'those Cursed Carnal Conferences [that] our own Wisdom, Fear, and want of Faith, had prompted us the Year before to entertain with King and his Party.' They were henceforth steadfastly to maintain this belief.

The end of the Second Civil War intensified the struggle between Parliament and Army, and made the destruction of the alliance inevitable. The middle-group was determined to reach a settlement at all costs (except as regards the abolition of episcopacy.) The Army could not accept this; furious at the bloodshed Charles and the Scots had caused, and viewing the political compromise as the repetition of past sins, the officers were increasingly receptive to Ireton's persuasive arguments for interruption of the treaty and imposition of their own settlement.

Cromwell, as David Underdown has so conclusively argued, was among those men who could not perceive of a lasting settlement without king, lords or commons. He was not alone in this desire to see a successful conclusion to the Treaty of Newport; this wish was shared by most of his fellow officers in the General Council up until the middle of November. Cromwell however was to cling tenaciously to the hope the treaty would succeed long after the rest of the Army leaders had abandoned this stance.

Oliver had hoped to see a 'reformed and purged Parliament,' but the purge, in his eyes, would have to be initiated freely and constitutionally from within Parliament. But 'Righteousness no longer looked down from heaven [upon Parliament;]' and the Army, following the decisive leadership of Henry Ireton, decided to purge Westminster on December 6th. Cromwell was torn with indecision between his desire to see the middle group's negotiations culminate in success, and more radical policies. Despite repeated and urgent pleas from Fairfax and the other officers to join them at Windsor with the greatest possible haste, Cromwell was unwilling to commit himself to an action that not only conflicted with his conservative nature, but had scarcely been demonstrated to be an unequivocal design of Providence. He 'balked at the use of force against constitutional authority, but could suggest no other alternative which would avoid splitting the Army.'

His dilatory movements in the north at Pontefract disclosed his emphatic intention to stay out of action; he simply did not wish to be in Westminster before the purge. In adopting this course of non-action, he could honestly state upon returning to London that 'he had not been acquainted with the design; but since it was done, he was glad of it.'

But long after the Purge, Cromwell continued to lean towards the policies the middle group had espoused. Ireton's agitation for the execution of the king, though highly instrumental in swaying the officers of the General Council, left Cromwell unmoved. He alone, of all the Council's members objected to the new rule requiring the officers of the guard to prohibit 'any private discourse betwixt him [Charles Stuart] and any other person, save what one of yourselves or one of the aforesaid Gentlemen shall hear.'

Still unconvinced that 'Babylon would not be healed,' Cromwell searched for a settlement through secret, but nonetheless positive negotiations with Charles. He entreated with the King and his secluded comrades at Windsor almost until Christmas, and was not sure that 'justice and necessity demanded the death sentence until far into January.'

'Religion was not the thing at first contested for,' Oliver had once emphasised, 'but God brought it to that issue at last.' Nevertheless, despite his profound distrust of both the king and the negotiations, he was so anxious for the Treaty to succeed that he would have accepted a Presbyterian settlement, could the Parliamentary commissioners persuade the king to abandon episcopacy.

Regardless of Cromwell's rash outbursts ('I tell you we will cut off his head with the Crown upon it.') and Dr. Hill's erroneous contention that he 'played the leading part in bringing Charles I to the scaffold,' Cromwell's belated acquiescence in the execution of the king should not be construed as a positive conversion to regicide. The execution for Cromwell was an act of conservative pragmatism; the blatant insincerity of the king left no other viable political alternative, and Providence had long appeared to be dictating that the sought-after settlement could be reached only along this path.

The death of Charles was to herald a beginning as well as an end: an end to the monarchy, a beginning of the Commonwealth. It did neither. Nevertheless, Gardiner's contention that 'the sword destroys but it can do no more' is not completely valid, for the execution served to unravel the Gordian knot of 1649. It did nothing however, to alleviate the tension between the army and Parliament; relations between the two deteriorated unabatedly. The Rump, for its part, was increasingly resentful of the army's claims to a say in national politics. The military's proper role, declared the MPs, was one of servitude; the 'servants' though, were unceasing in their criticism of the purged Parliament, which they and others viewed as 'an overlapping, omniscient oligarchy.' The manner in which the Rumpers combined executive, legislative and judicial authority in their own persons (together with all the advantages and profits accrued from office) made them inordinately distasteful to those people outside the narrow ruling elite, i.e. the majority of the political nation. Consequently the Army pressured the Rump to reform itself as well as demanding that it erect a lasting settlement.

Hostility between Parliament and the Army appeared to increase geometrically; and by late summer of 1652 the radical officers were prepared publicly to demand dissolution. But Cromwell restrained them. Moreover he continued to act as a mediator and peacemaker through the winter; 'it was probably through his influence that a forcible dissolution was averted in January.' He was still searching for

'healing and settling in March; he told his brother officers that 'the use of force against the Rump would imply that "the Parliament is not the supreme power."'

Cromwell's devotion to Parliament and his perseverance to reconcile both the military and the Rumpers cannot be overemphasised. Throughout the conflict between the quarreling duo he had denounced cries for a violent solution, restrained the more radical army leaders, declared repeatedly his and the Army's allegiance to the civil authority at Westminster. He 'would obey parliament's orders', he said, 'if it would command the army to break their swords over their heads, and to throw them into the sea.'

The traditional view has it that it was the inability of the Rumpers to implement a reasonable, responsible settlement in terms of constitutional, legal, fiscal and ecclesiastical reform, and the final attempt at self-perpetuation through a recruiter election, that led Cromwell to dissolve them.

Dr. Blair Worden however, rejects this orthodox version outright and he has put forward a strikingly new interpretation. He argues persuasively that the bill the House was about to pass on the morning of April 20th 1653 'provided for completely fresh elections,' and that Oliver's subsequent dissolution of the Parliament was due to his objections to this line of action.

Why this sudden turnabout? Why did Cromwell, who had pressed so long for reform and new elections, dissolve the Rump when it was about to do this? Fresh elections would not have filled Westminster with army and government supporters. Rather the Rumper's schemes for dissolution and election were jeopardizing the very survival of the Commonwealth. 'There is no doubt that the bill would have led to the election of members who had not sat since 1648 and men of similar views,' men who opposed the principal events upon which the Commonwealth's foundation rested - Pride's Purge, the execution of Charles, and the abolition of monarchy.

Though sometimes questionable, none of Cromwell's actions were a prelude to military rule. The Army's role in the calling of Barebones and Cromwell's position as regards that event substantiates this completely.

The spontaneous dismissal of the Rump left Cromwell and his fellow officers without plans as to future action. That a sovereign assembly should be called was not disputed, but the Army Council's views diverged widely as to its structure. Lambert wanted 'a small governing body of ten or twelve men, Harrison an assembly of seventy, modelled on the Sanhedrin of Jerusalem and dedicated to a Fifth Monarchist "rule of the saints."'

Meanwhile, the reins of government lay securely in the Army's grip. Though an interim government was elected - a council of state of ten members (seven of whom had been Rumpers) - it was the military who were 'busy choosing the men who were to constitute the new supreme authority.'

By the 30th of May the Army had completed the list of nominees. The officers had made most of their selections from friends, comrades, kinsmen, 'saintly' Rumpers and loyal gentry.

It was never in Cromwell's mind at this point in time to erect a military or personal dictatorship. On the contrary, he appeared to have

proposed that 'if any [officers] of the army bee chosen [to sit in the new Assembly] they must lay downe their commissions.' That Harrison or Lambert would have suggested this is inconceivable; neither desired to relinquish *his* command in order to sit, nor did either feel any qualms about 'rule by the sword.'

This exclusion of army officers would not only quash charges that the military had broken the Rump parliament to usurp power itself, but would also prevent the army from exerting pressure upon the newly gathered representatives. Oliver 'seems no more to have thought of governing as general or protector than he heeded certain suggestions that he should take the title of king,' he intended to divest his own authority upon the new representative body without delay.

He opened the Barebones Parliament with joyful optimism. In light of his own and the army's rule in determining its composition, he had good cause to view the body assembled 'as a gathering of the Saints, long expected, for which much tribulation had been endured, but now at last granted to them: out of it now great things would surely emanate.'

But Barebones, invested with the authority Cromwell had relinquished, embarked upon a reckless course of hasty and unwise reform. The Lord General and the army were disgusted and alarmed at the eagerness of the Puritan radicals to attack both 'ministry and property,' but Cromwell, to his credit, refused to purge or dissolve them. But great was his relief when his moderate adherents in the assembly voluntarily resigned their powers and dissolved Barebones on the morning of 12 December 1653. This dubiously arranged relinquishment of authority put unlimited power in Cromwell's hands, something a strict constitutionalist would not have abided, but there was no practical alternative.

Oliver had no wish to rule extra-legally and the embarrassment of seeming to be a military dictator was swiftly eradicated by the acceptance of the *Instrument of Government*, an eclectic, though clumsy scissors and paste affair. Henceforth, the

'supreme legislative authority of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland, and the dominions thereunto belonging, shall be and reside in one person, and the people assembled in Parliament: the style of which person shall be the Lord Protector . . . and the Lord Protector, with the consent of the major part of the Council, for preventing the disorders and dangers which might otherwise fall out both by land and sea, shall have power, until the meeting of the first Parliament, to raise money . . . and make laws and ordinances for the peace and welfare of these nations where it shall be necessary.'

In addition, the new document fulfilled the Army's demands for a 'well composed' Parliament with 'proper representation' of the like Cromwell had called for at Putney. Indeed, there is no mistaking the army's imprint upon the new *Instrument of Government* as regards electoral reform. There are striking similarities between it and the earlier *Heads of Proposals* that had emerged from the meetings at Putney in late 1647.

At those debates Ireton had demonstrated that, though not opposed to radical constitutional reform, neither he nor his father-in-law would stomach a Leveller franchise which might ultimately have a socially

revolutionary effect. Essentially, both men had argued against the radicals' claims that the vote was a fundamental birthright of all Englishmen; only property, an 'interest in the realm' gave that right.

The *Heads of Proposals*, which had consolidated their views, had called for a redistribution of constituencies attractive to the yeomanry and lesser gentry, and the first Protectorate franchise laid down by the *Instrument* did just this. Hereafter, 'every person and persons seised or possessed to his own use, of any estate, real or personal, to the value of £200 . . . shall be capable to elect members to serve in Parliament.' This 'disenfranchised smaller freeholders and gave the vote to copyholders and leaseholders more generously' than did the Reform Bill of 1832, but it did not embrace the Leveller concept of a broadened, democratic franchise; the Army rank-and-file did not receive the vote.

Cromwell was sincere in his desire to transform military rule into civilian rule, to reduce the army and lighten the burden of taxes. He took the oath of the Protectorate, significantly enough, not in his military uniform, as Napoleon was to do in later centuries, but in civilian dress.

But progress towards an agreeable settlement at home was not fortuitous. As Austin Woolrich has shown in his pamphlet *Penruddock's Rising 1655*, Cromwell, since his installation as chief of state had greatly increased his enemies. Regicides like Colonel Matthew Allured inveighed against Oliver's assumption of absolute power; many others who had fought for a parliament 'would not raise a finger for a Protector, and might even help to overthrow him.' The Presbyterians and royalists were marshalled on the right; the radical republicans, Levellers and Fifth Monarchists, who beseeched their followers to 'go home, and pray and say, Lord, wilt thou have Oliver Cromwell or Jesus Christ to rule over us?' were no less solidly arrayed on the left. Christopher Hill's words are anachronistic, but apt: 'Cromwell was left sitting on a thin line of bayonets.'

It is not hard to imagine a jittery Cromwell, who though unwilling to rule by the sword, felt increasingly forced to rely upon the army. Colonel Penruddock's Rising brought an abrupt reversal of his previous quest for settlement – convinced that only the implementation of extreme measures would eradicate conspiracy and subversion, the Lord General divided England into eleven districts under as many major-generals. 'Safety only in repression, and that the Puritan Commonwealth could be established only by reliance on the Army.'

Though their primary duty, as laid down in *Orders for Securing the Peace of the Commonwealth*, was to prevent and ferret out conspiracy through their command of regular forces and militia, they were not just a response to Penruddock's revolt. They conformed with Oliver's ideas about how the country should be governed. As Ivan Roots has shown, the Major-Generals were administrators, to 'help fulfill the sensible intention of any ruler to govern, to get some effective central control, uniformity, commonly regarded as the antechamber to unity.' It would be an error to assert that Cromwell envisaged a JP-like role for the Major-Generals from the outset, but his 'new-style lord lieutenants' were showered with orders and directives. They busied themselves in both state and church; their ever-extending administrative functions were eventually 'carpeting the remotest village with a moral pattern.' In essence, Cromwell saw the Major-Generals as the main link between

Whitehall and the counties; they 'mirrored at the provincial level the Protector and his council, and extended into local life the authoritarian rule of a minority.'

But this injection of military rule into the localities served to resurrect a problem that faced so many provincial people in this period - 'the conflict between loyalty to the local community and loyalty to the state.'

This was not the first time that the centrifugal forces of the country had clashed with the interests of the nation, and Cromwell as a landowner could not have been ignorant of the conflicts of allegiance the Major-Generals would create. Moreover, the entire course of action was inconsistent with his previous behaviour. Fundamentally, it violated his belief in a constitutional settlement. It destroyed prior efforts at reconciliation; the decimation tax, which required an additional ten percent from the shrunken incomes of the royalists completely 'negated the healing effects of the Act of Oblivion of February 1652, which Oliver had been so personally anxious to see passed.'

It cannot be denied that the experiment of the Major-Generals was a blatant act of Puritan authoritarianism; the Cromwell who installed them was not seeking a constitutional settlement. But it is not implausible that Oliver was stampeded into this act, not only by the total picture of conspiracy and subversion he saw, but by groups in the army, who, whether out of impatience or disgruntlement, desired military domination in the nation. Cromwell was particularly influenced by General Harrison and his millenarians at this time. The latter insisted that 'upon higher principles than those of civil liberty' the saints must rule; if necessary, by the sword. Harrison most certainly saw the Major-Generals as the fulfillment of the Biblical prophecy that 'the saints shall take the kingdom and possess it,' and though this can only be conjecture, may have persuaded the Protector to look upon it as such as well.

Whatever the reasons, the Major-Generals were a disastrous experiment. More than anything else he did during the Protectorate, this action 'hindered the reconciliation of the great members of the gentry who were neither royalist nor Cromwellian, but indefinitely 'presbyterian!' Naturally they were enraged at the exorbitant authority invested in officers of low birth, but what undoubtedly rankled them to the utmost degree was the 'overriding of their easygoing management of local affairs.'

The ousting of the Major-Generals, who had been hated more than the sequestrators, committee-men and ship-money sheriffs, did not end the search for a viable settlement. The Humble Petition and Advice erected a constitutional framework for government; there was no military junta. By 1657 regular elections had been guaranteed, the parliamentary constituencies were reformed, and elected members found no opposition to the taking of their seats. The regime, spurred on by Cromwell, was far ahead of national opinion as regards liberty of conscience and toleration. In the relief of poverty, the increase of educational provision, social justice as regards the underprivileged and reform of the legal system, the government was anxious for marked improvement. Hindsight may reveal that their achievements did not measure up to their intentions, but expectations burned brightly.

The efforts at reconciliation with the opposition were seriously set

back by the rule of the Major-Generals, but not irrevocably impaired; the 'Protectorate's stock of goodwill probably recovered.' Even the opposition, especially those on the right, regarded the new government as a 'bulwark against further social revolution and as a dispenser of firm government.'

The period between his death and the restoration reveals the unique position Oliver had vis-a-vis army and parliament. As commander-in-chief, his dominating influence 'was the only thing that held the army together;' his death left an enormous power vacuum. The army was not held in check by the new Protector; he could not restrain Fleetwood and Lambert in their bid for army supremacy, for, in Firth's words, *imperium in imperio*. Richard, some men murmured, 'was not the general of the army his father was,' and the fact that the Army's chief demand after September 1658 was to be allowed to select its own commander supports the assertion that Oliver's position with the army was unique. He had ridden to power on the backs of the military; this made him the only acceptable chief executive so long as the army held national prominence and power.

Cromwell's position with Parliament was likewise unique. He was a former MP and had demonstrated his loyalty to the parliamentary cause in the past; his crusading spirit for a constitutional settlement continually encouraged hopes he might yet succeed.

Oliver was a consummate politician, and while alive, he alone had held the government together and directed the course of the settlement. In 1653, Oliver's expulsion of the Rump had been generally accepted by the political nation. It was an acknowledgement that neither the military nor the representative assembly could function without his auspicious guiding zeal. After his death, Westminster, though courageous, acted irrationally. It lost respect and credibility, but then so did the Army; the latter's refusal to allow parliament to sit in 1659 exposed selfish motives and resulted too in its demise as a ruling force.

Cromwell's death brought ungovernability and near-anarchy in its wake; this can only elucidate the skill with which he rode and restrained the two polar forces of the army and parliament. Despite claims by modern historians that the 1650's were stagnant and inevitably headed for restoration, Oliver's political achievements under the Protectorate were both positive and significant.

He envisaged no military settlement, but a constitutional one based on parliamentary lines. Josef Stalin's assertion that 'in the name of the constitution, he took up arms, executed the king, dissolved Parliament, imprisoned some and beheaded others' is not fair. Oliver was a soldier in God's army, a Saint whose heart God had drawn out to wait for some extraordinary dispensations, and his acts reflect this conviction. Through him were God's designs to be made manifest. The Restoration was not due to any inherent flaw in Cromwell's settlement. The Protectorate neither bred irreconcilable conflicts of interest, nor did it deny the men of substance who formed the political nation an active participation in government or neglect their interests. It was not incurably bankrupt either. In sum, the ousting of the Saints and the return of Charles was not inevitable; undoubtedly the major reason it occurred was because the republicans, sectarians and army malcontents who pulled down Cromwell's infant settlement had nothing to erect in its place.

CROMWELL'S DAY 1975

Cromwell As A Military Leader

(An Abridgement of the Address given by Brigadier Peter Young, D.S.O., M.C., F.S.A. at the Annual Commemoration Service)

What in the jargon of Sandhurst, was Oliver Cromwell's O.Q.? which, being translated, means Officer Quality. To answer this question we must, I suggest, compare him with the other generals of his day, and take a look at the state of the Art Military in his time. But I seem to hear a muttering. Why not compare him with the great generals of all time? To do this I suggest is to put him outside his league. I do not believe that it serves any useful purpose to assert that Cromwell merits comparison with officers like Napoleon I, the first Duke of Wellington, the Duke of Marlborough, Prince Eugene, Frederick the Great, Marshal Saxe, Julius Caesar, or either of the Alexanders – to name but a few. It may be that had Cromwell seen a bit more soldiering, that had he begun his military service in the normal way at an age of about seventeen or twenty he might have made a career comparable with those of some of the gentlemen I have just named. But the fact is that Cromwell's reputation rests on a relatively limited operational experience.

He came of the younger branch of a family, which contributed at least six field officers to the armies of King Charles I, and like most of Essex' troop commanders of 1642 he was armigerous. He could have got into Sandhurst even before the last war. But in fact, I suppose, that had he entered the army in those days he would have been a University candidate, for after some time at the Free School at Huntingdon, he spent some time at Sidney Sussex, Cambridge: then 'a nursery of puritanism', according to Archbishop Laud. I think we may say that his education was rather above the average. He had sufficient Latin to be able, when Protector, to converse in that tongue with the Dutch ambassador. In 1650 he exhorted his idle son, Richard, to study cosmography, mathematics – at which, incidentally, he himself is said to have excelled, and a little history. 'These', he said 'fit for public services for which a man is born'. It would not be difficult to find support for this view in the recorded opinions of Wellington and Napoleon. In 1620 he married Elizabeth Bourchier, daughter of a London merchant. Just as well he wasn't a regular officer. One can imagine what the C.O. would have said when he found out that one of his subalterns had married at the age of 21! He settled down to run his estate and to rear a family. Between 1621 and 1629 Elizabeth bore four sons and two daughters; and then in 1638, as an afterthought, another daughter – who lived on well into the reign of George I.

Many imagine Cromwell to have been rather a stern and stolid character, and looking at the splendid portrait by Samuel Cooper, one might get that impression. I suggest on the other hand that he was really rather temperamental. He had, you will remember, Welsh blood in his veins: his great-grandfather Richard Williams, had adopted the surname of his patron Thomas Cromwell, Earl of Essex, King Henry VIII's minister.

At Naseby he writes:

'I could not (riding alone about my business) but smile out to God in praises, in assurance of victory, because God would, by things that are not, bring to naught things that are . . . and God did it. O that men would therefore praise the Lord, and declare the wonders that He doth for the children of men!'

An eyewitness recalled that just before the battle Oliver was seized by a fit of laughter. What would the Duke of Wellington have thought? Then again before Dunbar he rode about all night by torchlight, mounted on a little Scots nag, and marshalling his army: 'biting his lips till the blood ran down his chin without his perceiving it, his thoughts being busily employed to be ready for the action in hand'. And then at zero hour, which was 0533 hours, the mood of elation descended upon him again as at Naseby and he was 'carried on as with a divine impulse. He did laugh so excessively as if he had been drunk, and his eyes sparkled with spirits.' Aubrey is not suggesting that he had been at the rum ration. There is simply evidence, that like most soldiers Cromwell was sufficiently human to know the almost unbearable tension of waiting 'to go over the top'. It is not given to everyone to conceal it – though Marlborough, for one, seems to have been able to.

The English armies of 1642 were not well off for officers of experience, indeed there were troops on the Parliament side which had not a single professional soldier in them. Whether Cromwell's was one of them we do not know. Nor do we know how much interest, if any, he had taken in the events of the Thirty Years War which had been raging on the continent all his adult life. It would be strange indeed if he had taken no interest in the conquering career of King Gustav Adolf of Sweden nor pondered such great events as the sieges of Breda (1625 and 1637), the battles of Breitenfeld (1631), the Lech and Lützen (1632) and the sack of Magdeburg (1632). But though the war dragged on, these great events lay ten years in the past and the great figures of the war Spinola (1569–1630), Tilly (1559–1632), Pappenheim (1594–1632), Wallenstein (1583–1634), and the Great Gustavus (1594–1632) himself had long since passed from the scene. Are we to suppose that Cromwell derived some profit from a study of *The Swedish Intelligencer* or Cruso's *Instructions for the Cavall'rie*? then the only cavalry drill book available in English. That Cromwell himself selected the men of his troop there is no doubt. Maybe too he himself supervised the purchase of their horses. But who drilled the troop? The names of his Lieutenant, Baildon and his Cornet, Waterhouse have been preserved, but of his officers only his Quartermaster and brother-in-law, John Desborough (1608–1680) was to make a name for himself.

Cromwell received £1104 'mounting money', and by 29 August 1642 could muster sixty men all raised in Cambridgeshire and Huntingdon. From the first, according to Richard Baxter,

'... he had special care to get religious men into his troop. These men were of greater understanding than common soldiers and therefore more apprehensive of the importance and consequence of war and making not money but that which they took for the public felicity to be their end, they were the more engaged to

be valiant These things it's probable Cromwell understood, . . . But yet I conjecture that . . . it was the very esteem and love of religious men that principally moved him; and the avoiding of those disorders, mutinies, plunderings and grievances of the country which debase [debauched] men in armies are commonly guilty of. By this means he indeed sped better than he expected. Aires, Desborough, Berry, Evanson and the rest of that troop did prove so valiant that as far as I can learn they never once ran away before an enemy.'

Cromwell missed Powick Bridge, and the part he played at Edgehill, if any, is obscure. Since he became a colonel early in 1643 we may assert that he emerged stainless from his first campaign, and that his troop was one of a dozen or so on the Parliamentary side which could already hold their own with Rupert's Horse. That all was not well with Essex' horse Cromwell himself recalled in an oft-quoted speech of 1657.

' . . . At my first going into this engagement, I saw our men were beaten at every hand . . . and I told him John Hampden I would be serviceable to him in bringing such men in as I thought had a spirit that would do some thing in the work . . . 'Your troopers', said I, 'are most of them old decayed servingmen and tapsters and such kind of fellows; and', said I, 'their troopers are gentlemen's sons, younger sons and persons of quality; do you think that the spirits of such base and mean fellows will be ever able to encounter gentlemen that have honour and courage and resolution in them? . . . You must get men . . . of a spirit that is likely to go on as far as gentlemen will go, or else I am sure you will be beaten still He was a wise and worthy person, and he did think that I talked a good notion but an impracticable one.'

Set the task of turning his troop into a regiment Cromwell went to work in a thoroughly practical fashion, as his letters reveal. Here (29 Aug. 1643) he tells the Suffolk Commissioners how to raise, train and command troops.

' . . . I beseech you be careful what captains of horse you choose, what men be mounted; a few honest men are better than numbers. Some time they must have for exercise. If you choose godly honest men to be captains of horse, honest men will follow them, . . . I had rather have a plain russet-coated captain *that knows what he fights for, and loves what he knows*, than that which you call a gentleman and is nothing else. I honour a gentleman that is so indeed.

To this homily he adds a P.S.

'If you send such men as Essex hath sent, it will be to little purpose. Be pleased to take care that such may come along with them as will be able to bring them to the main body; and then I doubt not but we shall keep them and make good use of them.'

Here again (28 Sept. 1643) he lectures the Suffolk Committee on personnel selection:

' . . . It had been well that men of honour and birth had entered into these employments, but why do they not appear? Who would have hindered them? But seeing it was necessary the work must go on, better plain men than none, but best to have men patient of wants, faithful and conscientious in the employment, and such, I hope, these will approve themselves to be. My troops increase, I have a lovely company; you would respect them, did you know them. They are no Anabaptists, but honest, sober Christians; they expect to be used as men.'

Not all his colleagues thought Cromwell's Regiment such 'a lovely company'. Here a dragoon officer tells us what he thought of them in 1644:

' . . . When any New Englishman or some new upstart Independent did appear there must be a way made for them by cashiering others, some honest commander or other, and those silly people put in their command. If you look upon his own regiment of horse see what a swarm there is of those that call themselves godly; some of them profess they have seen visions and had revelations.'

Still this officer was a Presbyterian and there was war to the knife between the Presbyterians and the Independents in the Army of the Eastern Association in the year 1644. Then as later Cromwell was hard-hearted when it came to sacking officers whose views, religious or political did not coincide with his own. Still like Sir Anthony Absolute he was the best of men when he was not crossed.

He was a firm believer in discipline. He was all for a bit of iconoclasm, but he abhorred pillage and marauding. He was not particularly heavy-handed but

'no man swears but he pays his twelve pence; if he be drunk he is set in the stocks, or worse, if one calls the other "Roundhead" he is cashiered; insomuch that the countries when they come leap for joy of them, and come in and join with them. How happy were it if all the forces were thus disciplined'.

In April Cromwell had two deserters whipped in the market-place at Huntingdon and 'turned off as renegadoes'.

'Moneys is the nerves of War.' Who said that? Believe it or not it was King Charles I. Until he became Governor of Ely (July 1643) Cromwell was not wealthy enough to pay his men out of his own pocket, but thereafter his troubles were over for there is evidence that Ireton, his deputy, managed to collect £15000 in the next eleven months.

Minor victories at Grantham (13 May) and Gainsborough (29 July) at a time when the tide was flowing for the Royalists, built up the reputation of the Lord of the Fens. Of the skirmish at Grantham S. R. Gardiner wrote: 'The whole fortune of the Civil War was in that nameless skirmish,' and Lt. Colonel T. S. Baldock, R.A. in his valuable work *Cromwell as a Soldier* adds 'Nor is this an exaggeration'. Personally I don't see it. We have only one account of this 'glorious

victory' and that is a letter from Cromwell himself, who with a fine disregard for statistics writes that his side 'lost but two men at the most'. Still the fight has its points of interest.

'... So soon as we had the alarm, we drew out our forces, consisting of about twelve troops, whereof some of them so poor and broken, that you shall seldom see worse. With this handful it pleased God to cast the scale. For after we had stood a little above musket-shot the one body from the other and the dragoons having fired on both sides for the space of half an hour or more, *they not advancing towards us, we agreed to charge them*, and advancing the body after many shots on both sides, came on with our troops *a pretty round trot, they standing firm to receive us*; and our men charging fiercely upon them, by God's providence they were immediately routed, and ran all away, and we had the execution of them two or three miles.

Gainsborough, on the other hand, was a very creditable effort. The defeat and death of Charles Cavendish was a severe blow to Newcastle's Army, depriving it of one of its most enterprising officers, even if his tactics on this occasion were very indifferent for he exposed his rear to Cromwell.

Cromwell now became Lt. General of Manchester's army and as such nearly met his end at his next outing, when at Winceby Fight (11 Oct.) Sir Ingram Hopton bowled him over. Although later 'he recovered a poor horse in a soldier's hands, and bravely mounted himself again', Winceby was Sir Thomas Fairfax' victory rather than Cromwell's.

Cromwell has been accused of deliberately avoiding going to Meldrum's rescue, when Rupert relieved Newark. As he was at Cambridge nearly eighty miles away, at least four days march even with horse, it is not likely that he heard what was up in time to get there. So his next opportunity for distinction was at Marston Moor, where his wing routed Lord Byron. He was wounded in the first onset, probably by Colonel Marcus Trevor, and was absent from the field for a time, having his wound dressed. He returned and with Sir Thomas Fairfax, disposed of Goring and then of Newcastle's Whitecoats. His enemies made the most of his temporary absence, and since we have no despatch from Cromwell's own pen, only a letter telling a friend of his son's death, we have little detail to tell us how he himself saw this, the hardest fought fight of all the war, when at the height of the battle Rupert's men had stood 'like an iron wall, so that they were not easily broken'... It was here that the Prince dubbed him Ironsides, whilst David Leslie professed Europe had no better soldiers.

Newbury added nothing to Cromwell's reputation. In fact he was seen off by that dissolute hero George Goring. The political quarrel that followed led to the formation of the New Model Army, that 'company of poor ignorant men' with which Sir Thomas Fairfax was to win Naseby, Langport and Torrington, and in which Cromwell was to serve as Lt. General of the Horse – not, as is vulgarly supposed, Commander-in-Chief.

At Naseby Cromwell's wing probably outnumbered his opponents, the Northern Horse, by about two to one. He managed to dispose of

the dour Langdale with his leading regiments, keeping half his command in hand and with them wheeling against the left of Astley's Foot. It was less than three years since the middle-aged farmer M.P. had first taken the field, and here he was handling heavy cavalry as well as any officer in Europe. There is not much difference between the arms and equipment of an Ironside, and the heavy cavalryman of the Napoleonic Period. One wonders how Wellington might have fared at Waterloo had Cromwell rather than Uxbridge commanded his cavalry. I yield to no man in my admiration of, for example, the Union Brigade, but I dare say Cromwell would have had something to say about the charge that took them into Napoleon's Grand Battery.

It is as well to remember that it was as Second-in-Command to Fairfax that he served in 1645 and 1646. It is true that he had briefly an independent command when he went round mopping up Winchester, Basing House and Langford House. Only at Basing was there hard fighting.

In the Second Civil War in 1648 the Lt. General operated independently once more. In South Wales Colonel Horton had done his work for him by defeating a rather indifferent Welsh Army at St. Fagan's (8 May), the siege of Pembroke which followed was complicated only by the lack of heavy artillery. Starvation solved the problem.

Turning against the Engagers, a bad army and badly commanded, he marched his men – who had not been paid for months – two hundred and sixty miles in twenty seven days. He managed to get them new shoes and stockings when they reached Leicester. With 'a fine smart army, fit for action' (Hodgson) he set about Hamilton, and though outnumbered, met with no serious opposition save from his old opponent Langdale.

Now, with about seven years service, Oliver Cromwell, M.P., found himself for the first time in an entirely independent command. Lord-Lieutenant and Commander-in-Chief in Ireland; selected for three years, with an establishment of twelve thousand men and a total salary of £13,000. Once more he arrived to find the back of his work broken. A fortnight before he landed Colonel Michael Jones, the Governor of Dublin, had routed Ormond's army at Rathmines (2 August): an 'astonishing mercy' Cromwell called it. In consequence Oliver found himself faced only by a series of sieges. Drogheda, Wexford, Ross, Waterford, Cashel, Cahir, Kilkenny and Clonmel.

*And now the Irish are ashamed
To see themselves in one year tamed
So much one man can do
That does both act and know.*

Not perhaps Marvell's happiest verse. So far from being tamed by the massacres at Drogheda and Wexford, 'their memory still helps', as Sir Charles Firth, no unfriendly critic of Cromwell, puts it 'to separate the two races Cromwell wished to unite.' Still the Duke of Wellington himself has given it as his opinion that: 'The practice of refusing quarter to a garrison which stands an assault is not a useless effusion of blood.' What after all is one trying to do in a military operation? To make the enemy think he is beaten, to persuade him to give up the struggle. In

fact the atrocities at Drogheda and Wexford had a mixed effect. Trim and Dundalk were abandoned without more ado, but at Waterford and Clonmel the garrisons, rendered desperate, held out beyond all expectation. At Clonmel 'an old surly Spanish soldier' Hugh O'Neill repulsed the Ironsides with the loss of some two thousand casualties — a defeat which Ireton called 'the heaviest we ever endured either in England or here.' The garrison slipped away to Waterford *sub nocte*, leaving an irate Noll to receive the surrender from the Mayor.

Dunbar, another victory of a small, expert army against numbers says a great deal for the tactical skill of the Army Cromwell led, but it throws a curious light on his relations with his senior officers.

Cromwell, you will recall was cut off from the direct road to England, and was actually thinking of shipping his army home in a sort of seventeenth century Dunkirk. He was outnumbered by twenty two thousand to eleven thousand.

On Monday evening

'... the enemy drew down to their right wing about two-thirds of their left wing of horse, ... shogging also their foot and train much to the right, causing their right wing of horse to edge down towards the sea. We could not well imagine but that the enemy intended to attempt upon us, or to place themselves in a more exact condition of interposition. The Major-General [Lambert] and myself coming to the Earl of Roxburgh's House, and observing this posture, I told him I thought it did give us an opportunity and advantage to attempt upon the enemy, to which he immediately replied, that he had thought to have said the same thing to me. . . . We called for Colonel Monk, and showed him the thing; and coming to our quarters at night, and demonstrating our apprehensions to some of the colonels, they also cheerfully concurred.'

Do you not find it interesting that Cromwell should have depended so much upon the judgment of the hard-fighting Yorkshireman, John Lambert (1619–1683), a man twenty years younger than himself, whose military experience had been rather similar, including Marston Moor and Preston; and upon the forty two year old professional soldier, George Monck.

The marvellous victory of Dunbar proved indecisive, and so in 1651, when a serious illness prevented Cromwell taking the field before July, he resorted to a risky but brilliant strategy. On 4 August he wrote to the Speaker:

'... we have done to the best of our judgments, knowing that if some issue were not put into this business, it would occasion another winter's war, to the ruin of your soldiery, for whom the Scots are too hard in respect of enduring the winter difficulties of this country, ... but how to remove him out of this place, without doing what we have done, unless we had had a commanding army on both sides of the river of Forth, is not clear to us. . . .'

Worcester is interesting on various counts. The first is that

Cromwell's strategy, allowing him to call upon the home forces, regular and militia, so that on 27 August he had twenty eight thousand men at Evesham, with five thousand militia in reserve at Coventry, when the King had but twelve thousand at Worcester. Then there are those bridges of boats. Such bridges had been used several times in the First Civil War, but never for switching reserves across a major river at the height of a battle. This showed real tactical originality.

It does not add much to our knowledge of Cromwell as a military leader to discuss his conduct of his Dutch war or the expedition to Jamaica.

How then does he compare with the generals of his day? It is entertaining to speculate as to how he would have shown against Condé (1621–1686), or Turenne (1611–1675). But it is not very profitable. The victor of Rocroi (1643) with his furious cavalry charges would, one suspects, have been quite at home with the Royalist armies of his day: Hopton Heath where the Cavaliers are described as making 'a very fierce charge French-like'. Turenne, one suspects, would have been a much more formidable opponent. Napoleon rated him very high indeed.

How does Cromwell compare with his contemporaries in his own country? Of these the most important on the Parliamentary side were Sir Thomas Fairfax and Sir William Waller. The latter was an enterprising and skilful tactician, with the victory of Cheriton — a turning point of the war — to his credit, but with a beating at Cropredy Bridge and a real disaster to set against it and his series of perhaps rather easy successes at the beginning of the war. Sir Thomas Fairfax, who against heavy odds had kept Yorkshire Roundheads going, must have great credit for the offensive of the New Model Army. He was an inarticulate man, and it is only fair to speak up for him now. I would assert that no Parliamentary leader did as much to win the two English Civil Wars as Sir Thomas Fairfax.

Cromwell In Cambridge
(The Address given by Dr. R. C. Smail of Sidney Sussex College,
at the Annual General Meeting, April 22nd 1976)

In Cambridge there is almost no memorial to Oliver Cromwell. The meaning of 'almost' will shortly be made clear; but it can be stated without qualification that no statue, plaque or inscription has been set up in any public, accessible place in the city to remind the inhabitants and the countless visitors of its links with one of the greatest of Englishmen. It is a surprising omission. Oliver was born in Huntingdon and when as a young man he moved house, it was only to St Ives or Ely. All these places are well within twenty miles of Cambridge and it was in this area that he spent the first forty years of his life. All three of the towns preserve visible links with Cromwell. In Ely, the Steward's House in which he lived; in St Ives, a statue in the market place; in Huntingdon, the medieval room in which he went to school, now turned into a museum in his memory. But in Cambridge, nothing.

Cromwell was more than an inhabitant of the Cambridge region. In 1616 he entered the University's newest College as an undergraduate, although his father's death limited his stay there to a year. In 1640 King Charles, after eleven years of personal rule, summoned parliament. There were two elections in that year, one in the spring and the other in the autumn, and on both occasions, for the Short Parliament and the Long, Cromwell was elected as one of the burgesses for Cambridge. In this capacity he was increasingly closely involved with the town's affairs. In 1642, when it looked certain that Parliament would have to defend itself against the king, he took the initiative in securing parliamentary authority for two companies of volunteers to be raised in Cambridge, and he also saw to it that the necessary arms and money were forthcoming. Even before the king had raised his standard at Nottingham, Cromwell had secured Cambridge castle for Parliament and had organized the operation which prevented a convoy of College silver from reaching the king. On the 17th of that same month, August 1642, Parliament entrusted the care of the town to Cromwell, together with the Mayor and three aldermen. When the Eastern Association was formed, Cromwell was prominent in its affairs. Professor Clive Holmes has recently demonstrated in detail why and how the Association became the only successful regional grouping of counties achieved by either side. The military forces it raised and trained – and it was in this process that Cromwell first showed his genius as a military commander, especially of cavalry – brought Parliament its great victory at Marston Moor and formed the basis for the New Model Army, the instrument by which Parliament won the war. The headquarters of the Eastern Association was in Cambridge, and it provides yet another link between Cromwell and the city.

In the first sentence of this discussion the word 'almost' was used. Perhaps it would have been better to say that there is no public, but only a private, memorial. In the ante-chapel of Sidney Sussex College there is an oval plaque of Welsh slate for which Will Carter, Cambridge

artist and printer, designed and cut this inscription: Near to this place was buried on 25 March 1660 the head of Oliver Cromwell Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland, Fellow Commoner of this College 1616–7.

Conciseness is as inseparable a characteristic of lapidary inscriptions as greenness is of grass; the plaque therefore bears the flat statement that 'the head of Oliver Cromwell' lies buried in the ante-chapel. This phrase, however, goes somewhat beyond the limits imposed by the available evidence. A more accurate statement would be 'an embalmed head continuously reputed during the past two hundred years to be that of Oliver Cromwell'. How justified has the College been in preferring brevity to the literal truth? How well founded has been the widely held belief that the severed head now buried in Sidney is the head of Oliver Cromwell? Has Cambridge in fact the best of all memorials to the Lord Protector inasmuch as it has provided a burial place for his only surviving remains? A short survey of the evidence will show the extent to which such questions can be answered.

It is necessary to be clear at the outset that the human member buried in the College is not a skull, but an embalmed head, complete with flesh, skin and hair. When it was severed from the body of which it was once part, it was not struck off at the first blow. A little above the point at which it was eventually separated there is a deep cut made by an unsuccessful stroke of the axe, or whatever sharp instrument was employed. The skin on either side of this cut is embalmed skin, thus proving conclusively that decapitation took place after death. The head was then impaled on an iron-tipped oaken pole, presumably for the purpose of public display. A short length of the pole is still in position, so that the point of the iron spike protrudes through the top of the head, and enough of the shaft is visible below the head to provide, in the days before its final interment, a convenient handle for lifting it and for passing it from hand to hand.

It was buried in Sidney Sussex in 1960 as the result of an approach made to the College by Dr Wilkinson. The head had then been in possession of his family for a hundred and fifty years and had generally become known as the Wilkinson head. There were earlier occasions on which the family had tried to arrange for its burial. They did so on the assumption that it was indeed Cromwell's head, and that it should therefore be reinterred where Oliver himself had first been laid to rest in 1658, that is, in King Henry VII's Chapel in Westminster Abbey. This proposal was made to Mr Asquith's government just before the First World War and to Mr Attlee's just after the Second, but it was declined on both occasions. The government took the cautious view that there could be no sufficient certainty that the Wilkinson head was that of Oliver Cromwell. In 1960 Dr Wilkinson therefore approached the Cambridge college of which Cromwell had been a member, and it was there that the head was given a simple Christian burial.

The ownership of the head before Josiah Wilkinson bought it in 1814 is also well authenticated. In the last decade of the eighteenth century it had been the property of a syndicate who had acquired it, also by purchase, for the purpose of placing it on exhibition. Events in France in 1789 and in the years which followed gave the phenomenon of revolution almost as great an interest then as it has now. That interest might be made profitable by exhibiting the reputed head of one widely

regarded as England's own revolutionary. This is what the syndicate attempted. They assessed their chances of making a profit so optimistically that when they bought the head from James Cox in 1790, they paid him £230 for it. They may have been luckier than they knew in persuading him to part with it. Cox was a London jeweller who was also the proud possessor of a private museum, to which for many years he longed to add the head of Cromwell. He had first seen it when it was owned by Samuel Russell, an indifferently successful actor with a craving for strong drink, which often he lacked the means to satisfy. It might be supposed that he could easily have been tempted to accept a sufficient offer for the head, but he was strangely attached to the head, and whenever Cox made an offer, it was always refused. Cox finally succeeded only after a patient campaign in which he lent Russell small sums of money until he had accumulated a debt which he could not possibly repay; Cox then took the head in full settlement. This he achieved only in 1787. In light of the trouble he had taken to get possession of it, it is strange to find him parting with it only three years later. The profit motive provides the most likely explanation. It cost him only £118; he sold it for £230.

How long was Russell in possession of the head? There is evidence that he had it in 1775, and perhaps in 1765, but there is none of a verifiable kind which refers to it earlier, or which shows how he acquired it. The history of the Wilkinson head can thus be traced back through more than two hundred years, but in the 1760's the trail at last dies away. The only course open to the investigator is now to go back to the Lord Protector's death bed and to follow his corpse, or rather its head, forward through time, to see how close it can be brought to the mid-eighteenth century and the visible trail of the Wilkinson head. Only if the two trails could be joined together would it be possible to prove that the Wilkinson head is indeed the head of Cromwell.

Oliver died in Whitehall on 3rd September, 1658. As Head of State it is to be expected that his corpse would be embalmed, and whether this was done or not is a crucial piece of evidence in attempting to decide the problem under discussion. If the body of Cromwell was not embalmed, then the embalmed Wilkinson head cannot be his. On the day after Cromwell died a newspaper reported that the Council of State had ordered embalming; but any such report, however reputable the newspaper, is hearsay evidence. On an item as important as this, direct evidence is needed, preferably the original minute of the Council's proceedings. A century ago, Henry Riley of the Historical Manuscripts Commission reported the relevant volume of minutes among the muniments of the Marquis of Bath; but when Karl Pearson and G. M. Morant, in the course of their well-known investigation of the Wilkinson head in the 1930's, wished to consult the Minute book, it could not be found, and has been regarded as missing ever since. It is only in recent months that Roy Sherwood, in the course of his researches into the court of the Lord Protector, has again brought it to light. He writes on his discovery elsewhere in this issue; here it need only be said that, thanks to him, we now know for certain that the embalming of Cromwell's body was indeed officially ordered, thus confirming the information given by the newspaper, as well as by one of the most distinguished physicians of the day, Dr George Bate.

The subsequent history of Cromwell's head is, in its main outline,

easily recounted. The Lord Protector was accorded as splendid and costly a state funeral as any of his royal predecessors and was buried in Westminster Abbey. Just eighteen months later King Charles II was restored to his inheritance, and his loyal Cavalier parliament lost no time in taking gruesome, posthumous vengeance on those whom they regarded as the chief regicides. Cromwell's body, together with those of Bradshaw and Ireton, was exhumed. In January, 1661, on the twelfth anniversary of the execution of Charles I, the three corpses were publicly hanged on the gallows at Tyburn. At the end of the day they were cut down and beheaded; the heads were then impaled on the gable end of Westminster Hall, the splendid medieval building in the Palace of Westminster in which Charles I had been tried and condemned. There they remained for longer than twenty years. Just how much longer cannot now be precisely determined; the available evidence points to 1684 as the most likely year in which they at last disappeared. In the middle of the eighteenth century a story was already being told that Cromwell's head was blown down in a storm, that it was picked up by a sentry on duty outside the neighbouring buildings of the Exchequer, that, fearing the consequences, the soldier said nothing about the incident, but nevertheless kept the head, that it passed in time to his daughter who married — Samuel Russell!

This tradition cannot be authenticated. There remains a gap of eighty years between the disappearance of Cromwell's head from Westminster Hall and the appearance of an embalmed head in the possession of Russell and which, by way of James Cox, the syndicate and successive generations of the Wilkinson family, now lies buried in Cambridge. Are there two different heads, or is there but one? At least this can be said: the Wilkinson head in life belonged to someone who in death was embalmed, and whose head was subsequently cut off and displayed on a stake. Embalming, decapitation, impalement. All these happened, and in that same order, to the dead Cromwell. If the Wilkinson head is not Cromwell's, then whose head is it? No certain answer can be given; but the probability seems strong that Cambridge is the last resting place of Oliver's mortal remains.

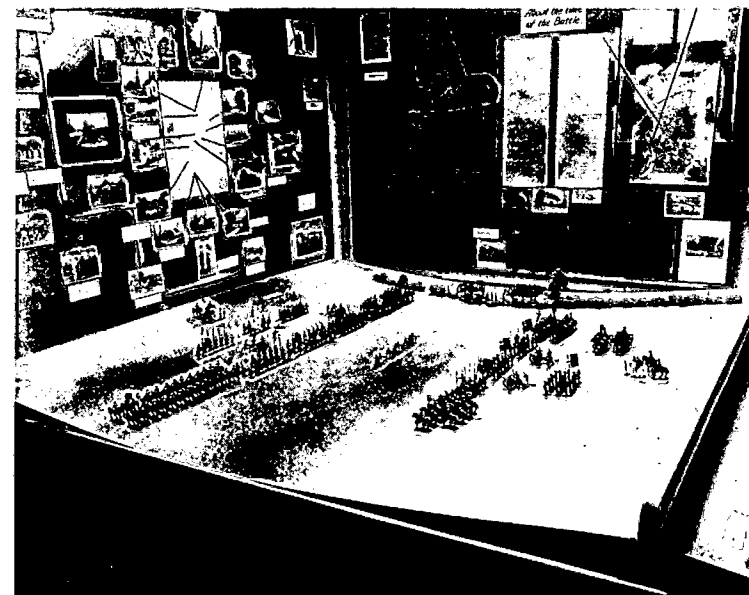
The remarks made by Dr. R. C. Smail in his most excellent talk on 'Cromwell in Cambridge' (printed elsewhere in this issue) concerning the discovery of a 'missing' historical document are most certainly deserving of enlargement. As Dr. Smail pointed out, Pearson and Morant's biometrical study of the question of the authenticity of the embalmed head, thought to be that of Oliver Cromwell, was to a degree circumscribed by the lack of certain vital evidence; was Cromwell's corpse embalmed? As Dr. Smail has also pointed out the document in which Pearson and Morant had hoped to discover official corroboration of the embalmment of the Protector's corpse was reported to them as being missing at the time of their investigations in 1934. But a request made by me in February 1975 to the Marquess of Bath to consult this document, the title of which is the *Privy Council Register of Richard Cromwell, September 3rd 1658–March 22nd 1659* received, in part at least, an affirmative response. The first volume, of the two volume register, covering the period 3 September 1658 to 18 January 1659 was available for examination. My consequent visit to Lord Bath's library at Longleat House confirmed that Pearson and Morant were correct in deducing that the corroborative evidence they were looking for could be gained from this document. In fact it can now be revealed that the body of Oliver Cromwell would most certainly have been embalmed. The relevant entry in the Council Register is dated 14 September 1658, eleven days after Oliver's death, and follows immediately after the heading 'Some preparations for removing his Highness's body from Whitehall to Somerset House':

That his Highness's corpse being embalmed with all due rites appertaining thereunto, and being wrapped in lead, there ought to be an inscription in a plate of gold to be fixed upon his breast before he be put into the coffin.'

Thus, with the happy discovery that an important part of a once missing document is still extant, a vital piece can now be added to the still incomplete jigsaw that is the history of what is considered to be the head of Oliver Cromwell.

As to the second part of the Council Register which covered the period 19 January to 22 March 1659, this is apparently still missing; at least the extremely accommodating present librarian to the Marquess of Bath, Miss B. M. Austin, has no knowledge of it. (Miss Austin did not know that the first part had ever been mislaid, although 1934 was long before her time.) It goes without saying that the recovery of this particular document would present historians with an invaluable record of the period leading up to the collapse of the Cromwellian dynasty with the abdication of Oliver's son, Richard.

Roy Sherwood



This museum, the brain-child of a local man, Mr. Eric Westaway, merits the attention of as many members of the Cromwell Association as can possibly get to see it. One room of the museum is almost entirely devoted to the battle of Naseby which took place on 14 June 1645 and was effectively the final clash between the forces of Charles I and those of Parliament; an event in which Oliver Cromwell played a significant part. The exhibits include relics from the battlefield and a beautifully executed scale model showing three separate stages of the battle. There is also a ten-minute tape recording relating to the model which describes the events on that June day in 1645.

Opening times are at 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., Saturdays and Sundays only (parties at other times by arrangement) from the last weekend in March until the last weekend in October (inclusive). The prices of admission are adults 25p, children 15p. There is a free car park.

Signposts to the museum are much in evidence throughout the village of Naseby which is situated six miles southwest of Market Harborough on the B4036. I feel sure that members will find the journey a rewarding one.

Roy Sherwood

