

# CROMWELLIANA



The Cromwell Association  
1972

# THE CROMWELL ASSOCIATION

*President:* MR. MAURICE ASHLEY, D.Phil.(Oxon.), B.A.

*Vice-President:* THE LORD CARADON OF ST. CLEER.

*Chairman:* MR. TREWIN COPPLESTONE.

*Council:* ALDERMAN SIR C. L. ACKROYD, B.I.,

MR. ESMOND S. DE BEER, M.A., D.Litt., F.S.A.,

THE REV. J. CLARK GIBSON, THE REV. D. A. GREEVES, M.A.,

MISS J. S. HENDERSON, MR. R. HENDON,

BRIGADIER H. A. JOLY DE LOTBINIERE, MR. F. E. LEESE, M.A., B.Litt.,

MR. G. G. LILBURN, B.A.(Oxon.), CAPT. P. A. LINDSAY,

THE REV. ROBERT S. PAUL, M.A., D.Phil., MR. A. W. SMITH,

MR. A. RICHARDSON, MR. R. E. SHERWOOD, MISS J. SOLOMON, M.B.E.

*Hon. Secretary:* MISS H. PLATT, B.A.

Combe Lodge, Ringley Park Avenue, Reigate, Surrey.

*Hon. Treasurer:* MR. S. J. P. THOMAS, B.A.

Oak Lodge, Blanford Road, Reigate, Surrey

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.

The minimum annual subscription is 50p. Life Membership £5.25.

PLEASE SEE IMPORTANT NOTICE  
PAGE 5 — re ANNUAL SERVICE

## MILTON'S LEFT HAND

(A Recorded Lecture given on Radio 3, March 3rd 1971 by  
Professor Austin Woolrych)

When Milton took to pamphleteering at the outset of the Great Rebellion, he was consciously turning aside from his true vocation. He was thirty-two, and for many years he had been studying and disciplining himself with one end in mind: to become a great Christian poet. He gloried in this calling, even while he was writing polemics against the bishops. He confessed to 'an inward prompting which now grew daily upon me, that by labour and intent study... joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die.' He spoke of singing 'an elaborate song to generations'; he even discussed possible themes for a great epic or drama. He found it hard, he said, 'to interrupt the pursuit of no less hopes than these... to embark in a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes.' Nor did he take kindly to writing prose, 'wherein', he said, 'knowing myself inferior to myself, led by the genial power of nature to another task, I have the use, as I may account it, but of my left hand.' Yet he felt that there were such great causes afoot in the early 1640s that he must support them with what talents he had.

One question has been much in my mind these last few years. Did Milton, when it was all over, feel that his sacrifice had been worth the cost? Against all his expectations, he had sailed that 'troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes' on and off for nearly twenty years.

In 1660 the great causes all seemed lost, he was blind and advancing in age, and his great epic was barely begun. I've recently been working on the volume of the Yale edition of his prose works which will contain the tracts that he wrote while the Commonwealth was heading towards collapse. I've had to follow closely the events that carried England towards the Restoration, trying to feel them as Milton felt them, and listening with him to the chorus of ridicule and vituperation that assailed him at the end. Did he *then* feel he had misused 'that one talent which is death to hide'?

I don't think he did. His predicament was tragic, of course, but he was never one to believe that causes are sanctified only by success. First, however, we ought to ask what the essential causes were to which he dedicated himself. Superficially they were many: first the liberation of the church from the bishops, then the right of divorce, then the liberty of the press, then the justice of punishing tyrants, next the vindication of the Commonwealth and the Protectorate before the courts of European learning, and so on. But one theme runs through them all. It is an ideal of Christian liberty, and the essence of it for Milton was that every human being should have the right to hold and practise whatever faith he derived from his own reading of the Scriptures, guided by the illumination of the Holy Spirit in his own mind and heart. Naturally he wrote much about civil liberty too, but his conception of it was more subject to modification than in the case of spiritual liberty, and he always put it second.

At the outset he cherished a larger vision, which he then shared with very many puritans of all shades. He and they dared to hope that the last times prophesied in the Scriptures were already dawning, that God was about a work of regeneration that would progressively establish Christ's kingdom on earth, and that He had marked out England as an elect nation and holy

people. 'Come therefore O thou that hast the seven stars in thy right hand', Milton prayed in 1641, echoing a great image of Christ in Revelation; 'O perfect, and accomplish thy glorious acts; . . . seeing the power of thy grace is not put away with the primitive times, as fond and faithless men imagine, but thy kingdom is now at hand, and thou standing at the door.' The vision is still bright in *Areopagitica*, three years later. 'Now again by all concurrence of signs . . . God is decreeing to begin some new and great period in his church, even to the reforming of Reformation itself; what does he then but reveal himself to his servants, and as his manner is, first to his Englishmen?'

These millenarian hopes would recede as each new government of revolutionary England disappointed his expectations in turn. The Long Parliament duly abolished the bishops, but it didn't introduce liberty of conscience. Milton also smarted under the notoriety and abuse that his tracts on divorce brought him. He wrote *Areopagitica* in protest against the new licensing laws, which threatened to close the printing presses to all but rigidly orthodox opinions. He saw the struggle for religious liberty being lost, both in the Westminster assembly of divines and in Parliament. When the design for a new, intolerant, Presbyterian national church began to take shape, he attacked 'the new forcers of conscience under the Long Parliament' in stinging lines, ending with the famous charge that 'new presbyter is but old priest writ large'. He also came to believe that the Parliament-men were enriching themselves corruptly through gross extortions upon the public. His sonnet to Fairfax shows how much he felt was wrong in 1648:

For what can war, but endless war still breed,  
Till truth, and right from violence be freed,  
And public faith cleared from the shameful brand  
Of public fraud. In vain doth valour bleed  
While avarice, and rapine share the land.

When Milton wrote those lines, England was in the grip of the second Civil War. The army's victory led inexorably to the purging of the Parliament, the trial and execution of Charles I, and the establishment of the Commonwealth. Milton took heart again. He saw the king's trial as a heroic act of public justice, and he wrote *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* to justify it to his outraged countrymen. God, he trusted, would now incline the people 'to hearken with erected minds to the voice of our supreme magistracy, calling us to liberty and the flourishing deeds of a reformed Commonwealth.'

The new Council of State was so glad to have a defender of Milton's calibre that it appointed him as its Secretary for Foreign Languages. This brought him into frequent personal contact with the great men of republican England, at least until he became totally blind in the course of 1651. His regular official duties were modest; his essential service lay in defending the Commonwealth against its assailants in print. His first major assignment was to reply to *Eikon Basilike*, a spurious compilation of the late king's meditations and prayers. His opinion of the English people slumped sharply as they wept their way through thirty-five editions of his pious forgery in a year. 'An inconstant, irrational and image-doting rabble', he called them in his *Eikonoklastes* — a sad descent from the 'noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep', which he had acclaimed in *Aeropagitica*.

His next work was much bigger and more demanding. It was a reply in Latin to a royalist treatise commissioned by Charles II from the great classical scholar Salmasius, and Milton consciously and willingly sacrificed the last of his eye-sight to it. To most modern readers his *Defence of the English People* is a desert with few oases, but to Milton it was a triumph, and it won him a European reputation. In it he transfers his confidence from the nation at large to the minority who have the wisdom and courage to desire liberty and deserve it; the right of government is theirs. Viewed thus, the judgement upon Charles I was the judgement of the people; 'for why', he asked, 'should I not say that the act of the better, the sound part of the Parliament, in which resides the real power of the people, was the act of the people?'

'The sound part of the Parliament' meant the so-called Rump, which now held the supreme authority. But Milton's confidence in it was shaken as he discovered that it fell far short of his own conception of Christian liberty. He was no longer content with the mere toleration of religious differences. He now held that the state should renounce all direct authority over religion, and that it should cease to support the parish clergy by tithes or any other enforced maintenance. The Rump thought otherwise, and so did the orthodox Independent divines who advised it. Milton protested in his twin sonnets to Cromwell and Sir Henry Vane in 1652. He praised Vane for being one of the few who knew the true bounds between the spiritual power and the civil. To Cromwell, 'our chief of men', he spoke thus:

New foes arise  
Threatening to bind our souls with secular chains:  
Help us to save free conscience from the paw  
Of hireling wolves whose Gospel is their maw.

A serious quarrel was developing between Cromwell's army and the Rump, and Milton watched it with mixed feelings. He remained silent when Cromwell finally expelled the Rump in 1653, and while Barebone's Parliament ran its brief course. But when Cromwell at last assumed the headship of the state as Lord Protector, Milton greeted the change with apparent enthusiasm. His *Second Defence of the English People*, published in May 1654, contained a long panegyric to Cromwell. 'On you has fallen the whole burden of our affairs', he wrote; 'there is nothing in human society more pleasing to God, or more agreeable to reason, nothing in the state more just, nothing more expedient, than the rule of the man most fit to rule. All know you to be that man, Cromwell!'

This eulogy fills page after page of sonorous Latin, and yet there's something formal and impersonal about it. It reads like a literary celebration of an ideal puritan hero rather than a spontaneous tribute to a man known and loved for his own unique qualities. Milton is not bowing before a charismatic leader; he is saluting the man on whom the causes that he cares for have come to depend. He virtually tells Cromwell what he hopes and expects of him in a long exhortation, beginning with a homily on liberty. This exhortation contains the key to Milton's subsequent disillusion with the Protectorate.

His most earnest plea was for the total disestablishment of the church. Yet although Cromwell continued to uphold liberty of conscience, his new religious settlement maintained an established clergy, and he refused to abolish tithes until Parliament devised some better provision. Milton also

urged Cromwell to admit 'those men whom you first cherished as comrades in your toils and dangers to the first share in your counsels.' He hoped Cromwell would be reconciled with those republican leaders whom he continued to admire, such as Bradshaw and Vane, but the rift between them and the Protectorate only widened. His concern for liberty was affronted when new licensing laws restricted free publication in 1655. He also praised Cromwell for spurning the royal title, and urged him 'to flee from the pomp of wealth and power'. Yet Cromwell came close to accepting the crown in 1657, and his Court took on more and more of the trappings of monarchy. The fat estates acquired by the military grandees, the rise of a new breed of courtiers, the new titles, the new upper house added to Parliament — all these were at variance with the plain and frugal republican virtues that Milton had extolled. Mind you, I'm not suggesting that Cromwell could or should have followed all his advice. Cromwell had to wrestle with political realities, and Milton's sense of political realities was not particularly strong.

Milton wrote no new works for the government after 1654. He continued to draw his salary and to render occasional letters of state into elegant Latin, but otherwise he withdrew from public affairs. He soon immersed himself in his vast Latin treatise *Of Christian Doctrine*, and before Cromwell died in September 1658 he was almost certainly at work on *Paradise Lost*. His dissatisfaction deepened during the brief Protectorate of Cromwell's son Richard. In the spring of 1659 he complained to a friend of how the nation had been backsliding, in respect of liberty and spiritual truths. That year he published two English tracts attacking the authority of the state and its maintenance of the clergy as the great banes of the church; both in effect called for a reversal of the Protectorate's religious settlement.

Before he wrote the second of these tracts, the Protectorate fell. Richard Cromwell was overthrown by a combination of discontented army officers, republican politicians and radical sectaries. A shrill campaign in press and pulpit had persuaded the army that 'the Good Old Cause' was being betrayed by courtiers, crypto-royalists and others who were itching to persecute the sects. Milton largely shared these fears. When Richard's enemies restored the Rump to the supreme authority from which Cromwell had deposed it six years earlier, Milton hailed its members as the 'authors, assertors and now recoverers of our liberty'. His optimism was reborn with his change of allegiance, but it was brief. The Rump lasted only five months before the army turned it out again, and by the end of the year the country was drifting into anarchy.

From October 1659 to April 1660, Milton sought again and again for some form of settlement that would shore up the Commonwealth against the swelling tide of royalist feeling in the country. All these last half-dozen tracts or sketches implicitly condemn the Cromwellian Protectorate. None of them mentions Cromwell by name; Milton was reacting against the policies rather than the man. But he now saw Cromwell's expulsion of the Rump as a cardinal error, if not a crime. He stipulated two fundamental requirements of a free Commonwealth: first, liberty of conscience; and second, that it should abjure the rule of *any* single person, by whatever title.

In his final political utterance, *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*, there's a pathetic contrast between means and ends. The means that it proposed for saving the Commonwealth were desperate,

even preposterous; England would never have stood for the perpetual Grand Council, with membership preferably for life, that it advocated. But the ends remained constant, and Milton never pleaded the causes of spiritual and civil liberty more poignantly. We may shudder to think what potential abuses lay in his argument for the right of the minority to compel the majority to be free; we may well ask how the republican virtues that he expounded so eloquently could have flourished in the kind of one-party state that the harsh historical circumstances drove him to prescribe. Yet in its essence his last vindication of responsible self-rule against monarchical servitude still speaks to all ages.

So we come back to the question that I posed at the start. Did Milton in 1660 think that the long deflection of his talents into lost causes had been worth the cost? Each revolutionary regime had disappointed him in turn. The multitude was clamouring for the return of the king, spiritual and civil liberty as he conceived them were facing a long night, and his great epic was still but a fragment. Nevertheless I think he himself gives us the answer. With the Restoration only a very few weeks away, when virtually all the other champions of the Good Old Cause had been scared into silence, he published a second, much enlarged edition of his *Ready and Easy Way*. He knew that by its tremendous indictment of kingship he risked not only his liberty but perhaps his life, and not his life only but his still unwritten masterpieces. He thought it was worth it, if only to speak these last words (as he put it) 'to some perhaps whom God may raise of these stones to become children of reviving liberty'. I think he would still have endorsed what he had written in 1642: that if he had left the cause 'without the least furtherance or contribution of those few talents which God at that present had lent me, I foresee what stories I should hear within my self, all my life after, of discourage and reproach.'

## IMPORTANT NOTICE

### CROMWELL'S DAY, 1972

As September 3rd falls on a Sunday this year, the Annual Service will be held on:—

**Saturday, 2nd September, at 3 p.m.**

in the

**Fellowship Room,  
Central Hall, Westminster, London, S.W.1.**

(entrance Tothill Street)

The Service cannot be held at the Statue outside the Houses of Parliament this year, on account of works connected with an underground car park, involving excavations in the vicinity.

*The address will be given by*

**Dr. Blair Worden**

*Research Fellow in Modern History, Pembroke College, Cambridge*

Members are urged to attend in good numbers particularly as the change of venue precludes an outside audience.

Those wishing to have lunch together before the Service should meet outside the restaurant in the basement of the Central Hall at 1.15 p.m.

## CROMWELL'S DAY, 1971

(The Address given by Professor Ivan Roots at the Annual Commemoration Service, September 3rd, 1971)

It is an honour to have been asked to address you at this service today. For more years than I care to remember Oliver Cromwell has fascinated me and puzzled me, too. What first set me off was a poem: Andrew Marvell's *An Horatian Ode on Cromwell's Return from Ireland*, that wonderful web of ambiguities and ironies, unsentimentally sympathetic to the king, yet hugely taken with the character and personality of the Lord General, 'the war's and fortune's son'. The man who could strike the imagination of so thoughtful and subtle a poet as Marvell must I felt have had remarkable qualities — and I have never since had any cause to doubt it. Milton, whose opinion always commands respect, found Cromwell 'our chief of men' and looked to him for the victories of peace, so much harder than those of war. Dryden, too, spoke of how

'His name a great example stands, to shew  
How strangely high endeavour may be blest  
Where piety and valour jointly go.'

Dryden changed his mind later of course, on this as on other things, but men who had more reason to revile Cromwell, who fought or schemed against him, were compelled to reluctant admiration. Clarendon called him 'a brave, bad man' — brave first, you notice — and praised his 'most magnanimous resolution'.

In another poem Marvell alludes to 'that powerful language' of the Lord Protector. Certainly as soon as I dipped into Carlyle's edition of the letters and speeches I recognized a master of words. Dr. Christopher Hill — there's no keener eye for a telling phrase — has called him the most quotable of Englishmen. More recently Dr. Blair Worden has deplored 'the clumsiness of expression habitual in Cromwell's speeches'. It is an odd charge. Of course Cromwell could be diffuse, even exasperatingly obscure, especially when he wanted to be, but he also had a gift for the vivid, the direct, the concrete. To read Cromwell's speeches to the first protectorate parliament, say, to hear in your head how he snaps off in mid-sentence and goes off on a new tack is a revelation. You can guess, as his hearers must have guessed, how he would have finished his thought if another, fresh, instant, had not flashed into his mind.

These great speeches were made to parliaments, welcoming them, rebuking them, encouraging them, dismissing them. There are those who find the statue in whose shadow we stand ironical, even offensive, thinking of him merely as the ejector of the Long Parliament. Evidently you do not agree — and I am with you. Cromwell was not an enemy of parliaments — he sat in them, he fought for them, he called them and tried to get them to join him in the 'healing and settling' which rather than dominion was his goal as Protector. They failed him. Professor Trevor-Roper has upbraided him for not managing the Commons better. No doubt it was a defect in him that he was not a Tudor but we may wonder if anyone could have made much of the parliaments of the sixteen-fifties, which like those of the late sixteen-twenties were their own worst enemies. They broke Cromwell more than he broke them — and to less purpose. Yet he persisted in believing in

parliaments — not in parliamentary sovereignty, fusing executive and legislative, it is true, nor that parliaments should make themselves perpetual. He stood for government by a single person *and* a parliament. In these days of the prime-ministerial ascendancy of your Wilsons and MacHeaths that seems innocent enough.

In previous addresses here much has been made of Cromwell's connexions with English liberties and interests, of his great work for English power and prestige. We may echo Dryden's

'By his command we boldly cross'd the line  
And bravely fought where southern skies arise',

and

'He made us freemen of the continent'

— or Marvell's

'He once more joined us to the continent'—

apt words as we stand flustered at the edge of the Common Market. But what I would stress today is not Cromwell's boldness and confidence. *They* were in fact fitful and in the long run perhaps no more valuable than his doubts and diffidence. His career is marked throughout by inconsistencies, hesitations and contradictions. They seem to me to point up his true humanity — to make him a complex individual man like you and me. He was not, thank heaven, God's Englishman but he may have been one of God's many Englishmen. I imagine he believed, now and then, that he really had 'a hot line' to the Almighty, but never that he had an exclusive one. Cromwell listened to God but he also listened to other men who might themselves have heard, perhaps more clearly, the voice of Providence. It was this awareness of others that made Cromwell a prime contributor to the practice of religious toleration. He may not have started it — indeed, it has been said that he never initiated anything — but he fed it and kept it alive. Under his protectorship there was a great deal of religious liberty — too much in fact for many among his own supporters, as the bitter debates in the case of James Naylor reveal. There would I believe have been more if settled political conditions had been achieved. As it was the Protectorate ensured the permanence of religious liberty in England — in spite of the aberrations of the post-restoration period. Unlike William Laud, Cromwell could not see in uniformity the true father of unity. He knew that in God's heaven there are many mansions and as many roads to them. He was never truer to himself than when he wrote in 1650 to the Assembly of the Kirk, who knew *they* had the only way: 'I beseech you in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken'. 'In the bowels of Christ' — in compassion, in the spirit of the New Testament. What he was saying was: 'Stop, think for a moment of other people, be aware of them. Doubt, be diffident. Take things into consideration.' William Laud could never do that. That is why for all his many qualities he was in the last analysis a little man. Cromwell could. His capacity for honest doubt of his own capacity his appreciation, sometimes disappointed, that all men are seekers, his indefatigability — these are the hall-marks of his greatness — one which came to fruition not in the dynamic sixteen-forties but in the bleaker years of his protectorship. It is for these things above all that I for one remember him and honour him today.

## CROMWELL AFTER THIRTY YEARS

(The Address given by Dame Veronica Wedgwood at the Annual Meeting of the Association, April 25th, 1972)

Has a nought been left out in the title? I am sure some of you must have thought so. Cromwell after 300 years seems to have some bearing on the century in which he lived, but Cromwell after 30 years... why 30? I must plead guilty to an egocentric approach, at least in my title.

Shortly before the war I was commissioned to write a short biography of Cromwell for Duckworth's Great Lives series. It was a distinguished series and included Rose Macaulay on Milton, Maurice Ashley on Marlborough, Herbert Butterfield on Napoleon, Bernard Darwin on Dickens. So it was a great opportunity for a brash beginner to be in such company. The length, 30,000 words, gave space for little more than an outline sketch — an impressionistic study — and one might imagine that a book of such small compass would not have room for much critical or analytical material or for the expression of the controversial opinions and theories which make history such a lively subject but which also, owing to the continuously changing nature of the historical debate, tend to give a book the atmosphere of its own period and thus, both in a good sense and a bad sense, to date it.

I wrote the little book just over 30 years ago. Hence my title.

Earlier this year I was asked to revise it for an entirely new edition. At first I thought this would be easy, given the short and simple nature of the book. I could not have been more wrong. It proved a major task for three reasons.

First, because I was myself 30 years older, more experienced in history, possibly more experienced in life: more moderate in my views, less inclined to pass the stern judgements which were characteristic of my arrogant and idealist youth; much more cautious, much more given to seeing many sides to every question, unwilling to generalize; and more deeply versed in knowledge of the 17th century than I had been when I dashed off my youthful 30,000 words.

Secondly, the documentation of the period has increased. More lines of research have been opened; new documents have come into the public domain, and many documents, known before, have become much more readily available. For instance, when I wrote my original book Abbott's great edition of Cromwell's letters and speeches was only complete up to 1649. For the last and most critical years we were still largely dependent on the Lomas edition of Carlyle. Again in the last 30 years an immense amount of valuable and controversial work has been done on the whole period of the Civil Wars. The famous gentry controversy has come, has raged and has died down once more. Our knowledge of the finances and the mechanism of 17th century government at the national and local level has been deepened by much scholarly research. For Cromwell himself there have been many important books including most recently Christopher Hill's *God's Englishman*, and most significantly our President's *The Greatness of Oliver Cromwell*, and *Oliver Cromwell and the Puritan Revolution*.

The third reason for which I had very largely to re-write my book, was of a different kind. It was simply because of the change in the atmosphere — in the 'climate of opinion.' I realised as I read my early work that it had altered almost beyond recognition. That's very obvious, you may say.

We all know — if we have lived long enough — the revolutionary changes in the social atmosphere and moral codes which have taken place since the 1930s let alone the changes in political background and perspective. And what has it to do with Cromwell anyway? With the historic Cromwell, with the man as he was in his own epoch — nothing whatever. But I do not need to say to an audience which reads and understands history, and among whom there are several distinguished practising historians, that the *real* Cromwell, Cromwell as he was in his own period, we can never wholly know. It is the hope and aspiration of historians to arrive as closely as they can to the truth as it once was. But, conditioned as we are by contemporary experiences and modes of thought, we know we can never quite do that.

It is therefore to the third of my reasons, the change in the climate of opinion, that I want to devote this short talk. Because it struck me as I laboriously updated my little book that far more of the revisions I made were the result of the change in the contemporary atmosphere, than of the expansion of our knowledge.

Surprising as it may seem in our present politically restless and morally permissive society, the stature of Cromwell is now steadily growing in popular esteem. He appears today greater, more formidable, more admirable and perhaps above all more interesting to the general public than he did in the late 1930s.

In the 1930s the most obvious element in the political situation — which cast a lurid and misleading light backwards on to the figure of Cromwell — was of course the rise and apparent triumph of the dictatorships. Cromwell, at the time when his statue was set up outside Westminster Hall, was so to speak a Great Liberal and one of the Heroes of the Nations — you will remember that Charles Firth's fine biography first appeared in the *Heroes of the Nations Series*. But this same Cromwell, by the 1930s, had been relegated in popular belief to the ranks of the dictators. Not of course by scholars, or by thoughtful readers of history. But the popular climate of opinion affects, one might almost say *infects*, even scholarship. Cromwell's admirers were thrown on to the defensive. Ernest Barker wrote what was then a very timely little book, *Oliver Cromwell and the English People* in which he faced and contended with the dangerous modern comparisons. Professor Abbott in the latter part — the Protectorate — of his monumental edition of the *Writings and Speeches* was strongly prejudiced by his reactions to the European dictatorships and especially to Hitler. This was not to the detriment of his textual scholarship, but it was often to the detriment of his critical commentary.

This ugly discolouration of the Cromwell image long outlasted the fall of the two major dictatorships in Europe. As late as 1958, when the tercentenary was celebrated, some of you may remember that the scouts of the BBC went out with a tape recorder, stopped passers by in the Cromwell Road and asked them what they knew about Cromwell. I suppose one should be glad that they had all at least heard of him. One, I remember, said 'Didn't he take the fancy work out of the Churches?' But more than one instantly compared him to Hitler. Another, a serious schoolboy of about twelve gave a simple but, within its limits correct account of his career; when asked what he thought of him, paused, considered, but concluded that on the whole he was not a Good Thing, because government should be by consent, and Cromwell was a dictator.

The climate has now almost completely altered. I hesitate, among serious students of Cromwell, to refer to the recent film. Its multitudinous errors were 'thick as leaves in Vallombrosa'. But it had one significant merit: it was favourable to Cromwell. True he was given words and sentiments that were out of key with the seventeenth century, and held forth about democracy and progress in a manner more suited to the nineteenth, or even the twentieth century. But at least we heard nothing that associated him with tyranny and dictatorship, and we were clearly meant to recognise him as a Good Thing. All this reflects a welcome change in the climate of opinion.

This change in the contemporary atmosphere struck me again and again as I re-read the short biography I had written in the very different atmosphere of thirty years ago. Then I had consistently taken a defensive line about Cromwell. I had obviously been much more concerned to show what Cromwell was *not*, than to show what he was. I seemed to be continually emphasising that he was not a dictator in the 20th century sense, *not* an enemy to freedom; very much the reverse. And this negative attitude seemed to pervade the whole book. It was not a simple matter of taking out a phrase here and there, but — to use a popular modern term — it was a matter of radical re-structuring of the book.

I had at least avoided open references to Hitler and Mussolini, but there were numerous oblique comparisons, especially when it came to Cromwell's foreign policy, which it was then very much the fashion to decry as aggressive imperialism — an opinion that I no longer hold. Some of my sidelong comparisons to problems current in the 30's had by now become so obscure that they would have needed footnotes to explain them, although at the time I can only suppose that they were topical and comprehensible. All of these I unhesitatingly eliminated from the revised text, as they added nothing at all to the better understanding of Cromwell.

No historian can altogether eliminate from his thoughts and from his work some reflection of the contemporary world in which he lives and writes. But I very much hope that I have never written another book quite so highly charged with the tensions of the period in which it was composed. I offer as an excuse, to those here who are old enough to recall those days, that I wrote it between the autumn of 1938 and the spring of 1939, that is between the Munich crisis and Hitler's seizure of Czechoslovakia. I doubt whether anyone could have kept all contemporary vibrations out of their work at that time

I also noticed something else in the text of my book, something which suggested a less obvious, more gradual, and rather surprising change in our national outlook. I doubt if anyone in retrospect would regard that agonising time of cliff-hanging before the outbreak of war in 1939 as an epoch when the English nation felt particularly confident of its destiny. Yet in describing Cromwell's character, I found that I repeated with conviction some of the opinions of S. R. Gardiner and other late nineteenth century writers: namely, that Cromwell's profound belief in a righteous mission was a very English thing. In short that Milton's phrase — 'God's Englishman' — how ever much we younger people derided it at that time still meant something to us. Half unwillingly, half admiringly, we still believed that there was something in it. In spite of economic depression and the consequent disillusion and uncertainty, in spite of much moral retreat and surrender and anxiety in the larger world of international politics, we still

felt that when it came to the crunch, Right would win against Might, and that the English would be in the forefront of the battle. Was it not this still persistent, if somewhat battered and shamefaced, confidence in ourselves and our mission, that caused the astounding revival of 1940: our finest hour?

Re-writing Cromwell's life to-day, I can still credit him with a belief in a righteous mission; but I hardly feel that in 1971 I can describe this as a notably English characteristic any more. That is something which has also changed.

To return from these wider and vaguer speculations to the more mundane matter of how to update a book more than thirty years old: the revised bibliography, the modification of facts in accordance with new research — these are simple matters. The hard thing was to make the portrait of Cromwell comprehensible to a much changed world. All the defensiveness about dictatorship was of course removed, and the book became much better for that at once. That particular dark association with Cromwell has been exorcised in the changing light of politics.

But the basic self-confidence and the basic political and moral codes which still held good in 1939 have given way by 1972 to something like moral anarchy. Our knowledge of the long perspectives of history may, and I hope do, encourage us to believe that a new order may emerge which will preserve and build on what was best in the old.

In the anxious and troubled present, Cromwell steadily gains prestige as a national figure. He too, as we now see, lived in a period of violence and doubt and change, of fierce moral speculations and revolutionary ideas, and of iconoclasm too (in every sense); a period when it seemed at times that society was perilously near to a descent into anarchy. Cromwell's doubts and uncertainties and problems are akin to our own; he becomes closer to us, and at the same time gains in stature because of that hard-won faith and confidence in God which was his sheet anchor. These are the things which give him a new contemporary meaning to us in 1972.

C. V. WEDGWOOD

---

## BOOK NEWS

Members will look forward with keen anticipation to the publication of the revised edition of Dame Veronica Wedgwood's biography of Oliver Cromwell.

A new book by our President, Dr. Maurice Ashley, "Oliver Cromwell and his Age", profusely illustrated, will be published by Thames & Hudson Ltd., in November.

"Civil Strife in the Midlands, 1642-51", an account of the Civil War in the Midlands and its effects on the population, by member R. E. Sherwood, is to be published by Phillimore & Co. next April.

"The Established Church and Popular Religion 1750-1850", by member A. W. Smith, has some Cromwellian references. Published Longmans, 65p.

## NOTES & NEWS

**CROMWELL ASSOCIATION COUNCIL:** Captain P. A. Lindsay, Mr. R. E. Sherwood and Mr. A. W. Smith have joined the Council.

**NEW MEMBERS:** Members enrolled since the Annual Meeting in April come from places as far apart as London, Glasgow, Canada, U.S.A. and Japan.

**THURLOE PLAQUE IN LINCOLN'S INN:** The Association is arranging for this plaque, removed during alterations, to be re-designed and replaced. As soon as the new plaque is re-fixed it is hoped to arrange for Sir David Renton to unveil it. Members desiring to be present at this ceremony should advise the Hon. Secretary, who will send them details as soon as these are known.

**ASSOCIATION LIBRARY:** The Council have had preliminary discussions on the building up of the library which is at present very small. Members are asked to consider whether they have books which they would be glad to donate to the Library, or would sponsor the acquisition of a new book by defraying the cost. Their name as donor could then be inscribed in the book. Members interested in this project should write to Mr. A. W. Smith, 26 Grange Crescent, Chigwell, Essex.

**MARSTON MOOR MEMORIAL:** Many members visiting this memorial have expressed concern at its state of disrepair, since two of the three bronze tablets have been stolen. Replacement of these two tablets will prove costly but members of the Council of the Association feel that the renovation of this important memorial must be undertaken. Contributions from members towards this cost would be welcomed by the Hon. Treasurer, Mr. S. J. P. Thomas, Oak Lodge, Blanford Road, Reigate, Surrey.



One of the two stolen tablets to be replaced by the Association.

— Printed by —  
D. E. PARKINS  
109 Dalston Lane  
London E.8