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My purpose is to discuss the evolution of historical opinion concerning Oliver Cromwell, taking into account when relevant, influences such as the particular personal background of the historian and/or the prevailing political ideas of the era. Special emphasis will be given to the later historians as their interpretations seem most valid. The basis will be on the general conclusions about Cromwell drawn by each historian or group of historians. Small points about which historians disagree will not be included. Neither the period nor the life of Cromwell as such will be analyzed or related chronologically. With the exception of the section of views of Cromwell by his contemporaries, only major historians will be included; the majority consulted will be English but other outstanding European historians that have been translated such as Guizot and Von Ranke will be included, as will the American dealing with the subject. The total plethora of scholarship on the period by necessity may not be noted; a few important articles such as Trevor-Roper's "Cromwell and His Parliaments" will be included. One should be able to draw from this thesis not only the development of the interpretation of Cromwell but also general aspects of the development of English historiography.

INTERPRETATIONS OF OLIVER CROMWELL, 1647-1970

by

Anne Lloyd

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the Faculty of the Graduate School at
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INTRODUCTION

The variety and complexity of the elements in Oliver's nature will always fascinate and perplex posterity. We shall never see clearly to the bottom of him, for the well is deep.---G. M. Trevelyan

In 1658 Oliver Cromwell was buried in Westminster Abbey with more pomp and ceremony than had been given to any other Englishman except a king; two years later his body was exhumed, hanged, drawn, and quartered as if he had been a common thief or traitor. Since then men have had remarkably different and often violent reactions towards Cromwell. Historians have been digging him up ever since; such a paradoxical figure, it would appear, could never be allowed to remain peacefully in his grave. The complex evolution of historical interpretation of Cromwell illustrates not only the general development of British historiography but also how popular judgments are often perverted and subject to the political climate of a particular age. Moreover, certain assessments transcend the age or school of history, as in the case of the repeated stress on Cromwell's contradictory character and the excellence of his foreign policy. Men have continued to bring him into their own time and have reinterpreted him in terms of their own age.

CHAPTER I

CROMWELL AS VIEWED BY HIS CONTEMPORARIES

For the most part the recorded judgments of Cromwell's contemporaries, except when they were mere panegyrics or unfounded libels or, when, as with Milton and Dryden, they represented a cause, are highly critical. It is hardly surprising that criticism grew in his later years, for the middle position that he assumed satisfied few; he was assailed from such diverse political sectors as the Presbyterians, Levellers, Republicans, and Royalists.

The Presbyterians tempered their aspersions somewhat. Richard Baxter, a moderate Presbyterian minister, wrote Reliquiae Baxterianae, in which he viewed Cromwell as a Machiavellian figure: "the ends being good and necessary, the means could not be bad." Baxter also criticized Cromwell's state church and its system of Triers and Ejectors of Ministers which had no discipline and courts and so produced a vacuum. Baxter concluded that Cromwell was just and pious until 1655, but that fame and success thereafter corrupted him. Still, for Baxter, Cromwell desired to do good and he promoted the interest of God more than any had done before him.

The Levellers, London radicals led by John Lilburne, desired the "rights of man" to be extended further than Cromwell and other parliamentarians did. Their "Agreement of the People," drafted at Putney in 1647, granted the franchise to every free man, absolute sovereignty to

the House of Commons, and complete equality before the law, law reform, property reform and an indemnity for all those who had participated in the Civil War. The Agreement of the People was not accepted by Cromwell. Lilburne, incensed at this rejection violently criticized the government. He was imprisoned for libelling a member of The Lords and while in prison published a pamphlet, "Jonah's Cry Out of the Whale's Belly," in which he accused Cromwell of not supporting the Levellers' proposals because the House had bribed him with £2,500 to betray and destroy the Leveller cause. Even when, in the summer of 1647, Cromwell did press Parliament to come to terms with the army and the king, Lilburne charged Cromwell with personal ambition and with being loyal to neither side. In defense of Cromwell one should add that he did later release Lilburne and while he continued his accusations Lilburne was collaborating with the Royalists.¹

As fierce in their criticism of Cromwell as the Levellers were the Republicans, who felt betrayed by their apostate, Cromwell, who had first led them towards their utopia and then seized power for himself. Edmund Ludlow, an adamant republican, became a bitter critic of Cromwell after the latter expelled the Rump in 1653. Ludlow, who had been commander-in-chief of the Parliamentary army, accused Cromwell of being "vehemently desirous to be a king"² and of having a new form of government, the Rule of the Major Generals, drawn up to replace the Instrument of Government in order that Cromwell would be king. ". . . accordingly

¹See Maurice Ashley, "Oliver Cromwell and the Levellers," History Today XVII, No. 8 (August, 1967).

²Edmund Ludlow, Memoirs, ed. C. H. Firth, Vol. II (Oxford, 1894), p. 21.

it was prepared by his creatures . . . and appeared to be a shoe fitted to the foot of a monarch."³ Ludlow believed that Cromwell refused the crown only because the army objected, and that his government was based on order, not consent, due to his ambition and hypocrisy. To Ludlow and the republicans, England seemed about to enter the social millennium; "to attain in a short time that measure of happiness which human beings are capable of, when, by the ambitions of one man, the hopes and expectations of all good men were disappointed."⁴

While bitter, the Royalists did not believe in the perfectibility of man as did the Levellers and republicans. Sir Phillip Warwick, a Royalist member of Parliament, wrote after the Restoration:

I verily believe he was extraordinarily designed for extraordinary things which one while most wickedly and facinorously he acted, and at another as successfully and greatly performed . . .⁵

Perhaps the best known of the royalist critics of Cromwell was Sir Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon. Clarendon had initially been a moderate royalist and was forced to become speaker for the crown as a result of the excesses of the Long parliament in the debate over the Grand Remonstrance, a propagandist statement of the opposition's case against Charles I. It was over the question of printing the Grand Remonstrance that swords were first drawn in the House of Commons. Clarendon was detached from his own church and was repelled by the fervor of the rival creeds. (Clarendon did not view Puritanism as a force which could unite

³Edmund Ludlow, Memoirs, ed. C. H. Firth, Vol. II (Oxford, 1894), p. 21.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Warwick quoted in Maurice Ashley, Cromwell (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1969), p. 82.

men to work together to reform church and state.) He did not look upon this rebellion as unique: rather, the upheaval had been caused by "the same natural causes and means, which have usually attended kingdoms swollen with long plenty." Preferring to work for reform within the established system, Clarendon did not support rebellion. He had followed Charles II to France. When Charles was restored Clarendon became Lord Chancellor, but he subsequently lost the favor of the king and failed to establish a workable party in Commons. He was impeached in 1667 and fled from the country, to die in exile.

Clarendon viewed Cromwell in his History of the Rebellion written during his banishment, as a "brave, bad man" who:

. . . though the greatest dissembler living, always made his hypocrisy of singular use and benefit to him; and never did anything, how ungracious or unprudent soever it seemed to be, but what was necessary to the design. Even his roughness and unpolishedness, which is the beginning of the Parliaments he affected . . . was necessary.⁶

To Clarendon, Cromwell was in some respects a Machiavellian figure.⁷ And still Clarendon admired this "borgia--figure" for his courage, perseverance and political judgment.

Cromwell's foreign policy was a sound one, based on the use of aggressive sea power and his decision not to pursue a Protestant crusade at the expense of hard economic realities. The Royalists were often more favorably inclined to Cromwell than were the Republicans, especially after the Restoration when they witnessed the miserable failures in foreign policy during the reigns of Charles II and James II. During

⁶Edward Hyde, the Earl of Clarendon, History of the Rebellion (Oxford, 1888), p. 170.

⁷An excellent source is Felix Raab's The English Face of Machiavelli (London, 1964).

Cromwell's protectorate England was respected and feared on the continent.

To a degree Clarendon was sympathetic towards Cromwell, perhaps because of Cromwell's failure, like his own, to form a workable party in Commons. Clarendon believed himself to be misjudged as well. His narrative is noteworthy for its character portrayals; he drew on the tradition of character delineation from the Elizabethan interest in the humors. While Clarendon's history is biased, his keen understanding of human nature makes it one of the best contemporary accounts.

An extreme Puritan view is represented in the Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson, written by his wife Lucy Hutchinson after the Restoration, but not published until 1809. Colonel Hutchinson had signed Charles I's death warrant and later died in prison during Charles II's reign, even though during the last years of the Protectorate he had supported the Royalist cause. Cromwell is portrayed in Hutchinson's Memoirs as an ambitious man who consciously thwarted Parliament and became a dictatorial ruler giving no heed to religious principle or God's will.

Sharp criticism of Cromwell was not confined to the political factions within England. The poet Abraham Cowley, writing under the pseudonym of Ezebiel Grebner in Visions and Prophecies Concerning England, Scotland and Ireland, viewed Cromwell as a Machiavellian figure:

. . . I see you are a Pedant, and Platonical Statesman, a Theoretical Commonwealthsman, an Utopian Dreamer. Was ever Riches gotten by your Golden Mediocrities, or the Supreme place attained to by Virtues that must stir out the middle? Do you Study Aristotle's Politiques, and write, if you please, comments upon them, and let but another practise Matchaviol, and

let us see then which of you two will come to the greatest preferments.⁸

Following the death of Cromwell, Cowley wrote A Vision, concerning his late pretended Highness, Cromwell the Wicked: Containing a Discourse in Vindication of Him, by a pretended Angel, and the Confutation thereof, by the Author, Abraham Cowley. The Angel "Abraham" compares Cromwell to Richard the Third". . .for he presently slew the commonwealth, which he pretended to protect, and set up himself in the place of it."⁹

Such were the adverse judgments passed upon the great Protector by his contemporaries. Anonymous attacks were likewise frequent. While it may appear that most of his opponents, the Royalists, whom he harmed the most, held him in higher esteem, it should be noted that he may have destroyed the Royalist institutions but he seemingly destroyed the republicans' and Levellers' dreams of a utopian commonwealth and their belief in the perfectability of mankind.

Noteworthy support for Cromwell came from the poets of the day. John Milton, Secretary to Cromwell, wrote an eloquent defense of Cromwell which is perhaps more important in our time than his own. In his The Second Defence of the People of England Milton said of him:

Cromwell our chief of men, who through a cloud
Not of war only, but detractions rude,
Guided by faith and matchless fortitude
To peace and truth thy glorious way hath ploughed.¹⁰

Politically Milton believed in an aristocracy which would rule in

⁸Cowley quoted in Raab, The English Face of Machiavelli, pp. 133-34.

⁹Abraham Cowley, Anglistica & Americana, Vol. II (N. Y. 1966), p. 297.

¹⁰John Milton, The Second Defence of the People of England, Vol. VI (London, 1806), pp. 432-33.

accordance with natural law, and its own insight and wisdom. He believed in the sovereignty of the people, but paradoxically he did not have faith in representative government. Milton desired complete separation of church and state; toleration could not be achieved without separation. While The Second Defence vindicates and praises Cromwell, fear and doubt are evident.

. . . much remains
 To conquer still: Peace hath her victories
 No less renowned than war; new foes arise--¹¹

Edward Waller, John Dryden and Andrew Marvell wrote death odes to Cromwell. Waller's grief was evidently soon abated, for he wrote a joyous ode on the return of Charles in 1660. Dryden continued after the Restoration to speak of him as that "bold Typhoeus." Marvell wrote an earlier ode in support of Cromwell's Irish campaign; in his death ode he lauded Cromwell with these lines:

. . . he First Put Arms Into Religion's Hand
 . . . Valour, Religion, Friendship, Prudence dy'd
 At Once with him, and all that's good beside . . .¹²

For the most part, Cromwell was admired rather than loved by those who defended him. Many of those who criticized him admired him as well. Even John Locke, who did not support the rule of the major generals, viewed him as greater than Augustus and Julius Caesar. In the area of foreign policy he was exalted by both his critics and supporters.

¹¹John Milton, The Second Defence of the People of England. Vol. VI (London, 1806), pp. 432-33.

¹²Andrew Marvell, "Poem Upon the Death of Oliver Cromwell," The Poems and Letters of Marvell, ed. H. M. Margoleouth, Vol. I, (Oxford, 1962), p. 128.

CHAPTER II

COMMENTARY ON CROMWELL TO 1845

The earliest biographer of Cromwell was Samuel Carrington. His The History of the Life and Death of His Most Serene Highness Oliver late Lord Protector (1659) is not historically accurate and should be viewed as little more than a eulogy. Carrington stressed Cromwell's role in trade and foreign policy which later historians emphasized.

Immediately after the Restoration, Cromwell was portrayed by the Royalists as the late dictator and usurper. The most widely read of the early biographies was James Heath's Flagellum, published in 1663. Here Cromwell was represented as the man of blood, a monster despicable in both his private and public lives, a tyrant guilty of every sin and crime. The book was printed in six editions during Charles II's reign, and well into the 18th century it continued to be the most popular work on Cromwell. Carlyle viewed it as "that chief fountain of lies concerning Cromwell." Abroad, the tone of criticism was the same as that exemplified by the German Narrative of the Meeting of Cromwell and Master Peter in Hell and the Latin Comparison of Cromwell and Tiberius.

But this period of unchallenged criticism lasted only a few years in England. The English became involved in a costly war with the Dutch; the Dutch fleet sailed up the Thames; the English government was near bankruptcy. Pope remarked "For forms of government let fools contest" and Pepys observed that everyone reflected upon Oliver and looked wistfully back to the days of the Protectorate when England was feared and

respected. Abroad he remained under sharp criticism. Leti's Life of Oliver Cromwell (1691) portrayed him as the Machiavellian tyrant--blood-thirsty, hypocritical, demagogic, vindictive. But English criticism of Cromwell was tempered.

Appearing a year after Leti's book, Nathaniel Crouch's History of Oliver Cromwell softened the earlier indictment of Cromwell. While his work is not a defense of him, Crouch did condemn those that attributed all of Cromwell's thoughts and actions to hypocrisy and ambition. However with the publication at this time of Ludlow's Memoirs and Clarendon's History the Royalist-Republican criticisms were revived and in Pope's words he was "damned to everlasting fame."

Isaac Kimber in 1722 published the first really favorable biography since Carrington's panegyric. His Life of Oliver Cromwell was more scholarly, for he used Cromwell's own writings. He wrote of the human weaknesses and qualities of Cromwell. John Banks' A Short Critical Review of the Political Life of Oliver Cromwell (1739) continued Kimber's reasoning that to have accomplished what he did, Cromwell must be credited with elements of greatness. (This tact shows the 18th century emphasis on logic.) Banks wrote:

. . . though Cromwell was ambitious to a very high degree, yet at the same time he had a passionate regard for the public good. It is certain he did more things for the honour and advantage of the nation, notwithstanding his own precarious situation, than had been done for whole ages in the preceeding times.¹³

Influenced as well by antiquarian method, David Hume attempted an impartial assessment of Cromwell in his History of England (1754).

¹³John Banks, Political Life of Oliver Cromwell (London, 1760), p. 232.

Though relying too heavily on the Royalist biographers, he did seek an explanation of Cromwell's actions beyond accounting for them on the basis of mere character. He viewed Cromwell in the context of the social condition in England, but was still unable to achieve an adequate explanation for Cromwell's conduct. "He was in many respects, and even a superior genius, but unequal and irregular in his operations."¹⁴ Hume was anticlerical and did not judge Cromwell's religious motives as all important to him. Hume's view of his subject as a man of contradictions could be attributed in part to the ambiguity in Hume's own political thought. Whigism can be seen in his belief in liberty and tolerance and in his enthusiasm for the Glorious Revolution, but at the same time Toryism can be perceived in his defense of the Stuarts, distrust of radicals, and rejection of the idea of a social contract.

Tobias Smollett wrote his History of England (1759) to rival the popularity of Hume's work. Like Hume, Smollett viewed Cromwell as a divided personality, a mixture of "enthusiasm, hypocrisy and ambition . . . the strangest compound of villainy and virtue, baseness and magnanimity, absurdity and good sense, that we find upon record in the annals of mankind."¹⁵

While there were more scholarly attempts to assess Cromwell in the 18th century, for the most part historians in the two hundred years following his death can be divided into either the Whig or Tory schools. The Whigs saw Cromwell as the betrayer of the cause of democracy due to his overbearing ambition, and the Tories excoriated him for the regicide and

¹⁴David Hume, History of England, Vol. V (London, 1754), p. 411.

¹⁵Smollett quoted in Maurice Ashley, Cromwell (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1969), p. 130.

revolution. Carlyle was to refer to the material concerning Cromwell published before his work in 1845 as "bewildered interminable rubbish heaps . . . the dreariest perhaps that anywhere exist still visited by human curiosity."¹⁶

¹⁶Smolett quoted in Maurice Ashley, Cromwell (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1969), p. 130.

CHAPTER III
VICTORIAN INTERPRETATIONS

While the Victorians approached Cromwell with more critical scholarship, their assessments, like those of their predecessors, were imbued with the ideals of their age. Whereas 18th century radicals had reproved Cromwell for his failure to carry the revolution further and for his assumption of power, the Victorians lauded him for his moderation and control during that chaotic period. Victorian England feared the expansion of the chaos and revolution that engulfed Europe in the mid-19th century, as well as the radical movements, like Chartism, within their own country. Cromwell was the hero sent by God to impose order when demands and acts of groups like the Levellers were excessive and anarchistic. Moreover Cromwell represented the moral tone of the Victorian Age: ". . . that which chiefly distinguished the army of Cromwell from other armies was the austere morality and the fear of God which pervaded all ranks,"¹⁷ wrote Macaulay, the greatest historian of the age. Victorians like Macaulay, Morley, Carlyle, and Gardiner traced the advent of constitutional government and popular sovereignty back to Cromwell:

In constituting this body, [The House of Commons] the Protector showed a wisdom and a public spirit which were not duly appreciated by his contemporaries . . . Cromwell reformed the system on the same principle on which Mr. Pitt . . . attempted to reform it, and on which

¹⁷Thomas Macaulay, History of England (Boston, 1900), pp. 120-21.

it was at length, reformed in our own times. Small boroughs were disfranchised even more unsparingly than in 1832 . . .¹⁸

England's empire, so dear to the Victorians, was traced back to Cromwell:

She at once became the most formidable power in the world, dictated terms of peace to the United Provinces, avenged the common injuries of Christendom on the pirates of Barbary, vanquished the Spaniards by land and sea, seized one of the finest West Indian islands, and acquired on the Flemish coast a fortress which consoled the national pride for the loss of Calais. She was supreme on the ocean. She was head of the Protestant interest.¹⁹

Cromwell represented the nineteenth-century middle class. "No sovereign ever carried to the throne so large a portion of the best qualities of the middling orders, so strong a sympathy with the feelings and interests of his people."²⁰ To Macaulay, Cromwell, with his religious attitude toward politics, was the 17th century Gladstone.

During the revolutionary period in Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, Macaulay attributed England's tranquility to Cromwell and his revolution: "It is because we had a preserving revolution in the 17th century that we have not had a destroying revolution in the 19th century." Macaulay's History of England was widely read and influenced greatly the popular conception of Cromwell.

With the publication in 1845 of Carlyle's Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector could finally speak for himself. The

¹⁸Thomas Macaulay, History of England (Boston, 1900), pp. 120-21.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 136.

²⁰Macaulay quoted in Christopher Hill's God's Englishman (London, 1970), p. 267.

Letters and Speeches were instrumental in changing the popular conception of Cromwell as a Machiavellian and villainous figure. Carlyle was himself contradictory and neurotic and the Puritan ethos of hard-work influenced him greatly as a result of years of meager living. Carlyle viewed Cromwell as the soul of the Puritan Revolt, and advocated that the period of the 17th century in which Cromwell lived be known as "Cromwelliad." Contrary to popular fancy, "it became apparent that this Oliver was not a man of falsehoods but a man of truths."²¹ Criticisms concerning ambition and the Irish question, are explained away as being necessary to the maintenance of stable government. To Carlyle, Cromwell was the god of the mid-seventeenth century. Carlyle's portrayal of Cromwell recalls what Cassius sarcastically said of Julius:

Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus; and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs, and peep about
To find ourselves dishonourable graves.

Carlyle was, of course, very subjective in his approach to history. He wished history to reveal all that man was and all that God had wanted him to be. For him history was in essence the lengthened shadows of great men, the compound of innumerable biographies. He scorned the idea that men read history to discover the truth about human nature, however, since men did not even know themselves and their surroundings. He felt, moreover, that the spirit of man could best be apprehended in moments of crisis, moments of impulse rather than reflection. God's work could most clearly be seen then. Thus Carlyle chose times of crisis like the French Revolution and the English Revolution for his subject matter.

²¹Thomas Carlyle, The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell with Elucidations, ed. S. C. Lomas, Vol. I (New York, 1899), p. 10.

F. B. G. Guizot admired stable government as well. Guizot, Prime Minister of France, who was exiled after the Revolution of 1848, emphasized the social and economic forces which precipitated the English revolution in his History of Oliver Cromwell and The English Commonwealth. While Guizot admired Cromwell for "having governed the most opposite events [disorder and order] and proved sufficient for the various destinies . . . and for restoring order even at the cost of freedom,"²² he still was not fully in tune with a popular revolution. Guizot concluded that Cromwell did not in the end achieve his goal of leaving "his name and race in possession of the throne." He continues:

God does not grant to those great men, who have laid the foundations of their greatness amidst disorder and revolution, the power of regulating at their pleasure, and for succeeding ages, the government of nations.²³

An assessment by another foreigner was that of Leopold Von Ranke, the father of scientific history, who believed the proper test of the historian was to tell "precisely what happened." Von Ranke did not make ultimate character evaluations. However, in his estimation Cromwell had no comprehensive plan.

The consciousness of a high mission which anti-
mated him may have been strengthened and elevated
by subsequent events; but to trace all his actions
in detail to a settled plan is to be guilty of a
false pragmatism which only obscures the motives
which were really most powerful. He himself said
on one occasion, 'He goes furthest who knows not
wither he is going..' The directing impulse to all

²²F. B. G. Guizot, History of Oliver Cromwell and the English Commonwealth, trans. Andrew Scoble (Philadelphia, 1854), p. 356.

²³Ibid., p. 357.

that he did or left undone was supplied in most cases by the necessities of the moment.²⁴

Von Ranke viewed Cromwell as pragmatic; he necessarily had to assume control:

How, under any conditions, could a military and civil authority, with equal claims, have continued to rule side by side with each other? It was inevitable that they should quarrel; and in the quarrel the General necessarily gained the advantage . . . Here as ever the contradiction manifested itself between the intention as at first avowed and its subsequent results.²⁵

Von Ranke approved of the extreme militarism of the period as necessary to the maintenance of political and social order.

Both Guizot and Von Ranke emphasized the paradoxes in Cromwell's behavior: his love of liberty and his love of order, his impatience to be done and his slowness to act, and his constructive and destructive acts. Since both had witnessed the revolutions of 1848 in their own countries, they could comprehend Cromwell's difficulty in creating new and lasting institutions.

J. T. Headley, an American historian, wrote his Life of Oliver Cromwell (1857) in which he attributed to the commonwealth of Cromwell the ideas which promoted the American Revolution. "The questions of constitutional and personal liberty, which he settled, have been the foundation of every revolution for the emancipation of man."²⁶ His work is quite Puritan in tone. Cromwell's Commonwealth was God's Church on earth;

²⁴Leopold Von Ranke, History of England principally in the Seventeenth Century, Vol. IV (Oxford, 1875), p. 108.

²⁵Ibid., p. 411.

²⁶J.T. Headley, The Life of Oliver Cromwell (New York, 1857), p. viii.

Charles II's court was a brothel. Cromwell is not even held answerable for Drogheda, the massacre of the Irish garrison. Headley believed that had Cromwell lived he would have established a Republic. Cromwell is also portrayed as the father of England's empire.

Godwin Smith, in a lecture at Oxford in 1867, took issue with the popular Whig conception of Cromwell that viewed him and the seventeenth century as crucial in the emergence of constitutional government and of religious and intellectual freedom in England. Smith argued that Cromwell should not have executed the king. Instead of eliminating flunkeyism in government, quite the opposite occurred: "[t]he royal martyr has been the seed of flunkeyism from that day to this."²⁷ Cromwell could not be excused for Drogheda and Wexford. "Cromwell was a fanatic, and all fanatics are morally the worse for their fanaticism: they set dogma above virtue, they take their own ends for God's ends, and their own enemies for his."²⁸ Moreover Cromwell meant to set himself up as monarch. Smith rebuked Carlyle for his blind hero-worship, although giving him credit for improved government administration, reforms in law and church, and his foreign and commercial policies. Smith objected to the thesis that all Victorians ideals--freedom, stability, oral order and empire--were attributable to Cromwell.

The mid-nineteenth century marks roughly the break between the romantic and scientific approach to history. Guizot, Von Ranke and Smith began the trend away from the romantic conceptions of Cromwell as exemplified by Carlyle and Macaulay. Morley, Gardiner and Firth continued a

²⁷Godwin Smith, Three English Statesmen (Oxford, 1882), p. 60.

²⁸Ibid., p. 64.

more scientific approach to the study of Cromwell, using only primary source material related to him and placing him within the context of his period.

John Morley, a Liberal statesman-historian, did not allow Cromwell to overshadow all events and men as did Carlyle. Morely called it "a common error of our day to ascribe far too much to the designs and the influence of eminent men, of rulers." Morley's work, Oliver Cromwell was not only a biography but a history of the times. Although Morley accorded to Cromwell a prominent place in the events of the century and credited him with high ideals and pure ambition, to Morley, "Cromwell's revolution was the end of the medieval rather than the beginning of the modern era."²⁹ Thomas Cromwell and even Walpole had more influence on institutions in England than did Cromwell. Foreshadowing twentieth century interpretations, Morely looked to the religious and social forces working in the 17th century. The Revolution of 1688 was more successful and "the Declaration of Rights and Toleration act issued from a stream of ideas and maxims, aims and methods, that were not Puritan,"³⁰ and could be ascribed to Cromwell. As Frederic Harrison pointed out in regard to Morley's work, however, the revolution begun in 1629 lasted a century: "the Commonwealth and Protectorate were the decisive acts of itIt is by fixing the eye too closely to the period from 1642 to 1662 that Mr. Morley, like Mr. Gardiner, somewhat loses sight of Cromwell's work."³¹

²⁹John Morley, Oliver Cromwell (London, 1900), p. 492.

³⁰Ibid., p. 495.

³¹Frederic Harrison, George Washington and Other Addresses (London, 1901), p. 154.

While Samuel Gardiner labeled events of the 17th century as the Puritan Revolution instead of Clarendon's Great Rebellion, he still viewed Cromwell critically. Gardiner felt that the truth concerning the 17th century had been obscured by Whig and Tory biases of earlier historians. A Puritan and a descendant of both Cromwell and Ireton, Gardiner guarded himself against bias by basing his work on primary sources, state papers and the like. In order to further insure a critical distance, Gardiner published each year the material he had concluded so that one could observe what did actually happen instead of his own reflection of events. He criticized the literary tradition of Hume and Macaulay who "cooly dissect a man's thoughts as they pleased, and label them like specimens in a naturalist's cabinet. Such a thing, they argue, was done for mere personal aggrandisement; such a thing for national objects; such a thing from high religious motives. In real life we may be sure it was not so."³²

By the late 19th century Cromwell was regarded by many as the epitome of middle class virtues; no longer was he the tyrant and hypocrite. Gardiner felt that Cromwell had had an impossible task before him and that he was judged great in part because he was the typical Englishman. "He stands forth as the typical Englishman of the modern worldIt is for us to regard him as he really was, with all his physical and moral audacity, with all his tenderness and spiritual yearning, in the world of action what Shakespeare was in the world of thought, the greatest because the most typical English man of all time."³³

³²J. R. Hale, ed., The Evolution of British Historiography (New York, 1964), p. 61.

³³Gardiner quoted in Maurice Ashley, The Greatness of Oliver Cromwell (New York, 1958), p. 14.

Like Morely, Gardiner emphasized Cromwell's lack of permanent institutional innovations, i.e., government administration reform, judicial reform. Cromwell's negative acts endured; the limitation of the power of the king and royalty. But he initiated little else that was permanent. However, in order to distinguish between positive and negative in relationship to the old order appears paradoxical. If negative, destructive work is permanent, it is ipso facto positive and constructive for it enables the new order to take form. Gardiner viewed Cromwell as in advance of his age. "He was a liberal in advance of his time, a russet-coated Gladstone even less successful with the Irish problem and even more apt to confuse theology with foreign policy."³⁴ Many of Cromwell's ideas he felt foreshadowed the 19th century. Cromwell's interests were similar to those of Victorian England--social and religious reform, commerce and empire. Like Cromwell, Gardiner affirmed Britain has waged wars, annexed territory, extended trade, and raised herself among the nations of Europe. Thus Gardiner assessed Cromwell as being greater than his work and time:

Oliver's claim to greatness can be tested by the undoubted fact that his character receives higher and wider appreciations as the centuries pass by. The limitations on his nature--the one-sidedness of his religious zeal, the mistakes of his policy--are thrust out of sight, the nobility of his motives, the strength of his character, and the breadth of his intellect, force themselves on the minds of generations for which the objects for which he strove have for the most part attained, though often in a different fashion from that which he placed before himself.³⁵

³⁴Gardiner quoted in Christopher Hill, Oliver Cromwell, (London, 1958), p. 4.

³⁵Samuel Gardiner, Oliver Cromwell (New York, 1901), p. 318.

Charles Firth, offered in 1906 the last of the great Victorian interpretations of Oliver Cromwell. Firth, a student of Gardiner, emphasized more than did his professor the portrayal of Cromwell's character. Firth, like Morley and Gardiner, lauded Cromwell, the soldier. "Cromwell succeeded in inspiring them [the army] not only with implicit confidence in leadership, but with something of his own high enthusiasm. He had the power of influencing masses of men which Napoleon possessed . . ."36 Firth observed that the liberality of Cromwell's practice often redeemed the comparative narrowness of his theory.

Firth's emphasis upon Cromwell the statesman rather than Cromwell the visionary indicates the turn away from the Victorian interpretation of Cromwell as foreshadowing the 19th century in England, toward the 20th century interpretation of Cromwell as the pragmatic man of politics. Cromwell was seen by Firth as more practical than other statesmen of his party, more open-minded and better able to adapt his policy to the changing needs of the times.

Firth extolled Cromwell's foreign policy and particularly his colonial policy; Cromwell was the first English ruler to systematically employ the power of the government to extend the colonial possessions of England. While his institutions had perished, his achievements for England were great.

Thanks to his sword absolute monarchy failed to take root in English soil . . . Great Britain emerged from the chaos of the civil wars one strong-state . . . Nor were the results of his actions entirely negative. The ideas which inspired his policy exerted a lasting influence

³⁶ Charles Firth, Oliver Cromwell (New York, 1906), p. 468.

on the development of the English state
Cromwell remained throughout his life too much the
champion of a party to be accepted as a national hero
by later generations³⁷

Thus we have the ideas that made for Cromwell's rehabilitation during the Victorian period. He stood for the English people; the middle class coming into prominence in England could identify with this most "typical" Englishman who came from the "middling" orders. Also during the Victorian period England became for the most part a democracy. The Cromwellian period was viewed as the beginning of popular sovereignty.

³⁷Charles Firth, Oliver Cromwell (New York, 1906), p. 486.

CHAPTER IV

TWENTIETH CENTURY INTERPRETATIONS

The Victorian interpretation of Cromwell continued in the early decades of the twentieth century. He remained a hero for some historians and popular writers. In John Drinkwater's play, Oliver Cromwell (1921), Cromwell appeared as the man of contradictions, who loved his fellow Englishmen and valued individual liberty above all else. J. R. Seely, in his The Growth of British Policy (1921), viewed Cromwell as the founder of the British Empire and saw him as the most audacious and original statesman that Britain had had, comparing him to Elizabeth I. Theodore Roosevelt credited Cromwell with heading a movement which made the English-speaking world masters of their own destinies; like Guizot, Roosevelt wrote that Cromwell should not be judged for his failure to create permanent institutions.

In the 1930's, however, the pendulum swung away from Cromwell as the ideal statesman of the Victorians. The Nazi era produced biographies that portrayed Cromwell as a conservative dictator and totalitarian leader. Freudian psychoanalysis influenced historians' approach to Cromwell. But the 1930's biographers were not united in their estimation of Cromwell; John Buchan in 1934 revived the Cromwell of Carlyle--Cromwell the Godly Caesar.

Since the 1930's historians have divided chiefly into different schools in their interpretations of Cromwell. The narrative school, represented by C. V. Wedgwood and Trevelyan, neither take Cromwell out of

the context of his own time and judge him by 20th century values nor do they subordinate his role to social and economic forces. Their narrative approach provides a close textural causation with the historic event and individual. The Marxist school, represented by Tawney and Hill, views social and economic forces as primary factors in events of the seventeenth century, thus relegating Cromwell to a less important position as representing the rising gentry. The anti-Marxist school, represented by Hugh Trevor-Roper emphasizes economics but views the seventeenth century as the period when the gentry were declining; Cromwell represents the declining gentry that desire a return to the Elizabethan age. The nihilist school, represented by D. Brunton and D. Pennington, do not believe that the civil war can be explained by general long-term causes.

Since the 1950's there has been a distinct move away from an economic and social emphasis and isolated empirical study to a reevaluation of the ideas and men of the seventeenth century. Robert Paul, Christopher Hill and William Lamont have once again emphasized religion as a decisive factor in 17th century politics and in the character of Cromwell. Most recently he has been judged as a conciliator. Ashley and Hill have viewed him as attempting to maintain the tenuous balance between individual liberty and a stable system of government. As the interpretation of Cromwell through the 20th century is traced one can see how the contradictions in Cromwell's character underlie the perplexities and contradictions of our own age and why Cromwell remains both interesting and pertinent to men more than 300 years later.

In the 1930's, as already mentioned, historians treated Cromwell as a Hitler-figure. The major historical work which followed this line was W. C. Abbott's The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell, With an

Introduction, Notes and Sketch of his Life (4 vols. 1937-47). Abbott added more than 700 items to the corpus of Cromwelliana that Carlyle had collected, chiefly letters and recorded accounts of Cromwell's conversations as reported by both foreigners and Englishmen. Abbott distorted the character of Cromwell in his comparisons between Cromwell and Hitler. He wrote: "The events of the past twenty years [Hitler and Mussolini and W W II] were required to find an appropriate descriptive phrase to fit the position which Cromwell heldThey reflect the fact of the present in the mirror of the pastIt is no mere accident that comparisons have been made between Cromwell, Hitler and Mussolini . . . the rise of an Austrian housepainter to the headship of the German Reich, of a newspaper editor-agitator to the leadership of Italy, and of a Georgian bandit to the domination of Russia, have modified our concept of Cromwell's achievement, and perhaps our concept of his place in history."³⁸ Abbott reacted against Gardiner's and Firth's liberal bias and was much more sympathetic to the royalist cause.

Mary Blauvelt's Oliver Cromwell, A Dictator's Tragedy portrays Cromwell as a leader forced into the role of dictator. Cromwell's struggle on behalf of religious toleration becomes the dictator's tragedy.

His life was the tragedy of conflicting ideals, his career a successful failureIn the main his failure was due not to his mistakes but to the circumstances with which he had to deal, the men with whom he had to work. That was the tragedy of it³⁹

Blauvelt saw him as a Hamlet-figure. "The times are out of joint Oh

³⁸W. C. Abbott, The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell, With an Introduction, Notes and Sketch of his Life, Vol. IV (Cambridge, 1947), p. 898.

³⁹Mary Blauvelt, Oliver Cromwell, A Dictator's Tragedy (New York, 1937), p. xi.

cursed spite / That ever I was born to set them right." Cromwell did not want power but power was forced upon him. The philosophy that one cannot always know what is right but one must make quick decisions for the sake of unity was also forced upon him. Blauvelt judges Cromwell's foreign policy as astute but he is condemned for being the forerunner of imperialism. (This condemnation of imperialism is another outlook of the 1930's when men were much concerned with the question of imperialism, e.g., the movement for Indian self-determination.) Cromwell was a product of his times; even the Irish question could be explained by Cromwell's background. Thus Cromwell is portrayed as an unwilling dictator; a man not in control of his own fate.

Ernest Barker in his Oliver Cromwell and the English People like Abbott draws comparisons between the Independents and the Nazis and by implication between Cromwell and Hitler. Maurice Ashley also was greatly influenced by the politics of the 1930's and Cromwell is viewed by Ashley as a conservative dictator. Milton Waldman viewed Cromwell as the "Rod of Iron" who sought, through violence, to: "force a Commonwealth of God which by its very nature pertains to men's inward hearts alone,"⁴⁰ but this man of violence could not build his temple. Cromwell knew how to destroy but not rebuild. Although the historians of the 1930's see him as a conservative dictator they temper their judgment and see him as a reluctant, melancholy or unwilling one.

While the prevailing interpretation of Cromwell in the 1930's was one of a dictator there were exceptions. John Buchan returns to the

⁴⁰Milton Waldman, Rod of Iron, the Absolute Ruler of England (Boston, 1941), p. 274.

Cromwell of Carlyle who was the great English statesman: a Caesar who belonged to a small group of English kings who had the good of the English people uppermost in their minds. Cromwell again becomes the epic figure but is humane and typifies the English character! Buchan writes: "He had no egotism, and would readily take advice and allow himself to be persuaded. He would even permit opponents to enlarge on his faults and point out his spiritual defects, than which there can be no greater proof of humility."⁴¹ Hensley Henson, Bishop of Durham, remarked that the popularity and large sales of Buchan's biography had restored his faith in democracy.

The narrative school of history represented by Trevelyan and Wedgwood reacted to the extreme bias exhibited toward Cromwell by the Victorian school and the 1930's biographers. They objected to judgments of Cromwell colored by political ideals and prejudices of the time in which the historian wrote. Trevelyan remarked:

Cromwell had been for two centuries vilified as a mere hypocrite and vulgar tyrant, and no one had dared, from motives of political prudence, to speak up for him, was there something to be said for Carlyle's one-sided panegyric?⁴²

A case for Cromwell was not advanced by Carlyle, except insofar as he made available the speeches and writings of Cromwell. Trevelyan believes that the historian should relate the past to the present but should not judge a man and his actions by the prevailing political standards of the day. Trevelyan was more traditional in approach and viewed his subject as drama. Great men were the primary "dramatis personae" in history,

⁴¹John Buchan, Oliver Cromwell (Boston, 1934), p. 516.

⁴²G. M. Trevelyan, "Cromwell's Statue," Autobiography and Other Essays, (New York, 1949), p. 69.

contrasting sharply with the common men of the social and economic view of history which was gaining prominence. The historian must capture the feeling of the time of which he is writing. Trevelyan reacted against the scholarly German method which he felt would make the historian a "Potsdam Guard of learning."⁴³ Trevelyan can be seen as a continuation of the 19th century literary tradition of history. Trevelyan maintained that ideas were of uppermost importance:

. . .the North never felt that it was engaged in a death struggle with the South, nor were West and East roused to battle by conscious intention to subdue one another. In every shire there were two parties, of which the weaker only waited the opportunity to join hands with an invading force from the other side of England. For in motive it was a war not of class or of districts, but of ideas. Hence there was a nobler speculative enthusiasm among the chief and their followers, but less readiness to fight among the masses of the population, than in other contests that have torn great nations.⁴⁴

Trevelyan thought that Cromwell's statue was appropriately placed in front of The House of Commons for "without him we should not have become a nation governed by Parliament."⁴⁵ Returning to the Victorian emphasis on order, Trevelyan viewed Cromwell's Protectorate as the means to control chaos. Cromwell "usurped the rule, to save England and the Empire from disruption."⁴⁶ He had to assume power when faced with the divisions within the country; the Rump represented no one and the Catholic powers Cromwell believed to be plotting against England. If Britain was to

⁴³The Evolution of British Historiography (New York, 1964), p. 71.

⁴⁴G. M. Trevelyan, England Under the Stuarts (New York, 1920, p. 229.

⁴⁵Trevelyan, Autobiography and Other Essays (New York, 1949), p. 67.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 166.

achieve any semblance of unity, Ireland and Scotland had to be conquered. Trevelyan emphasized Cromwell's contradictory personality and his inordinate religious zeal as crucial factors in the subsequent history of England. "Oliver as I conceive him," wrote Trevelyan, "was a blend of the gentle Oliver of Buchan's perception and Ashley's 'intensely irritable country gentleman.' At Drogheda his 'notable mercifulness in war' had been overborne by one of his fatal gusts of passion."⁴⁷

Of the same literary tradition, C. V. Wedgewood is more sophisticated in her approach to Cromwell and the 17th century than is Trevelyan who tended to follow the Victorian school too closely. In her Sense of the Past she emphasizes recapturing the feeling of the time. Her narrative approach to history is more complex than the Marxists give her credit for. Major historical changes she considers can only be fully analyzed in light of a multiple causation and the intricate interdependence of a succession of events. In contrast to the Marxist emphasis on class divisions, she believes that what essentially divided Puritan from Anglican, Roundhead from Royalist, Whig from Tory, were differences of opinion about the royal prerogative, Parliament, the established church and the judiciary. She does not obscure her analysis by a single-cause dialectic.

Wedgewood concurs essentially with Gardiner's view of Cromwell as the "most typical Englishman of all time." Cromwell "was typical of certain aspects of English character . . . with his Juggernaut self-righteousness, his indignation at other people's injustices, his blindness to his own, his sincerity, his lack of intellectual doubt, his fundamental kindness."⁴⁸ That the modern dictator in part owes his power

⁴⁷Trevelyan, Autobiography and Other Essays (New York, 1949), p.177.

⁴⁸C. V. Wedgewood, Life of Cromwell (New York, 1962), p. 123.

to the sense among the people that he is an apotheosis of every one of them, led to the over-emphasis of Cromwell in the 1930's as a dictator. Cromwell was never totally dictatorial, and furthermore one cannot judge a man of the 17th century by 20th century standards. For Wedgewood, Cromwell's career typifies the dilemma of the statesman: "the contradiction between ethics and politics, between the right and the expedient."⁴⁹ Cromwell saw no other way to maintain order other than by his protectorate. Wedgewood views religious toleration as the predominating factor in his decision to overthrow the king and later to assume power.

Winston Churchill, a more "popular" historian than Trevelyan or Wedgewood, and decidedly royalist in outlook, maintains a similar literary and narrative approach to history. In his consideration of Cromwell's behavior in Ireland he likens him to 20th century leaders for his mass executions. However, Churchill views Cromwell as a

laggard from the Elizabethan Age . . . a rustic Tudor gentleman, born out of due time . . . In foreign policy he was still fighting the Spanish Armada, ever ardent to lead his ironside redcoats against the stakes and faggots of some Grand Inquisitor, or the idolatrous superstition of an Italian Pope.⁵⁰

Churchill does not judge him as an opportunist but doubts his political objectives reflected in "No man rises so high as he who knows not whither he is going." While crafty and ruthless at times, Cromwell was a reluctant and apologetic dictator. Cromwell did deplore the arbitrary nature of his power, but was able to convince himself that his authority sprang

⁴⁹C. V. Wedgewood, Life of Cromwell (New York, 1962), p. 14.

⁵⁰Winston Churchill, The New World (New York, 1958), p. 303. See pages 35-36 of this thesis for similar interpretation by Hugh Trevor-Roper and G. M. Young.

from God.

In many ways Churchill's portrayal of Cromwell is a sophisticated version of Clarendon's "brave, bad man." Both Churchill and Clarendon before him were sympathetic towards Cromwell and saw in him a "reluctant dictator" willing to share his power with others if, of course, they agreed totally with him. They both admired his love of England, his aggressive foreign policy, his respect for private property, and his part in the promotion of "liberal ideas," such as religious toleration.

Perhaps the most influential development of history in the 20th century is the social and economic orientation of the Marxist school. Since Marx the emphasis has shifted to economic and social history with the common man as the "dramatis personae." Marxist historians like Tawney, and to a lesser degree Hill, seek to explain history in England in the 17th century in terms of class warfare. They chide the former historians for their narrative approach to history and emphasize a more empirical one. But the facts too often are fitted into the Marxist system, and individuals, even Cromwell, are lost in the historical sweep of economic forces. While the purely Marxist interpretations have not gained widespread acceptance, still the prevailing attitude especially in the late 30's 40's and early 50's was a result of this influence. No longer were most historians concerned with the "character" of Cromwell but instead with the class he represented and its place in the over-all structure of society. The concern became not the question of the morality of his actions but the economic and social conditions that produced such a man. Whereas older historians called him a saint or hypocrite, a dictator or liberal, the question now became, was he the epitome of the rising or of the declining gentry?

Perhaps the greatest exponent of an economic interpretation of history was R. H. Tawney. Tawney's Religion and the Rise of Capitalism had a tremendous impact on later historians. Tawney had grown up when English socialism was gaining prominence. Many of the socialist writers, like the Webbs and Hammond with whom he was associated, looked to history for their chief support in their advocacy and search for a utopia. Tawney sympathized with the underprivileged and sought to explain the origins of the relationships of class to class and people to government which were in such need of reform. His Religion and the Rise of Capitalism sought to show that the development of capitalism was due to the Protestant ethic after the Reformation. In his work Tawney emphasizes the economic drive which influenced Cromwell and the Independents. He notes the coincidence of a particular religion with a particular social role. Cromwell identified with the industrial and commercial classes. Cromwell's character can be explained in part by the narrow fanaticism of Puritanism and the demands it made for individual liberty.

In 1941, Tawney began what was to be by far the most formidable attack on the Whig version of the English Revolution. The subsequent controversy from 1941-1954 in the Economic History Review between Tawney and Stone, and Trevor-Roper and Cooper delineated the conflicts inherent in a primarily economic interpretation of history. It showed that there could never again, after Marx, be one single economic interpretation of history. The Whig interpretation which focuses on Cromwell falls to Tawney's and Trevor-Roper's preoccupation with the rising or declining gentry and the hierarchy of the aristocracy.

Tawney views the period from 1558-1640 as one in which the gentry rose and the aristocracy declined; the civil war was the clash between

these two classes. The bourgeois revolution was the act by which British capitalism overthrew feudalism and sought favorable conditions for its development.

Tawney, like James Harrington, considers the cause of political upheaval to have been the result of social change; in other words, power or the quest for it follows the acquisition of wealth and property. From 1540 to the middle of the 17th century the rising gentry bought the lands of the nobility, but the nobility would not abdicate their privileges; the only remedy was to reorganize the structure of power through violence should this prove necessary. Thus, Cromwell was a member of the rising gentry who, having acquired land, sought political power.

While still economically oriented, Hugh Trevor-Roper refutes the idea that the aristocracy declined and the gentry rose to the degree Tawney would have us believe. Trevor-Roper's "Ins and Outs thesis" states that it was the economically and politically frustrated gentry rather than the rising gentry that were at the center of the English revolution from the Long Parliament to Cromwell's triumph. Many gentry during this period were in financial difficulty, and many peers, employing better agricultural methods, were gaining financially. Also the gentry did not hold administrative offices. Trevor-Roper researched Tawney's rising families and found that their money had not been made in land but rather through trade and office holding. Trevor-Roper asks Tawney and Stone to explain the Independents like Cromwell, Ireton, Ludlow and Bradshaw who supported the war. None of these men possessed land valued at over £300.

Trevor-Roper in his article, "Oliver Cromwell and his Parliaments,"⁵⁰ argues that Cromwell failed to govern through Parliament because he did not know how to manage Parliament as Elizabeth had done: Cromwell was a

conservative back-bencher who longed for the return of Elizabethan rule.⁵¹ Cromwell did not reject Parliament in theory: "Cromwell was deliberately consistent in nothing. No political career is so full of undefended inconsistencies as his. But he was fundamentally and instinctively conservative, and he saw in Parliament part of the natural order of things."⁵² Trevor-Roper views Cromwell as a tragic figure--Cromwell's problem was his character and that of Independency which he so aptly represented. "Cromwell himself, like his followers, was a natural back-bencher. He never understood the subtleties of politics, never rose above the simple political prejudices of those other backwood squires whom he had joined in their blind revolt against the Stuart Court."⁵³

Thus for Trevor-Roper Cromwell was the back-bencher lacking political expertise, forced to the front through revolutionary economic and social circumstances. During his and the Independents' brief ascendancy, institutions were left intact, persons were destroyed. Cromwell thought free Parliaments could not exist with caucus control; but in reality Parliaments could not exist without some degree of caucus control. He had not the wisdom to manipulate Commons through his Privy Council as did Elizabeth. Cromwell appears as the impolitic dreamer, a backward looking idealist thrust into the political arena.

G. M. Young in his Charles I and Cromwell supports Trevor-Roper's contention that Cromwell was a conservative, Elizabethan back-bencher:

What is Cromwell, once released from the servitudes,
falsities and austerities of party, but a rustic

⁵¹Hugh Trevor-Roper, "Oliver Cromwell and His Parliaments," Crisis of the 17th Century (New York, 1968), p. 346.

⁵²Most probably Trevor-Roper takes his title from Neale's Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments.

⁵³Ibid., p. 388.

Tudor gentleman, born out of due time, of the stock of Hunsdon and Henry Sidney, rejoicing in hawk, hound, pictures and music, Scotland subjugated, Ireland prostrate, and England, the awe of the Western world, adorned and defended with stout yeomen, honourable magistrates, learned ministers, flourishing universities, invincible fleets?⁵⁴

Cromwell was born out of time and in many senses was the tragic Tudor.

The legacy of Tawney and the Marxist concept of history are evident in the writing of one of the most prominent English historians working in the field of the 17th century today. Christopher Hill, for years an avowed Communist, withdrew from the party in the late 50's.⁵⁵ Hill continued the interpretation of the Cromwellian period as the bourgeois revolution. In his earlier writings, Hill viewed Cromwell as primarily a representative of a particular class, the bourgeoisie. Cromwell couched his words in religious terms and tried and failed to make Paritanism a political instrument.

In the 1960's Hill's orientation changed. While economics was still the focus of his interpretation, Hill admits in his Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution: "after two decades of economic interpretation of the English Civil War the time is ripe for a revival of interest in the ideas that motivated seventeenth century revolutionaries."⁵⁶

Hill's recent biography of "God's Englishman" credits Cromwell with more importance in the English Revolution. Hill's study of Cromwell is not the conventional biography. His underlying principle remains that of

⁵⁴G. M. Young, Charles I and Cromwell (London, 1963), p. 14.

⁵⁵From a conversation with Raymond Carr, Warden of St. Anthony's College, Oxford, March 15, 1971.

⁵⁶Christopher Hill, The Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution (Oxford, 1965), p. 6.

Cromwell's place against the background of the historical forces of his time. Though religion is taken into account, economic and social motives remain fundamental.

But the theological interpretation of Cromwell is really tautological. If we assume that God did not in fact speak to him, as is perhaps safest in the present state of the evidence, we then have to consider why Oliver thought God willed this, that or the other course of action. And so we are brought back again to the world in which Cromwell lived.⁵⁷

Hill is much more interested in Cromwell's early years in Parliament and the army than in the years of the Protectorate. While earlier historians' interpretations of Cromwell rested for the most part on the choice of sides they would have made at Naseby, for Hill the question is which side would one have taken at Burford.⁵⁸ Hill would have stood with the Levellers, and this explains his predominant interest in the period prior to 1649. Hill does not think that Cromwell was personally ambitious, but concludes instead that he assumed power in order to prevent anarchy. "A halt at some stage must be called; the more conservative revolutionaries break with their radical supporters; the Directory succeeds the Jacobins. The uniqueness of Cromwell is that he was Napoleon to his own Robespierre, Stalin to his own Lenin and Trotsky."⁵⁹ While he was successful in foreign policy, his personal rule fell far short of the state he wished to form and he died a disillusioned and unhappy man who knew anarchy would ensue upon his death.

Hill's evaluation is that Cromwell was a great soldier and statesman but no social revolutionary; he was basically conservative in approach

⁵⁷Christopher Hill, Oliver Cromwell (London, 1958), p. 5.

⁵⁸Naseby, June 14, 1645--the Roundheads routed the Royalists. Burford, May 1649--defeat of Leveller-led mutiny in Army.

⁵⁹Christopher Hill, Oliver Cromwell (London, 1958), p. 22.

after the split with the Levellers at Putney and Burford. Most of his political actions were carried out to preserve order as, for example, in his Irish campaign where he felt he must move swiftly in order to return home to prevent anarchy. Although Hill considers him to have desired religious toleration, the maintenance of property and order were of the uppermost consideration to him. His gentry background prevented him from going further in the revolution.

Historians such as G. Alymer, Joan Thirsk, Valerie Pearl, D. Brunton and D. Pennington, while using an empirical approach, questioned the Marxist analysis. Brunton and Pennington challenged the validity of long-term causal interpretations and therefore their outlook has been named the nihilist school. They carefully analyzed the background of each member of the Long Parliament and drew conclusions on such factors as age variable between the Royalists and Roundheads. The latter were, on the average, seven years older. (A plausible explanation for this difference is that the older MP's remembered Charles I's repeated refusals to abide by his word and did not trust him.) Valerie Pearl has taken issue with the Marxist approach; her study, London and the Outbreak of the Puritan Revolts, refutes Hill's contention that all of London supported the Roundheads. (Hill refers to them as the London trained bands.) G. E. Alymer shows in his study of the Civil Service under Charles I that Trevor-Roper over-emphasized office-holding as a factor. Office was crucial for a few but most of the gentry prospered from land, law and business. Joan Thirsk's studies of land tenure during this period has shown that there was not as much transfer of land from Royalists to the gentry as Hill would have us believe.

This economic and social interest, whether Marxist or anti-Marxist, predominated in historical writing on Cromwell and the 17th century during

the 40's and 50's. In the late 1950's, however, historians began to re-emphasize the importance of ideas in shaping men's actions. As already mentioned, Christopher Hill in his Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution thinks there should be a re-examination and re-emphasis of the ideas that influenced the men of the 17th century. The re-emphasis on religion as a primary influence not only on Cromwell but also on the events of his time was exemplified by Robert Paul in 1955. Paul sees Cromwell as a Christian trying to make God's will prevail, torn between his religious ideals and the necessities of political action. Paul believes that all political problems are at base theological. He rebuts those historians who accuse Cromwell of personal ambition: Cromwell he says was forced to become a dictator when he realized religious liberty could be achieved only through his personal rule. This paradox of religious liberty and dictatorship was the tragedy of Cromwell's career: "In defending one liberty he seemed to threaten all the rest, that in standing as the champion of freedom he often appeared as the epitome of tyranny."⁶⁰

A. H. Woolrych also emphasizes religion in his character study of Cromwell. Cromwell's "waiting upon Providence explains much that may seem inconsistent in his career."⁶¹ Religion was his foremost consideration.

William Lamont's Godly Rule puts forward the most comprehensive religious interpretation of Cromwell's period. Lamont views as paramount the influence of Millenarianism. Cromwell and the New Model Army wanted

⁶⁰Robert S. Paul, The Lord Protector (London, 1955), p. 392.

⁶¹A. H. Woolrych, Oliver Cromwell (Oxford, 1964), p. 161.

to usher in the Kingdom of God on earth but failed. After the battle of Marston Moor, Cromwell singled out the Saints as those who had fought the anti-Christ. However at Putney many of the Saints denounced individual possession of property and thereafter millenarianism was associated by Cromwell and other leaders with the lunatic and anarchistic fringe. Cromwell became the Godly Constable instead of the Godly Prince when after 1647 he placed means before ends; he did not impose a doctrine but neither did others. Lamont judges Cromwell's rule favorably because it promoted a re-grouping and re-thinking of religion. Cromwell directed the responsibility in religion to private instead of public discipline. Reform would come through the actions of individuals and not by being forced upon them by the central authority. The events of this period can be explained at first by the drive toward a Godly Utopia, and that failing, at least to maintain Godly Order.

The royalist interpretation continued by Churchill in the 1950's has lately been taken up again by Peter Young. Young is the head of the department of history at the Royal Military Academy; one might expect a bias for the royalist cause and an emphasis on Cromwell the soldier.

Writing first during the 30's Maurice Ashley was dismayed by the dictatorships of Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini and allowed his revulsion to color his interpretation of Cromwell. He saw the Protector as a conservative dictator. In his latest biography he admits that "he was influenced by the example of the dictators of the thirties and by many years of conservative government in Britain." His latest biography stresses the role of ideas in history, especially those of religion. Essentially Ashley continues to underestimate the radical elements within the revolution as exemplified by Ashley's treatment of the incident

in 1647 when Joyce seized Charles I.⁶² Ashley believes Cromwell's major contributions to have been in the fields of law and religious liberty. His role as chief executive was not easy for he was repeatedly faced with the "conflict between the protection of liberty of thought and the maintenance of peaceful government."⁶³ Cromwell is still seen as the great imperialist who started England's empire and he remains essentially for Ashley an enlightened Elizabethan. Ashley, like many of the most recent biographers, admires Cromwell for his pragmatism and statesmanship; he was not wedded to one form of government. Cromwell was indifferent to forms of government (the means) as long as he could achieve his end of religious toleration. His ability to act quickly and forceably is highly esteemed.

Many have called Cromwell ambitious but Ashley denies these allegations.

Naturally, his enemies described him as ambitious; but is not ambition merely the force that drives every man forward through life? That his statesmanship was inspired by personal ambition for private gain is hard to believe, nor is there the slightest evidence to sustain so grave an accusation.⁶⁴

When he had to assume executive authority under the Instrument of Government he viewed himself as providing a balance to the factions that had divided Parliament and the country. "Unless you have some such thing as a balance, you cannot be safe."⁶⁵ Like Hill, Ashley believes that Cromwell assumed control in order to prevent anarchy. Ashley holds Cromwell

⁶²In 1647 Count Joyce, a member of the Levellers, seized Charles I exemplifying the radicalism among the rank and file in the army.

⁶³Maurice Ashley, Oliver Cromwell (New York, 1958), p. 363.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 361.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 366.

responsible for the execution of the king, but he maintains that that act brought parliamentary government to England permanently. Ashley's shift from his earlier criticism of Cromwell's dictatorial control to a guarded admiration of his rule can be traced in part to the realization in contemporary politics of the necessity for a powerful man at the head of the executive who can force through measures when debate has continued for too long.

CONCLUSION

Cromwell reached his historical zenith when England reached hers. While Cromwell may never regain the lofty, idealistic Victorian interpretation, he is credited among most recent historians with being particularly attuned to the English way of thinking about public affairs; he was no visionary but a practical statesman.

While historians have differed in final judgment on Cromwell, certain aspects of his character and politics have been agreed upon. Except for the early contemporary and Restoration works on the man, all historians have admired his dedication to religious toleration. All have stressed either his contradictory character or the paradoxical situation with which he was confronted. British historians have unitedly honored him for his far-sighted foreign policy which established England as a foremost European power. The reasons behind his foreign policy have however been contested. For example, Trevor-Roper attributes his policy to religious motives; Julian Corbet views prestige among the European nations as foremost in his consideration; and Michael Roberts believes the fear of the Catholic powers was instrumental. The effects of his foreign policy were however to make England great.

In contemporary scholarship Cromwell is not criticized for his failure to create permanent political institutions as he repeatedly was in earlier works. Historians today are less likely to moralize and cast value judgments. Moreover, no longer is there the all-prevailing belief among historians that economic and political institutions can transform man.

Historians have moved away from assessments of Cromwell based on the politics of their own era, but instead have increasingly stressed that statesmen cannot always act according to principle but must act in accord with the necessities of the moment. Cromwell is seen as the conciliator attempting to maintain the tenuous balance between individual liberty and stable government.

Cromwell's personal ambiguity about kinds of government and political theory in general has been the chief contributor to the plethora of interpretation on him: He "who knows what he would not have, but he cannot what he would" condemns himself to continuous re-evaluation.

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