

A detailed oil painting of Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a dark, textured tunic with a prominent silver breastplate and pauldrons. Underneath, a white ruffled collar is visible. He has long, dark, wavy hair and a serious, somewhat stern expression. The background is dark and indistinct.

# The Lord Protector

Religion and Politics in the  
Life of Oliver Cromwell

Robert S. Paul



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Religion and Politics in  
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*To Eunice*



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## Preface

Ralph Waldo Emerson's observation that "there is properly no history; only biography" would be a commonplace by now, were it not for a moderate reaction which declares that there is properly no biography; only history.

Perhaps the protest is a necessary corrective to the enthusiastic Carlyles and Macaulays who expounded history as an epic of the world's great ones, and who regarded the facts of history as little more than the homage paid to the eternal Hero by his generation. Whatever needs to be said in qualification of the reaction, it is a healthy reminder that a man cannot be separated from his environment – that there is for us, heroes included, a time to be born, and that we are bound to it, and conditioned by it.

Nevertheless, when we have said that, there still remains something within human character which is unique, timeless and which eludes definition. Oliver Cromwell is an illustration of this. Biographies of the Lord Protector have appeared regularly since the time of his death, and will probably continue to appear at regular intervals, because beyond the factors of time and place one recognizes within his personality an irreducible element which remains an enigma. So to Dr. S.R. Gardiner Cromwell was "the most typical Englishman of all time", to Sir Ernest Barker he was "the incarnation ... of the genius of English Nonconformity", to Wilbur Cortez Abbott he was the prototype, if not the archetype, of modern dictatorship.

The place of Oliver Cromwell in English history, however, has an importance beyond the riddle of his own personality, for the seventeenth century may well be described as the meeting ground of the ages of Faith and the Age of Reason, and within such a setting Cromwell is in any case a figure worthy of careful study. His significance is made more pointed by the fact that his Independent or Congregational churchmanship, with roots in Separatism and spiritual "democracy", appears to run counter to so much within his life, and we submit that the issues raised by

his life and thought must therefore be of interest not only to historians and students of political institutions, but also to any who are concerned about the relationship between personal religion and the call to public action.

At this point I must give grateful acknowledgment to those who have played more than a modest part in the appearance of this book. I am well aware that my own interest in that borderland which separates the pastoral meadows of theology from the urban rush of politics was first stimulated by the former Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford, Dr. Nathaniel Micklem. To him and to Canon Claud Jenkins, the Regius Professor of Church History at Oxford, I can only pay a respectful tribute for all the help and encouragement they gave me in the earlier stages of my researches. Sir Ernest Barker and Dr. Geoffrey Nuttall both read through the script in its original form, and gave me valuable advice, although I am sure that none of these gentlemen would necessarily wish to accept all my conclusions. I must also acknowledge a debt to Dr. Norman Sykes, the Dixie Professor of Church History at Cambridge, for so readily giving me the opportunity of perusing certain unpublished MSS. of the late Sir Charles Firth, and to the Harvard University Press for permission to quote extensively from the works of the late Professor W.C. Abbott. I also wish to thank Mr. C.E. Wells of the Morgan-Wells Studio Service for the photograph of the Cromwell statue used as frontispiece.

I wish to thank Miss L. Schofield, Mrs. J. Dowling, and Miss G. Maddy for helping to type the MS. A special word of gratitude is due to Miss Edna Wakeley and Mrs. Joyce Youngman for their work upon the original typescript, to the Rev. E.T.D. James for preparing the index and Miss S.M. Burrough for proof corrections, and finally to my wife, who in addition to invaluable and painstaking work upon the MS. was reluctantly obliged, from the first day of our honeymoon, to take the Lord Protector into our family as a more or less permanent and nonpaying guest.

To her this book is dedicated in grateful and penitent homage.

## Introduction

The late W.C. Abbott of Harvard listed nearly 3,700 works dealing with Cromwell,<sup>1</sup> and any addition to that list demands a very formidable excuse on the part of the author. The only justification that can be offered is the enigma of Cromwell's character itself.

It fascinates because it is full of paradox, and yet the paradox within his life was not merely political: it was not simply that of a man who began by fighting for individual liberties and ended by becoming an absolute dictator. The issue is complicated by religion, and at its deepest level the contradiction is between the Independent<sup>2</sup> who held "democratic" ideas in ecclesiastical matters, and the man who tried to remedy England's political impasse by becoming Lord Protector. To solve the dilemma historians have resorted to a wide variety of theories, the most simple being that of the royalists, who by denying the genuineness of Cromwell's religion are able to present the picture of a black-hearted tyrant who schemed for power from the beginning, while at the other end of the political rainbow there is the answer of nineteenth-century Liberalism – Cromwell the Great Democrat, who was forced by circumstance into absolutism. It would seem that between Clarendon's royalist convention of the "brave bad man" and Carlyle's noble "hero" there is a great gulf fixed, and if this is so, there can be no answer to the dilemma, and one's estimate of Cromwell must be consigned to the arbitration of prejudice.

Although there have been modern attempts to cut the Gordian knot and present a "realistic" view of Cromwell,<sup>3</sup> most of the

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1. *A Bibliography of Oliver Cromwell* (Harvard University Press, 1929). Also Addenda to the Bibliography in *The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (Harvard University Press, 4 vols., 1937–47), IV.

2. Where capitalized, the word is intended in its ecclesiastical sense.

3. Cf. G. R. Stirling Taylor, *Oliver Cromwell* (1928); W.C. Abbott, *Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (hereafter abbreviated to *W.S.* in references). The place of publication is mentioned in first references to books, and where it is not specified it must be presumed to be London.

theories fail because they reflect not so much the background of Cromwell's England as ideas current at the time of writing. No aspect of the seventeenth century has suffered so much in this respect as that of religion. G.M. Trevelyan has observed that in pre-Restoration England "it would have been difficult to find more than a handful of men who openly avowed a disbelief in the miraculous sanctions of the Christian faith, in one or other of its forms".<sup>4</sup> By the great majority of people in the seventeenth century the reality of God and the Devil, Heaven and Hell, was never doubted, and yet historians have more often than not ignored the fact that such beliefs were bound not only to colour the thought of that time, but also to condition the life and conduct of the people who held them. Hence if we are to attempt to understand Cromwell's career it is of the utmost importance that we should discover to what extent he shared the theological beliefs common to his time.

A similar facet of the same problem is to be seen in the usual treatment given to Cromwell's association with Independency. To treat the possibility of Cromwell's acceptance of these ecclesiastical views as a matter of incidental importance is entirely to misunderstand the Independent's emphasis upon membership in the Church. It is therefore of some importance to discover whether Cromwell regarded his Christian responsibility seriously enough to have joined an Independent Church. If he did, the relationship between religion and politics in his life may shed light not only upon his character but also upon the later development of political consciousness in English Nonconformity.

If this book then starts from Thomas Carlyle's premise that "a man's religion is the chief fact with regard to him", it does so not with any hope of weaning any from their cherished prejudices about the great Oliver, but upon the ground that religion was an indispensable part of the seventeenth-century environment, and that without giving it its due place we cannot hope to understand either the man or his age. At the same time, if religion and life were so closely related within seventeenth-century Puritanism we should also expect to discover that the mundane situations of political experience were not without significance in our understanding of Cromwell's religion.

To attempt an extended discourse on Cromwellian biography

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4. *English Social History* (1944), 232.

would be to invite comparison with W.C. Abbott's exhaustive survey,<sup>5</sup> and yet we cannot ignore the subject entirely, if only because Abbott's own great work needs to be given the place it deserves.

Throughout this book the original authorities have been regarded as primary, but it is clear that in travelling such a well-trodden historical path any writer must owe an immense debt to historians like S.R. Gardiner, C.H. Firth, and W.C. Abbott whose researches made the way plain. The debt to Abbott's *Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* is evident, and its text of Cromwell's written and spoken word is accepted as authoritative. My previous debt to Mrs. S.C. Lomas's edition of Carlyle's *Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* is almost equally great.<sup>6</sup>

Of the early biographies James Heath's *Flagellum* was perhaps the most important,<sup>7</sup> more for the extent of its influence than for its value as history. Carlyle regarded it as "the chief fountain indeed of all the foolish lies that have been circulated about Oliver since",<sup>8</sup> and W.C. Abbott's restrained irony is perhaps even more damning.<sup>9</sup> There is a passage in Galsworthy's *Loyalties* where it is remarked of one of the characters who was facing libel, "If he's as innocent as Christ, mud will stick to him", and that seems to have been the avowed principle of James Heath: he discovers a murderer in the Cromwell ancestry, he passes on with evident relish gossip of Cromwell's crude manners, and he is at pains to hint at an immoral relationship between Cromwell and Mrs. Lambert.<sup>10</sup> At the same time it is for his collection of anecdotes that Heath's book has more value than many more reputable volumes, for its author has provided us with some

5. Cf. Introduction, *A Bibliography of Oliver Cromwell*.

6. New York and London, 1904, 3 vols. References to this edition appear as *L-C*.

7. *Flagellum: Or the Life and Death, Birth and Burial of Oliver Cromwell The late Usurper* (1663). All references are to the second enlarged edition of the same year.

8. *L-C*, I, 12.

9. "Thus what the newspapers of his day omitted, Heath supplied, following, or founding, that great journalistic principle of giving the people what they want – abuse and personal gossip; and, based on these unflinching recipes for popularity, it is small wonder that his book was a success." *Bibliography of O.C.*, p. xviii.

10. *Op. cit.*, 128. There was no basis for the rumour in fact, but it was a favourite subject in Restoration "comedy"; cf. *Cromwell's Conspiracy. A Tragic-comedy Relating to our latter Times*, by "A Person of Quality" (1660). The importance of Heath is that his gossip was retailed by men like Dr. Bates and Sir W. Dugdale.

material – albeit of a doubtful kind – for a period of the Lord Protector’s life which is otherwise more or less a blank.

In contrast, Samuel Carrington, whose favourable biography had appeared four years earlier, in a book of over two hundred pages,<sup>11</sup> devotes only two pages to his hero’s early life, and only nine pages to the whole period of the Civil War up to the invasion of Ireland! The same criticism to a lesser degree must be levelled against the anonymous author of *The Perfect Politician*, although it is undoubtedly the best of the early lives.<sup>12</sup> The rest of the earlier biographies range from the almost useless panegyrics of Henry D’Awbeney and Richard Fleckno[e]<sup>13</sup> to more sanely-balanced works published anonymously by Isaac Kimber<sup>14</sup> and John Banks<sup>15</sup> at the beginning of the eighteenth century, but our interest in them is limited, since their material is largely secondhand. The Rev. Mark Noble’s *Memoirs of the Protectoral House of Cromwell*, published in 1784,<sup>16</sup> falls, however, within an entirely different category. As Mrs. S.C. Lomas has shown,<sup>17</sup> for all Carlyle’s gibes at “poor Noble”, the work was one of painstaking and often invaluable research, and really introduces the period of modern scholarship in Cromwellian studies.

Of Carlyle’s own contribution it is sufficient to say that style, temperament, and literary prestige united in him to make him the ideal prophet, and the *Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*<sup>18</sup> presented for the first time material which stimulated the great reassessment of the seventeenth century associated with the names of Dr. S.R. Gardiner and Sir Charles Firth. All later biographies of Cromwell are dependent upon the literary

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11. *The History of the Life and Death of His most Serene Highness, Oliver, Late Lord Protector*, etc. (1659), dedicated to the Lord Protector Richard.

12. *The Perfect Politician: Or, A Full View of the Life and Actions (Military and Civil) of O. Cromwel*. (1660), attributed to Henry Fletcher and William Raybould; (cf. Abbot, *Bibliography of O.C.*, 135, item 1066.) Quotations from 3rd edition (1681).

13. *Historie and policie re-viewed, in the heroick transactions of his most serene highness, Oliver, Late Lord Protector, from his cradle to his tomb* (1659), by H.D.; and *The Idea of His Highness Oliver, late Lord Protector, &c.* (1659) by Richard Fleckno. The latter can be compared with *Panegyrici Cromwello* (1654) by the Roman Catholic chaplain of the Portuguese Ambassador.

14. *The Life of Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, impartially collected* (1724).

15. *A short critical review of the political life of Oliver Cromwell* (1739) “by a Gentleman of the Middle Temple”.

16. Two vols. References are to the 3rd edition of 1787.

17. *L-C*, I, p. liv seq. Cf. *Ibid.*, 13 f, for Carlyle’s remarks on Noble.

18. First published 1845.

evidence amassed by Carlyle and the detailed research of Gardiner and Firth, from the “popular” books of John Morley and Frederic Harrison at the beginning of this century, to the recent biographies by John Buchan, Hilaire Belloc, Maurice Ashley and G.R. Stirling Taylor. All these books, however, were written prior to the monumental work of the late Wilbur Cortez Abbott. His debt to previous scholars like Gardiner, Firth, and Mrs. Lomas is recognizable and, as we shall discover, his interpretation is often open to serious criticism, but this in no way detracts from a piece of scholarship which perhaps marks the greatest advance in Cromwellian studies since the publication of S.R. Gardiner’s histories.<sup>19</sup>

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19. *History of the Great Civil War 1642–43* (1886–91, 3 vols.); *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate 1643–60* (1894–1901, 3 vols.). References are to the 4 vol. editions of 1893 and 1903.



## Chapter One

# Formative Influences

### I

The family into which Oliver Cromwell was born owed its fortunes directly to the break-up of the monastic orders and to the Protestant Establishment. Its wealth can be traced to Richard Williams, nephew to Henry VIII's chief adviser and agent in the dissolution of the monasteries, Thomas Cromwell, Earl of Essex.<sup>1</sup> This Richard Williams adopted his uncle's surname, "Cromwell" or "Crumwell", in return for his patronage; he was knighted while his uncle was still in power and managed to retain the King's favour after Thomas Cromwell's fall, and he passed on a considerable fortune to his son, Sir Henry "Cromwell", who was knighted by Elizabeth, and whose liberality earned him the title "the golden knight".

Sir Henry was a vigorous local organizer against the threat of the Armada – an activity in keeping with one whose wealth was bound up with the Protestant succession – and of his daughters, one became the mother of Major-General Whalley, and another became the mother of John Hampden. His heir was knighted "Sir Oliver Cromwell" at the accession of James I, and one of his younger sons was Robert Cromwell, the father of the future Lord Protector. Sir Oliver Cromwell was a man "who from love of ostentation pushed his father's liberality to extravagance",<sup>2</sup> and eventually had to sell Hinchinbrook House to the Montagus, who thus became the leading family within the shire; which seems to have led to some rivalry between them and the Cromwells. Sir Henry's second son, Robert, inherited an estate at Huntingdon,

- 
1. Thomas Cromwell's sister married Morgan Williams, a man from Glamorganshire who had settled in London. Her son, Richard, followed his uncle to Court, and for his help in the dissolution of the monasteries he was granted the Benedictine Priory at Hinchinbrook, Neath Abbey in Glamorganshire, together with many rich properties in the eastern counties and much that was formerly held by the rich abbey of Ramsey. Cf. Noble, *Protectoral-House* I, 14–17, and J.L. Sanford, *Studies and Illustrations of the Great Rebellion* (1858), 178 note; also W.S. I, 5.
  2. C.H. Firth, *Oliver Cromwell* (1903), 3.

worth about £300 in the money of that time,<sup>3</sup> and he married Elizabeth, the young widowed daughter of William Steward of Ely, who brought with her a jointure of £60 a year. Her great-uncle, Robert Steward, had been the last Catholic Prior of Ely, and with the change in national religion, the first Protestant Dean of Ely Cathedral. In view of Oliver's later influence in the fen country, it is interesting to note Dr. Trevelyan's judgment that Ely Cathedral had for centuries maintained a dominant position over the "County Palatine" of Ely, and indeed, over the whole of Fenland.<sup>4</sup>

From this it will be seen that the fortunes of the family into which Oliver Cromwell was born were strongly linked to the Protestant succession, and primarily to the Anglican settlement of Elizabeth as offering the best hopes of stable government, and hence the continued enjoyment of their wealth.

Oliver's father did the things appropriate to a country gentleman of standing in those days. He was a bailiff of Huntingdon, a Justice of the Peace, a Commissioner of Sewers,<sup>5</sup> and, besides other offices of local importance, he sat at Westminster for the borough in 1593. Dr. George Bates, who hated the Protector cordially, admits that he was "born of honest parents,"<sup>6</sup> and even James Heath was not able to discover anything to the disparagement of Robert Cromwell, apart from the fact that Oliver's mother kept a brew-house, "and thought it no disparagement to sustain the Estate and Port of a younger brother, as Mr. Robert Cromwell was, by those lawful means; however, not so reputable as other gains and Trades are accounted"<sup>7</sup>

Oliver was baptized on April 29, 1599, in the church of St. John, Huntingdon, the second son of his parents. A comparison of the portraits of Robert Cromwell and his wife Elizabeth suggests

3. Three or four times as much in pre-1939 money. Mr. Hilaire Belloc's estimate of Robert Cromwell's estate as "perhaps four or five thousand all told" seems to be far too high. Cf. Belloc, *Cromwell* (1934), 29. Cf. the article by Mr. Isaac Foot, in *The Contemporary Review*, Vol. CXLVI, July-December 1934, 556-63.

4. *English Social History*, 149.

5. i.e. fen drainage.

6. *Elenchus Motuum Nuperorum in Anglia: Or, a short Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Late Troubles in England* (English translation, 1683), 237. First part of the Latin edition was published 1649/50, second part 1661-63, third part (by Thomas Skinner) 1676.

7. *Flagellum*, 8. Walter Cromwell, maternal grandfather of Richard Williams, had been a brewer among other things. These facts probably account for royalist gibes at Oliver as a brewer.

that she had the stronger character.<sup>8</sup> She came from a family with strong Puritan leanings,<sup>9</sup> and in this way she may have influenced her husband, for while there is no reason to doubt that Robert Cromwell was a loyal member of the established Church, his choice of school and college for Oliver suggests that he had Puritan sympathies.<sup>10</sup>

There were good reasons for Puritanism to flourish in the Cromwell family. The family fortunes were entirely dependent upon the Protestant succession, and at the time Oliver was born, less than fifty years had elapsed since the Catholic reversion under Mary. The threat of the Armada was still too recent for Englishmen to forget the Catholic menace from abroad, while the tendencies at court gave cause for disquiet; the truculence of James I at the Hampton Court Conference in 1603, the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot in 1605, and the weak Stuart foreign policy towards Spain all tended to encourage Puritan reaction among those families which had most to lose in the event of a Catholic triumph.

East Anglia was certainly infected with Puritan ideas earlier than most of the country, to some extent because of its geographical relationship with Holland.<sup>11</sup> Also, the religious persecutions in Europe were bringing Protestant refugees to this country, many of them weavers who settled near the cloth manufacturing town of Norwich. The city was becoming something of a Puritan centre, and it is not surprising to find here some of the first experiments in religious Separatism which eventually spread throughout the eastern counties.<sup>12</sup>

These counties, too, contained the seats and estates of great Puritan landowning families like those of Cecil, Montagu,

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8. Cf. *W.S.*, I, 13, and the portraits in John Morley's *Oliver Cromwell* (1900 edn.).

9. Oliver's uncle, Sir Robert Steward, was a Puritan. Cf. *Flagellum*, 13; *Elenchus*, 238.

10. Cf. *infra*, p. 29 ff. Sidney Sussex College was noted for an unconsecrated chapel and lack of sympathy with Laud's reforms; G.M. Edwards, *Sidney Sussex College* (1899), 42 f., 100; J.B. Mullinger, *History of Cambridge University* (Cambridge, 3 vols., 1873, 1884, 1911), III, 130 and n.

11. The ports and mercantile centres tended to be Puritan; *English Social History*, 241.

12. Robert Browne's views spread through the surrounding counties at least as far as Bury St. Edmunds; R.W. Dale, *History of English Congregationalism* (1907), 120–5; H. M. Dexter, *The Congregationalism of the last three hundred years* (U.S.A., 1879), 70; Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (New York, 1893), 10 n. 4.

Devereux, and Rich, together with many lesser names, like the Barringtons of Essex, the Hampdens of Buckinghamshire, and the Cromwells of Huntingdonshire, all of which had built fortunes on the ruins of the old Church. The Puritan nobility extended its protection to persecuted members of the party,<sup>13</sup> and as family alliances grew, the influence of the new ideas became ever wider and stronger. To this we must add the influence of Puritan teaching in the University of Cambridge,<sup>14</sup> and the fact that the standard of preaching and ministration held by the Puritans contrasted very favourably with the general slackness and ignorance of the older clergy.<sup>15</sup>

In a sense these influences are all too abstract to be assessed accurately or to be over-stressed, but they indicate that the young Cromwell was born and bred in a part of the country which was alive to the new religious temper. Such influences must be seen in relationship to the ideas of prelacy remembered by an impressionable youth from the episcopal visitation of Huntingdon by the Bishop of Lincoln when Cromwell was five years old, or the impression of monarchy gained from the lavish entertainment of James I at Hinchinbrook in 1603.

## II

Oliver was born the second of three sons in a family which contained seven daughters, but since his brothers, Henry and Robert, died in childhood, he was left his father's heir in a family circle which was predominantly feminine. At the end of his year at Cambridge, when he was barely eighteen years of age, his father died<sup>16</sup> and left him at the head of the family. There is not much material to estimate the effect on Oliver of this feminine

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13. For the protection afforded Robert Browne by his kinsman William Cecil, Lord Burleigh, see *Dale, Hist. of English Cong'ism*, 124 f., 132 f. Lord Warwick gave protection to Jeremiah Burroughes, after the latter had been deprived by Bishop Wren; *A Vindication of Mr. Burroughes Against Mr. Edwards his foule Aspersions in his spreading Gangraena, and his angry Antiapologia*, etc. (1644), 19.

14. Martin Bucer's influence at Cambridge had been in marked contrast to Peter Martyr's failure to impress Oxford, J.B. Mullinger, *Hist. of Cam. Univ.*, II, 109–25. The Marian exiles returned in full force to Cambridge, *ibid.*, 171–4, and the University had recently witnessed the brief but influential tenure of office of Thomas Cartwright.

15. For Richard Baxter's description of the low state of the clergy intellectually and morally during his boyhood, see *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (1696), ed. Matthew Sylvester, Pt. I, 1.

16. He was buried at All Saints, Huntingdon, on June 24, 1617.

family circle, but there may have been a tendency for a few years to revolt from maternal control.

Of his boyhood and youth we know very little that is reliable. Heath informs us that he received his earliest education under “the slighted Governance of a Mistris”, until “his Father removed him to the Tuition of Dr. Beard Schoolmaster of the Free-School of that Town, where his Book began to persecute him, and Learning to Commence his great and irreconcilable Enemy”.<sup>17</sup> Of Dr. Thomas Beard’s influence we shall have more to say, but speaking of Cromwell’s character at this early stage, Heath speaks of the “Vices which were so predominant and visible in him” that Dr. Beard was unable to make any impression on “his obstinate and perverse inclination”;<sup>18</sup> then, as if warming to the subject, the author of the *Flagellum* says that “Among the rest of those ill qualities which fructuated in him at this age, He was very notorious for robbing of Orchards”, which crime was continued to such excess by “this Apple-Dragon” that the offence “ripened in him afterwards to the throwing down of all Law or Conscience, and the stealing and tasting of the forbidden fruit of Sovereignty”.<sup>19</sup>

A modern reader will discover less significance in these youthful escapades than did James Heath, writing just after the Restoration, but the local gossip probably had a residuum of truth in it, and there is no reason to think that young Oliver Cromwell was any more pious than the average lad of his age. There is, however, a persistent rumour, duly recorded by Heath, that as a youth Cromwell had curious dreams and presages of future greatness,<sup>20</sup> and a similar story is told by Dr. Bates, who says that as a child Cromwell reported that “one appeared to him in the likeness of a Man, who told him that he should be a King”,<sup>21</sup> and that Dr. Beard whipped him for it.

There is also the account of Oliver’s part in a play, *The Five Senses* (placed by Heath at Huntingdon, and by Carrington during Cromwell’s year at Cambridge)<sup>22</sup> in which the youthful

17. *Flagellum*, 4.

18. *Ibid.*, 5.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*, 6.

21. *Elenchus*, 337. Probably it was copied from Heath.

22. Carrington, *Hist. of the Life and Death of Oliver*, 3. However, in the 1657 edition of Anthony Brewer’s *Lingua, or the Combat of the Tongue and the Five Senses*, it says, “First acted at Trinity College, Cambridge, after at the Free School at Huntingdon”, and this may explain the confusion; cf. Abbott, *W.S.*, I, 24 n. 13.

Cromwell is reported to have set a crown upon his head and added “beyond his Cue some Majestical mighty words”.<sup>23</sup> It sounds, as Professor Abbott has remarked, “too apt to be true”, and yet we must admit it is the kind of incident which, in the light of future events, would have remained in people’s memories.

There is considerable divergence of opinion as to the extent Oliver benefited by his education at Cambridge. Carrington says that while there he perfectly acquired the Latin tongue, “which Language as all men know he made use of to treat with Strangers”.<sup>24</sup> A more fulsome account of his university career, and even more vague, comes from the sycophantic pen of Richard Fleckno, who observed that “He was bred a scholar in the University where, during his youth, he gave the first Essay of that Admirable vivacity of spirit, profoundnesse of judgement, and indefatigable industry, which afterwards inform’d all the Actions of his life”.<sup>25</sup>

The royalist writers were rather less vague concerning Cromwell’s scholastic accomplishments, and purport to give us some, idea how that “vivacity of spirit, profoundness of judgement, and indefatigable industry” were employed.<sup>26</sup> Sir William Dugdale says that in Cambridge Oliver “made no great proficiency in any kind of Learning; but then and afterwards sorting himself with Drinking Companions, and the ruder sort of people (being of a rough and blustering disposition) he had the name of a Royster amongst those that knew him”.<sup>27</sup> Heath says that Cromwell was placed in Sidney Sussex College “more to satisfie his Fathers curiosity and desire, than out of any hopes of Completing him in his Studies”, and adds that while he was there “he was more Famous for his Exercises in the Feilds than in the Schools, (in which he never had the honour of, because no worth and merit to a degree)<sup>28</sup> being one of the chief Matchmakers and Players at Foot-ball, Cudgels, or any other boisterous sport or game”.<sup>29</sup>

That an undergraduate, not yet seventeen years of age, preferred

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23. *Flagellum*, 6 f.

24. *Hist. of the Life and Death of Oliver*, 4; cf. *infra*, p. 33 n. 3.

25. *The Idea of His Highness*, 4. Fleckno was apparently a Catholic priest (cf. Leslie Stephen’s article in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, VII, 260).

26. Although all their accounts may have been based upon the *Flagellum*.

27. *A Short View of the Late Troubles in England* (Oxford, 1681), 459.

28. Heath’s bias excels itself here. Cromwell left Cambridge on the death of his father; even had that not been the case, it was common practice for gentry to spend a short time at the university without proceeding to a degree.

29. *Flagellum*, 7 f.

sport to books would hardly be cause for remark in modern times, but in the seventeenth century university “organized games and athletics did not exist, and sports were either discouraged or forbidden”.<sup>30</sup> Games which in these days would be regarded as healthy amusements were regarded at this time as evidence of youthful dissipation, and the author of the *Elenchus* cursorily dismisses Cromwell’s year as an undergraduate by saying, “he laid an unsolid Foundation of learning at Cambridge; but he was soon cloy’d with Studies, delighting more in Horses, and in Pastimes abroad in the Fields”.<sup>31</sup>

Since all our information regarding Cromwell’s boyhood and youth comes through his most violent detractors, it is almost impossible to form a just estimate of his character, although the very silence of Carrington may indicate that according to the judgment of the day there was little to single out for praise. But allowing for the use which the Restoration writers make of the available data, there is not much in these “uncontrolled debaucheries” which would to-day be regarded as evidence of an uncommonly vicious spirit. Boys of all ages seem to run to type, and we cannot err far in judgment if we represent him as a fairly boisterous youth, with not much time for books, but with a keen interest in active outdoor life and considerable prowess in the arts of personal combat.

At the same time we should not ignore the dreams of future greatness, in which both Heath and Carrington saw the evidence that they each wanted to see. Such grandiose imaginings are not uncommon, especially in lads brought up in the shadow of other people’s wealth, and it would appear that Oliver, like many other highly-strung boys, indulged in his day-dreams without evincing much of the application necessary for achievement. The dreams did not prove, however, what James Heath tries to prove, that Cromwell schemed for personal power from his earliest days, and the words of Mr. Hilaire Belloc – by no means the least critical of his biographers – are a useful corrective to Heath’s bias:

If there is one thing certain about the moral character of Cromwell, to the man who reads him and remembers his reading impartially, it is that he was not ambitious.

He lived to be over forty-five without making any effort at fame

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30. Trevelyan, *English Social History*, 184.

31. *Op. cit.*, 237.

or power; and no man ever develops the desire for them long after youth has passed.<sup>32</sup>

### III

We must return to discuss the influence of one whom most of Cromwell's biographers dismiss with little more than the note that Oliver was placed under "Thomas Beard – a Puritan schoolmaster, who wrote pedantic Latin plays, proved that the Pope was Antichrist, and showed in his *Theatre of God's Judgements* that human crimes never go unpunished by God even in this world".<sup>33</sup> It is to be doubted whether Dr. Beard's influence can be dismissed as briefly as that.

Dr. Beard seems to have maintained close connections with the Cromwell family, and Oliver appears to have held him in respect throughout life. As a friend of Robert Cromwell, Thomas Beard had attested his will,<sup>34</sup> and subsequently he acted with Oliver in several offices of local importance; they were signatories together of the Parliamentary indenture for the election of the Huntingdon burgesses in 1620,<sup>35</sup> they were Justices of the Peace for the borough in 1630,<sup>36</sup> while Beard was prominent among those who signed the indenture which saw the election of Oliver as a burgess for Huntingdon in 1627/8.<sup>37</sup> It was largely to uphold Dr. Beard's views against the Bishop of Winchester's nominee, Dr. Alabaster, that Oliver Cromwell made his maiden speech at Westminster on February 11, 1629. From this it would appear that he never lost his respect, or perhaps his affection, for Thomas Beard.

Although Dr. Beard remained within the Church of England, he was a rigid Calvinist and an uncompromising Puritan. He was a graduate of Cambridge,<sup>38</sup> and had been appointed Master of the Hospital and Grammar School of St. John the Baptist,

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32. Belloc, *Cromwell*, 64.

33. Firth, *Oliver Cromwell*, 5. Notable exceptions, however, are W.C. Abbott and Hilaire Belloc; cf. *W.S.*, I, 22–6, Belloc, *Cromwell*, 59.

34. Copy of the will, *W.S.*, I, 29 f.

35. *Ibid.*, 46.

36. Noble, *Protectoral-House*, I, 102.

37. *W.S.*, I, 52.

38. Matriculated at Jesus College, 1584; A. B. 1587/8; A. M. 1591; S. T. B. 1602; S. T. P. ("Bird") 1614. *The Book of Matriculations and Degrees ... in the University of Cambridge from 1544 to 1659* (Cambridge, 1913), compiled by John Venn and J. A. Venn, *in loco*.

Huntingdon, in 1604, but his Puritan zeal was such that he added to this the office of “lecturer” in the town. An indenture dated March 23 1625/6 indicates not only the respect in which he was held by the people of Huntingdon, but also his own enthusiasm for the new thought in undertaking this additional labour.<sup>39</sup>

It is, however, in his writings that the significance of Dr. Beard in our study of Cromwell really appears, and of these his earliest and most popular work is the most important. *The Theatre of God's Judgements*,<sup>40</sup> according to its title-page, is a collection of histories from secular and sacred authors “concerning the admirable judgements of God upon the transgressors of his commandments”. In other words, it developed the thesis of God's immediate concern in the events of history, and His active participation by granting rewards and punishments to His servants and His enemies. Dr. Beard's book was entirely concerned with pointing out the punishments visited upon the latter, and his purpose was to induce such people by the fear of God's wrath to turn from the error of their ways.

Eternal punishment for the wicked and reward for the good, was taken for granted in the doctrine of Providence accepted in the seventeenth century, but the important thing to notice is the extension of the doctrine to a belief that divine rewards and punishments were operative “even in this life”, and particularly the way in which Beard applied his thesis, for it illustrates the attitude taken by Puritans towards their sovereigns, which so infuriated James I. In Beard's view the justice of God manifests itself “chiefly towards them which are in the highest places of account, who being more hardened and bold to sinne, doe as boldly exempt themselves from all corrections and punishments due vnto them, being altogether vnwilling to be subject to anie law of iustice whatsoever”.<sup>41</sup>

He went on to emphasize that princes are subject both to the Law of God and of Nature, and we should remember that the same thing had been said twenty years earlier in the House of

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39. An extract from the indenture is quoted in the article on Thomas Beard in the *D.N.B.* A Puritan “lecturer” was a minister appointed by zealous Puritans to supplement local preaching.

40. First published 1597. It was partly translated from the French, to which Beard added over three hundred additional historical examples.

41. *Op. cit.*, 7.

Commons, with unpleasant results for the one who said it.<sup>42</sup> Since then, the issue which Peter Wentworth had raised – the limits to the royal prerogative, and the rights of Parliament to discuss national religion – had become increasingly prominent, and the political tension had been heightened by the House of Commons' challenge to the Crown in the granting of monopolies and the levying of subsidies. Thomas Beard's comments upon the limitations of absolute power among the Kings of Persia and Pharaohs of Egypt must have been received with a good deal of interest "for", he said, "they had not so much authoritie as to iudge betwixt man and man or to levy subsidies and such like by their owne powers; neither to punish any man through choler, or any ouerweening conceit, but were alwaies tied to obserue iustice and equitie in all causes".<sup>43</sup>

It is obvious that these comments pointed towards the struggle between the Stuarts and their Parliaments, and the *Theatre of God's Judgements* maintained a steady popularity, running into four editions within the first fifty years of the seventeenth century.<sup>44</sup> As W.C. Abbott has said, "it is scarcely conceivable that Oliver Cromwell did not read Beard's book",<sup>45</sup> and that alone would make it of interest, but the fact that it advocated a doctrine that was at the centre of Cromwell's thought and conduct promotes the *Theatre* to considerable historical importance.<sup>46</sup>

The relevance of the book to contemporary events in the early

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42. Peter Wentworth, in the debate on Freedom of Speech, February 8, 1576. He was committed to the Tower, where he remained until March 12; cf. G.W. Prothero, *Select Statutes and other Constitutional Documents illustrative of the reigns of Elizabeth and James I* (Oxford, 1913, 4th edn.). Wentworth said, "For the Queen's Majesty is the head of the law, and must of necessity maintain the law: for by the law her Majesty is made justly our Queen, and by it she is most chiefly maintained ... The King ought not to be tinder man, but under God and under the law, because the law doth make him a King ..." (*Ibid.*, 120–22). The speaker was quoting Bracton, "Ipse autem rex non debet esse sub homine sed sub deo et sub lege, quia lex facit regem ..." Henry de Bracton, *De Legibus et Consuetudinibus Angliae* (6 vols., 1878–83), I, 38; cf. I, 268, edited by Sir Travers Twiss.

43. *Theatre*, 10.

44. 1597, 1612, 1631, 1648.

45. *W.S.*, I, 25.

46. "Though Oliver afterwards learned to modify the crudeness of this teaching, the doctrine that success or failure was an indication of Divine Favour or disfavour never left him, and he was able, in the days of his greatness, to point unhesitatingly to the results of Naseby and Worcester as evidence that God Himself approved of the victorious cause." S.R. Gardiner, *Oliver Cromwell* (New Impression, 1925), 3.

seventeenth century was enhanced by the interpretation of eschatology accepted by the majority of Puritans – an interpretation which identified the “latter days” of the Bible with the time in which they were living. Thomas Beard shared this view,<sup>47</sup> and the *Theatre* served as an introduction to his later publication, *Antichrist the Pope of Rome*,<sup>48</sup> which as its title indicates, set out to prove that the Pope was Antichrist. Both the interpretation of Providence held by Beard and the apocalyptic view of contemporary history were common enough in Puritanism, but in view of the fact that Cromwell came to hold these views very strongly,<sup>49</sup> we feel it is not extravagant to trace here the powerful influence of his Calvinist schoolmaster.

The appearance of the Authorized Version of the Bible in 1611 was the one tangible success from the otherwise miserable débâcle of Puritanism at Hampton Court in 1603, and the Bible was perhaps the greatest single influence on the life and thought of Cromwell. It has been said that “for him a single volume comprehended all literature, and that volume was the Bible”,<sup>50</sup> and while the statement needs modification, it is true that his amazing knowledge of the Bible made up for any deficiencies in literature. But great and continuous as the influence of the Authorized Version undoubtedly was, it must have been a later influence, for it did not appear until Cromwell was twelve years old. The Bible of Cromwell’s schooldays was the Genevan Bible, with its blackletter type and its remarkable annotations.

It would be from this Bible that Dr. Beard would teach the Scriptures, and it should be noted that the commentary provided in the Genevan Version was based on the same theology that appears in Dr. Beard’s books. This commentary must have been of very great importance in helping to produce the hatred of Roman Catholicism which was characteristic of Englishmen – and particularly Puritans – during the first half of the seventeenth century, for it must be remembered that at the end of Elizabeth’s reign there was a general desire for more religious

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47. *Theatre*, 3.

48. Published 1625.

49. Writing to the Governor of Edinburgh Castle, Cromwell mentioned our Lord’s care not to meddle with secular power, and added, “This was not practised by the Church since our Saviour’s time, till Anti-christ, assuming the infallible chair ... practised this authoritatively over civil governors.” September 12, 1650, *W.S.*, II, 338; *L-C*, II, 127–8 (CXLVIII).

50. John Morley, *Oliver Cromwell*, II; cf. *ibid.*, 50–2.

teaching, which the Queen was reluctant to permit<sup>51</sup> and the clergy unable to supply; hence, to a very large degree the Genevan Bible and its commentary had to meet that need.

Although practically all Cromwell's words indicate a knowledge of the Authorized Version rather than the Genevan, there are definite traces of the latter in one of his earliest letters, October 13, 1638,<sup>52</sup> but by 1638 the new version had been in existence nearly thirty years and had rapidly supplanted the older book, and therefore it is possible that these traces of the Genevan Version were drawn from Scripture memorized almost thirty years before under the vigilant eye of Dr. Beard;<sup>53</sup> no small testimony to the learned schoolmaster's faculty for implanting seeds of knowledge in the young.

The influence of the Authorized Version was something which extended throughout Cromwell's life; but it is not quite true to say that the Bible "comprehended all literature". In his letter to Richard Mayor, written just before Cromwell sailed for Ireland, he sets down his wishes regarding Richard Cromwell's education:

I would have him mind and understand business, read a little history, study the mathematics and cosmography: – these are good with subordination to the things of God. Better than idleness, or mere outward worldly contents. These fit for public services, for which a man is born.<sup>54</sup>

Similarly in a letter to Richard himself he advises him, "Recreate yourself with Sir Walter Raughley's History: it's a body of history, and will add much more to your understanding than fragments of story".<sup>55</sup>

This does not sound like one who despised human learning, but it shows the emphasis which Cromwell placed upon history as a study that would give a man "understanding"; and if history can be described as the secular study of Providence, we are again reminded of the *Theatre of God's Judgements* and the theology behind it.

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51. Cf. Elizabeth's letter against "prophesyings". Prothero, *Statutes and Const. Docs.*, 205 f.

52. Cf. Analysis, *infra*, p. 399. Letter reproduced in full, *infra*, p. 36 f., W.S., I, 96 f.; L-C, I, 89 f. (II).

53. This seems the most likely explanation for the Genevan references, although there may have been other, or contributory reasons, such as the continued use of the G. V. in Robert Cromwell's home.

54. August 13, 1649, W.S., II, 102 f.; L-C, I, 451.

55. April 2, 1650, W.S., II, 236 f.; L-C, II, 53 f.

## IV

The influence of Thomas Beard on Cromwell was at least the influence of one with whom we know him to have been in fairly close contact for thirty years or more. In trying to estimate the influence of Cromwell's stay in Cambridge, on the other hand, we know very little, except that he was there for only one year. We have already noted a general consensus of opinion that as an undergraduate he was fonder of field sports than of his books, although there is no need to accept the royalist suggestion that he therefore kept bad company.<sup>56</sup> Notices of his time in Cambridge, however, are very fragmentary, and Sidney Sussex College has little more than the bare statement of his admission.<sup>57</sup>

The Cambridge to which Cromwell went in 1616 was undergoing change. It has been seen that the university had been under strong Puritan influence,<sup>58</sup> culminating in Thomas Cartwright's Lady Margaret professorship, an appointment which J.B. Mullinger regarded as significant evidence of the strength of the party.<sup>59</sup> Cartwright's acceptance of the chair appears to have been inconsistent with his antagonism to episcopacy,<sup>60</sup> but although he held the position for only a year, his influence upon the university can hardly be denied. Although the Puritans within Cambridge were probably a minority, they were men of authority and ability, and exerted an influence out of all proportion to their numbers,<sup>61</sup> but by the end of the century it was a declining influence, for Cartwright retired to Warwick and died just before the ill-fated Hampton Court Conference of 1603.<sup>62</sup> In their Millenary Petition to James,<sup>63</sup> the Puritans had attacked among other

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56. *Supra*, p. 22 f. On March 23, 1646, Cromwell wrote to Lord Howard on behalf of Thomas Edwards (a contemporary at Sidney Sussex College), and whom he described as "a most religious man" for as long as he had known him. Not much can be inferred from this, but it does not suggest Oliver kept bad company while at Cambridge; *W.S.*, I, 431; *L-C*, III, 328 (Supplement 18).

57. Edwards, *Sidney Sussex College*, 1899, 73.

58. *Supra*, p. 20 n. 2.

59. Mullinger, *Hist. of Cambridge University*, II, 207-9.

60. It is important to notice the tenacity with which many Puritans held their appointments within the Establishment. This was received with scorn by the Separatists; cf. the extract from the examination of Henry Barrow and John Greenwood. Prothero, *Statutes and Const. Docs.*, 223.

61. Mullinger, *Hist. of Cambridge University*, II, 194 f., 299 f.

62. Died December 1603, Conference January 1603/4.

63. April 1603.

things the sources of college revenues, and they met with a sharp rebuff from the university in a grace which passed the Senate on June 9, 1603, to the effect that "Whosoever by word, writing or other way, should in the university openly oppose the doctrine or discipline of the Church of England, or any part thereof, should *ipso facto* be suspended from any degree taken or to be taken".<sup>64</sup> This was followed in 1604 by the enactment in Convocation of canons which sought *inter alia* to enforce uniformity of dress in ecclesiastical ministrations, and especially the wearing of the surplice. Hitherto this had been successfully evaded in the chapels of the two recent Puritan foundations, Emmanuel College and Sidney Sussex College.<sup>65</sup> It is of some interest to see that Sidney Sussex College should be associated with Emmanuel, which from its foundation had been regarded as a centre of extreme Puritanism.<sup>66</sup> It is evident, however, that by the beginning of the seventeenth century the university had moved towards compliance, and it is of importance to notice that within a university swinging towards conformity, Cromwell entered a college which had a brief but decidedly Puritan tradition.

Of Richard Howlet, Cromwell's tutor, we can say little. He went subsequently to Ireland and became Dean of Cashel.<sup>67</sup> A former pupil of his, Dr. Bramhall, Bishop of Derry, said that he had never known him to quarrel with anyone, and described him as "A moderate man in his tenets, far from Dr. Ward's rigidity and his way".<sup>68</sup> He was recommended to William Laud by Archbishop Ussher as "an able man and very fit for government";<sup>69</sup> and these testimonials suggest an efficient if somewhat compliant and colourless personality, which may be the main reason why we know so little of him. Writing of Cromwell's undergraduate days, however, the author of *The Perfect Politician* says that Oliver's tutor observed that he was not "so much addicted to Speculation, as to Action".<sup>70</sup> As far as we know, that is the only comment made by Richard Howlet about his celebrated pupil.

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64. *Ibid.*, II, 448.

65. Founded 1596.

66. Founded by Sir Walter Mildmay, 1584, *ibid.*, 310 ff. Two Blundell scholarships were transferred from Emmanuel to Sidney Sussex. Cf. *ibid.*, 198.

67. Cf. note by Mrs. Lomas, *L-C*, I, 36. He was installed as Dean, March 9, 1638/9.

68. Quoted *ibid.*, from *State Papers Dom. Ireland*, Car. I, cclvi, 107, 108; cf. *Cal. S. P. Ireland* (1633-47), 196 (July 12, 1638).

69. *L-C*, I, 36 n.

70. *Op. cit.*, 2.

On the other hand, the material available for Dr. Ward, Master of Sidney Sussex during Cromwell's stay in Cambridge, is almost too profuse, since it is difficult to tell what is relevant. Samuel Ward came from an impecunious family, and had been admitted to Christ's College in 1589 while it was still Puritan in temper.<sup>71</sup> He was subsequently elected a Fellow of Emmanuel, and later became the third Master of Sidney Sussex, and Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity.<sup>72</sup>

His Puritan views and personal piety have been recorded for us in his *Diary*, and in other MSS. in the possession of Sidney Sussex College, some of which have been edited for us in *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries*, by Dr. M.M. Knappen.<sup>73</sup> Dr. Ward's character would not be of much interest to us, however, were it not for the fact that in a small college like Sidney Sussex the Master must have had a good deal to do with the undergraduates. As Lady Margaret Professor he eventually had considerable prestige throughout the university, but his influence upon a small college with practically no established traditions must have been felt at every point through college life, especially at a time when attendance at college chapel was compulsory.<sup>74</sup>

The first thing we notice about Samuel Ward is the introspective piety of his Calvinism. His *Diary* is often little more than a daily catalogue of faults and failings, usually morbid and often ludicrous: "Sept. 15, 1595. My 'crapula' in eating peares in a morning and other things which might have diminished my health. As also my to much gluttony at dinner tyme. My unfitness to do anything after dinner"<sup>75</sup> [*sic.*]

A good deal of Ward's self-examination sounds less like confession of sin than sensible advice to himself for the avoidance of future illness through over-eating, although he would have

71. Edmund Barwell's appointment as Head had been secured with the support of Sir Walter Mildmay (an old student of Christ's), and had been regarded as a victory for the reforming party, although Barwell proved to be singularly ineffective. William Perkins, the most competent tutor in Christ's at that time, fell under suspicion for his Puritan views, and was called before the Vice-Chancellor in 1587. Mullinger, *Hist. of Cambridge University*, II, 472 f.

72. J.B. Mullinger confuses him with a contemporary, Samuel Ward of Ipswich, one of the foundation fellows of Sidney Sussex College; cf. *ibid.*, II, 359; Edwards, *S.S.C.*, 45, 67 ff. The Samuel Ward with whom we are concerned was a student of Christ's, Fellow of Emmanuel, 1595, master of Sidney Sussex, 1610, and Lady Margaret Professor, 1623.

73. Chicago, 1933.

74. Trevelyan, *English Social History*, 184.

75. *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries*, III.

regarded the resultant distemper as a “judgment” of God. Samuel Ward’s morbidity did not decrease with the years.<sup>76</sup>

He accepted implicitly the same interpretation of Providence that we have noted in Dr. Beard, but whereas the latter emphasized the background of God’s transcendent purpose within history, Dr. Ward stressed the imminence of God’s intervention in the history of the individual. As J.P. Mullinger has written of him, “as he summed up each day’s experience nothing appeared too trivial to form an indictment against himself, nothing in the course of events so ordinary as not to furnish a theme for wonder or to constitute a mystery”.<sup>77</sup> Yet we must appreciate Ward’s background if we are to understand his theology. He alone of his family had managed to win his way to a university and against the constant threat of poverty he had managed to maintain himself through the generous gifts and influence of his patrons. An impediment in his speech almost prevented his intention of taking holy orders, but against all disabilities he succeeded and achieved very considerable academic eminence. Such a career in a life governed by the ideas of “Election” and “Grace” could only mean to Samuel Ward God’s personal care and intervention on his behalf.

The movement away from Puritanism during the last years of Elizabeth’s reign was observed by Samuel Ward with extreme disfavour. This is quite clear from many extracts in his *Diary* – as, for example, when at Emmanuel College in 1604 he observed “two plots laid to bring our College to the wearing of the surplice”.<sup>78</sup> Ward managed to quieten his conscience enough to conform – the wearing of the surplice was to him “an indifferent ceremony” – but only because he could discern “no way of escape”; the future colour of national churchmanship had been decided by the Hampton Court Conference, and he saw no reason to suffer for being “singular”.

His tendency towards compliance apparently grew with the years,<sup>79</sup> for later Dr. Ward embarked upon the most unpuritanical course of accepting plural livings,<sup>80</sup> and before the death of James

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76. In his *Considerations* (1621) we have his detailed account of his reasons for and against asking a certain lady to be his wife! *Ibid.*, 121–3.

77. *Hist. of Cambridge University*, II, 491.

78. Extract from the *Diary* (Edwards, S.S.C., 68 f.). This is not *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries*.

79. For Ward’s early Puritanism, cf. Knappen’s Introduction, *ibid.*, 37–41.

80. *Ibid.*, 41.

he had become a royal chaplain,<sup>81</sup> but if we examine Ward's theology as distinct from his conformity in Church Order, we find that so far from giving up his original views he remained a rigid Calvinist throughout.<sup>82</sup> He took a strong Calvinist stand at the Synod of Dort in 1619, and was one of the signatories of the *Joynt Attestation*, the Calvinist reply to the Arminianism of Dr. Richard Montagu's *Appello*. Later on he was invited, together with the Master of St. Catherine's, to represent the university at the Westminster Assembly – an indication that he was regarded by the Presbyterians then in power as sufficiently sound in doctrine; Dr. Ward retained the temper of Calvin and the same doctrine of Providence that Cromwell had learned from Thomas Beard. For this reason, we suggest that as a formative influence upon the future Lord Protector he is not to be disregarded.

It is difficult to place Cromwell's year at Cambridge in its proper perspective; it was a comparatively short period and he left without a degree, although there is no reason to suggest that he left devoid of learning,<sup>83</sup> but perhaps the period can best be considered as a continuation of his early life and schooldays, and it is for Samuel Ward's re-emphasis of Dr. Beard's theology that we feel the year cannot be lightly dismissed: while at the university Oliver did not escape the atmosphere of the *Theatre of God's Judgements* and the august theology that inspired it.

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81. *Ibid.*, 42.

82. Sir Simonds D'Ewes described a visit he made to Cambridge in 1635, when he heard a candidate for the B.D. degree assert both the doctrine of Justification by works and that the outward act of baptism expiated sin. He commented that the "brasen-faced asserting of these Popish points, especially the denying of Justification by faith, was abhorred by myself and all the orthodox hearers in the Commencement House; and Dr. Ward, the Lady Margaret Professor, and Master of Sidney College, sitting moderator the same day, openly rebuked the same Nevel for broaching those gross heresies, contrary not only to canonical Scripture, to the articles and homilies of our Church, but to the tenets and writings of all our Protestant divines, as well Lutheran as Calvinistic. I supped the same night in Sidney College, with the same Dr. Ward, where we both lamented the times that this wicked Nevel durst so impudently and openly maintain the vilest and most feculent points of all Popery." *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Sir Simonds D'Ewes, Bart., during the reigns of James I and Charles I* (1845, 2 vols.). Edited by J. P. Halliwell, II, 124.

83. *Supra*, p. 22–3. "Mr. Waller assures us, that he had a good knowledge of the Greek and Latin histories; nor must it be forgot that he ever patronized men of learning and science; and Dr. Manton says he had a very valuable and well-chosen library; all which does not seem to lead us to suppose him averse to learning, or that he was without a competent share of it himself, making allowance for the short time he was at college." Noble, *Protectoral-House*, 1, 96.

## V

Cromwell's biographer, Carrington, says that he was intended for civil law, but that he "dived not over deep into this Study".<sup>84</sup> There is a persistent tradition that after leaving Cambridge Cromwell studied at Lincoln's Inn, probably because his father, grandfather, and two of his uncles had been there.<sup>85</sup> Professor Abbott thinks that he may possibly have been at Gray's Inn,<sup>86</sup> but in any case there is no direct evidence of any kind that he joined any of the Inns of Court.<sup>87</sup> James Heath says that, having left the University, Cromwell's "uncontrolled debaucheries did publicly declare, for Drinking, Wenching, and the like outrages of licentious youth, none so infam'd as this young Tarquin",<sup>88</sup> and suggests that he was sent to London to study Law in the hope that his vices "might passe in the throng".<sup>89</sup> Needless to say, there is no evidence to support this slander – indeed, there is such a complete lack of data regarding Cromwell's time in London that even Heath cannot find crumbs with which to feed his malice; the only thing he can suggest is that the very nature of the place so affected Cromwell that he "spent his time in an inward spight".<sup>90</sup>

Heath's dilemma of having, for once, no fact or fiction which might be used for further blackening Cromwell's character, is not without its historical importance, for if such a persistent traducer could find no clear record of Cromwell's stay at Lincoln's Inn, it indicates the doubt which exists about the years between Cambridge and his coming of age. His marriage on August 22, 1620,<sup>91</sup> however, to Elizabeth, the daughter of Sir James Bouchier,<sup>92</sup> suggests that he must have been in or near

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84. *The History of the Life and Death, etc.*, 4.

85. *W.S.*, I, 13, 33.

86. *Ibid.*, 33 ff.

87. Except the engraving of his lying in state, which says that he was "educated at Cambridge afterward of Lincons Inn". Cf. Abbott, *Bibliography of O. C.*, p. xv.

88. *Flagellum*, 8.

89. *Ibid.*, 9.

90. *Ibid.*

91. At St. Giles, Cripplegate; cf. *W.S.*, I, 35.

92. Cf. *Flagellum*, 14, J. Allanson Picton, *Oliver Cromwell: the man and his mission* (and edn., 1883), 33. John Buchan calls him Sir "John" Bouchier, and there was a Sir John Bouchier listed among the regicides (cf. Hansard, *Parliamentary History of England from the earliest times, etc.* (1807, etc.), IV, 48), who descended from John Bouchier, natural son of Lord Berners. This

London for some part of the time. Sir James was a city merchant owning an estate at Felstead in Essex and a house at Tower Hill, and he was related to the Hampdens.

There was always a bond of very deep affection between Cromwell and his wife: "there was never a vibrant man of eminent public activity so simply devoted to his home and so certainly satisfied with his marriage. He gave example of what is meant, in any sane and just definition, by the word chastity."<sup>93</sup> Yet although his wife must have been one of the greatest influences of his life, there is no material on which to base an estimate of that influence. Whether or not the increased responsibilities of marriage were responsible for bringing about his religious conversion we cannot say, but all the biographers are agreed that Cromwell was converted some time during his early married life.

Noble suggests that this conversion took place some time before Oliver was returned to Westminster for the borough of Huntingdon in 1628.<sup>94</sup> Heath, who is usually vague on matters of chronology, seems to place it earlier than that, although he is more interested in explaining the change of manners as a ruse by Oliver to augment a dwindling patrimony, than in historical accuracy.<sup>95</sup> Bearing in mind the fact that all the stories of Cromwell's dissipated youth are derived from royalists like Heath, and remembering the sober protestantism of his home and education, it is at least arguable that his religious experience may have been by way of gradual development rather than by sudden change. The story of the conversion may be no more than the attempt of writers like Heath to explain the transition between the early debauchee they depict, and the religious enthusiast Cromwell is known to have become, and the rhapsodical religion of Cromwell's letters might have been no more than his reaction to an attack of melancholia in the forms of expression popular among Puritans at that time.

Upon examination, however, it will be found that the reasons

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man is described by Noble as "a rigid independent and republican, he was very dissatisfied with Cromwell's usurpation". Noble, *The lives of the Regicides, etc.* (1798), I, 102-4. This was clearly not the father of Cromwell's wife, of whom Noble commented, "Sir James was of so new a family, that he had his coat of arms granted him in Oct. 1610." *Protectoral-House*, I, 123 f.

93. Belloc, *Cromwell*, 55.

94. Cf. *Protectoral-House*, I, 100 f.

95. *Flagellum*, 12-14.

for believing that there was a comparatively sudden conversion are too weighty to be ignored. James Heath was obviously puzzled by the change, and his attempts to explain it as a subtle piece of financial duplicity are not very convincing. On October 13, 1638, the year of the Scottish National Covenant, Oliver Cromwell wrote the following letter to the wife of his cousin, Oliver St. John:

Dear Cousin,

I thankfully acknowledge your love in your kind remembrance of me upon this opportunity. Alas, you do too highly prize my lines, and my company. I may be ashamed to own your expressions, considering how unprofitable I am, and the mean improvement of my talent.

Yet to honour my God by declaring what He hath done for my soul, in this I am confident, and I will be so. Truly, then, this I find: That He giveth springs in a dry and barren wilderness where no water is. I live (you know where) in Mesheck, which they say signifies *Prolonging*; in Kedar, which signifieth *Blackness*: yet the Lord forsaketh me not. Though He do prolong, yet He will (I trust) bring me to His tabernacle, to His resting-place. My soul is with the congregation of the firstborn, my body rests in hope, and if here I may honour my God either by doing or by suffering, I shall be most glad.

Truly no poor creature hath more cause to put forth himself in the cause of his God than I. I have had plentiful wages beforehand, and I am sure I shall never earn the least mite. The Lord accept me in His Son, and give me to walk in the light, as He is the light. He it is that enlighteneth our blackness, our darkness. I dare not say, He hideth His face from me. He giveth me to see light in His light. One beam in a dark place hath exceeding much refreshment in it. Blessed be His Name for shining upon so dark a heart as mine! You know what my manner of life hath been. Oh, I lived in and loved darkness, and hated the light. I was a chief, the chief of sinners. This is true; I hated godliness, yet God had mercy on me. O the riches of His mercy! Praise Him for me, pray for me, that who hath begun a good work would perfect it to the day of He Christ.

Salute all my good friends in that family whereof you are yet a member. I am much bound unto them for their love. I bless the Lord for them; and that my son, by their procurement, is so well. Let him have your prayers, your counsel; let me have them.

Salute your husband and sister for me. He is not a man of his word! He promised to write about Mr. Wrath of Epping; but as yet

I received no letters. Put him in mind to do what with conveyance may be done for the poor cousin I did solicit him about.

Once more farewell. The Lord be with you; so prayeth  
Your truly loving Cousin  
Oliver Cromwell.<sup>96</sup>

The Scriptural phrases of this letter may be a style affected by Puritans, but the letter as a whole is certainly that of one who has been through an unforgettable religious experience: “You know what my manner of life hath been. Oh, I lived in and loved darkness, and hated the light. I was a chief, the chief of sinners.” These confessions ought not perhaps to be taken too literally, since the apostle Paul spoke in terms no less extravagant of his own life before being converted to Christ,<sup>97</sup> but they do indicate the fact of an evangelical experience in Cromwell’s life. Mr. Hilaire Belloc saw the importance of this when he wrote, “No Calvin, no Cromwell. You shall not understand the mind of Cromwell, nor any of the innumerable minds who have known themselves, from that day till yesterday, to be Elect of God, until you have felt the fierce blast from the furnace which Jean Cauvin of Noyon in Picardy kindled.”<sup>98</sup>

Some form of religious conversion is implicit in the religion of Calvin’s *Institutes*, for it emphasizes that in the face of Man’s sin, we are saved by the Grace of God alone.<sup>99</sup> The selection of one man for salvation and another man for damnation was predetermined within the fore-knowledge of God, and the “Elect” were chosen not because of their natural merits, but because God in His grace had awakened in their hearts the faith which alone could merit salvation. Once a man grasped the full assurance of God’s promise to him, he would pour out his heart in praise and thanksgiving for this unmerited gift: the certainty of his own salvation gave to the Puritan a tremendous sense of his unrepayable debt to Almighty God. “The Puritans”, wrote Lord Macaulay, “were men whose minds had derived a peculiar

96. W.S., I, 96 f.; L-C, I, 89 f. (II). Cf. *infra*, p. 339 for analysis of the Biblical phrases.

97. I Timothy 1:15. “Seriously to argue from such language as this that Cromwell’s early life was vicious, is as monstrous as it would be to argue that Bunyan was a reprobate from the remorseful charges of *Grace Abounding*.” John Morley, *Oliver Cromwell*, 14 f.

98. *Cromwell*, 35 f.

99. John Calvin, *The Institutes of Religion* (translation by Henry Beveridge, Edinburgh, 1863), 2 volume edn. (I, 254–5), Bk. II, iii, 5–6.

character from the daily contemplation of superior beings and eternal interests. Not content with acknowledging, in general terms, an overruling Providence, they habitually ascribed every event to the will of the Great Being, for whose power nothing was too vast, for whose inspection nothing was too minute. To know Him, to serve Him, to enjoy Him, was with them the great end of existence.”<sup>100</sup> Cromwell’s humility before God in the letter to Mrs. St. John reminds us with what overwhelming gratitude Samuel Ward rehearsed God’s goodness to him: it is Christianity lived in the spirit of St. Paul, and it had been called into being by an experience similar to that of the Damascus road. Henceforth all events in life were related to the certainty of eternal salvation, and we may apply to Cromwell the words with which Lord Macaulay described the typical Puritan of the seventeenth century, for he came to share a faith which believed that “it was for him that the sun had been darkened, that the rocks had been rent, that the dead had risen, that all nature had shuddered at the sufferings of her expiring God.”<sup>101</sup> This Paulinism with its idea of special choice – or “election” – by “grace”, is for our purpose the most important feature of Cromwell’s conversion, since it leads on directly to the question of his vocation: God had chosen him, Oliver Cromwell, for salvation, and henceforth he was, however unworthily, the “chosen vessel” of the Lord.<sup>102</sup> But the very nature of such religion suggests a conception of Providence which held God to be responsible for every detail of the individual’s life, no less than for every circumstance of history, and once the evangelical experience was his, Cromwell could not help breathing the same air as Samuel Ward and Thomas Beard; for good or ill he would enter into the legacy of his earlier training.

Is it possible to arrive at a date for this religious change? Cromwell was undoubtedly subject to periodic attacks of melancholia which seem to have borne some relationship to his religious experience, and we know that he had an attack in 1628, and that the London physician, Sir Theodore Mayerne, diagnosed his condition as *valde melancholicus*.<sup>103</sup> Dr. Simcott, Cromwell’s family doctor at this time, assured Sir Philip Warwick “that for many years his Patient was a most splenetick man, and had phansyes

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100. *Essay on Milton* (Oxford Plain Texts, 1909), 49.

101. *Ibid.*, 50.

102. Cf. Acts 9:15.

103. Sir Henry Ellis, *Original Letters illustrative of English History* (and series, 4 vols., 1827), III, 248.

about the cross in that town". The physician said that he had often been called to Oliver's at night in the belief that he was dying.<sup>104</sup> These fancies may have been the outcome of a deep religious struggle in a highly strung nature, or they may have been pathological; in either case we can imagine that they would deepen the sense of self-condemnation and intensify the desire for the assurance of divine forgiveness.

Bishop Burnet said that Cromwell had "led a very strict life for about eight years before the wars", and from this it would appear that Cromwell was converted just before 1629–30,<sup>105</sup> but it is easier to hazard guesses than to speak with any certainty.<sup>106</sup> Perhaps the first piece of positive evidence is from Cromwell's own correspondence. His earliest extant letter was written from Huntingdon on October 14, 1626, to ask Mr. Henry Downhall of St. John's College, Cambridge, to stand godfather for his son, Richard, who had been born on the fourth of the month.<sup>107</sup> While courteous, the style is straightforward and businesslike, and utterly devoid of Biblical quotations – a complete contrast to the letter to Mrs. St. John, quoted previously.<sup>108</sup> We must agree with one of Cromwell's former biographers when he observes that "it is impossible to believe that the man who on such an occasion could write to a valued friend without one word of gratitude for divine favours, or any reference to his growing responsibilities in life, could have been already so full of religious fervour as his later letters show that he became"<sup>109</sup>

It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that his conversion occurred between the dates of these letters, October 1626 and

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104. *Memoires*, 1681, 249. Hypochondria was common in the seventeenth century; cf. Ward's *Diary*, and the concern of Richard Baxter and Sir Simonds D'Ewes for their health.

105. *History of My Own Time* (2 vols., 1897–1900), edited by O. Airey, I, 121. As a Scot, Burnet would date the beginning of the wars from either the outbreak of the first Bishops' War in 1638 or from the riots of the previous year.

106. Dr. S.R. Gardiner coupled the fact that Cromwell was ill in 1628 with the occurrence of his name in the register of St. John's Church, Huntingdon, as undergoing ecclesiastical censure. Dr. Gardiner admits the entries appear to be forged, but suggests that they were inserted later with Oliver's knowledge as a sign of penitence, and he infers from this that Cromwell was converted in 1628. The date is a good one, but the argument is weak, since Oliver was hardly likely to be elected to Parliament for the borough (1628), and be appointed a J.P. (1630) if he had recently been publicly censured. Cf. Gardiner, *Oliver Cromwell*, 5; *W.S.*, I, 51 f.

107. *W.S.*, I, 50 f.; *L-C*, III, 221 (Appendix 1), *infra*, p. 413 (Appendix VII).

108. *Supra*, p. 36 f.

109. J. Allanson Picton, *Oliver Cromwell*, 47.

October 1638. Two other letters fall within this period, and of these, the first does not help us very much, being purely a business letter to a complete stranger about some hawks which had strayed;<sup>110</sup> but the second, to Mr. Storie, appealing in restrained but unmistakable Biblical language for the continued financial support of a “lecture” not only identifies Cromwell with the Puritanism of his time, but shows him to be actively interested in its promotion.<sup>111</sup> This narrows the time for his conversion to between October 1626 and January 1635/6.

Unfortunately we have no more literary evidence to help us define the date more positively, but there are several facts about Cromwell’s life at this time which may assist us. A tradition has persisted that about the time he removed from Huntingdon to St. Ives in 1631, he had seriously considered emigrating to New England, and this would suggest that by this time he had sympathies with the Separatist settlers of America.<sup>112</sup> Heath says that he was dissuaded from going by the death of his uncle, Sir Thomas Steward, and the inheritance left to him.<sup>113</sup> In 1628 Oliver was elected to Parliament as a member for Huntingdon borough, and in the following year he made his first recorded speech on an issue which showed him to be strongly against the “flat popery” preached by a certain Dr. Alablaster.<sup>114</sup> Dr. Beard had signed the indenture which returned Cromwell to Westminster, and it was in defiance of his old schoolmaster that Oliver had attacked Dr. Alablaster’s preaching in the Commons; in 1630 we find that both Oliver and Dr. Beard are appointed justices for the borough.

These events indicate a close relationship between Oliver and

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110. To John Newdigate, April 1, 1631, W.S., I, 70; L-C, III., 313 f. (Supplement 1).

111. Appendix I.

112. Cf. Sir William Dugdale, *A Short View*, 459. By this time Cromwell had begun to support “popular” (i.e. puritan) movements: in 1630 he strongly opposed the change in the local government of Huntingdon, he was fined for refusal to take knighthood, and in 1633–4 he continued the work begun by his uncle, Sir Thomas Steward, by championing the fen-dwellers against the Crown and the “Adventurers” in the Fen-Drainage scheme. For further light on these incidents, see W.S., I, 66 ff.; Noble, *Protectoral-House*, I, 108 f.; J.L. Sanford, *Studies and Illustrations of the Great Rebellion* (1858), 232–7; *Cal. S.P. Dom.* (1619–23), 96; *ibid.* (1631–33), 23, 501; *ibid.* (1637), 447, 503; *ibid.* (1638–39), 301; Lord Clarendon, *The Life of Edward, Earl of Clarendon* (Oxford, 1857 edn.), I, 88 (reference to book and section).

113. *Flagellum*, 16.

114. W.S., I, 61 f., February 11, 1628/9; cf. Bulstrode Whitelocke, *Memorials of English Affairs*, etc. (1732 edn. corrected and enlarged), 12.

his old schoolmaster since 1628, and we are forced to ask ourselves whether that relationship would have been likely if Beard's former pupil were still persisting in the course of folly attributed to him by his early biographers. We must therefore either regard the accounts of Cromwell's earliest wildness entirely as royalist fabrications, or else date his conversion between the years 1626 and 1628. Further, perhaps the date should allow for a period before his election to Westminster when the new convert would be very much "on trial", and this indicates a date just before 1628, as Mark Noble suggested.<sup>115</sup>

The royalist accounts of Cromwell's early life, while they may be modified, cannot be entirely disregarded, since the temperate Sir Philip Warwick says that

The first years of his manhood were spent in a dissolute course of life, in good fellowship and gaming, which afterwards he seemed very sensible of and sorrowful for; and as if it had bin a good spirit, that had guided him therein, he used a good method upon his conversion; for he declared, he was ready to make restitution unto any man, who would accuse him, or whom he could accuse himself to have wronged: (to his honour I speak this. ...) <sup>116</sup>

Sir Philip's mention of "good fellowship, and gaming", however, is very different from the complete depravity attributed to Cromwell by the Restoration writers like Heath and Dugdale, and it seems a more credible picture of his young manhood, although to Cromwell himself, this way of life would appear as having been spent in "darkness" and hating the "light". It is difficult to see how he would ever have persuaded Elizabeth Bourchier to marry him, or her father to accept him into the family, if the character given him by Heath and Dugdale had been authentic.

In summary, therefore, it is suggested that Cromwell was converted after an emotional struggle which may have culminated or had its sequel in the illness of 1628, but by the time Charles I acceded to the throne Oliver must have been sufficiently "sound" in his religious views for the Puritan Dr. Beard to be one of his foremost supporters in his nomination for Parliament, and from this time onwards he gives every evidence of being decidedly Puritan in his views.

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115. *Protectoral-House*, I, 100 f.

116. *Memoires*, 249 f. Cromwell acted up to this principle, and it is reported that he paid back a certain Mr. Calton £30 that he had won unfairly. *Flagellum*, 15 f.; *The Perfect Politician*, 2 f.

We must, however, see the implications of his conversion in relation to the formative influences of family, environment and education, for it made him not only a “good” man, but also a partisan and an advocate: “Election” implied personal choice, and once Cromwell accepted this salvation he accepted also a vocation from God. Our interest is to see how this was interpreted.