

Review: Ian Gentles, *Oliver Cromwell: God's Warrior and the English Revolution*, Palgrave Macmillan, NY, 2011

Pages: 263

Cromwell: Christian Leader

This appears to be a fair and balanced account of a much-maligned figure in English history. Cromwell was an authentic Christian, late-soldier and general, and had outstanding political ability to navigate a regicide, or mete out justice against Charles I the Man of Blood.

The author's prior work on Civil War and Irish campaign battles shows, with great detail of strategy and tactics on how well Cromwell fought, also where fate happened to be on his side.

From Cromwell's advisers there are memorable quotes about the difficult situation the Parliamentarians were in, e.g., the Earl of Manchester: "If we beat the king 99 times he would be king still, and his posterity; and we subjects still. But if he beat us but once we should be hanged and our posterity undone."

In hindsight, England was just not ready for a Christian Republic or a more limited monarchy, mainly because it required systems and communication technology which didn't exist, also, how to possibly achieve such a thing when the majority of voting English were still ungodly?

Foreword (pp. xv-xix)

Before age 43, Cromwell had not military training.

In 1642 he closed theatres, then banned Christmas, and criminalised adultery.

Cromwell laid the foundation of Protestant nonconformity.

I) The Unknown Oliver (pp. 1-9)

Uncle Sir Oliver was amongst the top ten families in Cromwell's county. Arminians of the day rejected predestination, preached obedience to the king, and promoted a more 'popish' worship style. Cromwell belonged to a group of godly people at St Ives. The local bishop was hostile to lay preaching.

He was frequently infirm in life. At age 53: "I grow an old man, and feel infirmities of age marvellously stealing upon me."

II) Parliamentary Extremist (pp. 10-21)

In 1640, Charles I summoned parliament after a disastrous 1639 war in Scotland to force a new prayer book on them which drained the treasury.

Cromwell thought the English bishops were, "like the Roman hierarchy".

Parliament listed over 204 grievances against Charles I in the 1641 Grand Remonstrance.

Ireland rebelled in October, 1641, killing up to 150,000 Protestant settlers. Parliament responded in 1642 with a scheme to make the Irish pay in kind for their own reconquest with 2.2M acres of land.

"Money is the lubricant which greases the wheels of war." [p19]

III) Apprenticeship to War (pp. 22-36)

The harquebus was a portable tripod gun which had already become obsolete.

Cromwell had Independents, Congregationalists, Baptists, and Presbyterians amongst his officers. They were instructed to be, "instruments of a divine plan in which England, as a nation elected by God, had been assigned to overthrow popery and establish a godly commonwealth." [p25]

Cromwell couldn't raise many troops during harvest time as men had to tend to their fields.

Cromwell led battle from the front.

At York, Charles had 5,000 horse and 6,000 foot.

At the Battle of Marston Moor, 22,000 Parliamentarians and Scots faced 13,000 Royalists under Newcastle and Prince Rupert. Cromwell's right flank buckled, but the left was highly successful. The Royalists lost 4,000 and the King's cause was domed from then on.

IV) The Army New Modelled (pp. 37-51)

“After Marston moor, a sensible king would have sued for peace.” [p37]

The Earl of Manchester: “If we beat the king 99 times he would be king still, and his posterity; and we subjects still. But if he beat us but once we should be hanged and our posterity undone.” [p37]

The Self-Denying Ordinance forbade MPs from serving in the army, but a Lord's amendment still enabled Cromwell to command.

At Naseby, Parliament had 17,000 under Fairfax, against 12,500 under Charles. Pikemen were armed with 16-foot weapons. Cromwell's Ironsides saved the day, routing the king's cavalry. He captured 4,000 infantry and the king's secret correspondence.

Many local militias (“Clubmen”) sprung up, and who were partial to Charles.

V) War by Other Means, 1646-8 (pp. 52-64)

Once the Scottish army was gone, the peace party demanded most of the New Model army disperse, and the rest be sent to reduce Ireland.

Radical independents were called “Levellers”.

In 1647, the army issued a demand to purge all corrupt MPs, limit future parliament duration, end the king's power to dissolve parliament, create a right of petition, and enact public accounting of war expenditures. They also wanted peace with the king and a new constitution. Charles refused.

Cromwell on the Agreement of the People: “Would it not make England like the Switzerland country, one canton of the Swiss against another, and one county against another? Was it not a recipe for anarchy?” [p58]

Cromwell: “The supreme foundation and supremacy is in the people.” [p59]

Lt. Col. William Goffe was convinced Rv 17-20 and Nm 14 taught the army was Christ’s instrument to overthrow the ‘mystery of iniquity’ represented by the ‘kings of the earth’ who had surrendered their power to ‘the Beast’, whom he took to be the Pope. [p59]

Col. Rainborowe on suffrage: “The poorest he that is in England hath a life to live as the greatest he; and therefore ... to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that government.” [p59]

Ireton thought only those with “a permanent fixed interest” in the kingdom should have the vote; servants, apprentices, labourers and beggars should be excluded.

One senior officer said Charles was, “guilty of all the bloodshed, vast expense of treasure, and ruin that hath been occasioned by all the wars both of England and Ireland.” [p60]

Parliament forbade any communication with the king with the Vote of No Address.

VI) Revolution, Regicide, Republic (pp. 65-84)

Charles then stoked a fresh Civil War with the help of Scotland. It was now Parliament’s duty, “to call Charles Stuart, that man of blood, to an account for that blood he had shed, and mischief he had done. ... against the Lord’s cause and people in these poor nations.” [p67]

At the Battle of Preston, Cromwell took 4,000 infantry captive, then proceeded to pacify Scotland.

Ireton then drafted a 25,000-word *Remonstrance of the Army*. (*Salus populis suprema lex.*): “That capital and grand Author of our troubles, the

Person of the King ... [must] be speedily brought to justice for the treason, blood, and mischief he is therein guilty of.” [p73]

Cromwell believed God had witnessed repeatedly against the king in his battle victories.

Regicide carried the risk of renewed civil war, and perhaps foreign invasion.

Cromwell: “I tell you we will cut off his head, with the crown on it.” [p80]

Thousands came to see Charles execution at 1400, where he affirmed he was dying as a Christian according to the profession of the Church of England.

Afterwards, the Commons voted to abolish the House of Lords as “useless and dangerous”, and to eliminate the office of the king, i.e., create a republic. Cromwell meanwhile prepared to invade Ireland to avenge the Protestant massacre of 1641.

VII) Twice-Born Oliver (pp. 85-103)

Cromwell’s 1636 opening address to parliament: “That men that believe in Jesus Christ ... believe the remission of sins through the blood of Christ and free justification by the blood of Christ, and live upon the grace of God.” [p89]

Cromwell was an unorthodox Calvinist. He regarded the pope as either Antichrist himself or an agent thereof.

Cromwell’s Barebones Parliament of 1653 was made of 140 hand-picked saints; they were to exercise supreme authority for eighteen months then cede power to a new assembly for a year, following which the people would be ready for free elections.

In 1655, Cromwell sent a disastrous invasion fleet to the Spanish Main (the West Indian expedition).

By 1657, the Parliament was offering Cromwell the crown.

Cromwell reduced the number of alehouses, enforced the 'Sabbath' (Sunday), so that in the 1650s the rate of illegitimacy dropped to 0.5% (Britain today is 30-40%).

Cromwell brought the Jews into England, and he had no time for atheists or other religions.

VIII) Crushing the Levellers and Conquering Ireland: The Republic Year One (pp. 104-120)

Levellers wore a sea-green ribbon.

Cromwell faced a 15,000 royalist army under the Earl of Ormond.

Ormond failed to take Dublin with 11,000 men, leaving a safe landing port for Cromwell.

At Drogheda, Cromwell gave no quarter. He overcame the 4-6ft thick and 20ft high walls, killing 2,800 of the 3,1000 defenders against 150 dead English. A town that refused surrender was given no quarter since it put besiegers at great personal risk. The few Irish survivors were shipped to the Barbados.

At Wexford, Ormond had 4,800 troops; Cromwell killed 2,000 and lost 20 men. This victory ended the royalist naval threat from the continent.

Waterford was the only successful Irish defence.

AS a result of the invasion, the Gaelic population shrank 20% (300,000), and 10,000 had been shipped to the West Indies. Ireland was now "clean paper", ready for Cromwell to impose his Protestant vision on the country, for which they eternally curse his memory.

In 1650, Scotland recognised Charles II as king. Civil war ensued for three years till the he surrendered.

IX) Dunbar to Worcester: The Crowning Mercy (pp. 121-134)

After Charles II's defeat, the Scots again mustered an army, 20,000, against 16,500 for Cromwell. They met at Dunbar, where the English

attacked at 0400 and had won by 0700. The Scots lost 3,000 dead and 10,000 POWs. Cromwell lost 20 men.

The final battle was Worcester, where Charles lost 2,500 men and Cromwell 200. He fled to France, and Cromwell imposed a rule of eight commissioners over Scotland.

Cromwell's tactics including flexible use of the reserve line made him, "father of the British army". [p134]

X) A Greedy Puritan? Oliver Cromwell and Money (pp. 135-143)

Cromwell gave back much of what he received.

He gave £2,000 (half his annual income) to relieve the persecuted Protestants of Savoy.

XI) Our Chief of Men (pp. 144-159)

Louis XIV welcomed the exiled Stuart princes.

Cromwell was sympathetic to the Jews as, "God's chosen people," also, that Jewish financiers and merchants could improve England's economy.

"If godly reformation was to be achieved, then the ungodly would have to be barred from voting."

Cromwell abolished the *peine forte et dure* under which those who refused to plead either guilty or innocent were slowly crushed to death.

Maj. Gen. John Lambert drafted England's only ever constitution, the Instrument of Government: a Lord Protector was to be the head of state with a standing army of 30,000; Parliaments were to gather triennially; anyone worth over £200 could vote; Ireland would have 30 seats and England 400; Christianity was to be the state religion and non-conformists tolerated, but not Catholicism [though Cromwell turned a blind eye to it, also to witchcraft]).

Upon Cromwell's death, his successor was to be elected by the Council of State.

XII) King in All But Name? Lord Protector 1654-8 (pp. 160-177)

Cromwell banned duels, cock fighting and horse racing.

The Instrument was to have four key features: shared government by one, and parliament; a militia; freedom of religion; and time-limited parliaments.

Cromwell divided England into twelve zones each under a Major-General.

The people still celebrated Christmas, Easter, and Whitsun, and dancing around Maypoles.

Military expenses during the Protectorate were 80-90% of expenses; mainly spent on Ireland and Scotland.

Cromwell advanced the Commission for the Propagation of the Gospel in Wales.

XIII) Horse Breeder and Patron of the Arts? Poetry, Painting, Performance and Political Thought Under the Protectorate (pp. 178-191)

Hawking, hunting, and horseriding were the epitome of English gentry.

Cromwell censored the press.

He had no time for opulence.

XIV) Quietus: Death, Funeral, Legacy Protectorate (pp. 192-202)

Cromwell was ever-wary of assassination.

Free general elections in April 1660 led to the return of Charles II; he executed eleven of the regicides and ordered exhumation of Cromwell, Bradshaw, and Ireton. He stuck Cromwell's skull on a spike outside Westminster for 27 years.

The people became disillusioned with Charles II after only few years.