

not to make any change in the government did not apply beyond the first article under which the Protectorate had been constituted—that which referred to a Single Person and a Parliament; and it adopted that article in a resolution of its own. Cromwell had conquered the Parliament into a show of effecting by its own act what was the result of his strong will. He had said to them, “The wilful throwing away of this government,—I can sooner be willing to be rolled into my grave and buried with infamy, than I can give my consent unto.”

When the destinies of a nation hang upon the life of a single man, the importance that is attached to the slightest accidents befalling him extend from his contemporaries to history. Cromwell soon after this great trial of his strength was taking a little relaxation after his own simple fashion. He had been dining under the trees in Hyde Park—he might have sat under the ancient elm which still tells of a time long past. A new set of six horses had been given him by the duke of Oldenburg; and with his old country habits, he took the reins to drive home. The horses plunged, and my Lord Protector was thrown from the box. Marvellous to relate, a pistol went off in his pocket,—he carried a pistol, at a time when most men went armed; and grave historians duly notice how apprehensive he must have been of his life to bear about with him such a weapon. His life was certainly unsafe. His aged mother, who died in the following November, “at the sound of a musket would often be afraid her son was shot, and could not be satisfied unless she saw him once a day at least.” The good old lady died at the age of ninety-four, blessing that son, and saying “The Lord cause his face to shine upon you, and comfort you in all your Adversities.” Yes, Adversities. The height of his power was truly an adversity; and we may well believe him to have been sincere, when in a burst of disappointment amidst the contentions around him, he said of the task of governing, “I had rather keep a flock of sheep.” But his genius was fitted for governing: however Ludlow underrated it, in pointing the moral of the runaway horses: “He would needs take the place of his coachman, not doubting but the three pair of horses he was about to drive would prove as tame as the three nations which were ridden by him; and therefore not contented with their ordinary pace he lashed them very furiously.” By his fall, says the republican philosopher, “he might have been instructed how dangerous it was to intermeddle with those things in which he had no experience.” Oliver’s system of government

was really founded upon his experience, and not upon refined theories aiming at impracticable perfection. He drove the state carriage for some years without tumbling from the box; and though he knew the use of the bit and the whip, he rarely “lashed very furiously.” Only when the state-carriage stood still, was he moved out of his wonted calmness. For three months the first free Parliament, although the recusant Members had retired to their homes, made small progress in “settling.” From the 21st of September till the 20th of January, the Instrument of Government was in a constant course of amendments and additions. It was natural enough that attempts should be made to apply every check to arbitrary authority in the Protector; but the mistrust was too marked; and the disposition to nullify the existing constitution of the Protectorate too apparent, not to produce a corresponding restlessness in the nation. Very large questions were depending with foreign powers; but the function of the executive was stultified by the perpetual discussion as to the authority in which should be confided the right of declaring war or making peace. The legislative power of the Parliament was absolute; for if the Protector did not give his consent to any Bill within twenty days of its passing, it became Law without his consent. And yet the Assembly could not see the necessity of its legislative sanction to the necessary reforms which had been proposed, and partly effected, by Cromwell and his Council. These measures were suspended, and referred to Committees for revision. Other propositions of public importance, such as the celebration of marriage; the treatment of lunatics; the relief of prisoners for debt; the equalisation of taxes; were introduced as Bills, but none were adopted. They triumphed over Cromwell’s supposed ambition in deciding that the Protectorate should be elective and not hereditary. They outraged his principles of toleration, which had been recognised in the Instrument of Government, by appointing a Committee to define what was “faith in God by Jesus Christ;” and to settle what were “damnable heresies.” They went farther, and ordered that several heretics, amongst whom was John Biddle, a Socinian schoolmaster, should be imprisoned. The supplies were voted as tardily, and with as impolitic an economy, as if the foreign affairs of the country had been conducted with dishonour instead of a dignity which all nations bowed before. The government under a Parliament and a Single Person was becoming impossible. The crisis arrived. The Parliament was to sit five months. Five calendar months would have expired on the

3rd of February. Five lunar months expired on the 22nd of January. On that day the Protector summoned the House to attend him in the Painted Chamber. Another long speech—and the Parliament is dissolved. The Protector could be angry, and speak harsh truths. “Dissettlement and division, discontent and dissatisfaction, together with real dangers to the whole, have been more multiplied within these five months of your sitting than in some years before. Foundations have also been laid for the future renewing of the troubles of these nations by all the enemies of them abroad and at home.” And so, concluded Oliver Protector, “I think it my duty to tell you that it is not for the profit of these nations, nor for common and public good, for you to continue here any longer.” He has a difficult task before him. His army is unpaid: the people are wretched with soldiers at free quarters; royalists are encouraged to undertake new plots; the old Commonwealth men are ready to join with them. But Oliver keeps up his heart, though he must find his only resource in the same species of despotism against which he fought. “If the Lord take pleasure in England, and if He will do us good, He is very able to bear us up. Let the difficulties be whatsoever they will, we shall in His strength be able to encounter with them. And I bless God I have been inured to difficulties; and I never found God failing when I trusted to Him. I can laugh and sing, in my heart, when I speak of these things to you or elsewhere. And though some may think it a hard thing to raise money without parliamentary authority upon this nation; yet I have another argument to the good people of this nation, if they would be safe, and yet have no better principle: Whether they prefer the having of their will, though it be their destruction, rather than comply with things of necessity?” Necessity, the tyrant’s plea in all ages, cannot be avoided even by this man who had so few of the qualities of a tyrant besides the energetic will. It is manifest that if the Parliament had not blindly set itself to obstruct the honest exercise of that will in its labours to keep “the good people of this nation safe,” any systematic display of arbitrary power would have been as impossible as it would have been impolitic on his part, even if not alien to his nature. He is conscious of his own strength; and he will front alone the storms that are gathering around him. But he had faithful public servants, whose devotion to their country was not weakened by the quarrels of factions. Blake, one of the noblest of these, thus answered Thurloe, Cromwell’s secretary, when informed of the dissolution of

the Parliament: “I was not much surprised with the intelligence; the slow proceedings and awkward motions of that assembly giving great cause to suspect it would come to some such period. And I cannot but exceedingly wonder that there should yet remain so strong a spirit of prejudice and animosity in the minds of men who profess themselves most affectionate patriots, as to postpone the necessary ways and means for preservation of the Commonwealth, especially in such a time of concurrence of the mischievous plots and designs both of old and new enemies, tending all to the destruction of the same. But blessed be God, who hath hitherto delivered, and doth still deliver us; and I trust will continue so to do, although He be very much tempted by us.”

Blake writes this letter from the Mediterranean, where he is doing some memorable things which we shall presently have to notice. Meanwhile “the mischievous plots and designs” to which the admiral refers, are making England very unquiet in this Spring of 1655. Charles the Second, who, after some wandering, has settled himself at Cologne; has gone with the Marquis of Ormond to Middleburg, that he may be ready for a landing in England. Wilmot, now earl of Rochester, is in London, organising a general insurrection. “There cannot be,” says Clarendon, “a greater manifestation of the universal prejudice and aversion in the whole kingdom towards Cromwell and his government, than that there could be so many designs and conspiracies against him, which were communicated to so many men; and that such signal and notable persons could resort to London, and remain there, without any such information or discovery as might cause them to be apprehended.”* It was the policy of Cromwell, as it is of all really sagacious rulers, not to be too prompt with measures of repression—not to alarm and irritate the peaceful portion of the community by fears and suspicions, which are generally the sparks to explode combustible materials instead of being the safety lamps for their discovery. Cromwell left the “signal and notable persons” to pursue the course of their own rashness—even to the organisation of a conspiracy which Rochester represented as so sure of success, that the king’s hopes “were so improved, that he thought of nothing more than how he might with the greatest secrecy transport himself into England; for which he did expect a sudden occasion.”† The narrative which Clarendon gives of the result of the enterprise which was to place Charles at the head of an Eng-

* “Rebellion,” vol. vii. p. 137.

† *Ibid.*, p. 138.

lish army, sufficiently shows how justly the Protector measured his own strength and that of these sanguine Cavaliers. The assizes were being held at Salisbury. The city was full of grand jurymen and petty jurymen, of magistrates and witnesses, all sleeping quietly in their beds, before the dawning of another day on which the law should assert its wonted majesty in the judgment seat, whatever might be the political differences of republican or royalist. At five o'clock on the morning of the 11th of March, a party of two hundred horsemen rode into the streets of Salisbury, headed by sir Joseph Wagstaff, "a stout man, who looked not far before him,"—a jolly Cavalier, much beloved by the roaring set that Puritanism had not been able to tread out. Their first operation was to seize the sheriff and the two judges, and to break open the gaols. Clarendon recounts the proceedings of these loyal adherents of king Charles, with a solemn unconsciousness that he is showing how necessary was the government of a Cromwell to save England from utter lawlessness and bloodshed: "When the judges were brought out in their robes, and humbly produced their commissions, and the sheriff likewise, Wagstaff resolved, after he had caused the king to be proclaimed, to cause them all three to be hanged." There was a country gentleman amongst these insane royalists, John Penruddock, who had some sense of decency, although Clarendon rather blames his scrupulousness: "Poor Penruddock was so passionate to preserve their lives, as if works of this nature could be done by halves, that the major-general durst not persist in it." The judges were dismissed, their commissions being taken from them; but the sheriff was to be hanged because he refused to proclaim the king. This likewise was resisted; though very many of the gentlemen were much scandalised at the tender-heartedness. To have hanged the sheriff "would have been a seasonable act of severity to have cemented them to perseverance who were engaged in it." No one stirred to help these valiant supporters of the true monarchy and its attributes. In a few hours they left Salisbury, and carrying the sheriff with them, went forwards into Hampshire and Devonshire. There were none to join them. They were hungry and wearied; and a single troop of Cromwell's horse, being by chance in the country, dispersed them almost without a blow, three days afterwards. Some of the leaders, and about fifty of their followers, were taken prisoners. Wagstaff escaped to France. Penruddock, Grove, and others, were tried at Exeter. The two gallant Cavaliers, brave men who deserved much

commiseration, were beheaded; a few others were hanged; the larger number were transported to Barbadoes. In the north, Wilmot had gone to take the command of the insurrectionary army. That army never extended beyond a few rash partisans. Wilmot got back to his master, out of heart; and Charles and his court sat down again at Cologne, to wait for times when the existing government might not be quite so strong or so popular as was manifested by the town-crier of a Dorsetshire town refusing, at the peril of his life, to utter the words "Charles the Second, king of England," when Penruddock dictated a royal proclamation.

The complex machine for governing England by a Single Person and a Parliament being again out of working condition, the simpler and ruder machine of the Single Person must work as it best may to prevent all government from coming to an end. This is despotism. But despotism, however odious as a principle, has many degrees of evil, and is only rendered tolerable by the desire of a despot to perform a bad office in the least mischievous way. Burke has truly described the government of Cromwell as "somewhat rigid, but for a new power no savage tyranny."* The period at which his despotism put on its most rigid form was in the year that followed the dismissal of the Parliament at the beginning of 1655. He was left without a legal revenue, for the maintenance of the civil and military powers of the government. A merchant named Cony had refused to pay custom duties, as illegally levied by ordinance. Cromwell tried to soothe the sturdy citizen, who reminded him that he himself had said in the Long Parliament, that the subject who yields to an illegal impost is more the enemy of his country than the tyrant who imposes it. The Protector sent the merchant to prison; and then more arbitrarily imprisoned the Counsel, who had, in pleading for his writ of Habeas Corpus, used arguments which went to deny altogether the legality of the authority of the existing government. There was a compromise in which Cony at length withdrew his opposition to the impost, and his legal defenders were released. Sir Peter Wentworth refused to pay the taxes levied upon him, and was brought before Cromwell and his Council. He was required to withdraw an action which he had commenced against the tax-collector. "If you command it I must submit," said Wentworth to the Protector. He did command it, and the resistance was at an end. Clarendon, who records these acts of oppression, and especially Cromwell's lecture

* "Policy of the Allies."

of the judges "that they should not suffer the lawyers to prate what it would not become them to hear," yet says, "in all other matters, which did not concern the loss of his jurisdiction, he seemed to have great reverence for the law, rarely interposing between party and party." In his fiscal measures the most invidious was the imposition of an especial tax upon a limited number of royalists—a property tax, under which all those of the king's party who were considered disaffected, and who either possessed an income of a hundred a year from land, or a personal estate of fifteen hundred pounds in value, were called upon for a contribution of one-tenth. To assess and collect this tax it was necessary to call forth some new instruments. The Protector divided the country into ten districts, each under the authority of a Major-General, who had various large powers, and who had especially under his command the Militia of the Counties. The Militia was a force essentially different from the regular army; a force not without strong popular instincts, and not so manageable in carrying through acts of oppression. It was a military police, especially appointed to enforce a system of partial repression. There was no resistance to the acts of the Major-Generals and their Commissioners, and there was no large amount of murmuring. The decimation of the richer royalists, who had already been so harassed by sequestrations, and for whose relief Cromwell had himself laboured to carry through the Act of Oblivion, was truly described by Ludlow as calculated to render its victims "desperate and irreconcilable, they being not able to call anything their own, whilst by the same rule that he seized one-tenth, he might also take away the other nine parts at his pleasure."* There is a worse evil in despotic courses than that of making men "desperate and irreconcilable"—that of making them time-serving, slavish, and apathetic. A passage in Baxter's life is illustrative of this: "James Berry was made Major-General of Worcestershire, Shropshire, Herefordshire, and North Wales,—the counties in which he had formerly lived as a servant, a clerk of iron-works. His reign was modest and short; but hated and scorned by the gentry that had known his inferiority, so that it had been better for him to have chosen a stranger place. And yet many of them attended him as submissively as if they had honoured him; so significant a thing is power and prosperity with worldly minds."† That these Major-Generals meddled with other royalists than those of good property is shown by the arrest of

* "Memoirs," vol. ii. p. 519.

† "Life," p. 97.

John Cleveland, "that incomparable son of Apollo" according to the creed of the Cavaliers, for whose cause he has been writing bitter satires since the first days of the Long Parliament. Colonel Haynes has arrested him at Norwich, and sent him to prison at Yarmouth. Cleveland addressed a petition to the Protector, though he had ridiculed his "copper-nose," in which the unfortunate poet says, "I am inclined to believe that next to the adherence to the royal party, the cause of my confinement is the narrowness of my estate, for none stand committed whose estate can bail them. I only am the prisoner who have no acres to be my hostage. Now if my poverty be criminal, with reverence be it spoken, I must implead your highness, whose victorious arms have reduced me to it, as accessory to my guilt." The Petition, an elaborate composition far more laudatory than insulting, procured the poet's release.*

At this period the government of the Protector was more than usually harsh towards the Catholics and the Clergy of the Anglican Church. The plots against the Commonwealth were generally mixed up with the intrigues of Papists, and the harshness towards them was the practical continuance of the spirit of the severe penal laws. The Episcopalians were harassed at the instance of the Presbyterians, in spite of Cromwell's own ardent desire for toleration. One of the most odious measures against them was an ordinance prohibiting them to be received in private families as preceptors. Archbishop Usher, for whom the Protector had a deep respect, remonstrated with him against his injustice. He did not withdraw the ordinance, but it remained inoperative. Prejudices were too strong to allow him to act up to his own principles. But with the great Puritan body, and the various sectaries that sprang from them, he was determined to keep their animosities under the control of an equal justice. "If a man of one form," he declared to the Parliament in 1656, "will be trampling upon the heels of another form; if an Independent, for example, will despise him who is under Baptism, and will revile him, and will reproach and provoke him, I will not suffer it in him." Neither should the Independent censure the Presbyterian, nor the Presbyterian the Independent. This toleration made him many enemies: "I have borne my reproach; but I have, through God's mercy, not been unhappy in hindering any one religion to impose upon another." The Quakers, who were hunted and persecuted by every other sect, found a friend in Cromwell. George Fox, who had

* Printed with the Poems, edit. 1657.

been seized in his preachings, and carried to London, managed to see the Protector, and exhorted him to keep in the fear of God; and Cromwell, having patiently listened to his lecture, parted with him, saying "Come again to my house. If thou and I were but an hour of the day together, we should be nearer one to the other. I wish no more harm to thee than I do my own soul."* George and some of his brethren had been dispersing "base books against the Lord Protector," as major-general Goffe informed Thurloe. Cromwell sent the Quaker unharmed away, having received from him a written promise that he would do nothing against his government.

* Fox's "Journal," quoted in Carlyle's "Cromwell," vol. ii. p. 121.

CHAPTER IV.

Greatness of Cromwell in his Foreign Policy.—Naval armaments.—Blake's exploits.—Jamaica taken.—Cromwell's interference for the Vaudois.—He attempts to procure the re-admission of the Jews to settle in England.—Hostility of the Republicans to the Protector.—Cromwell requires a pledge from Republican leaders.—Meeting of the Protector's Second Parliament.—Cromwell's opening Speech.—Members excluded from the Parliament.—Case of James Nayler.—Sindercomb's plot.—The Parliament votes that Cromwell shall be offered the Crown.—Conferences on the subject of Kingship.—Cromwell declines to accept the title.—Blake's victory at Santa Cruz.—Cromwell inaugurated as Protector under a new Instrument of Government.—Second Session of Parliament.—The Upper House.—The old secluded Members admitted to sit.—Cromwell's Speech.—Violent dissensions.—The Parliament dissolved.—Projected rising of Royalists.—Allied War in the Netherlands.—Dunkirk.—Cromwell's family afflictions.—His illness and death.

"His greatness at home was but a shadow of the glory he had abroad." So writes Clarendon of him who, he says, "will be looked upon by posterity as a brave bad man." The mere courtiers of Charles II. used to talk of the Protector as "that wretch, Cromwell."* It is something for Clarendon to acknowledge that "he had some good qualities." He had the highest of all qualities in a prince—a sense of public duty. He was an Englishman, bent upon sustaining the honour of his country amongst the nations. In this great design his genius luxuriated. He was not beset with difficulties, as at home, when he sent forth his fleets to sweep the Barbary pirates from the Mediterranean, or employed his diplomatists to express in distinct terms, that the Protestants of the Piedmontese valleys should not be massacred by a duke of Savoy, although supported by a king of France. He went straight to his object, when he concluded the French alliance, and rejected that of Spain, because "there is not liberty of conscience to be had from the Spaniard, neither is there satisfaction for injuries nor for blood."† "Elizabeth, of famous memory, that lady, that great queen," as Cromwell terms her, was the load-star of his foreign policy; "nothing being more usual than his saying 'that his ships in the Mediterranean should visit Civita Vecchia, and that the

* Letter of Henrietta Maria; Green, p. 380. † Speech, 17th September, 1656.