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THIRD EDITION.

**England's Eleven Years'**  
**Government under the**  
**Single-Chamber System.**

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**From 1649 to 1660.**

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BY

**OBLON GATA.**

(Entered at Stationers' Hall.)

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**PRICE ONE PENNY.**

LONDON :

HENRY J. DRANE, Farringdon Street, E.C.



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This little Pamphlet is written as a gentle protest against the wilful travesty of historical characters to suit political or  
————— other exigencies. —————

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## PART I.

It is common school-boy knowledge that this country was ruled under a single-chamber system for a period exceeding eleven years—from February 6th, 1649, to April, 1660.

At two o'clock in the afternoon of January 30th, 1649, Charles's head fell at one blow from the executioner's axe, and he had paid the full penalty for being a traitor, tyrant, and murderer. Never in our history did events move so rapidly as they did in the next six weeks, a period in which was initiated the embryo of a government which was so soon to expand into a colossal structure that easily out-tyrannised any acts of tyranny perpetrated by Charles himself. Two days after, February 1st, the remnant (the faithful fifty-three) of the Commons representing the soldiery, made legal the outrageous act of Colonel Pride—perpetrated seven weeks previously—by which 140 members of opposite political views were forcibly ejected from the House so as to ensure a unanimous vote. On February 6th, the House of Lords was abolished, and on the next day, February 7th, the Office of the Crown shared the same fate. Of course all this was done in the name of legality and liberty. We see the most illegal of all our Parliaments, the faithful fifty-three, constituting itself the supreme authority in the country, and taking for its motto: "Liberty, Liberty. The people are the origin of all just power. *Que sa voix est la voix de Dieu.* Liberty, Liberty"—and so on.

These framers of the constitution inspired of liberty worked well. They became benevolent. A few of the members excluded on December 6th were allowed to take their seats on condition they were "good boys" in the future. They had also to sign a declaration that they quite agreed with what had been done during their enforced "holiday"; further, writs were even issued for new elections, but of course only to those constituencies which would return a republican member with certainty. On February 15th, Parliament appointed an executive Council of State consisting of 41 members, with Bradshaw as president and John Milton as Foreign Secretary. On May 19th the consummation of their labours was attained, and England was proclaimed a Commonwealth and Free State. For the present we pass over the murders at Drogheda, September 11th, and Wexford, October 12th, the battle of Dunbar, September 3rd, 1650, and the battle of Worcester, September 3rd, 1651. It would be extremely interesting if it could be definitely ascertained what were Cromwell's views on the burning subject of the day, namely Tariff Reform. The probability is that he cared very little for such a trifling topic, he appears to have been well pleased with the grant allowed him—£6,500 a year, with the use of Hampton Court thrown in as a residential villa—probably the topic of "absolutism" was more interesting to him.

The Parliament of 1651 was an avowedly Tariff Reform Parliament. On October 9th, that is, within six weeks of the battle of Worcester, it passed the famous Navigation Act. This Act forbade the importation of goods in any but English ships or those ships of the country where the goods were made. The objects of the Act were three, namely, the protection of the shipbuilding industry of the country, the destruction of the monopoly possessed by the Dutch in the world's carrying trade, and the fostering of the home sea-carrying trade. This, of course, precipitated a naval war with the Dutch.



Cromwell's reasons against the war were both religious and financial. Let us hope the policy of selling some of the late King's property, divesting the Church of some of hers, and appropriating the lands of fallen antagonists, brought some slight measure of consolation to him.

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NOMINEES OR NOMINATORS, OR  
POWER, POWER, WHO SHALL HAVE IT?

By the end of the year 1651 it was evident a great amount of jealousy existed between Cromwell and the Parliament. The latter in 1652 attempted to carry out its principal project, namely, the reduction of the army. Cromwell was equally determined to thwart it. He and his officers voted a remonstrance to the Parliament for daring to be so impudent, and politely hinted that as a Parliament they had sat long enough, and the best thing they could do was to dissolve. Parliament took the remonstrance in bad part, and by March, 1653, it was evident a climax could not be long delayed.

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THE REFORMERS.

In the State at this time there were three bodies of reformers, each so terribly anxious for the welfare of the nation, that they thought it best that each party should be endowed with absolute power. The parties were:—

1. The Parliamentary Party with Sir Harry Vane at its head.
2. The Army, represented by the officers.
3. Cromwell himself.

Result: Cromwell won.

Briefly Vane's plan was, that the members should continue to sit and co-opt a certain number of their own friends, whose fidelity would be guarantee that they would not betray the cause. Oliver soon perceived that this was a simple way of perpetuating themselves in office. His idea of a free Government was in a nominated council, with the popular choice completely ignored.

To ascertain if an agreement could be arrived at, a conference with the leaders was held in Cromwell's rooms in Whitehall, April 19th. The meeting was adjourned on the understanding that Parliament would not proceed with the Bill until another conference had been held. The next morning, news was brought to Cromwell that Parliament was already at work, and that the Bill was being rammed through as quickly as possible, and was on the point of becoming law. This was enough for him; if power were to be retained, now was the time to act. He immediately crossed to the House, and by the aid of 300 soldiers, and the dropping of pious scriptural ejaculations from his lips, he cleared the place, locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and went home.

To Cromwell all due must be given. He with twelve others formed themselves into a Council of State. Letters were sent to the Independent ministers of the country asking them to consult their congregations, and forward names of persons suitable to become members of Parliament. The Council selected 128 names from England, 5 from Scotland, and 6 from Ireland. Thus Ireland, when first sending members to the British Parliament, had the honour of being represented by six Englishmen, with Henry Cromwell at their head. This Parliament, as it voted itself on July 4th, contemplated grand legislative measures, but its principal work seems to have been the utterance of a plethora of Biblical texts; however, a blow was struck at the Church by requiring all marriages to be per-

formed before a justice of the peace. It gave Cromwell supreme executive and judicial powers, and created for him a new High Commission Court, for the trial of offenders where it would be unsafe to let the verdict go to a jury. The farce ended happily. The members surrendered all power to him. They drew up a deed called the "Instrument of Government," by which they nominated him ruler with the title of His Highness the Lord Protector, assisted by a Council of twenty-one.

Oliver's next move was the reform of the Church. This, he thought, would best be done by filling the parish pulpits with Independent or Presbyterian ministers. Two bodies of commissioners were formed, a Commission of Triers consisting of forty-three members, and a Commission of Ejectors consisting of about twenty to thirty members in each county, assisted by some ten ministers.

The work of the Triers was to examine prospective presentees to all benefices. Cromwell was the most indefatigable of workers. At that time nearly half the livings of the country were at his own private disposal, *et bien qu'il eût d'autres chats à fouetter* he interviewed each applicant for presentation. The work of the Ejectors was to oust certain ministers, who were thought not to be reputable, from their livings, and so make work for the other body of commissioners.

The religious work of Oliver was most unfortunate. It laid the foundation of that harsh treatment which was inflicted on the dissenters, when within the space of ten years the wheel of fortune again brought the episcopalians uppermost. As regards the Church, Cromwell unwittingly wrought her an inestimable boon. Within a few years of his death she had not only recovered her lost place, but had put herself in such a position, that for a space of 240 years the hand of the despoiler had been stayed.

## CROMWELL'S FIRST FREE PARLIAMENT.

This Parliament met September 3rd, 1654, and was dissolved January 22nd, 1655. By the Instrument of Government the Protector was bound to call a Parliament every three years, and allow it to sit for five months without being adjourned, prorogued, or dismissed. It was to consist of 460 members, 400 for England, 30 for Scotland, and 30 for Ireland. That it was not a harmonious assembly was certainly not the fault of Cromwell—he did all that it was possible to secure a body of 460 sycophantic creatures. No Churchman was capable of serving, the lower populace were excluded from the elections by restricting the franchise to those who possessed an estate of £200 or more in value, and he and his officers nominated 144 members their own personal friends, including themselves.

Oliver soon found something was wrong with his first Parliament; it was actually wicked enough to discuss his authority. He soon put an end to it. On September 12th (when Parliament was nine days old) he ordered the doors to be locked, sent for the members and gave them a sweet homily—*he had received his office from God and the people, and none but God and the people would take it from him.*

He allowed them to re-enter the House on condition they signed an agreement to be true and faithful to him, in other words, to do nothing to oppose his wishes. He dissolved the Parliament January 22nd, 1655, that is, after a sitting of five lunar months. Some Cromwellian biographers put his mathematical ratiocinations but on a plane approaching mediocrity. This is a great injustice. He could calculate easily that by reckoning lunar months instead of calendar months he could put an end to the Parliament's existence so much sooner. He now ruled without a Parliament until lack of funds compelled him to summon another, September 17th, 1656.

## HIS IDEAL OF FREE GOVERNMENT.

He divided England into twelve military districts, and over each placed a friendly major-general whose duty it was to punish disaffected persons. A disaffected person was one whose politics and religion differed from the major-general's. The disaffected persons were registered like so many bullocks; they could not change their residence without notifying the major-general, an ejected minister could not become a teacher nor use the prayer book; the liberty of the Press was smothered by requiring permission from the Secretary of State before any matter could be printed or sold. This policing of the country was naturally very expensive. Two questions now fronted him, how to get the money to pay for it, and how to get it without calling a Parliament. Happy thought! Why not make the delinquents pay? The major-generals were ordered to exact one-tenth the incomes of persons who were classed as disaffected. This plan was extremely satisfactory, except to those who were forced to pay.

Want of money eventually compelled him to call another Parliament, which met September 17th, 1656, and although he used every artifice possible to fill it with creatures subordinate to his will, he found a majority against him. What to do? Nothing easier! Why not prevent a sufficient number of members from attending in order to secure a majority? This was done. He placed soldiers at the door of the Commons, and anyone without a "pass" was refused admittance. The ninety-three excluded members protested vigorously against this treatment, not only because it was an act of tyranny, but because it was done in the name of God and religion. But to Cromwell religion (or its simulation) was everything. Of his attempt to form a House of Lords to protect himself from the Commons nothing need be said. With regard to his desire to assume the title of King, probably only the ridicule of his

own family was insurmountable. He died September 3rd, 1658, aged fifty-nine years.

The same story of plot, counter-plot, and intrigue was continued to the end of the chapter. Even in the death chamber itself, before his body was yet a corpse, plot was rife as to who should seize the sceptre from his weakening grasp.



## PART II.

Charles, thou wast never a hypocrite. Thy greatest enemy can never truthfully burden thy memory with that fetid epithet. It is true that as a ruler thou aimedst at absolutism and attainedst it; for eleven years without a break thou ruledst without a Parliament, thus sadly profaning the constitution as ordained by Edward III.; but one must not forget in that mortal struggle for supremacy the pretentious claims of the Parliament were equally exorbitant and unreasonable. That Parliament aimed at absolutism just as much as Charles is merely a matter of history. A Bill was introduced by which members could perpetuate themselves in office, and on the very day that Charles gave his consent to the execution of Strafford, May 10th, 1641, he sanctioned the Bill which declared that Parliament should not be adjourned, prorogued, or dissolved without its own consent. Of course, Cromwell did not rule absolutely for eleven years; he did not "reign" five years altogether; but notwithstanding the fact that he excluded his political opponents from all share in the Government (excepting, of course, the privilege of paying extra taxes), he schemed so well that he managed to rule nearly half his time without the aid of a Parliament. And Cromwell did undoubtedly claim to rule on behalf of God, religion, the people and liberty.

## SUFFRAGETTE TACTICS.

One incident is worth recording, as it shows the method adopted towards those who practised suffragette tactics. Charles's trial commenced in Westminster Hall on January 20th, 1649. By some chance or other Fairfax's name was

included among the 133 persons who were to compose the Court. When the crier called the name "Fairfax" the whole assembly was startled to hear a woman's voice cry, "He has more wit than to be here." The charge against Charles was made "In the name of the people of England." When it was read and immediately these words were spoken the same voice cried out, "Not a tenth part of them." The brutal Axtell, officer of the court (this is the same gentleman who cracked low jokes while the soldiers were blowing tobacco smoke in Charles's face, when the latter was endeavouring to get the Court to listen to him), ordered the soldiers to fire into the box from whence the sounds proceeded. The voice was that of Lady Fairfax. Truly the effects of chaining one's self to a grille or a seat were more hazardous in those days than now.

#### HYPOCRISY RUN MAD.

Historians are divided in their opinions concerning the part that Cromwell played in bringing about the execution of the King. Some aver that he was averse to extreme measures, but that he was forced on by others. Here the historian is unkind to rob him of the chief point in his character, that of stubbornness.

If Cromwell really used the words attributed to him by the historian Guizot (who, however, gives his authorities) the part he meant to play is clear enough. I have translated his words into the vulgar English of to-day. It was noon, the 20th of January, 1649, Cromwell and other members of the Court were sitting in the painted chamber, when news was brought that Charles was being taken to Westminster Hall for trial. Cromwell rushed to the window and saw the King being carried on a sedan between two lines of soldiers. He turned round pale and excited and cried: "He's come; he's come; now we shall have a chance to distinguish ourselves; mean-



while, one of you clever ones find an answer to the first question Charles will be sure to put, namely: 'What is your authority for trying me?'" During the trial Charles begged the Court to let him speak, but the soldiers round him caused such a row and became so abusive that the place was more like a tap-room than a court of justice. One of the members, Colonel Downs, could restrain his feelings no longer, but exclaimed: "Have we hearts of stone, are we men?" Cromwell, who was sitting close by, turned round and said: "What the deuce do you mean, Colonel, are you off your head. Can't you see you're giving the whole show away?" At length, January 29th, it became necessary for the members to affix their signatures to the fatal order of the Court. Cromwell treated it as a huge joke. He signed third, and having done so, put his fingers in the ink and smeared it over Henry Martin's face, who immediately reciprocated the graceful act. Perhaps this was Cromwell's pretty way of donning mourning garb.

All honour is due to the Irish Nationalists who some years ago (I believe it was during Lord Rosebery's Government) refused in Parliament to vote money to erect a statue of the Dictator. They probably represented the voice of England as well as Ireland.



## PART III.

What have you or I or anyone else not seeking place, power, or patronage under the State, to gain by the destruction of the Upper Chamber? Its abolition last time brought a sword to Ireland, and it would undoubtedly do so again. Is there a governing chamber in the world to-day where its members dare express their opinions so freely, and with less trimming and pooling of conscience? The people rule, the people must rule, but the passion of the people may not be its voice. Second thoughts are sometimes best, even with nations. The House of Lords, as in times past, is bound to give way under the deliberate and considered judgment of the nation. Abolitionists, in your *essai* ponder the consequences: if your objective fail, you will alarmingly ensconce the Coroneted Court in its own privileges.

Take the case of a constitutional Free Trader to-day. He desires the present method of government and the maintenance of Free Trade. He votes for the latter, and in so doing he votes for the manufacture of a legislative system that can foist on him a cast-iron Tariff Reform *régime* without troubling to consult him or anyone else. And how can this be done, you say. Very easily. With a single chamber the constitution could be altered to suit one's convenience every twenty-four hours. The most momentous law could be passed by resolution and without discussion. Under the present Constitution, by the Septennial Act of 1716, Parliament is bound to dissolve by the end of the seventh year. With an unbridled single chamber, this Act could, by resolution, be changed to a Centennial Act; then another little resolution to provide for the co-option of new members when Father Senility gently intro-

duced himself to some of the more patriarchal of the flock—you have then a Government responsible to no one but itself.

Of course, the Office of the Crown would go, too, perhaps not so quickly as last time, when it survived the abolition of the House of Lords by one day; but still it would be at the mercy of a Parliament elected under a totally different issue: perhaps one to inflict dire penalties on the poor farmer who allowed the cruel thorns to grow on the hedges to the annoyance of newly fledged sparrowlets. Some may say in answer to all this: "Oh, things are very different now. Georgian times are not strictly comparable with Cromwellian times." The answer is a very simple one. In Cromwell's time it was revolution first and abolition last; the next time it will be abolition first and revolution last. If the Office of the House of Lords has grown into desuetude, if the Constitution has become effete and unworkable, then produce your plan to remedy it, discuss it, send it to the nation, let the people be the judge, and if the Fates will it that our form of government shall revert to its Cromwellian prototype, a system which would undoubtedly let loose upon the community a torrential sluice of unparalleled tyranny perpetrated under the ægis of some conjured-up chimera, then let us submit, let us submit.

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