



OLIVER CROMWELL.

OLIVER CROMWELL.

THE world at length understands Oliver Cromwell. Every believer in truth, every worshipper of sincerity, must thank Thomas Carlyle for this. He was the first to expose the misrepresentations that have grown and thickened these last two hundred years, and to help mankind to realise what an honest, earnest, God-fearing man this Cromwell was—how he was guiltless of selfishness and ambition; and how, full of faith and love, he laboured for one great end, in the council-chamber or the battle-field.

Cromwell came of good family. His mother had royal blood in her veins. His paternal ancestors sat as barons in parliament so far back as Edward the Second's time. Cromwell himself was born at Huntingdon, in the large Gothic house to which his father's brewery was attached, on the 25th of April, 1599. He was a second son, and the only one of three who lived to manhood. Curious tales are told of Oliver's childhood. On one occasion, it is said, playing with the future Charles I., he quarrelled with his illustrious playmate, and made the blood flow in copious streams from the prince's nose. On another occasion, he is said to have dreamt that the curtains of his bed were slowly withdrawn by a gigantic female figure, who told him that before his death he would be the greatest man in England. His first years were spent in the Grammar-school of his native town, and he entered Sydney Sussex College, Cambridge, April 23rd, 1616, the very day on which Shakspeare died. Soon after the death of his father, Cromwell proceeded to London, and, according to Noble, was entered at Lincoln's Inn, although the books of all the inns of court have been searched, and there is no mention made of Cromwell in any of them. In August, 1620, Cromwell being then twenty-one years and four months old, we find him married to Elizabeth Bourchier, a kinswoman of the Hampdens. The marriage was celebrated in St. Giles's Church, Cripplegate—the church in which, some fifty years after, Milton's wearied body found repose. Cromwell then returned to Huntingdon, where he threw open the doors of his house to the persecuted nonconformist divines, where many of his children were born, and where he seems to have been active in business as a brewer, and at the same time to have undergone a deep religious change. In the third parliament of Charles I., Cromwell took his seat for Huntingdon. It was a parliament of sober, serious men. Weeping like a girl, old Coke declared Buckingham the author of all the miseries that had fallen upon the nation; but Charles angrily prorogued the parliament. In the next session Cromwell made his first speech. "Dr. Alabaster," he had heard, "had been preaching flat popery at Paul's Cross;" but the matter dropped, as, in another fortnight, parliament was dissolved. In the next eleven years, Charles ruled without parliaments, and Cromwell retired into private life. He removed from Huntingdon to St. Ives, where he remained till the summer or spring of 1638. In that year we find him at Ely. Here he remained till the time of the Long Parliament, draining the fens, while "cousin Hampden" was trying the right of the king to collect ship-money. At length the Long Parliament met, with Cromwell as member for Cambridge. During the first three-and-twenty months we find but few traces of our hero. He was, however, only biding his time, in patience possessing his soul. On Sunday, 23rd of October, 1642, we find Captain Oliver present at Edgehill, and doing his duty, though he had but four tapsters to lead against the enemy. Associations were formed for the protection of the counties against the king's troops; of these the most important was that in the Eastern counties, in which he raised a troop of horse, of which he became colonel. Cromwell was made lieutenant under the Earl of Manchester, and governor of the Isle of Ely, and did good service to the parliamentary cause by his bravery, his determination, and skill. Shortly after we find him at Waisby, near Horncastle, where he had a horse killed under him. This engagement had a startling effect. It revived the parliamentarians. Charles, when he heard of

it, was reported to have said, "I would that some one would do me the good fortune to bring Cromwell to me, alive or dead."

Cromwell now had his hands full. Prince Rupert, in 1644, came pouring over the hills from Lancashire with an army of some 20,000 men, and was met by the parliamentary generals at Marston Moor—with what result, the world knows well. But we must pass rapidly along the history of those times—the passing of the self-denying ordinance, Cromwell's expedition in the west, his return to the associated counties, the battle of Naseby, etc. Suffice it to say, war being done with for a time, we find Cromwell in his place in parliament, deep in debate on the further establishment of the Presbyterian government. Meanwhile, after much insincere negotiation on his part, the king escapes from Hampton Court, and is lodged for the present in Carisbrook Castle. In 1646 Cromwell wins the battle of Naseby; and parliament makes him a baron, and settles on him a pension. In 1648 the civil war again breaks out. Cromwell marches into Wales, in May; then to Scotland, in August; and returns to town in a crisis. Members of parliament are sent to the Tower and elsewhere. The minority becomes a majority: that majority did a thing memorable in English history: by it was tried and executed Charles Stuart, King of England. The second civil war being thus terminated, Cromwell left England for Ireland, where Ormond, with his army, is strong for the king. Cromwell's career began at Drogheda, whose garrison, consisting of 3,000 men, he put to the sword. Wexford met with a similar tragic fate. Of a truth, Cromwell was no rose-water quack. At Clonmel he closed his Irish campaign, and returned to England, where, in 1650, he was made Captain-General and Commander-in-Chief of all the parliamentary forces. Immediately he was marching on to Scotland. At Dunbar he defeated David Leslie with an army of upwards of 23,000 men. Next summer he destroyed the hopes of royalty for a time, and thus triumphantly consummated his military career. Henceforth we find him as potent in the council-chamber as in the field of battle. The Rump Parliament had become useless; and thirty-one months after the battle of Worcester it had to be dismissed, and in what manner dismissed it is needless to repeat. This was followed by the Barebones Parliament. After five months of struggling and debating, the members resigned their powers to his excellency, and the parliament dissolved itself. Nothing remained but that Cromwell should be made Protector, which accordingly was done. At this time, says Carlyle, "he stands some five feet ten, or more—a man of strong, solid nature, and dignified, now partly military carriage; the expression of him, valour and devout intelligence—energy and delicacy on a basis of simplicity. Fifty-four years old gone April last; brown hair and moustache, now getting gray. A figure of sufficient impressiveness—not lovely to the man-milliner species, or pretending to be so. Massive structure; big massive head, of somewhat leonine aspect; wart above the right eye-brow; nose of considerable blunt aquiline proportions; strict yet copious lips, full of all tremulous sensibilities, and of all fierceness and rigours; deep loving eyes—call them grave—call them stern, looking from under those craggy lashes as if in life-long sorrow, yet not thinking it sorrow."

Well may Cromwell look sorrowful. Troubles thicken round him. No parliament suits him; and he is surrounded with plots—some royalist, some the reverse—on all sides. He has no peace, no rest; he becomes haggard and weary-worn. On the 6th of August, 1658, Lady Claypole, Cromwell's favourite daughter, died. A few days after, George Fox, the Quaker, meets Oliver in Hampton Court at the head of his guards. "I saw and felt," writes honest George, "a waft of death go forth against him, and when I came to him, he looked like a dead man." Quaker Fox saw but too truly: the conqueror of all England had bowed, in his turn, to a mightier power. A hand, heavier than his own, was on him. On the 3rd of September, Oliver Cromwell died.