

all about us the signs and sounds of a society which by Cromwell's standards is unimaginably affluent, unimaginably secular, unimaginably materialist — how very far away from us those days must seem when our forefathers felt the spirit of God moving among His servants.

Yet a powerful element in the English character to which Cromwell appealed and which he himself embodied, is still among us; and many to whom Cromwell is no more than a name have none the less inherited it. The capacity to sacrifice and to endure, the sense of a spiritual mission here on earth, the belief in a liberty which must be guarded and fought for.

Twenty-five years ago today, on September 3rd, 1939, this country went to war against the diseased tyranny of Hitler. Who among us that day thought of Cromwell? Among us here of the older generation, certainly some, perhaps all, had thoughts for Cromwell on that day. I know I did. September 3rd was then once again a fateful day for the English nation and those virtues in his countrymen which Cromwell valued and cherished were to be needed once again; and were not found wanting, in the years that followed, neither in the finest nor in the darkest hour. In Marvell's words, 'timorous conscience' found courage to go through with the cause.

Inevitably in 1964 we recall the events of 25 years ago this day. But there is something else to be remembered in this year. For are we not also celebrating the fourth centenary of another great Englishman, more famous and less controversial than Oliver Cromwell — I mean William Shakespeare.

What has Shakespeare, transcendent poet and dramatist, to do with Puritan Cromwell? The Puritans, we know, did not like the theatre, though Cromwell was never so opposed to innocent amusement as Royalist propagandists have tried to make out.

But the great poet and the great Protector had this in common: both were great Englishmen; both were born and bred in the English countryside and understood the virtues and failings of their fellow men — Shakespeare as a great imaginative artist, Cromwell as a great leader. Both were deeply concerned for the welfare and the honour of their country and its people. Both recognised as the most terrible of disasters, that Englishmen should turn upon each other, should fight each other. Both knew, one by imagination, the other by experience, that of all wars, civil war is the worst.

So, at the end of King John, Shakespeare utters a faith in the face of danger that we have echoed in our own time,

This England never did nor never shall,
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,
But when it first did help to wound itself
Nought shall make us rue,
If England to itself do rest but true.

Are not these words akin to Cromwell's last prayer? Do not Cromwell's words utter the same belief, infused with a deeper spiritual content, when he prayed that the people of England might have consistency of judgment, one heart and mutual love?

And do we not all of us today, in the memory of Cromwell, join with him in that prayer.

THE CROMWELL ASSOCIATION



CROMWELL'S DAY 1964

The Address given by

C. V. WEDGWOOD, C.B.E.

at the

Annual Commemoration Service

before the statue outside the Houses of Parliament

This day — September 3rd — when we meet here to remember Oliver Cromwell, was, I believe, first called Cromwell's Day by Andrew Marvell in the noble elegy that he wrote at the time of the great Protector's death. Cromwell died — so wrote the grief stricken Marvell in 1658 — on a day which was "worthy of his glories past." A day thrice memorable in his life.

It was memorable first for his victory at Dunbar on September 3rd, 1650; the unexpected and extraordinary victory which he called a Signal Mercy; a victory which, by destroying the forces of extremism in Scotland, opened the way for peace within a nation all but destroyed by civil war.

The day was memorable a second time for the victory in the heart of England at Worcester on September 3rd, 1651, which brought to an end nine years of intermittent civil war in England. This victory, which he called a Crowning Mercy, was indeed that. No one of lesser stature than Cromwell had the military skill or the perception, strength and judgment in political affairs to make an end, at long last, to the destructive struggle between Englishmen; no one else, in the tragic, contemporary phrase, could "staunch this issue of blood." And for this, not only Cromwell's supporters, but indifferent neutrals, even some Royalists, were grateful.

September 3rd was a third time memorable in 1654, when as Lord Protector of England, Oliver Cromwell opened his first Parliament. He himself believed that this was a fateful moment — "the greatest occasion", he said, in his opening speech, "that England ever saw." He hoped that this Parliament, unlike its predecessors under the Stuart Kings, would solve the central problem of government and create the harmony which had been lacking for more than half a century between the legislature and the executive; or to put it more simply, between the elected representatives of the nation in Parliament, and the ruler.

When his first Parliament met in 1654, it was five years since King Charles I had been tried in Westminster Hall and executed not far from here, outside the Banqueting House in Whitehall. Cromwell hoped that this Parliament he had called, would confirm the constitution and give permanent stability to the new government of England. He urged them, on that September 3rd, 1654, to "a sweet, gracious and holy understanding of themselves and of one another."

In that hope he and they were disappointed. There was no "sweet, gracious and holy understanding." The political problem was not solved. Cromwell, to his regret, was left to maintain the peace and order of the nation through the strength of his Army and not, as he had hoped, by the support and goodwill of this great civil assembly, Parliament. It was a bitter disillusionment for him, for steadfastly he believed in rule by Parliament; only in that bitter crisis of the nation's affairs, it was not possible.

Let us honour Cromwell for his failures as well as his successes; he knew, good Parliament man as he was — he knew, none better, that he had not solved the central and vital question of government. He had merely postponed its solution. Yet he had done so much else. He brought peace at home: he brought greatness abroad. He made the name of England respected throughout Europe; he restored his country's generous reputation as the champion of oppressed Protestants and defender of minorities. But he did not flatter himself that he had created a permanent solution for England's

government; under the stress of the circumstances in which he found himself he was not able to restore or re-create a workable Parliamentary government.

Yet he had done all that, under God, he could do for his people. And so we come to the last date — September 3rd, 1658 — when the great Protector died. The words which he spoke dying have often been quoted before by speakers at the foot of this statue, but they cannot be quoted too often. He prayed for his English countrymen. "Lord . . . I come to Thee for Thy people," he prayed; "Thou hast made me, though very unworthy, a mean instrument to do them some good, and Thee service . . . Lord, however Thou do dispose of me, continue and go on to do good for them. Give them consistency of judgment, one heart and mutual love . . ."

This is a wise and statesmanlike prayer. The dying Cromwell asked that the English people be given sanity, unity, charity — "consistency of judgment, one heart and mutual love." Could these be called the three great political virtues? Cromwell's prayer is the prayer of a God-fearing, devout and humble Christian, but it is also the prayer of a statesman who — even as darkness closed over his mind — perceived the cardinal virtues, the essential qualities, necessary for a healthy, human society.

Andrew Marvell, who knew and truly valued Cromwell — Andrew Marvell who was, as a member of Parliament, bravely to carry on the Puritan political tradition into the heartless and corrupt age of Charles II — he it was, who in writing of Cromwell's death, imagined him rising towards the bliss of eternity, received by the great leaders of Israel, leaders in faith, in law giving, in war, in nationhood — Moses, Joshua, David. There is a certain naivety, a certain youthful ingenuousness in Marvell's vision of Cromwell making the acquaintance of these great figures in the Courts of Heaven, but his idea is none the less a sound one. Cromwell's obscure early life, his rise to power in time of crisis, suggest a man who had been specially called to a task unexpected and unsought by him; and he was one who, when the call and the moment came, sought to guide his people — first his soldiers and then the nation — (as he guided his own life) in the ways of God.

He first put arms into Religion's hand
And timorous conscience unto courage manned
The soldier taught that inward mail to wear
And fearing God, that he should nothing fear.

Such a soldier of God and for God, was Cromwell.

He combined his extraordinary practical capacity for leadership with the ever present sense of a purpose greater than his own; he believed that an Almighty Hand guided the fortunes of his countrymen, and that he was an instrument in that Hand.

One of his most valued soldiers and supporters during the tense weeks when the King was brought to trial, Colonel Harrison, was to describe later how they had felt at that time. "I believe the hearts of some have felt the terrors of that presence of God that was with his servants in those days."

The presence of God that was with His servants . . .

Three hundred and more years later, standing here as we do now, outside the seat of that great Parliament, for the rights and existence of which Cromwell took up arms in 1642 — a Parliament now unrecognisably different from anything that Cromwell knew, yet lineally its descendant . . . standing here with the noise of the traffic thrumming past above our heads, and hearing