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CROMWELL'S GOVERNMENT.[1]

By the Rev. T. W. Gilbert, B.D.

" Cromwell's government was the most tolerant government which had existed in England since the Reformation " (Prof. Firth).

THIS statement made by Professor Firth on page 367 of his book on " Oliver Cromwell " in the *Heroes of the Nation* series, is sufficiently arresting even in this age which has seen the reversal of many judgments on historical personages. The process of rehabilitating the character of Cromwell has gone forward rapidly since the day when Carlyle published the Letters and Speeches of the Protector, but the mind of the average reader experiences a recoil when faced with this claim by Professor Firth. It seems apparently inconceivable that the age of the Commonwealth and Protectorate with its " irregular hewing and jostling of one another " (to use a Hobbesian phrase), because of religious bigotry and prejudice, should have been the age to produce a statesman more tolerant than Tudors or Stuarts, and it is therefore worth while examining what evidence there is in support of this claim.

By way of introduction, a short sketch of the position prior to the days of Cromwell is, of course, essential. Looking back to the earlier and later Middle Ages, one sees that the prevailing idea of Universalism, both in Church and State, tended inevitably to religious uniformity. This does not mean that the dead hand of repression crushed out all freedom of thinking, but it does mean that independence of judgment and of idea was the exception, and not the rule. When Pope and priest held the keys of heaven and hell, it was not a time for the encouragement of liberty of thought on religious matters, and apart therefore from isolated movements such as those of the Albigenses or the Hussites, the problem of religious toleration did not present itself on any large scale. The position was radically changed, however, by the " rational " appeal which was inherent in the Renaissance. It is not too much to say that Individualism in the modern sense took its rise in the Renaissance. The " rational " appeal, which was stimulated by the rediscovery of the Classics, meant a new Individualism in Art and in Literature, and when this same Renaissance spirit was applied

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to the study of the Bible, and to religious matters generally, it meant a new Individualism in Religion also. It is here, therefore, that the problem of Religious Toleration begins. Prior to the Reformation the conception of Religious Toleration was practically wanting. " Extra ecclesiam nulla salus " was a cry which made for uniformity, and just as in Anglo-Saxon days Borough and Parish denoted the same settlement from the political and ecclesiastical standpoint, so then and in later days, Church and Nation were synonymous terms. But Individualism was both the cause of the Reformation and also its result, and hence arises the difficulty of harmonizing these opposites, i.e. National Religious Uniformity and Individualism.

So far as the Tudors were concerned, their attitude was clear. They still adhered to the mediæval standpoint that Religious Uniformity must be coincident with Nationality. The sixteenth-century maxim " Cujus regio ejus Religio " might produce a relatively tolerant policy amongst the small states of Germany, where it was easy for a man to migrate from one principality to another, but in England the same maxim simply meant the iron hand of the Sovereign crushing out any deviation from the national religion. Such was the attitude of Henry VIII and of Mary Tudor. It was a clear and unmistakable attitude, for it meant the attempt to crush out all innovation, and the attempt at repression involved persecution solely for religious opinions.

The problem became more difficult for Edward VI and Elizabeth. In the rising tide of the Reformation during Edward VI's reign, the position was more complex.

It was easy for orthodox Roman Catholics like Bishop Gardiner to accommodate themselves to the First Prayer Book of 1549, but the Prayer Book of 1552, with its pronounced Protestant teaching, was quite another matter. The difficulty was postponed for a time by the demise of Edward VI, but was raised again at the accession of Elizabeth. Her religious settlement, with its basis resting mainly upon the 1552 Prayer Book, was bound to raise difficulties with the Roman Catholics. For a time, however, there was no drastic action. The reformed Anglican Church had yet to find a consciousness, and the political exigencies of Elizabeth's position at her accession, precluded any drastic action, so far as the Roman Catholics were concerned. Moreover, in the uncertain position of the Counter-

Reformation, with its "fatal flaw" in the antagonism of France and Spain, the Pope himself did not wish to force the situation, and for the time being Roman Catholics and Protestants worshipped together in the parish churches. When the threatened Bull of Deposition did eventually come, Elizabeth's position was comparatively secure, and her hand began to fall heavily on Roman Catholics, and increasingly so in the second half of her reign, when her position was stronger. It was the same with regard to the Puritans. Like the Roman Catholics, the Puritans of the early part of Elizabeth's reign made no attempt to set up a separate organization. The Genevan Exiles and the Cartwright Presbyterians were no secessionists. Rather, they wished to remain within the confines of the Church, and to remodel the Church from within; but the coercion of the Crown began to fall on them at once. The Brownists and Barrowists went much farther, for the congregational principle which they adopted was really the first claim to break away from the Church of the nation, and this breach in the mediæval and Tudor ideal brought down the full weight of Elizabeth's displeasure as the statute of 1593 reminds us. Elizabeth's attitude was the attitude of Hobbes: "All subjects are bound to obey that for Divine Law, which is declared to be so by the laws of the Commonwealth"; she did not wish to pry into opinions, but she did demand an outward conformity to the Church of the nation.

It is clear, however, that the very spirit of Elizabethan England was the spirit of the Reformation, and especially in its development of Individualism. The spirit of expansion and of bold adventure, and even the filibustering spirit of the Drakes and the Raleighs, was the result of the Queen's own vigorous outlook. She had nourished and brought to vigorous life the individualism which came from the Reformation, and that individualism was expressing itself in the religious sphere just as much as in the political. Only the respect and love which men bore to Elizabeth prevented the inevitable clash.

The Stuarts therefore inherited a problem which needed careful handling, but the problem was not treated with the delicacy it demanded. It was not that James I was without ideas on the subject of religious toleration, the truth is that he had many ideas on the subject, but they were not based upon any deep principle. He seemed to have some idea of European toleration of religion, his

dealings with Spain and the Empire do in some measure reveal a broad outlook, and the League of Nations would have found some support from him, as from his contemporary Henry IV. But captiousness is the keynote of his mind, and Divine Right was the tune to which he walked. The proceedings of the Hampton Court Conference show the real attitude of James I in religious matters, just as the tearing out of the Protestation of 1621 reveals his true attitude in politics; and therefore, while we see the Roman Catholics being alternately caressed and punished, the ultra Puritans are always "harried."

The position was intensified in the reign of Charles I by the high Anglican teaching of such men as Laud and Montagu, and by the presence of a Roman Catholic Queen. When to the driving power of Puritan Individualism was added general political discontent, it was late in the day to attempt the Tudor policy of uniformity again. But the experiment was tried. Church and State were combined in the High Commission and Star Chamber Courts to crush out any deviation from the ideas held by King and Archbishop.

Turning now to the closing years of the Civil War, we are able to see how far the spirit of toleration had advanced. The three great religious bodies had each their own ideas on the subject. The Anglicans had advanced a little way, but certainly only a little. Archbishop Usher was a moderate Churchman, but his answer to the query of Sheldon on the subject of religious toleration in August, 1647, is this: "That, although every Christian prince be obliged, by all just and Christian ways, to maintain and promote to his power the Christian religion in the truth and purity of it, yet in case of such exigence and concernment of church and state, as that they cannot, in human reason, probably be preserved otherwise, we cannot say but that a Christian prince hath, in such exigents, a latitude allowed him, the bounding whereof is by God left to him" (Cary, *Memorials*, p. 334). There is here no recognition of the principle of religious toleration, but a toleration to be granted merely to save the Church and State. Yet even this goes beyond the point of view of Bishop Warner of Rochester, who answered Sheldon's query in the following words: "I affirm the necessity and exigence of state may be such, that (a Christian prince may tolerate the exercise of other religions beside the religion established), so as the religions so tolerated be not destructive to the catholic faith, or the real settled

peace of the kingdom: or so that he oblige not himself to such a toleration for ever, but until he may regain the power given him by God, whereby to reduce them, by a Christian and meek way, to one right and well-grounded kingdom" (Cary, *Memorials*, p. 346). Bishop Warner's answer would have appealed to Charles, and was no doubt drawn up with that intention. Toleration now in 1647, when the kingly fortunes were low and when there was need for some sort of accommodation with the victors, but a toleration which was to be replaced later on by reducing the non-Anglicans "by a Christian and meek way" when the King came into his own again—such a recommendation may have appealed to the versatile mind of Charles, but it lacked any real basis, since it was a mere temporary political expedient.

The Presbyterian attitude was akin to that of the Anglican, with the difference that the Presbyterians imagined themselves now the predominant party in the State, and their point of view, therefore, was as rigid as that of Episcopalians in days gone by. "Presbytery doth but translate the Papacy to a free state," such were the biting words of Hudibras later, and they only reflect the better-known words of Milton, "Presbyter is but old Priest writ large." Presbyterians had Divine Right ideas of their own organization quite as strong as those of Laud or of Charles, and they were ready in turn to suppress any forms of "heresy," whether the heresy was Episcopalianism or Anabaptism.

It is only with the Independents that we get the admission of toleration as a recognized principle. The general ground was that every man had a right to toleration, provided his principles were not inimical to the State, and the application of the principle was extended by some writers even to Roman Catholics and to some obscure sects, as well as to Anglicans (*Humble Petition of the Brownists*, printed 1641). As a leader of the Independents, we naturally expect Oliver Cromwell to have the same advanced views, and such is undoubtedly the case. We never find Cromwell advocating a policy of religious uniformity, for the mere forms of Church government made no strong appeal to him. His opposition to Laud in the Long Parliament was the attitude of those who were loyal sons of the Church. "No Interference of Bishops in political matters" was the rallying cry of men like Falkand, just as much as men like Cromwell. "I can tell you, sirs," said Cromwell to two members

of the House of Commons, "what I would not have, though I cannot what I would." Such was his attitude in those early days, it was opposition to tyrannizing over men's consciences, an effort to force the Bishops back to the more primitive position of shepherds of their flock, rather than agents of political and religious oppression. For it was the personal side of religion which was paramount to Cromwell, not the religious organization, and this it was which made him boast later on that the Commonwealth Church was not a national Church, "for a national Church endeavoured to force all into one form" (Stoughton ii. 480). Outward national uniformity was the very negation of the Cromwellian ideal, and "varieties of religious experience" was the very essence of his position.

Our next step is to consider the extent to which Cromwell carried out the ideal of toleration to which he had given assent, and in support of which he had written so strongly during the Civil War—as his various letters show. For clearness sake we must remind ourselves that the abolition of the Prayer Book took place in 1645, and the suppression of the observance of Christmas, Easter and Whit-Sunday in 1647. This was the period of Presbyterian domination, and the result of the domination is well portrayed in Evelyn's Diary, where he declares the Church of England at this stage to be "reduced to a chamber and conventicle, so sharp was the persecution." It is true that a number of Anglican divines in 1647 and 1648 took a leaf out of the book of their opponents and became appointed to Lectureships under the ordinance of 1641, which allowed parishioners "to set up a lecture, and to maintain an orthodox minister at their own charge, to preach every Lord's day where there is no preaching, and to preach one day in every week where there is no weekly lecture." The heavy hand of Parliament caused the temporary suppression of most of the Lectureships, and although perhaps in some country parishes the Prayer Book may still have been found in use, yet the impression which one gets of the country as a whole is that the Acts of 1645 and 1647 were being generally employed, and that the Church of England was becoming "reduced to a chamber and conventicle."

With the rise of Cromwell to power, however, we can see a distinct betterment in the position of the proscribed Anglicans, for "in practice, he was more lenient than the laws," as Professor Firth truly says.

The first thing that surprises us is the open and free way in which so many of the Anglican clergy exercised their ministry in London. This tolerance cannot be attributed to the moral support given by Londoners, since they were Presbyterian in sympathy, and the more obvious explanation is that it was due to the connivance of Cromwell himself. The fact remains that in no obscure corners, but openly in prominent churches and attended by large numbers, the Anglican Liturgy was practised and Anglican teaching freely given. Dr. Pearson, for instance, was Lecturer at St. Clement's, Eastcheap, where he delivered the discourses which later were published as his textbook on the Creed. Farindon, who had been ejected from the church of St. Mary Magdalene, Milk Street, was restored there in 1654. Gunning, afterwards Bishop of Ely, conducted Anglican worship in the Chapel at Exeter House, Dr. Wild at St. Gregory's, " the Ruling Powers conniving at the use of the Litany," as Evelyn tells us, and men like Archbishop Usher, Hall, later Bishop of Chester, and others constantly conducted worship according to Anglican usage, as the testimony of many contemporaries shows. Nor was the preaching in any way modified so as to trim to the times. Dr. Nathaniel Hardy, for instance, commemorated " the royal martyrdom " by an annual sermon on Charles I, in St. Dionysius, Buckchurch, in Fenchurch Street, where he was allowed to minister. Fuller shows the same outspokenness. A sermon preached at Westminster in 1654 is mainly a plea for the Restoration of Charles II, and the following passage is typical: " All that we desire to see is the King remarried to the State: and we do doubt not, but as the Bridegroom on the one side will be carefull to have his portion paid, His Prerogative, so the Bride's friends entrusted for her, will be sure to see her joynter settled. . . . The Libertie of the subject." The preface to the same sermon declares: " God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray . . . for the blessed and happy agreement of the King and Parliament, and desire thee to joyn with me, whosoever shall read this weak work. . . ." Again, in a sermon on Hezekiah's recovery, preached at Chelsea 1655, Fuller refers to the hope of seeing the Restoration as a reason why a man should wish to live longer. These instances emphasize Neal's statement (History of Puritans, iv. 72), that several of the clergy in London " indulged the public exercise of their ministry without the fetters of oaths, subscriptions or engagements."

Now if this is true of Presbyterian London, it is conceivable that the same condition of things would be prevalent throughout the country generally. So we find outstanding men like Ball, afterwards Bishop of St. David's, acting openly as an Anglican parish clergyman at St. George's, Bristol; we see Hacket, the later Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry, acting in a similar capacity at Cheam, though the Surrey Committee later compelled him to omit certain parts of the Liturgy "as were most offensive to the government." Bishop Hall is noted as having preached at Heigham Church, Norwich, July 1, 1655. Wm. Parsons, Rector of Birchanger, though he had been imprisoned by the Presbyterians for several months for his loyalty to Charles I, returned to his living and used the Prayer Book. How far these and such like infractions of the law were deliberately connived at, it is not perhaps possible to say; though on the parallel of Cromwell's attitude later to such cases, it is arguable that such infractions had his passive acquiescence at least. There is no question, however, but that the Protector did show favour to certain outstanding Anglicans. Parr in his Life of Usher, and Peter Barwick in his Life of John Barwick, show themselves by no means friendly to Cromwell, but they have to admit, though grudgingly, the latitude allowed by him. The former writing of the year 1654 says, page 73: "That Oliver Cromwell to make the world believe that he did not persecute men for Religion, had for some time before this showed favour to some of the orthodox clergy; as particularly to Dr. Brownrigg, Bishop of Exeter, whom he had sent for and treated with great outward respect; and as for Dr. Bernard, who had been the Lord Primate's Chaplain in Ireland, and was after Dean of Kilmore, Cromwell having saved his life at the taking of Droghedah, had made him his Almoner here. . . ." The latter writer, page 218, refers to the Bishops of Oxford and Exeter, and says: "To these two, and to these only of all the Bishops, the liberty of preaching in publick was indulged by those who were then in Power, that they might seem forsooth to do some credit to their ill-gotten Government by Acts that were not ill. . . ." This concession to Bishop Skinner of Oxford is all the more remarkable, seeing that he, more than any other Bishop, was trying to keep alive the Episcopal organization by regularly conferring orders at Launton, a living which he held throughout the Commonwealth.

The way, therefore, was opening naturally towards the procla-

mation on religious liberty which was issued February 15, 1654–5, which promised toleration "to all persons in this Commonwealth fearing God, though of differing judgments, by protecting them in the sober and quiet exercise and profession of religion and the sincere worship of God." The high hopes of toleration were blighted by the Royalist insurrection under Colonel Penruddock, in March of the same year, and the reaction which followed is marked by three persecuting orders against the Anglican Clergy. On August 24 the Major-Generals are directed to inquire into the execution of the law for the ejection of "scandalous" or Anglican ministers, and on September 21 it was ordered that none of the Royalists "are to keep in their houses chaplains, schoolmasters, ejected ministers, or fellows of colleges, nor have their children taught by such," and also that "none who have been, or shall be, ejected from any benefice, college, or school, for delinquency or scandal, are after November 1, 1655, to keep any school, preach, or administer the Sacraments, marry persons or use the Book of Common Prayer," on pain of imprisonment or banishment "unless their hearts are changed, and they obtain the approval of the Commissioners for Public Preachers."

Readers of Evelyn's Diary will remember the anguish of the Diarist at these Proclamations, and his reference to Cromwell as the imitator of the Apostate Julian, but the facts show us again that Cromwell was more "lenient than the laws." Gardiner says that Cromwell promised the moderate Episcopalians in 1656 that they would not be molested so long as they caused no disturbances, though Parr in his "Life of Usher," page 75, declares that when the Archbishop went the second time to get the promise put in writing, Cromwell said, "That he had since better considered it, having advised with his Council about it, and that they thought it not safe for him to grant liberty of Conscience to those sort of men, who are restless, and implacable enemies to him and his government." In spite of this disclaimer by Parr, contemporary evidence shows that the practice of toleration previously pursued by Cromwell remained very much the same. Private chaplains are still found exercising their office. Archbishop Usher, who died March, 1655–6, had the ministrations of the chaplain of the Countess of Peterborough. Barwick acts in the same capacity to the Bishop of Durham, and Dr. Allestree is allowed to act as Chaplain to Sir

Anthony Cope, by an order of July 1, 1656 (*Cal. of S.P. Dom.* 1656–7). In fact, Gardiner goes so far as to say that there is no evidence that any ejections took place in consequence of this order, and that even Walker in his "Sufferings of the Clergy" "did not succeed in producing a single instance of a chaplain or a schoolmaster reduced to poverty by this action of the Protector." Without necessarily endorsing this assertion *in toto*, we can at all events see from the *Calendar of State Papers Domestic*, that the Council frequently exercised the right of dispensation against the severe orders of 1655, the usual formula being, "Order therein in Council, that the Major-Generals and Commissioners permit him to preach (or to exercise his ministry) the late proclamation and instructions to the Majors-General notwithstanding." (Instances can be found on pp. 67, 104, 127, 154 of the *Cal. S.P. Dom.* 1656–7.)

Moreover, that the latitude allowed by Cromwell still continued after 1655 is evidenced in various ways. In the "Letters and Papers of State addressed to Oliver Cromwell" we find that many of them are complaints about "the body of a corrupt, ungifted and scandalous ministry yet left standing, blinding and hardning the people against the worke of reformation," and one quotation from a letter signed by fifty-six people is illuminating, especially if the probable year of publication is kept in mind, i.e. 1655 or 1656. "The Common Prayer-Book is much in use still, the superstitious observation of Saints' dayes kept alive: the blood of Christ profusely spilt in the Lord's Supper: and those Ministers that are zealous of reformation, despized and disregarded," and so they pray for the "displacing and ejecting such Magistrates and Ministers, as are destructive to, or nothing helpfull in the work of reformation. . . ."

In London itself matters continued very much as before. We find Archbishop Usher being buried in Westminster Abbey with the full rites of the Church of England by Dr. Bernard, then Preacher of Gray's Inn, on April 17, 1655–6. We see the publication by Anth. Sparrow, late Bishop of Norwich, in 1657, of a book of general exposition of the various offices in the Prayer Book, such as any average Churchman would like to read; we read the ordinary Anglican teaching of the sermons preached by Dr. Hewitt in St. Gregory's, London, and published in 1658, and in the same year we hear of the two public disputations by Peter Gunning with Henry Denn on the subject of Infant Baptism before crowded congregations

in the Church of St. Clement Danes. And it is in these same years that people like the daughters of Dr. Cosin appeal to Cromwell for their "fifths" unpaid, and they get their wrongs righted, or ecclesiastical bodies like the surviving members of the Chapter of Norwich appeal to him for "moneys and goods due . . . which we cannot recover by law . . ." and their appeal is endorsed by Protector and Council (*Cal. S.P. Dom.* 1656–7, p. 260). The same spirit which prompted Cromwell to interfere in 1655 when the Berkshire Committee was trying to eject Pocock the Orientalist from his living of Childrey, a living in which, thanks to Cromwell, he remained undisturbed afterwards, that same spirit still prompted Anglicans to appeal direct to him when they felt the need.

Hence there is every reason to accept the statement of Bishop Kennet "that the Protector was for liberty and the utmost latitude to all parties, so far as consisted with the peace and safety of his person and government, and therefore he was never jealous of any cause or sect in the account of heresy and falsehood, but on his wiser account of political peace and quiet; and even the prejudice he had against the episcopal party was more for their being royalists than for being of the good old church" (*Life of Bishop Hall*, by Rev. Jno. Jones, p. 371).

A word or two must be said before concluding, with reference to Cromwell's attitude to religious bodies other than those of the Church of England. Here again he was more lenient than the laws. This would not appear so at first sight, so far as the Roman Catholics are concerned. His words to the Governors of Ross in October, 1649, are very forcible: "I meddle not with any man's conscience, but if by liberty of conscience, you mean a liberty to exercise the Mass, I judge it best to use plain dealing, and to let you know, where the Parliament of England have power, that will not be allowed of." Yet it is in this same year, 1649, that we get the toleration of Roman Catholic in Maryland, toleration which was withdrawn in 1654, but granted again in 1658, and he could truthfully write to Cardinal Mazarin that under his rule there was "less reason for complaint as to rigour upon men's consciences than under the Parliament."

The Quakers who had been specially exempted from the Religious Toleration Edict of 1654 had good reason to be thankful for the protection of Cromwell. In January, 1656, we are told of large

meeting houses in London holding 1,000 people being regularly filled, and of men such as Howgill and Burrough preaching constantly for three years in London. Naylor seemed to have attracted many people from the Court, and Cromwell's efforts to save Naylor from the persecution of the Parliament are well known. The same far-sighted toleration is witnessed in the admission of the Jews, in spite of the arguments of the theologians on one side, and the calculated fears of the merchants on the other.

But enough has been said to prove the truth of Professor Firth's contention, and the Protector's attitude after all was only consistent with his oft-repeated plea for toleration. To him liberty of conscience was "a fundamental," "a natural right," and "he that would have it, ought to give it." And although through political exigencies there was an inevitable tendency to make Anglicanism and support of the exiled Charles correlative terms, Cromwell's plea that he punished for treason against the State, and not for mere religious opinion, had more of truth in it than could be assigned to the similar plea made on behalf of Tudor or Stuart. Amid the tumult of many conflicting ideas, which the Civil War had made vociferous, he kept his own fundamental idea of toleration reasonably clear, and with a wise "dispensing power," which the Stuarts emulated later to their own destruction, he did something to stay the rigour of intolerant laws.

THE BIBLICAL HISTORY OF THE HEBREWS. By F. J. Foakes-Jackson, D.D. Cambridge: *Heffer & Son.* 10s. net.

This is a fourth edition of Dr. Foakes-Jackson's well-known Old Testament history. It has been enlarged by the addition of notes on the Apocrypha and by two new chapters dealing with the period between the Testaments, while the copious notes on the chapters have been revised and maps added. The author's position is so well known that it seems almost unnecessary to say that in these pages the conclusions of the more reasonable school of Biblical critics will be found temperately and concisely stated. He admits that "narratives once universally accepted as *literally* true are related with less confidence than was customary at one time," but he holds that "this does not detract from their spiritual value," and that it is not what Israel was, but what it became, that really matters. A great deal of information, which would have to be sought for in many volumes, is here gathered together in one.