

RALEIGH LECTURE ON HISTORY

Thomas Carlyle and Oliver Cromwell

BLAIR WORDEN

Fellow of the Academy

I

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, almost to the week, the statue of Oliver Cromwell that stands outside the Palace of Westminster was unveiled.¹ The event, the first national tribute to Cromwell since his own time, concluded the tercentenary commemoration of his birth. It was also the climax of a cult of Cromwell which had swelled over Queen Victoria's reign and had secured his widespread recognition as the greatest figure in English history.² To the commemorators his modern standing had one

Read at the Academy 27 October 1999.

¹ I use the following abbreviations: *CL*: Charles R. Sanders and Kenneth J. Fielding, eds., *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle* (Durham, North Carolina, 1970–); *CW*: *The Works of Thomas Carlyle* (30 vols., 1896–9); *HS*: Thomas Carlyle, *Historical Sketches of Notable Persons and Events in the Reigns of James I and Charles I*, ed. Alexander Carlyle (1898); *LS*: Thomas Carlyle, *The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, ed. S. C. Lomas (3 vols., 1904).

I mark with an asterisk (*) material which I have taken from typescripts or photocopies of material in the 'Nineteenth-Century Cromwell' archive which was compiled in the 1960s under the leadership of Tim Mason, described by him in 'Nineteenth-Century Cromwell', *Past and Present*, 40 (1969), 187–91, which is now Bodleian Library MS. Eng. c. 6759. My indebtedness to the project goes well beyond those instances. The late Colin Matthew generously lent me his copy of his material from the archive.

² I have discussed that movement in my essay 'The Victorians and Oliver Cromwell', in Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore and Brian Young, eds., *History, Religion and Culture. Essays in British Intellectual History, 1750–1950* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 112–35, and more briefly in my essay 'The English Reputations of Oliver Cromwell 1660–1900', in William Lamont, ed., *Historical Controversies and Historians* (1998), pp. 35–48. I am writing elsewhere about the erection of the statue.

Proceedings of the British Academy, 105, 131–170. © The British Academy 2000.

principal cause: the publication in 1845 of Thomas Carlyle's book *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*. The work, Victorians recalled, had 'burst on the world as a kind of historic revelation.'³ 'At a single stroke' it had 'completely reversed' the verdict of history,⁴ which since the exhumation of Cromwell's body in 1660 had unanimously declared him a ruthless hypocrite and Machiavel. Carlyle, it was agreed, had shown the key to Cromwell's conduct to lie in the sincerity and intensity of those Puritan convictions which earlier writers had derided.⁵ If, by the end of the century, Carlyle's worship of Cromwell seemed overdone, then the emergence of a 'calmer' admiration for the Lord Protector was itself judged a measure of Carlyle's achievement, for 'we Oliverians', 'no longer battling for revision of an unjust sentence', no longer needed the argumentative extravagances that had been Carlyle's weapons of victory.⁶

The Victorian assessment of the effect of his book, which echoed his own indications of its revolutionary significance, involved, as we shall find, some simplification and exaggeration. Yet even when we have qualified it we are confronted by an extraordinary historiographical coup: one

³ *The Daily Telegraph*, 7 February 1881, p. 5.

⁴ Frederic Harrison, *Carlyle's Place in Literature* (1894: reprinted from *The Forum*), p. 540. For other Victorian testimony to the impact of the work see *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, V (1846), 233; Edmund Clarke, *Lectures on . . . Oliver Cromwell* (1847), p. vi; Daniel Wilson, *Oliver Cromwell and the Protectorate* (1848), p. vii; **The People*, no. 56 (Wortley, Leeds, 1849–50), p. 28 (for the influence of the *Letters and Speeches* on Joseph Barker); David Hodge, *Thomas Carlyle* (Edinburgh, n.d.), p. 18; Peter Bayne, *The Chief Actors of the Puritan Revolution* (1878), p. 393; J. A. Froude, *Thomas Carlyle. A History of his Life in London* (2 vols., 1884), I, pp. 356–7; W. K. Leask, *Readings from Carlyle* (1894), p. 19; David A. Wilson, *Carlyle on Cromwell and Others* (1925), p. 305; Peter Allen Dale, *The Victorian Critic and the Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), pp. 99–101; Roger Howell jr., 'The Nineteenth Century', in R. C. Richardson, ed., *Images of Oliver Cromwell* (Manchester, 1993), p. 98; Owen Dudley Edwards, 'Conan Doyle on Carlyle', *Carlyle Newsletter*, V (1984), 32; D. J. Trela, *A History of Carlyle's 'Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches'* (Lewiston, NY, 1992), p. 169; Timothy Lang, *The Victorians and the Stuart Heritage* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 198.

⁵ *Westminster Review*, XLVI (1847), 445; Clarke, *Lectures*, p. 203; Wilson, *Oliver Cromwell*, p. 284; John Forster, *Historical and Biographical Essays* (2 vols., 1858), I, pp. 311–12; John Tulloch, *English Puritanism and its Leaders* (Edinburgh and London, 1861), pp. 155–7; E. Paxton Hood, *Oliver Cromwell* (1882), pp. 10–11; T. H. Green, *Four Lectures on the English Revolution* (1912), p. 71.

⁶ Frederic Harrison, *Memories and Thoughts* (1906), pp. 58–61 (cf. p. 70). For the 'calmer' mood see too F. W. Cornish, *Life of Oliver Cromwell* (1882), p. 19; Anon., *Historical Celebrities* (1887), p. 7; Samuel H. Church, *Oliver Cromwell* (1895), preface; S.R. Gardiner, *Cromwell's Place in History* (1897), p. 115; William Arthur, *Heroes* (1902 edn.), pp. 40–1; C. H. Firth's Introduction to *LS*; Green, *Four Lectures*, p. 2; Jules P. Siegel, *Thomas Carlyle. The Critical Heritage* (1971), p. 470; **The Todmorden Advertiser and Hebden Bridge Gazette*, 22 February 1889; cf. J. B. Marsden, *The History of the Later Puritans* (1852), p. 403; but cf. Bayne, *Chief Actors*, p. 389.

little explored, historians having largely ceded the study of Carlyle to literary scholars and critics, among whose priorities neither the historical content of the *Letters and Speeches* nor its impact has normally ranked high.⁷ The book, a best-seller read by high and low, stands beside the histories of Macaulay and J. R. Green among the Victorian works which stamped the modern image of the English past. Carlyle, as he watched the book 'silently making its way into the heart of the country', judged it 'probably the usefulest work I shall ever get to do'.⁸ He believed he had rescued Cromwell just in time, before Cromwell's beliefs and language, traduced for two centuries, had finally become unintelligible.⁹ A century and a half later the idiosyncrasies of Carlyle's own prose and editorial procedures, and the extremity of his political incorrectitudes, can make his book almost as remote and baffling as Cromwell was before Carlyle. Carlyle saw that he could make Cromwell's life intelligible by recovering the thread of purpose running through it. Carlyle's study of him can be recovered on the same principle.

It is worth the effort, for the *Letters and Speeches*, despite, but also because of, its peculiarities of both manner and matter, is the one great book to have been written about Cromwell, even if it is easier to think of it as a great book than as a good one. In it a volcanic, untameable writer finds a volcanic, untameable subject, to which his gifts and convictions are eccentrically but uniquely suited.

Even by Carlyle's standards of creative agony the composition of the work was a hideous ordeal. The chronological complexity of the civil-war period, and its 'shoreless lakes' of unsorted documents,¹⁰ induced tortured despair.¹¹ Only after a long and wretched struggle did he find a focus and a form. Was the book to be primarily about Cromwell himself, or about the Puritan movement he had come to lead? Or should it rather be a general history of the earlier and mid-seventeenth century, in

⁷ Much the most substantial study is Trela, *History*. Trela's detailed account of the composition of the *Letters and Speeches* draws on surviving drafts of the work, as does K. J. Fielding, 'Carlyle and Cromwell', in Jerry D. James and Rita B. Bottoms, eds., *Lectures on Carlyle and his Era* (Santa Cruz, Calif., 1985), pp. 45–64. C. H. Firth's shrewd description of the writing of the book, in his Introduction to *LS*, remains valuable.

⁸ *CL*, XX, pp. 143, 162; Trela, *History*, p. 182.

⁹ *CL*, XIV, p. 102, XV, pp. 88, 97, 118.

¹⁰ *LS*, II, p. 233.

¹¹ His correspondence insistently describes the miseries of composition. See too Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, I, p. 339; Thomas Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, ed. K. J. Fielding and Ian Campbell (Oxford, 1997), pp. 147–8.

England and perhaps Scotland too? Eventually he settled on a biography—only to suspend and then abandon that ambition in favour of an edition of the letters and speeches, where Cromwell's words would be elucidated by Carlyle's commentary. Cromwell's words being many, Carlyle saw that the book would be long, perhaps unpublishably so. So he strove to keep his explanatory material to a minimum.¹² Yet when the editing was complete, and even as the book was at the printer's, Carlyle (at whose very name compositors would groan) greatly expanded his commentary, introducing—or reintroducing from his mountain of abandoned drafts—passages that can seem arbitrarily selected or positioned. More than half the words of the book are Carlyle's rather than Cromwell's.¹³ The work is, he recognised, 'a kind of life of Oliver'.¹⁴

It was published shortly before Carlyle's fiftieth birthday, at the peak of his fame and influence, if a little beyond the peak of his powers. His books of the previous seven years—*Sartor Resartus*, *The French Revolution*, *Chartism*, *Of Heroes and Hero-Worship* (the work of 1841 which contained his first sketch of Cromwell), and *Past and Present*—had made him the most powerful didactic voice of his time. The public disillusion with Whig parliamentary reform in the 1830s, the hard times and revolutionary prospects of the 1840s, and the awakening of moral and religious earnestness over those decades, gave an urgent authority to a scourge and prophet who cried doom and preached regeneration. His insistence that, at that 'serious, grave' epoch, 'the time for levity, insincerity, and idle babble and playacting is gone by' spoke especially to the idealistic young, who found in Carlyle's publications of the late 1830s and early 1840s a 'creed' and a 'religion'.¹⁵ Like his previous books, the *Letters and Speeches* is a tract for the times. Like them it assails the values—liberal, utilitarian, rationalist, materialist—of early Victorian England: of a society turned from God to Mammon, from eternal verities of good and evil to the 'babblements' of rights and liberty and parliamentary enfranchisement.

More ambitiously than his earlier works, the *Letters and Speeches*

¹² In the *Letters and Speeches* Carlyle repeatedly alludes to the pressures of space; see too *CL*, XIX, p. 66 n.

¹³ Trela, *History*, p. 99.

¹⁴ *CL*, XIX, p. 177.

¹⁵ *CW*, X, p. 209 (cf. *LS*, I, p. 8; *CL*, XX, p. 143); Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, I, pp. 291–6 (cf. p. 179); James Martineau, *Essays, Reviews, and Addresses* (4 vols., 1890–1) I, p. 271; Peter Karsten, *Patriot-Heroes in England and America* (Madison, Wisc., 1978), p. 146; Peter Bayne, *Lessons from My Masters* (1879), p. 9.

looks to history for present remedy. Not, of course, to history as written by Carlyle's contemporaries, those 'cause-and-effect speculators' who supposed that the spiritual attainments of the past could be 'accounted for' by materialist explanation or be subordinated to the ephemera of power-struggles and constitutional conflicts.¹⁶ For Carlyle, history was a nation's bible, a record of God's government of its affairs; or else a Homeric epic, a witness to the divine capacity of heroes.¹⁷ The historian was a 'sacred poet',¹⁸ charged with identifying and singing the divine essence of the past.

Yet there was a humbler role for him too. One of the few historical works Carlyle ever praised was an edition, published in 1840 by the recently-formed Camden Society, of the chronicle of the twelfth-century monk Jocelin of Brakelond. From it he learned that competent editing can facilitate, even if in itself it does not constitute, insight into the historically divine. In *Past and Present*, published in 1843, the book of Carlyle with which the *Letters and Speeches* was most intimately connected, Jocelin's narrative supplied the material for Carlyle's portrait of the divine hero Abbot Samson. Now, in the *Letters and Speeches*, his portrait of the divine hero Cromwell rested on his own, sometimes doggedly antiquarian labours.

Jocelin's chronicle showed Carlyle something else. The miraculous intimacies of recognition reachable through the 'chance crevices' of the archives¹⁹ could, he believed, prove to his own time, to an era imprisoned by present-mindedness, that the past never dies: that though its outward forms vanish irretrievably, its soul is eternal. To him the progressive philosophy of his time, transfixed by the impermanent, was sundering the present from the past.²⁰ The result was a creeping determinism, a proneness to see man as the product rather than the creator of his circumstances, a refusal to imagine the meeting of moral and spiritual challenges which earlier ages had been ready to confront.²¹ The more distant from the present, whether in time or spirit, the documents recovered by an

¹⁶ *CW*, II, p. 75, V, pp. 131–2, 155, 199, 208, XXVI, p. 400, XXVII, pp. 72, 86–7, 90–1, 394, XXX, pp. 28, 405; *HS*, pp. 303–4.

¹⁷ *CW*, X, p. 240, XX, pp. 322–6, XXVIII, pp. 78–9, XXX, pp. 26–7, 280; *CL*, VII, p. 52; *LS*, I, pp. 6–7.

¹⁸ *LS*, I, p. 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 543 (cf. pp. 378, 406, 520).

²⁰ *CL*, XVII, p. 199; Trela, *History*, p. 152 (from Victoria and Albert Museum, Forster MS. 48 E. 36, fo. 100^v). Cf. *CL*, I, p. 156; *CW*, XX, p. 24.

²¹ *CW*, V, p. 291, X, p. 199, XXVI, p. 353, XXVII, p. 79; *LS*, II, p. 253 (cf. I, p. 398).

editor, the more radical their instructive scope. So the *Letters and Speeches* introduces the reader, across two centuries of unbelief, ‘across the death-chasms, and howling figures of decay’,²² to intimate documents of Puritan rule, of the nation’s ‘last glimpse of the godlike’.²³ For if England were ‘ever to struggle Godward again, instead of struggling Devilward’,²⁴ it was to ‘new Cromwells’ and ‘new Puritans’ that it must look.²⁵

Some Victorians chuckled at Carlyle’s championship of seventeenth-century godliness: at the spectacle of ‘sour, fanatical, strait-laced Puritanism’ being ‘fondled and poetised by one to whom Christianity is but the mythic expression of religion’.²⁶ But if Carlyle had rejected the theology of his Calvinist upbringing, then morally and emotionally—even, with part of his mind, intellectually—he remained unconquerably pledged to the Decalogue, to the Prophets and Psalms, to the terrors of hell,²⁷ perhaps most of all to the operation of divine providence. Cromwell’s own statement that ‘all our histories’ are enactments of God’s providence, noticed Carlyle’s disciple David Masson, ‘expresses exactly one part of Carlyle’s religion’.²⁸

Carlyle resolved to take his readers inside Cromwell’s soul and inspire them to emulate it. For whereas Carlyle’s contemporaries sought political and economic solutions to England’s sickness, for him—as for the Puritans themselves—reformation begins with ‘the inner man’, of whose evils the afflictions of society are merely an extension.²⁹ The challenge of persuasion facing Carlyle seemed to him massive, not least because he judged the scriptural linguistic habits of the Puritans to have been turned, by the subsequent degeneration of Protestantism, into cant.³⁰ If the printing of

²² *LS*, II, p. 271.

²³ *Ibid.*, I, p. 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, II, p. 234.

²⁵ *CL.*, XV, p. 57; cf. XIV, pp. 184, 210, XXI, p. 226, and *CW*, X, pp. 19–20.

²⁶ R. W. Church, *Occasional Papers* (2 vols., 1897), I, p. 4. Cf. *Westminster Review*, XLVI, 471–2; Arthur, *Heroes*, p. 44; Hilaire Belloc, *Oliver Cromwell* (1927), p. 78.

²⁷ Carlyle is nowhere more slippery, or more eager to have things more than one way, than over the question whether the afterlife will bring punishments and rewards: *LS*, I, pp. 45, 460, II, p. 316; *HS*, p. 318; *CW*, IV, p. 26, V, p. 97, X, pp. 144–5, XXX, p. 357; *CL*, XXIII, p. 123; D.W. Trela, ‘A New (Old) Review of Mill’s *Liberty*’, *Carlyle Newsletter*, VI (1985), 425.

²⁸ David Masson, *Carlyle Personally and in his Writings* (1885), pp. 89–92.

²⁹ *CW*, IV, p. 304, X, pp. 217–18, XX, p. 298, XXVIII, p. 160; Thomas Carlyle, *Selected Writings*, ed. Alan Shelston (Harmondsworth, 1986 edn.), pp. 168–70 (all references to that publication being to Carlyle’s *Chartism*). Fred Kaplan, *Thomas Carlyle. A Biography* (1983), p. 326.

³⁰ *LS*, I, pp. 4, 7–8, 461; *CW*, V, pp. 136–7; Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, I, p. 357.

Cromwell's words were to overcome rather than confirm the prevailing impression of his character, the reader would need close guidance. Carlyle supplied it in those excitable textual interpolations which now seem the most bizarre feature of the book, and at which even its Victorian admirers sometimes baulked.³¹

An ominous figure stood in Carlyle's path. This was the imaginary representative of the historian's trade whom he names Dryasdust, and on whom, from first to last, he heaps abuse. Casual readers suppose Dryasdust to be a mere antiquarian. Yet it is his historical philosophy that is dry as dust. He is a Whig in politics and a sceptic in religion.³² Though Carlyle strenuously complained, as Whigs themselves did, of the baneful legacy of royalist and Tory accounts of the civil wars, of the damage wrought by Heath and Clarendon and Hume, that tradition was only one half, and by Carlyle's time the subordinate half, of anti-Cromwellian historiography.³³ The Whig tradition of civil-war history—today more often scorned than traced—derives from the late seventeenth century, and particularly from a group of publicists centred on the deist John Toland. Toland's circle created the canon of historical literature that would shape eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century perceptions of the civil wars.³⁴ To those men and their successors the mid-seventeenth-century conflict was essentially a struggle for civil liberty. As far as possible they bypassed the religious dimension of the conflict. We have become so used to hearing the conflict called a 'Puritan Revolution'—a concept that originates with Carlyle³⁵—that we may miss the radicalism

³¹ For Victorian judgements on them see *LS*, II, p. 272; *Christian Remembrancer*, II (1846), 125, 127; *Gentleman's Magazine*, NS XXVI (1846), 475; Church, *Occasional Papers*, I, p. 40; Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, I, p. 357; Wilson, *Carlyle on Cromwell*, p. 305; Siegel, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 470.

³² *LS*, esp. I, pp. 70, 72 (cf. II, p. 468); *HS*, p. 312; *CW*, X, pp. 50, 213, 303. For the association of Whiggery with unbelief see *CL*, VII, p. 23; *CW*, XXVIII, p. 108; Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, p. 362. Carlyle somehow contrived, in characterising Dryasdust, to conflate the evils of inept antiquarian pedantry with those not merely of the Whigs but of the philosophy of the Enlightenment, of which he deemed Whiggery a branch. The editorial deficiencies of earlier publications of seventeenth-century documents are linked to the empty 'spiritual notions' of the society that produced them: *LS*, I, pp. 3–4. (Not all antiquarians were impressed by Carlyle's own editorial labours: *Notes and Queries*, 25 October 1851, 330; cf. 9 October 1852, 340.)

³³ *LS*, I, p. 406 intimates its decline.

³⁴ I have traced their historiographical activities in my essay 'Edmund Ludlow: the Puritan and the Whig', *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 Jan. 1977, and more fully in my edition of Edmund Ludlow, *A Voyage from the Watch Tower*, Camden Society, 4th ser., XXI (1978).

³⁵ He used the term 'the Puritan Revolt' (*LS*, I, 10). Eight years later J. A. Langford could refer (in his *English Democracy* (1853), p. 29) to 'the great Puritanic Revolution'; in 1878 Peter Bayne published *The Chief Actors of the Puritan Revolution*, a label that would soon be adopted by S. R. Gardiner.

of his decision to place Puritanism centre-stage. We may miss, too, the radicalism of his insistence, in an era when the constitutional and legal issues of the civil wars were attracting high public interest,³⁶ that those matters had been peripheral—or, even when they had not, ought to have been—to the religious ones.³⁷ In the eighteenth century, Whigs and biographers of Cromwell had been embarrassed by the ‘enthusiasm’ of the Roundhead cause.³⁸ Carlyle made its ‘enthusiasm’ a merit.³⁹

He was not a solitary agent. Early in the nineteenth century, civil-war Puritanism had begun to command fresh respect and attention. Yet its rise in esteem was slow and partial. In the 1820s the young Macaulay and the ageing William Godwin, the one representing the moderate strand of Whig historiography, the other its republican one, recognised that Puritanism had helped to thwart the Stuart tyranny. But it was only as an ally of civil liberty that they endorsed it, not for its religious content, which they could not palate.⁴⁰ Around the same time a series of Nonconformist historians ventured to praise Puritanism not merely in its pre-civil-war and post-Restoration guises, which earlier chroniclers of Dissent had commemorated, but in its civil-war form.⁴¹ Even so they were careful to

³⁶ Worden, ‘Victorians and Oliver Cromwell’, pp. 116–17.

³⁷ *CW*, V, pp. 209–11; *LS*, I, pp. 72–3. One of Carlyle’s rare moments of discomfort in the face of sentiments of Cromwell is induced by Cromwell’s statement that in the civil wars ‘religion was not the thing at first contested for’: *LS*, II, p. 417 n.

³⁸ Isaac Kimber, *The Life of Oliver Cromwell Lord Protector* (1724), pp. 108, 161; *Gentleman’s Magazine*, IV (1733), 434; William Harris, *An Historical and Critical Account of the Life of Oliver Cromwell* (1762), p. 13; John Banks, *A Short Critical Review of the Life of Oliver Cromwell* (1763 edn.), pp. 139, 238; William Jones, *The Reformation of the Christian Church* (2 vols., 1818), I, p. viii; Thomas Cromwell, *Oliver Cromwell* (1821), p. 86; Lang, *Victorians and the Stuart Heritage*, pp. 95–6. Cf. T. B. Macaulay, *The History of England* (4 vols., Everyman edn., repr. 1972), I, p. 98.

³⁹ *LS*, I, p. 70 (cf. II, pp. 332, 463; *CW*, X, pp. 239, 303, XXVIII, p. 68—though also Charles E. Norton, *Two Note Books of Thomas Carlyle* (New York, 1898), p. 17 and Trela, *History*, p. 2); *Christian Remembrancer*, II, pp. 147, 150; *The Nonconformist*, 1862, 142 (cf. *The Congregationalist*, II (1873), 112); John Morley, *Critical Miscellanies* (3 vols., 1886), I, p. 244 (cf. Green, *Four Lectures*, p. vi). See too Thomas Price, *The History of Protestant Nonconformity in England* (2 vols., 1836–8), II, p. 630; and the account of Cromwell in **Penny Magazine*, 1839.

⁴⁰ William Godwin, *History of the Commonwealth* (4 vols., 1824–8), II, p. 294, III, pp. 443–4, IV, p. 583; Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays* (2 vols., Everyman edn., 1907), I, pp. 185–8; Macaulay, *History of England* (4 vols., Everyman edn., repr. 1972), I, pp. 60–2. Cf. Clarke, *Lectures*, p. 106; William Thomas, *The Philosophic Radicals* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 248–9. Godwin refers, in a spirit of theological detachment, to the Puritans’ attitude to ‘the author of the universe’ (*History*, III, p. 443), Macaulay, in a similar spirit, to their view of ‘the deity’ (*Critical and Historical Essays*, I, p. 186): language which (in its contexts) places both men closer to Gibbon than to Carlyle.

⁴¹ Worden, ‘Victorians’, p. 122. See too Benjamin Brook, *The Lives of the Puritans* (3 vols., 1813); William Orme, *Remarkable Passages in the Life of William Kiffin* (1823), p. 6; John

dissociate it from the violent and revolutionary measures which, they intimated, had perverted the sober Roundhead cause. If there was a single stimulus to the rise of sympathy for civil-war Puritanism it was the publication in 1806 of the *Memoirs* of Lucy Hutchinson. The editor assured his readers that if only Lucy's husband, the regicide colonel at the centre of her narrative, had lived in modern times, when the struggle against civil and ecclesiastical tyranny had been largely won, he would have been unquestioningly loyal to church and state.⁴²

Carlyle's account of the Puritan movement was quite different. In his hands its connection with revolutionary violence—a force which, though it dismayed him when it did not have a godly mission, gladdened him when it did—became not the curse of Puritanism but its virtue. The biblical fervour of the Puritans, their taste for Old Testament parallels (especially those reporting the scattering of God's enemies), their pre-occupation with Antichrist,⁴³ features of the movement which Whig and republican historians had always suppressed or disowned, delighted him. He warmed not to the assistance lent by Puritanism to civil liberty but to its seizure of power and its imposition of godly rule. The Puritans, he rejoiced to observe, intended 'that England should all become a church';⁴⁴ that 'God's own law', 'the hard-stone tables, the God-given precepts and eternal penalties', might be brought 'into actual practice in men's affairs on the earth'.⁴⁵ Under Cromwell, Puritanism had stood 'erect, with its foot on the hydra Babylon, with its open bible and drawn sword',⁴⁶ chaining and punishing those evils which the *laissez-faire* philosophy of Carlyle's time was wantonly indulging.⁴⁷ Now as then, England needed rulers who would enforce the distinction between right and wrong: who

Morley, *Oliver Cromwell* (1901), pp. 1–2. In the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth it was very unusual to apply the term 'Puritan' to the politics of the period 1640–60. Roundheads were rarely described as Puritans except in relation to their careers before 1640. By 1831, however, Macaulay could refer to 'the Puritan leaders' of the Long Parliament (*Critical and Historical Essays*, I, p. 135). (The young Carlyle surprisingly called James Harrington, the republican of the Interregnum, a 'Puritan': *CL*, I, 262–3.)

⁴² Julius Hutchinson, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson by his Widow Lucy* (1806), pp. iv–ix.

⁴³ *LS*, II, pp. 344 n., 519, 525; cf. I, p. 51, II, p. 548.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I, p. 72.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 40, 72, II, p. 61. Cf. *ibid.*, II, pp. 247, 253, 306; *CW*, V, pp. 151–2, 227.

⁴⁶ *LS*, III, p. 199; cf. *CW*, XXX, p. 359.

⁴⁷ *LS*, I, pp. 72–3, II, p. 551.

would give the people, as Cromwell himself had put it, not what they want but what's good for them.

To Carlyle that was the function of heroes, whose divinity gives them a 'divine right'⁴⁸ to exact obedience. Seeing into the eternal, heroes perceive, what lower mortals cannot glimpse and what no number of ballot-boxes will ever voice, the true will of a nation, its will towards good.⁴⁹ Between 1839 and 1845, the years when his study of Cromwell was conceived and written, Carlyle's theory of hero-worship, which always had its authoritarian streak, was taken over by it.

Developments in Carlyle's mind are never easy to trace or pin down. Rarely does he express a view which has not been foreshadowed in his earlier writings. Sometimes he will revert to earlier positions which his subsequent works have seemed to renounce. We can nonetheless identify long-term movements in his thinking which produced changes of perception and of emphasis. In Carlyle's early reflections on heroism, heroes are the true—because the best—representatives of the societies that have produced them. By 1845 their bond with society has been broken. They have become not representatives but enforcers.⁵⁰ Carlyle's two studies of heroes in 1843 (rival exercises, it must be said, in credulity), the one of Abbot Samson, who had sorted out the community of Brakelond, the other of the ruthless dictator Dr Francia, who had brought order and justice to modern Paraguay, reflect that development on a small scale. The *Letters and Speeches* reflects it on a large one. Carlyle's work moved him towards the extreme positions of the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, the publication of 1850 that would finally burn his bridges with liberal England.⁵¹

Carlyle's illiberalism is not a consistent force. Not much in Carlyle is altogether consistent, though the contradictions of his writing do not trouble him. For most of the time they are concealed, thanks to two features of his argumentative method. First, his writing generally keeps the opposing parts of his mind apart, so that they rarely confront each other. Secondly, they receive unequal treatment. One side of his thinking, usually the more extreme one, tends to be forcibly and insistently dis-

⁴⁸ *CW*, V, p. 199.

⁴⁹ See e.g. *LS*, II, p. 231. Cf. *ibid.*, II, pp. 271, 336–7, 432; *CW*, V, p. 297, X, p. 215, XXVI, p. 422, XXX, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Cf. the observant remarks of Anthony Le Quesne, *Thomas Carlyle* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 82–4.

⁵¹ Twentieth-century experiences of hero-worship have made Carlyle's teaching hard to stomach, but also easy to misunderstand. It had nothing to do, for example, with the adoration of crowds: see *CW*, V, p. 223; *LS*, II, p. 57.

played: the other, usually the more moderate one, is normally, but not invariably, hidden. Nowhere does that habit produce more perplexing results than in his approach to Whig or liberal interpretations of history. Inside Carlyle, the belligerent anti-Whig, there is a thin Whig trying to get out. Indeed in his youth—as he would not care to remember—he subscribed ardently to the historiographical enthusiasms bequeathed by eighteenth-century Whigs.⁵² That ardour soon faded. Yet through his maturer years he would intermittently voice sentiments about the contribution of the constitutional conflicts of early-modern England to modern liberty which might have been uttered by Macaulay (whom Carlyle despised, as Macaulay despised him).⁵³

Carlyle often allocates his most illiberal views to one of his imagined *alter egos*, Professor Teufelsdröckh and his successors. That device (used in the *Letters and Speeches*) enables him to introduce opinions that might otherwise seem too shocking to be borne. Yet sometimes it serves an opposite purpose. It indicates a distance between Carlyle and the views the *alter ego* expresses. It enables Carlyle to indicate a capacity for reasonableness of mind. In those areas of his writing where the author's voice is given no such companion, Carlyle's procedures of exposition allow reasonableness no means of expression. Carlyle believes in writing down only what seems urgent, only what lives in the heart and memory, only what the fire of inspiration compels.⁵⁴ So he likes to eschew balance and qualification. Even so there are signs enough of the underlying presence

⁵² *CL*, I, pp. 115, 156, 262–3; Norton, *Two Note Books*, pp. 19–20; *CW*, XXVI, p. 461 (which can be instructively compared with Trela, 'A New (Old) Review', 74). In Carlyle's native Scotland the writings of George Brodie and John Millar had given an early nineteenth-century buoyancy to the Whig interpretation.

⁵³ Carlyle, *Historical Sketches*, pp. 36, 199–200, 231, 336–7; *CW*, V, pp. 135, 145–6, 207, 237, XXIX, p. 323, XXX, pp. 359–60. Such opinions are rarely visible in the *Letters and Speeches*, but they can be glimpsed at *LS*, III, pp. 13, 151, 219. See too Carlyle's Whiggish sentiments about the revolt of the Dutch against Philip II of Spain (*CW*, XXVII, p. 72, XXX, pp. 119–20; Maurice D. Conway, *Thomas Carlyle* (1881), pp. 107–8) and about Andrew Marvell (*Alfred Lord Tennyson. A Memoir by his Son* (2 vols., 1886), II, p. 236; with which compare Elizabeth Story Donno, ed., *Andrew Marvell. The Critical Heritage* (1978)). Carlyle's view that seventeenth-century England, and eighteenth-century France, might have been spared revolutionary violence had the monarchy only made prudent, healthy and gradual adjustments to inevitable change (*HS*, p. 213; *CW*, II, pp. 118, 239, III, pp. 120–1) recalls Macaulay's argument for the passage of the Great Reform Act. Carlyle expressed, albeit in characteristically idiosyncratic form, standard Whig sentiments about the excellence of Queen Elizabeth (whose son he wished Cromwell had been) and the failings of the Stuarts (*HS*, pp. 20–1, 35–6, 52, 148–52, 218, 221; Trela, *History*, p. 55).

⁵⁴ *CL*, XXIII, pp. 154–5; Trela, *History*, p. 54; cf. *CW*, V, p. 94, XXVI, p. 21. One of the difficulties in locating Carlyle's own positions is his habit of identifying so closely with his biographical subjects that his views seem indistinguishable from theirs: cf. below, pp. 152–3.

in his mind of conventional positions which, he judges, have sufficient advocacy in the world to stand in no need of his own pleading.

So Carlyle's rejections of conventional opinion can be less simple and fundamental than they seem. Even so, his conventional assumptions give him no pleasure. His statements of them are generally issued through clenched teeth or from the corner of his mouth. His acknowledgements of the long-term constitutional benefits of Puritanism and of the Revolution of 1688 could scarcely be less gracious or more fleeting. Rarely does he let them interrupt or soften his assaults on that Whig and republican tradition to which a side of him grudgingly adheres. The tradition had its own heroes, whom Carlyle, in heroising Cromwell, sought to supplant. Whigs had, in Carlyle's words, 'as good as canonised' the parliamentary leaders of the civil war,⁵⁵ Sir John Eliot and John Hampden and John Pym, who withstood the Caroline tyranny. Republicans exalted the radicals, especially Sir Henry Vane and Algernon Sidney, who ruled the Commonwealth from 1649 to 1653. The *Letters and Speeches* allows virtues to the Whig heroes, but because of their Puritan zeal, not their commitment to civil liberty. Previous nineteenth-century admirers of Hampden had distanced him from Puritan theology and Puritan fanaticism:⁵⁶ Carlyle located Puritan beliefs, theocratic and providentialist, at his core.⁵⁷ Even so he could not warm to Hampden or Pym as to Cromwell. They were 'smooth-shaven respectabilities', 'dreadfully dull'. It was the wild, rugged, ungainly Cromwell, the historiographical outcast, who had 'grappled like a giant, face to face, heart to heart, with the naked truth of things!'⁵⁸ Carlyle, to whom a portrait could be far more instructive than a biography,⁵⁹ was unable to forget Hampden's thin lips,⁶⁰ as emblematic of narrowness of spirit as Cromwell's copious, tremulous ones were of greatness of soul.⁶¹ Sir Henry Vane, 'rather a thin man', paled beside Cromwell too.⁶²

⁵⁵ *CW*, V, p. 207.

⁵⁶ Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays*, I, p. 105; George Grenville, Lord Nugent, *Some Memorials of John Hampden* (2 vols., 1832), II, p. 19; Robert Vaughan, *The Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell* (2 vols., 1839), I, p. lx.

⁵⁷ *LS*, I, p. 72; *HS*, p. 318.

⁵⁸ *CW*, V, p. 209.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, XXIX, p. 330.

⁶⁰ *LS*, III, p. 65; *HS*, p. 202; cf. *CW*, X, p. 119.

⁶¹ *LS*, II, p. 315.

⁶² *Ibid.*, II, p. 236. Carlyle liked to deride the 'thin patriotism' hailed by the Whig cult, which went back to Toland, of 'unspotted', 'incorruptible barren-figures' who, in Carlyle's judgement, had refused the responsibilities of power and of action. *LS*, III, p. 65; *CW*, III, pp. 199, 202, 243–4.

Since John Toland's time, Whig and republican historians had joined in glorifying the Long Parliament, that 'ever-memorable assembly' whose courage and wisdom had rescued the nation.⁶³ Here as elsewhere Carlyle's study of Cromwell changed his thinking about present-day politics.⁶⁴ A part of him revered the Long Parliament, in conventional terms.⁶⁵ He wanted to think that the failings of nineteenth-century parliaments were those of the age, not of the institution. He wanted to show how different, in the Puritan age, parliaments had been, and thus how different they might be now. Yet, as he worked on Cromwell, a different view became dominant in his mind. He saw that 'red tape', the 'official' mind, the taste for 'respectability', the paralysing instinct for 'constitutional logic' or 'checks and balances', are innate to parliament.⁶⁶ That was why the Long Parliament had had to be saved from itself by Cromwell's army through Pride's Purge in December 1648 and then forcibly expelled by it five years later. Thereafter, Carlyle approvingly reports, Cromwell's wrathful dissolutions 'conquered' the parliaments of the protectorate.⁶⁷

In the seventeenth century as in the nineteenth, it seemed, parliament was a mere 'talking-apparatus'.⁶⁸ Carlyle repudiated the Whig cult of parliamentary oratory, whose devotees saw in Hampden, 'that exquisite orator',⁶⁹ a precursor of modern rhetorical prowess.⁷⁰ He had no time for Hampden's 'parliamentary eloquences', his 'measured euphemisms'.⁷¹ To Carlyle 'the art of speech', 'whereby a man speaks openly what he does *not* mean', was 'the falsest and most accursed affliction' of the nineteenth century, of an age so habituated to 'lying' that it had become blind to its own 'unveracity'.⁷² In the 'artless' speeches of Cromwell,⁷³ who addressed his parliaments inarticulately but from the heart, he found the stick with

⁶³ See e.g. Ludlow, *Voyce*, p. 69; Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays*, I, pp. 18, 129; John Forster, *Statesmen of the Commonwealth* (5 vols., 1840), II, p. 130.

⁶⁴ The change is indicated by Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, I, pp. 359–60, with which compare Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, pp. 96–7.

⁶⁵ *CW*, XX, pp. 218–19, 228–30, XXIX, p. 323; *HS*, pp. 336–8; cf. *LS*, I, p. 95.

⁶⁶ *CW*, V, p. 230; *LS*, I, pp. 238, 265, 349, 352, 389–90, 520, II, pp. 235–6, 252–3, 270, 393, 507, III, pp. 16–17, 65, 93 n., 186; cf. *CL*, XIV, p. 210.

⁶⁷ *LS*, III, 192–4; cf. *CW*, V, p. 234.

⁶⁸ *LS*, III, p. 192.

⁶⁹ Forster, *Statesmen*, IV, p. 44.

⁷⁰ On the cult see John Burrow, *A Liberal Descent* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 89–90.

⁷¹ *CW*, V, p. 209; cf. D. J. Trela, 'Carlyle's Portrait of John Pym', *Carlyle Newsletter*, IV (1983), 14.

⁷² *Ibid.*, XX, pp. 180–1; *LS*, I, p. 71, II, pp. 304–5.

⁷³ *LS*, II, p. 554.

which to beat the moderns. Cromwell was ‘interesting to me by the very inadequacy of his speech’.⁷⁴ The more deeply the protector’s addresses stumble into incoherence, the more warmly do Carlyle’s editorial interjections applaud them.⁷⁵ Even Cromwell’s grammatical failings become witnesses to authenticity of soul, to depths far below the level of words.⁷⁶ David Hume had written that a collection of the utterances of Cromwell, who had addressed his parliaments ‘in a manner which a peasant of the most ordinary capacity would justly be ashamed of’, ‘might justly pass for one of the most nonsensical books in the world’.⁷⁷ Carlyle turned that verdict on its head. When read attentively, with an eye to their spiritual import, the speeches ‘glow with intelligibility’, with ‘the splendour of a genuine veracity’.⁷⁸

As Carlyle’s admiration for the Long Parliament subsides, so his enthusiasm mounts for the ‘armed soldiers of Christ’ who purged and expelled it. The New Model army, that ‘company of poor men’ (the phrase of Cromwell that Carlyle made his own), had ‘all the earnest . . . men of England in the rear of them’. Representing as it did England’s ‘serious minority’, it was as healthily indifferent to parliamentary majorities as to parliamentary privilege.⁷⁹ Its accomplishments, too, had present-day relevance to Carlyle, who would soon be recommending the formation of drilled industrial regiments parallel in spirit to Cromwell’s military ones.⁸⁰ Carlyle, who thrilled to the invincible bravery and discipline of the New Model, laboured to reconstruct its military exploits on his visits to the sites of Cromwell’s battles.⁸¹ But it is the army’s revolutionary political actions of 1649–53 that bring his narrative to fever pitch.

⁷⁴ *LS*, I, p. 69.

⁷⁵ See especially Carlyle’s commentaries on the speeches of 1656 and 1657.

⁷⁶ *LS*, II, pp. 538, 554, III, p. 70.

⁷⁷ David Hume, *The History of England*, ed. H. Stebbing (n.d.), pp. 738, 739 n. (cf. pp. 719 n., 731). (Hume allowed that there were ‘a few exceptions’.) For comparable judgements see *Gentleman’s Magazine*, IV, 434 (cf. XII (1741), 93, 152); Banks, *Short Critical Review*, p. 168; John Millar, *An Historical View of the English Government* (4 vols., 1803 edn.), III, p. 299; *Christian Remembrancer*, II, 153; Karsten, *Patriot-Heroes*, p. 147. Sometimes the murkiness or ambiguity of Cromwell’s speeches was judged deliberate: Kimber, *Life of Oliver Cromwell*, p. 351; Harris, *Historical and Critical Account*, pp. 33–5; Cromwell, *Oliver Cromwell*, p. 342; *CW*, V, pp. 234–5.

⁷⁸ *LS*, II, p. 304.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 254, III, p. 92; *CW*, V, p. 218; *LS*, I, p. 401, II, pp. 232, 252, 254–5, 264, 555, III, p. 92; *CW*, XX, pp. 243, 246, XXX, pp. 23, 44. Cf. *CW*, IV, pp. 315–16; *HS*, p. 321; Carlyle, *Selected Writings*, p. 190.

⁸⁰ *CL*, XXIII, pp. 86–7, 163; cf. *CW*, XXX, pp. 40–2, 252.

⁸¹ Cf. *CL*, XVIII, p. 157.

The execution of the king was ‘perhaps the most daring action’ resolved on by ‘any body of men to be met with in history’: an action that trembled, as in its necessary extremities heroism always does, on the edge of madness. Above all it was a supreme act of justice,⁸² for Carlyle the quality, far more than bread, by which man lives.

A few months later Cromwell’s army carried the same benefit to Ireland. Here too Cromwell resolved to ‘see God’s judgements . . . exercised on this earth’.⁸³ The present condition of Ireland distressed Carlyle. The blame for it, he maintained, did not lie, as the Irish liked to tell themselves, with Cromwell. On the contrary Cromwell had brought to that afflicted land the harsh Protestant truths which, if only his settlement had outlasted Puritan rule, might have saved it. The blame rested with lies: lies told both by the Irish themselves—by priests in the seventeenth century, by ‘O’Connellism’ now—and by those English governors who had undone Cromwell’s work. Modern Ireland, Carlyle explained, would never be at peace with itself until it confronted the memory of the ‘savage’ massacre of 1641 and repented of it. When applied to Cromwell’s massacres of 1649, ‘savage’ becomes a term of praise.⁸⁴ At Drogheda and Wexford Cromwell used the brute force that is hideous when practised by the wicked but has a dreadful beauty in the hands of the righteous.⁸⁵ Like the regicide, it transpires, the deeds of Drogheda and Wexford were an act of ‘surgery’; and Cromwell, enthused Carlyle in a phrase that became famous or notorious, did not believe in ‘the rose-water plan of surgery’.⁸⁶ Alongside justice, Cromwell brought to Ireland its equally implacable partner, ‘veracity’. At Drogheda he ‘promised’, as Carlyle puts it, to sack the town if it refused quarter. Where modern politicians blithely break their word, Cromwell was faithful to his.⁸⁷

⁸² *LS*, I, pp. 401, 406.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 401, 461. Carlyle enthused over other contentious measures of uncompromising justice taken by civil-war Puritans: e.g. *LS*, I, p. 348, III, pp. 196–7.

⁸⁴ *LS*, I, pp. 453, 459, II, pp. 4–5, 58–60; Carlyle, *Selected Writings*, pp. 169–70.

⁸⁵ Carlyle applied comparable double standards elsewhere in the *Letters and Speeches*: I, p. 401, II, pp. 462, 543; cf. *CW*, XXX, p. 261.

⁸⁶ *LS*, I, pp. 401, 459–60. For the fame or notoriety see *North British Review*, XXXVI (1846), 535; *Christian Remembrancer*, II, 152; Goldwin Smith, *Three English Statesmen* (1867), p. 73; Karsten, *Patriot-Heroes*, p. 152; Siegel, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 313; Andrew Roberts, *Salisbury. Victorian Titan* (1999), pp. 49, 445; Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, ch. 15. Mrs Gaskell expects the reader to recognise the allusion by her hero Mr Thornton (‘Rose-water surgery won’t do for them . . .’) to the *Letters and Speeches*. Margaret Hale, Thornton’s interlocutor, recognises it. Cf. below, n. 183.

⁸⁷ *LS*, I, p. 462.

The divine anger which Cromwell visited on the Irish in 1649 was turned, four years later, on the Rump of the Long Parliament.⁸⁸ Among early nineteenth-century Whig and republican historians the memory of Cromwell's coup had provoked an indignation almost equal to that of the leaders of the disbanded parliament. Now as then the dissolution seemed the fatal moment of the revolution, which robbed it of its moral purpose and warrant and sacrificed it to Cromwell's ambition.⁸⁹ Again Carlyle turned conventional historiography upside down. The dissolution had always had its defenders, on the conservative ground that, together with the establishment of the protectorate eight months later, it had rescued the country from republican and sectarian anarchy.⁹⁰ No one since Cromwell's time had defended it on Carlyle's ground, that it was the necessary preliminary to godly rule. In its place came Barebone's Parliament, an assembly of the pious, a body chosen, Carlyle was pleased to find, not by the electorate but by godly rulers. History had derided Barebone's, but for Carlyle it was 'the assembly with the notablest purpose'—the reign of God's law on earth—'who have ever met in the modern world'. Yet, since it observed parliamentary procedures, it too was a 'speaking-apparatus'. Being thus ill-equipped to govern, it was thwarted by the 'shrieks of sham-Christianism' which its godly policies provoked.⁹¹ So as protector Cromwell turned to the laudable 'despotism' of the Major-Generals to cure the nation.⁹²

Carlyle was by no means the first historian to praise the protectorate. Even writers appalled by Cromwell's blood-stained rise to power had long conceded that he put it to some good uses. From the time of the Restoration the protectorate's vigour and ability, the foreign triumphs of its army and navy, its encouragement of trade, the incorruptibility of its domestic administration, had been time and again invoked to shame the impotence or degeneracy of present governments. Yet those secular accomplishments barely engaged Carlyle's attention.⁹³ Macaulay had admired the 'legislative mind' behind the secular policies of the protector, 'the greatest prince that has ever ruled England':⁹⁴ Carlyle took little interest in

⁸⁸ *LS*, II, p. 266.

⁸⁹ Godwin, *History*, III, pp. 304, 472–3; Forster, *Statesmen*, V, pp. 97–8, 124–5; cf. *CW*, V, p. 230.

⁹⁰ Even Hume accepted that argument: Hume, *History*, p. 729. Carlyle too deploys it (*CW*, V, p. 233; cf. *LS*, II, pp. 234, 462, 499, III, p. 186), but the point is secondary for him. In any case, in his mind the word 'anarchy' normally indicated a breakdown at least as much of public morality as of the public peace.

⁹¹ *LS*, II, pp. 271, 306, 311.

⁹² *CW*, V, p. 235; cf. *LS*, II, pp. 462, 542–3.

⁹³ See e.g. *LS*, II, p. 482.

⁹⁴ Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays*, I, p. 50.

Cromwell's legislation. Where other writers compared favourably the worldly deeds of the protector to those of England's hereditary rulers, deeds which earned Macaulay's praise, for Carlyle it was the 'perfect truth' of the protectorate, its spiritual aspiration, that made it the foremost government in the nation's history.⁹⁵ He rejoiced in its godly mission: its war on vice; the reform of the clergy; and, abroad, Cromwell's aim 'to unite the Protestant world of struggling light against the papist world of potent darkness'.⁹⁶

Even so, Carlyle was not at ease with the protectorate. His account of it seems to have been hurriedly drawn together.⁹⁷ For him the earlier Cromwell, the warrior-hero and agent of divine destruction, had transcended politics. As protector, charged not with destruction but with reconstruction, Oliver was obliged, as a merely mortal ruler would have been, to haggle with parliament.⁹⁸ Carlyle acknowledges that Cromwell's godly policies were pursued 'with only partial, never with entire success'.⁹⁹ The fault lay with the nation, which had not 'rallied' to him¹⁰⁰—a damning failure, for 'the most significant feature in the history of an epoch' is 'the manner it has of welcoming a great man'.¹⁰¹ The nation's rejoicing on Charles II's return proved its unworthiness.¹⁰² Carlyle had earlier supposed, what classical and Renaissance political theory had taught, that a community will be drawn, as by a magnet, to the leadership of great souls.¹⁰³ He found instead that it resists it.¹⁰⁴ In Carlyle's narrative the protector becomes a worn-down figure, a subject for pathos and pity, bearing on his solitary shoulders a cause that will not survive him.¹⁰⁵ Like other

⁹⁵ *CW*, X, p. 222, XXIX, p. 459.

⁹⁶ *LS*, II, p. 444.

⁹⁷ *CL*, XVIII, pp. 236, 249, 256, XIX, pp. 86, 87. While preparing the book Carlyle referred mostly to the 'letters' and rarely to the speeches, which begin in 1653, the year of Cromwell's assumption of the protectorate.

⁹⁸ Carlyle's unease on that point is evident at *LS*, II, p. 365, III, pp. 45, 77.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 457; cf. II, pp. 228–9, 392, 440–1, 444, 466, 499–500, III, pp. 15–16.

¹⁰⁰ *CW*, V, pp. 216–17, 227, 236, XX, p. 162.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, V, p. 42 (cf. p. 229); *LS*, II, pp. 61–2; *CW*, X, pp. 32, 270.

¹⁰² *CW*, XX, pp. 161–2.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, XXVII, pp. 393–4 (cf. XXVI, p. 268, XXVIII, pp. 11–12); Blair Worden, *The Sound of Virtue. Politics in Philip Sidney's Arcadia* (New Haven and London, 1996), p. 30. Carlyle's debt to classical traditions of thought was greater than he allowed himself to realise.

¹⁰⁴ *CW*, XXX, pp. 268, 274.

¹⁰⁵ *LS*, III, pp. 27, 82, 198; *CW*, V, p. 236; cf. Tulloch, *English Puritanism*, p. 109. Carlyle did subscribe to the conventional view that the future course of English history might have been much healthier had Cromwell lived longer or had a worthy successor (*CW*, XXIX, p. 459; *LS*, I, p. 62. Cf. Godwin, *History*, IV, p. 342; Macaulay, *History*, I, p. 105; Forster, *Historical and Biographical Essays*, I, pp. 335–6). But he made the point only secondarily.

heroes of Carlyle, he becomes more significant for what he was, for the ideals and qualities he represented, than for what he did.¹⁰⁶

Not only had the nation failed Cromwell. So had Puritanism. At first Carlyle, or at least a side of him, saw Cromwell merely as the most heroic representative of that heroic movement,¹⁰⁷ which itself was the representative—because it represented the best—of England.¹⁰⁸ Yet Puritanism's 'mad suicide' after Cromwell's death¹⁰⁹ showed that it, like the Long Parliament which it had controlled, was unequal to its divine task. Having held up 'the Puritanic age' for emulation,¹¹⁰ Carlyle acknowledged that it had had its shortcomings.¹¹¹

They were those of the society from which Puritanism emerged. Carlyle was never at home with the early-modern period. He knew about, and (mostly) warmed to, medieval feudalism. He knew too that the French Revolution had brought feudalism's final and inevitable destruction, and that democracy, to which he could not warm, was inevitably replacing it.¹¹² It was the non-feudal and non-democratic aspects of society, from the fourteenth century to the eighteenth, that perplexed him. He had learned from Scottish sociology about the stages of social development. He approved of the energy, industry and ingenuity with

¹⁰⁶ *CW*, XXVI, pp. 264, 353, and Carlyle's portraits of Dr Johnson; cf. S. R. Gardiner, *Oliver Cromwell* (1901 edn.), p. 315.

¹⁰⁷ See esp. *LS*, I, pp. 1–10 (a passage which may well have been written some time before the composition of the *Letters and Speeches*: see the quotation from Victoria and Albert Museum, Forster MS. 48. E. 36, f. 113^r in Trela, *History*, p. 32), 11. But cf. *HS*, pp. 343, 346; *CL*, XI, pp. 15–16.

¹⁰⁸ *HS*, pp. 55, 123, 164; cf. *LS*, II, p. 432, III, p. 16.

¹⁰⁹ *LS*, III, p. 197–9.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 389–90 (cf. p. 8).

¹¹¹ Though Carlyle's practice of avoiding qualifications to his central arguments (above, p. 141) normally allows him to conceal the fact, there is—not surprisingly in view of his relationship with his own Calvinist upbringing—a persistent tension within his attitude to Puritanism: *CL*, XVIII, pp. 275–6 (with which compare *CW*, X, p. 117). Puritanism's neglect of 'forms' made it, he conceded, 'rough and defective', a judgement which tallies with his occasional intimations that Christianity had been at its best in the middle ages, before (evidently sometime between Dante and Luther) Catholicism had been corrupted and a glorious truth become a vicious lie. Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, I, pp. 275–6 (with which compare p. 264; *LS*, I, p. 166; and *HS*, p. 320); *CW*, I, p. 171, V, pp. 102, 111, 119, 124, 137, 143, 205–7. Carlyle could write condescendingly, even witheringly, about seventeenth-century Puritanism in its non-Cromwellian forms (e.g. *LS*, I, p. 331, II, p. 62; cf. *CW*, V, p. 111). Similarly Carlyle conceals most of the time, but not all of the time, the shortcomings of Cromwell, as of his other heroes: *LS*, II, p. 365, III, p. 198; *CW*, III, p. 146, V, pp. 167, 197, 228, 241–2, X, pp. 57, 224, XXVI, p. 254; cf. Trela, *History*, p. 181.

¹¹² *CW*, II, pp. 118, 133, V, p. 119, X, pp. 250–1, XX, p. 8 (cf. pp. 131, 269); cf. Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, p. 333.

which communities advance their social organisation and economic resources. He accepted, what in recent decades had become something like an orthodoxy,¹¹³ that the English civil war had been in some way related to the rise of a commercial class.¹¹⁴ He recognised that the ‘fighting’ of the high middle ages had ‘given place to trading, ploughing, weaving and merchant adventuring’,¹¹⁵ and that that change, too, was irreversible. Yet Carlyle, who rebuked historical nostalgia,¹¹⁶ succumbed to it.¹¹⁷ Hard as he tried to bring alive the texture of the society that had produced Puritanism, its starched ruffs and fringed breeches and pointed beards,¹¹⁸ his heart lay with the frugal spontaneity of an earlier age. He yearned for the time when kings were ‘raised aloft on bucklers with clangour of sounding shields’.¹¹⁹ He wanted to think of the Puritan leaders as a continuation of the feudal ideal, as an ‘earnest religious aristocracy’, the last of England’s ruling classes to combine rank with intellect.¹²⁰ Yet intellect itself had assumed early-modern forms which Carlyle found easier to admire than love. The age had been sicklied-o’er with the pale cast of thought, trusting too much to words, possessed by the self-consciousness of which the most heroic times are free.¹²¹

If only Cromwell had been born in the middle ages! Carlyle’s imagination links him to William the Conqueror, who sorted out the ‘pot-bellied’ natives;¹²² and, behind him, to the Norse kings commemorated in Icelandic sagas.¹²³ Yet even the medieval age cannot contain Carlyle’s

¹¹³ Orme, *Remarkable Passages in the Life of William Kiffin*, p. 207; Worden, ‘Victorians’, pp. 119–20; cf. Smith, *Three Lectures*, pp. 47–8.

¹¹⁴ Carlyle, *Selected Writings*, p. 207; cf. *CW*, IV, pp. 314–15.

¹¹⁵ *HS*, p. 186.

¹¹⁶ *CL*, XVII, p. 312.

¹¹⁷ Sometimes the nostalgia is for unspecified ‘old days’ or ‘early days’: *CW*, V, p. 78, XXVIII, pp. 30, 51.

¹¹⁸ *HS*, pp. 166 (cf. p. 260), 269; *LS*, I, p. 91; Fielding, ‘Carlyle and Cromwell’, 57.

¹¹⁹ *HS*, p. 185; *CW*, II, p. 9, XX, p. 123.

¹²⁰ *HS*, p. 233.

¹²¹ Carlyle’s position can be pieced together from: *CW*, I, p. 54, V, pp. 78, 171, XXVI, pp. 83, 215, 309, XXVII, p. 74, XXVIII, pp. 5, 8–9, 22–3, 51, 100–1, 231, XXIX, p. 37; Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, pp. 228, 252; John Clubbe, ed., *Two Reminiscences of Thomas Carlyle* (Durham, North Carolina, 1974), p. 59. Revealing too is Carlyle’s desire to claim Shakespeare for medieval feudalism—and for pre-Reformation Catholicism: *CW*, V, pp. 102, 111, 119.

¹²² *CW*, XX, p. 123 (cf. XXX, pp. 249–52); Kaplan, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 382; Simon Heffer, *Moral Desperado. A Life of Thomas Carlyle* (1995), p. 337.

¹²³ *LS*, I, p. 8; K. J. Fielding, ‘Unpublished Manuscripts—II: Carlyle’s Scenario for *Cromwell*, *Carlyle Newsletter*, II (1980), 10. Likewise Carlyle links Robert Blake, the Cromwellian naval commander, another of his heroes, to the ‘old sea-kings’: *CW*, V, p. 32, XX, p. 104.

hero. He is a 'primeval' figure,¹²⁴ his exploits decked with mythological and anthropological imagery,¹²⁵ his place among the 'sanhedrim of the gods'¹²⁶ announced by proto-Wagnerian outbreaks of thunder, lightning, fire. Carlyle, who set out to heroise Puritan society, instead created a hero beyond society.

II

How did Carlyle's book, a work at once so hostile and eccentric to its age, come to be embraced by it? A part of the answer must lie in the central perception of his enterprise: that Cromwell's letters and speeches are extraordinary documents; and that unlike the customary pronouncements of rulers, which are couched in language intended to conceal the character within,¹²⁷ they convey an authentic image of the inner man. The *Letters and Speeches* spoke to an age eager to explore that subterranean emotional landscape of past minds which the 'philosophic' historians of the eighteenth century were now reproached for having missed.¹²⁸ Cromwell, unknowable from the jumbled and scattered versions in which his words had earlier been printed, now stood, enthused one reviewer, 'in bodily and mental presence before us. We live, speak, correspond with him.'¹²⁹ Twentieth-century scholarship has warrantably emphasised

¹²⁴ *HS*, p. 344.

¹²⁵ *LS*, I, pp. 8, 9–10, 406–7, 458–9.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, II, p. 554.

¹²⁷ Cf. Wilson, *Oliver Cromwell and the Protectorate*, p. 232.

¹²⁸ *CW*, XXVI, p. 261, XXVII, pp. 68–9 (cf. pp. 91–2), XXVIII, p. 234, XXIX, pp. 57, 77; Richard Hutton, *Criticisms on Contemporary Thought and Thinkers* (2 vols., 1894), I, pp. 13–14; George Dawson, *Biographical Lectures* (1886), pp. 370, 389; cf. Morley, *Oliver Cromwell*, p. 4. In recovering the sincerity of a Puritan through his speeches, the *Letters and Speeches* was anticipated by John Forster's study of John Pym (*Statesmen*, II, pp. 194–5). Forster anticipated Carlyle's imaginative techniques in respect of Cromwell, too (*Statesmen*, IV, p. 284).

¹²⁹ *North British Review*, XXXVI, 526. Cf. Wilson, *Oliver Cromwell and the Protectorate*, p. 114; Dawson, *Biographical Lectures*, p. 389; Clubbe, *Two Reminiscences*, p. 104; Siegel, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 54. Carlyle's concern for imaginative re-creation, which was indebted to Sir Walter Scott and the Romantic movement, went beyond them. It is, he thought, when we see the events of a past age as with our own eyes that we can grasp its divine content and purpose (*CL*, VII, p. 52; cf. *LS*, I, p. 70). Re-entry into past minds was also essential, Carlyle believed, to counter the distortions of historical judgement wrought by writers—especially Whig ones—who forgot that people of the past did not know what the future would bring, and did not know that developments in their own time which they intelligibly took to be perilous would prove to be harmless (*CW*, IV, p. 81, V, pp. 221–2; *LS*, I, p. 442, II, p. 437).

Carlyle's weaknesses as an editor, his haphazard methods, his archival omissions and gullibilities, his dogmatic errors.¹³⁰ In its own age, however, the book set new standards of editorial diligence and accomplishment. 'At one stroke', declared another reviewer, Carlyle had 'placed himself at the head of our editors of documents.'¹³¹ There was particular praise for the explanatory clarity of the passages of scene-setting that precede each document.¹³²

There was praise too for their artful vividness.¹³³ Carlyle decried literary 'art', as another form of lying. At best it distracts from the moral and instructive purpose which is writing's sole warrant.¹³⁴ Yet no author is without it. As a feat of social description and of narrative power the *Letters and Speeches* is not *The French Revolution*—What could be?—but it bears the same genius and the same hunger for its expression.¹³⁵ Carlyle had been attracted to literary possibilities in Cromwell, in the 'wild image' of the man and his time, long before he saw didactic ones, indeed while he still subscribed to the view of him which the *Letters and Speeches* would overthrow.¹³⁶ The attraction persisted. While planning the *Letters and Speeches* he made a note to himself that the battle of Dunbar was 'one of [Cromwell's] great scenes'.¹³⁷ In the book it is immortally so.¹³⁸

¹³⁰ See especially the judgements by Mrs Lomas in *LS*; and Trela, *History*.

¹³¹ *Gentleman's Magazine*, NS XXVI, 476. Cf. *Christian Remembrancer*, II, 125, 127; *The Athenaeum*, 6 December 1845, 1165; Bayne, *Lessons from my Masters*, pp. 62–3; Alexander Ireland, *Recollections of George Dawson and his Lectures in Manchester* (n.p., 1882), p. 8; J. A. Picton, *Oliver Cromwell* (1882), p. 388; James Kerr, *Carlyle as Seen in his Works* (1886), pp. 6–7; *Todmorden Advertiser*, 2 February 1889; Siegel, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 470.

¹³² *Westminster Review*, XLVI, 445–6; *Christian Remembrancer*, II, 125–6.

¹³³ Bayne, *Lessons*, pp. 63–6.

¹³⁴ Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, I, p. 461, II, p. 74; *LS*, I, p. 69; *CW*, XX, p. 168; Chris vanden Bossche, 'Polite Conversation and Revolutionary Style', *Carlyle Newsletter*, III (1982), 46.

¹³⁵ One reason, perhaps, why the *Letters and Speeches* allows so much less scope to Carlyle's powers of social description than *The French Revolution* lies in Carlyle's growing tendency to separate his hero from society and to focus on the first rather than the second. Carlyle's drafts, written when he expected the scope of the book to be much broader, suggest how different, in that respect, the work might have been had he not narrowed its focus: e.g. *HS*, pp. 254–71. Carlyle's decision to produce not a history or biography but an edition of documents, which determine the shape of his narrative and often break its flow, is a stimulus to the ingenuity of his narrative skills but also a restriction on them.

¹³⁶ Norton, *Two Note Books*, pp. 7, 15, 17, 93; *CL*, I, p. 237, V, p. 244.

¹³⁷ Fielding, 'Unpublished Manuscripts—II', 10.

¹³⁸ Together with the account of Cromwell's death it became the passage of the book most often commended and anthologised. On the compelling quality, at once moral and literary, of Carlyle's prose see January Searle, *The Life, Character, and Genius of Ebenezer Elliott* (1850), p. 144; Dawson, *Biographical Lectures*, p. 367; Ben Tillet, *Memories and Reflections* (1931), p. 77.

Though the beguilements of Carlyle's artistry should never be underestimated, the magnetic properties of the *Letters and Speeches* had another source too: the intensity of the bond between author and hero.¹³⁹ The book has an autobiographical subtext that recalls *Sartor Resartus*. Carlyle could hardly have concealed, and the harshest critic of either Carlyle or Cromwell might not gainsay, the bond of courage, that indomitable, lonely force with which the two men take on the world and its conventions and stake their unremitting originality of character. Other parallels owe more to literary or psychological contrivance. Repeatedly Carlyle's own memories and self-assessment determine the emphases of his narrative. There is the formation of impregnable, steadying values during Cromwell's long period of modest obscurity before his entry on the world's bustling stage.¹⁴⁰ There is Oliver's devotion to his godly mother;¹⁴¹ his hypochondria (for Carlyle always a sign of grace);¹⁴² his rescue from agonies of despair through religious conversion.¹⁴³ When Carlyle reaches Cromwell's maturity he links the solitary burden of his hero's decision-making with his own humbler but no less solitary responsibilities of biographical resurrection. Author and hero, Carlyle intimates,

¹³⁹ Cf. Bayne, *Chief Actors*, p. 92, on the 'affinity of genius' between Carlyle and Cromwell. Similar points were made in Carlyle's obituaries: Ivan Roots, 'Carlyle's Cromwell', in Richardson, *Images of Oliver Cromwell*, p. 92.

¹⁴⁰ *LS*, I, p. 61; *CW*, V, p. 223 (cf. p. 131). Carlyle gave to his (largely frustrated) attempt to recover Cromwell's early career a time and energy far disproportionate to the documentary legacy of that phase of Oliver's life (cf. Trela, *History*, p. 102). His emphasis on the early Cromwell is a key element in Carlyle's relationship not only with his hero but with his reader. He strives to create a triangular bond that will unite the 'earnest' author, the 'earnest' hero, and the 'earnest' reader (*LS*, I, pp. 1, 11, 68, II, p. 2; *CL*, XIX, p. 177, XXI, p. 226). Like author and hero, the reader is urged to take 'courage' and to work for good in the world. Cromwell, the 'Huntingdon farmer' who 'had been content to plough the ground, and read his Bible', but who 'threw down his ploughs' at the crisis of God's cause (*CW*, V, pp. 215, 223, 226), is the earnest reader's role model. That reader may be confined, like the young Cromwell, to provincial obscurity, silent and unsung, but he is the 'the salt of the earth', who, even if on a scale much smaller than Cromwell's, can do his bit for godliness and reform—for 'Is not every man, God be thanked, a potential hero?' (*CW*, V, pp. 176, 224–5, X, p. 204; *HS*, p. 281; *LS*, I, p. 461; cf. Conway, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 101). More modest models are supplied by inconspicuous but devoted followers of Cromwell and of Puritanism (*HS*, p. 289; *LS*, II, pp. 270, 450, 278).

¹⁴¹ *LS*, II, pp. 395–6; cf. *CW*, V, p. 236.

¹⁴² *LS*, I, pp. 44, 61; *CW*, XXIX, p. 282; Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, I, p. 183. Cf. Bayne, *Chief Actors*, p. 393; Dawson, *Biographical Lectures*, p. 430; Dale, *Victorian Critic*, pp. 99–100. As often, Carlyle was inverting Hume: Hume, *History*, pp. 712, 727.

¹⁴³ Well before he wrote on Cromwell, Carlyle described the afflictions and progress of his own soul in language close to Cromwell's own: *CL*, XVI, p. 190; Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, I, pp. 61–2 (with which compare *LS*, I, p. 353, III, p. 69); cf. *CW*, I, p. 145, XX, p. 298.

are a 'minority of two'.¹⁴⁴ When he reaches Cromwell's last years Carlyle ties the protector's weary struggle towards rest to his own humbler but no less taxing labours of literary completion.¹⁴⁵ Sometimes we can hardly tell, from Carlyle's personal pronouns, which of the two men is speaking.

Perhaps Carlyle himself scarcely knew. Men who described the public lectures he gave in 1838–40 reported the manner of his delivery—the struggle of an uncouth, clumsy speaker to give voice to earnestness and sincerity—in terms which strikingly anticipate Carlyle's own accounts of Cromwell's delivery.¹⁴⁶ In the *Letters and Speeches* 'my friend Oliver'¹⁴⁷ joins Carlyle against the hollow proprieties of classical structure and diction.¹⁴⁸ The literary indecorum of the book, its offences against grammar and syntax, its unevenness of pitch and proportion, its jump-starts and moments of spontaneous combustion, its very warts as it were, are vindicated by the features of Cromwell's character and speeches which they mirror.

III

Yet literary power, though an essential explanation of the book's impact, is an insufficient one. Carlyle argues by coercion, not by reason.¹⁴⁹ But readers, even hectored readers—even readers told, as Carlyle's insistently are, that their readiness to accept his estimate of Cromwell is a test of their salvation¹⁵⁰—are free agents. Many of Carlyle's readers, moved and

¹⁴⁴ *LS*, II, p. 540. Elsewhere Carlyle thought of himself as a 'a minority of one': Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, II, p. 22.

¹⁴⁵ *LS*, III, p. 145. Repeatedly the words of both hero and author struggle to 'blaze' or take 'fire'. Hero and author are both enjoined to 'struggle', to take 'courage', to press 'forward'.

¹⁴⁶ *CL*, XII, p. 142 n.; Richard Shepherd, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Carlyle* (2 vols., 1881), I, pp. 202–4, 215–16; Heffer, *Moral Desperado*, p. 182. Cf. Masson, *Carlyle Personally*, p. 41; Siegel, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 284; and the review of *Past and Present* by John Forster which describes the language of the work in terms that might have been taken from Carlyle's descriptions of Cromwell's delivery: D. J. Trela and Roger L. Tarr, *The Critical Response to Carlyle's Major Works* (Westport, Conn., 1997), pp. 147–8.

¹⁴⁷ *CL*, XXI, p. 228.

¹⁴⁸ Carlyle intimates that the classical inheritance has produced, in historical writing, the elevation of artificial, shallow, foreign values above natural, deep, native ones: *LS*, I, p. 69, II, pp. 404 (cf. p. 545 and *CW*, V, p. 216), 516 (cf. *LS*, III, p. 16); *CW*, XXIX, p. 458. See too Clarke, *Lectures*, pp. 164–6, 208–9; Clubbe, *Two Reminiscences*, p. 104.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Morley, *Critical Miscellanies*, I, p. 155.

¹⁵⁰ *LS*, I, pp. 92, 401, 461, II, pp. 252, 301, 316–17; *CW*, XX, pp. 309–10. (He is especially keen to apply the test at the most provocative moments of his commentary.)

mesmerised as they were by his books, felt able to applaud them only because they could pick and choose among his opinions. Can there be another instance in our literature of a writer speaking so profoundly to so many people who dissented so fundamentally from so many of his views? The absorption of Carlyle and his opinions into the society he scourged is perhaps as surprising a feature as any of high- and late-Victorian intellectual history. He reads like a Job or like Timon by his cave—and yet, as Thackeray said, had the best company in England ringing at his doorbell.¹⁵¹ Two overlapping characteristics of his writing, we may suggest, assisted the process of assimilation. First, as we have noticed, not every side of him was committed to his most belligerent or iconoclastic statements. Readers could sense that his bark might be worse than his bite. Secondly, his own indifference to conflicts of opinion, which he would not allow to impair his own sympathy of spirit with men whose views he judged misguided,¹⁵² rubbed off not only on his friends but on his readers.

The *Letters and Speeches* was particularly open to selective reception because its readers could, and sometimes did, simply read Cromwell's words and omit Carlyle's. Yet for the most part the process of reception was more subtle. Carlyle's judgements were less often bypassed than adjusted. Carlyle, the great anti-Victorian, was Victorianised.

There would have been a nineteenth-century following for Cromwell of some kind even if Carlyle had not written about him. The growth of interest, early in the century, in the civil-war era,¹⁵³ and the taste for national heroes generated by the Napoleonic wars,¹⁵⁴ had ensured so much. A number of readers related the success of the *Letters and Speeches* to a movement of opinion in Cromwell's favour over the previous quarter of a century. Others intimated (some more persuasively than others) that Carlyle had only told them truths about Cromwell that they already knew or suspected.¹⁵⁵ Macaulay's and Godwin's character-

¹⁵¹ Le Quesne, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 55; cf. Carlyle's self-accusation recorded in Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, II, p. 123 (cf. p. 22).

¹⁵² *CW*, V, p. 182; Morley, *Critical Miscellanies*, I, p. 139. For the potential appeal of that approach see Siegel, *Thomas Carlyle*, pp. 205–6.

¹⁵³ Worden, 'Victorians', p. 116.

¹⁵⁴ Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (New Haven and London, 1957), pp. 308–9; Karsten, *Patriot-Heroes*, esp. ch. 6.

¹⁵⁵ *British Quarterly Review*, III (1846), 54, 60, 94–5; *New Englander*, IV (1846), 213; *Athanaeum*, 6 December 1845, 1166; *The People*, no. 56, p. 28; Arthur, *Heroes*, p. 40; *Adam Rushton, *My Life* (Manchester, 1909), pp. 108–10.

isations of Cromwell in the 1820s exercised a lasting influence, which, though generally far less potent than Carlyle's, would mingle with it and occasionally even surpass it.¹⁵⁶ Carlyle's own conversion to Cromwell—though he would never have admitted the fact—was a response to a flurry of publications by lesser writers that began in 1838.¹⁵⁷ In 1845, while his book was still in the press, a national controversy was provoked by a campaign, which would run through the century, for a statue of Cromwell at Westminster. The origins of that initiative, though owing something to the sketch of Oliver in Carlyle's *Of Heroes and Hero-Worship* of 1841, do not seem to have owed much to it.¹⁵⁸ Most of the

¹⁵⁶ *British Quarterly Review*, III, 60–1 (review by Robert Vaughan, whose interpretation of the seventeenth century was heavily influenced by Macaulay); **Bradford Observer*, 2 October 1845; **Weekly Record of the Temperance Movement*, 24 May 1856, p. 69; Forster, *Historical and Biographical Essays*, I, pp. 279–80; A. J. Bray, *The Life . . . of Oliver Cromwell* (1869), p. 5; *Howard Evans, *Radical Fights of Forty Years* (London and Manchester, 1913), pp. 17–18; Bayne, *Lessons*, pp. 58–9; Leask, *Readings from Carlyle*, p. 15; J. K. Maconachie, *Oliver Cromwell: Christian and Patriot* (1899), p. 3; Morley, *Oliver Cromwell*, pp. 2–3; Rushton, *My Life*, pp. 108–10 (echoing Macaulay); Bernard Pool, ed., *The Croker Papers 1808–1857* (1967), p. 221; R. L. Brett, ed., *Barclay Fox's Journal* (1979), pp. 195–6; Trela, *History*, p. 171. See too Orme, *Remarkable Passages in the Life of William Kiffin*, p. vi; *CW*, XXVIII, p. 479; Clarke, *Lectures*, p. vi. Godwin anticipated a number of features of Carlyle's account of Cromwell; and yet the points of similarity are also often ones of telling contrast. In terms close to Carlyle's he favourably compared Cromwell's speeches with the 'rules of art' and the 'oily smoothness' of conventional rhetoric (II, p. 348; cf. Macaulay, *Essays*, I, p. 50). Like Carlyle he admired Cromwell's 'earnestness' and (though Godwin did not think it lasted) his 'sincerity' (II, p. 348); but where, for Carlyle, 'sincerity' is a mark of godliness, for Godwin it is a 'republican virtue' (II, p. 202). Godwin resembles Carlyle in being dissatisfied by the moral claims of 'civil' or 'negative' or 'individual' liberty, which makes us 'selfish' (II, pp. 497–9, II, pp. 188–9); but where Carlyle looks instead to a religious ideal of human fulfilment, Godwin looks to a pagan, classical one, which favours the notion, spurned by Carlyle, of 'independence' of character and status (II, p. 294, III, pp. 2, 442, IV, 18). Godwin wonders whether seventeenth-century England had sufficient virtue to sustain republican rule (II, p. 499): Carlyle decided that it had insufficient godliness to sustain the godly rule of Cromwell. The gap between Macaulay's admiration of Cromwell and Carlyle's is indicated by Macaulay's description of Oliver as 'the most profound politician of that age' (*History*, I, p. 94).

¹⁵⁷ *Bronterre O'Brien, *The Operative*, 4 November 1838–30 June 1839; M. Russell, *Life of Oliver Cromwell* (2 vols., New York, 1839); Trela, *History*, pp. 162, 166. The most original contribution, the first publication to accept Cromwell's faith and sincerity without qualification and to treat them as the centre of his life, was an essay by John Robertson in the *Westminster Review*—an essay Carlyle had hoped to write himself—in October 1839 (perceptively discussed by Trela, *History*, pp. 166–8). Though Carlyle claimed that he had 'never read' Robertson's 'trash', the essay anticipates Carlyle's work time and again with notable closeness of sentiment, and sometimes even in its wording. It was eleven months after the publication of Robertson's piece that Carlyle recorded that he had learned to revere Cromwell 'within the last twelvemonth' (*CL*, XII, p. 267 (cf. pp. 260, 264)). Robertson's essay influenced others: David Masson, *Memories of London in the 1840s* (1908), p. 11; and see *Westminster Review*, XLVI, 436 n.

¹⁵⁸ *Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine*, July–December 1845, 329–36; *Punch*, 1845, 150–1; *The Times*, 29 August–17 September 1845 (letter-pages); **Morning Herald*, 16 September 1845; **The*

pro-Cromwellian sentiment of the earlier nineteenth century dwelt on Cromwell's secular deeds, that traditional object of commendation. There was also, however, a growing belief and interest in Cromwell's sincerity,¹⁵⁹ which would be Carlyle's theme. Carlyle liked to think of himself as a lone battler on his hero's behalf, the single-handed recoverer of Cromwell's nobility of soul. Yet in a letter of 1845 he let slip a different view, voicing the hope that his work would end 'the controversy' about Cromwell's integrity.¹⁶⁰

If the *Letters and Speeches* did not begin the Cromwellian movement, it rapidly took it over. It was one thing to commend Cromwell in the measured prose of literary periodicals, another to bring him vividly to life before a wide public.¹⁶¹ And it was one thing to assert Cromwell's sincerity, another to demonstrate it, as Carlyle's documents and commentary so persuasively did.

Perhaps the widest and certainly the most enduring constituency won by the book was Nonconformity, a movement which was self-consciously the heir of seventeenth-century Puritanism, and which had itself contributed significantly to the improvement of Cromwell's reputation in the decades before Carlyle wrote.¹⁶² Congregationalists and Baptists, who retained grateful memories of Cromwell's rule, were especially responsive to the work.¹⁶³ The enthusiasm of Nonconformists for Carlyle was by no

Standard, 16 September 1845; **Hampshire Advertiser*, 20 September 1845; **Hampshire Telegraph*, 20, 27 September 1845; **Buckinghamshire Gazette*, 27 September, 4 October 1845; *Bradford Observer*, 2 October 1845; **Liverpool Mercury*, 17 October 1845; **Lancaster Gazette*, 1, 8 November 1845.

¹⁵⁹ Worden, 'Victorians', p. 113.

¹⁶⁰ *CL*, XIX, p. 27.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Wilson, *Oliver Cromwell and the Protectorate*, p. v.

¹⁶² Worden, 'Victorians', pp. 122 ff. For indications of the impact of the *Letters and Speeches* on Nonconformist households see Dawson, *Biographical Lectures*, p. 64; Evans, *Radical Fights*, pp. 17–18; Robert Steele Coffey, *Thomas Carlyle* (Bradford, 1881), p. 8; W. T. Stead, ed., *The Gist of Carlyle's Cromwell* (1899), preface; cf. Merlyn Richter, *The Politics of Conscience* (1964), p. 47 (on the evangelical Anglican, the young T. H. Green). Perhaps it was within provincial Nonconformity that Carlyle's attention to the 'earnest' reader (above, n. 138) was most appealing. Carlyle's mistrust of the artifice of diction modelled on classical literature is likely to have been another source of the attraction of the *Letters and Speeches* to Nonconformity: cf. David M. Thompson, *Nonconformity in the Nineteenth Century* (1972), p. 142.

¹⁶³ Worden, 'Victorians', pp. 122–3. Perhaps Carlyle's emphasis on Cromwell's early career as a farmer (see Ralph Samuel, 'The Discovery of Puritanism, 1820–1914: A Preliminary Sketch', in Jane Garnett and Colin Matthew, eds., *Revival and Religion since 1700* (1993), pp. 213–14) appealed to the strong farming element within those denominations (Thompson, *Nonconformity*, p. 14).

means confined to the *Letters and Speeches*.¹⁶⁴ The breadth and intensity of his appeal to them is initially startling, for it had to cross the enormous gap between their predominantly liberal political opinions and his illiberal ones. Men whose desire for social and economic independence was an article of their political faith¹⁶⁵ faced Carlyle's contempt for that ideal.¹⁶⁶ Their views on—for example—slavery or capital punishment were often starkly opposed to his. If there were massive differences of political perspective, so could there be of religious position. Non-conformists had to endure, though sometimes under protest, Carlyle's disdain for their own faith, that empty shell, as he alleged, from which the heart and meaning of seventeenth-century Puritanism had long disappeared.¹⁶⁷ They did so because they recognised, as did other religious affiliations, that Carlyle, whatever his religion might or might not be, believed in belief. He was an ally against scepticism, who—as his critics complained—could make earnestness and sincerity sound like a system of belief, or at least a substitute for one.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ For the readiness of Dissenters, and of Christians of other denominations, to claim Carlyle for their faiths see *British Quarterly Review*, X (1849), 3; Alexander Japp, *Three Great Teachers* (1865), pp. 29 ff.; Hodge, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 42; Coffey, *Thomas Carlyle*, pp. 15–16; David Thomas, *The Cedar is Fallen* (1881), pp. 11–12; David Masson, *Carlyle* (Glasgow, 1881), pp. 17–18; Siegel, *Thomas Carlyle*, pp. 171–2; David J. Laura, 'Carlyle and Arnold: The Religious Issue', in K.J. Fielding and Roger L. Tarr, eds., *Carlyle Past and Present* (1975), pp. 131, 149 n.; cf. Thomas Lathbury, *Oliver Cromwell or The Old and New Dissenters* (1862), p. 2. For Non-conformist enthusiasm for Carlyle see too *The Congregationalist*, X (1881), 209.

¹⁶⁵ John Vincent, *The Formation of the Liberal Party* (Harmondsworth, 1972 edn.), p. 13; Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists. Political Thought and Intellectual life in Britain 1850–1930* (Oxford, 1991), p. 113.

¹⁶⁶ *CW*, I, p. 186, V, p. 125.

¹⁶⁷ *Christian Remembrancer*, II, 154–5; *British Quarterly Review*, III, 62–3, 78; *New Englander*, IV, 212; Arthur, *Heroes*, p. 41. (The protests were not confined to Nonconformists.) Carlyle mocked Nonconformists for clinging to religious beliefs and practices which he admired when he encountered them in the seventeenth century: *CL*, XVII, p. 255; *CW*, XX, p. 280 (cf. XXIX, p. 398).

¹⁶⁸ George McCrie, *The Religion of Literature* (1865), pp. 3, 65; Siegel, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 209. Cf. Dawson, *Biographical Lectures*, p. 434; Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, ed. Kerry McSweeney and Peter Sabor (Oxford, 1987), p. 232; Heffer, *Moral Desperado*, p. 200. Carlyle's 'gospel of earnestness' could appeal to men of all faiths and of none: Houghton, *Victorian Frame of Mind*, pp. 220–1, 231, 238. Carlyle was one of a number of nineteenth-century admirers of Cromwell from Dissenting or other religious backgrounds who, in various ways, had parted from their earlier faiths. Others were George Dawson, William Godwin (divided though his feelings about Cromwell were), Macaulay, John Forster, S. R. Gardiner, Frederic Harrison, and W. F. Stead (who produced an abbreviated version of the *Letters and Speeches* in 1899). Then there were such Cromwellians as John Robertson who were linked or sympathetic to Dissent but did not belong to it: see his remarks in *Westminster Review*, XXVIII (1837), 217, 221, 259.

Uncomfortable as the point was for Nonconformists, it was the differences between seventeenth- and nineteenth-century Puritanism that made their warmth towards Carlyle possible. While no Nonconformist would have endorsed Carlyle's claims for the godlike capacity of heroic men,¹⁶⁹ at least Dissent had largely shed that pessimistic assessment of human nature to which, in the seventeenth century, his philosophy would have been a blasphemous affront. Most Nonconformists had retreated, too, from the doctrinal rigidities of Calvinism.¹⁷⁰ Though the experience of conversion was as fundamental to them as to that of their seventeenth-century forebears, their perception of it, like Carlyle's, was more emotional than theological,¹⁷¹ which is why they could warm not only to the Calvinist conversion of Cromwell related in the *Letters and Speeches* but to the non-Calvinist, even non-Christian one of the hero of *Sartor Resartus*.¹⁷²

There were, to simplify, two kinds of Cromwellianism in Victorian England, one hard, one soft. The hard version was the more miscellaneous, for it drew together men of Left and Right, who might be drawn to one aspect of Cromwell's career or personality but not necessarily to others. Since the early nineteenth century a belligerent populism had recalled Cromwell's readiness to bring both crown and parliament, those twin agencies, as they now seemed, of social oppression, to account.¹⁷³ Carlyle himself preached class harmony, not class conflict. Though he liked his heroes to be poor, as a stimulus to their spiritual earnestness,¹⁷⁴ he declined to join the voices commending Cromwell as an instrument of social liberation. Even so the pugilism of his own accounts of Cromwell's coups of 1649 and 1653 boosted the protector's following among Chartists and socialists and populist republicans. So did Carlyle's assumption that nobility of soul was 'better than all social rank'.¹⁷⁵ For

¹⁶⁹ Cf. *North British Review*, XXXVI, 516–17; McCrie, *Religion of Literature*, pp. 61–2.

¹⁷⁰ Richard Helmstadter, 'The Nonconformist Conscience', in Peter Marsh, ed., *The Conscience of the Victorian State* (New York, 1979), p. 157; Michael Watts, *The Dissenters* (Oxford, 1978–), II, pp. 1–2. Cf. Orme, *Remarkable Passages in the Life of William Kiffin*, pp. x, xiv–xv; Bayne, *Chief Actors*, p. 21; Houghton, *Victorian Frame of Mind*, p. 418; Lang, *Victorians and the Stuart Heritage*, pp. 115–16.

¹⁷¹ Noel Annan, *Leslie Stephen* (1951), p. 112; Helmstadter, 'Nonconformist Conscience', p. 143.

¹⁷² Stuart Reid, *Thomas Carlyle: His Work and Worth* (Manchester, 1881), p. 16 (cf. Martineau, *Essays*, I, p. 271); *The Congregationalist*, X, 209; *Proceedings of the Fourth National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches* (London, 1899), p. 220; Maconachie, *Oliver Cromwell*, p. 9; Arthur, *Heroes*, p. 44. Cf. Bayne, *Chief Actors*, p. 393; Helmstadter, 'Nonconformist Conscience', p. 143.

¹⁷³ Howell, 'The Nineteenth Century', pp. 99–101.

¹⁷⁴ *CW*, V, pp. 128, 166, XXVIII, pp. 91, 435.

¹⁷⁵ *LS*, I, p. 21 (cf. p. 186 and II, p. 270). For a glimpse of the social basis of Cromwellianism at a later date see V. S. Pritchett, *A Cab at the Door* (1968), p. 143.

radicals Cromwell was the leader who 'first put arms into the people's hands', and who, with 'the bright flash of his sword', 'broke our feudal gyres'.¹⁷⁶ Carlyle's pugilism spoke also to political militants within Nonconformity. Here was the grouping which responded most eagerly to Carlyle's plea for the emulation of Cromwell in present times. Militants delighted in Carlyle's injunctions to his contemporaries to 'awake', to put God's decrees into 'practice', to 'work' for the divine cause in their age as Cromwell had in his.¹⁷⁷ That theme ran through the tercentenary commemorations of 1899, which militant Nonconformity dominated. The same constituency welcomed Carlyle's emphasis on Puritanism's occupancy of power, a long-overdue break, militants proclaimed, with the timid subservience of Dissenting to Whig historiography, and a no less overdue one from litanies of Nonconformist sufferings before and after the revolutionary decades.¹⁷⁸ Militant Nonconformists welcomed too Carlyle's observant pleasure in Cromwell's gory Old Testament allusions, from which staid Victorian readers averted their eyes.¹⁷⁹

Two other components of hard Cromwellianism took strength and courage from Carlyle. First, his assessment of Cromwell's deeds and policies in Ireland, though the feature of the book that met most resistance,¹⁸⁰ also won both instant and lasting concurrence. Vindications of Cromwell's conduct there had previously been rare and qualified. Now they became bolder and more frequent.¹⁸¹ Secondly, Carlyle's scorn for

¹⁷⁶ Hood, *Oliver Cromwell*, pp. 397–400; Karsten, *Patriot-Heroes*, pp. 145, 152; Howell, 'The Nineteenth Century', p. 100.

¹⁷⁷ *LS*, I, pp. 71, 72, III, pp. 73, 188, 220 (cf. p. 198 and I, p. 8); *CW*, V, pp. 1, 226–7; E. Paxton Hood, *Thomas Carlyle* (1875), p. 350; R. F. Horton, *Oliver Cromwell* (1897), ep. ded.; F. W. Aveling, *Cromwell and Puritans* (1899), p. 27; *Methodist Times* 27 April 1899, p. 265; *Proceedings of the Fourth National Council*, p. 278. At the tercentenary Lloyd George exploited such sentiments by echoing Carlyle: *The Times*, 26 April 1899, p. 12 (cf. *LS*, I, p. 72).

¹⁷⁸ Worden, 'Victorians', pp. 123–4; cf. *The Congregationalist*, II, 41.

¹⁷⁹ For the nineteenth-century reaction against the Puritans' addiction to the Old Testament see Merle D'Aubigné, *The Protector* (Edinburgh, 1847), p. 142; J. B. Marsden, *The History of the Early Puritans* (1850), p. 417; Smith, *Three English Statesmen*, p. 73; Hood, *Oliver Cromwell*, p. 22; *Daily News*, 28 April 1899, p. 7. Cf. Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays*, I, pp. 60–1; Macaulay, *History*, I, p. 94; Forster, *Statesmen*, II, p. 196; Masson, *Carlyle Personally*, p. 94; Dawson, *Biographical Lectures*, p. 64. As a general rule it was populist, and militant Nonconformist, Cromwellians who were readiest to applaud the execution of Charles I, a deed which troubled his more moderate admirers.

¹⁸⁰ C. Sylvster Horne, 'The Cromwell Tercentenary', *London Quarterly Review*, ns II (1899), 133.

¹⁸¹ *Westminster Review*, XLVI, p. 455; Clarke, *Lectures*, pp. 141–2, 147–51; Wilson, *Oliver Cromwell*, pp. 148–9; Bray, *Life . . . of Oliver Cromwell*, p. 29; Smith, *Three English Statesmen*, pp. 73, 127–8 (cf. Macaulay, *History*, I, pp. 97–8); Hood, *Oliver Cromwell*, pp. 211 ff.; *Daily News*, 25 April 1899, p. 8; *The Spectator*, 3 November 1900, p. 323 (cf. W. E. H. Lecky, *A*

parliamentary sovereignty and procedures, and his preference for enlightened dictatorship, struck chords among men who wearied of the impotence and slow pace of Victorian parliaments, or who believed that the complexities of modern government and society, or the danger of anarchy, demanded an iron hand at the top. That view, though present at least from the 1850s,¹⁸² perhaps became most prominent with the rise of the National Efficiency movement of the 1890s. Its exponents, though often enemies of radical populism and of democracy, shared the radical populist admiration for Cromwell's capacity to break through convention and get things done.¹⁸³ People who disliked such sentiments blamed them on Carlyle, though for him it was Cromwell's divinity, not his efficiency, that had qualified him for sovereign rule.¹⁸⁴ There were Dissenters and

History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century, ed. L. P. Cutis (Chicago, 1972), p. 31); Frank G. Black and R. M. Black, eds., *The Harney Papers* (1969), p. 308; Martha S. Vogeler, *Frederic Harrison. The Vocations of a Positivist* (Oxford, 1984), p. 360. Cf. Forster, *Historical and Biographical Essays*, I, p. 38; Angus Macintyre, *The Liberator: Daniel O'Connell and the Irish Party, 1830–1847* (1965), p. 208 (though also William Allingham, *A Diary*, ed. Helen Allingham and D. Radford (1907), p. 277).

¹⁸² *Oxford Chronicle*, 24 February 1855, p. 5; Andrew Bisset, *Omitted Chapters from the History of England* (1864), pp. 417, 430; Dawson, *Biographical Lectures*, p. 81.

¹⁸³ *Contemporary Review*, LXXIII (1898), 610; **Daily Chronicle*, 14 November 1899 (leader); *National Review*, XXXV (1900), 61; John Morley, *Recollections* (2 vols., 1917), II, pp. 48–9, 315; Karsten, *Patriot-Heroes*, p. 153; Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw* (5 vols., 1988–92), III, p. 315 (though cf. Bernard Shaw, *The Complete Prefaces* (3 vols., Harmondsworth, ed. Dan H. Laurence and Daniel J. Leary (1993–7)), I, p. 389). Cf. *Proceedings of the Fourth National Council*, p. 280; Black and Black, *Harney Papers*, p. 308. Just as there was a populist Cromwell, so was there a businessman's Cromwell. He is brought to fictional life in Mrs Gaskell's *North and South* (cf. above, n. 86), where Mr Thornton, 'an iron', 'rough' figure, 'no speech-maker', bent on 'justice' and a 'wise despotism', the 'resolution and power' of his features concealing an inner 'gentleness' and 'tenderness', has much of Carlyle's Cromwell in him, and is surely a Carlylean captain of industry, or 'silent industrial hero' (CW, XXX, p. 30), in the making. Cf. the attitude to industrial relations of the Nonconformist businessman Sir Richard Tangye, that ardent collector of Cromwelliana: Stuart Reid, *Sir Richard Tangye* (1908), pp. 105–6, 199–203 (with which compare *Daily News*, 20 April 1899, p. 6; Vincent, *Formation of the Liberal Party*, pp. 29–30; Stephen Mayor, *The Churches and the Labour Movement* (1967), p. 183).

¹⁸⁴ Thus where Carlyle scorned parliamentary 'eloquence' for its barrenness of soul, Lord Rosebery, a key figure both in the National Efficiency movement and in late-Victorian Cromwellianism, fretted at its antipathy to the spirit of efficiency; and where Carlyle detested the eighteenth century for its godlessness, Rosebery saw that century's legacy as a restraint on the dynamism and modernity of the state (H. C. G. Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 137, 141, 145–6, 211; cf. Lord Rosebery, *Napoleon. The Last Phase* (1900), p. 229). There is a similar distance between Carlyle's Cromwellianism and that of Auguste Comte and his disciples, whose philosophy Carlyle thought the 'ghastliest of algebraic spectralities' (Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, II, p. 372). Yet the biography of Cromwell by the Comtist Frederic Harrison for the most part follows devotedly in Carlyle's wake.

others who did remember Carlyle's insistence on the moral and religious basis of Cromwell's foreign policy. With Carlyle they admired, and reproached worldly modern statesmen who failed to emulate, Cromwell's readiness to 'go to war for a creed' and his impatience, when God's cause stood in the balance, with considerations of 'policy' and 'protocol'.¹⁸⁵ More commonly, however, Carlyle's account was absorbed by an older, less morally sensitive tradition which delighted, as Carlyle did not, in Cromwell's assertion of national might, and which now recruited that memory to the cause of Imperialist expansion.¹⁸⁶

The more secularly-minded adherents of hard Cromwellianism, while glad that Carlyle had shown Cromwell to be a good rather than a bad man, did not generally share Carlyle's preoccupation with his sincerity. Here Carlyle's success lay more among the practitioners of a gentler, kinder Cromwellianism, which belonged, as the hard version did not, to the dominant strand in Victorian moral thought. On this as on other fronts the *Letters and Speeches* reflects a larger pattern of responses to Carlyle's writings. Conventional opinion was always in two minds about Carlyle. Should it emphasise the ground it shared with him, or the differences between them? Many of his principles—work, duty, earnestness, sincerity—were archetypally Victorian in vocabulary.¹⁸⁷ Yet they could be less so in content. Three virtues above all did win Carlyle conventional praise: his influence as a 'moral force' or 'moral teacher';¹⁸⁸ his 'earnestness'; and his 'sincerity'.¹⁸⁹ In each case the praise, wittingly or unwittingly, was selective. In each case he would have had grounds to mistrust it. To Carlyle, conventional invocations of 'morality' were cloaks

¹⁸⁵ *LS*, II, p. 468 (cf. p. 512; *CW*, X, pp. 143–4); Dawson, *Biographical Lectures*, pp. 48–50, 56–7, 83.

¹⁸⁶ Worden, 'Victorians', p. 134; and see E. T. Cook and Andrew Wedderburn, eds., *The Complete Works of John Ruskin* (39 vols., 1903–12), XXIX, p. 60.

¹⁸⁷ Houghton, *Victorian Frame of Mind*.

¹⁸⁸ Masson, *Carlyle*, pp. 16–17; *Saturday Review*, 12 February 1881, p. 200.

¹⁸⁹ For the range of agreement on the latter two qualities, which tended to be coupled, and which were virtually identical in Carlyle's mind (*CW*, V, p. 45, and compare p. 147 with p. 185), see: *Christian Remembrancer*, IV, 120–2; *Gentleman's Magazine*, NS XXVI, 473; W. R. Greg, *Literary and Social Judgements* (1869 edn.), p. 136; Bayne, *Lessons*, p. 9; Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography* (2 vols., 1877), I, p. 387; Hodge, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 23; *The Congregationalist*, X, 213; Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, I, pp. 291, 295; Kerr, *Carlyle as Seen in his Works*, pp. 105–7; Morley, *Critical Miscellanies*, pp. 137–9, 156; James Martineau, *Essays*, I, p. 271; Houghton, *Victorian Frame of Mind*, pp. 220, 243, 256; Siegel, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 401; Jude V. Nixon, "'Return Alphias': The Forster/Carlyle Unpublished Letters", *Carlyle Studies Annual*, XVIII (1998), 86.

for worldly advancement.¹⁹⁰ To him, ‘earnestness’ was the enemy of ‘respectability’:¹⁹¹ convention was liable—so anyway its critics said—to yield the first to the second or to conflate the two.¹⁹² ‘Sincerity’, for Carlyle, was the ‘first characteristic’ of a hero.¹⁹³ Yet mainstream Victorians were troubled where not repelled by his doctrine of heroism, a doctrine which, despite his denials,¹⁹⁴ seemed to his readers, sometimes even to the friendliest of them, to involve or imply the worship of force or to make might the judge of right.¹⁹⁵ Even when the doctrine was remembered approvingly, as in those pious anthologies of Carlyle, with their whiff of the Sunday school, compiled around the end of the century, it was not for its vindication of divinely appointed leadership or of righteous force but as an antidote to levelling moral tendencies and as a spur to ethical uplift.¹⁹⁶ The moral or spiritual ambition characteristically urged by Victorians was ‘high’, ‘lofty’, ‘elevated’, ‘exalted’, rising into the purer air above. Carlyle’s hero-worship looks not up but down, into vaporous abysses or the roots of the earth.¹⁹⁷

The sincerity of the Cromwell of the *Letters and Speeches* made many

¹⁹⁰ *CW*, XXVII, p. 29. Though Carlyle’s understanding of the difference between right and wrong was for the most part orthodox enough, his sense of the incompatibility of right with convention was not. In *The French Revolution* Carlyle meets the charges conventionally levelled at his hero Mirabeau with the reply that ‘the morality by which he could be judged has not yet got uttered in the speech of men’ (*CW*, III, p. 145).

¹⁹¹ *CW*, V, p. 208, XXVIII, pp. 108–9, 326–7 (cf. p. 479).

¹⁹² See e.g. *The Congregationalist*, II, 112 (cf. *CW*, X, p. 117).

¹⁹³ *CW*, V, pp. 45, 147.

¹⁹⁴ Clubbe, *Two Reminiscences*, pp. 98–9 (cf. *CW*, V, pp. 31, 204), XXVII, p. 73; Carlyle, *Selected Writings*, p. 178).

¹⁹⁵ See e.g. *Christian Remembrancer*, III (1842), 348–9, IV, 151–2, XI (1846), 243–5, 302; Marsden, *History of the Later Puritans*, p. 170; William M’Combie, *Modern Civilisation* (Edinburgh, 1864), pp. 55–7; Greg, *Literary and Social Judgements*, p. 123; Smith, *Three English Statesmen*, p. 82; Morley, *Critical Miscellanies*, I, pp. 166–75; *The Congregationalist*, X, 287–8; Kerr, *Carlyle as Seen in his Works*, p. 164; Leask, *Readings from Carlyle*, p. 20; Morley, *Oliver Cromwell*, pp. 3, 480, 493; Arthur, *Heroes*, pp. 9–10; Siegel, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 429; Jane Garnett, ‘Aspects of the Relationship between Protestant Ethics and Economic Activity in mid-Victorian England’, D.Phil. thesis, Univ. of Oxford (1986), pp. 155–7; cf. Bisset, *Omitted Chapters*, p. 433. Carlyle had his defenders: e.g. Dawson, *Biographical Lectures*, pp. 386–8; *Saturday Review*, 12 February 1881, p. 199.

¹⁹⁶ Japp, *Three Great Teachers*, pp. 29 ff.; Reid, *Thomas Carlyle*, pp. 6, 11; Hodge, *Thomas Carlyle*, pp. 17, 23; Leask, *Readings from Carlyle*, pp. 4, 26–7 (though cf. p. 19); cf. J. R. Seeley, ‘From the Cambridge Lecture-Rooms: Bonaparte’, *Macmillan’s Magazine*, XLIV (1881), 170.

¹⁹⁷ He once observed that the only way an inhabitant of the eighteenth century could have avoided its scepticism was by remaining ‘below’ the age: *CW*, V, p. 171. Carlyle did occasionally look upward: *LS*, II, p. 499 (cf. *CW*, XX, p. 162); Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, I, p. 62.

more friends than his heroism.¹⁹⁸ Anthologists withdrew him from Valhalla, deleted the madness in him next to greatness. The qualities conventionally commended in Carlyle—sincerity, earnestness, morality—were the ones which he ascribed to Cromwell, and which his readers were generally ready to recognise in Carlyle's hero. But again he could mean, by those same words, different things. Victorians praised Carlyle for rescuing Cromwell's 'moral character', which earlier generations had besmirched.¹⁹⁹ Yet the nineteenth century's concern with 'character',²⁰⁰ like its notions of morality, seemed false to Carlyle.²⁰¹ For Victorians Cromwell's morality, his commitment to the rule of principle, the high seriousness of his idealism, his courage and resolution on its behalf, were the essence of his greatness. Yet while those qualities made him an ethical model, he was not one to be followed into the irregular political aims and methods by which he had made force the arbiter of politics.²⁰²

Whig and liberal history, assailed by Carlyle, assimilated him. In the 1860s Peter Bayne, who had an 'almost reverential admiration' for the *Letters and Speeches*,²⁰³ declared it to have been the 'special glory' of the Puritans that they had 'combined all that is seen in them by Bentham'—Carlyle's *bête noire*—'with all that is seen in them by Carlyle'.²⁰⁴ Most Victorian admirers of Cromwell saw around them not, as Carlyle did, national degeneration but national progress, that guiding principle of Victorian Whig historiography which answered to the growing confidence, optimism and prosperity of the period after around 1850. Carlyle's influence, which had been at its strongest in the bleaker era before the middle of the century, remained a mighty force thereafter, despite the growing extremism of his views and even though it had become easy for his critics to portray his alienation as isolation.²⁰⁵ That influence,

¹⁹⁸ Good examples of the capacity of readers to discriminate between them in favour of the former are: *North British Review*, XXXVI, 505–37; Tulloch, *English Puritanism*, pp. 53 ff.; Bayne, *Lessons*, pp. 53–61; Bayne, *Chief Actors*, p. 391; *Todmorden Advertiser* 22 February 1889; cf. George Gilfillan, *Modern Christian Heroes* (1869), pp. 10–11.

¹⁹⁹ Clarke, *Lectures*, p. 6 (cf. *The Times*, 13 September 1845, p. 7).

²⁰⁰ Collini, *Public Moralists*, ch. 3; cf. Samuel, 'Discovery of Puritanism', pp. 210, 244.

²⁰¹ *CW*, XXVII, p. 79; cf. *LS*, III, p. 65; *CL*, XIX, p. 27. Carlyle likewise departed from nineteenth-century convention in mistrusting the word 'principle': *CW*, V, p. 208 (cf. e.g. Godwin, *History*, II, p. 31; Smith, *Three English Statesmen*, p. 2).

²⁰² Worden, 'Victorians', pp. 128–9.

²⁰³ Bayne, *Lessons*, p. 61.

²⁰⁴ Quoted by Lang, *Victorians and the Stuart Heritage*, p. 136.

²⁰⁵ Siegel, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 189; Heffer, *Moral Desperado*, pp. 13, 15. For tributes to the long-term impact of Carlyle's seriousness see e.g. Martineau, *Autobiography*, I, p. 387; *The Spectator*, 12 February 1881, p. 209; Morley, *Critical Miscellanies*, I, p. 137.

nonetheless, mingled with and was diluted by more emollient developments of opinion.

Whig history paid its largest tribute to Carlyle in placing Puritanism at the centre of the civil-war conflicts. Yet the Puritanism it celebrated, like the Cromwell it celebrated, was an ethical rather than a political model. It had as much in common with the peaceably- and constitutionally-inclined movement delineated by Dissenting historians before Carlyle as with his version. The influence of Macaulay, who liked Puritan morality but disliked Puritan theology, was at work too. Hume had accused Puritanism of 'loosening all the ties of morality', and thus of being an incitement to Cromwell's selfish ambition:²⁰⁶ to the Victorians Puritanism was above all a moral force, and Cromwell's Puritanism evidence of his integrity of character. Over the nineteenth century Puritanism won the ethical high ground of seventeenth-century historiography, where its sober virtue was contrasted with the decadent profligacy of the Restoration. Carlyle made the same comparison, but less powerfully or influentially than Macaulay. Cromwell and Puritanism were agreed by their mainstream admirers to have represented, in their 'morality', the best of an unusually 'moral' age.²⁰⁷ The moral dimension of Puritanism was preferred to its 'enthusiastic or fanatical' one,²⁰⁸ the movement earning most admiration when it rose above sectarian narrowness, as Cromwell was likewise praised for doing.²⁰⁹ It was for its moral content that at the end of the century S. R. Gardiner—perhaps the man who, more than any other, shaped the characterisations of Cromwell and of Puritanism that have predominated through the twentieth century—judged the Puritan legacy to posterity

²⁰⁶ Quoted by Lang, *Victorians and the Stuart Heritage*, p. 11.

²⁰⁷ Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays*, I, pp. 103–4; Macaulay, *History*, I, p. 92; Robert Vaughan, *Memoirs of the Stuart Dynasty* (2 vols., 1831), II, p. 220; D'Aubigné, *Protector*, p. 277; Marsden, *History of the Later Puritans*, pp. 34–5; Smith, *Three English Statesmen*, p. 2; Dawson, *Biographical Lectures*, pp. 61–2, 64; Morley, *Critical Miscellanies*, I, p. 140; Charles Kingsley, *His Letters and Memories of his Life edited by his Wife* (2 vols., 1977), I, p. 399; Gardiner, *Cromwell's Place*, p. 61; Gardiner, *Oliver Cromwell*, pp. 7, 289; Karsten, *Patriot-Heroes*, p. 152. Cf. Godwin, *History*, I, pp. 84, 86, II, p. 31, IV, pp. 590–4; Price, *History of Protestant Nonconformity*, II, p. 628; *Westminster Review*, XXXIII (1839), 216, 227, 236–7; Forster, *Statesmen*, IV, p. 181. Carlyle too equated Puritanism with morality (*CL*, VII, p. 53)—but with his own understanding of it.

²⁰⁸ D'Aubigné, *Protector*, p. 365.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 245–6; *British Quarterly Review*, X, 254; François Guizot, *On the Causes of the Success of the English Revolution of 1640–1688* (1850), p. 59; Tulloch, *English Puritanism*, pp. 160, 202–4; Gardiner, *Cromwell's Place in History*, pp. 43, 103, 108–9; Gardiner, *Oliver Cromwell*, pp. 7, 143; Morley, *Oliver Cromwell*, p. 6. Cf. Hume, *History*, p. 692; Lang, *Victorians and the Stuart Heritage*, pp. 75–7, 107.

‘the most precious possession of the nation’.²¹⁰ Gardiner’s judgement caught the mood of his time. By contrast it was only on the fringe of militant Nonconformity that Carlyle’s identification of the best of Puritanism with military theocracy won a following. Carlyle thought that Puritanism spoke for the nation until it let Cromwell down. Gardiner thought that it spoke for the nation until Cromwell let it down, by attempting, through the rule of the Major-Generals, that enforcement of biblical morality which for Carlyle was Puritanism’s chief glory.²¹¹

On no subject did Carlyle stand further from Victorian orthodoxy than religious toleration, the proud achievement of nineteenth-century thought and legislation and the supreme ground of Nonconformist gratitude to Cromwell. The Victorians saw toleration as Cromwell’s highest aspiration and achievement.²¹² Carlyle detested the ‘babble of toleration’ around him, which he attributed to religious ‘doubt and indifference’.²¹³ Cromwell, he thought, had rightly believed in ‘toleration’ only of ‘the unessential’, and in ‘inexorable intolerance for the want of the essential’.²¹⁴ ‘On the whole’, ruled Carlyle, men are placed on earth not to ‘tolerate’ falsehoods but to ‘extinguish’ them.²¹⁵

As in religion, so in politics, Carlyle’s Cromwell was assimilated. Gardiner portrayed the protector as the champion of ‘liberty and peaceful progress’,²¹⁶ who from time to time unfortunately lost sight of the constitutional principles he inherently favoured. Other Victorians agreed that Cromwell wanted to rule constitutionally, and were troubled when he was unable to do so:²¹⁷ Carlyle thought it ‘curious’ that he made the

²¹⁰ S. R. Gardiner, *Cromwell's Place in History* (1897), p. 106.

²¹¹ Gardiner, *Oliver Cromwell*, p. 263 (cf. p. 317). Cf. Gardiner, *Cromwell's Place*, pp. 106–7; Picton, *Oliver Cromwell*, p. 440.

²¹² Worden, ‘Victorians’, pp. 130–1; and see Wilson, *Carlyle on Cromwell*, p. 295.

²¹³ *HS*, p. 163; Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 127.

²¹⁴ *LS*, II, pp. 345 n., 536; *HS*, p. 163; *CW*, XX, p. 129. It is characteristic of Carlyle that, where other Victorians were enraptured by John Milton’s plea for freedom of expression, *Areopagitica*, Carlyle was much more struck by the poet’s anti-prelatical tracts, whose ‘dogmatic narrowness’ dismayed other Victorian opinion: Norton, *Two Note Books*, pp. 23–30; Tulloch, *English Puritanism*, pp. 206–7; Siegel, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 68.

²¹⁵ *CW*, V, pp. 149–50. And yet on the subject of toleration, too, Carlyle cannot suppress evidence of Whig and liberal sentiments which he elsewhere scorns: *LS*, I, p. 459, III, p. 154; *CW*, X, pp. 225–6, XX, pp. 309, 318, XXVI, p. 468, XXVII, pp. 57, 72.

²¹⁶ *Free Church Chronicle*, 1899, p. 153; cf. the equation of Puritanism with progress by Andrew Fairbairn, *The New Sacerdotalism and the New Puritanism* (1885), p. 8.

²¹⁷ *Eclectic Review*, XXV (1849), 9; Langford, *English Democracy*, p. 40; Tulloch, *English Puritanism*, p. 134; Smith, *Three English Statesmen*, p. 89; Gardiner, *Cromwell's Place in History*, p. 98; Firth’s comment in *LS*, I, p. 1; Lang, *Victorians and the Stuart Heritage*, p. 137. Cf. Macaulay, *Essays*, I, p. 52; Macaulay, *History*, I, pp. 100–1.

attempt.²¹⁸ Before Carlyle, Cromwell was the villain who had destroyed the Whig aims of the parliamentary heroes. After Carlyle he was welcomed into the Whig fold. In 1840 John Forster had published his *Statesmen of the Commonwealth*, an influential paean to Eliot, Pym, Hampden, and Vane and to the cause criminally betrayed by Cromwell.²¹⁹ Forster was one of those whom the *Letters and Speeches* instantly converted to Cromwell.²²⁰ Yet he soon returned to the Whiggish theme of the heroism of the parliamentary leaders of 1640–2.²²¹ Where, for Carlyle, the parliamentary leaders were Cromwell's inferior and disposable allies, in Forster's subsequent writing their contribution to the defeat of Stuart tyranny is at least as substantial and edifying as his.²²² So is it in many Victorian accounts.²²³ Peter Bayne combined the reverence for Cromwell he had learned from Carlyle with a no less fulsome respect for that ancient focus of Whig admiration, the moment of deliverance from tyranny brought by the gathering of the Long Parliament in 1640, 'a day memorable in the annals of the world'.²²⁴

For to the later Victorians, no less than to Macaulay and Godwin early in the century, it was the thwarting of tyranny that was the enduring achievement of the Puritan Revolution. Carlyle, though acknowledging that feat, took little interest in it. In conventional accounts, the tyranny had been at once political and ecclesiastical, the two being inseparably combined.²²⁵ The 1640s had been a struggle for 'civil and

²¹⁸ *CW*, V, p. 232; cf. *LS*, II, p. 440, III, pp. 198–9.

²¹⁹ Cf. Wilson, *Oliver Cromwell*, p. vi.

²²⁰ John Forster, *Debates on the Grand Remonstrance* (1860), p. 414.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, passim; Forster, *Arrest of the Five Members* (1860).

²²² Cf. Nixon, "Return Alphas", 83.

²²³ Clarke, *Lectures*, p. 216; *The English Republic*, I (1851), 362–3; Tulloch, *English Puritanism*, p. 94; Bayne, *Chief Actors*, pp. 164–7; Thomas Cooper, *Thoughts at Forescore* (1885), p. 200; Fairbairn, *New Sacerdotalism*, p. 6 (with which compare the stained-glass windows commemorating seventeenth-century Puritanism in the chapel of Mansfield College, Oxford, of which Fairbairn was Principal); Horne, 'Cromwell Tercentenary', p. 125; C. S. Horne, *A Popular History of the Free Churches* (1903), p. 88; John Brown, *Commonwealth England* (1904), p. 141; Lang, *Victorians and the Stuart Age*, p. 219; Samuel, 'Discovery of Puritanism', p. 211. Another indication of Carlyle's assimilation is the readiness of Whiggish admirers of his account of Cromwell to recommend gradual methods of reform in place of the sudden ones (normally) praised by Carlyle: *Christian Remembrancer*, II, 152; Morley, *Critical Miscellanies*, I, pp. 197–8; Gardiner, *Cromwell's Place in History*, pp. 41, 98, 104; cf. Nugent, *Memorials of John Hampden*, I, pp. 211–12.

²²⁴ Bayne, *Chief Actors*, p. 189.

²²⁵ See e.g. Guizot, *Causes of the Success of the English Revolution*, pp. 2–3; Forster, *Debates on the Grand Remonstrance*, p. 419 (cf. Forster, *Statesmen*, I, p. 18); Marsden, *History of the Later Puritans*, pp. 6–7; Smith, *Three English Statesmen*, p. 9; Gardiner, *Oliver Cromwell*, p. 16; Fairbairn, *New Sacerdotalism*, p. 6. Cf. Russell, *Life of Oliver Cromwell*, p. 222; Clarke, *Lectures*, pp. 2–3; Aveling, *Cromwell and Puritans*, p. 21; *Free Church Chronicle*, 1899, p. 154.

religious liberty', that tireless nineteenth-century phrase which became a standard term in tributes to the achievements of Cromwell and of Puritanism.²²⁶ It was a phrase Carlyle liked to mock.²²⁷ What Carlyle was watching was the transformation of Cromwell into a Victorian liberal. Cromwell became an earlier Gladstone:²²⁸ an ironic development, for the Liberal leader seems on the whole to have had an unfavourable view of Cromwell,²²⁹ though not as low as Carlyle's of Gladstone.²³⁰

IV

'Courage, my friends,' as Carlyle would say at this point, 'I now see land!'²³¹ But Cromwell was not a Victorian liberal. Wherever Carlyle differs from other nineteenth-century, indeed from twentieth-century commentators about the inner springs of Cromwell's actions, it is he who is right, or at least the more right. The deficiencies of his portrait are obvious enough. Disdaining political processes, he did not explore the practical goals and pressures of Cromwell's career very far.²³² He found it easier

²²⁶ *Congregational Magazine*, NS VIII (1832), 423; *Westminster Review*, XXXIII, 236; Clarke, *Lectures*, pp. 10–11, 106, 216; D'Aubigné, *Protector*, p. 305; **York Herald*, 9 December 1848; Bray, *Life . . . of Oliver Cromwell*, p. 5; Alessandro Gavazi, *Justice to Oliver Cromwell* (1869), pp. 6, 12; Picton, *Oliver Cromwell*, p. 229; F. A. Inderwick, *The Interregnum* (1891), p. 318; C. H. Firth, *Oliver Cromwell and the Rule of the Puritans in England* (Oxford, 1953 edn.), p. 249; Reid, *Sir Richard Tangye*, p. 201; Rushton, *My Life*, pp. 108–10; Lang, *Victorians and the Stuart Heritage*, p. 116; Pamela Horn, 'Nineteenth Century Farm Workers', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, IV (1972), 168; Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil*, ch. 3; cf. G. M. Trevelyan, *England under the Stuarts* (1904), p. 327. (The phrase itself had been common enough before 1800.)

²²⁷ *CW*, XXVIII, p. 164, XXIX, p. 296 (cf. XXVII, p. 79); *HS*, p. 271; *CL*, XX, p. 124.

²²⁸ For the drawing of parallels between them see *Congregational Year Book* 1877, p. 122; William Willis, *Oliver Cromwell and the Vaudois* (1895), title-page; Firth, *Oliver Cromwell*, p. v.; Howell, 'The Nineteenth Century', p. 102. Cf. the description of Gladstone by the Cromwellian John Clifford quoted by D. W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience. Chapel and Politics, 1870–1914* (1982), p. 98; and, for a parallel less flattering to both men, J. Morrison Davidson, *Annals of Toil* (4 vols., 1896–8), II, p. 208.

²²⁹ Roger Howell, 'Images of Oliver Cromwell', in Richardson, *Images of Oliver Cromwell*, p. 29; Howell, 'The Nineteenth Century', *ibid.*, p. 103 (cf. M. R. D. Foot and H. C. G. Matthew, eds., *The Gladstone Diaries* (14 vols., Oxford, 1968–94), VI, p. 169, XII, p. 151).

²³⁰ Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, II, p. 423.

²³¹ *LS*, III, p. 124; *CW*, IV, p. 288.

²³² The nearest Carlyle comes to a purely political explanation of any of Cromwell's political difficulties is at *LS*, III, p. 149. Carlyle has still less time for constitutions than for politics. His indifference to the constitutional arrangements of the years 1653–8 is sharply illustrated at *LS*, II, pp. 302 n., 315, 393, and by his neglect of the subject of the council which advised and limited the protector.

to see the world through his hero's eyes than his hero through the world's. His study was distorted, too, sometimes to that point of absurdity which he never feared to risk, by both the stereotype of the heroic character,²³³ and the German frame of philosophical reference, that he brought to it.

Yet we, no less than the Victorians, can read Carlyle selectively. When Gardiner wrote, the Victorian religious revival, except on its extreme wings, was in retreat. The new scepticism, which made it hard for writers to enter into the Puritan mentality, placed a veil over it:²³⁴ a thinner one than that of the eighteenth-century scepticism attacked by Carlyle, but for that reason less easily perceptible to subsequent generations. Carlyle, understanding instinctively the consuming power of Cromwell's providentialism, recognised his hero's inflexible commitment to divine justice and vengeance.²³⁵ As the only historian to have been comfortable with every manifestation of Cromwell's ferocity, he grasped that his conduct in Ireland, and his military coups in England, were consistent with his beliefs and conduct throughout his career, not, as the gentler Cromwellians of Victorian England preferred to think, troubling departures from his better feelings. Alone among Victorian historians Carlyle knew the depth of Cromwell's indifference to constitutional forms and liberties when godly reformation was at stake. He is, too, the only narrator of Cromwell's life to have grasped intuitively Cromwell's principle of liberty of conscience: to have seen at once that, for all the magnanimity and tenderness contained in Cromwell's personality, the toleration he sought would be confined to the godly; that it was intended to secure not, as liberal Victorians supposed, the rights of individuals, but the unity of

²³³ The debt of Carlyle's portrait of Cromwell to predetermined characterisation is indicated by the parallel between the 'worn and weary' protector (*LS*, III, p. 82) and the 'worn down' Abbot Samson (*CW*, X, p. 101), or by the resemblances between his account of Cromwell and that of Mirabeau in *The French Revolution: CW*, II, p. 137, III, pp. 131, 137–42, 145–6. See too Carlyle's parallel between Cromwell and Dr Johnson (*CW*, V, pp. 217–18).

²³⁴ For indications of that process see: Cornish, *Life of Oliver Cromwell*, p. 14; A. M. Fairbairn *et al.*, *Bicentenary Lectures* (1889), preface; Frederic Harrison, *Oliver Cromwell* (1889), p. 189; Morley, *Oliver Cromwell*, p. 362 ('the spiritual raptures of the hour': cf. *Congregational Year-book*, 1881, p. 166); Horne, 'Cromwell Tercentenary', p. 127; Lord Rosebery, *Oliver Cromwell. A Eulogy and an Appreciation* (n.d.), p. 22. The tone of Morley's and Rosebery's remarks recalls (*pace* Morley, *Oliver Cromwell*, pp. 1–2) the eighteenth-century biography which explained how Cromwell 'grew mighty sober and religious' (Kimber, *Life of Oliver Cromwell*, p. 2).

²³⁵ Carlyle's belief that 'there is no crime which the Supreme Powers do more terribly avenge' than 'the crime of being deaf to God's voice' (*LS*, II, p. 63) attuned him to Cromwell's conviction that God's enemies, when they fail to acknowledge the evidence of divine disapproval and to repent of their cause, must receive no mercy (Blair Worden, 'Providence and Politics in Cromwellian England', *Past and Present*, no. 109 (1985), 67–8; cf. *LS*, I, p. 217).

the saints and the advance of God's word.²³⁶ In most twentieth-century accounts, Cromwell's zeal for godly reformation, and his principle of liberty of conscience, are separate if not contradictory impulses. Carlyle knew their indivisibility.

Gardiner led that revolution in seventeenth-century scholarship beside which Carlyle's archival labours look innocent and his contextual settings, though often perceptive, always thin. In placing Cromwell at odds with his society Carlyle gave his book a positively anti-contextual impetus. Yet Cromwell, the most private of decision-makers, took resolutions of incalculable consequence for the future of his country in solitary prayer and inner turmoil,²³⁷ within recesses of his mind which no amount of contextual reconstruction will recover and which Carlyle penetrated as Gardiner never did.

Gardiner's partner in the professionalisation of seventeenth-century studies was C. H. Firth. If Carlyle's is the one great book to have been written on Cromwell, Firth's biography is the best good one. Yet a comparison of the prose of Carlyle, who believed, as Leslie Stephen put it, that 'every sentence must be alive to its finger's ends',²³⁸ with the prose of Firth is no advertisement for the efficacy of professional historical writing. Carlyle explained, histrionically no doubt but at least matching, and thus catching, the intensity of what he described, that Cromwell's Puritans 'knew in every fibre, and with heroic daring laid to heart, that an almighty justice does verily rule this world; that it is good to fight on God's side, and bad to fight on the Devil's side!'²³⁹ Here, on the same theme, is Firth: 'Briefly stated, Cromwell's argument was that the victories of the army, and the convictions of the godly, were internal and external evidences of God's will, to be obeyed as a duty.'²⁴⁰ Firth's biography was written a century ago. Half a century ago G. M. Young, in glancing at the limitations of Firth's book, said what might equally well be said today: that Cromwell is 'one of those figures who invite, almost

²³⁶ *LS*, I, pp. 205–6, 218, 242, 250–1, II, p. 322 (cf. pp. 332, 348); Blair Worden, 'Toleration and the Cromwellian Protectorate', *Studies in Church History*, XXI, 199–233. In fact the principle of liberty of conscience is given too little attention in Carlyle's account; but that defect is at least an antidote to the distortion wrought by nineteenth-century enthusiasm on its behalf.

²³⁷ Cf. Blair Worden, 'Oliver Cromwell and the Sin of Achan', in Derek Beales and Geoffrey Best, eds., *History, Society and the Churches. Essays in honour of Owen Chadwick* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 125–45.

²³⁸ *Dictionary of National Biography*: Carlyle, Thomas.

²³⁹ *LS*, I, p. 8.

²⁴⁰ Firth, *Oliver Cromwell*, p. 209 (cf. pp. 247–8); see too Vogeler, *Frederic Harrison*, p. 359.

demand, a personal interpretation, who impose on us a certain personal intimacy. And here Carlyle holds the field.²⁴¹

Perhaps some readers would welcome a less personal intimacy. To read the *Letters and Speeches* is to engage with two minds, Cromwell's and Carlyle's, where readers with interests confined to the seventeenth century might prefer to deal with one. Carlyle, who preached literary self-effacement, practised its opposite. Yet editorial impersonality, even if attainable, has its own limitations. Firth gave encouragement to C. S. Stainer,²⁴² whose honourably colourless edition of Cromwell's speeches in 1901 attempted, as Carlyle's book had not, to come to grips with the problems of textual derivation which they raise. But Stainer's book sank with little trace. Three years later Firth had to settle for a fresh edition of Carlyle, whose errors were ably and severely corrected by Firth's devotee S. C. Lomas.²⁴³ In W. C. Abbott's massive attempt to replace Carlyle in 1937–47—an indispensable quarry but not a book—the tedium of the commentary spreads into the texts themselves. The revolution of seventeenth-century studies begun by Gardiner and Firth has not shaken the supremacy of a work so alien to the premises and methods of the modern academic community. The *Letters and Speeches* is not, perhaps, the ideal place for a first encounter with Carlyle; but it remains the place to meet Cromwell.

²⁴¹ Firth, *Oliver Cromwell*, pp. vi–vii.

²⁴² Charles S. Stainer, *Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (1901), p. xi.

²⁴³ *LS*, I, p. lxii.