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## Oliver Cromwell, the Regicide and the Sons of Zeruah

*John Morrill and Philip Baker*

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### *Editor's Introduction*

Historians have long debated Cromwell's attitudes towards the execution of Charles I and his role in bringing it about. Some have argued that he was a late and reluctant convert to the cause of regicide, while others have suggested that he accepted the need to bring Charles to trial rather earlier and was then trying to secure as much support for this course as possible. Morrill and Baker engage with this debate by arguing that it is essential to distinguish between Cromwell's attitudes towards Charles I and his attitudes towards monarchy. They suggest that the evidence of Cromwell's contributions to the Putney Debates reveals that by 1 November 1647 at the latest he had come to acknowledge the severe problems posed by Charles I personally, but that he believed God's views on the future of monarchy were not yet apparent. Furthermore, his reference to the 'sons of Zeruah' (11 November 1647) indicates that he felt that the army could not get away with killing the king at that stage. Morrill and Baker argue that the key to Cromwell's behaviour from November 1647 to January 1649 lay in the combination of a growing conviction that Charles should be brought to trial – and possibly even executed – with a continuing uncertainty over when, how and by whom this was to be accomplished.

The essay draws out the ways in which Biblical language and allusions saturated Cromwell's 43 letters and 28 speeches that survive from this period. These drew on 21 Old Testament books and 13 New Testament books, but they contain no evidence at all that he had read anything other than the Bible.

The letters during the course of 1648 indicate a particular preoccupation with Isaiah, chapters 8 and 9, and show Cromwell searching for guidance from God as to how to proceed. He was clear from the beginning of 1648 that Charles should be brought to trial; by the autumn of that year he apparently believed that the King deserved to die; but he remained uncertain as to when and how this would be achieved, and he almost certainly did not want to see the monarchy itself abolished. His initial preference was probably for Charles to abdicate in favour of one of his sons, and for a new paper constitution to be brought in prior to the King's trial. Pride's Purge threw him off balance, and in an attempt to restore his preferred sequence of events, Cromwell was forced to accept the 'cruel necessity' of bringing the King to trial and execution sooner than he had envisaged.

The importance of this essay lies in its very close reading of Cromwell's letters and speeches during the 15 months prior to the Regicide, its judicious sifting of other contemporary evidence, and its very precise analysis of Cromwell's motives and attitudes. The authors demonstrate that Cromwell was simultaneously 'a bitter opponent of Charles, a reluctant regicide, and a firm monarchist'. This provides a far subtler and more nuanced account than earlier treatments of the subject as well as a penetrating reconstruction of Cromwell's mind during the late 1640s.

# Oliver Cromwell, the Regicide and the Sons of Zeruiah<sup>1</sup>

*John Morrill and Philip Baker*

I

In the middle of the night following Charles I's execution, Oliver Cromwell stood over the coffin, peering down at the body to which the severed head had been surgically reattached, and is reported to have muttered the words 'cruel necessity'.<sup>2</sup> Whether or not this report – from a very distraught and highly partial observer, with an uncertain oral history before it was written down – is true, these words are, we shall suggest, precisely the words that would have been passing through his mind. Cromwell was, we shall argue, at once a bitter opponent of Charles, a reluctant regicide, and a firm monarchist. To understand how this can be so, and how he attempted to square circles in his own mind and in the making of public policy, we need to look with renewed care at his recorded words and actions over a period of some 15 months from the time of the Putney Debates to the final show trial.

This paper argues that Oliver Cromwell 'fell out of love' with Charles I no later than 1 November 1647 but that it took him a lot longer to decide quite how and when he was to be removed from power and to decide what the implications of Charles' deposition and/or execution were for the future of the monarchy. In doing so, it takes sides in perhaps the greatest single contention in modern scholarship about Cromwell. It does not question, but rather embraces, the near consensus that has acquitted him of the charges of hypocrisy, double-dealing and a craving for power levelled against him by almost all his contemporaries. His sincerity and his deep religious faith are now widely accepted. There may have been a strong capacity for self-deception in his make-up, but not a calculating policy of deceiving others. However, this paper does come up against a more sharply divided modern historiography about his actions and motives from the autumn of 1647 to 1 January 1649 than for any other period in his career.

1 This essay is based on extensive discussion between the two authors. It was fully written by John Morrill on the basis of these discussions and then subjected to revision and redraft after further debate between the authors.

2 The words were later recalled by the Earl of Southampton and are printed in Joseph Spence, *Anecdotes* (London, 1820), p. 275. See the full text and context in R. S. Paul, *The Lord Protector: Religion and Politics in the Life of Oliver Cromwell* (London, Lutterworth Press, 1955), p. 195.

The interpretative difficulties are concentrated into that 15-month period. All students of these events agree that Cromwell was at the least *a* and probably *the* driving force sustaining the trial and execution of Charles I throughout January 1649.<sup>3</sup> The evidence for this is plentiful but all of it unreliable. Cromwell himself falls silent as far as the historical record is concerned.<sup>4</sup> In the weeks following Pride's Purge, only one letter of his has survived, a request on 18 December 1648 written to the master and fellows of Trinity Hall that they allocate a room in Doctors' Commons to Isaac Dorislaus.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, between the act of regicide and Cromwell's departure for Ireland in August 1649, in essence we only have letters relating to the marriage of his son Richard to Dorothy Maijor or routine military memoranda. We have to rely on what others report about him, or what they later recalled. So nothing is certain. It might be fruitful to wonder about this; but for the present we do not wish to disturb the existing consensus. His name does stand out on the death warrant. It would seem that he was a determined king-killer in January 1649.

There is an equal consensus that Cromwell had never voiced any thought of putting an end to Charles I's rule before October 1647. We can see no reason to doubt Cromwell's commitment to monarchy in some form before that date, and no evidence to suggest that he may have had regicide on his mind.

But historians do not agree at all about Cromwell's intentions in the intervening period. On one wing are those like Charles Firth, David Underdown, Blair Worden and Barry Coward<sup>6</sup> who see him as a reluctant regicide, as a very late convert. They rely principally on his recorded words at Putney, on a speech in the Commons at the passage of the Vote of No Addresses (on 3 January 1648), on a sequence of letters to Robert Hammond throughout the year 1648, on royalist newsletters, and above all on his actions in the three weeks that followed his return to London on 6 December and ended with his meetings with those lawyers who had taken their seats in the Rump – especially the Tweedledum and Tweedledee of commonwealth jurisprudence, Whitlocke and Widdrington; and they paint

3 A cross-section of recent writing can be found below, note 6.

4 There is probably no great significance in this. It is probably a function of the fact that he had now returned to London and was in daily oral communication with all the principals with whom he had been in regular contact by letter over previous months (Lenthall, Fairfax, St John, Hammond, etc.).

5 *The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, ed. T. Carlyle, rev. S. C. Lomas (3 vols., London, 1904), I, letter lxxxvi. For its significance see p. 35.

6 C. H. Firth, *Oliver Cromwell and the Rule of the Puritans in England* (Oxford, OUP, 1900), pp. 156, 168, 172–80, 185, 206–12; D. E. Underdown, *Pride's Purge: Politics in the Puritan Revolution* (Oxford, OUP, 1971), pp. 76–89, 119, 167–8, 183–5; A. B. Worden, *The Rump Parliament 1648–1653* (Cambridge, CUP, 1974), pp. 47–9, 67–9, 77, 179–81; B. Coward, *Cromwell* (London, Longman, 1991), pp. 58–68.

a picture of a man desperate not to fall into a republican abyss, to move every which way to pressurize Charles into accepting the army's bottom line. On the other side are historians such as Veronica Wedgwood, Ian Gentles, Peter Gaunt and Robert Paul,<sup>7</sup> who interpret some of the same material (especially the letters to Hammond and those after the battle of Preston) differently; who place less reliance on royalist newsletters as tainted by too much wishful-thinking; who rely more on tantalizing army documents and memoirs, which are often graphic but always tainted with the wisdom of hindsight; and who rummage around more in the events of the weeks immediately after the Putney debates. The resulting narrative sees Cromwell as steeling himself much earlier for a confrontation with Charles, and as someone willing to look at a variety of means of achieving that end. For these scholars, Cromwell's manoeuvres after Pride's Purge were intended not to prevent a trial but to ensure that it had the widest possible support and the best possible outcome. In the middle, inscrutable as he can be, stands the towering figure of Samuel Rawson Gardiner, reviewing the evidence with a care others have eschewed and with much still to teach us – and sitting inscrutably on the fence.<sup>8</sup>

We believe that it is possible to get closer to the truth; and we hope to demonstrate this by a more careful discrimination between several questions. We want to distinguish much more clearly between Cromwell's attitude to Charles himself and his attitude to monarchy; and to assess his view of the role of that king and of the monarchy itself in the settlement of the nation. We want to focus most sharply on his own words, to subject them to a keener biblical hermeneutic than hitherto and to interrogate other sources as and when that process requires it.

We are assisted by the fact that for the period from the meeting of the General Council of the army in Putney Church in late October 1647 to the purge of the parliament on 6 December 1648 we do possess plenty of Cromwell's own words. We have 43 of his letters, several of them more than 1000 words long and many of them to close friends, what we can take to be fairly full transcripts of 28 speeches and significant interventions during the recorded parts of the Putney debates, again several of them meaty and substantial contributions of several hundred words each. In addition, we have less full summaries of several speeches made in the House of Commons and written down by others. No similar period gives us such a balanced blend of Cromwell's public and private utterance. However, beyond that we enter a quagmire of fragmentary material, all of a treach-

7 C. V. Wedgwood, *The Trial of Charles I* (London, Collins, 1964), pp. 25–6, 321, 77–80, 232 n.30; I. Gentles, *The New Model Army in England, Ireland and Scotland 1645–1653* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1992), pp. 283–307; P. Gaunt, *Oliver Cromwell* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1996), pp. 85–91; Paul, *Lord Protector*, pp. 158–60, 168–9, 175–6, 183–4.

8 Gardiner, *Civil War*, IV, pp. 27, 31, 56–9, 175–6, 191–2, 232–9, 281–97.

erous kind, too much of it subject to much wisdom of hindsight, and much else to deeply partisan perspective. Although so much of this contextual material contradicts other evidence, most historians (Gardiner apart) have chosen to decide what is reliable and what is not on more or less *a priori* grounds. This more than anything else explains the quite sharp range of interpretations of Cromwell's part in events. We wish to suggest that a closer attention to his own words and tighter comparison of the contextual material can yield a projection of Cromwell's ideas and intentions that is more convincing than any previous account.

Most of the letters from 1647–8 investigated for this paper contain retrievable quotations or paraphrases from books Cromwell had read. We can see he had read 34 books – 21 of them from the Old Testament and 13 from the New. There is not a shred of evidence from this period that Cromwell read anything other than the Bible. His political theory derived exclusively from his understanding of God's willingness to work with and through a variety of forms as recorded in the Old Testament. The nearest he ever came to a historical disquisition on the basis of government was at Putney:

[Consider the case of the Jews]. They were first [divided into] families where they lived, and had heads of families [to govern them], and they were [next] under Judges, and [then] they were under Kings. When they came to desire a King, they had a king; first elective and secondly by succession. In all these kinds of government they were happy and contented. If you make the best of it, if you would change the government to the best of it, it is but a moral thing. It is but as Paul says [Philippians 3.8] 'dross and dung in comparison of Christ.'<sup>9</sup>

Nowhere does Cromwell draw in any comparable way on classical or modern historical reading or knowledge. If we are to understand Cromwell's ruminations about what was possible and what was right to be done about the king in 1647–49 we must follow him through the Bible and the Bible alone.

## II

The story begins at Putney, and – from Cromwell's point of view – it begins with the very last and longest of his 28 contributions. We need to begin by revisiting the conclusions of a separate joint paper published recently

9 *The Clarke Papers: selections from the papers of William Clarke*, ed. C. H. Firth, Camden Society, new series, vols. 49, 54, 61, 62 (1891–1901), I, pp. 369–70.

under the title *The Case of the Armie Truly Restated*.<sup>10</sup> In that paper we concluded:

First, that the franchise debate at Putney was important because of its later resonance not because it changed anything at the time or helps us to understand the dynamics of politics in the later 1640s or the failure of the Putney Debates and the subsequent political recriminations. After the fury of the debate on 29 October, agreement was reached by all present – from Ireton on one wing to Rainsborough on the other – on a revision of the franchise, an agreement that was subsequently put out of mind by all present. Secondly, there was a running skirmish throughout the debates at Putney between the proponents of the *Case of the Armie* and the proponents of the *Agreement of the People*. The latter is far from a digest of the former and is not penned by the same hands, the *Case* being the work of Sexby and the *Agreement* of Wildman. This debate, we suggest, split officer from officer and adjutator from adjutator. Thirdly, the only ‘Levellers’ present at Putney were those spotted by historians. There were men present *later* associated with the name Leveller. Sexby, we have shown, was never a Leveller, and Wildman and Pettus were welcomed at Putney as men associated with the radicalisation of London politics not as the soulmates of Lilburne and Overton. Fourthly, the issue that really divided the General Council, and which led to its collapse amongst bitter recriminations of bad faith on all sides was not the franchise or even the detail of the Agreement; it was the Agreement’s eloquent silence – the future role of the monarchy. It was bitter disagreements about that which caused Clarke to stop reporting; that caused Ireton to storm out on 5 November of all days; and which dominates the subsequent recrimination. And again it was an issue that split the senior officers amongst themselves, the officer-adjutators and soldier-adjutators amongst themselves and the new agents amongst themselves.

Three issues relating to the kingship came up at Putney. The first was the allegation in *The Case* that the grandees had entered into a personal treaty with the king that would lead to the betrayal of the cause for which the soldiers had fought and many of them died. To this Ireton and Cromwell robustly replied that everything they had done was rooted in the express will of the General Council, and it was the agents who were at fault for seeking to undermine army unity. This issue was tersely discussed at the outset of two days’ debates, but in essence the agents withdrew the charge; and the grandees having protested their innocence dropped their complaint. The other debates related to the future settlement. Whether new arrangements for the making and administration of law, for civil government and for securing religious liberty for all sincere protestants were driven

10 Morrill and Baker, ‘The Case of the Armie Truly Restated’ in M. Mendle, ed., *The Putney Debates* (Cambridge, CUP, 2001).

through the existing parliament or formed into a paper constitution approved by the people at large, there remained the question as to whether the king would have any role in that settlement, and if so, at what point he would be consulted or invited to consent to it. Was there to be any *future* personal treaty with the king and if so with whom? And behind that lay a further question: whether *the* king, that is King Charles I, should be so consulted and invited; or whether *a* king should be so consulted and invited. Hard things were said about Charles I at Putney; and Sexby for one spoke against monarchy itself.<sup>11</sup> Captain Bishop and Colonel Harrison both called Charles ‘a man of bloud’,<sup>12</sup> and Cromwell for one assumed that Harrison was calling for the king’s death, as we shall see.<sup>13</sup>

Personal animus against Charles was present from the beginning of the debates, with Sexby, in the first substantive contribution on the first day, saying that ‘we have labour’d to please a Kinge, and I thinke, except we goe about to cutt all our throats wee shall not please him’.<sup>14</sup> Several speakers made clear their desire to ensure the outright abolition of the negative voice – something which had been a steady demand since the summer of 1646 of those soon to be called Levellers.<sup>15</sup> However, the *Case of the Armie* itself had called for a settlement of the people’s rights and freedoms before there was any consideration of those of the king. It had not called for the abolition of monarchy.<sup>16</sup> In the words of William Allen: the *Case* had allowed kings to be set up ‘as farre as may bee consistent with, and nott prejudiciall to the liberties of the Kingedome . . . which I thinke hee may and itt is not our judgement onely, butt of those set forth in the *Case of the Army*’.<sup>17</sup> If we read the silence of the *Agreement of the People* in the light of Wildman’s *A Cal to all the soldiers of the Armie* of 29 October (which we can presume most of those present would have done), we would reach the same conclusion. For in *A cal*, Wildman exhibited an extreme hostility to Charles, demanded his impeachment and recommended that only a free parliament (in other words, one elected within a free constitution) should reach a

11 CP, I, p. 377.

12 CP, I, pp. 383, 417. For the significance of this phrase, see P. Crawford, ‘“Charles Stuart. That Man of Blood”’, *Journal of British Studies*, XVI (1977), pp. 41–61.

13 CP, I, p. 417 and below, p. 25.

14 CP, I, pp. 227–8.

15 See the comments of Captain Allen (CP, I, p. 367), Col. Hewson (CP, I, p. 390) and Colonel Titchborne (CP, I, pp. 396, 405) and of the civilians Pettus (CP, I, pp. 351–2) and Wildman (CP, I, p. 386). Appearing in July 1646, *The Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens* was the first ‘Leveller’ pamphlet to manifest hostility to monarchy and the negative voice of the king: see D. M. Wolfe, ed., *Leveller Manifestoes of the Puritan Revolution* (New York, Humanities Press, 1967), pp. 109–15.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 214. See also Morrill and Baker, ‘Case of the Armie Truly Restated’.

17 CP, I, p. 377.

settlement with the king.<sup>18</sup> If monarchy were to be restored it would be by a free people conferring it onto a supplicant king – and not necessarily Charles I. This was a line of argument to which Wildman persisted in his heated exchanges with Ireton on 1 November,<sup>19</sup> where he concluded quite baldly that his argument was not about the survival of monarchy but about the need to call this king to account and to prevent future abuse of royal power: ‘I onely affirme that [our settlement] doth affirme the Kinge’s and Lords’ interest surer than before.’<sup>20</sup> Such a programme was close to that previously articulated by some future Leveller leaders, by some officers and by some agents; but it was incompatible with what Lilburne had been urging most recently in print and in private, and with what many officers – Rainsborough<sup>21</sup> as much as Ireton – and some adjutators had been saying. It split the General Council vertically and not horizontally.

Beyond that, as the rhetorical temperature rose on 1 November, some people went further than they had previously. Thus Sexby asserted that ‘wee are going to sett uppe the power of Kinges, some part of itt, which God will destroy; and which will bee butt as a burthensome stone that whosoever shall fall upon itt, will destroy him’.<sup>22</sup> But even this is compatible with a programme of extreme hostility to Charles and a delay in offering any role to some future monarch until every other aspect of the settlement was in place.

This, then, is the context for Cromwell’s three major interventions in the debate on 1 November.<sup>23</sup> The sequence is important. He began by arguing that this was not the time or the place for the army to decide on a negative voice in the king or in the Lords. That belonged either to a parliament chastened and made wiser by the army’s remonstrations or it belonged to a parliament elected under new and better electoral rules.<sup>24</sup> In a part of the speech apparently not recorded by Clarke but quoted directly by Colonel Goffe, he added that the General Council must beware of ‘a lying spiritt in the mouth of Ahab’s Prophets. Hee speakes falselie to us in the name of the Lord.’<sup>25</sup> Goffe rebuked Cromwell for cherry-picking the offerings of comrades from the Friday prayer meeting. Cromwell, clearly stung and hurt,

18 [John Wildman?] *A Cal to all the Souldiers of the Armie* ([29 Oct.] 1647, E412/10), pp. 2, 3, 5, 6, 8 [all second pagination].

19 *CP*, I, pp. 386–94.

20 *CP*, I, p. 377.

21 ‘Mr Rainsborough tooke occasion to take notice as if what Mr Allen spoke did reflect upon himself or some other there, as if they were against the name of Kinge and Lords’: *CP*, I, p. 377.

22 *Ibid.*

23 For his views on kingship on the opening day see summary in Firth, *Oliver Cromwell*, pp. 177–8.

24 *CP*, I, pp. 368–71.

25 *CP*, I, p. 374.

responded by twice acknowledging his hastiness in running to judgement. Following Allen's call for all to keep an open mind on the king's future, and Sexby's meditation on the words of Jeremiah: 'we find in the worde of God: "I would heal Babylon but shee would not be healed". I thinke that wee have gone about to heale Babylon when shee would not',<sup>26</sup> Cromwell returns to Goffe's rebuke and pleads for caution against the too-ready appropriation of Old Testament typologies. But he then goes into a dramatic and clearly extempore meditation on the series of testimonies given forth as a result of the day of prayer.

Truly wee have heard many speaking to us; and I cannott butt thinke that in many of those things *God* hath spoken to us . . . I cannott see butt that wee all speake to the same end, and the mistakes are onely in the way. The end is to deliver this nation from oppression and slavery, to accomplish that worke that God hath carried on in us . . . We agree thus farre.

He then makes a crucial admission: 'wee all apprehend danger from *the person of the kinge*'.<sup>27</sup> For several minutes he labours that point, reiterating that there is a problem with Charles himself – '[I] my self do concurre' with those who held that 'there can bee noe safetie in a consistencie with the person of the Kinge or the Lords, or their having the least interest in the publique affaires of the Kingedome'. But he argues that this does not mean that 'God will destroy these persons [ie kings in general] or that power'. Furthermore, God has clearly shown that they must not 'sett uppe' or 'preserve [kings]' where it threatens the public interest. But God has not yet made plain, he says, whether it would be hazardous to the public interest to 'goe about to destroy or take away' king and Lords or whether it would be more hazardous to retain them.<sup>28</sup> His plea is not to rush to judgement on this issue. The Council must not assume that even if God wills it, they are *ipso facto* the self-appointed instruments of God's will:

[let] those to whome this is not made cleare, though they do but thinke itt probable that God will destroy them, yett lett them make this rule to themselves, though God have a purpose to destroy them, and though I should finde a desire to destroy them . . . Therefore let those that are of that minde waite uppon God for such a way when the thinge maye bee done without sin and without scandall too.<sup>29</sup>

26 CP, I, pp. 376–8.

27 CP, I, p. 379 [emphasis added].

28 CP, I, pp. 382, 380.

29 CP, I, p. 382.

It is our contention that this gives us the key to Cromwell's politics over the next 15 months: an ever-greater conviction that God intended Charles I to be struck down, and a continuing uncertainty about when and how that would be done and about the extent of his and the army's agency. This anger against a king who was duplicitous and who willed the nation back into blood, the principal author and progenitor of the second civil war, can be seen to mount steadily; and Cromwell's public and private letters are a chronicle of his introspective search for the connection between God's actions in the history of His first chosen people, the people of Israel, and of His new chosen people, the people of England. In a sense Goffe's rebuke at Putney took 15 months to reach fruition.

### III

After 1 November, the generals reinforced the news blackout over events at Putney. The newspapers carried no reports, and Clarke and his team of stenographers laid down their quills. Fragmentary notes in his papers suggest that the mood got uglier by the day, but that the divisions remained vertical and not horizontal.<sup>30</sup> The debates seem to have been about whether the army should precipitate an immediate crisis by a confrontation with the parliament and king, or proceed more slowly, and this division underlay the bitter disputes about the nature of the rendezvous Fairfax had called, and whether the army as a whole would adopt the *Agreement* or the more orderly process laid out in what became the *Remonstrance*. According to a petition issued on 11 November by some – but not all – of the new agents, Ireton stormed out of the General Council, not to return, on 5 November when a vote was taken to send a letter to the Speaker declaring it was the army's desire that no further propositions should be sent to the king.<sup>31</sup> Significantly, although parliamentary duties may have kept Cromwell away on 5 and 6 November,<sup>32</sup> Cromwell remained active in the Council; and he was certainly present on 11 November, when Harrison called the king 'a Man of Blood' and demanded that 'they were to prosecute him'. Cromwell responded by reminding him that as in the case of David's refusal to try Joab for the slaying of Abner, there were pragmatic circumstances in which murder was not to be punished. The pragmatic circumstance was that 'the sons of Zeruiah were too hard for him'.<sup>33</sup> Zeruiah was David's sister, and Joab was just one of her many sons. Cromwell is saying that Joab's brothers were

30 Morrill and Baker, 'Case of the Armie Truly Restated'.

31 A. S. P. Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty* (London, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1938), pp. 452–4. For the vote itself, see: *CP*, I, pp. 440–1.

32 *CP*, I, p. 440 discusses his absence on 5 and 6 November.

33 *CP*, I, p. 417.

too powerful for him to proceed against Joab. Joab/Charles was guilty of murder; *realpolitik* alone prevented his trial. It is worth speculating – we can do no more – who was who in Cromwell’s application of this biblical passage. The difficulty of doing so does not detract from the shock. The reason for not proceeding against Charles was not that it would be unjust but they could not (yet) get away with it.

#### IV

Cromwell crossed some sort of Rubicon on 1 November, and events quickly strengthened his resolve. The next three weeks saw the king’s escape from Hampton Court; the news reaching Cromwell from a variety of sources that Charles had initialled a treaty with the anti-Solemn Leaguers in Scotland followed fast on its heels, but – in the view of a number of observers from across the political spectrum – he was most affected by reading intercepted correspondence between the king and the queen which rejoiced in the way the army grandees were being bamboozled.<sup>34</sup> We do not have to believe the melodramatic tale of the letter containing Charles’ plan to doublecross the army allegedly cut from a saddle-bag in the Blue Boar in Holborn by Cromwell and Ireton dressed as troopers, although Gardiner’s careful analysis of its basis in fact is more impressive than the breezy dismissal of most modern scholars.<sup>35</sup> Certainly something as significant as this is needed to explain Ireton’s dramatic volte-face between 5 and 21 November.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps the most important supplementary testimony comes in Sir John Berkeley’s account of his encounter with Cromwell and Ireton on 28 November 1647 when Berkeley presented himself at Windsor with letters from the king. He found an army council meeting in progress: he records that ‘I look’d upon Cromwell and Ireton and the rest of my acquaintance. Who saluted me very coldly, and had their countenance very changed towards me.’ Berkeley was

34 Robert Ashton, *Counter Revolution: the Second Civil War and its Origins* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 30–6; Austin Woolrych, *Soldiers and Statesmen: the General Council of the Army and its Debates 1647–1648* (Oxford, OUP, 1987), pp. 268–76; Gardiner, *Civil War*, IV, pp. 27–31.

35 See Gardiner, *Civil War*, IV, pp. 27–31, and especially pp. 27n.3, 28n.2. A strong piece of supporting evidence is the postscript in Ireton’s letter to Hammond on 21 November which speaks of Cromwell being gone from headquarters up to London ‘on scout I know not where’ (*ibid.*, p. 27). On the other hand, Patrick Little who has recently completed a thesis on the Boyle family and the politics of Britain and Ireland, tells us that the source of the story – Orrery’s secretary Morrice recording a conversation he had with Orrery about a conversation Orrery had with Cromwell – is not to be trusted. So we will not pursue it.

36 Of course, the escape of the king and the immediate panic that he might have fled to the Scots (as the prioritizing of letters to Lambert in the North suggest) may be sufficient reason. This was the view of the bilious Robert Huntingdon in his unreliable *Sundry Reasons* (1648, E458/3), p. 11; see the comments of Gardiner, *Civil War*, IV, pp. 26–7 and 26n.2.

then told by an unnamed officer that at the afternoon meeting of the council, Ireton and Cromwell had called for the king to be transferred as a close prisoner to London 'and then br[ought] to a tryal'; and that none be allowed to speak to him' [i.e. negotiate with him] upon pain of death'.<sup>37</sup>

All this hangs together. A whole variety of separate and differently problematic sources see a transformation in Cromwell in the weekend of 19–21 November and the days that follow. Perhaps it was the escape of the king; but most of these accounts attribute it to the content of intercepted letters that revealed the king's initialled agreement with the Scots and intention to string the army along as far as maybe.<sup>38</sup> If Cromwell had had a regicidal epiphany at Putney, it became much firmer within the month.

Reliable material becomes very sparse for the next few months. We can be sure that Cromwell spoke strongly in favour of the Vote of No Addresses on 3 January 1648, and in that speech and in the first of a vital sequence of letters to Colonel Robert Hammond (a distant relation by marriage and the king's gaoler) a hardening of attitudes is clear. Cromwell's words as recorded by John Boys in his diary on 3 January are therefore important.<sup>39</sup> They seem to represent very clearly his conversion to the trial of the king but not to republicanism. Supporting the Vote of No Addresses, he said that they 'should not any longer expect safety and government from an obstinate man whose heart God had hardened'. This can only mean the end of Charles I. But it is perfectly compatible with his further statement that 'we declared our intentions for Monarchy unless necessity enforce an alteration'. Some historians, including Barry Coward and David Underdown, interpret 'necessity' here in a secular sense – 'the dictates of political reality' as Coward glosses it – while others, including Gaunt, gloss it in a religious sense – until God reveals it to be his will.<sup>40</sup> The latter is clearly the correct reading, as the incessant linkage of the words 'providence' and 'necessity' throughout 1648 and the speeches of the 1650s demonstrates.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Cromwell's reference in his letter to Hammond (written late on the evening of the same day) that the king's flight and subsequent developments represented 'a mighty providence to this poor kingdom and to us all' gives a rather chilling menace to his concluding words: 'we shall (I hope)

37 *The Memoirs of Sir John Berkeley* (1699), pp. 70–4.

38 Woolrych, *Soldiers and Statesmen*, pp. 305–6.

39 D. E. Underdown, 'The Parliamentary Diary of John Boys, 1647–8', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, XXXIX (1966), pp. 156–7, 145–6.

40 Coward, *Cromwell*, p. 58; Underdown, *Pride's Purge*, pp. 88–9; Gaunt, *Oliver Cromwell*, pp. 89–91.

41 A. B. Worden, 'Providence and Politics in Cromwellian England', *Past and Present*, CIX (1985), pp. 55–99. See also Cromwell's charge to the Nominated Assembly in 1653 that their authority came to them 'by the way of necessity, by the way of the wise Providence of God' (*LSOC*, II, p. 290), and his linking of providence and necessity (in having destroyed the name and title of king in 1649) when he declined the kingship in 1657 (*ibid.*, III, pp. 56, 58, 70).

instantly go upon the business in relation to [the king], tending to prevent danger' and his request that Hammond 'search out' any 'juggling' by the king.<sup>42</sup>

There is tantalizing but unreliable evidence that Cromwell was seriously considering, in late January 1648, direct negotiation with the Prince of Wales which could have led to Charles' abdication or deposition. It consists principally of a letter of intelligence of the variably reliable Roman agent in London, written on 17 January, which names Cromwell and St John as the men behind the initiative.<sup>43</sup> But it is supported by a report home by the French ambassador Grignon.<sup>44</sup> He wrote on 31 January that there was a plan by people he does not name to send the Earl of Denbigh to France with letters for the Prince of Wales, but that Denbigh was reluctant to go; and this in turn is confirmed by a letter in the Hamilton papers (and Hamilton was Denbigh's brother-in-law), dated 1 February, that 'the Earl of Denbigh is to go over with some overtures to her Majesty and the Prince'.<sup>45</sup> It may be significant for what was to happen at the end of the year that the person who was supposed to raise the matter with the Prince was the Earl of Denbigh.<sup>46</sup> As the year wears on there is stronger evidence of Cromwell's involvement in plans to depose Charles in favour first of James Duke of York and then of Henry Duke of Gloucester. All this represents something more persuasive than the oft-quoted and more tainted evidence of the Ludlow manuscript that at that time Cromwell refused to join Ludlow in condemning monarchy, or to affirm it (the quotation is too well known and too unreliable to be repeated here).<sup>47</sup>

In essence, there were lots of insubstantial straws blowing around in the wind, and they were all blowing in the same direction. Cromwell was exploring all kinds of ways of moving to a reckoning with Charles I, but had yet to satisfy himself of the natural justice of any of them. He then set off on campaign, and was too preoccupied with the hydra with its variety of cavalier and Presbyterian heads to formulate any immediate practical solution. But his letters leave us in no doubt that his mind was as full of Isaiah as it was of the sound of musket and cannon.

42 *LSOC*, I, pp. 289–91 and top p. 290. Peter Gaunt, *Oliver Cromwell*, p. 90 makes more sense of the events of 3 January than any other recent historian.

43 Gardiner, *Civil War*, IV, p. 56, n.4.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 57, n.1.

45 All the evidence is presented and weighed by Gardiner, *Civil War*, V, pp. 56–7 and p. 56, n.4, and evidence that St John 'hath made Cromwell his bedfellow' is in p. 57, n.1.

46 See the discussion of this in John Adamson's essay below, pp. 36–70 [in the original publication].

47 *The Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow*, ed. C. H. Firth (2 vols, Oxford, OUP, 1894), I, pp. 184–6. For three slightly contrasting commentaries on this meeting see: S. R. Gardiner, *Oliver Cromwell* (1900), p. 133; Firth, *Oliver Cromwell and the Rule of the Puritans*, p. 185; and Coward, *Cromwell*, p. 59.

## V

The sweep of Cromwell's writings throughout 1648 suggests a man who feels guided by God and clear of the end though not quite of the means. He never again discussed the king except as someone who had put himself outside the protection of God's people. For the whole of 1648 Cromwell's concern was not whether to remove the king but when and how.

In the late spring, he set off on campaign first in South Wales, then to head off the Scottish invasion, then to pursue the retreating Scots almost to the gates of Edinburgh, and finally to mop up royalist resistance in the north. At every stage he wrote letters which have survived, several of them public or semi-public letters to Speaker Lenthall or General Fairfax, others private and confessional, as to St John, Wharton and Hammond.<sup>48</sup> His public rhetoric consistently calls for *all* (and all must include the king as principal author) responsible for the new war to be called to account for their treason and sacrilege; his private rhetoric adds to that a continuous engagement with the scripture and with very specific texts as he sought to discern the will of God for himself and for His people.

It is, of course, the case that the army council committed itself to the trial of the king at the conclusion of the three-day prayer meeting at the end of April. Or so William Allen maintained in a pamphlet written in 1659.<sup>49</sup> But we should not use this, as some have, as evidence of Cromwell's position. Allen *may* be recalling things accurately; Cromwell *may well* have been present for part of the meeting.<sup>50</sup> Even if both are true, it does not follow that this directly informed Cromwell's thinking. Allen alleged that at Windsor Charles Stuart was branded 'a man of blood' who should atone for his shedding of innocent blood in accordance with the requirements of the Book of Numbers [35 v.33]: 'So ye shall not defile the land wherein you are: for blood it defileth the land; and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it.' The army committed itself to putting the king on trial as soon as it was in a position to do so.<sup>51</sup> The application of this text to that man of blood Charles Stuart sustained many in the months that followed. But Cromwell himself never endorsed it; nor did he ever cite from the Book of Numbers before, during or for eight years after 1648.

His own thinking followed a different course. After each of the major episodes in the second war, unlike any of those in the first, the leaders were

48 LSOC, I, pp. 350–1, 353–4, 393–400.

49 W. Allen, *A Faithfull Memorial in Somers Tracts* (16 vols, 1748–52), VI, pp. 500–1.

50 Gentles, *New Model Army*, pp. 245–6; Gaunt, *Cromwell*, pp. 92–3.

51 Allen, *Faithfull Memorial*, pp. 500–1. At a less-well-remembered prayer meeting also at Windsor on 26 November this commitment was renewed: Gardiner, *Civil War*, IV, p. 235.

put on trial – either before a court martial or by reference to the High Court of Justice.<sup>52</sup> The first war had been a struggle between two parties who believed that they were fighting God’s cause. God had shown which side he was on from the moment of the formation of the New Model. Anyone seeking to overturn ‘so many evidences of a divine providence going along with it and prospering a just cause’<sup>53</sup> were in effect committing sacrilege, seeking to overturn the judgement of God. It was ‘the repetition of the same offence against all the witnesses that God hath borne’. But, in addition, ‘this is a more prodigious treason than any that hath been perfected before; because the former quarrel was that Englishmen might rule over one another, this is to vassalize us to a foreign nation’.<sup>54</sup> This comes from a letter written from Yorkshire to Robert Jenner and John Ashe on 20 November, the very day that the army’s *Remonstrance* was being presented to parliament. That theme of the wickedness of the king in seeking foreign arms and giving undertakings to foreigners, starting with the Scots, was at the heart of the indictment of Charles in that *Remonstrance* and it was to reappear in the charge against him two months later.<sup>55</sup> The clearest statement that the time had come for Charles to account for his crimes came in the coda to Cromwell’s long letter to Lenthall describing his victory over Hamilton at Preston on 20 August:

Sir, this is nothing but the hand of God . . . You should take courage to do the work of the Lord in fulfilling the ends of your magistracy, in seeking the peace and welfare of the people of this land, that all who live quietly and peaceably may have countenance from you, and *they that are implacable and will not leave troubling the land* may speedily be destroyed out of the land.<sup>56</sup>

This cannot but be a reference to the king himself. We might note, however, that the phrase ‘destroyed out of the land’, for all its rhetorical strength, leaves open the possibility of exile rather than execution. A similar unambiguous if oblique reference to the king is to be found in a letter written to

52 Gardiner, *Civil War*, IV, pp. 202–6; S. R. Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate* (4 vols, London, Longman, 1903), I, pp. 10–11, 41; Ashton, *Counter Revolution*, pp. 421–2; Gentles, *New Model Army*, pp. 255–7.

53 Cromwell to Lenthall, announcing the fall of Pembroke, 11 July 1648 (*LSOC*, I, pp. 324–5). Cromwell had the three principals of the South Wales revolt – Laugharne, Powell and Poyer – tried and convicted. They were sent up to London to draw lots as to which of them was to be shot. Poyer (literally) drew the short straw and was executed by firing squad in the Piazza of Covent Garden.

54 *LSOC*, I, p. 387 (cf. the comments of Firth, *Oliver Cromwell*, p. 206).

55 This is a point which is made all the clearer by the evidence of Anglo-Scottish dislikes presented in David Scott’s paper below, pp. 138–60 [in the original publication].

56 *LSOC*, I, pp. 333–4 (emphasis added).

Fairfax which endorsed a petition from the officers of the regiments in the north, itself supporting the *Remonstrance*: 'I find . . . in [all the officers] a very great zeal to have impartial justice done upon *all* offenders; and I do from my heart concur with them.'<sup>57</sup>

Such language, sustained over six consecutive months, for judgement on *all* the authors of the war clearly extended to the king himself. The questions were when and how, not whether he should be tried and by implication deposed or executed. Cromwell spoke of providence throughout his life, but never with the persistence or confidence of 1648. Letter after letter speak of providence and (connected to it) of necessity as linked aspects of God's immanence and engagement with the affairs of men.<sup>58</sup> And providence is more and more invoked as the guarantor of action against the king.

Such were his musings on public events. But throughout the months of campaigning he was also clearly studying the Bible and looking for personal meaning in it. When we first planned this paper we thought we had identified a simple and powerful biblical parallel that guided Cromwell through the year. On four occasions in 1648 Cromwell makes references to the story of Gideon and we became convinced that he had come to see himself as Gideon *redivivus*.<sup>59</sup> Indeed his account of the battle of Preston written the day after the battle and sent to Speaker Lenthall, reads less like other accounts of the battle than it does of the biblical account of Gideon's defeat of the Midianites at Ain Harod.<sup>60</sup>

Let us recall the story of Gideon. He was called from the plough to lead the army of Israel. He winnowed the army, reducing it to a small, compact force made of Israel's russet-coated captains, and he destroyed the Midianites and harried their fleeing army for 200 miles as Cromwell did after Preston. He then executed the kings of the Midianites, denying them quarter because they had shed innocent blood on Mount Tabor. He refused to take the crown himself and returned, loaded with honours, to his farm. It is not surprising that Cromwell found this a powerful story and suitable to his condition in 1648. And he drew powerfully on it, nowhere more than in an extraordinary outburst to Fairfax in the middle of a letter full of nitty-gritty military matters as he swept through South Wales in June 1648:

I pray God teach this nation . . . what the mind of God may be in all this, and what our duty is. Surely it is not that the poor godly people of this Kingdom should still be the objects of wrath and anger, nor that our God

57 *LSOC*, I, p. 391 (emphasis added).

58 See John Morrill, 'King Killing no Murder', *Cromwelliana* (1998), pp. 12–22, an early and much cruder version of this paper, but with a fuller analysis of the 1648 letters (printed as an appendix to the article in *ibid.*, pp. 22–38).

59 *Ibid.*

60 *LSOC*, I, pp. 331–45.

would have our necks under a yoke of bondage; for these things that have lately come to pass have been the wonderful works of God; breaking the rod of the oppressor, as in the day of Midian, not with garments much rolled in blood but by the terror of the Lord.<sup>61</sup>

This passage draws on Galatians, Acts and 2 Corinthians, but the central image with its reference to the breaking of the Midianites is from Isaiah, and actually that turns out to be the crucial point. For Cromwell's allusions to Gideon are all passing ones; there is no sustained meditation on his story. On the other hand he spent much time and space in several letters in extended meditation on Isaiah chapters 8 and 9. Indeed he wrote to Oliver St John on 1 September 1648, a week after the battle of Preston, telling him that 'this scripture hath been of great stay with me, Isaiah eighth, 10. 11. 14. Read the whole chapter.'<sup>62</sup> That chapter and the next tell how most of the people have missed out on righteousness and that those who follow the idolatrous leaders of Judah and Israel will be destroyed. So

Associate yourselves, o ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces . . . gird yourselves and you shall be broken in pieces . . . And I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him, Behold I and the children whom the Lord has given me are for signs and wonders in Israel.

Cromwell was working out his own destiny in relation to God's plan, and God was no democrat. He had worked through a godly remnant in the days of Isaiah and he could and would do so again.

In November Cromwell wrote two letters to Hammond.<sup>63</sup> We do not have time here to demonstrate the many misunderstandings of the letter of the 6th such as Underdown's claim that it represents Cromwell's willingness to acquiesce in a settlement between parliament and the king 'if Charles accepted a permanent Presbyterian settlement'.<sup>64</sup> For Cromwell makes it clear that such an agreement could be approved of only if one followed 'carnal reasonings' – human expediency rather than divine imperatives. Instead we rely on Gentles' better reading of this letter: 'peace is only good

61 *LSOC*, I, p. 321.

62 *LSOC*, I, p. 350.

63 *LSOC*, I, pp. 393–400; and III, pp. 389–92.

64 *CP*, II, pp. 49–50, with a commentary by Firth and an attribution to Cromwell. This attribution is probable but not quite as secure as Firth maintains. Why was Clarke (in London) in possession of a letter of such a private nature written by a senior officer stationed in Yorkshire to a colonel stationed on the Isle of Wight? Could the letter have been by another senior officer who had been in Scotland with Cromwell? This is the only letter of Cromwell's for this period without any biblical allusions in it.

when we receive it from out of our father's hands . . . War is good when we are led by our Father.'<sup>65</sup> And peace with this king was not at God's hand.

Less enigmatic and more powerful was the follow-up letter Cromwell wrote on 25 November. It is a plea to Hammond to see how a critical mass of evidence points to God's manifest will being encapsulated in what the army proposes in the *Remonstrance*.

Seek to know the mind of God in all that chain of Providence, whereby God hath brought thee thither, and that person to thee . . . and then tell me whether there be not some glorious and high meaning in all this, above what thou hast yet attained.<sup>66</sup>

Nowhere was the clustering of biblical gobbets more dense than in this letter. The opening paragraphs alone – some 700 words – contain 24 citations from 11 biblical books,<sup>67</sup> with especial focus on the Epistle of James [ch. 1 vv 2–6] with its exhortation to Christians 'to ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed' and from Romans 8, with its great cry that, freed from the law, the true Christian must look beyond present deprivations to the presence of the Holy Spirit. So Cromwell is pleading with Hammond to trust in providential reason and not in worldly, fleshly reasoning. By the time he wrote that letter Cromwell had seen the army *Remonstrance* approved by the army council on the 16th and presented to the parliament on the 20th and he knew that Hammond would have seen it. The letter is in fact begging Hammond to go along with the *Remonstrance*. Thus he told Hammond that while 'we could perhaps have wished the stay of it till after the treaty', in the end could the people of God expect any good from 'this man against whom the Lord hath witnessed'? The *Remonstrance* demanded unambiguously that 'the King should be brought to Justice, as the Capital cause of all'.<sup>68</sup>

## VI

Space precludes any further exegesis. We hope that if our analysis of the development of Cromwell's thinking up to 25 November is convincing, then it provides the safe guide through the treacherous and incomplete shards of evidence for the month of December. It means that we can agree whole-

65 Gentles, *New Model Army*, p. 283.

66 *LSOC*, I, pp. 393–403.

67 As identified by Paul, *Lord Protector*, appendix V, p. 406, nn.1–9, p. 407, nn.1–11.

68 *A Remonstrance of his Excellency Sir Thomas Fairfax . . . and of the General Council of Officers* ([16 Nov.] 1648, E473/11), reprinted in *The Parliamentary or Constitutional History of England* (24 vols., 1761–3), XVIII, pp. 161–238.

heartedly with but recontextualize Ian Gentles' reading (itself pre-echoed in the work of Veronica Wedgwood and Robert Paul).<sup>69</sup>

The key to understanding Cromwell's actions over the seven weeks separating his return to London and the king's execution is to keep several questions separate. Did Cromwell want to see the king put on trial? Yes. Did he know what form the trial should take? *Yes and it was not the way it actually happened.* Did he want Charles to cease to be king? *Yes, either deposition or abdication.* Did he want to see the king dead? *Yes and no – yes in that he deserved it, no in that it might shipwreck the very civil and religious liberties it was intended to safeguard.* Did he want to see monarchy abolished? *Almost certainly not.* And underlying all his hesitancy was a dread that if the army pushed heedless on to regicide and a king-less commonwealth, the sons of Zeruah would be too strong for him.

Let us remember that on 7 December, as Cromwell took his seat in parliament, the position was as follows. Even the purged Rump of the House of Commons had refused to take any action to reverse the decisions that had provoked Pride's Purge until Fairfax answered their demand for the release of the imprisoned members; the House of Lords was totally opposed to the Purge. The Presbyterian clergy were gargling in preparation for thunderous denunciations from their pulpits.<sup>70</sup> The Levellers were utterly opposed to trial of the king by parliament.<sup>71</sup> Lord General Fairfax was utterly opposed to the king's trial and as recently as 16 November all but six of the army council had voted that if the king agreed to the 'fundamentals' they would add to the Newport articles that he should be reinstated. His rejection of these terms outright had swung the majority behind the demands of the *Remonstrance* for his trial, but the army remained unpredictable. Cromwell was well aware that this was not an irrevocable conversion to regicide, rather it was evidence of volatility. Let us not forget that as late as 21 December 1648 the army council voted by a simple majority against the king's execution and even on 25 December, it voted by 6: 1 that if the king accepted the terms put to him by Denbigh his life should be spared. An unco-operative parliament, a divided and volatile army, a resentful, hostile and hungry populace, all of Scotland and 90 per cent of Ireland in the hands of men implacably opposed to the king's trial and deposition, and two of Charles' nephews ruling France and the Netherlands – all this must have made David's problems with the sons of Zeruah look small beer indeed. No wonder Cromwell urged caution in moving to *the desired end*.

69 Wedgwood, *Trial of Charles I*, pp. 25–31; Paul, *Lord Protector*, pp. 183–4; Gentles, *New Model Army*, pp. 297–314.

70 See the argument and evidence presented below by Elliot Vernon, pp. 202–24 [in the original publication].

71 As demonstrated by Andrew Sharp in his essay below, see pp. 181–201 [in the original publication].

We have no shred of evidence from Cromwell's own lips or pen that he was keen to prevent the trial of the king, or that he doubted that the king deserved death, or that he believed he should remain on the throne. Indeed every piece of surviving strictly contemporary evidence – newspapers from across the spectrum, secret royalist intelligence reports, and German, French and Italian ambassadorial reports<sup>72</sup> support the following claims about his behaviour in December 1648.

- 1 Cromwell attempted to bring back anyone willing to accept the new situation created by the purge (to flatter and tame some of Zeruiah's sons).
- 2 He pushed on with a new paper constitution that might be brought in prior to a trial.
- 3 He attempted a private negotiation with Hamilton on 14/15 December.
- 4 He simultaneously worked to transfer the king to the custody of his most bitter and determined enemies, especially Thomas Harrison who had demanded his death as early as 11 November 1647.
- 5 He demonstrated a preference for the trial to be deferred until *after* the introduction of the new constitution and the holding of fresh elections on the new more equitable system and until *after* the trial of the other incendiaries who had shed innocent blood in the second civil war (trials which would demonstrate the depths of the king's duplicity).

We can go a step further. In January 1648, Cromwell had tried to persuade Denbigh to travel to France in order to persuade the Prince of Wales to accept the throne upon his father's deposition.<sup>73</sup> The army *Remonstrance* of November 1648 demanded that the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York surrender themselves for trial or stand debarred from the throne; which (in the absence of any statement in the *Remonstrance* against monarchy) would make Gloucester the heir to the throne. Cromwell was close to Isaac Dorislaus and wrote in December 1648 to the master of Trinity Hall asking him to use his position as master of Doctors' Commons to provide rooms for Dorislaus.<sup>74</sup> It was Dorislaus who co-authored the charges against the king, charges which specifically indicted the Princes Charles and James but not Henry in their father's treasons.<sup>75</sup> It was Denbigh who was sent to see Hamilton and the king at Windsor on 27 December with a secret offer which seems likely to have included an offer to the king: abdicate in favour of Henry and your life will be spared; refuse and you will die and the destruction of your House and of monarchy will be laid at your door.

72 All this material is discussed by Gardiner, *Civil War*, IV, pp. 276–92.

73 Above, p. 28.

74 *LSOC*, I, pp. 403–4.

75 Gardiner, *Documents*, p. 373.

This is certainly the view of the French ambassador in his report on 21 December, and he was more precise and accurate than most in his reporting throughout that month.<sup>76</sup>

Our argument is then that by 25 November Cromwell was resolved to see Charles I put on public trial. No more than Ireton had he committed himself to the abolition of monarchy. As the phrase in that letter to Hammond ('we could perhaps have wished the stay of it until after the treaty')<sup>77</sup> makes clear, Cromwell still preferred a different sequence of events: a breaking-off of the treaty; the purge or dissolution of parliament; an interim council on the model of the Scottish Commission of Estates; a high court or a commission of *oyer* and *terminer* consisting of Lords, Commons and military men; a trial of major royalist incendiaries culminating in the king; a conviction and then an ultimatum – abdicate in favour of your son and live, or refuse to abdicate and die. Prudence made him linger over the first; justice always pointed to the second. His return to London was timed to assist that process. He – like everyone else – was thrown off balance by the events of 5 and 6 December. Now the issue was whether to wait until the original sequence was re-established or whether to proceed straight to a trial. Ireton was drawn more to the latter, Cromwell to the former. Eventually, after the failure of the Denbigh mission, Cromwell fell into line. Whitelocke's teasing testimony that Cromwell invited Widdrington and himself to a meeting that presupposed the removal of Charles I, but for 'settling the Kingdom by Parliament, and not to leave all to the Sword' is perhaps the clincher.<sup>78</sup> The delays had little to do with cold feet over Charles. They represented the hesitations of a man who had a master plan at the end of November and was trying to work out how he could restore an orderly sequence to *necessary* events in the wake of the unplanned purge of 6 December. But events took on a momentum of their own, and Cromwell found that a flash flood required him to shoot the rapids in a raging torrent. When he muttered 'cruel necessity' over the corpse of Charles I, perhaps it was a reflection on the fact that it was not just the king who had experienced the harshness of divine decrees. As Cromwell said his prayers on 31 January 1649, perhaps he prayed: 'help me against the sons of Zeruiah who are *everywhere*.' Or to put it another way: 'help us in this time of cruel necessity.'

76 Gardiner, *Civil War*, IV, p. 282.

77 LSOC, III, pp. 389–92.

78 *The Diary of Bulstrode Whitelocke, 1605–1675*, ed. Ruth Spalding (Oxford, OUP, 1990), pp. 226–7. See the important gloss on this by Wedgwood, *Trial*, pp. 78–80.