

**LIFE OF OLIVER
CROMWELL.
PP. 260-384**

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OLIVER CROMWELL.

L. DE LOUIS

By ALPHONSE DE LAMARTINE,

*Author of "The Girondé," "The Restoration of
Monarchy in France," Etc.*

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1888.

Thomas Carlyle, a Scotch writer, endowed with the combined qualities of exalted enthusiasm and enduring patience, dissatisfied also with the conventional and superficial portrait hitherto depicted of Cromwell, resolved to search out and restore his true lineaments. The evident contradictions of the historians of his own and other countries who had invariably exhibited him as a fantastic tyrant and a melodramatic hypocrite, induced Mr. Carlyle to think, with justice, that beneath these discordant components there might be found another Cromwell, a being of nature, not of the imagination. Guided by that instinct of truth and logic in which is comprised the genius of erudite discovery, Mr. Carlyle, himself possessing the spirit of a sectary, and delighting in an independent course, undertook to search out and examine all the correspondence buried in the depths of public or private archives, and in which, at the different dates of his domestic, military, and political life, Cromwell, without thinking that he should thus paint himself, has in fact done so for the study of posterity. Supplied with these treasures of truth and revelation, Mr. Carlyle shut himself up for some years in the solitude of the country, that nothing might distract his thoughts from his work. Then having collected, classed, studied, commented on, and rearranged these voluminous letters of his hero, and having resuscitated, as if from the tomb, the spirit of the man and the age, he committed to Europe this hitherto unpublished correspondence, saying, with more reason than Jean Jacques Rousseau, "Receive, and read; behold the true Cromwell!" It is from these new and incontestable documents that we now propose to write the life of this dictator.

Cromwell, whom the greater number of historians (echoes of the pamphleteers of his day) state to have been the son of a brewer, or butcher, was in reality born of an ancient family descended from some of the first English

nobility. His great-uncle, Thomas Cromwell, created Earl of Essex by Henry the Eighth, and afterward beheaded in one of those ferocious revulsions of character in which that monarch frequently indulged, was one of the most zealous despoilers of Romish churches and monasteries, after Protestantism had been established by his master. The great English dramatist, Shakespeare, has introduced Thomas Cromwell, Earl of Essex, in one of his tragedies. It is to him that Cardinal Wolsey says, when sent to prison and death by the fickle Henry.

“Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition!
Had I but served my God with half the zeal
I served my king, he would not in mine age
Have left me naked to mine enemies.”

This Cromwell, Earl of Essex, was for a brief space Henry the Eighth's minister; he employed one of his nephews, Richard Cromwell, in the persecution of the Catholics, enriching him with the spoils of churches and convents. Richard was the great-grandfather of Oliver the Protector.

His grandfather, known in the country by the name of the “Golden Knight,” in allusion to the great riches which were bestowed on his family at the spoliation of the monasteries, was called Henry Cromwell. He lived in Lincolnshire, on the domain of Hinchinbrook, formerly an old convent from which the nuns had been expelled, and which was afterward changed by the Cromwells into a seignorial manor-house. His eldest son, Richard, married a daughter of one of the branches of the house of Stuart, one resided in the same county. This Elizabeth Stuart was the aunt of Oliver Cromwell, who afterward immolated Charles the First. It appears as if destiny delighted thus to mingle in the same veins the blood of the victim and his executioner.

King James the First, when passing through Lincolnshire, on his way to take possession of

the English crown, honored the dwelling of the Cromwells by his presence, on account of his relationship to Elizabeth Stuart, aunt of the future Protector. The child, born in 1599, was then four years old, and in after years, when he himself reigned in the palace of the Stuarts, he might easily remember having seen under his own roof and at the table of his family this king, father of the monarch he had dethroned and beheaded !

It was not long before the family lost its wealth. The eldest of the sons sold for a trifling sum the manor of Hinchinbrook, and retired to a small estate that he possessed in the marshes of Huntingdonshire. His youngest brother, Robert Cromwell, father of the future sovereign of England, brought up his family in poverty on a small adjoining estate upon the banks of the river Ouse, called Ely. The poor, rough, and unyielding nature of this moist country, the unbroken horizon, the muddy river, cloudy sky, miserable trees, scattered cottages, and rude manners of the inhabitants, were well calculated to contract and sadden the disposition of a child. The character of the scenes in which we are brought up impresses itself upon our souls. Great fanatics generally proceed from sad and sterile countries. Mahomet sprang from the scorching valleys of Arabia ; Luther from the frozen mountains of Lower Germany ; Calvin from the inanimate plains of Picardy ; Cromwell, from the stagnant marshes of the Ouse. As is the place, so is the man. The mind is a mirror before it becomes a home.

Oliver Cromwell, whose history we are writing, was the fifth child of his father, who died before he attained maturity. Sent to the University of Cambridge, a town adjoining his paternal residence, he there received a liberal education, and returned at the age of eighteen, after the death of his father, to be the support of his mother and a second parent to his sis-

ters. He conducted, with sagacity beyond his years, the family estate and establishment, under his mother's eye. At twenty-one he married Elizabeth Bourchier, a young and beautiful heiress of the county, whose portraits show, under the chaste and calm figure of the North, an enthusiastic, religious, and contemplative soul. She was the first and only love of her husband.

Cromwell took up his abode with his wife in the house of his mother and sisters at Huntingdon, and lived there ten years in domestic felicity, occupied with the cares of a confined income, the rural employments of a gentleman farmer who cultivates his own estate, and those religious contemplations of reform which at that period agitated almost to insanity Scotland, England, and Europe.

His family, friends, and neighbors were devotedly attached to the new cause of puritanic Protestantism; a cause which had always been opposed in England by the remnant of the old conquered church, ever ready to revive. The celebrated patriot Hampden, who was destined to give the signal for a revolution on the throne, by refusing to pay the impost of twenty shillings to the crown, was the young Cromwell's cousin, and a puritan like himself. The family, revolutionists in religion and politics, mutually encouraged each other in their solitude, by the prevailing passion of the times then concentrated in a small body of faithful adherents. This passion, in the ardent and gloomy disposition of Cromwell, almost produced a disease of the imagination. He trembled for his eternal salvation, and dreaded lest he should not sacrifice enough for his faith. He reproached himself for an act of cowardly toleration in permitting Catholic symbols, such as the cross on the summit, and other religious ornaments, left by recent Protestantism, to remain upon the church at Huntingdon. He was impressed with the idea of

an early death, and lived under the terror of eternal punishment. Warwick, one of his contemporaries, relates that Cromwell, seized on a particular occasion with a fit of religious melancholy, sent frequently during the night for the physician of the neighboring village, that he might talk to him of his doubts and terrors. He assisted assiduously at the preachings of those itinerant puritan ministers who came to stir up polemical ardor and antipathies. He sought solitude, and meditated upon the sacred texts by the banks of the river which traversed his fields. The disease of the times, the interpretation of the Bible, which had then taken possession of every mind, gave a melancholy turn to his reflections.

He felt within himself an internal inspiration of the religious and political meaning of these holy words. He acknowledged, in common with his puritanic brethren, the individual and enduring revelation shown in the pages and verses of a divine and infallible book, but which, without the Spirit of God, no prompting or explanation can enable us to understand. The puritanism of Cromwell consisted in absolute obedience to the commands of Sacred Writ, and the right of interpreting the Scriptures according to his own conviction—a contradictory but seductive dogma of his sect, which commands on the one hand implicit belief in the divinity of a book, and on the other permits free license to the imagination, to bestow its own meaning on the inspired leaves.

From this belief of the faithful in true and permanent inspiration, there was but one step to the hallucination of prophetic gifts. The devout puritans, and even Cromwell himself, fell naturally into this extreme. Each became at the same time the inspirer and the inspired, the devotee and the prophet. This religion, ever audibly speaking in the soul of the believer, was in fact the religion of diseased imaginations, whose piety increased with their

fanaticism. Cromwell, in his retreat, was led away by these miasmas of the day, which became the more powerfully incorporated with his nature from youth, natural energy, and isolation of mind.

He had no diversion for his thoughts in this solitude, beyond the increase of his family, the cultivation of his fields, the multiplying and disposing of his flocks. Like an economical farmer, he frequented fairs that he might there purchase young cattle, which he fattened and sold at a moderate profit. He disposed of a portion of his paternal estate for 2000 guineas, to enable him to buy one nearer the river, and with more pasture land, close to the little town of St. Ives, a few miles from Huntingdon. He settled there with his already numerous family, consisting of two sons and four daughters, in a small manor-house, buried under the weeping-willows which bordered the meadows, and called "Sleep Hall." He was then thirty-six years old. His correspondence at that time was filled with affection for his family, praises of his wife, satisfaction in his children, domestic details, and the solicitude of his soul for those missionary puritans whose preaching he encouraged, and whose zeal he promoted by voluntary contributions. His exemplary life, careful management of his household, his assiduous and intelligent attention to all the local interests of the county, gained for him that rural popularity which points out an unobtrusive man as worthy of the esteem and confidence of the people, and their proper representative in the legislative councils of the country. Cromwell, who felt that he possessed no natural eloquence, and whose ambition at that time went no further than his own domestic felicity, moderate fortune, and limited estate, solicited not the suffrages of the electors of Huntingdon and St. Ives; but in the cause of religion, which was all-powerful with him, he thought himself bound in con-