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I

JOHN MORRILL

The causes and course of the British Civil Wars

Introduction

An assiduous reader of everything published in England or in English in the 1630s would find little evidence of a polity crumbling into civil war. The modern editors of the exhaustive catalogue of all such publications list around 750 titles a year for the decade, and it was pretty tame stuff compared with the publications of the final quarter of the sixteenth century when a virulent Catholic campaign was waged against the heretic-bastard-tyrannical Elizabeth, a campaign which called for her to be deposed in favour of the Queen of Scots (before that queen's execution in 1587) or a string of less plausible Catholic candidates thereafter. Furthermore, the Puritan polemic against bishops and against the 'innovations' of Archbishop William Laud and his henchmen – the restoration of stone altars against the East walls of churches, the insistence on the faithful kneeling at an altar rail to receive holy communion, the clamp-down on preaching by unbeneficed clergymen and so on – was turgid and uninspired in comparison to the vitriolic and effective polemic of the Martin Marprelate Tracts of the 1580s. Historical treatises, play-texts, ballads might ponder the evils of tyrannical government in the distant past or in places geographically remote from Britain, but the application to the Stuart realms was veiled and indirect: much more so than in the more vigorous historiographical and theatrical worlds of the decades straddling the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Only a small part of this can be explained by censorship.¹ There was a licensing system for all published work, operated by the Stationers' Company (more concerned to protect their monopoly than to police anything but the grossest content of what they licensed), or (for religious works) by the bishops and their chaplains – more pro-active, but with plenty else to occupy them. There was blue-pencilling of religious works, and some authors were required to add glosses to their work, which they found irksome. This may have considerably heightened the amount of self-censorship (just as printers who

wanted government business would be keen not to be seen to be printing material the court found deeply irritating), but there is no evidence of widespread suppression of work. One measure of all this was that those who wrote in Latin could be much more blunt than those who wrote in English. No-one was punished in early Stuart England for taking up extreme views in Latin, since such works were accessible only to an elite intellectually equipped to evaluate them. If Richard Montagu had written *A New Gag for an Old Goose* (1624) – with its attempt to make the doctrine and practice of the Church of England closer to Catholic teaching and practice than continental reformed Protestant teaching and practice – in Latin, there would have been no furore. It was, however, another matter to write it in the vernacular, to be read by the indiscriminating multitude. A handful of men who stepped over the line – and it really is only a handful of five men – were hauled before the courts and were whipped with knotted cords through the streets of London or were branded and disfigured by knife and hot iron. But those who could not live by widely recognized rules of limited self-censorship had the option of publishing abroad and smuggling their tracts into England; and *that* was subversive and resented by those around Charles I. So we return to our starting point. An assiduous reader of everything published in England or in English in the 1630s would find little evidence of a polity crumbling into civil war.

And yet by 1642 there was civil war in England. It is important to say ‘by’ 1642, because the raising of armies and the creation of the bureaucracies and engines of war was the culmination of a short but severe and acute crisis throughout Charles I’s dominions, following on from the outbreak of civil war in Scotland and a Scots ‘invasion’ of England, and the outbreak of civil war in Ireland and an English and Scottish ‘invasion’ of Ireland. It is that which unlocks the mystery of how England could have an acute crisis in the 1640s without a chronic crisis preceding it.

The problem king

In 1625, Charles I’s accession to the thrones of England, Scotland and Ireland was the most untroubled in any of those kingdoms since the fourteenth century. He was only the second of eight Stuart rulers in 250 years to have reached his twenty-first birthday at the time of his succession; most of the others had not even reached their twenty-first month. He was the first ruler of England since Henry V in 1410 to have a completely uncontested succession, with the partial exception of the seventeen-year-old Henry VIII in 1509. This was a great strength and removed the greatest single cause of civil war in the early modern period – a disputed succession. Paradoxically,

it meant that although civil war was less likely than at any point in the sixteenth century, if there *was* a civil war it would get much nastier. To get rid of Charles I, one had to think of replacing not *him* but monarchy itself: hence the crisis of 1649. If only he had had a younger brother who did not get on with him.

Yet Charles I was a problem King. He had very strong and high-minded views of the nature of his office and the nature of the confessional state he was destined by God to protect and develop, but very few of his subjects shared his particular views. He was naturally authoritarian, seeking to develop policies not in the cut-and-thrust of conciliar debate and the give-and-take of Parliamentary management (the Houses would give him money if he would address their concerns, many of them neutral to royal authority), but in the internal forum of his own conscience, informed only by the advice of the ghostly fathers he chose to listen to. He would not listen to, let alone weigh up, any advice he did not want to hear. He had a strong sense of what was right; a poor sense of what was feasible. Hence, rather than reach uncomfortable accommodations with the English Parliament, from 1629 he suspended it *sine die*. Hence, rather than get the best diplomatic deal he could with the Spanish in order to give military support to the French Huguenots, or make the best diplomatic efforts he could for the Huguenots while fighting the Spaniards, he took on both super-powers simultaneously between 1626 and 1629 with predictable consequences. It was just as well for him that the eyes and arms of Habsburg and Bourbon were so fixed on the Rhineland and North Italy that thoughts of new Armadas were not entertained. Charles' supreme folly in this regard was his determination to impose his will militarily on the Scots in 1640 when he lacked any of the necessary cash, and the country lacked the political will to make it possible. Few if any believed the King to be a classical tyrant. However, self-righteous haughtiness and a penchant for authoritarian ('wicked') counsellors like Thomas Wentworth, 1st Earl of Strafford, and William Laud, archbishop of Canterbury, induced a high level of anxiety within the political elite. A preference for surrounding himself with first- or, at most, second-generation peers and for ignoring or cold-shouldering the older aristocratic families, with their wealth of land, cash and connections, compounded the problem. Not the least of Charles' problems in the early 1640s was a revolt of these *consiliarii nati*, those entitled by their ancient lineage to be his advisers.

Charles presided over a court that was less riddled with sexual and financial scandal than that of his father. He was a puritan with a very small 'p' or, more accurately, a prude. There was a straitlacedness, an obsession with decorum about Charles' court; but much of the new regulation and ceremony he introduced derived from continental *Catholic* models and that fed

into the growing conviction of large numbers of his subjects that Charles was – deliberately, as a few thought; through inadvertence and the cunning of others, as many thought – a Catholic *Risorgimento*, or revival. A Catholic Queen, a beguiling Papal nuncio who had become the King's chess partner, secret (but known to the great-and-the-good) Catholics in the Privy Council and Household, high-profile converts, a Catholic chapel allocated to the Queen but packed with courtiers – there was much for anti-Catholic paranoiacs to fret about. By the later 1630s, the old Elizabethan and Jacobean fear of the enemy-without, conniving with a fifth column in the darker corners of the land, had been fatefully replaced by a fear of a conspiracy at the heart of the state, with the King as its dupe or complaisant agent.

And popery seemed to be implanted into the heart of the established episcopal Church of England. The promotion of William Laud, first to the see of London (1628) and then of Canterbury (1633), with his own mentor and close ally Richard Neile at Winchester (1628) and then York (1632), transformed the agenda of the established church. The group they headed, with the full support of the King, were sacerdotal ceremonialists: they believed in the autonomy, dignity and divinely conferred authority of the priestly caste, in the restoration to the church of much of the jurisdiction and wealth 'plundered' (their word) from it during and since the Reformation. They believed in a strict (and at times strained) enforcement of the words and *rubrics* of the Book of Common Prayer. Episcopal adjudication was to replace parochial self-determination over the appropriate furnishing of the church and the precise forms of worship and of religious ritual. Most obviously, it was to be the bishop and not the vestry that decided where the communion table / altar should be (and that was normally against the east wall and to be made of stone, and railed off); and episcopal visitors would ensure that men and women knelt to receive the body and blood of Christ rather than sat around a table to commemorate Christ's death and resurrection: 'once offered, a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, satisfaction and oblation for the sins of the whole world'. Such a programme generated a rainbow-coalition against it: all the self-consciously godly believed that the Reformation was being betrayed; liberal intellectuals, whose thought was nurtured as much by Christian Humanism as by hardline Calvinism, disliked the clerisy; and common lawyers resented the challenge to their monopoly. Laudianism had few friends beyond the clerical estate and it was swept away in 1640–1.

A central plank of the Laudian programme was the restoration of the wealth of the Church. In England this amounted to little more than a series of legal challenges to agreements reached by borough corporations and the Church in the mid sixteenth century which commuted tithe payments (that is, the church tax of one-tenth raised on parishioners' incomes) for fixed (and

non-inflation-proofed) sums. In Scotland and Ireland, however, it meant a much more substantial attempt to cancel many of the transfers of church land, including former monastic estates, or at the least to re-negotiate the terms and conditions on which they had been transferred, so as effectively to ensure that a proportion of the revenues were restored to the Church; and there was widespread fear that the same was intended for England. It was for this reason that an overwhelming majority of the descendants of those who had acquired church lands in the sixteenth century supported Parliament in the Civil War.

This fear for the security of former church lands was part of a more generalized fear that property rights were not safe under Charles I. His attempt to lay royal claim to lands reclaimed from the sea, his aggressive policy of securing crown interests in relation to the disafforestation of large areas of the west country, his encouragement to the Court of Chancery to interfere in areas that the common lawyers thought to be their preserve, and declining public confidence in the probity and independence of the judiciary (revealed by the blizzard of appeals to the House of Lords against their judgements in 1641), also reveal a serious deterioration of trust in the political system during the 1630s. The King's determination to keep himself free of Parliament by excessive use of his discretionary power to raise money by prerogative action was the coping stone on this process. Monarchs had for many decades been able to call on coastal counties to provide them with ships to defend the realm when there was a sudden threat of naval attack, but to convert this into an annual renewable charge on *all* counties under the pretence of on-going threats from Barbary corsairs was all too thin an attempt to use the letter of the law against its spirit.

It does not follow that anyone was planning a civil war. As we have seen, despite the inefficiency and complaisance of the engines of censorship, the perceived misgovernment did not produce a literature as violent in its clamour for change and for direct action as the events of the 1580s and 1590s had done. There was no literary campaign for the King's assassination or deposition; there was no direct call to resistance. More than 30,000 men, women and children migrated to the New World in the course of the 1630s, almost one per cent of the population, and a lot of more substantial men – future leading Parliamentarians including William Fiennes, Viscount Saye & Sele, and Robert Greville, Lord Brooke, and at least ten future radical MPs, including Oliver Cromwell – seem to have been very close indeed to emigrating; and certainly they discussed how to demonstrate their dissent by acts of passive disobedience – refusal to pay Ship Money and challenging the charges levied for the war with Scotland in 1639 and 1640 being the most obvious. England, however, was a long way from civil war in 1640.

A British crisis

The Scots were worse treated than the English. At the outset of his reign Charles had arbitrarily cancelled all the land grants made by his predecessors over the past 200 years. Although his intention was not to reclaim the lands but to re-negotiate the terms on which they were granted away, the principle of an inalienable grant being summarily cancelled caused true alarm, and not just north of the border. It was a Scottish Chancellor who observed that the King's actions rendered insecure every title to land from the time of King Fergus, the fabled first King of the Scots. Widespread passive disobedience broke the policy and it had to be abandoned as unenforceable. The Scottish Council ceased to make policy – it was made in London and delivered to Edinburgh for enforcement – and appointments in Scotland owed everything to patronage at Whitehall, and this caused deep resentment, while a belief grew that the Union of the Crowns had led to the end of Scottish self-government under a Scots King who happened to live in England. It was the attempt to promote the assimilation of the government, liturgy and practice of the Scottish Church to that of England which created the first great crisis of Charles' reign. Following Charles' calamitous visit to Scotland in 1633 for a coronation that exceeded his English coronation in popish flipperies (bishops in rochets and golden copes, a great crucifix woven into a tapestry screen behind the high altar, holy communion according to the full English rite), Charles proceeded to introduce new canons, a new ordinal and finally a new prayer book (based on the 1549 English Prayer Book, more conservative even than the Elizabethan Prayer Book of 1559). The contents of all three were inflammatory, but they were introduced without any of the appropriate consultative stages – they were not submitted to a General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, to a Parliament or even to the Scottish Council. This provoked a constitutional crisis as well as a religious crisis; and the Scots reacted by binding themselves into a Covenant of passive disobedience – a collective promise not to accept the cuckoo-worship. Just such a general protest had wrecked Charles' Act of Revocation cancelling his predecessors' land grants, but the signing of the National Covenant in 1638 had a different outcome. Charles did not capitulate: he set out to impose his will by force.

There was a war between the King of England and the Parliament of Scotland from the summer of 1639 to the autumn of 1641, and the King was the protagonist. It was Charles I who decided in 1639 to make use of those Scottish noblemen who remained loyal to him – principally the Catholics of the North East – together with the army of loyal Irish Catholics controversially assembled in recent years by Lord Deputy Wentworth and a scratch

army scrambled together in England. It obviously took time to co-ordinate this multi-national force from across Charles's dominions, and the Scots were nimbler in their preparations, so that when the English lumbered up to the Borders the Scots were able to outface them in a stand-off. The resulting truce included clauses that required the King to accept the abandonment of every crown-sponsored church reform since the turn of the century. It was an ignominy Charles could not abide, and so he called an English Parliament to finance a second war. That Parliament offered him unprecedented sums of money in exchange for a guarantee of regular English Parliaments and the abandonment of the most offensive aspects of 'fiscal feudalism'. Charles, though, had no intention of dishonouring his agreement with the Scots by making what he considered dishonourable concessions to his English subjects; and so he dissolved Parliament after just two weeks and attempted to invade Scotland from England without the cash or a credit-line to support it. The Scots were nimbler yet this time, and headed south across the border before the English could cross it heading north. The disintegration of Charles' army left the Scots in control of Northumberland as far south as Newcastle (and thereby in control of London's coal supply) and they made it clear they would not return home until they had their war costs met and their Presbyterian religious reformation guaranteed by an English Parliament, and a new federal constitution in place that ensured an effective self-government for Scotland. From November 1640 to September 1641, the English 'Long Parliament', as it afterwards came to be styled, was under intense pressure from an occupying power to introduce changes to the government of church *and* state in England. The Long Parliament, however, was also in a unique position in English history. It was a Parliament that the King had lost the power to dissolve. Until the Scots were satisfied and went home, they were an occupying power insisting on the continuance of the Parliament. This gave the MPs a once-and-for-all opportunity to settle grievances. They could not afford to waste it. They spent several months driving 'wicked counsellors' from office – into exile, into the Tower, or onto the block; they passed a law ensuring that henceforth there were Parliamentary sessions at least every third year; they passed a law transferring to themselves the right to determine the length of their own sitting; they moved to restore to the Houses the authority to vet and to veto senior royal appointments – an authority spasmodically exercised in the fourteenth century but not since; they dismantled the Laudian regime but fell out comprehensively about what to put in its place. The King's ill will in giving his constrained assent to all this, his feckless attempts to use the remnants of his army to stage coups against them, his manifest determination to reverse as much as possible as soon as possible, radicalized many members. The breakdown of order

around the country led some to call for an end to innovation and others to blame the King.

In the autumn of 1641, the Scots believed they had got all they wanted: payment by the English, a new constitutional *and* religious framework *within* Scotland, and the expectation of radical reform of church and state both *within* England and *between* England and Scotland. Scotland was now a self-governing kingdom with a fully Presbyterian church; and the English had agreed to developing a confederal constitution for Britain. Then, just as the Scots pulled out, there was a rebellion by the Catholic communities of the Pale in and around Dublin. It too seemed to come out of clear sky.

The early Stuart period had seen a significant drop in the levels of violence, of rebellion and of enforced plantation that had marked the period 1570–1610 in Ireland. However, it had not seen any diminution in levels of resentment and injustice. Nonetheless, the 1630s were a strange decade. The King's Lord Deputy, Thomas, Lord Wentworth (created Earl of Strafford only in January 1640), was sent to Ireland with one overwhelming objective: to make it less of a drain on the English Exchequer. To that end, he granted more freedom of religion to the Catholics than they had enjoyed for decades, and he raised revenues mainly by going after the New English and making them disgorge some of their ill-gotten gains. In the long run, his aim was to resume an aggressive policy of plantation that would have hit the native population; but in the short term, the Catholics did better than they had come to expect, and they watched Wentworth seek to rebuild *royal* and Protestant *clerical* power and authority at the expense of the colonial-settler interest. When he was attainted and executed by the Long Parliament, the Protestant colonists sought to take their revenge; and the Catholic groups faced the bleak prospect of renewed religious persecution and expropriation at the hands of those very families and their English comrades who had already taken so much from them in earlier plantations. With English government paralysed in the autumn in 1641, and the Long Parliament solidly behind the Protestant interest, the old English Catholic leaders who had suffered most from the plantations saw not only the necessity but the opportunity for a pre-emptive strike to secure their own control, within the kingdom of Ireland, of the institutions of that kingdom. They launched a failed coup in Dublin. Alongside that, however, there was a second uprising, by the dispossessed Catholics of Ulster against those who had expropriated them a generation before, and either driven them abroad (whence many now returned) or reduced them to labouring on the land they had once farmed. Many personal scores were settled. Over time, as the repossession got out of control, many hundreds, perhaps as many as 3,000, Protestants were killed and perhaps as many again fled to England, a sight as harrowing and

inflaming as any modern refugee column. The stories, dreadful enough, were grotesquely exaggerated (and gruesomely illustrated in woodcuts) by the English press. Enough copies of atrocity stories were printed for every literate household in England to receive a dozen different accounts. It seared the English conscience and an Anglo-Scottish army was despatched to protect the remaining British-Protestant communities. To pay for this army, Parliament passed an act guaranteeing one fifth of the land mass of Ireland to those who lent £2 million – just over 1,000 so-called ‘Adventurers’ quickly raised the full sum. That army could protect the remaining Protestant settlers, but it became just one party in a bitter series of ethnic and religious wars that would see the population of Ireland drop by one third, and see nearly half the productive land of Ireland change hands.

The massacres in Ireland fed back into the growing sense of panic and recrimination in England. From the summer of 1641 parties began to form at the centre and in the localities, first around the future of the bishops and the Prayer Book, then around the control of the army needed to suppress the rebellion in Ireland, and finally over the King’s summons of MPs to join him away from his capital. The Civil War no-one had planned and no-one really wanted came upon the nation largely unawares.

As the nation polarized, it did so in a way that had never been possible before. Men (and it was essentially a male choice) across the social spectrum, or at any rate the *literate* social spectrum, made free political choices. The economic ties between landlord and tenant were weakening, and many tenants defied the political preference of their lords. In towns all over England, men of the second rank took power from long-established oligarchies. Preachers in pulpits had an influence that had no precedent. Above all, the free choice of sides was possible because there was a revolution in the production of, and access to, the printed word.

A war of words

The paper war began with a flood of Scottish tracts pouring into England in 1638–9 seeking to explain to the English that what Charles had imposed on Scotland was not only wicked and ungodly of itself, but was a foretaste of what he would seek to impose on the English. Even more dramatic was the coverage of the massacres of Protestant settlers in Ulster in 1641–2, and, even more, the gross and grossly exaggerated accounts of those massacres and of the plight of thousands of destitute refugees who fled across the Irish Sea played on English anti-Catholic prejudices. Of the 1,500 pamphlets appearing in the months from November 1641 to the raising of standards and the outbreak of Civil War in England in August 1642, 1 in 6 focused on

the Irish Rebellion, many describing atrocities (in lurid detail and with woodcuts more graphic than anything that would be presented photographically today). These were the bedrock upon which rested a polemic that portrayed Charles I and his bishops as, at best, the dupes, and, at worst, the passive agents of a Papist plan to recover Britain and Ireland. In the course of 1641 more than 200 pamphlets were published calling for the abolition of bishops, or at the very least their 'reduction' to the status of chairmen of diocesan boards of governors. About two-thirds of that number were published in defence of the Elizabethan and Jacobean order (shorn of Laudian 'innovations'). Rather less was published for and against the Book of Common Prayer; but the debate generated was still significantly larger than the debate on any single secular political issue. More than half the English counties drew up petitions to Parliament and/or the King calling for the retention of bishops and Prayer Book, and almost as many lobbied against (28 counties all told). There was no great pamphlet debate about the Annual Parliaments Bill (which became the Triennial Act); about the Grand Remonstrance; about the Attempt on the Five Members; about the Militia Bill; even about the Nineteen Propositions.² In January 1642, for example, there was a fierce literary debate about the protest of the bishops that their absence from the Lords (enforced by mass picketing of the Parliament by Puritan apprentices) invalidated the votes taken on those days, which generated five times as many items as discussion of the King's attempt to arrest the leading 'incendiaries'.

The paper war of 1640–2 was intense and it generated several new genres of literary text.³ The systematic printing of religious petitions (and later of petitions for peace and a negotiated settlement) was the first. The widespread reporting of speeches by MPs, many of them fabricated (some ascribed to non-existent MPs; others put into their mouths by ghost-writers, perhaps with their collusion – as in the case of 15 of the 33 printed speeches by John Pym) was another; another, short 4- to 8-page graphic narratives of disturbances in particular parts of the country – many of them, too, invented, like the narrative of the Papist uprisings in Cheshire in the spring of 1642 or pitched battles in the Welsh marches in the late summer. In the twelve months from the autumn of 1642, the King's press corps and the Parliamentary press corps issued over 200 *official* declarations helpfully gathered together at the close of the year as Edward Husband's *Exact Collection of all Remonstrances, Declarations, Votes, Orders, Ordinances, and Proclamations, Petitions, Messages and Answers*. All this material was available across the kingdom. It could be supplemented by the four Parliamentary sermons (two in each House) delivered on the day of fasting and humiliation which was held each month. We know of a Cheshire MP who sent a large package home every month of all these kinds

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of material, with instruction that they be passed round the country houses and read out in churches and market squares – and the material he sent was from both sides; and we know of a Suffolk yeoman who received on subscription the fast-day sermons with their powerful political messages and demand for personal and national reformation. They were not alone.

As the war took hold, there were changes in the literary output. From mid 1643 there were weekly newspapers, normally in 8-page quarto, describing the course of the war and reporting major votes in Parliament (though not individual speeches). Initially these took a straightforward Royalist or Parliamentary standpoint, but by 1646 the Royalist press was collapsing, while the Parliamentary press took on factional hues, reflecting the tensions within a movement that had won the war but did not know how to win the peace. Hundreds of pamphlets described particular events, or contained reports from generals (Cromwell's battle letters were censored by Parliament, his pleas for religious liberty being excised).

The war of the three kingdoms

The Irish Civil War broke out in November 1641 and continued spasmodically until it merged with the full-scale Cromwellian invasion in August 1649 (leading to a conquest effectively completed by 1652, to be followed by outbreaks of banditry or guerrilla war down to 1660 and beyond). The English Civil War broke out in the high summer of 1642 and lasted until the King surrendered in May 1646; and was followed by a series of regional rebellions in the spring and summer of 1648 (and by Scots 'invasions' in August 1648 and August/September 1651); and the Scottish Civil War broke out in 1644 and lasted until late 1645 and then started up in a rather different form in 1649, lasting until 1651, when it was superseded by an English conquest and occupation that lasted down to 1660. There were civil wars in each of the kingdoms, but there was for much of the time *in addition* a single war being fought out across all three kingdoms.

The numbers of men in arms were immense – certainly a higher proportion of the adult male population than in the wars of the twentieth century. In the summers of 1643, 1644 and 1645 there were probably 150,000 Englishmen in arms (perhaps 11 per cent of the 1.4 million males between the ages of 16 and 50 in a population of 4.5 million). The proportions of adult male Scots and of males resident in Ireland in arms was almost certainly higher. At some point in the 1640s, perhaps 1 in 4 of all adult males probably bore arms. At least 1 in 20 males died as a direct consequence of the clash of arms, and as many again of the diseases characteristic of military encampment and confinement in barracks. These were traumatic wars.

The wars were fought in different ways and according to different rules in each of the kingdoms. In England, the death rate even on the losing side of a battle was rarely more than 10% and most usually about 5%, while something between 15% and 25% were taken captive. Officers might be ransomed, or exchanged, or released on a promise of not rejoining the war. Common soldiers were invited to change sides – and many, like most of the 3,000 Royalists who surrendered after the battle of Naseby (June 1645), did so. Others were simply disarmed and sent home. When a town surrendered at the end of a siege, the garrison and inhabitants would often negotiate terms which were usually honoured (typically the garrison was allowed to march forth with their colours but without their weapons, and the inhabitants would secure guarantees that they would not be plundered or required to pay the costs of the siege, and would be granted special exemptions from, or reductions of, the heavy fines levied by Parliamentary ordinance on all those who had assisted the King's cause). Occasionally towns (the two main examples are Bolton in 1644 and Leicester in 1645), or strongly defended houses (the most notorious example is Basing House in Hampshire), were stormed and massacres ensued, but even then the massacres were perpetrated in *hot blood*. There are very few examples in England and Wales of disarmed soldiers or prisoners, let alone civilians, being massacred in *cold blood*. Most of the small number of atrocities in the English Civil War involved a strong religious motivation.

It was very different in Ireland. There prisoners were routinely massacred, garrisons and civilians killed even when a town was surrendered on a promise of quarter; and much of the killing was in cold blood. Cromwell's notorious killing of perhaps 3,000 soldiers and an unknown number of civilians during the sack of Drogheda in September 1649 and of slightly fewer at Wexford a month later were the largest but not the most vicious episodes in which many hundreds were killed in cold blood, often clubbed to death to save bullets. The story of the wars in Scotland lies somewhere between the English and Irish stories, although both the maverick Royalist commander James Graham, Earl of Montrose, with his largely Irish Catholic army, and his Presbyterian opponents left few alive who bore arms against them and who fell into their grasp.

It was a war of fluctuating viciousness, then, but cumulatively a war which created tens of thousands of widows and orphans and many more thousand war invalids – a county like Cheshire was issuing war pensions to 453 certificated Parliamentarian 'maimed soldiers' as late as 1656. The national figure might be as high as 15,000, excluding the Royalists (many of whom took over the pensions after the return of the King in 1660).

The price of war

Wars are first of all expensive in lives; but at a lesser level they are greedy for resources. Many people had felt that Ship Money was an insupportable burden; and indeed more was collected from Ship Money in five years in the 1630s than from all the Parliamentary subsidies raised in the 1620s to support simultaneous wars against France and Spain. Yet at the height of the civil wars, Parliament alone was raising the equivalent of a Parliamentary subsidy every fortnight, or a full Ship Money levy every six weeks. In addition to that, there were many direct taxes for local and specific purposes (for the refugees from the Irish Rebellion, for the maintenance of Parliament's Scottish allies, for maimed soldiers). The King was asking for rather less, but relying more heavily on free quarter as a result. Some disputed regions were paying both sides simultaneously; and a 'liberated' region would be back-taxed. To supplement the taxes on land and income, both sides introduced (for the first time in English history) an excise, levying it on staple products such as beer and other beverages, on salt (the necessary preservative for all food) and on meat. Needless to say, each side expected their opponents to pay for the war. Wherever the King was in control, he asked grand juries to indict Parliamentarian activists of treason so that he could confiscate their estates; the Parliamentarians passed an Ordinance giving local committees the power to confiscate the estates of all they considered Royalists. In due course those 4,000 Royalists who had been 'sequestered' were divided into two groups: nearly 80 per cent were deemed to be 'delinquents' or lesser offenders, and were allowed to resume their estates on payment of fines that averaged two years' income and after taking oaths of loyalty to the Parliament; and the remaining 750 were deemed to be 'malignants' (such as the King's closest adherents and all 'Papists in arms') and their estates were to be confiscated and sold outright. Royalist land flooded the market in the wake of the sale of the lands previously held by bishops and cathedral chapters and the lands of the Crown. This was not an asset sale on the scale of the 1540s when the monastic estates were sold off; and it paled into insignificance in comparison with the confiscation and redistribution of 40 per cent of the land of Ireland from (Irish) Catholic to (English) Protestant proprietors, or the greater part of the estates of the Scottish aristocracy. Nevertheless, it was not negligible.

It was a war that affected regions and social groups very differently. Virtually no blood was shed, no battle fought, no siege endured in Cambridgeshire or Suffolk (except for some 'stirs' during the second civil war of 1648). The far north west, parts of mid Wales, Kent and Surrey witnessed only spasmodic violence. On the other hand, the Severn and Upper

Thames Valleys saw almost constant fighting and towns like Bristol, Chester, Newark and Worcester experienced several prolonged sieges. The most devastated areas were almost certainly the western and the West Midlands counties: divided at the outset, these were the battlegrounds where the Royalists made their major advances in 1643 and then steadily lost ground thereafter. The north-eastern counties of Northumberland and Durham experienced little fighting, but three years of military occupation by a Scots army that had to live off the country since the English Parliament failed to honour its obligation to pay and supply them made them feel (and certainly complain) as though they had the worst time of all. Counties like Cambridgeshire sent their young men off to war; they had to pay huge sums in taxation to sustain the war effort, and more was expected of an area free of fighting; but at least they only had to pay one side, crops were not trampled underfoot, town suburbs were not pulled down to make medieval walls more effective as barriers, and absent troops could not demand free quarter. Across the Midlands and West, many householders had to put up with unwelcome guests staying overnight or for much longer periods, eating what they wanted and taking whatever they pleased when they moved on: ‘taken by the troopers when they left us, six yards of hose, a bible and other necessaries’, recorded one farmer when those quartered on him moved away; while in the West Midlands another farmer complained that soldiers had requisitioned not only his calf, but the chair to which it had been tethered. Several parishes along the Welsh Border formally complained when Parliamentary troops melted down their organ pipes to make bullets; and at Devizes Sir Ralph Hopton, finding his troops short of ‘match’, the greased smouldering rope used to fire ‘matchlock’ rifles, ordered the cords impregnated with human sweat to be torn out of the mattresses of the better-off citizens, for emergency use.

Most people’s material world was falling to pieces in the 1640s, but so was their mental and spiritual world. Few people approved of the religious changes of the 1630s, but most people wanted a return to the comfortable patterns of Jacobean religious practice. The rhythms of the liturgies written for the Prayer Book by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in the 1540s – with known and recognized patterns of prayer and response, with a liturgical year that fell in with the seasons and gave shape to a life of feast and fast, with high-points in midwinter, early spring and early summer – and with scope for local parish communities to adapt and develop the forms of the Prayer Book, had been disrupted by the autocratic centralism of the Laudian regime which commanded people to reorder their churches as they were instructed by their bishop, required them not only to follow the Prayer Book services in a particular way but to restrict themselves to those services laid out in the

Prayer Book, and reversed a century of inexorable lay expropriation of the wealth and jurisdictions bequeathed by the medieval church. What most Royalists, and initially most Parliamentarians, wanted, was the end of Laudianism, and the introduction of reforms of church structures that would hobble episcopacy so that it could never rise again, and a return to a sort of Anglican Congregationalism, local self-determination within the broad framework of the 1559 Elizabethan church settlement. Those who made the war happen, however, and who took control of the armies and the local wartime civil administration were committed Puritans, determined to discard the discredited half-way reformation, and to build on the experience of Geneva, Presbyterian Scotland and, above all, New England and the non-separating Congregationalist way. The need for military assistance from the Scots in 1640–1 and 1644–6 required a dialogue with the champions of the Scottish way, but a full-blown Presbyterianism was favoured by few in England. In the event, the Puritans could agree on what they would not have, but not what they would have, and the system hammered out by the Anglo-Scottish Westminster Assembly and diluted by the Long Parliament (what Robert Baillie famously christened ‘a lame, Erastian presbytery’) had no admirers within the Puritan cause and many opponents who began to clamour for the right of the righteous to gather in covenanted communities outside the national system. The issue of religious liberty and the benefit/catastrophe of religious pluralism became the new burning issue of the years 1645–8.

Within the national, parish-based church, much changed. One in three of all ministers were expelled from their livings; use of the Prayer Book and the celebration of the great Christian Festivals of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost were proscribed; churchwardens were placed under duress to remove all ‘monuments of idolatry and superstition’ from their churches, and in Suffolk and Cambridgeshire William Dowsing undertook the task of a roving commissioner and kept a remarkable diary of his bureaucratic iconoclasm. Soldiers often anticipated or completed the minimalist response of the wardens. Cathedrals were closed down and converted into prisons, shopping precincts or preaching centres. The church courts vanished and their jurisdiction was transferred to justices of the peace (their office having been restored after suspension during the war years). In at least a third of the parishes, liturgy continued to be based on pared-down versions of proscribed Prayer Book forms, especially in the administration of the sacraments. Elsewhere, worship tended to be designed and dominated by the godly ministers, who chose the readings, articulated the extempore prayer, and preached. This converted few. Meanwhile, Baptist churches were flourishing, and freer forms of experiential worship were spreading wherever the

New Model Army was stationed. For in the absence of chaplains, many officers, and later many troopers, had taken to breaking the Word themselves and encouraging prophetic and apocalyptic utterance by one and all. The venom and bitter self-righteous anger of the orthodox Puritan was no longer directed at 'Laudians' or even Papists; it was directed against sectarians. William Prynne, who had lost the tips of his ears for criticising the Queen for taking part in stage plays and the stumps of his ears for accusing the bishops of usurping the King's supremacy over the Church, now inveighed against the sects and against the 'atheism' of the Army; while the more irenic Richard Baxter – sheltering in Coventry, having been driven by popular Royalist feeling from Kidderminster where he had been town preacher – was profoundly shocked by the inappropriate religious enthusiasm of the New Model Army in the wake of its great victory at Naseby: 'a few, proud, self-conceited, hot-headed Sectaries had got into the highest places', he later recalled, 'and by their very heat and activity bore down the rest or carried them along with them, and were the Soul of the Army'.⁴

Baxter would not be reassured by what was issuing from the presses. From late 1645 in a crescendo down to early 1649 came passionate advocacy of religious liberty, and then the claim that there could be no religious liberty until there was political liberty. The group who came – from the autumn of 1647 – to be known as the Levellers demanded manhood suffrage, or at any rate the active political participation of all not in personal service or in receipt of alms, a constitution that itemized a set of natural rights – religious liberty and freedom from conscription foremost amongst them – which no King and no Parliament could touch, and an end to professional lawyers, professional clergymen, all who claimed a superiority of knowledge to lord it over others. They wanted an end to the discriminatory consequences of primogeniture, the granting to all tenant farmers of greater security of tenure, and the reversal of much recent enclosure, so that the poor could be endowed with the land taken from them by the greed of landlords. It fell short of the strict egalitarianism of Winstanley and the Diggers in the heady days of 1649–50, but it was menacing stuff to those who had gone to war to safeguard existing property rights and to create a Puritan confessional state.⁵

By 1646 the war in England was won. It was not a victory for better generals, more advanced military technology or tactics. It was a victory for the side that could keep its soldiers paid by ruthless taxation and sounder credit; and which had control of the seas (and therefore supply lines) and a cause that more of its soldiers were passionately committed to. More Parliamentarians than Royalists truly believed that God was on their side. The Scots were fed up and ready to go home; and there was stalemate in

Ireland, with the Protestants in control of the Pale and substantial parts of Ulster and the Catholic Confederacy in control of the other two-thirds of the island. A half-hearted expeditionary force sent in 1647 made little headway. Conquest was left to the greatest Ironside of them all, Oliver Cromwell, but only after the King's death.

Revolution

The Tacitean epigram 'they made a desert and they called it peace' was something of an exaggeration, but it was an exaggeration that informed many hearts and minds in 1646–7. Parliament had won, but at immense material cost and they had to build a new world on the rubble of the old. They had defeated the King but how could they stop him from being his old self once the general disarmament everyone clamoured for had been achieved? They told him their terms for the post-war settlement, and he ignored or spurned them. They modified them and it made no difference. A majority were willing to commit themselves to the disbandment of the Army without its arrears being guaranteed, without an adequate promise of a binding and comprehensive indemnity for the soldiers' actions in war (that chair attached to a calf was in someone's mind and perhaps on their conscience and there were many hundreds of worse cases); and they included the confirmation of the lame, Erastian but Presbyterian confessional state that most in the Parliamentary Army abominated. And so the Army refused to stay silent. It petitioned and bullied the Parliament, and was faced by resentful denials and a serious attempt by a majority of MPs to raise a second force to compel it into early disbandment. The Army occupied London, purged Parliament a first time (in August 1647, of eleven 'incendiaries') and offered their own terms to the King, placing fewer restrictions on his powers, demanding a far more limited exemption from pardon for his own closest supporters, and permitting the return of the 1559 ecclesiastical settlement so long as the episcopate was jurisdictionally emasculated. In return they insisted on the senior officers and their civilian allies securing control of his Council, and they asked him to concede the principle of religious liberty to all species of Protestants. Charles saw it as a good deal, but he also saw in the disunity of his opponents the prospects for an even better one. As Army unity in turn disintegrated, and as calls grew within it for a settlement without him at all, he fled to the Isle of Wight and called for a second war to purge the kingdom of those who had drenched it in blood. He promised a Scottish faction that he would allow a Presbyterian experiment for three years, and a confederal union of the kingdoms, and he sought to build a rainbow coalition of Catholic and Protestant-landowner interests in Ireland. For several months

the outcome of the renewed fighting in 1648 was unclear. The King's friends, however, each followed their own timetable and not an agreed one. Rebellions in the south east, in Wales and in the North followed one another in series and not in parallel, and the Scots delayed their invasion until the major rebellions in England had been dealt with. By the autumn the second war was over. Gradually the Army leaders, who had come to believe in late 1647 that the King must be replaced by one of his sons, but who doubted their own moral authority to be the agents of his deposition and death, became convinced that Charles I was a 'man of blood' as defined in the Book of Numbers (35:33), one who had shed innocent blood on whom God would have vengeance, and that he deserved to be deposed and probably executed. Yet still they hesitated. Could they handle the domestic and international fury that would result from the act of regicide? For weeks the Army leadership pressurized the King to abdicate in favour of his younger sons. They threatened him with trial and execution, but they delayed setting up the court. Miscalculating to the end, he called their bluff and he was indeed convicted before a court made up of the Army's closest friends and he was executed on 30 January 1649. If they were to stand their ground against all comers, the Generals had to establish a free Commonwealth; but few of those who signed the King's death warrant were strict republicans; and most of the true believers in kingless government – Henry Vane, Algernon Sidney, the more radical of the Levellers – refused to do so. This kangaroo court was not their high-minded route to the restoration of civic virtue. The blighted attempt to build that republic of virtue in the 1650s began with a public relations catastrophe.⁶

NOTES

1 See further the discussion in chapter 3 below, pp. 56–8.

2 These documents from 1641–2 are printed in Gardiner, *CDPR*, pp. 144–55, 202–32, 245–7, 249–54.

3 For further discussion of this topic, see chapter 3 below, pp. 58–64.

4 Cf. Introduction, p. 1, and the references there given.

5 For further discussion of the Levellers and Diggers, see chapter 4 below, pp. 72–80.

6 For the part played in this catastrophe by the publication of *Eikon Basilike*, see chapter 11 below, pp. 205–6.

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