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The Works of Thomas Carlyle

VOLUME 6:
OLIVER CROMWELL'S
LETTERS AND SPEECHES I

EDITED BY HENRY DUFF TRAILL



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CENTENARY EDITION

THE WORKS OF
THOMAS CARLYLE
IN THIRTY VOLUMES

VOL. VI

CROMWELL'S LETTERS AND SPEECHES

I

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your most humble servant

Oliver Cromwell

June 14th 1645.

Housebourn

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THOMAS CARLYLE

OLIVER CROMWELL'S
LETTERS AND SPEECHES
WITH ELUCIDATIONS

IN FOUR VOLUMES
VOLUME I

LONDON
CHAPMAN AND HALL
LIMITED
1897

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

THE First Edition of this Work¹ having, contrary to expectation, spread itself abroad with some degree of impetus, has, as in that case was partly natural, brought me into correspondence with various possessors and collectors of Cromwell Letters; has brought obliging contributions, and indications true and fallacious, from far sources and from near; and, on the whole, has disinterred from their widespread slumber a variety of Letters not before known to me, or not before remembered by me. With which new Letters it became a rather complex question what was now to be done.

They were not, in general, of much, or almost of any intrinsic importance; might here and there have saved some ugly labour and research, had they been known in time; but did not now, as it turned out, tend to modify, in any essential particular, what had already been set down, and sent forth to the world as a kind of continuous connected Book. It is true, all clearly authentic Letters of Cromwell, never so unimportant, do claim to be preserved; and in this Book, by the title of it, are naturally to be looked for. But, on the other hand, how introduce them now? To unhoop your cask again, and try to insert new staves, when the old staves, better or worse, do already hang together, is what no cooper will recommend! Not to say, that your Set of Cromwell Letters can never, in this Second or in any other Edition, be considered as *complete*: an uncounted handful of needles to be picked from an unmeasured continent of hay,—how can you ever assure yourself that you have them all?

After deliberation, the law of the case seemed to be somewhat as follows: *First*, that whatever Letters would easily fit

¹ December 1845.

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themselves into the Book as it stood,—easily, or even with labour if that were all,—should be duly admitted. *Secondly*, that for such Letters as tended to bring into better relief any feature of the Man or his Work,—much more, had they tended to correct or alter in any respect any feature I had assigned to him or to it: that for these an effort should be made, if needful; even a considerable effort; effort, in fact, to be limited only by this consideration, Not to damage by it to a still greater degree the already extant, and so by one's effort accomplish only loss. *Thirdly*, that for such Cromwell Letters as did not fall under either of these descriptions, but were nevertheless clearly of his composition, there should be an *Appendix* provided. In which, without pretension to commentary, and not needing to be read along with the Text, but only apart from it if at all, they might at least stand correctly printed:—they, and certain other Pieces of more doubtful claim; for most part Letters too, but of half, or in some cases of wholly, official character;—if by chance they were elucidative, brief, and not easily attainable elsewhere. Into which Appendix also, as into a loose back-room or lumber-room, not bound to be organic or habitable, bound only to be maintained in a reasonably swept condition, any still *new* Letters of Cromwell might without ceremony be disposed.

Upon these principles this Second Edition has been produced. New Letters intercalated into the Text, and Letters lying in loose rank in the Appendix, all that I had, or could hear of or get any trace of hitherto, are here given. For purchasers of the First Edition, the new matter has been detached, printed as a Supplement, which the Bookseller undertakes to sell at prime cost.—And now, having twice escaped alive from these detestable Dust-Abysses, let me beg to be allowed to consider this my small act of Homage to the Memory of a Hero as finished;—this Second Edition of *Oliver's Letters and Speeches* as the final one. New Letters, should such still turn up, I will not, except they contradict some statement, or fibre of a statement, in the Text, under-

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 take to introduce there; but deposit them without ceremony
 in the loose lumber-room, in a more or less swept condition.
 T. CARLYLE.

London, 11th May 1846.

TO THE THIRD EDITION

THE small leakage of new Cromwell matter that has oozed in upon me from the whole world, since the date of that Second Edition, has been disposed of according to the principles there laid down. Some small half-dozen of Authentic new *Letters*, pleasantly enough testifying (once they were cleared into legibility) how every new fact fits into perfect preëstablished correspondence with all old facts, but not otherwise either pleasant or important, have come to me; one or two of these, claiming more favour, or offering more facility, have been inserted into the Text; the rest, as was my bargain in regard to all of them, have been sent to the Appendix. In Text or Appendix there they stand, duly in their places; they, and what other smallest of authentic glimmerings of additional light (few in number, infinitesimally small in moment) came to me from any quarter: all new acquisitions have been punctually inserted;—generally indicated as new, where they occur; too insignificant for enumerating here, or indeed almost for indicating at all.

On the whole, I have to say that the new Contributions to this Third Edition are altogether slight and insignificant, properly of no real moment whatever. Nay, on looking back, it may be said that the new Contributions to any Edition have been slight; that, for learning intelligibly what the Life of Cromwell was, the First Edition is still perhaps as recommendable a Book as either of its followers. Exposed, since that, to the influx of new Cromwell matter from all the world, one finds it worth observing how little of the smallest real importance has come in; what of effort has had to expend itself not in

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improving the Book as a practical Representation of Cromwell's Existence in this world, but in hindering it from being injured as such,—from being swollen out of shape by superfluous details, defaced with dilettante antiquarianisms, nugatory tagrags; and, in short, turned away from its real uses, instead of furthered towards them. An ungrateful kind of effort, and growing ever more so, the longer it lasts;—but one to which the Biographer of Cromwell by this method has to submit, as to a clear law of nature, with what cheerfulness he can.

Certain Dictionary *Lists*, not immediately connected with Oliver, but useful for students of this Historical Period, a *List of the Long Parliament*, and *Lists of the Association Committees*; farther a certain Contribution called *The Squire Papers*, which is for the present, and must for a long time remain, of doubtful authenticity to the world: these I have subjoined to the Second¹ Volume, which offered space for such a purpose; but have been careful, in Text, Appendix, Index, to make no reference to them, to maintain a perfect separation between all parts of the Book and them, and to signify that these are not even an Appendix, or thing hooked-on, but rather a mere Adjacency, or thing in some kind of contact,—kind of contact which can at any moment be completely dissolved, by the very Bookbinder if he so please.

And in general, for the reader's sake, let me again say plainly that all these Appendixes and Adjuncts are insignificant; that the Life of Cromwell lies in the Text; and that a serious reader, if he take advice of mine, will not readily stir from that on any call of the Appendixes etc., which can only be a call towards things unessential, intrinsically superfluous, if extrinsically necessary here, and worthy only of a later and more cursory attention, if of any whatever, from him.

T. C.

London, 16th October 1849.

¹ The *Lists* will be given at the end of the Third Volume in the present Edition; the *Squire Papers* are adjoined to the Second Volume.

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE present, like an earlier, volume of the series has a history of some, though of a slighter, interest connected with the name of Mr. John Stuart Mill. In the year 1840, Carlyle had, at the suggestion of Mill, then editor of the *Westminster Review*, undertaken to contribute to that periodical an article on Oliver Cromwell. While this article was being written, ill-health compelled the editor to go abroad, and his temporary successor, who, probably through some misunderstanding or oversight on Mill's part, had been left uninformed of the engagement, decided to deal with the subject himself, and wrote in that sense to Carlyle. It was undoubtedly a somewhat provoking incident, and Carlyle was not unnaturally annoyed by it; but he was, fortunately, too much attracted by his subject to abandon it, and, instead of throwing aside his uncompleted essay, resolved to expand it into a history of the Civil War.

As, however, was not unusual with him, and, as became still more his habit in later life, the hot fit of enthusiasm for a newly conceived project was succeeded by the cold fit of regret for his decision, and of disenchantment with his task. Even after he had determined, warned by the discovery of its true dimensions, to reduce the scope of the work, and to make it mainly a biography of Cromwell, embodying a narrative of the principal events of the Civil War and the Commonwealth, we still find him lamenting, always with his customary touch of exaggeration, the difficulties and labours of the undertaking. 'My progress with Cromwell, he writes, 'is frightful.' 'A thousand times I regretted that this task was ever taken up.' Again, he describes it as 'the most

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impossible book of all I ever before tried,'—an unconscious 'Grecism' which numbers the book among its own predecessors, but which has the august countenance of Milton, in the well-known passage wherein he includes Adam among 'his sons since born,' and calls Eve the 'fairest of her daughters.' Even in looking back upon the completed work, Carlyle could find no less despairing terms in which to speak of it than these: 'Cromwell I must have written in 1844, but for four years previous it had been a continual toil and misery to me; four years of abstruse toil, obscure speculation, futile wrestling and misery, I used to count it had cost me.'

Happily for himself and for the world, we can trace much other and far more fruitful employment of the period of preparation than he here acknowledges. In 1842, he visited the field of Naseby, in company with Dr. Arnold, and in the following year, he inspected the scene of the 'crowning mercy' at Worcester, and also that of the decisive victory of Dunbar, on the very anniversary of the fight: journeys which, in their inspiring effect upon his wonderfully vivid descriptions of those memorable battles, count for a good deal more in the success of the *Cromwell* than all the 'abstruse toil, obscure speculation and futile wrestlings' of which he speaks.

In the course, however, of his four years of preparatory labour, his plan, as we all know, underwent a still further modification. Commenced as a History, and transformed into a Biography, it was now to become virtually an Autobiography with copious editorial annotations. Having originally proposed to compose a narrative of the Civil War, and next to write in place thereof a Life of Oliver Cromwell, Carlyle's final idea was to let his hero relate the story of his own career, in the words of his own written and spoken deliverances, as explained, illustrated and amplified by their Editor. And so at last the book took the definitive form of its description on the title-page as *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches: with Elucidations*.

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Assuredly that description is not, on the first blush of the matter, a very promising one. To this day, indeed, it must remain more or less of a marvel, and much more than less of a testimony to Carlyle's remarkable gifts, that he succeeded in producing a masterpiece from such forbidding materials. *A priori*, one would have said that whatever merits such a book might possess, they could not possibly be those of a continuous and coherent narrative; whereas nothing is more noticeable about the *Cromwell* than the unity of the impression which it produces on the reader, and the completeness with which the fire of its author's genius has fused it into an artistic whole. Of his battle-pieces, with their intense reality and dramatic vigour of narrative, mention has already been made; but these might well have been and probably would have been in most other hands mere 'purple patches' on a fabric of the dullest and plainest hoddie-grey. But the inexhaustible animation which he has contrived to infuse into a story, the main thread of which is carried on through a series of what, with all respect to Carlyle's hero, are some of the most undistinguished and ineffective letters ever written, it is this that makes the work a living thing. The mere editing of the letters, the emendations, 'elucidations' and explanatory scholia are full of critical ingenuity and insight; and it will be superfluous information to any one who has studied the text without their assistance, to remark that few letter-writers have ever demanded more of these qualities from an Editor than Oliver Cromwell.

From the historical point of view, the work displays much the same merits and the same defects as the *French Revolution*. Carlyle approaches both the English and the French revolutionary movement from the same standpoint of preconception; as indeed he frankly confesses in his Introduction. 'To see God's own law then universally acknowledged for complete as it stood in the holy Written Book, made good in this world.' This, according to Carlyle, is the whole, sole, and sufficient cause, beginning, and end of the Puritan-Democratic uprising; and he dismisses all political

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and constitutional questions, all disputes between Royal prerogative and popular liberties, as mere irrelevances. To uphold the law of God was 'the general spirit of England in the seventeenth century,' as 'in other somewhat disfigured form' (somewhat disfigured indeed!) 'we have seen the same immortal hope take practical shape in the French Revolution, and once more astonish the world.' A man who will set about to explain the whole of the events between 1635 and 1659, on this theory and this alone, will, in Carlyle's own language, 'go far.' Much, too, is demanded from one who essays to pose Cromwell as a single-minded soldier in the warfare of truth against quackery and sham. 'Fundamentally sincere,' that great man may well have been and was: but to deny that, like hundreds of other men of his age and faith, he habitually abode in a spiritual region in which the dividing line between the genuine and the spurious forms of religious emotion was continually getting obscured, and words which were at one moment the outpourings of a devout soul, sank at another moment into the merest cant of the conventicle—to deny this, is surely not only to shut the eyes to certain obvious features in Cromwell's career, but to leave many of his otherwise easily explicable utterances unexplained. Carlyle applies his own theory to these with courage: but as regards the more unctuously and offensively pietistic among them, not without effort; nor is the result successful. Fortunately, however, it is pre-eminently as a man of action that Cromwell lives for his countrymen of all political schools and religious sects; and since the time has now come when they can agree to differ as to his motives, Carlyle's too heroic theory of him need not, and does not, any longer irritate even those who are least in sympathy with it. They willingly acquiesce in Carlyle's canonisation of the Lord Protector; for they feel that he has earned a right to his saint, by drawing them so masterly a portrait of the man.

H. D. TRAILL.