

## CHAPTER 19

### ENGLISH CIVIL WAR

Excerpted and adapted from M. Wiesner-Hanks, *Early Modern Europe 1450-1789*,  
2nd edition (Cambridge, 2013) pp. 338-341;  
J. Spielvogel, *Western Civilization since 1300*, 7th edition (Belmont, 2009) pp. 470-472.

In 1603, Queen Elizabeth died after ruling for almost fifty years, and the English throne was inherited by her distant cousin James Stuart (1566-1625), the king of Scotland, son of Mary Queen of Scots (herself a firm Catholic whom Elizabeth had executed for plotting with Philip II of Spain; see Chapter 16). James had thus been baptized Catholic by his mother, but when he came to the Scottish throne as an infant, his mother had been imprisoned and he was instead raised by Protestant advisors. These men accepted Calvinist theology and supported the Scottish Presbyterian church structure, in which power was held by elected councils, called presbyteries, rather than by appointed bishops. As he grew, James gained an impressive education, but also developed a strong sense of the divine right of kings; in a speech to Parliament shortly after he assumed the English throne, James described himself as their “natural father,” responsible only to God. His audience in Parliament, especially the House of Commons, did not agree. During Elizabeth’s reign, Parliament had gone far beyond discussing and approving taxes, and they were clearly not willing to tolerate any king lessening their influence in affairs of state.

James inherited Elizabeth’s problems, but boasted none of her political shrewdness. Like all early modern monarchs, Elizabeth used patronage very lavishly, rewarding favorites with positions and offices for their service. Those who hoped for advancement flocked to London and to the court in the same way French aristocrats later would to Versailles. Patronage seekers included some of the great nobles, who held seats in the House of Lords, but also the lower-level nobility – what in England are usually termed “gentry” – and wealthy merchants and professionals, all of whom were represented in the House of Commons. In contrast to France and Spain, English nobles and gentry did not look down on commercial ventures, and they were not tax-exempt. Both

gentry and urban merchants gained economically from England's overseas trade, and also invested in new commercial ventures at home, gradually gaining more land and wealth than the high nobility. Members of the House of Commons were thus well educated and very wealthy by the seventeenth century, and they were intent on making sure that they had a voice in determining the taxes they were obliged to pay, the privileges they would receive, their relations with the monarchy, the raising of royal funds, and many other matters of public policy.

Some of the gentry and many urban residents, especially in London, were also dissatisfied with the Church of England established by Henry VIII and affirmed by Elizabeth. They thought that the church, with its hierarchical structure of bishops and elaborate ceremonies, was still too close to Roman Catholicism, and they wanted to "purify" it of what they saw as vestiges of Catholicism. These "Puritans," as they became known, had become increasingly vocal toward the end of Elizabeth's reign, and they expected James, who had been raised in Presbyterian Scotland, to support them. Instead he viewed the hierarchy of bishops as a key support for royal power, stating flatly, "no bishop, no king."

The war with Spain, including the stunning defeat of the Spanish Armada, had left England deeply in debt at James's accession, and the struggle to pay off these debts gave the House of Commons the leverage it needed to expand its powers. The first three decades of the seventeenth century saw a running battle between the Commons and the king. The Commons gradually gained the right to discuss foreign policy as well as taxation, and refused to approve the union of Scotland and England. These disputes continued under James's son, Charles I (r. 1625-49). In 1628, Parliament passed the Petition of Right, which the king was supposed to accept before being granted any tax revenues. This petition prohibited taxation without Parliament's consent, arbitrary imprisonment, the quartering of soldiers in private houses, and the declaration of martial law in peacetime. Although he initially accepted it, Charles later reneged on the agreement because of its limitations on royal power. In 1629 Charles decided that since he could not work with Parliament, he would not summon it to meet. From 1629 to 1640, Charles pursued a course of personal rule, which forced him to find ways to collect taxes without the

cooperation of Parliament. One expedient was a tax called “ship money,” a levy on seacoast towns to pay for coastal defense, which was now collected annually by the king’s officials throughout England and used to finance other government operations besides defense. This use of ship money aroused opposition from middle-class merchants and landed gentry, who objected to the king’s attempts to tax without Parliament’s consent.



Charles I of England by Anthony van Dyck, 1636

While Charles was ignoring Parliament, his archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud (1573-1645), pushed forward religious change. Laud tried to force all English churches to adopt more elaborate ceremonies and services or risk punishment through a newly established “Court of High Commission.” This emphasis on liturgical beauty, combined with the king’s marriage to Henrietta Maria, the Catholic sister of King Louis XIII of France, aroused suspicions about the king’s own religious inclinations. Many in England suspected the king of secretly sympathizing with the Catholic Church. Grievances mounted. Charles might have survived unscathed if he could have avoided calling Parliament, which alone could provide a focus for the many cries of discontent throughout the land. But when the king and Archbishop Laud attempted to impose the Anglican Book of Common Prayer on the Scottish Presbyterian (i.e. Calvinist) Church, the Scots rose up in rebellion against the king. Financially strapped and unable to raise troops to defend against the Scots, the king was forced to call Parliament into session. Eleven years of frustration welled up to create a Parliament determined to deal the king his due.

The Scots, rejecting Charles I as their king on religious grounds, soon invaded England, and in 1640 Charles was forced to call Parliament to pay for an army to fight the Scots. This Parliament, called the “Long Parliament” because it met for thirteen years, was dominated by men with long-standing grievances against the king, and refused to trust him with an army without drastically limiting his power to use that army. It passed an act ruling that the king had to call Parliament at least once every three years, and prohibited any king from dissolving a Parliament without its approval. It abolished various independent royal courts, and impeached Archbishop Laud. It even discussed (but never demanded) depriving the bishops of their votes in the House of Lords, and even doing away with the episcopal structure completely. Charles acquiesced to many of Parliament’s restrictive demands, as he was faced with both a Scottish invasion and a Catholic rebellion in Ireland. Some members of the House of Commons wanted to go further, however, and give Parliament control over the army, the Anglican church, and the appointment of all judges and officials. Here Charles refused, and also maneuvered to take back some of the measures he had already agreed upon. He began to recruit a separate army from among the nobility and gentry who were loyal to him, and gradually the country split into

two camps: the parliamentarians and the royalists, with some moderates in between. England headed toward civil war in what would be the only full-scale revolution in Europe in the seventeenth century.

Parliament proved victorious in the first phase of the English Civil War (1642-1646). Most important to Parliament's success was the creation of the New Model Army, which was composed primarily of more extreme Puritans known as the Independents, who believed they were doing battle for the Lord. It is striking to read in the military reports of Oliver Cromwell, one of the group's leaders, such statements as "Sir, this is none other but the hand of God, and to Him alone belongs the glory." We might also attribute some of the credit to Cromwell himself, since his zealous soldiers were well disciplined and trained in the latest military tactics. Supported by the New Model Army, Parliament ended the first phase of the civil war with the capture of King Charles I in 1646.



Oliver Cromwell by Robert Walker, c. 1649



German engraving, printed in 1649, depicting the beheading of Charles I in London

A split now occurred in the parliamentary forces. A Presbyterian majority wanted to disband the army and restore Charles I with a Presbyterian state church in place of the Anglican bishops. Yet the army, composed mostly of the more radical Independents who opposed a state-run Presbyterian church, marched on London in 1647 and began negotiations with the king. Charles took advantage of this division to flee and seek help, ironically, from the Scots. Enraged by the king's treachery, Cromwell and the army engaged in a second brief civil war (1648) that again ended with Cromwell's victory and the capture of the king. This time Cromwell was determined to secure victory by eliminating the king. The Presbyterian members of Parliament were purged, leaving a Rump Parliament of only fifty-three members of the House of Commons who then

tried and condemned the king on a charge of treason and adjudged that “he, the said Charles Stuart, as a tyrant, traitor, murderer, and public enemy to the good people of this nation, shall be put to death by the severing of his head from his body.” In January of 1649, King Charles was publically beheaded by the elected body which supposedly represented his own subjects. Yet for most Englishmen, this official regicide was shocking and entirely unexpected. Guided swiftly and decisively by Cromwell, the revolution had triumphed, and the monarchy in England had been destroyed, at least for the moment.

## HOMEWORK QUESTIONS

- 1.) How did Charles I and the English Parliament come into conflict?
- 2.) In what ways does Oliver Cromwell resemble Charles I, and in what ways do they clearly differ?

**\*\* PRIMARY SOURCE \*\***

**Oliver Cromwell, *Speech at the General Council***

Excerpted from C. Stainer (ed.), *Speeches of Oliver Cromwell, 1644-1658*  
(New York, 1901) pp. 71-79.

*\*\* Following the execution of Charles I by order of the English Rump Parliament in 1649, Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) continued his efforts to impose a staunchly Protestant order throughout the British Empire. Some royalists, who had favored Charles, fled to Ireland and joined with the native Catholics there to resist the puritanical Cromwell; the Scots and Welsh also resisted Cromwell's ascendancy. The speech reproduced below, delivered just a few months following the regicide, deals with Cromwell's appointment, by Parliament, to lead a large contingent of troops into Ireland in order to put down the royalist/Catholic rebellion. His New Model Army subsequently devastated much of the Irish countryside and ultimately succeeded in breaking any hopes of Irish political independence. \*\**

I [Oliver Cromwell] do confess, my lord, I should desire that in this business of Ireland I might not go upon it out of any personal respects whatsoever, and that I would have personal respects far from this Army. I do not think that God has blessed this Army for the sake of any one man, nor has his presence been with it upon any such ground; but the presence and blessing which God has afforded this Army has been of his own good pleasure, and to serve his own turn. The presence and blessing which he has afforded us has been for his own name's sake, because he would do amongst the sons of men what seemed good in his eyes for the bringing of his glory and purpose to pass; and upon this score has this Army undertaken all that it has undertaken in the presence of God.

It matters not who is our Commander-in-Chief, if God be so; and if God be amongst us, and his presence be with us, it matters not who is our Commander-in-Chief. Truly I do believe that God has so principled our Army that there is none amongst us but that, if God should set us out under any man,



we should come to this: to submit to one another in this for the work's sake. Therefore I would that we might think of this: What is this business of Ireland? What are our considerations in relation to England, to Scotland, to friends here or there, or to enemies anywhere? And if we, taking considerations of that kind and seeking directions from his guidance, work together and answer the best guide that He shall give us, I doubt not but He will bless us. And therefore I shall be bold to offer to you some thoughts of mine and some considerations, which perhaps will best serve to ripen your resolutions as to this undertaking, that so you may have your undertaking from the Lord.

You know how it has pleased God to beat down all your enemies under your feet, both in this kingdom and the kingdom of Scotland; and you have with simplicity of heart made this opposition to those enemies upon those honest and religious grounds which are fit for godly, honest and religious men to propose to themselves. And God has brought the war to an issue here, and given you a great fruit of that war, to wit, the execution of exemplary justice upon the prime leader of all this quarrel in the three kingdoms [King Charles I], and upon divers persons of very great quality who did co-operate with him in the destruction of this kingdom.

Truly notwithstanding you have brought this work to this issue, yet it seems your work is not at an end. You have yet another enemy to encounter with, and friends to stand by. The interest you have fought for you have yet further to make good, not only to the end that you may be able to resist those who have been heretofore your enemies – and are still your enemies, and are more enraged, and are not warned by those examples and those witnesses that God has witnessed for you. But, some will say, they are removed at a further distance! But they are joined together in strong combination to revive the work here again, that they are certainly in the kingdom of Scotland and in the kingdom of Ireland. In the kingdom of Scotland you cannot so well take notice of what is done, nor of this that there is a very angry, hateful spirit there against this Army, as an Army of Sectarians, which you see all their papers do declare their quarrel to be against. And although God has used us as instruments for their good, yet hitherto they are not sensible of it, but they are angry that God brought them his mercy at such an hand. And this their anger, though without any quarrelling of ours with them,

will return into their own bosoms, for God did do the work without us; and they that are displeased with the instruments, their anger reaches to God and not to those who serve him. And you see they have declared the Prince of Wales their King, and endeavours are both here and there with that party to do what they can to co-operate with them to cause all this work to return again, and to seek the ruin and destruction of those that God has ordained to be instrumental for their good. And I think you are not ignorant that a great party here does co-operate in the work, and their spirits are embittered against us, even though they might know that if God had not used this poor Army instrumentally to do what it has done, they had not had a being at this time. But such is the good pleasure of God as to leave them to the blindness of their minds.

I must needs say I do more fear – not that I do think there is a ground to fear that it will be, but as a poor man that desires to see the work of God to prosper in our hands – I think there is more cause of danger from disunion amongst ourselves than by anything from our enemies. And I do not know anything that is a greater danger than that. And I believe, and I may speak with confidence, till we admire God and give Him glory for what He has done, that there is such danger. For all the rest of the world, ministers and profane persons, all rob God of all the glory and reckon it to be a thing of chance that has befallen them. Now if we do not depart from God and disunite by that departure and fall into disunion amongst ourselves, I am confident, we doing our duty and waiting upon the Lord, we shall find that He will be as a wall of brass round about us till we have finished that work which He has for us to do. And yet let us not be sensible that this is the rage and malice of our enemies. ... I wish that they may see their error, those that are good amongst them, and repent, but certainly this wrath of theirs shall turn to their hurt, and God will restrain the remainder that it shall not hurt us.

In the next place we are to consider Ireland. All the papists [i.e. English Catholics] and the King's party – I cannot say all the papists but the greatest party of them – are in a very strong combination against you, and they have made a union with those apostate forces that were under Inchiquin and the Confederate Catholics of Ireland; and all that party are in a very strong combination against you. The last letters that the Council of State had from thence do plainly import:

that Preston has 8,000 foot and 800 horse, that Taaffe has as many, that my Lord Clanricarde has the same proportion, that my Lord Inchiquin and my Lord Ormond have a matter of 3,000 foot and 800 horse, and that these are all agreed and ready in conjunction to root out the English interest in Ireland and to set up the Prince of Wales his interest there likewise, and to endeavour as soon as they can to attempt upon our interest in Leinster and Ulster and Connaught, in all of which provinces we have an interest, but in Munster none at all. And though we are fortunate in that interest we have in these three provinces, it is not so considerable but if these Confederate forces shall come upon them, it is more than probable, without a miracle from heaven, that our interest will easily be eradicated out of those parts. And truly this is really believed, if we do not endeavour to make good our interest there, and that timely, we shall not only have, as I said before, our interest rooted out there, but they will in a very short time be able to land forces in England, and to put us to trouble here. And I confess that I have had these thoughts with myself, and that perhaps may be carnal and foolish. I had rather be over-run with a Cavalierish interest than a Scotch interest; I had rather be over-run with a Scotch interest than an Irish interest – and I think of all, this [the Irish] is the most dangerous, and if they shall be able to carry on this work they will make this the most miserable people in the earth. For all the world knows their barbarism – I speak not of those of any one religion, for almost all of them are but in a manner as bad as papists, and you see how considerable they are at this time.

And truly it is thus far, that the quarrel is brought to this state, that we can hardly return unto that tyranny that formerly we were under the yoke of, which through the mercy of God has been lately broken, but we must at the same time be subject to the kingdom of Scotland, or to the kingdom of Ireland for the bringing in of the King [Charles II]. Now it should awaken all Englishmen, who perhaps are willing enough he should have come in upon an accommodation. But now he must come from Ireland or Scotland! This being so, I would not have this Army now so much to look at considerations that are personal, whether or no we shall go if such a Commander go or such a Commander go, and make that any part of our measure or foundation; but let us go, if God go. If that we be still in our calling, prosecuting that cause that hitherto we have been engaged in, and if opposing those enemies be a part of that cause, wherein we desire that there

may be no personal respects, and if we be satisfied in our judgements and consciences that He is in it, I would that you would let this be your motive.

And I do profess it as before the Lord of Heaven, and as in his presence, I do not speak this to you that I would shift at all from the command or in any sneaking way or in any politic way lead you to an engagement, before I declare my thoughts in the thing, whether I go or stay, as God shall incline my heart to it. And if you undertake it upon these grounds, I am confident there will not be so much dispute amongst those who shall go as who shall stay. My meaning is, you will, every honest heart that sees a freedom of their ways, will rather be whetted on out of love to God and duty to God, to go where he may do Him most service, rather than stay. ... Doing service to God and giving glory to God will be the best motive to this work, aye, it will be much better to have considerations of this kind, than to lay this as the foundation: who shall command in chief. For my own part, though the Council of State has put that upon me, yet I have desired them to give me till Tuesday to give in my answer. I desire you therefore now to give your resolutions as to the particular regiments that are to go in that kind, and to state what other demands you will make for your going that will enable those to go and to have a subsistence when they go.

#### HOMEWORK QUESTIONS:

- 1.) How does Cromwell understand his work as potential Commander-in-Chief of the New Model Army?
- 2.) Why does Cromwell, of all his exterior enemies, most fear the Irish?