**3-Cromwell’s Commonwealth**

**Commonwealth and Protectorate (1649-1660)**

The execution of the king aroused hostility not only in England but also throughout Europe. Regicide was considered the worst of all crimes, and not even the brilliance of John Milton in The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates (1649) could persuade either Catholic or Protestant powers that the execution of Charles I was just. Open season was declared against English shipping, and Charles II was encouraged to reclaim his father’s three kingdoms.

Despite opposition and continued external threats, the government of the Commonwealth was declared in May 1649 after acts had been passed to abolish the monarchy and the House of Lords. Political power resided in a Council of State, the Rump Parliament (which swelled from 75 to 213 members in the year following the king’s execution), and the army. The military was now a permanent part of English government. Though the soldiers had assigned the complex tasks of reform to Parliament, they made sure of their ability to intervene in political affairs.

At first, however, the soldiers had other things to occupy them. For reasons of security and revenge, Ireland had to be pacified. In the autumn of 1649, Cromwell crossed to Ireland to deal once and for all with the Irish Confederate rebels. He came first to Drogheda. When the town refused to surrender, he stormed it and put the garrison of 3,000 to the sword, acting both as the avenger of the massacres of 1641 (“I am persuaded that this is a righteous judgement of God upon those barbarous wretches who have imbrued their hands in so much innocent blood”) and as a deliberate instrument of terror to induce others to surrender. He repeated his policy of massacre at Wexford, this time choosing not to spare the civilian population. These actions had the desired effect, and most other towns surrendered at Cromwell’s approach. He departed Ireland after nine months, leaving his successors with only a mopping-up operation. His reputation at a new high, Cromwell was next put in charge of dealing with those Scots who had welcomed Charles I’s son, Charles II, to Scotland and who were soon to crown him at Scone as king of all of Great Britain and Ireland. Although outnumbered and in a weak defensive position, Cromwell won a stunning victory in the Battle of Dunbar on September 3, 1650. A year later to the day, having chased Charles II and a second Scottish army into England, he gained an overwhelming victory at Worcester. Charles II barely escaped with his life.

Victorious wars against the Irish, Scots, and Dutch (1652) made the Commonwealth a feared military power. But the struggle for survival defined the Rump’s conservative policies. Little was done to reform the law. An attempt to abolish the court of chancery created chaos in the central courts. Little agreement could be reached on religious matters, especially on the vexing question of the compulsory payment of tithes. The Rump failed both to make long-term provision for a new “national church” and to define the state’s right to confer and place limits on the freedom of those who wished to worship and gather outside the church. Most ominously, nothing at all had been done to set a limit for the sitting of the Rump and to provide for franchise reform and the election of a new Parliament. This had been the principal demand of the army, and the more the Rump protested the difficulty of the problem, the less patient the soldiers became. In April, when it was clear that the Rump would set a limit to its sitting but would nominate its own members to judge new elections, Cromwell marched to Westminster and dissolved Parliament. The Rump was replaced by an assembly nominated mostly by the army high command. The Nominated Parliament (1653) was no better able to overcome its internal divisions or untangle the threads of reform than the Rump. After five months it dissolved itself and returned power to Cromwell and the army.

The problems that beset both the Rump and the Nominated Parliament resulted from the diversity of groups that supported the revolution, ranging from pragmatic men of affairs, lawyers, officeholders, and local magistrates whose principal desire was to restore and maintain order to zealous visionaries who wished to establish heaven on earth. The republicans, like Sir Henry Vane the Younger, hoped to create a government based upon the model of ancient Rome and modern Venice. They were proud of the achievements of the Commonwealth and reviled Cromwell for dissolving the Rump. But most political reformers based their programs on dreams of the future rather than the past. They were millenarians, expecting the imminent Second Coming of Christ. Some were social reformers, such as Gerrard Winstanley, whose followers, agrarian communists known as Diggers, believed that the common lands should be returned to the common people. Others were mystics, such as the Ranters, led by Laurence Claxton, who believed that they were infused with a holy spirit that removed sin from even their most reprehensible acts. The most enduring of these groups were the Quakers (Society of Friends), whose social radicalism was seen in their refusal to take oaths or doff their hats and whose religious radicalism was contained in their emphasis upon inner light. Ultimately, all these groups were persecuted by successive revolutionary governments, which were continually being forced to establish conservative limits to individual and collective behaviour.

The failure of the Nominated Parliament led to the creation of the first British constitution, the Instrument of Government (1653). Drafted by Maj. Gen. John Lambert, the Instrument created a lord protector, a Council of State, and a reformed Parliament that was to be elected at least once every three years. Cromwell was named protector, and he chose a civilian-dominated Council to help him govern. The Protectorate tackled many of the central issues of reform head-on. Commissions were appointed to study law reform and the question of tithes. Social legislation against swearing, drunkenness, and stage plays was introduced. Steps were taken to provide for the training of a godly ministry, and even a new university at Durham was begun. But the protector was no better able to manage his Parliaments than had been the king. The Parliament of 1654 immediately questioned the entire basis of the newly established government, with the republicans vigorously disputing the office of lord protector. The Parliament of 1656, despite the exclusion of many known opponents, was no more pliable. Both were a focus for the manifold discontents of supporters and opponents of the regime.

Nothing was more central to the Cromwellian experiment than the cause of religious liberty. Cromwell believed that no one church had a monopoly on truth and that no one form of government or worship was necessary or desirable. Moreover, he believed in a loosely federated national church, with each parish free to worship as it wished within very broad limits and staffed by a clergy licensed by the state on the basis of their knowledge of the Bible and the uprightness of their lives, without reference to their religious beliefs. On the other hand, Cromwell felt that there should be freedom for “all species of protestant” to gather if they wished into religious assemblies outside the national church. He did not believe, however, that religious liberty was a natural right, but one conferred by the Christian magistrate, who could place prudential limits on the exercise of that liberty. Thus, those who claimed that their religion permitted or even promoted licentiousness and sexual freedom, who denied the Trinity, or who claimed the right to disrupt the worship of others were subject to proscription or penalty. Furthermore, for the only time between the Reformation and the mid-19th century, there was no religious test for the holding of public office. Although Cromwell made his detestation of Catholicism very plain, Catholics benefited from the repeal of the laws requiring attendance at parish churches, and they were less persecuted for the private exercise of their own faith than at any other time in the century. Cromwell’s policy of religious tolerance was far from total, but it was exceptional in the early modern world.

Among opponents, royalists were again active, though by now they were reduced to secret associations and conspiracies. In the west, Penruddock’s rising, the most successful of a series of otherwise feeble royalist actions in March 1655, was effectively suppressed, but Cromwell reacted by reducing both the standing army and the level of taxation on all. He also appointed senior army officers “major generals,” raising ultra-loyal militias from among the demobbed veterans paid for by penal taxation on all those convicted of active royalism in the previous decade. The major generals were also charged with superintending “a reformation of manners”—the imposition of strict Puritan codes of social and sexual conduct. They were extremely unpopular, and, despite their effectiveness, the offices were abolished within a year.

By now it was apparent that the regime was held together by Cromwell alone. Within his personality resided the contradictions of the revolution. Like the gentry, he desired a fixed and stable constitution, but, like the zealous, he was infused with a millenarian vision of a more glorious world to come (see millennialism). As a member of Parliament from 1640, he respected the fundamental authority that Parliament represented, but, as a member of the army, he understood power and the decisive demands of necessity. In the 1650s many wished him to become king, but he refused the crown, preferring the authority of the people to the authority of the sword. When he died in 1658, all hope of continued reform died with him.

For a time, Richard Cromwell was elevated to his father’s titles and dignity, but he was no match in power or skill. The republicans and the army officers who had fought Oliver tooth and nail now hoped to use his son to dismantle the civil government that under the Humble Petition and Advice (1657) had come to resemble nothing so much as the old monarchy. An upper House of Lords had been created, and the court at Whitehall was every bit as ceremonious as that of the Stuarts. While some demanded that the Rump be restored to power, others clamoured for the selection of a new Parliament on the basis of the old franchise, and this took place in 1659. By then there was a vacuum of power at the centre; Richard Cromwell, incapable of governing, simply left office. A rebellion of junior officers led to the reestablishment of the Rump.

But all was confusion. The Rump was incapable of governing without financial support from the City and military support from the army. Just as in 1647, the City demanded military disbandment and the army demanded satisfaction of its material grievances. But the army was no longer a unified force. Contentions among the senior officers led to an attempt to arrest Lambert, and the widely scattered regiments had their own grievances to propound. The most powerful force was in Scotland, commanded by George Monck, once a royalist and now one of the ablest of the army’s senior officers. When one group of officers determined to dissolve the Rump, Monck marched his forces south, determined to restore it. Arriving in London, Monck quickly realized that the Rump could never govern effectively and that only the restoration of Charles II could put an end to the political chaos that now gripped the state. In February 1660 Monck reversed Pride’s Purge, inviting all of the secluded members of the Long Parliament to return to their seats under army protection. A month later the Long Parliament dissolved itself, paving the way for the return of the king.

**II-The Stuarts, Part 2**

**1-Charles II (1660-1685)**

**1-The Restoration**

Charles II arrived in London on the 30th birthday of what had already been a remarkably eventful life. He came of age in Europe, a child of diplomatic intrigues, broken promises, and unfulfilled hopes. By necessity, he had developed a thick skin and a shrewd political realism. This was displayed in the Declaration of Breda (1660), in which Charles offered something to everyone in his terms for resuming government. A general pardon would be issued, a tolerant religious settlement would be sought, and security for private property would be assured. Never a man for details, Charles left the specifics to the Convention Parliament (1660), which was composed of members of the competing religious and political parties that contended for power amid the rubble of the Commonwealth.

The Convention declared the restoration of the king and the lords, disbanded the army, established a fixed income for the king by maintaining the parliamentary innovation of the excise tax, and returned to the crown and the bishops their confiscated estates. But it made no headway on a religious settlement. Despite Charles’s promise of a limited toleration and his desire to accept Presbyterians into the Anglican fold as detailed in the Worcester House Declaration (1660), enthusiasts from both left and right wrecked every compromise.

It was left to the Cavalier Parliament (1661–79) to make the hard choices and to demonstrate that one of the changes that had survived the revolution was the independence of Parliament. Despite Charles’s desire to treat his father’s adversaries leniently and to find a broad church settlement, the Cavalier Parliament sought to establish a rigid Anglican orthodoxy. It began the alliance between squire and parson that was to dominate English local society for centuries. The bishops were returned to Parliament, a new prayer book was authorized, and repressive acts were passed to compel conformity. The imposition of oaths of allegiance and nonresistance to the crown and an oath recognizing the king’s supremacy in the church upon all members of local government in the Corporation Act (1661) and then upon the clergy in the Act of Uniformity (1662) led to a massive purge of officeholders. Town governors were put out of their places, and nearly one-fifth of all clergymen were deprived of their livings. Authority in the localities was now firmly in the hands of the gentry. The Conventicle Act (1664) barred Nonconformists (Dissenters) from holding separate church services, and the Five Mile Act (1665) prohibited dispossessed ministers from even visiting their former congregations.

This program of repressive religious legislation was the first of many missed opportunities to remove the underlying causes of political discontent. Though religious Dissenters were not a large percentage of the population, their treatment raised the spectre of permanently divided local communities and of potentially arbitrary government. This legislation (the Clarendon Code) is inappropriately associated with the name of Lord Chancellor Clarendon, for he, as well as the king, realized the dangers of religious repression and attempted to soften its effects. Indeed, in central government the king relied upon men of diverse political backgrounds and religious beliefs. Clarendon, who had lived with the king in exile, was his chief political adviser, and Charles’s brother James, duke of York (later James II), was his closest confidant and was entrusted with the vital post of lord admiral. Monck, who had made the restoration possible, was raised to duke of Albemarle and continued to hold military authority over the small standing army that, for the first time in English history, the king maintained.

**2-War and government**

Charles II could not undo the effects of the revolution, but they were not all negative. The Commonwealth had had to fight for its survival, and in the process England had become a potent military power. Wars against France and Spain had expanded English colonial dominions. Dunkirk and Jamaica were seized, Barbados was colonized, and the North American colonies flourished. Colonial trade was an important source of royal revenue, and Charles II continued Cromwell’s policy of restricting trade to English ships and imposing duties on imports and exports. The Navigation Acts (1660 and 1663) were directed against the Dutch, still the most powerful commercial force in Europe. The Cromwellian Navigation Act (1651) had resulted in the first Anglo-Dutch War (1652–54), and Charles’s policy had the same effect. In military terms the Dutch Wars (1665–67; 1672–74) were a standoff, but in economic terms they were an English triumph (see Anglo-Dutch Wars). The American colonies were consolidated by the capture of New York, and the policy of the Navigation Acts was effectively established. Colonial trade and English shipping mushroomed.

In the long run Charles’s spasmodically aggressive foreign policy solved the crown’s perpetual fiscal crises. But in the short run it made matters worse. The Great Plague of London (1664–66) and the Great Fire of London (1666) were interpreted as divine judgments against a sinful nation. These catastrophes were compounded when the Dutch burned a large portion of the English fleet in 1667, which led to the dismissal and exile of Clarendon. The crown’s debts led to the Stop of the Exchequer (1672), by which Charles suspended payment of his bills. The king now ruled through a group of ministers known as the Cabal, an anagram of the first letters of their names. None of the five was Anglican, and two were Roman Catholic.

Charles had wearied of repressive Anglicanism, underestimating its strength among rural gentry and clergy, and desired comprehension and toleration in his church. This fit with his foreign-policy objectives, for in the Treaty of Dover (1670) he allied himself with Catholic France against Protestant Holland. In exchange he received a large subsidy from Louis XIV and, in the treaty’s secret clauses, known only to the king’s Catholic ministers, the promise of an even larger one if Charles undertook, at some unspecified moment, to declare himself a Catholic. That moment came for the king on his deathbed, by which time his brother and heir, the duke of York, had already openly professed his conversion. In 1672 Charles promulgated the Declaration of Indulgence, which suspended the penal code against all religious Nonconformists, Catholic and Dissenter alike. But a declaration of toleration could not bring together these mortal enemies, and the king found himself faced by a unified Protestant front. Parliamentary Anglicans would not vote money for war until the declaration was abrogated. The passage of the Test Act (1673), which the king reluctantly signed, effectively barred all but Anglicans from holding national office and forced the duke of York to resign the admiralty.

**3-The Popish Plot**

Anti-Catholicism united the disparate elements of English Protestantism as did nothing else. Anglicans vigorously persecuted the Protestant sects, especially Quakers and Baptists, who were imprisoned by the thousands whenever the government claimed to have discovered a radical plot. John Bunyan’s The Pilgrim’s Progress (1678), which became one of the most popular works in the English language, was composed in jail. Yet Dissenters held out against persecution and continued to make their converts in towns and cities. They railed against the debauchery of court life, naming the duke of York, whose shotgun wedding to the daughter of his brother’s lord chancellor had scandalized even his own family, and the king himself, who acknowledged 17 bastard children but did not produce one legitimate heir. Most of all they feared a Catholic revival, which by the late 1670s was no paranoid delusion. The alliance with Catholic France and rumours of (an all too true) secret treaty, the open conversion of the duke of York, heir to the throne, and the king’s efforts to suspend the laws against Catholic officeholders were potent signs.

Not even the policy of Charles’s new chief minister, Thomas Osborne, earl of Danby, could stem the tide of suspicion. An Anglican, Danby tried to move the crown back into alliance with the majority of country gentry, who wanted the enforcement of the penal code and the end of the pro-French foreign policy. He arranged the marriage of Charles’s brother James’s eldest daughter, Mary (later Mary II), to William of Orange (later William III), the Dutch stadtholder. Yet, like the king, Danby admired Louis XIV and the French style of monarchy. He attempted to manage Parliament, centralize crown patronage, shore up royal finance, and maintain a standing army—in short, to build a base for royal absolutism. Catholicism and absolutism were so firmly linked in the popular mind that Danby was soon tarred by this broad brush. In 1678 a London Dissenter named Titus Oates revealed evidence of a plot by the Jesuits to murder the king and establish Roman Catholicism in England. Although both the evidence and the plot were a total fabrication, England was quickly swept up in anti-Catholic hysteria. The apparent murder of the Protestant magistrate who had first heard Oates’s revelations lent credence to a tissue of lies. Thirty-five alleged conspirators in the Popish Plot were tried and executed, harsh laws against Catholics were revived and extended, and Danby’s political position was undermined when it was revealed that he had been in secret negotiation with the French. Parliament voted his impeachment and began to investigate the clauses of the Anglo-French treaties. A second Test Act (1678) was passed, barring all but Anglicans from Parliament, and an exception for the duke of York to sit in the Lords was carried by only two votes. After 18 years Charles II dissolved the Cavalier Parliament.

**4-The exclusion crisis and the Tory reaction**

The mass hysteria that resulted from the Popish Plot also had its effects on the country’s governors. When Parliament assembled in 1679, a bill was introduced to exclude the duke of York from the throne. This plunged Britain into its most serious political crisis since the revolution. Rebellion in Scotland required the use of brutal force to restore order. But, unlike his father, Charles II reacted calmly and decisively. First he co-opted the leading exclusionists, including the earl of Shaftesbury, the earl of Halifax, and the earl of Essex, into his government, and then he offered a plan for safeguarding the church during his brother’s reign. But when the Commons passed the Exclusion Bill, Charles dissolved Parliament and called new elections. These did not change the mood of the country, for in the second Exclusion Parliament (1679) the Commons also voted to bypass the duke of York in favour of his daughter Mary and William of Orange, though this was rejected by the Lords. Again Parliament was dissolved, again the king appealed to the country, and again an unyielding Parliament met at Oxford (1681). By now the king had shown his determination and had frightened the local elites into believing that there was danger of another civil war. He also had the advantage of soaring tax revenues as Britain benefited from the end of European wars in 1678 and 1679. The Oxford Parliament was dissolved in a week, the “Whig” (Scottish Gaelic: “Horse Thief”) councillors, as they were now called, were dismissed from their places, and the king appealed directly to the country for support.

The king also appealed to his cousin Louis XIV, who feared exclusion as much as Charles did, if for different reasons. Louis provided a large annual subsidy to increase Charles’s already plentiful revenues, which had grown with English commerce. Louis also encouraged him to strike out against the Whigs. An attempt to prosecute the earl of Shaftesbury was foiled only because a Whig grand jury refused to return an indictment. But the earl was forced into exile in Holland, where he died in 1683. The king next attacked the government of London, calling in its charter and reorganizing its institutions so that “Tories” (Irish: “Thieving Outlaws”), as his supporters were now called, held power. Quo warranto proceedings against the charters of many urban corporations followed, forcing surrenders and reincorporations that gave the crown the ability to replace disloyal local governors.

In 1683 government informants named the earl of Essex, Lord William Russell, and Algernon Sidney as conspirators in the Rye House Plot, a plan to assassinate the king. Though the evidence was flimsy, Russell and Sidney were executed and Essex took his own life. There was hardly a murmur of protest when Charles II failed to summon a Parliament in 1684, as he was bound to do by the Triennial Act. He was now fully master of his state—financially independent of Parliament and politically secure, with loyal Tory servants predominating in local and national government. He died in 1685 at the height of his power.