

Major-General Thomas Harrison: Millenarianism, Fifth Monarchism and the English Revolution 1616–1660. David Farr.

Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014. xi + 304 pp. \$134.95.

In the spring of 1653 the regicide Thomas Harrison was one of the three most influential men in England, alongside his fellow generals Oliver Cromwell and John Lambert. This study is nonetheless the first full-length scholarly biography of Harrison ever to appear. Balanced and thoroughly researched, it advances our knowledge and understanding of an important figure. There are reasons, of course, why Harrison has had to wait so long. The source material is limited, and Harrison's prominence proved short-lived; by the end of 1653 his political and military career was already over.

Harrison played a significant role on the national stage on three occasions. In 1648–49 he was a key officer pressing for the trial and execution of the king, and had been the first prominent figure to denounce Charles as a “man of blood.” In 1653 he was influential in pressing Cromwell to dissolve the Rump Parliament and replace it with a nominated assembly of the godly. And in 1660, following the Restoration, his trial and execution made him a powerful symbol of both Royalist retribution and radical defiance. Rejecting a conventional approach, Farr has chosen to begin his book with Harrison's trial and execution. Selected as the first to suffer, as the most prominent surviving regicide, he reacted with a calm defiance that seriously disrupted the Royalist agenda. Part 2 then focuses on Harrison's career during and after the Civil Wars and under the Commonwealth, while part 3 surveys briefly the years of enforced political retirement under Cromwell's protectorate. Only in the very last chapter, rather oddly, do we find any information on Harrison's birth, background, and early years. Only here, too, do we have some discussion of Harrison's personality and private life.

Farr's account is strongest on his subject's military and political activities. A committed soldier from the outbreak of the Civil War, contemporaries quickly recognized his zeal and efficiency. Farr argues persuasively that this military environment was crucial in shaping Harrison's outlook and behavior. Years of close fellowship with Cromwell and like-minded officers made it almost impossible for him to conspire against the protector, especially when some other millenarian officers felt able to

work with the Cromwellian regime. Farr is also right to place the millenarian vision at the heart of Harrison's religious and political creed. Like Cromwell himself, Harrison wrestled continuously with the challenge of interpreting God's providential design. Resolute when he thought it clear, he was bemused by the turn of events at the close of 1653, when Cromwell assumed supreme power, and waited for a divine enlightenment that never arrived. In 1660 he found in martyrdom a resolution of sorts, convinced that it was now God's will for him to justify to the world the rightness of his cause. Harrison was no mere dreamer, however. Farr documents in great detail his active role as a committeeman. He spells out, too, how Harrison acquired considerable landed wealth through his military service and the purchase of confiscated Royalist estates. Contemporaries hinted that he enjoyed his new affluence, and Farr suggests that reluctance to lose it may also help explain why Harrison's refusal to accept the protectorate always stopped short of active opposition.

Many gaps inevitably remain. We do not know whether Harrison had gone through a conversion experience, or how he came to adopt his radical creed. His marriage and family life remain almost invisible. Farr approaches the surviving evidence with a rather narrow focus, and more contextualization would have been welcome. He devotes considerably more space to documenting Harrison's disillusion with the Rump and the Nominated Assembly than to discussing the reasons for it. He takes as a given the strength of millenarian fervor in this period, and assumes that readers will be familiar with the Fifth Monarchist movement. And while he makes the most of the surviving evidence, its paucity is underlined by the frequent repetition of key quotations, some on multiple occasions. There are a few minor slips, such as Robert for Richard Overton on page 99. This study is nonetheless a very welcome contribution to our understanding of the *dramatis personae* of the English Revolution.

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