

Patrick Little, ed. *The Cromwellian Protectorate*.

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As Professor Barry Coward observes in the introductory chapter to this collection of essays, the years of the Cromwellian Protectorate have not in recent decades excited the innovatory interpretations and lively debates that in those years marked the studies of the 1630s and 1640s. The 1650s have tended to be written off and rather neglected accordingly as the age of “retreat from revolution,” a drift back to conservative, reactionary government, a “monarchy in all but name.” This important volume challenges that view, as well as offering new evidence on the workings of the Protectorate across the Three Kingdoms.

Linking the chapters together is a common theme: the radical rather than traditionalist and monarchical aims of those in power. Peter Gaunt shows how Protector and Council acted energetically in the first nine months of the new constitution (from 1653 to 1654) to implement a wide-ranging program of reform

with the introduction of some 180 ordinances. These covered, among other major matters of state, the union with Scotland, law reform, and the settlement of religion and the church. David Smith argues that the key element in Cromwell's own attitude to Parliament was that its members should not only allow liberty of conscience, but also promote godly behavior: "the godly people gradually to become coterminous with the nation as a whole" (18). Chris Durston's chapter on the activities of the County Ejection Committees from 1654 to 1659 also indicates that for Cromwell there was no "greater priority than the pursuit of the reformation of manners" (189). In his powerful article on Wales and the Protectorate, Lloyd Bowen demonstrates Cromwell's deep commitment to the activities of the Propagation of the Gospel in Wales and his support for its agents there, even after the ending of the scheme in 1653. Paul M. Hunneyball, in the first detailed study of Cromwell's architectural patronage, revises Sherwood's depiction of relatively modest, Protectoral residences. He presents instead accounts of lavish expenditure on houses for the Protector, spending quite comparable to that of the early Stuarts on their building projects, but significantly to the exclusion of architects and symbols associated with the monarchical past.

But much of the material in this book also offers grounds for a more critical approach to the largely sympathetic view of Cromwell generally held by his modern biographers. The most significant essay, and one that surely will be required reading for all future students of the period, is perhaps Blair Worden's on the relationship between Cromwell and his council. By the Instrument of Government of 1653, the written constitution for the new regime, the Protector was obliged to rule with the consent of his council. An article by Gaunt in 1991 made a good case for Cromwell's concern for constitutional proprieties and respect for conciliar independence. Worden's chapter effectively revises that view. Persuasively documented, it demonstrates rather the dependence of the Council on the will of the Protector and indeed its helplessness, when in the last months of Cromwell's life it could no longer rely upon his direction.

Other chapters bring out the inefficiency and even self-destructive nature of Protectorate government. Patrick Little, exploring the hitherto-unexamined nature of the interaction between the Scottish, Irish, and English Protectorate councils, records the dependence of the former two on the latter, leading to occasional paralysis or even "meltdown" of business (141). For Jason Peacey, the collapse of Richard Cromwell's Protectorate can be ascribed not so much to his personal failings as to the intractable problems with which he was beset. Not least of these was the ill-drafted and confused nature of the second Protectorate constitution, the Humble Petition and Advice of 1657, which enabled opponents in Parliament to question not merely the administrative details, but the very legitimacy of Richard's rule. Stephen L. Roberts offers a generally upbeat assessment of town recovery in the late 1650s in the Severn region, but even he indicates that "liberty of conscience" could fracture fragile civic unity (183). Durston and Bowen conclude that the radical religious program created a profound alienation from the Protectorate government in both England and Wales and a climate of opinion that readily

welcomed the return of the Stuarts and the old order. For Smith, Cromwell's pursuit of the radical religious agenda was the principal factor in the wrecking of his relationship with all his Parliaments.

Some central themes on the history of the Protectorate are revised here and some new topics most profitably explored. This book must be welcomed as a major contribution to our understanding of the Cromwellian Protectorate.

HILARY MADDICOTT

Birkbeck College