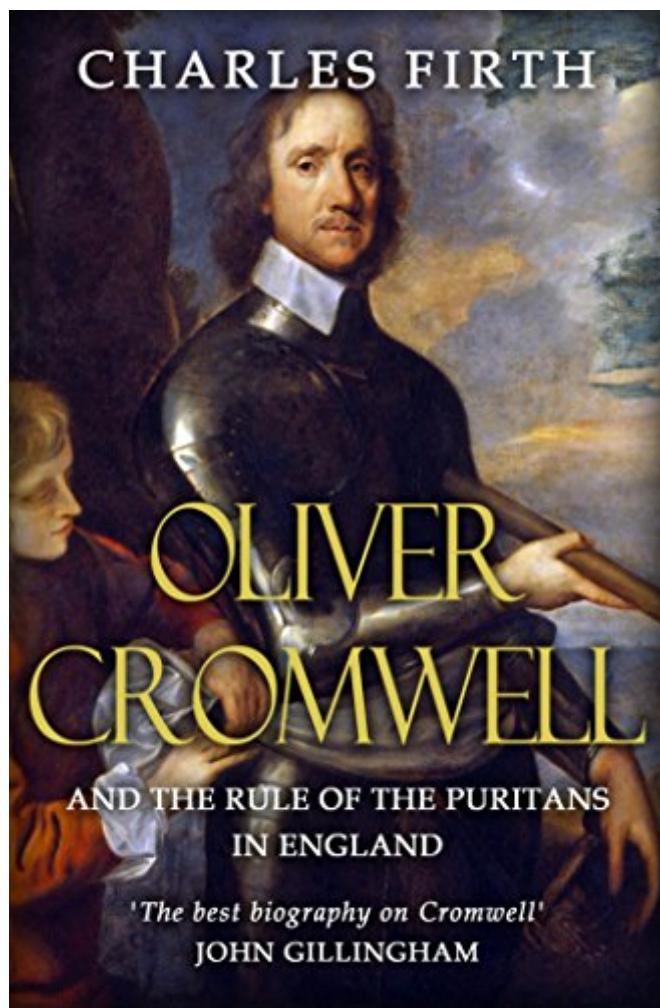


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Oliver Cromwell And The Rule Of The Puritans In England



Synopsis

Sir Charles Firth's biography of Oliver Cromwell portrays a man who was both soldier and statesman in one, a man of a large-hearted, expansive vigorous nature, one who always invokes the might of God to explain his very human acts of revenge and justice. Firth describes the years which led to Cromwell seizing power. These years included the rise and fall of megalomaniac King Charles I, meetings of the Long Parliaments of the 1640s and the discussions concerning the newer ideas in English Christianity (Presbyterianism, Calvinism and so forth). Then came the Puritan rebellion against Charles following their Nineteen Propositions of 1642. Throughout the 1640s and 1650s the Royalists, fighting on behalf of the King, were engaged in fighting with the Puritans, and Firth gives excellent and vivid descriptions of battle based on first-hand accounts. Assisted by the Scottish Army, the Battle of Marston Moor was a key point in the conflict, where Cromwell gained the nickname 'Eel Ironsides' from his followers and 'Lord of the Fens' from his opponents due to his support of the rights of peasants. In 1648 he joined the army to quell any outbreak of civil war and anarchy, persuading the soldiers to side with him and Parliament. He also formulated 'The Agreement of the People'. Then Ireland rose up against its Parliament, leading to Cromwell's attempt to convert the nation to Protestantism, and England went to war with Scotland and the Netherlands. After the execution of Charles I in 1649, Cromwell was placed at the head of the English Republic, a perpetual Parliament always sitting, which became the Little Parliament within a few years. Opposed to him were the Levellers and Presbyterians, which shows that the events had both a political and religious dimension. He also gave kindness to the Quakers and formed an alliance with France against Spain in a move that was much criticised in the years that followed. Cromwell initially wanted to incorporate the army into how England was governed, but by 1653 civilian rule had been restored. Cromwell was given the title of Protector and set about promoting the separation of powers within government and the reform of law and the English courts system. He also encouraged education and scholarship, which were linked with his own religious ideals to unite the branches of the English church, and hoped to secure England's commercial and religious interests within Europe and the colonies. Right up to his death in 1660, argues Firth in a wide-ranging and brilliant study of Puritanism and the man who stood at its head, no man exerted more influence on the religious development of England. Charles Firth (1857-1936) was Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford University and president of the Royal Historical Society. His works concerned seventeenth-century England and included Scotland and the Commonwealth.

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Customer Reviews

Dozens of biographies and historical studies have been written about Oliver Cromwell. Each views him from a different perspective; he has been seen as a dictator, a liberator, a tyrant, and a military genius. Protestants are more likely to picture him as an heroic savior; Catholics, and particularly Irish Catholics, as a cruel oppressor. Oliver Cromwell and the Rule of the Puritans in England takes a more balanced and beneficent view of Cromwell the man as well as of Cromwell the leader.

Charles Firth published the work in 1900; its Victorian prose is rich and ornate something I regard as agreeable and refreshing though some contemporary readers may find it cumbersome. Cromwell became a member of Parliament in 1629 but his rise to power lay less in political adroitness than in his skills as a military commander. Though lacking formal military training his singular martial talents elevated him, along with the aristocratic Thomas Fairfax, into command of the Parliament's Pilgrim-dominated army. It was largely his leadership which brought defeat to the Catholic opposition in both of the bloody internece 17th century civil wars. After the beheading of King Charles I, Cromwell was named Lord Protector, head of what was to be called

the Commonwealth. Indisputably a deeply religious man, Cromwell served as Protector until his death in 1660. Firth pictures him as a largely wise and moderate leader, more religiously tolerant than most politicians of his day. He did his best to restore stability and order after the chaos of civil war. On the other hand, forces under his command waged a cruel war to suppress Catholicism in Ireland. As suggested above, Cromwell's legacy remains deeply controversial. Charles Firth has written a significant study in his favor.

I found this to be a very compelling depiction of Cromwell and the brief rule of the Puritans in 17th century England. The mixture of a man of deep and abiding faith with a surprisingly successful "self-taught" military leader provides an interesting story. This is my first book about Cromwell so I have no sense about any bias the author may have inserted in the work. If you've never read about "The Protector" this is a good place to jump in.

All O.K. It expanded what I knew about Cromwell. I did not know that his was a descendent of the powerful Thomas Cromwell, under Henry VIII, who was chiefly responsible for bringing down Queen Anne Boleyn. He later lost his head as he had caused her to lose hers. Then King Charles I lost his thanks to Oliver. Quite a story.

Firth's "Oliver Cromwell", is a good, well balanced biography not only of a man but also of the age he helped to usher. While dismantling both dark and bright legends about Cromwell, he does show us the origins of both. The account of the war is vivid and horrid at the same time, like the era itself. I would recommend this book to any true lover of history.

Concise and well written. Covers the important points in a complicated man during a time of upheaval and change in England. A good place to start for the armchair historian.

Absolutely loved it! Enough detail to satisfy a curious mind and concise enough to make it an enjoyable book to read. Well worth the money.

In revolutionary Boston there was a tavern called Cromwell's Head. According to Gavin Nathan, "The two-story wooden building had a large sign hanging outside of Oliver Cromwell...It was hung so low that people would cross the street to avoid walking under it." Okay but Gavin Nathan misses the point. Thankfully, Esther Forbes does not: "The 'Cromwell Head' made a good deal of trouble

first and last. The sign, a swinging portrait of the Lord Protector, hung so low no one could pass along the north side of School Street without inadvertently bowing low to Oliver Cromwell, which humiliated Episcopilians and Crown officers."And so for my point: after reading Firth's book, I now understand just how brilliant the 'joke'. Oliver Cromwell, not perfect but not at all the monster he is often portrayed to be. In fact, Oliver Cromwell enters my unofficial "hall of heroes".

Informative but difficult to keep track of all the people and how they affected the outcome.

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