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*The Humble Petition of Several Colonels
of the Army: Causes, Character, and
Results of Military Opposition to
Cromwell's Protectorate*

By BARBARA TAFT*

IN OCTOBER 1654 three regimental colonels in the army put their names to a petition which denounced the Cromwellian Protectorate as contrary to parliamentary government.¹ Since the beginning of this century, when Samuel Rawson Gardiner described the petition in some detail,² scholars have noted its appearance with little comment. Frequently mentioned, it has never been considered as the central document that it is: the last of the Army-Leveller manifestos and the first signal that before the decade was out army officers, Commonwealthsmen, and Saints would unite under the banner of "the Good Old Cause" to destroy the Protectorate and restore the parliamentary republic.³ An examination of the ideological sources of the colonels' petition, the men who instigated it, and the conspiracies which surrounded it will clarify the reasons for hostility to the Protectorate among various revolutionary factions, cast light on the extent of the opposition among high-ranking officers, and expose Oliver Cromwell's response to challenges from the only critics who could destroy his regime.

Since 1642, when Henry Parker stated "the Sovereign power resides in both Houses of Parliament, the King having no negative voyce,"⁴ government by a representative legislature had been a recognized goal of

*I wish to thank Caroline Robbins and Lois Schwoerer for their helpful comments on an early draft of this article. A midcourse version was presented at a meeting of the Washington Renaissance Colloquium in 1977.

¹ *To His Highness the Lord Protector, et&. and Our General: The Humble Petition of Several Colonels of the Army*, [Oct. 18] 1654, British Library, 669, fol. 19, No. 21; the October date, like other conjectural dates of tracts cited in these notes, is the MS date on the copy in the Thomason collection in the British Library.

² *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate, 1649-1656*, 2nd ed. (London, 1903), III, 211-214.

³ "The Good Old Cause" became the rallying cry for the 1659 coalition, which brought down the Protectorate and restored the 1649 Commonwealth (*infra*, p. 41).

⁴ *Some Few Observations upon His Majesties Late Answer*, 1st ed., [May 21] 1642; expanded to *Observations upon Some of His Majesties Late Answers and Expresses*, 2nd ed., [July 2] 1642, esp. p. 45.

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all revolutionary factions. There were increasing differences of opinion about the position of the king, the Lords, and the electors of the Commons, but throughout the Civil Wars revolutionary leaders were at one in their resolve to defeat the king and establish a new order. The triumph of Parliament's armies in 1648 shattered the superficial unity of the victors. A great many men who had been at war with Charles for six years had every intention of retaining the Crown as a part of a defined parliamentary government. Only a fraction of those who favored the destruction of the monarchy approved of the parliamentary republic established in 1649 by the remnant of the Long Parliament known as the Rump. A different but smaller fraction approved of the Rump's Commonwealth when Cromwell and the army destroyed it in the spring of 1653. Eight months later, after an unsatisfactory experience with an appointed Parliament of "godly men," Oliver Cromwell assumed the office of Lord Protector in accordance with an *Instrument of Government* drawn up by a small group of officers.⁵

Many revolutionaries had long favored a written constitution defining the powers and limitations of the government, but the peremptory imposition of the *Instrument* by a few grandee officers and the discretionary powers granted to the Protector alienated thoughtful men who had not protested the forcible exclusion of the Rump. Within a few months the monarchical trappings of the Cromwellian court and the imperious rule of "His Highness" and his courtiers confirmed their fears and provoked growing opposition in the regiments as well as among the Commonwealthsmen and Saints whose regimes had been successively demolished by Cromwell. Although military and civilian intriguants were frequently conjoined, this paper is largely concerned with the opposition within the army, where the officers who instigated *The Humble Petition of Several Colonels* were the cutting edge of emerging disaffection.

The central figures in the initial intrigue were the three regimental colonels who signed the petition—Matthew Alured, John Okey, and Thomas Saunders—and John Wildman, a one-time Leveller, who drafted the petition. Some, perhaps all, of the four had known each other for several years. Disapproval of Cromwell's Protectorate brought them together in 1654. By the spring of that year the termination of the Dutch War, the union with Scotland, and the relative peace which prevailed in Ireland had released military officers from the pressing professional demands which discouraged politicking. In May Cromwell received abundant evidence that Colonel Alured, who was in Ireland, had "evill intentions" toward the government. Alured was relieved of his command and recalled to London, where, wrote Lieutenant-General Fleetwood to

⁵ *Instrument of Government*, Dec. 1653, repr. in *The Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution, 1625-1660*, ed. Samuel R. Gardiner, 3rd ed., revd. (Oxford, 1906), No. 97.



Colonel John Okey.

*From an extra rare Equestrian Portrait in the Collection of
James Bindley Esq^r.*

PORTRAIT OF COLONEL JOHN OKEY; THIS PORTRAIT AND THE TWO FOLLOWING IT ARE REPRODUCED BY COURTESY OF THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM



THOMAS SAUNDERS de Ireton Com. Verb. Arm.
nec non Equitum Tribunus

PORTRAIT OF THOMAS SAUNDERS, BY DANIEL LOGGAN AFTER BALTHASAR FLESSIERS



PORTRAIT OF JOHN WILDMAN, WHO DRAFTED THE PETITION, BY WENCESLAUS HOLLAR

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Cromwell, Alured “sayth, some of your army meet now with Wildeman.”⁶ During the summer, Wildman, Saunders, and Okey were elected to the first Protectorate Parliament, which assembled on September 3.⁷ Okey, whose regiment was serving with the army of General Monck, did not leave Scotland until September 6.⁸ By the time he reached London, Cromwell had ordered the exclusion of all members who refused to sign a “recognition of the government” pledging themselves not to alter the settlement of the state in a single person and Parliament.⁹ An examination of the reports of the session indicates that neither Okey nor Saunders nor Wildman was present after the imposition of the recognition on September 12.¹⁰

According to notes drawn up by John Thurloe, the Protector’s knowledgeable intelligence chief, the colonels first met with Wildman before the middle of September at the house of a London merchant in Birchen Lane.¹¹ Also present were a fourth colonel, Francis Hacker, and Vice-Admiral John Lawson, who had assisted Wildman’s election in Scarborough.¹² Thurloe asserted that Wildman drew up a petition, after which George Bishop saw it “and shewed it to Bradshaw.” John Bradshaw, president of the High Court during the king’s trial and many times president of the Commonwealth Council of State, had broken with Cromwell the day the Rump was expelled.¹³ Captain George Bishop had

⁶Protector to Fleetwood, May 16, Protector to Alured, May 16, Fleetwood to Protector, May 18, letter of Thomas Sandford, May 24, *A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe*, ed. T. Birch (London, 1742), II, 285, 286, 294-295, 313 (hereinafter *State Papers of Thurloe*). See also a tract, *The Case of Colonel Matthew Alured*, [May 23] 1659, pp. 4-8. Charles Fleetwood was commander-in-chief of the forces in Ireland.

⁷Wildman was returned for Scarborough, Saunders for Derbyshire, and Okey for Scotland.

⁸Cornet J. Baynes to Adam Baynes, Sept. 5, *Letters from Roundhead Officers, Written from Scotland*, ed. J. Y. Akerman (Edinburgh, 1856), p. 96.

⁹*Diary of Thomas Burton, Esq. . . . with an Introduction Containing an Account of the Parliament of 1654; from the Journal of Guibon Goddard, Esq.*, ed. J. T. Rutt (London, 1828; repr. 1974, with Introduction by Ivan Roots and Annotated Index of Speakers by Paul Pinckney and Paul Hardacre), I, xxxiii-xxxv; *The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, ed. W. C. Abbott (Cambridge, Mass., 1937-47), III, 451-463.

¹⁰Saunders was named to a committee on Nov. 22 (*Commons’ Journals*, VII, 387-388, hereinafter *C.J.*); appointment to one committee is not evidence that the member was in attendance, and “Colonel Sanders” may be an error for Major Thomas Sanders, M.P. for Devon, who signed the recognition. In August petitions protesting Wildman’s return had been sent to the Protector and Council (*Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 1654, pp. 309-310, hereinafter *C.S.P., Dom.*), but I have found no evidence to support a conclusion that Wildman was excluded before the House met; see Maurice Ashley, *John Wildman, Plotter and Postmaster* (London, 1947), pp. 84-85.

¹¹Thurloe’s Notes of Wildman’s Plot [1655], *State Papers of Thurloe*, III, 147. Gardiner, *Commonwealth and Protectorate*, III, 228, n. 3, reproduces most of the paper with C. H. Firth’s corrections and conjectural additions; Gardiner points out that such notes as Thurloe made on this occasion, jotted down only for his own use, “are of value only inferior to documentary evidence itself.” The September date for the meeting coincides with Okey’s journey from Scotland.

¹²For Scarborough election, see Roy Carroll, “The Parliamentary Representation of Yorkshire, 1625-1660,” *Diss. Vanderbilt* 1964, pp. 68, 336.

¹³*The Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow*, ed. C. H. Firth (Oxford, 1894), I, 357.

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opposed Cromwell's position during the army debates at Putney in the autumn of 1647; during the Commonwealth, Bishop had been in charge of domestic intelligence under Thomas Scot.¹⁴ Thurloe remarked other secret meetings in 1654—at Wildman's house and in various taverns—and his notes indicate that he was concerned about several, possibly interlocking, plots.¹⁵ The upshot of the autumn meetings of Wildman, Lawson, and the colonels was the completion of a petition for the subscription of "several Colonels." Alured, Okey, and Saunders affixed their names, but before it could be circulated to others Alured was imprisoned in the Mews and the petition was taken from his chamber.¹⁶ On October 18 the petition was published—presumably by Wildman.

Addressed "To his Highness the Lord Protector, &tc. and our General," the petition decried Cromwell's unfettered control over a standing army and demanded successive Parliaments, freely chosen by the people and holding the supreme power in the state. Splendidly phrased, the petition owed much to the army manifestos of the 1640's, which had been drafted with Leveller ideology very much in mind. References to their engagement, "not as a Mercenary Army," but as citizen-soldiers called forth "in judgment and conscience for the just Rights and Liberties of our Country," were taken directly from the army's *Declaration* of June 14, 1647.¹⁷ The *Remonstrance of His Excellency Thomas Lord Fairfax and of the Generall Council of Officers Held at St. Albans the 16. of November, 1648*, was repeatedly cited and quoted. As men who had fought for the cause of English liberty, the colonels denounced the government wherein a single person held "Power . . . over such a Militia, as the late King durst not claim; that is to say, A standing Army, which may . . . be made wholly Mercenary, and be made use of to destroy at his pleasure the being of Parliaments, and render . . . us and our Posterities under an absolute Tyranny and Vassalage." The army had condemned the principle of the king's "unaccomptableness" as "the grand root of Tyranny" and had shed much blood that no person be exempt from accountability to the people's representatives in a supreme Parliament. "Upon the same accompt," continued the petitioners, they rejected the Protector's "absolute Negative Voice" over all legislation and his power to levy money to maintain mercenary forces. Concluding,

¹⁴ *The Clarke Papers*, ed. C. H. Firth, Camden Soc. (London, 1891-1901), I, 383; G. E. Aylmer, *The State's Servants: The Civil Service of the English Republic, 1649-1660* (London, 1973), pp. 272-274. Ashley, *Wildman*, p. 86, confuses George Bishop with Henry Bishop, a royalist conspirator; Henry Bishop subsequently was associated with Wildman (*ibid.*, p. 119 et passim).

¹⁵ Thurloe's Notes, *State Papers of Thurloe*, III, 147-148.

¹⁶ For Alured's seizure see postscript on broadsheet of *The Humble Petition of Several Colonels; The Case of Colonel Matthew Alured*, p. 9. For imprisonment in the Mews see Dutch ambassador to the States General, Nov. 13 (N.S.), *State Papers of Thurloe*, II, 709.

¹⁷ Cf. *A Declaration; or, Representation from . . . Fairfax, and the Army . . . Humbly Tendred to the Parliament*, June 14, 1647, esp. p. 6; probably drafted by Henry Ireton.

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the colonels asked for “a full and truly free Parliament” to consider “those Fundamental Rights and Freedomes¹⁸ . . . that were the first Subject of this great Contest, which God hath decided on our side, according as the same have been proposed to the late Parliament by the General Council of the Army, in the *Agreement of the People*, which remains there upon Record.”

The 1654 demand for “a full and truly free Parliament” was a clear attack on the recent exclusions; the recollection of the *Agreement of the People* submitted to the Rump on January 20, 1648/9, implied a positive alternative to Protectoral government. The 1648/9 *Agreement*, which the Council of Officers had proposed as the constitutional core of the emerging republic, was a modified version of the second Leveller *Agreement* published by John Lilburne on December 15, 1648.¹⁹ The officers’ version restricted the religious liberty guaranteed by the civilian Levellers and altered the reapportionment of parliamentary seats; the petition sent to the Rump with the revised *Agreement* recognized an obligation to consult the remnant of the elected House about the settlement of the new state. For the most part, the officers’ *Agreement* incorporated the essence of the Levellers’ proposals. The franchise was greatly extended and the separation of powers was established by barring members of the Representative (as Parliaments were to be styled) from the executive Council of State. The Representative, empowered to act in all matters not reserved as native rights, could not impress men for service in foreign wars, enact any law or privilege that did not apply equally to all men, interfere with the execution of justice, or punish in the absence of a declared law.²⁰

Colonels Okey and Saunders had been present at several of the Whitehall debates during which the officers amended the *Agreement*; Wildman had attended at least two sessions. The lengthiest debate concerned the state’s role in religion—an issue which had engaged revolutionaries throughout the 1640’s—and in this and other differences about the *Agreement* Okey and Saunders supported the cautious minority paced by Commissary General Ireton.²¹ By 1654, the de facto toleration

¹⁸Cf. *A Remonstrance of . . . the Generall Councell of Officers Held at St. Albans*, [Nov. 22] 1648, esp. pp. 3, 14-19, 66-67; drafted by Henry Ireton.

¹⁹*Foundations of Freedom; or, An Agreement of the People*, [Dec. 15] 1648.

²⁰*A Petition from . . . the General Council of Officers . . . concerning the Draught of an Agreement of the People . . . Together with the Said Agreement Presented Saturday, Jan. 20. And a Declaration of . . . the Said General Council, concerning the Same. Tendred to the Consideration of the People*, [Jan. 22] 1648-9.

²¹For debates, Dec. 13, 1648–Jan. 13, 1648/9 see *Clarke Papers*, II, 73-186, passim. Okey was present on Dec. 14, 18, 21, 26, 29, Saunders on Dec. 14, 21, 26, and Wildman on Dec. 14, 18—Worcester College, Oxford, Clarke MSS, XVI, fols. 28, 42, 44, 62, 64; Firth’s compilation of “Officers Attending at Councils,” *Clarke Papers*, II, App. D, has some inaccuracies and fails to note that several lists of officers “present” include records of divisions on major questions (Barbara Taft, “Voting Lists of the Council of Officers, December 1648,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, forthcoming, 1979).

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of all Christian sectaries during the Commonwealth years had taken much of the heat out of disputes over religious freedom, while the social and economic issues which had divided Levellers from many senior officers had slipped into the background after the disintegration of the Leveller leadership in 1649. Politically, civilian Levellers and army officers had agreed since 1647 that the people were sovereign and their representatives should be supreme in the state. The Protectorate's disregard of these principles brought Wildman and disenchanted colonels together.

Wildman's role as draftsman of the *Petition of Several Colonels* is attested by its thrust and phrasing as well as by Thurloe's attribution. Wildman's first political appearance had been as a spokesman for the Levellers in the autumn of 1647. Nothing is known of his ancestry or education, but he may have attended Cambridge, and he probably had some training in the law.²² There is no evidence that he was a Puritan sectary and much reason to suspect that he was a deist, although he had, as Clarendon noted, "a smooth pen" and was readily "inspired with the spirit of praying and preaching when those gifts came into request."²³ During the army debates at Putney in October 1647, Wildman repeatedly demonstrated that he could move easily from secular arguments based on natural law to the turgid language of the Saints. The proposals presented at Putney in the first *Agreement of the People*²⁴ had been more militantly advanced a fortnight earlier in Wildman's first political tract: *The Case of the Armie Truly Stated*. This tract was the first subject raised at Putney, and Henry Ireton was not contradicted when he fingered Wildman as the author.²⁵ Like the colonels' petition seven years later, *The Case of the Armie* referred to the army's struggle for the rights and liberties of all Englishmen as set forth in the army's *Declaration* of June 14, 1647. More distinctly Leveller in tone was *The Case's* call for a constant succession of Parliaments restricted by a paramount constitution setting forth unalterable rights.²⁶ In his speeches at Putney Wildman elaborated his conviction that control of the militia must reside in the Commons alone and rejected the king's veto over any law enacted by the Commons.²⁷ In *Putney Projects*, which appeared by December 30, Wildman repeated all these themes in conjunction with a slashing attack on Cromwell and

²²The only biography of him, Ashley's *John Wildman* (supra, n. 10), is lively and readable but is marred by numerous errors.

²³Edward Hyde, earl of Clarendon, *The History of the Rebellion*, ed. W. D. Macray (Oxford, 1888), Bk. XIV, par. 48. Ashley, *Wildman*, p. 11.

²⁴*An Agreement of the People*, [Nov. 3] 1647. The *Agreement* was presented at Putney, Oct. 28 (*Clarke Papers*, I, 236).

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 226, 356.

²⁶[John Wildman], *The Case of the Armie*, [Oct. 19] 1647, esp. pp. 4, 6, 14-16.

²⁷*Clarke Papers*, I, 353-356; *Case of the Armie*, pp. 12, 15-16; *Petition of Several Colonels*.

Henry Ireton for their promotion of the *Heads of the Proposals* as a basis for settling the state. Appealing to the sectarian army with a scriptural parallel—"It is with us as if we fled from a Lyon, . . . and leaning our hands on the wall a Serpent bites us"—Wildman condemned Cromwell and Ireton for supporting proposals which returned control of the militia to the king after ten years, gave the king the power to call and dismiss Parliaments, admitted the king's negative voice over decisions taken by the people's representatives, admitted bishops and the king's power in religious matters, and granted the Lords equal power with the Commons.²⁸

For another year Wildman was a valued member of the Leveller leadership. In January 1647/8 he and Lilburne were imprisoned for seven months for promoting a petition asking the Commons to assume the supreme authority and introduce the Leveller program of electoral, economic, and social reform.²⁹ In November and December Wildman played a prominent part in the meetings which produced the second *Agreement of the People*. The first day this *Agreement* was debated by the officers, Wildman countered Ireton's proposal to limit religious liberty with arguments based on rationalism and Puritan separatism. Four days later Wildman withdrew from the debates.³⁰ He soon moved away from the Leveller leaders as well, and despite taunts from old allies who publicized his failure to join them in denunciations of the new republic,³¹ Wildman employed most of his energies during the Commonwealth years in building up his own estate by speculation in land sales.³²

The advent of the Protectorate revived Wildman's concern with national politics. There is no record of his opinion of the expulsion of the Rump or the Parliament of Saints, but the exclusion of properly elected members—himself among them—from the Parliament of 1654 confirmed his long-standing distrust of powerful executives, military might, and Oliver Cromwell. It is not surprising that Wildman immediately joined forces with newly disillusioned army officers. He had been an effective Leveller spokesman for fourteen months, and nothing in his long career suggests that his commitments to civil liberty and government by the people's representatives were anything but sincere. At the same time, his speeches and pamphlets never approached the passionate intensity of

²⁸John Wildman ("John Lawmind"), *Putney Projects; or, The Old Serpent in a New Forme*, [Dec. 30] 1647, esp. pp. 1, 22-41.

²⁹For imprisonment and a copy of the petition, see John Lilburne, *An Impeachment of High Treason against Oliver Cromwel, and His Son in Law Henry Ireton*, [Aug. 10] 1649, esp. pp. 45-53. See also Ashley, *Wildman*, pp. 49-59.

³⁰John Lilburne, *The Legall Fundamentall Liberties of the People of England*, [June 18] 1649, pp. 29-34. *Clarke Papers*, II, 75-77, 120-121. The last day Wildman was noted as present was Dec. 18 (Worcester College, Clarke MSS, XVI, fol. 42).

³¹Lilburne, *An Impeachment of High Treason*, p. 34. Richard Overton, *Defyance of the Act of Pardon*, July 2, 1649, p. 7.

³²Ashley, *Wildman*, Ch. vi.

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Lilburne's, and his abandonment of the Levellers when the Commonwealth was established was the first of many examples of Wildman's willingness to work with opponents of despotism wherever he found them. "I am butt a single man," he had concluded at Putney in 1647. "I shall venture myself and [my] share in the common bottome."³³

More startling is the participation of serving colonels and a senior naval commander in a major attack on the government of the Protector they had followed so long. Vice-Admiral Lawson, who would aggravate suspicions of his participation in the colonels' intrigue by his prompt promotion of an unwelcome petition from the fleet,³⁴ had served in the sea and land forces of the Parliament since 1642.³⁵ Like many Puritans in the army and navy, Lawson saw the hand of God in Parliament's victories,³⁶ but there is no indication that he was a fanatical millenarian or that he participated in intrarevolutionary politics before 1654. He was, however, an influential member of the Corporation of his native Scarborough, and his sponsorship of a candidate like Wildman as the borough M.P. in 1654 suggests that Lawson had a definite view of "the honest interest of the nation."³⁷ The colonels who signed Wildman's draft had been involved in army politics since 1647, but nothing in their previous conduct had set them apart from other trusted officers. Their social profile, also, was probably a near microcosm of the profile of all senior officers in 1654. Of the thirty-seven original generals and colonels in the New Model Army, thirty had come from noble or gentry families.³⁸ The proportion of well-born officers began to decline in 1647, and it is probable that by the first year of the Protectorate fewer than two thirds of the senior officers were gentry of any degree, while at least one third were of humbler birth.³⁹ Saunders and Alured were from lesser gentry families in Derbyshire and Yorkshire. Okey, son of an obscure Londoner, rose through the merit system in the New Model Army.

³³Clarke Papers, I, 406 (Nov. 1, 1647).

³⁴Infra, p. 35.

³⁵The *Dictionary of National Biography* (hereinafter *DNB*) has a good account of Lawson's naval career; he died of wounds in 1665.

³⁶Lawson to Sir Henry Vane, Feb. 12, 1652/3, *Letters and Papers Relating to the First Dutch War*, ed. C. T. Atkinson (London, 1910), IV, 45-47. Lawson is often described as a Baptist—e.g., Gardiner, *Commonwealth and Protectorate*, III, 216; Louise Fargo Brown, *The Political Activities of the Baptists and Fifth Monarchy Men in England during the Interregnum* (London, 1911), p. 11 et passim—but there is no record of a Baptist congregation in Scarborough until more than a century after his death; see *The History of Scarborough*, ed. Arthur Rowntree (London, 1931), p. 333. Clarendon at one point described him as "an Independent" and at another as "a notorious Anabaptist, who had filled the fleet with officers and mariners of the same principles" (Clarendon, *History*, Bk. XVI, pars. 106, 152); "Anabaptist" was commonly used as a generic term to denigrate anyone with advanced religious or political views.

³⁷Carroll, "Parliamentary Representation of Yorkshire," p. 68: Lawson to Vane, Feb. 12, 1652/3 (supra, n. 36).

³⁸Clements R. Markham, *A Life of the Great Lord Fairfax* (London, 1870), pp. 195-199; nine of the thirty were from noble families.

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Okey was the proprietor of a ship chandler's shop when he joined Parliament's forces in the summer of 1642.⁴⁰ His business experience probably assisted his appointment as quartermaster to a troop of horse commanded by Lord Brooke. The battlefield demonstrated Okey's courage and leadership, and when the New Model was formed in 1644/5 he was named colonel of the only regiment of dragoons. He retained the command of this regiment through 1654, by which time it was a regiment of horse.⁴¹ In the spring of 1647 the regiment had pressed for the formation of a Council of the Army, and Okey spoke out early and often in the growing dispute between the army and Parliament.⁴² His concern, however, was with the needs of the newly idle regiments; at no time did Okey reveal any sympathy with enthusiastic Levellers. He was named to two committees during the debates at Putney in the autumn of 1647; but he made no speeches of record, and in December three troops of his regiment disowned the actions of "surreptitious Agents" of "Anarchical Liberty."⁴³ As already noted, in December 1648 Okey attended at least five of the officers' debates on the second *Agreement*,⁴⁴ and he was roundly denounced by Lilburne as one of the "creature Colonels" who used "base and unworthy language" during the session of December 14.⁴⁵ Okey certainly encountered Saunders at Whitehall in 1648, and the two may have been acquainted since 1642/3. Okey was in Staffordshire with Lord Brooke when Brooke was killed during the attack on Lichfield. Sir John Gell, commander of the Derbyshire forces, took over the siege of Lichfield,⁴⁶ and it is probable that Gell's major, Thomas Saunders, was with him.

Saunders, the eldest surviving son of a family that had been in Derbyshire since the fourteenth century, was heir to a considerable estate.⁴⁷ Educated at Repton, he was admitted to the Inner Temple in

³⁹Ibid., pp. 347-348; *Clarke Papers*, I, xxxiii; C. H. Firth, *Cromwell's Army* (London, 1902; 4th ed., 1962, new Introd. by P. H. Hardacre), p. 47. Definitive support for this judgment must await a quantitative study of the shifting social profile of senior army officers.

⁴⁰For biography, see H. G. Tibbitt, *Colonel John Okey, 1606-1662*, Bedfordshire Hist. Rec. Soc., XXXV (Streatley, 1955).

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 1-6.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 24-25; *Writings and Speeches of Cromwell*, I, 434, 444, 475.

⁴³*Clarke Papers*, I, 279, 413. Address to Fairfax from Okey's dragoons, Dec. 1647, John Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, 2nd ed. (London, 1721-22), VII, 931.

⁴⁴Supra, p. 22 and n. 21.

⁴⁵Lilburne, *Legall Fundamentall Liberties*, p. 35.

⁴⁶Tibbitt, *Okey*, pp. 3-4; Samuel R. Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War, 1642-1649*, rev. ed. (London, 1894), I, 97-98.

⁴⁷Thomas Saunders, or Sanders (1610-95), is featured in an article by John L. Hobbs, "The Sanders Family and the Descent of the Manors of Caldwell, Coton-in-the-Elms and Little Ireton," *Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, New Series, XXI (1948), 1-23.

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1632.⁴⁸ Ten years later, Saunders was among the first in his county to take a commission under Sir John Gell and raise forces for Parliament.⁴⁹ By 1643/4 Saunders had quarreled with Gell, and they embarked on a dispute which lasted more than two years. Accused of being a Brownist, coward, and insubordinate knave, Saunders revealed in the course of the controversy that he was both independent and determined. He carried his case to the Committee of Public Safety at Westminster as well as to the high command of the army, and in March 1645/6 he was assured that his troop of horse would be kept intact and accommodated within the New Model Army.⁵⁰ By the end of 1647 Saunders was the major in Colonel Francis Thornagh's regiment. None of Thornagh's officers participated in the debates at Putney. The regiment was on free quarter in the counties of Derby and Nottingham throughout the autumn, and Saunders may have had a hand in a December address to Fairfax which expressed the regiment's strong support of the *Representation* of grievances sent to Parliament from the Council of the Army at Windsor.⁵¹

A better clue to Saunders' political inclinations at this time may be found in a manuscript which was discovered among his papers. Probably drawn up toward the end of 1647, the paper is not unlike Wildman's tracts of the same year. God has blessed the work of those who fought for "the cause" of free Parliaments. The present Parliament and the chief officers of the army have failed to respond to major grievances of the people: abuses of the law, vexatious tithes, neglected trade, relief for the poor, abusive taxation. The paper asked for an end to the present Parliament, a reapportionment of seats before the election of successive Parliaments, a contract between the people and their deputies limiting the power of the deputies. Religious freedom, protection from military conscription, and equality before the law were demanded as fundamental rights. Regular rotation in office was proposed. Finally, the manuscript expressed confidence that the soldiers who signed the Engagement at Newmarket "in June last" (June 5, 1647) would stand fast for "the cause for which we appear" and that God would protect them from ambitious tyrants who designed "the people's slavery" and from "all such mercenary vassals as they shall hire to destroy us." The manuscript copy has not, apparently, survived.⁵² There are no indications of the authorship; nor is there any evidence that Saunders approved all of the proposals advanced in the paper. Still, its presence among papers which Saunders retained suggests his early awareness of many revolutionary concepts which were first put forth by the Levellers.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 9. *Students Admitted to the Inner Temple, 1547-1660*, ed. W. H. Cooke (London, 1877), p. 274.

⁴⁹"A true account of the raising and employing of the forces under Sir John Gell from the beginning of October 1642, until the end of September 1644": Pole-Gell MSS, Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Ninth Report*, Pt. II, 387.

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It is reasonable to conclude that Saunders and Okey concurred with the political decisions of the Council of Officers at the time the Commonwealth was established. Both colonels⁵³ were present at several of the debates at Whitehall in December 1648, and despite any reservations about the constitution, Okey was a member of the army delegation which presented the revised *Agreement* to the Rump on January 20.⁵⁴ Six weeks before, spurred on by military success and religious conviction, senior officers had approved the use of force to clear the House of known supporters of the monarchy. But on December 11, just five days after Pride's Purge, an army pamphlet coupled a defense of the purge as an "extreame Remedy" to prevent "a perpetuall Tyranny" with a reaffirmation of the army's commitment to "a free and successive Parliament" as the rightful guardian of England's liberties.⁵⁵ The Council of Officers' decision to submit its version of the *Agreement of the People* to the existing House accorded with the concept. Okey and Saunders also approved of the trial and execution of the king. Saunders' regiment had submitted one of the petitions demanding that the king be brought to the bar;⁵⁶ Okey was the sixth man to sign Charles's death warrant.

Much less is known about the events and politics which touched Matthew Alured during the Civil Wars and the establishment of the Commonwealth. Youngest of the "three colonels" by more than ten years, Alured was some sixteen years younger than his brother, John

⁵⁰The dispute between Saunders and Gell can be followed in the Saunders MSS in the Derbyshire Record Office, 1232M, fols. 06-065 (Feb. 21, 1643/4–Mar. 5, 1645/6), passim; cf. the Gell MSS and the Derby Committee Letterbook—both in the Derbyshire Record Office.

⁵¹Sir Charles Firth and Godfrey Davies, *The Regimental History of Cromwell's Army* (Oxford, 1940), I, 280. For *Representation* of the Council of the Army, Dec. 7, 1647, see Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, VII, 923-925. For *Representation* of Thornagh's regiment, *ibid.*, p. 930.

⁵²The manuscript, which was in the possession of Hans Wintrop Mortimer, Esq., was printed by William Harris, *An Historical and Critical Account of the Life of Oliver Cromwell* (London, 1762), App., pp. 501-507. Mortimer, who inherited all the Saunders properties by 1769, was in prison for debt by 1793, was forced to sell all his estates, and died insolvent in 1807 (Hobbs, *Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological Society*, New Series, XXI, 15-17). A search, undertaken at my request, of the Saunders archives in the Derbyshire Record Office and the Derby Local History Library has failed to unearth the original; I am grateful to J. C. Sinar, County Archivist, and R. E. Marston, Librarian, for their advice and help on this and other occasions.

⁵³Saunders was named colonel of his regiment after Thornagh was killed in Aug. 1648 (Firth and Davies, *Regimental History*, I, 282).

⁵⁴Supra, pp. 22-23. For Jan 20, 1648/9, see *The Parliamentary or Constitutional History of England; . . . from the Earliest Times, to the Restoration of King Charles II* (London, 1751-62), XVIII, 516 (hereinafter *O. P. H.*).

⁵⁵*The Parliament under the Power of the Sword. With a Brief Answer Thereunto by Some of the Army.* [Dec. 11] 1648, esp. p. 7. See also *A New-Years Gift: Presented by . . . Fairfax and the General-Council of Officers*, [Jan. 2] 1648/9, which proclaimed the officers' support of the *Agreement's* proposals for a Representative.

⁵⁶*The Declarations and Representations of the Officers and Souldiers in Colonel Scroops, Colonel Sanders and Col. Wautons Regiments*, Dec. 5, 1648.

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Alured, regicide and Rumper. John, M.P. for Hedon in the Short and Long Parliaments, represented the fourth generation of Alureds elected to the House from Yorkshire boroughs; Matthew would be returned for Hedon in 1658/9.⁵⁷ During the Civil Wars, Matthew Alured was colonel of a regiment in the Army of the Northern Association,⁵⁸ and in 1646/7 he was one of fourteen colonels and lieutenant-colonels who submitted a petition to Parliament which made a number of demands: a religious settlement in accordance with the reformed churches, the benefit of Magna Carta and the Petition of Right for all subjects, the payment of arrears and freedom from debt harassment until back pay was received, and an act of indemnity for all officers and soldiers who served the Parliament.⁵⁹ It was one of the first political petitions from a group of officers,⁶⁰ and the Commons responded sharply: “as to their Arrears, the House hath and will take them into Consideration, . . . The rest of the Petition, which concerns the Management of the Affairs of the Publick, it does not concern any to give Instructions to the Houses therein.”⁶¹

Alured probably remained in or near Yorkshire until 1650,⁶² when the Council of State commissioned him as colonel of a post-New Model regiment of foot. The regiment was ordered to Scotland in the autumn,⁶³ and within a year Alured and Okey commanded two of Lieutenant-General Monck’s four regiments of horse. Both colonels achieved military victories in western Scotland in 1651. Both reported that much of their success was due to God’s help, although a subsequent letter from Okey suggested that London reports of the prominent part played by Alured’s troops were inaccurate.⁶⁴ Alured served in Scotland until

⁵⁷Some facts about Matthew Alured are included in an article on the Alured family by W. D. Pink, “Alured of the Charterhouse, Co. York,” *Yorkshire Genealogist*, ed. J. Horsfall Turner, I (1888), 1-11.

⁵⁸*The Humble Petition of the Commanders and Officers in Colonel Matthew Alured’s Regiment*, [Apr.] 1645, repr. in *Memorials of the Civil War: . . . Concluding Volumes of The Fairfax Correspondence*, ed. Robert Bell (London, 1849), I, 214-215. The petitioning officers asked Fairfax to accept the services of the regiment in his new post in “the southern parts.”

⁵⁹“The humble Petition of Colonels, Lieutenant Colonels, Majors, and other Officers, that have faithfully served the great Cause of the Kingdom, under the Authority of Parliament,” *Lords’ Journals*, IX, 95-96 (Mar. 22, 1646/7). Presented to the Commons the same day (*C.J.*, V, 120).

⁶⁰The editors of the *Old Parliamentary History* describe it as “remarkable . . . the first we have met with presented from that Quarter” (*O.P.H.*, XV, 337).

⁶¹*C.J.*, V, 120 (Mar. 22).

⁶²Alured was named a commissioner to collect assessments in the East Riding in Feb. 1647/8 and again in Apr. 1649: *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, ed. C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait (London, 1911), I, 1081, II, 34.

⁶³Firth and Davies, *Regimental History*, II, 462-463.

⁶⁴Diary of the Proceedings of the Forces under Lt. General Monke, Aug. 4, 1651, *Scotland and the Commonwealth, . . . August 1651 to December 1653*, ed. C. H. Firth, Scottish Hist. Soc., XVIII (Edinburgh, 1895), 1; Col Hacker commanded a third regiment of horse. Letter from Okey, Aug. 19, and letter from Alured, Aug. 29, *ibid.*, pp. 316-317, 320; letters from Okey, Sept. 5 and 30, Tibbutt, *Okey*, pp. 44-47.

ordered to Ireland in the spring of 1654. Saunders' regiment was sent to Scotland in 1652 and remained over a year,⁶⁵ but there is no indication that Saunders and Alured encountered each other before the summer of 1654.

Army officers had been concerned with warfare rather than politics during the years between the execution of Charles I and the defeat of Charles II in the autumn of 1651, and Okey was the only one of the "three colonels" who participated in the political activities of the Council of Officers during the last year of the Commonwealth. He was one of three regicide officers who subscribed to the religious proposals submitted to the Rump in 1651/2 by John Owen and other ministers.⁶⁶ More important was Okey's role in the army petition drawn up in August 1652. This petition, which was presented by Okey and five other colonels, asked the House to consider substantial reforms in religion, the legal code, taxes, public accounting, and arrangements for army pay. The officers also urged the House to settle the qualifications for members of future and successive Parliaments.⁶⁷ A proposal to include a demand for immediate election of a new Parliament had been deleted.⁶⁸ It is probable that Cromwell persuaded the officers to alter this clause, and Okey's bitter comment when Cromwell forcibly ejected the Rump eight months later indicates that Okey had long favored dissolution. "The end," he remarked to Colonel Desborough after the eviction on April 20, 1653, "would be bad" because the means indicated that Cromwell had been guilty of hypocrisy in persuading the officers not to petition the House for a dissolution, "and so short a time after to eject them with so much scorn and contempt."⁶⁹

There is no reason to believe that Okey, Saunders, or Alured turned against Cromwell before the Parliament of Saints was replaced by the Protectorate. In all likelihood, like most Puritan officers in the spring of 1653,⁷⁰ they shared the millennial belief that God would guide a government entrusted to godly men as He had guided a godly army to military

⁶⁵Firth and Davies, *Regimental History*, I, 283-284, II, 463-464.

⁶⁶Owen's plan was submitted on Feb. 10, 1651/2 (*C.J.*, VII, 86); for the 27 subscribers, see *ibid.*, pp. 258-259 (Feb. 11, 1652/3, where the list is dated Feb. 18, 1651/2); the other regicide officers were William Goffe and Edward Whalley. For the proposals see Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Exeter, 1971), pp. 83-86, and references cited.

⁶⁷*C.J.*, VII, 164-165 (Aug. 13, 1652). The petition was printed in *A Perfect Account of the Daily Intelligence from the Armies*, Aug. 11-18, pp. 673-676. The other colonels were John Barkstead, William Goffe, Francis Hacker, Edward Whalley, and Charles Worsley.

⁶⁸*A Declaration of the Armie*, [Aug. 10] 1652, p. 6.

⁶⁹*Memoirs of Ludlow*, I, 356.

⁷⁰Alured, Okey, and Saunders, like Lawson, are frequently termed Baptists (e.g., Brown, *Baptists and Fifth Monarchy Men*, p. 70; *Writings and Speeches*, ed. Abbott, III, 481), but there is no positive evidence to support any sectarian affiliations; see A. C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists* (London, 1947), esp. pp. 76-77. Tibbutt, *Okey*, p. 50, applies the pejorative term "Anabaptist" to Okey.

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victory. Saunders had written effusively to Cromwell in 1650, "God hath made you the man of his right hand, stronge and succesfull for himselfe, cause and saints."⁷¹ There is no hint that Saunders felt otherwise in April 1653. Nor, apparently, did Alured, who in February had been entrusted with the command of all the forces in western Scotland.⁷² Okey was one of the few officers who demurred when Cromwell forcibly ejected the Rump,⁷³ but Okey's comments probably were prompted by personal pique that dissolution had been rejected when he urged it eight months before. His irritation was short-lived. Nine days after the dissolution he was one of four officers named to examine the state of the post office, and in November Okey accepted appointment to a new High Court of Justice, on which he apparently served until he returned to his regiment in Scotland in the spring of 1654.⁷⁴ Overall, from 1647 through 1653 the political attitudes of Okey, Alured, and Saunders do not suggest any hostility to Cromwell.

Throughout these six years, almost all senior officers had followed Cromwell in politics as in battle. He led them in resistance to the Levelers in 1647 and encouraged cautious compromise with Lilburne in 1648. After the execution of the king, Cromwell persuaded the army to accept the makeshift republic, although it had neither the written constitution desired by many soldiers nor the millenarian concepts envisioned by more. When newly idle officers reconsidered the Commonwealth in the autumn of 1651, Cromwell was bluntly informed that he had no support for his inclination toward a settlement of the government "with Monarchical Power in it."⁷⁵ Otherwise, officers who had no plans beyond a hardening resolve to replace the Rump with a government of "honest, godly men" were eager to follow Cromwell wherever he led. Acceding to his veto of their wish to press for dissolution of the Rump in 1652, they accepted his violent ejection of the House in 1653. Cromwell's decision to pass the supreme power to a selected group of god-fearing men was largely encouraged by the army, and the Council of Officers cleared the names for the Nominated House. The unexpected antimilitarism of

⁷¹Saunders to Cromwell, Sept. 19, 1650, *Original Letters and Papers of State, Addressed to Oliver Cromwell* [1649-1658], ed. John Nickolls (London, 1743), p. 22.

⁷²Firth and Davies, *Regimental History*, II, 550.

⁷³Major John Streater, who denounced Cromwell's action unequivocally, was immediately cashiered—see "Ten Queries: by a Friend of the now Dissolved Parliament," [Apr. 20, 1653], British Library, MS in George Thomason's hand (E. 693, No. 5); John Streater, *Secret Reasons of State in Reference to . . . the Interruption of the Present Parliament, Anno 1653*, [May 23] 1659.

⁷⁴*C.S.P., Dom.*, 1652-53, p. 299 (Apr. 29); Tibbutt, *Okey*, pp. 71-73. Act establishing a High Court of Justice, Nov. 21, 1653 (*Acts and Ordinances*, ed. Firth and Rait, II, 780-782); Tibbutt, *Okey*, pp. 61-62.

⁷⁵Bulstrode Whitelocke, *Memorials of the English Affairs*, rev. folio ed. (London, 1732), pp. 516-517 (Dec. 10, 1651). For Cromwell's ongoing interest in monarchy see Nicholas to Hyde, Sept. 9/19, 1652, *The Nicholas Papers*, ed. George F. Warner (London, 1886-1920), I, 310; Whitelocke, *Memorials*, p. 549 (Nov. 1652).

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influential Fifth Monarchy appointees hastened the demise of the Little Parliament and facilitated the establishment of the startlingly different regime imposed by Cromwell and a few grandee officers on December 16, 1653.

Within a month of Cromwell's installation as Lord Protector, the need to stimulate addresses of welcome from the forces in Ireland and Scotland as well as England revealed that many officers were far less enthusiastic about the establishment of the military Protectorate than they had been about the expulsion of the Rump.⁷⁶ On December 21 Thomas Harrison, major-general and Fifth Monarchy leader, declared that he could not "own and act under this present power" and was immediately cashiered. A few other Saints resigned their commissions within a few weeks, but two prominent Fifth Monarchy officers, Colonel Nathaniel Rich and Major-General Robert Overton, retained their commands for many months.⁷⁷ Lieutenant-General Edmund Ludlow, a strong Commonwealthsman who had been a senior official in Ireland since 1650/1, had accepted Cromwell's expulsion of the Rump, subsequently excusing himself on the grounds of distance, ignorance, and hopes for godly government.⁷⁸ Ludlow could not, however, accept the dissolution of the Nominated Parliament, and he refused, as a commissioner in Ireland, to sign the proclamation of the Protectorate. At the same time Ludlow refused to give up his military commission, declaring that he hoped to use it against "the usurper." Fleetwood permitted Ludlow to carry on in this curious position for a year, at which time he was discovered distributing seditious pamphlets, including copies of the *Petition of Several Colonels*.⁷⁹ The preceding spring there had been reports of disaffection in Ireland and Scotland,⁸⁰ but except for the recall of Alured, the authorities took no action until the winter of 1654-1655.

In and about London, where the quasi-monarchical court and arbitrary rule of the Protectorate were conspicuous, soldiers and civilians were more immediately disquieted by the displacement of parliamentary government. Throughout 1654 dispatches of the Venetian envoy noted evidence of resentment toward the new despotism among the populace and the army, observing that unrest accelerated after the exclusion of opposition members from the 1654 Parliament.⁸¹ That action confirmed

⁷⁶Firth, *Cromwell's Army*, pp. 365-366.

⁷⁷B. S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men* (London, 1973), pp. 99-100. See *infra*, pp. 37-38.

⁷⁸*Memoirs of Ludlow*, I, 356-357.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 373-378; *infra*, p. 37.

⁸⁰Fleetwood to the Protector, May 18, *State Papers of Thurloe*, II, 294-295.

⁸¹Dispatches of Lorenzo Paulucci, Jan. 18-Dec. 1, 1654 (N.S.), *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian*, 1653-54, pp. 172-281, *passim*; for army see esp. pp. 172, 174, 188-189, 231, 277-279, 281 (*hereinafter C.S.P., Ven.*). Cf. Antoine de Bordeaux-Neufville to Paris, Sept. 24 (N.S.), Public Record Office, Baschet Transcripts, 31/3/96, fols. 22^{r-v}; newsletter, June 23, *Calendar of the Clarendon State Papers*, ed. O. Ogle, W. H. Bliss, et al. (Oxford, 1882-1970), II, 380.

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the growing fear that the Protectorate was impregnated with obstacles to liberty which, as the colonels' petition repeatedly emphasized, the Council of Officers had long denounced: an executive empowered with a negative voice over legislation; control of a standing army by a single, independent executive rather than by a succession of supreme, representative legislatures.

In view of the deepening hostility to Cromwellian government, it is all but certain that *The Humble Petition of Several Colonels* would have been signed by a number of officers if the Protectorate had not discovered its existence before it could be circulated, employed strenuous methods to stifle it, and moved swiftly against the three colonels who precipitated it. Their characters and previous conduct were so attuned to the characters and conduct of their fellow officers that it is impossible to believe they were in 1654 the only colonels prepared to sign a petition that restated principles which countless officers had many times sworn to uphold.

Although the petition could not readily be termed treasonable, it attacked the foundations of the Protectorate; and Cromwell responded with resolution and perception. Okey later hinted that the petitioners were frustrated by "trepanners from Whitehall,"⁸² and it is probable that the Protector's informant was Colonel Francis Hacker, who was listed by Thurloe as a participant in the first meeting of Alured, Okey, Saunders, Lawson, and Wildman.⁸³ Hacker may have been a Protectorate spy;⁸⁴ more probably, he was a concerned officer who abandoned the project when he discovered the extent of the attack. Learning of the intrigue, the Protector sent Captain Horsington to Alured's chamber, where the petition was found,⁸⁵ and Alured and Okey were taken into custody. Alured was cashiered for mutiny and imprisoned by order of the Protector for more than a year.⁸⁶ Okey was acquitted of treason by a court martial, and after he surrendered his commission, Cromwell gave him his liberty.⁸⁷ Saunders does not appear to have been detained at all; coming before Cromwell, he "declared his dissatisfactions" and was ordered to surrender his commission.⁸⁸ The variety of the punishments is an example of Cromwell's magnanimity and wisdom. Alured, clearly the most meddlesome, was imprisoned.

⁸²Okey, 1658/9, *Diary of Burton*, IV, 157.

⁸³Thurloe's Notes, *State Papers of Thurloe*, III, 147. Ludlow stated that Okey's effort to promote the petition among his officers "was interrupted . . . by his major" (*Memoirs of Ludlow*, I, 406); Okey's major, Tobias Bridge, succeeded Okey as colonel of the regiment and became one of Cromwell's major-generals in 1656.

⁸⁴Gardiner, *Commonwealth and Protectorate*, III, 211, n. 4, suggests this possibility.

⁸⁵*The Case of Matthew Alured*, p. 9.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 1-2. Newsletters, Dec., Jan., *Clarke Papers*, III, 11, 15, 17.

⁸⁷Newsletters, Nov. 25, Dec. 2, intercepted letter, n.d., *ibid.*, pp. 10, 11, 13.

⁸⁸Newsletter, Dec. 16, *ibid.*, p. 12.

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Generosity to Okey and Saunders deprived other military malcontents of martyrs at no cost to the Protector. As Cromwell knew, a colonel without a regiment was a negligible threat.

At the same time, Cromwell and Thurloe recognized that the colonels' protest could not be dismissed as an isolated incident. Despite the exclusion of the most rigid Commonwealthsmen, a solid majority in the House continued to oppose executive control of the armed forces and executive checks on the sovereignty of Parliament.⁸⁹ More ominous was mounting evidence that the colonels' petition was the fruit of just one segment of deep and spreading disaffection in the army. Discovery and seizure had prevented circulation of the petition for signatures, but the published manifesto was "dispersed," as Alured stated, "into the said several Armies of England, Scotland and Ireland, or part of them; and into many parts among the people of the said three Nations."⁹⁰ There is much support for Alured's assertion. Within a fortnight of the petition's publication, an unspecified quantity were intercepted in Scotland,⁹¹ and Ludlow wrote that "about three hundred of the petition" were sent to him in December for dispersion in Ireland.⁹² The printed copies probably ran into the thousands, and the zeal with which Protectorate authorities seized and destroyed the manifesto is suggested by the character of contemporary comment on the contents⁹³ and by the fact that few copies of the 1654 broadsheet have survived.⁹⁴

On October 19, the day after George Thomason added the colonels' petition to his collection, he picked up a closely related pamphlet: *Some Mementos for the Officers and Souldiers of the Army*. The "mementos" are a patchwork of phrases from the colonels' petition interspersed with warnings of sacred duty and heavenly judgment. If, stated the unknown author, soldiers failed to defend "that great Cause" for which they had engaged, "you are the greatest Traytors and Rebels against Gods Ordinance of Government, that ever breathed in English air." The sole

⁸⁹C.J., VII, 408-421, passim (esp. Dec. 28, Jan. 20).

⁹⁰*The Case of Matthew Alured*, p. 8.

⁹¹*Infra*, p. 38.

⁹²*Memoirs of Ludlow*, I, 406-407.

⁹³The only extensive comment was in the *Observer*, Oct. 24-31 (British Library, E. 814, No. 4), pp. 1-15, where the editor, who was almost certainly Marchamont Nedham, mocked the perpetrators as "worshipfull Penmen . . . condemned weekly to the Privies instead of the Gallies" and concluded his point-by-point refutation of the contents: "I have done with this Brat that is fathered upon a few members of the Army."

⁹⁴In addition to the broadsheet in the British Library (*supra*, n. 1), D. G. Wing, *Short-Title Catalogue . . . 1641-1700* (New York, 1945-51), No. 1369A, lists 1654 broadsheets in the Huntington Library and in the Union Theological Seminary in New York; Timothy Crist, associate editor of the Wing *STC* revision, has kindly checked the unpublished MS, which lists other copies at Harvard and Yale. Another, very tattered copy of the broadsheet is in the Public Record Office, S.P./18, XLII, fols. 113v-114; an abstract of this copy is printed in *C.S.P., Dom.*, 1653-54, pp. 302-304, where the editor has misdated it Dec. 20, 1653.

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source of “Rights and Freedoms” was “an Authority justly derived” from “free successive Parliaments,” and soldiers were warned that they “dare” to abandon that “just cause” in order “to settle the powers of Tyranny, which the Protector sais he will have,” they must “take the guilt of shedding the blood of a hundred thousand men unlawfully, upon your own heads.”⁹⁵ There is no positive indication of the draftsman of the pamphlet, although *Observer* considered it one of the “Kites . . . of the same Brood” as the colonels’ “Brat.”⁹⁶ Wildman could have inserted the religious addenda in half a day, and it is notable that copies of *Some Mementos* were included in packets of the colonels’ petition which turned up in Ireland and Scotland.⁹⁷

In London, an unexpected petition from seamen in the fleet appeared by November 4.⁹⁸ The navy had been less concerned than the army with Cromwell’s politics, and after the expulsion of the Rump the generals at sea had issued a bland declaration indicating that the navy considered itself a nonpolitical service.⁹⁹ Since this attitude seemingly persisted through the early months of the Protectorate, the publication of a fleet petition with any political implications was a matter of concern to uneasy Cromwellians. The petition was largely an enumeration of immediate service grievances—impressment, involuntary foreign service, arrears of pay to distressed families—but one brief paragraph noted “That the Parliament declared, They intended to maintain and enlarge the Liberties of the free people of England”; the seamen were encouraged to wait, concluded the passage, “because the Army also often declared for the same.” It was an exceedingly mild—almost incidental—political observation, and although the petition came from Lawson’s fleet and was approved for forwarding at a council of war presided over by Lawson,¹⁰⁰ it is doubtful that Lawson initiated so narrow a document. Cromwell, shrewdly concluding that unrest would be short-lived if the seamen were paid, “without loss of time . . . sent down a considerable sum of money for the fleet.”¹⁰¹ The Protector apparently also decided that it would be unwise to dismiss a popular vice-admiral. Lawson retained his command until 1655/6, when new agitation in his squadron and renewed suspicions of his loyalty caused him to resign.¹⁰²

⁹⁵*Some Mementos for the Officers and Souldiers of the Army, from Some Sober Christians*, [Oct. 19] 1654, esp. pp. 1, 8.

⁹⁶*Observer*, Oct. 24-31, p. 15. *Ibid.*, Oct. 31-Nov. 7 (British Library, E. 816, No. 4), pp. 9-31, for Nedham’s derisive analysis of the *Mementos* and the “Memento-maker.”

⁹⁷*Infra*, pp. 37, 39.

⁹⁸*To His Highness the Lord Protector: The Humble Petition of the Sea-Men Belonging to the Ships of the Commonwealth*, [Nov. 4] 1654.

⁹⁹*Writings and Speeches of Cromwell*, III, 9-10. For adulatory addresses of the army, see *ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁰*A Perfect Account of the Daily Intelligence from the Armies*, Nov. 1-8, pp. 1596-98; *Mercurius Politicus*, Nov. 2-9, pp. 4001-04.

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Throughout the winter of 1654-1655, Cromwellians were alarmed by any gathering of known or suspected opponents. Thurloe noted that yet another hostile petition was assisted by Bradshaw, who, it will be recalled, had been shown Wildman's draft by George Bishop. Such unregenerate Commonwealthsmen as Henry Marten, Lord Grey of Groby, Sir Arthur Hesilrige, and John Weaver were said to be meeting at Bradshaw's house and elsewhere. Other reported conspirators included "Scott," who probably was Thomas Scot, the republican Rumper, but may have been Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Scot, an M.P. from Ireland who was suspected of disaffection; Colonel Jerome Sanker, another M.P. from Ireland whose loyalty was in question; "one Aysr," the Colonel William Eyres who had been arrested in 1647 and 1649 for his complicity in Leveller mutinies.¹⁰³

In 1654, Thurloe mustered enough evidence to detain Eyres for his involvement in an amorphous intrigue related to the colonels' petition. William Prior, a Leveller agitator who had worked with Eyres in 1647, informed John Dallington, an emissary from disaffected seamen, that men in the army who "were resolved to stand to their first principles" supported a declaration which would be set up "in every market-place" to rally opposition meetings at such places as Marston Moor and Salisbury Plain. Prior's and Eyres's subsequent descriptions of the proposed declaration indicate that it was probably excerpts from the *Petition of Several Colonels*. Prior also told Dallington that "agitators" had been sent to the armies in Ireland and Scotland, and he suggested that Dallington see Eyres for more details. Eyres, however, told Dallington very little and departed for Ireland. Eyres's reticence proved wise but futile. Dallington confessed all he knew on December 21, and Eyres was arrested as soon as he landed in Dublin.¹⁰⁴

In Ireland, meanwhile, Ludlow was discovered spreading copies of the

¹⁰¹Paulucci, Nov. 23 (N.S.), *C.S.P., Ven.*, 1653-54, pp. 278-279.

¹⁰²Gardiner, *Commonwealth and Protectorate*, IV, 229-231. Gardiner, *ibid.*, III, 215-216, suggests Lawson as the author of the seamen's 1654 petition.

¹⁰³Thurloe's Notes, *State Papers of Thurloe*, III, 147. The thirty Irish members of the 1654 Parliament included seven serving officers who proved less than subservient to the Protector: Scot, Sankey, Daniel Axtell, John Clarke, John Hewson, William Purefoy, Thomas Sadler (see Ellen D. Goldwater, "Two Cromwellian Parliaments: Politics, Patronage and Procedure," Diss. CUNY 1973, App., pp. 389-401). For Eyres, see Firth and Davies, *Regimental History*, I, 9, 179, 378, II, 528-529; the index confuses two army officers named William Eyres; a third William Eyres (or Eyre) was returned to Parliament in 1648, 1654/5, 1658/9 (Great Britain, *Members of Parliament*, I [1878], 495, 502, 510).

¹⁰⁴Examination of Dallington, Dec. 21, *State Papers of Thurloe*, III, 35. Prior to the Protector, n.d., *ibid.*, p. 146. Herbert on Eyres's arrest, Jan. 27, *ibid.*, p. 124; examination of Eyres, Jan. 27, *ibid.*, p. 126. For Prior and Eyres in 1647, see *Clarke Papers*, I, 79, 419. Another 1647 agitator, Adj.-Gen. William Allen, was arrested in Jan. 1654/5 in response to a command from Cromwell (letters re Allen, Jan.-Feb., 1654/5: *Writings and Speeches of Cromwell*, III, 578; *State Papers of Thurloe*, III, 140-143).

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colonels' petition and *Some Mementos* "up and downe the army." He was assisted by Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Brayfield, Captain Thomas Walcot, "and divers others of my friends," but only Ludlow was disciplined at this time. He still refused to deliver his commission "to any other power save that of the Parliament, who had entrusted me with it," but when confronted with the prospect of imprisonment he agreed to refrain from hostile acts until he appeared before Cromwell. Ludlow did not travel to England until October 1655, when he was promptly imprisoned in Beaumaris Castle. Six weeks later he was released to appear before the Council at Whitehall, where he refused to renounce future opposition to a government which seemed to him "to be in substance a re-establishment of that which we all engaged against."¹⁰⁵ Ludlow was not detained again. He, too, was powerless without the support of an armed regiment.

The most alarming plot in the web surrounding the colonels' petition involved the forces in Scotland and Major-General Robert Overton. An able commander, he, like Alured, was a Yorkshireman who served in the Northern Army until he was commissioned in the New Model in 1647. He was also an admired friend of John Milton and an ardent Fifth Monarchist. Like all Saints, Overton had approved of the forceful dissolution of the Rump to make way for godly government, but soon after the establishment of the Protectorate he evinced his doubts of military rule. In 1650 Overton had left his post as governor of Hull to serve with Cromwell in Scotland, and in 1654 he journeyed from Hull to London to discuss his return to Scotland.¹⁰⁶ Warning Cromwell that if he "did only design the setting up of himself" he could not serve him, Overton promised that he would inform the Protector if conscience forbade faithful service. Cromwell accepted the pledge, and in September, when Overton arrived in Scotland, he made the same promise to General Monck.¹⁰⁷

Overton had all the political naiveté of a Fifth Monarchy enthusiast, but it is not possible to absolve him of collusion with men hostile to Cromwell's government. Before Overton left England, he and Wildman reportedly discussed "their dislik of things," and although Thurloe did not believe that any design was laid at the meeting, he reported that Overton soon sent back word that there was a party in the North "which

¹⁰⁵Fleetwood to Thurloe, Jan. 3, *ibid.*, III, 70. *Memoirs of Ludlow*, I, 406-412, 425-436.

¹⁰⁶Firth and Davies, *Regimental History*, II, 546-551; *DNB*, s.v. "Overton."

¹⁰⁷Overton to a friend, Jan. 17, 1654/5, *State Papers of Thurloe*, III, 110. Monck to the Protector, Sept. 28, 1654, *Scotland and the Protectorate, . . . 1653 to 1659*, ed. C. H. Firth, Scottish Hist. Soc., XXXI (Edinburgh, 1899), 193. "I conceive it unsafe," wrote Overton subsequently, "for any state founded by Blood, to concede or place too great a power in soldiers"—Robert Overton, "Governments gaine & goodnesse. &c.," from "Religious Meditations &c.," [ca. 1665], Princeton University MS, fol. 39; quoted with permission of the Princeton University Library.

would stand right for a commonwealth.” A cadre of disaffected officers met in his Aberdeen headquarters, and on December 18 they sent forth a letter summoning sympathizers to a meeting in Edinburgh on January 1 to consider whether they had been faithful to their duty “to assert the freedoms of the people in the privileges of parliament.” The letter was signed by nine officers, five of whom belonged to the regiment that Colonel Rich had commanded until his removal a few weeks before.¹⁰⁸ Overton did not sign the letter, but one of the men who did—Samuel Oates, chaplain of Colonel Thomas Pride’s regiment—declared that nothing was done without Overton’s “privity and concession.” Oates also stated that all participants were innocent of hostile intentions toward the Protectorate.¹⁰⁹ Monck thought otherwise. In October and November he had discovered copies of *Some Mementos* and the colonels’ petition; in December he had learned of the proposed Edinburgh meeting, not from Overton, but because one of his majors, Abraham Holmes, received a copy of the December 18 letter. Many men and officers were questioned, and the five officers from Rich’s old regiment were among those cashiered.¹¹⁰

Overton and Holmes were sent to London, for Monck and Thurloe agreed that the design was broad and deep. One informer told Monck that he himself was to be seized, after which Overton would march to England where he would be joined by forces commanded by Hesilrige and Bradshaw. Lawson and his squadron were said to be implicated; so were the regiments of Matthew Thomlinson, Thomas Pride, Ralph Cobbett, Richard Ashfield, and John Mason.¹¹¹ No supporting evidence was forthcoming, and later suggestions that Overton had been conspiring to restore Charles II were patently absurd—although Monck apparently considered them plausible.¹¹² Overton professed his innocence of any wrongdoing, and nothing was proved against him. Not only were intercepted letters to and from Overton indicative of his deep discontent, however, but the circumstantial evidence was very strong. Cromwell sent him to the Tower, and he remained a close prisoner for more than four years.¹¹³ Major Abraham Holmes, who had been a strong Leveller agitator in 1647 and was known as a fanatical republican, satisfied

¹⁰⁸Thurloe’s Notes, *State Papers of Thurloe*, III, 148. Intercepted letter of Hedworth et al. to Holmes et al., Dec. 18, *ibid.*, pp. 29-30. For Rich and his regiment at this time see Firth and Davies, *Regimental History*, I, 151; Monck to Protector, Dec. 30, *State Papers of Thurloe*, III, 55. Rich, Harrison, and other Fifth Monarchists were imprisoned in Feb. 1654/5 (Thurloe to Monck, [Feb. 16?], *Clarke Papers*, II, 242).

¹⁰⁹Letter of Oates, n.d., *Scotland and the Protectorate*, ed. Firth, p. 241.

¹¹⁰Cornet John Baynes to Adam Baynes, Oct. 31, *Letters from Roundhead Officers*, ed. Akerman, p. 104; Monck to the Protector, Nov. 23, 28, *Scotland and the Protectorate*, ed. Firth, pp. 213, 215-216; Monck’s letters, Dec. 26, Jan., 4, *State Papers of Thurloe*, III, 45-46, 76-77. For courts-martial see Monck’s letters, Feb. 20, 27, *Scotland and the Protectorate*, ed. Firth, pp. 251-252.

¹¹¹Information to Monck, n.d., *State Papers of Thurloe*, III, 185; cf. Thurloe’s Notes, *ibid.*, p. 148.

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Cromwell of his innocence in the northern conspiracy and was sent back to his post.¹¹⁴ Again, Cromwell had conjoined harsh example with essential generosity.

Wildman, whose name was linked with several of the abortive plots and whose petition was a feature of almost all of them, was finally apprehended amid the collapse of a shadowy tailpiece to the intrigues of the winter. On February 10, when he apparently discovered that a party of horse was coming to arrest him, Wildman was seized while dictating a call to arms against Cromwellian tyranny. The theatrical posture, sweeping manifesto, and ephemeral plans for action were typical of countless conspiracies in which Wildman would be involved during the next four decades. In 1654/5 any project that existed evaporated with Wildman's imprisonment for seventeen months and the escape to the Continent of his principal collaborator, Edward Sexby, a 1647 agitator who was also suspected of dispersing copies of the colonels' petition and *Some Mementos*.¹¹⁵ Wildman's *Declaration* was printed in mid-March and scattered about the streets of London. It was a stinging indictment of the Protectorate; but if, as Bulstrode Whitelocke stated, all who read the manifesto "knew there was too much of Truth in it,"¹¹⁶ it did not incite anyone to action. Wildman's arrest had marked the end of the wave of hostile plots which had been the principal concern of Cromwell and his councilors since the discovery of the meetings which produced the *Petition of Several Colonels*.

The depth of Cromwell's concern was evinced by the positive measures he employed to discourage disaffection as well as by his considered responses to the plots which were discovered. Accused officers were treated with a skillful combination of lenity, cashierings, and arbitrary imprisonments. Broader measures were employed to encourage loyalty and ensure the Protector's safety. The Council of Officers, which had been in eclipse since Cromwell assumed the supreme civil power, came together several times after the discovery of the colonels' petition, and at a "very full meeting" at St. James's on November 29 the assembled

¹¹²Monck to the Protector, Mar. 10, *ibid.*, p. 217.

¹¹³Letters to and from Overton, Dec. 30, Jan. 17, *ibid.*, pp. 55-56, 110-112: *DNB*, s.v. "Overton."

¹¹⁴*Scotland and the Protectorate*, ed. Firth, p. 247, n. 2.

¹¹⁵Noel Boteler to Protector, Feb. 10, *State Papers of Thurloe*, III, 147; newsletter, Feb. 13, *Clarke Papers*, III, 23. For Sexby, see paper of Mar. 5, *State Papers of Thurloe*, III, 194-195; *Memoirs of Ludlow*, I, 414. For the intrigue and its relationship with other plots of the winter, see information of Samuel Dyer, Feb. 27, 1657/8, and examination of Dyer, *State Papers of Thurloe*, VI, 829-833.

¹¹⁶John Wildman, *A Declaration of the Free-born People of England, Now in Armes against the Tyrannie . . . of Oliver Cromwell*, [Mar. 16] 1654/5. Ashley, *Wildman*, p. 90, erroneously states that the *Declaration* "was not published at the time"; it is in the British Library, 669. fol. 19, No. 70, with George Thomason's MS date and note that "Last night this libell was scatered up and down the streets." Whitelocke, *Memorials*, pp. 618-620.

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officers “resolved to live and die with his Highness and the present government.”¹¹⁷ Despite this reassuring gesture, on December 20 the garrison in the Tower was increased to 900, and five days later the Lieutenant of the Tower was ordered to add another 300 soldiers.¹¹⁸ Anxiety was so evident that after the discovery of the disaffection in Scotland the Venetian envoy reported that the Protector lived “in fear of his own shadow.”¹¹⁹ At the turn of the year additional cannon were installed about Whitehall, troops were punctually paid, and men suspected of trafficking in illicit arms were rounded up.¹²⁰

Within a month of Wildman’s arrest, efforts to regain the loyalty of wavering officers were immeasurably assisted by a wave of royalist risings which regenerated the army’s inherent loyalty to the Lord General who had so long commanded them. Two years later officers would sharply rebuke Cromwell when he considered Parliament’s proposal to make him King Oliver,¹²¹ but even the threat of hereditary kingship did not revive the turmoil which had afflicted the regiments in the winter of 1654-1655. Within four months of Alured’s seizure in October 1654, officers who put their political principles above loyalty to Cromwell had been imprisoned, cashiered, or silenced. Thereafter, while Oliver remained Protector the army would support him.

Six months after Oliver’s death, the regiments were aflame with demands for the parliamentary government extolled in the *Petition of Several Colonels*. It was an old theme by 1659. Seventeen years before, civil war had been precipitated because King Charles refused to recognize his “accomptableness” to Parliament and surrender his control of the militia. In 1647 a politicized army, contending that it was “not a Mercenary Army” but a citizen force, had proclaimed its commitment to “the cause” of successive, representative Parliaments exercising the supreme power in the state. “The cause” of 1647 became “that old cause” in 1654 and “the Good Old Cause” by the spring of 1659—when soldiers, Saints, and Commonwealthsmen united in the demand for “the Good Old Cause” and “the Good Old Parliament” and no single person or House of Lords.¹²²

¹¹⁷Dutch envoy to the States General, Nov. 13 (N.S.), *State Papers of Thurloe*, II, 709. Newsletters, Nov. 25, 30, *Clarke Papers*, III, 10-11. Thurloe to John Pell, Nov. 10, 17, 24, Dec. 1, *The Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell . . . Illustrated in a Series of Letters between Dr. John Pell . . . Thurloe, and Other Distinguished Men*, ed. Robert Vaughan (London, 1839), I, 78, 80, 85, 87-88; Thurloe’s letters to Pell belittling the colonels’ intrigue and assuring the envoy that the loyalty of the army “is fixed and of a-piece” are less meaningful than Thurloe’s private notes and the government’s actions.

¹¹⁸Protector to John Barkstead, Dec. 20, 25, *State Papers of Thurloe*, III, 56, 57.

¹¹⁹Paulucci, Jan. 8 (N.S.), *C.S.P., Ven.*, 1655-56, p. 4.

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Richard Cromwell was powerless against the forces gathering against him. He commanded little loyalty from soldiers who scorned him as a “young gentleman” who had never drawn a sword in battle;¹²³ he had none of the hard wisdom which had enabled Oliver to frustrate the development of effective opposition in the regiments. A few senior officers were genuinely loyal to Richard. Some others, corrupted by the civil power they had exercised during Oliver’s regime, were eager to retain Richard as a figurehead in a Protectorate dominated by themselves. Many more, freed from the mystique which had bound them to Oliver, rediscovered the principles they had put aside in 1653 and joined forces with Saints and Commonwealthsmen to press their commanders into an alliance which brought down the Protectorate and restored the Commonwealth the army had destroyed six years before.

The Humble Petition of Several Colonels was the first—and last—powerful plea for parliamentary government produced by the army during Oliver’s Protectorate. Only the army, which had destroyed the monarchy, the Commonwealth, and the brief reign of the Saints, could destroy the Protectorate. Because Oliver was in fact as well as name Lord General of the Army, he was not turned out by republican regiments which were sorely tried by the regal style of his government. The personal devotion of the men he had commanded in victorious wars was an essential factor in his success, but he nourished their loyalty with rare skill. He persuaded the vast majority that his Protectorate was the only workable barrier between them and the return of Charles Stuart. He dealt with once-trusted officers who challenged his despotism with an adroit mixture of severity and magnanimity. The brief duration and total collapse of regimental opposition to his regime attest his success. Oliver was, as the colonels’ petition contended, master “over such a Militia as the late King durst not claim.” There is some irony in the related fact that this “Militia”—England’s first “standing Army”—included citizen-colonels whose commitment to representative government was so steadfast that they instigated one of the century’s strongest attacks on all standing armies.

¹²⁰Newsletter, Dec. 30, *Clarke Papers*, III, 16-17. Paulucci, Jan. 16 (N.S.), *C.S.P., Ven.*, 1655-56, pp. 7-8. For seizures of suspects, Dec.-Jan., see *State Papers of Thurloe*, III, 68, 78, 129-130, et passim.

¹²¹C. H. Firth, “Cromwell and the Crown,” *English Historical Review*, XVII (1902), 429-442, XVIII (1903), 52-80.

¹²²*The Humble Remonstrance of the Commission Officers and Private Soldiers of Major General Goffs Regiment*, Apr. 26, 1659. For a study of the pamphlet literature in the spring of 1659, see A. H. Woolrych, “The Good Old Cause and the Fall of the Protectorate,” *Cambridge Historical Journal*, XIII (1957), 133-161.

¹²³Moore to Hyde, Oct. 15, 1658, *Calendar of the Clarendon Papers*, IV, 100.