

A Baptist Soldier—William Allen.

ONE of many services rendered by Dr. Whitley's *A History of British Baptists*, is to have brought out the great place taken by Baptists in Cromwell's "New Model Army." A typical figure amongst them, about which we are exceedingly well informed, is that of William Allen, whose name appears more than once in Carlyle's *Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*. To Carlyle, Adjutant-General Allen was "a most authentic, earnest man . . . a strenuous Anabaptist . . . a rugged, true-hearted, not easily governable man; given to Fifth Monarchy and other notions, though with a strong head to control them." This impression is confirmed when we identify him with the Trooper Allen (as Carlyle wrongly refused to do), who brought the letter of the soldiers to Major-General Skippon in 1647.¹ Allen stated then, in his examination, that he was a Warwickshire man who had been a felt-maker by trade in Southwark. He had served in Essex's Army under Colonel Holles, till he was taken a prisoner at Brentford. After seven days of captivity he was condemned with seventeen others to be hanged; then every tenth man was drawn out to be hanged; finally he was dismissed with the others. He was wounded at the first battle of Newbury, and again at Henley, when Skippon rewarded him with five shillings. If only Allen had written for us a few "letters from the front," the historian would have been more grateful to him than for what he did write—with the one exception of the account of the famous "Windsor prayer meeting." Carlyle's pages have made us familiar with that gathering of army leaders, meeting for three days of prayer in the *impasse* to which an impractical Parliament and a shifty king had brought them, retracing their steps to the point at which they had exchanged straightforward action for political scheming, and led at last to the historic conclusion, "That it was our duty, if ever the Lord brought us back again in peace, to call Charles Stuart, that man of blood, to an account for that blood he had shed and mischief he had done to his utmost, against the Lord's Cause and People in these poor Nations."

Military movements brought William Allen and John Vernon into Devonshire, where they married sisters of the name of Huish,² their father being James Huish of Sidbury. The names

¹ See *The Clarke Papers*, ed. Firth, I., 432.

² Not Doily, as Dr. Whitley conjectured in the *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*, IV. 3, p. 131.

of Allen and Vernon stand on the church-roll of Dalwood in Dorset, and often recur together in later records and books, as in the prefaces they both contribute to the religious autobiography of Deborah Huish, their sister-in-law. This is entitled *The Captive taken from the Strong*, and was taken down from her lips by William Allen. But this was in later days of sorrowful leisure, after Allen had been so disappointed in his leader. His first disillusionment with Cromwell appears in an intercepted letter of his of 1654, written soon after the Protectorate began, in which he says: "As to the person in chief place, I confess I love and honour him, for the honour God hath put upon him, and I trust will yet continue; I mean that of uprightheartedness to the Lord, though this last change with his atendencyes hath more stumbled me than ever any did; and I have still many thoughts of heart concerning it." He was, in fact, coming to think of the Lord Protector as Labour thinks of its leaders—they need watching, to say the least. Yet at the same time he will not resign his commission, and argues against a friend who has done so, on the ground of more effective influence where he is: "I trust I shall not, upon the account of honourable or other worldly respects, stay a day longer in employment than I judge I may do more good in than out." Allen was then in Dublin, whither he had gone as "Adjutant-General of the Horse" in 1651, and he also appears as a commissioner for the settlement of Ulster.⁸ But it was not long before his dissatisfaction with Cromwell led to an open collision. They had an interview in London, which, according to Allen, made the Protector very angry, though Allen complains that he was not allowed to say as much as he wanted to, since the Protector did most of the talking. Allen came down to Devonshire, where his movements and talk aroused suspicion that he was plotting. Finally, he was dramatically arrested when in bed at his father-in-law's house, by several soldiers armed with sword and pistol. Allen writes in defence of himself, and in protest against such treatment after thirteen years of faithful service. His defence was hardly likely to smoothe the ruffled plumage of his old commander, for he says:

"You are also pleased to tax me with having as light an esteem of you as of C.S. [Charles Stuart], though neither did any word in my letter, nor any action of mine ever give you ground for such a surmise. What my esteem hath been of you in some verticall forsaking days I believe you

⁸ Allen's services in Ireland were very great, as may be seen in Dunlop's *Ireland under the Commonwealth*. He was also one of the thinkers and organisers who suggested grouping all Baptist Churches into Associations; see Appendix to Rippon, IV. (Whitley).

can remember; and I can truly say, if I have erred, it hath been, I fear, in esteeming too highly of you. The different esteem I yet have of your Lordship, from the other in part is this; I could freely engage against the other as formerly, but I durst not lift a hand against you, nor join with or advise the doing of it."

Cromwell's own view of the situation is given in the letter to his Exeter agent: "Adjutant-General Allen doth very ill offices by multiplying dissatisfaction in the minds of men to the present Government." Nevertheless, Allen was permitted to return to his post in Ireland, though difficulties were not ended—how could they be for two such men? In 1657, we hear of Allen's resignation to Henry Cromwell, who records the impression Allen made on him:

"Subtile and grave Mr. Allen brought up the rear and was more ingenuous than the rest in declaring that the ground of his dissatisfaction took its rise from the first charge of the government, foreseeing that they should be no way able to answer the end for which they were first engaged; and being now more fully convinced of it, and looking upon himself as formerly discharged by his highness, he thought it best for him to draw to a more retired position."

We hear of Allen and Vernon again in Devonshire just after the death of the Protector. Sir John Coplestone has his eye upon them, as the late Protector had commanded, for they are men who need watching: "Certainly they are persons of as much venom and revenge as any whatever and will not spare to adventure on anything that may give them the least hope of success." Allen's displacements from military service, like the repeated banishments of Athanasius, reflected the vicissitudes of the time, for he was made a colonel of horse by the restored Long Parliament in 1659, only to be displaced by Monk in 1660. Soon after this, he was imprisoned for "endeavouring to debauch some of the soldiers from their obedience, and likewise suspected of being dangerous to the State." In the following year he and John Vernon were sent into exile, and the last we hear of Allen is an elegy over his brother-in-law's death in 1666. Some of its lines surely express the writer's own disappointment with the times:

His soul did mourn in secret for such pride
 He found with many long before he died:
 To see a worldly, formal, selfish spirit
 'Mongst men professing Heaven to inherit.

But the fullest account of his attitude is to be found in his *Word to the Army*, a pamphlet of twenty pages issued in 1660.

In this, as in his *Faithful Memorial* of the preceding year (which gives the account of the Windsor prayer meeting), he reviews the decline of the true cause, and speaks of Cromwell in his virtual kingship as "a ghost from the grave" of the Stuarts. The army has been guilty of "King-craft and worse than Bishop-like trapannings." He sees a grim meaning in the taking away of the Protector on the very anniversary of his victories at Dunbar and Worcester. The only true way to a Magna Charta is to acknowledge God.

We may sympathise with this Baptist condemnation of Oliver as a "worldly politician" (the phrase is S. R. Gardiner's), without for one minute thinking that he could have succeeded where Oliver failed, even though he had been Oliver. There are situations in which events demonstrate their power over men,⁴ and the situation becomes too big for them, as we know to our cost to-day from the Great War and the present industrial strife. There is no short cut to a kingdom of the saints, and the Parliament supposed to be made of them was at least as ineffective as any other. But through human failure, as well as human success, such as it is, the vision of great aims, conscientiously and courageously pursued as they were by William Allen, is something of which to be proud. Both for him and for his fellows we may claim an interest that is of eternity as well as of time. As S. R. Gardiner remarks, "It was because the spear of Parliamentarism was tipped with Puritanism that the strife appeals to all who are attracted by the spectacle of unselfish human emotion resolving itself into action."

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⁴Cf. Lord Grey, *Twenty-five Years*, p. 51. "There is in great affairs so much more, as a rule, in the minds of the events (if such an expression may be used) than in the minds of the chief actors."

AN EXCESSIVELY RARE "First Baptist Collection of Hymns," was offered for sale in October at four guineas. The advertiser gave a doubly misleading description. The book was compiled by a Dublin Presbyterian, who in one hymn on baptism takes it as granted that baptism is by immersion; if that constituted a man a Baptist, we might count many Brethren, all the Disciples, the Second Adventists, and all the Orthodox Churches of the East, including Russians. The book was published in 1693, but Keach had published 300 hymns in 1691, Powell's hymns had come out in 1671, Katherine Sutton's in 1663.