

English Catholics and Toleration from the Execution of Charles I to the Death of Oliver Cromwell, 1649-58

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"When the bleeding head was held up, the shout of the soldiers was drowned in the groan of the vast multitude."¹ Among the loudest voices raised in lament over the execution of Charles Stuart were those of the English Catholics. Overwhelmingly Royalist, or regarded as Royalist, throughout the Civil War the Catholics had collected large sums of money for the king's cause, even though well aware that he sanctioned their persecution in an effort to appease the Parliamentarians.² Numerically incapable of playing a dominant role in the Royalist cause, nevertheless, many Catholics had served the king long and faithfully. One, Sir Marmaduke Langdale, was commander of the Royalist left at Naseby. All during the struggle, Langdale proved himself an able commander, retaining his loyalty to the Crown until it was restored in 1660.³

With the war completed, the king dead, and the forces of Oliver Cromwell in absolute control of the nation, the Catholics once more prepared themselves for a long, bitter period of persecution. The Catholics had placed their faith in Charles' success, and as W. K. Jordan states, "The execution of the king marks the nadir of Catholic hopes in England."⁴ Certainly, the Catholics had every reason to expect that the Parliamentarians would revive enforcement of the abhorrent recusancy laws, allowed to lapse under Charles. Certainly the memories of embittered Parliamentarians would turn to 1640

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1. G. M. Trevelyan, *England Under the Stuarts* (New York, 1910), p. 290.

2. Thomas Lonqueville, *The Life of Sir Kenelm Digby* (New York, 1896), p. 277.

3. Joseph Gillow, *Bibliographical Dictionary of the English Catholics* (4 vols., New York, 1894), IV, 123-24.

4. W. K. Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration in England*, (4 vols., Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1938), III, 180.

when, largely under the influence of Henrietta Maria, nearly one in five peers was a Roman Catholic.⁵ Few indeed would recall the Humble Petition Of The Brownists, presented to the Commons in 1641, urging toleration for all sects and for all believers. The petition argued that each man had the right to determine his own religious beliefs and practices. Such beliefs and practices, the petition stated, should be tolerated as long as the individual obeyed the civil laws and remained loyal to the state.⁶ The petition had been rejected in 1641 and was now all but forgotten. Parliament was in complete control, and having already dealt what contemporaries believed to have been the death blow to Royalism, it was only natural that Catholicism would be next. Royalism and popery had flourished together, or at least the Parliamentarians believed they had; now they would die together. Soldiers eagerly awaited the call to rid the island of the pestilent papists.

Curiously, the call to arms never was sounded. Ironically, the English Catholics fared far better after Charles' departure for a better world than they had while he was alive. If, indeed, actual toleration was not extended to the Catholics in the decade following the king's death, a state of virtual toleration existed, save during rare instances of grave national crisis. The villanious low-church Protestants, the most vociferous opponents of the Catholics and committed to a policy of extermination of all traces of popery, granted more freedom of worship to the Catholics than had been granted prior to the Republic or after the Restoration. A careful look at the position of the English Catholics in the decade following the execution of Charles will perhaps shed some light upon this strange period of toleration at the close of a long history of religious persecution.

One of the major determinants preparing the ground for a climate of opinion favorable to toleration was the long and difficult Civil War. Because of the war much of the countryside lay devastated. Only the presence of a strong Parliamentary army prevented a lapse into total anarchy. Without the exhausted condition of the nation and the fear of anarchy, in all probability toleration would not have been considered. Coupling this situation with the leadership of moderates like Cromwell and Fairfax, both of whom favored order and sought to end the long civil strife, a policy of toleration became feasible.⁷ That

5. Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution, 1603-1714* (Edinburgh, 1962), p. 69.

6. Jordan, *Development of Religious Toleration*, IV, 440-441.

7. I received this information from a lecture delivered at the University of Virginia by Dr. Oron J. Hale, to whom I acknowledge my sincere gratitude.

this policy of toleration was to include the English Catholics is apparent in the public statements of both Fairfax and Cromwell as early as 1647. Both advocated the extension of complete religious freedom to all loyal Englishmen, including the Roman Catholics.⁸ Obviously, these early statements were designed primarily to win the support of the Catholics who, by 1647, were becoming disenchanted with the forked-tongue policies of Charles. Few Catholics however, sincerely believed that they were to be included in any scheme of toleration after the completion of the Civil War. Ample proof was given to contradict the statements of Fairfax and Cromwell.

In the latter part of 1647, a petition signed by nine priests was addressed to the Independent leaders in the name of the lay Catholics of England. The Catholics, in this petition, declared themselves willing to renounce the papal claim of power to dissolve the bonds of civil obedience, to concede that faith must be kept with heretics (Protestants), and to denounce the papal teaching that all excommunicated persons merited destruction. One must realize that these were bitter provisions for the Catholics to adhere to, and it is to their credit that they sought a practical and mature solution to the most difficult problem of the times. Unfortunately, the petition was rapidly rejected by the Parliament.⁹ The Catholic solution could never have been successfully implemented at that time.

A second attempt at reconciliation was made by a prominent Catholic who believed that Oliver Cromwell was the only hope for the English papists in postwar England. Sir Kenelm Digby, Chancellor to Queen Henrietta Maria (in exile since 1644) and the leading Catholic intellectual of his day, repeatedly sought to effect a settlement with the Parliamentarians. As early as May, 1648—again, before the execution of Charles—the two met in England to discuss the future, if there were to be one, for the English Catholics. Cromwell, motivated in part by a desire to strengthen his own position, and in part by his respect and admiration for Digby, was prepared to offer a *modus vivendi* to the Catholics, subject to certain restrictions. Freedom of worship would be extended without qualification if the Catholics would renounce the temporal pretensions of the papacy and agree to maintain an army of ten thousand men for the service of the Commonwealth. Digby was quite willing to accept the first provision, but was unable to guarantee the military support demanded by Cromwell. At this point, the radical Parliamentarians,

8. Jordan, *Development of Religious Toleration*, III, 98.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

learning of Cromwell's negotiations with an avowed Royalist papist, were appalled and promptly ordered the banishment of Sir Kenelm.¹⁰ A split had already taken place among the Parliamentarians, a split resulting in two main factions which have been conveniently named Presbyterians and Independents by later historians. The former favored persecution and elimination of all papists, and indeed, all who did not accept their own beliefs. Cromwell belonged to the latter group which favored peace and toleration within the limits of the civil law. The Presbyterians had ordered the banishment of Digby, and since they were the dominant faction in Parliament at the time, there was little that Cromwell could do.

Digby's action, from the point of view of the Royalists, was equally traitorous. Charles was in the hands of the Parliament while Digby was negotiating with the man most responsible for the king's position. To make matters worse, the topic of the negotiations was not the release of Charles, but rather the future of the English Catholics under a Parliamentary regime. Nevertheless, Digby's action is justified, not only because it was the sole realistic choice, but also because the capture of Charles had removed the spirit from the Royalist cause. Henrietta Maria and the young Prince Charles assumed the roles of opposition leaders after the capture of the king. The queen, however, had by this time given up, to a great extent, all hope for a monarchical restoration. In later years, her opposition was to become more vociferous as she countered young Charles' desire to recover his throne through Scotland or Ireland. She also strongly disapproved of Sir Edward Hyde's proposal to request assistance from Spain against the regicides, arguing, quite realistically, that such a course of action would be a waste of time.¹¹ Digby, close to the heart of the Royalist opposition and aware of the futility of continuing it, sought to achieve toleration and to save what was left of the Catholic estates, including quite obviously, his own.

Sir Kenelm continued his entreaties, and in February, 1649, a month after the execution of Charles, he returned to England with Walter Montague.¹² Cromwell once again offered freedom of worship to all Catholics who would accept the government of the Commonwealth and renounce all doctrines subversive of civil authority. As the negotiations continued, Cromwell wrote to the Parliament, in the summer of 1649, urging complete toleration for all loyal Englishmen, in

10. R. T. Petersson, *Sir Kenelm Digby* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1956), pp. 235-36.

11. Lonqueville, *Life of Sir Kenelm Digby*, p. 275.

12. S. R. Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth & Protectorate, 1649-56* (4 vols. New York, 1903), I, 81.

cluding the Catholics. Parliament, aided by the Council's abandonment of its position to extend toleration to the Catholics, refused Cromwell's advise, and once again, as in countless other instances in the past, banished both Digby and Montague.¹³ Most likely the main reason for the rejection and banishment was the rebellion in Ireland led by the barbarous Irish Catholics. Cromwell commanded an army into the embattled area and subdued the Catholic strongholds at Drogheda and Wexford in short order. The inhabitants of both fortresses were either put to the sword or shipped to Barbados. Cromwell's action, according to Maurice Ashley, was purely military and was designed to prevent later bloodshed and to suggest to the Irish that further rebellion was senseless.¹⁴ Ashley's argument neglects the fact that Cromwell believed that the Irish were savages, and as such, should be treated with no mercy.¹⁵

The bad taste left by the Irish campaign is perhaps best expressed by Cromwell in a letter written to the Governor of Ross shortly after his return to England. In the letter Cromwell stated, "I meddle not with any man's conscience, but if by liberty of conscience you mean a liberty to exercise the Mass, I judge it best to use plain dealing, and to let you know where the Parliament of England have power, that will not be allowed of."¹⁶ Fortunately, for all but the Irish Catholics, this policy applied only to Ireland. Sincere English Catholics would be granted as much freedom of worship as was possible. One such sincere Catholic, who established more good will between the members of his faith and the Parliamentarians than anyone at this time, was the great Lord Baltimore. Certain that the Parliamentary cause would be successful, Baltimore replaced the Catholic governor of his colony, Maryland, with William Stone, a Protestant. Furthermore, in 1649, he submitted to the colonists a draft of an Act of Toleration which was passed by the Catholic-dominated Assembly. The Act asserted that no person who professed a belief in Jesus Christ was to be persecuted, provided that such persons pledged their loyalty to the Lord Proprietor.¹⁷ This clause was included because, during the Civil War, many Puritans had emigrated to Maryland. Puritans opposed the idea of living under the rule of a Roman Cath-

13. Gillow, *Bibliographical Dictionary of the English Catholics*, II, 74; Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth & Protectorate*, I, 172.

14. Maurice Ashley, *The Greatness of Oliver Cromwell* (London, 1957), pp. 231-35.

15. ———, *Oliver Cromwell & The Puritan Revolution* (London, 1958), p. 99.

16. G. B. Tatham, *The Puritans in Power* (Cambridge, England, 1913), p. 233.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 218-19.

olic. Baltimore's policy was realistic since by 1649 the Puritans formed a significant minority in the colony. Also, by extending religious freedom to the Puritans, the Catholics went a long way towards the idea that men of different faiths could live together in harmony. In passing this Act, the Catholics rejected the philosophy of the Inquisition, announcing in effect a willingness to live as brothers among men regarded by the Church as heretics. Quite definitely, the Catholics understood that by taking the first step and granting toleration to the Puritans, that they would be insuring their own religious freedom. Nonetheless, this action on the part of Baltimore went a long way towards establishing an opinion in England favorable to toleration.

In a spirit of goodness and brotherhood, Parliament, in November, 1649, passed an act imposing forfeiture of all goods as well as banishment upon all Catholics who had borne arms with the king, while all Catholics who had not served the king, as a reward for their loyalty, were to forfeit only half of their goods in addition to being banished from their homeland.¹⁸ Attempting to appease those forces in the Commonwealth which demanded wholesale persecution of all Catholics, the act was never rigidly enforced. A large degree of religious freedom was granted to those Catholics discreet enough to carry out their worship in private chapels.

Proof that the law was not strictly adhered to is found in the fact that during the entire period of the Commonwealth, only one Catholic priest, Father Peter Wright, a Jesuit, was executed. This fact is significant because, by 1650, the missionary efforts of the clergy were resumed and many Catholic families risked their lives to shelter priests.¹⁹ Further proof of the laxity in enforcing this law is found in the charge of a Presbyterian writer, exaggerated to be sure, who stated that in the years 1650-1652, not fewer than eighteen popish books had been printed in England, despite the severe laws against such printings. The same critic also asserted that the books had been printed in large editions and that at least thirty thousand popish volumes had been sold in England.²⁰ Certainly the Protestants were not interested in reading Catholic books; therefore, there must have been some Roman Catholics in England at this time. In addition, the number of Catholics was sufficiently large to merit an attack by the Presbyterian.

The most important evidence, however, is the tract, *Christian Mod-*

18. Jordan, *Development of Religious Toleration*, III, 181.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 181-82.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

erator: or, Persecution for Religion Condemned, written around 1651 by William Buchley. John Austin, a prominent Catholic lawyer, assumed the pseudonym Buchley in order to express his views freely. In forceful terms, Austin submitted that the Civil War had been waged to secure forever the principle that the religious conscience must remain free from all coercion. He argued that England must accept the fact that the individual, despite laws to the contrary, was ultimately sovereign in matters pertaining to religion. Austin stressed the loyalty of English Catholics to the Commonwealth and urged complete toleration as the best means of preserving Catholic loyalty. Contending that the Catholics had been persecuted more by force of habit than by reason, he argued for consideration of the Catholic case solely as a religious problem.²¹ The truly astounding point raised by Austin's tract was his emphasis upon the individual conscience. Here again was a definite departure from Catholic tradition. In effect, Austin's argument out-Luthered Luther, who declared in his *Babylonian Captivity* that no Christian should be ruled, save by his own consent.²² Austin expressed a desire to be ruled by the Commonwealth in return for the right to worship according to the dictates of his own conscience. The full weight of his argument did not bear fruit until the era of the Protectorate, when virtual toleration nearly became a reality.

The spirit of toleration descended into the hearts of the Parliamentarians on September 27, 1650, when all clauses imposing financial penalties for recusancy were repealed. Public celebration of the mass was still prohibited and all citizens had to attend state services on the Lord's day and all other days of humiliation.²³ Given an economic breathing space and hope for the future, the Catholics sought to justify Parliament's faith by remaining loyal. Peace reigned throughout the land until the summer of 1651, when Charles II and his army of Scots invaded England from the north. In a decisive battle, the Royalists were defeated at Worcester. Prior to the battle, on May 19, Father Peter Wright, S. J., mentioned above, had been hanged at Tyburn for treason. As Father Wright had been taken into custody in 1650, it would seem apparent that a correlation exists between his execution and the invasion of Charles. Had the invasion not occurred, in all probability Father Wright would not have been executed, but rather retained in prison. His death was

21. *Ibid.*, IV, 446-52.

22. Margaret James, *Social Problems & Policy During the Puritan Revolution, 1640-60* (London, 1930), p. 5.

23. Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth & Protectorate*, II, 3.

meant as a warning to the English Catholics not to flock to the Royalist banners nor in any way assist the invading king. Certainly Cromwell had no reason for executing a priest whom he had held in captivity for over a year other than to use his death as a symbol for other Catholics.

Few Catholics actually fought with Charles at Worcester, though many were instrumental in his escape to the Continent. The miraculous tale of Charles' escape after Worcester begins at the home of Charles Giffard, a Catholic gentleman who possessed a remote home in Shropshire. To Giffard and his servant, Yates, the fugitive king entrusted himself. Traveling by the cover of darkness, Giffard transported the king to the cottage of the Penderel brothers, a poor Catholic family of woodcutters who were also tenants of Giffard. Charles was dressed in the rough clothing of a farmer, clothes belonging to Richard Penderel. Penderel also cut the king's long locks and blackened his face. The next day, September 6, 1651. Charles and Richard Penderel hid themselves in the trunk of a dead tree in a little wood called Spring Coppice. While in the tree, the soldiers of Cromwell passed within a few feet of the wood. However, the king was not discovered. Charles' needs were attended to by Elizabeth Yates, and on the following day, Charles and Richard Penderel set out across the country to the west. Many times during the journey, Charles was prepared to surrender in despair. Had it not been for the perseverance of Penderel, who also saved the king's life, it is highly improbable that Charles would have been restored in 1660. Penderel led the king to Mosley Hall, the residence of a Mr. Whitgreave, a Catholic who was harboring Father John Huddleston in a secret "priest hole" which dated to the days of the Gunpowder Plot.²⁴ During their stay together at Mosley Hall, Charles and Father Huddleston became quite close, and before leaving, Charles told him that, "he knew he was a priest, and he needed not fear to own it, for if it pleased God to restore him to his kingdom, they should never more need privacies."²⁵ It is interesting to note in passing that Father Huddleston was the same Catholic priest who was reported to have reconciled Charles to the Roman Church on his deathbed.²⁶ The shelter provided for Charles is the last significant instance of Catholic support for the Royalist cause during the Interregnum period.

After the battle at Worcester, the laws against the Catholics began

24. Arthur Bryant, *King Charles II* (New York, 1933), pp. 12-20.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

26. Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth & Protectorate*, II, 53.

to be tightened. A reward of one thousand pounds was placed on the heads of all those who had, in any way, sheltered the fugitive king.²⁷ Under the instigation of Oliver Cromwell, the Parliament, on February 24, 1652, passed the Act of Oblivion. This Act declared a pardon for all those who had committed treason or felonies against the Commonwealth prior to the Battle of Worcester. On the surface, this Act appeared to be a reward for all Catholics who had remained loyal to the Republic during the last Royalist invasion. However, the Act did not prove to be a concession as it only included treasonable words. All acts committed in the name of the king, regardless of when they had occurred, were still subject to punishment.²⁸

Cromwell's fostering of an act of this nature at this particular time is strange indeed. While the Act was being debated in Parliament, Cromwell, as a member of the Committee for the Propagation of the Gospel, was advocating complete toleration. In answer to another member of the Committee who urged the exclusion of the Roman Catholics, Cromwell replied, "I had rather that Mahometanism were permitted amongst us than that one of God's children should be persecuted."²⁹ By both of these seemingly contradictory actions, Cromwell shows an unwillingness to persecute all Catholics for the misguided actions of a few. The Act of Oblivion left a great deal to the discretion of the enforcer, the law being strictly followed only in instances where a Catholic was suspected of still harboring strong Royalist convictions. Few Catholics suffered because of the Act and the year passed peacefully. The next year, in December, the Commonwealth gave way to the Protectorate.

Of the many provisions which made up the Instrument of Government, the first written Constitution in English History, several dealt specifically with the question of toleration. Article XV for example, denied the right to vote and to hold office to all Catholics. To have attempted to include the Roman Catholics in the electorate would have been political suicide for Cromwell or any leader at the time. Many Englishmen still maintained that all Catholics were agents of a foreign power and should be denied all liberties. Article XXXVI stated: "That to the public profession held forth none shall be compelled by penalties or otherwise; but that endeavours to be used to win them by sound doctrine and the example of good conversation." The Catholics were declining in numbers every year with many conforming to the state religion. Those who remained were too few in

27. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

number to make a policy of persecution worthwhile. Most Catholic lands had already been seized and it did the Government no good to jail recusants as the difficulty involved in maintaining the Catholics in prisons far outweighed the security afforded the Government by their imprisonment. Article XXXVII, designed to appease the more militant Protestants, specifically extended freedom of worship to all but the Catholics and the Anglicans.³⁰ Both were secretly assured that, except during periods of national crises, their right to worship in private would be respected. That Cromwell approved of allowing private services to continue is indirectly shown in a letter to Cardinal Mazarin. In answer to Mazarin's request that Cromwell make a public declaration granting indulgences to the Roman Catholics, he replied that he believed neither the time nor men's minds were prepared to accept such a radical proposal.³¹ However, as long as order was maintained and the Catholics remained loyal, they would not be persecuted. A scant year after the enactment of the Instrument of Government, on December 12, 1654, the army presented a petition favoring complete liberty of conscience. Cromwell was known to have favored the petition which wisely included a clause preventing public worship by the Catholics. Although the petition was refused, it nevertheless shows that many persons in England still were troubled over the fact that liberty of conscience was being denied to other Christians.³² While this "social conscience", as twentieth century historians would put it, was developing, an organization was springing up which would add fuel to the arguments of those who urged the exclusion of the Roman Catholics from all civil and religious privileges. The twin-headed monster, breathing treason and subversion, once more reared its ugly head.

In November, 1653, "The Sealed Knot" was established in England to direct the Royalist conspiracy. One of the members of the six-man "Knot," a small group of loyal peers, was Lord Belasyse, a Roman Catholic.³³ Belasyse was chosen as a leader of this group more for his Royalism than for his religion, as there is no indication that he sought to enlist the aid of his fellow Catholics on behalf of the king. Belasyse presents an interesting case to students of this period. For his service to the king during the Civil War, he had been elevated to the peerage. On the other hand, his son, Thomas, con-

30. S. R. Gardiner (ed.), *The Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution, 1625-60* (Oxford, 1906), pp. 410-16.

31. Tatham, *Puritans in Power*, pp. 233-34.

32. Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth & Protectorate*, III, 221.

33. David E. Underdown, *Royalist Conspiracy in England, 1649-60* (New Haven, 1960), p. 77.

formed to Parliamentary rule and in 1657 was married to Cromwell's daughter, Mary. Lord Belasyse was also related to Lord Fairfax.³⁴ Since Belasyse made no attempt to enlist fellow Catholics in the king's behalf, a clarification must now be made. Belasyse was to maintain contact with a group of northern Catholic recusants, masters of intrigue and ardently pro-Royalist. However, he did not seriously negotiate with other Roman Catholic groups in 1654, possibly because he felt that they would choose the Royalist cause anyway in the event of a rebellion, or, more probably, because it was known that many of the Catholics were engaged in secret negotiations with the government.³⁵ One of the most prominent Catholics seeking to reach an agreement with Cromwell was Sir Kenelm Digby, who had returned to England shortly after Cromwell was named Lord Protector.³⁶ A positive result of the negotiations between the two was a proclamation issued by Cromwell in 1655 which granted to Catholics the right to celebrate the mass. In fine print, the Lord Protector inserted a clause depriving the Catholics of their possessions.³⁷ Fortunately, this clause was not rigidly enforced.

Returning to the activities of the "Knot," an attempt was made under their direction to assassinate Cromwell in May, 1654. This rash and ill-planned action was a severe blow to the cause of toleration. Father John Southworth, S. J., was arrested shortly after the attempt in London. On his person were found all of the requisites necessary for celebrating the mass. Father Southworth was quickly tried and condemned to death. Despite pleas made on his behalf to the Lord Protector, Cromwell refused to intervene, declaring that the priest had been fairly tried and convicted. Not even his good friend Digby could persuade him to change his mind. Father Southworth was executed on June 28, 1654, the only priest to be killed under the Protectorate. He is also believed to have been the last to suffer death in England merely for having had the misfortune of being ordained a Catholic priest.³⁸

The death of Father Southworth, however, marked a clear demarcation in Protectorate policy. The Catholics now entered a period of calm and tranquillity previously unknown to them. They were permitted to celebrate the mass, and though a cloud of suspicion and hate hung perpetually over them, they nonetheless enjoyed an era of peace and prosperity. Cromwell's leniency was powerfully in-

34. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

36. Petersson, *Sir Kenelm Digby*, p. 251.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

38. Jordan, *Development of Religious Toleration*, III, 184-85.

fluenced by Catholic realization that the survival of their faith was dependent upon the triumph of religious toleration in England. To insure the success of toleration, the Catholics abandoned their political aspirations and extremist movements and repudiated the philosophy which for many years had cloaked them under a mantle of treason.³⁹ They had proven their loyalty to the government, as Austin had earlier promised. Since the religious policy of the Protectorate was determined by Cromwell, and since, as has already been shown, he favored toleration for all loyal Englishmen, he permitted virtual freedom of worship to the Roman Catholics.⁴⁰

The degree of religious freedom granted by the Lord Protector may best be determined from the writings of the various ambassadors serving in England at the time. On October 1, 1655, Sagredo, the Venetian ambassador, in a letter to his prince, discussed the government's policy towards the Catholics. He contended that more than twenty Spanish priests were in residence at the embassy where mass was celebrated daily before large throngs.⁴¹ Sagredo, in the same letter, obviously excited by the large turnouts for mass in London, estimated that at least one-fourth of the entire population of England was Roman Catholic.⁴² A check of the Proceedings of the Committee for Compounding during this period, which contains a list of all Catholics whose estates had been sequestered, reveals that the Ambassador was far too optimistic in his estimate.⁴³ This was certainly not a complete listing of all papists in the country, but nonetheless a reasonable indicator. Had there been as many Catholics in England as Sagredo would have us believe, it is highly improbable that Cromwell, for all his devotion to toleration, would have granted them the freedom which he did. No accurate count can be made, but all other evidence seems to indicate a far smaller Catholic community. The main value of Sagredo's correspondence, taking into account his bias and inaccuracies, is found in his affirmation that the Catholics were publicly worshipping in London in 1655. The French ambassador, another Catholic, corroborates Sagredo's testimony on this point, stating that many Catholics were celebrating mass at the chapels maintained by the embassies of Catholic nations.⁴⁴ Theoretically speaking, Cromwell had retained his earlier promise that no

39. Petersson, *Sir Kenelm Digby*, p. 256.

40. Ashley, *Oliver Cromwell & the Puritan Revolution*, p. 144.

41. Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth & Protectorate*, IV, 19.

42. Jordan, *Development of Religious Toleration*, III, 185.

43. M. A. E. Green (ed.), *Calendar of the Proceedings of the Committee for Compounding*, Vol. I, 1643-60, (London, 1889), 728-33.

44. Ashley, *The Greatness of Oliver Cromwell*, p. 363.

mass would be celebrated on territory over which Parliament exercised control.

Freedom of worship, though limited, was destined to be short-lived once more, for in March, 1655, while mass was being publicly celebrated in London, the Royalists staged another uprising. Under the direction of the Action Party, headed by a group of Royalist gentry, the Royalists began the only rebellion in the entire Interregnum in which they relied solely upon themselves.⁴⁵ Among the leaders of the movement was John Weston, a Catholic who owed his position within the Party to his wealth and not to his religion. This movement, like all other Royalist risings in the decade, was poorly planned and executed and ended in dismal failure. Cromwell, following an all too familiar pattern, revived the Act of Abjuration of 1643, for he had no more priests to sacrifice. According to the provisions of this act, all adult Catholics whose loyalty was suspect were forced to renounce the temporal power of the papacy and the doctrines of transubstantiation and purgatory as well as other characteristic Catholic teachings.⁴⁶ This act was enjoying the height of its enforcement during the same period as Sagredo's letter—ample proof of the laxity in carrying out the law. The situation remained in a state of deadly calm until Cromwell ran into financial difficulties early in 1656.

In March of that year, English Catholics, numbering over four hundred, were arrested and hauled off to prison for attending Sunday mass at the Portuguese embassy. These recusants were released only after they had paid heavy fines.⁴⁷ Cromwell's financial embarrassment continued, resulting on November 29, 1656 in the introduction into Parliament of still harsher measures against the recusants. All Catholics who refused to take the Oath of Abjuration were to forfeit two-thirds of their estates to the Government. Moreover, any English subject celebrating mass in the chapel of a foreign embassy was to be fined one hundred pounds for each offense.⁴⁸ It is perhaps indicative of the vast strides made towards an acceptance of toleration when one considers that the measure was not signed into law by Cromwell until June 26, 1657, suggesting a long, heated debate in Parliament. The Venetian ambassador attested, however, that once the act was passed, it was vigorously enforced. Nevertheless, so

45. Underdown, *Royalist Conspiracy*, p. 127.

46. Jordan, *Development of Religious Toleration*, III 185.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 187; Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth & Protectorate*, IV, 19.

48. Jordan, *Development of Religious Toleration*, III, 188.

long as fines were paid, private worship was permitted to continue.⁴⁹

Calm once again settled over the land until March, 1658, when another Royalist invasion was imminent. On March 3, all Catholics and Royalists were ordered to leave London and to remain within five miles of their usual places of residence. Only a division within the Royalist ranks over which should occur first, foreign intervention or an internal revolt, prevented a grave national crisis.⁵⁰ Tension was still at a fever pitch on September 3, when Oliver Cromwell died peacefully in his bed.⁵¹ Shock and sorrow passed through the Catholic community over the death of the Protector who had done more than any other man to establish and maintain religious freedom in England. Only in periods of short-lived crises were their lives or properties in danger. At other times, as long as they adhered to the civil laws and remained loyal to the Government, they were allowed to worship according to their own beliefs. The emotion felt by Englishmen—Catholic and Protestant—is best expressed in the immortal lines from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, "He was a man, take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again."⁵² During the all too brief decade of Cromwell's rule, men of different faiths had lived, for the most part, in harmony. No one knew, at the time, what the future would entail for the English Catholics.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

50. Underdown, *Royalist Conspiracy*, p. 221; C. H. Firth, *The Last Years of the Protectorate, 1657-58* (New York, 1909), pp. 67-68.

51. Underdown, *Royalist Conspiracy*, p. 230.

52. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene 2.