EDWARD HYDE, EARL OF CLARENDON  
(1609–1674)

Edward Hyde was educated at Oxford and during the 1630’s practiced law. From about 1641 onward, he was among the chief supporters and advisers of Charles I; he went into exile with the boy who was to become Charles II, and remained the center of the Stuart cause during the Interregnum. After the Restoration, he became Lord Chancellor and Prime Minister to Charles II, but was impeached in 1667 (owing partly to England’s ill success in the Dutch War), and spent the last seven years of his life in France.

Clarendon’s great History of the Rebellion was written in part amid the very events which it describes. For the Muse of history, a short view like this is not an unmixed blessing. But Clarendon’s learning—legal, classical, and historical—and the formality of his method save him from many of the failings of partisanship. He wrote as a Lord Chancellor should, with imperial dignity, and he wrote for posterity, which he envisaged as a senatorial assemblage of Lord Chancellors. His History, which first appeared in print thirty years after his death, was not only one of the earliest English histories to rise above the level of a chronicle; it served to formulate and crystallize the social philosophy soon to be known as Toryism. As an historical rhetorician and portrait painter, there can be no doubt that Clarendon ranks among the greatest; the strength and resilience of the Tory view of history may be estimated from its present prevalence and influence.

From The History of the Rebellion

[THE CHARACTER OF JOHN HAMPDEN]

He was a gentleman of a good family in Buckinghamshire, and born to a fair fortune, and of a most civil and affable deportment. In his entrance into the world, he indulged to himself all the license in sports and exercises and company, which was used by men of the most jolly conversation; afterwards he retired to a more reserved and melancholic society, yet preserving his own natural cheerfulness and vivacity, and above all a flowing courtesy to all men; though they who conversed nearly\(^1\) with him found him growing into a dislike of the ecclesiastical government of the church, yet most believed it rather a dislike of some churchmen, and of some introducements\(^2\) of theirs which he apprehended might disquiet the public peace. He was rather of reputation in his own country, than of public discourse or fame in the kingdom, before the business of ship-money,\(^3\) but then he grew the argument of all tongues, every man inquiring who and what he was, that durst at his own charge support the liberty and property of the kingdom, and rescue his country from being made

\(^1\) Intimately.  
\(^2\) Novelties.  
\(^3\) Charles I tried to collect a tax from the entire kingdom under an ancient law empowering him to tax the harbors of England to support a navy. Hampden legally resisted the third levy of ship-money, and so became the “argument” (subject) of discussion throughout the land.
a prey to the court; his carriage throughout that agitation was with that rare
temper and modesty, that they who watched him narrowly to find some advan-
tage against his person to make him less resolute in his cause, were compelled
to give him a just testimony: and the judgment that was given against him infi-
nitely more advanced him, than the service for which it was given. When this
Parliament began (being returned knight of the shire for the county where he
lived) the eyes of all men were fixed on him as their Patriae Pater, and the pi-
lot that must steer their vessel through the tempests and rocks which threat-
ened it. And I am persuaded his power and interest at that time was greater, to
do good or hurt, than any man’s in the kingdom, or than any man of his rank
hath had in any time; for his reputation of honesty was universal, and his affec-
tions seemed so publicly guided, that no corrupt or private ends could bias
them.

He was of that rare affability and temper in debate, and of that seeming
humility and submission of judgment, as if he brought no opinions with him,
but a desire of information and instruction, yet he had so subtle a way of inter-
rogating, and under the notion of doubts insinuating his objections, that he left
his opinions with those, from whom he pretended to learn and receive them;
and even with them, who were able to preserve themselves from his insinuations,
and discerned those opinions to be fixed in him, with which they could not
comply, he always left the character of an ingenious and conscientious person.
He was indeed a very wise man, and of great parts, and possessed with the
most absolute spirit of popularity, that is, the most absolute faculties to govern
the people, of any man I ever knew. For the first year of the Parliament he
seemed rather to moderate and soften the violent and distempered humors
than to inflame them, but wise and dispassioned men plainly discerned that
that moderation proceeded from prudence, and observation that the season
was not ripe, rather than that he approved of the moderation, and that he begat
many opinions and motions the education whereof he committed to other
men, so far disguising his own designs that he seemed seldom to wish more
than was concluded, and in man gross conclusions which would hereafter con-
tribute to designs not yet set on foot, when he found them sufficiently backed
by majority of voices, he would withdraw himself before the question, that he
might seem not to consent to so much visible unreasonableness, which pro-
duced as great a doubt in some, as it did approbation in others of his integrity.
What combination soever had been originally with the Scots for the invasion
of England, and what farther was entered into afterwards, in favor of them, and
to advance any alteration in Parliament, no man doubts was at least with the
privity of this gentleman.

After he was amongst those members accused by the King of high treason,
he was much altered, his nature and carriage seeming much fiercer than it did
before; and without question when he first drew his sword, he threw away the
scabbard, for he passionately opposed the overture made by the King for a
treaty from Nottingham and as eminently any expedients that might have pro-

5. The “knight of the shire” represented the whole
       county, not just a constituency.
6. Father of his country.
7. Insinuations.
8. Ingenious (in the 17th century, the words were
       frequently interchanged).
1. Leading forward.
2. The English Civil Wars were set off by a Scot-
tish invasion which had actually been invited by
the English Parliament. This was done with the
“privity” of Hampden, i.e., with his knowledge.
duced an accommodation in this\(^3\) that was at Oxford, and was principally relied on to prevent any infusions which might be made into the Earl of Essex towards peace, or to render them ineffectual if they were made; and was indeed much more relied on by that party, than the General himself.\(^4\) In the first entrance into the troubles he undertook the command of a regiment of foot, and performed the duty of a colonel on all occasions most punctually. He was very temperate in diet, and a supreme governor over all his passions and affections, and had thereby a great power over other men’s. He was of an industry and vigilance not to be tired out, or wearied by the most laborious, and of parts not to be imposed upon by the most subtle or sharp, and of a personal courage equal to his best parts, so that he was an enemy not to be wished wherever he might have been made a friend, and as much to be apprehended where he was so, as any man could deserve to be, and therefore his death was no less congratulated on the one party than it was condoled on the other. In a word, what was said of Cinna might well be applied to him, *Erat illi consilium ad facinus aptum, consilio autem neque lingua neque manus deerat,* he had a head to contrive, and a tongue to persuade, and a hand to execute any mischief;\(^5\) his death therefore seemed to be a great deliverance to the nation.

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3. I.e., this treaty.
4. The point is that Hampden was an uncompromising member of the Puritan war-party, whereas the Earl of Essex, who was commander in chief of the Parliamentary armies, was too moderate a man for the war-party.
5. Clarendon quotes from memory; the words concern not Cinna but Catiline. They are from Cicero’s third oration against Catiline.