

## Prayer of the Month • November 2015

Strengthen us, O God,  
to relieve the oppressed,  
to hear the groans of poor prisoners,  
to reform the abuses of all professions;  
that many be made not poor to make a few rich;  
for Jesus Christ's sake.

Oliver Cromwell, 1599–1658

This prayer is adapted from a letter that Cromwell wrote after the Battle of Dunbar, in 1650. The thoughts are fairly concisely expressed, as befits a man of action. We can discern a reforming zeal, a desire to do something to amend what is wrong. The phrase 'all professions' hints at an ambition, that resulted in Cromwell become Lord Protector of the Commonwealth, and to be in a position to effect radical change. He was born, in 1599, in a wealthy and influential East Anglian family, that could trace its ancestry back to Thomas Cromwell, Chancellor of the Exchequer to Henry VIII. He was educated at Sidney College, Cambridge, which had a strong Puritan ethos. He married Elizabeth Bourchier, in 1620, and the couple were to have nine children. He became the member of parliament for Huntingdon in 1628, the last parliament for eleven years. When King Charles I recalled parliament in 1640, because he needed funding for the Bishops' War, Cromwell petitioned for the release of John Lilburne, a Puritan martyr. At the outbreak of the English Civil War in 1642, Cromwell was an officer in the 'Roundheads' or Parliamentary Army. He recruited a band of cavalry in Cambridgeshire and was rapidly promoted. By 1648 he was commanding a large part of the New Model Army. In 1647 he failed in his attempt to reconcile the king, Charles I, parliament, and the army, and then put his full support behind the army. He played a decisive role in the execution of Charles I, and in 1653 became head of state and Lord Protector. He sought to restore order in the land, and refused the offer of the English crown in 1657. His actions came from a strong religious feeling, as he sought to reform inhumane elements of the legal, judicial, and social systems, and to clamp down on drunkenness and immorality. He died on 3 September 1658, and a state funeral was held for him in November.

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