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*Royalist Agents, Conspirators and Spies: Their Role in the British Civil Wars, 1640-1660*, by Geoffrey Smith (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011; pp. xiv + 282. £60).

In this fascinating book, Geoffrey Smith explores the lives and experiences of those Royalists who served Charles I and Charles II as agents, spies and conspirators during the 1640s and 1650s. He takes us into a murky world of intrigue and intelligence-gathering that is all the more challenging to reconstruct because it was by definition intended to remain secret. The book is based on a huge amount of research in the relevant primary sources, both printed and manuscript, especially the Ormond papers, the Nicholas papers, and the Clarendon papers. As a result, Smith provides much the clearest picture so far published of who these Royalists were, what they were trying to achieve, and the obstacles that confronted them.

Smith's account is particularly interesting because it focuses on people who were not among the highest ranks of the king's supporters. Royalist agents 'were to be found principally among the officers in the king's armies, captains and majors rather than generals, among middle-ranking courtiers, drawn for example from the "grooms" rather than the more aristocratic "gentlemen" of the king's bedchamber' (p. 3). The roles of agent, conspirator and spy were closely connected and often merged into each other during the course of an individual's career. A number of them, especially during the 1640s, had been courtiers, though usually not prominent office-holders, while others included swordsmen such as Daniel O'Neill and Sir Nicholas Armorer, and poets like Abraham Cowley and Edmund Waller. Royalist agents were a very varied group, comprising figures as diverse as the devout and scholarly Anglican cleric Dr John Barwick and Colonel Joseph Bampfield, a West Country gentleman who was as close as the seventeenth century produced to being a

professional spy. It is one of the notable merits of Smith's book that he conveys a good sense of these people collectively without losing sight of their individual personalities and activities.

One of the biggest problems that Royalist agents faced was 'the lack of a powerful and highly talented individual with the will and authority to control and direct their activities' (p. 7). The leadership of the Royalist party was bedevilled throughout the Civil Wars and the Interregnum by factional rivalries and personal disputes: what Clarendon called 'the discomposures, jealousies, and disgusts, which reigned at Oxford' (pp. 9, 239). Different groups and factions competed for control of policy, and as a consequence patron-client relationships frequently shifted and there was little overall direction or co-ordination. Overlapping clientage networks, and the lack of strong and effective leadership from the top, were characteristic of the Royalist party throughout this period and seriously hampered the activities of its agents. The Royalists never found an equivalent of Sir Francis Walsingham or John Thurloe, indeed probably could not, for these figures were the state's official intelligence-gatherers whereas Royalist agents were the clandestine supporters of a defeated monarch. Their predicament was exacerbated by the perennial shortage of money of which they regularly complained in their correspondence.

These difficulties help to explain a gradual trend, which became particularly marked from around 1653-5, towards Royalist agents being drawn less from among influential courtiers and more from middle-ranking officers of the king's armies. Household officers like John Poley became noticeably less prominent in the king's service from about this time, whereas army officers like Major Nicholas Armorer gained much greater dominance. 'A crowd of colonels, majors and captains who had served in the armies of Charles I' loomed large among Royalist agents during the Protectorate, although inevitably by this stage 'their

roles were effectively restricted to the furtherance of plots within England to overthrow the Cromwellian Protectorate' (p. 199).

In one sense, the story of these Royalist agents is 'a history of failure' (p. 238). Nevertheless, they were extraordinarily persistent and resilient, and they played an important part in keeping popular Royalism alive despite constant disappointments and discouragements. Their determination helped to preserve loyalist attitudes throughout the Interregnum, and thereby ensured that the republican regimes could never feel entirely comfortable. Oliver Cromwell lamented in a speech on 15 February 1655 that 'the enemies of the peace are still restless in their designs', while a few months later Thurloe wrote in a memorandum that the Cavaliers were 'implacable in their malice': they were 'men of another interest, which they can no more cease to promote than to live' (p. 244). The unease of Cromwell and his most senior colleagues owed much to the activities of Royalist agents despite the dangers and setbacks that they often faced. Some paid the ultimate price, and those who survived were not always rewarded at the Restoration. Nevertheless, Charles I and his son owed them much: as Charles II observed when Daniel O'Neill died in October 1664, 'I am sure I have lost a very good servant by it' (p. 254). Thanks to Geoffrey Smith, we now have a much clearer idea than hitherto of the identity and character of these Royalist agents, and of the nature of their activities. Notwithstanding all their efforts to remain in the shadows, their careers and experiences have been recovered far more fully than they ever intended should be possible.

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