

BATTLE OF WIGAN LANE

Colonel Robert Lilburne (1613–1665)

to Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658)

Wigan, 25 August 1651

Upon the receipt of your orders to stay here with my regiment, I marched that day from Stockport to this town, which was twenty-two miles, before I rested, hearing the enemy was here, and thinking I might have a little surprised them, but they were gone to Chorley. The next day, I marched after them towards Preston, and lay within two miles of them, only with my own regiment and about 60 horse and dragoons, which is all the country could assist us with all this while (saving only one company from Manchester of foot, and two from Chester, which have been with me two days).

That night, I sent 40 horse to alarm them (who then wounded Colonel Vere), hearing they were to have had a rendezvous at Preston that next day. I did that to give notice to the town and country I was there to oppose the Earl,¹ and to stay the people from rising with him, who reported it that none of our forces was in the country; and indeed the country believe all was their own, which the people generally took for granted, and was coming in apace, as by these enclosed you may perceive.

The next day, in the afternoon, I having no foot with me, a party of the enemy's horse fell smartly amongst us, where our horse was grazing, and for some space put us pretty hard to it. But at last it pleased the Lord to strengthen us, that we put them to the flight, and pursued them to Ribble Bridge (this was something like our business at Musselburgh²) and killed and took about 30 prisoners, most officers and gentlemen, with the loss of two men that died next morning.

Hearing of your excellency's regiment coming towards Manchester, I only removed two miles to a more convenient ground, thinking to have stayed there till your regiment could come, which I expected this day, but their weariness frustrated that expectation; and this morning I had intelligence that the enemy was upon their march, which I thought was a running away from us, being they began at eleven in the night, and marched so fast and privately.

But their confidence was much otherwise raised, having increased their number at Preston, and that engagement of the priests and Manchesterians (who are very malignant) to assist them with 500 men and arms, and the hopes they had of surprising your excellency's regiment put them into great heart that when we appeared here (thinking we had been, as it were, pursuing a flying enemy), they showed a great deal of courage by a mighty shout they gave beyond the town in sight of us, in the way towards Manchester; which we observing, together with the advantage they had of us in these grounds, and hearing their numbers of foot was much increased, and the danger your regiment was in, put us upon new thoughts when they were at one end of the town and we at the other, and resolved rather to decline engaging with them here than hazard the loss of your regiment, and put ourselves upon an engagement upon too much disadvantage. They exceeding us much in foot, and we having no grounds to fight our horse upon, we were drawing off (thinking to have marched in the flanks of them towards Manchester, to have gained a conjunction with our friends there).

But they seeing it presently drew through the town to fall upon us. Which we observing, and being so near to them, resolved to trust God with the issue, and He was graciously pleased to give us a comfortable success, to the praise of His great name, in a total rout of our enemies, who were increased to about 1.400 or 1.500, and I had only my own regiment, and those three companies of foot and the 60 horse and dragoons. The dispute lasted almost an hour, and very difficult to us, they overlaying us so with foot (having no ground but the lane to

¹ James Stanley (1607–1651), Earl of Derby, commander of Royalist forces marching to reinforce Charles II's army at Worcester

² A reference to Cromwell's victory at the Battle of Dunbar (3 September 1650)

fight in) the same place where your regiment beat up Hamilton's rear,¹ but at last God gave us the day; and I desire that He alone may have the praise for that great salvation he showed to us, a company of poor creatures.

As for the particulars, I cannot yet give a very exact account to your excellency, but only that the Lord Derby is sore hurt, but escaped, though narrowly; the Lord Widdrington² and Colonel Sir William Throgmorton³ dying, and Tillisley⁴ and Bayntun slain; and several other very considerable persons of great quality, and about 60 soldiers. And we have taken most of their colors, and about 400 prisoners.

I thank God I lost not one officer, nor above ten soldiers that I can hear of, but many horses killed and spoiled with their pikes, which I hope your excellency will be pleased to consider and repair. The country begins now to bring in prisoners, and show themselves to me; but before, but a few appeared. The enemy's word was Jesus, and their signal a white about their arm. Our word was Providence, and signal the green.

Henry Cary, *Memorials of the Great Civil War in England* (London: Henry Colburn, 1842), II:338–341.

¹ Following the Battle of Preston, Cromwell defeated elements of the Scottish army holding Wigan (19 August 1648)

² William (1610–1651), Baron Widdrington

³ Major-General Sir William Throgmorton (–1651)

⁴ Major-General Sir Thomas Tyldesley (1612–1651)