

BATTLE OF WIGAN LANE

Colonel Robert Lilburne (1613–1665)

to Sir William Lenthall (1591–1662), Speaker of the House of Commons (1640–1655, 1659–1660)

Wigan, 25 August 1651

My Lord General¹ being pleased to command me to stay here to assist the well-affected against the Earl of Derby, who was then at Warrington in this county with some considerable force, both from the Isle of Man and which he had from the Scots' army, wherewith he did not only much encourage the enemies, but also discourage all the well-affected in these counties of Lancashire and Cheshire, and whereof he thought himself wholly master—as indeed he was—and none in those counties were able or durst appear against him. And begun to beat drums and raise men in all places where he came, and would have been very strong in a short time, not only through the excess of many malignants, papists, and disaffected persons, but that assistance the ministers and those who are called Presbyterians afforded, and would have more abundantly appeared. For they are the men who are grown here more bitter and envious against you than others of the old cavaliers' stamp.

The power of the Almighty was very much seen in the total overthrow (I hope) of that wicked design which was laid and hatched not only here, but through the whole north of England, who was getting into the like posture, as you may further understand by those papers I have here sent you. But that God, Who has all along appeared with us and for us, has showed Himself very good and powerful in the dissipating of this enemy, who was about 1.400 or 1.500 strong. I had only three companies of foot, about fifty or sixty dragoons, and about thirty horse from Liverpool, with my own wearied and somewhat shattered regiment, through our tedious march from Scotland and hard duty we had here.

Yesterday morning, about eleven or twelve o'clock in the night, the enemy marched from Preston, we lying within two or three miles of them, where we expected those supplies of forces which came not. Some of our intelligence informing us the enemy were running away towards their army with what they had gotten, we pursued them hither, with some confidence that that intelligence was true; and the rather we believed it because of some discouragement we put upon them the day before.

But upon our approach hither, we found it otherwise, for they were bending their course towards Manchester; where they had not only very great hopes of surprising my Lord General's regiment of foot, but also great assurance of the assistance of 500 men in and about that town. But upon the sight of our near approach, they unexpectedly put themselves into a posture of fighting with us, which then we endeavored to decline, in regard of the great advantage they had by their many foot and hedges, and the danger we apprehended my Lord General's regiment of foot at Manchester to be in. We were drawing off, thinking to have marched in the left flank of them, thither to have gained a conjunction with our friends, who had order to march to me that day towards Preston. We had thought to have met them in the way, having sent several messengers to let them know both the enemies' and our motion.

But the enemy, perceiving us to draw off, quickly advanced upon us with their horse and foot. Which we perceiving, and that we could not go off safely enough, we fell to dispute with them, which lasted almost one hour. Our horse being not able to do any service but in lanes, and they over-powering us so much in foot, made the business very difficult that we hardly knew whose the day would be for so long; but therein was the salvation of God the more seen, and the great opportunity we had to destroy them. I desire that He may have the praise and glory of that happy success he was pleased to give unto us, His poor creatures.

Having given you this narrative in general, which I thought it my duty to do, this enclosed list will inform you further of the particulars. I desire the Lord would teach us to walk in some way answerable to those manifold

¹ Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658)

and gracious dispensations He daily gives us experience of, and manifests His love unto us in, that His name may be magnified in all we do in our several places and stations. This great mercy to us here I hope is the earnest of His further tenderness to the great concerns of all good people in this nation; which is the hearty desire of your faithful and most humble servant to my power.

This bearer was all the while in the engagement, and is able to give you a fuller relation.

I have not lost an officer in this engagement, but one corporal and not above ten soldiers slain, but very many wounded.

Henry Cary, *Memorials of the Great Civil War in England* (London: Henry Colburn, 1842), II:341–345.