

FORD MADOX BROWN AND "CROMWELL ON HIS FARM AT ST. IVES":
A DEBT TO THOMAS CARLYLE

I have suffered so much myself from imaginary nervousness, and every friend I have has suffered so exactly in the same way...

No man ever does any good in the world without passing through the phase some time between the ages of thirty and forty. This is what I have endeavoured to depict in the Cromwell on his Farm, which seems to be so little understood by ordinary mortals.¹

Ford Madox Brown's interest in Cromwell dates from his period of "imaginary nervousness" in the early 1850s. About this time he read Thomas Carlyle's Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches, 1845, executed the Sketch for 'Cromwell on his farm' (c. 1853, Tate Gallery - Fig. 1) and began the drawing which is now in the Whitworth Art Gallery, Cromwell on his farm, 1853-56-76 (Fig. 2).

The theme of Cromwell on his farm at St. Ives, where Cromwell lived from 1631 to 1636, interested Ford Madox Brown for over thirty years -- from the time of the Tate and Whitworth drawings, begun c. 1853, to the Johannesburg Art Gallery drawing, completed 1887 (Fig. 3). It was not a casual interest. Ford Madox Brown evidently identified with the hypochondria Cromwell suffered before the first Civil War of 1642-46 and, through this identity and resultant sympathy, he appears to have developed a quasi-religious reverence for the leader. The source for the four "Cromwell on his farm" pictures and the catalyst for Ford Madox Brown's attitude to Cromwell appears to have been Thomas Carlyle's Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches.²

The first sketch for Cromwell (Tate version) appears to have been done after Ford Madox Brown had read Carlyle's Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches and had been impressed by the character study of Cromwell before the Civil War. The composition for all four works has already been defined. In 1856, about three years after completing the Tate sketch and beginning the Whitworth drawing, Ford Madox Brown went to the Fen country with Carlyle's book as guide to experience for himself the ambience of Cromwell's St. Ives period. The details he gleaned were incorporated in the Whitworth drawing and served as a basis for the Lady Lever painting (Fig. 4), commissioned in 1872 and completed in 1874. The Johan-