

## *Introduction*

But he had his setbacks. At some unknown date he and his wife had what he refers to in his diary as their ‘old differences’, and separated for a time; in March 1658 he underwent a dangerous operation for the removal of a kidney stone. By the following August, however, he had recovered and had settled with his wife and a maid in Axe Yard, Westminster.

Shortly afterwards, in September 1658, Oliver Cromwell died, and the republic which Mountagu and Pepys served lost the only leader capable of holding it together. Mountagu had supported, in vain, every proposal to make the Protectorate hereditary, as well as the more radical proposal to make Cromwell King. After Oliver’s death he transferred his allegiance to Richard, his son and successor, but Richard was too diffident a politician to survive in the jungle rivalries which now broke loose. With his overthrow in April 1659, Mountagu distanced himself, in common with many other moderates, from the revolutionary cause. Despatched with a fleet to the Baltic in March 1659 to mediate in the war between Sweden and Denmark, he found himself increasingly at loggerheads with the government, in which unyielding republicans were now in the ascendant. He made contact with agents of the exiled Charles II, and in August brought home his fleet in circumstances which suggested that he was eager to take part in the royalist risings of that month. Arriving after their collapse, he found himself in disgrace, and retired to Hinchingbrooke for the winter. Pepys, who at the end of May had paid him a brief visit in the Baltic carrying letters from the government, remained in charge of his affairs in London. His letters to Mountagu on public as well as private affairs were one of the means whereby his master kept in touch with events.

In October the general officers of the army took over the government, dismissing the Rump parliament (i.e. what remained of the parliament of the Civil War) which had been in session since Richard’s fall in April. But they no longer commanded a revolutionary army worth the name, and their men, unpaid for months, deserted in droves. The public, tired of political experiments, gradually set their hopes on a return to the old scheme of government, or something like it – a monarchy and a parliament. The most powerful section of the army, under General Monck in Scotland, had declared its opposition to the October *putsch* and