

COLONEL THOMAS BLOOD

Colonel Thomas Blood, adventurer, was born about the year 1618, probably in the County Clare, his father being an iron-master who also had property in the counties of Meath and Wicklow. Part of his early life was spent in England, where he married a Miss Holcroft of Lancashire in the year 1648. He returned to Ireland as a Lieutenant in the Cromwellian Army and was given grants of land in payment for his services.

After the restoration of Charles II, however, under the Act of Settlement, Blood, with many other Parliamentary officers, was deprived of his property and, in revenge, formed a conspiracy to capture the Duke of Ormonde. Although the plot was discovered, Blood attempted to carry it out and failed. His brother-in-law, Lackie, was captured and executed in spite of a brave effort on Blood's part to release him. A large reward was offered for Blood's capture, dead or alive, but he escaped by using various disguises, being sometimes dressed as a Quaker, at other times as a priest, and eventually got away to Holland.

His adventurous spirit soon brought him back to England and we next hear of him, with three companions, rescuing his friend, Capt. Mason, from a special guard of eight picked soldiers. Blood was wounded in the fray and, a reward of £500 being offered for his capture, he lay hidden until his recovery.

In December, 1670, under the supposed instigation of the Duke of Buckingham, he again made an attempt on the life of the Duke of Ormonde. The intention was to hang the Duke on a common gibbet at Tyburn. Blood with five companions captured the Duke, but, unfortunately for the success of his plan, he went ahead to prepare the gibbet and left the Duke to be brought on by his confederates. The alarm was raised, Ormonde was rescued, and Blood was again forced to go into hiding with a price on his head—this time £1,000.

Six months later Blood entered on the most daring event of his career, his attempt to steal the Crown Jewels. His plans were elaborately laid. First he gained the confidence of Edwards, the Keeper, and went so far as to arrange a marriage between his supposed nephew and Edwards' pretty daughter. The meeting of the supposed bride and bridegroom was the day fixed for the attempt, and, without rousing suspicion, Blood soon had the Keeper gagged and bound, and made off with the Crown, the Globe and the Sceptre. Unfortunately for Blood, the Keeper's son returned unexpectedly and raised the alarm. The thieves were pursued and captured and the priceless jewels recovered. "It was a bold attempt," said Blood, "but it was for a Crown."

He refused to confess except to the King himself, and his audacity saved him. Charles was intrigued with so daring a rogue and instead of having him gibbeted he restored him to his forfeited Irish estates, worth £500 a year.

Shortly afterwards he fell out with his protector, the Duke of Buckingham and made scandalous imputations against his character. The latter took an action against Blood for £10,000 damages, but, before the action could be heard, Blood died on the 24th August, 1680, after an illness of fourteen days, involving a speechless lethargy. Suspecting another trick of this inventive scoundrel to escape the Court sentence, the authorities had his body exhumed and examined, and proved beyond doubt that, contrary to all expectations, Blood had died a natural death.

An elegy published in the year of his death ends with these lines:

Here lies the man who boldly hath run through
More villainies than ever England knew;
And ne'er to any friend he had was true.
Here let him then by all unpitied lie,
And let's rejoice his time was come to die.

SIR JOHN BOURKE OF BRITTAS

Sir John Bourke of Brittas, commonly called "Captain of Clanwilliam," was born about the middle of the 16th century. His father, Sir Richard Bourke, was brother to Sir William, First Baron Castleconnell, and his mother was Honor, daughter of Conor O'Mulryan, Chief of Owney. Before marrying Bourke, Honor had been previously married to De Lacy of Bruff, and was mother of that famous soldier of the Desmond Wars, Sir Piers De Lacy.

Sir John was married to Grace, the daughter of Sir George Thornton, who received some of the confiscated Desmond property in Co. Limerick. He, therefore, kept aloof during the Desmond Wars, but, during Sir George Carew's victorious march through Limerick after he had taken the Castle of Lough Gur, he was called upon to submit to Queen Elizabeth. He replied, stating he considered "it was sinful and damnable personally to submit to Her Majestie," and Sir George Carew thereupon laid waste his lands. On submission he was reprovved for his "rebellious obstinacies," but through the good offices of Sir George Thornton, was pardoned and restored to his estate. He did not feel happy under the "protection" of the Queen and applied for leave to travel to Spain on a "pilgrimage to St. Iago," but this was refused him and he was compelled to remain with his family at Brittas.

When the religious persecutions which followed the suppression of the Fitzgeralds began, Bourke incurred the enmity of the Government by his open avowal of the Catholic Faith and by his protection of the persecuted and hunted clergy. During the short lull in the persecutions he openly attended Divine Service at St. Mary's Cathedral, temporarily restored to the Catholics, and was received together with his family and retainers, into the Dominican Confraternity of the Holy Rosary.