

DR. GEORGE CLARKE: LETTERS AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

Dr. George Clarke (1661-1736), politician and virtuoso, was the son of Sir William Clarke, secretary at war to Charles II, who was killed in a naval engagement against the Dutch in 1666. George entered Oxford university in 1676, and took the degrees of BA in 1679, MA in 1683, BCL in 1686 and DCL in 1708. He was elected to a fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford, in 1680, which he retained for life as a secure retreat when out of favour politically. He was elected MP for the university in 1685, but never sat, as the parliament was prorogued and never reconvened.

In March, 1682, he was appointed judge-advocate of the army in place of his stepfather, who resigned in his favour, a position he held until 1705. As there were few land forces under Charles II, there were not many courts martial, but under James II, he was at the court martial in September, 1688, of the lieutenant-colonel and five captains of Berwick's regiment at Portsmouth, who were cashiered after refusing to accept James' order to add five Irish recruits to each company of the regiment.

In 1690, he accompanied William as secretary at war in Ireland, and remained, under Solms and Ginkel, until December, 1691, when he returned to England with Ginkel, becoming secretary at war there until 1704. On the accession of Queen Anne in 1701, he became secretary to her husband, Prince George of Denmark, Lord High Admiral, and from 1702, joint secretary to the admiralty. He sat in parliament from 1702-1705,

when, as a result of opposing the Whig candidate for the speaker's chair, he lost all his positions and returned to Oxford. He was MP again between 1711-1713, lord of the admiralty from 1710-1714, and, in 1717, became MP for his university, continuing to represent it until his death. He was a substantial benefactor of the university during his lifetime and by his will, and was universally regarded by his contemporaries as a virtuoso and man of taste.

The autobiography, which was written late in life, ending at 1734, two years before his death in his 74th year, is unique among Williamite sources in attributing the raising of the 1690 siege solely to the shortage of powder and shot caused by Sarsfield's action at Ballyneety, without any reference to the weather. It was published in Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Leyborne-Popham MSS*, 1899, pp. 271-281. The correspondence to Daniel Finch, Earl of Nottingham, secretary of state for war and one of the council of nine advising Queen Mary while William was in Ireland, was published by the Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Finch MSS*, ii, 1922. The newsletter enclosed with his letter of 22 August may have been printed here by Edward Jones, king's printer, who accompanied William in Ireland.

SOURCES: *Dictionary of National Biography; Kings in Conflict: Catalogue*, (Ulster Museum, Belfast, 1990), [No. 151, for Edward Jones].



LETTERS OF DR. GEORGE CLARKE TO THE EARL OF NOTTINGHAM

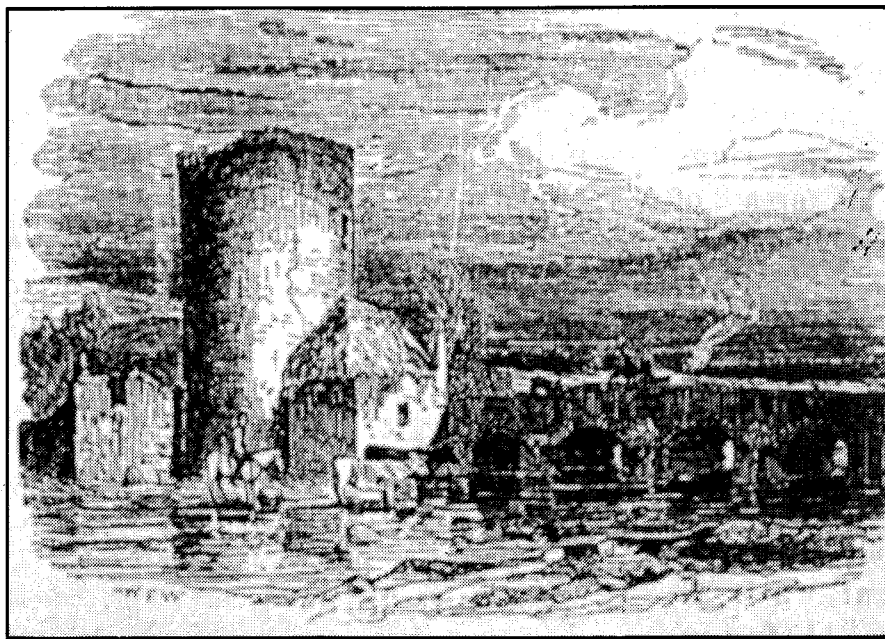
Aug. 4, 1690. Camp at Golden Bridge.

I hope this is the last I shall send to your lordship from this camp; his majesty came hither today, and tomorrow Lieut-Gen. Douglas will join us, so that our guns being come with our provisions to Waterford from Dublin, we shall march tomorrow or next day at the farthest towards Limerick, which, we are informed by a deserter, was left last Saturday [2nd] by the French, who are gone with their cannon and baggage for Galway. If their squadron of ships that sailed by Waterford has bent its course thither, as there is reason to believe, perhaps Monsieur Lauzun may embark for his own country.

Aug. 10, 1690. Camp before Limerick.

Yesterday I had the honour of your lordship's letter of the 2nd inst., and in pursuance of the leave your lordship gives me of acquainting you with our affairs here, can inform your lordship that about two hours before the express came, his majesty was got within less than half cannon-shot of Limerick, which was much more than could have been expected, if any but Irish had had the defending of the passes to the town, which are all narrow lanes, planted on both sides with thick quick-set hedges. Those who understand what belongs to this kind of fighting are of the opinion that our men behaved themselves very bravely. I am sure they went up with all the cheerfulness imaginable to the hedges the enemy had lined, and beat them from enclosure to enclosure till they retreated behind their works. His majesty sent a trumpeter into the town to tell the governor he expected he should send out some officers to hear what concessions he would make, provided he surrendered; his answer was that he was much surprised at the letter, and that he should endeavour to preserve the Prince of Orange's esteem by vigorously defending those troops which the king had given him the honour to command; it was signed Boisseleau. The Duke of Berwick, Sarsfield, Luttrell, Dominick Sheldon, Wauchope and Barker were by when this answer was sent to Sir Robert Southwell, but my Lord Tyrconnell was at the camp about two miles off, on the other side of the water.

This morning great part of our army is gone over the river, the Irish that were set to guard the ford retiring as soon as they had made one discharge: pray God preserve the king's person, and all the rest will probably do very well, for men cannot choose but fight where his majesty sets them such an example.



Round tower and bridge at Golden, Co. Tipperary. From 'Illustrated Guide to the Great Southern and Western Railway' by George S. Measom, Dublin, 1866.

There have been several alarms given to the country by the rapparees, who are numerous in some parts. Upon advice of their design to attack Youghal, a detachment of 600 horse and dragoons was sent that way, which has at present dispersed them, and when the Protestants have arms put into their hands, which his majesty is doing as soon as possible, they desire no assistance from the standing forces to enable them to deal with them.

Aug. 18, 1690. Camp before Limerick.

Till last night the army has lain still before Limerick, but then the trenches were opened by the English and the Dutch on the right and the Danes on the left. The former have carried on their approaches within pistol-shot of the counterscarp, but the ground being rocky have not been able to make them deep, so that at present they are not so secure as the Danes, who have fallen upon better ground, and have entrenched themselves very safe. Two little redoubts the Irish had made were taken and are still kept, and at this moment our batteries are firing upon them, though not with so good effect as could be wished, since our six four and twenty pounders are not yet come from Carrick, and we find the want of those guns that Sarsfield disabled. One thing is pretty strange, that though the trenches were carried 1200 yards, we have lost but one man, and there are not above twelve wounded. The rapparees under my Lord Clancarthy have burnt Tallagh in the county of Cork, and the last advices say are retired towards the town of that name. On Thursday [14th] Col. Sarsfield repassed the Shannon at Portumna, and drove along with him those draught horses which he took of ours. Yesterday

[Sun. 17th] he was with the Duke of Berwick and Dominick Sheldon at Loughrea, within twelve miles of Galway, with most of their horse and dragoons, who are in a very indifferent condition, and inclinable to separate, if we may believe five trumpeters that came from them this morning and last night. 'Tis now confirmed from all hands that above £30,000 of King James', and a very great quantity of money belonging to Count Lauzun, my Lord Tyrconnell and several others, together with their best goods were cast away in the river, some time before we came hither. My Lord Tyrconnell and the count are gone to Galway, where the French are still kept under the walls.

Aug. 22, 1690. Camp before Limerick.

I send you the news of this place in the paper which comes along with this, and have nothing to add but that the battery there mentioned is finished, and plays with good effect upon a tower that did us considerable mischief. Several of our great guns are come from Waterford and tomorrow we expect the whole train, but whether we shall need them for the town on this side the water is questionable, as some who have come over from the enemy assure us that they are breaking down the bridge between the towns and building a little fort by the waterside, which looks as if they designed to retreat to the other side.

NEWSLETTER
ENCLOSED

Aug. 21, 1690. Camp before Limerick. Till yesterday we lay pretty quiet in our trenches, except that on the 18th at night an attack was made upon a fort of the

enemy's that was near the counterscarp, which proved unsuccessful by reason of the darkness of the night, and our men being unacquainted with the ground where the approach was to be. The 19th was spent in securing the trenches, which before were not so deep as was necessary, and yesterday the 20th the resolution was taken again to attack that fort, which the confusion that happened among our men in the night prevented our being masters of before. To avoid the like disorder his majesty directed the guards to be relieved in the afternoon, that those who mounted might know the ground they were to defend or gain; and accordingly on the 19th, the Duke of Würtemberg, Maj-Gen Tettau, Sir J. Hanmer and Brigadier la Melloniere went on, about four in the afternoon, with a battalion of the Blue Guards, the regiments of Meath, Lisburn, Cutts, Belcastel and two of the Danes, and finished a battery of three pieces of cannon of 24lbs. within a little of the fort, and played upon it from thence a great part of the 20th in the morning, to make it more easy for our men to get over. About two in the afternoon the assault was begun by six score of grenadiers, commanded by four captains, who advanced from the trenches to the fort, near seven score paces, and received the enemy's fire from the counterscarp and fort, still reserving their own till they came near enough to make it certainly take place. Col. Belcastel put himself at the head of these men. By that time they were advanced to the outside of the fort, and clapping a ladder against it, immediately got up, and was followed by the grenadiers, who leaped in after him, and killed sixty of the defendants that could not escape by reason of the narrowness of the passage, and took one of the three captains that commanded there prisoner. All this while the enemy fired incessantly from the walls and counterscarp, but by the help of fascines our men covered themselves in a little while from the shot; and our batteries playing at the same time made them retire from that part of the wall, which in a manner hung over them. They found in this fort some bombs that the Irish had buried, but had not time to set fire to; and in the middle of the action a good quantity of powder blew up in their battery, just by, which stopped their firing from thence upon the flank of our men for some hours. At five in the afternoon they made a sally from the town, both of horse and foot, upon which a detachment under the command of Col. Boncour and Lieut.-Col. Windham advanced within less than carbine-shot of the wall to sustain the regiment of Belcastel; and the regiment of Gröben did the same, who were just then come into the trenches, it being the hour for relieving the guards. The enemy's horse, commanded as we are told by Col. Henry Luttrell, kept close



John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough. Painting by Sir Godfrey Kneller. Blenheim Palace.

under the town wall, so that ours could not charge them by reason of a ditch that was between; but the foot, that were posted with a bank before them, soon forced them to go back a little faster than they came out. All this while, our horse was open to the fire that was made from the walls and counterscarp, and suffered very severely. Col. Boncour was wounded, and so was Col. Neuenhuse who came after to the head of them, and Lieut-Col. Windham, who brought them off, had his horse shot under him, himself only and one more escaping unwounded of seven officers of the regiment of Byerley that went upon this service. The regiment of Schömberg behaved themselves very bravely, and of the Earl of Oxford's 21 men, not one came off but was either hurt himself or had horse wounded, and Capt. Lucy, who commanded them, was shot through the head with a musket-ball. At two this morning [21st] they made great fire from the walls and glaces of the counterscarp, but our men in the trenches were ordered upon pain of death to keep theirs, for fear of a sally, and some platoons of shot advancing towards the enemy that were drawn out, obliged them soon to retire, so that the workmen have continued their trenches to the fort, and from thence to a bog

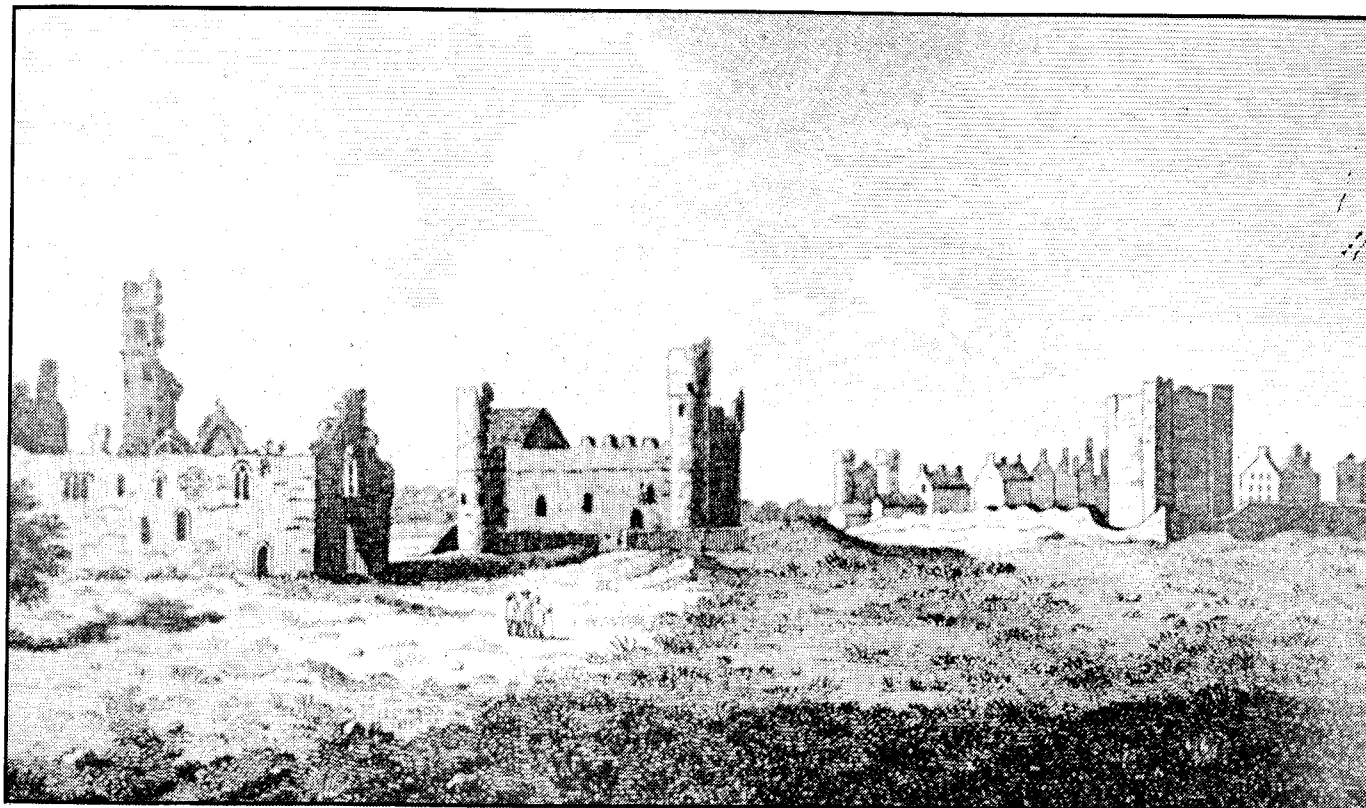
which secures them entirely from any sally the town can make, and by four this afternoon a battery will be finished very near the wall.

Aug. 28th, 1690. Camp before Limerick.

You will have from other hands a particular of yesterday's action. Our men held the counterscarp for an hour and a half, but the numbers poured in from the town obliged them to quit it.

Sept. 2, 1690. Camp at Caherconlish.

Your lordship will know so much better than I can tell you the progress and raising of the siege of Limerick, that I shall trouble you with nothing but the account of a safe and uninterrupted coming of the army to this old camp, from whence we marched with design of taking the town. The deserters that come in acquaint us with Monsieur Boisse-leau's being disgusted, and that he is gone for France, and that their horse went away towards Loughrea, though some of our intelligence would make them cross the Shannon under Sarsfield's command. The Protestants of this country don't think it very safe to stay at home, and indeed the outrages of the Irish make most people of their opinion, so that all will be left desolate behind us. We hope for my Lord Marlborough's



View of Kilmallock, c. 1790.

arrival, and that the season may be favourable enough to permit the taking of Cork and Kinsale, which would be a very advantageous enlarging of our quarters. The king got last night to Waterford, but I believe this wind will not permit him to go to sea.

Sept. 7, 1690. Camp at Tipperary.

We are come thus far from Limerick without any greater loss than some of our soldiers whose desire of plunder carried them too far from the camp. Lt.-Gen. Douglas marched this morning towards the north with part of the forces that are, and are to be, under his command, the regiments of Deering, White and the Governor of Enniskillen being there already. The retreat of the army from Limerick has made the Papists of this country very insolent, and, we fear, put a stop to the embarking of the French, who waited the event at Limerick before they would take their final resolution. My Lord Tyrconnell, Count Lauzun and Mrs. Boisseleau are gone for France, and Anthony Hamilton at present commands in the town. Our marches are slower than otherwise they would be, by reason we want horses to draw our heavy cannon, which came away from Limerick in very good time, so that 'twill be longer than was thought before the army goes into winter quarters.

Sept. 10, 1690. Camp at Tipperary.

Our army still continues at this place in expectation of my Lord Marlborough, whose arrival must direct our motions. On the 8th, a strong detachment of horse

and dragoons, under the command of Maj.-Gen. La Forest, went towards Kilmallock, in order to take possession of that town, and a party of foot was commanded to follow, in case he should meet with opposition. When he came thither, the gates were shut, and those within demanded liberty to march away with their arms and baggage, but at last agreed to be gone without either, and their hands in their pockets. La Forest thought that they had been a garrison that was provided with necessaries for a defence, but they proved to be only a party of two hundred from Limerick, that about an hour before came thither to refresh themselves. Those that came yesterday from Limerick tell us all of the French are embarked at Galway and sailed for France, and that yesterday ten sail of their ships came into the Shannon. The weather begins to be very ill for those that lie in the field, and is truly Irish.

EXTRACT FROM THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DR. GEORGE CLARKE

From Finglas the army marched southwards, and came at last to Carrick, where the king stayed till he received an account from Maj.-Gen. Kirk, who commanded before Waterford, that the place had capitulated and the garrison was to march out next day. Upon which his majesty went thither and returned at night to Carrick, and next day went to Dublin in order to go to England, where

he thought his presence necessary to quiet the apprehension the nation were under upon the French threatening to land, for they hovered about the coast some time after the advantage they had over our fleet off of Beachy. But by that time his majesty got to Dublin the fright was over, and he did not pursue his voyage, but took a resolution of returning to the army.

After the king left Carrick the army, under the command of Count Solms, advanced to Golden Bridge, and there his majesty joined it again from Dublin and marched it to Limerick. In his march he received an account that the French regiments had left the place and were gone to Galway, which was very true, and they continued at Galway all the time the army lay before Limerick, and as soon as the siege was raised set sail for Brest, and the Earl of Tyrconnell and Monsieur Lauzun with them. Indeed the French did little or no service in Ireland, not having struck a stroke that I know of while they were there, for they retired from the Boyne very early in the day, and marched by way of Limerick to Galway, from whence they embarked from France, as is before mentioned. The ill-success at Limerick is well known to be owing to the want of ammunition occasioned by Sarsfield's falling upon the artillery &c. at Cullen, as it was coming up to the siege, so that after a fruitless attack of a breach, which we had not powder or shot to make larger, the king left the army and embarked at Duncannon for England, leaving Count Solms at the head of the troops.