



THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION

BY LIAM IRWIN

There would not have been any sieges of Limerick in 1690 and 1691 if there had not been a monarchical and constitutional upheaval in England in 1689, and that 'Glorious Revolution' would not have happened if William of Orange had not needed English support in his titanic struggle with Louis XIV of France. The war in Ireland in 1689-91 was remembered in folk tradition as *Cogadh an Dá Rí*, 'the war of the two kings': it was more accurately the war of three kings. It involved directly the deposed King James II attempting to recover his three kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland from William, Prince of Orange and Stadholder of the Republic of Holland, who as William III had become joint ruler with his wife Mary, elder daughter of James, under the terms of the revolution of February, 1689. Indirectly, Louis XIV of France, at war with William as leader of a Grand Alliance of European states, was simultaneously trying to divert William's energies from the continent and assist his cousin and ally, James, in regaining his kingdoms. The list of kings could indeed be further lengthened. The disputed succession to the throne of Spain might also rest on the outcome of the war in Ireland, while most of the other monarchs in Europe, particularly the Emperor Leopold I, were anxious that Louis should not prevail over William. Along with most Catholic rulers, the Pope wanted the Protestant William to contain the autocracy and ambitions of the French king. Without exaggeration, one can say that the outcome of the war in Ireland, particularly in 1690, was of vital importance for the contemporary history of the entire European continent. An understanding of this background is essential for a full appreciation of the significance of the siege of Limerick in August, 1690.

Two quite unrelated events in June, 1688, the birth of a royal baby in England and the death of an elderly archbishop in Germany, were to prove decisive catalysts in determining the fate of at least three kings, their disparate kingdoms and the history of most of Europe for much of the next century. In England by the late 1670s, it was clear

that Charles II and his Portuguese queen, Catherine of Braganza, would not have any children. There was a certain irony that Charles II, who had a number of natural children from his numerous affairs, should fail to produce a

legitimate heir. His successor was his brother James, Duke of York, who had converted to Roman Catholicism. The prospect of a Catholic monarch was viewed with great suspicion by the Protestant majority and various attempts



Louis XIV by Hyacinthe Rigaud.

were made to exclude James from the succession. These coincided with intense anti-Catholic feeling in England generally, culminating in the hysteria of the Popish Plot. An incredible series of allegations about the activities of Catholics were spread by an ex-priest, Titus Oates, resulting in increased suspicion and persecution. In Ireland the most notable victim of this scare was the Archbishop of Armagh, Oliver Plunkett, who was put to death in July, 1681. Plunkett was, in fact, the last important Catholic to suffer, as the fury generated by Oates had begun to subside and the inevitability of James becoming king was beginning to be accepted. Indeed when Charles died in 1685, the accession of James was remarkably smooth. This was due, in no small measure, to the firm expectation that the reign of a Catholic king would be a temporary arrangement, lasting no longer than the lifetime of James himself. His heirs were the two surviving daughters from his first marriage to Anne Hyde. Both were staunch Protestants and married to equally firm Protestant husbands. While Mary and William had no children, the younger daughter, Anne, was frequently pregnant, though as yet she had no surviving children. Her husband, Prince George of Denmark, is best remembered by the devastating comment of Charles II: 'I have tried him drunk and I have tried him sober, either way there is nothing in him'. In 1674, three years after the death of his first wife, James had married a fifteen year old Italian Catholic, Mary of Modena. This raised the fear that she would produce a son who would be raised as a Catholic and would take precedence in the succession over Mary and Anne. Mary of Modena had given birth to four children, none of whom survived infancy and she also had four miscarriages. By 1685, it was confidently expected that there would be no Catholic heir.

The widespread initial acceptance of James and the public goodwill towards him was dramatically illustrated shortly after his accession in the response to two rebellions which were raised against him. The Duke of Monmouth, an illegitimate son of Charles II, received some support from the ordinary people in the south-west of England but none of the gentry, or any other area, rallied to him and the revolt was easily suppressed. It is of interest that at the decisive battle of Sedgemoor in which Monmouth was defeated in July, 1685, a major role was played by a cavalry commander named Patrick Sarsfield. Sarsfield thus began his fateful association with the fortunes of James II. He was, in fact, seriously wounded during this battle. A further curiosity is that Sarsfield's elder brother, William, was married to Monmouth's sister Mary, another illegitimate child of Charles II by his mistress Lucy Walter. Even less success attended the small



King James II, 1685. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

scale Presbyterian uprising in the west of Scotland led by the Marquis of Argyll. Furthermore, parliament, which had been notably circumspect in its dealings with Charles, voted James more money in 1685 than any previous English king had ever received in peacetime. Given these clear demonstrations of support, even of popularity, it is quite extraordinary how quickly and totally James destroyed the goodwill that existed towards him.

His first mistake was the unnecessarily severe punishment of those who had supported Monmouth. In the 'bloody assize', presided over by the notorious Judge Jeffreys, three hundred people were sentenced to be hanged, drawn and quartered. This caused great revulsion among the ordinary people. More influential men in parliament saw in it the use by the king of the judicial system to implement political policy. This not alone revived memories of the autocratic rule of Charles I, but also fuelled fears that James might wish to emulate his cousin, Louis XIV, in creating an absolutist state in England on the model of France. This anxiety was intensified by the king's religious policy. James claimed that he wanted nothing more than religious toleration and equality. This, in a sense, was the truth. He was genuinely unhappy at the persecution of the Huguenots by Louis, who revoked their charter of toleration, the Edict of Nantes, in 1685, and had no desire to attempt anything similar in England. His policy of restoring Catholics in England to positions of power and influence would be presented in modern terms as positive discrimination or affirmative action. If he had confined himself to that aim, James would have faced formidable obstacles.

It seems clear, however, that he intended something far more drastic; the restoration of the Catholic Church to a dominant position at the expense of the Anglican Church. Such a policy would have needed extreme tact and diplomacy and to have been undertaken very slowly. James adopted the opposite approach. He appears to have had little appreciation of the delicacy of his position as the Catholic king of an overwhelmingly Protestant, and increasingly alarmed, country. This weakness was intensified by his reliance on the advice of his confessors, especially the Jesuit, Fr. Petre. James was a deeply religious man, tortured by his inability to live up to his convictions, especially in his moral behaviour. Charles II had characteristically prophesied that 'my brother will lose his kingdom by his bigotry and his soul for a lot of ugly trollops'. The mistresses of James were notorious for their lack of physical beauty. One of them recorded candidly: 'I wonder what he sees in us all - for none of us is handsome and if we have wit, he hath not enough himself to find it out'. There was obviously no truth in the sardonic observation of Charles that they were selected for James by his confessors, but in every other respect these men held a powerful sway over the king, further alienating his subjects from him and invariably giving him disastrous advice.

Ultimately, it was a combination of religious and political miscalculations which precipitated the expulsion of James. In addition to promoting Catholics to prominent positions at Court, in the government and in the army, James was determined to circumvent the penal legislation which had existed since the reign of Elizabeth I and had been increased during the anti-Catholic scare of the 1670s. These laws had been passed by parliament, and there was no possibility that the members would agree in the climate of the time to rescind them. Indeed James had not recalled parliament since November, 1685, when it had raised objections to his plan to give officer positions to Catholics. He decided instead to use the discretionary royal power known as the prerogative, to dispense with the anti-Catholic laws. This approach was termed 'Indulgence' and in April, 1688, James issued his Second Declaration of Indulgence which the Anglican bishops were ordered to read from their pulpits. The Archbishop of Canterbury and six other bishops refused, whereupon James imprisoned them in the Tower of London and had them put on trial for seditious libel. The charge was not that they had refused to accept the principle of religious freedom but that they had questioned the king's power to dispense with the penal laws. In this way the potent cocktail of religious and political fears was mixed. Arbitrary government, where the



monarch could ignore the law laid down in parliament, was allied to the advancement of Catholics in all spheres of English life and seemed to confirm the trend towards a French-style absolutism. The trial of the Seven Bishops therefore took on exceptional significance. It was arranged for June, 1688, precisely at the point when Mary of Modena gave birth to the son who would ensure the continuation of the Catholic dynasty. A truly explosive situation had arisen which James, predictably and fatally, mishandled, thereby setting in train the events which would cost him his throne.

The other event in June, 1688, which was to prove decisive was the death of Maximilian Henry, Archbishop of Cologne. The See of Cologne, apart from being a strategically located ecclesiastical region in the north-west of the Holy Roman Empire, was important because its occupant was one of the Electors who chose the Emperor. The Holy Roman Empire, caustically dismissed by Voltaire as being 'neither holy, Roman nor an empire', was a loose confederation of states roughly corresponding to modern Germany, Austria, Switzerland and northern Italy. Archbishop Maximilian, a Bavarian prince, was under the influence of Louis XIV, and had appointed a nominee of the French king, Cardinal William von Furstenberg, as his coadjutor. Louis was determined to have von Furstenberg appointed to the vacant archbishopric to ensure the continuation of French influence in the empire. The Emperor Leopold was equally determined to prevent this, and when he succeeded, with the help of Pope Innocent, in frustrating the appointment, Louis sent French troops to occupy Cologne and in September, 1688, invaded the Rhineland and Palatinate. This event highlights the issues which dominated European politics at this time. They were a complex mixture of political, dynastic, religious and commercial rivalries. Ultimately, everything centred around Louis XIV of France. Louis succeeded to the throne at the age of four in 1643, was crowned in 1654, but only became the effective ruler in 1661, when the powerful minister, Cardinal Mazarin, died. From then, until his death in 1715, he was an absolute monarch, having no powerful ministers and refusing to delegate any power or decision-making. Under his rule France, with its twenty million people, became pre-eminent in European politics, diplomacy, art and above all, war. Louis aimed to extend French power and influence in every possible way, often using the perennial pretext of aggressors that the defence of France necessitated the action. In the period 1667-'88, Louis was, on the whole, successful in his aims. Apart from his own undoubted skill, the weakness and disunity of the other great European powers were important factors in his success. The empire, with its three

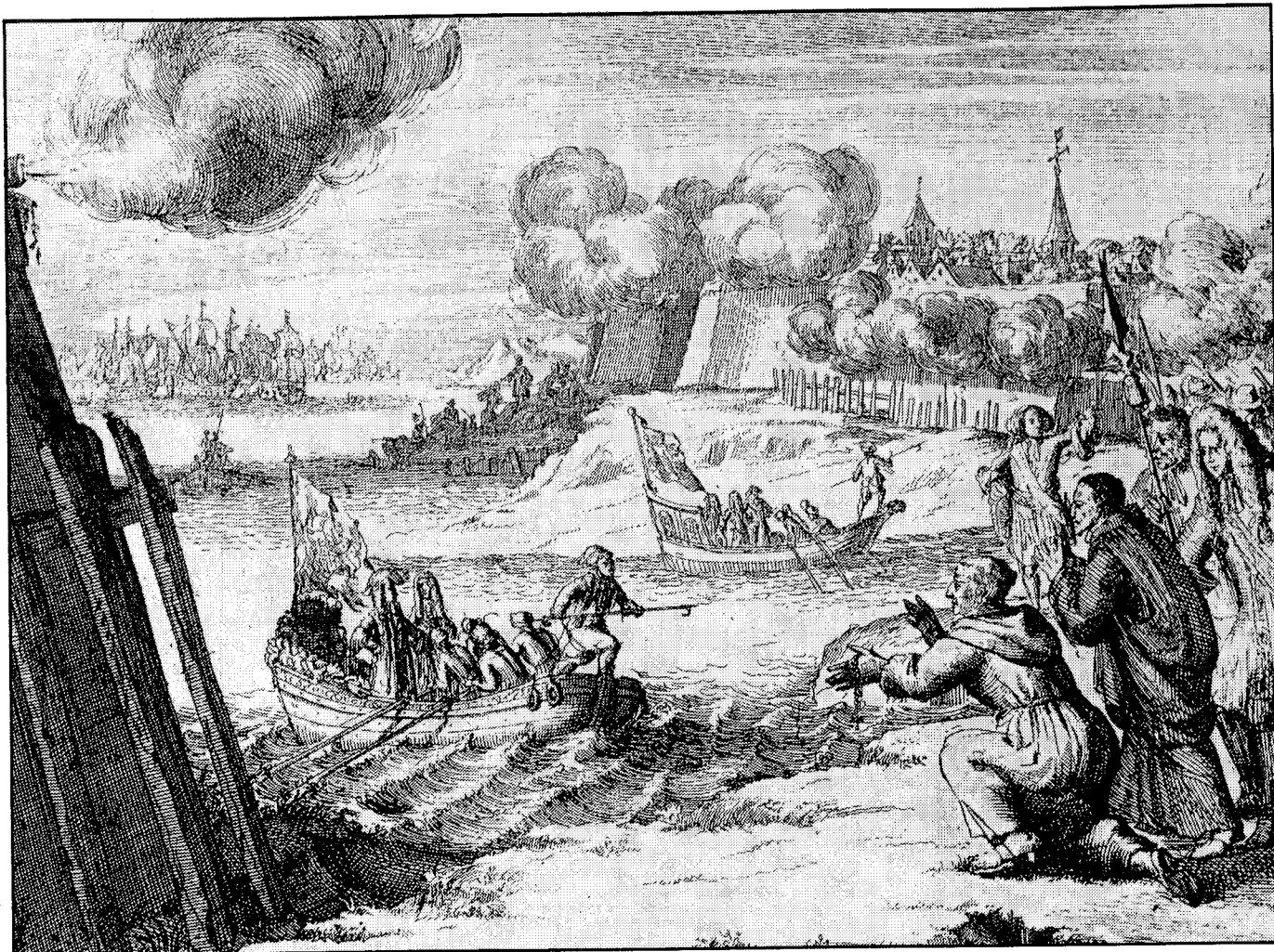


King William III, attributed to Jan Wyck. Ulster Museum.

hundred and sixty odd states, was endemically divided. Its princes were more jealous of each other and fearful of the emperor than of France. The emperor himself had to face a threat to his Hapsburg dominions from the Turks, who even reached the gates of Vienna in 1683 and threatened all of Europe. Spain, ruled by the imbecilic Charles II, had lost its former importance. Eventually, Europe had to look to Holland and its ruler, William of Orange, for a leader and defender against the insatiable aggression of France. Despite some earlier attempts at containment, it was not until 1689 that an effective opposition to Louis was organised. This was the 'Grand Alliance' set up under the 'Treaty of Vienna' in May, 1689, where the two great maritime powers of Holland and England, both now ruled by William, joined with Leopold of Austria on behalf of the Empire. This alliance was subsequently strengthened by the inclusion of Spain, Sweden and Saxony. Pope Innocent XI also gave covert support to the alliance. He had clashed with Louis over royal control of the

church in France, had been horrified by the refusal of French help to defeat the Turks, and regarded the persecution of the Huguenots as very unwise.

The central dynastic issue of the time was the Spanish succession. The successor of the ailing King Charles would control not just Spain, but the Spanish Netherlands, strategically placed between France and Holland. There was no undisputed heir to the impotent Charles, the physical and mental casualty of generations of Habsburg intermarriage. The Emperor Leopold claimed the succession on behalf of the Habsburgs. Louis XIV based his claim on his Spanish wife, Maria Theresa. Should Leopold succeed, France would be surrounded by Habsburg territories. The power and prestige of the emperor had increased enormously, and with the threat from the Turks about to be removed, Louis realised that France was now vulnerable. Hence his obsession with the See of Cologne and his fateful decision to invade the Rhineland. In his attempt to pre-empt a Habsburg attack, Louis inadvertently created a far more



James II arriving at Kinsale, Co. Cork, in March, 1689.

formidable alliance against him.

It is easy to over-emphasise the role of religion in the wars of this period. William of Orange was undoubtedly the champion of Protestant Europe and his religion was the key element in his acquisition of the kingdoms of James II. William's greatest preoccupation, however, was the aggression of Louis XIV: he was anti-French long before the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. The outrage felt in Protestant states at the treatment of the Huguenots undoubtedly assisted William's plans to form an effective alliance against France. Other rulers and states were to use religion as a cloak for their political ambitions. Brandenburg was under no particular threat from France in 1688, nevertheless the Elector, Frederick III, used the revocation as the excuse to end his state's alliance with Louis which had failed to deliver the expected benefits. He skilfully exploited his subjects' fear of Catholicism to gain support for this policy change. A similar intertwining of religion and politics can be seen in Sweden and some of the north German principalities. An examination of most periods of conflict in human history will show an economic motivation. This was also true of this

period, with commercial competition between the maritime powers of England, the Netherlands and France being an important contributory factor. In 1689, circumstances were to dictate that these complex issues of European history would become entangled briefly but fatefully with the peculiar and equally intractable problems of Irish history.

There were about two million people in Ireland at this time. Half a million were Protestant, descendants largely of English and Scottish planters, soldiers and adventurers who had settled here from the mid-sixteenth century onwards. The majority Catholic population were predominantly of Gaelic background, though the Old English element was disproportionately important. The Old English were the descendants of the original Anglo-Norman settlers who had rejected the Reformation but claimed special treatment on the basis of their origins. By the late seventeenth century, England simply classed them as 'Irish papists' along with their Gaelic coreligionists. Patrick Sarsfield illustrates this Catholic duality, coming from an Old English family with a Gaelic Irish mother. Most Catholic landholders were

Old English, though Catholics by then owned a mere 22% of the land, a result of the confiscation and plantation policies of the preceding one hundred and fifty years.

While the twin issues of land and religion were to dominate the politics of the period, it should be remembered that over 80% of the population were landless labourers living in wretched cabins to whose material lifestyle a Jacobite victory would scarcely have mattered. The main aim of the Catholic leaders was restoration of lands to former owners, particularly those confiscated since 1641, when Catholics had owned nearly 60% of the land of Ireland. In particular, they wanted the repeal of the Acts of Settlement and Explanation which had been passed in the early 1660s. These acts effectively confirmed the Cromwellian plantation and were regarded as a breach of faith by Charles II towards the Irish Catholics, who had supported his father against Cromwell. A return to the status quo of 1641 would, however, have been of little benefit to the Gaelic Irish whose aristocracy had mostly lost their lands prior to that date. The second demand, which united both groups, was for an end to all discrimination against

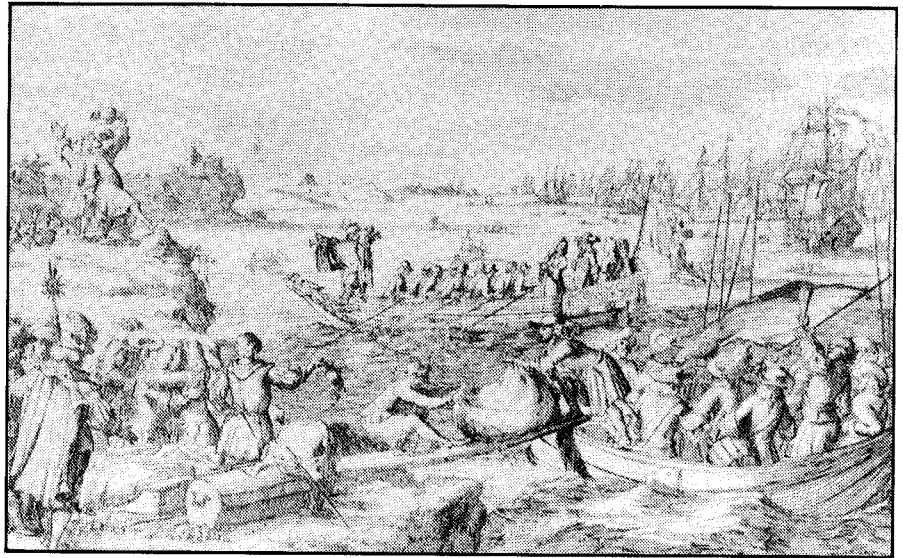


Catholics. It was recognised that the particular circumstances which had arisen in 1689 gave them a unique opportunity to extract these concessions from a king who desperately needed their help, but who had also shown promising favour towards his co-religionists since his accession. Events were to show a greater reluctance on James' part to accede to these requests than his Irish supporters had anticipated. For all the inhabitants of Ireland the wider issues of European diplomacy and war had little relevance. In Ireland it was merely another stage, though a decisive one, in the struggle for power and dominance between the Catholics who had to rely on James II and the Protestants, whose champion William III was to become.

The expectations which Irish Catholics felt at the accession of James and the corresponding fears of Irish Protestants had been soon fulfilled. The man chosen by James to implement his 'Catholic design' in Ireland was Richard Talbot, who was created Earl of Tyrconnell in June, 1685. Though he was not fully in charge in Ireland until 1687, he had already remodelled the army, putting Catholic officers in charge and greatly increasing its numbers, so that it became a large and predominantly Catholic force. As chief governor, he extended this policy to the administration and the judiciary. Catholic sheriffs were appointed for most counties, and the number of Protestant judges was reduced to a minority. Urban areas were forced to surrender their charters, which resulted in new Catholic dominated corporations being installed. This was in fact a direct imitation in reverse of what had been done under Cromwell in the 1650s.

As his popularity declined in England, James brought over Irish Catholic troops. This was a politically disastrous move as it further alienated public opinion from him. Indeed this utilisation of 'Irish papists' may have been the crucial factor in his overthrow. Even in the Irish context, it was a fatal move, as many of the troops sent to England were removed from the northern part of the country, particularly Derry, thus seriously weakening the one area where resistance to James could be expected.

The sequence of events which transformed the situation occurred with remarkable ease. William, in response to the invitation from England, landed with a large army in Devon in November, 1688. James quickly panicked, probably when he realised that so many crucial army officers and political figures were supporting William. He decided to flee to France to seek aid from his cousin and ally, Louis. William summoned parliament in England, which declared that James, by fleeing, had in fact abdicated, and offered the crown jointly to William



William III disembarking at Belfast Lough.

and Mary in February, 1689. Scotland also accepted the change of monarchs, while Ireland alone of his three kingdoms remained loyal to James. William's main preoccupation, having established his position, was to return to the continent to continue the war against France. Louis craftily decided to divert William by encouraging and aiding James to use Ireland as a stepping stone to regaining his kingdoms.

Tyrconnell had held Ireland for James with the exception of the north, where the garrisons at Derry and Enniskillen declared for William and Mary. James arrived in Ireland in March, 1689, landing at Kinsale and proceeding without delay to Dublin. He was accompanied by a number of men who were to play a prominent role at Limerick, including his natural son, James, Duke of Berwick, Major Boisseleau and Patrick Sarsfield. James had a straightforward plan in Ireland. He would destroy the small pockets of Williamite resistance in the north-west, link up with the Scottish Jacobite army and invade England. In April, James began the siege of Derry, confident that the city would not resist. Indeed the governor, Robert Lundy, would have surrendered, but the citizens dismissed him and endured terrible deprivations during the ensuing fifteen week's siege. Eventually, the city was relieved and James abandoned the siege and retreated to Dublin. This reverse, allied to the death of the Scottish Jacobite leader Viscount 'Bonnie' Dundee, forced James to abandon his planned invasion of England. The war would now be fought in Ireland, and James had to wait for William to pursue him. Two weeks after the relief of Derry, a Williamite force of ten thousand men arrived under the command of Marshall Schomberg. Having taken Carrickfergus, Schomberg marched to Dundalk, where he was

confronted by James in September, 1689. Fearing that his army was not sufficiently large, Schomberg refused to fight, and in the resulting stalemate both armies, as was normal in seventeenth century warfare, retired to winter quarters.

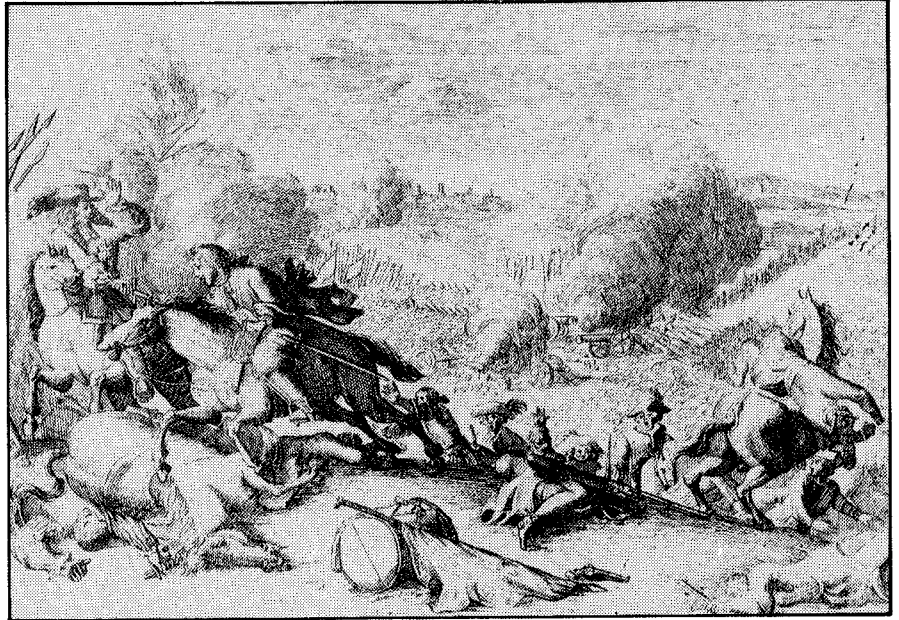
In March, 1690, the Williamites were further strengthened by the arrival of seven thousand Danes under the command of the Duke of Würtemberg. This force did not come to Ireland for any political or ideological reason; they were mercenary soldiers who fought for William because they were paid to do so. In the same month, Louis XIV finally sent some French troops to assist James. Louis' main concern was to keep William occupied in Ireland. He did not want to weaken his own army, and insisted that the seven thousand troops he sent to Ireland should be replaced by Irish recruits. This led to the strange spectacle of over five thousand Jacobites leaving Ireland at this crucial stage. The justification offered by this exchange was that the Irish were poorly trained and ill-equipped, while the French were experienced soldiers with modern weaponry and expertise. More absurdly, the French, at the insistence of James, were put under the command of a foppish courtier, the Comte de Lauzun, with limited military skill or experience.

William finally arrived in Ireland in June, 1690. James marched northwards from Dublin and decided to face his opponent at the river Boyne. The fateful battle took place on 1 July. The Williamites succeeded in crossing the river, and despite some resistance, especially from the cavalry, the Jacobites were eventually forced to retreat. The casualties were comparatively light, one thousand Jacobites and five hundred Williamites killed, and though James was defeated, he was not routed. However, he had lost both his nerve and the will to fight on. Dublin was abandoned, and

James quickly returned to France. Tyrconnell was left in command of the Jacobite army, and he ordered a retreat to Limerick. Lauzun and the French joined him in the city. William decided to continue the war hoping that the Jacobite Irish would surrender, or failing that, he was confident of easily capturing Limerick and quickly ending all resistance. Tyrconnell and the French shared William's view of the hopelessness of defending Limerick and urged capitulation. It was left to Patrick Sarsfield to insist that they fight on, and eventually his arguments were successful. Limerick would not surrender. William reached the city on Saturday, 9 August, 1690. The stage was thus set for the first Williamite siege of Limerick.

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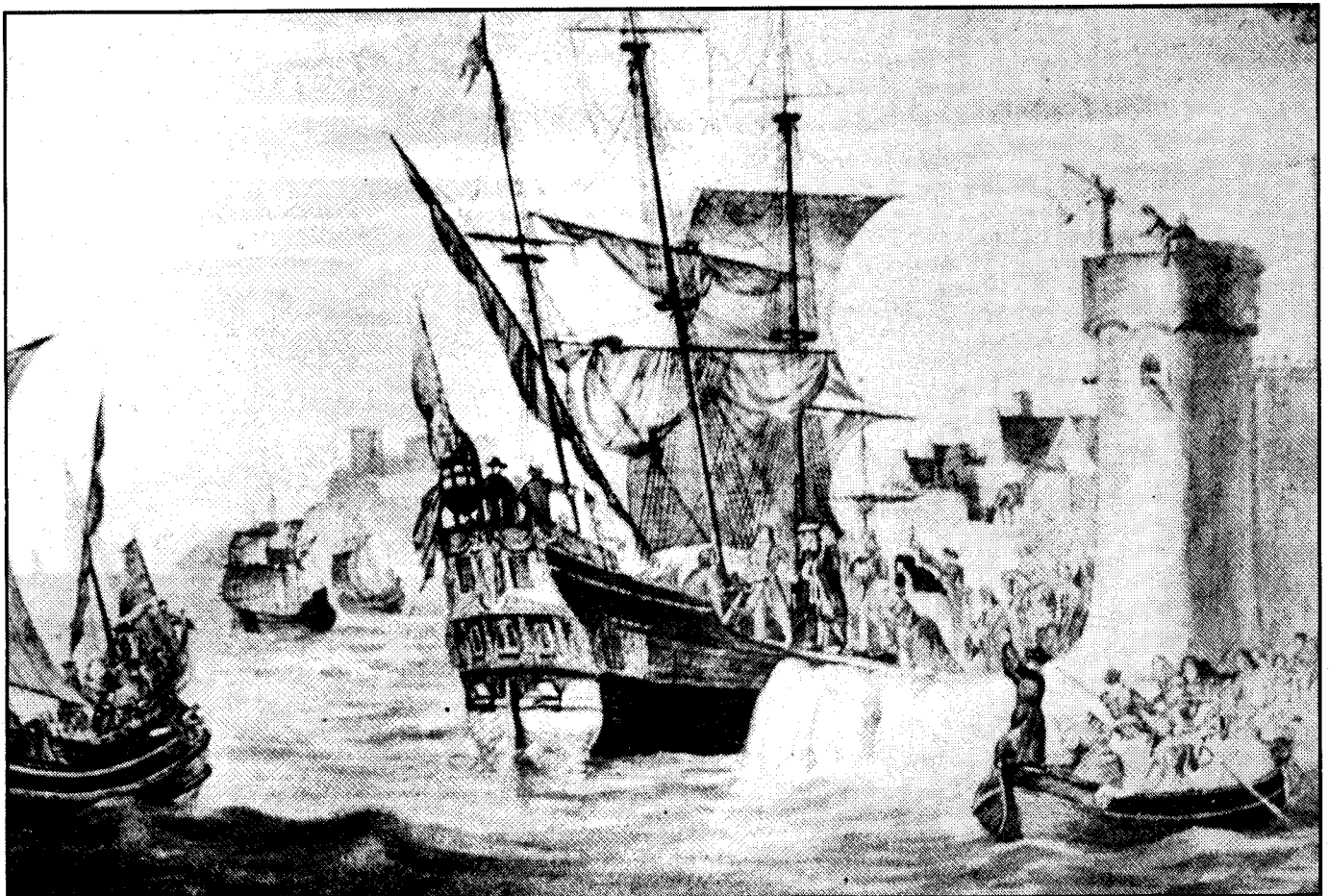
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