

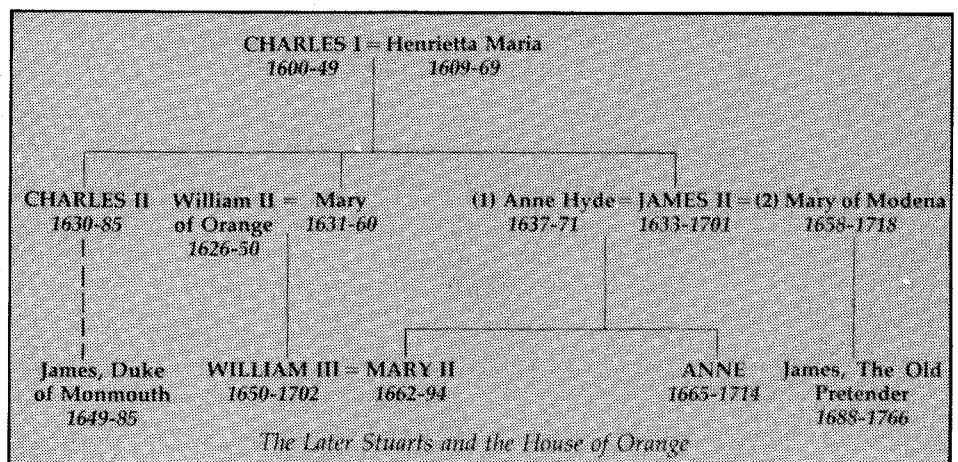


# IRELAND AND JACOBITISM

BY RICHARD HAYES

**I**n the struggle for kingship in Ireland between two foreign princes, a large part of Ulster stood behind William of Orange while the rest of the country rallied to the cause of James the Second. From the division of the nation in its support of the rival factions came an unhappy heritage and tradition. For one thing, in that last decade of the seventeenth century lies the main cause of the partition of Ireland which constitutes an acute national problem in our day ... Part of the heritage too was the inception, in Ireland as in Great Britain, of the cult known as Jacobitism, whose aim was the restoration of the Stuarts and which for the succeeding fifty years had repercussions in these countries and in the continent. The failure of the rising of 1745, when the white flag of the Stuarts went down at Culloden Moor, marked the end of Jacobitism as a serious political force. It did linger as a vague sentiment, a romantic tradition, for long afterwards and as such exists to a small extent up to the present ...

In most features Irish differed from British Jacobitism. The loyalty and devotion to James the Second and to his son and grandson, which stirred the enthusiasm of a considerable proportion of the people of England and Scotland, did not exist in Ireland. By the Irish participants on the side of James the Jacobite War from 1689 to 1691 was not regarded as a fight for a dynasty. The chiefs and nobles, who summoned local followers and led them into battle, had as their predominant motive the regaining of their confiscated lands. They had no affection for James, whom they used merely as an instrument in their designs. Nor was the war a religious one except in a subsidiary way – it was not a struggle between Catholic and Protestant, though it has been regarded as such ... A considerable number of Catholics fought in the Williamite army (its finest regiment, the Dutch Blue Guards, was almost exclusively Catholic), while a substantial number of Protestants were



in the army of James. Apart from the fighting forces, the Protestant archbishop of Armagh and seven Irish bishops of the Protestant church supported James. A number of high-placed ecclesiastics of the same creed sacrificed their worldly prospects by refusing to take the oath of allegiance to William; the provost of Trinity College and leading state officials were Jacobites in conviction. And, finally, at the beginning of the war, James appealed in vain for help to the Catholic powers of Europe, while the Williamite victory was received with elation in Rome and was celebrated with *Te Deums* in the Catholic cathedrals of Austria.

Jacobitism had not for its aim, as it is sometimes said to have had, the establishment of an independent Ireland. Most of the Irish gentry, who captained their dependents in the war, were not separatists. James the Second himself had no sympathy – quite the contrary – with the idea of an autonomous or semi-autonomous Irish nation. A few extracts from the *Instructions* left by him to his son illumine his attitude towards the country – its national status, native culture and traditions. 'Great care must be taken', he writes, 'to civilise the ancient families (of Ireland) by having the sons of the chiefs of them bred up in England ... by which means they will have greater dependence on the Crown and, by degrees, will be weaned from

their natural hatred against the English'. He writes, too, that the garrison towns should not have natives of Ireland as governors, nor any troops except English, Scotch and strangers, 'for the Irish are easily led by their chiefs and clergy'; and he recommends that 'the O's and Macs who were forfeited for rebelling in James the First's time ought to be kept out of their estates'. No native too, he maintains, should be Lord Lieutenant, and the Irish parliament must be subordinate to that of England. There is no doubt that James, an intensely patriotic Englishman, did not love Ireland and that, had he triumphed, her political status would have remained unchanged.

There was, as has been said, in the Jacobites of Ireland none of that loyal and romantic attachment to the Stuarts which was so marked in those of Scotland. This is particularly seen in the spirit pervading the Jacobite poetry and ballads of the two countries. Those of Scotland show an intimate personal devotion to the Stuart princes which is absent from those of Ireland. In these latter, immensely smaller in bulk compared with the former, the theme is conventional and lacks the fervour of those of the Highlands. The romantic figure of Prince Charles Edward did often, it is true, inspire the Irish poets. But when their verses are most poignant

and spontaneous, it is not of him they sing but of their country's unhappy fate, the tragedy of her exiled sons and chiefs, and the hope of their return. In this respect they mirror the state of the nation and of popular feeling. At times, too, one of them breaks away from convention and strikes a harsh realistic note:

*King James came over to Ireland  
 Wearing an English shoe and an Irish  
 brogue  
 (Do tháinig Rígh Seamus chughainn go  
 h-Eirè  
 Re na bhróg Ghallda 's re na bhróg  
 Ghaolach).*

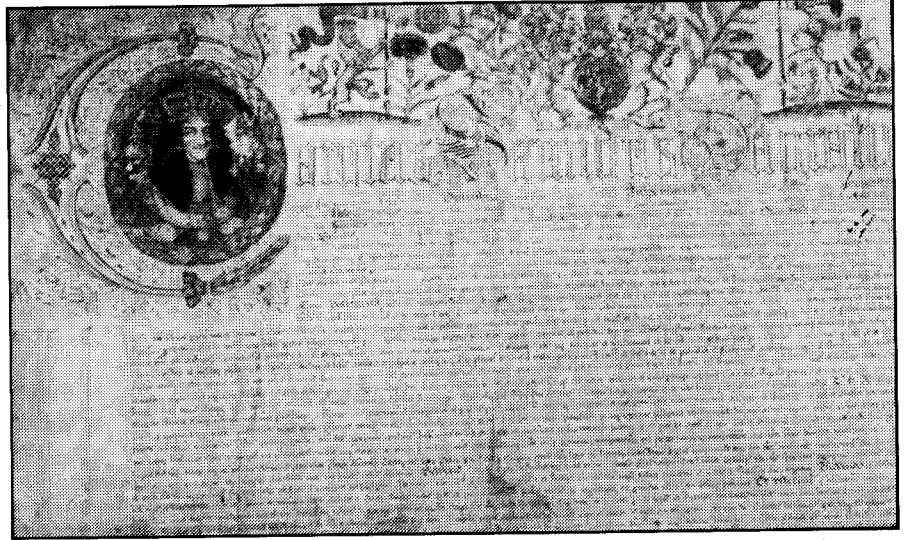
and 'it was his coming', the verse continues, 'that took Ireland from us'. Another figures Ireland lamenting bitterly that

*It was the second James who crushed my  
 senses  
 And left me lamenting ...*

while still another descends to vulgarities in characterizing the dethroned king.

Not the least significant feature of the aftermath of the Jacobite War in Ireland was the emigration to the Continent of most of her native nobility and their followers. They sacrificed everything out of loyalty to a dubious sense of honour that, however admirable it may be, cannot divest them of blame for deserting in her hour of need their country, which they left behind without leaders to guide or hearten. They had, it is true, a vague hope of returning with foreign aid, and became engaged abroad in many projects to liberate their native land. These, however, proved futile, and their only effect was to intensify the harsh regime at home, where a horde of foreign planters now reigned supreme.

On the other hand, as a result of the going abroad of the chiefs and nobles, the feudal conception of patriotism associated with their caste began to vanish. It gradually gave way to a spirit of democratic nationalism, hitherto unknown, which ultimately materialised in the United Irish movement in the last decade of the eighteenth century, and later in that of O'Connell. The new spirit appeared, as has been said, in the eighteenth-century poets – in the nationalistic note that crept into their verses, in which the Stuarts were forgotten and Ireland and her hopes were sung. At the same time it should not be forgotten that the effects on many aspects of Irish life from the loss of her native aristocracy must have been profound. W.B. Yeats, speculating on this from one viewpoint, wrote: 'Since the flight of the Wild Geese, who might have grown to be leaders in manners and taste, Ireland has had but political leaders'.



*Heading of Inspeximus of Charles II, c. 1660, with portrait of the monarch.  
 Limerick Museum.*

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In England and Scotland the literature of Jacobitism is an extensive one, to which two recently published books are a valuable addition.<sup>(1)</sup> One is a study by F.C. Turner of the life and character of James II of England, round whom more controversy has raged and who has been more unfairly treated by many of his biographers than any other British monarch. He has been charged with cowardice, duplicity, intolerance, cruelty; his vices have been stressed or exaggerated, his virtues ignored or minimised, his motives misjudged. To such an extent has this been carried that it is in many ways a caricature of him which has come down to us. Eulogists, on the other hand, have portrayed him – it must be said with more fairness – as a patriotic Englishman with views of tolerance in advance of his age, a brave soldier in his youth, a stranger to deceit in an age of duplicity, an uncompromising Catholic who sacrificed his kingship for his religious convictions. In recent times, at any rate, there has been, as in the case of his brother Charles II, a more judicial assessment of his character and actions than in the past; and it is one of the merits of Turner's book that it is in many respects an example of the change. Basing it entirely on original material, he has no prepossessions and is uninfluenced by what Hilaire Belloc has described as the vulgarity and falsehood of official Whig history.

The author deals in detail with some of the charges with which historians from Burnet to Macaulay and others later still have assailed the character of the Stuart king. Regarding that of cowardice, for example, he shows that when James, then Duke of York, fought in the French army in the war of the Fronde the evidence is overwhelming that he was exceedingly brave – 'so brave as to be

outstanding in an army in which courage was not exceptional'. He fought in four campaigns by the side of Turenne, the greatest soldier of the age, who admired him for his skill and valour; and Condé, equally illustrious in the art of war, wrote that, as regards personal bravery, he desired 'to see nothing superior to the Duke of York'. His gallantry was particularly notable at the battle of the Dunes, in which he boldly rallied his broken forces several times and charged the enemy again and again. Similar valour was shown by him as a naval officer in 1665 during the Dutch war at the battle of Lowestoft where, with men falling about him, he remained on deck for eighteen hours under heavy fire. In contrast with such exhibitions of personal valour were his vacillation and pusillanimous conduct a few years later in the campaign against William of Orange – especially in Ireland. The change is attributable, as is now generally recognised, to a premature mental decline due probably to riotous living.

The nature of other charges against James is fairly discussed and it is made clear that many of them, originating in contemporary Whig calumnies to justify the Revolution, are unfounded. Dealing with that of intolerance, F.C. Turner states that it was James's intention, the passion of his life, not only to make Catholicism dominant in England but to grant toleration to all sects. He declared that, 'though he wished to see his own religion embraced, he thought it contrary to the precepts of Holy Writ to force conscience, and that he expected to see his Catholic subjects enjoying the freedom of other Englishmen and not treated as traitors'. Some of the most striking pages in this biography discuss without prejudice the opinion, held by not a few, that the Stuart king was very much in advance of his time in the matter



of religious toleration; his settled conviction was that no one should be made to suffer for his religious beliefs. His biographer writes that not only was it excusable for James to entertain such aspirations for his co-religionists, but that it was his clear duty as a convinced Catholic to do all in his power to realise them. Unfortunately, in trying to do so, he was indiscreet and hasty in his actions and took no account of their consequences.

At the time of the second Exclusion Bill, designed to deprive him of succession to the throne, James was persistently advised by his friends and by his brother, the king, that he should abandon Catholicism or make at least outward conformity to the Church of England, and thus make his accession assured. Rejecting the advice, he replied that, rather than adopt it, he hoped that 'God would give me grace to suffer death for the true Catholic religion'. It was one of many instances of his readiness to sacrifice his earthly inheritance for a greater thing. Commenting on his attitude, Turner writes that in adopting it 'he rose to a pitch of moral heroism to which we cannot but pay respect, and which would have struck a chord of sympathy in the hearts of the Exclusionists themselves if they had not been blinded by political and sectarian passion'. And a little later, he again openly professed his faith, declaring that, as to abandoning Catholicism, 'by God's grace he would never do so damnable a thing'.

While so expressing his religious convictions James, despite a defective sense of judgment, realised the powerful forces against which he had to contend – and contend in lonely isolation. For a hundred years previously there was a growing distrust and hatred of Catholicism in the mass of the English people, based to no small extent on the belief that no Catholic could be a loyal subject without reservations in favour of the popes. Gradually, as F.C. Turner says, all the latent Protestant fury fastened itself on James, who became the embodiment of the menace it dreaded. There was especially banded against him a clique of powerful magnates – cunning, ruthless, unscrupulous, and typified in their leader, Shaftesbury. They had a violent hatred of Catholicism, which the masses to some degree shared, and which they seized as an instrument to strike at and weaken the monarchy. But against malignity and intrigue James stood steadfast until in the end these forces, exploiting his own infirmities, overwhelmed and undid him.

To Irish readers the pages of this book devoted to the Jacobite campaign in Ireland will be of particular interest. The campaign makes one of the many tragic chapters of Irish history and marks the crisis in the ill-fortunes of James. It was in Ireland, as the author says, that he



*King Charles II (1630-85), c. 1665.  
Museum of London.*

revealed most clearly his characteristic defects as a ruler. His failure was partly due to the fact that he made no study of local conditions; he was convinced that the only Irish grievance was the religious one. Like so many Englishmen before and since, he regarded Ireland as a conquered country to be exploited for the benefit of England. On the other hand, there was little if any affection or disinterested loyal sentiment in the Irish for him. He was, it is true, received with acclamation on his arrival among them; but they were soon disillusioned on finding that their hopes in him were unfounded. D'Avaux, the French ambassador, reporting his experiences in Ireland to Louis XIV, wrote that 'five months after James's landing in Ireland he had entirely lost the affection of the Irish people who, at his arrival, had been ready to do anything for him'. And when James arrived in France after his flight on the Boyne reverse, he had already forgotten Ireland – lost to him, he said, by Irish cowardice; and there is no evidence, as Turner says, that he ever again took more than a passing interest in that country.

On the whole, this book is in many ways the most impartial and scholarly biography of James the Second that has yet appeared. Basing his work on original authorities and new material, the author challenges many of the traditional views that have hitherto been accepted as orthodox. And on what may fairly be regarded as controversial matters he is eminently just and detached. In contrast with the distorted – at times caricaturish – portrait of James presented by Whig writers, one finishes this book with the impression of a man with many infirmities and many virtues, with a fervent patriotism (which did not include his Irish kingdom), with a fine nobility

and an unswerving fidelity to the Catholic faith which cost him his kingly heritage. Though it is perhaps doubtful if its author would agree with the view, this biography is in some ways a rehabilitation of the last of the Stuart kings who, with all their faults and failings, wore a grace and a distinction that have not since appeared on the English throne.

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Sir Charles Petrie is probably the greatest living authority on Jacobitism, and his history of that movement recently published is, as one would expect, of singular interest and value. Many will remember his striking book on the subject which appeared in 1932. As a result of further study, he has added to and revised that work to such an extent that a new edition in two volumes has been necessary. The first volume deals with the period 1688-1716; the other, not yet published, will continue the history down to the '45 and the extinction of Jacobitism as a political force. Many separate works have been written on particular periods of the movement, on the lives of its chief figures and on its raisings. Personal memoirs, too, have added to its literature. This work, however, is the first which gives a comprehensive history of the movement as a whole from its beginning to its eclipse. Round Jacobitism, indeed, has grown up an immense saga of legend and poetry, and it has been embellished by a halo of romance that has often obscured its realities in a mist of sentiment. It is one of the commendable features of this book that it dissipates the mist and gives a clear survey of the movement, while not ignoring the gallantry and pathos that often marked it.

The birth of Jacobitism is generally associated with the flight of James II in 1688. Petrie states, however, that its seeds were sown at the time of the Restoration nearly thirty years previously. The plant rose above the ground, he says, in the reign of Charles II with the appearance of many of the events which led to his brother's loss of the throne. One was the outburst of anti-Catholic feeling, largely due to suspicion of France, then the dominant power in Europe and regarded by the mass of Englishmen as the ally of Rome. The religious hostility was accentuated by the conversion of James, then Duke of York; by the supposed Popish Plot; and by other happenings. After James ascended the throne, his efforts in the cause of religious toleration fanned the flame and helped to recreate the same coalition of interests against him as had sent his father to the scaffold. His own lack of firmness too, after the landing of William of Orange, played into the hands of his enemies and proved a fatal mistake. Sir Charles Petrie, with good reason, believes that, if he had stood his ground, engaged the enemy





*James, Duke of York, (later King James II), as Lord High Admiral, c. 1675.  
National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.*

immediately and appealed to the national dislike of foreigners, he would probably have won and saved the throne. Instead, despite the entreaties of his best friends, he became a fugitive, fled to France and never saw England again.

A similar weakness was shown by James later in the disastrous Irish campaign, although in this instance it was but a minor factor in its failure. The infirmity to which it was attributable and its causes have been referred to in a previous page. It is Petrie's opinion that the king's upbringing as a sailor and soldier unfitted him to solve complex political problems, affected his nervous system and left him in civil life a poor judge of men. Other features of his character, as revealed in his actions, are discussed dispassionately in this book.

Regarding the vexed question of his religious convictions, the author writes: 'Many accusations, several of them only too true, have been brought against James, but it has never been suggested that he was otherwise than perfectly sincere in his religious opinions'. His effort for religious toleration was misinterpreted, its failure being due to the want of tact that distinguished him. To the author he seems too straightforward to be a successful politician, and he did not know what dissimulation was. His creative work for the navy, for which he never got full credit, displayed his genius for organisation and was one of many proofs of his intense patriotism.<sup>(2)</sup> Sir Charles Petrie's final summary is that none of the more serious charges, once brought against James, can be proved and that his blunders were very clearly

due to the limitations of his intellect.

Ireland's part in the Jacobite movement is clearly sketched in this history, in which the author furnishes an intimate and personal acquaintance with the tangled situation existing there in the reigns of Charles II and James II. The account of its political and religious state under the former king is, perhaps, a little rose-coloured. His picture of the country as 'happier than for many a long year' differs from that of Lecky, whose opinion was that as a result of the legislation passed in that reign 'the downfall of the old race was all but accomplished'. There is in the book a clear and careful comparison of the relative strength and personnel of the Jacobite and Williamite armies. In that respect Petrie's statement that there was probably a higher percentage of Catholics in the army of William than in that of James will surprise many readers. The book, too, has a vivid and masterly description of the clash at the Boyne. The author proves that the so-called battle was really a retreat of the Jacobite forces, which was only saved from becoming a rout by the charges of the Irish Horse and the tactics of the French Regulars. The Irish campaign, he shows, failed for three main reasons; the ill-equipped Irish army; the lack of a capable general; and the pusillanimity of James. One of the features of the war in Ireland 'to the eternal credit of his Irish subjects' was that for a year after the king's flight they fought on. Far different was the attitude of the English Jacobites, who contented themselves with drinking toasts to 'The King over the Water'. It prompts Sir Charles to the reflection that, if the drinking of toasts could have affected the political situation, James would have been carried to the throne on a wave of enthusiasm and claret.

#### REFERENCES

1. *James II*, by F.C. Turner, London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1948, and *The Jacobite Movement, The First Phase, 1688-1716*, by Sir Charles Petrie, London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1948.
2. One of the latest assailants of James's character, Winston Churchill, the English politician, charges him with acting in the interests of France. It is difficult, as Sir Charles Petrie says, to reconcile the charge with James's blunt refusal to accept the assistance of Louis XIV. Churchill in making the charge is defending the attitude of his ancestor John Churchill, who was one of the leading traitors against the king to whom he had sworn allegiance. Hilaire Belloc's description of John Churchill as unscrupulous and treacherous is not unjust.

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