

# A JACOBITE NARRATIVE

## INTRODUCTION

*A Jacobite Narrative* was the title given by John T. Gilbert, former secretary of the Public Records Office of Ireland, to his publication in 1892 of part of the manuscript *A Light to the Blind*. The manuscript itself bears the title, partly obliterated, 'A Light to the Blind: Whereby they may see The ... Dethronement of J[ames] the Second, King of England: With [A br]ief Narrative of his warr in Ireland: and of the warr [between] the Emperor and the King of France for The Crown of Spain. Anno 1711'.

The original manuscript was in two volumes. Volume 1 of that set was acquired by Thomas Carte (1686-1754), biographer of James, first Duke of Ormond, and is now part of the Carte collection in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Volume 2 of the original, together with a transcript of volume 1 by the original author in smaller format, was in the possession of the Plunkets, Earls of Fingall, and was acquired from the 12th earl by the National Library (MSS 476-7) in 1934. Some passages in the Carte volume are omitted in the Fingall transcript.

The work is divided into three books, the first dealing with events in Ireland from 1641 to the death of Charles II in 1685; the second deals with the life of James II from his accession in 1685 to his death in 1701; the third deals with the life of James III, originally intended, as stated on the title, to end in 1711, but an addition takes it to 1713. The first and second books are in volume 1 of the Fingall MS and in the Carte MS. The third is in volume 2 of the Fingall MS.

The explanation of the title *A Light to the Blind* is given in the opening chapters – the writer regrets that the English people became blind to the merits of James II, and hopes that the light of reason will restore their sight. Given the political circumstances of early 18th century England, it is not surprising that it remained in manuscript.

The extracts published by Gilbert in *A Jacobite Narrative* are taken from the volume 1 of the manuscript, amounting to just over half that volume. The earlier and later periods of the reign of James II are omitted, the period from the revolution in 1688 to the treaty of Limerick, 1691, being included.

The manuscript was first published in



*Flag of Gordon O'Neill's regiment, 1690.*

Historical Manuscripts Commission, 10th Report, Appendix, Part 5, 1885. Gilbert's *A Jacobite Narrative* was first published at Dublin, 1892. This also contained 12 appendices, giving the text of contemporary documents, including Boisseleau's account of the 1690 siege, in French, and others from late 1690 and 1691, of Limerick interest. Gilbert's book was reprinted in facsimile, with an introduction by J.G. Simms, by Irish University Press, Shannon, in 1971.

The author of the manuscript is not known with certainty. Volume 1 of the Fingall set is inscribed 'Plunket's Irish Hist[ory], Vol. 1'. Gilbert says that family tradition ascribed it to Nicholas Plunket, an eminent lawyer and member of a branch of the house of Fingall, who may have been connected with a Plunket who, under the pseudonym 'John Rogers', acted in 1713-14 as a secret agent for James III in England and on the continent, and who corresponded with David Nairne, secretary to James III. Simms states that Nicholas Plunket, brother of the first Earl of Fingall, was an eminent lawyer, but as he died in 1680, he cannot be the author. He discounts 'John Rogers' as the author on grounds of lack of

stylistic affinities between *A Light to the Blind* and his writings (in the Nairne papers, Carte collection, Bodleian Library, published in J. Macpherson, *Original Papers*, Vol. 2, London, 1775).

Simms suggests that the author may have been Nicholas Plunket of Dunsoghley, Co. Dublin (1629-1718), a member of a collateral branch of the Fingall family. He was the compiler of 'A faithful history of the rebellion and civil war in Ireland ... 1641 ...', which his grandson, Henry, proposed, unsuccessfully, to publish. Carte saw this in 1733, and made extracts from it, calling it 'Plunket memoirs'. There are stylistic similarities between it and *A Light to the Blind*, neither was completed until the reign of Queen Anne (1701-14), and both refer to members of the Dunsoghley family. Further support for this Nicholas as author is the extraordinarily detailed account of the death of his youngest son, John, at Derry (*A Jacobite Narrative*, pp. 75-77), and the fact that Carte had access to both manuscripts.

Nicholas of Dunsoghley was in London in 1689, but due to the treatment of Catholics there, took refuge in France. After the war he returned to London. The Dunsoghley estate was restored under the treaty of Limerick, by what seems to have been a generous interpretation of its terms.

The author's attitude is clearly that of the Old English Catholics of the former Pale. His ideal is a Catholic Ireland led by a man such as Tyrconnell, for whom he has great admiration, and is sure that, had he lived, Limerick and Ireland would have been saved. Together with O'Kelly's *The Destruction of Cyprus*, they make clear how much the Jacobite cause suffered from internal dissensions.

The text here printed is taken from Gilbert's *A Jacobite Narrative*, summarising some longer passages, but omitting none of the meaning.

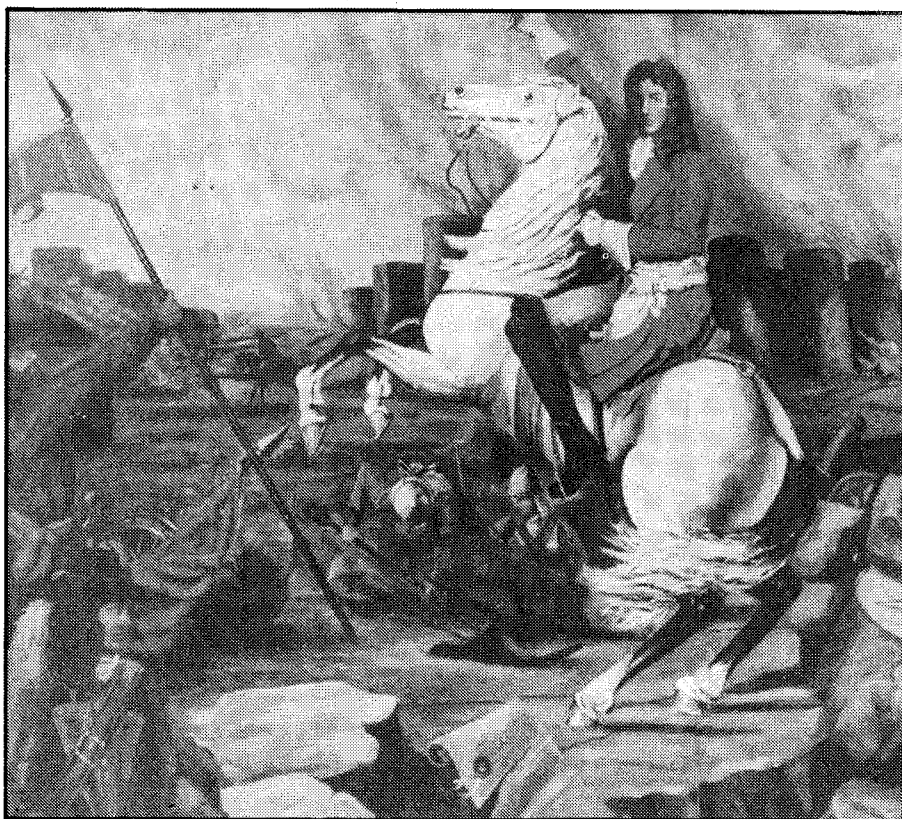
Sources: J.G. Simms and J.T. Gilbert, Introductions, in *A Jacobite Narrative of the War in Ireland, 1688-1691*, (IUP, Shannon, 1971); J.T. Gilbert, Introduction, in HMC, 10th Report, Appendix, Part 5, 1885, p.107; See *Dictionary of National Biography* for life of Nicholas Plunket.



# A JACOBITE NARRATIVE

**A**fter the battle of the Boyne, in which the Irish lost most of their tents and baggage, the army was ordered by Tyrconnell to march to Limerick, which it did in fifteen days, going via Rathcoole, Naas, Castledermot, Carlow and Kilkenny. 'There followed them a great number of gentlemen, who had no military employments, and of the clergy, of farmers and tradesmen, as also of ladies, and inferior women with their children, they having an aversion to stay at home under the arbitrary comportment of an heretical or infidel army'. The army had not properly been tested at the Boyne, and lost through mismanagement. 'For the army was rather somewhat stronger at the end of that petty conflict than before, and at its arrival before Limerick it might have been reinforced by ten thousand resolute men at the least, and might have there given battle (as 'twas expected) with the highest probability of victory'. But, nevertheless, James resolved to return to France. His ship called in to Kinsale 'from whence he wrote a letter to the Duke of Tyrconnell, whereby he empowered him to assume the administration of the civil and military affairs, and to use his discretion, either to make peace with the Prince of Orange, or continue the war'.

Meanwhile, William at Finglas issued a proclamation promising farmers and tradesmen protection of their persons and goods if they returned home, but excluding landed gentlemen. This foolish edict was probably issued at the behest of his great officers, who expected to be granted these lands after the defeat of the Irish. This opinion of the officers was also foolish, as they 'could not be ignorant that the Irish might have a reinforcement by the time they came to Limerick, where they might with greater advantage give the second battle. If their general had been pleased, he might have called to his assistance before the



*Patrick Sarsfield outside the walls of Limerick, August, 1690.  
Painting by John Hayes.*

walls of Limerick fifteen thousand good men, by draining the garrisons and by summoning the volunteers. Wherefore it was a great impudence in the Prince of Orange to hazard the conquest of Ireland upon that airy conceit; and, de facto, he soon found his mistake, to his stinging grief, at the walls of Limerick, where his great triumphing army was shamefully baffled by an indifferent proportion of the Irish forces in defending a most feeble town'.

William, having refreshed his army, began the march to Limerick on 9 July,

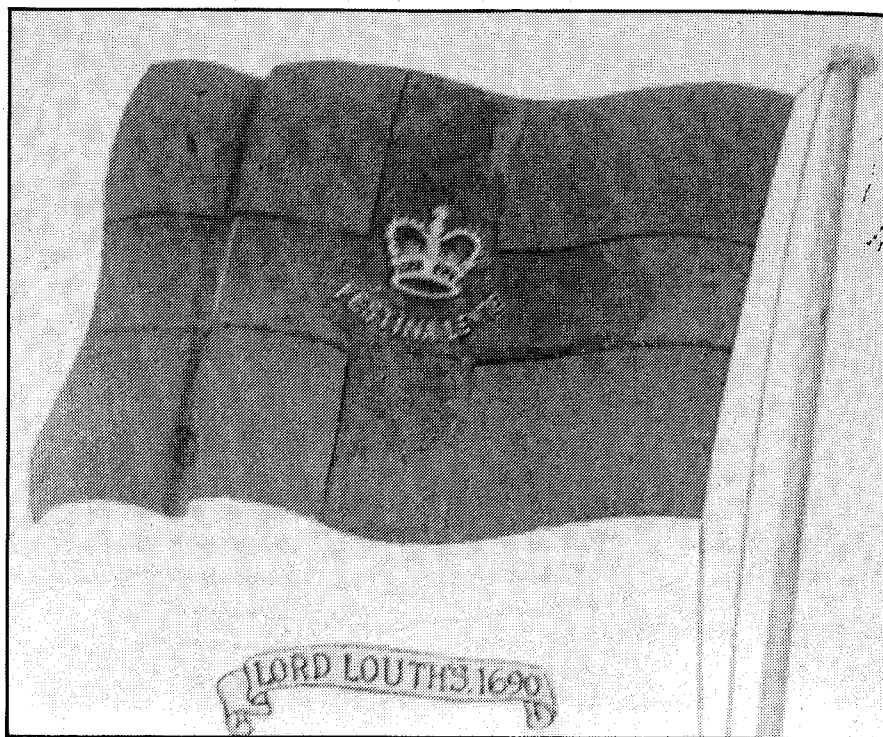
having first sent Lieutenant-General Douglas to take Athlone. William travelled the same route via Kilkenny, sending forces to the towns of the south-east, which had been either already abandoned or surrendered on terms. The Waterford garrison under its governor, Colonel Michael Bourke, was allowed to march to Limerick with arms and baggage. These towns had all given trouble to Cromwell 40 years before, and if they had now resisted 'Orange had been undone ... Here I must own my admiration that gentlemen should take



upon them to be governors of towns when they know that they are not able to defend them. They should be so honourable in their dealings, as to tell so much to the prince who employed them, to the end that the nation who depends upon their defence may not be destroyed'.

On hearing an account at Waterford of the defeat of an English and Dutch fleet by the French, and the landing by some Frenchmen in England, William sent some troops there, and went himself to take ship at Dublin. But receiving fresh news there, he rejoined the army at Golden Bridge on 4 August. On the 8th, Douglas joined him at Caherconlish 'within four miles of Limerick', having failed to take Athlone, losing 40 men slain and 300 through sickness.

Limerick ... 'was then a weak town, having no outward works but a toy of a palisade before a little part of the wall, nor a rampart within. The wall is of an old standing, and far from being thick'. A report was spread that the Irish would put their backs to the wall of Limerick, and there engage the enemy in a regular fight for the kingdom. This raised the courage of the army and encouraged displaced civilians to join in. There was a strong likelihood of success, given the advantage of the ground, their increased numbers and their resolution highly incensed by the loss at the Boyne. But Tyrconnell took an opposite view, considering to himself that, two years previously, he had raised the great army to reinthrone James: he was then encouraged by the assurance of James coming to Ireland, sufficient money coming from abroad, reinforcements coming from France, and a strong probability of success. But now he saw his great army reduced by half, unsuccessful at Derry, defeated at the Boyne, by which Leinster and much of Munster were lost, James returned to France, the French going home, the brass money which paid the army valueless, no stores or provisions, and Connaught, the only area under his control, unable to provide for the army and the vast multitude of refugees from Ulster, Leinster and Munster. Limerick, a weak town, was their chief defence, but even if successful there, England and Holland would send another army, and another after that, rather than be at the mercy of James. French armies were too much engaged in Europe to help, so while the Irish army was intact, it was the proper time to get advantageous terms from William, and not worth risking loss of life, estates and practice of religion by further resistance. He put all this to the mixed council of state and war in Limerick. Opposition arose, sustained vehemently by a few officers, Maj.-Gen. Sarsfield, Brigadier Henry Luttrell, Col. Gordon O'Neill and others. 'Zeal for king and country I highly commend - but it should be exhibited with discretion. Over-audacious enterprises are condemned by reason. What



*Flag of Lord Louth's regiment.*

these caballing gentlemen can say for continuing the war against the sentiment of the duke, is reduced to these three points, that they have a sufficiency of men, that they have courage enough, and that they will have out of France a consummate general to govern their army, and therefore they will likely have a happy end. The truth of the three premised points I cannot deny; for all their losses hitherto since the beginning of the war are to be attributed to mismanagement, which if for the future they can rectify, I do not doubt but they will carry the day, supposing all other requisites be supplied, of which immediately ...

But allowing that the Irish army is strong and courageous enough, and ruled by a most expert general, is this sufficient to recover Ireland from the hands of so powerful an enemy ... Is not money, the sinew of war, altogether wanting? The lack of it chiefly ended the Irish war the next year. Nor were there enough provisions to feed the army and the people, which was seen after the siege ... 'For soldiers have been seen to beg, and officers have not tasted of bread in five weeks; and water hath been the beverage of the nobler persons. How could it then be expected that men would join the army, when there was neither money nor necessary food to be had?'

The anti-Tyrconnell faction depended on preserving Limerick to keep up the war. If it was taken, all was lost: if preserved, there would be time to prepare for the next campaign. 'But now is the quære: How could the caballists judge it probable that they would preserve with part of their army so very

weak a place against a potent-triumphing host that was furiously bent upon finishing the war by the expungation of that fortress? Certainly their undertaking (on which depended the welfare of the nation) was temerarious after the manner they proceeded. For they should have kept the whole army within and without the city in the county of Clare side, having first made entrenchments at the ford above the town to hinder the enemy to pass the river, and to cut off the communication between the garrison and their camp, and this to the end that the garrison in the day of a general attack might be sustained by their army'.

Tyrconnell, finding that he could not get agreement to make peace with William, left about 8000 men, some of the regiments unarmed, in Limerick, appointed Boisseleau as governor, with the Duke of Berwick, Major-General Dorrington, who was also colonel of the regiment of guards, Major-General Sarsfield, Brigadier Henry Luttrell, Brigadier Wauchope and Brigadier Maxwell as assistants. The rest of the forces he sent to Connaught. The cavalry remained a while hard-by in Clare, under the command of Berwick and Major-General Sheldon. Tyrconnell then went to Galway, 30 miles distant, to arrange shipping for the French, who would not stay in Ireland because the king was gone, and they gave the country up for lost after the Boyne, 'where they struck not a stroke, but what they did in the retreat.

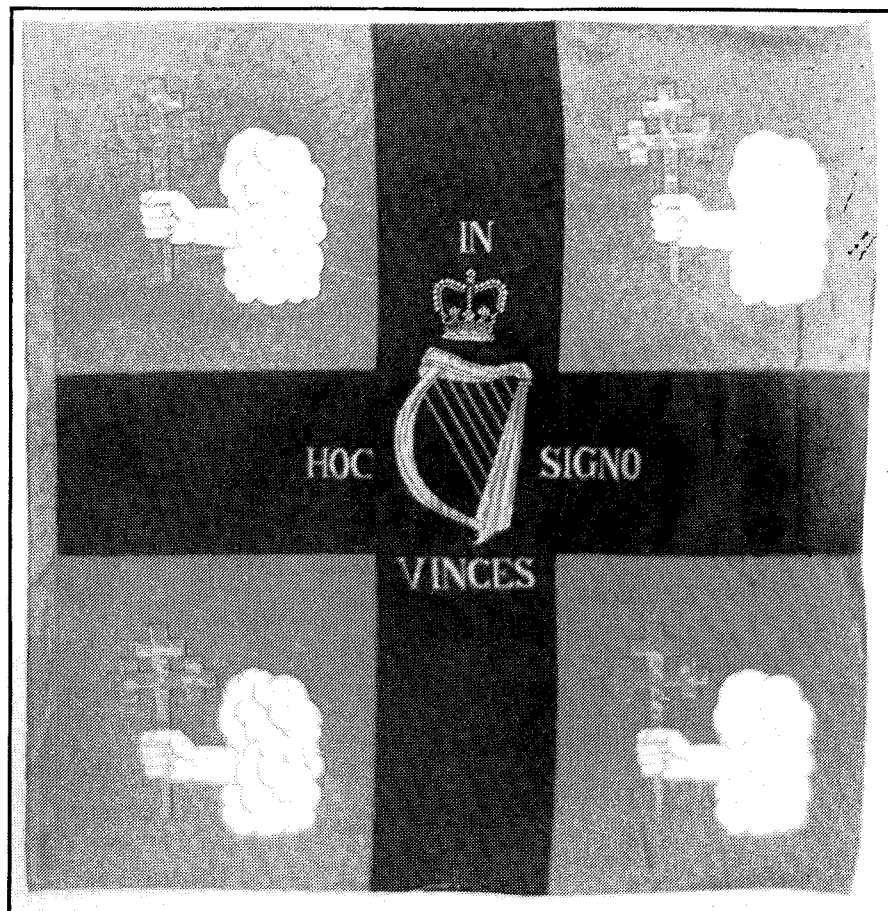
By the time Tyrconnell went off, the Prince of Orange invested Limerick, viz., on the ninth of August. He sent that same day a summons of surrender to the



*Statue of Patrick Sarsfield at Sarsfield Barracks, Limerick.*

town, but it was rejected by the governor. The next morning the prince sent Major-General Ginkel and Major-General Kirk with a great body of horse over the river into the county of Clare, for the sake of forage and to cut off the communication between the Irish cavalry and the garrison. They passed the Shannon near Sir Samuel Foxon's house, two miles above the town, which the Irish might have prevented by making entrenchments and leaving strong guards thereat with a few pieces of cannon. The Duke of Berwick, hearing of their trajection, ordered the corn within ten miles of the city to be destroyed, that the enemy might not make use of it. This action proved prejudicial to the Irish in the winter following, by reason it caused a great scarcity of grain. Then the Irish cavalry retreated to the borders of the next county, viz., of Galway, and the English horse returned that evening to their camp.

The next day, viz., on the eleventh of August, a deserter came from the



*Flag of Earl of Antrim's regiment, 1690.*

English army into the town and informed that there were eight pieces of battering-cannon, with ammunition, provisions, tin-boats and other necessities on the road from Dublin coming to the Prince of Orange for the siege. Major-General Sarsfield, being desirous to keep off the beleaguer of Limerick for the present season, flew that night to the horse camp and offered his service towards the intercepting of that great convoy. Upon which there was given him five hundred horse and dragoons, with which party he hastened over the Shannon into the county of Tipperary, and thence into the county of Limerick, and without any rest marched till he overtook the convoy in two days after, viz., on the thirteenth of August, at night, at a little old castle called Ballyneety, within seven miles of Limerick. He surprised it in the night-time. He bursted the cannon, he burned the provisions and ammunition, destroying everything, and carried off some money, having killed about sixty of the soldiers and wagoners, with no loss of his own. For this action the Duke of Tyrconnell recommended Sarsfield to the king's favour, and his majesty thereupon and for other considerations sent a patent into Ireland in five months after, creating him Earl of Lucan'.

This loss infuriated William, but he got fresh cannon. On 12 August, Brigadier Stuart was sent to take Castle-

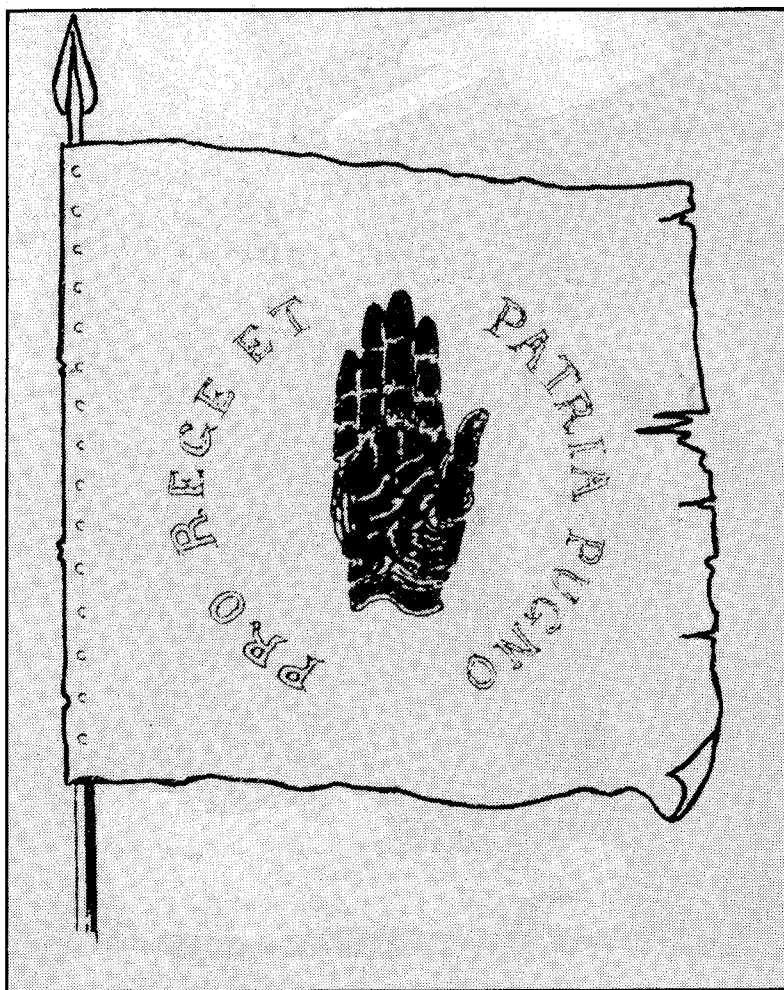
connell. After a few days' siege, the governor, Captain Barnewall, with 120 men, surrendered for want of water. On 17 August, the Williamite trenches were opened, and the chief battery soon carried within pistol-shot of the south wall of Irishtown. On 20 August, a small Irish fort, called Stone Fort, with about 100 men, was taken after a brisk fight. Captain Edmund Kelly and most of the defenders were killed; a captain and the rest were made prisoners, but with more on William's side killed. Within an hour, Irish foot made a sally to regain the fort, but were eventually forced to retreat by William's cavalry, with some loss to both sides.

'From the seventeenth to Wednesday, the twenty-seventh of August, the mortars and cannon of the besiegers played furiously. The mortars did not the damage which was expected; but the cannon made a large breach in the wall, whereupon orders were given by the Prince of Orange, in the morning of the said twenty-seventh, to the army to prepare for a general attack. Five hundred grenadiers were to begin, who were to be supported by seven regiments of foot, and in like order other bodies were appointed. The garrison was much fatigued by frequent hard duty. However, they must reject conditions. But for the more easy and surer defence against the grand attack, which was soon expected,

the governor had timely an entrenchment made within the breach from side to side. Behind this work he placed a few pieces of cannon and his battalions. He ordered some companies to stand [within] the breach when attacked. Part of his men, who were on duty the day before, he did not call to the action at the beginning, though in the heat thereof they were brought into play'.

If the Irish were overpowered that day, everything was gone, their religion, their property and liberty, because they would have no possibility to negotiate conditions. The Irish commanders hazarded too far the safety of the nation in relying on the defence of such a weak town against a strong enemy. They should have called a parley when they saw the large breach and the numerous host ready to mount it. Garrisons usually capitulate when their walls are down and a powerful enemy ready to enter the town. Persons with indifferent knowledge of military science would lay two to one that the town would be carried by storm; 'so I am apt to believe that Providence had a hand in the preservation of Limerick that day for the sake of the loyal people, who suffered so much for justice, to the end that they might not be quite destroyed.

But to go on: the Prince of Orange commanded the signal for attacking to be given between three and four of the clock in the afternoon, which being done, his men went on bravely, and after some loss they mounted the breach. The first that did it was Captain Farlow, who no sooner gained the honour but he got his death on the place, where the conflict was bloody. However, the assailants by their numbers prevailed and entered the town and the circumference of the entrenchment. 'Twas here the defendants put all their might, and their commanding officers signalled themselves in managing of this last contention wherein their all was at stake. Whereupon the soldiers were ordered not to fire till the pound was full, as 'twas said, and then they poured in their shot amongst the ingressors, from front, right and left so furiously that they put the living to a stand, and seconding seasonably their fire, forced at last the enemies to face about to the breach and fly. The Irish pursued violently, and drove them



*Drawing of flag of Gordon O'Neill's regiment, 1690.*

out of the walls and into their works, making a great slaughter. The whole action continued three hours, with violence on both sides, in which there killed of the besiegers, soldiers and officers, at least two thousand, besides the wounded; of the besieged, not above 100, amongst whom were Captain Lawless and Captain Smith of the guards. But Captain Dowdall was slain a few days before in a sally. The next day after this attack there was a cessation for burying the dead.

On Friday, twenty-ninth the Prince of Orange called a council of war, wherein he proposed to make a second attack, which should be undertaken by the second line of the army, that was fresh, and the first line, that had suffered much, should sustain them. But the majority of votes carried it in the negative, which was improved by the Irish Protestants alleging that if the army was foiled in the second assault, the Irish Catholics would regain immediately the whole kingdom, and therefore in this doubtful case it was more prudent to proceed slowly in the conquest of the nation than hazard all at one effort'.

This result incensed William, but he ordered that the army should decamp to winter quarters within two days. He

himself returned to England via Waterford, accompanied by Prince George of Denmark, the Duke of Ormond and other nobles, leaving Count Solms commander-in-chief. He appointed Lord Sidney, Sir Charles Porter and Thomas Coningsby Lords Justices of Ireland. On Sunday, 31 August, William's army marched from Limerick in some haste, fearing pursuit from the Irish, but the Irish cavalry and the rest of the forces were not nearby. The English army came to Tipperary on 6 September, and from there dispersed to winter quarters. The French at Galway, hearing the news, were now willing to remain in Ireland, but as their fleet had arrived they could not stay without new orders. Tyrconnell returned to Limerick to settle affairs, and appointed Dorrington governor, as Boisseleau was returning to France. He ordered the army dispersed to winter quarters, colonels to recruit whose regiments were depleted, and gave commissions to raise new foot regiments, as he now saw some prospect of success, and still could not get agreement to

make peace with William, who would now grant better terms than before the siege. He appointed Berwick governor-general of Ireland, went to Galway and sailed with the French on 12 September. Meanwhile, the cabal shipped agents from Limerick, namely Dr. Creagh, Bishop of Cork, Colonel Nicholas Purcell of Loughmoe and Simon Luttrell of Luttrellstown, to Louis to explain their opposition to Tyrconnell and to seek a French general and other officers to continue the war. When Tyrconnell was gone, Sarsfield, wanting quarters in Leinster, crossed the Shannon at Banagher, Co. Offaly, to besiege Birr Castle, but Major-General Kirk relieved it with greater force, and Sarsfield had to retire. About the end of September, Solms was recalled to England, and Ginkel made William's commander-in-chief in Ireland.

Cork and Kinsale were taken by a force sent from England on a fleet of 80 ships under Lord Churchill, Earl of Marlborough, supported by Würtemberg and Major-General Scravenmore, who marched from Tipperary. Cork surrendered on 28 September, the garrison made prisoners of war and transported to England. Kinsale surrendered on 5 October, the garrison of about 1200 men being allowed to march to Limerick with arms and baggage.