

# LETTER FROM MR. THEOPHILUS HARRISON TO THE REV. JOHN STRYPE

This letter, from a Protestant clergyman who had fled to England and returned after the Boyne, was published in Henry Ellis, *Original Letters Illustrative of English History, Second Series, Vol. 4*, (Harding & Lepard, London, 1827). The original is in the British Library, *Cole Mss, Vol. 52, p.392*. It mentions a detail not noted elsewhere, that William promised the plunder of Limerick to the soldiers, and illustrates the exaggeration of rumour with each retelling, the women and children at Ballyneety not merely being killed, but thrown alive onto the fire. It confirms other accounts that the reason for no quarter being given at the taking of the Irish redoubts on 17 August was revenge for the deaths at Ballyneety. Light relief is provided by his concern for the velvet of his pulpit cushion, made into a pair of breeches.

Dublin, August 23, 1690.

Dear Sir, After some few days stay at Liverpool for a wind, blessed be God, I had a good and quick passage. Mr. Bonnell tells me he acquainted you with the transactions of King James's government here, and how severely the poor Protestants were handled, their churches, contrary to the royal word, seized and profaned by idolatrous worship. The calamities under which they groaned were so great that they cannot be conceived by any but those that were the actual sufferers, or who beheld the cruel executioners perform their barbarous parts. All men are convinced that they ought to return solemn thanks to heaven for sending a conqueror who gives new life to their drooping spirits, and cheerfully submit to that providence which has eased them from a burden under which it was impossible for them, in human probability, to have much longer subsisted, they themselves, as well as their substance, being almost consumed, and without miracles, must necessarily next winter be famished. A Jacobite is a monster here, and passive obedience an absurdity. The usage of Protestants here, they say, was sufficient to convince the most fierce Jacobite, had he been in the same unhappy circumstances. As to the present posture of affairs, Limerick is closely besieged, the outworks taken,

and all the men in them put to the sword, though they cried for quarter. The occasion of this severity was Sarsfield's cruelty, who, two days before, surprised our guns within seven miles of the camp, and killed all the wagoners, together with their wives and innocent babes, so that when the Irish cried quarter, answer was made they should have the same quarter the wagoners had. The guns were retaken, and though damaged, in good order again. It is reported that Limerick has offered to parley.

It is certain Tyrconnell and Berwick have left Limerick. So have the French, who are marched towards Galway, being a more convenient harbour for their return homeward, but the garrison of Galway has denied them admittance, so that they lie encamped between Limerick and Galway. It is said that his majesty has promised the soldiers the plunder of Limerick, which is thought to be very considerable, which animates the army to a very great degree.

You heard, I suppose, that Douglas's men were drawn off from Athlone, at which several that ran away at the rout of the Boyne, rallied and made a body of about 3000 in the county of Westmeath, in which part of Athlone stands. They plundered all Protestants, burnt their houses, and forced them to fly to these parts for shelter. Upon which Colonel Wolseley, with his Inniskilling men, who are really very formidable, was sent into the country. About sixty of his men, not staying for the rest, set upon 500, killed about 50, and took several prisoners, with the loss of three men only. They are now encamped at Mullingar, the county town, and so keep the country in some order. I preached last Sunday in my own church, where I found about thirty of my scattered flock, my church miserably defaced. The seats were employed to wainscot a room for the priest, but no priest appeared, nor any of the considerable Popish inhabitants, some with King James's army, some abscond, and some Protestants not yet returned to their houses, which were all possessed by the Irish, so that the country looks somewhat desolate. My pulpit cushion was dragooned, the velvet made into a pair of breeches,

but chalice etc. preserved.

There is no want of corn in the country, nor of other provisions, but how it will be in winter, God knows, for most are willing to put what provisions they have at an easy rate, for fear of the army on the one hand, and of the fugitive Irish, or raparees, who steal in the night, on the other.

It was my good fortune to leave a faithful servant behind me, who had lived with me above eleven years. His friends are all Papists. He is an Irishman, but bred in the Protestant religion, to which, and his master, he had been steadfast. Notwithstanding very strict search, he has preserved most of my goods. He was forced to sacrifice some few things to save the rest. Bedsteads and chairs were my greatest loss. I found surplice and hood, and two good gowns and cassocks, as I left them. I did not know when I landed whether this servant was alive, but next day he came to me, and brought me two horses, which in the rout, he took from men that owed me old debts, and picked up five pounds in money, lest I should want at my landing. He settled my tithes also before I came as well as he could, but what was set for £300 formerly, scarce amounts to £150 now, but, blessed be God, it is as it is. As to my deanery lying near Athlone, I must expect no profit from thence this year. And now I beg you to present my service to all my good friends in Low Layton, particularly the good family of Ruckholts. My thanks to Mr. Houblon for his letter, as much as if I had occasion to make use of it, for his correspondent was ready to do me any kindness. I will not forget my promises to Mr. Hill, etc.

I am sincerely, dear sir, your affectionate brother and humble servant, Theo. Harrison.

*Postscript:* I am informed that it was not Sarsfield that took the carriages, but whoever it was, he burnt them, and threw the women and children alive into the fire, one of the wagons excepted, in which was the treasure to pay the army, but that was retaken.

To Mr. Strype, to be left at Mr. John Hill's, Stationer, in Change Alley, opposite the Royal Exchange.