



RAPIN DE THOYRAS: HUGUENOT SOLDIER

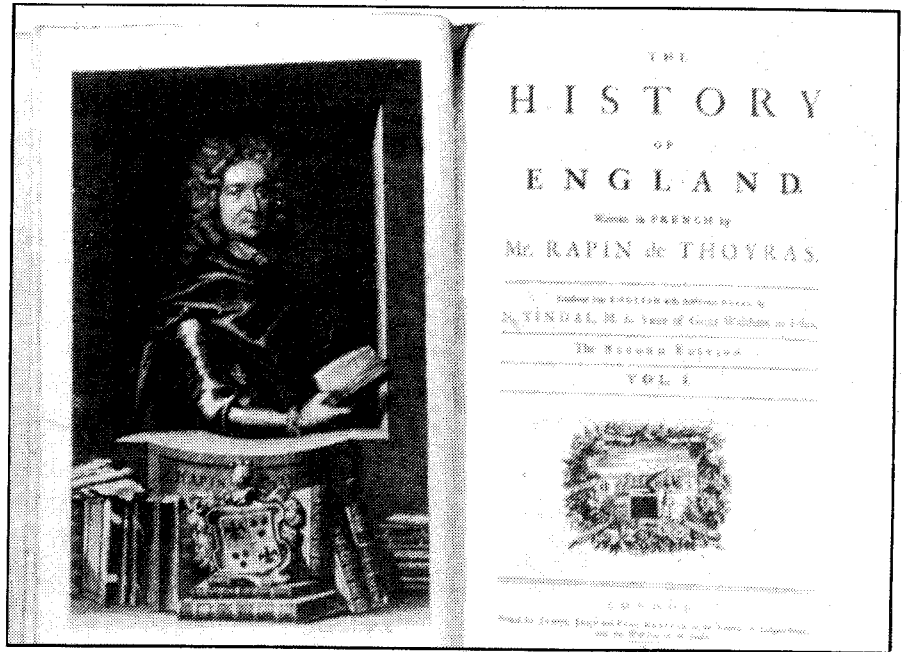
BY LARRY WALSH

Paul de Rapin-Thoyras, a younger son of Jacques de Rapin, advocate, was born at Castres, France, on 25 March, 1661. His education began at home under a tutor his father kept in the house, after which he was sent to Puylaurens, and from there to the Protestant academy at Saumar. Here, at the age of seventeen, he showed his quick temper and persistence in two quarrels, which resulted in sword-fights.

At the beginning of 1679, he returned to his father's house to study law. Later the same year, the family was forced to move to Toulouse. Seeing conditions for Huguenots worsening, Rapin asked his father's permission to abandon his law studies to become a soldier. His father's answer was vague, and the uncertainty caused Rapin to neglect his studies. He acted in only one legal case, and then applied himself to literature, maths and music, in which he acquired great skill.

In 1685, his father died, and two months later, the Edict of Nantes, which gave civil rights to Huguenots, was revoked. Rapin moved to the country with his mother and brothers, and at the height of the persecution in March, 1686, went to England with his youngest brother. Introduced into French Catholic society there by an uncle, he was embarrassed by the prevailing religious controversy and went to Holland, where he had relatives. At Utrecht he enlisted in a company of French volunteers, commanded by his first-cousin, and returned to England with William. In 1689, Lord Kingston made him an ensign in his own regiment, and with them he came to Ireland. He gained the respect of the officers of the regiment at the siege of Carrickfergus, especially of Lieutenant-Colonel Fielding, who in less than a year procured him a lieutenancy. At the beginning of 1690, the regiment came under the command of Douglas, who, on the recommendation of three French colonels, took notice of him and afterwards put great confidence in him.

He fought at the Boyne, and afterwards went with Douglas to Athlone, acting as joint quartermaster-general of the detachment. On the raising of that siege, Rapin was sent ahead to the army on its way to Limerick to receive orders, where William, at the head of the line, stopped him and asked several questions, to which Rapin replied, clearing Douglas of allega-



Title page of Tindal's translation of Rapin's 'History of England', 2nd edition, 1732.

tions of misconduct.

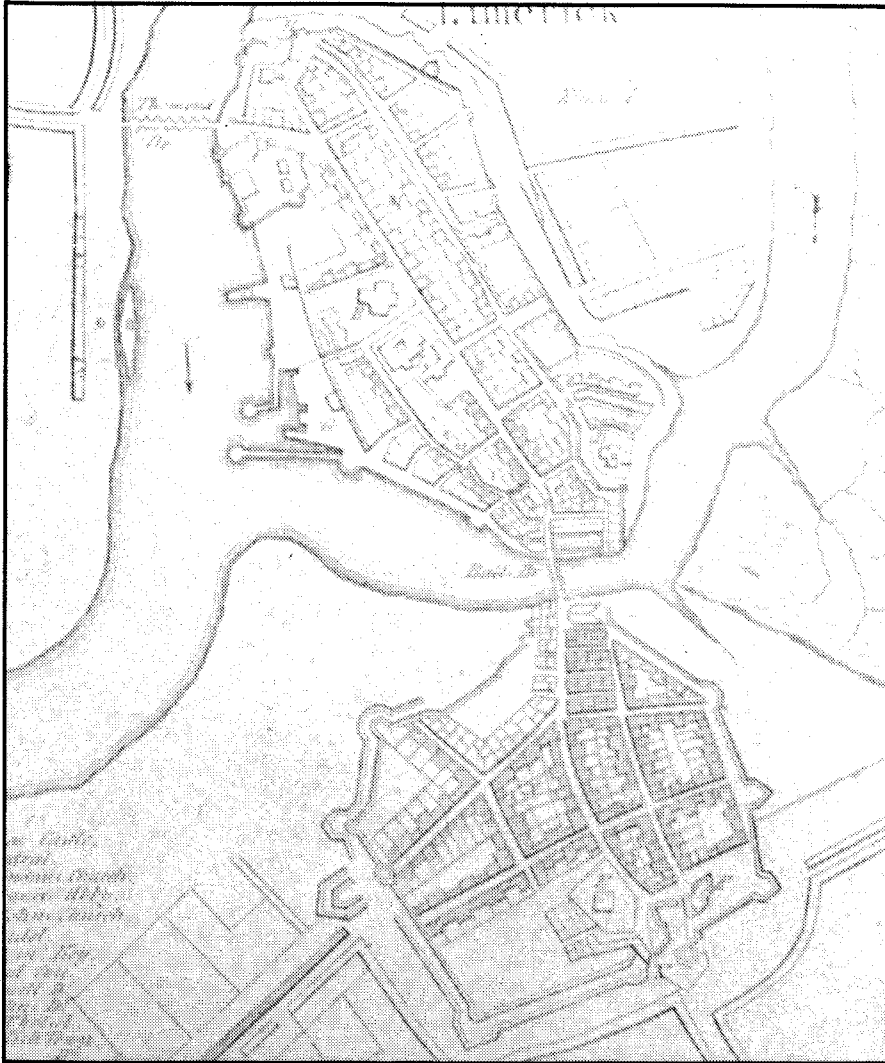
At the assault on the breach at Limerick on 27 August, he was shot in the shoulder, and when the siege was raised, he had to ride four miles on horseback in great agony. He remained with the rest of the wounded, among them his brother, who was shot through the body, when his regiment went to the north to winter quarters. Shortly afterwards, he heard that Douglas had promoted him captain of the company in which he had formerly been an ensign, and caused him to be admitted, although absent.

The following year, Douglas transferred to Flanders, and wanted Rapin as his aide-de-camp, but he was still unfit due to his wound. He took part in the 1691 campaign, starting at the capture of Ballymore, where he was of assistance to a captive family with whom he became acquainted the previous year. He was at the siege of Athlone, and took part in the assault through the river on the Connaught side of the town. Athlone was left in the charge of two lieutenant-colonels, of different nationalities, who did not speak each other's language and were jealous of their respective powers. Rapin and a friend, a captain in the other regiment, each trusted by his lieutenant-colonel, helped in solving further problems that arose between them.

After Athlone, he served in several garrisons, including Kilkenny, where he was a frequent visitor to the bishop. Some time afterwards, he rejoined his regiment at Kinsale, where he became an intimate friend of the commander, Sir John Waller.

About the end of 1693, he received an order to go to England, without any reason given, but at the same time received a letter from Colonel Belcastel telling him that he was to become governor to the Earl of Portland's son, Viscount Woodstock, who in April, 1697, was given the Earl of Clancarthy's forfeited estate of 135,820 acres. Some time later, he learned that he had been recommended by Ruvigny, Earl of Galway and also a Huguenot. This put an end to his hopes of rising in the army – the only amends he received was to resign his company to his brother, who died in 1719 as lieutenant-colonel in a regiment of English dragoons. Shortly afterwards, William granted him a pension of £100 per year, until such time as he could do better for him, which never happened. On William's death in 1702, the pension ceased.

His employment obliged him to go to Holland, England and France, following Portland's diplomatic assignments, until eventually his pupil was established at The Hague. While there, in 1699, Rapin married



Map of Limerick from Rapin's 'History of England', 4 volumes, printed by J. Harrison, London, 1784-89.

Marianne Tostart, an advantageous match, of which his biographer would say nothing more, as she was still alive at the time of writing. His final duty was to attend the young lord on his grand tour of Germany, Austria and Italy, after which his employment ceased and he returned to his family at The Hague, where he spent a number of years. He occupied his leisure hours studying fortifications and history, and was a member of a 'learned society'. With an enlarging family, economic necessity forced him, in 1707, to move to Wezel, in the duchy of Cleves, where prices were cheaper. Here he met and became friendly with many Huguenot exiles.

He began a study of English history, his linguistic abilities in Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, High and Low Dutch, and English, enabling him to make use of foreign authorities on English history. His 17 years constant application to the work ruined his health. About three years before he died, he found himself totally spent, and often attacked with violent stomach pains. He might have recovered if he stopped working - this he knew, but could not. His only concession was not to get up before six in the morning. He died on 16 May,

1725, of a violent fever and lung infection, leaving his widow, one son and six daughters.

Rapin's manner was grave, which led him, in the army, to seek the company of the serious, prejudicing several of his comrades and some of his superiors against him, but gaining him the favour of many in high places. However, he would take drink, but not as often or as much as many of his colleagues. He wrote several humorous pieces in prose and verse, designed only for the immediate amusement of friends, and never thought any worth keeping.

His first publication, *An Historical Dissertation on the Whigs and the Tories*, was published at The Hague in 1717, and in English translation at London the same year. His *History of England* was not completed, ending with the execution of Charles I in 1649. It was published at The Hague, 8 volumes, in 1724, and continued to the death of William III by David Durand, The Hague, 1734. It was translated into English by Rev. Nicholas Tindal in 15 volumes, London, 1725-31, and continued by him to the accession of George II in 18 volumes, 1728-47, volume 16 being volume 1 of the continuation. There were many

subsequent editions and abridgements up to the early 19th century.

In his preface, Tindal states: 'nor is it scrupled to copy or imitate any part of the several authors when conducive to the usefulness of the work, or where there is no occasion to alter or abridge'. In the case of the first siege of Limerick, the text is taken from Story's *Impartial History*. However, in footnotes, he quotes two informative letters of R. Warre, under-secretary to the Earl of Nottingham, on the raising of the siege of Limerick.

Appendix: Letters of R. Warre

To Sir William Dutton Colt, Envoy-extraordinary at the Court of Hanover: Whitehall, September 9, 1690: Nothing induced the king to quit the siege but the season of the year and the nature of the country, which in those parts is so much subject to be overflowed that the soldiers could no longer remain in the trenches in wet weather, and no art or industry could remedy this mischief. The deserters do agree that if the weather would have permitted the king to remain there a few days longer, the necessities and despair of the people in the town would have forced the officers to surrender, if they had not been disposed to do it themselves. The enemy had so little share in obliging the king to retreat that he did not meet with the least disturbance from them in decamping or in his march. The Protestants thereabouts are by this means left to the mercy of the Irish, but most of them withdrew to places within the army's protection. Though this disappointment is the more unhappy for coming at the end of the campaign, yet the progress the king has made towards reducing that kingdom is so considerable as would have been esteemed at first sufficient for one year, and enough to render it a glorious campaign.

October 21, 1690: I have endeavoured to inform myself of the number of persons lost before Limerick, but cannot give you a distinct nor a just account. I spoke with a gentleman who was at the siege all the time, and had the best opportunity of being informed herein. He tells me the greatest loss to our men was in gaining the redoubt, and assaulting the counterscarp, the rest happening in the trenches, where about ten men a day might be killed. He computes the whole at a thousand or twelve hundred at the most. He observed a thing not unworthy your notice, that where a colonel or a captain was deficient in his full number of men, if he was ordered on service, he would deliver in his loss as if his regiment or company had been complete, which made some judge our loss greater than it was, but, at any rate, it was not much greater than what I tell you.

(Based on an anonymous biography, in the form of a letter, in Rev. Nicholas Tindal's translation of *The History of England*, Vol. 16 (continuation Vol. 1), by Mr. Rapin de Thoyras, London, 1737, with additional material from 'Huguenots in the Irish Jacobite war, 1689-'91' by Harman Murtagh, in *The Huguenots and Ireland: Anatomy of an Emigration*, ed. by C.E.G. Caldicott, H. Gough and J.-P. Pittion, and 'England's First Refugees' by Robin Gwynn, in *History Today*, May, 1985).