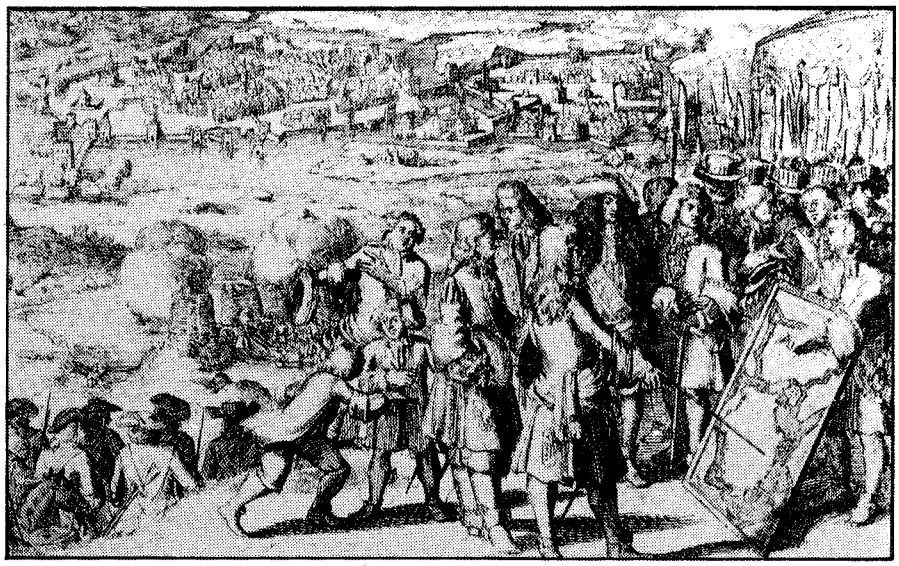
Williamite Peace Tactics, 1690-1



William before the walls of Limerick, August 1690. Dutch print by Adriaan Schoonebeek. The view of Limerick is copied from Speed's map of 1610, and the effect is to place the camp on the Clare side of the Shannon.

By J.G. Simms
PART ONE

William III's policy for ending the Irish war went through many changes during the fifteen months between the battle of the Boyne and the surrender of Limerick. With the varying fortunes of the war it oscillated between unconditional surrender and the securing of a negotiated settlement by the grant of liberal terms. William regarded the Irish war as an exasperating sideshow which diverted his forces from the real scene of action in the Netherlands, where he and his allies were hard put to it to withstand the pressure of the French. From the beginning of his reign, his policy had been to induce the Irish Jacobites to surrender upon terms, and it was with the greatest reluctance that he decided in the spring of 1690 that he must himself go to Ireland and fight the matter out. As he put it to his ally, the elector of Bavaria:

> *It is a terrible mortification to me to be able to do so little to contribute to the common good this year, and that I am obliged to go to Ireland, where I shall be as it were out of knowledge of the world. If I can soon reduce that kingdom I shall afterwards have my hands free to act with all the more energy against the common enemy.*[1]

For a negotiated settlement the principal questions at issue were the Catholic religion and the estates of the Jacobites. One of William's first acts after his accession to the English crown had been to issue a proclamation, in February, 1689, in which he called on the Irish Catholics to surrender on a promise that they should keep their estates and continue to enjoy all the favour for the private exercise of their religion that the law allowed; he also promised that he would speedily call a parliament in Ireland and there promote further indulgence to them. If, however, they did not surrender within two months, their estates would be forfeited and distributed to those who had assisted William in reducing Ireland to its due obedience.[2] At that stage, with William precariously established in England and James apparently firmly established in Ireland, there was almost no response to this proclamation and it became clear that Ireland could not be reduced without the use of force. However, there continued to be much discussion in Williamite circles as to whether the Irish Jacobites could be induced to accept terms and whether too uncompromising an attitude would have the unfortunate effect of making them desperate and prolonging their resistance. There were several advocates of a policy of discrimination, and it was suggested that the offer of pardon to the less intransigent might be useful and cause internal jealousy.[3]

From the time that he was committed to the Irish expedition William's general policy appears to have been to offer the minimum of concessions consistent with bringing the war in Ireland to a rapid conclusion. It was of over-riding importance to him to finish that war as soon as possible and switch his forces over to the Continent. At the same time, if he could bring sufficient pressure on the Irish Jacobites to induce them to surrender unconditionally he would be able to make use of their forfeited estates to pay for the campaign and to reward deserving friends and helpers. It was not until that policy had been tried and had failed that William accepted the fact that the grant of comparatively favourable terms would be necessary to make the Jacobites submit.

In May, 1690, just before he crossed over to Ireland, William appointed Sir Robert Southwell to be his principal secretary of state for Ireland. Southwell was ordered to accompany William on his Irish expedition, and was well aware that one of his chief duties would be the framing of terms for the conclusion of the war. We have the memorandum which he drew up to clear his ideas just after his appointment. On the first page is the note, 'about a declaration of pardon and how far to extend or contract it'. In the margin is written, 'to prepare some heads herein as being a matter of great weight and consequence'.[4] After William's victory at the Boyne, Southwell took the view that the Jacobite cause was hopeless; the body of the people were fled wherever their fears or inclination sent them, and the only course for the leaders was to 'retire into a few places of strength and there capitulate in the best manner they can'. If William went on as he had begun, the Irish were at his mercy and their lands would provide enough to pay all the arrears of the army and the cost of the Irish expedition; and England would not have cause to repent of 'the care and expense they were at'.[5]

William directed Southwell to consult the committee of Protestants who had taken provisional charge of Dublin.[6] The question put to them was 'what is fit to be done for drawing in and protecting the Irish and others now in rebellion against their sacred majesties King William and Queen Mary? The result of the committee's deliberations was reported to William's camp by Joseph Coghlan, who had represented Trinity College in the patriot parliament of 1689. The report maintained a significant silence about the Jacobite landowners, but recommended that a free pardon should be given to members of the lower orders who surrendered and gave up their arms.[7] The committee's report was made over to Southwell and his staff, who burned midnight oil in drawing up a declaration, the scheme of which was 'to invite in all of the meaner sort, as farmers or those who have some personal estate in house, goods or cattle,

but not to (be) meddling with the landed men till it appears into what posture they throw themselves or into what corners they retire'. Southwell expected that this would bring in 'the body of men which make the bulk of the nation and that the rest will afterwards look the more abject'.[8]

This was the well-known declaration of Finglas, in which William promised pardon to members of the lower orders who surrendered by 1 August. But as for the 'desperate leaders of the rebellion', as William was now in a position to make them sensible of their errors, they were to be left to the event of war, unless by great and manifest demonstrations they convinced him that they were deserving of his mercy, which could never be refused to the truly penitent.[9] This attempt to drive a wedge between the common people and the landed classes was a complete failure. It had a superficial resemblance to the Cromwellian policy of exempting the lower orders from transplantation to Connacht. But it was ill-adapted to the situation of 1690, when the Catholic nobility and gentry still had considerable forces at their disposal and had not given up hope of obtaining tolerable terms of peace. In any case a declaration which confined its terms to worldly goods and made no reference at all to the question of toleration for the Catholic religion would have had little appeal for the private soldier, who never showed any inclination to give up the struggle until the concluding stages of the war, when he began to be restive about getting his pay.

Contemporary accounts, both Williamite and Jacobite, are agreed that the uncompromising character of the declaration of Finglas served to stiffen the Jacobites at a time when their defeat at the Boyne must have made their position seem desperate. Story, the Williamite chaplain, observed that many of the Irish officers complained that the declaration was too narrow and that their exclusion from its terms obliged them to stick together as their only means of self-preservation.[10] Story's own view was that William himself would have preferred a more generous declaration but was obliged to consider the views of the English interest in Ireland. Bishop Burnet's comments ran on much the same lines:

> *It was hoped that the fullness of the pardon of the commons might have separated them from the gentry, and that by this means they would be so forsaken that they would accept of such terms as should be offered them. The king had intended to make the pardon more comprehensive, hoping to bring the war soon to an end, but the English in Ireland opposed this. They thought the present opportunity was not to be let go of breaking the great Irish families, upon whom the inferior sort would always depend. And in compliance with them the indemnity now offered was so limited that it had no effect; for the priests, who governed the Irish with a very blind and absolute authority, prevailed with them to try their fortunes still.*[11]

The Jacobite author of *A Light to the Blind* came to a similar conclusion:

> *But the estated gentlemen the prince excluded from his mercy. This was a foolish edict, and the first of this kind, I believe, that ever had been; for commonly a prince, entering into a country in order to conquer it, doth in the first place encourage the principal persons to submit unto him, and when these are gained the rest do follow in course. I suppose the prince of Orange was persuaded to go against reason in favour of his great officers, who would have the Irish Catholic lords of land to be rejected from all expectation of recovering their estates, because the said officers were sure in their own conceits that the Irish army would be overcome at last, and because then they might have those lands by the prince's grant.*[12]

It is very doubtful whether William was persuaded against his better judgment to adopt this uncompromising policy. The explanation of the Finglas declaration is presumably that William's appreciation of the situation after the Boyne was very much the same as James's, that all was over for the Jacobites. The resistance at Limerick showed William his mistake, and from the autumn of 1690 there was a marked change of policy. Southwell dropped out of the picture and the working out of a new policy was chiefly entrusted to William's Dutch advisers – Ginkel, the commander in the field, and Bentinck at William's headquarters. Both Ginkel and Bentinck took the view that the war in Ireland should be brought to an early conclusion by a negotiated settlement, and that this could be secured only by the offer of liberal terms to Catholic landowners. William himself accepted the desirability of a negotiated settlement, but was evidently reluctant to make more concessions than necessary. In particular, he was anxious to arrive at a settlement which would allow for sufficient confiscations to satisfy his English parliament and himself. The winter session of 1690-1 was largely occupied with a dispute between William and the commons about the right to dispose of the expected Irish forfeitures. The record makes it clear that William throughout kept a close control over policy and that Ginkel had by no means a free hand in his negotiations.

From the Williamite point of view the advantage of the new policy was that it tended to produce a division of opinion among the Irish Jacobites, driving a wedge between the influential minority who held estates under the restoration act of settlement and the majority who had failed to recover their lands at the restoration. The land-settlement question involved a distinct cleavage of interest, as was clear from the strong opposition which certain members of the patriot parliament of 1689 had offered to the bill for the repeal of the act of settlement. To a large extent this cleavage between the landed and the landless coincided with the other great line of demarcation, which separated the Catholics of Ireland into Old English and Gaels. Ormond's policy had been directed to securing that as few as possible of the reinstated Catholics should be of Gaelic stock. Apart from the conspicuous exceptions of Lords Clancarty and Antrim, the overwhelming majority of the Catholics who regained their lands at the restoration belonged to families of Norman or English origin. Besides those who had wholly or partly recovered their ancestral estates under the act of settlement, the 'new interest' – such Catholics as Denis Daly who had bought lands granted to Protestants – were attracted by the prospect of a negotiated peace. Charles O'Kelly, the author of *The Destruction of Cyprus*, was highly critical of the latter class:

> *Some Catholics were only too anxious to submit. These were men of new interest, so called because they had purchased from usurpers the inheritance of their own countrymen. As these lands were all restored to the old proprietors by the repeal of the settlement, the coveting purchasers, preferring their private gains to the general interest of religion and country, were for submitting to a government which they very well knew would never allow that decree.*[13]

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2. *H.M.C. rep.* 12, app. vi, p. 165.
3. Various arguments are set out in pamphlets published in 1689, *A declaration for Ireland or no declaration?*, *Reasons for his majesty issuing a general pardon to the rebels of Ireland.*
4. B.M., Add. MS 19,670, f. 2.
5. Southwell to Nottingham, 4 July, 1690 (B.M., Add. MS 38,146, ff. 98-9).
6. Same to same, 6 July, 1690 (ibid., f. 101).
7. Southwell papers in T.C.D., MS I, 6. II, p. 57.
8. Southwell to Nottingham, 6 July, 1690 (*H.M.C. Finch MSS*, ii. 343).
9. *London Gazette*, 10 July, 1690.
10. G.W. Story, *A Continuation of the Impartial History of the Wars of Ireland*, p. 27.
11. G. Burnet, *History of his own time* (1823 ed.), iv. 99.
12. J.T. Gilbert, *A Jacobite Narrative*, pp. 105-6.
13. *Macariae Excidium* (ed. J.C. O'Callaghan, 1850), p. 71.

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