

The Second Siege of Athlone

from

The
Irish Chieftains ;

Or,

A Struggle for the Crown.

Charles Ffrench Blake-Forster.

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After the repulse of the Prince of Orange at Limerick, Donal Bran and his band returned to their rendezvous in Bunnacippaun Wood ; and, when they divided the booty they had taken, retired to their homes. However, after the lapse of a short time, the restless spirit of the daring Donal Bran again aroused him into action, and during the winter he visited Rathorpe, in order to take leave of Major Forster, before recommencing his foray against the Williamites.

“ Well, Donal,” said the High Sheriff, when he heard the cause of the Rapparee’s visit, “ I see you are indefatigable in your zeal to do your King and country service.”

“ I have heard, sir,” said Donal, “ that the King said, before he left Dublin, that his army was loyal enough, but wanted true courage to stand by him at the trying moment. The number of the enemy was more than double that of ours, and the men composing our army were wretchedly armed. It went hard enough with us, sir, when we had to send out a division of our men, only armed with pikes, to oppose the Blue Guards of the Dutch, when they crossed the River Boyne, fully armed with the best muskets. Still our pikemen closed with them, and did not retire to the ditches until the Dutch musketry had terribly thinned their ranks. In the end, the whole overwhelming force of the enemy bore down upon us in great numbers ; but still they could not make a single regiment of ours prisoners, or even break their ranks, while our dauntless cavalry always showed front whenever the English, Dutch, Danes, Huguenots, Swiss, Scotch, Brandenburgers, or Northerners attempted to come near ; and at the unsuccessful siege of Limerick the enemy lost more by far than we did at the Boyne — so I do not yet despair of our success. But whatever way the struggle ends, if I do not return, I hope, sir, you will take care of Nora and my aged father.”

“ Indeed I shall, Donal,” replied the High Sheriff. “ But come now and take the stirrup-cup before you leave.”

The O’Kelly of Mullaghmore, who was on leave of absence at Rathorpe, together with The O’Donnellan of Ballydonnellan, Captain O’Brien, Captain Stacpoole, and Colonel Burke of Tyaquin, complimented Donal Bran on his daring conduct during the war, who, ere he left, promised not to return without some of the enemy’s horses and arms for the King’s service. The Rapparee then proceeded to Bunnacippaun Wood, from which he departed on the next day, with a few of his picked men, who were well mounted and armed. On his arrival at Banagher Bridge, the Irish commander there told him that a strong party of Irish had failed in an attempt to surprise Mullingar, and that if he pushed on into the King’s County he would meet O’Conor the Rapparee there. Donal Bran then proceeded on his way, and in a few days fell in with O’Conor and his band, whom he joined without delay. Altogether they formed a body of sixty foot and sixty horsemen, well armed ; and having marched together for some days, their scouts informed them that two companies of Williamite Grenadiers were marching

by the road at some distance. Donal Bran and O'Conor, after holding a short consultation, resolved to attack them, and ordering their horsemen to dismount, moved on to a part of the road which was narrow, and lined with ditches and brushwood. They left their horses in charge of some of the men, and lay under cover of the ditches, resolved to wait until the enemy approached. They were not left long in suspense, and when the advanced guard of the Williamites came up, they allowed them to pass unmolested ; but when the main body were about passing the Rapparees instantly opened a deadly fire on them. Numbers of the enemy fell, and the Rapparees, with shouts of exultation, rushed forth, and overpowered, by force of pike and skian, the survivors. They then returned to where their horses were, and having mounted, pursued, and cut up the few men who were in advance ; and having collected the arms of the vanquished, retired towards Banagher, where they could place them in safety. In a few days after, O'Conor and Donal Bran received intelligence that Phillipstown was only garrisoned by 120 dragoons, so they resolved to surprise them ; and of a cold, wet winter's night they assembled near the borders of a bog adjacent to Phillipstown, and having crossed it, they suddenly rushed, sword in hand, into the quarters of the Williamite dragoons, and surprised and killed all of them. The Rapparees next burned the town, and carried off great booty, including horses and arms. They then retired to Banagher, well pleased with their success, and divided the spoil amongst them. Donal Bran's Rapparees then departed, under the command of Conor O'Shaughnessy, Torlough O'Nee, and Ronald Scott, on their return home ; and Donal himself went to Limerick, at the head of a party of O'Conors men, to present the Governor with the captured horses, for the use of the army.

Lieutenant-General De St. Ruth lands with the promised aid.

Dermot Oge Cloran still continued to manage the Gortinsiguara estate. He had to encounter very great difficulties in endeavouring to make up the share of the tax levied by the King to support the war on the O'Shaughnessy property ; a levy which fell heavily on the estates of Irish proprietors in the few counties over which the authority of King James now extended. Dermot Oge wrote to O'Shaughnessy, communicating the sad news of his father's death, and his letter was conveyed to him by De Tourville. He shortly afterwards wrote to him again, giving an account of the sad state of affairs in Ireland, and the great difficulty he had in managing his property. This letter he sent by Monsieur Maximilien de la Maine, the Captain of a French vessel that plied between Galway and France — for since his last visit to Clooneene the Chevalier Victor de Tourville had not been heard of in Ireland.

During the winter the families of Clooneene and Rathorpe received many visitors. One evening, while they sat over their wine at Clooneene, the Chieftain, who was seated in his arm-chair near the fire, appeared much grieved. In fact, he was greatly affected since he had heard of the hasty and unexpected retreat of the King to France. His loyalty, however, prevented him from often commenting severely on the unaccountable steps taken by his Majesty, as he attributed them to the bad advice of the Duke of Tyrconnell and the Duke de Lauzun ; but his opinion, like the rest of the Irish who were sincere in the cause of their country, was that the King ought to have stood or have fallen with his brave and faithful adherents. Still the patriotic old Chief endeavoured to make his guests keep up their spirits, and pressed them to partake plentifully of the wine, saying — “ Although we are now confined to about eight counties, if we only obtain money, arms, and ammunition from France, we need not yet despair. We have that strong barrier, the Shannon, between us and our enemies ; and Limerick, which De Lauzun thought so little of, is still unconquered. Donal Bran has given me some news which he picked up in his recent expedition to Leinster. It appears that the so-called Lords Justices have taken proceedings against the Irish aristocracy residing in the different counties over which they have jurisdiction, for High Treason, and have removed the several cases for trial to the Court of King's Bench.”

“ Why,” passionately exclaimed Sir Toby Butler, “ in that case the accused parties are not likely to hear of their trials until they are convicted.”

“ That is just what the English want to do. Sir Theobald,” replied the Chief. “ Here, also, are some proclamations which Donal gave me. The first states that the Catholic inhabitants of counties should be assessed for all damages committed on the properties of Protestants residing in said counties.”

“ That is,” remarked Dermot Oge, “ making the innocent suffer for the guilty.”

“ The second proclamation,” continued the Chief, “ would better suit uncivilized Turkey or Algiers than enlightened England. It declares that no person shall be protected who has a son in the enemy’s quarters, thereby punishing the fathers for the sins of the children. The third document ordains that no more than ten Catholics shall assemble together, and sentences the Priest of the parish in which any larger assemblage is held to transportation for life. Here is another proclamation, but not from these inhuman Justices. It is signed by the Baron de Ginckell, offering to grant all persons now in arms reasonable terms if they submit to the Prince of Orange. It is evident the Williamites are more liberal in their offers since they were repulsed at Limerick, than they were after the hard-fought battle of the Boyne, when William offered by proclamation to give protection to all labourers, farmers, and artizans, but excluded the landed proprietors, saying he would leave the desperate leaders of the rebellion to the chances of war — in other words, leaving them to be robbed and murdered. However, this proclamation did not cause one of them to desert their King, or make the bold peasantry hold back their valuable support.”

“ Nor shall this one do so either,” exclaimed The O’Kelly of Mullaghmore. “ While a regiment stands in arms in defence of my country, I will be found in its foremost ranks, and will wait patiently for the aid we expect from France.”

“ I hope,” said the Chief, “ that no men will be again sent us from that country. We suffered much by sending our 6,000 brave soldiers last year, and more than 1,200 since of our best troops, to assist King Louis in his Continental wars.”

The winter was now nearly over, and in the month of January the Duke of Tyrconnell landed in Limerick on his return from France, and amongst those who accompanied him were Sir Richard Nagle and Sir Stephen Rice, the latter of whom was presented with the freedom of the city of Limerick. His Excellency was received by the Mayor, George Roche, and the Sheriffe, John Young and James Robinson. The Duke of Tyrconnell brought over with him, for the assistance of the Irish, the balance of £24,000 which he had received from King Louis. He left £10,000 at Brest, to buy meal, and gave £13,000 to purchase clothes for the Irish army, who were much in need of them, leaving only £1,000 to provide arms. His Grace also brought a patent from King James, conferring upon the gallant Patrick Sarsfield, who was the idol of the Irish army, the titles of Baron of Rosberry, Viscount of Tully, and Earl of Lucan, in the county of Dublin and Peerage of Ireland, which gave general satisfaction to the Irish.

The Rapparees kept the enemy’s quarters in great agitation, until at length, on the 8th of May, 1691, the third year of the war, the Irish, who had so long expected assistance from France, were rejoiced to see a fleet proudly sailing up the Shannon, whose *azure flag*, bearing the fleur-de-lys *gules*, indicated to be French. These vessels were laden with 146 officers, 150 cadets, 300 English and Scotch, twenty-four surgeons, 180 masons, two bombardiers, eighteen gunners, 800 horses, nineteen pieces of ordnance, 12,000 horse-shoes, 6,000 saddles and

bridles, 16,000 muskets, with wretched old uniforms, stockings, and shoes for 16,000 men, a quantity of lead and balls, and a great supply of biscuits, but were minus what was more necessary than all these supplies — namely, money, which was then very scarce in Ireland. This fleet was under the command of that gallant and distinguished, though self-opinionated officer, lieutenant-General the Sieur de St. Ruth. This able officer distinguished himself in the wars of Flanders, Germany, and Holland, and after about twenty years' service, in which he proved himself a great commander, he was, in 1688, appointed by King Louis XIV. to the rank of lieutenant-General, and in two years after 1690, received the command of the French and Irish, the latter being Lord Mountcashel's Brigade, engaged to reduce the Duchy of Savoy.

The fact of the Sieur de St. Ruth being entrusted with the command of the Irish army was another great mistake committed by King James during this war, though the King of France, in speaking of this General, said — “ Whatever he, who is a Captain of great conduct and experience, after arriving in Ireland, and informing himself upon the place, shall judge necessary for the work, we shall not fail in despatching to Ireland.”

The Irish received Lieutenant-General de St. Ruth on his landing with demonstrations of joy, and a *Te Deum* was solemnly chanted in the cathedral of Limerick, for the people were rejoiced at this important national event. Now the Irish aristocracy and peasantry strained every nerve to equip an army in as short a time as possible, to meet the Williamites in the coming campaign, but their praiseworthy preparations fell far short of those that were being made by the army of the Prince of Orange, for during the previous month several ships had arrived from England, at Waterford and Kinsale, laden with cannon, shells, ball, powder, clothing, and everything else which the men might require, and which the great wealth of England could well afford.

On the 12th of May, all the Rapparees were summoned by proclamation to collect from all parts of the country, and assemble in the yet unconquered Province of Connaught, to fill up the ranks of the regular army. The horses they took from the enemy were of great service to the cavalry ; still more were required, and had to be procured from the gentry, who willingly resigned them to supply the deficiency. By paying some money to tradesmen and labourers, and working on the patriotic feelings of others, 170 caissons, 400 small carts, with carriages for ten field pieces, were obtained, and with an army of about 20,000 men, the Sieur de St. Ruth prepared to meet the English in the following month of June.

The mighty Williamite army was also busily preparing for action. No expense was spared in sending them, from England, clothes, ammunition, provisions, and the best of arms.

The National Debt of England now commenced, by the Prince of Orange recklessly raising vast sums of money to carry on the war in Ireland, and enable him to keep up his great forces in Holland, who were continually engaged in continental wars.

On the 30th of May, the Baron de Ginckell left Dublin, taking with him the soldiers stationed in that city, and a great body of the Irish Williamite Militia, to join his forces at Mullingar. On arriving there on the 31st, the Commander-in-chief found his troops in the best condition he could expect. He then marched to Rathconrath, where he was joined by Lieutenant-General Douglas, and their united forces amounted to about 19,000 men, including officers. All preparations for war were by this time completed in the Williamite camp, and the soldiers looked to great advantage in their splendid scarlet uniforms, while their arms were of the best possible description. They had also at their command a magnificent park of artillery, which was never equalled by that of any previous army in Ireland. Their engineer-

ing department was under the control of Sir Martin Beckman, Superintendent of Artillery, who was specially sent from England by the Prince of Orange for that purpose. The Baron de Ginckell, having concluded the necessary measures for the defence of Mullingar, and having planted four pieces of cannon on the south side of that town, despatched the Rev. Mr. Trench, a Protestant clergyman, and a staunch Williamite, with a small party of horse, numbering thirty, to Ballyboy, where the Duke de Wirtemberg was stationed, to tell his Grace to reconnoitre about Banagher, and encamp in that neighbourhood. When this party reached their destination, they found Ballyboy in possession of the Irish, through whom, with great difficulty, they fought their way to Roscrea, where they found the Duke. On the 7th, the Baron de Ginckell sent another messenger to the Duke de Wirtemberg, with orders to join the rest of the army, and then marched to Ballymore, which was situated about half-way between Athlone and Mullingar. Convenient to this place was a fort bearing the same name. This fortification was erected on a peninsula that jetted into the lough, and had an area of about ten acres. On the south side, which was not protected by the waters of the lake, there were a wall and ditches, and on this side also stood the entrance. The road which led to it was very narrow, and a bog extended from the south-west in a north-western direction. The Irish, during the winter, fortified this place, and on the following spring a detachment of the regular army, withdrawn from the garrison of Athlone, under Lieutenant-Colonel Ulick Burke, arrived there. The whole garrison of regular troops and Rapparees amounted to 1,130 men. The place was not suited in anyway to stand a siege, as every part of the fort was commanded by an adjoining eminence. The garrison had scarcely any powder, and their cannon consisted of two small pieces, mounted on cart-wheels. On the approach of his army, the Baron de Ginckell despatched a messenger to the Governor, to demand the surrender of the fort, and offering favourable terms, but lieutenant-Colonel Burke refused to comply, and fired on the advanced guard of the English. The Baron de Ginckell now ordered four field pieces to cannonade the fort. For four hours they kept up an incessant fire, but still the Irish would not surrender to the superior forces of the Commander-in-chief. Finding they could not succeed by this means, the Williamites had to formally besiege this wretched fort. There was an old ruined castle to the south-west of the peninsula which commanded it, and therefore the Baron de Ginckell resolved to take possession of this fortification, in which were stationed fifteen men, under the command of a sergeant. In attempting to execute their design the troops were fired upon several times by the Irish, who, after some time seeing that further resistance was useless, reluctantly surrendered ; and the Baron de Ginckell ordered the brave sergeant to be immediately hanged for his obstinate defence of an untenable place. The remainder of the day the Baron de Ginokell was busily employed in making as strict preparations as if he were about to besiege a strongly-fortified city ; and at ten o'clock that night he had succeeded in erecting four strong batteries, on which he caused to be mounted fourteen cannon and four mortars, with which, on the next morning, the 8th of June, between half-past three and four o'clock, he opened a galling fire on the fort. After four hours' hard cannonading, the Baron de Ginokell imagining that Lieutenant-Colonel Burke's stubbornness was overcome, summoned him to surrender the fort, at the same time threatening him thus : — “ If you will not deliver up the place within two hours, by — you shall have the same treatment your sergeant met with yesterday.” On receiving this message, the Governor, instead of complying, replied by saying, that he hoped any message the Commander-in-chief of the army of the Prince of Orange wished to send him would for the future be in writing. The Baron then wrote him the following note : —

“ Since the Governor desires to see in writing the message which I just now sent him by word of mouth, he may know that if he surrenders the Fort of Ballymore to me within two hours, I will give him and his garrison their lives, and make them prisoners of war ; if not, neither he nor they shall have any quarter, nor another opportunity of saving themselves. However, if in that time their women and children will go out, they have my leave.

“ Given at the Camp, this 8th day of June, 1691, at eight o’clock in the morning.

“ Baron de Ginckell.”

The Governor was unmoved by this threat, and asked permission to march out on honourable terms, but was positively refused leave to do so ; and all the women and children remained in the fort, preferring to suffer death with their relatives, than throw themselves on the mercy of the enemy. All the guns and mortars again opened on the fort. The newly-erected works quickly fell before the incessant fire of cannon-ball and shell. The garrison behaved most heroically, and continually fired their two small guns, in order to preserve themselves ; but their powder being exhausted, and Lieutenant-Colonel Burton, their principal engineer, killed, they saw the necessity of endeavouring to obtain a treaty from the Commander-in-chief of the Williamite army. Accordingly, at twelve o’clock in the afternoon, they hung out a white flag, as a signal of their intention to surrender; but the Baron de Ginckell, being very much annoyed with the Governor for having refused to accept the conditions he offered, commanded the firing to continue without intermission. At seven o’clock that evening, two large breaches having been effected, a strong body of men, well armed, proceeded in four boats to attack the place in an unguarded quarter. The Irish now, for the second time, hung out a signal of surrender, and the Baron de Ginckell ordered the firing to cease. Lieutenant-Colonel Burke then came out, with some of his officers, and surrendered the fort. Forty of the Irish were killed, and the prisoners amounted to fifty-one officers, 780 privates, 260 Rapparees, and about 400 women and children. These were secured by Colonel Earle, who entered the fort by the breach after its surrender. The Irish officers were sent to Dublin by their captors, and there confined ; and the unfortunate soldiers and Rapparees were transported to the Island of Lambay, where their four days’ allowance of food was scarcely sufficient for one meal ; and their friends being prohibited from seeing them, they died miserably, after suffering the most direful want. The women and children were liberated, but, being homeless and friendless, only to wander for a short time over the country, and then die of neglect and starvation. Though the Williamites claim the credit of having spared the lives of those unfortunate creatures, still, in reality, they were their murderers, for they banished their fathers, husbands, and brothers, who alone on earth would have afforded them succour.

The Baron de Ginckell was engaged from the 10th to the 17th of June, in repairing the fort and putting it into a state of defence.

On the 17th, lieutenant-Colonel Toby Purcell was appointed Governor of Ballymore, and four companies of Lieutenant-General Douglas’s regiment were left under his command, and on the 18th the whole of the Williamite army was on its march to besiege Athlone. On reaching Ballybum Pass, where they halted for the night, they were joined by 7,000 foreign troops, under the command of the Duke de Wirtemberg and the Count de Nassau, which augmented the Baron de Ginckell’s forces to about 27,000 men.

Baron de Ginkell besieges Athlone.

During the last siege of Athlone the English Town was not defended, but now 400 men were stationed there, under the command of Colonel Sir John Fitzgerald, Baronet. Its walls were not razed to the ground by Lieutenant-General Douglas in his cowardly and hasty flight from before the town in the previous year. He feared waiting to do so, believing he was pursued by Sarsfield. They were, however, old, and not sufficient in strength to resist artillery such as the Baron de Ginckell had at his command. A small advanced party of cavalry belonging to lieutenant-General the Sieur de St. Ruth, Commander-in-chief of the Irish army, having arrived, it was then resolved to defend the Leinster side of the Shannon, in order to

gain time until the whole Irish army would have come from Limerick to relieve the garrison. Such was the state of Athlone when, at three o'clock on the morning of the 19th of June, the Baron de Ginckell, at the head of nearly 27,000 men, appeared before it.

Sir John Fitzgerald despatched some grenadiers and irregulars to the moat of Grenoge, and at the break of day they beheld Baron de Ginckell and his forces approaching. The Irish defended every pass for five miles, retreating in regular order, and by their gallantry prevented the Baron de Ginckell's forces from pressing onward more quickly. During this slow march, the English, Dutch, and Danes lost considerably. So successfully did this small body of Irish engage the enemy that it was nine o'clock before they returned to the English Town. The Baron de Ginckell, seeing that the Irish were prepared to offer every resistance, and defend the English Town as well as the Irish Town, though the walls of the former were old and weak, and all the houses within and without them burned, immediately ordered three cannon to be planted on the Lanesborough side, and to open fire on a breast-work possessed by them on the Connaught side of the river. At six o'clock in the evening a second battery was erected by the English. During the entire of the ensuing night the Williamites were hard at work, so that at eight o'clock on the following morning their exertions were rewarded by having a strong battery mounted, with nine eighteen-pounders, ready to open fire on the town. Their heavy ordnance was by this time all drawn up before the walls of Athlone, and now thundered forth upon the devoted town. For a time nothing could be seen but clouds of black smoke gradually ascending, and then blending with the atmosphere, and nothing heard above the loud booming of the cannon, which, reverberating through the country, shook the very earth. The result of this heavy and deadly fire was that by twelve o'clock they had succeeded in making a large breach in the bastion near the Dublin Gate. When this was effected, De Ginckell gave orders to continue the fire without intermission, in order to prevent the garrison from repairing the breach. At three o'clock the Baron de Ginckell held a council of war, and, after much debate between his principal officers, it was agreed on to make an effort to take the town by storm. At five o'clock in the evening, the storming party, which consisted of 4,000 men, Dutch, Danes, Huguenots, Hanoverians, and English cavalry and infantry, boldly advanced to the breach. Here they were opposed by the Irish, who fought bravely, though almost exhausted from fatigue and hunger, having been engaged with the enemy for forty-eight hours without intermission. Still they persisted in defending the breach, and although many of them fell, their ranks were as quickly filled up by others. Thus the conflict continued, until between killed and wounded the Irish had lost 200 brave soldiers. They then retreated, stoutly contesting the ground, inch by inch, with the enemy, until they reached the narrow bridge that connected both portions of the town. Here the Irish determined to make a last effort, in the hope that in the meantime they might receive reinforcements from Lieutenant-General de St. Ruth. A thought now occurred to the Governor which reassured him to a certain extent. He conceived that by breaking down the arches of the bridge in the rear, while the small but daring party of Irish on the bridge held their 4,000 well-disciplined foes in check, the English would be prevented from crossing the river. In a few moments could be heard the sounds of shovels, spades, and pickaxes hard at work tearing up the ancient bridge, which being overheard by the Scotch veteran, Major-General Hugh Mackay, caused him a great deal of anxiety, and he endeavoured to encourage his men, and even called upon the officers by name to press forward, and by their example incite the English and other foreigners to beat back the Irish from the bridge, as he knew that if they succeeded in breaking any of the arches the Williamites would be as far as ever from victory. The English now pressed forward, crying out "The bridge, the bridge! Drive the Irish from the bridge!" But during this time, while the dauntless Irish soldiers stationed in front kept back the enemy, their companions were actively engaged in tearing up the rear of the bridge. A dull sound now fell on the ears of the English, and although the small band of Irish soldiers believed that it was caused by the falling in of one of the arches, still they did not even turn

round, but, regardless of their own safety, continued to engage the enemy. This sound was immediately followed by a splash, and the English were soon after relieved of their anxiety, as only a portion of an arch had given way. They now redoubled their efforts, as they felt sure if they did not succeed in passing quickly, the remainder of the bridge would soon be broken down ; but, despite their best endeavours, they were not able to repulse the Irish, who bravely maintained their ground, until warned by their comrades in the rear to save themselves, as the bridge was fast giving way. Some of the Irish then crossed on the fast sinking arch, whilst the majority remained, and took no notice of the summons, but continued to fight desperately. In less than a minute the whole arch gave way, leaving the heroic little party of Irish face to face with their enemies, with the turbulent waters of the Shannon behind them ! Their object being achieved, the Irish threw their arms into the river, and then plunged in themselves, while they were followed by a shower of bullets from the English ranks, which took no effect ; and the Williamites were surprised to see them immediately after pulled on shore, on the other side, by their companions in arms.

At the moment the Williamites took possession of the English Town, Lieutenant-General de St Ruth, who marched from Limerick at the head of the entire Irish and French troops, encamped two miles from thence. One of the first acts, after the English were frustrated in their many attempts to cross the bridge, performed by Lieutenant-General de St. Ruth was to dismiss the brave Sir John Fitzgerald, who had defended the English Town so well, and to appoint Lieutenant-General d'Usson its governor, at the same time giving as a reason that none of the Irish officers knew anything about the proper method of defending fortified towns, but the real cause was on account of his partiality to the latter, who was a countryman of his own.

In the evening. Baron de Ginckell ordered twelve cannon to be drawn within the now deserted English Town, and next day a battery for five twenty-four-pounders and a floor for six mortars were begun.

At six o'clock on the morning of the 22nd of June, a heavy fire was opened on the north-east portion of the Castle of Athlone, and at seven in the evening a large breach was made in its ancient and mouldering walls. On the 23rd, the cannon still continued to pour deadly showers of iron missiles, without intermission, during the night, against the walls of the Castle, and were well supported in their work of destruction by a galling fire from the large mortars ; and at five o'clock in the morning, the whole of one side of the Castle was razed to the ground. At two o'clock in the afternoon, the Williamites received a large supply of boats to enable them to cross the river, which were guarded by Colonels Lord Oxford's and Bayley's Regiments. They also captured one of the Irish soldiers, who was endeavouring to escape, and having offered this unfortunate fellow his life on condition that he gave whatever information he possessed with regard to the Irish, he informed them that sixty-four of his countrymen were stationed in the adjoining mill. The moment the Williamites heard this, their grenadiers fired the building, and the unfortunate Irish, having no means of escape, perished in the flames, with the exception of one who plunged into the river, and swam with great difficulty to the Irish Town. Another garrison less brave, had such an appalling catastrophe occurred to them, would probably have surrendered at once to the enemy ; but the gallant Irish took no notice of this cruel threat which had been put in force against them, and maintained their position with as much determination as they had hitherto done.

The Baron de Ginckell, not content with the number of cannon he had, gave orders on the 24th to have three additional batteries erected, on which he intended to mount the fresh supply of guns which he had received from the capital. He then resolved, if possible, to cross

the river. The plan he formed for doing so was to pass at the fords below Athlone, and also endeavour to cross at Lanesborough. For this daring purpose he procured some tin boats and some floats, and despatched an English Lieutenant in charge of a party of men to examine the ford at Lanesborough. On reaching it, the Lieutenant, observing some cattle grazing on the Irish side of the river, and either forgetful that his orders were to return as soon as he would have made his examination, or wilfully disobeying, he went in pursuit of them. The Irish, seeing this, suspected the enemy intended crossing at this ford, and to prevent them they erected breast-works as quickly as possible. The Lieutenant was afterwards tried for disobedience, and as it was considered necessary to make examples he was condemned to be shot. Brigadier Wauchop, on hearing of the Baron de Ginkell's intention, informed Colonel Edmond Buighe O'Reilly, who commanded at Lanesborough, and directed him, in case of any danger, to send for the Earl of Antrim's Regiment, which was ready to advance and drive the English and their allies into the river. Colonel O'Reilly threw up strong works on the only accessible part of the river on the Connaught side, and thereby frustrated the design of the Baron de Ginkell.

On the 25th, the Irish opened fire from two other batteries, which they had erected late on the evening of the 24th. They also kept up a steady fire from their other guns with such effect that the Williamite soldiers who were encamped close to the river had to remove their quarters to a much greater distance. The English returned this fire with tremendous effect from six twenty-four pounders. Almost all the houses in the Irish Town were destroyed, and several of the breast-works considerably damaged. Next day all the Williamite cannon kept playing on the now almost ruined town, as the determined inhabitants showed no signs of surrender. Still the Irish resolved to hold out, although it was with the greatest difficulty they could walk through the heaps of rubbish caused by the falling of the houses, and notwithstanding that they observed the enemy had received thirty large waggons heavily laden with powder. Baron de Ginkell, having taken possession of one end of the bridge, resolved to plank the broken arch, and force his way into the town, under the protection of the heavy fire of the Williamites. The firing was continued vigorously during the night, and an incalculable amount of ammunition was recklessly consumed ; but De Ginkell did not mind this in the least, as he was aware he could procure plenty, whenever he required it, from Dublin. On the 27th, Athlone was almost reduced to ashes, nothing being left but the blackened ruins of the houses, and here and there heaps of large broken stones, cannon-ball, and the calcined and mutilated remains of the dead. The streets, which a few days before could be easily trodden, now presented such an appearance, from the *debris* formed by the tumbling down of the houses, that it was impossible for more than three men to march abreast. Though the Irish garrison were aware that Baron de Ginkell was receiving fresh supplies of ammunition and provisions from Dublin, and other parts which had submitted to the Prince of Orange, still they made no proposals of surrender ; and the Green Flag of Erin, and the time-honoured standard of the Royal Stuarts, continued to wave proudly over this heap of ruins. A new battery was now erected by Baron de Ginkell, and mounted with five guns, for the purpose of cutting off all communication between the Irish garrison, under Lieutenant-General d'Usson, and the Irish army commanded by Lieutenant-General de St. Ruth. At this juncture the Baron de Ginkell began to think the Irish garrison would immediately surrender to him, their position was so desperate, in consequence of the dilapidated state of the walls, that they could scarcely move without exposing themselves to the well-directed fire of the Williamites. However, they obstinately continued to defend the almost ruined town with unabated vigour, which caused several of them to be slain. When the Commander-in-chief of the allied army considered the Irish should surrender, he did not suspect that ere they did so an action would have been performed destined for ever to grace the pages of Irish history. In the afternoon, 100 cars reached the Williamite camp from Dublin, laden with cannon-ball and other kinds of ammunition. The breast-works which were erected on the Connaught side of the bridge, and

which so successfully prevents Baron de Ginckell from planking the broken arch, having now taken fire, the Irish were compelled to retreat ; and De Ginckell, seeing no other obstacle of any importance in his way, under cover of a heavy fire from all his batteries, succeeded in placing beams across the buttresses which he intended to plank. The Williamites succeeded in boarding a portion of the arch, but night having fallen, they deferred doing the other until the morrow. Sunday, the 28th of June, was the most remarkable day since the siege had commenced. Great excitement prevailed throughout the Irish Town, for the garrison knew that as soon as Baron de Ginckell would have completed the planking, they would be no longer able to maintain the town. On the other hand, the English, Dutch, Danes, and other Williamites, were elated with the prospect of success that lay before them, and Baron de Ginckell concluded that even before he would have had time to lay down the other planks, he would see the signal of surrender hung out by the Irish. But in this he was mistaken, for an Irish sergeant of Brigadier Maxwell's Dragoons resolved to save Stout Athlone, at the imminent risk of his own life. To achieve this praiseworthy object, he knew it was necessary to destroy the newly-planked bridge, and for that purpose he demanded only ten resolute men. The required number having readily volunteered, the eleven brave Irish, clad in armour, rushed fearlessly forth, and commenced to hurl the plank into the river. Their work was only partially accomplished when a tremendous volley from all the field-pieces of the English was directed at them, the dense smoke of which completely darkened the air for the time being. A deep groan of despair burst from the Irish ranks, on beholding the lifeless bodies of their companions, literally riddled with bullets, with the exception of a few, who were blown into the river. By this heroic and unparalleled act, the Irish lost eleven of their bravest and most determined soldiers, without gaining the least advantage ; but their death was scarcely ascertained when eleven more from the ranks of the same regiment, with yells of vengeance, rushed forward, perfectly satisfied to share the unhappy fate of their dauntless companions, in the endeavour to accomplish what they had so nobly though unsuccessfully begun.

While thus busily engaged, the order ' Fire ! fire ! ' was given through the Williamite lines, and the English and other foreign soldiers commenced to reload their muskets, and the artillerymen the numerous field-pieces, and immediately after the entire army of the enemy opened a deadly fire on the bridge. When the darkness caused by this fierce cannonade cleared off, two alone of the brave Irish party remained on the Connaught side of the Shannon, the other nine having perished. A shout of exultation now arose from the Irish ; for, although they had lost so many of their faithful friends, they had the happiness of beholding the last plank that Baron de Ginckell had placed on the broken arch of the bridge floating swiftly down on the rapid waters of the Shannon ! Notwithstanding this defeat, the Baron de Ginckell resolved to again renew the attack on the Irish Town by the bridge, under cover of a close gallery. During the entire of this day the Williamite guns kept up an incessant fire, but particularly against the Connaught Tower, which Baron de Ginckell had been informed was the strongest part of the fortifications of Athlone, and thirteen squadrons of waggon horses were despatched to Dublin for a fresh supply of ammunition. The few remaining batteries of the Irish being now destroyed, they commenced to throw up breast-works and make ditches, to protect themselves from the fire of the enemy, to which they were at this time entirely exposed, and they continued to do so with great perseverance, though repeatedly interrupted by the terrific fire of the Williamites, which killed several of them. Up to this nothing was heard but the booming of cannon, but part of the wall which had hitherto stood on the bank of the river, and a portion of the Connaught Tower now fell with a loud crash. Baron de Ginckell, seeing there was yet no sign of surrender, in great uneasiness called a council of war, to determine what was best to be done should the intended attempt to take the Irish Town under the covered gallery fail. Accordingly in the afternoon the Williamite officers, of different nationalities, assembled in obedience to the command of the Commander-in-chief. After a stormy debate, it was unanimously resolved to attempt the passage across the Shannon on the

next morning, in the following order : — One party to cross to the Irish Town by the bridge ; a second to cross the river by means of the pontoons ; and a third, together with the horse, to pass at the ford. That night the pass-word agreed on was ‘ Kilkenny.’ It was then ordered that three Captains, five Lieutenants, two Ensigns, seven Sergeants, forty-three Grenadiers, and eighty-three privates out of each regiment, with fifteen rounds of ammunition each, should form in order under the walls of the town at six o’clock, under the command of the veteran Major-General Mackay, who had distinguished himself in Scotland, in opposing the gallant Viscount Dundee, who fell in the service of King James, at the battle of Killicrankey. Strict silence was also enjoined, and all the men were ordered to wear green sprigs in their hats, as marks of distinction.

The Passage of the Shannon.

At early dawn next morning, Major-General Mackay, at the head of the great storming party, stood ready to attack the Irish garrison, but to his dismay he soon discovered that the bridge of pontoons could not possibly be prepared before ten o’clock that morning. He was also very much disappointed to hear that his design of attacking the Irish Town was already known to the garrison, and he could now observe several detachments of the Irish army pouring into the town, notwithstanding the heavy fire which was directed against them from the Williamite batteries. Although the English and the other foreign troops intended carrying out this project with great secrecy, a deserter from their ranks swam across the Shannon on the previous night, and informed Lieutenant-General de St. Ruth of their intention, who very prudently ordered the picked men of his army to march to the town on the ensuing morning. Baron de Ginckell, seeing that the passage across the river would be warmly contested, owing to the reinforcements which had been received from the Irish camp, for the encouragement of the numerous rascals that compassed his army, caused a large quantity of money to be distributed among them. The Williamites then advanced to the bridge and commenced the contest by hurling a shower of grenades on the Irish, which was paid back with interest. This reciprocal fire was kept up for an hour when the Irish succeeded in burning the English fascines. The Williamites at first endeavoured to extinguish the flames, but the wood being old and very dry it soon became ignited, and it was apparent to them it was utterly impossible to do so on account of the numerous sparks that were flying in all directions, and accordingly they fell back and commenced to erect new breast-works, knowing that when the others were burned they would be entirely exposed to the fire of their enemies. The Williamite soldiers, but particularly the English, were discontented at being thus defeated, and Baron de Ginckell, in a rage, ordered all farther attacks to cease until he would have held a council of war. The cannon, however, continued to fire on the town. In the evening the Sieur de St. Ruth directed the walls of the Irish Town which stood next his camp to be removed, so that his men might march at any moment, sword in hand, to the trench near the river, and cut off the Williamites, should they again attempt to cross the Shannon ; but, unfortunately for the garrison, this order was not attended to. D’Usson, the Governor, was opposed to this measure from the commencement, and proposed to have the town garrisoned by a number of well-disciplined troops. But this prudent advice was not listened to by De St. Ruth, who only ordered up three badly-armed regiments of raw recruits, in order, as he said himself, “ to teach the fellows how to stand fire in front of the enemy.” These unfortunate men were doomed to certain death, not being properly supplied with either powder or bullets. Colonel Cormack O’Neill’s Regiment having applied three times to Brigadier Maxwell for bullets, that officer jestingly asked them, “ Do you design to shoot larks ?”

It now became evident that should the proposed council of war be held by the Commander-in-chief, great difference of opinion would exist as to the best course to pursue. The Irish, on the other hand, were overjoyed at having defeated a general of the Baron de Ginckell’s

ability, in his *third* attack on the town, and almost felt certain that he would abandon the siege.

On the 30th of June, a council of war was held by the Williamites, in which their present unsatisfactory position was debated ; and it was the opinion of many of the officers that the Commander-in-chief should either at once abandon the siege, or make a desperate struggle for victory. One of the principal reasons assigned by those was, that all the forage in the country for many miles round the town was already consumed. But others maintained that it would be advisable to remove from their present position, and attempt the river at another pass ; while a third party even objected to this mode of proceeding, on the plea that it would be leaving the way to Dublin open to the Irish army, under the command of Lieutenant-General de St. Ruth. But the Marquis de Ruvigny, Count Tetteau, and Major-General Thomas Tollemache, were for attempting another attack on the garrison, which was at length agreed to, though strongly opposed by Mackey, who held from the beginning an opinion that the passage of the river should have been attempted in a different place, and not opposite the Irish. It was next arranged to commence the attack at six o'clock next morning, for as that was the hour for relieving the guards, it would create least suspicion. Though, as a matter of right, the command belonged to Major-General Mackay, Baron de Ginckell, seeing he entertained such doubts of the success of the enterprise, preferred giving it to Major-General Tollemache.

Thomas Tollemache was the second son of Sir Lionel Tollemache, Baronet, of Helmingham, in Suffolk, and his wife Elizabeth, Countess of Dysart in her own right, she being the eldest daughter of William Murray, Lord Huntingtower, First Earl of Dysart, and descended in the male line from Lord Tullibardine and Huntingtower, who lived in the twelfth century, and from whose eldest son the Duke of Atholl derives his descent. On the death of her first husband, Sir Lionel Tollemache, the countess married, secondly, the Duke of Lauderdale, Knight of the Garter, his Majesty's Commissioner for Scotland, in the reign of King Charles II. ; but her ladyship had no issue by this marriage.

Mackay, being somewhat annoyed at the order given by Baron de Ginckell, told Tollemache that his taking command of the storming party was very ungentlemanly, and showed a great want of respect on his part. On being thus addressed, Tollemache at once resigned the command in favour of the fiery Scotsman, and as he, therefore, could not otherwise accompany the troops, he obtained Mackay's permission to do so as a volunteer.

The reason why the council of war decided on six o'clock as the hour for making the attack on the town was, because they calculated the Irish would imagine they had only come to relieve the guards who were stationed in the English Town. Baron de Ginckell gave orders that when the church bell tolled six o'clock, it was to be considered as the order for an immediate attack. When all the preparations were made, two deserters from the Irish camp swam across the River Shannon, and informed Baron de Ginckell that if he attempted another attack on the Irish Town, he might feel certain of success, as the Irish officers were all quarrelling with the French, and on the worst terms with De St. Ruth, who entertained the opinion that the Williamites were about to retreat. They also added, that the Commander-in-chief and the Earl of Lucan were perpetually quarrelling, as the latter General held a contrary opinion, and maintained that Baron de Ginckell would make, at least, one more attack. Indeed, so sure, said they, was De St. Ruth that the Williamites would abandon the siege, that he gave balls and other entertainments to the neighbouring gentry, which prevented the discipline in the camp from being as strict as it ought to have been. Had this been the case in Baron de Ginckell's camp, it would not have been of much importance, as the soldiers were nearly all veterans who were trained on the great battle-fields of the Continent ; while, on the contrary,

most of the Irish were raw recruits, unaccustomed to military life, with nothing to boast of but their courage.

On the morning of the 1st of July, when the church clock struck six, strange to say, the signal bell was not heard for six minutes after, and Brigadier Maxwell, suspecting that the Williamites intended executing some scheme — for, like many of the Irish officers, he was not deceived from the beginning by the movements of the enemy — though Baron de Ginckell had removed his cannon, sent a messenger to the Commander-in-chief of the Irish army, demanding the return of the troops which had been withdrawn from the garrison But De St. Ruth, still not believing that the Williamite Generals would venture another attack, refused to comply with his request, although Lord Lucan endeavoured to impress upon him the necessity of doing so without delay, saying at the same time — “Baron de Ginckell is a man who will never leave Athlone without making another great effort to reduce the garrison, as he would be afraid to do so, in consequence of public opinion, which now runs very high, and the unfavourable way the news of the three repulses he already met with was received in Dublin.”

At the tolling of the bell, 2,000 picked men, under the command of Major-General Mackay, the Duke de Wirtemberg, the second in command of the Williamite army. Prince George de Hesse-d’Armstadt, Brigadiers Sir Henry Bellassyse, Baronet, and Louis la Mellionere, Majors-General Count Tetteau, and Tollemache, with Colonel Hamilton, marched to the bank of the River Shannon, followed by 1,000 men who were to support them, while the remainder of the army were directed to cross by the bridge of boats, and the stone bridge. At the same time, the long line of Musketeers fired on the Irish Town, while all the great guns and mortars poured forth a terrific shower of shot and shell. Sixty bold Grenadiers, commanded by Captain Sandys, marching twenty abreast at the head of Mackey’s column, plunged fearlessly into the river, and received a heavy fire from the soldiers who garrisoned the Irish Town. However, not one of the storming party was injured by this discharge, as they were all clad in armour, and, seeing their escape, those under the command of Mackay cheered them loudly as they pressed forward through the water. The Irish were surprised by this sudden attack, but resolved to defend themselves, in the hope that assistance would speedily reach them from their camp. Lieutenant General d’Usson, whose duty it was, as Governor of Athlone, to be present, was absent at the time of the attack, which placed them in a still more precarious position; for he, like their Commander-in-chief, could not believe that the English would venture another attack. At the breach the Irish were only able, owing to a want of bullets, to give the enemy one discharge. The troops under Mackay, having hurriedly crossed the Shannon, entered the ruined but yet unsubdued town, and then divided into separate parties. One of these was ordered to get between the garrison and the camp, for the purpose of preventing their retreat; a second to wheel above the ford in the direction of the stone bridge, to assist those who were endeavouring to plank its broken arch; and a third to turn below the ford, and secure the landing-place for those who were to cross over by the bridge of boats. The bridges being now for the first time open to the Williamites, they rushed in great numbers into the town. Some of the Irish fled in the direction of their camp, but others maintained a hopeless resistance, having only pikes and the butt ends of their muskets to defend themselves with. Notwithstanding this disadvantage, they fought manfully for about half an hour, when 600 of them were slain, including several officers of distinction. Still the Castle of Athlone, the garrison of which was commanded by Major-General Wauchop, held out. The English, Dutch, and Danes, being now in full possession of the ruins of Athlone, scrambled over them, cursing and swearing fearfully, and pressed forward to besiege the castle. The moment the invading troops entered the river, an express was despatched to De St. Ruth, who was quite at ease in his tent, signing articles of accusation against the Duke of Tyrconnell, to give information of the attack. On hearing the news he said “—It is impossible

that Monsieur le Baron de Ginckell would attempt to take the town, and I so near with an army to succour it." To this vain boast the Earl of Lucan, who was present, replied— " I knew well the enterprise was not too difficult for English courage to attempt, and told you so before." He then urged the Commander-in-chief to send immediate assistance to Athlone, but he treated Lord Lucan's advice with contempt, and exclaimed passionately — " I would give 1,000 *Louis d'ors*, the English durst attempt to pass the river :” to which his Lordship responded — “ You had better spare your money, and mind your business.”

While the two commanders were engaged in altercation, the noise caused by the attack reached De St. Ruth's ears, and he at once saw his fatal error. He then despatched Major-General John Hamilton, with two brigades of infantry, to drive the enemy out. Hamilton had two miles to march, and, consequently, arrived only in time to rally the disheartened garrison, who were flying half dressed from the town they had so long and manfully defended. The reinforcements from the Irish camp opened such a deadly and effective fire on the English that the contest remained for a considerable time doubtful ; but as the Williamites were momentarily pouring into the Irish Town, Major-General Hamilton at last saw it would be useless further to attempt resisting such overwhelming odds, and consequently abandoned the attempt. In the present state of affairs, no hope remained for the gallant defenders of the castle, who were still obstinately defending it.

They were, therefore, obliged to surrender, and 100 of them were shamefully murdered in cold blood. Thus fell the ancient town of Athlone, not through any fault of the Irish, but through the misconduct of Lieutenant-General de St. Ruth, in not having given them sufficient and timely aid.

The Irish lost since the commencement of the siege, including prisoners, about 1,300 men. Among the killed were the gallant veteran, Colonel the Honourable Richard Grace, who had so successfully defended Athlone in the previous year, when it was besieged by Lieutenant-General Douglas. Colonel Art Oge Mac Mahon and Colonel O'Gara were badly wounded. Among the prisoners were Brigadier-General Maxwell, a French officer, two Captains, two Lieutenants, and an Ensign. The English lost, between killed and wounded, in all 489 men. Such was the second siege of Athlone, during the struggle for the Crown of Ireland.

The Irish chieftains ; or, A struggle for the crown (1872)

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