

Athlone.

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ATHLONE, which prior to 1885 was a Parliamentary Borough, partly in the barony of Brawney, Westmeath, and partly in the barony of Athlone, County Roscommon, 12 miles from Ballinasloe, and 59 miles from Dublin. The population of the town in 1891 was 6,700, and 1,169 houses. Lewis, in his Topographical Dictionary, tells us that in 1831 the population numbered 4,406. The town derives its name from the word Ath-Luin, signifying in the Irish language the ford of the moon, which previous to the introduction of Christianity the ancient inhabitants were worshippers of, or according to some Ath-Luin, in reference to the rapids at the bridge over the Shannon. After the erection of a town at this fort, it obtained the name of Bael-Atha-Luin, or the town of the “ford of the moon,” but which is now contracted into Bealathluin, as it was generally called by the Irish-speaking inhabitants of the neighbourhood. The town is situated on the river Shannon, by which it is divided into two parts, and on the great western road from Dublin to Galway. A monastery for Cistercian Monks, according to Archdall, dedicated to St. Peter, was founded in 1216, on the western or Connaught side of the Shannon. He says— “Here we find an abbey which was founded for Cistercian Monks under the invocation of St. Peter. Other writers give the dedication to St. Benedict, and say it was founded for the members of his Order. In a table of the proclamation of the church of Elphin this monastery is called the Monastery de Innocentia 1296.—King John, by a grant dated 30th May, gives to that abbey four carucates of land in the See of Lagscueth’s exchange for the See in which he erected the castle of Athlone and granted to the said monastery the tenth of the expenses of the aforesaid castle. 1279—King Edward I., on the 5th June, granted to the abbey the weirs and fisheries of Athlone and the tolls of the bridge, also eight acres of arable land in fee at the yearly rent of £12. 1455—died the Abbot, Thos. Curran, a man celebrated for extensive knowledge and unexampled wisdom. In the reign of Queen Elizabeth the abbey was in the possession of Sir Richard Bingham, First Commissioner of Connaught, together with three chapels in the barony of Athlone, viz., Camma, Kiltoom and Orayne, which were long under the name of vicarages. But we find that monks belonging to this abbey officiated in each of these churches from time to time till the final suppression, and received annually thereout three parts of the tithes belonging to the same which were found at the following amount : The chapel of Gamma, 40s. ; Kiltoom, 20s., and Omayne, 10s., all Irish money. 8th Sept., 20th of Elizabeth, a grant was made to Edward Fallon, of Athlone, of a mill on the water of Cluville, in Roscommon county, and two other mills above the bridge of Athlone on the east end of the bridge, and a small piece of land adjacent to the said castle lately built in the county Westmeath to hold the same at the rent of 12d. yearly. And on the 5th August preceding another Royal grant was made to the said Edward Fallon of a stone house and two gardens thereunto belonging with two other houses on the south side of the said castle and an eel weir on the river Shannon, all parcel of the possessions of this abbey. (Inquisition, 1st August, King James I.) Sir Richard Bingham, referred to above, was Lord President of Connaught, and in that capacity ruled the people of that province with a rod of iron. Morrison, the English historian of the period, says “Nevertheless, the people of Connaught were severely governed by Sir Richard Bingham ; the sheriff’s, and other officers of justice followed the example of the Lord President (Bingham). They entered the several counties attended by large bodies of armed men, pillaging and murdering the inhabitants whom they affected to despise.” The O’Fallons, who were rewarded by the “ virgin queen” with part of the property of St. Peter’s Abbey, were a branch of the O’Kelly’s who ruled the

barony of Athlone. In ancient times the O'Fallon's ruled the district comprising the parish of Camand Dysart, outside Athlone, in the county Roscomrnon. The O'Fallon had his chief castle at Milltown, a townland in Dysart. The first Sovereign of Athlone by the Charter, 1606, was Edward O'Fallon. In Queen Elizabeth's time the ancient monastery was used as a store. It had then a steeple. In a letter from John Crofton to the Lord Deputy, dated 16th July, 1572, he says, "The rebels burned the whole town. The steeple of the abbey, where the store is, was well defended. The body of the church where all the malt, beer, biscuits, all the baking and brewing vessels were stored was consumed by the rebels, who numbered 2,000 foot and 60 horse." The steeple of St. Peter's abbey, long since removed, is shown on a medal of William III. commemorating the taking of Athlone. The late Rev. Professor Stokes, M.R.I. A., gives the following interesting account of the ancient pile : "The street leading to it is called St. Peter's Port, and contains the house formerly called the governor's house, with curious staircases conducting to view points on the roof whence the governor could note the approach of the enemy. The walls of the abbey contain a figure called Sheelnagig, used to ward off the evil eye ; and also in the Nun's Church at Clonmacnoise, Killcora Castle, and many other parts of Ireland."

The town was incorporated by Charter dated 16th December, 4th James I., which was seized by James II., on a judgment of forfeiture obtained in the Court of Exchequer, and a new Charter was granted in the third year of that monarch's reign, but the judgment being subsequently declared void, the former was adopted and acted upon since the accession of William III. Other Charters confirming and extending the privilege of the Corporation were granted on the 16th James I. and the 17th Charles II., and the New Rules made by the Lord Lieutenant and the Privy Council. The 25th Charles II. provided that the appointment of the Sovereign, Recorder and Town Clerk should be subject to their approval. The style of the Corporation is the Sovereign, Bailiff, Burgesses, and Freemen of the Town of Athlone, and the officers are a Sovereign, two bailiffs, thirteen burgesses, including the Constable of the Castle, Viscount Castlemaine, a Town Clerk, Recorder, Sergeant-at-Mace, Billet Master, and a select body called the Common Council. These rights and privileges are long since abolished. Prior to the Act of Union the borough returned two members to the Irish Parliament. From that period down to 1885 it returned one Parliamentary representative. Athlone was represented in the Patriot Parliament of James II, 1689, by Edmund Malone, Ballinahown, and Counsellor Malone. The last named was the great advocate who in his place in the House of Commons opposed the penal statute of Queen Anne in 1709, entitled "an Act to prevent the further growth of Popery in Ireland." In 1800 Sir Richard St. George and the faithless Will Handcock were the Parliamentary representatives of Athlone. Barrington says of the last named worthy "Will Handcock (Athlone). He made and sang songs against the Union in 1799, at a public dinner of the opposition and made and sang songs for it in 1800." Will lived for some years after the publication of the first edition "Barrington's Rise and Fall of the Irish Nation," and he did not contradict the statement, consequently we may assume that the writer was correct. Handcock got a peerage. He was Governor and Constable of the Castle of Athlone, a Privy Councillor, and in 1802 was created a peer of Ireland as Baron Castlemaine, Moydrum, with limitations, default of issue male, to his only brother Richard and his heirs male. In 1822 he was created Viscount Castlemaine. He died in 1839.

ATHLONE IN THE DAYS OF CROMWELL.

The following account is compiled from Gilbert's "History of Public Affairs in Ireland" during the period 1641-1652. In Connaught no great service was done against the enemy, but some things that were done by Con O'Rourke, Anthony Brabazon, one Edmund Kelly, who lived near Athlone, Dowltagh, and others, if united, might have done some good for the common cause. Daily the force under them was becoming less, and they could not subsist long if they did not get relief. In Dublin a force of 6,000 men (foot) with 300 horse, was raised, of which Ormond took command for the relief of Athlone and part of the province of Conn-

ought. All this was notified to the Supreme Council, and General Preston expressed his intention of taking the field against the enemy, but at the same time he did not wish to run any risk, as he received no special command from the Council. The result was that his son, Don Diego, was appointed Chief in command in his stead. Orders were sent to Sir James Dillon, Governor of Westmeath and Longford, to have the forces in the two counties in readiness. Don Diego, MacThomas, Roger O'Moore, and other commanders and volunteers had their rendezvous near Kilbeggan. The enemy reached Athlone without opposition and relieved the garrison there with men and munitions of war. It is said that Sir James Dillon was all the time in friendly correspondence with the enemy. He sent orders to the inhabitants of the barony of Clonlonan to send 60 barrels of oats to Major Greenfield to Athlone for the enemies horse, otherwise they would burn and destroy all the barony. This was done, and the poor men lost both their oats and the garrons that carried it. The enemy, coming unaware into the district named plundered the gentry and inhabitants, and burned several houses, besides slaying a number of defenceless people. Amongst the killed was Christopher M'Auley, of Ballyloughloe ; and it is said that Sir James had a knowledge that he would be slain. Sir James continued all the time in his own house within two miles of Athlone feigning sickness. The Irish, under Dillon's command, and to whom he was bound to impart the strength and movements of the enemy, were left in complete ignorance of their doings in 1646. George Dillon at this time, an uncle of Lord Castellagh, a man of great pretensions, went to Waterford where the Lord Nuncio was stopping at the time, and he told him that the Castle of Athlone, though in possession of his nephew, who was a Protestant, was a stronghold of considerable importance, and that it was dangerous to have it in such keeping that it should be governed by a Catholic commander. The Lord Nuncio glad of the proposed change, despatched Dillon to Athlone to effect the change suggested. On arrival in Athlone he put himself in communication with a Franciscan Friar, Rev. Anthony O'Dallaghan, a zealous and pious member of the Order, to whom he unfolded his plan of surprising the Castle, and taking it from Lord Castellagh. Father O'Dallaghan appointed Captain Dillon, a brother of Lord Castellagh, and Captain McAuley to carry out the enterprise. On the evening of the night on which the castle was to be surprised George Dillon invited Lord Castellagh, Lady Castellagh, and the other members of the family, besides some visitors who were guests at the Castle, to his house in town. The invitation was accepted, as the Governor and his family never thought that his uncle would deceive him. Captain McAuley, who was well informed of the intrigue shortly after Castellagh quitted the Castle, approached the wicket entrance to the fortress, accompanied by four stout followers well armed. McAuley was well known to all the officials and hangers-on at the Castle. McAuley called on the porter to admit him, but that worthy said he would allow in himself, but not his followers. The Captain when passing through the wicket, signalled to his stalwart adherents to rush in after him. They did so, and one of them stabbed the porter with his skein in the heart, and he dropped dead at his feet. A party of armed men who were concealed in adjacent houses followed their leader. The defenders who offered opposition, were quickly disarmed, and some of them slain, and others thrust outside the castle walls. The castle bell by signal was rung, and Captain Dillon proclaimed that the castle was taken and that it would be held for the King, and Lord and Lady Castellagh on hearing the shouts of joy that the castle was captured for the Clergy, became affrighted, and accused George Dillon of treachery.

Clanrickard, on the arrival of Captain Purcell and his forces, encamped near Athlone. He sent for Captain Kelly and son, and Terence Coghlan, of Kilcolgan, and employed them to wait on Owen Roe O'Neill, who was then in the County Longford, to know would he succour Athlone. The agents waited on him in Ballinalee (St. Johnstown). He received the envoys graciously and assured them that he would relieve Athlone or perish in the attempt. The agent's returned to Clanrickard's camp where the forces of Munster and Connaught were mustered. Clanrickard on hearing the decision of O'Neill and the strength of his army, ordered the redcoats that night to attack the Connanty Tower of the Castle, as he believed it could be easily captured. The attack was made, and ended in signal failure, and the redcoats

retreated to their camp. Next day Clanrickard invited Captain McAuley, the Governor, to a Conference in the camp. He attended, and the result was that he yielded up the Castle, as he knew nothing of O'Neill's promised succour.

In 1648, Colonel Richard, son of Walter Burke, apprehended the Provincial of the Franciscians of Ireland, Father Thomas MacKiernan, in Killclare, within four miles of Galway, where he was visiting the Friars of his Order, and was sent a prisoner to Clanrickard. He was handed over to Sir James Dillon by Clanrickard, who ordered him to be kept in close custody, where he endured great insults from his apostate friars, Father Patrick Plunkett and Father James Caron, who visited him everyday, not for zeal or affection either to himself or his cause, but to induce or seduce him to abandon the faith for a corrupt Government. Sir James Dillon, who kept him a close prisoner in the Castle of Athlone, heard of the conduct of Plunkett and Caron towards the Provincial, and after that their visits to his cell were less frequent. Owen Roe O'Neill on hearing of Father McKiernan's imprisonment remonstrated with Castellagh, the Governor of the Castle, and Sir James Dillon, and he was set at liberty.

Athlone, 1680

Piers in his "History of Westmeath," written in 1682, gives the following rather quaint account of Athlone :

"Athlone, a corporate town, situate on both banks of the Shannon. The part on this side of the river was much the better built. The other part, together with the King's Castle situate on the western bank, is in the county Roscommon. both parts united into one town by a very strong raised and well built bridge, in the middle whereof stands a fair monument with some figures well cut out in marble, together with Queen Elizabeth's escutcheon of arms, with inscriptions declaring the time and the founders of the building. This bridge, though the arches thereof be wide and large, causeth the river, which is here very deep, to rise and swell backwards, so that under it the river hath a great fall, which giveth it an advantageous situation to several under-shaft mills at each end of the bridge. One tower on the corner of the castle wall is so advantageously seated that it commandeth the whole bridge which nevertheless hath a great drawbridge on that end. This castle was founded by King John on a parcel of land belonging to St. Peter's Abbey, which is on that side of the river, for which he granted a compensation otherwise. It is built on a high raised mound hill, resembling one of our Danish raths or forts, the walls whereof do almost shut up the whole ground, in the centre whereof is an high raised tower which overlooketh the walls and the country round about. On the side that faceth the river are the rooms and apartments of the Lord President of Connaught and Governor of the Castle, the middle tower being the repository or store-house for ammunition and warlike provisions of all sorts. Of late, since the presidency was dissolved this castle and the demesnes of it and all revenues were granted, in fee by His Gracious Majesty now reigning to the Right Honourable Richard Jones, Earl of Ranelagh, grandson to Roger, Earl Ranelagh, who was President of Connaught in 1641, and his heirs. The presidents heretofore here held their courts of justice which are now dissolved. This town on both sides of the river the usurper Cromwell well fortified. The part on this side hath very strong walls flanked with lime and stone, according to the rules of modern fortification. The inside of these walls and bulwarks was lined with a large rampart of stone and earth. The outside was made not easily accessible by a large deep graff. Round about on the flankers were mounted several great guns. The town on the other side was also fortified with great ramparts of earth flanked, and a large deep graff. The works here were set with a quickset hedge which was well kept and newly shorn, and had obtained a considerable growth at the time of his Majesty's happy restoration. The town before the war (1641) on this side was fairly built, as to outward appearance, most houses boasting of their newly hewn coins and arches, but most especially the curious workmanship of the funnels of the chimnies, and one house built backward from the street by one Devenish that exceeds all the

rest for politeness of architecture. But this beauty was all without doors, for within they were ill-shaped and ill-contrived. In the fury of the late war this town was wholly destroyed by fire, but since it had in a good measure been repaired until by a very late fire nineteen of these houses have again been burned into cinders ; the market house on this side, the water hardly having been preserved. Here were two old convents or monasteries, the one on the Connaught side, called St. Peter's, the other one on the side of the river, St. Marys, for Franciscans, founded by Cathel Crumbdearg (or the red fist), but he lived not to finish it, that work being afterwards done by Sir Henry Dillon in 1244."

Cathal Crowdearg O'Connor was King of Connaught. He was known by the name of the red hand in consequence of the number of English he slew in the field and in single combat. He was a devoted son of the Church and his charity was unbounded. In 1189 he completely annihilated at Knockroy, a strong force of English under Almorice de St. Laurence, County Galway. He died wearing the habit of a grey friar in the monastery of Knockmoy; the same year he founded the monastery of Athlone.

The "Four Masters" notice that a fearful epidemic devastated Ireland that year.

Continuing, Piers says : " A church on the Leinster side in a fane state of preservation. The Castle gave the title of Viscount to the Right Honourable the Earl of Ranelagh, and the whole corporation sendeth two burgesses to our Parliament. The castle and town during the first years of the rebellion (1641) were holden and commanded by the Right Honourable Roger Jones, Viscount Ranelagh, Lord President of Connaught, but with what forces or strength at first I have not learned. Sure I am that the number was not great. No doubt there was the constant ward that is always in the King's Castle and and I believe but very little additional strength. For all the country that lies nighest Athlone on both sides of the Shannon were then for the most part of the Popish religion.

" Scarce six families in the county of Westmeath were Protestants, but more particularly this town of Athlone were all Papists. The town itself being of stone houses without other fortifications was strange. Nevertheless, it had walls and two towers of gatehouses or towers that covered the principal streets. The people were rich, and very early gave the Lord President faith and assurance to keep and defend their town against all Irish rebels, whatsoever, and in their assurance the Lord President thought fit to withdraw his forces out of the town, trusting themselves with the guard of the town on this side of the bridge. But it was not long before they appeared in their true colours, for in a few weeks time finding the President, trusting to them, went every Sunday with few attendants, and no apprehension of treachery in them, to the church, which is on this side of the town, and near Dublin Gate. They invited Sir James Dillon, who had at that time commanded all the Irish forces within twenty miles of Athlone on this side, to come to them, and opening the gates late on a Saturday night receive all his forces into their town without any noise, designing to surprise the Lord President, his daughters, and attendants next day as they should go to church, and having him in their custody to take the castle and capture the soldiers defending it. The Irish soldiers lay quiet till near morning, not one appearing abroad. The time for the execution of their design drawing nigh, the Lord President being ready to go to church, and the ladies taking coach, one of the Irish soldiers fixing and preparing his musket, it went off unawares. The others who lay ready, mistaking this for the signal, poured in the shot upon the castle windows, which altogether opposed that part of the town on this side. For as yet the Lord President had not appeared on the bridge, and by this mistake, although some damage was done to the house, the President, his family, and the King's Castle were preserved. Sir James being defeated in his expectations, laid close siege to the castle on this side, and on the Connaught side the Irish did the same. Blocking up all the passages, and manning all castles near hand on both sides of the river, and thus besieged and blocked up, doth the President remain for twenty-two weeks time. Nor were all the Protestant forces in Ireland able to

relieve them till supplies came from England. At last, in April, 1642, four regiments of volunteers, consisting of 4,000 men, besides officers, rendezvoused at Chester, for Irish service. The colonels were the Lord President of Munster, Sir Michael Early, Colonel Hanks, and Colonel Cromwell. This being now an unhappy conjuncture of time by reason of the difference between the King and his Parliament, the four regiments being also detained by cross winds from the sea, their commanders thought it their duty to offer their services to his Majesty, then at York. Resolving to march to him thither, if he were willing to accept their service, and to command them to come, that pious and gracious prince, though he received the offer of their services graciously, yet refused to accept thereof, saying that being raised for the service of Ireland and relief of his Protestant subjects there, he would not for any stress he himself was put to divert them, and advised them with all diligence to pursue the war there. The wind at last blowing fair, to the end of May the said regiments, with three or four troop of horse and dragoons, landed in Dublin, and after some time of refreshment they draw into the field under command of the Earl (now Duke) of Ormonde, who was then Lieutenant-General of the army in Ireland, who, with them marched to the relief of Athlone, and by slow and weary marches comes to Ballinmore, within ten miles of Athlone. The Irish in all this march not attempting to intercept him ; yet attended close at his rear in hopes of picking up some tired stragglers. Hither came the Lord President to attend the General. For now the Irish had drawn off all their blockades and here received from him two full regiments of foot. His own and Sir Michael Early's, and two troops, the Lord Digby's of horse, and Colonel Moyles of the dragoons, but without any manner of provision, not so much as one biscuit, they being to be received into a place that had been blocked up and destitute of all necessaries. With the whole conduct of this affair the care and the vigilance of the General was conspicuous, who in all this time lodged not one night from the army, nor was known so much as to once have pulled off.

The President having received these forces sent them to several quarters, some to Ballinaclossy, of whose hard fate, I spoke before, some to Connerstown, and some elsewhere ; and it was expected that having a force now so considerable, he might have lived of himself and on the blood of his enemies. Making these who had been before so hard as to besiege him—now to maintain him. But the President, of temper exceeding good, just and honourable, was fitter for rule and command in time of peace, rather than war. Nevertheless, he often made impressions on enemy and never met them, but had advantage of them. Yet wanting salt, and having but little bread, and that very bad and having fallen into flukes and other emaciating diseases, and though now he was free on all hands, was under as bad or worse circumstances as when blocked up. His men began to die apace of all manner of diseases, which idleness, want of bread and employment usually bring along with them, insomuch that in one month's time the soldiers died faster almost than their surviving comrades could make graves for them. At this time it was that sixteen men, resolute and brave, rather than die like sheep, of hunger and disease, resolved to make an attempt to make their way with their arms in their hands to Dublin. They take their journey out of Athlone by night, but were met at Lowbaskin, near Ballymore, by some Irish soldiers, who shot them. Things going thus ill at home, the President about the middle of July takes the held and marches into Connaught with a force of 900 foot and two or three troops of horse, with one good battering gun. They sat down with this force at the Castle of Ballyconnell, about seven miles from Athlone on the road to Roscommon, which he forced to yield. Thence he immediately advanced before Ballintubber, the chief seat of O'Connor. There were in a body about three thousand horse and foot of the Mayo forces, under the command of one Butler, together with the county of Roscommon forces under O'Connor himself. The President, that he might draw them into the plain grounds, makes show of retreat for about three miles, when facing about he chargeth the enemy who had followed him, but in very good order and were drawn up, and after a short dispute he defeated their united forces.

“ Thus, wherever he saw an enemy he was victorious, yet so unfortunate as by all to be

nothing advantaged, nor were his men better fed or clad, but still remain under the same sicknesses and hardships as before, a clear demonstration the President knew better how to get than use a victory. After this victory, having a small supply of provisions, and ammunition scarce, he was forced to take himself a little too early in the year to his winter quarters. Some he quartered with Sir Michael Earnly in Roscommon, and some he marches back to Athlone. During his absence in Connaught Sir James Dillon was not idle in Westmeath. He made a blockade and encamped at Ballykeeran, three miles east of Athlone, upon a pass, and from thence took the opportunity of the absence of the main body of the enemy to storm the town on this side, being at this time but weakly manned. The soldiers forsook the walls, and betook themselves to the defence of the houses that were in themselves strong and flanked each other. He prevailed not against any but the hospital, which he forced and fired, and in it twenty sick soldiers were miserably burnt. But he enjoyed not his triumph long, for Captain St. George advancing on the Castle side with his company beat him out again with loss and slaughter of many of his men and forced him back to his former station at Ballykeeran. Soon after this Sir Michael Earnly was commanded to attack him in his camp, which he did, and forced him to retire to his stronger castles of Killinure and Killinfaughney. But as soon as his back was turned he took up his old station again and thence continued to distress the town by merely suffering no provisions to be brought in, and thus again, through famine and the badness of that small diet, the soldiers began to die apace, and the President being now under greater difficulty than ever, ordered Lieutenant Colonel Moyle, an expert soldier, with his troop of horse, to attempt to make his way to Dublin to solicit for relief. He marched out, but after some miles travel is met by very considerable forces of the Irish, and the alarm still increasing he was forced to retire back, fighting every step back, and thus filling up all the measures of a gallant commander and expert soldier, he made a gallant retreat without the loss of a man. Being hereat nothing discouraged he undertakes in a few days the same march, and through many difficulties and hardships, often fighting in great hazard, at last made his passage and brought his troops safe to Dublin. There he sets forth the deplorable state of the English regiments at Athlone. But, alas ! the State was then in no condition to afford relief. They were at that time themselves under great pressures. The Colonel seeing he could not prevail takes up his station elsewhere in the war. Things going every day worse and worse at Athlone, the President is forced to conclude a peace with Sir James Dillon, by which the country was encouraged and permitted to supply and furnish the markets, but, alas ! the poor soldiers were little advantaged thereby, for having no money wherewith to buy, they were tantalized, not relieved, by the plenty of the markets. During this treaty of cessation, the President had several meetings abroad with Sir James Dillon and his party. The President being under these ill circumstances, was very desirous at least to have his daughters and some other ladies in a place of comfort and safety, resolving in his own person to abide all hardships, to the uttermost. Giving several distant meetings to Sir James Dillon, he prevailed with him to procure from the great Council, then at Kilkenny, free passages for his daughters and other ladies and their men-servants, towards Trim. Sir James himself undertook the convoy, and very honourably formed the undertaking therein, for soon after he delivered up idles and his charge to Sir Richard Grenville at Trim.”

The Siege Of Athlone, 1691.

HEROIC DEFENCE OF THE BRIDGE. FROM A. M. “SULLIVAN’S “STORY OF IRELAND.”

The Williamite army rendezvoused at Mullingar towards the end of May, under Generals De Ginckle, Talmash, and Mackay. On the 7th June they moved westward for Athlone, “the ranks one blaze of scarlet, and the artillery such as had never before been seen in Ireland.” [1] They were detained ten days besieging an Irish outpost, Ballymore Castle, heroically defended by Lieutenant-Colonel Ulick Burke and a force of twelve hundred men against Ginckle’s army of thirteen thousand, and that artillery described for us by Macaulay. On the

18th Ginckle was joined by the Duke of Wirtemberg, the Prince of Hesse, and the Count of Nassau, with seven thousand foreign mercenaries. On the 19th their full force appeared before Athlone and summoned the town to surrender.

On the previous occasion, when besieged by Douglas, the governor (Colonel Grace) relinquished as untenable the Leinster (or “English”) side of the town, and made his stand successfully from the Connacht (or “Irish”) side. The governor on this occasion—Colonel Fitzgerald resolved to defend both the “English” and “Irish” sides. St. Ruth having strongly counselled him so to do, and promised to reach him soon with the bulk of the Irish army from Limerick. Colonel Fitzgerald had not more than three hundred and fifty men as a garrison ; nevertheless, knowing that all depended on holding out till St. Ruth could come up, he did not wait for Ginckle to appear in sight, but sallied out with his small force, and disputed with the Williamite army the approaches to the town, thus successfully retarding them for five or six hours. But Ginckle had merely to plant his artillery, and the only walls that Athlone possessed—on *that* side at least—were breached and crumbled like pastry. Towards evening, on the 17th June, the whole of the bastion at the “Dublin Gate,” near the river on the north side, being levelled, the (English) town was assaulted. The storming party, as told off, were four thousand men, headed by three hundred grenadiers, under Mackay, and with profuse supports besides. To meet these, Fitzgerald had barely the survivors of his three hundred and fifty men, now exhausted after forty-eight hours’ constant fighting. In the breach, when the assault was delivered, *two hundred* of that gallant band fell to rise no more. The remainder, fiercely fighting-back inch by inch towards the bridge, pressed by their four thousand foes. From the Williamites shouts now arose on all sides of “*the bridge the bridge*” ; and a furious rush was made to get over the bridge along with, if not before, the retreating Irish. In this event, of course, all was lost; but the brave Fitzgerald and his handful of heroes knew the fact well. Turning to bay at the bridge-end, they opposed themselves like an impenetrable wall to the mass of the enemy ; while above the din of battle and the shouts of the combatants could be heard sounds in the rear that to Mackay’s ear needed no explanation—*the Irish were breaking down the arches behind*, while yet they fought in front ! “*They are destroying the bridge*” he shouted wildly : “On ! on ! save the bridge the bridge !” Flinging themselves in hundreds on the few score men now resisting them, the stormers sought to clear the way by freely giving man for man, life for life, nay four for one ; but it would not do. There Fitzgerald and his companions stood like adamant ; the space at the bridge-end was small ; one man could keep five at bay ; and a few paces behind, wielding pick and spade, and crowbar, like furies, were the engineers of the Irish garrison. Soon a low rumbling noise was heard, followed by a crash ; and a shout of triumph broke from the Irish side ; a yell of rage from the assailants ; a portion, but a portion only, of two arches had fallen into the stream ; the bridge was still passable ! Again a wild eager shout from Mackay. “On ! on ! Now ! now ! the bridge !” But still there stood the decimated defenders, with clutched guns and clenched teeth, resolved to die but not to yield. Suddenly a cry from the Irish rear : “Back, back, men, *for your lives*.” The brave band turned from the front, and saw the half-broken arches behind them tottering. Most of them rushed with lightning speed over the falling mass ; but the last company—it had wheeled round even at that moment to face and keep back the enemy—were too late. As they rushed for the passage, the mass of masonry heaved over with a roar into the boiling surges, leaving the devoted band on the brink in the midst of their foes. There was a moment’s pause, and almost a wail burst from the Irish on the Connacht side ; but just as the enemy rushed with vengeance upon the doomed group, they were seen to draw back a pace or two from the edge of the chasm, fling away their arms, then dash forward and plunge into the stream. Like a clap of thunder broke a volley from a thousand guns on the Leinster shore, tearing the water into foam. There was a minute of suspense on each side, and then a cheer rang out—of defiance, exultation, victory—as the brave fellows were seen to reach the other bank, pulled to land by a hundred welcoming hands.

St. Ruth, at Ballinasloe, on his way up from Limerick, heard next day that the English town had fallen. He instantly set out at the head of fifteen hundred horse and foot, leaving the main army to follow as quickly as possible. On his arrival, he encamped about two miles west of the town, and appointed Lieutenant-General D'Usson governor instead of the gallant Fitzgerald, as being best skilled in defending fortified places. [2] Now came the opportunity for that splendid artillery, "the like of which," Macaulay has told us, "had never been seen in Ireland." For seven long days of midsummer there poured against the Irish town such a storm of iron from seven batteries of heavy siege guns and mortars, that by the 27th the place was literally a mass of ruins, amongst which, we are told, "two men could not walk abreast." On that day "a hundred wagons arrived in the Williamite camp from Dublin, laden with a further supply of ammunition for the siege guns." That evening the enemy by grenades set on fire the fascines of the Irish breastwork at the bridge, and that night, under cover of a tremendous bombardment, they succeeded in flinging some beams over the broken arches, and partially planking them. Next morning it was Sunday, the 28th June the Irish saw with consternation that barely a few planks more laid on would complete the bridge. Their own few cannon were now nearly all buried in the ruined masonry, and the enemy beyond had battery on battery trained on the narrow spot it was *death* to show in the line of the all but finished causeway !

Out stepped from the ranks of Maxwell's regiment, a sergeant of dragoons, Custume by name. "Are there ten men here who will die with me for Ireland?" "A hundred eager voices shouted "Aye." "Then" said he, "we will save Athlone ; *the bridge must go down.*"

Grasping axes and crowbars, the devoted band rushed from behind the breastwork, and dashed forward upon the newly-laid beams. A peal of artillery—a fusilade of musketry—from the other side, and the space was swept with grape-shot and bullets. When the smoke cleared away, the bodies of the brave Custume and his ten heroes lay on the bridge riddled with balls. They had torn away some of the beams, *but every man of the eleven had perished.*

Out from the ranks of the same regiment dashed as many more volunteers. "There are eleven men more who will die for Ireland." Again across the bridge rushed the heroes. Again the spot is swept by a murderous fusilade. The smoke lifts from the scene ; nine of the second band lie dead upon the bridge two survive, but the work is done ! The last beam is gone : Athlone once more is saved !

I am not repeating a romance of fiction, but narrating a true story, recorded by lookers on, and corroborated in all its substance by writers on the Williamite and on the Jacobite side. When therefore young Irishmen read in Roman history of Horatius Cocles and his comrades, who

 "kept the bridge
 In the brave days of old."

let them remember that the authentic annals of Ireland record a scene of heroism not dissimilar in many of its features, not less glorious in aught ! And when they read also of the fabled Roman patriot who plunged into the abyss at the forum, to save the city, let them remember that such devotion, not in fable, but in fact, has been still more memorably exhibited by Irishmen ; and let them honour beyond the apocryphal Curtius, the brave Custume and his glorious companions, who died for Ireland at Athlone.

The town was saved once more—yet awhile. "Ginckle, thus a second time defeated in trying to cross the Shannon, resolved to renew his approaches over the bridge by the more cautious method of a covered walk, or 'close gallery,' and to support the new mode of attack by several others in different directions." The whole of that day he cannonaded the Irish town with great violence, "as I believe never town was," writes a spectator. Nevertheless, the Irish,

burrowing and trenching amidst the chaotic mass of ruins and piles of rubbish once called the town of Athlone, continued to form new defence as fast as the old were levelled, and Ginckle was at his wit's end what to rely upon if his "close gallery" should fail. A council of war in the Williamite camp decided that on the morning of the 29th, the passage of the river should be a third time attempted, and in greater force than ever. A bridge of boats was to be thrown across the river some distance below the old stone structure, and it occurred to some one to suggest that as the summer had been exceedingly dry, and as the water in the river appeared to be unprecedently low, it might be worth while to try sounding for *a ford*.

This haphazard thought this apparently fugitive suggestion won Athlone.

"Three Danish soldiers, under sentence of death for some crime, were offered their pardon if they would undertake to try the river. The men readily consented, and, putting on armour, entered at three several places. The English in the trenches were ordered to fire seemingly *at* them, but in reality over their heads, whence the Irish naturally concluded them to be *deserters*, and did not fire till they saw them returning, when the English by their great and small shot, obliged the Irish to be covered. It was discovered that the deepest part of the river did not reach their breasts." [3] Thereupon it was decided to assail the town next morning suddenly and by surprise at three points ; one party to go over the bridge by the "close gallery" a second to cross by the pontoons or boat bridge ; the third, by one of the fords. Once more Mackay was to lead the assault, which was fixed for ten o'clock next morning ; again, as at the Boyne, each Williamite soldier was to mount a green bough or sprig in his hat ; and this time the word was to be "Kilkenny."

That night a deserter swam the river below the town and revealed to St. Ruth that an assault was to be made by a boat-bridge and "close gallery" early next morning ; and lo ! when day dawned, the Williamites could descry the main army of the Irish defiling into the town, and detachments stationed at every point to contest the assault which was to have been "a surprise." To make matters worse, the boats were not ready till ten o'clock, instead of at six. Nevertheless the assault was proceeded with, and the storm of grenades began to fly. It had been decided to begin the conflict at or on the bridge, close to the broken arches, where (on their own side) the English had a breastwork, up to which the "close gallery" had been advanced, and upon the attack at this point the other operations were to depend. After an hour's hot work the Irish set on fire the fascines of the English breastwork. There being a strong breeze blowing, in a few minutes the flames spread rapidly ; the breastwork had to be abandoned ; the "close gallery" was almost destroyed ; and the storming columns were called off. The Williamite assault upon Athlone a third time had proved a total failure.

Great was the exultation on the Irish side of the river at the triumphant defeat and utter abandonment of this, the final attempt, as they regarded it, on the part of the foe. After waiting till near five o'clock to behold the last of the Williamites called to the rere, and every other sign of defeat exhibited on their side, St. Ruth drew off the victorious Irish army to the camp, three miles distant, and, over-confidently, if not vaingloriously, declaring the siege as good as raised, invited the resident gentry of the neighbourhood and the officers of the army to a grand ball at his quarters that evening.

Meanwhile Ginckle, a prey to the most torturing reflections, wavered between a hundred conflicting resolutions or momentary impulses. At last he decided to raise the siege, but wishing for the decision of a council to shield him somewhat from the outcry he apprehended in Dublin and in London, a meeting was held to consider the point. After a hot and bitter disputation, a resolution, at first laughed at by the majority, was adopted—namely, to *try that very evening, nay that very hour*, a sudden dash across the river by the fords, as (it was rightly conjectured) the Irish would now be off their guard. As a last refuge from disgrace, Ginckle resolved to try this chance.

Towards six o'clock the Irish officer on guard on the Athlone side, sent word to the General (St. Ruth) that he thought there was something up on the opposite bank, and begging some detachments to be sent in, as only a few companies had been left in the town. St. Ruth replied by a sharp and testy remark, reflecting on the courage of the officer, to the effect that he was frightened by fancy. By the time this hurtful answer reached him, the officer saw enough to convince him that infallibly an assault was about to be made, and he sent with all speed to the camp entreating the general to credit the fact. St. Ruth replied by saying that if the officer in charge was afraid of such attacks, he might turn over the command to another. Sarsfield was present at this last reply, and he at once judged the whole situation correctly. He implored St. Ruth not to treat so lightly a report so grave from an officer of undoubted bravery. The Frenchman—courageous, energetic, and highly-gifted as he unquestionably was—unfortunately was short-tempered, imperious, and vain. He and Sarsfield exchanged hot and angry words ; St. Ruth resenting Sarsfield's interference, and intimating that the latter henceforth should know his place. While yet this fatal altercation was proceeding, an *aide-de-camp* galloped up all breathless from the town—*the English were across the river and into the defences of Athlone !* Even now St. Ruth's overweening self-confidence would not yield. " Then let us drive them back again," was his answer, at the same time directing troops to hurry forward for that purpose. But it was too late. The lodgment had been made in force. The English were now in the defences. The walls of the town on the camp side had been left standing, and only a siege could now dispossess the new occupants. Athlone was lost. [4]

[1] Macaulay.

[2] M'Cann.

[3] Harris.

[4] Amongst the slain on the Irish side in this siege was the glorious old veteran, Colonel Richard Grace, who was governor the preceding year. His great age he was now nearly ninety years of age caused him to be relieved of such a laborious position in this siege, but nothing could induce him to seek, either in retirement or in less exposed and dangerous duty, that quiet which all his compeers felt to be the old man's right. He would insist on remaining in the thickest of the fighting, and he died " with the harness on his back." He was one of the most glorious characters to be met with in Irish history. The erudite author of " The Green Book" supplies a deeply interesting sketch of his life and career.

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