

The Battlefield of Aughrim.

from

The battle-fields of Ireland, from 1688 to 1691

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'Twas five o'clock on the morning of July 12th, 1691. A heavy fog obscured the rising sun, and passed like a moving curtain along the hills that separated the adverse armies now preparing for the stern arbitrament of battle. What a chaos of human feeling surged and swayed beneath it! On the one side, the love of home, kindred, and country, and the memories that come of ages of persecution ; on the other, that of power, plunder, and confiscation, and the wantonness that exalts vice into virtue, and defies usurpation. The maintenance of legitimate right, and the establishment of perfect civil and religious liberty, called forth the royal army, and marked its footsteps from the advent of this war to its close. An unnatural usurpation, and the ambition to dominate in matters civil and religious, heralded the other, and its course was marked by cruelty and proscription. Their causes were markedly dissimilar, and of the spirit which impelled them to battle, each army, in its various gradations, was a fair representative.

At early dawn, Ginckle, who induced the battle, was moving his men across the river, and forming them, according to prearrangement, on a level ground about a mile to the west of it, leaving still a span of two miles between him and his adversary. This was effected by eight o'clock, but an advance was suspended, owing to the heavy fog that lay over the hills, and rendered the manœuvring of his army in the vicinity of the foe both troublesome and hazardous.

As the line in which it was now drawn up, was that in which it entered the field of Aughrim, and which it preserved through the action, until forced to re-form after a series of futile assaults against the Irish right, it is here particularly described, in order to avoid disconnecting repetition hereafter.

Two parallel lines, somewhat over two miles in length, a considerable distance apart, arranged in four divisions, each consisting of a front and rear line under the command of its respective brigade and regimental commanders, constituted his entire army and array of battle. Beginning at the northern or right flank, and passing to the left, each division, front and rear, stood in the order following : [1]

FIRST DIVISION, front : — Levison, Winn, Oxford, Langster, Ruvigny, and Villers ; rear : — Cunningham, Winn, Lanier, Wolseley, and Byerly. The front line of this division was under the command of Lieutenant-General Scravenmore

THE SECOND DIVISION, front ;— presents the regiments of Kirke, Gustavus Hamilton, Herbert, Lord George Hamilton, Foulke, Bellasis, and Brewer ; and its rear those of Stuart, Earle, Tiffin, St. John, Lisburn, and Meath ; the former commanded by Major-General Mackay and Brigadier Bellasis, and the latter by Major-General Talmash and Brigadier Stuart. [2]

THE THIRD DIVISION, front : — La Mellioneire, Du Cambon, Belcastle, Greben, Danish, Danish, Danish ; rear : — Nassau, Lloyd, Prince of Hesse, Lord Cutts, Danish, Danish, Danish. [3] It is scarcely necessary to remark that the troops of this division were all foreign, being composed of Danes and Huguenots ; the front line under the direction of Major-General Tettau and Brigadier La Mellioneire, and the rear under that of Major-General Count Nassau and the Prince of Hesse — a Brigadier.

THE FOURTH DIVISION : — Nearly all foreign too, stood in this order ; front : — La Forrest, Schested, Donop, Doncour, Monpouillon, and Eppinger ; rear : — Schack, Nienhouse, Zulistein, Reedefel, Ginckle, and Eppinger ; the former under Major-General La Forrest and Brigadier Eppinger, and the

latter under Major-General Holstaple and Brigadier Schack. — The whole was under the command of Lieutenant-General Ginckle, now Earl of Athlone, [4] and the Prince, or Duke, of Wurtemberg.

Of this long array of names, none represented less than a regiment, while many of them stood in front of a brigade. For instance : Ruvigny's place represents two regiments ; Cunningham's two ; Stuart's three ; Wolseley's four ; Brigadier Ginckle's two ; Eppinger's two ; and so on to between sixty and seventy regiments. And taking the lower number, sixty, and averaging the horse and foot at 500 [5] to a regiment, we deduce a force that cannot, by any legitimate computation, be set down at less than 30,000 men.

Of Ginckle's artillery perhaps no accurate estimate can now be given, — some historians rating it at over thirty pieces, and others as low as twelve ; while Story, who was present at the battle, is unaccountably silent on the subject. This, however, is well attested by all : — that at Ballymore, before his battering-train arrived, he had eighteen field-pieces and three mortars ; that at Ballyburn he was joined by Wurtemberg and Nassau, with a force of seven or eight thousand men, who, from the important positions held by them through the winter, must have had a park of artillery not less than eight pieces. And that the number was further increased after the siege of Athlone by four of the captured guns, which were mounted on carriages and taken to Aughrim. From the beginning to the end of the war he had cannon at will ; and this is beyond a doubt : — that while he might have had over forty pieces, he had certainly not under thirty ; and with this immense train, and an array of 30,000 men, computed at 23,000 foot and 1,000 horse, he stood between Garbally and Liscappel, awaiting but a favorable moment to advance on his expectant adversary.

It was really a formidable host, and wholly composed of veterans, both officers and men : of Dutch, Danes, and Prussians, who had seen service on many a continental battle-field ; of French Huguenots, whose bravery is generally conceded, and whose undying hatred of their own sovereign, rendered that service the most acceptable which was found under his most deadly enemies ; of Scotch, whose native hardihood is proverbial ; of English veterans, who, while well fed, are not wanting in many of the soldierly qualities ; and of Irish Protestants, now well inured to war, and who, if not the most brave, were certainly not the least zealous, for to them were chiefly to appertain the lands and livings of the country, which had now, even more than liberty or religion, become the wager of battle. With perfect harmony in his councils ; with an army which, for numbers, appointments, and appliances combined, was never equalled in the country since its first invasion ; with the prestige of a recent victory, and excited to the highest enthusiasm that promised reward or religious frenzy could inspire ; Ginckle now approached that field whereon was to be decided the destiny of three kingdoms, the fate of one of the oldest dynasties of Europe, and the liberty or thralldom of a race coeval with European history.

On the other hand, the scene passing in the Irish camp, while no less inspiring, was highly characteristic of the people and the cause they advocated. 'Twas the dawn of the Sabbath morning, and its advent was solemnized by those religious observances, the preparations for which had been made through the preceding night. And those ceremonies being ended, the troops were drawn out in the same order of battle in which they had, for the last two days, been awaiting the arrival of the enemy. As they stood in their mingled uniforms of red and green, with colors advanced, and their old battle-flag, bearing the emblem of an early civilization, and standing out above the long line of tents that formed the background, they made a most gallant show, which the import of the hour and the associations of the day and place rendered deeply solemn and impressive. In this order they remained through the early hours, the deep calm of determination settled over all ; but as the morning advanced the silence was at length disturbed by the stirring notes of preparation. The shrill tones of the trumpet sounded along the hill, and was followed by a long roll of drums, when St. Ruth, equipped in a splendid uniform, and bearing " a snow-white plume in his hat," rode along the lines, and in a few impassioned words impressed on all the significance of his address on the preceding day, to which the chaplains added their exhortations and appeals, that touched the springs of many a harrowing and many a hallowed memory. The effect was electric. The history of centuries passed before them : the solemn ceremonies they had witnessed : the attested chivalry of their leaders : and the gallant bearing of their general, kindled the fire of heroism in every breast ; the silence was broken, acclamations loud and prolonged rent the air, amid which, St. Ruth retiring, took post on the crest of the hill, and, surrounded

by his staff, looked eagerly for the enemy through the passing clouds that still intercepted the two armies. The signs of approaching conflict now multiplied rapidly, and aids were arriving in quick succession to announce the slow but steady advance of the foe. At eight, his right rested on Garbally, and his left on the river of Clantuskar. At nine, his right was at Cahir, and his left beyond the river, still preserving an unbroken front, and tending a little southward. At ten, the Irish pickets, borne back over the last line of intervening hills, were seen descending into the adjacent valley, and falling back on their supports at Urrachree and Aughrim ; and at eleven, the clouds rolling away, the midday sun presented the two armies to each other in all the stern magnificence of war ! At this sight, a shout of fierce defiance rang out from the opposing hosts, and echoed far over the hills, when a silence more dread and impressive than the clangor of battle settled over both, the English army still moving measuredly forward.

Up to this moment St. Ruth had kept his whole force drawn out along the hill, presenting an imposing front, as an invitation to the enemy ; but as Ginckle, still preserving the order indicated, commenced to descend into the plain, the suspense of the Irish army was at last broken, the word of command passed along the line, and all were at once in motion. Then succeeded the rolling tramp of squadron after squadron of the cavalry, hastening to their allotted stations, the matrosses wheeling their guns into position, and the leaden step of the infantry, moving down the hill and forming in their advanced trenches along its base.

The English army continued to move on until within a quarter of a mile of the morass, when it halted, while Ginckle, who accompanied his left wing, advanced to a steep hill over against the Irish right at Urrachree, which enabled him to make a still closer reconnoissance than he had made on the evening of the 10th. St. Ruth, at the same time, took his stand on the ridge of Kilcommodon, above his centre, whence he had a complete view of the entire English army ; and thus, for some time, each general stood scrutinizing the ranks and disposition of the other.

'Twas as St. Ruth expected. The weight of Ginckle's army lay towards Urrachree, and he expressed much satisfaction that he had anticipated this movement, and had made a corresponding disposition to meet it ; for the heaviest division of his army, also rested on that side, which he now saw was Ginckle's objective.

This pause was of short duration. It was now on to twelve o'clock, and Ginckle seeing the absolute necessity of possessing the Pass of Urrachree, before he could bring the weight of his left infantry against the Irish main line in that quarter, directed his first movement accordingly.

Two rivulets, coming from different directions on the extreme right of the Irish army, crossed the road in front of Urrachree, and rendered the pass at that point more difficult than the ground in front and rear of it. Between these streams a small cavalry outpost had been stationed by St. Ruth, rather with a view to invite than repel the enemy, and against this point Ginckle now directed a company of Danish dragoons, with orders to gain the pass and hold it until reinforced by the infantry advancing from the main line for that purpose. Apprehending no resistance from the few troops stationed there, the Danish horse soon cleared the distance between them, and quickening their pace to a gallop, advanced at the charge, until within a few rods, when, seeing the Irish still maintain their position, they suddenly halted ; when the former, taking advantage of their indecision, sounded the charge, and advanced on them at a full gallop. The Danes did not await the shock, but, breaking in disorder, retreated off the field, notwithstanding the efforts of their captain to rally them, and returned to the rear of their infantry. [6]

Ginckle was deeply mortified at the unsoldierlike conduct of his Danish horse, and in order to remedy the mischief created by it, in the presence of his troops, Sir Albert Cunningham's dragoons, who entered on the right of his line, were now called up to his left, and 200 of them were ordered to advance beyond the stream, and, clearing the ground of all minor detachments in their way, to take post behind some hedges beyond it, make a lodgement there, and await the support of the infantry. Those troops were reckoned the best dragoons of the British service, and as they rode across the intervening slope of tillage, with swords drawn, and their steel caps and cuirasses glancing through the clouds of

dust struck from the parched soil over which they passed, the Irish felt that the battle was about to open in reality, and caught its inspiration. As the dragoons neared the pass, where the little outpost stood to receive them, they halted suddenly, wheeled to the left, and took post behind a line of hedges until the front line of infantry was seen moving across the plain to their support, when they were again put in motion towards the pass. But during the interval, it was found that the Irish outpost had retired to the shelter of a hill in their rear, where, being reinforced by a company of Lord Galway's horse, they wheeled to the front and stood to invite the charge of the enemy. But as the British dragoons advanced across the stream, the Irish again wheeled round and retired, with the intention of drawing them farther from their supports. Deceived by the disparity of their force, or encouraged by this indecisive conduct, the English horse charged on them with great impetuosity. Passing the hill, they were saluted by a well-directed musketry fire, under which they wavered, and, at the same moment, the Irish battery on the right opened on the advancing files of the English infantry. This was instantly answered by the opposing batteries, which had now been brought into position along the whole line, and, to the stirring responses of their artillery, the cavalry on both sides rushed to the encounter. It was deadly and intense ; the British bore themselves gallantly, but here, as at the Boyne, they were no match for the Irish horse, and, despite the advantage of numbers, they were broken, after a brief but deadly struggle, and borne back over the stream, where many of them were unhorsed and sabred, despite the steel cap and corselet that protected them. The smoke and dust of battle soon cleared away, when it was seen that they had relinquished the fight, and retired as the Danish horse had done, while the Irish cavalry stood leisurely behind the stream to invite another onset.

This discomfiture of his favorite cavalry, by less than half their number, filled Ginckle with deep concern, and had not a less dispiriting effect on the troops that witnessed it. The possession of this point, according to the plan adopted, was of imperative necessity ; so, in order to carry out his design, as well as to remove the depressing effect from the minds of his men, he now resolved to throw forward an overwhelming force of cavalry, to clear the ground up to the Irish main line, and make way for the heavy columns of infantry drawn up and ready for the action. For this purpose, the whole of Sir Albert Cunningham's dragoons were massed into charging column, and, led by himself in person, were to be hurled against the Irish squadron at the pass : while Eppinger, with his regiment of Royal Holland dragoons, — 920 strong — was to make a flank movement, more to the right, and, by sweeping round the hill, take them in the rear, cut them off from their supports, and lay bare their whole right for the action of his infantry.

St. Ruth, from his position, saw with exultation the gallant conduct of his cavalry, and, anticipating the next movement of Ginckle, now moved down to his right to counteract it. He caused the advanced troops to fall farther back, ordered another squadron to their support, and gave them directions to continue a retiring movement until they should receive the order to charge. He next ordered Lord Galway to hold his horse, stationed behind the house of Urrachree, well in hand, until the enemy, in passing, should receive a volley from the musketeers within it which was to be the signal for a simultaneous charge on both divisions of the assailants. By this arrangement Galway's horse were held completely out of sight until the moment, while the other detachment, which alone seemed to invite the enemy, was not such as to awaken their apprehension.

Both of the English regiments moved briskly across the tillage field that led down to the stream, and crossed it without any opposition, the Irish horse retiring according to orders, and forming under the shelter of their main line. After crossing the stream and entering the field beyond it, the assailants separated, Cunningham bearing directly for the opposing cavalry, and Eppinger wheeling by his right, scattering the few infantry pickets in his way up to the house of Urrachree, where he again moved by his left to flank the Irish cavalry, as directed. In passing this point he received the fire of the Irish musket which caused considerable loss, and the smoke from which had scarcely cleared away, when he received the shock of Galway's horse on his right flank, and recoiled in confusion. At the same moment the other detachment closed with Cunningham's dragoons, and the entire forces on both sides were soon mingled in deadly conflict ; the English burning to wipe out the disgrace of the previous encounters, and the Irish to maintain the prestige of a name borne unsullied through all the changes of this wasting war.

Along the broad plateau in front of Urrachree, hidden by the enveloping clouds of dust and smoke, excepting at intervals that rendered the flashing of their arms perceptible, this tumultuous mass of men and horses rocked and swayed in all the dread clangor of small-arms and cannon, mingled with the fierce neigh of the war steeds driven headlong to battle. At length some squadrons of the English horse, detaching themselves from the main were seen to approach the stream, re-form, and again rush the conflict, while the whole mass, assailants and assailed, rolled steadily on towards the scene of the first encounter. Ginckle beheld this sign with amazement and concern for he well knew its import. His troops were giving ground, and he immediately advanced the Portland horse — 480 men — under the command of General Holstaple, to succor them, while St. Ruth, on his part, threw in the Tyrconnell Guards, under Brigadier James Talbot, to sustain his cavalry, and the conflict was continued with unabated fury on both sides. Other detachments were now successively thrown in from each side, as chance or necessity directed, until what first began in a skirmish between outposts, absorbed nearly the entire cavalry of the adverse wings, and, after a series of rencounters, which lasted for over two hours, the English horse broke and fled in disorder, the Irish horse were recalled from the pursuit, and the same little band that had invited those successive assaults, reined up behind the stream, as fresh and defiant as ever.

Ginckle lost heavily in those attacks. The dragoons of Eppinger and Cunningham were decimated ; the Portland Guards suffered “ severely in men and horses,” and their leader, General Holstaple, with many of his officers, was slain. The loss of the Irish, though beset by twice their number, was insignificant. An infantry picket, stationed behind the hill, was scattered, and had a few men sabred by the dragoons of Eppinger ; but Brigadier Talbot, one of the heroes of Limerick, in an encounter with the Portland horse, fell, covered with many wounds. [7] It was now past two o’clock, and the battle rested as it began, but the prestige of success, and the spirit it infused, remained with the Irish army.

While Ginckle had been pushing forward detachment after detachment of his cavalry towards the Irish right at Urrachree, his own right wing and centre had moved into position along the edge of the marsh, and had brought their artillery to bear on the opposing lines beyond it. Their guns were disposed in six batteries : — two on the esplanade in front of Aughrim ; two at the centre ; and two against the southern slope of Kilcommodon. [8] Here, in the order already indicated, the troops stood observing the different changes of the battle raging within their sight ; but, as the excitement increased, their order became gradually indistinct, until both lines mingled into one, which stood close up to the marsh, beyond which the Irish stood prepared to receive them. But, up to this, no movement was made by either, beyond the enfilades of their batteries ; for the Irish plan was strictly defensive, and the enemy awaited the success of the movement on their left, which was to be the signal for their assault. In this state of expectation the first hour passed and the second, and still no order from the left reached them. The successive repulses of his cavalry had shaken the fortitude of Ginckle, and, despairing of success from a further persistence in his present plan of attack, he drew in his troops, ordered a suspension of hostilities, and called a council of his generals.

More favored by fortune in this particular than his adversary, the council was his tower of refuge, and had always been attended with happy results in the most trying emergencies. And the present was one of those on which depended, not only the result of this day’s battle, but the success or failure of the campaign now favorably inaugurated. To this council he represented his fears for the final issue, should the battle be continued much longer, with the result of the last two hours. He had directed it according to the plan stamped by their general approval, and with that impetuosity that best suited the condition and character of his troops. But, notwithstanding their ardor and overwhelming odds, they had been repeatedly hurled back, with a valor and intrepidity that had damped their enthusiasm and restored the confidence of their opponents. As yet, the battle had been entirely between the cavalry, in which branch of the service he outnumbered his adversary two to one ; and though all the cavalry of his right had been drawn into it, the Irish main line had not been approached, nor any portion of its infantry brought into action. And should he now, at this late hour, fling the whole weight of his horse and foot against the quarter in dispute, and even succeed, after a protracted engagement, in reaching the Irish main right, it was more than probable that night would close upon a suspended battle ; in which case, the advantages would be in favor of the native army, and it were hard to divine what morning would bring forth to his own, remote from its encampment, and in an enemy’s country. Im-

pressed with these views, and before the council had assembled, he dispatched couriers to Ballinasloe to order up his tents, being resolved to encamp along the valley, opposite to Kilcommodon, for the night, and renew the battle early on the following morning. The consultation lasted until four o'clock. The council was divided : some being in favor of the general's plan, and some for immediately renewing the battle ; but finally, the latter course was adopted, on the advice of Major-General Mackey. This old veteran remarked that neither the English right or centre had yet been engaged, and it occurred to him that by a change of disposition, and by bringing up additional forces to the left, St. Ruth would be ultimately compelled to weaken his left or centre, or perhaps both, to sustain his right, when a simultaneous advance of the whole English line would change the tenor of the battle. The age and experience of the general, and the simple plausibility of his argument, prevailed ; the order to bring up the tents was countermanded, and preparations were accordingly made to renew the engagement.

The British army accordingly underwent another transformation. The cavalry, which could not cross at the centre, were posted on the right and left wings. The left wing of infantry was further strengthened by some fresh regiments from the right, while 12,000 infantry were massed against the centre and inner left of the Irish line, to await the result of Mackey's experiment.

It was half-past four o'clock, as Ginckle moved forward his left wing of infantry, flanked on either side by his cavalry, determined to reach the ground in front of the Irish line. As they approached the stream which had been the scene of the previous encounters, two Danish regiments, consisting of infantry and cavalry, deployed to the left, along its outer margin, as if intent on turning the extreme right of the Irish position. This, which was a feint on the part of Ginckle, had the desired effect ; for no sooner was it observed by the latter, than a corresponding force was detached to counteract it ; and, as they continued to wear round in that direction, Ginckle hurled his main body to the assault, across the grounds of Urrachree.

This movement on the part of the enemy determined St. Ruth no longer to defer the battle ; but by accepting his offer to confine him to the Irish main right, and prevent any discursive movements which should result in weakening it : so, withdrawing his cavalry, he threw forward his infantry to his first line of defence, and awaited the enemy in confidence. As the British advanced, their cavalry was also withdrawn, and thus, as if by mutual agreement, the ground was completely cleared for the action of the infantry on both sides.

The front line of the English left, consisting of the Huguenot regiments of La Mellioneire, Cambon, and Belcastle — about 2,500 men — marched boldly across the ground, followed by the other regiments in close succession. As they approached within range, they were met by a deadly fire, but still they pressed on with characteristic valor, delivered their fire in return, and were soon at close quarters along the first line of intrenchments. The disposition made of the ground here by St. Ruth, greatly tended to equalize the disparity of numbers, and the Irish troops were quick to seize on every advantage that offered ; so that the enemy soon found they had to contend with men no less daring and intrepid than themselves. Every hedgerow soon became the scene of assault and defence. A deadly and protracted struggle now took place ; the soldiers on both sides resting their muskets on the separating hedges, and literally discharging them into each others' bosoms. The Irish, after defending one of those lines with the greatest obstinacy, would suddenly retire on another, when the enemy, thus drawn on, would find themselves at once taken in front and flank, and borne back rapidly to the first line, where the conflict would be again renewed and again repeated with a like result as before. This desperate conflict raged along the right for over an hour without cessation. Ginckle's last column had been pushed forward, and the result was still the same ; — every inch of ground won by their successive assaults, was again disputed, and again recovered. The Huguenots suffered dreadfully. Every advance into the inclosures thinned their ranks ; and less and less able to penetrate this wing, the battle culminated on the outer line, — “ until,” says a Huguenot actor in the scene, “ there remained only one course to adopt, — which was to perish and sell our lives dearly.” and, in this emergency, Ginckle called up two regiments of infantry, and the cavalry of Lanier and Ruvigny from his right for the final test of his experiment.

St. Ruth witnessed this intense struggle with varied emotions of hope and fear. Up to this hour he entertained grave doubts of the steadiness and discipline of his newly raised infantry. But as he saw column after column of Ginckle's veterans hurled on them and steadily repelled, his apprehensions were removed, and he felt and expressed a full assurance of victory. As yet, his whole line was intact, for he had not displaced a single man from his left or centre. But as this last reinforcement was called up, it became manifest that Ginckle was absolutely committed to turning his right at whatever cost, and he was at last compelled to order some fresh infantry from his extreme left to its support. [9] This gave Ginckle the desired opportunity, and he hastily availed himself of it ; for while these troops were marching from the left to the right, across the hill of Kilcommodon, he ordered his centre to cross the marsh, and assail the main position of the Irish.

The whole English infantry were now put in motion. The regiments of Earle, Creighton, Brewer, and Herbert, sustained by those of Foulk, Stuart, and others, were to cross at the main centre, where the marsh was narrowest, and where the hedges approached nearest to it, to make a lodgement in the first line, and await the support of their cavalry. Those of St. John, Tiffin, Lord George Hamilton, the French, " and other regiments," were to pursue a similar course against the inner left ; while the cavalry under Talmash on the right, and Lanier and Levison on the left, were to force a passage at Aughrim and Urrachree, sweep round the base of the hill to their support, and endeavor to bring on a general engagement.

The regiments of Earle, Creighton, Brewer, and Herbert, moved forward, crossed the marsh without opposition, formed on the other side, and advanced up the sloping meadows of Kilcommodon without firing a single shot. As they approached the first row of hedges, the Irish infantry received them with a destructive fire, and retired on their second line with a steadiness and precision that might have awakened suspicion of preconcert. But the feint was taken for an actual retreat ; the ardor of the assailants was excited, and eager to avenge the fall of so many of their comrades, they rushed forward on the second line, which was temporarily defended, and yielded in the same manner. Exasperated beyond endurance, they now lost all caution, and pressed hotly up the hill until they reached the last line of hedges, where the effect of their rashness at once became apparent. The infantry that had lured them on by this feint retreat, now suddenly appeared on either flank, pouring volley after volley into their devoted ranks, while above them, on the hill-side, stood the Irish cavalry, reined back and ready for the onset. The ground over which they had passed was difficult and dangerous, and files of infantry lined the way down to the marsh to intercept their retreat ; no cavalry support appeared on their right, for as yet the Pass of Aughrim had not been attempted ; and on their left, towards Urrachree, the sounds of battle seemed to recede, as if their arms had met with a reverse in that quarter. Colonel Earle, who took in the situation at a glance, advanced to the front, exhorting his men that " there was no way to come off but to be brave," ordered them to reform, and endeavor to reach the line which they had so imprudently abandoned. The troops, obedient to the command, halted, closed ranks, and commenced a retrograde movement ; but it was now too late ; for at the same moment the Irish cavalry charged fiercely down the hill ; and, unable to withstand the shock, they were helplessly broken, hurled by repeated charges into the marsh, across which they retreated in utter confusion, hotly pressed by the infantry, and borne back to the level of their batteries. [10] Their loss was very severe. They had advanced to the assault over 3,000 strong. One-third of that number in killed and wounded strewn their way back. Colonel Earle, after being captured and rescued three times, escaped severely wounded ; many officers of note were slain ; and 400 soldiers, with Colonel Herbert, remained prisoners in the hands of the victors.

While the battle stood as described on the right and centre of the Irish line, the regiments of St. John, Tiffin, Lord George Hamilton, some French " and other regiments," were directed against its left. This division was led by the Prince of Hesse, and he had orders from General Mackey, who commanded in that quarter, not to pass the first line of hedges, but after establishing a position there to hold it until supported by the cavalry, which, under the command of Talmash, and supported by some regiments of infantry, were moving round towards the extreme left of the Irish, and forming on the plateau in front of Aughrim, with the intention of assaulting the pass leading up to it. The strength of this position, the narrow way which led to it, and the guns bearing across it from the hill, were such as to render the movement slow and hazardous ; and the attack of the Prince of Hesse which depended

on its result should necessarily be so regulated as to keep time with it. Talmash drew up his command on the common, and after directing his batteries, of which there were two, against the opposing force of the Irish, opened a fierce cannonade, while he formed his troops, both horse and foot, for the assault. In the mean time the Prince of Hesse had crossed the marsh, and approached the enemy's left on Kilcommodon. Meeting with no opposition, and scarcely apprehending any, so closely did the Irish there lie in their trenches, he advanced rapidly to possess the seemingly abandoned trenches, until within a few yards of them, when their sudden appearance, and a succession of well-directed volleys, warned him of his error. This unexpected salute checked the onward movement of his troops, and for a time they wavered as if about to retreat. But the ardor of the impetuous Prince being excited, he rallied them again, and under his order to charge, they rushed forward with increased fury and entered the lines of the enemy. This afforded the latter the opportunity sought, and no sooner had the assailants advanced to a proper distance, than they were taken front and flank, turned, as at the centre, and driven back on their supports, now being pushed eagerly forward by General Mackey, who, after several attempts to check their retreat, dispatched orders to Talmash to suspend his assault on the Pass of Aughrim, and lead back the infantry to the support of his broken division. Under this order fresh succors were deployed from the English right, but Talmash himself, unwilling to abandon his design, remained with his cavalry and a portion of the infantry, to carry out his projected attack.

The assault against the inner left of the Irish line was now renewed, that against the extreme left was begun, and the contest raged along the whole left with the utmost obstinacy, assailants and assailed being so completely "enveloped in dust and smoke as to be invisible to the bystanders." At length, after nearly an hour of the most intense excitement, during which the intermingled mass rolled with varied success across the fallow-fields between the hedges and the marsh, the English broke and fled across it to the protection of their guns, one regiment alone, of all that crossed to the attack, holding a position in the hedges, near the extreme left, whence the Irish troops had been withdrawn, and even this was in imminent danger of total destruction.

It was now near sunset, and the shadows began to deepen over the scene of conflict, when St. Ruth, from the ridge of Kilcommodon, surveyed the situation beneath him. On his right, where the battle commenced, the successive assaults of the enemy had been broken and repelled ; from being assailants they had become the assailed ; and driven far back from his outer line, had thrown up temporary intrenchments, behind which they continued to return the fire of his infantry, while they endeavored to withstand the repeated charges of his cavalry, careering on their flanks. On his centre he was completely victorious. The terrible repulse of the enemy's infantry there, and their consequent loss, had filled them with consternation and dismay, and though heavily reinforced, and urged forward with every threat and suasion of command, they could not be brought to attempt a second assault, but stood, a discomfited and disheartened host, under the shelter of their cannon, which alone disturbed his line in that direction. On his inner left the sight was no less inspiring. There, the columns under the Prince of Hesse, after being, for the third time, bloodily repulsed, were floundering back through the morass in utter disorder, though Mackey stood on its outer edge, urging forward still fresh arrivals from the right, and doing all that a brave and intrepid soldier could do to retrieve an apparently lost battle. From the first, Ginckle's chances of success depended on his ability to turn the Irish right, or to bring on a general engagement along the whole line, when the immense numerical superiority of his army, with its proud array of field officers, could scarcely fail of success. To this end, all the energies of his mind, and all the resources at his disposal had been constantly directed ; but, up to this hour, all had signally failed. Favored by the happy disposition which he had made of his ground, St. Ruth had so handled his army as to disconcert every attack, and defeat his enemy in detail. Everywhere he had cause to fear that the least inadvertence would be fatal, yet every thing moved with precision, every plan answered his expectations, and now, at every point, he stood secure and successful. His cavalry had sustained its wonted reputation, had borne down every opposition throughout the day, and its reserve stood fresh and eager, within immediate support of the only point undecided. His infantry, which had sustained the brunt of the battle, since its renewal after the early cavalry rencounters, stood now, on all hands, firm, defiant, and victorious. Two thousand three hundred of the enemy strewed the valley from Aughrim to Urrachree, while, up to this moment, his loss was quite insignificant. Victory seemed completely within his grasp ; a grand future opened before him, and, perhaps, wrapt in one of those bright visions that sweep the mind on the wing of thought : — a people freed ; a kingdom re-

stored to its legitimate sway, and his own sovereign rendering him the meed of glorious service ; he doffed his hat to those around him, and exclaimed in the ardor of enthusiasm : — “ Now, my children, we will beat them back to the gates of Dublin.” [11] — words which, though not realized, are worthy of grateful commemoration, indicative at once of a patriarchal spirit, and an exalted heroism.

Through all, the activity of the opposing generals was incessant. Ginckle was everywhere, aiding and animating his men, and sharing the danger and fatigue of the private soldier. On the other hand, St. Ruth had followed every movement of the battle, and was found at every point where aid or encouragement demanded his presence. Two horses had broken down under him during the fatigues of this eventful day ; and now, mounting a third, a powerful gray, which stood ready to his call, he rode down to the left, to congratulate his infantry on their victory in that quarter. Here he beheld the last regiment of the enemy’s infantry, abandoned to their fate, afraid to attempt a retreat across the marsh, and defending their temporary lodgement with the last efforts of despair. Dismounting from his horse, he approached the gunners, and with his own hand giving direction to one of the three guns bearing on the enemy’s lines, returned to his staff, and remounted. His attention was then directed to the movements of Talmash, who, at the head of the English cavalry, and supported by a compact body of infantry, was approaching along the defile that opened up to the village and castle of Aughrim. Inquiring casually what the enemy meant by moving in that direction, he was answered that they intended to force the Pass and succor their infantry beneath him. “ *Then* ” said he, “ *we have won the battle.* ” Considering the difficulties to be encountered, and the force stationed there, he deemed their destruction certain ; and, after watching their steady advance for some time, he exclaimed with mingled feelings of admiration and pity : — “ *They are brave, His a pity they should be so exposed !* ” Then forming his guards to charge down the hill, and dispatching orders to call up his reserve of cavalry to confront the force of Talmash, he addressed his staff, now ranged around him, saying : — “ *They are beaten, let us beat them to the purpose !* ” They were his last words, — for scarcely were they uttered, when his head was shattered by a cannon-ball, and he lay a corpse on the hill of Kilcommodon, while his horse ran wild and riderless across the plain ! Amazement seized on all around him. The cavalry arrived and halted on the hillside. His attendants approached, threw a cloak over the body, and bore it to the rear, whither it was followed by his guards and the members of his staff. The charge that was to decide the battle was suspended. The Irish infantry, unaware of the death of their general, still held their ground. The cavalry stood waiting the order to charge, and nothing was wanting to complete the victory but that expected word ; but it never came. Meanwhile, Talmash beheld the confusion and the hesitancy of the Irish troops on the hill, and auguring that something was going wrong there, pushed on with greater rapidity. The fire from the Irish lines and the castle opened on him, and twice he was repulsed, but still renewed his efforts. It was now the crisis of the day, and so was it felt by assailants and assailed. Colonel Burke, who had command in that quarter, pressed the enemy closely and successfully. The cavalry were held in check, and unable to advance ; but the English infantry, moving along the northern margin of the marsh, began to break through in battalions and companies. They too were checked, and for some time held immovable. At this trying moment Burke found that his supply of musket-balls was exhausted, and a fresh supply was urgently demanded. It arrived ; it was opened ; but by some fatal blunder, or treacherous design, it was found that cannon-ball had been sent instead of those demanded. [12] The effect is easily foreseen. The soldiers still fought as men seldom fight. They exhausted their last shot, and all means being gone, they cut the round buttons from their coats, fired them, and discharged even their ramrods at the enemy, and then in rage and despair stood to offer their bodies as a last resistance, and died fighting where they stood. The Pass was carried ; the castle grounds were gained and barriers thrown up there to impede the Irish cavalry, while Talmash, after passing the defile, moved round by his left, and succored his devoted soldiers. The English infantry at the centre now crossed the marsh in force and formed to carry the left and centre. At this sight a wild and piercing cry of “ treason ” rang along the Irish lines. The infantry was left to struggle alone, and the cavalry, without a commander, retired to the crest of the hill and formed for a last effort to redeem the day. It was useless. The infantry did all that men could do, and disputed every inch of the ground up to their camp, where, they made a last desperate stand, until surrounded by horse and foot of the enemy, when they broke, and, under the protection of their cavalry, retreated off the field. The left and centre of the Irish army being carried, the enemy turned their attention to the right, which, ignorant of what had passed, still pressed the foe beyond their lines, and were still victorious. But being now surrounded on all sides, and attacked front and rear, they

were over-whelmed and literally cut to pieces ; nearly all the infantry on that side being slaughtered where they stood.

The castle of Aughrim, which withstood the assailants long after the Pass was carried, was at length taken, and all within it put to the sword. Night closed over the scene of carnage. The Irish cavalry baffled in their design to support the infantry, which became intermingled with the horse and foot of the enemy, after aiding some time in the retreat, withdrew to the south-west and pursued their route to Loughrea, while the infantry crossed the bog to the west, and moved in the direction of Galway. The retreat of these portions of the army was regular and unbroken ; but the fugitives were cut down without mercy ; their cry for quarter was totally disregarded ; and the slaughter of the straggling bands continued far into the night. In this butchery the Danish troops were conspicuous. Remarkable through the day only for pusillanimity, they became the “ best pursuers,” through the night, until a fortuitous circumstance put an end to the pursuit. While despairing and resistless they fled from the field which they maintained to the last, an Irish drum-major, who was lying wounded by the wayside, was ordered by the almoner of a regiment, named O’Reilly, to beat the charge. It was done, and on hearing it the pursuers halted, and believing the Irish about to rally, retired to the main body, and the vanquished pursued their retreat unmolested. Thus ended the disastrous day of Aughrim. Up to the death of St. Ruth, no pending battle was ever more prophetic of victory. After it none was ever so unaccountably lost in the presence of numerous officers of experience and ability. It would seem as if fortune held the balance of the day, to elicit deeds of unexampled heroism, and inverted it in the hour of victory to maintain her proverbial fickleness.

The loss of the British in private soldiers was 2,300 ; in addition to this, 200 officers of all grades were wounded, and seventy-three killed, including among them one major-general and five colonels — making in all nearly 3,000. The loss of the Irish as estimated by the victors was 7,000, including their commander-in-chief, and seventeen generals and officers of the highest distinction. The number of officers of subaltern rank was great, and far exceeded those of the enemy. [13] The spoil of the victors included all the guns and camp equipage of the vanquished ; and their trophies, eleven-standards and thirty-two pair of colors, were immediately borne to London by “ my Lord O’Bryan, as a present to her majesty,” the Prince of Orange being then on the Continent.

The next day Ginckle encamped on the heights of Kilcommodon and buried his dead. The Irish slain, who strewed the hill and lay scattered over the country for miles, were stripped and left unburied, to be “ devoured by the wild dogs and birds of prey.” The country people fled the vicinity of the British army, and retired to the woods and mountains as their only refuge. The body of St. Ruth, according to the English annalist, was stripped and thrown into a bog. A more recent and better authority says, that “ by tradition well attested, his ashes lie in the roofless church of Athunree, beside those of Lord Galway, who fell upon the same field of battle.” There is, however, reason to doubt both, and the writer is aware that the people of the locality where the battle was fought, directed by tradition, point to a few stunted white thorns, to the west of the hill, towards Loughrea, beneath which, they say, rest the ashes of this great but unfortunate general.

It is painful to speculate on the cause that left the Irish army without direction after the death of St. Ruth. Many have endeavored to explain it, but all — as well those who doubt Sarsfield’s presence on the field, as those who maintain the contrary, — are lost in conjecture, and none who participated in the battle and survived it, has placed the matter beyond speculation. So leaving that point as time has left it, what appears most strange in the connection, is the absence of all command at such a conjuncture. The disposition of the Irish troops, though dexterous, was simple. The day was all but won. The foiling of Talmash would have been the completion of victory. A force sufficient was on his front ; a reserve more than ample to overwhelm him was on its way to the ground — nay, drawn up and even ready for the word. The few British troops that held a lodgement in the hedges at the base of the hill, were completely at the mercy of those above them. It required no omniscient eye to see this, nor a voice from the clouds to impel them forward, and surely no military etiquette weighed a feather in opposition to the fate of a nation. Any officer of note could have directed the movement, and many of experience and approved courage witnessed the crisis. Yet in this emergency, all the hard-won laurels of the day were tarnished, and land and liberty were lost by default ! Nor can the rashness of St. Ruth,

his reticence as to his plans, his misunderstanding with Sarsfield, nor the absence of the latter, justify the want of intrepid action among those present. This stands unexplained and inexplicable, nor will the flippant appeal to Providence, whose ways are too frequently offered as an excuse for human misconduct, answer here. The want of ammunition at such a moment, was, no doubt, of some import, but the concurrence of events too plainly indicates that Aughrim was won by the skill of St. Ruth and the gallantry of his troops, and that it was lost through want of decision in his general officers, at a moment the most critical in the nation's history.

But time passed on Galway surrendered on honorable terms after an exchange of hostages. The passes of the Shannon were abandoned one by one down to Limerick, where the final stand was made, during which Tyrconnel, after years of faithful service, “died apparently of a broken heart.” The city, though twice betrayed by General Clifford, made a most gallant defence, and its surrender wrested a treaty from the enemy, as glorious to its defenders, as its violation was infamous to the victors. — retributive justice, how slow is thy finger on the dial !

THE END.

- [1] The above description of Ginckle's line of battle is taken from a copperplate engraving in Story's *Impartial History*, second volume, to which he refers the reader, with the following remarks : —
“ It is to be observed that my Lord Portland's horse is not in this order of battle, because they came not up until after it was ordered ; however, they had their full share in the action ; and Colonel Foulke's, which were always to guard the train, but being then convenient for it, and the General resolved to make all the force he could, they had also their part both of honor and service in the action ; and though Brigadier Stuart is there set down, it is only as to his post, for he was then at Dublin, ill of wounds received at Athlone.” He might also have added that Brewer's remaining force was called up from Mullingar, the safety of which was committed for the time to the militia, and that towards the evening, he was further reinforced by a large body of Enniskilleners.
- [2] See the Preceding note.
- [3] The six Danish regiments of this division stood as indicated — three in front and three in rear — but their regimental leaders are not named on the map.
- [4] Ginckle was honored with this title after the fall of Athlone ; but whether it had been already conferred is a matter of little import.
- [5] Story estimates the foot regiments to be each 705, the horse 286, and the dragoons 444, irrespective of officers ; but many of them were actually double of those numbers ; as an instance Eppinger's Royal Regiment of Holland Dragoons was 920 ; Portland's horse 480 ; several others exceeded the standard, and all had been fully recruited after the siege of Athlone.
- [6] “ These men,” says Story, “ ran away from a less number than themselves, though the officer behaved himself very well.” — He might have said less than half their number. The Irish were but seven men ; there were sixteen of the Danes.
- [7] As none of the histories consulted by the writer alludes to the death of Holstaple and Talbot, save in recapitulating the loss on both sides, he deems it necessary to give his authority for placing it so early in the battle, lest his assertion shall be attributed to fancy, which should always be held in abeyance to historic truth. The following lines from Garriek's rambling play, “ *The Battle of Aughrirn*,” it is hoped, will satisfy the reader. It is necessary to introduce it by stating that there was no general named Hostile in the English army, and that the renowned comedian only adopts it for the sake of euphony : Holstaple being a rough, and rather unpoetic name : —

Lord Portland's horse approached the mortal fight
With sword in hand to put our troops to flight : —
This Talbot saw, and like a hero bold,
Disdaining life, he scorned to be controlled ;
But, as a Mars, amid the throng he run,
And there he stood, like marble to the sun,
Till, being hacked and flanked on every side,
By multitudes oppressed, he bravely died.

And again, after the retreat of the English, an Irish officer is made to say :

Aughrim is ours, brave General Hostile's dead,
Who, even now, Lord Portland's horse did head, —
Drove all before him, till a lucky ball,
Shot with good aim from off the castle wall,
Clove up his skull, etc., etc.

Nothing, perhaps, could excuse the introduction of this doggerel, save the name of the author, who lived at a time which enabled him to consult many of the real actors in the battle.

- [8] If the dots on the batteries, as represented in Story's map, indicate the number of guns, there were thirty of them in all ; and on his other maps they do indicate them.
- [9] Those troops who were ordered from the rear of his left, were, either by design or inadvertence, sent from the front of that position ; and on the concurrence of this and a subsequent blunder, historians have based their accusations of treason against Brigadier Henry Luttrell, who, it is said, received the order.
- [10] Some historians allude to the "*sounding*" of this marsh, and "*wading*" through it ; but the fact is : that it was but a rushy bottom, difficult in no place, save at the stream, where it was impracticable to cavalry ; for we find the Irish charging and recharging the enemy three times across it.
- [11] "A boast," says Taylor, "which the special interposition of Providence alone prevented him from accomplishing * * * ten minutes more would have completed the destruction of the English army." — Vol. ii., page 180.
- [12] It was found, on examining the ammunition with which they had been supplied, that while the men were armed with French firelocks, the balls that had been served to them were cast for English muskets, of which the calibre was larger, and that they were consequently useless. — Haverty's *History of Ireland*, page 661. This would seem the more probable version, although that in the text is in accordance with general authority. This book was not seen in time to alter the text : but the effect was the same.
- [13] Those were nearly all killed after the death of St. Ruth ; for "up to that," says Taylor, "the Irish had lost scarcely a man." No insignificant number of them was put to death, after their capture, by order of General Ginckle ; and for this brutal and unsoldierly order, Story offers as a palliation, the conduct of Henry V. of England, at the battle of Agincourt : — "*who, seeing the king of Cicilies appear on the field, ordered every man to kill his prisoner, contrary to his generous nature,*" — and among those so murdered in cold blood, was Colonel : Moore, and that most loyal gentleman and chivalrous soldier, Lord Galway.

Since writing the above, my attention has been called to Haverty's "History of Ireland," a work of much careful research and investigation, in which the loss of the Irish army is estimated at : — killed, nearly 4,000, and 526 of all ranks taken prisoners. This would seem the more probable, as Story doubts his own estimate, and in the end of the year, 1692, says, "time has informed me of some mistakes, though possibly there may be some as yet remaining."

The battle-fields of Ireland, from 1688 to 1691: including Limerick and Athlone, Aughrim and the Boyne (1867)

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