

Battlefield of the Boyne

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The Convention Parliament of England had been dissolved on the 6th of February, and a new one, more in the interest of William, had been convened in March. To this Parliament he signified his intention of taking the command of the forces in Ireland. The proposition was highly satisfactory, and a supply of £1,200,000 was granted him for that purpose ; a presentation of £100,000 was also voted to Marshal, the Duke de Schomberg ; and large supplies of provisions, clothing and military stores were soon got in requisition.

The report that de Lausun had landed in Ireland with a French army, tended to hasten these preparations, and to swell the proportions of the designed armament. Pending the prince's departure, large bodies of English troops were shipped to the garrisons of Ulster, and as Schomberg had expressed dissatisfaction with the conduct of his English and Anglo-Irish troops in the field, a new army, consisting of foreign adventurers—Dutch Danes, Scandinavians, Swiss, and French Huguenots ; some, no doubt, induced by religious fanaticism, but many by the higher pay in the English army, and the promise of subsequent plunder, flocked to his standard. On the 6th of June, William's grand park of artillery and ordnance stores arrived at Carrickfergus, and on the 14th he himself, accompanied by Prince George of Denmark, the Prince of Hesse Darmstadt, the Dukes of Ormond and Worttemberg, the Earls of Oxford, Portland and Scarborough, Generals Mackey and Douglas, and other notables, arrived and proceeded to Lisburn, where Schomberg had awaited his arrival since the fall of Charlemont.

No sooner was the news of William's arrival spread abroad, than the clergymen of the Established Church, and the Presbyters and dissenting clergy of all denominations, waited on him, proffering him their allegiance, and embarrassing him with fulsome addresses, indicative of all they had done and would do for the advancement of religion and the eradication of "popery." [1] William, though impatient of delay, received them with grave respect, if not with cordiality. The gentlemen of the establishment were simply told that "he would take care of them," while large sums of money were distributed among the dissenting teachers of the northern province, indicating that, as they had already done more for the cause, more was expected under the government about to be established for their behest. The men of the establishment retired not over-pleased with their new master, and the Covenanters, thanking God that they had a country to sell, and a religion to trade in, also took their departure, and William addressed himself to the real object of his mission ; for, as he expressed it, "he did not come into Ireland to let the grass grow under his feet." This was a significant hint to the Duke of Schomberg, that he had fallen under his displeasure through his tardy movements since he came to the country. It was so received by that old veteran, and an estrangement, never after reconciled, was the consequence. The days of Schomberg were nearly numbered ; but, short as they were, they were embittered by the ingratitude of the prince in whose service he had spent the better part of an eventful life.

The available force of William in Ireland now numbered over sixty thousand effective men. There were none of these who had not seen active service, and by far the greater portion were veterans long inured to continental warfare. The "Thirty Years' War," which has left

its impress on the nations of Europe, down to the present day, had sent afloat a swarm of military adventurers ready for any cause that could offer fame or reward ; and to England they flocked as the best market for their services. From this force he selected an army of

38,000 or 40,000 men, and, placing the remainder in the garrisons of Ulster, he struck his tents and turned his steps towards the Irish capital.

If we except those bands of Rapparees that traversed the country at large, and levied on it in the name of the king, or for their own support, the Jacobite force, according to the highest estimate, was now but 30,000 men. And taking into consideration the long sweep of coast from Dublin round by the south and west to Galway, and the defences of the Shannon from Lanesborough to Limerick, there could not have been then in garrison less than 10,000. This would leave him an available force for active service of about 20,000, and of these 6,000 were French, the only well-appointed infantry in the service ; and about 9,000 Irish infantry, indifferently armed with muskets and short pikes ; but the cavalry were a superb body, long inured to service under Hamilton, Berwick, and Sarsfield, and numbered about 5,000 men. When with these is taken into consideration a train of twelve field-pieces, lately brought over from France by the Duke de Lausun, the reader will have a reliable estimate of the force which King James now assembled to dispute the possession of the country with the Prince of Orange.

On the 16th of June King James arrived at Castletown-Bellew, near Dundalk, where part of his army occupied an advanced position under the command of M. Girardin, a French officer ; and thither also the rest of his forces soon repaired from their winter-quarters at Drogheda. Here, drawn up on the heights, behind a river, with their right resting towards Dundalk and the lowlands, where Schomberg had passed the preceding winter, stretching before them to the north, they awaited the appearance of the enemy.

From the 16th to the 22d William was at Newry and James at Dundalk, each awaiting the arrival of his artillery. While the main armies stood thus, almost in sight of each other, several skirmishes occurred between the pickets thrown forward on both sides, in one of which Colonel Dempsey, with two companies of his own regiment, encountered 200 foot and 60 horse of the enemy, only six of whom escaped ; but the gallant colonel himself received a wound of which he died a few days after. This incident raised the spirit of the troops to a high pitch, and made them eager for a battle ; and the king himself, much elated by the event, determined to abide the enemy in his present position. But the Irish leaders were not so favorably impressed, either with the condition of the troops, or the position which they occupied, and endeavored to dissuade the king from risking a battle under such disadvantages. They again urged him to abandon the capital, and to fall back on the defences of the Shannon, where, by instituting a desultory system of warfare, he could keep William in check until the winter set in, when, by the promised assistance from France, they could render his campaign as inglorious as that of Schomberg had been in the last. Every argument that could favor such a course was urged, and all the circumstances by which he was surrounded seemed to point it out as the best that could be adopted. A fleet was fitting out in France, of which his earnest friend, M. de Seignelay, would have command ; a few days more would see it afloat, and on its way to destroy the fleet and transports of William around the coast of Ireland : it would also bring arms and ammunition in abundance, and by winter a powerful and well-disciplined army would be ready to take the field. These and many other arguments were urged, but all in vain. The king would not relinquish the capital without striking a blow for it ; he became all at once as bold and intrepid as he had hitherto been weak and temporizing ; rejected their remonstrance, and determined to risk all on a single battle.

This he tells in his memoirs, written several years later, and it is but just that his reasons for disagreeing, which are not wanting in plausibility, should be placed beside those of the generals. He held that the loss of the capital would end whatever prestige his name had with the French king ; that it would entirely alienate the Protestants of Ireland ; that it would throw the provinces of Leinster and Munster completely open to William, while he would be confined to one province, the smallest and poorest in the kingdom ; and that his final defeat,

though it might be protracted for a time, would be eventually certain. But, whatever were the merits of the different views, is now but speculation ;—the king remained persistent.

On the 23d, William's artillery having arrived, he moved forward. The same day King James retired to Ardee, where he was met by his train, and drew up in a strong position in the direct route between William and the capital. William, still advancing, crossed the mountains between Newry and Dundalk, and, observing the situation of the Irish army, divided his own into two bodies for the purpose of flanking it, or forcing it into the plain, where his great numerical superiority would render victory certain. Seeing this, King James continued gradually to fall back ; on the 29th, he crossed the Boyne, at Drogheda, and, drawing up his army on the heights of Donore, overlooking that river, he there awaited the enemy.

The Battle of the Boyne.

The Boyne, which finds its head-waters near Carbery, in the County of Kildare, takes a meandering course towards the west and north, until it enters Meath, through which it flows in a north-easterly direction through Trim, Navan, Slane, and Drogheda, four miles below which it falls into the Irish Sea. At tide-water it is navigable to Navan, a distance of nineteen miles, for barges of fifty tons burden ; but at low-water, from Navan to Slane, it is a shallow stream, brawling over a rocky bottom of a few yards in width ; and from that to Old Bridge it is fordable by horse and foot at almost every rood of its length. Below Slane, its course is due east for nearly a mile, when, dipping abruptly towards the south, it takes a semicircular sweep of nearly three miles to Old Bridge, and the curve so formed embraces its memorable battleground. The northern bank, for nearly half a mile back, is high and firm down to the water's edge, while the opposite one is low and sedgy, and the ground behind it broken, back to the base of Donore, which is over a mile from its mid-current :—the chord of the arc indicated is nearly two miles, and the distance from Old Bridge to Slane, in a direct line, is somewhat under three.

On the evening of the 29th, when James crossed the river, the distance between his rear-guard and William's advance, was about eight miles, and on the morning of the 30th the latter appeared, and halted his army facing the concave bend of the river, behind a line of hills which partially concealed it from observation, while awaiting his artillery, which was still some miles in his rear.

With that promptitude which characterized all his movements since his arrival in the country, he immediately ordered an examination of the river from Old Bridge to Slane, and proceeded himself with a detachment of cavalry to reconnoitre the position of the royal army. While so engaged he was struck by a cannon-shot that grazed his shoulder and drew a little blood. This caused a report of his death to be spread throughout the camp, and created the greatest alarm among his followers ; but, calling for a napkin, he stopped the blood, and, putting on another coat, passed through the ranks to restore the confidence of his soldiers, and then completed his reconnoissance. [2] Towards noon he moved his army forward to the river, when, his cannon having arrived, he established his batteries along the heights, ordered a heavy cannonade to be kept up against the Irish centre, and, retiring within his lines, summoned his generals to receive his plan of action.

It was the intention of William at first to cross the river at Slane during the advanced hours of the night, and falling on James by surprise, to strike his left, and turn it from the road to Dublin. The Duke of Schomberg, with characteristic caution, would have opposed this proposition, on the ground that though James's army appeared small from the English line of sight, he might have large reserves behind Donore. But the duke was again rebuked by the prince, and notified to retire, which he did, deeply mortified, and received his orders after-

wards in his tent, with the querulous remark, that “ they were the first that had ever been sent him !” Bating this, the utmost harmony pervaded the council of William, and confidence reigned supreme throughout his camp.

But, notwithstanding the discourtesy shown by William to the Duke of Schomberg, the advice of that old veteran had its due weight in his council ; the determination to assail the Irish left during the night was abandoned, and the following plan of action was adopted : Of the 40,000 men of which the prince’s army now consisted, about 13,000, composed of the Dutch Guards, the Enniskillen infantry, and the Brandenburg and Huguenot regiments, under the command of Duke Schomberg and Caillemotte, [3] formed his centre, opposite to the same division of the royal army. His right, 10,000 horse and foot, under Count Schomberg and General Douglas, respectively, was extended in the direction of Slane ; and his left, about 12,000 strong, comprising the Dutch, Danish, and Enniskillen horse, and the British and Scotch infantry, was drawn up towards Old Bridge, and to be commanded by himself in person. His immense train of artillery, variously estimated at from fifty to sixty pieces, including several mortars, was portioned out to each division, the weight of it being placed against the Irish centre ; and his reserves, about 5,000, were stationed in the low ground to his rear, within easy supporting distance of his right and left, and not more than a mile from either. The Count of Schomberg was to open the battle at daybreak by forcing the Pass of Slane, and turning the Irish left ; when this should be accomplished, the duke was to cross at the centre, and, carrying the intrenchments opposite, press them back from the river ; biding these results, the prince himself would cross at Old Bridge, and, flanking their right, cut off their retreat to Dublin. Thus, by a general movement, the royal army would be completely overthrown, and the war terminated by a single blow :—the chances of defeat had no place in his calculation.

As William had the advantage of ground—that is to say, the northern bank of the river was steep and firm down to its margin, while the southern side was low and broken —James had thrown his army well back towards the hill of Donore, and during the interval had made the following disposition : His centre, about 8,000 men of all arms, was arranged in two lines ; one, comprising the musketeers and pikemen, under Major-General Dorrington and the Marquis de Hoquincourt, was placed in the intrenchments along the river, and the other, composed of the exempts, under General Nugent and Taafe, Earl of Carlingford, in the broken ground behind it. For the support of these the infantry regiments of Tyrconnell, Parker, and Gordon O’Neil, and the dragoons of Lords Clare and Dungan, were held between a small village and the hill of Donore, as the ground nearer to the river was low, and commanded by the enemy’s artillery. His right wing, about 3,000 men, of whom but eight battalions were infantry, rested near the town of Old Bridge, opposed to William’s left, under the command of Lieutenant-General Hamilton and the Duke of Berwick. His left, composed of the French troops under the Duke de Lausun and M. de la Hoquette, stood about a mile from his centre, in the direction of Slane ; while that important Pass, which, he tells us in his Memoirs, he expected to be William’s first point of assault, and which lay three miles from his centre, by the course of the river, was entirely neglected until late at night, when, at the urgent request of his generals, it was occupied by Sir Neale O’Neil and his regiment of dragoons. A strip of moor-land, extending from Old Bridge to the Pass of Slane, ran behind his right and centre, traversing the base of Donore round to the south-east ; and behind this, but well drawn up against the hill, he held a reserve of nearly 3,000 infantry and cavalry, the former under Sir Charles Carney, and the latter under Sarsfield and Brigadier-General Maxwell.

How little soever conversant in military affairs, one cannot fail to see the almost insuperable disadvantages of the Jacobite army. Lying on the convex of the river, with an army scarce half the number of the opposing force ; its supporting distance to the Pass of Slane treble to that of the enemy ; the ground near the river unsuited to the action of cavalry, which was its main dependence ; and its ordnance miserably inferior in number and calibre, it was

barely possible to repulse the enemy, but almost impossible to turn a repulse into a victory, To an ordinary observation the chances of battle would thus present themselves : by intrepidity and superior valor, James might hold his ground until the return of tide, which would suspend it, or if the enemy succeeded in crossing without his ordnance, he might draw up all his force on the heights, and by one of those desperate and sudden efforts that man is sometimes capable of, hurl him back into the river. There was no other alternative between him and defeat ; the vast numerical advantage of the Prince of Orange rendered the former improbable, and the lack of military ardor in the king himself was not calculated to evoke the latter.

With a will concentrated on the object of his mission, exultant in power, and personally brave and enterprising, William's plan was simple, bold, and aggressive. Weak in numbers, and straitened in resources, that of James was tortuous, cautious, and weakly defensive. Fortitude and military capacity he is said to have possessed, and they would seem not to have entirely deserted him on this occasion ; but in that desperate daring which alone could wring success from the surrounding disadvantages, he was utterly deficient. His army was gallant, and even eager for the conflict, and a rival whose persistent malignity would have roused the meekest spirit, confronted him ; but the blood did not course warmly in his veins at the devotion of the one, nor did vengeance steel him to action at the sight of the other. Trepidity was manifest in all his motions, and he had not even the self-control to hide it from his soldiers. The Pass of Duleek, in his rear, claimed more of his attention than the enemy on his front ; for, while ordering the battle, he was devising a retreat, and had, in their sight, dispatched one-half his artillery in the evening for the defence of the capital. It therefore mattered very little how he disposed of the remainder—six pieces, on a line of four Irish miles. [4]

So stood the hosts on the night of June 30th, 1690, prepared to deliver battle on the dawn of the morrow ; and, as darkness settled down and hid each from the view of the other, the feelings that swayed them may be easier felt than depicted. One feeling, that in such moments pervades every bosom alike, from the private to the king, must have been theirs in common—the hope to survive the carnage ;—in all else their thoughts must have been as different as the causes they represented. The mercenary can have but one passion and one object—to slay and to dominate. The patriot has many, and all are sacred. The poetry of emotion is his, and over none does it exert a more boundless influence than over the race of which this king's army was mainly composed. The memories of the past, standing out like the immemorial hills ; the voices of futurity coming up the long vista of time, and all pleading the reversal of a fate more cruel than Egyptian bondage : while clearer to the ear and nearer to the heart come the pleadings of kindred, and the anxious house-hold lifting up their prayers to heaven for the devoted hearts that shield them from ruin, death—dishonor. All these speak to them, and a thousand fancies, taking the form of life, pass in solemn review, till the hardest soldier, with moistened eye, and heart full to breaking, grasps his sword, compresses his lip, looks out for the dawning, and sighs for relief in conflict.

But did not the Irish of that day deceive themselves ? This king, whose cause they had espoused, was not their king. His restoration would still leave their country an appanage of the British Crown, and his house was a name of woe and desolation throughout the land ! Would her future, under it, be much brighter than her past ? There was, no doubt, many a thoughtful mind in that Irish army that had all those misgivings ; but this was not the time to indulge them. Nor should we of the present day be hypercritical. Royalty was then something more than a name, and we should not judge the events of the seventeenth century by the light of the nineteenth, nor the Ireland of untoward circumstances as the nation of her people's will. To the memory of this unhappy king this truth should be generously conceded....He could have retained his throne had he violated his conscience. He could have ruled the Irish people as his predecessors had done, and at that time they had no power to stay him ; for

the Catholic descendants of the Palesmen were firm in their allegiance to the English throne, and the native race was destitute of means to strike for separation. He had forfeited his crown and jeopardized his power, for right. He had emancipated them from a bondage servile to mind and body. He was the first royal champion of civil and religious liberty. He had offered them justice in his power, and appealed to their loyalty in his adversity. His cause was their cause. He was banished by his own people, outraged by his own family ; he came to them in his bereavement, and to their honor, be it recorded, they did not forsake him ! His very injuries threw a sacred influence around him, and as he sacrificed to justice, they paid him the homage of their blood !

Yet, in truth, he was not their king ;—not the ideal king of the Irish race. That should be a native king ; one infusing nationality through every hamlet in the land, and defending its liberties against a world in arms ! Six hundred years had failed to eradicate the hope of such a king from the hearts of every successive generation, and every outrage of the invader only rendered it the more indelible. The place, too, was historic. Every hill and valley, from Drogheda to Clonard, in rath and ruin, bore ample testimony of their aspiration for native rule. Tara and Skreen, now plainly visible in the soft moonlight of summer, stood out in relief against the southern sky, and it is no stretch of the imagination to say : from that same Pass of Slane, the ancestor of Sir Neale O'Neil, had, nearly 900 years before, reconnoitred the Danish host and marked it for destruction. Many a chief and many a clan of his martial house had, since then, crossed the Boyne to do battle with the invader, but never a braver soldier than he, nor a more devoted following than that which now counted the moments by the reverberation of the enemy's cannon along its banks, and looked through the night for the eventful dawning. [5]

The night wore slowly away, and as its shadows were blending into the gray dawn of morning, the cannonade which had been kept up since the preceding noon from William's batteries ceased for a time, and the beat to arms was distinctly heard on the heights of Donore. It was promptly answered by a roll from the Irish camp, and the troops on each side were immediately in motion, and deploying down towards the river. An hour of hurried preparation now passed on, when the waters of the gentle river were again startled from their short repose by a heavy peal along the whole English line, the smoke of which having cleared away, William's left, the cavalry in advance, was seen doubling the curve in the river, and advancing steadily towards the Pass of Slane. The firing thus resumed, was now kept up incessantly from the English left and centre, and as the sun appeared above the hills, and both armies stood out bolder on the foreground, William himself, accompanied by Prince George of Denmark, the Prince of Nassau, and the Duke of Wurtemberg, and surrounded by a grand cavalcade, was observed reviewing his army, and, by word and example, infusing hope and courage through all its ranks.

King James saw all that was passing from the heights of Donore, and as Count Schomberg and Douglas moved in the direction of Slane, he ordered de Lausun to move his troops in the same direction. Then, after seeing the remainder of his baggage on its way to Dublin, [6] whither the half of his artillery had already been sent, he stood to watch the issue of the day, with much composure of manner and much Christian resignation, but none of that military ardor by which a gallant general often imparts a spirit and energy to a small army that render it invincible in the hour of battle. Not so, however, with the Duke of Tyrconnell. Though bowed by age, and broken in health, he moved from rank to rank, exhorting all to bravery ; and it is very questionable which felt most solicitude at that hour—that king for the fate of his crown, or that patriot for the cause of his country. As for Sarsfield, he had little to do in the affairs of that day ; for both he and General Maxwell were in continual attendance on the king's person, and his attention, with the exception of one visit to his right, was entirely divided between the reserve on Donore and the French troops on his left. Hamilton and Berwick were at their post on the right, and well had it been for James and his cause had he

tarried in Dublin and committed the marshalling of his army to those generals, and the issue of the day to the King of battles.

Apprised of the design of the enemy on his position, O'Neil had made such preparations as time allowed for his reception. Around the pass on both sides of the river he had drawn intrenchments, and as the morning dawned had thrown forward a small detachment to impede his progress. The ground over which he approached was favorable to defensive operations, being much broken and interspersed with hedges : these natural impediments, and the weight of his artillery, rendered his movements slow and irregular ; the fire of the skirmishers met him at every step as he neared the pass, so that it was eight o'clock before he had forced them back within their intrenchments.

Here the fight was renewed with great stubbornness, and continued for two hours longer, when Schomberg, with the loss of two hundred men, forced the position, and the dragoons retired with the loss of one-fourth their number, bearing away the body of their leader, mortally wounded, and renewed the contest on the other side of the river. Schomberg immediately commenced to cross, and the king, apprised of the state of affairs here, sent Sarsfield, with sixty dragoons and a piece of artillery, to oppose him ; but these succors only arrived in time to see the defenders driven from their intrenchments, and the troops of Schomberg drawn out on the southern bank to receive them.

All further attempts to check the progress of the assailants were now futile ; the dragoons retired on their supports ; the gun brought down by Sarsfield got " bogged," and had to be abandoned, and Schomberg, his artillery being got over, deployed by his right, on the outer side of the marsh, to turn the left of the king's army. He had, however, scarcely got clear of the river, when the troops of de Lausun appeared on the inner side of the marsh to oppose him. The force of the latter was 6,000 men, within support of a reserve of 3,000 ; it was fresh, finely appointed, and the marsh at this place was narrow and practicable to horse and foot ; but he showed no disposition to engage, although Schomberg halted and drew up to offer him battle. After some time the troops on both sides were put in motion, Schomberg still moving by his right, and de Lausun by his left in the same direction, the marsh gradually widening round towards the rear of Donore, until nearly a mile intervened, when an engagement became impracticable, and the Irish left was flanked.

In the mean time, King James, seeing that Count Schomberg had crossed the river, believed that the other division of William's army would also move in the same direction, and that the entire battle would be finally transferred to his left. He therefore determined to withdraw his own right and centre from the river, to the support of de Lausun, and with this intention he now proceeded to his right. There seeing that William's left and centre were still drawn up on the opposite bank, and being opposed in his design by Tyrconnell, he returned to his left, where Count Schomberg and de Lausun were still confronting each other. Posting his reserves on the right of the latter, and riding up to him, he ordered him to charge the enemy across the intervening ground ; but the order was disobeyed, although Schomberg halted again and formed to invite an action. In this state of perplexity the king rode back to the reserves, placed the infantry at the edge of the marsh, supported on each side by his cavalry, with the foot dragoons filling up the intervals, and approaching M. de la Hoquette, " *whispered him*" to lead on the French infantry. The latter was about to comply with this *request*, when he was checked by de Lausun ; at this time, Sarsfield and Maxwell, who had been out inspecting the ground in front, returned, and pronounced it impracticable to cavalry, it being traversed by two double ditches with a rivulet flowing between them. So the king was convinced, and de Lausun was relieved from his importunity. In this manner the two wings continued to manoeuvre, the situation each moment growing more critical, as Schomberg neared the end of the marsh, where the road turned towards Duleek, and led on to the capital.

Thus, through some motive of de Lausun, never after explained, and through the absence of control in the unfortunate king, never forgiven, the French auxiliaries, and with them the Irish reserve,—a body of 3,000 men,—were neutralized ; the Irish left was completely turned, and the remainder of the army, not exceeding 11,000, was left to contend with 30,000 under William and the Duke of Schomberg.

In the mean time a considerable change had taken place in William's left and centre. The Duke of Schomberg had discovered another ford in the direction of Slane, and when that pass was carried, had moved by his right to avail himself of the advantages it offered, while William had moved by his left somewhat nearer to the town of Drogheda. These changes necessitated corresponding movements in the Irish line. A greater extension was the consequence, and some regiments of its rear were extended to oppose the Duke of Schomberg ; but still they offered a good front, and awaited the enemy in confidence.

It was well on to noon, and the tide was on the return, when the firing ceased on Duke Schomberg's front, and the Dutch Guards, accompanied by their band, detached themselves from the main body and moved down to the river. Here the music of the band ceased ; the guards formed in compacted columns, twenty abreast, and commenced the passage of the river in the face of a well-directed fire. [7] When they had all got below the level of their own artillery, its fire was again directed against the Irish intrenchments, and compelled the men there to lie close in their works, until the guards got beyond the mid-current and began to ascend on the opposite side, when they quitted their defences, and advanced into the river to meet them, and, as they closed, Major Arthur, of the Irish Guards, singling out the leader of the enemy, passed his pike through his body. This stimulated his men to action ; a desperate conflict ensued ; the Dutch Guards were held in check for a considerable time, and many fell on both sides, and were trampled beneath the current.

The Dutch Guards were the household troops of the Prince of Orange ; were fighting under his eye, and formed a compact body of five thousand men, while the Irish were mostly raw levies, inferior in number, and indifferently armed with pikes and muskets. The result was doubtful for some time, until Major Arthur was wounded and conveyed to the rear; disheartened and borne back by the weight of numbers, his troops gradually gave ground ; and the Dutch troops advanced and effected a landing. As they reached the firm ground above the river, they were charged by the dragoons of Clare and Dungan, and wavered ; but Lord Dungan being slain, the dragoons became panic-stricken and retreated, nor could they again be brought to the charge. In this state of indecision the Dutch renewed their assault, and established a position in the broken ground behind the Irish line. The position was a strong one, and at once laid bare the intrenchments on the river, while it afforded a protection against the Irish cavalry ; and here they remained during the succeeding events of the day, suffering severely, but defying every attempt to dislodge them.

William, who witnessed this, felt deep concern for the fate of his household troops. They had accompanied him in all his campaigns, and his care for them, in peace and war, was that of a patriarch for his household. From his point of view, their condition was now perilous in the highest degree, they being surrounded by the enemy on all sides, and in danger of total destruction before relief could reach them. To him, the movements of Schomberg, always slow and measured, seemed now painfully so ; and, suspending his advance against the Irish right, he rode down to the centre, to precipitate the troops forming there for the relief of his famous guards. Two regiments of the Huguenot troops and one of British infantry were immediately formed, and, under the leadership of Caillemotte, commenced the passage of the river.

Hamilton, from the right of the Irish line, had followed these events with a feeling akin to that of William. He believed, like him, that the fate of the Dutch troops was sealed, could the reinforcements of the enemy be held in check or repulsed ; but he also saw that the intrenchments at the centre were partially abandoned from the effects of the enemy's fire on their rear, and that all now depended on intrepid action. He therefore detached two regiments of infantry from the right, to march close by the river, and throw themselves before Caillemotte, while he hastened himself, by a more circuitous route, with the cavalry, to sustain them.

The troops of Caillemotte advanced rapidly to the mid-current, where they were met as the Dutch Guards had been, and, like them, were forcing their way against the Irish infantry, when Hamilton reached the scene of action. As he appeared, the infantry opened to the right and left to make way, and, with unchecked impulse, he rushed to the onset. The effect was instantaneous. In a moment, the enemy were helplessly broken, trampled, and dispersed. Caillemotte, two colonels, and two lieutenant-colonels were slain, more than half his command were either killed or wounded, and the remainder fled to the opposite side, pursued by the victorious cavalry. As they pressed the fugitives up to their lines, the Danish horse were precipitated against them, but were instantly broken, hurled back in confusion, and closely pressed on the columns now forming under the Duke of Schomberg. Hushing on wildly, and crying out " Horse ! horse !" in great alarm, they created a panic, which was near ending in a total rout ; when William again appeared among them, restored order in the ranks, and the Irish cavalry leisurely retired.

William now collected all the infantry of the centre, while Schomberg, placing himself at the head of the cavalry, entered the river, and advanced with the same coolness and caution that had hitherto characterized all his movements. The Irish horse had just returned from the pursuit, and were drawn up on the river to oppose him. They did not wait for his whole force to get in motion, but as he approached the middle of the river, they bore down on him with their wonted impetuosity. The effect was the same as before. Schomberg and Walker of Derry were slain ; dismay and inextricable confusion was the consequence, and all retreated to the northern side to reform. Taylor, in his short but life-like portraiture of this battle, says of the event just detailed : " Had James chosen this moment to place himself at the head of his troops, for one general charge, or had the French auxiliaries attacked the Dutch in flank, the event of the battle would certainly have restored his crown !" The poor king—he was at that very moment concerting a retreat on his left, outraged by his French general ; and even his reserves were two miles from the scene of action !

This was the crisis of the day. The tide was now making fast ; the water was nearly waist high in the river, and half an hour more would render a crossing impossible for that day. William could no longer delay his movements on the left, and so, ordering Sir John Hanmer and the Prince of Nassau to reform his demoralized troops at the centre, and lead them on for the relief of his guards, he hastened to the left to make a last effort to restore the battle.

Had Sarsfield and Maxwell now appeared with the reserves, and left de Lausun to watch Count Schomberg, the battle had been won, or, at least, suspended ; for at this moment the balance leaned to the Jacobite arms, and delay would have been tantamount to a victory. During the approaching night, the division of Count Schomberg, cut off from support, and lost in the intricacies of the ground behind Donore, could have been totally destroyed ; there were three thousand troops within a few hours' march of the field, and the morning would have opened with fairer prospects of success. [8] But all these chances were lost by the fears of the king for his capital ; no support appeared for the centre ; and Hamilton, after performing prodigies of valor, was forced to retire again to the right, to oppose the passage of the Prince of Orange.

William, whose design through the day had been to strike the Irish army in the rear of its right, turn it from the direction of the capital, and form a junction with Count Schomberg, was now compelled to abandon that project, and lead his left to the support of his centre. For this purpose he marshalled a force of about 12,000 infantry and cavalry. The Danish and Dutch horse, bearing the standard of Nassau, were placed in the advance ; after them came the foot, and the Enniskillen horse brought up the rear. Placing himself between the cavalry and infantry, he entered the river, the water rising to the flanks of the horses as they reached the mid-current. Hamilton, who had just returned from the Irish centre, watched their approach with great anxiety, until they began to ascend the southern side and had gained a surer footing ; when, ordering his infantry to retire, he withdrew the cavalry also, to reform for the charge. William, on seeing this movement, believed that they were abandoning the field, and urged his cavalry more hastily forward. He was soon undeceived : the Irish horse had but withdrawn for greater impulse ; in another moment they dashed forward ; the Danes were scattered right and left, bearing back the Prince among them, and the flanks of his infantry lay completely exposed. The Irish cavalry had, for the third time that day, asserted their superiority.

William's situation was now desperate. His Danish and Dutch horse were scattered and swimming in the river ; his infantry were hardly able to bear up against its current ; the Irish cavalry lay on his front, and their infantry had opened with effect on his flanks. But he was equal to the emergency, and his gallantry at this trying moment would go far to erase a very dark record. Making his way to the head of his Enniskilleners, now about to advance, he asked promptly "What they would do for him?" They cried out with one impulse that they would follow where he led, and hastening forward after him, they threw themselves between their infantry and the Irish cavalry, now reformed on the bank above them. The sight of these troops, their own countrymen, protecting the foreign mercenaries of William, roused the spirit of vengeance in the breasts of the Irish, and, wheeling as before, they swept forward in one compacted mass. The Enniskilleners did not await the shock, but turned and fled across the river, deserting their general at his greatest need ; nor could they again be rallied until the battle was decided. [9] William, on being deserted by the Enniskilleners, again rode through his infantry and reformed their disordered ranks. The Danish and Dutch rallied, and formed round his person, and, with the desperate resolve to do or die, he pressed resolutely forward.

The scene along the whole line was now terribly grand and exciting. The entire left and centre of the English army were in motion, and, stirred to the highest daring by the danger of their Prince and the exigency of the hour, were pressing through the river simultaneously. Hanmer led the cavalry of the centre, and the Prince of Nassau the infantry, each vying with the other for precedence. The latter was crossing at the ford lately attempted by Caillelotte and the Duke of Schomberg, and the former at one hitherto neglected, which lay nearer to Old Bridge, and offered more immediate support to the Prince of Orange. This disposition nearly connected the English left and centre, and caused another derangement of the Irish lines opposite. The Dutch Guards, too, who still held their lodgement on the side of Donore, rallied as their succor approached, and drew a portion of their fire from the compacted masses of Nassau on their front. Three regiments of the Irish Guards—those of Tyrconnell, Parker, and Gordon O'Neil—the exempts under Nugent, and a few squadrons of cavalry, were thrown against Hanmer, and, animated by Tyrconnell and Dorrington, were opposing a most deadly resistance ; while Berwick and Hamilton still disputed the passage of William, and held him in check on the right.

But the balance of the day was inclining, and the fates were again propitious to William. Nassau pressed fiercely on. The Dutch Guards assumed the offensive, and their fire became destructive. The Irish generals exhausted every effort to animate their troops, but in vain. Attacked in front and rear by superior numbers, they at last broke, abandoned the river, and withdrew in good order towards Donore. The command of Nassau, on ascending from the

river, were joined by the Dutch Blues, and both turned their attention to where the Irish Guards were still offering a stern resistance to Hanmer. [10] The position of these troops now became critical in the extreme, and a short time would see them either all slain or captured by the enemy. There was scarce an alternative, when Berwick arrived with a portion of the cavalry of the right, charged vigorously, and held the enemy in check until the remnant of these famous guards retired. This was the most destructive conflict of the day to the Irish ; “ for,” says King James in his Memoirs, “ the greater part of the exempts and brigadiers in both corps were killed, likewise the Earl of Carlingford, M. d’Amande, and several other volunteers that served with them. Nugent and Casanova were wounded in Tyrconnell’s, Major O’Meara and Sir Charles Tooke were killed, and Bada wounded. In Parker’s, the Colonel was wounded ; Green, the Lieutenant-Colonel, Doddington, the Major, and several officers were killed ; and in both squadrons there remained but thirty men unhurt.”

Hamilton, with the remaining cavalry, no longer able to offer an effectual resistance on the river, retired before William, who crossed, wheeled to his right, and pressed on towards his centre. As the English forces united, the Irish horse also converged, and formed on their front for the protection of their infantry, forming in line of battle on the hill. A series of conflicts now ensued between the Irish cavalry and the converging forces of the English left and centre, which are described by the annalist Story, as of the most desperate character : for more than half an hour, during which all “ were completely enveloped in dust and smoke,” neither gained or lost an inch ; and when no longer able to withstand the overwhelming force against them, the Irish cavalry retired, reformed, charged the enemy again and again, “ ten times in succession,” and at last fell back to the flanks of their infantry, to make another effort to redeem the day. William advanced boldly on the position now assumed by the Irish army, but, astonished at the imposing front they still presented, he halted to array his troops, when the Irish infantry, taking advantage of this hesitation, bore down on him. The first and second line gave way ; but their force was spent against the Dutch Guards, and they retired ; the cavalry now charged again and broke the guards, but the wings closing on them, they were completely surrounded. A terrific struggle took place ; General Hamilton was wounded, unhorsed, and captured ; Berwick had his horse killed, but was saved by a trooper ; Colonel Sheldon cut his way through at the head of the cavalry, and again reformed them on the front ; and while the two armies stood thus, neither advancing nor receding, the order for a general retreat sounded along the Irish line.

While the events just described were transpiring on the river, Count Schomberg continued to hold de Lausun inactive, wearing slowly round by his right ; and as the Irish centre retreated on Donore, he had reached the termination of the lowland, and thrown forward his cavalry on the road leading to Dublin. King James, on seeing this, got alarmed for the safety of the capital—should Schomberg get the start of him,—so directing de Lausun to defend the road, he issued an order for a general retreat, and, taking the regiments of Brown and Purcell as an escort, withdrew from the field and pursued his way to Dublin. On receipt of this order, “ the Irish army retreated” from the hill, bringing off all their standards and artillery ; [11] — they crossed the lowlands to the north of Donore ; — and the Boyne was lost.

It was six o’clock in the evening. The infantry soon reached the town of Duleek, the French bringing up the rear, and formed in line of battle behind the river Nanny. The cavalry arrived soon after, and had just crossed the river as Count Schomberg drew up and formed on the other side. Both armies then remained facing each other for over an hour ; the Irish, seeing that the enemy did not advance, began to retire, and Schomberg followed. The Irish halted and reformed again, in a long ravine, near the village of Neal ; the enemy also halted, but did not attack ; and in this posture night settled down on the two armies. It was now nine o’clock ; the Irish resumed their march, and the enemy following no farther, they continued their way unmolested towards Dublin. William remained on the field. Some say that sorrow for the death of Schomberg was the cause of his not pressing the foe. It might have been caused by a lack of artillery, as his train had not crossed the river. Perhaps he might have

been apprehensive that the garrison of Drogheda would issue out and capture or destroy it in his absence, as they might have done during the latter events of the day ; but whether it was one of those causes, or a combination of them, now matters but little ; he had won the Battle of the Boyne, and it was enough for a day.

The principal personages killed in the Jacobite army were Lord Dungan, Taaf Earl of Carlingford, Sir Neale O'Neil, and the Marquis de Hoquincourt ; in that of the Prince of Orange, the Duke of Schomberg, [12] Caillemotte, and Walker of Derry, who commanded a regiment of Enniskilleners. Besides these, several officers of distinction fell on both sides ; among whom were two colonels, two lieutenant-colonels, in the division of Caillemotte, and Sir Charles Tooke, Majors Arthur and O'Meara, and the Chevalier de Vaudry, in Tyrconnell's. The number of officers of subordinate rank killed and wounded on each side was very great, considering the loss in private soldiers, which did not exceed one thousand in either. The number of the wounded in the army of William is not known, and, excepting Hamilton, there is no mention of prisoners being taken on either side.

Such was the Battle of the Boyne. Memorable for the extinction of the Stuart dynasty, for the politico-religious government it entailed on England, and for the wrongs innumerable it bequeathed to Ireland ; but for nothing more memorable than as a well-contested and long-doubtful battle. It was one fought by twenty thousand men, [13] indifferently armed, with only six pieces of artillery, and under a king whose conduct would have disconcerted the best army in the world, from six in the morning until six in the evening, on a river fordable at every rood of its length, against an army of thirty thousand [14] veteran mercenaries, with experienced leaders, cannon at will, and a prince of great military skill and daring. From the beginning their temerity seemed almost madness, to the bravest and most experienced, and their king was besought to relinquish it. Yet three times through the day the battle seemed equally poised, and once victory was assuredly within their grasp, had their king but displayed one-half the courage and intrepidity of his rival. Through the loss of this field the future was foreshadowed. There the Irish army lost prestige abroad—and at home every thing but their manhood : yet seldom was that better vindicated than on that “ ill-fated river” and as they turned their last look on it, and saw the long lines of William winding up to Donore, well might they exclaim in their anguish, “ Change kings, and we'll fight the battle again !” The kings were changed, but not for them. On that river their web of destiny was woven, and though they battled on bravely for a time, patriotic devotion and heroic sacrifice were in vain.

[1] Addresses of the same import were presented to James on his arrival, by the established clergy. But Taylor says their addresses to William were “ probably more sincere,” and instances this fact :—“ James was regularly prayed for by all the churches within his lines. When William advanced Ms name was substituted, and when he retreated, his rival again became ‘ our most religious and gracious king.’ ”— Vol. ii., p. 145.

[2] The many conflicting statements of this trifling affair are set at rest by a letter which may be seen in the Dublin Nation for May, 1865. It was written by Lord Meath—who was present at the battle,—is dated July 5, 1690, and is a rare specimen of epistolary correspondence. Enlarging on the affair, Pinnock, in his Catechism of Irish History, says : “ Burke, an Irish gunner, having grazed the arm of William with a cannon-shot, and having taken a fresh aim, on which he might depend. James desired him ‘ not to make his child a widow.’ It is also asserted, and with apparent truth, that having seen his own troops overcoming those of William, he cried out repeatedly : ‘ O spare my unfortunate subjects !’ and having turned the tide of battle against himself, by gross mismanagement, he fled precipitately to Dublin, leaving his Irish subjects behind him.” Inadequate artillery, and gross mismanagement on the part of the king, were, no doubt, the causes of the final result of the battle ; but such exclamations, even by this “ most Christian king,” would be either too saintly or too infamous, and on his own authority the statement is here rejected. It was he

himself that ordered the battery down to fire at William. (See Berwick's Memoirs, vol. ix., p. 396.)

- [3] Caillemotte was a brother of General Ruvigny, and Count Schomberg : was a son of the duke of that name.
- [4] Seeing the superiority of William, in numbers and artillery, he was now as eager to avoid as he had been before to court a battle. The French generals also wished to decline an engagement. The Irish declared themselves ready to fight. Under these circumstances, a kind of half-measure was adopted. It was determined to hazard a partial battle, and to retreat without risking a general engagement. To this strange determination James, in all probability, owed the loss of his kingdom.—(Taylor, vol. ii., p. 148.)
- [5] Nial-Caille, the last monarch of Ireland, of the house of O'Neil, after having defeated the Danes and Normans in several engagements, was drowned in the river Callan in Kilkenny, while engaged in raising the country for their total expulsion. One of his attendants having fallen into the river, he was trying to save him, and in the attempt lost his own life. The crown of sovereignty passed from the house of O'Neil, and it was not until the reign of Bryan, more than a century after, that the Danes were finally extirpated.
— (See McGeoghagen's History of Ireland.)
- [6] On seeing this, the king gave orders for his left to move in the same direction, and sent the remainder of the baggage to Dublin. (Memoirs of Berwick, p. 397, vol. i.)
- [7] The water at this time was low, not reaching the drums of the band, which accompanied them.—(Haverty's History.)
- [8] This force actually arrived next day, and narrowly escaped being captured by the victors. Two of them were taken and hanged as spies, and the rest retired after the Irish army. Had these been in the battle, the Irish army would have been twenty-three thousand, according with the estimate of the Duke of Berwick.
- [9] Taylor, after commenting in indignant terms on this conduct of the Enniskilleners, adds :
“ Their apologists say that they misunderstood their orders, and returned again. However this may be, it is certain that William, ever after, viewed this part of his force with contempt, not unmingled with hatred.” (Vol. II., page 151.)
- [10] Sir Jno. Hanmer, crossed the river nigh a place where, the day before, the enemy had a battery of six guns, but now they were gone, as most of their artillery, etc. (Story's Imp. History, Vol. I.—The Boyne.)
- [11] They brought off five pieces. The other got bogged near the Pass of Slane, and was abandoned.
- [12] Schomberg was shot by O'Toole, an Irish officer of the exempts, who took him, from the blue ribbon which he wore, to be the Prince of Orange. (Memoirs, 398.)
- [13] If the French auxiliaries, six thousand, and the Irish reserves, three thousand, which performed no service throughout the day, save watching the movements of Count Schomberg, be deducted, the number actually participating in the action was only eleven thousand men.
- [14] This force is exclusive of William's right, which consisted of ten thousand men under Count Schomberg and General Douglas, with ten pieces of cannon and two mortars.

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

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