

Oliver Cromwell Tyranny of 1649



**By
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There is a street in Drogheda named after Oliver Cromwell's work there; it is called Scarlet Lane for the blood which flowed down its streets. Why was Cromwell in Ireland and why in Drogheda?

OLIVER CROMWELL CAME TO IRELAND IN 1649 as head of the English army that was given the task of suppressing those Royalists who wanted to restore the English monarchy. The monarch, Charles I, had been beheaded in 1649 after losing a civil war to the forces of Parliament. Of course, many still had loyalty to the king and his son whom they wanted to install as Charles II , and many of those loyalists were in Ireland.

Not only was there Irish support for a monarchy, but also there was hope that Charles II would repay the Irish for its support by granting freedom of worship to the Roman Catholics. The first order of business of the new Council of State which succeeded the monarchy as ruler of England was to regain control of Ireland , and Oliver Cromwell, who had proven himself an able military commander during the civil war, was sent to Ireland to reestablish suzerainty over Ireland .

Arriving in Dublin on August 15, 1649, Cromwell thrilled the crowd at his welcoming with a promise to carry on “the great work against the barbarous and blood-thirsty Irish.” He chose an assault on Drogheda, north of Dublin , as a useful lesson to all of Ireland that if they resist his assertion of English control of Ireland there would be an “effusion of blood.” Drogheda , located on the River Boyne, was well fortified by a wall which surrounded it. Its defences were led by Sir Arthur Aston with 3000 Royalists. Cromwell had 8000 troops, called his Ironsides, disciplined, daring, fanatical, and papist hating, and the best artillery of the time which easily breached the fortified walls of Drogheda . As custom-

ary, Cromwell asked for the city's surrender with the promise of no reprisals. Aston refused to surrender, and the assault began on September 11, 1649. First, the Church of St. Mary was subject to bombardment and later St. Peter's Church was set afire.

When found, Aston was bludgeoned to death by his own wooden leg. The defenders put up a vigorous defence but when Drogheda fell, 3500 defenders and civilians of the city had been killed. Captured soldiers were sent to Barbados, and those brought to Dublin as prisoners were assigned backbreaking and dangerous work with scant rations, no shoes, no shelter, and tattered clothes. The lucky ones were sent to the West Indies. Hence, in Drogheda there is a street named Scarlet.

After the crushing of Drogheda, Cromwell gave this characterization of his actions there: This is a righteous judgment of God upon these barbarous wretches, who have imbrued their hands in so much innocent blood.... it will tend to prevent the effusion of blood for the future, which are satisfactory grounds to such actions, which otherwise work remorse and regret. This speech allows the reader into Cromwell's motivations for his harsh actions in Drogheda, and indeed in Ireland as a whole. He refers to Irish hands "imbrued in blood." This is a reference to a rising in Ireland in 1641.

Soon after the rising, there arose a legend in England which Cromwell, his Ironsides and most Englishmen believed that up to 200,000 English settlers in Ireland were massacred by the Irish. Stories of men being roasted and eaten alive, of women being put into leaky boats and set out to sea to drown, and of children murdered in front of their parents and such like gruesome tales were circulated and taken as truth by the general English population. From his bench, Justice John Cook declared that all Irish men and women living on October 23, 1641 or born in Ireland since that date were traitors and should be punished.

Cromwell, a believer of this rubbish, addressed the Irish people in these words: They [Englishmen] lived peaceable and honestly among you; you had equal benefits of the protection of England with them, and equal justice from the law.... You broke the union. You, unprovoked, put the

English to the most unheard of and most barbarous massacre without respect of sex or age, that ever the sun beheld, and at a time when Ireland was in perfect peace, and when, through the exercise of English industry, through commerce and traffic, that which was in the natives hands was better to them than if all Ireland had been in their possession and not an Englishman in it. Sad it was for Ireland that Cromwell believed a fiction. Atonia Fraser in her biography of Cromwell says that there is no historical evidence that a massacre took place during the 1641 rising.

Legend had created a massacre and gave Oliver Cromwell justification for his vengeful assaults on Irish cities.

Parliament was so pleased with the slaughter at Drogheda that on October 2, 1649 it instituted a Thanksgiving Day: The House does approve of the execution done at Drogheda as an act both of justice to them [the slain] and mercy to others who may be warned by it.

Wexford fell next. 2500 Irish were killed, including 250 women and 250 children. Five Franciscan priests and two friars were burned to death when the Franciscan Friary was put to the torch. Cromwell said about Wexford: I thought it not right or good to restrain off the soldiers from their right of pillage, or from doing execution on the enemy. That Cromwell was unfeeling or even hostile toward Catholic clergy is evident in many of his actions and statements. When Cromwell next assaulted New Ross, the city leaders surrendered but asked for liberties of conscience. Cromwell's reply tells us much about his attitude toward Catholics: I meddle not with any man's conscience. But if you mean a liberty to exercise the Mass. ...that will not be allowed of. Cromwell exemplified the anti-Catholicism of his age. Even before the Parliament which executed Charles I, Catholics were not tolerated and priests had bounties on their heads. A dead priest or a captured priest was worth twenty pounds. One priest wrote this poem in hope for a better future:—

The Gaels are being wasted and deeply wounded
Subjugated, slain, extirpated,
By plague, by famine, by war, by persecution.
Then shall Erin be freed from settlers.

Then shall perish the English tongue.
The Gaels in arms shall triumph
Over the crafty, thieving false set of Calvin.

It would be many centuries before the dream of this poet was to be partly realized.

Cromwell with his Ironsides and his artillery defeated the garrison at Arklow, overthrew Inniscorty, forced Cork to capitulate, and conquered Fethard, Cashel, and Carrick and negotiated the surrender of Kilkenny. Waterford, Galway and Limerick held out but by 1652 almost all resistance was overcome and the Articles of Kilkenny signed.

As in our own time when atrocities are committed in the name of God, Oliver Cromwell often invoked God in his bloody work in Ireland . Cromwell (born 1599) experienced a conversion in his twenties. His was a conversion to a Puritan spirituality which was in the Calvinist tradition, that is, that conversion was given to the elect few. Unlike Catholics who believe that grace can be imparted from without by sacraments like Baptism, Calvinists believed that only God can confer grace and does so selectively.

Cromwell, like some people in our own time, felt that his orders came directly from God. He supported the liberty to choose one's own way to God but abhorred "the tyranny of Bishops," especially the Bishop of Rome. Likewise he rejected Scottish Presbyterianism and Anglican Episcopalianism. His attitudes explain this statement: I shall not, where I have power, and the Lord is pleased to bless me, suffer the exercise of the Mass.... nor suffer you that are Papists.... and may help a reader to understand the culture which led the great essayist Thomas Carlyle to say Oliver Cromwell came as a soldier of God the Just, terrible as Death, relentless as Doom doing God's judgment on the enemies of God.

Mammon, too, might be a motivating force in Cromwell's
zeal in Ireland

In 1642, a group of businessmen offered to finance a war against Ireland

These investors, called the Adventurers, were to be repaid with Irish land.

Oliver Cromwell was one of the investors, purchasing 2000 pounds worth of debentures in this scheme.

When Ireland was conquered, the Adventurers were rewarded when Ireland was “settled.”

The Physician-General of the Army of Cromwell, Dr. William Petty, estimated that about 504,000 of the Irish perished and were wasted by sword, plague, famine, hardship and banishment between 23rd October 1641 and the same day in 1652. Put another way, the population of Ireland in 1641 was 1,448,000 and by 1652, 616,000 perished of which 504,000 were natives and 112,000 colonists and 40,000 soldiers left Ireland to join armies on the continent.

Oliver Cromwell left Ireland on May 26, 1650. Only nine months in Ireland, Cromwell gave birth to death, exile, persecution, indentured slavery, and a form of 17th century ethnic cleansing. His name is forever associated by the Irish people with fevered anti-Catholicism and a burning hatred for the Irish people. Cromwell's Settlement plan for Ireland can be fairly judged as being even more harmful to Ireland than his blood letting in 1649.

Cromwell, Oliver: To Hell or to Connaught (This is the second in a two-part series on Oliver Cromwell)

OLIVER CROMWELL SPENT NINE MONTHS IN IRELAND SUBDUING BY FORCE most of the resistance to English rule. However, the job would not be complete to Cromwell's satisfaction until Ireland was secure for all time as part of the

Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland. To finish his work, Cromwell returned to England to start the legislative suppression of Ireland while his son Henry Cromwell completed the military campaign. Cromwell and the Parliament passed the Act of Settlement of Ireland in 1653 whose goal was the massive transfer of land from Irish hands to English hands. The map in this article shows the plantation plan for Ireland , including pushing “the habitation of the Irish nation” to Connaught and Clare, giving the still resisting Irish the choice to go “To Hell or to Connaught.”

To complete his work in Ireland, Cromwell had several pressure groups to satisfy. One powerful group was the Adventurers who had bought acreage in Ireland on speculation in the early 1640’s. Their investment was authorized by an act which declared forfeit 2,000,000 acres of Irish land as punishment for the rising of 1642. These Adventurers, called so because theirs was a risky investment in an adventure which was highly unpredictable, were able to buy up Irish land cheaply, for example £300 for 1000 acres in Connaught and £450 for 1000 acres in Munster. Cromwell was himself one the investors in debentures on Irish land. Another very important group to keep satisfied was the Ironsides, Cromwell’s army, who were owed arrears in pay which he had told them would be paid in Irish land. Once settled in Ireland , these hardened troops provided England with an occupying army. In 1652, when England declared that hostilities were over, there were 30,000 English soldiers in Ireland .

Where would Parliament get the land for these settlements? The Act of Settlement contained a list of the condemned whose land would be forfeit. Irish soldiers were given a choice of death or exile. The reputation of Irish troops as fierce fighting men made them desirable recruits for armies in continental Europe . France , Poland , Italy and Spain were some of the nations which sent recruiters to Ireland to bring back Irish young men for their armies. Between 1651 and 1655, 40,000 young Irish men left their homeland never to return. Their lands were forfeited.

The clergy was yet another source of acreage. Not only did the churches have land that could be confiscated, but also the Roman Catholic priest

was regarded by the Puritan Parliament as an arch enemy. Cromwell's people regarded priests as subversive since they had stayed with their flocks during all of Ireland's conflicts with England. The clergy were key, too, in achieving the English goal of making Ireland Protestant. By reducing the number of priests and by prohibiting the celebration of the Mass, Parliament hoped that Catholicism would wither and die away in Ireland.

To effect such a change, Parliament placed a bounty of £20 for the arrest of a priest and made assisting a priest a capital crime. Priests were encouraged to accompany soldiers who left for other lands, and others were simply killed or transported. One of the internment camps set up for Irish Catholic priests was on the island of Inisbofin off Galway.

Most of the land which Cromwell needed to settle Ireland was taken from landowners who "... had not manifested constant good affection to the interest ... of England." This group and noblemen like Lord Inchiquin, who had taken leadership roles in Irish conflicts out of loyalty to the crown, could not be trusted by England to have power and wealth in the new Ireland. Once the land was taken from these estates, it would be redistributed to the settlers. The landless Irish would be forced to move west, to settle in places like the Burren in Clare known "to have not wood enough to hang a man, water enough to drown him, nor earth enough to bury him." The price the Irish paid for Cromwell's settlement was dear, but the price the English paid may have been even more dear: "... the price he [the Irishman] had to pay for his life also purchased his enmity for generations yet to come. Within the very wording of the Ordinance were to be found the seeds of its own destruction." (D. M. R. Esson in *The Curse of Cromwell*).

The map of Ireland showing the hurtful and cruel settlement of Ireland was a well thought out theoretical plan of diabolic inspiration. Looking at the map from east to west, a reader can see that the least able to resist another Irish rising, i.e., wounded veterans and the widows of those killed in action, were given land in the north of Dublin County and a small portion of Cork around Youghal. The original Pale around Dublin, over the years the securest area in Ireland for the English, was to be extended

south from Dublin to include Kildare, Wicklow, Carlow and Wexford. Thought to be relatively secure in their proximity to Dublin and the Irish Sea, these counties were to be for the “special planting” of friends of Parliament.

Acting as a buffer between the Irish internment counties on the west and protecting the counties on the east, the counties Limerick, Tipperary, Waterford, Kings (Offaly), Queens (Laois), and Westmeath, Armagh, Antrim and Down were settled by both soldiers and Adventurers. Louth was given exclusively to the Adventurers. The soldiers had control of Kerry, Kilkenny, Wexford, Cavan, Monaghan, Fermanagh, Tyrone and Londonderry. They also received as arrears compensation the counties Longford, Leitrim, Donegal and Wicklow. Parts of Mayo and all of Sligo went to the soldiers, as they were on the border of the western counties of Irish internment.

All of Clare, Galway, Roscommon and most of Mayo was reserved as an enclave for the surviving Irish. The English plan was to pen in the Irish west of the Shannon River, which was seen as a defensible border, with the ocean to the west. Where the Shannon was not available in the northwest, the military settlement would seal this area. All of the islands off the coast of the enclave were cleared of the Irish or used for special purposes, such as the internship camp for priests on Inisbofin. Inside this prison without bars the English hoped to make the hardcore Irish leadership impotent, there being no ports, no war industries, no fortresses, and no natural defences. All confiscated land was to be transferred on 26 September 1653 and all unauthorized Irish were to be in Connaught or Hell by 1 May 1654.

Cromwell and Parliament should have known better; theirs was a mad plan for both England and Ireland. Many of the officers and soldiers who were given land were not farmers nor desirous of living in Ireland. The Adventurers were investors in land, not even gentlemen farmers. Within ten years, only one-third of the new settlers remained in Ireland. The value of the Irish tenant farmers and labourers found new respect among the new settlers for their skills with the land. All kinds of schemes and delaying tactics were invented to get exceptions for the Irish who were

either needed to work the land or who wished to avoid wild Connaught and its ancient residents who had no special reason to be welcoming to new comers.

The Settlement terms were never fully carried out, but enough was accomplished to embitter English - Irish relations for three hundred years and more. The Cromwellian settlement crushed the Irish economy by denuding Ireland of its natural forests by making timber a cash crop, by reducing its cattle wealth from a worth of £4 million in 1641 to £½ million in 1660, by erasing the production of milk, butter, oatmeal, oat bread, and meat to be replaced by dependence on the potato, by driving Irish vessels from commerce through laws requiring English only shipping, by reducing Irish Catholic land ownership from 60% in 1641 to 9% in 1660.

Little wonder that an angry Ireland seething under English colonial rule rose up again and again to claim its independence. In his biography of Oliver Cromwell, John Morley assesses Cromwell's place in Irish history in these words: "...to everyone it will at least be intelligible how his name has come to be hated in the tenacious heart of Ireland . What is called his settlement aggravated Irish misery to a degree that cannot be measured, and before the end of a single generation events at Limerick and the Boyne showed how hollow and ineffectual, as well as how mischievous, the Cromwellian settlement had been."

And Cromwell himself? He died in 1658 and was buried with kings in Westminster Abbey. But by 1660, the king was back on the throne, and by 1661 Cromwell's body was exhumed from the Abbey, and his head was placed on a pole in front of Westminster Hall. Sic Semper Tyrannis.



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