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The Ulster Protestant and the Williamite wars in Ireland

Introduction

I was invited by Rev Ian Harris, minister of Carrickfergus Free Presbyterian Church, to hold a week of meetings in his church in June 1990. The theme was the events in Ireland during the Glorious Revolution. Carrickfergus, the town in which William, the Prince of Orange, landed on his way from England to the Battle of the Boyne, was to be the main venue for activities to mark the tercentenary of the Glorious Revolution. Consequently, Rev Harris and his congregation were anxious to set before the town the spiritual significance of the events of 1690. I began the week of meetings on Lord's Day, June 3rd and continued until Friday 8th. During the activities in the town, most of which were organised by the Orange Order, the Free Presbyterian Church distributed 20,000 gospel tracts and leaflets. The messages I delivered in the church were later published in The Burning Bush, a magazine which I edit. Following their appearance in the magazine, I was asked to consider printing them as a booklet. Hence this publication.

Chapter 5

Enniskillen and the battling rector of Kilskeery

I have to say immediately that the resistance to James II that centred in Enniskillen was by no means mounted by Enniskillen men only. The Inniskilleners (the old name for Enniskillen) were made up of Protestant men from the counties Sligo, Mayo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Cavan, Monaghan, Donegal, West Tyrone and Fermanagh. The Protestant community combined into a disciplined and regimented force which not merely withstood the best of James' military leaders but repeatedly defeated them most decidedly. The actions of the "Inniskilleners" were sparked off, as was all Protestant resistance, by the actions of Lying Dick Talbot, the Earl of Tyrconnel, James II's Viceroy in Ireland. Tyrconnel had turned 6,200 Protestants out of the army and had thrust Roman Catholics into positions of public trust, most of whom were totally unfitted for the positions they occupied. The French Ambassador, Avaux, said of Tyrconnel's actions in Ireland, "...the man who served the King of France as Tyrconnel served James II ... would have lost his head...". Tyrconnel's bigoted actions raised the ire of the Protestant people and ultimately cost James II his throne.

Famous regiments

The men who concentrated in Enniskillen and organised themselves to resist the troops of James II were eventually commissioned as the famous Inniskillen regiments which played such a prominent part in the fighting exploits of the British army on many battlefields. Their name lives on today following their reorganisation into the Irish Rangers. The prowess of the fighting men of the Western Protestant Army is seen in the many engagements in which they took part and the victories they enjoyed. The strategic importance of their activities is seen in that during the period of the struggle at least one half of the Irish army was kept from going to Derry and the Inniskilleners kept them in so great a fear that they were forced to divide their men, keeping strong guards at Strabane, Lifford, Castlefin, Claudy Bridge, Newtown Stewart, Castlederg, Omagh and Charlemont, in case the Western Protestant army should attempt to attack the Irish/French army besieging Derry.

The tactic of the Western Protestants differed from the underlying strategy of the Protestants of the North East. Following the Break of Dromore, the Protestants retreated toward Derry where soon was gathered the Protestant population from Dungannon, Money more, Magherafelt, Portglenone, and Coleraine. The Protestants in the West adopted the tactic of defence by attack. By remaining separate from the main body of Protestant resistance in Derry the Inniskilleners proved to be a massive problem for the army of James II. He could not for one moment ignore this threat to his Western flank and his supply route from Dublin.

Faith



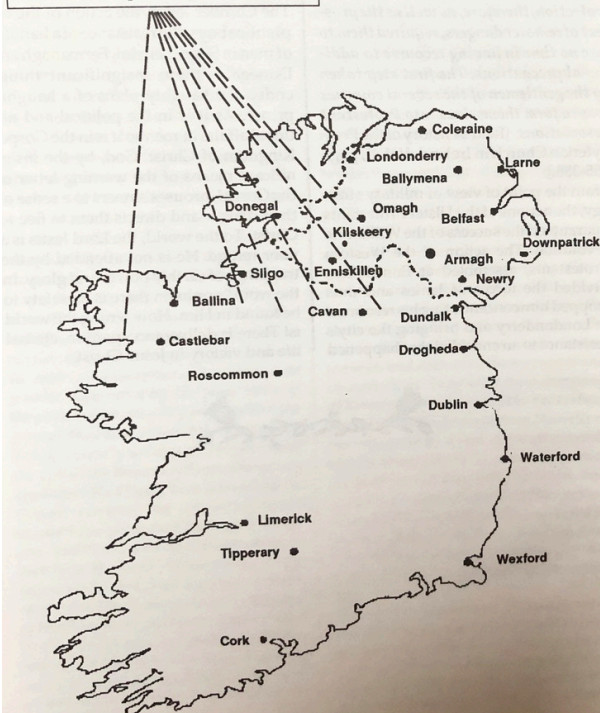
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The Protestants of Ireland who declared for William took a great step of faith. Their information, especially for those in the West of Ireland, would be sketchy and not very up to date. If William's march on London were to prove unsuccessful then a terrible vengeance would be wrought by James II and none would suffer more than the heavily outnumbered Protestants of Ireland.

In Enniskillen and Sligo there was an event that aided the Protestants organising for their defence in the face of the growing aggressiveness of the Roman Catholic population. The resident garrison of soldiers in both towns had been withdrawn some time previously. Their absence aided the organising of a Protestant force. The news that Tyrconnel was going to replace these garrisons with recently formed Roman Catholic regiments hastened the Protestant efforts in preparing for their defence. A copy of the Comber Letter reached Enniskillen the same day as it reached Derry. It was soon passed on to Sligo and other Western towns. This likewise served to spur Protestant preparations for defence.

A map of modern Ireland showing the main towns mentioned in the narrative

The main areas from which Protestants gathered to Enniskillen to resist James' attempts to launch a counter-offensive against William



Sligo was seized and occupied on 3rd January 1689. This was done despite the false report that Derry had surrendered. The report was based upon the city admitting the two Protestant companies of Lord Mountjoy and Colonel Lundy on 21st December. They issued a statement, called The Sligo Manifesto in which they explained their reasons for their action. Part of it reads as follows:

The declaration of the Protestants of Sligo.

4th January 1688-89.

We the Protestants of the County of Sligo, at present assembled for our common safety, do hereby declare the occasions and motives of this association, and what is intended by it.

1. We resolve to adhere to the laws of the land and the Protestant religion.
2. We shall, as we ought, unite ourselves accordingly with England and hold to the lawful government thereof, and to a free Parliament.
3. We declare that our taking up arms is only defensive, and not in the least to invade the lives, liberties, or estates of any of our fellow-subjects, whether Roman Catholic or others, while they demean themselves in peaceable manner to us.
4. Our reasons for thus doing are so urgent that we could no longer with prudence forbear putting ourselves in some

necessary posture of defence; for the Roman Catholics, arming in such vast numbers throughout all the Kingdom, to give us just apprehensions of ill designs in them, they are pretending the King's commission for what they do, whereas we are assured that the King has commanded all Roman Catholics lay down their arms, which we conceive should extend to Ireland as England; and therefore we doubt that the leaders of this Irish army do act from their own heads upon designs of their own, which we justly fear will be prejudicial to the lives, liberties and properties of the Protestant subjects of this kingdom if not prevented. Lastly we declare that we will assault none that molest not us, so we will, to our power, protect all from violence, even the Roman Catholics themselves, whilst they behave themselves peaceably and neighbourly among us (though we will admit none but Protestants into our association), until we be ascertained from the lawful authority Government of England what further orders we are to obey; and we doubt not that all good Protestants of this Kingdom will, when they are able, join with us in the same public defence, and that God will bless this so just, innocent, and necessary undertaking for our lives, laws and religion.



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The Sligo force consisted of 800 foot soldiers and 500 horsemen. These were drawn from Roscommon, Leitrim, Mayo as well as Sligo. These men would have been the remnants of Cromwellian troops disbanded about 1653 and who settled in the area.

Defenceless Protestants

The Sligo defenders applied for assistance to the Governor of Derry, Col. Lundy, but none ever arrived. They therefore set about arming themselves with whatever weapons they could make themselves. This was necessary because Tyrconnel had by then stripped the Protestant people of all arms for his Roman Catholic army.

Enniskillen, little more than a village, was brought face to face with the crisis in Ireland in a manner similar to events in Derry. On 11th December 1688, the provost of Enniskillen, Paul Dane, received a letter from Tyrconnel ordering him to receive and quarter two companies of foot soldiers in the town. The troops were already at Clones, in Monaghan, less than thirty miles away, when the letter arrived, so time was short. The troops were Roman Catholic - should they be allowed to enter the town? As in Derry there were those who objected to refusing entrance to the King's troops. However, seven men, William McCormack, William Browning, Robert Clarke, James Ewart and Allen Cathcart demanded that the town be closed against them and that Enniskillen declare for William. Despite much opposition, they won the day and Enniskillen became a centre of resistance.

James' troops drew nearer to the town and on Sunday 16th December, word came that they were in Lisbellaw only four miles away. Church services were interrupted and the 200 foot soldiers, only half of whom had weapons, and the 150 horsemen were assembled and marched out to battle. It was not much of a battle because the Irish troops immediately retreated, much discouraged from the first by the reports circulating amongst Roman Catholics, of the determination of the Protestants of Enniskillen to fight. This was the first of many encounters.

Western Protestant Army

In April 1689 the Sligo forces combined with the Inniskilleners and so the Western Protestant Army was formed. Enniskillen now became the centre of resistance and safety for the refugees who fled from the ravaging army of James. The Inniskilleners were singularly successful on the battle field. This was due largely to the man who led them, Col Lloyd, nicknamed 'Little Cromwell'. William McCormack said of him, "..... under his conduct we never failed accomplishing what we designed, but without him could not, or ever did anything...." The man must have had exceptional gifts as a leader to turn such a band of untrained irregular 'soldiers' into such a successful army. Under Lloyd, the Inniskilleners raided far and near and harassed the Jacobite army. They even came to within thirty miles of Dublin. One of the results of these raids was a plentiful supply of food and ammunition. Enniskillen literally lived off the fat of the land in sharp contrast to the conditions in Derry.

Lundy's treachery was felt even in Enniskillen. He sent out orders to all Protestants in the west to retire to Derry as this was best for their security. The Enniskillen Governor, Gustavus Hamilton, refused, believing that it was wiser to maintain the western garrison and so divide the forces of James. Later, it transpired that the real purpose of Lundy was to gather all Protestant resistance into Derry so that he could surrender all at once. Some Protestants from Cavan did leave for Derry on Saturday March 23rd, encouraged to flee to Derry by the presence of a force of Irish soldiers under the command of Lord Galmoy moving in the direction of Enniskillen.

Crom

Lord Galmoy was, in turn, encouraged by the retreat of the Cavan men. He laid siege to Crom Castle, near Newtownbutler and about 17 miles from Enniskillen. His siege was not very successful, however, even though its defending force was small and it was not at all suitable for withstanding a serious assault. Lord Galmoy had his enthusiasm for battle sharply curbed while standing about a mile from Crom Castle survey-



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ing it, with a glass of wine in his hand, ready to drink a toast to the confusion of the Protestants in Crom, when a marksman, using a long barrelled fowling piece, fired at him and broke the wine glass in his hand and killed the man beside him. He never did get drinking his toast. Shortly after, the Enniskillen men sent a relic force which drove Galmoy's troops back into Co. Monaghan. The treachery of Irish Romanism was displayed when an offer was made by letter to exchange Captain Dixy, a Cavan man captured by Galmoy's troops, for Captain Brian MacConagher MacGuire, an Irish officer held prisoner in Crom Castle. The Irish captain was sent to Galmoy who immediately hung Captain Dixy and his cornet, Edward Charleton. Their heads were also cut off and used as footballs by Galmoy's soldiers. To his credit, Captain MacGuire attempted to stop the execution, offering to return to Crom Castle as a prisoner. Lord Galmoy refused to listen to him. One report of the incident records that afterwards MacGuire did, on his own initiative, return to Crom, refusing to serve King James any more.

Enniskillen and Kilskeery ministers

During these events, the Presbyterian Minister of Enniskillen, Rev. Robert Kelso, played an important role. Of him, William McCormack recorded — "Both publicly and privately . . . animating his hearers to take up arms and stand upon their own defence, showing example himself by wearing arms and marching in the head of them when together."

Another minister, Rev. Andrew Hamilton, rector of Kilskeery, also took a very prominent part in the resistance. His story is particularly interesting because of his activities as an envoy for the Inniskilleners. He was twice sent to Derry seeking arms. The first time, in March 1689 before the siege had begun, he was received with but a very cold welcome by Lundy. All Lundy would give the Inniskilleners out of newly arrived stores were some sixty broken and discarded muskets and five barrels of gunpowder out of a stock of some 500 barrels! On his second visit, in April, he was captured by the Irish army but released and allowed to return to his rectory in Kilskeery. He records that while a prisoner in the Irish camp he saw some Irish and French soldiers take some potshots at a poor woman (she was about seventy years of age) who had come into the camp to beg food. Finding some meal spilled on the ground, she was gathering it up. Her action was believed to be that of a witch attempting to bewitch the horses on behalf of the Derrymen because the spilled meal had fallen among some horses' dung. So they began shooting at the poor creature, wounding her several times before a soldier went up to her and shot her at point-blank range with his musket. In July he was also part of a group of envoys who went to Ballyshannon and then on by ship to Derry seeking supplies from English ships sent over to aid the Protestants in their war. These requests were more generously answered than the one sent to Lundy back in April. It was while he was away on this expedition that Hamilton's rectory was burned by the Duke of Berwick as an act of revenge for the part he played in the war against James.

Record

Rev. Andrew Hamilton wrote an account of the war entitled: The Actions of the Enniskillen Men. In it he explains that it was the barbarous treatment Protestants received at the hands of the Irish army that made the Inniskilleners so determined. He cites the case of some men from Kilskeery who followed thieves who had stolen a number of their cows. Upon overtaking the thieves in the direction of Omagh, where there was an Irish army garrison, and recovering their animals, they started for home. Shortly after, they were overtaken by some Irish dragoons. Some of the party immediately sought refuge in the nearby bogs and escaped, but the rest, having no weapons of any sort and believing themselves to have done no wrong, yielded. The five men were butchered by the dragoons. Indeed, they were so badly cut with swords and bayonets that they could scarcely be recognised by their relatives. Such actions as these drove home to Protestant hearts that it was part of Rome's creed that 'no faith is to be kept with heretics'.

Andrew Hamilton was the son of a previous rector of Kilskeery who bore the same name. His father had been rector of Kilskeery during the 1641 rebellion when he was forced to flee for his life. He returned to his parish in 1661, the year his son was ordained. Such experiences as those endured by his father undoubtedly made him the staunch Protestant that he was. He was something of a contrast with the other Episcopalian ministers who tended to avoid defiance of King James, believing him to be the 'Lord's anointed'. Part of his



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activities in the war was to raise troops of horse and being sent as an emissary to William by the Inniskilleners. James attainted (took away his land) him as one of those in rebellion against the king.

Motto

The brave and ingenious resistance mounted by the Protestants of the west and centred in Enniskillen was based upon the motto: We stand upon our guard, and do resolve by the blessing of God, rather to meet our danger than expect it. Their stand kept James from conquering Derry and with it the whole of Ireland. From such a subjugated Ireland he could have, with the aid of France, most likely driven William from the throne, and the future of the British Isles, Europe and North America would have been greatly different from what it turned out to be.