

THE IRISH QUESTION.

THE TRUTH ABOUT '98:

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PART III.

MR. FOX AND LORD BEDFORD.

In the English House of Commons, Mr. Fox, and in the House of Lords, Lord Bedford, made similar attempts to save Ireland. Lord Bedford moved a motion for "the immediate stoppage of a system of coercion in Ireland, shocking to humanity, and disgraceful to the British name," and he asserted that he had "documentary evidence to prove that the cruelties had not been resorted to on the spur of the moment, but had been deliberately resolved upon long before for a certain purpose." But it was all of no use. Pitt was too strong for them, and the merry work of "smoothing the way for the Union" proceeded.

LORD HOLLAND'S TESTIMONY.

Lord Holland, in his *Memories of the Whig Party*, adds the weight of his testimony to the foregoing. He says:—

"It is a fact incontrovertible that the people were driven to resistance by free quarters and the excesses of the soldiery, which were such as are not permitted in civilised warfare, even in an enemy's country. Trials, if they may be so called, were frequent under court-martial, such court martial being composed of three officers, two being generally under twenty-one years old, and the third an Orangeman who had sworn to exterminate the people over whom he was placed as judge—floggings, picketings, death, the pitchcap, were the usual sentences."

And, again, in another part of the same work, Lord Holland wrote:—

"The measures which led to the Rebellion, suggested by Lord Clare, and by the remorseless faction of Orangemen, who called themselves the Protestant ascendancy, roused the indignation of every man who had a sense of justice or the feelings of humanity. The outrages perpetrated with the sanction of the Government excited horror. *The Irish Catholics were goaded into premature hostility.* . . . The insurrection was the chief cause of the Union, by furnishing the English Government with both the means and the pretext for accomplishing a measure which in no other circumstances could have been attempted."

LORD CORNWALLIS'S TESTIMONY.

More remarkable perhaps than any other, and certainly more incontrovertible, is the testimony of Lord Cornwallis, who went to Ireland as Viceroy in June, 1798, and whose correspondence discloses with hideous clearness the brutalities practised by the soldiery and the blood-thirstiness of the ascendancy faction, both in provoking and suppressing the rebellion.

Writing of the Duke of Portland, on the 28th of June, Lord Cornwallis said, with regard to the conduct of the troops:—

"The account you see of the numbers of enemy killed in battle are greatly exaggerated. I am sure that a very small proportion could be killed in battle; and I am very much afraid that any man in a brown coat, who is found within several miles of the field of action, is butchered without discrimination."

Writing to Major-General Ross, on 9th July, he said:

"There is no enemy in the field to oppose our troops. *We are engaged in a war of plunder and massacre.*"

And again, on 31st July:—

"Our war is reduced to a predatory system in the mountains of Wicklow."

In a letter to Major-General Ross, under date 24th July, he wrote:—

"The whole country is in such a state that I feel frightened and ashamed whenever I consider that I am looked upon as being at the head of it. Except in the instances of the six State trials that are going on here, there is no law, either in town or country, but martial-law; and you know enough of that to see all the horrors of it—in the best administration of it. Judge, then, how it must be conducted by Irishmen (*i.e.*, Orangemen), heated with passion and revenge. *But all this is trifling compared to the numberless murders that are hourly committed by our people without any process or examination whatever.* The yeomanry are in the style of loyalists in America, only much more numerous and powerful, and a thousand times more ferocious. They take the lead in rapine and murder the Irish militia, with few officers, and those chiefly of the worst kind, follow closely in the heels of the yeomanry in murder and every kind of atrocity; and the fencibles take a share, although much behind."

On the 15th April, 1799, after the Rebellion had been practically suppressed, he wrote as follows to Major-General Ross, with reference to an accusation of undue leniency made against him by the ascendancy faction:—

"You write as if you really believed that there was any foundation for all the lies and nonsensical clamour about my leniency. On my arrival, I put a stop to the burning of houses and murder of inhabitants by the yeomen, or by any other persons who delighted in that amusement, to flogging, for the purpose of extorting confession and free quarters, which comprehended universal rape and robbery throughout the whole country."

THE TACTICS OF THE ASCENDANCY PARTY.

The evidence which Lord Cornwallis's correspondence supplies of the true character of the ascendancy faction is still more striking.

In a letter addressed to the Duke of Portland, on 8th July, 1798, he said:—

"The principal persons (*i.e.*, the *Orangemen*) are in general adverse to all acts of clemency, and although they do not express it, and perhaps are too much heated to see the ultimate effects which their violence must produce, would pursue measures that could only terminate in the extirpation of the greater number of inhabitants, and in the utter destruction of the country. The words *Papists* and *priests* are forever in their mouths; and by this unaccountable folly they would drive four-fifths of the community

into irreconcilable rebellion."

On the 27th July in the same year, he wrote to Major-General Ross as follows:—

"The conversation of the principal persons (*i.e.*, ascendancy caste) of the country all tends to encourage this system of blood, and the conversation even at my table, where you will suppose I do all I can to prevent it, always turns on hanging, shooting, burning, etc., etc.; and if a priest has been put to death, the greater joy is expressed by the whole company."

On the same date, writing to the Duke of Portland, he said:—

"The minds of people are now in such a state that nothing but blood will satisfy them, and although they will not admit the term, their conversation and conduct point to no other mode of concluding this unhappy business than that of extirpation."

In September, 1798, he wrote:—

"The principal personages (*i.e.*, Beresford, etc.) who have long been in the habit of directing the councils of the Lord-Lieutenants, are blinded by their passions and prejudices, talk of nothing but strong measures, and arrogate to themselves the exclusive knowledge of a country of which, from their mode of governing it, they have, in my opinion, proved themselves totally ignorant. . . . Religious animosities increase, and, I am sorry to say, are encouraged by the foolish violence of all the principal persons who have been in the habit of governing this island."

In the following year, 1779, when the rising had been to a great extent suppressed, and when his main object was to produce comparative quiet during the discussion of the Union, he still complains of the same ferocity and bloodthirstiness on the part of the Orangemen.

In June, 1799, he wrote to Major-General Ross:—

"The country is becoming every day more quiet; but the ferocity of the loyalists will not, for a long time, permit the restoration of perfect tranquility."

And on the 16th November he made the following remarkable statement:—

"The greatest difficulty which I experience is to control the violence of our loyal friends, who would, if I did not keep the strictest hand on them, convert the system of martial-law (which, God knows, is bad enough of itself), into a more violent and intolerable tyranny than that of Robespierre. The vilest informers are hunted out from the prisons, to attack, by the most barefaced perjury, the lives of all who are suspected of being, or of having been, disaffected, and, indeed, every Roman Catholic is in great danger. *I attempt to moderate that violence and cruelty, which has once driven, and which, if tolerated, must again drive this wretched country into rebellion.*"

We might multiply, *ad infinitum*, quotations of this character from the letters of Lord Cornwallis. The fact, however, is sufficiently proved by the foregoing, that, according to the testimony of the English Viceroy himself, the unfortunate people of Ireland were driven into rebellion by the excesses of the soldiery, and by the ferocity of the so-called loyalists of that day.

MR. GOLDWIN SMITH'S TESTIMONY.

On this point, the statements of Mr. Goldwin Smith, now a leading "Unionist," are particularly interesting. In his *Irish History and Irish Character*, he says:—

"The Protestant gentry and yeomanry, as one man, became Cromwellians again. They commenced a reign of terror, scarcely less savage than that of the Jacobins. The suspected conspirators were intimidated, and confessions, or pretended confessions, were extorted by looting upon the homes of the peasantry the licence and barbarity of an irregular soldiery, more cruel than a regular invader. Flogging, half-hanging, pitch-capping, picketing, went on over a large district, and the most barbarous scourings, without trial, were inflicted in the Riding-house, Dublin, in the very seat of Government and justice. This was styled 'exerting a vigour beyond the law,' and to become the object of such vigour it was enough, as under Robespierre, to be suspected of being a suspect. . . ."

"The peasantry, though undoubtedly in a disturbed state, might have been kept quiet by lenity; but they were gratuitously scourged and tortured into open rebellion. . . . These were the crimes, not of individual ruffians, but of a faction—a faction which must take its place in history beside that of Robespierre, Couthon, and Carriere. The murders by the Jacobins may have excited more indignation and pity because the victims were of high rank; but in the use of torture the Orangemen seem to have reached a pitch of fiendish cruelty which was scarcely attained by the Jacobins. . . . The dreadful civil war of 1798 was the crime, as a candid study of its history will prove—not of the Irish people, but of the Orange terrorists, who literally goaded the people into insurrection."

A striking confirmation of the statement that the people were driven into insurrection against their will by the organised brutalities of the military is afforded by the history of the rising in the County of Wexford. It was in this county that the Rebellion became most formidable. For three or four weeks the insurgent troops held undisputed possession of the greater part of the county; they numbered close upon 50,000 men, and they were not defeated until General Lake had collected in front of Vinegar Hill an army of 20,000 trained English soldiers, commanded by no less than 17 general officers. Yet we have it on the best authority that the conspiracy of the United Irishmen never got a firm footing in Wexford at all; and in the list of "places to be relied upon," prepared by Lord Edward Fitzgerald in February, 1798, the name of Wexford does not appear. The people of this county had long been distinguished for their thrift, industry, and peaceable habits. Notwithstanding the risings elsewhere in Ireland, Wexford was, up to the middle of April, 1798, in a state of profound peace. At that time, however, Lord Kingsborough, at the head of the North Cork militia, arrived in the county. The soldiers were billeted on the people, martial law was proclaimed, and in a month this county, where "the conspiracy" had never taken root, was the scene of a fierce war. The people were forced into the field in defence of their lives, their homes, the honour of their wives and daughters, and their religion.

(To be continued.)