

THE IRISH QUESTION.

THE TRUTH ABOUT '98 :

By J. E. REDMOND, M.P., Barrister-at-Law.

PART IV.

OUTRAGES BY THE PEOPLE.

THAT the Rebellion of 1798 witnessed some deeds of cruelty and of outrage on the part of the people has never been denied by Irish Nationalists, nor has any attempt ever been made by them to palliate those crimes. It is, however, manifestly unfair to parade before the world the deeds of violence committed by the people, and to omit all mention of those which drove them to desperation and madness. That a system of torture and of murder, such as that described in the foregoing pages, could be practised upon a people without leading to acts of savage retaliation, of cruelty, and of horror, can only be believed by those who have but lightly studied human nature. We abhor the crimes which marked the history of 1798, whether committed by the yeomen or the people, and we do not propose in any way to palliate any of them. But we desire the truth to be known, and the truth is that every deed of atrocity committed by the people was an act of retaliation for atrocities practised upon them by, or at the instigation of, those in authority. No serious effort was made by those in command of the troops to save the people from outrage until the end of the year 1798, when the Rebellion was practically over. On the contrary, as we have seen, Sir R. Abercromby was actually recalled from the chief command because he ventured to censure the license and barbarity of the soldiers.

GENERAL ORDERS OF ENGLISH COMMANDERS.

As an instance of the recognised military despotism of the day, the following extract from a proclamation of General Derham in Belfast will be instructive:—

"And shall it be found hereafter that said traitor has been concealed by any person or persons, or by the knowledge or connivance of any person or persons of this town and its neighborhood, or that they, or any of them, have known the place of his concealment, and shall not have given notice thereof to the commandant of this town, such person's house will be *burnt*, and the owner thereof *hanged*."

"This is to give notice that, if any person is taken up by the patrols after 10 o'clock, he will be fined five shillings, for the benefit of the poor. If the delinquent is not able to pay five shillings, he will be brought to a drum-head court-martial, and will receive *one hundred lashes!*"

"JAMES DERHAM, Colonel-Commandant."

The following is a copy of a general order issued by the officer in command in Cork, from the "Adjutant-General's office," on the 7th May, 1798:—

"Whereas it has been reported to Lieutenant General Sir James Stewart that in some parts of the country where it has been necessary to station troops, at fire quarters, for the restoration of public tranquillity, that general subscriptions of money have been entered into by the inhabitants to purchase provisions for the troops; by which means the end proposed, of making the burthen fall as much as possible on the guilty, is entirely defeated by making it fall in a light proportion on the whole, and thereby easing and protecting the guilty—it has been thought proper to direct that, wherever that practice has been adopted, or shall be attempted, the general officers commanding divisions of the southern district shall immediately *double, treble, and quadruple* the number of soldiers so stationed; and shall send out regular foraging parties to provide provisions for the troops, in the quantities mentioned in the former notice, bearing date the 27th day of April, 1798; and that they shall move them from station, through the district or barony, until all arms are surrendered, and tranquillity to be perfectly restored—and until it is reported to the general officers, by the gentlemen holding landed property, and those who are employed in collecting the public revenues and tithes, that *all rents, taxes and tithes are completely paid up.*"

General orders of this character were frequent enough; but not one single order was issued to the soldiery by their commanders threatening any pains or penalties whatever for deeds of outrage perpetrated upon the people from date of the withdrawal of Sir R. Abercromby down to the 31st August, 1798. On the latter date, Lord Cornwallis issued an order which showed clearly enough what the character of the proclamation given to the people during all those months must have been. It ran as follows:—

"It is with great concern that Lord Cornwallis finds himself obliged to call on the general officers, and the commanding officers of regiments in particular, to assist him in putting a stop to the licentious conduct of the troops, and in saving the wretched inhabitants from being robbed, and in the most shocking manner ill-treated by those to whom they had a right to look for safety and protection."

The previous silence of the commanding officers throughout Ireland, in the case of the notorious conduct of their troops, convicts them of complicity in every deed of horror committed upon the peasantry.

GENERAL ORDERS OF REBEL COMMANDERS.

In marked contrast was the action of those who commanded the rebel forces. Whatever atrocities were committed by the people were in direct defiance of the orders of those in authority amongst them, and no attempt had ever been successfully made to hold the rebel leaders responsible. The first general proclamation to the rebel forces was couched in the following terms:—

"Soldiers of Erin, remember your homes; let the domestic hearth never be violated, nor the arms of the nation sullied by cruelty or revenge. Bear in mind that the weak and the defenceless claim your protection, and that retaliation is only the weapon of the coward and the slave. Let this be engraven on your hearts, and let it be proclaimed to the extremity of our land that *insult to female honour contempt of orders, pillage and desertion, shall be punished with death.*"

The leaders of the rebel army in Wexford issued the following general orders:—

"Any person or persons who shall take upon them to kill or murder any person or prisoner, burn any house, or commit any plunder, without special written orders from the commander-in-chief shall suffer death:—

"By order of

"B. B. HARVEY, Commander-in-chief.

"F. BREEN, Ad.-Gen.

"Head-Quarters, Carrick-Byrne Camp, June 6, 1798."

"At this eventful period, all Europe must admire, and posterity will read with astonishment, the heroic acts achieved by a people strangers to military tactics, and having few professional commanders. But what power can resist men fighting for liberty!

"In the moment of triumph, my countrymen, let not your victories be tarnished with any wanton act of cruelty. Many of those unfortunate men now in prison were not our enemies from principle; most of them, compelled by necessity, were obliged to oppose you.

"To promote a union of brotherhood and affection among our countrymen of all religious persuasions has been our principal object. We have sworn in the most solemn manner—we have associated for this most laudable purpose, and no power on earth shall shake our resolution.

"EDWARD ROCHE:

Wexford, June 7, 1798."

SCULLABOGUE.

In spite, however, of these proclamations, certain deeds of atrocity were committed, and the massacre on the bridge at Wexford, and the scene of Scullabogue, will never cease to call the blush of shame to the cheeks of Irishmen. The truth, however, of these horrible events robs them of much of their blackness, and shows the utter unfairness of casting upon the Irish people generally the shame for the deeds of a handful of murderous cowards. The massacre at Scullabogue of loyalist prisoners to the number of about one hundred, was the deed of a number of runaways from the Battle of Ross, where the rebel troops were defeated. They brought tidings, which were perfectly true, that the victorious troops were putting all the rebel prisoners to death, and, in a spirit of savage retaliation, the loyalist prisoners in Scullabogue were similarly killed. The rebel leaders were in no way responsible for this deed, and the Commander-in-chief, Bagenal Harvey, immediately afterwards resigned his command, in a great degree owing to the horror and disgust which the news of this deed inspired in his breast. Persistent attempts have been made to attribute this deed of horror to Catholic ferocity against Protestants. Nothing could be more absurd, and, as a matter of fact fifteen or sixteen Catholics shared the same fate as the Protestants in Scullabogue.

We repeat that we do not desire to palliate occurrences of this character; but truth compels the assertion that they were no worse than many which resulted from the systematic course of oppression and cruelty pursued by the soldiery, and probably were not nearly as bad as certain massacres perpetrated upon the people in cold blood and apparently with the full approval of the officers in command.

For example, the massacre on the gibbet-rath at Kildare exceeds in atrocity that of Scullabogue. According to Sir Richard Musgrave, whose testimony will not be regarded as that of a man partial to the rebel cause, 3000 rebels surrendered themselves and their arms to General Dundas on the 26th of May, and on the 3rd June this multitude of unresisting men were suddenly attacked by the troops, and 350 of them slaughtered. Equally horrible was the burning of the hospital at Ennisecorney where between 80 and 100 wounded rebels were burned to death by the soldiery.

There is no more reason why the massacre of Scullabogue, taking it at its worst, should be regarded as inflicting a permanent and general stigma of cruelty upon Irishmen than the awful atrocities committed in India during the Mutiny (such as the roasting of prisoners alive by the native troops under command of British officers), or the flogging of negroes with piano wires during the suppression of a rebellion some years ago in Jamaica, should be regarded as putting a similar stigma upon Englishmen generally and proving their incapacity for self-government.

We have no desire, however, to pursue this matter further: Outrages were perpetrated on both sides in '98 that were very horrible; but before apportioning the blame between the Government and the Orange faction, who between them deliberately goaded the people into insurrection, on the one side, and the tortured and maddened peasantry on the other, the impartial student of history should carefully consider both sides of the story.

WAS THE REBELLION A CATHOLIC ONE?

It remains to be considered whether the statement of our enemies is true that the Rebellion of 1798 was a Catholic rising. It is clear that, alike in origin and organisation, the so-called conspiracy of the United Irishmen was, on the contrary, essentially a Protestant one. Of the 162 leaders of the movement, whose names have been handed down to us, no fewer than 105 were Protestants and only 56 were Catholics. The founders of the Society and the prominent leaders of the Rebellion were almost to a man Protestants. It is true that the rebel forces were chiefly made up of the Catholic peasantry, and that the yeomanry regiments were mostly Orangemen and Protestants; but the question of religion had little or nothing to do with the business. Even in the county of Wexford, which, according to Mr. Lecky, "was the only county where the rebellion was distinctly Catholic," its chief leaders were Protestant landlords, like Bagenal Harvey, of Bargo Castle, and Beauchamp Colclough, of Tintern Abbey.

Lord Cornwallis, in a letter to the Duke of Portland, dated 28th June, 1798, speaks of "the folly which has been prevalent of regarding Catholicism as the foundation of the present Rebellion;" and we do not believe that any reliable evidence whatever is forthcoming to prove that the question of religion had anything to do with the Rebellion whatever.

(To be concluded in our next.)