

Irish Land and the English Civil War 1641-48

John R. MACCORMACK, M.A.
St. Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Ireland and Irish issues have long been regarded by historians of the English Civil War as an important part of the general picture. Considerable attention has been given to King Charles I's negotiations with the Irish at different times during the war and to the effects which these dealings had on opinion on the parliamentary side. Less well known, perhaps, is the extent to which vested interests on the parliamentary side affected relations between King and Parliament whenever the question of Ireland was raised.

Shortly after the outbreak of the Irish Rebellion, the radicals in the Long Parliament, under the astute leadership of John Pym and in close co-operation with a group of London merchants, devised a scheme for the suppression of the rebellion. An army would be raised which was to be under the direction of parliament rather than of the Crown and that army would be supported financially by the sale of "shares" in the land of the Irish rebels. For reasons best known to himself, Charles I accepted the scheme and subscriptions of money were soon pouring in from "adventurers" – i.e., investors – in London, Parliament and the general populace. The scheme assumed more and more importance in the Spring of 1642 as relations between King and Parliament deteriorated and civil war approached. By late summer parliament was employing these funds as the nucleus of their own war-chest and was laying plans to employ the troops not against the Irish rebels but against the King. The men and money raised by the "Irish Adventurers" played an important role in the first and perhaps most important battle of the Civil War: Edgehill.

The long term aspect of the scheme was even more important. A vested interest had been created both in London and in the House of Commons itself which would be satisfied only with a Carthaginian peace in Ireland. The foundation of the Cromwellian settlement had been laid. In the Commons, 104 members had invested heavily¹ and proved to be an important and influential pressure group, ever alert to a threat to their interests. With the conquest of Ireland by Cromwell, they came – so to speak – into their own and the distribution of the confiscated lands took place in 1653 and 1654.

¹ J. R. MacCormack "The Irish Adventurers and the English Civil War" in *Irish Historical Studies* Vol. X, no. 37 (March, 1956).

The Adventurer scheme originated in London and immensely increased the fervour of the London Irish interest. That this interest was already strong is indicated by the remark of one London observer to the effect that the Irish “owe the merchants here twelve hundred thousand pounds, which they want ...”² In December 1645, the London Adventurers petitioned that “those Merchants of London and elsewhere that have lost their debts by the Rebellion there... may have a share also of the Rebels land for all ...”³ On April 4, 1642, a committee of the London Adventurers was formed which included some of the wealthiest men in London and henceforth, was to be assiduous in the promotion of their interests.⁴ In September 1642, another committee of eleven London merchants was appointed⁵ and empowered to negotiate contracts with “well affected” persons for the supply of the English and Scottish armies in Ireland. It is perhaps worth recording that this group seldom found it necessary to go beyond their own numbers to find the necessary “well affected” ones.

A short time later the London shipping interests were well served by the passage of an order in the Parliament permitting the fitting out of privateers “for cruising on the Irish coasts.” All rebel property on sea or land was fair game and the privateers were given explicit permission to “invade... ports... and to sack or pillage any such place or places” and to “enjoy as their proper goods all ships, goods, monies, plate.... pillage and spoil” which could be shown to be rebel property.⁶

On June 19, 1643, the Londoners gave evidence that their appetite for acquisition in Ireland had been no more than whetted. They asked Parliament to “give such encouragement, as may induce those who are Merchants and live on trade to adventure considerable sums ...”⁷ It was pointed out that various Irish cities might be put up for sale as well as such privileges as fishing rights on the Shannon. Parliament replied to this request by the passage of an ordinance which provided that if an adventurer paid in a sum equal to one quarter of his original investment he would be apportioned land in Ireland at twice the former rate. In addition the cities of Limerick, Waterford, Galway and Wexford were put up for sale. This ordinance⁸ had the effect of bringing in heavy new investments.

It is against this background that the “Cessation” of 1643 must be

² William Dobbins to Sir Philip Percevell, London, Feb. 15, 1641/2 Reports of The Historical Manuscripts Commission, Egmont I, p. 164.

³ “Reasons delivered...” British Museum Thomason Collection, E314 (7) p. 20.

⁴ Journals of the House of Commons, ii, p. 511.

⁵ Public Record Office, London, *State Papers*, 16/529 pt. ii/127/148.

⁶ Journals of the House of Lords, v, p. 409.

⁷ Journals of the House of Commons, iii, p. 135.

⁸ *Ibid.*, iii, pp. 136, 141

viewed. A few weeks after the passage of the above ordinance, Charles I negotiated a cease fire with the Irish Rebels. It requires no stretch of the “historical imagination” to picture the reaction in London and Westminster. On Nov. 2, 1643, the Parliamentarians declared that they disavowed the cessation in all respects “being so injurious to the power committed to them, the Interest of this Kingdom, and the Adventurers therein, destructive to religion. . .”⁹

Clarendon, though approving of the Cessation, termed it “the most unpopular act the King had ever done...”¹⁰ Both Houses of Parliament condemned the King’s action. One of the worst features of the Cessation, they declared, was that “it will... make null the Acts and Ordinances of Parliament, made for the forfeiting of Rebels lands. . .” For some weeks a parliamentary committee pondered the problems posed by the Cessation. Many of the troops which had till now fought against the rebels had agreed to the Cessation. How to keep the remainder loyal to Parliament? The solution was characteristic: “that... Parliament... provide... for the maintenance of those of their army in that Kingdom... and that when God pleaseth to crown their endeavours with success... every one, according to his condition and merit, shall be plentifully rewarded in land. . .”¹¹

Any advantage accruing to King Charles through the Cessation in Ireland was more than countered by the Scottish invasion of England in support of Parliament, in January 1644. But Charles’ action had touched the Parliamentarians on the raw and the feeling aroused was still a factor which affected the outcome of the peace negotiations between King and Parliament at Uxbridge more than a year later.

The importance of any single issue during the Uxbridge negotiations must not be over-stressed. It is clear, however, that the question of Ireland was one of the most important at the conference and it was the issue on which the King was least willing to concede to the Parliamentary demands. One observer wrote that although it was hoped that agreement could be reached on other issues, the King would probably not yield to the parliamentary demands for Ireland. “If he consents not to the suppressing of these rebels, doubtless he frustrates all good intentions, and brings himself and all that side to ruin ...”¹²

The parliamentarians claimed that the Cessation with the Irish was

⁹ Journals of the House of Lords, vi, p. 292.

¹⁰ Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, *An Historical View of the Affairs of Ireland*, London: J. Wilford, 1731. See also Clarendon, *History of the Great Rebellion*, ed. W. Dunn Macray, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1888, vol. III; p. 268.

¹¹ Journals of the House of Commons, iii, p. 294.

¹² Henry Verney to Sir Ralph Verney, Feb. 13, 1644/5, H.M.C.R. Report VII, Verney Papers, p. 450.

illegal because by it the interests of the Irish Adventurers were endangered. “We do affirm,” they said, “that several great sums of money were paid by particular persons... who according to the true intent of the Statute ought to have the benefit of the same.”¹³ The Cessation must be made void, they declared, and the King must agree to pass whatever acts the Parliament submitted to him for the reduction of Ireland. The King refused to pass “all such acts... before he know whether such acts be reasonable or no...”¹⁴

This section of the treaty negotiations came to an end in an atmosphere made sulphurous by mutual accusations of bad faith. To the old charge that Charles had connived at the Irish Rebellion was added the accusation that the Cessation was simply the first step towards bringing an Irish army into England. For his part the King declared that it was the unreasonable declarations of Parliament at the beginning of the Rebellion that had made it a war of religion “and against that Connivance (at toleration) that had been used in that Kingdom ever since the Reformation, and tending to make it a national quarrel, and to eradicate the whole stock of the Irish... which made the rebellion so general ...”¹⁵

Parliament could now assume that the possibility of obtaining a free hand in Ireland from Charles was a remote one.¹⁶ In their last message their chagrin is indicated by the violence of their language: “We cannot believe that your Lordships will think it fit, there can be any agreement... with such creatures, as are not fit to live no more than with Wolves or Tygers... in the Name of him who is the Prince of Peace... give not your consents to this cessation of War in Ireland, till Justice have been fully executed upon the actors of that accursed rebellion.”¹⁷

Within the Parliamentary camp there was intense rivalry between various groups interested in Ireland. By mid-1645 a clash of interests between the London Adventurers and a group in the House of Commons headed by the egregious Sir John Clotworthy was evident. On July 1, 1645, with the establishment of a joint committee of Lords and Commons for Irish affairs dominated by the Clotworthy faction, the Londoners met a setback from which they never recovered. In general it may be said that disagreement

¹³ Message of the Parliamentary Commissioners, John Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, Part iii, vol. v., p. 846.

¹⁴ Papers of the King's Commissioners, Feb. 10, 1644/5, Rushworth, Part iii, vol. v., pp. 859-61.

¹⁵ His Majesties Answer to Certain Papers, Rushworth, Pt. iii, vol. v., p. 884.

¹⁶ On Feb. 22, 1645 after the papers from Uxbridge relating to Ireland had been read to the House of Commons, the member noted that Charles “gave less satisfaction in that than either in religion or in the Militia...” Sir Symonds D'Ewes, *Parliamentary Diary*, B.M. Harl. 166, p. 179a.

¹⁷ Papers of Parliamentary Commissioners, Feb. 22, 1644/45, Rushworth, Pt. iii, vol. v., p. 863.

over Ireland played a significant part in the general deterioration in Parliament-London relations in the period.

The Londoners did not, however, give up without a struggle. In July, 1645, shortly after the formation of the Committee, they presented a new scheme for raising money for Ireland. Among other things it was urged that more Irish towns be put up for sale, namely Cork, Kinsale and Youghall.¹⁸ The scheme was coldly received and, was shelved for some months.

The result was a settled hostility on the part of the Londoners to all attempts to raise money for Ireland. On Oct. 11, 1645, the House of Commons attempted to borrow money from the Londoners and was met by a blank refusal.

On Nov. 11, 1645, the London civic government demonstrated their support for their merchants by a petition to the Commons urging that the petition of the London Adventurers be taken into consideration and such action taken "as may encourage the said Committee and Adventurers."¹⁹

On the same day a paper was presented to the Clotworthy Committee by William Hawkins, one of the most prominent of the London merchants interested in Ireland, outlining propositions for Ireland. Four cities were to be chosen by the Adventurers which would be put up for sale. In addition all persons who were able to prove that they were owed debts at the beginning of the Rebellion, should, on the investing of one third or one quarter of the sum owed, have the whole debt secured on land. Some weeks later the London Adventurers offered to contribute £20,000 to the cause if their requests were granted.

The petition is interesting because of the evidence it affords of London opinion regarding the nature of the eventual settlement which they felt should be effected in Ireland. All their propositions, they asserted, only tended to the re-establishment of stable government in Ireland "and the better peopling and civilizing of that Realm... to effect a good and speedy plantation of that Kingdom, with a religious people, in the place... of that Idolatrous Nation the Irish Rebels." If Parliament would "give those lands freely to men thus qualified and undertaking..." that end would be accomplished with "the most speed and security."²⁰ Among other benefits accruing from their schemes was the possibility that "The Protestant party throwout Christendom, will the rather also be encouraged to joyn with us in this great work of Reformation, and a fruitful and good land will thus again ere long be repeopled to live under the Sunshine of the Gospel. . ."²¹

¹⁸ Order Book, Committee for Irish Affairs, July 26, 1645, P.R.O. S.P. 63/26/9 p. 14; "The Heads of An Ordinance," B.M. Thomason Collection, E314 (7) p. 11.

¹⁹ Journals of the House of Lords, vii, p. 695.

²⁰ *Reasons delivered...* B.M. Thomason Coll., E314 (7) Jan. 2, 1645-6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

The House of Commons appears to have remembered this petition; at any rate, in January 1646, when the defeated and desperate King Charles was vainly hoping for a negotiated peace with the Parliament, the Commons resolved that one of the peace conditions should be that the King should agree to the “utter Abolition of Popery” in Ireland.²² Charles was at this time negotiating with the Irish for their support and when, a few weeks later evidence of his negotiations with the Irish through the Earl of Glamorgan fell into the hands of the Parliamentarians, they demonstrated their usual sensitivity. When the evidence of the negotiation and of the King’s promise of toleration for the Catholics of Ireland was read in the Commons, one angry member declared “that they had the example of former Parliament, and knew how they had acted towards kings of England in similar circumstances.”²³ That night a group of leaders of the radical party in the House met and planned the deposition of Charles “towards which the letters they had received from him and his declaration in favour of the Irish Catholics... would give them sufficient reason ...”²⁴

In the summer of 1646, after the defeated King Charles had given himself up to the Scots, the Parliament made a perfunctory attempt at peace. They presented to the King a list of sweeping demands known as the Propositions of Newcastle. From the first, this negotiation – if it can be termed such – was plagued by the Irish issue. The Earl of Ormonde was concluding a peace agreement²⁵ with the Confederate Catholics in Ireland on behalf of the King at the very time that Robert Goodwin – himself a leader of the Irish interest group in the House of Commons – was setting out for Newcastle to present the parliamentary demands to the King.

The Parliament demanded what amounted to unconditional surrender, (including a free hand in Ireland)²⁶ and it is not surprising that Goodwin and his party returned empty handed.

Charles’ negotiations with the Irish had an adverse effect on his relations with the Scots, some of whom, at this time, were disposed to support him. On Sept. 7th, Charles wrote: “I am more and more assured that nothing can be expected from the Scots; besides, I find the Irish peace angers

²² Journals of the House of Commons, iv., pp. 394-5; L. Whitaker, Parliamentary Diary, B.M. Add. MS. 31, 116, f. 252.

²³ Montreuil to Mazarin, London, Jan. 22/Feb. 1, 1646, *The Diplomatic Correspondence of Jean de Montreuil 1645-1648*, ed. J. G. Fotheringham, vol. I, The Scottish History Soc., 1898-9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Bulstrode Whitelocke, Annals, B.M. Add. MS. 37,344, f. 63.

²⁶ S. R. Gardiner, *Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution*, 3rd ed., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1951, p. 300.

them much.”²⁷ The parliamentarians in London adopted a similar position: “What leads me to fear that this negotiation may not succeed,” writes the French ambassador, “is that those whom I see are obstinate in wishing the abandonment of Ireland.”²⁸

The city of London, in the summer of 1646, had been increasingly at odds with the Parliament and there was some reason to believe that the King might find influential support from this quarter. But again the London vested interest in Irish land and debts proved a decisive factor in tipping the scales against Charles. One observer, writing in Oct. 1646, was not optimistic as to the degree of support the King could expect from the Londoners. “One is not assured of the city of London,” he wrote, “for... it has still another suit in order to obtain possession of the confiscated properties it acquired some time ago in Ireland.”²⁹

This was underlined a few days later by a report that London had offered Parliament “to find money for the war in Ireland on the Understanding that all that is recovered shall belong to them.”³⁰

Toward the end of 1647, with the possibility of a second Civil War in the air, Parliament was anxious to have the support of the city of London and to that end passed several measures designed to placate the Irish interest. By an ordinance of Nov. 13, 1647³¹ the advantages of the doubling ordinance of 1643 were made even more lucrative.

More evidence of a new found spirit of co-operation between city and Parliaments is afforded by the ordinance of Jan. 13, 1648, by which £50,000 was to be raised for the campaign in Ireland. The provisions were such as to gladden the hearts of the merchants of the city who had lent large sums to the Parliament in previous years because by it “every person who hath any just debt owing to him upon Publiques Faith” by lending a given sum under the terms of the ordinance, was to be credited with double that sum and was to be re-paid by the “speedy sale of all the Houses, Buildings, Lands and Tenements of the Irish Rebels within... the Cities, Towns or Liberties of Dublin, Cork, Kinsale Youghal and Drogheda in... Ireland ...”³²

It may be recalled that the London Adventurers had, in 1645, repeatedly

²⁷ Charles I to Henrietta Maria, Newcastle, Sept. 7, 1646, Camden Soc., *Charles I in 1646*, London, Camden Soc., 1856, pp. 63-4.

²⁸ P. Bellievre to M. Brienne, London, Sept. 20, 1646. *Montreuil Correspondence*, vol. 1., p. 267.

²⁹ P. Bellievre to M. Brienne, Oct. 8, 1646, *Ibid.* n. 300.

³⁰ Advices from London, *Calendar of State Papers Venetian 1641-47*, p. 289.

³¹ C. Firth and R. Ruit, *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum* vol. 1., pp. 1027-29, London, H. M. Stationery Office, 1911, vol. I, pp. 1027-9.

³² “An Ordinance of Parliament for raising fifty thousand pounds...” B.M. Thomason Coll., E424 (6).

petitioned for the sale of three of these cities and were undoubtedly pleased to see Dublin and Drogheda added to the list.

The significance of the rapprochement between Parliament and London was underlined by the circumstances of the second Civil War which began with royalist risings in Kent and Essex in May and June of 1648. The royalists had high hopes of support from London which, in the Spring of 1648 had demonstrated increasing sympathy for the King.

As a Royalist force of Kentish men approached the city, Parliament hurriedly passed various measures designed to retain the loyalty of the Londoners. Among these was an act providing that the London Adventurers would be trustees of the properties to be confiscated in Ireland by the act of Jan. 1648.³³ Whether or not this tipped the scales is, of course, not known. But London remained on the side of Parliament and what promised to be a very formidable royalist rising dwindled rapidly to a few pathetic skirmishes.

In the Autumn of 1648, after the defeat of the Royalist forces by Cromwell and while the leaders of the New Model brooded on their next move, Parliamentary commissioners were carrying on rather unusual negotiations with Charles. Whether or not Cromwell would have permitted the restoration of the King at this time is highly questionable but, in any event, agreement between the King and the Parliament was made almost impossible by the ever-present Irish issue.

Charles still regarded Ireland as one of his few remaining sources of strength; an asset which gave him a real, if tenuous bargaining position. Parliament, as usual, could be content with nothing less than a free hand in Ireland.

By October 28, 1648, after Charles had made some sweeping, if somewhat spurious concessions to the Parliamentarians, progress had been made towards some kind of settlement. But on that date the Commons heard that the King's agent, Ormonde, was negotiating a peace with the Irish and immediately demanded that Charles repudiate Ormonde.³⁴ Charles' answer was evasive and on Nov. 11th the Houses again demanded a clear-cut repudiation. One observer wrote that "The Houses are much staggr'd at the Proceedings in Ireland and doe almost give all their part for lost there."³⁵ To this the King replied that on the conclusion of the treaty he would condemn Ormonde's activities "But until such a Conclusion, His Majesty desires he may not be further pressed in this particular." The Parliamentary commissioners, perhaps mindful of the effect of such statements on the more inflammable sections of the House of Commons and the New Model Army, pointed out that the King's answer "relates only to the future, and will be

³³ P.R.O., Letter Book of Derby House Committee for Irish Affairs, S.P. 21/27.

³⁴ Journals of the House of Lords, x., p. 569.

³⁵ Bodleian, Clarendon State Papers, 31/f. 290.

interpreted to be in the mean time a countenancing and approving of those Proceedings: which we humbly desire your Majesty to take into your serious consideration...”³⁶

On November 25th Charles retreated and made public a letter to Ormonde telling him to stop the negotiation with the Irish. But Charles had yet to deal with the real holders of power on the Parliamentary side. On the same day the general council of officers of the New Model ordered the arrest of the King in order that he might be “proceeded against in a due way of justice.”³⁷

In this paper an attempt has been made to show the influence of a vested interest on the politics of the English Civil War. The Irish Adventurer interest affected relations between the King and the Parliament from the outset and greatly reduced the possibility of agreement between Charles and his opponents. It was of considerable significance too in the relations between the Long Parliament and London. The alliance between Parliament and the Scots was at the outset strengthened and later weakened by a common interest in Ireland.

If, as has been asserted by some historians, Charles I’s negotiations with the Irish implanted a reasonable fear in Protestant hearts of the conquest of England by an army of Irish “Papists,” that fear was not unmixed with a due concern over the safety of investments.

³⁶ Journals of the House of Lords, x., p. 597.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 614.