

THE CURSE OF CROMWELL

by Mike McCormack, Historian

In 1649, a bitter struggle between England's King Charles and his Puritan Parliament erupted in a civil war won by Oliver Cromwell and his Puritan Army. After beheading King Charles Stuart, Cromwell turned his new fanatically anti-Catholic army of zealots toward Ireland. On August 14th, he landed at Dublin with 10,000 foot-soldiers, 4,000 cavalry and enough artillery to crush all resistance. On 3 September, 370 years ago this month, he began his campaign at Drogheda. For eight days, the town held out until a breach in the walls allowed his army to storm in and cut down the defenders to a man. An unusual tombstone tells what happened next.

The tombstone was the tallest in the Riverhead, Long Island cemetery and contained a record-setting 1,860 letters engraved upon it noting that the man beneath was Captain James Fanning. It reads as follow: *Captain James Fanning, died 1776 in the 93rd year of his age. He was great grandson of Dominictus Fanning, who was Mayor of a city in Ireland under Charles 1st. He was taken prisoner at the Battle of Drogheda, 1649, all the garrison, except for himself, being put to the sword. He was beheaded by Cromwell, his head stuck upon a pole at the principle gate of the city. His property confiscated because when proclamation of peace was made, as a member of the Irish Council he advised not to accept unless the British Government would secure to the Irish their religion, their property and their lives.* The rest of the 1,860 letters tells of his grandfather, father, siblings, wife and children. The tombstone, weathered by acid rain and weather, was moved into the Riverhead museum where the lettering on the marble stone is almost obliterated, but careful tracing with one's finger can still make out the inscription. The story of his great grandfather is the most significant part because it proves that under Cromwell's order of 'no quarter', the army indiscriminately slaughtered the defenders as well as the defenseless civilian population. On 2 October, Cromwell appointed a day of thanksgiving in celebration of the slaughter at Drogheda of which he wrote; *The enemy were about 3,000 strong in the town. I believe we have put to the sword the whole number. In this very place (Saint Peter's Church) a thousand of them were put to the sword, fleeing thither for safety.* Hugh Peters, Cromwell's chaplain, gave a total loss of life as 3,552, of who about 2,800 were soldiers, meaning that about 750 were civilians.

What followed became his trademark across Ireland. On 11 October, after crushing northern strongholds, he swept south to Wexford, reducing Arklow, Inniscorthy and Ross the way. Historian Dr. John Lingard in his 8-volume **History of England**, wrote: *Wexford was abandoned to the mercy of the assailants. The tragedy recently enacted at Drogheda was renewed. No distinction was made between the defenseless inhabitants and the armed soldiers, nor could the shrieks and prayers of the 300 females who had gathered round the great cross in the market-place, preserve them from the swords.* After Wexford, he attacked Waterford and laid waste the cities of Cork, then Cashel and Carrick. At Clonmel, Hugh O'Neill, nephew of Owen Roe, with 1,500 men, put up the last resistance to the Puritan army but failed to stop them.. In May, Cromwell returned to England after the bloodiest campaign ever seen in Ireland, leaving his son Henry in charge and for the next two years, scattered pockets of resistance were systematically wiped out.

In 1652, after three years of slaughter, the last of the Irish Clans accepted Cromwell's terms of surrender. In August, all Irish who couldn't prove that they had supported his Army were to forfeit all properties and move to the most barren part of Ireland or face execution; **To Hell or To Connaught** was the choice. English speculators, who advanced monies to support the army in Ireland, were rewarded with 11 million acres of confiscated land. Unable to pay its soldiers in cash, all debts were also paid in Irish land; thus was Ireland made to pay for her own conquest. The Irish were given six months to move out. Many took to the hills living as outlaws raiding the English settlements. More than 34,000 went abroad to join the Irish Brigades of foreign armies. Those able-bodied who had no property were left to form a workforce for their new English masters with the stipulation that they were not permitted to live in the towns of their own land.

Then there were the elderly, and the wives and children of those killed in the wars who wandered the road as homeless. Cromwell had them rounded up and given to merchants to be sold to the English colonists in Barbados and America. That trade in Irish flesh became so profitable that enterprising merchants were soon kidnaping Irish men, women and children to expand the trade. Records show that from 1651 to 1654, 6,400 exiles were sold to those English colonies. In 1655, 2,000 more boys and girls were shipped and it was estimated that by the year 1660, 10,000 Irish had been so distributed among the different English colonies in America (see *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, IX, 37). Of the total number thus shipped out of Ireland, estimates vary between 60,000 and 100,000 [Lingard, **History of England**", X (Dolman ed., 1849), p 366.

Many who ended up in these colonies endured a hell on earth. Women and elderly men were sold first; then the children were dragged kicking and screaming to the auction platform where they were stripped and examined. Rich planters and their wives desired young boys as pages and young girls as servants, but homosexuals and pedophiles frequented the auctions buying children whose fate would be years of debauchery until they became too old for such purposes and were sold to the brothels of Bridgetown in Barbados for the pleasure of visiting sailors. Worst of all were the children who were part of a cruel plan to develop a 'master slave'. Irish children were considered trainable, but too susceptible to sunburn to make good workers in the tropical sun; male slaves from Africa were considered suitable, but less trainable. To breed a perfect slave, Irish girls as young as 11 and 12-years old, who had never even seen a black man before, were sent to breeding sheds where they were impregnated by Mandingo men over and over until they too, by their early twenties, were considered 'worn out' and sold to the brothels. When a volcano destroyed part of Montserrat in 1995, files saved from the island's library documented lineage records of those matings, kept in the same way as pedigrees are kept for dogs and thoroughbred horses.

Suffice to say; of the many English plantations of Ireland, Cromwell's was the worst. But, the greatest plantation of all was the planting of an unforgiving hatred in the hearts of the Irish on all who were a part of that cruelty. To this day, '*The curse of Cromwell on ye*' remains one of the harshest profanities an Irishman can utter to anyone!.