The Drogheda massacre in Cromwellian context[1]

JOHN MORRILL

Surprisingly enough, Oliver Cromwell was capable of understatement. This is how he demanded the surrender of one of places he besieged:

> I summon you to deliver into my hands the House wherein you are, and your ammunition, with all things else there, together with your persons, to be disposed of as Parliament shall appoint, which if you refuse to do, you are to expect the utmost extremity of war.[2]

When the Governor failed to take the hint, he became less euphemistic: 'if God give you into my hands, I will not spare a man of you, if you put me to a storm.'[3]

This is not Cromwell writing to the Irish Governor of an Irish town. It is Cromwell writing to the English Governor of an English town. And this is not 1649 but the spring of 1645, in the dog days between Cromwell's resignation as Lieutenant General of the Army of the Eastern Association and before his commissioning into the New Model. He was working out his notice and besieging Faringdon, a market town on the main road from Oxford to Swindon and Bristol. Lieutant Colonel Burges, commander of the garrison, called his bluff and Cromwell, lacking artillery to open up a breach, stormed the walls but was driven back with 14 casualties. He was then recalled and could not make a second attempt. So we do not know whether Cromwell was bluffing or whether he intended to anticipate the Drogheda Massacre in England.

The English phase of the War of the Three Kingdoms is usually seen as remarkable for the restraint of all participants. Killings in cold blood are almost unheard of; killings of civilians in hot blood rare and limited. There is no evidence of prisoners being killed at the end of battles. Officers were exchanged – John

1 I am grateful to Jason McElligott, Micheál Ó Siochrú, Rory Rapple, David Smith, and the editors of this book for their perceptive comments on drafts of this article. 2 S.C. Lomas (ed.), *The letters and speeches of Oliver Cromwell with elucidations by Thomas Carlyle* [henceforth L&S] (3 vols, London, 1904), 1, p. 195. 3 Ibid.

Lilburne was the beneficiary of one such exchange arranged by Cromwell himself[4] – or ransomed in the traditional way, or were released on a pledge not to return to fighting.[5] Rank-and-file soldiers were either disarmed and sent home or were offered an opportunity to change sides. So great was the royalist take up of the offer of positions in the New Model that when at the Putney Debates it was proposed to enfranchise every soldier who had served Parliament in the 'late wars', the offer was restricted to those who had served before 'Naseby fight'.[6] A vast majority of the sieges in the English sector were settled by negotiation and surrender, and on such occasions both sides always extended a guarantee of security of personal safety and always honoured terms made. When towns were stormed, there could be loss of life, and civilians killed in the cross-fire; and stormed towns could be plundered. But Rupert's sack of Bolton and Leicester were notorious because they were so unrepresentative, and even there it was plunder, not rape and murder, that his men were intent on.[7]

It is clear, however, that there was a hardening of attitudes over time. When Fairfax took the surrender of Colchester in early September 1648, he granted 'fair quarter' to all civilians and to the rank and file, but insisted that the 300 officers surrender on 'mercy'.[8] Tellingly, the garrison asked for definitions and were told by Fairfax that 'fair quarter' meant 'to be free from wounding and beating and to be provided with adequate clothing and food while in custody', while 'mercy' meant that they had to surrender their lives into his hands and that he would decide their fate. In the event, he put three leaders on trial before a military tribunal and had two of them shot.[9] So the principle of executing those held culpable for delaying a surrender and causing loss of life preceded Cromwell's arrival in Ireland.

4 M. Gibb, *John Lilburne the Leveller* (London, 1949), pp 91–3. 5 See especially the important sequence of articles by Barbara Donagan: 'Atrocity, war crime and treason in the English Civil War', *American Historical Review*, 99:4 (1994), 1137–66; 'Codes and conduct in the English Civil War', *Past and Present*, 118 (1988), 65–95; and 'The web of honour: soldiers, Christians and gentlemen in the English Civil War', *Historical Journal*, 44:2 (2001), 465–89. 6 C.H. Firth (ed.), *The Clarke Papers* (4 vols, Camden Society, 1891–7), 1, pp 365–7. 7 The best account of Rupert's sack of Bolton is G. Pendlebury, *Aspects of the English Civil War in Bolton and its neighbourhood* (Bolton, 1983), pp 9–17; and for the sack of Leicester, see J.E.O. Wilshere and S. Green, *The siege of Leicester, 1645* (Leicester, 1970). All the general military histories, from Gardiner onwards, describe these as atypical examples of plunder; but all accounts are surprisingly vague on the number of people killed. 8 See the discussion in Edward Hyde, earl of Clarendon, *History of the Great Rebellion* (6 vols in 3 parts, 1839), 6, p. 250. For the clearly understood distinctions between surrender on quarter and on mercy, see Donagan, 'Atrocity, war crime and treason in the English Civil War', 1150–2. 9 A. Kingston, *East Anglia and the Great Civil War* (London, 1902), pp 281–3; and see the discussion in J. Burke, 'The New Model Army and the problems of siege warfare', *IHS*, 27 (1990), 6–8; Firth, *The Clarke Papers* 2, pp xi–xiv.

II

The nearest thing to a Drogheda-in-England in the First Civil War was Cromwell's sack of Basing House in October 1645.[10] Basing House was a vast medieval house upgraded by successive marquises of Winchester on the spoils of office – 380 rooms were added during the reign of Henry VIII alone. The defensive earthwork enclosed an area of more than 14 acres, and the Old and New Houses were protected by walls eight feet thick with regular towers. Three times in 1643–4 Sir William Waller had stormed it and been driven back. In 1645 Cromwell spent many weeks trying to starve out the garrison of 300–400 men, only for a relief column to break through with several weeks' supplies. Cromwell believed that not only the marquis but most of the defenders were Papists. It took six weeks of the play of cannon on those massive earthworks for a breach wide enough to permit a storm to be made. At 6 [?]a.m. on 16 October 1645, 6,000 New Model soldiers stormed the House, facing stern resistance, taking heavy casualties especially from nail bombs lobbed from windows. Full and clear reports suggest that between a quarter and a third of the defenders were killed in hot blood. Most of those not bearing arms or who surrendered were spared, although there is reliable evidence that six Catholic priests were killed in cold blood, and less reliable testimony that a few others, including the daughter of a Protestant chaplain who went to her father's aid, were also killed. Some of those who surrendered were stripped naked and plundered, but they do not otherwise seem to have been harmed. The worst that the royalist press could claim is that Inigo Jones was stripped and had to be carried out in a blanket. The words of Cromwell's soldier-chaplain Hugh Peters seem accurate enough: the Ironsides treated prisoners, he said, 'somewhat coarsely but not uncivilly'.[11]

This is an account that would be accepted by all the historians who have studied it. Let us now see how Cromwell wrote about it, when he sent his account to the Speaker of the House of Commons. He begin with a very matter-of-fact account of the storm of the House, noting that when Colonel Pickering had taken the New House and came to the Old House, the defenders 'summoned a parley; which our men would not hear'. At the end of the storm 'we have little loss: many of the enemy our men put to the sword; and some officers of quality; most of the rest we have prisoners, amongst whome the Marquis of Winchester himself and Sir Robert Peak. With divers other officers, whom I have ordered to be sent up to you'.[12] He clearly did not want to practice

10 The fullest discussions are in W. Emberton, *The close and perilous siege of Basing House* (Basingstoke, 1972); G. French, *The siege of Basing House* (Hove, 1970); and the admirable J. Adair, *They saw it happen: contemporary accounts of the siege of Basing House* (London, 1961). 11 H. Peters, *The full and last relation of all things concerning Basing House* (London, 1645). 12 L&S 1, pp 223–5.

summary justice on them, but to give Parliament the opportunity of show trials if it wished. He then called 'for the place to be utterly slighted' and indeed it was. It was burnt to the ground and the blackened stone and brick offered to the local communities for their own purposes. Within weeks it was reduced to what we see today, the outline of a medieval earthwork. Cromwell speaks of the 'good encouragement of his men', a euphemism for booty. He asks for fresh infantrymen to be conscripted and 'a course to be taken to pay the army', perhaps a reference to proposals to sell off the bishops' lands. And he concludes: 'The Lord grant that these mercies may be acknowledged with all thankfulness: God exceedingly abounds in His goodness to us, and will not be weary until righeousness and peace meet; and until He hath brought forth a glorious work for the happiness of this poor kingdom.'[13]

Faced by an especially defiant and apparently Catholic garrison, Cromwell was not especially concerned to save life, let alone safeguard property. He was willing literally to dismantle one of the three or four largest houses in England, to kill those he held most responsible, to hand over the key leaders for condign punishment, and to feel utterly confident he was doing God's work. Given the coarsening effect of war on all those involved, of becoming used to piles of bodies, it is not a huge distance from Basing to Drogheda.

III

Cromwell spent just 40 weeks in Ireland in between mid-August 1649 and late May 1650. In that time, he captured 25 fortified towns and castles (and visited 5 more already in English hands) on a progress that began in Co. Louth and moved through counties Dublin, Wicklow, Wexford, Waterford, Cork, Kilkenny, Tipperary and (the east tip of) Co. Limerick. In other words, he travelled through east Leinster, but spent 34 of his 40 weeks clearing Munster of royalist garrisons.[14] He never moved north of Drogheda, or south of Kinsale, or west of Mallow and Dunmanway. He killed most of the garrisons at Drogheda and Wexford, many in cold blood hours or days after they had surrendered, and in each case a significant number of civilians were killed, either caught in the cross-

13 Ibid. 14 The following are in my view sound and clear general accounts: J. Scott Wheeler, *Cromwell in Ireland* (Dublin, 1999); A. Woolrych, *Britain in revolution, 1625–1660* (Oxford, 2002), pp 461–80; P. Corish, 'The Cromwellian conquest', in T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin and F.J. Byrne (eds), *A new history of Ireland:* iii *Early modern Ireland, 1534–1691* (Oxford, 1976, 1991), pp 336–85. The Irish context is fully and admirably explored by P. Lenihan, *Confederate Ireland at war, 1641–1649* (Cork, 2001). There is still much to be said for the calm authority of S.R. Gardiner, who retraced Cromwell's footsteps on a cycling holiday that took him to Drogheda as far south as Cork. See his *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate* (4 vols, London, 1903), 1, pp 80–159.

fire or at least in the heat of action, albeit often vindictively. We will examine what happened in more detail shortly. But we need to remember that he followed up the ferocity at Drogheda and Wexford by startlingly generous surrender articles (as at Mallow, Fethard and Kilkenny), and blood was shed on only five occasions even though several towns defied him for days or weeks (he was even forced by the weather and disease to abandon a siege of Waterford). The nearest thing to a further massacre was at Gowran which he took on 21 March 1650. Cromwell had offered quarter; it was refused until after the artillery had breached the walls. At that point Cromwell declined further negotiation but granted quarter to the common soldiers and mercy to the officers for an immediate surrender. The garrison included, significantly, some renegade officers from the 1648 Kentish rebellion. Cromwell shot the commissioned officers, including the English ones, hanged the priest to the garrison and released the rest.[15] More dramatically and revealingly, although he lost 2,000 men at Clonmel in a spectacular ambush in May 1650, he offered and honoured generous terms to both town and garrison.[16] If we leave aside Drogheda and Wexford (which of course we won't!) the laws of war as understood in England were as strictly observed by Cromwell in Ireland as they had been in England.[17] The same cannot be said for other English commanders, but that is another part of the context for making sense of what happened at Drogheda and Wexford.

IV

Cromwell was not amongst the most anti-Catholic and probably not amongst the most anti-Irish of Englishmen in the 1640s and 1650s. He was anti-Catholic and anti-Irish, but he was less so than many of those he served alongside in the army and the Long Parliament. This might seem very surprising, and it will take more space than is available here to make this case convincingly.[18] Nonetheless let us adumbrate it.

Cromwell's letters and speeches are surprisingly short of strong anti-Catholic rhetoric. He does not make the same intimate connection between Laudian bishops and Popery that one finds in Pym or Prynne, for example. One

15 L&S 2, pp 46–7. 16 The number of casualties suffered by the English varies in the different accounts, but the careful Scott Wheeler, *Cromwell in Ireland* p. 156 and n. 65 gives 2,000. 17 See the precise discussion in Jason McElligott, 'Cromwell, Drogheda and the abuse of Irish history', *Bullán*, 6:1 (2001), 123–5. More generally, and excellent, see Donagan, 'Codes and Conduct', 76ff. 18 The fourth of my Ford Lectures in Oxford in 2006, entitled '*Ubi Solitudinem Faciunt, pacem appellant*. War and "peace" in Ireland, 1650–1655', explored this theme, and will be published in a book provisionally entitled *Living with revolution: the peoples of Britain and Ireland and the legacies of war, 1646–1670*.

looks in vain for repeated references to the papal antichrist.[19] There is no reference in his letter from Basing House to those he has killed and taken prisoner being Papists. The Heads of the Proposals, with which he is closely associated, offered the Catholics the prospect of an easier time in the future than in the past.[20] His defense of indemnity acts in the Rump would have spared Papists in arms from the penalties of the Acts of Sale.[21] No Catholic priest in England was tried and executed while he was Lord Protector.[22] In a letter bearing his name to Cardinal Mazarin, he wrote that:

> although I believe that under my government your Eminency, in the behalf of the Catholics, has less reason for complaint as to rigour upon men's consciences than under the Parliament. Truly ... I have made a difference; and as Jude speaks, plucked many out of the fire,[23] the raging fire of persecution, which did tyrannize over their consciences and encroached by an arbitrariness of power upon their estates. And herein it is my purpose, as soon as I can remove impediments, and some weights that press me down to make further progress, and discharge my promise to your Eminency in relation to that.[24]

His speeches as Lord Protector were equally silent on the special culpability of the Catholics. His foreign policy was based on an utter conviction that 'the Spaniard is your enemy'. That gave rise to some strong language about the international Catholic conspiracy to overthrow Protestantism, and he does refer there to his belief that the 'Spaniard have an enemy in your bowels' – the English Catholic community – but he does not press for any new measures against them.[25] His purpose was to get Parliament's financial support for the

19 The nearest he comes is in his opening speech to the second Protectorate Parliament on 17 September 1656: see below. 20 S.R. Gardiner (ed.), *Constitutional documents of the Puritan Revolution 1625–1660* (3rd edn, Oxford, 1906), pp 316–26, at art.XII, which repeals all the penal laws and speaks (mildly) of 'some other provision to be made for discovering of papists and popish recusants, and the disabling of them from disturbing the State'. 21 A.B. Worden, *The Rump Parliament* (Cambridge, 1974), pp 267–8. 22 One priest was executed, but he had been convicted of treason in 1628 and permanently exiled on pain of death if he returned to England. He was given every opportunity to avoid execution in 1654 but embraced it. See John Morrill, 'John Southworth 1592–1654', *New Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article67460, accessed 25 January 2005. 23 A reference to *Jude* 1: 22–23: 'And of some have compassion, making a difference. And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.' 24 T. Birch (ed.), *A collection of state papers of John Thurloe, esq* (7 vols, London, 1742), 5, p. 735; L&S 3, pp 5–6; W.C. Abbott, *Writings and speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (4 vols, Cambridge, MA, 1937–47), 4, pp 368–9. There is some doubt as to the authenticity of this document (drawn to my attention by Blair Worden), but most of those who have studied it are happy to treat it as genuine. 25 L&S 3, pp 511–17.

Spanish War. All laws penalizing Catholics for absenting themselves from Protestant worship were repealed, and penalties for attending Catholic worship largely unenforced. In terms of freedom of religious practice, the 1650s were the easiest decade for English Catholics between the accession of Elizabeth I and the accession of George I. Cromwell disliked Catholics; he had friends who were open about their yearning for the return of the Book of Common Prayer and bishops, indeed he was a friend to past (Ussher) and future (Wilkins) bishops, as well as to supporters of the Presbyterian order, the Congregational way, to born-again Baptists and to Quakers. He was friends with all those with 'the root of the matter in them', all who were seekers after God's truth, for he did not believe that any one church had a monopoly of truth,[26] though we cannot find any sign that he found the root of the matter in any Catholic. But persecution was not a route to conversion. Cromwell would give liberty to evangelize to all those who sought truth through the sovereign authority of Scripture; and he would give a de facto liberty to practise any other form in private.[27]

Cromwell was an extreme erastian. He hated priestcraft, the claims of the clergy to a monopoly on preaching and to a custodianship of the truth. His earlier spleen against the English bishops (in 1636 he called them 'the enemies of God His Truth',[28] and he was outspoken in his denunciations of them in the early days of the Long Parliament)[29] was equaled, if not surpassed, by his loathing of Scottish Presbyterian ministers. This is what he wrote to the Commissioners of the Kirk on 3 August 1650, just days before the Battle of Dunbar:

> There may be a spiritual fullness, which the World may call drunkenness ... There may be as well a carnal confidence upon misunderstood and misapplied precepts ... I pray you read the twenty eighth of Isaiah, from the fifth to the fifteenth verse.[30]

That reference is to the desecration of the Temple by drunken priests vomiting over the altar of the Lord. He is accusing the Presbyterian clergy of spiritual drunkenness and of spiritual arrogance. There is a spitting contempt in this passage that he reserved for a self-important clergy. And he says to these Scottish clergy: 'There may be a covenant with death and hell'.[31] He had used that phrase once before, in a document with a chilling title: 'The Declaration of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland for the undeceiving of deluded and seduced people ... in answer to certaine late declarations and acts framed by the Irish Popish Prelates and clergy in conventicler at Clonmacnoise'. And addressing

26 The best of the many discussions of how he wrestled with these issues is J.C. Davis, *Oliver Cromwell* (London, 2001), pp 112–37. 27 John Morrill, 'Oliver Cromwell 1599–1658', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article6765, accessed 25 January 2005. 28 L&S 1, p. 79. 29 Morrill, 'Oliver Cromwell 1599–1658'. 30 L&S 2, pp 79–80. 31 Ibid.

those clergy, *not the Irish people*, he writes 'your covenant if you understood it, is with death and hell! Your union is like that of Simeon and Levi'.[32] And this is our link from Cromwell's contained anti-Catholicism to his contained anti-Irishness.

The *Declaration* is withering in its contempt for the Irish clergy and deserves a fuller study than is possible here.[33] It lays the blame for the 1641 Rebellion on the clergy: 'you put the English to the most unheard of & most barbarous massacre (without respect of sex or age) that ever the sun beheld'. He accuses them of exercising an ecclesiastical tyranny and superstition, of terrorizing people into handing over their property with a false promise of helping them to Heaven in return, of mystifying the people and withholding the truth from them:

> you cannot feed them [with the word of God] but instead poison them with your false abominable and Antichristian doctrine and practices; you keep the word of God from them, and instead thereof you give them your senseless orders and traditions.[34]

He thus portrays the Irish as *held in ignorance*. He has no doubt that the English have brought civility and sound economy amongst them, and that they enjoyed peace and prosperity because of it until the clergy corrupted them into rebellion. He is deeply prejudiced. But there is a large gap between prejudice and a will to exterminate. His scorn turns to anger as he examines the charge of the Clonmacnoise Declaration[35] that his purpose was 'to extirpate the Catholic religion' and 'the distruction of the lives of the inhabitants of this nation'.[36] To the first he makes clear that he will strike out against all public (as against private) Catholic worship or evangelization; but

> as for the people what thoughts they have in matters of religion in their own breasts I cannot reach, but thinke it my duty if they walk honestly and peaceably, not to cause them in the least to suffer them to suffer for the same, but shall endeavour to walk patiently and in love towards them to see if at any time it shall please God to give them another or a better minde.[37]

This is entirely consistent with his policy in England: persecution doesn't work, so permit those outside the circle of truth to worship privately but not to evangelize.

32 L&S 2, pp 5–23, at p. 7. The reference to Simeon and Levi is to Genesis 34, where these sons of Jacob became the embodiment of fanaticism and bad faith to those who had come amongst them to right a terrible wrong done to their sister Dinah. 33 See note 18. 34 L&S 2, p. 14. 35 For the text to which he is replying, see Denis Murphy, *Cromwell in Ireland* (Dublin, 1902), pp 406–10. ('Declaration of the bishops and clergy assembled at Clonmacnoise, 4 December 1649'). 36 L&S 2, pp 15, 17. 37 L&S 2, p. 17.

He is even more emphatic on his plans for a civil settlement: 'I shall not willingly take or suffer to be taken away the life of any man not in arms, but by trial to which the people of this nation are subject by law for offences against the same'. Banishment would only be used to commute the sentences of those guilty of capital offences. Estates would be confiscated only from those who had taken part in the massacres or taken up arms in defence of the rebellion, and those laying down their arms would be given 'merciful consideration'.[38] This is of course a far cry from the language of the Act of Settlement of 1652;[39] but it is close to the policies he advocated for royalist-Catholics in England, and it is close to the policy of the Protectorate in Ireland. I will demonstrate elsewhere that Cromwell was strongly opposed to the Act of Settlement. For the moment, I will rest on the categorical statement of S.R.Gardiner after his careful examination of the evidence: 'as far as the act of 1652 is concerned, there is no evidence whatever to connect it with Cromwell.'[40]

Cromwell came to Ireland full of disinformation about the nature and extent of the massacres of 1641–2.[41] He came full of contempt for priestcraft in general and Catholic priestcraft in particular. He came believing the English to be God's chosen people and the Irish an ignorant, backward people needing English civility. He came to Ireland knowing that he had to divide and rule if he was to succeed. He came knowing that his most inveterate enemies were those whose loyalty to the House of Stuart was even greater than their loyalty to the Church of Rome, and knowing that he could do business with those whose loyalty to the Church of Rome was greater than their loyalty to the House of Stuart. And so he sanctioned George Monck's pacification with O'Neill;[42] he made his own accommodation with the marquis of Antrim – a pardon in exchange for the use of the latter's boats as transports;[43] and he also sanctioned exploratory discussions with leading Catholic clergy to see if he could secure political obedience in return for minimal rights of religious practice.[44] His personal dealings with liberal Catholics like Sir Kenelm Digby were perfectly amicable throughout the 1650s. Even at an individual level, he could exercise acts of compassion for Catholics. When he discovered that Bishop David Rothe was dying, he rescinded the order banishing from Ireland clergy whom he had taken prisoner at Kilkenny, so that the old man could die amongst his own people.[45]

38 Ibid., pp 18–20. 39 Gardiner, *Constitutional documents*, pp 394–400. 40 S.R. Gardiner, 'The transplantation to Connaught', *English Historical Review*, 14 (1899), 707. 41 For a brilliant reconstruction of the impact of press discussion of the 1641 massacres, see Ethan Shagan, 'Constructing discord: ideology, propaganda and English responses to the Irish Rebellion of 1641', *Journal of British Studies*, 36 (1997), 4–34. 42 Gentles, *New Model*, pp 355–6 and n. 39. 43 J. Ohlmeyer, *Civil War and Restoration in the three Stuart Kingdoms: the career of Randal MacDonnell, Marquis of Antrim 1609–1683* (Cambridge, 1993), pp 230–40. 44 J. Collins, 'Thomas Hobbes and the Blackloist Conspiracy' *Historical Journal*, 45:2 (2002), 305–31; A. Brown, 'Anglo-Irish Gallicanism, 1635–1675', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2004), chapter 4 45 M. Tanner, *Ireland's Holy Wars* (New Haven, 2003), p. 145. 46 *Declaration*, L&S 2, p. 21. For the present the reader has to take it on trust that this is not a Machiavellian tract, designed to pretend to a settlement he had no intention of honouring. I have no space within the limits set for this essay to say more than I have about the consistency of his thinking. The question of Cromwell's Machiavellianism is explored in John Morrill, 'How Oliver Cromwell Thought', forthcoming in a festschrift. 47 It is important to note that transportation of large numbers of English, Scots and Irish political prisoners took place in the 1650s, the single largest group being Scots after the battles of Dunbar and Worcester. See Sean O'Callaghan, *To Hell or Barbados* (Dingle, 2000). Chapters 1 and 2 deal specifically with the transportations after the massacres of Drogheda and Wexford. See more generally C. Carlton, *Going to the wars* (London, 1992), pp 332–6 and n. 79. 48 McElligott, 'Cromwell, Drogheda and the abuse of Irish history', 109–32.

Cromwell came to Ireland because:

> England hath had experience of the blessing of God in prosecuting just and righteous causes, whatever the cost and hazard be! ... We are come to ask an account of the innocent blood that hath been shed; and to endeavour to bring to an account ... all who by appearing in arms, seek to justify the same. We come, by the assistance of God to hold forth and maintain the lustre and glory of English liberty in a nation where we have an undoubted right to do it; wherein the people of Ireland ... may equally participate in all the benefits; to use their liberty and fortune equally with Englishmen, if they keep out of arms.[46]

He came to Ireland with a sense of ethnic superiority but not of ethnic hatred.

V

We can now turn to events at Drogheda in September 1649 and in Wexford in October 1649. In both those towns there were massacres. In both those towns the greater part of the garrison was killed in hot blood or in cold blood, and in the former the survivors were sent to indentured servitude in Barbados.[47] In both towns there were significant levels of civilian casualties, killed or molested in hot blood. The evidence that civilians (other than priests and friars) were killed in cold blood is of a limited and inconclusive form. But Cromwell himself confessed that significant numbers of civilians were killed. In total, there seems no reason to doubt an official New Model report that 3500+ were killed at Drogheda, and there is now fairly general agreement that about 1500–2000 were killed in Wexford.

The above paragraph already pins my colours to the mast. There are more than enough accounts of the massacres and excellent accounts of the historiography, especially of the massacre at Drogheda. Jason McElligott has given us an outstanding summary of the nationalist and revisionist cases,[48] and

LETTERS

FROM

IRELAND,

Relating the ſeveral great Succeſſes it hath pleaſed God to give unto the

Parliaments Forces

there, in the Taking of

Drogheda, Trym, Dundalk, Carling-ford, and the *Nury*.

Together with a LIST of the Chief Commanders, and the Number of the Officers and Soldiers ſlain in *Drogheda*.

Die Martis, 2 *Octobr.* 1649.

ORdered by the Commons aſſembled in Parliament, That the ſeveral Letters from the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, *together with ſo much of Colonel* Venables *Letter as conſerns the Succeſſes in* Ireland, *be forthwith printed and publiſhed.*

Hen: Scobell, Cleric. Parliamenti.

London, Printed by *John Field* for *Edward Huſband*, Printer to the Parliament of *England*. 1649.

9 Anon., *Letters from Ireland* (London, 1649), title page.

a totally convincing and necessary explanation of why Tom Reilly's claim that there was no civilian massacre at Drogheda is not to be trusted.[49] In essence, Reilly fails the test of source criticism at almost every turn. He argues a case and unreasonably privileges second- and third-hand evidence that supports his presupposition and unreasonably dismisses contrary evidence.[50] When it comes to first-hand evidence, he reasserts an already discredited attempt to deny that Cromwell confessed to the deaths of civilians. This is so central that I will rehearse McElligott's arguments here by reference to the original printed version. Figure 9 is the title page of the pamphlet in which Cromwell's main account of the taking of Drogheda (dispatched on 17 September) was printed together with the follow-up to events following the storm and massacre (dispatched 27 September). The first contains a list of royalist regiments (totalling 2,700) and their commanders and the second contains 'a list of the officers and soldiers slain at the storming of Drogheda', naming eight of the dead officers. It makes clear that it is published with the authority of the Parliament itself, and the printer (John Field) had been the regular printer of 'official' print for several years and was to remain so even after Cromwell became Lord Protector.[51] It is unthinkable that he (for commercial or any other reason) would falsify a report from the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, especially so soon after the new Licensing Act[52] under which all the printers had been called in, put on tough bail bonds of £300 not to publish without a license and not to publish anything detrimental to the regime (like a false report of a civilian massacre). Figure 10 gives us the end of Cromwell's second letter to Lenthall and the appendix listing those killed at Drogheda. There is nothing typographically or otherwise to suggest that this is not part of Cromwell's letter. Indeed it is clearly the list referred to in the Commons order to the printer: 'A letter from the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, from Dublin, of the twenty seventh day of September *together with a list of the officers and soldiers slain at the storming of Drogheda* was this day read ... and be forthwith printed and published.'[53] And what does this appendix tell us? It tells us that at Drogheda, Cromwell's army killed 60 royalist officers 220 troopers, and 2,500 infantry, surgeons, 'and many inhabitants'. There is no getting round those words.[54] Hugh Peter, close to

49 T. Reilly, *Cromwell: an honourable enemy* (Dingle, 1999). 50 McElligott, 'Cromwell, Drogheda and the abuse of Irish history', 120–7. 51 Ibid., p. 121; Anon., *Letters from Ireland* (London, 1649). 52 For a discussion, see Jason McElligott, 'Propaganda and censorship: the underground Royalist newsbooks, 1647–1650' (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2000), pp 166–85. It is perhaps also worth stressing that John Field, printer of Cromwell's letter from Drogheda, was also the printer of this Act. See *An act against unlicensed and scandalous books and pamphlets, and for better regulating of printing* (20 September 1649). 53 *Journal of the House of Commons* 6, 2 October 1649, http://www.british-history.ac.uk, accessed 30 January 2005. 54 Reilly tries to do so (*Cromwell: an honourable enemy*), pp 96 and 119 n. 19, by drawing attention to Carlyle's false claim in the first edition of L&S that the appendix is an eighteenth-century addition. As

A Liſt of the Officers and Soldiers
ſlain at the ſtorming of *Drogheda*.

Sir *Arthur Aſton* Governor.
Sir *Edmond Verney* Lieutenant Col: to *Ormonds* Regiment.
Col: *Fleming*, of Horſe.
Lieutenant Col: *Finglaſs*, of Horſe.
Major *Fitzgerald*, of Horſe.
Eight { Captains / Lieutenants / Cornets } of Horſe.
Col: { *Warren*, / *Walls*, / *Byrne*, } of Foot, with their Lieutenants, Majors, &c.
The Lord *Taaffs* brother, an *Auguſtine Fryer*.
Forty four Captains, and all their Lieutenants, Enſigns, &c.
Two hundred and twenty Reformado's and Troopers.
Two theuſand Five hundred Foot Soldiers, beſides Staff-Officers,
Chyrurgeons, &c. and many Inhabitants.

10 'A list of the Officers and Soldiers slain at the storming of Drogheda', from *Letters from Ireland*.

Cromwell and on his council of war,[55] suggested that the total number killed was 3,552, and he gives the number of military survivors amongst the defenders as 400. Cromwell thinks there were 2,782 killed apart from 'the many inhabitants' (although his 2,500 infantrymen and support service men is clearly a rounded number).[56] The implication of both Cromwell and Peter is that about 700–800 civilians died and I see no reason to doubt that figure. After all, several thousand soldiers climbing over the corpses of colleagues to clear a town full of effective

figure 10 reveals this claim was simply incorrect. This is in itself fatal to Reilly's thesis and it is disgraceful that so many reviewers have not checked this. 55 Anon, *A Letter from Ireland, read in the House of Commons from Mr Hugh Peter, minister of God's Word* (London, 1649), title page and p. 4. 56 My arithmetic from the figures given in figure 10 and is very close to that of Gentles, *New Model*, p. 361.

snipers, and clearing it street by street and house by house, are not going to ask questions about the status of those they encounter. What is not clear is how many civilians, as against how many combatants, died in cold blood. The sources that discuss this are amongst the least reliable and nothing is to be gained by revisiting that debate. What is clear from Cromwell's own pen is that there was a significant but not enormous level of killing of disarmed combatants, and possibly others, in cold blood.

As to the precise sequence of events, we have a completely satisfactory description and analysis by James Burke, no element of which has been challenged by any of the more recent military historians to study it.[57] The main elements in the story are these. First, Cromwell summonsed the town and threatened to withhold quarter if there was no surrender on his terms.[58] Second, his initial storm of the town was repulsed with considerable loss of life – enough for the successful storm to be assisted by the heaped pile of their comrade's corpses that they could scramble over so as to effect an entry through a breach that did not come down to ground level. Third, it was the sight of fallen comrades that was the occasion of Cromwell issuing the order for no quarter to be given 'to any in arms in the town'. Fourth, the New Model stormed through Drogheda across the Boyne Bridge killing all that opposed them in any way. Fifth, this left significant numbers of defenders and civilians holed up in the castellated Towers around the walls, in the tower of St Peter's Church, and on Millmount. According to a letter from 'an eminent person in the army' published in London on 8 October, Colonel Axtell was detached to take Millmount, and (daunted by the steep rise and the sturdy stockade that protected it), he offered to spare the lives of the governor and the 200 men with him if they surrendered on the promise of their lives, which they did.[59] But the same letter tells us that the disarmed men were moved to a windmill 'where they were later slain', implying a delay; and Ormond wrote to a fellow royalist that 'they were butchered an hour after quarter was given them.'[60] Those who took refuge in St Peter's Church died after the pews were ignited beneath them, dying in the flames or by jumping from the Tower. It is not clear if those in the church included civilians; it seems perfectly possible. Those who took refuge in

57 James Burke, 'The New Model Army and the problems of siege warfare, 1648–1651', *IHS* 105 (1990), 1–29 – see especially 8–15. For more recent accounts that follow Burke, see Scott Wheeler, *Cromwell in Ireland*, pp 83–90 or Gentles, *New Model*, pp 357–63. Burke covers all the important points about Cromwell's 'massacres' far more thoroughly than anyone else, including the widely cited, but evidentially very thin, Robin Clifton, 'An indiscriminate blackness? Massacre, counter-massacre and ethnic cleansing in Ireland, 1640–1660', in M. Levene and P. Roberts (eds), *The massacre in history* (Oxford, 1999), pp 107–26, especially pp 108–10, 117–22. 58 Murphy, *Cromwell in Ireland*, p. 92. 59 The letter was published in a diurnal strictly licensed by the Houses, *Perfect Diurnal* (London, 8 October 1649). 60 J.T. Gilbert, *A contemporary history of affairs in Ireland* (6 vols, Dublin, 1880), 2, pp 271–2. See below, n. 67.

the turrets around the walls surrendered the following day, and we know that the officers and every tenth man (Roman-style decimation) were clubbed to death and the rest sent to the Tobacco Islands.[61] Some royalist reports speak of summary executions spread over several days – in the case of Sir Edmund Verney three days after the taking of the town, and although this is from a second-or third-hand account, it is consistent with the reports of New Model officers.[62] As a final act of vindictiveness, the heads of 16 royalist officers were sent to Dublin and stuck on pikes on the approach roads.[63] (Slightly odd: why not leave them at Drogheda?)[64]

The key evidence remains Cromwell's own reports to John Bradshaw and William Lenthall, dispatched on 16 and 17 September once the Lord Lieutenant had returned to Dublin. The first was about 400 words long and the second more than 2,000 words, one of his longest letters. The former gives no detail of the storming of the town, but reports the main facts: that 'being entered, we refused them quarter'; that almost all the defenders were killed and the rest already en route to the Barbados; that some 3,000 were slain; and that his next target was Wexford.[65] Two other things in the letter are worthy of note: the first is the statement that God had given the defenders strength to resist, the more to 'give new courage to our men' – this is clearly linked to the refusal of quarter. The second is the justification that 'this bitterness will save much effusion of blood, through the goodness of God'. Although he also hopes 'that all honest hearts may give the glory of this to God alone, to whom indeed the praise of this mercy belongs', he stops short of saying whether 'this mercy' is the low number of English casualties or the large number of defenders killed as a punishment for their misdeeds.[66] The emphasis is that this is an act done *in terrorem*.

Cromwell's much longer and more considered letter, written the next day,[67] gives more precise detail of this military operation than any of his other battlefield letters, with the possible exception of the letter after the battle of Preston. Cromwell's willingness to admit in writing of the killing of those who surrendered on Millmount ('they were ordered by me to be put to the sword'[68]

61 We know this from Cromwell's account, see below p. 257. 62 It is a near contemporary account, from one of Ormond's officers to the family back home at Claydon, Bucks. See F.P. Verney (ed.), *Memoirs of the Verney family during the Civil War* (4 vols, London, 1892), 2, pp 344–5. 63 Anon., *Two letters of a bloody fight in Ireland* (London, 22 September 1649). The display of heads had not been part of the English (or Irish) experience of war (as against judicial execution for treason) over the previous half century, although some of the reports of the 1641 Rebellion had spoken of the display of Protestant heads at Kilkenny (I am grateful to Clodagh Tait for this reference). Above all it was not part of *Cromwell's* experience. 64 For a possible explanation, see below, pp 258–9. 65 He refers to it as 'the southern design – you know what' – an intriguing message. 66 L&S 2, pp 464–5. 67 L&S 1, pp 466–72. 68 Thus overruling Axtell who had granted quarter. What remains an insoluble problem is whether Axtell knew that Cromwell had forbidden any to be spared and cynically offered it knowing that he would be overruled, or whether Axtell believed that he had the authority to grant quarter only to find his superior officer had forbidden it and countermanded it. Given the chaos as the third storm began and the evidence that the order to deny quarter was given after the assault had started, the latter is at least as likely as the former. 69 L&S 1, pp 468–9. 70 At the battle of Philiphaugh, General Leslie granted quarter to several hundred of Montrose's men, but was subsequently overruled by his council of war and the men were executed: see below, p. 264. 71 L&S 1, p. 469. 72 Ibid., p. 471. 73 Ibid., p. 469. 74 Ibid., p. 469. 75 In the past his letters to the Speaker of the Commons following a military engagement were ordered to be published, his letters to the executive committees of the Parliament never were. 76 Cromwell always refers to Drogheda as Tredagh (the English spelling of the Irish Droichead Átha). I am grateful to Rory Rapple for this

he says, adding 'being in the heat of action, I forbade them to spare any that were in arms in the town').[69] This is carefully vague about the fact that they had surrendered before they were killed, although it is implied.[70] A statement that when those holed up in the turrets surrendered, 'their officers were knocked on the head, and every tenth man of the soldiers killed' is more explicit about what happened,[71] as is the statement that 'all the friars were knocked on the head promiscuously but two', along with Fr Peter Taaffe, brother of Lord Taaffe.[72] Perhaps grimmest of all his account of the roasting of those sheltering in the Tower of St Peter's Church 'where one was heard to say in the midst of the flames: 'God damn me, God confound me, I burn, I burn.'[73] It is hard to believe that in the general confusion and screaming from within a locked Tower, these words could be made out. Cromwell is here putting words into the mouth of a dying man, words which describe and prescribe his agony now and in the life to come (in bleak Calvinist mode). There is an edgy bravado here, which suggests that Cromwell is not really content with his *in terrorem* argument. He wants also to strengthen the case for that extraordinary use of the discretionary power that lay in him as the general of an army denied entry to a town.

And in this letter to the Speaker of the House of Commons, a letter he could anticipate would be published, he made a double justification of what had happened:

> I am persuaded that this is a righteous judgment of God upon these barbarous wretches, who have imbrued their hands with so much innocent blood; and that it will tend to prevent the effusion of blood for the future, which are the satisfactory grounds to such actions, which otherwise cannot but work remorse and regret.[74]

We have seen that the second of these reasons is the one he also used in the letter to John Bradshaw that he did not expect to be published.[75] It was followed up immediately by letters in his summons to the Governors of Trim and Dundalk ('I offered mercy to the garrison at Tredagh[76] ... which being refused brought their evil upon them ... if you, being warned thereby, shall surrender your garrison to

the use of the Parliament of England, … you may thereby prevent effusion of blood').[77] The towns were surrendered and all lives were spared. As we have seen, it set the pattern: surrender and be spared; resist and be massacred. Although several towns held out for weeks on end, eventually all but Wexford surrendered on terms and were spared. The same cannot be said for all the commanders under the authority of the Parliament.[78] But it held true for Cromwell.

But what of that chilling phrase 'this is a righteous judgment of God upon these barbarous wretches, who have imbrued their hands with so much innocent blood'? It has generally been assumed by all who have written about it that it referred to the 1641 massacres, and it has often enough been said that he knew he was lying – that he knew perfectly well that the garrison consisted of English and Ormondist troops, none of whom could have taken any part in the 1641–2 massacres.[79] Drogheda had *never* been a Confederate town. So why do we assume that he was referring to the 1641 rebellion? In the course of his post-Drogheda letters Cromwell only mentions by name *English* officers and members of Irish noble families. In that list of those killed, he privileges the names of English officers along with those from Irish noble families – the earl of Westmeath and Sir James Dillon, brother of the earl of Roscommon.[80] Is it not possible that Cromwell's reference is to the blood guilt of those who refused to accept the judgment of God in the first Civil War, those who committed sacrilege by renewing the war and carried a culpability far higher than that of those who fought to establish God's judgment in that first war, the culpability for shedding innocent blood that brought Charles I to the scaffold?[81] It was a reference to that same rage which overtook him throughout 1648 and led to the summary trials and death sentences on the leaders after the sieges and battles of Pembroke, Preston and Pontefract. It was a rage that had allowed him to refer to those English rebels who obstructed the Lord's work as acting 'barbarously'; so this was not a term he held back to use of the Irish.[82] Is this why the heads of

explanation. 77 L&S 1, pp 463–4, Letter from Drogheda, 12 September 1649. 78 It was broadly true of his successors as senior commander, but it certainly not true of the New English set on vengeance for 1641 – notably Sir Charles Coote, whose own father had been killed during a skirmish with the Irish. 79 See, e.g., Gentles, *New Model*, p. 362; Woolrych, *Britain in revolution*, p. 469; Morrill, 'Oliver Cromwell 1599–1658'. 80 Above, p. 254, figure 10. 81 See P. Crawford, 'Charles Stuart, that man of blood', *Journal of British History*, 16:2 (1977), 41–61. 82 For example, Cromwell to Fairfax, 4 August 1645, referring to his defeat of the very English Clubmen at Sherborne: 'they have taken divers of the Parliament soldiers prisoners, besides Colonel Fienes and his men; and used them most barbarously' (L&S 1, p. 210); for other uses by Englishmen about Englishmen, see Donagan, 'Codes and conduct', 90–1. I also entered the word 'barbarous' and the period 1641–49 into the long title search on Early English Books Online. There were 103 hits. Only one quarter of them applied to the actions of Irish Catholics, far fewer than the number that applied to the action of English royalists (above all Prince Rupert). Smaller number of entries related to Scottish Royalists, foreign Catholics, Parliamentarian soldiers, non-Christians, and there were six Leveller

the English officers like Sir Edmund Verney were sent to be put on spikes in Dublin? Is this why he singled out English officers to be denied mercy at Gowran? And was the concern to highlight the English officers intended to send a clear message to royalists amongst the English readership of the letter not to cross to Ireland to continue the struggle?

My suggestion is, then, that there was a massacre at Drogheda, but that we must be careful not to make that the emblem of a focused and blind hatred of the Irish on Cromwell's part. Cromwell went to Ireland as a calloused army veteran hardened to the sight of blood. He went with a distaste for the Catholics in general and Irish Catholics in particular, though a distaste tempered by his sense of them as the victims of priestly obfuscation, and he went to do a job of work. The letter to Speaker Lenthall ended with a 300-word plea for supplies:

> that a consideration may be had of them … such as may give a speedy issue to this work, to which there seems to be a marvelous fair opportunity offered by God. And although it may seem very chargeable to the State of England to maintain so great a force, yet surely stretch a little for the present, in following God's providence, in hope the charge will not be long.[83]

That's the rub. He was well aware how much every army had been rendered unfit by the lack of political will to do unpopular things to requisition men, money and supplies, and that throughout the last nine years (and, he might have known, the last 100 years) it had been the bane of generals in Ireland. He was nervous about being left without money or reinforcements. The whole letter can also be seen as a vindication of this postlude.[84] Give me the tools and I will do the job, with God visibly on my side. I will use terror where it is needed, mercy where it is prudent. For 'if God please to finish it here as He hath done in England, the war is like to pay itself'.[85]

VI

The sack of Wexford is too often seen as the logical next step after the sack of Drogheda. In fact, it was a disaster for Cromwell's policy. He had threatened his

accusations of 'barbarous' behaviour by the Long Parliament. 83 L&S 1, p. 471. 84 This is also how I would read his speech to the General Council of the Army in Whitehall on 23 March 1648 on whether or not he would accept the invitation to command the army that was being assembled for the Irish campaign. Although he calls the Irish interest 'the most dangerous' and says that 'all the world knows their barbarism' (L&S 3, pp 403–4), the main thrust of his speech is that he cannot undertake the task unless he is guaranteed a sufficient supply of men, munitions and cash (see the comments either side of the intervention of Hardress Waller on ibid., 3, p. 405). 85 Ibid.

way into five fortified towns since taking Drogheda and had treated well those who surrendered to him. He clearly intended to talk his way into Wexford and to use it as his winter headquarters. But – by common consent – he lost control of the situation and an unauthorized massacre took place.

The following facts are not in dispute. Cromwell arrived before the gates with only 60 per cent of the force that he had at Drogheda (because, as he put it on 27 September, 'it's easily conceived what [numbers of men] the garrisons already drink up, what our field armies will come to, if God shall give more garrisons into your hands').[86] He could afford to wait a little while to negotiate the surrender, for his artillery was coming by sea and he could not plan an attack until it arrived. On the other hand, there was an outbreak of the 'bloody flux' (dysentery) amongst his men, and that was all too likely to reduce their fighting effectiveness.[87] Furthermore, he could not readily prevent the Governor, David Synott, from receiving reinforcements. The latter already had more men in the garrison (around 3,000) than Aston had had at Drogheda, and by all accounts far more armed townsmen at his disposal, perhaps as many as 4,500 men in all.[88] So while he was less peremptory in the early exchanges with Synott, time was not on his side and once his artillery was in place, he began to apply pressure.

Although most of the town walls were reinforced with 15-foot earthworks, there was a vulnerable area at the southern end, and Cromwell's guns quickly made a breach there. Synott decided to surrender at this, but given the civilized nature of their previous exchanges (which included a cart laden with 'sack, strong waters and strong beer' as a gift to Cromwell from the town),[89] he opted to attempt one more round of negotiation first. He was generally satisfied with the terms offered to the garrison (freedom for the common soldiers to return home, disarmed; the officers to surrender on the promise of their lives but not their liberty; the townsmen to be free from plunder). Nonetheless, he hoped one last round of negotiations might improve those terms, both to protect his officers' freedom and especially to protect the lives and liberties of the Catholic clergy and religious. As he haggled, his subordinate, in charge of the Castle at the southern corner, unilaterally accepted the terms Synott was seeking to refine. Cromwell's troops poured into the Castle and started bombarding the town from the high castle walls. The defenders retreated from the town walls, allowing Cromwell's men (without awaiting orders from their field officers, and certainly without an order to deny mercy) to swarm over the walls and rampage through the town, killing at will. English and Irish sources agree that at least 1,500 and probably nearer 2,000 people were killed, including two overloaded boatloads of escapees, many (most?) of whom were civilians. There was indis-

86 L&S 1, pp 471–2. 87 Gentles, *New Model*, pp 364–5 is especially good on this aspect. 88 Scott Wheeler, *Cromwell in Ireland*, p. 97; Reilly, *Cromwell: an honourable enemy*, p. 155. 89 Reilly, *Cromwell: an honourable enemy*, p. 148.

criminate pillage, although it does not seem to have continued beyond nightfall on the day of the storm – that is, a few hours. There is much less evidence of killing in cold blood, but much more suggestion that civilians as well as soldiers were killed in hot blood.[90]

The level of killing was less both absolutely and proportionately. There was no systematic summary execution of prisoners. According to one English report sent back to London by Richard Lawrence, 1,300 prisoners were taken.[91] This is compatible with Cromwell's report, but it is odd that it is not spelled out. Nonetheless, even the Irish sources do not speak of calculated killing of the kind that had been an instrument of policy at Drogheda. They do speak, however, of sadistic mistreatment and slaughter of civilians during the sack of the town.

Fr Denis Murphy offers the fullest account of later Catholic sources, and he had no doubt that there was much gratuitous targeting of civilians, including women. Tom Reilly in contrast thinks none of the Catholic sources can be trusted and that (those capsized boats apart) there were few civilian deaths.[92] The truth here can be fairly safely put in the middle. Reilly seeks to discredit all the Catholic sources by criticizing those written in the aftermath of the Land Settlement. So he fails to give proper weight to the near-contemporary testimony of, for example, Bishop Lynch, who was writing within months that 'many priests, not a few religious, many more townspeople and two thousand soldiers were killed'.[93] In general, I see no reason to doubt that civilians were killed in significant numbers in Wexford.

It is important to bear in mind that there was a great deal of friction between the inhabitants and the recently arrived and none-too-welcome garrison. Wexford was a Confederate town and most of the leading townsmen had backed the radical Confederate line adopted by Cardinal Rinuccini – to put loyalty to

90 There is an especially clear account in Woolrych, *Britain in revolution*, pp 468–72, followed by Gentles, *New Model*, pp 366–72, Corish, 'The Cromwellian conquest', pp 340–3 and Scott Wheeler, *Cromwell in Ireland*, pp 96–100. The account in Reilly, *Cromwell: an honourable enemy* (pp 131–67), as against the tendentious commentary (pp 169–96), is sound. Gardiner, *Commonwealth and Protectorate* 1, 127–33 is, as ever, brilliant in his source evaluation, but on this occasion a bit weak on his claim that Cromwell was not in breach of the laws of war. 91 R.L., *The taking of Wexford. A letter from an eminent officer of the Army* (London, 1649). 92 Murphy, *Cromwell in Ireland*, pp 161ff; Reilly, *Cromwell: an honourable enemy*, pp 169–96, both refer to and discuss all the main sources, from both sides. 93 'Multi sacerdotes, nonnulli religiosi, plurimi cives et duo millia militum', in P.F. Moran (ed.), *Spicilegium Ossoriense* (3 vols, Dublin, 1875), 1, p. 341. Reilly fails to spot that this is written in 1650 not in the 1670s (and indeed refers to it is as by 'Fr' Lynch not by a Bishop). He does not seem to have read the compelling discussion of the Irish Catholic sources that does distinguish the probably unreliable from the probably reliable in Gardiner, *Commonweath*, 1, pp 131–2 and nn. In any case, there is a much more reliable exact contemporary source whose veracity simply cannot be impugned: Bodleian Library, Carte MSS 25, f. 720, Commissioners of Trust [viz Richard Bellings, Nicholas French, Gerald Fennell] to Ormond, written from Kilkenny, reported the fall of the town 'and all put to the sword'. I am grateful to Micheál Ó

the Church first and to the King second. Furthermore, the town had been a haven for pirates who had long preyed on Parliamentarian supply lines to its friends and supporters in Munster, and Cromwell himself commented on atrocities committed by the townsmen rather than by the garrison (the starving to death of Protestant prisoners in a locked chapel, and the drowning of about 150 other prisoners in a leaking hulk in the harbour).[94] The composition of the garrison inserted by Ormond under the agreement between himself and the more pragmatic Confederates caused a lot of friction, and Ormond had to agree to complement it with regiments of impeccable Confederate pedigree. This garrison was solidly Irish and Catholic. These were not people he could be expected to wish to treat mercifully. Yet all the evidence is that while there was a massacre, there was no deliberation about it. When I – like others – have called Drogheda Cromwell's Hiroshima and Wexford his Nagasaki, we were wrong. He was shamefaced about what happened at Wexford, and brought things back under control as soon as he could.

Despite Tom Reilly's attempt to minimize the number of civilian deaths, there can be no doubt that they took place. Whatever the reliability of the specific stories told later in Catholic sources, the correspondence emanating from the army is quite clear. What Cromwell does own up to is the deaths of many townspeople: 'of the former inhabitants, I believe scarce one in twenty can challenge any property in their houses. Most of them are run away and many of them killed in this service.'[95] Cromwell knew the garrison to be overwhelmingly 'outsiders', so this must be a reference to the deaths of civilians. This is also implied by his statement that many of the deaths were 'a just judgment upon them, causing them to become a prey to the soldier, who in their piracies had made preys of so many families, and made their bloods to answer the cruelties which they had exercised upon the lives of divers poor Protestants.'[96] These again are references not to the garrison, almost all of whom had arrived in the past few weeks (as Cromwell well knew), but to the inhabitants of the town who had been notoriously involved in piracy, and probably to alleged atrocities in which Protestant prisoners were starved and drowned years before.

All the letters and newsbooks on the Cromwellian side that reported the sack of the town acknowledged that when the defenders abandoned the battlements, the troops (presumably under their captains) scaled the walls and stormed through the town. Cromwell never says whether he attempted to restrain them, or whether he allowed events to take their course, although his silence is eloquent. All the other English accounts are silent on that too (again I do not think this silence is neutral). So although army sources claimed that many more were spared death at Wexford, the number killed in the first assault would

Siochrú for this reference. 94 L&S 1, pp 486–7. He does not make clear that these incidents had happened in 1641–2. 95 L&S 1, p. 487. 96 L&S 1, p. 486.

appear to be indiscriminately soldiers and civilians as one would expect with an army out of control.

Cromwell's letter home is edgy and defensive, with long digressions aimed to lay the blame on Synott for stalling the surrender, and particularly for dragging things out on the day of the assault. And Cromwell distances himself – although, significantly, not God – from what ensued.

> We intending better to this place than so great a ruin, hoping the town might be of more use to you and your army, yet God would not have it so; but by an unexpected providence in his righteous justice, brought a just judgment upon them ... I could have wished for their own good and the good of the garrison that they had been more moderate ... Thus it has pleased God to give into your hands this other mercy, for which, as for all, we pray God may have all the glory. Indeed your instruments are poor and weak and do nothing but through believing and that is the gift of God also.[97]

That the intention had been to secure the town by surrender on terms, that the storm and sack of the town were uncontrolled by the senior officers, that they needed to make clear that the Governor was to blame for not surrendering while he could, were confirmed, or at any rate reiterated, by all the English reports from Wexford back to London.

VII

The Drogheda massacre was a massacre. It was without straightforward parallel in seventeenth-century British and Irish history. There were occasions when 3,000 or more combatants were killed in a single engagement; there were occasions when a comparably high *proportion* of those on the losing side were killed. There were a few examples of the defeated being killed in cold blood, but probably not on the scale of Drogheda, and there were even fewer occasions when it would seem that significant numbers of civilians were killed. But there was nothing which matched it in scale or in the range of its brutalities.

Charles Carlton has tabulated deaths during the English Civil Wars. He says that there are nine battles in which more than 1,000 participants were killed, but in none of these was the death rate on either side above 25 per cent. Much the same is true of towns taken by storm. Even at Basing, the proportion of the defenders killed was around one quarter – 100 out of 300–400. Civilians were clearly killed in significant numbers (80 or so at Bolton by Rupert's soldiers probably the largest number) or in cold blood (as again by Rupert's men at

97 L&S 1, pp 486–8.

Leicester in late May 1645).[98] In Scotland, higher proportions of the defeated army were killed during and especially in the immediate hot aftermath of battle (one in three Covenanters at the battle of Aberdeen in September 1644; one in two at Auldearn on 9 May 1645;[99] and the Covenanters took their revenge at Philiphaugh on 13 September 1645 where half of Montrose's men were killed in hot blood and many more in cold blood, after General Leslie's undertaking of quarter was overruled by his council of war).[1] None of the numbers or percentages on these occasions reached the total killed at Drogheda.

Death-rates in the major battles in Ireland were comparable to those in Scotland,[2] although the slaughter of Lord Preston's Army at Dungan's Hill (8 August 1647) was certainly the highest proportionately (probably over 60 per cent) and perhaps absolutely of all the battles of the Wars of the Three Kingdoms.[3] The average death rate in all the set-piece battles in Ireland was roughly three times the rate in England (30 per cent as against 10 per cent). This was very much in line with the sixteenth-century wars in Ireland where bad faith and killings in cold blood had been commonplace in the early 1540s as in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, although the English did not return to the system of martial law and provost marshals described elsewhere in this volume for that earlier period.[4] No storm of an Irish town in the 1640s led to more than 100 deaths.

So the Drogheda massacre does stand out for its mercilessness, for its combination of ruthlessness and calculation, for its combination of hot- and

98 Carlton, *Going to the wars*, chapter 9 ('To slay and be slain'); though c.f. W. Coster, 'Massacre and codes of conduct in the English Civil Wars', in Levene and Roberts, *Massacre in History*, pp 92, 96, 98–100, who puts the number slain at Bolton at '78+'. He gives the largest number slain in cold blood in one place as the 120 soldiers who surrendered to Waller at the end of the battle of Cheriton (29 March 1644), most of whom were (or were thought to be) Irish. However, this figure is not sustained or justified in the only source Coster cites (J. Adair, *Roundhead General: a military biography of Sir William Waller* (London, 1969), p. 148). 99 E. Furgol, 'The civil wars in Scotland', in John Kenyon and Jane Ohlmeyer (eds), *The Civil Wars: a military history of England, Scotland and Ireland, 1638–1660* (Oxford, 1998), pp 58–9. 1 C.V. Wedgwood, *Montrose* (London, 1952, 1998), pp 110–15. For a context for Scottish massacres, see A. Macinnes, '"Slaughter under trust": clan massacres and British state formation', in Levene and Roberts, *Massacre in history*, pp 127–48 2 Lenihan, *Confederate Catholics at war, 1641–49*, chapters 5–6 and appendix 8. See index entries. 3 Scott Wheeler, *Cromwell in Ireland*, pp 34–5, thinks 3,000 out of 5,000 men in Preston's army were killed at Dungan's Hill, and that 'the English put to the sword all prisoners who were "formerly of our side, and all English"'. See also, P. Lenihan, 'The army of Leinster and the battle of Dungan's Hill', *Irish Sword*, 18 (1991), 139–53; A.W.M. Kerr, *Ironside in Ireland: the remarkable career of Lieutenant General Michael Jones* (London, 1923), pp 69–75 4 Probably the best introduction to martial law as it was (brutally and corruptly) used in Ireland is D. Edwards, 'Ideology and experience: Spencer's *View* and martial law in Ireland' in H. Morgan (ed.), *Political ideology in Ireland, 1541–1641* (Dublin, 1999), pp 127–57, or, in a more focused way, in D. Edwards, 'Beyond reform: martial law and the Tudor reconquest of Ireland', *History Ireland*, 5:2 (1997), 16–21.

cold-bloodiness. With as much bloodstained ink having already been spilt about it, this essay adds nothing to what we know about what happened – except for a reproof to those who continue to misrepresent the plain facts. It simply says that we need to be careful not to exaggerate the blind anger and prejudice of the man responsible for it, Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell had, in my view, been building up to an explosion of anger against anyone who defied God's judgment in the wars of 1642–7. Those who, in the wake of what he took to be a conflict resolved, continued to fight for the family and the office God had blasted – be they English, Anglo-Irish or Irish – must be punished for the innocent blood they had shed. At Drogheda, he killed English, Anglo-Irish and Irish indiscriminately, if anything singling out the English for severity: their heads were the ones which against the custom of those wars were displayed on pikes; those who were spared death and transported to slave-conditions in Barbados were Irish. In establishing that Cromwell was content to undertake an *in terrorem* massacre at Drogheda, we should distance ourselves from too easily making him the scapegoat for the bigotry of others in the English conquest and miscalled Cromwellian Settlement. Paradoxically, by blaming Cromwell for the much more lasting horrors of the Commonwealth period in Ireland, we let those really responsible off the hook.

not guilty ??