God's Executioner

Oliver Cromwell and the Conquest of Ireland

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royalist troops remained in captivity unless freed following the intervention of relatives and friends. Bizarrely, Ormond did enjoy one small success at this time. While fleeing south after the battle, he convinced the important parliamentary outpost at Ballyshannon in County Kildare, bypassed on the march to Dublin, to surrender by informing the commander that the royalists had in fact triumphed at Rathmines. On arriving in Kilkenny the marquis set about rallying dispersed forces around the country, and marched northwards to assist those towns he identified as vulnerable to parliamentary attack. Colonel Jones, anxious to exploit his victory, moved quickly against Drogheda, which Inchiquin had recaptured for the royalists only a few weeks earlier. On 11 August, he brought 3,000 infantry and 800 cavalry before the town, along with four cannon transported up the coast by ship. Two days later, however, the parliamentarians raised the siege 'in some confusion and haste' on receiving news of Ormond's approach. His confidence temporarily restored, the lord lieutenant resolved 'once again to attempt the reduction of Dublin', which he believed, despite all the evidence to the contrary, to be 'more feasible than ever'.[61] Not surprisingly, the royalist advance on the capital never materialised, as word arrived shortly afterwards of the appearance of English ships off Dublin. Oliver Cromwell had finally arrived.

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Cromwell at Drogheda and Wexford

Many of their fellow subjects have they slaine
Cryinge for quarter, though too much in vaine.[1]
THOMAS COBBE, '*A poeme uppon Cromwell*' (1650)

On Wednesday, 11 July 1649, around five in the evening, after months of careful preparation, Oliver Cromwell finally left London to join the vast expeditionary army assembling to the west. Parliamentary news-sheets described his almost regal departure, in a coach drawn by six gallant Flanders mares, accompanied by a large entourage, including 'very many great officers of the army'. Curious onlookers watched him leave the capital, with 'trumpets sounding almost to the shaking of Charing Cross had it been now standing'.[2] Cromwell travelled first to the port of Bristol, which declared a public holiday in his honour, and spent the next month organising for the forthcoming campaign. Westminster successfully raised £100,000 in cash, an enormous sum at the time, mainly in the form of loans from London merchants. The English parliament's ability to finance the New Model Army gave it a decisive advantage over the royalists, and the marquis of Ormond later described this war chest as 'more formidable' than any military strength at Cromwell's disposal.[3] Access to cash enabled Cromwell to purchase food and other commodities in England, independently of the slow-moving central bureaucracy, and to quell discontent among the army rank and file, by providing pay in advance of their departure for Ireland.

Cromwell's meticulous preparations, however, delayed the expedition, creating serious logistical problems in England and Wales. Local communities complained of growing disorders as troops passed through the countryside and deserters scavenged for

food. In late July, already well into the traditional campaigning season, Cromwell finally issued a general order to assemble at Milford Haven, despite increasingly bleak news from Ireland. Reports suggested that royalist forces, led by Ormond, continued to sweep all before them, threatening the few surviving parliamentary enclaves, including Dublin. In early August, Colonel George Monck unexpectedly arrived back in England, bearing news about the fall of Dundalk to Lord Inchiquin. Cromwell and the Council of State had known for months about Monck's temporary alliance of convenience with the native Irish general, Owen Roe O'Neill, but kept it secret. The loss of Dundalk, along with the desertion of hundreds of Monck's men to the royalist side, threatened to expose this damaging information to the public. In an attempt to forestall any backlash, particularly among the troops assembling for Ireland, the Council decided to take pre-emptive measures, with Monck acting as a willing scapegoat for the regime. Parliament publicly criticised his cooperation with the Catholic Irish but took no further action against the colonel. Nonetheless, the entire episode cast a shadow over the impending invasion.

A week later, however, Cromwell received word of Ormond's defeat at Rathmines, which he described as 'an astonishing mercy'.[4] In addition to routing the largest royalist field army in Ireland, and clearing the way for an unopposed landing at Dublin, Jones's victory provided clear evidence to the parliamentarians that God looked favourably on their endeavours. Indeed, the earl of Leicester believed that many of Cromwell's men would simply have refused to go to Ireland 'if they had not been encouraged by this extraordinary victory'.[5] Although the earl exaggerated the level of discontent in army ranks, news of Rathmines undoubtedly invigorated the parliamentary campaign at a crucial moment. Shortly afterwards, on 13 August, the invasion fleet set sail, with Cromwell and thirty-five ships heading directly for Dublin. Henry Ireton and seventy-seven ships departed from Milford Haven that same day, destined for the southern coast, to discover whether any of the Munster ports held by Irish Protestants would declare for parliament. For the moment they remained loyal to the king, so Ireton changed course for Dublin,

joined by a third squadron of eighteen ships, commanded by Colonel Thomas Horton. Cromwell, travelling abroad for the first time in his life, suffered greatly while crossing the Irish Sea. The army chaplain, Hugh Peters, described him as looking 'as sea-sick as ever I saw any man in my life'.[6] After two stormy days, the flotilla arrived off Dublin, and the troops landed at Ringsend, just outside the city. Large crowds and celebratory shots of artillery greeted Cromwell's arrival. The general made a short speech, praising God for the safe passage of the invasion force. He promised rewards for all those carrying on 'that great work against the barbarous and bloodthirsty Irish', including 'the propagating of the Gospel of Christ', and talked of 'restoring that bleeding nation to its former happiness and tranquillity'.[7] Cromwell's inflammatory words received rapturous applause from an audience of Irish Protestants eager to take the offensive, avenge the settlers killed in 1641–2, and regain control of the country.

As his forces gradually assembled in Dublin, Cromwell planned for the forthcoming campaign against the town of Drogheda, 30 miles to the north of the capital. Control of Drogheda would open the gateway into Ulster as well as protecting his rear while the New Model Army marched south against the former confederate heartland in Leinster and Munster. Anxious to ensure order in Dublin after his departure, Cromwell issued a public proclamation on 24 August, prohibiting soldiers from harming civilians. Furthermore, he encouraged farmers and merchants to bring their goods to market, promising them 'ready money'. As long as civilians paid all contributions, and did not disturb the peace, they would have 'free leave and liberty to live at home with their families and goods', at least until the issuance of fresh protections the following January.[8] This declaration, along with the subsequent execution of a handful of soldiers for unlicensed pillaging, has been used to suggest that Cromwell did not harbour any hostility towards the ordinary Catholic inhabitants of Ireland. In fact, his actions represented nothing more than prudent military practice, motivated by genuine necessity. Starting a campaign so late in the season, with a large army and a limited supply base, he desperately required a cooperative local community to provide vital commodities, especially fresh food. Moreover, the New Model Army maintained strict internal

discipline at all times, crucial for preventing the spread of disorder among the ranks.

Cromwell's conciliatory policy towards the civilian population unsettled the Catholic leadership. Sir Edmond Butler, governor of County Wexford, wrote to Ormond complaining that he had experienced great difficulty in preventing the country people from making terms with the parliamentarians, as 'the rogues allure them by speaking that they are for the liberty of the commoners'. The earl of Castlehaven concurred, as he noted incredulously how Cromwell paid a local inhabitant £5 for a night's lodging.[9] In contrast, each day fresh petitions reached Ormond, detailing abuses committed by royalist troops against the inhabitants. In the absence of regular pay, royalists simply seized whatever they needed, sometimes in exchange for worthless credit notes. The lord lieutenant published a declaration for the punishment of serious offences, but to no avail. The parliamentarians, for their part, as the royalist Sir Lewis Dyve noted wearily, 'had money to pay for what they took'.[10] Throughout the next four years of the Cromwellian conquest, elements of the local population played a key role in sustaining English armies, both in garrisons and on campaign. Cromwell's first military action in Ireland, however, soon exposed the true nature of the parliamentary mission.

The marquis of Ormond was already in Drogheda when news arrived of Cromwell's landing at Ringsend. Following the defeat at Rathmines, the marquis had issued a defiant declaration, forbidding royalists to capitulate to the enemy 'upon any terms save in the language of the sword, but upon all occasions to fight it out to the last man'. Now, in the face of a dramatic new threat, he summoned a council of war to discuss military strategy.[11] Ormond, vigorously supported by the earl of Castlehaven, wanted to fortify Drogheda and draw the parliamentarians into a protracted siege, depleting their resources, and allowing the royalists time to re-assemble a significant field army. Colonels Warren, Wall and Byrne, the three regimental commanders charged with holding the town, disagreed, and argued unsuccessfully in favour of a tactical withdrawal.[12] Before departing south, Ormond appointed Sir Arthur Aston as garrison commander. Aston had served in Russia, Poland and Germany

during the Thirty Years War, before returning to England to fight for King Charles I against parliament. He lost a leg in a riding accident, but as governor of Oxford, the royalist capital during the English civil war, he acquired a fearsome reputation as a strict disciplinarian. The royalist Edward Hyde mischievously described him as 'having the good fortune to be much esteemed when he is not known and very much detested where he was'.[13] An English Catholic, experienced in foreign warfare, Aston must have felt very much at home among the eclectic mix of Irish and English soldiers, both Protestant and Catholic, who comprised the royalist garrison of Drogheda.

According to folklore, Aston claimed that 'the man who could take Drogheda could take Hell', an unlikely statement from such a seasoned veteran given the precarious situation faced by the defenders, although they did enjoy some advantages. The river Boyne divided the town in two, and if Cromwell attacked from the south, Aston would be able to withdraw across the river, using a drawbridge that could be pulled up behind his retreating troops. Moreover, as Ormond's forces slowly regrouped following the debacle at Rathmines they posed a growing threat to any besieging army. The impressively high medieval town walls, however, had not been designed to withstand cannon fire, and Cromwell possessed the largest artillery train yet seen in Ireland. Aston ordered the construction of obstacles behind the walls, but could do little else to prevent the inevitable breach in Drogheda's defences. A lack of cavalry limited attempts to gather supplies before the siege began, and made sorties almost impossible once Cromwell's vanguard reached the outskirts of the town. Finally, the defenders suffered from severe shortages of key military supplies, such as gunpowder, match and shot. Ormond, supervising developments from a vantage point some 20 miles away, frequently promised to send the necessary materials, but despite Aston's desperate pleas, he provided little apart from encouraging words and some additional manpower.

Cromwell, his arrangements complete, departed from Dublin in great style, with trumpets sounding, drums beating and colours flying. He arrived before Drogheda on 3 September, followed shortly afterwards by his siege guns, transported by ship from Dublin. The

parliamentarians spent a week preparing to assault the town, and on 10 September Cromwell issued a summons to surrender, warning Aston that 'if this be refused you will have no cause to blame me'.[14] On receiving a defiant rejection from the royalist commander, Cromwell ordered the white flag over the camp replaced by a red ensign, and the bombardment began in earnest. The night before the summons, Sir Edmund Verney, an English Protestant gentleman, had written to the lord lieutenant from inside Drogheda. Verney had served under Ormond earlier in the decade against the Catholic Irish, but now stood side by side with his previous opponents against a new enemy. Although fully aware of the impending parliamentary assault, Verney exuded confidence in his letter, 'being in great hopes and expectation that the service I am at present engaged in will receive a happy issue'. He warmly complimented the royalist officers, especially Colonels Warren and Wall, describing them as his 'most intimate comrades', and insisted that the ordinary soldiers were equally 'all in heart and courage'. Verney concluded a review of the defences by stating that he little feared 'what the enemy can do forcibly against us', but nonetheless he urged Ormond to move towards Drogheda, in order to distract Cromwell and break up the siege.[15] The marquis received this letter the following day, as the parliamentary artillery began to shatter the town walls, but he remained a mere spectator to the unfolding tragedy. Within forty-eight hours, Verney, Warren, Wall and Aston were all dead, along with approximately 2,500 officers and men of the garrison, and an indeterminate number of civilians.

The storming of Drogheda on 11 September shocked contemporary opinion and established Cromwell's reputation for cruelty and savagery, which has persisted in Ireland until the present day. And yet, despite all the subsequent condemnation and outrage, as well as some crude attempts at justification, doubts persist over what exactly happened on that day. Not surprisingly, few eyewitness accounts survive from the royalist side, although hundreds of the garrison did manage to slip away over the north wall in the confusion of battle. Many of these men made their way to Ormond or Inchiquin, and reported what they had seen. Unfortunately, apart from the

reflections of the Anglican clergyman, Dean Nicholas Bernard, the town's inhabitants left no diaries or letters describing the tragic events. Petitions presented to Ormond over the next twelve months, in addition to those dating from the Restoration in 1660, contain some information on individual fatalities but little else. As a result, we must rely heavily on parliamentary statements, with all the attendant problems of bias (deliberate or otherwise) and a lack of corroborating evidence. The following reconstruction is based almost entirely on the reports of those actually present at Drogheda, in an attempt to separate fact from fiction, and reality from propaganda, be it parliamentarian or royalist.

The key evidence consists of the letters composed shortly after the event by Oliver Cromwell, who led his troops through the breach of the town's southern walls. Cromwell's correspondence provides a first-hand account of that dramatic day, much of which is verified by another key parliamentary participant, Colonel John Hewson.[16] Cromwell's first letter, to the president of the Council of State John Bradshaw, was written five days after the storming of Drogheda. In it Cromwell speaks of 'stout resistance' provided by the enemy. The defenders repelled the initial assault, but a second attack drove them back from their entrenchments within the walls. Cromwell then explains how the parliamentarians refused to grant quarter, 'having the day before summoned the town'. He believed the entire garrison was subsequently killed, including 'almost all their prime soldiers'. Cromwell heard of only one officer escaping, and he believed the enemy was 'filled upon this with much terror'. In typical fashion, he ascribed 'the glory of this to God alone', before concluding that 'this bitterness will save much effusion of blood'.[17]

The second letter, written the following day to William Lenthall, speaker of the parliament at Westminster, was clearly intended for public consumption. It describes in vivid detail the artillery barrage and the opening of a breach in the walls. Cromwell conceded that the enemy had provided stiff opposition, inflicting 'considerable' losses, before they began to retreat in some disorder, with the parliamentarians in hot pursuit. In the confusion, the garrison failed to pull up the drawbridge over the Boyne in time, allowing the New

Model Army to cross over to the north side of the town. Meanwhile, Sir Arthur Aston had occupied a fort called Millmount on top of a steep hill, not far from the breach in the walls, 'a place very strong and of difficult access, being exceedingly high, having a good graft, and strongly palisadoed'. Cromwell simply stated that 'our men getting up to them, were ordered by me to put them all to the sword'. How exactly the parliamentary troops managed to take Millmount is not recorded, and Hewson sheds no additional light on this issue. The slaughter continued elsewhere and according to Cromwell 'being in the heat of the action, I forbade them to spare any that were in arms in the town'. He remarked ironically how on the Sunday before the assault, the inhabitants celebrated mass in St Peter's church, having expelled the local Protestants from the building. Two days later 'in this very place near one thousand of them were put to the sword, fleeing thither for safety'. Clerical robes provided no protection, and Cromwell witnessed the summary execution of a number of 'friars', including two killed the following day in cold blood.[18]

After describing the action in graphic detail, Cromwell then proceeded to justify his actions. In a reference to the massacre of Protestant settlers in 1641–2, he claimed that the killings at Drogheda constituted 'the righteous judgement of God upon these barbarous wretches, who have imbrued their hands in so much innocent blood'. The Catholic Irish, however, never controlled Drogheda during the 1640s, as the town remained in either parliamentary or royalist hands until Cromwell's arrival. It appeared, therefore, to be a highly unsuitable target for the purposes of revenge. Moreover, in addition to Catholic troops, the garrison contained English and Irish Protestants, who could not possibly have taken part in the events of 1641–2. Cromwell, fully briefed by Michael Jones and other Irish parliamentary supporters after landing in Dublin, knew this, but parliament had predicated the invasion of Ireland on the need to punish Catholic rebels for the massacre of Protestant settlers, and the new regime desperately needed military success to bolster flagging popularity on the domestic front. Like Charles I before them, the defenders of Drogheda, both Irish and English, Catholic and

Protestant, were adjudged guilty of prolonging the conflict unnecessarily, and they suffered accordingly. In a purely military sense, Cromwell's severity set a marker for the campaign of conquest, and once again he expressed the hope that the harsh tactics at Drogheda might discourage further resistance and 'prevent the effusion of blood for the future'.[19]

Despite all the self-congratulatory and self-justifying rhetoric, Cromwell implicitly conceded that something terrible had happened at Drogheda. He wrote that without 'the satisfactory grounds to such actions', outlined in his letters to Bradshaw and Lenthall, the scale of the slaughter could not 'but work remorse and regret'.[20] This sentence, largely ignored by historians, strongly suggests a man ill at ease with his conscience. As always, Cromwell found solace and comfort in his religious convictions, the unshakeable belief that he was doing God's will. Moreover, although this savage act sent shock waves throughout Ireland and abroad, in refusing quarter to enemy troops Cromwell had acted entirely within the accepted conventions of warfare at the time. The commander of Drogheda, Sir Arthur Aston, had refused a summons to surrender, thereby technically at least forfeiting the lives of the garrison in the event of a successful assault. Indeed, centuries later the duke of Wellington remarked, 'that it has always been understood that the defenders of a fortress stormed have no claim to quarter'.[21] So why did the events at Drogheda in September 1649 prove so controversial at the time and continue to be contested even today? It is important to stress that in the context of an Irish siege during the 1640s, or indeed one in England or Scotland, the sheer scale of the killing was simply unprecedented. Even after the fall of the town, Cromwell did not bother to preserve any prisoners for ransom or future exchanges with the enemy. The message seemed to be that his opponents could expect little mercy in what amounted to a war of extermination.

Cromwell's account raises a number of questions, principally relating to the nature and extent of enemy casualties. The two letters above are filled with internal contradictions, perhaps understandable given the confusion of battle. When writing to Bradshaw, Cromwell estimated the garrison of the town to number around 3,000, a figure

based on a captured royalist muster roll compiled shortly before the town fell, and on his belief that the parliamentarians 'put to the sword the whole number of defendants'.[22] He speculated that no more than thirty soldiers, subsequently shipped to Barbados, escaped with their lives. In his account to Lenthall, however, he lists the casualties as somewhere in the region of 2,000, along with the officers seized when the last strongholds surrendered. Later in the same report, he speculates that up to 1,000 perished in the vicinity of St Peter's, having fled there for safety.[23] Did this 1,000 consist entirely of garrison troops, or in the chaos of the assault did civilians also perish? Uncertainty also surrounds events at Millmount. This imposing fortress would have proved difficult to storm, and yet it appears as if Aston and the other defenders threw down their weapons after no more than a cursory show of resistance. Cromwell specifies in the letter to Lenthall that he alone ordered the execution of all the prisoners, but why did Aston surrender before obtaining sufficient guarantees that his life and those of his men would be spared? Perhaps, given his experience of warfare on the Continent and in England, he simply presumed they would be taken prisoner, to be ransomed or exchanged. The alternative explanation is that somebody offered the defenders of Millmount quarter, which Cromwell subsequently overturned, as he had expressly forbidden his men 'to spare any that were in arms in the town'.[24]

A parliamentary broadsheet, published in London in early October, provides some insight into Aston's fate. According to *A Perfect Diurnall of Some Passages in Parliament*, Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Axtell went with twelve men to the top of the mount to confer with the garrison commander. They tried to convince him to surrender, but Aston 'was very stubborn speaking very big words'. Axtell persevered, eventually persuading the defenders to hand over their arms, at which time they were 'all slain'.[25] A royalist eyewitness account agrees with this version of events, but adds another vital piece of information. Garrett Dungan, one of the 'many men and some officers' who escaped from Drogheda, managed to reach Lord Inchiquin's camp, nearly forty miles away at Castlejordan. Inchiquin recorded Dungan's story in a letter to the marquis of Ormond.

According to Dungan, Aston was killed 'after quarter given by the officer that came first there', presumably Axtell.[26] This same Axtell subsequently gained a fearsome reputation in Ireland for brutality, and was temporarily suspended from active service in 1651, after executing eighteen civilians in retaliation for the deaths of some soldiers under his command. It may well be that Axtell simply broke his promise and slaughtered the helpless prisoners. More likely, and as Cromwell made clear in his letter, the decision to kill these men rested solely with the commander-in-chief. Such a calculated act of cold-blooded murder, not taken in the heat of action, was not only highly dishonourable but also a clear breach of the contemporary military code. Two years later, in 1651, Henry Ireton, Cromwell's son-in-law and replacement as commander-in-chief, dealt with a similar case in a very different matter. Ireton summoned a council of war to examine charges against Colonel Tothill, accused of executing troops who had surrendered on terms to a junior officer. The colonel argued that he possessed the authority to override a subordinate officer's actions, but the council disagreed and stripped Tothill of his command. Ireton worried that the punishment 'fell short of the justice of God required therein to the acquitting of the army from the guilt of so foul a sin'. He notified the royalists of the court martial, and released other prisoners without exchange or ransom, but he blamed a subsequent military setback on Tothill's earlier 'violation of faith'.[27] This case received extensive coverage in parliamentary news-sheets in London, and the parallels with his actions at Drogheda must have troubled Cromwell.

Dungan's tempered account of the storming of Drogheda provides a fascinating counter-balance to parliamentary reports. He confirmed Cromwell's responsibility for the massacre of the garrison, but related that 'many were privately saved by officers and soldiers'. This suggests that, like Ireton two years later, not everybody in the New Model Army shared their commander's views on how best to deal with the enemy. Intriguingly, Dungan insisted that a number of the leading royalist officers, such as Sir Edmund Verney and Colonel John Warren, were still alive twenty-four hours after the assault, although he could shed no light on their subsequent fate.[28]

This corresponds with later reports of the execution of these men in the days following the fall of Drogheda, another highly dishonourable act, as according to the Continental veteran, Sir James Turner, 'in such cases mercy is the more Christian, the more honourable, and the more ordinary way in our wars in Europe'.[29] It appears, however, as if the accepted military conventions did not apply in the case of the Catholic Irish and their royalist allies. In addition to Dungan, a number of other officers, such as Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Kavanagh, managed to escape the carnage. Captain Arthur Dillon also fled the doomed town and reported to Ormond on the 'putting to the sword of all the garrison', while Captain Tadhg Connor, left for dead, 'the rest of his men being all killed', slipped away under cover of darkness.[30]

If, as the evidence suggests, some of the garrison fled over the north wall of the town, and the parliamentarians spared other defenders, then the casualty figures presented by Cromwell and others, based on the captured muster rolls, are clearly inaccurate. The real controversy, however, revolves around the issue of civilian deaths. It seems highly unlikely that while storming a town in the face of stiff resistance, 10,000 parliamentary troops would at all times have distinguished, or been able to distinguish, between enemy soldiers and non-combatants. The account of Dean Bernard, an ardent royalist and Protestant cleric, who had resided in the town throughout the 1640s, appears to confirm this. Although no friend of the parliamentarians, Bernard was a keen advocate of Protestant unity in Ireland, to counter the influence of 'popery, heresies, blasphemies and such like errors that strike at the foundation of religion'. In a series of sermons composed in the months after the storming of the town, he tried to persuade Drogheda's Protestants not to quarrel among themselves, by reflecting on the events of early September. The dean reminded them of the threat to their lives and goods, spared 'by a special providence of God', and similarly how divine intervention saved hundreds of Protestants a few months later when a gallery packed with people collapsed during a service at a meeting house, but nobody suffered serious injuries.[31] Historians have seized on Bernard's comments as proof that no wholesale massacre of

civilians took place at Drogheda, as the population apparently survived the initial assault and continued to thrive months later. In support of this case, the extant minutes of the corporation assembly, which begin on 6 April 1649, and continue through the 1650s, make no mention of the siege. These minutes, however, were not actually written up until after Cromwell's departure from Drogheda, and the fact they ignore the parliamentary assault, the biggest event in the town's history, is like records from London in 1666 not mentioning the Great Fire. After all the 'troubles' and upheaval of the summer, parliamentary sympathisers may simply have been trying to present an appearance to the world of business as usual.[32] As for Bernard, he only referred to the town's Protestant inhabitants and made no comment on the fate of the Catholics.

In many ways, a subsequent passage in Bernard's sermons is far more illuminating about the realities of warfare and the horrors of the storming of Drogheda. He describes how, 'in the heat of prosecution' immediately following the assault, parliamentary troops shot through the windows of his house, where over thirty Protestants had gathered seeking sanctuary, killing one person and seriously wounding another. The soldiers broke into the building, discharging their weapons, before the timely intervention of an officer known to the dean restored order.[33] This account raises a number of key issues. According to Bernard, the soldiers fired on civilians sheltering indoors, which belies claims that the parliamentarians only targeted those in arms. Moreover, the group was only saved from further harm when an officer recognised Bernard and identified his companions as Protestants. The implications of this sequence of events for the town's Catholics do not require any further explanation. A more detailed relation of Bernard's experiences, apparently penned after the Restoration, alleged that the parliamentarians attacked the dean's house because of his well-known loyalty to the king and Ormond.[34] This second document, written to demonstrate Bernard's royalist credentials, nonetheless confirms the basic thrust of the earlier narrative. Therefore, according to the one surviving civilian account of the storming of Drogheda, troops of the New Model Army deliberately attacked non-combatants in their homes.

During the 1660s, petitions to the court of claims, established to resolve land disputes following the restoration of Charles II, listed a number of people, including Captain Thomas Archer and Robert Hartlepoole, as 'slain at Drogheda in his majesty's service'. Alongside these military personnel, however, others, such as James Fleming, are described as 'murdered', while Henry Mortimer, an alderman of the town, was killed 'being then about seventy years of age'.[35] Cromwell similarly distinguished between soldiers and non-combatants in his reports to England. On 27 September 1649, he sent Lenthall an update of developments in Ireland, along with specific details of enemy losses at Drogheda. In addition to the 3,000 military casualties, the list included the phrase 'and many inhabitants'. Unfortunately, the original letter does not appear to have survived, but parliament ordered a copy to be published on 2 October.[36] Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, Thomas Carlyle claimed, without any evidence whatsoever, that the offending phrase must have been added in a later printed compilation, while C. H. Firth suggested that the printers in 1649 may have tagged the casualty list on to Cromwell's letter, perhaps on parliament's command.[37] Carlyle's supposition is easy to dismiss, as the original pamphlet from October 1649, complete with the incriminating phrase, still exists. As for Firth's theory, the parliamentary regime in England took a close interest in the world of publishing, and passed an act in late September to control output. John Field and Edward Husband, official printers to parliament, risked losing their positions if they tampered with official documents in any way. Moreover, Firth never explained why parliament might have added something so important to one of Cromwell's letters, without his approval. Oftentimes, the most straightforward answer is the correct one. In his report, Cromwell, who had witnessed the assault on Drogheda at close quarters, simply acknowledged that the casualties included many civilians.

In deciding to publish Cromwell's dispatches from Ireland, parliament publicly signalled the support of members for his conduct in the field. The general received a letter of thanks, taking notice 'that the House doth approve of the execution done at

Drogheda as an act both of justice to them and mercy to others who may be warned by it'.[38] The parliamentarians fully understood the importance of this victory in bolstering support for the Commonwealth regime in England. The Council of State ordered that Captain Samuel Porter be paid £100 'for his pains and charges in his journey bringing the news of taking Drogheda', which was officially proclaimed in churches across London.[39] In Ireland, Cromwell proved eager to exploit the psychological advantage the massacre gave him over his opponents. On 12 September, the day after taking the town, he wrote to the commander of Dundalk, the nearest royalist garrison, demanding that the town capitulate without delay in order to avoid a similar fate. The defenders, however, had already fled, while Carlingford and Newry subsequently surrendered without a fight. As word of Cromwell's severity at Drogheda spread throughout Ireland, it appeared as if his harsh policy might indeed pay immediate military dividends.

Outside Ireland, news of the massacre travelled fast, as letters flooded back to England, a number of which were subsequently published. Bulstrode Whitelocke, a leading figure in the parliamentary regime, acknowledged that the various accounts provided different perspectives on events at Drogheda, but 'they all agreed in the not giving of quarter'.[40] In some instances, parliamentary soldiers returning home from service in Ireland provided eyewitness testimony. Thomas Wood, for example, fought at Drogheda, and regaled his family in England the following year with colourful and lurid stories about the killing of civilians, which his brother later published.[41] In early October 1649, reports reached the Continent of Cromwell's bloody victory in Ireland. The Venetian ambassador in Paris received a letter from England (dated late September 1649), which told of 'a sanguinary encounter' at Drogheda, which according to the exiled royalist John Evelyn, 'makes us very sad, forerunning the loss of all Ireland'.[42] Shortly afterwards, Charles Stuart's secretary, Sir Edward Nicholas, also in Paris, wrote to Ormond about Drogheda, 'and the cruelty used by those inhumane rebels that took it, which had made a great impression of grief in his Majesty'.[43] By November royalists circulated detailed accounts of the killing of officers in

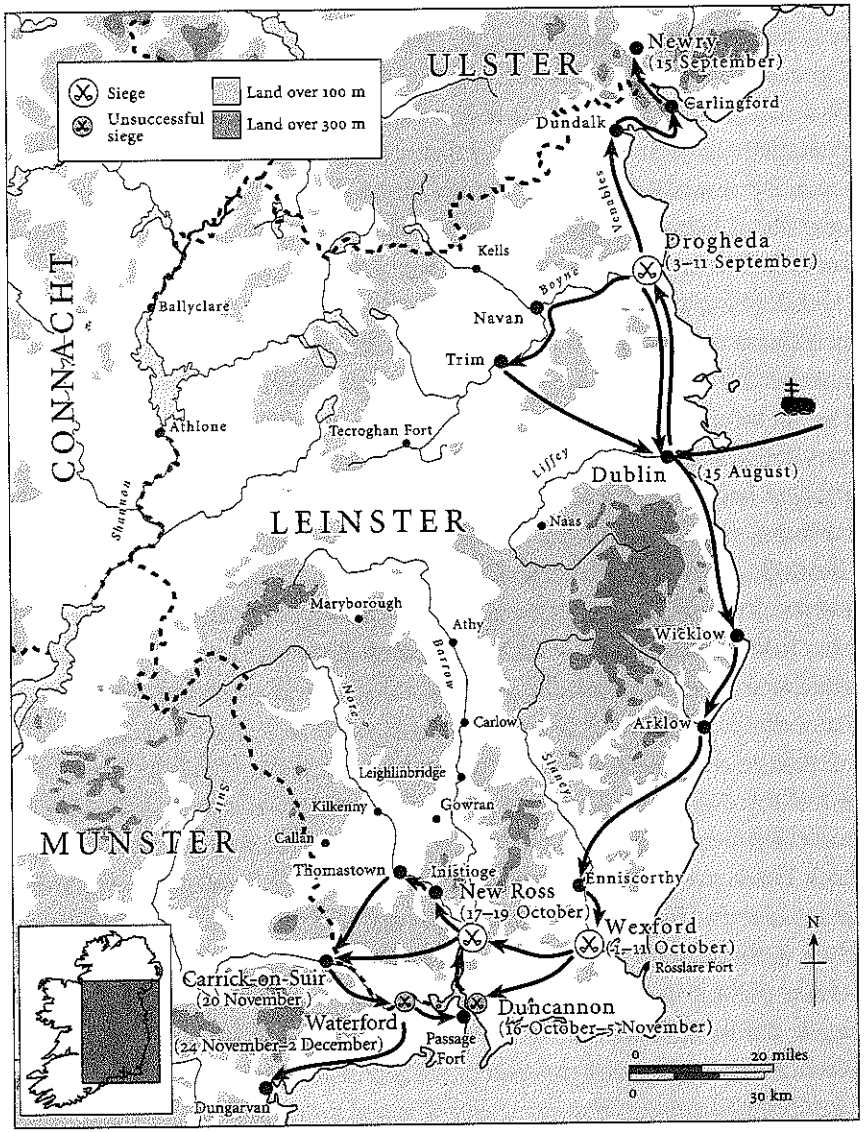
breach of quarter. James Buck, for example, wrote to Sir Ralph Verney describing the cold-blooded murder of his brother Edmund as he walked alongside Cromwell three days after the town fell, and the execution of Colonel Boyle around the same time, allegedly summoned away to his death while dining with Lady Moore.[44]

Despite the best efforts of the parliamentarian regime, underground royalist news-sheets continued to appear regularly in London throughout 1649, publishing bitter diatribes against the new political order. The English press had become increasingly preoccupied with the affairs of Ireland during the course of the year, and eagerly awaited news of Cromwell's progress. On 22 September, a vessel from Ireland brought information that Drogheda had fallen, with the loss of 3,000 defenders. *The Moderate Messenger*, a pro-parliamentary publication, wanted to believe the news, 'but reports are commonly accompanied with such incredible stories, that it diminisheth that credit which otherwise would be given thereto'.[45] The royalist press also responded cautiously, with the editor of *Mercurius Elencticus* declaring that he would not render himself 'so ridiculous as others have done, in reporting falsities improbable, nay impossible things, to please the credulous readers'.[46] Other news-sheets simply denied the veracity of recent stories from Ireland, claiming as late as the first week in October that Drogheda still held out against Cromwell. The parliamentarian press mocked the unwillingness of royalists to accept the growing body of evidence about the storming of the town, particularly following the publication of letters from Hugh Peters and Cromwell on 2 October. Peters, however, did not witness events at Drogheda, as he only arrived in Dublin from Milford Haven on 11 September with the final detachments of the expeditionary force, and one critic poked fun at his precise figure of 3,552 enemy losses, 'not a man more or less'.[47] Casualty lists were notoriously inaccurate in the early modern period, and frequently manipulated by the victors. Following the rout of Ormond's army at Rathmines in early August, *Mercurius Elencticus* claimed that the parliamentarians had tampered with a letter from Dublin giving details of the battle, doubling the number of royalist casualties 'with an ink of a blacker temper than the letter

was written in'.[48] Similarly, *The Man in the Moon* questioned the figures from Drogheda, and declared that the besiegers themselves had lost 3,000 men.[49] In an effort to convince a sceptical public, the parliamentary press published Cromwell's report, including his full casualty list, although a handful of news-sheets, perhaps uncomfortable with the large-scale slaughter of civilians, did not include the incriminating phrase 'and many inhabitants'.[50]

All pro-parliamentary accounts, however, accepted Cromwell's justification that events at Drogheda would hasten the end of the conflict in Ireland. An official government publication insisted that the sacking of the town had so terrified the enemy, 'that they scarce can make a defensive war against us, but leave us everywhere masters of the field'.[51] According to another report, 'though some are of opinion, that the enemy's rage will be the greater, by the slaughter at Tredagh, yet we find the terror great that is upon them'.[52] Unable to refute the evidence any longer, the royalist press instead focused on the 'inhuman cruelty' of the parliamentary forces, and for the first time stories about a wholesale massacre of civilians began to emerge. In early October, *Mercurius Elencticus*, until then the most moderate of the royalist news-sheets (at least in its Irish coverage), made a number of specific and shocking allegations. The dead at Drogheda included women and children, while many officers died after quarter had been promised them, 'in the most cruel manner they could invent, cutting off their members, and pieces of their flesh, which they wore in their hats triumphantly two days after'.[53] *The Man in the Moon* picked up on the allegations of civilian deaths the following week, claiming that the figure of 3,000 dead included 2,000 women and children. Drawing a direct comparison between Cromwell and the Catholic rebels in 1641–2, the editorial condemned the 'barbarous cruelty in that abhorrid act [at Drogheda] not to be paralleled by any of the former massacres of the Irish'.[54] Whether based on first-hand accounts from Ireland or rumours circulating around London, these stories added to Cromwell's growing reputation for cruelty.

Back in Ireland, the marquis of Ormond admitted in a letter to Charles Stuart that it was 'not to be imagined how great the terror is that those successes and the power of the rebels have struck into this



Map 3 Cromwell's Campaign, August–December 1649

people', while another contemporary believed that the royalists lost 'both courage and resolution' as a result of the defeat.[55] Basing his account of developments on the reports of survivors, Ormond quickly put his pen to work, denouncing the actions of Cromwell

and the New Model Army. On 18 September, he informed Prince Rupert of the fall of the town, with the 'bloody execution of almost all that were within it'.[56] The following week, in a letter to Charles, Ormond accused Cromwell of 'much more than anything I ever heard of in breach of faith and bloody inhumanity'.[57] He compared the behaviour of the parliamentarians to that of the royalists, giving as an example the storming of a small fortification outside Dublin the previous July. The royalists took the entire garrison at Rathfarnham prisoner on that occasion, 'and though 500 soldiers had entered the castle before any officers of note yet not one creature was killed, which I here tell you by the way to observe the difference between ours and the rebels making use of a victory'.[58] While unreserved in condemning the massacre at Drogheda to royalist leaders abroad, Ormond proved uncertain on how best to exploit the affair in Ireland itself. Cromwell's severe tactics had clearly unnerved his opponents in the field. Dundalk, Newry and Carlingford all surrendered without a fight, and when units of the parliamentary army approached Trim on the march back to Dublin, the panicked garrison fled, failing to burn the town and castle as ordered. Surviving evidence suggests that Ormond might well have played down the horrors of Drogheda on the domestic front, so as not to unduly alarm his supporters. Nonetheless, the story of an atrocity committed at Cromwell's express order was in circulation not only in Ireland, but also in England and on the Continent within weeks of the fall of the town. By the 1660s, following the restoration of Charles II, Irish clerical sources confidently asserted that 4,000 civilians had died in Drogheda, the result of 'an unparalleled savagery and treachery beyond that of any slaughterhouse'.[59] The issue remains contentious to the present day but the surviving evidence clearly shows that a significant number of non-combatants were killed during the storming of the town.

Despite the widespread and long-lasting repercussions of events at Drogheda, it merely represented the opening salvo in a long war of conquest. After a week replenishing supplies in Dublin, Cromwell departed from the capital again on 23 September, leaving sick and wounded soldiers behind, and headed south though County

Wicklow, on route for Wexford. Described by a parliamentary newssheet as 'the Dunkirk of Ireland, and a place only famous for being infamous', the port of Wexford provided a base for a large privateering fleet, consisting primarily of Irish and Flemish vessels, which successfully targeted English shipping throughout the 1640s.[60] This unofficial confederate navy maintained valuable trade and communication links between Ireland and the Continent, as well as posing a major threat to Cromwell's vital supply lines with England. As they marched southwards, the parliamentarians captured a number of smaller garrisons, but they also proved vulnerable to ambush in the mountainous terrain of south Wicklow and north Wexford. In one such encounter, a contingent of O'Byrnes seized some horses, including Cromwell's own charger, and other supplies. Nonetheless, a force of around 9,000 troops reached the outskirts of Wexford town on 1 October relatively unscathed. The royalists had garrisoned the town only a few days earlier with 1,500 troops commanded by Colonel David Sinnott, who warned Ormond of the inhabitants' inclination to make terms, 'such impression they have of Drogheda'.[61] The chances of a successful defence, already undermined by low morale and internal divisions over whether or not to surrender, further diminished when, on the approach of a parliamentary detachment, royalist troops inexplicably abandoned the fort of Rosslare, which guarded the entrance to the harbour. The fort occupied a strong position but was possibly undermanned. Whatever the reason, capturing Rosslare allowed the English navy, commanded by Admiral Deane, to discharge vital military supplies, including the siege artillery.

Confident of success, Cromwell summoned the town to surrender on 3 October, but as the weather turned wet and stormy, Sinnott played for time, entering into protracted negotiations during the following week. His initial demands included a complete cessation of hostilities while the talks took place, and more controversially the continued free exercise of the Catholic religion. Irritated by Sinnott's tactics, Cromwell angrily refused to halt preparations for storming the town, as 'our tents are not so good a covering as your houses'.[62] While the parliamentary troops suffered in the exposed conditions,

the defenders continued to receive supplies, including 500 additional troops, by ferry from the north of the harbour, suggesting that, as at Drogheda, Cromwell had not carried out the basic requirement of surrounding and cutting off the besieged town. Finally, on 10 October, the siege artillery opened fire, creating two breaches in the medieval walls the following day, and forcing Sinnott to reopen negotiations. The two sides argued over surrender terms, including a guarantee for the life and liberty of the garrison, and protection for the townspeople from violence and plunder. At the same time, however, Captain Stafford, governor of Wexford Castle, a stronghold overlooking the town, initiated his own contacts with the parliamentarians. Stafford, 'a vain, idle young man . . . nothing practised in the art military', agreed to open the gates to the besiegers, who immediately turned the castle guns on the town.[63] Panicked, the defenders fled, allowing parliamentary soldiers to scale the walls unopposed. The garrison rallied near the market place, but their spirited resistance proved futile. Cromwell wrote that over 2,000 Irish soldiers and civilians, including Sinnott, died as the English 'put all to the sword that came in their way'.[64] According to a petition of the surviving inhabitants, all the men, women and children of the town 'to a very few' were killed during the assault, while a clerical account described how 'the blood lust of soldiers flooded the streets and houses'.[65] Many perished when overcrowded boats overturned in the harbour, but at least one eyewitness claimed that the parliamentarians spared more soldiers at Wexford than at Drogheda, to use them as forced labour during the campaign.[66] Others apparently escaped the carnage, as by the end of the week, the Commissioners of Treaty in Kilkenny complained to Ormond about large numbers of troops, many of them wounded, streaming into the city, 'that pretend all of them to come off from Wexford'.[67] Cromwell seized over seventy pieces of artillery, and tons of supplies, along with a number of warships, but widespread pillaging by his troops upset Cromwell's plans for using the town as a winter base. Nonetheless, the fall of Wexford permanently crippled the royalist/confederate navy. Not long afterwards, Prince Rupert broke through the English blockade at Kinsale and fled with a small fleet of

seven ships to Portugal. By the end of the year, therefore, Irish naval activity was reduced to a handful of privateers working out of Continental ports such as Dunkirk and Ostend.

Unlike Drogheda, Cromwell did not participate directly in the storming of Wexford, and there are no reports of breach of quarter, such as happened at Millmount. Nonetheless, the deaths of large numbers of civilians at the hands of soldiers under his command further tarnished Cromwell's reputation with the Catholic Irish. Worryingly for the parliamentarians, there was growing evidence that their tactics had begun to generate a military backlash. When Cromwell's forces approached the strategic fort of Duncannon in late October, the commander, Thomas Roche, rejected a summons to surrender, as 'I and those under my command are sensible of your cruel and tyrannical quarter'. Shortly afterwards, when the royalists attempted to retake the town of Carrick, recently seized by the parliamentarians, the attackers cried out to the besieged 'that they would soon give them Tredagh [Drogheda] Quarters'.[68] Rather than bring an end to the conflict, the massacre at Drogheda, and to a lesser extent events at Wexford, may have actually stiffened the resolve of the Catholic Irish to fight on against an indiscriminate and merciless enemy. With no end to the war in sight, and unable to use Wexford as a winter base, Cromwell faced a difficult choice. He could retreat to Dublin, through hostile territory, and risk losing many of the gains of the previous months, or attempt to break into Munster, by crossing the river Barrow at the town of Ross. Despite continuing losses through disease, reducing his effective combat force to as little as 3,000 men, and Ormond's presence nearby with a numerically superior army, Cromwell characteristically chose to march on Ross.

After this second crushing defeat at Wexford, the royalist alliance received a timely boost with the news of Owen Roe O'Neill's decision to join forces with Ormond. The arrival of Cromwell had convinced Ormond of the need for a speedy reconciliation with the Ulster Irish, which the marquis of Clanricarde believed 'would unquestionably unite the whole kingdom'.[69] After months of violent confrontations and fruitless negotiations, the lord lieutenant sent emissaries north in late August, including the Ulster general's Protestant nephew,

Daniel O'Neill, to agree terms as a matter of urgency. Owen Roe responded positively, though he honourably waited for his temporary truce with Charles Coote in Derry to expire before giving the order for his army, estimated at about 5,000 strong, to march south. Ormond hoped that news of these manoeuvres might have relieved the pressure on royalist forces elsewhere, but 'an unexpected fit of sickness' delayed the Ulster general's departure.[70] In fact, O'Neill, almost seventy years of age and seriously ill with gout, which made any movement almost unbearably painful, had only a few weeks to live. Progress proved tortuously slow, so in mid-October he sent 2,000 troops on ahead, who according to one report were 'ill-armed, but very useful men if but fed'.[71] A few days later, on 20 October, O'Neill finally agreed to serve under Ormond at the head of an army of 6,000 infantry and 800 cavalry, terms almost identical to those rejected by the royalists at the start of the year. Bitterness engendered by confederate infighting in the late 1640s, along with a general mistrust of the Ulster Irish, had prevented an earlier rapprochement, thus enabling Cromwell to gain a vital foothold in the kingdom. Moreover, O'Neill's decision to intervene in Leinster now allowed a parliamentary force of 5,000 men, commanded by Colonel Robert Venables, to advance north from Drogheda into Ulster practically unopposed. Many of the Scots in Ulster, equally hostile to Irish Catholics and English parliamentarians, observed a position of strict neutrality, while an attempt by George Monro and Lord Clandeboye to rally royalist forces resulted in a catastrophic defeat at Lisburn near Belfast in early December. By the end of the year, Colonel John Reynolds, supported by Charles Coote in Derry, controlled much of the northern province, including all seaports apart from Castle Doe in County Donegal.

In the south, despite the arrival of the Ulster Irish vanguard, Ormond proved incapable of stemming the parliamentary offensive. Just over a week after the fall of Wexford, the strategically crucial town of Ross surrendered to the parliamentarians after a brief siege, opening the gateway into Munster. According to an official account of the proceedings of the English army in Ireland, the parliamentarians feared that taking the town might have cost 'much blood,

it being of a considerable strength'.[72] Cromwell attempted to undermine royalist morale by allowing two captured officers from Wexford, Majors Dillon and Byrne, to travel to Ross in advance of his army. They undoubtedly related stories of the horrors suffered by the inhabitants of Wexford, and the garrison commander, Lucas Taaffe, suspected the townsmen of seeking to avoid a similar fate by agreeing terms with the parliamentarians. On arriving outside the walls of Ross, Cromwell summoned Taaffe to surrender, claiming, despite recent events at Drogheda and Wexford, that he had always 'endeavoured to avoid effusion of blood'. According to Cromwell, both towns, by refusing terms, had suffered 'through their own wilfulness'.[73] Taaffe urgently requested assistance, and Ormond assured the Commissioners of Treaty in Kilkenny that he would send reinforcements, as Cromwell's failure to take Ross would prove 'a great dishonour and loss to the [English] rebels'.[74]

On the morning of 19 October, however, the parliamentary artillery created a breach in the town walls. Before the inevitable infantry assault began, Taaffe surrendered, with Cromwell permitting the garrison to march away with arms and baggage, and guaranteeing the civilian population protection from 'injury and violence'. The reward for non-resistance did not extend to religious freedom, despite Cromwell's assurances that he did not 'meddle' with any man's conscience. In an exchange of correspondence with Taaffe, he explained in typically blunt terms that 'if by liberty of conscience you mean a liberty to exercise the mass, I judge it best to plain dealing, and to let you know, where the Parliament of England have power, that will not be allowed of'.[75] Cromwell's position was entirely consistent with his Independent religious convictions. Nobody would coerce the Catholic Irish to attend Protestant services, but at the same time the Catholic Church would not be tolerated. The loss of Ross dealt yet another blow to the royalist war effort and to Ormond's rapidly diminishing authority, particularly as Taaffe insisted that the lord lieutenant had authorised his actions. Discontent with Ormond was not restricted to the ranks of the Catholic clergy, and 500 Protestant royalist troops at Ross defected to the New Model Army.

Successive defeats, starting with the rout at Rathmines, had strained the uneasy alliance between confederates and Irish Protestants to breaking point. For Protestants in the ports of Youghal, Cork and Kinsale, under the control of Lord Inchiquin for much of the 1640s, Irish Catholics, not English parliamentarians, remained the principal enemy. The success of royalist forces during the first half of 1649 kept them in check, but the arrival of the New Model Army provided Protestants with a viable alternative to fighting alongside their hated Catholic neighbours, and the number of desertions from royalist forces increased dramatically, despite the introduction of the death penalty for offenders. Even before the fall of Wexford, officers sympathetic to the parliamentary regime had attempted unsuccessfully to seize Youghal, but the relentless advance of Cromwell's forces finally convinced many Munster towns to renounce Ormond's authority and declare 'for the Protestant religion and interest of the English nation'.[76] This switch of allegiance by Youghal, Cork and Kinsale probably prevented the premature end of Cromwell's expedition, by providing winter quarters for his depleted forces, as well as suitable ports to receive supplies from England. The local Protestant population also enthusiastically volunteered to join Cromwell's army, each one of whom, according to a contemporary correspondent, was worth six soldiers from England.[77] These new recruits possessed an intense determination to pursue total victory by force of arms.

Before Cromwell could fully take advantage of local Protestant support, however, he needed to secure a passage into Munster by crossing the river Barrow, already swollen with winter rains, using a specially constructed boat bridge. This provided an ideal opportunity for a royalist counter-attack against weakened forces engaged in a difficult manoeuvre. Unfortunately for the royalists, Ormond proved unequal to the task. An apocryphal story tells how Cromwell, when staying in the house of Francis Dormer in Ross, came across a portrait of Ormond, and announced that his opponent, whom he had never met, looked 'more like a huntsman than any way a soldier'.[78] In Ormond's defence, following a series of catastrophic setbacks, the royalists faced enormous obstacles in

trying to reorganise their shattered forces. In addition to low morale, intensified by the seemingly unstoppable momentum of the parliamentary offensive, the royalist lord lieutenant also had to contend with military supply problems and a severe lack of cash. All gunpowder, for example, had to be imported from the Continent, a more difficult task after the fall of Wexford, while the city of Limerick would only offer £100 towards the war effort, 'so inconsiderable a sum' that the royalist leadership refused to accept it.[79] Moreover, the slow progress south of the Ulster Irish, due to O'Neill's illness, delayed the arrival of significant reinforcements. In these circumstances, the Ulster general cautioned Ormond not to fight Cromwell except on 'great advantages'. He believed that the weather would almost certainly defeat the parliamentarians before any army the royalists could possibly muster. On 1 November, O'Neill again warned that any precipitous engagement with Cromwell would be 'of a most dangerous consequence', resulting in the loss of the kingdom.[80] Ormond needed no lessons in prevarication and delay, but this correspondence suggests that the great Ulster general would have adopted a similarly wary approach.

A few days later, Owen Roe O'Neill, his body ravaged by decades of campaigning on the Continent and in Ireland, died at Cloughoughter Castle in County Cavan, the home of Sir Philip MacHugh O'Reilly, a staunch ally, and one of the original conspirators in the 1641 rebellion. His death deprived the Catholic Irish of their most successful military commander, and perhaps the only general with the necessary skills and experience to challenge the parliamentarians on the field of battle. One source lamented how the enemy now no longer feared the name General O'Neill, 'which not long before did sound like a thunderbolt in his ears'.[81] Nonetheless, despite this serious setback all was by no means lost. By making a stand on the Barrow, Ormond would have created serious difficulties for the parliamentarians, denying them access to the Munster ports and precipitating a retreat to Dublin. A royalist officer, Major Benson, compiled a detailed report on the possibility of preventing a crossing 'without the hazard of our whole fortune upon a battle'. He argued that the royalists should avoid a set piece encounter 'until

their courage be a little [recovered] by some small successes against the enemy, either by surprisal, ambush or other advantage'. Both Benson and Lord Inchiquin strongly recommended the destruction of any bridge thrown across the Barrow before the entire parliamentary army had crossed, thus restoring royalist morale.[82] On 6 November, however, John Walsh, Ormond's lawyer, reported the presence of English troops on the west side of the river. Their sudden appearance caused panic in the local population, who fled with their cattle and portable goods. With the parliamentary forces now spilt while they completed work on the pontoon bridge, the earl of Castlehaven urged Ormond to take immediate action, stressing the vulnerability of Cromwell's position. According to the earl's scouts, the parliamentary bridgehead contained no defensive works and few troops to ward off any assault. Ormond, naturally cautious and crippled by indecision, failed to take advantage of the situation, hoping instead that 'Colonel Hunger and Major Sickness' would further diminish enemy forces. Within a week the entire parliamentary army had crossed the river unopposed. Deeply disappointed, Castlehaven informed the marquis of the growing discontent of the Catholic population with his poor military performance.[83]

Ormond desperately needed some success to bolster his waning authority, and after months of disastrous defeats and missed opportunities, he finally received good news from Duncannon. Situated on the mouth of the Suir, the fort of Duncannon, one of the most modern in the country, guarded the entrance to Waterford Harbour. A heroic defence of the fort in early November severely dented the New Model Army's myth of invincibility, and gave hope to other royalist towns and garrisons. Undaunted by this setback, the parliamentarians maintained their offensive, with one column, commanded by Michael Jones and Henry Ireton, pushing north towards Kilkenny. Despite enjoying a significant numerical advantage, Ormond declined an engagement, and Jones eventually withdrew to rejoin the main army moving south against Waterford. Cromwell, after recovering from a serious fever, which had already killed or debilitated hundreds of his own troops, hoped to exploit

internal tensions within the city and avoid a lengthy siege in difficult conditions. Castlehaven blamed Catholic clerics for attempting to undermine royalist authority there, but he acknowledged that four out of five of Waterford's citizens would have gladly sold the city for private gain.[84] Many former confederates never forgave Ormond for his unwillingness during the 1640s to grant major concessions to Irish Catholics, despite authorisation from Charles I, while dissatisfaction with his military performance simply exacerbated a growing sense of grievance. On 21 November, John Lyvett, mayor of Waterford, informed Ormond that Cromwell had arrived at the city walls but that reinforcements could still get through. Lyvett identified certain unnamed troops, almost certainly those under Ormond's command, as unacceptable.[85] Instead, the municipal authorities granted access to a detachment of Ulster Irish, proven fighters and committed Catholics, led by Lieutenant General Richard Farrell. Faced with determined resistance and appallingly wet weather, which made moving siege artillery almost impossible and facilitated the spread of disease through his exposed forces, Cromwell lifted the siege in early December and retired to the southern ports of Munster.

Secure at last in his winter quarters, Cromwell could reflect on a relatively successful autumn campaign. In the space of just four months, he had inflicted a series of spectacular defeats on the royalists, and seized control of the entire eastern, northern and southern coastlines, with the exception of Waterford and Duncannon. The royalists appeared incapable of opposing him in the field, and the tenuous alliance between Catholics and Protestants had all but collapsed. Nonetheless, Cromwell failed to land a decisive military blow, and large tracts of the country remained in hostile hands. Naval supply lines had proved crucial so far, but this advantage would no longer be available to him as soon as his forces marched inland. The English army, ravaged by disease, continued to suffer grievous losses, including the death of Colonel Michael Jones in early December, 'whose finger', according to Cromwell, 'to our knowledge never ached in all these expeditions'.[86] Moreover, his opponents, initially demoralised by successive defeats, appeared re-

energised at the end of the year by the intervention of the Ulster Irish, despite the death of Owen Roe O'Neill. Questions remained, however, over whether Ormond and his lieutenants possessed the necessary military skills and popular support to counter the parliamentary offensive. Fully aware of the difficult task ahead, Ormond remarked pessimistically that 'the breathing time which probably the enemy will give us this winter is like to be but a short reprieve'.[87] Cromwell remained characteristically busy during the winter months, planning his next move. On the last day of the year, he wrote to John Sadler, town clerk of London, blaming Catholic landlords and 'great men' for the 'injustice, tyranny and oppression' suffered by the ordinary people of Ireland. He argued that the free and impartial administration of justice, no doubt meaning English justice, would make the country 'look so much the more glorious and beautiful'.[88] After the atrocities at Drogheda and Wexford, it is doubtful if any Irish Catholics shared his vision of a bright future under parliamentary rule.