IRELAND IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

OR

THE IRISH MASSACRES OF 1641-2.

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THE IRISH MASSACRES OF 1641–2,

THEIR CAUSES AND RESULTS.

Illustrated by Extracts from the unpublished State Papers, the unpublished MSS in the Bodleian Library, Lambeth Library, and the Library of the Royal Dublin Society relating to the Plantations of 1610–39; *a Selection from the unpublished Depositions relating to the Massacres, with fac-similes; and the Reports of the Trials in the High Court of Justice in* 1652-4, *from the unpublished MSS in Trinity College, Dublin.*

BY

MARY HICKSON.

WITH A PREFACE BY J. A. FROUDE, M.A.

VOLUME I.

'Our ancestors were guilty of abominable and atrocious crimes, to which the present generation, thank God, looks back with all the horror and indignation they deserve.' (*Historical Address to the Irish Catholics by* Rev. C. O'CONNOR, D.D.)

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PREFACE.

THIS book needs no prefatory recommendation from me or from any one. It tells its own story, and will recommend itself by its internal merits. Nevertheless I am glad to welcome a publication which may bring about a solution of a most important historical question. The great rebellion of 1641 broke out on the 23rd of October of that year, and was alleged to have been accompanied by a series of massacres of helpless unarmed Protestant colonists, many of them women and children, who had in some cases been promised protection and a safe convoy to English garrisons by the Irish insurgents. On the recovery of the country the estates of the insurgent Irish gentry were confiscated by the Long Parliament, and were sold to pay the cost of the reconquest. A High Court of Justice sat to try the survivors charged with being actors in the massacre, and such of them as were found guilty were executed. Protestants who had retaliated upon the Catholic Irish, at Isle Magee and other places, by crimes of a similar kind, were also tried and variously punished. The anniversary of the day on which the insurrection broke out was observed with peculiar solemnity for a hundred years. The Irish massacres of 1641 became part of European history, and held a place of infamy by the side of the Sicilian Vespers and the Massacre of St. Bartholomew.

We are now asked to believe that the entire story was a

fabrication, invented by the Puritan English as an excuse for stripping the Irish of their lands; that there never was any massacre at all; that not a Protestant was killed save in fair fight and open war; and that the evidence collected by commissions and published to deceive Europe is so extravagant that a glance suffices to detect its worthlessness. This account of the events of 1641 and of the years succeeding has been allowed to grow without serious contradiction till it has come to be universally received and believed by the Irish people, both at home and in America; and, being believed, it lies among the causes which have exasperated the Irish race into their present attitude. They regard themselves not only as having been robbed, but as having been made the victims of abominable calumnies. Nor is it only irresponsible agitators who tell them so, but reverend and grave historians, some of whom go so far as to say that there *could* have been no massacre. Thus, in the absence of any clear rejoinder, judgment is going by default, and we are sliding into an acknowledgment that the Long Parliament and their officers in Ireland were the real criminals, and successfully carried through a conspiracy so base and infamous that Sir Phelim O'Neil and his confederates seem innocent in comparison.

The Irish Rebellion and Cromwell's reconquest were not done in a corner. Catholic Europe, with the Pope at its head, was deeply interested in the struggle and the issue of it. The barbarities of which the Irish were accused and were said to have been found guilty were published to the world, and, involving as they did the character of a Catholic nation, it might have been expected their publication would have drawn forth at once an indignant contradiction. Hundreds of exiles who had been in Ireland at the beginning of the insurrection were scattered over France, Spain, and Italy, and might have repudiated, had they been able, the tremendous accusation against their countrymen. They did nothing of the kind. Individuals among them here and there after a lapse of years

asserted that they had no share in the massacres at Portadown, at Shrule, at Silver Mines, Portnaw, Macreom, and other places, but it never seems to have occurred to them to deny the general fact. And no writer of credit, Catholic or Protestant, who had lived through the rebellion thought of denying it. Not only Temple, Borlase and Clarendon, but the Catholics Clanricarde and Castlehaven, Father Walsh the Franciscan friar, Philip O'Reilly of Crom Castle, Mr. Kearney the Catholic brother of a Catholic bishop, with other Irish Catholic writers of the seventeenth century (whose narratives are hereafter printed for the first time from the Carte MSS.), all admit that massacres were committed, however they may venture to palliate or excuse those crimes. The Rev. Charles O'Connor, D.D., a highly respected Roman Catholic priest of the last century, made the same admission.

The confidence with which the innocence of the Irish of any such crimes is now insisted upon has been the growth of time; of the unwillingness of the English to keep alive painful memories when they trusted and hoped it was needless to do so because ancient enmities between classes and creeds and the two islands were fast dying out; and also of a consciousness on the part of the English that they have much to repent of in regard to Ireland, which has made them careless of defending themselves against particular charges. Yet passion ran hot in the seventeenth century, and in times of violent excitement right and wrong are strangely confused. Things antecedently improbable may have happened notwithstanding, and the modern popular Irish view of the matter may be the correct one after all. It may be so, but it has not yet been proved to be so: and on a question which touches so deeply English honour and affects the feeling between England and Ireland to this hour, no uncertainty should be allowed to rest which inquiry can remove. If this modern Irish theory, so confidently proclaimed by Irish popular orators and writers, is right, we are bound to admit it. The Long Parliament

committed a frightful crime which remains unatoned for; which ought to be publicly confessed; and atonement so far as possible ought to be made. On the other hand, merely to connive, from some feeble notion of conciliation, at the growth of a false theory so certain to envenom Irish feeling and widen the breach between the two nations, is as foolish as it is cowardly and wrong. No conciliation will be good for anything which rests on a basis of cowardly lies. There have been lies enough in our dealings with Ireland, and we know by this time what fruit has grown of them.

The evidence on which the Long Parliament professed to have acted is preserved in thirty-two volumes of MS. depositions in Trinity College, Dublin. Mr. Prendergast, in his 'Cromwellian Settlement of Ireland,' ignores or depreciates this evidence, and Mr. Prendergast carries weight as an authority, having been appointed by the Government to calendar the earlier Irish MSS. Mr. Gilbert, after being employed by the Historical MSS. Commission to report upon the depositions, has declared them to be utterly untrustworthy, invalid on the face of them. But Mr. Prendergast is prejudiced against the Cromwellians, and Mr. Gilbert's report is largely composed of extracts from Mr. Prendergast's works and from violent Nationalist writers like Curry and Carey. It is true that Mr. Gilbert, whose labours in other departments of historical research have been great and valuable, also quotes Burke and Warner in support of his views on the untrustworthiness of the depositions, but he admits that Reid, an historian whose accuracy and impartiality are acknowledged by all, disputes the truth of Warner's and Burke's verdicts. Moreover, Mr. Gilbert does not give us a single specimen in full of any one of the depositions. He and Mr. Prendergast have their conscientious opinions, as Reid had his, but a large portion of the public interested in an important historical question desire a fuller inquiry and to have the depositions printed in order that readers may form their own independent and impartial

judgment upon them. I greatly wished that they might be calendared with the rest of the State Papers, and I anticipated no objection to this from any quarter. Sir Thomas Hardy, the late Deputy Keeper of the Records, felt as I did, and strongly recommended that a calendar should be made of those MSS. The Irish are so confident that the depositions are worthless that I supposed they would welcome any investigation which could only prove that they were right. On the part of the English, sad as the revelations of our ancestors' iniquities might be, there ought not to be, and I believed there would not be, any present unwillingness to look truth in the face, however unpalatable the exposure.

When I found that the depositions were not likely to be calendared with the rest of the Irish State Papers I thought at first of examining them myself and publishing my own account of them; but I suspected my judgment on the same grounds on which I suspected that of Mr. Prendergast and Mr. Gilbert. They are in sympathy with popular 'Irish ideas,' and I am equally in sympathy with the Protestant traditions of my own country. I concluded that I at least could not usefully interfere any further when I was informed by Miss Hickson that she was about to make an accurate transcript of a large number of the depositions and to print them that readers might judge them independently, and that she would add in her work some unpublished documents relating to the plantations of 1612–39. Though I could not hope, and she did not hope or indeed wish, that her verdict would be considered final, her main object being to furnish full materials for others to form an independent judgment on, it seemed to me from what I knew of her writings, her love of justice as well as her love of her native country, that her book could not fail to be valuable. She has no English prejudices, she is the descendant of some of the exiled and transplanted Irish and Anglo-Irish of 1649, she is keenly alive to the wrongs which her country has

Harleian MSS. and to compare them with the originals in the College.

Thus her work cannot be regarded as a mere counter-statement of opinion against the popular Irish theory. It presents the reader with a statement of facts hitherto unnoticed, powerfully supported by the photograph, and she asks him to use his own eyes and his own unbiassed judgment on them. She has published for the first time—and this is perhaps the most valuable part of her most interesting work—the proceedings of the High Court of Justice, and has thrown clear fresh light on Cromwell's administration. The document which she gives from the Council Books of the Commonwealth, in which he orders the debenture of one of his soldiers, who had killed a poor Irish carpenter named O'Byrne, to be given to the man's widow and children, is very interesting and curious (*v.* vol. ii. p. 236).

I can only repeat my hope that an authoritative Calendar of the depositions may yet be made by the Government, and that photographs of a few of the most important MSS. may form part of it. The clear ascertainment of the truth or untruth of a story which touches so deeply the honour of English action in Ireland will do more towards allaying hatreds between classes, creeds, and nations, than the most absolute reversal of the Act of Settlement of 1660-70, which arose out of and had its justification in the crimes charged on the Irish in the depositions.

J. A. F.

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