

Cromwell letter to William Lenthall

Letter to William Lenthall

(1649)

by Oliver Cromwell

- related portals: Letters.

Oliver Cromwell was commanding the New Model Army in Ireland, William Lenthall was Speaker of the the Rump Parliament of the Commonwealth of England. This letter covers the infamous storming of Drogheda

N.B. The date in the letter is given as "upon Friday, the 30th of August last", however Thomas Carlyle, points out that it was "Friday 31 August;" and that Cromwell consistently had the date wrong by one day throughout the letter.

Carlyle cites: Newspapers; in Parliamentary History (London, 1763), xix., 201. VOL. I. 18

References

- Carlyle, Thomas (1861), *Oliver Cromwell's letters and speeches: with elucidations*, Volumes I & II, Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1861 Volume II, Part V, pp. pp. 166–173 ^[1]. Letter CV
- Carlyle, Thomas (1868). *Oliver Cromwell's letters and speeches: includind the supplement to the first edition*, Volume 1, Harper & brothers pp. 381–385 ^[2]. Letter LXXI

For the Honorable William Lenthall, Speaker of the Parliament of England: These.

Dublin, 17th September, 1649.

Sir,

Your Army being safely arrived at Dublin ; and the Enemy endeavoring to draw all his forces together about Trim and Tecroghan, as my intelligence gave me,—from whence endeavors were made by the Marquis of Ormond to draw Owen Roe O'Neil with his forces to his assistance, but with what success I cannot yet learn,—I resolved, after some refreshment taken for our weatherbeaten men and horses, and accommodations for a march, to take the field. And accordingly, upon Friday, the 30th of August last, rendezvoused with eight regiments of foot, six of horse and some troops of dragoons, three miles on the north side of Dublin. The design was, To endeavor the regaining of Drogheda; or tempting the Enemy, upon his hazard of the loss of that place, to fight.

Your Army came before the Town upon Monday following. Where having pitched, as speedy course was taken as could be to frame our batteries; which took up the more time because divers of the battering guns were on shipboard. Upon Monday, the 9th of this instant, the batteries began to play. Whereupon I sent Sir Arthur Ashton, the then Governor, a summons, To deliver the Town to the use of the Parliament of England. To the which receiving no satisfactory answer, I proceeded that day to beat down the Steeple of the Church on the south side of the Town, and to beat down a Tower not far from the same place, which you will discern by the Chart enclosed.

Our guns not being able to do much that day, it was resolved to endeavor to do our utmost the next day to make breaches assaultable, and by the help of God to storm them. The place pitched upon was that part of the Town-wall next a Church called St. Mary's; which was the rather chosen because we did hope that if we did enter and possess that Church, we should be the better able to keep it against their horse and foot until we could make way for the entrance of our horse; and we did not conceive that any part of the Town would afford the like advantage for that purpose with this. The batteries planted were two: one was for that part of the Wall against the east end of the said Church; the other against the Wall on the south side. Being somewhat long in battering, the Enemy made six retrenchments: three of them from the said Church to Duleek Gate; and three of them from the east end of the Church to the Town-wall and so backward. The guns, after some two or three hundred shot, beat down the corner Tower, and opened two reasonable good breaches in the east and south Wall.

Upon Tuesday, the 10th of this instant, about five o'clock in the evening, we began the Storm: and after some hot dispute we entered, about seven or eight hundred men; the Enemy disputing it very stiffly with us. And indeed, through the advantages of the place, and the courage God was pleased to give the defenders, our men were forced to retreat quite out of the breach, not without some considerable loss; Colonel Cassel being there shot in the head, whereof he presently died; and divers officers and soldiers doing their duty killed and wounded. There was a Tenalia to flanker the south Wall of the Town, between Duleek Gate and the corner Tower before mentioned;—which our men entered, wherein they found some forty or fifty of the Enemy which they put to the sword. And this 'Tenalia' they held: but it being without the Wall, and the sally-port through the Wall into that Tenalia being choked up with some of the Enemy which were killed in it, it proved of no use for an entrance into the Town that way.

Although our men that stormed the breaches were forced to recoil, as is before expressed; yet, being encouraged to recover their loss, they made a second attempt; wherein God was pleased so to animate them that they got ground of the Enemy, and by the goodness of God, forced him to quit his entrenchments. And after a very hot dispute, the Enemy having both horse and foot, and we only foot, within the Wall,—they gave ground, and our men became masters both of their retrenchments and 'of' the Church: which indeed, although they made our entrance the more difficult, yet they proved of excellent use to us; so that the Enemy could not 'now' annoy us with their horse, but thereby we had advantage to make good the ground, that so we might let in our own horse; which accordingly was done, though with much difficulty.

Divers of the Enemy retreated into the Mill-Mount; a place very strong and of difficult access; being exceedingly high, having a good graft, and strongly pallisadoed. The Governor, Sir Arthur Ashton, and divers considerable Officers being there, our men getting up to them were ordered by me to put them all to the sword. And indeed, being in the heat of action, I forbade them to spare any that were in arms in the Town: and, I think, that night they put to the sword about 2,000 men;—divers of the officers and soldiers being fled over the Bridge into the other part of the Town, where about 100 of them possessed St. Peter's Church-steeple, some the west Gate, and others a strong Round Tower next the Gate called St. Sunday's. These, being summoned to yield to mercy, refused. Whereupon I ordered the steeple of St. Peter's Church to be fired, when one of them was, heard to say in the midst of the flames: "God damn me, God confound me: I burn, I burn."

The next day, the other two Towers were summoned; in one of which was about six or seven score: but they refused to yield themselves: and we knowing that hunger must compel them, set only good guards to secure them from running away until their stomachs were come down. From one of the said Towers, notwithstanding their condition, they killed and wounded some of our men. When they submitted, their officers were knocked on the head; and every tenth man of the soldiers killed; and the rest shipped for the Barbadoes. The soldiers in the other Tower were all spared, as to their lives only; and shipped likewise for the Barbadoes.

I am persuaded that this is a righteous judgment of God upon these barbarous wretches, who have imbrued their hands in 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. The officers and soldiers of this Garrison were the flower of their Army. And their great expectation was, that our attempting this place would put fair to ruin us: they being confident of the resolution of their men, and the advantage of the place. If we had divided our force into two quarters to have besieged the North Town and the South Town, we could not have had such a correspondency between the two parts of our Army, but that they might have chosen to have brought their Army, and have fought with which part 'of ours' they pleased,—and at the same time have made a sally with 2,000 men upon us, and have left their walls manned; they having in the Town the number hereafter specified, but some say near 4,000.

Since this great mercy vouchsafed to us, I sent a party of horse and dragoons to Dundalk; which the Enemy quitted, and we are possessed of,—as also 'of' another Castle they deserted, between Trim and Drogheda, upon the Boyne. I sent a party of horse and dragoons to a House within five miles of Trim, there being then in Trim some Scots Companies, which the Lord of Ardes brought to assist the Lord of Ormond. But upon the news of Drogheda, they ran

away; leaving their great guns behind them, which also we have possessed.

And now give me leave to say how it comes to pass that this work is wrought. It was set upon some of our hearts, That a great thing should be done, not by power or might, but by the Spirit of God. And is it not so, clearly? That which caused your men to storm so courageously, it was the Spirit of God, who gave your men courage, and took it away again; and gave the Enemy courage, and took it away again; and gave your men courage again, and therewith, this happy success. And therefore it is good that God alone have all the glory.

It is remarkable that these people, at the first setup the Mass in some places of the Town that had been monasteries; but afterwards grew so insolent that, the last Lord's day before the storm, the Protestants were thrust out of the great Church called St. Peter's, and they had public Mass there: and in this very place near 1,000 of them were put to the sword, fleeing thither for safety. I believe all their friars were knocked on the head promiscuously but two: the one of which was Father Peter Taaff, brother to Lord Taaff, whom the soldiers took, the next day and made an end of. The other was taken in the Round Tower, under the repute of a Lieutenant, and when he understood that the officers in that Tower had no quarter, he confessed he was a Friar; but that did not save him.

A great deal of loss in this business fell upon Colonel Hewson's, Colonel Cassel's, and Colonel Ewer's regiments. Colonel Ewer having two Field-Officers in his regiment shot; Colonel Cassel and a Captain of his regiment slain: Colonel Hewson's Captain-Lieutenant slain. I do not think we lost 100 men upon the place, though many be wounded.

I must humbly pray the Parliament may be pleased 'that' this Army may be maintained; and that a consideration may be had of them, and of the carrying on affairs here, 'such' as may give a speedy issue to this work. To which there seems to be a marvellous 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 to stretch a little for the present, in following God's providence, in hope the charge will not be long—I trust it will not be thought by any (that have not irreconcilable or malicious principles) unfit for me to move, For a constant supply: which, in human probability as to outward things, is most likely to hasten and perfect this work. And indeed if God please to finish it here as He hath done in England, the War is like to pay itself.

We keep the field much; our tents sheltering us from the wet and cold. But yet the Country-sickness overtakes many: and therefore we desire recruits, and some fresh regiments of foot, may be sent us. For it's easily conceived by what the Garrisons already drink up, what our Field-Army will come to, if God shall give more Garrisons into our hands. Craving pardon for this great trouble, I rest,

Your most obedient servant,

Oliver Cromwell.

P. S. Since writing of my Letter, a Major who brought off forty-three horse from the Enemy told me that it's reported in their camp that Owen Roe and they are agreed.

The defendants in Drogheda consisted of: The Lord of Ormond's regiment; Sir Edmund Varney Lieutenant-Colonel's, of 400: Colonel Byrn's, Colonel Warren's, and Colonel Wall's of 2,000; the Lord of Westmeath's, of 200; Sir James Dillon's, of 200; and 200 horse.

References

[1] <http://books.google.com/books?id=NXMNAAAAIAAJ&pg=RA1-PA166#v=onepage&q&f=false>

[2] <http://books.google.com/books?id=uObhAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA381#v=onepage&q&f=false>

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