

land, in her need, could spare them no men, nor ships, nor money for the defence of Ireland; that if the country was in danger of invasion, that danger would not be averted by any aid from England, for England found it difficult to guard her own shores. Then it was that in 1778 the Irish Parliament passed the Militia Bill, and the people set themselves to work at that easy task for those of Celtic blood—the learning to be soldiers.

It is difficult to restrain one's pen in describing the state of Ireland in 1779, when first Lord Charlemont took command of the Volunteers and the force began to assume respectable proportions. Sir Jonah Barrington says: "By the paralyzing system thus adopted [*i.e.*, English interference with Irish industries and measures] towards Ireland she was at length reduced to the lowest ebb; her poverty and distresses, almost at their extent, were advancing fast to their final consummation; her commerce had almost ceased, her manufactures extinguished, her constitution withdrawn, the people absolutely desponding, while public and individual bankruptcy finished a picture of the deepest misery; and the year 1779 found Ireland almost everything but what such a country and such a people ought to have been."\* Twenty thousand people destitute and out of work, begged and idled in the streets of Dublin; merchants and traders were daily driven to insolvency; provisions rotted in the warehouses of Cork for want of purchasers; the whole social fabric seemed about to be destroyed.

On the 1st of December, 1778, the people of Armagh formed the first Volunteer Corps. They offered the command to Lord Charlemont, who held the position of lord lieutenant of the county. He declined the proffered post at first, but afterwards, influenced probably by the advice of, and under pressure from, his friend Henry Grattan, he accepted the position. It is difficult to form an estimate of the character of James, Earl of Charlemont. Honest but timid, patriotic but undecided, he had been a greater man had he been more ambitious, and perhaps made Ireland more his debtor had his love of peace been less. A patron of the fine arts, scholarly and artistic, he occupied his position under compulsion, and sheathed his sword only too readily, giving up his

command with more of pleasure than regret. His probity cannot be questioned; he acted always as his uncertain capacity told him was right; and while none can doubt his integrity, many will doubt the wisdom of those who made and maintained him commander-in-chief.

Once started, the Volunteer movement grew apace. The men of every county, the citizens of every borough, flocked to the colors. The highest born and fairest ladies of the land handed them their standards and wished them "God speed." The government, against their will, had to hand them sixteen thousand stand of arm; private munificence did the rest. Soon artillery and cavalry corps were added, and within twelve months a fully-equipped Irish army, determined to uphold the rights of Ireland, faced the ministers of King George. At first no Catholics were admitted to the ranks of the citizen army; but by degrees a spirit of liberality pervaded most of the regiments, and Roman Catholics received as hearty a welcome as their Protestant brethren. In many places the Catholics subscribed to buy arms for the Protestant Volunteers, and by their disinterested conduct earned the respect of all on-lookers.

As yet England still prohibited the free exportation of Irish goods, while her manufacturers with the products of their looms, and her merchants with their wares, inundated the Irish markets. These were sold at an immediate loss with a view to future profits, when Irish manufacturers and merchants would be ruined and their operatives pauperized by this mingled system of prohibition and competition. The Irish people and the Volunteers, though determined at any cost to put an end to a state of things which would only terminate in the ruin of their native land, adopted with singular unanimity a course calculated to partly accomplish what they desired pending the legislative attainment of their ends. The guilds of merchants and traders, the bodies corporate, and the mass of the people united in resolutions to never buy or sell, to consume or wear, any articles of foreign manufacture whose equivalents could be produced in Ireland, "until such time as all partial restrictions on their trade should be removed." These resolutions encouraged Irish manufactures, and commerce almost immediately began to revive.

\* *Historic Memoirs of Ireland*, page 9, first edition.