

AN UNTITLED MANUSCRIPT

Never forget the Ghosts of History: That is the Message from what I have transcribed, and you are about to read, Apocalyptic Warnings, Visions that go far back to Ancient Times, and, although they do not sit so neatly with my boyhood Instruction in History, their Essence and Pattern seem undoubtedly Compelling and True.

My Account starts with an Image that could be from The Deluge itself: Humble Savages seeking Sanctuary, in the earliest days of Erin, as long ago as the arrival of Cesair, even before the Descendants of Magog, who had travelled over Land and Sea from the Plains of Scythia, and made this Island their Home, one of many Tribes to Invade this Shore, in an Age before the Sons of Mil. The Tongue they spoke was unfamiliar to my ear; Nonetheless, I understood the Meaning, in the Language of my own Race, the Tongue of Gaedhael, from when Tribes were dispersed throughout the Continents, Punished for the Sin of Pride. Though this first wave of People were like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, before being tempted by the Serpent, they had a Purity of Soul, from whence we all begin, and must return, on humble acceptance that there is a greater Meaning to our Existence, just as those simple Savages saw the Presence of a Greater Being all about them: The Sky, Stars, Forests, Rivers and the Seas; The Being that Lives both inside and out, in the large arc of the Heavens and smallest Petal of a Flower.

I have written down the Visions and Voices that fill my head, as a record of a Night spent upon the Summit, beneath the Standing Stone, no doubt Monolith of Antiquity, looking down on a serene Paradise, where Heremon and Heber divided Erin between them. On the evening before, on the Seventh Day of September, in the Year of Our Lord 1759, as a full Moon rose over the Island, I made my ascent through the wooded slopes and rested in the clearing at the Apex, there to write the Words, of so many Visions that have troubled me so much, and that place became my Hermitage, amidst Nature, and my Temple of Spiritual Contemplation.

In the dawn light, now without the aid of a lamp, I read the Words of those Ancestral Ghosts, often faint and fragmented; As best I can, I give them to you, the Reader of this Parchment. In these ghostly Whisperings, a Collective Ancestral Memoir of generations of Dead Spirits, a Prophetic Pattern is clear for me, and indeed it should be to any Courageous and Honest Reader, that when we pursue Power we get War. From the very earliest stages in Man's History, when Protagonists fought with the Stone they picked from the earth or the Stick from old trees, to the Modern Day when Musket and Cannon shatter Life and Limb with such abandon, the Race's terrible Fate is clear, if we do not amend our ways by turning away from the Path that seeks Power. What is the Great Curse that betroths us so to the Mistress of Power? I venture that it is Primeval Fear that is at the very Core of our Human Imperfection, and we are not even bound by Blood: For Family Members turn upon one another; We raise the Sword to fellow Countrymen when Circumstance calls for it; Nothing, even as Holy as our Faith in the Saviour Jesus Christ, will make us all One, nor any other Creed shared by two people, or that which marks us as Whig or Tory. There is no doubt, from what the Dead have told me, that our Commonality only unites us if there is a Greater Enemy at hand to threaten us, other than ourselves. Power is the greatest Foe of all, but still we are Blind to this Truism, and continue to delude ourselves to our Real Motives: We want Territory, with all that brings, and will Fight to Extend or Defend it, against the Danger that

that brings; We do not Countenance any Challenge to our Authority or Ideas, though can argue in the Sweetest of Words; And we Protest great Injustice if we think our Wealth or Position is threatened.

Yet the need for Power is so great, driven at its Heart by that deepest Fear, no King wants to concede it: No Serf would forego the Hope of it; Anyone would choose to be the Enslaver, rather than the Enslaved. The Weak seek Power through the Strong, and when they see their Needs met, give Loyalty; Although it is a Covenant that lasts only so long, because Power has no Surety. And though a person who comes to Rule might Promise to be Just and Wise, the Fear of losing Dominance will curtail any Instinct of Compassion and Fairness, for Power robs us of our Heart; It is an Illusion, because it has to be Fought for again, and again. It brings Pride to the Victor, making him Vainglorious, and once grasped, Power must be Retained, because the Vanquished is always at the door, dreaming what was lost can be Regained. In this Time of Reason, we should Hope for some different Order that Rules us all, but alas no! It is evident that the Struggle for Power has its own callous Logic: Wars are seldom commanded by the Insane, but it is Madness all the same; And no matter how ardently we try to avoid Conflict, the Reason we are preening ourselves at all, is for Power. If we were to be Truthful, and we seldom are, that is the Prize we covet. As we will not give up the Lust for Power we eventually meet our Nemesis, sinking into a Conflagration that we genuinely have not sought, but we are Dishonest, in that we do Desire Power, whilst we Protest our Motives are Noble: our Opponents' Ignoble. Fault does not Lie with the Foe, rather with us all, for Power is at the Centre of everything we all do, and as we proclaim our Love for Peace, we Lie, because it is Peace on our own Terms we want; And should we Compromise, it is of Necessity or Defeat, not Morality. Peace must be on our Terms, that is what we Deceitfully crave and at the very same time insist we are walking the Road to Peace, but it is the Road to War, albeit signposted as the Route to Peace. The Devil tricks us into thinking Power Guarantees us Life and Protection, Wealth and Status, Control and Freedom. It does Promise, and Delivers, all of these; Ultimately it takes it back, and replaces it with War and Death: For Power is not an impregnable Citadel to Protect one: Believing so will eventually lead Man into dark Times of Despair; But remember, Hope, that drives us all, is Born of Despair; And that can allow us choose the Alternative to Power, though that which is not Powerlessness.

Here follows a *Prophecy Foretelling the Times of Despair*, please God someone will find the Manuscript and take Heed of its Message.

The glow of the Sun is turning black: A Storm is coming, and as we cross the wet Sand, watching the Sky and the Sea, we make much Haste, as we do not want to be trapped by the rising Water, and anxiously keep an eye towards Home, a cluster of hide skin Tents on a stony Beach...We are huddling in the Tents as the Wind shrieks around us, and our Homes are torn open: Water and Screams fill the Darkness: We run, making for higher Ground, up the wooded Slope, branches slap our faces; Flashes of Lightning illuminate our Way; Then Darkness, and the deafening Thunder...we have reached the Summit, without stopping, where we will sit all Night...A grey Morning breaks as the Storm fades into the distance, and along the Coast I see the other Island, basking in a pool of Sunlight...It is not the Storm that leaves us so few in Numbers: it is the Rivalry, Recrimination and Fear; Survivors fight one another:

A new leader steps forward: Strong and Sure, and those who follow feel Strength and Security... I am left to wander the Coast, where I Scavenge, eat Limpets I prise from the Rocks or Fish I spear from the Rivers that flow out of the Forest. I do not enter deep into that Place, for I am on my own; But I do venture in a little way, for to find fresh Water to Drink.

I am standing on the Rock, and although it is a beautiful Day (birds sing, insects buzz, a gentle breeze rustles the leaves) I am Afraid, for the Forest behind me is Dark and Deep and full of Beasts and red-eyed Demons, Beings I have no Power against, while on the Island are distant members of my tribe: Women are gathered around the Fire cooking; Others are stretching out Animal skins to dry; Children are playing with a Dog; Men are standing on the Beach by the dugout Canoes; The smell of roasting Meat reaches me; I feel Hungry; I call, but my voice is lost; They do not hear.

The tribe is on the hunt; We are crossing the Cliff on the Beach that leads into the next Bay, to make our way along the soft Sand that curves around to the Hill that falls sharply to the Sea, and I am feeling Excited: I am a Hunter, I am with my People; We are working together. The Sun is well up over the Water, and it is going to be a hot Day, though I am wearing thick Skins as there is an early Morning Chill; My long Hair flops in my Face and I keep brushing it back... The River trickles into the Sea, making Channels through the Sand; This is where we enter, along the Bank through the Dunes and into the Scrubland, which gives way to Forest, cooling Moss and Shade, and it is here we Hope to find Prey, and we do: The Fearsome Bear, a Female with young Cubs, Coming upon her in a Clearing, with her Young. She is faster than us, and she rises up on her hind Legs and Roars, the terrifying sound echoing through the Forest, sending Birds flapping from Tree tops, while the cubs scatter for the cover of the undergrowth. The mother lunges straight for me, and I shake with Fear and lift up my Spear to stop her, but she lands on the Weapon and its snaps, leaving the Spearhead in her Chest, but not Mortally wounding her; She lands on top of me and sends me falling to the ground; all I see are Teeth and Claws. The others come to my Rescue and hit the Beast with their Axes and stab it with their Spears and Daggers, and I role out of the way as the Bear turns to defend herself; But she is outnumbered and is brought to the ground, and soon she is Killed. There is Great Rejoicing for a Bear is a great Feast for the whole Tribe: Yet still I feel Sad, for the Cubs have no Mother and will most likely Die...We are told to chop down a Tree, strip its Branches and tie the Animal around it by the Limbs, then carry it back to the Shore and the Canoes...It is hot; My Beard scratches my Face, but my Cuts are not Deep...

A dull thudding Noise comes from the heart of the Forest, and we have been sent to Investigate: From the cover of the Undergrowth we watch some Men hacking away at Trees, something very frightening, meaning Life to them but Death to us. They ring-bark the trees; Then they need more woodland; We know who these People are: We have met the Tribe before, on the Beaches and at the Mouths of the Rivers, and though long divided, we speak a similar Tongue, so we can Barter: Their Pottery, finer Axes, Arrows and Javelins for our Fish and hunted Meat, seasonal Berries and Fruit. Our Chief is uneasy, because we give more than we get, More and More for Less; Now they come too near, want too much, and they encroach on our Hunting Grounds; Still our Leader is hesitant; Though some of the Young men want War, saying if this goes on we will have no Power, but our Tribe is divided on what is best.

It is getting Dark and I am bent over, my Back sore, cutting the Wheat with a Jaw-Bone Scythe, while over my Shoulder a round Moon is rising and making the Tombs glitter like the

Stars, those Tombs that watch us as we work the Fields. That is not our world: That is the World of the Rulers, and we never get so far that we cannot see those Burial Places, high on the Hills...I wonder where the curve in the River goes; Dark Boats come around, their oars splashing the still Waters, bringing Fish from the Coast I am told; Sometimes they come from farther away with Exotic Things, and as a Child I remember seeing a milk-white Figure made of Ivory, the Tusks of strange Beasts in far off Lands. The Rich wear Necklaces made of Stones brought from across the Sea: The orange Amber I have always liked; But not for my Wife, for we are too Poor. I wonder what it is like to live in one of those large Homesteads at the foot of the Tombs, made of long timber Beams and thatched Roofs, where the Wealthiest live, and are protected by Palisades, or even in the smaller Dwellings of the Artisans, Potters and Stonemasons. I rarely get to walk the cobbled Pathway that winds passed those great Homes, up to the three Mother Tombs, because I live down here in a hide skin Tent, with those who work the Fields and tend the Cattle, guard the Herds from Predator wolf and lynx; We build the Stockades, repair them when they fall in a Storm; Sow the Crops, chase the hungry Birds away; Reap and store the Crops and Fodder; Keep next Season's Seed Corn dry and safe from the Weevil. We have no control over the Gods and Spirits: A Bull might be Sterile, a Heifer barren, and the Rains might destroy a Harvest...We have to preserve Sufficient Seed Stock for the following Year, and the Poor go Hungry...I think about that Road going to the Setting Sun: On Summer Evenings whilst I am sitting, resting at the end of a hard Day, the great Tombs sometimes reflect the Colours of the Dusk, and I long to take that wooden Track.

The curved Trumpets echo across the Lakes and Marches, and I gather up my wicker Shield, Sword and Spears, as do my Brothers, for it is nearly Dawn, and we are Excited: Not yet Frightened. Soon the Light will begin to come over the top of the Defences, and in the gloom the Oxen and Cart are being made ready, while a servant fans the Fire to heat up the boiled Meat for us to eat before we leave; Our Mother is weeping for her three Sons, and our Father, who is not Accompanying us because he is old, tries to Comfort her...We will be gone a long time, perhaps until Winter, for we are going to Battle; The Tribe is threatened: Our Uncle says we need more Ore to forge our Weapons to defend ourselves, and he has some Insight, as he is the Metal Smith. He has shown me those Magic Rocks, of Green and Blue; But they are now Rarer and more Expensive: We cannot afford the Amount we Need. Enemies will take Advantage in unsettled Disputes, so we are being assembled for War... The army moves East after Daybreak, as we travel to meet up with the Tribe of the Mountains, who are locked in Conflict with Sea Traders, who Long Ago brought Knowledge of how to Create Fire from Rock and mould it into any Shape. They traded that Knowledge for the Rocks, on the Islands along the Coast, but they grew Stronger, more of their People arrived, they Intermarried, set Tribe against Tribe; Now they want to sail away with more of the Rock, for Trade over the Waters. They want to have the greatest Share of the Wealth; Would they come to want it all? Why share if you can take Everything? Others grow Uneasy, Power is slipping; Power has to be regained: So we are going to War.

The Arrowhead pierces my Shield, and stops, its Tip nearly touching my Eye, as we attack to the cry of the Horn, a Terrifying Sound; Running through the damp Grass on the flat bank by the River; I hear the Water flowing...Our Army is charging the Enemy; Getting close we draw our Spears from the Pouches on our backs and fling them. They whizz through the Air, and we hear Shouts of Pain and Anger: Arrows come our way, and a Warrior beside me falls silently. As we close in we pull our Swords, and the Battle is fierce and close; People shout and fall; Blood splatters on my face, I do not even know if it is my own; I continue striking out and defending with my Shield. My arms ache and the dying Day seems to freeze, an

orange Glow over the bear Trees...Things are turning against us: Others are running; I am gripped by Fear, the Fear that makes you Act before you Think...I am fleeing through the Forest, feet throwing up the dead Leaves, branches scratching my face; We are starting the Long Journey Home.

There is a Peace, both Tribes strong enough to prevent Defeat, but not enough to Win, and we live apart, divided by the Blood-Free Space that protects from Surprise, on our Islands and Hill Forts: My Hill looks out across the Plains and Lakes, to other Settlements of my Family and Clan; The Guards watch from the Walls, their Trumpets over their Shoulders, ready to sound the Alarm if the Enemy is sighted along the distant Tracks; And should the Alarm be called, there are no Differences between us, we all Act as one. The Tribe is Rich, with great Herds of Cattle, the making of a Tribe's Wealth; And the bull is Mightiest, and so much is owed to the Virility of that Creature: So much else is Impotence...I sit outside my Home, thinking about the World, drinking Mead from a wooden Cup, the Day almost done. The evening Meal is being cooked: Smoke wafts past me out the Door, and I smell the Meat in the cauldron...Our society has Wealth: The Rich glow in their Gold Finery, brightening the dull Cloaks and Leggings made out of Wool...We are ready to Defend, but for now we have Peace, Food in our Bellies, Shelter and Strength; The Weapons are there if we need them: The Leaf-Bladed Sword for Cutting and Thrusting, the Metal Shield, the Halberd, Axe and Javelin. The Tribe hasn't wiped Blood from them for a long Time: I have never Fought, my Sons, now Men, haven't (not yet!), but I am unsettled, because I don't know what Forces can be Appeased if our Riches need to be Concealed.

The Hall is warm, the Fire in the Hearth blazing, and the Smoke rises through the opening in the Thatched Roof: I can see the Stars, and hear the icy Wind blow. Everyone at the Table is Merry, pounding it with their fists, while the Ghosts in the Dark Corners of the Rafters are ignored, I think to myself. To the beating of the Drums come the Tales of great Battles, and the Bravery of the Tribal Warriors of Long Ago, Men with the Strength of Gods, Invincible, all-Powerful. At the Great Banquet, the Young Warrior dreams of such a State: I peer into my Drink and Dream; Feelings become Real: Fear turns to Courage, Weakness to Strength; Doubt to Certainty. But I hear Whispers nearby, faint over the Singing and Shouting: Two of the Elders are talking; I listen: They talk of the People of the Three Great Kings, how they are seeking Vengeance for the Killing of their Prize Bull, its throat slit. And they have killed one of their own Warriors, Stabbed and Strangled, the Body buried in the Bog, after everyone was told to watch his Execution, for they blamed him, because of his Blood Ties with our People. Tensions are high, they blame us: They say we wish to Weaken them, so we can overthrow them from Within; And now they are looking for Compensation, but the Demand is too great: Our one Bull. (Either that or the entire herd of cattle!) They also demand removal of Tariffs on the Ridge Tracks...I Fear our People are not as Powerful as the Tales suggest, but nobody says it.

The Kin is gathered: I am standing at the Back in a puddle of Water, the wet seeping into my torn leather Footwear; I am barely able to see over the shoulders of those in front, so I have to stand on my Toes and strain my Neck. The Trumpets make a deafening Sound, and I see the new Leader walk up to the top of the Mound and turn towards us; The trumpets fall silent. The bearded Man is far off, and looks Small, but he is a Strong Warrior who has won every Fight he has Fought, ready to bring his People to War and Victory. I want to be a Warrior, a Chief: A Ruler wears Colourful Clothes and wears Gold Jewellery, and doesn't have Holes in his Shoes. Nobody tells him what to do; He is not Afraid of anything; He has

nothing to be Afraid of, for they say he is a God, or a Favourite of the Gods, so People have to do what he tells them.

The evening Sun glints off our Weapons as we stand in line, whilst on a Hill across the Marshy Ground stand the Enemy, with whom we have just done Battle. I am exhausted: I must Sleep after Days of Marching, Waiting, Fighting; We are the Victors, for now, says someone. The Ground is not suitable for their Chariots, those Terrifying Weapons, unknown to us, but of which we have heard the Tales, how they shatter everything in their way. This new Race has Weapons made from a stronger Metal: It is called Iron, and our Swords bend and shatter with its blow; Fortuitously, in this Battle the Spirits of the Waters brought us Victory, the Earth too muddy for our Attackers; Their Wheels got stuck and the Horses were frightened. We are nimbler on our Feet, making up for inferior Weaponry, and now we can Command a good Price for Peace. The priestess, Magh, Matriarch and Mother of five Warriors, crosses the rough Terrain; A Man on the other side steps down from a Chariot and comes down the Hill to meet her; Another Man is with him; They talk for a while, the Other seems to be Interpreting: He Gestures, Grimaces, Laughs. Then Magh gestures to us to come forward; We do as Commanded...We are following the Three, over the Squelchy Ground, Slippery felled Tree Trunks and Mossy Rocks, no place for Wheels and Horses; We ascend the Slope of Scrub where the Enemy Warriors are standing. I know what Magh wants: The Skills to make Iron and to have one of the land Knives, as well as greater Knowledge of Sowing and Reaping; In Return they will be not Fear the Mist of the Marsh, and the Creeping Attackers at Night; They will only have to worry about the Peoples on the Fertile Plain, where Rivalry is greater...From where we now stand we can see a Fort on a gentle Hill, surrounded by a Circular Wall of Wooden Stakes; Within, the Conical Shape Thatched Roof of a Homestead is visible; Other smaller Dwellings and open Farms with Enclosures are scattered about outside. How vulnerable these people are! I would be Fearful if I were them: On a Moonless Night a Watchman would not see an Enemy approach, and the Settlement easily set upon, the Inhabitants Slaughtered before they could fully wake and grab their Iron Weapons; Ladders would easily scale the Wooden Stockade, for the Watchman would only have time to call out the Alarm for the Warriors to hasten to the Defences, when the Enemy is sighted, but too late!

He is from the Fields of Blood, where Sacrifices are performed as Warning and Punishment, and he is on the run, but does not Disclose why, only that he has Travelled for Days; He is quite old to be making such an Arduous Journey. We are sitting by the River: He is Thirsty, and is cupping up the Water with his Hands, and while I have far to Travel, I spare him some of my Meat. He tells me where he wants to be, Home, and that the Sky God will help him. We speak the same language, and he is a Person of some Status; His bright sleeveless Cloak is long, fastened with a very large Golden Brooch studded with Precious Stones, and he is adorned with a lot of Jewellery, a glittering Torque Necklace and a knot work Bracelet on each wrist; But he has no Sword to protect him on his Journey. He tells me he has lived on this Island since a young Man, and had a Family, but now he wants to return to where he had fled from long ago, to join other members of his Tribe. He says that when a young Man he did not know how Alliances worked: That battle, his first, against a stronger former Ally, the Romans, was bloody, ending in Defeat; The former Ally had besieged their fellow Tribes, who were beginning to Starve. They attacked to relieve them but were repulsed; They attacked again, under the cover of Darkness, and had some Success. But the Enemy had built huge Fortifications around the Hill Fort they sought to take: Ditches and a Moat, wall wooden Palisades, Watchtowers and Pits with deadly sharpened Stakes. They attempted to cross these Defences, but were attacked by a force of Cavalry; The fighting was

Fierce, and though they fought Bravely they were no match for the Germanic Mercenaries, who speared them as they attempted to overcome the Defences. The Attackers had no choice but Retreat, as the cause was Hopeless, and they were pursued; And in the depth of winter set upon in a dark Forest, but there were still Leaves on the Trees, the boughs thick, making fighting Difficult; And the Wood was cut through with many Rivers with deep Banks and slippery Rocks. The Legionaries cut them down as they tried to Escape... He is Anxious to be on the move; Finished the Meat he bids me Goodbye and is gone...I watch him disappear across the Bog Track and think: How his Tribe has brought great Disruption to this land; The Tales of the Tribe give vivid Accounts of their Invasion, and I think how events faraway, beyond the Tracks and Seas, make their way to this Island: there is no Escape.

I am worth Fifty Milch Cows, though I have come from nothing, and still know my Power will grow, as I shout to the Assembly, that if they support me they will grow in Power too; Prosperity and Safety assured. I am Eloquent, my strong Voice carrying, a Spirit runs through my Body. All the Kin sit around: My Brothers, Uncles and a sea of Cousins. All can Vote: For me or anyone else: They know I am not my dead Father's choice, but I am Passionate, believe I can Lead them, that my Words can Convince them. Three others want the Title of King: The more the better: That divides. My loyal Followers have collected Knowledge of all their Weaknesses and Strength...I am speaking first, taking the lead, no one Opposes me; I list my Strengths, sure to include all those possessed by my Opponents; I possess the Qualities of all of them, not just the few of each one: Even combined they are Weaker than me. One I know will transfer Loyalty to me, while a second can be Bought, leaving my Chosen Brother... I have set the first against my Brother: While my Brother is too Honourable to buy off the second, for he lives too strictly by the Law, though the Law still works in my favour. I can shout anyone down and I do...There is no one talking, opposing, I am flying like a Bird of Prey, I think to myself, the assembled Tribe no more than rodents scurrying in the grass, terrified I will sweep down on them. My Supporters stand at the back, and I am Confident of their numbers; Everybody knows how many Swords and Axes I have at my disposal, my Power is clear, and I can threaten to split the Tribe, which is in no one's Interest; So it is easier to support me: I will Win either way. And what of our Enemies? I ask them. They are shuffling and I am Confident my support is growing; The blank faces in the dim Light become more Animated: More and more come over to my Side, because they realize the Tide is in my Favour: The Opposition is shrinking, and knows it, it is obvious to me...The Vote is being taken: I am certain of Victory.

We sweep across the River, up the other Bank, the full Moon brightening our Path, and we are upon the Boys guarding the Herd before they had time to react: Once the Charge of the Horses is heard it is too late; Not a single Cow Herder has time to Flee, and they are all cut down. It is a great feeling (Power!) as I bring the Sword down on my Victim's head; A low thud as it breaks his Skull, but not the Skin, no Blood; He falls without any further Cry; In the Shadows, Voices are pleading: Then screams of Pain, followed by Silence. I am Invincible; I am accepted, this gives me a Sense of Power; Nothing can harm me; I am releasing so much Anger, against so many things I cannot remember. When Feeling this way, I think the Defeated can only accept their Defeat, accepting my Greater Strength, my Power; They should be even Grateful and Admiring at our Power over them: Accepting in Death; The outcome is Simple: There is no further Wrong to be righted. The Cattle low in Terror, the sound carries into the Distance, where Dogs bark somewhere...Now a Cloud is crossing the Moon, making the Scene much darker, only the Black outlines of hairy horned Cattle to be seen; And they are moving restlessly, Fearful, and are crowding against the Pens; We must Control them quickly, and an Order is shouted to corral the Animals to the Gate and then

make off with them across the River, as there is no Time to lose. We must Control the Beasts, which are very Strong, and harder to Control when frightened; That Feeling rises again in my own Stomach: Fear; But I dismiss it, and concentrate on escaping with our Prize: Some Fifty Head I reckon, a sizeable Portion we can retain when the Owners come searching. The thrill of it is the greatest Feeling, returning with such a Bounty, hooves thundering on the Earth as we make for Home. We can all hold our Heads high; We have Outwitted and Won; More Food for the Bellies, more bartering Power, more Status as fearless Warriors; Those are the Real gains of our Raids: I'd rather be this, than a Slave in Chains, left outside like a Dog; Or Weak and Crippled, dependent for survival only on Charity of others. No! This is the way to Live, even to Die, in the act of Defiance, rather than meekly on a Master's whim.

The River Journey is easier, for the Sea is frightening, but I am glad to go through that Danger and Misery for how I Feel now: Elated, with a sense of Achievement, my Heart only now beginning to Calm, though we have spent nearly all the Day working our way deep along the still River. There is a great Peace: I am dreamily watching the Water splitting along the side of the Boat; The Breeze from the Sea is still carrying us, and I reflect what a Wonder that such a Vessel, made only of Hide and Wood, can survive the Open Sea: Waves like Mountains, Winds that could topple us into the Deep and lashing Rain. My Arms still ache from a whole Night spent bailing out Sea Water, which pours over the side and leaks through the tar; But it is worth it when I see that Sight: a walled Town of Stone, with Watchtowers, and large Buildings with Orange Slated Roofs, so different to what I am used to. The Cone-Shaped Thatched Buildings sticking out of the Scrub and Woodland near the River bank are like the ones at Home: In the Wild outside the Settlements Life is so different...This is a large Town...Soon we moor at the wooden Jetty; There are no other Boats around, and it is a Quiet, Warm, Overcast Summer's Day...My Father tells me and the others to wait while he finds an Official, as he walks along the Pier across the Mudflats to the Bank and the Double Arched Entrance Gates to the Town; I can see the Soldiers on the Tower over the Gates, their Helmets moving about, but all is Peaceful...I am woken by a Voice, my Father talking to someone, and I look up: He is coming down the Pier with a stocky Man in a Tunic and Sandals, balding and his Face weather beaten; He has come to Inspect the Goods and collect a Tariff, and I wonder how many Coins my Father will have to give him: Will he have to give the Official a Bribe?...We are being asked to stay for the Night in one of the Taverns, have something to eat and get a good Night's sleep, and I am looking forward to sleeping in a proper bed, in one of those Roman Houses, so warm and dry; and I am also getting a liking for their Drink, their honeyed Wine...I am standing outside the Tavern, the Clouds have cleared, and the setting Sun is cutting its way through the Maze of Streets, my Belly is full and I am a bit drunk, but in good Mood: I feel like finding a Woman; there are plenty of them in this Town, but my Father would beat me if I defiled a girl's Honour, and her Family would want Compensation and my Blood: What Female in this fine place would want a poor Barbarian Youth? There are the Women who service the garrison; They come from Lands faraway, brought by their Husbands, or as Slaves. If I were a Roman Legionary a Woman would Desire me; And I would have Money too...We are leaving, passing the Fort, where I can hear the Soldiers in the Parade Ground: Orders being shouted, but I don't fully understand the Language, of Men in Training for War; The Noise of columns of Troops marching, their Metal Armour and Shields clanking, while the rest of the Town still hasn't woken, and I dream of being a Legionary, one of the Brave and Heroic.

It is a Moonless Night as our Boat pulls up on the Sand, and we get out and move silently up the Beach...Through the Dunes, then through the long Grass and Woodland...The ground is flat and easy to walk on...Now we see our Destination: It is silhouetted against the grey

Sky, but there are no Lights, I notice: There should be, it is Dark: Perhaps we had been spotted as our Vessel got near the Shore, in the Twilight; No Dog barks, these Places usually have large vicious Mastiffs...we get to the Walls and Gate; The Gate is easily broken open; Yet the Noise does not alert anyone inside...The Family and Servants of the Villa have fled: There are Signs of them leaving in a hurry, the stable door in the Courtyard is wide open; They must have escaped on a Horse and Cart, taking the Road to Segontium. They will not have taken all their Valuables with them, and we can take our Time; There is nothing to worry about...We stroll across the Cobblestones, along the Terrace looking in the Windows, their shutters wide open. The Front Door is ajar, and we go inside, into a Palatial Hall with Mosaic flooring and Frescos on the walls, nothing that even the Wealthiest back in our own Land have seen. All the Rooms are the same, with under floor Heating as well as Fireplaces...A cry goes out: One of the Party has discovered something, so we run in Excitement and Greed...In a Room we find him rooting through a Chest; It is full of Gold Coins and Jewellery; Other Items we can leave, these are the things we really want...we are in the kitchens, there are Silver Platters on the table, with the remnants of meals: Honey coloured pieces of Fish and cooked Meat, left over Vegetables, Cheeses, half-eaten Bread, Fruit, stacks of dirty Plates, Forks and Goblets (some still with Wine in them). It's the Silver Platters I want; I wipe the leftovers off with my Sword, everything is now there for the taking...The Flames help guide us back to our Boat, and we need such Assistance as we have consumed numerous Carafes of Wine from the Cellar, for this Night is something to Celebrate: We take what we want; What others have themselves taken.

The young Warriors are Impulsive, and want to Raid, as it is the Custom of every new King to bring his Warriors on Campaign, but the Tribe is small and cannot afford to bring Trouble upon itself, so we must be Careful: Know what we can Take and what we must Leave...They are growing in Strength, though their King is still a Vassal himself; We could ally ourselves with them; But would they be Loyal or Treacherous? Would they betray us to the Overlord? Our Spies watch their Activities to determine where their Loyalty lies, now and in the future, depending on Circumstance. A Marriage could bind an Alliance, though it would not be without Opposition, as Power is now becoming centred on the few: They become Stronger; so the Rest of us stay Weaker, whatever we do.

There is greater Wealth in Slaves: For every healthy Female three Cows; There is confused News from the Roman World, but there is greater Opportunity for Raids along the Coasts, setting up Trading Posts and even Settlements. The Legions are retreating, other Wars in other Lands, so it is easier to snatch Bodies, Young and Healthy, that get a Good Price, that we can trade to other Tribes: They pay generously; And the Tribute they have to pay is even greater the Stronger our Power grows. I am standing on the Marchlands near Fast Running River; The faces are Interesting, different Expressions, standing there in their Neck Chains, Cold on this windswept Plain; There are Men with Sullen Angry Faces, some hint of Fear in the Eyes, though well Hidden; Women Crying, and Anguished at being separated from their Children; The Children are Hysterical, Weeping and Howling, wanting to get to where their Mothers are held, but they will all be sent in different Directions...The Summer Evening is darkening and the Fires are lit; I am looking forward to Eating and Drinking. I think of the Slaves who have been moved on, their Long Walk has begun, as the drops of Rain begin to fall, but I don't think of them for long...The Drunken Talk turns to new Raids, But my Friend, Muiredech, tells us about the Successes of Cuneda, who has Defeated and Expelled Settlers, and as a result he has been made a Local King. He is darkening the Overlord's Relations with any Settlement or Trade, intent now on War not Peace, and this may have implications on our own Island, of which we must be aware.

I do not sit at the top of the Table, which is the Place for the King, my Father, and his Chief Sons; They sit up there along with their Mothers, Inne and Rignach. My Father is distant, with Fierce Eyes and a Violent Temper, and the others taunt me sometimes that my Mother is a lesser Concubine, which makes me Angry. She does not take part in the Festivities, she is hard preparing the Food and bringing Drink, but she wants me to join in, as much as I can, for I have a Right of Place, which cannot be denied. I am Angry and Sad for her, yet I do what she says, and that makes me feel Guilty, but it makes me feel better for her that I am sitting farthest away from the Roaring Fires and the Bubbling Cauldrons. I am near the huge Double Doors, that even when closed the howling draft comes through the chinks; Even the Rain gets through, sometimes the Autumn Leaves under the gap at the end. On this Night to mark the Coming of Winter, it is very Cold and I feel the Chill: It gets through my woollen Coat, and I eat the food Greedily, to make me Warmer, and drink what Ale I am offered, and Wine too if it comes; The Meat is good; The Cold makes everything tastier. Samhain always brings mixed Feelings: I am Angry with my Father, and all my Brothers, and I feel Pain for my Mother; She is so poorly treated, especially by the other Wives and Concubines; They resent her: Resent each other; They all vie for Power, the best for their own Off Springs, by Plotting and Scheming. They are Dangerous: You must watch your back; Everything is for the taking, as there is no certainty in the Transition of Power, and keeping everyone uncertain is the King's Strategy: Keep them divided against each other; As long as the Nobles have their Slaves and Servants they remain Enslaved to him; His father taught him that, it is said... It seems late now, I have had a lot to Drink and Eat, but the doors keep swinging open, people are coming and going, and I am hit by the Wind and drenched by the Rain, still my Mood is a bit better: It is not too Bad; I will make the most of my Circumstances, as my Thoughts drift away to the Tales of the Heroes. The Brothers aren't that Bad; I get on best with Conell, and it is good he has returned, for he helps me to be a Warrior: Under his training I grow Stronger, I have some Skill with the Hurl, not much though. With his Knowledge and Patience I can throw a Javelin with great Accuracy, and can hold my own with the Sword and Shield, but I have some way to go, Fighting on Horseback. I shall follow him as a Warrior, when he goes to carve out his own Kingdom, as he says he shall do, and I judge he will, because he has Real Power, is a Leader, one who has Self Assurance, but also inspires Loyalty; I can gain some Power by allying myself to his Rule: I need to Survive.

The Lawyers haggle and the Oak-Seers whisper presciently of serious Consequences and we must listen, even though for so long deaf, when the Rock calls out the Prophecy of our own Doom on the Night of the False Harvest Moon. Still the Laigin infringe on our Borders, agree cattle Tribute: Then Renege; They agree Boundaries: Then violate that Agreement; They agree Terms: Then do not give what is Promised; They are Dishonest in their Tribute; They are Deceitful in their Cattle-Counting. But how is payment to be Enforced? The Answer is not always clear...They seek to control our vassal Kingdoms, for Land and Vassals mean Wealth and Prestige, and Unification of Kin means Security; The Glory of Victory means Stability within. One Tribe will ultimately lead to another; If we let one away others will follow their example, and our Suzerainty will be challenged, from within and without. There are murmurs Ailill Molt has Enemies in his own Kin, for Power is no respecter of Blood, and they harbour a Desire for the Seat of the High King, the bitter dreams of the Vanquished. Whatever way, it looks like War will once again ravage the Land, unless both sides move enough to reach a Peace. If our Interests are met our Peoples will have Peace: If they are not, our Peoples will be at War: Bloodshed, Plague and Famine again, until a savage Battle determines the Logical limits of Rule, guaranteed by the horizon of bog...Yet the Desire for Power does not disappear: The Fight always goes on.

I see the Hill Forts, their gloomy Silhouettes against the grey Evening, and I think how the World is changing; Those haunted Places are from Times long ago, so many of them now quiet and covered in grass, they have become Extinct, and I find myself begging the question: Are we going the same way? Many are asking that question, and it is creating unease...The king, Diarmait mac Cerbaill, is desperate to consolidate Power, afraid that the Dynasty faces Subjugation, or even Oblivion; The greatest king of any Ruler, Diarmait is frustrated he is repeating the Failures of his Father and Grandfather. Princes carve out their own Kingdoms, the ties of the Kin are weakened and the Loyalty of the People to their King unthreads. Each Noble has his Retinue, Slaves and Servants; Each Freeman has his growing Power. With more Labour to farm and do the work of the homestead, the Warriors are free to make Weapons and fight Wars, and so many of them Desire to be Powerful Lords, all with their own Hostages. These are uncertain Times: The King is fearful of Plots and seeks advice from Prophets, and does what he can to alter the course of those Predictions: He fights ferociously to avoid that Destiny, and he carries on his shoulder the great burden of Grief, the Death of his own Son in Battle. The King suffers many Defeats himself, having to flee the Battlefield; The struggle for power attempts to avoid Defeat, but bring about that very thing: The harder the Fly Wriggles, the more it gets caught in the Spider's Web.

I traipse behind the Chariot, along the dusty Track, but it moves slowly for the Horses are tired, and it has been a long day; I am hot and exhausted, the Fear of Battle has drained me, but the Mood is Good, and I am looking forward to the Drinking Horns full of Ale; I can see them. I drive away the bloody images of the Plains at Ath Goan, and the farther I get across that Plain, the further those images recede; I dispel them as soon as I Think them; They still try and enter my Head, like the angry Spirits of the Dead, they keep coming: I keep pushing them away. I feel Sadness: We lost many Warriors; Connell among them, but at least he lived to Avenge his own Father's Murder, and at least that Treacherous Ui Mail King is Dead, and it is welcome if Faelan is to be King, a worthy Ally. His rise means the Enemy is weakened, so bitter Family Rivalries can be pursued and I feel a Deep Sadness: Who are really Friends and really Foes?

The News brings both Anxiety and Relief when I hear that Aed is Dead, a King who always divided his Opponents, or tried to, a King who desired Power more than anything else. It is said he would wake at Night in a cold Sweat, Terrified, and even though the Poets praised him, others whispered that he feared Losing what he loved most: Power; That he needed Power, visited in Nightmares by Images of Defeat, Humiliation, Enslavement and Death. It is always a Sign, that in the following days his Tyranny would grow: My Allegiance is to the Children of Cholmain the Great; They are my People. We Rule here at Uisnech, Sacred Centre of the World, Sacred since the Beginning of Time, the ancient dwelling place of the Old Gods and Goddesses, where the Summer fires are lit, a Beacon across the Plains to the other Kingdoms. Hopefully the Throne can once again be shared in Succession, and Balance of Power restored to the Dynasty. Brother turns against Brother and I am still grieved when the Lust for Power turns a Prince against his own Blood; There is deep Bitterness: Aed made use of the Rivalries to his own Advantage, but perhaps it did bring some Peace. If the Enemy from afar it is not a Threat, we find the Threat from within ourselves...I recall the Stories my Father told me of the Seer who will come, and warn us that the need for Power is the Wickedness in the Black Heart, its Possession has no limit to Violence and Cruelty; I have passed the Stories on to my Children...I hear more News of the Men from the North: They plunder the Coasts, attacking Churches and Settlements, and Peoples near the Sea live in Terror, because the Invaders are great Seafarers, and there are Fears too that they will make their way up the Rivers. Maybe their Threat can unite us, for a

while at least; In such times people recall the ancient Tales of the great Victory at Druim Derg.

Now they come in whole Fleets, whilst before it had been single Vessels scouring the Coastline looking for suitable Targets to raid, but not going any distance Inland. That has changed, as I can see, looking down upon their Dragon Dead Ships that are pulled up upon the muddy banks, half hidden by the Bull Rushes; I count come thirty Masts, and each Boat must have at least 10 Warriors. They have set up Camp near the water's edge, and are knocking down trees from the Woodland not far Inland, and I must be Careful, for I am near the Edge of the Forest, where Parties out to fell trees or hunt food could come across me. I lie low, my Horse tethered to bushes some distance away, and I hope no one comes across her, for I cannot get back to Mide without my Horse. Time is so important: I must be able to move faster than them, to bring the Warning, for their Incursions are making the Situation very Tense, more steps that lead us to War, and I think that the Divisions weaken our chances to defeat the Foreigners, so we must Unite, even if it is only against our own Hypocrisy. Conchobar sees Threats everywhere: He is sure to die by the Assassin's hand, and others think the War with the Foreigners will not come: They are wrong, for all they want to do is Deny it is going to happen, and laugh at their own Fear. The Wise say, when the Enemy Sword's Shadow falls within reach of your arm it is too late to Fight...The River is deep, and wide enough to allow the Ships travel deep into our Territory, and they can easily cross the Ford; I know this because I have used the route while herding Cattle to the Lands of Ui Briuin Cualann. The North Men pay no attention to the Traffic across the Swift Running River, because they may have come to some Agreement with the Ui Fergusa and the local Monastery, but the Traveller is left with a menacing Fear. What will they do? Most of the time they ignore use, still they seem to be planning something. If I go about my Business they might pay no attention: if I am caught Spying upon them I will Die a horrible Death, I am sure. I must return and report what I have seen: That our isolated Churches, Monasteries and Homesteads are easy Prey for these Barbarians, and they need to be confronted by the might of a United Force.

Our Horses thunder through the Track in the Woods, to a clearing with a stone Church; All is Quiet, the Horses snort and shift about, uneasily. There is no one about, no North Men, they may be hiding in the Forest or watching from the Hill overlooking this Peaceful and Holy Site, a place that holds a strange attraction. We move on, towards the Coast... The Path winds through open, rocky ground full of gorse, and I know we are getting near our prize...There it is: The Island with its Palisade and Ditch enclosing the Promontory. There are no Longboats moored on the beach, and there's an eerie silence, which is frightening, but things are going in our favour: I am feeling Vengeance, and Pride too. We are able to sweep through the land, that those Foreigners took, and reclaim it as our own...The houses by the rocks overlooking the Island are empty, with our Swords we gently push open the doors, but find no one inside; Nor do we find any Bounty. We cannot see any one moving on the Island: The Slave Fortress looks abandoned, and the little Church looks unused. I think to myself: Perhaps they are hiding at the far side of the Island, out of view... Others are in the Dwellings, ransacking them to find anything of Value...How lucky we came across this large Farmstead while returning to Camp, such chance I say to my Brother...We are rooting through valuables, oblivious to wailing, hysterical Children and sobbing Women (with whom sated Lust was excused as Vengeance and Justice, but I think no more about this) who are huddled in a corner...We exit the building with our Riches, into the watery Sunlight, passing the headless Corpses, blood darkening the dusty earth, of old Men and Boys; The Warriors will find this Scene when they return.

The rope is fastened tightly around my wrists as the horse drags me among the Track, through a rocky, gorse covered Landscape; The Sea is not far off; I can glimpse it, its blueness, Still and Calm. That is where they are taking me, Naked and Enslaved, to the Foreign Slave Market; I feel terrible Fear, trapped, wanting to Escape, yet knowing I am unable. This is me now: Without my long iron Sword, Shield, Armour and Helmet; Powerless, Naked. They have not killed me, unlike the two others and I try and recall what happened, the exact Course of Events in the confusion of Battle: We were Winning, but a few of us got separated from the Main Force, and were surrounded by a pack of Norsemen, who were Angry, because we had ravaged the Hinterland of their Town: Now this, after we slaughtered them in their hundreds and drowned their Chief in the lake, like a rat. They would want Revenge, and were Angry: We were outnumbered, so, the fight Hopeless, we fell to our knees, our Fear overcame us; I feel Shame, also Anger, at myself. I was unable to come to the Defence of my fellow Warriors, when their Heads were smashed open with Axes...I am sitting, exhausted, but calm...This is what we fight to avoid: To be Stripped and Defeated, and I pray; Strangely, the Scene is Beautiful, Birds are singing and the Sun shining: This is the Place to come to when all else is Lost; The Place where the body Dies and the Soul escapes, in the Fulfilment of the Journey to Heaven. I glimpse the Island, with its Slave Compound and wooden Church, ships moored at the Water's Edge, busy in the Trade of Human flesh, and I think: I will never see my Wife and young Child again.

I am staggering along the bank after a day of Battle, where our Army was routed, a King of Tara and many of his Chieftains slain, where I have lost my Father and a Brother. Brave Niall Glundubh fell, acting against growing Foreigners' Power, and knowing that an Alien threat unites a divided Kin; He had to put an end to wavering Vassals. I watch the water drifting by, Sunlight shimmering on its surface, flowing quietly towards the Sea, and I have the images of Battle: The Foreigners' Axes cracking skulls, severing jaws and hacking limbs; Swords slicing through flesh; Spears thrusting or falling quietly from the Sky, and I see my Father, his stomach torn open, eyes staring; I lost sight of my Sibling early in the Battle, but am told he was killed early on by a barbarian Spear. Their Armour and Helmets gave them more protection: Our Clothes could not protect our Bodies and our Battle Caps, with their pretty Colours and Crests, could not withstand their blows. I feel Anger, for it was a frenzy of swipes and blows, ducking and running, but in relief, I am not stained with my own blood, thank the Lord, but that of the Enemy; My face and mantle are also caked in lime, a sour taste on my lips. I had felt the Battle was lost early on: The lines of red and yellow Shields and Helmets moving forward resolutely, fierce bearded faces looking out, determined for Battle, coming forward over the boggy ground without Hesitation or Contemplation of Fear. I felt Fear: That Fear that wants to speak to the legs and tell them: run! Now I am, as Horsemen cover our Retreat; I hear the clang of Swords and screams of pain...Night will soon be here and the chase will become more difficult, which will allow us merge into the Forests, hopefully making the pursuit too Dangerous.

I am a Captive here for many Years, since I was a young Man, kept as a Hostage, and the Neck Brace hurts me; My ankles are forever raw and sore because of the Manacles. How long more can this last? The door opens and throws Light into the small room, as our Gaoler comes in with bowls of Gruel, but he seems agitated, and, from beyond the open door, I hear Noises, but I dismiss them: I have heard such Sounds before; The Shouts and Insults preceding Battle...This exchange is between Gaelic and Norse, and adds to my Sense that something of Significance is happening. I heard, Yesterday or the Day before, a large number of footsteps, clanking of Armour and Metal, an Army on the march, and during the Night noises again, returning, and hushed Conversations. But I get no Information, nor does

anyone else imprisoned in this hovel. More Sounds: People walking on the wooden boards; More than usual, for I am used to the daily bustle, but this is different: Something is happening, and I am sure it is Important. I am Curious, Excited, Frightened what it might be...I don't know what part of the Day it is; The normal Voices and Sounds of Commerce are absent, but there is an unsettling Silence; A bird is chirping somewhere; I am beginning to feel Hunger, it must be time for my second Meal of the Day...The light through the chinks in the wooded wall fades, and it seems to be getting darker, and I recall we have not been let out into the Yard, to go to the toilet and get some fresh air; I am feeling Uncomfortable, but also Apprehensive. What's going on? Drumbeats; I hear the Drums in the distance...It must be the Depth of Night, those Drums are still beating; Otherwise the whole town seems as though it is holding its Breath...Dawn is breaking, a grey morning; The others are beginning to mutter to one another, their Anxiety overcoming their fear of the Guards...It is now Day, our Gaoler has not brought our Food and I realize the Drums are Silent and everything is Quiet: No one is about outside...We are all Hungry and Afraid; Someone smells smoke, then I smell it too. I hear people running past the door shouting...It is night again, nobody has come near us all Day. But I smell the charred wood and smoke. I cannot sleep: No one can...The door bursts open and in come three Men with Swords and Torches; I am Afraid, and we are pulled up and taken outside into the Dark. Under the Light of the Torch's flame, we are being led up the narrow Street, the wooden boards hurting our bare feet, while other groups in Chains are being brought out from other Lanes and Buildings. Are we going to be killed? At the top we can see the dark Plain, studded with Camp Fires as far as the eye can see, and it becomes Evident that the Norse Town is under Siege by a huge Army. I feel Freedom, and immediately hope my Family is alive; I wonder how my Wife is and what my Children look like now, and if Domnall ua Neill is still King.

The Conversation is getting animated and Belligerent against the Treacherous Enemies of our King, who for over Thirty Years has ruled fairly, returning Hostages to their Families and keeping the North Men in check. We have ruled over Dubhlinn, and our Actions put an end to the bloody Tyranny of the Foreigners; We are all agreed upon this...

The dusty Track is quiet as I await a Traveller: A Pilgrim, a Pedlar, a Cleric, a Merchant, a Soldier, bringing News of faraway Lands, of Wars that I know will find the Route back to my small World beside this Lake, where with a tiny Plot of Land I struggle to Live: Alas! Mine is a Precarious World. Along the Lake shore stands the Royal Island, the still Waters around it glowing Orange in the sinking Sun. No longer does the Road from here lead to Tara, as the World has changed and there is no Sanctuary from it. I tell my Children (warn them!) of the Blood Prophet who will come and stand upon the Poet's Rock, and cry out a warning to the People who are Blind and Deaf, who do not listen and cannot see the Vision...Reports that Robert the Pious has retreated in Defeat to his Palace at a place called Beaugency, driven from the Battle Field by his Sons. The Monks say he is a King of great Piety, thence the Title, a Poet and Chorister that seeks Seclusion singing Matins and Vespers. But the means to pass Power from Father to Son, thwarting the Designs of Rivals, does not lead to Harmony, I tell from the Accounts. He is a King who had only limited Dominion when he was anointed as Successor, and his Reign sees him extend Power where he can, for Power is like blossoming Life, if it does not Grow, it Dies.

The great Trade Routes to the East, beyond Christendom, bring Goods and Ideas, but also Rivalry and Competition, and indeed, War. I have seen some of the Merchandize that has travelled from those Places, and the Glee and Wonder on faces of Buyers at Markets; But I warn my Children be careful: Too often with Good comes Evil. Routes through Mountains

and Deserts, across open Plains, where the Traveller is at the Mercy of Attackers, bring me News from an ancient Civilization formed by a Warrior called Yu the Great, in a Time after the Flood, because his Father was tasked with halting the Deluge of the World sent by God...The golden City of Byzantium: The Purple Princess Zoe, a woman of great Beauty, had been seen as a potential Bride for the Holy Roman Emperor, but who resented a favoured Sister: And now her father, Emperor Constantine III, is dead; The reports do not say whether his Daughter is Betrothed, for the Hope of an Heir. It is said that Zoe has great Devotion to sustaining the Position of her Family Dynasty, under which the Rulers of Byzantium fought with the Bulgars, and defeated them decisively at a small Village called Kleidion at the Foothills of a Wild and lonely Mountain range. Ninety-nine out of every Hundred captured Bulgar Soldiers were blinded in both Eyes: The Hundredth blinded in only one, so he could guide the Ninety-Nine Home; Samuel surrendered and the Frontier of the Dunav was secured. The World is Cruel and our Cause often less Noble than we Protest, my Disgust at such Cruelty suggests to me...The Steam is rising off the Thatch of the Roof, and the Threshold to my small Home is Warm in the Sun. I have decided to take a Rest before returning to my Work, even though I have much to do, but I fear I am getting Older, slowing down, my Bones ache. My grown-up Sons are away for the Day hunting, and I wonder if they will have any Luck, and I think I shall perhaps take my Dug Out and do some fishing; I am feeling Lonely, and miss my Wife, soon to follow her to the Next World I think, going the same way as King Canute. But I am not a powerful King: No one will Remember me when they carry me in my Shroud to the Church Graveyard...Canute the Great they called him, Ruler of England, and it is said he was Wise and brought a Reign of Peace to his Kingdoms. One of his Daughters married Conrad, Holy Roman Emperor and Descendent of Charles the Great; With Church Allegiance he suppresses rebellious Nobles, as if God Himself had chosen the Family Dynasty for the Throne...He has sent his Son across the snow-capped Alps, white Peaks shining against clear blue Skies, to confront the Warrior-Bishop, who had once conferred on Conrad the Iron Crown of Lombardy, said to be hammered out of one of the Nails that came from the True Cross. I have heard this Tale: That the Nail came into the Possession of St Helena, Mother of the Emperor Constantine, and the Object is said to have Sacred Powers...As my net submerges in the calm Waters of the Loch I Hope the approaching Cloud will shadow my Presence so that the Fish will swim unawares into the Net. My Mind drifts: The News I heard only this Morning, Sigtrygg Silkbeard has abdicated; There is great Excitement and Speculation among the Monks who passed this Morning on a Cart, travelling for Days from the Norse Capital. Whatever the Reason, there is Proof that Politics on Foreign Shores have Effects far away; No Ocean is too Wide or too Treacherous for the Consequences: If only I could gently tell my Children this. A rumble of Thunder brings me back, momentarily; Whatever the Reason for his going, his Kingdom survived the Defeat at Clontarf; I remember the Figures standing on the Walls of Dublin; Perhaps I saw his distant Figure there: Did he hear us Massacre his retreating Army at the Banks of the River? Recent years saw his Fortunes revive, and revival of Victory on the Battlefield too, and I have in my Possession a Coin that bears his Head.

Someone is playing the Drum and Singing, others joining in, but my Eyesight is very Poor and I cannot see them; I cannot Work, my Daughter cares for me, while my Sons act as Herdsmen and Kernes, and help provide for me; But they have their own Families to care for. I Love my Grandchildren and Hope my own Offspring will pass on the Wisdom of the Generations that have been passed on to us; And I enjoy the taste of the Ale, it eases the Pains and make the Past look Happier and the Future more Hopeful: I enjoy the Tales I hear from the Travellers along the Road, which are more Vivid because of my Blindness. My Sons have been Lucky enough, they have not seen the Hardship of War: Though it is never far off;

But my Grandsons will not be so Lucky, it is the Danger of every New Age. Word comes from a place called Raab, where a King called Henry III fought a Savage Battle against a huge Magyar Army, those Fearsome Warriors on Horseback, but it is said that Difference in the Ranks of this Noble Warrior Class voided Superiority of numbers: Their leader, Aba, caught while Fleeing and beheaded, was renowned as a Man who stood with the Poor against the growing Power of the Holy Roman Empire; War came because he paid too heavy a Price for Peace: Tax on the Bishops made an Enemy of the Church, and breaches of the Treaty made Conflict inevitable...The Night is getting late and I am tired; Around me people are Talking and Laughing; The Music has stopped and a Woman speaks to me and fills my Cup with Ale. My Mind drifts away again: From my Doorway I see a Friar coming along the Road, tall and thin with a white goaty Beard; He might have some Interesting News if he is returning from Foreign Parts...He tells me of his Travels, to the Abbey of Fecamp, situated in a Duchy called Normandy, where there is great Upheaval; The land is ruled by Descendants of Norsemen and under the Suzerainty of Henry I, King of the Franks. There is a Noble called William the Bastard, Illegitimate Son of Robert the Magnificent and his Mistress, Herleva, a Woman of low Status: The Bastard lost his Father when he was only eight, which created great Instability, with others vying for Power, and there are Rumours among the Friars there that Assassins have been at Work, and that they have already killed three of the young Noble's Protectors. It has become a Land of Savagery and the Bitterness of Revenge, but it is more Prudent to keep our Words more selective when talking of such Matters, the Friar whispers, as if Spies could hear him even here: Normandy is beyond Ducal Authority and God's Peace. And it seems the Suzerain Lord does not want to protect his Vassal, which has encouraged others, and it is said a Conspiracy to kill this William was put in place. The young Duke was due to reside in a Castle deep in a Forest, after a hunting Expedition in the said Forest, but was warned by a Jester that his Life was in Danger, so he escaped, avoiding the main Roads and Towns, anywhere where his Enemies might catch him. Now he is marshalling his Forces, and I think we might hear more of this young Noble, says the Friar with a Smirk, adding that perhaps the Moral of these Struggles is that a Fool can be the Maker of a King; With these Words he bids Farewell and gives a Blessing, and continues on his Journey.

I remember what my Father told me and I think his Words had much Truth; I certainly take more notice of them now. Herding Cattle I meet a Man who tells me of a Battle at a place called Senlac Hill, a King has been killed and his Kingdom seized: The Vanquished, though positioned on the high Ridge that gave them Advantage, still lost to the Superior Enemy, led by the Duke of Normandy; I remember that my Late Father spoke of him. The Archers changed the course of the Battle, their Arrows arcing over the wall of Shields, and the King was killed, many of his Aristocracy with him, the Remnants of his Army scattered. On Christmas Day the Duke of Normandy was crowned King of the English: The Man informs me that the new King has returned to Normandy, and that some of the Old Nobility have been Practical and have submitted to his Authority; He mentions an Earl called Waltheof, but doubts Peace will last, the Bitterness of Defeat greater than the Joy of Victory.

A Cart trundles its way along the Track and I stop it to hear if its Driver has any News; He has, he has spoken with Sailors and Traders at many of the Ports: William, King of the English, has put down a Rebellion in his new Kingdom, with savage Brutality the Accounts say...The Cart moves off, creaking...and continues its Journey into the Distance.

A great Battle has taken place near a city called Manaz, between Byzantium and the Warrior Horsemen, a Race that has created a great Empire from its Homelands in the Aral

Sea. Led by Alp Arslan, the People have taken most of the Lands of the Sunrise; In this latest Battle, they even captured the Emperor Romanus Diogenes, making the Situation very Dangerous; But there are those close at Home not too troubled by his Capture in faraway Lands, a Strange World of Mountains and Deserts, where the Sun splits the Rocks, and wild Beasts and Savage Tribes roam. But Byzantium in weakening, I hear, having thrived for so long after the Fall of the Western Empire, since Diocletian split the Roman World in two, centuries ago; Now Constantinople might well have to turn back to former Brethren for support, putting aside Issues of Ecclesiastical Supremacy to find Common Cause against a Common Enemy, the Followers of Mohammed.

Some Saxon Princes have Revolted and elected Rudolf Rheinfeld as their Anti-King, against a Ruler weakened in his struggle with the Tuscan Monk, who once elected by the Cardinals in Rome set down Edicts no Emperor could accept, even though the King was a Man who stood Barefoot in the Snow to plead Mercy from the Holy Father. It seems such Penitential Acts conceal the True Nature of our Motives: Who can accept another Mortal as Supreme Arbiter of our Authority? Who can decide the Divide between Temporal and Spiritual Authority?

An Elderly Man stops on the Road at the edge of the Field and asks for a cup of Water...The Sun is Hot and we have not had Rain for some Days, and we are all busy getting the Harvest in...I ask him his Business in these Parts and he replies that he has taken to Wandering the Country, having spent so many years on the Sea, and I pursue by asking him if he is not afraid of being Robbed and Murdered; He responds that he has Nothing Worth stealing, and if he is Murdered he has had a Long Life anyway. Life on the Sea also has its Dangers, and I am intrigued, and ask him of the favourite Place he has been too, and he tells me Venice, the most Glorious City in the World: Opulent and Powerful, with Merchants of all Colours and Creeds; From Humble Origins the People of the Lagoon grew into a Powerful Trading and Naval Power; Driven from the firm Shore by Barbarians they built their City on the waters, and, forbidden to buy Estates on the Mainland, the Sea became their Wealth, also finding Protection in Alliance with the Eastern Emperor. He tells me that these are Practical People, Trading in the Markets of Egypt and the Levant; Many of their Merchants grumble, how they could do even more Profitable Business with the Moslem, if the Middle-Man was done away with. The Rulers have won favourable Trading Concessions from Byzantium in return for Military support against the Emperor's Enemies. Their Galleys are impressive to see, he says, the Admiration of any Sailor; The Vessels lethal in War and Trade: They are easy to Manoeuvre, and Quick, he shows me with his hand, far Superior to the Cog.

A new Emperor has come to the Throne in the East, a different world from the one I inhabit, strolling in the late Evening by the lapping Waters of the Loch, the midges biting my face. A Boy has become Ruler, inheriting a long Peace initiated by his Grandfather, Zhenzong. This Nation exports the Highest Quality Silk, a Product still so Rare and Expensive, the Preserve of the Wealthiest. The Creators tried to keep control of this Material, a Royal Decree making the export of the Silkworm or its egg Punishable by Death; But foreign Traders were determined to discover the Secret: How the Worms are fed on the Leaves of the Mulberry Tree; Then how they climb a Twig placed on the Leaf and start to spin a Cocoon, like a Spider's Web; From this, Threads are drawn and made into the Silk; Still, to this Day, no one makes it as well as those of the Middle Kingdom, though I have no Experience of such Luxury; My Clothes are not fine: My Woollen Trews, Tunic and Mantle are Rough and make me Itch, but do keep me warm in the Winter.

The Pope in Rome has issued an Edict, calling on Christians to join a great Army to Fight the Muslim Infidels in Comradeship with our Eastern Brethren, whose earlier Pleas fell on deaf ears; I am now too Old, and don't know if I would go anyway, while my Sons are too busy Farming, scraping a Living, for we have our Masters. Though my Eldest Grandson looks as though he might go: Young Men want to Fight; What better than when you have a Reason? He will be the first of us to see the World, Strange Peoples and Places; Other Young Men will join him, but those Events are too faraway for most. God knows that we do Penance: Our Struggles with the Shadow of Famine and outbreaks of Plague; Images of a Daughter dying come into my Mind, and I feel her Spirit near me. This Pestilence affected many Lands; Plague can cross more than Nine Waves, just like so many other Sorrows. I see her in Agony and Terror, unable to take any Comfort from our Tears; Us, Helpless and Powerless. If my remaining Daughter watches a Son take that Road to War it will drive her to Despair, but young men need War to Prove Themselves, otherwise they fight among one another or bring Trouble on the heads of the Parents and their Sept, by crossing Boundaries preserved orally in the Law or simply jealously Guarded; But everyone wants to be a Victor in Battle and win the Glory it brings.

More People move, now that Winter is turning to Spring, and I am heartened to see the Figure along the Track, and Hope this Traveller brings News from the Holy Land: Perhaps I will find some Information about my older Brother, who is gone five years and no Word. I have heard that a Knight called Baldwin of Boulogne has been made King of Jerusalem, the Coronation taking place on Christmas Day in Bethlehem: What a sight that must have been, watching a King being Crowned in the very Place Jesus was Born. I can picture a humbled Knight in his Chainmail and Sword, kneeling in the Church of the Nativity, the Crown being placed on his Head. What Wonderment: To see the very Cave Our Saviour was Born in, the Manger he was laid down in, wrapped in Swaddling Cloth...The Traveller shrugs his shoulder; He has nothing to tell me, he has only come from the land of ui Faelain...All I know is my Brother left Francia in the Spring, well ahead of the main Army of Knights, in an Army led by a lord called Walter San Avoir and a Priest called Peter the Hermit, but the Tales I hear are very fragmented, and it is believed that many of the Crusaders did not even make it to their Destination, The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, contained within the Hill of Calvary, where Christ was Crucified and the Tomb in which he was buried, and rose from again three days later. Many of the Poor starved or were forced to return Home at an early stage; My Brother was not among those who came back, nor were any of the others he left with. The Army did arrive at the banks of the great River Danuvius, where there is a Walled City, guarded by an impregnable White Fortress, overlooking the Waterway. The Crusaders were, for some Reason, denied access, so they set up Camp outside, then Circumstances forced them to Pillage the Countryside, which brought them into Conflict with the local Garrison; It is said a number of the Knights were imprisoned, stripped of their Armour and their Bodies hung from the Walls of the City. What happened next is not certain, but they did move on: They are reported to have stopped in other Towns and Cities; Some accounts tell of Crusaders being Enslaved or Murdered by Bandits in a Region of Dark Wooded Mountains farther on the Route to Constantinople. They did get to Constantinople, some of them at least, and now the Story becomes confused, suggesting Divisions among the Crusaders, one group going for Nicaea, the other, led by a Germanic Prince named Reinhald, leading a Party of the Germanic Tribes, attacked Xerigordon. Maybe the Division weakened them, they had been warned that the Turks were Formidable, and so were Defeated; It seemed their Bravery outweighed their Sense, and Survivor Tales say the Crusader Army was ambushed by Kilij Arslan and his men in a narrow wooded Valley, and since then I have heard no more; In Grief I wonder what has become of my older Brother.

The Dal Cais are not content with Over-lordship, and demand complete control of Territories they come to Dominate, and it makes me Angry that the Sept I belong to is now so Weak, where it once had been so Powerful. Our Rivalry with them is old, more bitter since we desecrated the Sacred Inauguration Tree...They make too much of their Ancestor's Victory, forgetting we cut down the Enemy, stopping them escape to fight again...Muirchertach O'Briain gave the Fortress on the Rock to the Church, but it has no Writ here, and he deprived the Eoghanacht of their place of Royal Assembly, a Tribe that held sway for hundreds of years, but no longer.

The night is going to be Cold: There could be Snow, and the Children are Ill with Coughs, I hope it will not be a long Winter as I enter my Home in the fading light, my wife welcoming me, fearful not only of Robbers abroad but also the Spirits of the Dead who roam the land, returning to their old Dwellings to see that all is well, and feel a little Sad, I think, to revisit old Memories. Though my Wife is more concerned about Evil Spirits who live in the Mounds, the Puca, who can take on the shape of any Creature: I did hear an eerie Cry as I walked past the Lake, a wading bird perhaps or a Banshee foretelling Death...My labour work at the Abbey brings me News from over the Seas; I am pondering the latest I have heard as I walk home: A battle at Tinchebray, over a Rivalry Blood cannot settle, nor limit its Brutality, even to the Boundaries of the Battlefield, and what I heard makes me feel Sick: I could bring no such Cruelty to my Family for any reason... I much enjoyed the Ale with Bread and Cheese I was so kindly given before I started my journey Home...The Inheritance of 5,000 Pieces of Silver, a Wealth I can only imagine, yet a Prophecy that his Dominion and Power would one day outstrip the others' would inspire anyone to Victory...What has happened to the Duke of Normandy is unknown; It is said he has been taken Prisoner, and is now in the Dungeon of a Castle somewhere, his Army destroyed in a swift Battle.

Another day passes that my Brother does not appear on the Road, and I hear that a Treaty has been signed between Bohemond and the Emperor of Constantinople: May be my Brother is party to these events? Has he become a Knight, rewarded for his Bravery, and chosen his new Life in the Holy Land? I hope so! Was my Brother with Behemond at the storming of Antioch? And if so, he may have died at the hand of the Seljuks or Danishmends, but I Pray he is now Prospering in the service of the new Duke of Antioch, and that his bleached Bones are not scattered in some wild, Forsaken Place without Christian Burial, a lonely wait for the Day of Judgement. But his Soul can watch the full Moon, the one I watch now, rising over the horizon far along the Road. Antioch is a very important trading Port, and I imagine my Brother, and I remember how I looked up to him, assured of Protection, now a wealthy Merchant there, wearing Garments of Rich Cloth and living in a Fine House, with a good Wife who came with a bountiful Dowry.

I hear good tidings that we have won a great Victory against the Moors led by Ibrahim Ibn Yusuf, in a mountainous Region of Hispania; The forces of Christendom led by Alfonso, King of Aragon and Navarre, who is said to be a brave Warrior. The battle has taken place against the Almoravid Dynasty, a war-like nomadic Tribe of the Desert, and it is said the Rulers have become too used to the Luxuries of City living, and that that will be their downfall.

I am working under the light of the full Moon, as we are gathering the last of the Crops before Winter, and am relieved the Weather has been kind, but I am feeling Melancholy: I have heard of another distant Battle in the Holy Land; Though my Brother would be too old to fight now. He could hardly be still Alive; I am getting old myself: My back hurts as I bend

to reap in the Barley, and my own Children are now Adults. There has been trouble around the Principality of Antioch: King Baldwin has fought a fierce Battle with a Muslim called Lighazi, who had just come from Victory over the Christians, when he defeated Roger of Salerno, who was struck down while standing beside the Jewelled Cross that was his Banner, most of his Knights falling with him: It is said a North Wind blew the Dust in their faces, giving the Enemy Opportunity. The Turkish Horsemen, with their Bows and Arrows, encircled Roger's forces, and Victory was theirs; This was a bitter Defeat, following early Successes. But Lighazi did not follow up his Victory by attacking Antioch, instead his army Plundered the land around, and drank what Alcohol could be found...Now Baldwin has brought Peace to the Principality, checking the Muslims at Hab and bringing a Peace out of Stalemate, the Accounts say.

War has broken out in the Northern Homelands of the Vikings, the News of it has spread through the City of Dublin, and other old Viking Port Towns, but I do not think it will have any Consequences here; But others are not so sure. Being young I have not experienced War; Parts of me want to: Parts of me do not. I am told that Sigurd the Crusader is Dead, a man who had ruled the Kingdom with his Brothers, which ensured a long period of Peace, where Conflict had been averted; No one expected War would ever return, convinced people had truly changed. Unification had started long ago at the Battle of Hafsford, when Harold Fair Hair established himself as sole ruling Monarch; Now it appears Rivals are fighting over the Throne...What if they are right: What will happen if Harold Gille succeeds to take Power? He has already been chosen as King over half the Kingdom, but it is likely he will see Magnus's offer to share Power as a sign of Weakness; Or that the actions of Magnus might be a Rouse, whilst he awaits the Opportunity to go to War. Now I am less at ease: Their Dispute could well find its way to these Shores, for he has strong links with Rognvald Kali Kolsson, who has strong trading interests here, and Harold Gille also claims to be the Bastard Son of Sigurd, by a Gaelic Mother. It is likely she is of some Standing, whereby there may be Loyalty as well as Interest; We can never make ourselves free of Foreign Wars.

A woman called Matilda wants the Crown of England, which seems to me very Strange: Her Rival for the Throne is her Cousin, Stephen, but he has been captured and his Chances now look Bleak, as his Armies have suffered a Defeat while besieging Lincoln Castle. A Force loyal to Matilda attacked, and it is said that Stephen himself has been taken, and surely to be Beheaded. The Tale of this Battle has made its way along the Tracks, told and retold at Markets and Taverns, finding its way across the Sea. A Lay Brother in a black Soutane with a white hood, which I have never seen before, is Witness to these Events, caught up while working for the Bishop of Lincoln, a welcome Relief from the toil of the fields.

I recall the rough voiced cleric in his black and white garments I met in the Monastery and the Priest translating his simple Latin... The Crusaders have expelled the Moors from the City, when bad weather had forced the Vessels, headed for the Holy Land, to take Refuge in the City of Porto; The Ships that got that far were Lucky: Many had already Perished in the stormy Seas. There they had an Audience with Alfonso, King of Portugal, and joined him in a bid to capture Lisbon, being offered the Pillage of the City as payment. Through the long hot Summer they besieged the Walls before the Inhabitants agreed to Surrender, Hunger having become so great. Lisbon has now fallen, and although the lives of the Moors were to be spared as Terms of the Surrender, the Agreement was broken and there has been a terrible Slaughter, even whilst a Priest amongst them tried to quell the gravest Excesses; The Streets of the City flowed with blood for Days.

The Merchant is grateful for the Ale I have given him, being such a hot Day, after unloading Goods from his Cart. One Object strikes me as so Beautiful: A delicate, blue piece of smooth shiny Pottery; He notices my Interest, and says I would have to brew Ale for an entire Year to afford one of these: Ceramic pottery from the Song Dynasty he tells me, a great Civilization in the Eastern Corner of the Earth; This is the real thing he insists, not an imitation, and is only affordable to Kings; That is why he will try and sell these Luxuries at the Royal Island...I ask him more about this Land, and he tells me that they are great Inventors, and their Alchemists, while searching for the Elixir to Life, discovered a Magic Substance that can bring Victory in Battle: They use this Magic on Fire-Arrows and this Empire's great Navy defeated an Enemy with Fireballs shot from huge Trebuchets, a type of Catapult, that curved over the Sky like burning boulders...We sit drinking on the bench beneath the thatch roof, I feel Bad, I should be helping my Sons in the Fields, but I am getting old. He is telling me of his Travels as a Trader: How he has crossed much rougher Waters than the Rivers that lead into the Plains of Erin. His Caravan has crossed many Lands, and he has come from the Old Land of the Angles, where there is trouble: The Foreigner, King Henry, has passed a new Constitution, to curb the Power of the Church, and increase his own, no doubt; There are a lot of fine words, but it all comes down to one thing: Power. In the Ecclesiastical Courts a Cleric guilty of a Crime might be Defrocked: In a Royal Court he could be Hanged or Mutilated. Everyone has Sympathy towards their own, slow to Judge and quick to Forgive; For this Reason the new Archbishop is likely to put up a Fight, for the Church wants its own Authority. The Traveller knows all this, because he has spent time in London and even taken by a Wealthy Merchant to one of the Royal Hunting Lodges away from the Grime of the City.

The Rats run around the floor of my cold House, cold though the Fire is Lighting; I hear the Rodents in the straw. My Wife helps me as much as she can, but she is Feeble and has to look after her Grandchildren, but she does her best though the Work is Hard. The Place is very Dark, even though there is still Daylight flooding in through the open door, as the smoke is escaping out, like a departing Soul: Soon mine will leave too; I am Anxious about Death, but also other things that might affect those left behind in this World, for our King has marched on Dublin alongside Ruaidhri O'Connor, where the Connaught King has been Inaugurated. These Events do not bode well for the Power of MacMurrough, the implacable Enemy of O'Rourke, who has marched south to confront the Leinster King, and the forces met in the Wooded Hills, but the Armies of the High King, in Victory, made it over the Mountains, only to find Ferns ablaze, the hope of Plunder thwarted.

The white Shroud is being lowered into the ground, hugging the frail Human shape of my Father, while the drizzle beats gently against the cloth. My thoughts turn to the last words he spoke after the Priest had Anointed him, of Troubling Events on our Island, and those farther afield; Now it seems they have come to pass: MacMurrough has brought in an Army of Foreign Mercenaries, led by a Knight with the name Striguil, a man in search of Fortune. Signs of things to come have been portending for some Years: The exiled King forced to pay a Hundred Ounces of Gold, but still clearly not deterred; A high Price for Amorous Intrigue. Some of the Foreign Soldiers had stayed behind; Now the others are back, and in larger numbers: Hundreds of Knights, Archers and Foot Soldiers have landed on the Southern Shores in the Territory of the Norse, and are awaiting Instruction.

The Attack on Viking Wexford brings mixed Feelings, as they too are Foreigners, the Natives left to fend outside the Town Walls. But the new Invaders do not discriminate, and it seems the Norsemen did not expect such a Professional Army, a force far Superior that

anything Erin could put on the field. It has to be admitted, though painful: Bravery isn't everything; When the Vikings sallied out from their defences, they soon discovered the Mettle of the Enemy, for which they were no Match: The Enemy Cavalry in Armour and with long Lances swept through them; And the Archers rained down black clouds of Arrows; And soon the Vikings had to retreat to the Town. A Trader that escaped, as the Attackers tried to break down the Town Gates, says he could still hear the Noises of the Attack as he rowed across the Waters, to the Marshes on the other side.

I hear that Wexford has Surrendered and accepted its new Overlords, and that MacMorrough is marching over the Mountains against MacGiolla Phadraig, who is a formidable Foe. Grief for a Son's Mutilation or Rage at being forced to Flee is no Guarantee of subsequent Victory; The Feud is old, when the Aims of those two violent Men clashed, and Leaders like MacGiollamcholmog bear the Mark. I see no Virtue in any of them, who have divided the Lands of my Tribe. They bring their Battles to our Soil, and there seems no Respite from this Struggle for Dominance; And the Poor always pay, while the Alliances of Kings shift and change. There is no Bond against Cruelty in Family, as even the Case of our King O'Melaghlan shows.

Another Force of those Invincible Warriors has landed and built a Fort on the Coast, the arrival of Reinforcements a cause for unease, as it is rumoured that MacMurrough now has his eyes set on ruling the Whole Island. His new Allies from over the Sea give a new Confidence, that before he could only Dream of; And with such Hope, the Nightmarish Visions of his Father's Fate can be Laid to Rest. The new Encampment has been attacked; Though outnumbered they won, capturing Prisoners and Beheading them, the Bodies flung into the Sea, the headless Corpses washed up farther along the Coast. I look over at my Axe and Sword in the corner, Weapons I've yet to use in real Battle.

The afternoon is Warm and Dry, and my skin itches in my woollen Clothes; The Oxen heave along, furrowing the Soil, as I heave and push the Plough. A call comes out, an offer of Mead, and we stop our Work, grateful to relieve the Drudgery and Thirst...Gathered around we talk: More Signs that War will come to us; A labourer, not from these parts, says the Army is marching again, the Norse of Dublin started to Negotiate a Deal with MacMorrough and the Earl of Striguil. Everyone knows Dublin is Vital in the Cause to Rule Ireland, so why have they left without a Fight? Somebody says the Normans fooled the Defenders, MacMorrough having led them across the Mountains and down the Deeply Wooded Slopes on to the Plains before the City, and caught the Inhabitants unawares. It is not clear what exactly happened next, but it is thought, that while the Archbishop and Regan negotiated, a party of Normans attacked the City and forced their way in, a Terrible Slaughter ensued, and MacMurrough appears to have Avenged his Father's Death.

Solemn Treaties are torn up when Circumstances change, and that is what MacMorrough has done; In a fury, O'Connor has executed his Hostages in response to these Acts, and the Claim being made on his Position as High-King. I am standing near the edge of the Road watching Eastwards; They have not arrived yet, so we still wait. They may not come this far, and while the Scouts have been out, there have been no Reports, as yet, of more Attacks. Where they have attacked in the Lands of O'Rourke, they have burnt Homes and Churches, and carried away Hostages and Cattle; The latest is that they have gone into Tir Briuin. We are poorly equipped and have no Armour, unlike the Norman Allies of MacMorrough; This is Frightening. I am Afraid of Death: But if the Battle comes, the Battle comes; Though, it is

now more than likely that the Raiding Parties will retire for the Winter; We can expect them again in the Spring.

Joy and Relief: MacMorrough has Died in his Palace at Ferns; The Invader, Striguil, is now to become King, although I fear he will not be Content: Like his Father-In-Law, he will want to be King of all Erin...And though last Year did not see Blood on our Soil, I have my Fears that we will not see this one out, without Bloodshed. The Vikings of Dublin want their City back, and all Agree must be Planning for Battle; The High-King wants the Foreigners driven from these Shores; I believe he is likely to achieve some Unity against this Powerful Enemy, for these Mercenaries have swept through the Country, setting up their own System of Government and overriding Ancient Brehon Law in the Territories they occupy. The Summer is now here, and there is talk that we will be Mustered to march on Dublin; This is the right time of Year to do so, as there is time to take the City before the Winter sets in. We will need that time against such an Enemy; Yet it is still uncertain if our King will join in this Conflict, and I do not know if I will get my first taste of War, a thought that fills me with both Excitement and Fear.

The grey Men come out of the Mist screaming like Ghosts, their Horses sounding like Satan himself; Terror grips me, and I can't move. They are cutting their way through the main Forces, who are desperately scrambling from their Tents to get their Weapons, the Guards in the Forest having been taken by Surprise, with no Warning. Soldiers are fleeing towards us, with Chain-Mailed Cavalry cutting them down: Limbs and heads fly, spraying Blood. Our tethered Horses are neighing in Panic; There is general Confusion; I see a Lance, bright with its Red Pennant, cut through a man who is Brave and standing to Fight; He has no Chance, and it goes right through him. I am shaking, holding my Axe in one hand, my Sword in the other (it seems far too short!); The Attackers look like Devils, in their Metal Helmets and Nose Guards. A whistling Sound: I turn to see my Cousin, his black beard and hair, an Arrow stuck in his shoulder; no Blood is showing through his green Tunic; He drops his Weapons, cries in Pain; Arrows drop in the grass around me: I fear one will pierce my Skull. Quickly putting my Weapons away I help him to shelter; Others are also running, while a group of our Horsemen are mounting a Counter Attack, galloping through the Mayhem, their Spears pointed horizontally. More Arrows fly through the Air as a pale Sun begins to break through the Mist, a strange Image mixed up with Fear; I need to escape...The Cart is bouncing over the Track and my Cousin is groaning; I feel relieved he is still Alive, but I feel Guilty that I broke the Arrow as I tried to get in out; At least the bleeding is not too Bad and he is able to talk, though in Pain. I keep looking behind, but there is no Sign now of any Pursuit, though still our Horsemen go back to prevent any possible Attacks, in the desperate Hope of holding them off, but I think that their Chances are slim, if one did take place. I think, that the deeper we get into our own Territory, the more Hesitant they might be of following, for they were few in numbers, and while they were Disciplined and Fearless, our Brave Warriors were no match, they were not Foolish. I Hope I never see War again, though I do feel Anger, for the Images are awful...The Rain is now beginning, and finally I am beginning to feel Hungry and Thirsty; The Stories say the Feeling hits you when the Peace from Battle has been gained.

I have no Idea how this will change my Life and the Lives of my Family (it is hard enough as it is)...The last Winter has been bad throughout the Chiefdom, time spent away from the Fields, and we have failed to get in enough Hay for the Winter, and the Rains just took over where the War ended...The Synod seeks to bring in new Rules on Tithes: What more can I offer up? Even the High-King himself is uneasy, his Kingdom getting smaller, yet the O'Neill

is quiet; As for my Lord, I hear he is thinking of moving farther West, to the Banks of the Shannon. And as for us: I do not know; But Pray that they will still allow us to herd the Cattle and till the Land, unless they move us off and bring in their own. I am certain the Gaelic Kings will lose Territories, as well as Tribute and Service owed to them; These are unnerving Times, where things change fast and the Future is Unknown.

I am sweating in Fear, Memories and Ghosts filling my Thoughts, as columns of Cavalry pass, their grey Chain Mail and Helmets, red Shields and upright Lances with bright fluttering Pennants. Those Foreigners are hated; They are Arrogant, knowing they have such Power, and I feel ashamed that I keep my head down and continue to hoe; I am now very Frightened: Not long ago, I was in an Army against those Foreigners, now I am Cowering, Praying no one will ask me anything; If they do I will not reveal the Truth. With O'Rourke killed, change continues unchecked: The latest is that his blackened Head is stuck on a Pike at Dublin, and his rotting Corpse hanging upside down, the neck dripping.

The Lord of Meath is dead; A rush of Pleasure soothes the Anger that I feel all the time, but there is no Escape from it, especially as I still feel the burning Pains of Battle, and the way he hanged a King from a tree, like a Thief. The man bringing these happy Tithing's says he has been killed by a Native Gael, who had been awaiting the Opportunity to strike, Avenging the Murder, and the Ignominious Way the Remains were treated. De Lacy was struck on the back of the head with an Axe while supervising work on a Motte, another physical Symbol of Occupation I see around me, the Foreigner anxious to prevent further Burnings reinforced his Occupied Lands. His Head and Body rolled into the Ditch, the Laughing Stranger tells me, yet the Death may bring more Bloodshed; I wonder how de Tuite might react, my delight at Justice being served is tempered with a little Apprehension.

The Latin Army has taken Constantinople, the Traveller tells me: In three days they sacked the entire City, not even the threat of Excommunication could stop them, Plundering all the Wealth to be found: Gold, Silver and Diamonds. Great works of Art and Literature have been destroyed, as Christian Greek is set against Christian Latin, unlike here, where there is always the Presence of the Ancient Gods. But the Attackers have insisted on their Revenge, to take back what was taken from the Merchants, since Commerce is an Insidious Warrior, with its Indolence concealing the true Consequences of its Purpose; Time shows the real picture, and Anger is unleashed, the Fury to set back the Course means the blood of Men, Women and Children flows through the Streets.

King John has rejected his Undertakings and now the Barons have risen in Rebellion, led by Robert Fitzwalter, in the Cause of Law over Will; The question is: How shall it affect this Island, the Imposition of English Law already being rolled out? It is bound to bring in other Interests: Here the Lords do the King's Will, and they seize any Opportunity to exploit the Weaknesses and Divisions among our Chiefs, strife that leads only to Misery for the Poor, the Prize always to be won by the Powerful. Those new Foreigners have made themselves into Princes, undermining the King's Authority, and he acted then as he seems to be acting now; In their Rivalry, they all share the same Ambition, yet acts of Butchery make Common Cause when such is needed, but the arrival of the King with a huge Army makes the Country quiet, no need for War. He has come into this Land and met with Cathal Crovderg, who is realizing that a support of the King and his Princes is not without a Price, and the English King is Rapacious, as the History between the two Men shows, for he has seized four important members of the Retinue, in lieu of the Son left at home.

A chilling picture: The Vultures wheeling around over the empty Streets of that City on the Great Trade Route to the East, and the Description of the silence, both in the Sky overhead and on the Ground; No one moves, anyone Alive hides behind closed doors, afraid of being Slaughtered if they venture out; The heat is Unbearable, and there is a suffocating Stench; The Smell comes from the Citadel and the Mosque, where wild dogs skulk, and the birds wait patiently until the dogs have had their Feed, leaving behind Bones with scrapings of reddened Meat and Skin. What's left, the Vultures will share with the rats that scurry around the darkened lanes, the only place there is any Escape from the searing Heat of the Sun. That is a Land far hotter and Unforgiving than this one, the gem of a City on a Route along Dessert and High Mountain Range, according to accounts from Traders on the Caravan passing through Samarkand at the time, allowed through unhindered, to take in the sight of Destruction and carry the News farther West. The Universal Emperor tolerates the Merchant, and the Pagan is said to respect other Faiths, including the Followers of Nestorius, but when it comes to Power, he shows no Mercy.

The Mongols have won a devastating Victory at the Kalka River, as the Nomadic Warrior Horsemen move farther and farther West, the Logic of the Hoof meaning they move on from one Victory to another, now bringing down a Once-Powerful Persian Dynasty, ruled by Mamluks, a Warrior Caste from the ranks of the Enslaved. The Mongols turned initial Defeat into Victory, a rearguard Attack that seemed to put their Campaign in question: They fled, pursued; But it was a feigned Retreat, a common Tactic of theirs, and the combined Armies of their Opponents became spread thin, and with this, the Mongols turned to meet them on the Banks of the Kalka, a River that flows into the Sea of Azov. These are strange exotic names, faraway, though they get nearer with Tales of a rampaging Tribe, a People that seem unstoppable. Following the chase they have executed the Princes and Nobles, who had surrendered on the Promise of Mercy.

More frightening than the Horsemen of the Apocalypse, the Mongol Hordes sweep across the Plains, cutting through the Kingdom of Hungary; At least it is some comfort that their Skills are of the land, being able to move huge distances fast, and not as Mariners; It is good to live on an Island as far West as you can go without reaching the End of the World...Three Armies led by Khan Batu have descended on the Kingdom, driving unchecked from the East, even though the Warnings of their approach were there for more than twenty years as Refugees sought Sanctuary from the King, alas, their flight away has only brought the problem with it. It appears they have found their Excuse, and Opportunity: A time of Turmoil among the Magyar Aristocracy, embittered by Bela's actions of drawing more Power back to the Centre, into his own hands. But the Cumans show Loyalty (Gratitude as Loyalty): The Nomadic Warriors had once raided the Kingdom of Hungary, now show Loyalty in return for Sanctuary. But Hatred of this People has left the Cuman Khan dead, murdered by the Magyars, and the Tribe have deserted Bela and scoured the Countryside, Killing and Pillaging...His own Nobility seem to Hate him more than they Fear the Mongols, who they do not see as a serious Threat...I remember it said that Mongols would feign retreat, luring the Enemy to its Death, no one could call King Bela a Coward now; How quickly people forget. The Magyars chased them for weeks, until they came to the Banks of a flooded River that ran through a dark Forest, a Forest hiding a huge Army of Mongols that had set up Camp there. In the darkness, they saw a figure crossing the River, an escaped Slave of the Mongols, and he revealed to them the Plan to attack the following Night, so Bela ordered them to intercept the Enemy as they crossed the Soja Bridge. As Midnight fell, they caught the Mongols while crossing, and brought upon them a surprise Defeat, still Victory wasn't that easy, as the main Mongol Army was still hidden from sight, lurking in the Darkness. The Magyar Warriors

returned to their Camp and celebrated their Victory, and as they did so, the Mongols attacked, at three points along the long River, using huge stone-throwing Machines to clear the Hungarian soldiers left to guard the Bridge. The Magyars were still too Confident, thinking the Invasion a minor one, until they saw the mass of Fearsome Warriors blacken the dawn horizon. Legend tells that the Magyars are Brave fighters, and they fought Courageously, even killing several heavily-Armoured Bodyguards of Batu; They were too few, and were routed and pursued by the Mongols, pursued back to their camp...

It is ten Years since my Father died, and it would sadden him so sorrowfully to see the Land like this: The ground becomes Drier and more Cracked by the Day, and I am worried that this Day will also pass without a fall of Rain. I cannot remember a Summer as Hot and Dry as this one, though there is a hint of Autumn: The fields dusty stubble, yet early in the Season. The Cattle have no Grass to eat, the ground is so Burnt and Cracked, I can see their ribs, the Animals are beginning to Starve, the Beef herds promise little Meat. If the Drought continues, the Soil will be too Barren when it comes to plant Crops and Fodder for next Spring, as it is, there is hardly enough Food to feed my Family; Others are in the same Situation. The Lake is drying out; I can walk so far into it, Bones of Fish scattered about, while the River that runs into it is but a Trickle, and when I herd the Cattle down to the Lake's edge, they look Sorrowful with those big eyes. The dusty Road shimmers in Silence, and no one has travelled it Today, as I wait longingly that someone will bring me News from other parts of Erin and beyond her Shores...Accounts of King Louis's Crusade are Confused, an Englishman settled here, went off to fight, a costly Venture, led and financed by the crown, raising Taxes and leaving the Bishops grumbling. From what I hear the Campaign has not come to Conclusion, and I hear it has seen mixed Fortune, but the King is renowned for his Bravery, having brought his Men on to the beaches in stormy Weather to face the might of Fakhr ad-Din's Army, and later at Fariskur. The capture of Damietta certainly showed good Prospects that the War was serving the King well, undertaken from a Promise on his Sickbed... Only recently, I hear that Fakhr ad-Din is Dead, slaughtered along with much of his Army in a surprise attack by the Christians, and the misplaced sense of Confidence seems to make Pitiful Sense with the Accounts of what happened next: The Crusaders were trapped in the dark narrow alleys of Mansourah, unable to Manoeuvre their Horses, and the King himself and his Knights were taken Captive, held in Chains; Many of his Soldiers were decapitated on a Whim; He is now Free, the Ransom paid, the Terms accepted by the Mamluks, though the Sultan has been hacked to pieces.

I feel Sorrow and Anger at what they have brought upon us, when they invaded our Island, nearly a Hundred Years' Ago: War, Drought, Famine and Servitude; Our surviving Rulers fight valiantly, and such would not have happened under them, for their Rule was Just, and still their Power survives. The Marriage, between Aed O'Connor and the Daughter of Dougal McSorley, will give us added Strength against our Enemies...That part of the Dowry will help us: The supply of young Foreign Mercenaries, though they speak our Tongue, and are willing to fight alongside us. I am young too and determined to Avenge the loss of Parents and Siblings to the Rulers who made them creep away and Starve to Death among the Reeds; I shall fight never to go Hungry again. The Additions to the Gaelic Armies give us all Courage to Fight: They shall help turn the tide, for they are much better armed than us, and fight with the heavy Sparr Axe, so heavy it has to be wielded with both hands, and even cuts through Armour; They also carry on them a great Sword, which also has to be used firmly with both hands, and sweeps through any Attacker; And they are protected against Attacker by long Chain Mail Shirts and Iron Helmets; These elite Soldiers have Squires to carry their Provisions and Throwing Swords.

The bright Summer day brings News of the King of Erin's death in Battle, at a place by the name of Drumderg, where the English have cut many down; Many Princes and Warriors of Connaught and Tirowen have fallen...And though he was described by many as Sovereign of the Gael, not all were Loyal to him, including this Tribe, who like others have stood aloof.

Will Haakon the Old take up the Offer of the High Kingship of Ireland? It is an interesting Offer from our Chiefs, who I have heard are travelling to Norway to make the Proposal; It could be the chance to drive the English from this Island, and return Power to where it rightly belongs. He is a Ruler involved in disputes overseas: One Enemy being the Danes, means he has allied himself with Ghibelline Frederick; Other Rulers seek his Friendship, aware of his powerful Fleet. No doubt that is a Consideration of the Irish Kings seeking his Alliance, and his impressive Fleet has recently been put to Sea over Suzerainty of the Hebrides; But Nature sometimes has different Plans, and has chosen to destroy that powerful Fleet.

The Divisions among the English can play into our hands, the parliament De Montfort has called in London could bring Change, the Knights and Burgesses might win themselves a greater say in running the Kingdom: Those who now Rule so much of Erin also seek Common Cause and assert their Rights. Descendents of old Settlers, Newcomers and Gaels with Common Purpose have come together, yet even in the Hallowed Cloisters there are Divisions. Henry of Winchester has been thwarted in silencing his rebellious Baron; His Peers have saved him from the Sovereign's uncompromising hold on Power. De Montfort raises the Magna Carta in his campaign to give more Power to the Baronial Council, but I think he is bound to find Dissension among his own Followers in time, and on reflection. Lewes makes Henry a figurehead of a King, a Prisoner in his own Realm...The day is cold, but there is a stretch in the evenings, a promise of Spring and warmer weather, perhaps better Fortune.

The Lender sometimes has great control over the indebted Party, but it is a dangerous Relationship; The Latter can turn on the Former. The Creditor does not always have the greater Strength, for the weight of Power is not always that clear: The Terms not always Civilized, Balanced and Immutable. No one wants to be Indebted, and the Gentiles grumble, forbidden to partake in Usury they grow Resentful of the Power they see it imposes upon them, Land in exchange for Money; That is the real measure of our Wealth: The Poor, like I, know that. But the King has free reign to Tax the Creditor, and the Jew has to pay dearly for the English King's military Campaigns; We understand that, even the Settlers know how the Exchequer can extract Money, as if by Alchemy. The Monarch has no scruple taking Profits made through Transactions outlawed by the Church, and now their Practices are banned and controls imposed, with all to carry the mark of their Race...Llywelyn is at odds with Edward for still showing Loyalty to the Family of Simon de Montfort, and has married Montfort's Daughter, to the fury of the King, none of which bodes well for the Future. The Welsh man also has his Enemies within, those with their own Motives, and he has now been declared a Rebel, and I think many of the Princes will seek to make Peace with the English King; Llywelyn cannot even count on the support of his own Brother.

The Council was made up of Prelates, Bishops and Abbots from all over the Christian World, its Purpose to end the Divisions among Believers. The old Mendicant monk smirks, and says we all find Differences when someone else chooses to Disagree with us, even if it's a few small words. The Holy Men met in Lyon, he says, Kings and Emperors also attended, and they agreed on Reunion; But the Monk doubts it will last. The Byzantine Emperor, who

attended, has been locked in conflict with the Latin Empire, a decade after retaking Constantinople, and to Appease, the Pope has tried to curb any renewal of Ambitions from the Latin Princes, so instead they spoke of a new Crusade to Reconquer the Holy Land. The Monk says he thinks the most honest Delegation was the Mongol Embassy, being Baptized not for Faith but for Alliance, and the Papacy happy to include them among its Allies.

O'Melaghlin, a brave Ruler of his People, has been slain by the Mac Coghlan, a King who stood up to the forces of Tuit, de Saunford and the Treacherous Connaught men. Despite the odds he triumphed, killing the Baron and his Brother too, that our Priests compare him to the Mythic character, Hector, of ancient Greece, and as great as any of the Nine Worthies, since he led us to Victory, just as Hector led his Trojan army. Father Eoin says that a Pagan Prophecy foretold chief O'Melaghlin would destroy his Adversaries in Battle, but the Omens foretold he would be killed by fellow Men of Erin, but he ignored the Warnings, determined his Fate would be determined by Destiny; Now he has fought his last Battle.

The Maid of Norway's Death is causing great Instability in the Kingdom of Scotland, as many are contending for the Crown, among them Lord Annandale and the Lord of Galloway. I doubt if Edward can effectively Arbitrate between the Factions, because any Contender must prove Descend from David The First, I am told, yet the Guardians are Anxious that the Rivalry does not lead to War among the People of Alba. The Treaty of Birgham might as well be torn up, one of its Negotiators, De Warenne, is a man well versed in court Intrigue, an agile man in switching Loyalties, he is well acquainted with the Politics of Scotland.

O'Neill has met with Bruce and offered him the Kingship of Ireland, interesting Events, and the English face being driven from this Island, with the Scots having moved South by way of Invermullon and are now attacking a strategic point along the Route to Dublin, the Castle owned by the widow Rohesia de Verdun. I am more worried about Food than about War, though: The rains of Spring have been Unrelenting; The Lake has risen and my Home flooded; It is not letting up, the Summer is proving no better: The Fields are waterlogged, the Harvest is failing, Fodder for the surviving Livestock faces Destruction, Prices are rising and Salt is getting Scarce. Felim Mac Aedh ua Conchonbair is said to be marching West, but common Language and Culture do not always make for Alliance, and there are Rumours that the Earl of Ulster is also on the move, to intercept the Scottish Army. When they grow Hungry they will take what they can from the Land, so it is not whether, but how, I shall Die, and to add, this Cough still casts a shadow over me, clinging to me since late Winter...This report of a Skirmish or Battle between De Burgh and Edward Bruce is confused, unclear on the outcome, some suggest the Earl's Cavalry has been routed and that the Scots have retired into the Forest...Now the Road is silent of any more News...

Felim has left the side of the Earl and is believed to be returning to Connaught, I am not sure the Reason, but he has a dangerous Rival there in the Son, and this leaves the De Burgh exposed; One can only guess his next move. But Bruce must be heartened, allied with O'Neill, there must be great Confidence of Victory...This Winter will be Hard, there is very little to feed Man or Animal...

Bruce's Army has sacked Kells and set it Alight, Roger de Mortimer's Force there, being no match, has retreated; The de Lacys quick to leave the Fray, abandoning Mortimer, while Walter Cusack has a chance of holding out at Trim, a formidable Citadel against any Attacker. Stories tell of Fields being burnt and Food robbed from the Poor, though it gives Pleasure to hear of the attack on the Tuit Manor. An Army cannot be stopped, but still the

Winter Duties have to be done, keeping out of Mind that the Winter Crop might fail with the continued Rain and cooling of the Nights, and the risk of Frost. At Michaelmas, only so many Animals could be Slaughtered, not enough Salt to preserve the Meat; Only Hope that they live to see Spring. My older Sons may be called upon to Fight, more chance of Food in their bellies, I am certainly too Ill and, God willing, will be spared my Obligation of Service.

The Army is moving on, and has set the de Verdun Manor House on fire...This Christmas has been a Hungry one, but the end of the Hardship is still not in sight, and I think there is much more to go, at least the Soldiers are going, that gives us all a feeling of Relief, though their presence hasn't been as Bad as feared; Nonetheless, it is better them gone, off now to find new Farms to Plunder, the farther away the better.

I Pray that Spring brings better Conditions, Lent sees a lengthening of the Evenings and the Hope of Easter, Resurrection. The Scots are now as Hungry as we are, and have returned, causing a lot of Unease: When the Soldiers are Hungry, the Peasants are Hungrier still, but the Connaught Men have Food, to allow them Fight. Felim has regained his Crown with the assistance of both his own Race and the English, the Superior Mail Armour a significant factor in the outcome, as a result, Rory is Dead...The Irish are Rebelling everywhere on the Island, but Bruce is moving his Forces back into the Lands of his Northern Allies...

William de Burgh has joined Forces with de Bermingham, and it appears there will be a major Confrontation with the restored King, who has turned on the English, who accuse him of treacherously betraying them, after all their Support. It is said Felim O'Connor is intoxicated on the Power: He has Plundered and Killed, Gael and English; They are now getting assistance from Gaelic Chiefs, ours among them, not all those belonging to the Race of Erin are of one. We share more in Common with the English, settled here so long that you cannot tell them apart from ourselves, than we do with the Scots, though sharing with them a common Tongue and long History.

Their Foot Soldiers with their long Pikes can move more readily in the Winter months, unencumbered by the Winter snow and frozen ground, but Cavalry Men need Fodder for their Horses, and the land has very little to offer, now just a barren icy Landscape. The Scots are now at the outskirts of Dublin, and have taken Hostages; I can't remember the Names. But Bruce is near the Walls, and the latest is that the Inhabitants have set fire to the dwelling places outside the City, while Tales from those having escaped tell of a Population nervous and suspicious; Those remaining have taken great strides to defend themselves from the Invaders, who they see at having Free Reign throughout the Hinterland, Burning and Plundering; Now they are surrounded by Dangers, not just from the Dark Wooded Mountains to the South. But a period of quasi-Peace makes people calm in their Fears, and with Bruce's Army near at hand, alarm rises and they notice that the Defences have fallen into Disrepair.

The Templars are accused of Heresy, their Wealth and Privilege have certainly won them Enemies...Petronilla de Midia has been burnt as a witch; I know her Family, but do not remember her; Up until her Death, she'd been working as a Maid in the City of Kilkenny. Bishop Ledrede is the Man behind her Death, and the Attempts on many others more Powerful than this Poor Girl, but the mob of Foreigners, her own Race!, and Gael too no doubt, were baying for her Blood, and were Happy to see her choke on the Smoke and watch her be engulfed by the Pyre of Flames, the Maid with Child out of Wedlock.

I never heard of him, but the Priest tells the Story of King Charles IV of France and Charles I of Navarre, also Count of Champagne, in the long line of Capetian Rulers. The Priest seems Forlorn, then Angry: The king's first Wife was a Wicked Woman, and he shakes his head, no worse a Woman since Eve, her Sinfulness discovered in the Gift of a Purse. She was fortunate to escape with her head, being shaved and imprisoned until her Death, to commence her real Torments. The Knight in question was well prepared for the worst that Hell could offer, only the Pain unending. But Charles was a Truly Christian Man, and showed Mercy to his Wife, and had her sent to a Nunnery in the Hope she would Repent; He would not take her back to the Marital Bed. Now he has been taken up to Heaven, after six years on the Throne, fighting to impose control on Troublesome Nobles. Still, he had his Critics, a Sign that even the Divinely Appointed is tainted with Original Sin, succumbing to the Temptation of Persecution. His Confidence in Charles of Valois proved its Worth, with the taking of Aquitaine; The plight of his Vassal over grievances of high Taxes and bad Harvests forced Charles to the Battle Field, where his Father had managed to avoid War, though the other Priority made him choose Peace. I ask the Priest, who now has the Throne: He says that the Law has appointed, that Philip of Valois be the King, and his Coronation has concluded the matter.

Mortimer has been hanged, his Rule come to an end, a Man with a Ruthless Reputation on this Island, and I recall vividly, and in Great Terror, the Memories of that War. He was not a man to remain Loyal to his King, and who conspired against his Sovereign and committed Adultery with the Queen; No doubt he was Compensation for the King's Unnatural Urges. He deposed the Sovereign and killed him in a Horrific Way, then put his Heir on the Throne; Though Mortimer wanted the real Power for himself, which made many others around him uneasy. But it seems the young King wanted to clip the wings of this exotic bird, and perhaps it was the Execution of his Cousin that finally drove him to action, and Mortimer and the King's Mother were arrested. Despite her Pleas for Mercy, Mortimer has suffered an Undignified Death, by hanging, the body left swinging on the Scaffolds for two Days and two Nights. Now that the Traitor is removed, where will the English King turn his attentions?

The O'Tooles of Imaile attack on the English Settlement has taken the Foreigners by surprise, as it sits on the Hills overlooking the City: They can sweep down on them within half a day riding, or less; They have moved quickly from the South, having also burnt the Port of Arklow, and taken the Castle.

The mules seem weighed down by the Barrels of Wine, as they slip and slide on the muddy Track; It will be easier for them coming back, Fleece is bulkier but lighter...The Merchant tells me of the War, and the Fears he has for his Trade; A major Sea Battle has already been fought: Hundreds of French Ships were at anchor in the Inlet, led by the Knight, Hugues Quieret, awaiting orders to attack England. Trade depends on control of the Seas, so the young King acted, getting word of the Enemy's Plan. With the Sun at their backs, the English Fleet attacked and the French, blinded by the beams of light, were no match for the Arrows from the English Bows; the Genoese were not able to compete with such a rate of fire. Once in close Combat, the Fighting became even Fiercer, with the Combatants attacking each other's Vessels. The blood turned the waters red, and even the King himself was wounded, though not Mortally. By Nightfall, the French were losing, and when they fled to the Shores they were attacked by the Flemish, who then entered the Fray.

Many with Obligation of Fealty did go; I remember the local Lord on horseback, leaving with his Caravan and Foot Soldiers, Pikes silhouetted against the Dawn Sky. Now the

accounts of Battle have come back: Soldiers wading across the shallow Waters, seeking more booty after already Pillaging the lands around; The streets filled with the Screams of the Dying and the clash of Steel. Orders were not Obeyed, everyone simply wanted what they could get, and the French who could not make it to the Tower or Castle were cut down. The smell of smoke started to fill the Nostrils, accompanied by the pathetic Screeching of those trapped in burning Buildings. There was plenty of Gold to be had...The Hunger was getting worse; Spirits falling; Hopes that an important river could be crossed were dashed. On the other side, the Enemy has lined up on the slopes of the bank...At dawn, Knights and Men-At-Arms made it across, but they were forced back by the French, who were being Mercilessly cut down by Arrows of the Bow Men, the rest of the ordinary Foot Soldiers (my Story Teller one of them) began to cross and join in the Battle; He said the Territory they entered was rich in Food and like Heaven itself...

He arrived in Ireland last month, appointed by his Father, and already holding the Earldom of Ulster, arranged at a very young age, though the Crown has little charge over those Territories; It all seems to be a Scheme to reinforce a King's Authority. Little is known of him and this Island is a complicated Assignment, one that should challenge any Man; No doubt with this in Consideration he has brought a large Army with him, expecting the worst. He has held High Office, but it is hard to tell if he will show as much Willingness as the Archbishop to bring about Conciliation. He comes to a land laid waste, as he predecessors have found: Rokeby had little success; Engagements with the likes of the O'Byrnes resulted in their Peaceful Compliance, with Submissions that are like the Morning Mist, soon burnt off by the Sun.

They can assume our Language and Customs, built Mounds, like the ancient Races, and Castles and Fortresses too, but they differ in one way to us living today: Power; Of little substance, whether it be the Foreigners who take on the Habits of the Gael or the Crown's Administrators, who seek to Control the Controllers. And the Power of the English grows over the old Race, day by day, whether the King's Lieutenant or the Earl, and the Statutes say Intermarriage and Fostering are banned, that they must not take our Names or speak our Tongue, whilst over the Generations many have come to enjoy Gaelic pastimes, loving the Horling over Archery. Brehon Law must be banished and English Common Law observed, while our Minstrels are branded as Spies, to be shunned and treated with Suspicion. Most despicable of all, to the Pious: No one of Native Blood can step inside the Hallowed Ground of a Cathedral, as if we do not Pray to the same God.

The Mariners' Tales are always interesting, for living by the still Lakes, I think a lot about the open Sea. My attention is held by an Account of a Sailor, who was in a Battle on the Waters, a Fleet under the command of a John Hastings, against the Genoese, but the Castilians won a decisive Victory, destroying the entire Fleet and taking many Prisoners, among them a considerable number of Knights ... Merchants also have Tales to tell: Of that delicate Silk, a secret known first to the Chinese, as well as Gems and Spices, that travel those Roads, and are keenly sought after by the Rich of the West; In return, they send back Ivory, Metals and Gold. But the Trade in such Wealth attracts Bandits: It is not merely the Merciless Sun and the Barren Sands that kill, for the Nomads Prey upon the Caravans. Since the time of the Parthians, Middle Men existed to protect the travelling Merchants, but, even without those Dangers, I am told few have reached the end of the Magical Highway, which must be full of such heavenly Wonders...Tales and Wealth also brought with it that terrible Plague and wiped out so many Inhabitants of the Villages and Towns.

...If the Priest says so, it is Authority for me, since the Colonists support Urban, and they never do any Favour to the Cause of the Gael: They are like their Pope in so many ways, soon to reveal their true Character. Power makes us Cruel, and his Alienation of the French King makes him a Pious Warrior of the English Cause. The Monks of the Monastery do not give Allegiance to Pope Clement, for they despise our Race, and despise what they see as our Primitive and Savage ways, our old Gods and our Old Ways. He had not the Courage to accept the Invitation, and so the Antichrist has been Excommunicated, as no Pope can be put on the Holy See by a rabid Mob.

He should have executed Bollingbroke when he had the chance, for he did many of the others, whose who sought to curb his Power, and he put too much store in Filial Loyalty. The Battle has left him a King without a Crown, though he has the Legal Writ and safe behind the walls of the White Tower, yet many of his Court are now convicted of Treason at the hand of the Magnates and have been sentenced to be Hanged, Drawn and Quartered; Many also stand accused for the failures of the War against the Kingdom of France; The King wants Peace: The Nobles want to fight on. But the King's Uncle may still return from Castile, for he does not seem to have been involved in the Actions of his Son; Though there is no Love for him among the Peasants, portrayed as a Butcher's Bastard for an unjust Tax trebled in its severity... And with his present Troubles he is unlikely to heed the Pleas of his Colonial Parliament.

Castile and the Kingdom of Portugal are at War, with the English involved too; This latest, comes after the Discontent sown from the Treaty that betrothed Beatrice of Portugal to the future King of Castile, the Nobles and rich Merchants afraid their Interests were being undermined. With the Son of King Peter at their head, they have Rebelled against the designs of King Juan, with Leonor forced to Abdicate, the two sides are at War, and Portugal appears to be the Victor; From the Victory, the Tactics showing their Effectiveness. Plague has proved as effective as War, as the Tales of my Family confirm, the Misery and Evil of our ways that Cause and Worsen the Evils of War...On the scorching Plains the Armies meet again, the Portuguese waiting on the slopes of the Hill along the Road along which their Enemy will soon approach. They are ideally positioned to witness the Approach of the Adversary, the steep slopes offering them ideal Protection...The first Castilian Troops have arrived, and are Cautious to take on the other side in a direct Attack...Though by now, Winter, the blood of that battlefield must have been washed away by Rain and Snow, and the suffering there Known only to the Lord.

Was he finished from the moment John of Gaunt died? But they are rallying around the Duke; I wait for more News, my eyes turning up from my work, watching the shimmering Road. He is demanding only his own Patrimony, but once you get what you Desire, you Desire more; That's if his words are True...The King is now in Erin, with most of his Loyal Knights, to Avenge the Death of his Heir Apparent, the English Baron dressed like a Gael, cut down unrecognized, as Anonymous as his Killer. The Duke of York has sided with Bollingbroke: Perhaps Expediency; Yet the king sees Plots and the Executioner's Axe falls, to restore that sense of Security, even those of Royal Blood.

Richard II has Abdicated and is now a Prisoner; the Reign of a Sovereign who had more Faith in retaining Power by forging Peace with Foreigners than trusting his own Baronage, has come to an end...

When a Rival encroaches on your Land, the Signs are Ominous, and, no matter how Cautious a Prince might be, or indeed how Hopeless the Cause of taking up the Sword, the Omens always foretell Conflict. Events show de Ruthyn has the Power of the Crown behind him; Richard's Fate was a Reason for his supporters to Proclaim Glendower Prince of Wales. The Revolt is spreading, much of Wales has gone over to his side; Percy has offered Pardons for the Rebels if they Surrender, though the efforts of the English King have not succeeded, and the Welsh have won a major Victory. The English and Flemish Settlers, though supported by Soldiers and Mercenaries, have been defeated, not suited to the Terrain, unlike the Archers on their Ponies; This has made-up for overwhelming odds.

They lay in wait for the Scots and rushed them when they came close, but the Scots were quick to react and retreated to the Hill, where they formed a sheltron, to make them Secure from being Assailed: Unfortunately the Human Shield was no Protection against the English Bows; And rather die Fighting than to be cut down like Deer, the Scots charged the Ambushers. Many of the leading Kinsmen were captured, including Douglas himself, Earl of Angus; Though he wore the strongest Armour, he was wounded half a dozen times and lost an eye...Circumstances looked favourably upon Albany, the Enemy distracted elsewhere, and, although the King owed much to de Percy, the latter was bitter, more so, because of the quarrel over the prisoners' Ransoms and promised Rewards; Now Northumberland is in Allegiance with Mortimer.

The Peace Treaty, it is said, will put an end to that War, with the Territories returned to their Boundaries, and large Ransoms paid out for release of Captives. After such a blood-thirsty Battle, a Peace might make differences resolvable in a Peaceful way, for the Accounts say it was a Merciless scene from Hell, its coming was well Predicted, even before the Pagans rose in Rebellion. The Knights' Plan was to defeat their Enemies, one by one; The intercession of Wenceslaus gave only temporary Hope. Under the drone of Peace Talks, Armies were marching: No such Battle has ever been seen on the Plains: The heavy Cavalry, in their full Armour, scorched in the heat of the Summer Sun; The Relief of rain only dampened the Gunpowder...The Teutonic Forces took courage from the initial Retreat, and pursued the Enemy, greedy for the rich Bounty; But what is seen is not always happening, of which Vytautas has witnessed to his cost. Further Hope was symbolized when the Banner of Krakow was captured, but it was soon retaken; The chance to Kill a King was swiftly pursued, but a Loyal Servant quickly assailed the Attacker. The retreating Army was seen returning to the Battle, and the Knights were now overwhelmed by numbers, and with an opportunistic Lance through the Grandmaster's neck, killing him outright, his Troops were without Leadership, so thrown into a state of Confusion...More Died in their hastily built Fortress, than on the Battlefield itself... They have blamed their Defeat on the Traitor, who lowered his Banner as a Sign to withdraw from the Battlefield.

They blame the Pirates of Ceuta for ravaging the Coastline, and taking good Christians to be sold into Slavery, and that is why they took their City: To put an end to such Outrageous Atrocities, that leave the Territories near the Sea barren of people, too Afraid to be always watching the Horizon during the Day, and Fearful of every Sound in their beds at Night. Their skill as Mariners has provided them with Victory, a craft taught by the hand of Death; Now they have a Barrier, of Sand and Sea, between them, and chance to Explore the Strange Lands beyond the Desert, where Caravans of Camels (horse-like Creatures with humped backs) carry Riches across the Trade Routes, led by experienced Nomads, who Trade in Gold and Flesh. There are Rich Lands to the South, along the coast, and the Moorish Rulers can be excluded, direct Trade bringing a sweeter Profit for the Explorers who seek to find this

Land; There are Tales of a lost Christian Kingdom, cut off from Christendom for Centuries; Emissaries from that Land have already brought Accounts of this Kingdom, a place of earthly Peace, though at times Besieged by Infidels and Barbarians, who want its Gold: Shining nuggets, that can be gathered from the Rivers. This Kingdom has a Magic Spring, that, when drunk from, will return the Old to their Youth, and, as a result, the Inhabitants of this Kingdom live to a Considerable Age. Even the King of Macedon crossed the Land of Darkness to find the source of Eternity, and, in that Grim Place, he heard the trapped Souls of Shapur and his Army.

Father Zelivsky is a Good Man, who stands up for the Rights of the Peasants, and challenges the outrageous Wealth of the Church, a follower of Hus, who was burnt at the Stake for his Beliefs. And he Died a Courageous Martyr by all Accounts, and not once did he stop Praying for his Persecutors, as they set him alight; Nor did he Recant in order to save his own Mortal Life. The Good Priest, and his Followers, were Provoked and so the Burgomaster, and his Councillors, were torn to pieces by the Mob; Knights and Nobles have taken up Arms too... The one-eyed leader, unwilling to Compromise, has led his Forces to Battle, and has made great use of the tools of the Peasant at Sudomer, where they proved themselves on the Field. Well-defended and using something called an Arquebus, they defeated the Army of Knights and Horses that outnumbered them; Then, under darkness, and a Fog descending on the Marches, they escaped to continue on the War; The offer of Surrender should have been accepted...The Emperor struggles to Unify his Power in pursuit of his Ideals, and his Armies are marching on Prague, having received the Blessing of the Pope, with Soldiers from throughout Christendom...If he is a Good Example of them, they are Mercenaries for Reason of Pillage, not Piety.

The Scottish King is dead, slain by Atholl, a Man who came to rue the day the Ransom was paid and the Sovereign returned, and who had conspired with others to gain the Throne for himself. The Protection of the Friars was not enough, and though the King hid ignominiously, having been alerted by Servants, the Assassins discovered him, and cut him through, having gained access with the assistance of the Chamberlain. He was a Ruler not greatly loved, for paying off a Ransom has a high cost in so many ways; Nonetheless, he had Qualities that suited him well for the Roll, and was quick to Avenge the Murder of his Brother; The Bitterness of the dispute did not end there, and there seems no Conclusion to such Disputes. The defeat of Noblemen on those Foreign Battle Fields had consequences back in Scotland, and King James was then to turn his attention to those, Indifferent, even Hostile, to his return; But also one other Reason: The Memory of his Brother, David. With grounds for bringing charges of Treason, James was able to pursue his Ambitions for Power and settling old Grievances. The Queen, who escaped wounded that Night, made sure the Son and Heir was brought to Safety; That boy has now been Crowned, and may still bring Stability to that Kingdom.

The White Earl is truly one among the Gaels, and well capable of answering the false Charges against him, brought by the Archbishop, accusations made to the Privy Council of Treason, Feebleness and Negligence; Other charges too, but unnamed. This is a Dispute with a long History: Ormonde challenges Old Talbot's claim to the Earldom of Waterford, who is now too occupied with fighting the French, and is raising a vast Fleet of ships to carry more Soldiers to that War. But, I suspect, it is his Brother who does his bidding here, as if one such cruel Enemy is not enough: The White Earl also faces Challenges from Desmond, a long Rivalry between Foreign Magnates, who many Generations ago made this Island their own,

easing ties with across the Waters; Differences they always find, when Disagreement emerges over the Rights to the Land.

He has a Cruel Reputation here, now he has suffered Defeat and Death at their hands! False Accounts said the French were in Retreat, and the rising dust confirmed that; Seems that they were wrong: That it must have signalled something much Different. Talbot hastily ordered his men to Attack, but they were not prepared for what they found: The French were well entrenched, and Armed with Crossbows and Cannons...And Talbot could only watch from the distance, as his men were pierced with Arrows and ripped apart by Cannon Balls, that are said to sound like shrieking Banshees. The ditch they had to cross was too much; The defence too overpowering...The Duke's attack on his right flank was the Harbinger of Battle's end, as the English broke into Retreat; Talbot Died, trapped under his White Cob, which was killed by a Cannon Ball; Unable to free himself, the Lord was battered to death with an Axe after being recognized by a French Archer. The Englishman's Boldness and daring did not serve him well: He should not have gone to the rescue of Castillon; That Rashness cost him his Life, and his Son's, as well as many Knights and ordinary Soldiers...I hear News of a greater Catastrophe, which happened before these Events: Constantinople has fallen; The Byzantine Empire is no more. No one could have thought that the Civilization, founded by Constantine the Great, could ever crumble, that Bastion of Christianity, falling after Weeks of Bombardment, gradually the walls of the City giving way. The Inhabitants had attempted to repair the Damage, but the Turks kept up the Assault, the Byzantines, no doubt dispirited by the Blood Moon and other Omens that appeared to Prophesize their Destruction.

They have met at somewhere called St Albans; Henry, the Puppet of Somerset, was already ensconced in the Town, while York's Forces took up their positions on a Ridge overlooking the Enemy. This was a Perilous Act on York's part; He, and the other Magnates, put everything at Risk: Should they lose, they would Forfeit their Lives and their Estates, for Rebelling against a King goes against Divine as well as Temporal Order, even if he who sits on the Throne is not the one who holds the Royal Sceptre, and himself the line of a Usurper. It was a fiercely contested Battle, one not seen on that soil for a generation, Shrewsbury only a Memory for the old. But the Contest could not be averted and it became a Bloody Melee in the narrow streets and lanes, after which the followers of Richard were Victorious, finding the King sitting quietly, even though wounded, in the Shade of a Tree...With Somerset Dead, the course of Events had quickly changed. He decided to Die bravely, the words of the Prophecy had come true...

The Fighting was so Brutal that the River, near where it was fought, ran red with the Blood of the Dead and Wounded, in a Battle with the same Divisions. Geraldine was disturbed because of the importance of Waterford and, had the Banner he marched under had no bearing, he would still have been forced on to the Field. It is told that the Battle lasted the full length of day, with Butler being the decisive Loser; Fitzgerald killed or captured most of his Opponents, even taking Hostage, MacRichard Butler... But his uncle is Secure within the walls of the well-fortified Town, and it is probable that the Desmond will turn his Attention to other Towns throughout the Earldom, to take what he can or destroy what he can't.

The Earl of Desmond and his Sons have been Beheaded at Drogheda, despite showing Loyalty to the Cause of the King; There is Rumour that Tiptoft had a part to play in their

Fate, and gained from the Earl's Death, and was also ready to exploit the ill-advised Comments and take great Pleasure in the performance of his Task.

Edward is Dead, a King who was a formidable Foe, who did not see the Omen as a Sign of his Defeat, but a Portent of Victory; And Victory it was, a hard and bloody Battle; Desiring Vengeance, and no doubt Power, he turned us around to meet our Adversaries...They are falling back, and against the superior bills, into the marshy Wetlands by the River; And in an instant they break and start to run, and the Rout has started; It is astonishing, bringing with it a thrill of Excitement: Many are being hacked to Death, others drowning in the River and the Water is starting to flow Red...It is hard to see everything in Battle, preoccupied with the immediate need to Kill and stay Alive; But when word spreads that the Battle is turning, Hope is quickly lost, especially with the Knowledge that little Mercy will be shown...Edward became wary of his Cousin, who hoped he could Rule while the King spent his time on Hedonistic Pursuits; The Cousin was mistaken, for the King wanted to Rule the Kingdom himself, and through that Marriage extended his Affinity; And the King was right to be Mistrustful, even of Family, Cousin or Brother...Even though he treacherously changed Allegiance, Edward still showed Compassion, a Counterbalance to ruthless Power...

Walking up the narrow street towards the Cathedral, I hear the Coronation Ceremony, as the young King is Crowned. We are soon to take the Fight across the Sea to Henry, making this a time of both Excitement and Dread, my first taste of War; I am doing my Father proud, and am not much older than the new King. Great cheers fill the whole City; There is a Tension, a Sense that things are going to Change...He is being carried on the shoulders of two Stout Men as the Mob follows behind, towards the Castle, that towers gloomily over Dublin, as my thoughts go to the Prospects: my first time at Sea, away from Ireland, to a Foreign Land to fight in a War against an Enemy I know little of, for a Cause I know equally little of; Though I am excited, and frightened, in Contrast: The day is Fair and the bunting flutters cheerfully as the Church bells ring out and I catch a glimpse of the gentle Sea, that looks Warm and Peaceful in the sunshine.

Another Pretender to the Throne, but my Memories are as vivid as if they were of Yesterday; I shall never forget: We had no Armour, unlike those in the Cause we served, and we discovered this bitterly when the Arrows came raining down. The Mantle protects against the Cold and Rain, but not the sharp, swift Arrow; I wake every Night with the sound; Being outnumbered so greatly, and without Protection, what could we do but run? Schwarz's men were well equipped and highly trained; That and Bravery made their Performance Splendid...And he watched from the Ship while his Followers were massacred on the Shore, after which he set sail for here, to be made welcome by the Earl...They have now laid Seize to the Port of Waterford, and the latest being, that they have made no Progress, and come out weak in Skirmishes with the Besieged. They have landed Troops at Passage, but it is not clear if this will help their Campaign, as the Cannon on the Tower is doing much to crush the Morale of the Soldiers.

They have divided the World between them, which their Explorers have discovered beyond the Horizons of the Ocean, where the Sun sets in the sleepy resting place of the Dead. Cristobal Colon has caused great Rivalries between them, not perhaps his Intention, when he discovered those Wonderful New Lands, inhabited by Natives Unashamed of their Nakedness: A People so Innocent and Pure, living in an unsullied Garden of Eden, the place the Explorer was in search of. The Tribe of the Guanahani worship Natural Deities, much like our Forbears...The Turks have cut off the Routes East since they took Constantinople,

and so they sailed South along the coast of the Land of Africa, as well as West across the Ocean...

Kildare has won a spectacular Victory at Knockdoe and de Burgh has been put to flight; Some say they could hear the Trumpets, even here, as the Call to Battle was issued; A Battle that lasted the whole Day; By Nightfall, the Slopes were littered with the Dead. So great was the Toll, that the Corpses were buried where they were Slain, too many to bring home for Christian burial; Decency meant they could not be left beneath the Sky, looking despairingly to Heaven for the Day of Judgement, food for the Crows and Wolves. Handguns and Cannon added to the Bloodshed, these new Weapons give our Nature much more Rein. Mor FizGerald is now even more Powerful; The King could not dispense with him, even for Acts of Treason, for he is a man of huge Strength, Plain-Speaking and Hot-Tempered. He is said to have told them that if he was not allowed Rule, then he would make the Land Unrulerable; The Earl is a man who keeps his Word, and I suspect he might have Powers not of this World, and perhaps that is why he escapes the Gallows; So it is best to be Cautious of the Man.

The Castle is Important, located strategically on the Red River, and its Recapture, after so many Years, a considerable boost; What begins as Cattle Raiding will grow, over time, into full scale War, Wealth and Status measures in the size of the Herd. These two Tribes have been in Conflict since the first Invaders set foot on these Shores. I remember the Army that was led by Hugh Oge, son of Hugh Roe, Plundered and Burned without meeting any Opposition. Having successfully taken the Fortress from the Sons, he has placed his own Warden there, and he has now been nominated as Lord of Tirconnell.

The Earl has been Summoned, to answer charges of dipping his fingers in Crown Revenues, he would certainly be quite acquainted with the Royal Treasury, as well as making treacherous Alliances, so it seems no Coincidence that the new Lord Lieutenant has been sent over here, and with a large Force at his disposal. He certainly served himself and his King well: The Attacks on the Land of Peace laid Ruin to much of the settlers' Estates, but the new Earl was soon to be rewarded by the King, for he brought back a great Booty, when he destroyed the Castle of O'Reilly, killing the Chief himself, and driving so many of the Defenders out into the Bog to Perish. How more relieved would the Foreign Inhabitants of Dublin be, when its Mayor presented them with the head of O'Neill; He has had great Victories, marching he army into Tir Eoghan, and bringing that place to a peaceful Condition; But, there is said to be deep Distrust of him among his Fellow Race, many of whom hardly see him as such.

Heretical Clergy incited those simple Peasants to take up Arms against their Masters, and while those Implements of the land can be adapted for the Battle Field, such Weapons are no match for the Weaponry of a Professional Army, with real Power behind it: The Poor cannot muster Artillery or Cavalry, and so their Aims are doomed. The Peasants listened to the fork-tongued Preachers, eager to have their Grievances addressed; I know what it is like to be Poor, to face the daily Hardship of Life. The Princes who rule them are not eager to pay Taxes to Rome; They too take up the arguments of Dissent, and have bitter Differences with the Nobility, but at the very bottom is the Peasant, who is the Slave of them all. Yet the call for Support does not always mean that Victory results in the sharing of that one thing every man desires a bit of: Power; It is that, which is the Motive of our Actions. War is always the Enemy of the Peasant, but the Feudal Lords need War, because it provides them with much Wealth, which is the visible Status of Power. Now in Penury Condition, they turn to their Peasants to maintain their Style of Life, with the Laws that favour the Powerful over the

Weak. Their Scythes and Flails did not serve on the Battle Field, and their Leader, a sincere though misguided Mystic, could not bring God's Blessing to Events, though he did Champion the Poor, and denounce the Excesses of the Church, still, the Lord's Judgement was not on his side that Day, and he Died a cruel Death, for the Conviction that Good Deeds are needed to be Righteous.

I think Lord Offaly is too Impetuous, but, then, he is only a young Man, and acts like a young Man does, easily tempted into a Trap that could be certain to arouse his Fury. The Archbishop could see the Mistake he was making; Wiser Counsel could not prevail, the young Lord reacting angrily to Advice. The course of Events led a rebel Army to the walls of Dublin...The killing of Archbishop Allen sealed his Fate, though it is unclear what Orders were given on that Matter, after being apprehended, the Chancellor was taken away for safe protection; Instead he was Mercilessly beaten to Death. The youthful Rebel mustered many Irish Septs and led them into Revolt...The Winter is now well over, and Skeffington has Besieged the Kildare Stronghold, and is bombarding it with Cannon. The Rising has left the land Desolate, already Savaged by Plague...

The Lord Deputy has proposed the Chiefs, of both Races, submit to the King's Authority, for which they will then be given Title to their Lands, Lands we have held since the earliest Invasions of the Island of Ireland. Those who retain the old Brehon Laws, and Ancient Customs of our Ancestors, must give them up and take up the ways of the Foreigner, and we must Convert to their King's new Church. Some Leaders have already renounced the Jurisdiction of the Pope, and if the Chiefs do this they are promised Freedom from Attack. The King's Writ does not rule here in the Sword Land, but no doubt there will be moves... these territories within the Lands of War, thus pushing back the Borders of the Lands of War. Not always Disloyal to Crown Authority, now the Sheriff cannot ride in these Parts, though at time Alliance has been the most Wise. I do not believe the Melaghlinns will Submit, having survived in Power by Violence and Cunning for so long; Though, more Powerful Chiefs are wavering: Conn has given his Son as Hostage and it is rumoured he will kneel before the "King of Ireland" and Sacrifice anything to keep the trappings of Power, that one thing that will cause Rift even between Kin and Blood...I know where my Duties and Loyalties lie should these Events come to War.

He has gone to War with the Holy Roman Emperor, and King Henry has now taken the side of Charles, with the Scots and the Turks aligning themselves with the French; There is a long Animosity between the two Men. When your Territory is surrounded, it makes you feel Nervous and Threatened, and often, there is no alternative but War, in a desperate Hope to reverse the Balance. It seems the Holy Roman Emperor has come to Negotiate a Peace, due to Financial worries and that Unrest within his own Empire...The accounts tell of a terrible Slaughter: The ancient Pike and the modern Arquebus made it a Bloodbath, with the heavy Cavalry engaging with its age old Ferocity...The tightness of the Columns made easy Retreat impossible, and the Swiss cut them down in Revenge: The Imperial Force was routed that Day; Many of the Soldiers had their throats cut after they sought Quarter. That is the last I have heard about this latest War in Europe: How a Scot should know all this I do not know? He does bring News of his own People, Battle between two of the Clans: Clan Donald, supported by the Camerons, in Conflict with Clan Fraser, over whether or not Ranald of the Glens should be Chief of the Clan. Moidart's return has meant that the unpopular Ruler, with little support, was forced to flee back to support the Frasers, from a Warlike Man who would not wait for War to come to him. With his Kin and Allies, he went on the Offensive, but showed enough Cunning not to risk direct Confrontation with the stronger Enemy, so retired

back into Wilderness of his Highland Territories, from thither, he harried his Enemy, finally engaging with them in frontal Battle, and having cut off the Pass doomed any chance of Fraser retreat; They were all Slaughtered but several, and the Blood of the Dead is baked red in the Glen.

Primogeniture benefits the Ambitions and Birthright of one Man, but it denies those to the rest of the Warrior Nobility: Age old Dispute, from the first Invasion, continue and increase; The Authorities in Dublin take the side of their own Laws, though the Logic leaves so many Disenfranchised and Bitter...

The Battle opened with O'Neill Horse crossing the Ford, the Enemy charged with holding their Advance until Reinforcements arrived, but Aodh fell back to the Bog, unable to hold them off, though the arrival of the Mercenaries turned the course: With the assistance they were able to take the Offensive, while O'Neill and his Men were still forming a line for Battle. They were not there to pay Homage, as O'Neill so much demanded, among his own Sept, and others, and the tide changed making re-crossing the Fearsad a perilous Task. It drowned many who were not cut down by the Sword, but he escaped, with the help of the O'Gallaghers, and is said to be hiding in the Ford of Protection, so, no doubt, he will be seeking new Allies after this bitter Defeat.

A Brawl, while under the Hospitality of the McDonnells, led to his Death, his head chopped off and stuck on a Pike. Piers was sent to collect it, and have it delivered to Dublin, where they quickly sent News home of the Slaying; Some say he Misjudged, and should have been more Responsive to the Overtures of Radclyffe. His Rule had been favoured by the Queen, on Condition of Submission, but he would not Agree without Firm Assurances, suspicion of Motive so integral to Power...As for her, she feared he could enter into Alliance with the Spanish, so let him return with the Title he already held...Sussex had little Success against the Rebel Chief, and even tried to kill him with poisoned Wine. He was to Die, a fugitive from Defeat in Battle, under the roof of one of his many Enemies; Though he seemed to have forgotten previous Enmities.

He is the new Baron Dungannon, inheriting the Title from his murdered Brother, and has spent much of his Youth fostered by the Hovenendens. The new Customs and Laws suit him, and not his cousin...

Black Tom Butler is said to have returned from his Summons, though it seems being the Queen's Favourite appeased her fury that deviant Banners challenged Royal Authority: The distant Cousin persuaded her, that the Fault for the Battle lay with the Geraldines; Now they languish in the Tower, and their Forces suffered Severely, massacred as they fell back to the River, their Leader wounded and captured. Butler has Dissenters in his own Family, so he must try and win back...

They are besieging the Seat of the Ormondes, but the News is that Sidney will march on the Rebels with a significant Force, his Reputation already established as a man Ruthless and Competent. The Rebels have already pursued their Cause with great Vigour, and make great Advances against the encroaching Power of the Crown...

He would not be driven into the Woods, like a common Outlaw, for long; Soon enough, he would venture forth to do Battle; Now he has done so, having attacked the Settlers in their stronghold, Kilmallock, which they had taken from the Geraldines, and the Attack has been

Unsuccessful according to the Stories. Gilbert, though his horse was shot, still led his men in a Cowardly Assault, driving back the Besiegers. Now he is Mercilessly on the Offensive, taking no Quarter as he sweeps West: Beheading Men, Women and Children, and leaving the gruesome Spectacle for all to see.

The Death of his Half Brother left him the sole male of the Dynasty, a mere 12 years of age, and on the run from the Crown Authorities. The League was not Powerful enough, or united enough, to Protect him and his Family name, and he has spent much time on the Continent at the Court of the French King, and a guest of the Holy Roman Emperor. He was a Cultured and Learned man, his Adventures as a young man also led him into Soldiering, fighting against the Turks, but Henry's Death meant a change of Luck, and he was restored to his Lands, having contributed to Defeating the Wyatt Rebellion...His political Opponents mistrusted him, but he was favoured by the young Queen, which saved his Head from the Executioner's Block. He was said to have dabbled in the Black Arts, though also bravely professed his Catholic Faith, and many of the Peasants, who dwell near his Castle, were wary to approach the place. In this Sense, he was much Similar to that Noble Ancestor, though a less able Politician, perhaps, for both have gained Reputations for having Supernatural Powers. It is said his Ghost, along with the Army of Dead Warriors, sleep in a deep Cavern, waiting for the Day they will Rise up and Defeat the Foreigners, driving them from our Shores. Locals say the Earl's Ghost rises on the First Day of May, every Seventh Year, to ride his Steed across the Plains, and many have witnessed the Sight.

They have shown they will not allow Willis to be Sheriff, a Man who has set himself up in the Monastery, with Profane Contempt for everything Sacred, and is taking advantage of the Disorder pertaining in that Country, allowing him to Plunder at will. The Rulers have been alarmed, for some considerable time, by Dublin's Plans to break up the Lands of the Maguires...With the young Noble clamped in irons, and so far from home, Willis, it appears, has nothing to Fear from his People, as they are Disparate in State, and any attempt by their Chief to escape has been thwarted. Although Tyrone has taken a keen Interest in ending his Incarceration, he still campaigns with the Marshal, although there is no Love lost between them, after he eloped with the Sister, whom he is said to treat with great Cruelty. But the Earl, too, is Ambiguous in his Loyalty to the Crown, though he partook in the attack on Enniskillen, which has now Surrendered, and he might find some Tactical Advantage in allying with Tir Chonaill, for there is deep Division in his own Kin, which has cost much loss of Life, with Cabins burned and Tenants killed.

The O'Neill has now demonstrated where his Loyalties belong, for now at least, and the Ruler has Allied with that old Enemy who escaped from the Castle, then proceeded back to his home Land, and is now Inaugurated as the Chief of his People. Now Bagenal has suffered a humiliating Defeat: I have heard he was leading a Force, bringing supplies to an English Fort, and ambushed by an Irish Army well Trained and Equipped with the latest Weaponry. The Woodland gave the Soldiers good cover, where to wait patiently for the arrival of their Quarry, and, Invisible to the Enemy, they opened fire, cutting down many before they had chance to reply. The English Commander blessed himself as Fortunate to get through; But his Trial was not over yet, by any Means: Among the Hills and Bog, O'Neill's Army struck again; This Occasion he was not so Lucky to escape without great loss of numbers. As night fell the Fighting subsided and the O'Neill, so Gallant in Battle, led his Forces away. A Brother, a Labourer on the Lands of the Earl, was, I believe, most probably Present at the Battle, for he got Training in the use of the Musket, and our Mother waits Anxiously for any News from that War Torn Country.

The Omens are good: Such a Victory is Reason to give Praise, and has shown the Prowess of our Soldiers, fighting at their Best; Our Forces were well prepared for the Advance, having dug deep Trenches that the English could not Circumvent. O'Neill and O'Donnell attacked from both sides simultaneously, their Men Emboldened by the Words of St Berchan, and the call to Valour by their Leaders; Victory had to be theirs that Day, or they would all be Slaughtered by the Enemy; They would receive no Mercy at the hands of the English if captured. But that was not to happen that day, for the Men of Erin cut through their Regiments, losing only Six Score Men, though sadly half a dozen Officers of the Nobility. The Kerne poured Shot upon Shot, and the relentless Volleys did their work with great Efficacy; Bagenal was shot in the forehead and Died without Complaint. Confusion ensued, made worse by the Explosion of a Barrel of Powder, which killed and burned many of the Enemy, with this, the Remnants of the Army, possessed by an unearthly Fear, fled back to Armagh, where they have taken Refuge, with the Ulster Forces surrounding the City; O'Neill will not let the Victory pass without imposing a fitting Punishment upon the English for their Crimes against our People.

They look wretched, walking this Road, broken but still making much Haste, like Thiefs fleeing Capture, for the Defeat they suffered was Absolute: Each side blames the other for the outcome. They cannot lay bare the Country of Cattle and Grain, as was done on the march to meet the Spanish...We got to Kinsale as it was being bombarded by Mountjoy, and began to Besiege the Besiegers, how events occurred next is not too clear, but Differences in Tactics were suggested from those I spoke with; The Confusion of the Battle makes it Difficult to draw a Picture of the Scene. The weather was as Frightful as on this Morning: Windy, Wet and Cold; Though the Storm that had raged had abated, making Conditions somewhat more Clement. This allowed us to Harass the Enemy, while they continued, but to no Avail, to create a Breach. Bitterness is Evident in the Voices; They conclude that O'Neill's Counsel was not listened to, that a War of Attrition to weaken them into Surrender was the wiser Tactic, but O'Donnell insisted otherwise, and his view Prevailed, leading to this Pathetic Exodus.

The Honesty of his words cannot be Trusted, for he is a Man that has every Reason to defile the Earl's good name; That such a Man would kneel before a mere Official of the Queen is unthinkable. Would a Cowardly Man venture from his Fastnesses, delivering himself into the hands of people who bear him ill? I think not. In the end, the English Queen came to him seeking Peace; He, an Honourable Man, agreed, and travelled South, to meet with her Officials, but he would never go down on his knees to Beg for what was Rightfully his. There was no Question, but that they had to Agree to the Terms set by the Earl, for so Powerful a Man could not be trifled with; Once the Terms were Agreed, the Queen was informed, and pleased that Peace had been made after so many years of War. As for the Peace, it is the English who go back on their Word, not the Irish; Those who Treacherously change side can only blame themselves, for putting their own Interests before those of Erin. He is a Great Man, and will never take Flight from the Enemy; The Earl has proved himself to be a Man, when a Decision has been taken, to stand and Fight for his People.

There is no better Source than Father O'Cleirigh, who has spent so much time in Rome, where the Pope has been so supportive of the Cause, yet it is such a Bitter thing to Learn, that all Hope now seems Dead. Rumours say he was Poisoned, just like the others were, having Died in Mysterious Circumstances, and the Spanish King has Betrayed us, with other Battles more pressing to the Strategy of his own Empire; That we share the one True Faith is not Reason enough for coming to our Assistance in this, our Time of Need, when the Heretics

persecute us, and deny us the Expression of our Faith...They are in Rome, many of them, and these Swordsmen are out of place, and Desire only to be back among their People, fighting to Protect them... Among those who have Intelligence of what is happening, say the O'Neill tried ardently to enlist more Support, and have them taken into the Service of the Duke, advising that they cannot now return to their Homeland; If so, they would be Beheaded. They deserted from the Army of Gustavus Adolphus, but the Catholic King of Poland would not pay them, though they had Fought for him without Rancour, for they knew they were doing the Lord's Work...I do not know what has become of him, indeed whether he Died on some European Battle Field or while en route. Perhaps he lives contentedly in the Holy City or has gone to serve in Flanders, of which there had been much talk.

The Curate says it is a Glorious Day and Thanks should be given to God, for the Holy Roman Emperor has struck a mighty blow for the Faith. Victory after Victory has brought the Lord's Army to the City of Prague, held by the Heretics. Fatigue and the onset of Winter would not deter the Soldiers' will to Fight. The poor, Devout Infantryman did not break Rank when the Horsemen from Hell thundered towards him. Frederick could not Defeat the will of God, though the Topography of the land provided such Advantage. Soon the Bohemians were being surrounded...They fled to the Star. From Prague the King and Queen escaped across the River with their Crown Jewels, but leaving the Filthy Books behind. The Gates of the City shut, the Mob soon wanted Vengeance for bringing this Judgement upon them: Vengeance will truly be taken upon those people now.

The Tavern is smoky and the Conversation of the Spanish Invasion, led by a General called Spinola, Land Routes more vital now that the Monarchy has suffered such Humiliation on the Sea. He marched the Army of Flanders over the Border and has been making swift gains in the Lower Palatinate, having overrun the Towns of Kreuznach and Oppenheim...The English have sailed up the Rhine, but are confined to their Fortresses; And the Profane King and his Queen are rightly in Despair as the new Crusade threatens to crush them.

The Stories are truly Horrifying, and Shocking for any Christian ears to hear, and Unimaginable that anyone that feared for his Eternal Soul would do such things: God has Punished them all with Plague, and even turned Nature Herself against them. The greatest Punishment of Men has been reserved for Protestants, such as Christian of Brunswick, Herod's death! The Acts committed and Destruction to Life and Property on those bleak God-forsaken Plains have been Merciless...Troops concealed, his Army equipped with the most modern of Artillery, the General lured Mansfeld across the Bridge...The King of Denmark is alarmed: The English are only Meek in their Support, while the French are embroiled in Strife within their own Borders; It is not the Coat of a King that makes him an Enemy.

The two Ferdinands are clearing the Spanish Road, for so long of such Importance to the Spanish Royal Family, and the Bourbon Encroachment so Detrimental to their Power. There seems no Possibility that their Allegiance to the One True Faith will forge a Common Bond, for it is so Critical that the Army of Spain can march overland, since the Sea presents so many Dangers. Spain is much Diminished as a Sea Power, and the English and the Dutch appear to have full Control of the Waves, though the Habsburgs still have their eye on the United Provinces, and Desire to reverse the Conditions that led to the Truce; In addition to that, the French will not be at ease to see more Troops moving along that Road, already feeling Surrounded and Besieged.

France has declared war on Spain: Finally the official Stamp has been pressed, for the Habsburgs are too Powerful, so the Cardinal has been paying the Swedes handsomely so to maintain Armies in German Territories...Unease grew when the Cousins, against Advice of the Generals, sent their Armies into the Battle, and yet proved them Wrong; Although, as the battle unfolded, God was looking favourably on the Imperial forces, and blessed the tercio Formations with Victory, as the Protestant Armies were repulsed and repulsed, and the Swedish Armies were left in Disarray, their Influence greatly Diminished. So now it seems that Finance alone is not enough, and the French Armies will now be marching to War; Their Forces have already been pushed back, leaving the Rhineland very Dangerously Exposed, though they have taken back Speier.

Although a Lutheran, nonetheless, he supported the Cause of the Emperor, in his Judgement not the true Rival, and was further encouraged by the Promise of retaining the Lands of Saxony. Now he has negotiated a Peace, and, Pray, it will bring an end to the War of Europe; And with his Powerful and threatening Commander Dead, Ferdinand was easily Persuaded in Agreeing to a Settlement. So he has Capitulated, Betraying everything Holy that he set out to Achieve; Such is the Bitterness of War, when the Noble Aims cannot be realized, we settle for what we started with; Perhaps those who Rule hide behind their Noble Ideals to Mask their true Motives: Themselves? They should have fought on...How often we turn against ourselves, just as Devereux felt, in Conscience, he had to thrust the General through with his Halberd; An act against a Soldier campaigning for his own Aggrandizement, and prepared to throw in his lot with his Previous Enemies.

When the Earls sailed away, their Peoples had expected them to return before long, though they were really being left to their Fate, which soon became Apparent. The Authorities saw their Opportunity, and put their Plans in action, aware there were no Gaelic Armies to oppose them. But they have not driven all of us out; The Undertakers have found it difficult to find enough in numbers, willing to cross the Waters to a land that is in their Minds, Wild and Hostile. While our Race is being driven to the Poorer Lands, the Settlers are pleased enough to find anyone to work the Soil, even if they Steadfastly refuse to Convert. While allowed to Farm, as their Ancestors have done for Centuries, there is still quiet Bitterness among most; Indeed, some of those driven out have become a Thorn in the side for the Authorities, as the Wood-Kernes carry on their Disenfranchised Fight.

There are so many Peace Treaties to end Wars, though they as quickly torn up, often before the Ink and Wax has even dried, and the Holy Father has called the Catholic Powers to meet, but the Habsburgs are Mistrustful of him, since he is a bitter Opponent of the Austrian monarchy...

Wentworth is raising an Army to fight the Presbyterians, it seemed certain when News came that King Charles was Summoning both the English and Irish Parliaments, and they want to raise an Army of some ten thousand men. It has to said, the new Earl is not popular among the Inhabitants of this Island, whichever side, for he has made Allies out of Mutual Enemies in their Enmity towards him. The English King might win Support with Promises to address Catholic Grievances, but he has proven himself a man who will Disgrace his Word. Across the Sea, neither side has shown, up until now, much Resolve to push the Issue to full-scale War; Now, it seems they have gathered their Strength again, and the Drums of War are now beating. Still, it is difficult to know if the English would welcome Irish Catholics fighting for their Cause on their own Soil.

We stripped them down to their Naked Skin and forced them from their Dwellings, which we are already setting alight. Standing, Shivering in the Cold Winter Night, the Family shake, most likely with Fear, not knowing if they will be Clubbed to Death...Vengeance is so Sweet, a Sense of Power, an Injustice finally put Right; We are now the Masters of this Land: No one will again Deprive us of our Birthright. They have forced us to the Edge of Starvation, after the failed Harvest; It is they who have created the Conditions that we find ourselves in: We go Hungry, but they increase our Rents...The Family is fleeing down the Track, Crying and Pleading, followed by Jeers and Laughter; They seem Surprised and Bewildered, as if our Anger is without Justification, astonished that we Dare to Defy their Authority. They should count themselves Lucky we do not Kill them all: Men, Women and Children; But we show Mercy, where they show none, of which the Slaughter at Lisnagarvey is clear Testimony. It is hard to listen to Leadership when the Blood runs in Rage, for if we stop, they will only come back on us with even greater Persecution, denying us our Faith and our Land and to live as we see fit.

The Priest says Sir Phelim O'Neill is a Pious Man, to be Trusted, who is acting in the name of the King, and with Royal approval, for this Reason all Catholics should unite together and fight against English Apostates. I am travelling to the Friary, to take Advice, Confess my Sins and do Penance, and seek Guidance on what I should do with the Gold Plate...With certainty the Man, clearly of English Origin and a Settler, and attired such that would make him appear a Gaelic Peasant, was making his way to Dublin, to hand it over to the Authorities, so to help in their War against our People. I am Proud I overpowered him, though he carried both a Dagger and a Pistol, though as he escaped into the Night my Heart sank, thinking that he might have recognized my Face. They shall not win, so it matters little; Nonetheless, many of the Settlers have buried their Hoards, intending to return in more suitable times to retrieve them.

Fear is mounting: The Plan to take Dublin Castle at the outset was a Disaster, and O'Neill's Assurances that Victory was a breath away, have proved to be False, with his Rising in the north a Fiasco; Furthermore, he has not kept control of the Rabble. We were assured we acted within the Law, told to Seize the Goods and Lands of English Protestants within this Kingdom...That Victory was too easy, I was told, making them think we were of greater Strength than was really the Case...But, this is a well defended Town, and it is not proving quite as easy...Rumours abound that an English Army has arrived at Dublin with the Orders to crush us.

What Difference does such an act make for me? I do not own the small piece of Land I Farm, and can be Dispossessed of it at anytime, so it is of little Consequence who my Master is, be it a King or a Parliament...

The Hierarchy have called on all Catholics to take the Oath, and we must obey the new Council, and swear Allegiance to King Charles; Now, at least, our Consciences can have some Peace, that our Actions are of Soldiers fighting the Just and Holy War, and might achieve those Freedoms so long promised but denied us...Mountgarret has turned away from his Cousin, whilst first having espoused the Cause of the Government, and brought Kilkenny out in the name of the Confederacy, fearful for the Plight of his Catholic Brethren, while still being Merciful to the Protestants of the land. Cork, having chosen its own General, has proved that keeping the Confederacy intact is not an easy Task...The Viscount intercepted Ormond whilst he was returning with his Army, but failed to gain any Victory; some say he suffered a decisive Defeat.

War has broken out between the English King and Parliament, though its coming has been long Foretold, I never heard that the Rival Forces were moving towards War, and that efforts to avert the Conflict were being strenuously Endeavoured. All that comes to my ears is the sudden Sound of Cannon and Matchlock, the clash of Steel and the agonized Screams of Pain, and the choked groans of Life expiring: I know those Sights and Sounds well. I am told the King has been Victorious, but has offered Essex Pardon if he should Surrender, though the Messenger was roughly handled and sent back to his Master.

Owen Roe O'Neill has returned from his Service in Spain and taken over command, and, while he professes Loyalty to the English King, most believe his true Vision is to free his People from the Chains of Slavery. This great military Leader will not rest until his Ancestral Lands are returned and the Scots ejected from his Country...

He has gone over to the side of Parliament, and has been appointed Lord President of the Province, for his changing of Allegiance was done with the Benefit of himself in Mind and a Reflection on the Reality of the Situation he found himself in.

Such Scurrilous Pamphlet Anger me so: That a piece of Filth like that could accuse one of our Rebel Leaders of Heinous Crimes, when they were the ones who dragged him along on a sledge, from the Tower, to his place of Execution by being Hanged, Drawn and Quartered. The cowardly Sheriff accused him of being the Sinner, when all the Brave Man did was fight for his Faith, and by doing so, for God. It is they who should Fear being troubled for Eternity, for Maguire displayed himself as a Humble Christian with boundless Courage. It at least contained his final Reply, so Powerful those Words, that their radiant Truth could not be Omitted: The Martyr sought to be permitted to Die as a Good Christian, Forgiving all his Enemies, including those with a part in his Execution. Declaring himself a Roman Catholic, admitting Original Sin and being a Sinner, he placed himself in God's Grace and commended his Soul into the arms of his Saviour, Jesus Christ. Asked about the Sins of killing Protestants, and whether he sought the Pardon of God for those Acts, Maguire replied he sought Pardon for all his Sins, and that Ireland had Just Cause for its Wars, and as the Execution commenced he called out, beseeching God to have Mercy on his Soul.

I can always rely on the Grey Merchants to bring News; They do not stop their Trade, even in these Troubled Times: The latest is that the Covenanters have been defeated at Benburb. With new Muskets and ample supply of Ammunition, O'Neill saw no necessity for Excess Caution; Monro's Cavalry could not break the Resolve of our Pike Men, and with those sharp narrow heads pushed the Enemy back to the River's edge. Fatigued by their long march, their Position was Hopeless, and they broke in Disarray, to the Hellish Noise of the Musket and the Merciless cut of the Knife. The General and his Cavalry were quickly in Retreat, far in advance of the Poor Foot Soldiers; Then, that is so often the Reality of Battle...This is the first of many Victories in this War, which will bring us to certain Victory in its Conclusion.

The army, filled with the Spoils of Battle, has dispersed to get in the Harvest for the Winter, and rumblings say he should have taken the War to the Enemy, but instead gave Terms too Generous, letting them Escape and Regroup. Monro is re-stocking, and has brought fresh Men to the Fight; Yet our Leader's Intentions are none the Clearer for all this Uncertainty. Now, O'Neill has been Requested to Appear at Kilkenny, to Settle the Divisions that exist within the Council; They may share the same Religion, but are not of the same

Race; It is History that is the Betrothed of our Love, I think, Loyalty to a King of the same Blood, albeit Blue, seems to secure Loyalty quicker than Loyalty to the King of Heaven.

It is said Preston was forced into Battle whilst attempting to march on Dublin; the Forces there were away attempting to Relieve Trim Castle; By the accounts, we could have done with a better Commander, allowing his Men to get trapped along the narrow Road, an easy Topography for Ambush. The Pike Men and Musketeers were trained to form in Spanish Style; But they were too tightly Confined and Deserted by their Cavalry; Some did Escape into the surrounding Bog. Those unfortunate to be Surrounded were Slaughtered; Those taken Prisoners were bound like Felons before they too were put to the Sword; Those who had any Value had their Lives spared. Tales describe how the Corpses are left Rotting on the earth, without due Respect of Christian Burial...

Now, even the Presbyterians, before bitter Enemies, are our Allies against the English Parliament, even though we fought them so recently in the Northern parts of the Island, O'Neill having such Success against them. It was not this that brought him back from Flanders, but for the Struggles of his People to gain their Liberty, and not for signatures to meaningless Treaties, since the Motives and Trustworthiness of the Royalists has always been in question.

After a long and bitter War, King Charles has been executed by Parliament, convicted of Treason, having been found Guilty of all the bloody and barbaric Acts committed in the War, a War that will continue across the Waters. Though, he insisted, the very Trial was Unlawful, that, as Monarch, he was appointed by God and so had Divine Right; A view the Parliamentarians did not concur with. From the Gallows, he told the gathered Crowd that the Sovereign rules and the Subject obeys: The Order of things; Then the Executioner, masked and anonymous, brought down the Axe on his head.

The Army, I am told, is led by a Commander called Oliver Cromwell, and has arrived at Wexford, and is said to be preparing to Bombard the Walls, while he has also brought his Fleet along the Coast to block the activities of those Privateers. He has marched his Army South, after his crushing Defeat of Aston, but now the Autumn is setting in and we might well have an early Winter; That may curtail his Plans. The Lands here are quiet, though eerily so, as if the Earth and the Sky hold their breath in Anticipation, and there have been some Skirmishes, but nothing of Comparison, thank God. The Garrison of Scots at Trim has fled on hearing the Fate of their Comrades, being in a dire Situation, as Ormonde had already evacuated the bulk of his Troops on hearing the Fate; I believe he has moved to the South of the Island to avoid encirclement and capture. Some of the Parliamentarian Dragoons are camped on the Hill sacred to the Pagans and the Ancient Gods, where the Powerful druidess, Tlachtga, gave birth to her triplet Sons, but what the Parliamentarians are planning to do I have no Idea, yet I wait Patiently for News, since they are disturbingly close, and as their Cavalry can be with us in a matter of hours.

The main Force is moving along the Southern Coast with some speed, I am told, and has reached Arklow in the County of Wicklow...The Town has fallen, after a pounding from Cromwell's Cannon; But with God's help the Mountain Passes will put a halt to his Advance; And the Nation can take some Comfort that they have already been attacked by the local Clan of Brian McPhelim O'Byrne.

They have taken the Seat of Ferns, that despite it having a Castle, though the Garrison appears to have fled. The Parliamentarians are now surrounding Enniscorthy, which has a very stout Castle, and is Strategically situated on high ground overlooking the Town and the River Slaney; It is reported to be well Armed and strong enough to withstand any Assault.

I cannot predict what the next Year will bring, but I fear it will be more of the same Suffering: Garrison after Garrison has fallen, Town after Town surrendered. I would not like to be in the way of that Army, and so have taken Precautions and hidden my Pike away; At least us Poor can hide ourselves away, unlike the Wealthy, with their Castles and Finery. This Puritan leader claims he has no Argument with the Peasant, but pursues the Royalist or native Noble, and the Priest, with a ruthless Obsession. But the evil Deeds will be Punished, for strange events have followed the wicked Crimes: Many of the Troops have been struck down by God, some of them who had Blasphemed when they mockingly put on the Habits of the Franciscan Monks they had Slaughtered. I ardently think that only God can Punish them now, as we all have to answer to Him on the Judgement Day, and as the one Mortal who could lead us, has now been taken from this World.

Fethard has Surrendered, not long following Cromwell's departure from Youghal, where his Troop had rested in Winter quarters. The season has been Mild, meaning the Army could recommence its Campaign of Plunder and Rape, destroying Food and Homes as they go. The Town submitted when it heard that the Parliamentarians were approaching, having some experience in showing Wisdom, having faced that same Situation after Inchiquin's Bloodbath against the Garrison at Cashel.

O'Neill has been Hanged, Drawn and Quartered for High Treason, his former Allegiance counting for nothing after he set the Island on fire with Rebellion. It is said he proved a resolute Defendant, demurring from a Course that might have spared him his Life. Even though he was Tortured for days, he did not Confess to what his Accusers wanted; It would have been an easier path for him, if he conceded a Guilty Plea. As they brought him to his Death, he could have revealed to them, and the Crowd, whether the Great Seal was Genuine or Forged.

The lands are to be given to Soldiers of Parliament and Adventurers, to reinforce Security against the Catholic Territories to the West, what this means for my Family I do not know; It may mean no more than a change of Master, as we Struggle to make a Living from this small Plot. We have no Power to influence events, yet the Leaders have greater chance of some Mercy...The Earl is a Powerful Man, and Powerful Men must be treated with Caution, as one would a rabid dog; His Position as a Confederate Commander and General of this Province should lead to harsh treatment; But reality may make such Punishment Inexpedient: Justice is easier to administer to the Weak.

The waters are so calm, and the Castle on the Island rises out of the Morning Mist, though the Beauty of the Scene does nothing to distract me from my Worries; If only the outside World could be as calm and placid as this Lough. Oh yes, the Years following the Wars have been Prosperous enough, that I cannot deny. Henry Cromwell has served us with some unexpected Fairness, and is owed some degree of Gratitude, still not enough to make up for the Sins. There is much demand overseas for Cattle and Sheep; Now the word is that the Prosperity will not last, for it challenges the Commercial Interests of others, those Powerful enough to put an end to our increased Wealth, including the Poorest of us, who have never enjoyed much. The English Breeders are determined to halt what they call the flood of Cheap

Irish Meat into their Market; But haven't they, the English, benefitted for centuries at our Expense? They will not allow any Growth for us, if it does not offer them Growth first, or instead of. Ormonde has brought no Influence to bear on the King, and the Parliament is in no way inclined towards stopping the Act. The Monarch, it is evident, cannot or will not stand up to his Parliament, in spite of Pleas that such measure will be Ruinous for us. But the Lord Lieutenant will fight to repeal the Legislation, I am sure, whilst the Poor of Ireland will wait for some Justice, and I fear it will be Patience spent in Vain, for we are the least of concern to the Rulers of this World. I predict terrible Catastrophe: Live Exports are the Staple of our land, without them we have no Means to Prosper and pay our Rents, and, in turn, the Landlords will not have Sufficient to pay what they owe to the Crown in Customs and Excise.

The Archbishop finds the Church in a Pitiful State, shocked by her Decline and the Ignorance of us simple Folk towards the Tenets of the Faith. And he is no happier with the Conduct of the Clergy, who he sees wasted by the Excess of Drink. His College has proven attractive to Protestant Parents as well, and in no little way tolerated by Ormonde...But this Act has brought in a new level of Persecution. The College has been Demolished and the Archbishop has gone into hiding.

The Plot, a malicious lie against the Roman Catholic Church, is having serious Repercussions for the Faithful. Certainly the King has shown Duplicity in his Dealings, but he is not the worst Enemy a Catholic could have; Indeed, the Queen Consort is a Catholic, and the King does not seem to be too ill-disposed towards us. He is said to admire his Queen's Piety, so why, in God's Name, should anyone seek his Death? Who better would replace him? There are others, more deserving of being despatched from this World, for they have driven Religion underground and all Priests have been exiled from the Islands. Charles did seek to defend the Rights of Catholics with his Royal Declaration of Indulgences, and even gave his support to Catholic France. But Parliament would not issue sufficient Moneys to finance the Fleet, at all times Suspicious this was a Plot with the French...Oates has accused the Queen of seeking her Husband's Death, with the help of her Physician, Sir George Wakeman; Another accused is a Man by the name of Colman, Secretary to the Duchess of York.

No finer a Man to die for his Faith, a true and illuminating Catholic Martyr, and the Pamphlets praise his so highly, an Exemplar, whose Prayers we need more than he needs ours. His Accuser had not even the Courage to print his own name, while the Archbishop died a Traitor's Death, and a cruel Death; If he were a Traitor to the Crown, he was not a Traitor to God. That Renegade, Murphy, will need to keep much of his Beer to try and cool him in the Fires of Hell; Who but the English could believe a Drunk and a Liar such as him. I wouldn't use his printed Words to wipe my Arse. The Protestants are Fearful, and rightfully so, for there is now talk of Succession, and they seek to exclude York from becoming Sovereign.

He is now Lieutenant-General of Ireland, a Man used to Surviving, ransomed from Capture in one Battle and escaping Drogheda. Like so many others in our bleak History, he fled these Shores to join the ranks of Foreign Armies...Intrigue surrounded his early Life, some saying he was bribed by Cromwell...He was a significant voice in the York Household, and was arrested once again; But with James on the Throne, he is now certain to carry some considerable Influence, and his favour is Indisputable, having been given the two Titles of Viscount Baltinglass and Earl of Tyrconnell.

With the Succession secure, it appears the Enemies of the King were determined to act, both Tories and Whigs saw Allegiance in mutual Opposition. They have given the Crown to Dutch Stradholder, William of Orange, Married to the King's Daughter, who has shown great interest in taking up the Sceptre: I am told he greatly fears a possibility of Alliance between England and France. With naval Invasion and Hatreds being fanned up, leading to Riots in the streets by ignorant Mobs, James saw that he was in no position to win. But he saw that Irish Troops were Loyal Fighters, and came to recognize he could depend on that Loyalty. So when he left at Christmas Time, he must have taken Comfort from this Knowledge.

The Dragoons have come to the edge of Kells, and are undoubtedly within easy reach of us, and even the Metropolis is bracing itself in fear, though it is of some doubt that such Raids possess the numbers for an action as daring as that. Still, they have instilled Terror, and have taken thousands of Cattle, Oxen and Sheep, and as much Wheat and Malt they can place upon pack Horses. It is of little Consolation in this age of Turbulence, but I have heard no accounts of Killings or Molestations of the ordinary People.

Sarsfield is the Hero they all praise, who has defeated their means of Advance into Connaught, by laying Siege, and waiting, like a Cat waits for a Mouse, always showing attentive Patience for the task in hand. With time and dwindling food, and in no small measure falling Morale, the Commander sought Terms, and Sarsfield, being the Honourable Man that he is, agreed to those Terms, and in such amicable Surroundings. With Terms reached, the Enemy was allowed to march out unmolested, with their Arms, Drums beating and Colours flying; And now the West has been saved: Thank God for Patrick Sarsfield!

He is not going to face them where Cuchulann faced Queen Maeve and the Army of Connaught, even though they say it is the place to do Battle. The Stories suggest James will not do Combat there: It will be more his Intention to fall back to Dublin, for the Metropolis is the heart of Power, if you lose it you have lost Power. But with the English King arrived, with even more Soldiers from the Continent landing, there is a fear that our Army is strongly Disadvantaged and outnumbered, and with much Reason. So, the Battle will be a Defensive one, which will determine the Fate of this Isle, as the unsettling Talk suggests we might not be as well endowed as the Bravado of youth likes to Pronounce. Though we here are somewhat removed from the heart of the War, nonetheless, there is a Tension in the air, that the Maelstrom could touch us at any moment, and in consequence my poor Wife is demented with Worry, a sentiment any Mother would share.

The Campaign is soon to be renewed and William's Forces are now assembling at Mullingar, and it is thought from thence to march on Athlone; That is a Prize they will have to fight for heartily, because it will not be given up easily. The thought of that frightens me, but I keep my Countenance as Merry as I can, but, alas, not enough that my Features can only be seen as a Mask of my real Concerns: Dragoons have been sighted, a surly lot, not wise to be Challenged or have their Tempers aroused.

That's not Thunder: It is Cannon fire, I'm sure, though difficult to tell where it is coming from. They have been making for the Castle at Ballymote, where there is a Jacobite Force, though not large in number...Perhaps that is where the noise is coming from, but it is only a Skirmish and of no Consequence...

He told me he believes it is Sean's head, on a Pike at the Market House in Mullingar, and I, being as compassionate as I can, have kept this News from his Mother; It would certainly kill her. I will travel there in the morning, on foot, regardless of the Danger, to gather the Remains of my Son, who took a different Course: He took to the Woods and Scrub, taking his chances in the Countryside he knew so well. Indeed, it suited the Person he was, if the Identification is correct; I hear the head is badly Decomposed. In my Sorrow, I hope my Mournful journey does not end with Confirmation; But a part of my Heart also wants some Knowledge of what has happened to him: Is he Alive or Dead? Are his Mortal Remains in a ditch or deep in the trees? I can Dream that he is still fighting, and escaped the hands of the cruel Militia, who burn the homes of good Catholics, blame us for all their Ills, steal our Cattle and Fodder.

I hear the fighting was Fierce, though not his first introduction to the Battle Field; Of their Circumstances we have heard nothing, and we await some News, a Message by word of mouth or some simple words written down by a Chaplain. Deserters have brought Tales, but nothing for us; On the run as a Deserter is not a Life, always looking over your shoulder, for if caught, hanged from the nearest tree...He is despised among the Irish Troops, and it is he that has brought this Calamity upon them...They most likely are making their way to Limerick, once again to defend the City, and perhaps force William to spend yet another Winter without Victory, and so giving time for Relief to arrive from France, and that thought might persuade him to cut his losses and depart these Shores, for this is our Island and of little Importance to him. If Sarsfield could, once again, repeat those Brave actions that destroyed Artillery and Gunpowder, and caused the Enemy to run in Terror into the night, we could all be saved.

He decided the Location that they would stand and fight: Thereupon, the Enemy lined up to do Battle, a Battle they won, causing the Bogs to darken in Blood, though that very Terrain had given so much Promise; The ground suited them well: There were Ditches and Hedges as protection against Musket and Cannon; There was good Reason for Confidence. It was a misty morn: Like that day he fought his first Battle, and the Clergy fired them up with Zeal, promising that God would make them all Saints, and their Mother in Heaven would lay them in her Bosom...There is Confusion, but what is clear, is that Catastrophe struck when the Musketeers opened cases of Ammunition, to discover: The Balls did not fit their French Flintlocks, and so the Cavalry crossed the Causeway, and the Battle was Lost. The Infantry fought desperately; I do not know exactly where they were, nor have I received any Knowledge as to their Fate. In all the Confusion, Saint Ruth himself was killed, a Cannon Ball blowing off his head, an unfortunate act of Chance that left the officers without Instruction of what to do, Ignorant of their General's Battle Plan. But the Earl of Lucan fought on through this Pitiabale Debacle, bravely leading his Men against superior numbers, but he could have done nothing to Save them, they were surrounded by Enemy horse and foot; Hacked to Death or Trampled, the Battle turned into a Rout. My heart sinks in Despair when I picture the Scene; Perhaps they escaped, as darkness and rain clouded Visibility, allowing some of them to disappear into the night.

I have no News from the Continent, where my last Son continues to serve the Cause of King James. The war that Ravaged this land, causing so much Suffering and Pain, leaving many of us to die of Starvation, and I have seen them myself, hence my Boundless Gratitude that I too did not Suffer the Depredations of so many of my Neighbours. James still Dreams of taking back his Realm: But his Attack across the Channel put an end to that, as they watched the Forlorn sight of the Naval Ships being destroyed by the English; After gaining

control of the waters, they could not be prevented from destroying the Vessels, and so the Campaign to retake his Kingdom sank. Another savage War was averted, but one that might have brought Padraig, God willing he came out with his Life and Limbs, that bit nearer his Homeland, when, on being Pensioned out of Service, could return to his Family Homestead; But, alas, by then, I would be long in the Grave.

Henceforward, the Brigades will become part of the French Armies, to serve the will of Louis "The Sun King", now the unchallenged Monarch of Europe, and there comes constant testimony of his Armies' Victories on the Battle Field. Skeenkirk fell to him, and I am informed that Irish Brigades were present in the thick of the fighting, and that it was a fiercely contested Encounter, at that, with William of Oranges' Forces coming very close to the French Positions as they readied themselves in the woods, and upon attacking, caused some Confusion to ensue, that almost proved Favourable to the Enemy. No decisive Attack came, despite much Cannonading to assist them, and our Soldiers stood Resolute...

The Earl of Westmeath has had his Outlawry reversed, following a tradition in that Lineage, that, though on the Opposing Side, fairs well, even as Generous as the Spoils granted to the Victors. They are Wealthy Landowners here...My Father told me he received 20,000 acres, despite being excluded from such generous Treatment by the very Act itself.

The Harvest has been a good one, and long may this State continue, for it at least keeps Food in my belly and some Income to treat myself to small Luxuries; Some little Comfort for an old Widower, whose Melancholic Thoughts brings his Mind to far-off places, hoping that the empty Road will show that figure walking towards home...I must not Ponder too much on the Restrictions to Wool Exports, there are Markets to be found here in Erin, and I can survive well enough on other Produce, and should be Grateful for what I have now, in the Present, for the Poor Farmer never knows his Fate tomorrow.

I relive that Fear as if it were only Yesterday, when I had not even had my first Shave, though I thought I was old enough to make my own Decisions and Enlist in the Regiment, along with others I recognized. That did not save me from the Fear that dawn: After a still and uneasy night, I woke in the early hours to Sounds from across the River: Drums beating, the noise of Horses and marching. We were quickly mustered, as it was clear William of Orange's Army was on the move, though we had been expecting them to cross the Tidal Water in front of us, as Rumour swept through the army, that the River was too high to cross until much later in the day, and Speculation rose that the Enemy was going to take us on the Flank. The mist of the morning added to the sheer Confusion and to the Sense of Fear; Not only I, but I think nearly all my Comrades. The mist lifted and the Day promised to be bright and very Warm: Perfect for Musketeers, said one Veteran comfortingly. We waited, out of sight of the River and the Enemy, our Camp much depleted, as many of the Men had started their march upstream. The calm of Bird Song, Insects Buzzing and Cattle in the distance Lowing was suddenly broken by Terrifying and Deafening Whistle and Explosion of Cannon; But at that time we were still out of range. It was not until we were Ordered over the bump into the Corn Fields on the other side, did we see the extent of the Battle: The Enemy were wading across and forming on the Bank, while our Infantry and Cavalry were engaging them; Yet so much was Obscured by black smoke. In the field, we could see little; My head was hardly able to peer over the top of the Corn, whilst around Cannon Balls exploded, followed by the Screams of Pain; As I stumbled between two of the Ridges I stepped on a Severed Arm; I just looked straight ahead, not turning my eyes to either side of me, Fearing that what I might see would make me Freeze in Terror, or perhaps, shamefully, run

away. Near the River Edge was Mayhem, the noise of Muskets and shouting unbroken, for even the shortest respite. Our Orders came to fire; I muttered the Drill of what to do, trying to remember it in my utter Panic, Praying that the Damned Gun would fire once I had done so, and that I would succeed in hitting an Attacker. That Sulphurous Smell stuck in my nostrils and the smoke seemed to sit on the ground, at moments lifted by a gentle Breeze. I ignored the Instructions to point the Musket at the goulies, aiming at the chest, meaning the Ball went over the head...I ran up that Slope as fast as my legs could carry me, Explosions either side of me; Horses trampling the Wheat as our Cavalry attempted to slow their Advance; I leaped over a wounded horse lying in my path, feeling the hide through my light sole. I don't think I killed anyone that day: At least, I lived to see another myself, and have Survived this long...The march was hot, but I was much relieved to have Survived that morning; We moved at a steady though Orderly pace. Alarming calls said that Dragoons were on our Flank; And, indeed, soon enough, the sound of Carbine Shot rang out, and we were Ordered into a Defensive Position: I remember muttering to myself, that Death has not stopped Stalking me yet; It still hasn't. But we put up a stalwart Defence, and our Pursuers decided it more Prudent to cease their Attack; After which, we resumed our Formation. That was the last Encounter we had that day, and as Evening extended, we were much pleased to be on the outskirts of the Metropolis, where we got an Opportunity to Imbibe, some long-desired Liquor...It later Battles, on the Isle of Erin or in Foreign Lands, my Fear has been much more Controlled, but still there. It has drained me of so much Spirit over the years, and I Hope that Blenheim has been my last, for I now feel aged, and long to see my Home; I have been told through others that my Siblings have moved from our Ancestral Place, and even moved away from the Shores of the Lake; Henceforth, I will make it my Purpose to get back.

The conclusions of the manuscript appear to be based on fragmented visions recorded by the anonymous author. Through my own experience I share those conclusions. Those words could be mine. In spring 1999 the patterns of history became clear to me. And I saw that the Cold War that had ended some years before had actually been the peace – or relative peace – the only degree of nonviolence humanity seems capable of achieving. Further research led me to conclude that everyone eventually gets the war they are trying to avoid. And nations do try to avoid wars, do want peace; the problem is they want it on their own terms. They get that war because they are not prepared to give up the thing that all wars are fought about, and all nations are prepared to kill for – power – manifesting itself in the form of ‘national interest’, though motive presented in more noble terms. All wars are fought to gain power, regain power or retain power. As the human race moved into the 20th century the conditions for global war were born, and the first was inevitably fought. And just as the First World War led to the second, the second will lead to the next.

As for myself, a steep path led me here: from a child of little ability but that to escape into the past to an adult struck almost vision-like with the patterns of history, that everyone else seemed blind to. Though, my immersion in the past made me shy away from the reality of the here-and-now, thinking it happier to dwell there, reminisces now soured with regret. I blended my history with art to reveal truth through creativity and fiction: in the tale the truth, the rapture of the parable. My imagination brought me in touch of my ancestors through

genealogy. This brought me across the above manuscript; how it came to be there I do not know. The study of my family history has shown up a number of coincidences; this two hundred year old manuscript the most startling. The text refers to the place I grew up, that hill he ascended was the one I often sat upon to reflect. I had dreamt of writing a history of the place that had such a huge influence on my life, which I have such deep memories of. But that's another story.

First I should share my own views of history, which I share with that 18th century author, at that location of mutual importance. My own contribution could begin in a much earlier epoch, for example when the first Homo sapiens trekked out of Africa and into Europe, millennia after that following the great herds of herbivores westwards across the open steppes – mammoth, bison, woolly rhinoceros and wild ox. My story could have narrated how our species turned from scavengers, competing with beasts for the flesh of dead carcasses and making crude weapons from the stones they found in the dust, to the creators of the cave art, depicting the struggles of the people who inhabited the continental plains, their eternal combat with the fierce animals painted in red ochre and black manganese oxide – images that appeared to move in the flickering light of the artist's or viewers' torch.

Or I could have stood here, on this desert of ice that without human eye to witness it was changing: snow melting in the silence of a brilliant white day, the quiet broken only by the trickling of water, glacial plains dazzling under a blue sky and lapping against the ice-capped Wicklow Mountains; a scene that over imperceptible time would give way to icy tundra and grasslands, juniper trees and copses of birch. In the shelter of this hill the herd of elks would take cover, while out to sea ice bergs sailed past, glacier and land bridge disappearing.

To the east, on the Atlantic shores of Europe, life was changing too: a flat sparsely wooded tundra landscape, the only extensive tree growth being in the deep river valleys. But while life on the edge of the ice sheets was short and harsh, there was still plenty of food to be found – all the impressive and majestic creatures recorded in the cave art. There was also a wide variety of plant food such as blueberries, raspberries and hazelnuts. The vegetation growing season was getting longer and there was much less snow. The diversity of food sources guaranteed the inhabitants of the caves and rock shelters a certain security of nutrition. There was the seasonal reindeer migration from the higher ground in summer to the sheltered valleys in the winter, where they could be successfully hunted and killed by the tribes. The hunting season was the high point in the cycle of nature, when the whole tribe came together for the slaughter and afterwards to celebrate. It was a time to arrange marriages and hold initiation ceremonies. These occasions became festivals, when men and women exchanged gifts such as figurines carved from ivory, or necklaces made from shells and pebbles and the shamans told tales around the campfires of how they communed with the spirits of dead ancestors, and with the spirits of great beasts; how they changed form to visit the animal world; how they brought back messages and interceded on behalf of their people.

The cycle of this world became their certainty. They would have to continue the journey west, across the expanse of flat polar desert, driven by the actions of humans, nature and the supernatural. They followed the trails of remote ancestors, deep into the interior and along its desolate wind-and wave-swept coast. That new universe could provide both plenty and scarcity, that would either be shared out or fought over. They survived and changed as the plains of icy tundra warmed and changed to rich grassland; where the herds flourished so did the human hunters.

By the time they reached here the waters had risen and made Ireland an island: the seas were warm and the land covered in thick deciduous forest. This seems the point where my own contribution should begin, where that ancient manuscript began, that place of shared importance. That account began with a storm, a point on the continuing struggle of humanity. That is where I shall begin, as a place of sharing, cast my imagination into the past and reflect.

A summer morning, as the sun glinted on the calm waters, I imaged those early Mesolithic settlers in their dug out boats spearing fish that silently came too close; the splash of the spear as it ruffled the surface, and the fish was either pierced or so quick it got away. Excited exchanges of chatter would echo across the sound through the shaded forest, mossy and cool, dark and forbidding. I met them on the beach, scrambling over the rocks, with their stone implements prising the stubborn limpet shells. Passing on a winter night, I looked across to the island: there they huddled in the hide skin tents, the frames of hazel shaking with the force of the wind. The island was exposed; yet it also gave protection. As I went through the woods I felt their presence. The forest was a cosmic universe, endless mystery, accessible only by the rivers, but still threatening beyond the immediate banks of their waterways, a place inhabited by terrifying creatures, half animal half spirit. The roar of the bear or the howl of the wolf would instil fear. But a sense of power, even invincibility, would fill them all when the body on one such creature, killed in the hunt, was brought back to the island for feasting. The cooked flesh tasted even better as the drizzle gently soaked their clothing made of furs.

I could share their fear on occasions, but I was never able to experience the precariousness of food supply, never having faced the danger of hunger or starvation. The seasons for them were a time of changing opportunity and challenge. The hunter-gatherers picked hazelnuts and berries as the days noticeably shortened and lost their warmth; caught fish at the mouths of the rivers in the summer, ate plentifully but smoking enough to carry them through the winter. The winter must have been the challenge. They would hunt in the clearings, venture nervously into the forest in pursuit of prey. I ventured in with them, when they went in search of the mystical stag, a creature I imagined never killed by this tribe. On that quest I overcame my fear, and cast out of my mind tales of the red-eyed demons that lurked in the dark forest, forest that in summer was so cool and shady – calm yet eerie; peaceful yet suggesting an eruption of violence: a bear or wild boar to emerge suddenly from the undergrowth. I travelled with them, along the banks of rivers flowing through the mottled woodland, deeper and deeper into the unknown.

The ground on which my family home would be built was then forest, a sylvan setting, undisturbed but for the sounds of the woodlands. Then one day the place was visited by a new sound: chopping. The boundaries of the world were being pushed back as new tribes moved in, people with the skills of agriculture. They ring-barked the sacred trees to kill them and let the light reach the soil. The green of forest gave way to fields of crops, barley and wheat, and extensive areas of pasture.

The initial changes seemed small and uncertain, though accompanied by a sense of unease among the older inhabitants of this place. Benefits did go alongside this change, an opportunity for trade with the newcomers: fish and other produce in return for the sturdier stone axes made of igneous rock. But the benefits ultimately tilted one way, and those who did not assimilate died out. The subtle conflict no doubt resulted in more blatant expression of open violence, when power was clearly shifting from one group to another.

Hide skin tents gave way to more permanent structure as hunting and gathering gave way to more permanent society. Where the wooded slopes dropped down towards the coast, on the level ground between, the constant quotidian of life: the plumes of smoke rising sluggishly from the hole in the thatched roof of the rectangular shaped buildings, the settlement protected by an imposing palisade of tall stakes, as the community went about its business, herding and farming, following the agricultural seasons. Beyond the defences were the patchwork of fields, where once there had been forest and scrub. Over time the carpet of forest shrank as more land was cultivated, those patchwork of fields and enclosures visible to the south towards Bray and northwards to the Liffey.

But the dark side of this hill held dangers. Wolves prowled, their howls at night waking those sleeping behind the walls. Bears had not been seen for a long time; there was no living memory of one. Wolves could still cause enough destruction: the chewed scattering of human bones, red with flesh and tissue, was often all that was found of a missing loved one. But it was not only the large fierce beasts – of this world or the other – that threatened their lives. When the seed-corn was sown it had to be guarded from the innocuous pigeon or sparrow, even the rampaging tiny weevil. The forces of nature often showed no mercy: rain and flooding, drought and storm, frozen winters and mysterious, invisible causes for the death of livestock, such as the loss of a breeding bull.

The isthmus of Howth had long ceased to be an island, accounts of the maelstrom there long passed into tribal myth. The Liffey was the goddess of all their rivers, a meandering network of tributaries and estuaries, a natural defence against forces from the north that served a tribe's sense of security. At low tide she exposed sand banks, treacherous to travellers along the beach making the crossing; when the tide was in, she was turbulent and noisy. Upstream she narrowed, and easier to cross, but either bank was still darkly forested and without pathways or clear direction. All communications were along the rivers, little was known of what lay beyond, and left to the imagination. On the shoreline news was passed and commerce transacted, old ties renewed and new ones formed, marriages and alliances arranged.

From this hill they could make out the northern horizon, from where stories of a growing power at Newgrange passed along the coast. They were expanding on the banks of the Boyne, a river overflowing with fresh drinking water and rich in salmon. This race comprised mainly new settlers who still kept their old contacts overseas. Occasionally their black boats made of hide and wood could be spotted out in the bay, having rounded the tip of Howth, making for the trading points near the river. Those who had visited this growing civilization described how the settlement was nestled around group of gentle hills on the bend in the river. On top of the main hill stood a simple but sacred earthen mound, looking down upon its fertile lands: lands ripe for development, for the expanding herds of cattle and other livestock, and for the growing of wheat and barley. That sight could tell its future – up to a point – though not its end. That wealthy society had wonderful orchards of ripe fruit ready for picking.

The power of this civilization must have had the pull of a whirlpool, other smaller tribes being sucked in. Like all great powers, it would have produced mixed feelings among lesser peoples: envy of its strength and resentment of it for their own weakness. The Boyne people would have grown all they needed, and manufactured all they wanted. The flint works of Antrim would have prospered on the supply of raw material to feed the demand for farming and construction – and war. But did the tribes in the bay below fare that well? Were they the

consumers of a huge agricultural surplus? And what would they have to barter? For the population of the Boyne must have grown rapidly, well fed and free from danger of hunger. Their economic and cultural power must have spread wide. The only hope for poorer tribes, menial or slave work for the building of the great tombs of Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth. Overland or by sea, quartz from Wicklow was laboriously brought north, no doubt enlisting the resigned willing as well as the resentful resigned. Like before, and since, internal power struggles meant tribes could be split: advantage gained by allegiance with external forces.

From their hilltops the Boyne tombs surveyed their dominion. Around those vast tombs grew a commercial and social heart. A cult of the dead brought life to the hinterland. News of this great civilization travelled the whole island. That bend in the river Boyne became a destination for maritime trade and all the forest and mountain tracks led to that centre. The Boyne People ruled the lands as far as the horizon, cutting through opposition like a scythe through grass. Any visitor could only splendour at the sight, especially Newgrange, the most transfixing of all megaliths, with its façade of white quartz that twinkled and sparkled in the sunlight. Its brilliance could be seen for vast distances and at certain angles during dawn or dusk the rocks picked up an opalescent hue. Word travelled back here of how the wealthy lived: at the foot of the temple mounds the elite built their houses of long timber beams with thatched roofs, surrounded by palisades and approached by cobbled pathways. Even the smaller homesteads of the artisans, potters, stonemasons and labourers were luxurious. Fields and pastures stretched in a great radius from the gigantic tombs.

Under the gaze of the quartz eye the poor bended over to sow or reap and the herdsmen corralled the black cattle for milking. The whole community contributed to building these monuments, and could rightfully take pride in their achievement. To them the land they farmed and the heavens arching overhead was the total universe, eternal and unchanging. For centuries traders from other parts of the island traipsed the mud trackways, going there to barter whatever they had. Curraghs appeared from around the loop in the river, bringing fish from the coast. Sometimes vessels came from farther afield bringing luxury items such as orange amber or snow-white ivory figurines, or exotic foods.

But the people of the Boyne civilization were, like the sun and stars they worshipped, merely passing through the celestial passage. They were only part of the cycle of nature – the leaves that fell in autumn to become humus in the earth – and the day would come that they would be gone, but the seasons would go on. The ephemeral buildings where they lived disappeared without trace and the great tombs became overgrown with brambles and ferns. For later generations the forlorn mounds would be dark, pondering tumults on the rim of the skyline, mysterious and sinister, inviting yet repelling. The front of Newgrange collapsed, leaving its sacred chamber in darkness at midwinter. The thin thread of golden light no longer flowed over the earthen floor of the passage to its home, to sojourn for those fleeting moments, warming cold bones and stones. For millennia people would ponder the question of what happened to this once-powerful civilization. They weaved tales and myths about the nature and origin of the mounds, to replace the absence of recorded facts and to illuminate some ancient truth.

The descendants continued to live under the shadow of those ghostly temples. They farmed the land and herded cattle, but their religious practices changed. They constructed stone circles within sight of the Boyne Ridge, and erected wooden buildings inside, as if to rival their ancient predecessors. The new edifices may not have had the grandeur of Newgrange, but the people of the stone circles did follow the movements of celestial bodies,

recording the seasons of the sun and the phases of the moon, and at night the crystals in the rocks of the circles twinkled like the distant stars in the firmament.

Right throughout Atlantic Europe the stone temples were gradually falling into disuse as a new epoch began – the Bronze Age. On the Dublin Mountains, in view of their trading posts down by the coast, the race built its own megalithic monuments in honour of the dead. The itinerant metal workers of this race arrived by sea and travelled the tracks and rivers, selling their creations to awestruck kings and warriors. The commercial process of conquest continued, more arrived and settled – and dominated. Looking down upon this bay and island the wedge tombs kept sentinel on the coming and goings. Their presence would be a mysterious reminder of the past for long into the future, ashes in beakers and dusty barbed-and-tanged arrowheads giving hints of an earlier civilization transpired. The earth hid more secrets of this people: the modest ritual of cist burials, concealing any signs of previous existence, deep in the ploughed fields of later ages, content in anonymity with the soil, perhaps such a strong self-confidence with their beliefs that there was no need for a showy statement in the physical world.

On the island the smoke of the fires could be seen near the little dwelling; my mind shared that scene. Small boats with sails made of hides gathered in the sound, carrying tin from Cornwall, copper and gold from along the coast in Wicklow. The smiths made their implements and weapons, the magical liquid poured into clay moulds. Crowds stood around the metal worker as he poured in the molten liquid, then looked on in silence as it hardened and cooled; then they watched him break the clay cast to present the perfectly formed object. The metal worker also had secrets how to make the farming implement or weapon even stronger; at first arsenic, frequently occurring naturally with copper, was used, then tin was alloyed with copper to make bronze. Those with the knowledge of metal came to possess great wealth, for those with power would pay lavishly for artifacts of copper. The wielder of a copper dagger had the edge over the opponent with the stone weapon. The metal axe was better for felling the forest. Bronze axes were deposited in bogs and rivers as votive offerings to the gods, the objects symbolically decorated with zigzag and hatch-triangle, meaning now lost.

Ireland was attractive to invaders and traders, having plentiful deposits of copper and gold. As well as the likely influx of newcomers, the indigenous people also learned the skills of making metal out of stone. Men, women and children were worked like ants in the dark hot underworld, chipping away at the rock face with their mauls, using fire and boiling water to loosen the rich veins of copper ore, toiling in a world dimly lit by torches of oil and cloth, dreaming of daylight; but even there their work did not end: in the wind or rain, cold or heat, the miners worked in the open elements separating the mineral from the gangue.

To be adorned with metal objects was to be adorned with status. And it was gold that made a person's status in society unquestionable and unassailable. Its untarnishable glitter gave it unsurpassable attraction. And the Wicklow Mountains were rich in the precious metal. Easy nuggets were to be had by dipping the hand into the silted floor of the mountain stream. From hammered sheets of gold the artists crafted the moon-shaped lunula, delicately incised with markings, gorget necklaces with bosses and concentric circles, sun discs with perforations to sew on to garments. Over time the goldsmiths increased their repertoire to include delicately formed flanged earrings and torcs, and ribbed gold bracelets. The wealthy glowed in their gold finery, ornamentation brightening the dull cloaks and leggings made of wool and leather. Ireland had entered a golden age, as if it could never end.

But the gold did lose its shine. Under the gathering of black clouds the age that had united an island in harmony could no longer hold its people together. The signs of conflict were everywhere to be seen: the advent of the bronze sword, that cut-and-thrust leaf bladed weapon, spilled much blood on the boggy turf of Irish battlefields. The use of the shield – sometimes metal, more often leather or wood – gave protection to the skilful wielder of the decisive new weapon. And lines of tall bronze spearheads glinted against the sky as warriors marched to war. The chilling sounds of the curved bronze trumpets heralded the approach of an army determined on combat. The race was dividing into querulous tribes. They built their homes on hilltops, where the sentries would sound their horns of approaching attack, and the workers in the fields could take shelter with their livestock inside the fortifications: palisade walls with a deep ditch encircling them. Coastal cliff tops made natural promontory forts and ideal look out posts for invaders from the sea; new settlers were now unwelcome and to be mistrusted. The warriors of each tribe gathered in their great halls, feasted by the huge roaring fires, with the smell of cooking beef wafting from the giant bronze cauldrons. The warriors told tales of their prowess and invincibility in battle. The island was swept by war and cataclysmic upheaval. So great was the chaos that many of the wealthy deposited their riches in bogs and riverbeds, to be interred to the guardianship of a chthonic force the legacy and memory of a race, a people that might otherwise have disappeared without trace or record. And so a people buried their precious belongings beneath the ground and left a fragmented memory, which in time would be reborn in a new race's mythology.

The scene northwards towards the Liffey and beyond changed little in appearance, but for the continued encroachment upon the forest: more patches of pasture for cattle and fields for arable farming. More cone-shaped thatched roofs dotted the landscape and along the coast the duns and promontory forts kept watch upon the sea; what brought merchants could also bring pirates. The island with its sheltered sound was a landmark for vessels making their way up the coast, a point they could stop and trade with the local peoples. But the place was still remote. The rising land near the mountains south and west was still densely forested. When they saw this part of the coast line they knew they were nearing what the river mariners called the Oboka: the largest river entering the bay, wide and turbulent, disappearing into the heartland, cutting through a boggy wilderness before narrowing to its mysterious source in the mountains. The travellers to this land met with a world rich in prospect yet apparently sparse in humans. For millennia accounts of the farthest island to the west were brought back to continental Europe by traders. The ancient Greeks spoke of an isle beyond the Pillars of Hercules, on the very edge of the ocean. Such a place had an enthralling fascination, for beyond the setting sun was the entrance to the netherworld of Hades. And there in the endless foaming swells lurked Medusa with her hair of hissing serpents. Those who lived near the unknown could hear the heaving of Atlas as he held the earth aloft his shoulders. This island people had a powerful allure. Perhaps they were of the spirit world, the home for the souls of the deceased? An ancient manuscript of the sixth century BC, long lost but referred to by classical scholars, spoke of the Holy Island (*Insular sacra*) inhabited by the Race of Érainn (*Gens hiernorum*). Greek maritime traders also called this island *Ierne*. The writer, Festus Rufus Avienus, penned the description of this mysterious land in *Ora maritima*, his version of the lost manuscript, and gave it the name Ériu. The Alexandrian geographer, Ptolemy, created a map of the island in the second century AD, describing her rivers and several of her tribes. His sources were from the lost work by Marinus of Tyre, itself inspired by the earlier lost manuscript.

The tribes they met here were not shy about commerce, again self-interest putting aside any suspicion - temporarily. In time the land passed from the age of bronze to the age of iron.

The vessels arrived at the promontory fort on the island. The tribes along the coast and in the hinterland travelled to the shore to barter, carrying with them foodstuffs, wool, hides, subdued frightened human slaves, and yelping excited Irish wolfhounds.

With trade came news, always of distant events – sometimes unsettling – yet remote and easy to dispel as of no consequence to those living on the ocean's fringe. Sailors brought accounts of the rise of the Carthaginians, a civilization built upon trade. Then came word that it had closed the sea lanes through the Pillars of Hercules to its Greek rivals, and that the civilization of Tartessus was under the control of the Carthaginian king, and more importantly so too were the rich silver deposits and the Tin Islands. Information was fed to the small fort on the island of an overland route to the city of Massilia. It did not have too dissimilar a history: geography giving shelter from the winds and a love story of beginnings which would have a dark twist.

Stories of warlike tribes must have come to this shore with the regularity of the waves breaking on Killiney beach. And little notice was taken, as the boundary of these expansions kept stretching, and Celtic tribes moved into the lands of the Etruscans. No one would have known its benefit for the small city state of Rome, a nearby rival of Etruria. And yet the raiders could not envisage any limit to their expansion, and reports came that they had sacked Rome, only bought off with a ransom of gold. Perhaps Tages told some embittered Etruscans – once such a powerful people – that their conquerors had reached the extent of their greatness. Roman revenge would drive them to the margins.

Commerce brought new customs and fashions, and warriors with their iron weaponry, offering their services to the divided tribes of the mountains and beyond. They moved in slowly – surreptitiously – through the land, displaced by foreign wars or simply on adventure. Their presence, like that of the foreign merchants, was welcome. Warriors seeking service with kings were of help in power struggles. And these new soldiers were formidable fighters, and the nobles among them often had powerful families back in their home lands. They took the tracks through the woods that led over the mountains, away from this sparsely inhabited coast. Beyond the mountains to the west they entered the bogs and lakes, plains traversed by roads made of logs or travelled by boat along the rivers, making contacts with new tribes, making new alliances, joining the ruling native warrior class through marriages and tribute for their services. Their victory would be one of time.

The implications of distant events were imperceptible to the inhabitants along these bays. The fate of Vercingetorix would have seemed of no significance, other than an exciting tale of battle and heroism: the young charismatic Gallic leader uniting the disparate tribes of Gaul against a Roman general called Julius Caesar in an attempt to stop the expansion of Roman power, although many of the tribes had self-interest in supporting Rome. They traded slaves, grain, meat and hides for Roman wines and other luxury goods. Caesar was motivated by ambition and to sate this saw the advantage of conquering Gaul. Conquering brought prestige and wealth, driven more by process than by plan, a close relative of opportunity. The movement of the Helvetii from their home in the Alps would give Caesar his chance. Their intentions to resettle in Gaul would challenge Roman – Caesar's – interests. So he acted: he played on the fear of its citizens with images of Celtic hordes descending upon their great city, as they had done three hundred years before. In the war over the destiny of Gaul, Caesar retained the support of many native tribes. But even a genius can be cursed by misjudgement: he executed Acco, chieftain of the Senones, for plotting against him. The shocked Gallic aristocracy began to fear for their safety and power under Roman rule. Vercingetorix was

also driven by the desire for power and seized the chance to make himself leader of a great Gallic army, exploiting growing hostility to Rome. But it did not change the course of events. In the end Roman military might triumphed, with Vercingetorix forced to retreat to his fortress of Alesia. Reality persuaded the leader of the Celtic tribes to surrender. One account said he rode out on his horse dressed in his finest armour. He circled Caesar several times, the Roman general seated on a dais, before dismounting and setting himself at the victor's feet: in chains he was led in victory procession through Rome, six years later he was once again dressed in his armour, and ritually strangled.

Did it ruffle the outward tranquillity of this scene when word arrived that Roman legions had crossed the sea and landed in Britain? It must have been met with remote indifference that Caesar had taken his fight against the escaping warriors, following them into the marchlands and fens of north-west Gaul, then across the short but choppy stretch of waters into Britain where friends and fellow tribesmen lived. The descriptions would no doubt have caught the imagination: biremes with oars and masts appearing over the horizon, moving towards the brilliant-white cliffs of Dover, thousands of Britons there to meet them. Caesar was driven by desire to crush opposition among the Britons and conquer an island believed rich in pearls, silver and gold. The first invasion attempt, unsuccessful, was followed by a second. Distant, and safely exciting, stories told of King Cassivellanus, ruler of the most powerful tribe in Britain, how he gained the throne by killing his opponents while wearing a magic cloak that made him invisible. His right to the crown was illegitimate, rightfully belonging to his brother. Cassivellanus defeated the powerful Trinovantes, and came to rule over all the other tribes. He was the natural leader to counter the Romans. But the subordinate tribes loved power more than they hated the Roman invaders. Many sided with Caesar, and revealed his hiding place, after he had fled when the legions forded the River Thames. So Cassivellanus surrendered and promised not to attack other rival tribes, gave hostages and paid tribute, and Caesar returned to the continent.

For a hundred years the scene here changed little, as did the landscape by the River Thames. But the Catuvellauni were once again on the war path, and accounts said they had displaced their old enemy, the Trinovantes, and captured their capital. Further to that, they were now moving – logically – to the next boundary: the lands ruled by the Atrebates, who in turn appealed to Rome for help. To Rome, Britain was as still as much a source of wealth as it had been a century before. After a long break the two sides met at the Thames and the Romans, with their war elephants – bewildering and terrifying to the locals – crossed the wide river, pursuing their enemy into the marches of Essex. After defeat, tribe after tribe sued for peace. It was said that the leader of the anti-Rome alliance, Caratacus, had fled. In the following years news of campaigns became routine, and seemingly unimportant, and names and actions of individuals were recounted – then forgotten.

On a September morning, the end of summer, the slight chill of approaching autumn, the woods here were quiet and peaceful. The trees boasted their canopy of leaves that the climbing sun glinted on, its rays landing on the brambles and holly bushes beneath. Some distance off farm work was getting under way in the surrounding settlements. Later in the day work was stopped by a sudden shower of heavy rain, just below here, falling through the boughs and crackling on the previous year's bed of dead leaves. In another forest, in a world removed, the sound of rain was mixed with the cry of death, as the Roman general Varus and his legions were ambushed by Germanic tribes in the of dark mysterious Teutoburg Forest. As daylight faded the scene fell silent, as silent as here, as night approached. The limits of empire were decided and the seeds of future myth planted.

Mariners from just beyond the eastern horizon brought news of campaigns into that most westerly region. Such proximity must have made people here feel uneasy. On a clear summer's day the mountains of Wales could be seen from this hill. In late summer 78 AD Roman general, Agricola, exterminated the race of the Ordovices. The reports would have caused dismay, as the fierce mountainous tribe had earlier inflicted a crushing defeat on a Roman cavalry force. But the tribe of hardy sheep farmers with their mountainous strongholds and hill forts could not reverse the onward march of conquest. The word of the mariner carried weight, for he knew that the crossing to here could be a short journey, in ideal conditions and season the cumulus clouds would be a good omen. But not every single foreboding comes to pass.

Rumours suggested Agricola might follow up his successes with an invasion of Ireland, and was entertaining an exiled Irish chieftain with this idea in mind. Fear, accounts of the stories about those who had already fallen to the advance of the Roman legions, would have been palpable. Yet the traders carried on as best they could; they always did. A threat of invasion was no threat to the economic reality of business, which always carried on until circumstances dictated it could no more. Some Romans had even settled here, bringing with them their beliefs and customs. At Bray Head to the south they had a cemetery: the interred buried with copper coins placed on mouth and eyes. Even from this remote land they believed they could find their way to the banks of the River Acheron, and have the coins to pay Charon to get them across, and arrive peacefully in the Elysian Fields. But being on the western fringes of the world, tradition told them they were probably nearest their spiritual destination. They were keen to make votive offerings to the civilization that passed on before them. But the rumours of Rome spreading its earthly empire to this island never materialized.

Ebb and flow become hypnotic, until as if unconnected the consequences of remote events rudely wake us. The Roman world had experienced a long era of relative peace, but along this stretch of the coast and inland, news came that the Roman legions were departing from Britain to defend their borders on the continent against encroaching Germanic tribes. The change would carry risk and opportunity, excitement and uncertainty, for the inhabitants on this shore. The fall of Roman Britain may have damaged trade but it also presented new opportunities for the tribes. And its gradual decline brought increased raids on the province, with the realization that the grip was weakening. Once again the war trumpets could be heard, echoing off the hill, as warriors made their way along the mud tracks towards the coast. May be the Dál Messin Corb took advantage of the shifting balance of power and came over the mountains from their fertile lands on the plains of Kildare, and down to the shore below, where the local sept could carry them across the Irish Sea, to the rich pickings at isolated villas and poorly defended towns. The often placid waters of the bay and beyond belied a maelstrom of terror that the departing curraghs would inflict on reaching their destination. The Romano-British had no defence against such attacks, and could only seek shelter farther inland.

The Dál Messin Corb would come to know this landscape well, in time they would be driven from their ancestral lands to the strip of coast between here and the Liffey. Once a leading Leinster tribe they would be pushed east by the expanding strength of the Ui Neill. Their ancestors, the Domnann, were not unfamiliar with the area. North of Howth, their kingdom had stretched from the shore into the hinterland of Meath. The Dál Messin Corb would be well settled in their new territory when word arrived about the Battle of Driim Derge, establishing the Ui Neill as the dominant power in the midlands, grown rich on the raids into Britain, with implications for fading tribes at home.

Along a narrow track, through a dense forest, was the way to the humble church overlooking the island, where a similar structure stood. The Dál Messin Corb now concentrated on ecclesiastical matters, not politics, in this sleepy place of the hermit. This coastal region was the refuge of defeated tribes, driven out by the victors. Though they found rich lands in the Vale of Shanganagh between here and Bray. They must have felt safe, with the forested mountains to the south and west. And looking north, they must have felt secure: the wide Liffey, with its marches, and the impenetrable forests on the far bank and bleak bogs farther upstream – deterrence against invasion.

As before – and since – it would be events over the seas that would bring changes to this place. As often, it was the long course of events that would in time reveal those consequences. For centuries the lands around the Baltics had traded with the Roman world, for the empire had an insatiable demand for amber, animal hides and furs. But the trade collapsed along with Rome. Gone was the demand for leather to make the boots, shields, clothing and tents for the conquering legions. Over time the consequences would find their way across the seas to here. That commerce had brought with it knowledge of new technology, the introduction of mast and sail. With political upheaval overseas and increasing population at home the displaced warriors of the northern lands took to the sea in greater force. But the consequences of causes are not conscious of eventual victims.

This would have been an ideal spot to keep watch for Viking longboats, seeing their red-striped wool cloth sails on the furrowed sea as the vessel rounded Howth and moved towards this end of the bay, close along the line of the shore; but with less time to warn of danger if they came from the south, around Bray Head, a much shorter distance to reach the isolated churches of St Begnet. News of the Nordic invaders struck terror, raising a permanent sense of vigilance and unease. Each spring, after the fortress of winter, the threat of attacks returned; sometimes they came, sometimes not, then – all of a sudden. But the churches here were not as rich in gold as other places, so the place was left alone as the Viking raiders made their way into the heartland of the country. Yet nowhere on the island had riches comparable to those found in the Frankish kingdom of Europe. Ireland was more a source of slaves.

In time, with raid came trade, the Vikings keen to establish power and prosperity for themselves. And with trade came alliance. The ancient road north would be visible at times, during winter months when trees were bare, a brown muddy track cutting through what is now Cabinteely, fading into the distance towards the Liffey. There the desolate crossing of hurdles marked the boundary into the lands of the Gailenga. The road carried large numbers of travellers and caravans of ox-drawn carts between destinations. And when the Norsemen made their settlement at the mouth of the Liffey they made peace with local tribes for commercial expediency; opportunity beckoned for Ui Briuin Cualann, another tribe once driven to this coastal territory when fortune had been less favourable to it. As the Viking city of Dublin grew this sept gained too, as a bulwark against hostile tribes beyond the mountains. And the tribe stayed neutral when Máel Sechnaill Mac Máele entered his frequent wars with Viking Dublin, wise, as the High King of Ireland was also at times ally of the Norse colonizers.

Ui Briuin Cualann learned to prosper as foreign raiders became native merchants. But the Norsemen were also vulnerable. Their defensive, nervous settlement developed near that lonely crossing made of wattle screens, a rich source of toll revenue, on a hazel-covered boulder ridge in close proximity to local monastic communities. The high ground gave

strategic advantage – unbroken views over the surrounding countryside, view to advancing hostile tribes. The closest at hand were the ones to befriend.

Dublin grew in wealth and strength. She imported precious metals, silks, spices, amber, jet, pottery, tin, salt, wine and horses, walrus ivory from the north Atlantic, soapstone from the Scottish Isles, and weapons, pottery and glass from North West continental Europe. She exported hides, leather, wool, cloth, furs, jewellery and slaves. The Gaelic hinterland provided the timber for the Viking ships, cattle for meat and hides, arable land for the crops to make bread and ale. The diet of the urban population was varied and healthy: the country offered pickings of wild strawberries, apples, cherries, plums, sloes, blackberries, rowans and hazelnuts. The indigenous septs supplied the basis for all the wealth – slaves. The overgrown promontory fort on the island was put to use, to house the manacled and frightened bodies, spirits broken, before being taken over the horizon to the foreign slave markets. Smaller vessels would bring them up the coast, or they would be brought along the cliff path skirting through the woods on the slope of this hill. As Viking Dublin grew rich on its human traffic her Irish allies in the surrounding territories benefited. As darkness fell upon this landscape, in the rural homesteads slaves might find some peace in exhausted sleep, in this alien and lonely place. It was said there was not a farm between Howth and Arklow that did not have a slave working on it: so much so that no Irish man had to put hand to the flail and no native woman had to knead dough or wash her own clothes. In the freedom of sleep the enslaved could dream of where their hearts lived.

Dublin became a prize to be coveted. On a clear night, looking south beyond Bray, if lit, the beacon on the headland at Wicklow could be visible – warning. A sense of unease must have spread among the vassal tribes in the Norse kingdom when news travelled along the roads: the city of Dublin had fallen to the Irish enemies. The city's fortunes ebbed and flowed over the years: their vassal tribes' status with it.

Good Friday was sombre and quiet. Mid spring was promising summer: the trees on the hill were coming into leaf and the gorse on the rocky outcrops shone brilliant yellow. Soon the grief and shock of crucifixion would be replaced by the light and hope of resurrection. The small Norse settlement overlooking the island was empty of its men, gone to fight in the coming battle. Across the bay towards the flats of Clontarf, unheard and unseen, armies were assembling. The importance of the coming conflict would grow in valour through re-telling, a myth to serve a much later age. Warriors of Ui Briain Cualann had been marching to Dublin over the previous days, subjects to the Viking kingdom and the powerful king of Leinster, Máel Mórda mac Murchada, who ruled beyond the mountains to the west and south.

By evening, as the sun started to creep, exhausted, behind the Dublin Mountains the Irish survivors began to return to their ring fort homesteads, uncertain of their future – but alive. The king of Leinster was dead, as were most of his sons. His army was wiped out, which would certainly lead to provincial tribes seeking to fill the power vacuum. As darkness fell they recalled how Christ had been lifted down from the cross and cleaned for burial.

The weakened dynastic struggles of the island continued, but here remained peacefully aloof. Political struggles across the seas remained distant, curious but unimportant. In this relative idyll no significance was put on the events of 1066, the Battle of Hastings and the victory over the English by William the Conqueror, a dispute about power dressed up as legal entitlement: only power could be the motive for showing such pitiless cruelty to those who

opposed you. The years passed and peace lasted, the forested mountains giving cause for flutterings of unease. North to Dublin the view changed little. Beyond the Liffey on the very edge of the horizon struggles for supremacy – kingship of Ireland – continued, as if a larger more sinister world did not exist. Struggles continued with increased ferocity throughout the island. Here small tribes – once great – but now pushed to the margins knew sadly that victory didn't last as long as defeat, and the latter inevitably followed the former.

Kings came and went, and kings fought. Turlough O'Connor, with his naval and cavalry prowess, destroyed the power of Munster. But on his death that power passed to Muirchertach MacLochlainn, ally of Dermot MacMurrough, king of Leinster. The sept could not keep aloof from the conflict: for to rule Ireland, the victor had to rule Dublin and its hinterland. The advantage was becoming a disadvantage, with new set of circumstances. The peace and prosperity now seemed fragile. The people must have wondered what would happen to them, certainly as the course of events became clearer. MacLochlainn was killed in battle and Rory O'Connor, son of Turlough, was crowned high king of Ireland. MacMurrough's dream of controlling Dublin and its rich hinterland was shattered, and he was driven into exile.

Power only survives in expansion, by definition: dominance. That is the bulwark we need against defeat. To a world east, beyond the Irish Sea, MacMurrough pleaded his case. It was said he found support from a disgruntled, ambitious baron. Nothing of his machinations made it here to disturb a renewed period of peace, with hope it would last, the land never to be revisited by war. While the chief of Ui Briain Cualann and the warrior caste stood tall over the labourers and slaves, there were still taller giants that could sweep over the country like ancient gods: powerful persons who knew nothing of the simple folk who inhabited these parts, but could still make decisions to profoundly change their lives. In the sultry haze of that July day, 1170, a storm threatened to clear away the clouds, but there were no visible signs of war, only that faint mutter of thunder from across the mountains threatening the peaceful calm. Unbeknownst to the local people, men over the sea were setting out on conquest. That campaign, and its human consequences, would not ruffle the conscience of the invading warriors. Below, they carried on their lives. At a place called Chepstow Castle in Wales on that same day an army of knights thundered over the drawbridge of that citadel, their red and yellow banners fluttering in morning sunshine. Following the cavalry were the foot soldiers and archers, all – rich and poor – dreaming to profit from the campaign. Lives would be radically changed by the ambitions of that Norman baron Richard fitz Gilbert de Clare, or Strongbow. A smaller party had already arrived in the south to help MacMurrough: now Strongbow was coming in force.

Reports came that Strongbow had taken the city of Waterford, with the news tales of slaughter, and now he and his army were marching on Dublin; but there were no signs. The spine of mountains running south to north, covered in thick forest and high ferns, were too far away to see any movement. A walker on this hill during that afternoon would have seen nothing with the naked eye. The land from the foothills to the sea, green wooded and patched with ring forts and fields, and then empty barley fields would have looked peaceful. But along the range of the distant mountains MacMurrough was leading his Norman allies towards Dublin, along a disregarded track, that would bring them sweeping down to the walls of Dublin; a prize they would capture with unsettling ease.

Like all vanquished, the Norse king of Dublin, Askulv MacTurcaill, saw defeat as temporary. Driven out, he would return. A fleet of long boats could be seen approaching the

mouth of the Liffey, a clear portent of trouble. Chief of the Cuala, Macgilla Mocholmoc, was too weak to choose his allies, allegiance made with the stronger winner in greater battles; for so long a vassal of the Vikings, his new masters were now the Normans. He faced the dilemmas of power. Still, Askulv landed with his warriors east of the city and expected Mocholmoc to join in the retaking of Dublin. But Macgilla Mocholmoc, married to Strongbow's sister-in-law, aware of the political nature of aristocratic marriage, had to choose carefully. That the Norman commander in Dublin, Miles de Cogan, held Cualann hostages was another consideration. Cuala had remained aloof before: it would so again. The chief gave his guarantee to the Normans that he would stay neutral, coming to their assistance in the rout should victory turn in their favour – it did. From all the ring forts and homesteads in his kingdom, the warriors gathered and made their way to the walls of Dublin. From the sidelines the army stood and watched, to see which way history – their future – would go. The terrifying roar of the helmeted and chain-mailed Norse warriors, brandishing axes and shields, might cast doubt on the outcome; until the Norman cavalry thundered out of the gates on their war horses, smashing through the column of charging Vikings and scattering them. But they regrouped and overwhelmed the horsemen. The knights made their retreat back into the town. Soon Vikings were hacking at the wooden gate and scaling the walls with ladders. Macgilla Mocholmoc was uncertain who he would ally his people with. As quickly, a Norman sortie from another gate attacked the Vikings from the rear. Panic ensued and the attackers fled, pursued by the Normans. Macgilla Mocholmoc ordered his men to attack: they cut down the fleeing Norse with javelins and spears, and helped to kill some 2,000 in the fields and moors surrounding the city.

After victory the Cuala warriors headed home, the hills and island at the tip of the bay a welcoming and reassuring sight for the tribe members who lived around here. The chief had been on the right side, his diplomacy had paid off, and he would rule under a new overlord. The one who had ruled over him before, Askulv, was executed and his white-haired head stuck on a spike over the main gate to the city. He died bravely and defiantly, but wrongly predicted that the Viking Kingdom of Dublin would be born again. Such a boast must have made the chief of Cuala uneasy: the future was far from certain, as he would soon find out.

But the Norman grip on power was still not firm. Cuala had fought alongside them against the Norsemen. Now the former Irish allies of Strongbow were rebelling, rejecting him as the king of Leinster following MacMurrough's death; marriage to the dead king's daughter, Aoife, did not assure succession. The Uí Chennselaig were on the march from the south. Once rounding the paths on Bray Head they could see this hill and island, near which they made their camp. Macgilla Mocholmoc would have to judge carefully once again, pick the winner when the time was right. The lords of Cuala had pursued mainly ecclesiastical matters for over a century and a half, like their former Norse masters. Now local religion was becoming froth was political matters. Archbishop of Dublin, Lorcán Ua Tuathail, was hostile to the Norman presence: he was concerned the lands of his tribe, the Uí Thuathail, within the old Kingdom of Dublin, could be seized. Norman soldiers were taken over church property in the hinterland; something Macgilla Mocholmoc was not immune to, causing fear for his own sept's ultimate fate. But a new alliance against the Normans was beginning to look undefeatable – the side he chose. In addition to the Uí Chennselaig, to the north west Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair, high king of Ireland, was approaching the city. In Dublin Bay was another Viking fleet, this time that of Godred the Black, prince of the Isle of Man, fearing he could be the next target of Norman expansion; one expansion pushes back the boundaries to another, and is only limited by the forces that ultimately weaken it.

The summer of 1171 saw a tense stand-off. Scouts from this hill brought welcome news to the camp on the plains: smoke could be seen rising from near the city. Irish cavalry had torched the crops in the fields outside the walls, destroying desperately needed grain. In the dying days of the summer negotiations went on, that Strongbow might become a vassal in return for the crown of Leinster. Then night brought some dark news: Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair's army had been routed in a surprise attack; the high king had been defeated by the Norman baron – Ireland was his. Macgilla Mocholmóc returned to his ring fort in Castlelyons to ponder his next move, all-too-aware he had chosen the wrong side. But even masters have masters. King Henry II of England would come to claim his prize and curtail the rival ambitions of his wayward earl. Along with other Irish princes Macgilla Mocholmóc submitted to the reality of power and became a feudal tenant on the lands between here and the plains of Kildare.

The small settlement around the church of St Begnet would grow into a village, living from fishing and farming. The poor Hiberno-Norse of the area were incorporated into the new order. The toil and sweat of their lives changed little, and they continued their lives as always, accepting their world was ordered by divine and earthly powers, gaining strength by accepting certain things could not be changed. It mattered little about a treaty signed in a place called Windsor confirming a King's lordship over them. The landscape they knew as their tribal lands were shired and feudalism introduced. A single street with thatched wooden buildings, gables and doorways facing the road, grew out of the transfer from one powerful master to another. On that rocky street – the Celtic church at its centre – life continued, following the seasons and the years.

Foreign settlers came here, bringing new tongues, French and inchoate English. Perhaps many longed for the lands they came from? The beauty of a view does not heal home sickness or sense of displacement. Many of the old Irish were pushed into the margins, beyond the crushing obligations of serfdom itself. The hierarchy in the village worked its way down: from the richer villein in his longhouse to the peasant in his cabin; below them, cotter and betagh. The long narrow plots of the cultivated land stretched from the cluster of dwellings up to the pastures and meadows at the foot of this summit, and a climb through a thicket of woodland, a place of fascination but also danger.

Newcomer and indigenous were under the control of the bailiff of the manor of Shankill, his lord being the archbishop of Dublin. All were in fee to the lord, the life of all was hard, but the poorest settler could fain some status over the betagh. Both were subject to the noble, but also nature and the seasons. I can see them following the cycle of nature – all in flux – except perhaps for the ring of the church bell and the indolently rising plumes of smoke from the hearths of homes, where now long gone – forgotten – flesh and blood had lived, confident of the past's certainty and ultimately the future's too.

Each season had its own hopes and fears. In spring the seed was planted with care, the ploughmen urging on the team of oxen, careful not to dig the trenches too deep too early, that the fields might become rain-filled at sowing time. A prayer would always plead that each spring would be a fair one: but if it were not life would go on with the same optimism nonetheless – God's will or human sins. Summer brought that sense of anxiety, fear that the harvest would not be enough to see all – people and animals – through the dark months. Hay was gold, to be mowed with great skill, as cattle grew thin and weak in the long winter months. A good hay crop would keep animals alive until spring; a good grain crop the same for humans. The sound of the sickles slicing through the crops and the chatter of the workers

carries up through the meadows and woods to this spot. The reapers grew thirsty in the baking heat, and knew their right in ale to wash down their portion of wheaten bread.

By Michaelmas the harvest was in, and in the purple gloam of autumn the stubbled fields glistened silver as angled light weaved through wood and hedge. And beyond the village: more arable land and rugged common, levelling to the rocky coastline. The calm, still sea and deep-blue of evening brings the eye around to Howth, its woods mellowing for winter. And winter was a quieter time, prayers in the little church that the store would take them through. Christmas was the dark season's point of hope, where change and constancy merged, and told in the narrative: the Feast of the Nativity. The church and homes were decked with holly and ivy, a time when the poor could rest and indulge, from Christmas Eve to Epiphany. And me, a lonely ghost from the future, looked down on their warm festive community, knowing the future. In their world a bright star might shine over the village and a serf's home become the manger. With the lengthening of the evenings and mornings, came the promise of spring and Easter resurrection. And the work of spring would start anew.

The betagh struggled on, embittered that the economically equal but of foreign stock was a free man, while the native who had lived here for as long as the generations could recall was now a mere serf. The Gaelic peasant might never have thought his master would change, from vague rumours of distant events that in time came closer and closer, until while taking a break from toil, to get some peace on this hill, he might look towards Dublin, where an English king was entertaining Irish chiefs submitting to him as overlord, keen to take any possible advantage over Henry's suspicions of Strongbow and his barons. And he might wonder what all this would mean for him – if anything. And his stomach might have rumbled if he could see all that sumptuous food at the banquet.

The native peasants' way-of-life changed little from before, though they could have identified with the Gaelic chiefs and nobles as fellow-Irish, and must have had mixed sympathies to hear of their fate: pushed out of newly colonized lands to the mountains and the bogs. Descendants of MacMurrough were not protected, driven into north Wexford as tenants-at-will but with no security of tenure. The serf would hear about their efforts to hold power, alliances and submissions to that end. Word of a marital union, Norman baron, William de Burgh's married the daughter of King Donal Mór O'Brien, and then supported him in his struggle with the rival Irish chief, McCarthy. The poor who worked the fields below had a foreign king, King John of England, who decreed they would live by English law and custom, a sovereign who was as suspicious of his own magnates as of Irish chiefs. He was sending a force against John de Courcy, who had become connected by marriage to the MacLochlainn dynasty. De Courcy was becoming too powerful – a kingmaker. So the king used the ambitious young Hugh de Lacy. But ambition is a dubious loyalty, and the king would be sending an army to defeat that once-loyal servant, this time supported by Gaelic kings of Connacht and Limerick.

Irish tribes would rise against the colonists. Brian O'Neill of Tyrone, with little murmur here about the subtle steps to war, was a rising in region; he had surpassed the northern MacLochlainn dynasty, with the help – some said – of the O'Donnells, he became king of Tyrone. Most would have forgotten the detail when news came he had been proclaimed high king of Ireland at a meeting on the shores of Lough Erne, that he had freed himself of his dependency of the O'Donnells with a strategic marriage with the old foe. Fedlimid O'Concobhair and Tadg O'Briain had acknowledged him as king of the whole island. But this story would end at a place called Downpatrick, where he was reported killed by alliance,

both inside and outside his own kin, and supported by the English authorities in Dublin and the Anglo-Irish settlers of Ulster. The O'Donnell's were happy to see his rule would end on the battlefield and his head shipped off to London. The poor could only see this as the comings and goings of the mighty, but observed that the Gaelic dynasties were weakened by their own power rivalries. It was understandable that the poor took enraptured joy in the solace provided by the prophecies of the early saints, that the colonists would be vanquished, for they had most to dream for and most to lose.

Low level war can become mundane, making it seem like peace, and create the illusion that things are well, or getting better. Cogs to carry troops and provisions to the wars in Scotland dropped anchor in the sound, little notice was taken amid the normal coming and going of mercantile trade. Sailors would have carried accounts of the conflict between the English and the Scots. Yet the inhabitants would feel a disconnect; but for the sailing of troops and provisions the foreign wars had no reality. More real were the incursions of the native tribes from the mountains, the O'Byrnes and the O'Tooles. An anxious eye south, along the curve of Killiney Bay would be on the lookout for sign of fire rising from the castle in the manor of Shankill or the fort at the ford of Bray. The road to here would carry attackers quickly and unopposed, sweeping around the side of the two hills and down the wooded slopes into the settlement. These dangers were enough to create a constant sense of indefinable unease, though not always a sense of imminent danger.

News of what was going on in those mountainous fiefdoms was received with attuned interest, to decipher what implications might be suggested, how the rival races co-existed in some peace. But the arrival of snow – always a peaceful scene, though harsh – would be the natural event to rush restrained rivalry into open war. While the snow settled lightly here, in the mountains now shrouded in cloud it was building into drifts, cutting off that world from the rest. Added to the effects of famine there was no other logical course. The seriousness of the rebellion was underlined by the crown sending Henry of Almain, nephew of the king and son of the Duke of Cornwall, to establish order. It seemed his campaign was assisted when snow turned to rain, and the last remaining foodstuff and livestock of the Irish tribes were destroyed. Then news arrived that the Irish were burning English settlements along the coastline and mountains. What could stop them in their desperation? They could already come within sight of this place. There is no one more violent than a person on the brink of total destruction.

Welsh merchant vessels plied their trade here and farther down the coast, commerce with coastal towns and the interior. Those mariners would drink in the taverns and bring word of war in Wales against the Cambro-Normans, settlers there as well as here. Accounts of victory carried deep into the heartland of O'Toole and O'Byrne territory bringing with in – hope. The treaty of Montgomery was of great inspiration to them, when Llywelyn ap Gruffudd was recognized as the Prince of Wales, a dynastic title long claimed but never before acknowledged by an English king. And while homage still had to be done, the treaty was a fillip to those here who looked across the sea towards the lands of Gwynedd for encouragement. Spirits had been with the victory of Llandeilo fawr. Here there followed a sense of tension at what would happen next; then word of the killing of those Irish rebels at Arklow, a trap as they were about to set sail for England

Many complex factors set those tribes to war: the cruelty of nature, internal blood strife, conflicts within Ireland and outside it. The end of the thirteenth century saw the O'Melaghlin go into decline; dispossessed bards and warriors would take to the roads, some

of whose descendants would find themselves here. With them they carried tales of great pedigree, a race descended from those Milesian invaders who arrived on these shores at the dawn of time, to become high kings of Ireland on the ancient seat of Tara, who to that day still fought gallantly against the English usurpers of their land. The fortunes of the O'Melaghlin sent others to this place as well. Events allowed Murchadh to defy his vassal status to his overlord, MacMurrough. And he sought to break out of his challenging kingdom of bleak mountain, forest and bog – a domain always at the mercy of plague and famine. MacMurrough's loss was seen as opportunity for gain. And he forced the settlers out, burning down fortress and manor along the coast as far as Bray; once again death was within sight.

But a certain level of violence became the norm – peace. Then the sight of fire, from Dublin now, again made fear very immediate. The townsfolk there were said to be hurriedly rebuilding the walls, which had been allowed to fall into disrepair due to complacency, and setting fire to the suburbs which might have given cover to Bruce's forces in any attack. Like people of any age, the comfort of relative peace was always thought to be permanent: horror and fear of full scale war could never return. But it did in the late spring of 1317, as it always does. Events were bringing this day closer, though perhaps people did not want to believe it; why not dream for as long as you can? For the reality of war was frightening, most of all for those not doing the fighting – children, women and the old – the ones consigned to the backbreaking and menial tasks in the fields yet the very ones to suffer first when marauding knights and their retinues destroyed crops, burned homes and took what food there was. The defenceless need the defending but are left at the mercy of either army, who trample and trash them forwards and backwards.

The locals knew Edward Bruce, the Scottish prince, had landed in the country and crowned king of Ireland. A war from across the waters found its way to these shores, and bloodshed where there had already been starvation. It seemed the rain would never stop, it destroyed the crops in the fields, so human and animal went hungry; the first bellies to be fed were the soldiers'. To the north Donnall Ó'Neill had invited Edward Bruce, brother of Robert, victor of Bannockburn, to be king of Ireland. The O'Neill had sworn to the Pope in Rome he would give up the crown of Ireland, stressing the commonality of language, custom and blood that the Irish shared with the Scottish race. Though from this place, the view looked different: signs of war to the north and south, and a pattern whereby tribes followed what was in the narrower interest. The Gaelic chiefs were not heeding the call for unity, O'Neill was isolated in his support of the alliance with Scotland. But he had much to gain from his magnanimity and selflessness. Giving kingship of the island to Edward Bruce would mean an influx of galloglasses to help fight his war against the English colonists. Securing his power base was worth the sacrifice of the title, King of the Irish. The Bruces were motivated by the promise of an ally against the English crown and security of their sovereignty. What was in the interest of the peasants was staying alive, avoiding death by starvation, as the country experienced a catastrophic famine; for three years the harvests were wiped out by torrential rain. The meadows below were waterlogged and could not be mown. The cabins of the poor were still cold since the winter as turf was too wet to cut, and wood too arduous or dangerous to come by. War and nature had left much of the land uncultivated and invaded by the weeds following a black period where the inhabitants of the graveyard became the meals of the starving. Those empty dwellings were stark testimony to human suffering and forgotten lives.

The mountain tribes were taking the cruel opportunity to attack the manors on the marches in greater frequency. And the port village, huddled nervously on the rugged coast near the

hill, waited powerlessly for the horsemen to emerge into the meadows from the wooded slopes, to inflict terror and mayhem upon all its inhabitants. News of Edward Bruce's death at Faughart reached this desolate place, and with it died the prospect of a Scot ruling the Irish. The inhabitants in the shadow of the hill worked the land as they always did, and as best they could. They knew that the poor would always be the losers, whichever side won.

Humans have some success in their struggle with nature. The land experienced extremes of weather, from snow to floods. Weakened, but resolute, the people carried on. And on an August night, illuminated by the moon, a small creature slid down the chain of the cog anchored in the sound. It made a ripple through the calm water, making it to the shore and clambering over the slippery seaweed-strewn rocks. The Black Rat had found itself a new home, and more were making their way to land. The rugged common, with its blooming heather and flowering gorse, was quiet but for the gentle bah of sheep dreaming and rabbits scurrying from their burrows. Muffled laughter carried to the tiny rodents' ears, happy villagers sitting outside taverns enjoying the warm evening and escaping all their worries and problems. For them it was just the end of another day. The farm workers had spent the daylight hours in the fields, the rain having broken, allowing them gather in what paltry hay the dismal weather could provide. The fishermen had been luckier in their catches, though grumbled while they had pulled in the nets about the archbishop's prise. The womenfolk had worked in the homes as well as helping in the fields, and prepared meals and ale for the evening. And the evening became a merciful relief from the awful weather, the setting sun leaving behind a strawberry sky as the summer night spread its sultry darkness; when the mariners would tell their tales of exotic places, the Orient and the Holy Land. And the betaghs and cotters who had spent the day packing the mules for the overland journey to Dublin listened in rapture. That was the world the rats were making for. For the people the night was warm and merry, seducing them to forget the harshness of life.

One fell ill, then another, then many together. Soon most in the village were unable to carry on their daily work. The Reeve sent word to the bailiff in Shankill that help was needed. But when the reply came back, it was bad, no one could be spared; the illness had struck there too. Travellers from Dublin told of people falling sick there as well. And as night came so did the piteous cries from the homes, descriptions of those who crossed over the thresholds horrifying, of huge buboes growing out of victims' armpits and groins as they writhed in agony. What began as a fever – not unusual – ended with buboes burst, their black pus oozing on to the straw floor. The silence from the buildings was the final sign that all the occupants were dead. Too few to work the fields and provide, too few to bury the dead, yet they organized themselves as best they could. Those who were not struck down ate what they could and summoned up enough strength to help bury the deceased, though lacking the parish priest, who one Sunday did not emerge from his humble thatched dwelling beside the graveyard for evensong. His parishioners knew he was a good father and tirelessly tended to the needs of the ill, giving the Last Rites to so many. So many must have believed the end of the world was at hand – that every person would perish. Put down to God's punishment and peoples' wickedness, omens of passing comets or the corrupt air blamed by the savants, the tales of that vague disease that had been moving westwards with every new report had now arrived. Perhaps most believed the pestilence would never come. They must have thought they were already in Hell when it did: in the sluggish heat of summer the flies gathered as swollen corpses were carted along the rocky street to their burial, the stench wafting in a light breeze from the sea. And to those not yet dead the noise of the horses must have sounded like the hooves of the Devil himself. Contrary to their dark despair the people here, so many nameless people, did survive – and come to thrive – against the odds. A long struggle with

Nature eventually left humans as the winners over this disease. We still have no success in our struggle with our own human nature, the incurable disease of war. As the people rebuilt their lives from plague, famines and cruel extremes of weather the struggle for power on the island continued.

One day manor officials reported that King Richard II had arrived in Ireland with a large army to restore royal authority. The village below had seen many changes almost two hundred years since the last English monarch came here. That feudal settlement was under strain from the entropic effects of power struggles. The oldest surviving members of that community could recall how nature influenced that eternal drive, dreaded memories of the Black Death when all thought Judgement Day was at hand; but in time that hellish catastrophe that sent so many to a hideous death brought increased opportunity to survivors, even the betagh and the cotter.

The sovereign had faced dissent in his own kingdom, the serfs rebelling against crippling taxes to finance an expensive war with France, which seemed to serve only the nobles and not the commoner and peasant. Breaking into Richard's citadel, the White Tower, the mob hacked to death his chancellor, Archbishop of Canterbury Simon Sudbury, and paraded his head through the streets of London – justice restored with blood – the architect of their misery removed; with a feeling of righteous justice comes a sense of power, invincibility that any demand can be made and have to be conceded. While cruel natural events brought some advantage they were not enough to realize the rebels' dreams: ringleaders were executed and peasants sent back to their lives of feudal subservience.

A strong mother, Joan of Woodstock, 'Fair Maid of Kent', convinced her child son of his divine right to rule: but the young king did not seem the right choice as sovereign. The untimely death of father and brother had brought him to power aged only ten and in need of a regent. Family blood rivalries can result in bloodshed just as much as rivalries between races. Fair measures put in place to arbitrate on differences are only advanced symptoms of the illness diagnosed as interest, never curing the body politic.

The poor here may well have heard of the priest, John Ball, who preached that villein and noble should be equal; or the peasant leader, Wat Tyler, who led his followers in their demand for justice and an end to the poll tax, and was killed with a dagger for addressing the king as if both held level status. King Richard had bravely ridden out to meet the rebels, and had initially agreed to their demand. But if you truly believe you have divine right – with all the freedoms and riches that entails – how could you be so impudent to challenge God's order of the universe? There is no greater honour than to be appointed by God to hold absolute power; unfortunately every human desires power, or at least a small amount. But the more we have the more we want to keep. Lost in those reports of great victories in France was the evolving dispute between the king and parliament, the body made up the Lords, the aristocrats and ecclesiastics, and the Commons representing knights and burgesses; the latter group carrying the financial cost of war against the king of France. What news came across the sea or from the seat of local power in Dublin might have been given little weight. But this place would have stirred with expectation when word arrived in the village that King Richard II had arrived in Ireland with a huge army. The view from the manor was the sovereign came here to assert his authority throughout his realm, similar to earlier peregrinations in his English kingdom. Now as Lord of Ireland he had come here, to the great relief of the feudal lords who wished him to reverse re-emerging gaelicization. Leinster king, Art Macmurrrough, was the target, the dynastic ruler who dominated both Hiberno-Norman and Gael of the

province. He had cut off Dublin and its peaceful shires from south of the country by taking over the strategic Barrow Valley. It was he who Richard needed to crush or force into submission; and the Gaelic chief did sue for peace. The peasant below – Gaelic or foreign stock – probably preferred peace to war; peace makes hardship easier. They would have felt a relief when they heard the O'Tooles and O'Byrnes had submitted too and become lieges of the king, proximity always giving a sharpened edge to imminent danger; Bray and the mountains beyond looked peaceful, for once reassuring. But such hope never lasts too long, submissions only made by the threat of overwhelming force; once the king and his army was gone so was the submission. Neither hostages nor money forfeited to the papacy could make them keep their word.

So the English king came back again. But the second expedition was cut short, Richard returning to England in a hurry. The launch of a second campaign against MacMurrough would have created unease: its sudden termination equally unsettling. Would the hinterland of Dublin once again be at the mercy of Leinster tribes?

The events demanded explanation, for he was a king appointed by God. Soon enough word seeped through the porous world of tavern and market: the king had gone back to England to put down a rebellion. Only time would tell if he was successful or not. Cogs dropping anchor off shore brought more details: his cousin Bollingbroke was the leader, rising against the king on hearing his estates were to be confiscated. Richard saw him as a rival for the throne who had been curbed; it seemed that divine right had to be fought for. Richard remembered the fate of his great grandfather. With strong support and the unpopularity of the king Bollingbroke might well have convinced himself that he was God's favourite and argued that Richard had broken the terms of his kingship, had ruled by arbitrary will not the law of the country. Each instalment of the story was often heard here first, excitement from the initial sighting of a merchant vessel rounding Bray Head. Deposed shortly after Michaelmas, by the following spring Richard was rumoured dead, starved to death as a prisoner in Pomfret Castle.

The mind finds answers for unanswered mysteries. In the village taverns those of English stock that supported Richard saw the new king, Henry IV, as a usurper. The mystery of his fate brought hope: that he was not dead, that he would return in splendid glory to reclaim his crown. They would listen to whatever tales brought them solace. And many travellers passed through the village with its rocky port, bringing with them varied stories; one, an old Scottish woman, who frequently crossed between the isles, knew the face of King Richard from when she saw him entering Christchurch Cathedral for a ceremony knighting Irish chiefs, and that since his reported death had seen him in disguise, living in the Scottish highlands.

The English colonists of the village lived on the edge. On this hill, they could see the lands of the wild Irish – while many natives also living among them – so vigilance and suspicion were needed to stay alive. They wanted a king that kept order and was strong, solid with authority coming from God. They could see that in an anointed sovereign. A king's right came from the divine, but a magnate's right came from might; power threatening to create chaos out of order.

The start of King Henry's reign brought in another year, another century. The O'Byrnes were rampaging once again. Their mercenaries were encamped along the banks of the Bray River, the marcher Lawlesses and Archibolds were further threatened by loss of yet more land and financial extortion. The Gaelic attackers could move swiftly on their ponies,

collecting severed heads on their way. But the Lord Mayor of Dublin, John Drake, raised a force – including from this village – and launched a surprise attack on the camp. It was said the blood flowed out into the natural harbour, to be diluted in the waters of Killiney Bay. An array of Gaelic heads was brought back to Dublin in triumph. And once again an Irish chief submitted to a new English king, promising he would be a faithful liegeman of Henry IV and protect the subjects of the Pale against the remaining Irish enemies of the crown. Domhnall O’Byrne undertook to cease raids and end the constant threat of making off with chattels and goods in surprise sorties. He returned to the authorities the prize he had won earlier in the campaign – the fort of Newcastle Mckynegan – with its lands in woods, meadows and pastures. But he was to die not long after, rumours that he was murdered by kin, and normal pattern of war soon resumed.

The years of the new century passed with word of wars, on the island and across the sea. This place saw the comings and goings. Accounts of continental battles, in a long war that only those buried in the cemetery could remember the beginning of. Inhabitants of English stock stilled prayed events were – or would ultimately – go their way against the French. The battle fought on St Crispin’s Day gave new rise to such optimism, following a time that no news arrived concerning that struggle for the crown of France. The St Crispin’s Day battle was won by the longbow; archers were often sighted here, embarking or disembarking; perhaps marching south or even retreating to the security of Dublin.

But the French gave thanks for the outcome of a battle at a tiny village in that huge kingdom, a battle they would always recall. On that field the lethal strength of the archers concealed a weakness: lack of armour made them vulnerable in hand-to-hand combat. The French knights caught the English unprepared, the infantry men cut down before their defences would be completed. They were never supposed to fight men on horses. A man who had a fate in the lives of the population here was reported missing. John Talbot, as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, sought to crush the power of the Butlers, who in turn sought alliances with the tribes of the mountains; bonds of interest strengthened through bonds of marriage. To the south, through the grey shore mists, Braen O’Byrne took Wicklow; among those massacred Talbot’s constable of the town’s castle, bloodshed always sure to send fear pulsing up the coast towards Dublin.

It is often difficult to tell when wars have ended, if they ever really end. The Earl of Shrewsbury – defeated, captured and ransomed – was again fighting on the plains of France. Cannon was the deciding factor at this pivotal battle, though few here would have yet heard about that new technology. As for Shrewsbury, his horse had been hit by a cannon ball and killed. The earl, encumbered by his heavy armour and pinned to the ground by his dead stallion, was set upon and killed by French foot soldiers. He would no longer play a part – whether judged good or bad – in the fate of the inhabitants here.

But the consequences of that battle, and the consequences of that war, were to have repercussions here. At a small abbey town called St Albans rival factions for the English crown clashed in a short battle, in the narrow darkened streets, by the end piled high with mutilated corpses. Powerful magnates rose in rebellion against an anointed king, who York took prisoner after his bloody victory. When the screams and clash of battle faded the people of that small market town faced the inevitable – plunder. Yorkist forces ravaged the town and countryside about, the deposed sovereign brought back to London. These accounts brought a great sense of foreboding; and people here waited for the next instalment as a kingdom unruled by its rightful king descended into chaos. There grew a feeling that the worst

accounts they heard were merely omens of still worse to come. Fatalism and history convinced them that the war would be felt across the sea. The local struggles here became part of that conflict beyond the eastern horizon, the civil war between the houses of Lancaster and York, bitter family feud from Edward III's progeny. The fortunes of the Anglo Irish magnates competing for the rule of Ireland gave their self-interested loyalties to one or other of those houses, in the hope of their ultimate victory.

The rivalry between the Geraldines and the Ormonds, each entering pragmatic alliances with Gaelic tribes, would take on the banners of Lancaster or York. The Geraldine Earl of Kildare proclaimed his allegiance to York. In the village below, such a pronouncement might seem of little significance, as might the announcement of the end of timber trade between the Wicklow Irish and Dublin. Farming and fishing were unaffected by such moves. But for Gaelic inhabitants within the bounds of the peaceful shires, the Dublin assembly's passing of new anti-Irish laws created deep unease; as it stood an Englishman could kill them with impunity, yet many of them strived to live in a place their ancestors had lived for centuries. No doubt many were enraged by the injustice of powerlessness; nor could they have sympathized with Kildare's motives: enhancing his own dynastic power by abandoning his Irish ally to promote himself as the shield of the English shires, consolidating power for himself and his descendants, enshrining hereditary entitlement.

One dusk in late summer, 1470, Sir Edward Dudley rode into the village with his entourage of knights; not stopping but embarking upon the ship anchored in the sound, which would take him to England - to the civil war. Many notables passed through, some of the villagers might have woken from their crepuscular dozing. Officials would have been forewarned that the deputy lord lieutenant would be sailing from here during the night, so the warden on watch would be alerted. And as the sun sunk beneath the skyline the lookout at the gate would hear the sound of the horses approach along the road from Dublin. But the day would have shown signs of something about to happen, the fishermen off-shore sighting the approaching carrack with its four masts and royal ensigns. The fishermen in their small vessels might sail curiously but nervously close to the quietly anchored ship with its threatening aft and forecastle structures. Some thought they spotted a cannon, a machine that with a deafening noise and release of sulphurous smoke send an iron ball huge distances, killing all in its path - knight in armour and peasant soldier alike. By next morning the ship had gone, to the turmoil of civil war, where Warwick, now loyal to the Lancastrian cause, continuing to plot against the king; a bigger storm that could crash small boats against the rocks.

While in England plots were hatched against King Edward IV, in Ireland he trusted the motives of Kildare, appointing him judiciar to stabilize this English colonial heartland. And keep the Irish out, as well as pursuing them into their heartlands. Betaghs and cottars laboured, digging a double ditch six feet high. Earth and rocks were removed from the ground and piled up to give the defences their depth. From the shoreline at Kilbegnet's Sound they worked their way through the rocky and resistant Commons, passed the end of the meadows at the foot of this hill, and on westwards, skirting the mountains. Each lord within the shires who held lands that bordered the territories of the native Irish had to build the ditches on the boundary. Murage taxes were raised to build defences around the whole village, and its wealthy merchants were given grants to built fortified townhouses, seven castles in all. This hill stood poignantly just outside the Pale; one way a view of peace: the other a view of war. But pursuit of power is not limited by boundaries, the line of war and peace always moving back and forth, whenever interests are either furthered or forfeited. The

Irish tribes of east Leinster were also determined to dominate the marches of Dublin's hinterland, even to the doors of Christchurch Cathedral. Soon the gallowglass became a sight here, in the service of the Wicklow lords.

A new phase, a new turmoil, gripped England on the death of Edward IV. But the chaos benefited Kildare. Intrigue and rumour surrounding the new king, but Kildare was still in favour. Richard, Duke of Gloucester, usurped the crown and became King Richard III. It was said he murdered his two nephews to remove any challenge for the throne. But that was a kingdom of maelstrom. People here might well have speculated what the consequences might be when they heard of the latest battle, the crown once again changing hands, this time to the little-known house of Tudor. The deposed king who had a short reign in life would have a long reign in death as reputed tyrant. Yet the loyal colonists here could muster 200 men-at-arms to defend or further the borders of English rule, on the orders of Kildare, to fight for the authority of whichever king; or unknowingly fight for Geraldine ambitions.

On that distant battle field nobles fought among each other over who would rule over everyone else, while the peasants fought – willingly or not – according to feudal obligation. While Richard held the high ground, Henry Tudor's on the marshy ground beneath, it was not geography but treachery that would settle the matter. Sir William Stanley had held back his army from the fray, waiting to see which way the battle would go. Richard had always, shrewdly, mistrusted him as a man who sided with the army he thought would win and so benefit him most. But maybe Stanley was only different from everyone else in that his self-interest was transparent. At a critical moment, Richard saw Henry's banner and a movement of horsemen, the rival king was riding across the field towards Stanley's position, presumably to try and persuade him to desert. Richard launched down the slope in an attempt to kill the Tudor threat, but Henry's bodyguard surrounded him, protecting their lord. At this moment Stanley made his decision, entering the battle against Richard III, so ending the battle, and placing the discarded crown on the head of the new king. News of that day came jumbled and piecemeal: that the battle had been bloody right to the very end, and a deposed king had been ignominiously stripped, his corpse tied to the back of mule and taken away. It was reported later that monks in Leicester had buried him anonymously. Tales – much the same – came back from both sides of the battle; Irish had fought for both factions. Those caught on the marshy ground were cut down as they charged the slope; those on the hill were not safe from the dark clouds of arrows raining down, survivors forever-after woken by the swishing sound those weapons made.

Kildare's lordship over the Pale did not change with the change of king, even though he had supported the losing side. King Henry VII mistrusted him but was too weak to send an army to Ireland and defeat him; so Kildare remained on the lord lieutenant's throne in Dublin. And the wars to the south went on, the ancient local wars that each generation could remember. But English wars also continued to be fought here; the motives were the same. Kildare still saw his interests through the familial struggles of the English nobility. The Yorkist cause was his cause. Stories circulated that a priest called Richard Simon had presented to boy to Gerald Fitzgerald, who claimed to be Edward, Earl of Warwick, who had a claim to the throne. Here – in the Land of Peace – there was a fervent passion among English stock for the return of a Yorkist king. The Earl of Kildare was quick to take up his cause. Quickly followed an announcement that an army was being raised to fight for the young 'prince'. Motives began to turn the growing conflict into a broader foreign war – from Burgundy to the Low Countries. Mariners told of Flemish and German mercenaries assembling to set sail for here, to join an army of Irish nobles and Gaelic kerns to invade

England and put the Yorkist pretender on the throne. And they did set off on that summer day, the Gaelic soldiers looking no different from the ones who periodically swept down from the mountains.

Summer was in decline when word of the war came back: first about a place called Bramham Moor, where a Lancastrian army had been defeated – it was going well for Kildare – then further skirmishes in Sherwood Forest near Nottingham. Then the accounts changed: the armies met on the River Trent. The invading army of ‘King’ Edward VI had been defeated, the Irish, without heavy armour and unused to set-piece battles, suffering the greatest. Many of them drowned trying to swim across the river; others were said to have fought bravely to the end. The people of this small port knew survivors would soon be returning, passing through, giving their pitiful accounts of that short but bloody war.

Among the dead was Thomas, the Earl of Kildare’s brother. But Gerald would not be ruffled in his seat of power. Treason would have been enough to see him hanged, drawn and quartered. But the English king still depended on Kildare to keep Ireland at peace, always a source of rebellion and descent; he could not overthrow his adversary, so Kildare was pardoned, as was the life of Lambert Simnel, who Henry allowed to work in the royal kitchens. Two people, one the master one the puppet, lived on. Simnel may still have dreamed of being a king, the opulence and power it would bring, not a servant being ordered about by commoners. Kildare did still dream of being a king.

Another pretender was said to have landed in Cork. Kildare had seized another opportunity to further his own ambitions. Though many in the Pale, who he claimed to protect, grumbled, feeling their interests had lost royal favour because of his political machinations. Unease stirred at the prospects. This time the individual was Richard, Duke of York, believed to have been killed by Richard III, but who had escaped from the Tower. From Dublin came reports that Kildare had been dismissed as lord deputy and had returned to his castle in Maynooth. Travellers along the road from Dublin told of a new lord deputy arrived from England. The latest pretender had a worse fate than the first, hanged at Tyburn, his cause betrayed by the Treaty of Étaples. Life in the four shires may not have felt much different, no greater sense of security. But the English king’s rule was now less tenuous. France dropped its support for Warbeck and English dropped its claim to Brittany, one treaty betraying another.

They would hear that the attainted Kildare, a prisoner in London, had been released to return to Ireland. He had returned to Leinster, said to once again chief governor of the island with a grant to any crown lands he could retake from the Irish. It seemed the English king was won over by the firebrand magnate, once again convinced he needed him to rule Ireland; interest served best by pragmatism. All on the borderline of conflict, wherever ultimate loyalty lies, can feel secure with buffer zones. Soon after his return, the earl was undertaking a major incursion into Wicklow, taking the territories of Fercullen and Ferter from the O’Tooles and the O’Byrnes.

For a time the southern Pale became quieter, put down to the deeper expansion of Kildare into Wicklow. The O’Tooles had been pushed back towards their Immal heartland and the O’Byrnes were being pressurized too: their chief, Cathaoir mac Dunlaing O,Byrne, was murdered by his own kinsmen for wishing to make peace with Kildare and save what he could. External threat can create internal disunity, it can also have the opposite effect: old enemies can become allies. But for the while, Kildare was the secure overlord of this place, at

the height of his power. Then word reached here that he had been shot and fatally wounded by the O'Mores. He was returning to Maynooth for reinforcements after his artillery had failed to reduce the O'Carrolls to submission. Death nearly always brought change – and danger. How would his son, the 9th earl, fare?

When peace on the edge of the Pale was disturbed it was for reasons far beyond the boundaries of a ditch. The young earl pursued the same agenda as his father had, and the crown authorities theirs. Across the sea the young king had his agenda. The newly-appointed lord lieutenant Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey, led an army through on his way to assert Henry VIII rule over the Wicklow tribes, and curb the power of the Kildares. People knew Gerald Óg Fitzgerald had been summoned to London and being interrogated by the Star Chamber, accused of building his own personal power-base as his father had at the expense of the king's authority. News was fragmented from across the waters. But from deep in the mountains Surrey had been well received by the O'Tooles and O'Byrnes, hoping to make gains at Kildare's expense. At least it held out the promise that peace might last that little bit longer, even if beyond the mountains to the west conflict was resumed.

Then Surrey's name was replaced by that of Piers Butler. Then in January 1523, when information was sparse along the muddy and snow-covered roads, the villagers heard that Kildare had returned from London – released – to resume his previous position; speculation that the king still needed him to keep Ireland in relative peace. Yet one concern was renewed war in the mountains. To their relief, it turned out that Kildare sought reconciliation with the leading O'Tooles and O'Byrnes, despite their opportunism during his absence, with the symbolic gift of horses. But few must have thought it could last. And it didn't. Soon the Gaelic tribes of east Leinster were drawn into the struggle among the two great Anglo-Norman dynasties for kingship of the island. In late May, with the lengthening of the evenings, as darkness descended, in the marches to the south the burning homesteads could be spotted, from the coast at Bray in an arc stretching west to the Dublin Mountains.

The vision of destruction could be seen from here, yet life still went on, for no other reason than that was what people always did. They had their new weekly market every Tuesday, a humble enough activity, though one resented by the merchants of Dublin. And as yet another year moved towards its end the annual fair was held, beginning on the feast day of St Begnet and lasting four days. This new festival was to finance the defences of the settlement, the bailiff authorized to levy customs on all merchandize coming for sale. Those who they were building the defences against were among the sellers and buyers, some from within and less or unknown faces from south of the Pale. Despite the weather being wet and cold, and the light all day threatening darkness, people kept their spirits up: the fair was an occasion to trade, meet old acquaintances and friends, to barter and fight, arrange or venture into marriages, drink and forget. Irish from beyond the Pale mingled, conversing with fellow-Gaels who lived in the shire, selling wolffells and hides to the Dublin merchants. Customers from the mountains purchased items such as salt and wine, spices and silk. The hammering of the forge rang throughout the village, as the blacksmith made horseshoes and weapons for his 'foreign' customers. And the brewer women kept their taverns full, visitors and locals warmed by the smoky turf fire, piping hot savoury meat pasties washed down with the homemade ales. Mariners partook in the trade, bringing wares and tales from over the sea. The market here was just another of so many they travelled to, and they probably thought very little of what lay beyond this hill, its slope of bare trees and mucky sodden leaves sweeping down to the edge of the village. They had heard of, or even seen, places much

stranger than this – wondrous places. To the inhabitants here this was, for much of the time, the very edge of the world; the very edge of life and death.

Word spread from Dublin that the Kildares had risen in rebellion against King Henry VIII. Lord Offaly's real motive was concealed behind the symbolic act of throwing down the governor's sword before the lord chancellor and denouncing the king as a heretic. All knew about the power of the Anglo-Irish magnates and the suspicion it produced in kings. Most recently, in keeping with the historic pattern, Thomas Fitzgerald's father had been imprisoned in the Tower of London, along with other Geraldines; rumours said they had been executed – emotions were high. Beneath the rumours were the facts, cold and calculated, invisible. Before that public act of defiance Thomas Fitzgerald, under advice from other Geraldine family members, had quietly solicited the support of other chiefs throughout the island. But it was the symbolism that created the fever that change was possible, change of power. The poor felt change could benefit them too. There was talk of an invasion force being sent by the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. Local clergy, Gaelic and English, roused support for the Geraldine Fitzgerald rebellion. Henry was condemned as a heretic. Oaths of Allegiance to the pope and emperor were demanded. Fervour made it seem that the locality was the epicentre of broader continental rivalry. It was merely the tailwind of the storm. By the end of that summer the rebels held the coast from Louth to Wexford. There was a great sense of elation: peace would have to follow. The Pale was in their hands. And the inhabitants had hope that destructive raids from the O'Tooles and the O'Byrnes would now cease forever, seeing that both tribes had joined in alliance with the Geraldines. There must have been a selfish relief when the mountain tribes took their raids north of the Liffey, sparing the south. But it was understandable, they only existed by meagre subsistence, life and paltry survival depended on peace. The O'Tooles and O'Byrnes pillaged Fingal, the City's granary and raided Howth in the deep of night, driving away hundreds of cattle. These clans too had selfish motive at heart and a greater stake of power than the poor of the Pale. But their enthusiasm had been preceded by hesitancy: would the Geraldines prevail over the Butlers? Would the English intervene and crush the rebellion? They chose the Kildare hegemony – wrongly.

They quickly revised their positions when Skeffington's army defeated the Kildare's after a siege of Maynooth Castle. Wonder and trepidation surrounded conversation about the new technology used – artillery – and how it might affect the powerful and powerless alike. Wicklow lordships quickly sued for peace, no doubt fearful that the cannons might be used to crush them. The political landscape that changed fundamentally, the magnates that had dominated were gone. And the O'Tooles would take advantage of this, and their prominent leader Turlough O'Toole saw strength to be gained. Whether or not the peasant farmers of the southern Pale realized they were now more vulnerable is unknown. Few could have seen its consequence from the fall of Kildare. Then, not all possibilities can be predicted. His forces had pulled down the castle at Powerscourt, a vital bulwark.

From beyond the Sugarloaf the tribe could sweep around Bray Head, then across the Vale of Shanganagh before they passed the flank of this hill. Below, the village with its defences and seven towers stood in uneasy security. Between here and Bray were the marches greyly dividing the rebels from the Pale: the wasted fields belonging to the manor of Shankill, the woodland shelters where robbers and mountain tribes could launch ambushes. Despite defences and castles, the town was anxious, but carried on its trade with unsettled determination. The ships continued to drop anchor in the sound, the sailors and merchants sometimes nervous at the distant fold of wooded mountains. Some cargo was put on to smaller vessels and travelled up the coast to Dublin. Other merchandize was moved by mule

to the town, to the stored in the castles until it could be carted along the road to the city, also vulnerable to attack.

The O'Tooles and O'Byrnes, in their cloud-cast mountain fastnesses, did not know, but might well have suspected, that English policy was to destroy their lordships. Tadgh McGerald O'Byrne, had accepted the English king as his liege lord, pledging not to side with any enemy of the crown and offering 120 gallowglasses for military service to the authorities in Dublin. To keep his territory the lord of the O'Byrne would campaign with the crown forces against fellow-Gaels. But submissions are expedient and fickle: support for the crown switched to Kildare, then back to the crown. All the time the ordinary population hoped for an end to war, that the plain between the hills and the Liffey might have another reign of unending peace. History should have told them that peace was only merciful breaks between wars.

In dark December 1535 an English army marched south into the heartlands of the Gaelic sept to do battle. When news came back some weeks later, that peace had been agreed, there was no doubt relief. The O'Byrnes had entered an indenture with the king's representative, to ally against the O'Tooles when required. But peace only lasts as long as it serves the needs of its signatories. Turlough O'Toole also agreed peace, which lasted until his authority as ruler was challenged; a threat to his power he could not ignore or leave uncontested; weakness brings attack. And the peasants here must have wondered how the disturbances to the south would impact on them. A longing for peace among the powerless decides loyalties. They must have cheered calls from the Archbishop of Dublin, the lord of this manor and for whom they toiled the land, when he called upon the lord deputy to take stronger actions against the Gaelic tribe. But they would have known too that the powerful always act on what is in the best practical interest of power. Safe in his ecclesiastical palace in Dublin the archbishop was perhaps more motivated by his own narrower interests.

Lord Deputy Grey had intelligence that the tribes to his south might join forces with a burgeoning confederacy of Ulster chiefs. Yet Grey was also motivated by narrow self-interest. He was indeed allied with the O'Tooles and for that reason did not want to destroy them. The tribe could be used to ravage lands within the Pale belonging to his detractors, including the archbishop. His internal enemies made allies of his Gaelic opponent. And the poor had to suffer in war, whatever the reasons for the strife. And so the O'Tooles raided the Pale, destroying and stealing, exacting tribute and Black Rent, to the despair of the poor in the shifting marches. All they knew was the destruction wrought by war, and the underlying anxiety ever-present in peace.

Lord deputies came and went, led their armies into the mountains, defeated the enemy and agreed truces; for a while there was peace. The poor knew all-too-well the cost to their livelihoods. And a new lord deputy, Anthony St Leger, knew the financial cost – 500 marks annually. What would it have meant to them that he managed to entice the O'Toole clan into the Tudor fold? Possibly more hope than expectation. But clan chief, Turlough O'Toole, saw the benefit of what was on offer, and became the first Gaelic chief to submit.

Around Christmas time 1540 word spread that the mountain chieftain was in London as a guest of King Henry VIII, in the opulent surroundings of Hampton Court. He was happy to submit to the king's authority, for legal title to his lordship was being challenged by the Palesmen. O'Toole was happy to adopt English ways and manners if it meant the first born son of his lineage would be heir to his mountainous kingdom, in perpetuity. For the king, as

with any ruler, wild marches needed to be tamed to bring peace and security to the realm. And so the process of expansion continued, and as always claimed to be for civilization, not power. But the submissions of the Gaelic tribes in the mountains did bring 15 years of relative peace to the inhabitants here. They put their expertise gained in fighting the crown authorities in the shires south of Dublin into war against the Scots. Under the terms of the submissions O'Byrne and O'Toole were to provide kerns for Henry VIII's overseas wars. For once foreign wars brought trouble away from this place, the fleets in the sound waiting to carry away the soldiers who not long before had ravaged the soil they now departed from.

Perhaps spring would bring the inhabitants of the Pale what they wanted: peace. They continued to live in a world on the edge of power struggles, ones that began in distant places. They were ruled by the new king of England, now their king too, not just their lord. Splitting with the pope, the Tudor monarch began confiscating the property of the Church. The Catholic chiefs of the clans in the mountains handed Church land over to the crown authorities in deals to hold on to power. Yet the humble faith of the simple Gaelic-speaking peasant continued on the same: the mass was in Latin, and personal devotions and invocations always between the individual and God. On more pastoral matters, if the priest did not speak Irish, an individual could wait on the passing of an itinerant priest, an Irish priest. It would hardly have registered that that excommunicated king of England was also king of Ireland, not just lord. The Act of Kingly Title had no impact on their lives, spiritual or temporal, for their struggles and the way they coped with them remained unchanged. It could not be discerned that from the year 1541 all inhabitants of the island, foreign or native, were under the one jurisdiction of the English crown. For the simple betagh – never one of the five bloods – it made not an ounce of difference what Irish chiefs attended the parliament in Dublin the June of that year, that Conn O'Neill was created Earl of Tyrone and made a privy councillor; that Brian MacGillpatrick was granted a hereditary baronage; that Murrough O'Brian would be raised to the title of Earl of Thomond. None of these events had any importance for the ordinary inhabitants of the village at the foot of this hill.

For periods the noise of war did stay away, and the Land of Peace was just that. One day that tranquillity was broken: the sound of drums echoed off this hill and the tramping of feet filled the air. On the road from Dublin the pikes were visible, as columns of soldiers marched into the village. Carts and carriages pulling cannon creaked behind them, moving slowly while cavalry covered flank. The Earl of Essex, the Lord Deputy, had given the order to assemble. Off shore, and stretching into Killiney Bay, a fleet of men-of-war was anchored, waiting to collect the troops and carry them to Scotland. When by nightfall the ships had sailed, silence and peace descended like a mist, and life returned to what was normal, for a time at least.

The Desmond rebellion in Munster and rising tensions in Ulster would have felt as far away as the New World, in so much as they affected the struggles of everyday life. Then the calm of summer 1580 was shattered by the rebellion of the once-staunch Palesman, Viscount Baltinglass, in alliance with the Gaelic tribes of Wicklow, old enmities forgotten. The Baltinglass family that had been richly rewarded by the English king for its services against the Kildare rebellion; but times had changed. While the Gaelic tribes were witnessing their lordships being reshaped in the model of Tudor governance – their power threatened. The poor here were ruled by the lords of the Pale and plundered by the lords of the mountains. Now, an English Palesman was in rebellion with the very same Gaelic tribes. Still, throughout the summer the Pale remained calm: the authorities in Dublin were nonchalant. For the new Earl of Kildare was now a loyal subject, and the lord deputy in the Castle was

confident that the earl, recently supplied with four ensigns of English infantry, would be able to crush the rising. The poor knew there was deep grievance among their Pale landlords against the policy of Sidney, and that Baltinglass joined in when assured his title and estates would be secure.

While the peace was not yet disturbed, the arrival of more troops from English made inhabitants wonder if finally the authorities were about to take action. The pillaging by the rebels were still distant events, shocking but not reason for a sense of imminent threat. Reports said Baltinglass and his Gaelic allies had retreated into the fastness of Glenmalure with the crown forces pursuing them into the deep wooded glen. And then reports: a devastating defeat had been inflicted on the English forces, an event that could bring invaders swarming into the Land of Peace. The high, dark forested Wicklow Mountains loomed closer when the news fled frantically through this place. The inhabitants braced themselves for what they thought – from history's long pattern – was the inevitable. Local reality had no need to consider any broader consequences, for the poor of here lived and died here. They heard that in the north O'Neill, initially in support of the government, was switching his allegiance on hearing of the victory at Glenmalure.

As a hint of autumn left a chill in the air retreating soldiers make their way along the road from Bray to Dublin, dots of muddy blue, red and white. And the line of the Pale threatened to move nearer the capital. Anxiety grew, for all the races that lived here, a vacuum meant instability, and instability threatened violence. It would follow as certain as the autumn. On a clear day, the coast at Wicklow was visible, and in early October the castle there was attacked by the rebels and destroyed, a cause of more unease. Then came an unsettling account of Rathcoole being destroyed by O'Byrnes. There was now even a question mark over Kildare's loyalty, who was said to be weighing up his options.

Then the sound of cannon and arquebus could be heard approaching from the south. Smoke rose from tower houses and farms being pillaged. In the village with its seven castles the inhabitants cowered, praying that stone and ditch would hold back the attackers. They would wait, senses sharpened, for the sound of horses descending the track from Shankill, and the sight of Gaelic and Baltinglass forces descending through the boughs and canopy of the wooded hill. The town might be protected, but the enemy would make off with cattle in the pastures and destroy outlying barns and farmsteads, denying food to animal and human over the coming winter. The people prayed the winter itself would put an end to campaigning. It did not. Some sense of ease was provided when Lord Deputy, Baron Grey de Wilton, placed his forces along the ditches of the southern Pale to curb the invasions. The arrival and billeting of more foreign soldiers created mixed emotions, yet self preservation determined that joy was felt when the mountain Gaels began retreating to their native territories. By Christmas the threat from beyond the rim of the mountains seemed to have passed.

Years on, few might recall that ordinary event, when a man-of-war dropped anchor near Bullock, and a rowing boat carried a finely dressed dignitary towards the shore, disembarking the important courtier in the creek that formed the natural harbour next to the castle, where a carriage and cavalry escort awaited. A rough track through the rocky coastline, full of yellow gorse, then up a narrow ridge, thick with forest to its left, until it disappeared into the haze and veered right, then dipped down a slope and out of sight, into the demesne of Monkstown Castle, home of Sir John Travers.

To the powerless – here or anywhere else – argument about adoption of English norms of tenure and succession was meaningless. To the powerful, such cultural ideas present as the reason for conflict, but they only add legality to the real motive – power. Ideas can create heated emotions, but they are harmless: they have never caused, prevented or stopped war. People would only recall vaguely, if at all, the viceroy’s struggle with Shane O’Neill, in the tussle for control of Ulster. Detail had become sketchy, how Conn O’Neill had submitted and in return received the title, Earl of Tyrone, many of the details of the agreement as sketchy as common memory. Rivalry between siblings for a chiefdom would not stand out in the mind; the two sons of Conn were bitterly divided on who should succeed their father. Matthew was the adopted natural son and, a fact that would be remembered, born of a liaison between chief of the O’Neill and the wife of a Dundalk blacksmith; Shane, the younger, was the eldest legitimate son, and so was the lawful heir under primogeniture. After having Matthew murdered he took over the O’Neill lordship.

News from the northern parts of the island would have filtered through, and more quickly forgotten. Few would have heard of O’Neill disputes with Breifne, or with those other neighbours the MacMahons and Maguires, and their long term significance on future course of events. The great historic rivalry between the O’Neills and O’Donnells captured the imagination, though: Shane’s seduction of Calvagh O’Donnell’s wife, the Dowager Countess of Argyll. Beneath the sensational was the attempt by O’Neill to control O’Donnell vassals. Hidden was the policy of Sussex to exploit the hostility between them and do anything to bring Shane O’Neill down.

The Earl of Surrey was an ambitious man, a symptom of the fever for power. The growing strength of O’Neill was not obvious to those living here: that he had devastated the lands east of the River Bann; that he burned down Carlingford and blockaded Dundalk. Some memory might have stuck when he began raiding villages in the Pale. From this summit an anxious eye might scan the horizon to the north, the line beyond which O’Neill’s men were laying waste.

There would have been those who recalled that peace had been made, with the northern earl going to London and prostrating himself before the English queen. Though he submitted, people vaguely remembered that the wars went on. And the landlords in the shires grumbled how they were paying the cost of deputies’ campaigns; their poor tenants knew they would pay the greatest price. Some recalled those who migrated north to work and fight for the O’Neill chief. And while conditions favoured them they prospered. The northern lord was growing in strength, and seemed to achieve all he demanded. Neighbouring clans were at his mercy. But shocking accounts stick in the mind: routed by Sidney’s army he turned to his adversaries, the O’Donnells, who set upon him and knifed him to death in a drunken brawl after inviting him into the clan stronghold. Their leader Alexander O’Donnell, although he had seen several brothers killed by O’Neill, was not averse to making a deal – except the deal on offer from Sidney was superior. In the fading light of an August evening, no sight of Dublin visible, but on a pole over the gate of the city’s royal castle was stuck a wizened head, prune black, salted for the journey – the nearest Shane O’Neill came.

After temporal victory, eternal struggle is resumed. Few remembered the confused chaos of Ulster, and though its patterns might have been unclear, it was still following a logical path to conflict. Plans to colonize Ulster had very little impact here, their lives already ruled by such custom and law. Conflict flared: Sir Brian MacPhelim O’Neill had risen in rebellion against the encroachment of the colonizers. Some might have remembered him as once loyal

to the crown against Shane O'Neill. The Baron of Dungannon was still loyal to the authorities in Dublin Castle and their campaign to crush Turlough Luineach O'Neill. Those who worked the land would shudder to hear of crops burned, and kept the memories of such events, even if far away.

Some older people recalled that he was fostered by a Pale family, the Hovendons, and introduced at Court by Henry Sidney. He was favoured by the authorities, and seemed certain for an earldom, the most likely candidate to bring peace to Tyrone and all of Ulster. But there were other branches of the family who sought the O'Neillship; but such genealogy and political manoeuvrings were obscure to the folk living about this hill. No such matters could impinge upon their world. Lord deputies rode out the gates of Dublin on campaigns, new agreements made, programmes of colonization introduced, more conquests shired, as they had been for hundreds of years in the lands stretching all directions from here. Over the sea the Protestant queen was expedient and willing to compromise with the northern chiefs. She had more pressing concerns on the continent, farther east still. She would forsake co-religionists for peace with Catholic enemies, were the interest of England best served. But there was nervous watching towards headlands and horizon for the sight of sails, which could bring imperial rivalry to this shore. Hugh O'Neill had been loyal to the queen and was related by marriage to Lord Bagenal. He showed loyalty to the crown by slaughtering Spanish sailors washed up on the shores of Ulster, later appealing to King Philip for assistance when circumstances forced him into rebellion. No one could tell that he – like all leaders do – was hedging his bets; all the time seeking to secure his own power base against gradual encroachment of his territory.

Events so brief, wars cut short and peace agreed, political manoeuvrings and deals, made news of the attack on Enniskillen Castle just another entry to the annals. But the siege was the first salvo in what would become the Nine Years' War, though the conflict had been more years in the making. The village below thrived on its status as a port and the rich herring stocks off its shore, and the war was having no impact on the lives of its villagers. Word of English garrisons on the border of Ulster being captured then retaken filtered through – confusing sequence of events. Anyway, a distant regional war would have little impact upon their lives. What to them if the Earl of Tyrone was given complete governance of Ulster? The rumour from Dublin, brought by travellers from the city, was that he joined the rebellion because all of Ulster was not granted to him. Everyone had their own problems. Yet a sense of racial pride must have been stirred by accounts from Clontibret, the northern confederacy was growing in strength, a formidable Gaelic army was rising. The weak and powerless gain a feeling of strength when the course of history appears to be changing in a direction that could favour them. O'Neill's army was well trained and well equipped: now with the most advanced weapons – muskets, calivers and pikes – to compliment the traditional axes, javelins and bows. This force was quietly built up while he was loyal to the crown, put down to his devious plotting to conceal his patriotic intent. This fervour forgot that he still kept diplomatic channels open and skilfully followed the dictates of the real objective – power.

While the war in Ulster brought episodes of 'peace', in other parts of the island rebellions were occurring. The reality of proximity brought unease. Once again the mountains to the south were dark and ominous. In Wicklow Feach MacHugh O'Byrne was once again threatening the southern Pale. But the mountains appeared a little more benign with word that Mountjoy had defeated O'Byrne, tracking him down to a Wicklow cave and beheading him there. For the indigenous peasant it may have been difficult to take sides, but it was never good to be caught in the middle. Yet O'Neill's victory at Yellow Ford must have inspired

more hope that the cause of fellow Gaelic Roman Catholics was the winning one, Bagenal's army ambushed and routed a sure sign for waverers that Tyrone would be victorious. Kinsale would wake people from any such dream, back to the reality that they would have to struggle day-to-day, whichever side won, and possibly punished for backing eventual loser.

The war ended and within several years the rulers of Gaelic Ireland had fled the island from the shores of Donegal. Life was changing here too: the ships still came to anchor in the safe waters of the sound, though in decreasing numbers. It was losing its importance as a port for the city of Dublin, with it went the prosperity.

In other ways life went on in much the same way it always had. The Old English of the Pale, such as Harolds and Walshes, who held the lands in the hill's hinterland, fought with the New English and the Protestant authorities in Dublin Castle. Beyond the Irish Sea a new king was crowned. The policy of this sovereign would unfold over the years. And each winter passed over into another year, the remote events of each giving way to more developments in the next; and none seemed anymore relevant to daily life than the other. And each year the Lord Mayor of Dublin rode the franchises with his entourage, the sound of hooves and trumpets heralding their approach along the coast, up to the invisible boundaries of municipal authority.

While in the small village there was peace, on the continent a war was raging, following some incident where a man was thrown out of a window in the city of Prague. The travelling Gaelic priest or the Established Church curate explained differently that it was about religion. The Bohemian Revolt had begun, and for another thirty years news of campaigns and battles would filter through to the quiet seaport. The Catholic Ferdinand II was not wanted by Protestants – circumstance where principal disguises interest – for not all the Protestant gentry opposed the Catholic monarch. But such complexity would not have fed through to this remote place on the edge of Europe. The villagers may have heard of complex events, but probably would not have seen them of any import (why should they?): of how the rebels of Bohemia sought to join the Protestant Union led by Calvinist Frederick V, Elector Palatinate, and also sought the allegiance of the Duke of Savoy, Charles Emmanuel, a Catholic who was easily able to switch loyalty between Bourbon and Hapsburg; and the Elector of Saxony John George I, a committed Lutheran – yet more committed to stopping the advance of Brandenburg, so favoured Catholic rulers in this war; and the Prince of Transylvania, Calvinist supporter of enlightened absolutism, who like any other ruler saw it as a means and justification for retaining power, no philosophical idea however great can supplant that. The rivalry of religion seemed to run deep: but the rivalry of power ran deeper – still does. For the German princes used religion to further their own authority. They were oppressed by the Holy Roman Emperor: they oppressed their own peasants. The desire for power is simple but the wielding of it and struggle for it creates structures that conceal its true and insidious essence. Geography added, Germany became the battleground for foreign powers. Savoy knew the importance of geography, controlling the Alpine passes; as did Venice, bordering the Val Telline, a vital artery for the Habsburgs, without it the house would fall. The decaying Hanseatic League revealed the deep-seated rivalries of its members, making any alliance against its Catholic Habsburg foe weak and ephemeral. Bohemia, which became the starting point of the war, was divided, but not simply on religious lines: divisions among the Protestants made the Lutherans cling to the Habsburg rulers for security, the theological enemy gave balance to those Protestants vying for power.

But political vision is revised when political vacuum occurs. The debate raged across the chancelleries of Europe on whether Ferdinand of Styria would become king of Bohemia, and Holy Roman Emperor, or whether it would go to one of his Spanish cousins. Secret agreements are revealing, though the details seldom known to contemporaries. Madrid agreed Ferdinand would succeed to the throne of Bohemia in return for that vital concession: access for its troops across Germany. The Protestant rebels looked for allies, including the new young Catholic king of France, but he could not yet see, as history in time would make clear, the Protestant cause was his country's natural ally in the struggle with its old rival, the Habsburgs. Dilemmas and choices: one set of interests over another, each equal in advantage and disadvantage. It so often becomes easier to put the decision down to moral scruple or the will of God. The Protestant Frederick had to choose between loyalty to his Reformation supporters in Bohemia, who wanted him as their king, and equally sacred loyalty to his Holy Roman Emperor.

So much of this was unknown to the inhabitants of these parts, so much of it only to be revealed by the passing of time and the sacred dedication of the historian. But when the battle lines are drawn, the issues become simpler: loyalties clearer, emotions unequivocal. And when a travelling priest brought news of a great victory of a Catholic army over its heretic Protestant enemy at a place called White Mountain the cause to rejoice was logical. A Catholic army had routed the Protestant enemy. The complexity of the causes would be unknown to the poor uneducated, as it would be to the educated. But intellect is no match for the comfort we all get from the simplicity of war and victory, even if only temporary. Prayers were answered when such news came to the increasingly-impooverished fishing community on the toe of Dublin Bay.

The poor peasants in the village below had no church to serve their spiritual needs. The church building stood without its roof, its Anglican minister long gone and the Catholics would trek to the parish of Cabinteely for Mass; long gone were the holy icons: the reliquary containing the bones of St Begnet, the gold professional cross and the wooden statue of the Virgin Mary – all destroyed. But many of the poor held out some faith in an English king, his Scottish and Gaelic ancestry might make him more disposed towards the Catholic religion. He made peace with Catholic Spain, who would leave these shores alone in return for an end to English attacks on Spanish global interests. Some might have sensed that the welfare of Catholics on these islands was not among the core interests of Spain's monarchy, and never had been, any support offered was calculated and self-serving. The Stuart king's racial origins did not make him look more favourably upon his Catholic subjects either. Yet it was still a peaceful period in these parts.

In relative peace word came of the rankling between James I and his parliament, his persecution of Catholic and Puritan alike and his determination that no theology would undermine his authority. He ruled by divine right, not a matter of negotiation with parliament. But the Commons had a different view of divine order. Just like the king, their theology never conflicted with their interests, and somehow all consciences were clear. Attempts were made to kill the heretic king and Catholic martyrs died cruel deaths for their principles, dragged from prison by a horsetail to the place of execution, where their privy parts were cut off and burnt before them, the same with the bowels and inlaid parts, still conscious beheaded and finally the corpse quartered. All this reported in pamphlets that made their way to the homes and village taverns here.

It was said Charles I might be somewhat more benign. As a young man he had travelled to Spain – so long the arch enemy of the Reformation, with the intention of arranging marriage with the infanta of the Spanish royal family. Nothing came of that romantic diplomacy. The new king was reported to be betrothed to another Catholic, Henrietta Maria, daughter of the French king. Little was heard of his disputes with parliament, which was exerting more power through enactment of laws seeking to exert control over the monarch. It tried and executed Strafford on charges of treason; and the king signed the execution order, sending a loyal servant to the gallows. The Commons wanted to strip more and more powers from the king, leaving him as a figurehead. It all took so long, perhaps no one really believed the war would come – it did. And here few could have conceived it would have any impact on them – it did.

It was a Saturday in October, market day in Dublin city, and farmers from here had made their way to the capital to sell their produce. During the morning rumour spread around the stalls, which would have explained a somewhat different atmosphere compared to other market days: an attempt had been made to seize Dublin Castle and its huge armoury of weapons. The conspirators had been captured, news got out as some of them were drinking in a tavern the night before. Now anyone of Gaelic ethnicity was under suspicion of being part of a plot to massacre all English and Protestants in the country. Market trade carried on nonetheless, but the air of tension rose. More rumours spread: a rebel army was approaching from the Wicklow hills. On a number of occasions that long day, the drawbridge of the Castle was raised, soldiers with pikes and muskets visible on the battlements. Farmers and traders from the hinterland finished up their business and headed for home, carrying with them the news of the day.

Back here by nightfall, a cold orange sun setting on a bed of autumn gold, word passed around. Word had already come from the south by late afternoon, that the O'Byrnes were on the march, and the land braced itself for attack. Piecing together disparate facts people concluded this was all part of a bigger rebellion. Late the next day came accounts of a rising in Ulster by Sir Phelim O'Neill, who was about to be crowned King of Ireland; others said the Earl of Tyrone would be given the kingship. Protestant authorities in Dublin banned all native Irish from entering the city on pain of death. Nobody knew how long this rule would apply, or continue to be enforced. The small tenants and peasants of Irish stock must have been confused about where their loyalties should lie: with the crown, who would probably punish them for a rebellion they had no hand or part in, and they did, but thankfully mainly south of the Pale; or with their fellow Catholic Gaels, who might nonetheless sweep down from the mountains, burning and pillaging; or with their Old English landlords, to whom they were struggling to pay rent, co-religionists but still racial masters, who might choose not to, or be unable to, protect them.

Many of the poor felt a certain satisfaction that events were giving hope Ireland might once again be ruled by the Irish, pure and adulterated in race and religion. This led many to rob and attack in a frenzy of revenge and righteous indignation. There was also fear that the favourable course of events might not continue. Protestant, English refugees from the north were flooding into Dublin bringing tales of atrocities, and prospect of retaliation. The road from Bray to Dublin was crowded too, settlers in Wicklow being driven out by the O'Byrnes. The native tribe was bitter to reverse the colonization of its territory. As was tradition, its attacks could not be contained by invisible boundaries, weakness always being pushed back. The land between Bray and Killiney showed tell-tale signs: smoke rising from burning settler and native homesteads in daylight, dancing flames after dark.

The following spring, the farmers feared the benefit of more clement weather might be undone by the destruction of war. Unease grew, King Charles had ordered an army be despatched to crush the rebellion. It was also whispered gleefully among the native tenants that Owen Roe O'Neill was returning from the Spanish Netherlands to fight for an island free and ruled by her own people. The rumble of cannon fire sporadically reminded the inhabitants that war was never far away, as rebel – Gaelic and Old English – besieged Dublin, a city loyal to the English parliament not the English king. Events farther away would complicate the lives of the poor of here even more: civil war had broken out in England; little might have been read into the years of political struggle for control of that nation, but it was real with real consequences. There was talk of an alliance between the confederacy and the royalists. It seemed the crown was no longer wishing to crush the rebels but ally with them to defeat the forces of parliament. Enemies can always become allies in the struggle between the powerful. The powerless find it difficult to choose which side to support, which side serves their interests, which side is going to win. Soon the lords of the Pale carried both king and Catholic banners, which their tenants would fight under. And this alliance between Gael and royalist was a malevolent sea around the Protestant island that was Dublin city.

Ormond's defeat at Rathmines was just one more bloody episode in a war that had ravaged the entire country for eight years. With the confederate and royalist forces in retreat the capital and its hinterland were now firmly controlled by the parliamentarians. It was a fearful time for those who had experienced the taste of a little power, whether or not they had used it for vengeance and material gain, because they now faced the prospect of being the poor oppressed once more. Their minds conjured up the images of Coot's campaign in this area at the outset of the war as he travelled south: his burning of homes; murder of men, women and children; killing of livestock and destruction of corn.

The Battle of Rathmines was opening up another violent period, within days, in August 1649, yet another naval fleet entered Dublin Bay, sailing towards the mouth of the Liffey and the port of Ringsend. The men-of-war were carrying Oliver Cromwell's army to Ireland. It was a calm silent sight from this hill as the vessels made their way on the breeze passed Howth. Some hours later came the sound of pounding cannon, as the parliamentarian force made its way into the walled city of Dublin to the joy of the English inhabitants. The gloom of occupation and menace fell upon the hinterland, unease concealing deep fear: the wild maelstrom of freedom was being returned to its cage. The English civil wars had ended, King Charles I had been beheaded – parliament was victor. The poor of the Pale had been ruled by English Catholics for centuries, always the ethnic masters. Now they too had forfeited their lands; the poor would have preferred them and their English Anglican king to Protestant parliamentarians, who wished to eradicate the Catholic faith, Gaelic or English. Yet the real hand of power would remain unchanged in the lives of the poor.

The world below, in its autumn serenity, was paradoxically calm. Cowered life went on as normal, or at least a semblance of such. The forces of parliament had marched north, with suggestions it was planning to besiege royalist and confederate-held Drogheda. And for several days the silent mud roads brought back nothing and many hoped or believed the walls of that city on the River Boyne could withstand the enemy's artillery. But the cold chill of September hit with news that Drogheda had fallen with loss of many lives and that Cromwell was now back in Dublin with his victorious army; time once again to look down and work on. There were sightings of his roundhead cavalry on the roads about, more a potential by proximity than an actual threat. But Cromwell kept his word that the peasantry were not to be molested and lived off. Where the army needed food or shelter, supplies from the local

population were to be paid for, not taken. People heard of soldiers hanged from trees by the side of the highways for as little as stealing a chicken: not much to them, perhaps, but a lot to a poor widow. Yet still a sense of unease beneath the skin, and parliamentarian troops occupied Bullock Castle, reality of war once again nervously close.

By late September some relief to the fear: Cromwell and his army was marching south, the sound of fife and drum carrying across the Vale of Shanganagh, growing fainter as the force got farther away, to Bray and beyond. The village and the farmsteads below returned to a peace, but the tranquillity was disturbed with news from Wexford town. The accounts added to the growing descriptions from Drogheda that gradually made their way through the countryside and towns. The parliamentarian army had marched south to Wexford, the confederate town whose privateers were a menace to vessels on the Irish Sea. Garrison after garrison had surrendered, the only opposition an attack by the O'Byrnes outside Arklow. Although historically ambiguous, the poor here must have felt in those times the mountain clan might be their saviour. If Cromwell could massacre the innocent of Drogheda and Wexford he could do the same to the poor Catholic inhabitants here; the forces of Puritanism despised them more than their English Catholic landlords or Anglican clergy who presided over the ruined church of their village did. But he didn't, and the war that ravaged the country in the coming years mercifully spared them. Death by war, famine or plague did not touch them as harshly.

But Oliver Cromwell would sail away from these shores, and within a number of years would himself be dead. The following year, December 1659, word spread that Dublin Castle had been seized and the Commonwealth government overthrown, by army officers fearful that Cromwell's successor, his son Richard, was about to be toppled. These rebels risked losing everything they had gained under the English republic if the monarch was returned; switching sides might save them. Soon Charles II was restored and the sound of peaceful, rejoicing cannon fire could be heard from the city walls; the same sound heard welcoming Oliver Cromwell that august day in 1649. The new reign would be one of relative peace and prosperity, and the inhabitants of this hinterland benefited from that. But all reigns must come to an end, by natural means or otherwise, and Charles II would die peacefully, unlike his father, to be succeeded by his brother James II. Change is not always for the better. Before long there was a rebellion against the new king, a Catholic, by his Protestant aristocrats.

Monmouth, an illegitimate son of Charles II, was claiming to be heir; it was just another power struggle among the ruling orders. But the summer following the rising had seen the rebels defeated and the Duke of Monmouth executed for treason; life here, in its simplicity, went on. The peasants in the cabins and hovels below struggled on, no immediate change to their lives when Richard Talbot was made lord deputy and started replacing Protestant officials with Catholic ones.

In July 1690 a battle was fought on Irish soil, one that would grow in symbolism and myth over the following centuries, a battle that was part of a largely foreign war. On the continent, the Stadholder of the Dutch Provinces, William, prince of the House of Orange, had been trying to convince the republic that it should invade England to overthrow the Catholic king and replace him with a Protestant monarch. But many of the Dutch were more concerned in gaining England as ally against France than being delivered from Catholicism, for the Netherlands had come near to what all powers struggle to avoid – utter defeat – at the hands of an earlier Anglo-French alliance. France had the strength to overwhelm the loose confederation that made up that small but rich mercantile state. The Dutch knew this: as did

William. For them peace was necessary for trade. But William feared that Catholic James II of England would fall into Louis's orbit of influence, something he could not contemplate. Many suspected William's motive was more for his own personal power rather than Holland's needs. Over time he managed to persuade the doubters and gradually an alliance against France, the superpower of Europe, was formed. Because in the shadows lurked the spectre of another Anglo-French alliance. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the bloody persecution of French Huguenots gave the merchants moral justification: now they saw themselves acting on principal, against a ruler determined to destroy Protestantism (yet one that would go to war against a Catholic adversary). Holy Roman Emperor, Leopold, was as much a champion of Catholicism as Louis: yet they would stand opposing each other on the battlefield. Leopold had driven back the Ottomans from the gates of Vienna to widespread relief of Christendom, while the Bourbons stood back to best serve their own interests; the Habsburg defeat of the Turk meant France could be next. Revoking the Edict of Nantes was a strike for the faith and way of attracting Catholic princes back under the influence of The Sun King. Leopold might have driven back the infidels but as master of continental Europe he had a conflict: power and conscience; how could he reconcile his religious ideals with his political ones? But he fought Louis because the French king was the greatest challenge to his power, whether or not he had theological dilemmas. The wrestle for power superseded everything. From differing interests, states with differing religions joined against the burgeoning power of France. This was the backdrop to the Battle of the Boyne.

On a warm serene summer's day in 1690 the competing forces finally met on Irish soil. The move towards war on the island had been building up over the preceding years; now it seemed the moment had come, though expected, but still causing shock and fear. News travelled slowing along the roads and lanes from the capital. Peaceful here, but beyond the line of the northern horizon the European powers were holding their tournament, jousting for European supremacy. In the mist of dawn on that Tuesday morning, a rosy sun rising over the island, the fishermen started about their activities, casting their nets; the farm labourers took to their fields and plots. It was like any idyllic summer day – calm.

Faraway, drums were beating mingled with the sound of feet and hooves, signs of battle nearing. Then it seemed the gates of hell burst open as the bombardment started: the thunder-sounding cannon fire followed by a shrieking whistle, then earth-shaking thud and ear-ringing silence – for those still alive; quickly followed the survivors' screams of pain. As the morning progressed the Williamite army made it across the eternally-flowing River Boyne to a mêlée of gunpowder smoke and high pitched popping of musket and carbine and the clash of steel. One part of the battle became memory for some young men from this place; for others it was a place where memory died. But on that fateful day word of the bloody events had not reached their homes, where families waited anxiously. They did not know that the Danish Guards had crossed to the south bank, only defended by Dungan's Dragoons. Heavily outnumbered they fought loyally for their colonel. The Jacobites lost the battle but little changed for the little people. The war dragged on for a number more years until it was lost. William had long returned to the continent, the epicentre of his power struggle.

The Grand Alliance carried on, leaving behind the provincial disputes between victor and vanquished, while the strength of France kept potential enemies as allies. Common enemy creates the means for union, an ethical front on how wars should be fought; somewhat less, brutality does not change cause or true motive. However much moved by the philosophy of the Enlightenment or the evolving concept of European identity, what truly drove the rulers

and elites of the continent was the same as it had always been. That did include the reality of making peace. And the people here did enjoy a subdued peace when yet another treaty was signed – as many as there were wars – the peace of Ryswick: the settlement to end the war that had fought its cause on the periphery of Europe, a westerly island peripheral to its main concerns, and those distant colonies of North America. Wars are fought where interest is served: peace sued for when interests are best ensured by peace; whichever is judged to be the better. The unity of alliance fails when interests differ. Savoy made peace, weakening the resolve of Spain and Austria. William of Orange saw the value of peace as his British subjects and parliament became weary of the cost of war. The Sun King too was inspired to seek peace and even make territorial concessions: peace was needed to prepare for the next conflict, over the throne of Spain with its vast overseas empire.

Partition was negotiated: the child Joseph Ferdinand, electoral prince of Bavaria, grandson of Leopold, would become king; but he died aged six; then it was proposed that Louis' son, Grand Dauphin Louis, would receive Spanish possessions in northern Italy and Archduke Charles, youngest son of Leopold would have the rest. But Leopold wanted above all the territories of Italy, it did not suit. But one peace can open the way to another war. And at Karlowitz the Holy Roman Emperor made peace with the Ottomans, removing the threat to his eastern borders from marauding Turks. Now his interests could be better served by conflict not diplomacy, the decision always decided by strength. The ailing Charles II's preference could be challenged on the battlefield instead of in the conference room. The logic of power makes war unavoidable, eventually. So the armies of Europe went to war again, all for the balance of power.

Pamphlets soon became kindling for the hearth, their paper and ink rising in wisps of smoke from the poor cabins hereabout. And as the years of war passed, origins and purpose was lost, until a peace seemed to settle the matter once-and-for-all. Peace was confusingly made by myriad treaties between individual powers, all satisfied or resigned to how the terms served their interests. From this hill the watcher would look more anxiously for pirate ships in the bays. For those who put their hope in it, the prospect of a Jacobite fleet faded farther beyond the horizon as the years passed. Like the Dutch, the people of this land knew what is decided is decided without them. Then, the balance of power is always tipped against the weaker. This drives the weaker to try and become stronger.

Prussia invaded a German state called Saxony, but it seemed unimportant, the global preliminaries not seen as connected, if even heard of at all. Yet the reality of that international war would impinge, an alliance formed between the Prussian ruler, Frederick II, and the British government. An unsettled air fell upon this place; the poorest would suffer when rumours that the masters' master would force a union under Westminster rule. He pitted his armies against a strong alliance of once-bitter enemies that surrounded his kingdom, which made him feel like a traveller on the road, afraid of being set upon by brigands. An empire would grow out of the need for security created by insecurity. But at first the war of desperation did not go well for Frederick; many must have forecast his imminent collapse. Old enemies wished it, since this rising power threatened them and they would forgive each other their differences. And Frederick despaired, contemplating suicide. Prussia was not yet to meet its nemesis: the war nations seek to avoid but have to fight to prevent it, to discover that that war is the one.

The gazettes here could not follow the losses and gains of the impetuous Prussian king, but sometimes chance can disguise the unchangeable course of human history. In the wild

eastern wilderness of Russia the empress died and her successor switched loyalties to Prussia, saving it from what was looking bleakly like utter defeat. Such good fate dispels any feelings of despair, and the victory so desired becomes certain destiny. But the Russian-speaking Peter III did not last, deposed and by his own wife Sophia Augusta Frederica, to die in suspicious circumstances. His usurper switched again, favouring Austria to Prussia. Once again the Prussian leader despaired: victory impossible without Russia as ally. Peace is always preferable to war when the latter means utter defeat – best to save something. At Hubertsburg a treaty was signed. But Frederick must have believed fate had looked favourably on him once again. Though his army was much reduced and his treasury he had raised the status of Prussia in the eyes of other Germanic kingdoms. Prussia's rise – and ultimate fall – had begun in earnest. But the fate of the Bourbons would be met sooner. They lost their colonies to Britain, but more significantly they would also lose their heads. But the Seven Years War, while it was a winner, left Britain in huge debt; it would not be too long before the consequences became apparent. A treaty in Paris brought an end to that conflict as here people began looking forward to spring and its promise.

While Europe stood at peace the rest of the world did not. When the continental armies were at rest, what happened elsewhere was no irritant to conscience. Across the Atlantic Pontiac tried to make gain from French losses but would have to settle for a buffer zone between his people and the colonists; buffers are what we settle for, and contain at least a temporary illusion of security, what is really sought. For George III peace was cheaper than war, and so a promise that tribal lands beyond the Appalachian Mountains were safe; a guarantee his colonists would ignore. Reports arrived that war had broken out between the Anglo-Saxon settlers and the Indians. Divisions between crown authorities and settlers were growing. The settlers were defying their king, pursuing their own interests at the cost to the crown. Yet the settlers would argue it differently, motivated by rival interests. And the dispute grew over the years until it became the Declaration of Independence, soil and money transformed into a noble ideal.

Here, throughout the Seven Years War in Europe, the eagles still wheeled over the landscape from their craggy eyries as they had done for thousands of years. And the foxes still crept into the village to scavenge, as their ancestors had done, the high-pitch ow-wow-wow-wow breaking the quiet of the night. They did not instil the terror of wolf's howl, and fewer in living memory could recall that creature's nearing presence; perhaps some lived in the wild mountains, much still covered in dark forest.

As those far-off struggles continued life here carried on with its normal patterns. The labourers herded the cattle for their masters and tended their own small plots if they were privileged to have had such possessions, becoming increasingly dependent on the potato, and left their sheep to graze on the rocky common. Seasonal work in the long summer days brought them much needed cash, but the prospect of leaner times was present in the fearful shadows of the mind. In this long age of peace, landlords ruled with absolute power, some benignly others not. At such times wars seemed like things that happened only in foreign parts. The castles were crumbling, inhabitants recalled the one still standing only a few years before, but had forgotten the origin of those tower houses. Some educated men, antiquarians, speculated that King Henry II had constructed them in the 12th century. Others were convinced they had been built by the Danes or Ostmen, the place having a Viking connection and legend of buried treasure. Little remained of the defences and ditches that centuries before had surrounded the village, attacks from rebel tribes from the mountain longed ceased.

Occasionally a column of redcoats would march into the village, led by an officer on horseback, to carry out the writ of a magistrate or in pursuit of raparees. Sometimes a cart would accompany the soldiers with the corpse of an executed pirate to be hung on the rocks offshore – a warning to those who might consider similar enterprises. The poor fishermen who plied their trade in the waters about witnessed that the lure of riches from piracy had its drawbacks, fishing a less dangerous occupation.

It was to such a scene that the author of the 18th century prophecy arrived, outside a world in conflict, in this place a relative calm. I can see it: the traveller on the final stage of his journey to the small town nestled beneath the hill at the tip of the bay, now poor but renowned as a place of refuge in times of pestilence where many inhabitants lived into their hundredth year. The journey on a late afternoon in autumn would give him time before darkness obscured the road, an ancient highway travelled since Celtic times and before with the constancy of the hills ahead.

Leaving the noise of Dublin behind he would follow the quiet shore through the duns and marshes, always alert for robbers and a cudgel under his cloak, his horse splashing through rivers that dissected his path. The sight of Merrion Castle would give little comfort to the nervous mind. The rough dusty uneven surface on which the horse trod slowed the rider down, who noted the sun crossing the skies towards evening. Another traveller on horseback, a lumbering cart, a carriage of a well-too-do, or a solitary walker, would still elicit a welcome. It would be lonely, mostly the company the birds overhead and the only conversation for his thoughts the wind whistling in the rushes and the waves breaking on the sands.

Playing children might run alongside him as he passed the cluster of cabins and a small Catholic chapel at Booterstown; leaving behind the tiny village, the road rising upwards from the shore, brought him to the welcome of Blackrock, looking forlorn in the loss of summer, the bathers and visitors returned to the city for another year, the villas of the gentry closed up and their owners retired to their townhouses for the winter. Those fine houses, looking impressive yet somehow forlorn, in the approaching twilight, walled demesnes behind high gates: the brewer's property, Peafield Cliff, looking down on the strand; work on the grand entrance to the newly planted avenue to Mount Merrion, residence of the fitzwilliams, fortunes regained a century before; along the road the walls showing the trees and rooftop of Frescati House, mute in solemn expectations of events to come. He could have detoured to the poor village, stopped at the Sign of the Ship tavern, to the welcome of afternoon revellers and the inviting smell of tobacco and alcohol. But that was not his destination.

On he went, on the now-rugged coastline to his left huddles of fishermen cottages, to his right stubbled country fields and pasture. With a glimpse of the sea through hedgerows came also the cry of seagulls. The route then descended into a sandy cove with a terrace of various sized dwellings, a tavern and a coffee house, quiet to the outside world, only sound those raucous birds fighting over fish discarded on the pier of the town harbour. This was a place settling in for the night and the traveller's journey was not ending here, but passing through, upwards out of the little community. The winding road looked down on the ruined Carrickbrennan Church and its graveyard, the sound of a rushing river nearby over which he had crossed minutes before, beyond that the towers of Monkstown Castle, candlelight dancing on the window panes, to the west the sun moving towards the mountains.

He would not be calling on the hospitality of the genteel family, but where the road forked keeping to the right. And in the fading daylight he could now see this hill more prominently, silhouetted against the greying sky. Over the bay to the east an almost-full moon was rising to give some guidance. The sound of a brook signalled he was nearing the stone bridge at Swan's Hollow, and he knew he wasn't far from his destination: through the towered entrance, along the darkened stony street, with its ruined churchyard and sleeping cemetery, ancient tower houses and simple cabins, to the inviting lambent glow from The Red Cross. Later, inside by the heat of the open fire, filled with a meal of roast mutton and warmed by the tavern's best claret, he could forget far off wars, most recent the defeat of Frederick II at Kunersdorf, the Prussians slaughtered by the enemy artillery, twenty thousand of them lying dead on the battlefield by sunset. No doubt in that inn some whispered of French invasion, in favour of or feared, but news of the naval Battle of Lagos would scupper any possibility of that.

The Treaty of Paris that ended the Seven Years War in Europe did not mean the end of the power struggle for Europe. Another war led to another peace: then all over again. The inhabitants here heard of a Russian queen called Catherine, a queen who had murdered her husband and taken the throne – as well as many lovers. The salacious details – true or false – were more gripping than the mundane facts: a person driven by need for power, yet advocating the ideals of enlightenment; influenced by Locke, correspondent of Voltaire, defender of Diderot and the *Encyclopédie*. But she concluded her intellect did not agree with such ideas when events showed they threatened her interests. She defended the rights of Christians in the Ottoman Empire: while she put strict controls on Roman Catholic authorities after the partition of Poland, where she had championed the anti-reform movement. To the simple superstitious peasants here, with their devotion to the remote papal figurehead in Rome and more homely local Marian devotion with its mix of Celtic paganism and Catholic theology, Catherine the Great was a queen of the rich over the poor. Yet she was a contradiction too. The cotters below, unable to get by on their tiny patches of land and rising rents making hunger inevitable, heard about this queen who granted rights to her subjects living under serfdom, and how those subjects loved her. But it is war that shows everyone's true motives, where their consistent and true energies are directed.

The empress followed on the policies of the earlier tsar, Peter the Great. Fear must have gripped her belly when she pictured the same possible fate, as it must have his when his army was defeated at the Puth. The tsar was almost captured, with terrifying images of being paraded through the streets of Constantinople, a prisoner in a cage. Catherine would have shuddered at such a thought too, a lesson in what was truly important. Peter sued for peace but had to give up Azov and other gains on the Black Sea. And even though he went on to win the Great Northern War he was always embittered for those losses. Yet he had triumphed over Charles XII's ambition to break Russia into a mass of tiny principalities. That spectre was also joined by the vision of fighting a war on two fronts, so he had sought to appease the Ottomans, though their fear of him was said to be greater than his of them, anxiety of a Russian fleet arriving on the Bosphorus palpable on the streets of Constantinople. Poltova lifted his spirits: the Swedes defeated and the Ottomans neutral. When you appear to be on the ascent you make friends. Moldova and Wallachia saw the rise of Russia as opportunity to throw off their subservience to the Sublime Porte. But they lost their nerve and chose to stay loyal to their Turkish overlords. Peter the Great needed the support of the Christian provinces: without them he was defeated at the River Pruth, almost ending up a chained bear.

Catherine the Great pursued the same aim – access to salt water – gaining strategic locations on the Black Sea, and keeping them. Her forces occupied Azov and Taganrog, followed by defeat of the Turks in Wallachia and Moldova, bringing Moscow closer to Constantinople itself, a situation of growing alarm to the Ottomans. She had returned Russia's frontiers to the Dnieper, strategic trade route for Russia. Nonetheless, the war with Turkey would continue: the Turks still controlled the estuary where the river flowed into the Black Sea. After a number more years of conflict the sultan decided it was time to make peace, which served best the chances for his empire. Out of the negotiations Catherine was given Azov, Taganrog and Kerch and allowed unfettered access to the Black Sea. In addition, she acquired the southern delta of the Dnieper, and the mouth of the river itself. The regional balance of power had shifted to Russia. Russia was also rebuilding its fleet, and with the help of Britain was able to bring a naval armada from the Baltic to the Mediterranean. Britain's reasoning was that to help Russia was to hinder France, its arch enemy and ally of the sultan. But the success in the Mediterranean with the destruction of the Ottoman navy among other successes began to worry friend and foe alike – Russia was becoming too powerful.

Austria did not want her penetrating deep into the Balkans, or to seize Constantinople. So Catholic Habsburg Empress, Maria Therese, even contemplated forming an alliance with the Ottomans – the old enemy. Catherine's friend Frederick the Great was uneasy too. While he did not relish Russian dominance of Poland, he was even less sanguine about Russian dominance of South Eastern Europe. But at this stage of his life he was weary of war. And if Austria allied with Turkey and went to war against Catherine, Prussia would be dragged in because of treaty obligations. He proposed Poland be carved up between the three powers: Prussia, Austria and Russia. Marie Therese was the slowest to take up the proposal. Having by this stage entered into a secret treaty with Constantinople she found herself in a dilemma: either she agreed to a treaty with Frederick, a Protestant who stole Silesia from her, and the Orthodox usurper Catherine, or she abandoned the Ottomans. If she maintained her alliance with Turkey she risked fighting a war against Russia without the support of any other European power: she chose to renege on the treaty with Constantinople. England, France, Sweden, Spain condemned the partition, but none had anything to gain from going to war over Poland.

There would have been little stir when the French emperor, Louis XVI, summoned the Estates-General, the first time in almost two centuries, to debate the country's crippling debt. It would have seemed as insignificant as the outbreak of the first Xhosa war. The occasional black face might be seen in the village, a slave accompanying his master from one of the large houses in the district. To the local peasant they would appear exotic, though cowed in their subservience and fearful of the local population as if they would be devoured, that their new world was inhabited by cannibals.

But long forgotten were accounts from that dark continent, news of those first Europeans to land on what would become known as the Eastern Cape. Those initial contacts followed a familiar pattern: initial tentative contacts, suspicious but curious, outwardly courteous yet instilling a perception of overwhelming threat on the part of the indigenous population. Dutch settlers mundanely established a small trading station to supply ships rounding the Cape en route to India. And that might well have been the extent of their ambitions – commerce – no other prescience of how the future might unfold.

Gradually more came to settle the coastal area, eventually moving farther into the valleys for land to graze cattle and grow crops. The Cape Peninsula, swept by north-west gales from

the Antarctic in the winter months, was a harsh environment. The summer months offered little rain, making it inhospitable to many types of agriculture. So the settlers moved east, where the climate was more welcoming: summers with rain and milder winters.

In time this course brought them to the Great Fish River, where they encountered the Xhosa tribe. The process was gradual, in time with the increased need for good grazing land tensions developed, and cattle raiding became a feature of the relationships between the indigenous and settler peoples. What followed came to be called Africa's Hundred Years War, although it was characterized by expediency with some native tribes siding with the colonists. The settlers found the Xhosa to be experienced fighters, gained in earlier conflict with the Zulus to their north; now they had a more alien enemy to contend with. The constant push on territory – physical encroachment, a growing sense of entrapment, claustrophobic insecurity – only needed an excuse, and become a defining trigger to commence the inevitable.

But Africa might as well have been out among the stars. Closer, yet still remote, came word from France: the citizens of Paris had risen up against their king, the king – some might recall – who had supported the cause of the North American colonies in their struggle for independence from the British crown; a move inspired by revenge for his earlier defeat. Some of the poor might have been filled with hope by such news, and also those gentry influenced by the enlightenment: others felt uneasy and threatened. People took what they wanted from it. Supporters took courage from the taking of the Bastille, that symbol of absolutist monarchy, the prison's demolition well under way when the earliest accounts of that first day reached here, with images of the governor's head on a pike paraded through the narrow streets of Paris.

Pamphlet and word of mouth brought the latest instalments: the ancient regime was swept away, though the king still resided in his palace at Versailles, but the towns and countryside belonged to the ordinary people. The small landholder and poor cotter would have understood the fear, when rumour spread that the aristocracy had hired brigands to destroy the crops in the fields if they could not collect their feudal dues; payment of tithes to the Established Church meant they could identify with the poor of France. The wealth of the Catholic Church hierarchy would have been understood: while essentially without ascendancy privilege the priest could still become comfortable with the dues owing on his pastoral duties. Yet, did they all feel comfortable with the direction of the French Revolution in the months and years following the fall of the Bastille? Their faith was simple, to many of the enlightened they were superstitious and irrational, but to them that faith was integrally part of what they were. They had their heroes, from Cuchulainn to Sarsfield, but would have been tested to where their true loyalties should lie as the revolution in France progressed. Subversive pamphlets secretly passed hands in the taverns. The Rights of Man issued by a national assembly in Paris, declared that all men are born free and have entitlements to live their lives in such a manner they see fit. The nation was the source of all sovereignty, not an individual such as a king. This would have chimed with those who dreamed of a free Catholic Erin.

But French peasants of the Vendée felt less resentment towards their nobility and grew hostile to the direction of the revolution, especially those who did not benefit from the sale of Church lands. When a person's symbols and beliefs are attacked so too is any power they might possess. Many a Catholic peasant here could identify with the struggle of those rebels of the Loire, people who rose in anger against the closure of local churches, the seizure of sacramental vessels and ban on the placing of crosses on graves. The French peasants took

their trusty farm implements and massacred where they could the patriots of the new order, having no faith in the new calendar of change. But those who mete out revenge can have it meted out against them: the insurrection was met with homes and farms burned, crops destroyed and villages razed. A young revolutionary general by the name of Hoche would bring the rebellion to an end.

Europe moved towards war, the Bourbon royal family prisoners, but some must have wondered why war hadn't begun sooner, that the monarchs of Europe had not moved quicker to crush revolution against a fellow-sovereign. Leopold II, Holy Roman Emperor, had not embarked on war to save his sister, Marie Antoinette, the wife of Louis XVI. The Austrian leader was a cautious ruler, a quality that perhaps slows the development towards conflict, though does not change that ultimate consequence of the struggle for power. Furthermore, Leopold was an enlightened thinker and had looked sympathetically upon the revolution of 1789, believing his brother-in-law should try and achieve the best compromise possible. But no one truly desires compromise when power is the issue; the revolutionary government in Paris did not, nor did the monarchs of Europe, power the only thing we genuinely fight over. Those who hold power show their good nature, so to keep it: those who want power show their bad nature to get it. Observers impatiently await war, not knowing the process can be slow. As the 18th century entered its final decade, the omens were looking bad, but the armies were still tardy about marching on to the battlefield. War was not the objective, only the ultimate means. Austria found Prussia only lukewarm in its commitment to conflict with France. Russia hostile to the revolution still preferred to make gains while the western powers fought France, and maritime Britain had no interest in entering the continental quarrel. Self-interest made them all reticent, for the time being. All this had added to Leopold's reluctance to act. In time, war would come.

The emperor was dead the newspapers here reported, to be replaced by his son Francis I, the item carrying very little weight to those in the village below. Then came reports that the French Assembly had forced the Louis XVI to declare war on the new emperor. Paranoia and fear often gets the better of reason, often with disastrous consequences, undermining our objectives. The outbreak of a distant war would last twenty years. The papers reported that Prussia had entered the war by virtue of its treaty obligations to the Habsburgs. In time monarchies were drawn into the war against France. Whatever their enlightenment credentials, the execution of fellow-sovereigns showed the greater ideal to be one of self-preservation – life. Britain too entered the conflict, from a position of aloof diplomacy, finally choosing war when interests were under threat. Pitt had no interest in who ruled France, but did about the stability of the continent.

People who get into power are almost always those who desire power, the motive for their actions. In the village people heard chilling accounts of what was taking place. Those who did not want to believe chose to deny; those who did, didn't need any proof anyway. In Paris they squabbled over policy detail, but they had to retain the virtue of the Revolution by any means necessary, a view held with all sincerity. The air of suspicion and repression spread like a plague. Moral outrage at the death penalty had to be qualified so thousands could be sent to the guillotine to save the state from foreign reactionary forces and dissent from within. Ideals count for nothing when you are dead – power is what keeps people alive – so cannot be let go, at any cost. Fear of defeat and death is a greater motivator than preservation and victory of principals. Intellectuals can be more dangerous than sans culottes: they can have eloquent, educated arguments that make violence more palatable.

When the rebels assembled with their pikes that balmy May night, revolution was on their side. The United Irishmen, inspired by the revolutions of North America and France, were emancipating poor Catholics suppressed under British rule. But the oppressed can become the oppressor. Icons of Catholicism that in one land were the icons of tyranny, in another were the sacred relics of a golden age before enslavement, symbols of hope in the future. The rebels were filled with excitement and expectation. The people's metaphorical shackles were to be removed and, in control of their own destiny, they would be free at last. Nonetheless others must have felt nervous uncertainty, like the fear felt by the French revolutionaries when Brunswick made his chilling statement. But immediacy of fright passes, replaced by rage.

As darkness descended they gathered in the village under the shine of a waxing moon, waiting for the signal to march on the capital. They would take the Dublin Road, passing the big barn. Dawn would bring them to the gates of the capital and to freedom. The big houses in the vicinity, whether the proprietors were sympathetic or hostile, remained silent as there was no militia or yeoman in the area to protect them. For these people the night was tense and fearful. But they would not be harmed that night, when victory is so tantalizingly within grasp magnanimity can be generously shown. The rebels wanted to take the symbol of British oppression, Dublin Castle – their Bastille. More patriots were said to be marching from the mountains in Wicklow to join the revolutionary army. The entire city was surrounded by a crescent of freedom fighters. Nothing could stop them: all they awaited was the signal. But the signal never came, though they waited and waited. Then confusing word came down the Dublin Road in the early hours of the morning: the mail coach to Wexford had passed through Loughlinstown, passed the militia camp there, which was believed to be full of United Irishmen. The coaches that departed each night for different parts of the country were to be ambushed just outside the city. Scouts listened out, anxiously hoping that they would not hear the sound of hooves and the coachman's cry and lash of the whip, and see the lanterns on the carriage through the hedgerows as it approached. When they did hear it, they knew the plan had failed and did not know what to do but disband.

As the sun rose, casting its orange rays down the village street, straight between the ruined or dilapidated castles on either side, the rebels were already dispersed, their pikes and firelocks gone, their cockades removed. The crown of their own local sovereign was long gone, only memory, but the people knew that a crown without real power was a sham, with as much writ as King Stanislaus or even the sovereign of this realm.

In France, the revolution that overthrew a king would get itself an emperor. Before long the young military genius who had brought France so much glory would be appointed first consul. Much hope was placed in the accounts of his achievements, the saviour that would bring the rule of King George to an end. Though by autumn the rebellion in Ireland had been crushed and the following year the War of the Second Coalition began. This place settled into a broken peace, but the reminders of a foreign war were now present: on this hill the semaphore tower, to send messages back to the authorities in Dublin, communicating an invasion from the sea or rebel approach from the mountains to the south, and the Martello tower and battery on the island below. Life resumed its normal cycles, as if nothing had ever happened and blind to the signs of that overseas war.

That war followed with campaign after campaign, reversal of victory or defeat. By the end of 1813 it was approaching the endgame. Although many here would not have been familiar in detail with the map of Europe, they knew it had been radically changed since the

revolution and the crowning of the French emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte. French nationalism had radically changed the borders of the continent, annexing the Netherlands, large parts of Germany, Switzerland and Italy. Napoleon dissolved the ancient title of Holy Roman Emperor, though the French Empire was fated not to last as long. To have had everything and to have lost everything is the greatest bereavement. France would be mourning that loss forever, and forever trying to regain it, the lost prestige of power. The procession of campaigns and battles, peace treaties and truces – and their breaking – showed no sign of what the future held for the French people.

Christmas 1813 fell on a Saturday, a winter that was particularly cold, with considerable snow and ice. The inhabitants went about their festive pastimes as in any other year. On Christmas Eve, the unlit street of the village was brightened by a blanket of white, as more silent flurries added to the existing layers. The castles stood mute, long unoccupied, unneeded for defence. The dwellings in the village were in darkness, but for the occasional candle flickering behind a pane of glass or kink in a shutter. Some sounds of revelry came from the taverns. The laughter and cheers faded as the path from the village wound through the rocky commons. The sounds had faded to silence by the time the path came to the natural harbour overlooking the island with its ancient ruined church and new Martello tower and battery. A lantern glimmered on top of the parapet of the tower, a soldier on watch, otherwise no sign of life. Up here above the commons, the signalmen in the semaphore station kept the fire alight, although that night the low cloud and the blizzard would obscure any messages.

Autumn 1813 had brought accounts from Leipzig of a huge battle, on a scale never seen on the continent before. Napoleon – who once had an aura of invincibility, that attraction of the powerful, had been defeated and had fled back to France. Word was, his empire's days were numbered. Napoleon had sought an armistice, but the powers pitched against him declined; a sense of victory makes compromise irrelevant. The coalition was poised to invade France early the following year. Those young rebels who fifteen years before had gathered in the village with their pikes, could see a just master in Napoleon Bonaparte: an emperor born of revolution now reconciled with the pope and Roman Catholicism, the idealism dazzling the murky reality.

There were no outward sign of events changing, but at Christmas the former chief secretary in Dublin set off from his home in London, through the wintery night to the port of Harwich to catch a frigate to Europe. On the 3rd of January 1814, with a breeze lifting the coastal mist, Castlereagh set sail across the North Sea. In Europe events were unfolding, Paris would soon be in the hands of the coalition. January passed into February and winter became spring. Meanwhile diplomacy continued, while the continental war drew to its conclusion. Castlereagh sought the establishment of a German confederation and treaty that would bind all to the principle that mediation rather than war was the way to resolve disputes in the future – and for all time. The Big Four signed a treaty with the aim of keeping France subdued.

Many poor of this land still loved an aristocrat, a king and more so an emperor; so Napoleon was their natural saviour, as he had sought to save Catholic Poland from Russian domination. But principles are never without baser motives when it comes to war; it is those motives that eventually bring all to meet their nemesis. All alliances are grounded on what best serves interest. Tsar Alexander I, professed ally of Napoleonic France, saw his economy being destroyed by the trade embargo against Britain that had been demanded by the French emperor. The tsar refused to comply, so Napoleon had to take on Russia, to force Britain to

negotiate. His own adage came true: an empire dies from indigestion. He ignored the risks, like Charles XII had done before him and Hitler would after him, and took his Grande Armée across the vast plains towards Moscow, with crops and homesteads burned by the retreating Russians so to deprive the invaders of food and shelter. Moscow burned before their eyes as the winter set in; the soldiers starving, the retreat was sounded.

Yet when the Napoleonic Wars came to an end, the event carried little impact in this small community living by farming and fishing. The wrangling at the Congress of Vienna probably held little interest: the interests of power can often make no sense to the poor, who do not see it as serving their needs, so they carry on with their lives until circumstance bring occasion for them to believe they have the means to chart the course of their own destiny. The uneasy question of a unified Poland under the protection of the tsar was unsettling to the interest of other great powers, as was the question of Saxony and Prussia's desire to keep Austria from having any voice in the reshaping of Germany. To them this was a distant and opaque diplomacy, without having a real significance apart from the occasional rumblings that the rivalries far away in Vienna could lead to renewed war in Europe due to the deep divisions among the Chaumont allies, differences encouraged by the French negotiators. And rumours of a threatened duel between them would seem as inconsequential as a brawl outside a tavern in this little place.

It was a milder winter, Christmas 1814, and the danger of renewed war had somewhat eased. And as 1815 dawned no stories of secret alliances spread through the village, no talk of the old enemy France now in alliance with Britain and Austria pitted against Russia and Prussia. And while treaties were agreed, the developments carried no sense of disquiet, so far away from the Habsburg city of Vienna where unease was mounting over the Eastern Question. Exotic names – Wallachia and Moldavia – were being infiltrated by Russia, which might give the tsar a stranglehold on the Danube. Austrian prophetically saw in St Petersburg's support for nationalist movements among the Romanian, Serbs and Greeks the collapse of the Ottoman Empire – followed inevitably by their own multi-ethnic state. It would be many generations before they saw the fulfilment of those predictions.

But 1815 did bring renewal of war, Napoleon once again in charge of France. His escape from Elba brought hope among followers here that revolution would spread once again, that the pikes hidden away could be brought out one final time – for victory. In Vienna the great powers had successfully concluded agreement branding slavery as unworthy of a Christian state. But the term 'civilizing mission' in the text of the final Declaration would have sinister repercussions, concealing later colonial expansion under the cloak of morality – a very European trait – and the ability to bend the principal of abolition to fit the needs of self interest. The conclusion of the congress saw the internal power balance between the powers shift: Austria was the biggest winner, guaranteed to dominate the new German confederation, and to be the bulwark against restlessness of the masses. But as soon as the ink dried, as the powers hastily concluded their negotiations, the armies were on the march again across the roads of Europe; the denouncement on the field of Waterloo, on that hot June day. Whatever difference still divided the parties were quickly set aside when faced with a threat from the old common foe.

Then news: Bonaparte had been defeated and had fled the battlefield. Later the twice-defeated emperor had been captured for the second time. The allies were now in control of Paris. Negotiations on another treaty had commenced, with the Prussian generals wanting punitive terms against France. But Metternick and Castlereagh counselled against a vindictive

peace, fearful of the dangers posed by the spirit of revenge. France was insistent that she would lose no more of her sacred soil, for Louis XVIII could not rule a stable realm if more and more of its territory was carved away by the victorious powers. France, with a certain strength, was looking more appealing to Tsar Alexander, who was becoming disillusioned with the Hohenzollern-Romanov entente. An alliance with Britain was impossible because of vital conflicts of interest. But the new Bourbon ruler held out some prospect for furthering the interests of St Petersburg, and Russian negotiators spent those hot summer days challenging every exaggerated Prussian claim against France.

Meanwhile, while Capodistria and di Borgo were negotiating his nation's interests, the tsar was spending his time in the company of his spiritual advisor, the prophetess, Baroness Von Krudener, whose mysticism helped give rise to the idea of the Holy Alliance. Though much watered down and received with scepticism, the treaty was signed by the three emperors – Alexander, Francis and Frederick William – with the signatures of all the Christian monarchs of Europe added later, with the exception of the Prince Regent of Great Britain and the Papacy. But Russia failed to protect France from losing territory and paying an annual war indemnity of 700 million Francs, harsher terms than followed Bonaparte's first defeat.

This landscape would retain those physical symbols, the Martello and semaphore towers. Even the names of the greatest figures will yet become ciphers of mythology and legend, fragmented historic tales and disparate lonesome facts. The physical evidence in granite will have a longer life, upon which new myths can be spun.

Whether the 'end' of war in Europe brought any sense of hope in this remote part of the world is unknown, that it was meant to be the birth of a new age where disputes would be resolved without conflict. News arrived of Tsar Alexander's proposal that Russia and Britain jointly worked together to reduce the armies of Europe, and preserve peace across the continent. Some of the optimism must have filtered through, that the days of wars were over. The founding of the Society for the Promotion of Permanent and Universal Peace by the Quakers must have given a belief that the world could change, but unfortunately at the heart of power any desire for peace is coupled with promotion of interest; rulers become undone by their own ambition. And the recipients of peace overtures had suspicions of motive. In the halls of Westminster Castlereagh doubted the tsar's sincerity: Russia retained a huge land army while the forces of Britain, Austria and Prussia were being reduced. No, he suspected Russia really wanted the British navy cuts, something no British government could accept: Britannia ruled the waves, with such might concessions were inconceivable.

At this time, the piers of Dun Laoghaire had not been constructed. The scene along the sweeping shore of Dublin Bay had not changed over thousands of years. Not long after the end of the Napoleonic Wars building of the asylum harbour started, made from the granite of this hill. Blasting shook the bucolic peace, radically altering the physical landscape, while to the east in the city called Aix-la-Chapelle another congress was being convened. A political landscape was continuing to be transformed, more subtly, with rivalries and suspicions being cloaked in the language of diplomacy. Capodistria's proposal of an African Institute where the naval powers could confront the movement of slaves on the high seas was rejected. It was suspected that it was a ploy by Russia to maintain a naval presence in the east Mediterranean and rekindle the concept of the Holy Alliance under the auspices of the 'Alliance Solitaire'. France achieved its objective of reducing its obligations under the Treaty of Paris and Duc de Richelieu re-established the country as a European power, part of the congress system.

The well-to-do often flirt with Liberal ideas, and here consciences were panged with guilt over the sufferings of the quarry workers. Faraway the flirtation with liberal ideas had ceased when the reality meant conceding power: Frederick William III of Prussia turned his liberalism to more reactionary views – abandoning the influence of his friend Alexander – by introducing the Carlsbad Decrees, so deep was the fear of revolution. Here, revolutionary ideas continued to have support among many of the poor and disenfranchised, the embittered and powerless.

Looking down from the hill, the physical marks of history are there, seemingly so permanent but changing unobtrusively, as if nothing was happening at all: as if the carved out quarry and cliffs had always been there. But the scene two hundred years ago would be witnessing change: at the growing number of villas stretching along the shore towards Dublin, eating into more of the verdant farmland; to the line of dwellings in a sea of fields that make up the village, its few remaining castles in ruins; or the island, with its modern Martello tower near the church of an ancient Celto-Christianity. At this time, to the east, in the tense and heated conferences one question was emerging, one that many sought to keep off the negotiating table – rather the bland communiqués of unity to conceal the power rivalries that bring the changes leading to war. The Eastern Question could no longer be ignored. Austria feared war in the Balkans, and blamed Capodistria for the insurrection of the Greeks. Though being Orthodox Christians didn't ensure support from the Third Rome, turning to Britain in frustration at the inaction from St Petersburg. But Russia's own desires would dictate her pace.

By now the asylum harbour was completed and vessels that sought to escape the storms of the bay had a place to take shelter. This rugged carved out hill turned more or less silent. In late November 1827 the season was turning bleak and the northerly and easterly winds swept in. It was one of those ships heading in towards the capital that carried news of Navarino, and the presses of the city were quickly running with the story. Admiral Codrington had led a fleet of twenty four ships from the navies of Britain, France and Russia, as part of an agreement to bring the Turks and Greeks to peace terms. But the Ottoman and Egyptian fleets took the move as aggression and fired on them. In the ensuing battle Codrington was triumphant, wiping out the Ottomans and Egyptians. And the talk across Europe was whether or not this event would mark the partition of the once-great Ottoman Empire.

The following April Tsar Nicholas of Russia declared war on Constantinople, hoping it would be a quick one – it wasn't. The other powers refused to be drawn in, fearful it might lead to the partition of the Ottoman Empire. That became a possibility as the Russian army crossed the Balkan Mountains in the thundery, sweltering heat of summer. But the Romanov ruler was content with symbolic victory. The peace of Adrianople left much of Ottoman territory intact. Russia was soon to realize that her interests, in these circumstances at least – were better served retaining the sultan. If Turkey were to be partitioned, Britain and France might secure a foothold in the Balkans and the Levant. The support of their Orthodox brethren presented labyrinthine problems for Russia. Instead, the tsar chose the status quo: only if the exit through the Bosphorus was threatened would Russia act, as always the bottom line – interest.

It was a hot summer when word arrived of revolution in Paris, fifteen years after Napoleon was finally defeated. Now the replacement Bourbon, Charles X, was deposed. If anyone here had taken any notice of events, even fewer could recall the origins of that event five years before when the newly crowned sovereign had attempted to change the country's

constitution, making ridicule of the Eucharist a crime punishable by death. A pious Irish peasant then might be forgiven for envying such power, and gladly drink to the return of the ancien régime that would proclaim the authority of the Roman Catholic faith, devotion to monarchism not yet fully replaced by nationalism. But the French middle class opposed, wanting to exert more control; power was theirs for the taking. The streets were grabbed by the revolutionaries, barricades erected and the king forced to flee. Charles' apologists here would have paid no attention to reports of his attempts to retain power by dissolving the newly elected chamber of deputies, censorship and the exclusion of the commercial middle class from future elections. Yet why the 'people' had risen, that it had taken such a time, was probably not linked to constitutional conflict arising when the new monarch came to the throne.

As that summer of 1830 passed into autumn the repercussions of the July Revolution rumbled on, like the occasional explosions in the quarry on what was once the slopes of this hill, almost unnoticed to the accustomed and the disinterested. If news came by word of mouth or in print, of anarchy in Belgium or an uprising in Poland, little would have been thought of the connections to the abdication of the Bourbon Charles X; or the significance placed upon such subsequent events by the chancelleries of Europe, or possible future consequences. In late August riots had erupted in the streets of Brussels. Nationalistic fervour brought respectable theatregoers on to the side of the mob, going with the spirit of revolution as shops were looted. Soon the talk moved to the question of succession, until order was once again restored – temporarily. The dispute would be settled when the five great powers agreed in London to recognize the independence of Belgium, territory many had seen as acting as no more than a buffer.

The revolt of officers in Warsaw spread to places with unfamiliar names such as Lithuania, Belarus and the Ukraine. But the inspiration drawn from events in Paris would not be enough to guarantee success, outcomes always determined by hard realities. Few would have followed the minutiae of historic events in the Catholic kingdom of Poland. Many would not even have heard of the land at all, or if they had, could not locate it on a map. Those who knew of her saw similarities with their own nation: a country that no longer had any independence. From her partition to the short-lived status of Duchy of Warsaw, she saw fortune change. The Russian, Habsburg and Prussian dogs were hungry to fight over and feed on the carcass of Poland. And after Vienna, a historic event remote to the young here, independence came to an end, though with semblance of autonomy; Russian-dominated Congress Poland had her own constitution, her own courts, army and treasury. But she was not free, for St Petersburg had the real power and withdrew many of the meagre freedoms and ignored the constitution. In 1830 Russia was reported to be planning to deploy Polish troops to help crush the Paris Revolution, which would have been a violation of its constitution. The end of the facade of freedom forced the young officers to take up the fight for freedom.

None who lived below would have heard much about the rise of a kingdom called Prussia, though there were memories of how the Germanic kingdom had saved the day at Waterloo twenty years earlier. Very few would have heard about the Prussia-dominated customs union, the Zollverein. The stuffy bureaucratic business of tariff controls and economic policy planning, the obscure advantages, or not, of such agreements appeared as obscure irrelevancy. Pedantic detail, but so well trumpeted no doubt, that the union was of major economic not political importance would have been lost on the people here, but also on the many poor Germanic folk who inhabited the territories covered by the agreement. Nobody

might have guessed that the exclusion of Austria from the customs union, with her highly protected industries, would have ramifications for Europe – for the world.

Symbols carry great importance, but not when it comes to war: in truth war is always about the cold reality of interest. Though ostensibly it can be about anything – a set of keys. The masts of the troop carrier docked in Kingston harbour was the visible link to a far off war in the Crimea, infantry and cavalry boarding to the cheers of the assembled crowd. The press reported that their cries reverberated off the hills; if so, like any echo, they then faded away. Dublin slums were the recruiting ground for British army and navy. Many from the rural hinterland hereabout enlisted too, taking the Saxon Shilling, what nationalist saw as treachery; and they attempted to turn the imperial war on the shores of the Black Sea into opportunity. Those going to fight saw economic reward, adventure and an opportunity to put a barbarous injustice to right. The papers reported atrocities at the Battle of Sinope, loud calls for action drowning out pacifist calls for restraint. The ‘Massacre of Sinope’ by Russian forces became fact. Perhaps the long peace since 1815 dulled memories, to the advantage of the war party in London.

But the journey of history is indolent, and patterns – simple enough – are spread apart and not always easy to identify. Also, the false reasons nations go to war blind them to seeing those patterns. Power and interest are never admitted as the driving force. The Latin and Orthodox monks that brawled over who should have control of the keys to the Holy Places saw symbols of power in the heart of Jerusalem. For their respective capitals in Europe the struggle was different. Even when rulers spoke passionately about the common bond of religion the historic patterns told a different story. Impassioned soldiers setting sail from Kingstown had not been born in the Russo-Turkish War of 1806, when Russian forces entered Moldavia and Wallachia to prevent a Napoleonic invasion of the region, to which the sultan retaliated by closing the Dardanelles to Russian ships. Few of the young men might have reflected that the war over which power controlled Constantinople was centuries old and continued into their ‘modern times’; the lesson being – how alliances change. A generation earlier Britain allied with Russia defeated an Ottoman fleet at the Battle of Navarino. Only a veteran could remember 1833, when the demon Russian enemy had promised assistance to the sultan in the Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi, in his struggle with Mehmed Ali, ruler of Egypt. The internecine wrestle among the Muslim leaders for a redistribution of power unsettled Britain and France when Russia took advantage and gained concessions on blocking access to the Black Sea, encouraging the European states to promote reform in the crumbling Turkish Empire in an effort to prevent Russian advancement.

It would be understandable that an idealistic young man – Irish, French, Turk or Russian – would have been moved by the impassioned words of his ruler: populist Napoleon III, once president then emperor, social reformer and imperial expansionist, became the champion of Roman Catholicism in the Holy Land, aiming to restore France to its former grandeur; Nicholas I, charging to the rescue of Orthodox Christians and the rallying cry of pan-Slavism, and the hollow defence of Orthodoxy; Sultan Abdülmecid inspiring his troops to defend the long religious and military tradition of the great Ottoman Empire.

As the century passed its zenith Austria was struggling to maintain her position as leader of the Germanic nations, ending in a decisive war that lasted only seven weeks. But the news of the war across the wires and in print took little account of the long history of hostility – hundreds of years – between the two giant rival powers of Europe. Now more and more was being heard about Prussia, considered by the editorials to seek the domination of Europe. The

call of German nationalism had an appeal to the patriotic among many poor and indeed those of the elite or middle class moved by conscience, or perhaps a sense of being psychologically dispossessed within their own society. Yet it seemed the romantic ideals of nationalism had different interpretations, the narrative dictated by the consideration of power: how it was to be retained or gained, the ancient struggle.

On 15 November 1863, King Frederick VII of Denmark died without leaving a male heir, causing a succession crisis. So the crown passed to Christian of Glücksburg, the maternal line. The Danish sovereign also ruled over the autonomous duchies of Schleswig-Holstein, made up ethnically of Danes in Schleswig and mainly Germans in Holstein, a deep source of nationalistic rivalry. The dispute was old and complex, little of its detail would be familiar to the inhabitants here; arguments over obscure duchies would have seemed of little importance. Opaque international treaties made much of legal language and hereditary entitlement, obscuring the clarity of motivation – power. The Germanic Augustenburg family that had renounced any claim to the duchies of Schleswig-Holstein as part of the 1852 Treaty of London, renounced that agreement on the death of King Frederick VII, Frederick of Augustenburg defiantly taking the title of Duke of Schleswig-Holstein.

It was seen, in simple terms, as just another dispute of succession: of who would rule over the subjects. Those who worked the land about here, mined in the quarries or made a living fishing off the coast, understood that condition: Queen Victoria was sovereign over them, ruled on her behalf by the Viceroy in Dublin Castle. In the village the Peelers had their new barracks to impose British rule. Nationalism fervour had its supporters among the folk in these parts, just as it had in Schleswig-Holstein: patriotic Germans wanted the duchies to become a federal German state ruled over by an Augustenburg duke. They were matched by an equally strident Danish nationalism. Protesters, conservative and liberal, took to the streets of Copenhagen demanding that Schleswig be annexed to bring ethnic Danes into the family fold. Impassioned arguments obscured the truth of the dispute as much as the legal ones did. A sense of simplicity united opposing philosophies in a common cause. The new Danish king must have cursed his place in the bloodline, and so too his unfortunate place in history. Outside the palace the crowds called for resolute action. And Christian IX complied with the popular wish: Schleswig would unite with Denmark.

The conflicting interests set the parties on course to war. And interests can make things very complicated, as dangerous for the participants as the spider's web is for the fly. The majority of the German Confederation wanted the Augustenburgs to rule over both duchies, but Prussia and Austria did not, preferring to argue the legal case: all should abide by the international agreements signed. On that basis they went to war.

Rumbles from the continent over the previous two decades were of the struggle between Austria and Prussia; now they were allies. Two days before Christmas 1863 a small Confederal force crossed the border, the inhabitants of Schleswig put up a stiff fight. But Schleswig would put up a fight. Though apparent common purpose can disguise competing purpose, and contain the portents of the next war. For Austria the campaign was an opportunity to undermine Berlin and prevent it annexing Schleswig. She wanted to hamper Prussian victory at either Austria's or Denmark's expense. News of the war gathered over the Christmas season and into the new year. The two powers – now 'allies' – insisted they were acting to enforce international law and not as leading states in the German Confederation or supporters of the Augustenburgs. On those grounds they entered the duchy of Schleswig when Denmark refused to comply with their ultimatum. For the next nine months, to the

outside world, they fought alongside one another as friends: but in diplomacy there is no such thing as friends, only potential enemies.

Meanwhile, Napoleon III was indicating France would support the direct Prussian annexation of Holstein-Schleswig, which unsettled Vienna. Reports seemed to suggest France was angling for another anti-Austrian war, a war the Austrian Empire could not afford to fight. Bismarck had no desire for a war; though he did seek to annex the duchies. For one reason, as independent principalities they could become satellites of the Habsburgs. As in the past Prussia grew stronger on the perception of her own insecurity, and the Schleswig-Holstein issue was critical to that security. But Bismarck could not openly take them for fear of a backlash from the rest of the Confederation and even other European states eager to maintain the territorial integrity of the Danish kingdom. It did not serve his interests to be openly aggressive, so he restrained the Prussian forces from entering Jutland.

The seasons passed, and once again the bare stubbled fields caught the slightly evermore slanting rays of the evening sun. The illiterate heard the reports in the tavern or seated in their cottages, the well-to-do in the new villas and houses read the Irish Times while journeying by train between Dublin and its stretching suburbs: that on 1 August King Christian of Denmark ceded all rights of the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein to the authority of the occupying Austro-Prussian force. The future of the two principalities would be decided at a later date by the German Confederation. The outcome of the war hailed a new dawn of joint hegemony over the German states by the two most powerful of its peoples.

The cadences of ordinary life went on with its humdrum rhythm as events unfolded over the sea. The Danish War became even remoter as the months went by. The Iron Chancellor secretly pursued his plans to annex the two duchies, and also ultimately crush the Habsburgs as leaders of the Germans. Without too much fuss the states moved through the sea mist towards the rocks of war. Proposed diplomatic solutions were rebuffed: Berlin would not agree ceding an inch of Silesian territory to Vienna in return for Prussian control of the duchies. For the Prussian coffers were full and its people increasingly supportive of the nation's growing military prowess, and intoxicated by economic boom.

Gastein was a place unheard of, where it was agreed Austria and Prussia would retain joint sovereignty. With such complex and soporific diplomatic events little of their long term consequences could be foreseen. Sovereignty was jointly held, Vienna ruled Holstein and Berlin Schleswig. No one knew that Bismarck saw the agreement as temporary. To the rustic pace of life here, with all its relative hardships, no inkling was shown that another continental war was about to begin. More so, to all those faraway, in the territories affected by those disputes, it must have been easy to be seduced into the false prospects of peace by scheming leaders, lulled by a false sense of hope.

Prussia challenged Austria for the leadership of the German Confederation. At Koniggratz the matter was settled. With Austria's defeat a sequence of events was set in motion, destination First World War. Austria, driven out as leader of the Germanic peoples, would turn its attentions south-east, to try and keep its prestige and status as a leading power, but sink in the quagmire of the Balkans. While the significance of Koniggratz was unknown, the event like a distant rumble of thunder on a horizon of inky cloud, as farm hands worked in the beating sun to get in the hay. There was concern the storm and rain would make its way to the fields below, cutting short the work, but only a remote concern. The closer sound of a train was more urgent, the dark smoke from its engine marking its approach

from Kingstown. The world was changing: the telegraph using the system of Morse code was carrying news from over the seas in minutes. The old semaphore tower looking down on the fields was no longer in military use. Along the bay in Dublin City, the Electric Telegraph Company was receiving daily dispatches from the rumbling Austro-Prussian War, revealing events of the present but not the future.

While one great power struggle in Europe had come to an end, so too had another in the United States of America. Some years before, the coffin ships had sailed from Dublin Bay, carrying their human cargo to the New World, their departure witnessed from this viewpoint. In less than a generation immigrants to North America would take part in its first civil war. Nearly a century had passed since thirteen colonies, with common purpose, broke away from their fellow Anglo-Saxons. Once again identity had been formed by interest. And in 1861, what had once united them in building the future was dividing them in how it would be governed. The Irish chose their sides accordingly; and they killed and died accordingly. Those tiny islands of genuine humanity were battered by the storms of disingenuous righteousness.

Slavery did not cause the war, its absence could not have prevented it. The paths of North and South had diverged long before the first shot, before famine had driven the population of this island to starvation, to die in the ditch or take the immigrant ship. The South was poor, dependent on the export of cotton, and its plantation owners ruled as kings, their black slaves toiling the fields. With the wealth from the commodity they purchased manufactured goods from the North and luxury items from Europe. The North was rich, urban and industrial; and industry would scar the landscape with the dead and mutilated, in the numbers only progress can provide. They divided also over the conflicting principle of tariffs: the South wanted them low, to keep the price of imported goods down; the North wanted them high, making imported goods more expensive and locally manufactured goods cheaper. And in the virgin lands to the west they saw the means to dominate Washington. On failure to compromise on what was really beyond anything but gesture, North and South went to war.

War is old and savage, with progress made more devastating by technology, Union and Confederate forces in lines, shoulder to shoulder marching the no-man's-land towards each other. As they took those first fatal steps they were met with a wall of solid shot and explosive shell, mangling and vapourizing; then those still standing were met with canister filled with iron balls, cutting down all that were still in their path.

The Irish were there when war began at Fort Sumter as artillery fire shattered the silence of dawn. The exchange of shells at that first battle left no one dead, but technology would kill over half a million before the war ended. The Irish on the Union side fought at Vicksburg, bombarding and starving the Confederates into submission. They died at Saunders Field, their flesh becoming bones in the wilderness of the forest. They fell in huge numbers at Gettysburg over three days of bloodshed, splattered into the soil by cannon and Howitzer.

Letters from across the Atlantic brought word of those who had emigrated, who came to fight in their adopted country's war, having left behind the small cottages and plots of land for a new life – many to die. On this side of the ocean the morality of that civil war was debated. Among the opponents of slavery – high political figures – came the concerns of interest: the price of freedom versus the price of cotton.

Obscure, remote disputes in continental Europe continued, but did not so readily capture the imagination of the people who lived in this little part of the world. The Three Emperors' League would have no apparent relevance to their struggles or prospects. Chancellor Von Bismarck's efforts to consolidate his gains and maintain the power of the new Germany could hardly be seen as any advantage or disadvantage to them. If Europe stayed at peace, so what?

One characteristic of the powerful is fear. Bismarck was concerned that the new Germany could be crushed by a hostile alliance of Austria, France and Russia. As Frederick the Great, who had felt Prussia was like a traveller on the road ready to be pounced upon and killed by robbers, Bismarck was all-too-aware of his nation's vulnerability. The iron chancellor did not realize the longer term consequences of his actions. He was as ignorant of the future as the cottier living in a cabin near the quarry below who eked out an existence as best he could, prayer and hope keeping him going. As for the powerful, they create their own weaknesses.

A new imperial constitution, in a land they had no contact with, did not weigh heavily on people's minds. A complex legal text hailing the birth of a North German Confederation did not exorcise the competing sovereign interests: Bismarck's desire to consolidate and extend Prussia's power did not appeal to Baden, Württemberg or Bavaria. The new constitution ceased to be a constitution, but rather a haggled-over treaty; an amalgam of sovereign territories became an empire. A strange term, Fürstenbund, in a strange tongue, did not imply any meaning to the poor family in its cabin. To the disenfranchised, debate about whether authority should come from a Reich or from a federal council representing the different member states was irrelevant. They saw their own struggles in more simple terms.

But real power lies with the truly powerful. It doesn't matter what any constitution says. Many here would have seen hope in the prospect of Home Rule, if it could be achieved; and not just the Catholic Middle Class, whose interests were suited to a gradual transfer of power. To others a more radical solution was needed: real authority was with the queen, Westminster and their representatives in Dublin Castle; just like in Germany, where the constitutional Federal Council was impotent because Prussia held over 60 percent of the land area and population of the principalities that made up the confederation. Militarily Prussia dwarfed the other states, and no permanent committee to oversee military matters could alter that reality. The island of Ireland was like a German principality. Home Rule would have as much clout as the federal Committee for Foreign Affairs. Bismarck made certain the foreign ministry became the mouthpiece of the new German Empire, at its head – the Kaiser.

There was a sense of peace. Tenants were seeing prospects of greater protection for their tenures. There was little indication of impending war on the continent. Even in the capitals of Europe there was an air of serenity, although the planning for war was surreptitiously under way. While not stated to the public, war was seen in some circles as inevitable; logic dictated so since the defeat of Austria at Sadowa. The balance of power on the continent had changed. At the time Moltke had urged further action against France while the Prussian troops were still mobilized for war. But Bismarck was not enamoured with such a move. It was the question of the Spanish succession that would drive the competition for power in Europe openly on to the battlefield. When news came from Madrid of the Hohenzollern candidate for the throne the French government erupted in rage. It saw the dangers as much as Bismarck saw the advantages. A Catholic monarch on the throne of Spain sympathetic to Prussia would create another front for France to worry about. Napoleon III insisted Prince Leopold of the Swabian branch of the ruling German dynasty renounce his candidature.

Dangerously, in a brief period where peace seemed so assured, France was swaggering under an illusion that its historic greatness was as real in the present – it wasn't. France was dismissive of the Prussian military, that it posed any sort of obstacle to a French victory. The misjudgement made them seek more than the withdrawal of the Hohenzollern Candidate – humiliation. Fuel was added to the pyre, already burning with anti-German public opinion; and so grew the feeling of prowess and power, and desire to humiliate an adversary. France demanded Prussia undertake never to reopen the question of the Spanish throne, pushing all the time.

Bismarck was pleased with the course of events, they were going his way. While the change in policy by Kaiser Wilhelm was a setback for Bismarckian foreign policy, he was rewarded by the French emperor overplaying his hand: this would, as France had threatened, lead to war. For Bismarck, if the diplomatic splat led to war, so be it. In the larger plan, he believed Germany could not be fully united until France was defeated, drawing in the wavering southern German states. It was not the literal editing of the Ems Telegram that brought the sides to war – that was a display of fury and outrage – but that France thought it needed to avenge Sadowa and deserved compensation for the Prussian victory. Their perceived interests, aroused by illusion and megalomania, brought them to war, as always happens when the powerful are in competition.

As night fell on 14 July the parties were on the precipice of war, as that familiar wave of patriotism that precedes war swept through France and Germany. Yet in the southern German states there was mixed sentiment, where there was hostility towards internal foe Prussia and historic sympathy for France. Being one of the German family did not define loyalty; once again, that was interest. The outcome was settled on the battlefield of Sedan in early September 1870, when Napoleon III surrendered and the war virtually ended.

News of these dramatic events came across the wires. Germany would now be fully united under Prussian dominance. There were those in the village and the small farms in the countryside around who looked to France for revolutionary hope. They would welcome the republic that would arise. They would also have seen the name of Bonaparte as the true hope of liberation and freedom. The Protestants of this largely unionist constituency may have felt uneasy about the fall of a monarch. They may have felt more secure if a Bourbon had ruled in Versailles – and continued to.

But Prussia was rising as a power, and nothing can stop such momentum. France thought it was still the greatest nation on the continent, and could not shake off the illusion, fear of reality can be horrifying. France needed to avoid being encircled. And it needed a bulwark on the Rhine, the cordon sanitaire so common a feature of power struggles. It was not so much who would rule as monarch of Spain, but why one candidate was preferred over another. It would not be the technology that caused war, the error in translating a telegram or its deliberate editing, but desire for that one thing as old as the species – power.

The response of other nations on whether to stand back, enter the fray or pressure for negotiated peace was driven by the same. But the degree of support was misjudged. Austria-Hungary was reticent about giving support, now beginning to face the reality that it depended on Germany for its own existence, a weakness that would turn into a strength when dealing with the new German empire. Britain's concern was for its treaty obligations to Belgium, which Napoleon III had imperial designs upon. There was even an aspiration in Westminster that Germany take the place of the Habsburgs as Britain's natural ally against France and

Russia. The United Kingdom's main concern was the near east and its interests there. France was now seen as an unreliable ally, a partner best replaced by Prussia. But this would have drawn Berlin into the near east where it had no compelling interest. A foreign policy that increased the wealth and size of the British Empire triumphed over one based on ethics. Russia could tolerate the aggrandizement of Germany because it served its own purposes in Poland. Although the tsar was uneasy about the Prussian war machine he was more concerned about the overthrow of a fellow monarch and replacement by a republic. Those in the Russian corridors of power were prescient enough to see the longer term bitterness of France against Germany, something St Petersburg could try and use to its advantage. Germany occupied in the west would leave Russia to further its own strategic ambitions in the near east. So France found no support in the execution of its war.

In January 1871, with Paris besieged by the Prussian army, the war came to an end; and with it the Second Empire. Out of the revolution of chaos came the Third Republic. France found itself humiliated in the Treaty of Frankfurt that concluded the war, always the bruised pride of the vanquished – five billion gold francs and the loss of Alsace and Lorraine. The cession of the territory was a greater source of bitterness than any advantage to Prussia for its gain. Bitterness would last and grow. The vanquished never see the peace as permanent: the victor sees the matter as permanently settled. Bismarck saw the French response not so much as about the loss of territory but the bitterness of defeat itself, defeat of a great people; a greatness that would never be regained, though the symbols would be imbued with such passionate meaning. Bismarck's words were prophetic, describing Germany itself half a century later.

The revolt in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the summer of 1875 seemed remote, unconnected to anything here. They could have been provinces in darkest Africa as easily as being part of Europe. That their Slav Christian populations had risen up against their Ottoman rulers was of no importance. Now the Baltic Slavs saw the prospect of freedom from Turkey under the banner of Panslavism, a fervour that had already gripped Russia.

The pursuit of power creates the ironies of history: in this instance rebellion ignited by Austria Hungary, the country with most to lose from the rise of nationalism, with the prospect of Slavs within their territories becoming part of a Greater Serbia allied to Russia and unleashing destructive ethnic forces within the whole of Austria Hungary. This scenario drew the vision of the collapse of the ancient Habsburg dynasty, with the loss of power and most probably their lives. But it could not be agreed what the solution was to avoid this. Some believed the dual monarchy needed to expand into the western Balkans to compensate for territorial losses to Italy; while others argued that this could lead to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which would create chaos in the whole region and destroy Austria-Hungary as a consequence. Emperor Francis Joseph's tour of Dalmatia, acting as the protector of Turkey's Slav peoples was quickly brought to an end, when the consequences became clear, as the population rose up in the cause of freedom. The League of the Three Emperors, what they had in common never overcoming what divided them, set about the quest for resolution. The differences between allies can be as destructive as the differences between adversaries.

Prestige is so often an illusion – illusion of power – and often more dangerous than true power. France opposed moves to make peace. Russia feared that rebuffing France's interjection would force that country into alliance with Britain. St Petersburg did not want the isolation and repeat of the Crimean War. Bismarck was uneasy with the Tsar's insistence that France be drawn into the peace negotiations, content its interests were not undermined as

long as Russia and Austria-Hungary were working together, for the German Empire saw only disadvantage from a strengthening France. At the core of German policy was the concept of the balance of power, keeping the gains Prussia made and that had led to the creation of a united Germany. It favoured a strong Russia and a strong Austria-Hungary, neither of them too weak, nor too strong. What the iron chancellor feared more than was a turn of events that could threaten the Treaty of Frankfurt itself, and the risk that the new Germany could unravel. So often the issues are found deeper than a casual glance upon the surface.

Alliances become enmities: friends become foes. Austria-Hungary and Russia had not yet become enemies over crises in the Balkans. Meeting at Reichstadt the two foreign ministers Prince Gorchakov of Russia and Count Andrassy agreed common stances, where interests merged, and discussed the anticipated war between Russia and Turkey, in which Russia would regain Bessarabia, which it lost in the humiliating outcome of the Crimean War, as well as reasserting itself in the Black Sea. In return for its neutrality Austria would gain Bosnia and Herzegovina; and the aspirations of the Baltic Slavs were bargained away.

As the autumn fields and hedgerows turned russet and gold and the woodlands below lost their leaves, in the Near East Tsar Alexander II was convinced fellow-Slavs were suffering humiliation at the hands of the Turks, a situation that could no longer be tolerated – nor could a rebounding Ottoman Empire, more significantly. When news came through on the feast of St Begnet of the tsar's speech in Moscow calling on God to help Russia fulfil its 'sacred mission' in defence of Orthodox Christianity, nothing was reported about cautioned whispers of reason, the arguer for real interest. Alexander did not want war against the Turks with all of Europe opposed to him. Russia needed German support, and Germany wanted Russia to work in agreement with Austria-Hungary, so an arrangement would have to be reached: Austria-Hungary would gain territory, in return offering neutrality in Russia's war against the Ottomans.

And so the war began, with many thinking Turkey would win. And they did hold up the Russian advance, becoming the heroes of public opinion on this side of the world, atrocities in Bulgaria forgotten. The renewed political support came because of the iconic figure of Osman Pasha, Ottoman commander at the siege of Plevna. But in the end superior force meant Russian victory, and the treaty of San Stefano, and then the Congress of Berlin that tore that up.

The aim of the congress chaired by the German chancellor was to reshape the countries of the Balkans and reverse the gains Russia made from San Stefano. Once again this would be done; once again Russia would be humiliated. After centuries of wars against the Ottomans the Russian people expected something colossal to result from the latest war: a reshaping of the Balkans to reflect Russia's territorial ambitions. The press of Europe hailed the congress a huge success that changed the political reality of the continent. But most participants were dissatisfied, a dissatisfaction that festered. The route to world war was being mapped out, but if it had not been that road it would have been another. It is the destination that is significant; it is the desire for power that determines the destination.

All the parties entered the negotiations to get out of it the most they could. Bismarck had preferred Russia and Austria to be allies and did not want to have to choose between them; not having to, served Germany best. His effort for balance tilted too far towards the former Habsburg enemy. It was a tightrope he could never walk, certain to fall. Strenuous efforts to avoid war can be the very cause of war. Austria was seen as a winner, gaining considerable

territory that further embittered the Slavs of the region. Ultimately everyone gets the war they are trying to avoid.

The congress was a dispute among supposed allies, as is often the case. The League of the Three Emperors was supposed to unite Russia, Germany and Austria under the banners of conservatism and monarchy. But marching under the same banner is no assurance of peaceful co-existence. What divided Russia and Austria was far more critical than what united them: nations' common ground only keeps them united if it does not challenge the vital interests of the individual states. The nations of the league had conflicting goals. Germany, the most powerful of the three, would have to choose which of the other two would be its ally.

The United Kingdom also had vital interests, an earnest competitor of Russia. Its objective was to prevent Russian encroachment on Constantinople and the eastern Mediterranean. Britain had interests in Egypt with the Suez Canal and railway links across Iraq. The question was who would take the spoils of Egypt and the Levant when the crumbling Ottoman Empire finally collapsed.

Far removed from Great Power diplomacy in Berlin, mixed feelings must have been felt by the people in these parts: cynicism, outrage, anger, bemusement, incomprehension. Many emotions could be expressed, but few could see the eventual consequences of the congress taking place in the German capital in June 1878, as smaller nationalities were carved up to suit the purposes of ancient European dynasties, who were to be the arbiter of nationalist dreams, whether they were fulfilled or shattered. Rumania, Serbia and Montenegro – names long forgotten since some older dispute – were allowed to retain their sovereignty. Russia regained Bessarabia, forfeited after the Crimean War. But a Big Bulgaria was split, given the status of an autonomous principality under the suzerainty of the sultan while having its own Christian government and national militia. Rumelia and Macedonia were restored to Turkish rule. Bismarck's old compromise that Russia would dominate the eastern Balkans and Austria the western part was at an end. The march along the road to World War One moved another stage of the journey.

From Africa came word of a crushing defeat of British forces by a Zulu army at a place called Isandlwana, followed by an attack on the small contingent at Rourke's Drift, where a tiny number of British soldiers held out against overwhelming odds. Irish names were among the list of the dead in both battles.

On that cold misty morning of 22 January 1879 a walker on this hill might look down towards Kingstown, with its piers and steamboats, to the birthplace of Lt-Colonel James Henry Reynolds, the army surgeon at the battle for Rourke's Drift. No sense of that distant clash: the firing of the rifles, the stabbing of assegai into red uniform, the heat of high summer in the Southern Hemisphere, the swarming mass of spear and shield threatening to overwhelm. As the winter's day curled towards darkness and the gas lamps of Kingstown began to glow peacefully, like beacons, one of its natives was waiting in the depths of the night for what would be the final assault against them, and possibly the fate of Isandlwana.

But British imperial might would turn the tide of war in the following months, and the king of the Zulus, Cetshwayo, taken prisoner and the campaign concluded. This tribe that had forged itself a great empire was reduced to a vassal. Its independence lost, even with all his caution, Cetshwayo could not change the course of events. Though he had tried. Before the

outbreak of the war, the Zulu king had moved with care, never wishing to aggravate the colonial authorities. He would not send his impi into Natal, a soft target, which would have enraged the government and public opinion in Britain. As long as Westminster was more distracted by the concerns of war with Russia in Afghanistan, his power seemed secure, at least temporarily. Continual encroachment of Zulu territory and designs for a federal system in South Africa, the crushing of indigenous as well as Boer settler power, created for the great Zulu race a deep sense of unease and claustrophobic anxiety. But Cetshwayo was not a primitive savage, uneducated and unsophisticated, an image portrayed by his white adversaries. In his colour he might have been different to any European leader, in his dress and in technological and scientific terms the society he ruled was very different. He acted no differently than a ruler in Europe. He sought to hold on to power, by compromise much of the time. Even when the ultimatum was issued, one he could not comply with, his approach was realistic. Even when the British force crossed the Buffalo River he chose a measured approach. When he ordered his warriors out of his royal capital, Ulandi, he would still not attack the easy target, the white Natal settlements. A defeat of the enemy army in open battle was his objective, strengthening his hand for a negotiated peace – peace and power. There was no difference between an African king and a European prime minister or chancellor.

In that same year the Dual Alliance, negotiated by Bismarck, came into being, an event that probably stirred little passion here, and proclaimed as the ‘organic link’ between Austria and rest of Germany destroyed in 1866 – by Prussia. A decade of alliances, some secret others merely with secret clauses, was coming. No one here would have seen any of the terms in print, with no idea of the ramifications. Austria had played its strongest hand: gaining a formal alliance, which Vienna needed to supplement an Anglo-Austrian alliance against Russia. What it meant, was that Germany would have to step into the breach to defend Austria-Hungary: Britain would not have to, Germany would be fighting Westminster’s battles for it. To the politicians and leaders, and especially ordinary citizens, the inevitable outcome was not foreseen. Although it was inevitable, as the struggle for power, one way or another, always leads to the same outcome – war.

War might have been inevitable, but the final configuration of ally and foe was less than certain, as the influential Russian ambassador to Germany, Saburov, proposed: Germany to stay neutral in a war between Russia and Britain; and Russia would stay out of a war between Germany and France, and respect the integrity of Austria-Hungary as long as it did not extend its influence in the Balkans, something that a growing sense of decline and existential threat made impossible.

Although Germany had inflicted a humiliating defeat on France in 1870, Bismarck was conscious of the need to bandage the wounded pride of the enemy. He gave support to Paris over its colonial expansion into North Africa, bringing France into dispute with Italy over Tunis. Germany stood to gain from French foreign policy turning away from the Rhine and towards the Mediterranean. Yet he would still draw Italy into alliance with Berlin and Vienna – the Triple Alliance. Italy would strengthen Germany’s southern and western flanks in a two-front war with France and Russia. Italy, angry at France, was quick to join the old enemy, Austria-Hungary, in alliance because that was where her interests lay. Mutual suspicions between the two ‘allies’ were to persist, and Rome was quick to point out the defensive nature of the alliance in 1914, when Germany and Austria-Hungary took the offensive in starting the Great War.

Then came news of Alexander II's assassination, and history would speculate whether Russia would have taken a different political path had he survived. Yet the interests of power outlived his death – immortal interests of power – for the real issues fought over in Russia's past were the same as would be fought over in its future. His reign had been remembered as a period of radical reform and reorganization of the army and navy following the Crimean War. But his suppression of separatist causes made him the target of the assassins. Supporting Germany unification was the price Alexander II had to pay for the successful suppression of the January Uprising. But he would have supported Germany at nearly any price to prevent a rerun of the Crimean War.

The League of the Three Emperors had broken but Bismarck wanted to keep on friendly terms with Russia, maintaining the balance of power and keeping down the number of fronts Germany would have to defend. And so the Reinsurance Treaty was signed, so secret that even Germany's now-closest ally, the Habsburgs, did not know about it. With Russia competing with Austria-Hungary in the Balkans, Bismarck feared it would lead to an alliance between Paris and St Petersburg. In the most secretive of the treaty's protocols Germany would remain neutral should Russia intervene in the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, a move that encouraged Russian expansion into the region, and a situation where Vienna would drag its stronger ally into the conflict Bismarck had been trying to avoid. The defining of the problem – desire for power – is simpler than finding a way of avoiding its consequences. Whatever move is made the result is war.

Though a large and thunderous man, even Bismarck's chancellorship could not last forever. In 1890, in a row with Kaiser Wilhelm II, his stewardship of the German Empire came to an end. Leo Von Caprivi succeeded him, and would let the Reinsurance Treaty with Russia lapse and yet fail to forge an alliance with Britain.

Differences, so frequently presented as immutable and indivisible, melt like snow in sunshine with the warmth of expediency. So there was no contradiction when the Third Republic joined in alliance with the autocratic Romanovs. France was no longer an isolated power, and had an ally against Germany, when the two entered their alliance in 1893. Russia was pleased: it gave a freer hand against Austria-Hungary, believing Germany would be too stretched to lend support to its ally. The new alliance would give it opportunity to develop projects such as the Trans-Siberian Railway, thus extending control right across the vast eastern territories as far as the Pacific. French financiers were eager to sell Russian bonds to the French middle class, which would contribute to the eventual war. Not even a brilliant statesman like Bismarck could foresee every eventuality and its significance for the future after he had left office: while chancellor he banned the sale of Russian bonds on the Berlin Stock Exchange in retaliation for Russia imposing taxes on foreign owners of estates in Russia. This affected German aristocrats with estates on Russian territory; so Russia turned to Paris in search of funds. And when Constantinople closed the Straits in its war with Italy, Russian grain could not be exported and the loss of revenue put pressure on Moscow's debt to its French lenders, the bitter irony: their allies actually pushed them towards war in 1914. The Straits had always been their lifeline.

In the secret world of power politics, little but the vague outlines of treaties was known to the wider public. But the confrontation between the Franco-Russian alliance and the Triple was quietly building. As a logical step the German General Staff began to plan for war on two fronts: what was still to their minds a remote possibility, and could so easily be driven from the mind, the Schlieffen Plan was born. But nations can only see the consequences of all

their actions in retrospect, and that's too late. That is why it is so important to see as many of the implications as possible, if the reality we seek to avoid can be avoided.

Tel-el-Kebir must have sounded an exotic place. British defeat of nationalist rebels there meant they were now masters of Egypt. One of their vital aims in the east Mediterranean had been accomplished – defence of commercial interest – the key motive for its policy of reform within the crumbling Ottoman world. Not in contradiction, Gladstone told parliament that indefinite occupation would be against all the principles of Her Majesty's Government, and withdrawal was promised, finally complied with forty years later. Her ally in bringing order to Egypt, France, was disgruntled: the British navy controlled the seas of the east Mediterranean while its army controlled the lands of Egypt. Britain and France would stand on the brink of war over rivalry in the African continent for some more years before they saw that Germany posed to them both.

And as the 19th century moved towards its conclusion the west continued its fight against the barbarous slave trade, the practices it had condemned at the early part of that century. But throughout, all was subject to the demands of interest. When General Kitchener led a force into Sudan, against slavery and to avenge the death of Gordon, he also went in to safeguard the Suez Canal and prevent rival imperial powers moving into the region; selfish motive always present. Modern technology in rifle, machine gun and artillery meant inequality in death: shells raining down to explode on the ground, making shrapnel of red dust and rock, or burst in the air, slashing their victims from above. Those not dead were left to die or helped along the way. It was said the skull of the deceased mahdi who had attacked Khartoum was made into a drinking vessel by General Kitchener, a final act of civilization.

Through the hazy darkness of the chill night the fireworks climbed, then scattered with a bang and fizzle. In the bay the foghorns hooted, while in the Queen's Tavern, where the dead reposed and the living remained mirthful, revellers welcomed in the New Year and new century. A hundred years before it was a feeling of disappointment at failed rebellion, yet hope. Whatever happened, people would go on as best they could. That new century had seen the dissolution of the Irish parliament, that throughout the 18th century assembled in that fine example of Georgian colonnaded neoclassical architecture. It was unclear how these changes would affect the poor living in the village and hamlets, or in isolated cottages scattered about, and hard to think what difference moving the administration of power to Westminster would make. Their lives were always directed by foreigners from over the Irish Sea. So many distant events would, one day, have consequences for them. But the local ruling aristocracy saw their power base being challenged, and at first defeated the bill for union, so enough of them had to be persuaded with incentives. Whatever the arguments, the powerless saw that political unions always favoured the stronger party promoting them. Still, people took what benefit they could, always conscious the powerful were always the greatest winners.

That century had seen huge change to this quiet bucolic place, with the quarrying of the hill transforming its north face from a gentle slope to a steep cliff. The influx of Scots brought underlying resentment from locals, fearing economic dilution. In time the wealthy would begin to build their fine villas on what had once been the feudal common land.

Union had brought the promise of Catholic emancipation, but the ascendancy would not concede it. That would not be gained until Daniel O'Connell; the very elderly would remember him, his monster meetings and the hope he instilled in the hearts of the peasantry.

O'Connell promoted peaceful means: but the logic of his huge support implied violence. The government in London gave in.

The famine had been a dark time, and its blackness grew over the years. Those who could recall remembered when the first signs of the potato blight reached them, and realized the implications – so dependent on this food source – their lifeline turned black and noxious-smelling as revealed by the spade. Here they would not suffer the devastation of the west and south but knew they could end up in the newly-opened workhouse at Loughlinstown, situated in that verdant vale. There famine or fever would take many of them, remains interred in the paupers' grave within the walls. Those experiences had radicalized some, moderated others. But the Fenian cause never gathered enough support. The tragedy of the famine, the cruelty of self-interest – from supporters of the Corn Laws to the opportunism of big Catholic farmers – in its brutality brought improvement in rural conditions. In time the legal position of tenants improved, ultimately leading to the peasant proprietor. For half a century the struggle was for Home Rule, now it seemed as the clock struck midnight that dream was about to come true. Divisions not long past now seemed a distance away, though around here the loyalty to the Parnelites was always strong and rivalries within the party continued. Though none thought the course of constitutional politics would become overshadowed. As silence covered the darkness, festivities finished, the witness on this hill could not tell what the coming century held, that things were to worsen quicker than anyone would have thought.

In the east the new century had already dawned as the New Year dinner party sat down to carve the goose. In the Chinese coastal province of Shandong came another day of deepening bitterness: another day to reflect on the cruelty of nature and foreigners – Christian enemies – resolved to divide the melon. They saw reforms as purely a guise to force commercial dominance. By mid-year China would be in full-blown rebellion, to which the world power would respond: the United Kingdom, Russia, Japan, France, United States, Germany, Italy and Austria Hungary. The rebels would be crushed because China was weak enough to defeat. The threat from the rebellion was strong enough to unite the imperialist power but not strong enough to keep them united; once defeated the titanic rivalries between them re-emerged.

Risings are circuitous in their coming, complex, from the fall in global silver production to the British conquest of Bengal and monopoly on opium growing. But starting with the First Opium War the dispute came down to one simple truth: British merchants wanted to sell their goods, especially narcotics, into China; the Qing imperial government wanted to restrict foreign traders and prohibit opium imports. So they went to war. The western cause found European intellectuals to create the myths they needed. China was a fossilized, backward and conservative race compared to the enlightened progressive western world. A hundred years in the future, as the 1900s expired, the new China had its myths too.

Around the world there were other struggles and visions, rivalries and competition. Aware that modern war was dominated by technology that could kill in mass number, the generals warned their leaders that conflict in the new century would be fierce and destructive in human terms – though perhaps short. There were more optimistic voices still. In *The Great Illusion* Norman Angell pronounced that no continental war could be started because the economic consequences would be too catastrophic; for this reason war would not be entered into. H.N. Brailsford wrote confidently that the boundaries of national states would not be redrawn: wars on the European continent were gone forever. Those who predicted a war of

mammoth scale, its destructiveness and horrors, such as Bloch and Engels, were unable to prevent it.

There was a flurry of optimism for peace among world leaders, leaders who would plunge their countries into conflagration only a few years later. The 20th century had started with a certain enthusiasm: 1899 saw the first Hague conference, called by Nicholas II of Russia. It seems the tsar was driven by a sense of idealism: but a reduction in armaments would have a much-needed economic benefit for Russia, at a time when the wind of social change was blowing through the vast country. But if the conference gave the public of Europe a feel good factor, it was not matched by the suspicion and cynicism of the participants. The Kaiser said he would attend the 'conference comedy' but regardless of outcome he would place his trust in God and his 'sharp sword'. The British War Office did not want any restrictions put on the development of weaponry through the imposition of an international code on the laws and customs of war. Yet agreement was reached and signed. Prohibited were such acts as the use of chemical weapons and dropping bombs from balloons or by methods yet to be developed – portent of the air plane. The conference had no effect on the progression of conflict: within three months Britain and the Boer Republic were at war; Russia entered its Asian war against Japan within a few years, to be defeated and driven back west to old conflicts. The coming conflagration showed the objective of power determined whether war would be fought, and how it would be fought, not the laws on how it could be prevented or how it should be executed. The second convention in 1907 added little, and did nothing to halt the slow, subtle journey to the first of its kind – global war. Events showed it was not peace conferences motivated by morality and law that decided on peace or war, rather interest and power. In time governments are left with only one option: war.

Despite optimism, Britain was becoming uneasy about the expansion of the German navy. Within a few years the two countries had moved from being potential allies to being adversaries. Now, a large German navy posed a threat to British global interests. But Germany was nonchalant when Britain entered into the Entente Cordiale with France, and later one with Russia. Berlin was still convinced that British differences with Paris and St Petersburg were too great to form a lasting alliance; its natural ally was Germany, and sooner or later Britain would see that. The press here reported a bizarre incident: Russian warships had fired upon English fishing trawlers in the North Sea, along the Dogger Bank, having mistaken them for Japanese torpedo boats. The fleet was en route to the Far East to wage war against Japan. And the incident almost dragged Britain into the war against Russia, as it was already in alliance with the Empire of Japan to curb Russian global aspirations. Yet war was averted, despite the outcry at the deaths of three English fishermen: interest prevailed, and the matter referred to the International Committee of Inquiry at The Hague. In time Japan would become the enemy and Russia – twice – the ally. No war starts without cause, and forgotten are the switching of loyalties to configure with interests. A surprise attack was one hundred years in coming, with Captain John Glynn sailing into Nagasaki; the purpose trade, with a threat of force. Not even recognized were the final signs, crushing sanctions.

Any sense of hope in the years before 1914 was a false one, based on illusion not reality. The desire for peace and disarmament was strong among socialists and middle class liberals in those early years of the century. When war did begin many of those pacifists sided with the cause of war, for various intellectual reasons, and perhaps too the seductive security of patriotism – identity and common enterprise. Events in day-to-day life did not intrude much on the lives of the inhabitants here, where Unionism was strong and the Catholic middle class

placed their allegiance in Home Rule and the Catholic hierarchy. There was little to show that the First World War was approaching. But the signs were there.

As the entente became stronger Tangiers became the place where Germany sought to drive a wedge between the United Kingdom and France; but its strength grew because of German strength. Kaiser Wilhelm II took up the cause of Moroccan independence, lending support to the sovereignty of Sultan Abdelaziz. France, perceiving its influence threatened, proposed a series of reforms – reform always disguises real motive – but would not agree to an international conference. German chancellor, Count Bernard Von Bulow threatened war. And although tensions rose, France would not risk war over the issue. Germany, isolated diplomatically, had to accept a face-saving compromise. War was averted, and a false sense of security created, for rulers do want peace, but on their own terms. If those terms are not met war is the result. A peace is only war postponed, and the Algeciras Conference achieved that. But it worsened tensions between the Triple Alliance and the nations soon to make up the Triple Entente, another step towards world war.

The path to war sojourned again in Morocco a number of years later. A rising against the sultan led the French to intervene (the protection of Europeans a genuine reason, but not the only one). Britain wished to restrain her partner in the Entente Cordiale but, always fearful of naval rivalry, was compelled to support France. Britain had become alarmed by the arrival in Agadir of the German gunboat, *Panther*. David Lloyd George stated that peace was too high a price to pay when Britain's vital interests were at stake. The crisis did not lead to war, Germany settling for peace (and some territorial compensation) when a financial crisis at home threatened to drive it off the gold standard. So reality and pragmatism saved the conflict for another day. But the route to war had more decisively been set upon. If Germany had hoped to bully Britain away from France and Russia it failed, it only strengthened their growing cohesion. And while Britain still had its rivalries with Russia in Persia and China they would be resolved as Germany grew to be seen as the greatest peril to United Kingdom interest.

Once again the Balkans came to the fore with the Ottoman Empire looking near to collapse, though not a new prediction. The Young Turk revolution had brought no resolution and the war with Italy had left Turkish coffers depleted. After decades, the Balkan states were now impatient with the stubborn continuance of Ottoman rule in Europe. Serbia and Bulgaria forged common cause – the dismantling of Turkey – and formed an alliance that sidelined the differences that exists in all alliance marriages. The Balkan League was soon joined by Greece, with the dream of taking Salonica and even the symbolic Constantinople herself; prizes Bulgaria secretly coveted. Serbia supported Bulgaria's objective of breaking the grip of Turkish power in return for support in the later battle against Austria-Hungary; but Sofia had nothing to gain from such a goal.

Russia dared not estrange itself from the league, a collection of weak ethnic communities, for fear of upsetting pro-Slavic sentiment at home. But the league was an aggressive enterprise that did not serve Russia. Foreign minister, Sazonov was determined Russia would go to war for one reason alone – the Straits. But the other members of the Entente were passive about the unfolding events, as were the members of the Triple Alliance. And yet the complexity of power ambition creates contradictions: Germany was patron to Turkey yet still sought to maintain Austria-Hungary as a Great Power. Berlin thought the victory of nationalism in the Balkans would bring benefits to Germany, it did not comprehend this would be the death knell for Vienna. The intricacies made the states indecisive, reluctant to

be embroiled; yet, no course seemed to promise hope of avoiding the war all wanted to prevent. Each nation had its own nightmare of the conflict that would lead to the destruction of its own civilization.

Two enemies found common cause when Austria-Hungary and Russia issued a joint declaration, calling on the Balkan League to desist from war. But on that very same October day war was declared on Turkey, the first Balkan War had begun, another step to the ultimate conflict. It was settled without the fire spreading further and drawing Russia and the Habsburgs into conflict. St Petersburg was far more concerned that Bulgaria would take Constantinople, her real interest in the region. Austria-Hungary was satisfied with the peaceful resolution by supporting what it abhorred – nationalism. It would support the creation of the state of Albania, as a glacis against Serbian expansion; it was satisfied with its gain to the point of avoiding a broader war. But for Serbia this war was just the first on the way to creating a Greater Serbia, its eye on Bosnia Herzegovina, now annexed by Austria-Hungary. An armistice was signed and war put off for a time.

Alliances only plaster over differences with a coat of allegiance that will, in time and conditions, crack. The Balkan League did fall apart, but reportage on such confusing events would only reduce comprehension of the significance. The lowest common denominator is always power: and the consequences (eventually) always war. The ‘allies’ argued over the spoils of their victories, the Balkans quickly at war again, all over the dividing of Macedonia. King Ferdinand of Bulgaria ordered his forces to attack the Serbs and Greek armies occupying Macedonia late one summer’s night in June 1913. But Bulgaria quickly lost the initiative and its weakened position drew other local powers into the conflict: Romania decided to redress its territorial disputes with Sofia, and Turkey took the opportunity to reverse its territorial losses. Being quickly defeated, a peace was signed in August; people easily forget how quick blood and ink dry. Readers of the newspapers here noted this short, if bloody, war. May be there was a sense of confidence that the modern war would be short and that this distant place would be unaffected. But Serbia was emboldened and was Russia’s only ally in the Balkans, and those brief wars now allowed Belgrade take the conflict into the next phase of its political dream, a political nightmare for the whole of Europe.

Each crisis came and went: each time optimists believed the next one would go too. There was a resistance, or blindness, to the reality that events were leading towards a conflict among the Great Powers. Quietly the armies of Europe were building up for that war most in authority thought would be short but violent; none could see the future, how long it would last and how far reaching the consequences would be for the those dynasties fighting for the very things they would lose – power and survival.

The desire for power is often the desire for existence itself. Increasingly for Russia the issue of the Straits was becoming just that. It did not seek war with Germany or its destruction, but it could not passively watch as Germany began to draw Turkey into its orbit of influence when the Turks invited them in to drive the Bulgarians from the gates of Constantinople. When German general, Liman Von Sanders, was put in charge of the Turkish army Nicholas II appealed to his entente partners. But interest can be nuanced, and the details of the Triple Entente did not neatly apply. For France had a common interest with Germany in restoring Ottoman finances and opening up potential markets for armament sales. Britain was reorganizing the Turkish navy, with the prospects of lucrative ship building contracts – a revitalized fleet whose enemy could only be Russia. Luckily for Russia Germany was not ready for war in 1913. But by the following year it would be, a situation tempting to

misjudgement or submission to the logic of fatalism. It could not put off war forever; nor could Russia, whose vital interests were being eroded. When Constantinople closed the Straits during its war with Italy Russia was given a glimpse of its future: if they were strangled at the Straits so too would be their sovereign existence. The country was sending out vast quantities of grain through Odessa to help pay off those foreign loans, ironically much of them borrowed from France. It was not history, religion or ethnicity that bound Russia to the Balkan Slavs, rather the need for a physical barrier against Germany and Austria-Hungary, a desperate need to keep them away from Constantinople. The logic showed that war with Germany was inevitable, that essential interests clashed: Russia was preparing for that war.

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo stirred only passing interest, assassinations of aristocrats not uncommon, and not much thought given to the consequences. Gavrilo Princip, dejected and thinking all was lost, was by chance offered his opportunity to kill the heir to the Habsburg, along with his wife. But little known were the forces at work, forces that history had clearly shown leave nothing to chance. Austria was now tethering on the precipice of annihilation. It saw an internal threat instigated by outside forces. Vienna believed St Petersburg wanted to encircle Austria and impose its supremacy. The unleashing of nationalism posed the danger of disintegration. The creation of a Greater Serbia was the death knell for the ancient Habsburg dynasty. That had to be stopped. The timely assassination presented the opportunity to act against Serbia.

Even in the months before Sarajevo the configuration of alliances could have changed. Britain and Germany had reached agreement over the Baghdad railway. France had settled its difference with the German Empire earlier in the year, and at that point might have sided against Russia. Russia too could have switched her loyalties. Many at court would have gladly sided with Germany in return for some concessions on the Straits. There was even talk of a Russo-Turkish alliance against the three big European powers.

In the last months before the war, one of the aggressive causes of war – reason – was at work. With Russia's military build up under way the German foreign ministry was by now convinced that sooner or later war would have to be fought with Russia: and better sooner than later. Austria Hungary, for all the misgivings Berlin had about it, was its essential ally in the expansion of German interest. And so it encouraged Vienna to pursue an aggressive punitive policy against Belgrade over the assassination – the ultimatum. The Serbian reply was conciliatory, and unexpected. But nothing short of total capitulation and humiliation could satisfy Austria; Serbia had to be crushed.

Though Russia was not ready for war, and would not be until 1917, it could not stand by and allow Serbia be defeated, for its buffer state would be gone. It would declare war on Austria Hungary for its announcement of hostilities with Serbia. Germany would respond against Russia and in the last hours seek that France stay neutral. But the Schlieffen Plan condemned the continent to full scale war. It required total victory, but its rigidity exposed Germany to total defeat.

All the powers would go to war because Serbia would not agree in full to the ultimatum from Vienna. And all went to war for their own reasons. The Austrians wanted survival and regain some status as a Great Power; they did not want to see their monarchy disintegrate. After its defeat by Prussia half a century before Austria took comfort in expanding into South Eastern Europe. Prussia had a vision to expand and protect what the German Empire had

already achieved. It wanted to retain what it had gained since 1871. It had been forced back into alliance with its old Germanic rival in an effort to reduce the length of battle frontier in the war that was fated to come, fated by the inescapable logic of conflict. The powers of the Triple Entente would fight along together but also alone. Russia wanted to preserve free passage through the Straits, which was being threatened as Germany forged links with the ailing Ottoman Empire. France would go to war for the Entente itself, which it felt would guarantee its survival as a great power. It wanted renewed status, and to avenge the loss of Alsace and Lorraine. Britain sought to prevent longer term German dominance of the Continent and on the seas, a threat to global British interests. Italy would try to remain neutral from its treaty commitments until it extracted concessions from Austria.

For the remaining days of June and all July life here was calm and normal. The smoke of the trains could be seen moving to and from Dublin, the shrill whistle echoing off the cliffs of the quarry. There was a holiday atmosphere. In the fields the farm labourers worked to get in the hay, always a sense of urgency should the weather change. Nothing seemed unusual, no sense of impending war. But diplomacy is so often an invisible force.

On the last night of July, a gibbous moon threw a pale light on the world below. In the village the gas lamps flickered and the last tram of the night had run. Austria had declared war on Serbia, but it all seemed of little importance. Austria was appearing slow to mobilize, although reports were filtering through that there had been skirmishes between the two armies, but no sign of full scale conflagration. Russia was issuing orders to begin its mobilization. And as the Town Hall clock struck midnight Germany had delivered an ultimatum to the tsar: mobilization must stop within 12 hours or it would commence its own mobilization – Kriegsgefahrzustand had been declared. It appeared it would not be long before the Kaiser's army was on the march. There were mutterings whether France would stay neutral while Germany took on Russia on its eastern front. Britain's position seemed more to hinge on whether Belgian neutrality would be respected, but it was still ambiguous on clear cut military support for France. Change was happening by the hour, telegrams crossing between capitals through the night. And while there was still a nonchalant calm through Europe, in the corridors of power there was deepening sense of hopelessness. A hopelessness that would bring war here, a place the decision-makers had never heard of.

On that Easter Monday bank holiday 1916 governesses pushed prams in Victoria Park, young couples strolled along the wooded paths and children played among the trees and on the rocks. The weather promised to stay sunny; the day was calm but for the twittering of the birds, human merriment and the hooting of the trains running along the coastline. As the afternoon wore on some with keener hearing might have picked up a very faint sound of what appeared to be gun fire, somewhere distant – unimportant; war could not reach them here, not on that beautiful April day. In the city rebels were taking up their positions and seizing key buildings. But they had failed to take Dublin Castle, the seat of British power. Whether anyone on this hill did hear shots no one could tell. By evening as the park was being closed word of the rebellion had reached here.

By next morning fighting was intensifying, yet here there was still calm. Then came a louder sound, like thunder – but definite: artillery. British guns were pounding the rebels. There was no doubt of what people were hearing. Their senses now told them what rumour and report had brought them the previous evening. Tuesday was a work day, so there were fewer using the park, mainly the retired or household servants looking after young children.

Those who worked in the city found they were cut off because the trains and trams south of the city had stopped.

All settled in for an uneasy night, during which a steamer berthed in Kingstown Harbour below, a serene sight with the beads of lamps lighting up the piers. Disembarking troops began their march to Dublin. After dawn more ships began to arrive and the gunboat Helga started firing from the mouth of the Liffey at the city centre. As the day progressed plumes of smoke rose over Dublin; otherwise the normality of life made it all feel surreal. The sunshine and the birdsong made everything so peaceful. For those trapped or fighting in the city streets everything was real: there was nothing to disguise reality. A foreign war had again made its way to Ireland. Empowerment or enslavement were to be determined by what side to join in that global war, conflict between imperial combatants who fought for their own core interests, not those of the Irish. Whether in hope or fear, the inhabitants of these parts, chose what wild tales to believe. The volunteers were marching on Dublin; Britain had been invaded by Germany, following on from reports of zeppelins bombing English towns – the Empire was crumbling; rumours even circulated that German troops had landed in Ireland, and that a German prince was about to be offered the high kingship of the island. From here they looked north: the blue of day blackened by smoke; the dark night reddened by flames.

Within a week the fires of rebellion had been quenched, the dream of realizing the country's independence through other nations' wars had been once again dashed; yet the consequences gave rise to martyrs. But it would be the weakening power of the British Empire that would finally give victory to the ideals of Irish republicanism, in part at least.

For a small place like this, fate is decided faraway. The struggles between great powers divide us. And as the world settled in for a transitory peace the land was taking on a new struggle of its own, for a future that ultimately couldn't be untangled from the rest of the world. And on 11 November 1918 at the eleventh hour the guns went silent across Europe, the armistice signed in the bare mist-clad winter forest of Compiegne. Germany was to abandon the lands west of the Rhine and agree to a neutral zone on the east bank, and its army and navy slashed; punitive measures in the eyes of Germany: not punitive enough in the eyes in France.

With the end of the war came the hope that it would be the 'war to end wars'. German efforts to bring Mexico into the war had finally drawn the United States into the conflict. The war brought forward President Wilson's 14 Point Plan for world peace and the creation of the League of Nations. But, as throughout history, behind the grand ambitions for peace lay the secret tussle for power. France could not accept anything less than total victory, unforgiving reparations: Germany could never accept defeat as final. Yet it signed the Treaty of Versailles, for it did not have the means of resuming war. Breaking the treaty would have to be done by other means. Even victors can be exhausted and defeated by war, their peoples without the will to resume the fight.

France's main allies were not as uncompromising. And the treaty could only work with the co-operation of the new German government, which would always seek ways to undermine the imposed obligations. The default on delivery of steel and coal led allied troops to occupy the Ruhr, further outraging German pride. But the only way to force Germany to resume payments was compromise; even France saw this. So with compromise Germany resumed payments, with the assistance of American loans, and the allies evacuated the Ruhr.

Still, at the heart, the victors always see the vanquished as being unwilling, and vanquished see the terms of the victors as being unjust. The compromise failed, so a new one had to be agreed. It was concluded that Germany would never be able to repay the huge damages owed under the Versailles treaty, so the billions of gold marks off the reparations. But Britain and France had their own debts to repay and only agreed a deal over Germany if their own outstanding loans could be renegotiated.

German Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann was as much against the terms of Versailles as Hitler, but he took a peaceful course to achieve its ending, or at least the longer route to war to achieve it. Power not regained peacefully has to be regained violently if the objective is of any worth at all, and it always is for rulers.

Balance of power had dominated rivalry during the 19th century and up to the First World War – and beyond. The defeat of Germany had changed nothing: the configuration of alliances would influence the shape of war to come. The map of Europe at the end of the first war did not help France. Germany would rise again, but France did not have a vital ally to the east, Russia withdrawn from the world stage and embroiled in internal revolution. Germany's geographic sense of bitterness was to the east, the changed frontiers with Poland, and so was happy with the Treaty of Locarno signed in December 1925. The pact – wrongly – became a source of hope for international peace: 'The Spirit of Locarno'. Germany was admitted to the League of Nations; now rehabilitated, war could fade from people's minds. Yet the desire for peace and the desire for power are dubious bedfellows. The western borders were left unchanged. The signatories – Germany, France and Belgium – agreed not to attack one of the others; Britain and Italy, acting as guarantors, would go to war against the aggressor, old 19th century diplomacy. In the east the borders were open to revision: Britain hoped that France would renounce its eastern allies, Poland and Czechoslovakia, who would then have to give in to German pressure for territories it laid claim to.

The pact was naturally less well received in Eastern Europe. Poland saw it as Germany being offered war in the east in return for peace in the west. The Poles saw through French assurances that they would stand by Poland. Russia, once France's essential counterweight to Germany, felt further isolated and its Rapallo Treaty signed three years' before under threat; Rapallo, another example of where enemies become the most natural allies. Logic told the two nations that that was the course to take. Germany was in tatters and diplomatically isolated. The USSR feared an alliance of the Four Powers – Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany – that could result in a new war of intervention, memories of their own civil war still fresh in the mind, and with the west motivated to get its debts repaid. The Bolshevik leaders were new to power, and power was what they wanted to hold on to. That and not World Revolution would determine their foreign policy. Hitler would tear up the treaty, but later negotiate another with similar sentiments of cooperating in 'the spirit of mutual goodwill', to benefit both against a common enemy.

All rhetoric and high-minded ideals stripped away, nations pursued the policy of power. Those recalling the events place false importance on contiguity of events – The Wall Street Crash, the Great Depression and then the rise of totalitarianism. Such events would have had no significant contribution to the outcome had it not been for the underlying need for power that characterizes our species.

The Stresa Front was trumpeted as an alliance of the three powers – Britain, France, and Italy – against German aggression. But principled-sounding words can be as dangerous as

words of hatred, true motive disguised. Events following that meeting in April 1935 showed the ideals were hollow. Labour Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald went on to sign the Anglo-German Naval Agreement a few months later, to protect British maritime interests. Her navy had been severely curtailed by the Washington and London naval conferences. The empire had global naval commitments and would not be in a strong position to increase the size of its fleet in an arms race with the Third Reich. An agreement with Germany was considered the best way of ensuring British supremacy of the seas. France and Italy were appalled: the agreement weakened the Stresa Front and, more crucially, undermined their national interests.

Mussolini had for a long time harboured ambitions of empire building and set his sights on Abyssinia. But he was still far from allying with his fellow-dictator, for while many ideas might converge interests did not: the Duce still threatened war on Germany should Hitler try and absorb Austria into the Reich. German ambitions were met with warnings from Rome. The remnants of the old Holy Roman Empire and ousted Habsburg dynasty were an essential bulwark for Mussolini. Italy had already signed an agreement with France, promising France support against Germany in return for a freehand in Africa. Mussolini needed a victory, and interpreted Stresa as giving him the green light. And so a kingdom and an empire went to war, and the empire lost – as did the League.

All the members of the League were there to serve their own purposes first, peace and conciliation second. Such structural weakness would eventually make the institution crumble, when the right circumstances prevailed. The illusion was shattered. Sanctions were imposed, but Britain and France assured Mussolini that vital oil supplies would not be cut off. The two allies wanted to keep Italy from moving into alliance with Germany. But reluctantly Mussolini concluded that his interests – bound up so much in fantasy as they were – were better served by joining with that other great fantasist high up in his Eagle's Nest at Berchtesgaden.

Friendships – alliances – are born out of the uneasy sense of necessity, and the frightening though perhaps subconscious perception of the alternative. Some conflicts fall conveniently into the divisions that people want to see them – principled, a clash between good and evil, a struggle of ideas. The Spanish Civil War was one example, a bloody conflict in Europe while the other powers moved diplomatically towards world war. The international backers of the sides revealed the true nature of conflict. The Soviet Union came to aid of the Republicans: war in the west was preferable to war on its own frontiers, for they had deep seated suspicions that the western powers would unite against the USSR. It was not ideological: Moscow stood by as Chiang Kai Shek in China massacred fellow communists. Germany saw it as an opportunity to test its weapons, the bombing of Guernica, and create another front on the Pyrenees for France to worry about. But General Franco felt no debt towards Hitler, subsequently remaining neutral when global war broke out. Protagonists work in earnest to avoid war (at least the one they do not want) but cannot because key factors move and change, meaning power is either lost or won. Alliances are forged; those most pertinent to the interests of the signatories are the ones that point the way to war. Otherwise the obligations can be evaded, interpretations fudged – interest secured.

The efforts to stop – or delay – world war did not start with the Munich Agreement, but from the moment the ink was dry on the Treaty of Versailles. Treaties and non-aggression pacts are the stepping stones to war. One way or another World War Two was coming. It came in the form of Hitler. The collapse of the Austrian Hungary Empire left millions of

Germans stranded in the newly created Czechoslovakia, with a dream of unification, and influences of pan-Germanism that preceded even the upheaval of the First World War; a dream that Hitler wished to bring true. The fantasist, banishing his failures as an artist and his time as a tramp to the realms of fiction, made reality out of his dreams: rising to power, adored by millions, the saviour of the German people from Jewry and Bolshevism, the one who would return Germany to greatness – the greatest race on earth. The non-believer believed in providence, rising from the abyss of the anonymous to the zenith of recognition and power. He strove to unite Sudetenland with Germany, promising it would be the final foreign adventure. The road to war is often winding, often taking branching paths to see where they might lead. Britain and France hoped war could be avoided, at that time at least, so pressurized the Czech government into capitulating, assuring them Germany had no more ambitions. But Hitler had more ambitions. And ambitions are only – eventually – limited by reality not by imagination, which Hitler had copious amounts of.

The ghostly, crackling words of Winston Churchill filled the homes of the village below, in his speech to the British House of Commons, attacking the agreement in Munich and the betrayal of Czechoslovakia. Also at stake were the interests of Great Britain, and risk the country would become a satellite of a Nazi dominated Europe, gone could be her survival as a world power – the planet's largest empire. He attacked Lord Baldwin's tardy approach to the defence of Britain, the man who had recognized Churchill as a war leader and undefeatable as long as he did not become premier in peacetime; otherwise he would come to be vilified like the rest of them. The randomness of history can be kind or cruel.

French and British governments would come to realize their best ally in the east was the Soviet Union; the Bolshevik menace would have to be revised. When it was decided that Germany was the greatest threat to both France and Britain Russia was the natural ally, regardless of ideology. As Stalin's purges continued politicians in the west made him respectable in the eyes of their publics. Russia saw benefit from rapprochement with Britain and France: but also keeping lines of communications open with Berlin. As for Hitler, on his eastern frontiers, his preference was alliance with Poland, a bulwark, and room to expand for Germany. Goring's hunting trips had made Moscow nervous an alliance was being prepared against them. The two nations may have been natural partners: but in power, compatibility is not the basis for marriage.

During the summer of 1939 Anglo-French-USSR negotiations continued, while here the season went on like another. Those talks became news but not very sinister. There was talk of war – a certain unease and fear possibly – but there seemed no great of imminence of hostilities. Some expressed optimism that an alliance against Hitler would deter him from invading Poland; perhaps Czechoslovakia would be his final foreign adventure.

But interest and suspicion made a treaty impossible. In any case, the common enemy had not grown to sufficient strength to dwarf differences of interest among his adversaries. They would only create a common security when that common enemy grew in stature to become the indisputable source of their insecurity. Only then could an alliance be formed. Moscow had called for a triple alliance to stop further German expansion and demanded the right of its troops to cross Poland and Romania. But they had their territorial disputes with Moscow and were as fearful of Russia as they were of Germany, so would not agree. Britain and France still hoped they could call Hitler's bluff, diplomacy enough to deter him. In time they would go to war with Germany for the very same reasons they had in the First World War. Stalin still mistrusted them, fearing they wanted Russia to fight Germany alone, weakening her and

making her vulnerable to later invasion. His suspicions mirrored his own thinking, having hoped the capitalist nations would fight among themselves, allowing Russia to take the spoils.

Germany tried to disrupt negotiations, and Stalin was becoming enticed by the extravagant offers from Berlin, though he mistrusted Hitler more than he did Chamberlain or Daladier. He knew Hitler's vision in *Mein Kampf* of expanding east – Lebensraum. But negotiations with Britain and France were going nowhere, and evidence for impending invasion of Poland increasing. So talks were suspended: negotiations with Germany opened. A tactic in diplomacy is so often to buy time, to put back the inevitable war. Stalin needed his buffer zone.

News came over the radio, next day in print, that the negotiations had been suspended. About a week later – more sinister and confusing – were reports that German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop has signed a peace agreement in Moscow; the ideological foes had become allies. The last days of August played out, like every other August children prepared to start another school year. On 31st August the night set on the village; the last tram had run and the electric street lamps cast yellow pools of light on to the pavements; the occasional car rumbled passed. Just before midnight drinkers stepped out of the pubs chatting in groups before making for home. Everyday life would resume in the morning as normal. But things were to change. May be behind the parting farewells of the drinkers one of them heard the clock on the town hall chime twelve; the first of September, another day: another world war.