



God's Executioner: Oliver Cromwell and the Conquest of Ireland

Dr. Micheal O Siochru

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Cromwell spent only nine months of his eventful life in Ireland, yet he stands accused there of war crimes, religious persecution and ethnic cleansing. The massacre of thousands of soldiers and civilians by the New Model Army at both Drogheda and Wexford in 1649 must rank among the greatest atrocities in Anglo-Irish history: a tale that makes decidedly uncomfortable reading for those keen to focus on Cromwell's undoubted military and political achievements elsewhere. In a century of unrelenting, bloody warfare and religious persecution throughout Europe, Cromwell was, in many ways, a product of his times. As commander-in-chief of the army in Ireland, however, the responsibilities for the excesses of the military must be laid firmly at his door, while the harsh nature of the post-war settlement also bears his personal imprint. Cromwell was no monster, but he did commit monstrous acts. A warrior of Christ, somewhat like the crusaders of medieval Europe, he acted as God's executioner, convinced throughout the horrors of the legitimacy of his cause, and striving to build a better world for the chosen few. He remains, therefore, a remarkably modern figure, somebody to be closely studied and understood, rather than simply revered or reviled.

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