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Brazen as Falstaff, Devious as Iago: Sir Ralph Lane's Approach to Holding Office in Ireland and Virginia

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Abstract Much has been made of the ideological connection between the mental world of servitors in Elizabethan Ireland and the origins of early English colonial endeavor in North America. In this vein, the case of Sir Ralph Lane, the first governor of the Roanoke colony and, later, muster-master general of Ireland, would seem to present a historiographically promising test case, one that might not only link Ireland and the Roanoke Colony but also could show, following recent suggestions, how attitudinal, behavioral, and aspirational commonalities existed between early modern English military culture and the ethos of early English colonial endeavor. Lane's record on both sides of the Atlantic, however, rather than painting a picture of the applicability of martial virtue and military discipline at times of crisis, demonstrates instead the stark reality of the impulsive and appetitive culture of the garrison in the Elizabethan period and its corrosive effects. Lane's remarkable capacity for corruption, willful mismanagement, and wily self-defense in an Irish context in fact amplifies and complements troubling tendencies that scholars have recently detected in Lane's famous discourse of his government in what was commonly termed Virginia printed in Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations*. Lane can indeed serve as an emblem of common features shared by Elizabethan Englishmen drawn to office in Ireland and Elizabethan/Jacobean Englishmen drawn to settle in Virginia, but largely because of his mendacity, venality, and irresponsibility.

Ralph Lane, the first governor of Roanoke from September 1585 to June 1586, has largely been forgotten. This seems strange, if not perverse, if only because Lane achieved more milestones in global history than most. He was, for instance, the first Englishman to act as a colonial governor in the New World, and he was, according to the evidence, *the* pioneer of Anglo-American letters insofar as he was the first man in North America to write a letter and send it back to England.¹ Given Lane's association with English exploration,

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¹ "Original Documents from the State-Paper Office, London, and the British Museum," *Archaeologia Americana: Transactions and Collections of the American Antiquarian Society*, no. 4 (1860): 3. The letters are Lane to Secretary Walsingham, 12 August 1585, National Archives, London, SP Colonial C.O. 1/1/3-4; Lane to P. Sidney, National Archives, SP Colonial C.O. 1/1/5. (Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as TNA.)

expansion, and colonization in the age of Gloriana, readers might be forgiven for anticipating the soft-focus approach to his story so often associated with biographies of obscure Elizabethans. My reappraisal of Lane, however, is as far from James Antony Froude's "England's Forgotten Worthies" as can be imagined.²

It might well be argued that there is less to Lane than meets the eye. After all, Edward E. Hale, his most exhaustive biographer in the nineteenth century, believed that he had been justly neglected and might with profit be left in his "unknown grave, childless and forgotten."³ Lane's sin was that he faltered when presented with the glorious opportunity of becoming the pioneer of Anglophone colonization in the New World. This verdict may seem harsh—Lane's governorship was always seen as a holding operation, setting up a base for English privateers while exploring for precious metals, a northwest passage, or, at least, a better place to settle in the hinterland. In any case, Lane's grandiose title of governor was self-awarded; his superior officer, Sir Richard Grenville, merely ceded him the title "General" or "Lieutenant General" when leaving him in charge at Roanoke.⁴ And yet Sir Ralph's account of his American sojourn, later anthologized in Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations*,⁵ is occasionally so engaging that it raises the question of why he escaped the celebrity reserved for that other colonial martial adventurer, Captain John Smith.⁶ Indeed, in 1608, just over twenty years later, John Smith used Lane's example as a motivational tool to inspire his wavering colleagues.⁷

Lane was above all a professional military administrator, and his command of the first community of Englishmen (about 107 in number) in North America showcased some of his vocational skills. The survival of the expeditionary parties under his command, in spite of hunger and the non-cooperation of the Chowanoac, Mangoak, and Moratuc peoples, even astonished Wingina, the hostile *weroance* or leader of the neighboring Roanoke Indians. Despite dwindling resources and intermittent conflict, Lane and the vast majority of his men endured right up to their abrupt but timely evacuation by Sir Francis Drake in June 1586. In Quinn's words, "few early settlements of this size were able to survive in such good health for so long."⁸

But Lane died in 1603, not 1586. Like Florence Nightingale and Richard Cromwell, he outlived his moment in the sun. Certainly, once he had written his account of his Roanoke experience (printed by Hakluyt in *Principal Navigations* in 1589) and his

² James Anthony Froude, "England's Forgotten Worthies," in *Short Studies on Great Subjects* (Oxford, 1924), 257–315.

³ Edward E. Hale, "Life of Sir Ralph Lane," *Archaeologica Americana*, no. 4 (1860): 317–45 at 343.

⁴ David B. Quinn, ed., *The Roanoke Voyages, 1584–1590* (London, 1955), 177n4. See 210–11 for Grenville and Lane's feud.

⁵ "An account of the particularities of the employments of the English men left in Virginia by Sir Richard Greenevill under the charge of Master Ralphe Lane [. . .]," in Richard Hakluyt, *The principal navigations, voiajes, traffiques and discoveries of the English nation etc.* (London, 1589) 737–47.

⁶ A statue of Smith was erected on Jamestown Island, Virginia, in 1908. Small replicas retail for \$10.95 in the souvenir shop at "Historic Jamestowne."

⁷ Karen Ordahl Kupperman, ed., *Captain John Smith: A Select Edition of His Writings* (Chapel Hill, 1988), 92.

⁸ Such was their haste to depart that they left three men behind, their fate unknown. For Lane's achievement, see David B. Quinn, *Set Fair for Roanoke: Voyages and Colonies, 1584–1606* (Chapel Hill, 1985), 121. For their departure, see Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Roanoke: The Abandoned Colony* (Lanham, 2007): 91–93.

short preface to Thomas Hariot's *A briefe and true report of the newe found land of Virginia*,⁹ Lane rarely adverted to his service in America again. After a brief period serving in Portugal as part of the Lisbon expedition of 1589, he spent most of his remaining years as muster-master and clerk of check of the garrison in Ireland—an administrative role crucial for determining the financial burden required to maintain Elizabeth I's army in the sister kingdom. This Irish service has suffered the peculiar neglect reserved for episodes of Tudor Irish history,¹⁰ but even taking this historiographical oversight into account, the general incuriosity is odd: Lane ultimately held high military office during the course of the Nine Years' War, an epic conflict crucial for England's security that took place in Ireland between 1594 and 1603.¹¹

The lack of inquisitiveness about Lane's later career becomes even harder to explain given that his service on both sides of the Atlantic makes him of particular significance as a case study for the testing of concepts central to the historiography of the early British Atlantic. The foremost of these, associated with Nicholas Canny and widely received by Atlantic historians, proposes the existence of an "ideology of English colonization," a worldview formed "by lessons that the English gained from their Irish experience and later applied in the New World." Canny argued that English servitors' disdainful attitude to the alterity of Indigenous populations resulted from "practical conclusions" drawn from their experience of contact with "barbaric" people (namely the Irish).¹² Lane, to a greater extent than others, had undergone an intensity of contact with Indigenous societies in *both* the New World and Ireland. However, as Audrey Horning has suggested, it might be more likely that Lane's American experience influenced his Irish service than vice versa.¹³

In this light, Lane's vexed encounters with Roanoke's native population take on a fresh significance. His relations with Wingina, initially cordial, experienced a violent deterioration. Lane presented this development as the result of an irrational resolution on Wingina's part following the death of his kinsman Granganimeo, the colonists' greatest Indigenous sympathizer.¹⁴ Nevertheless, even some contemporaries were leery of Lane's rough relations with the Indians. It is generally assumed, for

⁹ Thomas Hariot, *A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia* (London, 1588).

¹⁰ A significant and suggestive counterexample is the very brief treatment given Lane in C. G. Cruickshank, *Elizabeth's Army* (Oxford, 1966), 141–42. Warren Billings's entry for Lane in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* devotes only a couple of lines to Sir Ralph's Irish service; Warren M. Billings, s.v., "Lane, Sir Ralph (d. 1603), Soldier and Colonist," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/15995>; the *Dictionary of Irish Biography* has no entry for Lane.

¹¹ Paul E. J. Hammer, *Elizabeth's Wars: War, Government, and Society in Tudor England, 1544–1604* (New York, 2003), 67; for political and dynastic implications for Tudor and early Stuart England, see Rory Rapple, "Brinkmanship and Bad Luck: Ireland, the Nine Years' War and the Succession," in Susan Doran and Paulina Kewes, eds., *Doubtful and Dangerous: The Question of the Succession in Late Elizabethan England* (Manchester, 2014), 236–56.

¹² Nicholas Canny, "The Ideology of English Colonization: From Ireland to America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 30, no. 4 (1973): 575–98, at 598.

¹³ Audrey Horning, *Ireland in the Virginian Sea: Colonialism in the British Atlantic* (Chapel Hill, 2013), 75–84, esp. 84.

¹⁴ Michael Leroy Oberg, "Indians and Englishmen at the First Roanoke Colony: A Note on Pemisapan's Conspiracy, 1585–86," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 18, no. 2 (1994): 75–89, at 83.

instance, that Hariot was referring to the former governor in his *Brief and true report* when he criticized those of “our company [who] showed themselves too fierce in slaying some of the people in some towns, upon causes that on our part, might easily enough have been borne withal.”¹⁵ Furthermore, recent comprehensive treatments of Lane’s governorship of Roanoke have raised serious doubts about the reliability of Lane’s report.¹⁶

Rather than speculating overmuch about the “practical conclusions” Lane may have arrived at from his contact with Indigenous people during his service in either Virginia or Ireland,¹⁷ I approach his career differently. I take as its point of embarkation Quinn’s passing observation that Lane’s Roanoke report shows a marked tendency to conceive of things from a professional soldier’s point of view.¹⁸ When seen from the vantage point of his full career, this insight might get to the core of what made Lane tick. Whatever Lane’s credentials as an ethnocentric ideologue of colonization may be, his martial approach to his mission in Virginia, combined with his experience on both sides of the Atlantic, puts him in a good position to be regarded as an early instance of the soldier/administrator in the “Tudor-Cromwellian imperial tradition,”¹⁹ as Sidney Saunders Webb called it. Lane was certainly suffused with the values of the martial profession of his time. This, of course, raises further historiographical questions about the extent to which persistent humanistic rhetoric about martial and soldierly virtue, much cited in recent cultural and intellectual historical treatments concerning early modern England and colonial Anglophone America, tallied with lived martial and soldierly realities.²⁰

Lane’s a priori attitudes and the consequences that followed had more to do with roll-keeping and accountancy than with anthropology, more to do with a specific view of the opportunities that crown government offered office holders than with fixed prejudices against Indigenous peoples, more to do with the working out of particular impulses and appetites than with paradigm shifts in ideology. In short, to discern Lane’s worldview and what sustained it, I focus on his relatively unglamorous service as muster-master and clerk of the check in Ireland, attempting the far from simple task of taking the measure of his particular approach to the queen’s business. While Lane’s account of his time at Roanoke, so well known, is not my primary focus here, it will prove an important point of reference.

LANE’S BACKGROUND

Little is known about Lane’s early career. After a decade of military service, initially at Newhaven and later against the northern rebels of 1569, he was appointed equerry of

¹⁵ Hariot, *A briefe and true report*, in Quinn, *Roanoke Voyages*, 317–87, at 381.

¹⁶ Michael Leroy Oberg, *The Head in Edward Nugent’s Hand: Roanoke’s Forgotten Indians* (Philadelphia, 2008); Kathleen Donegan, *Seasons of Misery: Catastrophe and Colonial Settlement in Early America* (Philadelphia, 2014).

¹⁷ Canny, “Ideology of English Colonization,” 598.

¹⁸ David B. Quinn, *Set Fair for Roanoke: Voyages and Colonies, 1584–1606* (Chapel Hill, 1985), 213.

¹⁹ Stephen Saunders Webb, *The Governors-General: The English Army and the Definition of Empire, 1569–1681* (Chapel Hill, 1979), 446.

²⁰ Phil Withington, “Introduction: Citizens and Soldiers: The Renaissance Context,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 15, nos. 1–2 (2011): 3–30; Paul Musselwhite, *Urban Dreams, Rural Commonwealth: The Rise of Plantation Society in the Chesapeake* (Chicago, 2019).

Elizabeth's stables in 1571.²¹ His father, Sir Ralph Lane of Orlingsbury, Buckinghamshire, was married to Maud Parr, a first cousin of the future queen Catherine Parr, and had been one of Thomas Cromwell's enforcers of ecclesiastical ordinances.²² Whatever connections Ralph the younger might have enjoyed through his mother (Ralph Senior, it seems, died in 1540 when Ralph the younger was probably around nine or ten), his involvement in the Newhaven expedition, under the command of Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick, and the royal stables, within the jurisdiction of Master of the Horse Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, suggests considerable affinity with the Dudleys.²³ He also served Lord Treasurer Burghley in various contexts as either *agent provocateur* or spy, receiving a number of sinecures for his efforts.²⁴ In June 1572, he played a central role in the provision of soldiers and supplies for Elizabeth's clandestine mission to support the Sea Beggars, the emerging Dutch Calvinist insurgency against Spanish rule in the late 1560s and early 1570s.²⁵ When later the relationship between English troops and the Prince of Orange became strained over the nonpayment of wages, Lane posed as part of a conspiracy to return Flushing to Philip II's control, but in this he was but one double agent among many.²⁶ By January 1574, he was considering an expedition even further afield. He told Burghley of an offer he had made Philip II to provide Englishmen for "Levant service" against "the Turk," and five years later, he considered entering the service of the king of Fez.²⁷ For all this, Lane's obvious political dexterity and cosmopolitanism was incidental to his primary expertise, which lay in a specific type of man-management—that is, the recruitment of recently or soon-to-be cashiered troops in specific

²¹ Hariot refers to Lane as "one of her Majesty's equerries and governor of the colony of Virginia." Hariot, *A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia*, A2r.

²² Ralph Lane the younger to Cromwell, 23 March 1540, TNA, SP1/158/195; Commission to Lane to search certain ships, 21 August 1571, TNA, SP12/80/34. Sir Ralph Lane's nephew, the son of Sir Robert Lane, boasted the Christian name of Parr. See Alan Ford, "Reforming the Holy Isle: Parr Lane and the conversion of the Irish," in *A Miracle of Learning?: Essays in Honour of William O'Sullivan* (Aldershot, 1998) 137–63, especially 139–40.

²³ Receipt of Ralph and George Lane to Sir Edward Darrell, 8 December 1515, TNA, SP46/45, fol. 80; J. Dudley to Earl of Leicester, 31 March 1566, TNA, SP15/13/8; Copley to Leicester, 11 March 1575, TNA, SP15/24/11. For reference to Lane at court as a "defender" in a staged "royal challenge" by the Earl of Oxford, Charles Howard, Sir Henry Lee, and Christopher Hatton, an exercise of arms before Elizabeth "for Honor, and love of Ladies onlie," see Richard Jones and William Segar, *The booke of honor and armes* (London, 1590), 90–102, at 95, 100. For the Newhaven expedition, see Wallace T. MacCaffrey, "The Newhaven Expedition," *Historical Journal* 40, no. 1 (1997): 1–21.

²⁴ Lane to Burghley, 17 January 1574, Cal MSS Hatfield, 182, Hatfield House Library and Archives, Hatfield; Commission to search ships of Brittany, 21 August 1571, TNA, SP12/80/34. Lane received a patent to seize goods bought from pirates in return for his intelligence on Portuguese and Spanish politics; Lane to Burghley, 21 March 1580, TNA, SP94/1/42, Burghley to sheriff of Dorsetshire and Mayor of Poole, 16 April 1589, TNA, SP12/223/65. Lane later had a patent to secretly transport gold and silver to the Netherlands in the mid-1580s; see Huddleston to Council, June 1585, TNA, SP15/29/23.

²⁵ Lane to Burghley, 4 June 1572, TNA, SP12/88/7.

²⁶ Rory Rapple, *Martial Power and Elizabethan Political Culture: Military Men in England and Ireland, 1558–1594* (Cambridge, 2009), 86–126.

²⁷ Lane to Burghley, 4 June 1572, TNA, SP12/88/7; Lane to Burghley, 21 January 1574, British Library, Lans MS 19, fols. 105r–10r. In 1579, Lane requested a letter of introduction from Elizabeth to the king of Fez and Algiers; Lane to Burghley, 16 August 1579, TNA, SP63/131/68.

theaters of war and their subsequent redeployment elsewhere, an important part of what David Parrott has termed “the business of war.”²⁸

A recurring feature of his career in the late 1570s and 1580s and into the 1590s was the composition of dissertations on the technical and logistical aspect of military and naval affairs, all written in a bid to net some choice commission or other. In these efforts, he always sought to associate himself with the most efficient and economical innovations in mustering, munitions, and fortification.²⁹ The tactic was shrewd, for since the late 1560s muster procedure in England had been of concern for Burghley, and Lane tried to make himself visible during this period of attempted rationalization.³⁰ At first glance, his appointment to the Roanoke expedition appears to have been a very different type of service to that which he usually offered his superiors, but, on reflection, perhaps not. Lane likely approached the Roanoke expedition in much the same way as he would have, say, the transfer of English troops from the Netherlands to Hungary. It seems certain that he recruited a substantial number of the first expeditionary force in Ireland following the subjugation of the Earldom of Desmond, and then redeployed them to the Carolinas—the fact that it was an Irish boy who shot Wingina and an “Edward Nugent” who subsequently finished him off is particularly suggestive.³¹ In any case, half a decade after Lane’s Roanoke service, his appointment to an administrative role reforming the crown’s martial fabric in Ireland was clearly deemed to be a good fit.

LANE TAKES OFFICE IN IRELAND

Lane’s appointment to the offices of clerk of the check and muster-master in Ireland in 1592 signaled a bold changing of the guard in Dublin at a time of relative peace.³² By the early 1590s, Irish army administration seemed ready for the impress of some of the methods used on the trained bands in England. There, muster-masters like Lane had increasingly become the necessary hinge between locally organized troop levies and the national organization of military campaigns. A central part of their duty had been, first, to ensure that each captain had an indenture that listed the names of recruits and stated the quantity and quality of his equipment, and, second, to guarantee that copies of the information would be sent to both the Privy Council and the local lord lieutenant.³³ Given that he was a relatively fresh

²⁸ David Parrott, *The Business of War: Military Enterprise and Military Revolution in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2012).

²⁹ These plans are many in number. For a selection, see Lane, Leighton, and Smith to Privy Council, 6 December 1587, TNA, SP12/206/12; Direction left by Leighton, Clere and Heydon, Deputy Lieutenants of the country of Norfolk, 30 April 1588, TNA, SP12/209/118; Lane to Burghley, 26 January 1579, British Library, Lans 29/56.

³⁰ Objections and answers relating to the Bill for Musters, Captains, Soldiers, &c. with Lord Burghley’s notes, British Library, 58/ 70. Burghley was highly aware of the opportunities for fraud in the system; more prophetic was Lane’s scheme to assist Don Antonio of Portugal with troops supposedly recruited for Ireland; Lane to Burghley, Scheme to aid Don Antonio, 7 March 1580, British Library, Lans. 31/43.

³¹ Quinn, *Roanoke Voyages*, 204–5.

³² The amalgamation of the offices was recent but had been mooted as early as 1563; see “Notes to be considered,” September 1563, TNA, SP63/9/25.

³³ Neil Younger, *War and Politics in the Elizabethan Counties* (Manchester, 2012), 158, 202, 232, 310, 319.

face with all the right experience and credentials, Lane's appointment appeared like an unequivocal push for reformation and improvement. His commission stated that he was to hold the office "as Sir Thomas Williams [the late incumbent, had] . . . with similar fees and other incident commodities," and his tenure was "for life."³⁴ But while Williams had died leaving numerous debtors seeking redress for his "taking and embezzling," Lane was supposed to strike a new tone: his patent stated bluntly that Elizabeth had found "it necessary to have that office supplied by a man expert and faithful to us, being void of corruption."³⁵ His job, in short, was to ensure that the number and quality of mobilized troops in Ireland did not depart greatly from official records. To this office was also annexed the job of calculating the check on behalf of both the Irish Council in Dublin and the Privy Council in England. The job of the clerk of check was, as C. G. Cruickshank put it, to "satisfy himself that the appropriate deductions had been made [in payment of the garrison] for absences without leave, defects in equipment, and offences against the regulations."³⁶ The sum of the checks noted and calculated were deducted from the subsequent full pay, thereby, it was hoped, saving the crown money over time.³⁷ When done well, the savings could be substantial; for instance, the check calculated on the English army's pay in the Netherlands during the year ending October 1588 came to £9,112 4s. 8d.³⁸

Once appointed, Lane appears to have been a fresh broom. The late officeholder's deputy, John Dannett, for instance, was swept out without much ado. But soon enough, Lane, like all his predecessors, faced the challenge of having to deal with the army itself. As recently as the spring of 1590, the volatility of the crown garrison had made itself felt when a band of seventy-seven soldiers protesting about arrears of pay had marched from Limerick to block Lord Deputy Fitzwilliam's exit from Dublin Castle.³⁹ In spite of this unrest, Ireland seemed, if not more peaceful, certainly more pacified than it had been for a long time. The reach of crown government went deeper than ever before. Plans for the establishment of small military bases in Ulster with the agreement of the Gaelic-Irish lords had almost come to fruition but foundered on the obnoxious behavior of a number of the new military captains appointed by Fitzwilliam, by any standards a tremendously venal

³⁴ Fiant 5750 and Fiant 5757, in *The Irish Fiant of the Tudor Sovereigns: During the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Philip & Mary, and Elizabeth I*, ed. J. Digges-La Touche and J. Mills, 4 vols. (Dublin, 1994), 3:195.

³⁵ Petition of John Morgan, 12 July 1592, TNA, SP6/166/15. Williams's professional fate had been entwined with that of the lord deputy, Sir John Perrot. For the massive scandal related to Matthew King's stewardship of the clerkship of check in 1563, see "Notes to be considered," September 1563, TNA, SP63/9/1.

³⁶ C. G. Cruickshank, *Elizabeth's Army* (Oxford, 1966), 146–47.

³⁷ Ciaran Brady, "The Captains' Games: Army and Society in Elizabethan Ireland," in *A Military History of Ireland*, ed. Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffrey (Cambridge, 1996), 136–59, esp. 148–51; see also Ciaran Brady, *The Chief Governors: The Rise and Fall of Reform Government in Tudor Ireland, 1536–1588* (Cambridge, 1994), 108.

³⁸ Cruickshank, *Elizabeth's Army*, 146. See also James Digges's Book of the Checks to 11 October 1588, 1 May 1589, TNA, SP84/32/408.

³⁹ Rapple, *Martial Power and Elizabethan Political Culture*, 291. Lane had been pivotal in the safe dispersal of troops returning from the Portuguese expedition; see Acts of the Privy Council of England (London, 1899), 18, viii, part 1, 20; TNA, PC2/16, fol. 245, 22 August 1589.

viceroys.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, relative to the violent crises of the late 1570s and early 1580s, these challenges seemed small, bureaucratic, and far from insuperable. In Connacht, where a similar scheme to the one proposed for Ulster had been successfully instituted in the south of the province, Sir Richard Bingham, the notorious provincial president, reigned supreme.⁴¹ With the departure of Fitzwilliam and the promise of a new regime of greater probity, Lane was soon receiving signs of favor in Ireland, including, not long after his appointment, an (Irish) knighthood from the new lord deputy, William Russell. Lane's technocratic vision, in short, seemed unaffected by his new environment. On 1 December 1593, he sent Burghley a letter containing something approaching a personal mission statement. He pledged himself to the task of stamping out the perennial "gross abuses" that persisted unchecked within the crown's military establishment in Ireland, making it "not [only] difficult, but also impossible for a clerk of any band—upon whose sole oath dependeth at this day the knowledge of the muster-master of the strength and weakness of every band—to deliver a false musters [*sic*] without being discovered."⁴²

That was the aim, and the means he suggested for carrying it out entailed unprecedented democratization within each band of soldiers, bypassing the time-honored collusion between captains and company clerks by making the rank and file privy to "the alterations, entries and vacancies" made by the clerk of each armed band in their outfit's muster books. This transparency, Lane argued, would bring corruption to a halt, as the level of scrutiny that resulted would make fraud impossible.⁴³ It was a brave proposal—but never implemented.

Lane's swift integration into the world of Dublin officialdom was remarkable. Although far from a familiar face, he had not been a total stranger to Irish affairs. In the early 1580s, he had been retained to build fortifications in war-torn Munster and had subsequently been appointed sheriff of Kerry in 1585—an office pivotal to the performance of inquisitions of escheated or concealed Munster lands under the direction of vice-treasurer Sir Henry Wallop following the Earl of Desmond's rebellion.⁴⁴ Earlier, in 1580, the secretary of the Irish Council, Geoffrey Fenton, had raised the idea that either Philip Sidney or Ambrose Dudley, the Earl of Warwick himself, might become "baron of Kerry" with a claim over that palatinate, so Lane's record of service in the Dudley interest may have played its part in his appointment as sheriff there.⁴⁵ His performance in this office, of course, had been interrupted by his service across the Atlantic. He had not put down deep roots in Irish service. Nevertheless, while Lane may not have had a wealth of

⁴⁰ Hiram Morgan, *Tyrone's Rebellion: The Outbreak of the Nine Years War in Ireland* (Woodbridge, 1993), 37–43, 47–54, 65–67, 122; For Fitzwilliam's corruption in relation to Ulster, see Thomas Lee, "A brief declaration of the government of Ireland," in *Desiderata Curiosa Hibernica*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1772), 1:106. For a summary of Fitzwilliam's venality, see Terry Clavin, "Sir William Fitzwilliam," *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2013), <https://www.dib.ie/biography/fitzwilliam-sir-william-a3258>.

⁴¹ For Bingham's *modus operandi*, see Rapple, *Martial Power and Elizabethan Political Culture*, 250–300.

⁴² Lane to Burghley, 1 December 1593, TNA, SP63/172/32.

⁴³ Lane to Burghley, 1 December 1593, TNA, SP63/172/32.

⁴⁴ Lane, James Moore, and Thomas Myagh's offer, TNA, SP63/107/61–61i, Lane to Privy Council, 12 March 1584, TNA, SP63/108/17; Ormond to Walsingham, 8 January 1583, TNA, SP63/99/12.

⁴⁵ Fenton to Leicester, 8 September 1580, TNA, SP63/76/19. See also Michael MacCarthy-Morrogh, *The Munster Plantation: English Migration to Southern Ireland* (Oxford, 1986), 10–11, 26. One of Lane's letters from Roanoke, dated 12 August 1585, was to Sir Philip Sidney.

friends in the Irish administration, he was far from unprotected because he had one very good friend whose star seemed to be rising to an unassailable position: Sir Richard Bingham, president of Connacht.

The connection between Bingham and Lane was of long standing. As early as 19 May 1573, when their respective Irish careers had been impossible to predict, Lane had extolled Bingham's merits to Burghley, describing him as "the most sufficient man for every kind of martial function" and praising his "most painful and faithful service under my simple conduct" against "the rebels of the North" in 1569.⁴⁶ He also lauded Bingham's "sincere judgement in religion . . . being void of these ceremonial superstitions . . . deeply touched with the fear of God." Bingham was, in short, despite some serious early indiscretions, "one of us."⁴⁷ For all Lane's unctuousness, Bingham, never a patient soul, had threatened to derail his own rehabilitation by demanding a crown pension from the lord treasurer. Lane apologized on Bingham's behalf, claiming that his friend "was iron-bellied" when he wrote his demand.⁴⁸ The episode is a salutary illustration of how some Elizabethan martial men as late as the 1570s believed that they could sell their allegiance for the highest price. Without Lane's intercession in 1573, Bingham would probably never have had a subsequent career in crown service. By 1591, however, the "iron-bellied" man seemed unstoppable. After being appointed president or governor of Connacht in 1584, he had become the apparently unimpeachable overlord of his province. Even the hatred of two chief governors, Sir John Perrot and Sir William Fitzwilliam, had not prevailed against him. He had also become something of a cult figure. A coterie of intellectuals found themselves drawn to his severity. Richard Beacon in *Solon his Follie* (1594) presented a highbrow treatment of Bingham that cast him as the personification of Machiavellian reason-of-state,⁴⁹ while Edmund Spenser's man of iron, Talus, the enforcer of justice on behalf of Artegall in book 5 of the *Faerie Queene*, was most likely modeled on Sir Richard.⁵⁰ From his appointment in Connacht, he had cut a swathe through all his opponents, whether they were fellow English servitors, English Irish, or Gaelic-Irish, and by the early 1590s, having established a *modus vivendi* with the magnates of south Connacht, he was pushing hard against the O'Donnell lordship and its traditional claims over northern Connacht.⁵¹ Lane quickly became an important collaborator with Bingham's expansionist designs in this contested area. Over the course of 1592 and 1593, both promoted a scheme whereby Lane, "in respect of our old and ancient familiarity and good will," would take charge of a strategically pivotal triangle of territory lying between

⁴⁶ Lane to Burghley, 19 May 1573, British Library, Lans. MS 18, 2; *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries*, 2nd series, no. 12 (1911): 277–82. Lane had been captain of 548 footmen in the Army of the South in 1569.

⁴⁷ For Bingham's pardon for his part in the conspiracy to spirit Arthur Pole away to Continental Europe, see *Calendar of the Patent Rolls* [. . .], *Elizabeth I*, vol. 4, 1566–69 (London, 1964), 63–64.

⁴⁸ Ralph Lane to Burghley, 27 October 1573, TNA, SP 12/92/42.

⁴⁹ Richard Beacon, *Solon his follie, or, A politique discourse touching the reformation of common-weales conquered, declined or corrupted* (Oxford, 1594).

⁵⁰ Rapple, *Martial Power and Elizabethan Political Culture*, 86–126, 297–98.

⁵¹ Rapple, 256–57. Bingham had advised Lane of opportunities in Ireland from at least as early as 1580; see Bingham to Lane, 11 November 1580, British Library, Cotton Titus BXIII, fol. 322. See Bingham to Lord Keeper Sir John Puckering, 16 April 1593, TNA, SP63/169/14, where he rehearses at length the way "Romish bishops" had given Maguire and O'Donnell confidence that would come to Ulster from Spain.

Loch Erne and the west Atlantic coast of Donegal, an area bounded by Belleek, Ballyshannon, and Bundoran, right on the borders between northern Connacht, western Ulster, and the ocean. Lane stressed the importance of fortifying this region where rebels could pass “from the one country to the other,”⁵² while Bingham stressed that Lane’s establishment there would ensure that “the great lords of Ulster should not be suffered to live in their old tyrannous Irish manner.”⁵³ Bingham and Lane’s project did much to create the ratcheting political tension that issued in Donegal’s “Red” Hugh O’Donnell and Fermanagh’s Hugh Maguire’s insurgency in 1593, which, in turn, would become a catalyst for Tyrone’s open campaign against the crown from 1595 onward, and, thereby, a crucial staging post on the descent into that epic conflict between the Gaelic-Irish chieftains of Ulster and the crown known as the Nine Years’ War.⁵⁴

LANE’S STRANGE DIPLOMACY WITH TYRONE IN MAY 1596

Given Lane’s close alliance with Bingham and his cooperation in an aggressive bid to undermine Gaelic-Irish interests in Ulster, it seems strange that only three years later he performed what looks like a political and cultural about-face. On 20 May 1596 (a significant date that will be repeatedly signposted) Lane, given to a profusion of plans and projects, produced a very different type of proposal for settling affairs in Ulster. It went by the unwieldy title “A project of a course by an opinion grounded upon assured intelligencing to be holden to make the earl of Tyrone for the time to come not only a most loyal subject but also a most profitable servant to her Majesty even to the full amends of his former late great offence which means are these that follow viz.”⁵⁵ Talk of ending the conflict by means of a “pacification” and “pardon” had long been in the air.⁵⁶ But Lane’s recommendation went further in the direction of appeasement than even the most conciliatory approaches. It was the anatomy of a capitulation, the indulgence of Tyrone’s every whim.

A somewhat similar approach, although much more vaguely couched, had been mooted on 1 April 1596 by the maverick captain of the kern, Thomas Lee, a rank outsider.⁵⁷ For the previous three years, Lee had made much of his supposed close friendship with Tyrone in the hope that it would make him politically indispensable.⁵⁸ But while Lee’s 1596 proposal was basic, Lane’s later bromide was anything but. It was the consummate work of a man used to proffering impressive-sounding

⁵² Bingham to Lane, 3 August 1592, TNA SP63/166/70i; Lane to Burghley, 28 September 1592, TNA SP63/166/70.

⁵³ Bingham to Burghley, 17 April 1593, TNA, SP63/169/16. Lane intended for the area to be stewarded on his behalf by his nephew William Lane; Lane to Burghley, 28 September 1592, TNA SP63/166/70.

⁵⁴ For a statement of the Maguire lordship’s grievances against Bingham, see Maguire’s griefs, Lambeth Palace Library, London, Carew MS, v. 617, fol. 284.

⁵⁵ “Project by Sir Ralph Lane addressed to Lord Burghley,” 20 May 1596, TNA, SP63/189/41i.

⁵⁶ To cite two examples out of many, Fenton to Burghley, 7 September 1595, TNA, SP63/183/9; Norris to Cecil, 27 November 1595, TNA, SP63/184/36.

⁵⁷ Around this time, Lane was quick to boost Lee, his supposed kinsman, in his correspondence. Lee to Burghley, 1 April 1596, TNA, SP63/188/2; Lane to Burghley, 6 April 1596, TNA, SP63/188/13. In 1539, Lane’s father had carried out some of his investigations of priests’ personal property with a Thomas Lee, likely Lee’s father; Ralph Lane and Thomas Lee to Cromwell, 15 March 1539, TNA, SP1/144/525.

⁵⁸ Morgan, *Tyrone’s Rebellion*, 175–76.

logistical solutions. Whereas Lee merely sought an end to his own financial and political disgrace as recompense for his diplomatic work, Lane was more ambitious. Indeed, a month earlier, Sir Ralph had suggested, on the back of his recent contracts with Tyrone, that he himself should be elevated from his ex officio membership of the ad hoc Irish council of war to full membership of the Irish (Privy) Council—a promotion that would lead to his becoming party to the negotiations taking place at that time between the proclaimed traitor Tyrone and Lord General John Norris.⁵⁹

Lane's project, sent to Robert Cecil in May, identified as its first priority securing the earl's trust. Unless this occurred, Sir Ralph argued, Tyrone might never be "contented to make his personal repair at all times to the state here separated and singled from the rest of his wicked complices." While a pardon was necessary (Tyrone had in fact received one seven days earlier), Lane stressed that it did not afford the earl sufficient protection. Tyrone's position in the rebel confederacy with O'Donnell and Maguire, Lane explained, routinely required him to violate the terms of his pardon and put his life in danger. Consequently, he needed a "perpetual protection under her Majesty's hand and signature *without condition or limitation of time* for his safe going coming, or abiding with state here, or with her Majesty in England *without impeachment or prejudice either to his life or liberty*."⁶⁰ Lane also stressed that Tyrone needed to be protected from the volatility of court politics, so the protection would have to be confirmed "by [individual] special letters" penned by each of Elizabeth's closest counsellors.⁶¹ While Tyrone was confident that the Earl of Essex and Lord Buckhurst would have no problem signing up to these demands, he was, Lane said, less confident of Secretary of State Robert Cecil's goodwill, and for that reason he desired his signature above all others.

If these guarantees were received by Tyrone ("brought unto him by some party of whom special choice may be made"), the earl would "not only make his personal repair from time to time to state here but also into England there to prostrate himself at her Majesty's royal feet." Then, "though [Tyrone] pretend[s] no command among them," he would draw O'Donnell and the rest of the lords of Ulster and Connacht unto himself and introduce "garrisons of mean Englishmen commanded by English, with English sheriffs and all process according to her Majesty's Law" throughout all of Ulster, including his own territory of Tyrone.⁶² Before such a happy event might take place, however, two further conditions would have to be met. The first of these would be Tyrone's appointment as "Her Majesty's Lieutenant General in the North" and the second an agreement that Tyrone would by right "have the appointing of the English garrisons in every of the countries where he will plant the same." Tyrone, Lane suggested, already had a number of "such English captains [and] English sheriffs" in mind "as of whom, before his breaking out into rebellion, he did most assure himself of their love and true affection unto him." Once he knew Secretary Cecil's mind, Tyrone would send him a "particular list" of these favored Englishmen. To sum up, Lane conceded that Tyrone's petition for the Lieutenancy of the North "may worthily be judged an insolent suit," but he insisted that

⁵⁹ See also Lane to Cecil, 14 November 1602, TNA, SP63/207, part 6, 21.

⁶⁰ Project by Sir Ralph Lane addressed to Lord Burghley, 20 May 1596, TNA, SP63/189/41i (my emphases).

⁶¹ Project by Sir Ralph Lane addressed to Lord Burghley, 20 May 1596, TNA, SP63/189/41i.

⁶² Project by Sir Ralph Lane addressed to Lord Burghley, 20 May 1596, TNA, SP63/189/41i.

the only sensible thing to do was to concede it to him “of her Majesty’s gracious grant.”⁶³ To do so would be to face facts; Tyrone “in his rebellious estate” already firmly possessed all the powers that the proposal would grant. There was no real alternative.

While the content of Lane’s proposed agreement with Tyrone may have looked like a shocking document to neophytes, it would have had a sickening familiar ring to old hands in Irish matters, especially Lord Treasurer Burghley. The preconditions related to safe conduct as well as the itemization of Tyrone’s autonomous power over the Province of Ulster amounted to the repetition of scandalous demands made more than thirty years earlier by that formidable warlord and former head of the O’Neill clan, Shane O’Neill. Those demands had been conceded by the crown in the 1563 Treaty of Drumcree but, crucially, never ratified by an Irish Parliament. Internal clan politics may have determined that Hugh O’Neill execrated Shane’s memory, but his proper interests as “the O’Neill” and Earl of Tyrone, as well as his concerns for his personal authority and jurisdictional independence, were much the same as those of his bullish predecessor. This outlook, of course, took as its template the expansive hereditary claims made for chieftains of the O’Neill name—enshrined in the *Ceart Uí Néill* but given a fresh infrastructural twist, one that came naturally to a martial projector like Lane.⁶⁴

Under Lane’s plan, Tyrone would control Ulster’s armed men, both his own and the queen’s, with more real authority than any of the lord lieutenants in English shires. Such a Gaelic-Irish lord lieutenant would not only be preeminent among the local aristocracy but would, given his influence over O’Donnell and Maguire, also hold sway over the entire northern half of the country. Tyrone’s “Lieutenancy of the North” would amount to much more than martial government of a mere shire, or the Earl of Ormond’s seigneurial privileges over his territories: it granted Tyrone supremacy over an area that had hardly any civic or legal infrastructure of a type recognizable to sensitive English souls.⁶⁵ While templates for reconciling Irish chieftains’ claims with English legal and governmental culture already existed, Lane was proposing something innovatory using the nascent language of military-fiscal state building.⁶⁶ Had he anything to gain from this humiliating proposal? A great deal, as it happens, especially at the very moment he proposed it in May 1596. To explain why, one has to rummage around Sir Ralph Lane’s complicated affairs to discern suggestive trends and a wider financial context that reveal much about how he had employed his talents in Ireland between 1594 and 1596.

UNDERPERFORMANCE OR COLLUSIVE DESERTION?

Curiously, only a year prior to his diplomatic proposal, Lane had played a different tune, viewing Tyrone not with awe but with scorn. On 6 May 1595, Lane had been so excited about the prospect of the Gaelic-Irish earl’s anticipated destruction that he had devised a plan (complete with map) about what might be done with

⁶³ Project by Sir Ralph Lane addressed to Lord Burghley, 20 May 1596, TNA, SP63/189/41i.

⁶⁴ Ciaran Brady, *Shane O’Neill* (Dublin, 2015), 44–75; Morgan, *Tyrone’s Rebellion*, 69, 76–81.

⁶⁵ Project by Sir Ralph Lane addressed to Lord Burghley, 20 May 1596, TNA, SP63/189/41i.

⁶⁶ See Morgan, *Tyrone’s Rebellion*, 177n76, for a possible Scottish parallel.

Ulster once O'Neill had been eliminated. His plan was presumptuous because in May 1595 Tyrone had not yet been proclaimed a rebel.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, Lane petitioned the queen for the privilege of settling the region of Ulster east of the River Bann. He claimed this privilege, he said, because he was her “ancientest most humble servant . . . Sir Richard Bingham excepted.”⁶⁸ Already his petition was wildly optimistic: things had been particularly challenging for Elizabeth’s government in Ireland over the course of 1594 and early 1595. The crown army was failing in Ulster in the beginning stages of what would become the Nine Years’ War. It seemed outmanned, outmaneuvered, and strangely paralyzed. Furthermore, the Dublin administration’s hopeless dysfunction was coming ever more sharply into focus. The subsequent proclamation of Tyrone as a traitor on 23 June 1595 only served to make the regime’s military situation worse.

Ireland was no longer merely a local concern. In the context of the Anglo-Spanish war, Elizabeth’s chief officers had decided to appoint Sir John Norris, proven in the Netherlands, Portugal, and Brittany, as lord general of the army in Ulster. Norris was also a trusted client of Burghley’s and nominally president of Munster. The move was calculated but disruptive, most notably because Norris and the sitting lord deputy, William Russell, loathed each other and had done so at least since the time they had served together in the Netherlands in 1586 and 1587. While Russell, a committed friend of the Earl of Essex, retained some sort of viceregal preeminence, Norris, a Cecilian through and through, took effective command in the conduct of the war against Tyrone in the field.⁶⁹

Far from being welcomed as a possible savior, Norris received a frigid reception from the practiced hands of the Irish administration when he arrived (reluctant and tardy) in May 1595.⁷⁰ Repeated attempts had been made to stymie his appointment.⁷¹ This was likely because his appointment signaled the first loosening of the grip with which a small group (of which Wallop, Lane, and Bingham were members) had controlled the levers of state in Ireland since 1588. After Norris’s arrival, however, the Irish Council could not control the “official” administration narrative about the war as well as they might have liked.⁷² Significantly, Norris and Lane also detested each other and had done so for more than half a decade since the Portuguese expedition.⁷³ It is tempting to think that it was Norris’s arrival that precipitated the collapse of Lane’s confidence of May 1595 into abject despair within a month.⁷⁴

Around this time, the Irish councilors’ correspondence with Burghley and Sir Robert Cecil became perceptibly shiftier and awkward. When the marshal of the army, Sir Henry Bagenal, offered on 5 July to tell Burghley what was afoot in

⁶⁷ Lane to Burghley, 6 May 1595, TNA, SP63/179/72, 72i. The map referred to in the letter is missing.

⁶⁸ Lane to Burghley, 6 May 1595, TNA, SP63/179/72, 72i. For other opinions, see William Piers’s “plat,” 6 November 1595, TNA, SP63/177/2, 3.

⁶⁹ John S. Nolan, *Sir John Norreys and the Elizabethan Military World* (Exeter, 1997), 67–218.

⁷⁰ His bands had transferred to Ireland from Brittany two months earlier.

⁷¹ Lord Chancellor Archbishop Loftus to Robert Cecil, 19 March 1595, TNA, SP63/178/97. Loftus pushed for Bingham instead.

⁷² Rapple, *Martial Power and Elizabethan Political Culture*, 298.

⁷³ Loftus to Robert Cecil, 19 March 1595, TNA, SP63/178/97.

⁷⁴ Lane to Burghley, 7 June 1595, TNA, SP3/180/19. Lane concludes, “Ireland, [had] never stood in greater danger of being utterly lost.”

Ireland, requesting leave to travel to England to give the lord treasurer sensitive information, Burghley was unsympathetic. Why could Bagenal not just send him the information in a letter or employ “some trusty persons” to carry his advice?⁷⁵ Either Burghley had underestimated the sort of *omertà* that existed between the Irish councilors at this time, or perhaps he knew but did not care overmuch. Letters coming in and out of Ireland were not safe from prying eyes—even Lord General Norris’s own correspondence from Robert Cecil had been compromised.⁷⁶

The spectacular failings of the crown army in the field could not be denied, however. Norris claimed to see what was holding things back. The bands were woefully inexperienced, especially those “last sent out of England.”⁷⁷ By contrast, Tyrone’s army, in no way the usual caricature of a Gaelic-Irish force, was well disciplined, well trained, and reckoned to be made up of around ten thousand foot soldiers and one thousand horses. It was insistently, patiently, bearing down upon the borders of the Pale.⁷⁸ This strange disparity of energy and force raised a simple question: Why was the queen’s army so underpowered? According to Secretary Geoffrey Fenton, in a letter to Lord Buckhurst, the garrison’s weakness had three likely causes: sickness, desertion on the part of the new bands arriving from England (his favored reason), or the crooked bookkeeping of “captains that love to receive full pay, but [are] careless to have their companies full.” He believed there were only sixteen hundred to seventeen hundred men in pay in Ulster, split into thirty companies, and confided that the Irish Council had ordered the captains to “take a supply of twenty soldiers of this country-birth [that is, Irish soldiers] in every company of 100 to fill out the bands.” This policy was risky and might “prove dangerous for the doubtfulness of [the Irish soldiers’] disposition in this broken time,” but there was no choice, as, in spite of the supposedly continuous movement of soldiers west across the Irish Sea, there were never enough English troops to make up the numbers.⁷⁹ Further west in Connacht, things were so bad that Sir Richard Bingham, usually cocksure and aggressive, was now on the back foot, seeking to divest from the province altogether. All his (and Lane’s) designs for western Ulster had been subverted; the territory between Ballyshannon, Bleleek, and Bundoran was now firmly in the hands of O’Donnell.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Bagenal to Burghley, 5 July 1595, TNA, SP63/181/8. Bagenal would later complain that “masses of treasure” sent from England had not been distributed with “indifferent equality”; Bagenal to Cecil, 29 October 1597, TNA, SP63/201/39. Burghley’s insensibility here raises the question of how much he may already have known. Did he benefit to any extent from turning a blind eye to the Irish officers’ military administration?

⁷⁶ Lane to Burghley, 28 September 1592, TNA, SP63/166/70; Bingham to Lane, 3 August 1592, TNA, SP63/166/70i.

⁷⁷ Norris to Cecil, 4 June 1595, TNA, SP63/180/8. Norris’s two thousand hardened troops from the Brittany campaign were, of course, in a much more robust condition than the rest of the crown garrison.

⁷⁸ For Tyrone’s “military revolution,” see James O’Neill, *The Nine Years War, 1593–1603: O’Neill, Mountjoy and the Military Revolution* (Dublin, 2017).

⁷⁹ Fenton to Buckhurst, 30 July 1595, TNA, SP63/181/66. For comparison, see Wallop’s 1580 complaints about the number of Irishmen in the crown army: Wallop to Burghley, 1 August 1580, TNA SP63/75/1; see also Nicholas Canny, *Making Ireland British, 1580–1650* (Oxford, 2001), 68–69.

⁸⁰ Bingham to Burghley, 10 October 1595, TNA, SP63/183/82; Russell to Burghley, 26 December 1595, TNA, SP63/185/30; Norris to Burghley, 27 June 1595, TNA, SP63/180/55; Norris to Cecil, 2 August 1595, TNA, SP63/182/5; Norris to Burghley, 27 June 1595, TNA, SP63/180/55; Bingham to Burghley, 10 October 1595, SP63/183/82; Russell to Burghley, 26 December 1595, TNA, SP63/185/30.

What had gone so wrong and who was responsible? Sir Henry Wallop, as vice-treasurer and treasurer-of-wars, who really should have known, affected not to know. He told Burghley on 1 August that to his mind the “great decay of the bands,” especially those that had last come over from England, was inexplicable. This admission was particularly scandalous as, from the crown’s perspective, great sums of money had been pumped into Ireland to support the army. “I understand,” Wallop stated, that the bands “were as well-furnished as any that ever came from thence [that is, England] to the place. Yet if now they should be mustered, it is thought few of the captains will be found to have above *forty* able Englishmen in the band [out of a hundred].” Furthermore, the bands were “destitute of brogues, shirts, mantles, or anything to defend them from the weather.”⁸¹ A compilation of the cash sent since 13 January 1595 was calculated on 24 August, and three days later a memorandum was drafted in which it was computed that £66,891 had been sent to Ireland for the army in 1594 and 1595.⁸² Where had it all gone? Burghley wanted accountability, yet he found it all but impossible to secure any records, let alone accurate ones.

The Irish Council cast around for the necessary accounts and in their absence commissioned new ones. The lord deputy, according to Wallop, had “given order that the muster-master [should] thoroughly examine and certify with all expedition” all the defects in the army.⁸³ The matter was pressing as the situation in the field was pathetic. Norris recounted how soldiers were openly telling their commanders that they intended to desert and steal rather than starve. A fifteen-day delay in pay had resulted in the wasting of the country, the emptying of the towns of population, “discipline subverted, and that which will be most regarded, Her Majesty’s charge unprofitably expended.”⁸⁴ Norris, beholden to none, was frank about where blame for the unfolding military disaster lay. He pointed his finger at “those that have the chiefest disposition of things here, [who] care not how long the war last so they may make their profit.”⁸⁵ Four days later, groping sluggishly toward the truth, Wallop admitted that some captains through “greediness of gain” had permitted collusive desertions “by selling leave to divers of their soldiers to depart.” He argued that the queen’s service would not have been so compromised had “able and well-chosen captains out of England” continued to lead the bands in Ireland, but on arrival in Ireland, these bands were transferred to old hands in the Irish service, with disastrous results: “[T]he leaders here . . . being strangers to the soldiers have the less care of them, and being poor and needy grow so greedy of their pain and gain, as in these regards they will rather wink at their running away, or give them leave by passport to depart.”⁸⁶

⁸¹ Wallop to Burghley, 1 August 1595, TNA, SP63/182/1 (my emphasis).

⁸² Memorandum, 27 August 1595, TNA, SP63/182/74. For certificates, estimates, and declarations related to treasure issued under the Privy Seal in 1595, see February 1595, TNA, SP63/178/61; 21 July 1595, TNA, SP63/181/42i; 21 July 1595, TNA, SP63/181/42iii; 14 June 1595, TNA, SP63/182/38iii; 29 July 1595, TNA, SP63/183/7iii; 22 October 1595, TNA, SP63/184/11ii; 10 February 1595, TNA, SP63/183/50i.

⁸³ Wallop to Burghley, 1 August 1595, TNA, SP63/182/1.

⁸⁴ Norris to Cecil, 2 August 1595, TNA, SP63/182/5.

⁸⁵ Norris to Cecil, 2 August 1595, TNA, SP63/182/5.

⁸⁶ Wallop to Cecil, 13 August 1595, TNA, SP63/182/31; Fenton to Burghley, 26 August 1595, TNA, SP63/182/63.

Surely the person best able to set the record straight on all this would be the clerk of check and muster-master himself, Ralph Lane. But Lane seemed uninterested in doing this. Instead, after briefly acknowledging the situation, in a non sequitur he set himself to petitioning the queen for a fresh command in Ireland of his own choosing.⁸⁷

By October 1595, a temporary negotiated ceasefire had been agreed. This formal suspension of hostilities not only avoided an immediate crushing reverse for the crown but also allowed the queen and Burghley to take stock of the Irish administration's management of the war. Consequently, Sir Ralph Lane, despite his nonchalance, increasingly became a person of interest.⁸⁸

LANE UNDER SCRUTINY

One might assume that Lane, the very model of a modern muster-master, would simply hand over the relevant records and data for scrutiny. In fact, when vice-treasurer Wallop openly began blaming Lane for the army's woes, he confided to Burghley that Lane had not sent him any certificate of the checks in the six months that had elapsed since the previous 31 March—a devastating indictment.⁸⁹ Lane, for his part, alert to the changing atmosphere, immediately sought allies, looking to Lord Deputy Russell to defend him against Wallop. The vice-treasurer, Lane told the lord deputy, was making unreasonable demands, threatening to withhold payment of the troops until he had received certificates of the checks not only for the army mustered in Ulster but also for the garrison in “times past.” Furthermore, according to Lane, Wallop had insisted that the certificated record of checks should stack up in such a way “as may be found *greatly* to lessen Her Majesty's charge.” Lane protested that this amounted to the unfair and tendentious foreshadowing of the checks and content of the muster books,⁹⁰ but Wallop had a point. If the omnipresent daily complaints about the “weakness and decay” of the bands were in any way true, it logically followed that there should be both an abundance of checks and a significant rebate for the crown.⁹¹ Or so one might have thought.

Faced with this expectation, Lane adopted a strategy of prevaricating defense, using a repertoire of evasion on which he would rely for the rest of his career. While acknowledging the general situation, he was studiously vague about the details of the problem, as if it had little to do with him, and, although he complained about the limited resources given him to do his job, he sometimes concluded by proffering brave, visionary, but impractical technical proposals to solve everything in one fell swoop. For example, at the end of August 1595, he admitted to the lord deputy that the bands were weak and decayed but added that the shortfall in numbers was not down to deaths but rather to sickness.⁹² This meant, of course (Lane was

⁸⁷ Lane to Burghley, 3 August 1595, TNA, SP63/182/7; Lane to Burghley, 26 August 1595, TNA, SP63/182/65.

⁸⁸ Norris to Russell, 30 August 1595, TNA, SP63/183/10iii.

⁸⁹ Wallop to Burghley, 6 September 1595, TNA, SP63/183/3.

⁹⁰ Lane to Russell, 31 August 1595, TNA, SP63/182/7iv (my emphasis); see also Norris to Cecil, 2 August 1595, TNA, SP63/182/5; Norris to Cecil, 13 August 1595, TNA, SP63/182/28.

⁹¹ Wallop to Burghley, 6 September 1595, TNA, SP63/183/7.

⁹² Lane to Russell, 31 August 1595, TNA, SP63/182/7iv.

managing expectations), that neither a high number of checks nor a significant lessening of the crown's charges could reasonably be expected. The men, although incapacitated, were allegedly lying sick in towns throughout the English Pale, and being alive, were therefore still entitled to their pay. Although firm figures, of course, were unavailable, he also admitted that an unprecedented rash of desertions had brought about the disappearance of about a third of the army. He repudiated Wallop's huffing and puffing about the non-submission of his certified checks, explaining that he lacked the means to safely "convoy the packet from [his] camp to Dundalk" to Dublin, an operation that would, by his reckoning, need five hundred men. While he admitted that the records could be sent by sea, the necessary wait for a favorable wind would guarantee that he could not meet Wallop's absolute deadline for submission of the checks. Even if he succeeded in beating the odds, Lane confided, the information in the books would be as good as useless because he had been unable, for no fault of his own, to do his job properly. He complained that he lacked "commissaries"—delegated representatives appointed to assess numbers and checks of the garrison on his behalf wherever they were scattered throughout the country.⁹³ Characteristically, he proffered a plan to make everything better: for every three hundred men in the army, one representative of the muster-master, a "commissary," should be appointed to audit the captains. Such commissaries should then be paid not out of the checks but from the crown's own kitty. At first glance this might have appeared sensible, but on reflection, given the acute existing situation, it looked like a red herring designed to distract from the immediate crisis.⁹⁴

When, at length, Lane submitted the muster book, it raised more questions than it answered. Why did it (incredibly) contain no mention of kern (aka Irish foot soldiers)? Why was the information supplied concerning the number of horsemen based on an old certificate rather than an accurate new one?⁹⁵ After perusing the books, Wallop told Burghley that they were "so imperfect and uncertain" they would, if sent to court, "rather offend than satisfy." Consequently he decided with the lord deputy's agreement that it was best not to "trouble" Burghley with them—a convenient decision, perhaps. Nevertheless, he expressed confidence that Lane would "very shortly" proffer a "more perfect check book of the whole army for the half year ending the last of this month according the wonted manner whereby I shall in some measure be able to certify your Lord [of] my defalcations of checks that you have so often required and myself much desire to [provide], but cannot, through the lack of perfect declaration thereof from Sir Raphe as aforesaid."⁹⁶

The substance of the books that Lane sent to Dublin was troubling. The first book, a record of the muster of Lord General Norris's Ulster army, taken on 27 August at Kilmonaghan, painted a stark picture. Of 2,650 footmen, only 1,799 could be mustered; 545 were sick, hurt, or in garrison elsewhere, and 305 were utterly absent.

⁹³ He had one deputy, Thomas Chambers, "bred up all his time under Sir Henry Wallop," who had one delegated commissary, paid for out of Lane's own pocket. Lane to Russell, 31 August 1595, TNA, SP63/183/7iv.

⁹⁴ Lane to Russell, 31 August 1595, TNA, SP63/183/7iv.

⁹⁵ Lord Russell to Burghley, 14 September 1595, TNA, SP63/183/32; Lane to Burghley, 8 September 1595, TNA, SP63/183/16

⁹⁶ Wallop to Burghley, 26 September 1595, TNA, SP63/183/53.

Only the dead and absent, of course, were eligible to be numbered as checks. Worse still, of the alleged 1,799 physically present and being paid, a quarter were incapable of marching, let alone fighting, and of the rest, 300 had become incapacitated following “the skirmish at Armagh” and “the fight at the Oglish.”⁹⁷ So, out of a possible 2,650, only 1,050, there or thereabout, were in anyway capable of fighting, and at that rate of attrition, who could depend on them? A second book recorded the muster taken in the Newry on the same day—Marshal Bagenal’s garrison—and counted merely 225 horsemen, 260 kern, and 122 pioneers, with 41 sick, hurt, or imprisoned by Tyrone. In this tally, only fifteen dead men were deemed eligible to be calculated as checks. Wallop, with palpable exasperation, admitted to Burghley, “I can no way satisfy you touching the defalcations of checks, which for anything I see, will not be so great as your Lordship expects and I think [they] ought. And therefore . . . I hope your Lord will hold *me* excused.”⁹⁸ While Wallop’s petition sought tolerance, mercy, and understanding for the administration, he excluded the muster-master from any type of special pleading.

Given that withdrawal from communication was one of Burghley’s most powerful and time-honored means of applying political pressure, the dwindling number of surviving letters from Lane to Burghley between September 1594 and April 1595 may be significant. By depriving erstwhile correspondents of information, encouragement, moral support, patronage, and protection, the lord treasurer could, with economy, communicate an unambiguous message of disapproval.⁹⁹ Lane broke the awkward silence in December 1595 with a request for license to leave Ireland and return to England for the duration of the truce, suggesting that he might be given a role perfecting mustering practice back in England. Lane’s fresh proposal may have been full of the usual technical jargon, but his bricolage only highlighted a clumsy attempt to play factional politics: “I am moved eftsoons in the duty of my loyalty to offer my humble service for her Majesty to your Lordship, first, and *then to the earl of Essex, whom we take here for the particular patron of her Majesty’s martial affairs* amongst your lordships of that most honourable Board.”¹⁰⁰

But by the beginning of 1596, metropolitan patience with the Irish administration had become paper thin. A draft letter of Elizabeth’s meant for the Irish Council, composed on 7 January, gives a flavor of her outrage at what she increasingly felt had been a trick played at her expense: “[W]e expect care be taken amongst you, both for exact musters, whereof great shame is spoken how we are defrauded, and of the provident issuing of our treasure, without spending the same, in concordatum [that is, exceptional payments to individuals], rewards and other waste, while you complain of the soldier’s want and misery for whom these great sums by us are desired, and not in superfluous and vain expense.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Wallop to Burghley, 26 September 1595, TNA, SP63/183/53.

⁹⁸ Wallop to Burghley, 26 September 1595, TNA, SP63/183/53 (my emphasis).

⁹⁹ Rapple, *Martial Power and Elizabethan Political Culture*, 286.

¹⁰⁰ Lane to Burghley, Dec 23 1595, TNA, SP63/185/24 (my emphases).

¹⁰¹ Draft letter, 7 January 1596, TNA, SP63/186/6; Elizabeth to Russell, Norris, Wallop, and Fenton, 8 January 1596, Lambeth Palace Library, Carew MS, v. 632, fol. 140. Elizabeth’s ultimate letter of 8 January to her principal officers was slightly more measured.

The Irish administration became increasingly panicked.¹⁰² Over the new year, Elizabeth's disdain for her Irish government reached a new low. She even refused to admit Chief Justice Gardener, acting as an emissary of Lord Deputy Russell, to her presence.¹⁰³ Her horror over the financial workings of the sister kingdom, or as she put it: "manifest errors and defaults . . . committed of late years in that government, whereof some are past all remedy," only grew.¹⁰⁴ She emphasized her displeasure on 25 May 1596 (again, note the date), singling out particular officers for attention: "And for you our Treasurer of all others we see nothing but great sums expended and no good nor timely certificates how they are issued but in generalities with accounts of idle and particular charges wherein we find large allowances made to yourselves by yourselves in all things. And for the musters, of which let Ralph Lane be sharply warned, either we have none or such, as we assure you, it is ridiculous to the world to hear what an army we pay and yet what an army we have."¹⁰⁵

If Lane had been an effective muster-master operating in the queen's best interest, there would surely have been some evidence of his acting against the captains' compulsion to overestimate the number of their soldiers in service while underpaying them. But no such evidence was forthcoming. Although Elizabeth's displeasure, expressed so unambiguously, may have stung, it cannot have surprised him.¹⁰⁶ His muster book, when it at last came, covered the half year from the beginning of October 1595 to the end of March 1596, the period of the cessation. Scandalously, out of £39,817 12s. 6d. sterling spent on the support of a garrison clearly deficient in numbers, only £1,051 5s. 1d. by his calculation had been saved in checks due the queen.¹⁰⁷ By no stretch of the imagination could this tally with the great checks hoped for at court. Lane had probably been bracing himself for official displeasure for quite some time. His colleagues had already ostracized him.¹⁰⁸ As early as 6 May, he told Burghley "I have . . . so little favor done unto me by some of the state here as not only not to commend my service . . . but also they have in their advertisements upon base supposals condemned me either as negligent or else as over remiss."¹⁰⁹

As always, he never hesitated to admit there was a problem but, equally predictably, refused to take responsibility. Although the army never lacked numbers on payday, it always seemed to suffer mysterious shortages of men in the field. The reasons Lane gave for this remained the same: a significant number of men in pay

¹⁰² Bingham to Burghley 6 August 1595, TNA, SP63/182/16; Russell to Burghley, 26 December 1595, TNA, SP63/185/30.

¹⁰³ Cecil to Russell, March 9 1596, TNA, SP63/187/20; Note of Elizabeth's mislikes, 10 March 1596, TNA, SP63/187/25.

¹⁰⁴ Elizabeth to Russell and Council, 9 March, Lambeth Palace Library, Carew MSS vol. 612, fol. 67. For Russell's defense, see Russell to Burghley, 12 February 1596, TNA, SP63/186/58. For Norris's denunciations, see Norris to Cecil, 20 March 1596, TNA, SP63/187/45.

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth to Russell and Council, 25 May 1596, Lambeth Palace Library, Carew, vol. 612, fol. 76.

¹⁰⁶ Lane to Cecil, 20 October 1596, TNA, SP63/194/33, in which he refers to "her Majesty to my great grief repossessed again of an opinion of great fault in me"; Lane to Cecil, 24 October 1597, TNA, SP63/201/29, in which he refers to "the indignation of her Majesty so publicly and heavily inflicted upon me."

¹⁰⁷ This meant that the checks were of even less value than those claimed for the previous six months of £1,307 3s. 11d. Muster Book, 31 March 1596, TNA, SP63/187/67i; Checks for the half year from 1 April 1595 and ending 30 September 1595, 20 November 1595, TNA, SP63/184/29.

¹⁰⁸ Lane to Cecil, 1597, TNA, SP63/201/29, for Lane's account of his "public disgrace."

¹⁰⁹ Lane to Burghley, 6 May 1596, TNA, SP63/189/12.

were sick and unable to fight; he also still lacked delegated “commissaries” to do the counting on his behalf; and the garrison was scattered far and wide across the country. Furthermore, these factors had caused his muster books to be so lamentably unreliable and tardy.¹¹⁰ He, a scorned retainer, was not only underfunded but also dangerously ill with a “strangury” (blockage or irritation of the bladder) caused by Ireland’s “raw and waterish climate.”¹¹¹ Yet, although “sick,” Sir Ralph was not slow to hint that he knew enough about where the Irish administration’s metaphorical bodies were buried that if he were handled roughly he might be able to damage his fellow officers badly. For instance, he reflected in passing that the £2,600 he had accrued in checks over one year actually looked remarkably efficient when compared with the paltry £4,700 worth of checks accounted for by his accuser vice-treasurer Wallop over the course of five-and-a-half years during the eye-wateringly expensive “Desmonds wars.”¹¹² Lane’s implied meaning was clear: the vice-treasurer was no angel and would be wise to leave him alone.¹¹³

But the ever-developing situation affected not only Lane but also his oldest friend and protector, Sir Richard Bingham. Hostilities had been intensifying in Connacht.¹¹⁴ Tyrone protested that this did not constitute a breach of the ceasefire on his part, but Lord Deputy Russell felt sure that the Ulster chieftains were choreographing everything.¹¹⁵ In any case, Russell made an attempt to appease the disaffected in Connacht by formally investigating Bingham’s conduct, reviving long-suppressed (and likely accurate) charges against him.¹¹⁶ Bingham had been in a similar situation before, but his old expedients, the intimidation of witnesses and juries and the mocking of judges, were not going to work on this occasion.¹¹⁷ The new enquiry was presided over by Russell, Fenton, and Adam Loftus, lord chancellor of Ireland.¹¹⁸ In May 1596 (as indicated before, the timing is significant), Bingham was removed from Connacht and placed in confinement in Dublin. His rustication marked the removal of a hitherto crucial carapace of protection from Sir Ralph and, indeed, rather than submit to trial in Connacht, Sir Richard would flee to England without permission the following August, preferring the queen’s displeasure to probable assassination.¹¹⁹

So, on 20 May 1596 (that month again), it was an objectively more vulnerable Lane who set himself to answer a precise set of charges leveled against him by

¹¹⁰ Humble justification of the musters of Ireland, November 1596, TNA, SP63/195/53. When Lane was finally granted “commissaries,” he took issue with their methods; Lane to Cecil, 4 February 1602, TNA, SP63/208/part 1, 35.

¹¹¹ Lane to Cecil, 20 October 1596, TNA, SP63/194/33.

¹¹² Lane to Burghley, 6 May 1596, TNA, SP63/189/12.

¹¹³ Lane to Burghley, 6 May 1596, TNA, SP63/189/12. Lane repeated this charge in a letter to Cecil six months later, adding that Wallop had been “extraordinarily rewarded . . . by concordatum, and in English” (i.e., pounds sterling); Lane to Cecil, 20 October 1596, TNA, SP63/194/33.

¹¹⁴ Spoils during Cessation, 29 January 1596, Lambeth Palace Library, Carew MS, vol. 627 fol. 261; Norris to Cecil, 29 February 1596, TNA, SP63/186/89.

¹¹⁵ Russell to Burghley, 19 October 1595, TNA, SP63/183/94.

¹¹⁶ Bingham to Burghley, 22 October 1595, TNA, SP63/183/99.

¹¹⁷ Russell, Loftus, and Fenton to Burghley, 13 December 1595, TNA, SP63/185/13.

¹¹⁸ Fenton to Burghley, 1 December 1595, TNA, SP63/185/2. The charges, of course, were nothing new, having been tabled and quashed in 1589.

¹¹⁹ For reasons why Richard Bingham went to England, 30 September 1596, TNA, SP63/193/5. Lane, by contrast, stuck it out in Ireland; Lane to Cecil, 20 October 1596, TNA, SP63/194/33.

Burghley. The first question asked why the Irish Council had requested a full pay for seven thousand men month after month, when in fact “there hath . . . been scantily the one half” of that number serving. In fact, to Burghley’s horror, the army had continued to be paid in line with inflated muster numbers—even following the cessation in October—despite the fact that troop numbers had been reduced (by Lane) to the tune of forty men per band. Where, the lord treasurer enquired, had the money gone? While Elizabeth’s charge for her army over the past half year had been £49,000, the check, scandalously, came to a measly £1,307. Questions needed to be answered. Where had so many men, armor, and weapons disappeared to? More pertinently, why was Lane so incurious about their disappearance?¹²⁰

Lane, ever mercurial, had an excuse for everything and never wittingly, or unwittingly, incriminated himself. But, no doubt in a bid to distract, on 20 May 1596, the same day that he addressed Burghley’s questions (and against the backdrop of the hog-tying of his best ally, Bingham), he proffered his most ingenious, perplexing, distracting piece of political theater yet: his audacious counterintuitive “project . . . to make the earl of Tyrone . . . a most loyal subject.”¹²¹ This cannot have been a coincidence. Did Lane hope that by posing as a midwife for peace he might receive some sort of indemnity for the (studied) mess over which he had presided? Or had he come to the conclusion that, because his colleagues on the administration were going to hang him out to dry anyway, he should seek favor from the coming man, who in May 1596 certainly seemed to be the Earl of Tyrone? Was Lane’s project, like Tyrone’s artful negotiating strategy, designed to win precious time? Burghley was not a well man, after all; nor could Elizabeth be expected to live very much longer.¹²²

QUIS CUSTODIET IPSOS CUSTODES?

Four months later in September 1596, the Privy Council decided to send a trustworthy man to take the measure of the Irish garrison to produce at last an accurate record of the lists of the Irish garrison. That man was Maurice Kyffin. It is difficult to imagine a person less suited temperamentally for the ways of Irish government. Kyffin was the very incarnation of successful Welsh integration into the thinking and workings of the Tudor Regime—his translation of Bishop John Jewel’s *Apologia* into Welsh [1595] stands as a monument to his capacity to think with the *regnum Cecilianum*.¹²³ In 1588, he had served as surveyor of the muster rolls of the English army in the Netherlands, the year that the English army in the Netherlands returned the impressive check of £9,112 4s. 8d. already referred to—an exemplary

¹²⁰ Lane’s answer to Burghley’s charges, 20 May 1596, TNA, SP63/189/34. The document contains both Burghley’s charges and Lane’s answers.

¹²¹ Lane’s answer to Burghley’s charges, 20 May 1596, TNA, SP63/189/34; Project by Sir Ralph Lane addressed to Lord Burghley, 20 May 1596, TNA, SP63/189/41i.

¹²² Lane’s subsequent recollection of his period of disgrace was typically self-serving; see Lane to Cecil, 30 May 1601 TNA, SP63/208, part 2, 101.

¹²³ See Maurice Kyffin, *Andria the first comoedie of Terence in English* [. . .] (London 1588); Maurice Kyffin, *The blessedness of Brytaine, or A celebration of the Queenes holyday* [. . .] (London 1587), republished in 1588; and his translation of John Jewel, Maurice Kyffin, *Deffyniad ffyd Eghwys Loegr lle y ceir gwyled* [. . .] (London, 1595).

tally that Kyffin, with his forensic mind, no doubt had played an important role in calculating. Perhaps it was because of his strict (and unpopular) book-keeping that he briefly found himself imprisoned for debt in the Fleet, an oddity in a line of work full of opportunities to get ready cash.¹²⁴ Afterwards Kyffin had hoped for employment in France but was appointed instead to muster the companies throughout Ireland, to draw up “perfect muster rolls of the said bands . . . [so] the Treasurer may make defalcation of their deficient in the pay of their bands.”¹²⁵

Thus began a sad tale. Kyffin’s appointment, although supposedly not meant “to prejudice [Lane] for the execution of his office,” was clearly the inauguration of a rolling enquiry and audit into the muster-master’s practices and accounts.¹²⁶ And although Kyffin’s patent stated that Sir Ralph’s recovery from his illness was “doubtful,” the old muster-master was hale and hearty enough to frustrate and obstruct the Welshman’s every move. He insisted that Kyffin, despite his patent, should be under his control, and when Kyffin refused to submit, Lane rebuffed all requests for access to muster rolls, refusing to “allow [him] to confirm names, numbers taken . . . in later musters.”¹²⁷ Kyffin came ultimately to doubt that the muster rolls had ever existed.¹²⁸ Sir Ralph had probably conjured up out of thin air a set of what to him had looked like plausible-looking numbers.

In defiance of Lane, Kyffin traveled throughout the country mustering troops, despite being offered “large rewards” to do otherwise. He examined each soldier, taking his name in private rather than accepting the information given him by the clerk of the band or the captain. He also offered rewards to poor soldiers “for private intelligence.” After “invert[ing]” the muster rolls the clerks gave him, he proceeded methodically through the lists of soldiers and found that there were “divers borrowed and hired *passevolante* [who] commonly answer to other men’s names,” generally recruited from “the inhabitants thereabouts [and] mingled with the rest.”¹²⁹ When he threatened the blow-ins with death for their impersonation of the deserters, they refused to stop their pretense, saying they were afraid to “deliver the plain truth,” believing that they would be hanged by the captains as mutineers once he had departed. Kyffin, unlike their superior officers, had no coercive powers and no means to defend them. On his lonely mission, he himself received “bitter threats of death and destruction” from officers refusing to cooperate. He felt like walking prey: “[I]t is not unlike but I shall be dispatched, since there be plots already laid to kill me.” As for the state of the garrison and what it said about Lane’s management of it, Kyffin’s conclusion was stark: “Touching the office of muster-master and clerk of the check here . . . it will be found to be no better than a mere coven and collusion. Dead pays, perquisites and extorting profit claimed as due and belonging to the office serve for the bulwark to maintain the

¹²⁴ Glanmor Williams, s.v., “Kyffin, Maurice (c.1555–1598),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* online, 2004.

¹²⁵ *Acts of the Privy Council*, 26, XII, 59.

¹²⁶ *Acts of the Privy Council*, 26, XII, 59.

¹²⁷ For Lane’s complaint that the resources allowed Kyffin were greater than those given him, see Lane to Cecil, 24 October 1597, TNA, SP63/201/29.

¹²⁸ Kyffin to Lord Treasurer Burghley, 26 December 1596, TNA, SP63/196/29.

¹²⁹ Kyffin to Lord Treasurer Burghley, 26 December 1596, TNA, SP63/196/29.

frauds and falsehoods long practised.”¹³⁰ Simply put, while there were multiple scams at work in 1590s Ireland, this one was based on drawing down funds from the crown to pay an army in Ireland that simply did not exist, the money being transferred instead from Elizabeth’s coffers to a network or syndicate of administrators, enablers, and captains, with Lane acting as some kind of coordinator and launderer.

Kyffin died in obscure circumstances in 1598, and even after his death the Irish Council considered him a threat. They impounded his papers, notably his last checks on the garrison covering the half-year up to September 1597; his servant Hugh Tuder tried doggedly to keep his dead master’s records out of their hands and only gave them up after being placed in irons for three weeks in Dublin Castle. His persistent efforts to complete his master’s work led him, like Kyffin, to endure “many a hungry day, and lie on the cold ground many a bitter night,”¹³¹ but it all came to nothing.¹³² By that stage, the narrative had changed, and matters had moved on. Russell had been recalled in May 1597 and replaced by Thomas Burgh, who died in office only four months later. Only a month after Kyffin’s death, the lords justice of Ireland, Loftus and Gardener, could freely admit without any risk of retribution that “many English companies . . . sent hither [had once been] weaponed and armed in reasonable good sort . . . [but had] been altered and transposed since from one captain to another . . . and many of them, by the ill handling of their captains . . . changed from English to Irish, and many discharged without our knowledge.”¹³³

Of course, no meticulous record of the system survives, nor can we tell who were the main beneficiaries of the scam. Nevertheless, the opportunities that arose to make money by *not* having an army in Ireland were immense. The bands of men levied from England had already been hollowed out, with able-bodied men of any means bribing their way out of service as quickly as possible.¹³⁴ Of the remaining English soldiers, those who were less impoverished on their arrival in Ireland were likely substituted by indigent Irishmen willing to be mustered *passevolante* style before absconding again, although no doubt some were content to sit in dank fortifications eating scant victuals and receiving a fraction of the wages due to the Englishmen they were replacing. Even so, this army, made up largely of Irish troops and the most desperate sweepings of the English shires when not being fraudulently mustered (if indeed they were mustered at all), was likely at most half the size it was meant to be. The remaining Englishmen, of course, were liable to catch the Irish flux and die, but that was not a problem. Every fatal casualty willfully unaccounted for, every stout-born English yeoman purchasing his freedom, every English churl perishing of dysentery in a Godforsaken town in the Pale, every man

¹³⁰ Kyffin to Lord Treasurer Burghley, 26 December 1596, TNA, SP63/196/29; Kyffin to Burghley, 13 February 1597, TNA, SP63/197/89.

¹³¹ Hugh Tuder, servant of Kyffin, to Burghley, 19 April 1598, TNA, SP63/202, part 2/14.

¹³² Tuder to Burghley, 26 March 1598, TNA, SP63/201, part 1/92; Tuder to Burghley, 19 April 1598, TNA, SP63/202 part 2/14.

¹³³ Lords Justice Loftus, Gardener, the Earl of Ormond and the rest of the Council to the Privy Council, 27 February 1598, TNA, SP63/202 part 1/56.

¹³⁴ The character of John Falstaff outlines the method in the first part of *Henry IV*. William Shakespeare, *Henry IV*, Part 1, 4.2.12–48.

not in attendance but acknowledged all the same by Lane's remarkable method of mustering, made a cartel of English servitors in Ireland rich in a time of war.

It is remarkable that Lane continued in office until his death given that his speculation risked the very security of the Elizabethan regime and his corruption was far beyond the normative venality found in the service of the state, the run-of-the-mill type of thing readily identified by both Linda Levy Peck and Joel Hurstfield.¹³⁵ More astonishingly, Lane ultimately achieved rehabilitation over the course of 1597. His best protection had probably been the fact that he could not be summarily dismissed. His patent stated that he held his office for term of life under the great seal, which, he asserted in a letter to Robert Cecil, could not be taken from him "but with [his] consent and satisfaction," as to do otherwise would be to engage in "violating her Majesty's justice and law in an unusual precedent prejudicial to *all* patents." To forfeit his office against his will would require "a lawful trial."¹³⁶ In short, to get rid of him would be just too much trouble.

It took the death of Burghley in 1598 for the full restoration of both Lane and Bingham's reputations and, when it occurred, it was a clear indication of the Earl of Essex's burgeoning influence. While Bingham returned to Ireland with the title of marshal of the army, Lane successfully petitioned for custody of Belfast Castle, although the means to make it his own were at that stage far beyond his power or anyone else's.¹³⁷ Evidence suggests that the relationship between Lane and Bingham had cooled during the controversy of 1595–96, and it may be the case that the old comrades never rekindled their old attachment. Bingham's will left Gardener his "ambling grey gelding" and Wallop his pistol, but bequeathed Lane nothing at all.¹³⁸ Sir Ralph would ultimately gain a foothold at Ringhaddy Castle on Strangford Lough in the Dufferin in 1602, once a portion of Sir Thomas Smith's attempted colony of the early 1570s. Significantly, he referred to Ringhaddy as a plantation, adopting the modish martial terminology used at the time to describe garrisoned fortifications hastily erected in coastal areas of Ulster.¹³⁹ There was no more need for the desperate diplomacy of May 1596.

¹³⁵ Linda Levy Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, MA, 1990); Joel Hurstfield, *Freedom, Corruption and Government in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge MA, 1973).

¹³⁶ Lane to Cecil, 24 October 1597, TNA, SP63/201/29. Lane claims that Lord Deputy Russell in his bed chamber had promised him a reward in England as "good or better" than his office in Ireland in return for his surrendering his patent.

¹³⁷ Letter from Elizabeth to the Lord Justices of Ireland, 31 August 1598, TNA, SP63/ 202 part 3/ 47; Lane to Cecil, Dec 23 1598, TNA, SP63/ 202 part 4/46i; Fiant 6235, *Irish Fiantes*, 3:326.

¹³⁸ Prerogative Court of Canterbury, TNA, PROB/ 11/94. Bingham's will was made on 7 January 1599, twelve days before his death. In 1595, he had joined the chorus of criticism about the quality of the troops but had to assure Lane that he had "no whit discredited [his] musters"; Bingham to Burghley, 6 August 1595, TNA, SP63/182/16; Bingham to Lane, 16 November 1595, TNA, SP63/185/16i.

¹³⁹ Docwra to the Privy Council, 2 November 1600, TNA, SP63/207 part 6/10; Lane to Cecil, 14 November 1600, TNA, SP63/207, part 6/21; Lane to Cecil, 29 December 1600, TNA, SP63/207 part 6/108; Docwra to the Privy Council, TNA, SP63/208 part 1/126; Mountjoy to Privy Council, 1 May 1601, TNA, SP63/208 part 2/35; Chichester to Privy Council, July 8, TNA, SP63/208, part 3/ 59. My research on the changing use of the term *plantation* has been presented as a conference paper and is being prepared for publication. Rory Rapple, "Synchronous and Anachronistic Terms for Confiscation and Expropriation in Elizabethan Ireland," paper presented at the Early-Modern Ireland and the Wider World Conference, Huntington Library, 8 April 2022.

SIR RALPH LANE AND “DESTRUCTIVE INDIVIDUALISM”

In Ireland in 1596, Lane proved himself adept when it came to acting out a cringing drama of inertia, obstruction, and impenitence. In this he was no novice, however, as he had done much the same a decade earlier in the aftermath of his governorship of Roanoke. While it has been generally acknowledged by historians that his “Account of the particularities of the employments of the English men left in Virginia [. . .]” is one of failure written in a defensive manner, that assessment has recently been revised.¹⁴⁰ Michael Leroy Oberg and Kathleen Donegan have each, through an attentive reading of the evidence, come to the conclusion that Lane’s discourse was written to conceal inconvenient truths. His Roanoke service, of course, has never been immune from criticism. The nineteenth-century disparagement of him as a paltry underachiever who balked when offered the opportunity to become the father of the proud English colonial tradition was based on a tradition of deploring Lane’s pusillanimity, not his mendacity.¹⁴¹ Donegan contends that the gaps, evasiveness, and lack of narrative coherence of Lane’s report have largely gone unnoticed by historians because, when confronted with his confusing rhetorical strategies, they have chosen instead to rely on the surveys of Virginia written by Thomas Hariot and John White, figures who “radiate historicity. . . [offering] an emphatically realistic record of what was there.”¹⁴² Lane’s account has been quietly relegated in importance, a primary source to be supplemented and supplanted by secondary-source interpretation.

Lane’s “Account” is not just a difficult document to read: it is a wholly tendentious piece of work, as infuriatingly brazen in its own way as Lane’s self-exculpatory letters from Ireland in the 1590s. Oberg has argued very persuasively that Lane’s supposed “aggressive self-defense” against Wingina/Pemisapan was a self-serving, all-or-nothing bid to keep the Roanoke Indians from withdrawing into the mainland away from the colony.¹⁴³ The colonists had become dependent on the local Indians for food, as they had not planted any crops themselves. Furthermore, Wingina had a practical motive for trying to get as far away from the English as possible: the need to avoid further contact with the devastating contagion of diseases that the English had already visited on the native population. Although Hariot was particularly sensitive to the effect the English were having on the health of the local population, Lane made no reference to this whatsoever.¹⁴⁴

Kathleen Donegan’s forensic analysis of Lane’s Roanoke report is even more uncompromising. She charts all Lane’s evasions, circumlocutions, and omissions

¹⁴⁰ For discussion, see Kathleen Donegan, *Seasons of Misery: Catastrophe and Colonial Settlement in Early America* (Philadelphia, 2014) 19–68, esp. 32, 33, 218n24.

¹⁴¹ Hale, “Life of Sir Ralph Lane.”

¹⁴² Donegan, *Seasons of Misery*, 32–34, 218n24.

¹⁴³ Oberg is quoting Quinn’s assessment that Wingina’s conspiracy “can be said to have justified Lane’s action as aggressive self-defense.” See Oberg, “Indians and Englishmen at the First Roanoke Colony,” 75–89, at 77. Quinn’s assessment can be found in Quinn, *Set Fair for Roanoke*, 128.

¹⁴⁴ See Hariot, *A briefe and true report*, in Quinn, *Roanoke Voyages*, 381. From the very start, Lane prefaced his account with the resolution to declare “the conspiracy of Pemisapan,” and for that reason it has generally been taken as read that such a conspiracy in fact existed when this is highly questionable. See Oberg, *Head in Edward Nugent’s Hand*, 1–100; also Oberg, “Indians and Englishmen at the First Roanoke Colony,” 75–89.

and, having raised questions about virtually every “fact” readers think they know about Lane’s governorship, concludes that in his “discourse” he “maps a disordered epistemology”:

Lane’s report is a mess. It lacks fluidity, has maddening omissions, and is poorly organised. It tells too little, leaving gaping holes in the story, except for when it tells too much, laying out everything Lane intended to do instead of describing what he actually did. The text declares allegiance to certain structuring principles—order, division, particularity—and then immediately subverts them. It requires the reader to engage in uncomfortable reading practices: to discount what is on the pages because each is filled with nonevents; to search for what is not on the pages because information is suppressed everywhere; to riffle back and forth between pages because the text refuses chronology. Having failed at his commission, Lane also fails to account for it. . . . Lane’s strangely indeterminate relationship to facts actively refuses knowledge production . . . the purely informational content of Lane’s report can be summarised in just a few sentences . . . This narrative . . . cannot establish temporal boundaries, [it] imbricates real and imagined events, and . . . actively refuses chronology.¹⁴⁵

These are all tropes easy to find in Lane’s Irish correspondence. He was at once as devious as Iago and as brazen as Falstaff—both martial men—but, did his actions and vexed relationship with accountability have any broader importance?

In 1625 when Francis Bacon pondered the factors leading to the destruction of plantations (using the term to denote newly established settlements or colonies made up of transplanted people), he argued that the difference between failure or success was determined by the planters’ commitment to the life of virtue. It was “the base and hasty drawing of profit” and the thoughtless use of the “scum of people and wicked condemned men” that sowed the seeds of these projects’ decay.¹⁴⁶ Bacon’s pithy, unidealistic remarks, for all their banality, get to the core of the matter, and his observations about Jacobean plantations might as easily have been made about the discipline or “martial virtues” employed in the business of administering the Elizabethan army in Ireland.¹⁴⁷

The common denominator was less a shared dark anthropological view of the Algonquians and the Irish, or an avid obsession with the process of expropriation and colonization in and of itself, less still an overarching belief in the civilizing mission of the English abroad. Rather, it was a common ethos that T. H. Breen has described as “destructive individualism,” an urge that tended toward short-termism, poor impulse control, self-interest at any cost, and the instrumentalization of everyone and everything.¹⁴⁸ For the English, sociologically speaking, it was perhaps the result of social and attitudinal changes brought about by the explosion of gratuitous land speculation and the mass seizure of movable goods following the dissolution of the monasteries. Or perhaps the impulse went further back, hard-wired by the English martial rapacity for land and booty displayed during the wars with France—the oscillations between the apparently cast-iron discipline of the

¹⁴⁵ Donegan, *Seasons of Misery*, 32–33.

¹⁴⁶ Francis Bacon, *The Essays*, ed. John Pitcher (London, 1985), 162.

¹⁴⁷ Withington, “Introduction: Citizens and Soldiers: The Renaissance Context,” 3.

¹⁴⁸ T. H. Breen, “Looking Out for Number One: Conflicting Cultural Values in Early Seventeenth-Century Virginia,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 78, no. 3 (1979): 342–60, at 351.

military camp under the gaze of a superior officer and the gorging and coining that could take place once the superior officer's attention moved on.¹⁴⁹ Whatever its provenance, it pushed forward its path without heed for concerns to do with the commonwealth, the common good, or sustainability. These tendencies can be seen embryonically in Ralph Lane's imagined service in Roanoke, where, despite the impression he sought to convey of his skillful soldierly allocation of men throughout the area—"wild men of my own nation"—and the heroic progress these men supposedly made on various exploratory expeditions under his direction, they were agents of contagion and brutality.¹⁵⁰ He and his men planted little, drew excessively on the reserves laid up by their Indigenous neighbors, and took impulsive homicidal action when the Roanoke Indians began to prioritize their own well-being. He thereby poisoned the local political situation without serious thought for the native society that surrounded him or for those colonists who might come after him.

In Jacobean Virginia, the same "destructive individualism" would in turn normalize the sacrifice of the common weal for individual profit.¹⁵¹ Of course, as Paul Musselwhite has skillfully shown, the road to Jamestown's reality was paved with commonplace humanist good intentions, many of them familiar to the Irish official class. But in spite of the common knowledge that an economy without diversity was a bad thing, and despite avowed intentions to plan the economy and society along urban corporate lines, short-termist impulses motivated tobacco profiteers to consume the very land on which they and their families relied for food with a nutrient-leeching cash crop.¹⁵² In reality, these urges also resulted in an impaired "cohesive group identity,"¹⁵³ which in turn led to the establishment of estates in isolation from each other, as well as an abiding reluctance to allot adequate resources to the sensible defense of the colony—not that the promotional pamphlets and sermons soliciting investments and extolling the colony's potential could ever admit to that.¹⁵⁴ In Elizabethan Ireland, as would later obtain in Jamestown, those born in England found it easy to omit to contribute to the foundation of a vibrant educational or religious infrastructure dedicated to the spreading of Protestant values, choosing instead in the spirit of destructive individualism to adapt and maintain an ineradicably kleptocratic administration where the only difference between, say, the corruption of Fitzwilliam, or Loftus, on one hand, and the venality, on the other, of the Wallop-Gardener-Bingham-Lane cartel that replaced it, was the identities of those among whom the spoils were split and the type of scam each employed. The lived reality of the military model of social engineering was in many ways the highest obstacle that had to be scaled before the transition to anything approaching a real urban corporate model could be attempted. The common ground between the

¹⁴⁹ H. J. Habakkuk, "The Market for Monastic Property, 1539–1603," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 10, no. 3 (1958): 362–80; J. E. Kew, "The Disposal of Crown Lands and the Devon Land Market, 1536–1558," *Agricultural History Review* 18, no. 2 (1970): 93–105; Steven Gunn, *The English People at War in the Age of Henry VIII* (Oxford, 2018); Neil Murphy, *The Tudor Occupation of Boulogne: Conquest, Colonisation and Imperial Monarchy, 1544–1550* (Cambridge, 2019).

¹⁵⁰ Lane to P. Sidney, 12 August 1585, in Quinn, *Roanoke Voyages*, 204–5.

¹⁵¹ Breen, "Looking Out for Number One," 351.

¹⁵² Musselwhite, *Urban Dreams, Rural Commonwealth*, 23–55, esp. 40–48.

¹⁵³ Breen, "Looking Out for Number One," 359.

¹⁵⁴ Musselwhite, *Urban Dreams, Rural Commonwealth*, 23–55, esp. 28–30.

English serving in Tudor Ireland and the early English colonists in the New World was primarily materialist, not idealist. It was driven and defined by a profiteering motive rather than adherence to any Renaissance anthropology that justified ethnocentrism. It was egocentric. As Breen puts it, it was all about “looking out for number one.”¹⁵⁵

So, in large part, Ralph Lane’s brass-necked service as muster-master in Ireland marks him out as a normal type. Lane had no difficulty reconciling his parasitical stewardship of the muster books of Ireland with showy expressions of devotion to queen and country. Nor did he shrink from advocating a humiliating accommodation with the most successful of Gaelic-Irish rebels when it offered a short-term opportunity to obscure his crimes and save his own skin. Far from reserving special disdain for the Irish, or, indeed, the Algonquians, Sir Ralph Lane reserved special disdain for everyone, whether of immediate use to him or not, whether “savages” or “wild men of [his] own nation.”¹⁵⁶ He also showed himself adept at applying himself to the soldierly task of envisaging niche solutions to logistical challenges, even when these solutions involved conjuring whole armies out of his fertile imagination. It was only the pressure of real war and an unprecedented international and confessional crisis for England in the mid-1590s that fouled things up, transforming the crown’s army in Ireland from being a discreetly maladministered cash cow for the benefit of a local cartel to a critical liability to the security of England and its Protestant settlement. Under scrutiny, Lane’s army dissolved; an “insubstantial pageant faded/ leav[ing] not a rack behind.”¹⁵⁷ And yet despite his flagrant violation of the terms on which he was appointed to his office, he managed to carry on, in the words of poor Hugh Tudor, “daintily fared and easily bedded”¹⁵⁸ until his death in 1603. If ideology is understood as a set of ideas that arises from a given set of material interests, it might be said that the ideological origins of English colonization found expression above all in the commitment among enterprising office-holders to unrestrained, self-interested profiteering, no matter the cost to crown, country, or colleagues. This ethos was generic. Lane’s treacherous self-indulgence may have been heightened by the near-catastrophe he escaped in Roanoke in 1585, or perhaps, just perhaps, like Milo Minderbinder in Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*—the profiteer who bombs his own airfield because the enemy will cover the cost of the operation plus 6 percent—he had convinced himself that what was good for Ralph Lane was ipso facto good for queen and country. The lucrative war machine and the man who managed it had to be protected above all else.

¹⁵⁵ Breen, “Looking Out for Number One.” 346.

¹⁵⁶ Lane to P. Sidney, 12 August 1585, Quinn, *Roanoke Voyages*, 204–5.

¹⁵⁷ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, 4.1.155–56.

¹⁵⁸ Hugh Tudor to Burghley, 19 April 1598, TNA, SP63/202 part II/14.