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“Tipperary Joe”: Field Marshal Viscount Gough

By Anne Chadwick

It is 125 years since, on 2 March 1869, Viscount Sir Hugh Gough, field marshal and eminent Irish soldier, died in Dublin. His fellow officers called him “Old Paddy Gough”, the Chinese named him “Ko” and called a mountain after him. But to his “boys”, the men by whom he was loved, he was simply “Tipperary Joe”.

The sobriquet, picked up by the British press, was used for good and ill – in references to his “Tipperary tactics” to revile him, in references to his “Tipperary brogue” to patronise him. “*I never was bate and I never will be bate*”, was his fighting creed, and he and his men carried the name of his county from Spain to China and India over 50 years. Goughs had settled in Waterford, Tipperary and Dublin in the 13th century. In the 17th century others came from Wiltshire to Limerick, thereafter providing the Church with clerics and the Army with officers, administrators and supportive wives for 300 years.

Hugh Gough was born in Woodstown, Co Limerick on 3 November 1779, the youngest son of four. His parents were disappointed at his birth, since they had hoped for a daughter. The child was somewhat neglected, especially as two girls were born within a few years. Later he wrote that his education consisted of what he could pick up listening to his older brother’s tutors. Nevertheless, the evidence of his numerous letters, army orders and dispatches show a man who was witty, incisive and literate.

Gough’s character showed a humanity that not even the hardships and brutalities of army life could dim. The atmosphere of home, religious and military, shaped the futures of the children. Thomas, the eldest, became Dean of Derry. The three younger brothers entered the Army. Jane married a soldier; only Elizabeth the younger formed no army connections.

Hugh Gough was early in uniform. At 13 he obtained a commission in his father’s regiment of militia. From this he transferred to a regiment of the line. His commission dated from 1794. In 1795 he was at the Cape of Good Hope. Next he transferred to the 87th Foot, where he found men whom he liked and understood. But his posting to the West Indies was a sorry affair. In seven years the forces were decimated by yellow fever. In 1803 the raising of a second battalion of the 87th was sanctioned. It was composed mainly of men from Tipperary, Galway and Clonmel. Gough was appointed Major and in 1805 the force sailed from Somerset to Ireland.

Repression, consequent on the failure of the 1798 Rebellion, and the passing of the Act of Union meant that the country was temporarily quieted and after a short spell of duty the men were back. While attending a regimental ball at Plymouth the young Major Gough met Frances, daughter of General Stephens. As she sat with her father she noticed the red-haired officer come into the hall. She whispered to her father, “*There is the man I saw in my dream*”; a year later they married.

Within months of the birth of a son the family were separated in 1808 when the 87th left for the Peninsular War. Gough went in command as major of the regiment whose war-cry was *Faugh-a-Ballagh*, whose regimental march was *Garryowen* and the bulk of whose soldiers were, like himself, Munstermen. In his strong Irish accent he cheered and rallied them.

During the first months in Spain he saw service at Oporto and Talavera. His letters paint a picture of a ferocious campaign, detailing the forced marches through countryside laid waste



by the retreating French. The ordinary soldier suffered greatly . . . “men without a shoe to their feet”, “hundreds fallen out from fatigue and hunger”, and again, “Almost all the men I brought up had no shoes on their feet which were actually cut to the bone”. To his father, the old soldier now living in Co Tipperary, he wrote of “the misery of the war, of the dead lying in the streets, of rain that turned streams into rivers, sweeping food and ammunition away”.

At Talavera Gough was wounded and the regiment was garrisoned; but by 1811 it was before Barrosa where the 87th earned their nickname of “The Aiglers” as they captured the Eagles of the 8th French Regiment. Gough’s account is of “most dreadful carnage”.

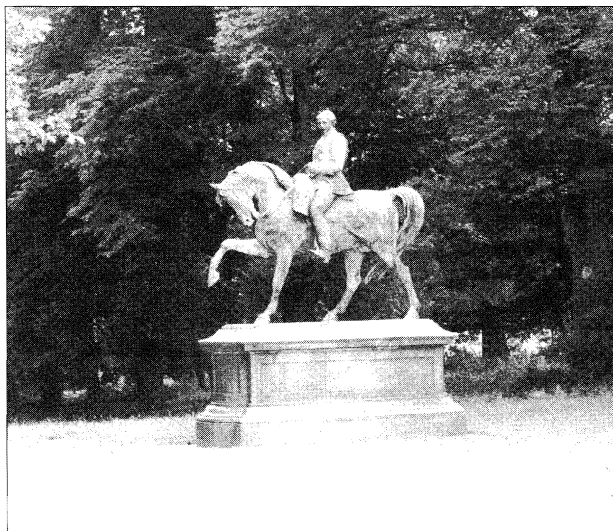
With no pleasure he says: “I could not, confused and flying as they were, cut down one, although I might have 20, they seemed so confounded and so frightened”.

The regiment was awarded by being named the Prince of Wales Own Irish Regiment and was granted the right “to bear as a badge of honour upon the regimental colours and appointments an eagle with a wreath of laurel above the harp”. It went on to fight at Tarifa, “the most wretched little village in Europe” and at Cadiz. In battle the French proved to be no match for the Faugh-a-Ballaghs. “The conduct of Lt. Colonel Gough and of the 87th surpasses all praise”, wrote Colonel Napier. In a break from war Gough visited Tangiers and was astonished to find how cheap products were. The Moorish inhabitants, “an uncommon fine race”, he thought, “deserve the name of ‘savage’ quite as little as the lower order of Spaniard, or, I will add, my own countrymen”.

The results of conflict carried on by British and French on the Peninsula were the wasting of the countryside and the starvation of people and animals. The rank and file of the 87th asked permission to give a day’s pay for the relief of the distress. Their commander wrote of “my glorious set of fellows, for which I shall ever feel truly proud of my country”. The Peninsular Army was disbanded in 1814. Gough was invalided home; neither he nor the 87th was at Waterloo. In 1817 the battalion was dispersed, and there followed a two-year spell in Plymouth for the recuperating Gough, on half-pay and regretting the inactivity. In 1819 he was given command of the 22nd Foot, the Cheshires, and two years later the regiment was on the way to Ireland.

The early years of Union had seen a kind of torpor descend on the land. Penal laws had largely been repealed or had lapsed. A promise of Catholic emancipation was in the air. The Napoleonic Wars had fuelled relative prosperity as Ireland became the army’s granary. Under superficially stable conditions the population rose by as much as half again in the 30 years before 1821.

But it could not last, depending on the rupturing of a pastoral economy. Endemic famine and failed harvests undermined shaky foundations. Factors such as the violent opposition of the



The statue of Gough which was formerly in the Phoenix Park, Dublin, until its removal to England.

King to the granting of Emancipation and the imposition of tithes, paid by a largely Catholic people to the Established Church, combined to ferment unrest. Agrarian disorder erupted; secret societies – Whiteboys under their varied guises – became active.

In 1821 Sir Hugh (knighted in 1815) took his troops to Ireland. The 22nd Cheshires had long known service in the country. In his history of the Regiment, Bernard Rigby says: "It might be well to remember that . . . many Irishmen worked in England and that many enlisted in the British Army. The 22nd had its own proportionate share of these men".

The regiment was stationed in Co Cork, though its duties took it to Tipperary and Galway. "Very hard duty it was, Captain Rock and Lieut. Firebrand and the Whiteboys out every night burning houses and cornstacks". Rigby comments: "It was all very sad. On the one hand disciplined well-led gallant soldiers, and on the other, hungry desperate peasants".

Hugh Gough carried out his responsibilities with justice and humanity. He ensured that his men were guilty of no excesses. Indeed, it would have been strange if the man who had shown pity to his enemy, to the hapless Spanish peasant and to his own often wayward men had acted any differently. As the tour of duty came to an end turbulence was decreasing. The Cheshires were withdrawn. They were due for service in Jamaica but their Colonel did not go with them. It was 1826 and Gough was 47. For the next 11 years he remained on half-pay.

The lease of Rathronan House near Clonmel now became available. In the course of a country drive Frances had remarked on the house, saying "That is where I should like to live". Her husband, who wanted to be near his family, purchased the lease. With his brother at Birdhill, his father at Ardsallagh, the closeness of the family bond was maintained. The Goughs now joined the coterie of landowners setting in and around Clonmel. Sir Hugh worked the 893-acre estate, enjoyed the company of his children and became a magistrate.

On the bench he showed common sense and humanity. A farmer, who had given up his gun when attacked by Whiteboys, came to his notice. Gough commented: "I would say that if I were in that man's position I would have done just what he did . . . and been, moreover, much obliged to the midnight gentleman for letting me off so easily . . ." Life at Rathronan was full and happy; family visits were frequent. In 1836 Gough's aged father died there. Daughters were married from its gardens.

The house within sight of Slievenamon no longer stands. The narrow bye-road winds by the old parochial house, past the spot where a tree once grew, bisecting the road. It curves along between hedges near the roofless Rathronan Church. Further on, sunken in the bushes, are rusted railings half supporting, half supported by, tottering stone pillars. A wrecked gate-house is drowned in grasses and trees. The avenue twists through greenery to a clearing. Of the house there is no sign . . . not a stone left upon a stone, the fate of many such buildings.

Gough earned the affection of local landowners. More important to him, he also won the confidence and respect of the peasantry. Pleasant though it was to be settled in Tipperary and though a succession of honours came to him (he was made Major General in 1830 and Knight Commander of the Bath the following year) inactivity began to chafe. When in 1834 the command of the 87th became vacant Sir Hugh expected to be invited to lead the regiment. He was not recommended and in disgust almost resigned from the army.

It was to be three years before in 1837 he was offered the command of a division of the Indian Army. He and Frances set sail for Madras. When the ship docked in Mauritius where the 87th happened to be stationed, the sight of their old commander greatly excited the men, who gave him a terrific reception. "The headlands were lined by them, still cheering, and the last we saw . . . was a bonfire with their figures around it", wrote an aide later.

The work waiting Gough in India was mainly of an administrative nature, but after years





Field Marshal Lord Gough

when he had thought himself forgotten it was welcome. After two years he was launched into the murky waters (in every sense) of the Yangtse-Kiang and the First China War. He arrived in March 1841 to be confronted by a situation that was confused and confusing. Conflicting advice from Whitehall, dissension between merchants and unease between naval and military commands added up to a diplomatic nightmare. For months the forces waited. Sickness ate into the ranks. Recruits sent as replacements hardly knew how to use their guns. Additionally operations were constantly being interrupted. The hapless Captain Elliot took it upon himself more than once to call a halt to hostilities without informing the Commander in Chief in order to parley with mandarins. War ensued and the cities of Amoy, Canton and Chusan fell to the British. Much of the credit for the progress of the campaign must go to Gough. Gough did not make the

mistake of underestimating the enemy, nor did he feel that the ordinary people should be made to suffer unduly. "I am sick of war and the fearful consequences". He forbade plundering; he himself was meticulous in taking no loot. He paid for anything that he wished to have, all except a pair of little shoes found in the street which he sent to Frances as a curiosity!

By September 1841, with the cession of Hong Kong to Britain and the payment of hefty restitution, the first China War dragged to an end. Early in 1843 Gough, having been created a Baronet "as of Sinone and Drangan in the County of Tipperary", returned to India as Commander-in-Chief of the Army. It was a heavy responsibility for the 64-year-old soldier, but one he was eager to accept. Under his leadership over the next seven years three major campaigns were waged and at each of six decisive battles he led sitting astride his favourite charger, his white hair blowing in the wind. The situation on the Afghan border was volatile. It was neither the time nor the place for the administrative officers to be at loggerheads, but the Governor General, Sir Henry Hardinge, was unable to hide his irritation at the methods used by Gough in battle. He wrote to the Prime Minister, declaring that Sir Hugh was unfit to command, though he admired courage and determination. Hardinge countermanded Gough's requests for troops and provisions. He dismissed Gough's suggestions but often incorporated them in dispatches as if they had emanated from him.

In 1846 at Sobraon, a pitched and desperate battle, Gough rallied his ammunitionless troops with "Thank God! Then I'll be at 'em with the bayonet". This comment aroused the interest of the British press and the phrase "Tipperary tactics" made its appearance again. It would convey to the reader the image of an ape-ish Irishman employing the methods of agrarian terror, brute force and clumsy opportunism, a mixture of faction fighter and Whiteboy. Gough refused to allow it influence him. He continued stubbornly to press for supplies for the Army. He had reason to expect the fullest support from the Government. He had led more battles than any other General, with the sole exception of Wellington. He had never lost a fight. He had the complete confidence of his men.

Hardinge now bombarded Peel with complaints. Eventually it was intimated to Gough that he should hand over to Sir Charles Napier and act as second in command. Gough replied that as soon as the order came he would resign. The Government quietly "lost" the order. In a kind of shamefaced apology he was granted a pension and created Baron. Hardinge had been recalled in 1847.

In 1849 Gough brought the Sikh wars to an end with the battles of Chilianwala and Goojerat. Both were bloody. The first brought down a storm of recrimination on Gough; the second, equal amounts of praise. Early in 1850 Gough, now a Viscount, was home. He was 70 and all his wars had ended. He and Frances moved to St Helen's House in Booterstown, near Dublin, where friends and old comrades, eminent and lowly, were welcome. In the scanty Gough papers held in the National Archives in Dublin there is evidence that he often helped old soldiers find employment.

Frances died on 15 March 1863. On 2 March 1869 Gough himself died and was buried beside her in Stillorgan. As the cortege passed out between the granite gates of St Helen's, a poor woman was heard to say: "Well, he has left no better man than him in the parish". Of the honours accorded him, the one he most cherished was that of Knight of St Patrick. "Me Shamrock Badge" he called it. S. J. Watson remarks: "At the end of the 19th century there were Goughs living around Clonmel at Rathronan, Knockevan, Inishlounaght, Salisbury, Greenhill and Birdhill. Now there are none". It would be a pity if the memory of one who was arguably the greatest of them, one who was heart and soul an Irishman, should fade in the county he loved.

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