

## “YE VOLUNTEERS SO BRAVE AND STOUT”

*by*

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SOON after Mrs. Jason Westerfield presented to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the only piece of the so-called “Volunteer Furniture” known to exist in this country (Pl. 1)<sup>1</sup>, I found myself in Dublin. I had made the trip for quite a different reason, but our newly acquired textile, which had, after all, sprung from this very place, was on my mind. Since Mrs. A. K. Longfield Leask had already made her outstanding contributions to our knowledge of the history of Irish textile printing in the eighteenth century, and had made the definitive statement on the history of this chintz in particular, there was no need for me to attempt to discover the name of the printer and the date, place, and conditions of manufacture.<sup>2</sup> I was free to visit the places and see the things associated with the textile and with the remarkable phenomenon in Irish history that it commemorates. And now I am free simply to record the fact that a piece of the chintz is preserved in Boston and to offer my ideas on its significance.

It is June 3, 1782, in the Phoenix Park at the western outskirts of Dublin. At the left of the main road, a number of different corps of the Irish Volunteers, from Dublin county and nearby parts, have gathered for a Provincial Review in the “Fifteen Acres,” or reviewing ground. The men stand at attention beneath their banners,<sup>3</sup> as the Commander-in-Chief, James Caulfield, Earl of Charlemont, rides past with his officers, to the cadence of a flute and two drums. In the distance, the scraggy trees, which still harbor deer, form a penciled backdrop for this array of military splendor. Between the trees, the dark mass of the Viceregal Lodge, the summer residence of the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, broods heavily. Its current occupant, William Henry Bentinck, third Duke of Portland, is not discernible in the scene; but he is indeed present.<sup>4</sup> Beyond another opening in the trees rises a thirty-foot marble monument in the shape of a Corinthian column crowned by the figure of a phoenix soaring up from the flames.<sup>5</sup>

A great company of fashionable Dubliners has turned out to watch the review. Some arrived in smart carriages bearing initials on the doors.<sup>6</sup> Others have come on foot and now stand near the refreshment pavilions, the gentlemen holding up parasols to protect their ladies’ soft complexions from the early summer sun. One couple, with their little son, have ventured too close to the military lines and are being urged back — not so gently — by one of the foot soldiers. A group of boys, more enterprising than this



Pl. 1—The *Volunteer Furniture*, printed linen-and-cotton, Ireland, Leixlip, 1782. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (58.1177). Gift of Mrs. Jason Westerfield.

trio, have found a viewing perch in a tree, from which one of them topples into the family picnic meal laid out below. The barking and cavorting of a few loose dogs offers a teasing contrast to the measured rhythm of drum and hoof.

Perhaps this brief description will serve to suggest that the design of the chintz is charged with more intent than pure decoration. It is not merely a disarmingly clever arrangement of toy soldiers. Something real is happening. This is a topical event, carefully observed and faithfully reported. The places and things represented are still there, almost unchanged. For what possible reason would a manufacturer choose so curious a subject to ornament an article of domestic use? Volunteers appear at this time on other kinds of household objects as well. The National Museum at Dublin exhibits two pitchers, one of which is illustrated here (Pl. 2), and a linen damask table cloth (Pl. 2) decorated with figures of these soldiers.

The conclusions one draws from reading the history of Ireland between 1775 and 1785 are eminently satisfying. They explain clearly and succinctly this sudden and very positive fad for decorating everything with figures of Volunteers.

At the time of the war in America, England had withdrawn almost all her troops from Ireland. The Irish feared an invasion from France. As early as 1776, citizens in different parts of the country banded together under the local Protestant gentry and formed independent, private, military forces. Soon, throughout Ireland, other corps began to form as it became evident that the citizens, led by gentlemen of position and responsibility, would have to defend their country in the absence of military forces supported by the Crown. The Volunteers received no pay, but they were given arms and firm military training and discipline. In the city of Dublin, each profession or trade formed its own corps, with its particular uniform, motto and banner. Outside, associated bands of Volunteers represented different towns or counties and were known by those place names. It was a citizen's army, potentially a revolutionary army, which never did, in the few years of its existence, burst out in rebellion against the Crown.

Lord Leinster, Lord Charlemont<sup>7</sup> and other titled Irish patriots held the Volunteers together and in control. Charlemont's career with the Volunteers began with his command of the corps of the town of Armagh. In June, 1780, he was elected Commander-in-Chief of the entire Volunteer force, and he held that position until the natural dissolution of the Volunteers. He served as reviewing general in all parts of Ireland and his memoirs

and letters frequently refer to trips made for this purpose. He was reviewing the Dublin and country corps in Phoenix Park as late as 1785, although in fact the Volunteers had dwindled to near nothing by that time.

The original threat which gave so spontaneous a rise to the Volunteer movement gradually subsided, but this new force in Irish affairs had become aware of itself and its potential power. It is difficult to form a true, objective picture of what did in fact happen, since every history I have found, even relatively recent ones, is biased *pro* or *con* this limited insurgence. It is a fact, however, that the Volunteers, independent citizens and curiously loyal both to their birthplace and to the Crown, began to agitate for free trade and for parliamentary reform. During the eighteenth century, Irish manufacture had fallen off seriously because of the trade restrictions imposed by the parliament of England. Furthermore, the war in America had cut off an important market for Irish linen. Irish manufacturers were urging non-importation agreements, and the Volunteers took up their cry. In different parts of Ireland, people took informal oaths not to buy British merchandise and to boycott any traders who dealt in imported goods. Ireland had to manufacture to survive, they said, and her citizens must use her products. Non-importation verses appeared:

“Ye noblemen in place or out,  
Ye Volunteers so brave and stout,  
Ye dames that flaunt at ball or rout,  
Wear Irish manufacture.”<sup>8</sup>

The Volunteers, a patriotic force *par excellence*, clothed themselves only in textiles of Irish origin. Fashionable ladies limited their wardrobes to gowns of Irish silks and chintzes. Non-importation agreements, which of course could be neither official nor nationwide while the parliament of England ruled the country, read, in one instance, as follows:

“. . . That we will not, from the date hereof, until the *grievances of this country* shall be *removed*, directly or indirectly import or *consume* ANY of the manufactures of *Great Britain*; nor will we *deal* with any merchant, or shopkeeper, who shall *import* such manufactures; and that we recommend an adoption of a similar agreement to *all* our country-men who regard the commerce and constitution of this country.

Resolved unanimously, that we highly applaud the manly and patriotic sentiments of the several corps of Merchants, Independent Dublin, Liberty, and Goldsmiths' Volunteers, and heartily thank them for their demonstration of zeal and ardour in the cause of their country —



Pl. 2—(Left) Pitcher with transfer-printed decoration. English, Wedgwood, about 1780. By courtesy of the National Museum of Ireland. (Center) Linen damask tablecloth, possibly Irish, about 1780. The inscription may refer to the organization of the Union Light Dragoons, City of Dublin, which was formed September 12, 1780. By courtesy of the National Museum of Ireland. (Right) *James Caulfield, 1st Earl of Charlemont*. Portrait by Richard Livesay, about 1783. By courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

and that we shall ever be ready to join with them in defending our rights and constitution, and gladly and cheerfully contribute to PROTECT them from PROSECUTION or PERSECUTION . . .”<sup>9</sup>

The Volunteers supported the free-traders in every possible way. When, in October, 1779, the free trade resolution was carried from the Irish House of Commons to the Lord-Lieutenant, the Volunteers lined the streets along the way. A few days later, on November 4, the anniversary of William III’s birthday, they gathered in College Green in Dublin and hung signs on the base of his statue and around the necks of their cannon reading “A free trade or . . .” and similar phrases.

Numerous objects have come down to us linking the Volunteers with free trade at this time, and the apotheosis of the phenomenon comes in a print drawn and engraved by William Hincks, showing “Hibernia, attended by her brave volunteers, exhibiting her commercial freedom.” In March, 1780, the English act forbidding the Irish to export woolens was repealed, and the Crown allowed Ireland to trade directly with the colonies. Two years later, the Volunteers met at Dungannon, in northern Ireland, and formulated their plans for a free Irish parliament. This movement, which culminated to the detriment of the Volunteers in their Convention in the Rotunda at Dublin in November, 1783, need not concern us here.

Is it surprising then, that at this time an Irish entrepreneur chose to represent his champions when he produced one of the most elaborate chintzes ever made in Europe up to that time, or that he chose an occasion when he might also depict the champion of champions, Lord Charlemont (Pl. 2), whose identity was inseparable, in the public mind, from the aims and fortunes of the Volunteers? Thomas Harpur, who produced this chintz at Leixlip, and Edward Clarke, the Dublin linen draper who commissioned the pattern, must have found an eager market for this product.<sup>10</sup> The Volunteers were popular and Charlemont was the national hero. The same is true for the makers of the linen damask tablecloth and the commemorative pitchers, prints, bookbindings, etc. which have come down to us. Ironically, one of the pitchers was made in England (Pl. 2). The canny directors of the Wedgwood firm were not going to miss a chance to overcome Irish resistance to English wares, and they offered them an irresistible product!

Mrs. Leask lists a number of extant pieces of the chintz.<sup>11</sup> In Dublin, the National Museum of Ireland, the Royal Society of Antiquaries and the First Volunteer Masonic Lodge of Ireland each have a length of the

chintz. Another piece is said to be in private hands in Ireland. A quilted coverlet, faced with lengths of the chintz, is in the Municipal Museum and Art Gallery at Belfast. In 1956, after Mrs. Leask's list was published, Miss Edith Standen noticed another quilt faced with the Volunteer Furniture, preserved in the Chamber of the Nine Nobles, or Worthies, at Crathes Castle, Kincardineshire, Scotland. Through a misunderstanding, a piece was listed as being in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum in New York; this was, in fact, a length taken to that museum for examination a number of years ago and taken away again by its owner. It may be identical with the piece purchased by Mrs. Westerfield outside New York City and now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

I wish to acknowledge a real debt of gratitude to Mrs. Leask for the helpful references and advice she was kind enough to give me during the preparation of this paper.

#### NOTES

1. Reg. no. 58.1177. Width (loom),  $30\frac{1}{4}$ " ; length, approximately 42." (Printed on narrower fabric than originally intended: pattern as engraved measures approximately  $32\frac{3}{4}$ " in width). Printed in purplish-brown on tabby-woven ground showing linen warps and cotton wefts. Details touched with brown, red, yellow and blue, with blue over yellow for green. The brown, yellow and blue appear to have been penciled in; the method used in applying the red puzzles me. The browns were badly rotted, and large pieces of the ground have thereby been lost. In other respects, the piece is in excellent condition, and the colors are bright.
2. See the following articles by A [da] K. Longfield (Mrs. H. G. Leask): "History of the Irish Linen and Cotton Printing Industry in the 18th Century," *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, (hereafter referred to as *JRSAI*, with vol. numbers consecutive rather than series), LXVII (1937), 26-56; "Linen and Cotton Printing at Stratford-on-Slaney, County Wicklow," *JRSAI*, LXXV (1945), 24-31; "Printed Cotton from Robinson's of Ball's Bridge," *JRSAI*, LXXVI (1946), 13-15; "Notes on the Linen and Cotton Printing Industries in Northern Ireland in the Eighteenth Century," *Proceedings of the Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society*, 2nd Series, IV (Sessions 1950/51—1954/55), 53-68; "Linen and Cotton Printing at Leixlip in the Eighteenth Century," *The Journal of the County Kildare Archaeological Society*, in three parts: XIII, No. 4 (1953), [177]—183; XIII, No. 5 (1954), [242]—246; XIII, No. 6 (1955), 288-298. Mrs. Leask discusses the Volunteer Furniture in her articles in *JRSAI*, LXVII, 44-45 and in *Journal County Kildare*, (1955), 293-296. For other studies of the chintz, see the following: [letter of presentation from Robert Bruce Armstrong], *The Journal of the Royal Historical and Archaeological*

*Association of Ireland*, XIV (1876-78), 10 f.; E. MacDowel Cosgrave, M.D., "A Note on an Irish Volunteer Curtain," *JRSAI*, XXXV (1905), 60 ff. and 173 f.; W. G. Strickland, "Volunteer Curtain," *JRSAI*, LII (1922), 175-177; Frances Little, "Cotton Printing in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century," *The Bulletin of the Needle and Bobbin Club*, XX, No. 1 (1938), 20 ff.

3. The motto *Loyal and Determined* has not yet been identified with any known corps of the Volunteers. See *JRSAI*, XXX (1900), 325 ff. for some of the identified mottoes.
4. Francis Hardy, *Memoirs of the Political and Private Life of James Caulfield, Earl of Charlemont*, 2nd. ed., London, T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1812, Vol. II, p. 59. The Duke of Portland (1738-1809) served as Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland only between April and July, 1782, and attended this Review on June 3. He returned to England and followed an active political career, being twice appointed prime minister.
5. Lord Chesterfield laid out the Park and opened it to the public during his viceroyalty (1745-46). He also erected the column, thereby perpetuating for future generations the misnomer "Phoenix." The word is, in fact, a corruption of the Irish *fionn uisce*, or clear water, referring to a spring which flowed in another part of the lands enclosed in the Park.
6. It has been suggested that the initials M and C refer to the Earls of Moira and Charlemont (see *JRSAI*, XIV, 10 f.; XXXV, 173 f). The arguments do not seem convincing to me.
7. James Caulfield, 4th Viscount and 1st Earl of Charlemont (1728-1799), descended from an Oxfordshire family. His collateral ancestor, Toby or Tobias Caulfield (1565-1627), after serving in military campaigns, and having accompanied Essex to Ireland in 1598, settled in Ireland and received the Barony of Charlemont from James I in 1615. The 4th Viscount was raised to the dignity of an Earl in 1763, in recognition of his service in the defense of Belfast in 1760. Charlemont was not primarily a military leader, and his biographers discount his ability as a statesman. His patriotism, integrity and taste for literature, painting and architecture—which had been sharpened by trips to Italy and the Mediterranean (1746-54) and by residence in London (1764-73), where he associated with outstanding men in these fields—appear to have been his prime recommendations. It was he who built Charlemont House in Rutland (now Parnell) Square at Dublin and the enchanting little Casino on the grounds of his residence at Marino, outside Dublin. However, Charlemont was sincerely devoted to the cause of the Volunteers, and once said of them, "to that institution my country owes its liberty, prosperity and safety; and if after *her* obligations, I can mention my own, I owe the principal, and dearest honours of my life." (F. Hardy, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 378).
8. Quoted from Constantia Maxwell, *Dublin under the Georges*, London, George G. Harrap, 1946, p. 26, where the author gives no source.
9. These resolutions, among others, were agreed upon "at a general meeting of the Free-men and Freeholders of the City of Dublin, convened by public notice . . . William James, and John Exshaw, High Sheriffs, in the Chair." (Thomas MacNevin, *The History of the Volunteers of 1782*, Dublin, James Duffy, 1845, note, p. 96; see also p. 89 ff.).



10. Mrs. Leask published a very important notice from the *Dublin Evening Post*, September 14, 1782, which explains the connection between Harpur and Clarke: "We have the pleasure to inform the public, that Mr. Harpur, of Leixlip, linen-printer, has now nearly finished on cotton from copperplate, for Mr. Clarke, proprietor of the Irish Furniture Cotton-Warehouse, in Werburgh-street, a Volunteer Furniture, in chintz colours, which is an exact representation of the last Provincial Review in the Phoenix-Park, and that it is allowed by judges to be in every distinct respect the most masterly piece of copper-plate printing ever offered to sale in this, or perhaps any other country, and is a very convincing proof of the merit of numbers of our manufacturers were they properly encouraged." (*Journal County Kildare*, 1955, 294).
11. *Ibid.*

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*In Memoriam*

GRACE O. CLARKE

Died June 24, 1958

Secretary, the Needle and Bobbin Club, 1940-1944;

Director, 1945-1947

FRANCES POND LITTLE

(MRS. WILLIAM NELSON LITTLE)

Died April 24, 1959

Director, and Editor of the *Needle and Bobbin Club Bulletin*, 1942-1956. Associate curator, in charge of the Textile Study Room, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1934-1941. Author of *Early American textiles* (New York, 1931); *Eighteenth-century costume in Europe, a picture book* (New York, 1937), and many articles on textiles in the *Bulletin of the Needle and Bobbin Club*, the *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum*, and other periodicals.