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MORE TO SPOIL THAN TO SERVE

The common sort of our countrymen that go to war, of purpose more to spoil than to serve.

Geoffrey Gates, The Defence of the Military Profession (1579), 43

By definition all civil wars involve compatriots fighting each other. During the 1640s Englishmen, Scotsmen, Welshmen and Irishmen (and women), killed each other in battles, sieges, skirmishes and ambushes. Yet for most of them death in combat was a remote and random possibility. Their surviving letters, diaries and memoirs show that they were just as—if not more—concerned about losing their property in some almost accidental episode of violence. Most common was the attitude of Sir William Brereton. After reviewing the problems facing Cheshire after a year of civil war he concluded that ‘Our greatest care being to preserve the county from plundering.’¹ Parliament justified an assessment to Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire to raise soldiers by explaining that it was ‘the better to prevent the spoiling of the said counties’.² The English language reflected this important change. Although the word plunder was first used in a fairly rare Swedish newsletter of 1632, far more people became aware of it ten years later when *A Relation of the King’s Army* described how after capturing Brentford ‘they plundered it without any respect of persons’. By the following year the word plunder, brought over from the Thirty Years’ Wars by Prince Rupert and his henchmen, had become so familiar that William Prynne used it thrice in a single sentence.³

Frequently wars have been financed by the violent seizure of the other side’s property, be that through prize money, rapine, looting, spoilage, piracy, privateering, sequestration, ‘liberation’, reparations, or—to sum them all up—plunder. Indeed the number of words in the language indicates the prevalence of this practice.

In ancient times prisoners were slaughtered, sold into slavery, and their women seized. During the middle ages a sophisticated system of ransom was used to pay the victors and spare the vanquished. During the sixteenth century privateering was used to finance the founding of the British Empire. For instance, only 2 of the 25 ships Sir Francis Drake took to the West Indies in 1585 were Royal Naval vessels, as were 34 of the 197 English ships which defeated the Armada three years later. Through plunder the Swedes were able to field a huge army of 150,000 men in the Thirty Years’ War. Thus by

the start of the civil war the violent seizure of property had for centuries been an integral part of a soldier's life. 'They were as good fighters and as great plunderers as ever went to a field', Captain John Hodgson wrote approvingly about the Lancashire infantry he had the honour to command.

For armies plunder could be both a blessing and a curse. It could erode military discipline, while alienating civil support. Thus initially commanders were determined to do all they could to stamp it out. In the Bishops' Wars, for instance, Sir Jacob Astley punished some of his troops for rustling Sir Nicholas Tempest's cattle near South Shields. One miscreant revenged himself by setting fire to Tempest's straw, destroying some £20 worth, which must have made a spectacular blaze. Surrounded by burnt timbers, he was hanged with a sign proclaiming his offence, which the whole army could read as they were marched past, because, as Astley noted, 'base minds [are] only awed by fear of punishment'.⁴

On the other hand soldiers often had to plunder to stay alive. It could be an inducement to fight, a reward for victory as well as salve for defeat. Just as unchecked cavalry actions had their civilian origins in the pell-mell excitement of the hunt, so plunder was akin to poaching. It was a popular peacetime substitute for war. Its organized armed gangs purloined game to which they had no claim, and afterwards they would feast on the loot, reinforcing their own sense of group loyalty.⁵ Indeed during the war poaching became a very common form of plunder: within a couple of years nearly all of the 2,500 royal deer from Windsor Park had ended up in the bellies of Essex's soldiers.⁶

Plunder provided a psychological satisfaction, being a concrete example of the power a soldier enjoys over unarmed civilians. By the same token, the victims feel violated. Being forced to hand over their goods to fellow countrymen, they increasingly grew tired of the war until, as David Underdown so neatly put it, 'the real enemy was the plunderer' (plate 6).⁷

For Nehemiah Wharton the civil war began in August 1642 with an orgy of plunder.⁸ The London apprentice left his master, George Willingham, merchant of St Swithin's Street, on the 16th of that month, most likely as a sergeant, to fight with Denzil Holles's regiment of the city's Trained Bands. Almost immediately he and his comrades started to plunder. Wharton was annoyed to be detached from his unit to fetch some ammunition, because it delayed his arrival in Oxford and meant that he missed all that was worth liberating. The only loot left was a few surplices that he tore up for bandages. At Wendover Sergeant Wharton's regiment chopped up the altar rails for firewood. After hearing a sermon from a Godly minister whom 'the cavaliers had pillaged to the skin', they did the same to the Rector of Southam, Warwickshire, 'a very malignant town'. Even though Lord Brooke threatened to court-martial anyone caught looting, the practice did not stop. The soldiers poached so much deer from the parks of great houses that Wharton boasted to his master 'venison is almost as common with us as beef is with

'you'. A couple of weeks later looting became so much of a problem that not even drill parades at six in the morning and six at night could control it: so Lord General Essex swore to hang anyone found guilty.

There was something casually cruel about the looting by Wharton and his comrades, who cynically maintained that 'all rich men were royalists'. They plundered the house of John Penruddock, a catholic from Ealing, taking all his furniture, leaving him not even a chair or bed, before maliciously vandalizing his garden, ripping up all his fruit trees. At Castle-morton, Worcestershire, they looted Rowland Bartlett's house. Even though a week earlier Captain Scriven's royalists had plundered him of nearly a thousand pounds, they had so much beef, bacon, pots and pans that the Londoners had to steal his carts to carry the loot away. Even so, poor Bartlett's problems were not over. A few days later other parliamentary soldiers from Gloucester returned to steal his clothes, drink his wine and perry, and smash his linen press with their musket butts.⁹

Far from expressing any remorse, Wharton, a religious young man, described this campaign of plunder in Bunyan-esque terms as his 'pilgrimage'. Having presumably been well brought up to respect property, he pillaged with the brutal enthusiasm of a godless veteran of the Thirty Years' War. And if the troopers did feel any guilt about stealing the goods of their fellow countrymen they soon assuaged it by listening to 'a famous sermon' or two.

The victims were not able to overcome the experience so easily. The author of *A Relation of the Rare Exploits of the London Soldiers* (1642, R862) wondered how 'these strange inhumanities' were possible, particularly when 'they are practiced amongst Christians against Christians'. The excuse that the prey were papists rang hollow. 'Were they Jews or Atheists it is a stain', the pamphlet indignantly maintained. Anyway religion was all too often an excuse for vandalism and greed. During the sack of Winchester 'our unruly soldiers' looted all the houses, and then 'found a great store of Popish books, pictures and crucifixes', which they triumphantly carried through the streets to the market-place with an enthusiasm apparently enhanced by the copious use of liberated alcohol.¹⁰

Marauding rapidly became so serious a problem that in September 1642 John Hampden admitted that his troops had 'grown so outrageous that they plunder everyplace', having pillaged in one morning alone five or six houses, selected after asking the locals to discover which malignants' properties offered the richest pickings. Hampden and five fellow roundhead regimental commanders warned that unless they started making an example of notorious looters by stringing them up on the nearest tree, their army would become as odious to ordinary folk as was the king's. 'We are all the most abominable plunderers,' Colonel Arthur Goodwin, the parliamentary governor of Aylesbury, confessed to his son-in-law, 'I am ashamed to look an honest man in the face.'¹¹ Thus on 9 November parliament ordered Lord General Essex to show looters no mercy.

Of course, stories about rapine could—and did—grow with each telling. Lady Scudamore complained to General Waller that his troops had badly ravaged her house. The general had a local alderman look into the matter, but he found only minor damage to the chapel roof, and a few trees cut for kindling.¹²

Even before the formal declaration of war, the royalists had become enthusiastic plunderers. On 11 August 1642 the king's garrison at Portsmouth rustled some three hundred and fifty cattle and sheep from Portsea Island. Three days later a cavalier troop raided Knowle House in Kent. In the course of requisitioning five wagon loads of weapons, they smashed open forty locks, and stripped £40 worth of gold leaf from a coach.¹³ One eyewitness alleged that the only reason why the locals cheered as Charles raised his standard at Nottingham was from trepidation that 'the cavaliers would come and ransack their houses'.¹⁴

The king's soldiers quickly gained an unsavoury reputation for fulfilling such fears. In November the Mayor and Corporation of Sandwich complained that 'the cavaliers are extremely outrageous in plundering when they come, putting no difference at all between friends and supposed enemies'.¹⁵ After spending the night at an inn, rather than paying they would rip up the feather beds, and 'for sport' smash in all the barrels of wine and beer they had not drunk.¹⁶ They massacred a flock of a thousand sheep, wasting the meat they could not eat or take away. Things in Cheshire were even worse. A victim recalled that at Nantwich Lord Grandison's men 'set a pistol at our throats and swear God damn them they will make us swallow a bullet' unless we told them where we had hidden their valuables.¹⁷ At Welverham, they rounded up all the elders, tied them to a cart and dragged them through the mud to a dungeon, in which they spent the night without food or light, to persuade them to reveal where they had stashed their goods. On the following day—a sabbath, puritans noted with added horror—the royalists plundered the village without let or hindrance.¹⁸

The king issued two proclamations in 1642 and a couple the following year forbidding such outrages. The first, dated 27 August 1642 (less than a week after the declaration of war), stated that many soldiers had broken into the homes of loyal subjects on the spurious grounds that they were 'papists' houses, or houses of persons disaffected'. Quite clearly this was a piece of propaganda aimed at the abuses committed by Sergeant Wharton and his comrades from the London Trained Bands. At first Charles did little to control his own men. He stood idly by watching them loot Wolverhampton in October 1642 because he believed he had no friends in that city. The second proclamation of 25 November was a more serious attempt to counter the adverse effect the plunder of Brentford had had on public opinion. After admitting to 'unjust and unlawful actions done by divers soldiers of Our Army', Charles ordered all taking property without his express permission to be executed without mercy.¹⁹

Had the proclamation been enforced the king's hangman could have ended the lives of more of his soldiers in a few months than did the roundheads in five years. The crown not only lost the crusade against looting—if indeed it ever really bothered to fight it—but forfeited the propaganda campaign against looters. The sack of Brentford so terrified Londoners that they stood their ground at Turnham Green, the war's critical confrontation, and afterwards fortified the city so well that the crown lost all chance of taking the capital, and thus winning the war. Prince Rupert's sack of Birmingham the following year further alienated public opinion by establishing the indelible image of the cavaliers as avid plunderers.

Even though this view has been challenged with regard to the extent of royalist plundering in Leicester, the activities of Lord Thomas Wentworth's men in Buckinghamshire lend it credence.²⁰ On 15 May 1643 they raided Winslow for arms. They found a cache, and killed a few enemy stragglers. Heartened by their success, the next day they rode to Great Horwood, where the villagers agreed to fork out over £100 rather than be pillaged. Moving on, they threatened to burn Swanbourne to the ground unless the inhabitants gave up their weapons. When they refused the cavaliers torched Swanbourne, but had to leave at the approach of some three to four hundred armed country folk. Wentworth concluded that although 'we have gotten the king but little by our plundering', the raid had taught the locals a lesson they would not forget.²¹

There is no doubt that the victims learned a lesson: the problem was that it was not the one the plunderers wanted taught.

The first—and quite literally vital—lesson the victims of plunderers then (like those of muggers today) had to learn was not to resist. When Mr Rellisone tried to use his bow and arrow to prevent Sir Francis Wortley's men from pillaging Bakewell House, Warwickshire in October 1642, they killed him. The following year a foraging party shot and killed Edward Morgan when he tried to prevent them requisitioning two of his master's oxen from Brampton Park. In 1644, just outside Leicester, a hapless carter met the same fate trying to stop a patrol of Lord Hastings' royalists from seizing his load of plums and spices.²² That June a cavalier raiding party shot dead the landlord of the Red Lion Inn, Dunstable, when he protested against the seizure of his horses. The following year Andrew Pottinger, a substantial freeholder and parliamentary partisan, with a wife and six young children, died from being hit on the head as he attempted to prevent roundhead troops from the Newbury garrison rustling his sheep. After the inhabitants killed two parliamentary soldiers who were plundering Nuthurst, Sussex, troops from the local garrison retaliated by imprisoning several of them in Arundel Castle.²³

Most people learned how to survive being plundered. Bereft of their goods, they were at least left their lives—as well as a vivid sense of being violated.

Near Acton on 27 August 1642 the London Trained Bands (of whom Sergeant Wharton was a member) robbed an old man of all his clothes, and his house of all its furniture and fittings down to the bare walls. ‘I found him sitting on his only stool, with tears flowing down his hoary beard’, reported a bystander.

William Harvey, the physician who discovered the circulation of blood, frequently declared that of all the losses he sustained at the hands of the roundheads during the civil wars ‘none was so crucifying to him’ than the malicious destruction of his papers, including the only manuscript of his book *De Insectis*.

Bulstrode Whitelocke described how in November 1642 Rupert’s troops plundered his house, Fawley Court:²⁴

There was no insolence or outrage usually committed by common soldiers on a reputed enemy which was omitted by these brutish fellows at my house. They had their whores with them, they spent and consumed a £200 load of corn and hay, littered their horses with sheaves of good wheat and gave them all sorts of corn in the straw. Divers writing of consequence and books which were left in my study, some of them they tore in pieces, others they burnt to light their tobacco, and some they carried away with them.

The royalists ate all his food, killed his deer, presented his prize hounds to Prince Rupert, broke open his trunks and chests, slashed up his beds strewing feathers all over the place, and stole his coach and horses. When William Cooke, a long-standing tenant, suggested that they use faggots for firewood, instead of fine timber being seasoned for ploughs, the troops threatened to toss him into the bonfire.

Even though Bulstrode Whitelocke was writing years after the event, it is clear that the pain of being plundered still smarted. The experience left scars that might last a lifetime. Take the Reverend Ralph Josselin, minister of Earls Colne. When the royalists entered the Essex village on 12 June 1648 they plundered promiscuously and started looking for roundheads. Fearing arrest, Josselin, who had served as a parliamentary chaplain, escaped to the neighbouring village of Coggeshall. The next day he returned. The royalists spotted him when his baby daughter cried out for her father. Josselin ran, trying to take refuge in a neighbour’s house. But she refused him sanctuary for fear of being further plundered. ‘It cut my heart to see my life no more regarded by her, and it was the greatest damper and trouble to my spirit for present that I ever met with’, wrote Josselin.²⁵ One wonders how, over the years, for the minister lived in Earls Colne until his death in 1683, he and his unnamed neighbour felt as they met on the street, raised a glass in the inn, or worshipped together at Divine Service.

This sense of being ravaged by foe and fair-weather friend alike was not confined to parliamentarians. Having his horse stolen by roundhead troops so upset Alexander Brome that he wrote a poem trying to sort out his feelings, which ranged from a violent desire to see the thief hanged, to the philosophical

resignation ‘that all worldly goods are frail’. Soon after having to surrender Hereford, the royalist magnate, John Scudamore, told a friend how the enemy had stolen the hangings, linen, pewter, brass, and all movables from his house in Gloucester. They smashed every window, bolt and lock, defaced the ceiling mouldings, ripped out doors, and chopped up the stairs and floor boards for firewood. After draining his barrels of wine and beer the enemy used the precious staves for kindling, even though there was plenty of coal and firewood available. They ripped the lead from his roof, felled the trees in his park, and scared his poor wife almost to death. Mindlessly they slaughtered the cattle he had specially imported from Flanders to develop a breed stock. (Had they not been replaced after the war the very popular breed of white-faced Herefordshire cattle might have never been developed.)²⁶

The prospect of being plundered terrified some men almost out of their wits. Nehemiah Wellington bought and read news reports of royalist sackings with a morbid fascination. In the first three months of the war he noted ten such atrocities: at Shrewsbury ‘they spare no one’, at Salford ‘much hurt’, noted the London artisan, before concluding ‘our condition here is miserable’.²⁷ Compared to those who sat trembling in London the condition of those who were actually plundered was far worse. ‘To hear the pitiful shrieking, weeping and howling of the women and children’, wrote a survivor of the sack of Nantwich by Lord Grandison’s cavaliers, ‘did trouble me more than anything else: God grant I never heard the like.’ Another survivor of the same incident voiced the frustration felt by all victims: ‘if we stay at home we are now their slaves. Being naked they will have of us what they list.’²⁸

Some tried to avoid being plundered by moving away. In late September 1643 Mrs Joyce Jeffries shut up her house in Hereford, which she believed was vulnerable, to move to her country home in Kilkinton. It did not work, for the following month Captain Hammon ‘and his barbarous company spoiled her of her goods, coaches linen and money’. Desperate, the widow paid a neighbour to hide her few remaining valuables. The tactic backfired. When the troopers returned the following March they were so angry to find the cupboard bare that they smashed in all the locks to her house. Most folk soon learned how to conceal their valuables. Lady Sussex put them in the turret room over her bedroom which she walled up. As she ostentatiously dined off pewter, she told inquirers that she had sold all her silver. The owner of Dimsdale Farm near Edgehill hung his plate down the well, while Abel Barker, a gentleman from Hambleton, Rutland, kept no cash on his person lest it be stolen.²⁹

The trouble with running away from plunderers was that they also plied their trade upon the way. Eight highwaymen relieved Lady Lambert of £8 on the road near Alton.³⁰ Colonel Hastings’ troops based in Ashby-de-la-Zouch became so notorious that they were known as the ‘Rob-carriers’ because they plundered so many pack trains. One of their victims was Daniel Gittins, a farm manager from

Blackwell Hall, who was travelling on business when they robbed him of his horse, saddle bag, cane and buckskin coat at the Wheatsheaf Inn, Daventry. When their efforts to use soap and water to prise off his wedding ring failed, the troopers threatened to smash his brains out and trample him under their horses' hooves. Only the intervention of the serving girls from the inn saved Gittins's life.³¹ Abraham Haynes, who was travelling from London to visit his daughter in Shropshire had an equally unfortunate encounter outside an inn just 8 miles short of her house. Suspecting him to be a malignant, the landlord and his cronies searched Haynes for secret messages. Discovering none, they nonetheless kept the £14 they found about him, and for good measure had him arrested and sent back to London, where he languished in jail for six months before being freed without being charged.³²

All too often the victims of plunder were the most vulnerable. Soon after her husband died a cavalry troop ransacked Lady Elizabeth Wiseman's house, and even though their captain was very polite the widow admitted that the whole affair 'added great affrightment to my late griefs'.³³ In Kent the roundheads searched and pillaged Lady Filmer's house ten times during her husband's painful and dangerous bout of bladder stones. As a young boy Anthony Wood lost the silver plate his godparents had given him at his christening, while the men who spoiled John Wolstenholme's house in Nostel, Yorkshire, wounded two serving maids, calling one 'a Romanish whore' as they stole her purse and gold ring. 'I live in fear of my life with all my family', Wolstenholme concluded.³⁴

Sometimes plunderers showed compassion. Billed in the house of a heavily pregnant gentlewoman near Appleby, during the 1648 invasion, Sir James Turner discovered a cache of gold coins hidden under the floor boards. In tears the lady explained that her husband was a spendthrift so, unnoticed, she had to skim money off from her allowance to save it for a rainy day, such as her impending confinement.

Turner returned the money.³⁵

Most victims were not so lucky. Perhaps the most heart-rending story concerned Margery Royston, a widow from Warwickshire, who was robbed of the money she had painstakingly saved to reclaim her 9-year-old daughter who had been shipped as an indentured servant to Virginia.³⁶

As she mourned for the child she would never see again so that a few troopers could enjoy an evening's carousing, Mrs Royston must have pondered the capriciousness of her fate. Innocent and guilty, friend and foe, honest men and crooks seemed to suffer equally from the whims of plunder. When the royalists took Cirencester in 1643 they freed John Plot, a lawyer of unspotted reputation, whom parliament had imprisoned for his loyalty to the crown. He walked home from his cell only to find his house full of the king's soldiers who stole £1,200 which he never recovered.³⁷ Plunder could destroy a lifetime's work. After watching the royalists rustle cattle in Worcester in 1646 a diarist noted, 'and so a poor honest man

ruined in a one night what he hath laboured for all his days'.³⁸ A doggerel verse summed up the pain of being plundered by both sides without rhyme, reason or mercy:

I had six oxen the other day
And them the Roundheads got away.
A mischief on them speed.

I had six horses in the hole
And them the Cavaliers stole.

I think in this they are agreed.

The implicit violence and irrationality of plunder made many lose faith in a rational orderly world. After some cavaliers stole his possessions, John Jones, a royalist from Flint, complained that their action was 'against the Laws of this Land, the Covenant of this State, and the Oath of a King'.³⁹ Interestingly enough, the perpetrators accepted a similar argument. Thomas Chadwick suggested to Hugh Kidd that they should break into Beresford Hall because, 'there was no other law now'.⁴⁰ And to prove the point that the rule of the gun had replaced that of the law, Chadwick was shot and killed during the robbery. Captain Antonio Vernatti used the same rationale to excuse the protection racket he and his troops set up at Hatfield Close, Yorkshire. Having escaped from a debtor's prison in London, Vernatti broke into Herbert Le Roy's home, stealing £10. He threatened to burn down Charles Weterlow's house if he did not hand over his livestock and plough, and spurned the orders of the Earl of Newcastle, the royalist theatre commander, to stop by explaining that there was no longer any law in force forbidding his extortions.⁴¹

Plunder could reduce some victims to despair. In late 1643 a Mrs Harrison wrote to a friend in France that she was afraid that England was rapidly becoming like Germany which was being ravaged by the Thirty Years' War. William Davenport found the contradictory signals his tormentors gave him especially confusing. After losing seventeen of his horses in January 1644, whilst out riding on the following 20 May some of Captain Standley's troopers seized his mare. Bitter protests did not save him from having to walk home. Three days later Standley's men requisitioned three more of his horses. Much to his surprise on 8 June he received a letter from the captain 'containing many kind expressions of friendship', saying his men had taken the mare without permission and promising to return her. A few hours later Standley's troop arrived at Davenport's house, but instead of giving back his mare as promised, they seized his remaining seventeen horses, leaving him without a single mount.⁴²

Protestations of amity might explain why Edmund Jodrell, a Cheshire gentleman, refused the assessment the parliamentary army sent him in 1643. Admittedly he did cough up £20 towards the first

demand for £100 which was signed ‘Your faithful friends’. But he refused to pay any of the second assessment for £300 which arrived seven weeks later, signed ‘Your very faithful friends’. So the roundheads immediately plundered him of £150 worth of goods, and threw him into Nantwich jail, where he languished for several months before being released on the payment of a further £50. Jodrell—like so many in those lawless days—learned that the line between assessment and outright plunder was a narrow one, best not crossed. Between 1642 and 1645 he paid the parliamentary authorities a total of £423 2s 6d, in addition to the fine and goods seized for nonpayment of taxes. Jodrell claimed that the goods were worth £150. An inventory valued them, however, at £97 18s 2d, which suggests that victims of plunder—like those claiming against their burglary insurance policies today—might have been inclined to exaggerate their losses.⁴³

After losing all his goods worth several hundred pounds Silvester Warner of Marston, Warwickshire prayed ‘God will either take him out of this world or make him more able to undergo these burdens.’⁴⁴ In the spring of 1644 Randolph Crewe wrote to Sir Richard Browne, the king’s agent in Paris, that ‘I mourn and groan to think’ of the coming campaign season, with its ‘devastation and impoverishment’. Having been sorely plundered on several occasions of practically everything he owned, including his son’s and grandson’s inheritance, Crewe added that he had nothing left in life to lose.⁴⁵ Henry Townsend, of Gloucester, summed up many people’s feelings when he suggested that a new verse should be added to the church’s Litany:⁴⁶

From the plundering of soldiers, their insolence, cruelty, atheism, blasphemy, and rule over us, Lord Deliver us.

Soldiers and armies plundered for a number of reasons. For some it was simply a matter of staying alive. The garrison of Newbury, who stole Andrew Pottinger’s sheep, killing him in the process, were ‘half starved and...very desperate’.⁴⁷ Sir Samuel Luke, whose parliamentary garrison at Newport Pagnell was so poorly supplied that a couple of fellows had but a pair of breeches between them, was relieved to be able to seize some wagon loads of barley on their way to a brewer, and planned to kill the oxen which pulled them for meat.⁴⁸

Horses (as William Davenport learned only too well), were an extremely attractive item of booty. The largest category of cases (30 per cent) heard after the war by the Indemnity Commission, set up to hear cases of alleged military violence against civilians, involved horses.⁴⁹ Cavalry and carters needed them. Stolen horses were highly mobile, hard to identify and almost impossible to recover. Sir Samuel Luke

had to tell his cousin, Katherine Barker, that she had little chance of ever seeing her stolen mount again. Richard Napier, who had lost a horse to the royalists at Shrewsbury, begged Colonel Mytton that ‘the next time you beat up the enemy’s quarters, and take any of their horses, I pray take one for me’.⁵⁰

Both sides regarded loot as a proper reward for a job well done. ‘They deserved such encouragement by their excellent service and brave adventures’, is how Chaplain Ashe defended the spoilation by his roundheads after Marston Moor.⁵¹ ‘The soldiers had the whole plundering of this rich Castle’, wrote a parliamentary newspaper about the sack of Sherbourne, ‘and to speak the truth they deserve it right well, for they carried themselves most resolutely.’ Royalists agreed that the spoils of war were ‘the soldiers’ right for their hard service’. Commanders promised their men so many hours or even days of pillage if they successfully took a town. Afterwards many took French leave home with their loot, or if denied their due would desert or mutiny in protest. Thus the promise of plunder could become a two-edged sword. It could persuade men to fight, or (as Rupert’s cavalry demonstrated at Edgehill and Naseby, and as numerous military commentators warned) it could seduce them into letting victory slip through their sticky fingers.⁵²

Celtic troops had an infamous reputation for plundering in England. They were from lands where ethnic, religious and clan difference made fighting more violent. Being relatively poor and ill-equipped they made the most of the opportunities proffered by the wealth of England. Often unable to speak the victims’ language they were more likely violently to grab what they wanted, rather than demand it, albeit with drawn sword in hand.

Soon after the civil war started parliamentary scribblers played on English fears. Their first diatribe, *The Welsh Plunder*, sold badly, probably because it was poorly written even by the abysmal standard of the propaganda of that day. Just as terrible was *The True Copy of a Welsh Sermon preached...by Shon ap Owen, priest*, a forgery in which a royalist chaplain urges the Welsh soldiers to invade England ‘to spoil and plunder, burn and deface whole Towns and Villages’.

Some roundhead propagandists accused the royalists of crimes which their own soldiers were more likely to commit. *A True Declaration of Kingston’s entertainment of the Cavaliers* (1642, T2668) claimed that the ‘barbarous Behaviour’ of the king’s Irish and Welsh soldiers was worse than anything known on the Continent. Not only did they stable their horses in churches, and chop up the pews for firewood, but they and their horses used God’s house—as well as those of His people—as a jakes.⁵³

The reputation of the Scots as avid plunderers was far worse, and far more deserved. In a couple of days in 1645 some Caledonian troopers relieved Richard Richardson, a farmer from Bramshall, Staffordshire, of £6 worth of corn, peas and hay. That same year, during a six-week occupation, the covenanting army plundered Hereford of goods valued at £31,743 5s 2d, and the adjacent parishes of

some £30,000 worth. They did so with such an enthusiasm and efficiency—which account books can never properly measure—that a hundred and eighty years later the townsfolk still told stories of the trauma: of how the Scots would prise rings from women's fingers: of how they would stop at nothing to find even the most carefully hidden booty. Captain Thomas Wathen of Hereford concealed his pack-horses in a pit dug in the ground. When the soldiers entered his house, Mere Court, one of them saw Wathen's son rocking his baby brother in a cradle. Picking up the infant, playing with and kissing it, the trooper soon won the boy's confidence. When he asked where was his father, the lad replied that he had gone to hide the horses.⁵⁴ It is no wonder that the inhabitants of Cleveland complained in 1646 that whereas the cavaliers had 'only sucked some of our "blood"' the Scots Army 'has devoured our flesh, and are now picking over our bones'.

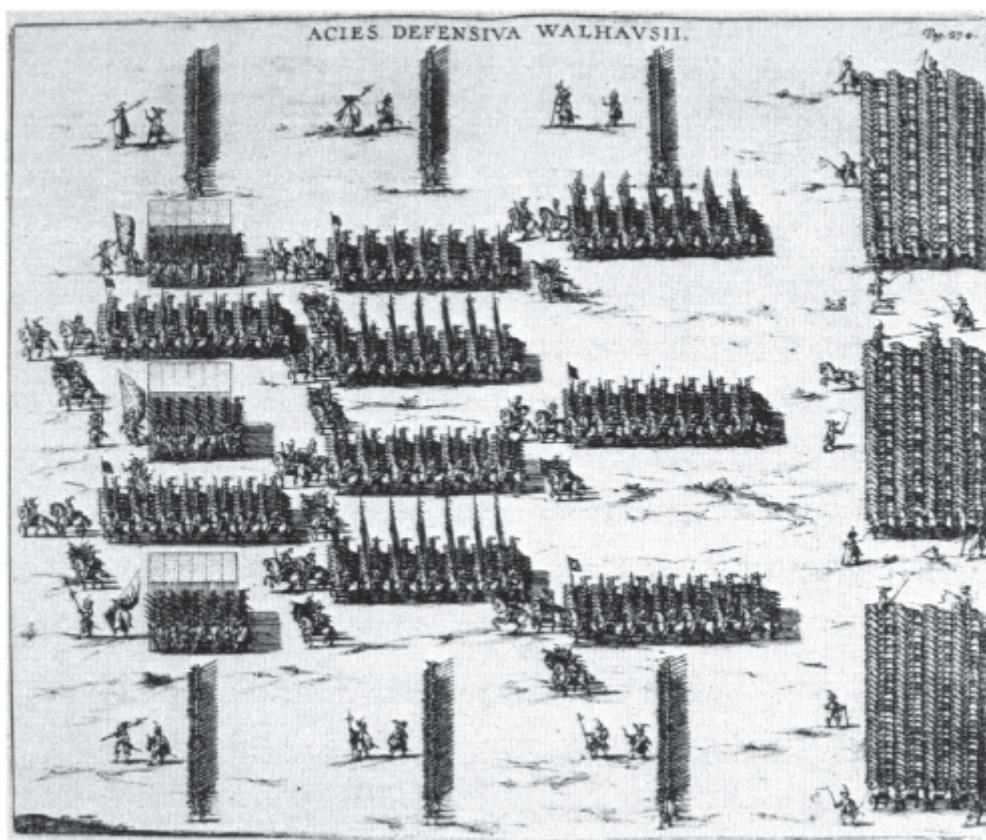
By the following year the Scots reputation for rapacity was so odious that General David Leslie published two open letters maintaining that 'Never did Army live more peacefully and soberly than we have done.' He even got some forty-seven gentlemen from Nottinghamshire to sign a testimonial to this effect. It did no good.⁵⁵

Sometimes troops plundered for political reasons. Thomas Bradley, a royalist soldier from Wolverhampton, took the opportunity of destroying his landlord's title-deeds when his comrades came across them as they were pillaging the parish chest.⁵⁶ Colonel Birch, who started life as a lowly carter, proudly wore the sword the high-born royalist Colonel Arundel surrendered to him in January 1645.

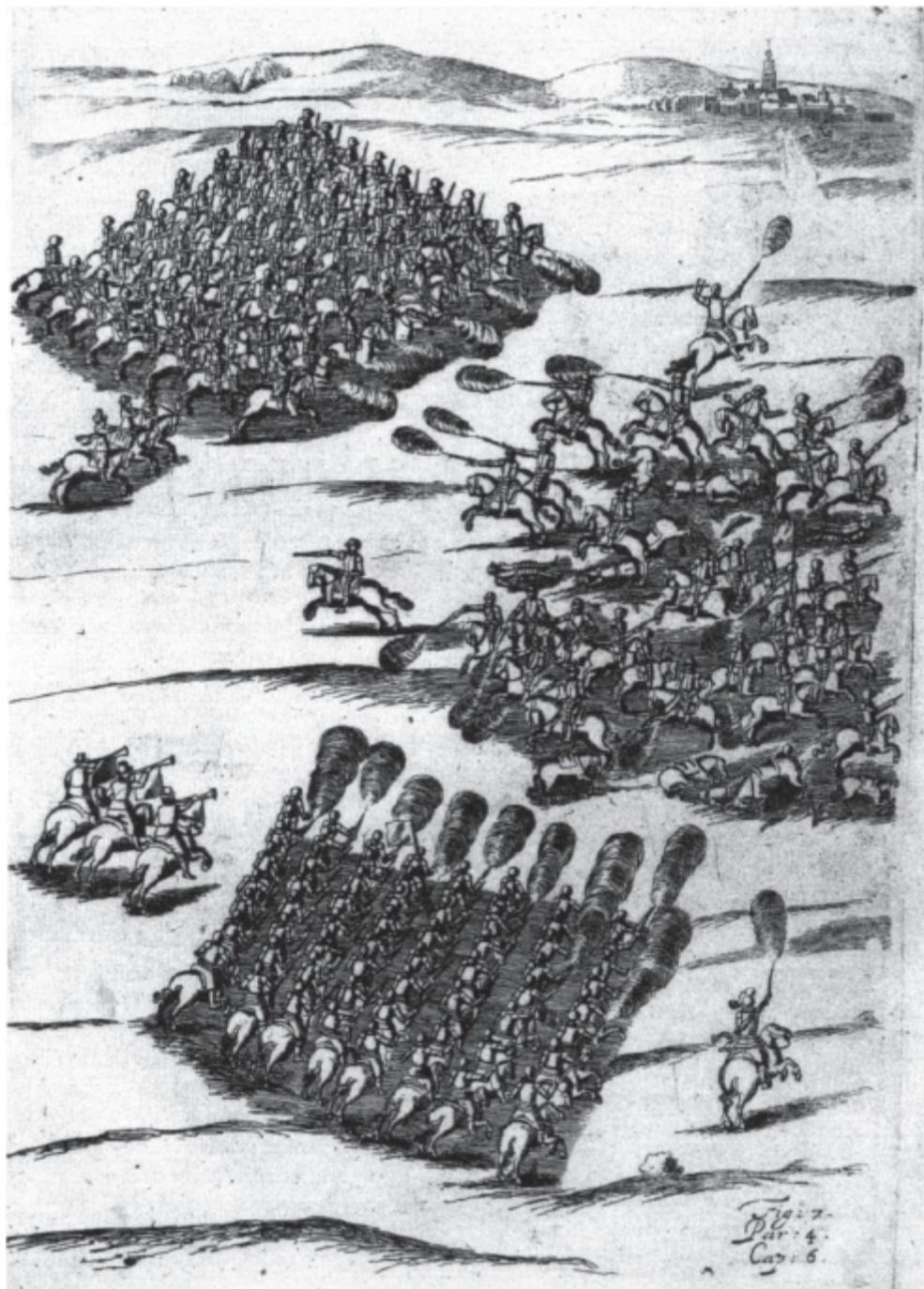
The symbolic significance of vandalizing cathedrals is obvious. At Canterbury Colonel Sande's troops used a statue of Christ for musket practice, cheering every time someone scored a bull's eye by hitting Our Saviour's head or heart. They smashed up the cathedral as one trooper played the current hit song 'The Zealous Soldier' on the organ:⁵⁷



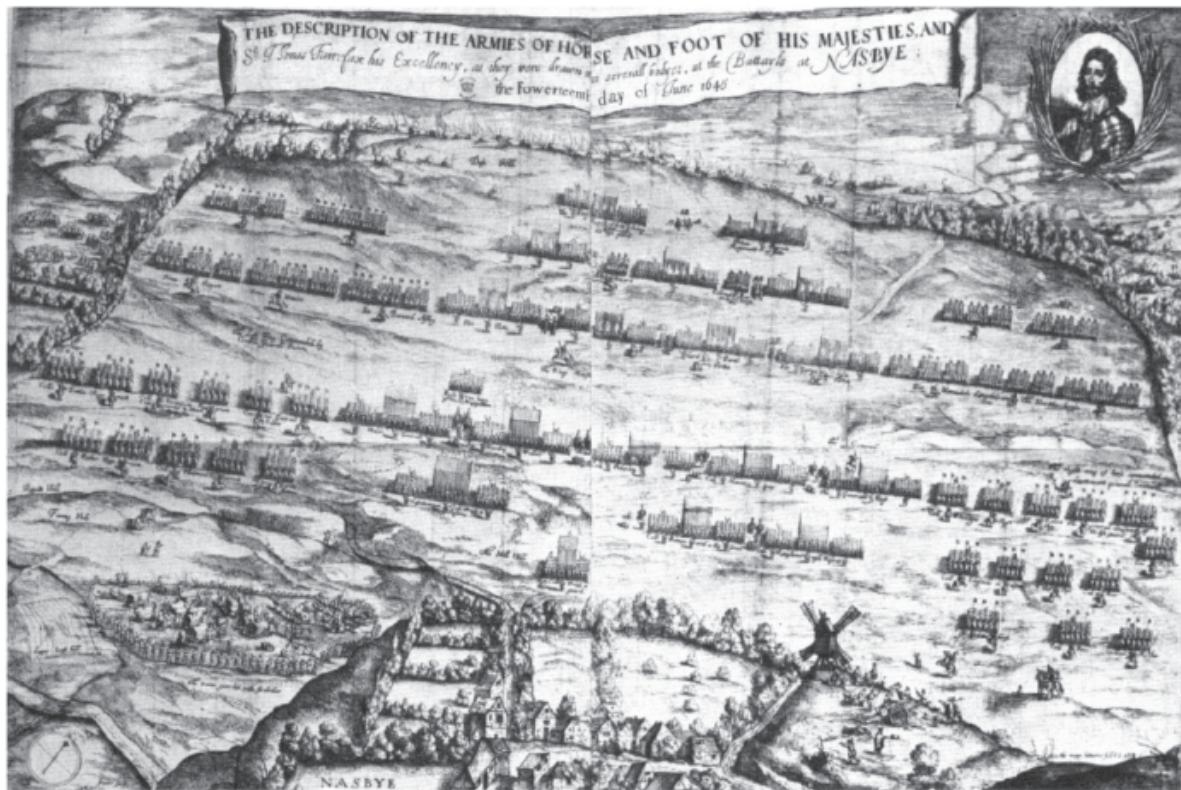
1 'And when did you last see your father?', painting by W.F.Yeames



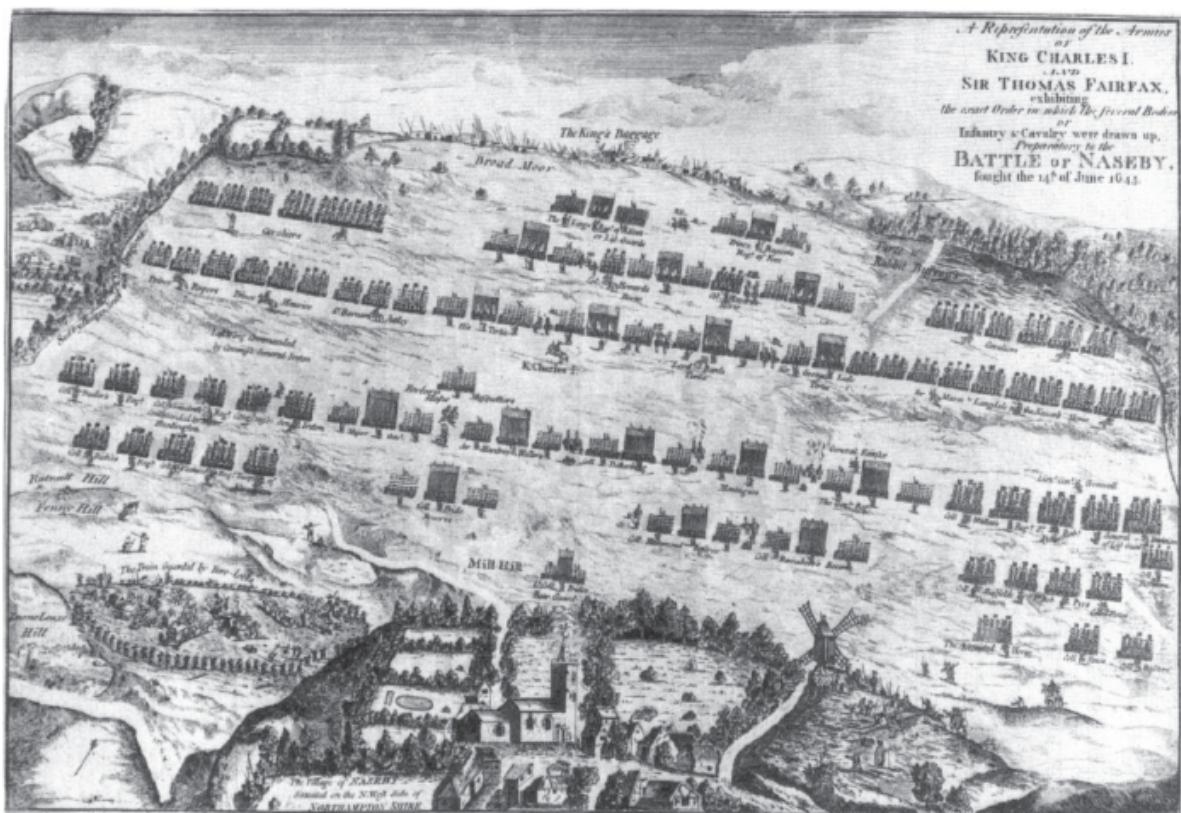
2 'De militia equestri antiqua et nova', 1630



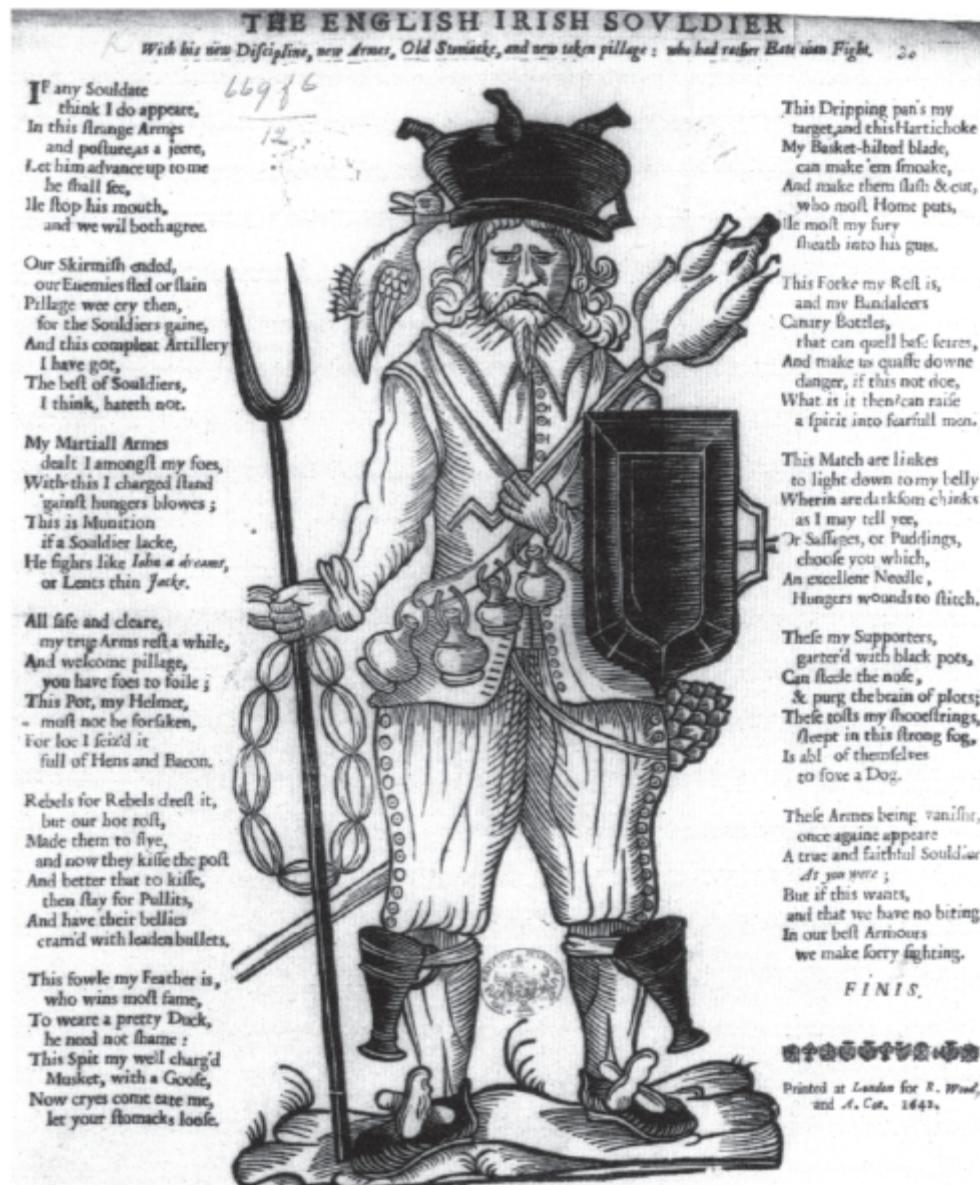
3 'Militarie instructions for the cavallrie', 1632



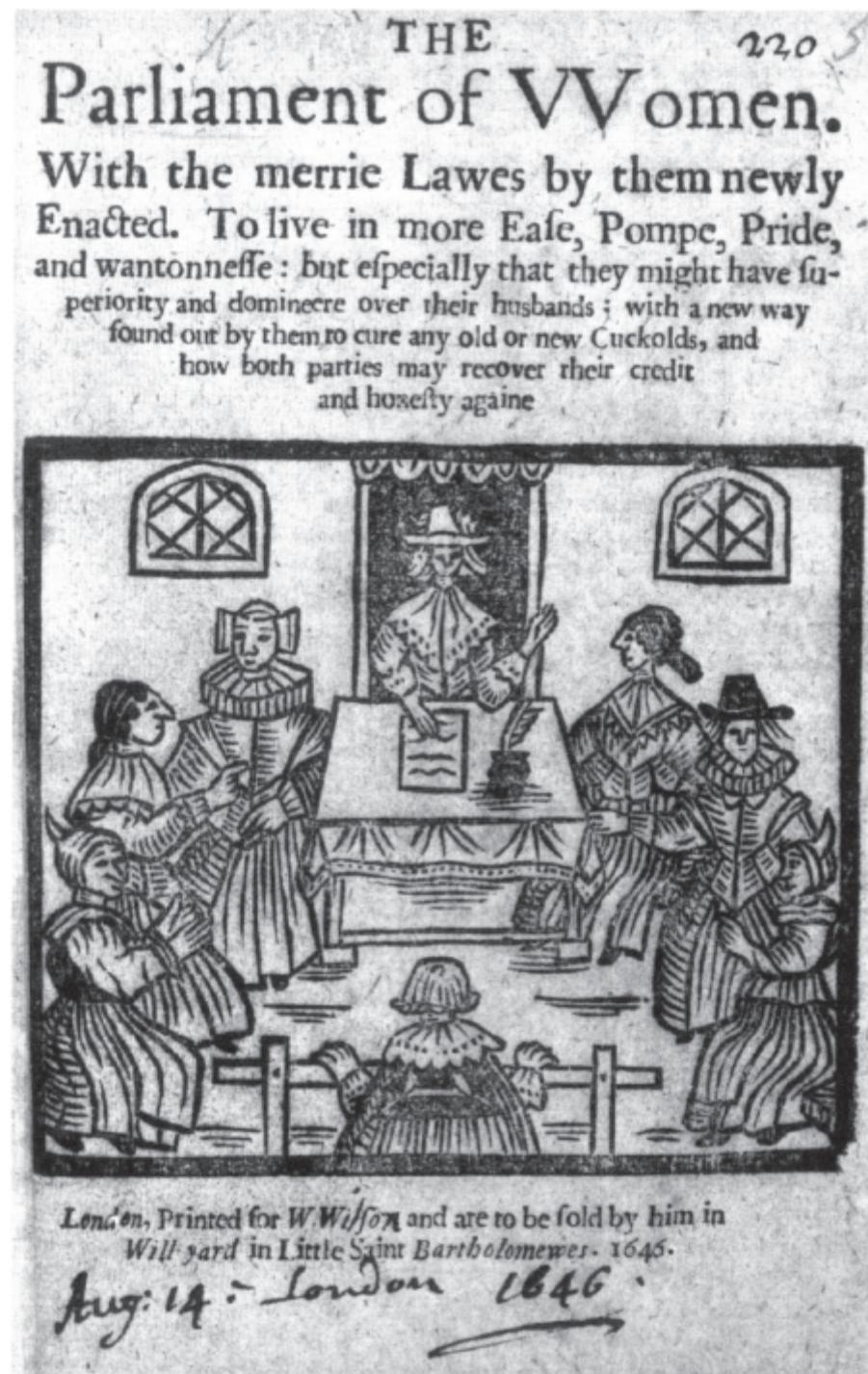
*4 Battle of Naseby, 1645. Illustration from Joshua Sprigge's *Anglia Rediviva**



5 Another contemporary plan of the Battle of Naseby, 1645, exaggerating the strength of the Royalist army



6 A 1642 caricature of a pillaging soldier



7 'The Parliament of Women', 1646



8 Prince Rupert's dog Boy, painted by his sister Princess Louise

9 'A dog's elegy', from a contemporary satirical pamphlet, 1644, on the death of the dog (right)

A DOGS ELEGY, 17 O R. R V P E R T S TEARS.

For the late Defeat given him at Marston-moore, neer York, by the Three Renowned

Generalls; Alexander Earl of Leven, Generall of the Scottish Forces, Fardinando Lord Fairfax, and the Earle of Manchester Generalls of the English Forces in the North.

Where his beloved Dog, named BOY, was killed by a Valiant Souldier, who had skill in Necromancy.

Likewise the strange breed of this Shagg'd Cavalier, whelp'd of a Malignant Water-witch; With all his Tricks, and Feats.



Sad Cavaliers, Rupert invites you all
Close-mourners are the Witch, Pope, & devill,
That doe survive, to his Dogs Funeral. } That much lament yo'r late befallen evill.

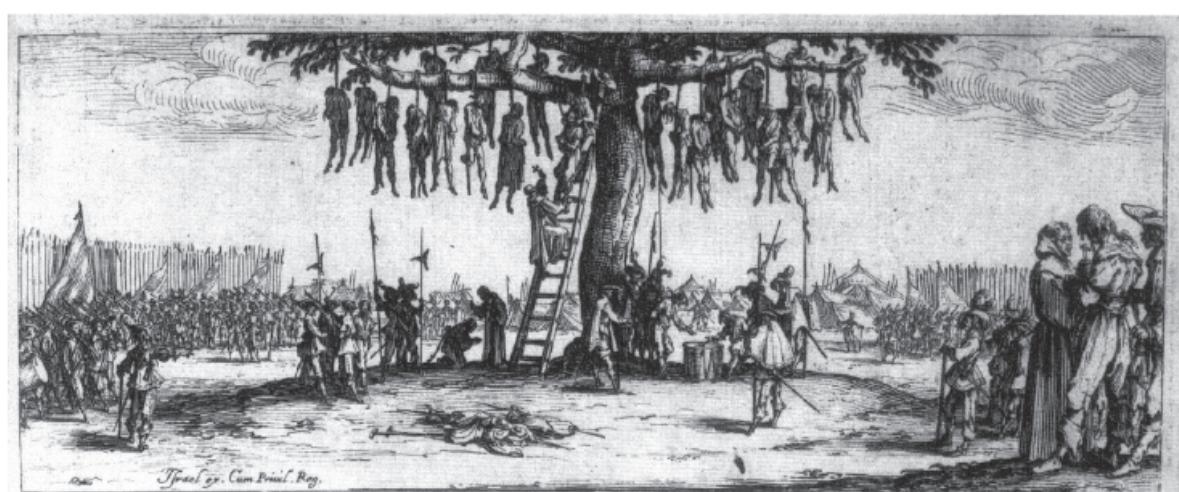
Printed at London, for G. B. July 27. 1644.



10 Hugh Peters, parliamentary army chaplain



11 'The Loyall Sacrifice'



12 Scene from 'Les Misères et les malheurs de la guerre', showing the hanging of thieves. Etching by Jacques Callot, 1633



13 *The Siege of Basing House, 1645, in its final stages, with the principal tower destroyed*



14 An engraving of the Battle of Dunbar, commissioned by Parliament in 1651





15 Atrocities in Ireland, 1641

16 Irish massacre scenes (right)

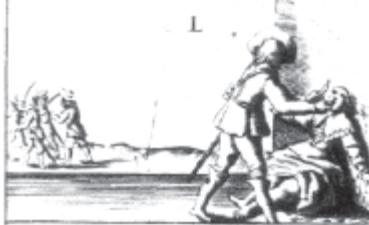
The Lord Blayre forced to ride 10 miles with out Bridle or Saddle & faine his life his Lady lodged in Stratford allured 2 of a dozene her & her Childrens, now a knyghtman of her, and hanged him up before her face a daye telling her she must expect the same to terrifie her neare.



M'Dauenant and his wife bound in their chairs strangled the 2 Eldest Children of 7 years old rested upon Spittles before their Parents faces cutt their throats and after murdered him.



Arthur Robinsone daughter 14 yeares old the Rebells bound her arme a broad, decovered her one after another tell ther spoyled her then pulled the haire from her head and cutt her tongue that she myght not tell of their crudelty, but he declared it by writing.



A Minister and his wife came to Dublin Jan 30 1641 left behinde him some goods with a suspected friend sent for them but could not be delivered unless he or his wife came for them she came and presently they hanged her up.



A Woman mangled wife horred a manner that it was not possible ther should be knowen & after the Villaine mangled his handes in her blode was taken by the Troopers aduised to be hanged hanged of the lader & hanged himselfe like a Bloody Tiger.



Companys of the Rebells meeting with the English forces for their hue falling downe before them crynge for mercy thrust therre into their Childrens bellies & threw them into the water.



11

George Penfe hanged on a tree in his owne ground Cut his right a peice carrying it up & downe saying this is the right of one of the traitors against our Holie Father the Pope.



A Proclamation that neither English nor Irish should either sell or keape in their houses any Powder upon the left of goods & lyfe neither any Armes whatsoeuer except with a license & then but five pound at most at a shill. of a pound



12

Front.

C

m m m m
m m m m S 4.
m m m m

D 2
m m m m
m m m m
m m m m
m m m m

E.

p p p p
P P P P
P P P P
D 1
P P P P
P P P P
P P P P
P P P P
P P P P
S 1
P P P P
P P P P
P P P P
D 4
P P P P
P P P P
P P P P

S 2
m m m m
m m m m
m m m m

D 3

m m m m
m m m m

m m m m
S m m m m

L
Reere.

Deep March.

25

CHAP. VII.

*Of Marching the Company in Divisions, with the order
and places of the Officers.*



Vr Soldiers now being somewhat expert in their distances, we will next draw them forth into a deep March. Wherefore note, that our files must be at order, and our Ranks at open order: the Muskettiers of the right flank are to make the Van, and to march next after the Captain; The Pikes are to make the battell, and to march after the Ensigne, either in one or two divisions, according to their number. The Muskettiers of the left flank (sometimes called the second division of Muskets) make the Reere Guard, which is led commonly by the second Serjeant. Howbeit if there be but one division of Pikes, then the eldest (or chiefest) Serjeant leads the second division of Muskettiers. If the Company be but small, then it is best to make but two Divisions, one of the Muskettiers, another of the Pikes; For the placing of the rest of the Officers, you may perceive by the figure in the Margent: Wherefore note that M. stands for Muskets, p. for Pikes, D. for Drummes, S. for Serjeants, E. for Ensigne, L. for Lieutenant, and C. for Captain.

Note, if you have but three Drummes, then let the Drumme in the second division of Pikes be wanting: If onely two, then upon a March, the first between the third and fourth ranke of the front division of Muskettiers. The second between the third and fourth ranke of the second division of Pikes.

Note that between each Division in March, there ought to be 12. foot distance; 6. foot before the Officers, and 6. foot behinde him.

CHAP.

A great and bloody

18

FIGHT AT COLCHESTER, AND

The storming of the Town by the Lord Generals Forces, with
the manner how they were repulsed and beaten off, and for-
ced to retreat from the Walls, and a great and terrible
blow given at the said storm, by Granadoes and Gunpow-
der. Likewise their hanging out the Flag of Defiance, and
their sallying out upon Tuesday last, all the chief Officers
ingaging in the said Fight, and Sir Charles Lucas giving the
first onset in the Van, with the number killed and taken, and
Sir Charles Lucas his Declaration.



uly London Printed for G. Beal, and are to be sold in the Old
ig Bayley, and near Temple Bar, 1648.

18 'A great and bloody fight at Colchester', 1648



19 *The Siege of Oxford* by Jan de Wyck



20 *Sir Edward Walker with Charles I* by unknown artist



21 Portrait of John 1st Lord Byron by William Dobson



22 Colonel Thomas St Aubyn, by Popham

For God and His cause I'll count it gain
To lose my life. I can none happier die
Than to fall in battle to maintain
God's worship, truth, extirpate Papacy.

Their singing done, the troopers splintered the organ pipes as a result the instrument, although repaired, never sounded as sweet again.

When the roundheads captured Chichester in December 1642 they ran up and down the cathedral slashing the cushions with their swords, as their officers cheered them on. They ripped pages out of the prayer books, defaced pictures of the king and queen, smashed statues, ground down the chalice, broke the organ pipes with their halbards, and kneaded pieces of coal into the Bible. Being told that the silver plate had been hidden behind the panelling in the chapter house, the soldiers ripped it out as their commander, Sir Arthur Haselrig, urged them on: ‘There boys! There boys! Hack it! Hack it! It rattles! It rattles!’⁵⁸

Lichfield cathedral suffered badly after its capture in March 1643. Apart from smashing the organ, ripping the copes and surplices, and tearing down the tapestries, the troops uses dogs to hunt cats in the cathedral, thinking the echo of the barks and feline hisses off the vaulted cathedral roof great fun. For an encore they brought in a calf wrapped in linen, carried it to the font, and sprinkled it with water in a blasphemous parody of baptism.⁵⁹

Many puritan troopers found the sacrament of baptism especially galling. The following year some rebel soldiers came across a baptism under way in Yaxley, Huntingdonshire. Barring entry into the church, they urinated into the font, in which they baptised a horse.⁶⁰ Beauty outraged them as much as holiness. Roundhead vandals trashed the Queen’s Chapel in St James’, throwing a Rubens into the Thames. At Winchester they broke into the muniment room, tossed some of the records into the river, and used others to make kites.⁶¹

How then are such incidents to be explained without recourse to postulations such as mindless violence, or anti-episcopal high jinks? One way of doing so is to set them within a military context.

Take Sir Thomas Myddleton’s roundheads who kicked in Wrexham’s church organ to melt down the metal pipes for musket bullets. At one level the explanation is simple. Short of ammunition they needed the lead to make a very different sort of music. Yet this unit had a reputation for dirty tricks. For instance during a siege, a few weeks earlier in December 1645, they had called out from the walls pretending to be old friends, and promising not to shoot. When the royalists emerged from cover they opened fire, killing six. Harry Brych, a cavalier officer, thought that Myddleton’s men were as ‘contemptible an enemy as ever we had in Ireland’. A few days later he was outraged to find what they had done to Hawarden parish church—the prayer books torn up and scattered all over the nave, the communion rails torn out and the altar dragged into the centre. ‘Some of our soldiers came, and swore it was not right’, concluded Brych.⁶²

To give another example, the roundheads who hunted cats and baptized a calf in Lichfield cathedral did not do so for unthinking fun: they had just survived some very bitter fighting, in which prisoners had been executed.

In sum, plunder could be a practical way of obtaining military necessities, such as bullets (while providing the added bonus of smashing organs that produced music that most puritans thought papist). Plunder was also a way to demonstrate the power that the armed have over the unarmed. Finally, it could be a satisfying outlet for relieving the ecstasy of victory and the despair of defeat, particularly after an especially vicious fight.

At its least harmful plunder could be a way to vent high spirits. Captain John Hodgson remembered that during the Scots campaign of 1650 someone found a large barrel full of cream which he brought to the officers' mess. They drank it by the dishful, some filling their hats with cream. When the churn was nearly empty two officers turned it upside down over a third's head, so he could lick the inside as the cream dribbled down all over his clothes. Everyone thought it hilarious, including Oliver Cromwell who paused to watch the fun.⁶³

Food—which is a great comforter in times of trouble—played an important role in plundering, even in the heat of battle. When the London Trained Bands assaulted Basing House in 1643 they came across an outhouse full of food, which they promptly started to eat, musket fire, cannon balls and a burning roof notwithstanding. A year later, after the Scots had broken through the defences of Newcastle, a company chanced upon a christening feast. As some thirty guests were about to toast the infant, the covenanters burst in, collapsing the banquet table, sending meat and drink flying. The Scots promptly grabbed the vittles, before relieving their hosts of their clothes, money and furniture. In the latter instance a sense of grievance could have augmented the need to eat in order to assuage fear and control elation, because after the sack of Newcastle many common soldiers were outraged that their officers seemed to have got the pick of the loot.⁶⁴

When defeated troops plundered to assuage their sense of shame the consequences could be frightful. After putting up a poor show at Edgehill, Colonel Mostyn's Flintshire regiment was sent to do garrison duty at Chester. The royalists got out of hand and sacked St Mary's Nunner, the town house of Sir William Brereton, the local rebel leader. After being beaten in Cheshire, Ashton's cavaliers brutally plundered Droitwich and Bromsgrove, taking goods from their own county. In Lancashire Prince Rupert's men plundered from friend and foe alike, seizing cattle, sheep and chickens, and killing all who tried to stop them, in a blind rage at having just been defeated at Marston Moor.⁶⁵

Men pillaged through thick and thin. Nehemiah Wharton greatly enjoyed plundering. As a soldier in the London Trained Bands he was free of the restrictions of civilian life, which the erstwhile apprentice

may have found most irksome. Even decent family men such as the Reverend Ralph Josselin relished using other people's possessions. At Grantham on 11 September 1644, the parliamentary chaplain noted in his diary, 'We quartered at Mr. Wolph's, a grand malignant. We had a good lodging and diet.' A survivor described how the soldiers lorded it over the country folk of Shropshire: 'They ride up and down, with swords, muskets and dragoons, to the great terror of the people.'

Quite simply plunder was great fun. John Ward, a parliamentary trooper who took part in the capture and sack of Worcester, promptly wrote a poetic paean on the ecstasy. A Devonshire ditty (here modernized, for the dialect is hard to comprehend) described the joys of rapine in a coarser fashion:⁶⁶

I will work no more
Do you think I will labour to be poor
I will sell my cart and also my plough.
And get a sword if I know how.
For if I mean to be right
First I will learn to swear and roar.

But first a warrant it is fit
From Mr. Captain that I get...
For then I have power in my place
To steal a horse without disgrace,
And beat the wives too.

Another street ballad, *The Mercenary Soldier*, repeated this theme in 1646:

I come not forth to do my country good,
I come to rob and take my fill of pleasure.

As the war continued, plunder—like so many other activities—became institutionalized in order to limit its damage and enhance its profitability. In 1643 some Staffordshire villagers paid Captain Corbet's troops 13s 4d not to purloin when they spent the night in the parish church. At the same time the churchwardens of St Michael's, Bedwardine, Worcestershire, paid 3 shillings less to some troopers 'for preserving our church goods and writings'. Sixteen leading royalists from Gloucester offered the king a large sum of money in the spring of that year if his forces would spoil only parliamentarians after they had taken the city. Two years later, during the successful Siege of Bristol, Fairfax promised his men two

weeks' pay if they gave up the traditional perquisite of a sack. The city fathers were only too happy to contribute to the cost of being spared, while the soldiers were pleased not to have to auction off their loot in a buyer's market.⁶⁷

Because the troops could not carry their swag on the march, markets were often organized to dispose of the proceeds of a successful pillage. After a whole day stripping Weaverham, Cheshire, the royalists held a special fair at Timperley to hawk off the results. On the other side the local county committee might organize such a sale. Following the capture of Chichester they organized a special market, at which, one committee member vouched to a friend, there would be plenty of bargains because 'the soldiers do usually sell cheap'.⁶⁸

By 1644, Ireland, a poor country, had been so badly ravaged that the Council of War had to issue a set of orders how shares of plunder were to be distributed according to rank. It is unlikely, however, that these were followed, for by now conditions had become so decayed, and the war so vicious, that men needed to loot all they could simply to stay alive.⁶⁹

Private enterprise was sometimes used to circumvent the open market. Joyce Hammon managed to buy back for 21s 6d from Captain Gammon some gold and two beaver hats that his men had plundered from her house in Hereford. During William ffarington's absence fighting for the king, the roundheads plundered his house of goods valued at £428 9s 4d. His wife, Margaret, petitioned the local parliamentary commander for their return, saying that they included several family heirlooms. When he offered to let her have them for a bargain price of £350 she balked, and sought the help of her cousin, admittedly a distant one, Ralph Asherton. After Asherton, a parliamentary officer, had arranged for the goods to be transferred to the custody of his company, he advised Margaret that if she would not pay the £350, he could not stop his men from selling her husband's goods for what they would fetch, and that she would never see them again. The fact that he had the gall to sign this thinly veiled blackmail note 'your very loving cousin' could have done nothing to relieve Mrs ffarington's distress.⁷⁰

Sometimes relatives were no protection. Abraham Curtis of Wrexhall, Warwickshire, had three boys, all serving in the parliamentary army. Yet in March 1644 troops from one of his son's companies pillaged him.⁷¹ The terrifying thing about plunder is that soldiers could turn upon their masters. In 1649 a company of roundheads burst into the house of William Prynne, a radical who had been an obdurate enemy of Charles I's for over two decades, having had his ears sliced off and his face branded for his opposition. They roughed up his servants, drank up his beer, smashed up the crockery, took all his money. In all, Prynne recalled, they 'hallowed, roared, stamped, beat the tables with their swords and muskets like so many bedlams, swearing, cursing, blaspheming at everyword.'

One stage removed from plunder was the officially sanctioned practice of free quarter, which as William Hill, a yeoman for Newent, Gloucester painfully learned, was demanded under duress. When in April 1644 Colonel Mynne's regiment of Irish troops moved into the village, Sir Edward Clark, the leading local royalist, ordered the householders to provide them with food and lodging. When Hill demurred 'with sword in hand' Sir Edward went to the yeoman's cottage, and 'said that if he knew anyone in the Town that would not open his doors to let in Colonel Mynne's soldiers, he would break it open'.⁷²

The threat of violence lurked behind every encounter between soldiers and civilians, causing resentments which festered for years. During the war neighbours assessed and collected your taxes. Captains did, often with a squad of musketeers behind them, and always demanding and receiving far more than they had in the halcyon days of peace.⁷³

The war was less than two months old when the city fathers of Gloucester learned that sad lesson. Eighty-seven rebel troopers arrived on 21 October 1642 to guard the bridge over the River Severn. Straightaway they demanded that the city authorities pay them. Mayor Dennis Wise tried to buy them off with what he optimistically called loans, as he wrote warning parliament that their troops would turn vicious unless they received their arrears very soon. The Mayor and city officers of Preston tried to placate Prince Rupert and his senior officers with a sumptuous feast. 'Banquets were not fit for soldiers' declared the king's nephew as he threw the worthies into jail.⁷⁴

The probability of violence if they refused to billet and feed soldiers, was nearly as certain as the chances of being paid if they complied were remote. Householders were expected to furnish their enforced guests with food and lodging at a set rate in return for an IOU signed by an officer or NCO promising to redeem their expenses at some later date, the costs being met from the soldiers' pay. Because soldiers were rarely and tardily paid, little remained to discharge such tickets, particularly those issued by the king's army.

Financially the cost of free quarter and plunder was immense. A 1645 petition from Bedfordshire, a county which saw comparatively little fighting, claimed that such exactions had cost £50,000. Dr Morrill has estimated that in Cheshire soldiers extorted £120,000 in free quarter, far more than the amount the county raised in taxes, while villages claimed to have lost plundered goods worth an additional £190,000.

⁷⁵

Psychologically free quarter could be as painful as plunder, for it involved extending the very personal act of hospitality in one's own home to someone you had not invited, whom you might not like, indeed could well hate, and who might behave in an abominable fashion about which you could do nothing. Knowing they had scant chance of redeeming the chits they had been given for providing free quarter,

many householders tried to serve their uninvited guests the worst possible food, which further exacerbated the relations between forced host and reluctant guest.

During the summer of 1643 the royalists troopers who were billeted on the puritan minister of Wrington, Somerset, were encouraged to be on their worst behaviour until he returned to using the Laudian forms of worship. On the other side of the coin, as Sir James Turner, the Thirty Years' War veteran who invaded England with the covenanters in 1644, explained, it was very hard to get a soldier who had endured the hunger, danger, and hardships of a campaign to settle down and behave himself in someone else's home. Such unwanted guests could vent the anger they felt towards the soft life of 'civvie street', by demanding the finest food and accommodation and violently expressing their displeasure when it was not forthcoming. Even when officers strictly supervised free quarter, Turner admitted the abuse of the system 'continues heavy and great'.

John Nicholas could not have agreed more. After being plundered thrice in one week of May 1643 the royalist gentleman was forced to hide amid the insalubrious droppings of his pigeon loft. The following May he was relieved of a further £500 and had to provide free quarter for five captains and fifty other ranks 'so that my house hath been in worse case than an inn'. Another royalist, the poet John Taylor, sardonically noted how quickly every rogue learned to help himself to whatever he wanted by uttering the phrase 'free quarter'. 'We call it free quarter. What a grief!' fulminated John Hacket,⁷⁶

to be made servile to provide for such guests, and when the family knew it was Judas that dipped his hand with him in the dish, what an expense it was to bring out all the stores, laid up for a year, and to waste it in a week.

In some ways wartime taxation, assessments and sequestration can be regarded as a form of officially sanctioned plunder. They were often extracted with the threat of violence, especially in disputed areas. When the Worcestershire parliamentary committee sent a tax demand for £10 a month to Elmley Lovett they warned the villagers that if they did not start paying within three days 'you will answer the contrary at your peril of pillaging and plundering, and your houses fired, and your persons imprisoned'.⁷⁷ Even the mild-mannered poet William Phyliп of Hendre Fechan had to threaten his neighbours with violence after being appointed a tax collector. The fact that the bard did so in Welsh verse with the grace of an Eistedfodd champion and the determination of one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Revenue, did little to hide the implied threat of force:⁷⁸

Here is the sealed demand of a saint—pray

Pay without delay.

Lest the saint (his lust he concedes not),

Becomes an angry Devil.

Each side tried to get the other to pay for the war. Defeated loyalists had their estates sequestered, and had to negotiate to buy them back. The degree of their involvement in the king's causes determined the price, while none of the proceedings afforded them anything like due process.⁷⁹ And if they were squeezed dry until the pips squeaked, few victors minded.

The war was immensely expensive. In terms of the gross national product its cost may not have been exceeded until the world wars of the twentieth century.⁸⁰ To support the fighting it has been estimated that Oxfordshire paid £60,000 a year, seventeen times more than it had to fork out in ship money. At the other end of the scale the expenses of the village constables of Belton, Leicester rose from £9 7s. 1d. in 1638 to £32 16s. 7d. in 1644.⁸¹ Exeter spent £18,479 12s. 10d. in ten weeks during the summer of 1643 rebuilding its defences. Sieges cost Gloucester £28,740 and Chester £72,826 12s. 6d. War damaged incomes. The Duchess of Newcastle estimated that the war had cost her husband £941,300. The war not only ruined Worcester's economy and tax base, but increased the proportion of its population on poor relief from the peacetime average of 4–5 per cent to 23 per cent in 1645. Sleaford Grammar School could not collect a penny from its endowments between 1644 and 1646 because 'these times were so confused in respect of the wars'.⁸²

After the war contemporaries remarked on the damage all around them, 'there is scarce a house in the town that is not flattened, and scarce a room is not into which shot hath not been made', observed William Jessop of the ruins of Lyme after the siege.⁸³ The villagers of Marston complained that their houses had been destroyed, their fruit trees chopped down, and their fields so ruined by the construction of earthworks during the Siege of Oxford that they could no longer farm them. Troops blew up Chipping Campden, they razed Basing House, they demolished Corfe Castle's walls, and turned Pembroke Castle into a shell. They smashed in Canterbury cathedral's stained glass, burned Winchester's record office, toppled the central spire at Lichfield cathedral, and melted down every piece of silver plate they could lay their hands upon. Over a hundred and forty towns in England, and heaven knows how many in Scotland and Ireland, suffered significant war damage. Sometimes it was direct destruction, such as the loss of 286 buildings in Gloucester during the siege. More often it resulted from the decision to level houses, particularly outside city walls, to provide defenders with clear fields of fire. Defenders blew up 241 houses at Leicester; 400, valued at £40,000, at Worcester; and 200 worth £49,330 at Farringdon.⁸⁴

In 1649 John Taylor, poet, water bailiff and ardent scribbler, went on a 600-mile journey in the west of England 'to see', he explained to all who would buy his travelogue, 'the wonders of the West'. He began:

It's a mad world (My masters) and in sadness
 I travelled widely in these days of madness,
 Eight years a frenzy did this land molest,
 The ninth year seemed to be like the rest.

Farringdon he described as 'a good handsome town, turned into ashes and Rubbish'. The front of Wells cathedral he reported as badly defaced. All over Devon and Cornwall there was considerable damage, while Exeter was 'turned all to ruins, rubbish, cinders ashes and fume'. Two years later in a second travel book, Taylor reported that Lichfield 'is so spoiled', Harlech was 'almost inhabitable', while the lead roof of St David's cathedral had been stripped for bullets.⁸⁵

The overall picture of Wales that Taylor paints is one of relative prosperity. Landlords' rentals very quickly returned to their pre-war level. Although there is no doubt that the war did immense damage, the nature of warfare limited its effects. Battlefields were not turned into the devastated landscapes of, say, the Somme or Caen. Artillery wiped out few buildings, even though many castles were slighted, they were militarily obsolete, and had not to be replaced. Unlike a modern economy, that of pre-industrial England lacked a vulnerable and crucial infrastructure. Few bridges were destroyed, and even though that at Upton-upon-Severn was not repaired until 1830, there were plenty of alternative ways of crossing the river nearby. The pace of restoration could be slow. It took Exeter thirty years to completely rebuild its suburbs, while at York and Gloucester the job was not complete until the eighteenth century. Of a sample of 39 destroyed churches, 4 were rebuilt by the Restoration, 10 by 1700, 7 by 1800, and 7 remained in ruins. Yet there is no evidence that such delays damaged either the local or national economies.⁸⁶

As the war went on and the killing increased, each side seemed to care less about the other, and plunder became more common, brutal and organized. Just as the parliamentarians vented their frustrations on Irish prisoners so the royalists increasingly went in for plunder. For them—unlike the roundheads—it grew into a necessity, with the decline of their supply lines: unable to control plunder the royalists lost the first civil war. On the other side the Committee of Both Kingdoms in Westminster, as well as roundhead commanders in the field, issued strict orders for the exemplary punishment of plunderers. While the royalist Captain Richard Coe recorded the hanging of plunderers without comment in his diary, the puritan Chaplain Sprigge thought that the execution in October 1645 of a trooper chosen by lot from four condemned to death for pillaging Winchester 'made a good impression on the soldiery'.

⁸⁷

Unlike many royalist commanders (whom both the brutality of the Thirty Years' War, as well as a desire to punish the rebels, had hardened), most parliamentary leaders realized that plunder was

inherently counterproductive. ‘I know that the soldier’s plunder is but a bottomless bag’, Sir William Brereton told the House of Commons in April 1645, ‘the state loses by it: the soldier does not account it for pay...our reputation is extremely lost thereby with the common people.’ In a strikingly modern phrase he concluded that by controlling plunder, particularly when compared to the excessive pillage wreaked by the enemy, ‘we then gained their hearts’.⁸⁸ The other side agreed. In March 1645 Sir Edward Nicholas wrote in the king’s name to Sir William Campion that if he could stop his garrison from plundering he would win ‘hearts to his majesty and affections to his Service’.⁸⁹

A classic example of the effectiveness of controlling plunder in winning the hearts, if not the minds, of seventeenth-century Englishmen and women can be seen in the Western Campaign of 1645. Not only were parliamentary soldiers encouraged to fight by being told that they were saving their fellow countrymen from cavalier rapine, but they were strictly and effectively forbidden to maraud. Not even Chaplain Hugh Peters was allowed to destroy Stonehenge, which he thought was a ‘monument of heathenness’, as his regiment marched past.⁹⁰ In May 1645 General Edward Massey justified his order to spare Malmesbury by telling his men that ‘he could not judge any part of England to be an Enemy’s country, nor an English town capable of devastation by English soldiers’.⁹¹ In addition the New Model Army won friends by promptly paying off the chits it issued for taking free quarter. Such magnanimity brought an immediate military dividend. Civilians supported the invaders with food, lodging and, most precious of all, intelligence. As a consequence the enemy surrendered in droves.⁹²

In contrast Charles’s inability and reluctance to control the rapacity of his men cost him dear. As defeat loomed and supplies shrank, the cavaliers proved the Duke of Wellington’s adage that ‘a starving army is worse than none’. Admittedly the crown executed a few looters: the army marched past two swinging corpses at Badminton on 13 July 1644, and a couple more at Stratton Down thirteen days later. Such examples had little effect. William Maurice, a royalist gentleman from Flintshire, complained that the cavaliers were ‘plundering and impoverishing the country extremely’.⁹³ Sir Edward Walker agreed that the behaviour of his own side was enough to turn anyone into a rebel. ‘If they would fight more and plunder less’, sighed Sir John Colepeper about the king’s soldiers. When they took Huntingdon in August 1645 the few royalists in Oliver Cromwell’s home town welcomed them with much bowing and scraping. Grovelling made not a jot of difference. After drinking ‘by the pailful’, the soldiers plundered friend and foe alike, seizing all the horses they could find, and driving off seven hundred cattle which they ransomed back to their owners. Even the king, who was notoriously tolerant of such abuses, was outraged. He ordered two men to be hanged, one for plundering a tradesman and the other for robbing a church.⁹⁴

In early 1645 the villagers of Brent Knoll discovered what it was like to be plundered by desperate and defeated troops,⁹⁵ On 25 March some sixty royalist cavalry were billeted on the village. They were a scratch lot, mostly from Colonel Ascough's and Colonel John Tynte's regiments with a few from Lord Hawley's, which helps explain their outrageous behaviour. Certainly their officers did nothing to restrain them. Lieutenant Henry Tynte announced that in his opinion all country folk 'were fools and...were good for nothing but to be made idiots'.

In one regard, at least, no one could accuse the soldiers of disobeying their officer's inclinations. They broke into John Jones's house to steal 25 shillings, and took 12 bushels of malt and 6 yards of cloth from William Weakes's home. Three troopers, Francis Swift, Richard Hutchings and John Parsons, who were billeted on Henry Simons, stole his 'fat Bullock', which they gave to a servant. When Simons tried to reclaim it they beat him up, and threatened to run his wife through with their swords if she did not fetch a rope to hang her husband. Discretion proved the better part of matrimony. Having placed the noose about Simons's neck, with many foul oaths the soldiers swore to string him up. Only the immediate offer of 20 shillings assuaged their anger and saved his life.

Simons was lucky to survive (although one wonders whether his marriage did as well). Having stolen thirty horses some troops murdered a labourer on the Axminster road. A private threatened to despoil Mr. Tythingham if he did not hand over three quarters of beans or oats. When Tythingham proffered only six bushels, the brute snarled that he would string him up if he did not give him 40 shillings.

Outrage followed outrage. While drinking at the King's Head pub, two soldiers, Abraham Williams and John Rogers, fell out, Williams drew his sword, slashed at Rogers, cutting his staff in half. It must have been made of strong wood (or else the sword of the softest metal), for Williams's weapon broke. Incensed, he leapt down from his horse to slice open Roger's face with the shattered end.

Within eleven days (that included an Easter Sunday) the royalists plundered £687 worth of goods from eighty-five inhabitants of Brent Knoll. (In the same time they took £850 from the smaller adjacent hamlet of Berrow, after threatening to burn every house there to the ground.) Losses suffered in Brent Knoll ranged from Thomas Coulbroke's 4 shillings to John Somerset's £100.

Thus it is no surprise that John Somerset—who had once served the crown as a captain—became the village-Hampden. On 4 April he led a spontaneous attack against the soldiers. Armed only with pikes, staves and muskets they caught the troopers napping. Although no one was killed, several were wounded, including an officer who was shot in the thigh. When he banged at Thomas Gilling's door demanding sanctuary from the pursuing mob, Gilling told him to 'begone, begone'.

Once reinforcements arrived from Bristol the villagers did not have a chance. They were harshly fined. Colonel Ascough had Somerset and Gilling arrested on the general charge of leading an

'insurrection' against His Majesty's forces, and specifically for ordering Private Abraham Williams to be beaten up. The latter charge sounds most spurious, since Williams was the thug who slashed John Roger's face with his broken sword. Ascough could well have trumped it up to justify his men's plunder. Nonetheless their lawyer, William Morgan, advised Somerset and Gilling that if they went before a court-martial they had not a prayer of proving either their innocence or the soldiers' crimes. From Bristol gaol the pair petitioned Sir Ralph Hopton and the Prince of Wales to be released, and after five weeks they were freed on bail. Never brought to trial, and having forfeited their bail money, they returned home to survive as best they could. Somerset, the erstwhile royalist captain who defied the king's troops, had his estate sequestered by parliament in 1651, and survived by four years to see the Restoration, unlike Gilling, who died in 1658, the same year as Oliver Cromwell.

For its victims plunder involved the blatant seizure of their property without the customary reticence of theft. It was an outrageous violation whose scars could last a lifetime. On the other hand plunder became a way of life for the perpetrators that gave some meaning to otherwise meaningless lives as soldiers in the civil war. Indeed at the local level fighting between garrisons all too frequently became little more than a gangland contest to control protection rackets. A few grew resigned to the abuse.

Alexander Broome sang:⁹⁶

Now our lives,
Children, wives,
And estate
Are a prey to the lust and plunder
To the rage
Of our age.

Some men joined the military to avoid being continually plundered: others did so to be better able to 'rob and plunder without control'.⁹⁷ Robert Wilson, the isolate of that most beautiful Hertfordshire village of Ashwell, threatened to have the cavaliers plunder any farmer who refused to pay him the high wages he demanded as a day labourer. Lucy Hutchinson condemned plunderers as 'the scum of mankind'. A pamphleteer declared that the good folk of Lancashire had 'resolved to fight it out rather than their Beef and fat bacon shall be taken from them'. The latter response, as the growth of the Clubmen movement showed, was to become the most common reaction to this scourge, which, more than anything else, forced the mass—perhaps the majority of people—who wanted to remain safely neutral, into facing the full horrors of civil war.⁹⁸