THE CHIEF GOVERNORS

The rise and fall of reform government in Tudor Ireland 1536–1588

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1

Reform as process: the viceroyalties of Lord Leonard Grey and Sir Anthony St Leger, 1536–1547

'Poor Leonard Grey', as he began to sign himself soon after his appointment as lord deputy in February 1536, has been as harshly treated by historians as he was in his own times. Recalled in disgrace after barely four years in office and executed in 1541 on groundless charges of treason, his sad fate has conventionally been seen merely as the result of his own intemperate and somewhat obtuse conduct as viceroy. A bungling militarist who placed too much confidence in agreements exacted under duress, a relentless self-seeker inattentive to advice and intolerant of criticism, he has been adjudged to have contributed greatly to his ruin by failing to appreciate the extraordinary opportunities for the reform of Ireland that had been made available to him after the fall of the Geraldines.[1]

Grey's slender reputation has been easily overshadowed by those of two of the most formidable figures of the period, his superior, Secretary Thomas Cromwell, and his successor as viceroy, Sir Anthony St Leger. Modern assessments of these two have left little for Grey to claim as his due. Such credit as had been given for the limited reforms introduced during his time in Ireland has been accorded to Cromwell, while his failure to establish his authority over the native lords has been contrasted with the great diplomatic successes for which St Leger has received so much praise. Such judgements would seem, however, to be both unfair and misleading. They are unfair because they ignore the massive difficulties which Grey was compelled to face in the aftermath of the Kildare rebellion; but more importantly, they are misleading because they underestimate Grey's not inconsiderable achievement in re-establishing the authority of an English governor in Ireland. No one can deny that Grey was ultimately a failure, but the circumstances of his ruin should not obscure the boldness of his experiment

[1] The style first appears in Grey to Cromwell, 7 May 1536, *SP Hen. VIII*, II, 315, and recurs regularly thereafter; typically unflattering treatments of Grey are Bradshaw, *Constit. Rev.*, pp. 123–34; Ellis, *Tudor England*, pp. 135–6; and the sketch in *DNB* by J. T. Gilbert.

in viceregal government and its importance for the subsequent development of reform in Tudor Ireland.

(1)

Thomas Cromwell's attempt to reorganise the government of Ireland before and after the Kildare rebellion has now received due acknowledgement. He is said to have confirmed the English crown's authority by stage-managing the Irish parliament of 1536–7, securing the smooth passage of the act of supremacy and related legislation. He is said also to have resuscitated the central administration, increasing its revenues through the confiscation of Geraldine and some monastic lands, and introducing procedural reforms by which the crown's revenues might be better accounted. And he has been credited with the most ambitious aim of subordinating the government of Ireland to direct control from London through his own regular involvement in Irish policy-making and through the appointment of a series of special commissioners who reported directly to him.[2]

The reconstruction of a coherent programme of Cromwellian reform for Ireland is consistent with what, until recently, was the conventional view of his methods in England. In the Irish context, however, such a conclusion seems somewhat forced. Though Cromwell played an active role in the preparation of the parliament of 1536–7, the central pieces of legislation then devised, such as the attainder bills and the constitutional changes required by the reformation, were simple necessities clearly dictated by events. Other items, most notably the act against absentees, had long been advocated by reform writers in Ireland, while many more were simply matters of local interest. The proficiency of the secretary's management of parliamentary affairs, moreover, should not be exaggerated. Between them Cromwell and the commissioners he appointed to direct business for him in Ireland were responsible for a number of embarrassing errors and delays. The replacement of one act of succession (declaring the legitimacy of Anne Boleyn's progeny) by another (denying it), the error specifying the time for the collection of the annual subsidy, and the disregard of the residential conditions imposed on members by a statute of 1477 which rendered the bulk of the parliament's legislation technically invalid, all testified to a certain lack of care.[3] Such mistakes do not seriously question Cromwell's

[2] Bradshaw, *Constit. rev.*, chs. 4–6; for a different emphasis see Ellis, 'Thomas Cromwell'.

[3] For a detailed reconstruction of the parliament's proceedings see R. D. Edwards, 'The Irish reformation parliament of Henry VIII, 1536–7', T. W. Moody (ed.), *Historical Studies* VI (1968), pp. 59–84; and for important corrections Brendan Bradshaw, 'The opposition to the ecclesiastical legislation in the Irish reformation parliament', *IHS* 16 (1969), pp. 285–303.

genuine concern; but they raise doubts about the extent of his concentration on Irish matters. The secretary's routine correspondence with Ireland further suggests the intermittent character of his engagement. It was by and large spasmodic, reactive and infrequent; even in his most active period between August and December 1537, it was not particularly impressive: of the nineteen letters known to have been despatched by him in that time, only three related in any way to matters of policy while the remainder, as might be expected, were concerned with the recommendation of private suits. For the following year, not a single letter from the secretary survives.[4]

None of this detracts from Cromwell's reputation as an administrator. As a man burdened with an extraordinary range of responsibilities, Ireland generally assumed a place of secondary importance in his scale of priorities, to be given close attention only when its affairs appeared to impinge upon larger issues closer to the centre of power. For this reason Cromwell's attention to Ireland following the defeat of the Geraldines was both intermittent and inconsistent: yet two fundamental principles may be seen to have determined the secretary's attitude in these years.

The first was a concern with public finance, with the increase of revenues and more emphatically with the reduction of costs. In the matter of raising revenue Cromwell's achievements were distinctly limited. Though the newly acquired crown lands promised an increase of £5,320 and though the clerical and lay taxations sanctioned by parliament promised further substantial gains, none of the administrative innovations established by Cromwell to exploit such resources in England were introduced into Ireland. The new business proved too great for the traditional offices of the Dublin administration to manage and, as arrears and bad debts mounted, crown revenues in Ireland stagnated in the later 1530s, yielding an average of less than £4,500 p.a. Since revenue improvement demanded more attention than Cromwell was prepared to give it, the secretary concentrated instead on the less complex matter of reducing government expenditure. To cut costs he had the royal garrison halved from 700 to 340 in September 1537, and even then he continued to press for further reductions in the numbers in service. The costs of maintaining the army drove him to look with increasing interest at ways of delegating the defence of Ireland once again to acceptable Anglo-Irish lords and even to pay serious attention to Butler proposals to launch a private colonising enterprise in south Leinster.[5]

This willingness to consider farming out the defence of English interests

[4] Bradshaw, *Constit. rev.*, pp. 141–2; for Cromwell's patronage correspondence during the period see *LP (1537)*, nos. 414, 456, 457, 468, 472, 486, 500, 575, 591, 734, 735, 763, 782, 826, 838, 991; for political letters, nos. 485, 1189, 1207.

[5] Ellis, 'Thomas Cromwell'.

in Ireland is closely related to the second principle of Cromwell's post-rebellion Irish policy: his concern with the establishment of a patronage network. Cromwell's exploitation of patronage, the recommendations for grants of land, office and private suits which swell his correspondence, has sometimes been explained as part of an effort to encourage a dependable reformist group within the Dublin administration. Certainly, he was anxious to buttress the position of his men in office, but he was happy also to further the suits of several Anglo-Irish lords, whose interests were by no means identifiable with the promotion of reform. It is unlikely in any case that deep political considerations underlay his support of the merchant Edward Beck, the adventurer Francis Herbert and a host of more obscure souls like Hugh Lynn and Mathew Skeyn with whom he concerned himself. Instead, Cromwell, like so many of his contemporaries at court, was simply determined to establish widespread bonds of dependence wherever the opportunity arose.[6]

Cromwell's involvement with Ireland in the years after the Kildare rebellion, therefore, hardly amounted to anything like a coherent programme of reform. On review it seems simply to reflect the basic *desideratum* of all Tudor governments in their dealings with Ireland: that of defending England's interests in the island in the cheapest possible manner. Such a conservative intent was, in the wake of the disorders of the early 1530s, quite understandable; yet it presented a most serious obstacle to the English official charged with the daily management of the crown's affairs in the island. Seen from London, where Ireland was regarded as a potentially dangerous but intermittent problem, it seemed reasonable to eschew expensive and possibly troublesome initiatives in favour of more cautious, occasional interventions. From the closer perspective of Dublin, however, such complacency appeared to be highly irresponsible. In Dublin it was clear that the conditions prevailing in every province of post-rebellion Ireland were by no means so settled as to allow for an easy withdrawal to financial retrenchment and inaction.

Within the sprawling Desmond lordship of the south-west, the crown's nominee to the vacant earldom, James Fitzmaurice, was openly challenged by his uncle James FitzJohn, an active supporter of the Kildare Geraldines whose claims to succession had already been denied by the government. To the north of Desmond, the Gaelic lordship of Thomond remained unreconciled to the Kildare defeat, offering sanctuary to Geraldine refugees

[6] On the concern with patronage at the Henrician court see David Starkey et al., *The English court from the wars of the roses to the civil war* (London, 1987), ch. 3; Starkey, 'Court and government' in Christopher Coleman and David Starkey (eds.), *Revolution reassessed* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 29–58.

and refusing entry to government forces. Throughout Connacht pro-Geraldine elements among the MacWilliam Burkes, the O'Connors of Sligo and the O'Malleys placed the anti-Geraldine Clanrickard Burkes and their supporters under constant pressure. In Tyrconnell, the ambitious Manus O'Donnell then seeking to displace his father as chieftain adopted a pro-Geraldine stance, while O'Neill, the most powerful Geraldine figure in Ulster, remained hostile. In Leinster itself the government faced more immediate threats from Geraldine allies among the O'Connors, the O'Mores and the Kavanaghs who seemed poised to attack the Pale at the earliest opportunity. For the governor in Dublin, the outlying Geraldine areas were not, as Cromwell and some later commentators seemed to assume, isolated long-term problems which could be dealt with at some point in the future. They were the essential elements of a national network of disaffection which threatened his administration with imminent danger and required immediate action.[7]

The unreconciled Geraldines were not the only powerful interest threatening the English governor: the Butlers of Ormond presented a quite different but equally dangerous challenge of their own. At court Ossory's agent, Robert Cowley, was pressing strongly for a thorough campaign against Geraldines in all parts of the country which Ossory himself was to lead with the support of his allies in each province, while pro-Butler counsellors in Dublin were castigating the deputy's failure to establish his authority by military means.[8]

The new English governor thus faced a simultaneous challenge to his authority from two different directions both of which required a finely judged response. To assert himself with the Geraldines he would have to operate not on a local but on a national level, ranging up and down the country as the Kildares had done assuring potential allies and enemies of his ability to offer powerful friendship and to inflict fearful punishment. Yet in assuming such an assertive stance, he had also to separate himself from the Butlers, avoiding identification with their interests and dependence on their resources lest he be seen as a pawn of the house of Ormond. Thus, simply in order to maintain the independence of his office, the viceroy was from the beginning compelled to adopt a strategy that was directly contrary to the restrictive, conservative axioms laid down by his superiors in London. This

[7] Ossory to Cromwell, 2 June 1536, *SP Hen. VIII*, II, 297–9; Thomas Fokes to Cromwell, 22 Mar. 1536, ibid., p. 308; Grey and council to Cromwell, 1 June 1536, ibid., pp. 318–21; Grey to Cromwell, 7 May, 24 June, 10 Aug., ibid., pp. 314–15, 324–6, 353–7; council of Ireland to Cromwell, 9 Aug., ibid., pp. 349–53.

[8] Walter Cowley to Robert Cowley, 29 Apr. 1536, *SP Hen. VIII*, II, pp. 311–14; Robert Cowley to Cromwell, June 1536, ibid., pp. 323–30; Walter Cowley to same, 10 June, *LP (1536)*, I, no. 1112.

tension between the needs of the governor and the outlook of the ministers in Whitehall became evident even within a year of Lord Leonard Grey's appointment to office.

(II)

During the first months of his service Grey seemed more than willing to be guided by Cromwell and his agents. He was happy to allow the management of parliamentary business by special commissioners and to take the advice of two of Cromwell's *protégés*, the master of the rolls, John Alen, and the chief justice of common pleas, Gerald Aylmer. Throughout 1536 both men remained close to Grey, supporting him strongly against the allegations of another of Cromwell's special agents, William Body. By the middle of 1537, however, relations between Grey and the two counsellors had become strained and by the end of that year Alen and Aylmer had become open opponents of Grey, identifying themselves with a Butler effort, which they had previously denounced, to secure the viceroy's recall.[9]

The causes of their disillusion with the deputy were, according to Alen and Aylmer, all too simple: Grey, they alleged, had abandoned reform and the English interest in general and was seeking through factional alliances and intrigues to establish himself as the new leader of the dispossessed Geraldines. The evidence which they produced in support of this charge was indeed persuasive. From the beginning of 1537 Grey, they claimed, had launched a systematic campaign to rehabilitate the Geraldines. In Desmond he disowned the anglophile James Fitzmaurice, supporting the case of the disreputable James FitzJohn and even acknowledging the latter's claims to a suzerainty over MacCarthy More and the Fitzmaurices of Kerry. In Thomond he made his peace with the Geraldine Cormack O'Brien. He befriended the Geraldine claimant to the lordship of MacWilliam Burke and rejected his Butler supported rival. In Ulster he made peace with O'Neill and furthered the chieftain's provincial ambitions by recognising his son-in-law as the rightful Magennis and by launching an unprovoked attack on the independent-minded O'Reillys. In Leinster he gave the lordship of the O'Connors to Ferganim, a brother-in-law of the rebel Lord Offaly, and even lodged with him on a journey into Munster leaving troops and ordnance with the new chieftain for his own use. He released a son of the O'More who had been detained in Dublin Castle for his part in the rebellion and covertly tolerated the raids which O'More in alliance with the Kavanaghs was

[9] Grey to Henry VIII, 23 Feb. 1536, *LP (1536)*, I, no. 317; same to Cromwell, 29 May, 24 June, 24 Nov., ibid., nos. 988, 1194; II, 1157; Thomas Alen to Cromwell, 17 July, ibid., II, no. 101; John Alen to Henry VIII, 6 Oct., *SP Hen. VIII*, II, pp. 383–8.

making on Butler territories in the midlands. Grey had even carried his divisive strategy into the halls of the Dublin administration, openly antagonising English officers like Alen and Brabazon, restoring favour to figures like Chief Justice Howth and Attorney General Bathe who had been compromised in the rebellion, and, most seriously of all, surrounding himself with shadowy, unofficial counsellors like James and Richard Tuite who were well known to have been active Geraldine agents in the past.[10]

In seeking to explain the viceroy's conduct historians have tended to take Grey's detractors very much on trust. Grey, they have concluded, was a crude political adventurer who badly miscalculated both his own strength and that of those who were led to oppose him.[11] Yet this simple tale of a greedy and reckless fool is in the end unconvincing for two important reasons: first, it ignores the very real pressures which forced Grey to adopt his hazardous pro-Geraldine attitudes and, having done so, it fails, secondly, to see how close the deputy came to making his strategy work.

Given the realities of political conditions throughout Ireland, the restrictions imposed from London left Grey with little choice but to attempt a *rapprochement* with the Geraldines. The crown's directives to keep the peace and to increase the revenues while cutting costs and reducing the garrison were deeply contradictory, and had he attempted to meet them the governor would soon have found himself embattled in Dublin, incapable of asserting his authority in the island or even of defending the Pale. He might, of course, have compensated for this weakness by employing the services of the Butlers, but such a reliance would have entailed the loss of the independence which the Dublin government had won only so recently and at such a great cost.

Faced with this dilemma, Grey's decision to look toward the Geraldines had considerable merit. Unexpectedly jolted from their ascendancy and vulnerable now to attack from many sides, the Geraldines were urgently in need of a protector who could limit their exposure and perhaps restore them to some measure of influence. At the same time they continued to enjoy elaborate networks of connection far more extensive than the English governor or even the Butlers could hope to acquire. With Geraldine co-operation the viceroy could expect to have royal directives transmitted

[10] Alen's reports to the commissioners, 1537, *SP Hen. VIII*, II, pp. 480–501; Alen's charges against George Paulet, Mar. 1538, ibid., pp. 551–3; his memo to Wriothesley, Mar. 1538, *LP (1538)*, no. 641; Alen and Aylmer's accusations against Grey, June 1538, *SP Hen. VIII*, III, pp. 36–43, and letters to St Leger and Cromwell, July, ibid., 46–8, 55–7; the names of Grey's closest Geraldine supporters are supplied in Agard to Cromwell, 1 July 1536, *LP (1536)*, II, no. 1, and W. Cowley to Cromwell, Apr. 1538, *SP Hen. VIII*, III, pp. 12–14.

[11] See note 1 above.

and enforced with the same effectiveness and economy as those of the earls of Kildare. The establishment of a sound understanding with the surviving leaders of the group thus seemed to allow the English government to retain the authority which it asserted in 1534, while at once meeting the financial restrictions required since then, and avoiding a dangerous dependence upon the Butlers.

This was, of course, a high risk strategy. The Geraldines, it was clear, would not become steadfast allies overnight to the man who had once promised their leaders pardon and reneged upon his word: they would have to be educated gradually through a mixture of persuasion and coercion to value his good-will. But more immediate trouble was to be expected from the disappointed Butlers and from the anti-Geraldine reformers within his own administration who would see in the viceroy's conduct only a betrayal of the aims for which they had already risked so much.

The inevitable consequences of Grey's strategic decision followed almost immediately. Ossory's son, Sir James Butler, and his closest advisers Robert and Walter Cowley, began their assault on the deputy's character as soon as his independent attitude became clear. And though their allegations originally savoured of party interest, their claims were considerably reinforced by the unrelated criticisms levelled by the disillusioned Alen and Aylmer. The campaign against Grey grew more intense when King Henry despatched Sir Anthony St Leger to investigate, among other things, the grounds for the charges against his viceroy. St Leger appeared to sympathise with Grey's enemies, encouraging their allegations and their propositions for an alternative approach to government; and when he concluded his commission in April 1538, Alen, Aylmer and Lord Butler returned with him to London. Given the standing of his critics, the gravity of their charges and their access to influence at court, Grey's removal seemed inevitable. Alen, indeed, was so confident of the outcome that he presumed to offer Cromwell advice as to how it should be most smoothly effected.[12]

But despite all this, no order for Grey's recall was received from the king upon St Leger's return. Instead both parties were simply directed to resolve their differences and to join together in the execution of the king's business. The much anticipated coup had failed to materialise. By the end of the year, moreover, Grey's credit at court appeared to have recovered remarkably, and his critics were on the defensive as Cromwell began to investigate the

[12] Cowley to Cromwell, R. Cowley to Cromwell and to Norfolk, 10 June 1536, 14 Oct. 1536, 20 Jan. 1538, *LP (1536)*, I, no. 1112; II, no. 709; *LP (1538)*, I, no. 114; Ormond to St Leger, 12 Mar. 1536, June 1538, ibid., II, 556–8; III, 20–3, 55; Lord James Butler to Cromwell, 11 Aug. 1536, and to Cowley, June 1538, ibid., II, 357–9; III, 32–4; Agard to Cromwell, 4 Apr. 1538, ibid., II, 567–8; Alen's memo to Wriothesley, Mar. 1538, *LP (1538)*, no. 641, and to Cromwell, 29 Nov. 1538, *LP (1538)*, II, no. 937.

counter-allegations which Grey had made against them. At the same time, Grey's own supporters were busy reporting his military and diplomatic successes to Cromwell and urging his requests for additional supplies of men, munitions and money.[13] King Henry was also reported to have approved of Grey's work and of his plans for an impressive progress through the country, and, as a token of his renewed confidence in the viceroy, he sent Grey a goshawk early in 1540.[14] By then, in any case, the coalition against Grey had all but broken up. Ormond wrote to Cromwell in December 1539 renouncing his earlier hostility, as an unworthy scheme fomented by others 'more to please our affections than to have regard for the commonwealth'.[15] Walter Cowley now wrote recommending the governor for reward as enthusiastically as he had once demanded his dismissal; and Treasurer Brabazon now renewed good relations with Grey, leaving Alen and Aylmer virtually isolated on the Irish council. Far from having succumbed to the criticism which he himself had provoked, Lord Deputy Grey seemed not only to have survived the attack with remarkable ease, but to have established at last a firm control over his own administration. And when his long pressed suit to report to the king in person was at last answered, it was granted on the express understanding that he should return promptly to commence the great campaigns in Ulster and Munster which he had proposed.[16]

The reasons for Grey's success in confounding his critics are not hard to find. Despite the gravity of their charges and the urgency with which they were pressed, the coalition against Grey was not invulnerable. The motivations which lay behind the Butlers' resentment of Grey were obvious to Henry and Cromwell, as were the more narrow ambitions of those administrators who sought to establish a position of influence for themselves in government. And so while King Henry might have been willing to check the overweening stratagems of his viceroy, he was hardly willing to do so to advance the aims of the more ambitious and more dangerous Butlers or still less the notions of obscure political figures like John Alen. The coalition itself, moreover, had never been solid: though St Leger had feigned sympathy with Grey's critics, his fellow commissioner George Paulet openly declared his support for the deputy. Later Thomas Cusacke, that weather-

[13] Francis Herbert to Cromwell, 20 Mar. 1538, Mathew King to Cromwell, 26 Apr., *LP (1538)*, I, nos. 559, 849; Irish council to Cromwell, 12 Dec. 1538, 16 Feb. 1539, *SP Hen. VIII*, III, 108–11, 118–21; James Bathe to Cromwell, Nov. 1539, *SP Hen. VIII*, III, 157–62; William St Loe to Cromwell, 21 Apr. 1540, *LP (1540)*, no. 558.

[14] Grey to Henry VIII, 10 Mar. 1540, *SP Hen. VIII*, III, 187–9.

[15] Ormond to Cromwell, 20 Dec. 1539; Cowley's 'Memo', 5 Feb. 1540; council of Ireland to Henry VIII, 16 Jan. 1549, *SP Hen. VIII*, III, 164–7, 179–84, 174–5.

[16] Henry VIII to Grey, 1 Apr. 1540, *LP (1540)*, no. 441.

vane of Anglo-Irish politics, who travelled to court with Grey's critics, underwent a sea-change, and announced his support for the embattled governor. These defections considerably weakened the strength of the case against Grey. But a far more important defence lay in the viceroy's own hands: for in spite of the influence his opponents may have hoped to exert at court, he still retained the power of initiative in Ireland.[17]

Whatever suspicions may have been raised by Grey's pro-Geraldine policy, its practical results were, in the short term, quite satisfactory. Despite ever-more limited military resources, Grey turned out to be a surprisingly active and effective governor. He made several tours of the country, conducting a progress through each province on at least two occasions, settling territorial and dynastic disputes and securing formal bonds of good behaviour from the principal lords in each province. Grey's favoured mode of reply to his critics thus took the form not of defensive rejoinders, but of detailed accounts of his progresses through the island accompanied by copies of the agreements which he had secured from the lords.[18] It could not be assumed, of course, that such treaties would prove durable in themselves; yet they provided evidence of Grey's ability to establish respect for the royal presence in several important areas with the minimum of force. By means of sharp punitive campaigns in Connacht and Leinster he compelled O'Brien, O'Flaherty and O'Connor to confirm their submissions. In Ulster he forced MacMahon to make good his agreements by seizing his herds until he had paid compensation for his disorders. He made several surprise raids upon O'Neill, and finally inflicted grievous injury on the great chieftain in a daring attack on his forces at Bellahoe in Farney late in 1539. In these ways Grey signalled the conditional nature of his friendship towards individual Geraldine followers: for though he was clearly anxious to attach many of them to his cause, he recognised also that the most powerful figures in the group would follow him only if they could be convinced of his ability to overwhelm them. It was for this reason that at the end of 1539 Grey pressed so strongly for permission to follow up his victory against O'Neill and further to reinforce his authority over the restless James FitzJohn of Desmond through a well-supported military progress.[19] And it was the manifest success of his strategy in the previous four years that persuaded

[17] Articles by Alen and Aylmer against Paulet, Mar. 1538; Thomas Alen to St Leger and to Wriothesley, 10 Aug. 1538; Lord Butler to Cromwell, 27 Aug.; Anthony Budgegode to Cromwell, 26 Sept. 1538, *LP (1538)*, II, no. 471; nos. 65, 66, 196, 433.

[18] Grey and council to Cromwell, 8 Oct. 1538, 18 Jan. 1539, 9 May 1538, 30 June 1539, *SP Hen. VIII*, III, 99–101, 111–15, 126–7, 135–6, 154–6; 'Treaties between Grey and the Irish', ibid., pp. 169–73.

[19] R. Cowley to Cromwell, 8 Sept. 1539; Grey to Cromwell, 21 Oct. 1539; Ormond to Cromwell, 20 Dec. 1539, *SP Hen. VIII*, III, 145–7, 154–6, 164–6; *AFM*, sub anno 1539.

Henry and Cromwell to discount his critics and summon Grey to court to plan the new offensive.[20]

The evidence of Grey's remarkable recovery between the summer of 1538 and the spring of 1540 must qualify the traditional view of his viceroyalty as a period of continuous wrangling and failure. Perforce, however, it makes his eventual fall seem all the more sudden. Yet that, like so many other coups at the court of King Henry, is precisely what it was. On arrival at court in April Grey was, to the dismay of his Irish enemies, warmly received, and the matter of his summer strategy was referred directly to the privy council. A letter from that body to the Irish council early in June did not mention the deputy but showed continued support for his proposal to launch a new campaign. Then suddenly, on 12 June, the council baldly announced to Dublin the viceroy's arrest and imprisonment on a charge of treason. The written record offers no further evidence.[21]

Some circumstantial developments, however, provide a basis for explanation. Sometime in May, Alen and Aylmer followed Grey to court to renew their allegations: their list of charges had grown, but their case was essentially the same as that which had failed two years before. If anything, their position was weaker, for they came now without Butler support, and Alen had been summoned only to answer the counter-charges which Grey had levelled against him.[22] A more serious occurrence was the unrest among the O'Connors whose raids on the borders of the Pale were attributed by Grey's enemies to his own covert intrigues. The restiveness of the O'Connors, however, was related to a more ambiguous development which had occurred in Grey's absence: the dissolution of the Geraldine league and the flight of the Kildare heir to sanctuary in France. Again, Grey's enemies claimed that the escape of Gerald Fitzgerald was evidence of the deputy's incompetence, of his bemusement by the Geraldine faction; but it could equally be reported as a direct result of Bellahoe, a recognition on the part of the Geraldines in Munster and Ulster that it was time to come to terms with the governor.[23] These Irish issues were not in themselves decisive, but they gained considerably in importance when related to a far more important event which took place at the English court: on 10 June, two

[20] Grey to Cromwell, 30 Dec. 1539, 13, 15 Feb., 10, 17 Mar. 1540; Henry VIII to Grey, 1 Apr., *SP Hen. VIII*, III, 167–8, 182–4, 185–6, 187–9, 193–4, 194–5.

[21] Richard Cox, *Hibernia Anglicana* (2 pts., London, 1689–90), II, 264–6; Brereton to Cromwell, 17 May 1549, *SP Hen. VIII*, III, 204–6; Henry VIII to Brereton, June 1540; privy council to Irish council, 12 June, *LP (1540)*, nos. 723, 775.

[22] Alen to Wriothesley, 20 Apr. 1540; Alen's 'Allegations and defence', June 1540, *LP (1540)*, nos. 550. 830.

[23] On the collapse of the Geraldine league compare Wilson, *Beginnings of mod. Ire.*, pp. 171–226, with Bradshaw, *Const. rev.*, pp. 132–8, 174–85; Grey and council to Henry VIII, 18 Jan., 13 Feb., 17 Mar. 1540, *LP (1540)*, nos. 82, 199, 355.

days before Grey's arrest, Thomas Cromwell was accused of treason at the council board by the duke of Norfolk and immediately sent to the Tower.[24]

Grey and Cromwell had established strong personal links over many years. Cromwell began his career in the household service of Grey's father, the earl of Dorset, and he was to return the favour by employing Grey's nephew in his own household in 1539.[25] It was Cromwell who had secured Grey's appointment as viceroy, and though he was initially unhappy with the deputy's pro-Geraldine strategy and rebuked him for his treatment of the Butlers, the secretary gradually became convinced of the merit of Grey's management of affairs in straitened circumstances. It was Cromwell who shelved the allegations against Grey in 1538, who brought about a reconciliation between Grey and Ossory in the same year and who finally convinced the king of the virtues of Grey's plan for a new offensive.[26] By 1540, then, Cromwell had become an advocate and defender of a formerly controversial policy. To his enemies, therefore, it was equally important that his decisions concerning Ireland should be discredited along with all the other projects with which he had been identified.

In part, then, Grey's fate was simply like that of the Viscount Lisle and a handful of other figures who were innocent victims in the fall of Thomas Cromwell. But the link between Grey's ruin and the palace revolution of 1540 was sealed when Sir Anthony St Leger, one of Norfolk's closest associates in court politics and one exceptionally qualified for the Irish office, declared himself willing to succeed Grey as deputy. St Leger's own plan for Ireland was, as we shall see, ambitious and subtle: but an essential precondition of its success was the ruin of his predecessor. Thus more than two years after his special commission which had reached no conclusions, issued no report and made no recommendations, St Leger at last broke silence and formally endorsed all those charges which Alen, Aylmer and the Butlers had unavailingly raised against the viceroy for so many years. Powerless to influence affairs in Ireland and defenceless at court in face of a determined high-level intrigue to unseat him, Grey's position was hopeless. Just twelve days after his committal to the Tower he was succeeded as

[24] On the circumstances of Cromwell's fall see B. W. Beckingsale, *Thomas Cromwell, Tudor minister* (London, 1978), pp. 138–43; Muriel St Claire Byrne (ed.), *The Lisle letters* (6 vols., Chicago, 1981), VI, pp. 135–77; G. R. Elton, 'Thomas Cromwell's decline and fall', *HJ* 10 (1951), pp. 150–85.

[25] On Cromwell's connections with Grey see *LP (1521–23)*, no. 2437; *LP (1524–26)*, no. 3053; *LP (1538)*, I, no. 136, and II, no. 1184. I am grateful to Dr Mary Robertson of the Huntington Library, San Marino, for these references.

[26] Council of Ireland to Cromwell, 16 Feb. 1539; Grey to Cromwell, 6 Nov. 1538; Ormond to Cromwell, 20 Dec., *SP Hen. VIII*, III, 118–21, 163–4, 164–7; Cromwell's 'Remembrances for Ireland', Sept. and Nov. 1538, *LP (1539)*, II, nos. 287, 494.