

# ON GUERRILLA WARFARE

**From The Life and Death of Lord Edward FitzGerald by  
Thomas Moore. The short preface is Moore's.**

*At the time of the search after him (FitzGerald) on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March, there was found in his writing-box, at Leinster-House, a paper, which is generally supposed to have been the production of his own pen, and with the insertion of which, therefore, I shall conclude this part of my subject.*

If ever any unfortunate cause should put our city, with the other parts of the country, into the possession of a cruel and tyrannical enemy, whose government might, by repeated oppressions, drive us into the last stage of desperate resistance, our conduct then should be regulated in a manner best calculated for obtaining victory.

The following thoughts are humbly offered for the inspection of every real Irishman.

In such a case every man ought to consider how that army could be attacked or repelled, and what advantage their discipline and numbers might give them in a populous city, acting in concert with the adjoining counties.

It is well known that an officer of any skill in his profession would be very cautious of bringing the best disciplined troops into a large city in a state of insurrection for the following reasons:

His troops, by the breadth of the streets, are obliged to have a very narrow front, and however numerous, only three men deep can be brought into action, which, in the widest of our streets, cannot be more than sixty men; as a space must be left on each side or flank for the men who discharge to retreat to the rear, that their places may be occupied by the next in succession, who are loaded; so, though there are a thousand men in a street, not more than sixty can act at one time, and should they be attacked by an irregular body armed with pikes or such bold weapons, if the sixty men in front were defeated, the whole body, however numerous, are unable to assist, and immediately become a small mob in uniform, from the inferiority of their number, in comparison to the people, and easily disposed of.

Another inconvenience might destroy the order of this army. Perhaps at the same moment, they may be dreadfully galled from the house-tops, by showers of bricks, coping stones, &c. which may be at hand, - without imitating the women of Paris, who carried the stones of the unpaved streets to the windows and tops of the houses in their aprons.<sup>1</sup>

Another disadvantage on the part of the soldiers would be, that, as they are regulated by the word of command, or stroke of the drum, they must be left to their individual discretion, as such communications must be drowned in the noise and clamour of a popular tumult.

In the next place, that part of the populace, who could not get into the engagement, would be employed in unpaving the streets, so as to impede the movements of horse or artillery; and in the avenues where the army were likely to pass, numbers would be engaged forming barriers of hogs-heads, carts, cars, counters, doors, &c. the forcing of which barriers by the army would be disputed, while like ones were forming at every twenty or thirty yards, or any convenient distances the situation might require; should such precautions be well observed, the progress of an army through one street or over one bridge would be very tedious, and attended with great loss, if it would not be destroyed. At the same time the neighbouring counties might rise in a mass and dispose of the troops scattered in their vicinity, and prevent a junction or a passage of any army intended for the city; they would tear up the roads and barricade every convenient distance with trees, timber, implements of husbandry, &c. at the same time lining the hedges, walls, ditches, and houses, with men armed with muskets, who would keep up a well-directed fire.

However well exercised standing armies are supposed to be, by frequent reviews, and sham battles, they are never prepared for broken roads, or enclosed fields, in a country like ours, covered with

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<sup>1</sup> "The soldier, if posted in the streets of a town will be assailed from the roofs and windows of the houses and lost. He cannot remain there; nor is he much better off, if in the squares surrounded by houses. The examples of Warsaw, that of Ghent, and of Brussels in 1789, sufficiently demonstrate the truth of what I advance." – *Bulow, Spirit of Modern System of War.*

innumerable and continued intersections of ditches and hedges, every one of which is an advantage to an irregular body, and may with advantage be disputed, against an army, as so many fortifications and intrenchments.

The people in the city would have an advantage by being armed with pikes or such weapons. The first attack if possible should be made by men whose pikes were nine or ten feet long; by that means they could act in ranks deeper than the soldiery, whose arms are much shorter; then the deep files of the pike men, by being weightier, must easily break the thin order of the army.

The charge of the pike men should be made in a smart trot. On the flank or extremity of every rank, there should be intrepid men placed to keep the fronts even, that, at closing, every point should tell together. They should have at the same time two or three like bodies at the convenient distances in the rear, who would be brought up, if wanting, to support the front, which would give confidence to their brothers in action, as it would tend to discourage the enemy. At the same time there should be in the rear of each division some men of spirit to keep the ranks as close as possible.

The apparent strength of the army should not intimidate, as closing on it makes its powder and ball useless; all its superiority is in fighting at a distance; all its skill ceases, and all its action must be suspended, when it once is within reach of the pike.

The reason of printing and writing this is to remind the people of discussing military subjects.