



# DISPATCHES LETTERS BETWEEN IRELAND AND SPAIN

The following letters are taken from the book *Beatha Aoibh Ruaidh Uí Dóinnáil*: The Life of Hugh Roe O'Donnell, Prince of Tirconnell (1586-1602) by Lughaidh O'Clery with historical introduction, translation, notes, and illustrations by the Rev. Denis Murphy, S.J., M.R.I.A. The letters have been translated into English by the author above.

The letters herein form a sort of broken correspondence between the Irish in rebellion and the Spanish king and his court. Letters tend to cluster around opportune moments for transport with long periods awaiting reply. We see the difficulties in communicating across long distances, particularly over the sea, and the anxiety that must have been felt awaiting a reply. Indeed O'Neill complains of this: 'It is so difficult to send our letters to Spain, that though I sent this off more than a month ago, it has been returned to me.' One letter complains of their messengers that 'they are nowhere in existence either there in Ireland or elsewhere, but rather it is thought that they must have been swallowed up in the vast ocean.' O'Rourke explains of his lateness that 'owing to an attack made on me by the enemy, [...] I could not reply with the others.'

Included within are scans of two of the letters which bear the signatures of O'Neill and O'Donnell.

Each letter has some brief accompanying contextual information. These were taken, with some alterations, from the abovementioned text by Rev. Denis Murphy, S.J., M.R.I.A. For further context and additional information we recommend James O'Neill's book *The Nine Years War 1593-1603*.

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Seeking aid O'Donnell addressed the following letter to Irish nobles in Spain. Donegal, April 8th, 1593.

You will have heard, my beloved friends, how I found a means of escaping from the prison in which I was, and how after much labour and hardship I reached my own territory. There I found an Englishman, agent of the Queen, and with him many soldiers; all of whom, with the help of God's grace, I slew or drove out in a very short time, and never since have the English returned here, though not for want of will and desire to destroy me and do me all the harm they could. This is why I and the other chiefs who have united with me and are striving to defend ourselves, cannot hold out long against the power of the Crown of England without the aid of his Grace the Catholic King. Wherefore, by common consent, we have thought it well to send the Archbishop of Tuam, though his presence is very necessary here, to treat of this matter with his Majesty, and to give you, gentlemen, who are there our letters, that you may all speak to his Majesty and beg of him immediate aid to assist us in fighting and combating for the service of God, and to protect and get back our lands, for it is right that we should be all of one mind, and that we should help each other in this undertaking. This I will do for my part till death, with the aid which I hope for from his Grace and with your presence and help. I will say no more, but pray God may be with you, and enable the Lord Archbishop to return with this favour.

Having received O'Donnell's letter Fitzmaurice addressed a letter to the Spanish King, and on behalf of his companions in arms, asking for aid and license to take part in any expedition that might be sent for the relief of their country:

SIRE—Maurice Fitzmaurice, heir of the Earl of Desmond, and the other Irish gentlemen in your Majesty's service have received, through the Archbishop of Cashel, at present at Court, letters from the principal Catholic gentry now united. They write that they are agreed to carry on war against the Queen of England, and they have asked us to implore your Majesty to send them aid in all possible haste. We know that these Lords are Catholics, and among the strongest and most powerful in Ireland, and uniting thus of their own free will, they risk their lives and estates to serve God and your Majesty. We have thought it right to implore your Majesty, for the love of God, to be pleased to take their needs to heart, and to send the aid you will think fit; and with it to send us to defend and uphold the said undertaking, for we hope, with God's help, your Majesty will be victorious and conquer and hold as your own the kingdom of Ireland, and obtain thereby an entrance into England, for it would be a great pity that these lords should be lost for want of aid, as was the Earl of Desmond, who rose in arms in the same way. We trust in God that your Majesty and the Council will weigh well the advantages that will ensue to Christendom from this enterprise, and since the opportunity is so good, the cause so just and weighty, and the undertaking so easily completed, your Majesty will do what is best for the service of God and of your Majesty; seeing that by so doing the Queen of England will be compelled to withdraw the forces she is accustomed to send to Flanders and France, and cannot employ English on the coast of Spain. This is what we can say and beg of your Majesty, on this subject; we are ready to do whatever your Majesty may command. May our Lord preserve your royal person, as Christendom requires.

In Lisbon, 4th of September, 1593.

DON MAURICIO GERALDINO.

James O'Hely, Archbishop of Tuam, was deputed by the Irish chieftains and bishops to go to Spain and inform the King of their needs. His petition would seem to have been warmly supported by someone at the Court, as we learn from the following document presented to the King:

The Archbishop of Tuam in Ireland says that for years past he has been anxious, and has laboured much both in public and in private, to unite and combine in a league and in friendship the Catholics of Ireland, for the purpose of making them take up arms on behalf of the Catholic faith and of your Majesty's service against the English heretics. In this he has been successful, for the most powerful Lords of the Catholic party in the northern part of the kingdom have united and risen against the Queen with great unanimity, and many other Catholics mean to do the like. Wherefore, the said Archbishop, on behalf and in the name of all these, as is evident from the letters which they wrote to your Grace, has come to ask your Grace to help, on such a favourable opportunity as this of making war on the Queen at home, the said Lords and their people; and the Irish gentlemen who are now serving your Majesty in this kingdom, will give very great help in this undertaking, especially Maurice Fitzmaurice and the Viscount Baltinglas. Wherefore, the said Archbishop humbly beseeches your Grace to order some aid both of men and arms for this purpose, and that they should be given so that he may be able to return with an answer suitable to the good-will and earnestness with which they offer to serve your Majesty. He says it will be of much importance for the success of the confederation if your Majesty will order a friendly letter to be written to the Earl of Tyrone, called O'Neill, that he may enter into the confederation publicly, seeing that he belongs to it already in secret, assuring him that your Majesty's aid will not be wanting.

Cornelius O'Mulrian, bishop of Killaloe, wrote to the King from Lisbon; the letter bears date September 3rd, 1593:

SIRE,—By letters from Ireland I have learned that many very powerful gentlemen have risen in the north of Ireland against the Queen of England, as your Majesty has learned from the Archbishop of Tuam, who has come on their behalf to beseech your Majesty to be pleased to send them aid in all haste, as it is evident that these powerful gentlemen, with the others in Ireland, mean to put themselves under your Majesty, and for this they have taken up arms with such spirit and Catholic zeal in defence of the faith, trusting in the aid that will be supplied by your Majesty, and ready to subject the kingdom to you. I beg of you, most mighty King, by the Blood of Jesus, to enter on this task with a lively faith and courageous mind. By sending this force to Ireland your Majesty will acquire everlasting renown and a vast and very fertile kingdom. There you will be at the door of England, and no English will further molest the coast of Spain or oppose your Majesty in Flanders or in France. I trust your Majesty will consider all this. I now conclude, and beg to offer myself to bear a part in this expedition, for the service of God and of your Majesty. May God in his infinite mercy preserve and prosper us, and grant you a long life, as is needed by all the Christian people.

Your servant and chaplain,

CORNELIUS, bishop of Killaloe.

Unfortunately there is no context available for this letter.

In the beginning of March in the past year, the Archbishop of Tuam, Thomas Fitzjohn, son of John of Desmond, and Mr. John Lacie, with a certain captain of his Catholic Majesty Philip II., set out from hence to cross over to you in Ireland, whose return we have awaited with the utmost anxiety. But it now appears evident that they are nowhere in existence either there in Ireland or elsewhere, but rather it is thought that they must have been swallowed up in the vast ocean. If they had come back Philip II. would doubtless have sent you help. Now however we have just learned with great satisfaction that you the Earl of Tyrone have openly taken up arms and joined with the other chieftains of Ulster against the Queen, and I have every confidence you will be successful. I have earnestly, but with great caution, persuaded the King to send you a fleet with which to oppose the enemy and subjugate the English government, and that you may free yourself and all your people from the oppressive yoke of the English for ever. Furthermore, I find the King's mind most ready and willing to send you assistance, and that immediately. Wherefore you must manfully and bravely and vigorously resist, without making any peace or treaty with the enemies of the faith, for King Philip has seen these letters and requested me to write to you that you shall be helped immediately, and be assured that I shall be with you very shortly, so that you may crush the enemy and regain your liberty. Resist therefore like a brave nobleman and an uncompromising warrior, and I promise that instant succour shall not be wanting. I would freely unfold to you everything, only I fear my letters might fall into the enemy's hands. The one thing I ask and beg of you is that you will not make peace with the enemy till I come to you.

We have already mentioned the appeal for help made by the Irish chiefs through their envoy the Archbishop of Tuam to the King of Spain. On the 25th of September, 1595, O'Neill and O'Donnell wrote to him.

Our only hope of re-establishing the Catholic religion rests on your assistance. Now or never our Church must be succoured. By the timidity or negligence of the messengers our former letters have not reached you. We therefore again beseech you to send us 2,000 or 3,000 soldiers with money and arms before the feast of SS. Philip and James. With such aid we hope to restore the faith of the Church, and to secure you a kingdom.

O'Neill wrote to Don Carolo, the King's son, at the same date.

I have been informed by the bearer of this that you have written to me, but your letter has not yet reached my hands. I was confident that I should not appeal to you for aid in vain. The faith might be re-established in Ireland within one year if the King of Spain would only send 3,000 soldiers. All the heretics would disappear, and no other sovereign would be recognised than the Catholic King. Both I and O'Donnell have besought him to succour the Church. Pray, second our petition. If we obtain positive assurance of succour from the King, we will make no peace with the heretics. We have written frequently, but are afraid none of our letters has reached the King as he has returned us no answer. The bearer, a man of pious zeal, has undertaken this perilous mission.

Early in 1596 the Philip II. sent an envoy to Ireland, Alonso Cobos. He brought a letter from the King to O'Neill. 'I have been informed,' he wrote, 'that you are defending the Catholic cause against the English. That this is acceptable to God is proved by the signal victories which you have obtained. I hope you will continue to prosper, and you need not doubt but I will render you any assistance you may require. Give credence to Fussius the bearer, and acquaint him with your affairs and your wishes.' O'Neill and O'Donnell replied to the King as follows.

We have received most opportunely your Majesty's letters so much wished for, full of clemency and almost fatherly love, shortly after we had been discussing about entering into a treaty with those who represented the person of the Queen of England, on account of the long delay in sending the aid expected from your Majesty, and the sufferings and complaints of our subjects and people worn out by the continuous wars and hardships. The terms were indeed honourable and very favourable, so far as they related to the liberty of the Catholics and the security of our country and friends. We did not however conclude it, though some of our pledges have been placed in the hands of our enemies. But as your letters, mighty King, clearly testify your feelings and kindly disposition, we shall not in future take into reckoning comfort or discomfort, but, supported by the hope of your favour next after God, we will again enter on the conflict and we will gladly renew the war, which has ceased for some time, though the forces of the enemy by sea and land are increasing daily. You, most merciful King, will in the meantime supply us with all that is needed to take the business in hand and to carry on the war, six thousand soldiers and arms for ten thousand. And we consider it most desirable that as soon as this letter reaches you, you would send some quick-sailing light-armed vessels of the fleet with lead, powder, and engines of war, and about a thousand soldiers, in order to increase the courage of our people and lessen that of the enemy. But in as much as we have felt to our great and indescribable harm the evil doings and crimes of those whom the

Queen of England is in the habit of sending amongst us, we beg and beseech your Majesty to send someone well known to you and perfectly fit to be the King of this island, for his own welfare, ours, and that of the Christian state, who will not be unwilling to rule over and live amongst us, and to direct and guide our nation well and wisely; he will obtain much advantage and glory by so-doing, as it is quite certain that we are willing to encounter the risks of war through our great affection and love for you, caring little for the temporal advantages offered to us by the enemy; and would that your Majesty would appoint the Archduke of Austria, now Governor of Flanders, a famous man and worthy of all praise, than whom none would be more acceptable. Your Highness should know that we have given information about all to your Envoy. This declaration of our sentiments will suffice for all the other noblemen, and he can return to Spain all the sooner. May the great and good God long keep your Majesty safe for the spreading of the Catholic faith in all parts of the world.

Given in Lifford, the 16th day of May, in the year of our salvation, 1596. We wish in fine that your Majesty should give implicit credit to the bearer Alonso Cobos in all that relates to the present business.

Your Majesty's most humble servants,

[L.S.] Hugh O'Neill. [L.S.] Hugh O'Donnell.

O'Neill and O'Donnell to Don Carolo, 1596

Scripsimus iam Serenissime Princeps, Patri tuo Rege maximo, quem plene per festinan-  
tiam licuit que nobis et Patria necessaria maxime censuimus. Idam in eo negotio im-  
ploramus celsitudinem ut expeditioni quam de generosa indole sua concepimus, benigne  
respondeat, nosq. suorum clientum albo peccatariter adscribat et causa hac tam pie ac  
iustissima assensu scilicet catholice libertatis et vindicande Patrie a tyrannica  
prauitatis iugo clementer suo more suffragetur, inq. Divine Majestati obsecutas, infi-  
nitam unanimem multitudinem à tartari faucibus eruens, Christo lucrifaciat, et sattha-  
nici furoris ministros ac Reipublice Christiane turbones impios aut plane extinguat, aut  
ad sanitatem redire compellat. Serenissimæ celsitudini tue omnia fausta precamur.  
In Cesser, May, 16. Anno 1596.

Tue celsitudini addictissimi

ONEILL &



Excellentissimo Serenissimæ Prin-  
cipi Hispaniarum Regis Catho-  
lici Filio

Madridum.

O'Neill and O'Donnell wrote a joint letter to Don Carolo at the same time.

MOST SERENE PRINCE,

We have written to your father, the mighty King, as well as haste would allow us, what we thought most necessary for us and our country. In this business we beseech your Highness to respond generously to the hopes which we entertain of his generous qualities, and set us down in the number of his clients, and help us mercifully, as is his wont in a cause so pious and just, namely the asserting of Catholic liberty and the delivering our country from the yoke of wicked tyrants; and in this way obeying the majesty of God, he will save an infinite number of souls from the jaws of hell, gain them over to Christ, and either crush utterly the agents of Satan's wrath and the wicked disturbers of the Christian republic or compel them to return to wiser counsels. We beg God to grant your most serene Highness every blessing.

From Lifford, May 16th, in the year 1596.

[L.S.] HUGH O'NEILL. [L.S.] HUGH O'DONNELL.

The other chiefs too wrote to the King to the same purpose. So Maguire:

... I was the very first of all in this kingdom, not of my own authority, but through reliance on God's help and your clemency, who had the courage to rouse the wrath of the Queen of England. I have incurred infinite losses in consequence. But all these I care little about, because of your good will towards me ... The Lord O'Neill, whom we all obey, has written our unanimous request ... I have entrusted my private business to the nobleman, the Rev. Charles O'Conchyr, as my trusted agent and spokesman, in whom I beg you will put all trust.—  
From Donegal, 23rd of May, 1596.

And MacWilliam Burke:

The hateful and cruel violence of the tyrant's wrath has had the effect of preventing the knowledge of our family, always most attached to the Catholic faith, from reaching your Majesty's ears. For the English, who could not endure the glory of our family, not only directed their efforts mainly to destroy the best of them by deceit and treachery, but also they plotted how to root out completely all trace of their noble descent by cleverly cutting up our territory into several parts. But now, O mighty King, powerfully drawn and attracted by the sweetness of your kindness and mercy, we place ourselves among your servants, we promise your Catholic Majesty for ever fidelity and obedience, and we undertake to use strenuous efforts, with God's help, to defeat and root out the enemies of the Christian name—even our enemies will bear witness that we have done this hitherto. May God long preserve your Catholic Majesty safe. Given at Donegal, 25th of May, 1596.

Your Majesty's most devoted,

MAC WILLIAM.

Brian O'Rourke wrote:

I conceive that I have received an adequate reward for all the toil and for the hardships which I have endured from the tyrannical cruelty of the heretics, and that I am abundantly consoled, when I call to mind the great generosity of your Majesty, expressed so kindly and lovingly in your letter. This I received later than the others did theirs, owing to an attack made on me by the enemy, and therefore I could not reply with the others. Not doubting in any way of the prosperous issue of your kindness, I promise at all times to be most obedient and faithful to your Catholic Majesty, and most willingly I subscribe to the answer sent by the chiefs O'Neill and O'Donnell. From Donegal, May 26th, 1596.

The most devoted servant of your Catholic Majesty,

O'RUARK.

MacSwiney Banagh, too, wrote that ‘he had received his Majesty’s letter, that he was chief of a territory and of one side of the harbour into which his Majesty’s messengers had come; that he had treated them with all kindness, as he was bound to do, and aided them to bring their business to an end as soon as possible, and would do the like so long as he lived, so that his Majesty’s ships could make a stay in the harbour with security at all times.’ He asked for guns and five hundred men, to be put under his command for the welfare of the country.

O’Neill and O’Donnell wrote a joint letter to Don Juan de Idiaquez, Councillor of State, from Donegal, May 25th, 1596, asking him to urge their petition with his Majesty.

Having opened our minds by letter to his Catholic Majesty, and set briefly before him our wants, it remains for us to address you, who have always shown singular kindness to us. Therefore we beseech you earnestly to remember our ancient and remote descent, and, as is your custom, to take means to inform his Majesty carefully and exactly of the state of this kingdom, which we have undertaken to defend as best we can, an honourable and holy undertaking, and persuade the King not to allow this excellent opportunity to pass unheeded; we can hardly hope that such another will ever again occur, and to send us aid as soon as possible. We leave to the care and fidelity of Thaddeus, bishop of Clonfert, and Bernard O’Donnell much more, in which we trust you will not fail to aid us.

It was the wish of O'Neill, O'Donnell, and all the other chiefs who made common cause with them, to send a joint letter signed by all to the King. Their anxiety for the speedy arrival of aid from Spain is borne testimony to by O'Neill and O'Donnell in this document.

We, the Lords O'Neill and O'Donnell, testify by this letter that it was by our persuasion Don Alonso Cobos, the Envoy of his Catholic Majesty, was impelled and moved to hasten his return to Spain before the arrival here of the rest of our nobility who live far away from this place. We are of one mind with these, and therefore can speak for all of them. Our chief reason is that he may take our letters with all possible haste to the Catholic King, and set before him our wishes. Given at Lifford, 6th May, 1596.

The Envoy, on the other hand, bore testimony to the universal desire of the Irish chiefs to cast off their allegiance to the Queen of England and to submit to the King of Spain.

I, Alonso Cobos, say and certify to all who may see this, that I came to Ireland when all the Irish Lords had almost concluded peace with the Queen on terms favourable to them, and that solely through conscientious motives, and for the great love they bear to his Majesty, they have declined to bring it to a conclusion, and have taken up arms against the Queen, and turned their hearts in all sincerity to God and the King, whose vassals they are, until his Majesty orders otherwise, as most suitable to his service. And to show that I am sure of what I state, I have set down at the foot my name and seal. Lifford, 15th of May, 1596.

Another letter from the King reached O'Neill and O'Donnell soon after the one mentioned above, whether by the same or another messenger we know not. Here is their answer:

We welcome with much joy your Majesty's second letter, breathing the fragrance of sweetness and mercy, and in our inmost hearts we embrace it. We have answered it not only with the same feelings but almost in the same words as we did your first. About the time we received your first letter from the hands of your Majesty's Envoy we were very urgently asked by those who governed here on behalf of the Queen of England to make a truce and accept terms of peace; just and very favourable terms were offered and laid before us, which guaranteed liberty and peace to the Catholic faith, and security of our possessions to us from the heretics. Some pledges of ours have passed to the enemy, for we were induced to accept their terms owing to the complaints of our suffering subjects, worn out by the hardships of the war continued up to the present, and most of all to the great delay in the coming of the succour we expected. But since we are asked piously and affectionately by your Majesty's letters, setting at nought the hellish devices of the English, and relying on God's mercy and yours, we have not hesitated to renew this war, which was interrupted for some time, even though the forces of the enemy both by land and sea are increasing day by day. It will be your duty, most merciful King, in the meantime to supply what is needed for bringing the business to an end, and to send the war supplies—six thousand soldiers and arms for ten thousand.

Towards the end of 1596 another Envoy would seem to have come from the King of Spain. We have not his letter, but we have replies to it sent to the King by the several chiefs of the north. O'Neill and O'Donnell wrote to him a joint letter from Donegal, bearing date October 16th.

Most merciful King,—We cannot express in words the intense joy and delight which the letter of your Catholic Majesty, full of extreme kindness and mercy, has caused us. Since the former Envoys left us we have used every means in our power, as we promised we should do, to gain time and procrastinate from one day to another, without causing any bloodshed or allowing our countrymen to be plundered or oppressed. But how could we impose on so clever an enemy, so skilled in every kind of cunning and cheating, if we did not use much dissimulation, and especially if we did not pretend we were anxious for peace? We will keep firm and unshaken the promises which we made to your Majesty to our last breath; if we do not, we shall incur at once the wrath of God and the contempt of men.

Letters of the same purport were sent to the King by Maguire, Brian O'Rourke, Mac William, O'Doherty, MacSwiny Banagh, Cormac O'Neill, and Hugh MacDavid.

In the course of 1597, Don Roderigo de Vayen was sent by the King of Spain to confer with the Irish. He landed at Killybegs and went to Donegal where O'Donnell then was. There he was entertained most generously, and at his departure he was given presents of dogs and horses for his royal master. We have not the King's letter, but we have a reply to it written no doubt on behalf of O'Donnell and the other chiefs too.

We have received your Highness's letter by Don Roderigo de Vayen this last March, in which you informed us that we should go forward in our enterprise, and that your Majesty would send us aid. We returned answer by the said Don Roderigo. Believe no news from England of any agreement in this country. Great offers have been made by the Queen of England, but we will not break our oath and promise to you. We are compassed round on all sides in such a way that except God keep us we shall be undone. But as yet we have defeated our foes. We skirmish with them very often, and they come off the worst, and lately I was present at the killing of the Sergeant-Major of the Queen's army, and of the Lord Deputy's brother-in-law, with many others. The Earl of Kildare was hurt and died of his wound. The Governor of Connaught came into the country where O'Donnell was, with a great army, nearly as great as the Deputy's was, and laid siege to one of his castles; but after a while he was forced to steal away with the loss of a nobleman and many officers and soldiers, and driven to leave the Queen's great ordnance behind, with all their victuals and carriages. Hence at present we are so situated that we must humbly crave your immediate aid.

In the spring of 1600 two ships came from Spain, under the command of Ferdinand De Barranova. In answer to the question why the King had delayed so long the promised relief, he said that his master was fully determined to aid them with men and money; but having been told that they had made peace with the English, he wished to learn from messengers of his own what was the true state of affairs. For this purpose he now sent Matthew de Oviedo, a Spanish Franciscan, who had already visited Ireland at the close of the Geraldine war with James Fitzmaurice and the Spanish force sent to the help of the Irish. On the 24th of June he wrote to the King:

SIRE,—I wrote by Don Martin de la Cerda giving your Majesty an account of the state of things in this island when we came with your Majesty's letters. As I have been here for two months, seeing everything that has been done, I can give a more exact account of what is taking place in this province. At present we are hemmed in between two armies, one of which came by sea, the other by land, not to speak of the many garrisons which the English have near us and from which they make incursions every day. Yet such is the bravery of these two Earls and of their followers that if they fought with equal arms they would have no fear; but as they have neither muskets nor artillery, they cannot drive them from the forts which they are erecting each day within the province, and as the war has lasted so long they are so exhausted and impoverished that they have not the means of supporting the soldiers or of paying them, and so every day we are afraid they will leave us. The English are making great efforts to bring about a peace, offering excellent terms; and for this purpose the Viceroy sent messengers twice to O'Neill, saying among other things that your Majesty is making peace with the Queen, and that his condition will be hopeless. At other times he says that no greater misfortune could happen the country than to bring Spaniards into it, because they are haughty and vicious, and they would destroy and ruin the country. To

all this they reply most honourably that they will hold out so long as they have one soldier, or there remains a cow to eat. At present they have got together a very good army, so that O'Neill made the Viceroy retreat when he was coming by land, and O'Donnell keeps those who came by sea shut up in their fortresses. The consequence is, that if a help of six thousand men and some large guns were now sent them, they could take any city in Ireland. I wish it were possible for me by word of mouth to show the importance of this undertaking and the great service that would be rendered thereby to God and to his Church, and the great advantage it would be to the service of your Majesty and the peace of your states to attack the enemy here. This is the best possible opportunity, and if it is allowed to slip by, I do not know when we shall find another. But as I cannot urge it otherwise than by these few lines, I pray God, in whose hands the hearts of kings are, that He may move the heart of your Majesty to help us at once. Every day I promise the Catholics this help, and in this way I keep them on hands. May the Lord preserve your Majesty for many and very happy years to be the protector and help of all the afflicted.

From Dungannon in Ireland, June 24th, 1600.

Your Majesty's humble chaplain,

FRAY MATTHEO, Archbishop elect of Dublin.

Another reached the King from O'Neill at the same time, though it was written six weeks after that of the Archbishop. Hugh O'Neill wrote again to the King a few days later.

SIRE,—We have written by Don Martin de la Cerda to your Majesty in acknowledgment of what your Majesty has done for us and in gratitude for what we have received, both arms and money bestowed on us by your generous hand. We have given to the Archbishop of Dublin and to Don Martin a very long account of our condition, that the one in writing and the other by word of mouth may give information to your Majesty, and you may rest assured that if we were able with our own forces and those of our friends to resist the power of this enemy, it would be enough for us to know that we were doing a great service to God and to his Church, and also to your Majesty's interests, in order to make us risk our lives and shed our blood, without troubling and wearying your Majesty, who we know has so many and important things to attend to. But, Sire, a war so long and continuous against so powerful an enemy, and against some of our own countrymen, who do us still more harm, as your Majesty will understand, must have so exhausted and impoverished us that it is by a miracle we hold out, and that owing to our reputation. At present matters stand in so favourable a way in this kingdom, that with some help and some large guns to make breaches in walls, this war would end successfully, for we have an army in all the provinces of Ireland, and when the succour reaches us and its arrival becomes known, our strength would be doubled; whereas if the aid fails to come or is delayed, our forces must grow less and melt away, not having means to subsist.

We humbly beseech your Majesty to order this aid to be hastened, since experience has shown us what evils arise from a delay in such matters. The Archbishop of Dublin encourages and strengthens us and revives our hopes, and by his presence has given us much courage and confidence, and in this way his coming has been of great use and benefit. It only remains that the authority of his Holiness, which has been asked for on behalf of your Majesty, should be sent to him, for

there is urgent need of it to correct and reform matters concerning religion, and without it this cannot be done. May our Lord watch over and preserve your Majesty, giving you the increase and prosperity which your vassals and humble servants desire.

From our Camp in Ireland, June 28th, 1600.

It is so difficult to send our letters to Spain, that though I sent this off more than a month ago, it has been returned to me. Now it will go by way of Scotland. I can assure your Majesty that the enemy's strength grows daily, and that our people are losing courage, seeing the succour delayed. But I trust in God and in your Majesty that it will not fail us.

From the Catholic Camp, August 3rd, 1600.

Your humble vassal and servant kisses the feet and hands of your Majesty.

HUGH O'NEILL.

On the 17th of September O'Neill again wrote to the King.

SIRE,—If the letters which I sent to your Majesty by several ways by special messengers had reached your royal hands, I have no doubt the clemency of your Majesty, your generosity, and your zeal for the increase of the holy Catholic faith which exist in the breast of your Majesty to an heroic degree, would have moved you to send to this kingdom as soon as possible the aid so often promised and so much desired by us. Knowing too from our letters the extreme danger in which we are and the great advantages both spiritual and temporal which must accrue from sending this aid, and its importance to your Majesty's authority and the spread of the Catholic faith, we cannot believe your Majesty will fail us in such circumstances. But fearing the letters have been lost, I am obliged to send this third messenger and by him to give you again an account of the wretched and unhappy condition in which we the Catholics of this kingdom find ourselves. It is such that if your Majesty does not aid us speedily we shall all be ruined, to our great sorrow and to the extinction of your Majesty's authority, in whom we all put our trust, and against whom the enemy think they are carrying on the war when they attack us. This year the Queen has employed all the forces both by sea and land to crush the Catholics, knowing they are under your Majesty's protection, and for this reason she has sent by sea to the port of the Foyle a large number of vessels bringing infantry and cavalry and a vast quantity of ammunition and provisions, and every day this expedition is strengthened with additional vessels and forces. She has erected three fortresses along this coast, which her garrisons hold. They are doing great harm, since they oblige us to make encampments in order to prevent them from entering farther into the land. On the other hand, the Viceroy came here in the spring, and I and all my friends were obliged to go and hinder his advance over the frontier, where I was for many days. And now he is coming back with 7,000 foot and a large body of horse. Such is our enemy, not to speak of those dwelling on our frontiers. I am so impoverished and exhausted, having carried on the war for six years, that I have neither food for my men nor money to pay

them; and what is worse, seeing that I am weak and that the help does not come, my friends pass over to the English, for the Queen confers on them great favours and extraordinary gifts. From what I have said your Majesty may infer the great danger in which we are, and since we are yours and you have received us under your protection, and the chief cause of the persecution which we suffer at the hands of the Queen arises from the hatred she has towards the Spaniards, we have the natural law both divine and human in our favour, and we can prove that according to it you cannot abandon a nation which is fighting for the Catholic faith and trusts in the promises of aid given us by his Majesty Philip the Second of blessed memory, your Majesty's father, and by your Majesty and your Ministers, when the Archbishop of Dublin and Don Martin de la Cerda came, and on behalf of your Majesty commanded us to continue the war. We found that all we could do was to hold out till this September. This is now half passed and we do not see the help.

We beseech your Majesty to consider the straits in which we must be, and for the love of God and for your own dignity, I beg you will not allow these traitorous enemies of the Catholic faith to triumph over us, for they would triumph over Spain at the same time. Even if this help comes at the end of October it will be in good time, and with six or seven thousand men and heavy guns (to make batteries) we shall be masters of the kingdom. May God inspire your Majesty and your Royal Council to determine on what is best in this case and all others. Watch over us and promote the welfare of yourself and of your kingdom for His holy service and for the increase of His holy faith.

Written in the Irish Camp, September 17th, 1600.

O'NEILL.

Here is the letter written at the same time by de Oviedo to one of the ministers.

MOST EXCELLENT LORD,—By every possible way and with the greatest care we have sought out messengers to give his Majesty and you an account of things in this country, and in addition to the letters which Don Martin took with him, these gentlemen and I have written at great length. But as the voyage by sea is so uncertain, I am afraid that of those which I sent by three different ways none has reached your Excellency's hands; and hearing that the Earl O'Neill has resolved to make again the same petition to his Majesty, informing him of this state of things, to him I refer your Excellency for the account, not to weary you with a long letter and a repetition of what you have already heard so often of the sufferings of this country. They are so great that the mere narrative of them will move to much pity a heart as christian as yours. I have been employed all this time in giving consolation to them, being continually with O'Neill and assuring him that aid will come from his Majesty, the only way of putting an end to these sufferings. He has always put his trust in it, knowing that such is the desire of his Majesty, and he has often told me that in it chiefly he places his hopes. And though he is still as hopeful as ever, yet seeing that some of his people are not so, as the delay seems to them very great, he is very downcast, fearing that some of his friends will grow weary of enduring so much suffering as he has already witnessed and even now has before his eyes. With all this he conceals this fear, and he bears his share of these hardships with as much courage as if it were his first day; and hearing that the Viceroy was coming to his territory with a large force, he went half way to meet him and engage him in battle, and God knows how small his force is. But the reputation he has with the enemy is so great that it alone sustains the war, and I trust in God that if the Viceroy comes he will return with as little profit to himself as he did last spring. I beseech your Excellency by the love of God if perchance (a thing I do not believe) the succour has not set out when this reaches, you will continue to urge this matter, and that the aid will not fail to come

immediately, lest the delay may be the cause of our losing all, as undoubtedly it may be.

Our Lord bestow all happiness on your Excellency as your chaplain desires.

From this island of Ireland, Sept. 18th, 1600.

FR. MATTHEO, Archbishop elect of Dublin.

On the same day the Archbishop wrote to the King, again urging him to take pity on the distressed condition of the Irish.

SIRE,—Already in three other letters I have described to your Majesty the state of things in this island, which is sustained in its sufferings by the hope which it has in your Majesty, and owing to it, many of the friends of these two leaders O'Neill and O'Donnell persevere in their fidelity, for without it I believe from what they suffer they would have passed over to the Queen's side, as some have done since I have come here. My coming by order of your Majesty has been of some advantage, for I have assured them they will be very soon aided by your Majesty, as I tell them every day. As things are set out more at length in O'Neill's letter, I refer you to it. In this I merely beseech your Majesty to take pity on these poor Catholics, remembering the great service that will be done to our Lord by taking up the cause of his Church, which is persecuted in this country, and how worthy this undertaking is of the greatest Prince in the world and her son, and how great is the reward which in return is prepared for your Majesty in heaven.

May God protect the royal person of your Majesty.

From this island of Ireland, Sept. 18th, 1600.

FR. MATHEO, Archbishop Elect of Dublin.

O'Neill was anxious to send his second son Henry to reside for some time in Spain, that he might learn the accomplishments suited to his high station and see the Catholic religion in its full splendour. He made known his wish to the King. Here is the kindly answer which he received.

NOBLE AND WELL-BELOVED,—I have already written a joint letter to you and your relative O'Donnell, in which I replied to the letter of both of you. By this, which I now write to you personally, I wish to let you know my good will towards you, and I mean to prove it not only by word but by deed; and whereas, from intelligence which reached me from Ireland some days past, I understood you wished to send your son here to be reared and instructed in the Catholic faith, and those who brought the letter understood so from you, I wish to let you know hereby that if such is your determination, it will be a pleasure to me to carry it out. If you send him here, he shall be very dear to me, and I will treat him as a youth of fair hopes, and as the son of such a father should be treated. Don Martin de la Cerda will bring him over, and supply his wants on the journey, as we have ordered.

Given at Madrid, the 24th of December, 1599.

O'Neill wrote in reply:

SIRE,—The singular favour which your Majesty has done me in deigning to call my son to your service as your vassal, is such as I cannot express in writing. I have nothing now to offer you in proof of my gratitude, since I have already devoted to your royal service my life, my property, and my state; in this profession I will continue all my life, and I hope to do such service as will give proof of my good will. I do not need to commend my son to your Majesty, since he is your vassal and will be received as such by you. We have received the Archbishop of Dublin as a proof of your Majesty's good wishes, with whom we will treat of our affairs. He will give you an account of all. And as there are many vessels from this port belonging to merchants who cannot be trusted, it would be much for the advantage of your Majesty's service if they were not admitted into any ports of your kingdom unless they have letters with my signature, for I know such persons as are suspected and such as are not. I had not an opportunity of communicating with you through the Archbishop of Dublin, since Maurice Fitzgerald has been prevented in Spain from coming in these vessels; as he has a claim to the Earldom of Desmond, we might well suppose he would be opposed to its present possessor, who is on our side and does good service to your Majesty's cause; for in spite of the noble birth of that gentleman, his services, and our obligations to him for what he has done and is still doing on behalf of the Church and your Majesty, yet good reasons compel me to beseech your Majesty to keep him back and employ him elsewhere; he can come at some future time, with the aid which you are about to send us, for then there will be no fear that his coming will do any harm but rather much good to your service. May our Lord preserve and prosper your Catholic Majesty, and increase your successes, as we your vassals and stewards desire.

Given in the Monastery of Donegal, in Ireland, 24th of April, 1600.

Your Majesty's vassal and servant, kissing your royal hands,

AODH O'NEILL.

The King on receipt of this letter sent it, as was his custom, to the Council of State to report to him on its contents. They replied that his Majesty might give Hugh O'Neill to understand the high estimation in which he was held for his bravery and continuous efforts against the heretics. As regards the coming of his son, he will carry out all that Don Martin de la Cerda will make known as his father's wishes, and he will give him a position near his royal person. It will be well to carry out his suggestions about the ships also. On the 18th of May the Archbishop of St. Iago wrote to the King:

In obedience to the orders of your Majesty, I have received the person and despatches sent hither by Fray Matheo de Oviedo from the kingdom of Ireland, where he has gone by your Majesty's order. Don Henrique, son of the Earl of Tyrone, and Captain Don Martin de la Cerda have landed here. I received them with all possible respect and supplied all their wants. Moreover, I gave them the opportunity of confessing and receiving Holy Communion, as they did at the Mass which I said at the altar of our glorious Apostle and Patron St. James; and by so doing he and his suite have proved themselves good Catholics. From what I have learned of the condition of the Catholics of that kingdom, I consider the course which your Majesty has taken in defence of our holy faith very just and worthy of your Majesty, namely, to help those who suffer there because they are good Catholics. For which your Majesty will receive a lasting reward from our God.

Philip II. of Spain died September 13th, 1598, and was succeeded on the throne of Spain by his son Philip III. Though by no means the equal of his father as a ruler, yet he seems to have looked on his father's good will to Ireland in the light of a sacred inheritance bequeathed to him. He continued to show the same kindly and generous feeling to the suffering Irish, the same readiness to aid them. Soon after he mounted the throne, he wrote to the Irish chiefs who had sought help from his father so often and so urgently, assuring them of his desire to assist them in their struggles for their country and religion. The letter was an answer to one of O'Neill and O'Donnell addressed to his father. It bears no date but that of the year 1598:

Philip by the grace of God, &c, greeting.—Your letter reached me at the time I was in very great grief for the death of my dear father. Knowing his good will towards you, I received it with much satisfaction, both because of your constancy in defending the Catholic faith and of the victories which you have gained over its enemies. I congratulate you on both, and I exhort you to persevere courageously in your good work. You need have no doubt about my good will towards you, and you shall see proofs of it when opportunity offers, as you can learn from Hugh MacDavid, a modest and sensible man, who brought your letter to me.

The kindly reception that O'Donnell met with on all sides made him hope that his mission would be successful. On February 28th he wrote to the King:

SIRE,—All we have learned about Ireland, we have informed the Council of State of. In this letter we merely beseech your Majesty with all humility that you would be pleased to look into this business, for if we know that you take it in hand we shall have more confidence in you than in all the world besides to advance the welfare of our poor country, and you will see the need of making haste. I pledge my word to your Royal Majesty that, once landed there, we shall make the whole country subject to your Majesty in a very short time; this I promise knowing the state of the country just now. May God preserve your Majesty for many years.

From Corunna, February 28th, 1602.

HUGH O'DONNELL.

Nearly two months had gone by, and yet no sign appeared of succour being sent immediately. On the 15th of April he wrote another and still more pressing letter to the King:

SIRE,—I, a faithful, humble, and favoured servant of your Majesty, should commit a great crime if I doubted about the accomplishment of what, for such well-founded reasons, worthy of Christianity and of your Majesty, you have been pleased to offer me and assure me of, it being in every way so conformable to the Catholic sentiments of your Majesty. But having such experience in the matters I mention, that no other, from acquaintance with them, can judge better of them, and knowing that the whole of the success of what I desire arises from succour being sent immediately, and seeing time pass by so quick, and the cruel knife coming so near each day to the throats of this persecuted people, who put their hopes in the mercy of God and in the clemency of your Majesty, I cannot refrain from renewing my sad entreaties. This resolution I have taken in consequence of what I hear

to-day (the 15th of April) will happen in Ireland, and I say it with all the earnestness and zeal which I owe to God and to your Majesty, that if within a month from this day there do not land on the northern coast of that kingdom 2,000 soldiers, or at least 1,500, with arms, provisions, and money to enable us to raise and bring together 5,000 or 6,000 of the inhabitants and revive the war, so as to expel the enemy from the Earl O'Neill's territory and from mine and to make them abandon that quarter, even though in the whole of June a great fleet with aid should reach there, I doubt very much whether they will reach in time, or whether they will find anything but the blood and ashes of that multitude of faithful men. Most humbly do I beg of your Majesty to allow me to set off with 2,000 soldiers, a thing that can be done very well this month, and will be most useful until more forces can go ; and if any one asserts the contrary, I ask your Majesty to allow me to go in all haste to the Court, that I may, in presence of the Council, give good reasons for my assertion. If this force is not sent I take it as certain that the whole of the north will fall away, and all the rest will soon follow, and all will come under the intolerable yoke of the heretics. The States of your Majesty will suffer thereby. I say this in God's presence. But I will submit myself in all things to your Majesty's will, putting my hope in God and in your Majesty.

May God preserve your Majesty for many years.

HUGH O'DONNELL.

From Corunna, April 15th, 1602.

Yet in spite of the promises made to him, time was passing by and there was no sign of immediate aid being despatched to Ireland. He prepared to go before the King to know what it was that caused the delay in raising the army which he had promised. The Conde de Caracena wrote to the King, June 10th, from Corunna demanding of him the favour of an audience for O'Donnell, in which he might set forth in full detail the state of affairs in Ireland and the pressing want of the promised succour:

SIRE,—The Earl O'Donnell is in a state of great affliction, thinking of the straits to which the Catholics of Ireland are reduced and particularly the Earl O'Neill; yet he holds his own condition to be worse, since they can lose but their lives, while he will forfeit his honour and the good name he acquired by continuing the war for so many years, being now absent from his country. This he supports by many reasons and proofs. In fine, what he desires now is that your Majesty would immediately give orders for his departure to that kingdom in whatever way your Majesty may be pleased, though he has no doubt whatever but that your Majesty means to help them, and he is equally sure that the delay has been the cause of his losing his lands, and that his followers are either slain or have gone over to the enemy. He says what he feels most is that your Majesty does not give him an audience; in twelve days he will go by the post to where your Majesty may be in case you are pleased to allow him, and all the more readily because he thinks the success of his expedition depends on this interview. And it seems to me that the matter is so very urgent and important that it is my duty to write to your Majesty. Your Majesty in all this will command whatever best suits your service; which I will always carry out, as I am obliged. May God watch over your Catholic Majesty.

A week later O'Donnell wrote to the King.

SIRE,—Several times I have written to your Majesty what I thought likely to advance the service of your Majesty and the safety of the persecuted Catholics of the poor kingdom of Ireland. To these letters I have received no answer whatever; and I am weary of seeing how I am wasting my time here, and I fear that things are going on badly at home. It concerns the interests of your Majesty to learn exactly the fallen state of the Catholics of Ireland. I beseech your Majesty to deign to send me permission to proceed to the Court for the purpose; and not to trouble you farther, I end by asking God to prosper and preserve your Majesty in all your undertakings, as we your favoured vassals need and desire.

From Corunna, 20th of June, 1602.

HUGH O'DONNELL.

O'Donnell's letter to King Philip III of Spain

Señor

A V. mag.<sup>a</sup> muchas veces é escrito pidiendo lo q. pensava aprovechar al servicio de V. mag.<sup>a</sup> y a la conservación de los affligidos catholicos del pobre Reyno de Irlanda de lo qual no é recibido respuesta ninguna y cansado de como passo mi vida aqui y temiendo cosas q. el despreciar alla, importa al servicio de V. mag.<sup>a</sup> y a la salud cam.<sup>a</sup> del caydo estado de los catholicos de Irlanda suplico quanto puedo á V. mag.<sup>a</sup> se sirba de combiar me licencia para yr a la corte a este efeto y para no dar mas en fado acabo, rogando a Dios q. prospere y guarde a V. mag.<sup>a</sup> en todas sus empresas, como nosotras sus fauorecidos vassallos tenemos necesidad y desseamos. De la fortuna  
a Veinti de Junio 1602

John O'Donnell

O'Donnell left a will. Unfortunately we have only a part of it:

... Also I declare, that in case the Earl O'Neill (though I know and believe he will not do so) should wish to violate the agreement and settlements arranged and made between him and me and our heirs, I hereby beg his Majesty to uphold my brother in his rights and to retain him in his service. Also I say and declare this is one of the terms of our agreement, that all aid and help sent by his Majesty to the Earl O'Neill and to me shall be divided into two equal parts, and the same shall take place with regard to our heirs, seeing that one claims no pre-eminence above the other, and whichever of them shall be the elder in walking together shall be at the right of the other. I beseech his Majesty to uphold my brother according to the agreement, and to oblige him to serve all the better, I pray his Majesty to place him in some position of trust with a sufficient salary.

F. Florence Conry was one of those who had gone to Spain with O'Donnell to solicit aid, and was by his bedside when he died. After O'Donnell's death he addressed the King on the state of affairs in Ireland:

F. B. Florence says that at the end of nine years, during which the Catholics have carried on the war against the English army more by a miracle than by human power, they find themselves so exhausted by the struggle and so discouraged, receiving nothing but letters from Spain, that in order to remove this doubt they sent to Spain the best messenger they had, namely, the Earl O'Donnell, to make known their wants to his Majesty and to ask for aid; and when lately they heard that the Earl had died, and that his entreaty did not avail with his Majesty, and that no aid in men is going there but only some money and more letters, they will certainly make terms in one of two ways: if all the Catholics are still in strength, they will make terms all together; and if they are not, but in great straits, the enemy will willingly give very good terms to each lord individually, and in this way they will leave the leading men without help or power to offer resistance. This would be a great pity, and so Spain will lose this Irish nation, after the infinite hardships which they have undergone to serve the King; and two evils will ensue therefrom: the first, that the other foreign nations, seeing this pitiful ending and the wretched spectacle of the destruction of Ireland for want of help, will never again incur any risk for or put their trust in Spain; the second, the Irish who are so long Catholics, for they received the faith 1,300 years ago, will turn heretics through mere compulsion and necessity, as there is no one to aid them. And the Queen of England will employ the seventeen thousand soldiers whom she keeps in her pay each year in Ireland and all the Irish soldiers, in the war of Flanders or on the coast of Spain or on the way to the Indies. All this may be prevented by sending help in men there without any delay, as the Earl O'Donnell demanded; that is, if the help sent amounts to 10,000 or 12,000 men, they should go to Cork or to Limerick; if to 2,500, they should go to his territory and be placed in garrisons in Donegal and

Sligo, and they should not be led out to fight but erect fortifications there with the footsoldiers of the country. If the aid sent amounts to 3,000 or 4,000, they should go to Galway and take possession of that city, where the Earl O'Neill and his brother can come without hindrance from the enemy, and for this reason the Earl O'Donnell brought with him the Baron of Leitrim, who is now here, because all the people about Galway are his vassals and are tyrannized over by his rival. When our troops surround Galway, neither the Viceroy nor the enemy can succour it by land or by sea after two days have elapsed; after eight, not even by sea. Galway is almost an island, and by making a trench from an arm of the sea to a lake, all succour will be cut off by land; and by making a little fort on the other side of the river where St. Mary's church stands with two pieces of artillery, the entrance will be cut off for the ships which now go up to the walls. If his Majesty is pleased to send 3,000 men to Galway now, the Baron, who is here, promises to take them there to capture Galway with them, if the Viceroy is not in the city. If he happens to be there, he will take them to a place two leagues from Galway, where they can stop in spite of the enemy, and he will undertake to provide them with bread and meat for six months; and if on coming there they do not find all he says to be true, he will be satisfied that they should cut off his head.

This is the reply that was given to Conry:

At the meeting of the Council in ... last year, his Majesty decided that 50,000 ducats should be sent, with whatever arms and ammunition could be provided. Later he was pleased to order that the sum should be 30,000 ducats, and that from the beginning of this year 20,000 ducats should be sent every month; the Earl O'Neill should be informed thereof. Though his Majesty ordered the Minister to procure the said sum of 30,000 ducats, in order that Don Martin de la Cerda might take it with him in two ships that have been got ready for the purpose in Corunna, and though frequently urged to do this, he has not done so up to the present. The result is that the Irish who are living here have lost heart and spent the supplies given them for the journey, owing to the delay. The season too is so far advanced that if the expedition is further deferred, Don Martin de la Cerda and all he is taking with him, as well as the above-mentioned Irish, run manifest risk of being lost. Besides, the Earl O'Neill and the Catholics who are of his party will be entirely ruined, not caring to make terms for all, since they relied on his Majesty's promises. In this way the enemy will be freed from the excessive expenses that the war will bring on them, and can more easily attack his Majesty's subjects; from which irreparable harm may ensue. Much harm has been done already in the estimation of the Irish by the delay, for they think his Majesty has changed his mind, and is the cause of the delay for some reason unknown to them, for they do not suppose it arises from want of money. Taking it for granted that his Majesty will not abandon this business, which tends so much to God's service and his own advantage, as has been already proved on several occasions, the Council is of opinion that they should be provided with money immediately, from whatever source it is to come, in order that they may set off without further delay with Don Martin and the others who are going; and if this cannot be done, these people should be undeceived and told that they are to look to themselves, though this would have such bad results that his Majesty ought not to allow it.