

AODH Ó NÉILL'S SPEECH AT YELLOW FORD.

Taken from *Ireland Under Elizabeth*, a 1903 English translation of Filib Ó Súilleabháin's 1612 work *Historiae Catholicae Iberniae*, originally published in Latin. Speech given on 14 August 1598, at the Battle of Yellow Ford. Ó Néill and his men would rout the English, killing 1,500 and compelling another 300 to flee. The English commander Henry Bagenal, a sworn enemy of Ó Néill's, would be himself among the English dead.

On this day the Catholics numbered 4,500 foot and about 600 horse, amongst them O'Donnell, who brought about 1,000 Connaught mercenaries under the MacWilliam Burke, and about 2,000 of his own men of Tyrconnell and others. The rest were followers of O'Neill, his brother and kinsmen, and chiefs who were bound to him by ancient ties. In a word, there were assembled here nearly the entire youth of the nobility of Ulster and many young Connaughtmen of by no means ignoble birth. They were, however, very inferior in equipment, for both horse and foot were light armed, except a few musketeers, who had heavy guns. For this reason O'Neill being informed of the enemy's equipment, the strength of their army, and the resolution of their general, was in doubt whether a wise man would give ground until Fearfeasa O'Clery, an interpreter of Irish Prophecies, assured him, the holy prophet Ultan had foretold that in this spot the heretic would be routed, and showed him the prophecy written in Irish verse in a book of holy prophecies. Reassured by this prophecy O'Neill stimulated his men to the fight with this speech: -

Most Christian and fearless men, the Great and Good God has this day in His Divine generosity more than granted our most earnest and frequent prayers and petitions. We have ever been praying to God and his Saints to grant us to fight the Protestants on equal terms. For this have we offered up our prayers; for this have we made our sufferings, and now we are not only equal, but actually superior in numbers. Therefore, you, who have, when inferior in numbers, routed the heretical columns, are now in superior numbers pitted against them.

I, for my part, hold that victory lies not in senseless armour, nor in the vain din of cannon, but in living and courageous souls. Remember how often when you were not so well equipped or disciplined you have overcome greater generals and forces, and even Bagenal himself. The English never could compare with the Irish in spirit, courage or steadfastness in battle, and the Irish who will be fighting against you will be dispirited by the consciousness of their crime and schism in fighting against the Catholic faith.

This very Catholic faith will stimulate your valour. Here you are to defend Christianity, fatherland, children and wives. Here must well-deserved chastisement be meted out to Bagenal, of all heretics, your bitterest enemy, who assails your properties, who thirsts for your blood, who impugns my honour.

Here must be avenged the insult put upon me by Bagenal when I was deprived of part of my camp at Mullaghbane. Here must we get satisfaction for the deaths of your comrades whom we have lost in the attack on Portmore, and that fort itself which you have so long besieged, and have now cut off from supplies, must be captured.

Here is to be obtained that victory which the Lord has promised in the prophecy of St. Ultan. On then, with good heart and with the help of God and his Saints.