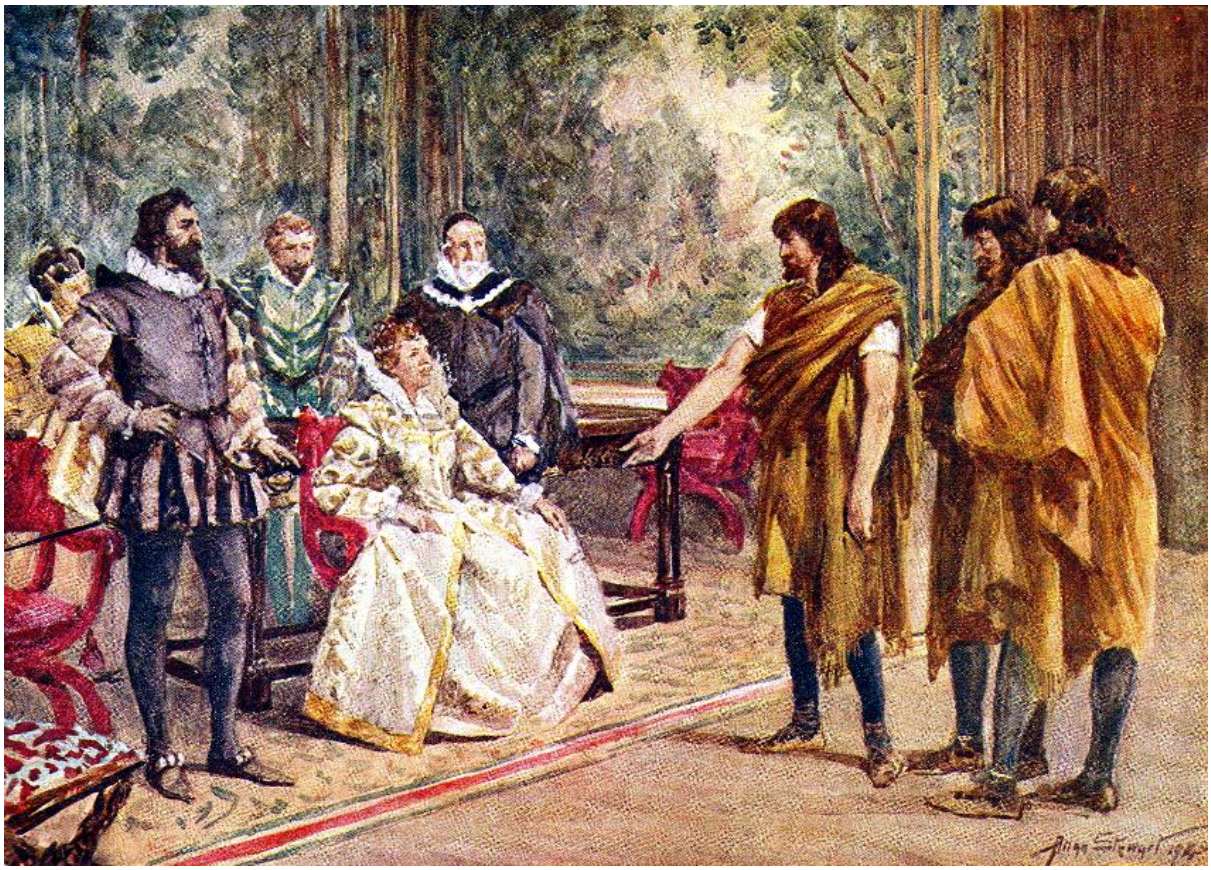
LETTERS OF SHANE O'NEILL

Litreacha Sheáin Ui Néill



By An Chartlann

PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

The following letters are taken from an article in the Ulster Journal of Archaeology, Volume 5, titled *"Original Letters in the Irish and Latin Languages, by Shane O'Neill, Prince of Tyrone, and Proclamation of High Treason against Him by Queen Elizabeth."* The article is available as part of JSTOR's Early Journal Content and can be freely redistributed on the conditions that JSTOR is attributed and the work redistributed for non-commercial purposes only. The full article, which includes a preface by the Gaelic scholar John O'Donovan and Queen Elizabeth's proclamation of high treason against Shane O'Neill can be read here.

The footnotes contained as part of this work are originally John O'Donovan's.

AN CHARTLANN.

I.

SHANE O'NEILL TO QUEEN ELIZABETH, 1 JULY, 1561.

My humble duty premised. I wonder very much for what purpose your Lordship strives to destroy me, the faithful subject and the steadfast liegeman of Her Majesty the Queen, without any ostensible cause, but that you wish to aggravate her royal Majesty by unnecessary expenses in commencing an unjust war against me. And I have more to say on this subject, if it were necessary; but I say this only, that, until you take away your said soldiers from Armagh, I will not go anywhere else, but will, to the best of my ability, by God's favour, defend myself against your unjust war; but since you have unjustly levied soldiers to place them against me at Armagh, I being driven to it will approach the sacred presence of my Lady the Queen, which I have long wished to do, and which I shall never desist from accomplishing, viz., to present my person before my most serene Mistress. But to prevent my journey, you, as soon as you came to Ireland, without any just reason, sent a force of soldiers into my country, - you, who ought to have advertised me friendlily of your arrival in Ireland. I call the Most High God to witness that I have nothing more at heart, and that I wish for nothing more anxiously, than to present my person before Her Serene Highness; and although she may learn that I am mendacious to those dwelling in Ireland on account of your Lordship, nevertheless you[1] have proved yourself more mendacious in word and deed than I am considered to be. And I beseech your Lordship, if you do not desire to do injustice to me, that you will, as you ought, send my messenger with my letters into the

[1] Or rather he whom you left in your place. [J. O. D.]

presence of Her Majesty; which if you do not do, I will send a messenger to Her Highness by the way which is in my power; and in the meantime I will seek no security from your Lordship unless on this condition, - that you withdraw the said soldiers from Armagh. And know for certain that by the journey in which your Lordship intends to thwart me to make my appearance before my Lady the Queen, I have lost three hundred marks of my property. And I am not more certain of this than you are yourself, and many in the English districts. – Farewell. 1 July, 1561

I am,
O'NEILL.

IN ORIGINAL LATIN

Humili recommendatione premissa, plurimum mirandum habeo qua parte intendit dominacio vestra me fidelem subditum reginse immotum sorvientem perdere circa regiam Majestatem absque aliqua rationabili causa, sed quod vultis regiam Majestatem agravare sumptibus non necessariis injustum bellum contra me incipientes. Et plura habeo dicenda erga hanc rem, si opus esset; sed hoc solum dico, donee dictos soldarios de Ardmachia detrahetis, nullam partem neque transpetam, sed ad posse, Deo favente, me contra vestrum injustum bellum defendam; sed iniquum habueritis contra me opponere proseriptum habitandum soldarios in Ardmachia ego coacte adirem conspectus domine mee Begine qui voluntarie in animo habeo, sed semper habere non desinam, meam personam presentare serenissime domine mee; sed ad transitum meum impediendum vos cum primum in Hiberniam venisti, absque aliqua justa deliberatione, impetu soldarios missistis in meam patriam, qui deberetis me amicé certiflcare de vestro adventu in Hiberniam. Provoeo Deum altissimum in testem, quod nil majus

in animo habeo, nee quicquam equius exopto, quam meam personam representare celsitudini Begine; et quanquam disceret me mendacem esse de habitantibus in Hybernia propter vestram dominacionem; sed ipse to plus mihi mendax esse pro verbo et facto quam comprobassem. Etobsecro vestram dominacionem, si non cupitis injustitiam ministrare mihi, uti debetis ut meum nuncium simul cum meis Uteris mittetis ad conspectum Begine, uti pollicita erat Domina Begina per meum nuncium, quod si non faeeritis, ego via qua. Potero nuncium mittam ad ejus celsitudinem; et interim nullam peto a vestra dominacione securitatem nisi hoc pacto ut dictos soldarios detrahetis de Ardmachia. Et scitote pro certo quod transitum quern intendit dominacio vestra impedire erga me, quod perdidi tria millia marcarum de bonis meis ad transitum faciendum ad conspectum Domine mee Begine, et non plus certus sum ego de hac re quam vos ipsi et plures in partibus Anglicanis. Et valete. 1 Julii, 1561.

Misi,[2]
O'NEILL.

[2] This signature is in Shane O'Neill's own hand. The Latin composition is evidently in the hand-writing of Neal MacConnor, who, according to Campion's *Historie of Ireland*, was his secretary when he was murdered in 1567. See Dublin Ed., p. 189 to 192. – The word "Misi" which precedes the signature, both in the Latin and Irish documents, is the Irish personal pronoun in the emphatic form.

II.

SHANE O'NEILL TO QUEEN ELIZABETH, 17 JULY 1561.

My humble duty premised. I have read your proclamation against me, and I would wish, if it were agreeable to your Excellency, that you would not delay to send my messenger with my letters before Her Highness the Queen, that I may, as I well can, take exception to every single article contained in the proclamation. And in the meantime, please to say if it please you to withdraw your soldiers from Armagh, and to have the peace between us which I wish for, till the return of my messenger from the presence of Her Majesty; or whether you rather wish for war, which I do not decide upon, because I would prefer peace. And I call the Great God to witness that you desire, without any cause, to withdraw my subjection and my obedience from her Gracious Majesty. And be it known to your Lordship for certain, that whatever shall be ordered by my mistress the Queen, agreeable to justice and reason, and which may be transmitted to me by your ambassador, be it war or peace ye wish to have with me, I will accede to without doubt. – Fare ye well. From my woods, this 17th of July, 1561.

I am,
O'NEILL.

IN ORIGINAL LATIN

Humili recommendacione premissa. Perlegi vestram contra me proelamacionem, et optarem si placitus esset vestrae amplitudini, ut meum nuncium una cum meis Uteris non tardaretis mittere ad conspectum Celsitudinis Eeginse, ut in singulos articulos in proclamatione contentos exeusacionem

acciperem uti bene possim; et interim si placerit vobis dueere soldarios de Ardmachya et pacem habere inter nos usque adventum nuncii de conspectu Reginee vellem ego, aut si bellum plus optamini, quod dicere non possum, et pacem majus eligo. Et Deum Optimum protestor pro teste sine causa vultis meum servitium subjectionem et obedienciam separare a regia Majestate. Et pro comperto sciat vestra dominacio quod quicquid mihi erit ordinatum per Dominam meam Eeginam congruum juri et rationi, et mihi tuus nuncius mittetur (si paeem aut bellum mecum habueritis) perficiam sine debito. - Valete. Ex sylvis meis, xvii Julii, 1561.

Misi,
O'NEILL.

III.

SHANE O'NEILL TO THE EARL OF SUSSEX.

A blessing from O'Neill to the Justiciary, as in duty bound; and to the rest of the Council. And I am asking of them, what have I done that would go (tend) to the dishonour or to the injury of the Queen? Or to you, on account of which you have, since your arrival in Ireland, violated your engagements to me without reason or cause, and for which you have offered to invade me without sending me a messenger or a letter? In as much as we were obedient to the Justiciary whom you left in your place[3] in Ireland; and in as much as it was not malice that prevented me from appearing in my own proper person in the presence of her Gracious Majesty the Queen, but that I asked the Queen for a loan of a small sum[4] of money, because the money of Ireland does not possess current in England; and I offered to give up my own hostages for this money-loan, until I myself should return from England; and these hostages would be the best of my children,[5] and my foster brother,[6] and also my foster-

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[3] *Whom you left in your place* – This was Sir William Fitzwilliam, who was Lord Deputy in the absence of Sussex, by commission from the Queen, in 1560.

[4] *Small sum.* - Cox, p. 316, states that her Majesty lent him two thousand five hundred pounds, which was no small sum in those times.

[5] *The best.* – He was evidently Henry O'Neill, who afterwards escaped with O'Donnell from the Castle of Dublin, and was thought to have been lost in the snow, in the mountains of Wicklow; but he escaped into Ulster, where Hugh, Earl of Tyrone, threw him into prison. See *Four Masters*, p. 1. 917.

[6] *My foster-brother.* – He was Dubhaltach O'Donnelly who was afterwards slain by O'Donnell, A.D. 1567.

father,[7] my foster-mother, and my brother; and after giving these in pledge for the small sum of money, to show that I would not break my promise, which indeed I would not do if I had delivered up no pledge at all; and when I sent my own people and the people of the Justiciary to request this again of the Queen for a pledge, and when we thought that it would be sent to us at your coming into Ireland, it was not thus you acted, but you did what we never anticipated would have been done by you; and, in good sooth, we also sent ten or twelve letters to the Justiciary who was appointed in Ireland after your departure, and now let these letters be produced in witness for me; and I also appeal to such of the Council as wish to hear conscientious evidence that it was not malice or negligence that prevented me from going hitherto in the presence of the Queen's gracious Majesty, but the want of that loan-money, which we expected to reach us. And the intention which we then had of visiting the Queen we would have still, but for the amount of obstruction which you have unseemingly thrown in my way, by sending a force of occupation into my territory without a cause; for as long as there shall be one son of a Saxon in my territory against my will, from that time forth I will not send you either settlement or message, but will send my complaint through some other medium to the Queen, to inform her how you have baffled me in my said intention (of going to visit her,) and I will exercise my utmost against this force (of your soldiers) and against every one who will place them there, until they are removed. And if it be your determination not to prevent me any more, take your people away with you, if it so please your Honour, and I will appoint a day with you, as soon as ever you take away your people with you, to fulfil every promise and every offer which I made to the

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[7] *My brother.* – This might mean "my kinsman." He was probably his youngest brother, who became a bishop.

Queen; and be assured that it was not from fear of war that I promised to go to visit her before, but on account of her honour and her graciousness to preserve every thing that each party possesses, and to exalt me from this time forth, in order that I might bring the wild countries which are under me to civilisation and to goodness, and that I myself, and those who should come after me, might devote our time to the honour and service of the Queen, and of the servant (Deputy) who should be appointed in Ireland by her. And all Ireland would be the better of my going to visit the Queen, (by the permission of God,) for there would not be in Ireland any one man who would offer the slightest annoyance to her Deputy, as these troubles would be stayed by the power of God, the consent of the Queen, and the service which I would render her Deputy.

This is enough; but I pray you to send me every secret and every answer which you shall have touching this matter without malice, and not to do any more against me until you bring me the news, and to show my letters to the chief men of the Council.

I am,
O'NEILL.

Seán Ó Néill Chuig Iarla Sussex.

Beandacht ó Ua Néill do chum an Iustís mar dhligheas se, □ do chum na coda ele do'n Chomhairle; agus atáim ag a fiafraighe diobh créd do rinne me do ni, do rachadh a n-easonoir no a n-dighbháil don Bhanrioghain no daoibhsi, as ar bhriseabhair orum gan fhatha, gan adhbhur, □ tairgsin gabhaltus do dhenamh orum, gan giolla, gan liter do chur chugam ó do thangabhair a n-Erinn; □ an Iustís do fhagabhair in bhur n-ionadh a n-Erinn go rabhamair-ne umhal dó; □ nach raibhe do mhailis orum gan mo phearsa fén do dhol a bh-fiadhnuise grás na Banrioghna, acht an mhéid gur chuir me iarroidh air sochamal airgid ar an m-Banrioghain, ar son nach imigheann airged na h-Ereann a

Saxanoibh, □ gur fhuráil me mo bhráighe gill fén do chur ris an innmhus sin no go bh-fillinn fén as Saxanoibh. Agus as í so an bhráíghe gill, iodhon, an mac is fear do'm chloinn □ do mo dhearbh-chomhalta, iodhon, m'oide □ mo bhuime □ mo bhrathair, □ iad sin do chur a ngioll res in big airgid ar nach brisfinn mo ghealla, da m-béind gan mo gheall ris; □ gur chuir me mo dhaoine fen □ daoine an Iustís da ath-iarroidh sin a ngioll air na braighdibh sin a g-ceann na Banrioghna; □ an uair do shaoilemur sin do theacht chugainn re bhur theachtsa a n-Erinn, ni h-amhlaidh sin do rindeabhair-si, acht a ni nar shaoileamar do dhenamh daoibh; □ dar n-doigh do chuireamar a deich no a dó dhég do litreachibh a g-ceand an Iustís do bhi a n-Erinn ó do imgheabhair-si fós; □ tugthar na litreacha sin do lathair, □ cuir is in fiadhnuise de, □ na litreacha sin orum, □ fiadhnuise an mhéid thoigerus cogus do dhenamh don Chomuair an fad bhias én mhac Saxanoigh am' thir dom' neamh-thoil, ni chuirfe me reidhiughadh no teachtaireacht chugoibh ó'n uair-si amach; acht mo chosaoid do chur slighe ele a g-ceann na Bnahrioghna, da inisin di mar do chuireabhair-si an toirmeasc sin orum; □ do dhena me mo dhicheall ar an m-baradh sin, □ ar gach duine da ccuirfe ann iad, no go m-berthear as iad. Agus ma ta a rún agoibh gan mo thoirmeasc ni is mó, beiridh bhur muinntir chugaibh ma's toil le bhur n-onoir é, □ do dhenfa lá ribh, mar is taoisge bheireas sibh bhur muinntir chugoibh, do chriochnughadh gach geallta □ gach trialla da ttug me do'n Bhanrioghain. Agus biodh a dheimhin agoibh nach d'egla chogaidh do ghell me dul 'n a ceand a roimhe, acht a ngioll ar a h-onoir □ ar a grásaibh do chumhdach gach neith da bh-fuil ag gach duine, □ dom' mhédughadh ó so suas, innus go ttugainn na tirtha fiadhanta a ta fúm do chum sibheltuis □ do chum maithis, □ innus go ccaithind me féin □ gach duine da m-bia am' dhiaigh re serbhis □ re h-onoir na Banrioghna □ na feadhmantoigh bhias a n-Erinn uaithe; □ budh fherrde Ere uile mo dhul-sa a g-ceand na Banrioghna do thoil Dé, uair ni bhiadh a n-Erinn én dhuine do chuirfedh saobhnós beg no mór ar a feadhmanntach, ar a se as anadh

se saobhnós sin do chumhachtuibh Dé d'aonntna na Banrioghna, don t-serbhis do dhenaim-ne d'a feadhmantach.

Ni beag; acht guidhmid sibh gach rún gach fregra bhias aguibh air sin do chur chugam gan mhailis; gan ni is mó do dhenamh orm no go ttuga sibh sgéla; taisbena no litreacha do mhaithibh na Comhairle.

Misi,
Ó NÉILL.

IV.

SHANE O'NEILL TO THE BARON OF SLANE

A blessing here to the Baron of Slane, and to (his wife) the daughter of the Earl; and tell them that I received the letters of the Deputy, from which I have understood that the Deputy is not willing to send myself, my man, or my letters, to bring my answer to the Queen, and that nothing will please him but to plant himself in my land and in my native territory, as I am told very day that he desires to be styled Earl of Ulster. And a good proof of this is, that, as soon as the Deputy came into Ireland, he who was bound to send me letters with affection to make known unto me his coming into Ireland, which I did not know, - in order that I might rejoice at his coming into Ireland, as I ought to do at the coming of the servant and representative of the Queen, - did not do so; on the contrary, the Deputy, as soon as he arrived, did not send me messengers or letters with the news of his arrival, but came at once into my country, to make a settlement in it, as he thinks he can. But it is certain that it is difficult to do this, God willing and I live, and as justice is particularly on my side; because, even if the best of the Clann O'Neill were dead together with myself, such of them as remained alive would not be encroached upon; for it was often attempted to take possession of their country, but it was never yet accomplished.

And I am complaining of it to you and to the chiefs of the Galls[8] of Ireland that it was not by my fault that any misfortune has happened above or below, and that it was not through malice that I did not go to visit the Queen, but that I was waiting to obtain a small sum of money on the security of honourable

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[8] *Galls*: - Literally "foreigners," meaning the old English settlers. The same term is still used.

hostages of my people; for it is not with dishonour or ill-will that I should like to appear in the presence of the Queen, but with love, humility, and fidelity. And if it were the will of the Deputy now, after all the injuries he has done to me, such as his burning and demolishing of Armagh and the destroying of my own town, to take away his Saxons with him out of my country, I would set out as soon as I possibly could to visit the Queen; and if it so be that this is not pleasing to him, it is certain there is not among my adherents a man who would not defend me against him, and more especially yourself; but in my opinion neither you nor any other member of the Council has any influence with the Deputy; and if you have, it is a bad counsel for you not to receive me humbly into the service of the Queen; or otherwise you may be prevented by fear from giving him counsel. And we call God to witness that there is not among you a man (how great so ever be his obedience to the Queen) who is more anxious to show his humility and tender his services to her than myself, but that the Deputy is not pleased to receive it willingly from us. This is enough.

I am,
O'NEILL.

Seán Ó Néill Chuig Barún Bhaile Shláine.

Bendacht annso do chum in Bharuin Sláine □ do chum inghine an iarla; □ indis dóibh gur ghabh me literachadh in Iustís as ar thuig me nach toil leis in Iustís me féin, mo dhuine, no mo literachadh do chur re mo fhregra a g-cend na Banrighna, □ nach áil leis ach gabhaltus do dhenamh in m' fhearann □ in mo dhuthaidh, amhuil mur indistear damh gach laoi gur ab áil leis Iarla Uladh da ghairm de; □ is maith in derbhadh air sin comh luath □ thanic in Iustís a n-Eirind, in té do dhlighfeadh literachadh maille re gradh do chur chugam-sa da chur a g-céill damh-sa a thecht a n-Eirind mur nach roibhe a fhis agam, indus

go m-beith luathghair orm-sa fa n-a thecht a n-Eirind, mur bu chóir damh a bheith orm re techt óglaigh fhir-inait na Banrighna, is é a chontrail so do rinne in Iustís; comh luath thanic se a n-Eirind nir chuir techta no liter chugum-sa re sgeala é féin do thecht, ach thanic ar tús ind mo dhuthaidh do dheanamh gabhal-tuis indti dar leis féin; is deimhin gur deacair sin do dhenamh, do thoil Dia misi in mo bheathidh, go formhór in chóir agam do letrom; da m-beith in chuid is ferr do chlannaibh Néill misi gan anmain, ni dhentai gabhaltus ar in chuid do bheith beó aca; is minic a thairgeadh gabhaltus do dhenamh orra nir criochnaidheadh sin ariamh aca.

Agus ataim-se 'ga cosaide ribh-si re maithibh Gall na h-Eirinn, nach me féin is cintach re dolaidh da n-dentai a bhos no thuas, nach roibhe do mhailis orm-sa fa na dhul a ccend na Banrighna, ach fuireach re sochumail airgid d'fhaghail a ngeall air bhraigdibh onorach do mo mhuinntir; ni maille re easonoir no re neamh-thoil do b'áil lium a dhul a bh-fiaghnise na Banrighna, ach maille re gradh re h-umhlacht re tairiseacht; da mu thoil leis in Iustis anois tar éis gach dolaidh da n-dernadh dhamh-sa – mur ata Ardmacha do Iosgadh do bhriseadh, mo bhaile féin do bhriseadh damh – na Sasannaidh do bhreith chuigi as mo dhuthaidh, mur is luaithi d'fhedfaind do bhéind a triall a ccend na Banrighna; ma atá nach toil leis sin, as deimhin nach bh-fuil da mhéd pairti rinn duine mach m-beithi do ar coimhed orm, go formhór sibh-si féin; dar Icam féin ni bh-fuil comhairle agaibh-si no aigi duine ele don Chomhairle ar Iustís, ma atá is olc in comhairle dibh gan misi do ghabhail maille re h-umhlacht a serbhis na Banrighna, no ni leigenn egla duibh comhairle do thabhairt dó; cuirmuít a fhiaghnuise ar Dia nach bhfuil agaibh (da mhéd 'umhla don Bhanrighnain) duine is mó re miangas is mó atá ar ti m' umhlacht mo sherbhis do thabhairt don Bhanrighain no misi, ach mu'r a beith in Iustís nach áil leis sin do ghabhail go toiltinneach uainn. Ni beg sin.

Misi,
Ó NÉILL.