

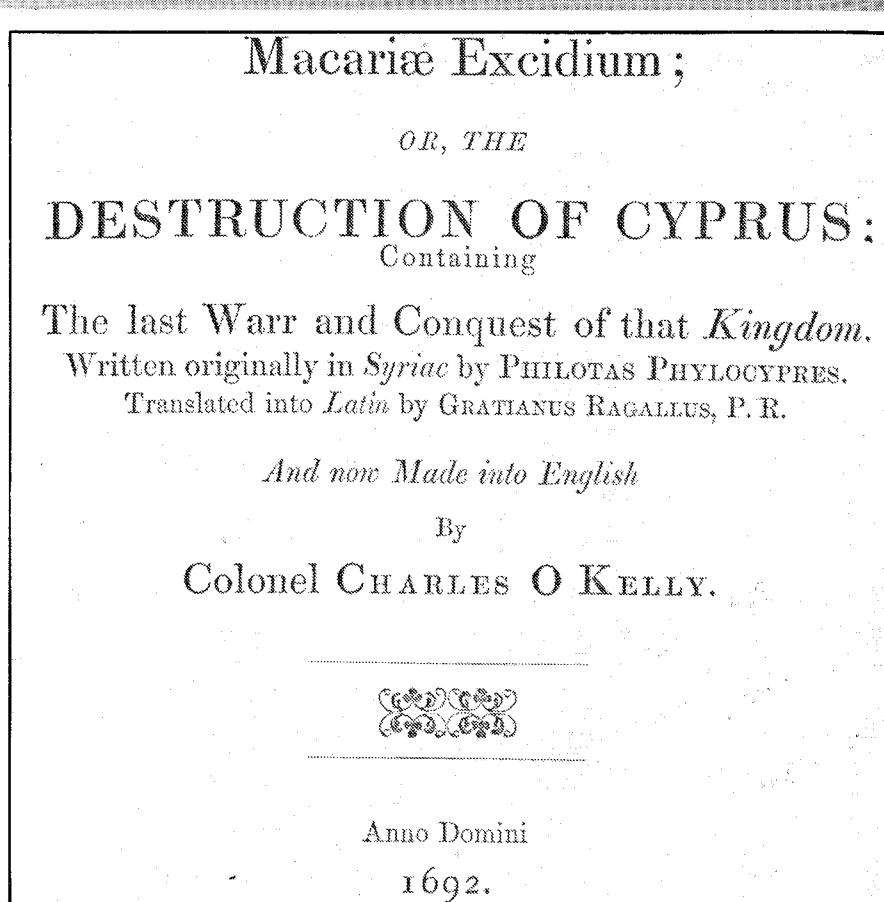
THE DESTRUCTION OF CYPRUS

BY CHARLES O'KELLY

INTRODUCTION

Charles O'Kelly was the eldest son of John O'Kelly, eighth lord of the manor of Screen, Co. Galway, and his wife, Isma, daughter of Sir William Hill of Ballybeg, Co. Carlow. He was born at Screen Castle in 1621, and, being a Roman Catholic, was sent for his education to St. Omer in the Spanish Netherlands. He returned to Ireland in 1642 to take part in the civil war on the royalist side against Cromwell's parliamentarians, commanding a troop of horse under the Marquis of Ormond. The family estate was forfeited on Cromwell's victory, and O'Kelly went to the continent to serve Charles II in exile, commanding a regiment composed of Irish exiles, first in France and later in Spain. On the restoration of Charles II in 1660, O'Kelly went to England. The family estate was restored, and on the death of his father in 1674, O'Kelly became the ninth lord of Screen manor.

Under James II, he appears as a burgess of the reformed corporation of Athlone in November, 1687, and was the member for Roscommon in the parliament summoned by James in Dublin in 1689. In the summer of the same year, he was commissioned to raise a regiment of infantry for James, to be commanded by himself, with his brother, John, as lieutenant-colonel. The regiment was not maintained for long, although he continued to serve in the army with the rank of colonel. After the Williamite successes at Derry and Enniskillen in July, 1689, Sligo was abandoned by the Jacobites and occupied by the Inniskillingers. O'Kelly, then 68 years old, was directed by Sarsfield to hold Connaught with whatever local militia that could be raised. On 19 September, he was surprised at Boyle, Co. Roscommon, by a force of cavalry and infantry from Sligo and routed with considerable loss. O'Kelly escaped with his cavalry, although pursued for about seven miles. Among the booty taken was O'Kelly's portmanteau with a letter



Title page of Charles O'Kelly's manuscript, as published by the Irish Archaeological Society, 1850.

from Sarsfield, which was forwarded to Schomberg at Dundalk. Both Story and Stevens (27 Sept., 1689) report the ceremony with which the news was received – the parading of the Inniskilling regiment and the firing of volleys of musket and cannon – Story reporting O'Kelly as being captured, and Stevens reporting that the cause of the ceremony was afterwards found to be mere fiction.

The next mention of O'Kelly is his appointment as one of the commissioners for Co. Roscommon for assessing taxes on personal estates and trade and

traffic by King James, 10 April, 1690. (D'Alton, i, p.38). In August, 1691, he was guarding a castle at Lough Glinn, near Castlereagh, Co. Roscommon, when he tried unsuccessfully to persuade Beldearg O'Donnell not to defect to the Williamites. He surrendered the castle about 9 September, and proceeded to Limerick, then under siege by Ginkel. There, on September 15, he advised Sarsfield to replace Brigadier Clifford, who was in charge of the out-guard on the Clare side to prevent a crossing of the river by Ginkel. The advice was not acted upon, and during the night the



Williamites crossed. O'Kelly was still for holding out. Although it was proposed by Sarsfield and the Archbishop of Tuam that he, then at the horse-camp, be called in for consultation in the treaty negotiations, it was objected that, if he came, there would be no agreement, and the proposal was not acted upon.

At the conclusion of the treaty, he retired to the family residence at Aughrane, or Castle Kelly, and devoted his remaining years to literature and religion. He died in 1695, aged about 74. The estate was preserved under the terms of the treaty of Limerick, and after the death of his son, Denis, in 1740, reverted to the descendants of his brother, Lt.-Col. John O'Kelly of Clonllyn.

His account of the war was disguised, possibly with the intention of publication, avoiding censorship, as a history of the conquest of Cyprus, purporting to be a translation of an ancient Syrian manuscript in his possession, now deserving translation because of the resemblance of current events in Europe with several passages in the ancient history. Titled *Macariae Excidium, or the Destruction of Cyprus, containing the last Warr and Conquest of that Kingdom, Written originally in Syriac by Philotas Phylocyprus. Translated into Latin by Gratianus Ragallus, P.R. And now made into English by Colonel Charles O'Kelly, Anno Domini 1692*, it substitutes Cyprus for Ireland, Cicia for England, Syria for France, Paphos for Limerick, Theodore for William, Amasis for James, Lysander for Sarsfield etc.

It was first printed in *Narratives Illustrative of the Contests in Ireland in*

1641 and 1690, (Camden Society, London, 1841), edited by Thomas Crofton Croker from a manuscript in his possession. In 1842, a manuscript in Latin, containing more material than the 1841 publication, came to the attention of the Irish Archaeological Society, which delegated John Cornelius O'Callaghan to trace and compare all known copies, and prepare a complete text for publication. This was printed in Dublin in 1850, edited from four English copies and the Latin manuscript, together with the Latin text, a memoir of Charles O'Kelly and his descendants, and extensive notes, by O'Callaghan. A third edition, titled *The Jacobite War in Ireland*, prepared by Count Plunket and Rev. Edmund Hogan S.J., was published at Dublin, 1894, as a volume in the 'New Irish Home Library'. O'Callaghan concluded that there was not enough reason to consider the Latin as the original, and that the English text is O'Kelly's history, properly speaking. Murray, in his introduction to Stevens' *Journal*, p. XXV, states that internal evidence points to the Latin text as the original narrative.

O'Kelly also wrote *The O'Kelly Memoirs*, which reportedly contained histories of the wars of 1641 and 1689-91, giving greater detail of 1689-91 events than in *The Destruction of Cyprus*. The manuscript volume containing this was in the possession of Count John James O'Kelly Farrell, minister-plenipotentiary from Louis XVI to the Elector of Mayence at the time of the French Revolution, and was lost in the disturbances of the time. O'Callaghan deduced that O'Kelly wrote the first history in brief in order

to leave some record before he died, but, living longer than expected, he later treated the subject more fully.

O'Kelly's history is written from the point of view of a member of the Gaelic Catholic aristocracy, in contrast to the Old English Catholic author of *A Light to the Blind*. O'Kelly is deeply hostile to Tyrconnell, and after the Boyne attributes all his actions and those of his supporters to a desire to come to a rapid settlement with William to preserve their lands, some of which were purchased from the Cromwellian settlers over the heads of the original owners. The history concentrates on the politics of the Jacobite dissensions, and is short on military detail. Of local interest, it confirms some Williamite accounts which locate Sarsfield, after Ballyneety, with the cavalry camp, based in Co. Galway, and not, as related by Lenihan, directing every detail of the defence of the city.

The text given below is extracted from O'Callaghan's English edition, substituting the marginal annotations in place of the disguised names of persons, places and ranks.

SOURCES: J.P. O'Callaghan, (ed.), *Macariae Excidium, or the Destruction of Cyprus, being a secret history of the war of the Revolution in Ireland by Colonel Charles O'Kelly*, (Irish Archaeological Society, Dublin, 1850); *Dictionary of National Biography*; J. D'Alton, *King James's Irish Army List*, 1689, (Dublin, 1860); M. Lenihan, *History of Limerick*, (Mercier Press, Cork, reprint, 1967); R. Murray, *Journal of John Stevens*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1912); G. Story, *Impartial History*, (London, 1691).

To return now to our forlorn army on the River Boyne, though they were abandoned by their chief, the cavalry, however, with the assistance of 6000 men, French foot, made a brave retreat, fighting and marching day and night, till they came to Dublin, where, finding neither king nor captain general, nor indeed any principal officers, and understanding that James left orders that every man should shift for himself, they were in a great consternation; but the death of Schomberg, killed upon the first onset, was the occasion they were not hotly pursued, having now time to retire leisuely to Limerick: and it is admirable how every individual person, both officer and soldier, came thither without any orders, and without the conduct of any of their chief commanders, as if they were guided to Limerick by some secret instinct of nature. In a week's time after the battle, the appearance there was so considerable that Tyrconnell and Lauzun (the French general) were equally surprised; the first was concerned lest



Richard Talbot, Duke of Tyrconnell.

such a sudden rally might hinder (at least delay) the execution of the design which was hatched in the cabinet; the

other was no less troubled that so many of the French appeared, after he had written to France, and perhaps to Louis himself, that they were all, to a very few, cut off; and the contrary being now made evident (for they did not lose 6 men that day) he had reason to apprehend that it might bring his credit and sincerity in question at the court of France; so that these two great men being of one resolution, though for different ends, were linked together in a friendship that seemed everlasting. Lauzun longed so much to be back in his own country that he could not endure to hear of prolonging the war in Ireland; and it is probable that some of his captains (who longed to breathe the sweet air of France), despairing of the country, believed it impossible to preserve it. Tyrconnell nourished this humour, because it went along with his design not to oppose William in the conquest of Ireland. For the more speedy effecting that work, he omitted nothing that might encourage William to advance, and discourage the Irish to resist; he shipped away his wife, an English lady, with all his own wealth



and the king's treasure, to France, where she gave out, (pursuant to her instructions), that all Ireland was lost, to the cities of Limerick and Galway, which could not hold out long; that the Irish had no army, and that the nation, for the most part, submitted to William. All this was done in order to fortify the king's relation of the present state of Ireland, and to keep Louis in the dark from the true knowledge of their condition; and it was hoped by this artifice the country would be really lost, before the French king should come to know whether or not they were capable of being relieved? Of the other side, no endeavours were omitted by Tyrconnell to persuade the Irish that it was folly to expect any relief from Louis, who had his hands so full that he was not able to assist them, and no visible way now left for self-preservation but to treat with William, who likely, at that time, would give them any conditions, that he might be at liberty to join with the rest of the confederates in order to attack France on all sides. But the generality of the Irish nation were of another sentiment; not infringed so often the public faith. In a grand council at Limerick, it was concluded to dispatch two persons of quality to France to signify their present condition and resolution to defend the country, not doubting but Louis would powerfully support them, for it was his true interest to give William work in Ireland. It was also resolved in that consult that Sarsfield, the darling of the army, should command in chief, next to the captain general. When these results were made known to Tyrconnell (for he was not that day at council), he seemed to like neither. He said it did not belong to the council to send deputies abroad: it was his prerogative, and that he would send when and whom he thought fit. As for Sarsfield, he could not endure to hear of his preferment.

[He describes William's progress from Dublin, blaming Tyrconnell for the lack of harassment of his army. When the siege of Athlone was abandoned, Tyrconnell recalled most of the troops that went there with Sarsfield, but] ... he commanded him, however, with a very inconsiderable party, to follow and observe the enemy's motions; whilst, in his absence, he contrived all the means that art could invent to draw the captains of the army (among whom he had a great many creatures of his own) and the members of the council, who were, for the most part, of his choosing (for he did what he pleased with James), to condescend to a treaty with William as the best expedient that could then be fixed upon for self-preservation. To induce them the more thereunto, and to dishearten altogether the Irish troops (who were raw men, not acquainted with sieges), having viewed and surrounded all the outworks and fortifications of Limerick, which, indeed, were not fully-

finished, he publicly declared the place was not tenable; and next day, as if he despaired of its defence, he marched off to Galway, encamping his veteran troops under the walls of that town: and yet all these discouragements, which were designedly concerted between Tyrconnell and Lauzun, could not divert the Irish infantry from their former resolution to expose their lives for the defence of Limerick, which was of so great importance for the preservation of Ireland.

William made no great haste to Limerick, to give Tyrconnell the more time for compassing his design to bring the Irish to a general condescension for a treaty; and when he found matters were disposed thereunto, most of the prime commanders being already gained, he advanced near the town. Whereupon Sarsfield being sent for, and arriving at Limerick, was much surprised to find such a change in the general officers, who, however, durst not act any thing contrary to the sentiments of the tribunes who headed the legions, and who were, for the most part, of Sarsfield's resolution, to continue the war. Upon his arrival the scene was altered; the defence of Limerick was resolved upon, and all the infantry were ordered to man the place, excepting three legions, ordered to guard some fords near the town upon the River Shannon; the Men at Arms and Light Horse encamping near the city, on the Connaught side.

On the 9th day of the sixth month [August, old style] and the fortieth after the engagement on the River Boyne, William appeared with his victorious army, and began the fatal siege of the city of Limerick. Next day after, Tyrconnell, without consulting the rest of his captains, ordered the legions who guarded the fords to withdraw from thence, and march all along to Galway, whereby William had the passage left open to send part of his army on the Connaught side the river, and surround the city on all sides; and, in effect, some of his cavalry having got over, next morning made a show as if they would besiege Limerick on that side also; but, though they returned back the same day, they did, however, so alarm the Irish horse camp that Tyrconnell and his inseparable companion, Lauzun, retired in great haste overnight, and rode all along to Galway, leaving the horse encamped halfway between that town and Limerick. Whilst they were at Galway, they gave out that Limerick could not hold above 5 or 6 days; that the Irish soldiers were so cowed, that they would never defend it; as for Galway, they declared openly it was no place tenable: and yet both those towns were held impregnable in former times: and so leaving no artifice unattempted to induce the Irish to a speedy submission, they were not a little surprised to hear of Sarsfield's fortunate success in defeating the convoy coming to William's camp

from Dublin, and destroying the great battering engines, the provisions, and all other instruments of war, which gave such encouragement to the Irish that they laid aside all thoughts of capitulating. It was much taken notice of, how Tyrconnell and Lauzun, with all their partisans, were crestfallen upon the news; for the French saw that it delayed their return, and Tyrconnell's creatures understood well that it ruined their project. They made it therefore their business to vilify and ridicule that brave action, saying it was folly to think such an accident, which was inconsiderable in itself, could hinder the loss of Limerick, or promote the preservation of Ireland. That the advantageous articles that might be now obtained from William, before the surrender of Limerick, could not be rationally expected after the loss of that place, which must infallibly happen within a few days; and the French troops being resolved to go off, it was to be feared that the Irish, losing Limerick, and deserted by their allies, would get no other conditions but mercy. This was industriously spread among the nobles and captains of the army, who, indeed, had good reason to be dissatisfied with the proceedings of Lauzun and his French troops, for, in lieu of assistance and encouragement, they daily disheartened the people; and the irregularities they committed in their march and quarters were so exorbitant, that it must needs alienate them from the hearts of the Irish. But Sarsfield and his party were not wanting to represent to the people, that there was no danger of losing Limerick, when it was not besieged on both sides; that William was not powerful enough to surround it; that the disorders of the French troops were purposely tolerated, to make the Irish weary of them, whereby they might have an honourable pretext to quit the country; and that Tyrconnell designedly contrived at it, because, by ruining the country, the people were rendered unable to maintain a war: besides, he hoped that this rude behaviour of the French would make the inhabitants of Ireland to incline the sooner to a treaty with the English, from whom they might hope for milder usage. Some zealous Irish, as well as of the nobles and officers of the army, as also some holy bishops, knowing that if William prevailed, he would suppress the Roman Catholic rites, were of opinion, that the only way to preserve the true worship of God, the service of James, and the interest of the country, was to lay Tyrconnell aside, and to enter into a mutual league and association among themselves, for those necessary ends. This expedient, which the most knowing Irish looked upon as the best they could take to rescue the country from the arms of William and the treachery of their own governors, was not, however, approved by Sarsfield, who either wanted resolution to go on



Drawing of Patrick Sarsfield, Earl of Lucan, after the statue by John Lawlor, 1881, Cathedral Place, Limerick.

with so great an undertaking (though no man doubted his personal courage), or perhaps did not think it justifiable in him to depose the viceroy of James, and enter into a new association without the king's authority; so that this project, unhappily, fell to the ground, which occasioned the loss of Ireland.

Tyrconnell having now convoked all the general officers at Galway, he produced to them (but it was under a seal of secrecy) a letter from James, containing his orders to such of the army as were willing to repair to him, to take this opportunity of the French fleet, which then rode in that harbour, dispensing the rest from their oath of fidelity, and giving them free liberty to submit to William, and make the best conditions they could for themselves. Some of Tyrconnell's party having hereupon declared their willingness to go off, Sarsfield stood up and said this letter was grounded upon misinformation of the present state of affairs; that if the king were rightfully informed how the case stood in Ireland, where they had a considerable army, and resolute to the

last man, and how feasible it was to defend that part of the kingdom which lies between the River Shannon and the sea, until they were relieved out of France, his majesty would, instead of inviting them to leave the country, rather encourage them to stay and defend it; and that, for his part, he was resolved not to be imposed upon by any such artifice to abandon his country or the king's interest in Ireland: and most of the tribunes having declared the same resolution, Tyrconnell was forced to pass by the proposal for that time.

Never was a town better attacked, and better defended, than the city of Limerick. William left nothing unattempted that the art of war, the skill of a great captain and the valour of veteran soldiers, could put in execution to gain the place; and the Irish omitted nothing that courage and constancy could practice to defend it. The continual assaults of the one, and frequent sallies of the other, consuming a great many brave men of the army and garrison. On the 19th day, William (after fighting for every inch of ground he gained), having made

a large breach in the wall, gave a general assault, which lasted for three hours; and though his men mounted the breach, and some entered the town, they were gallantly repulsed, and forced to retire, with considerable loss. William, resolving to renew the assault next day, could not persuade his men to advance, though he offered to lead them in person; whereupon, all in a rage, he left the camp, and never stopped till he came to Waterford, where he took shipping for England; his army in the meantime retiring, by night, from Limerick.

The raising of this siege was so great a disappointment to Tyrconnell's design, that he could not, with all his cunning, dissemble his resentment; but that which most surprised all men was the sudden resolution he took to go along with Lauzun into France, when all the world expected he would make use of this happy advantage to recover Waterford, and perhaps all the province of Leinster. 'Tis true that his going off did not displease the generality of the nation, who did not approve his design of subjecting the country to the power of William and to the mercy of the English, who were their sworn enemies. But yet there wanted not some even of the Irish Roman Catholics, who coveted nothing more than to submit to Prince William. These were men of new interest, so called because they purchased from usurpers the inheritance of their own countrymen, which Cromwell and the rebellious parliament of London formerly distributed among the English; and these lands being restored to the ancient proprietors by a late decree of the parliament convened by James, in the city of Dublin, upon his first arrival in Ireland, the coveting purchasers, preferring their private gain before the general interest of religion and country, were for submitting to a government, which they very well knew could never allow that decree. These, however, were the men advanced by Tyrconnell to all beneficial offices of the kingdom, without regard to merit or capacity for managing the employments; for to be a creature of Tyrconnell's was the only qualification requisite, in those days, to make a complete captain, or an able statesman. Before he took shipping for France, he established a new form of government in his absence, never before heard of in Ireland. Twelve senators were named to manage the civil affairs, the major part being the new interest men, without whose concurrence the rest could not act. He chose the Duke of Berwick, a natural son of James, to command the army; and in regard his youth gave him but little experience, he appointed a select council of officers to direct him, among whom Sarsfield was the last in commission; and it is probable he had not named him at all, but that he dreaded the army would revolt to him, if he were discontented, which might dash in pieces the viceroy's project.