



LETTERS OF JEAN PAYEN DE LA FOULERESSE TO THE KING OF DENMARK

INTRODUCTION

These three letters are extracted from a manuscript collection of official dispatches preserved in the Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen, bearing the title, in French, 'letters written from London to the King of Denmark and his ministers of state, in the years 1688, 1689, 1690, 1691 and 1692, from Jean Payen de la Foulereesse, Gentleman of the Chamber to the King of Denmark, and Councillor of his Chancellery'. The collection consists of 281 letters, with a supplement of about 130 pages containing letters and proclamations of James II and William, copies of treaties between England and Denmark, an account of the coronation of William and Mary, etc. The letters, in French, were translated and published by L. Barbe in the London journal, *Notes and Queries*, 5th Series, VIII, 18 August, 1877.

The letters contain details not noted by other correspondents, in particular the narrow escape of William from the Irish cavalry (Württemberg, Journal, 14 August), the publication in altered form by the Irish of William's Finglas declaration and the reaction of the women, and William's reaction to requests by Württemberg for additional regiments to enter the breach. He supports Story's account of the presence of women at the breach, although he does not say that he saw them himself, but that 'it was noticed'. However, this in a letter written two days after the assault indicates a genuine belief among the Williamites that the women were there. His description of the walls, 'an old rampart flanked by towers in the ancient style', runs contrary to the general Williamite view of the fortifications as strong. He also draws to attention an aspect of life at the siege not referred to elsewhere, the 'fetid exhalations' created by tens of thousands of men camped at one place for three weeks without 20th century sanitary facilities.

To King Christian V, Camp before Limerick, August 24th, 1690

Sire, - I started from Dublin on the 18th of the present month and arrived here yesterday. I found operations but little advanced. Contrary to expectation, the garrison, composed of from ten to twelve thousand men, is defending itself vigorously. And this siege, which was considered to be of but little consequence, and supposed to present no difficulty, has turned out to be a very serious undertaking, and one which it will not be easy to bring to a favourable termination. The beginning it is true, was successful: but the result still appears uncertain. As



Singland mill, close to the site of the Williamite camp. Drawing by C.M. Doran.

the king's army approached the town, it drove the enemy from all the posts which they occupied about the fortress. This success threw them into such consternation that, had the artillery been here, it is presumable they would have capitulated. Sarsfield's expedition, in which he attacked the detachment that escorted the guns and rendered the latter useless, as I wrote from Dublin, has not only inspired the enemy with fresh courage, but has also delayed the opening of the trenches for more than a week, it having been necessary to send for artillery from Waterford. During this time the besieged have fortified themselves with new outworks and with good retrenchments within the town.

The Shannon flows through the town and divides it into two parts. The king can only attack that part of it which is on this side of the river, not only because it is difficult to cross the water, but also because the enemy have a very large body of troops encamped on the other side; and because, moreover, if he should divide his forces it would not be possible to beat the enemy in the open field and to carry on the siege at the same time. The

trenches were opened on the 17th of this month. The Duke of Württemberg was the first to do duty in them. Next day his highness led the Danish troops against a redoubt, which they carried, sword in hand, with a bravery which excited the admiration of the while army. On the 20th, M. de Belcastel, colonel of a regiment of French refugees, at the head of his own men and of a detachment of your majesty's troops, led the assault of another redoubt. It was attacked with great intrepidity, but defended with equal vigour. It was at last carried, but with the loss of forty officers, of whom, however, none are Danish. Last night the trenches were brought to within a hundred paces of the counterscarp, which the king will give orders to attack in a few days. The enemy seem inclined to defend this position vigorously. They have strengthened it with a part of their artillery. The other fortifications are but of little importance. They consist only of an old rampart flanked by towers in the ancient style. The greatest strength of the town is in its garrison, which, as I have already stated, is very numerous. Moreover, the other side of the town being free

and open for the introduction of supplies, it is likely that the siege will be a protracted one. M. Boisseleau, a French officer, is in command of the fortress, but Tyrconnell and the Duke of Berwick, with the cavalry, are on the other side of the river, between Galway and the town which we are besieging.

Two days ago the besieged made a vigorous sortie, but were repulsed with no less vigour and with great loss. Yesterday the king ordered bombs and carcasses to be thrown into the town. These set fire to it in several places. The flames were, however, extinguished during the night, and do not appear to have caused much damage. Today the artillery has been employed, and not without success, in making a breach in the rampart. There is the greater anxiety to bring matters to a speedy close, as, if the rains which are usual in this country at the season in which we now are, should surprise us, it would be impossible to hold out on the marshy ground on which we are encamped.

The king is so busy with the siege that, since my arrival, I have not been able to find an opportunity of congratulating him on the crossing of the Boyne, in accordance with the orders contained in your majesty's dispatch of the 22nd of July. I shall, however, do so as soon as possible, and, at the same time, I shall not fail to mention the matter of the toll of the Elbe, about which negotiations have been opened at the imperial court. The king is almost all day long in the trenches, and exposes his person on every occasion as much as a private exposes and is obliged to expose his. A few days ago a squadron of the enemy might easily have carried him off. He had gone, attended by only seven or eight persons, to reconnoitre the fortifications on the banks of the river, to the right of the camp. He was perceived by the enemy's cavalry. A squadron was detached and sent to cross the river at a ford which is near, and to cut off the king. This might easily have been done without attracting the attention of those who were about the king. Fortunately, however, the late Duke of Schomberg's equerry, who was on a slight eminence between the camp and the spot where the king was standing, saw the enemy's manoeuvre, and came at full speed to warn the king. He at first laughed at the equerry's advice, so that the latter, who knew that there was but little time to lose, began to swear and to address him in language so coarse that the respect which I owe your majesty does not allow me to repeat it. Thereupon the king, who had left his saddle, remounted his horse, and barely had time to escape in safety. The enemy, who had already passed a part of the river, fired their carbines at him, and Count Schomberg, who was at his majesty's side, had his horse shot under him.

I must not conclude this report without informing your majesty that the Danish troops are giving greater

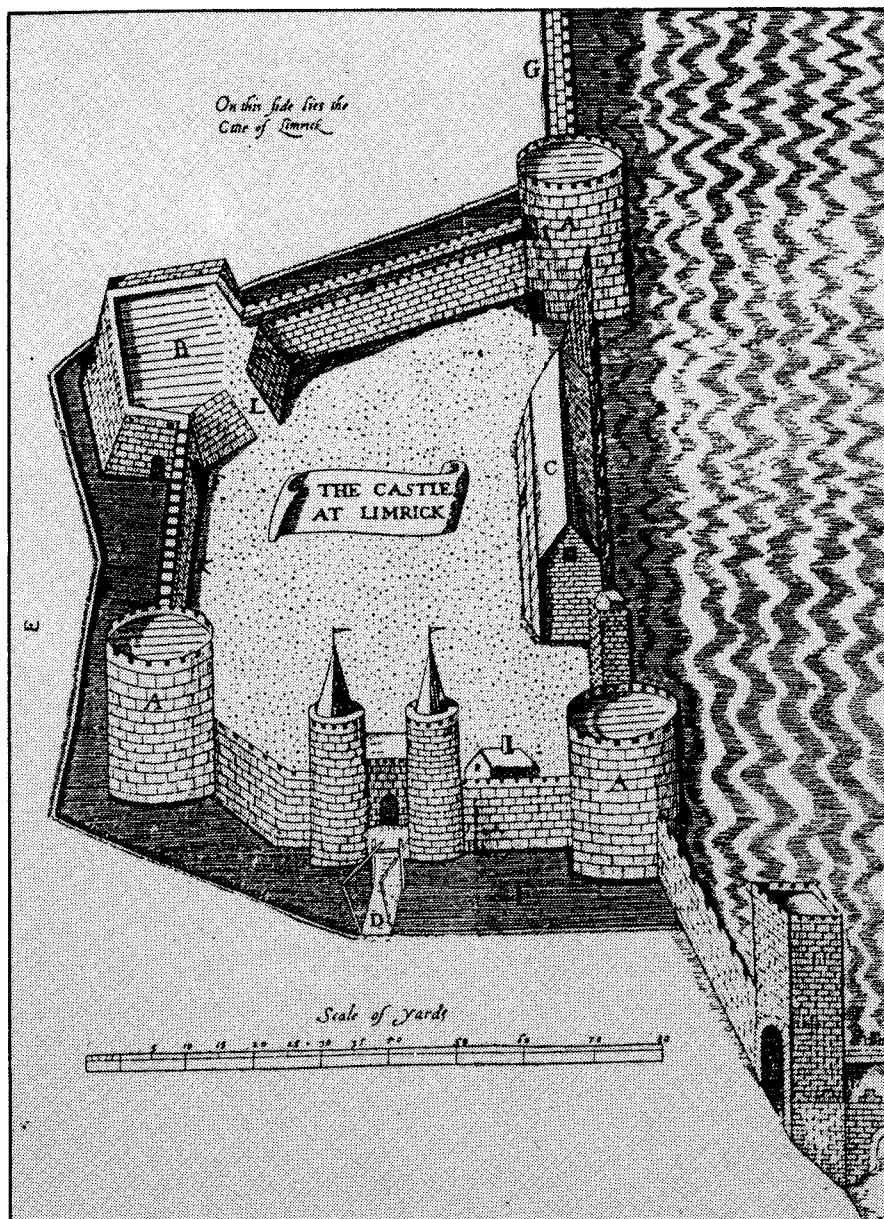
satisfaction every day. All are loud in their praises of them. The Duke of Würtemberg has so far won the king's good graces that his majesty does nothing without listening to his advice. Mr. Walter, captain in the Guards, died yesterday of a shot wound which he had received on the second day of the siege. He is regretted both by the troops and by the commanding officers. Sire, &c.

To King Christian V, Camp before Limerick, August 29th, 1690:

Sire, - My report of the 24th inst. informed your majesty of the state in which the siege of Limerick then was and of the vigorous resistance made by the inhabitants. From the present dispatch your majesty will learn the continuation of this resistance on their part, as well as other events which have happened in their favour since then. The day before yesterday, 27th of this month, the king gave orders to attack the counterscarp. The hour fixed upon was four in the afternoon. A hundred Protestant officers of the refugee troops and five hundred grenadiers had been commanded to open the attack. They were supported by the troops that day on duty in the trenches under the orders of General Douglas. The Duke of Würtemberg, who was to relieve the trenches that evening with a body of troops, was to second the former. The king having taken his station on a small eminence, whence he had a full view of the attack, ordered three guns to be fired as a signal. The attack was made in the preconcerted order, and at first with a successful result. After standing a heavy and continuous fire, the assailants carried the counterscarp. They kept it for an hour and endeavoured to take up a position in it. But finding the covered way too narrow and too near the rampart, they did not succeed in doing so. From the top of this rampart the enemy, seconded by the artillery which flanked the covered way, flung huge stones upon the assailants and occasioned considerable loss. Meantime, a part of the troops which had been led to the attack, inspired with great zeal and ardour at seeing that the enemy, who had been driven from the counterscarp, were retreating into the town through the breach which our guns had made in the rampart, followed them, contrary to orders, and scaled the breach. Your majesty's Green regiment and some English grenadiers remained in it more than half an hour. A few of the latter even penetrated as far as the public square of the town. There they all met their death, for the order to storm the town not having been given, and no dispositions to that effect having been made, it was impossible to second these brave troops. The enemy, seeing some confusion on our side, regained courage and recovered from the surprise caused by the attack which they had just sustained. Having driven our men from the breach, they again took possession of it, and, immediately after, of the covered

way, which they stormed with stones and shot. Whilst the Green regiment was still within the breach, the Duke of Würtemberg, who was at the extremity of the trenches, sent word to the king, through the Marquis de la Barre, one of the aides-de-camp, that he would undertake to put him that day in possession of the town if his majesty would only give him a few regiments to support those already in the breach. I was by the side of the king when the Marquis de la Barre delivered his message. He continued to observe the enemy's manoeuvre and made no reply. A moment later M. de la Forest came to the king on the part of the duke to reiterate what the marquis had already proposed. His majesty replied that it was now too late, that the opportunity was passed. He at the same time ordered the troops to retire behind the trenches and into the camp. Several English regiments were still standing unsheltered on the glacis, as though they wished to brave the fire of the enemy. This fire was terrible, and lasted from four o'clock, at which time the action commenced, till half-past six, when the assailants retired. Our losses amount to fifteen or sixteen hundred men, killed and wounded. Colonel Calney and M. de Suzanet, captain of the grenadier company of your majesty's regiment of Guards, are amongst the former. The Green regiment has lost one hundred and nineteen men. It is computed that all the Danish regiments together have four hundred and thirty-two killed and wounded.

The opinion is generally expressed throughout the army that, if the Duke of Würtemberg had that day been on duty, and had consequently led the attack, the town would have been taken. Everybody is favourably inclined towards the prince. There can be no doubt that if the town be attacked a second time the king will choose for the purpose a day when the duke has the trenches. The artillery is still working at the breach and preparing the way for an attack on the body of the fortress. The counterscarp is no longer thought of, it being impossible to take up a position in it and, consequently, to maintain possession of it. There are some who think that the king will be obliged to raise the siege in spite of our making believe that we intend to continue it. They allege three reasons. The first is, that for the last three days the weather has been very bad, which is not only tiring for the troops, but might even prevent them from leaving the marshy ground on which they are encamped. The second is, that some apprehension is felt lest the French troops which are at Galway should return to reinforce the Irish, and thus enable them to attack us. This would not be difficult, considering the losses which the army has sustained, and would still have to sustain, if we continued the siege. But the third and most important reason is that we are running short of shot and, it is said, of powder as well. It is, therefore, more likely than not that the siege will be



King John's Castle and the river Shannon, from 'Pacata Hibernia', 1633.

raised. The Duke of Würtemberg's advice would be to make another attack without loss of time. He is confident it would be successful, but neither the other generals nor the king himself are of this opinion.

Some deserters who have escaped from the town during the siege relate that King James's partisans have published the last amnesty issued by the king, after having omitted the advantageous conditions contained in it and substituted threats, in order to frighten the inhabitants of the town, and that this has had the effect for which the declaration was falsified. We are informed that the citizens, who are for the most part Roman Catholics, are more than ever exasperated against the English. The very women, prone as they are to violent passions, have since then become furious. It was noticed that during the attack on the counterscarp they caused as much, indeed, more damage than the

garrison, by throwing huge stones on the assailants, of whom a great number thus perished. Two days ago one of the deserters, an officer, more courageous than prudent, undertook to return into the town and to distribute amongst the inhabitants the genuine declaration of the king. But as there are a multitude of monks and priests, who usually possess great influence over the people, it is not expected that it will be possible to disabuse them of the false notions which have been suggested to them.

Since the failure of the attack made by the army, intelligence has been received that M. d'Anfreville has arrived at Galway with ships for the embarkation and the transport to France of his most Christian majesty's troops. Consequently, if the town of Limerick had been taken, as might easily have happened had fitting dispositions been made, the war in Ireland would have been brought to a close. The reverse being the case, it is

probable that Count Lauzun will not be in a hurry to embark nor M. d'Anfreville to set sail, and that the war in this country may last another campaign.

After having informed your majesty of the state of the siege of Limerick, I must add that I had a long audience with the King of England this morning. In your majesty's name I congratulated him, in the best and most suitable terms I could find, on the crossing of the Boyne. I told him with what interest and satisfaction your majesty had heard of the advantages gained by the English army over that of King James, and of your majesty's hopes and wishes for the conquest of the whole of Ireland and for the prosperity of the allies. The king answered that he was thankful to your majesty for this mark of friendship. He said that the Danish troops had greatly contributed to the success of his arms, that he admired their bravery and their intrepidity, that he was particularly satisfied with the good and prudent conduct of the Duke of Würtemberg, and that he would not fail to write and inform your majesty of it at the earliest opportunity.

At this very moment, ten o'clock in the evening, the Duke of Würtemberg sends me word that it has been resolved to raise the siege, and that the king will start tomorrow at daybreak for Waterford, whence he is to set sail for England. The taking of Limerick is put off till next spring, and M. Ginkel is to command the army till further orders. Letters received from England bring intelligence that Lord Marlborough has embarked with a body of troops, intending to make a descent near Cork or Kinsale, and it is reported here that siege will be laid to these towns in the autumn. Sire, &c.

To M. de Jessen, Secretary of State, Camp before Limerick, August 29th, 1690:

Sir, - I have nothing to add to the report which I send his majesty. Nevertheless, I have the honour to address this letter to you to inform you that the ill success of the siege, joined to the rain, which has been falling for the last three days, and which inundates the camp, obliges the King of England to abandon the undertaking. We start at daybreak for Waterford, where we are to take ship. The king's yachts, indeed, are not there, having orders to await him at Dublin. There are, however, several men-of-war, on one of which the king can embark. The tents are already being furled in this part of the camp, and in spite of the storm which is now raging, I may be obliged to set out before the king in order to arrive at the same time as he in Waterford. God grant that our passage may be better than the success we have met with in this cursed siege, during which we have all been on the point of perishing from the fetid exhalations of the bogs and of the excrements of the army. I am, sir, &c.