

Remonstrance of the Irish Chiefs to Pope John XXII

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Lest the sharp-toothed and viperous calumny of the English and their untrue representations should to any degree excite your mind against us and the defenders of our right, which God forbid, and so that there may be no ground for what is not well known and is falsely presented to kindle your displeasure, for our defence we pour into yours ears with mighty out-cry by means of this letter an entirely true account of our origin and our form of government, if government it can be called, and also of the cruel wrongs that have been wrought inhumanly on us and our forefathers by some kings of England, their evil ministers and English barons born in Ireland, wrongs that are continued still; and this we do in order that you may be able to approach the subject and see in which party's loud assertion the truth bears company. And thus being carefully and sufficiently informed so far as the nature of the case demands, your judgment, like a naked blade, may smite or correct the fault of the party that is in the wrong.

Know then, most Holy Father, that since the time when our early ancestors, the three sons of Milesius or Micelius of Spain, by God's will came into Ireland (then destitute of all inhabitants) with a fleet of thirty ships from Cantabria, a city of Spain standing on the bank of the river Ebro or Hiberus (from which we take the name we bear), 3,500 years and more have passed, and of those descended from these men 136 kings without admixture of alien blood assumed the monarchical rule over all Ireland down to king Legarius, from whom I, Donald, have derived my descent in a straight line. It was in days that our chief apostle and patron S. Patrick, sent us at the inspiration of the Holy Ghost by your predecessor Celestine in the year 432 taught the truths of the Catholic faith with the fullest success to our fathers.

And after the faith had been preached and received, 61 kings of the same blood, without intervention of alien blood, kings admirably in the faith of Christ and filled with works of charity, kings that in temporal things acknowledged no superior, ruled here uninterruptedly in humble obedience to the Church of Rome until the year 1170.

And it was they, not the English nor others of any nation who eminently endowed the Irish Church with lands, ample liberties and many possessions, although at the present time she is, for the most part, sadly despoiled of those lands and liberties by the English.

And although for so long a time those kings with their own power had stoutly defended against tyrants and kings of divers countries the inheritance that God had given them and had always kept their birthright of freedom unimpaired, yet at last, in the year of the Lord 1155, at the false and wicked representation of King Henry of England, under whom and perhaps by whom St. Thomas of Canterbury, as you know, in that very year suffered death for justice and defence of the church, Pope Adrian, your predecessor, an Englishman not so much by birth as by feeling and character, did in fact, but unfairly, confer upon that

same Henry (whom for his said offence he should rather have deprived of his own kingdom) this lordship of ours by a certain form of words, the course of justice entirely disregarded and the moral vision of that great pontiff blinded, alas! by his English proclivities. And thus, without fault of ours and without reasonable cause, he stripped us of our royal honour and gave us over to be rent by teeth more cruel than any beast's; and those of us that escaped half-alive and woefully from the deadly teeth of crafty foxes and greedy wolves were thrown by violence into a gulf of doleful slavery.

For, from the time when in consequence of that grant the English iniquitously but with some show of religion entered within the limits of our kingdom, they have striven with all their might and with every treacherous artifice in their power, to wipe our nation out entirely and utterly to extirpate it. By base and deceitful craftiness they have prevailed against us so far that, with no authority from a superior, they have driven us by force from the spacious places where we dwelt and from the inheritance of our fathers; they have compelled us to seek mountains, woods, bogs, barren tracts and even caverns in the rocks to save our lives, and for a long time back to make our dwellings there like beasts. Yet even in such places as these they harass us continually and endeavour all they can to expel us from them and seek unduly to usurp to themselves every place we occupy, mendaciously asserting in their blind madness that there is to be no free abode for us in Ireland but that all the land is entirely theirs by right.

Whence, by reason of all this and much more of the same kind, relentless hatred and incessant wars have arisen between us and them, from which have resulted mutual slaughter, continual plundering, endless rapine, detestable and too frequent deceits and perfidies. But alas! all correction and due reform fail us, for want of a head. And so for many years the native Irish clergy and people have stood in too serious and terrible danger not alone as regards what is perishable and bodily, but further still, through this want, the greatest danger, that of souls, is hanging over them, and that beyond an ordinary degree. For we hold it as an established truth that more than 50,000 human beings of each nation, in addition to those cut off by famine, distress and prison, have fallen by the sword in consequence of that false representation and the grant resulting from it, since the time when it was made. Let these few general particulars of the origin of our ancestors and the wretched position in which a Roman Pontiff placed us suffice on this occasion.

Know, most holy Father, that King Henry of England, who was authorized in the manner already stated to enter Ireland, and also the four kings his successors have clearly gone beyond the limits of the grant made them by the Pope's bull in certain definite articles, as appears plainly from the very text of the bull.

For the said Henry, as is embodied in the bull, undertook to extend the bounds of the Irish Church, to preserve its rights uninjured and entire, to bring the people under the rule of law and to train them in a good way of life, to implant virtue and to root out the weeds of vice and to make a yearly payment of one penny from every house to blessed Peter the apostle.

Henry himself, as well as his aforesaid successors and their wicked and crafty English ministers in no respect indeed keeping this promise, but departing altogether from the terms of the grant, have of set purpose and design accomplished in fact the opposite of all the foregoing engagements. For by them the bounds of the Church have been so far restricted, curtailed, and cut down that some cathedral churches have been forcibly despoiled of a half of their lands and possessions and even more, while nearly every liberty of the Church has been by these same persons cast adrift. For bishops and dignitaries are summoned, arrested, taken and imprisoned without respect by the king of England's ministers in Ireland; and though they suffer repeated and serious wrongs of this kind they are so overpowered with slavish fear that they in no wise dare to intimate them to your Holiness, and since they themselves are shamefully mute, we also will keep silent in this matter.

Likewise, the Irish people, whom in set terms they had promised to shape to good morals and to bring under laws, they so shape that its holy and dove-like simplicity has been surprisingly altered into a serpentine craftiness through daily life with them and through their bad example; and they also deprive it of the written laws by which, for the most part, it was formerly governed, and of all other . law, save what could not be uprooted, enacting for the extermination of our race most pernicious laws, beyond measure wicked and unjust, some of which are here inserted as instances.

In the King of England's court in Ireland these laws are rigidly observed, viz. that any person that is not an Irishman may bring any Irishman into court on any cause of action without restriction; but every Irishman, cleric or lay, excepting only prelates, is refused all recourse to law by the very fact of *being Irish*.

Also, as usually happens for the most part when by perfidy and guile some Englishman kills an Irishman, however noble and inoffensive, whether cleric or lay, regular or secular, even if an Irish, prelate should be killed, no punishment or correction is inflicted by the said court on such a nefarious murderer; nay more, the better the murdered man was and the greater the place he held among his people, the more his murderer is honoured and rewarded by the English, not merely by the populace but even by English religious and bishops, and most of all by those to whom it falls through their positions to inflict just punishment and due correction on such evil-doers.

Also, every Irishwoman, whether noble or otherwise, who marries any Englishman, is entirely deprived, after her husband's death, of the third part of his lands and possessions, her rightful dowry, precisely because she is Irish.

Likewise, wherever the English can oppress an Irishman by main force they in no way suffer the Irish to dispose of their property (by their last wishes or to make a last will and testament; nay, they appropriate to themselves all the goods of those persons, and deprive the Church of its right and of their own authority make serfs by violence of the blood that

has been free from all antiquity.

Likewise, by the common council of this king of England and also by the action of certain English bishops, of whom the chief is a man of small wit and no learning, the archbishop of Armagh, an unjust statute has been lately made in the city of Kilkenny in this form of deformity:

It is agreed that it be enjoined on all religious that abide in the land of peace among the English that they do not receive into their order or religion any except those that are English by nation; and if they do otherwise the Lord King will take them as contemnners of his command, and their founders and patrons will take them as disobedient and in opposition to this ordinance made by the common counsel of the whole land of Ireland among the English."

And even before this statute was made, and afterwards, the friars, preachers, minorites, monks, canons and other English religious have been observing it strictly enough, in the highest degree being acceptors of persons; yet the monasteries of monks and canons where at the present day the Irish are refused were, generally speaking, founded by them.

Likewise, where they were bound to implant virtues and root up the weeds of vice, they have cut out by the root the virtues already planted and of themselves have brought in vices.

Also of the same and the banquets of the English. For the English inhabiting our land, who call themselves of the middle nation, are so different in character from the English of England and from other nations that with the greatest propriety they may be called a nation not of middle medium, but of utmost, perfidy. For, from of old they have had this wicked unnatural custom, which even yet has not ceased among them but every day becomes stronger and more established, viz. when they invite noblemen of our nation to a banquet, during the very feast or in the time of sleep they mercilessly shed the blood of their unsuspecting guests, and in this way bring their horrible banquet to an end. When this has been thus done they have cut off the heads of the slain and sold them for money to their enemies, as did the baron Peter Brunecheame (Birmingham), a recognized and regular betrayer, in the case of his gossip Maurice de S. and his brother Caluache, men of high birth and great name among us. Inviting them to a banquet on Trinity Sunday, on that same day when the repast was finished, as soon as they had risen from the table he cruelly murdered them with twentyfour of their following and sold their heads dear to their enemies. And when he was afterwards accused to the king of England, the present king's father, of this crime, the king inflicted no punishment on so nefarious a traitor.

Likewise Sir Thomas de Clare, brother of the Earl of Gloucester, summoning to his house Brian Ruadh, prince of Thomond, his gossip, though as a token of closer confederacy and friendship he had communicated of the same host divided into two parts, at last by

counsel of the aforesaid unspeakable nation he suddenly tore him from the table and the feast, had him dragged at horses' tails, and having cut off his head had the headless corpse hung by the feet from a beam.

Likewise, Geoffrey de Pencoyt, of the same nation, after a feast which he had made for them in his house, on that same night, as they were sleeping in their beds, killed Maurice, king of Leinster, and Arthur, his father, men of very high nobility and authority.

Likewise, John fitzThomas, Earl of Kildare, three days after the killing, had the head of an Irish nobleman, his gossip (accidentally slain not by him but by others), cut off in order to basely sell it. And likewise, the same Earl John, after the execrable death of the father as above narrated, thrust into a filthy prison John, son of the aforesaid most distinguished Caluache, a handsome youth who, from the time when he had been lifted from the baptismal font by the earl himself, had been reared continuously in his house; and after a few days he had the guiltless youth not guiltlessly put to death in the prison.

Let these few cases, notorious to everyone, out of the countless misdeeds of that nation suffice as instances, on this occasion.

And though acts of this kind appear horrible and detestable to all Christians, yet to those of that oft-mentioned nation, as by too hard a daily experience we feel, they seem honourable and praiseworthy, since those that do them reap not at all the punishment of which they are deserving, but by a too flagrant antithesis the reward of praise which they do not merit is heaped upon them. For not only their laymen and secular clergy but some also of their regular clergy dogmatically assert the heresy that it is no more sin to kill an Irishman than a dog or any other brute. And in maintaining this heretical position some monks of theirs affirm boldly that if it should happen to them, as it does often happen, to kill an Irishman, they would not on that account refrain from saying mass, not even for a day.

And as, beyond all doubt, the monks of the Cistercian order of Granard, in Ardagh diocese, so too the monks of Inch, of the same order, in Down diocese, shamelessly fulfil in deed what they proclaim in word. For, bearing arms publicly, they attack the Irish and slay them, and nevertheless they celebrate their masses.

And in like manner friar Simon of the Order of Friars Minors, brother of the bishop of Connor, is the chief formulator of this heresy; and in the year just passed, unable from the fulness of his malignant heart to keep silent he shamelessly burst out in words into a declaration of this kind in the court of Lord Edward de Broyse *Bruce*, Earl of Carrick and in the presence of the said lord, as he himself testifies, viz. that it is no sin to kill a man of Irish birth and if he were to commit it himself he would none the less for that celebrate mass.

And falling out of this heresy into another error, all of them indifferently, secular and regular, assert with obstinacy that it is lawful for them to take away from us by force of arms whatever they can of our lands and possessions of every kind, making no conscientious scruple about it even when they are at the point of death. And all the land they hold in Ireland they hold by usurpation in this way.

And of whatever condition or station he may be that should withstand this error or preach in opposition to them, for that alone he is proclaimed an enemy to the king and kingdom of England, as guilty of death and outlawed by the King's council. For, lusting eagerly for our lands, they it is that, to the no small loss of the kings and kingdom of England, by sowing perpetual dissensions between them and us, have craftily and deceitfully kept us apart from them, lest of our own free will we should hold from the King directly the lands that are rightfully our due.

That this is a characteristic policy of theirs is well established, and from it spring frequent acts of bad faith and treachery. For they never cease from sowing similar dissensions not merely between persons of remote consanguinity but even between brothers and near relations. And as in way of life and speech they are more dissimilar from us and in their actions from many other nations than can be described by us in writing or in words, there is no hope whatever of our having peace with them. For such is their arrogance and excessive lust to lord it over us and so great is our due and natural desire to throw off the unbearable yoke of their slavery and to recover our inheritance wickedly seized upon by them, that as there has not been hitherto, there cannot now be or ever henceforward be established, sincere good will between them and us in this life. For we have a natural hostility to each other arising from the mutual, malignant and incessant slaying of fathers, brothers, nephews and other near relatives and friends so that we can have no inclination to reciprocal friendship in our time or in that of our sons.

Likewise it cannot escape you, since it is manifest to everyone, that the Roman curia does not receive a penny from every house in Ireland as was promised.

In this way then, and no other nor otherwise, have the kings of England and their often-mentioned subjects observed the articles of the above-said Bull to the Irish church and nation.

Since then such injustices and abominations of the said nation were clearly and openly intimated to that King's *Edward II* counsel and also to the King himself about two years past in letters of several noblemen of our nation by means of John de Hutome (now, as we have understood, bishop of Ely), in order to have redress, and as we also offered him *i.e. the King* generally that, to his greater advantage and to our peace we would hold our land, due by right to us alone, from him immediately without any opposition, according to the conditions and articles laid down and contained in Adrian's bull (of which we transmit you a copy) or that he should make a friendly arrangement between our said adversaries

and us, himself dividing up reasonably with consent of the parties and to avoid unlimited bloodshed our own land that belonged to us; but since then we have received no answer from him or his council in that matter.

Let no one wonder then that we are striving to save our lives and defending as we can the rights of our law and liberty against cruel tyrants and usurpers, especially since the said King, who calls himself lord of Ireland, and also the said kings his predecessors have wholly failed in this respect to do and exhibit orderly government to us and several of us.

Wherefore, if for this reason we are forced to attack that King and our said enemies that dwell in Ireland, we do nothing unlawful but rather our action is meritorious and we neither can nor should be held guilty of perjury or disloyalty on this account, since neither we nor our fathers have ever done homage or taken any other oath of fealty to him or his fathers. And therefore, without any conscientious misgivings, so long as life endures we will fight against them in defence of our right and will never cease to attack and assail them until through want of power they shall desist from unjustly injuring us and the justest of Judges shall take evident and condign vengeance upon them for their tyrannous oppression and other most wicked deeds; and this with a firm faith we believe will soon come to pass.

Furthermore, we are ready and prepared to maintain by the testimony of twelve bishops at least and of many other prelates the articles here set forth and to prove the wrongs herein recited, lawfully in due time and place and by way of law which is due to us of right; not like the English, who in the time of their prosperity and power will never stand to any due course of proceedings or process of law; and if prosperity and power were with them now they would have been far from taking shelter under the wings of the Roman Curia, nay rather would they be fiercely afflicting all nations round about with their wonted tyranny, despising the power of God and that of the Roman Curia, which we declare to be one and the same ordinance. Whence, if the said Curia were fully instructed concerning their deeds, they would be ill satisfied by the comfort they would receive from it, for comfort is not merited by their wickedness.

Therefore, on account of the aforesaid wrongs and infinite other wrongs which cannot easily be comprehended by the wit of man and yet again on account of the *injustice* of the kings of England and their wicked ministers and the constant treachery of the English of mixed race, who, by the ordinance of the Roman curia, were bound to rule our nation with justice and moderation and have set themselves wickedly to destroy it; and in order to shake off the hard and intolerable yoke of their slavery and to recover our native liberty, which for a time through them we lost, we are compelled to wage deadly war with them, aforesaid, preferring under stress of necessity to put ourselves like men to the trial of war in defence of our right, rather than to bear like women their atrocious outrages.

And that we may be able to attain our purpose more speedily and fitly in this respect, we call to our help and assistance Edward de Bruyis, illustrious earl of Carrick, brother of

Robert by the grace of God most illustrious king of the Scots, who is sprung from our noblest ancestors.

And as it is free to anyone to renounce his right and transfer it to another, all the right which is publicly known to pertain to us in the said kingdom as its true heirs, we have given and granted to him by our letters patent, and in order that he may do therein judgment and justice and equity which through default of the prince *i.e. the King of England* have utterly failed therein, we have unanimously established and set him up as our king and lord in our kingdom aforesaid, for in our judgment and the common judgment of men he is pious and prudent, humble and chaste, exceedingly temperate, in all things sedate and moderate, and possessing power (God on high be praised) to snatch us mightily from the house of bondage with the help of God and our own justice, and very willing to render to everyone what is due to him of right, and above all is ready to restore entirely to the Church in Ireland the possessions and liberties of which she was damnably despoiled, and he intends to grant greater liberties than ever otherwise she has been wont to have.

May it please you therefore, most Holy Father, for the sake of justice and general peace mercifully to approve what we have done as regards our said lord and king, forbidding the King of England and our aforesaid adversaries henceforward to molest us, or at least be pleased to render us with fitting favour our due complement of justice in respect of them.

For know, our revered Father, that besides the kings of lesser Scotia who all drew the source of their blood from our greater Scotia, retaining to some extent our language and habits, a hundred and ninety seven kings of our blood have reigned over the whole island of Ireland.