

TNA: PRO SP 63/76/9*Copy of Viscount Gormanston to Grey, 4 September 1580*

Like the other letters copied and forwarded to Walsingham in this crucible month of late 1580, this describes Turlough Luineach's advance towards the Blackwater, the boundary of his country. He had issued a set of demands and a summons to his presence to the neighbouring petty lords of Ulster, and in particular to Hugh O'Neill, the Baron of Dunganon, an increasingly anxious succession of letters from whom is preserved in this sequence: 'Oneile is come vnto the black water & myndeth to send for me to come vnto him' (SP 63/76/6, 3 September 1580), he wrote; and, on 4 September, 'he Lay yesternight on this side the black water, & euery howre send for mee to come vnto him' (SP 63/76/7). As Hugh O'Neill took pains to remind Grey in one of his letters of late August (SP 63/75/84, *supra*), he was descended directly from the first Earl of Tyrone, Conn O'Neill – one of the celebrity successes of the early Tudor 'surrender and regrant' policy – and could therefore expect the English government's support against the upstart tanist to the O'Neill headship, Turlough Luineach. In Ulster politics, the name was everything: as Gormanston notes here, the O'Neill tanist repined that 'he is called but Terelaghe lenaghe', and sought to be recognised as O'Neill so that he might assert the traditional privileges of his headship – the submission of his 'urraghs' or petty lords, as well as his 'cuttings' or financial rights over the people of his country. It seems that, to this end, Turlough Luineach planned to exploit the political instability caused the New English administration by the Munster rebellion and conspiracies in the Pale; by threatening to break his borders, he probably hoped to compel English support for his election as O'Neill *taoiseach*. This strategy of sword and buckler diplomacy – common to Irish military politics, on both sides, in this age – was one Spenser had learned thoroughly by the time he composed *A view of the present state of Ireland*:

Eudoxus: It is then a verye vnseasonable time to pleade lawe when swordes are in the handes of the vulgare or to thinke to retayne them with feare of punishmentes when they loke after libertye and shake of all gouernement/

Irenius: Then soe it is with Ireland Continvallye/ *Eudoxus*. for the sworde was neuer yeat out of theire hand but when they are wearye with warrs and broughte downe to extreame wretchednes then they Creepe a little perhaps and sue for grace till they haue gotten newe breathe. and recouered theire strength againe So as it is in vaine to speake of plantinge of lawes and plottinge pollicies till they be alltogeather subdued[.] (ll. 361-369)

The text of this copied letter is written in a broad secretary hand (not Spenser's), which appears in other copied letters from this period (e.g. SP 63/75/73); the word 'Copia' in the bottom left margin seems to be in the same hand, though it might be a later addition. The first line of the text ('Viscount Gormanston') is in a mixed hand, probably Spenser's. The endorsement conforms to the appearance of that of other letters in this group: the first and third sections are in Spenser's mixed hand, and the second ('To the Lord Deputie') – probably added later, when the letter was being filed in London – in a cramped secretary hand.

Endorsements

Viscount of
Gormanstone
To the Lord Deputie

4 September./

Text

Viscount Gormanston

My duty done, May it please your Lordship to be aduertised that I am credbly enformed that tirelagh leynaghe is bent to invade the pale And hath for certayne combyned with the rebelles & hat given forth openly speches that he wold stand indefence of religion while Life doth Last him And said further that he is & wilbe oneall who so ever thinketh evill of the same / disdayning as I take it, that he is called but Terelaghe lenaghe, the said Terelagh was in campe asaterday Last nere to aplace mvckno* adioyning to Mac mahownes contrey who comanded the said mac mahowne to mett him vppon monday next with all his force at Caricke bradaghe* with xiiij dayes victualles, he sent to orely* to met{t} him ther as then whose dutyfull behaviour is not alittle to be dubted (wherof we had good triall in shaen onelles rebellion) for his whole force was with the said shaen as then) which if he refuse to do hath sent him diffyance this inteligence is gev{en} by one Mac Lawe of agniemollyne* bilonging to the said Mac Mahown{e} and one whom he maketh (as I am enformed) no smale account* of, myn auctour reportes the said tyrelaghe to be of force at this present in camp with him fyve or six thowsand at the lest wherfore if it stode with your good Lordships pleasuer I take it not amys that force were sent to thies borders and to the countey of loweth with victuall for certayne dayes for* preventing the emenente daunger It is greatly to be doubted that the rebelles I meane the said Tirelagh & the rest intend to invade vppon both the sides of the pale at one instant whose traytours intencions and most wicked attemptes I beseche god to prevent So with my humble dutie comytting your good Lordship to the allmyghty who send her maiestie victory with many yers Raigne in happie helthfull & good state long to contynew And your Lordships good successe I humbly take leave nobber the fourth of Septembre 1580

Your Lordships to comand

Christopher Gormanyston

Copia

To the right honorable my
very good Lord the Lord deputie

Textual Notes

* **mvckno]** The copyist has here written the 'v' over what may have begun as a 'u' – the abortive series of minims is not surprising, given that the copyist was probably unfamiliar with the place name.

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* **bradaghe]** The second 'a' of this word has been written over an 'r'; again, the copyist seems to have been unfamiliar with the name.

†

* **to orely]** These two words are very closely touching, but appear to have been intended as two separate words.

†

* **aginemollyne]** Our reading here is as tentative as, no doubt, the copyist's also was.

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* **accountpt]** The secretary has compressed this word (like many others on the right margin) to make it fit on the page: the terminal 't' here is written above the penultimate 'p'.

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* *after dayes for]* 'the' deleted.

Annotations

Viscount of Gormanstone] Christopher Preston, Viscount Gormanston; see biographies.

tirelagh leynaghe] Turlough Luineach O'Neill; see biographies.

bent ... pale] Cf. SP 62/75/84 (*supra*): 'Tirlagh Lennagh is repayering to these bordres with a great army of men who pretendeth to invade the pale'.

he wold ... of religion] Although Turlough Luineach was obviously of a different religion from the New English governors, defence of the Catholic faith seems rarely to have been one of his explicit complaints at this time. Cf. SP 63/75/77, where he demands to have all his urraghs, the keeping of the Blackwater, and 100 men in pay at English charge.

he is ... Terelaghe lenaghe] The head of the O'Neill family was given the title of (the) O'Neill. As tanist to Shane O'Neill, this is the position that Turlough Luineach claimed, partly in resistance to English support for Hugh O'Neill.

Mac mahownes contrey ... bradaghe] McMahan's strength was in the county of Monaghan. The young McMahan had succeeded to his title on his father's death in 1579 (*CSPI 1574-85*, p. 159); McMahan was one of the urraghs that Turlough Luineach strove to retain rights over (see SP 63/76/1 above). Hugh Conallagh O'Reilly (see below) also reported to Grey and the Council that Turlough Luineach was 'with a great host in Campe within few miles of moynecan Mac Mathons towne' (SP 63/76/5).

he sent to orely] Hugh Conallagh O'Reilly, Irish lord of the East Brenny (or Breifne). O'Reilly had permitted his country to be 'shired', transforming it into Co. Cavan, in the summer of 1579, and Sir Nicholas Malby called him in September 1581 the best (Irish) subject in the land (SP 63/85/51). A letter of O'Reilly's to Grey and Council (SP 63/76/5), dated 3 September, records Turlough Luineach's instruction that O'Reilly go over to him; it sends to Grey 'a lettre that Terlagh Lennagh Onele sent me desyring me [...] & the best in my Country to goe where he is otherwise yf I doe not

goe to him he will come to my Country'.

shaen onelles rebellion] Shane O'Neill, whom Turlough Luineach succeeded as O'Neill; see biographies. During his rebellion in the 1560s, until his death in 1567, Turlough Luineach gave brief support to the English, but was reconciled with Shane.

myn auctour] I.e. Gormanston's informer (by whom he has been 'credibly informed').

fyve or six thowsand] Cf. 'His force is iiiij^m more neare five' (TNA SP 63/76/1 *supra*).

loweth] Louth.

emenente] Imminent (though perhaps eminent, i.e. great).

doubted] Feared.

nobber] A town in County Meath, approximately 70km north-west of Dublin.