

Archbishop Rinuccini, Papal Nuncio

By May Sparks

THE Supreme Council of the Kilkenny Confederation petitioned His Holiness Pope Innocent X for help in their struggle, and he decided to send a Nuncio to Ireland.

He selected as Nuncio a man of great piety and culture, John Baptist Rinuccini, Prince Archbishop of Fermo. This distinguished Prelate was born in Rome on September 15, 1592. He came of a noble patrician family of Florence.

His Excellency left Rome early in the year 1645 and on reaching France he bought there the "San Pietro," a frigate of 28 guns. His suite consisted of 26 Italians and a number of Irish officers.

His Excellency brought with him as a gift from His Holiness to the Confederates, 2,000 muskets, 2,000 cartridge boxes, 4,000 swords, 2,000 pike heads, 4,000 brace of pistols, 20,000 lbs. of powder with match in proportion.

The money sent by His Holiness to the Confederates has been estimated at £20,000 in Spanish gold—this was the "wine from the Royal Pope" that Clarence Mangan sings of in "My Dark Rosaleen."

The frigate set sail on the 16th October, 1645. On the fourth day out the frigate was pursued for several hours by English ships which, however, were soon left behind. At daybreak of the fifth day the Captain of the "San Pietro" sighted a large warship and a frigate in full pursuit. The chase continued for nine hours and the "San Pietro" was driven 125 miles out of its course. The enemy ship caught fire and so the "San Pietro" was enabled to get away safely.

The Nuncio was watched for in the seas around Ireland, but he escaped the enemy.

The "San Pietro" dropped anchor in the bay of Kenmare, Co. Kerry, on the night of 21st October, 1645.

The next morning the Nuncio came on shore and his first halting place on Irish soil was a shepherd's hut, where His Excellency celebrated the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass at which attended all the people of the countryside who had heard of his arrival.

After a short rest His Excellency set out for Ardtully, where he was the guest of Donough Mac Carthy for two days. He then went to Macroom. The son of Viscount Muskerry came out three miles with a troop of fifty horsemen to meet him. He was welcomed to the town by the clergy and people. The Bishop of Ardfert and Aghadoe, the Most Rev. Dr. Richard O'Connell, presented the Nuncio with a horse, upon which he later rode into Kilkenny.

After some days in Macroom the Nuncio went to Dromsecane where he received the delegation from the Supreme Council. At Clonmeen he was entertained by Donough O'Callaghan, and at Kilmallock by the Dominicans. On his way to Limerick the Nuncio was met three miles outside the city by a delegation. The clergy and officials then came to escort His Excellency under a canopy through the city.

The Venerable Bishop of Limerick, Most Rev. Dr. Richard Arthur, then 99 years of age, had himself carried half-way to the city gates and there knelt for the Apostolic Blessing; he then went back to the Cathedral door where he met His Excellency again and made the famous gesture of obedience to the Holy See by presenting his Episcopal Insignia to the Pope's representative. After a few days stay at Limerick the Nuncio resumed his journey towards Kilkenny via Cashel. He received a true Tipperary welcome at Cashel.

His Excellency entered Kilkenny on the 14th November, 1654. He halted at the old Parish Church of St. Patrick's, a short distance outside St. Patrick's City Gate. He then entered the Church, and having put on the Insignia of Office, he mounted a richly caparisoned horse.

At this point fifty students from the Jesuit College

conveyed their greetings to His Excellency in Latin verse. This group headed the procession which had formed at St. Patrick's Gate and was composed of the clergy and one hundred and fifty of the nobility and merchants on horseback, and two divisions of Cuirassers of one hundred men each. The streets were lined with regiments of infantry and several thousands of cheering people. Cannon boomed, church bells pealed.

As the procession wended its way through High Street one of a band of students who had gathered at the famous Market Cross, read an address of welcome to His Excellency. The procession went to St. Canice's Cathedral where the Venerable Bishop of Ossory, Most Rev. Dr. Rothe, welcomed the distinguished Italian. His Excellency ascended the High Altar, gave the Pontifical Blessing to all and then intoned the *Te Deum*.

Meanwhile the "San Pietro" set sail and dropped anchor under the Fort of Duncannon in Co. Wexford.

On the Nuncio's arrival in Kilkenny he at once set to work to aid the Confederate cause, and with very good results.

The glad tidings of the great victory of Owen Roe O'Neill at Benburb on the 5th June, 1646, was received by the people with wild delight.

It was a glorious epoch. New hope had come to the nation. All the people had banded together for Ireland's sake. In the Parliament House assembled the leaders of Ireland. A Supreme Council was elected and there it was ordered that money should be minted, taxes levied, arms and ammunition made and armies raised. A factory for the making of arms and gun-powder was in the city.

In front of the Parliament House paraded daily with music and banners flying the proudly caparisoned body guard of the rulers of the nation, and there for three years was regulated the Government of Ireland by Irishmen. When success was smiling on the cause an ignominious Treaty was signed by the Viceroy, Lord Ormond (on behalf of the King) and the Confederates.

The Nuncio and Owen Roe O'Neill were altogether

opposed to the Treaty, and as a result of their opposition both were obliged to go "on the run."

Well has the poet Davis sung:

*Sagest in the Council was he, kindest in the hall;
Sure we never won a battle—'twas Owen won them all.*

Rev. Michael J. Hynes, M.A., Ph.D., Cleveland, in "The Mission of Rinuccini," says: "The devotion of Owen Roe O'Neill to the Nuncio is as good a commentary as any that might be needed to show the place that Rinuccini should have in Irish history."

About one hundred years ago, a religious banner with a representation of Our Lady, which was believed to have been carried in the Confederate processions, was found concealed in a wall in the Black Abbey, Kilkenny. This banner was sent by the then Dominican Community of the Black Abbey to the Dominican House of Studies at Tallaght, Co. Dublin, where it now is.

In December, 1646, the Papal Nuncio in a great public ceremony at the Black Abbey ordained several students to the Priesthood. He often celebrated Mass in this church.

When repairs were being carried out at Rothe's Arch in 1849 a Confederate banner was found hidden in the wainscotting. This banner is now in the Headquarters of the Society of Antiquaries, Dublin.

Owen Roe O'Neill stayed for a time as a guest at Rothe House, and the Nuncio called there on several occasions.

During his time in Kilkenny His Excellency presided at many public exercises of devotion. The Blessed Virgin Mary had been chosen by public act as the Patroness of Ireland. Her statue, a magnificent piece of craftsmanship in silver, was carried in procession with great solemnity. This famous statue belonged to St. Mary's Church.

It was principally at St. Mary's Church, next the Tholsel that His Excellency officiated. He celebrated Mass on a few occasions in the Franciscan Church.

On Christmas Day, 1646, the Nuncio celebrated Pontifical High Mass at St. Canice's Cathedral, at which there was an overflow congregation.

Pope Innocent X gave the Nuncio a great welcome home and offered him a position at the Papal Court. This the Nuncio did not accept; he decided to return to his own people at Fermo. He remained in Rome from November, 1649, until June, 1650, when he returned to Fermo and was received with great manifestations of joy by his flock, who loved him so much and to whom he was such a generous friend.

The Nuncio's suffering in Ireland told on his health, and when the news of the death of his dear friend, Owen Roe O'Neill, and of the atrocities of Cromwell reached him, he died of a broken heart on 14th December, 1653.

Rev. Fr. Meehan in his "Confederation of Kilkenny" says:

"We may fearlessly assert that if the Nuncio's policy had been adopted and carried out by the Confederates, who had within themselves all the resources of success, Cromwell could not have triumphed and Ireland must have been spared those ineffable sufferings which fell to her lot during the usurpation and for centuries afterwards."

