

IRELAND

CLANS AND FAMILIES OF IRELAND

THE GAEIL

The last of the major Celtic settlements in Ireland took place about the year 50 B.C. and was a direct result of Roman attempts to dominate the Celtic tribes of Gaul. Among the many peoples uprooted and dispersed by this attempt were a group who appear to have been known to themselves as the "Feni," who came directly from the Continent to Ireland, arriving, according to popular tradition, in south Kerry and the Boyne estuary. The earlier inhabitants of the country, who resisted fiercely the incursions of the new comers, called these people the "Gaothail" or "Gaeil," from the language they spoke, Gaedelg, in English "Gaelic." Although details of the history of the first centuries A.D. remain obscure, it is clear that the influence and power of the "Gaeil" spread steadily over the next three centuries at the expense of the "Laighin" and the "Erainn," expanding northwards from Kerry into Tipperrary and Limerick, and westwards into Roscommon and Galway, until by the fifth century they were dominant throughout most of Ireland and had established the dynasties and tribal groupings which determined the politics and culture of the country until the arrival of the Normans.

As they pushed their way west and north through Ireland, the "Gaeil" also made their presence felt on the western coasts of Britain, where the decline of Roman power left many relatively wealthy areas vulnerable to attack. Sporadic raids carried out during the third century developed into permanent settlements in the fourth and fifth, with the largest and most powerful colonies in southwestern Wales and western Scotland, although Cornwall, Devon, Hampshire and the islands of Man, Orkney and Shetland also show signs of this expansion. The main evidence for it today is the distribution of Ogham stones. These are memorial stones, with the name of the person commemorated inscribed by representing Latin letters with groups of lines set at different angles. Virtually all of the stones found in the British Isles are of Irish origin, and their distribution closely reflects the limits of Gaelic power in Britain.

The most important and enduring distinction within the "Gaeil" was between the southern tribes and those of the north and west. In the south they gave themselves the name "Eoghanacht," or 'people of Eogan,' in honour of their ancestor-deity Eogan (in English 'Owen'), and about the year 400 A.D. founded at Cashel the dynasty which held power through most of the southern part of the country from the fifth to the twelfth centuries. In later historical times, the

powerful Munster families of O'Sullivan, McCarthy and O'Connell can claim descent from the "Eoghanacht."

Similarly, in the midlands, west and north, the tribes of the "Gaeil" were known as Connachta," or 'people of Conn,' in myth the brother of Eogan. Their name endures in the modern province of Connact. By far the most important of the "Connachta" tribes were the "uiNeill," ('O'Neill') claiming descent from Niall Noigiallach ('Niall of the Nine Hostages'), who appears to have lived in the early fifth century, and is given in the genealogical tracts as a son of Eochu Mugmedon ('lord of slaves'), himself several generation descended from Conn. Among Niall's brothers were Ailill, Brion and Fiachra, founders of the important "Connachta" tribes of "uiAilella," "UiBrian," and "UiFiachrach."

The rise of the "UiNeill" took place through the fifth and sixth centuries, with the conquest of a line of kingdoms stretching from Sligo Bay on the west coast, north to Inishowen in Donegal, and eastwards as far as the Irish Sea. Separate dynasties emerged in the northern and eastern kingdoms to be known by the later annalists as the northern and southern "UiNeill," the former with their seat at Aileach in Inishowen, the latter based at Tara in County Meath. From the beginning of the seventh century, the "UiNeill" claimed the high-kingship of all Ireland, alternating between the northern and southern branches. The claim was never accepted by all the other local dynasties, in particular by the "Eoghanacht," dominant in the southern part of the island, but no serious challenge to the power of the "UiNeill" emerged until the tenth century.

Although the "Eoghanacht" and the "UiNeill" were the two predominant tribal groupings, a number of others were locally powerful, particularly in the northeast of the country, where the "Oirialla" controlled territory now included in counties Tyrone, Armagh, Fermanagh and Monaghan, and the "Ulaidh" inhabited what is now counties Down and Antrim. These peoples almost certainly originally possessed lands further to the west, but were displaced by the aggressive expansion to the north and east of the "UiNeill."

GAELIC SOCIETY

Within these large areas many smaller divisions existed, known as "tuatha," of which there were about 150 throughout the country; the names of many of these are reflected today in the names of the baronies which make up the modern counties. Each of these "tuatha" had its own ruler or petty king, who owed allegiance to a more powerful leader, an over-king of three or more "tuatha," who in turn was subordinate to the king of the province, generally of the "Eoghanacht" or the "UiNeill." Such an arrangement was clearly ripe for potential conflict, and continuous warfare between "tuatha," over-kings and provinces was endemic in Ireland until the end of the Middle Ages.

The tribal culture of the “Gaeil,” like that of all Celts, was highly developed and complex, and dominated life throughout the country for fifteen centuries, until its final collapse in the seventeenth century. In essence, it consisted of a highly codified legal system which regulated relationships within and between classes, families, larger kin-groups and “Tuatha.” Three classes existed: the professionals (“aos dana”, made up of poets, historians, druids; the free (“saor aicme”), warriors, owning land and cattle; and the unfree (“daor aicme”), slaves, many of whom were prisoners or the descendants of prisoners taken in war.

The professionals were widely honoured and with the exception of the jurists, travelled freely between the various tribes; it was not until the beginning of the eighteenth century that itinerant poets and musicians finally lost their position and privilege. Amongst the free, rights and responsibilities pivoted on the “fine,” or kin-group. For most purposes, this consisted of men who had a great-grandfather in common, that is, up to and including second cousins. Each member of this group bore responsibility for the actions, debts and contracts of the other members, and loyalty to the group was the primary social obligation. The immediate family, as we would understand it, was secondary to the “fine.” Thus, kingship of the “tuath” or the province passed from one member of the “fine” to another, rather than necessarily to the eldest male heir. The vivid sense of kinship and mutual obligation engendered by such a system are clearly visible throughout Irish history, and even in Irish society today.

CHRISTIANITY, PLACENAMES AND SURNAMES

Of all the outside influence on Gaelic culture up to the time of the Tudor conquest, the most powerful was the introduction of Christianity. It was Laoighire, son of Nial Noigiallach and first “UiNeill” ruler of Tara who reputedly received the Christian missionary Patrick in the year 432; in any case, early missionary activity, largely emanating from Britain, seems to have been concentrated in the northern part of the country, in what was later to be the territory of the “Oirialla,” the “Ulaidh” and the southern “UiNeill.” Because the earlier pagan religion was tolerant and accommodating, like many polytheistic systems reckoning one god more or less to be of little importance, Christianity made rapid headway. By the end of the sixth century it was solidly established throughout the country.

In the long term the introduction of Christianity posed problems for Gaelic society; there was simply no place in the existing scheme of things for monastic communities separated from their kin, following a way of life so different from that which surrounded them. In the end, the solution proved to be that of giving to the most powerful churchmen, bishops and abbots, a status equivalent to that of king of a “tuath,” with a proportionate status to lower members of the church hierarchy. In turn, the church adapted itself to the existing social structure, and many bishoprics and abbotships remained within the same extended kin-group.

As a result, the church in Ireland acquired a large measure of temporal power from an early date.

Monastic ideals very quickly took root as the church grew, with over 800 monasteries founded by the end of the sixth century; abbots soon wielded considerably more power than bishops, as confederations emerged in which a single large monastery might have control of 30 or more smaller establishments. It was this system which provided the closed equivalent in early Ireland to large-scale settlement. Gaelic culture was rural and agricultural, based around the "fine," and gave rise to no towns. The large monasteries, such as Armagh, Clonmacnois and Bangor, provided commercial and administrative networks, and were themselves centers of trade, law and above all, learning.

It was for this learning, and for their piety, that Irish monks very quickly acquired an international reputation. The copying of manuscripts was an important part of the functions of the monasteries, and the sixth and seventh centuries produced such masterpieces of illuminated manuscript as the "Book of Kells" and the "Book of Durrow," vivid evidence of the monks' extraordinary veneration of learning and of the rich fusion of Christianity with Celtic tradition.

The security and prosperity of the monasteries at home was the driving force behind the great expansion of Irish influence in Britain and continental Europe between the sixth and tenth centuries. Exile was the ultimate sacrifice for the monks, and it was the quest for such a sacrifice, not missionary fervor, that led so many of them abroad in these years. Once established, however, their fervor and dedication achieved great missionary success, with the conversion of the Picts, and the creation of enduring monastic foundations throughout areas now part of Italy, Austria, Germany, France, Holland, Belgium and Spain, as well as Britain. Even as their fame as religious pioneers and scholars grew, the Irish monks retained many of the distinctive features of their own institutions, for example in refusing to accept the authority of the Pope in calculating the date of Easter. Irish obstinacy was well known; Pope Honorius I wrote to the Irish in 634 'earnestly exhorting them not to think their small number, placed in the utmost borders of the earth, wiser than all the ancient and modern churches of Christ, throughout the world.'

PLACENAMES

The rapid growth of the church is also the source of many of the commonest placenames in Ireland today. For example, two of the most familiar prefixes: 'Kill-' and 'Donagh-', come from Irish words for 'church,' "cill" and domhnach," the latter meaning literally 'Sunday' and used by extension for the place of worship on that day. Placenames with elements such as these almost invariably originated between the fifth and ninth centuries. Many of the names in everyday use today, in particular those for the smallest geographical unit, the townland, however, are of much greater age, in all probability as old as human habitation

itself. This is truest of those names which are derived from natural features, containing such elements as druim" (Drum-), a height; "cnoc" (Knock-), a hill; "tulach" (Tulla-), a mound; "glean" (Glen-), a glen. The age of some of these can be gauged from the fact that some of the features they describe no longer exist. Thus 'Derry,' in Irish "doire," meaning 'oakwood,' is common and widespread throughout the country, even though the forests described in the names have long since vanished.

Of later date and more fluid, are those names recording human activity: "gort" (Gort-), a field; "baile" (Bally-), place or farm; "rath" (Rath-), a fort; "lios" (Lis-), an enclosure. In some cases history is itself inscribed in the name; "tamhlacht," (Tallagh/Tamlaght), means 'famine grave,' evidence that famine was familiar in the country from the earliest times. Such names as these proliferated as the population increased, changing and adapting to the different uses made of the land. It was not until the seventeenth century that the demands of the English administrative and legal systems began to enforce standardization of these name, a process in which many thousands of the old names were lost.

SURNAMES

Although up to the tenth century surnames in Ireland were not hereditary, the influence of the church, dating from this period, can still be seen in many common modern Irish surnames, in particular those beginning with 'Gil-' or 'Kil-,' an Anglicized version of the Irish "Giolla," meaning follower or devotee. Thus Gilmartin, the Irish "MacGiolla, Mhartain," means 'son of follower of (St.) Martin.' Similarly the church is the origin of all those names starting with 'Mul-', a version of the Irish "Maol," meaning bald and applied to the monks because of their distinctive tonsure. Thus Mulrennan (O'Maolbhreanainn') means 'descendant of a follower of St. Brendan.'

While many of the names appearing in accounts of this time appear similar in form to modern Irish names, incorporating in particular the prefix 'mac' (meaning 'son of'), in fact they were not hereditary, lasting only one generation. Thus Turlough mac Airt, was Turlough, son of Art; his own son we be Conor mac Turlough, Conor son of Turlough.

Nonetheless, Ireland was one of the first European countries in which a system of fixed hereditary surnames developed. The earliest names appear to be those incorporating 'O' or its earlier form of "Ua," meaning 'grandson.' The first recorded fixed surname is O'Clery ("O Cleirigh"), as noted by the Annals, which record the death of Tigherneach UaCleririgh, Lord o Aidhne in Co. Galway in the year 916. It seems likely that this is the oldest surname recorded anywhere in Europe.

By the eleventh century many families had acquired true surnames as we would know them today. All of these surnames incorporate the same two basic

elements, 'O' or 'Mac,' together with the personal name of the ancestor from who descent is indicated. In many cases this ancestor can be quite accurately identified, and the origin of the name dated precisely. Thus at the start of the eleventh century, Brian Boru possessed no surname, being simply 'Brian, High-King of the Irish,' his grandson Teigue called himself "UoBrian" in memory of his illustrious grandfather, and the name became hereditary thereafter. Similarly, the O'Neills derive their surname from Nial Glun Dubh, who died in 919.

Due to linguistic changes, the origins of many of the personal names such as Niall or Brian which form the stem of the surname remain obscure, but two broad categories can be distinguished; descriptive and occupational. In the first category we can guess that the progenitor of the Traceys (O'Treasigh) was a formidable character, "treasach" meaning 'warlike,' while the ancestor of the Duffs must have been dark-featured, since "dubh," the root of the name means black or dark. Among the occupations recorded in names are the churchmen dealt with above, clerks (Clery, "OCleirigh," from "cleireach"), bards (Ward, "Mac an Bhaird," from 'bard'), spokesman (MacCloran, "Mac Labhrain, from the Irish 'labhraidh') and smiths (McGowan, "mac Gabhann," from 'gabbha'). One category of name, common in English, which is extremely rare among Irish names is the toponymic, deriving from the name of a locality. It seems likely that this reflects the fact that, for the Gaeil, who you were related to was much more important than where you came from.

Although the immediate reason for the early adoption of hereditary names in Ireland may have been rapidly expanding population, it can also be seen as the logical outcome of a process at work from the times of the earliest tribal names. Originally, these indicated identification with a common god, often connected with an animal valued by the tribe, as in the case of the "Osrai," or 'deer-people,' for example. Next came identification with a divine ancestor, the "Boinnri," for instance, claiming descent from the goddess Boinn, the divinized river Boyne. Later the ancestor was merely legendary, as for the "Eoghanacht," while later still the tribe claimed direct descent from a historical ancestor, as in the case of the "UiNeill." This slow emergence of kin-relationships out of religion and myth into the realm of history would seem to reach its logical conclusion with the adoption of hereditary surnames, permanent proof of verifiable ties of blood. On a more mundane level, of course, such proof was a valuable political asset, since it demonstrated membership of a powerful kin-group. Even today, the fact that all Gaelic names, with few exceptions, begin with O or Mac is undeniable and continuing proof of the significance of family and kin for the Irish.

Although it began early, the process of the creation of surnames was slow and continued for over six hundred years. As the population grew and new families were formed, they sought to consolidate their identity by adopting hereditary surnames of their own, usually by simply adding 'Mac' to the first name of the founding ancestor. In the course of this process, then, many more surnames were created which are in fact offshoots of more common names. Thus, for example

the MacMahons and McConisidines are descended from the O'Brien family, the former from Mahon O'Brien, who died in 1129, the latter from Constantine O'Brien, who died in 1193. The continuing division and sub-division of the most powerful Gaelic families like this is almost certainly the reason for the great proliferation of Gaelic surnames.

HISTORY OF IRELAND

Imagine that you are standing on a windswept headland, a country of lush green glens behind you, the tumultuous sea at your feet. A beautiful girl approaches you, an orphan, she says, but of noble lineage, who tells you a tale so full of romance and heroism and piety and cruelty and "sturm and drang" that you cannot decide whether to laugh or cry, but still find yourself listening and enraptured to her compelling voice.

This is Ireland, and the Irish themselves are inclined to surrender to her charms. For centuries, they have been compounding a political and social mythology out of songs, legends and history, and the heroes of that mythology – Finn MacCool, Brian Boru, Patrick Sarsfield, Wolfe Tone, Daniel O'Connell and Charles Parnell -- remain the controlling models for modern Ireland's political and social behavior. When Patrick Pearse, a leader of the 1916 Easter Rebellion, invoked the Ulster hero Cu Chulainn while British troops besieged his little band in the Dublin General Post Office, he rallied his men with an image from the nation's antiquity. The revival of the Irish language, a cornerstone of government policy, affirms the continuity of the Irish Republic with its remotest antecedents. It is a nation that requires an understanding of its most distant past to complete an understanding of its present.

THE CELTS

The Celts were a family of Indo-European warrior aristocracies related by language, religion, mastery of horsemanship and a flammable temperament that kept them always at each other's throats. From their arrival in Ireland between 500 and 50 BC, the Celtic clans warred ceaselessly. Sensitive and superstitious, they were terrorized by their priests (druids) and master-poets ("filidhe;" pronounced "fee-lee"), whose curses carried weight with the gods and in whose memories reposed the only record of tribal histories, genealogies, and myth. These learned, almost Brahmanic castes maintained their own training academies and provided the only source of social unity among the various tribes.

The family was the fundamental Celtic social unit from which all rights and authority flowed. Tribal alliances were matters of military convenience rather than treaty and not until the fifth century A.D. did the Irish establish the semblance of a central power. Even then, the high king, ruling from the Hill of

Tara, drew his authority not from law but from the tacit consensus of the legislative assemblies of tribal chieftains and nobles. The O'Neill high kings, whose dynasty endured until the eleventh century, invoked a national spirit by convening the first such assembly—though each tribe had previously conducted its own and continued to do so. The O'Neills also raised a standing army (the Fianna), but even after they had subdued the Ulaid of Ulster—last of the Celtic tribes to resist Gaelic dominance—in 851, their control of Ireland remained tenuous.

Gaelic civilization flourished unconsumed by the Roman Empire in what W.B. Yeats would call the Celtic Twilight. Its decentralized social structure evolved without interference, and when, in the fifth century, Christianity was introduced by St. Patrick, the new church adapted itself at once to this structure. Abbeys and monasteries patronized by local chieftains and entirely independent of diocesan authority became the seats of church power; out of touch with Rome, the Irish clung to old doctrines long after they had been abandoned or revised elsewhere in Christendom. Yet the monasteries nourish a lively intellectual life; graduates of the poetic academies, attracted by the ascetic ethos, flocked to the monasteries and abbeys, learned to write and created the stunningly illuminated manuscripts in which the oral literature of the nation was first recorded. By decree of St. Columba (Columcille), a Gaelic prince, poet and founder of the first native order, lay poets were officially employed in every royal court after 575. The literary arts thus enjoyed the patronage of both church and state.

When the barbarians inundated Europe in the fifth century, Christian learning crawled to high ground in Ireland. As the deluge subsided, Irish missionaries ventured over the European continent, founding monasteries, restoring literacy and resuscitating the faith amid the ruins of Hellenic civilization. John Scotus Erigen (which means “Irish-born”) and his contemporary Sedulis Scotus taught in the palace schools founded by Charlemagne, and the monasteries of Ireland received students from abroad; but while this lively traffic earned Ireland the epithet Isle of Saints and Scholars, it turned Rome's efforts to reforming the doctrinally wayward church and bringing it under central control.

In 795, the predatory Vikings, commenced their raids along the Irish coast, leveling monasteries and torching whole libraries. These Norse pirates built a string of garrisons along the eastern coast, proclaiming themselves kings and establishing Ireland's first cities and ports. The fractious Gels were helpless to dislodge these ferocious and well-organized intruders. Late in the tenth century, an obscure chieftain from Clare, Brian Boru, overthrew the Danish King of Limerick and, by three usurpations, dispossessed the O'Neills and declared himself High King of Ireland. For a few short years, Brian united the tribes of Ireland behind his leadership; he routed the Danes from their chief stronghold, Dublin, at the Battle of Clontarf in 1014. Brian, alas lost his life in the battle and the Irish relapsed into squabbling over succession to the Tara monarchy.

THE NORMAN INVASION

Though their dominance had been broken, the Norsemen remained in Ireland as sailors and merchants, intermarrying with the Gaels and assimilating the native culture. In 1166 they joined with the chiefs of Leinster to overthrow their king, Dermot MacMurrough, who fled to England where he formed an alliance with some Norman adventurers who he hoped would restore him to his realm. In 1169, these mail-clad buccaneers landed on the Baginburn headland in Waterford and in two years had seized Leinster for their leader, Richard Fitz-Gilbert de Clare, known as Strongbow. MacMurrough died soon after. Before these brilliant, methodical soldiers the Irish had no defense. In 1171 Strongbow and the rest of the Normans resentfully acknowledged themselves subjects of Henry II, and the high king Rory O'Connor recognized Henry as his sovereign in return for control over all unconquered areas. Ireland had become the property of the English crown.

The Normans marked their holdings with a line called the Pale, a thin strip of land on the eastern coast. But as Norman and Gael intermarried, the former became, as the saying goes, more "Irish than the Irish themselves." (The Irish referred to the Normans as "old foreigners," while the English called those who had gone native "degenerate English.") By 1261, the Gaels had adopted Norman military techniques, putting an end to their conquests, while the Normans had taken up the Gaelic language and culture, maintaining poets and commissioning manuscripts like native chieftains.

The rapprochement displeased the English. In 1297, to consolidate the colony and muster troops from it for his Scottish wars, Edward I convened an Irish Parliament at Kilkenny, which was hostile to the Gaels and assimilated Normans. By 1366, the Parliament had promulgated statutes to separate the "races," but these were largely ignored by a very mixed population. The Normans had built cities, introduced English common law and mingled names like Bourke, Butler and Carey with O'Brien, O'Neill and O'Donnell. Culturally distinct from England and uncomfortable as colonial, the Normans declared parliamentary independence in 1460.

THE PLANTATION

The Reformation and the Tudor monarch put an end to the Norman's adventure. In 1541, Henry VIII compelled the Irish Parliament to recall his sovereignty. He then asserted his authority to govern the Irish church, as he had already done in England, and imposed the Plantation policy, under which native Irish and some "degenerate English" landholdings were seized and regranted to loyal English fortune seekers. Resistance to the policy centered in Ulster, where the chieftains Red Hugh O'Donnell and Hugh O'Neill, setting aside old rivalries, formed the Tyrone Confederation and in the first of Ireland's revolutions, rose against Henry's "new earls" (as those who literally bought titles and rights to the land

were called). Promises of Spanish assistance were obtained and from 1594 to 1603 the Tyrone Confederation rebelled with some success against the English. In 1601, a Spanish fleet sailed into Kinsale on the southern coast, and the English Lord Mountjoy turned to attack them, whereupon O'Donnell and O'Neill Swept down from the north to besiege the besiegers. The Spanish pressed for a decisive engagement; O'Neill argued for attrition, but O'Donnell forced the issue. The Battle of Kinsale was fought on Christmas Eve, 1601, and the Hispano-Gaelic alliance insufficiently prepared, went down in defeat. The defeated earls, O'Donnell and O'Neill were permitted to return to Ulster; but after a few years of suffering English rule, they sailed in self-imposed exile to the Continent in 1607, an event often called the Flight of the Earls.

The Plantation policy went forward apace. In Ulster, barely one-tenth of the land was retained by its native inhabitants; the rest was planted with Presbyterian colonists from Scotland, dissenters in their own country. In 1641, Norman soldiers, unemployed and wandering the countryside, enlisted with the Irish chiefs of Ulster in another uprising. The Irish Parliament, now sitting at Dublin, expelled its Catholic members, who gathered at Kilkenny to proclaim a provisional government.

Presiding over this revolution was Owen Roe O'Neill, a nephew of Hugh and a statesman of some sophistication; he envisioned for Ireland a centralized and autonomous native government. After Owen Roe's victory over parliamentary forces at Benburb in 1646, Charles I, facing Cromwell's insurgence at home, offered a treaty that would have reversed the Plantation policy; but the Catholic clergy, holding out for emancipation from the Protestant crown persuaded Owen Roe to reject it. After deposing the king in 1649, Cromwell turned to the reconquest of Ireland, and in Septembers stormed the town of Drogheda, slaughtering 3,500 inhabitants in reprisal for earlier revolutionary terrorism. Owen Roe's death in November signaled the collapse of the resistance. Limerick and Galway capitulated in 1652 and 30,000 Irish soldiers followed their chiefs into exile in what the Irish remember as the Flight of the Wild Geese.

The Cromwellian Act of Settlement in 1652 extended the Plantation policy; Irish lands were seized and distributed among demobilized English soldiers and the financiers of the conquest. The Catholic Church was outlawed and its properties confiscated. Towns were seeded with English burgesses and native merchants were relocated to the perimeters. The common people were reduced to virtual slavery as tenants on lands immemorially theirs. By 1655, what remained of the Gaelic nation languished among the stony acres west of the Shannon. By 1688, Protestants, though they constituted a tiny minority of its population, owned 78 percent of all the land in Ireland.

STUART vs. ORANGE

With the ascension of James II, a Catholic, in 1685, England's policies in Ireland were somewhat liberalized. But James was deposed in 1688, and fled to France. In 1689 he moved to Ireland, where he hoped to establish in this Catholic nation a base from which to recover his throne. Catholic France rallied to the Jacobites (as his followers were called) and sent a fleet to Kinsale in 1689. But Protestant Europe as determinedly supported William of Orange, James' Protestant successor. Things came to a head on July 1, 1690, when a mixed army of Danes, Germans, French Huguenots and English overwhelmed the Jacobites at the Battle of the Boyne. The Irish arm, under Patrick Sarsfield, fell back and retrenched beyond the Shannon. They then sallied forth to meet the Protestants at the Battle of Aughrim, and when defeated again, Sarsfield gathered the remains of his army behind the walls of Limerick and indomitably withstood two lengthy English sieges before finally obtaining favorable terms of surrender, which London was largely to ignore. Sarsfield and his men, like the earls some forty years before them, fled in exile to France. (Sarsfield joined the French army and died in battle in 1693 crying: "Oh, that this were for Ireland.")

ROBERT EMMET, WOLFE TONE –IRISH PROTESTANT PATRIOTISM

The hope of Irish freedom dashed, England imposed the Penal Laws in 1695, the apartheid statutes by which Catholic were denied nearly all rights at law and were reduced to serfdom. (In the words of one lord chancellor; "The law does not take into account the existence of such a person as an Irish Roman Catholic.") Yet while the Penal Laws ensured the privileges of the Ascendancy (Protestant settlers), they also effectively tied most the Protestant gentry—but not the Protestant magnates—to the land, while tariffs restricted the economy. Furthermore, although the Dublin Parliament was supposedly autonomous in most areas, in fact it merely rubber-stamped the acts of Westminster. All Catholics and many Protestants chafed under the English yoke. In 1791 the Protestant patriot Wolfe Tone founded the United Irishmen, which—inspired by the French Revolution—attempted to bring together Catholics and Protestants in common cause against the English government. The movement gained strength quickly in Ireland but was suppressed in 1794. Tone fled to Paris to raise an army of liberation, and in 1798, Ireland's third revolution broke out in Wexford. Tone and a French fleet hurried to its aid, but the ragtag rebels, led by two priests, John Murphy and Michael Murphy, were crushed at Vinegar Hill (Waterford City) before the fleet could arrive. The French, surrounded at Castlebar (County Mayo) surrendered, and Tone, denied an honorable execution before a firing squad and condemned instead to the gallows, slit his throat. In 1801, the Act of Union, abolished the Irish Parliament and absorbed Ireland into a United Kingdom. Revolution erupted for the fourth time in 1803, let this time by Robert Emmet, but it collapsed in confusion on the brink of success and Emmet, who stirring speech from the scaffold embedded itself in the Irish memory, was hanged.

CATHOLIC EMANCIPATION

In 1793, a Catholic Relief Bill had ostensibly restored all Catholic rights except that of holding elective office, an omission that rendered the rest meaningless. In 1823, Daniel O’Connell—the brilliant Kerry lawyer and orator who came to be known as “the Liberator”—organized the Catholic Association which, by tithing its members a penny a month, became an organ of legal defense and agitation and the underground government of the Gaelic nation. O’Connell was a peerless organizer and when defiant voters in Clare elected him to Westminster in 1828, the orchestrated mass movement behind him so intimidated England that he was seated, accomplishing full Catholic emancipation in a stroke.

In 1830, leading a substantial Irish voting bloc in Parliament, O’Connell embarked on a campaign to repeal the Act of Union. Committed to reform within the constitution, activism within the law and loyalty to the crown, O’Connell threw his party’s support behind the Whigs, counting on their backing the repeal movement if they displaced the Tories. But Prime Minister Melbourne’s Whig government, once elected, reneged, supported by a Protestant Ascendancy determined to protect its property and power under the Union by force if necessary. The Irish masses stood ready to take up arms at the first word from O’Connell; the Young Ireland party, led by journalist Charles Gavin Duffy and poet Thomas Davis, urged O’Connell to abandon his pacifist principles and lead them in revolution. O’Connell had no such intention. Instead, in 1842-43, he organized and addressed a series of “monster meetings”—rallies in support of repeal; at the one held at Tara, nearly a million people assembled peacefully to hear him speak in the open air. The meetings were perfectly legal, but the English government—mindful of O’Connell’s tremendous influence—sent troops to surround the meeting held at Clontarf and threatened violence if the crowd did not disperse. Though he was within his rights and though the assembly could probably have overwhelmed the soldiers, O’Connell canceled the meeting. The next year, he and Duffy were arrested and convicted of sedition. Though the House of Lords later reversed the verdict, O’Connell emerged from two months in prison largely stripped of his influence. He split with Young Ireland in 1846, momentum passed to its leaders and he died in 1847.

THE IRISH FAMINE

In 1847, the potato, staple of the common people, succumbed to blight for the second time and the Great Famine descended over Ireland. It was a catastrophe beyond description; starvation, dysentery and cholera decimated the population, and tens of thousands fled to America. Ireland lost about two million people between 1845 and 1855, yet Britain stuck to its free-trade philosophy and intervened as little as possible on the theory that private enterprise would eventually sort things out. Relief aid actually decreased as the famine worsened. Yet, throughout this Irish holocaust, food was exported from Ireland to pay rents to absentee landlords in England. Great estates went bankrupt and passed

into the hands of profiteers who thought nothing of evicting their destitute and starving tenants.

In 1848, under the leadership of William Smith O'Brien and spurred by the writings of John Mitchel (who had been deported to Australia for publishing the seditious journal "United Irishman"), what remained of Young Ireland staged and bungled an armed insurrection. Its participants followed Mitchel to Australia. For almost a decade, the nationalist movement lay dormant and the Irish language and economy languished through neglect. Industrialization was financed by London only in Ulster, which attached itself commercially to the industrial northwest of England, alienating itself still further from the rest of Ireland, where there were virtually no manufacturers. Circumstances were preparing Ulster for separation.

HOME RULE

After the collapse of the repeal movement, the nationalists regrouped behind the Home Rule proposal, which would have restored at least a measure of autonomy to the Irish nation. After 1875, the leader of the Home Rule party at Westminster was Charles Stewart Parnell, an Irish Protestant and charismatic leader who implemented the policy of "obstruction," or withholding his considerable political support to gain concessions for Ireland. Parnell's tactical brilliance secured the admiration and cooperation of William Gladstone, the Liberal prime minister; despite their efforts, however, the Home Rule Bill was twice defeated in Parliament. Shortly thereafter Parnell suffered a serious blow to his reputation: Two British civil servants were murdered in Dublin's Phoenix Park and "The Times" published a forged letter allegedly from Parnell condoning the killings. Then, in 1888, a divorce proceeding revealed Parnell's liaison with a colleague's wife. He was condemned by Protestant England and Catholic Ireland. His followers dropped away and he died in disgrace three years later at the age of forty-five.

Nationalist leadership passed to Sinn Fein (Ourselves Alone), a party founded in 1902 by Arthur Griffith, who favored an independent Irish Parliament. Despite the resistance of Ulster's Orangemen, a society formed to protect the privileges and liberties of Protestants, and the organization of paramilitary Ulster Volunteers, a Home Rule Bill was finally enacted in 1914. But the Orange militants had succeeded in amending the bill to give Ulster's six counties, with their Protestant majority, the option of seceding from Ireland and remaining in the Union. The outbreak of World War I fatally delayed implementation of the bill and Ireland, on the eve of its independence, stood divided against itself.

EASTER RISING

The Easter Rebels of 1916, also known as the Irish Volunteers, looked to England's enemy, the Germans for aid as Hugh O'Neill had looked to the

Spanish and Wolfe Tone to the French. On Good Friday, 1916, their emissary to Berlin, Roger Casement, was captured by the British while returning to warn that German support would not be forthcoming. (Casement was convicted before a military court and hanged.) The Volunteers canceled what was to have been a national insurrection, but the Dublin contingent, hopeless of success, rose to martyrdom on Easter Monday. The 1,200 Volunteers seized strategic buildings around the city; on the steps of the General Post Office, leader Patrick Pearse read the proclamation of an Irish Republic. British troops, ordered to dislodge the rebels, left central Dublin in ruins. Seventeen rebel leaders—including Pearse, Thomas McDonough, John McBride, Joseph Plunkett, and James Connolly—died before a firing squad. Public outrage at the executions persuaded the British to commute the sentences of William Cosgrave, later president of the Free State and Eamon de Valera, later president of the provision government of the Republic.

The martyrs, none of them important figures before death, became national heroes afterward. In the elections of 1919, Sinn Fein scored a landslide victory in parliamentary elections, but the deputies refused to take their seats, convening instead the Dail Eireann (Assembly of Ireland)

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IRISH FREE STATE

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partition, referred the question to the heavily Protestant Ulster Parliament seated at Stormont, which put the issue of union before a popular referendum whose outcome was never in doubt.

PARTITION

Since the late 1920's, the industrialized cities of Northern Ireland—Belfast and Derry—and many of the larger towns have divided into sectarian camps. In the 1960's a Catholic civil rights movement agitated for Catholic representation at Stormont in proportion to the Catholic population, which brought a violent response from the Protestants, to whom the cause seemed synonymous with reunification with the Republic. The IRA, now an extralegal militia outlawed even in the Republic, came to the defense of the Catholic constituency. Confronted by virtual civil war, which Stormont was powerless to stop since it represented only one side, Britain suspended the Northern Ireland legislature in 1972. Stepping between the warring factions, the British army became a target of IRA hostility along with the paramilitary Ulster Defense Force. But now, bound by the legal precedent of the 1949 referendum, Britain has no way of withdrawing from Ulster without a majority mandate, and Ulster has no way of forming a government to

which both sides can consent and thereby impose law and order without British intervention.

Ulster Protestants are proud of their heritage and fearful of losing not only property but some of their rights and liberties as British subjects under the Irish Republican constitution, which embodies the moral doctrines of the Catholic Church. Efforts within the Republic to conciliate Northern Ireland by expunging from the constitution certain clauses—such as the one against divorce—offensive to Protestants have proven futile. Further, the Republic's economy is weak and agricultural, plagued by unemployment and inadequate social services, while Northern Ireland is industrial and shares the benefits of the British welfare system. The Republicans, however, have never acknowledged Britain's authority over any portion of Ireland and regard partition as an act of gerrymandering by an illegitimate power. The intransigence of both sides makes reconciliation seem unlikely, despite recent agreements and attempts at rapprochement between British and Irish prime ministers.