"We are the young Europeans," boasts Ireland's Industrial Development Authority. When this Kerryman was photographed a century ago, continuing emigration threatened to make Ireland a country populated chiefly by old people and children. Today's young Irish adults are staying home.

The Irish

Mention Bolivia or Belgium to the average American adult, and the conversation will soon flag. Bring up Ireland, and the talk will always find a focus. Yeats? Killarney? Guinness? Associations generously tumble forth. Some 40 million Americans have Irish blood in their veins; five times that many, it seems, believe they can imitate an Irish brogue. Often overlooked—veiled, perhaps, by an assumed familiarity—is how *un*familiar to most Americans the Republic of Ireland really is. The Republic is, today, a Common Market member with some 20th-century problems, some 21st-century industries, and some abiding (if eroding) 19th-century attitudes. As Britain's Prime Minister William Gladstone noted a century ago, the behavior of the English toward the Irish constituted the darkest stain upon the history of a splendid people. As continued strife in Northern Ireland attests, old passions remain. Our contributors here focus on the Republic of Ireland—on its past and its present—and on the peculiar Irish immigrant experience in America.

TROUBLES

by Thomas C. Garvin

Nature placed Ireland exactly the wrong distance from Great Britain.

Had the island been somewhat closer to its larger sister, the Irish people might well have become more fully assimilated into the British family, much as the Scots and Welsh have been. Had Ireland been placed farther out in the Atlantic, it might have been allowed to develop in relative peace, as Iceland was, without the incessant interference of a powerful neighbor.

As it happened, Ireland was just close enough to keep London obsessed with the island's potential in wartime as a back door to the British Isles, a door that the Spanish, French, and Germans, in succession, sought to open. On the other hand, Ire-

land was always remote enough to sustain its people's sense of separation, just far enough away to ensure that strong nationalist sentiment, once rooted, would survive. As Dominic Behan put it:

> The Sea, oh the sea, *is a gradh geal mo chroí**
> Long may it stay between England and me;
> It's a sure guarantee that some hour we'll be free,
> Oh! thank God we're surrounded by water!

This may be bad poetry, but it is fairly decent political science.

For eight centuries, Ireland has been half in and half out of British affairs, much as England has always been half in and half out of Europe. While the Irish may sometimes be loath to admit it, the fact is that the British, from Tudor times forward, created modern Ireland. If Northern Ireland's peculiar status and sectarian violence are both legacies of British rule, so too is the political unity among the 26 counties that today constitute the Republic of Ireland.

Ireland was originally settled by various peoples who sailed over from Britain (the place of origin emphasized by anglophile archaeologists) and the European mainland (according to Irish scholars of a more nationalist bent) beginning around 7,000 B.C. They found a green, heavily forested island ringed by coastal mountains of spectacular beauty. The climate, though undeniably wet, was nevertheless mild, warmed by the tail of the Gulf Stream.

During the first millennium B.C., the arrival of the aggressive, inventive, Gaelic-speaking Celts, warriors and skilled craftsmen, gave the island a new set of masters. From the mixing of peoples ensued Ireland's first golden age, which survives in the form of powerful epic poetry and intricate, abstract designs wrought in stone and precious metals.

While Rome extended its sway over the rest of Europe, the Irish remained on the periphery. Unlike the Franks, the Goths, and even the Huns, they were never tutored by the Romans in the arts of government. It was an important lesson to have

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*Roughly translated from the Irish, "bright love of my heart."

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missed. Ireland for centuries remained the domain of dozens of petty local kings, each presiding over a *tuath*, or tribe. Because kingship was elective, Ireland's tribal monarchies were continually rent by factional strife. They also warred among themselves, frequently over the possession of cows, the basic unit of wealth. The greatest epic of the so-called Heroic Age is the anonymous *Táin Bó Cúailnge*—in English, *The Cattle Raid of Cooley*—which recounts a protracted dispute between the rival courts of Ulster and Connaught.

Ireland was Christianized during the fifth century A.D., mainly by missionaries from Britain, one of whom may have been named Patrick. As barbarian hordes overran the Roman Empire, Irish Christianity was left on Europe's edge to develop in its own peculiar way, with strong pagan undertones.

The conversion of Ireland turned out to have been a decisive event in the history of the West. In that unlikely haven, safe from the depredations visited on Italy and Gaul, Irish monks tended the embers of civilization. When relative peace returned to Europe, during the sixth and seventh centuries, Irish monks such as Columcille and Columban fanned out across Britain and the Continent, spurring the revival of both Christianity and learning. Back home, the Catholic Church continued to foster the arts: This is the age that produced the silver Ardagh chalice, the carved high cross at Ahenny, the brilliantly illuminated *Book of Kells*.

Invaders

The Irish monasteries, virtually sovereign within their vast domains, became quite wealthy. They were also quite defenseless and, hence, an irresistible target. Sailing their dragon ships out of the fjords of Scandinavia, the pagan Northmen plundered and burned their first Irish monastery in A.D. 795. The sporadic Viking raids of the early years would grow by the mid-ninth century into a savage, sustained assault. Wrote a ninth-century monk with relief at the prospect of a reprieve: "Bitter is the wind tonight, / White the tresses of the sea; / I have no fear the Viking hordes / Will sail the seas on such a night."

Even in the face of Viking invasion, the Gaelic chieftains rarely put aside their differences. Once, late in the 10th century, a Munster tribal king, Brian Boru (the surname means "tribute of cows"), managed to array most of the other Irish kings behind him. He engaged the Northmen and defeated them decisively at Clontarf, north of the Viking city-state of Dublin, on Good Friday, 1014. Even then, it was a less-than-pure victory: Two-thirds of the Viking force consisted of disgruntled Irish Leinstermen.

IRELAND

Nor did Brian's achievement endure. He was slain at Clontarf and his jerrybuilt Kingdom of Ireland died with him. Thereafter, Ireland remained fragmented, with the most powerful families—such as the O'Briens of Munster, the O'Neills of Ulster, the O'Connors of Connaught—vying for possession of the mainly symbolic title *árd rí* (high king).

In retrospect, the most fateful invasion of the island was not that of the Vikings, who eventually settled down, but that of their cousins, the Normans. The Vikings had their good points: They founded most of Ireland's major cities, introduced coinage,

and turned the island's eastern ports into key junctions in the web of West European trade. What the Normans did was to bind Ireland, for the first time in history, to Britain. It was an ill-fated relationship.

From France, the Normans—Gallicized Norsemen—had steadily worked their way across England and Wales during the century after William the Conqueror's victory at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. In 1169, a small Anglo-Norman expedition landed in County Wexford, in response to an invitation from the King of Leinster, Dermot MacMurrough, to take his side in a local, factional squabble. Led by an adventurer named Richard FitzGilbert de Clare—better known as Strongbow—the Normans with their longbows and their steel body armor soon conquered large areas of Ireland.

Today, outside of Ulster (where distance and native Gaelic resolve proved too formidable), the conquest is marked by the hundreds of square stone castles built by Norman earls to consolidate their rule—picturesque redoubts atop grassy hills, now awaiting capture by Ireland's latest invader, the American tourist, on film.

Beyond the Pale

Ireland became an Anglo-Norman dominion. England's King Henry II spent Christmas in Dublin in 1171, asserting his right, and that of his English successors, to the "lordship of Ireland." The principle, at least, was established. But Ireland was separated from England by a turbulent sea. Many Gaelic chieftains refused to submit. Copying Norman weaponry and tactics, they retained considerable autonomy. Aristocratic Normans, for their part, displayed a tendency to "go native." They adopted the Irish language and often married the daughters of prominent Gaelic nobles. The area effectively controlled by London's viceroys shrank over the centuries to a small, semicircular region around Dublin, called "the Pale." In a broad swath "beyond the Pale" lay the estates of the Gaelicized Norman lords, many having little real allegiance to the king of England. Beyond that, especially in the provinces of Connaught and Ulster, the Normanized Gaelic chieftains held sway. Late-medieval Ireland was a confusing amalgam of dozens of jurisdictions, languages, laws, and loyalties.

All of that was to change, abruptly, with the consolidation of the Tudor state in England during the 16th century. Henry VIII and his heirs launched a vigorous "reconquest" of Ireland. By the end of Elizabeth I's reign, Ireland had been vanquished

militarily after a long series of ferocious campaigns. Ulster was the last to succumb, in 1603. London systematically set out to "de-Gaelicize" Ireland—to impose English law, an English landlord system, and (this being the era of the Reformation) English Protestantism. Henry VIII had broken with the Church of Rome in 1534. Because both the Gaels and the "Old English" aristocrats resisted the Reformation, they shared a common disaster as Ireland's farmland was transferred gradually during the 17th century from mostly Catholic to mostly Protestant hands. In Ulster, reliable colonists from England and Scotland settled on confiscated acreage. Across the country, empty Catholic churches and monasteries slowly collapsed into rubble.

The 'Ascendancy'

During the next four centuries, the Irish attempted repeatedly to reverse the verdict of history. Plagued by disunity and indiscipline they failed every time, often at horrific cost.

A protracted rebellion during the 1640s was put down in 1649 by Oliver Cromwell, who ravaged the island for nine months. He began his campaign with the massacre of more than 2,000 civilians in Drogheda's Saint Peter's Church. "I am persuaded," he wrote, "that this is a righteous judgement of God upon those barbarous wretches." From Drogheda, Cromwell marched around the island, putting towns to the torch and Catholics to the sword. Between the outbreak of the uprising and Cromwell's departure, one-third of Ireland's population fell victim to bloodshed, disease, or starvation.

The English renewed their resettlement efforts. Thousands of new colonists from Scotland were transported to Ireland's northern province. These Ulster Protestants put down permanent roots, and their descendants today dominate the modern substate of Northern Ireland, a latter-day British Pale on the island. The Cromwellian settlements in the rest of Ireland never achieved such permanence.

The elevation of James II to the throne of England in 1685 offered Irish Catholics a last glimmer of hope. But the unpopular James, an avowed Catholic, was driven from England three years later. His attempted return, via Ireland, was thwarted by his Protestant son-in-law, William of Orange, who had been installed in Britain as King William III. In the hearts of Irish Catholics, the defeat of James's cause at the Battle of the Boyne, in 1690, would symbolize for centuries the final collapse of Irish medieval society, the political and cultural impotence of Catholic Ireland, and the domination by a new, landed Protestant "as-

The Famine's aftermath: Death and emigration emptied whole villages. "It is my opinion," concluded Sir Charles Trevelyan, head of Britain's Treasury, in 1847, "that too much has been done for the [Irish] people."

cendancy" backed by British power.

Yet, between 1690 and 1800, Ireland experienced a second great cultural renaissance. It stemmed from the island's new elite—the few hundred thousand English-speaking Protestants and their dependents who now owned virtually all of Ireland's land. By the early 19th century, this ascendancy presided over an Irish-speaking, Catholic rural proletariat of four to five million, which lived in a virtual state of serfdom. A battery of Penal Laws was enacted by an Irish Parliament (subsidiary to Westminster's) between 1695 and 1727, creating, in effect, a system of ethnic-sectarian apartheid. Catholics were stripped of most civil rights. They were barred from elective office, the military, the civil service, and the legal profession. A Catholic could not acquire land from a Protestant, nor dispose of it as he wished at death. "Popish priests," ordained abroad, faced intermittent persecution.

The 18th century was a Protestant century in Ireland. Dublin, the old Viking trading center, became a great Georgian city, the second largest in the British Isles. The Anglo-Irish community produced an extraordinary group of writers and thinkers, including Bishop Berkeley, Edmund Burke, Oliver Goldsmith,

Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and Jonathan Swift. In the country-side, Palladian villas rose amid acres of formal gardens. Irish craftsmen became adept at blowing glass, weaving linen, hammering silver—still important industries in Ireland. The privileged few were cultured, content, all-powerful. In 1776, English visitor Arthur Young wrote that an Irish landlord "can scarcely invent an order which a servant, labourer, or cottier dares to refuse to execute."

Many Protestants came to feel they could run Ireland on their own, without England's support. A new kind of Irish nationalism—a Protestant nationalism—evolved during the 18th century. By 1782, in the wake of Britain's vain attempt to keep her American colonies, the Irish Parliament in Dublin had won more leeway from Westminster than it had ever before enjoyed. Inspired by the French Revolution, the United Irishmen society made its appearance during the 1790s, led by Protestants but supported by many (Catholic) agrarian secret societies and committed to breaking the connection with England.

Courting Disaster

In 1798, a series of fierce but badly coordinated uprisings briefly shook the foundations of British rule. The upheaval was especially bloody in County Wexford, where a Catholic peasant army briefly overran Ireland's southeastern corner. Several hundred local Protestants were murdered before the rebels were themselves slaughtered by government troops. By the time order was restored, perhaps 50,000 people had perished, the bulk of them innocent civilians. Also gone was any hope that Protestants and Catholics in Ireland would ever again make common cause.

London, meanwhile, had by now had enough of Irish autonomy. In 1801, under the Westminster Parliament's Act of Union, Ireland became part of a British unitary state, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The Irish Parliament was abolished. Henceforward, Ireland would send about 100 members of Parliament to the House of Commons in London. London would govern Ireland directly. The Catholic clergy and the small Catholic middle class of the period, horrified by the revolutionary excesses of the Catholic peasantry a few years earlier, acceded to the Act of Union. They hoped that Westminster would treat their religion more tolerantly than the propertied Protestants at home, galvanized into antipapist extremism by the terrors of 1798, were ever likely to do.

The Union endured from 1801 until 1922 and represented

the last and longest attempt by Britain to assimilate Ireland to itself. But Ireland never developed into a peaceful province of the United Kingdom.

For one thing, most of Ireland experienced no industrial revolution.* British businessmen were loath to invest money in the troubled isle. Much of Ireland was given over instead to grazing, producing beef and lamb for export to Britain. Most Irish people continued to live off the land. Many roamed the countryside, as itinerant laborers. The luckier ones farmed small plots leased from (often absentee) Protestant landlords. Meanwhile, the island's population grew and grew, doubling every generation, becoming ever more reliant for sustenance on a single crop, the potato. As population increased, rents rose, and the size of the average farm plot shrank. A tragedy was in the making, as one royal commission after another pointed out. But remedial steps were not taken.

The 'Great Hunger'

Religion remained a divisive issue; that is a second reason why Union did not "take." Despite Westminster's promises, civil rights for Catholics did not follow from the Act of Union. Once Ireland had been subdued, London essentially forgot about the country. It required extended, nonviolent political campaigns by Daniel O'Connell and the Catholic clergy to pry even minor concessions out of Westminster.

A Catholic member of the Irish gentry, and a gifted orator, O'Connell led his countrymen in a Gandhi-esque crusade against the Penal Laws. Supported financially by the "Catholic rent"—a penny-a-month levy collected by priests from parishioners—O'Connell organized mass meetings in the countryside, terrifying landowners and mobilizing public opinion on behalf of Catholic emancipation. Britain's home secretary (later prime minister), Sir Robert Peel, commented on the "fearful exhibition of sobered and desperate enthusiasm" that O'Connell's followers displayed. In 1829, London gave O'Connell what he wanted. Henceforth, Catholics could be elected to Parliament; increasingly they were, as O'Connell taught the peasants how electoral politics was played. It was an extraordinary achievement.

O'Connell died in 1847, as Ireland was suffering a calamity that suddenly made politics seem irrelevant. The Great Famine is a third reason why Ireland never became another Scotland or

*Only in Protestant Ulster did industrialization occur, mainly around the growing city of Belfast. The fact that it did helped to make most of the province's people, then as now, firm proponents of Union.

Wales. Beginning in 1845, and continuing for five years, the Irish potato crop failed, owing to a blight—*Phytophthora infestans*—that Victorian science was powerless to overcome. Eyewitness accounts of the Famine's horrors can be compared only to those of Hitler's Final Solution. At least 1.5 million Irish peasants died. Another million emigrated, mostly to the United States. In short order, between 1845 and 1855, Ireland lost about one-quarter of its population. Ireland's demographic history during the 19th century is truly catastrophic. In 1800, the population of the island was about 4.5 million. By 1845, it was nearly nine million. But by 1900, it was down to 4.7 million, and it declined further—to about 4.4 million—during the next half century.

While landlords and local authorities tried desperately to alleviate "the great hunger," the British government dragged its heels. The government of Lord John Russell failed to appreciate the magnitude of the disaster on what seemed still a remote and ever-troubled island. Wedded to laissez-faire economic policies, the British were, in any event, reluctant to tamper with the free operation of market forces. "It is not the intention at all to import food for the use of the people of Ireland," asserted the chancellor of the Exchequer in 1846. Ironically, despite the failure of the potato crop, there was always plenty of food in Ireland. The peasants simply could not afford to buy it. Ireland remained a net *exporter* of foodstuffs—mostly grain—throughout the Famine years.

An Irish Nation?

The Holocaust was indirectly responsible for the creation of Israel; the Famine made possible an independent Irish state. It kindled a new and deeper form of Irish nationalism. It revived the ancient hatred of Great Britain. Finally, it transformed the character of Irish society. Post-Famine Ireland was very different from pre-Famine Ireland. The huge rural proletariat was gone. It was replaced by a peasantry that, thanks to the severe shortage of labor, soon acquired control of much of the land. Under the leadership of Paul Cardinal Cullen, Catholicism became a more highly bureaucratized, pietistic institution than ever before: The beads and scapulars, the holy pictures and statues, the pilgrimages—the whole public display of Irish Catholicism was introduced at this time.

The mainstay of the Catholic Church was now an expanding class of conservative, politically able, literate, and English-speaking independent farmers. Led by Charles Stewart Parnell (who fought in Parliament for Home Rule) and Michael Davitt

(whose Land League successfully agitated for fair rents and a curb on evictions), the Irish Catholics broke the Protestant ascendancy's monopoly on power and shattered many of its legal supports. One tactic employed by Davitt was passive resistance; tenants would refuse, en masse, to pay landlords their rent or provide essential services. (This approach was tried, successfully, on a certain Captain Charles Boycott, in County Mayo in 1880, enriching the English language in the process.) Irish-Americans generously supported such efforts—and others, including attempts by the clandestine Irish Republican Brotherhood to foment violent revolution.

In London's view, Irish-American involvement spelled trouble. Observed Sir William Harcourt, Britain's home secretary during the 1880s: "In former Irish rebellions the Irish were in Ireland. . . . We could reach their forces, cut off their reserves in men and money and then to subjugate was comparatively easy. Now there is an Irish nation in the United States, equally hostile, with plenty of money, absolutely beyond our reach and yet within ten days' sail of our shores."

By the turn of the century, Irish Catholics in Ireland had achieved substantial political and economic control of the island, excepting eastern Ulster. For the first time, the country

The 1921 settlement between Dublin and London left much unresolved. Fifty years later, sectarian strife would flare in Northern Ireland. Above: Bloody Sunday, in Derry, January 1972. It ended with 13 civilians dead.

possessed a cadre of politicians, clergy, labor leaders, and intellectuals capable of leading Ireland to independence. A literary revival was under way (see Background Books, pages 94–97). In 1912, the House of Commons passed a Home Rule Bill for Ireland, subject to approval by the House of Lords by the end of 1914 and bitterly opposed by Ulster Protestants. "Home Rule," they argued, was tantamount to "Rome Rule."

Divisions and Resentments

The accident of World War I accelerated the pace of events. Home Rule was put off indefinitely, angering the more extreme Irish nationalists. In 1916, during Easter week, a paramilitary nationalist group, the Irish Volunteers, staged a dramatic uprising in Dublin and proclaimed a provisional government. British troops restored order after a week of fierce fighting that left 450 dead, 2,600 wounded, and downtown Dublin badly battered. The rebellion enjoyed relatively little popular support.

But Major General Sir John Maxwell's decision to execute 15 of the rebel leaders, over a period of nine days and after secret trials, radically altered Irish opinion. Even as the victorious Allies met at Versailles in 1919 to redraw the map of Europe, the British found themselves fighting a nasty guerrilla war in Ireland against the resurgent Irish Volunteers, now known popularly as the Irish Republican Army (IRA). With deadly effectiveness, IRA gunmen and "flying columns" targeted British soldiers, police agents, and detectives. London responded by bolstering its forces with the notorious "Black and Tans"—mercenaries culled from the ranks of British Army veterans—whose behavior the authorities in London found it impossible to restrain.

"The troubles" dragged on until 1921, when London finally agreed to partition. The provinces of Munster, Leinster, and Connaught, and three of the Ulster province's nine counties—26 counties in all—became the effectively sovereign, and overwhelmingly Catholic, Irish Free State, later renamed the Republic of Ireland. The rest of Ulster, its population predominantly Protestant, remained part of the United Kingdom but acquired its own Parliament.

A short but bitter civil war ensued, in which the forces of Arthur Griffith's Free State government defeated the "fundamentalist" elements of the IRA, led by Eamon De Valera, who opposed partition and any lingering constitutional association with Britain. The Free State arrangement was ratified, in effect, in 1923, when Irish voters gave Free State proponents a majority of seats in the Dáil (Parliament).

The first truly independent government of Ireland, the first attempt ever on the island to forge something like a nation-state, was off to a very shaky start. On the plus side, owing to Britain's efforts during the preceding century, Irish leaders inherited a ready-made, well-developed administrative system. And the Irish people were highly literate, thanks both to the church and to a system of national schools that, 100 years earlier, Daniel O'Connell had pressed the British to create. But the population was also poor and deeply divided politically. The people's energies had been drained by a decade of war, reprisals, and executions that left few families untouched; the IRA continued to perpetrate occasional acts of terrorism.

"When all the shooting was finished, and all the dead were buried, and the politicians took over, what had you got left? A lost cause!" So reflected an old IRA partisan in 1980. Perhaps in one sense he was right. Ireland remains a divided isle; sectarian violence continues to flare; and in Ulster, Britain's long retreat from Ireland continues. At the same time, however, an independent, democratic Irish state in the rest of Ireland has managed to survive, even to prosper.

The Republic of Ireland today is not the kind of country most Americans think it is. Neither is it the kind of country its founders hoped it would be. It is English, not Irish, in language. Culturally and economically, its citizens still look to England in many ways. Ireland is an urbanized country; the society and values of the countryside, long a source of cohesion and strength, are unfamiliar to large numbers of Irish young people. Ireland is even somewhat less Catholic than it used to be.

Irish unity has never been achieved and can never be achieved on the basis of a Gaelic or Catholic national identity. The increasingly permanent look of the partition of Ireland raises the question of whether there is *any* Irish identity that can encompass both Irish Catholic and Ulster Protestant. Some Irishmen insist loudly in words, and occasionally assert violently in deeds, that there is. Others quietly believe that there is not.