

THE IRISH QUESTION

A SHORT HISTORY

Part I – from the old days to the 19th century

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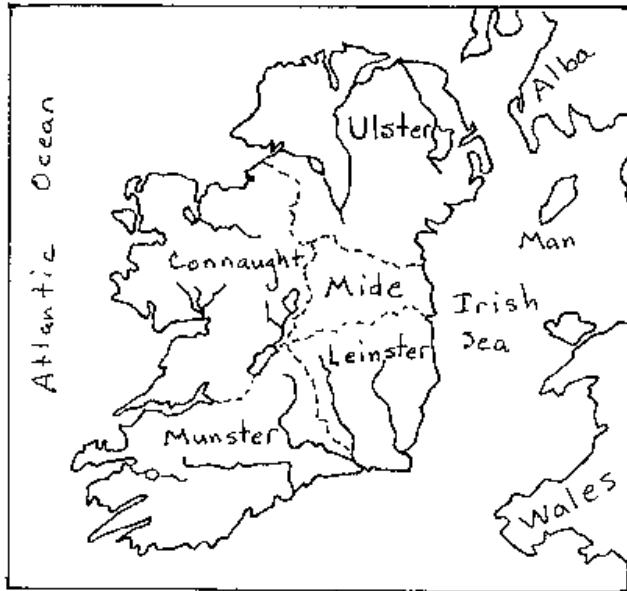
THE “IRISH QUESTION”

Irish Question is a phrase used mainly by members of the British ruling classes from the early 19th century until the 1920s to describe Irish nationalism and the calls for Irish independence. It is a complex problem that dates back to the 12th century and is still unresolved.



0. Ireland in the old days...

- **6000 BC:** the first settlement of Ireland took place by hunters and fishermen along the island's eastern coast.



- **600 - 150 BC:** the Gaels, a Celtic-speaking people from western Europe, reached the island and subdued the previous inhabitants.
- **50 BC - 50 AD:** the island was organised into five kingdoms, the traditional "*Five Fifths of Ireland*".
- **400 AD:** seven independent kingdoms had evolved – their kings often allied their armies to raid neighbouring Roman Britain and the Continent.

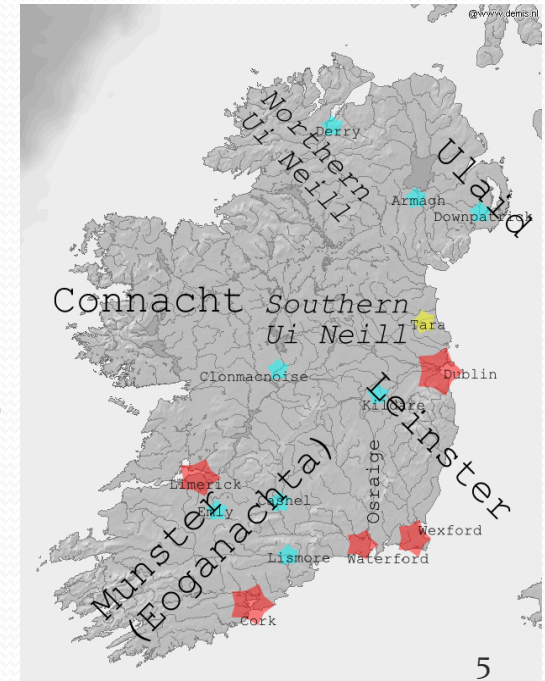
The 5th century: St. Patrick.

- On one of these raids a lad of 16 was captured in Wales, taken to Ireland and sold into slavery.
- During his enslavement the boy turned to religion and some six years later at the age of 22 he escaped.
- The young man studied theology in the Roman church and in 432 A.D. he returned to Ireland where he began a lifelong quest of converting the Irish to Christianity.
- This was none other than Ireland's patron, **Saint Patrick** (ca. 387-460).



The 9th and 10th centuries.

- In the **9th** and **10th centuries**, Ireland came under fierce attacks from **the Vikings**. Monasteries suffered great atrocities at the hands of these aggressors.
- In **853** the **Danes** invaded the island and were followed by Danish settlers who gradually assimilated with the local population and adopted Christianity.
- In **1152** the four ecclesiastical provinces (Ulster, Leinster, Munster, Connaught) were created. Both Gaelic and Danish elements helped form a united Church, a choice disapproved by the papacy.



1. From the origins ...



- The conquest of Ireland began during the reign of **Henry II** (1154–1189) when Dermot MacMurrough, King of Leinster, solicited Henry's help to recover his kingdom from the King of Connaught: Henry landed at Waterford and declared himself Lord of Ireland with pope Adrian IV's support. At first England was too busy with her own wars to mind Irish affairs, though.

- In Tudor times **Henry VIII** (1509–1547) tried to impose his religious reformation on the island but in Ireland the Catholic Church was still popular and socially useful.

Henry's interference in religious matters thus proved a mistake and resulted in problems for both countries.



1. ...to the 16th c.



- The violent extremes of **Edward VI** (1547-1553) and of his half-sister **Mary I** (1553-1558), known as *Bloody Mary*, made the situation even worse.



- As for **Elizabeth I** (1587-1603), she soon realized that the friendship between Ireland and Catholic Spain might enable the latter to use the island as a base to attack England. To prevent this danger, she then colonized all the south with Englishmen, who were given land for settlement.



- Under **James I** (1603-1625) thousands of Protestant Scots settled in Ulster to escape the king's rule.



2. From the early 17th c. ...



- In the 17th century, during the conflict between King and Parliament, Catholic Ireland supported **Charles I** (1625-1649) against **Oliver Cromwell**, but it was defeated and severely punished.



- Besides the tragic massacres carried out by Cromwell's Ironsides (1649-50), most of the country was handed over to Protestant settlers: thus **Ireland** became a colony, **the first English colony**. The hatred between colonized and colonizers was increased by the difference in their religions. From that time on, religion and politics became the two inseparable aspects of the Anglo-Irish conflict.

2. ... to the late 17th century.



- There seemed to be some hope for Irish Catholics in 1689, when the deposed **James II** (1685-1689), a convert to Catholicism, landed in Ireland to claim his throne, but in 1690 he was defeated in the battle of the Boyne by his Protestant successor **William III** (1688-1702).

- Though they had been promised fair treatment after the defeat, the Irish were actually oppressed by humiliating restrictions: the *Penal Laws*, passed by a Protestant Parliament in Dublin in 1695, turned them into virtual slaves.

- They were **excluded from political life**.
- They were **prohibited from having their own schools**.
- They could not **own more than a limited amount of land**.

- Ireland's economy began to decline and people had to emigrate,

3. The 18th century: the croppies.

- In **1798** a serious rebellion, known as the **United Irishmen Rebellion** broke out: the uprising lasted several months and was directed against British rule in Ireland.
- Influenced by the ideas of the American and French revolutions, the rebels were known as “**croppies**”, from their closely cropped hair, a fashion which was associated with the anti-wig (and therefore, anti-aristocrat) French revolutionaries of the period.
- Suspected United Irish sympathizers were often subjected to torture by flogging, picketing and half-hanging: **pitch capping**, in particular, was a form of torture invented to intimidate them.
- It was possibly the most concentrated outbreak of violence in Irish history, and resulted in thousands of deaths over the course of three months.



1845-52: the Great Famine

- The **Great Famine** was a period of mass starvation, disease and emigration which took place between 1845 and 1852.
- Also known as the **Irish Potato Famine**, it was caused by a potato disease commonly known as potato blight, a frequent problem throughout Europe during the 1840s.



- The impact and human cost in Ireland – where one-third of the population was entirely dependent on the potato for food – was monstrous: approximately **1 million people died** and **1 million more emigrated from Ireland**, causing the island's population to fall by between 20% and 25%.

4. The 19th c.: Charles Parnell.



- **Charles Stewart Parnell** (1846 – 1891), an Irish landowner, founded the Irish Parliamentary Party and was its leader **between 1875 and 1890**, when the party split following revelations of Parnell's private life which intruded on his political career.

- An enigmatic but charismatic personality, he created single-handedly the first modern disciplined political party machine, held together all strands of Irish nationalism and harnessed Irish-America into the Irish cause. He even converted the British P. M. W. Gladstone (1809 – 1898) to Irish Home Rule.
- Parnell is commemorated on **the first Sunday after the anniversary of his death on October 6**, known as “**Ivy Day**”.

