

IRELAND—ERA SUMMARY

450 TO 1922 A.D.

LIFE OF SAINT PATRICK TO IRISH INDEPENDENCE 450 TO 1922

Ireland, like Scotland, was a Celtic country, with a language and culture different from their powerful neighbor England. Like Scotland, it had a long history of resisting English dominance and had been, for the greater part of history, antagonistic to England. But in spite of their similar Celtic heritage, the histories of Ireland and Scotland diverged dramatically, particularly at the time of the Reformation. During the late Tudor era, Scotland became Protestant, and Ireland remained Catholic. From that point on, Scotland and England, although remaining antagonistic on many points, were eventually able to merge their countries under a single protestant government, and live in relative peace. Ireland, on the other hand, became even more fiercely Catholic in response to the oppressions of the English government, and the antagonism and hatred between the races, became ever worse over the years. When Scotland and England merged to become Great Britain, the Scotsmen enjoyed all due rights of citizenship. The greater population of Ireland, on the other hand, was entirely disenfranchised, dispossessed, and enjoyed no rights of self-government. It was ruled as a conquered colony, and badly ruled at that. As one politician stated in 1892; "the condition of Ireland is universally recognized as the chief scandal and chief weakness of the Empire." How it came to be so, is the sad story of Irish History.

St. Patrick and the Celtic Church – Celtic Ireland was never ruled by a single powerful king, but rather by local tribal chiefs. A large part of Ireland's inability to resist the continued oppressions of England rested on this fact, that the Irish, from their earliest history, were disorganized and disunited. Ireland never came under Roman rule, and therefore never enjoyed the benefits of an advanced civilization or centralized government. There were no roads, bridges, sewers, aqueducts, or public buildings of note, and the weapons and tactics of the Celtic tribes could not resist the organized armies of more advanced civilizations.



SAINT PATRICK BAPTIZING TWO IRISH MAIDENS

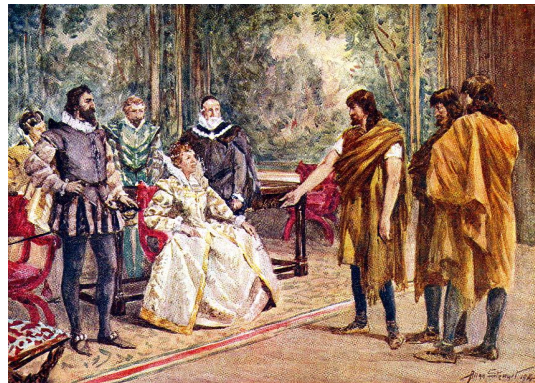
Ireland was converted to Catholicism by [Saint Patrick](#) in the fifth century A.D. and after that time the Irish monasteries were centers of learning and scholarship. It was mainly Irish missionaries, such as St. Columba and St. Mungo who converted Scotland to Christianity a few decades later. Until the ninth century, the Celtic Church thrived, but then, like all of Western Europe, Ireland suffered from Viking attacks. The general disunity of the Irish tribes however, made it impossible for the Vikings to actually conquer Ireland and the relative scarcity of booty in the

impoverished country, to some degree, discouraged the worst depredations. Finally, around 1000 AD [Brian Boru](#), an Irish Chieftain arose who managed to briefly unite the Irish tribes. He is credited with driving away the Vikings, although most of his wars were actually against other Irish clans. He governed well, but subsequent kings were less successful in holding the kingdom together.

The Normans in Ireland – One Hundred Years after the Normans conquered England, a Norman army was sent to conquer Ireland. The Normans succeeded in making many of the chieftains own them as overlords, but failed to actually impose a Norman government outside of a few towns on the eastern and northern coasts. Soon after the Battle of Bannockburn, [Edward Bruce](#), the Brother of [Robert I of Scotland](#), landed in Ireland with Scottish troops with the idea of driving the English out of Ireland. The attempt enjoyed early success, but eventually Bruce was killed, and the rebellion died with him. Over time however, English influence decreased in Ireland, particularly during the [War of the Roses](#), while for two generations, England was involved in a ruinous civil war.

Tudor Conquest of Ireland – It was not until the reign of [Henry VIII of England](#), that England began to reassert its dominance of Ireland, with the idea of bringing the monasteries and church under control of the king. Henry's

primary objective, as it was in England, was to obtain lands through conquest and foreclosures that he could sell to his noble friends to raise cash for himself. He did not however, complete the conquest, and the matter was not taken up seriously again until the reign of [Elizabeth I of England](#). Once England had won significant military victories over Spain, it was decided that having an independent Catholic nation so close at hand was a strategic risk. The idea of confiscating Catholic land to pass on to English



SHANE O'NEILL AND QUEEN ELIZABETH

nobles however, was probably an even more important a motive. The [Nine Years War](#) in Ireland was fought between 1594 and 1603 and resulted in the complete exile of the traditional Gaelic overlords of Ulster. This gave England free reign to establish Protestant colonies throughout the area. Over the next few decades hundreds of protestant colonists moved into Northern Ireland, pushing the Irish natives to the south and west. At the same time Penal laws were passed which discriminated against both the Irish Catholics and the Scottish Presbyterian residents, leaving virtually all power in the hands of the Anglican English.

Ireland, Cromwell and the Commonwealth – When the English Civil War broke out, the Irish took the opportunity to rebel, and in the Irish uprising of 1641, hundreds of Protestant settlers were slaughtered. Eventually the native Irish gentry and clergy put an end to the killing, and formed a *de facto* government, that ruled until [Oliver Cromwell](#) invaded Ireland during the [English Civil Wars](#). At this time he took a terrible revenge for the Catholic outrages against Protestants which had occurred nearly a decade previously. At the Siege of Drogheda he

ordered the indiscriminate slaughter of every man, woman, and child in the town, and all of Ireland was under his heel within a year. Cromwell remains one of the most hated characters of Irish History, and the atrocities committed on both sides during the civil war era did much to fan the religious hatreds of the following centuries.

Ireland suffered much under the commonwealth, but worse was yet to come. When the Catholic [James II of England](#) was deposed from the English throne, Ireland immediately declared for him, and against [William III of England](#). When the [Williamite War in Ireland](#) broke out, the Catholics laid siege to Protestant Londonderry, and the town was nearly starved when English reinforcements arrived. It was finally relieved when one of the English ships rammed through the boom that had prevented reinforcements and provisions from reaching the city. This unexpected setback sent the Irish army into confusion. The following year, the Irish resistance was firmly crushed at the *Battle of Boyne*, and the English victors took very hard measures to punish the rebels. Penal laws were now passed which not only disenfranchised, and dispossessed Catholics, but discriminated against them in all sorts of other ways, with the explicit intent to force them to convert to Protestantism or be driven to destitution. Instead of converting to Protestantism, however, the Irish only embraced their Catholicism, and suffered under horrible oppressions rather than convert to the religion of the hated English.

Eighteenth and Nineteenth century Ireland – By the mid-eighteenth century, there was a large native protestant Irish population, centered mainly in Ulster, and eastern coastal towns. Ireland, however, was governed as a colony, and inspired by the example set by the American Colonists, the local protestant population favored an independent parliament, and eventual Irish self-rule. The idea of extending the franchise to Catholics of course, occurred to no one, but the Protestant population, led by [Henry Grattan](#), eventually won the right to hold a local parliament. Grattan, was himself sympathetic to granting a very limited franchise to the Catholic gentry, but such proposals only provoked a firestorm of controversy. Very soon after the establishment of the Irish Parliament, the [French Revolution](#) occurred, an event which caused great consternation within England, particularly since the Irish Catholics were thought to be sympathetic to the Revolutionaries, and there was fear of an Irish alliance with France. Finally, in the [Irish Rebellion of 1798](#) did occur, and was accompanied by desperate atrocities on both sides. Grattan's parliament was dissolved, and the government of Ireland was taken under direct control of the English government. Ireland was absorbed into the "United Kingdom of Ireland and Great Britain", and although the Irish Protestants were still able to elect representatives, they had to meet in London, and had virtually no clout within the English dominated Parliament.

Soon after the [Napoleonic Wars](#), a Catholic hero appeared on the scene. [Daniel O'Connell](#) worked tirelessly for years to obtain the franchise for Irish Catholics, and eventually succeeded in doing so. He did this by actively forswearing violence, and gaining support among Protestants as well as Catholics. His heroic stance did much to advance the cause of Irish sympathy among the English, who feared the worst sort of violence were the Irish ever to gain political power. A few years later, spurred on by the Irish Potato famine, the English Parliament was compelled to abolish the corn-laws, which had done so much to create the crisis. Gradually,

minor political relief was provided to Ireland, but their desire for Home Rule was violently opposed, not only by the English, but by many Irish Protestants. [Charles Parnell](#) and [William Gladstone](#) were two statesmen who worked tirelessly for Irish reform, but could not manage to get a Home Rule bill through Parliament. There remained a violent and radical element to the Irish cause, which sabotaged the efforts of moderates to work out a compromise.

Irish Independence – It was not until the midst of [The Great War](#) that another Irish uprising took place. This one began during the Easter season of 1916, but turned into a guerilla war for Irish Independence. The solution finally agreed to by parliament was to allow Irish counties to withdraw from the United Kingdom on an individual basis, meaning that the Protestant county of Ulster, would be allowed to retain its British identity. Although unpopular with the Irish Nationalists, the partition of Ireland finally occurred in 1922. Even today the republic Ireland includes only the provinces of Leinster, Munster, and Connacht, while Ulster is still governed as part of Great Britain.