

THE REASONS WHY

By Mike McCormack, NY State Historian

After recent Orange parade violence, the question came up, *Why is there such hostility in Northern Ireland?* An answer jumped to mind, but prompted another question – where to begin! The answer is as complicated as the word *prejudice*! There is no valid reason why one group should consider another to be less motivated, less intelligent, and less capable than they are, except for a bigoted upbringing. Children of all races will play together, until adults teach them otherwise. In this case it has to do with greed and grievances – the greed of a colonial power and the grievances of a mistreated native population. A brief history here is required.

In 1170 AD, a Norman knight named Strongbow had been invited by a minor Irish king to assist in a dispute with Ireland's High King. After Strongbow won the dispute, he married the minor king's daughter and inherited the king's province. England's King Henry II, worried that his knight might build a rival kingdom at his back, went to Ireland where Strongbow wisely acknowledged Henry as Lord of all. Meanwhile, Pope Adrian IV (the only English Pope) had given Ireland to Henry since Ireland's missionaries all over Europe looked to Ireland for their ecclesiastic tradition rather than to Rome and Rome wanted control. Therefore, on the claim of Papal Bull **Laudabiliter** that *all lands which have received the Christian faith belong to the Holy Roman Church*, Henry agreed to *subdue the people and make them obedient to Rome's laws*. A more likely reason was that he was *willing to pay, from every house there, one pence to St. Peter*. Peter's Pence exists to this day. So, with the blessing of the Pope, the Isle of Saints and Scholars that had brought Christianity back to Europe after the Dark Ages and created such magnificent religious works as the Book of Kells, the Ardagh Chalice, and the Cross of Cong was placed under the spiritual guidance of the man behind the murder of St. Thomas Beckett!

The problem for the Normans was the autonomous nature of the Celts – they would not be ruled! So, the Norman expansion had to be by force of arms. Sadly, Celtic autonomy also excluded other Irishmen and the clans were largely independent with few allies among other clans and no real central authority. The result was that the Normans faced no unified resistance. However, as they spread across Ireland, they succumbed to the inviting Irish life-style and were absorbed, becoming as Irish as the Irish themselves. In 1366, in order to make Ireland a true English colony, Parliament passed the **Statutes of Kilkenny** forbidding Normans from adopting Irish manners and customs even to dress, hair style and language. The Irish life style was branded as vulgar, uncouth and as uncivilized as the Irish themselves. (Hello! Weren't these the ones who had saved civilization?)

In 1534, Henry VIII broke with the Church of Rome because the Pope wouldn't sanction his hopping from bed to bed. He declared himself head of the Church of England and began to execute Catholics who objected to his takeover. As head of his own church, he married 6 times (none of his wives knew where they'd be headed)! Still angry at the Pope, Henry moved to diminish Rome's power by confiscating Catholic monasteries, stealing their riches and persecuting Catholic clergy and laymen – including the Irish and Anglo-Irish. With the Protestant Reformation raging on the continent, a new dimension was added to the discrimination against the Irish; not only were they vulgar, uncouth and uncivilized, they were Catholic! Religion was becoming an issue.

In 1547, Henry died and 9-year old Edward took the throne with a protector who insured Protestant control. In 1553, Mary Tudor, Henry's first daughter and a devout Catholic, became Queen and power shifted. She replaced Protestant ministers and married Catholic King Philip of Spain. Her habit of sending her Protestant enemies to the block earned the nickname 'Bloody Mary.' In 1558, Elizabeth, Henry's second daughter, took over as Queen and changed England back to Protestant. With the shoe now on the other foot now, she replaced and persecuted Catholics. Religion was now a weapon in politics. Elizabeth even executed her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots, in 1587 to prevent a Catholic succession. In 1588, Catholic Spain sent an Armada against England, but it failed, further escalating Protestant hatred of Catholics.

Elizabeth decided to complete the conquest of Ireland and several Irish Chieftains defied her, notably The O'Neill, The O'Donnell and The Maguire with allies from the clans who had enough of English colonialism. (Rome and Catholic Spain also helped.) From 1594 to 1603, war devastated Ireland and the Irish lost. The Clan System was broken, the native population was crushed and English law governed Ireland. According to **The Economic History of Ireland**, by George O'Brien, the Irish people were reduced to a condition "*not far removed from slavery*". In 1609, the lands of the O'Neills, Maguires and O'Donnells and their supporters (half a million acres in Ulster) were confiscated and given free to any who claimed loyalty to the Crown as long as

they were English-speaking, Protestant and promised to keep the Irish out. In 1603, James I took the throne and continued Protestant control. In 1625, Charles I succeeded James and religious conflicts continued. He married a Catholic princess, Henrietta Maria of France, over the objections of Parliament.

In 1641, the displaced Irish rose in Ulster, and drove out the English who had stolen their lands. Stories of a great Papist Massacre were circulated claiming as many as 150,000 Protestants slaughtered by Catholics. Actually there were no more than 12,000 Protestants in all of Ireland at the time and it wasn't over religion, but it inflamed the English even further against Irish Catholics. The Irish formed the **Confederation of Kilkenny** to deal with King Charles for Irish rights but England's Puritan Parliament was hostile to Charles' religious policies and Catholic sympathies. They led a civil war against him in 1642 after which they felt he would follow their dictates. When he didn't, they rebelled again in 1648-9 after which he was tried, convicted, and executed for high treason. The monarchy was abolished and a Commonwealth was declared under Oliver Cromwell – a man whose hatred of Catholics knew no bounds. Cromwell then took his fanatically anti-Catholic, army of Puritan zealots to Ireland and devastated the country. He confiscated more than 11 million acres and gave them to his supporters. The dispossessed Irish were banished *to hell or to Connaught* – the most barren part of Ireland. Many took to the hills and lived as outlaws, raiding English settlements, while more than 34,000 went abroad to chance their fortunes in the Irish Brigades of foreign armies. Thousands of widows and orphans were shipped to English colonies in the Caribbean and America as slaves. The ordinary Irish, who had owned no land, were left to form a force of tenant farmers and laborers for their new English masters with the stipulation that they were not permitted to live in towns. Of all the plantations of Ireland, Cromwell's was the most thorough, but the plantation of an unforgiving hatred in the hearts of the Irish was the most lasting.

In 1660, the restoration of the House of Stuart was accomplished as Charles II acceded to the throne of England. He confirmed English possession of Irish lands and Protestant supremacy. In 1685, Charles was succeeded by his brother James II, a Catholic, who replaced Protestant officials throughout England and Ireland with Catholics and relaxed the Statutes of Kilkenny and other oppressive laws against Irish Catholics. The Protestants planned for the day when James' daughter, Mary, would succeed him for she was the wife of William of Orange, Protestant ruler of Holland. English Protestants felt that Mary would return power to them. Then, James had a son! The Protestants invited William of Orange to accept the English throne immediately and he agreed. James fled to Ireland to raise an army to defend his crown and on July 1, 1690 lost a key battle at the Boyne River. James fled to France and the Irish army withdrew to Limerick. The English couldn't take Limerick so they offered a treaty by which all lands and rights would be returned to Catholics if those who had fought the Crown would quit Ireland. The Irish accepted and 14,000 Irish left to join the Irish Brigade in the French army. After they'd gone, the treaty was broken and the infamous **Penal Laws** were enacted by which all rights and privileges were denied to Irish Catholics.

For the next hundred years sporadic uprisings by disgruntled bands of Irish against their new landlords occurred until members of Ireland's Protestant Ascendancy, angered by England's economic exploitation and taxation, formed **The Patriot Party** in the English-dominated Irish Parliament to legislate for better treatment. When their efforts were frustrated, a fusion of Protestants and Catholics against the Crown fostered **The United Irishmen** and the 1798 Rising resulted. The rising ultimately failed and brutal treatment followed to teach the Irish that they should never rise again. The Crown then mustered all its political power and intimidation to force the Irish Parliament to dissolve itself in favor of an **Act of Union** which made Ireland part of England in 1801. The Irish became a servile society in their own country, unable to vote, own property or even attend school while being subject to high taxes, rents on their former lands, and tithes to the Church of England to which they didn't even belong.

Forty-five years later, the potato – the staple crop of the Irish tenant farmer – failed for several years and the English Parliament turned a blind eye to Ireland's misery allowing millions to die of starvation and disease while another million fled. Those who lived through that tragedy passed on stories of their treatment at the hands of greedy landlords who exported tons of food throughout the entire period. Those who fled to other lands kept the memory of those times and their forced exile alive in their descendants who continued to support the cause of an independent Ireland. With the support of those exiles, Irish nationalists rose again in 1916 and were badly defeated. The irrational and cruel executions of the leaders and the internment of thousands of suspects finally turned the nation around so that when the internees were released in general amnesty, they were

ready to take on the Crown. A War of Independence, which lasted from January 1919 to July 1921, finally brought the British to the treaty table.

Again, the duplicity of the British reigned as the treaty offered a 26-county Free State with the remaining 6 counties to be given at a later date. The British threatened to unleash their army, just back from WWI, on Ireland if the terms were not accepted. Michael Collins, leader of the Irish forces, knew that the Irish were low on supplies, manpower and ammunition and couldn't withstand a British offensive. Rather than lose it all, the Irish accepted the treaty in 1921. As could have been foreseen, the six counties were never returned, Ireland was partitioned, and Irish nationalists in the north were left to suffer continued social, economic and physical persecution. The northern Loyalists, fearing to become a minority in a Catholic country dug in and accelerated anti-Catholic propaganda, gerrymandered voting districts and discrimination in jobs and housing to keep the Catholics an impotent and servile minority. These two communities still exist today.

Does this answer the question? Never in world history has one people struggled so hard for so long for one single goal – freedom! Nor have they been so maligned. They have made continuous attempts to resolve the issue and the pendulum has swung from parliamentary methods to military confrontation and back again, but the goal has never changed. Today, the parliamentary approach is again being tried, but Loyalist animosity created by centuries of propaganda and greed as well as nationalist mistrust from centuries of perfidious action is difficult to legislate away. The question should really be, *How do you defeat prejudice?*