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ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS

(1) THE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY BACKGROUND

THE history of Ireland between the Reformation and the 1641 rebellion is normally interpreted in either religious or racial terms or, on occasion, as a combination of both. It appears as an endless series of bloody and bitter struggles between Catholics and Protestants, or between the English government and 'the Irish people'. There is a half truth in this view, but it is by no means the whole story. For example, until 1641, there was no one military struggle in Ireland, in which Catholics could not be found in great numbers on the side of the English administration, and this despite the deposition of Elizabeth by Pius V in the bull 'Regnans in Excelsis' (1570). It is true that several attempts were made to invest with a religious aura, rebellions which might have been justified on other grounds. Thus in 1579, James FitzMaurice had Papal backing for his landing in Munster. In the same way, during the Nine Years' War, Hugh O'Neill claimed that he was fighting in the name of the Catholic Church, and called upon all Catholics to follow him. But whereas Gregory XIII had supported FitzMaurice, the anti-Spanish Clement VIII was much more circumspect in his attitude towards O'Neill, and his caution was shared by the Catholic towns, the Catholic gentry of the Pale counties, and such Catholic magnates as Clanrickarde, who fought with the English administration alongside Protestant Englishmen.

Nor is it historically desirable to emphasise the racial character of these wars and to describe them in terms of 'Saxon' and 'Celt'. Men of 'old English' stock were by no means loyal of necessity to the English Crown, nor were 'Gaelic Irish' lords always rebellious, against a government which could on occasion support their interests. In 1579 the rising in Munster was led by men of Anglo-Irish descent. In 1597 Hugh O'Neill's allies in the south

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included the Anglo-Irish Butler nobles, Mountgarret and Cahir, and the Anglo-Irish earl of Desmond. In 1601 the Gaelic forces of Thomond and McCarthy Reagh fought on the English side at Kinsale, while elsewhere 'Gaelic Irish' and 'rebel' were by no means synonymous terms. Ireland later split as the wedge of early Stuart English administration was hammered home, but until 1641 the cleavages often followed the lines of traditional rivalries, in which religious and racial differences did not always play the decisive part.

The new factor in sixteenth-century Ireland was the expanding power of the English Crown. Its expansion did not take place however in a homogeneous society but amid an already existing system of alliances and factions. In 1530 the English administration based on Dublin was merely one among a number of centres of political power. It was confined to a comparatively small area around Dublin, and it depended in practice upon the support of the earl of Kildare, whose castle at Maynooth lay less than twenty miles from Dublin. The so-called 'Irish Parliament' drew its representatives from only nine counties and about a dozen towns, and English power declined in direct proportion to the distance from Dublin. Outside the Pale[1], ninety states of varying size enjoyed *de facto* sovereignty. The great palatinates of Ormonde and Desmond were, to all intents and purposes, independent principalities, while farther north the territories of O'Neill, O'Donnell and other Irish chiefs had never been incorporated within the English feudal structure, even at its period of greatest extent, and they maintained the freedom of sovereign states. On a smaller scale indeed, Ireland resembled the Holy Roman Empire with its shifting patterns of states, large and small. This was the situation under the early Tudors, and there was no reason to think it would change.

When change did come, it began with the disruption of the alliance between the Crown and the Geraldine house of Kildare. For one moment, the Geraldines seemed victorious, in 1534, when only Dublin and Waterford remained loyal to the Crown, but the military power of the Tudors prevailed largely as a result of a new weapon, artillery. By 1541, the foundations of a new policy had been laid, based upon alliance with Ormonde, the

[1] By 'the Pale' is meant that part of Ireland which accepted English administration, however vaguely.

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ancient rival of the FitzGeralds,[1] and upon conciliation of the Gaelic princes. This was Henry VIII's method of 'sober ways, politic drifts and aimiable persuasions', and it was remarkably successful. It involved the alienation of the Geraldines of both Kildare and Desmond, however, and the results of this were to be seen in the Desmond rebellions of the second half of the century. Curiously enough, the Henrician reformation after 1540 did not disturb the government's relations with either Gaelic Irish or Anglo-Irish lords; and the local nobility continued to have the decisive voice in episcopal appointments, as they had always done. The Pope was repudiated by O'Neill, O'Donnell, McCarthy Mor, McCarthy Reagh and many others, and O'Neill's nominee to the bishopric of Clogher was not the only bishop to surrender his papal bulls when his lord renounced the Pope, and to continue his functions under a royal warrant. Monastic houses, however, often remained intact outside the areas of direct English control, despite the measures taken against them by the administration.

This policy of 'indirect rule' was not destined to last. Under Elizabeth, policies of more active centralisation and of more aggressive Protestantism began to move together. Against the background of war with Spain religious orthodoxy became the test of loyalty to the Crown, and of admission into the service of the Crown. It was increasingly unusual for a Catholic, even of English descent, to be allowed to enter the administration during the second half of the century, even though the Crown was dependent upon Catholic support in time of rebellion and war. But still the links of the towns and the Pale with the Crown proved stronger than were religious differences, and were even strengthened in the 1590's when the traditional enemies of the Pale, O'Neill and O'Donnell, joined forces against the Crown. The Ulster chiefs found their first experience of direct English control too strong for their liking, when in 1594 MacMahon's 'country', adjacent to their own, became a shire, open to the command of royal writs, which were enforceable by a Dublin-appointed sheriff; and the threat of losing their independence united the petty states of the north in a war which culminated at Kinsale in 1601. But though O'Neill attempted to make it into a war of religion, the

[1] Ormonde and the FitzGeralds of Desmond and Kildare who had taken opposite sides during the wars of the Roses continued their political rivalries into the 1560's.

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Pale resisted the call. In 1600, Sir Edward FitzHarris, who was later to play his part in constitutional opposition to the lord deputy under the early Stuarts, made clear the outlook of the Pale in a colloquy with O'Neill's chaplain, Fr. James Archer. Archer demanded the restoration of Catholicism and of forfeited estates. FitzHarris then asked what would become of the old English, to whom Archer belonged by race. Archer's answer was that the old English were too strong to be dislodged by the Irish; besides, the conquest was many centuries old. FitzHarris then declared that he was loyal for these very reasons, and had no wish to see Tyrone as chief over the whole kingdom. Earlier, in 1599, the Anglo-Irish earl of Delvin informed O'Neill that 'all the inhabitants of the English Pale for the most part, and especially myself, are Catholics and were so when he was not thought to be one'. He maintained that O'Neill had no justification for rebellion against 'their anointed Christian prince'. In this exchange of opinions lay the crux of the matter—whether or not loyalty was still possible to a Protestant Crown, or still desirable when so many accepted liberties were being removed by an advancing and efficient, though often corrupt, administration.

The Pale chose to co-operate with the Crown. O'Neill and O'Donnell preferred armed resistance against an administration which they did not trust and there was indeed much to be said for their lack of confidence, in an era when the holding of administrative office offered so much opportunity for abuse, and perquisites and bribery were accepted as part of normal routine. Even so, their resort to arms was by no means inevitable. In 1596 the requests which O'Neill made from Elizabeth were for a free pardon, liberty of conscience for the inhabitants of Tyrone, and that no garrison or sheriff, except his own, be placed in Tyrone. It is clear from this that O'Neill was prepared to tolerate the *status quo* provided the administration proceeded no further in its advance. The requests of his ally, O'Donnell, were phrased in similar terms. It was only after these negotiations had broken down and O'Neill had achieved some military success that the war began to spread. O'Donnell's raids into North Connacht exposed the weakness of the administration in that area, and in 1598, O'Neill rubbed home the lesson with his victory at the Yellow Ford, the high-water mark of his military success. By 1602 the tide had turned; he was abandoned by one of his allies,

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O'Cahan, and his northern flank was threatened by the English fleet. Spanish aid had provided the only hope but when it came it was almost too late and the outcome of the pitched battle fought at Kinsale by O'Neill and O'Donnell after a forced march of several hundred miles was disastrous. The war dragged on for two more years but in the end O'Neill was compelled to make the best terms he could. By 1603, Ulster was open to English administration for the first time in its history.

O'Neill found the transition from independence to vassalage too sudden and too drastic. The introduction of sheriffs and circuits of assize, the maintenance of garrisons at strategic points, the abolition of Irish land law in favour of English common law and the introduction of the State church, all emphasised the fact that the old order had suffered almost complete defeat. The personal ties which bound the Irish septs to their ruler were declared in 1605 to have no place in English law and the customs of tanistry and gavelkind suffered a similar fate in 1606–8. The final stage came in 1607 when O'Neill and O'Donnell took ship for Spain. This decision to escape seems to have taken the English administration by surprise but it was soon made the excuse for confiscation on a wide scale. By 1608, most of the land in the six counties of Donegal, Coleraine, Tyrone, Armagh, Fermanagh and Cavan had been declared forfeit to the Crown and the way was fully open for the entry of Scottish and English settlers. Geography favoured the Scots, who had already established themselves in parts of Antrim and Down and it was they, together with French emigrants from the Scottish lowlands, who took advantage of the opportunity.

In some ways the plantation of Ulster was a failure, particularly in the areas which were allotted to English undertakers. The rebellion of 1641 showed that thirty years of immigration had not completely destroyed the capacity of the Ulster Irish to wage a sustained military campaign. Nevertheless, though reservations must be made, the plantation in Ulster was too solidly established to be overthrown; a permanent problem was thus created. It was otherwise with the plantations made in other parts of Ireland which proved to be largely ephemeral growths. Only in Ulster did immigration take place on a scale which rivalled that to the New World, and for this reason it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the plantation in seventeenth-century Ireland.

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The results of the Flight of the Earls and of the Ulster plantation were fully reflected in the Irish parliament of 1613–15. For the first time, Protestant members enjoyed a majority in the house of commons, and though this was a gross distortion of the relative strength of the two religions, it was nevertheless a sound indication of the shift of political and administrative control which had taken place since the last parliament was held in 1585. For the first time all the counties were represented, but the increased representation largely benefited the Protestants who in a house of 232 members enjoyed a majority of 32.

The course of this parliament showed that despite its new accession of strength, the English administration was not to have things all its own way. The lord deputy was forced to modify drastically the legislative programme which he had prepared, in the face of strong Catholic opposition. It was noticeable, however, that though any extension of the penal laws was fiercely opposed, there was no opposition to the bills of attainder against O'Neill and O'Donnell. The Catholic old English of the Pale were still unwilling to regard the Ulster Irish as allies in a common cause.

During the next twenty years Ireland continued to be a country without unity. Political and economic factors intermingled with religious factors in maintaining a permanent state of imbalance. The clash of Reformation and Counter-Reformation, unrest in Ulster, the plantation of other areas outside Ulster, the uncertainty about land titles, together with the reaction against the expanding administration, all helped to create instability. The only source of unity in a country which had never been united came from the external force of the English administration. It so happened, however, that at almost the precise moment when centralised government became possible, further causes of disunity, namely religion and the confiscation of land, combined to make the task more difficult than it had ever been. The moment produced a great administrator in the person of Thomas Wentworth, but it was almost in the nature of the case that administrative unity should have to be imposed by force. There may have been another choice open, but on the face of it force seemed the obvious solution to a man of Wentworth's temperament. The term he used to describe his policy in his correspondence with Laud was 'thorough', which implied driving 'through' or 'thorough' those

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interests which lay in the way of fiscal, religious or administrative unity. It was in its essentials a policy of force, in which political concession and negotiation were regarded as signs of weakness. From a more general point of view, Wentworth was attempting to deal with problems which confronted all contemporary governments in their dealings with colonies. On the one hand they attempted to retain complete freedom of action, on the other they had to come to terms with the colonists themselves. Usually some kind of compromise was arrived at. In Wentworth's case, however, the English privy council was aiming at the restoration of complete freedom of action. This implied the removal of all the financial limitations which had hitherto curtailed the political power of the lord deputy. Complete freedom also implied an unwillingness to come to any understanding with existing bodies of opinion. A fresh departure was to be made by which policy decided in Whitehall was no longer to be modified by the facts of the situation in Ireland. As Wentworth himself put it in 1637, the King was to be 'as absolute here as any Prince in the whole world can be'.

Wentworth came to Ireland fresh from success as president of the Council of the North. There, his energetic and forthright methods of administration had achieved remarkable success and there was good reason to think that they would be not unsuccessful elsewhere. On the other hand it could be said that success in the limited field of northern England might prove a dangerous guide amid the complexities of Ireland. A country so divided could not be simply classified, as Laud and Wentworth tended to do, in terms of vested interests which it was their duty to destroy. In the short run it seemed possible that the policy of 'thorough' backed by the ability of a Wentworth might succeed, at any rate on the surface. In the long run, however, the odds were against it.

(II) POLITICS 1620–30

A description of Anglo-Irish politics in this period must take into account three main reservoirs of political power, the connections between each of them and the changing levels which occurred within them from time to time. These three were the English privy council, in particular its committee for Irish affairs;

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the 'new English' administration in Ireland, in effect, the Irish privy council; and lastly the old English aristocracy, gentry and merchants who made their political influence felt through unofficial channels except on the rare occasions when a Parliament—as in 1613, 1634 or 1640—or a Great Council—as in 1627—was sitting.

Ireland in the early seventeenth century was not a self-contained political unit. The political initiative to a large extent lay across the channel with the particular group which happened to be in power within the English privy council. Decisions which had far-reaching consequences for Ireland, as well as ones less momentous, were taken at the English court, not at Dublin castle. Appointments to office in Ireland frequently depended upon the amount of influence which could be brought to bear in England; thus, for example, Sir Edward Villiers owed his appointment as lord president of Munster to his all-powerful half-brother, the Duke of Buckingham. High officials of the Irish administration found that they could maintain their position only by keeping in constant touch with the internal politics of the English privy council. Boyle, Loftus, Mountnorris and many another found to their cost that standing still in Dublin could involve running hard in Whitehall. The power exercised by the English privy council caused a constant shuttling to take place between the two countries, an activity pursued as much as anyone by the old English who sent agents to preach their cause at the English court as the occasion demanded—the agents who went over to negotiate the Graces late in 1627 were neither the first nor the last. Finally it followed that political changes within the English privy council could have direct repercussions in Ireland. To take one example, the appointment of Thomas Wentworth as lord deputy, which would have been most unlikely under Buckingham, became possible under Weston, the Duke's successor as chief minister to the king.

Despite this dependence upon England, however, Anglo-Irish politics were not English politics; they had their own peculiar flavour. The political game in Ireland was played until 1632 between two main groups—the new English planter class, well established in Ulster and in the administration, which covered the whole of Ireland for the first time, and the old English excluded in practice from the administration, but still in possession

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of the richest land in Ireland. (Gaelic Ireland, and especially Ulster, which had played such a large part in the politics of Ireland during the sixteenth century had ceased to count as a political force within the constitutional framework of the early seventeenth century, while the Ulster Scots had not yet begun to make their influence felt and looked to Scotland for political and religious leadership.) These political groups were divided, by religion, by tradition, and by material interests. Nevertheless, divisions within the new English group, that is, within the Irish privy council, could lead to situations in which Protestant new English would co-operate with Catholic old English if political advantage could be gained. Politics were not therefore in fact as simple as might be assumed *a priori*. In theory, Richard Boyle, earl of Cork, and Francis Annesley, lord Mountnorris, were closer to one another than to the Catholic old English peer, Richard Nugent, earl of Westmeath. In practice, however, each of them was capable of co-operating with him, if the political game seemed to require it. And vice versa, the old English were also used to this particular political gambit which they played for the last time in 1640, before circumstances finally, in 1641, forced them to throw in their lot with Gaelic Irish.

The new English were divided over the perquisites of power, but agreed about the foundations on which that power was based. It was difficult to imagine a situation in which they might feel that their interests were being attacked by the English privy council, since they were essentially the English interest in Ireland. It was they who ran the administration on general lines suggested from England. Many of them had been members of Elizabeth's armies in Ireland and looked upon the plantations in Ulster and elsewhere as the legitimate reward for their military endeavours. Most of them shared a common religious attitude, which was particularly hostile towards the Church of Rome, though this did not preclude friendships with individual members of the Catholic gentry. A policy of further plantation, and a stricter attitude towards the recusant majority were unquestioned by most of the new English and they were only held back by the changed attitude of the English privy council. To them the obvious solution for the financial difficulties of the administration lay in the collection of recusancy fines, and they could not understand why on grounds of foreign policy such a course might seem undesirable

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in England. Their emphasis upon religious differences was due essentially to the realisation that only in this way could they hope to maintain their grip upon the machinery of government. Their political future depended upon the failure to find an oath of allegiance acceptable to the Catholics.

Thus the new English formed a vested interest, which felt all the more insecure because it was only a generation old. Firmly entrenched in the Irish privy council in which no Catholic sat, they formed a strong barrier between the English privy council and the execution of any policy of which they did not approve. Such an attitude was not unique to Ireland. It was, and is, to be found in many colonial societies in which a newly established planter class has established itself by force of arms and has acquired land by widespread confiscation. The counterparts of the new English were to be found in many parts of the new and old worlds; in Ireland, however, the conquerors had to deal with a society in many respects similar to their own. This did not necessarily make for easier relations nor was it obviously the case that a more efficient, more legally advanced and more powerful society was more civilised than that which it replaced. What is surprising is that with such basic agreement on fundamental issues, there still should have existed violent political differences within the ranks of the new English.

Broadly speaking, in 1629, just before Falkland was recalled, there were two main political groupings within the Irish privy council. The first group, which co-operated with the lord deputy and hence enjoyed the benefits of the patronage which co-operation carried with it, was headed by Richard Boyle, earl of Cork, a man of great business ability.[1] Born in Kent in 1566, Boyle had made his way to Ireland in 1588 like many another with the hope of acquiring cheap land. In 1590 he became deputy-escheator and by 1595, after the use of dubious methods, he had become the proprietor of a large estate. To this he added in 1603 the Irish lands of Sir Walter Raleigh. By 1629 he enjoyed an income from rents alone of £20,000 a year. With him were associated a powerful group of officials. Sir William Parsons, nephew of Sir Geoffrey Fenton, who had been Boyle's patron, was master of the court of wards and liveries. Sir Charles Coote, who had fought at Kinsale

[1] Cf. T. O. Ranger, 'Richard Boyle and the making of an Irish fortune' in *I.H.S.*, x. 257–97 (Mar. 1957).

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