Ireland's Two Cultures

JAMES F. LYDON. — *Lordship of Ireland in the Middle Ages.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972.

R. DUDLEY EDWARDS. — *New History of Ireland.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972.

PATRICK O'FARRELL. — *Ireland's English Question.* London: Batsford, 1971.

As a conclusion to his study of Ireland's long conflict of Gaelic and Anglo-Irish peoples during the middle ages, James Lydon discusses what problems modern Ireland had inherited from that period: "The root cause of all the trouble was the failure of the Anglo-Normans to conquer the whole of Ireland and to impose their own culture on the Gaelic lordships. They themselves were impossible to absorb and so they created the two-culture situation which has survived ever since." Both Dudley Edwards and Patrick O'Farrell agree with Professor Lydon about the nature of the cultural tensions which Ireland inherited from the middle ages, and both their books are similar to Lydon's in that they explore the long history of discord between the two nations of Ireland. Although both Edwards and O'Farrell extend their studies to the modern day, they share an acceptance of Lydon's analysis of what is the root cause of Ireland's endemic cultural struggle — the continuing existence of two antagonistic peoples in one small island.

In form, also, the three works have much in common. Lydon says about his study of medieval Ireland: "Since there is no lack of narrative accounts I have tried to be more analytical in my approach, and to interpret rather than merely describe events wherever possible." Both Edwards and O'Farrell also engage in "interpretation," and, like Lydon, see no need to indicate in footnotes when their insights are not original. O'Farrell's is the only one of the three works that provides a bibliography — of sorts. There may possibly be some excuse for Lydon's eschewing narrative for "interpretation" — the loss of so many medieval records in the Civil War of 1921-1922 has severely limited Irish medieval research, and the discovery of new material for reassessment of his period is uncommon. But the same cannot be said about later periods of Irish history, and the works of both Edwards and O'Farrell could afford a bit more "narrative" based on contemporary research and a little less "interpretation." The Irish are an ingenious and loquacious people when it comes to historical argument, and the major weakness of Irish historical writing to date — which Edwards and O'Farrell both perpetuate — has been its propensity to confine itself to "interpretation." Usually this takes the form of offering new glosses on unquestioned "facts" that have been accepted into the canon of Irish nationalist history, of one or other of the cultures in the island. Few readers of Irish history will feel happy when they read Dudley Edwards' introductory apology for "overstressing changing ideas," and Patrick O'Farrell's stated intention of "pursuing a theme" while letting "his discussion have a fairly loose rein to move along a general path."

The value of Edwards' and O'Farrell's works lies in the nature of their "ideas" or "themes." Both of them refuse to accept simplistic eighteenth century nationalist, or nineteenth century Marxist interpretations of Irish history, and they readily recognize the existence of two nations in Ireland, with significantly different cultures. Both of them are willing to admit that the endemic warfare between the two nations has its origins in cultural conflict, and that the Irish problem reflects a long continued cultural or tribal conflict.

Lydon develops this theme without reserve in his medieval study. He notes that in Ireland "no real fusion of the two cultures ever really took place, such as eventually happened in England after the Norman conquest." There was little assimilation of the English invaders into Gaelic society, intermarriage was rare, the Anglo-Irish always remain-

ed conscious of their Englishness, and considered Celtic culture inferior. It was the development of Ireland's two culture system that encouraged its two peoples to: "perpetuate animosities, fortified by religious bigotry, ignorance, persecution, and the deliberate falsification of history." And there was no escaping from this cultural tension. In Ireland the Anglo-Irish might stress their "Englishness" but at Oxford they were counted as "Hibernienses," and fought alongside the Gaelic-Irish in battles among the universities "nations." The Anglo-Irish were members of a "middle nation" that was neither English nor Gaelic, but they were conscious of having a culture of their own.

Lydon makes clear that even the papacy was forced to recognize the two cultures in Ireland when it came to regulating marriage and other social arrangements. Geoffrey de Geneville, Lord of Trim, presumed that the pope recognized the endogamous nature of Irish society when he sought dispensation for his son to marry a cousin, to avoid assimilation by an inferior people. When it came to diocesan administration in Kerry there were two archdeacons rather than the usual one appointed — an Anglo-Irish Archdeacon of Ardfert in the north, and a Gaelic-Irish Archdeacon of Aghadoe in the south. In 1324 the papal legate in Ireland attempted to dilute the Gaelic-Irish militancy of the Franciscans by bringing into their houses friars of the other culture. The result was an explosion during a general chapter meeting in Cork, with sixteen dead. Ecclesiastically, and otherwise, throughout the middle ages the Irish remained a divided people in church, state and society.

R. Dudley Edwards has long been Professor of Modern Irish History at University College, Dublin, and he has done much to build up the professional study of history in Ireland. An able lecturer and debater, he is noted for his shrewd and sometimes mischievious *obiter dicta*. Because of this one would expect a survey of Irish history from St. Patrick to the present day written by him to be a kind of compendium of insights which would upset traditionalist sensibilities. Unfortunately, this has not happened in his book which is generally flat and rather constrained. There are flashes of what might be expected from Dudley Edwards, of course, but the anti-traditionalist insights that he occasionally comes out with are not developed in the way one would like them to be. It is good to be reminded that in the seventeenth century some Irish did fight in Protestant armies, and that the Scots who took over Anglo-Irish lands in the Glens of Antrim were Catholic Highlanders. He also tells us that Pope Innocent XI refused aid to James II during his Irish campaign, and that in the eighteenth century Dublin Catholic clergy regularly prayed for the House of Hanover. Irish Catholics did not consider the Penal Laws harsh after the accession of George III — similar legislation was used against the Huguenots in France. Readers will appreciate his observation that: "after the Kilmainham Treaty the case for Home Rule was increasingly presented in terms of romantic nationalism, and it was easy to counter this in Belfast by 'playing the Orange Card.'" He believes that Manning used his influence at Rome on behalf of the British government because: "Manning did not favour any solution to Anglo-Irish problems which would remove the only Catholic representatives from Westminster."

One can appreciate these provocative asides, for they are rarely found in most of the "confessional" writing that characterizes Irish history. Dudley Edwards comments on this fact himself when he refers, in his epilogue, to the "obsequiousness towards modern Irish government north as well as south" shown by Irish scholars, and he demonstrates his own independence by remarking that: "it cannot be said that the government of the twenty-six counties today is any closer than it was in 1923 to representing the Irish community as a whole," and by wondering if Irish prosperity could have been greater after World War II if the Free State had stayed in the United Kingdom. He displays his shrewdness in his observation that the foundation of Queen's University, Belfast, and the National University of Ireland in 1908, both in the choice of names, and the fact of religious and educational partition, anticipated the separation of Ireland in 1921.

Yet the provocation provided by such insights is never sustained. Even the most resolute of Irish historians cannot live all his life in one of Ireland's two cultural centres without developing bias in his understanding of what is the canon of Irish history — what is his culture's "literary tradition." When Professor Edwards discusses the Irish rising of 1641 he acknowledges only "alleged excesses"... "a belief in a general massacre of Protestants." When he comes to 1798 there is no indication that the rising was largely Protestant. It is presented in Catholic sectarian terms with the government burning Catholic chapels, with no mention made that most of the militiamen were Catholics. When he comes to the modern period a reader can only wonder at his reference to De Valera's "cold-shouldering" clerical politicians. But such indications of bias are picayune compared to Dudley Edwards' almost total avoidance of Northern Ireland's problems, and the way of life of the "other culture."

Patrick O'Farrell's book, *Ireland's English Question* is in many ways the best of the three works, if only for the fact that it possesses both a bibliography and an index. Yet it tends to be wordy and repetitious, and it is full of quotations whose source is unacknowledged. The value of the study lies in its unashamed recognition of the existence of two cultures in Ireland. The two cultures O'Farrell recognizes are English Protestant and Irish Catholic, but he seems to deny the right of any Anglo-Irish Protestant culture to exist in Ireland.

O'Farrell is an Australian, a professor at the University of New South Wales, in Sydney, and he is a recognized authority on the history of the Roman Catholic Church in Australia. He is a strong conservative churchman whose ideas would be questioned by some of his liberal Irish co-religionists, as he readily admits. It is tragic to think, however, that most Irish Catholics would probably share the sensibilities that he reveals in this study. Any Ulsterman who has been conditioned to fear "Rome rule" will have his suspicions confirmed by reading O'Farrell. He tries to qualify much of what he says, but it seems clear that the triumphalism of the Council of Trent, rather than the ecumenical spirit of the second Vatican Council guides the thinking of Professor O'Farrell, and it is his inability to think in other than ultramontane terms that is the major weakness of his study.

In the period 1870-1921 O'Farrell uses some original material — though he seldom acknowledges his sources — and it is too bad that his writing so closely and consistently reflects his own ultra-conservative outlook, for his theme is an important one. The question of religion is at the root of the Irish problem, and it is essentially a "problem of identity" — not only for the Roman Catholics of the south with whom O'Farrell deals, but also for the Protestants of Ireland as a whole. O'Farrell is intelligent and shrewd enough to see that the penal laws of the eighteenth century were essentially loyalty tests to delineate the tribal allegiances of the people, and that such tribalism — based on differing religions, cultures and endogamy — is a continuing reality on the Irish scene.

Professor O'Farrell is not happy about Ireland having two nations. His religious and tribal triumphalism is such that he cannot envisage a pluralist Ireland. Within the island, he believes, the battles of the Counter-Reformation have continued, will continue, and should continue. "If the sun never set on the British Empire, neither did it set on the Irish empire — in that it was Roman, Catholic, American, Australian, Argentinian, universal, an empire of race and religion." The conflict between the two empires was and is brought into focus in the Irish homeland where: "Britain was more than an oppressor, rather a kind of anti-Christ, the origin and source of all evils." When the English, and their tribal auxiliaries, the Protestant Anglo-Irish, opposed the forces of Irish Roman Catholicism in the past, there was no doubt in Professor O'Farrell's mind about which of the opposing forces was on the side of the angels: "To the Irish there was no world of the neutral affairs of men. Eternity cast its light — or glare — into the ante-room of daily life, colouring all that was there."

O'Farrell argues that by the eighteenth century it was clear that what the Roman Catholics wanted was: "the age of the Counter-Reformation in Ireland, the sacerdotal age which belonged to priest and priesthood." But this dream was difficult to fulfill, for the enemy in the form of the Anglo-Irish, supported by English power, occupied Ireland and: "For the English, religion was moving from the realm of the spiritual conviction into that of social characteristic." By the nineteenth century the battle lines were clearly drawn. Against the "nineteenth century secularization of the English mentality ... the Irish church ... was coming to see itself as a strong and holy bastion against an evil world determined to make war on God himself." And so the battle continued, the issue being a struggle between two radically different cultures, one based on secularism, and political expediency, the other on religious principles. And to Professor O'Farrell there can, by definition, be no compromise between the two cultures, let alone mutual toleration: "Politics are of their nature pragmatic and circumstantial, inevitably local and limited in their applicability. Only principles have any potential for constancy or universality."

The failing of this ideological reading of Irish history, of course, is that Professor O'Farrell never quite succeeds in fitting the facts into his schema. He says, for example, of the eighteenth century Irish priesthood: "One result of the deprivation of Ireland of educational facilities was that many of the priests were continental-trained, distinguished by a strong ultramontanism, which put them and the people to whom they ministered even more at odds with the nationalist-political outlook of the English." The fact was that most continental-trained Irish priests of the eighteenth century—like the emigré priests who formed the first faculty at Maynooth — were Gallican rather than ultramontane in their sympathies. He tries to imply that the redoubtable John MacHale, Archbishop of Tuam, was a passionate ultramontanist, but this is a very dubious argument indeed. Dr. O'Farrell also lacks credibility when he refuses to allow a place in Irish history for any Protestant and says: "The outlook and position of the Protestant Ascendancy made patriotism impossible for them, even for those with a genuine belief that their interests were Ireland's interests." One can believe *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* without debarring the likes of Grattan, Wolfe Tone, Thomas Davis and Parnell from the pantheon of Irish nationalist heroes. O'Farrell is even suspicious of the laurels granted to O'Connell by Irish historians because the Liberator once admitted: "I am sincerely a Catholic, but I am not a Papist." Solemnly O'Farrell passes judgement: "Herein lies the vital weakness in the linkage he made between the forces of religion and those of politics, and his words go echoing down the years."

There is little doubt that in the late nineteenth century Cardinal Cullen managed to force an ultramontane veneer on Irish catholicism — but at the cost of separating the church from the Irish nationalist movement, which is so strong an element in Irish Catholic culture. Dudley Edwards makes the point that from the time that the hierarchy turned on Parnell, it has had "scant influence on the forces of revolution in the twentieth century." If Professor O'Farrell doubts this "Edwardsian" insight he should check with what the Bogsiders said to Bishop Philbin when that prelate told his people to take down their barricades in 1969! Unfortunately, for Professor O'Farrell's ultramontane thesis the power of Rome in Irish Catholic affairs has always been almost as qualified as English authority has been among the Protestants. When O'Connell said in 1831 he was sent "by God to regenerate the country," and when Fr. Mathew carried out his moral revolution which gave the nationalist movement its essential discipline, both folk-heroes were inspired by Irish Protestant example, not by Roman authority.

At times O'Farrell's rhetoric and apologetic carries him to embarrassing extremes. When he discusses emigration in the post-famine era he says: "Ireland was a Christian society; to remain within it was to enjoy all the protective advantages of a world based on faith and morality." When the emigrants reached Protestant shores at Liverpool, Montreal or New York they were: "corrupted by the heathen societies into which they were

dumped, often to be submerged by vice or drunkenness." In his excitement he slips at times into errors on the level of the schoolboy howler — as in his reference to "Poyning's laws."

Professor O'Farrell's book is not a good one — from the standpoint of historical scholarship — but it is fascinating as a revelation of how deep seated is the malaise that afflicts the Irish people. When John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin, came back from Vatican Council II he told his people to relax, nothing was about to change in Holy Church in his diocese, and it fills the reader with a sense of wonder to see this same King Canute mentality presented in the form of historical argument by such an able and intelligent person as Patrick O'Farrell. Yet this same backward-looking mentality still exists among intellectuals in both Irish cultures, and O'Farrell's almost comic bias shows how intractable is the nature of the endemic cultural warfare in Ireland.

As the events of the last four years have shown us, there is no easy answer to the problem of Ireland's two cultures and their warfare. At the conclusion of James Lydon's book there is a reference to a report on the state of Ireland made in 1515. In it the author tells the story of St. Brigid asking her good angel in which land were most souls damned. She was shown a land in the west where Christian folk died most out of charity: "... for there is most continual war, root of hate and envy, and of vices contrary to charity: and without charity the souls cannot be saved. And the angel did show her the lapse of the souls of the Christian folk of that land, how they fell down into hell as thick as any hail shower." The author was sure this was Ireland, for : "there is no land in the world of so long continual war within himself, nor of so great shedding of Christian blood, nor of so great robbing, spoiling, preying and burning, nor of so great wrongful extortion continually as Ireland." One can see little change in our year of grace 1974, and no one has the answer to the Irish cultural struggle.

For all their attempts to be "interpretative" rather than "narrative," Professors Lydon, Edwards and O'Farrell give comparatively few insights which will help the reader to understand the dynamic of Ireland's continuing tribal and cultural warfare. Perhaps the problem is beyond human ingenuity to explain, and we must fall back on the wisdom of Giraldus Cambrensis in the early thirteenth century. Professor Lydon tells us how he explained the continuing warfare of the two peoples:

> The Irish had not so strictly offended God that it was his will that they should be entirely subjugated; nor were the deserts of the English such as to entitle them to the sovereignty over and possible obedience of the people they had partly conquered and reduced to obedience. Therefore, perhaps, it was the will of God that both nations would be long engaged in mutual conflicts.

Desmond Bowen
Carleton University.

* * *

Brian Pullan. — *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice: The Social Institutions of a Catholic State, to 1620.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971.

The stability of the Venetian republic and its comparative immunity from large scale revolutionary commotions have long exercised the curiosity and interest of historians. In the sixteenth century a long succession of admiring commentators, from Gasparo Contarini to Jean Bodin, explained the phenomenon by reference to the social cohesion and political sagacity of the Venetian patriciate, to the excellence of the presumed "mixed" polity of the republic, and to its salutary legislation. By way of addition to these *loci communes* Contarini emphasized the comprehensive welfare activities of the republic: its provision of food for the populace at low cost, its encouragement and supervision of philanthropic institutions, its support of the sick and aged, and its relief of the poor. The