**Ireland and the Continent**

At first glance, Ireland, as an offshore island off an offshore island on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean, remote, romantic and untrodden by the Roman legions, does not appear to be in the mainstream of Europe. However, from the earliest of pre-Christian times, the dividing seas around her have been her connecting sea roads -- the equivalent of today's motorways and autobahns, linking her closely not only with Scotland, Wales and England, but with France, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Austria, Italy and even with Russia. The early pagan Celts, particularly during the time of the collapse of the Roman Empire, poured down through the Irish Sea and the Channel in enormous fleets of pirate ships, sweeping up thousands of prisoners as slaves -- including one from the Severn Estuary who was destined to return as Saint Patrick, the Evangelist of Ireland. These Celtic warriors, who flung themselves almost naked into battle, armed only with a short, stabbing sword, have been aptly described by the Roman historian, Diodorus Siculus, writing one hundred years before the birth of Christ:

"Physically the Celts are terrifying in appearance, with deep-sounding and very harsh voices. In conversation they use few words and speak in riddles, for the most part hinting at things and leaving a great deal to be understood. They frequently exaggerate with the aim of extolling themselves and diminishing the status of others. They are boasters and threateners, and given to bombastic self-dramatization, and yet they are quick of mind and with good natural ability for learning. " In fact their natural ability for learning was such that theybecame intoxicated with the message of Christianity brought to them by Saint Patrick in the year 432 AD, and the whole nation burst forth between the fifth and the ninth centuries in monastic universities, centers of learning which kept the light of Christ aglow in Ireland during the Dark Ages. These monks returned in vast numbers as "peregrini" -- wanderers for the sake of Christ -- who spread throughout Europe as far as Kiev in Russia. Staff in hand, wearing a roughspun habit and cowl with a rope cord tied at the waist and shod with sandals, they favored the "half-corona" hairstyle, the hair tonsured right across the front of the head, and they must have looked somewhat eccentric to pagan Europe. They carried no material possessions with them and brought civilization -- Latin, Greek and Christianity -back through Europe, leading them by the scholars hand and the sound of the Mass bell. They set up their stalls at the court of the Emperor Charlemagne and shouted "knowledge for sale!"

Saint Colmcille set up his monastery-university in Iona in 563 AD, and evangelized the Scots. Saint Aidan took on the English in 635 AD, and Saint Finian tackled the Welsh. Saint Columbanus, from Bandor, spread his rule of life like a fire throughout France, founding the Monastery of Luxeuil in 590 AD, and Annegray and Fontaines. His rule of life was so successful, and so widespread, that it rivaled the classic Benedictine rule. Eventually, because it was so austere, it gave way to the popularity of the "Fax" of the Benedictines, who brought tranquility out of chaos by leading people back to cultivate the land and to lead a quiet, spiritual life. Saints Fiacre and Kilian settled in Meaux and Aubiguy, while Saint Fursey founded the Monastery of Lagny, anpPalace of Charles the Bald, while other Irish monks set up in Rheims, Metz and Ghent. Liege fell under the influence of Irish monk scholars, as did Aix La Chapelle, Pavia, Cologne and Mainz. Ratisbon, Wurzburg and Mecklenburg too fell to the learning of the "peregrini. " In Irish history, 1798 was "the Year of the French, " as it was then that they landed a military expeditionary force in the Bay of Killala in County Mayo. It was defeated, and while French officers and troops were spared as prisoners of war, the Irish rebel peasantry and their French-trained Irish leaders, were massacred by the redcoats and German mercenary troops, the Hessians. The Hessians behaved in Ireland as did many of their descendants in the German invasion of Poland in Worid War II. When the rising of Coonnaught had been finally crushed, French ships once again sailed into Killala Bay but, being too late to be of any help, they quietly returned to France. In Lough Swilly, off the coast of Donegal, the ship carrying Theobald Wolfe Tone was taken, and he was imprisoned in Dublin where he died in mysterious circumstances, a death said by his captors to have been suicide. The Irish struggle for freedom continued, largely with the aid of the French. It was the French who helped inspire the insurrection of 1848, and it was in France that the Fenians -- the Irish Republican Broatherhood -first learned their trade, and became heavily influenced by the French revolutionary philosophy of violence, anti clericism and the destruction of religious education in schools- aspects of the less acceptable face of modern anarchical revolution.

Austria has had a special fascination for the wandering Irish since the monks of the ninth century. Ever chivalrous, when the militant Prussian, Frederick the Great, declared war on Maria Theresa of Austria, Irishmen flocked to her aid and joined her regular army, so much so, that at one time there were no less than thirty Irish generals in the Imperial Army. I The bestknown descendants of these generals were Brownes, Fitzgeralds, Nugents, 0'Donnells, O'Connells, Lacys, 0'Briens and Taaffes and, in 1915, Viscount Taaffe was Field Marshal, Minister of State and Chamberlain to the Emperor Franz Joseph.

As early as 1620, Thomas Carve, born in Tipperary in 1590, was the Catholic chaplain to the Austrian Foreign Legion. Francis MacDonnell, born in Connaught in 1656, joined the Austrian Army and captured the French Marshal Villeroi in battle. Count Andrew O'Reilly, who was born in Ireland in 1742, distinguished himself in the Seven Years War, fought at the battles of Amberg and Ulm in 1796, as well as at Kehl, and was made Governor of Vienna, the city where he died in 1832. His fellow Irish soldier, Field Marshal Brady, started life as a theological student destined for the priesthood in Vienna, and gave this up to enter the army of Maria Theresa. Field Marshal Nugent left Austria for England in 1811 and became diplomatic representative for his adopted country.

Many other Irishmen achieved eminence and it is probable that many Austrian citizens today, particularly in Vienna, who bear Irish names are unaware of their ancestral connections with the Emerald Isle.

Many of the Irish leaders trained in the fencing schools of France and became the greatest swordsmen of their day. Several returned to Galway and enjoyed the: thriQ of challenging the Williamite usurpers of their land to a gentleman's duel. The Williamites were not skilled in swordplay, and thus many leading families were deprived prematurely of their arrogant young sons. Due to the inequaIity of skills in swordplay, the first rules of dueling were set up in Galway -- pistols at dawn at twenty paces. This evened up the chances of survival for the young Williamite bloods in their duels with their French-trained opponents. Voltaire, commenting on the military genius of the Irish in the service of France, admired their gallantry fighting abroad and said that they had "always fought badly at home. " This was echoed by Thomas Davis, who commented that the "Wild Geese" fought with all the advantages of French discipline and equipment, and as soldiers with the rights of war, and not as "Rebels, with halters round their necks. "

The Irish were loath to stay out of European wars -some 250, 000 served in the British forces in World War I. They, like many, died bloodily in their thousands, and Professor Tom Kettle, an Irish Volunteer, summed up their thoughts when he wrote the following lines a few days before he was killed on the Western Front: "So here, while the mad guns curse overhead

And tired men sigh with mud for couch and floor,

Know that we fools, now with the foolish dead,

Died not for Flag, nor Emperor,

But for a dream, born in a herdsman's shed,

And for a secret scripture of the poor. "