

THE ACT OF UNION.



FROM the days of King John to the days of George III., Ireland was the dwelling-place of a parliament. This parliament was never an Irish parliament. Its members were chosen almost entirely from among the Anglo-Norman invaders, and its legislation was invariably prejudicial to the interests of the native population. With the advent of Protestantism and the accession to the English throne of William of Orange, the already limited representative body was reduced to still smaller dimensions by a law allowing Protestant members only to take their seat in the House. Hence, the last eight hundred years of Ireland's history are dotted by the landmarks of British tyranny—the Statutes of Kilkenny, the Penal Laws, the Act of Union. They all involved new civil relations for Ireland; they have all been sources of disasters for Ireland, and all point to England as their common originator. Let us see how this is verified in the Act of Union.

By the Act of Union Ireland lost the right to make her own laws. Henceforth she was to send her quota of representatives to swell the ranks of the British legislature, where Irish interests in common with English, Scotch, Welsh, and greater Imperial interests were to be discussed and legislated for. This measure was to be a panacea for the evils of Ireland; how then has it proved a source of disaster to her? Surely, if the vast bulk of the Irish people had no voice in their so-called legislature, could they reasonably regret its loss? Could they reasonably protest against the annexation of the parliament of Dublin with the parliament of London? What advantage would they derive from the maintenance of a legislature, the vast majority of whose members were the exclusive choice of a few landed proprietors? Should they not rather prefer a parliament in which their country would have, at least, the advantage of an adequate representation? No; bad as was her independent parliament, inadequately as she was represented therein, Ireland had reasons to cling tenaciously to her parliament. She construed the growing spirit of tolerance and reform that characterized the time, as a favorable prognostic