4. - Union with England

In 1782 a Parliamentary faction led by Henry Grattan (a Protestant) successfully agitated for a more favorable trading relationship with England and for greater legislative independence for the Parliament of Ireland.

However, London still controlled much of what occurred in Ireland. Inspired by the French Revolution, in 1791 an organization called the United Irishmen was formed with the ideal of bringing Irish people of all religions together to reform and reduce Britain's power in Ireland.

Its leader was a young Dublin Protestant called Theobald Wolfe Tone. The United Irishmen were the inspiration for the armed rebellion of 1798. Despite attempts at help from the French the rebellion failed and in 1801 the Act of Union was passed uniting Ireland politically with Britain.

In 1829 one of Ireland's greatest leaders Daniel O'Connell, known as 'the great liberator' was central in getting the Act of Catholic Emancipation passed in the

parliament in London. He succeeded in getting the total ban on voting by Catholics lifted and they could now also become Members of the Parliament in London.

After this success O'Connell aimed to cancel the Act of Union and re-establish an Irish parliament. However, this was a much bigger task and O'Connell's approach of non-violence was not supported by all.

The Irish Rebellion of 1798 brought the Irish question forcibly to the attention of the British Cabinet; and William Pitt the Younger, the British prime minister, decided that the best solution was a union.

By legislative enactments in both the Irish and the British parliaments, the Irish Parliament was to be abolished, and Ireland thenceforth was to be represented at the Parliament in Westminster, London, by 4 spiritual peers, 28 temporal peers, and 100 members of the House of Commons.

A union, Pitt argued, would both strengthen the connection between the two countries and provide Ireland with opportunities for economic development. It would also, he thought (mistakenly), make it easier to grant concessions to the Roman Catholics, since they would be a minority in a United Kingdom.

Naturally the union met with strong resistance in the Irish Parliament, but the British government, by the undisguised purchase of votes, either by cash or by bestowal of honours, secured a majority in both the British and Irish Houses that carried the union on March 28, 1800. Not one catholic was in the Irish Parliament.

The Act of Union received the royal assent on Aug. 1, 1800, and it came into effect on Jan. 1, 1801.

Henceforth, the monarch was called the king (or queen) of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

The union remained until the recognition of the Irish Free State (excluding six of the counties of the northern

province of Ulster) by the Anglo-Irish treaty concluded on Dec. 6, 1921.

The union officially ended on Jan. 15, 1922, when it was ratified by the Provisional Government led by Michael Collins in Ireland. (On May 29, 1953, by proclamation, Elizabeth II became known as queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.)

The Treaty consisted of twenty-five Articles.

Article 1 states "That the Two Kingdoms of Scotland and England, shall upon the 1st May next ensuing the date hereof, and forever after, be United into One Kingdom by the Name of Great Britain."

Article 2 provided for the succession of the House of Hanover, and for Protestant succession as set out in the English Act of Settlement of 1701.

Article 3 provided for the creation of one unified Parliament of Great Britain.

Article 4 gave the subjects of Great Britain freedom of trade and navigation within the kingdom and "the Dominions and Plantations thereunto belonging", meaning what were then the English overseas possessions.

Articles 5 to 15, 17, & 18 dealt with aspects of trade, movement, taxes, regulation, and other matters, to ensure equal treatment for all subjects of the new kingdom.

Article 16 required the introduction of a common currency for Great Britain, subsequently effected through the Scottish recoinage of 1707–1710.

Article 19 provided for the continuation of Scotland's separate legal system.

Article 20 provided for the protection after the union of a number of heritable offices, superiorities, heritable jurisdictions, offices for life, and jurisdictions for life.

Article 21 provided for the protection of the rights of the royal burghs.

Article 22 provided for Scotland to be represented in the new Parliament of Great Britain by sixteen of its peers and forty-five members of the House of Commons.

Article 23 provided for Scotland's peers to have the same rights as English peers in any trial of peers.

Article 24 provided for the creation of a new Great Seal of Great Britain, different from those of England and Scotland, but it also provided that the Great Seal of England was to be used until this had been created.

Article 25 provided that all laws of either kingdom that may be inconsistent with the Articles in the Treaty were declared void.

Such political issues were overshadowed however by the worst disaster and tragedy in Irish history – the great famine.