



The Irish Establishment 1879-1914

Fergus Campbell

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The Irish Establishment examines who the most powerful men and women were in Ireland between the Land War and the beginning of the Great War, and considers how the composition of elite society changed during this period.

Although enormous shifts in economic and political power were taking place at the middle levels of Irish society, Fergus Campbell demonstrates that the Irish establishment remained remarkably static and unchanged. The Irish landlord class and the Irish Protestant middle class (especially businessmen and professionals) retained critical positions of power, and the rising Catholic middle class was largely--although not entirely--excluded from this establishment elite. In particular, Campbell focuses on landlords, businessmen, religious leaders, politicians, police officers, and senior civil servants, and examines their collective biographies to explore the changing nature of each of these elite groups.

The book provides an alternative analysis to that advanced in the existing literature on elite groups in Ireland. Many historians argue that the members of the rising Catholic middle class were becoming successfully integrated into the Irish establishment by the beginning of the twentieth century, and that the Irish revolution (1916-23) represented a perverse turn of events that undermined an otherwise happy and democratic polity. Campbell suggests, on the other hand, that the revolution was a direct result of structural inequality and ethnic discrimination that converted well-educated young Catholics from ambitious students into frustrated revolutionaries.

Finally, Campbell suggests that it was the strange intermediate nature of Ireland's relationship with Britain under the Act of Union (1801-1922)--neither straightforward colony nor fully integrated part of the United Kingdom--that created the tensions that caused the Union to unravel long before Patrick Pearse pulled on his boots and marched down Sackville Street on Easter Monday in 1916.

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