

## Heritage of Our Empire

### *Our Empire : past and present*

Reginald Brabazon, Earl of Meath

1901

•

### The Making of Great Britain. Union with Ireland.

THE history of the conquest of Ireland and of England's earlier government of the sister isle, form one of the least satisfactory chapters in the making of our Empire. The long story of the conquest is, alas ! marked by frequent misunderstandings and injustices, which we all now heartily regret.

The difficulties of fusion between races so different as the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic were doubtless great, but these have been overcome in Scotland ; and it is, let us hope, only a case of time and of patience, on both sides, for the union between Great Britain and Ireland to be as complete and thorough as that between England and Scotland.

Ireland's earliest history of fabulous antiquity, interwoven with all manner of beautiful myths and legends, we must leave behind, and begin with the arrival on its shores of the great Christian missionary, St. Patrick, who commenced his glorious mission in 432. Never was teacher more gentle and persuasive than St. Patrick, or people more ready to embrace Christianity than were the Irish. Never was a great revolution swifter, milder, or more blessed in its results. St. Patrick died when seventy-five years old, it is supposed in 465, and before his death the crusade against Irish heathenism had in great measure done its magnificent work. Ireland was enthusiastic in her conversion.

Civilisation and Christianity went hand in hand. A new energy was born, arts and letters flourished, and within a century of St. Patrick's death Irish missionaries were battling against the paganism of our English forefathers. " England," says Mr. Lecky, " owed a part of her Christianity to Irish monks." Columba, an Irish refugee, had crossed to Scotland, and founded the far-famed monastery of Iona. Three centuries found Ireland prospering and unravished by hostile invaders, pursuing her missionary work abroad and nearer home, whither flocked many of the great scholars of the Continent, who had fled before invading destroyers, and Ireland became known as the " Island of Saints and Scholars," the welcoming refuge of learning, religion, and arts.

But art and learning were checked, and the saintly teaching of St. Patrick and the Church founded by him sank to a very low ebb in the succeeding centuries, during which Ireland was subjected to a series of disastrous invasions from Danes, Normans, and Norwegians. The Irish proved brave enough in defending their country, and the invaders, time after time, were defeated and driven back, but not before the land had been scourged by their armies and wide tracks laid waste. At various times, too, the Danes succeeded in making settlements in Dublin, Wexford, Waterford, Cork, and Limerick, where they added to the general lawlessness and confusion, not being strong enough themselves to conquer the Irish population, while the Irish were not strong enough to expel them from their midst. Dr. Gardiner, writing of this time, says, " In the domain of art Ireland was inferior to no European nation ; in metal work, in sculpture, and in the skilful illumination of manuscripts it surpassed them all. It had

no mean school of poetry and song.” But he goes on to point out, “ In political development it lagged far behind. Ireland was still in the tribal stage, and had never been welded into unity by foreign conquerors, as Gaul had been welded into unity by the Romans, and as England had been welded into unity by the Normans. Tribe warred with tribe, and chief with chief. The efforts of chiefs to attain supremacy over the whole island had always ended in partial or complete failure.” [1] In this long struggle for mastery, the personal bravery and bold impetuous spirit that characterise the Celt found an outlet whenever the pressure from outside was removed, and the five petty kingdoms of Ireland—Ulster, Leinster, Meath, Connaught, and Munster—were free to make war on each other.

The Church suffered in these turbulent times, and was no less disorganised than the State. Beyond the monastic bodies it exercised small influence. And Ireland in the twelfth century, alas ! instead of having persevered in her glorious course of enlightenment and progress, had exhausted the magnificent vigour and energy that had rolled back the forces of heathendom and achieved a moral conquest under St. Patrick second to none in secular history. All the golden flood of light and learning and missionary zeal which had overflowed and poured into the countries of Europe, stopped when the land was given up to civil war. The strength and valour of the people were wasted in the interminable quarrels and jealousies of a divided State, and Ireland sank lower and lower until it struggled for a bare existence. Exaggerated accounts of the deplorable condition of Ireland—it was represented as having practically abandoned Christianity and relapsed into barbarism, in addition to being torn with internal dissensions—made both the Pope and the English Archbishop eager to restore religious order. As the Papacy claimed sovereignty over all islands, Pope Adrian IV. in 1155 granted the island of Ireland to Henry II. of England, sanctioning its invasion as a sacred crusade.

Henry had only just succeeded to the throne, and for some years he was busy re-establishing order in his own kingdom, and had no time to give to Ireland. When at last he intervened in the affairs of the sister-isle, Henry, apart from Adrian’s grant, had legitimate grounds for declaring war, as the Irish had kidnapped and sold into slavery a large number of his English subjects. At the same time the Pope warmly encouraged the invasion of Ireland, being anxious to acquire ecclesiastical authority over the island, which had hitherto refused to acknowledge the supremacy of Rome, since the early Irish Church remained Celtic, not Latin.

The cities on the coast which had been conquered, and were still held by the Danes, such as Dublin and Waterford, were united with the English Church, and acknowledged the Pope as the Head of Christendom, but the Irish Church retained her independence, though she had lost all power over the people, and had sunk to a moral condition which put Henry in the position to declare that he proposed to conquer Ireland in order “ to enlarge the bounds of the Church, to restrain the progress of vice, to correct the manners of its people, to plant virtue among them, and to extend the Christian religion.”

Pleased with these laudable motives, Pope Adrian, the only Englishman who has filled the Papal throne, issued a Bull authorising Henry to take possession of Ireland on condition of his holding the country when conquered as a fief of the Church, and compelling every family in the island to pay tribute to the See of Rome.

The moral support of the Pope did not go very far towards enabling Henry to bring the Irish so completely under his yoke as to make it possible for him to carry out the second condition.

When the invasion of Ireland began to be seriously contemplated, the difficulties which it presented became apparent, and the holy crusade was deferred for a time, while Henry engaged in more mundane, but more promising, warlike enterprises on the Continent.

It was not till thirteen years later, in 1168, that the Irish question was brought to the fore again by the arrival at the English Court of Dermid MacMurrough, King of Leinster, who had been driven out of his kingdom in one of the incessant civil wars. He had come to seek the aid of England in recovering his crown, and he swore fealty to Henry for the possessions which Henry's knights promised to help him to re-capture.

A small body of a hundred and forty knights, sixty men-at-arms, and three or four hundred Welsh archers under Robert Fitz-Stephen, went over to Ireland in 1169 to his aid. They were followed by the Earl of Pembroke, Richard de Clare, known in history as the famous Strongbow, who came on his own account to the aid of Dermid with fifteen hundred men.

Waterford and Dublin surrendered, and Strongbow, through a marriage with the daughter of Dermid, King of Leinster, followed by the timely death of his father-in-law, soon found himself lord over Dermid's kingdom. He gave himself the title of Earl of Leinster, and a reign of violence and cruelty was inaugurated for Ireland under its knightly rulers.

Henry of England, however, looked with doubtful eyes on this quick success of his powerful vassal. He had refused to sanction Strongbow's action in going to Dermid's aid, and was doubly displeased at the independent attitude adopted by the new Earl of Leinster. Possibly he thought that a man who could bite off the nose and lips from the head of a dead enemy, as Strongbow is reported to have done, was not a person especially fitted to "correct the manners" of the people of Ireland.

Henry summoned Strongbow to England, and made him surrender Dublin to the Crown and do homage for Leinster. He further announced his intention of accompanying Strongbow back to Ireland. Many of the Irish chiefs and the Synod of Bishops, whom he summoned to meet him at Cashel, were ready to acknowledge Henry as their lord, and had he been able to carry out his plans, remaining in Ireland long enough to arrange affairs on a firm footing, and to enforce law and order by placing himself at the head of a united people, first subduing those tribes that refused to submit to him, and then building castles in different parts of the country to maintain his authority, the conquest of Ireland might have been permanently effected. But troubles in Normandy obliged him to leave Ireland while the pacification was still unfinished, and after his departure the fiery troubles and violence broke out again. In 1185 Henry sent over his son John to act as Lord of Ireland, but the foolish and ill-mannered prince's insults to the Irish chiefs in ridiculing their dress and rudely plucking their beards sufficiently illustrate his unfitness for any such government. He was soon recalled, and Ireland remained unconquered, though English influence was strong in the counties of Louth, Dublin, Meath, and Kildare, which were known about a century later as the English Pale.

And now there began the long struggle between the two races, the painful recollection of which has been far too persistently cherished, and cannot yet be said to have wholly died out, though the last genuine Irish grievance has been removed. The earnest efforts of the Crown to grant equal justice, liberty, freedom, and local self-government to the sister-island, the practical disappearance of the Irish tongue, intermarriage, education, free trade and easy communication between the two countries are gradually breaking down race prejudice and irrational hostility. The Lords of the Pale, as later on the Anglo-Irish chieftains were styled, far removed from the centre of government, grew independent of England, and, instead of civilising the people under their rule, soon sank to the level of those around them, and joined

the native chiefs in their cruel oppression of the Irish peasantry. Contemporary State papers bear testimony to the wretchedness of the common folk of Ireland. John, when he became King, went over to Ireland, and by severe measures temporarily enforced the use of English law ; but this did not prove acceptable to the Lords of the Pale, who, immediately the King had departed, lived once more upon what they could wring out of the oppressed English settlers, and snatch from the Irish in their forays outside the Pale.

In 1316 the Scotch invaded Ireland after the battle of Bannockburn, and the Irish welcomed Edward Bruce as their deliverer. But the Lords of the Pale, uniting, after a long period of strife among themselves, proved too strong for both the Scots and Irish, and defeated them at the battle of Athenree.

After this, anarchy and dissensions reigned as completely within and without the Pale as they had done in the days before the English “ crusade.” In 1367, Lionel, Duke of Clarence, was sent to Ireland to alter this state of things. He summoned the English colonists to a Parliament, and this Parliament passed the Statute of Kilkenny, under which the old idea of conquering Ireland was abandoned, and the relations between the two races were definitely fixed. All within the Pale were to be accounted English, all outside Irish. This Statute practically legalised a fierce antagonism between the English settlers of the Pale and the Irish. It enacted “ that the alliance of the English by marriage with the Irish be deemed high treason,” and also that “ if anie man of English race use an Irish name, Irish apparell, or anie other guise or fashion of the Irish, his lands shall be seized, and his body imprisoned, till he shall conform to English modes and customs.”

Richard II. made an effort to put things on a better footing, and restore something like order. But the Lords of the Pale gave him a very cold welcome when he landed in Waterford, and received the submission of the native chiefs. As soon as he left the island his power was at an end, and from this time to that of Henry VII. the English rule in Ireland was no more than a name.

Henry VII., in common with his predecessors, tried to accomplish the pacification of Ireland, but, like them, he was not able to carry his work through to the end. He succeeded, however, in seizing the leader of the unruly Lords of the Pale, the powerful Earl of Kildare, thereby scaring them into a momentary submission ; and in the same year, 1494, Poyning’s Law, or the Statute of Drogheda, was passed, by which no Bill could be brought into the Irish Parliament unless it had already met with the approval of the English King and his Council, and, further, it enacted “ that all English laws in force at that time should be obeyed in Ireland.”

Irish affairs were in a more hopeless state than ever when Henry VIII. took the matter in hand, and, with his Vicar-General (Cromwell) to carry out his designs, he succeeded in crushing the Lords of the Pale, and in almost completely destroying the leading family among them—that of the Geraldines. The moral result of this success was far-reaching ; the Irish without the Pale were awed by the strength of the English army. Wicklow and Waterford submitted to England, and English troops reduced the South of Ireland to obedience. Henry assumed the title of King, instead of Lord of Ireland, in 1542.

The only remaining question was how to govern the conquered island. Therein lay, as it has ever lain, the great difficulty.

A contemptuous ignorance of the Irish, their laws, their system of clan government and of tenure of land reigned in England. The only idea of English statesmen was to destroy all the

national characteristics of the Irish, even to their dress and their language, and to Anglicise them in all respects. English laws were established, and the Irish chiefs, when confirmed in their possessions, were required to send their sons to be educated at the English Court.

The same spirit dictated that no one who could not speak English was to receive ecclesiastical preferment, and the Archbishop of Dublin, Browne, “a mere creature of Henry and Cromwell,” as Gardiner calls him, adopted the most shameful and violent measures for forcing religious changes on the people.

Henry’s system of government in Ireland, however, so far as the chiefs were concerned, was, on the whole, one of conciliation rather than of coercion. The Irish nobles had their loyalty encouraged by considerable bribes, and the conditions on which they were accepted as loyal subjects were singularly righteous and untyrannical. They were to abstain from illegal wars and exactions on their fellow-subjects, to pay a certain tribute to the English Crown, and to render assistance in time of war. For the first time, the Irish chiefs were allowed to sit side by side with Englishmen at the Parliament in Dublin.

But before very long a new source of bitterness and strife arose from Henry’s injudicious effort to force on Ireland the Protestant reforms, for which the Irish had no wish. When it became known that a change in their actual faith was demanded of them, and that a new liturgy was to take the place of the ancient Mass, the Irish, inside and outside the Pale, united in defence of their religion, and an element of discord was established which remain’s powerful to this day.

In spite, however, of the bitter feeling stirred up against England on account of this interference with the national creed, on the whole, the moderate system of government established by Henry tended towards pacification. But such results are slow of growth, and though agriculture began to make progress, and order to be established in some districts which previously had been utterly savage, the country as a whole did not become civilised quickly enough to satisfy some of Henry’s successors. The conciliatory policy was dropped, and high-handed measures were again taken, with disastrous results, and a cruel war broke out, lasting, with short interruptions, from 1561 to 1606. This war developed into a struggle, which soon became chronic, between the English settlers and the Celtic population, together with the descendants of the earlier settlers, who had adopted the native manners, faith, and language, and had become politically one people, under the leadership first of Shan O’Neill, Earl of Tyrone, and afterwards of Hugh O’Neill.

In Elizabeth’s reign the religious dissension provoked by the Act of Uniformity, which had no practical effect in Ireland, was inflamed by the Pope, who, in 1580, sent two thousand men with a legate to assist in driving the Protestant English out of Ireland.

They were unsuccessful ; their fort was taken by Lord Grey, the whole garrison massacred, and the supporters of the Papal invasion were pitilessly punished. Then Lord Desmond rose, but he was slain, and his domains laid waste.

The English were now more completely masters of Ireland than ever before ; but their hold over the country was a dominion of terror and force, and the cruelties perpetrated by the conquering army make a painful page in the history of our Empire.

Further revolts were met with further cruelties.

When the flames of war had died down, England made some effort to establish order in the much-troubled country, but with poor success. It was in truth a struggle between

civilisation and semi-barbarism, enlightenment and utter ignorance. England adhered more tenaciously than ever to the old policy of Anglicising Ireland, and Ireland clung with renewed persistence to the Celtic system of law and land tenure. At last, in 1605, the illegality of all native Irish tenures was affirmed, the tribal rules of succession abolished, and the English law of real property declared to be in force in Ireland. This irritated the Irish, and the Roman Catholics within the Pale joined forces with their co-religionists outside it, and it was only by the strong, wise, and patient efforts of Sir Arthur Chichester that the disturbance began to be allayed and some prospect to appear of the new *régime* being accepted by the Irish.

Unhappily, the Lord-Deputy's just and sensible schemes for Ireland were set aside. James I. was determined to destroy all Irish laws and customs, and if possible to uproot the Roman Catholic religion. Pacific measures were suddenly abandoned, and the greater part of northern Ireland declared forfeit to the Crown on pretext of one of the numerous revolts. The colonisation of Ulster followed. English and Scottish settlers were brought over to occupy the lands of the dispossessed Irish. These proved good colonists, and in their hands Ulster rose to a condition of prosperity which has continued to this day. But the steady prosperity of one portion of the island, secured by an act of tyranny, was dearly bought at the cost of sullen disaffection all over the rest of Ireland, which broke forth later, and bore fruit in generations of distrust and lawlessness on the side of the Irish and of tyranny on that of England.

The colonisation, or, as it is sometimes called, the plantation, of Ulster, in 1610, was the introduction to the cruel story of the Irish Revolt, and its suppression by Cromwell, though the more immediate cause of that revolt was the government of Wentworth, and his policy of inflaming the Catholics and Protestants against each other.

The rising broke out in Ulster in 1641, and spread rapidly over the country. Thousands of English Protestants were massacred with every circumstance of cruelty and horror, but it is denied that a massacre was deliberately planned. The rising amounted to a national rebellion. The Confederate Catholics purported to hold a commission from King Charles I., and though this was a forgery, Charles treated the hideous incident with an indifference which contrasted forcibly with the fanatical zeal of Cromwell when he came into power. Determined to avenge the massacre of the Protestants, Cromwell deluged the unhappy country with blood when he landed at Dublin in 1649. He marched from victory to victory, but it is only fair to say that he issued the most stringent orders to "all officers and soldiers not to abuse, rob, or execute cruelties upon the people of the country unless they be actually in arms." But when captured with arms in their hands, he had no mercy. At Wexford another wholesale slaughter was carried out.

Cromwell's conquest was as effective as force can be. What he left unfinished, Ireton and Ludlow completed. Thousands of the Irish perished by sword or famine; many were transported to the West Indies to labour as convicts, women and children were shipped for virtual slavery, and forty thousand men received permission to enlist in the French and Spanish armies. Those who remained in their native land, of which the Province of Connaught alone was left to them, were treated as a conquered race. The greater part of Ireland shared the fate which had befallen Ulster. As Green feelingly remarks, "No such doom had ever fallen on a nation in modern times as fell upon Ireland in its new settlement."

In 1652, at the close of this awful war, Ireland was united to England on much the same terms as a captured and disabled vessel is taken in tow by her captor.

From this time the English maintained severe rule in Ireland till the reign of James II., when the Earl of Tyrconnel, an Irishman and a Roman Catholic, was made Lord-Lieutenant.

Under him all the English were turned out of office. An Irish Roman Catholic army was raised of fifty thousand men. James looked to this army to support him when, after his deposition by William of Orange, he made an attempt to regain his kingdom. In 1689 James landed at Kinsale. He entered Dublin, where the Parliament, composed exclusively of his adherents, passed a huge Bill of attainder against nearly three thousand persons. But though the Irish race welcomed James as the lawful King, the English and Scottish colonists regarded him as the enemy of their faith and nation, and they took refuge in Londonderry and Enniskillen. In Londonderry, when the Governor would have surrendered to James and his Irish troops, the inhabitants shut the gate in his face, and held a desperate siege, until, at the end of three months, succour reached them from William's ships, and the town was saved.

To meet the threatened danger, William III., in 1690, brought a force over to Ireland and defeated James and his troops in the Battle of the Boyne. That was the beginning of a series of English victories ending in another period of oppression, not as ruthless as the wholesale slaughters perpetrated by Cromwell's soldiers, but more utterly crushing. Limerick held out to the last, defended by the brave soldier-patriot, Patrick Sarsfield. Every Irishman is proud of "the sword of Sarsfield," as Mr. Disraeli once declared in the House of Commons. It won for the Irish Catholics, in 1691, the Treaty of Limerick, by which, amongst other things, they were promised religious freedom, and Sarsfield and his soldiers were permitted to sail for France. The treaty was shamefully annulled by the Irish Parliament in 1695, and Limerick is still called "the City of the broken treaty." A new series of penal laws were then framed to extinguish the religion of Ireland, and Ireland was now a land "where all hope of national freedom was lost," Green writes; "at peace, but with a peace of despair."

The two great struggles, the religious struggle (the attempt to extinguish Roman Catholicism) and the land-tenure struggle (the attempt first to force an alien system of land tenure, and later to give the land to the imported English and Scottish settlers), were aggravated under the reign of William III.; and for the first time the Roman Catholics those who clung to the national religion were excluded from the Irish Parliament. Henceforth only Protestants elected by Protestants might legislate for Roman Catholic Ireland. Under Queen Anne and George I. the rights of the Irish Parliament were further curtailed. In the latter reign the appellate jurisdiction of the Irish House of Lords over Irish cases was cancelled by the English Parliament.

Under all these curtailments of its original privileges, the Irish Parliament had become a very poor representative institution, and unworthy of the name of Parliament. Gradually there grew up in Ireland amongst the Protestant party a strong feeling of protest against the restrictions imposed on the legislature of the country. The great leader of this popular movement was Henry Grattan, and he was enthusiastically seconded by Flood. When the war with the American Colonies was over, the members of the Irish Parliament, with Grattan at their head, came forward to press their petition for the restoration of an independent legislature.

There was now an army in Ireland of forty thousand volunteers, raised to repel a threatened French invasion. These volunteers were in perfect sympathy with the agitation for Parliamentary independence, and ready to sustain its demands. With these men at their back, and the Celtic gift of eloquence on their tongues, the Irish members carried their point. On the motion of Fox in 1782, an Act was passed by the British Parliament by which the Irish Parliament was released from the judicial and legislative supremacy exercised over it by Great Britain. It enabled "the King, Lords and Commons of Ireland to make laws for the people of Ireland," and Henry Grattan, overjoyed at this triumph, exclaimed, "Ireland is now a nation." Ireland in a measure was constitutionally free, and this independence lasted for eighteen years.

But there were two sources of weakness in Grattan's Parliament. First, it was exclusively a Protestant Parliament. No Catholic was eligible either to sit in it or to vote for its members, consequently three-fourths of the population were excluded from representation ; in the second place, the House of Commons had no control over the executive government. In Ireland the executive power was vested in the Lord-Lieutenant, appointed by and responsible to the Government in England, and not, as in England, exercised by ministers who were themselves responsible to the Crown and Parliament of their country. There was no constitutional faculty by which the two Parliaments could act in conjunction on matters affecting the interests of both their peoples equally ; nor was the Protestant fourth of the population represented in any true sense in the Parliament. Out of its three hundred members, Dr. Gardiner points out, " two hundred were chosen by less than half that number of persons who controlled the elections of the petty boroughs."

The independence of the Irish Parliament did not bring liberty or prosperity to the people. The whole country was in the grasp of a few noble families and of the Irish Executive, which was inspired and supported by England. Bribed by a lavish distribution of places and pensions, the corrupt faction which formed the Parliamentary majority sacrificed independence for emoluments received from the English Viceroys, while the great mass of the Irish people went unprotected and unrelieved, and were left to struggle on unaided in a pitiable state of destitution and poverty. The harsh restrictions of William III. had virtually destroyed commerce ; trade with foreign nations was prohibited, while Irish products were shut off from England by heavy custom dues, and the country groaned under the bitter penal laws passed by the Protestant Parliament.

The condition of the Irish peasantry was nearly as deplorable as that which, just at this time, roused the lower orders in France to a great and terrible revolution. Pitt, the great English statesman, who felt for the " distressful country" and foresaw the inevitable storm gathering, did what he could to avert it. His first proposal was that there should be complete free trade between the two countries, and that Ireland should contribute a fixed sum towards the maintenance of the British Navy, which protected her shores as well as those of England. To this arrangement the Dublin Parliament agreed, but the jealousy of English manufacturers broke into loud protest, and Pitt was forced to relinquish his original scheme and to formulate another. But this was so hampered by restrictions that the Dublin Government declined to entertain it.

Meanwhile the Presbyterians, who formed the majority of the Ulster population, and who were specially prominent in the flourishing town of Belfast, grew more and more dissatisfied with the state of the Irish Government. Like the Catholics, they were refused representation and office, and they resented the injustice of the denial, a feeling shared by many of the Protestants themselves, for religious bigotry amongst the educated classes in Ulster had in a large measure died out. The more enlightened Protestants were quite willing to admit their Catholic fellow-subjects to the franchise, and Grattan, at the head of the movement, strenuously laboured for Catholic Emancipation. In 1791 the Society of the United Irishmen was founded at Belfast by Wolfe Tone to assist Grattan's reforms, its primary object being to unite Catholics and Protestants against the British Government, and to place them on a political equality without any disqualification of creed.

At last certain concessions were obtained from the Irish Parliament, and in 1793 " two Acts were passed, the one freeing Catholics from some of the worst penalties under which they suffered, and the other allowing them to vote for members of Parliament." [2] They were also admitted to practise at the Bar. Many other Catholic disabilities were removed, and Lord Fitzwilliam was sent over to support a full measure of freedom, but doubts as to whether

Catholic Emancipation would not be a violation of the Coronation Oath assailed the mind of George III., and Lord Fitzwilliam was recalled in 1795. His recall overwhelmed Grattan and his friends with disappointment, and Ireland was left once more in the hands of a legislature, described by Gardiner as a “Parliament dominated by place-hunters, who, under the pretence of maintaining Protestantism, banded themselves together with the object of gaining wealth and position.”

So evil and unsound a system could not hope to live, and it was far too provocative and aggressive to pass unchallenged. The Irish Parliament threw out Grattan’s Bill for Catholic Emancipation, and when all hope of obtaining fair treatment from the Parliament died out there were violent outbursts. Catholics committed outrages upon the Protestants, and the Protestants, the Government Party, calling themselves Orangemen after William III., retaliated with equal violence. The United Irishmen threw themselves on the Catholic side, and in 1796 Wolfe Tone started off to France to urge the Directory to bring an army into Ireland and establish a Republic. The French invasion, attempted by Hoche in the same year, failed, but the Irish Catholics broke out into the terrible Rebellion of 1798, and during this awful time over 150,000 of the Irish people were slain. After several engagements, in which the British were not always successful, General Lake finally defeated the peasant insurgents at Vinegar Hill in 1798. Two months previously the French had made a second attempt to invade Ireland by landing in Killala Bay, in Mayo, but were ultimately forced to surrender.

It seemed to Pitt, as probably to the whole of the civilised world, that such a state of affairs as had for long existed in Ireland must be brought to an end at any cost. The Irish Parliament had shown itself miserably unworthy of its functions, and many of the members gave a final proof of their character by submitting to be bought over to consent to the union of the English and Irish Parliaments. In 1801 the Union took place, one hundred Irish members being admitted to the British House of Commons, and thirty-two peers (four spiritual and twenty-eight temporal) were elected for life to the House of Lords. This arrangement lasted until the disestablishment of the Irish Church in 1869, when the spiritual peers ceased to exist. Free trade was at last established between England and Ireland, and taxation apportioned upon what were considered equitable lines.

In all directions the condition of Ireland was improved, and could Pitt’s large schemes for religious equality have been carried out, a gradual unity might have been built up between England and Ireland, such as exists between England and Scotland. This, however, was not to be. The Sovereign, supported by a large section of the population on both sides of the Channel, declined to permit these measures to be carried into effect, and, unhappily, Ireland has continued to be the scene of perpetual difficulties and of opposing parties.

Her condition, however, has never been so wretched as it was before the Union. Indeed, it would be difficult to point to any country in the Old World which has made during this century greater relative progress than Ireland. But although the Union of the two countries was in the long run followed by increased prosperity to Ireland, it was not to be expected that a Union in great measure purchased by British gold would be very acceptable to the mass of the Irish people, or that years of oppression could be forgotten in a day. So it was only natural that insurrections, or attempts at insurrection, should for some considerable time occur ; and as more and more freedom and liberty fell to the lot of the Irish, that each should become a little less violent than the former, and that each should be supported by fewer members of influential and educated classes. Thus in 1803 occurred Emmett’s insurrection ; in 1846 Smith O’Brien’s ; and in 1867 the Fenian revolt ; all suppressed with ease and little bloodshed.

In 1829, owing in great measure to the eloquence and energy of the great Daniel O'Connell, complete Catholic emancipation was conceded by the British Parliament, and in 1838 an Act was passed introducing into Ireland laws for the Relief of the Poor. Then commenced, in 1843, the great movement for the repeal of the Union, which was indissolubly associated with the name of O'Connell. It failed, as all other attempts have failed, but it served to draw the attention of England to the grievances of Ireland, and to hasten their removal.

One of the most serious causes of Irish discontent and crime was the collection of tithes from the Catholic peasants for the maintenance of the Clergy of the Protestant Episcopal Church. The grievance was removed in 1838 by the passing of the Tithe Commutation Act, and two years later another injustice and cause of scandal came to an end.

Before 1840 the municipal institutions of Ireland were monopolised by the Protestants, offices were openly sold, and corruption was rampant. In that year this blot on the fair fame of the country was erased by the passing of the Irish Municipal Corporation Act, which was amended in 1861.

The condition of the poor in Ireland was greatly alleviated by the introduction in 1838 of the Poor Law system, founded upon lines similar to those adopted by England in 1834.

Before the passing of this Act the misery and destitution of the Irish poor were far greater than in England amongst similar classes. In 1837 the proportion of paupers in Ireland to the rest of the population was twice as great as in England. It was well that this beneficent Act was passed before the advent of the great famine of 1846, or the sufferings of the people, terrible as they were, would have been still more acute.

This awful calamity, caused by a failure in the potato-crop, led to a large diminution in the population of the country, partly through death, but principally through the enormous emigration to the United States which then set in, and which continued for many years. The British Government and the English people made great exertions to alleviate the sufferings of the poor, and Parliament voted ; £10,000,000 for this purpose.

In 1849 Her Majesty Queen Victoria visited Ireland, and received a loyal welcome from all classes. Shortly afterwards the first Court under the Encumbered Estates Act was held in Dublin. This was an Act to facilitate the sale of land in the hands of bankrupt owners, and was the means of transferring many such estates to solvent men with capital at their backs, and possessed of the knowledge and energy necessary for the development of the land. The number of estates sold up to 1858 was 2,380, producing £22,000,000. In 1853 the Queen revisited Ireland, and the first Dublin Exhibition was opened. In 1861 her late Majesty, accompanied by the Prince Consort and the then Prince of Wales, repeated her visit.

The years 1865-67 were made eventful by the foolish efforts of the Fenian Brotherhood, said to have been formed by James Stephens, to separate Ireland by force from Great Britain, and to establish a Republic. In 1866 the American Fenians invaded Canada, and in 1867 partial risings took place in Dublin, Kerry, and Kilmallock, and the Fenians tried to seize Chester Castle. All these attempts were easily frustrated. In 1865 James Stephens was captured and imprisoned, but subsequently escaped to France.

In 1869 Mr. Gladstone passed a Bill for the disestablishment of the Irish Protestant Episcopal Church, and thus put an end to an old-standing complaint of religious inequality.

The year 1870 saw the passing of Mr. Gladstone's Irish Land Bill, to be followed later by several other Acts, drawn up with a view to improve the position of the Irish tenant-farmer, to render him independent of his landlord, and give him an interest in the soil. These were passed in 1881, 1887, and 1897.

By Lord Ashbourne's Act of 1885 and the Act of 1888, ; £10,000,000 were granted by Parliament to enable the tenants to purchase from the landlords the freehold of their farms.

By means of the above-mentioned legislation, the Irish tenant-farmer, who represents the majority of the population, has been fixed in the soil, and given, without purchase, an interest in it, called "Tenant Right," which he can sell in the open market, and which, when disposed of, has often produced more than the landlord is able to obtain by the sale of his nominal property. The amount paid by the tenant in rent is fixed, not by the landlord, but by Government officials, acting under a Court called the Irish Land Commission. Rack or excessive renting is therefore now an impossibility. The tenant cannot be evicted for any cause but that of non-payment of rent, and before he can be evicted full compensation must be paid him for all improvements he may have made on the farm. He cannot be evicted unless he is an entire twelve months in arrear, and the landlord cannot recover more than two years' arrears of rent ; and if the rent of the tenant is less than £100 per annum he is given an extra six months to redeem.

If a tenant desires to buy his holding, the Government lends him the entire money at four per cent, for forty-nine years, at the end of which period he has paid off by this means the entire capital and interest, and finds himself the sole owner of his farm.

These extraordinary privileges are possessed by no other tenant-farmer either in the New or Old World. The Irish tenant-farmers' rents have been reduced by some twenty-five per cent, and more, and in some cases by as much as fifty per cent., whilst in some parts of the country small landowners have ceased to collect rent, and where estates were encumbered have been brought to destitution.

The Irish labourer has also been benefited by Parliament enabling him to obtain at a reasonable rent good cottage accommodation through the Guardians of his Union, who are empowered, under certain conditions, to build labourers' cottages out of the rates. This legislation has had the effect of covering the land with comfortable stone and brick dwellings, for which, as a rule, only one shilling a week is demanded by the Guardians in rent.

But we must go back a little, for Irish affairs have occupied a very conspicuous place, and they have taken up a considerable proportion of the time of Parliament during the reign of Queen Victoria, especially towards the latter part. The year 1870 saw the formation, under Mr. Isaac Butt, of the "Home Rule" movement, an agitation for the establishment of a separate Irish Parliament. Out of this Home Rule party there sprang a determined body of Nationalist members, who set themselves with deliberate purpose to obstruct all business in the House of Commons until it had forced this claim of Ireland on the attention of Parliament and on the nation at large. On the death of Mr. Butt, Mr. Shaw succeeded as leader of the Home Rule party, but in a very short time the more active policy of Mr. Charles Stewart Parnell in opposing the payment of rent, and in obstructing British legislation in Parliament, obtained the support of the party, and he became the recognised and undisputed leader. At this time there was great disturbance in Ireland, arising out of the land struggle, which was then going on between some of the landlords and the peasantry. Between the years 1880 and 1882 many murderous outrages were committed, nearly all of which were connected with the land trouble. Meanwhile, "boycotting" (or, to employ Mr. Parnell's expression, "the treating

of obnoxious persons as moral lepers or outcasts”) was, on the advice of Mr. Parnell and his lieutenants, resorted to, in order to enforce the edicts of an organisation called the “Land League,” formed in 1879 for the purpose of compelling the landlords to submit to the demands of the agitators. This powerful league was suppressed in 1881, but it was immediately revived under the name of the National League.

In May, 1882, the whole civilised world was horrified by the dastardly murders of Lord Frederick Cavendish and Mr. Burke. Lord Frederick Cavendish, the newly appointed secretary to the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, had only just arrived to take up his duties. Mr. Burke was the permanent Under-secretary. These two gentlemen were murdered in Phoenix Park, Dublin, by a band of assassins, calling themselves the “Invincibles.” The murderers were betrayed by their own associates, and, after being brought to trial, five of them were found guilty, and they were executed.

The agitation for Home Rule continued to grow. The new Franchise Bill, passed in 1885, which lowered the qualifications of the county voters, placing them on the same level with the voters in towns, added two millions of voters to the number of constituencies, and gave a popular suffrage to Ireland as well as to England. This measure gave a great deal more force to the Home Rule party. Out of the one hundred and three seats which make up the Irish representation, the Home Rule party carried off no fewer than eighty-six, and, in 1885, Mr. Parnell found himself at the head of a compact Parliamentary party of eighty-six members.

The result of the elections in Ireland apparently converted Mr. Gladstone to the Irish opinions as to a Home Parliament for Ireland. When previously in office, Mr. Gladstone had imprisoned Mr. Parnell, and he had unscathingly denounced the agitators as “marching through bloodshed and rapine to the dismemberment of the Empire.” But after the election, in 1886, he avowed himself in favour of Home Rule, and brought in a Bill to give to Ireland a Domestic Parliament on College Green, in Dublin. The Bill was rejected on the Second Reading. Parliament dissolved on the Bill, and Mr. Gladstone appealed to the country in a General Election. He met with a heavy defeat. The Home Rule Bill led to the withdrawal from the Liberal party of the more moderate elements, and to the formation of the Unionist party by a junction, but not an amalgamation, of the dissentient Liberals with the Conservatives. Thus the Liberal party split up into two—the Liberal Unionists and the Gladstonian Liberals, and Lord Salisbury, at the head of the Conservative party, came into office with a very large majority.

The persistent struggle for Irish Home Rule continued to absorb much of the time of Parliament. In Ireland the land was still a source of grievous contention, and this same year (1886) fresh machinery was set in motion against the landlords. This was the newly established “plan of campaign”—a scheme for driving the landlords to accept such low rents as had arbitrarily, and of course illegally, been fixed by the National League members. The “plan of campaign” was subsequently condemned in 1888 by the Pope on moral grounds, as was also the system of “boycotting,” after receiving a report drawn up by Monsignor Persico, who had been sent by His Holiness on a special mission to Ireland to examine into and report on the condition of affairs in the island.

Mr. Arthur Balfour, when Unionist Chief Secretary for Ireland in 1889, 1890, and 1891, did very much for the improvement of the country, and consequently for the benefit of the people themselves, by inducing Parliament to vote large sums of money for the construction of light railways and roads, and for the supply of seed potatoes to congested and distressed districts.

About this time—that is, in 1891—Mr. Parnell died, and the Home Rule party in its turn split up into several hostile divisions. But before this happened its political power had waned. By the secession from the Liberal party of the moderate elements, on the introduction by Mr. Gladstone of his Home Rule Bill, and by the rejection of this measure in 1886 ; by the death of Parnell in 1891, and the weakening of his party by faction ; by the rejection of Gladstone's second Home Rule Bill in the House of Lords in 1893 by the enormous majority of 419 to 41 ; and by the election of the Salisbury administrations of 1886, 1895, and 1900, the Home Rule cause received a series of blows from which it has never recovered.

In 1898 the Irish Chief Secretary in Lord Salisbury's Government, Mr. Gerald Balfour, brother of Mr. Arthur Balfour, introduced and passed through Parliament a Bill to grant to Ireland a system of local government practically similar to that accorded to England in 1888.

By this measure the last genuine Irish grievance has been removed, and the people of Ireland now enjoy as complete religious and civil liberty as their fellow-subjects of Great Britain, and greater consideration at the hands of Parliament in matters appertaining to taxation, the ownership and tenancy of land, and Imperial financial aid towards national development.

It is to be hoped that the time is not far distant when ancient oppressions and animosities will be forgotten by all, and a united Ireland will loyally and contentedly take her place alongside the sister countries of England, Wales, and Scotland. Not regarding herself as a conquered land, but as enjoying equal privileges, equal rights, and equal responsibilities ; recognising that union is strength, and that only by the possession of a strong and united Government can the British Isles retain that place amongst the nations which has brought to so many gallant sons of Ireland distinction, honours, and wealth. Under that same united Government the mass of the people of Ireland are vastly richer, better educated, better housed, better fed, and better clothed than they were at the time of the Union.

In 1852 the deposits in the Irish Joint Stock Banks amounted to £10,000,000 ; in 1885 they had reached £29,000,000, notwithstanding a diminution in the population ; in 1837 the number of schools was 1384, the Parliamentary grant was £50,000, and the number of pupils 169,548 ; in 1884 the number of schools had grown to 7832, the grant had become £756,027, and the number of pupils 1,089,079 ; in 1841 the number of good farmhouses having five to nine rooms was 264,184, and of superior houses 40,080 ; in 1881 the good farmhouses had increased to 422,241, and the best class of houses to 66,727.

The following words written by an Irish Catholic writer, and quoted from Mr. Ward's interesting work, entitled " The Reign of Queen Victoria," bear eloquent testimony to the progress of Ireland during this eventful period.

Sir Rowland Blennerhassett says—

“ During the fifty years of Her Majesty's reign, great as have been the changes in every part of the world, it may be safely asserted that nowhere have they been greater and deeper than in Ireland. All the prominent evils in the political state of the country have been removed. The law under which legal provision is made for the poor has not only rendered impossible those scenes of shame and horror so often described by writers on Ireland fifty years ago ; it has also laid the basis of a system of local government capable of indefinite expansion. Since the passing of the Municipal Reform Act the corporate property of cities and towns can no longer be administered for the benefit of a favoured few. No civil disabilities now press upon the Irish Catholics. The burden of tithe has been removed. The

Church of a small minority no longer occupies a place of privilege. When Queen Victoria came to the throne, Catholics had no power to dispose of landed property, by deed or will, for charitable purposes. The Charitable Bequests Act, which was passed in the seventh and eighth years of her reign, redressed this grievance. Religious liberty and religious equality now exist to the fullest extent, and the Roman Catholic Church especially enjoys a far larger measure of freedom in Ireland than in any country which professes the Roman Catholic faith. But the greatest change which has taken place in Ireland during the Queen's reign is the alteration in the status of the occupiers of the soil. In 1837 the Irish tenant was absolutely at the mercy of the land-lord or his agent, or worse still, of the Tithe Proctor. His life was full of care, and his position often not so good as that of the slaves who laboured in the cane-fields of South Carolina. Now, there is no holder of land in any European country who enjoys privileges anything like so great and wide-reaching as the Legislature has bestowed on the Irish tenant-farmer."

At no moment of her history since the third century after St. Patrick could we leave beautiful Ireland so proud and exultant as to-day—proud, and justly proud, of her brave and gallant sons who, under the leadership of an Irish Field-Marshal, now Commander-in-Chief of the entire forces of the British Empire, have done such splendid deeds that the glories of the South African campaign ring with their names. Search the world over and no finer soldiers will be found than the sons of Erin. Her late Majesty's order commanding the establishment of a regiment of Irish Guards, and ordering the wearing of the Shamrock by Irish regiments on St. Patrick's Day in recognition of the valour of her Irish soldiers, will be cherished traditions for all time. These Royal recognitions of Irish bravery struck home to the hearts of the Irish people. And the memory of Queen Victoria's visit to Ireland in 1900—a gracious visit into which was crowded the pent-up wealth of affection and reverence and welcome that loyal Ireland entertained for the beloved Sovereign—should bury for good and all the "old, unhappy, far-off things and battles long ago." [3]

[1] See "A Student's History of England," by S. R. Gardiner.

[2] See Gardiner's "History of England."

[3] Mr. Balfour.

Our Empire : past and present (1901)

Author : Meath, Reginald Brabazon, Earl of, 1841-1929 ; Legh, M. H. Cornwall ; Jackson, Edith

Volume : 1

Subject : Great Britain — Colonies History

Publisher : London : Harrison

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : MSN

Book contributor : Robarts — University of Toronto

Collection : robarts; toronto

Source : Internet Archive

<http://archive.org/details/ourempirepastpre01meatuoft>

Edited and uploaded to [www.aughty.org](http://www.aughty.org)

March 19 2013