

**PAST TIMES AND
PASTIMES: IN TWO
VOLUMES; VOL. II**

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Past Times and Pastimes: in two volumes; Vol. II by Windham Thomas Wyndham-Quin

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WINDHAM THOMAS WYNDHAM-QUIN

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PAST TIMES

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PASTIMES

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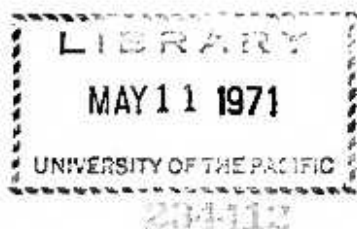
EARL OF DUNRAVEN

K.P., C.M.G.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II

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I

IRELAND

THE LAND WAR AND LAND PURCHASE

SCRIBBLING in this year of disgrace 1921, it is a little difficult to give a fair, unbiassed description of my feelings towards my native land. Ireland is of all the countries that I know of the most delightful to live in. To me it has always had an indescribable fascination, and this fascination is not in its effects peculiar to me. Exceptions there are among men who have settled in Ireland; but I cannot recall an instance of a woman who, by marriage or some other fate, came to live in Ireland who has not become devoted to its people.

I love Ireland for the pathetic tragedy of its history; and its people for their tenacious fortitude, innate chivalry and kindness of heart, sadness and keen sense of humour—characteristics which, though they are in abeyance at present, are racial and will survive. And so, after the conclusion of the Boer War, I devoted the very precious years since middle age in endeavouring to do what I could for my country.

Ireland is a hard mistress, and those who try to serve her must be content to suffer. The Irish character has some defects—one natural, and many acquired. Irishmen are liable to be actuated too much by personal attachment to a leader, too little

by adherence to some definite principle. They are apt to follow a man for what he is rather than for what he does or tries to do. Centuries of misgovernment, generations of struggle, have warped and twisted the natural character. England has never understood, nor even until recently has honestly tried to understand, the root causes of discontent in Ireland. Ireland has yet to learn that unity in action is necessary for success, and that hatred of England as a motive power is bound to fail.

I have to the best of my ability tried in speech and writing to enlighten England as to the historic causes of Irish discontent. I have tried to persuade Irishmen to believe in themselves and Ireland, to think together and act together, to rely upon peace within her borders and unity,—perhaps I have not altogether failed. At any rate, I did what I could according to my lights, and no man can do more. I set before myself a fairly definite programme. Ireland in the distant days of which I am thinking was in the throes of a bitter agrarian struggle. Various Acts interfering with the relations between landlord and tenant had reduced the principal industry of the country to chaos, and agrarian agitation and political agitation were inextricably mixed up together.

The abolition of landlordism, and, in natural connection with it, the reinstatement, so far as was possible, of evicted tenants—the wounded soldiers of the land war—a fair chance for labourers, a just readjustment of taxation, higher education, the obtaining for Ireland of such an extension of self-governing power as would give the Irish people full control of all purely Irish affairs—these were the principal items in the programme which I made up my mind to advocate; and I determined to pursue them through the one method by which, as I believed,

success could be attained—conciliation, peace at home, and good-will towards our neighbours. That seemed to me to constitute a sane, sound, and truly national policy.

In December 1902 and January 1903 the historic Land Conference was held, and, in view of its importance—marking, as it did, the dawn of a new era in Irish affairs—I deal with it, and with my own share in it, at some length.

THE LAND CONFERENCE

The story of the Irish Land Conference of 1902–1903 may be said to begin with the Land Bill, introduced by George Wyndham, the best Chief Secretary Ireland had had for many years, in the spring of 1902. This Bill was not a very great advance upon earlier Land Purchase Acts. It did not provide for the completion of purchase on anything like an adequate scale, nor did it afford any remedy for the sufferings of evicted tenants. It did not recognise the pressing problems of the Irish Land system, and it was condemned by the United Irish League and the great majority of the people.

Mr. William O'Brien, writing of this abortive attempt at settlement some years later, remarked that, if the 1902 Bill had become law, "it must either have deprived the tenants of all freewill and forced purchase upon them on the landlords' own terms, or restricted purchase transactions to insolvent estates and maintained landlordism practically intact for generations to come." The Bill was withdrawn on June 10, and another and more comprehensive measure was promised for the following year.

During the summer of 1902 a great deal of agitation and violent disturbance took place in Ireland.