

**TITLED CORRUPTION;  
THE SORDID ORIGIN OF  
SOME IRISH PEERAGES**

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Titled Corruption; The Sordid Origin of Some Irish Peerages by J. G. Swift MacNeill

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## PREFACE.

*The articles embodied in this work appeared originally in the columns of the public press. They were written at considerable intervals, and my aim was that each article should in itself form a separate study, independent of its predecessors or successors in the series. The articles are accordingly reproduced in the order in which they were written without regard to historical sequence. This will account for the somewhat abrupt transitions by which the reader is invited to pass from the perusal of one article to another.*

*It must not, however, be supposed that I have taken pains in the selection of the Peerages whose origin I have attempted to describe. They are largely taken up haphazard, and are not cases of exceptional corruption, but are rather types of the character of the ordinary Irish Peerage. I am confident that I could have placed before the public many Peerages whose creation was due to circumstances quite as discreditable if not transcending in iniquity the origins of the titles I have endeavoured to trace.*

*The matured judgment of Mr. Lecky, the Unionist historian on the Irish Peerages, which I have placed facing the title-page of this book, and which I took for my text in each article on its original publication, is in itself a suffi-*

cient defence against any imputation that may be levelled against me of drawing too dark a picture of the corrupt origin of the majority of the Irish titles.

The statements in these pages are startling. I have, however, supported them by evidence drawn almost exclusively from public documents, from the testimony of witnesses who deposed to matters within their own knowledge in the lifetime of the persons of whom they made dishonourable mention without fear of refutation.

The confidential letters of the Lords-Lieutenant of Ireland, in recommending gentlemen for the Peerage, are in themselves very frequently shameful confessions of the iniquity of the services of which these Peerages were the reward. The aspirants of the Peerage likewise bear witness against themselves, the grounds on which they base their supplications for "honours" being in many instances a disgraceful record of public immorality. I have aimed at introducing the borough-monger, the venal lawyer, the vulgar "nabob" aspiring to social rank, the landed devotees of cupidity, the peer seeking a step in nobility, and the commoner seeking a title by the sale of his country, in such a way as to enable the reader to realise the feelings of Lord Cornicallis—the Lord-Lieutenant at the time of the Union—when he expressed his longing to kick the man whom he was compelled to court.

It seems a somewhat ungracious task to revive the memory of the discreditable transactions of bygone days. The holders of the Irish Peerages are not, it may be said, responsible for the conduct of their predecessors. It should, however, be borne in mind that the chief argument in support of hereditary legislators is the services rendered to the country by their ancestors. It will be difficult to argue

*with a serious countenance that a gentleman is entitled to obstruct and thwart the wishes of the House of Commons from the fact of his holding a Peerage which is in some instances the reward of shame and dishonour, and in some even of crime, and thus being enabled to sit in the House of Lords, or to vote for the election of Representative Peers in that assembly.*

*I have taken every pains to acknowledge the authorities from whom I have obtained information. My very special obligations are, however, due to Mr. Lecky, who in his historical conclusions has displayed, having regard to his strong political views, a majestic impartiality. To Mr. W. F. Fitzpatrick, whose works have rendered the study of Irish history delightful, I am also most deeply indebted.*

HOUSE OF COMMONS,  
June 7, 1884.





### LORD ASHTOWN.

FIFTY-NINE years after the Union it was thought safe to publish an expurgated edition of the private correspondence of the Marquess Cornwallis, who was Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland at the time of the passing of that measure. In the Cornwallis Correspondence there is a list of the peerages conferred for "services" in connection with the Union. In that list there stands the name of Lord Ashtown, created a peer December 27, 1800.

The infamy of this gentleman's conduct was such that Mr. Lecky, writing in 1890, omits his name from the pages of his history. The Irish Parliament met on January 22, 1799, when an amendment to the Address to the Throne, moved by Mr. Ponsonby, maintaining "the undoubted birthright of the Irish people to have a resident and independent Legislature," was rejected by a majority of one, being supported by 105 votes and opposed by 106.

"One member," says Mr. Lecky, "near the close of the debate, after an ambiguous and hesitating speech, announced his intention of voting for the amendment of the Opposition. Shortly before the division he rose

again to say that he was convinced that he had been mistaken, and would now vote with the Ministers. Barrington states that it was well known in the House that in the interval he had received from Lord Castlereagh the promise of the peerage he afterwards obtained " (*England in the Eighteenth Century,* viii. p. 348).

A reference to what Mr. Lecky in a footnote calls " the very graphic description " of this scene in Barrington's " *Rise and Fall of the Irish Nation* " discloses the fact that the name of this venal miscreant was Frederick Trench, the first Lord Ashtown. Sir Jonah Barrington, who was a member of the Irish House of Commons, was an eye-witness of the conduct of Mr. Trench, which he thus records :—

" It was suspected that Mr. Trench had been long in negotiation with Lord Castlereagh, but it did not in the early part of that night appear to have been brought to any conclusion—his conditions were supposed to be too extravagant. Mr. Trench, after some preliminary observations, declared in a speech that he would vote against the Ministers. This appeared a stunning blow to Mr. Cooke (Lord Castlereagh's bribing agent), who had been previously in conversation with Mr. Trench. He was immediately observed sideling from his seat nearer to Lord Castlereagh. They whispered earnestly, and, as if restless and undecided, both looked wistfully towards Mr. Trench. At length the matter seemed to be determined on. Mr. Cooke retired to a back seat, and was obviously endeavouring to count the House, probably to guess if they could that night dispense with Mr. Trench's services. He re-

turned to Castlereagh. They whispered again, looked most affectionately at Mr. Trench, who seemed unconscious that he was the subject of their consideration. But there was no time to lose—the question was approaching. All shame was banished, they decided on the terms, and a significant and certain glance, obvious to everybody, convinced Mr. Trench that his conditions were agreed to. Mr. Cooke then went and sat down by his side. An earnest but very short conversation then took place; a parting smile completely told the House that Mr. Trench was that moment satisfied. These surmises were soon verified. Mr. Cooke went back to Lord Castlereagh — a congratulatory nod announced his satisfaction. . . . This change of sides, and the majority of one to which it contributed, were probably the remote causes of persevering in a Union."

Sir Jonah Barrington's book was published in the lifetime of Lord Ashtown, on May 1, 1833. Lord Ashtown survived its publication exactly seven years, dying on May 1, 1840, but no refutation of this story was ever attempted.