

**HENRY GRATTAN: BEING
THE GLADSTONE PRIZE
ESSAY IN THE UNIVERSITY
OF OXFORD, 1902**

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Henry Grattan: Being the Gladstone Prize Essay in the University of Oxford, 1902 by Percy M. Roxby

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SCHOLAR OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD

WITH FRONTISPIECE PORTRAIT



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PREFACE

THE British people have displayed an extraordinary aptitude for governing some two hundred millions of Asiatics, whose manners, characteristics, and dialects, are utterly unlike their own. They have to a great extent solved the admittedly difficult problem of administering vast colonial dependencies. But the task of successfully governing a small neighbouring island, with which there has been for centuries constant communication, and with the characteristics of whose inhabitants they might by this time be reasonably supposed to have become intimately acquainted, seems to be as much beyond their powers as ever. This is a commonplace. It is a commonplace, too,

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that an Englishman's views about Ireland are not infrequently marked by ignorance and distorted by prejudice. A political phenomenon, however, does not cease to be extraordinary because it is a commonplace. The superficial views held by most Englishmen on Ireland's problems can probably be explained by the inveterate habit of studying her history by the light of modern politics. Nearly all the information which most people in this country possess about the Legislative Union of 1800 is derived from pamphlets and books written to support or condemn the demand for Home Rule. But if it is impossible to interpret a nation's past by her present, the reverse process may be one of great utility. The following essay is an attempt to study a highly important part of Irish history from an impartial point of view, and without any political bias.

Henry Grattan the younger begins the

life of his father with these words: "The history of Mr Grattan's time comprises nearly all that is valuable in the history of Ireland." Exaggerated as this statement is, it is true that Grattan's life covers not only the most interesting, but considerably the most important epoch in the chequered record of the Irish people. In the years that elapsed between his *début* in the Irish House of Commons in 1775, and his death in 1820, occurred most of those events which gave rise to the great Irish problems of the nineteenth century. After a long season of comparative apathy, the nation in the days of Grattan awoke to a new life, and manifested a vigour of which she had hitherto given little indication. At the height of her new-born enthusiasm she obtained from England Free Trade and Autonomy. Then for eighteen years was tried the great experiment of Legislative Independence, which was