

# **IRISH HISTORY AND THE IRISH QUESTION**

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Irish history and the Irish question by Goldwin Smith

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**GOLDWIN SMITH**

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THE IRISH  
QUESTION**



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THE IRISH QUESTION

BY  
GOLDWIN SMITH  
AUTHOR OF "THE UNITED KINGDOM"  
"THE UNITED STATES"



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## PREFACE

A LONG summer was spent by me in that loveliest of all parks, the Phoenix, as the guest of Edward Cardwell, then Chief Secretary and real head of the Irish government. Under Cardwell's roof the Irish Question was fully discussed by able men, Robert Lowe among the number. But I had a still greater advantage in constant and lasting intercourse with such friends as Lord Chancellor O'Hagan, Sir Alexander Macdonald, the head of the Education Department, and other leading Irish Liberals of the moderate school, ardent patriots and thoroughgoing reformers though opposed to violence and disruption. To the teachings of these men in dealing with the Irish Question, I have always looked back for my best guidance. I did what I could generally to acquaint myself with the country and its people. I had the opportunity of seeing something of Maynooth as the guest of its excellent principal in that day. At that time there was rather a lull in the agrarian war, but religious antagonism was still marked. The fruit of my

studies was a little book entitled "Irish History and Irish Character," in which I tried to show that the sources of Ireland's sorrows were to be found in natural circumstance and historical accident as much as in the crimes or follies of man in recent times. Upon that text I preached in favour of charity and reconciliation. I am told that a chord was touched at the time. But my essay has long been superseded and buried out of sight by the important works, historical and political, which the controversy has since produced, as well as by the forty eventful years which have elapsed since its publication. The subject, however, has retained all its interest, and my confidence in the wisdom of my Irish friends and instructors has remained the same, or rather has been strengthened by the course of events.

I was in Ireland again a good many years afterwards in connection with the meeting of the Social Science Association, and was the guest of Lord O'Hagan. The Parnellite Movement was then in full activity; American Fenianism was at work; and the soil heaved with insurrection. My friend W. E. Forster was the Secretary, and, much against his own inclination, was administering measures of repression, the only alternative to which



appeared to be the abdication of the government. On this occasion I was unlucky enough to draw upon myself a thunderbolt hurled through the *Times*, but evidently from the skies, by hinting in a public speech that the Phoenix Park was as worthy to be the occasional residence of royalty as Osborne or Balmoral. A happy change, attended apparently with the best effects, has now come in that august quarter.

It is needless to say that this essay does not pretend to be a history of Ireland. It is an attempt to trace the general course of the history as it leads up to the present situation.

The works published in recent years to which I have been chiefly indebted are: Joyce's "Social History of Ancient Ireland," Richie's "Short History of the Irish People," Bagwell's "Ireland under the Tudors," Froude's "The English in Ireland," Lecky's "Leaders of Public Opinion in Ireland," together with the special chapters on Ireland in his general history, Ingram's "Two Chapters of Irish History" and "History of the Irish Union," Ball's "Irish Legislative Systems," T. P. O'Connor's "The Parnell Movement," and Sir Horace Plunkett's "Ireland in the Twentieth Century," with the comments on it by Father O'Riordan.

To Mr. Bagwell's "Ireland under the Tudors" I am specially indebted for his narrative of the Tudor wars. To Mr. T. P. O'Connor I am specially indebted for the most vivid accounts of the famine and of the evictions, as well as for an improved insight into the Parnell Movement and of the doings which preceded it. Of part of those doings I was myself in some measure a witness, through my social connections with a circle of English politicians who were inclining to an Irish alliance.

The annals of the Tudor wars are horrible and heartrending. But history cannot drop the veil over them. They long left their evil traces on Irish character and sentiment, explaining and extenuating some terrible things which ensued. Nor, in truth, have they become obsolete as warnings to us in general of the acts into which civilized nations may be betrayed when they make wars of conquest on those whom they deem barbarians.

It seemed that a brief account of the recent land legislation for Ireland might be useful to readers of an essay of this kind. I append one which has been prepared for me by my friend, Mr. Hugh J. McCann, B.L., of the Dublin Bar. Its author is in no way committed to any opinion expressed in the other part of the work.

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