THE IRISH PARLIAMENT FROM THE YEAR 1782 TO 1800. CRESSINGHAM PRIZE ESSAY, 1878

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W. ELLIS HUME WILLIAMS

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Trieste

THE IRISH PARLIAMENT

FROM

THE YEAR 1782 TO 1800.

BEING THE

CRESSINGHAM PRIZE ESSAY

1878.

BY

W. ELLIS HUME WILLIAMS, ESQ.

UNDERGRADUATE, TRINITY HALL.

"NOTHING EXTENUATE
NOR SET DOWN AUGHT IN MALICE."

CASSELL PETTER, & GALPIN,
LONDON, PARIS & NEW YORK.
1879.

LONDON:
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TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

Hugh MacCalmont, Earl Cairns,

LORD HIGH CHANCELLOR OF GREAT BRITAIN,

THIS ESSAY

IS

RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED.

PREFACE.

THE Author has thought it desirable to preface this essay on the Irish Parliament from the years 1782 to 1800, by a brief review of its antecedent condition, and by special quotation of the correspondence between the Irish Viceroy and the English Premier at the close of 1782.

It is difficult to estimate the utterances and action of the Irish or English Parliaments during that period, apart from the Social and Political influences coincident with them. These the Author has endeavoured to treat of with as much brevity as their importance permitted.

The present cry of Home Rule and agitation for Irish Volunteer organisation, lend fresh interest to past Irish history. The advocates of both may find their best response in its study.

TRINITY HALL,
CAMBRIDGE,
May, 1879.

"Irish Policy is Irish History, and I have no faith in any Statesman who attempts to remedy the evils of Ireland who is either ignorant of the past or will not take lessons from it."—*Disraeli, 1868.*

IN attempting an impartial consideration of the most eventful period of Irish history, it is essential to commence by examining the social and political condition of the country at the time. By tracing events both at home and abroad, we shall be enabled to form a just estimate of that combination of circumstances which was the precursor, if not the direct cause, of the crisis resulting in Irish Parliamentary Independence.

To begin with England. In the Spring of 1782, the Ministry of Lord North was brought to an abrupt termination. The position of the country at the close of his twelve years' administration was without precedent. Impolicy and injustice had borne full fruits in blunders and disasters. Political disappointments and military reverses afforded to a powerful Opposition ample justification for continual assaults. Ministerial majorities decreased in number and in quality. Fox and Burke, unceasing in their attacks, not only on the measures of the Government, but also on the capacity and personal character of its leader, at length forced his resignation. Much of the calamity which attended Lord North's administration must be attributed to the conflict between principles and measures, marking the efforts of the Premier to reconcile the caprices and prejudices of his Sovereign with the interests and requirements of the State. Friends were thereby alienated, foes were not conciliated. The favour of the King proved powerless against the dissatisfaction of the people. The Royal threats of abdication in March, 1778,