

**THE LIFE AND DEATH OF THE IRISH
PARLIAMENT: A LECTURE DELIVERED BEFORE
THE DUBLIN YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN
ASSOCIATION IN CONNEXION WITH THE
UNITED CHURCH OF ENGLAND
AND IRELAND, IN THE METROPOLITAN HALL,
JANUARY THE 19TH, 1863**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649276554

The life and death of the Irish parliament: a lecture delivered before the Dublin Young Men's Christian Association in connexion with the United church of England and Ireland, in the Metropolitan Hall, January the 19th, 1863 by James Whiteside

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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JAMES WHITESIDE

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THE
Life and Death of the Irish Parliament :
A LECTURE
BY
THE RIGHT HON. JAMES WHITESIDE,
Q.C. LL.D. M.P.
DELIVERED BEFORE THE
DUBLIN YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION
IN CONNEXION WITH THE
UNITED CHURCH OF ENGLAND AND IRELAND,
IN
THE METROPOLITAN HALL, JANUARY the 19th, 1863.
SIR THOMAS STAPLES, BART.,
IN THE CHAIR.

PART I.

JN1463
W15

THE LIFE AND DEATH
OF
THE IRISH PARLIAMENT.

CHAPTER I.

ORIGIN and Progress of the Parliament of Ireland—The Public Buildings of Dublin—Rev. James Whitelaw and the Historians of City of Dublin—Popular View of the alleged Conquest of Henry II. not correct—Antiquity and Fame of Dublin—Amusing Portrait of Henry by Giraldus Cambrensis—Object of Kings of England, from the first, to establish one Law, one State, one Church—“*Modus Tenendi Parliamentum*” not enforced in Ireland for 140 years.

MR. CHAIRMAN,

It affords me no common satisfaction to address you, Sir, in that chair, not only on the score of respect for your character and from private friendship, but because you prove in your own person what a happy life that of a Member of the Old Irish Parliament must have been. Wit, humour, eloquence, administered at suitable times and at reasonable intervals, operate as medicine for the mind; the consequent exhilaration of the spirits acts on the bodily health, and secures longevity and vigour. The “*mens conscia recti*” may be the true cause of the enviable condition of our Chairman—

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who is a living representative of the Parliament of Ireland, and a pure specimen of her ancient gentry.

I may well be apprehensive in endeavouring to describe what he has witnessed—my words may sound feebly in his ear, accustomed to the thrilling eloquence of the famous orators of our country; but his kindly nature will overlook my deficiencies; and my inadequacy to the task I have undertaken will be regarded by a generous audience with indulgence. To repeat my congratulations to the promoters of this Association, or to the Parochial Clergy by whom it is mainly worked, for the success they have obtained, would be needless; one and all of us can only hope and pray that this Society may prosper, and prove a blessing to our city.

The occupations of life engross so much of our time that we rarely can abstract our attention from passing events—revert to the past—compare our present with our former condition, and consider what we have gained or what we have lost as a nation.

That we should read the histories of other countries, and know little of our own, would seem to be censurable, though not surprising; but the duty of investigating the constitution and proceedings of the Parliament, by which we were so long governed, would appear to be plain; and it might not be uninteresting to ascertain *when* and by *whom* the Irish Parliament was planted—*how* it grew—*when* it died.

It is, moreover, by comprehending what kind of Parliament our forefathers obtained and enjoyed, that we can appreciate our gain or loss by the incorporation of the Irish with an Imperial Legislature.

The ancient Romans conquered what in their time was called the World; the victorious legions, encamped on the banks of the Euphrates and the Rhine, preserving their discipline and their manners in the midst of various nations.

The Patrician Senate ruled with wisdom, as provinces of the Empire, what are now splendid kingdoms. How did "the Commonwealth of Kings" govern? By incorporating in their Empire the countries they subdued; by imparting their laws and customs to the people they vanquished; and by converting discontented enemies into cordial friends and fellow-citizens. I ought to add, they not only established their laws in the new country, but also their national sports and amusements.

Thus, as we roam over Europe, we discover memorials of the Roman people. We may read their policy in the fragment of the arch, in the broken column, the ruined aqueduct, or in the scattered remains of the amphitheatre or the circus. At Nismes we may even now behold a model of the once mighty Rome; and we can comprehend the wise and sagacious policy which multiplied and ramified, while it secured and perpetuated, Roman civilization, authority, and power.

In our old law books it is prophesied that the *Saxon* race are destined to overspread and christianize the earth; and, in partial fulfilment of the prophecy, we behold, in distant regions, fresh settlements growing into kingdoms, and spreading our laws, our language, our liberties, and our religion. How are these mighty results obtained? In the same way as in the ancient Roman Empire—by freely imparting to the new country all the freedom possessed by the old, and thus consolidating an union of hearts and affections.

We can, therefore, easily apprehend the principle of policy upon which England would be likely to have acted had she conquered Ireland—namely, that of attaching the Irish people to the English rulers, by establishing a community of laws, and by bestowing upon the new acquisition all the rights and liberties enjoyed by the older country. But, of

all the rights possessed by Englishmen, that of Parliamentary representation is the most precious. Therefore, it would be natural to suppose they would not churlishly withhold from our forefathers that which they themselves so highly prized.

Thus are we prepared for the fact that Ireland possessed a Parliament; and as we walk the streets of our beautiful city, our senses teach us this was a capital and seat of the Parliament of a Kingdom.

The history of the city wherein we live is read even less than the history of our country; yet the stones we tread might suggest reflections; the public buildings we behold might stimulate inquiry, and occupy or agitate busy thoughts.

We are not destitute of materials for this pleasing study. The History of Dublin has been admirably written by the late Rev. James Whitelaw, rector of St. Catherine's, one of the best parish ministers who ever laboured in this city. His name is to be mentioned by me with reverence, for he was the intimate friend of my father (also a minister of the Church), and, with pious friendship, inscribed the epitaph which marks his tomb. Whitelaw's character was apostolical; his labours were as incessant as his benevolence was boundless. Death overtook him while engaged in his Master's work; his spirit fled to a kindred home. His example was a rich legacy to the Church which he adorned and served.

Whitelaw's History was left somewhat unfinished, but has been completed; and in its pages, as well as in the History of Dublin by Gilbert, and in the biography of the architect Gandon, by Mulvany, you may read the account of the erection of our celebrated public edifices—some of them designed by native talent—all of them executed through the liberality and by the superintending taste of our native Parliament. The study ought to teach you not to decry the labours, or to depreciate the genius of your countrymen.

When you have studied the style and proportions of that beautiful edifice, the Custom House ; when you have critically examined the interior and exterior of the Exchange ; when you have leisurely scanned the Temple of Justice, surmounted by a dome flung into the air ; when you have visited all the public buildings which adorn our city ; when you gaze with admiration on the palaces erected by our nobles, now changed into offices or board-rooms ; when you have visited the last of these (I allude to Charlemont House), which still continues in the possession of an Irish nobleman, who, except our Chairman, is the only surviving member of the Irish Parliament ;—then you may stand before the majestic building wherein the Parliament of Ireland was wont to sit. You may, perhaps, entertain yourselves with the narrative of its original design and happy completion ; you may, with a critical eye, discern, as you stand before the splendid portico which faces and frowns upon the statue of Moore, the mixtures of styles—the rich Corinthian added to the more simple Ionic. But, whether you gaze upon the noble structure when gilded by the rays of a summer sun, or when the trembling moonbeam has shed a softer light over its fine proportions—when criticism has been exhausted, unfeigned admiration of the stately edifice succeeds. The vast and grand proportions of the entire building fill the mind with delight, and you conclude your survey by commending the skill, the taste, the genius, the liberality which combined to produce so magnificent a result. While we pause to admire the building, we may exclaim—Could these walls speak, what might we not expect to hear ? But—the passions, the hatreds, the ambitions, the sallies of wit, the flashes of humour, the flights of eloquence, the eager conflict of intellects contending for fame and power, the fervid orators, the sagacious statesmen—slumber in the dust.

Within those walls, the voice of eloquence is hushed for ever.

We are assembled to inquire *when* the Parliament was born, *how* it lived, when and from what *causes* it died.

According to our theory, we should only inquire when it was that the Saxons invaded, or conquered, or settled in Ireland, and then conclude we had found the date of the birth of our Parliament. But even here a question might be made; for whereas it is commonly believed that the English came over in the reign of Henry II., yet we have the great authority of Lord Coke (I mean Coke upon Littleton), in the case of Calvin, in the 7th Part of his Reports, and in the preface to the 4th Part, that Ireland was in part subject to the crown of England long before the reign of Henry. He writes:—“Next followeth Ireland, which originally came to the king of England by conquest; but who was the first conqueror thereof, hath been a question. I have seen a charter, an excellent record, worthy to be made known to all, made by King Edgar, king of England in the tenth century, in these words:—“*Altitonantis Dei largifluâ clementiâ, qui est Rex regum et Dominus dominantium—*I, Edgar, king of England, give thanks to the omnipotent God, my King, who hath enlarged and exalted my empire over the kingdom of my fathers.”

He then specifies the various additions to his territories, adding: “*Maximamque partem Hiberniæ, cum suâ nobilissimâ civitate de Dublinâ.*” Wherefore, concludes the king, “I am devoutly disposed to exalt the glory of Christ in my kingdom, and to extend his worship and praise.” So did the good kings of England express themselves in the olden time; and thus we learn that, centuries before the Conquest, or rather the visit of Henry, a great part of Ireland had been annexed to England, and with it the most famous City of Dublin. In