

# **ENGLAND AND IRELAND**

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England and Ireland by John Stuart Mill

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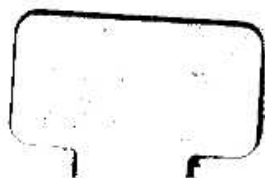
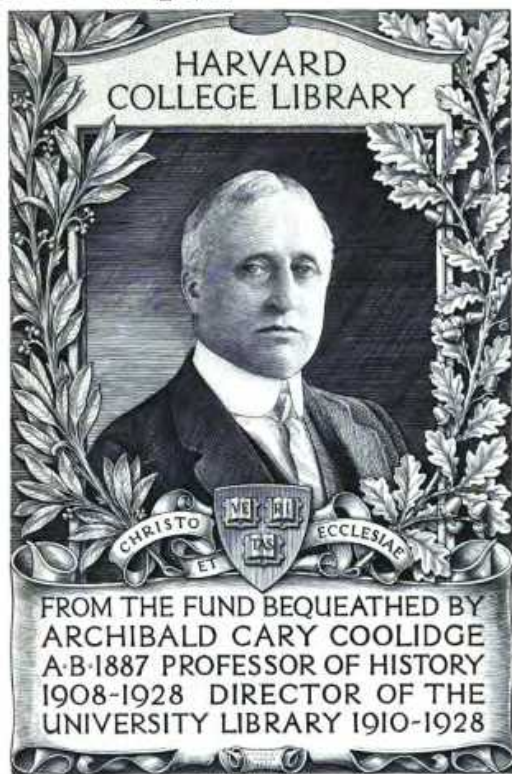
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AND IRELAND**



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JOHN STUART MILL

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## ENGLAND AND IRELAND.

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Once at least in every generation the question, "What is to be done with Ireland?" rises again to perplex the councils and trouble the conscience of the British nation. It has now risen more formidable than ever, and with the further aggravation, that it was unexpected. Irish disaffection, assuredly, is a familiar fact; and there have always been those among us who liked to explain it by a special taint or infirmity in the Irish character. But Liberal Englishmen had always attributed it to the multitude of unredressed wrongs. England had for ages, from motives of different degrees of unworthiness, made her yoke heavy upon Ireland. According to a well known computation, the whole land of the island had been confiscated three times over. Part had been taken to enrich powerful Englishmen and their Irish adherents; part to form the endowment of a hostile hierarchy; the rest had been given away to English and Scotch colonists, who held, and were intended to hold it, as a garrison against the Irish. The manufactures of Ireland, except the linen manufacture, which was chiefly carried on by these colonists, were deliberately crushed for the avowed purpose of making more room for those of England. The vast majority



of the native Irish, all who professed the Roman Catholic religion, were, in violation of the faith pledged to the Catholic army at Limerick, despoiled of all their political and most of their civil rights, and were left in existence only to plough or dig the ground, and pay rent to their task-masters. A nation which treats its subjects in this fashion cannot well expect to be loved by them. It is not necessary to discuss the circumstances of extenuation which an advocate might more or less justly urge to excuse these iniquities to the English conscience. Whatever might be their value in our own eyes, in those of the Irish they had not, and could not have, any extenuating virtue. Short of actual depopulation and desolation, or the direct personal enslaving of the inhabitants, little was omitted which could give a people cause to execrate its conquerors. But these just causes of disloyalty, it was at last thought, had been removed. The jealousy of Irish industry and enterprise has long ceased, and all inequality of commercial advantages between the two countries has been done away with. The civil rights of the Catholic population have been restored to them, and (with one or two trifling exceptions) their political disabilities have been taken off. The prizes of professional and of political life, in Ireland, England, and every British dependency, have been thrown open, in law and in fact, to Catholic as well as Protestant Irish. The alien Church indeed remains, but is no longer supported by a levy from the Catholic tillers of the soil; it has become a charge on the rent paid by them, mostly to Protestant landlords. The confiscations have not been reversed; but the hand of time has passed over them: they have reached the stage at

which, in the opinion of reasonable men, the reversal of an injustice is but an injustice the more. The representatives of the Irish Catholics are a power in the House of Commons, sufficient at times to hold the balance of parties. Irish complaints, great and small, are listened to with patience, if not always with respect; and when they admit of a remedy which seems reasonable to English minds, there is no longer any reluctance to apply it. What, then, it is thought even by Liberal Englishmen, has Ireland to resent? What, indeed, remains from which resentment could arise? By dint of believing that disaffection had ceased to be reasonable, they came to think that it had ceased to be possible. All grievances, of a kind to exasperate the ruled against the rulers, had, they thought, disappeared. Nature, too, not in her kinder, but in one of her cruellest moods, had made it her study to relieve the conscience of the English rulers of Ireland. A people of whom, according to the Report of a Royal Commission, two millions and a half were for many weeks of each year in a state of chronic starvation, were a sight which might cause some misgiving in a nation that had absolute power over them. But the Angel of Death had stepped in, and removed that spectre from before our gate. An appalling famine, followed by an unexampled and continuous emigration, had, by thinning the labour market, alleviated that extreme indigence which, by making the people desperate, might embitter them, we thought, even against a mild and just Government. Ireland was now not only well governed, but prosperous and improving. Surely the troubles of the British nation about Ireland were now at an end.

It is upon a people, or at least upon upper and middle classes, basking in this fool's paradise, that Fenianism has burst, like a clap of thunder in a clear sky, unlooked for and unintelligible, and has found them utterly unprepared to meet it and to deal with it. The disaffection which they flattered themselves had been cured, suddenly shows itself more intense, more violent, more unscrupulous, and more universal than ever. The population is divided between those who wish success to Fenianism, and those who, though disapproving its means and perhaps its ends, sympathize in its embittered feelings. Repressed by force in Ireland itself, the rebellion visits us in our own homes, scattering death among those who have given no provocation but that of being English-born. So deadly is the hatred, that it will run all risks merely to do us harm, with little or no prospect of any consequent good to itself. Our rulers are helpless to deal with this new outburst of enmity, because they are unable to see that anything on their part has given cause for it. They are brought face to face with a spirit which will as little tolerate what we think our good government as our bad, and they have not been trained to manage problems of that difficulty. But though their statesmanship is at fault, their conscience is at ease, because the rebellion, they think, is not one of grievance or suffering; it is a rebellion for an idea—the idea of nationality. Alas for the self-complacent ignorance of irresponsible rulers, be they monarchs, classes, or nations! If there is anything sadder than the calamity itself, it is the unmistakable sincerity and good faith with which numbers of Englishmen confess themselves incapable of compre-