

**THE CONDUCT OF
ENGLAND TO IRELAND,
JAN. 30, 1882**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649297993

The Conduct of England to Ireland, Jan. 30, 1882 by Goldwin Smith

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

GOLDWIN SMITH

**THE CONDUCT OF
ENGLAND TO IRELAND,
JAN. 30, 1882**

Conia

THE
CONDUCT OF ENGLAND
TO IRELAND

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED AT BRIGHTON

JAN. 30, 1882

BY
GOLDWIN SMITH

54
London
MACMILLAN AND CO.

1882

THE
CONDUCT OF ENGLAND TO IRELAND.

IRELAND may seem at this moment to be a problem for statesmen rather than for a student; but it is one about which the student has something to tell the statesman. The clue is to be found in geography and history.

Before entering on the subject in a practical way, however, it seems necessary to fix our morality. I have a profound respect for the genius of Carlyle as a historical writer, as a poet in prose, and as a humorist. His moral philosophy, if so serious a name can be applied to anything so fantastic, I cannot respect. In rebuking the optimism of democracy and the superstition of the Ballot-box, he has no doubt done good; but his worship of despotic force is a hideous anachronism, and his doctrine that might makes right, is, to borrow a phrase from his own vocabulary, 'an everlasting lie.' The soul of man morally civilised will have none of it, but flings it to the worshippers of Moloch, or of hundred-handed idols. However, Carlyle himself was a man of genius: if he worshipped a truly heroic, though imperfect, character, such as Cromwell, or even a brilliant buccaneer such as Frederic, he did not grovel before such an idol as Henry VIII. It is with his imitators that it is most difficult to have patience. Eccentric genius is always cursed in imitations. If the great cynic is in purgatory for his Reminiscences, he is reading the falsification of history in the interest of tyrant-worship by some of his disciples, or the outbreaks of emasculate petulance which others of them take for displays of strength. Certain Carlylesque histories of English rule in Ireland seem to have been

written with the express object of goading the Irish to rebellion against a power presented as one of insolence and wrong. If such was their purpose, they have not altogether failed of their effect. My own point of view, and, I have no doubt, yours, is that of ordinary morality. We abjure the doctrine that a strong nation is entitled, by virtue of its strength, to subjugate a weak nation, if it finds the accession of territory convenient. We recognise the law of righteousness. We hold that the union between Great Britain and Ireland, to be justified, must be shown to be good for both the partners. That, as matters now stand, it is good for both partners, and could not be dissolved without calamitous results to both, is my conviction, for which I shall try to give my grounds.

I say as matters now stand. Had it been possible for Ireland to remain from the outset independent, and for the two nations to grow up side by side separate, but in amity, that, I heartily admit, would have been best. But this was not to be, and could hardly have been. The geographical relation of the smaller island to the larger was such as to make conquest, in the age of universal war and rapine, almost a certainty. Unfortunately the same relation made it almost equally certain that conquest would, in this case, assume its most pernicious form. The genius of political evil spread his dark wing over the nation in its very cradle.

We are apt to consider the case of Ireland rather too much by itself. Four remnants of the Celtic population were left in existence when the tide of Saxon conquest had reached the full. The remnant in Cornwall has long since been thoroughly incorporated, nothing beyond a strong county-feeling being preserved. The extension of Wesleyanism among the Cornish men helped to complete the process. The Celts of Wales, a much larger mass, and sheltered not by mere hills, but by mountains, held out much longer. Even now Wales retains her own language. (She has a popular Church of her own, Calvinistic Methodism;) and in the relations of that Church and of the Celtic people to the Anglican establishment, and the English proprietary, she presents a certain analogy to the case of Ireland. But she is Protestant, her native language is surely, though slowly, dying under the influence of education and

railroads; her mountain barriers have become the resorts of English pleasure-seekers; above all, she is separated from England by no sea. Her complete incorporation is at hand. After the union of Scotland with England, down to 1745, the Scottish Highlands remained a separate country with a political and social organisation, a language and a costume of their own. But in 1745 the clan-system and the rule of its chieftains were broken; Presbyterianism extended itself to the Highlands, though in a form rather more enthusiastic, and more suited to the Celt than that which prevailed among the Saxons of the Lowlands. With religion the literary language made way, and what now remains of Highland isolation belongs, not to the political but to the picturesque. As in the case of Wales, the mountains, once ramparts of race, are now attractions to the tourist or the sportsman, and, instead of guarding seclusion, hasten incorporation.

Neither the land of the Cymry nor the land of the Gael was severed from that of the Saxon by the sea. What makes the Irish question is St. George's Channel. No legislator or publicist is doing more to solve the problem than those Mail Packet boats between Holyhead and Dublin, the most beautiful things in the way of steam afloat, which cut or rather shoot over the roughest sea almost with the certainty and punctuality of a railway train. If sea-sickness could be abolished, a great step towards the consolidation of the union would be made. Unluckily, that is a problem before which medical science folds its hands in despair.

The sea exempted Ireland both from Roman and from Saxon conquest. British Christianity found a refuge in Erin when the sword of the sons of Woden extirpated it in England, and it even became the parent of a civilisation essentially ecclesiastical in character, and wonderfully brilliant for the age, though, like precocity in general, shortlived, of which the monuments are the illuminated Book of Kells, the mysterious Round Towers, and the ruins which mark the now lonely and melancholy site of Clonmacnoise. Missionary enterprise was active, as well as ecclesiastical learning, architecture, and decorative art. But the Church in Ireland, amidst the general barbarism of the wild clans, was as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers.

The chieftains trampled on the clergy, disregarded spiritual privileges and immunities, treated Church offices as appendages of their chieftainries. The leaders of the clergy stretched their hands to the Papacy as the tutelary power of their order, and to the Norman who was the religious liegeman and the soldier of the Popes. In the Saxon Chronicle we find the remarkable assertion, that had William the Conqueror lived two years longer, he would have won Ireland without stroke of sword. He would have won it through an alliance with the Irish ecclesiastics, who, after his death continued their correspondence—Irish patriotism would say their intrigues—with the English Primates, and in the end brought about the Anglo-Norman conquest of Ireland. That enterprise was the complement of the Anglo-Norman Conquest of England; both were at once conquests and crusades, the Pope blessing the arms which brought under his spiritual dominion a national and independent church; a church which, in the case of Ireland, was not only national and independent, but heterodox, the Irish having preserved the old Brito-Celtic form of Christianity, though it is an anachronism to pretend that they were Protestants. The Reforming, that is Romanising Synod of Cashel, held under the auspices of the Norman conqueror of Ireland, was the counterpart of the Synod of Winchester, held under the auspices of the Norman conqueror of England. Romanism, which, when the English turned Protestants, became the religion of Irish patriotism, was at first the religion of the invader; while the religion of the patriot was the old Christianity of Celtic Britain. Let no patriot priest of Ireland hope to cast doubt on the authenticity of Adrian's missive, or to dispute the fact that the Church of Rome delivered Ireland to the Conqueror. It is impossible to conceive an event for which a Protestant Englishman at the present day has less to answer. It would have been well—comparatively well, at least—had the unfulfilled contingency at which the Saxon chronicler glances been fulfilled, and had the subjugation of Ireland, as well as that of England, been achieved by the hand of William; for William's personal powers, suspending the anarchic tendencies of feudalism, enabled him to complete conquest and to organise dominion.

Unlike historical optimists, I bewail the victory of the Norman at Hastings, and curse the spiritual ambition of that stony-hearted monk who sent forth the robber against an unoffending race—a race whose independence, though rude, was full of promise, and had produced Alfred. I take my stand by the side of Harold on the fatal ridge, and mourn over the ruin of the nation, the institutions, the language which fell with the patriot king. English, as well as Irish history, has its tears. But the result in this case was at least a United Kingdom, with an aristocracy which, though at first alien in race, though long oppressive, and still baneful, was from the outset in its extension national, became so at length in character, and, by its struggles with the Crown, gave birth to liberty. In the case of Ireland, the Plantagenet monarchy took but a feeble and fitful hold of the enterprise; the work was left to feudalism, which had commenced it in the person of Strongbow, and the fatal product of that anarchic and desultory force was not a dominion, but a military colony or pale, occupying but a small portion of the island, and waging a deadly war of race with the clans which continued masters of the rest. The native fastnesses, the bogs and hills, were not subdued, because it was not worth the while of private adventure to subdue them. Ireland was far from the centre of the Anglo-Norman power; Wales, through which the passage lay, was itself unsubdued; while between struggles with the barons and foreign wars the monarchy had always other business on hand. Of the Anglo-Norman Pale, Ascendency, Exclusion, Alien Landlordism, Absenteeism, and the whole train of Irish woes, are the offspring more or less direct. Incomplete conquest is the phrase which sums up these calamities. It is well to keep this in mind. Even supposing that the Englishman is to bear the sins of the Norman, that Protestants are to bear the sins of the Papacy, that the children to the third and fourth generation are to bear the sins of the fathers, many more than three or four generations have passed since the grant of Pope Adrian and the invasion of Strongbow.

It is well also to remember that Ireland was a party to her own subjugation. Not only was she betrayed by her clergy, she betrayed herself. Not only did the ambition of Irish ecclesiastics conspire with that of Norman ecclesiastics for the intervention

of Rome, but it was the revenge of an Irish chief that invited Strongbow to Ireland, provided the invader with native allies, and opened the gate to conquest. This, again, reminds us that if Ireland, in connection with England, has had a disastrous history, she might, if left in her savage independence, have had a history no less disastrous. What she has suffered, we know; what she might have suffered, we know not. We see that page of the book of fate in which actual events are written, and a dark page in the present case unquestionably it is: the page of unfulfilled contingencies is a blank; had it been filled it might have been not less dark. When Strongbow landed, the island was divided among a number of warring clans. Strongbow's ally, the chieftain Dermot, is described by Giraldus, the chronicler of the day, as 'tall and huge; warlike and daring, with a voice hoarse from shouting in battle; desiring to be feared rather than loved; an oppressor of the noble, a raiser up of the low; tyrannical to his own people and detested by strangers; one who had his hand against every man and every man's hand against him.' His followers, after a victory, having thrown a heap of heads at his feet, the savage clapped his hands with delight, yelled forth his thanks to God, and, seizing a head which he recognised as that of a hated enemy, tore off the nose and lips with his teeth. There would have been rough and bloody work before such elements could have been reduced to political order, even if there had been no Norman invader or connection with Great Britain. The island is much divided by bogs, obstacles to political unity in early times, hardly less serious than mountains. Nor were its situation and productions such as would be likely to give birth on a large scale to commerce and cities, at once the great organs of progress and the great originators of a regular police. A central government could apparently have been established only after a tough conflict with the forces of disunion; and we may be sure that every Irish anarch, when galled by the growing power of order, would have been ready, like Dermot, to call in foreign aid. It is unfortunate for Irish reason, though fortunate for Irish rhetoric, that Ireland cannot have an authentic vision of her independent history, as it would have been.

To revert to her history as it was—the Plantagenets,