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**HISTORY OF IRELAND**

**IN THE**

**XVIII<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

**VOL. I.**

**WORKS BY WILLIAM EDWARD HARTPOLE LECKY.**



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A  
HISTORY OF IRELAND  
IN THE  
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

BY  
WILLIAM EDWARD HARTPOLE LECKY

*NEW EDITION*

VOLUME I.

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## PREFACE.

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I STATED in the concluding volume of the English portion of this history that the outbreak of the great French War in 1793 appeared to me the best and most natural termination of a History of England in the eighteenth century, and that it was not my intention to carry my narrative beyond this limit. For the Irish portion, however, a different limit must be assigned, and in order to give it any completeness or unity, it is necessary to describe the rebellion of 1798, the legislative Union of 1800, and the defeat or abandonment of the great measures of Catholic conciliation which Pitt had intended to be the immediate sequel of the Union. In consequence of the addition of these eventful years my Irish narrative has assumed a somewhat disproportionate length, and I have often been obliged to treat Irish affairs with a fulness of detail which was not required in other parts of my work. I have had to deal with a history which has been very imperfectly written, and usually under the influence of the most furious partisanship. There is hardly a page of it which is not darkened by the most violently contradictory statements. It is

marked by obscure agrarian and social changes, by sudden, and sometimes very perplexing, alterations in the popular sentiment, which can only be elucidated and proved by copious illustration. It comprises also periods of great crimes and of great horrors, and the task of tracing their true causes, and measuring with accuracy and impartiality the different degrees of provocation, aggravation, palliation, and comparative guilt, is an extremely difficult one.

In order to accomplish it with any success, it is necessary to bring together a much larger array of original evidence, drawn from the opposite camps, than would be required in dealing with a history of which the outlines, at least, were well established and generally admitted. This is especially necessary, as our judgments must be, in a great degree, formed from manuscript materials which are not easily accessible, and as many of these manuscripts are the letters of men who, though they have all the authority of eyewitnesses, often wrote under the influence of panic or strong party passion. It is only by collecting and comparing many letters, written by men of different opinions and scattered over wide areas, that it is possible to form a true estimate of the condition of the country, and to pronounce with real confidence between opposing statements. Such a method of inquiry tends greatly to lengthen a book and to impair its symmetry and its artistic charm; but it is here, I believe, the one method of arriving at truth; it brings the reader in direct contact with the original materials of Irish history, and it enables him to draw his own conclusions very independently of the historian.

In these volumes I have made much use of the correspondence between the English and Irish Governments that exists in the Record Office in London, and I have derived some side-lights from the papers in the French Foreign Office, which have been kindly opened to my inspection. Several other manuscript sources have been of use to me. Both the Irish Record Office and the Irish State Paper Office are rich in documents illustrating the condition of Ireland in the earlier years of the eighteenth century, and Dublin Castle also contains a vast collection of papers ranging from 1795 to 1805, which, through the kindness of Sir Bernard Burke, I have been enabled to spend many weeks in exploring. For more than sixty years these papers were deposited in two very large cases in the Birmingham Tower, carefully fastened down with the Government seal, and with the inscription, 'Secret and confidential; not to be opened.' They remained in this state until after the passing of the Records (Ireland) Act, in 1867, when it was thought desirable to open these cases, and to classify their contents. The work occupied some years, but it was at last accomplished, and the whole collection is now excellently arranged, in no less than sixty-eight boxes. A great proportion of it is of little or no historical value, but it contains, among other things, numerous letters from informers, written during the progress of the United Irish conspiracy, and during and after the rebellion, and also a large and exceedingly interesting series of letters from magistrates and Government officials in different parts of Ireland, describing in detail the state of the country. These



letters have the same kind of value as the *cahiers*, describing the state of France on the eve of the Revolution, from which, since the days of Tocqueville, the best French historians have derived some of their most valuable materials. Occasionally, too, amid this great mass of serious, formal, and depressing documents, there may be found others of a very different character, which were seized among the papers of the conspirators, and which have sometimes a strangely pathetic interest. There are love-letters and rude poems; passionate expressions of youthful friendships; note-books in which eager scholars described their studies or recorded their passing thoughts; day-dreams of young and ardent natures, too often destined to end in exile or the gallows.

Another source from which I have derived much information has been the Pelham Papers, which have been deposited in the British Museum. Pelham was Irish Secretary from March 1795 to November 1798. His long and frequent visits to England while he was in office, made his correspondence unusually copious; and when he ceased to be Irish Secretary he still continued to correspond with leading persons in Ireland. The British Museum also possesses an interesting series of letters written by Percy, Bishop of Dromore—the well-known author of the ‘*Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*’—to his wife, during the rebellion, and during the debates on the Union.

It remains for me to express my gratitude for some private collections of papers which have been opened to me. Of these two of the most important have been given to public institutions since I had the privilege of

examining them. The Charlemont Papers have been placed in the Irish Academy. The Westmorland, or, as they are now called, the Fane Papers, are in the Irish State Paper Office. Lady Bunbury kindly placed in my hands a very interesting correspondence of Lady Louisa Conolly and her friends; and Lord Colchester, the whole correspondence of Abbot, who was Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant during the Administration of Addington. The Harcourt Papers, which throw some light on an important period of Irish history, have been privately printed by their owner, Colonel Harcourt, of Nuneham Park, and a copy has been given to the British Museum. To Lady Louisa Fortescue I am indebted for permission to read the correspondence of Lord Grenville at Dropmore, and to Lord George Hamilton for some curious papers describing the different interests and connections in the Irish Parliament.

# CONTENTS

OF

## THE FIRST VOLUME.

### CHAPTER I.

#### IRELAND BEFORE THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

	PAGE
Contrast between Irish and Scotch history . . . . .	1
Early relations between the English and Irish . . . . .	2
Ireland not thoroughly conquered before Elizabeth . . . . .	2
Savage manner in which the country was subdued . . . . .	3
How far religious considerations entered into the struggle . . . . .	11

#### *The Land War*

Spirit of adventure after the Reformation drew many speculators to Ireland . . . . .	13
The Irish land system . . . . .	16
The Composition of Connaught . . . . .	17
Confiscations under Mary in Leinster . . . . .	18
Confiscations in Munster after Desmond's rebellion . . . . .	18
Payne's description of Munster . . . . .	19
Abolition of tanistry and gavelkind . . . . .	21
Confiscations and settlements in Ulster . . . . .	21
Character of the settlers . . . . .	22
Description of Ulster by Sir John Davis . . . . .	25
Fresh encroachments on Irish land . . . . .	26
Attempt to overthrow the titles in Connaught . . . . .	29
The Graces . . . . .	30
Violated by Wentworth . . . . .	31
The settlement of Connaught deferred . . . . .	33

	PAGE
<i>Religious grievances</i>	
State of religion in Ireland under Elizabeth . . . . .	34
Disturbances under James I. . . . .	35
Growing Catholic zeal . . . . .	36
Protestant intolerance . . . . .	37
The Puritan Parliament threatens to extirpate Catholicism . . . . .	39
<i>Rebellion of 1641</i>	
Summary of its causes . . . . .	41
Conduct of the Lords Justices . . . . .	43
Character of the outbreak . . . . .	46
Events in Cavan . . . . .	50
In the rest of Ulster . . . . .	52
The Scotch little molested . . . . .	58
Crimes of the Irish. Report of the Commissioners . . . . .	60
Sir Phelim O'Neil . . . . .	66
Exaggerated accounts spread in England . . . . .	69
Motives of exaggeration . . . . .	70
The depositions . . . . .	72
Temple . . . . .	74
Exaggerations at the time of the Act of Settlement . . . . .	77
More probable estimates . . . . .	79
Conduct of the English Parliament and Lords Justices . . . . .	82
Conduct of the English soldiers . . . . .	83
Attempts of Irish leaders to restrain the horrors of the war . . . . .	89
The religious element . . . . .	93
Suppression of the Rebellion . . . . .	104
The Cromwellian settlement . . . . .	105
The Act of Settlement . . . . .	108
<i>The Revolution</i>	
Irish Parliament in 1689. Its composition . . . . .	116
Its Acts about religion and repealing Poyning's Law . . . . .	118
The repeal of the Act of Settlement . . . . .	119
The Act of Attainder . . . . .	125
Final ruin of the Jacobites . . . . .	134

## CHAPTER II.

1700-1760.

*Laws against Catholics in Ireland*

The Treaty of Limerick . . . . .	136
The Irish penal code not due to any rebellion . . . . .	137
Laws depriving the Irish Catholics of all civil life . . . . .	145
Laws prohibiting Catholic education . . . . .	148
Laws affecting property . . . . .	149

	PAGE
Laws preventing intermarriage of Catholics and Protestants	152
Laws affecting domestic life	153
Laws affecting religious worship	156
Degree in which the code was enforced	160
Its effects	169
<i>Commercial Legislation</i>	
Material advantages of Ireland	171
Irish forbidden to export cattle to England	173
Excluded from the colonial trade	174
Forbidden to export unmanufactured wool to the Continent	175
Forbidden to export manufactured wool	176
Effects of the destruction of manufactures	179
Extreme poverty. Famine	181
The commercial policy of England towards Ireland not peculiar	188
Its political consequences	190
Subordination of the Irish Parliament. The Revenue	192
Constitution of the Irish Parliament	194
Chief offices all filled by Englishmen	197
Scandalous pensions	198
Abuses of Church patronage	199
Absence of all efficient control	210
Partial restrictions of pensions	210
Letter of Lucas	211
<i>Absenteeism.</i> Its causes and extent	212
Its effects on agricultural economy	213
The Middlemen and Cottiers	214
Agricultural evils aggravated by the penal code	218
Spread of pasture	219
Nomadic pauperism	227
Attempts to diminish it	230
The Charter schools established	233
Their effects	235
Slow growth of population. Proportion of Catholics to Protestants	239
Summary of the depressing circumstances of the country. How far due to England	240
<i>Emigration of the more energetic Irishmen</i>	
Early nomadic tendencies of the nation	242
Emigration under Elizabeth, James I., and Cromwell	243
Accelerated by the Revolution	244
The Protestant emigration	245
The Catholic emigration	248
Irishmen in foreign service	248
Effect of this emigration on the national character	252

	PAGE
<i>Religious Legislation</i>	
Systematic degradation of Catholics . . . . .	252
Their condition under Anne . . . . .	254
Their condition in the early Hanoverian period . . . . .	260
Gradual relaxation of the religious disabilities . . . . .	269
Deposition of Bishop Sweetman . . . . .	270
Effects of the penal code on the respect for law . . . . .	273
On the character of Irish religion . . . . .	275
On the distribution of property . . . . .	278
On social life . . . . .	279
<i>Social and political effects of the confiscations</i>	
Extreme dread of Catholic ascendancy . . . . .	279
Schism between the landlords and tenants . . . . .	280
Its effect upon Irish literature . . . . .	281
Upon the character of the gentry . . . . .	281
Many influences conspire to corrupt them . . . . .	282
Their oppression of their tenants . . . . .	284
Duelling, drinking, extravagance . . . . .	286
Irish country life . . . . .	289
Disregard for law . . . . .	290
General character of the Irish gentry . . . . .	291
Character of the Middlemen . . . . .	293
<i>Better aspects of Irish life</i>	
Intellectual activity . . . . .	294
Dublin Philosophical Society . . . . .	296
The Dublin Society . . . . .	297
Berkeley . . . . .	300
Philanthropy greatly diverted to the Charter schools . . . . .	301
Lord Molesworth . . . . .	302
Synges Sermon on Toleration . . . . .	304
Tolerant spirit of some of the higher ecclesiastics . . . . .	305
Amelioration of the position of Catholics . . . . .	309
Redeeming features of the Government . . . . .	313
Character of the poor . . . . .	314
Diminution of intolerance . . . . .	318
<i>Description of the country</i>	
Dublin . . . . .	319
Condition of the roads . . . . .	329
Love of acting . . . . .	330
Increase of travelling . . . . .	331
Diminution of the Irish language . . . . .	331
Provincial newspapers and libraries . . . . .	332
Destruction of woods . . . . .	333
State of agriculture . . . . .	336

THE FIRST VOLUME.

XV

	PAGE
The linen manufacture. Growth of Belfast . . . . .	337
The fisheries . . . . .	339
Cork . . . . .	340
Limerick . . . . .	343
Waterford . . . . .	344
Kilkenny . . . . .	344
Galway . . . . .	345
The German colony . . . . .	351
The Huguenots in Ireland . . . . .	353
<i>Irish crime</i>	
Tories and Rapparees . . . . .	354
State of Kerry and Connaught . . . . .	357
The Houghers . . . . .	362
The privateers . . . . .	368
Military disorders . . . . .	368
State of the prisons . . . . .	369
Abductions . . . . .	370
Laws against intermarriages of Catholics and Protestants . . . . .	387
Consequences of these laws . . . . .	394
How far race has been important in Irish history . . . . .	396
How far the faults of the national character are due to religion . . . . .	401
Intensity of conviction formed under the penal laws . . . . .	404
Pilgrimages . . . . .	406
Illustrations of the tolerant character of the Irish . . . . .	408
Freedom of Ireland from the witch mania . . . . .	412
Active disloyalty not prevalent in Ireland . . . . .	413
Catholic bishops nominated by the Pretender . . . . .	416
The Catholics excluded from the British army . . . . .	416
And driven in consequence into foreign service . . . . .	418
Policy of the Government about foreign enlistments . . . . .	420
<i>Conflict between the Anglicans and Dissenters</i>	
Irish High Churchmen . . . . .	422
The Presbyterians in the North . . . . .	424
Growing animosity . . . . .	427
The Test Act . . . . .	429
Motives of the Bishops in maintaining it . . . . .	430
Interference with Presbyterian ministers . . . . .	432
The <i>Regium Donum</i> . . . . .	432
Controversies about a Toleration Act . . . . .	434
And about an Indemnity Act . . . . .	434
Toleration Act of 1719 . . . . .	435
Indemnity Act carried . . . . .	435
Impossibility of repealing the Test . . . . .	435
Causes of the decadence of Presbyterianism . . . . .	437

	PAGE
The New Light schism . . . . .	438
The Associate Presbytery schism . . . . .	438
<i>Conflict between the English and Irish interests</i>	
The Irish interest purely colonial . . . . .	439
Causes of the discontent that followed the Revolution . . . . .	439
Jacobite project for uniting Protestants and Catholics . . . . .	441
Molyneux. Petitions for an Union . . . . .	443
Patronage. Primate Boulter . . . . .	444
Disputes about Money Bills . . . . .	446
The jurisdiction of the Irish House of Lords taken away . . . . .	447
Swift's tract in favour of an exclusive use of Irish manu- factures prosecuted . . . . .	448
Wood's halfpence . . . . .	451
Swift's Irish career . . . . .	456
Minor Acts of the Irish Parliament . . . . .	458
The surplus in 1731 . . . . .	459
The Viceroy . . . . .	460
Lucas . . . . .	461
Stone . . . . .	461
Boyle . . . . .	463
Conflict with the Government, 1751-1753 . . . . .	464
Formation of a parliamentary Opposition . . . . .	465
Events from 1753 to 1759 . . . . .	466
Improvement of the position of the Catholics . . . . .	470
The expedition of Thurot . . . . .	470