

**ENGLISH  
INTERFERENCE WITH  
IRISH INDUSTRIES**

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English Interference with Irish Industries by J. G. Swift MacNeill

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# ENGLISH INTERFERENCE

WITH

## IRISH INDUSTRIES.

*John Gordon*

BY

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## P R E F A C E .

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*P-4 42, C.C.A.*  
AGRICULTURE is at the present time almost the only industry in Ireland. This fact has frequently been noticed and deplored. Public men of widely different views on other matters agree in their estimate of Ireland's economic condition, of which they give but one explanation. Thus Mr. Gladstone, on the introduction of the Irish Land Bill in April, 1881, spoke of "that old and standing evil of Ireland, that land-hunger, which must not be described as if it were merely an infirmity of the people for it, and really means land scarcity."\* "In Ireland," says Mr. Bright, "land, from certain causes that are not difficult to discover, is the only thing for the employment of the people, with the exception of some portion of the country in the North; the income for the maintenance of their homes, and whatever comfort they have, or prospect of saving money for themselves or their families, comes from the cultivation of the soil, and scarcely at all from those various resources to which the people of England have recourse in the course of their industrial lives."†

\* Hansard, 260, Third Series, p. 893.

† Hansard, 261, Third Series, p. 96.

"It is generally admitted, I think, on both sides of the House," Mr. Bright observes in another debate, "that in discussing the Irish question one fact must always be kept in mind—that is, that apart from the land of Ireland there are few, if any, means of subsistence for the population, and, consequently, there has always been for its possession an exceptional and unnatural demand. This, again, has led to most serious abuses, including nearly all those constant causes of trouble and complaint we are for ever hearing of in Ireland."\*

"The truth is," says Mr. Chaplin, from his place in the House of Commons, "that the English Parliament and the English people are mainly responsible for those conditions of the country which have driven the people to the land, and the land alone, for their support. It was not always so; there were other industries in Ireland in former days, which flourished, and flourished to a considerable extent, until they first aroused, and were afterwards suppressed by, the selfish fears and commercial jealousy of England—England, who was alarmed at a rivalry and competition that she dreaded at the hands and from the resources and energy of the Irish people." † "I am convinced that it is in the history of these cruel laws that lies the secret of that fatal competition for the land, in which—and it may well be a just retribution upon us—the source of all the troubles

Hansard, 261, Third Series, pp. 831, 832.

† Hansard, 261, Third Series, p. 851.



and all the difficulties that you have to deal with will be found.\*

"To understand the Irish land question of to-day," writes Sir C. Russell, the present Attorney-General for England, "it is necessary to look back. I have no desire needlessly to rake up bygone wrongs. I wish to Heaven the Irish people could forget the past. For them it is in the main a melancholy retrospect. But England ought not to forget the past—until, at least, a great act of reparation has been done. Even among men of some education in England, remarkable ignorance of the evil wrought in past times by England towards Ireland prevails. There is, indeed, a vague general impression that in very remote times England, when engaged in the endeavour to conquer Ireland, was guilty of cruelties, as most conquering nations are, but that those things have done very little harm; that their effects have ceased to tell, and that the only purpose served by keeping alive their memory is to irritate the temper of the Irish people and prompt them to look back rather than look forward. Emphatically I say this is not so. The effects have not ceased. It is not too much to say that Ireland and Irishmen of to-day are such as English government has made them." Sir Charles Russell then proceeds to place foremost among "the agencies employed by England which have left enduring evil marks upon

\* Hansard, 261, Third Series, p. 853.

Ireland," "the direct legislation avowedly contrived to hinder the development of Irish commerce and manufactures."\*

"If people felt impatient with the Irish," said Mr. Fawcett, addressing a political meeting at Shoreditch on November 2nd, 1881, "they should remember that the Irish were, to a great extent, what England had made them. If there were some Irishmen now displaying bitter hostility to England, it should be remembered that for a long time Ireland had been treated as if she had been a hostile or a foreign country. A mass of vexatious restrictions were imposed on her industry, and it was thought that if any branch of Irish trade interfered with English profits, that branch of Irish trade was immediately to be discouraged. For a long time, for instance, to please the agricultural interests of this country, the importation of live cattle from Ireland was absolutely prohibited."

These statements of leading public men are strong evidence of the far-reaching effects upon Ireland of a system which Mr. John Morley, writing on a literary topic, has not hesitated to designate as "the atrocious fiscal policy of Great Britain,"† and for which Earl Cowper, speaking at Belfast as Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, could find no gentler adjectives than "unjust and iniquitous."‡

\* "New Views on Ireland," by C. Russell, Q.C., M.P., pp. 83, 84.

† "English Men of Letters"—"Edmund Burke," by John Morley, p. 76.

‡ *Freeman's Journal*, Nov. 24th, 1881.

In the following pages I propose to exhibit summarily the material injuries inflicted upon Ireland by the commercial or anti-commercial arrangements of Great Britain. With this view, I will endeavour to sketch in outline the political relations of Ireland to Great Britain which rendered such arrangements possible (Chap. I.); the principal laws made by the English Parliament in restraint of Irish trade stating them in a plain and popular manner (Chap. II.); the opposition of the English Government to the efforts of the Irish Parliament to promote Irish trade (Chap. III.); the immediate effects of English legislation on Irish trade (Chap. IV.); the Irish Volunteer Movement and free trade (Chap. V.); the commercial arrangements between Great Britain and Ireland, 1782-1800 (Chap. VI.); the commercial arrangements effected between Great Britain and Ireland by the Act of Legislative Union (Chap. VII.).

In this inquiry I will, as far as possible, confine myself to an examination of the statutes, which will speak for themselves; to the journals of the Parliaments of England and Ireland; and to the statements of contemporary speakers and writers whose accuracy has not, so far as I am aware, been impeached.