

The Portrayal of the Irish in Lingard's History of England

by Anne WYATT

Lingard's *History* was inevitably steeped in controversy from the moment it appeared. In the England of 1819, the date of the appearance of the first three volumes, it was a bold and unprecedented act for a Catholic priest to attempt the rewriting of English history from the sources, with the object of clearing his Catholic fellow countrymen of what he felt to be the accumulated calumnies of almost three hundred years. The hostile spirit in which his work was received in some quarters found lively expression in, for example, the pages of the *Quarterly Review* and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*.¹

His aim was frankly apologetic. In a letter to a friend on the subject of obtaining sources he explained "In a word you see what I want – whatsoever may serve to make the catholic cause appear respectable in the eyes of a British public. I have the reputation of impartiality – therefore have it more in my power to do so."² As this quotation suggests no one knew better than Lingard, born as he was of English Catholic stock, that the only way in which he could hope to gain an audience for his work was by moderation, fairness, impartiality and meticulous scholarship. These became the hallmarks of his work. As he explained to a correspondent "I have been careful to defend the catholics, but not so as to hurt the feelings of the protestants."³ Objectivity, therefore, became the dominant note of his history. Nor was he unsuccessful in capturing thereby the respectful attention of at least some critics. One, who began a review of Lingard's *Vindication* of his fourth and fifth volumes with the observation that "A History of England by a Roman

¹ *Quarterly Review*, Vols. XXXIII (1825), XLVI (1832), LV (1836), "Dr. Lingard," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. XIX (1826).

² Quoted in Donald F. SHEA, *The English Ranke: John Lingard* (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), p. 28.

³ Quoted in SHEA, *English Ranke*, p. 28.

Catholic priest was assuredly destined to be met with coldness and suspicion” felt compelled to add in the same paragraph “We are disposed to entertain the highest respect for the industry, fidelity, and acuteness of Dr. Lingard.”⁴ Shortly after his death his work was referred to by a Protestant as a standard authority among Protestants.⁵

Acceptance, however, did not come easily. Though the *History* was generally well received by his fellow Catholics, especially those at Rome, there were those who accused him of Gallicanism⁶ while Bishop Milner condemned it roundly saying “It’s a bad book, Sir only calculated to confirm Protestants in their errors.”⁷ Criticism from outside his own communion was even more plentiful. Macaulay, for example, complained that “Dr. Lingard is undoubtedly a very able and well informed writer, but whose great fundamental rule of judging seems to be, that the popular opinion on a historical question cannot possibly be correct.”⁸

The points seized on by Lingard’s critics were extremely varied. Bishop Milner, for example, complained about his treatment of Becket⁹: John Allen, a regular contributor to the *Edinburgh Review*, attacked his account of the massacre of St. Bartholomew,¹⁰ while Carlyle indirectly challenged his account of Cromwell’s massacres in Ireland.¹¹ Other points debated were Lingard’s version of the relations between King John and the papal legate Pandulf, his account of the feudal relationship between the kings of England and the kings of Scotland, his stating that Mary Boleyn had been Henry VIII’s mistress before Anne Boleyn and so on.¹²

For our purposes what is noticeable in this barrage of criticism is that it contains almost no reference to Lingard’s treatment of Ireland, with the exception of Carlyle’s indirect criticisms of his approach to Cromwell. Ireland

⁴ “A Vindication,” *Westminster Review*, VII (1827), p. 187.

⁵ SHEA, *English Ranke*, p. 83.

⁶ SHEA, *English Ranke*, p. 74.

⁷ Quoted in SHEA, *English Ranke*, p. 76.

⁸ Quoted in SHEA, *English Ranke*, p. 64.

⁹ SHEA, *English Ranke*, p. 76.

¹⁰ SHEA, *English Ranke*, p. 68.

¹¹ Martin HAILE and Edwin BONNEY, *Life and Letters of John Lingard, 1771-1851* (London: 1911), pp. 333-334.

¹² Review of LINGARD’S *History*, *Dublin Review*, XII (1842), pp. 295-362.

is admittedly a peripheral topic in Lingard's work. He deals with Irish affairs in the traditional way, only as they impinged upon English affairs. Yet in some respects what he has to say about Ireland is revolutionary. For example, as we shall see, he offers us a new version of what happened in 1641, a crucial year for Anglo-Irish relations, yet his contemporary critics completely ignored what he had to say on this subject. More recent analysts have shown themselves equally uninterested. Neither Haile and Bonney writing in 1911, nor Donald Shea writing in 1969, refer to Lingard's treatment of Ireland even though Shea made a special study of Lingard's use of documents which would have made it appropriate to refer to his account of the events of 1641. One would have thought that the alleged massacre of 1641 was a good deal more central to English history than the massacre of St. Bartholomew¹³ but it was the latter that excited Lingard's critics. Could there be a better illustration of Burke's dictum that all the English want of Ireland is to hear of it as little as possible? Even Lingard himself seems to have taken no particular pride in this part of his achievement. In the "Preliminary Notice," dated 1849, which prefaces Volume I of his sixth edition, he surveys some of the more controversial aspects of his work but nowhere does he allude to Ireland.¹⁴

Lingard deliberately set out to write a history of England that was different from any that had gone before. He returned to the sources, to the documents. As Tierney writes in the *Memoir* that prefaces the sixth edition of the *History* "Hitherto, history had, in a great measure, been taken upon trust. Writer had followed after writer in the same track, and fiction had almost acquired the substance of reality."¹⁵ Lingard's aim was to begin as it were all over again. The results were particularly obvious in his treatment of the Catholics, but were also apparent in his handling of Irish affairs, where he made several departures from the traditional approach. This is clear if what he

¹³ As late as 1872, J. A. Froude for example demanded that the Irish should do penance for the supposed massacre. J. A. FROUDE, *The English in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (3 volumes; New York: AMS Press, 1969), reprinted from the edition of 1881, Vol. I, p. 106.

¹⁴ John LINGARD, *The History of England from the First Invasion by the Romans to the Accession of William and Mary in 1688* (6th edition 10 volumes, London: Charles Dolman, 1855), Vol. I, p. 6.

¹⁵ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. I, p. 29.

says is compared with the works of two other historians: David Hume and J. R. Green. Hume and Green are singled out here not because their handling of Irish affairs is particularly remarkable in itself, for on the contrary their views are only too representative of the general trend of English historiography in this respect, but because they both wrote works which in their day held pride of place. Hume's *History of England*, published between 1754 and 1762, was the standard English history before Lingard's appeared, while Green's *A Short History of the English People*, published in 1874, in turn partially displaced Lingard. These three therefore, Hume, Lingard and Green held successively the centre of the stage¹⁶ and helped to mould public opinion on historical issues. Lingard himself was well aware of the necessity of refuting Hume, though with characteristic caution he wanted to do so without actually appearing to do so.¹⁷ Let us see therefore what it was that Lingard wanted to refute, at least as far as Ireland was concerned.

Hume's first mention of the Irish gives some indication of his whole approach. "The Irish, from the beginning of time, had been buried in the most profound barbarism and ignorance; and as they were never conquered or even invaded by the Romans, from whom all the Western world derived its civility, they continued still in the most rude state of society, and were distinguished by those vices alone, to which human nature, not tamed by education or restrained by laws is for ever subject."¹⁸ He then goes on to fill in the picture in more detail, explaining that "the usual title of each petty sovereign was the murder of his predecessor; courage and force, though exercised in the commission of crimes, were more honoured than any pacific virtues; and the most simple arts of life, even tillage and agriculture, were almost wholly unknown among them"¹⁹

This was Hume's description of the Irish in the reign of Henry II. Time wrought no improvement. The English, he says, misgoverned the Irish with the result that "Being treated like wild beasts, they became such; and joining the ardour of revenge to their yet untamed barbarity, they grew every day more

¹⁶ G.P. GOOCH, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* (2nd. edition; London: Longman's Green and Co., 1952), p. 266.

¹⁷ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. I, pp. 1-10.

¹⁸ David HUME, *The History of England* (8 volumes; Oxford: Talboys and Wheeler, 1826), Vol. 1, p. 378.

¹⁹ HUME, *History*, Vol. I, pp. 378-379.

intractable and more dangerous.”²⁰ James I won Hume’s praise for a determined effort to civilize the Irish by the imposition of English law and the plantation of Ulster.²¹ The introduction into Ireland of the civilized arts of manufacture and agriculture was, Hume claimed, a reasonable compensation for the seizure of Irish Land.²²

But how did the Irish respond to these benefits? With the rebellion of 1641. This for Hume was a crucial episode in Anglo-Irish relations since for him it provided incontrovertible proof of both the base nature of the Irish and the perverted character of their religion. “Without provocation, without opposition,” he begins, “the astonished English, living in profound peace and full security, were massacred by their nearest neighbours, with whom they had long upheld a continued intercourse of kindness and good offices.”²³ He goes on to describe in more detail the sufferings of the English “defenceless, and passively resigned to their inhuman foes,”²⁴ ascribing as he does so a special role to the influence of Popery. For, he says, “Amidst all these enormities the sacred name of religion resounded on every side; not to stop the hands of these murderers, but to enforce their blows and to steel their hearts against every movement of human or social sympathy.”²⁵ Again he says, the revolt revealed Popery “in its most horrible aspect.”²⁶

Moreover he evidently considers it a historian’s special duty to dwell on this episode, for he not only describes it at length and in graphic detail but states categorically that it was “an event memorable in the annals of human kind, and worthy to be held in perpetual detestation and abhorrence.”²⁷ When, therefore, he came to consider the Restoration settlement in Ireland he invoked the “heinous guilt of the Irish nation”²⁸ to excuse its injustice, and in the reign of James II he recalls the memory of “ancient massacres”²⁹ to explain the flight of many settlers from Ireland. It is therefore crucial to

²⁰ HUME, *History*, Vol. V, p. 349.

²¹ HUME, *History*, Vol. VI, pp. 50-53.

²² HUME, *History*, Vol. VI, p. 377.

²³ HUME, *History*, Vol. VI, p. 384.

²⁴ HUME, *History*, Vol. VI, p. 383.

²⁵ HUME, *History*, Vol. VI, p. 385.

²⁶ HUME, *History*, Vol. VI, p. 389.

²⁷ HUME, *History*, Vol. VI, p. 385.

²⁸ HUME, *History*, Vol. VII, p. 395.

²⁹ HUME, *History*, Vol. VIII, p. 221.

Hume's whole interpretation of Anglo-Irish relations.

Such was the overall view of the Irish set before the English public in the standard history when Lingard's work appeared. Would he continue in this tradition? Would he write of the Irish in the same opprobrious terms? It is useful to remember at this point how thoroughly English Lingard was. He was born in Winchester in 1771 of Catholic parents. His mother came from a recusant family, her own father having actually been imprisoned for his religion. From 1782 to 1793 Lingard was educated at Douay College "Catholic England beyond the seas" which existed solely for the conversion of England. Patriotism there burned high. As Lingard's biographers have written "... next after his fidelity to his Church, no sentiment burned more hotly in the breast of the pre-*emancipation* Catholic than devotion to his country."³⁰ At Douay in 1790 Lingard took the College oath which bound him "to receive Holy Orders in due time, and to return to England, in order to gain the souls of others as often and when it shall seem good to the Superior of this college so to command."³¹ Lingard, therefore, was as firmly committed to his homeland as he was to the Universal Church: he fully belonged to the party of the English who remained faithful to the old religion and who were an integral, if inconspicuous, part of the national scene. How then would he write of the Irish?

His opening references to them consist partly of his own account of early Irish history and institutions, and partly of a summary of the evidence of Gerald of Wales which, keeping close to the original, leaps from topic to topic. Lingard begins by paying tribute to the civilizing role of Christianity in Ireland, especially in the fifth and sixth centuries for "When science was almost extinguished on the continent, it still emitted a faint light from the remote shores of Erin; strangers from Britain, Gaul and Germany, resorted to the Irish schools; and Irish missionaries established monasteries and imparted instruction on the banks of the Danube, and amid the snows of the Apennines."³² However this brief tribute to Irish culture is almost lost in what follows.

Not only are we told that with the invasion of the Northmen the natives "quickly relapsed into the habits and vices of barbarism"³³ but we are also

³⁰ HAILE and BONNEY, *Life*, p. 22.

³¹ HAILE and BONNEY, *Life*, pp. 31-32.

³² LINGARD, *History*, Vol. II, p. 85.

³³ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. II, p. 86.

given a lengthy description of the national institutions of tanistry and gavelkind. These are described by Lingard in entirely negative terms. Tanistry was the custom whereby the heir to the kingship or other dignity was chosen from among the eligible males in the family. It led according to him straight to anarchy. "The elections were often attended with bloodshed: sometimes the ambition of the tanist refused to await the natural death of his superior: frequently the son of the deceased chieffan attempted to seize by violence the dignity to which he was forbidden to aspire by the custom of his country."³⁴ Gavelkind was the custom whereby lands descended to all the sons equally without primogeniture; on the death of the possessor the land was thrown into one common mass and a new division made. Lingard describes such a system as being inimical to agriculture and therefore to the progress of civilization.³⁵

The passage of time in Lingard's view brought no improvement. Even after the Danish invasions attempts to restore tranquillity or to reform what he vaguely calls "the immorality of the nation" failed owing to "the turbulence of the princes and the obstinacy of the people."³⁶

Lingard then proceeded to fill out his preliminary remarks on the Irish on the basis of the evidence of Gerald of Wales, a twelfth century ecclesiastic who made two visits to Ireland. He begins indeed by warning us against accepting everything that Gerald says for "That the credulity of the Welshman was often deceived by fables, is evident; nor is it improbable that his partiality might occasionally betray him into unfriendly and exaggerated statements."³⁷ However having uttered this caveat he proceeds to give two reasons for accepting his evidence. The second of these reasons reveals Lingard's thoroughness and familiarity with a variety of sources. He says that Gerald's evidence is supported by that of St. Malachy and may therefore be trusted, a point that he elaborates on with additional evidence in a footnote some pages on.³⁸ It is the first reason that Lingard gives that should claim our special attention since it reveals the direction of his thoughts on the Irish. He writes that "the accuracy of his narrative in the more important points is confirmed

³⁴ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. II, p. 86.

³⁵ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. II, p. 86.

³⁶ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. II, p. 87.

³⁷ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. II, p. 87.

³⁸ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. II, p. 94.

by the whole tenor of Irish and English history.”³⁹ This is certainly an arresting statement.

It is not clear what Lingard means by “the more important points.” Are these all the points that Lingard himself mentions in the subsequent summary? Or is the reader himself expected to exercise his own judgment as to what is important or not important in that summary? Or is the phrase just a rather confusing rhetorical flourish, revealing some confusion and doubt in the mind of Lingard himself? All of these are possibilities. What actually follows in Lingard is a jumble of miscellaneous information.

We are told that Ireland was divided into five kingdoms with an overking, that trade conducted by the descendants of the Danes existed in the seaports and that wine was imported from Languedoc. But the native Irish, we are told, shunned the towns and preferred pasturage to agriculture. “Restraint and labour were deemed by them the worst of evils; liberty and indolence the most desirable of blessings.”⁴⁰ Then Lingard, still following Gerald, continues to speak of their handsome appearance, their “barbarous” clothing, their contempt for the use of armour and their employment of a steel hatchet called a “sparthe” which “was frequently made the instrument of revenge.”⁴¹ Then rather inconsequentially we are told that the Irish displayed great ingenuity in building their houses of timber and wickerwork: The narrative then switches abruptly to a second summary of the national character. “In temper the natives are described as irascible and inconstant, warmly attached to their friends, faithless and vindictive towards their enemies.”⁴² Tribute is then paid to their musical talents.

The summary of Gerald’s evidence concludes with some remarks on the Irish clergy. Gerald, while praising their “devotion, continency, and personal virtues,”⁴³ complains that they neglected their pastoral duties in favour of their monastic profession. In this abrupt fashion Lingard ends his introductory remarks on the Irish scene and turns to the invasion of Henry II.

The tenor of these observations seems to be overwhelmingly negative. Lingard’s opening remarks minimize Irish cultural achievements while presenting the national institutions as a modified form of anarchy. His

³⁹ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. II, p. 87.

⁴⁰ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. II, pp. 87-88.

⁴¹ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. II, p. 88.

⁴² LINGARD, *History*, Vol. II, p. 88.

⁴³ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. II, p. 89.

subsequent summary of Gerald's evidence is ill digested. While Irish physique, manual skill and musical talent all receive some praise together with a guarded tribute to the Irish clergy, the national character is twice summarized in opprobrious terms. Even the characteristic Irish weapon, the sparthe, is stigmatized as an instrument of "revenge." Couldn't it equally well be described as an instrument of defence? And all this is allegedly confirmed by "the whole tenor of Irish and English history," a sweeping and momentarily impressive phrase of uncertain meaning.

Probably what Lingard meant by the "whole tenor of English and Irish history" was "the generally accepted version of English and Irish history as it has been passed down to us by earlier historians." To put it another way, when Lingard came down to discussing the Irish national character, which is what Gerald is mainly concerned with, Lingard is content to say in effect "On this topic I will go along with the generally accepted view." We have seen from a brief look at Hume, what the generally accepted view was. In other words it is clear from this passage that Lingard shared the general prejudice of his countrymen against the Irish. He attributes to them precisely those vices – laziness, violence and inconstancy – which were the stock in trade of the nineteenth century English historian.

It is true that Lingard says in a footnote, that refers specifically to his description of the sexual mores of the Irish, that what he says on this subject should not be construed as a reflection on a "noble and highly-gifted people"⁴⁴ since it may be assumed that they have long outgrown the primitive customs of their ancestors. However this cannot be considered to be a substantial modification of Lingard's view of the Irish as already set out, partly because it refers only to this one limited topic and partly because excerpts from his correspondence as quoted in the *Life* reveal that he continued to think of them in the traditional fashion. He describes the Irish bishops of the famine period as "rebels at heart. They constantly remind the masses that if they are miserable it is owing to the English." He apparently despised them for this attitude and for their ingratitude for relief received during the famine though, as we shall see, to blame Irish problems on English policy was in fact in accordance with his own view of Anglo-Irish relations. He also wrote in the same letter that the Irish could not live "but in a tempest,"⁴⁵ a sweeping

⁴⁴ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. II, p. 94.

⁴⁵ HAILE and BONNEY, *Life*, p. 339.

statement that accords admirably with the spirit of Hume's writing.

Lingard's acceptance of the evidence of Gerald of Wales on the grounds that it accorded in effect with what everybody else said, is all the more remarkable in that such an approach was exactly contrary to his whole aim and method. He was after all attempting to rewrite English history from the sources precisely in order to put the English Catholics in a more just and favourable light. It would have been nonsense, for example, for him to accept some incriminating evidence against the English Catholics partly on the grounds that it was the sort of thing that people always said and believed about Catholics. Yet this is precisely one line of reasoning that he follows in accepting the evidence of Gerald of Wales. One is confronted with a seemingly invincible wall of prejudice against the Irish even in an historian as essentially fairminded and scholarly as Lingard.

His opening remarks are not encouraging to one who seeks for a fair treatment of the Irish in the pages of an English historian, nor does his narrative of events offer at first sight more hope. It is true he begins by expressing some doubts as to the worthiness of the motives of Henry II⁴⁶ in undertaking the invasion of Ireland but his narrative still embodies that tone of censure that superior beings adopt towards inferiors. If the Irish were not more successful in meeting the English invasion then it was their own fault for "This was the period when the natives, had they united in the cause of their country, might, in all probability, have expelled the invaders. But they wasted their strength in domestic feuds."⁴⁷ Lingard was no doubt correct to draw attention to Irish disunion as a factor affecting the course of the Anglo-Irish conflict but it seems unreasonable to blame the Irish for not uniting in the cause of a country which did not exist. Neither England, nor Ireland, nor France, nor Germany, nor Italy was in the twelfth century a "country" or "nation" capable of united resistance. Even in the reign of Richard II, 1377-1399, it was inappropriate to write of the "dissensions and folly" of the Irish whose "arms were as often turned against their own countrymen as against their national enemies."⁴⁸ Moreover Lingard's strictures on Irish disunity read all the more strangely when set against his own account of English mediæval history which, as told by him, consisted

⁴⁶ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. II, pp. 89-90.

⁴⁷ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. II, p. 96.

⁴⁸ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. III, p. 174.

mainly of rebellion and civil war.

Though it is clear from his early treatment of the Irish that Lingard harboured a deeply ingrained prejudice against them, it is also true that for much of his narrative he is impressively balanced. For example when dealing with the reign of Edward II, 1307-1327, he writes of the English settlers in Ireland as “a multitude of petty tyrants, who knew no other law than their own interests, and united to the advantage of partial civilization the ferocity of savages,” and of the natives as “equally lawless, and equally vindictive.”⁴⁹ The narrative of events in the reign of Henry VIII is free from censure of the native Irish and the same is true of his account of the reigns of Mary⁵⁰ and Elizabeth.⁵¹

It is with the opening of the Stuart period that Lingard’s treatment of the Irish takes a really new direction. We have seen him passing from abuse to neutrality: in the latter half of his work we find him expressing sympathy and understanding. He notes that under James I, as under Elizabeth, the Irish suffered from the constant threat of religious persecution and in some instances from legal disabilities, but what he dwells on is the seizure of Irish land which, beginning under Elizabeth, was ruthlessly extended under James. He writes that “New inquiries into defective titles were instituted, and by the most iniquitous proceedings it was made out that almost every foot of land possessed by the natives belonged to the Crown ... many were stripped of every acre which they had inherited from their fathers.”⁵² Most important of all Lingard saw in the injustice of these measures the source of future Irish troubles. The whole paragraph with which he concludes his section on James I is of great interest since his assessment of the Irish situation differs radically from Hume’s, and to some extent from Green’s:

Such was the state of Ireland at the death of the king. Civil injury had been added to religious oppression. The natives, whom the new system had despoiled of their property, or driven from the place of their birth, retained a deep sense of the wrong which they suffered; and those who had hitherto eluded the grasp of the servitors and undertakers pitied the fate of their countrymen, and execrated a government from which they

⁴⁹ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. III, p. 13.

⁵⁰ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. V, p. 263.

⁵¹ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. VI, pp. 155-159, pp. 289-292, pp. 307-309

⁵² LINGARD, *History*, Vol. VII, p. 94.

expected in a few years a similar treatment. There, was indeed a false and treacherous appearance of tranquillity; and James flattered his vanity with the persuasion that he had established a new order of things, the necessary prelude to improvement and civilization. In a short time his error became manifest. He had sown the seeds of antipathy and distrust, of irritation and revenge; his successor reaped the harvest, in the feuds, rebellions, and massacres which for years convulsed and depopulated Ireland.⁵³

Ireland in Lingard's estimation fared no better in the reign of Charles I, especially under the deputyship of Strafford who continued the policy of religious persecution and sought further to deprive the Irish of their land. This policy served "to awaken a general feeling of discontent, and to alienate the affections of the natives from a government which treated them with so much deceit and oppression."⁵⁴

These observations of Lingard prepare us for a very different interpretation of the events of 1641 from that of Hume. We have seen that the latter attributed the outbreak of the rebellion to the singular ingratitude and depravity of the Irish, and that he dwelt at length on the alleged atrocities committed. Lingard, on the other hand, deals with the same events almost en passant. His account of what happened is so different that the reader may be momentarily unsure as to whether the same year and the same events are being dealt with. Lingard mentions the origins of the rising as being due to an alliance between the natives and the royalist party and proceeds to say that "the open country was abandoned to the mercy of the insurgents, who, mindful of their own wrongs and those of their fathers, burst into the English plantations, seized the arms and property of the inhabitants, and restored the lands to the former proprietors or to their descendants. The fugitives with their families sought in crowds an asylum in the nearest garrisons, where they languished under that accumulation of miseries which such a state of sudden destitution must invariably produce."⁵⁵ That is all that Lingard has to say in the main body of his text about the "massacre" of 1641. True to his promise of refuting Hume without seeming to do so, he relegated all detailed

⁵³ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. VII, p. 95.

⁵⁴ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. VII, p. 203.

⁵⁵ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. VII, pp. 253-254.

discussion of this crucial issue to an appendix.

There, where it was likely to be missed by large numbers of the British public to whom the work was addressed, Lingard discusses in detail the whole question of the supposed massacre. He begins with the devastating understatement that “The reader will perhaps be surprised that I have not alluded to the immense multitude of English Protestants said to have been massacred at the breaking out of the rebellion.”⁵⁶ He continues that he is aware that Clarendon, Nalson, May and other “writers without number” had repeated the story of the massacre but he says “such assertions appear to me rhetorical flourishes, rather than historical statements. They are not founded on authentic documents. They lead the reader to suppose that the rebels had formed a plan to surprise and murder all the Protestant inhabitants; whereas the fact was, that they sought to recover the lands which, in the last and in the present reign, had been taken from them and given to the English planters.” He admits that in this process lives were lost but “that no premeditated design of a general massacre existed, and that no such massacre was made, is evident from the official despatches of the lords justices during the months of October, November, and December.” He then goes on to discuss the evidence in detail and reiterates the point made earlier in the body of his text that the blame for the limited violence that did take place should be shouldered not only by its direct perpetrators but also by those “who originally sowed the seeds of these calamities by civil oppression and religious persecution.”⁵⁷

Lingard appears to be the first English historian to critically examine the evidence for the alleged massacre of 1641, but the conclusions that he reached were inserted into his work in such a way that they received very little attention. Neither his reviewers nor his biographers saw fit to comment on the clearing of the good name of a whole people, though we have seen that they readily lighted on a multitude of other points. It remained for W. E. H. Lecky, the chief nineteenth century historian of the Irish, some fifty years later, to bring the whole issue before a wider audience, when in the opening chapter of the first volume of his *History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* he brought forward a mass of evidence to show that there was no massacre. He was seemingly quite unaware of Lingard’s efforts in the same direction. In a letter written in 1878 he mentions that Clarendon, Hume, Hallam, Goldwin

⁵⁶ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. VII, p. 282.

⁵⁷ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. VII, pp. 282-286, note NNN.

Smith and Green had all lent their support to the fact of the massacre and implies that he himself was making a new departure in re-examining the evidence for it.⁵⁸ Neither here, nor in the main text of his *History* nor in the footnotes to his *History* does he make any reference to the pioneer work of Lingard.

In the main body of his text Lingard dealt with the “massacre” of 1641 by almost ignoring it. However when he came to consider the course of the civil war that followed he was careful to do justice to both sides in his narrative where it could not be missed. In a lengthy and moving paragraph he relates how:

One act of violence was constantly retaliated by another

and how

It has been usual for writers to present their readers only one half of the picture, to paint the atrocities of the natives, and to conceal those of their opponents; but barbarities too revolting to stain these pages are equally recorded of both; and, if among the one there were monsters who thirsted for the blood of their victims, there were among the others those who had long been accustomed to deem the life of a mere Irishman beneath their notice. Nor is it easy for the impartial historian, in this conflict of passion and prejudice, amidst exaggerated statements, bold recriminations, and treacherous authorities, to strike the balance, and to allot to each the due share of inhumanity and bloodshed.⁵⁹

Lingard’s moderate and reasonable approach to the events of 1641 set the tone for his subsequent treatment of Ireland. While he does not dwell at length in the body of his work on the Cromwellian conquest he describes and by implication condemns the slaughter at Drogheda and Wexford.⁶⁰ He also devotes an appendix to this subject. His strongest words, however, are reserved for the settlement of Ireland under the Cromwellian regime – for the

⁵⁸ *A Memoir of the Rt. Hon. William Edward Hartpole Lecky, by his wife* (London: Longman's, Green and Co., 1909), p. 121.

⁵⁹ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. VII, p. 263.

⁶⁰ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. VIII, p. 136.

expropriation of the Irish and the persecution of their religion. These are described in detail, “Seldom” he writes, “has any nation been reduced to a state of bondage more galling and oppressive ... their feelings were outraged, and their blood was shed with impunity. They held their property, their liberty, and their lives, at the will of the petty despots around them, foreign planters, and the commanders of military posts, who were stimulated by revenge and interest to depress and exterminate the native population.”⁶¹

Nor did the Restoration bring justice for though Charles II lamented the fate of those deprived of their estates under Cromwell, and though “He sincerely deplored the miserable state of the Irish natives”⁶² the effect of the legislation passed was to confirm the existing holders of lands in their estates. He says “A measure of such sweeping and appalling oppression is perhaps without a parallel in the history of civilized nations.”⁶³

Lingard had little reason to allude to Ireland further in the remainder of his work, for he does not go beyond 1688, though he noted the pernicious effects of the ban on the export of Irish cattle to England,⁶⁴ and the failure of the attempt to reopen the land question.⁶⁵ These he relates as relatively minor grievances, but he leaves us with an overall impression of a burning sense of injustice at the treatment that Ireland had received from the reign of James I onwards.

How did Lingard arrive at this position, so different from that of Hume and most other English historians? Among all the reasons that suggest themselves the most obvious is that Lingard was a Catholic. A good part of the English detestation of the Irish was religious in character: we have seen that Hume for example described the supposed massacre of 1641 as Popery in its most horrible aspect. Clearly this was not a factor that would affect Lingard’s judgment, but he would still be open to the kind of nationalist prejudice that we find in Gerald of Wales. We have seen that he was in fact much influenced by this. We find in Lingard sympathy for the Irish and a lively sense of their grievances but this seems to have been accompanied by strong reservations about their national character. We find a similar

⁶¹ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. VIII, pp. 177-178.

⁶² LINGARD, *History*, Vol. IX, p. 27.

⁶³ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. IX, pp. 30-31.

⁶⁴ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. IX, pp. 67, 145.

⁶⁵ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. IX, pp. 145-146.

combination of sympathy and reservation in W. E. H. Lecky.⁶⁶

We have seen in Lingard's narrative a gradual unfolding of his views. He began with abuse, proceeded to neutrality and concluded with sympathy. One reason for this is external to Lingard. English policy in Ireland became steadily harsher as time went on and therefore any student of history not completely blinded by prejudice might be led to a sympathetic attitude to Ireland. But the more interesting reason relates to the mind of Lingard himself.

He begins in 1819 in the mainstream of English historiography as far as Ireland is concerned: he ends in 1830, the date of the appearance of the last volumes of his first edition, with attitudes that clearly differentiate him from his predecessors. This may be attributed to increasing self confidence stemming from the favourable reception of his first volumes. It may also be attributed to the evolution of his whole philosophy of history.

Lingard is essentially a narrative historian. As one of his reviewers wrote disparagingly "The most important Revolutions glide before us, without any anticipation of their approach, notice of their arrival, or retrospective of their effects."⁶⁷ Analysis is almost totally absent from his work. He himself despised the whole notion of the "philosophy of history" describing it as "the philosophy of romance."⁶⁸ Consequently, it is not easy to find any kind of thread or theme in his work. However in his survey of Roman Britain he did pause to observe that "History is little more than a record of the miseries inflicted on the many by the passions of a few."⁶⁹ In the original context this remark has little significance. Lingard simply uses it to explain why for seventy years after the death of Severus there was no mention of Britain in the annals of the period, but taken by itself it reveals a singular standpoint. History is not the story of the triumph of the Anglo-Saxon race, nor of the evolution of the British constitution, nor of the expansion of the Empire not of any of the other vainglorious themes beloved by nineteenth century historians. Instead it is in effect the story of persecution, the record of miseries inflicted by the powerful few on the masses.

Lingard himself would indignantly deny that he had any such theme, and

⁶⁶ See my article, "Froude, Lecky and The Humblest Irishman," *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. XIX, No. 75 (March, 1975), pp. 261-285.

⁶⁷ Quoted in SHEA, *English Ranke*, p. 58.

⁶⁸ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. 1, p. 8.

⁶⁹ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. 1, p. 34.

would resist the attempt to seize on a casual observation and erect it into a “philosophy of history.” Nevertheless there are some grounds for doing so. First of all it is obvious that such a view reflected his own experience of life. He was one of the persecuted. Unlike his grandfather he had never been imprisoned for his religion, but he had spent his boyhood and youth in exile on account of it. He must have been vividly aware of the extent of the possibilities of the abuse of power. This awareness of government as an agent of oppression rather than as a beneficent agency, apparent in a casual aside in Volume I, is in fact a major theme of his work.

For example in treating of the reign of Elizabeth Lingard reveals his awareness that the enjoyment of power, influence and success by one group was likely to mean precisely the opposite for another group. He says

The historians who celebrate the golden days of Elizabeth, have described with a glowing pencil the happiness of the people under her sway. To them might be opposed the dismal picture of national misery drawn by the Catholic writers of the same period. But both have taken too contracted a view of the subject. Religious dissension had divided the nation into opposite parties, of almost equal numbers, the oppressors and the oppressed. Under the operation of the penal statutes, many ancient and opulent families had been ground to the dust; new families had sprung up in their place; and these, as they shared the plunder, naturally eulogised the system to which they owed their wealth and ascendancy.

He then concludes,

But their prosperity was not the prosperity of the nation; it was that of one half obtained at the expense of the other.⁷⁰

Lingard for obvious reasons identified with the oppressed in England. It was not unnatural, therefore, for him to identify with the oppressed in Ireland. A awareness of how the English Catholics had been persecuted from a mixture of motives, religious, political and economic, naturally fostered in him an awareness of how the Irish had suffered in the same way. Consciousness of

⁷⁰ LINGARD, *History*, Vol. VI, p. 324.

“two nations” within England produced in him a consciousness of “two nations” within the British Isles. It is noteworthy that Lingard’s sympathy for the Irish only emerges in the Stuart period, after he had recounted the sufferings of the English Catholics in the Tudor period.

His view of history was born from his own experience of life. He was able to present a unique and highly individual view of English and therefore of Irish history. In spite of the fact that he confined himself to a strictly political narrative, almost devoid of flourishes and rhetoric, his personality was impressed upon his pages quite as firmly as that of any more colourful historian. Perhaps it is even more apparent in his history than in the case of other historians, for while the famous Whigs, Macaulay, Froude and Green, for example, wrote to some extent from a common viewpoint, Lingard expressed no views but his own. He appears to have had no masters and no followers.

The special contribution that Lingard made to the study of Irish history may emerge more clearly if his account is compared with that of Green for the period that they both cover,⁷¹ bearing in mind that Green’s account to a great extent superceded Lingard’s, just as Lingard’s had superceded Hume’s. Essentially what Green gives us is a modified version of Hume. We have the same account of Irish anarchy and confusion yielding before the civilizing mission of the English⁷² with the same special emphasis on the economic benefits of the Ulster plantation.⁷³ We have the repetition of the story of the massacre of 1641.⁷⁴ This massacre is then taken to justify the invasion of Cromwell with the slaughter at Drogheda and Wexford being ambiguously described as “awful” and “terrible.”⁷⁵ Are these adjectives meant to evince horror at Cromwell’s actions? Or are they meant to glorify him as the agent of the Lord?

However there are differences from Hume. Green does show an awareness that the eviction of the Irish from their land was the underlying cause of subsequent Irish disturbances⁷⁶ and he makes the point that ultimately the

⁷¹ That is down to 1688.

⁷² J.R. GREEN, *A Short History of the English People* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1878), pp. 438-453, pp. 509-510.

⁷³ GREEN, *History*, p. 452.

⁷⁴ GREEN, *History*, p. 527.

⁷⁵ GREEN, *History*, pp. 558-559.

⁷⁶ GREEN, *History*, pp. 452-453.

process culminated in making the Catholic Irishman a stranger, a foreigner, a hewer of wood and drawer of water in his own country.⁷⁷

However the eclipse of Lingard's history by Green's was nevertheless a loss, from the point of view of Irish history, for two reasons. Firstly Lingard makes the point about the injustice of the confiscation of Irish land more emphatically and at greater length than does Green and secondly he makes a clear connection between this confiscation and the outbreak of the rebellion of 1641, stressing that one of the main aims of the rebels was to regain their lost land. Green, on the other hand, emphasizes not this aspect but the bloodiness of the episode, repeating in fact the story of the massacre that Lingard had disproved.

How important was this? Did it really matter what version of English and Irish history was presented to the public for whom Lingard and Green wrote? Was the massacre of 1641 and the whole question of Irish grievances of just academic interest? It was obviously much more than that. The Irish question in one form or another was never totally absent from the nineteenth century political scene. It mattered greatly what the public in general and members of parliament in particular understood of Irish history. A close acquaintance with what Lingard had written on the subject would certainly produce a better understanding of the nineteenth century Irish situation than a reading of Green.

Lingard stood apart from the mainstream of English historiography. But there is one historian to whom he may be compared, W. E. H. Lecky. Writing in the second half of the nineteenth century, at a period when the Irish issue divided the English political scene, Lecky produced a work which aimed at doing justice to Ireland, just as Lingard's work aimed at doing justice to the Catholics. Both went back to the sources and produced works of meticulous scholarship. Both prided themselves on their impartiality and hoped to open the eyes of their readers to new dimensions of their subject matter.

To couple Lingard's name with Lecky's is to put him in the first rank of English historians. Unlike Hume or Green or many others he may be read primarily for his solid achievement as a historian: his treatment of Irish affairs, especially of the events of 1641, is an important and neglected aspect of that achievement.

⁷⁷ GREEN, *History*, pp. 772-773.