

ENGLAND UNDER

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GLADSTONE

1880-1884

BY

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TO
SIR JOHN POPE HENNESSY, K.C.M.G
GOVERNOR OF MAURITIUS

I Dedicate

THIS RECORD OF EVENTS
OVER WHICH WE HAVE OFTEN TALKED
AS A TOKEN OF FRIENDSHIP AND REGARD

ENGLAND
UNDER GLADSTONE

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ENGLAND UNDER GLADSTONE.

CHAPTER I.

THE FALL OF LORD BEACONSFIELD.

ON March 8, 1880, Lord Beaconsfield addressed a letter to the Duke of Marlborough, in which he announced his intention to dissolve Parliament and 'afford an opportunity to the nation to decide upon a course which will materially influence its future fortunes and shape its destiny.' Rarely in the century, the letter went on to say, had there been an occasion more critical. The peace of Europe and the ascendancy of England in the European councils depended upon the verdict she would now be called upon to give. But it was not upon any question of foreign policy that Lord Beaconsfield avowedly appealed to the country. It was the condition of Ireland which prompted him : the condition of Ireland was the first topic touched upon in the last letter of political importance he was ever destined to write. The Home Rule movement represented to Lord Beaconsfield a danger 'scarcely less disastrous than pestilence and famine.' It had been insidiously supported by the Liberal party, who tried to destroy the 'imperial character' of England by a 'policy of decomposition' which Lord Beaconsfield called upon all 'men of light and leading' to struggle against. The letter professed to attack the opponents of the Government for their desire to disintegrate the empire : it really called upon the English people to set the seal of their approval on the whole course of that policy which Lord Beaconsfield and Lord Salisbury delighted to style 'imperial.'