

THE DEPOPULATION OF IRELAND.

THE Census Returns, when published, will enable us to ascertain, in some degree, the extent of the combined ravages of famine and pestilence, in the first place, and of despair and emigration, in the second, in the depopulation of Ireland. But even these returns, authentic as they will be, cannot be complete; or the emigration that has gone on since the census was taken, and which still continues, will compel the statist to make large deductions from the amount which the census will yield, if he wish to ascertain the real number of the Irish people. The annals of the modern world offer no such record as that presented in the history of Ireland, since the memorable and deplorable years of the potato famine, and of the pestilence that followed in its track. The splendid emigrant ships that ply between Liverpool and New York, and which have sufficed in previous years to carry to the shores of America an Irish emigration, amounting on the average to 250,000 souls per annum, have, during the present spring, been found insufficient to transport to the States the increasing swarms of Irish who have resolved to try in the New World to gain the independence which has been denied them in the old.

"Emigration," says a letter dated a few days back, "is proceeding to an extent altogether unprecedented; but much less, in proportion, from Ulster than the other provinces. From most of the southern counties, the small farmers are hastening in vast numbers; and even in Leinster the mania for emigration prevails far and wide. The remittances from America are far greater in amount than in any previous year, and considerable sums are paid by the banks and by private commercial establishments, from day to day, on orders from the United States. From some districts in Ulster, numbers of the smaller tenantry are taking their departure. From one of the principal estates in Monaghan nearly one thousand persons of the cottier class are about to be sent to Canada at the expense of the landlord, who, it is stated, has made arrangements for providing them with a comfortable passage, and some small allowance of money to each family after reaching the port of their destination."

The number of emigrant vessels proceeding to America direct from Irish ports is quite unprecedented, and is one of the most extraordinary circumstances of the time.

Within eight days, the following eleven vessels, carrying 1568 passengers, sailed from the single port of Cork:—The *Dominique*, for Quebec, 150 passengers; the *Don*, for New York, 160; the *Lockwoods*, for New York, 280; the *Marchioness of Bute*, for Quebec, 120; the *Sara*, for Boston, 104; the *Solway*, for New York, 196; the *Try Again*, for Quebec, 130; the *Favourite*, for Boston, 120; the *Clarinda*, for New York, 100; the *Swift*, for Boston, 120; the *Field Marshal Radetzky*, for New York, 88 passengers. In addition to those vessels, the *Hotspur* went down the Cork river, on Tuesday, with 100 paupers on board, from the Kenmare Union house.

But what is most remarkable is, that, while this enormous emigration is going on, leading to a fear in some parts of the country that sufficient people will not be left to cultivate the land, the owners or mortgages of Irish estates continue to evict their tenantry with as much virulence as ever. The *Galway Vindicator* states:—"There were 195 ejectments entered—13 at the suit of the trustees of A. H. Lynch, one of Mathew S. Coneys, and 181 were brought by the Law Life Insurance Company; and of 183 entries of civil bills, 87 were at the suit of the insurance company. With the exception of three or four, the ejectments were all undefended. They were disposed of at the rate of one each minute; so that; taking an average of five souls to each family ejected, we will have 300 per hour, and in the entire 905 human beings cast upon poor-house relief."

The same journal estimates the total evictions in Connemara during the present season at upwards of 4000. In Limerick and Kerry the same system is carried on; the evicted remaining in the union workhouse until remittances arrive from their friends in America, when they shake from their feet the dust of their native land, and rejoin their friends and relations across the Atlantic.

The following letter from our Correspondent in Cork—accompanying a series of Sketches, which we have engraved for our present Number—gives the latest information upon this interesting subject:

(From our Correspondent at Cork.)

"The constant appearance of the heading 'Emigration from Ireland,' and the no less constant stream of well-clad, healthy, and comfortable-looking peasantry in our streets, induces me to send you the accompanying sketches and communications on that subject.

"Upon reference to notes and papers of my own, and to information afforded me by the emigration agents here, I am disposed to think that about the middle of May the great emigrational torrent ceases to flow from these shores. Looking backward for the last month, I find that, during the week ending April 11 the greatest rush for the season took place. The numbers who left Cork that week would not have fallen far short of 1500 souls, and this with the emigration of the other ports of Limerick, Waterford, Dublin, and even of Belfast, will give us an approach to 5000 weekly leaving the country. Large as this number may appear, it is well known that it is considerably below the mark when the departures for Liverpool are included. One agent informed me that he himself had booked 600 emigrants in four days, and yet he is but one of the many agents who are to be met with not alone in the large towns and seaports, but even thickly scattered through each petty town and village throughout the country. In England you can have but little conception of the sufferings of the poor Irish emigrant from the time he first announces his intention of leaving home to his final departure; nor, indeed, can it be understood even in this country, except by those who make it their business to investigate the subject. Impressed with this belief, and being desirous of witnessing some of the partings of the emigrants from amidst the scenes of their youth, I took, a few days since, a run into the south-west of the county, from whence the great stream pours into the city of Cork. In my ramble I fell in with a clergyman, who was there on his way to take leave of a large number of his parishioners, who were then packing up.

"None perhaps feel more severely the departure of the peasantry than the Roman Catholic clergy; as from them, and them alone, it may be said, comes the sole means of support which they receive. Yet none take a more active part in seeing them safely out of the country, or have looked more closely to the interest of those they leave behind, than those clergymen, even though their revenues are reduced, in most cases, to one-half, and in some to one-third. In company with one of these humble but exemplary men, I came to a sharp turn in the road, in view of that (or which we sought, and of which I send you a sketch, namely, the packing and making ready of, I may say, an entire village—for there were not more than half-a-dozen houses on the spot, and all their former inmates were preparing to leave. Immediately that my rev. friend

was recognised, the people gathered about him in the most affectionate manner. He had a word of advice to Pat, a caution to Nelly, a suggestion to Mick; and he made a promise to Dan to take care of the "old woman," until the five pounds came in the spring to his 'Reverence' to send her over to America. Then ensued a scene of tears and lamentation, such as might a have softened a much harder heart than mine or that of the priest. He stood for awhile surrounded by the old and the young, the strong and infirm, on bended knees, and he turned his moistened eyes towards heaven, and asked the blessing of the Almighty upon the wanderers during their long and weary journey. Many were the tears brushed quietly away from the sunburnt cheeks of those who there knelt, and had implicit faith that the benediction so fervently and piously asked, would be vouchsafed to them.

"It was not pleasant to linger amid a scene like this; so to dispel our sadness, we took a last farewell of the group, and ere long found ourselves upon the road to Kenmare, and in the midst of a train of from 200 to 300 men and women, boys and girls, varying in age from ten to thirty years. They looked most picturesque in their gay plaid shawls and straw bonnets, and were all on their way to Cork, to go on board the emigrant ship.

"Upon inquiry I was given to understand that this was but one of the many groups sent from the union houses throughout the country, and at the expense of the ratepayers. This, though an expensive process, is better than to leave them to pine and perish with want, as in the too wretched union of Kilrush; yet it is sad to see so much young blood sent from amongst us, and that too, as a gentleman, an extensive farmer in the county of Kerry, told me, at a period when it is found difficult to obtain hands to do the necessary farm-work. To so great an extent has this extraordinary emigration mania been carried in the county of Kerry, that this gentleman told me that he had been obliged even thus early to engage farm labourers at Millstreet, in the county of Cork, to take in his harvest in the county of Kerry during the coming season. Moreover, he stated that he was not the only one in the county who would be obliged to have recourse to the same means of procuring labourers. It would be strange indeed, that Ireland, who, at one time was able to supply with her superabundant labour the farmers of England and Wales, should be obliged to seek in the English and Welsh fields for hands to do her work. Yet it is quite possible that such a thing may happen.

"Having seen sufficient of the country, I turned my steps towards the city, and upon my arrival there, first sought out the houses of the strangers who frequently are obliged to remain in lodging-houses from one to the or six days, according to circumstances. I can assure you that it is not exaggerating the abject misery of these miscalled 'lodging-houses for emigrants.' It is no unusual thing to thrust from twenty to forty persons, of all ages and both sexes, into rooms not more than four yards by five or six yards square, with no other accommodation than a mass of filthy straw, placed around the room, upon which the weary traveler is expected to find repose. In the event of his being provided by the proprietor with some sort of covering, he is charged threepence a night; should they bring their own bed-clothes, they pay twopence; and those who are content to sleep on the straw, without divesting themselves of their rags, pay one penny

"For standing room where they may breakfast or dine—for it cannot be called accommodation—the charges are pretty much on the same scale. On the whole, it is fortunate that the great business of emigration is generally over before the setting-in of the warm weather, otherwise these lodging-houses, from their overcrowded state, as well as from the accumulated amount of filth in them, would become perfect nuisances, and dangerous to the health of the community. Several years since, when landing for the first time on the French shore, I felt much harrassed by the untiring persecution of the hotel touters; but little did I dream of ever seeing the touting system carried to such a fearful extent as it now is in Ireland; for no sooner is the red plaid of an Irish emigrant girl, or, the unbuttoned shirt-collar of a Kerryman recognised, than she or he is instantly beset by those harpies, or mancachers. It is sometimes impossible to escape, except by main force, and by the aid of the police. The latter are daily thanked by the bench of magistrates for their exertions in this respect.

"The accompanying is a sketch of a party of emigrants who have arrived on the quay after a long journey, in some cases close upon one hundred miles:— They are stretched and tumbled about upon boxes and straw to seek some few moments repose. This and the companion sketch of the row at the office-door, where some of the emigrants are seen paying their passage money, will show the extent to which the ruffianly touters and mancachers carry their interference, and from which they are only obliged to desist

upon the application of superior force.

"Having thus shown you what was picturesque in the passage of the group of emigrants from the home of their infancy to the office of the emigration agent who provides them with a ship direct from the port, it may not now be out of place for me to send you a sketch of the interior of one of those vessels, which I accordingly do, and which I trust will readily explain the mode in which those vessels are fitted up, and where each party gets so many square inches to her or his share of ship, as the case may be, and where if I am given rightly to understand, man, woman, and child are obliged to huddle together like pigs at a fair. But then the ship is partitioned, divided, and formed exactly according to the strict letter of the law, and none can grumble, yet few can go on board one of them without being instantly struck with the chances that appear of the complete demoralization of the whole group; and what it must be when the sea rolls heavily, when the hatches are all closed, and the ship heaves and labours in the storm, can be much better imagined by others than described by me. The answer given to a party who, upon seeing the way in which these unfortunate beings were left to toss and tumble about, asked if even a plank in the shape of a table was not to be provided for them, was, 'Cock them up with it, indeed! How badly off they're for a table!' And yet this man is known to be a kind, generous-hearted man in other respects.

"Every inquiry or remonstrance is answered by the allegation, that all is according to the Act of Parliament, or 'the Act so directs it,' so that you will perceive what little chances of extra comforts the emigrant has who emigrates in the smaller vessels belonging to men, some of whom are making lordly fortunes by their new trade.

"Having now shown you so much of what appertains to those who sail from this port direct to America, nothing remains but to send you a sketch of the departure of the steamers for Liverpool, which generally, of late, have been crowded to suffocation, owing, perhaps, as much to the cheapness of the fares, caused by the steam-boat opposition for some time back, as to a previous knowledge among the emigrants that they will be better provided for in the way of a ship in Liverpool, the 'great port of embarkation,' than they are likely to be in Irish vessel.

“The withdrawal of this ruinous competition will now, no doubt, in this matter of emigration, materially serve the Cork Steam-ship Company, as doubtless large numbers of those who heretofore made for Waterford, will be now tempted to turn their thoughts towards Cork, owing to the superiority of the vessels leaving the port. From early dawn on the day of the steamer's sailing up to the hour of starting, whether it be ten in the morning or five in the evening, the curious in those matters will be sure to find the quays leading to the packet-office one continued stream of cars, carts, trucks, and porters, and all heavily laden with feather-beds, boxes, trunks, indescribable baggage and sacks of potatoes, and all tending to the one centre, namely, the deck of the *Nimrod*, and where the well disposed as also the ill-disposed are sure to congregate to witness the departure. The sketch which I send you represents one of those weekly scenes, and from which I trust your readers will have some notion of the bustle and excitement that takes place upon those occasions, and when the incidents sometimes witnessed at the parting of friends and relations are truly heart-touching.

"During the existence of the low fares, it was more than once stated that 'some of the emigrants were wretched and miserable-looking beings.' At present it is the bone and sinew of the land that appear to go out, and even those in more than comfortable circumstances are often among the number, as the immense sums of money sent into this country from relatives in America (our branch bank alone paid out., on account of remittances received during this season, the large sum of £40,000) testify."

[Taken from *Illustrated London News*, Vol. XIX 1851, p.386]