

Ireland in 1864

By D. C. Heron, Q.C.

[Read Wednesday, 18th May, 1864.]

IN January, 1862, I had the honour of reading before the Society a short paper called Historical Statistics of Ireland. In it I said, "*Ireland is decreasing in wealth and population*". The proposition was earnestly controverted by several of my friends in and out of this Society, and they proved the reverse; whilst my friend Dr. Hancock did me the honour completely to refute my assertions in a government report presented to the Lord Lieutenant.

I believe the arguments against my views were considered by a great number of persons in Ireland to be successful. No government can be expected to admit that the governed country is decreasing in wealth and population. For two hundred and fifty years Ireland has been proclaimed to be the most prosperous country in the world; and, in the words of the late Professor Pillans at the Social Science meeting in Dublin in 1861, "*Ireland presents the greatest example of progressive prosperity of any country under the sun.*"

However, at the end of nearly two years and a-half from the reading of that paper, I now again repeat, "*Ireland is decreasing in wealth and population.*" A decrease in wealth and population is a sign that something is not right, in the legal and social conditions of a country. In the words of John Stuart Mill, "*when the population of a country leave it en masse, because its government will not make it a place fit for them to live in, the government is judged and condemned.*" In the words of Goldwin Smith, "*centuries of horrors to which history affords no parallel seem to be closing in the expatriation of a people.*"

In January, 1862, when I read the paper on the Historical Statistics of Ireland, and asserted that Ireland was decreasing in wealth and population, my figures were flatly denied to be correct by the highest authorities and the ablest writers; and it was systematically urged, that in Ireland, alone of the world, it was for the good of the country that population should diminish. What has been the result since January, 1862? The population is diminishing at the rate of 100,000 per annum. The land is still going out of cultivation. The domestic animals are still diminishing. In 1859 the value of the live stock in Ireland was £35,368,259. In 1862 it was £31,204,325, the reduction in value being £4,163,934. The decrease in the cultivation of Ireland from 1861 to 1862 was 138,841 acres. From 1862 to 1863, the decrease in the number of horses was 23,715. The decrease in the number of cattle was 116,615. The decrease in the number of sheep was 152,201. The decrease in the number of pigs was 89,522. Some of the signs of the times are singular. Not only have the horses diminished in number, the breed of horses is deteriorating, and deputations of country gentlemen helplessly petition the Lord Lieutenant to improve the breed of horses.

The net decrease in the land under green crops, in 1863 was 19,358 acres; the total decrease in cereal crops was 144,719 acres. Against this there was an increase in meadow, clover, and flax, to the extent of 71,846 acres. Thus the total decrease in the extent of land under cultivation, from 1862 to 1863, was 92,431 acres.

The emigration is rapidly increasing. At every railway station in Ireland, every day, the wail of the emigrants is heard. The present emigration from Queenstown alone per week is 1645.

Some things must be repeated as to the causes of this decline in wealth and population, now constant for nine years since 1855. By every statistical test known—population, emigration, poverty, production, cattle, pigs, poultry—for the present Ireland is beaten in the struggle for existence. Catholic Emancipation has been of no use to the Irish peasantry. The legal conditions under which they live extract almost the whole produce of the land from them, leaving only turf and potatoes to the cultivator.

Ireland partly subsists on the charity of foreign nations. About a million and a quarter of money, a sum equal to one fourteenth of the rental of Ireland, is now annually received by Ireland from foreign charitable persons. The soldiers of both armies on the Potomac subscribe for the starving Irish. The cathedrals on the Seine, the Rhone, and the Rhine appeal to the charity of the prosperous branches of the Celtic race. Whilst probably one third of the money subscribed by foreign nations, including America, for Ireland, goes to pay rent to the absentees who own the land of Ireland. In the struggle for existence, the Irish peasantry are hopelessly beaten as long as they remain in Ireland. In Ireland they never can rise beyond the position of tenants at will—the whole produce of the land taken from them except potatoes and turf—their very existence depending upon the caprice of absentees.

In seventeen years, from 1847 to 1863, 426,421 have died in the workhouses in Ireland, the workhouse test of destitution being remorselessly applied. As regards the sanitary condition of the people, the number of the afflicted classes has positively increased, notwithstanding the decline of the population from 6,532,385 in 1851, to 5,798,967 in 1861. During the ten years from 1851 to 1861, the number of the deaf and dumb increased from 5,180 to 5,653 the number of the blind from 5,787 to 6,879 ; the number of lunatics and idiots from 9,980 to 14,098.

The law of landlord and tenant in Ireland is only a complicated machine to collect rent. Whatever changes have been recently made have been most hostile to the occupier of the land. In the ruin represented by starvation, emigration, destruction of families, judicial sales, and agrarian murders, the amount of human misery represented by the statistics of Ireland for the last fifteen years, will ever retain a melancholy pre-eminence in European history. In 1849, two millions of persons received out-door relief. During the last fifteen years upwards of two millions of persons have emigrated from Ireland. The emigration has been viewed with exultation by the governing classes in Ireland. But they also are learning the lesson, that in men is the wealth of a state. Peers and gentry, representing one thirteenth of the rental of Ireland, have been sold out by the Encumbered Estates' Court, and their property has produced upwards of twenty millions of money.

The circulation of the bank in Ireland diminished from £6,917,269 in 1860, to £5,638,393 in 1862. The best of the peasantry are going as fast as they can. And, as they go the land which they cultivate becomes waste The estimated value of the

crops in Ireland in 1841 was fifty millions, in 1851, forty-three millions ; in 1861, thirty-five millions.

The value of the real and personal property on which probate and succession duties were received in Ireland declined from £11,016,833 in 1859, to £10,151,461 in 1861. From 1858 to 1863, the amount of funded property held in Ireland has every year been diminishing, and it is now nearly four millions less than in 1858.

Let us turn to the railways. What never before occurred in the history of railway enterprise in any country, has occurred in Ireland. For two years the receipts on the main trunk lines through the country are rapidly diminishing.

The number of the professional and educated classes in Ireland is rapidly diminishing. The number of practising barristers paying their subscription to the law library of the Four Courts, has been reduced by poverty from 690 in 1850, to 423 in 1863. As property has vanished ; those who lived by the litigation concerning that property have also disappeared.

The number of barristers, special pleaders, and conveyancers in England increased from 3,200 in 1850 to 4,630 in 1861.

But the decline of the country is not viewed with unmixed regret. The greatest statesmen and the ablest political economists have announced that millions of Irish must yet abandon Ireland, in the progress, and civilisation, and prosperity of Europe the Irish peasantry this moment have no share. Thus, beaten like a beaten army in the field, when there is no longer use in wasting life upon a hopeless struggle, they are retreating from the country where there is no field of industry for them. They have acted manfully in the crisis. They are leaving Ireland. Agrarian crime has diminished, because they are giving up the struggle for the land. They are leaving the country because the laws under which they live prevent them from cultivating the land. As a citizen of the world, I rejoice that so many millions of Irishmen have emigrated from misery at home to prosperity abroad. As an Irishman, I lament that the laws under which we live do not permit them to remain at home.

Under the present laws no Irish peasant able to read and write ought to remain in Ireland. If Ireland were an independent country, in the present state of things there would be a bloody successful insurrection in every county, and the peasantry would ultimately obtain the property in the land, as they have obtained it in Switzerland and in France. But if another Vico were to prophesy on the future of Ireland, he would say :—No insurrection in Ireland will occur until, in the progress of the destruction of the rights of the peasantry, the tenant right of Ulster shall cease to be recognized. The tenant-right of Ulster is worth £24,000,000 of money; it rests on force, not law ; it is in gradual process of destruction. If some philosopher like Vico, gifted with political insight into the future of nations, were to prophesy as to Ireland, he would say, in all probability, the last Irish insurrections will be made by the peasantry of Down and Armagh, upon their tenant-right being finally taken away from them.

The Irish peasantry remain the worst clothed, the worst lodged, the worst fed in Europe. The peasantry are flying as fast as they can—the horses and cattle are

diminishing at the rate of more than 100,000 per annum—the land is going out of cultivation at the rate of 100,000 acres per annum. All this systematically occurs under the most powerful and the most free government in the world, and within twelve hours of England—the greatest market for agricultural produce which the world has ever seen. The institutions of the country are perfect. No person can even suggest an improvement in the government, or the administration of justice. We have the best scientific aids to agriculture, and commerce is free.

" This best located, best economized,
Best flora'd, fauna'd, and geologized,
Best high-wayed, bye-wayed, (were they but restored)
Drained, green-cropped, guanoed, fallowed, in a word,
This best (consistent with the maximum
Of produce, and consumption's minimum)
Depopulated state in Christendom ;
—Poor native land' poor withered breast of earth,
That once exuberant nourished love and mirth.';

What ought to be done to stop these evils? As regards the land, my views are well known; and I again print the draft of the bill, which, in my humble judgement, ought to be passed.

WHEREAS it is expedient to amend the laws relating to the land in Ireland: Be it enacted by the Queen's most excellent Majesty', by and with the advice and authority of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and Commons in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same.

- I. The tenant of land in Ireland, his executors, administrators, and assigns, shall be entitled to the property in permanent improvements effected by the tenant upon the land.
- II. Such property shall be designated the Tenant-right.
- III. The value of the tenant-right may be the subject of set-off in all actions of ejectment for non-payment of rent, brought by land' lord against tenant.
- IV. For the purposes of this act, the word tenant shall mean and include every occupier of land having a terminable interest for which a rent is paid.
- V. Upon the termination of any lease or letting of land in Ireland, where the tenant shall have paid all rent then due, the tenant shall have a lien upon the land for the value of the Tenant-right until the Tenant-right he paid off and discharged.

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DISCUSSION.

Dr. HANCOCK said there were several matters in Mr. Heron's paper that required notice. Mr. Heron said that in 1841 the value of the crops was £50,000,000; in 1851,

£43,000,000, and in 1861, £35,000,000. Now, in his (Dr. Hancock's) report he stated, after careful inquiry, that there were no official returns of the acreage under crop or value of crops for 1841. Mr. Heron, however, chose to quote the figures for 1841 over again, without stating any authority for them. His statement, therefore, about 1841 was mere assertion. Again the statistics of produce were taken in a totally different manner between two periods, 1851 and 1861. From 1847 to 1855 the statistics were not revised by the poor law guardians—from 1856 to 1862 they were. The figures for 1851 and 1861 were not, in fact, comparable, and Mr. Heron did not show that they were, although he was addressing a scientific society. He had not, therefore, met the difficulty. Mr. Heron, in a former paper, stated that there was a progressive decline from 1841. He now repeated that, and said there was a progressive decline for nine years from 1855. Now, he (Dr. Hancock) had published most elaborate statistics, showing that there was from 1855 to 1859 a progress, and that from 1859 to 1863 there was a retrogression. And the fact was, from 1855 to 1859 there was a remarkable increase in the prosperity of the country, and since then up to 1863—there had been three bad seasons—a retrogression. Mr. Heron, however, overlooked the increase from 1855 to 1859, and asserted the proposition, which was incorrect, that there was a progressive decline since 1855. Mr. Heron did not refer to the latest published agricultural statistics, which give the produce of the crops of 1863. He did refer to those published in August last, which were in reference to the quantity of land put under crops that time twelve months, and to the quantity of cattle in July. Every man of intelligence knew that the number of acres cropped in March, 1863, depended upon how the crops for 1862 turned out, and that the number of cattle that the poor tenants had in 1863, depended upon what was left to them out of the crops of 1862, after paying all claims. He (Dr. Hancock) had shown that 1862 was the worst year the country saw since the time of the famine, the natural result of which was, that in 1863 there was a small acreage under crops, and a small number of cattle, and other floating capital left with the farmers. This being the result, he (Dr. Hancock) predicted it as being the natural consequence of the bad year of 1862, and that it should now be brought forward as a new fact certainly astonished him. Mr. Heron did not allude to the great increase in the produce of the crops of wheat, oats, turnips, and potatoes of 1863 as compared with the average yield for the previous seven years. The increase in each was very great, and especially in potatoes. The only crop that was not so good was hay. Neither did Mr Heron allude to prices. In the end of 1863 the prices were not favourable from simply economic causes. The produce of the two previous years being bad, a great deal of foreign wheat was imported. During the first year of good crops the farmers did not get the benefit, the corn in the stores being all brought into the market. The low prices were beneficial to the poor, and to the labouring classes, and if they were not beneficial to the farmers, they got some advantage in another way—in cheap potatoes for feeding pigs. In the first quarter of 1853 we imported of Indian corn, 47,000 quarters; while in the first quarter of 1864 we only imported 3,000 quarters. He thought that Mr. Heron ought to have noticed that fact, and explained how it was consistent with 1864 being an unfavourable year. Again, the recent returns showed a great increase in the flax crops last year, an increase that amounted in money to one and a half million sterling. The Irish farmers seemed to have a more accurate knowledge of things than Mr. Heron, because they were to be found applying to the government to be taught how to cultivate flax. The difference in the value of the flax crops this year in Ulster alone would amount to more than two millions. Mr. Heron adduced as the great proof of the ruin of the country, the emigration which was going on. In 1833, Mr. Heron contended that nothing would stop emigration until the rate of wages was the same in Connemara as

in the United States, and he said that could not occur until the population diminished! These were the points that he (Dr. Hancock) wished to notice in Mr. Heron's paper. He noticed them especially, as Mr Heron alluded to him. He did not think that Mr. Heron had dealt with the difficulty and the case with the scientific accuracy that should have guided him in addressing that meeting.

PROFESSOR HOUSTON expected new features and new remedies to be brought out. In both he had been disappointed. He had written himself on the question of statistical tests, and not one of the arguments on the other side had been touched by Mr. Heron, nor had they even been mentioned. He thought that such a course was not becoming a scientific man who took in hand to discuss the question of "*Ireland in 1864.*" He (Mr. Houston) asserted that Ireland had made progress within the past 10 or 15 years, and that advantages had arisen from doing away with the small holdings. As to the decline of the learned professions in Ireland, he quite disagreed with Mr. Heron. Facts were against his statement. If the proper authorities had been looked into, it would have been found that the number of persons receiving a University education—taking the aggregate of the students at the two Irish Universities (Dublin and the Queen's)—was double what it was 15 or 20 years ago. Then, again, the paper had not spoken of either clergymen or doctors, and before the writer made out such a case as that sought to be made out by him, he must take all the learned professions into account.

Mr. MICHAEL MORRIS, Q C , did not pretend himself to understand the theory of political economy, though he flattered himself that he knew as much of the system as concurred with the ideas of an ordinarily strong head upon the state of the country. His two friends who preceded him had taken exception to the paper. He should be sorry to say he agreed to the full extent with all that was in the paper, but, at the same time, he agreed in the great result at which Mr. Heron had arrived, and which he thought would he agreed to by every one who practically knew the country. He agreed that by every test that could be applied during several years, whether they selected the year 1859, or whether they selected 1857—the country had been for several years steadily decreasing in every element of wealth from population down to pigs. That appeared not alone from eyesight and observation, which he took the liberty of saying no amount of figures would contradict, but also from even the conceded figures of the three gentlemen whose views had been laid before the Society. These figures demonstrated to every one that the country had been decreasing in every element which it was possible to conceive Had it not decreased in population to a degree that the history of the world recorded nothing like it? Had not the quantity of land under cultivation decreased? Any one who reads Thorn's Almanack for 1864 will find every figure and fact used in this discussion. The Registrar-General issued his return last year as to the crops of 1863, and they are to be found in Thorn's Almanac for 1864. But no man could print in March an account of what was to be done in April and what is being done in the present May. Having learned arithmetic, he could understand figures when plainly set forth, and it appeared from Thorn's Almanac, that the quantity of land under cereal crops in Ireland was steadily decreasing, *de anno in annum*, from 1859 down to 1863 inclusive; and then, how was it that Dr. Hancock should say, that Mr. Heron had not referred to the year 1864? How could he? The year 1864 had not come in yet for the purpose of crops. He challenged contradiction to the statement that the extent of land under crops had decreased. He challenged contradiction to the statement that the number of cattle, sheep, and pigs were decreasing *de, anno in annum*.

If the population was decreasing, if the two great manufactures of the country—if he might so call them—the crops and the live stock were decreasing, what was there increasing to show that the country was prospering? If they looked to any other test would they not find the same result, no matter whether it was in great or small matters? Mr. Heron had, for instance, referred to the practising barristers, and even in that small matter there was a decline. They found, in short, by every return which could be obtained under government influence (and all he would say of the returns was that they would not make things look worse than they really were) that the country, to use a vulgar but appropriate expression, was going to the dogs—population decreasing, crops decreasing, cattle, sheep, and pigs decreasing. What was the only manufacture they had in the south and west? Distilling. A few years ago there were eighty distilleries at work in Ireland He quoted again from Thorn—for he did not pretend to say he put forward anything that others could not find. How many distilleries were there now? Nineteen. But, full as they were of figures, he had not heard a suggestion of any remedy for the evils of the country, except what Mr. Heron suggested—to transfer the property from one class of people to another.

Neither Mr Hancock nor Mr. Houston proposed any remedy. He would suggest to them to direct their minds to something practical to benefit the country. Though this country had to pay to the imperial revenue her full share—and some learned men said more than her full share—of taxes, none of it was spent here. No manufactures were fostered in this country, as in Scotland. In that country, with scarcely more than half the population of Ireland, there were at present 100,000 persons employed in manufactures, while Ireland, with nearly double its population, had but 35,000 so employed, and 33,000 of this number were in the flax manufacture, which was confined to but three counties. It was nonsense to expect the rate of wages would rise in Ireland to that in Scotland, not one-half of whose population was rural—that was, not living in towns—while four-fifths of the population was rural, only one-fifth of the Irish population lived in towns containing 2,000 inhabitants and upwards. What was to become of the remaining four-fifths? It might be very good political economy doctrine to banish them. It would be a shorter mode to kill them. He did not think they would get reasonable persons to say that the people ought to be driven from the country. He believed himself the country was not over populated, for if we had the same corresponding population in the other three provinces of the country that we had in Ulster (where the land was by no means so good as in Leinster or Munster), we should have, instead of five and a-half millions of people, nearly eight millions. And yet Ulster was a prosperous part of the country. The political economist's propositions reminded him of the farrier's bill—" *To curing your honour's horse till it died;*" and so they would go on curing the country till it was ruined, and they had taken their own twist out of it No matter what; might be said of prosperity, he would wish to see some sign of improvement that he could understand. He did not wish to hear people stating doctrines that were revolting to one's common sense, and telling them the country was improving when everything they saw showed them the country was going to destruction. Was there any one there knew the country towns of Ireland as they had been and as they were? He did. Were they not decaying? Were not the country shopkeepers ceasing to exist as a class worth the name? Why ?

Because 'their customers, the farmers, were gone or going from the country, and those who remained had no money to spend. It was said by Dr. Hancock all this was because of the seasons. There was always some reason. He was one of those who held that the repeal of the corn laws had a great deal to do with it. A few years ago Ireland exported three and a half million quarters of Wheat How much now? In 1862 she exported one and a quarter million, while she had imported two and a quarter million

quarters of Indian Corn, for which she paid hard cash. He did not think even the most thick-headed farmer in the country would be convinced into the belief that low prices would be useful to him, because he could feed his pigs the cheaper by them.

Mr. WILSON objected to Mr. Heron's proposed bill to deal with the land question, on the ground that it was impracticable, as it would be impossible to settle differences between landlord and tenant, on the giving up of land by the latter, as to what was really a permanent improvement on the contrary. Again, if such a bill became law they would doubtless find landlords and tenants making special bargains founded upon a contract that the tenant was not to put the laws in force against the landlord.

Mr. KANDAL MCDONNELL expressed his opinion that the fallacy of Mr. Heron's plan was his application of the principle of John Stuart Mill—that when a country became until to be habitable, owing to the conduct of the government, that government when put on its trial, must be found guilty—to the case of Ireland. He denied that the principle had any application to Ireland. Decrease of population and decrease of wealth were not of themselves the test of prosperity or non-prosperity. True prosperity consisted in a certain ratio between wealth and population. "*The more the merrier*" seemed to be the motto of Mr. Heron, but the merriness really depended upon the capacity to comfortably maintain the numbers. If twenty-four persons were put down to a meal that was only equal to feeding twelve, would it be contended that the twenty-four badly fed were more prosperous than the twelve well fed? He believed the population of this day were much more comfortable than the population of ten years ago. He found that Mr. Heron used in his paper language which was scarcely in keeping with a grave and sober discussion of an important subject. Thus the misery of the poor in the workhouse was, according to Mr. Heron, beyond description, and the emigration unparalleled He deprecated the use of such language. Free trade had been injurious to the Irish farmers by bringing them into competition with the great grain producing countries of the world. The true remedy was to abandon the cultivation of corn, to adopt that of flax, and to extend their pasture system, which, in consequence of the amount of green crop cultivation which it necessarily involved, would increase rather than diminish the employment of the people. Manufactures should also be encouraged.

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