

IRISH RAILWAYS.

A LETTER

TO THE

RIGHT HON. FREDERICK SHAW, M.P.,

&c. &c.

BY

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TO THE
RIGHT HON. FREDERICK SHAW, M.P.

SIR :

In attempting to discuss the important problem of the best method of introducing a general and comprehensive system of Railways into Ireland, it may be well, in the first instance, to consider some of the errors and disadvantages of the present system in England.

I would wish, however, to state in the most distinct terms, that I do not impute any blame whatever to the individuals, professional or otherwise, by whom the Railways have been constructed or managed. The evils are inseparable from the system; and I shall endeavour to point out one or two of the most striking of them by reference to those great lines with which I am best acquainted, namely, those by which Liverpool and Manchester are connected with the metropolis.

The enormous parliamentary and law expenditure of these Companies, in obtaining their several Acts of Incorporation, and in their subsequent applications to Parliament, is a matter of public notoriety.* Comparatively little, however, is known of the exactions to which they have submitted from landed proprietors and others, in effecting their objects. The original surveys for those lines, although undertaken with the utmost zeal, and by parties of unquestionable talent and experience, were all too much hurried to meet the standing orders of Parliament, and their promoters had the mortification of knowing that vast improvements might have been effected, had they not been trammelled by the limits of Parliamentary deviation.

The consequence of all this, combined with other causes (and particularly the haste with

* These expenses have amounted in some cases to as much as £2,000 per mile, and I have it from good authority, that the average cost to Railway Companies has been £1,000 per mile, wherever an opposition has arisen, whether well-founded or factious. And this holds good for the only two Irish Railways that were opposed, *viz.* the Dublin and Drogheda and the Dublin and Kingstown. See also Second Report of the Irish Railway Commissioners.

which the works were prosecuted) has been, that the united expenditure of those three great Companies has amounted to nine millions sterling.

It is now admitted by competent persons, that if these lines were now to be made under the control and direction of a small united board of suitably qualified persons (to whom *as trustees for public accommodation* the Legislature would grant ample powers), a line could be constructed, which would afford *at least* as much accommodation to the inhabitants of the intermediate districts, for less than six millions.

Of the sums expended, in round numbers, six millions have been raised by subscription, and three millions by loan, and the present premium on the shares is at least five and a-half millions, on which, as well as on the subscribed capital, the proprietors expect dividends at the rate of five per cent. per annum; and if I take the average rate of interest on the loans to be four and a-half per cent. per annum, the annual charge will be

Subscribed capital £6,000,000	... 5 per cent.	£300,000
Premium on capital 5,500,000	... 5 per cent.	275,000
Loans	3,000,000 ... 4½ per cent.	135,000
		<hr/>
		£710,000
		<hr/>

Permit me to contrast this result with the previous assumption of an outlay of six millions, and that the state would only seek a return of three and a-half per cent. interest, and one and a-half per cent. for a sinking fund, the entire charge in the first instance would be only £300,000 per annum; and after little more than thirty years, the public would have all the advantages of the Railways for *the mere cost of working and maintenance.*

Although the charge on the outlay in the two cases is represented by £710,000 and £300,000 per annum, the cost of working and maintenance will not be affected materially; as it has been ascertained on several Railways, under extremely different circumstances, that this cost varies only between three-fifths and two-thirds of a penny, per passenger, per mile. I may therefore safely assume that the cost of transmission, both for passengers and goods, might have been reduced one-half in the first instance; besides a further extent of reduction in consequence of the increased numbers of passengers and increased quantity of goods, from the reduced charges;—it would at once have thrown open to agricultural

produce the advantages of Railway communication, from which it is now precluded by the present rates; an advantage which the Railway Commissioners have shewn to be attainable on the Irish Lines: and ultimately, instead of exacting the present high fares for travelling between London and Liverpool, the charges could have been reduced to 10s. for the poor man, and to 20s. for those who would pay for the luxury of better carriages.

With such results before us, would it not be almost criminal not to endeavour to secure to Ireland the advantages of a better system—in the poorer country too, where all our resources should be carefully economised?*

Or, considering the question on grounds of public policy, is there any *disinterested* person who has paid any attention to it—is there any

* What says Mr. Henry Booth, the enlightened and intelligent Secretary of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway?—
 “ In Ireland the position of things is different; but even there
 “ the contemplation of what is passing in England may not be
 “ without its lesson: for in all countries, and under all circum-
 “ stances, it is an object worthy of a statesman, to prevent the
 “ reckless waste of the national means, and to give a right direc-
 “ tion to the public expenditure.”—*Letter to Railway Com-
 missioners, Second Report.* (App. A. No. 9, p. 78.)

sound *statesman* who has ever given utterance to his opinion on the subject, but admits, that had the Legislature been fully aware of the startling effect of the Railway system, both for good and for evil, it would have long hesitated, at the period of the formation of those great corporations, to whom such vast powers have been entrusted, before they would have *given them possession of the great highways of the country.*

I have heard it urged, from time to time, that Ireland is not yet sufficiently advanced for Railways, and that we do not require them. On the contrary, I sincerely believe, that there is no country in which the results would be of greater importance, with a population, a large portion of whom are at the present moment on the verge of starvation ; with a Poor Law about to be brought into operation, which threatens to reduce, to the lowest class, numerous bodies of the people, now but little raised above it ; where upwards of four-fifths of the proposed outlay will be paid in wages to actual labourers, and where the results of the construction of the works will be to provide increased and increasing employment, by developing the vast resources with which Provi-

dence has blessed us. I look forward with, I trust, a well-grounded hope, to such a change in our moral and social condition, as will be a rich and an ample reward to those who may now exert themselves to promote this all-important measure.

Railways have been one of the *consequences* of the commercial and manufacturing prosperity of England; in Ireland, I trust they will be the *cause* of our regeneration; and if the character of our population be thus raised, see what a market is opened for British manufactures, and what facilities are given to the export of Irish produce.*

* The following comparative statement of our Imports and Exports in 1825 and 1835, extracted from the Commissioners' Report, will be read with much interest.

The amount of Exports, was :—

	In 1825.	In 1835.
Cows and Oxenin number ...	63,524 ...	98,150
Sheepin number ...	72,191 ...	125,452
Swinein number ...	65,919 ...	376,191
Wheat.....in quarters ...	283,340 ...	420,522
Barley.....in quarters ...	154,822 ...	168,946
Oats.....in quarters ...	1,503,204 ...	1,575,984
Meal and Flourin cwts. ...	599,124 ...	1,984,480
Butterin cwts. ...	474,161 ...	872,009
Bacon, Hams, Beef, &c. in cwts. ...	966,531 ...	749,283
Beer.....in gallons ...	— ...	2,686,688
Linenin yards ...	55,114,515 ...	70,365,572

The

I have, however, learned, and with extreme regret, that the proposed Government plan, for the introduction of Railways into Ireland, is unpopular *in England*; and that most persons consider the proposed advance as an absolute grant.

I am disposed to think that there is great want of information, much prejudice, and some misrepresentation to encounter; the large sums which have in various ways been squandered on Railways, and on *Schemes* for Railways, must have found their way into some channels. The numerous class of men who have benefited by the present system are almost necessarily brought into close communication with Members of Parliament, with Landed Proprietors, with Capitalists, and with all who are interested in Railways; and, without attributing anything like intentional misrepresentation, such are not the parties from whom information should be

The amount of Imports, was:—

	In 1825.	In 1835.
Cotton Manufactures ...in yards	... 4,996,885	... 14,172,000
Woollen Manufactures in yards	... 3,384,918	... 7,884,000
Teain lbs.	... 3,889,658	... 4,794,316
Coffeein lbs.	... 335,921	... 1,205,762

sought ; and, on the other hand, few disinterested persons seem to take such an interest in the Government plan as to induce any amount of personal exertion to promote it.

Prejudice has been excited in the minds of very many well-intentioned persons, by attacks from the press, of a political and personal character, and with which, as I am not a politician, I have nothing to do.

Any information which may be wanting I am most anxious to supply, and a portion may be now given after an Irish fashion, by telling you what we do *not* want.

We *do not want a grant* of one farthing of English money. *Having no separate Exchequer of our own*, we ask for the aid of British credit, (or rather the *credit of the State*, and to which we are parties,) to enable us to raise the necessary funds, and, at the same time, offering unquestionably good security to protect the State against loss.

The security proposed, in addition to the proceeds of the Railway, is an assessment on property of vast extent and of immense value—a description of guarantee which those who un-

derstand the subject admit to be a perfect security. To the *granting* of such security, I admit, there are some objections, and particularly where the parties have no control over the expenditure of the funds or the management of the Railways; but if the Irish representatives, convinced of the importance of the object to be attained — convinced also, that under suitable management it is scarcely possible but that the great lines of Irish communication will yield a far greater return than three and a-half per cent. — will consent, and almost unanimously, to this condition, it becomes extremely difficult to imagine any sound arguments against the *principle* of Lord Morpeth's plan.

To a *detail* of the plan, as brought forward, there was an objection—it was proposed to commence with *one* line (to the south-west), and consequently *partially*; although I entertain no doubt whatever that the southern line was selected solely in consequence of its being probably more remunerative, and tending directly to make some of our south-western harbours available for facilitating British communication with almost every part of the world, and which latter

object was one of the prominent features of the Irish Railway Commission.

A modification of this plan, suggesting a triple line to the north, west, and south of Ireland, with a common entrance into Dublin, was some time since submitted by a deputation from Dublin, to a numerous and influential meeting of Peers and Members of Parliament connected with Ireland, and, as you are aware, has received such an amount of support, that I can scarcely think Lord Morpeth will hesitate to adopt it, provided it shall be supported by the English Conservatives.

But it is said, why not leave these works to private capital and enterprize, assisting them, if necessary, by loans from the State, or, in other words, *why not perpetuate in Ireland all the evils of the present English system*, and placing, our highways under the control of parties who must necessarily and inevitably become monopolists, and over whom, after they have acquired a vested interest, the State can have no *effective* check? The State to be asked to advance one-half the cost by way of loan, having no other security than the competency of the parties to construct and manage the works, and the produce of their

undertaking, if successful ; and all this for the benefit of the proprietors of the Railway :—instead of a perfectly secured advance, to be expended under the control and direction of Government, and *solely for the benefit of the State.*

But I take leave to deny that even such an advance, by way of loan, could possibly effect more than the construction of one or two short lines out of Dublin, in the direction of the principal streams of traffic, just so much as in my opinion would prevent the introduction of any comprehensive system ; one of the most important advantages of the Government plan being, that by *making the more profitable portions, pay for those which are less so*, the advantages of Railway communication may ultimately be extended to the more remote districts, where, if the direct pecuniary returns may not be so great, other results may be looked for, well calculated to afford the highest gratification to the enlightened legislator, and statesman.

But the same parties who recommend that all should be left to private capital and enterprize, not unfrequently add, that they object to the interference of the State, “because Railways can never pay in Ireland.” It is not for me to recon-

cile the inconsistencies of their arguments, but merely to suggest, that under the circumstances I have already detailed, a Railway might be eminently profitable in the hands of the State, and with the same income be nearly ruinous to private parties. But if you could offer capitalists the same advantages which the State would derive, namely, an absolute security of a return of $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. under any circumstances, and *in addition*, the increase of customs and excise which could be fairly traced to have arisen from the Railways—Could any prospectus be more tempting?

I have already stated, that I am not a politician—in truth, I have not had leisure to become one—the only political question on which I have ever felt strongly, and in support of which I have at any time taken an active part, arose out of my conviction of the value and importance of British connexion. Should, however, this question, this all-important *Irish* question, on the principle of which the Irish Members of both Houses are nearly unanimous, be unfortunately rejected by a majority of *British* votes, I feel that it will give an argument to the advocates of Repeal, infinitely more popular than any they have heretofore been able to urge.

I am bound to confess I did not always entertain the opinion that the State ought to undertake the construction of Railways; my altered opinion has been the result of a long, patient, and disinterested investigation. Should I succeed in convincing you, as I have thoroughly succeeded in convincing myself, of the truth of all I have written, I shall have every hope of success for this great measure.

You are placed in a position in reference to this question, by means of which you have eminently the power of repelling misrepresentation, dispelling prejudice, and of conveying information to the well-disposed; and if this Letter can at all assist you, it will give me sincere pleasure, as a very humble labourer in one of the most important, if not *the* most important, Irish *practical* question that has ever been discussed within the walls of Parliament.

Believe me,

With unaffected respect and esteem,

Your obliged and faithful

JAMES PIM, JUN.