

ESSAYS  
ON THE  
POPULATION OF IRELAND,

&c.

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Houses of the Oireachtas

ESSAYS  
ON THE  
POPULATION OF IRELAND,  
AND  
THE CHARACTERS OF THE IRISH.  
BY  
A MEMBER  
OF THE LAST IRISH PARLIAMENT.

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*Nec dubiè vires, quas hæc habet insula, vestras*

*Ducite*————

OVID. MET. vii.

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Houses of the Oireachtas

AN  
ESSAY  
ON THE  
POPULATION OF IRELAND.

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“THE importance of population,” says the justly celebrated Archdeacon of Carlisle “and the superiority of *it* to every other national advantage, are points necessary to be inculcated, and to be understood; inasmuch as false estimates or fantastic notions of national grandeur are perpetually drawing the attention of statesmen and legislators from the care of this, which is, at all times, the true and absolute interest of a country.”(A)

“It is not” says Doctor Davenant “extent of territory that makes a country

(A) Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy, Page 483.

“ powerful, but numbers of men well  
 “ employed, convenient ports, and a  
 “ soil producing all sorts of commo-  
 “ dities.” (B)

The population of a country, considered with reference to its effects, is indisputably one of the most important subjects that can engage the attention of those who are charged with the exercise of the powers of government. The existing relative circumstances of the British empire seem to render that of Ireland particularly worthy of regard. Its present state appears to be but imperfectly known. Its past and probable future increase have never yet fallen under public discussion.

When I affirm that there are, at this day, upwards of *Five millions* of people in Ireland; that, unless some powerful cause of depopulation start into existence, there will be found more than *Seven millions* in that country before the lapse of *twenty years*; and that a subsequent diminution of increase, at least within a

(B) Political and Commercial Works, Vol. ii. p. 192.

short period of time, is highly improbable; I feel I shall afford considerable matter of surprise: I am, however, far from despairing of being able to shew that these propositions rest on satisfactory grounds.

Sir William Petty tells us, that in the year 1672, there were in Ireland eleven hundred thousand souls.(c) Of this number it may be presumed that the population of that country fell short in the year 1700; it being reasonable to suppose that the increase by generation failed to compensate for the great and various losses of people occasioned by the civil war and political vexations which intervened between these two years; as the general circumstances of Ireland, during that period, appear to have been by no means so conducive to the multiplication of people as they have since proved. A supposition of this nature is, indeed, sufficiently fortified by the computations of the same writer; which tend to prove that the increase of the people of Ire-

(c) Political Anatomy of Ireland, Page 312.

land, from 1652 to 1672, was less than one-tenth of their number in the former year;(D) for there being no evidences whatsoever of the circumstances of that country having been more favourable to population during the twenty-eight years which succeeded, than during the twenty years which preceded the year 1672, we certainly may, on the ground of these computations, maintain an opinion, that, even had peace continued, the inhabitants of Ireland would not, in the year 1700, have amounted to more than twelve hundred and fifty thousand. And a comprehensive view of the events which distinguished the civil war and political vexations to which I have alluded, will, I am persuaded, satisfy the reader that it is no exaggeration to state the loss which the population of Ireland sustained by these at one-third of that which it experienced by the rebellion of 1641; which last Sir William Petty estimates at 616,000 people,(E) and consequently that the number of inhabitants in that

(D) Political Anatomy of Ireland, Page 312. (E) Same.

country could not, at the commencement of the last century, have much exceeded One million. In fact, it appears by Captain South's calculation, the accuracy of which has not, I believe, been impeached, that there were only 1,034,102 souls in Ireland in the year 1695.(F)

Assuming then that the people of Ireland amounted, at the beginning of the last century, to about one million, I find no difficulty in affirming, that on an average, since the year 1700, they have experienced an increase of one-fifth or thereabout every eleven years; and that accordingly there were about

1,200,000	people in Ireland	in 1711
1,440,000	- - - - -	in 1722
1,728,000	- - - - -	in 1733
2,073,600	- - - - -	in 1744
2,488,320	- - - - -	in 1755
2,985,984	- - - - -	in 1766
3,583,174	- - - - -	in 1777
4,299,808	- - - - -	in 1788
and 5,159,769	- - - - -	in 1799

(F) Abridgment of Phil. Trans. Vol. iii. p. 665.

I would not, however, be understood to affirm that the increase of people in Ireland was uniform throughout the course of the last hundred years. I have sufficient reason for suspecting that it was less remarkable for celerity towards the commencement, than towards the middle of the last century. I know that it was considerably retarded, during some of the above periods, by excessive emigrations. And I perceive ample grounds for entertaining an opinion that it has been much more rapid since 1777, and infinitely more so since 1785, than it was at any period anterior to the former year. The foregoing Table therefore is not offered as an accurate exhibition of the periodical numbers of people in Ireland, notwithstanding its general and striking coincidence with the different computations that have been made; but merely as a useful guide, which certainly will not lead us *beyond* the truth, in our reasonings on the population of that country, so long as the political circumstances

thereof continue in their present posture.

According to Mr. Bushe's computation, (G) which is now universally relied on and which first served to dissipate a very great, and perhaps dangerous error, with regard to the subject on which I am writing, there were 4,040,000 inhabitants in Ireland in the year 1788. But that gentleman's computation probably falling short of the truth, as is likely to be the case with most computations of a similar nature, grounded on taxes, and as indeed he himself expressly apprehended, we may take a medium between his statement and that in the Table, and safely venture to affirm that the number of people in Ireland, in the year 1788, was about 4,169,904.

By the Table it appears that in the year 1799 there were about 5,159,769 people in Ireland. And it being a fact, ascertained by a variety of coincident circumstances, that the increase of houses from 1788 to 1799 was not merely equal,

(G) Essay towards ascertaining the Population of Ireland, by G. P. Bushe, Esq. published by the Royal Irish Academy.

but greatly superior to that from 1777 to 1788, which last Mr. Bushe tells us was 173,058, we are thence abundantly warranted in inferring that there were at least 5,078,348 inhabitants in Ireland in 1799; the demonstrable excess of increase during the former period, beyond that of any preceding one, being more than sufficient to cover the loss incurred by the late rebellion. Or taking a medium, as before, between these two statements, consonantly to Mr. Bushe's sentiments, we may distinctly affirm that Ireland did contain 5,119,508 inhabitants in the year last-mentioned. And to exhibit the subject in a relative point of view, we may add, that the population of Ireland is actually superior, in point of density, to that of England; there being, according to Mr. Templeman's survey, 27,457 square miles in the former, the population whereof, including the increase by generation from 1799, does at present stand at about 5,497,500, giving about 200 persons to every square mile; and, according to the same survey, 49,450 square miles in the latter,

the inhabitants whereof, making suitable allowances for omissions in the late return, certainly do not exceed 9,444,950, giving about 191 persons to every square mile, or 9 less than in Ireland.

Were it necessary to have recourse to collateral proofs in order to evince the rapid increase of people in Ireland, a very admissible one might be drawn from the importation of coals.

In 1727 there were imported about - - - 70,000 tons(H)

In 1764 - - - 161,970 tons(I)

And, on an average of three years, to 1799, to the value of £322,583.(J)

If it were urged that the gradual diminution of bog-fuel rendered this increase in the importation of coals necessary, I should reply, that the collieries of Drumglass and Coalisland in the county of Tyrone; of Feathard in the county of Tipperary; those in the Queen's county; those in the county

(H) Essay on the Trade of Ireland, by J. Browne, Esq. page 74. Published in 1727.

(I) Mr. A. Young's Tour, Vol. ii. part 2d. page 92.

(J) Mr. Irving's account presented to the House of Lords.

of Kilkenny ;(κ) those in the county of Antrim ; that in the county of Leitrim ;(L) and several other inferior ones, have been discovered since the year 1700 ; and that their produce of coals is more than sufficient to compensate for the decrease of turf. Thus much for my first proposition.

The grounds of my second proposition appear equally substantial. There certainly does not exist any reason whatsoever for expecting that the concurrent causes of the past accelerated increase of people in Ireland, the nature and efficacy of which I shall explain hereafter, will cease to operate before the lapse of twenty years. No change of national circumstances produces an immediate and universal change of national habits and customs. Nor is it by any means likely that the progress of population in Ireland will be retarded within such space of time

(κ) It appeared by the evidence of Mr. Evans, given before the Irish House of Commons, in 1785, that the collieries in the county of Kilkenny and those in the Queen's county would, if properly worked, produce yearly 300,000 tons of coal.

(L) He also stated that the collieries near Lough Allen were equal to the supply of the whole kingdom.

by an insufficiency of home-food. The extremely fertile soil of Ireland does not yield at present within one-third of that which with skilful culture it might be made to produce.(M) There is a much smaller proportion of naturally barren land in Ireland than in almost any other country in Europe.(N) Nearly one million acres of bog and mountain may yet be converted, with considerable profit, into good meadow and tillage land (o). It abounds with natural ma-

(M) "To the extreme bad management" says Mr. A. Young, "of adopting the exploded practice of a century ago, it is owing, that Ireland, with a soil, acre for acre, *much better than England*, has its products inferior." Tour, Vol. ii. part 2d. p. 15.

(N) "Sand," says the same gentleman "which is so common in England, and yet more common through Spain, France, Germany, and Poland, quite from Gibraltar to Petersburg, is no where met with in Ireland, except in narrow slips of hillocks upon the sea-coast. Nor did I ever meet with, or hear of a chalky soil." Tour, Vol. ii. part 2d. p. 4.

(o) "No meadows," says Mr. Young, "are equal to those gained by improving a bog; they are of a value which scarcely any other lands rise to." Tour, vol. ii. part 2, p. 74. "Some of the mountains in the county of Antrim," says the same writer, "consist entirely of exceeding good loam; and such as would improve into good meadow." Tour, vol. i. p. 210. There are others of the same description.

nures (p). Its fisheries, if properly attended to, would furnish fifty times more than at present. (q) It annually exports provisions to the amount of about three millions sterling. Its exportation of provisions and increase of people, instead of proceeding inversely, have been, we may say, commensurate with each; the former being to the amount of 1,111,388*l.* on an average of seven years, to 1770, (r) when the number of people was about three millions; and to the amount of 2,397,843*l.* to England alone, on an average of three years, to 1799, (s) when the number of people was about five millions. Besides which, there has been, for several years past, a consi-

(p) "Inexhaustible quarries of the finest limestone are found in most parts of Ireland." Mr. Young's Tour, vol. ii. part 2, p. 67. "Limestone-gravel is a manure peculiar to Ireland; and is most excellent." Same, vol. ii. part 2, p. 68. Besides these, the coasts furnish, in the greatest abundance, sea-weed, sand and marine shells; which have proved excellent manures for potatoes, wheat, barley, and oats.

(q) "There is scarce a part of Ireland but what is well situated for some fishery of consequence; her coasts and innumerable creeks and rivers' mouths are the resorts of vast shoals of herrings, cod, hake, mackarel, &c. which might with proper attention, be converted into funds of wealth." Same, vol. ii. part 2, p. 186.

derable and annually increasing exportation of that article of food (potatoes) on which the lower orders almost wholly subsist. If all these facts be duly considered, together with the exertions which a crowded and rapidly increasing population cannot fail to occasion, it surely will be perceived, that there are ample grounds for expecting, unless some powerful cause of depopulation start into existence, that the people of Ireland will continue to multiply, at least for eighteen years to come, with as great celerity as they appear to have done since the commencement of the last century;

(R) Average of 7 years to 1770.

Grain	-	-	36,299
Beef	-	-	321,277
Butter	-	-	640,434
Live stock	-	-	10,635
Pork	-	-	96,833
Bacon	-	-	5,916
			<hr/>
			£ 1,111,388
			<hr/>

During this period the *importation* of grain amounted to £ 101,604.

From Mr. Young's  
Tour, vol. ii.

(s) Average of 3 years to 1799.

Grain	-	-	289,000
Beef	-	-	388,522
Butter	-	-	784,654
Live stock	-	-	154,630
Pork	-	-	674,981
Bacon	-	-	106,056
			<hr/>
			£ 2,397,843
			<hr/>

Mr. Irving's account.  
During this period it is to be observed that the exportation of provisions was considerably diminished by the rebellion and a bad season.

and that consequently, according to the measure of increase which regulates the table, and which seems to be sufficiently strengthened by facts, there will be, in the year 1810, about - - - 6,191,722 and in the year 1821, about - 7,430,266 inhabitants in Ireland, *subsisting on the produce of their own territory.*

But in order to remove all remaining doubts, especially from the minds of Englishmen, with regard to the competency of the land of Ireland to maintain a population of such magnitude, I shall bestow a few words more on that subject. Distributing the inhabitants of Ireland into nearly the same number of classes into which the accurate Mr. Gregory King divided the English community; (τ) and allowing to each class a proportionate degree of numerical strength, I affirm that the sustenance of 3-5ths or upwards of three millions of the people of Ireland does not actually require more than 1,500,000 acres English measure, or about 1-10th part of its profitable land. These three millions subsist wholly or chiefly on potatoes and

sour milk. The ordinary beverage of a considerable proportion of the Irish labouring-poor is water. According to the medium taken by Mr. A. Young, one acre yields more than sufficient potatoes for the maintenance of five persons throughout the year. Of course an adequate supply for three millions is obtained from 600,000 acres. And were I to say that a greater quantity of land than 900,000 acres is appropriated to the purpose of furnishing the milk which they consume, I am convinced I should exceed the truth. Now it is an

(T) A partial view of the classes into which Mr. Gregory King distributed the people of England in 1683.

No. of families.	Ranks, &c.	Heads per family.	No. of persons.
120,000	Freeholders of the lesser sort..	$5\frac{1}{2}$	660,000
150,000	Farmers.....	5	750,000
60,000	Artificers, &c.....	4	240,000
364,000	Labouring people and out servants	$3\frac{1}{2}$	1,275,000
400,000	Cottagers and paupers.....	$3\frac{1}{4}$	1,300,000
	Vagrants, beggars, &c. ....		30,000
			<hr/> 4,255,000 <hr/>
			out of
			5,500,000

incontestible fact, that at least 750,000 acres more may be applied to the maintenance of people subsisting on potatoes and milk without diminishing the quantity of land requisite to continue the present annual exportation of provisions. Consequently a million and a half more of people, thus fed, may yet be maintained by the land of Ireland. And the actual and potential states of the tillage, the pasturage and the fisheries of that country being properly compared and considered, will undoubtedly be perceived to indicate a possibility of adding at least 500,000 consumers of another description to the population thereof, without occasioning a scarcity of food. Wherefore I conceive I have not ventured too far in affirming that Ireland is really adequate to the support of (in round numbers) seven millions of people.<sup>(v)</sup> And as seven millions will give a density of population equal to about 318 persons for

(v) One hundred and thirty years ago, when the full value of Ireland was far from being accurately known, Sir William Petty affirmed, that its population, then amounting to 1,100,000, was not above the fifth part so many as its territory would maintain.

—Treatise of Taxes and Contributions, page 33.

every square geographical mile, so it may be expected that Ireland will exhibit, before the expiration of *twenty-years*, a more dense population, according to Mr. Zimmerman, than any other country in Europe: the various possible effects whereof, I readily persuade myself, will not escape the early notice of those who are entrusted with the exercise of the powers of government. So much for my second proposition.

That a retardation of the increase of people in Ireland, within a short time subsequent to the lapse of twenty years is highly improbable, I infer from the following considerations. First, admitting that the influx of wealth, secured, as we are taught to believe, by the Union, may begin, about that time, to weaken the operation of several of the efficient causes of the past multiplication of people in Ireland, yet the extension of commerce, of agriculture, and of manufactures, necessarily co-existent with such influx of wealth, together with those various attractions which a high degree of national opulence

presents, must not only prove the most cogent practical dissuasions from emigration, to which, as shall be hereafter shewn, it is almost wholly owing that the population of that country is not infinitely more dense than we find it, but must also have the effect of swelling the number of its inhabitants by the addition of strangers: both of which circumstances will, for a considerable length of time, probably compensate for an abatement of energy in the causes of increase. Secondly, although in most other countries population must be limited by internal means of subsistence, yet so happily circumstanced is Ireland, that a deficiency of the latter in that Island can but little impede the progress of the former.(v) It

(v) "There are indeed," says Doctor Davenant, "countries to whom their full complement of inhabitants would be dangerous, and subject them to frequent famines in bad and unseasonable years for corn. As for example, if France had had as many people as the land will feed in times of common plenty, half of them must have perished during their late dearths, for want of bread, *because they have a vast inland country, and only the out parts upon such an emergency can be relieved by the assistance of other places.*" Political and Commercial Works, Vol. ii. p. 222.

lies open to the four quarters of the globe. Its seas are navigable throughout the year. Its coasts may, for the greater part, be approached in the most tempestuous weather. It presents no fewer than *sixty-six* safe harbours in a circuit of about 750 miles.(w) It is every where intersected by noble rivers, already navigable in part, and which, with few exceptions, may be rendered wholly so at a moderate expense. It abounds with the choicest materials for the formation of smooth and durable roads. And canals may be cut through it in almost all directions, without exhausting, as in other countries, that supply of water which is necessary for various other important purposes. In short, it affords unparalleled facilities for a convenient importation of all the necessaries of life, and for a speedy conveyance of them throughout its whole extent. Thus much for my last proposition.

I must now take notice of the signal disparity in point of increase between the

(w) See Mr. M'Kenzie's Charts of the Coast of Ireland.

populations of England and Ireland, during the last century. According to Sir William Petty, there were 7,369,000 inhabitants in the former in the year 1682.(x) According to Mr. Gregory King, there were 5,500,000 in the year 1688.(y) The most prevailing opinion about the time of the revolution, seems to have been that they fell considerably short of seven millions. By the late enumeration it appears that their number actually is, including Irish and Scotch soldiers and seamen, and making suitable allowances for omissions, less than nine millions and a half. According to Captain South, as before noticed, the inhabitants of Ireland amounted, in the year 1695, to about one million. That they do now exceed five millions will not I expect be denied. Thus has a stock of about one million of people in Ireland increased by generation, in about one hundred years, to upwards of five millions; which, as is evident from

(x) Political Arith. p. 104.

(y) Dr. Davenant's Political and Commercial Works, Vol. ii. p. 184.

the facts adduced in the foregoing pages, is a much smaller number than its territory is competent to maintain. While, in the same space of time, a stock of about six millions and a half in England has been increased to not quite nine and a half; which however seems to be a more dense population than the actual produce of its soil can support;(z) inasmuch as it has been found necessary, according to a distinguished modern statistical writer, to import twenty millions worth of corn in the last ten years. Or, to place the comparative increase of people in England and Ireland in another, and more striking point of view, we may say, that, in the space of about fourscore years, the population of England has experienced an increase of little more than *one-fourth*, while that of Ireland has *doubled twice*.

And here I think it not altogether foreign to my subject to remark, that when

(z) Doctor Brankenridge does not consider the land of England as adequate to maintain more than nine millions of people.

the population of Ireland shall reach 7 millions, which will probably be the case about the time when the whole of the United Kingdom shall be placed on a proportionately equal footing with respect to taxes and contributions, that of England will, in all likelihood, not exceed ten: a circumstance which I confess I am inclined to suspect did entirely escape the notice of those who were concerned in framing the Act of Union. Had they been duly impressed therewith, it is not to be doubted but that, conformably to those liberal principles and those views of reciprocal benefit by which they professed themselves to be guided, they would have drawn up that clause which provides for the representation of Ireland with a more suitable regard to the future increase of people and wealth in that part of the United Kingdom, which increase it seems no longer within the compass of human power to obstruct. Had they fortunately adverted to the operation of those causes which have produced so great a disparity, in point of

increase, between the populations of England and Ireland, and been as solicitous to silence distant murmurings, as they were to obviate the objections and anticipate the possible remonstrances of the day, it is to be presumed that they would have expressly invested the Legislature with a discretionary power of modifying the clause alluded to, according to the future exigencies of the empire. Thus they would have furnished the means of rendering the representation of Ireland, at all times, as adequate as it is now deemed to be; of throwing open a wider door for the admission of Irish Roman Catholics into Parliament, when the frivolous motives of their exclusion shall cease to operate; and of removing eventually all justifiable grounds of future dissatisfaction. But this omission we ought rather to overlook than deplore.

It still remains for me to develope and illustrate the concurrent causes of that accelerated increase of people in Ireland, on which I have insisted,

Archdeacon Paley observes, “ that, un-

der circumstances very favourable to subsistence, population has been doubled in *twenty years*.”(A) Doctor Adam Smith remarks, “ that, in the British Colonies in North America, it has been found that the people double in *twenty or five and twenty years*. Nor in the present times,” adds he, “ is this increase owing to the continual importation of new inhabitants, but to the great multiplication of the species.”(B) Sir William Petty admits the possibility of doubling even in *ten years*.(c)

The circumstances which principally, if not exclusively, conduce to a rapid multiplication of people, are, a salubrious climate, plenty of food, early and frequent marriages. These combined, confessedly will, and obviously must, cause a duplication of people even in a shorter space of time than twenty years, unless counteracted by plagues, famines, destructive earthquakes, or other physical

(A) Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy, page 484.

(B) Wealth of Nations, Vol. i. p. 71.

(C) Political Arithmetic, p. 105.

calamities, wars or emigrations. "The havoc, however, or loss of people, occasioned by all which, except the last, is usually," says the distinguished moralist and politician of Carlisle, "repaired in a short time." (D) "In certain cases, men," says Doctor Adam Ferguson, "will in a few generations people a country to the full measure of its subsistence; and even increase under circumstances which portend a decay, such as wars, pestilence and slavery." (E) Now if it shall be found that Ireland has almost uniformly exhibited, throughout the course of the last century, a combination of all those circumstances which are acknowledged to be pre-eminently auspicious to a rapid increase of people, and that the ordinary effects of such circumstances have, in that country, been but partially frustrated by wars and emigrations, I should hope the reader will consider himself at liberty to assent to the moderate measure of increase on which I have insisted.

That the climate of Ireland is in a high

(D) Page 484.

(E) History of Civil Society, page 212.

degree salubrious, I have endeavoured, on another occasion, to evince, chiefly by means of the following facts: viz. the exemption of the natives of that country from all the diseases and personal deformities produced in other countries by intense heat, intense cold, impure water, vitiated air, or excessive moisture; their being subject to no endemic malady whatsoever; their being long-lived; and endowed with strength and agility. (F)

That there has been, in Ireland, almost invariably, since the early part of the last century, a vast profusion of that food on which the lower orders of the Irish have been accustomed wholly to subsist, is a fact of general notoriety.

And that marriages have been more frequent in that country than in almost any other in Europe, has already been affirmed by several intelligent travellers.

The causes of the salubrity of the climate of Ireland it seems altogether superfluous to discuss in this place. They lie

within the province of the naturalist, not within that of the politician.

The plenty of food which the lower orders of the Irish appear to have enjoyed during the period I am speaking of, is to be ascribed partly to the excess of their peculiar food, in point of quantity, relatively to a given measure of land, beyond any other article of food generally cultivated in Europe, and partly to the established customs of their country. Less than one-fourth part of that extent of land which is requisite to furnish a sufficient supply of wheat for the maintenance of a family of five persons throughout the year, will yield more potatoes than a family equally numerous can consume in the same space of time. The small farmers, the country artificers, and agricultural labourers, forming altogether a vast majority of the community, have hitherto subsisted chiefly, the last class wholly, on potatoes raised by themselves, and these people have, generally speaking, been in the habit of cultivating, not merely a sufficiency for the subsistence of their families, but also for the

support of pigs and poultry, and likewise a considerable surplus for market. Thus a general redundancy of this simple, but wholesome food, to the growth of which the climate of Ireland is well adapted, has almost always been secured.

The extraordinary frequency of marriage amongst the lower orders of the Irish people has been owing chiefly to the following circumstances. First, in consequence of an abundance of food the maintenance of children in Ireland has hitherto been attended with little or no expence: a consideration of no mean efficacy in prompting to matrimony. Secondly, the small farmers, the country artificers, and the agricultural labourers, have generally derived the most important advantages from their children, infinitely more than sufficient to indemnify them for the trivial expence of their support. The first usually acquire the means of paying their rents partly by tilling the lands of their more opulent neighbours, and partly by the cultivation of their own; of course, their solvency is justly measured by the number of working hands in their

families. The second either consign to their children the digging, planting, and manuring of their potatoe-grounds, while themselves are more profitably employed, or teach them their respective trades, and thus ultimately augment the general incomes of their families. The last are enabled by the labour of their children, reared, I might almost say, without expense, to pay the rents of their cabins and gardens without difficulty, and frequently encouraged thereby to venture upon the business of a farm; four stout labourers in a family being esteemed in Ireland equivalent to a moderate capital. In these three cases, then, self-interest seems to act as an additional stimulus to marriage. "The value of children," as Doctor Adam Smith remarks, "is the greatest of all encouragements to marriage." (c) Thirdly, the lower orders of the Irish people have always been accustomed to reconcile themselves cheerfully to many privations; to dispense with the greater part of those articles of com-

(c) Wealth of Nations, vol. i. p. 72.

fort which the same orders in England reckon among the *necessaries* of life, to consider the acquisition of a capital as totally unnecessary to marriage, and to rely on their bodily labour alone for the maintenance and clothing of their families, and for the housing of them also, when they find it expedient to quit their paternal roofs; habits of singular efficiency, it will readily be confessed, in accelerating the increase of people; and to which those of the middle class have borne a qualified resemblance. *Sic fortis Etruria crevit*, VIRG. Fourthly, the scanty, fluctuating, and inadequate incomes of the clergy of the church of Rome, which includes within its pale nearly four-fifths of the commonalty of Ireland, having, ever since the final overthrow of King James II. been derived solely from marriages, christenings, and confessions, it is to be presumed that a considerable number of them have, at all times, during the last century, been practically solicitous to promote matrimony, under the conjunct influence of secular and spiritual motives. No clergy, it is true, seem

to be more generally governed by considerations purely religious: none can possibly be more assiduous in the discharge of the pastoral duties. But in all great bodies of men, be their profession what it may, I suspect there will ever be found a large proportion acting at least as frequently in subservience to worldly interests as to those of a more exalted nature.

Hence it appears that, during the period I am speaking of, Ireland has been distinguished by a co-operation of all those causes which are universally allowed to be peculiarly productive of a rapid increase of people. Moreover marriage, the most efficacious of them all, has generally had in that country a direct tendency to improve instead of deteriorating the conditions of the lower orders, besides being consonant to the interests of those whom they habitually revere, and who have always enjoyed an *unlimited influence* over them. Nor have the usual effects of these singularly favourable circumstances been defeated by any of those disastrous events which arrest the progress of population,

except wars and emigrations. Since the commencement of the last century neither plague nor famine has been experienced in Ireland; nor to any physical calamity whatsoever can be ascribed a diminution of the number of its inhabitants. Wars and emigrations, then, are the only causes which remain to be assigned why Ireland is not at this day peopled up to the full measure of its means of subsistence, from which assuredly it is yet very far; why it does not now exhibit a population nearly twice as dense as I have represented it to be. The former do not appear to have occasioned any very serious losses of people: it is the latter that has been the grand obstacle to their increase. By the late rebellion, the only one in the last century, the population of Ireland sustained a loss of about 15,000 men. Of his majesty's Irish forces there fell about 1,600. Of the rebels there were slain in the field, according to the accounts received, somewhat less than 11,000. About 400 loyal persons were massacred or assassinated. And about 2,000 rebels were exiled or

hanged. By the foreign wars in which Great Britain was engaged during the last century, I should suppose that the losses of Ireland were little short of one-fourth of the general losses of the empire; as I think it probable that the soldiers and seamen drawn from that country composed, on an average, about one-fourth of the native land and sea-forces in the pay of England. In the last three wars I apprehend they constituted at least one-third. All these losses, however, were evidently trivial to a country so very favourably circumstanced for a rapid increase of people. Mr. Gregory King computed that the annual loss of England by war was 3,500, when its population, according to him, stood at 5,500,000(M). A proportionate annual loss could have but little impeded the multiplication of people in Ireland.

The various emigrations from that country during the last century were very great indeed. In the reign of George the First,

(M) Dr. Davenant's Political and Commercial Works, vol. ii,  
p. 178.

as appears by Archbishop Boulter's letters, soldiers were, not clandestinely, but openly levied in Ireland for the service of the king of France. Shortly after this practice, which it was to the last degree impolitick to connive at, had been finally suppressed, the Irish began to emigrate, chiefly from the northern counties, to America; and these emigrations appear to have been annually on the increase, and at length to have reached an alarming height, when they were checked by the rupture between Great Britain and her colonies. Besides these emigrations, there has been, during the last century, a great and continual efflux of people from Ireland to England, and to such other countries as presented to the Irish, those various attractions of which their own, until very lately, was almost wholly destitute. And I question whether the increase of people in Ireland has not been *much more* retarded by this almost imperceptible efflux than by the conspicuous emigrations just noticed. Since the year 1788, however, or since the commerce of Ireland began to assume a re-

spectable appearance; since its manufactures began to be multiplied and extended beyond their former limits, and its agriculture to be pursued with spirit and success, (1) these emigrations have been rapidly

(1) On an average of seven years to 1777 there we exported from Ireland . . . . . 20,252,239 yards of linen.

On a similar average to 1798 . . . . 41,670,659

Increase in the last period. . 21,418,420

Since the year 1777 the cotton, the woollen, the glass, and other manufactures, have either been introduced or greatly extended.

The export of grain on an average of seven years to 1777 was to the amount of £ 64,871, but the import during the same period was to the amount of . . . . . £ 83,270.

On an average of three years to 1799 to *England alone* 289,000.

Increase in the last period. . . . . 224,129.

This last period, as was before noticed, was very unfavourable to the exportation of provisions. In the year 1793 there were exported 730,065 barrels of wheat and oats.

Since the year 1777 a vast number of porter-breweries have been established, chiefly in the south. Their consumption of barley has been prodigious. It has had the effect of doubling the price; and eventually affording the greatest encouragement to agriculture.

The general exports of pasturage on an average of 7 years to 1777 were to the amount of . . . . . £ 1,369,533.

On an average of three years to 1799 to *England alone* 2,274,596.

Increase in the last period . . . . . 905,063.

declining. Of late years, indeed, they seem to have totally ceased. And in consequence it will be found, (in truth it is abundantly manifest) that the increase of people from that year to the present, has been infinitely greater than during any former period of equal extent; and *that Ireland does actually present to our view, in a state of unfrustrated agency, every physical, moral, and political cause, that can contribute to a speedy reduplication of people.* Yet it is in the recollection of the reader, that I have allowed no greater increase in the table for the eleven years ending in 1799, nor for

Total exports to England on an average of seven years to 1773.....	£1,240,677.
The same on a similar average to 1797.....	3,909,946.
Increase in the last period.....	2,669,269.

I have been under the necessity of taking the seven years to 1773, not being possessed of authentic documents respecting the general exports of the seven years to 1777.

This improvement of the state of Ireland, it is well known, has taken place chiefly since the year 1785, as indeed may be inferred from the increase of houses.

In 1777 the number of houses returned was	448,426.
In 1785 .....	474,322.
In 1788 .....	621,484.

Mr. Bushe was decidedly of opinion that the number of houses in 1788 did much exceed 650,000.

any period subsequent thereto, than for the successive periods which preceded the year 1788.

If what I have written should have the effect of provoking a stricter search into the important subject of these lines, on the part of those who possess the means of arriving at an accurate knowledge of *facts*, I shall have the consolation of thinking that my pen has not been unprofitably exercised.

ON  
THE CHARACTERS  
OF  
THE IRISH.

---

IN every civilized nation we find three prominent classes of people; the respective numerical strength and political importance whereof are proportioned and varied by the peculiar circumstances of the nation. In England, for instance, owing to the operation of certain causes, which, on the present occasion, it would be superfluous to assign, the central class of the community actually approaches much nearer in point of number to that below it, and is infinitely more preponderant in the political system than that of Ireland. On the other hand, the lowest class in the latter country, (in which I

would be understood to include all persons below the condition of the substantial yeoman) will, if considered, *in every point of view*, appear to merit a much greater share of attention on the part of government than that of the former.

In each of the three classes we may discover a considerable number of appropriate qualities or characteristics. They all possess, with individual exceptions, a few qualities in common. These are the ingredients of the general character of the nation; those, the constituent parts of the predominant characters therein. The first, resulting for the most part from physical causes, are generally immutable; the last, being altogether the productions of moral causes, are susceptible of modifications, and perpetually subject to change. To both a strict regard seems absolutely requisite to the perfection and ultimate success of all measures, devised for the twofold purpose of preserving the internal tranquillity of a free country, and facilitating the agency of its executive power.

Various circumstances have conduced to occasion in Ireland a much greater departure from uniformity of character, than is observable in England. Universal or pervasive habits, principles, and qualities, are certainly more numerous here than there. In other words, there is a stronger resemblance, in point of character, between the three classes in this, than in that country.

Notwithstanding the diversified intercourse which has long subsisted between the people of these two islands, it is certain, that few of the appropriate qualities or characteristics exhibited by the different classes of people in Ireland, are generally known in England; and it is no less true, that these few are, for the most part, indiscriminately, and of course improperly, applied to the Irish at large. Nor do the people of England seem wholly free from error, even with regard to the qualities common to almost all the natives of Ireland.

Indeed if it be considered, that the opinions most prevalent in this country

respecting the characters of the Irish people, have been derived either from the accounts of travellers, who appear to have laboured under strong national prejudices and political biases;(A) or from the accounts of factious Irishmen interested in aspersing and misrepresenting their countrymen; or from the conduct and principles of those needy and profligate Irish adventurers, with whom this country has always been over-run, and whose characters, generally speaking, appear to infinite disadvantage when compared with those of their countrymen at home, it will not be wondered at, that such opinions should be equally erroneous and unfavourable. In fact, it is well known, that many Englishmen, who went to Ireland teeming with contempt and detestation of the people of that country, after a few years association with them, returned to their own, with a disposition to become, on all occasions, their strenuous encomiasts.

(A) I particularly except that liberal and intelligent gentleman, and truly valuable member of society, Mr. A. Young.

With regard to the following sketch, I shall say thus much only: that it owes its origin solely to a persuasion of the actual necessity of disclosing the *real* characters of the Irish, in order to their being suitably governed; on which, I am disposed to think, the welfare, if not the stability of the British empire, does, in a special manner, depend; and that however imperfect and unsatisfactory it may be deemed, it has at least the advantage of being drawn with studied impartiality, by one who has exercised in Ireland, for a considerable number of years, all the various relationships of social life.

• The qualities, opinions, habits, and principles of the lowest of the three more prominent classes of a nation are seldom so narrowly canvassed as those of the other two. I apprehend, however, it might with little difficulty be shewn, that an accurate scrutiny of the former would prove as subsidiary to the art of governing, as a similar scrutiny of the latter: in some cases, much more so. Were I, for instance, to confine this observation

to Ireland, I think I should find myself fortified with such reasons as could not easily be overpowered. With this impression, then, I shall direct my chief endeavours to analyze that character, which I have found to predominate in the lowest class of the Irish.

The people of England have hitherto been in the habit of freely bestowing upon this class the epithets blundering, doltish, ignorant, in addition to others more severe and better grounded. Nay, there have not been wanting many who seemed disposed to believe that these epithets were, in some degree, applicable to the Irish in general. An uncouth, and sometimes unintelligible phraseology, gradually introduced amongst the natives of Ireland, in consequence of literal translations of the vernacular idioms of the Irish into the English language, might naturally have awakened a suspicion on the parts of many superficial persons in this country, that, in point of intellectual abilities, the Irish were considerably their infe-

riors.(B) Even in the best informed circles it is no uncommon error to measure the understanding of a man by the accuracy and elegance of his diction. That the epithets above-mentioned are, however, wholly inapplicable to this class of the Irish, is a truth of which every Englishman, who may happen to make Ireland his place of residence, will very speedily be convinced. Far from being inferior, they have appeared to me infinitely superior to the same class of the English community in an intellectual point of view. Generally speaking, they possess a degree of subtlety rarely to be met with amongst the same description of people in any country. The majority of them are perfect masters of the courtly arts of penetration and dissimulation; especially the latter. It is truly astonishing to see how readily many of them will

(B) If an Englishman, in France, were to make use of literal translations of the idiomatic expressions, "What o'the clock is it?—It is within ten minutes of twelve,—The fire is gone out," &c. I fancy he would impress the minds of many of his hearers with no very favourable opinion of his understanding.

discover the true characters and ruling passions of those they have to deal with; and what an unembarrassed air they will manifest when assuming and sustaining whatever character or appearance emergent circumstances may require. They are to an extraordinary degree inquisitive and communicative: their memories are surprisingly retentive; they are fond of wit; and set so high a value upon learning, that the poorest labourers will often appropriate a part of their scanty earnings to the education of their children. The more abstruse parts of arithmetic, and also mensuration and navigation, are taught in many of the poorest unendowed schools in Ireland. The art of writing is often carried almost to its utmost perfection amongst the people of this class: and their attainments in orthography and perspicuity of style have frequently, to my knowledge, excited the amazement of strangers.

The quality of courage they are generally admitted by the English to possess in a high degree. This quality, however,

which indeed seems to be uniform in the province of Ulster and part of that of Leinster, may be said to be conditional in the other parts of Ireland. On ordinary occasions they appear to exhibit neither more nor less courage than other people. Under *certain circumstances* I have seen many of them betray a deficiency of that quality. But when about to suffer in a favourite cause, or with a persuasion of the justifiableness of their offence, they generally display almost inconceivable fortitude and composure; such as never was surpassed, perhaps seldom equalled by any hero or philosopher of antiquity. And when commanded by those who have long enjoyed their confidence, respect and affection, they not only manifest the most undaunted courage, the most heroic intrepidity, but equal any, and excel most of the nations of Europe in the general aggregate of military virtues.

They have been reproached for cruelty; and apparently not without sufficient grounds. Their cruelty, however, is cer-

tainly less the effect of a sanguinary vindictive disposition, than that of an extravagant, enthusiastic, maddening zeal for the complete success of some favourite cause. *Their excessive hospitality, their native good-humour, their boundless charity, their uniform readiness to oblige and assist, their general benevolence, their singular sociability, and their uncommon propensity to commiseration, which, often at the risk of their lives, and frequently, it must be owned, to the detriment of society, they will gratify in behalf of the persecuted, whether innocent or in fault, all of which are confessedly more or less incompatible with a sanguinary disposition,—may be offered as so many corroborations of the justness of this remark.* They have also been censured for sloth. They are, however, occasionally indefatigable, as Mr. Young has testified.<sup>(c)</sup> And vast numbers of them possess a most singular spirit of enterprize, which no difficulties can abate, no obstacles check, and no disappointments extinguish.

(c) Tour, Vol. ii. p. 22, and in other places.

They have likewise been accused of perfidy; and no doubt have shewn themselves perfidious on various occasions. But when voluntarily and heartily engaged in a cause, they have been known to exhibit unparalleled fidelity; fidelity not to be shaken even by the prospect of death. I cannot, therefore, admit perfidy amongst their decided characteristics.(D)

They are certainly, for the most part, thievish, lawless, dishonest and destitute of a sense of equity.(E) They are almost uniformly quarrelsome when drunk: but neither irritable nor phlegmatic when sober. They are very bigotted; but, I think, not more superstitious than other people of the same rank. They are restless and licentious; but destitute of a true spirit of liberty, except in some of the northern counties: rebellious; but, with the same exception, regardless about the nature of their government.

(D) "The natives of Ireland," says Sir William Petty, "have been accused of treachery, falseness, and knavery: none of which I conceive to be natural to them." *Political Anatomy of Ireland*, p. 367.

(E) The people of the greater part of the province of Ulster are not meant to be included in the whole of this censure.

There are sufficient grounds for pronouncing them ungrateful. But their ingratitude certainly springs from a source specifically different from the ordinary sources of the ingratitude of others. In the exercise of their generosity they never look forward to a return on the parts of those who are benefited thereby; and when they experience favours, they habitually persuade themselves into a belief of similar disinterestedness on the parts of their benefactors. They are extremely improvident, precipitate, and regardless of consequences, whether immediate or remote. They are, generally speaking, versatile; and can easily accommodate themselves to any change in their condition. They manifest, for the most part, an astonishing degree of confidence, in many of those situations in which their neighbours, of the same class, would betray the utmost diffidence. Nothing can abash, confound, or overawe the greater part of them. They are prone to suppose themselves competent to the performance of many things, which others of the same rank, equally compe-

tent, would diffidently or modestly consider beyond the compass of their powers ; and this supposition (philosophers will credit the fact) has generally the effect of giving unwonted energy to their abilities, and eventually ensuring success.

Upon the whole, the character of this numerous and important class of the Irish community, notwithstanding its many reproachable qualities, can by no means be considered as decidedly and radically bad. On the contrary, I am inclined to think, that those who will take the trouble to trace up its bad qualities to their proper sources, to consider the favourable changes of which they are susceptible, and to make a just appreciation of its good ones, will not hesitate to admit, that it is perfectly practicable, by patient culture, a prudent conjunction of coercion and conciliation, and an uniformly impartial administration of distributive justice, by infusing amongst them a spirit of rational liberty, teaching them to practise the virtues of freemen, instead of compelling them to practise the vices of slaves, promoting

habits of industry amongst them, affording a safe scope for the exercise of their active qualities, and by involving their interests in the welfare of the empire; I say, that every reflecting man will readily admit the possibility of rendering them, by these means, as useful citizens and as valuable subjects as any upon the face of the earth.

The majority of the appropriate characteristics of the middle class of the Irish community, from which it seems almost needless to observe, that a vast many individuals have always been found exempt, have certainly been heretofore of an extremely alienating nature. Unbecoming pride, consummate effrontery, captiousness, ferocity, tyranny, sensuality, vulgar boisterous mirth, and inconsiderate prodigality pregnant with dishonesty, though not yet perfectly obliterated, can, however, be no longer deemed the predominant qualities of its character. And it is with infinite pleasure I take this occasion to observe, that for several years past this class has been in a rapidly progressive state of moral amelioration; presenting, at this

moment, vast numbers whose talents, learning, principles, probity, and unassuming demeanour, render them valuable members of society and ornaments to their country. Duelling, once so remarkably prevalent in this class, has almost totally ceased. Drunkenness is no longer a common vice. Frugality has become more general than prodigality. Agriculture and commerce are now favourite pursuits. And politeness is every day more practised and more admired.

This is the class whence chiefly have issued those adventurers who have rendered themselves conspicuous, both in the military and literary annals of Europe; acquired the greatest influence in the cabinets of foreign princes; and distinguished themselves in the diplomatic line: whence likewise have sprung those multitudes of the same description, who, it must with sorrow be confessed, have disgraced and scandalized their country. And I think it of consequence to observe, that this is the class whence government, wisely and generously overlooking religious distinctions,

may *now* draw the most strenuous supporters in every line. The influence of the highest class of the Irish community, however vast in appearance, is, in reality, circumscribed and almost inefficient. The diversified talents, the eloquence, the erudition, and the energy, discoverable in the class I speak of, and which, hitherto, in consequence of the peculiar circumstances of Ireland, have been disregarded or unnoticed, will assuredly be found the fittest instruments which government can employ to render their measures acceptable and efficacious; and eventually to perfect the laudable and indispensable work of conciliation. And, did I feel my presumption equal to my solicitude for the welfare of the British empire, I would incessantly press this truth on the minds of his Majesty's Ministers.

Before I quit this class I think it necessary to apprise the reader, that, while I include in it all those minute subdivisions, which may be found between the class first spoken of and the highest class of the Irish community, commencing with the estated

gentleman of two thousand pounds a-year or thereabouts; I do so, with the exception of many persons of very moderate properties who have issued from the class above it, and, in consequence of early education and subsequent association, exhibit, for the most part, the characteristics of their parent class; and that I think it would be more consistent with precision to make a further exception of certain professions. I must likewise desire the reader to recollect, that as the extremities of each class are necessarily blended with each other, it is impossible to draw any thing like an accurate line of demarcation between them.

In the highest class of the Irish community, no qualities or acquisitions are more common than hospitality, gaiety, affability, and liberality; politeness without pride; generosity without affectation; charity without ostentation; courage without boasting; assurance without effrontery; and learning without pedantry.(F) So highly, indeed, are pride, gravity, parsimony, ostentation, and punctiliousness, disrelished

by this class of the Irish, and also by the Irish at large, that he whose character is tinged with them, will always find Ireland, in point of society, a most ineligible place of residence. The chief faults of this class, which, however, are certainly *very far* from being so universal as the amiable qualities I have just mentioned, seem to be, an almost total want of public spirit and disinterestedness; a high degree of venality; supineness and partiality in the exercise of all public functions, especially those of the magistracy; and an unbecoming and imprudent propensity to intolerance on the score of religion, unaccompanied by a due veneration for the religion they profess: faults to which many are disposed to ascribe several of the bad qualities discoverable in the characters of the lowest class of the Irish.

Throughout all the classes of the Irish community, hospitality, urbanity, confi-

(F) "Every unprejudiced traveller," says Mr. Young, "who visits Ireland, will be as much pleased with the cheerfulness as obliged by the hospitality of the inhabitants, and will find them a brave, polite, liberal, learned, and ingenious people." Tour, Vol. ii. part 2, p. 114.

dence, and vivacity are predominant; courage and sagacity very common; and a high degree of intellectual vigour by no means rare. That such a general character should be tarnished by religious animosity, injustice, political corruption, and political delinquency, cannot be sufficiently lamented.

Of the good qualities which adorn this general character, some are evidently ascribable to physical causes; their permanence therefore may be relied on. Of the bad ones which deform it, all have indisputably originated in misgovernment; their obliteration, therefore, may be effected. And we may consider ourselves at liberty to cherish the pleasing hope of seeing the day when the national character of the Irish, cleansed from the feculency that has issued from political sources, and blended with the unsullied character of Britons, may give to the general character of the people of the United islands a degree of splendour, which that of no nation under the canopy of heaven has yet exhibited.

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