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PART LXXI.

I.—*The Congested Districts.* By Richard J. Kelly, Esq., B.L.

[Read Tuesday, 2nd December, 1890.]

IN certain parts of the great province of Connaught, principally in the Counties of Mayo and Galway, and in a few spots of Donegal, in the north, are comparatively closely-populated districts where the inhabitants living upon small patches of land, are unable from the peculiar circumstances of their situation to earn a livelihood, either by the mere cultivation of their own holdings, by labour upon other farms, or in any other pursuit. To find employment they are therefore forced by these conditions of their existence into precarious and peculiar ways of living. The miserable worn-out pieces of ground they are permitted to live upon and cultivate, are, relatively to the prevailing price for good land, disproportionately over-rented. From the unscientific mode of culture adopted, the fatal habit of sowing, year after year, the same kind of crop—the inevitable but not immortal potato—the land is unsuited as well as inadequate. The ground is actually sick of this uniform, changeless, and unvarying persistence in the growing of this one kind of root, and as a consequence, the first visitation of any climatic inclemency, such as a wetter summer than usual, as was the case this year, brings with it the certain failure of the crop, which means for the growers the total loss of their main food resource—translated into hard facts means scarcity in its acutest form. To add to the deleterious results of this simple if not stupid style of cultivation, the tendency of late which has arisen to use artificial manures, and the invariable custom, which comes from ignorance, to select, not *the best*, but often the smallest and worse sorts for seed; we find many other active causes, all tending to produce the same disastrous effects.

Cultivation of a cut away bog, or of a bit of worn out soil such as the holdings of these people mainly consist of, under these primitive conditions, it is needless to say, cannot result otherwise than in intermittent failure of the crops. Indeed the wonder is not that distress

and loss should be so recurrent as to occur in almost regular biennial cycles, but that the failure and loss of crops so sown and grown, should not be constant and continuous.

The principal class of peasant who live in these congested districts are the men who, pursuing the precarious avocation of fishing, live in the villages along the coast, and the inland migratory labourers who each year go in such increasing numbers to the English harvest fields. This latter form of nomadic occupation, with all its risk, uncertainties, and drawbacks, is practically their only resource and means of living. At home, work as they may, a month's spade-labour for the majority of them at the utmost serves to put their little plot of ground under the potato, and this, once planted, beyond occasional weeding and refilling, which is generally done in a day, there is nothing at home to which they can profitably turn their hands. There is for them no labour obtainable upon farms: tillage is fast going out of fashion, and large grazing tracts that can be minded by a herd are taking its place. Whatever little cultivation goes on is pursued by the middle-class farmer, who generally employs the members of his own family in the undertaking, and rarely needs outside help. There are in the West no large manufacturing towns which might absorb or otherwise utilise this surplus land labour, and no public works carried on which would give them even temporary employment. There is no resource but the migration to England, and thither for from three to seven months these vast bodies of men annually repair. Although at home with every inducement to idleness, they are abroad a hard-working and industrious class, and better conducted men it is impossible to find in any community. Those English farmers who employ them, are usually in the habit of having the same men every time they go over, and it is no unusual occurrence to have the same workers go to the same farmstead year after year for twenty years. With many temptations to immorality, they are conspicuously and creditably moral, and in comparison with their English fellow-labourers, an honest, moral, quiet-mannered, thrifty, hard-toiling, and sober people. They live on the most frugal diet and in the most economical manner, generally sleeping in barns, outhouses, or sheds, to save the cost of lodging, and to enable them to return to Ireland with their earnings undiminished by the spending of a single unnecessary penny. So careful and saving are they, that I have known them to walk twenty miles to their homes to avoid the cost of the railway ticket, and there is not one of them who does not trudge miles rather than go any distance by rail which he could conveniently walk by road. It is almost the universal practice to take the harvest-men's ticket from some principal station in the West, such as Athlone, Claremorris, or Athenry, and go thence to a central town in England, such as Chester, Stratford, Birmingham, or Manchester, and from that walk to their destination inland. The best proof of their worth and usefulness, and of the opinion held of them by their employers, is the significant and creditable fact that they nearly always return to the same farmsteads and to the same districts where they were first employed.

This form of labour is, needless to say, very unsatisfactory, and

its earnings very precarious. The spread and use of machinery in harvest operations in the English fields, the disuse of tillage, the gradual increase of rural allotments, these and a thousand other accidents may at any moment materially interfere with, if not altogether stop, the demand. As I have said (and this is well known to any one acquainted intimately with the conditions of life in the west of Ireland), there are no native means of occupation—nothing to which these industrious men can turn their willing hands. The selfish trade policy pursued by England deprived us of our once growing manufactures, and keeps us to-day tied to the Juggernaut of Free Trade. This, a purely agricultural country, where “such a doctrine is ruination itself.” When Ireland had manufactures, and then wanted free trade, England refused to allow it, because she herself was then protecting her industries. When now we require some form of protection to keep our people at home in profitable employment, the same cruel necessity of the connection forces us to be poor and to remain so. The economic laws which should prevail in an agricultural and a manufacturing country, are entirely and necessarily different; one wants bread and meat cheap, the other suffers by their cheapness. The migratory labourers and the congested districts are some of the products of this policy.

Mill, in his instructive review of the condition of the Irish cottier, as given with such graphic force and sympathetic interest in his *Political Economy*, so exactly describes their condition and prospects, that I can do no better than quote the words of this first and best friend of Ireland in his time. Speaking of the Irish cottier, he writes what is as applicable to-day to that class as it was when penned:—

“If by extra labour he doubled all produce of his bit of land, or if he prudently abstained from producing mouths to eat it up, his only gain would be to have more left to pay his landlord, while if he had twenty children they would still be fed first, and the landlord could only take what was left. Almost alone amongst mankind the cottier is in this condition—that he can scarcely be better or worse off by any act of his own. If he were industrious or prudent nobody but his landlord would gain; if he is lazy or intemperate, it is not at his landlord's expense. A situation more devoid of motives to extra labour or self-command, imagination itself cannot conceive. The inducements to free labour are taken away and those of a slave not substituted. He has nothing to hope or nothing to fear, except being dispossessed of his holding, and against that he protects himself by the *ultima ratio* of a defensive civil war. Rockism and Whiteboyism were the determination of a people who had nothing that could be called theirs but a daily meal of the lowest description of food, not to submit to being deprived of it for other people's convenience.”—*Political Economy*, Book II. c. 9.

Mill wrote of a condition of things but little changed since his time. Independently of his own fine open mind that, undimmed by predilection or prejudice, enabled him to understand and understanding to sympathise with the real condition of the poor peasantry of Ireland, he had at the time, in the person of the lamented Professor Cairnes, then teacher of Political Economy at the Galway Queen's College, a truthful narrator, and honest, disinterested observer of the things of which they both so ably wrote. Most of the

evils of the Irish situation then nobly noted exist to-day. A certain fixity of tenure has been, to a proportion of these small holding classes, given them under the Act of 1881; a larger number, weighted down by arrears, cannot secure even that little boon, but economic conditions still keep them tied down to inadequately small bits of land. Although the population of the country has decreased, still with it has not gone on a healthy corresponding increase in the size of the remaining holdings. There still exist those districts where the population has outrun the ordinary limited means of subsistence and powers of production, so far only as affects these particular spots where, although thousands of acres are elsewhere untenanted and untilled, human beings are huddled together amid unsanitary and unnatural surroundings.

We all know the most anxious part of the complex problem of land legislation is to find a remedy and a relief for these congested spots. Peasant proprietary, or any proposal for "fixing" these men so conditioned would, without some collateral proposal to increase their holdings, but intensify the troubles of the situation. Even, if possible relieving them of all the trouble of rent, or of the payment of interest in that form, if desirable, would not be an effective cure, for the largest quantity of produce which their holdings ever yielded, or which, under their system of tillage, they could, in the most favourable seasons, be made to yield, would not enable them on that alone to live and thrive. In former times, when agriculture was more profitable, and the population more pressing, the competition for land was intense, and rents were given for conacre which left no margin for living but a sufficiency of potatoes, the rest being absorbed in rent. The consequences of their peculiar system are felt in the heavy load of arrears which now press down a large section of this class, depriving them of any incentive to exertion, and reducing them to and keeping them in a condition of helpless and hopeless misery, from which alone the State, by direct legislation, can effectively extricate them.

The remedies for relief applied by the Crofters' Commission in Scotland must be tried in Ireland, whatever other agrarian reforms are otherwise undertaken, and the short-sighted folly of the delay is unaccountable.

Every proposal for dealing effectively with the congested districts must provide for a clearance of the old arrears.

When considering the position of the Irish cottier class, Mill went very fully into the question of the best means of abolishing that objectionable form of tenancy, and the alternatives proposed, he said, reduced themselves to two—the emigration of the people, and the turning of the class into hired labourers. We all know what is the opinion of every open minded man on the policy of expatriation, and that eminent writer himself but voiced the general belief when he absolutely condemned such an idea. The historic sentences he penned in just indignation of that course of action, have since become the creed of all land reformers, as they but expressed an axiomatic truth, time-honoured, universal, and everywhere revered, except by English statesmen in their treatment of Ireland:—

“Those,” he says, speaking of emigration, our favourite specific, “who think that the land of a country exists for the sake of a few thousand inhabitants, and that as long as rents are paid, society and government have fulfilled their function, may see in this consummation a happy end to Irish difficulties. But this is not a time, nor is the human mind now in a condition, in which such insolent pretensions can be maintained. *The land of Ireland, the land of every country, belongs to the people of that country.* . . . To the owners of the rent it may be very convenient that the bulk of the inhabitants, despairing of justice in the country where they and their ancestors have lived and suffered, should seek on another continent that property in land which is denied them at home. But the legislature of a country ought to regard with other eyes the forced expatriation of millions of people.”—Book. II., c. x., p. 201.

Yet for nearly a hundred years no other cure ever once suggested itself to the minds of the rulers of this ill-starred country, no other proposal ever once found favour with them than the policy of expatriation, condemned by their greatest authority of political science, as well as by the common experience of mankind. Already, in the twenty years ending 1881, 1,387,509 Irish have been sent across the seas; yet the Irish Land Question is as far from settlement, and the country, happily, as remote from that condition of solitude its rulers would call peace, as ever. Even to-day it is as when Mill wrote:—

“The loss and the disgrace are England’s! and it is the English people and government, whom it chiefly concerns to ask themselves how far it will be to their honour and advantage, to retain the mere soil of Ireland, but to lose its inhabitants.”—*Ibid.*

Another form of remedy Mill contemplated, and which worked itself out in England, was the transformation of the cottiers into hired labourers; but that has, to a certain degree, in the curious form of migratory labour, been here produced; yet the results are, if possible, more unsatisfactory than the old condition of things. The status of such a labourer has no charm for infusing forethought, frugality, or self-restraint, into him, and the labourer remains as he he was—a cottier—

“Equally passive in the absence of every comfort—requiring the most powerful incitements by which industrial virtues can be stimulated. Far otherwise would be the effect of making them peasant proprietors.”—*Ibid.*

This seems to be admitted, and economists teach, that there is for this purpose no stimulus to exertion as yet comparable to property in land—“a permanent interest in the soil by those who till it is almost a guarantee for the most unwearied labouriousness.” Despite the full and unchecked encouragement given to emigration, and which assumed the most curious phases of unwearying activity, the holdings of the great body of the people remain disproportionately small, and the disappearance of the millions who were shipped off by philanthropy, persecution, and poverty, has not led to the consolidation and betterment of the remaining small holdings. There are more to-day of that class of tenants, in proportion to the population, than there were twenty years ago; while of the landless labourers there has been almost an actual increase in recent years.

The figures under this head are instructive. Taking the latest published returns from *Thom's Directory*, of tenancies under thirty statute acres, we find the following instructive table :—

Provinces		Not exceeding an acre.	From one to five acres.	From five to fifteen acres.	From fifteen to thirty acres
1887—	Connaught,	5,364	12,461	46,477	33,468
1888	„	5,522	12,138	46,521	33,932
1887—	Leinster,	16,002	17,704	25,681	22,412
1888	„	15,789	17,463	25,582	22,313
1887—	Munster,	11,840	10,347	18,989	24,185
1888	„	11,899	10,589	18,719	24,195
1887—	Ulster,	14,916	20,312	65,415	54,814
1888	„	14,741	20,076	65,324	54,871
1887—	For Ireland,	48,122	60,824	156,562	134,879
1888	„	47,951	60,266	156,146	175,711
		Decrease, 171	Decrease, 558	Decrease, 416	Increase, 432

Of the 499,109 agricultural holdings that in 1881 were in Ireland, there are 348,970 which do not exceed 30 acres ; 283,466 which are under 20 acres ; 226,453 which are under 15 acres ; 161,029 which do not exceed 10 acres ; 78,630 not exceeding 5 acres ; and 16,879 which are under 1 acre.

The enormous decrease which has taken place in agricultural holdings above an acre in extent, since 1841, is still more remarkable, and can be equalled by similar statistics of no other country in the world. In 1841, the number of this class stood at 691,202, which were then the agricultural holdings over 1 acre in extent ; but in 1888, the number was 514,691, showing a decrease of 176,511, or 25.5 per cent. in 47 years.

Now it is evident that holdings of Irish land, under the present received conditions of cultivation, or under any improved ones, and under the existing form of tenure, or under a peasant ownership, which are under 15 statute acres in extent, are absolutely unable to support and maintain a family. And if we fix as an arbitrary limit that very reasonable figure, we find that there are to-day 156,146 holdings under that line, while of those agricultural ones which are under an acre, and, therefore, a mere foothold and habitation, there are no less than 47,951 holdings.

It may reasonably be asked how those people, so cribbed, cabined, and confined, can manage to live under such circumscribed conditions of tenure. The problem has puzzled even those who, like myself, know their habits and ways of life intimately. There are no home manufactures to employ them, no cottage industries to occupy their leisure moments, comparatively little agricultural work

to keep them at work even half the year. Their own holdings, from their narrow extent, demand and receive but little labour. To prepare for cultivation, and plant with the facile but precarious potato, even a five acre plot, with the spade, will absorb on an average about ten weeks decent labour, and then the anxious question has to be faced—what, under such circumstances, is to be done to earn a livelihood during the remaining forty-two weeks of the dreary year. As I remarked, the chances of permanent and profitable employment at home are absolutely nil. Land is rapidly going out of cultivation, as the agricultural statistics prove, and whatever tillage is pursued is carried on by the small middle-class farmers themselves, upon their own holdings and by the labour of their own family, or by the reciprocated help of neighbours of the same class in a season of exceptional hurry. Big grazing tracts are fast taking possession of the country. Large expanses of territories, requiring but the aid of a herd, for hundreds of acres, but intensifies the evils of congestion. The ruinous extent to which tillage is being superseded by grazing suggests anything but pleasant reflections to those who have to consider that this is a purely agricultural country, and that instead of, as such, supplying itself with food, it is positively producing little in that way but store cattle to be fed and fattened for England.

The political and legislative forces which are driving land out of cultivation in Ireland, within the past six years (not to go farther back in the weary monotony of these statistics of decline), are best evidenced by a comparison of the extent of land under the principal crops within this short period. In 1882 there were 152,824 statute acres under wheat, but in 1888 there were only 29,013; while of potatoes, the figures, respectively, stood at 837,918 acres, as against 804,566. There were 1,039,307 acres under oats in 1882, as against 1,280,858 in 1888. We find that the value of the crops in 1888 (the last reliable figures as given in *Thom's Directory*) was £32,413,181. Now, as the value of the potato crop alone was estimated in that year at £7,569,621, and may probably be considered as being about the same extent for all practical purposes this year, it is no great exaggeration of the measure of the admitted loss of this crop this season (putting it roughly for the whole country at 50 per cent. less than the normal yield) as being something near £4,000,000, which loss, needless to say, falls with peculiar severity upon the small congested holdings, where it forms the staple food.

The total absence, relatively speaking, of manufacturing industries in Ireland, is shown by a few figures. In 1881 there were only 61,749 persons (of whom 3,294 were females under thirteen, and 40,086 females above thirteen years of age) employed in the north, in the flax mills and factories, while for the wool and worsted manufactures in 1881 for the forty-three factories there were 7,710 persons as against 20,762 in 1871. In the cotton manufacture there were in 1881, 85,997 persons employed. In paper manufacture only 2,301. That practically ends the list of the chief Irish manufactures and the number of people to whom they give employment. That the remaining extent of the industrial population is small is shown by the fact that only 691,509 persons out of the whole population of

5,174,836 were in 1881 employed in any industries other than agriculture, which is supposed to occupy 997,956 persons as against 198,684 professionals, and 2,788,281 non-productives—representing upon the whole an unhealthy economic condition.

Those small landholders and landless classes whom I spoke of as deprived of the opportunities of employment in their own country, have, as already explained, in annually increasing numbers, adopted a very peculiar but precarious form of international labour, and as these now constitute a very large section of the population of the congested districts, a further consideration of their numbers and status is necessary. Every year, from the spring till the autumn, for longer or shorter periods, as circumstances dictate, they repair to England, and there earn sufficient to pay the relatively high rent exacted from them for their little mud cabins and potato gardens, and enough also to support their families. Considering that the average earnings do not exceed £12, and that nearly £2 of that goes in rent, and £2 more in railway travelling, one can form a fair idea of the wonderful economy and thrift with which the domestic arrangements are conducted. Dr. Grimshaw, the intelligent director of the Registrar-General's Department, has given in a handy form some interesting statistics under this head, and adopting his figures for this year, we find a most curious, and certainly original, condition of things. It would seem that in 1890, for all Ireland, no fewer than 14,081, or 2.7 per 1,000 of the population, were migratory labourers, representing a very uncertain and almost alarming situation, for that large body of men and their dependent families solely relying upon such means of employment, are at the mercy of a thousand accidents. The gradual decrease of land under cultivation in England, the introduction of improved machinery, the spread of cottage allotments, the failure of the potato at home (as this year), any one of these facts occurring, at one stroke, makes these 14,081 labourers paupers, and fit subjects for public relief. The failure of the potato, their only food resource, as now unfortunately takes place, and as is certain in biennial cycles inevitably to recur from the primitive style of cultivation and the nature of the crop-sick ground wherein it is planted, reduces this extensive class to the direst destitution. An examination of the statistics respecting the migratory labourers, reveals the fact that they come from the poor congested districts, that they form practically their chief population, and that, excepting a small spot in Donegal, in the north, they are natives of Connaught, and principally of the two counties of Galway and Mayo. All these significant facts are shown in the tables and statistics carefully compiled by the Registrar-General.

According to Dr. Grimshaw's remarks on the returns supplied to him by the enumerators of agricultural statistics, there were in June of this year 12,028 persons who "had either left, or intended to leave, their homes to seek employment as agricultural labourers elsewhere; of these, 2,247 had not left their homes at the time of the enumeration. The corresponding number for 1888 was 11,723, showing an increase of 305, or 2.6 per cent. in the present year."

From the returns collected by the enumerators of emigrants at

Irish ports, together with the information furnished by the authorities of the Midland Great Western Railway, "it would appear that 31,031 agricultural labourers travelled as passengers journeying to seek employment at a distance from their homes. Comparing these figures with those for 1888, it appears there is a decrease of 996."

In the Midland Great Western Railway returns a slight decrease is observed, for in 1888 the number of harvestmen carried by the company was 22,800, whereas in 1889 the number was 22,435, or 365 less than in the previous year. The number of harvestmen who travelled over this line in 1887 was 21,355; in 1886 it was 21,698; in 1885 it was 22,610; in 1884 it was 22,500; in 1883 it was 22,111; in 1882 it was 21,422; in 1881 it was 26,367; in 1880 it was 27,659; in 1879 it was 22,679; in 1878 it was 23,880; and in 1877 the number was 23,264.

"A discrepancy, similar to that observed in previous years, between the results obtained by the two methods is also observable in the statistics for 1889."

"It has been ascertained that a considerable number of the agricultural labourers who migrate annually to England pay two visits. This is an element which it is impossible accurately to eliminate from the emigration and railway returns. On inquiry at the Midland Great Western Railway I have been informed that "About 2,000 go twice each year," and that, "A large number remain in the counties near Dublin."

A review of the returns furnished by the agricultural enumerators shows that the total number of those in Ireland who pursued this particular kind of employment was, in the year 1889, 12,028; or at the rate of 2.3 per 1,000 of the population, according to the census of 1881.

From the statistics supplied by the Midland Great Western Railway Company, it would seem, so far as these returns are to be relied upon, that the number of harvestmen conveyed over that system from the western stations during the season of 1889, was 22,435, nearly all being from parts of Connaught. Many may have availed of the facilities of cheap travel afforded, and taken those special tickets, who were not really *bona fide* labourers of the agricultural migratory class; but it is impossible to be more exact. From the returns compiled at the ports there were 8,596 who went as migratory labourers from January to August, excluding Dublin, 3,491 going from Belfast; 2,088 from Londonderry; 462 from Greenore; and 562 from Larne.

More than five-sixths of the entire number, or 10,271, are natives of Connaught. 7,291 coming from the County of Mayo alone, which county furnishes over one-half of all the Irish migratory labourers. The railway returns point to a similar conclusion, as the persons who travelled on "harvestmen's tickets" from the railway stations situated in that county amount to 16,176, or more than one-half of the number returned by the railway authorities and emigration enumerators combined. In 1841 also, Mayo, as pointed out in the report for 1880, was the principal source of these migratory labourers. It must not be forgotten that many

who start from Mayo stations on the Midland Great Western Railway are natives of Sligo or Galway. The 7,291 were distributed among the various poor-law unions in Mayo, the principal being Swineford, 3,193; Claremorris, 1,308; Castlebar, 1,067; Westport, 762; the numbers being much smaller for the other unions. The numbers furnished by the other counties of Connaught are:—Galway, 1,416; Roscommon, 754; Sligo, 605; Leitrim, 205.

The total number in Ulster is 1,422; of these, 954 (or 67.1 per cent.) are natives of the County of Donegal. The numbers furnished by the various poor-law unions in this county include—Glenties, 355; Millford, 210; Dunfanaghy, 199; Inishowen, 120, the other unions furnishing but small numbers. It will be observed that the numbers for the four unions named make a total of 884, showing that nearly all the migratory labourers of Donegal, and more than half of all from Ulster, are natives of the very limited area along the Donegal coast comprised in these four unions. Of the Ulster counties, the next in order to Donegal is Armagh, which has 260, of whom 114 are natives of Newry, 30 of Armagh, and 101 of Castleblaney union. The County of Down furnishes 70; Monaghan, 46; Cavan, 26; Tyrone, 26; Antrim, 18; Londonderry, 16; and Fermanagh, 6.

In the province of Leinster there are only 113 migratory labourers, principally natives of the Counties of Louth and Longford, which respectively come to 70 and 24, or five-sixths of the whole number from this province. The numbers for the other counties of Leinster are very small, ranging from nine in Wicklow to two in Kildare, Meath, and Wexford. There are no migratory labourers in Carlow, Dublin, King's Co., Queen's Co., or Westmeath.

In the province of Munster there are 222, distributed as follows among the various counties:—Kerry, 138; Cork, 55; Clare, 10; Limerick, 7; and Waterford, 2. There are no migratory labourers from Tipperary.

Comparing the foregoing analysis with the corresponding returns for the year 1888, it is found that the total number of migratory labourers has increased by 305. In the province of Leinster the numbers show a decrease of 64, or 36.2 per cent.; and in Munster an increase of 11, or 5.2 per cent. In these two provinces the numbers were so small in 1888 and 1889 that they could not have any appreciable effect on the social condition of the labouring classes or on the labour market. In Ulster the number in 1888 was 1,394, while in 1889 it is 1,422, showing an increase of 28, or 2.0 per cent. An increase of 123 occurred in Donegal, which county is the chief residence of the migratory labourers of Ulster. On referring to the figures for Connaught, it is discovered that the numbers fell from 10,128 in 1885, to 9,877 in 1886; it rose to 10,148 in 1887, fell to 9,941 in 1888, and rose to 10,271 in 1889, being an increase of 330, or 3.3 per cent., compared with the number for 1888. These figures show that a large number of the inhabitants of Connaught still pursue the avocation of migratory labourers. Mayo still heads the list with the largest number, and shows an increase of 204 compared with the previous year.

The proportion for the whole of Ireland is but 2.3 per 1,000, but when considered by provinces it is found that the proportion in Connaught is 12.5 per 1,000, in Ulster it is 0.8, in Munster, 0.2, and in Leinster, 0.1.

A more exact analysis of the numbers furnished by Connaught shows that in Mayo the proportion of migratory labourers to the population reached the large number of 29.7 per 1000; in Roscommon it was 5.7; in Galway, 5.8; in Sligo, 5.4; and in Leitrim, 2.3

In Ulster, the proportion reached 4.6 in Donegal, and 1.6 in Armagh, but in all other counties it was under 1.0 per 1,000

The number of migratory agricultural labourers, not landholders; also the number having land, and the area of their holdings, is given as follows:—

Classification of Holdings in Statute Acres.	PROVINCES				Total of Ireland.
	Leinster.	Munster.	Ulster.	Connaught.	
No. of Migratory Agricultural Labourers not Landholders,	83	208	1,087	6,872	8,250
No. having:—					
Holdings not exceeding 1 acre,	3	—	3	14	20
Do. above 1	4	—	8	41	53
Do. " 2	3	—	20	64	87
Do. " 3	4	—	28	105	137
Do. " 4	3	—	29	147	179
Total No. not exceeding 5 acres.	17	—	88	371	476
Holdings above 5	8	3	108	1,213	1,332
Do. " 10	4	—	55	876	935
Do. " 15	1	2	31	576	610
Do. " 20	—	3	11	148	162
Do. " 25	—	1	7	103	111
Do. " 30	—	2	8	57	67
Do. above 40 acres,	—	3	27	55	85
Gross Total,	113	222	1,422	10,271	12,028

From the statistics it appears that 85.4 per cent. sought work in England, 10.2 per cent. in Scotland, and 4.4 per cent. in Ireland; in Leinster of the 113 labourers, 88 sought employment in Great Britain, and 25, or 22.1 per cent., in Ireland; in Munster, of the 222 labourers, 64 sought work in Great Britain, and 158, or 7.12 per cent. merely migrated to other parts of Ireland; in Ulster, of the 1,422 labourers, 1,228 sought work in Great Britain (348 in England, and 880 in Scotland), while 194, or 13.6 per cent. sought employment in Ireland; in Connaught, of the 10,271, 10,119 sought work in Great Britain (only 340 of these in Scotland), and but 152, or 1.5 per cent. in Ireland.

Of these 12,028 Irish migratory labourers, 8,250, or 68.6 per cent.

are not landholders. The percentage for each of the four provinces of migratory labourers who are not landholders is as follows :—

Connaught,	--	--	--	--	66.9
Ulster,	--	--	--	--	76.4
Leinster,	--	--	--	--	73.5
Munster,	--	--	--	--	93.7

Of course the landholding migratory labourers are proportionally more numerous in Connaught than elsewhere, as the average amount of land held by those who are landholders is larger in Connaught than elsewhere. The number of landholders ; the number having over five acres ; the number with holdings not exceeding five acres ; and the percentage of holdings not exceeding five acres is as follows :—

Province.		Number of Migratory Labourers who are Landholders.	Holders of over five acres,	Not exceeding five acres	Percentage exceeding five acres.
Connaught,	--	3,399	3,028	371	10.9
Ulster,	--	335	247	88	26.3
Munster,	--	14	14	—	—
Leinster,	--	30	13	10	56.7

A closer study of the figures will show that it is only in Connaught where any considerable number of migratory labourers hold farms exceeding an area of fifteen acres, but in considering this point the low value of the land in many parts of Connaught must be borne in mind.

On analysis by counties and unions it will be found that the condition of the migratory labourers in relation to the land, bears pretty much the same ratio as when considered by provinces : the proportions no doubt vary within small limits. It will be observed that of the 7,291 natives of Mayo, 2,516, or 34.5 per cent., are landholders, and of 2,516 only 240, or 9.5 per cent., occupied holdings not exceeding five acres.

In Leinster the highest rate per 1,000 is 0.9 in Louth.

In all the counties of Munster the numbers were so small that they are not likely to have any important general effect.

The following are, therefore, the counties in which the influence of the migration of labourers is most likely to be felt :—Mayo, 29.7 per 1,000 ; Galway, 5.8 per 1,000 ; Roscommon, 5.7 per 1,000 ; Sligo, 5.4 per 1,000 ; Donegal, 4.6 per 1,000 ; Leitrim, 2.3 per 1,000.

The following statement shows by Poor-law unions the proportion of migratory labourers in all those districts where it exceeds 10 per 1,000 of the population :—

Poor-law Unions.	Counties in which situated.	Rate, per 1,000.
Swineford, -- --	Mayo, -- --	59.4
Claremorris, -- --	Do., -- --	41.0
Castlebar, -- --	Do., -- --	33.1
Glennamaddy, -- --	Galway, -- --	28.7
Castlereagh, -- --	Mayo and Roscommon, -- --	22.3
Mountbellew, -- --	Galway, -- --	18.8
Westport, -- --	Mayo, -- --	18.6
Tobercurry, -- --	Sligo, -- --	15.9
Ballina, -- --	Mayo and Sligo, -- --	15.3
Dunfanaghy, -- --	Donegal, -- --	11.9

In Mayo no less than 13.1 per cent. of the adult male population usually seek such employment at a distance from their homes, while in no other county in Ireland does the proportion reach 3 per cent.

In Galway the proportion is 2.3 per cent. ; in Roscommon, 2.3 ; in Sligo, 2.2 ; in Donegal, 1.8 ; in no other county does it reach 1 per cent.

The very slender resources upon which these people manage to live are bad enough, and render their position almost unendurable, if to these inconveniencies and hardships of their life were not added the miserable hovels they are forced to live in. The census of 1881 furnishes us with figures upon this subject. According to it we find there were no less than 15,458 houses in Munster of what is designated the fourth-class (that is, practically, a one-roomed hovel) ; 7,042 in Ulster ; in Leinster, 9,383 ; 8,782 in Connaught, and in all Ireland, 40,665 ; while of the third-class, or two-roomed cabin, there were 88,329 for Munster ; 133,724 for Ulster ; for Leinster, 75,576 ; 86,846 for Connaught ; and 384,475 for all Ireland. If the habitations of the people are any indication of their comfort, a more cheerless, comfortless condition of things could not possibly be found than these figures reveal. Comparing the statistics of 1881 under this head with those of a like character for previous decennial periods, a lamentable decrease is noticeable in the number of the houses of the peasantry, and this not compensated for in any degree by a corresponding increase in a better-class accommodation. We find on analysing these tables, that in 1851, for instance, there were 6.3 persons in each house ; in 1861, 5.8 ; in 1871, 5.6 ; and in 1881, 5.6. Though in 1881 the number of first-class houses increased by 41,127 as compared with 1871, and by 11,311 as with 1861, and the second-class by 41,127 as with 1861, and by 61,543 as with 1871,—these being mainly civic structures, yet the total number of inhabited houses was reduced to 914,108 in 1881, as compared with 961,380 in 1871, and 995,156 in 1861. In 1881, the first and second-class were in the proportion of 53 per cent. of the entire number, while in 1871 they were as 46 per cent. In 1871 there were 519,783 third and fourth-class houses inhabited by 534,274 families ; in 1881 these numbers ran down to 425,140, in-

habited by 431,119 families, showing a reduction of 94,643 houses, and 103,155 families within the ten years. The total number of families from 1851, shows a steady decrease, being then 1,204,119 as against 995,074 in 1881; the decrease in families living in houses of the third-class—the ordinary small farmer cottage being from 588,440 to 390,094, while in houses of the fourth-class, the pure labourer population, it was from 284,224 to 40,665. These sad figures mean the decimation of the labour population, whence were drawn the best recruits for the British army and navy. With their decline has declined the men of Irish nationality in the services, and in being obliged instead to pick up and drill the weak off-scourings of their city slums, the English people are paying one of the penalties of their policy of expatriation of the people of Ireland. It requires a few Majuba Hills to make them see if they have benefited by the bargain. And, nevertheless, the Irish land problem is unsolved, and the congestion of the population is as bad as ever.

Now, brought face to face with this people, a large proportion of them as we see with no settled foothold in the land, most of them with but a paltry holding of over cropped and worn-out soil under eternal, changeless cultivation, the problem of congestion has to be faced. It is evident from the experience of the past forty years of rigorous banishings, that emigration is not the remedy. The overstocked labour markets of America and the Colonies are very properly objecting to the policy of the English government shooting into their cities the pauper peasants of Ireland, and practically we are at the beginning of the end of transatlantic toleration of that peculiar system of government—peculiar alone to this great empire. An alternative remedy more in consonance with economic laws and humanity offers itself in a generous and liberal policy of migration. There exist in Ireland thousands of acres of splendid grazing land which might be purchased and partitioned among these agricultural labourers, if the necessary grant for the purpose were voted by parliament. The money so advanced should not under any circumstances be of an eleemosynary character, but, on the contrary, partake of the sound character of a loan, repayable at a low rate of interest in 100 half-yearly instalments, or in less than fifty years if so agreed. That the security for such advances is unquestioned, the returns published by the Land Commission respecting their extensive, beneficial, and complicated transactions, indubitably prove, and are, indeed, most creditable to the honesty and probity of the contracting parties. We find that down to September of this year, out of £5,758,230, being the amount of loans issued, only £5,581 was unpaid—a remarkable fact, considering the depressing conditions under which farming has since been pursued, and the high rate of purchase often given. With that evidence of honesty before them, the British rate-paying public need have no misgiving in risking their credit to any amount to help the Irish farmer and labourer to get out of the difficulties English laws reduced them to. That experiment of migration, if carried out on a sufficiently thorough scale, would be costly, and some ugly collateral rights of tenants now holding the lands as graziers or otherwise, and imagining they possess the same inalienable

right to them as the holders of ordinary agricultural land, may be found on practice to arise, but into that aspect of the question I am not concerned to inquire.

There is a class of land now standing useless in the market, and capable of improvement and utilisation—the reclaimable waste lands, which could, at a comparatively small sum for purchase, be easily and cheaply secured. Mill, speaking of this subject in connection with the means of abolishing the cottier tenancy, thus writes:—

“A large proportion also of the present holdings are probably still too small to try the proprietary system under the greatest advantages; nor are the tenants always the persons one would desire to select as the first occupants of peasant properties. There are numbers of them on whom it would have a more beneficial effect to give them the hope of acquiring a landed property by industry and frugality than the property itself in immediate possession. There are, however, much milder measures, not open to similar objections, and which, if pushed to the utmost extent of which they are susceptible, would realise in no inconsiderable degree the object sought. One of them would be, to enact that whoever reclaims waste land becomes the owner of it at a fixed quit rent, equal to a moderate interest on its mere value as waste. It would, of course, be a necessary part of this measure to make compulsory on landlords the surrender of waste lands (not of an ornamental character), whenever required for reclamation. Another expedient, and one in which individuals could co-operate, would be to buy as much as possible of the land offered for sale, and sell it again in small portions as peasant properties.”—*Political Economy*, Book II, c. x, p. 203.

It would be too difficult and complex a subject to go into the important question here and now, of whether ordinary grazing tracts or the reclaimable waste lands should be selected for the purposes of migration. A great deal will depend upon the class of land which happens to be contiguous to the congested quarter, for that kind of land is what preferentially should be appropriated for the purpose. That something should and must be done in the direction of migration is evident from the general condition of the country, and the absence of any means of employment provided by either by public or private sources. No reliance can be placed to permanently relieve congestion on the ordinary and normal opportunities of labour. Despite all that has been of recent years done, the anxious problem of the unemployed labour population still remains unsolved and practically insoluble, except by increasing their land-takes, and finding work for them on their own holdings, thus keeping them out of the overcrowded labour markets at home and in England. Undoubtedly, a deal of good has resulted from the passing of the several acts dealing with the dwellings of agricultural labourers, and, as a result, some solid improvement has been made in their condition. We find that the number of loans sanctioned since the passing of the Act 23 Vic., c. 19, was 664, amounting to £325,660—the cases sanctioned in 1888-'89 being 13, amounting to £3,020. But the fact of the measure being purely permissive has considerably interfered with its utility, and confined its operations to quarters where it is not so urgently needed. In the West, and in those parts of it particularly which

are known as the congested districts, the overcrowded villages and sea-coast hamlets, where the habitations of the people are most wretched, it is a lamentable fact that the Act is practically a dead letter, and that nothing has been done in the desirable direction of improving the dwellings of these poor people. A serious defect of the measure is the disproportion existing between the work done and the cost. The machinery has been so complicated and expensive that a great deal more is eaten up in preliminary law costs than in actual work.

To the various Tramway or Light Railway Acts the labouring population are indebted for some means of employment, and some opportunities of local earning. Despite their many drawbacks, these projects have done good, and are calculated to do still more in the near future. Since their initiation in 1883 to 1887, when the last returns were published, 428 miles of railway, guaranteed upon the public rates, have been built, involving an expenditure of £1,884,816, and a guaranteed capital of £1,672,032. It is to be hoped there will be a considerable extension of these state-aided projects, as it is now evident that unless so encouraged there is no possibility of their otherwise being made. In this and in every other direction of private enterprise there unfortunately is very little disposition to avail of any of the facilities afforded for giving useful employment and improving land, and this deplorable want of private initiative makes it more urgent for the government to actively undertake the duties so scandalously neglected by the owners of land. Under various acts encouragement is given for draining and improving land; yet, although no country is in more urgent need of such, there has been very little done. Since 1847 only £4,875,348 was given in loans for this purpose, including £923,620 given out at one per cent. in 1880, and last year alone only £30,125 was applied for. For the aid of local drainage advantageous loan terms are offered; yet there only fifty-three districts formed, and there have been only 87,964 Irish statute acres drained or improved, at a cost of £555,631. For planting—and that is a matter as urgent as drainage—only 103 loans were granted since the passing of the Act 29 and 30 Vic., c. 40, and of this amount only two, amounting to £950, were sanctioned last year. It is thus evident that the amount of work given, or likely to be given, by all the various means of private enterprise, is very little, and can never be depended upon, under any circumstances, to afford sufficient employment to even a fourth of the labouring population. This fact, undeniably proved by the unerring test of statistics, renders it imperative on the government to itself become the employer of this unutilised labour, and makes it necessary that substantial employment should be found for them. It shows clearly that the ordinary instruments of employment in the country are inefficient, and helplessly incapable and unwilling to afford any. As a large proportion of the congested districts consists of the sea-coast villages, it may be interesting to consider for a moment what state encouragement has been given them in their precarious pursuit. We find that the number of men engaged in the salmon

fisheries in 1888 was 13,255, while the value of the fish exported was £33,948; but this is capable, with careful supervision, of being still more remuneratively increased. The coast fisheries, however, more intimately concern the congested districts. Take the mackerel fishery in 1888, for instance. It was less than the previous year, being in amount caught 160,725 boxes of two cwt., realising £129,084; while poaching on the Irish preserves, for want of official encouragement to native fishermen, were 21 Scotch, 86 French, and 357 English vessels in that year alone. The Irish herring fishery, which should be a staple native industry, is prosecuted on the east coast by 1,000 boats, large numbers, as elsewhere, being foreign, the proportion being, for the whole of Ireland, 1,053 of which 757 were Irish, and 232 Scotch. Although our seas abound with fish, still we imported from Scotland in 1888 34,038 barrels of cured fish. The amount captured was 65,249 mease realising £51,868. The Irish oyster fishery, so capable of development, in 1888, only came to 1,040 barrels, realising £550. The Irish deep-sea fisheries, judging by the figures published of the number of registered vessels from 1864 to 1882, annually declined. Then there were 9,300 vessels and boats, employing 40,946 men and boys; while in 1882 there were 5,827 vessels, and 21,801 men and boys. According to the collectors of customs and coastguard returns (the latest published), the number of craft of all descriptions engaged in fishing for sale in 1888, was 5,827, and the crews 21,801, consisting of 21,003 men and 798 boys. The number partially engaged in fishing was 4,326, and crews 15,386; and the number solely engaged was 1,501, and crews 6,415. The extent of the development of the fisheries may be best seen by an examination of even their present values. In 1888 the returns of the cod fishery in Ireland were valued at £145,230; mackerel, £80,425; herring, £131,902, and salmon, £491,100. All these figures point to the vast margin for development which exists, and show the great expansion possible under an intelligent and kindly system of state encouragement. This aid to the fisheries, if well directed and applied, would undoubtedly go far towards relieving the pressure of population in the congested sea-coast villages. All these facts and figures clearly reveal the actual condition of the agricultural labour population which form the congested districts, and it is evident that they must be taken into careful consideration in any measure proposing to deal effectively with that anxious and difficult problem. That the question is urgent is too plainly evident, and that the sooner it is grappled with the better for the interests of peace and progress requires no argument to prove. Whatever remedy is tried, it is to be hoped it will be thorough, complete, and satisfactory, not a mere piecing and patching over of the difficulty, a temporary tiding over the present troubles, but a measure of practical, enduring, and general good.