

English Taxation in America

Author(s): Thos. F. Meehan

Source: *The North American Review*, Vol. 145, No. 372 (Nov., 1887), pp. 563-567

Published by: University of Northern Iowa

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25101342>

Accessed: 14-08-2017 00:20 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



University of Northern Iowa is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The North American Review*

ENGLISH TAXATION IN AMERICA.

A SPEAKER at one of the recent meetings held in New York City to collect money for the Irish Parliamentary Fund said that the tax which the fathers of the Republic denied to England when they threw the tea into Boston harbor she has been collecting ever since by the indirect taxes Irish landlordism has imposed on one of our most important industrial classes. The point he thus made is one that seems to escape the notice of most American sympathizers with the Irish cause. It is an economic truth that ought to arouse the attention of all patriotic Americans.

“Irish landlordism,” says another writer dealing with this topic, “works like the darkey’s coon trap, that ‘cotched ’im a comin’ and cotched ’im a goin’.” The Irish landlord first robs the old people of the fruits of their toil, by an impossible rent, and then forces the young people off to America, to make up, under our more favorable surroundings, what is necessary to meet the exactions the soil of Ireland refuses any longer to yield. They thus profit, in a double way, by emigration, and have the energies of the Irish race, on both sides of the Atlantic, employed for their behoof.”

This is no rhetorical exaggeration, but a plain, everyday matter of fact ; for which one late instance will serve as a sufficient example. In the *New York World* of August 25th, 1887, there appeared the following news item :

“During William O’Brien’s tour through Canada he had no such harrowing tale of Lord Lansdowne’s cruelty to tell as that related yesterday in the office of Father Riordan, in Castle Garden, by Timothy Sullivan, of Bouane, near Kenmare, County Kerry, Ireland. Sullivan called at the Mission of Our Lady of the Rosary to request Father Riordan to send home \$25, which represented Sullivan’s earnings since he came to this country six weeks ago. His father, Daniel, was evicted some months ago by Lord Lansdowne’s order. With his four little children he was compelled to sleep in the open air, and every penny he could scrape together was used in paying Tim’s passage to this country with the hope that his labors here would be sufficiently remunerative to regain the farm. About six weeks ago Daniel, driven to desperation, entered the land from which he had been

evicted, for the purpose of taking with him enough vegetables to feed his hungry children. For this he was arrested, convicted, and sentenced to one month's imprisonment at hard labor. Tim is afraid that his brothers and sisters are now starving. He is working with a farmer at Flatlands, L. I., where he is earning only \$18 a month."

It is often asked, Why do not the Irish settle down quietly and peacefully here, like their fellow-emigrants from Germany or Scandinavia, and not be a continual source of political and social trouble to their American-born fellow citizens, and of unrest and unsatisfied ambitions to themselves? The answer is contained in the pathetic story of the Kerry peasant.

From May, 1851, when the official figures of the great Irish exodus first began to be collected, to the end of July, 1887, according to the statistics of the English Registrar-General, there have emigrated from Ireland, in round numbers, 3,169,500 persons, the majority of whom came to the United States. The proportion can be judged from the figures of the first seven months of the present year, during which time, of the 55,338 persons who emigrated from Ireland 49,830 came here. The most of these were victims of Irish landlordism, and were the flower of the youth and vigor of an industrious, hard-working people—the most profitable and desirable class of citizens any country could have. But, though all admit that they have become one of the most important parts of our social fabric, yet the Republic has never been able to reap the full measure of their energies, because, unlike the men of other nationalities, they were never free from the annoyances, unrest, and direct loss that the reflex action of the rack-renting Irish land system imposes upon their industry and labor here.

A familiar taunt in the English press is the sneer that Irish agitation lives on the savings of American servant girls. There is a very judicious silence kept over the indisputable fact that it is the Irish landlords, not the agitators, who have been living on the money wrung from the servant girls and servant men of America. Thousands among the readers of the *NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW* can bear personal testimony how the toilers in their employment labor, month after month, and year after year, only to send across the Atlantic, like the Kerry peasant, the bulk of their earnings. One of the most common things in our brokers' offices and in many savings banks is the sign: "Sight drafts for £1 and upwards on the — Bank of Ireland for sale here." How few stop

to think that those words—you never see them written of any other nation—are a eulogy as trumpet tongued of the fidelity and generosity of the Irish exiles to their kin beyond the sea, as they are unprofitable to American progress and industry. The figures of the tax Irish landlordism has thus wrung as tribute from American toilers are startling when considered in bulk. *One hundred millions of dollars* would scarcely cover the drain from 1848 to the present time. T. M. Healy, M. P., in his “Why there is an Irish Land Question,” says :

“During the famine period, the exiled Irish in America sent over large sums to their friends at home, most of which, it may be presumed, went into the landlords’ pockets to pay the rent. The following statement of sums remitted by emigrants in America to their families in Ireland, *through bankers alone, exclusive of money sent privately*, was printed by order of Parliament :

During 1848...	£460,180
“ 1849.....	540,619
“ 1850.....	957,087
“ 1851.....	990,811
Total....	£2,948,697

“Between 1848 and 1864 the Irish emigrants had sent back to Ireland upwards of £13,000,000,” says Lord Dufferin’s “Irish Emigration and Tenure of Land in Ireland.”

The Irish Emigrant Society of New York, since it was started in 1841, has transmitted to Ireland over three millions of pounds sterling, mostly in small drafts, more than the majority of its customers being Irish servant girls. This, though the principal agent for financial exchanges of this character, is only one of the many that exist in Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, San Francisco, and other centres, where there is a large Irish American population. Chief Justice Charles P. Daly, who was chairman of the New York Irish Relief Committee in 1846–47, at a meeting for a similar purpose, held in the Astor House, in 1862, stated that he had traced, through the New York public and private agencies for the remission of money to Ireland, no less than five millions of dollars sent from this city up to that date, and of the remittances included in that sum not one exceeded five pounds in amount, the majority being for sums of two pounds and one pound, clearly showing this immense sum was drawn directly from the scanty earnings of the most hard-working and poorest paid class of our industrial masses. These cold statistical figures, always in arrear, much understate the love-tax that landlord greed has filched through the pressure it has exerted on the sore hearts

of the Irish exiles in America. A well-worn line in the press accounts of the recent harrowing evictions in Ireland is the statement that the rents were faithfully paid "until the remittances from America failed."

The hardest fact in all this sad story is the certainty that the heroic sacrifices of the Irish-American toilers fail to achieve the object for which they strive. The Irish tenants are as badly off as ever they were, and have benefited little by these great sums of money that were almost immediately devoured by the rapacious appetite of landlordism, to be spent, for the most part, in riot and pleasure by the absentees in England or on the Continent. No repugnance was ever felt by Irish landlords over accepting money coming from such a source, nor did their allies of the English press ever deride the tribute or the class whence it came. It is only when, exasperated at the continued injustice and cruelty of the age-old tyranny, the Irish exiles add the additional tax on their industries of a contribution to political organizations founded to put an end to the evil under which their brethren in Ireland have groaned so long, that the English landlord organs come forward with their sneers about the "money of the Irish servant girls of America."

The sums sent over to Ireland by patriotic political organizations are but trifles when compared to the amounts that year after year have been remitted privately by emigrants in America to their families in Ireland. At the conference in Dublin, on October 17th, 1882, Patrick Egan, in resigning his position as Treasurer of the Irish National League, stated that from October, 1879, up to that date, there had passed through his hands for the various Irish National funds the sum of \$1,224,100.

At the last convention of the Irish National League of America, held at Chicago, in August, 1886, the General Treasurer of the organization acknowledged the receipt—in the two years from August 15th, 1884, to August 19th, 1886—of the sum of \$363,508. At the previous convention of the same body, held in Boston in August, 1884, the financial statement showed the receipt, from May 1st, 1883, to August 11th, 1884, of \$40,076. At the convention in Philadelphia, in April, 1883, the treasurer showed that his remittances to Ireland during a little over two years previously had been \$210,531.76. During seven years therefore American industry had been taxed by Irish agitation in the vast

sum of \$614,415, every penny of which was lost to American commercial interests.

This was only one leak, however. During the same period there had been contributions sent over through the New York Irish Parliamentary Fund (the "Hoffman House Committee") to the amount of \$137,000; through the Brooklyn and other similar committees of the Irish Parliamentary Fund, say \$40,000; the "Parnell Testimonial" \$30,212; the "A. M. Sullivan Testimonial" \$6,000, and various other items that would foot up another total of at least \$300,000, and make a round million contributed in public Irish funds in the past seven years. This year, although there has been a comparative lull in the collection of money for Irish political agitation, about \$100,000 has already been sent over to Ireland, and of this amount \$65,000 was sent in two lump sums—\$35,000 by the Hoffman House Committee and \$30,000 by the Irish National League, within the past two months.

These few figures will show the thinking American the enormous proportions to which this continual drain on the resources of the country has grown. They should make him, if he does not already, from higher motives, sympathize with the cause, an ardent advocate of Home Rule and national autonomy for Ireland. He surely cannot view without an indignant remonstrance any impediment to the remedy that must put an end to the necessity of sending so many millions of hard-earned American money across the Atlantic. And, if impelled by this strictly commercial motive alone, he investigate the subject a little further, he will find that, with the stoppage of this drain on Irish-American industrial and financial progress, the loss of which, of course, the Republic is too rich to feel the immediate result, there will also have been removed a most irritating cause of disturbance from our social, political, and commercial life, in the repose and relief that shall have been brought to the people of Ireland.

The logic of figures is incontestable, and the arithmetical view of the Irish question, in its relations to American industrial progress, is one that seems to have occasioned too little consideration from the parties most interested financially. When it is laid bare to public criticism, it adds another to the many proofs that, taken no matter from what point, moral, social, or commercial, Irish feudal landlordism, in the language of one of its chiefest organs, the *London Times*, "stinks in the nostrils of Christendom."

THOS. F. MEEHAN.