

THE IRISH CENSUS

(From the Times.)

In another column will be found a painful, but we believe, an authentic communication on the Irish census. That census is this year the summing up of events and changes such as have rarely afflicted or disturbed modern civilization. Indeed the tenor and sameness of human affairs in these latter times have left the mind almost unprepared for results so vast and so strange as those we have now to contemplate. It appears that the population of Ireland is at this moment very little more than six millions and a half. It is absolutely less than it was in 1821, and more than two millions short of the number that would have been reached in the natural order of things, but for the extraordinary occurrences of the last ten years. So startling a fact will, of course, become the subject of the closest inquiries; and it is only as the first step in a very long controversy that the attention of our readers is directed to some obvious considerations. The whole emigration from those islands during the last ten years has been 1,600,000. Of that number it is ascertained that at least 1,100,000 have emigrated from Ireland alone. There is, however, no doubt that of the remaining 500,000 many thousands were Irish, who have only used England as a stepping-stone to the New World; and it is also clear that the places of many English and Scotch emigrants have been supplied by Irish new comers. The population of this island, as returned in the census, is more than enough to be accounted for by the natural rate of increase. Although we have had cholera, influenza, dearth, and emigration, the increase for Great Britain, though a little below the rate of former periods, is still more than would arise from the natural growth of the population. Hence, for every Englishman that has fallen a victim to epidemic, or that has left this island, at least one native of Ireland has stepped into his place. In the column to which we refer attention is called to another consideration, familiar to those who have watched the increase of our own metropolitan and other civic populations. The great staple of a large emigration is just the very class from whom the increase of population is to be expected. The great inducement to a step in itself so perilous and so painful is the wish to provide for a family coming on, or to settle and marry with some prospect of comfort. The very young, the aged, and the invalid remain. Thus the decayed and barren stocks are left behind, and the prolific young shoots are taken away in the fulness of their bearing and growth. Hence the immense increase which has provoked such sanguine speculations as to the future of the United States. Hence the two additional millions found in this island after the ravages of disease and the drain of emigration. Hence also the enormous and increasing gap left in Ireland, deserted as it is by the young, the healthy, the able, and the industrious, and resigned to the orphan, the widow, the sick, and the aged. Nor must we forget that this fact is prospective. The six and a-half millions remaining in Ireland are not, as a whole, the prolific race that the eight millions and two hundred thousand were in 1841.

There can, indeed, be no doubt that some of the causes of this unparalleled reverse are most obvious and painful. Unquestionably, several hundreds of thousands have perished prematurely by famine, by fever, by cholera, by diarrhoea, by slow hunger, by nakedness, by want of fuel, by insufficient habitation, by want of medical aid, by neglect of neighbours, by desertion of friends, by the lowest possible rate of existence, and by the uttermost prostration of spirits. A quarter of a million poor creatures huddled at one time in workhouses or extempore additions to them, and even more than that number of habitations swept from the earth, testify to the almost incredible straits to which the Irish population has lately been reduced. Health, strength, wealth, hope, and life itself have fled from these ill-fated shores, leaving behind a miserable remnant, continually more incapable of providing for itself, or fulfilling the many offices of a Christian community. It must needs fare ill with the orphan, the widow, the cripple, the aged, and all the other feeble classes, when the healthier element has been filtered away, and they are left as dregs behind. Indeed, it is due to those upon whom have devolved the duties of public charity in Ireland, and who have discharged those duties hitherto with such indifferent success, to observe that their burden has been aggravated, as well as their hearts hardened, by the continual flight of those who should have borne the burden in the first instance. These miseries and difficulties, too, have not been equally diffused over the whole island. Their operation has been concentrated in certain districts, and rendered thereby more potent and disastrous. As to the exact proportion of causes contributing to the whole decrease of two millions, the census will give us but partial assistance. It will not tell us the premature deaths, or the deficiency of births, nor is there any registration in Ireland to supply these facts; it will not tell us, except in the rough, the migrations to foreign countries or to this island; nor is it easy to see how we shall ever obtain exact information on these points. One singular result comes out on a comparison of the British and Irish census. It appears that the aggregate population of these islands is only about half a million more than it was ten years ago, and that instead of increasing at the rate of a thousand a-day, as is generally supposed, we have only increased at the rate of a thousand a-week; nor is there any immediate probability of the rate being considerably increased.