

Marriage in Ireland after the Famine: The Diffusion of the Match¹

By K. H. CONNELL, Queen's University

(Read before the Society in Dublin on 16th December, 1955, and in Belfast on 20th January, 1956)

Of all the casualties of Irish social life in the decades after the Famine, one of the most significant was marriage of the kind which had become all but universal in peasant² families. Many of the characteristics of social and economic life in the two generations before the Famine depended on the readiness with which men and women, in their early twenties or younger, could arrange to marry, giving hardly a thought to their future source of income—the conventional standard of living was low, but few needed to doubt their ability to provide it for a growing family. The marriages that followed engagements so spontaneous were youthful and general. They were the immediate cause of the doubling of population in little more than half a century; they were a cause, as they were also an outcome, of the extreme fragmentation of holdings and of the extension of arable farming. Nor can the fire of the agrarian agitation of the 'thirties be explained if its participants' defence of the only family structure they knew is overlooked. More obvious, it is true, than this defence is the attack on property, but no small part of the offence of the owners of property lay in their increasing, and understandable, intolerance of a form of marriage which tended to decrease their receipts from rent only less rapidly than it swelled the number of their tenants—and a numerous tenantry might become a costly liability if the advocates of a poor law had their way.

The peasantry was attached to this form of marriage by more than its familiarity over a mere couple of generations. In a community which lacked so largely institutional provision for sickness, widowhood and old age, common prudence pointed to the virtues of early marriage. By its means too, the peasant father in Ireland, more fortunate than many of its kind elsewhere, was spared the anxieties associated with the establishment of his children. His sons, on their own initiative and whenever they pleased, could marry and secure their customary standard of living on land which their father or a neighbour did not miss, or on land newly won from mountain or bog. We should, perhaps, be chary of believing that Irish peasant-life ever

¹ This paper embodies part of the argument of a wider discussion of the history of Irish population since the Famine. I hope, in the larger work, to document or modify conclusions that are insecurely supported here.

I am very grateful to Professor Habakkuk for a number of criticisms he made of an earlier draft of this paper.

² A note on the use of the word "peasant" will be found on p. 94.

ghistened with the gaiety and contentment of its reflection in the eyes of a Carleton or a Lover. But, such is human resourcefulness, we are not required to believe that all was drab, even in the half-century which Ireland used to demonstrate how European life might most frugally be maintained and multiplied. Some relief, some contentment there was, and when its source was neither religion nor the potato-pot, ever filled with its strikingly adequate diet, most probably it was to be found in an institution of marriage entered virtually by all, of their own choice and at an uncommonly youthful age.

Before the Famme, then, it was not unreasonable for peasant sons and daughters, while still young adults, to feel that they could, at will, transform themselves into husbands or wives. The first move towards marriage was their own. But during the Famme, and in the following years, children commonly lost this initiative to their fathers. A marriage came to be heralded by commercial rather than biological advances, and until the two fathers concerned had completed their negotiations their children remained unmarried. Any clash of will between fathers and sons was incidental to this shift of the source of decision. After the Famme, as before, it was customary for a couple to marry only when assured of adequate land—land, that is, sufficient to promise the support of a new family. Before the Famme “adequacy” had been finely defined: none had long to spend looking for his few acres. But afterwards tenants (and landlords even more so) had lost their faith in tiny holdings. And for reasons more compelling, if farms were to be made viable, they had also to be made larger. We must digress now from the transformation of the institution of marriage to seek the causes of the consolidation of holdings which underlay it.³

³ The extent of consolidation is suggested by the following table, but on its reliability see p. 90, n. 6.

Distribution by size of agricultural holdings in Ireland

Year	Size of holdings in thousands of acres								
	1-5		5-15		15-30		above 30		Total
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No
1841 ¹	310	43.6	253	36.6	79	11.5	49	7.0	691
1861 ¹	85	15.0	184	32.3	141	24.8	158	27.8	568
1891 ²	56	11.8	139	29.7	120	25.7	153	32.7	469
1911 ³	54	11.1	140	28.8	129	26.6	163	33.5	485
1949 ⁴	No 120		% 29.8		106	26.5	175	43.7	401

¹ British Parliamentary Papers, 1867-8, iv, p. 631.

² Census of Ireland, 1891, B P P, 1892, xc, pp. 216-9, and 349.

³ Census of Ireland, 1911, B P P, 1912-13, cxviii, pp. 430-1.

⁴ Report of Emigration Commission, Dublin, 1955, p. 43, *Ulster Year Book*, Belfast, 1955, p. 60. The figures for Northern Ireland included in these totals relate to the year 1952.

Ever since 1815 the coincidence of circumstances which permitted extensive tillage in Ireland had become increasingly forced only the efforts of the peasants, pressed at times to violence, had obstructed the revival of the pastoral farming which the landlords preferred and the economists justified. But now, in the upheaval of the Famine, the peasants lost both the will and the power to preserve their economy of cottar-tillage. In the 'seventies its effacement has hastened as even the most favoured of European corn-growers saw in protection the pre-requisite of their survival, and nothing was more improbable in the politics of Westminster than protection of the peasants of Ireland.

As pasture-farming extended⁴ it was clear that it could be more productively practised on holdings larger than those which had emerged from the Famine, swollen though these already were with land cleared by eviction, emigration or death. And for all the perversity of the Irish economy, forces did exist which tended to enlarge farms towards their optimum size. Pasture-farming called for larger holdings chiefly because the family was the typical unit of labour seldom, of course, in the past, had agricultural labour been stretched to the limit, but a family could hardly be unaware of opportunities missed if it simply tended stock on land which its predecessor had tilled (and tilled, quite possibly, with the spade). But in the years after the Famine the landlord was more likely than the tenant to aim at a fuller employment of the tenant's labour for still he was its more likely beneficiary.

The motives of Irish landlordism were little softened by the Famine. It is probable that for at least the preceding decade the trend of rent-receipts, if nothing more, had taught property owners that the rural economy was slipping, if not careering, to disaster. Remedies they had urged, seldom, however, to see them practised when, at last, the disaster came it clearly was to be attributed, not to the landlords' policy, but to their powerlessness to enforce it. To the landlords the Famine called, not for a change of heart, but for a stronger arm, and if their arm was not strengthened, at least that of their opponents was weakened. The chief structural change in the class of Irish landlords in the years immediately following the Famine was a consequence of the Encumbered Estates Act of 1848. Its application restored to Ireland what for long her patriots had lamented, a native landowning class. But, wryly, the more native landlords that Ireland acquired the more must the fervour of her patriots have been tried. Encumbered estates were bought, for the most part, by middlemen and close-fisted traders, gombeen men of one sort or another who else, indeed, in Ireland in the 1850's would bid for land? And men such as these seem to have behaved with little less exigence than their predecessors.

In the years of the Famine and its immediate aftermath we are, then, confronted with no newly benign landownership requiring that we work out afresh the dynamics of rural society. After the Famine,

⁴ In the 26 counties the area under hay and pasture in 1851 was returned at 8 495 000 acres, in 1901 at 10,769 000 acres (Report of Emigration Commission, Dublin 1955 p 38)

as before, the central force in the Irish economy was the drive of rent, and so insistently was it applied that profit as a spur to the tenant-farmer was still rubbed away, almost to unreality. In circumstances such as these, when farms were enlarged, commonly the aim was to make the tenant a more capable rent-payer, not a more prosperous person.

But the consolidation of holdings survived into the year's when piecemeal, the pressure of rent was withdrawn from the rural economy, it is in these years, dominated by the land legislation, that the dynamics of the old rural society were outmoded. Formerly, while he remained a peasant, a man could seldom, with reason, aspire to a higher standard of living, except in the odd fortunate year or under the odder dutiful landlord. A lasting improvement in his condition was improbable, save as a reward for more productive farming, but as the more probable reward of increasing effort was a proportional, or at least a disputing, increase in rent, not unnaturally peasant farming remained slovenly and the peasant's life wretched.

But when rent-payments were fixed the peasant himself might benefit from increasing the yield of his farming. Ignorance as well as habits long ingrained, dissuaded him from any rash application of the methods of farmers overseas—and some of them, doubtless, were ill-suited to tiny fields and rocky land. There was more to appeal to him, however, in the alternative policy of adding to the number of his acres: in this way a family might rear more cattle, grow more cattle food, pocket more profit, and yet escape the anxiety that came of jettisoning savings on machines that might prove as unnatural as they looked, and it might avoid also the qualms inseparable from the abandonment of practices endeared and vouched for by long tradition. It was thus, shaped and egged on by the land legislation, that the Irish came also to display a classic trait of peasant life elsewhere—the lust for land.

After the Famine, we have argued, the size of holdings tended to increase as an effect of the extension of pasture-farming, and as a demonstration of how first landlords and then tenants sought to profit from the economies of size. This was not the only way in which the peasants' desire for a higher standard of living tended to make farms larger, and in the great and sustained flow of emigration there was yet another impetus towards consolidation.

The dominance of the potato over the Irishman's field and board was a condition of the old, uninhibited marriage: there was no other crop (none, at least, that flourished under Irish skies) which enabled a family to feed itself on the yield of a few acres. It was quite inevitable that the overthrow of the potato should make marriage more discriminate, and one of the ways in which it did so was by making young men and women more exacting than their parents in estimating the land necessary to endow a marriage. When the years of charitable relief had passed one thing was common to virtually all of the foodstuffs which the peasants increasingly used to supplement their potatoes: whether they were bought or grown by the people who used them, more land had to be earmarked for their acquisition than had been needed to grow the quantity of potatoes which they displaced. We have already seen how the swing towards pasture-farming

tended to enlarge the rent-producing portion of the peasant's land. We can now see that at the same time the provision of a more varied dietary tended to enlarge also the area of land used, directly or indirectly, to produce his family's food.

The diversification of the peasant's dietary was followed by other improvements in their standard of living. But, as we have suggested, most of these did not appear until after the land legislation—or, at any rate, not until the immediately preceding years when rents were curbed extra-legally. Until rent was restrained the peasant wily enough to keep for his family more than the cost of its conventional subsistence was intelligent enough to dispose of it (if he did not preserve it) in some manner better concealed from his landlord than dearer clothes or better furniture. Nor, of course, in the closing decades of the nineteenth century was it only the peasants' new-found ability to profit from their own industry that enabled them to improve their standard of living. The continual reduction of their numbers probably tended to ease their lives. And when every family had brothers and sisters (or even sons and daughters) in the United States, or in Britain or Australia, every family letter, every family reunion, might make wretchedness, however longstanding, less readily endured. Literacy, and literacy in English, naturally created new wants and made more accessible the means of their gratification. When, with the coming of the parcel-post⁵ and postal orders, the English stores distributed their catalogues in the Irish countryside, often they reached houses where their use was no mystery and where even the hazards of completing an order-form could be surmounted. People who read newspapers learned what their local dealer had overlooked in stocking his shop, and by no means the least affecting of the experiences of the traveller by tram (or bicycle or bus) was the sight of the large shop whose customer he might become only when possessed of money.

Changes in the popular dietary, moreover, did much to familiarise the Irish with shops and shopping. When they ate little but potatoes, they lived on what they grew themselves, money they seldom needed. But when they came to require meal or flour, commonly they had to go to the dealer to get it, and going to the dealer for everyday foods presupposed a money income, whether actual or expected. The deficiency of such an income might be painfully felt when the mealman dealt also in the growing range of goods, attractive in their own right, but alluring no less for the indication they gave of social status in a community that was more differentiated than formerly, more guilty of poverty and prouder of wealth. Country men and women, newly class-conscious, were apt to feel that their worth was measured, for all to see, by the amount of their shopping. It is not surprising that the occasion of so much of their envy was the man who sold them, from his mongrel stock, drink and tobacco, clothes and boots, crockery and ornaments, tea, groceries and American bacon.

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, then, the Irish peasant could see, set out not altogether beyond his reach, sources of material satisfaction which, when not novel, had formerly been

⁵ Mr Collins, of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs has been kind enough to find out for me that a parcel post with a 7 lb limit was introduced in 1883 and that, three years later, the limit was raised to 11 lb.

associated with a superior and unattainable station. He had become accustomed to the use of money and accustomed to lament its deficiency, the more so when he felt he had a status to preserve or improve, and when he had put his foot on the never-ending slide of "prestige spending". Above all, he knew now that the standard of living of his family was likely to be proportional to the yield of his farm. For reasons suggested already—and perhaps for others more convincing—when Irishmen aimed at higher agricultural output they were inclined to seek it by extensive rather than intensive means.

Finally, farms tended to be enlarged as a consequence of emigration. Indeed, so obvious was it for neighbours to absorb the land of families which had left the country, that the effect of emigration might appear to dwarf that of both the swing towards pasture farming and the desire for a higher standard of living. But too heavy an underlining of the independent influence of emigration might well be misleading. Without doubt, many of the emigrants left the country because of the operation of the two forces to which we have attributed consolidation. As these forces made farms larger, they made them also scarcer. Inevitably there were some who found themselves unlucky in the lottery for land: they, too, had come to expect a higher standard of living, what was more natural than that they should seek it in the overseas countries where neighbours, they knew, had found it already? But there were, of course, other emigrants who deliberately abandoned the land, or renounced their expectation of it. When their departure left farms idle, not simply worked with a greater economy of labour, the result might merely be that an otherwise landless son found himself anchored to Ireland. But instead of this (and with relevance to our argument) some neighbouring farmer might at last be let grasp the additional fields which the economics of peasant farming or the acquisitiveness of peasant society had made him covet.

After the Famine, the tendency of the enlargement of farms to make them scarcer was offset only slightly and temporarily by an extension of the farmed area.⁶ Formerly it had become the custom for fathers to provide for their children by the division of their own farms. But there was an obvious physical limit to the process of subdivision, one from which the peasants had sought to escape by reclaiming mountain and bog. The Famine, however, turned their thoughts elsewhere. Coinciding, as it did, with new opportunities for mass emigration it exposed the folly of subdivision when this was no longer virtually the only way in which the peasant could provide for his children.

⁶ *Area of Ireland under Crops and Grass, 1841-1911**

	(in thousands of acres)
	Cultivated Area (crops and grass)
1841	13,464
1851	14,608
1860	15,454
1880	15,340
1900	15,222
1911	14,702†

* B P P, 1912-13, cvi, p. 768

† Not including "grazed mountain" which, in the earlier figures, had been included with "mountain land" in the category "not used in agriculture."

As subdivision declined and consolidation extended, fewer people were driven by the fear of hunger to enlarge their holdings, and when farms were critically small sometimes it was more profitable and less laborious to absorb fields made idle by death or emigration than to reclaim waste. And, finally, the Famine dislodged the potato from its old eminence. Formerly potato-land had been the objective of most reclamation, now that potato-land was less scarce it was not so necessary to add laboriously to its extent.

After the Famine, it is clear, farms became fewer. Those that grew expanded by more than the area of land newly used in agriculture. Seldom, in the twenties, had land long eluded a would-be farmer, but now, for all the thinning of the population, his successor might seek a farm and never find it. The scarcity of land was felt also by a class of men humbler than would-be farmers. Formerly, when tillage had been widely practised, tenants who lacked money, and labourers who preferred potatoes, found the *conacre* system a mutually convenient arrangement. Here the wage of labour was the use of potato-land. But the *conacre* system lost its vitality during the Famine. With the sharp recession of tillage, fewer peasant families needed supplementary labour, and those that did, sharing the general desire for larger farms, were unwilling to make the sacrifice now involved in giving land for labour. And, with money circulating more freely, the man who was substantial enough to employ labour was unlikely to lack the coin needed for wages. The labourers, for their part, doubtless wished to join in the general reaction against the potato and to use in its place foodstuffs that had to be bought with money. While this may have made them welcome the substitution of money wages for *conacre*, it is unlikely that this process brought any relative improvement in their lot. When they were content to live on potatoes, and when the potato yielded bountifully, a tiny piece of land might give them a standard of living resembling that of the peasant. But now, while food had to be bought for every day, wages tended to be paid only when work was available.

It is this new scarcity of land, felt by labourers as well as peasants, that brings us back to the peasant-father's new-found (or, more probably, newly recovered) control of the marriages of his children. Formerly, if a son found his father unaccommodating enough to refuse him land when he wished to marry, he might well find a neighbour more obliging, he might mark out a portion of mountain or bog, or, as a last resort, he might work in return for *conacre* land. But now, commonly, fathers and neighbours alike, were scared of subdivision, reclamation had lost much of its appeal and *conacre* was elusive. By and large, in this new environment, a farm was to be had only when the father who occupied it gave it up. But it was an unusual father who parted with his land before death, or its imminence, loosened his hold. Everything made him cling to his farm. It was the source of his livelihood, and a more certain source, he may well have felt, than any promise made by his children. Sometimes he may have derived satisfaction of a sort from denying an adult son the prerequisites of his marriage, more probably he was persuaded that the dominant position in home and farm was properly filled by himself and he was unwilling to relinquish it, or divide it, for the benefit of a son. It was natural, too, for a father to convince himself

that it was for the good of "the family" as well as of the son that the son's marriage should be delayed and arranged by the father such a delay restricted the growth of population in a community all too well aware of its tendency to outstrip the increase in the supply of foodstuffs. It made more certain that the woman who was to succeed to the wifely duties of a peasant establishment should not evade payment of her privilege—womanly charm, needlessly exhibited in a possible daughter-in-law, is less likely to compensate for empty hands than when it is displayed before an aspiring husband. That the new wife's hands should be laden was in the interests of the husband's family, if often somewhat less directly in his own—a dowry might, it is true, take the form of additional fields, long desired, on occasion it might enlarge the working capital of an agriculture, starved of capital, but suspicious of investment—more usually, however, it was the wife's new brothers-in-law or sisters-in-law who were most intimately concerned by the size of her "fortune," because to it they looked for part or all of their patrimony, part or all of the dowries that would make them, in turn, acceptable to their fathers-in-law.

So far we have looked at some of the causes of the prolonged diminution in the number of farms which began in Ireland during the Famine. This unaccustomed scarcity of land is, I think, the most powerful of the forces which tended, in the succeeding decades, to disseminate the "arranged marriage"—a peasant's son could seldom marry unless he was provided with land—not, at least, while he continued to live in Ireland, that his father controlled the only land the son was ever likely to get gave him command also of the son's marriage. And whether he was prompted by "the good of the son" or self-interest, by spite or concern for "the family," the father rarely displayed the self-effacement to divest himself of his farm before he was an old man. When, in his old age, he thus enabled his son to marry, the son was no longer a youngster. But the peasant-father exploited his power of giving in marriage more fully than simply to ensure that a husband's responsibilities were not prematurely shouldered—the father came to determine not only the time when his son took a wife, he determined also, very often, her identity. And the ideal daughter-in-law is not necessarily the ideal wife—in his daughter-in-law the father hoped to find, not simply the appropriate dowry, but strength and submission, the promise of fertility and skill in a woman's duties in the house and on the land. "Not very purty!" a father is said to have exclaimed about his own daughter, "'Faix, I'll make her purty with cows!'"

Emigration, like the scarcity of land, was crucial to the general acceptance of the arranged marriage. In the old economy, in its prime (or at its most malignant), subdivision, conacre and reclamation, singly or in association, promised land to all a peasant's sons and marriage on the land to all his daughters. But under the new system, even had the number of farms remained stable, there was provision only for a single son, and, on the average, for a single daughter, the boy would inherit the farm, the girl could count on marrying the heir to a neighbouring farm. In fact, of course, the number of farms has probably declined continuously since the Famine, with the result that, in every generation, the children set up as peasants in place of

⁷ Michael MacDonagh, *Irish life and character*, London, 1898, p. 210

their parents have been fewer than they⁸ Now just as subdivision encouraged the rapid growth of population for which it could pretend to provide, so Ireland's new economy made her a pioneer (at least in the nineteenth century) of family limitation Malthus defined his "preventive check" as "a restraint from marriage from prudential motives, with a conduct strictly moral during the period of this restraint"⁹ He could scarcely have wished for a more meticulous or a more sustained demonstration of its effects than that experienced in the Irish countryside since the Famine

But, for all the rigour of his birth-control, the Irish peasant had (and still has) substantially more children than two¹⁰ It is unlikely that the arranged marriage would have met with an acceptance so widespread or so willing unless provision were elsewhere available for the brothers and sisters whom it denied any chance of a man's or a woman's place on the land In the years immediately following the Famine, with the lesson that farms were too small graven on the mind of its survivors, it is not unreasonable to imagine a family amicably calling

⁸ *Number of agricultural holdings in Ireland*

Year	Exceeding 1 acre	Of all valuations
	(in thousands)	
1841	691 ¹	— ²
1861	568 ¹	609 ³
1891 ⁴	469	487
1911 ⁵	485	536
1949	401 ⁶	—

¹ British Parliamentary Papers, 1867-8, iv, p 631

² I have not found a return of the number of agricultural holdings of all valuations in 1841 But on 1st January, 1846, (before, that is the consolidation associated with the Famine had proceeded far) the valuation returns record 1,067,794 holdings in the whole country apart from the boroughs (B P P, 1849, xlix, p 498)

³ B P P, 1867, lvi, p 518

⁴ Census of Ireland, 1891, B P P, 1892, xc, pp 216-9, 351-2

⁵ Census of Ireland, 1911, B P P, 1912-13, cxviii, pp 430-1, 433-4

⁶ Report of Emigration Commission, Dublin, 1955 p 43, *Ulster Year Book*, 1953, Belfast, p 60 The figures for Northern Ireland included in this total relate to the year 1952

The figures in this table should not be pressed too hard The apparent interruption in the fall of the number of holdings in the years before 1911 is probably to be attributed to a change in the method of enumeration formerly scattered pieces of land occupied by one person had generally been reckoned as a single holding, but in the 1911 census they were regarded as separate holdings The figure for 1861, for the number of holdings of all valuations is similarly inflated It would, moreover, be worth inquiring whether, over the period covered by this table, the same procedure was continuously followed in dealing with holdings divided by townland (or other) boundaries

⁸ T R Malthus, *Essay on Population*, Everyman edition, 1927, i p 14n

¹⁰ By 1911, an average of 4.14 children had been born to each surviving woman who had been married in the previous 34 years while she was in the age group 15-44 in 1946 the comparable figure (for the 26 counties only) was 3.31 These figures relate to the entire population in 1946 when the fertility data were classified by occupation, the fertility of the wives of "farmers and farm managers" was greater than that of the wives in any other occupational group (Report on Emigration, Dublin, 1955, pp 94-96)

a halt to subdivision, even at a sacrifice of some of its members. Indeed, in these years, the disinherited may have felt that it was they, not their brothers, who were favoured, that all too soon the heir to Irish land might more conspicuously be the heir to Irish disaster.

But, however chastening its experiences, a family's jealousies are apt, in the end, to be unleashed. The dispossessed needed compensation more lasting than their memories of the Famine. They got it, in part, as an incident of the arranged marriage. We have already noticed that the dowry brought by the bride of the boy who succeeded to the farm frequently helped to establish his brothers and sisters. And, doubtless, when there was sufficient profit in a farm, sons and daughters (and brothers and sisters, too) might look to it for assistance. But the dispossessed found their most substantial compensation in the coincidence that when the arranged marriage was the least arduous escape from the exigencies of rural life, there appeared also the opportunity for unlimited emigration.

And so satisfying was this compensation that the returned emigrant was the envy, not only of his peasant brother, but of his nephews, too, and as more and more young men yearned to acquire clothes like the Yankee's, a voice so *bizarre* and a purse so full, their generation learned with new conviction that a life tied to the land of Ireland was a life tied to tedium, liable to be dark forever when set against the dazzle of what might have been. When emigration thus (and otherwise) ceased to be a residual movement and acquired a momentum of its own, those who resisted its pull became tied the more firmly to the arranged marriage, their only escape, very often, being no marriage at all. The basis of any more liberal institution of marriage was higher productivity, an economy so developed that it could offer the expected standard of living to a larger number of families. But the more the ambitions, the capital and the people of Ireland were preoccupied by the needs of emigration, the more slender were the resources that could be spared to increase output. If yield per person per acre increased more slowly than the improvement in the standard of living, then the emigration of whole families heightened little, if at all, the chances of marrying young. In circumstances such as these, when emigration left a holding unworked it might well be dismembered by farmers nearby rather than preserved intact to endow, prematurely, the marriage of one of their sons. And, moreover, the desire to emigrate, together with the feeling that it was better done without a family, helped to make a people, long accustomed to youthful marriage, tolerant of the prolonged celibacy now demanded of them. When his neighbours, older perhaps than he, remained single because they were waiting (or once waited) for a chance to emigrate, so much less irksome was it for the chosen son also to defer his marriage—even though his abstinence might be poorly rewarded, by nothing more than his father's land, and a life like his.

There was a third stream of developments in addition to consolidation and emigration that did much to permit the dissemination of the arranged marriage. This was the current, weak and obstructed in the fifties, but quickening and broadening until by the new century it had carried the mass of the peasants out of their chronic poverty, to the prospect, if not the reality of comfort.

Before the Famine, alien though the "match" was to the needs of

the peasants, it was treated with more respect in the better-off farming families—they, indeed, could scarcely dispense with it and retain their position. Substantial households were an anachronism in Irish farming, as fragile as they were fortunate. Their survival had called for forbearance or foresight in their landlords, and it called for qualities no less rare from its beneficiaries. First among these was a strong family loyalty—one robust enough to resist every proposal for the dismemberment of the farm, the men (and the women too, unless they preferred spintserhood) should be ready to slip down the social scale, beneath their brother to whom the family's land was committed, and if families could be kept small, so much the better, for then there would be fewer brothers and sisters whom a perverted loyalty might prompt to disregard the family's well-being, and there would be more substantial inducements to deflect elsewhere the energies of the disloyal.

Family loyalty, even at a personal loss, and small families, both were inherent in the make-up of the match, and both were cultivated in men and women reared to feel distaste for marriage more liberally arranged. Just as these characteristics, and the form of marriage that fostered them, had been instruments of self-preservation in families that had farmed in a large way before the Famine, so, later on, when the ordinary peasant played the role of substantial farmer (however unconvincingly to the spectator) he, too, was inclined to welcome the arranged marriage for its defence of a way of life more worthy of preservation than any he had known.

No peasant survived the Famine unchastened by it, nor can we believe, however venomously he imputed blame elsewhere, that he shook off a nagging guilt that drove him to question his own feckless ways. After the Famine, then, the peasants were tolerant of new austerity and submissive to discipline as never before—they tolerated both celibacy and the patriarchal control of marriage to a degree that was quite unnatural in men of their background. To begin with they tolerated these features of the arranged marriage, later they desired them—because by then they had driven a stake into their country, a memorial to their virtue, which their chosen son was to drive deeper, but which he might destroy if he married improvidently.

In the late nineteenth century there was much to persuade the peasant that he was becoming a man of substance. If he were typical of his class, his farm was getting larger, while the number of its dependents diminished. In the bad year, if not every year, its yield might be supplemented by contributions from relations overseas. The peasant's skirmishes with landlord and state had brought him confidence as well as concessions. But dominating all was the land legislation. Initially this gave a share in the property-rights over land to the men who had been its tenants, then, in effect, it made them owners outright, subject to a charge whose real value tended ever after to diminish. Henceforth it was natural for the peasant to dream of his family established forever on land of its own. The peasant knew (when he did not overrate) the value of the property which he might give or bequeath, he was free, also, to bestow it on the son of his choice—for both of these reasons he was well-placed to attach conditions to its transfer. And the condition upon which he insisted above all was submission to his own wishes on how the future of the family was

to be ensured the son elected to receive the land must remain unmarried until the time of its transfer, then he must marry a woman whom his father believed to be endowed with qualities appropriate to her future responsibilities

But in making owners out of tenants the land legislation transformed the pernicious environment in which idleness and improvidence were instruments of self defence—two of the few sources of satisfaction left to the victims of a malevolent landlordism. Idleness, in the event, was dislodged more slowly than improvidence, if ‘the magic of property turns sand into gold’ the alchemy in Ireland belonged more to the stocking than to the spade. Men who relished still the leisurely tempo of their working lives were nimble enough in learning to count pennies and to add to their number. Often enough its victim likes to believe that avarice is not an end in itself, and what object could be more worthy than his own family of the hoarding, the intrigue and the calculation which were liable now to captivate the Irish peasant? He was pleasantly preoccupied by his recent conviction that his family was of some stature, there were men willing to teach him that Ireland’s farming families were the repository of all that was Irish and precious, and reproach for selfishness was misplaced when acquisitiveness ministered to a body far more numerous than himself, and far longer-lived.

Family pride, then, long forgotten under the rank growth of rent could be cultivated now in households that were impoverished less than formerly, and adorned, even, by some of the rights of property. The peasant, in consequence, became eager to ensure, by deliberate action, the seemly perpetuation of his line. And in this there is yet another element of his need of the arranged marriage—one that emboldened him to flout tradition and risk resentment, to single out one of his sons and one of his daughters and endow them virtually with all he possessed, so that the son might be enabled to carry on his name.

This was a striking departure, an assumption and exercise of a paternal authority, almost wholly without remembered precedent, and so extreme that a son might find himself adding a decade to the traditional period of a child’s dependence, and, if his brothers matured more quickly, it was likely to be in a climate more benign than Ireland’s. But an authority applied so sharply can have been little resisted—often enough, indeed, sons were submissive because they were led by their own inclinations where their fathers would have driven them. The emigrant, when he was not actively seeking friends or fortune, pictured himself for choice, a child of distress, rather than a child shrinking from his father’s rod. The son who stayed at home might find much to rile him in the father who personified the process of his subjection. But irritation seldom mounted to the point of rebellion—because the son earned from the extension of his subjection an extension of the land ultimately his, and there was nothing embedded more deeply in the worldly wisdom of the peasant than the belief that extra land was seldom bought too dear (save, perhaps, when it was bought with money). Sons, like their fathers, were apt to find the size of their farms preoccupying to the point of obsession—an obsession that obscured in their minds the fact that extra work, or extra skill or equipment might be no less fruitful

than extra land Many a peasant, in many a country, must be pardoned for reckoning the worth of his life by the extent of his land But seldom has this error been more plausible than in Ireland after the Famine Nobody who experienced that disaster was likely to forget how loosely the tiny farmer had held his life In the following decades the same lesson, more or less, was driven home by the market, the economists, and the landlords all persuaded the peasant (if they did not coerce him) to farm on a larger scale And so unfamiliar was he with the feel of property, even in lesser things, that when he was offered the part-ownership of land he was greedy of it to excess Land he had to have, even though its price were the postponement of his marriage and the emigration of his contemporaries—even though that is it set the stage for the arranged marriage But cause and effect were confused the arranged marriage, in its turn, was not the least of the forces that made Ireland a land of larger farms, of emigration and a rising standard of living, a land where it was seemly to marry late, or not at all—and a land, therefore, more than ever in need of the match

Note on the Use of the Word "Peasant"

When this paper was read in Dublin, several members of the Society criticised my use of the word "peasant" Amongst the obsolete usages of the word, *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary* gives "low fellow," serí and "booi" In Ireland, it was suggested, some of this derogatory content has been retained, making it offensive to use the word and its derivatives

There is no doubt that "peasant" has an uncomfortable feel in Ireland to-day, but it irks, I think, less the Irishman's respect for tradition than his desire to seem genteel Insofar as such a matter can be dated, it seems to have been soon after Ireland acquired political independence that her "peasants" were ousted by "farmers" Certainly, throughout and beyond the nineteenth century, the mass of their fellow-countrymen were "peasants" to Irish writers who understood them deeply, who respected them and wished them well "J K L" did not shun the word¹¹ It would be wrong, I think, to impute a desire to ridicule or offend to the author of *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* Michael Davitt dedicated his *Fall of Feudalism* "To the Celtic Peasantry of Ireland and their kinsfolk beyond the Seas" In the early years of the present century, James McCann and W P Ryan, radicals seeking the ear of the people in question, called their newspaper *The Irish Peasant*, and, when publication of this was interrupted, its successor was called *The Peasant*¹²

¹¹ See, for instance, *Letters on the State of Ireland*, Dublin, 1825, Letter V passim

¹² *The Irish Peasant*, 1905(?)–6, *The Peasant*, 1907–8 The Banim brothers use the word "peasant" freely and with no appearance of opprobrium Lover made the proper, and very common distinction between the "peasant" and the "snug farmer" (*Legends and Stories of Ireland*, 1848, II, pp 354, 359) "It was quite plain" to Charles Kickham "that the Irish peasant would glory in laying down his life in defence of his priest (C J Kickham, *The Eagle of Garryroe*, Dublin, n d, p 18) The author of *When we were Boys* used the word constantly (W O'Brien, 1890) And still, in the new century, it is retained by Irish and Anglo Irish alike To Canon Sheehan, it had an honourable ring one of his

If it were not misleading, it might be excusable to substitute the more decorous "farmer" for "peasant". But the historian, as well as the student of modern Ireland, needs both words. In Carleton's day, "here and there, between the more humble cabins," one might see "a stout, comfortable looking farmhouse, with ornamental thatching and well glazed windows, adjoining to which is a haggard, with five or six large stacks of corn, well trimmed and roped, and a fine yellow, weather beaten old hayrick."¹³ It was in the odd house such as this that a farmer might be found, the peasantry abounded in humbler cabins. A farmer is what even a prosperous peasant might wish to be.

"Peasant" is an imprecise word, and for this reason one might legitimately be chary of using it. Currently it means "one who lives in the country and works on the land, a countryman, a rustic."¹⁴ In this paper I have used it, more narrowly, to mean the owner or occupier of land who, in normal times, works it with little or no labour beyond what his family can supply. A farmer I regard as a man whose holding obliges him systematically to employ outside labour. This line of division, or one close to it, must, I think, be observed by the sociologist no less than the economist. To pretend that it does not exist in Ireland makes it the more difficult to profit from the history and economics of peasant farming elsewhere.

DISCUSSION

Professor M Roberts, proposing the vote of thanks, suggested that the arranged marriage, as it existed in Ireland after the Famine, was indeed the normal state of affairs in peasant societies all over the world. It was the pre-Famine social structure which was the abnormal. Dr Connell, he suggested, had been inclined to put the emphasis the other way round. He added, that it would be interesting to attempt to discover why the deplorable results of the introduction of the potato should have been so much more marked in Ireland than in any other country, despite considerable resemblances between Irish conditions and those prevailing in (*e.g.*) Sweden, touched on factors making for freer marriage in the agricultural states of central Europe in the nineteenth century, and suggested that marriage itself might after the Famine have been a main motive for emigration.

Professor E E Evans. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to listen to Dr Connell's closely reasoned lecture. I have not had the advantage of reading the paper beforehand and the argument is rather too involved to be easily digested. I could wish that he had given more attention to both vertical and horizontal variations in the rural population, to social and geographical differences which might

characters, for instance was 'a superb type of a very noble class of peasants' (*Glenanaar* (1905), Dublin, 1954, p 79). Father Gunan felt that "the Irish peasant, as a rule, dearly loves the big, strong, stout, powerful priest" (*The Island Parish*, Dublin, 1908, p 35). George Birmingham, in a work published in 1912, devoted a chapter to "The Irish Peasant" (*The Lighter Side of Irish Life*). Horace Plunkett did not erase his "peasant" for something softer (See, for instance, *Ireland in the new Century*, 1905 pp 44-5). And to Robin Flower, Tomas Ó Crohan was a peasant of the old school. (T O Crohan, *The Islandman* (1937), Oxford, 1951, p v).

¹³ *The Hedge School, Traits and Stories*, 1896, II, p 208

¹⁴ S O E D

well be significant. Geographically the incidence of the Famine was, for various reasons, uneven and its demographic consequence therefore different in different parts of the country. Sociologically I believe it is important to distinguish between the substantial peasants and the large numbers of depressed and landless, or virtually landless, people. These married at an early age, and it is significant that to day such groups as landless labourers and the travelling tinkers marry at much younger ages than the farming population. The average age for tinker girls is about twenty. Thus the average age of marriage could have risen merely by the reduction, through famine and emigration, of the very large numbers of depressed rural folk. The change among the substantial peasantry need not have been great. I question the assumption of the novelty of arranged marriages in post-Famine times. The marriage match and the dowry appear to be universal features of the world's peasantries and are not necessarily linked with late marriages, as the Indian evidence reminds us. I could wish that Dr Connell had given us some statistics. When precisely did the average age of marriage change? Was the process sudden, or was it spread over half a century? No doubt statistical evidence is hard to find, but we need to have details of when and where and in what social groups the changes occurred. I think the best way to tackle this would be to work in detail on sample parishes for which marriage registers are available.

Dr Connell sees consolidation of holdings as the main cause of the changed pattern of marriage. I would be inclined to lay the emphasis rather on the decline and prohibition of the practice of sub-dividing holdings, which made it possible for only one son to inherit the farm. It should be noticed that the changes of the critical Famine period also coincided in the more backward parts of the country with the enclosure movement which helped to fix both the field patterns and the land holdings.

There are other considerations of an anthropological order which might come in. The urge for progeny among peasant people has been guided by the forces of magic as well as economics. One would like to know when religious sanctions against sexual laxity became strong enough to overcome the rites of fertility observed on occasions such as the periodic "moral holidays," which broke the routine of the seasons. There is some evidence that trial marriages or "bed-fellowship" was practised in the north of Ireland and it would normally have resulted in early marriages, which were none the less sometimes the subject of careful bargaining as to dowries and so on. Dr Connell has brought many arguments to bear on his subject and it may seem to be superfluous to seek others, but I question whether documentary evidence by itself is sufficient.

Dr Geary. As I shall be somewhat critical of certain points in his paper, I would like to say at the outset that I take a great interest in Dr Connell's work. I have benefited from conversations and correspondence with him, and I am an admirer of his important book, *The Population of Ireland, 1750-1850*. I understand that his paper is designed as part of a larger work. If so, I assume he is not as yet committed finally to the present text, and that he will accept my criticisms, as well as those of other speakers this evening, as constructive in intent.

I think that a simpler theory than that of the lecturer's could be evolved to explain the decline in the marriage rate before and after the Famine. Before the Famine the population trend and marriage rate and other demographic phenomena were normal to the Europe of the time. The Famine, which was relatively the greatest catastrophe which afflicted any nation in the last two hundred years, changed the outlook of the people from fecklessness to concern for the future. Mass emigration improved the lot of those who emigrated and of those who stayed in lessening the pressure on land dedicated by nature and lack of capital to pastoral husbandry. In the Irish setting the indivisibility of holdings became a deterrent to marriage. The outstanding social symptom in the change of mind and heart of rural Ireland was the decline in the marriage rate from 7-8 per thousand population before the Famine and 5 per thousand in the 1860's. From some sentences in his paper it would appear that Dr. Connell regards the marriage trend and pattern as conscious and causative. It is my view that, while the rate of emigration and the marriage rate are related, the emigration rate is rather in the nature of the cause of the low marriage rate than the other way about. On recent experience, of every ten boys and girls at present living in the country at, say, age 15, no fewer than four will have emigrated before they reach the age of 50. In the light of these figures it seems likely that most young men and women contemplate emigration as a possibility. This emigration attitude is unsettling and is not conducive to early or any marriage. This, I think, is the principal nexus between high emigration and low marriage rate. The train of causation was Famine—Emigration—Low Marriage Rate, and it remains unbroken to this day. This, of course, is merely a hypothesis. Much work remains to be done to establish or refute it.

What I particularly missed in Dr. Connell's paper was the discussion of the reasons why the amazing transition of a marriage rate from 7-8 per thousand to 5 per thousand in a very short term of years was so easily effected, i.e. without the appearance of undesirable social phenomena such as high illegitimacy and prostitution rates. Such evidence as there is—I shall refer to it later—goes to show that the illegitimacy rate paradoxically was higher in the pre-Famine period than after. In the nature of things no statistics are available about prostitution but ordinary observation goes to show that it is less rife in Ireland with a phenomenally low marriage rate than in most other countries.

I would have expected that Dr. Connell would have made more use of statistics than he had done in a paper on the subject of marriages. This is not merely the prejudice of a professional statistician. A more liberal use of statistics would, I think, have enabled the lecturer to avoid the pitfalls of too absolute or unqualified statements, a tendency to attribute universality to what is more or less common.

In many countries besides Ireland the rural population rose between the middle of the 18th and the middle of the 19th centuries. It would be very interesting to know if this increase were accompanied, as in Ireland, with fragmentation of holdings or the bringing into cultivation of land which otherwise would be unused. Might I suggest that Dr. Connell should write a companion volume to his book

on Ireland on this subject ? I can think of no one better qualified to do so

As regards the period since the Famine, there has been a tendency to overstate the influence of exorbitant rents, land hunger and non-divisibility of holdings as tending towards a lowering of the marriage rate and conducive to emigration. It is essential to observe that with the continuing steep decline in the rural population and the relative stability of agricultural output, the standard of living of the average Irish countryman was improving rapidly throughout the whole period. Between 1841 and the present day the volume of agricultural output increased by about 50 per cent, as the rural population—between 1841 and 1951—declined by two-thirds, average output per rural dweller quadrupled in the 110 years. It is of the first importance that estimates should be made of agricultural output—and even of national incomes—in money and real terms for the last hundred years in Ireland. It will probably be found that agricultural rent as a percentage of national income was much smaller than has commonly been assumed. I am much interested in this connection in Professor Moody's remark that the Land Agitation, which reached its height about the 1880's, was long after the period of real distress. This is an illustration of the principle observed in the history of Ireland and of other countries that it is not the poorest classes, or nations at their most poverty-stricken, who revolt.

As bearing generally on the trend in the marriage rate and concomitant matters over an extended period, I would like to draw the attention of the Society to an important paper by our Honorary Secretary, Dr M. D. McCarthy, published some years ago. Dr McCarthy's paper gives an analysis of the marriage and birth rates in the Parish of Knockany in Co. Limerick during the period 1822 to 1941. The importance of this study derives from the fact that it is based on continuous records of vital statistics for a period long before the inauguration of official records, which began only in 1864. In Knockany Parish the average annual marriage rate declined from 6.3 in the period 1822-40 to 3.9 in the years 1921-40. During the same interval there was practically no change in the number of births per marriage, at 4.7. Not the least interesting feature of the study is its revelation of the fact that, despite the great decline in the marriage rate, there was also a decline in the illegitimate birth rate from 5.1 (illegitimate children per hundred children born) to little over one per cent in the later period. Dr McCarthy's paper also shows that the decline in the marriage rate did not occur immediately after the Famine. In the decade 1851-60 it was still nearly 6 per thousand population. A plausible explanation of the time lag in the trends of the marriage rate and other phenomena is that the country people began to realise that a better life was to be had only when news came home from emigrants in the first great exodus in the immediate post-Famine years.

As to the specific points in the paper, in the first paragraph Dr Connell states that the population doubled in little more than half a century before the Famine. This surely is an exaggeration since it yields an impossibly large rate of natural increase during that period. In my opinion it would be more correct to state that the population doubled in the *hundred* years before the Famine. Later in the same

paragraph the lecturer speaks of the farmers of the 1830's "defence of the only family structure they know" As I have already remarked, I think that the defence of the family pattern was neither conscious nor causative, either before or after the Famine The fall of the marriage rate was merely symptomatic

At the end of the second paragraph, Dr Connell speaks of pre-Famine marriage as "entered virtually by all of their own choice and at an uncommonly youthful age" This is a gross exaggeration of the position In 1841 the percentage of men unmarried in the age group 25-34 was no less than 43, and ultimately about 10 per cent never married contrast this with the respective percentages of the Soviet Union in 1926 of $17\frac{1}{2}$ and $2\frac{1}{2}$ respectively In 1841 the maximum marriage rate attainable would have been $9\frac{1}{2}$ per thousand population, far in excess of the actual marriage rate of 7-8 per thousand

I do not understand what Dr Connell means by the clause "for all the perversity of the Irish economy" in the 5th paragraph As shown by its results, there has been very little economic perversity in the Irishman's behaviour The population of the whole country was $8\frac{1}{2}$ million before the Famine and the number of Irish-born and their descendants at the present time living everywhere may be of the order of 15-20 million Having regard to the countries to which the Irish emigrated, and to the fact that all evidence goes to show that before the Famine the average standard of living was about the lowest in Europe, the average standard amongst this 15-20 million is probably three times as high as what it would have been had there been no Famine Dr McCarthy and I were able to append our signature to an addendum to the Population Report which contained the sentence "The Irishman's reaction to his environment has always been not only intelligent but intelligible"

I find it difficult to accept that, as a result of the cumbersome state Acts of 1848, a substantial part of Irish land passed into native ownership, as indicated in the 6th paragraph Has the lecturer any statistics on the subject?

If, as the lecturer suggests in the 11th paragraph, the potato has been overthrown, it has not been thrown very far Last year the production of potatoes in the Twenty-Six Counties was larger than in 1860

I cannot agree with the second sentence of the 12th paragraph, namely that most of the improvements in the countryman's dietary did not appear until after the land legislation As I indicated earlier, the improvement was taking place at a very rapid pace all the time since the Famine, mainly as a result of the prodigious decline in rural population

Dr Connell is wise to suggest, as he does in the footnote to Table 3 that the statistics of number of agricultural holdings should not be pressed too hard In this connection he is aware, of course, of Chapter IV of "Agricultural Statistics 1847-1926," which refers to this matter and which shows incidentally that from 1850 to 1909 (during which the statistics classified by holding size are reasonably comparable) there was striking little change in the pattern May I also direct his attention to the Report on Agricultural Statistics, 1914 I may add that, from 1927 to date, for statistical purposes a group of parcels of land, whether divided by geographical boundaries or

separated, are regarded as a single holding if they are in the same ownership and control. This is a subject which is being much discussed at the present time amongst international agricultural statisticians.

The following was communicated by Dr Geary after the meeting —

Unfortunately there are no statistics available bearing directly on Mr Meenan's interesting suggestion that the decline in the marriage rate between pre- and post-Famine may have been due to the virtual disappearance through death and emigration of a class of members of landless or very small farming households who nearly all married and at an early age. The following statistics have some bearing on the question —

Ireland (26 Counties)—Percentage of men unmarried in certain age groups in 1841 and 1951

Males	Age Group				
	16-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56 and over
1841					
Town	88.9	37.0	17.0	12.3	10.3
Rural	94.2	44.3	15.1	9.6	8.1
TOTAL	93.5	43.3	15.4	10.0	8.4
1951					
Town	94.4	50.5	26.0	21.2	23.0
Rural	97.6	72.9	46.7	36.1	29.4
TOTAL	96.2	63.9	38.9	30.5	27.5

The figures show that in 1841 at young ages the percentage unmarried in rural Ireland was appreciably greater than in towns, though the reverse was the case in later years. Since the landless men and very small farmers constituted in pre-Famine days a large proportion of the total rural population, it seems unlikely that there was any substantial class of "early marriers." This table also reminds us that the decline in the marriage rate was not confined to rural areas. It was equally marked in the towns, which suggests that the causes of the general decline are not to be sought only in land hunger, rack renting, indivisibility of holding, etc., which causes apply only in rural areas, though, of course, migrants from country to town will bring their rural outlook with them.

Mr J Kelly I should like to associate myself with the expression of thanks made by previous speakers to Dr Connell for his interesting and stimulating paper.

In his account of the changed attitude towards marriage brought about by the Famine, Dr Connell seems to suggest that this was entirely a spontaneous growth in the minds and hearts of the mass of the people. I wonder whether the teaching of the moral leaders and social philosophers of the day was not to some extent responsible. In the writings of the period, analysing the causes of the squalor and misery of the people, great emphasis was placed upon the part played

by improvident marriages. For example, Professor Leslie, who in his day was President of this Society, had a good deal to say on the subject.

Sentiment of this kind was not confined to Ireland. Round about the turn of the century the French government instituted a scheme of prizes for "temperance"—temperance meaning, not as might be supposed, abstention from alcoholic excess, but from large families. In Denmark, where a stable rural population had existed for many centuries, restrictions upon the marriage of farmers' sons were very severe and harsh, undoubtedly in order to prevent the fragmentation of farms. When I was a child in County Kerry, I well remember the reprobation expressed when, as happened once or twice in my neighbourhood, a farmer's son married a labourer's daughter. As there was no difference of any consequence between their educational or cultural backgrounds, I think the reason must have been that his action was looked on as grossly selfish, in that by marrying a girl without money he had spoiled the marriage opportunities of his brothers and sisters.

I should like to place before the statisticians of the Society the theory that we may be near the end, if we have not already reached it, of the cycle of very late marriages among farmers. I think there are reasons why this should be the case. Admitting that for a farmer the opportunity for marriage depends upon acquiring the ownership of a farm, and taking the normal life-span as seventy years, does it not follow that if at a given period a large proportion of farmers defer marriage until the age of 40 to 45, there will be, twenty-five to thirty years later, an equally large proportion of farmers' sons under thirty to whom the opportunity for marriage is given by the death or retirement of their fathers? I know empirical observation is a dangerous guide, but there do seem to be more young married farmers about than there were ten years ago.

I think Dr. Connell is not quite fair to farmers in attributing to them avarice and other mean motives in connection with their approach to the marriages of their children. No doubt these vices are manifest in some cases, but from my own experience I can only say that I have often been touched and humbled by the solicitude and self-sacrifice displayed by farmers in their efforts to give their children, and particularly their daughters, the chance to fulfil their normal human destiny.

Dr. Connell made a lengthy rejoinder to Mr. Kelly and Dr. Geary. It is regretted that exigencies of space preclude its reproduction in full.

Following is a synopsis —

I have some misgiving in seldom agreeing with Mr. Kelly or Dr. Geary. To Mr. Kelly I would say that I am not convinced that dissemination of Malthusian beliefs had immediate economic significance. The most persuasive of homilies is of little effect against economic necessity. There was no discernible Malthusian aim in the teaching of the priests. I doubt whether, if a generation of fathers marry unusually late, their sons may well be enabled to marry early. What about the middle-aged widow whose survival will preclude her son's inheritance? With his mother in the house and possibly unmarried brothers and sisters the son may delay his marriage through

consideration of, or subversive to, his mother. In fact, the average age of inheritance to farms has recently been calculated as 38 to 40 years.

Dr Geary's most telling criticism is in regard to my statement that pre-Famine virtually all of the peasantry married at an uncommonly youthful age. His criticism is somewhat qualified by the fact that if, as he says, 43 per cent of the men in the age group 25-34 were unmarried in 1841, the corresponding figure for women was 28 per cent. But the real danger lies in the temptation to view the whole phase of pre-Famine Irish population history through the peep-hole of statistics collected in the period's final years. The 1841 Census in itself gives us reason to doubt that the marriage rates of, say, 1800 or even 1820 resemble 1841. The literary sources also suggest that it had been the custom for the peasantry to marry earlier, and more generally, than is suggested by Dr Geary's statistics. Even as regards the statistics, those retrospectively collected in 1841 show that 32,652 first marriages are recorded as having taken place in the rural districts in 1830 but only 28,662 in 1840. In 1830, of all reported first marriages the brides in 5-6 per cent were said to be under 17 years of age, the corresponding figure for 1840 had fallen to 1.4 per cent. While travellers' tales are no substitute for vital statistics the literary evidence, unquestioned at the time, was overwhelming.

Nor is it in the least surprising that Dr Geary should have found statistical confirmation of the hypothesis, plausible on *a priori* grounds, that in the years immediately preceding the Famine the peasants' children were increasingly prone to postpone their marrying, some of them indefinitely. To me, the importance of these statistics of Dr Geary's lies in their implicit suggestion that the diffusion of the match—or the diffusion, at least, of some of its characteristics—had begun before the Famine. Afterwards, according to the argument of my paper more than anything else it was the growing scarcity of land that dislodged the old, indiscriminate marriage.

I am puzzled by Dr Geary's contention (in his second paragraph) that "before the Famine the population trend and marriage rate and other demographic phenomena [of Ireland] were normal to the Europe of the time," if only because we are so ill-informed on the trend of Irish population pre-1841 on the trends in Irish demography. I also question Dr Geary's thesis on grounds other than its statistical foundation. Influencing the demographic phenomena was the belief, widely held and with considerable justification, that the simplest necessities of life could continue to be readily available. Convinced that this was the case, the Irish could marry freely and youthfully. On the continent on the contrary it is improbable that, in the years immediately preceding and following the French Revolution, the mass of the people believed in the current, let alone the continuing, abundance of food. Land, in old peasant communities, is apt to be chronically scarce. It was otherwise in Ireland as the result of forces peculiar to herself—amongst them the nature of her landlordism and the impact of her connection with Britain.

I cannot agree with Dr Geary when he says (paragraph 8) that it was *impossible* for the population of Ireland to have doubled in the fifty or sixty years before the Famine. But whether, in fact, it did so, we shall never know. But I am chary to accept the implication

of Dr Geary's remarks that in the 1740's the population was already more than 4 million

Dr Geary thinks (paragraph 2) that a simpler theory than mine would explain the decline in the marriage-rate before and after the Famine. But the aim of my paper was to explain the diffusion of the match. It is only incidentally that it throws any light on the marriage-rate. And, as I see it, we need, not a simpler, but a more complex theory if we are to understand the forces that made the Irish so prone to marry late or not at all.

To go the whole way with Dr Geary, in his stating that the Famine changed the outlook of the people, requires us to believe either that the traditional fecklessness was rooted elsewhere than in a mercenary landlordism, or that this landlordism emerged from the Famine purged of its less reputable traits. It would, I am sure, be worth our while to test a hypothesis inconsistent with Dr Geary's that, by and large, the landlords of the fifties and sixties showed much of the exigence of their predecessors.

I did not discuss the apparently low incidence in Ireland of prostitution and illegitimacy because it had not occurred to me that these topics might fall within the scope of a paper concerned, not with the implications of the match, but with forces which caused its diffusion.

In his eleventh paragraph, Dr Geary questions my suggestion that the Encumbered Estates Act of 1848 led to the transfer to native ownership of a substantial part of Irish property. The authority for my statement is Dr Hammon, who said that by 1857 the Encumbered Estates Court had transferred from its old owners one-third of the soil of Ireland, and that, of the 80,000 purchasers, 90 per cent were Irish.