

POPULATION DISTRIBUTION IN COUNTY SLIGO.

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County Sligo had 180,886 inhabitants in 1841 and 67,447 in 1936, a decrease of 62.6 per cent. The eleven counties with an even more marked decline include Leitrim and Roscommon, but not Mayo, which had a decrease of 58.8 per cent. The density of population per square mile in Sligo was 240 in 1841, 135 in 1891 and 96 in 1936. The counties more densely peopled include Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Waterford, which have the chief towns of Eire within their borders, Louth and Wexford, both of which have a considerable urban population, and three counties with a comparatively small area of unproductive land, namely, Carlow, Monaghan, and Cavan. Sligo is relatively densely peopled, for one-third of its area is mountain and lowland bogland. In 1891, almost one-quarter of the county was congested,¹ with nearly 30 per cent of the population. As a result of heavy emigration, only one-tenth of the county would be congested on a 1936 re-assessment.

The movement of population from Sligo was most marked between 1841 and 1891, figures of emigrants are available from 1851, and 13,328 left in the ten years ending 1861, when the population was 124,825.² The loss in the next decade was slightly less, 12,049, and the population was 115,493 in 1871. In the next ten years, 11,708 people left Sligo, but more than double this number left between 1881 and 1891, and the population was reduced to 98,013. The loss by emigration between 1841 and 1891 was at least 120,000, of whom 60,000 left in the period immediately after the Famine.³ Females began to predominate among the migrants about 1875, but in Sligo, as in Mayo, the excess of males in the population was not noted until 1911, much later than in most Irish counties. At the 1936 Census there were 907 females to 1,000 males in Co Sligo.⁴

The total loss of population between 1841 and 1891 was 45.6 per cent and between 1891 and 1936 the decline was 28.5 per cent. 1891 is a turning point in the history of Irish rural development, but in the decade ending in 1901, 14,065 people, of whom 8,008 were women, left Co Sligo. The net migration out of the county, so far as can be estimated, was 11,300 in 1901-1911, 12,600 in the longer and abnormal period 1911-1926, and 7,500 in 1926-1936. There were signs in 1936 that the movement had spent its force but the next Census may reveal to what extent the present heavy movement from Sligo is likely to be permanent.⁵

¹ i.e., having a ratable valuation of less than £1 10s per head of population.

² Census Reports, especially for 1901, in which the figures for the preceding fifty years are given.

³ Actual decrease of population, 52,371. No figures are available for the natural increase (excess of births over deaths) during this ten years, but it cannot have been less than 8,000 and was probably much more.

⁴ Census Reports, 1901, 1926, 1936, to which a general acknowledgment is made.

⁵ Local information and observations see also *Irish Times*, *Irish Review and Annual*, 1941, p. 30, 1942, p. 24.

Town and Rural Population

The town population of Sligo numbered 16,671 in 1936, nearly one-quarter of the total Sligo, with 12,565 people, the eighth town of Eire in size, has grown steadily since 1891, when it had 10,274 people. It is a port serving counties Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon and Mayo, but the shipping has declined considerably in recent years, largely because it is cheaper to transport goods by rail from Dublin.⁶ The industries of Sligo include timber yards, an iron foundry, machinery works, furniture manufacture and bacon curing. Its main significance is as a commercial and market centre, not only for the county, but also for a considerable part of north-west Ireland. The other "towns" in Co Sligo are little more than market villages, such as Tobercurry (823 persons) and Ballymote (738 persons), which lie in the heart of extensive agricultural areas. Sligo has a dominant position in the economic life of the area, but its prosperity depends partly upon the maintenance of imports through the port, which is open chiefly to coasting traffic. There is a small but productive salmon fishery and 12 whole-time fishermen were recorded for Sligo town in 1936.⁷ Within the town boundaries, 15 per cent of all producers and repairers were engaged in agricultural occupations in 1936.

TABLE I—Number of farmers and their relatives, working farms of various sizes in each rural district, farm labourers and entire population. Various percentages are included for purposes of comparison.

Rural Districts	Acreage of Farms						Total	Total Agricultural Population and per cent of all Producers	Total Population and per cent of all employed persons in agriculture
	1-15	15-30	30-50	50-100	100-200	Over 200			
BOYLE NO 2									
Farmers	566	944	414	138	27	6	2,097	4,024	9,671
Percentage	27.0	45.0	19.7	6.7	1.3	0.3	100	94.6	86.6
Relatives	865	777	396	132	22	4	1,696	220a	—
DROMORE WEST									
Farmers	529	811	312	168	51	21	1,900	4,113	9,680
Percentage	27.9	42.9	16.5	8.9	2.7	1.1	100	94.5	84.0
Relatives	473	788	323	174	52	18	1,832	373a	—
SLIGO									
Farmers	1,238	1,344	572	253	65	10	3,517	7,354	20,898
Percentage	35.4	38.7	16.4	7.3	1.9	0.3	100	89.5	78.5
Relatives	851	1,162	501	206	51	5	1,796	941a	—
TOBERCURRY									
Farmers	949	1,076	497	168	46	27	2,777	5,310	14,233
Percentage	34.2	39.0	18.0	6.1	1.7	1.0	100	93.4	80.9
Relatives	674	811	411	146	42	20	2,113	401a	—
TOTAL									
Farmers	3,282	4,175	1,795	727	189	64	10,291	20,801	54,882
Percentage	32.0	40.8	17.6	7.2	1.8	0.6	100	93.4	80.0
Relatives	2,363	3,538	1,631	658	167	47	8,430	1,944a	—

(a) Number of farm labourers

⁶ My former student, Mr R C Le Clerc, B A, has provided useful local information. See also sources in note 5 and *The Times, Trade and Engineering Review*, March, 1939, Eire section.

⁷ The number of whole-time fishermen gives only a partial view of the significance of fishing, as many part-timers are returned as occupied in farming and other pursuits.

The rural population is primarily engaged in agriculture and Co. Sligo lacks the small but socially important industries which are characteristic of Mayo and Donegal.⁸ Table I shows the distribution of farms of various sizes and the manpower employed in each rural district, the boundaries of which appear in Fig 1. Over the rural areas of the entire county, 93.4 per cent of all "producers and repairers" are engaged directly in agriculture, and the most significant other occupation is building and contracting, which employs about half the residue in the "producer and repairer" group, 710 persons were so engaged in 1936, against 554 in 1926, and the increase may be ascribed to housing developments and road building. The overwhelmingly dominant position of agriculture is better expressed by the fact that 80 per cent of all employed persons in rural Sligo are agriculturists. The proportion is lowest in Sligo rd., where there is a considerable number of people engaged in personal service, either among the residential population, or in the tourist trade, or on farms. In Boyle II rd. 86.6 per cent of all employed persons are agriculturists, such high figures demonstrate the relatively small demand for goods and services among a population living mainly on small and medium-sized farms. Table I also shows indirectly the utter impossibility of providing a livelihood for more than a very slight proportion of the total population by the "tourist industry." Undoubtedly it brings profit to Sligo, a few seaside resorts such as Rosses Point, Strandhill and Enniscrone but in the whole county only 156 persons were returned as keepers of hotels, restaurants and boarding houses in 1936.

In all the four rural districts, 70 per cent of all the farms are of less than 30 acres, the proportion of the total having less than 15 acres is more than a third in Sligo and Tobercurry, and over a quarter in Boyle II and Dromore West. These very small farms, a marked feature of the landscape in both lowland and upland, are more numerous than in Kerry, but much less numerous than in Mayo and Donegal.⁹ Medium-sized farms of 30-100 acres include about one-quarter of the total, and most are of less than 50 acres. There are relatively few large farms. The number of relatives working on farms is less than the number of farmers, on farms of under 15 acres there are 72 assisting relatives per 100 farmers, on farms of 15-30 acres, 85 to every 100, and on medium-sized farms 91 to every 100. The comparatively large number on small farms undoubtedly includes many who migrate for part of the year to Great Britain. In this county of small and medium-sized farms the number of labourers is only one to every five farmers, it must be assumed, therefore, that they work mainly on the large farms.

The general agricultural economy of Co. Sligo is based on dairy farming and meat production. In 1939, a year before the latest drive for additional tillage, over half the whole area of the county was in pasture, and nearly one-third was in unimproved land.¹⁰ This includes the small areas covered by roads and buildings, water, woods and plantations, but consisted primarily of peat bogs, marshes and rough mountain pasture. Some of the unimproved land was grazed and much of it was of value as a source of fuel. Nearly 12 per cent of the county was sown to hay and the remaining 5 per cent was divided almost equally between cereal

⁸ Freeman, T. W., in *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. xvi, 1940-41, pp. 31-46 and vol. xvii, 1942-43, pp. 85-106.

⁹ Freeman, T. W., in *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. xvi, 1941-42, pp. 28-43.

¹⁰ Ireland, Department of Industry and Commerce, *Statistical Abstract*, 1942.

crops and roots Oats covered 16 of the 17 square miles sown to cereals, but wheat was grown on only 519 acres, barley on 171 and rye on 78 Rye was apparently more frequent in the last decade of the nineteenth century, but was already declining in significance¹¹ Potatoes covered 15 of the 18 square miles given to root crops in 1939, and turnips were cultivated on most of the remainder, with small quantities of mangels, cabbage and sugar beet The obvious dependence on crops used for animal feedstuffs is apparent and the arable farming reflects the general emphasis on dairying and meat production

There were 32,105 milch cows and 57,652 other cattle in 1939 In the dairying industry, co-operative creameries absorbed nearly 60 per cent

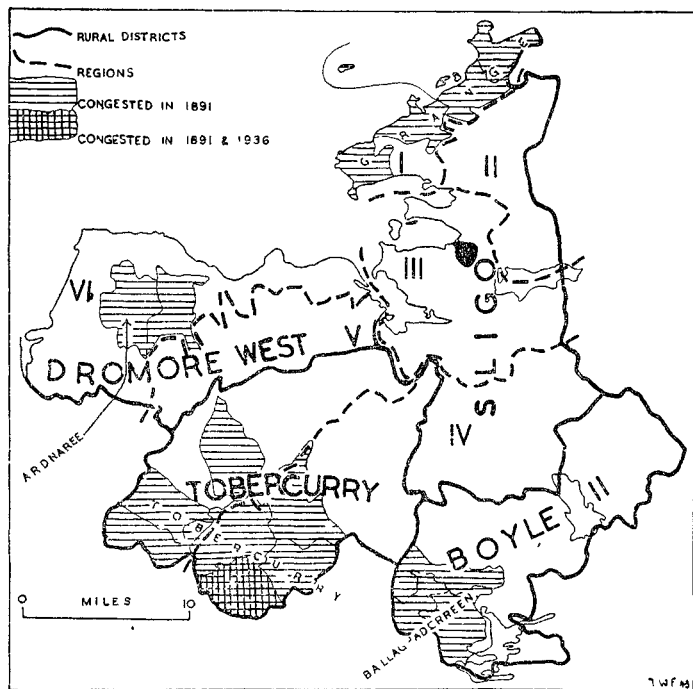


FIG 1 —Boundaries of Rural districts, Regions and Congested areas

of the milk, pig rearing and poultry keeping fitted into the general scheme. The number of hens was 542,000 and eggs provided an important source of income on most farms in the county Turkeys, geese and ducks were reared in much smaller numbers Meat production is at least as important as dairying in the general pastoral economy and there were 64,000 sheep, mainly on the uplands There were also nearly 9,000 horses and over 7,000 donkeys in Sligo, nearly all the horses were used for agricultural purposes and the ass, though biblically royal, has his humble but invaluable rôle in the agricultural and commercial life of rural Sligo.

¹¹ Base Line Reports of the Congested Districts Board, especially those for Co Sligo

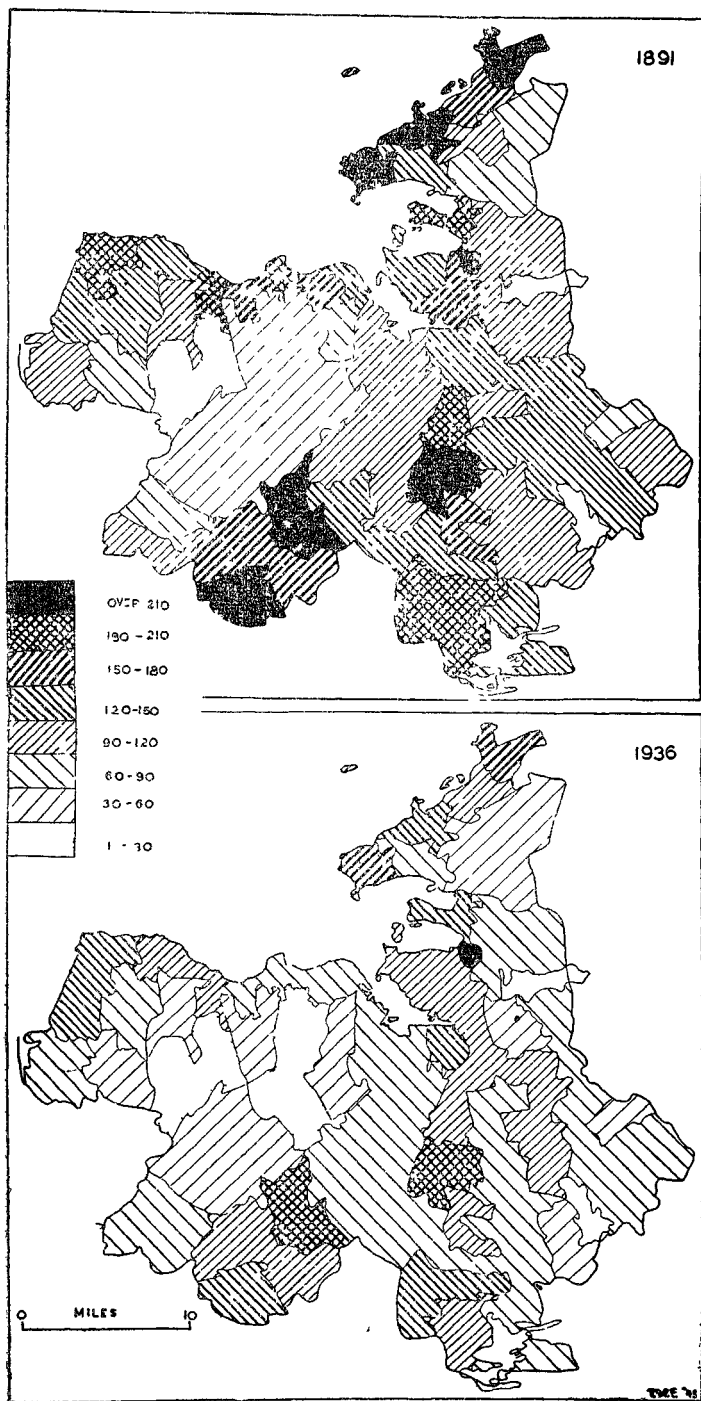
TABLE II—Population in each region (Fig 1), in congested and non-congested areas, 1891 and 1936, with density per square mile and percentage change

	Area in square miles	Population 1891	Population per square mile, 1891	Population 1936	Population per square mile, 1936	Increase or decrease per cent
I NORTH EAST COASTAL LOWLAND						
Congested area	29.2	6,798	232	4,139	142	-38.9
Non-congested area	6.6	913	135	565	86	-38.1
Total	35.8	7,711	216	4,704	132	-38.8
II THE LIMESTONE UPLANDS						
Non-congested area	49.2	4,156	90	2,519	57	-39.3
III THE SLIGO LOWLANDS						
Non congested area	72.4	9,065	125	6,600	91	-27.2
IV THE INTERIOR LOWLANDS						
Congested area	78.8	15,410	196	9,684	123	-37.3
Non-Congested area	208.4	26,531	127	17,521	84	-33.7
Total	287.2	41,941	146	27,205	95	-34.9
V. THE OX MOUNTAINS						
Congested area	35.8	2,961	83	1,738	49	-41.3
Non congested area	111.6	5,553	50	3,523	32	-36.0
Total	147.4	8,514	58	5,261	36	-38.2
VI NORTH WEST COASTAL LOWLAND						
Congested area	22.3	2,418	93	1,670	75	-30.8
Non-congested area	75.6	10,337	137	6,923	91	-34.6
Total	97.9	12,755	130	8,693	89	-31.9
Co SLIGO						
Congested area	166.1	27,587	166	17,231	104	-37.3
Non-congested area	523.8	56,555	103	37,651	72	-33.4
Total (excluding Sligo)	689.9	84,142	122	54,882	79	-35.7
Sligo town	3.7	10,274	2,767	12,565	3,396	+12.2
GRAND TOTAL	693.6	94,416	135	67,447	96	-28.5

County Sligo has been divided, on a basis of landscape, into six major geographical divisions (Table II and Fig 1) for all of which the populations of non-congested and congested areas, if any, in 1891 have been compiled and compared with those covering the same areas in 1936¹² The remarkable uniformity of population decrease between 1891 and 1936 is apparent, though the decline is very slightly higher in the congested districts. Part of the price paid for the amelioration of social and economic conditions has been a heavy loss of manpower from rural areas. Sligo town, with an increase of 12.2 per cent, has also contributed to the emigration movement, as it has failed to absorb by at least 800 persons the natural increase due to excess of births over deaths.

The general distribution of population in 1936 is shown in Fig 5, in which each dot represents 25 persons. In the compilation of this map reference was made to the relevant one inch to one mile maps of the Ordnance Survey and the dots placed in the inhabited areas. Absolute accuracy cannot be guaranteed, but the map shows the remarkably even distribution of settlement in the inhabited areas. The gaps caused by the

¹² The remainder of this paper is based on sources already mentioned, and also on the Memoirs of the Geological Survey, geological and topographical maps, and field observations. Other works consulted include Præger, R. L., *The Botanist in Ireland*, 1934 and *The Way that I Went*, 1939.



FIGS 2 (upper) and 3.— Density of population, 1891 and 1936

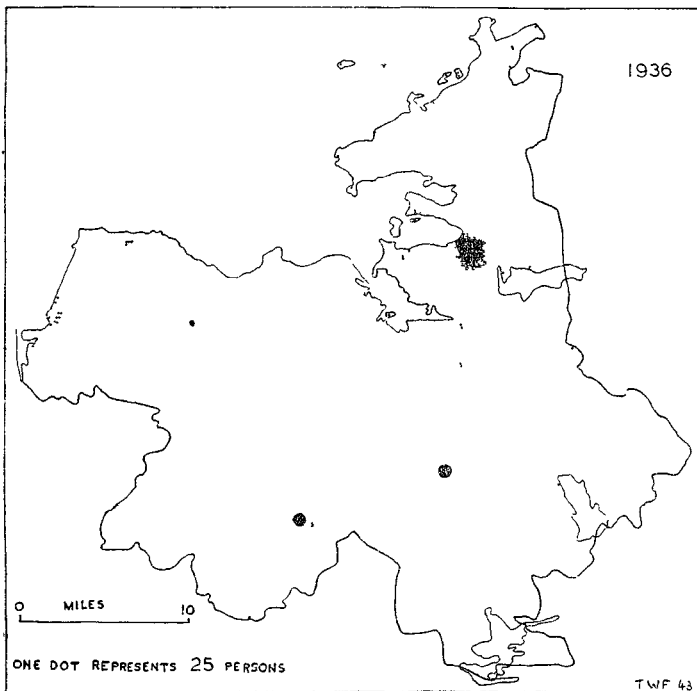
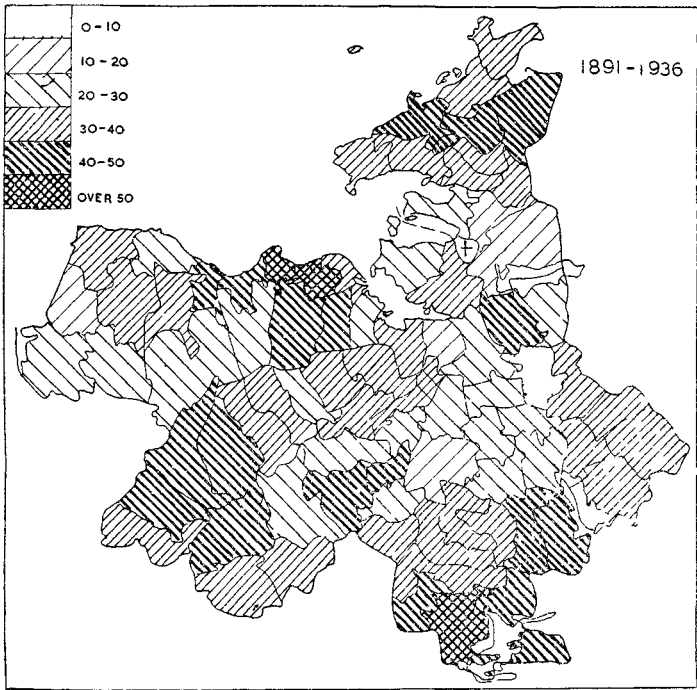


FIG 4 (upper) — Decline per cent in population, 1891-1936, in each District Electoral Division. The town of Sligo shows the only increase recorded.
 FIG 5 — Distribution of population, 1936, by the dot method. This map may usefully be compared with Fig 3.

Ox mountains and the Ben Bulbin range are apparent and the penetration of settlement in some of the valleys draining these uplands will be noted. The close occupation of coastal lowlands is seen here the gaps are mainly due to boglands or sand dunes and the lines of settlement along main roads emerge quite clearly. The gaps in the southern part of the county represent boglands and the increasing concentration on the cultivable areas towards the south will be noted. Comparison with Fig 1 will show that some of these more southern areas were congested in 1891. "Town" populations are shown by clusters of dots, except in the cases of Ballymote and Tobercurry. Sligo has been indicated by solid black and smaller dots to show the interpenetration of the town with the adjacent rural area. Like many Irish country towns, Sligo is remarkably closely settled near the centre.

I.—The North-east Coastal Lowland.

This coastal lowland in the north-east of Sligo merges into the lowlands around Sligo bay to the south and similar coastal lowlands in Co Leitrim and Co Donegal to the north. It is backed by the striking limestone hills which are called the Ben Bulbin range. Three to four miles wide, it is formed of Carboniferous limestones and sandstones covered with glacial drift. There are still extensive boglands in spite of considerable reclamation by the very numerous inhabitants.

All save one of the five *d e d*'s were congested in 1891 and formed the Grange district. The density of population, 232 per square mile, was remarkably high, especially as approximately half the area was uncultivated bogland, providing, however, pasture for cattle and supplies of fuel. The small farms are very closely spaced along the main road through the lowland and almost equally frequent along the various subsidiary roads, but the only market centres, Grange and Clifony, each had less than 100 inhabitants in 1936. The general picture is of a community of dispersed farms, so close together that no one lives in isolation. The acreage per farm was about 6 in the north and 4 in the south, of which 2 acres or less was sown to oats and potatoes in equal proportions. Small patches were given to cabbages and turnips and the remainder was meadow or pasture. Spade labour was general, though ploughs and horses were lent around, and the fertilisers used included farm yard manure, guano, shells and seaweed. Seaweed was the most important of all the manures and profit was also acquired from the kelp industry.

Fishing was practised in conjunction with agriculture, but the main financial resources were the profits from dairy farming and sheep. Only in the Mullaghmore peninsula were families mainly dependent upon fishing for a livelihood and even there most families had small patches of land with a few pigs and in some cases a cow. The varied fortunes of the fishing industry since 1891 have reinforced the dependence on the land. In 1926 there were only 46 and in 1936 only 42 persons returned as fishermen from the whole of Sligo *r d*, which also includes the coasts of the Sligo lowland as defined in this paper (region III—*vide infra*).

Labour was plentiful, as most farmers were eager to add to their exiguous incomes, a little was required intermittently on the roads and by the few large farmers in the region. In 1891 there was very little migratory labour and emigration was mainly directed to America. The persistence of emigration since 1891 is shown by the loss of nearly 40 per cent of the population from the congested area, and also from the only non-congested *d e d* in the region, Lissadell East. This district is much less densely populated and the valuation per head is much higher

than elsewhere, chiefly because there are a number of large farms. As a result of the decline of population, no part of the region would be congested to-day, but it is likely to remain an area of heavy emigration (Figs, 2, 3, 4)

II.—The Limestone Uplands.

These striking limestone hills are the western part of a range which extends into Co Leitrim and further east to Lough Erne. They are dry and bare, with precipitous scarps grading down into valleys which are settled up to 600 feet or even higher where the slopes are not too steep. The Glencar valley lies between hills 2,000 feet high on the north and a lower group which stretches southwards to Lough Gill on the south. Immediately to the east of Sligo and to the north of Lough Gill there is tumbled limestone country of low hills, partly covered with farmlands, with some excellent pastures. Elsewhere settlement is restricted to bog-strewn lowlands around the hills and the few valleys which penetrate the upland. The settlement is entirely dispersed and the farm-houses are generally two-storied, stone-built dwellings.

The density of population in the whole region was 90 per square mile in 1891 and 57 in 1936, a decrease of nearly 40 per cent. The valuation per head was more than double that of the coastal lowland, and in 1936 was over £3 per head in the districts on the north side of the Ben Bulbin range, over £4 10s in the districts based on Glencar and the west side of the upland and over £6 in Calry, the hilly area to the east of Sligo. In general, the region does not show marked pressure of population in relation to the natural resources, and the uplands provide excellent sheep runs.

III.—The Sligo Lowlands.

These lowlands are broken by the hills formed of metamorphic rocks which continue the line of the Ox mountains to the south of Lough Gill. The Collooney gap through the hills between the villages of Collooney and Ballysadare carries the road and railway to Sligo. To the north of these hills, inlets of the sea divide the lowlands into two peninsulas, of which the smaller stretches to Rosses Point and the larger includes Knocknarea, a dry limestone hill 1,078 feet high. Part of the lowland, around Collooney and Ballintogher, to the south of the hills from the Ox mountains to Lough Gill has been included with this region.

The immediate hinterland of Sligo town is included in this region which experienced, from 1891 to 1936, a lower loss of population than other regions. It is not a country of striking fertility, but no part of it was congested in 1891. The richer lands lie to the north of the Ox mountain ridge and its continuation, but all had a valuation of at least £3 per head in 1936, and some substantially more. The areas to the north of the ridge consist largely of good pastoral country on drift-covered Carboniferous limestone, with medium-sized farms of reasonably prosperous appearance. To the south of the ridge many similar farms are seen, but there are also many poorer holdings with thatched cottages in a very moderate state of repair. The d'eds from Collooney eastward have small areas of cultivated land on the margins of the ridge and the country consists largely of drumlin-strewn lowlands similar to those covering the greater part of southern Sligo.

Certain features of the region reflect the nearness of Sligo, there are flour and oatmeal mills at Collooney and Ballysadare, both worked by waterpower from falls. Rosses Point and Strandhill are small tourist

centres with hotels and a small volume of tourist traffic brings profit at least to a few individuals. Near Sligo there is a certain amount of "outer suburban" development. Houses have been built by Sligo people along the estuary. The region profits from its position near the one relatively large town largely because the farmers are in closer touch with an important distributing centre. A calcium carbide factory at Collooney has been re-opened recently.

IV.—The Interior Lowlands.

These lowlands consist mainly of Carboniferous limestones covered with drumlins, which are fertile and well-drained mounds largely sown to arable crops, with good pastures for cattle in the intervening marshy ground. In some parts of the lowland, especially towards the south and near the Ox mountains, less fertile glacial drift occurs and forms soils much less attractive to cultivation. In the extreme south-east of Sligo, around Lough Arrow and Lough Gara, there are upland areas of varied geological composition. The Curlew mountains, of Old Red sandstone, have farmlands interspersed with boglands to about 600 feet. Limestone hills reach 1,000 feet to the west of Lough Arrow, and Keishcorran rises in solitary grandeur to 1,188 feet above the drumlin-strewn lowland which stretches westwards towards the Ox mountains. To the east of Lough Arrow, a limestone ridge rising to over 700 feet is farmed, with very little arable land, almost to the summit. Higher hills further east, formed of Carboniferous shales, limestones and coal measures, reach over 1,500 feet and are cultivated to over 1,000 feet in places. The mines employed 26 colliers in 1926 and 32 in 1936.

The Interior Lowland, with the hill ranges noted above, covers two-fifths of Co. Sligo in area and in terms of rural districts includes the whole of Boyle II, over half Tobercurry and part of Sligo. Over one-quarter of this area was congested in 1891, and showed a remarkably high density of population which was reduced to a more reasonable level in 1936 by very heavy emigration. The congested districts on the southern margins are continuous with similar congested districts in Co. Roscommon and Co. Mayo. They are part of a region, based on central Mayo, remarkable for the close settlement which is a striking feature of the whole of the drumlin belt stretching across Ireland from Clew Bay to the country around Dundalk. A substantial part of the congested areas of Sligo, as of Mayo, consists of bogland and the population per square mile of farmland in 1891 was probably at least 300. The boglands provide grazing, rushes for cattle bedding and fuel, and must not be regarded as purely of negative value in the general agricultural economy.

The three *d e d*'s to the west of Lough Gara all had about 200 persons to the square mile in 1891, reduced to 98—122 by 1936. In Coolavin *d e d* the decline of population was 50.5 per cent, one of the highest in Ireland. The C.D. Reports show that nearly one-fifth of the families were very poor. On the farms about four acres were cultivated, mainly with oats and potatoes, though there were also small patches of greens and meadow. Spade labour was general and there was no rotation of crops. The only available manure was turf mould mixed with the droppings of livestock. Very little labour was in demand locally, except in haymaking and the cutting of turf. Most of the smallholders went to England between March and June and returned in the autumn with the savings absolutely necessary to balance the family budget. The houses were one-storied thatched cottages, with two or three rooms, and outhouses for cattle were just being built. Since 1891, many of the

old houses have been turned into outhouses and replaced by larger cottages. The CD report for the Ballaghaderreen district includes a comment on the women which is of wide application¹³. They "work very hard" when "the men are absent in England. They generally assist in the digging of the soil for the potato and oat crops and attend to the after cultivation of the potatoes. They carry manure in baskets on their backs, often very long distances, and, to fields that are inconveniently located. They also work hard cutting and saving turf, and they carry it on their backs from the bog to the nearest road."

The past fifty years have seen the alleviation of the severe conditions in this area. The ratable valuation, probably a fair assessment of the existing development of natural resources, has actually increased during the past fifty years in spite of the heavy decline of population. It is impossible to state with certainty that the area farmed is as large as in 1891, but many small farms appear to have been united. Seasonal migration generally leads to the permanent migration of which the population figures are eloquent but the money sent home by the migrants removes the fear of want.

Conditions in the Tobercurry area (Fig. 1) are generally similar to those just described. The density of population in the four divisions included as congested in 1891 was from 163-225 per square mile, even though one-quarter to one-half was bogland. The decline between 1891 and 1936 reduced the densities per square mile to 97-157, which is still remarkably high for an area limited in agricultural resources. One division, Achonry West, would still be congested on a 1936 re-assessment. The extraordinary concentration is noted around Curry, a small roadside settlement on the borders of Achonry West and Achonry East. Here there were 800 families within a radius of 2 Irish (c. 2½ English) miles¹⁴. The percentage of families reported as "very poor" varies from 9-27 per cent and the highest incidence of poverty is seen in the Achonry divisions.

Oats and potatoes were grown in equal proportions on the farmed lands, with small patches of greens and meadow. The land was badly cultivated, with no rotation of crops, but artificial manures were used to supplement the natural sources. The dwellings were thatched cottages with two rooms. Almost all the poorer farmers migrated to England for at least four months, June to October, each year, as very little labour was in demand locally except in the market villages, of which Tobercurry is the chief. The seasonal migration has led to permanent emigration and the Tobercurry congested district has now a much higher valuation per head than in 1891, and conditions are generally improved.

The remainder of the Interior Lowland was not congested in 1891 and was much less densely peopled than the congested area. The population decline is slightly less heavy in the non-congested part of the lowland, but some of the poorer parts, such as the hilly country on either side of Lough Arrow, and the north-facing slopes of the Curlew mountains, have lost over 30 per cent, and in some cases over 40 per cent of their population.

The farms are of various sizes, but small holdings of less than 15 acres are widely represented, and include one-quarter to one-third of all the farms in the lowland. Many of these are as poor as the farms in the congested areas, but the general picture is more favourable and most of the farms in the non-congested part of the lowland have an average

¹³ *op cit* in note 11, report on Ballaghaderreen district

¹⁴ *op cit* in note 11, report on Tobercurry district

valuation per head two or three times as great as that in the congested area. The difference between the two lies largely in the type of farming units rather than in any great difference in soil fertility. The density of population per square mile is not in itself an index of poverty or wealth.

The Interior Lowland shows the almost complete dominance of dispersed settlement which is characteristic of rural Ireland. Out of a population of 27,205 in 1936, only 2,066 or 7.6 per cent, were living in "towns and villages," as the Census reports define "clusters of twenty houses or more." These centres are market villages, of which two, Tobercurry and Ballymote, with 823 and 738 inhabitants respectively, are in effect small market towns. The functions of villages are performed by shops, general stores, inns, schools and churches at cross roads. The unusually small amount of nucleated settlement is due partly to the dominance of Sligo as a market centre and to the fact that the town of Boyle, Co. Roscommon, serves the district around the Curlew mountains and Lough Arrow.

V.—The Ox Mountains.

The Ox mountains gradually widen into a formidable bog-covered range to the west of Collooney, where they rise to nearly 1,800 feet. Extensive boglands are developed both to the north and south of the range, especially around the river Moy. Agricultural settlement is pushed to as high as 700 feet in places, and represents a conquest of the boglands. This region includes the lowlands bordering the mountains on either side. On the north, settlement is largely restricted to areas in river valleys and along roads, where boglands have been cleared for cultivation. The density of population per square mile is merely a reflection of the vast extent of uncultivated land within the region, and the heavy decline between 1891 and 1936 is almost certainly an indication of over-population now relieved by emigration.

The three congested divisions had in 1891 a type of life similar to that of the adjacent congested divisions in the interior lowland. There is abundant grazing land available on the mountains, in addition to the lowland bogs, but small farms are general and in 1891 one-eighth of the families were reported to be very poor. Few could exist without the profits of seasonal migration. The ratable valuation in each of the congested divisions shows a slight increase since 1891, and none of them would be congested on a re-assessment. It is obvious that the area is as productive and well-farmed now as in 1891, though supporting only three-fifths of the number of people. Seasonal migration generally leads to permanent migration but either is profitable for the people left behind.

The non-congested divisions consist mainly of bog-strewn mountains and lowlands, except in the extreme east of the region. Around Dromard on the north side of the range the lowland is virtually free from bogland and continuously settled, while around Coolaney the boglands and south-facing slopes of the Ox mountains are farmed to as high as 700 feet in places. These divisions had a density per square mile of 88–102 in 1891, and 47–66 in 1936. The eight other divisions all had densities of less than 60 per square mile in 1891, and less than 40 in 1936. Mallaghareuse had a density of 10 per square mile in 1891 and 7 in 1936. This recalls conditions in the peat bogs of Co. Mayo, but here the settlement is the extension towards a mountains range of lowland farming, rather than the occupation of a few clearings in a vast bogland. The valuation per head is highest towards the east limit of this region where

the farmlands are more continuous and less split up by boglands than further west

The incidence of dispersed settlement is even greater in this region than in the interior lowland, and there are only two market villages, Coolaney and Aclare, which together account for 5.3 per cent of the whole population. Churches, post offices, schools, inns and shops are placed at intervals along the roads, but isolation is a serious problem, especially in some of the valleys on the north side of the mountains

VI.—Coastal Lowland of North-west Sligo.

This lowland extends from Ballysadare bay to the Moy estuary and is formed of Carboniferous limestones covered with drift and rising towards the bog-strewn northern fringe of the Ox mountains included in region V. Two-thirds of the area and 87 per cent of the population of the Dromore West rd is included, and reference may be made to Table I for a general survey of farming conditions. More than one-quarter of the farms are of less than 15 acres, and over two-fifths of 15–30 acres. One-quarter are medium-sized farms of 30–100 acres, and less than 4 per cent are large farms. The number of labourers is small, and averages only one per five farmers, while the number of assisting relatives is approximately equal to the number of farmers. Two of the eleven d e d 's within this region were congested in 1891, but the general picture is of farming populations not unduly poor, and in 1936 the ratable valuation per head in Toberpatrick East and West was over £6 following a very heavy decline in population.

The two congested divisions, Buncrowey and Rathmacurkey, were included in the C D Reports with the Ardnaree districts in Co Mayo, to the east of Ballina. They are the last northward extension of the large congested area in central and east Mayo, with which their life is generally similar. They include an area of lowland, continuously settled and farmed, and part of the bog-covered flanks of the Ox mountains. Settlement occurs in the river valleys, where there are strips of alluvial soil, and in clearings within the prevailing bogland. Conditions of life are similar to those in region V, but the density of population is relatively high and the decline in population comparatively moderate between 1891 and 1936. In 1891, one-fifth of the population was reported to be very poor, but the housing was superior to that of many congested districts as out-houses were already general. The farmers tilled their lands with the spade, grew oats and potatoes, and sold their poultry and eggs in Dromore West and Ballina, Co Mayo. Migratory labour was not general in these two divisions, and some of the men added to their income by cutting and saving turf. This has continued to be the practice in the region and it has been suggested that turf is the most important cash crop of many small farmers on the fringes of the cultivated and moorland areas¹⁵.

The non-congested lowlands are thickly inhabited, especially along the road from Sligo to Ballina and a network of minor roads. Apart from Castleconnor East, a d e d with extensive boglands on the flanks of the mountains, all the divisions were relatively densely peopled in 1891, with 92–208 persons per square mile. This was reduced to 72–133 in 1936 by a heavy decline of population very varied in incidence. In Kilglass, it was only 11 per cent, but in Toberpatrick West and Aughris,

¹⁵ An unpublished thesis by Miss H. M. Williamson, B.A. (Mrs R. H. Kidd), on the basin of the lower Moy has been consulted for this section. Miss Williamson states that many of the houses along the main roads are new and greatly superior in appearance to those along the side roads.

50 and 52 per cent respectively. The divergences revealed here are probably quite fortuitous and due to obscure social factors such as the number of previous emigrants who had been successful and encouraged their relatives to follow. The average decline of 34.6 per cent gives a useful indication of the extent of emigration.

In rural Ireland areas near the sea frequently have greater resources than areas further inland, but fishing occupied only 17 full-time men in Dromore West rd in 1936 and 23 in 1926. The harvest of the shore is generally of more significance than the harvest of the sea, the clay soils are improved by the addition of seaweed and sand. The Moy estuary has some good arable land, largely on striped fields established on former demesnes by the Land Commission. Beef cattle are produced here by the larger farmers and the chief crops are oats and potatoes, though a small quantity of wheat is grown.

This region had only 6.6 per cent of its entire population in villages in 1936. Of these Enniscrone is a small fishing and tourist centre just outside the Moy estuary. The harbour is generally full of fishing vessels, but the fish are small in size and number, due to the scarcity of food along the rough rocky coast which is fraught with perils to navigation. The places of villages in the community generally is taken by roadside fairs, and also by schools, churches, shops and inns along the roads. In some senses the main roads, and pre-eminently the cross roads in such areas as these are themselves the analogues of villages among English rural communities, especially where the settlement, though nominally dispersed, is in fact practically continuous.

Conclusion.

The regional study of Co Sligo shows its variety of landscape and life and absence of any marked individuality. The congested districts of the north-east coastal lowlands are merely the continuation of similar lowlands in Leitrim and Donegal, the Ben Bulbin range is part of a limestone upland more impressively and continuously developed in Leitrim, and the congested districts of the interior lowland and around the Ox mountains are merely extensions into Sligo of a poor and over-populated landscape more widely developed in neighbouring counties.¹⁶ The Sligo lowlands, deeply penetrated by inlets of the sea and nowhere far from hills, possess a more marked character, partly because they are closely identified with the town of Sligo. The county as a whole is neither rich nor poor, but there can be little doubt that it was over-populated in 1891. In resources, it is perhaps comparable with Clare as one of the western counties closely linked with the Central Lowland of Ireland but possessing also some indications of the marked over-population of poor lands so characteristic of western Ireland.¹⁷

It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the emigration which has resulted in such a heavy decline of population has been profitable to all concerned. The position is not comparable with that in parts of the Scottish Highlands where "a neglected graveyard may be the only indication that a valley was once extensively peopled" and landlords have evicted small tenant farmers "by establishing large sheep farms (requiring only a few shepherds) or by creating huge game reserves or shooting preserves (deer forests or grouse moors), which would attract money in the form of high seasonal rents from wealthy town dwellers

¹⁶ Freeman, T W, in *Geographical Review*, New York, vol xxxiii, 1943, pp 1-14.

¹⁷ See Arensberg, C M, and Kimball, S T, *Family and Community in Ireland*, London, 1940, for a careful social study of Co Clare.

or visiting Americans"¹⁸ Reference to the illustrations and tables in this paper will show that the population still lives in mountain valleys and on hillsides, but the ultimate question is to what extent the steady decline of population is to continue. So far, it has been accompanied by a rise in the standard of living, due to the greater amount of farmland available per person and also to the remittances from former emigrants, with the profits of seasonal labour. It may appear to some that even this improvement over the past fifty years has been won at too great a price.

¹⁸ Stamp, L. D., in *Geographical Review*, vol. xxvii, 1937, pp. 3-5