

THE
DEPENDENCE OF NATIONAL WEALTH
ON THE
SOCIAL AND SANATORY CONDITION
OF
THE LABOURING CLASSES:

BEING

A PAPER READ BEFORE
THE DUBLIN STATISTICAL SOCIETY:

BY

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The Dependence of National Wealth on the Social and Sanatory State of the Labouring Classes. By WILLIAM HOGAN, Esq.
19th February, 1849.

In the year 1841, public attention was called to the duration of infantile life in the North Dublin Union Workhouse; about the same period Mr. Willis was elected a guardian, and he entered on his duties impressed with the belief, that there was an excess of mortality amongst the children of the workhouse. Circumstances had made him intimately acquainted with the very poor inhabitants of Michan's parish. He at once set about the formation of a table of infantile life, and after a minute and careful examination of the facts, collected in the course of his enquiries, was convinced that the alleged excessive mortality amongst the children of the workhouse was very much exaggerated, and that the deaths were not more numerous than in the same class outside, and not more than might have been expected, from the state of destitution and wretchedness to which the mothers were reduced before they sought admission.

Mr. Willis communicated the result of his enquiries to the Board of Guardians; and from that time no allusion has been made to an excessive mortality amongst the infants. His enquiries led to the careful compilation of several statistical tables, and to many important observations, which he published in the year 1845, in his work "On the Social and Sanatory Condition of the Labouring Classes in Dublin." He found that the mortality, as well in infancy as in more advanced life, was much greater in that class than was assumed in any of the accredited tables, used for the purpose of life insurance in this country—and has thus proved, that though the mortality in the workhouse was not excessive, as compared with the classes from which its inmates were drawn; yet that the mortality amongst the working classes in Dublin was excessive. He investigated the cases of 3000 families of the poor in Dublin; and the result was, that of one hundred children born in Dublin, but thirty-four lived to be twenty years of age, but twenty lived to be forty, and but fourteen lived to be fifty. These numbers might possibly be slightly varied, had we similar tables of the whole population; but it is not probable that the proportions would be much disturbed; and it is the probable and approximate truth of these proportions which suggested many of the remarks I now make.

We may consider that the labour of an individual, in Dublin, becomes valuable when he completes his twentieth year; and that he is then in a state to repay to society the expense which has been incurred in feeding, clothing, lodging, and educating him, while he was unable to contribute to his own support; and as those who died under that age were supported by means not of their own procuring, and as one hundred children must be born and maintained, in order that thirty-four may attain the age of twenty years, we may consider that these thirty-four cost society all that was expended on the one hundred children I have alluded to. This expenditure the adults ought to replace by their labour, and the nation must be impoverished by each generation whose adults do not repay what was thus expended. We may consider that from twenty to fifty is the period in which adults are in a state to be productive labourers; apprenticeship generally expires about twenty, and the completion of that year marks one of the great divisions in the population returns. As the labouring poor generally marry early, we may expect that a man's children will be able to support themselves by the time he attains fifty. I believe that, on an average, the period of productive labour is not so long as from twenty to fifty, though there is no reason why, in a healthy population, the period might not be longer. Now, unless the adults of each generation are profitably employed, until they replace what was expended on their generation during infancy, the nation must be impoverished; but if profitably employed from twenty to fifty, they replace more than they cost, and the nation is wealthier than before they became productive labourers. It makes no difference that his labour may have principally enriched the labourer or his family. No member of society can benefit himself alone by his industry. It must have been in some way remunerative, or it would not have continued to support him, and no man can enjoy in his family the necessaries and comforts of life, however humble, without giving some remunerative employment to others; besides, in supporting his wife and children, he repays what it cost to rear and support himself and his wife, as well as those children who died under age; and society is but a collection of individuals, and the united wealth of individuals constitutes what is called the wealth of the nation.

If these remarks are borne out as to the case of one hundred children born in Dublin, they are equally so of 100,000, or a whole generation; and it is manifest that in each generation the nation is wealthier or poorer than it was before, as the men which it produces are productively employed or not, during the age of labour, which may be considered as from twenty to fifty; and it follows, that no matter how the distribution of wealth may have been varied during any generation, the nation is poorer if its men have not repaid what it cost to produce them; and that if the labour of the men of any generation, has been productive and repaid more than they cost, the nation is wealthier, although each man

kept his own surplus earnings, and no large capitals were accumulated; as would be the case in the impossible event of all men being equally industrious, prudent, intelligent, and virtuous. In such a case, large capitals would appear in joint stock associations. Such associations, for new undertakings to which they are suited, is an evidence of the encrease of capital in comparatively small sums in numerous hands, and therefore of social progress.

If the men of any generation do not, for any cause, replace for the next generation what was expended on them, it is plain that it will be worse fed, clothed, and lodged than the preceding one; and if a few individuals should accumulate large capitals under such circumstances, the misery of the whole community would be increased, as there would be less left to clothe and feed them; while, on the contrary, if the men of any generation produce for their successors more than was expended on them, there is a fund out of which individuals may accumulate large capitals, without infringing on what should be appropriated to feeding, clothing, and lodging the rising generation.

I have, I hope, proved that a nation is wealthier or poorer, just as its male adults are profitably employed or not, during that portion of their life when their labour is remunerative. Will this view of the subject explain why the labouring population of Dublin are so poor and miserable? Can it be that each generation does not produce for its successor more than, if as much as, was expended on it; and that therefore each succeeding generation is so badly lodged, fed, and clothed? In addition to the poverty produced by premature death, we must remember that there is a scarcity of employment in Dublin, from a combination of all causes physical and social; and how much that scarcity is increased by trade combinations amongst artizans, to force their wages to the highest standard, which, as a consequence, drives trade to places where labour is cheaper.

Mr. Willis informs us that out of one hundred children born in Dublin, but thirty-four live to be twenty; at least half of these are females. There are, therefore, but seventeen men of twenty years old, from one hundred children. He also states, that a large per centage of the labouring population were not born in the county or city of Dublin; but as, on an average, they had been twenty years in Dublin when his account was taken, we must assume that most of them became inhabitants during youth, and were thus included in the enumeration and calculations founded on it. This explains the fact, ascertained from the census of 1841, that Dublin contains 232,000 inhabitants, and 49,000 families. Had the entire population been indigenious, we should have had less than 40,000 families. As, out of such a population, but seventeen men for each hundred live to be twenty, the number of men born in Dublin who attained that age, and could become heads of families, would be not quite 39,500.

The census of Ireland shows that, taking the average of all

Ireland, fifty-two per cent. of the population are under twenty years of age. On the population of Dublin of 232,000, we may assume, for convenience, that 132,000 have not completed their twentieth year, and 100,000 have attained that age. Although that is not the exact proportion, let us assume that half that number, namely 50,000, is nearly the number of the male inhabitants of Dublin who have attained twenty years of age. We have then 50,000 men, inhabitants of Dublin, of twenty years old and upwards; and taking Mr. Willis's tables of their average life as our guide, we will find that of these but 29,411 are forty or upwards, and but 20,588 are fifty or upwards. It will not affect my reasoning if I take the number as 50,000 who lived to be twenty, 30,000 who lived to be forty, and but 20,000 of them who lived to be fifty. We have, then, out of the population of Dublin, 20,000 men who die between twenty and forty, and 10,000 between forty and fifty. In other words, about two-fifths of those who live to be twenty die under forty, and one-fifth between forty and fifty. Taking the numbers in this loose way, that is, taking the nearest round numbers in each case, the same proportions are pretty nearly correct for all Ireland.

It is clear that the support of the whole community depends upon the profitable employment of each of these 60,000, until their children shall be reared, and able to support themselves. This, we may calculate, will not be before the fathers reach fifty years of age. Now, 20,000 of these men die under forty, on an average 1000 each year, and leave widows and helpless children (for nearly all marry); they die without having repaid to society what they cost it; and, of course, we must expect that poverty and inferior food and clothing will be the portion of their widows and children. This melancholy fate, then, attends two-fifths of the families of the labouring poor of Dublin. 10,000 more, being another fifth of the heads of families, die before fifty, and their widows and children will be more or less dependent on others, and, at the best, society has not been repaid by them more than they cost. The remaining 20,000 men live to be fifty, and will probably support their families, and produce more they cost; and society gains by them, if they have been always profitably employed; but against this gain must be written what it costs the community to maintain the widows and children of the 20,000 who died at different ages between twenty and forty. We see, then, that the community suffers loss by the premature death of two-fifths of its heads of families; that it has, probably, neither lost or gained by another fifth; and may have had its wealth increased by the remaining two-fifths. I fear that even the most sanguine must admit that the means for feeding, clothing, and lodging the succeeding generation will not be much, if at all, increased under such circumstances, and why? because, even if profitable employment could always be had, so few men live to avail themselves of it, even to the extent of rearing their own families.

Is there any thing in human nature, which makes it necessary that so many should die young? Experience proves that health may be preserved and life prolonged; that attention to cleanliness, ventilation, and diet, will generally be rewarded by improved health and longer life. Human life is, on an average, much longer than it was a century ago. The periodical census of England prove that it is progressively lengthening, though the commissioners express a doubt whether it has been prolonged as much as it appears to have been. What has been effected in England may be done in Ireland. There is no necessity that more than half of the population of Ireland should die under twenty, when more than half pass that age in England. Let the Irishman be better clothed, lodged, and fed, and he will be less liable to the assaults of disease; let him be temperate, and he will have better means to preserve his health and his life. I fear that in a great number of cases, perhaps a large portion of them, it is intemperance which, either directly or indirectly, produces the diseases under which parents and children are cut off. It brings in its train bad clothing, bad lodging, bad food, and bad temper; these all increase poverty and wretchedness, and induce that want of energy and self reliance which steeps men in helpless, hopeless misery.

As accuracy in the numbers was not necessary for my argument, I have assumed, and argued on the assumption, that out of a population of 232,000, there are 50,000 males of twenty years of age and upwards, of whom two-fifths die before forty, and three-fifths before fifty. These numbers were more convenient for illustration than the actual numbers, which are more appalling, and shew a much greater mortality. In page 82 of the Appendix to the Report of the Commissioners for taking the Census in 1841, it will be found, that of the inhabitants of Dublin but 44,026 men live to be twenty; but 19,275 live to be forty, and but 10,923 live to be fifty. Had but three-fifths died before fifty, we should have had 18,411 who attained that age instead of 10,923.

This is a melancholy view of our social state, but if it be a correct one, it is easy to see the remedy; we must acknowledge the truth, and act on it. National wealth is dependant on the social and sanatory state of the people. No nation can really and permanently increase in wealth, unless the labouring population are healthy and long lived, as otherwise they cannot be profitably employed. To live long and labour, they must be healthy; to be healthy, they must be well clothed, well fed, and well lodged for their rank in life; and to be all this, they must be temperate and moral. Could we, by any improvements in the labourer's condition, alter the proportions I have stated, so that 20,000 heads of families in Dublin, instead of dying under forty, might live to that age, nearly rear all their families, and almost discharge their debt to society;—and the remaining 30,000, at the same time, enjoy life beyond fifty, and rear their families—the nation would grow in wealth from generation to generation. As long as profitable em-

ployment existed for the people, there would be an ample fund out of which capitals could be accumulated without impoverishing the masses, and contentment, plenty, and health would spread over the land.

If this reasoning be correct, national wealth must depend on the good social state of the labouring classes. It is evident that the productive employment of a dissipated, and therefore unhealthy, and short lived class of labourers, cannot increase the wealth of a nation, because they do not live to rear their families and repay what they cost to the community; however skilful they may be, dissipation will bring them to an early grave, and they will leave widows and helpless children to pine in rags, poverty, and misery, and finally to fill the hospitals, poor-houses, prisons, and penitentiaries. All these involve heavy charges on the community, which therefore directly loses by the dissipation, ill health, and consequent short lives of the labouring classes. On this subject I am glad to quote the opinion of the Commissioners appointed to take the census of Ireland in 1841. They state, in their preface, pages 52, 53, that the prosperity of states ought to consist less in the multiplication than the preservation of the individuals who compose them.

Productive employment, though always desirable, will only add to the national wealth when the labouring classes are healthy and long lived. The idle, the dissipated, and the drunken will never provide for themselves or their families what is necessary either for health or long life; and they bequeath poverty and disease to their children, and a burden to their country.

A government which wishes to promote national wealth, and encrease the national resources, should seriously grapple with the social condition of the labouring classes: their state should be its first care. Something may be done to promote public health, and, as a consequence, national wealth, by sanatory measures. Intemperance may be discouraged, and prudence and industry given fair play. The temptations of the gin palace, with its lights and ornaments, could be met by means of healthful, innocent recreations, suited to the climate and the temper of the people. Streets could be kept dry and free from impurities, and an abundant supply of water might be brought to the door; but its use cannot be enforced; government cannot compel people to be cleanly in their habitations and persons; it cannot enforce industry, frugality, and self-restraint; in short, it cannot enforce morality; that must be done by education and other moral means. More, therefore, depends on the people themselves, in a free state, than on their rulers; but they can and should be taught by their rulers, the value and dignity of self-control; the importance of health, the value of cleanliness in person and in dwelling; the evils of intemperance, the value of productive labour, and those lessons of political economy which will explain what are their real interests as labourers, and how much is lost by the short-sighted expedients which they often adopt in the hope of securing high wages; and here a

large field of usefulness is open to the political economist, who would serve his country materially by popularising those lessons of experience which statistical tables afford ; who would, in short, bring down to common apprehension those moral and economical laws which such tables teach him.

Little, comparatively, can be done effectually, unless the social and sanatory state of the labouring classes is such, that they will avail themselves of all opportunities for improving their condition : as all appliances for encreasing wealth, for promoting health, decency, and comfort, are of little use until there is a desire, on the part of the people, to avail themselves of them. The Health of Towns bill, passed last session of parliament for England, will, it is to be hoped, be extended this year to Ireland ; but its extensive usefulness in advancing the comfort, promoting the health, and preserving the lives of the people, and, as a consequence, encreasing the national wealth, must, after all, depend in a very great degree on the people themselves. It is education and civilization, in the widest sense of the words, which they require.

The following is the per centage of the population in England and Ireland, living at the periods referred to in the foregoing remarks :—

Under 20 years of age, in England,	45·9187 ;	in Ireland,	52·0159.
Between 20 and 50, in England,	40·2465 ;	in Ireland,	37·5972.
50 and upwards, in England,	13·5318 ;	in Ireland,	10·3064.
20 and upwards, in England,	53·7783 ;	in Ireland,	47·9036.

As to those under twenty, the difference in favor of England is 13 per cent. It is relatively so much less.*

As to those over twenty, the difference in favor of England is about the same. It is relatively so much more.

Assuming that the English youth under twenty were all as unproductive as the Irish (which every one knows they are not), we have in Ireland an excess over England of 13 per cent. who are not of an age to be productive labourers, and 13 per cent. less of those who are ; making a difference of 26 per cent. in favor of the productive labour of England, *owing to the longer lives of the people*. The advantage in favor of English means of wealth by labour is of course very much increased, in consequence of the earlier age at which the generality of the population become productive labourers, and the much greater value of the labours of those who are capable of productive employment ; but in both countries *early death impoverishes the nation* ; and an encrease in wealth must ultimately depend on the long and healthy lives of the labouring classes ; and that again on their good social and sanatory condition.

* 46 : 52 :: 100 : 113.