

## THE CHANGING DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION IN COUNTY MAYO.

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County Mayo had, in 1936, 41.5 per cent. of its peak population of 388,887 in 1841. Nine of the twenty-six counties in Éire maintained their population to a greater degree than Mayo between 1841 and 1936. Dublin city and county had, in 1936, 157.4 per cent. of the 1841 population; of the remaining eight counties Kildare and Louth had slightly over 50 per cent. of their 1841 population. Donegal, Kerry, Wexford, Wicklow, Limerick and Cork then follow in order of decreasing ratio of the 1936 and 1841 populations. The rate of decline in Mayo, though great, is less than in its immediate neighbours, Sligo, Roscommon and Galway, and nearly all the midland counties.<sup>1</sup> The population in 1936 of 161,349 in Mayo gives an average density per square mile of 77, which is almost exactly the density for Kerry and Donegal, areas somewhat similar in terms of natural environment and resources. In previous papers, it has been shown that "congested" areas, in which the average valuation was less than £1 10s. per head in 1891, have had varied fortunes in the period 1891-1936.<sup>2</sup> If a re-assessment were made on the 1936 population and valuation, more than half the area congested in Donegal in 1891 would still rank as congested to-day. In Kerry, on the other hand, very few areas would fall into this category. Mayo is in this respect comparable with Donegal rather than with Kerry. Over two-thirds of Mayo was congested in 1891 and slightly under two-thirds of the population lived in these areas. Two-fifths of the area would rank as congested to-day, with one-third of the population.

The loss of population within the county has been highly varied and cannot be fully explained at the present time. Some of the causes operating in particular areas may be entirely fortuitous and accidental. Professor G. A. Duncan has shown that between 1911 and 1936 many areas show remarkably small decreases of population and even actual increases.<sup>3</sup> These are termed "areas of resistance" as opposed to "areas of denudation" in which the decline is heavy; neutral areas lie betwixt and between. The "resistance" areas have been noted in some of the poorer regions in Donegal, but in Kerry the rate of decline has generally been heaviest in the poorer regions. In Mayo, the phenomenon noted in West Donegal is reproduced in a lesser degree in the region north of Clew Bay. The greatest decreases, which reach over 40 per cent. in many areas, are found in the remainder of the county, especially in the extreme east. The adjoining counties of Sligo, Roscommon and Galway have also lost heavily in

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<sup>1</sup> Census of Ireland, vol. 1, 1936, pp. 2-6.

<sup>2</sup> Freeman, T. W., in *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. xvi, 1940-1941, pp. 31-46 and in vol. xvi, 1941-1942, pp. 28-43.

<sup>3</sup> Duncan, G. A., *Movements of the Rural Population in Southern Ireland, 1911-1936*, in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. xlviii, Section C, No. 1.

population, especially in the lowland areas continuous with East Mayo and broadly similar in their geographical features.

We may now review the movements of the past hundred years, taking the year 1891 as an intermediate stage.<sup>4</sup> In 1891 the population of the whole county was 219,034, 57 per cent. of the total in 1841. The present population shows a decline of 24 per cent. during the period 1891 to 1936, and the rate of emigration has slackened considerably. The volume of emigration in individual years during the latter half of the nineteenth century was varied, depending upon the conditions at any particular time in America and at home. These lie beyond the scope of the present paper, but are discussed in works by O'Brien and Carrothers.<sup>5</sup> The figures given in 1926 and 1936 Census Reports include movements to other parts of Ireland, chiefly into Dublin, whereas the earlier Census Reports show only emigration out of the country. The movement has been liable to periodic booms and slumps, comparable with those familiar to any observer of Irish emigration at the present time.

During the decade 1851-1861, 29,317 people left Mayo, and 21,204 of these left during the period from May, 1851, to December, 1854. This outflow of population, though heavy, was less intense than in Kerry and Donegal. 27,496 left between 1861 and 1871, and during this period the population of Mayo declined by 3.44 per cent. Emigration slackened off slightly between 1871 and 1881, when 24,705 left. At the 1881 Census there was a decrease in population of 0.33 per cent.; every other county in Ireland showed a larger decrease except Dublin and Kerry, which reported small increases. Emigration from Mayo was particularly heavy from 1881 to 1901, and averaged over 4,000 each year. The population of the county declined by 10.68 per cent. between 1881 and 1891 and by 9.07 per cent. during 1891 to 1901, rates of decline higher than the average for the whole country. In the fifty years under review, 164,589 persons left Mayo as emigrants. Of these, 45.6 per cent. were males and 54.4 per cent. females. The excess of females among the migrants was slight in the period up to 1865, after which it does not occur until 1873. Since then it has become steadily more marked; in the decade 1891 to 1901, out of 40,703 emigrants, 62.7 per cent. were females. The excess of males in the population was first noted in 1911, much later than in many Irish counties. Since 1901 the rate of emigration, so far as can be ascertained, has been less heavy than during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Net migration (out of the country or elsewhere in the country) was 27,000 between 1901 and 1911, 41,000 during the longer and abnormal period 1911 to 1926, and 21,000 during 1926 to 1936. The rates of decline in the population of Mayo have been heavier than those for the country as a whole. The proportion of females among the migrants has remained high, with the

<sup>4</sup> Census of Ireland, 1901, 1911, 1926, 1936. The introductory volume of the 1901 Census and the county volumes gives useful information on the progress of migration year by year.

<sup>5</sup> O'Brien, W. P., *The Great Famine in Ireland and a Retrospect of the Fifty Years, 1845-1895*, 1896, and Carrothers, W. A., *Emigration from the British Isles*, 1929.

<sup>6</sup> This has been calculated from comparison of the natural increase (excess of births over deaths) with the decline of population and includes all who left Mayo for residence outside the county, whether in Ireland or overseas. For period from 1901 on, see Census of Population, 1926; Preliminary Report, p. 13, and Census of Population, 1936, General Report, p. 19.

result that at the 1936 Census all save a few d.e.d.'s had an excess of males in the population, and the general ratio for the county was 1,000 males to 939 females.

Another interesting demographic feature of the county is the maintenance of the numerical strength of the town and village populations. In 1891 these numbered 26,016, 11·9 per cent. of the total population, and in 1936, 26,273, 16·3 per cent. of the total. The small "towns", more accurately described as villages or clusters of houses, have had varied fortunes, but in Mayo, as elsewhere in Ireland, during the period under discussion, a few new "towns", such as Achill Sound and Bangor have come to life. There appears to be a slight tendency towards nucleation of settlement, but it will be noted that over four-fifths of the population live in dispersed habitations. There are three major market towns in Mayo, all of which have some small industries and a share in recent industrial developments.<sup>7</sup> Ballina had in 1936 a population of 5,728, an increase of 17·5 per cent. over the 1926 figure and 18·2 per cent. more than in 1891. It is the natural centre for the Moy basin and itself a small port. Ballina's major significance lies in its position as a market centre and it also possesses wheat and maize mills. Under the impetus of the Government building programme its saw mills fared very well until recently. In Westport, a smaller town with a population of 3,409 in 1936, the population has declined steadily from 4,070 in 1891. Its industries include the making of boots, thread and knitwear, but here, as in Ballina, the major occupations are those of a general market centre serving the region around Clew Bay. A very limited number of vessels use Westport Quay, a mile from the town. An increase of employment in an Irish country town may not be reflected in the population figures, as much of the labour is drawn from the surrounding countryside. In Castlebar, the population increased steadily from 3,558 in 1891 to 4,826 in 1936 (plus 35·8 per cent.). This town serves a wide area of central Mayo as a market centre and has a bacon-curing factory. A recent development is a hat factory, but the town does not possess the varied industries of Ballina and Westport. It is worthy of note that in Ballina 10 per cent., in Westport 23 per cent., and in Castlebar 17 per cent. of all "producers and repairers" are engaged in agricultural occupations.<sup>8</sup>

It now remains to discuss the rural population. In the following table, the number of farmers and relatives assisting them has been listed for each rural district, the boundaries of which are shown in Fig. 4. The people engaged in Agriculture cover 92 per cent. or more in each rural district of the population listed as producers.<sup>9</sup> Among other occupations in the rural areas, the most significant is building and contracting, in which 1,410 persons (2·2 per cent. of producers) were engaged, followed by "makers of apparel" with 719 persons (1·1 per cent.) employed. The Gaeltacht Report deals with the possibilities of expanding the production of knitted goods, lace and embroidery.<sup>10</sup> The Irish lace and embroidery industries have lost ground through changes in fashion and the competition of inferior machine-

<sup>7</sup> Irish Trade Journal and Irish Review and Annual, 1940 and 1941.

<sup>8</sup> Census of Ireland, 1936, vol. 2; Occupations, pp. 153-154.

<sup>9</sup> I.e., excluding persons engaged in commerce, public administration, defence, professions, personal service, clerks and "unoccupied persons" which, in sardonic humour, includes housewives.

<sup>10</sup> Coimisiún na Gaeltachta, Report, 1926, pp. 51-55. See also ref. 7.

made goods. Machine knitting is practised in Mayo at various centres, and a toy-making factory in Belmullet has been successful. In addition, considerable employment was provided in the Erris area under the Gaeltacht Services Scheme. In the Congested Districts Board reports of 1891 many hopeful ventures in rural industry are noted, most of which are now forgotten.<sup>11</sup> One at least has been conspicuously successful. This is the Foxford mill, which is a monument to the energy and enterprise of the Sisters of Charity responsible for its foundation. The various small industries have developed from the home industries which were sources of ancillary income in the nineteenth century. Never as widespread or numerous as in Donegal, they have gone through much the same process of development or decay. Some have been organised on a small factory or rural industry basis with the assistance of vocational schools and others have ceased to exist at all. Opinions will differ about the prospects of their survival, but it is to be hoped that discriminating consumers will always be ready to buy goods of merit. The numbers engaged will never be large and it is, therefore, on the agricultural life that our attention will be focussed in the remainder of this paper.

Table I shows the general distribution of the agricultural population according to the size of the farm occupied. Small farms of less than 30 acres include 70 per cent. of the total in every rural district and nearly 80 per cent. in Castlebar and Westport. In Swineford nearly 90 per cent. of the farms are of less than 30 acres, and in Belmullet, 91.8 per cent. Over 50 per cent. of the farms in Swineford and Westport are of less than 15 acres and 78 per cent. in Belmullet. These high percentages of small farms are typical only of certain parts of the West of Ireland, notably of Donegal but not of Kerry and West Cork.<sup>12</sup> Whether such small holdings can ever be economic, even with the rough grazing usually available, is a question which has engaged the attention of various writers. Danish experience suggests that the medium-sized farm is the most economic unit and the smallest farms are of questionable value.<sup>13</sup> In the rural districts of Ballina, Ballinrobe, Castlebar and Westport about a fifth to a quarter of the farms are of medium size, from 30 to 100 acres. These include the greater part of the richer lowlands of the county, and in Mayo, as in Donegal, it is generally in such areas that the medium-sized and large farms are to be found. The number of large farms of over 100 acres nowhere reaches 5 per cent. in Mayo and is, in fact, insignificant except in the Ballina r.d. The small size of the farms is partly the cause and partly the effect of the paucity of man-power per farm. The number of relatives assisting farmers is approximately equal to the number of farmers, but there is only one full-time agricultural labourer to every eight farmers and it is obvious that the majority of these are employed on the larger farms. Under such conditions, the area which can be tilled is severely restricted in extent and liable to decrease as emigration proceeds and the population declines.

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<sup>11</sup> Congested Districts Board, Base Line Reports, 1891, and following years. This material has been used throughout the paper.

<sup>12</sup> Census of Ireland, 1936, vol. 2; Occupations, pp. 228-229. See also ref. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Yates, P. Lamartine, *Food Production in Western Europe*, 1940, section on Denmark and esp. pp. 86-89.

TABLE I.

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

RURAL DISTRICTS	1-15 acres	15-30 acres	30-50 acres	50-100 acres	100-200 acres	Over 200 acres	TOTAL	Total Agricultural Population per cent. of all Producers	Total Population per cent. Agriculturists
<b>BALLINA :</b>									
Farmers . . .	1,463	1,472	662	352	117	64	4,145	9,289	23,475
Percentage . . .	35.5	35.7	16.0	8.5	2.8	1.5	100	95.2	38.0
Relatives . . .	1,511	1,692	723	404	128	79	4,537	702 <sup>a</sup>	—
<b>BALLINROBE :</b>									
Farmers . . .	813	1,411	636	212	47	22	3,157	6,474	7,371
Percentage . . .	25.9	45.0	20.2	6.7	1.5	0.7	100	94.0	37.4
Relatives . . .	613	1,265	700	235	69	19	2,908	409 <sup>a</sup>	—
<b>BELMULLET :</b>									
Farmers . . .	1,700	302	81	37	16	44	2,185	5,094	13,447
Percentage . . .	78.0	13.8	3.7	1.7	0.8	2.0	100	92.8	41.4
Relatives . . .	1,752	348	111	43	18	64	2,339	570 <sup>a</sup>	—
<b>CASTLEBAR :</b>									
Farmers . . .	1,243	1,550	558	171	39	3	3,609	7,516	17,705
Percentage . . .	34.9	43.4	15.7	4.8	1.1	0.1	100	96.1	42.4
Relatives . . .	1,198	1,544	561	203	51	2	3,559	339 <sup>a</sup>	—
<b>CLAREMORRIS :</b>									
Farmers . . .	828	1,808	634	161	28	15	3,488	6,296	19,300
Percentage . . .	23.8	52.1	18.2	4.7	0.8	0.4	100	92.0	35.8
Relatives . . .	602	1,653	642	175	30	14	2,717	321 <sup>a</sup>	—
<b>SWINEFORD :</b>									
Farmers . . .	3,313	2,300	506	124	19	9	6,290	12,034	31,642
Percentage . . .	52.9	36.6	8.1	2.0	0.3	0.1	100	94.5	38.0
Relatives . . .	2,729	2,043	481	113	14	1	5,490	354 <sup>a</sup>	—
<b>WESTPORT :</b>									
Farmers . . .	2,254	1,211	576	269	57	27	4,420	9,600	24,446
Percentage . . .	51.3	27.6	13.1	6.1	1.3	0.6	100	94.5	39.8
Relatives . . .	2,155	1,293	639	291	64	19	4,464	806 <sup>a</sup>	—
<b>TOTAL :</b>									
Farmers . . .	11,614	10,054	3,653	1,326	323	184	27,294	57,023 <sup>b</sup>	147,386
Percentage . . .	42.8	37.0	13.4	4.9	1.2	0.7	100	94.6	38.8
Relatives . . .	10,560	9,738	3,857	1,464	374	198	26,227	3,502 <sup>a</sup>	—

(a) Number of farm labourers.

(b) Including 246 in the towns of Ballina, Castlebar and Westport.

In the following table, County Mayo has been divided into its major geographical units, as explained later in this paper. These units do not correspond with the rural districts, for here, as almost everywhere else, local government units cut across any scheme worked out from the geographical features. It has, therefore, not been possible to collate Table I with Table II, but the following table gives a useful basis for local treatment. For each of the six major divisions, the areas and populations for 1891 and 1936 of the d.e.d.'s which were congested in 1891 have been added together and the densities of population and decrease per cent. have been calculated. Where non-congested areas exist, they have been similarly treated. The only increase between 1891 and 1936 is found in one somewhat anomalous non-congested area and in the three towns. The congested areas in 1891 were more densely peopled than neighbouring non-congested areas, though for the county as a whole the non-congested areas were slightly more densely peopled. This is due to the levelling effect of the Achill-Newport and Louisburgh areas, devoid of non-congested areas and having a low density of population. Except in North-West Mayo, the congested areas lost a greater proportion of their population than the non-congested areas between 1891 and 1936 (see Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4).

TABLE II—*Population in each sub-region, in congested and non-congested areas, 1891 and 1936, with density per square mile and percentage change.*

AREA	Area in Square Miles	Population 1891	Population per Square Mile, 1891	Population 1936	Population per Square Mile, 1936	Increase or Decrease per cent.
<b>NORTH-WEST MAYO :</b>						
Congested area ...	392.9	16,977	43.3	15,525	39.6	- 8.2
Non-Congested area	86.9	2,921	33.6	2,205	25.6	- 24.3
Total ..	479.8	19,898	41.5	17,733	37.0	- 10.6
<b>ACHILL—NEWPORT AREA :</b>						
Congested area ...	285.5	17,718	62.2	13,496	47.3	- 24.0
<b>LOUISBURGH AREA :</b>						
Congested area ...	90.6	7,119	79.4	4,661	51.5	- 35.2
<b>SOUTH-WEST MAYO :</b>						
Congested area ...	143.7	9,734	67.7	6,095	42.4	- 36.4
Non-Congested area	59.8	385	6.4	435	7.3	+ 13.1
Total ..	203.5	10,119	50.1	6,530	32.1	- 35.6
<b>BALLINA LOWLAND :</b>						
Congested area ...	69.8	9,214	132.1	6,349	91.0	- 31.1
Non-Congested area	127.3	14,856	116.3	11,304	88.7	- 23.8
Total ...	197.1	24,070	122.1	17,653	89.6	- 26.6
<b>MAYO LOWLAND :</b>						
Congested area ...	411.5	75,890	184.2	50,467	122.3	- 33.6
Non-Congested area	411.4	51,330	124.8	36,846	89.6	- 28.2
Total ...	822.9	127,220	155.0	87,313	106.2	- 31.5
<b>Co. MAYO .</b>						
Congested area ...	1,394.0	136,732	97.9	96,593	69.3	- 29.3
Non-Congested area	685.4	69,492	101.1	50,793	74.0	- 26.8
Towns* ...	4.9	12,474	2,545.7	13,963	2,849.6	+ 12.0
Grand Total	2,084.3	218,698	104.9	161,349	77.3	- 26.2

\* Ballina, Westport and Castlebar only.

The landscape of Mayo is highly varied. In the west, there are striking mountains and bog-covered lowlands, with a varying extent of reclaimed land as farms. The mountain bastion is divided into two parts by Clew Bay, where the central lowland of Ireland reaches the Atlantic shore. The area to the north of Clew Bay has been divided into North-West Mayo and the Achill-Newport region, and consists almost entirely of areas congested in 1891. Thinly peopled, the greater part of it would still be congested on a 1936 re-assessment though the Achill-Newport area includes a fringe of richer lowlands on Clew Bay which would not now be congested.

South of Clew Bay the landscape from the Atlantic coast to Lough Mask and Lough Corrib consists of mountains reaching over 2,000 feet and traversed by deep valleys. Only a small part of the region was not congested in 1891, and by far the greater part would be regarded as congested to-day. The largest area of lowland, which lies around Louisburgh, is broken by several low hills. This area has been separated from the remainder of South-West Mayo in the population table. The Louisburgh area, owing to its lowland character, has a slightly higher density of population than South-West or North-West Mayo.

The remainder of Mayo consists primarily of lowland divided by several hills, notably the Ox mountains, which reach 1,200 feet in places. The River Moy rises on the south side of these mountains and flows past their western limit through the Foxford gap, reaching the sea through the Ballina estuary. The area between the Ox mountains and the hills of North-West Mayo may be termed the Ballina lowland. It is varied in physical features and agricultural life and rather over one-third was congested in 1891, though a much smaller area would be congested on a 1936 re-assessment. The whole of this lowland is fairly densely peopled in spite of the considerable areas of bogland, but in 1891 the poorer congested area was more congested than the richer non-congested area. However, the decline of population between 1891 and 1936 has evened out this apparent maladjustment in population distribution. The whole of Eastern Mayo consists of lowland with some minor hill ranges. This area, the Mayo lowland, is continuous with similar country in Sligo, Roscommon and Galway, and ultimately with the whole of central Ireland. The apparent simplicity of physical features is deceptive for significant contrasts are revealed by a more detailed survey. Within Mayo the lowland, from its most westerly extension on the shores of Clew Bay, rises gradually in altitude towards the east. The thickness of the glacial drift increases gradually in the same direction and the variety of the drift influences the agricultural life. The Mayo lowland was in 1891 divided equally between congested and non-congested districts, but with a remarkably high density of population per square mile in the congested districts and a lower, but still very considerable, density of population in the non-congested area. Attention has been drawn previously to the relatively close settlement of this region, and though the decline of population has been heavy between 1891 and 1936, slightly over one-third of the area congested in 1891 would still rank as congested to-day on a re-assessment.

### **North-West Mayo.**

This area is bounded on the east by the Ballina lowland and on the south by the Achill-Newport region which includes the striking range

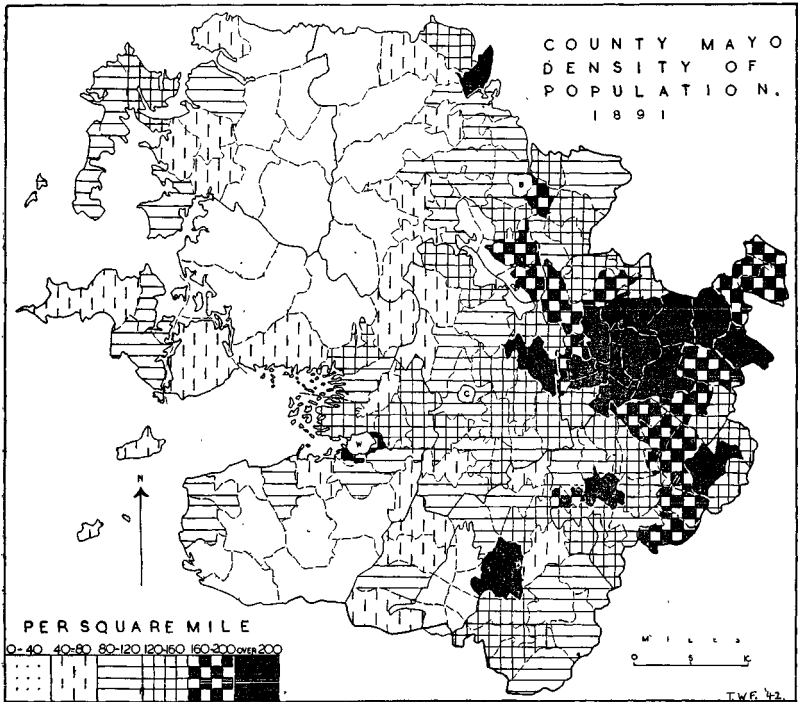


FIG. 1. Density of Population, 1891, for each District Electoral Division.

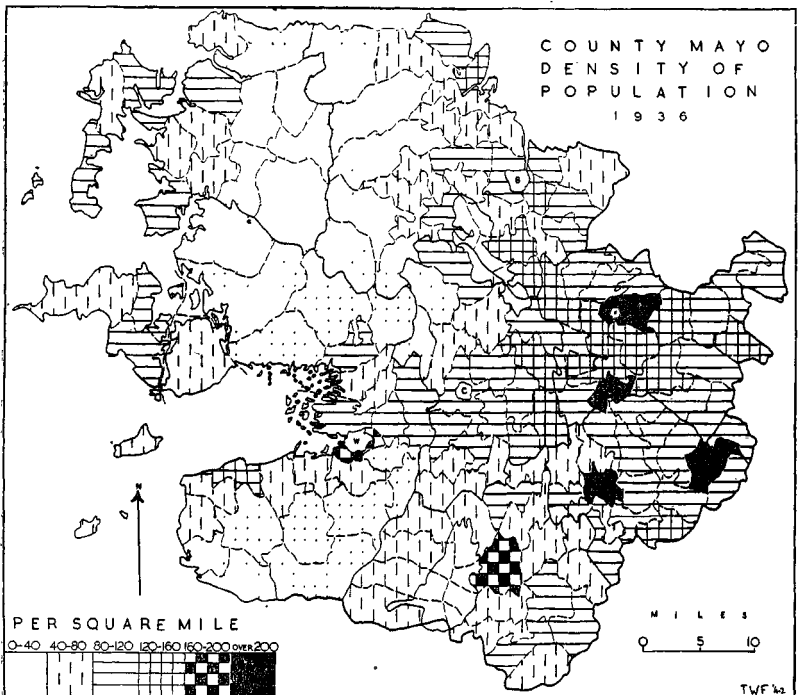


FIG. 2. Density of Population, 1936, for each District Electoral Division.

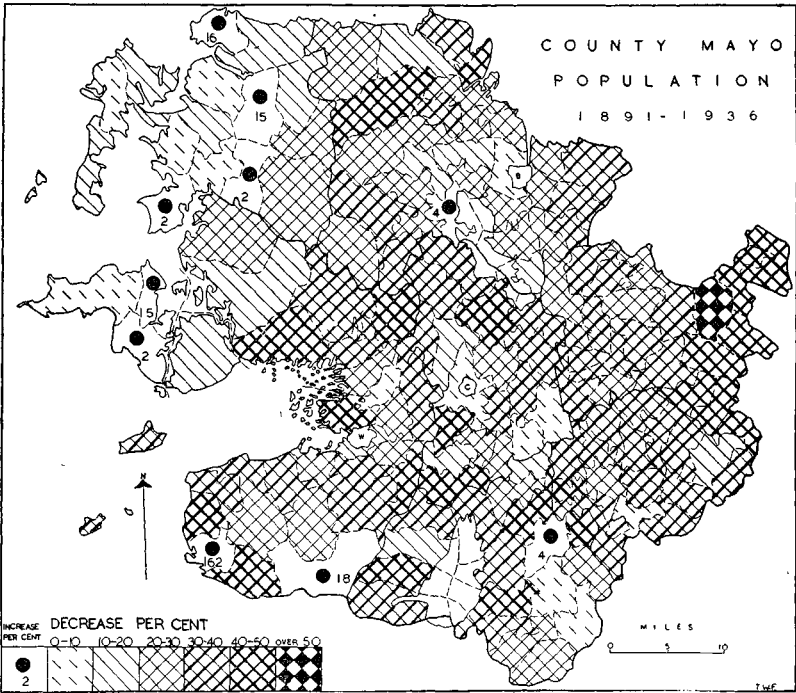


FIG. 3. Increases and Decreases in population, 1891-1936.

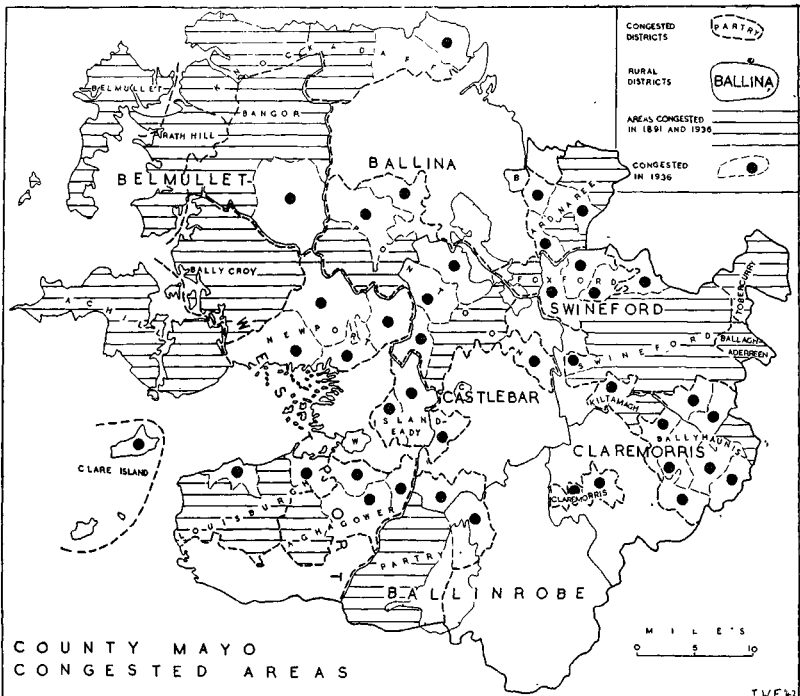


FIG. 4. Rural Districts and Congested Districts.

Erratum: For "Congested in 1936", read "Congested in 1891 only".

of mountains known as the Nephin Beg. North-West Mayo consists largely of level or gently-sloping boglands studded by small lakes and surrounded by hills reaching over 1,000 feet, in places over 1,200 feet. These occur in isolated groups around Broadhaven, as a well-marked line along the northern coast, and in a range continued northwards from the Nephin Beg range to the Ballycastle area. From Ballycastle, a road runs around the northern end of this range to Belmullet. The Owenmore River rises on the eastern side of the range and flows westwards in the valley which carries a road through the range from Castlebar through Bangor to Belmullet. The area around Ballycastle and the upper course of the Owenmore River has been included with North-West Mayo, as it is more akin to this area than to the Ballina lowland. The coastal areas, including the Mullet peninsula, consist largely of lowland deeply indented by the sea.

North-West Mayo covers the congested districts of Knockadaff, Belmullet, Rath Hill, Bangor and Ballyeroy, with a small non-congested area around Ballycastle. Except on and near the western seaboard the population is very sparsely distributed, and Praeger<sup>14</sup> has said that "this is the wildest, loneliest stretch of country to be found in all Ireland." In the Bangor district, the density of population per square mile was 18.1 in 1891 and 17.4 in 1936, about four families to the square mile. The lowest density is in the Glenco d.e.d. which, in 1936, had 252 persons in 42.3 square miles, an average density of 5.9. The farmlands consist of a few fields wrested from the bogs which, here as in other parts of the west of Ireland, provide valuable rough grazing. In 1891, on a farm valued at about £4, not by any means the smallest, there would be about three acres cultivated, divided equally between potatoes and oats, with a small patch of meadow. The ancillary sources of income were the profits of local labour, in the spring and at the harvest, and migratory labour. In the Bangor district, some home weaving was practised and markets were found at Belmullet and Ballycastle. Elsewhere very little was sold, but the home needs were met by local weaving. A considerable number of migratory labourers left after the spring sowing and the summer work was largely done by women, children and a few men too old to go to England. The position of the inhabitants in Bangor and Ballyeroy districts was more favourable than in Knockadaff, where the agricultural practice was primitive, local labour in scant demand and few went to England as temporary migrants. As a result, one-third of the population was "most wretched and miserable" and housed in one-roomed dwellings in 1891.

The areas around Broadhaven and Blacksod Bay are more densely peopled than those farther inland. They include the c.d.'s of Rath Hill and Belmullet, with part of Knockadaff. The area of reclaimed land is considerably greater than farther inland, and in the C.D. Report for Belmullet it is noted that "in some of the villages almost every acre of reclaimable land is either at present under cultivation, or from years of continuous crop growing has become so exhausted that it is nearly useless for any purpose. Round other villages there are considerable tracts of 'cut away bog', which the tenants are gradually reclaiming." This is true of many bogland

<sup>14</sup> Praeger, R. L., *The Way That I Went*, 1937, pp. 195-196. I am also indebted to Dr. Praeger for some local information. The Base Line Reports of the Congested Districts Board, produced in 1891 and following years have been extensively used in this and following sections.

areas in Ireland, but one factor which favours the seaboard areas is the availability of seaweed and sand as manure; in Belmullet the seaweed was mixed with farmyard manure. The farms valued at £4 had about two acres each for oats and potatoes, with small patches of meadow and green vegetables. The use of rough grazing was more limited than in the area discussed above. On some of the better pastures of Belmullet, yearling calves, bred in Roscommon, Sligo and Fermanagh were kept for twelve to eighteen months, during which they grew but did not fatten. Their ultimate destination was fattening pastures in County Meath or in England. Migratory labour did not figure among the ancillary sources of income in Belmullet, but fishing was of some importance. At the 1936 Census there were only twenty fishermen in the Belmullet r.d., but it is reasonable to assume that many men turn to this resource when favourable economic winds are blowing. The difficulty, in an area devoid of railways, is to transport the fish to a suitable market.<sup>15</sup> One-quarter of the inhabitants were reported as very poor in 1892. The agricultural practice in the Rath Hill district was similar to that of Belmullet, but migratory labour was the main source of additional income. The time of departure varied, according to the need for extra funds from March to June, and all returned in October or November.

North-West Mayo as a whole is an area of considerable poverty, but it has lost less heavily in population than many other parts of the county (see Table II and Fig. 3). It is difficult to account for this phenomenon, which is paralleled in the Rosses, County Donegal, but the explanation may lie partly in the continued maintenance of the migratory labour system, in the development of tourist traffic, and in the improvement of housing conditions and methods of agriculture, especially perhaps through the use of commercial fertilisers. The small industrial developments in and around Belmullet have already been mentioned. None the less, the main movement of population is outwards.

### **The Achill-Newport Area.**

The Achill-Newport area extends from Lough Conn to the extreme west of Achill. It includes several lowland areas, primarily bog covered, notably Glenhest and the lowlands on the north side of Clew Bay, with other patches in Corraun Achill and Achill Island. Nephin rises in solitary splendour to the west of Lough Conn and the Nephin Beg range, with several peaks over 2,000 feet high, runs in a westerly direction away to Achill, where it is broken into magnificent isolated peaks of which the last, Croaghau, rivals Slieve League in Donegal in its sharp descent into the Atlantic. From the Nephin Beg range a line of mountains runs northwards to the Owenmore River. The main communications of the region, inhabited only in the lowland and in a few places on the hill slopes, are along the coastal lowland of Clew Bay from Westport and Castlebar to Achill, which had a railway until 1940.

The area includes the congested districts of Achill and Newport, with the major part of Pontoon. The population declined by one-quarter between 1891 and 1936, approximately the average for the county. The areas away from the coast show a paucity of settlement similar to that already noted in North-West Mayo, but the lowlands,

<sup>15</sup> Micks, W. L., *History of the Congested Districts Board, 1925*, pp. 209 ff.

especially those near the coast, have small farms isolated from one another in places but elsewhere forming a line of continuous farmland with houses, as around Mullarrany and in parts of Achill. It is stated in the C.D. Reports that many townlands in Derry were "isolated in a sea of bog", and very low densities of population were recorded for this d.e.d. (31 to the square mile in 1891 and 19 in 1936) and Bunaveela (14 in 1891 and 11 in 1936). In Shramore, a division based on the Shramore valley in the Nephin Beg range, the density of population was 16.2 in 1891 and 10.2 in 1936. Much higher densities of population are recorded in the divisions around Nephin (Addergole and Deel), in Newport East and in Achill Island with Corraun Achill.

The C.D. Reports show that the areas cultivated on the small farms in this area were similar to those in other districts. In Pontoon, potatoes occupied from  $\frac{3}{4}$  to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  acres, in Newport  $1\frac{1}{4}$  acres, in Achill 2 acres. Oats covered from  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 3 acres in Pontoon, 1 acre in Newport and 2 acres in Achill where, however, rye was occasionally grown instead. Some green crops were grown, but the amount of meadowland was everywhere small and virtually non-existent in Achill. Among the ancillary sources of income, migratory labour stood first, American remittances second, with fishing a very bad third, though most of the families in the Newport area had some share in a boat. The proportion of very poor families was high in Achill and Pontoon (over one-quarter) but less high (10 per cent.) in Westport. Without the annual migration to Great Britain, the population would be very poverty stricken. Men and women left between March and June, and returned between September and Christmas, according to financial circumstances. It will be noted that only the Achill area and two divisions in the mountains would be congested on a 1936 re-assessment. This is due largely to the decline in population, which has been heavy everywhere in this region except in Achill, where two divisions record a small increase. This may be ascribed partly to the continued strength of the migratory labour movement, to some measure of improvement in agriculture and housing, and also to the gradual development of the tourist traffic. Praeger has described the improved conditions in Achill.<sup>16</sup> "In 1898. . . the population, far larger than the meagre agriculture and spasmodic fishing could support, was maintained on American money sent home by absent sons and daughters. Housing conditions were still very bad: Dooagh was a huddled cluster of poor thatched cabins. . . . Now things are changed. Dugort has many places where you can stay in comfort, instead of one only. Keel is a place of several pleasant hotels and many new houses. Dooagh is altered out of all recognition, for with Government aid all the old hovels are gone, and a quite extensive village has arisen of new houses not, as in so many places in Ireland, of design quite alien to the people and the environment. There is a little more tillage, due to continued peat-cutting and drainage."

### **The Louisburgh Area.**

This area, which is really part of South-West Mayo, forms a fairly compact unit worthy of special study. Primarily an area of lowland, it is broken by several low hills with Croaghpatrick rising magnificently to over 2,500 feet in the east. The Louisburgh area in the C.D.

<sup>16</sup> Praeger, R. L., *op. cit.*, pp. 192-193.

Reports includes the fringe of lowland to the north of Croaghpatrick and the whole of the lowland for which Louisburgh (population 346 in 1936) is the market centre. The Clare Island district has also been included in this region. All the d.e.d.'s in this area reach the sea except for Kilgeever, which had a density of population per square mile of 21 in 1891 and 15 in 1936. The other divisions are more densely peopled, for in this predominantly lowland region a higher proportion of farmland is available than in other areas. On the average farm with a valuation of £4, about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  acres were divided between potatoes and oats, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 acre was meadow. Mountain grazing was also available. Fishing, however, appeared to be of very minor significance in the area, but migratory labour was widespread in Louisburgh if not in Clare Island. In Louisburgh also there was a certain demand for local labour, and some landless families were supported almost entirely by the proceeds of local casual labour and migratory labour. Approximately one-fifth of the population was recorded as very poor. In spite of the heavy decline in population, only three of the six d.e.d.'s in this area would cease to be congested on a 1936 re-assessment, and that only by a narrow and possibly deceptive statistical margin (see Fig. 4).

### **South-West Mayo.**

South-West Mayo consists of the remainder of the mountainous region extending from the Atlantic to the shores of Lough Mask and Lough Conn. Several hills rise to over 2,500 feet, and they are divided into groups by deep valleys, of which the most significant is the trough drained by the Erriff River and the Aille River. This separates the Partry range from several groups of hills farther west, notably the Sheffery, the Mweelrea mountains and Ben Gorm with Ben Creggan. The incidence of settlement in this area is remarkably low; even in the Erriff valley there are few farms, and most of these are near the river. The land around the Aille River is more densely settled, and there is also a considerable number of farms on the lower eastern slopes of the Partry mountains and around the shores of Lough Mask and Lough Carra. The divisions which include these areas are more densely peopled than those farther west in the heart of the mountains.

A small non-congested area existing in 1891 was very thinly peopled and consisted of three d.e.d.'s spread around the Mweelrea mountains. This non-congested region shows a small increase in population, mainly due to the large increase in Owenadorraun. This is so unusual that it calls for special comment. It is the result of a settlement scheme, under which land has been reclaimed, fences built and new houses erected. There are other areas in the West of Ireland where this is possible, but only for suitable inhabitants desiring a somewhat simple type of life.

The congested area consists of the districts of Aghagower and Partry, and the rate of decline between 1891 and 1936 has been very heavy, averaging 36 per cent. and reaching 50 per cent. in some divisions. The families recorded as "very poor" numbered 10 per cent. in Aghagower and 17 per cent. in Partry. In the former district, the farmers had about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  acres cultivated, divided equally between oats and potatoes, with rough meadow on the banks of streams and grazing for cattle and sheep on the mountains. In some areas cultivation was rather neglected for sheep and cattle farming on the

hills. The areas given to oats and potatoes were about 1½ acres each in Partry, with 1 acre of meadow. Most farmers had grazing rights on the mountains, but there was a scarcity of meadow except in the lowland areas of Port Royal and Tawnynagry d.e.d.'s around Lough Mask and Lough Carra. Here, however, conditions are in some ways similar to those of the Mayo lowland, which is discussed later. Many of the farms had even smaller areas given to crops, and the chief additional source of income was migratory labour, followed not very closely by local labour. The labourers left in May or June and returned in November or December. Weaving flannels and frieze and knitting stockings for sale was practised extensively in the Partry district. Though this area does not stand out as one of conspicuous poverty, the rate of emigration has obviously been very heavy. Even so, two-fifths of it would still be congested on a 1936 re-assessment.

### **The Ballina Lowland.**

This lowland includes the area of the Moy basin, which is the immediate hinterland of Ballina.<sup>17</sup> The county boundary on the east forms a natural regional boundary only where it coincides with the summit of the Ox mountains, which rise to over 1,300 feet. To the north-east of Ballina, there is no natural feature to separate this region from the coastal lowland of County Sligo. On the south, the Ballina lowland is connected with the larger Mayo lowland by the Foxford gap between the Ox mountains and Lough Conn. This Foxford area has been included with the Mayo lowland, and the Ballina lowland is delimited by a line running from the Ox mountains to Lough Conn and thence northwards to include the areas around Crossmolina and Killala, with Lackan North d.e.d.

The major part of this area is non-congested, and the congested areas consist of four d.e.d.'s on the slopes of the Ox mountains (part of Ardnaree district) and Lackan North d.e.d. (part of Knockadaff). Within these areas, the density of population was remarkably high in 1891 and, in spite of a large decrease, still considerable in 1936. Three of the four d.e.d.'s on the slopes of the Ox mountains would rank as congested on a 1936 re-assessment. The farms are on poor soil, in many places of stony morainic material in hummocks with peat flats in between and have about 4 acres cultivated. Of this, less than an acre is meadow, a small patch is given to greens and the remainder is divided equally between potatoes and oats. The men found work in Ballina or intermittently in turf cutting, spring sowing, haymaking and harvesting locally, but in some divisions almost all the able-bodied men occupying small holdings migrated to England or Scotland every year. Some left in March, but most in June, returning in November with the savings necessary to balance the family budget.

The non-congested area of the Ballina lowland consists of carboniferous limestone overlaid by various glacial deposits. North of Ballina there are several moraines, but farther south drumlins are frequent. The amount of bogland increases towards the south, where there are considerable stretches of almost level ground. The lowland as a whole has good pastures, meadows and cultivated fields on the moraines, drumlins and other minor glacial features. In places the

<sup>17</sup> An unpublished thesis by my former student, Miss H. M. Williamson, B.A. (Mrs. R. H. Kidd) has provided useful information on the Ballina region.

fertile meadows of the Moy basin "appear as a ribbon of green amid the purple-brown of the bog". Several of the demesne areas have been divided and added to the area farmed. However, the population of this relatively prosperous area has declined by nearly one-quarter since 1891. As a result of this decline, and through the improvement of the holdings, the average rateable value of the holdings per person is higher than anywhere else in Mayo except in the Ballinrobe area. In 1936, it was over £4 10s. per head in the area around Killala, between £3 and £4 10s. to the north and west of Ballina, but less than £3 per head between Ballina and Foxford. The number of farms of over 30 acres in the Ballina r.d. is over 30 per cent., and in 1936, 70£ labourers were employed, presumably mainly on these richer lowland farms. Though a relatively prosperous area, the Ballina lowland is less attractive to labour from neighbouring congested regions than the lowlands in the north of Kerry or the east of Donegal.

### The Mayo Lowland.

The Mayo lowlands covers two-fifths of the area of the county and is equally divided between congested and non-congested areas. It will be noted that the density of population was remarkably high in 1891, particularly in the congested areas. The Mayo lowland is continuous with similar areas in the neighbouring counties, Sligo, Roscommon and Galway. In a forthcoming paper it will be shown that the population of the congested districts in East Mayo, Sligo and Roscommon, was 137,723 or 172 to the square mile in 1891 and 87,377 or 109 to the square mile in 1936, a decrease of 36.5 per cent.<sup>18</sup> The Mayo lowland, therefore, shares with neighbouring areas a high degree of concentration of population which has been steadily alleviated by emigration.

The high density of population is the more remarkable in view of the extensive development of boglands in the Mayo lowland, especially in the congested areas. The surface features are varied. In the west, where the Mayo lowland meets the Atlantic, a belt of drumlins appears as low islands drowned by encroachment of the sea in Clew Bay. These are continued around Westport and Castlebar, in the direction of Swineford, and run northwards to meet the similar belt in the Ballina lowland. Reedy pastures and peat bogs occur between these small hills, which are cropped with oats and potatoes, or used as pastures for cattle and sheep. South of this area, around Lough Mask and Lough Corrib, there are wide stretches which have a naked limestone surface similar to that found in various lowland areas of the West of Ireland, notably around Tuam and Gort. The small area of bare limestone in County Mayo is, in fact, the most northerly extension of a belt of similar country which stretches through County Clare and County Galway.<sup>19</sup> Here bogland develops only in the lowlands known as "turloughs", and the land is suitable for cropping and more especially for cattle and sheep rearing. The areas completely free from drift are very small in proportion to the area of the Mayo lowland and the thickness of the drift covering the carboniferous limestones increases steadily towards the east. More than half the surface

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<sup>18</sup> Freeman, T. W., *The Congested Districts of Western Ireland*, in the press and to be published in the *Geographical Review*, New York, during 1943.

<sup>19</sup> Praeger, R. L., *op. cit.*, pp. 207 ff.

in the extreme east of Mayo is formed of boglands on deep drift deposits. The settlement is found largely on the low limestone ridges which are covered with a thin coating of drift and rise above the unprepossessing boglands. The altitude of the Mayo lowland increases steadily from west to east, where a large area is over 400 feet high. The lowland is broken only by a few hills, of which the most significant, some miles to the east of Swineford and Kiltamagh, rises to over 700 feet to form the western end of the line of hills known as the Curlews in Sligo and Roscommon. In this area, which is one of considerable poverty, the settlement is largely in the valleys and on the lower slopes of the hills.

The congested area of the Mayo lowland includes the districts of Foxford, Swineford, Kiltamagh and Ballyhaunis, with parts of Tobercurry and Ballaghaderreen in the north-east of the county. Two divisions, forming the Claremorris district, are in the heart of the lowland, and on the north-west a belt of congested areas stretches from the Foxford district through part of Pontoon, covering the slopes of the Croaghmoyle hills, to the west of Castlebar. The Islandeady district includes some poor land around Castlebar. The richer lands of the non-congested districts consist of the better-drained areas, with the thinner drift cover, in the extreme south-east of the county, south of Claremorris. Another comparatively prosperous region stretches northwards through the "plains of Mayo" to the north-west of Claremorris and on towards Castlebar.

In the congested areas about four acres were cultivated on an average farm valued at £4. Of this, less than an acre was meadow, a small patch was given to greens and the remainder divided equally between potatoes and oats. In the Islandeady district, the cultivated area was about three acres and in Claremorris nearly five acres, but the relative distribution of the crops was much the same. From every district the majority of the farmers went to England or Scotland as labourers every year, leaving between March and June, and returning with the necessary savings in November. The only local demand for labour existed in the spring and autumn, or in the small towns within the region. The incidence of poverty was very high, in some cases reaching 40 per cent. of the number of families. It is, therefore, not surprising that the loss of population has been very heavy. Even so, one-third of the area congested in 1891 would still be congested to-day on a re-assessment. The non-congested areas, though more thinly peopled in 1891, have lost almost equally heavily. They include some larger farms, as far as can be seen, though it is impossible to be dogmatic about the position of these, as the districts of the Congested District Board cut across the rural districts. However, the greater part of the Ballinrobe r. d. was uncongested in 1891 and here nearly 30 per cent. of the farms are of more than 30 acres. Nearly half the Claremorris r. d. was uncongested in 1891, but nearly 25 per cent. of the farms are now of more than 30 acres. Swineford stands out as a contrast. Almost entirely congested in 1891, only 10 per cent. of its farms are of more than 30 acres. In all these districts, the number of labourers is very small in proportion to the number of farmers. Here again, the size of the farming unit appears to be smallest on the poorest land. It cannot be doubted that the Mayo lowland was, at the end of the 19th century, an overpopulated region, only able to maintain itself by migratory labour.

### Conclusion.

The general standard of comfort and prosperity has admittedly risen since the Congested Districts Board began its work. Micks, writing in 1925, says that: "To one familiar with the general condition of the West of Ireland before 1891 . . . the change is simply marvellous. Unhealthy hovels, then broadcast in the districts, have in most cases been obliterated or turned into cattle sheds. Compact holdings of increased acreage have taken the place of small holdings in numerous scattered plots. The first steps have been successfully taken by improving the mode of agriculture and the breeds of live stock and poultry. The farmers, as they may now be called, in East Connacht and similar areas are in a position much more favourable for taking advantage of such future, and far too long deferred, agricultural developments as made Denmark prosperous in a few years."<sup>20</sup> The Gaeltacht Report says that: "In East Mayo and part of North-West Mayo the Congested Districts Board succeeded, to a considerable extent, in the elimination of the large grazing ranches and the settling on them of the neighbouring tenants, for the most part from the adjoining congested and impoverished villages. The enlarged and rearranged holdings had, in most cases, been fenced and drained and provided with suitable houses and accommodation roads. In West Mayo (the Achill and Belmullet areas) the conditions which the Board set up to improve still exist, almost untouched in some districts and little improved in others."<sup>21</sup> Oddly enough, these are the areas which have maintained their population most successfully between 1891 and 1936. Obviously few "ranches" were available here. Micks gives an imposing list of estates purchased for "migration of tenants" but they lie mainly in the lowland areas distinguished.<sup>22</sup> We may, perhaps, regard the correlation of declining population with inadequate resources as generally sound but with the interesting exception likely to occur in any human distribution. The paradox even more fundamental in the population distribution here in Mayo, as in other parts of the West of Ireland, is that in some regions the poorer congested regions are more densely peopled than adjacent richer non-congested regions.

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<sup>20</sup> Micks, W. L., *op. cit.*, p. 213.

<sup>21</sup> Coimisiún na Gaeltachta, Report, 1926, pp. 39-40.

<sup>22</sup> Micks, W. L., *op. cit.*, pp. 227-232.

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### DISCUSSION.

**Senator Johnston**, proposing the vote of thanks, said that a paper like this constitutes an invaluable statistical framework which ought to be filled in by a local social survey.

The paradox of a dense population subsisting in small farms on poor land has been with us for a long time. The apparently obvious solution—dividing up the land—would, if persisted in, undermine our principal agricultural export industry—cattle—and as this is our principal means of payment for industrial raw materials the ultimate effect might be a diminished density of urban population by reason of the collapse of its economic basis.

Large farms are interdependent with small. Cheap production of

tillage crops is only possible on large, well-equipped farms, and small farms need the products of such large farms as raw materials if they are to make adequate use of available family labour. It is impossible on a small farm to produce enough raw materials for any specialised development of live stock product production. In normal times even a 15-acre farm would be "economic" if it was possible to buy cheap raw materials from external sources.

Much congested land is submarginal and ought, perhaps, to be taken over by the State for forestry purposes.

The State should establish an Agricultural Development Corporation to take over and recondition large farms, and these should be *let* on lease to tenants of the State possessing adequate agricultural knowledge and working capital. In general the State should encourage the best use of our *most* fertile resources and thus indirectly attack the problem of rural and urban slums.

Perhaps the problem of excessive density of rural population in certain areas will solve itself "ambulando" if present marriage and birth rate trends are maintained. But celibacy is all too prevalent even in large farms in fertile areas. Many good farms become derelict because they fall into the dead hands of childless old people. This is a social as well as an economic problem which clamours for attention. It diminishes agricultural production and undermines agricultural credit. It will not solve itself "ambulando", though its ideal solution would be "perambulando"—an increase in the number of perambulators.

**Miss I. Hughes Dowling**, in seconding the vote of thanks, said that the County of Mayo, unlike that of Donegal, was not highly industrialised. The people in rural areas in Donegal were always anxious to do any work which would bring in small amounts of money. This accounts for the great number of people engaged in cottage industries in that county. The people in Mayo, on the other hand, were too "easy going" to put themselves out to travel great distances to bring home work which could be done in spare time in the cottages. Some attempt was made in Mayo to introduce cottage industries, and at one time the crocheting of buttons was a home industry there.

The main industries in County Mayo are bacon curing, weaving and the manufacture of felt hoods. There are about 200 persons employed in Foxford, where the Sisters of Charity manage a woollen mill. There are 120 persons employed in the manufacture of felt hoods and 100 persons employed in the bacon factory in Castlebar. The knitting industry is carried on to a great extent in Achill.

The town of Belmullet, which is forty miles from a railway station, has a peculiar charm of its own, and it is not surprising that the people do not emigrate from that part of the county in the same proportion as they do from South-West Mayo. Although there does not appear to be any great attraction in Mayo to keep the people at home, the disposition of the Mayo man or woman is, on the whole, a happy one. Perhaps this accounts for the fact that the percentage of emigration is less than in other western seaboard counties.

**Professor M. Tierney**, supporting the vote of thanks, said that Mayo occupied a rather unique position among the counties ranked as congested. In other counties such as Donegal, Galway, and Kerry, the proportion of good agricultural land to bad was larger; East

Galway, for instance, contained some of the best land in Ireland. In Mayo, with the exception of the Moy Valley, the land was very poor, and this, of course, contributed to the general poverty of the county.

On one point he thought the lecturer might with advantage have extended his inquiry : the relation between country and town. Indeed, one of the most striking facts about Mayo was the comparative wealth of its towns, especially Ballina, which ranks as one of the richest Irish country towns. It was always a problem to him in his own experience of the area to relate this wealth to the poverty of the surrounding county. Even fifteen years ago the amount of business done by Ballina merchants in the London stocks and shares was quite striking.

Another aspect of the subject which he thought needed development was the historical study of the population. Plenty of materials existed for a study of family names on the lines of the work carried out years ago by Matheson, and in this connection the powerful Welsh strain in the people, especially of North Mayo, should not be forgotten. It is still clearly evident in the frequency of names such as Barrett, Davis, and MacHale. A complete survey should combine the sociological method used by Arensberg in Clare with the historical procedure followed in the Clare Island Survey by the Royal Irish Academy. It should include not only documented history and family names but also place names and folklore.

As regards the problem of congestion, he had for a long time doubted whether universal peasant proprietorship was really capable of providing a satisfactory solution. While it undoubtedly afforded some relief by comparison with previous conditions, he was not sure whether by its very uniformity and rigidity it would not in time create more problems than it could solve. He had often thought that like so many of the benevolent measures introduced during the period from about 1890, when the effort was being made to "kill Home Rule with kindness", it was an English treatment for a problem which we might have treated ourselves by quite different means. As it was he thought he could foresee a time when the consolidation of small farms into large estates might once more become an economic as well as a social necessity. In particular the relation between peasant proprietorship and population decline deserved to be carefully studied.

**Mr. Kelly:** I have great pleasure in associating myself with the vote of thanks to Mr. Freeman for his valuable paper. I think that studies of the kind undertaken by him and by Mr. Michael Murphy of U.C.C. are most important, and I only regret that there are not many more workers engaged upon such researches, when we should know more than we do about how our people really live.

Mr. Freeman refers to the fact that congested areas in Mayo have maintained their population more successfully than richer districts. In Ballyeroy, for instance, the people are crowded on to the small amount of useful land available, but on account of the large proportion of mountain and bog, the population per square mile is very low. If a well-meaning Government, in the hope of relieving the position, were to re-settle 50 per cent. of the people in another part of the country, I believe that the remainder would fly out too, for three reasons : existence would become intolerably lonely ; their traditional co-operative way of life would be disrupted ; and, being already closely intermarried, they would have difficulty in finding suitable mates.

Professor Tierney pays a generous tribute to the qualities of the

Mayo people, but I think he does less than justice to the economic status of the county. Apart from the Moy basin, there is another area, roughly bounded by Castlebar, Ballinrobe, Claremorris and the Galway border, which is fertile and prosperous. Mayo has more than one claim to statistical fame. With the exception of a few of the neighbouring counties, it has the highest proportion of unmarried males at ages 30-34 in the world, and in Éire it shares with Clare the honour of being the best rate-paying county. It is also one of the best counties for payment of commercial debts.

Professor Johnston suggests that marriage rates among Mayo farmers are similar to those of Meath. In both counties the rate, unfortunately, is declining, but whilst in Mayo 52 per cent. of farmers are single at ages 25-34, and 15 per cent. at ages 45-64, the comparable figures for Meath are 71 per cent. and 31 per cent. I would not agree with him in regarding the low marriage rates as almost a crime. We all know that farmers went through a bad time for some years prior to 1936, and the Census Report itself suggests that this may have been responsible for the fall in marriage rates. In Mayo, farmers' sons are brought up in the knowledge that only one can have the land and that the others must make their own way; in Meath the tendency is to expect the land to keep the whole family, but even there, I think that financial difficulties are sometimes responsible for the low marriage rates.

I agree with Professor Johnston that much underproduction is caused by farms being in the hands of ageing unmarried people. He suggests that the problem of rural over-population will solve itself by such persons dying out. In my view, this would be the worst possible solution, as these elderly people are often incapable of keeping their farms in good order, so that by the time the land falls into other hands, a heavy job of reclamation awaits the newcomer.

Late marriages also are a source of economic loss, as well as of much human misery. Sometimes the health of one or both parents breaks down before the children are of an age to help, so that the farm goes to rack and ruin. In my experience, the best credit risk, especially among small farmers, is the man who marries young. I also believe, purely from empirical observation, that the marriage difficulty is most acute in backward marginal farms. I would divide marginal farms into two classes: first, farms of sub-average quality in a district itself poor but where the economic pattern is more or less uniform; and second, poor farms contiguous to a district of good farms. The second class, in my opinion, is much the worse of the two.

**Dr. Geary** said that Mr. Freeman's paper was not a work on economics or demography but on geography; and the Hon. Secretaries were aware that Mr. Freeman's previous papers on similar lines had created interest amongst geographers in the United States and elsewhere redounding to his credit and the honour of the Society. He (Dr. Geary) heartily endorsed the suggestion of no fewer than three previous speakers that within some such framework as Mr. Freeman's social and economic inquiries for very restricted areas should be undertaken by qualified students. These inquiries would be based primarily on statistics; great masses of statistics, published and unpublished, were now available for quite small areas in the country

and they could easily be supplemented. The State Statistics Office would place all its information (of a non-confidential character) freely at the disposal of students and give them every guidance and assistance in its power.

Our present position is that by means of statistics we can describe (up to a point) economic and demographical phenomena; statistics have enabled us to pre-pounce some questions, but we know scarcely any answers. We have to admit that the capacity of statistics for indicating causality is limited. The statistics must be supplemented by "case histories". Answers to questions of the following type would emerge from these local inquiries:—

- (1) What is the local attitude amongst the "under 40's" to marriage and childbearing?
- (2) What is the attitude to (a) emigration overseas, and (b) emigration to Great Britain?
- (3) What has been the trend in fertility of marriages amongst local families?
- (4) What have been the effects of the important economic changes during the past 50 years, such as the breaking up of large holdings, decline in old-type and development of new-type industry?
- (5) Constitution of families.
- (6) Success or non-success of migrants from the locality who were university graduates, labourers, etc.

The Society has a traditional interest in this type of inquiry. Some years ago it offered a prize of £20 or £25 for an essay on "The Social and Economic Structure of an Area in Ireland". Actually only one paper was submitted and this was of a very inferior type. It is easy to enquire "Where are all the brilliant university graduates in economics?" The answer is equally easy: "They are doing what you were doing at their age—looking for a job." Dr. Geary suggested that the universities should take initiative in finding the necessary funds for endowing such research. Would it not be possible for travelling students or scholars with economic qualifications to spend at least part of their time on such work, under proper direction?

The results of such local inquiries would have not merely local interest. The object of "localising" it is to reduce the number of variables. As the nature of the physical universe is being revealed through study of the structure of the atom, so the answers to the many social and economic problems which now baffle us may emerge as a results of these inquiries.

**Mr. Freeman**, replying to the vote of thanks, expressed his deep gratitude to all those who had taken part in the very interesting discussion. The paper was, as Dr. Geary had remarked, essentially geographical and, therefore, written with strictly limited terms of reference. There was a need for demographic papers by those qualified to write them. Unlike Professor Tierney, he did not habitually sit at the feet of Socrates, but the paper asked questions as well as answered them. However, in reply to Mr. Kelly he would say that over a long period of years the decline of arable cultivation was associated at least with the steady withdrawal of manpower from the farms.

Senator Johnston and other speakers had shown the complexity of the human problem in such areas as Mayo. The paper had tried to

elucidate some of the general problems of the life of the area in terms of human geography. Even now, no adequate description of the geography of Ireland exists, and two developments are necessary in this field. The first was intense study of small regions, such as a single mountain valley, or a small town; some students have already carried out such studies, one of which was used in the preparation of the paper. The second need was for a general view of the whole country, which people in America and elsewhere wished to read. The present study lay between the two and might perhaps form a basis for either the very detailed or the more generalised work. As Dr. Geary had said, the demographic conditions of the country were most unusual and the speaker felt that the sharply declining population in many areas influenced the landscape and was itself a feature of major geographical significance. Mr. Kelly and other speakers had drawn attention to the low marriage rate and its consequences. Miss Dowling and Professor Tierney had spoken of the character of the people of Mayo, revealing once again the imponderable human factors which had to be taken into account.