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MARCH 1914

FROM "COFFIN SHIP" TO "ATLANTIC GREYHOUND"

By AN IRISH AMERICAN

II

THE "Famine," we know from Lord Brougham, "surpassed anything in the page of Thucydides—on the canvas of Poussin—in the dismal chant of Dante." It also surpassed the highest expectations of the British mercantile marine.

The Almighty, we know, sent the Famine to Ireland; but those who assert Divine interposition in the case of Ireland have omitted to point out how it came as a still greater god-send to the sister island. It is to repair this omission I am so imperfectly striving.

I have said that the total of Irish emigrants during the whole period, from 1846 to 1913, cannot have been less than 5,000,000. It was undoubtedly that, and probably many more. For instance, the Census Commissioners put down the emigration from Ireland, in the period 1841 to 1851, at 1,589,133 persons. The number is disputed, many believing, and among them John Mitchel, that a great proportion of these emigrants left Ireland on a much longer journey than to the United States.

There was certainly a deficit of Irish human life, somehow

I

VOL. IV—NO 37

THE IRISH REVIEW

arrived at, between 1846 and 1851, of 2,466,414 human beings that should have been in the island and were not there, as computed by the Census Commissioners themselves. How many of these were *bonâ fide* emigrants belonging to this world, and how many were registered for transit to the next, the Commissioners cannot say. But the British Companies, in their initial stage of development, were equally prepared for both. They got all who went to the new world, and succeeded in despatching many to the next. It was, of course, a matter for the emigrant to decide. He had paid his passage and might take his choice. A considerable saving, moreover, was effected by the longer route.

The Companies gained the cost of the food, such as it was, the live emigrant would have consumed; while the dead emigrant incurred no cost of funeral for himself or relatives. The great deep swallowed him cheap. Those who have read John Mitchel's *Jail Journal* will agree that, as between life on the Britisher's coffin ship or convict ship, and death at sea, in the words of one of their own poets, himself a Viceroy of Ireland, "sleep is best." Lord Houghton sang for the Irish as well as for the mere English.

The great County of Cork, in 1841, had 773,398 inhabitants, apart from the city; on 2nd April, 1911, it had fallen to 315,431, a loss of 457,967 persons—or 59.2 per cent. in seventy years. But emigration from Cork has greatly exceeded those figures. From the 1st May, 1851, to 31st March, 1911, the number of persons who declared themselves to belong to Cork County and City, who embarked as emigrants, came to 545,085. During the previous ten years the number must have reached fully 100,000; for Cork County comprises about one-eleventh of the whole of Ireland. Thus, from 1841 to 1911, some 650,000 emigrants sailed from Cork County and City alone. This one district cannot have paid less than £3,500,000 to £4,000,000 sterling in outward steerage passages only to the British mercantile marine in the last seventy years—and has paid this ransom out of the extreme destitution of that very fertile region.

The people who left ruined homes behind them have been the chief asset in the prosperity of the lines transporting them. That

“COFFIN SHIP” TO “ATLANTIC GREYHOUND”

and something more. They have carried to the land that gave them harbourage and welcome the qualities that ensured eviction and distraint at home.

The district of the British Consul at Boston, we are told in a recent report (that for 1912) contained, by the last returns, 4,895,000 inhabitants. Of these, 598,000 were either born in Ireland or born of Irish parents. We were to add those whose grandparents were of Irish birth, it is probable that a million persons, at least, would prove to be of immediate Irish descent in this one district of the United States. How have these Irish refugees comported themselves in the land of their escape?

The British Consular report answers the question. The Consular district of Boston, with a population only about half a million in excess of that of Ireland, had lodged in its Savings Banks in 1912 a sum of £219,686,000, as compared with £15,430,000 in the Irish Savings Banks.

The State of Massachusetts, with a population of 3,366,416, or about one million less than that of Ireland, had a Savings Bank deposit of £171,828,943. Whatever the proportion of Irish depositors may be to the total, it is plain that those who compose so large a part of the population must share largely in this particular banking return—for the Savings Banks represent the thrift of the small investor, and the Boston Irishmen probably bulk largely as small investors. The Irishman does not change his nature when he crosses the Atlantic. He merely changes his government. He exchanges a government expressly designed for his improvement for a government that has no designs upon him. In the one case the Government is determined to improve the people (at all costs); in the other the people are determined to improve the government.

Speaking in the Westminster House of Commons on February 5th, 1913, upon the Welsh Church Bill, Mr. MacKenna said: “We look upon it as one of the greatest glories of England that she alone has ever been sympathetic towards the smaller races in her midst.” The Irish have had so much of this sympathy that it has thrown them completely off their balance. It has shifted their centre of

THE IRISH REVIEW

gravity from the "midst" of England to the shores of the new world. In 1880 there were in the U.S.A. 4,529,523 persons having Irish fathers, and 4,448,821 having Irish mothers: a considerably larger number of persons of Irish parentage than are to be found in the whole of Ireland to-day.

Ireland could dispense with something of that fund of British sympathy that, as Mr. MacKenna truly says, has been "one of the greatest glories of England," in return for some slight control over her own funds.

If we contrast some of the emigration figures (taken from the *Encycloædia Britannica*), showing the proportions of Irish and Scottish persons in the United States, we shall at once perceive how strongly English sympathy "towards the smaller races in her midst" has impelled one of them—the Irish—to a most ungrateful flight.

The two "smaller races" contrast as follows: of every 10,000 foreign-born persons in the U.S.A., there were:

| | | | | | |
|---------|-----|-------|------------------|-----|-------------------|
| In 1850 | ... | 4,285 | born in Ireland; | 314 | born in Scotland. |
| In 1860 | ... | 3,893 | " " | 262 | " " |
| In 1870 | ... | 3,333 | " " | 253 | " " |
| In 1880 | ... | 2,776 | " " | 255 | " " |

When Irishmen speak of America as "New Ireland," they are assuredly much nearer the truth than those who know only the Carnegie libraries. Mr. Carnegie has two charities—libraries and the British Empire. Both are designed to turn out Anglo-Saxons. But the story of Ireland cannot be found in the one, and will not be told in the other.

To understand British dealings with Ireland requires a long memory. Who sups with the Devil needs a long spoon. Anyone who thinks that British policy has changed, and that England to-day intends to deal straight with Ireland and grant her a "measure of freedom" for the control of her own local affairs, need only study the British handling of the trans-Atlantic mail call at Queenstown to know the truth.

England has held Ireland in her grip for centuries. She has

“COFFIN SHIP” TO “ATLANTIC GREYHOUND”

reduced it to an economic servitude, following on a political, religious and moral servitude, unparalleled in the history of one white people with another. Those who think that the Britain of to-day is, in essentials, any fairer in intention towards Ireland should ponder well the facts laid bare in the Queenstown controversy.

The Cunard Company is the chief British transport line, and stands at the head of British shipping. It is, in many respects, the most important shipping concern in the world. It enjoys an enormous subsidy of public monies paid out of the British (and Irish) public purse. Its chief vessels, on which it has largely relied for its pre-eminence in the Atlantic trade, were built with sums advanced, on highly favourable terms, from the same purse. It is, in fact, a State-owned and State-controlled branch of the British sea service, and in everything affecting the trade of Great Britain it is as much a machine of the British Government as a vessel launched at any naval dockyard.

The mail contract, the huge building advance, the favours of the State, have never been wanting to ensure the Cunard Company the continued distinction of flying the “blue ribbon of the Atlantic.” In August last, when the British Parliament had just adjourned for several months, so that no questions might be asked, the Cunard Company announced that its larger steamers, the *Mauretania* and *Lusitania*, which had been specially built with money of the British and Irish taxpayer for the mail contract, would not call any longer at Queenstown, the port stipulated in the contract, and that both mails and passengers by these vessels would, henceforth, have to be embarked at Liverpool.

The protests that arose in Ireland, from Belfast to Cork, were met with an impudent and untruthful statement that this measure had been rendered necessary owing to the dangerous character of the entrance to Cork Harbour for vessels of very large tonnage and bulk. These priceless “greyhounds of the Atlantic,” we were informed, could not be imperilled by risking the terrors of a call at Queenstown. The *Olympic*, a much larger vessel than either, unfortunately for their contention, was due to continue the call of the White Star Line

THE IRISH REVIEW

at Cork, and entered Queenstown Harbour and embarked passengers there after the smaller Cunard vessels had abandoned it on the grounds stated.

This fact was at once pointed out by those who termed the Cunard Company's excuse a clear fabrication, whereupon the *Olympic* followed the *Lusitania* and *Mauretania*, and the White Star Company announced that in future she, too, would not visit the Irish port, and passengers by the vessel would have to embark in England. The action of the British Government, meanwhile, was in entire keeping with the necessities of the case. The Postmaster-General, responsible for the mail contract with the Cunard Company which required their vessels to call at Queenstown for the embarkation of the mails to America, declared that he was "powerless" to enforce that contract.

He publicly "deplored his inability" to make the British Company respect its obligations towards the Department he controlled, and he regretted that, although the tax-payers' money would still be handed to the Cunard Company, he had "no hold upon it" to compel it to fulfil the contract. British shipping was free. It was as "free" as the sea itself—that Ocean that has for its chief function the glorious privilege of carrying the British flag to the ends of the earth. No Government Department could dictate to a British-carrying company in matters of its internal economy. He added that the Board of Trade experts concurred in the opinion of the Cunard Company that Queenstown was a dangerous port of call for the larger vessels of the mail service, and that he was bound to accept this view.

At the same time as the Postmaster-General was making this pronouncement, in answer to a united Irish protest, the First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr. Winston Churchill, visited Queenstown, and was publicly entertained to luncheon there, when he made a momentous statement.

It is well to quote Mr. Churchill's actual words. They constitute the best reply to his colleague, the Postmaster-General, and the best defence of Queenstown as a port of entry, and they reveal very plainly the intentions of the British Government in regard to that port in particular and to Irish Commerce in general.

“COFFIN SHIP” TO “ATLANTIC GREYHOUND”

On September 2nd, 1913, replying to the address of welcome from the Queenstown Commissioners, he said :

“The Admiralty recognised the importance of Queenstown as a centre for a naval base . . . its strategic importance has not changed during the history of the port, and it was now as important from a naval standpoint as ever before, *even though conditions otherwise* had changed from an international standpoint. . . . Queenstown was the gateway to the most important trade route in the world—a trade vital to the United Kingdom—and the Admiralty hoped that one result of establishing the Training Squadron there would be a stimulus to recruiting for the Navy in the district.”

The London “Daily Telegraph” hailed this speech as an admirable pronouncement, and in a leading article declared that Mr. Churchill’s scheme of recruiting at Queenstown, might well furnish “matter for congratulation, as Irish boys make excellent blue-jackets, happy of disposition, amenable to discipline, and extremely quick and handy.”

The gist of the business lies here.

The Cunard Company objected to the delay of the call at Queenstown. It hampered their swift flights across the Atlantic, and might even, in the end, bring the German *Vaterland* in a winner. So the Queenstown call had to go. The blue ribbon of the Atlantic was at stake; and there was nothing more to be said. The Post Office acquiesced, and arrangements were made to bring the change into operation when Parliament was not sitting, and no Irish could apply. At the same time that Irish commerce was thus injured, by the withdrawal of a service so intimately associated with the country and by a libellous statement scattered broadcast against one of its chief ports, the Admiralty set to work to get young Irish flesh and blood into the Navy.

Irishmen might not trade for themselves, but they could defend British trade. The less trade they had at home the more likely they would be to fight for British trade abroad. They made such “excellent blue-jackets” if they had no cloth for their own jackets.

THE IRISH REVIEW

They were "happy of disposition, amenable to discipline, and extremely quick and handy."

The German Line that dared to assert its right to visit Queens-town had a very short shrift. It might open new services to the Black Sea; to the Baltic; through the Panama Canal—all these, we were told, were being established, without friction, by the Hamburg American Line as part of its "rate-cutting" enterprise. But when it tried to visit Ireland, the "protests" began; it might as well have tried to steam up the Bramaputra into the Sacred Presence of the Dalai Lama.

After a month of effort, and two false starts, it came to an inglorious end with a press paragraph: "In future the Hamburg-American boats will call at Southampton instead of Queenstown."

It was hardly necessary to insert "in future!" No vessel of the German line had yet been allowed to get even within sight of the shores of Ireland. The best comment on the story is to be found in the calendar of State papers of the reign of Elizabeth, indexed by the authorities of Dublin Castle for the use of historians. The work is one published by authority of the Crown, and is printed at the public expense, and the original records are available only to those who are known to be loyal to the British connection.

The reference now cited is taken from volume X of the Series as available to students in the public libraries:

"Dublin Castle, No. 22, Lord Deputy Fitzwilliam to Burghley, August, 1572. . . . The Three German Earls have arrived with Mr. Rogers, their conductor. According to your Lord ship's direction they shall travel as little waye into the country as I can."

There is an earlier instance of German intrusion into Ireland, in British official records, and the manner of meeting it was the same in the thirteenth century as in the sixteenth, and as it is now in the twentieth century.

We read, in the reign of Henry III. of England, who was not in law a sovereign in Ireland, but only a "lord of Ireland," first among other robber Norman Lords who claimed land there, that

“COFFIN SHIP” TO “ATLANTIC GREYHOUND”

the great German Emperor, Frederic of Hohenstaufen, had, as his secretary, an Irishman misnamed, in the English rendering, “Walter.” Now Frederic of Hohenstaufen was a very far-seeing prince, and one of the greatest monarchs that ever reigned, in Germany. His Irish Secretary, “Walter” of the Anglo-Saxon chronicles, loved Ireland and knew its worth. He told his Imperial Master of that fair land and how it lay, an island of “far off, great shadowy rocks and silent strands” awaiting the coming of the Deliverer. The Emperor sent his Secretary on a visit to his homeland, and the returned Irishman came back to Munster to tell the MacCarthyMore and the MacMurrough of the great land beyond the seas where Law ruled, and treaties stood, and princes vowed obedience to an Empire that was founded on religion and a belief in justice.

The visit of the Irish Secretary of the Great German Emperor to his native land had caused Henry III. of England acute alarm. He directed that “Walter” was to be watched and his doings and sayings “privily noted”; for the shadow of Germany must in no wise fall upon the Irish shore—even in the days of the Plantagenets.

It is not Germany alone. Germany to-day is dangerous; but every foreigner who attempts to land in Ireland is a potential political criminal. Were he Turk or Tartar, or Hindu, for him Ireland is a forbidden land.

In the *Letters of Queen Victoria*, published by her son, Edward VII., in 1907, we read in 1848 that in the “daily police report” Her Majesty received from Dublin, through the Chief Commissioner of Police in London, attention is drawn to the fact that “several French men have lately been observed in the country”; and the deduction is drawn that for a foreigner of any nationality to visit a nation of nearly 9,000,000 of men is undesirable, and a thing likely to lead Irishmen to “look to foreign support.”

Ireland is to have no intercourse with the outside world, save through and by channels that England strictly controls.

The Postmaster-General, the British Government, were “quite powerless” to enforce their own contract with the Cunard Company. They could not compel the Cunard vessels to visit Queenstown;

THE IRISH REVIEW

they had no authority over British shipping to enforce an obligation with themselves that was dependent on their own payment. But British influence could prevent and entirely prohibit a foreign steamship company, over which it had no shadow of control, from fulfilling its engagements!

A British steamship, bound in law to visit an Irish port, may break its bond, and the British Government is powerless to enforce it; but British influence is all powerful to intervene and effectually prohibit a ship that flies a foreign flag from coming even within sight of the Irish shore, although pledged to call there. German vessels may visit Southampton, Liverpool even (if they could see their way into its dirty, mud-afflicted channels); they may go to Scotland, to Leith or Aberdeen; to Dover or Hull, to any port where the trade and interests are British; but they may not go to an Irish port on pain of "complications."

The Irish are a race apart, and Ireland is a forbidden land. Some countries have strange names. Korea, we know, is the "Land of Morning Calm"—and the Japanese decided it should have no Mid-day. Ireland is the "Green Isle"—and the English have decided it should have no leaves and never bear fruit—except for themselves.

The various steps taken to prevent the Hamburg-Amerika Line from getting near the shores of Ireland should form a pleasing chapter in the history of the steps taken to bring about the "Anglo-Saxon Alliance."

German trade, permitted to have any touch with Ireland, would be a thing highly detrimental to Anglo-Saxon interests; for it would reveal the shocking fact that the Irish are not yet Anglo-Saxons. Therefore, when the *Rhaetia* was announced to call at Queenstown, British interests sprang to arms. The thing had to be stopped at all costs; and it was. Ireland is the Forbidden Land, and Queenstown the closed Port. Were the Empress of Austria alive to-day she would not be permitted to hunt the fox in Ireland. She would have to find him in England, his native soil.

In China there are certain ports open to foreign trade. These

“COFFIN SHIP” TO “ATLANTIC GREYHOUND”

are called Treaty Ports. Ireland is a much better investment for British interests with only closed ports. A “Treaty Port” in Ireland might revive such unhappy memories! The last Irish Treaty Port was Limerick. Some men there are who think that the Treaty Stone of Limerick should be at Downing Street, just as the older Stone of Ireland’s destiny, the *Lia Fail*, is at Westminster for English Kings to be crowned on. Even as they are crowned on an Irish stone, so their treaties should be writ on an Irish stone. The treaty may always be broken; but the stone, being Irish, stands sure—an eternal table for the registration of false oaths.