

## *The Repression of the Woollen Manufacture in Ireland*

IN his excellent book on 'Malthus and his Work,' Mr. Bonar writes as follows :

England in her jealousy would have surrounded her (Ireland) with a cordon quite as close as Berkeley's wall of brass. As soon as a considerable woollen trade grew up, England stopped it by legislation which (in 1699) forbade the exportation of Irish woollens, not only to England, but to any other country whatever. . . . The growth of industries like the woollen manufacture had set on foot a growth of population, which did not stop with the arrest of those industries. As often happens, the effects of an impulse to marriage lasted far beyond the industrial progress that gave the impulse. (Pp. 201, 202.)

This passage is cited as a fair expression of the current belief on this topic. Many of us seem to have got into the way of supposing that the poverty of Ireland, its over-population, and other evils can be accounted for by laying the blame on the selfishness of English woollen manufacturers in the seventeenth century. But a little reflection may lead us to doubt whether the cause assigned was really adequate to the production of such large results. It seems worth while to try and inquire whether there ever was a widely diffused and important woollen manufacture in Ireland, whether this manufacture ever was repressed, and whether the measures to which so much mischief is ascribed were due to the narrow-minded selfishness of English manufacturers.

### I.

From a very early period Ireland was noted for the manufacture of friezes ; we hear of it first in the time of Edward III, who made special provision for exempting wool and frieze, which had already paid customs in Ireland, from being subjected to such charges in England as well.<sup>1</sup> But the fullest details have reached us from Sir William Petty, who was a most careful observer, and who in carry-

<sup>1</sup> *Rules of Parliament*, ii. 372 b. The Irish frieze is spoken of as very different from English cloth.

ing out his excellent survey of the country must have had ample opportunities for acquiring information on the state of the manufactures. His 'Anatomy' was written in 1672, and it describes the clothing of the Irish as—

far better than that of the French Peasants or the poor of most other countries; which advantage they have from their Wooll, whereof 12 Sheep furnisheth a competency to one of these Families. Which Wooll, and the Cloth made of it, doth cost these poor People no less than 50,000*l.* *per Ann.* for the dying it; a trade exercised by the Women of the Country.

And in a later chapter :

The Cloathing is a narrow sort of Frieze, of about twenty Inches broad, whereof two foot, call'd a Bundle is worth from 3*d.* halfpenny to 18*d.* Of this seventeen Bundles make a Mans Suit, and twelve make a Cloak. According to which numbers and proportions and the number of people who wear this Stuff, it seems that near thrice as much Wooll is spent in Ireland as exported; whereas others have thought quite contrary, that is that the exported Wooll is triple in quantity to what is spent at home.

The Clothing-Trade is not arrived to what it was before the late Rebellion, and the Art of making the excellent, thick, spungy warm Coverlets, seems to be lost.<sup>1</sup>

It thus appears that the making of frieze was a very large and widely diffused domestic industry; but that it had suffered somewhat during the recent disturbances. We may also notice that in arguing as to the extent of the industry, Petty makes no reference to exportation. He elsewhere notes that 'the manufacture bestowed on a year's importation out of Ireland is not worth above 8,000*l.*' It is a fair inference that the frieze was made almost entirely for home consumption, and that the quantity exported was very small indeed in 1691.

## II.

Besides this ancient industry, there was another branch of the woollen trade of which we must take account, for during the seventeenth century<sup>2</sup> there had been several attempts made by the English settlers to introduce the manufacture of *the old* and also of *the new drapery* into Ireland. These were the arts which had been imported from Flanders under Edward III and Elizabeth respectively. The old drapery was a heavy broadcloth: the new drapery consisted of lighter goods, and of mixtures of wool with other threads. The first attempt to plant these industries in

<sup>1</sup> *Political Anatomy of Ireland*, chapters xi. xii. xiii.

<sup>2</sup> There is no more reason to believe that Edward III fostered the drapery manufacture in Ireland than there is for thinking that he did so in Scotland. 11 Ed. III, *cs.* 2, 3, 5.

Ireland appears to have been perfectly fruitless. In 1615, Mr. Talbot moved in the Irish parliament that 'cloth might be made in this realm,'<sup>1</sup> and Mr. Dallways followed him with a proposal that 'clothworkers might be sent for out of England, and every one to be free in each corporation.' But the subject seems to have been dropped at once, and the proposals were not even referred to the grand committee. Twenty years later, however, it appears that a bill for the freedom of working native materials into manufactures within Ireland was introduced, and it made some little progress in the sessions of 1634<sup>2</sup> and 1635. The delay which attended it is partly explained by the attitude of the crown advisers in England. We read in a commission<sup>3</sup> dated Whitehall, 25 March, 1641:

Concerning the act for the freedom of working materials of that country into manufactures within the said realm, for that some doubt is made of the fitness of the same to be passed in regard there is no caution therein to restrain such as have not served seven years apprentices and are exercised in the trade, who if they should be enabled to make manufactures might introduce many inconveniences in trade, yet do we also return it to you without alteration on that point, but with addition of a proviso to restrain the making of broad cloaths, signifying unto you and our council there, that before the debate thereof in parliament you do well advise of the fitness of passing the said act for manufactures.

There can be little wonder that the troubles which ensued have left no trace of the further progress of this proposal. It is chiefly instructive as showing that there was no drapery manufacture in Ireland before the Rebellion, and as indicating the kind of difficulty which was felt about introducing it. Strict regulations were then enforced in regard to the drapery manufacture in England. It would have been impossible to foster in Ireland a competing and unregulated industry which was illegal in England, but it was difficult to frame the best means for regulating a manufacture which had not yet come into existence.

Private enterprise, however, fared better than legislative enactment in carrying out the project. About 1665 or a little later some

Western Clothiers finding, so early and upon other reasons that are now suborned, that Trade decaying, and many of them reduced to extreme Poverty, removed themselves and their families over into Ireland, invited by the cheapness there of Wool, and of Livelihood. These erected then a Manufactory (great in respect to Ireland) at Dublin which hath been carried on ever since and increases daily. There came also over much about the same time sixty families from Holland, setting up another at Limerick; which, by occasion of the succeeding wars decayed. But, after these more of the English clothiers came and fixed about *Corke* and *Kinsale*, where

<sup>1</sup> *Irish Commons Journals*, 11 May 1615.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 19 Nov. 1634.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* (1796), p. 124.

they continue and are grown not inconsiderable. Some *French* have since resorted to *Waterford* to make druggets there, and other Commodities of their Fashion. And about a year or two ago, some Merchants of *London* raised another Manufacture at *Clonmel*, managing it by their Agents. . . . There is more cry than Wool in this matter : For I dare and do assure you that, modestly speaking, the whole Quantity of what we work up in Ireland amounts not to the Half of what any one Clothing County in England does.<sup>1</sup>

The author of this letter, writing in 1677 to allay his brother's fear of Irish rivalry in the English woollen manufacture, gives us a brief sketch of the attempts that had been made to introduce the trades of making the old and new drapery. The experiments were made by settlers from the west of England and abroad, who roused some opposition, as the English manufacturers were afraid of being undersold by Englishmen in Ireland, who had cheaper material and cheaper food. But the ancient native manufacture of frieze is not mentioned at all in this connexion, for it did not compete with west of England cloth or Colchester bays. We have here a further indication, if any were needed, that there was little, if any, export of Irish frieze to England at this time, and that it was a distinct manufacture which did not interfere with English trade.

The policy which was then pursued with regard to the manufacture of drapery in England was soon applied to the English manufacture which had been newly planted in Ireland. A guarantee of the quality of goods is now afforded by trade marks ; but as the woollen manufacture was entirely a domestic industry, it was hardly to be expected that the name and workmanship of any of the hundreds of English handloom weavers should be known abroad. Accordingly, the state undertook to give a guarantee that the pieces of English cloth were of a certain size and quality ; and it was the business of the *aulnager* to see that this was attended to, and to seal the cloth in regard to which he was satisfied. If Irish drapery was to compete in the English and foreign markets with English drapery, it was desirable that there should be no misunderstandings in regard to size and quality. Accordingly, in 1665 a statute was passed which instituted the office of *aulnager*,<sup>2</sup> and defined the sizes to which the cloth should be woven.

The intention of this act was evidently to improve and foster the art of woollen manufacture in Ireland ; but, as was often the case

<sup>1</sup> 'A Letter,' § 4, quoted in Smith's *Memoirs of Wool*, chapter lix.

<sup>2</sup> 'For the more orderly managing the trade and mystery of making and working of woollen cloth, and all other sorts of clothes of the natures and kinds aforesaid, and for the better ascertaining of the length, breadth, and weight of all such clothes to be made within the realm of Ireland . . . and that the buyers thereof may have just commerce and trade without deceit or fraud, may it please your majesty, that there shall be and hereby is constituted and appointed an office, called the Alnage Office, &c. (17 & 18 C. II, c. 15, § 9.)

with similar enactments, it did not serve its purpose. In 1695, the Irish commons condemned it as 'impracticable and prejudicial,' and proceeded to prepare 'the heads of a bill for the better making and regulating' of the woollen manufacture.<sup>1</sup> But no further progress appears to have been made in the matter.

The defects of the act of 1665 had probably become more glaring in consequence of the great expansion which the manufacture of drapery in Ireland received at this time. About 1692, that is to say as soon as the country began to get fairly settled, its growth was exceedingly rapid, and began to be prejudicial to the west of England trade. It attracted labour from Devonshire, and intercepted the Irish wool which had hitherto found its way to England. The manufacturers of Somerset and Devon, of Exeter, Taunton, Barnstaple, Ashburnham, and Tiverton had been accustomed to rely on Ireland for their supply of wool; but they could no longer, as they asserted in their petitions to parliament, procure it thence. It was also averred that

During the late rebellion in Ireland, many of the poor of that kingdom<sup>2</sup> fled into the west of England, where they were put to work in the woollen manufacture, and learnt that trade, and since the reduction of Ireland endeavours are used to set up these manufactures there.

From the English 'Commons Journals' it thus appears that there was a wholly new development of the Irish drapery manufacture from 1692 onwards; it is also clear that there was a considerable migration of English-bred workmen to Ireland, and that there was every prospect that the Devonshire industry would be transplanted to Dublin. It does not appear to have been a matter of very general interest throughout the kingdom. The manufacturers of Penistone and the West Riding, of Norwich and Colchester, had nothing to say on the subject; the only outcry was from the west of England, where the decay of the long celebrated manufactures had gone on *pari passu* with the development of the new industry in Dublin. It was not a mere anticipation of injurious competition, but actual experience of migration, that roused them. It was not a question between England and Ireland, for the greater part of England was careless, and almost the whole of Ireland was unconcerned; but it was a question between the people of Devonshire and the protestant interest in Dublin, as to the maintenance of an old-established industry in the one, or the development of a struggling industry in the other.

When the drapery manufacture had been thus introduced from England between the Restoration and Revolution, and was reinvigorated by the migration of protestant settlers after the battle of

<sup>1</sup> *Irish Commons Journals*, 10 Oct. 1695.

<sup>2</sup> Obviously the protestant poor; the Celts would hardly have taken refuge in Devonshire.

the Boyne, it began to attract the native Irish also. We can judge of the actual condition of the industry from a 'Petition of the protestant woollen manufacturers in the City and County of Dublin, as well Freeman as Foreigners in behalf of themselves and the rest of the Woollen manufacturers of Ireland, addressed to the Irish House of Commons in 1698.'<sup>1</sup> It asserts

that the Papists in the year 1692 were very few in the woollen manufactory of this Kingdom, and for six years last they have gotten the third part of the said manufactory into their own hands, for great numbers of them have left the Trade and Calling they were bred to, viz. Brogue Makers, Mealmen, Bakers &c. and have set up and follow the Woollen Trade, without serving any time, and carry on a greater trade than most of the Corporation. That the said Papists for want of knowledge in the Trade have made much bad goods, which have gone off by the lowness of the rates and is an absolute Cheat to the buyer, who cannot always distinguish between good and bad goods, all which have much damnified the protestant Interest in this Kingdom and caused a jealousy in England that our Manufactory will damnify theirs: for Preservation whereof, and for the Preservation of the Protestant Interest of this Nation the Petitioners humbly propose to the consideration of the House the disabling papists from following or working in the Woolen Manufactory, except Spinning, whereby the other may return to their former trades, or take to the Linen Manufactory, and that no Protestant or Person whatever may keep above three apprentices at once, and they to serve full seven years time, whereby the goods will be well made and bear such a rate as, considering the dearness of the necessaries we have from England,<sup>2</sup> we shall not be able to afford them cheaper than they.

From this it appears that the drapery trade had since 1692 attracted some of the native Irish, apparently Dublin craftsmen; there is no mention of its being undertaken by the peasantry, who had carried on the making of frieze for generations, but by men engaged in other trades. It was not a long-established industry, but a new development which they proposed to control, and confine strictly to the protestant interest for the future. It is unnecessary to discuss the general policy of regulating industry; but that policy was universally accepted at that time, and it would have been impossible to leave an unregulated Irish drapery manufacture to compete with a regulated English manufacture. The Dublin makers saw clearly that if their trade was to be allowed to flourish, they must endeavour to maintain the skill of the workers and the quality of the goods by insisting on regulations similar to those enforced in England.

There was a third direction also from which labour was attracted to this trade; for it is said that there were protestant immigrants from the Low Countries, who devoted themselves to the woollen

<sup>1</sup> *Irish Commons Journals*, 12 Oct. 1698.

<sup>2</sup> Probably fuller's earth.

manufacture in Dublin. The labourers thus attracted from England and abroad found the material plentiful and living in Ireland cheap ; native craftsmen were drawn into the business, and it seemed to be making very rapid progress ; such was the condition of the drapery manufacture in 1698.

At the same time the only figures which we possess—whether trustworthy or not—are very curious. In a ‘ Report of the Commissioners of Trade and the Plantations,’ addressed to the house of commons, there are figures to show the extraordinary growth of the manufacture between 1665 and 1696. On what data they rest we cannot say, but while they go to prove a considerable increase between 1665 and 1687, they show a great decline from 1687 to 1696. Even with all the rapid expansion after the reduction of Ireland, the manufacture in 1696 was only about one-third of what it had been in 1687 ; and the manufacture of frieze was in 1696 less than one-fourth of what it had been in 1665. It had increased greatly up to 1687, but not in anything like the proportion of the growth of the new drapery ; and it had declined more rapidly in the years of rebellion.<sup>1</sup> It is exceedingly difficult to reconcile the figures quoted in parliament with the assertions we find in the petitions, which make 1692 the beginning of rapid progress. We are forced to suppose that the migration which then began did not make itself felt in the returns of finished goods till some time afterwards, and this appears to have been the case according to the quotation of the custom-house books for 1698, given by Hely Hutchinson.<sup>2</sup>

The only incidental evidence bearing on these estimates which I know, is in the alleged fact that Ireland could not provide enough clothing for the small army supported there in 1697 ;<sup>3</sup> and there appears to have been a considerable importation of English cloth even during the years which immediately preceded the repressive statute. On the whole, we shall not be far wrong in saying that the manufactory of new drapery was small but developing

<sup>1</sup> We also find that the woollen manufacture in Ireland hath increased since the year 1665 as follows :

	New Drapery Pieces	Old Drapery Pieces	Friezes
			yards
1665	224	82	444,381
1687	11,860	108	1,129,716
1696	4,413	34½	104,167

*Commons Journals*, xii. 434.

<sup>2</sup> *Commercial Restraints*, fifth letter.

New Drapery	Old Drapery	Frieze
		yards
23,285½	281½	666,901

<sup>3</sup> *An Answer to a Letter from a Gentleman in the Country to a Member of the House of Commons on the Votes of the 14th inst. relating to the Trade of Ireland* (1698), p. 12.



rapidly; and that the manufacture of frieze, though it had shown great capacity of expansion during the Caroline period, was not much more important than in the time of Petty.

### III.

We may now examine how these two branches of the woollen manufacture—frieze and drapery—were respectively affected by legislation in 1698 and 1699.

In regard to the frieze, there is no difficulty. This was a stuff which was not made in England, and no jealousy was felt in regard to the manufacture; it was consequently allowed the same free play as before. This was the only form of woollen manufacture that was diffused throughout the country, the only woollen manufacture that could influence the habits of the people as regards population and so forth, and it was specially exempted from the operation of the new measures.

As this is a somewhat important point, it may be worth while to try and make it perfectly clear by quotations from the records both of the English and Irish parliaments.

The Irish house of commons went into committee to consider the matter, and on 12 Oct. 1698 reported 'that it is the opinion of this committee that an additional duty be imposed on old and new drapery of the manufacture of this kingdom that shall be exported from the same, friezes excepted.'

In the Irish statute which was based on this resolution, while duties are laid on the old and new draperies, frieze is specially excepted.

In the English house of commons, 18 Jan. 1698, the commissioners on trade reported 'that the exportation of all sorts of woollen manufactures out of Ireland to any parts whatever, except only that of their frieze as is wont to England, be restrained and discouraged by impositions, penalties, and all other ways that may be sufficient to hinder it.'

What the causes for the decay of the frieze manufacture may have been, we need not attempt to discuss: it is still made in small quantities for domestic consumption. Was it supplanted by the English drapery as an article of common wear, or did social disturbances interfere with the maintenance of the manufacture? We cannot say definitely what checked it; we can only be sure that the decay was not brought about by the jealousy of English manufacturers or through additional duties imposed at their request.

With regard to the drapery manufacture, the case is entirely different. This was an article of English manufacture, that would enter into direct competition with the production of English looms. What the English manufacturers asked for was a countervailing



duty which should prevent the English manufacturers in Ireland from underselling the Devonshire men. The Barnstaple weavers petitioned that the house would take such measures 'that the Irish woollen manufactures may not come cheaper to foreigners than the English, nor England fall into decay by the flourishing state of Ireland.'<sup>1</sup>

In consequence of these representations a bill 'to encourage the woollen manufacture in England, and to restrain the exportation of woollen manufactures from Ireland into foreign parts, and for better preventing the exportation of wool from England and Ireland,' passed the commons and was read twice in the lords. A multitude of petitions from the west of England poured in upon them as well as one from the merchants of Ireland, and these various parties were heard by counsel. The matter was subsequently referred to a committee with the instruction to prepare a clause or clauses to be added to the said bill for the effectual establishing the linen manufacture in Ireland. This committee had power to take evidence, and on their report the house did not proceed with the bill, but voted an address to his majesty 'that it is absolutely necessary for the good of England that the woollen manufactures in Ireland should be effectually discouraged.'<sup>2</sup>

The matter was taken up in the following autumn by the Irish commons. Shortly after the resolution already quoted was passed, the master warden and brethren of the corporation of weavers in the city of Dublin petitioned on behalf of themselves and the rest of the woollen manufacturers of the kingdom :

That whereas by a vote of the house on the 24th day of October last, a duty is to be laid on the old and new draperies that shall be exported out of this kingdom, except friezes, and therefore praying that they may be heard at the bar by their council before the house do ascertain the quantum of the duty to be laid on the aforesaid draperies.<sup>3</sup>

They were heard accordingly, and as a final result 20 per cent. was laid on the old drapery and 10 per cent. on the new. High as this rate may appear, it was obviously intended as a countervailing duty; it was a lower rate than that demanded by the Taunton

<sup>1</sup> *Commons Journals*, 11 Jan. 1697, xii. 40. The petition from Taunton is still more explicit: That by reason of the great growth of the Woollen Manufactory in Ireland, the great demands they have for the same from Holland, New England and other parts which used to be supplied by England, the vast numbers of our workmen that go thither, the cheapness of wool and provisions there, they are able to undersell the Petitioners at least 20 per Cent. which if not speedily remedied will endanger the loss of the Woollen Manufactures of this Kingdom, and praying that the House will take into consideration the true State of the Nation in relation to Ireland and make such provision for mutual trade between us and them, under such limitations and encouragements as may be for the Honour, Interest, and Safety of the Government, the encouragement of the Woollen Manufacture and of Trade and Navigation. xii. 87.

<sup>2</sup> 8 June 1698. *Lords Journals*, xvi. 309.

<sup>3</sup> *Irish Commons Journals*, 4 Nov. 1698.

manufacturers, and a much lower rate than the 43 per cent. which the commissioners on trade doubtfully recommended as a fair countervailing duty. The calculations on which this extraordinary view was based are given in full, and at any rate serve to show that the rate actually imposed was not levied without full inquiry and was not at all so heavy as some experts recommended. These same commissioners note carefully that this is to be regarded as a mere countervailing duty, for otherwise 'that additional duty would in effect amount to an absolute prohibition of the exportation of that sort of cloth from Ireland, which, we humbly conceive, can never be intended by that bill.'<sup>1</sup>

There appears to have been some hesitation on the part of the Irish commons about carrying the measure; and at his majesty's command the lords justices communicated with them about this bill, 'the passing of which in this session his majesty recommends to you, as what may be of great advantage to the trade of this kingdom.'<sup>2</sup> It was passed by majorities of 74 to 34 on the second reading, and 105 to 41 on the third.

After events proved that this act imposed something more than a mere countervailing duty; its effects are traced in the address to the crown at the opening of the next Irish parliament, that of 1708.

We cannot without the greatest grief of heart, reflect upon the vast Decay and Loss of our Trade, and this your majesty's Kingdom being almost exhausted of its coin: we are hindered from earning our livelihoods, and from maintaining our own manufactures; and our poor are thereby become very numerous especially the industrious Protestants, who in a Country wherein the number and power of the Papists is very formidable, ought as we humbly conceive to be encouraged. Very many Protestant families have been constrained to remove out of this kingdom as well into Scotland, as into the dominions of Foreign Princes and States.<sup>3</sup>

Besides these effects on Ireland, more especially on the protestant interest there, the results of the statute, as was commonly argued, were doubly prejudicial to England as well. The Irish exported their wool in a raw or half-manufactured state to France, while the workmen who could no longer earn a living in Ireland found their way to foreign countries, where they started industries which became more formidable rivals to the English manufacturer than the Irish would have been likely to prove. The single competitor was ousted from the field; but in so doing we called into being new rivals in the neighbourhood of our best markets.

<sup>1</sup> *Commons Journals*, xii. 439.

<sup>2</sup> *Irish Commons Journals*, 8 Jan. 1692.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 20 Oct. 1708.

## IV.

It seems at first sight that, while the policy pursued in regard to frieze requires no defence, that pursued in regard to drapery admits of none. But, at least, we may try to understand it. The whole question was a purely political one, and not a mere affair of economics at all. On the one side were those who thought it was desirable to foster the protestant interest in Ireland. The drapery was a protestant trade for the most part, and if it had been regulated by the Dublin corporation would soon have been as protestant as the most fervid Orangeman could wish. But after full consideration, parliament refused to foster the protestant interest in Ireland at the expense of the mother country. The development of this industry in Dublin would be prejudicial to Devonshire; therefore they were prepared to step in to prevent the mother country from being undersold.

If the official records are to be trusted, they did not desire to put the protestant interest in Ireland to any positive disadvantage in regard to the woollen manufacture, but only to remove their exceptional advantages. And they were prepared to foster this interest by other means. The French Huguenots might plant the linen trade there, and render it more flourishing. If foreign protestants could be attracted, it would be a gain to Ireland, which did no damage to the mother country, and therefore they were ready to foster this trade in every way.<sup>1</sup> They thus hoped to direct the energies of the protestant interest towards an industry which might prove profitable, while the established trades of England would not suffer.

According to free trade principles it would, of course, have been desirable that Ireland should have the benefit of her special advantage for the woollen industry, and that this branch of manufacture should migrate to the region where it could be most cheaply carried on; but there were many reasons why the legislators of the seventeenth century could not look at the matter from this point of view. For one thing there were financial considerations which weighed with them. In the year 1698, in the throes of a great European struggle, it was not possible to let any source of revenue fail, and anything that threatened the receipts from the customs was much to be deprecated. The subsidies from the woollen trade were one of the most important supplies, and while the country was already embarrassed, parliament could not but look with apprehension at the

<sup>1</sup> The English act which prohibited the export of Irish wool to the Continent gave the fines—after the reward to informers was paid—for the further encouragement of the linen manufacture in Ireland; and the Irish parliament, which levied additional duties on drapery, debated at great length the means for stimulating that trade.

possible results if the actual decline of the Devonshire trade extended to other parts of the country as well. Ireland with all her boasted sacrifices of blood and treasure had never been able to give substantial aid to maintain the power of the realm in Europe and America, and it was not clear that the new industry in Ireland would yield as much available revenue for some time at least as the Devonshire manufacture had hitherto done.

There was also a political reason which could not but weigh strongly with them—not a jealousy of the protestant interest in Ireland, but a jealousy of the power of the crown. Ireland was an independent kingdom, and the English house of commons had no direct control over its affairs; and there was a constant dread lest the power which the king acquired in Ireland should be used without the concurrence of the English parliament,<sup>1</sup> or even against English liberties. Twice within the century attempts had been made to develop the resources of Ireland, by Strafford, and under the second Charles and second James. On both occasions the result had been that the king had found himself in possession of power that seemed to menace his English subjects. Nor was King William's parliament inclined to trust him with the possession of any power that had been misused in the preceding reigns. They could not approve of transplanting an industry from Devonshire to Dublin, since that involved transferring a branch of revenue from under their own control, and giving greater independence to the crown.

The jealousy, then, such as it was, was political rather than commercial; this comes out clearly in the wording of the petitions, they appealed to parliament to interfere for the sake of the safety of the government. And the decision of the house of lords, after weighing all the evidence on the subject, is couched in far stronger language than that used by the men whose pecuniary interest was directly affected by the Dublin trade. It is in the lords address<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *An Answer &c.* pp. 8, 21.

<sup>2</sup> *Lords Journals* xvi. 9 June 1698. 'We the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament assembled do humbly represent unto your Majesty that the growing Manufacture of Cloth in Ireland both by the Cheapness of all sorts of Necessaries for Life and Goodness of Materials for making of all Manner of Cloth, doth invite your Subjects of England, with their Families and Servants to leave their Habitations to settle there, to the Increase of the Woollen Manufacture in Ireland, which makes your loyal subjects in this Kingdom very apprehensive that the further Growth of it may greatly prejudice the said Manufacture here, by which the Trade of this Nation and the value of Lands will very much decrease, and the Numbers of your people be much lessened here; Wherefore we do most humbly beseech Your most Sacred Majesty, that Your Majesty would be pleased in the most public and effectual Way that may be, to declare to all your Subjects of Ireland, that the Growth and Increase of the Woollen Manufacture there hath long, and will ever be looked upon with great Jealousy by all your Subjects of this Kingdom, and if not timely remedied, may occasion very strict laws totally to prohibit and suppress the same; and on the other hand if they turn their Industry and Skill to the settling and Improving of the Linen Manufacture &c. &c.'

that we find language which threatens the entire suppression of the Irish industry—a measure for which the petitioners never asked, and which the commissioners for trade thought was not under contemplation at all. The petitioners asked for countervailing duties; the lords seemed to think that these might do for the present, but that more complete repression might be ultimately required. As events proved, the so-called countervailing duties, in connexion with the further restrictions on trade which were passed in the following year, served to repress the Irish drapery manufacture quite effectually.

When we look back from the present day we can easily see, what was pointed out by pamphleteers at the time, that this was a shortsighted policy. There were one or two voices which pleaded for the new industry as a strength, not merely to the protestant interest, but to Ireland, and indirectly to England too. They held that the development of this new industry in Dublin, and the encouragement of Englishmen and aliens to flock there, would give a great impetus to the prosperity of the sister isle, and change her into a new source of strength to the realm. If she had more plenty she could do more to support the united power of the two kingdoms. As manufacturing increased, the price of raw products would go up. The Irish peasantry would have a better market both for wool and for food stuffs; the general increase of plenty, and new intercourse between protestants and Romanists, might well be expected to give better conditions for the growth of social institutions and for steady political progress. All this was hoped for; all this, so far as we see, might have been; but these beneficial results were frustrated by the measures which checked the development of the drapery trade. Considerable as the loss might have been if the Devonshire manufacturers had been ruined, the ultimate gain from an Ireland that was in any degree prosperous and contented would have far outweighed it. The chance of securing such prosperity was sacrificed; no more English capital found its way to Dublin for the establishment of weaving. Even in the narrowest commercial sense the ultimate loss to England was very great.

All those who had attempted to make the most of Irish industries had seen that it could be done most quickly by attracting British industry and capital to settle there. King James had succeeded in planting Ulster; and though Strafford proposed to continue the scheme, he did not altogether alienate the native Irish from loyalty to the king, whose representative he was; but when a similar delicate task was attempted in the south, it was undertaken by less skilful hands. The land speculators, who held Cromwell's bonds for the territory of the conquered country, devoured widows' houses, while the English parliament made long prayers and urged them on in their ruthless task. The dispossessed landowners and miserable

wanderers were shot down like vermin by these puritan intruders; and when English industry and enterprise pushed forward with the avowed desire of clearing out the native Irish—not of aiding them to make the most of their land—an undying hatred was roused. The recovery which took place under the second Charles and the second James was checked by the horrors of the struggle for the crown; but with the reduction of Ireland a new era opened. English enterprise and industry were beginning to find their way to Ireland once more, not now to dispossess men of their hereditary lands, but to give a better market for the produce of each man's land and labour, and better opportunities of satisfying his wants. Much national benefit might have accrued even if the drapery manufacture had been developed on the restricted lines which the Dublin weavers suggested; but this great opportunity was thrown away for the sake of an immediate pecuniary gain, and because the English parliament deemed it wise to sacrifice the development of Irish resources, for fear they should unduly increase the wealth and power of the crown.

While the indirect loss to Ireland from cramping the development of her resources was inestimable, the actual and immediate loss was not very great. The new duties taxed an industry that was not yet large, though it was growing rapidly. The manufacture of frieze would still continue unaffected by the new duty, and a portion of the new energy might find its way into the linen manufacture, which was receiving constant encouragement at that time. The foreign protestants who had migrated from France on the revocation of the edict of Nantes were well able to introduce an industry in which they were already well skilled. It seemed as practicable to transplant the Cambrai linen trade as the Devonshire drapery manufacture to Ireland, and so far as we can judge from figures there is no sign of a positive decay of Irish trade, taken as a whole.<sup>1</sup> There was no session of the Irish parliament till the reign of Queen Anne; and though we hear of bitter distress in Ireland then, there were other causes besides the repression of the Dublin drapery trade which had contributed to bring it about. The English parliament had passed a resumption bill; the titles of landowners through half a dozen counties were rendered doubtful; the trustees of the forfeited estates were putting owners to enormous expense in defending their titles, and society was thoroughly unsettled. The repression of the newly developing industry was but an additional drop in the flood that was sweeping over the land; but even though the direct loss it occasioned was inconsiderable, we can see from the ultimate result that it was a political blunder of the first magnitude.

<sup>1</sup> Dobbs shows that the average yearly trade from 1710-1720 was larger than it had been in 1698. He does not give figures for the intervening years.



## V.

We are now in a position to reply to the questions with which we started. The repressive measures were not due to the jealousy of English manufacturers, but to the fears of English politicians, who dreaded the political consequences if the protestant interest in Ireland were enriched at the expense of the west country manufacturers. The drapery trade which was checked was not large, though it was growing very rapidly. The widely diffused woollen manufacture—that of frieze—was specially exempted in the repressing statutes: the only hindrances to which it was exposed were the purely commercial ones which restricted the trade of Ireland with the plantations and foreign countries; and it is quite unnecessary to enter on the discussion of this navigation policy now. The grounds, on which it can be not justified but explained, are somewhat similar to those which influenced the politicians in repressing the drapery trade.

Perhaps the most curious thing in the whole story is the strangely mistaken view of the transaction which is current to-day. It has taken its place as the typical wrong of Ireland, that her manufactures were destroyed through the jealousy of English manufacturers. But the only wrong that was felt was done to the protestant interest in Ireland; the established Irish manufacture, and the general population of the country outside Dublin and a few other towns, did not suffer a loss, though they were prevented from sharing in a new gain. Swift taught us to note this distinction with reference to the graziers. The destruction of the Irish cattle trade had been the preservation of the Irish peasantry, and the burden of this new restriction fell also on the protestant interest, and not on the native Irish at all.

The first English writer who dealt with this subject at considerable length was John Smith, the careful author of the 'Memoirs of Wool,' in which are preserved many extracts from contemporary pamphlets bearing on the subject. The precise point of view from which he made his criticisms is not very clear; but one cannot be far wrong in saying that he would have made little objection to statutes which provided for the simultaneous development of the English and Irish industries. He comments severely on the ill effects of the attempts to repress the trade, and ascribes it to a 'monopolish imagination,' not 'founded in the truth;'<sup>1</sup> but he does not notice that the results he deplores were due to miscalculation rather than to deliberate intention. The countervailing duties actually imposed were doubtless absurdly heavy; but the effects of

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Wool*, ii. 29.



the measures were not contemplated by parliament in 1698. They proposed to handicap Ireland, so that the manufactures in both countries might be worked on equal terms, and it may be doubted if Smith would have regarded such a measure as unfair or unwise, since it would not have played into the hands of foreigners, or given such an incentive to the running of wool to France.<sup>1</sup>

A more serious element of misunderstanding may be traced to the influence of Adam Smith. In the fourth book of the 'Wealth of Nations,' while criticising the commercial system, he is too much inclined to ignore the fact that the regulations he condemns were political and not merely economic in character. He writes as if the manufacturers were successful in constantly inducing the weak and wicked British parliament to subordinate the public weal to the gain of their own class. It is not too much to say, however, that in economic legislation parliament steadily kept in view the public weal as they understood it, and that gains to one class of dealers and losses to another were only incidents which accrued in the effort to pursue the good of the nation as a whole.<sup>2</sup> But the unfortunate example which was set in that telling criticism has been too commonly followed, and it has become as common as it is easy to ascribe all such measures to the class selfishness of manufacturers, and thus to save ourselves the troublesome inquiry into the real political motives which weighed with statesmen.

It was under the influence of Adam Smith that Hely Hutchinson wrote on the 'Commercial Restraints of Ireland,' a book which has formed all subsequent opinion on the subject. The woollen manufacture was a subject on which he was well qualified to write, for he received the comfortable salary of aulnager: the duties of this post did not interfere with his enjoying the emoluments of a majority in the army, and he finally bartered it for the more lucrative position of provost of Trinity College, Dublin, which not only gave a comfortable residence with 2,000*l.* a year, but parliamentary influence which was most remunerative to a 'ready-money voter.' This successful place-hunter was glad to pose as a patriot and expound the wrongs of Ireland, and his work is well worth perusal. But it has served to lead public opinion still further astray, since he neglected to draw sufficient attention to the distinction between the manufacture of frieze and of drapery, the different positions which they held in Ireland, and the different treatment which they received from the legislature.

It has been the object of the present paper to bring into greater clearness the important distinctions which have been, for one reason

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Wool*, ii. 238.

<sup>2</sup> For fuller statements on this point, see my 'A. Smith u. die Mercantilisten' in the *Tübingen Z. f. d. g. Staatswissenschaft*, Jan. 1884, or *Politics and Economics*, §§ 19, 21.

or another, neglected or ignored in previous discussions of the subject. It is so necessary that we should, if possible, learn to detect the real causes of Irish poverty, that an erroneous estimate of the influence these measures exercised is doubly to be deprecated, if we cease to examine into other contributing causes, or rest satisfied with insufficient remedies. When we realise fully the nature of the Irish manufactures of frieze and drapery, and the conditions under which the drapery trade was repressed, we may see that there was little if any positive injury done to the native Irish, though a hindrance was imposed on their subsequent progress. When we follow out the real grounds for the introduction and enforcement of the repressive measures, we find that they were not dictated by the jealousy felt by English manufacturers of a possible competitor, but that this course of policy, mischievous though it proved, was deliberately undertaken from actual experience of real evils, and out of a shortsighted but public-spirited regard for the political interests of the realm as a whole.

Since the preceding article was in type, I have had an opportunity of seeing the interesting letters which have been brought to light by Mr. Oscar Browning, and which are printed on p. 309 below. Adam Smith's letter gives a fresh illustration of the mode of treating such questions which has been already criticised. Though the correspondence hardly touches directly on the repression of the drapery manufacture, it seems to indicate the general line of policy which was habitually pursued. In this respect Dundas's letter is the more instructive of the two: it is clear that in his view the underlying political jealousy was the ground for the favour shown to English manufacturers, and he argues that a political union, or joint political action, would remove the excuses for showing special favour to Englishmen. A union, or, if this cannot be accomplished, such a management of the Irish parliament that the two legislatures may work together, is, to his mind, the necessary condition for attempting to develop the resources of Ireland as an integral part of the empire. To this Adam Smith assents in general terms, though, as in his other writings, the important political condition is doubtfully implied rather than explicitly stated. He urges that 'under proper management' the developed opulence of Ireland might add so much to the resources of Great Britain as to make up for a temporary loss in particular English and Scottish towns.

Had Dundas and Adam Smith been fully acquainted with the facts as to the rapid migration of the drapery trade from Devonshire to Dublin, it is obvious that they could not have expressed themselves so strongly as they did on the impossibility of Ireland com-

peting effectively with England. So far as the west of England drapery trade was concerned, much less than a century would apparently have served to transplant the skill and stock of Englishmen to Irish towns.

It is also instructive to notice that Dundas, with all his desire for the development of Irish resources, did not propose to allow Ireland to undersell England in foreign markets; he would have had the 'wise statesman' impose countervailing duties to prevent the Irish from profiting unduly by cheapness of labour and freedom from taxes. Adam Smith does not dissent from this view, though he proposes the imposition of similar, not of countervailing, duties on exports to the plantations. But Dundas is advocating the maxim on which the statesmen of 1698 endeavoured to act, though they were so fatally mistaken in the calculations which guided them in applying it. Dundas did not hold what modern politicians would assume—that Ireland should be left free to develop her own resources in her own way, even though she thereby injured the staple manufactures of Great Britain. His principles differed very little from those of the legislators who imposed such fatal burdens on the manufacture of drapery in Ireland. Despite the terms in which he expresses his agreement with Dundas, Adam Smith's precise view seems to be doubtful. Here and elsewhere he lays so little stress on questions of national policy, that the language he uses bears a close resemblance to the cosmopolitan doctrine that the greatest possible development of each country will, in spite of some possible and temporary loss, confer an undoubted benefit upon every other part of the globe.

W. CUNNINGHAM.