

THE ECONOMIC OPPRESSION OF IRELAND.

By Arthur Griffith.

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The history of Irish trade, commerce and industry has yet to be written. Ancient Ireland traded extensively with the Roman Empire, Gaul, Spain and Greece. In the Middle Ages Ireland carried on extensive commerce with France, Flanders, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Germany, and independent Scotland, Wales and England. The Guild merchants of the great Continental trade centres mostly included Irishmen—Bordeaux, Rouen, Bruges, and other cities contain memorials of the Irish merchants. A Flemish sixteenth-century writer records that in his time the Irish merchants held two fairs yearly in Bruges, where they sold friezes, serges, furs, skins, etc. An Italian poet of the Middle Ages sings the praise of Ireland for the ‘noble woollen stuffs’ she sent to Italy, and Irish robes were used by the Queen of Hungary. The mercantile marine of Ireland was numerous and powerful. After the definitive establishment of English power in Ireland by Queen Elizabeth it was decried treason to export Irish goods in Irish vessels; Irish shipping was destroyed or seized by England, and it was forbidden to an Irishman to own a ship. Subsequently Ireland was forbidden to export to America aught except victuals, horses, salt, and people. She was forbidden to export cattle, etc., to England. Ireland thereupon turned her attention to a Continental trade, and succeeded in wresting much of the market from England. Alarmed by this, England removed most of her embargoes; but after the Williamite Wars, Ireland being down, a Penal Code against Irish industry and commerce unparalleled in commercial history was enacted. Irish direct trade with the world was interdicted. The great Irish woollen trade was deliberately suppressed. The Irish cotton manufactures were made subject to a duty of 25 per cent in England, and it was decreed a punishable offence to wear Irish cotton

in England or Scotland. The Irish linen manufacturer was practically excluded from England by an import duty of 30 per cent, and, while bounties were paid to English manufacturers for the export of linen, Ireland was forbidden to participate in such bounties. The Irish fisheries were deliberately impoverished, and a score of minor Irish industries, such as glassmaking, were legislated out of existence. In Ireland itself the farmers were forbidden to grow corn lest they might undersell the English farmer. In 1716 the unemancipated Irish Parliament sought to pass an Act entitling the farmer to cultivate five acres in every hundred, but the British Government vetoed the Act. Simultaneously civil rights, religious liberty, free tenures, and the right of education were interdicted to four-fifths of the Irish people.

The menace of the arms of the Irish Volunteers gained for Ireland restoration of the right to trade freely with the world, and power to protect and encourage Irish industry. In the twenty years 1780-1800 Ireland, on the admission of Lord Clare, Pitt's Chancellor, had advanced in cultivation, commerce and manufacture with more rapidity than any other European nation. The Irish woollen, cotton, linen and other trades had been restored or raised to a pitch of production and prosperity never equalled. Ireland had become a corn-exporting instead of a corn-importing country; the glass, metal and other manufactures were restored, and the Irish fisheries had become one of the first in Europe. In 1800 England forced the Union upon a flourishing Ireland through, as Lord Chief Justice Bushe said, a jealous intolerance of her prosperity.

Under the operation of that infamous Act, Ireland was once more turned back from tillage to grazing land, and one by one all her great industries, except linen, were again destroyed or reduced to skeletons of their former greatness. The Irish Exchequer and the Irish Custom House were suppressed by England. Some industries, such as the tobacco culture, were expressly forbidden by legislation. Others were ruined by less open methods. Thus the Irish Government before the Union had paid bounties of a few hundred pounds yearly to encourage the exportation of Irish fish. England after the Union paid bounties of £2,000 a year for many years to encourage the importation of British fish into Ireland. In the fifteen years 1829-1844 grants of £200,000

were paid to Scotland for the development of her fisheries. In the same period the amount granted to Ireland was £13,000. The Scots fishermen were allowed a Government brand, but the English Parliament, by an overwhelming majority, refused the same right to the Irish fishermen. A great Irish industry was ruined, and to-day the annual value of the Irish fisheries is but one-tenth the value of the Scots fisheries.

Thus were treated through the nineteenth century Irish industry and commerce until Ireland once more, as in the seventeenth, was confined to the English market and made subject to England's economic absolutism. Having thrice within three hundred years destroyed Irish commercial and industrial prosperity by force and fraud—having, in defiance of engagements, made Ireland jointly responsible for *England's* National Debt—having made, in the words of Nassau Senior, Ireland the most heavily taxed and England the most lightly taxed country in Europe—England has represented Ireland to the world as a naturally poor and incapable country, kept from want by English benevolence. Ireland is not the only country whose commerce and industries were forcibly repressed by a jealous rival; nor is she the only country whose soil was confiscated to foreign adventurers; possibly she may not be the only country where a price was placed by its foreign rulers on the schoolmaster's head; but the Irish people are the one people on the earth to-day whose education, commerce and industry having been repressed, are held up by the repressors to the scorn of the world as a lazy, idle, poverty-stricken and illiterate people.

POPULATION—PERSONS PER SQUARE MILE.

	1801	1911
Ireland	166	135
England	152	618

Prior to the 'Union' Ireland was, it will be seen, more densely populated than England. England is now over 4 ½ times more densely populated than Ireland.

TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONS.

	1801	1911
Ireland	5,395,456	4,390,219
England	8,892,536	36,070,492

The estimated population of Hungary was in 1801 7,750,000, as compared with Ireland's 5,400,000. The present population of Hungary is 21,000,000. Had Ireland progressed equally Ireland's present population would be 15,000,000.

NATIONAL DEBTS.—(FROM THE BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY PAPER 35 OF 1819.)

	Debt	Per Head of Population.
Ireland	£28,545,134	£5 6s. 0d.
Great Britain	£450,504,984	£42 18s. 0d.

On the basis of revenue, taxation per head in England in the financial year ending 31st March, 1917, was more than *four* times greater than the taxation per head in England in the year of the Union. On the same basis the taxation per head in Ireland in the financial year ending 31st March, 1917, was almost *eleven* times greater than in the year of the Union. The placing of a three-fold burden on the Irishman had its origin in the suppression of the Irish exchequer in 1816.

THE SMALL NATIONS.

	Area (sq. miles.)	Population.	Revenue (£).
Ireland	32,600	4,337,000	24,000,000
Holland	12,600	6,500,000	18,750,000
Belgium	11,600	7,500,000	32,000,000
Denmark	15,600	2,800,000	7,500,000
Switzerland	16,000	3,900,000	3,100,000
Norway	125,000	2,400,000	10,000,000
Greece	42,000	4,900,000	9,250,000
Bulgaria	43,500	4,750,000	10,300,000
Roumania	53,500	7,500,000	24,000,000
Sweden	173,000	5,700,000	22,000,000
Serbia	34,000	4,550,000	8,600,000
Montenegro	5,000	520,000	400,000

The figures are those for 1917 or the latest available.