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ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

ON THE SUBJECT

OF THE

RIVER SHANNON

TO THE

REPORTS PUBLISHED IN 1831.

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1834.

A LETTER, &c.

*To the Hon. Members of the United Parliament,
on the subject of the River Shannon.*

IN 1831, when Parliament was engaged, exclusively, with the Reform Bill, I got some of the principal landed proprietors to meet at the Thatched House Tavern to consider the state of this River, and the means of improving the Navigation, and the taking of the waters off the adjoining lands: after repeated meetings (having obtained the best opinions within reach at the time,) the Marquis of Downshire in the chair, we determined to wait on Mr. Stanley, the then Secretary for Ireland, with our Report.

This Report, and documents on which it was founded, were published at my expense, by S. W. Fores, 41, Piccadilly; many Members of the House were supplied by me with copies. Mr. Stanley admitted the value of the suggestions in this Report, and allowed the Chairman of the Board of Works, Colonel Burgoyne, who was about to be appointed

to that situation, to accompany me along the line of the Shannon. We did so in the autumn of that year, and the consequence has been, that Mr. Rhodes, an Engineer of high eminence, has made a survey of the line from Limerick to Lough Allan, whilst Captain Mudge, R. N. was employed to survey from the mouth of the river to Limerick.

The able survey of Mr. Rhodes is accompanied with an estimate for executing the proposed improvements, amounting to £153,000. The survey made by Captain Mudge is, unfortunately, not accompanied by any estimate. It is most desirable that the estimated cost should be ascertained without delay of this essential part of the navigation.

So far back as 1794, there appears on the face of an old map, now in my possession, made by John Cowan, these memorandums :—

“ At the summer assizes, 1794, the High Sheriff's and Grand Juries of the counties of Roscommon, Mayo, Galway, Clare, Limerick, Kings, and Tipperary, resolved, that the completing of the navigation of the River Shannon, and the great rivers adjoining thereto, from Lough Allan to Limerick, would tend effectually to improve and open the home and foreign markets to the produce of more than two millions of acres of land in the heart of the kingdom; and that the execution of this great navigation will effectually advance the commerce, manufacture, agriculture, and population of this kingdom.”

SLIEVE NEREN MOUNTAIN.

“This mountain is situated on the east side of Lough Allan, nearly opposite Munterkenny Colliery, and is also pregnant with a very good kind of coal, similar to the above, which, by sinking, may be procured on as easy terms as those on the west side of the said Lough. Here are likewise iron ore in abundance, and several slate quarries.”

MUNTERKENNY COLLIERY.

“July 2, 1792—Two pits open; the one eight, the other fifteen yards deep—the vein of coal about two feet thick, the upper part of which being large, round coal, beds upon a small dusty kind—the former sold at the pit’s mouth at 8*s.* 8*d.* a ton, and the latter at 5*s.*”

“N. B.—These coals being very pleasant, are extremely good for families and smiths. Were the navigation complete to Lough Allan, the whole country down to Limerick may be supplied on easier terms than we purchase from English vessels.” Surely this statement should be sufficient, and that no more delay should be allowed to take place in the completing of so desirable a work. But further evidence has been obtained; Mr. Grantham has reported on the benefit of letting off the superfluous waters.

All the bog Reports are filled with statements as to the amount of bog and waste lands kept, from

various causes, unimproved, but principally by the action of the water of the River Shannon and its tributary streams. Mr. Rhodes' survey, however, is the best and most able that I have seen; and I have consulted professional men, who all approve of his plan of *weirs* at the Falls, to keep the water all through at a more even level, and preventing the washing away (at these Falls) of the bottom of the river, which extraordinary floods are constantly doing; but when stone weirs are once established, the water can have no effect in wearing away their surface—the effect of these weirs being the keeping the water in summer up to some defined height, and thereby preserving this valuable line of navigation. It is a great mistake to suppose lands very much benefited by water remaining fully six months on them; they would be much more benefited by irrigation for a short period of time, which would be the effect of Mr. Rhodes' recommended improvement.

To the labouring classes in England who (whether right or wrong, I will not now stop to enquire,) conceive that my countrymen, coming as they do (principally from the counties bordering on this river) to labour here, do them an injury by increasing the number of labourers in this market, here is an opportunity afforded of at once employing them at home, and permanently too, as the six millions seven hundred thousand acres, which the ten counties bordering on this river contain, will be more capable of culti-

vation, after the improvements are effected on this river, and consequently and naturally will absorb in those improvements and cultivation many labourers who now, having no employment in the dead season of the year at home, come over to a better market, which this country affords. But let us attend to the circumstances of this river.

Part of it was in the hands of the Limerick navigation, but now I find that portion is transferred to the Dublin and Liverpool Steam Company; part in the hands of the Grand Canal Company; and part in the hands of Government. There are two canals from the metropolis to this river; one, I believe the Royal, is fallen into the hands of Government—and one in the hands of the Grand Canal Company. There is but one canal uniting with this river on the western side, a distance of about ten or twelve miles, to Ballinasloe. This fact alone is a convincing proof that the present state of the river offers no advantages for communicating with it.

Nor can this be any matter of surprise, when the circumstances of the river, in its present neglected state, is considered. Hear what Lieut. John Tully states in his Report in the printed document before-mentioned:—

“He started with three boats from Killaloe, in June 1821, with about thirty tons each of wheat—*about two-thirds what they could have taken provided there was no want of water, or the navigation had*

been in good order—encountered some difficulties between Shannon Harbour and Athlone, such as *bad fords*, innumerable detached rocks lying in the very centre of the cut;—he got to Athlone, however, *after a long passage from the state of the river*;—on his arrival at Athlone the three boats (though only drawing three feet six inches) stuck fast in the canal; he had to lighten them considerably to get into Lough Rea; the steamer had to lighten also: at Lanesboro' his troubles only commenced. The canal is filling up fast, the very walls on its banks falling into it. He was obliged to haul out into the lake, to tranship, with great difficulty—and after six days' hard labour he got his boats to Drumsna, where he had to hire two boats to take forty tons out of the boat which was left behind at Lanesboro'; he had to hire a store for a few days at Richmond harbour: he thinks the Government or Directors-General should be called on to pay the expenses incurred. They had a drudge-boat at work last January, when the water was high, now they have none when the water is low, and it might be useful."

Mr. Rhodes details the difficulties his boat met with, with all the advantages of her being well manned: in page 31, in his second Report, printed by order of the House, 10th June, 1833, he says he met a vessel stuck in the canal, belonging to Mr. Farrell, of Cloondrah, bound to Killalloe. Here follows some account of the difficulties this vessel encountered,

which is more fully detailed in said Report; left Lough Allan the 29th July. The first place they were stopt at was Battle Bridge—*second time at Carrick, and obliged to unload some*; next stop at Curnacurea; stopt and had to unload at James Town. *She rubbed*, and was delayed by discharges at Rusky Bridge; between Rusky and Clondra obliged to unload, and employ a lighter at Cloneen; *could scarcely get through Clondra canal*; delayed at different places between Clondra and Lanesboro'; were three days unloading and loading at Lanesboro', and had to employ a boat to lighten; stopt at Lanesboro' twelve days with contrary winds; eight days at St. John's Castle, Lough Rea; thirteen days at Bannagher, waiting for the clerk of the quarry; eleven days, with contrary winds, at Lough Derg; they have just returned, 1st October, and had only 18s. per ton. The tonnage they had in was 26—and the crew, three men."

Colonel Burgoyne and myself can vouch to the accuracy of those statements from our own observation, and the difficulties we experienced on the voyage we took as before mentioned, with a view of seeing the exact state of the navigation.

Much of the difficulty those vessels experienced will be overcome by Mr. Rhodes' plan of steam-vessels; and although I will never consent to place the whole of the trade of this great river in the hands of any individual, or even in that of any company, I freely

admit, that the country is deeply indebted to the late Mr. Grantham, who introduced the first steam-boat on the Shannon; and to Mr. Williams, who has so spiritedly worked out a trade under such discouraging circumstances, and has so clearly and so forcibly brought forward the advantages to be derived from the navigation of this river by *steam-boats*.

Supposing, then, this river were put by Government in the state in which Mr. Rhodes recommends; also, to be made now a king's river, open to every trader, whether to Sligo, Galway, Limerick, or Dublin. A toll, as at present, of only 1s. per ton for a vessel traversing the whole length, would produce a considerable revenue, as goods and passengers could easily navigate the entire Shannon in a day and a half, instead of in about three weeks, the time it takes at present. I feel justified in stating, that the produce on the northern and western side of the river (supposing good roads made to good piers on the river) would come twenty miles, and the eastern and southern side a distance of fifteen to this navigation. Taking the entire length as estimated for by Mr. Rhodes,—one hundred and fifty miles from Lough Allan to Limerick,—you have an area of above three millions of acres, the produce for exportation from which will make its way to this river; but as many of these acres are at present barren (very much owing, however, to the neglected state of the river,) making allowance for these at present

unprofitable acres, and also for the consumption at home, I may reasonably count on the produce of one million of these acres making this river the means of getting to the best markets, from which they are at present shut out. In Mr. Holmes' Report, in the pamphlet alluded to, he states his opinion, that "there are two millions of acres within ten miles of the shore of this river, which ought to produce half a ton per acre stock and crop; he says, one-fourth of this would probably go to distant markets, and be carried on an average sixty miles on the navigation." I think the produce of one million of acres, when the improvements contemplated are executed, would go fifty miles on the river; assume half a ton the produce of the acre, we have the enormous quantity of five hundred thousand tons carried to the best markets,—and suppose a toll of one-third the present charge for traversing the whole line, or fourpence per ton, we shall have a revenue of £8,333, after this river was put in a proper state to keep up the works, and go to farther improvements on the river.

By Mr. Rhodes' plan, steam-boats could ply from Limerick to Lough Allan almost daily: this improvement, taken in conjunction with the great western railways, now just about to be commenced, will, no doubt, render Limerick an important port at which to ship Irish produce. These works, besides giving employment, tend to pacify the people; and by producing an

interchange of inhabitants, must tend to conciliate the countries more than any other measure that Government at the present moment could devise ; besides being of material advantage to both countries.

It appears that the Grand Canal Company have almost a complete monopoly of the trade of this river — they have the power of charging 1s. per ton for all vessels using that portion of the river under their control ; they remit this, I believe, altogether to the traders using their canal, but I do not know that they remit any part of the sum usually charged for carrying on this canal when they get the trader there— they admit that this Company gain SEVEN THOUSAND POUNDS a year from the Shannon trade. As, therefore, the ordinary charge for traversing the whole length of this canal is 10s. or 11s. a ton tollage, it is clear that the trade is limited to about fourteen thousand tons per annum, and they are said to have most of the trade of the Shannon ; besides, by keeping the river navigation in the dilapidated bad state of repair it is in, as will appear from Mr. Rhodes' Report and other statements, they, perhaps, have an increase of trade thereby on their canal, as the only good navigation exists there, except the Royal.

Commissioners should be appointed to watch over this line of navigation, to be chosen by the counties bordering on the river ; and in order that the navigation should never be impeded from any want of

Government funds, these counties should be empowered, and required, to make temporary advances, on certain conditions, to keep up the works.

But I am decidedly of opinion that Government should put this great line of navigation in a proper state, and then trust to a small sum as toll, which I have no doubt would be fully adequate to keep up the works and the current expenses.

It should be made imperative on the counties adjacent to the Shannon to make roads to this navigation, and perhaps to make the tributary rivers and the lakes navigable, somewhat upon the principle, I believe, of the Highland roads—half to be advanced by the Treasury, and the other half to be subscribed by individuals, and charged on the counties.

As a measure of police, this work will be worth some regiments of troops. The disturbed districts have been, in many instances, those bordering on this river and its tributaries: I instance more particularly the baronies of Longford, in Galway, and Garrycastle, in the King's County. One of the reasons urged before the Magistrates for placing the district of Longford under the coercion act lately was, that Garrycastle being already under that act, and lying on the opposite side of this river—as the bad, troublesome, characters were hunted from that side, they took refuge in the wild districts on the other; and thus it appeared the barony of Longford became infected,

and these characters found a ready asylum in this neglected district.

Let this work be undertaken by Government—let these very characters (now bad, wild, and disorderly) be set to work—the best policeman you can have will be the overseer of this work—employ these men by day, and you need not watch them at night—give them pieces of bargain-work—allow them good fair wages—discourage their drinking whiskey, encourage good beer—and take my word for it, the men of the barony of Longford, and of Garrycastle also, will want coercing as little as any other set of men in any other part of the kingdom.

In a little Tract, published by C. Richards, 100, St. Martin's Lane, Charing-cross, in 1833, as facts for the Labourers' Friend Society, being a short narrative of the home colonies of Castle Sampson and Iskerbane, established upon Lord Clonbrock's estates in the county of Roscommon, in Ireland—*by myself*.

It is therein shown how a turbulent, disorderly peasantry were converted into useful labourers, and are now becoming small and comfortable landholders, in consequence of a judicious expenditure *of time* and money, valuing both at ONE THOUSAND TWO HUNDRED AND ELEVEN POUNDS; that by this expenditure alone sixty families have been rendered *independent*—peace restored to a district that had been greatly agitated—and yet that the improvements

made with this expenditure are paying Lord Clonbrock fully six per cent. interest, on the capital thus laid out, by an increased rental, calculated on a liberal scale of lettings.

Am I not justified in my expectations, that if Government will pursue with the river Shannon the same line that Lord Clonbrock took with the estate in question, the same results will follow (his Lordship, observe, made the great leading drain through the estate); and that the consequence will be, and that very shortly, that the people of these disturbed baronies will become, like those of Castle Sampson, peaceable and industrious cultivators of land now almost useless?

The Irish have long been told that the intentions of the people of this country towards them are good—now is the time to show that they have not been deceived:—here is a practical measure coming before you, pass it, and it will be taken as an earnest of your good intentions; and Irishmen will then give credit to what has so often been told them by the friends to the connexion with this great empire—that it is the determination of England, as it is her interest, to assist in the improvements of Ireland.

THOMAS BERMINGHAM.

*23, Dover-street, Piccadilly,
25th July, 1834.*







