

Agricultural Statistics of Ireland. By G. R. PORTER.

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A VOLUME of considerable interest and importance, entitled "Returns of Agricultural Produce in Ireland in the year 1848," has recently been distributed to the members of the two Houses of Parliament, and it is thought that a short abstract of its contents may prove interesting to the Section. This volume more than fulfils the promise set forth on its title-page, since it comprises also the returns of agricultural stock and produce in the preceding year—1847—and thus enables us to draw a comparison between the two years as regards this most important branch of the national industry, under circumstances which give to such a comparison an interest far greater than it would have possessed at almost any other period. The returns have been obtained, at the desire of Lord Clarendon, under the direction of that most intelligent and energetic public officer, Captain Larcom, of the Royal Engineers, who, it will be remembered, read before this section, at the meeting of the Association held at Cork, in 1843, a valuable and elaborate paper on the "Census of the Population of Ireland in 1841," in which paper a considerable amount of information was given that will admit of the comparison, as respects some matters connected with agriculture, being carried back to the year 1841.

The returns embraced, at both periods, the number of farms or holdings, distinguished in different classes, according to their acreage contents, information of deep importance, considering the faulty—it might rather be said, the fatal subdivision of the soil in that island; and it must be gratifying to learn, that a change in this respect is going forward, if not so rapidly as could be wished, yet more rapidly than could have been expected, from the known tenacity wherewith the Irish cottier had previously adhered to his patch of ground. The condition of the country in this respect, in each of the three years above mentioned, was :

	1841.	1847.	1848.
Farms from 1 to 5 Acres	306,915	125,926	101,779
" 5 15 " 	251,128	253,630	225,251
" 15 30 " 	78,954	150,999	146,725
Above 30 Acres	48,312	137,147	140,817
Total number.....	685,309	667,702	614,572

The number of holdings not exceeding an acre, were, in 1847, 62,447; in 1848, 44,262.

The paper read by Captain Larcom, on the Census Returns, did not give the number of these small holdings in 1841; but we may fairly presume that it must have been greatly beyond the number ascertained in 1847, seeing that the next smallest description of farms, those of 1 to 5 acres, had then decreased in the proportion of three-fifths, while those above 30 acres have increased in a three-fold proportion.

The next census returns, which will most probably be made under the direction of Captain Larcom, who so ably conducted the census of

1841, will doubtless be made to exhibit the effect which this change produces upon the course of employment. The fact has on previous occasions been noticed, that while, in England and Scotland, the proportionate number of the population employed in raising food has been decreasing in a very remarkable manner, the contrary result has been experienced in Ireland. It was ascertained, at the census of 1841, that, in Great Britain, 1000 persons engaged, as occupiers and labourers, in raising food, provided for the wants in that respect, of themselves and of 2,984 other persons, while, in Ireland, the like number of persons, viz., 1,000, so engaged, provided food for no more than 511 persons beyond themselves. In 1831, the number of occupiers not employing labourers—the lowest description of farmers—in England was 94,883, out of a population of 13 millions, whereas, in Ireland, a population of 7,700,000 furnished 564,274 of such small farmers. A great part of these have changed, or, it is to be hoped, will change their condition by becoming hired labourers for others, and as their employers will necessarily be in the possession of some capital, the labour employed by them will be rendered more effective than it could be under the old order of things, when the farmer of a mere patch of ground had usually little or nothing more than his bodily exertions to assist in developing the resources of the soil.

The amount of land under cultivation applied to the production of different kinds of food, and the actual produce, in each of the years 1847 and 1848, are given in the returns, as follows:—

	1847.		1848.	
	Acres.	Produce.	Acres.	Produce.
Wheat	743,871	Qrs. 2,926,733	565,746	Qrs. 1,555,500
Oats	2,200,870	„ 11,521,606	1,922,406	„ 9,050,490
Barley	283,587	„ 1,379,029	243,235	„ 1,135,120
Bere	49,068	„ 274,016	53,058	„ 263,415
Rye	12,415	„ 63,094	21,502	„ 105,375
Beans and Pease	23,768	„ 84,456	50,749	„ 172,508
Total Grain } and Pulse }	3,313,579	„ 16,248,934	2,856,696	„ 12,282,408
Potatoes	284,116	Barrels } 16,385,562	742,899	Barrels } 23,046,512
Turnips	370,344	Tons 5,760,616	255,058	Tons 3,643,074
Mangold Wurzel....	13,766	„ 247,269	12,588	„ 220,875
Carrots	5,994	„ 75,528
Parsnips.....	59,512	„ 729,064	2,548	„ 23,091
Cabbage.....			24,114	„ 325,763
Flax	58,312	Cwts. 349,872	53,863	Cwts. 258,608
Meadow and Clover	1,138,946	Tons 2,190,317	1,154,302	Tons 2,287,133
	5,238,575		5,108,062	

It is necessary to explain, that owing to the unsettled state of the country, it was found impossible to collect returns in the counties of Waterford and Tipperary, so that in drawing a comparison between the result of that year and of 1847, we must deduct the returns for these two counties. The total number of acres under cultivation, in 1847, was found to be 5,238,575. If we deduct therefrom the area

cultivated in Waterford and Tipperary, 432,977, the remainder will show the extent which is fairly to be brought into the comparison, viz., 4,805,598. The average under cultivation, in 1848, was 5,108,062, showing the gratifying fact, that an increase has been made in one year of 302,464 acres, exclusive of the two counties here mentioned. If the increase in those counties has kept pace with that of the remainder of Ireland, the increased breadth of land brought under cultivation in one year has amounted to 329,715 acres, or more than 6 per cent.

The produce, in 1847, if we deduct that of Waterford and Tipperary, was—

Wheat	2,389,815	Quarters.
Oats	10,950,414	„
Barley	1,251,432	„
Bere	230,144	„
Rye	58,632	„
Beans	82,402	„
	14,962,839	Quarters.

Potatoes	15,102,828	Barrels of 20 stone.
Turnips	5,146,490	Tons.
Green Crops.....	913,439	„
Flax	347,856	Cwt.
Hay	2,001,673	Tons.

The proportions in which the land was employed for different purposes, in 1848, in farms of different extent, are given as follows :—

	Under 1 Acre.	1 to 5 Acres.	5 to 15 Acres.	15 to 30 Acres.	Above 30 Acres.
Wheat	6·98	9·90	9·26	10·10	12·29
Oats.....	26·54	41·07	45·46	42·71	32·34
Barley, Bere, and Rye	13·46	9·27	7·18	6·35	5·55
Beans and Peas	0·94	1·01	0·98	1·04	0·97
Potatoes	37·60	23·24	17·95	15·84	11·95
Turnips	4·44	4·10	4·20	4·49	5·57
Other Green Crops....	5·71	0·98	0·81	0·78	0·93
Flax	0·25	0·60	1·18	1·39	0·89
Meadow and Clover....	4·08	9·83	12·98	17·30	29·51
	100·	100·	100·	100·	100·

The stock of various kinds that existed at the time of the last census (1841), and in 1847 and 1848, were as follow :—

	1841.	1847.	1848.
Horses and Mules.....	552,569	498,221	499,343
Asses	90,315	112,029	105,017
Horned Cattle	1,840,025	2,367,139	2,481,501
Sheep.....	2,091,199	1,981,635	1,809,107
Figs	1,353,101	517,476	549,583
Poultry	8,334,427	4,956,148	5,889,412

These figures afford a strong commentary upon the distress occasioned by the failure of the potato harvest. It appears that, comparing 1847 with 1841, the number of horses was lessened by 54,348,

but the deficiency in farms not exceeding 15 acres, amounted to 163,692, while there was actually an increase on farms above that area of 109,344. Of asses, there was an increase of 21,714; but on the small farms there was a falling off in the number of these animals, amounting to 32,955, while there was an increase on the larger holdings of 54,669. With respect to horned cattle, there was an increase of 527,114; but this was wholly experienced on the larger farms, there having been on those not exceeding 15 acres fewer in 1847 than in 1841 by 336,471, and consequently more on the larger holdings by 863,585. The number of sheep was less on the whole, in 1847, than in 1841, by 109,565; but the deficiency on the small farms was 529,226, while there was an increase on the larger. The greatest deficiency has been experienced in regard to pigs and poultry, which in Ireland are especially domestic animals, and, as might be expected, the falling off is found chiefly among the cottier class. In the larger farms,—those above 30 acres in extent,—there were 42,643 more pigs in 1847 than in 1841; whereas in all the smaller holdings the difference was very greatly in the other direction. On farms not exceeding one acre, the numbers were 295,048 in 1841, and only 19,108 in 1847. On farms from 1 to 5 acres, there were 251,587 in 1841, and only 21,422 in 1847. In the next division, between 5 and 15 acres, the numbers were 350,825 in 1841, and no more than 80,098 in 1847. Persons holding from 15 to 30 acres, kept in 1841 215,340, and only 113,864 in 1847, while on farms above that size, the numbers which were 240,301 in 1841 had advanced to 282,984 in 1847. The entire deficiency of this description of stock between the two periods was 835,625, or more than 60 per cent. The diminished number of poultry was 3,378,279 upon 8,334,427, or 40 per cent., which, as in the case of the pigs, applied entirely to the smaller farms. On those above 15 acres there was an increased number, amounting to 1,048,974, showing that the lessened number on the smaller farms was 4,427,253. The lessened number of pigs is clearly referable to the failure of the food upon which those animals are usually kept in the cabins of the peasantry; and as regards poultry, it could hardly be expected that a starving people should continue to rear things so easily convertible into food, or into that which would procure food for the owners. These facts, which are proved beyond controversy by the inquiries of the Irish government, place in a very conspicuous light the disadvantage of peasant holdings, as compared with farms which, from their extent, require to be cultivated by persons who, possessing some capital, are not driven, on the occurrence of the first calamitous season, to measures destructive of their own future prosperity, and injurious to the public at large. The question of the advantage, or otherwise, of maintaining a class of peasant proprietors, is one upon which it would not be advisable to dilate on this occasion; but the figures brought forward in the returns under examination appear to be so important, as exhibiting the consequences of farming without the needful appliances, that it was impossible to pass them by, without this one word of comment.

The table exhibiting the number of acres devoted in 1847 and 1848 respectively to the production of the different cereal grains, shows a result for which we could hardly have been prepared. There was a

falling off in the breadth of wheat, sown, of 178,125 acres, or 24 per cent. upon the quantity in 1847. Of oats there was a lessened sowing of 278,464 acres, or $12\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. Of barley, the cultivation was lessened by 40,352 acres, or nearly 14 per cent. On the other hand, the tendency to continue dependent for a great part of their daily food upon potatoes has been shown by the Irish peasantry in the marked increase of the land devoted to their growth, which amounted to 458,783 acres, or 160 per cent. upon the number of acres so employed in 1847! We hear but of little injury sustained by this root at present, and may expect that the misery through which that peasantry had to pass, consequent upon the destruction of their staple produce, will be forgotten, and that they may be willing to remain in dependence upon the success of this lowest description of food, and thus be liable at any time to a recurrence of the horrors of famine.

We are now for the first time in the history of this country enabled to record, with anything approaching to accuracy, the actual and comparative result of two consecutive harvests. The result is such as to prove—if indeed any proof to that effect could be required—of how much, and of how vital importance it is to know the truth upon this most momentous subject. We have seen that the breadth of land devoted, in 1848, to the cultivation of the cereal grains was much less than in the previous year, and the figures which record the result of that cultivation serve to show that the actual produce of the land, in all its most important objects, was such as greatly to aggravate the evil thence to be expected. It appears, upon calculation, that the produce of the cereal grains in bushels, and of potatoes in tons, in each of the two years, was as follows:

	1847.	1848.
Wheat..... Bushels	31·4	22·
Barley..... "	39·	37·3
Oats..... "	41·8	37·6
Bere..... "	44·6	39·7
Rye..... "	40·6	39·2
Potatoes..... Tons	7·28	3·87

If the deficiency here shown were equally great in Great Britain, we can be at no loss to account for the very large importations of foreign grain imported during the twelve months from August, 1848, to August, 1849, and which importations, great as they have been, would seem to be in no degree beyond our requirements.

The quantities so entered have been as follow :—

Wheat.....	4,323,645	Quarters.
Barley.....	1,323,827	"
Oats.....	1,221,883	"
Rye.....	220,829	"
Peas.....	266,475	"
Beans.....	531,177	"
Maize.....	2,287,283	"
Wheat Flour, 3,508,375 cwts., equal to	1,002,393	"

Total..... 11,177,512 Quarters.