

Talk of population: the clergy and emigration in principle

Migration from nineteenth-century Ireland, no less than migration from any other society, was driven primarily by an economic imperative. Whether attracted by the promise of a better life in Britain or the New World, or feeling compelled to leave by a lack of opportunity at home, most Irish emigrants determined their course based on a rational assessment of their own and their family's best economic interests.¹ Accordingly, as Professor David Fitzpatrick has eloquently observed, 'for its opponents as much as its advocates, the massive fact of emigration outweighed and enfeebled the expression of mere opinion.'² Yet for long periods of the century, usually coinciding with the years of greatest departures, debates on the economic utility and desirability of emigration raged. As intermediaries between the poor and the state, clergymen had an undeniable and continuing interest in the questions that were thrown up: Was emigration a legitimate means of relieving acute distress or of improving Ireland's economic fortunes? If so, should it be encouraged, directed, or organised? If not, should it somehow be prevented? Who should take responsibility for such measures? Who or what was to blame for 'excessive' emigration? According to circumstances, these questions acquired varying prominence with different denominations, and clerical answers to them often evolved, and even became radically altered. This chapter, by tracing these processes, will assess how members of the clergy regarded emigration as an economic principle.

That Ireland's problems could be dispensed with alongside a portion of its population became a common belief in the depressed decades following the Anglo-French wars. Figures ranging from MPs to classical economists to, in this instance at least, a rather unromantic Poet Laureate, were convinced that an expanded and expanding post-

Waterloo population could not be immediately provided for in any other manner.³ The idea derived from a widely held dogma of Irish ‘overpopulation’, in itself a rather problematic concept. As Joel Moykr noted some years ago, it is ordinarily difficult to define what overpopulation precisely entails, and as critics of his ambitious econometric investigation have since reinforced, the hard data necessary to test the thesis as applied to pre-Famine Ireland is too scant to be conclusive.⁴ What is true of economic historians today was equally true of contemporary political economists, yet there were few who did not propose ‘overpopulation’ as the base explanation for Irish ills.⁵

Such thinking relied heavily on the Reverend Thomas Malthus’s *Essay on the principle of population*, which first appeared anonymously in 1798, and went through six modified editions up to 1826. An acknowledged classic of the relatively new discipline of ‘political economy’, and a sensation when published, the essay challenged an eighteenth-century orthodoxy that people formed part of a nation’s wealth, and that a greater population meant a wealthier – certainly a potentially wealthier – nation.⁶ To Malthus, the inherent danger of unregulated population growth was a pressure on the means of subsistence so great as to induce, at best, a general drop in the living standards of the poorest classes, and, at worst, imminent disaster. He did not initially have Ireland in mind, but, particularly from the first of a number of localised ‘pre-Famine famines’ in 1816–17, many Irish observers, and latterly Malthus himself, came to find this prognosis strikingly applicable to the island.⁷

Within these Malthusian parameters the key question for Ireland was how to remedy the emerging imbalance. Two sets of options presented themselves. Firstly, efforts might be made to increase resources in line with population growth. Secondly, measures to reduce the population or the rate of its growth might be applied. Many contemporaries favoured prescriptions of the former sort. A host of proposals to introduce land reform, improve agricultural cultivation, and stimulate industry were forthcoming from pamphleteers of varying expertise, while most classical economists, as R. D. Collison Black has noted, were similarly focused on finding long-term strategies for economic development.⁸ Pitted against such capital-increasing plans were population-reducing ideas including Malthus’s favoured ‘prudential check’, wherein ‘moral restraint’ and marriage later in life would produce fewer children, and the as-yet theoretical check of artificial birth control, which Malthus was not alone in rejecting on

religious grounds.⁹ The problem which all of these proposals shared was their ambitious, long-term nature. Assuming they were possible at all, it would be several years before, say, industry could be sufficiently developed, or before the kind of cultural and moral transformation which Malthus envisaged could be brought about. Emigration, by contrast, appeared to promise immediate relief.

This perception gave emigration a new and broad appeal as a potential policy. Even for those who doubted its ability to single-handedly reverse the trend towards an overabundant population, it seemed to offer an expedient means of avoiding crisis until broader strategies could take effect. In 1817 the MP and economist Robert Torrens suggested in direct reference to Ireland that, 'until our institutions for extending education, and moral and prudential habits, have had time to give effect to a preventive check upon the number of births, there can be neither relief nor safety, except in emigration.'¹⁰ Torrens was also among the first to advocate emigration as an alternative to another proposal for more immediate relief of Irish distress which was gaining traction, namely an Irish poor law, which, as in England, would use a local property tax to create a minimal welfare safety net for the Irish poor; this was a constructed choice which did much to persuade others that state-directed emigration ought to be practised as the lesser evil.¹¹ This was decidedly new territory. In the eighteenth century, in line with contemporary thinking, sustained emigration from Ulster had provoked the alarm of administrators and landlords alike. They feared, respectively, a weakening of the Protestant interest and a lowering of rents as competition for land became less fierce.¹² Where once legislative efforts had been made to keep people in Ireland,¹³ a widespread acceptance of the Malthusian overpopulation principle meant that the opposite was now on the agenda.

There was great irony, therefore, in Malthus's own distinct opposition to any measure of assisted emigration. The first edition of his essay had entirely ignored the possibility of emigration as a check on population growth, while the second took care to dismiss it – as did others including J. R. McCulloch – as only 'a slight palliative', because it would simply create a vacuum to be filled by the unchanged reproductive behaviour of those left behind.¹⁴ Malthus was, in a sense, a double heretic on the issue, rejecting the previously accepted notion of government intervention to prevent emigration, but being equally leery of the new, opposing tendency. 'I have', he explained, 'always thought it very unjust on the part of Governments, to prohibit, or impede emigration;

but I have doubted whether they could reasonably be expected so to promote it, as to undertake the responsibility of settling those who may wish to emigrate particularly as the superintendence of so powerful an agent has often the effect of weakening the exertions of the settlers themselves'.¹⁵ Nonetheless, by the early 1830s, even Malthus expressed a grudging acceptance of the benefits of government emigration as a temporary measure, particularly – though he opposed it – before any poor law was to come into effect in Ireland.¹⁶

This gradual softening in Malthus's attitude can be traced *in*, but perhaps not *to*, his correspondence with Robert Wilmot Horton, an enthusiastic advocate of state-assisted migration, who also happened to be under-secretary at the Colonial Office. From this position, Horton successfully lobbied senior colleagues to assent to an experimental scheme of migration, which, he hoped, would prove that by the same stroke the underemployed Irish (and English) could be relieved and the underpopulated colonies could be peopled. Named for its overseer, Peter Robinson, the emigration took place in two stages, in 1823 and 1825, and involved the transfer of more than 2,500 applicants from the Blackwater region of north Munster to the Canadas, where they were settled on farmland to their apparent contentment.¹⁷ The problem was the cost. At an average of £22 per head, or £53,000 overall, the scheme was extravagantly expensive, rendering further government funding of emigration improbable. Notwithstanding this unconvincing result, Horton's continued agitation was rewarded (or perhaps bought off) with a select committee of inquiry into the subject in 1826. From this point, tied in with the growing discussion of a poor law, and spurred on by the emergence of another popular variation of the measure – Edward Gibbon Wakefield's 'systematic colonisation'¹⁸ – the debate on Irish emigration as a point of state-directed relief, far from lessening, intensified.

Oliver Goldsmith's Reverend Primrose was famously critical of men who 'merely talked of population', but after Malthus, there were many of his own vocation ready to do just that.¹⁹ The opinion of the Irish clergy on the point had been recognised as important from early on. Under the old dispensation, the Dublin and London governments had made direct appeals to Presbyterian ministers – occasionally known to encourage and even personally lead emigrants – to exercise their influence in a contrary manner and prevent the depletion of their congregations.²⁰ Although happy to use the unusual attention from those in power to air their grievances, it is not apparent whether

they had the ability or inclination to do any such thing.²¹ Later, Peter Robinson took care to consult with all local clergymen, and was especially surprised by the active cooperation of Catholic priests, who he had been warned would be overtly hostile. His gratitude was all the greater for his awareness of the fatal effect that 'their influence might have had if exerted against me upon the minds of the people, who were still suspicious that all was not right'.²²

Clerical involvement in the debate went beyond such local considerations, however. As the influence of Malthus demonstrates, what Boyd Hilton has termed the 'rage of Christian economics' did not bypass Ireland.²³ Richard Whately, former professor of political economy at Oxford, and cheerleader for the new science, was appointed to the Church of Ireland archbishopric of Dublin in 1831, from where he continued to make the case against the introduction of an Irish poor law, and in favour of emigration as a preferable alternative. As he had previously elaborated, emigration offered a means of quick and permanent removal of a burden which might well be relieved more cheaply at home in the short term, but which would inevitably grow and require ever more relief in the longer term.²⁴ Similarly, testifying before Horton's committee, John Jebb, the Anglican Bishop of Limerick, rejected the idea of sending money 'artificially' into Ireland via a poor law, on the grounds that it would teach people 'to rely on casual bounty [rather] than on their own continuous exertions'. Where aid was necessary, he vividly explained, emigration would prove, 'an immediate relief, it is what bleeding would be to an apoplectic patient [...] [it] would give relief to *many* and hope to *all*'.²⁵ A correspondent of the evangelical Anglican magazine the *Christian Examiner* went further still in this stance, suggesting that a poor law would prevent the rational and necessary exodus of motivated individuals from the overstocked labour market, negating whatever relief such 'natural' emigration already offered.²⁶

Many prominent parish clergy of the established church came to echo the call for state intervention to encourage emigration. In 1810, the Cork rector Horatio Townsend had explained that, despite the county being even then 'overpeopled', resulting in a rapidly falling standard of living, the people were 'affectionately attached to their native soil' and 'no idea seems really distressing but that of leaving it'. 'Happiness', he concluded, foreshadowing David Ricardo, 'may sometimes be found in situations apparently most uncongenial'.²⁷ Yet less than a decade later, Townsend was arguing that 'the time

of prescribing emigration is actually arrived, for [the country] cannot of itself support its population as *human creatures* ought to be supported.²⁸ To other Anglican clerics, emigration was a means, not merely of circumventing the introduction of a poor law, or of complementing its operation, but of effectually reducing poverty in and of itself. Michael Keating, rector of Ventry, wrote to Horton to assert that ‘emigration on an extensive scale, and the concentration in villages of the scattered labouring population’, would provide the most effective relief.²⁹ There was, he suggested, a need for a consolidation of farmland and a drain of the surplus labourers by emigration; other proposals such as wasteland cultivation or public works would be more expensive and less useful.³⁰ William Hickey, a Wexford rector better known as Martin Doyle, a prolific and popular author, disagreed slightly, telling a parliamentary committee that either home colonisation or ‘emigration by wholesale’ were necessary.³¹

There was, however, no Protestant consensus even on the central question, and a number of clergymen registered their opposition to any official sanction of emigration. Thomas Chalmers, the renowned Church of Scotland minister and economist who had an almost unrivalled influence on the social thinking of Irish evangelicals, rejected not only any extension of the poor law to Ireland, but also any alternative involving emigration. He expressed, like Malthus, ‘an utter want of faith in the efficacy of emigration as a permanent scheme’, although he was grudgingly willing to concede offering it as a temporary measure on the spurious basis that ‘much fewer would avail themselves of it than we are disposed to anticipate.’³² This was an error of judgment on which most Irish clergymen, of all denominations, could have set him right. Horatio Townsend’s earlier perception of a peculiar attachment to the soil aside, independently funded emigration was proceeding at a considerable pace by 1830, while, in the wake of the Robinson emigration, the Colonial Office had received thousands of petitions from Ireland requesting free passages to North America.³³ It was clear that any extension of government funding for emigration would be enthusiastically taken up.

For a section of Protestant clergymen, already disturbed by the effects of the exodus from their flocks, government-assisted emigration was therefore a scandalous proposition. Richard Ryan, vicar of Rathcore, Co. Meath, disapproved of it on several grounds, including a quasi-Malthusian objection to using public money ‘in attempting to produce consequences which should flow from the united and well

directed exertions of society'.³⁴ He was also, however, dismayed by the failure to address the economic situation which, as he saw it, forced the self-directed migration of Protestants, asking the Archbishop of Armagh, 'Do we not owe something to the humbler classes of Protestants who are every day driven out, and ought not landlords be induced to make a slight sacrifice to protect them and strengthen their own influence[?]'³⁵ An anonymous Anglican clergyman was equally damning of the need for 'self-expatriat[ion]', seeing it as a 'cruel remedy' resorted to by desperate Protestants afflicted by poverty and persecution and deserted by those landlords and politicians who should protect them.³⁶ The Dublin-based Dissenter Rev. J. B. McCrea seemed to sum up this growing anti-establishment feeling when he upbraided 'the political economy that would check the increase of the species, or curtail what is falsely called the redundant population' and told his congregation that 'the evils of emigration are already so numerous and so great, [that] the longer the practice is encouraged, the more will the pernicious effects be multiplied'.³⁷

These strong sentiments prompted action. Ryan and McCrea were among several clergymen involved in the 'Protestant Colonisation Society', which aimed, through the Dutch-inspired idea of 'home colonisation', to curb 'the growing national calamity of Protestant emigration'.³⁸ Originally a sub-committee of the Orange Order, the society was established on an independent basis at the end of 1829 – noteworthy timing – in order to attract broader support.³⁹ Its reception was mixed. Archbishop Beresford had previously been told by a relative that it represented 'much better work than processions or drums', but the Irish primate informed the Archbishop of Canterbury that, although he was not averse to keeping Protestants from emigrating, this plan 'originated in party spirit' and 'would serve as a provocation to continued hostility'.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, in his analysis of the Irish economy, J. E. Bicheno dismissed it as the 'preposterous' sub-Cromwellian work of 'zealots'.⁴¹ This alienation of moderate Protestant opinion may have been the fatal handicap. An 1832 report of the society claimed that twelve families who had intended leaving the country had already been settled on a thousand acres bought in Co. Donegal, and another fifty had been selected for settlement, but it also displayed an ultimately justified anxiety as to where further funding was to come from.⁴² While ostensibly the society had enunciated sentiments diametrically opposed to those of Whately, Townsend, *et al.*, a supportive comment of Michael Seymour illus-

trated the sectarian reality: 'If emigration must take place, let it be a Popish emigration; an increase in our exports of this class would indeed be a blessing to this country'.⁴³

Catholic clergy seemed to be in inadvertent agreement with Seymour, although it is, perhaps, the relative absence of public Catholic commentary on the issue during this period that impresses most. The economist Harriet Martineau, who saw emigration as a crucial part of any plan of relief, cautiously had her fictional Irish priest Father Glenny sit on the fence on the issue: emigration might be less painful than transportation, but it might also be avoidable through 'wiser social management'.⁴⁴ Yet, speaking before a parliamentary committee on the state of Ireland in 1825, Thomas Costello, a real-life Limerick parish priest, was unequivocal. He communicated positive second-hand knowledge of the Robinson scheme, and noted 'a very great disposition to emigrate' among his parishioners. Many of them had gone to Charleville in the past year to apply for places in the second phase of the scheme, encouraged by letters from already-departed friends. 'I think' he concluded on the general point of state-aided emigration, 'it would be very desirable to remove [the mendicant class]; those that are youthful or likely to become industrious in another country'.⁴⁵

The leading Catholic social thinker of the day, the Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, James Warren Doyle – 'J.K.L.' as readers knew him – addressed the point in more substantive terms. In an 1825 edition of his widely read *Letters*, Doyle appeared to be wholly enthusiastic about well-directed Irish emigration to Britain, suggesting that it could even be 'the natural mode of relief'.⁴⁶ Yet, writing to Thomas Spring Rice two years later, he observed pithily of Horton's continued lobbying: 'We are much occupied here with the emigration plan. I have no doubt it is unwise in principle, but may be a useful, nay, a necessary expedient to relieve our present distress'.⁴⁷ This later equivocation almost certainly reflected a growing pre-occupation with an Irish poor law as the primary means of relief rather than any cooling towards emigration *per se*, since Doyle continued to be a leading proponent of both. His advocacy was to the fore in the 1830 'Poor inquiry' chaired by Spring Rice, where he made a spirited and perhaps influential case for a poor law that incorporated emigration. While denying that Ireland was overpopulated, he expressed concern that those he saw leaving his diocese were 'the cream of the people', those who had the means to emigrate, and who left the country more distressed by their removal, and he therefore proposed a public programme of emigration, part-

funded by landlords, which would 'send away some good, and some not so good, and so relieve the parochial funds of a portion of the burthen upon them'.⁴⁸

In the 1820s and 1830s, therefore, there were both Protestant and Catholic clergy who were in principle in favour of state encouragement of emigration, though often for very different reasons. There was a strain of Anglican opinion that simply preferred emigration to a poor law, while there was a tendency amongst Catholic clergy to see emigration as part of the overall solution to Irish poverty – partially since, it was clear, their congregations increasingly felt the same. There was also another significant body of Protestant clergy that rejected any move which might increase the already heavy flow of Protestant emigrants, and, in the absence of government or landlord action to prevent the same, was prepared to intervene. The question arises as to how representative these sentiments were of the lower ranks of the clergy, who were, after all, closer to the everyday reality of emigration, and the possible effects of any economic doctrine applied from on high. An analysis of the extensive clerical testimony before the 1833–36 Poor Inquiry – which questioned over a thousand clergymen of all denominations on the subject – offers some answers.

The Commission for inquiring into the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland (hereafter the Poor Inquiry) was constituted under the chairmanship of Richard Whately in 1833. The archbishop had a well-known and long-standing preference for assisted emigration – and increasingly, for the emerging Wakefieldian, self-supporting form of systematic colonisation – over any significant state provision of poor relief.⁴⁹ It is therefore unsurprising that his Inquiry sought information on emigration, both as it already operated, and as it might impact as a government policy. Testimony on this and other points was gathered by the Commission in two distinct ways. Firstly, questionnaires were distributed to prominent members of local communities and over a thousand replies received – the overwhelming majority – were from clergymen. Secondly, agents of the inquiry travelled the country convening 'baronial examinations', or public meetings, at which clergy of all denominations were usually present and frequently vocal.

Each method of inquiry adopted slightly different approaches. The questionnaires asked the following: 'What number of emigrants, and of what description, have left your parish during each of the last three years?; To what country have they gone?; Have they received

any, and what, assistance for the purposes of emigration and from whom?⁵⁰ The baronial examinations also asked who and how many had emigrated, but, in addition, wondered what effect their departures had had on wages, how many would need to leave to allow those left behind to earn a living wage of 10*d.* a day, and whether it was thought people might be willing to avail of any emigration scheme offered. The baronial examinations therefore called for a good deal of instant speculation that many witnesses simply declared beyond them, while the questionnaires seem by their nature to have prompted more reflective responses, though again, the specifics were beyond the knowledge and perhaps the interest of a minority of respondents.

Nonetheless, the appendices of the Poor Inquiry provide a useful snapshot of pre-Famine clerical attitudes towards emigration, and from there, familiar patterns emerge. Indeed, using the questionnaire data, it is possible, via the admittedly crude means of content analysis, to quantify the differences in outlook. A warning should be attached here: the factual nature of the questions posed meant that the respondents' opinions were not directly sought, and were therefore not always given, directly or otherwise. For example, it is impossible to say from his responses here what William Hickey thought on the subject, even though his earlier testimony before Horton's committee marked him out as a proponent of a measure of emigration.⁵¹ Thus, of 1,085 clerical testimonies, it is necessary to set aside 839 which, like Hickey's, simply provide factual information on emigration and do not betray a stance on the issue one way or the other. This leaves 246 testimonies, a number further reduced when the 'don't knows', i.e. the 134 clergy whose answers consisted of 'no emigration' or simply ' - ' are taken into account. This leaves a smaller sample of 112 clerical opinions on emigration from which tentative impressions may be drawn.

It must firstly be noted that there was a considerable imbalance in clerical responses to the questionnaires, with Catholic clergy providing just under a third and Protestant clergy more than two thirds of the total. This could reflect a Catholic reluctance to engage with state surveyors, a greater intellectual engagement with social issues, including emigration, on the part of Protestant clergy, or simply differences in clerical workloads. However, notwithstanding this imbalance, there were significant differences in the breakdown of sentiment within each party. Catholic priests, it would appear, were overwhelmingly in favour of assisting emigration, by a factor of more than ten to one. Within the smaller sample of priests whose views

on emigration can be parsed, this translates into 91% of priests who were favourable towards emigration and 9% who were critical of it. If we factor in the larger sample of all Catholic responses, whether they contain a discernible opinion on emigration or not, we see that 11% of Catholic respondents were in favour of emigration and just 1% voiced any criticism of it. Protestant clergy were much more evenly matched. Taking, once again, the smaller sample of those who offered up an opinion reveals that 48% of Protestant clergy who expressed a view on emigration were positive towards it and 52% were negative towards it. Translating this to the larger sample shows that 4.3% of total Protestant responses contained positive feelings towards emigration, and 4.8% were negative about emigration, with the relatively small number of Presbyterian clergy within their number tipping the balance towards the negative. The breakdown for Presbyterian ministers was, within the smaller sample, 45% positive, 55% negative or, within the larger sample, 5% positive, and 6% negative.

A few points can be made on the basis of the above. Firstly, a significant overall majority of those clergy who used the questionnaires as an opportunity to offer their unbidden opinions of emigration were in favour of employing it, somehow, as a relief measure. Secondly, Protestant clergy, whether Anglican or Presbyterian, were far more likely than their Catholic counterparts to hold – or at least feel the need to express – negative feelings towards emigration. Thirdly, Catholic clergy at this point appear to have had nothing approaching a systematic critique of emigration, either as an already-existing phenomenon, or, importantly, as a potential government measure of relief. With these points in mind, it is worth exploring some of the detail of the testimony.

It has been noted that in earlier discourse, positions on emigration tended to interlink with positions on the poor law, and there is some indication in correspondence appended to the Inquiry that many Anglican clergy agreed with the Inquiry chairman insofar as, were an emigration plan to be enacted, ‘the necessity of poor-laws [would be] superseded, or at least confined to a limited scale.’⁵² However, the diverse origins of pro-emigration impulses amongst clergy are made clear in some of the few cases where witnesses admit to providing financial aid for the purpose. A Catholic priest in Queen’s County helped raise £108 to aid in sending away 140 local evictees; two Anglican vicars in Co. Down used parochial funds to enable some parishioners to join previously departed relatives; while a vicar in Co.

Donegal 'assisted some few families with from £20 to £30 each, who were tenants of my own private property, and whose farms I wished to get to increase others.'⁵³ Therefore, anything from apparently pure humanitarian concern to self-interested economic realism could be responsible for the cross-denominational feeling that emigration and its assistance, in some form, were a necessary step towards economic recovery and the elimination of poverty.

The above examples should not be taken to mean, however, that Protestant clergymen alone saw emigration in its wider economic context. Their Catholic counterparts were equally capable of seeing emigration in terms beyond the personal hard-luck story. Anglican and Catholic responses to the admittedly leading question of the baronial examiners as to how many people should be removed in order to have a positive effect on wages at home were all but unanimous. A 'great and constant' emigration was required, with anything between a quarter and a half – there was near consensus on a third, perhaps the favoured suggestion of the commissioners – of the local labouring population needing to be assisted if those left behind were to thrive.⁵⁴ There also appears to have been wide agreement that such proportions of people would willingly avail of any opportunity to go. Indeed, mention of those who had already managed to emigrate frequently led to the pleading assertion that 'more would be glad to do so if they had the means.'⁵⁵ A Westmeath clergyman elaborated that 'every effort is made for this purpose [emigration]; it is their only hope [...] they have hopes that in time a free passage will be granted.'⁵⁶

The case for a free passage was also made indirectly, on the basis that the independent system was in several respects inadequate: it involved great hardship for emigrants themselves, it could leave loose ends, and it may even have increased the distress of those who remained. A Catholic priest in Cork related several stories of desperate parishioners crossing the Atlantic without shoes, hats and coats, and leaving their wives and children behind to fend for themselves until such time as they could be sent for.⁵⁷ On the other hand, instances of farmers selling up and defrauding their creditors in order to fund their emigration seem to have particularly irked Anglican clergy in the same county, who in opposing the manner rather than the fact of these departures seemed to imply a receptiveness to a funded system which would avert such abscondments.⁵⁸ Similarly, the Anglican dean of Clogher bemoaned the damaging lengths to which some went to fund their departures:

a practice has become too common of young able-bodied men selling their interest in their farms and emigrating with the produce, without making any provision for the maintenance of parents to whom the lease was originally made, and who thus become burdens on the public, although they ought to be, and have hitherto been, in comparatively comfortable circumstances.⁵⁹

Some Catholic clergy agreed with the dean's admonishment. A Louth priest spoke of young emigrants 'rather embarrassing their relatives in endeavouring to procure means to defray their expenses'; another cleric complained of the departed 'leaving their parents at home, distressed from providing means for them to emigrate, and from the loss of their assistance.'⁶⁰ The crux of the problem was best expressed by a Kerry priest, however: 'Their emigration is rather of disservice; they have taken some means with them; they have left the infirm and poor, the real incumbrance of society, behind.'⁶¹ The key, then, for many clergy was simply that the wrong kind of emigration was occurring, a kind that increased rather than lessened domestic distress.

This attitude needs to be distinguished however, from a rather more forcefully expressed sentiment that regretted not simply the mode and residual effects of departures, but the loss of the departed themselves. This was partly an economic concern. Certainly, the idea that only the 'cream' of the population had the ability to emigrate in the pre-Famine decades has some credence. The average Atlantic passage fare up to mid-century of ninety shillings was considerable, and coupled with ancillary transport and provisions costs, was equivalent to about two years rent. Such a sum was difficult enough to come by for a small farmer, let alone a labourer or cottier.⁶² Therefore, while it is not possible, as Mokyr has noted, to establish absolutely the economic calibre or potential of those who left Ireland, it is safe to say that a disproportionate number of both Protestant and Catholic emigrants between 1815 and 1845 were of a somewhat elevated social status.⁶³ However, while the emphasis seems superficially to have been on the inherent entrepreneurial or leadership qualities of those lost, there was also a cultural and religious element to the regret. These sentiments were almost exclusively Protestant and largely based in Ulster. Hence, Alexander McIlwain of Down complained of the emigration of 'several young men, and many of them the ornaments of society in the sphere in which they moved'; William Dickey of Donegal regretted that 'the persons who emigrated are generally the children of decent farmers, who are likely to make useful members of

society [...] our neighbourhood is yearly drained of some of its most spirited and industrious youths'; and Samuel Butler of Londonderry believed the emigrants from his area to have been 'the flower of the people for activity and intelligence, and their loss [...] a very serious one to the public.'⁶⁴ Two Church of Ireland clergymen in Limerick put the point across most openly; emigration, they complained, was depriving them of 'the chief ornament of [their] church.'⁶⁵

Linked to these views was the repeated assertion by Protestant clergy that 'Roman Catholics emigrated from distress, and the Protestants from the distracted state of the country.'⁶⁶ A Wicklow session of the baronial exams was given a more explicit interpretation: 'one great cause of the emigration among Protestants ha[s] been the disturbed state of the country, and the violence of the Roman Catholic population.'⁶⁷ Meanwhile in Sligo, it was said 'the Protestants see their numbers daily diminishing, and they think if they remain at home they will be exposed to violence.'⁶⁸ It is certainly the case that pockets of pre-Famine Ireland were convulsed by agrarian violence. However, it is far from clear that significant numbers of Protestants emigrated purely because such violence was specifically targeted at them for religious reasons. Certainly, Dickson gave little weight to feelings of religious persecution as a cause of emigration in the previous century, and Michael Beames has dismissed claims that agrarian agitation in the 1830s targeted persons on a sectarian basis.⁶⁹ Indeed, George Cornwall Lewis, who was charged with critiquing Whately's third report, was specifically told by 'a person well-acquainted with the facts' that 'the motive to emigration with the Protestants is self-interest, and a desire to better their condition, and not religious persecution.'⁷⁰ This is not to suggest that the fear of sectarian violence or of being vastly outnumbered as the Catholic population rose ever higher did not figure at all in Protestants' decisions to emigrate; but it is to suggest that it was by no means the main reason for those decisions.⁷¹ Nonetheless, a number of Protestant clergy were keen to relay precisely the opposite impression to the Poor Law Commissioners. A Tipperary rector claimed that 'the only emigrants are the useful industrious yeoman, who has been driven from his native home by fear of the religious and political agitation' and his colleague in the same county agreed that 'a good many have left this parish, mostly Protestants and I fear many more will shortly leave their old habitations, to seek for peace and quietness in every foreign land where they think such is to be obtained.'⁷² This assump-

tion also stretched northwards. One Presbyterian minister saw fit to emphasise that little emigration had taken place from his area of late since 'our parishes have been, and still are, perfectly tranquil and quiet', clearly implying that political or sectarian unrest and not economic concerns had been the chief cause of Protestant outward migration.⁷³

However, there was also a concurrent rationale that blamed Protestant emigration on the fact that 'their interests are neglected by those who should protect them', by which was meant both the Government, which was responsible for 'the manner in which the political affairs of the country have been carried on of late' – a reference to Catholic Emancipation and Established church reform – and, most of all, the landlords, who 'now care no more for a Protestant than for a Roman Catholic.'⁷⁴ This latter point evoked the arguments of the by-now defunct Protestant Colonisation Society, and was mentioned here particularly in relation to the (Methodist) Palatines of Limerick, who were leaving in large numbers owing to, it was said, 'the difficulty they found in obtaining farms.'⁷⁵ Therefore, according to a significant section of their clergy, both political and economic insecurity, much of it blamed on perceived religious persecution, was driving Protestants away; 'unprotected from lawless aggression of mobs, and deserted by government', 'they scarcely consider[ed] their lives or their profession secure.'⁷⁶

There is little evidence at this juncture of a similarly politicised interpretation of the existing stream of emigration by Catholic clergy. Only one priest, Robert Taylor of Cork, exercised what can be seen as bald political opportunism, asserting that he 'never knew or heard of so many going to America in one season as are preparing for this next spring, in consequence of being told they must pay the tithe.'⁷⁷ Though there was a genuine feeling of grievance over the tithe, most Catholics expressed it far less drastically than Taylor suggested and simply refused to pay, a course of action that had the influential support of Bishop Doyle.⁷⁸ It seems highly unlikely, therefore, that this was the primary reason for any mass flight from Taylor's congregation, or any other, and perhaps the fact that he merely predicted (or threatened) such rather gives the game away. Other anti-emigration sentiment expressed by Catholic clergy was of a relatively benign nature. Even the innocuous observation of John Hanna of Down that, 'People here [are] unwilling to emigrate, and, could they exist at all, cleave to their native place' was a rarity.⁷⁹

Therefore, at this point, Catholic parish clergy regarded emigration with relative equanimity, and in contrast to many Protestant clergy, did not assign any blame for departures from their flocks. There even appeared to be general agreement with Bishop Doyle that emigration, properly managed, was a potentially useful measure. Poor Inquiry testimony also illuminates the split in Protestant opinion on the issue, between those who advocated emigration as a sensible economic safety valve, and those who decried it as a kind of banishment. On balance, it would seem that more of the lower-ranked clergy fell into the latter category. As the Presbyterian preacher John Brown of Aghadowey bluntly said of the government's tentative foray into aiding emigration, 'such drivellers as Wilmot Horton may think well of emigration, but I look on people as the wealth of a nation.'⁸⁰

Like the rest of its proposed measures, the emigration clauses of Whately's report – which suggested local schemes of 'extensive emigration', half paid for by the state and half by landlords, and that Poor Law Unions be able to borrow from central government for the same purpose – went unimplemented.⁸¹ But the issue did not rest there. By 1845 there were as yet only tentative signs of disquiet among Catholic clergy about increasing emigration. The 'incipient Christian socialis[t]', Thaddeus O'Malley, for example, argued that emigration should be a measure of last resort only.⁸² Yet in the absence of government intervention, there was a small flowering of private attempts to organise and direct the movement from Ireland in which both Catholic and Protestant clergy played a part.⁸³ Two of these were initiated by politicians who had shown previous sympathy towards Wakefieldian 'systematic colonisation.'⁸⁴ The Limerick Emigrants' Friend Society, founded in 1833 by William Smith O'Brien, had cross-denominational support for the distribution of information to would-be emigrants, and if its secretary, Rev. Michael Keating, was to have his way, there were ambitions for the society to co-operate with the Colonial Office in a much broader scheme of mass colonisation.⁸⁵ In 1843 Daniel O'Connell, who was no fan of Horton's proposals,⁸⁶ established the Catholic Emigration Society, which hoped to regulate emigration and boasted of 'the marked approval and support of the Venerable Prelates and the influential clergy of the Catholic Church, as well as of Father Mathew, the apostle of temperance.'⁸⁷

Both of these societies fizzled out in relatively short order, while another, the North American Colonial Association of Ireland (N.A.C.A.I.), spanned both of their existences but had equally

negligible results. Its initial aim was to acquire 500,000 acres of forest land in British North America and superintend the settlement of emigrant families who would rent and clear portions of this land.⁸⁸ Wakefield himself became directly involved in 1835, traveling to Canada as agent of the association and building a canal on the N.A.C.A.I.'s land, ultimately settling few people but losing a great deal of shareholders' money in the process.⁸⁹ The initial response of the governor-general of Canada, that the plan was a 'horrid swindle', seemed vindicated.⁹⁰ It is interesting to note, however, that one of the shareholders was Daniel Murray, Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, who invested £10 in five shares in 1839, and seems to have continued his relationship with the Association until at least 1846.⁹¹ A poor investment, as it turned out, but one that Murray might have hoped would yield good results for those migrated. According to Thomas Rolph, a former Canadian government emigration agent, on meeting the Irish bishops by invitation in Queenstown in 1839, he had convinced them that Canada was preferable to the United States for emigrants and 'there appeared to be a determination on the part of those prelates to encourage it by all means in their power.'⁹²

However, clerical testimony before the Devon Commission on the eve of the Famine suggested that, while the mix of views among Protestant clergy had hardly changed, the apparent Catholic openness towards emigration-as-relief was beginning to fade. Several priests still made the familiar economic case for encouragement of departures, often in bold terms. Michael Fitzgerald of Ballingarry, Co. Limerick, for example, argued for 'emigration on the largest practicable scale possible, and on the principle of the emigration to Canada under the sanction of the government in 1822'. 'This', he suggested, 'is the only effectual remedy' for agricultural distress.⁹³ However, James Davy of Kilworth, Co. Cork was among a handful of clergymen who communicated a more emotional response to the issue, one that simply preferred any alternative. Emigration was, he said, 'a great evil to the country [...] my feelings are averse to emigration. I think the people could be better and more usefully employed at home.'⁹⁴

Davy's view, rather than Fitzgerald's, was the harbinger of things to come. The crisis outflow during and after the Famine – sometimes attended by horrendous on-board and port-of-arrival suffering – encouraged a hardening of public rhetoric among Catholic clergy. Increasingly, clerical spokesmen interpreted the advocacy of emigration, not as a sincere effort to provide relief, nor even as a more general

economic plan from which relief for individuals might unintentionally flow, but as a component of a wider policy of deliberate depopulation, or, worse still, 'extermination'. Certain clerics may have been able to frame their own proposals for emigration assistance in terms of welfare, but the intentions of landlords and politicians were always to be suspected.⁹⁵ The change was clearly apparent in the hierarchy's response to one of several attempts to convince the government that some form of colonisation might mitigate the effects of the crisis. In 1847 John Robert Godley, a Leitrim Poor Law guardian and landlord's son, proposed the transfer at state expense of two million people to a 'new Ireland' in Canada. This would require the participation of accompanying clergy. As he explained to Parliament, 'the nucleus of an Irish Roman Catholic Emigration must be ecclesiastical'.⁹⁶ In the end, Godley's plan, like others, called for an application of public money which 'a vacuous and callous dogma' among administrators would not allow, but his inexperienced wooing of the hierarchy nonetheless provoked a trenchant public response.⁹⁷

Godley had written to every Catholic bishop outlining his plans. In April Edward Maginn, co-adjutor Bishop of Derry, responded publicly. Dripping with sarcasm, his letter left no doubt as to his opinion of both the proposal and, pertinently, the committee of landlords which Godley had assembled behind it. In part, Maginn objected to the destination; if emigrants there must be, they would go to 'the land of the brave and the home of the free' he insisted, rather than to where the 'British lion' might still exercise a pernicious influence over their lives. He also cast doubt on the motives of those pushing the plan, and warned that 'no matter how fair the device might appear, or how sunny the prospect held out, an 'offering from such a source must contain, like the basket presented to Cleopatra, an adder concealed beneath the flowers'.⁹⁸ Archbishop John MacHale of Tuam was similarly suspicious of the class and political allegiances of the originators and supporters of the plan. For him they induced 'a *prima facie* presumption that it is deserving of utter condemnation'.⁹⁹ This unambiguous public broadside was not the full story, however. Godley later told a parliamentary committee that he had been given 'very strong assurances of support' from 'many' Catholic clergy, and it appears that at least one bishop was amongst them.¹⁰⁰ A week before Maginn's letter appeared in the press, Godley privately informed Lord Monteaigle that he had 'received today the enthusiastic approbation and adhesion of the Bishop of Limerick (R.C.)', and that

William Monsell was planning to consolidate support for the plan in Limerick by way of a public meeting, although this did not evidently take place.¹⁰¹

Emigration arranged by individual landlords, particularly where connected to evictions, met with similarly divergent public and private responses. James Donnelly has estimated that half a million individuals were evicted between 1846 and 1854, but only a pitiful proportion of those were given any financial assistance to escape destitution or the overwhelmed workhouse system.¹⁰² Local priests, therefore, in common with tenants, generally welcomed any passage money that was forthcoming in such instances. Some defended the more generous landlord schemes of the pre-Famine and early Famine period against allegations of compulsion, and even the more notorious, parsimonious schemes of the later 1840s did not provoke the kind of disquiet that might have been expected.¹⁰³ The historian of the Palmerston estate emigration found Sligo priests objecting not to the scheme itself, nor even to its many shocking inadequacies, but, on temperance grounds, to one of its few generous measures – provision of a glass of rum punch on board ship each Sunday.¹⁰⁴ Emigration from the Lansdowne estate in Kerry was equally mean in its application, though it had the silent support of the prominent local parish priest, John O’Sullivan, who ignored press calls for him to publicly denounce it.¹⁰⁵ Finally, the migration scheme of the later-assassinated Roscommon landowner Denis Mahon was condemned by Monsignor McDermott of Strokestown partly on the basis that Mahon had not provided for all of his ejected tenants with Atlantic passages; indeed, another local priest, Henry Brennan, had urged Mahon to begin an emigration scheme earlier in the year.¹⁰⁶

This was not apparent in the public rhetoric which addressed the relationship between landlords and emigration. By the end of the Famine, and as the outward flow reached its peak, the polemics of Repeal and especially Tenant Right meetings – routinely attended by priests – were roundly denouncing all emigration as the expatriating insult added to the injury of eviction; as a damaging, involuntary and avoidable banishment.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, George Browne, the Bishop of Elphin, in whose diocese Strokestown was located, explained in an open address to Lord Shrewsbury what he regarded as the illusion of the emigrants’ free will. There is, he wrote, ‘a vast distinction between what is termed in human acts *voluntarium simpliciter* and *voluntarium secundum quid*’. Landlords, said Browne, were in pursuit of their own

interests and of land consolidation, presenting their tenants with a stark choice: destitution or emigration.¹⁰⁸ The point, however, is that even this choice was only rarely given, and indeed did not appear to apply in Strokestown, meaning, as David Fitzpatrick has argued, that landlords as a class were condemned, both in public and in local memory, on the wrong grounds.¹⁰⁹ It was their collective failure to properly satisfy the enormous demand from their ejected tenants for passage money, rather than their limited and inadequately resourced individual forays into migration, which was their – and indeed the government’s – real shortcoming.¹¹⁰

Just as Whately’s presence on Godley’s committee was true to pre-Famine form – though he waited until he had consulted associates including Nassau Senior before allowing his name to go forward – Protestant clergy were no more united in their reaction to proposals for organised emigration during the Famine than they had been before.¹¹¹ Several of them contacted government officials to register their feelings on the matter. A ‘resident rector’ of Leinster wrote to the Lord Lieutenant’s office in favour,¹¹² and in a later address to the new Lord Lieutenant, the Remonstrant Synod of Ulster (a body of non-subscribing Presbyterians) called for ‘a well-regulated and extensive system of colonisation.’¹¹³ Set against this were an Anglican minister from Cavan who brought up the familiar Malthusian objection to emigration – ‘it is like tapping the dropsical patient [...] the disease very soon acquires additional strength’ – and two Ulster clergymen, who lamented the lasting injury outward migration caused to the Irish economy.¹¹⁴ Given that the balance had tipped so far in its favour, there was also a new and significant concentration on the effects of Catholic emigration, as opposed to those of Protestant migration.

The response of Catholic churchmen had undergone a dramatic transformation. Where previously priests and bishops alike presented as ‘a body of men who accepted, without much thought, the conventional social and political ideas of their day’, they were now, in public discourse at any rate, emerging as critics, and perhaps equally unthinking ones, of any emigration advocated by the landed class and of any emigration or colonisation policy put before government.¹¹⁵ Increasingly, continued self-expatriation was blamed on the negligence and heartless, self-interested political economy of those two entities.¹¹⁶ Ireland, they argued, was not overpopulated. There was sufficient land for all if only it was better cultivated or nurtured from a state of waste.¹¹⁷ Though there remained many Catholic clergymen

who were privately willing to admit that emigration, whether organised or self-directed, offered the only immediate remedy for the misery they saw around them, in public an aggressive and condemnatory line was now adopted.

This changed attitude, increasingly matched by private reservations, was amplified during later peaks of emigration, and was bound up with anger at the failure of government and landlords to concede land reform. For many Catholic clerics, all emigration could be traced to the iniquitous power of landlords to evict at will, and to the successive governments which sustained that power. High-profile incidents such as the 1861 evictions at Derryveagh, Co. Donegal tended to reinforce that perception, although on that occasion, as the *Belfast News Letter* took pains to emphasise, the emigration was arranged and paid for by an Australian Catholic Church fund.¹¹⁸ Daniel Cahill, an immensely popular priest – one American contemporary said of him ‘another humbug, but the Irish seem to worship him’ – and roving orator, whose letters and speeches featured regularly in the Catholic press was a prominent exponent of this trope, routinely referring to ‘the extirpation of the Irish population.’¹¹⁹ In 1853 he addressed the Prime Minister on ‘the ruthless extermination of the needy Orange landlords of Ireland’: ‘You speak of your just laws on this subject,’ he said, ‘we point to the emigrant ship.’¹²⁰

Another vocal priest, James Redmond of Arklow, Co. Wicklow, insisted that landlords had a choice. They ‘could tear up the tenantry by the roots, and fling them like weeds to perish on the earth’s surface, to pine in the poorhouse, to be submerged in the ocean, or to be swallowed up in the insatiate maw of the internecine war of America’ or they could grant tenant right.¹²¹ Redmond furthermore excoriated the then Lord Lieutenant as ‘confessedly’ an ‘advocate of wholesale depopulation’, who was ‘labouring to make Ireland a land of flocks and herds and as a matter of necessity causing the expatriation of millions of Irishmen from the land of their birth.’¹²² In the 1860s, these sentiments also frequently found their way into pastoral letters and the extensive private correspondence of Irish prelates with Dr Tobias Kirby, the Rector of the Irish College in Rome, and they played a role in bringing about the National Association – an abortive episcopal foray into politics – in 1864.¹²³

All of this was reminiscent of the anti-government and selectively anti-landlord rhetoric of the Protestant Colonisation Society.¹²⁴ It was also, in part, a response to the surprisingly durable belief of economic

commentators that continued emigration offered a (partial) solution to Ireland's problems. In the immediate aftermath of the Famine, such thinking had been almost universal, if muted. An 1854 paper by John Locke of the Statistical Society of London purported to address 'excessive emigration and its reparative agencies' but having judged that the recent outflow had 'emptied the workhouses and raised wages', Locke concluded that only further emigration could induce all employers to pay more and cause landlords to give more liberal terms to those left behind.¹²⁵ Members of the Dublin Statistical Society – co-founded by Whately and from 1862 renamed the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland (S.S.I.S.I.)¹²⁶ – were similarly circumspect. James Lawson and Denis Caulfield Heron, erstwhile professors of political economy at Trinity College Dublin and Queen's College Galway respectively, spoke against emigration that was the result of 'bad laws at home', or 'the indication and result of a vicious state of things at home'. However, each found that 'voluntary emigration' had a place and, in Heron's words, would 'continue until wages are equal in Connemara and Chicago'.¹²⁷ Neither man believed that there should be intervention to prevent such migration.

By the time departures had begun to rise again due to the repeated harvest failures in the early 1860s, the pro-emigration tone of the 'Dublin School' (perhaps 'anti-anti-emigration' is more accurate) was on the face of it more assertive.¹²⁸ John Kells Ingram argued that emigration was 'a perfectly natural consequence of economic laws acting under the new conditions of human societies', and agreed with W. Neilson Hancock, former holder of the Chairs of Political Economy at Trinity and Queen's College, Belfast, that it was 'idle to deplore emigration as necessarily a calamity'.¹²⁹ Another member affirmed that continued emigration was 'the only prompt remedy for the poverty of small farmers and working men which lies within our reach'.¹³⁰ There were dissenters from this line of thought, ranging from John Stuart Mill, who regarded the ongoing exodus as England's 'loss and disgrace', to those such as the *Saunders's Newsletter* correspondent who felt that emigration had 'reduced the number of the labouring population below the requirements of the country' to Heron, who had come to believe that 'in men is the wealth of a state'.¹³¹ However, the prevailing, *laissez-faire* view of emigration put forward by Irish economists could be seen to tie in with the views and the interests of the landed class, as demonstrated by an interjection by one of its more progressive members in *The Times* in 1866. In December of that year,

Lord Dufferin, an Ulster landowner and Whig politician, mounted a defence of his fellow landlords against the charge of exercising ‘an exterminating policy’, later expanding the argument into a pamphlet which drew heavily on statistical evidence provided by Hancock and others.¹³² A version edited for mass consumption by an approving committee of peers emphasised the central point: ‘Emigration may be occasioned by a calamity; it may be followed by disastrous consequences; but it is in itself a curative process.’¹³³

If Irish landlords thereby hoped to persuade their critics, including clerical ones, that they were not responsible for the exodus, they were destined to fail. By restating a broader economic case in favour of emigration, one that was even then losing its near-consensus status among political economists, they merely seemed to confirm the ‘cruel theory’ that Archbishop MacHale had earlier condemned: that where there was suffering, ‘the rich landlord is to be entirely exempt, and the poor tenant [is] to bear the whole weight of adverse and tempestuous seasons’.¹³⁴ Any improvement in the economy wrought thus far by emigration, claimed the bishops, had come by increasing the land given over to cattle and sheep at the expense of people.¹³⁵ As the Bishop of Galway complained in an 1867 pastoral, emigrants were given ‘the cold assurance of heartless economists that the country needed depletion and that they should be offered up as victims for the supposed general good of society’.¹³⁶ The more moderate voice of David Moriarty, Bishop of Kerry, spelled out to Dufferin where he and his fellow landlords went awry:

Your Lordship and the Irish landlords must get rid of the notion that we have too large a population, and that emigration is a positive good. [...] It does great harm when landlords and especially noblemen connected with the government of the country speak of it with favour. It is always interpreted as indicating a hatred of the Celtic race, a desire to get rid of them.¹³⁷

Church of Ireland clergy reacted to Dufferin’s intervention somewhat differently, as connections with the Dublin School suggested they might. Whately aside, a paper by Thomas Jordan, a Dublin-based curate, to the Statistical Society in 1856 had indicated that an acceptance of the economic desirability of emigration still came readily even to many lower-ranked Protestant clergy.¹³⁸ Sure enough, Michael Keating re-emerged, warmly greeting Dufferin’s ‘excellent’ *Times* article and sending him papers from his Limerick Emigrants’

Friend Society days.¹³⁹ William Edwards, a Donegal rector, also wrote to Dufferin, pressing the point that advances in shipping and the consequent cheapness of travel could be held responsible for any recent upsurge in departures. In that sense, they were a natural phenomenon, further encouraged by higher wages in America. He added, in a swipe at Catholic anti-emigration rhetoric, that since so many others had gone to Britain, it was apparent that 'a very large number of those whom agitators describe as being driven from the country by the tyranny of England, have in fact been driven by her into a closer contact with herself'.¹⁴⁰ The Anglican Bishop of Ossory appeared more understanding of Catholic feelings that emigration was 'the most grievous of all calamities', but was evidently moderating his stance in an attempt to protect his own bailiwick. Catholic clergy, he asserted, 'know very well that of all the many thousands who leave the Irish shores year after year, there is not even a single one driven from his country by the Established church'. The Bishop insisted that priests should concentrate on bringing about a change in landlord-tenant relations if they wished to stop emigration; a campaign for disestablishment would be a distraction.¹⁴¹

Presbyterian churchmen regarded emigration with a little more caution. One periodical had joined in the early belief that the lessening of the population since the Famine had led the country 'to a height of prosperity unprecedented in all its former history', and William Hancock alluded to 'the favour with which emigration is still viewed amongst Presbyterians' when he drew attention to a plan for Presbyterian settlement in New Zealand being promoted by clergy in several congregations in 1863.¹⁴² However, it is likely that Hancock was reading too much into what may well have been a one-off initiative to safeguard the religious and moral welfare of those for whom emigration was the only alternative to the workhouse, and in that sense, like similar, cross-denominational attempts to relieve unemployed weavers, was not a whole-hearted endorsement of emigration as a permanent means of relief.¹⁴³ Certainly, those Presbyterian ministers who attended Tenant Right meetings – and in Ulster they were many – offered a similar critique to their Catholic counterparts.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, on the eve of the passage of Gladstone's first Land Act, a General Assembly delegate expressed a hope that this 'full satisfaction' would remove any further need for emigration from Presbyterian congregations.¹⁴⁵

The final efflorescence of sustained controversy over emigration, and perhaps the most intensive, came once again during a period

of economic depression. A run of poor harvests in 1877–79 created particular distress along the agriculturally unmodernised western seaboard. This led to an increased outflow of emigrants, but also catalysed aggrieved tenant farmers and their political allies into a full-scale ‘war’ for land reform.¹⁴⁶ Into this maelstrom was pitched a renewed enthusiasm for organised migration, encouraged by parallel developments in Britain, and driven in Ireland primarily by the efforts of two philanthropists, Belfast educationalist Vere Foster and James Hack Tuke, a Yorkshire Quaker.¹⁴⁷ While Foster acted as personal benefactor to thousands of single Irishwomen, expanding activities he had first begun during the Famine, Tuke ran the first scheme since Robert Wilmot Horton’s in the 1820s to extract significant Treasury funding, which was used to migrate whole families from Connacht to North America. To that extent, Tuke, despite a previous aversion to emigration that had been praised by no less than the rebel Fenian priest Patrick Lavelle, proved the more strategically minded of the two.¹⁴⁸ Like previous emigration advocates, Tuke hoped his method would free up small, uneconomical holdings and bring about land consolidation as a precursor to permanent recovery.¹⁴⁹

Both schemes attracted clerical attention. Indeed, Foster’s demanded it, since he issued passage money vouchers to each of the more than twenty thousand women he aided only on application by a local teacher or religious minister.¹⁵⁰ In the early 1880s, upwards of a thousand clergymen of all denominations co-operated, though some more enthusiastically than others.¹⁵¹ The Church of Ireland clergymen among them, on the whole appeared to regard emigration as ‘the only real remedy for our condition’, with one Roscommon vicar anxious to see state colonisation. ‘I advocated emigration after the Famine of 1846 to 52’, he told Foster, ‘and if my advice had then been taken [and] ships put on the water for free emigration instead of Poor Houses built the country would be better off this day’.¹⁵² Catholic clergy, if Foster’s printed publicity for the scheme was to be taken at face value, held similar pro-emigration opinions.¹⁵³ However, he quoted from their letters rather selectively, leaving out any statements against emigration, and most priests seemed more concerned about the welfare of individual emigrants than any broader notions of lessening an excessive Irish population in preparation for economic recovery.¹⁵⁴ For evident geographic reasons, few Presbyterian clergymen corresponded with Foster, but contemporary periodicals confirm that the notion of a surplus population found supporters in some corners, and

that, where it did not, there remained a sense that those for whom there was nothing at home should consider leaving.¹⁵⁵

While Tuke's early charitable efforts met with a similarly benign clerical reception, including the praise of some Presbyterian ministers, it was clear that as soon as government finance was provided in the form of a £100,000 grant in mid-1882, the Catholic Church turned decisively against him.¹⁵⁶ With his close personal connection to the Chief Secretary, W. E. Forster, and his committee of English Liberal MPs and Irish gentlemen, Tuke suddenly appeared to personify the worst spectres of nationalist rhetoric. He partly confirmed one priest's typical claim at a Land League meeting that Ireland was now home to 'fat cattle and famishing Christians [...] emigration schemes and cattle shows', and by removing entire families he was open to the popular charge of 'emigration by wholesale', and of depopulation masquerading as philanthropy.¹⁵⁷ Clergy and bishops of the west therefore united in railing against the Tuke committee,¹⁵⁸ and in July 1883 a joint pastoral was issued by the entire Catholic hierarchy, condemning the state-aided emigration as 'unwise and impolitic' and tending 'only to promote disaffection amongst the Irish race at home and abroad'.¹⁵⁹ To the new Archbishop of Tuam, John McEvilly 'the determination of the Government to transport our people to Canada' was 'the most terrible curse'.¹⁶⁰

A further twist came in October when a 'confidential circular' prepared by members of Tuke's committee, and proposing to put state-aided emigration on a more permanent footing, was leaked to the press. It was duly described as 'the production of hell itself', and attracted the opprobrium of western deaneries and of McEvilly.¹⁶¹ So great was the outcry that Dublin Castle officials felt the need to explain themselves in an open letter to McEvilly, assuring him that the proposals had not even been seen by them and did not reflect the government's true intentions.¹⁶² Although grudgingly accepted by all concerned, a suspicion lingered that the circular had provided an accurate 'glimpse into the mind of government'.¹⁶³ Nevertheless, the embarrassment of this incident may have helped persuade Parliament to split the next grant to Tuke's committee and in so doing may have heralded the ultimate undoing of the emigration scheme.¹⁶⁴ In 1883, £50,000 was given to Tuke's efforts, and another £50,000 towards what had long been the Catholic spokesmen's favoured alternative to emigration: home colonisation.¹⁶⁵

This incarnation of 'migration', as distinct from emigration, derived

chiefly from a suggestion of the agriculturalist Thomas Baldwin before the Richmond Commission in 1881, and found its strongest support in the Catholic Church. Baldwin initially believed that his plan for internal migration from the 'congested districts' of the west to other parts of Ireland, supplemented by a measure of emigration, would be accepted by the bishops 'in the interests of humanity'.¹⁶⁶ However, the evidence of the Bishop of Clonfert before the same body contradicted him. Patrick Duggan insisted that 'no matter how well carried out' he would never support a scheme involving emigration. 'I have other reasons besides economic ones', he explained in a telling phrase.¹⁶⁷ Several other bishops communicated the same point to Baldwin once his plans were published. Internal migration alone could relieve the region, they felt, and there would be no need for 'deportation' on top of that.¹⁶⁸ MPs had therefore consulted several western bishops on migration before granting funds, and following their allocation and the formation of the Land Purchase Company which was to carry out the project, bishops and clergy entered into its promotion with great zeal.¹⁶⁹ Mass public meetings were arranged and chaired by prelates, while deaneries issued supportive statements and several clergymen bought shares in the company, including Bishop Michael Logue of Raphoe who took 1,500.¹⁷⁰ All seemed to agree with the hastily clarified remark of Baldwin, who was appointed director of the company, that 'if emigration was a remedy for the ills of Ireland they would have been cured long since'.¹⁷¹ Finally, it appeared, a panacea for poverty and distress that would keep people at home was being applied. After a short burst of activity, however, the migration project came to nothing. Like the Protestant Colonisation Society of fifty years earlier, the migration company bought up land but that was found to be unsuitable and was publicly criticised by Michael Davitt as 'no bargain'.¹⁷² No families were settled and by the end of 1884, with no alternative land having been found, all impetus seemed to have been lost.¹⁷³ It should be noted that the Congested Districts Board, with which both Catholic and Protestant clergy closely co-operated, undertook migration and wasteland reclamation in the 1890s, but not without considerable difficulty and expense.¹⁷⁴

Through these successive phases of the heaviest emigration from Ireland we can trace significant changes in clerical perceptions of its usefulness and desirability. A majority of all clergy in the 1830s believed that emigration could form part of the solution to Ireland's problems and were open to its encouragement, direction or organi-

sation, whether by the state or by private bodies. Before 1845, only a coterie of rather extreme Protestant clergy appeared to offer any sustained criticism of emigration as a means of relief, upbraiding landlords and government for the negligence and lack of fellow feeling that allowed thousands of their brethren to be expatriated. After the Famine, whatever echoes of that sentiment remained were all but drowned out by a strikingly similar, but much greater outpouring of Catholic anger. Any trust of government, of landlords, or of the brands of political economy to which they subscribed, had been comprehensively shattered by their woefully inadequate and doctrinaire responses to the Famine. Emigration was now 'depopulation', 'deportation' or 'extermination'. It had become a problem requiring a solution, rather than a solution to a problem.

Notes

- 1 Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, p. 345; Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration*, p. 30.
- 2 Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration*, p. 17.
- 3 Robert Southey, *Essays Moral and Political* (2 vols, London, 1832), ii, p. 275; N. H. Carter, *Letters from Europe, comprising the Journal of a Tour through Ireland, England, Scotland, France, Italy, and Switzerland, in the years 1825, '26, and '27* (2 vols, New York, 1827), i, p. 213.
- 4 Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved*, pp. 38–51; Peter Solar, 'Why Ireland starved: a critical review of the econometric results' in *I.E.S.H.*, xi (1984), 110; Liam Kennedy, 'Studies in Irish econometric history' in *I.H.S.* xxiii: 91 (May 1983), 201–5.
- 5 Those who did reject the centrality of the overpopulation thesis included J. R. Elmore and George Poulett Scrope. J. R. Elmore, *Letters to the Right Hon. the Earl of Darnley, on the State of Ireland, in Advocacy of Free Trade and other Measures of Practical Improvement, more especially calculated to supersede the Necessity of Emigration* (London, 1828); [G. Poulett Scrope], 'The political economists' in *Quarterly Review*, xlv (Jan. 1831), 1–52.
- 6 Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?: England 1783–1846* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 335–6.
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