

State of this question at the beginning of the year.

More power of control ascribed to the Government than would be possible.

No means of selection.

No passports in this country.

No means of detaining and lodging such multitudes of emigrants.

ther the Government ought not to have proposed special legislation for the extraordinary circumstances of this year. This is a question which, in the main, must belong to higher authority than ours; but we will offer a few observations. We had proposed in the winter, as will be within Lord Grey's recollection, a Consolidated Act embodying some improvements which we thought desirable, and we afterwards selected from it, by his Lordship's desire, such clauses as appeared to us to be more immediately wanted; but we cannot for a moment say that we think that if either the longer Bill had been brought into Parliament, or the shorter one had been passed at an earlier stage of the Session than actually took place, either could have prevented the sweeping misfortunes of this season. The fact is, that at the commencement of the year, no fever whatever having yet appeared, and the existing law having been found sufficient in the greatest seasons of emigration—a starving people being at the same time about to fly from famine to a land which promised plenty—it is hardly to be conceived that any Government could have proposed, or that the public would ever have received, those stringent and almost prohibitory enactments which alone could have afforded even a chance of preventing the disease which appeared in the summer. The fever, as we mentioned before, frequently broke out almost immediately after departure. Plainly showing that it depended on no faults within the ship, but that it was taken out from the place of departure. We doubt whether any measure whatever would have been efficient except some one which either directly or indirectly compelled the great majority of the emigrants altogether to relinquish their purpose.

In the expectations of efficacy from public measures on this subject, it seems too often to be assumed, as is remarked before, that emigrants to North America must in some way be selected by, or fall under the direct power of the Government. Complaints are expressed that so many poor people go, that so many weak people go, that they are not more effectually compelled to observe good order and cleanliness on board—all these remarks assuming some authority on the part of the Government in these matters; but no such authority exists. A large number of ships go to North America for timber and other cargo; a great number of people having the means at their command, pay the price for which the masters are willing to give them a passage, and, except in so far as any broad and general rules of protection may be laid down by law, it is difficult to see how the Government could interfere with this practice. No system of passports exists in our country. It would be contrary to all its usages that any of the Queen's subjects having the means of payment in their possession, should be prohibited from passing from one part of her dominions to another.

And even if the principle were conceded, it is necessary to bear in mind, the immense extent of the operations which would have required to be dealt with, and the difficulty of controlling a people flying from starvation. From all parts of Ireland, during the second quarter of this year, nearly 150,000 persons were streaming towards the ports of embarkation, many of them having been for months preparing for the expedition, having thrown up any employment or lands which they previously had, and by an arrangement which in the main is very salutary, having already selected their ship, and paid for their passage. At what stage of their progress were these vast multitudes to have been arrested? Were they to have been sent back to the homes at which, if they had possessed any means of subsistence before, they must have parted with them in coming away? or, if they were to be detained at the ports for observation, could suitable buildings have been found apart from the risk of fresh infection, to lodge 40,000 or 50,000 people month after month? and would the public at large have undertaken to support during their detention those people, a large part of whom had expended their last means in providing merely for the journey and the voyage?

We confess that after reflecting on these difficulties, we are led to think, that when it had pleased Providence to afflict Ireland with a famine, and consequent fever, which could not be subdued even on the land, it was little likely that any human contrivance could have averted the same evil from the multitudes who had made their arrangements for a long passage by sea.