

population of those districts greatly exceeds the number for whom profitable occupation can be provided. In 1837, the inhabitants of the Western Highlands appear to have been reduced almost to the extremities of famine, from which they were relieved only by the charitable interference of external aid; and from all the most recent accounts which have been brought under my notice, I am induced to believe that they are now exposed to a recurrence of the same calamity. So strong, indeed, are the apprehensions entertained upon this subject, both by the landed proprietors and by the population at large, that there have been several recent meetings for the purpose of urging the Government to promote an extensive system of emigration from the Highlands, as the only resource which can save them from the most appalling destitution. Several petitions of a similar character have also been addressed to this House, from one of which I shall quote a short extract, as descriptive of the present condition of the Highlands, and of the feelings by which that condition is accompanied, in reference to the question of emigration. It proceeds from the town of Portree, in the island of Skye, was presented in April of the present year, and bears 688 signatures. It states, —

That the appalling state of want to which many thousands of the inhabitants of the Highlands and islands of Scotland were reduced in the year 1837, and the misery that has existed in some of the Highland districts since that period, now loudly demand the adoption of an extensive and systematic plan of emigration, as the only means of preventing a recurrence, year after year, of the same degree of frightful distress and suffering.

As it is unnecessary for me to accumulate further evidence upon a point which cannot be disputed, I now turn to Ireland, and am compelled to undertake the painful duty of presenting to the House a picture of the condition of the labouring classes in my own country.

Here, at least, it is impossible to exaggerate. Ireland is, in truth, the country which is chiefly interested in your determination to-night. Now, in asking the representatives of Great Britain to apply their best endeavour to relieve, by emigration, the superabundant and destitute population of Ireland, I will not appeal to those feelings of humanity which induce the English people to seek out objects, in every quarter of the globe, to which they may direct their benevolent exertions for the improvement of mankind; nor will I claim anything from that sense of justice which ought to remind you that almost all the evils under which

Ireland still suffers have been, either remotely or immediately, occasioned by English misgovernment; but I apply myself to the more ignoble motive of self-interest, and suggest the obvious reflection, that unless the condition of the labouring classes in Ireland be elevated to that standard of comfort which is the right of every human being, it will follow, as an unavoidable consequence, that the working population of England must be reduced to the same level of misery and indigence as theirs. It is contrary to every law which regulates the social system to suppose that, in two countries so closely united, there can permanently exist two separate scales by which English and Irish labour shall be differently remunerated.

Evidence respecting the destitution of the working classes in Ireland is scarcely needed. It is to be found in every authentic document which describes the condition of that country. Three years have scarcely elapsed since a parliamentary Commission of Inquiry reported to this House that it might be computed that about 2,385,000 persons, connected with the labouring population, are in distress for thirty weeks in the year, from the want of employment. In the same Report, the Commissioners of Poor Inquiry estimate that, in England, 1,055,982 agricultural labourers create agricultural produce to the value of 150,000,000*l.* per annum, whilst, in Ireland, 1,131,715 produce to the value of only 36,000,000*l.* They also calculate that, as the cultivated land in England may be estimated at 34,250,000 acres, whilst the cultivated land of Ireland is 14,600,000 acres, there are five labourers in Ireland for every two labourers in England engaged in the cultivation of any given quantity of land. If, therefore, there were the same proportion of labourers to land in Ireland as in England, then about 450,000 labourers would be required for its cultivation, whereas, in 1831, there were 1,131,715. These results are so startling, that, I own, I view them with some distrust. But the rate of wages affords an infallible test by which we may measure the redundancy of the population, as compared with the means of employment. Now, I state, with confidence, to the House, as well from my own personal observation as from innumerable sources which cannot be questioned, that the average wages of the Irish labourer, throughout the greater part of that kingdom, do not amount, throughout the year, to 3*s.* per week, — I ought, perhaps, rather to say, to 2*s.* 6*d.* My assertion cannot be contested, when I