Chapter XXV from "A History of the Irish Settlers in North America from the Earliest Period to the Census of 1850," 1852

New States of the North-West – Senators Cass and Fitzgerald, of Michigan, Allen, of Ohio, and Hannegan, of Indiana – Hon. Mr. Ryan, of Illinois – Hugh O'Neil, of Indiana – The Dowlings – Lieutenant-Governor Byrne, of Wisconsin – Irish Pioneers in Iowa – Reflections.

The six states carved out of the north-western Indian territories since the beginning of this century, have been the favorite goals of all recent emigration. The facilities of transit offered by the canals and railroads leading from the old Atlantic States westward, and the adaptations of the west for agriculture, attracted and made easy the progress of the Celtic multitude. If, in our own age, this young nation has been able to export its superfluous breadstuffs to the other side of the Atlantic, one of the chief causes is to be found in the constant supply of cheap Irish labor, which, for fifty years, has been poured along all the avenues of the west. If, moreover, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin and Iowa, have done much to increase the wealth and glory of the Union, a large share of the historical honor is due to Irish fugitives from British oppression, and their more fortunate sons, born as freemen.

A glance at the growth of the general population, since the reclamation of the North-west, will enable us to estimate, in one way, its importance to the Union. In 1800 the "Union" counted 5,305,625 souls; in 1810, 7,239,814; in 1820, 9,654,596; in 1830, 12,868,020; in 1840, 17,069,453; in 1850, about 23,250,000. Not only has the increase been mainly in the North-west, but the abundant produce of that fertile region has fed and distended even the older states. For every emigrant who goes up the lakes in spring, an increase of produce, or its price, comes down in harvest. The army of labor makes an annual campaign, and gives a good account of itself in every engagement with the wilderness, and the desolation of ancient barrenness. The host that unfurled its standard at Bunker's Hill, and took the British colors down at Yorktown, is scarcely more entitled to be called the army of liberation, than this emigrant multitude, who, armed with the implements of labor, smite the forest from the morning until the evening, and plant, in advance of the ages to come, the starry banner of the nation against the frontier skies.

Who constitutes this host? In every case it has been nearly half Irish. Until 1819, there was, unfortunately, no customs record of emigrant arrivals; until the Atlantic States, within ten years back, appointed local Commissioners of Emigration, we had no exact returns of the classes and origin of those who did arrive. But the names of men and places, the number of Catholic churches erected in, and the Irish feelings represented by, the public men of the west, enable us to estimate the share of that people in the population of the six new states of that quarter.*

**Certainly one half of the recent arrivals from Ireland has been added to the population of the Western States. How large a proportion these bear to all other settlers, may be conjectured by the following summary of the arrivals at New York alone, which we take from the Annual Reports of the Commissioners of Emigration for that State, for 1848, '49, '50.*

Passengers arriving in New York in the years ending 31st of December, 1848, 1849, and 1850, for whom commutation and hospital money was paid. (Americans not included.)

Countries	1848	1849	1850
Ireland	98,061	112,561	117,038
Germany	51,973	55,705	45,535
England	23,062	28,321	28,163
Scotland	6,415	8,840	6,772
France	2,734	2,683	3,462
Switzerland	1,622	1,405	2,380
Holland	1,560	2,447	1,173
Norway	1,207	3,300	3,150
Wales	1,054	1,782	1,520

In the United States Senate, Michigan has been represented by Generals Cass and Fitzgerald, both of Irish origin; Ohio was long represented by Mr. Allen, still in the vigor of his public life,– a man of real ability, and not only by blood, but by sympathy, allied to the fatherland of Burke and O'Connell. Indiana has sent to the same assembly Edward A. Hannegan, some time minister to Berlin; and Illinois is now represented by James Shields. The popular branch of Congress has also been largely recruited by men, of Irish parentage of birth, from the same region. In the thirty-second Congress there were forty such representatives.

Of the six states, Illinois has been distinguished for the number of its Irish public servants. Not only in the national councils, but in the not less important duties of organizing the finances and establishing the credit of Illinois, some of our emigrants have performed important services to their adopted state. Of these, one, for his industry and abilities, deserves particular mention. In 1842, the late Mr. Ryan, then a very young man, was elected to the State Senate, for the district including La Salle, Grundy, and Kendall counties. The services he rendered are related by an Illinois journal:–

"The election of Mr. Ryan, at this time, as subsequent events have shown, was a fortunate one for our state. At that dark period of her history the state was bankrupt in means and credit. Involved in debt to the amount of about sixteen millions of dollars, there was no hope that she could ever pay any part of that sum unless further means could be obtained to bring the canal, the most available part of her property, into use.

"Mr. Ryan, then, although but twenty-five years of age, was probably as well informed, in regard to the present and prospective resources of the state, as any man in it. Conceiving that is was necessary to complete the canal in order to save the state, and that the money for its completion must be obtained from eastern or foreign capitalists, he justly deemed that it was a necessary, in advance of any legislation, to convince those parties that a further advance of money to the state of Illinois was a proper, a prudent measure, on their part. With this view, he, immediately after his election, in August, 1842, proceeded to New York, and so well did he succeed in effecting his object, that, aided by the advice and assistance of Mr. Arthur Bronson, now deceased, Mr. Justin Butterfield, now Commissioner of the General Land Office, and others, he matured the plan of the canal law of 1843, for raising the sum of sixteen hundred thousand dollars for completing the canal. On his entrance into the Senate, in December, 1842, he introduced the bill, which was, during that session, passed into a law. Strange as it may now seem, the bill was violently assailed, and it required all the information, talents, and zeal of Mr. Ryan to secure its passage.

"Upon its becoming a law, Mr. Ryan, who had been thus instrumental in devising the plan upon which it was founded, and in carrying it thus far into execution, was deemed, by common consent, the most proper person to procure the loan proposed to be raised by the law. Accordingly he was appointed to this honorable and responsible agency, by the late Governor Ford, in the spring of 1843, with Mr. Charles Oakley, who was appointed his colleague. He proceeded immediately to England, where, after overcoming many serious obstacles, they were at length successful in effecting the loan of $600,000, which secured the completion of the canal.

"The mass of information with which Mr. Ryan had stored his mind, in relation to the resources of Illinois, together with is powers of argument, contributed largely to their success. After having secured the attention of the foreign capitalists to his facts and arguments, he was desired to submit to them a written statement of the facts which had been the subject of their discussion, and was assured, if Mr. Ryan and Mr. Oakley could verify those facts to such agents as these parties might send to Illinois, the amount asked for should be furnished.

"In compliance with this arrangement, Governor John Davis, of Mass., and Captain Swift, one of the present Canal Trustees, came to Illinois, and, after six weeks' substantially, all the representations that had been made by Mr. Ryan and Mr. Oakley.

"Soon afterwards, in the latter part of the year 1845, Mr. Ryan, having thus devoted himself for three years to the service of the state, with a zeal and vigor that could not be surpassed, and a judgment and discretion that resulted in complete success, felt that some attention to his own business was necessary.

"The supposed mineral riches of the shores of Lake Superior at that time attracted much attention; Mr. Ryan devoted himself to mining, and was engaged in that pursuit, in Pennsylvania, at the time of his death.

"He had just succeeded in his pursuits to such an extent as to be able to turn his eyes towards the prairies of his own beautiful state, with the hope of soon again making them his home, when the inexorable fate which awaits us all interposed her fiat, and terminated his career.

"Thus has Illinois lost, in the prime and vigor of his manhood, one of her most gifted and devoted sons,– rich in every endowment that gives value and dignity to humanity. In intellect, among the first; in goodness of heart, surpassed by none. Elegant and accomplished in his manners, wherever he has been, and in whatever position he has been placed, he has always commanded the respect and admiration of those who knew him. There was a charm in his manners that seemed to possess a mysterious influence over all who approached him. But by those to whom he was best known was he the best beloved. Those only who knew him well could know the full worth of his character."

In Indiana, the families of Gorman, or O'Gorman, the Browns,– two of whose cadets are now in Congress,– were among the pioneers. The family of O'Neils, originally settled in Carolina, and still represented there by the Hon. John Belton O'Neil, a jurist and scholar of high attainments, early branched off into Indiana. Hugh O'Neil, of this stock, was educated in the University of that State, at Bloomington, and studied law at Indianapolis. He is now (1852), in his fortieth year, United States District Attorney for Indiana.

Thomas and John Dowling, of the same state, have long been known, in its local politics, as editors and legislators. Thomas is now one of the three trustees of the state debt; John holds an important

office in the Department of Indian Affairs, at Washington, in which bureau he was preceded by his countryman, James Shields, now general and senator.*

**An obliging friend, long a resident of Indiana, in answer to our inquiries, writes:– "The truth is, Indiana is full of the descendants of Irishmen. I scarcely ever was in a crowd of the old residents, four fifths of whom did not proudly boast of their Celtic origin. The first Constitution of the State was formed by a convention, in which were several natives of the 'old sod.'"*

Wisconsin, admitted in 1848, has, at this present writing, a numerous and influential Irish population. Many of its new towns are almost exclusively occupied and governed by that class of citizens. The town of Benton is of this number, being founded, in 1844, by Mr. Dennis Murphy, a native of Wexford, who afterwards represented the county in the State Senate. In Milwaukie (sic), the Irish citizens are very numerous, and several of them, as Dr. James Johnson, are large proprietors of city property.

One of the most honorable reputations made in Wisconsin, is that of the Hon. Timothy Byrne, a native of Dublin, born in 1819. His parents settled in New York, in 1820, from which Mr. Byrne removed, in 1836, to Wisconsin Territory. From 1846 to 1849, he was a member of the Legislature; in 1849 and 1850, he was one of the commissioners for the improvement of the Fox and Wisconsin rivers; and in 1851, though his party was defeated, he was elected lieutenant-governor by a majority of five thousand. Thus, at the age of thirty-three years, he fills the second office of his adopted state, without any of the factitious aids of party support.

Iowa, the most recent of the states (except California), excels them all in her Irish predilections. In 1851, she gave the names of Matthew, O'Brien, Mitchel, and Emmett, to four of her newly surveyed counties. Her State Legislature has always had Irish members, and her Irish citizens exercise a controlling influence. The venerable pioneer, Patrick Quigley, Judge Corkery (a native of Cork), and others of the first brigade of emigrants, were mainly instrumental in producing this gratifying state of feeling in Iowa.

To win respect for a fallen race - to straighten the way of the stranger, and prepare a favorable public opinion to receive him - to watch over the growing passions of a young state – to direct wisely less experienced emigrants who follow - to found churches, towns and reputations – these are the great opportunities of early settlers. Need we add that, to affect all or any of these ends of American life, great judgment, forbearance, and energy are required. No "free-and-easy" philosophy will serve in this undertaking; no living from hand to mouth; no pot-house celebrity, will suffice. For a thousand years – until the population of the South Seas – there will not be such opportunities in the world again as are now open to the Irish in America. In another generation we will be too late,– we will be forestalled and shut out. The continent is being administered,– the dividend of a new world is about to be declared; but those only who are wise, patient and united, can obtain any considerable per centage (sic).

In the older states, many obstacles exist to the successful establishment in life of emigrants. The best farms and trades are all taken up by the native inhabitants, whose capital and connexions (sic) give them some facilities denied to the foreigner. But there are not half a dozen states in the whole Union of which this is generally true. Let not indolence plead such an excuse. There are characters, homes and fortunes, still to be made, by honest labor, in America. In what varieties of struggling were not the men engaged whose history we have sketched! What difficulties had not they, in their time, to overcome! Some were sold for a term of years to pay their passage- money; others lived in perpetual apprehension of Indian invasion; almost all were friendless and moneyless, on their first landing on these shores. Do you read this book to gratify vanity, or to furnish food for stump speeches? Alas! If so, friend, you do the book, the writer, and yourself a great wrong. It was written with a far other and far higher object: to make us sensible that we had predecessors in America whose example was

instructive, to induce us to compare what they did and were with what we are and ought to do. If it serves not this purpose in a degree, better it never was written or read.

This torrent of emigration from Ireland to America must, in a few years abate its force; it cannot go on as it has gone. Whatever we can do for ourselves, as a people, in North America, must be done before the close of this century, or the epitaph of our race will be written in the west with the single sentence –

“Too Late!”