

**IRISH TRANSATLANTIC PACKET
STATION. REPORT OF THE DUBLIN
COMMITTEE CONSIDERED AND
MR. WHITESIDE'S STATEMENT
REVIEWED**

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Irish transatlantic packet station. Report of the Dublin committee considered and Mr. Whiteside's statement reviewed by Various

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VARIOUS

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IRISH TRANSATLANTIC PACKET STATION.

REPORT OF THE DUBLIN COMMITTEE CONSIDERED,

AND

MR. WHITESIDE'S STATEMENT REVIEWED,

WITH

REMARKS ON THE RELATIVE ADVANTAGES

OF THE

SHANNON AND GALWAY BAY.

"I did not fail to remark the capacities of your noble river, navigable by steam for two hundred miles. I also made such observations as I could in our rapid passage on the Harbour of Foyens, which seemed to me capable of being reached at any time of the tide, and of affording shelter, with a sufficient depth of water, to the largest ships. I observed also a pier and a wharf for large steamers, and I was particularly struck with the magnificent dock under construction at Limerick, which when finished must prove of the greatest advantage to your interesting city."—HON. ARBON LAWRENCE, *Minister for the United States.*

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1852.

IRISH TRANSATLANTIC PACKET STATION.

THE Report of the Committee appointed last August in Dublin, to inquire into the expediency of forming an Irish Transatlantic Packet Company, has now been some weeks before the public, and the readers of that important document cannot fail to observe the intelligence and general impartiality with which the inquiry of the Committee has been conducted, and, what is of equal if not still greater importance, the prudent conclusions with which they have terminated their labours. The Committee, it appears, have collected information from every source, and after a deliberate and calm inquiry, they have arrived at the conclusion, that the general question of the expediency of a Packet Station on the coast of Ireland admits of no reasonable doubt; that the mode in which the subject had been treated by the late Packet Station Commission did not possess the confidence of the country; that topics of paramount national importance have been overlooked; and the interests of this great commercial empire, no less than those of the whole civilized world, demand the early realization of this project. As regards the expediency of forming an Irish Steam Packet Company, with a capital of £500,000, as suggested by the Dublin Meeting, it should be remembered, that two powerful Companies at present exist in Liverpool alone, subsidized by their respective governments, having a well appointed fleet of steamers, and that for a new association to rush into unequal competition with companies so sustained, would be most unwise;

that without the support of the state, granted for the transmission of the mails, (an object fully justifying the appropriation of national funds,) it would be most hazardous; that the safest course appeared to be, to test the question by the experiment of a first-class vessel, in order to convince the Government and the English people by the practical result; and that although this would be productive of some delay, yet that such delay was preferable to a contest, premature and unequal, leading to defeat. Such is the result of an inquiry, conducted by men of high mercantile character, and the country will read their Report with deep interest, and will feel bound to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to the Committee for the patient and laborious attention which has been bestowed upon the inquiry.

But whilst the Report itself is distinguished by all the impartiality which the supporters of the different rival ports could desire, it is much to be regretted that the interests involved in a question, upon which the people of Ireland have so strongly fixed their hopes, should have been risked by the indiscreet zeal of a member of the Committee, who, displaying the ingenuity of an able advocate, where the faculties of a judge would have been more appropriate, has applied his high talent in pleading the cause of a particular port, with all the zeal which he could have displayed for his most favoured client. However highly his professional abilities are estimated, the public, in a case like the present, would prefer the testimony of one experienced navigator or scientific engineer, to all the subtle sophistry of the Four Courts, or of Westminster Hall. Nor is the learned gentleman's want of nautical or engineering knowledge supplied by local information; for it does not appear that he has ever visited the Shannon, against which noble estuary he so dogmatically decides.

The resolutions of the public meeting clearly define the subject of inquiry referred to the Committee, namely, the consideration of the general question, of a western harbour, without reference to the selection of any one particular port; for the determination of which latter point, it was quite obvious the Committee were not a competent tribunal. It was a question demanding the utmost skill of the engineer, and the experience of the seaman; but yet

here we find a learned gentleman, necessarily more familiar with points of law than with the points of the compass—with the dicta of judges, than with Admiralty charts—with the orders of court, than with sailing directions, who “rushes in where pilots fear to tread.” Had the learned lawyer listened to the friendly advice and gentle remonstrance of the distinguished commercial gentlemen, his colleagues in this important inquiry, it would have been more prudent. *Civis creditur in arte sua*, is a wise legal maxim; and if the experienced mercantile members of the Committee had undertaken to determine an abstruse question of the law of real property, it is not very likely that they would have increased their high and well merited reputation. A careful summing up of the evidence taken before the Commissioners would, indeed, have been most important. But this would have been the function of a judge, and not that of an advocate. To weigh the claims and defend the rights of Ireland was surely a nobler office than to appear as counsel for the Ten Tribes. It is true the Committee have found themselves compelled publicly to disown any participation in the report offered to them by their learned colleague, and the author might, under ordinary circumstances, be left to the inferences suggested by their disclaimer; but where a report is circulated on the authority of a high name—a report which, professing to deal with facts, quotes exclusively from the evidence which answers its own purpose, it becomes indispensable that the public should have the fairest opportunity given them of weighing the testimony on the other side of the question.

Before proceeding to examine the report presented by the learned advocate, but treated somewhat unceremoniously by the Committee, it may be well to state, that the whole of the Committee were invited during their inquiry, to visit the two ports, of the Shannon and Galway, selected by the Royal Commissioners as possessing the highest qualifications for Transatlantic purposes. Almost all the members of the Committee took advantage of this opportunity of making themselves acquainted with our harbours: in this tour of duty they were, however, unaided by their learned brother. When some authentic documents respecting the siege of Malta were offered to

the historian Vertot, he rejected them, saying, "*mon siège est fait.*" His report was already written. "Facts," says the proverb, "are stubborn things," and therefore are, like other stubborn things, better avoided. But where facts are avoided, it is somewhat rash, that a conclusive opinion should be expressed. In the present case it should be borne in mind, that it is the very individual who disdained to visit our ports, and to whom their capabilities are even still unknown, who separates himself from his colleagues on the Committee, and presents himself to the public as the fittest person to adjudicate between the nautical advantages of different harbours.

The course adopted by the learned gentleman presents a contrast with the more comprehensive views of Lord Monteagle, whose letters appear in the appendix to the Report. It surely would have been more logical to have exhibited the injustice done to the general case of Ireland by the Commissioners' Report—an injustice done by their errors, and still more by their omissions—than to have undertaken the more limited and less generous task of advocating a local interest. The foundation of all expectation of success lies in demonstrating that it is for the interest of Great Britain as well as of Ireland, of our noble Colonies no less than of the United States, that the acceleration of the correspondence should be effected without delay. This was a service to Ireland which it would have been glorious to have accomplished, and creditable to have attempted. It would have been a work worthy of a patriot and a statesman. This great opportunity was unfortunately missed by Mr. Whiteside; and his error, besides producing other evils, has rendered this somewhat controversial reply indispensable, for where one party has spoken, it is but justice that the other should be heard.

In stating the grounds upon which Mr. Whiteside bases the claims of Galway "for the approval or disapproval of his fellow-citizens," much stress is laid upon an imaginary network of projected railways, put forward for public notice and patronage. These railways, it appears, are to radiate from Galway as a centre, and are to extend in all directions throughout the country: one of eighty-one miles in length to Arnagh; another of forty-five miles to Londonderry; another, about sixty miles, to Limerick; another of fifty

or sixty miles to Sligo; the whole involving an expenditure of about two millions and a half sterling—a startling estimate to provide for, in the judgment of practical men like the commercial members of the Committee who inquired into this subject in Dublin. But two or three millions form but a slight obstacle in the eyes of this zealous advocate. He describes these lines as if they were at present in actual operation, and adding the functions of the poet to those of the lawyer, confounds the past, present, and future. These lines, for the most part, would run in directions transverse to existing lines of traffic, where scarcely the humblest vehicle that plies upon our common roads finds support. Moreover, one of these lines, (that to connect Mullingar or Longford with Armagh,) would run almost in the very track of a line of canal, more than forty miles in length, which is at this moment in process of construction by the Government, to unite the Shannon at Leitrim with Lough Erne at Bel-turbet, and by this means to supply the only link wanting to connect the navigations of the north with those of the south, and to bring into direct communication Belfast and Limerick, together with all the intermediate towns in both provinces. A considerable portion of this line is now traversed daily by swift steamers, and it is obvious that any line of railway in that direction would not only affect important private interests, such as the Ulster Canal, &c., but would render useless a large public outlay, at this moment appropriated to the formation of this new "Junction Canal." What is, however, a more general and cogent objection is, that the traffic in this case proposed to be forwarded is already provided for.

But in order more fully to appreciate the folly of this scheme, it is only necessary to recal the struggles and expenditure of capital that have been made, during the last few years, to connect the chief towns of the country, and that even to this day, the line between Dublin and Belfast, the two most important towns in Ireland, remains incomplete, although years have elapsed since the parliamentary powers for its construction were obtained. The proprietors of this line will, doubtless, after so long a struggle, look forward, on its completion, to the traffic that will arise in the event of the establishment of a packet

station on our shores, and will watch, with jealous anxiety, any rival to their legitimate interests in this traffic; whilst the public will naturally inquire, why so large an expenditure as that now in progress in forming the Junction Canal, should be paralysed by the suggestion of a system of unproductive railways. Besides, the completion of these lines at so vast an expenditure, would not accelerate the intercourse between Belfast and Galway more than an hour and a-half, the difference of distance between the proposed direct route and that *via* Dublin, being, according to this writer's own showing, only forty-seven miles; and as, on the same authority, the difference in time between Belfast and Galway and Belfast and Foynes, amounts to only a few minutes, it is clear that, considering the question in reference to the communication with the north of Ireland and Scotland, these two ports stand at present on a par. But if the question is to be considered merely in its action on particular localities, there can be no difficulty in showing, that if Belfast could be brought, with this large expenditure, nearer to Galway by one hour and a-half, (between which towns there is not at present any trade whatever,) yet, by adopting the Shannon, all the advantages proffered to Scotland, Belfast, and the metropolis of Ireland, may be preserved and augmented, with the saving of some millions, and at the same time, London, Gloucester, Bristol, and the whole of the southern district of England, can be brought much nearer to the Atlantic by Limerick than by the Galway route; thus giving to the seat of empire, and to the whole of northern Europe, an advantage in postal communication greatly exceeding any proposed by the rival scheme. Before the close of the ensuing summer, a continuous railway communication is expected to be completed from London to Milford, and a corresponding communication will even sooner be completed from Limerick to Waterford on the other side. It is obvious, then, that if we look to what has been and what may hereafter be accomplished, the Shannon presents in this respect, as in every other, much greater advantages than any other port, facilities which will besides be increased within a short period, and comparatively at a small expense.

But we can afford to treat the subject on the simpler basis of existing arrangements, without condescending to