

Competing lines have mostly been made by already existing companies ; there are not many instances, I believe, of their being made by new and independent ones. Of course the State might guarantee the present owners of the railways against loss by reduction of charges, and in this way the country might obtain the benefit of low rates without the State becoming the owner of the railways. I think this course is as likely to be decided on as any other, and I certainly should not say a word against it ; but I believe the more thoroughgoing course of buying them up would be safer, because it would enable the State to use its credit, and its power of attaining unity of management in such a way as to effect the greatest possible economy.

I have now shown how, as I think, it is possible to do very great good to our country at a comparatively very small risk. But I do not deny that there is some risk. To ask a guarantee implies that there is risk, or at least that it is reasonable to believe there is. And the question arises, who is to bear it? Ireland only, or the United Kingdom ?

I have already stated my belief before this society, that, in a pecuniary sense, Great Britain owes us nothing, and that the taxation of Great Britain and Ireland ought to be equalized. Consequently, if I regarded this as an Irish question only, I should say that we ought to take the risk ourselves ; that if, at the end of a 21 years' lease, the working of the Irish railways under the new system were to show a loss, the loss should be made good out of either the Irish county rate or the Irish income tax. But I do not regard it as a purely Irish question. If the proposed system is tried in Ireland, and proves decidedly successful, as I believe it will if properly tried, it will certainly be extended to Great Britain ; and the reasons for trying it in Ireland first are partly, no doubt, that Ireland needs the change more ; but partly, also, and perhaps chiefly, that the Irish railways constitute a small and compact system of uniform gauge. If Irishmen are wise, they will try to understand and argue this question on its merits, and not repeat the mistake which has done our country so much harm, of asking exceptional favours for themselves. And if my voice could reach the government and legislature, I would remind them that in the last generation they gave the United Kingdom the blessing of cheap postage, and I would urge them to follow up the example by giving in this generation the blessing of cheap railway transit.

For Discussion, see p. 319.

II.—*The Financial Position of Irish Railways.* By W. Neilson Hancock, LL.D.

[Read Tuesday, 24th April, 1866]

Mr. William John Hancock exhibited the following Tables, compiled by Dr. Hancock, to shew the financial position of Irish Railways, and explained the views of Dr. Hancock in respect of the statistics thus shown.

I. CLASS.		Mileage	Dividend last half year, before April, 1866	Dividend per cent on average of 3 years before April, 1866
<i>Bankrupt or winding up</i>				
1	Banbridge Extension	12		
2	Bagnalstown	21		
3	Cork and Youghal			
II CLASS.		33		
<i>Stand still.</i>				
1	Athenry and Ennis	36		
2	West Cork, &c.	17½		
III. CLASS.		53½		
<i>No dividend on some Preference Stock.</i>				
1.	Belfast and County Down (class E)	49		
2.	Irish North Western (class A and B)	86		
3.	Limerick and Foynes	26		
4.	Londonderry and Coleraine	36		
5.	Londonderry and Enniskillen (C)	60		
6.	Newry and Warren Point (6 per ct. & 5½)	6		
IV. CLASS.		263		
<i>No dividend on ordinary shares.</i>				
1.	Banbridge Junction	7		
2	Cork and Bandon	28		
3.	Cork and Kinsale Junctions	11		
4.	Dublin and Meath	35		
5.	Finn Valley	13		
6.	Limerick and Castleconnel	13		
7.	Limerick and Ennis	25		
8.	Newry and Armagh	21		
9.	Portadown, Dungannon, and Omagh	41		
10.	Waterford and Kilkenny ...	31		
V. CLASS.		217		
<i>Dividend less than the funds.</i>				
1.	Waterford and Tramore	8	£ s d	£ s d
2	Waterford and Limerick	77	Nil	0 18 0
3.	Cork and Limerick direct	17	1 0 0	0 18 4
4	Cork, Blackrock, and Passage	6	1 10 0	1 18 4
5.	Great Northern and Western	72	3 0 0	1 18 4
6.	Athenry and Tuam	16	3 0 0	2 15 10
7.	Midland Great Western	245	3 0 0	3 0 0
			2 10 0	3 14 2
VI. CLASS.		441		
<i>Dividends less than commercial interest</i>				
1.	Dublin and Wexford	85	£ s d	£ s d
2.	Dublin and Belfast Junction	56	66 0 0	4 3 4
3	Dublin and Drogheda	75	71 0 0	4 10 0
4.	Belfast and Northern Counties	100	79 0 0	5 0 0
5.	Ulster	65	82 10 0	5 0 0
6.	Great Southern and Western	387	86 0 0	4 10 0
			92 0 0	4 10 0
VII CLASS.		768		
<i>Shares above par.</i>				
Dublin and Kingstown	...	6	187 0 0	10 0 0
				9 0 0

It appears from these tables that at present there are in Ireland three railways bankrupt, or winding-up; two at a stand-still; six paying no dividend on the preference stock; ten paying no dividend on the ordinary shares; seven, the dividends of which were less than those paid on the Government Funds; six paying dividends at a rate less than that of commercial interest; and but one the shares of which were above par. He thought that where lines had become bankrupt, or where works were stopped, Parliament should not give them extensions of time, or try to have them worked on the commercial principle, as he did not think they would succeed on that principle. He thought that these lines should be examined, and if their traffic would pay for the cost of completing them, supposing the money to be advanced at $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., then the Government might safely complete those lines. If the traffic would not pay for the cost of completing them at three and a-half per cent., then, if the localities took such an interest in the matter as that they would guarantee any portion of the cost of either keeping the railways in repair or of making them, so as to reduce to a profitable speculation for the Government to advance money at three and a-half per cent., then he thought they might be completed and become public property; and so far as money already advanced was concerned, he would have the lines worked for about seven years, and if they realized any profit beyond what would pay the Government three and a-half per cent. on what they advanced on them, he would then give the value of that excess as compensation to the existing owners. He would have the Government take possession of lines either bankrupt or where the works were not proceeding, only on the principle of the general taxes not losing. It was not a question of transference of burden, but simply a question of management. With regard to lines which only paid dividends to preference shareholders, he thought that as the limit of 21 years fixed by the act of 1844 runs out, the Government should take the lines. The traffic should be valued, and the lines purchased by the Government at $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., and he would do the same with those lines which paid no dividend to their ordinary shareholders. With regard to lines that paid less than the rate of interest in the Funds, he would not interfere with them, unless the companies were anxious to sell. With respect to those lines which paid more than the interest on the Funds, they were, of course, not wholly unsuccessful as commercial speculations, and there would be no occasion, till the experiment of Government management was tried, to interfere with them at all. He thought the Government ought to take contracts for keeping the lines in repair, but the receipts should go to the Government altogether, just as in the case of the Post Office. He thought that all the lines that it would be really profitable to make on the commercial system in Ireland had been made, and that new lines should only be made like country roads—namely, the locality anxious to have them should offer to contribute a part of the expense, whatever would make them profitable; and if the locality guaranteed that, the Government should advance the money, and the railway should become public property.

DISCUSSION.

Mr. W. DALY said the paper of Mr. Murphy was only another of the valuable contributions which that gentleman had made to the society. He thought that, even before any intervention of Government the railways might be made to pay better than at present.

Mr. M'CURDY GREER said he was disposed rather to agree with Mr. Murphy than with Mr. Hancock with respect to whether the Government should take in all the railways, or only those which were decidedly losing speculations. The Government, by taking the railways generally, would have a surplus of £300,000 or £400,000 to begin with, and that might be applied in the reduction of fares, which reduction could be afterwards extended as the increased revenue rendered it possible.

Mr. MOWATT said he never heard such a scheme propounded as that put forward by Mr. Murphy and Mr. Greer. The Post Office system had been referred to as a great success of Government intervention. The fact was that it was a most expensive system.

Mr. CONN (of Waterford) said that, as the introduction of railways into the country had done away with nearly all the various former modes of conveyance, the public were entitled to demand from the Government such intervention in the railway system as was become necessary for the public interest. At present the railways of Ireland were, as a whole, very badly managed. It was impossible now for a third-class passenger to get from Dublin to Waterford in less than two days, and to return it would take him 13 hours.

Mr. GERNON thought that want of liberality to the public underlay all the railway mismanagement of Ireland.

Mr. Michael O'SHAUGHNESSY spoke in favour of Government intervention.

Mr. SPROULE was of opinion that the passenger traffic of Ireland was a limited quantity, which could not be increased by reduced fares.

After some further discussion on the part of the members,

The CHAIRMAN (Mr. HAUGHTON, V.P.) said he should like to see the Government take the matter in hands, but he did not believe the results would be so very beneficial as some gentlemen conceived.

Mr. MURPHY replied ; and

Mr. HANCOCK observed that Mr. Greer seemed to mistake Dr. Hancock's views as to the purchasing of railways. He did not mean that the purchasing up should be confined, except in the first instance, to those badly circumstanced.

III.—*Notes on the French System of Railways.* By Alexander McDonnell, Esq.

[Read Tuesday, 19th June, 1866]

At the present time, when there is a good deal of interest taken in the question of railways, it appears to me that a short account of the French railway system may be interesting.