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Jonathan Swift and the Population of Ireland

CLAYTON D. LEIN

THE NUMBER OF SOULS in *Ireland* being usually reckoned one Million and a half," muses the *persona* of *A Modest Proposal*, "of these I calculate there may be about Two hundred Thousand Couple whose Wives are Breeders."¹ The computation itself is not novel. Swift had offered the same estimate several years earlier in the second of the *Drapier's Letters* (1724): "Now by the largest Computation (even before that grievous Discouragement of *Agriculture*, which hath so much lessened our Numbers) the Souls in this Kingdom are computed to be One Million and a half; which, allowing Six to a Family, makes Two Hundred and Fifty Thousand Families" (X, 16). Swift had also used the figure in a tract he never published, *A Letter on Maculla's Project About Halfpence & a New One Proposed* (1729): "They have been reckoned at a million and a half, whereof a million at least are beggars, in all circumstances, except that of wandering about for alms" (XII, 99).² The last passage is especially valuable, for it strongly attests to Swift's belief in the integrity of the tally. Yet for the student of Swift and of Irish economic history, the interest of this calculation lies in its enormous inaccuracy.³ That very inaccuracy, however, permits us to sketch Swift's position in a

¹ *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Herbert Davis, 14 vols. (Oxford, 1939-1968), XII, 110. All subsequent citations from Swift's works are from this edition and appear in the text with volume and page references.

² Davis concluded that Swift wrote this tract before he left in June 1729 for a long visit with the Achesons (XII, xvii-xviii).

³ The degree of inaccuracy can be gauged from the work of Kenneth H. Connell, the leading historian of Ireland's population. In a preliminary essay disclosing the initial fruits of his research, Connell had included Swift's figure in a table of estimates ("The Population of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century," *Economic History Review*, 16 [1946], 113). When Connell revised that essay for inclusion in his book, however, he eliminated Swift's puzzling calculation, thus quietly removing it from the realm of any serious consideration (*The Population of Ireland, 1750-1845* [Oxford, 1950], p. 4).

rather vigorous dispute in the 1720s over Ireland's true condition, a dispute which leads us to appreciate still more acutely Swift's perception of the condition of "miserable Ireland."

In the second and third decades of the eighteenth century, a number of Irish writers reopened the case of suffering Ireland by amassing and analyzing all statistics related to her economy. They were driven to undertake this enormous task by an alarming number of reports streaming back into England testifying that Ireland was experiencing a period of unprecedented prosperity. This opinion drove the leading Irish patriots absolutely mad. The nauseating disparity between that fabled prosperity and the universal misery huddled in the streets led Swift and his friends to suspect that the issue had been cunningly contrived by the English in order to catapult Ireland into an abyss of even more barbaric conditions. In 1728, Swift's close friend Thomas Sheridan raged against "those vile Betrayers and Insulters" of Ireland "who insinuate themselves into Favour, by saying, it is a rich Nation."⁴ His own distressed portrait of the country concluded with the desire "to know for what Ends, and by what Persons, this new Opinion of our flourishing State has of late been so industriously advanced: One Thing is certain, that the Advancers have either already found their own Account, or have been heartily promised, or at least have been entertained with Hopes, by seeing such an Opinion pleasing to those who have it in their Power to reward" (*Intelligencer*, pp. 64-65). That "new Opinion," however, was at least a decade old, for Archbishop William King had complained as far back as 1716 of the "gen^l opinion in great Britain" which "passes currant without Contradiction, that Ireland is in a flourishing condition."⁵ The mounting currency of such remarks in the late 1720s, however, can be measured by Sheridan's bitter allusion to the myth of Jason: "it is the common Phrase of an upstart Race of People, who have suddenly sprung up like the *Dragon's Teeth* among us, That Ireland was never known to be so rich as it is now" (*Intelligencer*, pp. 53-54). The anonymous author of *Considerations on Two Papers*

⁴ *The Intelligencer* (1730; rpt. New York, 1967), p. 53.

⁵ *Some Observations on the Taxes pay'd by Ireland to Support the Government* (1716), p. 1. I would like to thank my mentor Dr. Oliver Ferguson for lending me his microfilms of the two versions of this tract, which exist only in manuscript (Trinity College Library, Dublin, Lyons Collection, 1806b and MS N.2.15). They are invaluable for the economic discussions in which Swift was involved.

Lately Published. The first call'd, Seasonable Remarks, &c. And the Other, An Essay on Trade in General, And That of IRELAND in Particular protested that the figures contained in those two papers made Ireland's economic advance "three times more than the most sanguine Computer ever asserted the Riches of the most flourishing Country in *Europe*, have been increased in that time."⁶ He cautioned the anonymous author of the papers, who was Sir John Browne, "not to depend alone on what he finds set down in printed Books, which are deceitful; unless weighed by a sound and discerning Judgment" (*Collection*, p. 124). Swift himself delivered the most lacerating attack on all such calculators in *A Short View of the State of Ireland*, originally published in March 1728, and re-published by Sheridan in the *Intelligencer* later that same year:

If *Ireland* be a rich and flourishing Kingdom; its Wealth and Prosperity must be owing to certain Causes, that are yet concealed from the whole Race of Mankind; and the Effects are equally invisible. We need not wonder at Strangers, when they deliver such Paradoxes; but a Native and Inhabitant of this Kingdom, who gives the same Verdict, must be either ignorant to Stupidity; or a Man-pleaser, at the Expence of all Honour, Conscience, and Truth. (XII, 12)

The whole economic dispute underlying these remarks is far too complex to unravel here. It is enough to recognize that the matter of the population was only one flank of a large paper warfare.⁷ The

⁶ *A Collection of Tracts, Concerning the Present State of Ireland* (London, 1729), p. 111. All further references to this group of writings will be cited in the text as *Collection*. Another curious indication of the general belief in Ireland's prosperity appears in the Dedication to the 1719 edition of Sir William Petty's *Political Survey of Ireland*: "The good Effect which the Advice of my learned Author has had in the Improvement of *Ireland* in a few Years, may in some measure determine how much any Nation may be advanced in Riches and Reputation by following some such like Rules as are laid down by the same Person at the End of the Book" ([London, 1719], p. [A3]).

⁷ The best general account of Swift's place in the economic disputes in Ireland can be found in Oliver W. Ferguson, *Jonathan Swift and Ireland* (Urbana, Ill., 1962), which supplants all earlier discussions. Also see the extensive material in Louis A. Landa, *Swift and the Church of Ireland* (Oxford, 1954), pp. 96-188. The best discussions of Ireland's economy and social conditions, on the other hand, are to be found in Connell, *Population of Ireland*; L. M. Cullen, ed., *The Formation of the Irish Economy* (Cork, 1969), and his *Anglo-Irish Trade 1660-1800* (New York, 1968) and *Economic History of Ireland since 1660* (London, 1972); William E. H. Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, 5 vols. (London, 1892-1896); and George O'Brien, *The Economic History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin, 1918). The revisionist discussions in Cullen's

population issue manages to reveal quite clearly, however, the economic bases upon which Swift and his friends acted and the principles which determined their moral positions. To sketch the matter out quickly, I shall set out the problems of determining the population in Swift's time, compare it with modern estimates, and then evaluate the significance of the discrepancy.

"If there are difficulties in determining the population of England in the period before the first Census," confesses G. Talbot Griffith, "those difficulties are very much greater in the case of Ireland."⁸ The science of statistical demography was still suffering birth pangs in Swift's age, and those zealous "political projectors" who strove to grapple with Ireland's economy scientifically had to cope with data even more fragmentary than that of their English counterparts.⁹ But since a certain amount of information was commonly shared and bandied about which helped to shape the economic philosophies of the period, we need to recognize the sources these thinkers relied upon and how they employed them.

All initial population statistics on Ireland for English as well as Irish speculators stem from the writings of Sir William Petty. Petty had evidently been asked to compose a treatise on the state of Ireland by Edward Chamberlayne, the compiler of *The Present State of England*.¹⁰ Petty responded with *The Political Anatomy of Ire-*

books are the most valuable recent work I have read. Two articles which also provide much essential information on the background to Swift's economic principles are Louis A. Landa, "Swift's Economic Views and Mercantilism," *ELH*, 10 (1943), 310-35, and "A Modest Proposal and Populousness," *MP*, 40 (1942), 161-70. For an excellent introduction to the larger specific economic background to *A Modest Proposal*, see George Wittkowsky, "Swift's *Modest Proposal*: The Biography of an Early Georgian Pamphlet," *JHI*, 4 (1943), 75-104.

⁸ *Population Problems of the Age of Malthus*, 2nd ed. (London, 1967), p. 45.

⁹ For studies in the state of demography in Swift's time see: Connell, *Population of Ireland*; Griffith, *Population Problems*; James Bonar, *Theories of Population from Raleigh to Arthur Young* (1931; rpt. London, 1966); Charles E. Stangeland, *Pre-Malthusian Doctrines of Population* (1904; rpt. New York, 1966); and the pertinent essays in D. V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley, ed., *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography* (London, 1965), and in Lancelot Hogben, ed., *Political Arithmetic: A Symposium of Population Studies* (London, 1938).

¹⁰ *The Economic Writings of Sir William Petty*, ed. Charles Henry Hull, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1899), I, 122. All future references to Petty are to this edition. I have checked all of Petty's works with the original editions in Swift's time. In this connection, I would especially like to thank Mr. John M. Houkes and Mr. Richard Daubert, librarians for the Krannert Library Collections, for their aid in using the excellent resources of their collections.

land, 1672, which he seems to have composed in 1671, but which was not published until 1691, after his death. Petty explored the problem of the Irish population in this tract quite thoroughly, computing figures for as far back as 1641. He ventured the following estimates for that period: 1641—1,466,000; 1652—850,000; 1672—1,100,000 (*Petty*, I, 149, 141). But when Petty wrote his *Political Arithmetick* four years later (not published until 1690), he revised his reckoning for 1672 to 1,200,000 (*Petty*, I, 272). Petty's measurements became the most widely quoted calculations for the next half century and the starting point for all serious economic discussions.¹¹ In the late 1690s, a Captain South tried to wrestle with the thorny problem for the Royal Society and published his results in the *Philosophical Transactions*. He arrived at a figure of 1,034,102 for the year 1695.¹² His figures and Petty's are the only ones I have discovered cited by the leading writers of the time. All the other calculations provided by modern studies of Ireland are founded on estimates supplied by later authorities.¹³

After Petty, the nearest figures we have to compare with Swift's come from a variety of tracts composed between 1721 and 1736. What makes them interesting is the fact that they do not harmonize with Swift's claims. When Swift declared in the second *Drapier's Letter*, for example, that his total of 1,500,000 was "by the largest Computation (even before that grievous Discouragement of *Agriculture*)," he must have known that he was twisting the truth, for David Bindon, a Dublin banker and equally outspoken opponent to Wood, was just then asserting that "the Inhabitants of *Ireland*, are computed at *Two Millions* of Souls."¹⁴ When we examine earlier

¹¹ O'Brien (*Economic History of Ireland*, p. 9) mentions a census of 1659 which may have been known to Petty, but I have not seen that census referred to by any Irish writer of the period. See *Petty*, I, 142n, for further comments.

¹² On South see Connell, *Population of Ireland*, p. 259. For Swift's detailed knowledge of the *Philosophical Transactions*, see Marjorie Nicolson and Nora M. Mohler, "The Scientific Background of Swift's 'Voyage to Laputa,'" *Annals of Science*, 2 (1937), 299-334.

¹³ Even Arthur Dobbs, with one exception, did not tabulate the figures we find attributed to him in all modern works. He merely offered estimates for the number of houses, based on hearth-tax returns. Later students of Irish history such as Thom, Newenham, and Sadler finished the calculations and provided the numbers so widely quoted today (Connell, *Population of Ireland*, p. 4).

¹⁴ *Some Reasons Shewing the Necessity the People of Ireland are under for continuing to refuse Mr. Wood's Coinage*, in *The Hibernian Patriot* (Printed at Dublin. London: Reprinted and Sold by A. Moor, 1730), p. 215.

economic writings, especially those dealing with the Bank proposal of 1721, we find Bindon vindicated. One paper supporting the Bank, for example, dismisses objections to it with the acid comment: "'tis hard to think such an inconsiderable Rabble as he makes the rest to be, can be able to devour and destroy 2,000,000 of People, had they as much Cruelty, and as good Stomacks as CANIBALLS" (IX, xx). Swift's statement becomes even more perplexing when we discover Bindon's sum in two anonymous Bank tracts attributed to Swift himself. The *Subscribers to the Bank Plac'd according to Their Order and Quality*, for example, contained the following postscript: "N.B. The Total of Men, Women and Children in Ireland, besides French-Men, is 2,000000. Total of the Land of Ireland Acres 16,800000. (Vide Reasons for a BANK, &c.)" (IX, 290). In *The Swearers Bank*, on the other hand, we read: "It's computed by Geographers that there are Two Millions in this Kingdom, of which Number there may be said to be a Million of swearing Souls" (IX, 295).¹⁵

In addition to this evidence, Bindon's figure also finds support in tracts written throughout the 1730s. A 1731 census conducted independently by the established clergy for the Irish House of Lords set the population then at 2,010,219.¹⁶ And although a member of the Irish Parliament in a letter to a friend put the population at less than 2,000,000 in November 1733, perhaps influenced by a tract by Arthur Dobbs which I discuss later, the *Abstract of the Number of Protestant and Popish Families in the Several Counties and Provinces of Ireland*, published in 1736, calculated Ireland's population in 1732 at "very near two millions of inhabitants."¹⁷ Put to-

¹⁵ Davis, while admitting that there is "no evidence" that Swift had anything to do with *The Swearers Bank* and that there is even stylistic evidence to suggest it is not by him at all, prints it among Bank tracts "attributed to Swift and his friends" (*Prose Works*, IX, xix-xx). Ferguson asserts that *The Swearers Bank* is "almost certainly not by him" (*Swift and Ireland*, p. 70), but accepts *Subscribers*, which he finds "stylistically . . . resembles Swift's work" (p. 71).

¹⁶ Connell, *Population of Ireland*, p. 258. As one finds repeatedly in dealing with estimates of the Irish population, sources disagree on this figure. Connell attributes the figure in the text to Newenham's *A View of the Natural, Political, and Commercial Circumstances of Ireland* (1809). Griffith, however, gives the figure 2,010,321, citing an Irish Census Report (*Population Problems*, pp. 45-46). O'Brien, on the other hand, gives 2,010,221, citing Nicholl's *History of the Irish Poor Laws* as his authority. I have not been able to see the original document.

¹⁷ William E. H. Lecky, *A History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, 3rd ed., rev., 8 vols. (London, 1883-90), II, 255n; *A Collection of Tracts and Treatises Illustrative of the Natural History, Antiquities, and the Political and Social State of Ireland*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1860-61), II, 536.

gether, these sources show a rather steady agreement on the general size of Ireland's populace and clearly indicate that Swift's figure is strangely low and surely volitionally deceptive.

Yet how totally inadequate all these speculations were can be gauged by examining modern histories of Ireland and several recent studies of the Irish population in the prefamine period. According to J. C. Beckett, "it seems likely that the population was around two-and-a-half million at the beginning of the century, that it had risen to three million by the 1750's and to four million by the 1780's."¹⁸ Connell, in his exhaustive study of the Irish population problem, adjusted every traditional estimate quite radically, revising the 1687 figure to 2,167,000, a 1712 estimate to 2,791,000, a 1726 calculation to 3,031,000, and the 1732 projection to 3,018,000.¹⁹

Swift's computation thus proves to be quite a problem. If he wrote the Bank tracts attributed to him, he too once held the larger general estimate of Ireland's population, but had for some reason revised his conception of it by the time of the *Drapier's Letters*, where he offered a new but considerably shrunken figure, one, however, which he seems to have considered quite accurate as we can see from his repeated use of it. On the other hand, if he did not compose those early tracts, we find him still more out of tune with his contemporaries and deliberately obscuring the issue in claiming that his figure of 1,500,000 was the broadest ever made. In either case, we are faced with evaluating an estimate which is off by, at the very least, one million people, and perhaps by more than a million and a half, a full 100 percent, and this in the face of alternate calculations closer to the truth.

We need to recognize at this point that Swift's estimate is not totally unsupported in the literature of his time. Archbishop King's unpublished tract, "Some Observations on the Taxes," mentioned earlier, preserves a major piece of corroborating opinion. King's original draft of this work dates from 1716, but in that version he did not offer any population measurements. When he revised the treatise around 1721, however, he incorporated detailed statistical information about all facets of Ireland's economy, including some

¹⁸ *The Making of Modern Ireland, 1603-1923* (New York, 1966), p. 173.

¹⁹ Connell, *Population of Ireland*, p. 25. His figures now supplant the lower calculations of both Griffith and O'Brien.

computations on the number of people. At the time of the Revolution, he ventured, "I Suppose the people of Ireland . . . , notwithstanding the destruction Made of them in the Warre might be a Million." He then projected that we might "suppose the Number of People in Ireland to be increased $\frac{1}{2}$, that is 500000."²⁰ Another important piece of support comes from Arthur Dobbs, a friend of Swift's and possibly one of his sources for such information. Dobbs is noted for his *Essay on the Trade and Improvement of Ireland*, a comprehensive analysis of Ireland's economy which appeared in two parts in 1729 and 1731. As Connell and Irish historians note, Dobbs included in the second part an estimate of the Irish population as being 1,669,644 in 1725, a figure much closer to Swift's than Bindon's.²¹ No critic or historian has yet noticed to my knowledge, however, that Dobbs had also included an offhand estimate in his *first* part. In the middle of a discussion there on imports and exports, he remarked that "our Numbers since the Reduction of Ireland in 1691 are increas'd about $\frac{1}{3}$ " (*Essay*, Part I, p. 31). Since Dobbs accepted Petty's and South's statistics, although with some hesitation, this would mean that at the time of Swift's proposal he himself thought of the population as being between 1,300,000 and 1,400,000, a figure quite consonant with those of Swift and King.²² Also in 1729, another friend of Swift's, Thomas Prior, offered an estimate of 1,800,000 in his *Observations on Coin in General*, a figure which though higher than Swift's still lies significantly below the more received figure.²³

These conflicting reports suggest a number of interesting patterns. The fact stands out that all of the larger estimates come from

²⁰ *Some Observations* (1721), pp. 16-17. For information on King's drafts of this tract, see Ferguson, *Swift and Ireland*, pp. 187-88; R. Dudley Edwards, "The King Manuscripts in the Clarke Collection, T.C.D.," *Analecta Hibernica*, 8 (1938), 5-6.

²¹ 2 vols. (Dublin, 1729-1731), II, 9. On the association of Swift and Dobbs, which began when Dobbs was a child, see Desmond Clarke, *Arthur Dobbs, Esquire, 1689-1765* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1957).

²² The variance in the figure is owing to Dobbs's silence over the 1691 figure, whether it is a million (as he calculates in Part II, p. 11), or the slightly larger figure of 1,040,000 which he attributed to South (Part II, p. 11). The estimate is especially consonant with Swift's since Swift noted that his figure did not reflect the recent decreases due to the discouragement of agriculture, a decrease which Dobbs may be measuring.

²³ (Dublin, 1729), p. 44. On Prior's friendship with Swift, which is very thinly documented, see Desmond Clarke, *Thomas Prior, 1681-1751* (Dublin, 1951).

men and sources fully independent of Swift's circle (and therefore probably more representative of the general opinion). All of the supportive evidence, on the other hand, though coming from leading Irish spokesmen, also comes from known associates of Swift. We seem to discover here, then, a definite partisan effort involving Swift which was actively concerned with establishing a much lower estimate of Ireland's human resources.

This theory finds full confirmation in the vigorous statistical battle waged against these calculations of Swift and his friends by Sir John Browne, a challenge largely overlooked by previous Swift scholars and evidently unknown to Connell. Very little is known about Browne, and the little we have managed to unearth stems almost entirely from his collision with Swift over the problems of the Irish economy at precisely this time.²⁴ Browne apparently revered Swift, and later became one of the Dean's most zealous idolators; but in the 1720s he and Swift were sailing on irreconcilable courses. Browne had thrown himself into writing a series of tracts, published anonymously, which tried to trace Ireland's economic development since Petty's time as accurately as possible. He was as fully committed to relieving Ireland's miseries as Swift himself, but the results of his calculations made him odious to the Dean, who publicly condemned him as a signal example of Englishmen who glutted Ireland for petty advancements.

Swift and his friends, in fact, actively countered almost everything Browne published. Professor Ferguson has demonstrated that Swift's *A Short View of the State of Ireland* (1728) was an instantaneous reply to Browne's *Seasonable Remarks on Trade*, bent on morally invalidating the economic picture Browne had sketched.²⁵ Browne, in turn, replied to Swift with *A Letter to the Author of the Short View of the State of Ireland*, following this with *An Essay on Trade in General*. At this point, another but anonymous combatant entered the ring with *Considerations of Two Papers Lately Published*, a thorough but heavy-handed repudiation of Browne's calcula-

²⁴ All the information we have recovered on Browne can be found in Ferguson, *Swift and Ireland*, Appendix B, and *The Drapier's Letters*, ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford, 1935), pp. 226–28. Browne's career continued to dovetail with Swift's for some time after this, although it has never been discussed. I plan to deal with him in a future paper.

²⁵ Ferguson, *Swift and Ireland*, pp. 189, 146–47.

tions.²⁶ Browne quickly responded to this salvo with a brilliant broadside of his own entitled *An Appeal to the Reverend Dean Swift By Way of Reply to the Observer on Seasonable Remarks*. But this, in turn, was answered by the anonymous author's *A Letter in Answer to a Paper, Intitl'd, An Appeal to the Reverend Dean Swift*. Browne, evidently indefatigable, replied this time with *Reflections Little to the Purpose, on A Paper Less to the Purpose*. In 1729, Browne had five of these papers—the *Seasonable Remarks*, *Essay on Trade*, *Considerations on Two Papers*, *An Appeal to the Reverend Dean Swift*, and *A Letter in Answer to a Paper*—bound together and published as a unit, thus tidily incorporating the whole struggle between one set of covers.

The exchanges in the quarrel which become pertinent here result from Browne's frontal attack on the statistical information offered by his antagonist. The author of *Considerations on Two Papers* had been openly distraught with Browne's findings, particularly Browne's estimates on the wealth of the kingdom. "At present," he asserted, "I shall only desire him to consider, that no Nation could ever increase in Riches with that Velocity he has made *Ireland*, without a proportional increase of Cash, and of People" (*Collection*, p. 112), and he pursued that observation later with the information that "Sir William Petty says, the Cash of *Ireland* was 400,000 *l.* and the People, 1,100,000. At this time our Cash is at most 600,000 *l.* and our People 1,500,000. This is in truth a considerable Increase, considering the Circumstances of our Affairs . . . but it is no Degree of Proportion to the imaginary Increase of our Wealth, as laid down by my Author" (*Collection*, p. 121). Browne replied quite warmly to this contention in his *Appeal*:

Give me leave, Sir, to wonder that a Person so well versed in the Affairs of our Country, and so sanguine in its Cause, should disguise our Number

²⁶ The authorship of this tract and the subsequent reply by the same anonymous author is really quite undecided, although they are commonly ascribed to Dobbs. This attribution seems to stem from Henry R. Wagner in *Irish Economics: 1700–1783* (London, 1907), where Wagner assigns the tract to Dobbs without providing any supportive evidence (p. 31). Ferguson accepts Wagner's attribution (*Swift and Ireland*, p. 190), as did Jacob Hollander in the list of his collection (*The Economic Library of Jacob H. Hollander, Ph.D.*, comp. Elsie A. G. Marsh [Baltimore, 1937], p. 80). L. W. Hanson, however, rejects it, stating that "the internal evidence seems to me to be against the attribution" (*Contemporary Printed Sources for British and Irish Economic History* [Cambridge, 1963], p. 405). I agree with Hanson and think that, if it is by Dobbs, more evidence certainly needs to be brought forward to demonstrate it.

of Inhabitants; that is a Wealth which our Neighbours the t'other side of the Water won't willingly take from us; for we who stay at home are poor, and not worth seeking after. . . . There were returned by the Hearth-money Collectors in the Year ending Lady Day 1726, 374,286 Houses paying Quit-rent over and above certify'd Houses, Colleges, Hospitals and Barracks, which at an Allowance of six Souls to a House, may be equivalent in this Calculation to 42,381 Houses, and that makes the Number of Houses in all 416,667; to which if we allow a Medium of 6 Souls to the House, our Inhabitants must be about 2,500,000; and considering the prolifick Constitutions of our Country Folks, and the early Age at which they intermarry, I am very sure, Sir, you will agree with me that six to a House is not an extravagant Allowance. (*Collection*, pp. 130–31)

Browne's assailant, however, was not about to grant such a conclusion. His reply, *A Letter in Answer to a Paper*, minutely rehearsed Browne's "miscalculation" and "mis-use" of Petty in computing the amount of Ireland's arable land and wealth. He also returned expressly to the question of Ireland's population, and the melancholy of his remarks undoubtedly conveys the despair of all men of Swift's party:

And here let me barely touch on your Assertion, that the Number of People in *Ireland*, is 2,500,000, that is very little more than three Acres of profitable Land to every Soul in the Kingdom; a Condition, I fear, *Ireland* will not arrive to in an hundred Years of continued Peace and Health. But, as this Point will be more fully handled by a learned and ingenious Gentleman, from whom I took my Computation of the People of *Ireland*, not exceeding 1,500,000. I must refer you to what he says on that Head, which I am confident will satisfy every unprejudiced Reader. (*Collection*, pp. 140–41)

I have been unable to discover whom the author intends by his final comments. It may well be Arthur Dobbs who assiduously collected hearth-money returns in order to obtain accurate population estimates and who held at this time, as noted above, a figure of slightly below 1,500,000. But it may also be Thomas Prior, who announced in *A List of the Absentees of Ireland* (1729) that he had been gathering his statistics the summer before.

When we compare Dobbs's later figures with Browne's, in fact, some suggestive details emerge. Browne must have been relatively well informed, for his basic working figure of 374,286 houses is strikingly close to Dobbs's whose figure, in fact, is even larger—377,339 (*Essay*, Part II, p. 8). At the same time, though, Dobbs

could estimate the population in 1725 as having been 1,669,664. He remained a bit hesitant over this figure, confessing that "I don't insist upon this as a just computation, I am apt to believe it is rather within the Truth" (*Essay*, Part II, p. 9). He nevertheless arrived at the tremendously lower figure by claiming that the true number of persons per house was 4.36 rather than the figure of 6 employed by Browne. He selected this unprecedented figure as the result of population surveys in Antrim, where he had estates. Modern scholarship has demonstrated, however, that he probably erred as much on the low side as Browne did on the high side. For the particular controversy here, what is intriguing is that Browne had accepted the traditional statistic for the number of people per house while Dobbs had deviated from the tradition. Yet Browne was the one attacked. In any case, whether Dobbs is the person intended by the author of the *Considerations* or not, or is even the author of the tract, the economic warfare between Browne and his antagonist places Swift's remark in the *Modest Proposal* in a new light, especially since it contains the only published reference I have discovered that exactly supports Swift's claim.

Yet just as important for the total picture of the dispute is the fact that Browne himself was neither intimidated nor convinced by his opponent. In *A Scheme of the Money-Matters of Ireland*, published later in 1729, he reaffirmed the validity of his calculations by insisting that, "as I have observ'd in my Essay on Trade . . . the Number of Souls inhabiting . . . [Ireland] may be about 2,500,000."²⁷ But Browne's stubborn affirmation was in turn silently countered by Thomas Prior's estimate of 1,800,000 in *Observations on Coin*, published soon after Browne's tract.²⁸

²⁷ (Dublin, 1729), pp. 15–16. Browne had also reaffirmed the integrity of his figure in his *Reflections Little to the Purpose* (Dublin, 1729). There, in fact, he sharply declared that "I really thought that I made that Matter so plain in my *Reply*, that there was no room to doubt of our being 2500000 Souls" (p. 31).

²⁸ There are several additional unpublished estimates of the Irish population which did not influence either Swift or public opinion, but which add to our knowledge of various projectors. Gregory King, Petty's most distinguished disciple, composed his *Natural and Political Observations and Conclusions upon the State and Condition of England* about 1696, calculating England's population then at 5,500,000, and Ireland's as roughly one-sixth of that, or about 916,667 (I have used the reprint of King's tract edited by George E. Barnett [Baltimore, 1936], pp. 18–19, and have supplied the exact figure). Edward MacLysaght, in addition, cites a manuscript census of Ireland from 1706 which set Ireland's total population at 1,620,901 (*Irish Life in the Seventeenth Century: After Cromwell* [London, 1939], pp. 187–88).

Browne's accounts thus fortunately provide us some intriguing information, for they reveal one of Swift's contemporaries largely anticipating and defending our own general estimates of Ireland's population. The very fact that Browne directed his reply to his challenger to Swift, moreover, establishes that Swift was firmly identified with the economic position taken in that tract. The rebuttal to Browne, on the other hand, provides us with the only major clues I have discovered to the rationale behind the partisan effort.

Why couldn't the Irish patriots accept Browne's figures? I have not found a scrap of evidence to suggest that we should question the fact that Browne's figure genuinely appeared absurd to them, another product by "those weak wise heads, who proceed upon general Maxims, . . . without understanding the Constitution of the Kingdom" (XII, 79). As they declared (and assuming Petty's figures correct), the rate of growth Browne advanced was astounding, possible perhaps only under exceptionally stable and peaceful conditions. But Ireland's course in the early years of the eighteenth century had been anything but that. Between the turn of the century and the dispute in question, Ireland had experienced three periods of severe famine resulting from crop failures: 1708–1710, 1718–1721, and one which had begun the year before *A Modest Proposal* and would last until 1730.²⁹ Huge numbers perished in these famines as every Irishman who survived could testify. Certainly these losses, to the patriots, must have more than equaled the number of births augmenting the population. But of more immediate concern at the time was the problem of emigration. Not only had the natural course of Ireland's population growth been cruelly clipped by famine, it had been heavily stunted by the flight of thousands of virile Irish men and women to more secure or acceptable surroundings.

Swift addressed himself to this problem several times during the period of the dispute. In a letter to Sheridan's *Intelligencer* in 1728 under the pseudonym of "A. North," he openly lamented the excessive emigration in which "some thousand Families are gone or going, or preparing to go from hence, and settle themselves in *America*" (*Intelligencer*, pp. 246–47). In *A Modest Proposal* he

²⁹ M. W. Flinn, *British Population Growth, 1700–1850* (London, 1970), p. 41. According to R. J. Dickson, from 1715 to 1720 Ireland was afflicted with a severe drought and exceptionally severe epidemics, especially smallpox (*Ulster Emigration to Colonial America, 1718–1775* [London, 1966], pp. 28–29).

specifically noted the emigration to Spain and the Barbadoes (XII, 109). This drain had been emptying Ireland since the turn of the century, but it escalated dramatically in the decade preceding *A Modest Proposal*.³⁰ On 20 May 1718 Bishop Evans wrote to Archbishop Wake in England that "I hear 1000 of Protestants go to America, because their Landlords every where bear hard upon them."³¹ Confirmation of the remark comes in the complaint of the Lord Justices that year to the Lord Lieutenant: "We have had accounts from most parts of the Kingdom, especially the North, of very great numbers of Protestants, with their families, shipping themselves off for New England and other parts of the West Indies."³² Swift's ally, Archbishop King, complained bitterly of this emigration the following year.³³ Soon after this the numbers of fleeing Irish seem to have declined sharply, but the migrations recommenced seriously in 1724 and accelerated alarmingly in the famine of 1728–1730. The Lord Justices reported to Lord Carteret on 23 November 1728 that 20,000 people had indicated they would emigrate by the autumn of 1729 at the latest.³⁴ In a letter dated 13 February 1728/29,

³⁰ Swift noted with chagrin in several tracts the loss of thousands of skilled workers in wool as the result of benighted English policies (Landa, "Populousness," p. 167, and *Prose Works*, XII, 89).

³¹ Landa, *Church*, p. 156.

³² Quoted by Lawrence H. Gipson, *The British Empire Before the American Revolution*, 5 vols. (Caldwell, Idaho and New York, 1936–1942), I, 257. The Lord Justices claimed that over 1,200 had gone from two Northern ports alone, and that many had embarked from others. Gipson notes that "so anxious were many to get to America that they sold their services for a term of years in payment of the ocean passage" (I, 258). A Thomas Lechmere wrote to John Winthrop in 1718 that he "expected the arrival of twenty ministers with their congregations in the spring of 1719" (Dickson, *Ulster Emigration*, p. 22).

³³ Charles S. King, *A Great Archbishop of Dublin: William King, D.D., 1650–1729* (London, 1906), pp. 301–2. We should note in support of these remarks that the author of *A Letter to the Gentlemen of the Landed Interest in Ireland Relating to a Bank* (Dublin, 1721) mentioned a rumor that many of the Irish who emigrated at this time were returning from New England. He bluntly denied it, saying few, if any, ever returned (p. 8).

³⁴ Dickson, *Ulster Emigration*, p. 32; Landa, *Church*, p. 156. Carteret passed the report on to the English Privy Council so they could realize the huge disruptions in Ireland caused by the severe famines (Dickson, *Ulster Emigration*, pp. 186–89). It is really quite difficult to know precisely how many Irish emigrated to America in these years. For a recent survey of the problem, see Dickson, *ibid.*, esp. pp. 19–47. But also see Gipson, *British Empire*, I, 257. An indication of what Swift and the Irish might have believed to be occurring, however, can be found in the Lord Justices' report and in a letter by a Thomas Whitney dated 27 July 1728 in which Whitney claims that 40,000 people had emigrated just from the areas of Ulster and Sligo since 1720 (quoted by Dickson, *Ulster Emigration*, p. 33).

Archbishop Boulter outlined the frantic efforts of the government and clergy to supply corn for the North, for "we think this will put some stop to the great desertion we have been threatened with there."³⁵ But he complained on 13 March that "the humour of going to *America* still continues, and the scarcity of provisions certainly makes many quit us: there are now seven ships at *Belfast* that are carrying off about 1000 passengers thither" (*Letters*, I, 230–31). And to this American migration we need to add the many thousands who abandoned Ireland for France, Spain, the West Indies, and even England.³⁶ To understand the position of Swift and his compatriots, then, we need to recognize not the historical inaccuracy of their estimates on population and emigration but the shared conviction by members of all parties that Ireland's blood had been continuously let by massive spurts of emigration for over forty years.

As important to the Irish themselves as these waves of departures, however, was the relation of the population problem to the issue of tillage. Despite the steady and outspoken opposition of the Irish party to the enclosure of land, Irish landlords seemed to be insatiable in their desire to convert tillable land into grazing areas for their cattle and sheep.³⁷ To Swift, such action was criminal, for there was

³⁵ *Letters Written by His Excellency Hugh Boulter, D.D. . . . to Several Ministers of State in England, and Some Others*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1770), I, 224.

³⁶ We have no reliable statistics for these migrations, nor are they considered in any recent studies of Irish population that I have read. They must, however, have reached large proportions. In 1691 alone, thousands of Irish Catholic men made their way to France to form an army there (J. G. Simms, "Ireland in the Age of Swift," in *Jonathan Swift, 1667–1767: A Dublin Tercentenary Tribute*, ed. Roger McHugh and Philip Edwards [Dublin, 1967], p. 159). In a letter to Swift dated 27 February 1732/33, Sir Charles Wogan, an officer in one of these Irish brigades, claimed that "above 120,000 men, within these forty years" had joined the Irish ranks in France and Spain "to get rid of oppression" (*The Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Sir Walter Scott, 2nd ed., 19 vols. [London, 1883–84], XVII, 423). This invaluable letter, first printed by Scott, full of details on Irish men who chose a military exile, has not been reprinted since and seems to be little known. Also see Gipson, *British Empire*, I, 200, for remarks on the Irish flight to France. The Irish migration to the West Indies, meanwhile, was large enough to cause a great deal of unrest there (Dickson, *Ulster Emigration*, p. 35). The author of the letter to the *Landed Interest* noted above, meanwhile, asserted that "it is not disputed but that the poor People of this Kingdom leave their Country, and wander abroad to the very *Indies*, to seek for Land to Improve and Plant and work upon" (p. 8). Boulter claimed in the fall of 1728 that "above 4200 men, women, and children have been shipped off from hence for the *West Indies* within three years, and of these above 3100 this last summer" (*Letters*, I, 210). For the migration to England, see Dickson, *Ulster Emigration*, p. 44.

³⁷ On the tillage problem see: Ferguson, *Swift and Ireland*, pp. 151ff.; Landa, *Church*, pp. 142ff.; and Cullen, *Formation*, p. 12, and *Economic History*, p. 46ff.

"not an older or more uncontroverted maxim in the politics of all wise nations, than that of encouraging agriculture" (XII, 89). What we are likely to miss in the protests against enclosure, however, is the relationship many of the age assumed between a stable agricultural economy and populousness. That Swift relied on such a supposition can be seen in his comment in *A Short View of the State of Ireland* (1728), that "the Seventh [Cause of a Kingdom's thriving] is, by Improvement of Land, Encouragement of Agriculture, and thereby encreasing the Number of their People" (XII, 6). Many economists of Swift's time affirmed a similar causal relationship. Alexander Macaulay stated flatly one such "direct relationship between tillage and emigration: encouragement of the one discourages the other."³⁸ As far back as Captain John Graunt, moreover, disparities had been computed between the relative fertility rates of urban and rural areas.³⁹ Critics frequently, in fact, considered cities to be "barren." Sir Charles Davenant calculated that "London would even have decreased by about two thousand per annum had it not been for newcomers."⁴⁰ Economists assumed that populousness resulted, as Davenant put it, from "a regular way of living," and this was not to be found in urban, trading communities, but in stable agricultural ones. The disruption of Ireland's agricultural economy by enclosure and famine, then, had brutal consequences in terms of population theory. Not only had these developments driven masses of native Irish away, but by uprooting those that did remain, depriving them of their steady labor, and throwing them into urban areas, natural fertility had been severely blunted.⁴¹ The agricultural disasters of famine and enclosure could only mean the disintegration of a population. Only a blind man, a traitor, or a maniac could envision a vigorous increase in the face of all these "facts."

Far more than even these depressing realities lies behind the

³⁸ Landa, *Church*, p. 157.

³⁹ Stangeland, *Pre-Malthusian Doctrines*, pp. 140-43, 159-61; R. R. Kuczynski, "British Demographers' Opinions on Fertility," in *Political Arithmetic*, ed. Hogben, pp. 291-92, 310-11, 312-17.

⁴⁰ Stangeland, *Pre-Malthusian Doctrines*, p. 159.

⁴¹ "All agreed that steady physical labour and a simple uncomplicated manner of life promote reproduction" (Kuczynski, "British Demographers," p. 296). Conversely, urban life, with its emphasis on trade, disrupted fertility patterns. "The minds of men in London are more thoughtfull and full of business then in the Country," Graunt noted, and this meant, in the words of Robert Wallace, that their attention was necessarily diverted "from more necessary labour" (Kuczynski, *ibid.*, pp. 313, 310).

strenuous attacks on Browne, however, and we gain a still finer appreciation of the resistance of the Irish partisans when we examine their population estimates and realize the political implications. Since, in mercantilist theory, people were money, "every Birth," as one writer put it, "being as so much certain Treasure," the strangulation of a population's growth was a grievous economic *faux pas*.⁴² Assuming Petty's figure to be correct, Swift and his allies were claiming that the population of Ireland had increased by only 200,000–600,000 in over half a century, perhaps "a considerable Increase, considering the Circumstances of our Affairs," but a rate abysmally below that of England herself, even below that of many despotic European countries. How slow this growth could be construed becomes more apparent when we realize that Petty had speculated in 1672 that "it is naturally possible in about 25 Years to double the Inhabitants of Great Britain and Ireland" (*Petty*, II, 604).⁴³ Sir Matthew Hale asserted in *The Primitive Origination of Mankind* (1677) that "a population may double itself in thirty-five years."⁴⁴ We come closer to Swift, however, in the calculations of Arthur Dobbs. Assuming that each of 200,000 "breeding Women" in Ireland might have a child "once in two Years," Dobbs speculated that "by this Computation the Nation might double in 16 Years, tho there were no Accession of Inhabitants from abroad." "After the same Manner," he continued, "supposing 1 in 5 only to bear once in two Years, the Numbers might be doubled in 42 Years" (*Essay*, Part II, p. 11).⁴⁵ The implications of the estimates of the Irish party were thus harsh and inescapable. The natural course of Irish growth had been stifled, and stifled—the great unspoken truth—by England. No greater objective evidence could have been advanced to exhibit to England her blind betrayal of her own self-interested mercantilist policy. No statistic could have documented so devastatingly the reality of British tyranny.

One further dimension of the population controversy in Swift's

⁴² Charles Davenant, *An Essay upon the Probable Methods of Making a People Gainers in the Ballance of Trade* (London, 1699), p. 35.

⁴³ He repeated the remark in his *Treatise of Ireland* (Connell, *Population of Ireland*, pp. 259–60).

⁴⁴ Stangeland, *Pre-Malthusian Doctrines*, p. 148.

⁴⁵ Dobbs's note that his calculation does *not* depend upon immigrations is significant and demonstrates how thoroughly the Irish were attempting to document a frustrated natural fertility. Since Dobbs calculated from 1691, his forty-two-year cycle would end in 1733.

age we have forgotten lies in the relationship the speculators forged between populousness and liberty. In 1699, for example, Davenant declared, "Securing the Liberties of a Nation, may be laid down as a Fundamental for increasing the Numbers of its People . . . For Liberty encourages Procreation" (*An Essay*, pp. 32, 26). "Almost all Countries in the World have been more or less Populous," he affirmed elsewhere, "as Liberty and Property have been there well or ill secur'd" (*An Essay*, p. 25). Davenant's extensive comments on this issue reveal dimensions of the topic, moreover, which we might overlook. His observations reveal, for example, how subtly the issue of emigration ultimately (if silently) formed part of the discussion over Ireland's constitutional rights: "if it has been ever seen, that Men abound most where there is most Freedom (*China* excepted, whose Climate excells all others, and where the exercise of the Tyranny is mild and easie) it must follow, that People will in time desert those Countries whose best Flower is their Liberties, if those Liberties are thought Precarious or in Danger" (*An Essay*, p. 29). "If the Ambition of some, and the Mercenary Temper of others, should bring us at any time to alter our Constitution, and to give up our ancient Rights," he prophesied, "we shall find our Numbers diminish visibly and fast" (p. 26).⁴⁶

Davenant's philosophy determined the strategy selected by Arthur Dobbs two years after *A Modest Proposal*. Comparing the relative growth rates of the populations of England and Ireland, Dobbs expressly singled out the vast discrepancy between them, observing that England had increased "in proportion to its Numbers twice as much in the last 35 Years from 1690, as *Ireland* has done in the last 13 Years from 1712 to 1725" (*Essay*, Part II, p. 14), insisting that the stunning English gain was primarily owing to her political freedom: "The great Increase of their [England's] Numbers since,

⁴⁶ For more information on this association between liberty and population, see Kuczyński, "British Demographers," p. 310. A passage from John Arbuthnot's *Tables of the Grecian, Roman, and Jewish Measures* indicates that for the Augustans, this matter was part of the historical process of ruin: "Thus in that great Empire Corruption begat Slavery, Slavery produc'd worthless and rapacious Favourites, those begat Oppression and Poverty; Poverty and Oppression Depopulation, and want of Zeal and Affection in those that remain'd, and from all these causes at last proceeded the final destruction of this mighty Empire" (quoted by Lester M. Beattie, *John Arbuthnot: Mathematician and Satirist* [Cambridge, 1935], p. 353).

proceeds from the Establishment of their Liberties Civil and Religious, and the Increase of their Trade and Commerce upon it: This drew in Numbers from many parts of Europe; and their Increase at home proceeded from the Peace, Plenty and satisfaction, which since that time has happen'd to most Ranks and degrees of Men" (*Essay*, Part II, p. 12). It was thus not only the evidence of their eyes that led Swift and other members of the Irish party to deny Browne's estimates, but the symbolic role of their statistics as well. The stand on the population is intimately related to the cries for the need to grant Ireland her natural freedom.⁴⁷ Such thwarted growth as Ireland suffered would occur inevitably whenever a people were denied "the common rights and liberties of humankind." Nonetheless, all Irish economists agreed that the restoration of Irish liberty could reverse the process. But at the same time, Dobbs's calculations reveal the bitter melancholic hues of the reply that Ireland might only reach Browne's fantastic plateau "in an hundred Years of continued Peace and Health."

One more twist needs to be wrung from the matter of the population, however, before its full significance emerges—its role in the taxation controversy. If we browse for long in Irish writings of the period, we are forced to note a paranoiac fear of greater taxation from England. Archbishop King was stirred by this fear to compile his *Observations on the Taxes* in 1716. According to King, "'Tis a gen^l opinion in great Britain and passes currant without Contradiction, that Ireland is in a flourishing condition, that while England has bin oppressed and deeply Sunk in debt by excessive taxes, Ireland has bin at ease, contributed nothing to the Support of the Government and is not one Shilling in debt" (*Observations*, 1716, p. 1). King amassed extensive information to counter that view, ultimately claiming that Britain had never paid the same amount proportionately in taxes as Ireland had. But the intensity of the Irish fear is most memorably captured in an anecdote on Swift, which, if apocryphal, nonetheless superbly captures the pervading spirit of the Irish at this time. One evening, runs the anecdote, in the middle of a conversation, Lady Carteret suddenly exclaimed, "The air of this country is so good!" Swift dropped to his knees in an instant,

⁴⁷ On Swift's concern for Irish liberty, see Ferguson, *Swift and Ireland*, esp. pp. 139ff.

entreating, "For God's sake, Madam, don't say so in England; they will certainly tax it!"⁴⁸

In fact, once we comprehend the intensity of the Irish fear and opposition to British schemes for taxation, it seems impossible not to feel that the major economic documents of the period were consciously coordinated efforts on the part of the Irish party to stave off the British interest by documenting in exhaustive detail the true poverty of their country through studies of the absentees (Prior), the population (Dobbs), and the coinage (Maculla and Prior). Unfortunately, we have little information on the intellectual life in Dublin at this time and cannot easily determine how likely this coordination was.⁴⁹ The very rhetoric of the tracts, however, leads one even more to suspect an articulate underground effort. Prior wails at one point, "I believe, there is not, in History, an Instance of any one Country paying so large a yearly Tribute to another," and later, that "*Ireland* has parted with all its Substance, and reduc'd itself to the greatest Poverty, to enrich *England*."⁵⁰ Dobbs fingered the same tune in his *Essay*, urging the moral that "From these Observations *Britain* may see that we cannot reasonably be higher taxed, unless we are encouraged by Trade to increase our Numbers and give them full employment" (*Essay*, Part II, p. 39).

In light of this consistent position, we can only imagine the horror and anger these men must have experienced in seeing Browne pronounce that Ireland not only possessed a superb geographic location for trade, excellent harbors, a populous constituency, "inur'd to Want and Labour, easy to feed, and able upon poor Fare to run through a great deal of Work," but also that "the People are incumbered with very few Taxes."⁵¹ Such a public statement had catastrophic potential. If England sniffed any opportunity for greater

⁴⁸ George Birkbeck Hill, ed., *Unpublished Letters of Dean Swift* (New York, n.d.), p. 200. The anecdote is also related by King, *Great Archbishop*, p. 302n. Neither gives the source.

⁴⁹ A few traces of this collaboration can still be discerned. Swift and King, for example, seem to have coordinated their efforts several times on major issues, and Swift saw and used King's *Observations* (Ferguson, *Swift and Ireland*, pp. 187-88). Ferguson notes, too (p. 187), that a "contemporary note" states that Prior had use of King's *Observations* in preparing his *List of the Absentees*, a fact which implies a distinct coterie and sharing of materials for common purposes.

⁵⁰ *A List of the Absentees of Ireland* (Dublin, 1730), pp. 20, 63. These remarks sound uncannily like those of King.

⁵¹ Quoted by Ferguson, *Swift and Ireland*, pp. 146-47.

taxation, who could dare predict the abysmal results? As Browne's anonymous opponent bluntly observed, "If we are thus increased in Riches, does it not follow, that our Taxes ought to be proportionably increased? Which, I hope, is not the Conclusion my Author aims at" (*Collection*, p. 111).

And Browne must have been cerebrally ignoring one of the basic social realities insisted upon by all observers—the genuine inability of vast numbers of Irish tenants to support *any* greater taxation at all. King wrote to a friend in 1717 of his "apprehension of a Land Tax which the Kingdom could not bear; their Quit-Rents, Crown-Rents, & Hearth-Money (the same with your Chimney Money in England) being so heavy upon the Land."⁵² "The greatest part of the occupiers of the land here," Archbishop Boulter wrote in 1728/29, "are so poor, that an extraordinary stroke of 8 or 10 *L.* falling on them, is certain ruin to them" (*Letters*, I, 234). So poor were many farmers, in fact, that they could not even afford food, and in their desperate need "have eaten the oats they should have sowed their land with; and except the landlords will have the good sense to furnish them with seed, a great deal of land will lye waste this year" (*Letters*, I, 229–30).⁵³ The *Dublin Weekly Journal* of 5 July 1729 carried gruesome descriptions of the landless poor "crowded along the roads, scarce able to walk, and infinite numbers starved in every ditch in the midst of rags, dirt, and nakedness."⁵⁴ It was in the midst of these conditions that Browne had seen fit to announce that the teeming Irish had minimal taxes and an additional million to tax. His economic naiveté on this matter is almost unbearable. In admitting in his *Appeal to the Reverend Dean Swift* his astonishment that anyone "should disguise our Number of Inhabitants; that is a Wealth which our Neighbours the t'other side of the Water won't willingly take from us," he exposed an unexpected ignorance of one of the terrible axioms of the new economic order. As Petty, whom Browne had read, clearly stated in his *Treatise of Taxes & Contributions*: "Fewness of people, is real poverty; and a Nation wherein are Eight Millions of people, are more then twice

⁵² King, *Great Archbishop*, p. 207.

⁵³ So great was the poverty, in fact, that Boulter, even though opposed to emigration to America, confessed that it would be cruel to stop it, "as most of them can neither get victuals nor work at home" (*Letters*, I, 231).

⁵⁴ Dickson, *Ulster Emigration*, p. 44.

as rich as the same scope of Land wherein are but Four" (*Petty*, I, 34). No matter that those people, in Browne's words, are "poor, and not worth seeking after"; according to mercantilist theory, they inherently created wealth, and, if Browne was right, almost twice as much wealth as the Irish admitted publicly, twice as much wealth that could be taxed.

Though Swift and his friends grossly underestimated the true population of that kingdom they labored to preserve from economic collapse, they did derive in their apologetics one maxim whose truth should strike us today with bitter, not to say grotesque, aptness—Swift's biting volley, "There is not one Argument used to prove the Riches of *Ireland*, which is not a logical Demonstration of its Poverty" (XII, 11). If the oppression evinced by a stunted population growth drove Swift and his friends into paroxysms of despair, we can only envision the horror they would have experienced at the still more tragic, savage, rampant poverty suggested by our present knowledge. Their protests, as it was, helped little; nor did they ultimately, I think, have much hope they would. But at the very least, I think, these men hoped to smother the most pernicious brand of economic discussion, that variety which (to them) mangled statistics to the point of trumpeting prosperity in the face of poverty itself. They set forth the dismal plight of the nation as forcefully, dramatically, poignantly as they could, repeatedly complaining that "the screwing and racking of Tenants all over the Kingdom, have already reduced the miserable *People* to a *Worse Condition* than the *Peasants* in *France*, or the *Vassals* in *Germany* and *Poland*" (IX, 21), insisting that there was no money to be had—the people "have already given their bread, their flesh, their Butter, their Shoes, their Stockings, their beds, their house furniture and Houses to pay their Landlords and Taxes, I cannot See how any more can be got from them, except we take away their potatoes and buttermilk or flay them and Sell their Skins."⁵⁵ But along with these protests, they evinced a tough, gloomy realism. As the author of the counterattacks on Browne confessed, "All Nations in their Dealings with one another,

⁵⁵ *Observations* (1716), p. 17. The savage vituperation of this remark fooled Dickson into believing that it was by Swift (p. 30). But it is the concluding statement of King's 1716 draft on Irish taxation. The intensity of its invective demonstrates that Swift's particular acidity was not as uncommon in his age as we often imagine.

may be said to be as it were in a State of Nature; ever ready to lay hold of any Opportunity that may offer, to aggrandize themselves" (*Collection*, p. 109). Or, as Sheridan observed, voicing the lurking dread of all those of his party, "If the Bayliff reports to his Master, that the Ox is fat and strong, when in Reality it can hardly carry its own Legs, is it not natural to think, that Command will be given, for a greater Load to be put upon it?" (*Intelligencer*, p. 65).

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