

THE VALUE OF A VOTE.

BY H. MORGAN-BROWNE.



HERE is nothing much the matter with the British Constitution in theory, but there is a good deal to deplore in practice. For instance, look at the House of Commons and consider how we get it. There are 670 members elected to

East (Conservative majority, 11), Stafford (Liberal majority, 12); in 1895, King's Lynn (Conservative majority, 11), Lichfield (Conservative majority, 11); and quite recently in the by-elections in Durham City and York. But this kind of fictitious value which the balance of political parties in certain places gives to single votes is inseparable from the changes and chances of this mortal life. Another kind of inequality in the value of votes is that due to the different size of constituencies, and it is with this political unfairness, which can perfectly well be remedied, that I am here concerned.

In the following instances I have avoided confining myself to the most extreme cases only, in order to show that the anomalies with which I am dealing are not isolated exceptions, but, on the contrary, are of frequent occurrence.

In a little Irish town called Galway there are 2,000 electors; in Cardiff there are 20,000. It is clear that a vote in Galway is worth ten times as much as a vote in Cardiff. It is found by experience that under rather than over 75 per cent. of electors on the register go to the poll. 75 per cent. of 2,000 is 1,500; so that in Galway 751 votes given to A. B. at an election would almost certainly make him M.P. But in Cardiff 751 votes would be lost in the 7,501 required to make matters certain there. Consequently, in Galway a voter has ten times as much influence in the election of a member of Parliament as he would have in Cardiff. This is an illustration from two single constituencies; the matter becomes more flagrant when we find a whole section of the community politically more powerful than the rest. Yet this is the case with regard to Ireland. Roughly speaking, 16 per cent. of the population are on the Parliamentary Register—*i.e.*, are or may be voters. In the whole United Kingdom there are six and a half million voters who return the 670 members of Parliament. On a fair division that would give one M.P. to every 10,000 electors nearly. Now, Ireland has only 720,000 voters, and so is fairly entitled to 72 or 73 members of Parliament, instead of the 103 by which she is at present

do the people's will. They are elected by votes, of which every one is supposed to be as good as another—that is to say, a man in Newcastle, if on the register, has a vote which should be of as much account towards electing his member as the vote of a man in Kilkenny Co., Ireland. Of course, there must always be cases where votes are of more importance than in others. For instance, a Conservative vote is worth very little in West Monmouthshire, where the Liberal majority at the election of 1895 was over 5,200; while a Liberal vote is not of much use in West Birmingham, where the same election showed a Unionist majority of over 4,000. On the other hand, in some places single votes are worth all the expense of an election. Thus in 1892 the Liberal majority in Central Finsbury was only 5, while in 1895 the Liberal majority in Durham City was only 1, and the Conservative majority in North Salford only 6. In the following places individual votes must have given their possessors considerable importance at the time of the election:—In 1892, Linlithgow (Liberal majority, 7), St. George's-in-the-

**VOTING STRENGTH
of United Kingdom**



6,500,000 Voters

**REPRESENTATION
of United Kingdom**



670 Members

I.

represented. Ireland gets these 30 extra M.P.'s at the expense of England, as Scotland and Wales are represented in almost exact proportion to voters. The diagram above (Fig. I.) shows at a glance that Ireland gets more than her share of political representation.

You see the shaded square in the lower left hand corner of the right hand big square, which shows the proportion of Irish M.P.'s to English and Welsh and Scotch, is a good deal larger than the corresponding shaded square in the left hand big square showing the proportion of Irish voters. They would be the same size exactly if Ireland were proportionately represented.

We may put the matter in another way. The average English and Welsh constituency has about 10,400 electors, the average Scotch 9,200, and the average Irish only 7,000. Consequently we may say—

70 Irish votes = 92 Scotch votes = 104 English votes, which, though an actual fact under existing conditions, is not one which the

average English voter will contemplate with pleasure. This is on the average; in particular cases, as I have shown, the disproportion is far more glaring. Thus—

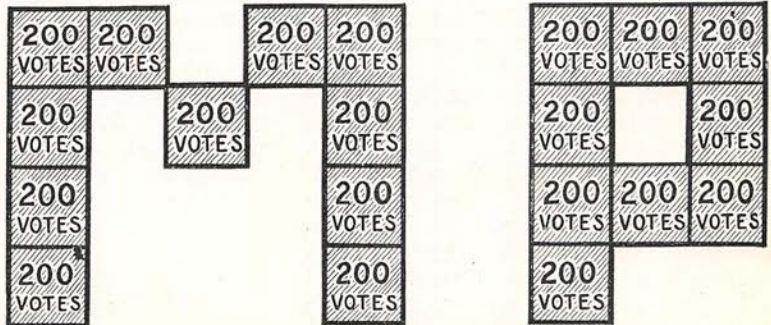
The vote of 1 Galway peasant equals in political power the votes of 10 Cardiff mechanics.

But to return to our averages. Remembering that only about 75 per cent. of the electorate go to the poll, and that a bare majority is all that is necessary to elect a member of Parliament, we may say that, on the average, 4,000 votes are

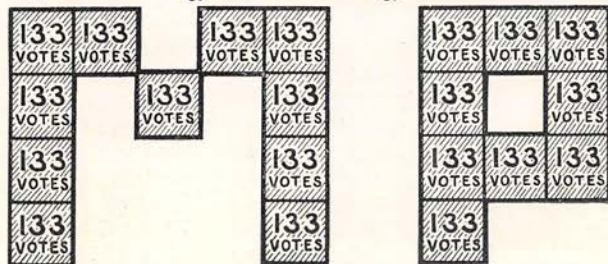
required to elect an English or Welsh M.P., while only 2,660 are required in the case of an Irish M.P. This is shown in Figures II. and III., where the letters "M.P." are built up of ballot-boxes of proportionate size, containing the necessary number of votes in each case. In reality the English M.P. is a more important man than his Irish colleague, because he represents so many more people, but in the House of Commons his

II.

4,000 VOTES go to the making of an ENGLISH M.P.

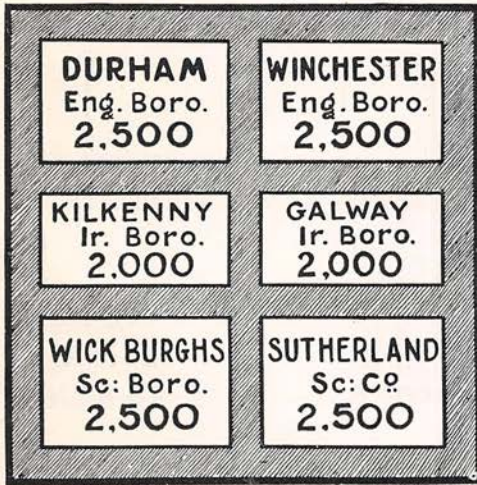


2,600 VOTES go to the making of an IRISH M.P.



III.

ROMFORD (Essex)



25,000 VOTERS.

IV.

vote has just the same value as the Irishman's.

But these inequalities of representation are by no means confined to Ireland as compared with England. In all four sections of the United Kingdom there are instances of unfair difference in the value of votes in different places. Of course, there cannot be mathematical exactness in these matters, while the rapid growth of population in favoured localities will always disarrange the most careful schemes from time to time; but one can easily see that there is room for a good deal of improvement in the present distribution of political power.

The largest constituency in the United Kingdom is the Romford division of the County of Essex. It contains nearly 25,000 electors, but returns only one member of Parliament. Half a dozen of the smaller constituencies scattered up and down the British Isles could be carved out of Romford, and enough voters would still be left to make a full average constituency.

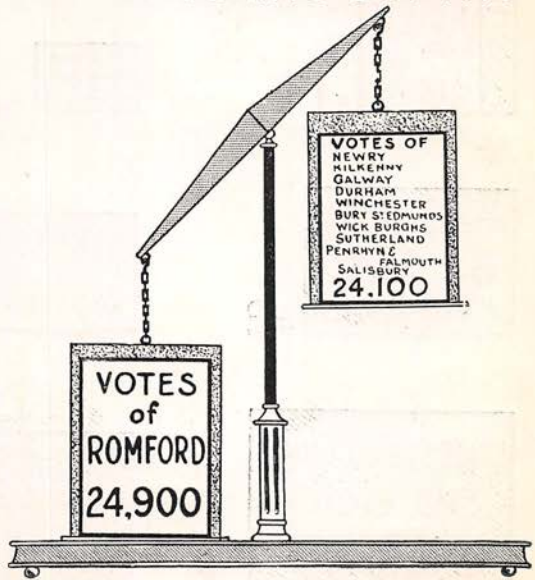
In Fig. IV. the big shaded square represents the 25,000 voters of Romford; out of these enough are taken to provide: Two English boroughs, two Irish boroughs, one Scotch borough, one Scotch county, with all their voters; yet the shaded part left represents more voters than Chatham (a town of 60,000 inhabitants) possesses. As a matter of fact, the voters of Romford could provide electors for no less than TEN of the smaller constituencies in the United

Kingdom. The next two figures show how all this works out.

In Fig. V. two large ballot-boxes are supposed to be put on to a pair of scales. In one are supposed to be the voting-papers of Romford (returning one member to Parliament), in the other the voting papers of ten small constituencies (returning between them ten M.P.'s) consisting of five English boroughs, three Irish boroughs, one Scotch borough, one Scotch county; yet, as you see, all the votes of the TEN would have to kick the beam when weighed against the votes of the ONE. That is the case at the polling-booths. In the House of Commons the case is very different, as Fig. VI. shows you. There, what we may call the shout of Romford saying "Yes" through its representative is weighed against the small voice of Kilkenny saying "No," but the scales balance exactly. The "Yes" and "No" in the diagram are in rough proportion to the voting strength of Romford and Kilkenny.

I showed in Fig. II. and Fig. III. how many more votes on an average went to the making of an English M.P. than were required for an Irish M.P. In actual practice in certain cases the difference is even more startling, and by no means confined to contrasts between England and Ireland. At the General Election of 1895 the largest number of votes polled by any candidate was 13,085 at Oldham (a two-member con-

At the POLLING BOOTHS.

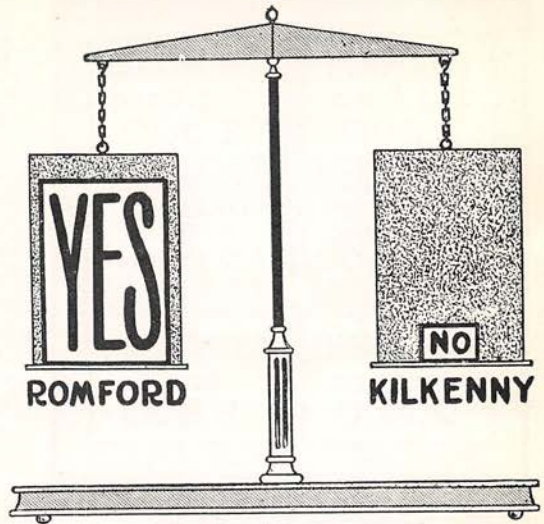


V.

stituency), and the smallest number polled by a successful candidate was 595 at Galway. In this case the member for Oldham received *twenty-two* times as many votes as the member for Galway. Or, again, compare the 8,386 votes required to win the seat at Cardiff (a single-member constituency) with the 681 which sufficed at Kilkenny. In this case, every vote at Kilkenny is worth more than 12 votes at Cardiff.

Another striking aspect of the same thing is this. To give places like Kilkenny (pop. 13,700), or Durham (pop. 15,300), or Pontefract (pop. 16,400), or the Wick Burghs (pop. 18,100), or the County of Bute (pop. 18,200), or the Montgomery District Boroughs (pop. 17,800), the same amount of representation—*i.e.*, one M.P. each—as is given to places like Romford, Walthamstow, Cardiff, Handsworth (Staffs.), Wandsworth, or Wimbledon—*each of which has more electors than any one of the other places has inhabitants*—is like giving some parts of the country universal suffrage, including babyhood suffrage, while other parts remain under a strictly limited franchise. This is no fanciful picture based on a rare exception. In the United Kingdom there are no less than 27 constituencies in each of which the *whole population*, down to infants in arms, is less than the number of *electors* in the Romford division of Essex. Here are a few cases

In the HOUSE of COMMONS.



VI.

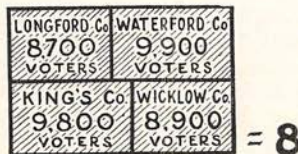
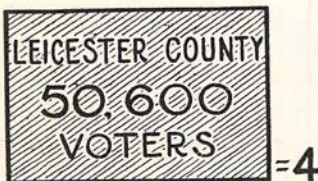
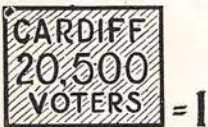
where the *electorate* of one constituency exceeds the *population* of other constituencies. There are :—

More VOTERS in Romford than PEOPLE in Canterbury;

More VOTERS in Walthamstow than PEOPLE in Rutland;

More VOTERS in Tot'enham than PEOPLE in Taunton.

Some Parliamentary Arithmetic.



VII.

Croydon is the *eleventh* largest single-member constituency in the United Kingdom, yet there are *eight* constituencies (including Bury St. Edmunds, Durham, Grantham, Pontefract, and Salisbury) each of which has fewer inhabitants than Croydon has voters; while Cardiff, with 20,500 electors, has more voters than the population of any one of *twenty-one* other constituencies (including Hereford, Winchester, King's Lynn, Windsor, etc.).

There is yet another way of looking at it. Supposing some of the busy centres of population were allowed to send representatives to Parliament upon the same terms as these sleepy hollows of the Kingdom. What would

be the result? If votes everywhere were as valuable as votes in Newry (Ireland), with 1,894 electors—the smallest constituency in the United Kingdom—Romford would return 13 members to Parliament, Walthamstow 11, Cardiff 10, instead of one member each; while Newcastle would return 17, the City of London 17, and Oldham 14, instead of two members each, as at present. Birmingham, which at present returns 7 members, would become entitled to 45. In short, there are 40 large constituencies in the United Kingdom—all with more than 15,000 electors apiece—which between them return 40 members to Parliament at present, but which, represented as Newry is to-day, would between them be entitled to 350

members, or a clear majority of the House of Commons.

Lastly, on the basis of Newry's representation, instead of a House of Commons consisting of 670 members, we should have one of no less than *three thousand four hundred and thirty-six*—3,436 M.P.'s!

Finally, in Fig. VII. we have ocular demonstration of some peculiar Parliamentary arithmetic under existing conditions. Bath, with little more than a third of the number of voters, returns two members to Parliament, against Cardiff's one; and four thinly populated Irish counties, containing altogether about the same number of voters as Newcastle, can outvote that town's representatives by four to one.



LLEWELLYN.

From a photograph by E. B. Mowl, Birmingham.