

## The British German Legion and the Irish “Marriage Force”: Assisted Emigration Schemes and the Mid-Victorian British Empire

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**Abstract** This article examines the *Lady Kennaway* assisted emigration scheme, designed to send women from Ireland’s workhouses to the eastern frontier of the Cape Colony in Southern Africa. First proposed by Colonial Secretary Henry Labouchere in 1857, the scheme’s purpose was to provide wives for the British German Legion, which had been resettled to British Kaffraria the previous year. Initially, the plan appeared to be of benefit for both Ireland and the Cape Colony. According to colonial officials and emigration commissioners, Ireland would be rid of a superfluous population, the Irish women would attain social and economic advancement, and the Eastern Cape would gain much-needed female settlers. Emigration authorities quickly found their optimism tempered by realities, however, as many Irish Poor Law guardians and workhouse women refused to participate. The *Lady Kennaway* scheme—so named after the ship that carried the emigrants—demonstrates the ways in which local interests could, and often did, shape imperial practices. Moreover, in tracking the decisions of emigration commissioners in London, colonial officials in Southern Africa, Poor Law guardians in Ireland, and potential female emigrants, this analysis reveals the multitude of individuals who molded Britain’s mid-nineteenth-century imperial project.

In November 1857, the *Lady Kennaway*, a full-masted vessel built forty years earlier, docked at Buffalo Mouth on the eastern border of Britain’s South African territories. Of the 212 passengers who disembarked, 153 were participants in a government-assisted emigration scheme designed to transport single women from Ireland’s workhouses to British Kaffraria.<sup>1</sup> Named for the ship that carried the emigrants, The *Lady Kennaway* emigration scheme was by no means the first of its kind. The Irish Famine of the previous decade had resulted in an unprecedented flow of emigrants from the island, with approximately 2.1 million people—one-quarter of Ireland’s population—leaving between 1846 and 1855.<sup>2</sup> While many of these individuals looked to remittances from family and friends to

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<sup>1</sup> Frederic Rogers to Herman Merivale, 21 August 1857, The National Archives, CO 386/107. (Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as TNA.)

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Kenny, “Irish Emigration, c.1845–1900,” *The Cambridge History of Ireland*, vol. 3, 1730–1880, ed. James Kelly (Cambridge, 2018), 666–87, at 669.

fund their migration, such financial support was not available to all. The poorest sections of Irish society found themselves reliant on landlords, philanthropists, and even the government to finance their passage. Young women from Ireland's workhouses accounted for the majority of these "invisible emigrants"<sup>3</sup>: contemporaries estimated that adult women over the age of fifteen comprised 58 percent of individuals who emigrated with assistance under the provisions of the Irish Poor Relief Acts between 1849 and 1863.<sup>4</sup>

Although not the first plan to assist the migration of Irish women, the *Lady Kennaway* scheme differed from its famine-era predecessors in several important ways. First, although emigration commissioners had assisted the migration of sixty-one women from the Wexford workhouse to Cape Town in 1849, Southern Africa was not a common destination for Ireland's emigrants—especially not the Eastern Cape. Instead, during the mid-nineteenth century, the vast majority of Irish emigrants left on ships bound for North America or Australia.<sup>5</sup> Second, and perhaps more importantly, this migration program developed in response to another scheme that had resulted in the settlement of the British German Legion to the area months earlier. The resulting influx of military settlers had brought a boom of male immigrants to a region already noted for a significant gender imbalance among the European population. In 1857, British officialdom hoped the *Lady Kennaway*'s Irish women would offset this imbalance and possibly even marry the restless legionaries.

The story of this "Marriage Force"—as *The Nation* newspaper in Ireland referred to the women—has been told before.<sup>6</sup> Often, however, the women are included as a side note in studies of the German Legion or of *British* female migration, examined within the political context of the mid-nineteenth-century Cape Colony, or their story is simply told in brief narrative form.<sup>7</sup> Historians, in other words, have not examined the *Lady Kennaway* scheme in an imperial context. Furthermore, while some scholars

<sup>3</sup> Gerard Moran, "Permanent Deadweight: Female Pauper Emigration from Mountbellew Workhouse to Canada," in *Women and the Great Hunger*, ed. Christine Kinealy, Jason King, and Ciarán Reilly (Hamden, 2016), 109–22, at 109.

<sup>4</sup> Robert F. Clokey, "Irish Emigration from Workhouses," *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland* 3, part 24 (July 1863): 416–35, at 416.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the government-assisted emigration of Irish women, see Trevor McClaughlin, *Barefoot and Pregnant? Irish Famine Orphans in Australia* (Melbourne, 1991); Dympna McLoughlin, "Superfluous and Unwanted Deadweight: The Emigration of Nineteenth-Century Irish Pauper Women," *The Irish World Wide: History, Heritage, Identity*, vol. 4, *Irish Women and Irish Migration*, ed. Patrick O'Sullivan (London, 1995): 66–88; Gerard Moran, *Sending Out Ireland's Poor: Assisted Emigration to North America in the Nineteenth Century* (Dublin, 2004): 123–58; Ciarán Reilly, "An Inhospitable Welcome? Emigration to the Cape of Good Hope during the Great Irish Famine," in "The Great Irish Famine: Global Contexts," ed. Marguérite Corporaal and Jason King, special issue, *breac*, 28 January 2018, <https://breac.nd.edu/articles/an-inhospitable-welcome-emigration-to-the-cape-of-good-hope-during-the-great-irish-famine/>.

<sup>6</sup> "Irish Wives for the German Legion," *Nation* (Dublin), 12 September 1857.

<sup>7</sup> For examples, see John Laband, "From Mercenaries to Military Settlers: The British German Legion, 1854–1861," in *Soldiers and Settlers in Africa, 1850–1918*, ed. Stephen M. Miller (Boston, 2009), 85–122; Cecillie Swaisland, *Servants and Gentlewomen to the Golden Land: The Emigration of Single Women from Britain to Southern Africa, 1820–1939* (Oxford, 1993); Keith Tankard, "Effects of Irish versus German Immigration on the Eastern Frontier, 1857–1858," *South African-Irish Studies*, no. 1 (1991): 113–21; George Hofmeyr, "The Irish Female Settlers and the Frontier," *Quarterly Bulletin of the National Library of South Africa* 62, no. 4 (2008): 196–202.

recognize these women as Irish, few have emphasized their Irish workhouse origins as a point of analysis. Yet, as I argue, both the Irish component and the imperial context of this story are important. The Irish women and the German legionaries were part of broader efforts to colonize Southern Africa through the settlement of European immigrants. Indeed, the *Lady Kennaway* plan stands out in history as a moment when colonial officials and emigration commissioners sought to combine military and workhouse emigration schemes for imperial ends. The conversations surrounding these efforts, especially the organization of the "Marriage Force" and the challenges that officials faced as they implemented the plan, provide crucial insight into the impact of local actors on Britain's imperial project.

In reality, such academic neglect is not unusual. More than twenty years ago, Adele Perry noted that scholars frequently approached migration studies and the imperial process as "wholly separate topics with little in common," despite the two being "deeply and irreparably intertwined." Similarly, the role of gender in migration was often cast aside in favor of other categories of analysis.<sup>8</sup> Yet, as Philippa Levine has reminded us, drawing together gender and empire not only repopulates "the stage with a more diverse cast of historical protagonists" but also highlights many of the power relations central to imperial expansion.<sup>9</sup> Assisted emigration schemes, tending as they did toward state involvement and social engineering, proved particularly revealing of the intersections between migration, gender, and imperialism.<sup>10</sup> In this particular case study, for example, officials from across the empire debated the potential marriage of German military settlers and Irish workhouse women as an appropriate means to colonize the Cape's eastern frontier.

Since the publication of Perry's *Edge of Empire* in 2001 and Levine's edited collection, *Gender and Empire*, in 2004, several scholars have addressed the critical role that British women played in assisted migration programs. The latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed the development of several female emigration societies, including the Female Middle Class Emigration Society, the Women's Emigration Society, the British Women's Emigration Association, and others. Largely female run, these philanthropic societies provided middle-class and upper-class British women with the opportunity to transform the emigration process, address the problem of "surplus" women in British society, and shape the colonies of settlement. While recognizing that both emigrators and emigrants exercised imperial responsibilities, much of the literature that explores the potentially empowering aspects of assisted female emigration focuses on the British emigrators as the "agents of empire."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849–1871* (Toronto, 2001), 19. James Hammerton reinforces this idea, noting, "The history of migration has in some respects been the 'poor relation' of imperial history generally, and more specifically of gender and Empire." A. James Hammerton, "Gender and Migration," in *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford, 2004), 156–80, at 156.

<sup>9</sup> Philippa Levine, "Introduction: Why Gender and Empire?," in Levine, *Gender and Empire*, 1–13, at 1.

<sup>10</sup> Hammerton, "Gender and Migration," 156–57; Philip Harling, "Assisted Emigration and the Moral Dilemmas of the Mid-Victorian Imperial State," *Historical Journal* 59, no. 4 (2016): 1027–49, at 1029.

<sup>11</sup> Lisa Chilton, *Agents of Empire: British Female Migration to Canada and Australia, 1860–1930* (Toronto, 2007). See also Jan Gothard, *Blue China: Single Female Migration to Colonial Australia* (Melbourne, 2001); Marie Ruiz, *British Female Emigration Societies and the New World, 1860–1914* (Cham, 2017).

The scholarship that explores Irish workhouse migration schemes, on the other hand, tends to examine the frequently negative reception that awaited these women as they reached the edge of empire. Indeed, from North America to Australia, immigration agents, colonial settlers, and employers complained that single women, especially those from Ireland's workhouses, were poorly trained and ill behaved. These complaints ultimately cast workhouse migration as a plot on the part of Irish Poor Law guardians to unload unwanted "paupers" onto unsuspecting colonial populations.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the government-sponsored schemes appear to have been a process controlled entirely by workhouse agents on one end and colonial employers on the other.

Workhouse women are rarely allotted a voice in these stories. Given the scarcity of historical documents penned by female workhouse emigrants, this absence is understandable. Because this article examines the role of workhouse women in a larger, imperial system, much of the evidence is drawn from official documents—documents in which male voices drown out female ones. The workhouse women, however, can be heard in their behavior, or more accurately, in reports of their *mis*behavior. Colonial officials, both at the point of departure and at the site of arrival, frequently complained that these women did not do what they were supposed to do. According to Perry, the "failure of working-class white women" to behave in an expected manner in this context reveals "the deep chasm that separated imperial discourse from imperial practice."<sup>13</sup> The women's unpredictable behavior can also be seen as the exercise of agency, a means by which they, too, shaped the historical story.<sup>14</sup>

The *Lady Kennaway* case study—with its diverse cast of historical characters—reminds us that government-assisted migration schemes were imperial by design. The plan involved the members of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission, the Colonial Office in London, Poor Law guardians in Ireland, colonial officials in Southern Africa, religious leaders in both locations, and, not to be forgotten, German legionaries and Irish women. The scheme generated varied responses from these equally varied protagonists. The proposed plan drew considerable support from officials in London and Cape Town, who understood the assisted emigrants as potential tools of colonial development and recognized their migration as a strategic opportunity for imperial expansion. In Ireland, however, the proposal generated significant and lasting debate. Irish Poor Law guardians, members of the provincial press, and the women themselves questioned the motivations behind the plan and carefully weighed the pros and cons of the opportunity. Including these varied perspectives exposes the myriad challenges faced by emigration commissioners, Poor Law guardians, and colonial officials as they sought to adhere to the reformative impulses of Britain's mid-Victorian, liberal empire. Moreover, examining these challenges highlights the complexities of the migration schemes and reveals the ways in which local attitudes could, and often did, shape imperial practices. Finally,

<sup>12</sup> Ciara Breathnach, "Even 'Wilder Workhouse Girls': The Problem of Institutionalisation among Irish Immigrants to New Zealand, 1874," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 5 (2011): 771–94; McLoughlin, "Superfluous and Unwanted Deadweight," 66–88.

<sup>13</sup> Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, 166.

<sup>14</sup> According to James Hammerton, for both men and women, this "countervailing and complex story of agency" is especially evident on the migrant voyage. Hammerton, "Gender and Migration," 164.

acknowledging the decisions of workhouse women at the site of departure as well as that of arrival provides insight into the countless ways that non-elite women navigated and negotiated the nineteenth-century imperial realm.

### THE IRISH POOR LAW AND ASSISTED EMIGRATION

By the time that government officials began to organize the *Lady Kennaway* scheme, the assisted emigration of Ireland's poorest inhabitants had been a subject of debate within British and Irish political circles for more than three decades. In the early 1820s, for example, authorities had introduced the Peter Robinson scheme to curtail agrarian violence in Ireland and remove surplus population. The scheme resulted in the government-assisted emigration of 2,600 individuals from Munster to Canada. While recognized by many as wildly successful, the Peter Robinson scheme was also wildly expensive. Dismayed by the substantial financial outlay required, authorities later insisted that the scheme had been an experiment and was not to be repeated.<sup>15</sup> Regardless, the topic of government-assisted emigration did not disappear, and throughout the 1830s the subject became tightly interwoven with efforts to introduce a poor law to Ireland—efforts that came to fruition in 1838.

Modeled on its 1834 English counterpart, the 1838 Irish Poor Law Act divided the island into 130 districts, or unions, each with its own workhouse. A locally elected board of guardians administered the workhouses, under the supervision of Poor Law commissioners. Although designed to provide indoor relief for the poor and destitute, the Poor Law also included means for the guardians to levy an emigration rate and conduct assisted emigration as a possible solution for overcrowding. With the onset of the famine in 1845, this potential problem became a reality as impoverished and starving individuals entered workhouses in dramatically increasing numbers. For example, over the course of seven months, from October 1846 to April 1847, the Naas workhouse population more than doubled. By April 1849, the Kenmore workhouse held eighteen hundred inmates, more than three times the number it was built to accommodate. And, by late June 1850, inmates housed in the Galway workhouse "were sleeping four to a bed, and in some cases five." The overcrowding continued into the 1850s, as more and more landlords turned to eviction to make their land economically viable.<sup>16</sup>

This population explosion in the workhouses introduced a shared desire—if not a shared desperation—among inmates and guardians alike to implement emigration schemes as a method of relief. As Hidetaka Hirota notes, however, the famine years also presented a "dilemma" for many guardians. While workhouse populations rose, resources declined as ratepayers struggled to pay the rates. As a result, while many guardians may have wished to support assisted emigration, the financial resources to do so simply were not available.<sup>17</sup> In the late 1840s, Parliament attempted to address the issue by expanding the role and financial powers of the union workhouses in assisted emigration schemes. With the passage of the

<sup>15</sup> Moran, *Sending Out Ireland's Poor*, 21–28.

<sup>16</sup> Moran, 128, 135, and 137.

<sup>17</sup> Hidetaka Hirota, *Expelling the Poor: Atlantic Seaboard States and the Nineteenth-Century Origins of American Immigration Policy* (New York, 2017), 35–36.

Monsell Act in 1849, for example, Poor Law guardians could borrow money from the Exchequer Bill Loan commissioners to finance emigration. “For the first time during the Famine crisis,” Gerard Moran notes, “the state was prepared to allow a form of assistance for the emigration of the poorer classes.”<sup>18</sup>

At roughly the same time, the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission received permission from the Colonial Office to relax its regulations, which had deemed workhouse inmates ineligible for government-assisted passage.<sup>19</sup> With the establishment of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission in 1840, government-assisted emigration had become a highly regulated and centralized process. Over the course of its existence from 1840 to 1872, the commission oversaw the recruitment and passage of more than 340,000 British and Irish individuals.<sup>20</sup> The height of this emigration occurred during the late 1840s and early 1850s, when the commissioners began to turn their attention to Ireland. In 1848, noting a demand for single women in Britain’s Australian colonies, a wish to offset the “disproportion between the sexes in those colonies,” and a high number of eligible and appropriate emigrants in the Irish workhouses, the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission began to cooperate directly with Poor Law authorities in Ireland.<sup>21</sup> These efforts resulted in several assisted emigration programs, the most famous being the Earl Grey scheme, in which the commission helped organize the movement of more than four thousand orphaned girls from Ireland to Australia between 1848 and 1850. By the 1850s, in other words, a precedent and a model for assisted emigration schemes were in place.<sup>22</sup> According to the commission, the *Lady Kennaway* scheme of 1857 was very much modeled on the “same principles” as the earlier schemes to southern Australia.<sup>23</sup>

Even as the famine wound down and workhouse populations returned to more manageable numbers, women and children continued to account for the majority of those seeking Poor Law relief. In 1857, for example, the workhouses in both Cork and Limerick were operating under capacity, but women and children accounted for more than 70 percent of the inmate population in Cork and more than 75 percent in Limerick.<sup>24</sup> For many guardians, this reality posed both concerns

<sup>18</sup> Moran, *Sending Out Ireland’s Poor*, 89.

<sup>19</sup> Ninth General Report of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners, 1849, C. 1082, at 4–5. See also Robin Haines, “Workhouse to Gangplank: Mobilising Irish Pauper Women and Girls Bound for Australia in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” in *Irish-Australian Studies: Papers Delivered at the Eighth Irish-Australian Conference*, ed. Richard Davis et al. (Sydney, 1996), 166–78, at 166.

<sup>20</sup> Harling, “Assisted Emigration,” 1036.

<sup>21</sup> Eighth General Report of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners, 1848, C. 961, at 8; Haines, “Workhouse to Gangplank,” 166.

<sup>22</sup> For more on the Earl Grey scheme, see McClaughlin, *Barefoot and Pregnant?*; Trevor McClaughlin, “Lost Children? Irish Famine Orphans in Australia,” *History Ireland* 8, no. 4 (2000): 30–34; Kay Moloney Caball, *The Kerry Girls: Emigration and the Earl Grey Scheme* (Dublin, 2014); Rebecca Abbott, “The Earl Grey Orphan Scheme, 1848–1850, and the Irish Diaspora in Australia,” *Women and the Great Hunger*, ed. Christine Kinealy, Jason King, and Ciaran Reilly (Hamden, 2016); Harling, “Assisted Emigration,” 1027–49.

<sup>23</sup> Eighteenth General Report of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners, 1858, C. 2395, at 23.

<sup>24</sup> On 8 August 1857, the Cork union workhouse could accommodate 3,970 people. Of the 1,919 inmates, 870 were women, 183 were girls between the ages of nine and fifteen, and 318 were children under the age of nine. On 1 August 1857, the Limerick union workhouse could accommodate 2,654



and opportunities. As Moran notes, most guardians feared that "these women would become a long-term burden on the unions' finances." Furthermore, "It was felt that those between 13 and 19 years had little to gain [from the workhouse experience] and the longer they remained as inmates their prospects of being rehabilitated outside of the workhouses diminished."<sup>25</sup> As a result, and as concerns regarding the imbalance of sexes elsewhere in the empire surfaced, emigration authorities and Poor Law guardians looked to Ireland's workhouses for a solution.

This is not to say, however, that Irish Poor Law guardians were "shovelling out" paupers,<sup>26</sup> nor does it indicate that colonial administrators controlled the entire process. According to Robin Haines, throughout the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission's existence, emigration commissioners were determined that the Poor Law "serve the interests of the colonies and not *vice versa*." Consequently, Poor Law emigration schemes often flourished when the need for labor in the colonies was high and suffered in response to any colonial complaints or objections.<sup>27</sup> The *Lady Kennaway* scheme and the resulting debates, however, reveal these emigration programs to have been much more complicated. While emigration authorities often did look to Ireland for potential emigrants, the Irish Poor Law guardians were not entirely subservient to the whims of distant colonial subjects. Instead, emigration commissioners, Poor Law guardians, colonial officials, the local press, and even the workhouse women all played integral roles in the success of each migration scheme.

## THE BRITISH GERMAN LEGION

Although famine-era assisted migration provided a model for the *Lady Kennaway* scheme, it was not events in Ireland that initiated the organization of the "Marriage Force" in 1857. The roots of this particular experiment can be traced to broader imperial practices, including the appointment of Sir George Grey as governor of the Cape Colony and high commissioner of South Africa in 1854. While new to the Cape Colony, Grey was not new to world of colonial officialdom. He was fresh from an eight-year stint as governor of New Zealand, where he had enjoyed relative popularity and high accolades for his leadership during the wars of the 1840s.<sup>28</sup> Among his successful efforts, Grey was noted for his introduction of

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individuals. Of the 1,165 inmates, 470 were women, 194 were girls between the ages of nine and fifteen, and 213 were children under the age of nine. Cork Union Board of Guardians Minute Book, 8 August 1857, Cork City and County Archives, BG/69/A/24; Limerick Union Board of Guardians Minute Books, 1 August 1857, Limerick City Council and Local Government Collections, BG 110/A 28.

<sup>25</sup> Moran, *Sending Out Ireland's Poor*, 139.

<sup>26</sup> Dympna McLoughlin, "'Shovelling Out Paupers': Female Emigration from Irish Workhouses, 1840–1870," Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, 1988, 231.

<sup>27</sup> Robin F. Haines, *Emigration and the Labouring Poor: Australian Recruitment in Britain and Ireland, 1831–60* (Basingstoke, 1997), 150.

<sup>28</sup> Grey's tenure at both the Cape and New Zealand has received significant attention from historians. See J. B. Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856–7* (Bloomington, 1989); Alan Ward, *A Show of Racial Justice: Racial 'Amalgamation' in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand*, rev. ed. (Auckland, 1995); Richard Price, *Making Empire: Colonial Encounters and the Creation of Imperial Rule in Nineteenth-Century Africa* (Cambridge, 2008); Alan Lester and Fae Dussart, *Colonization and the Origins of Humanitarian Governance: Protecting Aborigines across the Nineteenth-Century British Empire* (Cambridge, 2014).

military settlers to New Zealand—on the one hand, these ex-soldiers acted as agricultural laborers in the South Pacific colony, and on the other, the “Fencibles” served as military reinforcement in times of emergency. Following his arrival to Southern Africa, Grey quickly contacted the Colonial Office with a similar proposal for the volatile region of the Eastern Cape.<sup>29</sup> Not only did London officials support Grey’s suggestion, but by 1856 they had identified a likely source for these military settlers: the newly recruited British German Legion.

By the mid-nineteenth century, military settlement was a tried-and-true imperial practice. In addition to the New Zealand Fencibles, for example, the imperial government had introduced three similar settlements to Upper Canada in the wake of the War of 1812. These establishments, according to Richard Reid, served two strategic purposes: first, the imperial government hoped to transplant loyal populations to vulnerable outposts of empire, and, second, the emigration of demobilized soldiers promised to “ameliorate domestic problems” in postwar Britain.<sup>30</sup> In the 1850s, Grey and the imperial government expressed similar hopes for the legionaries, although for many colonial authorities the soldiers’ German origins raised concerns of loyalty.

The British government had established the German Legion as one of several foreign legions organized to assist them in the Crimean War. Once the fighting came to an end—which occurred before the German soldiers had even reached the front—many of the mercenaries found themselves unwelcome at home and consequently dependent on Britain for both protection and employment. Luckily for the German soldiers, they found Queen Victoria sympathetic to their plight. Married to a German herself, the queen encouraged officials to assist the soldiers rather than disband the legion. Treating the soldiers too harshly, she warned, would have a negative impact on British relations with the European continent and would likely complicate any future recruiting efforts. In response to the queen’s plea for “generosity,” British administrators scrambled to find an appropriate place for the mercenaries, and, in 1856, the War Office proposed to Grey that they resettle the men in British Kaffraria.<sup>31</sup>

Annexed by the Cape Colony in 1847 and located on the colony’s eastern border, the constitutional status of British Kaffraria continued to cause some confusion. On the one hand, “its existence was inextricably interwoven with the Cape in almost every facet”; on the other hand, British Kaffraria and the Cape were “officially separated.”<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, colonial officials did not promote European settlement to the Eastern Cape until the early 1850s. Relations between the British settlers and Xhosa inhabitants of Southern Africa had long been tense and had frequently erupted in armed conflict over the course of the nineteenth century.

<sup>29</sup> Laband, “From Mercenaries to Military Settlers,” 99.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Reid, “The End of Imperial Town Planning in Upper Canada,” *Urban History Review/Revue d’histoire urbaine* 19, no. 1 (1990): 30–31.

<sup>31</sup> Queen Victoria to Lord Panmure, 14 March 1856, in *The Panmure Papers: Being a Selection from the Correspondence of Fox Maule, 2nd Baron Panmure afterwards 11th Earl of Dalhousie*, vol. 2, ed. Sir George Douglas and Sir George Dalhousie Ramsay (London, 1908), 153; Laband, “From Mercenaries to Military Settlers,” 96–97.

<sup>32</sup> Tankard, “Effects of Irish versus German Immigration on the Eastern Frontier,” 119.



When the most recent war drew to an end in 1852, colonial officials argued that European settlement might play a prominent role in efforts to pacify British Kaffraria. According to Grey, whose policies centered on "'forced civilization' by amalgamation," the Xhosa needed to be brought into daily contact with Europeans so that they might adopt European cultural norms, legal codes, and agricultural practices.<sup>33</sup> Thus, in 1856, Grey eagerly embraced the War Office's proposition to relocate the German Legion to the area. Expressing concerns of renewed hostilities, he recognized the legion's proposed arrival as "timely." The German settlers' presence in British Kaffraria, he predicted, would provide "a means for promoting civilization and industrial occupations" as well as "a Military force to repel border aggression."<sup>34</sup> In fact, claiming that the Xhosa frequently commenced "their Wars" in December, Grey requested that "a large portion" of the British German Legion be in place by late November.<sup>35</sup>

While War Office administrators and the high commissioner of South Africa approved of the proposed military settlement, they also recognized the potential financial difficulties in implementing it; the "Mother Country," after all, did not wish to foot the entire bill.<sup>36</sup> Ever the savvy colonial administrator, Grey immediately began to promote the plan as one that stood to benefit both the colony and the crown, and he gathered funding from several different sources. First, and perhaps most importantly, members of the Cape Parliament supported the governor's efforts and unanimously approved a grant of £40,000 to fund the initiative.<sup>37</sup> Second, Grey pledged to draw annually from a reserve fund, a move that he predicted would yield an additional £40,000 over the next five years. Finally, the governor calculated that approximately £100,000 could be realized through land sales.<sup>38</sup> Altogether, he determined that Her Majesty's government could hope to recover close to £200,000 of the expenses necessary to relocate the British German Legion to British Kaffraria. He argued that Great Britain would actually save money simply from the "reduction of the Military Force" stationed in Southern Africa and "by avoiding the enormous cost" of continuous conflict with the Xhosa.<sup>39</sup> Thus, while the Cape Colony would gain both settlers and a border defense from the plan, the crown stood to reap significant financial benefits.

As Grey secured the necessary funding, the War Office deployed its representative, Major John Grant, to Southern Africa to investigate potential sites for the dispersal of the legionaries. Over the course of four weeks, Grant, accompanied by Grey, traveled extensively throughout the eastern frontier, and by early July the two men had agreed upon a set of formal terms to guide the settlement.<sup>40</sup> According to the *Conditions for the Formation of a Military Settlement in British South Africa*, the German legionaries could either claim one year's pay, at which point they would be released from service,

<sup>33</sup> Lester and Dussart, *Colonization and the Origins of Humanitarian Governance*, 249–53, at 249.

<sup>34</sup> Major Grant to Lord Panmure, 1 June 1856, TNA, WO 32/8326.

<sup>35</sup> Sir George Grey to Henry Labouchere, 18 July 1856, TNA, WO 32/8329.

<sup>36</sup> Major Grant to Lord Panmure, 1 June 1856, TNA, WO 32/8326.

<sup>37</sup> Major Grant to Lord Panmure, 1 June 1856, TNA, WO 32/8326.

<sup>38</sup> Major Grant to Lord Panmure, 14 July 1856, TNA, WO 32/8329; see also Sir George Grey to Henry Labouchere, 11 July 1856, Appendix No. 6, TNA, WO 32/8329.

<sup>39</sup> Sir George Grey to Henry Labouchere, 11 July 1856, Appendix No. 6, TNA, WO 32/8329.

<sup>40</sup> Major Grant to Lord Panmure, 14 July 1856, TNA, WO 32/8329.

or they could proceed to the Cape as military settlers. If they opted for the latter, they were to serve for seven years on the eastern frontier, during which time they would be expected to attend military exercises. In return for their commitment, they would receive free passage to Southern Africa and clothing for the voyage. On arrival, they could expect money, provisions, one acre of land, and “a building lot” to get established. Their wives and families would also receive free passage.<sup>41</sup> Any single men wishing to participate could take advantage of the offer for family passage, if they were “able & willing to be accompanied by two Sisters or female relatives.”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, British officialdom emphasized the need for women to be involved from the very beginning, noting that the entire plan seemed “to hinge very much upon the families.”<sup>43</sup>

Despite these efforts, the plan struggled. Far fewer German soldiers accepted the offer than British officials had hoped, leading authorities to question the recruitment process. By October 1856, many thought they had an explanation for the low enrollment rates as reports reached the War Office that two notices had been “extensively circulated” among the legionaries. Both publications, the War Office declared, were “full of misrepresentations” and obviously designed to dissuade the legionaries from enlisting for the Cape. The documents generated a flurry of correspondence between the crown’s law officers, military leaders, the War Office, and colonial officials. In the end, however, the crown’s attorney general and solicitor general determined that no grounds existed for criminal charges.<sup>44</sup>

Unable to place the blame on incendiary publications, British officials began to look elsewhere to explain the low enlistment. In November, the War Office employed Franz Demmler, a German professor of the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, to “mix among” the German legionaries and determine “their hesitation” to volunteer for service in Southern Africa.<sup>45</sup> According to Demmler, the fault lay with the soldiers and their lack of agricultural training. The legionaries, he explained, feared they would fail to find employment on arrival. Most of the men did not practice a trade, had “never handled a spade,” and had no “means beyond their daily pay of sixpence, for three years.” They were, it seemed, completely unprepared for life on the frontier of the Eastern Cape. If the situation was not remedied, the professor argued, the scheme was doomed to failure; rather than a group of promising military settlers, the War Office could expect “idlers and scamps” in their place, forcing the colony “to defend itself against men who were introduced to be its defenders.”<sup>46</sup>

While the low number of legionaries was likely disappointing to Cape officials, the very low number of women and children who agreed to accompany the German settlers was particularly concerning. The resulting imbalance among the sexes, Grey

<sup>41</sup> Appendix no. 8, 18–20: “Conditions for the Formation of a Military Settlement in British South Africa,” Panmure and Stutterheim, 24 September 1856, TNA WO 32/8331. See also W. B. Tyler, “The British German Legion—1854–62,” *Journal of the Society of Army Historical Research* 54, no. 217 (1976): 14–29; Laband, “From Mercenaries to Military Settlers,” 105.

<sup>42</sup> JJG [likely Major Grant] to Col. J. Linlock, 27 August 1856, TNA, WO 32/8326.

<sup>43</sup> War Office notes included with Major Grant to Lord Panmure, 1 June 1856, TNA, WO 32/8326.

<sup>44</sup> H. E. Cockburn to Lord Panmure, 1 November 1856, TNA, WO 32/8335.

<sup>45</sup> T. W. Murdoch and C. Alexander Wood to Herman Merivale, 27 November 1856, TNA, CO 386/107.

<sup>46</sup> T. W. Murdoch and C. Alexander Wood to Herman Merivale, 27 November 1856, TNA, CO 386/107.

predicted, would "be disastrous to the whole community." He warned that it had already "created considerable alarm in the minds of the native population" and would lead to both "great immorality" and "great expense" in the future. It would "be impossible under such circumstances to detain the German military settlers in their villages as ordinary settlers." They would simply "roam over the whole country" in search of wives, making them "quite useless for the defense of the colony." Indeed, from the moment the military settlers arrived at the Cape, they struggled to integrate. Rather than a security force, colonial officials worried that they had inherited a restless mercenary population. In response, Grey opted "to keep the settlers under arms as soldiers" and on full military pay<sup>47</sup>—decisions that ultimately proved controversial. Colonial officials in London complained that the German Legion had become a financial drain, while local administrators in Southern Africa complained that the mercenaries were nothing more than debauched drunks.<sup>48</sup>

### IRISH WIVES FOR GERMAN SOLDIERS

It was in this context of unrest and debate that Britain's colonial officialdom conceived of the *Lady Kennaway* scheme. Governor Grey, like many of his contemporaries, firmly believed that married men made better settlers. He pointed to this lack of female companionship to explain the failure of the German Legion to establish itself successfully in Southern Africa. What the military settlement needed, he argued, was more European women. While the German legionaries might help amalgamate the Xhosa through settlement practices and employment schemes, Grey did not encourage them to do so through marriage to local women. As Damon Salesa has noted, "proper amalgamation"—like that Grey had promoted in New Zealand—"did not combine two races into a 'new' race," but, instead, "projected, very baldly, the *disappearing* of one race into another." British legal, economic, and cultural practices were to supersede or absorb those of Indigenous peoples, leaving only the "remnants or relics" of "'native' polities, families, legal structures, and communities."<sup>49</sup> While Grey initially promoted similar policies at the Cape, he likely worried that the German military settlers lacked the moral probity, familiarity with British institutions and norms, or even enough knowledge of the English language to racially amalgamate the Xhosa. If anything, he may have feared that intermarriage between the German legionaries and Xhosa women might end in the disappearing of the Germans rather than the Xhosa communities.<sup>50</sup> Either way, he insisted on European wives for the military settlers.

<sup>47</sup> Sir George Grey to Henry Labouchere, 25 March 1857, House of Commons, "Despatches Concerning German Emigration to Cape of Good Hope from December 1856; and despatches concerning German Military Settlers," *Parliamentary Papers*, 1857–58 (389), 40:11. See also Henry Labouchere to Sir George Grey, 7 January 1858, TNA, CO 48/384; Laband, "From Mercenaries to Military Settlers," 112.

<sup>48</sup> Colonial Office notes included with Sir George Grey to Henry Labouchere, 29 October 1857, TNA, CO 48/384; Henry Barrington to Maclean, 8 September 1857, BK 41, Western Cape Archives and Records Service, Cape Town. (Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as WCARS.)

<sup>49</sup> Damon Ieremia Salesa, *Racial Crossings: Race, Intermarriage, and the Victorian British Empire* (Oxford, 2011), 242.

<sup>50</sup> According to Salesa, "The terminus of racial amalgamation, at least as far as aboriginal races were concerned, was a kind of tender obliteration, by means of racial crossing and civilization." Salesa, *Racial Crossings*, 242.

Initially, British officials encouraged and even facilitated the marriage of the legionaries to German women, permitting the soldiers to bring their fiancées to England and performing mass nuptials prior to their departure for Southern Africa. In November 1856, for example, “fifty-two couples were married in a single day on board the *Britannia*,” the naval vessel used to accommodate the German women as they waited in Portsmouth Harbor. The rushed and widespread nature of the ceremonies raised questions, and, at the instruction of the secretary for war, Grey later introduced the Military Settlers’ Marriage Act in British Kaffraria, in order to regularize the nuptials and recognize their legality.<sup>51</sup> Regardless, by 1857, many legionaries were still unmarried. In response, Grey recommended that an additional body of German emigrants, consisting of one thousand families, be sent to British Kaffraria. While the colonial secretary, Henry Labouchere, agreed with the necessity to restore the balance of sexes in the colony, he worried that sending more Germans to Southern Africa would be too complicated and expensive. At the same time, he was also convinced that emigration commissioners would struggle to find “large numbers of respectable young women” in England or Scotland who were willing “to emigrate alone to the colonies.” To avoid such challenges, Labouchere instructed the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission to look to Ireland, where “considerable parties of Orphans and other single females” had “at different periods” been recruited with great success.<sup>52</sup>

Cape officials responded with less optimism. Indeed, by the mid-nineteenth century, agents located in the settler colonies eyed the Colonial Office and its emigration policies with increasing suspicion.<sup>53</sup> For many, the 1857 *Lady Kennaway* scheme simply revealed how little London officials knew of Southern Africa. Henry Barrington, the chairman of the Immigration Committee at King William’s Town, initially predicted the failure of the entire plan. Many of the Germans, he insisted, did not “wish to encumber themselves with wives,” and those few soldiers who did wish to attract a female partner had “no great inducements to offer.”<sup>54</sup> Others argued that British Kaffraria was not suitable for young women, whether they were in search of husbands or employment. Cape colonial secretary Rawson warned on Grey’s behalf that distributing the immigrants among the region’s employers “would be ruinous alike to the women themselves, and to the credit of the Government that could allow such a proceeding.”<sup>55</sup> Still others worried that British Kaffraria simply could not absorb such a large number of single women.

Regardless, London officials had put the plans in motion, and Grey scrambled to prepare the colony for the women’s arrival. While he followed Labouchere’s instructions, the Cape governor also tailored the migration program to suit local needs. He immediately determined that the Irish women were more desperately needed in the interior of the colony than at the coast and directed the Cape’s colonial secretary to

<sup>51</sup> Laband, “From Mercenaries to Military Settlers,” 108–9; Tyler, “The British German Legion, 1854–62,” 21–22.

<sup>52</sup> Henry Labouchere to Sir George Grey, 5 June 1857, WCARS, BK 41.

<sup>53</sup> Robin Haines, “Indigent Misfits or Shrewd Operators? Government-Assisted Emigrants from the United Kingdom to Australia, 1831–1860,” *Population Studies* 48, no. 2 (1994): 223–47, at 238; Reilly, “An Inhospitable Welcome?”

<sup>54</sup> Henry Barrington to John Maclean, 8 September 1857, WCARS, BK 41.

<sup>55</sup> Rawson W. Rawson to the Lieutenant Governor, 29 August 1857, WCARS, BK 41.

organize committees in both Grahamstown and King William's Town to receive the women, arrange for their employment, and assist in their transition.<sup>56</sup> In mid-September, Cape officials advertised the expected arrival of the women and invited applications from potential employers across the frontier districts.<sup>57</sup>

Once Cape officials began to implement local measures, enthusiasm for the plan increased. Some even began to view the marriage component of the plan with hope. The German settlers now reportedly awaited the women's arrival with eager anticipation. Sergeant Gustav Steinbart, a member of the British German Legion, admitted that "a wife would prove of inestimable value" to him as a colonist. Married men, he explained, led "a more carefree and comfortable life" in the colony and consequently had "been able to accomplish more than the overwhelming majority of unmarried men." He expressed little interest in Xhosa women, noting them to be too dark-skinned and "uncultured," concluding instead that "the immigration of women is of vital importance to the well-being of the German colonists," if not to the colony itself.<sup>58</sup> Should the women not arrive, he later warned, the legionaries would "become demoralized and brutish" or the colony would "cease to exist" as soldiers left in search of "marriage partners."<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, collapsing distinctions between Irish and English, the legionaries reportedly viewed marriage to an Irish woman as an opportunity to advance through the hierarchies of Britain's colonial frontier. Although at first skeptical of the marriage plans, Barrington later reported that the legionaries "were most anxious for english [*sic*] wives," preferring them even to German women. As English speakers, the Irish women "would be able to market for them infinitely better than german [*sic*] girls." Barrington speculated that many of the German settlers "wished to become english," they wished for "their future families" to be considered English, and they considered marriage to an Irish woman a means to these ends.<sup>60</sup> While Cape officials increasingly hoped the women would "work a great moral improvement" among the colony's "labouring Europeans," the Germans looked to them for both economic and social advancement.<sup>61</sup>

If Cape officials had initially hesitated in response to Labouchere's instructions, London authorities moved quickly to implement the plan. Within weeks, officials had secured a ship for the voyage; the *Lady Kennaway*, they reported, was both cheap and experienced.<sup>62</sup> By July, a Mr. Lannigan had been appointed as the ship's surgeon superintendent. Again, this decision was presented as a winning proposition. Lannigan was already planning to settle at the Cape with his wife, and he had previously completed two successful emigrant voyages to Australia.<sup>63</sup> By mid-July, the

<sup>56</sup> Rawson W. Rawson to the Lieutenant Governor, 29 August 1857, WCARS, BK 41.

<sup>57</sup> John Maclean, *Government Notice: Female Immigrants*, 16 September 1857, WCARS, BK 41.

<sup>58</sup> Sergeant Gustav Steinbart to his sister, Otilie Lütke, 8 November 1857, in *The Letters and Journal of Gustav Steinbart, German Military Colonist to British Kaffraria, Cape Province, South Africa*, vol. 1, *The Letters: 6 October 1855–23 May 1858 (German and English texts)*, trans. and ed. J. F. Schwär and R. W. Jardine (Port Elizabeth, 1975), 103–5.

<sup>59</sup> Sergeant Gustav Steinbart to his brother, Eugene Steinbart, 24 February 1858, in *Letters and Journal of Gustav Steinbart*, 1:133.

<sup>60</sup> Henry Barrington to Colonel Maclean, *Report of Female Immigrants*, WCARS, BK 41.

<sup>61</sup> Henry Barrington to Colonel Maclean, *Report of Female Immigrants*, WCARS, BK 41.

<sup>62</sup> J. W. C. Murdoch to Herman Merivale, 27 June 1857, TNA, CO 386/107.

<sup>63</sup> J. W. C. Murdoch to Herman Merivale, 15 July 1857, TNA, CO 386/107.

logistics were in place, and the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission simply needed to secure the female emigrants. Less than a month later, in early August, the Government Emigration Board dispatched a special agent to Ireland to recruit “young women between the ages of eighteen and thirty five of good character and health” from among the “inmates of the Union workhouses.”<sup>64</sup> This mission proved more difficult than initially anticipated, however, and authorities found their optimism tempered by reality before the *Lady Kennaway* had even departed.

### CATHOLIC WIVES FOR LUTHERAN SOLDIERS

At first glance, the recruitment efforts in Ireland appeared to be a success. On his arrival, the agent, one Mr. Chaunt, selected forty women from the Limerick workhouse and fifty from Cork, and “declared himself much pleased” with their “healthy and cleanly appearance.”<sup>65</sup> Local Poor Law guardians, for their part, introduced and enforced their own guidelines for the emigration scheme. In Cork, for example, Poor Law guardians insisted that the cost to the union was not to exceed £4 per woman and that selected emigrants were to have spent a minimum of two years at the workhouse.<sup>66</sup> Such involvement was not new, especially in the Cork workhouse, where local guardians had proven themselves willing “to bend the regulations” to assist the emigration of pre-famine “paupers.”<sup>67</sup> In fact, as Ciara Breathnach has noted, the Cork workhouse demonstrated a similarly “non-chalant and short-sited approach to assisted emigration” as late as the 1870s.<sup>68</sup> Frequently, in other words, the Poor Law guardians not only supported the assisted emigration schemes but adapted them to suit their purposes, creating a short-term and low-cost means to rid the workhouses of a superfluous population.

Poor Law guardians were not alone in their enthusiasm. The women, too, were pleased by the opportunity—or at least many were anxious to take advantage of it. In late August, Limerick guardians reported “a rush” of new inmates, all hoping to “get abroad.”<sup>69</sup> Indeed, in 1857, the number of Irish women prepared to leave the workhouses was likely high. As Cecillie Swaisland has explained, many of these women had been committed to the workhouse as children, having lost their families during the catastrophic famine of the previous decade.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, they had witnessed the heavy flow of emigrants that had marked the famine years. Although the worst had passed by 1857, the *Lady Kennaway* scheme provided

<sup>64</sup> Frederic Rogers to Herman Merivale to August 21, 1857, WCARS, BK 41.

<sup>65</sup> “Emigration to the Cape of Good Hope,” *Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator* (Limerick, Ireland), 14 August 1857.

<sup>66</sup> “Cork Union,” *Cork Examiner* (Cork, Ireland), 14 August 1857; Cork Union Board of Guardians Minute Book, 8 August 1857, Cork City and County Archives, BG/69/A/24.

<sup>67</sup> Moran, *Sending Out Ireland's Poor*, 126. Also quoted in Breathnach, “Even ‘Wilder Workhouse Girls,’” 777.

<sup>68</sup> Breathnach, “Even ‘Wilder Workhouse Girls,’” 777.

<sup>69</sup> “Limerick Board of Guardians,” *Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator* (Limerick), 28 August 1857; “Limerick Board of Guardians,” *Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator* (Limerick), 4 September 1857. (Although the guardians discussed increasing numbers in both articles, the quotation is from 4 September.)

<sup>70</sup> Swaisland, *Servants and Gentlewomen to the Golden Land*, 36.



those still caught in the workhouse system with the means to leave Ireland. Perhaps even more enticing, Southern Africa offered the women opportunities for both economic and social advancement on arrival: according to Cape officials, marriage and employment options were readily available.

After the first few days, however, the excitement surrounding the government scheme subsided. Poor Law guardians, the local Irish press, Catholic clerics, and even the potential emigrants began to voice doubts about the plan. Most of the concerns stemmed from the proposed destination; few in Ireland knew much about the Eastern Cape, and what was known was largely negative. The steep price of passage from Ireland, limited chain migration, reports of an "inhospitable" climate, and accounts of conflict with the area's Xhosa inhabitants had all stymied Irish emigration to the region.<sup>71</sup> Of those Irish settlers who did make the voyage, most were Protestant and many were highly skilled or prosperous.<sup>72</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century, these demographics insured that Catholic women from Ireland's workhouses would represent a minority of an already limited Irish settler population and raised concerns that the women would not be made welcome on arrival. The colony was already haunted by a poor reputation, which seemingly legitimated these concerns. Ten years earlier, sixty-one women from the Wexford workhouse had migrated to the region in a similar government-assisted program. Their arrival coincided with Anti-Convict protests in Cape Town, and the resulting unrest "frustrated" plans for future schemes.<sup>73</sup>

Acutely aware of their role as the "natural protectors" of the impoverished women, Poor Law guardians actively sought additional information about both Southern Africa and the women's prospects on arrival. Their doubts grew about the suitability of the German mercenaries as marriage partners. In letters to the Colonial Office and the Emigration Commissioners, many guardians expressed concerns that cultural, linguistic, and religious differences between the legionaries and the Irish women would complicate the proposed nuptials. The chairman of the Limerick Union raised the issue of religious difference with the government agent, Chaunt, directly. Chaunt reassured the guardian that, although German, the legionaries were not Lutheran—instead, all were purported to be Catholic. If that were not the case, and the mercenaries were Protestant, he insisted, the Government Emigration Board would have sent him to the north of Ireland rather than the south.<sup>74</sup> The efforts of Cape officials and clergy to address the religious grievances of the German legionaries suggest that there was some truth to Chaunt's claims and that many of the military settlers were indeed Catholic.<sup>75</sup>

Regardless, members of the Irish press—especially the Irish nationalist press—remained skeptical. Local newspapers followed the deliberations closely, reprinting the minutes from the meetings of the union guardians and weighing in on the religious elements of the emigration scheme. The *Nation* referred to the scheme as a "most shameless and audacious" insult to Ireland's Catholic poor and insisted that

<sup>71</sup> Donal P. McCracken, "Odd Man Out: The South African Experience," in *The Irish Diaspora*, ed. Andy Bielenberg (Harlow, 2000), 251–71, at 256–57; Reilly, "An Inhospitable Welcome?"

<sup>72</sup> Colin Barr, *Ireland's Empire: The Roman Catholic Church in the English-Speaking World, 1829–1914* (Cambridge, 2020), 155.

<sup>73</sup> Reilly, "An Inhospitable Welcome?"

<sup>74</sup> "Limerick Union," *Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator*, 14 August 1857.

<sup>75</sup> Barr, *Ireland's Empire*, 174–75.

it was likely one more effort to “proselytise” the “emigrant population.”<sup>76</sup> A “Catholic Priest” wrote to the *Munster News*, opining “a German and Irish connection” to be “undesirable” and explaining that the “language, the feelings, and habits of the two are anything but identical.”<sup>77</sup> The *Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator* ran a letter from “a respected and valued friend in Dublin,” maintaining that the contents of the letter fully conveyed the newspaper’s opinion. Referring to the legion as “corrupt and heretical,” the Dublin correspondent warned that the “girls” would doubtless lose all “faith and morals” if exposed to the Germans. Furthermore, the letter writer threatened, if the proposal moved forward, the guardians would have to answer for the women’s religious fall. They would “incur an awful responsibility before Almighty God, for exposing these poor creatures to the danger of losing the faith—that precious gift for which many of their forefathers died.”<sup>78</sup>

Whether they feared the wrath of God, that of their nationalist forefathers, or simply local contempt, the Limerick guardians folded under the pressure. They noted the high number of interested women but also explained that emigration officials had provided too few details regarding the provisions and opportunities available at the Cape. Those details that were provided revealed the plan to be “most unfavourable.” The board of guardians contacted Stephen de Vere and Henry Monsell for further advice. Both men were MPs for Limerick County and advocates of emigration reform, and both expressed “mistrust on the subject” and discouraged involvement in the *Lady Kennaway* scheme. Ultimately, the guardians concluded that sending any woman to Southern Africa would be nothing short of an act of “cruelty” and announced “that the Young Women from Limerick Union would not proceed” to the Eastern Cape.<sup>79</sup>

Similar concerns and debate consumed the Cork Poor Law guardians as well. In the Cork Union, however, the women themselves played a larger role in the discussion. As noted earlier, the government emigration agent, Chaunt, had selected fifty women from the Cork workhouse to participate in the emigration scheme. Days before the women were scheduled to depart, however, word reached the guardians that they were no longer interested in the opportunity. In response to the rumors, the guardians called the women to appear before the board and inquired “whether they were still willing to accept the offer” of assisted emigration. As a group, the women answered, “No.” Declaring that they had clearly been “tampered” with, the guardians opted to question them again—this time individually. One by one, the women appeared before the board of Guardians, and, again and again, one by one, said “no.” The recorded minutes indicate that forty-seven of the fifty women refused to migrate without the permission of the local Catholic chaplain or assurance that a Catholic priest would receive them on arrival to Southern Africa. The three women who wished to proceed with the plan were Protestant.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>76</sup> “Irish Wives for the German Legion,” *Nation* (Dublin), 12 September 1857.

<sup>77</sup> “The Emigration to the Cape,” *Munster News* (Limerick), 9 September 1857.

<sup>78</sup> “The Lutheran Emigration Scheme to Africa,” *Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator*, 18 August 1857.

<sup>79</sup> “Limerick Board of Guardians,” *Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator*, 28 August 1857; Limerick Union Board of Guardians Minute Books, 22 August 1857, Limerick City Council and Local Government Collections, BG 110/A 28.

<sup>80</sup> “Cork Union,” *Cork Examiner*, 28 August 1857; State of the Workhouse for the week ending 22 August 1857, Cork City and County Archives, BG/69/A/24, p. 9.

Although their individual comments were not recorded, the Catholic women's actions spoke loudly, and their refusal to emigrate generated a response. Members of the press immediately praised the women for their religious convictions. As the *Cork Examiner* explained, the women had revealed that "the spirit of religious faith [was] strong in their hearts," and they had "exhibited a spirit of truth and independence most honoring to their character."<sup>81</sup> Others commended the chaplain for providing guidance for the women and expressing "firm opposition" to the scheme.<sup>82</sup> Still others applauded the guardians for their role in the matter, arguing, "Every Guardian, no matter how strong his Protestant opinions, [had] asserted the right these women had to protection for their religious faith."<sup>83</sup>

Certainly, this was not the first time that selected emigrants had chosen to forego their passage. Throughout the mid-nineteenth century, many opted to stay home in response to improving conditions and the promise of local work.<sup>84</sup> In 1857, however, as the press reports indicate, the Cork women refused to participate in the *Lady Kennaway* scheme in response to the advice of the local chaplain—a decision that reflected both the changing role of the Catholic Church in Irish society and the Catholic Church's changing opinion on emigration. The mass exodus of the famine years had improved the priest-to-people ratio in Ireland, granting the post-famine church "a vastly greater capacity and appetite for imposing social controls on its flock."<sup>85</sup> However, the Catholic Church also looked to any further departure of parishioners with suspicion and anger. "Emigration," Sarah Roddy explains, had become "'depopulation', 'deportation' or 'extermination.'" It was "a problem requiring a solution, rather than a solution to a problem."<sup>86</sup> Indeed, as the famine decade drew to a close, not only did Ireland's economic prospects improve but the Catholic Church increasingly shaped the expectations and reception of those who chose to leave the island.

Despite the refusal of the Limerick guardians and the Cork women to participate, the emigration plan moved forward. Hoping to avoid significant financial loss and not wishing to detain the vessel, emigration commissioners rushed to fill the vacant places with individuals from other locations in Ireland. In order to do so on such short notice, the emigration commissioner Frederic Rogers later reported that he had set aside Labouchere's instructions, opted to accept a smaller security deposit than initially requested, and obtained migrants from the "usual class." While never fully explained, the term likely referred to individuals outside the Irish workhouses. Indeed, when the *Lady Kennaway* set sail in September 1857, its passengers included English artisans "engaged in the erection of houses" and "Irish families engaged in agriculture" as well as 153 "respectable young Irish women."<sup>87</sup> Months

<sup>81</sup> *Cork Examiner*, 4 September 1857.

<sup>82</sup> "The Emigrants to the Cape," *Munster News* (Limerick, Ireland), 2 September 1857.

<sup>83</sup> *Cork Examiner* (Cork, Ireland), 28 August 1857.

<sup>84</sup> Haines, "Indigent Misfits or Shrewd Operators?," 230.

<sup>85</sup> Colin Barr, "The Re-energising of Catholicism, 1790–1880," in Kelly, *Cambridge History of Ireland*, 3:280–304, at 304.

<sup>86</sup> Sarah Roddy, *Population, Providence and Empire: The Churches and Emigration from Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Manchester, 2014), 50.

<sup>87</sup> Frederic Rogers to Herman Merivale, 7 September 1857, TNA CO, 386/107; "Extract of a Report from the Emigration Commissioner to Herman Merivale," 7 September 1857, WCARS, BK 41; Laband, "From Mercenaries to Military Settlers," 112.

later, the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission received word that all had arrived safely at the Eastern Cape.<sup>88</sup>

### COLONIAL SOLUTIONS FOR IMPERIAL PROBLEMS

From the moment the women disembarked in British Kaffraria, it became clear that local officials had different plans for them than those rumored in Ireland. The concern regarding the availability of Catholic clergy, for example, immediately proved to be nothing more than an “extraordinary misconception.”<sup>89</sup> Instead, having recognized that many of the immigrants would be Catholic, the Immigration Committee had arranged for “a friendly priest” to meet them on arrival; the women then remained under the care of an appropriate clergy member until they entered service.<sup>90</sup> Even those women who continued on from East London to King William’s Town and eventually to Grahamstown had hardly reached their final destination when they were greeted by the Roman Catholic bishop, Rev. Dr. Moran. Once having taken up temporary residence in the hospital, the immigrants received a surprise visit from local Catholic nuns. According to the *Colonist Newspaper*, the Irish women “had not expected to see nuns in South Africa” and, crowding around them, exclaimed, “Oh! thank God, here are some of our own at last.”<sup>91</sup>

The matrimonial plans, too, appeared to be of less interest to Cape authorities; at least, they made little effort to coordinate the women’s marriages to German legionaries. In his final report, Barrington noted that “several respectable” German settlers had applied for wives, but “they were not very fortunate.”<sup>92</sup> While many of the women found employment upon arrival and others found husbands, few of them married members of the German Legion. According to Cecillie Swaisland, “only two fulfilled the main intention of the scheme and married legionaries.”<sup>93</sup> Indeed, while Steinbart, the German military settler mentioned earlier, had openly expressed his desire for a wife, the Irish immigrants were simply a passing reference in his letters. They appear and disappear from his writing in much the same way they likely appeared and disappeared from his life. He noted, “Some of them became the wives of German Military Settlers,” but the number was minimal—certainly not high enough to argue that the “Marriage Force” successfully domesticated the troublesome German Legion.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>88</sup> The *Lady Kennaway* arrived in November 1857, but the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission did not receive notice until the following March. Frederic Rogers to Herman Merivale, 6 March 1858, TNA, CO 386/107.

<sup>89</sup> Eighteenth General Report of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners, 1858, C. 2395, at 221, appendix no. 40 (Sir George Grey to Henry Labouchere, 28 December 1857).

<sup>90</sup> Henry Barrington to John Maclean, 23 January 1858, WCARS, BK 41; Eighteenth General Report of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission, 1858, C. 2395, at 221, appendix no. 40 (Sir George Grey to Henry Labouchere, 28 December 1857).

<sup>91</sup> Eighteenth General Report of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners, 1858, C. 2395, at 221, appendix no. 40 (*Colonist Newspaper* [Grahamstown], 19 December 1857).

<sup>92</sup> Henry Barrington, Chairman of the Immigration Committee of King Williams Town, to the Chief Commissioner, Colonel Maclean, 23 January 1858, WCARS, BK 41.

<sup>93</sup> Swaisland, *Servants and Gentlewomen to the Gold Land*, 37.

<sup>94</sup> Sergeant Gustav Steinbart to his brother, Eugene, 27 March and some days in April 1858, in *Letters and Journal of Gustav Steinbart*, 1:129, 131.

The British German Legion continued to pose problems for Cape officials, and Grey ultimately turned to another location in the empire as a solution. In 1858, the Cape governor elected to send the mercenaries to India to assist British troops in the final stages of suppressing the Indian uprising. As Grey explained to the Colonial Office, the German soldiers had expressed discontent with their South African situation from the moment they had arrived and had never really become a productive addition to the colony. In reality, they had become just the opposite; according to Grey, their presence had become so threatening to the colony's peace that he had found it necessary to retain a large force of British regiments in Southern Africa to ensure that the German soldiers did not mutiny.<sup>95</sup> Sending the German Legion to India, Governor Grey explained, would allow him to dispose of a potentially disruptive portion of the population and would also free the additional British regiments for service in India.<sup>96</sup> The governor of Bombay, for his part, was happy to receive the reinforcements, arguing that the "only way to reestablish confidence" in India was to "show a strong front everywhere." Doing so, he acknowledged, would not be easy "in so vast a country" and the legionaries' assistance would be indispensable.<sup>97</sup>

At the same time, the governor of Bombay noted that the German soldiers were not his first choice; he would have preferred "English troops."<sup>98</sup> His preference is not surprising. The Indian uprising began as a mutiny of Indian soldiers, who rebelled against their British officers in May 1857. As the violence spread across northern India, many Britons explained the conflict as the irrational yet inherent response of non-European peoples to British rule.<sup>99</sup> While European, the German soldiers were not British, and they were sent to India at a moment when British distrust of mercenary soldiers was high. The governor of Bombay's preference for British soldiers also echoed the negative opinions voiced by colonists and officials in Southern Africa. Barrington, for example, referred to the legionaries as "lazy beggars"; he considered them "drunken profligate" laborers. They were, in short, not good enough for the very Irish women sent to be their wives.<sup>100</sup>

Indeed, when the response of Cape officials to the German soldiers is compared to the response of Cape officials to the Irish female immigrants, the blurry outlines of a colonial hierarchy emerge. In Australia and Canada, where Irish women had been sent previously to marry British colonists or enter domestic labor, colonial officials and local settlers had reported general disappointment in them. In the late 1840s, for example, emigration officers accused Irish female orphans of disorderly conduct while still en route to New South Wales, leading Australian officers to conclude that they were "an inferior class of their kind" and simply "a rough

<sup>95</sup> Sir George Grey to E. B. Lytton, 20 January 1859, TNA CO, 48/393.

<sup>96</sup> London officials were simply relieved to be rid of the financial drain and drama evoked by the German Legion's presence in Southern Africa, commenting, "I am very glad that the German Legion—whatever the cause—are fairly shipped off. The remainder will probably now be absorbed in the population generally & so I trust close all the controversy wh[ic]h their existence has created." See the Colonial Office notes included with Sir George Grey to E. B. Lytton, September 8, 1858, TNA, CO 48/390.

<sup>97</sup> Lord Elphinstone to Sir George Grey, 23 June 1858, WCARS, GH 39/9.

<sup>98</sup> Lord Elphinstone to Sir George Grey, 23 June 1858, WCARS, GH 39/9.

<sup>99</sup> For more on the 1857 Indian Uprising and its impact on the larger empire, see Jill C. Bender, *The 1857 Indian Uprising and the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2016).

<sup>100</sup> Henry Barrington, Chairman of the Immigration Committee of King Williams Town, to the Chief Commissioner, Colonel Maclean, 8 September 1857, WCARS, BK 41.



lot.”<sup>101</sup> Similarly, Canadian settlers frequently complained that the Irish women arrived unprepared and untrained for proper employment. Either way, as historians have argued, many of these migrants were considered “troublesome” paupers whom London officials readily handed off to “unsuspecting” colonial administrators.<sup>102</sup>

In southern Africa in 1857, however, when Irish female immigrants were viewed alongside German military settlers, they enjoyed a much warmer welcome. Indeed, emigration commissioners reported that the women were received “with much satisfaction.”<sup>103</sup> Upon arrival, they were rarely referred to as “Irish” in official correspondence (although they were still recognized as Catholic). Instead, colonial authorities referred to them as “immigrants,” as “white,” and sometimes even as “english [*sic*].”<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, many praised the women, describing them as “obedient and orderly,” commenting that “a finer and healthier body of young women” had never been seen, and commending the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission for “procuring a good class of emigrants.”<sup>105</sup> In his official report on the scheme, James H. Parker, the secretary of the Immigration Committee, called the experiment a success and credited the Irish women for their role in it: “I must say my thanks are due to the Immigrants for their good steady and upright behaviour.”<sup>106</sup> Although reports trickled in to suggest that some of the women struggled to find work, local agents on the whole were pleased with the scheme.<sup>107</sup> In his final report, Barrington argued that it would be advantageous to encourage “a small but steady & continuous stream of British immigration” to the frontier districts.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>101</sup> J. Murphy and Mr. Moorhouse (signed on behalf of the Board) to 3rd Earl Grey, 21 November 1848, National Archives of Ireland, CSORP, box 1572, O3081.

<sup>102</sup> McLoughlin, “Superfluous and Unwanted Deadweight,” 81.

<sup>103</sup> Eighteenth General Report of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners, 1858, C. 2395, at 46.

<sup>104</sup> Henry Barrington, Chairman of the Immigration Committee of King Williams Town, to the Chief Commissioner, Colonel Maclean, 8 September 1857, WCARS, BK 41; Henry Barrington, Chairman of the Immigration Committee of King Williams Town, to the Chief Commissioner, Colonel Maclean, *Report of Female Immigrants*, WCARS, BK 41. There is a rich literature on Irish immigrants and nineteenth-century notions of race; for examples, see David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, 1991); Bruce Nelson, *Irish Nationalists and the Making of the Irish Race* (Princeton, 2012); Elizabeth Malcolm and Dianne Hall, *A New History of the Irish in Australia* (Sydney, 2018): 22–47. Recently, Cian McMahon has argued that rather than becoming “white,” Irish immigrants developed their own diasporic identity. Referring to this diasporic identity as “global nationalism,” McMahon asserts that it “allowed Irish immigrants to adapt to different host communities.” Cian T. McMahon, *The Global Dimensions of Irish Identity: Race, Nation, and the Popular Press, 1840–1880* (Chapel Hill, 2015), 9.

<sup>105</sup> Henry Barrington, Chairman of the Immigration Committee of King Williams Town, to the Chief Commissioner, Colonel Maclean, *Report of Female Immigrants*, WCARS, BK 41; Eighteenth General Report of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners, 1858, C. 2395, at 221, appendix no. 40 (*Colonist Newspaper*, 19 December 1857; Sir George Grey to Henry Labouchere, 28 December 1857).

<sup>106</sup> James H. Parker, *Official Report*, 11 January 1858, BK 41, WCARS.

<sup>107</sup> For example, Barrington received word that the Grahamstown Committee was unable to place thirty of the women. Henry Barrington, Chairman of the Immigration Committee of King Williams Town, to Chief Commissioner, Colonel Maclean, 14 January 1858, WCARS, BK 41.

<sup>108</sup> Henry Barrington, Chairman of the Immigration Committee of King Williams Town, to the Chief Commissioner, Colonel Maclean, *Report of Female Immigrants*, WCARS, BK 41. In reality, despite hopes for additional immigration to the Cape Colony, the specific plan of assisting Irish female migration was not repeated.



While the German Legion had failed to integrate, their proposed Irish wives promised to become "a valuable addition to the population."<sup>109</sup>

As Cape officials celebrated the successes of assisted emigration, Irish Poor Law guardians were left to examine the challenges. While less is known about the Cork women who chose not to participate in the *Lady Kennaway* scheme, their actions continued to inform emigration debates even after the ship had departed. Several Cork guardians were initially angered by the women's refusal to emigrate and sought punitive measures. In response to the women's display of apparent insubordination, for example, the chairman of the Cork Board of Guardians immediately proposed a resolution to deny them any future opportunities to participate in assisted migration schemes. The proposal was quickly withdrawn—but not before it revealed the board's frustration.<sup>110</sup> As one Cork guardian proclaimed, "I never will give my voice, after what has occurred, in favor of emigrating a single emigrant from this house."<sup>111</sup> In reality, in both Limerick and Cork, Poor Law guardians suddenly found themselves responsible for those women who had been selected to emigrate under the protection of the government but who in the end remained in Ireland. As the guardians struggled to determine what was to be done with them, the discussion quickly turned to Irish emigration more broadly.

Some continued to argue that it was the destination, not the emigrants, that had created the largest problem. The guardians had simply known too little about Southern Africa, and what they did know appeared dangerous and unsuitable for "unfriended and unprotected" women.<sup>112</sup> These same women would likely thrive elsewhere in the empire. Indeed, many guardians had originally favored sending them to British North America, although they recognized that suggestion as also posing challenges. For one thing, the timing for such a plan was not advantageous. While departing in early September for the southern hemisphere would make for a summer arrival, leaving for Canada at that time meant the women would arrive "in the depth of winter."<sup>113</sup>

Concerns arose as well that if word of assisted migration schemes to North America spread, workhouses would be quickly overwhelmed by women anxious to join family members overseas. Not only could the Poor Law unions not afford to assist the migration of hundreds of women, but many did not wish to do so. John Stephen Dwyer, a Limerick guardian who had adamantly opposed the *Lady Kennaway* scheme from the start, later argued against any assisted female emigration at all. According to Dwyer, "too much extermination" (i.e., emigration) had "taken place already."<sup>114</sup> Rather than develop additional emigration schemes, he insisted, Irish Poor Law guardians needed to explore various means to retain the women at home, "where they [would] be advantageous to themselves and useful to the

<sup>109</sup> Eighteenth General Report of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners, 1858, C. 2395, at 47.

<sup>110</sup> "The Emigrants to the Cape," *Munster News*, 2 September 1857.

<sup>111</sup> "Emigration to the Cape," *Munster News*, 5 September 1857.

<sup>112</sup> Mr. Robert [*sic*], Butcher to the Cork Poor Law Guardians, 26 August 1857, printed in "Cork Union," *Cork Examiner*, 28 August 1857.

<sup>113</sup> "Limerick Board of Guardians," *Munster News*, 15 August 1857.

<sup>114</sup> "Limerick Board of Guardians," *Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator*, 28 August 1857.

country.”<sup>115</sup> Many agreed with Dwyer, and his motion for a “Committee of the Board” to investigate ways in which the workhouse women might “become useful to themselves and to the public” was immediately seconded and an appropriate group appointed.<sup>116</sup> By 1857, Ireland’s population had become “scanty,” and many feared that it could not endure further decline.<sup>117</sup>

The debate that waged within the Limerick and Cork workhouses in the immediate wake of the *Lady Kennaway* scheme foreshadowed emigration debates of following decades. As Irish individuals continued to leave the island in significant numbers, female emigration remained a topic of “great national and social interest.”<sup>118</sup> In June 1863, for example, the *Journal of Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland* published a paper by one of its members, Robert Clokey, exploring the recent decline in female emigration from Ireland’s workhouses. According to Clokey, this decline was often interpreted “to be an indication or evidence of failure.” Such an assumption, he argued, was “erroneous”: assisted emigration had proven a resounding success, “relieving the public at home from a serious burden” and at the same time “benefiting the colonies and enabling the emigrants to follow a useful, respectable, and independent career.” The decline was not due to “any failure of the system” but had occurred “concurrent with a diminishing population, an increasing independent emigration, a decreasing number receiving relief in the workhouses and increased means of employment at home with improved wages.”<sup>119</sup> In other words, rather than the fault of emigrants or the system, the decline was the result of Ireland’s growing prosperity.

Clokey’s paper, published alongside another on the Female Middle Class Emigration Society, generated comments from other members of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society, many of whom echoed the remarks voiced six years earlier by the Limerick and Cork guardians. In particular, the discussants debated workhouse emigration as an appropriate remedy for Ireland’s economic problems, and although they disagreed on whether or not assisted female migration had proven to be a success, many concluded that the moment for such projects had passed. The famine of the 1840s had resulted in an unprecedented outflow of Irish emigrants. By 1863, “Ireland was exhausted by emigration” and needed its “industrious, moral, and trained women” at home.<sup>120</sup> While Irish workhouse emigration continued throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, such schemes had peaked by the end of the 1850s.

<sup>115</sup> “Limerick Board of Guardians,” *Munster News*, 29 August 1857.

<sup>116</sup> “Limerick Board of Guardians,” *Munster News*, 29 August 1857, 12 September 1857; Limerick Union Board of Guardians Minute Books, 22 August 1857, Limerick City Council and Local Government Collections, BG 110/A28.

<sup>117</sup> “Limerick Board of Guardians,” *Munster News*, 22 August 1857.

<sup>118</sup> “Discussion,” *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland* (December 1863): 445–46, at 445.

<sup>119</sup> Clokey, “Irish Emigration from Workhouses,” 416, 432.

<sup>120</sup> “Discussion,” *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland* 3, part 25 (December 1863): 446–47, at 446.

## CONCLUSION

From the Emigration Commissioners in London to the governor of the Cape Colony, institutions and individuals recognized assisted migration as an opportunity to move the empire's people strategically in order to address colonial issues. But the ways in which officials understood the role of these emigrants differed. For those in London, for example, the Irish women of the *Lady Kennaway* scheme were part of a larger plan in which the superfluous population of one region could be employed to pacify another. The German Legion had been resettled to southern Africa to offer security against the Xhosa inhabitants; the Irish women, in turn, were introduced to mollify the legionaries. Cape officials, especially Sir George Grey, encouraged this perception of the plan in official dispatches. On the ground at the Eastern Cape, however, local agents, including Grey, acknowledged that the scheme held very different possibilities. The legionaries, they argued, were not appropriate husbands for the Irish women; indeed, no soldiers were promoted as suitable partners. Instead, Cape officials welcomed the women as potential settlers who could be absorbed into the local British population, and often were. The success of their integration, agents hoped, would set a potential precedent for future immigration schemes.

Finally, in Ireland, local Poor Law guardians and potential emigrants understood the possibilities of the plan very differently. Although many initially supported the proposal for an assisted emigration program, this specific plan quickly fell prey to nineteenth-century paternalistic impulses, concerns of religious discrimination, and changing emigration interests. Some members of the Irish local press and potential female emigrants actively opposed the scheme, local guardians struggled to implement the program, and emigration authorities found themselves forced to reconceive their plans and adapt the scheme accordingly. Even as colonial officials sought to develop an empire-wide view, in other words, they still found themselves subject to local pressures. Recognizing these varied challenges is essential; they reveal the ways in which a multitude of individuals—from colonial authorities to Poor Law guardians to impoverished women—shaped the migration process and, in doing so, molded the British imperial project.