



Using Online Databases for the 1840s-50s, Newton Key, Spring 2010

IRISH FAMINE AND DIASPORA

Potato Blight

DESTRUCTIVE SPREAD OF THE POTATO DISEASE.—The rapid and terrible destruction of the potato crop has spread dismay all through the country. Whole districts are afflicted in a single day by this vegetable cholera. A member of the poor-law commission, travelling in the northern counties, writes—“The progress of the potato blight is rapid beyond all conception. It seems as if travelling with myself, so suddenly does it appear in crops which had been sound and luxuriant, to all appearance, a few hours before.” The accounts from Leitrim, Donegal, Wexford, Waterford, Cork, Galway, and almost all parts of the country, concur in describing the general spread of the disease and its fatal character. The stalk of the potato is burnt up and almost black, and the smell from it most offensive. Along the western coast, in Mayo, the ravages of the disease have been terrible, and all classes have been struck with dismay. Already oatmeal is advancing in price. Potato fields, that had been green and healthy in appearance on Saturday, presented a mass of rotteness on Sunday. It is fortunate that the people

- “Ireland,” *Examiner*, 2011 (15 Aug. 1846), p. 519
- “This vegetable cholera”

Board of Works/Public Works in Ireland

EMPLOYMENT ON PUBLIC WORKS.

The following useful instructions have been issued from the Castle and the Board of Works. It was high time that prompt measures should be adopted to repress some of the abuses incidental to the employment by the State of such vast numbers of the labouring classes:—

“ Dublin Castle, October .

“ Gentlemen,—I am directed by the Lord Lieutenant to acquaint you that his Excellency's attention having been called to the class of persons who have hitherto been employed on relief works, he desires that instructions may be given to the officers of the board, that, as a general rule, no person should be employed whose tenements are valued, under the poor law, at £5 per annum or upwards, unless in undoubted destitution, nor the sons of persons so circumstanced.

“ His Excellency further desires that the officers will report to the board all cases in which the payments have not been made weekly as directed, and that no person employed under the board should be engaged in the ‘truck’ system, or in the sale of spirits or food in the neighbourhood of works, under pain of dismissal.

“ I am, gentlemen, your obedient servant,

“ T. N. REDINGTON.”

“ CIRCULAR—RELIEF DEPARTMENT.

“ Office of Public Works, October 29.

“ It being represented to the Board of Works that great inconvenience and abuses have arisen from the difficulty existing in many cases of obtaining labourers for occasional employment, and the indisposition that exists on the part of labourers to go to private works, even at high wages, in the expectation of getting work on the public roads, the board approves of allowing farmers and others requiring labourers to apply to the stewards on the public works for them; and in case the persons selected by the stewards refuse to go, on being offered the same rate of wages they are receiving on the roads, that the stewards should be required forthwith to discharge them.

“ (By order)

J. O. WALKER.”

- “Ireland,” Our Own Correspondent, *The Times*, 19395 (16 Nov. 1846), p. 6
- “no person should be employed whose tenements are valued...at £5 per annum”
- “the indisposition that exists on the part of labourers to go to private works..., in the expectation of getting work on the public roads”

“Letter from an Irish to an English Gentleman on the Operation of the Labour-rate Act and the Repeal of the Arms Bill,” *Quarterly Review*, 79, 157 (Dec. 1846), p. 238

condition of his country? Has any one yet satisfactorily reconciled the inconsistency which this autumn has exhibited most glaringly—viz., that of the *abundant exportations from Ireland*, and the non-payment of rent in *Ireland*? We can understand how the cottier must have been affected by the potato rot; but how, except indirectly, this can have made the superior middleman and comfortable farmer suffer, we do not see. Yet from this class have proceeded remonstrances and refusals of rent as urgent as from others. They have *been exporting abundantly* too, and selling fairly, if not dearly, in the English market. Yet now they are petitioners to the English people for what, under these circumstances, must be called superfluous alms. Again, is there any one who will tell us what the *general purchase of weapons throughout the country means*? Does it augur an insurrection against the Government, or against the landlords? or an outbreak against the *Board of Works*? Are rents to be formally repealed by Captain Rock, or the Union by Smith O’Brien? or is there to be a general parliament of the Irish labourers for the purpose of *extorting the highest payable wages, and yielding the smallest possible quantity of work*?’

Corn Laws and Ireland (# articles/decade)

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|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| ▶ <u><< 1740</u> [1 article] | ▶ <u>1870 - 1879</u> [169 articles] |
| ▶ <u>1760 - 1769</u> [1 article] | ▶ <u>1880 - 1889</u> [271 articles] |
| ▶ <u>1770 - 1779</u> [7 articles] | ▶ <u>1890 - 1899</u> [197 articles] |
| ▶ <u>1780 - 1789</u> [22 articles] | ▶ <u>1900 - 1909</u> [146 articles] |
| ▶ <u>1790 - 1799</u> [21 articles] | ▶ <u>1910 - 1919</u> [23 articles] |
| ▶ <u>1800 - 1809</u> [50 articles] | ▶ <u>1920 - 1929</u> [10 articles] |
| ▶ <u>1810 - 1819</u> [182 articles] | ▶ <u>1930 >></u> [7 articles] |
| ▶ <u>1820 - 1829</u> [476 articles] | |
| ▶ <u>1830 - 1839</u> [583 articles] | |
| ▶ <u>1840 - 1849</u> [777 articles] | |
| ▶ <u>1850 - 1859</u> [319 articles] | |
| ▶ <u>1860 - 1869</u> [261 articles] | |

Repeal of Corn Laws and Ireland

"The Late Crisis," *Dublin University Magazine*, 27, 158 (Feb. 1846), p. 248

Article author Irish (Protestant Ascendancy presumably) is against the repeal of the Corn Laws (for one thing, it would lead to lower tithes, destroying the Church of Ireland); but here makes the reasonable complaint that repealing Corn Laws/restoring free market will not "augment the industrial resources of Ireland"

And what is the state of Ireland now? Will that, or the state of the corn laws constitute the minister's difficulty? Would a repeal of these laws augment the industrial resources of Ireland, or in any respect tend to repress that system of organised assassination by which law has been rendered a dead letter, and the lives and properties of peaceful subjects made dependent upon the capricious forbearance of miscreants, whose cold-blooded atrocities have infixed a stain of indelible barbarity upon some of the rural districts of Ireland? We believe that Sir Robert Peel does not expect that any measure which threw two-thirds of the lands out of cultivation, and three-fourths of the people out of employment, could be regarded as coming with "healing on its wings" to a country afflicted by the miseries of which we complain, and to which, if some effectual remedy be not applied,

Lord John Russell (the Whig Prime Minister and Ireland)

"Lord John Russell's Visit to Ireland," *Examiner*, 2118 (2 Sept. 1848), p. 562

Compares the good this will do with the similar good the Queen's visit will do (actually, the newspaper thinks it WILL do good).

At the bottom, "the improvement and pacification of Ireland" (the British seem less concerned with the starvation/sickness and more concerned with rural "outrages" by secret societies

LORD JOHN RUSSELL'S VISIT TO IRELAND.

We saw with much satisfaction the announcement of Lord John Russell's intended visit to Ireland, and the reception which the news of it has had in Ireland confirms our previous opinion that good will result from it. Not that we expect any new views or facts to be revealed to the Prime Minister, or that in respect of the circumstances of the country more will be gained by personal observation than the greater vividness and impressiveness of objects *oculis subjecta fidelibus*; but what we reckon on mainly is the gratifying effect of the visit as a token of concern, and of confidence.

The Irish are naturally a courteous and polite people, and any marks of attention and consideration are fully valued by them, and cordially accepted and prized. A ruling Statesman's visit to them, and desire as it were to make their acquaintance, will have the grace of a sign of respect and good will; and this is much to a people prone to emotion, and with whom the kindly amenities are almost of as much worth as substantial service. It may be easy to recite and catalogue the things that Lord John Russell's visit will not effect; but, in one word, it will please, and we account that no inconsiderable effect. We hope, too, that the Prime Minister's visit will be the forerunner of another still more acceptable, and that the Queen will, when circumstances allow, honour Ireland with her presence; nay, if besides holding a Court in that part of the kingdom, her Majesty were occasionally to hold a Parliament there, it would, in our opinion, have in every way a good effect. There are special commissions for severe purposes, and why not a special session now and then for grace and contentment? There is much need of conciliation, of propitiation, and why should not all aids to them be made available? Substantial measures of improvement must have their place, but they will not work the worse for the accompaniment of what soothes and pleases. In nations, as well as in individuals, there is a proper pride which is to be cherished by certain deferences which the most exalted can pay, not merely without lessened, but with gained dignity. The tribute of respect is indeed often necessary to create or develop the titles to respect, and all people are made the better by the feeling that they are *considered*; the *inmemor est nostri* being, on the other hand, the most rankling and hardening of sentiments.

For the improvement and pacification of Ireland we desire to

Lord John Russell and Ireland

- “Lord John Russell has just been in Ireland,” *The Times*, 19966 (12 Sept. 1848), p. 4
- A “leading article” (an editorial) worth examining
- Most concerned with combating Daniel O’Connell’s campaign to reverse the Act of Union.

Soup Kitchens

The other function of the Relief Committees was to give gratuitous aid in cases of extreme destitution, and this was well performed by them to the extent of their means. As the distress increased, the distribution of cooked food by the establishment of soup kitchens, was found the most effectual means of alleviating it. The attention of the committees was, therefore, generally directed to this object by the Inspecting Officers. Boilers were manufactured and sent to Ireland in great numbers, and Government donations were now in every case made equal in amount to the private subscriptions ('pound for pound'), and in cases of more than usual pressure, twice or three times that amount was given. This mode of giving relief was not found to be attended with any serious abuse. The committees expended in a great measure their own money, which made them more careful in seeing that it was laid out with the greatest possible advantage and economy; and as the ration of cooked food distributed by them was not an object of desire to persons in comfortable circumstances, as money wages were, it acted in a great degree as a test of destitution. The great defect of this system of relief was, that being voluntary, it could not be relied on to meet the necessities of a numerous population in a period of great emergency, and the difficulty of obtaining private subscriptions was often greatest in the most distressed districts.

- "Correspondence explanatory of the Measures adopted by her Majesty's Government for the Relief of Distress arising from the Failure of the Potato Crop in Ireland," *Edinburgh Review, or critical journal*, 87, 175 (Jan. 1848), p. 266
- They work well and not given to "abuse" (19th-century version of welfare "cheats"); the only "defect" is that this is a voluntary system and doesn't reach most of the population!

Relief Committees

RELIEF COMMITTEES IN IRELAND.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—I solicit the smallest space in your columns to refer to a subject of grave and accumulating import.

The fact of persons in comfortable circumstances, or above the reach of want, placing themselves in the ranks of the destitute in Ireland, in order to obtain the funds granted to the distressed, has, notwithstanding every effort, become an evil of enormous magnitude. Self-respect, shame, or any of the human feelings that morally act on society, seem wholly forgotten, or remembered to be laughed at. Instead of public works demoralizing, the facility, without one faltering step, with which the move is made from the station of independence to the ground of pauperism, strongly suggests a pre-existent state of injured morals.

- An Irish Landholder, "Relief Committees In Ireland," *The Times*, 19438; (5 Jan. 1847), p. 6
- The rest of this letter mentions relief committees, but the tone here is interesting because it focuses on the loss of self-respect and independence (which is, perhaps, of less significance if one is starving, I would think)

Typhus

average. In the mild winter of 1846 it was much below the average. The rest of the year was unfavourable to health; some of the diseases of hot climates set in; the potato crop failed in England and Ireland, with disastrous effects. In 1847 scurvy, typhus, and other zymotic diseases prevailed; and at the end of the year influenza broke out, and its ravages extended over the country, and continued in some districts through the month of January, 1848. In London, 16,415 deaths were recorded in 1847.

- "Journal of Public Health," *Critic of Books, Society, Pictures, Music, And Decorative Art*, 7, 172 (1 June 1848), p. 266
- From blight 1845- to scurvy, typhus, etc. 1846-

Evictions and Emigration

It was at one time considered preposterous to expect that the whole or the greater part of the negro population of the United States would ever be transported back to the land of their ancestors. The notion that it would be possible thus to convey three millions of persons across the Atlantic was scouted as ridiculous. But we have seen, within the last ten years, nearly two millions of human beings escape from famine and evictions in Ireland to plenty and ease in America. This Irish emigration towards the west, moreover, is something more than a mere instance to prove the possibility of a negro emigration in the contrary direction; it offers, strange to say, an urgent motive for the latter movement. The Irish emigrants, spreading through the southern states of America, are everywhere taking the place of the free coloured labourers, who find themselves deprived of what were formerly their most valuable sources of livelihood. Twenty years ago the draymen, porters, and other out-door labourers in the city of Baltimore, were nearly all men of colour; they are now nearly all white men, and mostly Irishmen. The same substitution is gradually taking place in all the southern towns. The coloured labourers, thus displaced, must either sink lower in poverty and degradation, or betake themselves across the Atlantic, to their own "land of promise;" to that country, indeed, which is to them exactly what America is to the poverty-stricken Celts of Ireland.

- "The Black Republic," *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, 19, 227 (Nov. 1852), p. 655
- Suggestion of setting up Liberia for freed blacks (it was) because their position was being taken by evicted Irish in America (it wasn't)