THE IMPACT OF COLONISATION ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND – FAMINE AND EMIGRATION (1831-1860)

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THE COLONIAL ECONOMY (1831-1860)

The Act of Union between England and Ireland came into effect on 1st January 1801. From that point onward economic activity in Ireland was to radically change, with the ubiquitous and indigenous economic system - as it had evolved on the island until that period - being forced into a larger, more centralized *laissez faire* trading system dominated by London. The shock that this brought to the island's economic base could be sourced to article six of the Act, which introduced a mechanism to abolish tariff protection for Irish produce, remove the Irish exchequer and merge the currencies.

> "That, from the first day of january one thousand eight hundred and one, all prohibitions and bounties on the exports of articles, the growth, produce, or manufacture of either country, to the other, shall cease…. That all articles, the growth, produce, or manufacture of either country… shall from thenceforth be imported into each country from the other, free from duty…" (Act of Union, 1st August 1800; available at www.statutelaw.gov.uk)

Not only did the Act introduce the Union Jack as a symbol of political intent, with the dissolution of the Irish Parliament it removed Irish stewardship over indigenous economic destiny. The relative autonomy of the Irish Parliament in Dublin and its economy was subsumed by London's commercial weight under the auspices of a compliant Anglo-Irish landed ascendency. From their perspective, free trade between the two countries would assist in opening up the Irish market system to commercial activity within the context of a larger market. One hundred Irish members of the Westminster parliament would be able to platform Irish affairs and ensure that the adjustment to free trade would permit access for the Irish commercial and landed classes to the growing imperial and industrial market. The pay-off to the ascendency for supporting the Union was obvious - twenty-eight new Irish peerages were created and a further twenty peers were elevated within the ranks of the Lords. (Kee, 1976, p.158)

From another perspective, the Act was to usurp the commercial potential of the island in a colonial relationship that would change the Irish economic base in a manner that would destabilize the society for generations to come. The first act of resistance came as early as 23rd July 1803 when the United Irishmen, inspired by the French revolution, staged a failed rebellion. Led by Robert Emmet, Thomas Emmet and Thomas Russell, their Proclamation of the Provisional Government introduced the first statement of independence for the island and a call to arms: "You are now called upon to show the world that you are competent to take your place among the nations; that you have a right to claim their cognizance of you as an independent country…" (Kee, 1976, p.166) In its list of decrees it proposed a republic that would revoke the Union, abolish tithes, transfer all Church land to the new nation, introduce universal suffrage, and suspend all transfers of land and financial securities. Suppressed within weeks Robert Emmet was hung, drawn and quartered as a lesson to would-be resistance to the Union. R.R. Madden, in his homage to the 1798-1803 radicals and their attempts to decolonize Ireland (in *The United Irishmen*), considered the Anglo-Irish union prophetically:

> "Whether we contemplate past or present rule in Ireland every thing offers a warning against dangers, and woe betide the people, in such circumstances as ours, by whom it would be despised… God made the land, and all his works are good, Man made the laws, and all they breath'd was blood; Unhallowed annals of six hundred years, A code of blood - a history of tears!" (Madden, 1846, p.xi)

The economic changes that the Union brought were caught in the maelstrom of the times. In the shadow of the Act there was an ongoing war with republican France and London's urgency of defending England against invasion. Westminster continued to fear a Jacobin rebellion in Ireland and believed that it needed to subdue an Irish population which was increasingly politicized, conscious of economic exploitation and resistant to military repression. This suspicion of the Irish by the English establishment and the ascendency affected all thirty-two counties of the island. Edmund Curtis, in his *History of Ireland*, noted that an estimated one hundred thousand troops were stationed in Ireland going into the Act of Union to fortify it against external *and* internal subversion. (Curtis, 1952, p.349) The Napoleonic wars had projected Ireland to a new level of threat for the Tory establishment under William Pitt, with the Act being seen as a means of controlling a volatile and exposed region. In the aftermath of the republican uprisings and the 30,000 deaths that its suppression cost, Ireland was constantly and vigorously monitored.

The state's reaction was to reinforce the garrisons and its military networks across the island, to create a rearguard defence - and to keep the economy of the island linked as closely as possible to the English supply chain. In the restructuring Irish produce was put to new ends: wool, rope, uniforms, armaments, ceramics, and agricultural production were adapted to support military demands. Consequently, in the aftermath of war with republican France the Irish economy suffered a major depression, the diversifying markets that had created prominent hubs of activity around Galway, Westport and Belfast, contracted. Beyond its role as an island fortress, where significant aspects of economic life were integrated into the defensive complex, it retained its primary role as a colonial supply route. Indeed, by the time of the famine in 1845 Ireland was the barracks for more troops than were stationed in imperial India, with one British soldier for every 80 Irish people. Their role was straightforward - controlling the population, repressing resistance and assisting in the extraction of whatever was commercially viable.

The implications of article six of the Act were pervasive. The free trade 'partnership' that was mooted at the outset of Union, dissolved rapidly into a colonial relationship with Ireland as a dependent economy. Cecil Woodham-Smith reflected on the effects in *The Great Hunger*: "The hope of investment proved a delusion. Free Trade between the two countries enabled England to use Ireland as a market for surplus English goods; Irish industry collapsed, unemployment was widespread, and Dublin, now that an Irish Parliament sat no longer in College Green became a half-dead city". (Woodham-Smith, 1991, p.16) The imposition of the Union forced change in commercial activity across the island - with the north-east acting to strengthen its cotton and linen manufacture, while the south and west underwent a coerced diversification process to become a supplier of agricultural products such as barley, livestock, wheat and potatoes. While profit gravitated towards the financial hubs of London and Dublin, prosperity was increasingly being distributed on the basis of location, family heritage, faith and loyalty. For the vast majority of the population of the island, however, the new order meant socio-cultural subjugation matched with grinding poverty. It brought reaction and comment. The *Select Committee into the Disturbances in Ireland* in 1824 cited a Resident Magistrate in Cork who stated: "I have seen several countries and I never saw any peasantry so badly off". (House of Commons, *Hansard*, 1824, p.300) On a visit to Ireland in 1825, Sir Walter Scott commented on the lives of the rural Irish: "Their poverty has not been exaggerated: it is on the extreme verge of human misery". (Quoted in Pomfret, 1930, p.8)

Contemporary observations on the extent of economic degradation in the early 1800s give some indication of the intensity of the adjustment process that took place post-union. The warping of production and market forces, and the elevation of the export side to make it more compliant to the demands of the larger neighbor, left a large proportion of the population vulnerable to change. Woodham-Smith pointed out that between 1801 and 1845 warnings about the volatile state of the Irish economy were noted by no less than 114 commissions and 61 special committees, each referring to impending crises. (Woodham-Smith, 1964, p.31) Beyond *Hansard* and newsprint, there were also a number of key governmental reports, each cataloguing economic activity and poverty in Ireland in the years preceding the 1945 famine: the 'Poor Inquiry' of 1835-6, the Census of 1841, and the report of the 'Devon Commission' in February 1845. There were also a series of period observations which, together with the state's evidence, provided an intimate portrait of conditions on the colony. In sequence, they were Edward Wakefield's *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political* (1812), James Ebenezer Bicheno's *Ireland and its Economy* (1830), Henry Inglis' *A Journey Through Ireland* (1834), Alexis de Tocqueville's *Journeys to England and Ireland* (1837), Gustave de

Beaumont's *Ireland: Social, Political and Religious* (1839), William Makepeace Thackeray's *The Irish Sketchbook* (1843) and J.G. Kohl's *Travels in Ireland* (1844). Collectively, they presented a distressing view of a society and an economy on the verge of collapse. Thackeray presented a pen-picture of life in the Irish townlands at this juncture:

> "The houses have a battered rakish look, and seem going to ruin before their time. As seamen of all nations come hither who have made no vow of temperance, there are plenty of liquor-shops still, and shabby cigar-shops, and shabby milliners' and tailors' with fly-blown prints of old fashions. The bakers and apothecaries make a great brag of their calling, and you see MEDICAL HALL, or PUBLIC BAKERY, BALLYRAGGET FOUR-STORE (or whatever the name may be) pompously inscribed over very humble tenements. Some comfortable grocers' and butchers' shops, and numbers of shabby sauntering people, the younger part of whom are barelegged and bareheaded, make up the rest of the picture which the stranger sees as his car goes jingling through the street." (Thackeray, 1843, p.12; also see the www.dippam.com repository)

The psychological imposition of colonial Ireland proved to be as pervasive as the economic. "A Child of the Dust Must Not Be Proud", written repeatedly on slates by children in pre-famine Ireland was one of the most common National School punishments for minor misdemeanours. It is quiet a complex statement, but it says more about the system that formed a population into the colonial mindset of the period than about the impoverished children late for school. The 1839 Copy Book punishments mirrored the political economy of the day - structured, hierarchical and repressive. (Scally, 1995, p.158) Social positions were asserted clearly in a popular Irish hymn of the time: "The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate, God made them high and lowly and ordered their estate. All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small...". The structure and composition of Irish society resembled a jigsaw of economic and cultural activity dominated by agricultural production for export, emigration and shipping between the island and the neighbouring industrializing cities of Liverpool, Manchester and Bristol. The island's east-west divide was also cemented at this period, as Dublin's powerful economic interests recoiled from the hinterland of the west.

The gaelic areas of the island had changed little since the Huguenots arrived in the early 1700s, while the east of the island - increasingly concentrating around Dublin and Belfast - had bustling trading links shipping wheat, barley, tobacco, cotton cloth, whiskey, and labour to and from competing English and Scottish ports. Liverpool in particular saw a trade flow from Ireland that gave it a unique position in the development of the island. Built on the profits of the African slave trade and its proximity to the expanse of agricultural land to the Atlantic Ocean, Liverpool was elevated to become a trading hub in the way that London had become the financial and political powerbase of the two islands. A feature that was to become significant for the evolution of the Irish economy was the role of shipping labour to and from Liverpool docks throughout the 1800s. Liverpool's century began with 'cargos' of slaves from Africa through to the Caribbean and ended with the freighted Irish peasantry in all its desperation at the height of the mill system.

The era just prior to the famine saw a society on the verge of catastrophe, with an agricultural economy strained and exploited, residing uncomfortably with a nascent modernity, yet seeking dependence on British commercial and imperial power. The economic culture that was prevalent in English society - dominated by an utilitarian mix of capital appreciation, surplus value, labour and its division, manufacturing and ultimately profit - brought an alien economic culture to the Irish which confronted their conventions. For the English commercial managers Irish economic culture was antiquated, backward and unprofitable. Their target was the informal economy and means of exchange that would have been commonplace in Irish communities, notably in the rural west, and seemed incompatible with the regulated monetary system that accompanied free trade. Indeed, as Robert Scally pointed out in *The End of Hidden Ireland*, two distinct economic cultures were present in Ireland in the 1830s, one looking eastward to the commercial 'sophistication' of London and the other to a communitarian and indigenous form. The social and economic differences were profound: "…emigration from the townlands before the famine was restrained by a culture and worldview consonant with this seclusion, deeply suspicious of outsiders, secretive in its dealings with them, and scornful of those who strove to become like them, whether in regard to property, social station, or

personal ambition". (Scally, 1995, p.7) While the management of the state's economy was bureaucratic with dealings often documented in an assiduously methodical manner, the social economy of Ireland retained many of the *mores* pertinent to more flexible methods of commercial activity. This indigenous culture would repeatedly frustrate the establishment of what was ostensibly a London focused market system. By holding on to the obstinate economic culture of rural Ireland they showed themselves to have more akin with other colonial economic cultures than the disciplining *laissez-faire* culture of the south-east of England.

For most of Ireland in the pre-famine economy activity was not geographically centralized or monetarily fixed. The dominant commercial centers outside the ports were the village markets which served tenant cottages and small farming communities. The centers of Irish society were the *bailia* (ballys), clusters of smallholdings dotted throughout the landscape where families and immediate communities would have resided for centuries. Its patchwork form remained its strength, giving a sense of collectivity and local identity, self-sustaining when permitted to harvest its own resources. The jigsaw like pattern of this gaelic model of settlement can be seen in the Ordnance Survey records of the 1830s, often described as *baile fearann* (home towns), representing the link between townland communities and extended families. One of the most insightful pre-famine investigations of the nature and form of the *bailia* (and the *clachan*, Irish village) came from the federalist philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville. Tocqueville's observations were taken in the summer of 1835 and referred to various aspects of Irish life and economic activity at this crucial juncture. (Tocqueville, 1968, pp.154-55) The picture he painted of rural Ireland in *Journey's to England and Ireland* was of a pre-industrial world of lime-whited thatched cottages, grouped occasionally into small communities and focusing on local and often isolated market towns. This was the environment where most Irish lived, with barefooted poverty, sociological complexes respectful of gaelic heritage and folklore, resistant to the recently repealed penal laws, with historic patterns of worship, and knowledgeable of a European diaspora, the French and American revolutions.

For the rural population in general the short lives that they lived were wretched and impoverished, yet their resilience featured in both social interaction and economic survival. In the social memory of this society - numbering an estimated 62,205 *bailia* throughout the island - the rebellions and wars of the late seventeen hundreds still resonated. (Evans, 1949, p.90; also see Canavan, 1991) Their existence had no legal personality under British law. It was a society that referenced a pre-colonial world. With the 'granting' of status from London to specific Irish towns, two distinct maps were effectively rolled out over the island - one communitarian, clannish, culturally aware, the other paterialistic and exploitative. As with other colonial systems, the legal imposition with all its Whig formality, accentuated the socio-economic problems that already existed, rural and urban, landlords and tenants, county to county, political and religious. One testing corollary of this divided society was the pre-famine common adherence to *brehon law*, the uncoded conventions that were recognizable to the indigenous population, but which ran parallel to the Crown's legal system with its ceremony and foreignness. *Brehon* rule was as prominent in many areas as the emerging state formation, with a set of conventions that could deal with perceived injustices. Compensation, for example, was an aspect of *brehon law* that was unrecognizable in the Crown's judicial system, where debt could be repaid in alternative ways. Unjustified rises in food prices at markets could be resisted by community protest; the 'boycott' and the fast - where individuals or the community could resist what was perceived to be an injustice - were acknowledged as legitimate means of negotiation. Disputes commonly dealt with by *brehon law* included: unauthorized land exchanges, intra-family disputes, lifestock confusion and pricing disagreements. If disputes were not resolved, the community itself, or local clergy, would seek consensus to close the issue. Crucially, arbitrary violence and eviction from cottages were not punishments recognizable under this community sourced system of justice.

Joel Mokyr, in *Why Ireland Starved,* gives perhaps the most insightful breakdown of the demographic mix that constituted Irish society prior to the 1841 Census. The rural population were by and large made up of small tenant farming families who were unable to produce much more than a subsistence living. Three distinct classes were defined in this Census. 'Class I', the professional and landowning class comprising of 2.6 per cent of the population. This amounted to 1.9 per cent of the rural population and 6.6 per cent of the urban population. 'Class II' were "skilled artisans and farmers holding fewer than fifty acres". This represented 31.8 per cent of the Irish population; 28.3 per cent of the rural population and 49.9 per cent of the urban population. 'Class III' were labourers and smallholders, "persons without capital, in either money, land, or acquired knowledge [education]". (Mokyr, 1983, pp.18-19) 65.6 per cent of the population of the island were in this latter category; 69.8

per cent of the rural population and 43.5 per cent of the urban population. In total 81 per cent of the population of the island tilled under fifteen acres of land, with 55 per cent living off under ten acres. With families often exceeding eight people, subsistence living was the norm.

In the conventional economy there remained a right to barter, outside the strictures of 'legitimate' commercial activity which had been brought in with the Act of Union and its monetary system. The attempts to order non-monetary economic activity introduced additional complications for community market activity. This imposed form of commerce had a tendency to inflate prices, devalue indigenous produce, while facilitating comparative values from across the empire. By adding a new layer to the traditional economy the circulation of sterling pushed market prices up. The competitive advantage in most cases went against Irish traders. The economic theory behind this disciplining of commerce was that of classical liberalism, which presented enterprising profitable interaction as the primary motivation in human society. But it needed sound management. Its foremost advocate, Adam Smith, was to consider informal commercial exchange - such as barter - as unenlightened, and ultimately, unprofitable. The two economies lived uneasily together until the vital systemic break of the 1840s.

Land and *Laissez Faire*

The 1841 Census of Ireland categorizes most of the eight million Irish as 'smallholders' and 'labourers', a society where the vast majority of the population lived in rural communities. Land, its use-value and sale, was central to socio-economic activity. In this pre-famine economy land was used as a means of exchange, even for small tenants, through dividing and sub-dividing. The rural economy was built around lease-holding farmers and cottier labourers who could lease land, often on an annual basis. Consequently, the overuse of land was an ongoing intractable problem. This complicated economic quilt was to become very evident in the run up to famine, as surveyor John Kelly noted with reference to the midlands in 1834: "It is subdivided into very minute holdings, occupied generally by cottier labourers; and consequently the population settled in it is excessively numerous, their dwellings of a miserable description, and the Lands more or less worn out by continued burning of the soil for tillage". (Quoted in Scally, 1995, p.25) The land question would become more desperate as the population grew and as fields were sub-divided for sons or leased off in times of need. The source of mass disaffection began, however, with the changing tenancy system enforced throughout the 1830s as an attempt by large landowners to open up the land market. Increasingly, absentee landlords were utilizing the powers of rent collectors to manage Irish properties, enforce rent collections and evict non-compliant households. An initial wave of evictions came in the mid-1830s with inevitable consequences. Within Irish society there remained an obstinate popular political culture. It was manifested through a distain for authority, a habitual rejection of class structures and a willingness to resist imposed changes. (Clark, 1979, p.66) A legacy of the penal times the *rebelliousness* across Irish society was instinctive, community based and informed by a social memory that was drawn from long past atrocities and engagements. With the evictions that accompanied the changes to tenancy regulations the new society again was confronting the old. Scally makes an important comment on the tensions that had come between these two worlds:

> "Just as acquisitiveness or hoarding were still generally held by subsistence tenants as violations of traditional moral proprieties, private immodesty in dress, discordant pretensions of manner or speech or personal vanities in a man or woman could bring sharp rebuke or ridicule down on individuals or entire families. The townland strove to maintain its covert economy with an internal moral and even aesthetic code that was equally at odds with that emerging all around it." (Scally, 1995, p.34)

In many townlands the tenancy regulations were as alien as the monetary economy or the English language that came with it, restricting it mainly to the cities and larger towns. Barter would have been a common means of exchanging goods, with many families relying on a 'potato wage' - where tenants

would be paid in potatoes or labour merely for food. (Ó Gráda, 1994, p.194) Any breakdown of this form of pre-industrial economic activity was important in the context due to the sheer numbers who were vulnerable to market fluctuations. Large farmers often acted as middlemen for collecting rent, levying additional pressure on the tenant population in times of economic stress. Changing macroeconomic circumstances would impact on tenants also, and while the larger farmers could diversify their produce to engage with broader market circumstances, the smallholders lived precariously dependent existences. With shifts in food production for export, monoculture for subsistence became widespread. Furthermore, scarce resources and dependency on weather cycles give a harshness to life in Ireland. A culmination of all these factors meant that for the smallholders and their families, shortage and hunger were a way of life - and they represented the bulk of Irish society. The economy of the 1830s is an important marker in the development of the island, because it gives an insight into a colonial society prior to the dislocation of famine, a snapshot of a unique world at the point of breaking.

As the 1841 Census and the contemporary observers showed, pressures were building on this population in its struggle to sustain itself. The forms of contract for tenant leasing and the aggravated division of smallholdings, together with economic depression and the corresponding drop in the prices of agricultural produce, all provided early evidence of stress. The colonial economic framework had compelled the country towards crisis and this would inevitably reveal itself to be rural in form. The urban and rural divide contorted economic relationships across the island, with resistance to modernization and urbanization forcing rural communities to withdraw further into the microeconomies that had sustained these communities in the past against similar external pressures. Culturally they carried a general distain for the urbanized centres of the east coast and a political ambivalence that would be common to rural Irish society. In 1840 a Repeal Association was formed, led by the celebrated ‘emancipator’ of Irish catholics, Daniel O’Connell. It called for the repeal of the Union and the establishment of a native Irish Parliament. Crucially, its popularity and that of O’Connell depended on an engagement with the land question: “Though always inclined to use ‘Repeal’ as an emotive inspiration, and careful not to commit himself in much detail to the practical measures required to change society, he did definitely commit himself to the general principle of fixity of tenure for the tenant, making it clear that he was prepared to interfere with the basic structure of the landlord-tenant relationship”. (Kee, 1976, p.193) In Cork in May 1843 half a million came to hear O’Connell call for Repeal and the economic appendages of fair rent, free sales and fixity of tenure which would have revolutionized land relations on the island.

While economic activity was predominantly restricted for most to a limited exchange of produce - such as wheat, livestock, barley and potatoes - other more luxurious goods would have been commonplace in certain circles. Commodities being brought in from the colonies were making it through to the upper echelons of Irish society. Remembering that slavery in the colonies was not abolished until 1834 and carried on in many regions throughout the world for decades after - including most of America - imports were often slave sourced. Tobacco, sugar, cotton and tea were to be found across the island becoming features of Anglo-Irish patrician society. The recipients of *laissez faire* commerce, the richer farmers and the emerging legal and commercial professions, revelled in the exotic ornamentation that bedecked their homes and lifestyles. Whereas the tenants lived in their austere world of church and poverty, without furniture or sufficient apparel, the landlords’ families benefited from both the exploitation of the smallholders and a myriad of colonial spoils. The rituals and couture of these Irish landowners often puzzled and bemused onlookers. Indeed, they were often seen as vulgar profiteers in English circles, whereas in Irish society their fixation with exploiting the tenants brought them distain and occasional violent reaction. While forging control over the workings of the Irish economy and government, this class mimicked across the island the libertine chaos that they were exposed to in London. Marx and Engels made the point cynically:

> “Their country-seats are surrounded by enormous, amazingly beautiful parks, but all around is waste land… These fellows are droll enough to make your sides burst with laughing. Of mixed blood, mostly tall, strong handsome chaps, they all wear enormous moustaches under colossal Roman noses, give themselves the false military airs of retired colonels, travel around the country after all sorts of pleasures, and if one makes an inquiry, they haven’t a penny, are laden with debts, and live in dread of the Encumbered Estates Court.” (Marx and Engels, 1971, p.85)

Resplendent in brightly coloured cotton clothes courtesy of the slave plantations in the southern American states, sugar from the Caribbean, cosmetics and ivory ornaments from East Africa, the landlord lifestyle was paid for by tenant labour and rent. Even the cultural highlights of the pre-famine years were steeped in the economy of exploitation: the pianos, African woods and jewellery that decorated many of the middle and upper class houses were by-products of the ebony and ivory trades, and slavery in East Africa. Poignantly, the Irish tenants with their lime-whited turf walls and thatch, their beads and rituals, language, regional cultures, hunger and conflict, could be seen to have more in common with the slave communities of Mississippi or the villages of Guinea, than the individualized, anglicized rich of Dublin, Cork or Belfast.

The Anglo-Irish ascendency, along with increasing numbers of Irish catholic landowners, were to oversee the agricultural modernization process and evictions for farm extensions. Together with representatives of the absentee landlords and Crown representatives they constituted an establishment. It was recognizable as a distinct hegemony on the island. At times of scarcity they were the purveyors of hardship. Conflict with tenants, and the brutality that came with it, evolved through the 1800s as an aspect of commercial activity. Evictions created space for a change of land-use while depressing the price of local produce ensured that agricultural goods could be purchased at a fraction of previous costs. The more the landowners and merchants could squeeze the tenants the more market expansion could be facilitated. They even accounted for resistance. For them, periodic and sporadic protest was interpreted not as a response to grievances, but as potential insurrection, anti-state activity which necessitated suppression.

Land exploitation and the oppressive methods of this landowning class deliberately targeted the poor, and while the tenants struggled for survival, the profiteering of the landowners undermined sustainable farming practices. Furthermore, the agents, who had the task of managing tenants and their payments, aggravated the conditions by often violent methods of rent collection. The divisions within the society were obvious to the population. Cathal Póirtéir, in *The Great Irish Famine*, commented that between the years 1832 and 1859, 70 per cent of members of parliament and peers from Ireland were from this landowning stock. (Póirtéir, 1995) Unlike the process of industrialization evident across England involving certain rights and obligations by many owners, Ireland had been cynically and systematically underdeveloped. (Thompson, 1991, pp.83-96)

The Devon Commission, the Royal Commission which was set up to look at the state of the country in 1843, commented on the: "...strong sense of the patient endurance which the labouring classes have exhibited under sufferings greater, we believe, than the people of any other country in Europe have to sustain". (Woodham-Smith, 1964, p.24) The fragile nature of the society was becoming increasingly evident on a number of fronts. Discontent was rife and confrontation occasionally erupted between the tenants, agents and the militias who were assisting in enforcing rent collections and evictions. The Commission, chaired by the Earl of Devon and reporting in February 1845, was categorical in its condemnation of governance on the island of Ireland. Its brief was: "...to inquire into the law and practice with regard to the occupation of land in Ireland". (Woodham-Smith, 1964, p.21) Even though all of the members who sat on the Commission were landowners, they could not conceal the scale of the dispossession, anticipating economic meltdown. The inquiry estimated that in 1842 alone £6,000,000 in remittances had been extracted from the Irish tenants by agents. The beneficiaries were the estates of the ascendency and the landlords of London. There was no pretence of loyalty to tenant or land, in a crude exploitation of natural and human resources. This was intensified by the 'middle-man' system, where the agents employed to manage land were sub-letting plots. The landowners received their remittance, while the agent could extract a further toll on the tenants. It led to the sub-dividing of plots with the agents getting additional profit through the continual segmentation of farms. This *conacre* system created the familiar patchwork division of the Irish landmass.

Historically there had been agreed conventions on tenant rights, which had been customary in form and which included the acceptance of improvements in the holdings by tenants and security of tenure. These rights continued to be practiced in parts of Ulster and ensured the adaptation of, or investment in, the holdings. There was also the assurance that eviction would not be arbitrary. More often than not, however, across other parts of the island 'improvement' - trying to enhance a property by, for example, replacing a door - could be used as an excuse for eviction. Similarly, lack of financial security or the introduction of leasing papers could be seen as opportunities to extract rent to the point

of eviction. The insecurity of tenants was accentuated further by the seasonal urgency of producing goods for sale or having to labour for the agent or landlord. With the cash economy being a state and largely urban phenomenon, and the rural economy often working from an 'in kind' basis, tenants spent much of their lives working to pay off debt. Often indebted tenants would be left with rent arrears 'hanging' until the next season provided the opportunity for payment through bonded labour. It was used as a means of keeping tenants perpetually vulnerable to eviction and dependent. Edward Wakefield noted this system of rent collection to be: "...one of the greatest levers of oppression… the lower classes are kept in a kind of perpetual bondage… this debt hangs over their heads… and keeps them in a continual state of anxiety and terror". (Quoted in Woodham-Smith, p.23) The social philosopher John Stuart Mill, in his contemporary study *England and Ireland,* commented:

> "In Ireland alone the whole agricultural population can be evicted by the mere will of the landlord, either at the expiration of a lease or, in the far more common case of their having no lease, at six months' notice. In Ireland alone, the bulk of a population wholly dependent on the land cannot look forward to a single year's occupation of it." (Mill, 1886, p.16)

By 1841 two-thirds of the Irish population, which numbered over eight million people, were caught in this rural economy, their plight aggravated by the monoculture that had evolved since the Act of Union where large numbers of families - being tied to small-holdings of less than one to fifteen acres - were dependant on the high yielding potato crop for survival.

As with the maize that slave ships brought back to Africa from the American plantations, so to the potato was brought from the Americas to become the food of the Irish poor. Together with dairy produce, curd and milk, by the first two decades of the nineteenth century the potato had become the principal diet of the Irish population. Other crops were produced for export to supply English industrial cities, but potatoes provided Irish tenant families a basic subsistence and rapidly became identified with the lives of the Irish poor. This identification can be seen from one emigrant's experience going from Cork to North American in 1823: "The children during sickness called constantly for potatoes, refusing arrowroot or any other aliment more congenial to their situation, and nothing could prevail on man, woman, or child to eat plumb pudding which as is usual on ships board was part of the Sunday dinner". (Quoted in Ó Gráda, 1994, p.14) The monoculture and the lack of a cash economy left the west of Ireland particularly vulnerable. Furthermore, potato crop failures were recurrent, with an estimated twenty-four crop failures between 1728 and 1882, the most destructive in 1739, 1740, 1770 and 1880. Indeed, extensive crop failures occurred in a sequence of years up until 1844. There was a general understanding of the disparate yield of the crop, yet there remained dependence for a significant proportion of the population. When *phytophthora infestans* blighted the 1844 yield it signalled something catastrophic. The rot was to take full effect the following year. (Donnelly, 2005, p.40)

Christine Kinealy, in *This Great Calamity,* looked at the reaction to the arrival of the potato blight noting that the Mansion House, Dublin Castle and Westminster - including British Prime Minister William Gladstone - were well aware of the impending crisis. (Kinealy, 1994, pp.32-33) On 13th September 1845 the *Gardeners' Chronicle and Horticultural Gazette*, edited by the professor of botany at the University of London, John Lindley, warned of blight: "We stop the Press with very great regret to announce that the potato Murrain has unequivocally declared itself in Ireland… where will Ireland be in the event of a universal potato rot?" (Quoted in Woodham-Smith, p.40) In the event the outcome was mass starvation made worse by a sequence of incompetent attempts to address the situation. The catastrophe was fuelled by establishment inaction and a fundamentalism that contained a lethal mix of classical liberalism, ideas of population management and racism.

Ideological zeal for the market in the early 1800s had brought the customary form of the Irish economy into stark conflict with classical liberal perceptions of what should suffice for freeing commercial enterprise and releasing market forces on all aspects of society. Advocating deregulated, unfettered, free trade became the passion of classical liberals, the dominant ideology of the Whig establishment. Arguing for *laissez-faire* within the economy, the supposed natural evolution of the economic system could, in theory, bring prosperity with profit for those engaged in commercial activities. Popularized by James Mill in the 1824 edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the term

resonated among pioneers of free trade across the British Isles. While not overtly engaging with the French term itself, a generic form of *laissez-faire* could be read in the economic theories of Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo, each presenting a case for the freeing of the market and the necessity of 'natural' competitive renewal within economies. For Smith the 'invisible hand' of the market system was the life force which compelled society forward. It was only individual commercial enterprise that could unlock this energy. "Every individual... neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it... he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention". (Smith, 1776, Book IV, Chapter II, p.456) While never visiting Ireland, Smith was a fervent supporter of the Act of Union as a means of market expansion, and colonization as a rich source of profit generation.

Laissez-faire as a doctrine galvanized Dublin's elite and those in London who saw property management and private enterprise as primary social activities. Excessive government, as perceived by Adam Smith and the classical liberals, was a hindrance to profitability and therefore should be restricted in its intervention in the economy. From this perspective it was not prudent for the government to overtly manage economic activity - this should be the role of enterprising individuals. Liberty for the elite, property ownership, and the right to profit, were synonymous. Transferred to the Irish context this ideology meant limiting governmental intervention that would subdue market activity. If the market was to falter, classical liberal's argues, it should be left up to market forces to readjust. Interference was seen to be disruptive to this natural process, and ultimately, whatever the circumstances the market must take its course.

One of the most influential books of the period pertains to this ideology while introducing presumed laws of nature, 'natural law' that brings consequences to those who are perceived as not having the faculties or enlightened acumen to live in what was interpreted as the civilized world. George Combe's *The Constitution of Man and its Relations to External Objects,* sold 350,000 copies between 1828 and 1900, outselling Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) by seven to one. Combe's comments on the Irish people provide an insight into the mentality of governing and academic classes at the time of the famine:

> "By reckless marriages they have increased their numbers far beyond their capital, means of employment, and of subsistence; and abject poverty, occasionally destitution and famine, with the fearful ravages of disease, stalk through the land, appalling the beholder, and leading feeble minds to question the sway of a benevolent Providence in Irish affairs. The oppressors and the oppressed stand equally rebuked. A great calamity presses upon both; and it reads an instructive lesson concerning the practical evils of teaching religious doctrines irrespective of natural science and its applications." (Combe, 1847 edition, p.434)

The idea that famine was a natural form of social adjustment became a contemporary rebuke which could also be read into Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection, later termed "the survival of the fittest". The concept was defined initially in 1838 and as *the* scientific revelation of the day, was feverishly applied to economics, population and dependency during the Irish famine. (Desmond and Moore, 1991, pp.263-74) The starving Irish were to become the live experiment for this theory. One of the most influential interpretations of the philosophy came from the Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus, who had been influential in the development of the theories of Darwin. In his *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) Malthus elaborated on the idea of natural selection. It was his observation that in nature plants and animals produce far more offspring than can survive. His theory was that humans were also capable of 'overproducing' if left unchecked. Malthus concluded that unless family sizes were regulated, the misery of famine would become an epidemic that would eventually devastate humanity. For him population levels needed to be occasionally checked with food supplies managed in an arithmetical manner; poverty and famine were logical, natural outcomes of population growth.

Although Malthus thought of famine and poverty as natural processes, as a man of the Church for him the ultimate force behind these outcomes was divine institution. He believed that famine was God's way of preventing humans from becoming feckless. Furthermore, charity towards the poor could be seen to be self-defeating in that it created a situation where dependency thrived and the numbers of those in need would exponentially increase - putting more pressure on food supplies. The solution was that the poor needed to be disciplined into 'improving' their own conditions. The first major test of his theory came with the Irish poor:

> "Here, then, under our own eyes and on a large scale, a process is revealed, than which nothing more excellent could be wished for by orthodox economy for the support of its dogma: that misery springs from absolute surplus-population, and that equilibrium is re-established by depopulation. This is a far more important experiment than was the plague in the middle of the 14th century so belauded of Malthusians… The Irish famine of 1846 killed more than 1,000,000 people, but it killed poor devils only. To the wealth of the country it did not the slightest damage." (Marx, 1867, p.658)

The firmest application of the Malthusian system came with the introduction of the Irish Poor Relief (Ireland) Act of 1838 - '*An Act for the More Effectual Relief of the Destitute Poor in Ireland'* – which extended the 1834 British poor relief system to Ireland. The country was divided up into a number of Poor Law Unions with the task of overseeing the establishment of and management of workhouses. The obligation of the Unions was to force the poor into becoming more compliant contributors to the general economy. The workhouse was the punishment for those who were not 'improving'.

> "LVIII. And be it enacted, That every Person who shall refuse to be lodged and maintained in the Workhouse of any Union, or abscond out of such Workhouse while his Wife, or any Child whom he may be liable to maintain, shall be relieved therein, and every Person maintained in a Workhouse who shall refuse to be set to work… contrary to the Orders of the Commissioners, shall, on Conviction… be committed to the Common Gaol or House of Correction, there to be kept to hard Labour for any Time." (Poor Relief (Ireland) Act 1838, www.workhouses.org.uk)

The poor were to be disciplined into productivity and servitude until such times as they were deemed capable of inclusion within commercial society at large. The architects of this system did not, however, envisage demand for relief outside the workhouse. Nor did those who designed the system, instituted just seven years before the famine, anticipate such a complete breakdown that the workhouse would become a refuge from starvation. The blight of the 1845 potato crop left millions in this struggle to survive. When the situation across Ireland became apparent, theories of racial superiority were introduced to explain a malfunction in this natural scientific system - where ideological dehumanization could be utilized to relieve the conscience of the establishment. The 'inferior' Irish, as with other colonial peoples, were just not 'evolved' enough or capable of civilized social engineering. "Nineteenth century theorists divided humanity into 'races' on the basis of external physical features… Needless to say, the Teutons, who included the Anglo-Saxons, were placed at the top. Black people… were at the bottom, with Celts (Irish) and Jews somewhere in between". (New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education, 1998, pp.56-57.)

The Famine Economy

In the early years of the Union ongoing change to the agricultural base brought with it investment in marketable crops while encouraging sustenance farming which could keep the farming families alive and producing. In this economy the importance of the potato cannot be underestimated for rural life,

and was used to sustain life: as a basic diet, as a fertilizer, for animal feed and even distilled down for poteen. Unlike anywhere else in European in Ireland even bread was a luxury, as life rotated precariously around one produce. The sequence of events which caused the collapse of the domestic economy was thus tied to potato production, its severity largely a consequence of excessive profiteering and mismanagement on a monumental scale by landlords, Dublin Castle and Westminster. As Robert Kee pointed out in *The Most Distressful Country*: "Everyone knew that Ireland was short only of the potato and otherwise full of food in the form of oats, wheat, butter, eggs, sheep and pigs, all of which continued to be exported to England on a considerable scale..." (Kee, 1976, p.244) The blight first spread its way through the land in 1845 and led to the partial destruction of that year's crop. This was followed by the complete failure of the 1846 crop and subsequently no seeds to sow for the 1847 crop. With an estimated 3 million Irish people totally dependent on a single crop for survival, famine was inevitable. (Kennedy, et al., 1999, p.69) A further blight in 1848 was the final devastating blow to the society, its population and the conventional way of life. The ongoing and forced changes to the economic base magnified the difficulties faced by the population, where instead of intervention and structural support, the market was left to extract profit where it could be located - within decreasing and contorted economic activity. As the communities struggled to provide food they were forced to consume what remained on the small-holdings, their livestock and less profitable vegetables. Confusingly, livestock production contorted the agricultural market by showing profitability throughout this period, resulting from land clearances for cattle and sheep rearing and returns on animal produce such as leathers. Consequently, agricultural practices and employment warped in reaction to the malfunctioning economic system: "… tillage output was down 21.3 percent, potato output was down 75 percent", but "the volume of animal products was up 30.8 percent". (O'Rourke, 1994, p.310) Robert Kee recounted Daniel O'Connell's rebuke to the House of Commons: "More wheat, barley and wheat meal flour, he pointed out, had in fact been imported into Great Britain from Ireland in 1845 than in any other of the three previous years, and between 10 October 1845 and 5 January 1846 over 30,000 oxen, bulls and cows, over 30,000 sheep and lambs, and over 100,000 pigs had sailed from Ireland to English ports". (Kee, 1976, p.247) O'Connell died of a brain haemorrhage in Lyons on 15th May 1847.

As with all famines it was the poor and weakest would were to suffer the most. A letter to the *Evening Freeman* on 9th December 1847 conveyed the commonplace misery of the famine years:

> "The infamous and inhuman cruelties which were wantonly and unnecessarily exercised against a tenantry, whose feelings were already wound up to woeful and vengeful exasperation by the loss of their exiled relatives, as well as by hunger and pestilence, which swept so many victims to an untimely grave – in my opinion may be assigned as the sole exciting cause of the disasterous event which has occurred. I saw no necessity for the idle display of such a large force of military and police, carrying outside so many rounds of ball cartridge, and inside some substantial rounds of whiskey, bacon and baker's bread, surrounding the poor man's cabin, setting fire to the roof while the half-starved, half-naked children were hastening away from the flames with yells of despair, while the mother lay prostrate on the threshold writhing in agony, and the heartbroken father remained supplicating on his knees. I saw no need for this demonstration of physical force, nor did I see any need for brutal triumph and exultation when returning after these feats were nobly performed. Nor can I conceive that feelings of humanity should permit any man to send his bailiffs to revisit these scenes of horror and conflagration, with an order, if they found a hut built or a fire lighted in the murky ruins, to demolish the one and extinguish the other, thus leaving the wretched outcasts no alternative but to perish in a ditch." (Quoted in Scally, 1995, p.83)

The effects were devastating for the population across the island. More than 20 years after the famine, on 16th December 1867 in a speech to the German Workers' Educational Association on 'The Irish Question', Karl Marx made an insightful comment: "A million people died of starvation. The potato blight resulted from the exhaustion of the soil… Over 1,100,000 people have been replaced with 9,600,000 sheep. This is a thing unheard of in Europe". (Marx and Engels, 1971, pp.141-42) Marx was alluding to the fact that market forces, in the midst of famine, were continuing to adapt to adversity and extreme market conditions. Three particularly forceful interventions reverberated throughout Irish society during the famine period: mass eviction, used to adjust the agri-economy and

causing the expansion of the workhouse system, forced emigration moved unto an industrial scale, and the adjustment of free market practices brought about the repeal of laws restricting imports and trade.

Eviction had enabled new markets as well as the possibilities that came with clearing communities from the land. During the famine the systematic extraction of rent from tenants led to eviction being treated as a commercial opportunity in its own right by landlords. Eviction left few options for the impoverished tenants and out of the desperation a new market emerged which was to prove to be one of the most profitable enterprises of the period - that of shipping Irish emigrants. The shipping companies had suffered ill fortune with the demise of the slave trade, but with the acceleration of evictions and famine it gave the companies a reason to refit the vessels to revive this lucrative trade in people. The crude shift from one market to another, however, left many of the old practices in place, including the hellish treatment of the 'cargo', the sorry state of the ships and the brutality of the mariners. Nevertheless many prominent members of Anglo-Irish society were to find the shipping of the starving Irish more acceptable than shipping African slaves - it was immensely profitable. Even Lord Palmerston, at the pinnacle of the British establishment, ventured into the business by chartering craft for the shipment of Irish to North America. As a result of the business, the 'coffin ship' was to become synonymous with the plight of the poor rural communities trying to escape the hunger. "In the decade 1845-55 two million emigrants left Ireland, around 1.5 of them going to the United States. In Black 1847 the mortality rates on ships from Liverpool stood at 1 in 14, and from Cork at 1 in 9. Of the 97,000 Irish, who sailed for Canada in that year, a third died at sea or shortly after landing". (Rogers, 2009, p.291) Rumours and anger at such atrocities were not only voiced in the political circles of Dublin and London, but reverberated fearfully throughout Irish society itself, provoking attacks and reprisals - and a demand by landowners for the government to enforce military rule in many rural areas.

Emigrating Irish labour helped resuscitate the shipping market. The key figure that jumps out in regards to this resurgence of shipping is that just before slavery was abolished in Britain and Ireland in 1806 there were fewer than 100 ships going from Ireland to the northern states of America, yet the worst years of the famine there were 2,000 ships in operation. In the earlier years of passage, berths were built into the ships, many of which had been adapted for wood carriage also, with the passengers providing their own food for the journey. The volume of ships and the frequency of the journeys meant that prices remained relatively affordable. This market expansion led to the emergence of licensed agents in Irish towns and cities, 'passage-brokers', who could arrange transportation. Known for opportunistic, fraudulent and exploitative behaviour they nevertheless provided a way out for those who had nothing left but the workhouse between them and starvation. While comfort and support during the voyage varied immensely, from the coffin ships to more salubrious vessels, the consensus between the government and the shipping magnates was to keep the fares as affordable as possible. In 1842 for a man to travel with his wife and four children to New York was £21; to go to Quebec in 'British North America' would cost £6. To avoid paying the bond to enter US ports, emigrants would often make the transatlantic journey to Quebec and then cross the border to settle in Boston, New York or other developing northern cities. Tellingly, the United States Consul in Derry wrote: "To the United States go the people of good character and in comfortable circumstances... to British North America the evil and ill disposed. They go to Canada either because the fare is cheap or their landlords are getting rid of them". (Quoted in Woodham-Smith, 1962, p.212) Ellis Island, the importation centre off Manhattan, holds an unusual statistic in relation to disembarkation. Its halls received more Irish people through their doors - they estimate 12 million - than indigenous Irish living on the island of Ireland itself. Indeed, Paul-Dubois called the American Republic "Greater Ireland", and Karl Marx noted that: "...emigration forms one of the most lucrative branches of its [Ireland's] export trade". (Marx, 1867, p.659; www.dippam.com) The USA and Canada were to become mass workhouses for Irish people, as the population of the four provinces deceased year after year with poverty and famine driving millions to seek better lives elsewhere.

There was forced emigration across the island where landlords, such as the Honourable Mr Wandesford (Kilkenny) or Colonel Wyndham (Clare), cleared hundreds of their tenants overseas. Over 85,000 people left for the US in 1847 alone, and an estimated 109,000 for British North America. Starving and exposed typically to typhus - 'ocean plague' - and other fevers, the passage across the Atlantic was often as hazardous as remaining in the townlands. Cecil Woodham-Smith chronicled the worst of these journeys that there is evidence of: "The *Larch*, from Sligo, for instance, sailed with 440 passengers, of whom 108 died at sea, and 150 arrived with fever; the *Virginius* left Liverpool for Quebec with 476 passengers, of whom 158 died on the voyage and 106 were landed sick...".

(Woodham-Smith, 1964, pp.225-26) The *Virginius* came to represent the brutality of the trade of moving emigrants through the quarantine island of Grosse Île in Canada. On arrival only half a dozen were fit enough to walk from the ship; beyond those who died during the journey, the remaining emigrants were subjected to the imprisonment that came with the process of quarantine. In two months alone in 1847, 5,000 Irish died in transit on the Atlantic.

The numbers taking the eight week journey to America could be adequately monitored, whereas other migrant flows could not be easily quantified. The largely unrecorded human movement from the east coast of Ireland to Britain can reveal only approximate numbers, but the social and economic influence of the Irish diaspora on cities such as Glasgow, Liverpool and London itself, has been immense. The full extent of depopulation of the island could be seen generations later when, on estimation, over ten times the population of the island could claim Irish descent worldwide (80 million, 41 million in the USA alone). (Fitzpatrick, 1989, p.569) The sociological aspects of the diaspora's experience are symptomatic, emigration found a predictable pattern where the men initially moved to find work and the women and children were sent for to follow. This was compounded by young adults continuing the outward trek looking for better opportunities. What was tragic in the experience of the Irish diaspora was their inability to return to the island, engendering a culture of separation. The diaspora experience was to become perhaps the most prominent theme in Irish popular culture, playing on the melancholy of loss. Another aspect of the separation was the remittance, the sending of funds back to the family in Ireland. These remittances were to become a feature of Irish society and its economy: "Assuming a figure of £3 million from all sources implies an inflow equivalent to 2 to 3 per cent of national income before the First world War". (Ó Gráda, 1994, p.228)

Within the famine economy the role of the workhouse also became formative, buildings where the surplus-labour could be concentrated for incarceration and productivity. Between 1838 and 1843, 112 workhouses were built, and a further 18 under construction. These 130 workhouses were intended to cater for 94,010 'guests', the authorities believing that this would have been adequate room. During and for some time after the famine years Irish workhouses were severely over-crowded. By 1849, some 250,000 people were being accommodated. In June 1850, there were 264,048. Even though the death rate in these institutions remained high - 283,765 died between the years 1841 to 1851 (of whom 138,576 were of children under the age of fifteen) - so many destitute people clamoured to be admitted that soup kitchens had to be set up beside the houses to keep the starving from rioting. (PRONI http://www.proni.gov.uk/index/exhibitions_talks_and_events/from_north_to_south_online/the_workhouse_orphans.htm) Skibbereen workhouse in County Cork had been built for 800, yet by 1847 was holding 1,300 with queues encamped waiting for deaths in the institution to secure a place. With the government concerned about widespread looting and theft, the queen's speech of that year called for tougher measures to deal with crime in Ireland. (Kee, 1976, p.259)

The workhouse system was but one of a number of mechanisms that were to be put in place by the authorities in Dublin and Westminster to address what was universally acknowledged to be a catastrophe of unprecedented proportions. Others included sending in troops to further suppress the starving; free transport off the island; and pseudo scientific solutions - such as recommending the boiling of grass to eat. One of the most contentious attempts to with engage the crisis was the return to the ideological safeguard of 'freeing' up trade, and in particular the freeing of the corn trade. This market solution had been recommended by a committee of Dublin Corporation, which included notaries such as Lord Cloncurry and the Duke of Leinster. Their suggestions for confronting famine stricken Ireland, were: that ports should permit the importation of Indian corn and other foods - particularly grain from the British colonies; that the railway network should be extended; that a relief system be put in place; and that public work schemes should be set up. (Woodham-Smith, 1964, p.49) In response, the Prime Minister Robert Peel took on the 'cause' of repealing the Corn Laws which had protected British and Irish produce against the importation of cheap corn from the colonies. As a result of this patronage and with the backdrop of famine, Westminster went into political convulsions over the fundamentals of free trade. Famine in Ireland had given the advocates of releasing the 'invisible hand' of the market the opportunity to shift the macroeconomic base away from agricultural protectionism and towards liberalization based on importation. "The remedy is the removal of all impediments to the import of all kinds of human food – that is, the total and absolute repeal forever of all duties on all articles of subsistence". (Ibid., p.50) This stance pushed the question of food security in Ireland into a Tory versus Whig ideological tussle, with a long and bitter debate about trade practices taking precedence over famine relief.

According to John Mitchel, in *The Last Conquest of Ireland* (1861), Belfast Corporation also appealed for relief, and specifically looked for support to enhance the public works schemes which they believed could provide work and revenue for the large numbers of people who were moving into the city from famine stricken areas. This would relieve the pressures on the city and create opportunities for an increasingly desperate population. Interestingly, Mitchel alluded to other examples from Europe where governments were having to dealing with this crisis of potato blight, including the government of Belgium's plan to restrict food exports yet free up the ports for imports in order to flood the local market with available and affordable produce. (Mitchel, 1861, p.69) This type of initiative had been permitted during the 1782-3 Irish famine with relative success and was known to be effective. In the event, among the Irish establishment, land reform was to become the limit of governmental relief. Beyond this and particularly with the debate around the Irish Coercion Bill throughout 1846 (which advocated oppressive measures as a response to famine related unrest), the Act of Union itself and its repeal were to emerge as political rallying calls by more progressive forces in Ireland. Before being sentenced under the Treason Felony Act and deported to Bermuda, and a subsequent questionable role in the American Civil War, Mitchel etched two comments that have resonated through generations of Irish. First, that there were: "...heavy-laden ships, freighted with the yellow corn their own hands have sown and reaped, spreading all sail for England"; and second, that: "...the Almighty, indeed, sent the potato blight, but the English created the Famine". The Young Ireland movement's attempted rebellion in 1848 was prosecuted in the context of the famine, and throughout these years, as noted by Cecil Woodham-Smith in *The Great Hunger,* there remained the fact that: "...the poverty of the Irish peasant, the backward state of his country and the power of his landlord prevented him from benefiting from home-grown food did not mitigate his burning sense of injustice". (Woodham-Smith, 1962, p.76)

As the years of famine went on, the establishments in London and Dublin showed little interest in countering the principal grievances that had incited the revolutionary movement within Ireland. Charles Trevelyan, Treasury Under-Secretary and free trade fundamentalist, argued that the processes of famine should be left to "take their natural course". His personal objective was to export as much oatmeal from the island as possible, to adjust its natural market as a means of overcoming economic shortfalls. Charles Wood, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, relayed to Russell that they should be: "ready to give as near nothing as may be". James Wilson, in *The Economist*, commented that: "it is no man's business to provide from another". (Quoted in Ó Gráda,1994, p.192) Throughout the famine the price of bread remained high and while corn, 'Peel's brimstone', began arriving after the repeal of the Corn Laws on 15th May 1846, the relief of those subjected to famine was wholly inadequate and contributed to the crisis. The succession of the Whig administration of John Russell in July 1846 brought the economy and people into the heart of the famine years. Public work schemes and workhouses marked their utilitarian *ad hoc* approach to the alleviation of hunger, and the exploitation of the economy continued unabated. The Poor Law was amended in June 1847 to incorporate an 'improvement' measure which attempted to transfer the costs of dealing with Irish poverty to Irish resources. This attempted to shift the burden of the collapse of the Irish markets back onto the Irish economy, putting further pressures on the population through eviction and forced emigration. One severe way in which government policies were causing further degradation for the poor was detailed by F.S.L. Lyons in *Ireland Since the Famine*. This was the prohibition that became known as the 'Gregory Clause', a law which restricted relief (government support) to anyone who retained over a quarter of an acre of land. After spending everything on alternative food sources, rent and taxes, if the family could no longer sustain the rent they could be evicted. Lyons detailed a number of years where the clause was particularly oppressive, 1849 and 1850, and where (respectively) 90,000 and 104,000 people were subjected to this law. (Lyons, 1963, pp.43-45)

The famine was without doubt one of the biggest humanitarian crises of the 1800s. It was to resonate as an archetypal experiment in repressive government and mismanagement. Its influence on Victorian society was unprecedented and can be seen in the manner in which Karl Marx, in *Capital,* used it as the primary contemporary example of the logical outcome of a *laissez-faire* political economy:

> "The population of Ireland had, in 1841, reached 8,222,664; in 1851, it had dwindled to 6,623,985; in 1861, to 5,850,309; in 1866, to 5½ millions, nearly to its level in 1801. The diminution began with the famine year, 1846, so that Ireland, in less than twenty years, lost more than 5/16 ths of its people. Its total emigration from May, 1851, to July, 1865, numbered

> 1,591,487: the emigration during the years 1861-1865 was more than half-a-million. The number of inhabited houses fell, from 1851-1861, by 52,990. From 1851-1861, the number of holdings of 15 to 30 acres increased 61,000, that of holdings over 30 acres, 109,000, whilst the total number of all farms fell 120,000, a fall, therefore, solely due to the suppression of farms under 15 acres - *i.e*., to their centralisation." (Marx, 1867, p.652)

In 1841, when the census was taken, the population of the island of Ireland stood at 8,175,124. Shifts in population and the principle of natural law had brought the Anglo-Irish establishment to the vulgar Malthusian conclusion that Ireland was overpopulated, resulting in not enough food to sustain such a population. Indeed, Benjamin Disraeli stated that the island was "the most densely-populated country in Europe". Musing over population growth served as a convenient distraction. By the end of the famine in 1849: "In the four provinces of Ireland the smallest loss of population was in Leinster, 15.5 per cent., then Ulster, 16 per cent., Connaught's loss was greatest, 28.6 per cent., and Munster lost 23.5 per cent". (Woodham-Smith, 1964, pp.31, 412) This represented 20.9 per cent (1,708,600) of the Irish population. An estimated two million emigrated. The Irish population did not return to its pre-famine numbers until 2001.

Beyond the violence inflicted by famine at the behest of the middlemen, landlords, free traders, economists and the establishments in both Ireland and England, acts of solidarity were also evident throughout the catastrophe. Relief of the starving Irish became the *cause célèbre* for many in the middle of the 1800s. One of the most substantial contributions came from the British Relief Association, which - from its inauguration in 1847 - raised an estimated £200,000. Support came from other colonies and from as far afield as India, and even Sultan Abdülmecid of the Ottoman empire who contributed both funding (an estimated £1,000) and ships loaded with food. (Kinealy, 1994, p.161) Perhaps the most poignant act of solidarity and aid came from the Choctaw Indians in North America who, after suffering enforced evictions from their own lands, collected $710 for famine relief in Ireland in 1847. In the years after they too were to be subjected to a similar genocidal grab for land through the racist policy of 'manifest destiny' that was to decimate native American communities. What is nauseating to contemplate is that irrespective of the collective prostration that was famine, the Irish economy - when calculated through the prism of Smithian economics - was better off in terms of *per capita* income and economic growth because of the famine: "Astonishingly, between 1840 and 1913 per capita incomes in Ireland rose at 1.6 per cent per year, faster than any other country in Europe. Where Irish incomes averaged 40 per cent of the British level in 1840, this proportion had risen to 60 per cent by 1913" . (O'Hagan, 2000, p.20)

The shock of famine and the process of market adjustment in the years after brought economic reconstruction, but perpetuated emigration in a manner that was to redefine the geo-economic map of the island. Whereas the west of Ireland had been devastated and never fully recover, the east of the island - and particularly the economic hubs of Dublin and the emerging industrial port of Belfast - reacted in a manner that framed recovery. Belfast's population rose from 20,000 in 1803 to 100,000 in 1851. (Moody and Beckett, 1954, p.34) Industrialization, the adaptation of the agri-economy, the emergence of the linen, rope and shipping trades were to reshape the Irish economy. It also coincided with a political realignment which was to take the north and south in different directions within one generation of the famine.

The immediate effect of the famine on the Irish economy was on the utility of land and the collapse of the conventional economy. The long-term effects were to be seen in the north-south divide and a rationalized socio-economic makeup of post-famine Ireland. As Ó Gráda pointed out in *Ireland: A New Economic History: 1780-1939*, public schemes eventually came to replace farm labour as the principal means of income. At the height of the famine in 1847 the Board of Works had a labour force of over 700,000 on schemes, most of who would have come out of an agricultural background. After sustained emigration and evictions the male agricultural labour force post-famine continued to decline. (Ó Gráda, 1994, pp.195, 205) This imbalance in the general economic form of the island would, as a consequence, suffer years of contortion and depopulation. Furthermore, economic and business activity continued to be corrupted by nepotism and a survival instinct that would be carried into the political psyche of the Irish population. As early as 1868, the movement and radicalization of a whole generation of Irish people was to become a topical focus of study, as can be seen in J.F. Maguire's exploration of Irish political organizations in *The Irish in America*, or the debate from the previous year in Marx's *Capital*. Maguire noted that: "The mass came because they had no option but

to come, because hunger and want were at their heels, and flight was their only chance of safety". Marx put it in more colourful terms: "With the accumulation of rent in Ireland, the accumulation of the Irish in America keeps pace. The Irishman, banished by sheep and ox, re-appears on the other side of the ocean as a Fenian". (Marx, 1867, p.666)

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