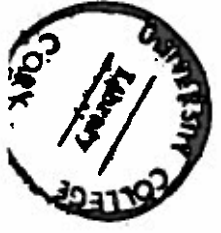


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The Great Irish Famine

VERITAS



been sent home through private channels we have no account.⁹¹

A public writer, reviewing the Commissioners' Report, said: 'Even this vast sum does not represent more than the one half of the total sent home. Much was brought over by captains of ships, by relatives, friends or by returning emigrants.' No doubt a great deal of money came through private channels, but it is hardly credible that another £16,000,000 or £17,000,000 reached Ireland in that way. It is only guess-work, to be sure, but if we add one-fourth to the sum named in the report, as the amount transmitted by private hand, it will probably bring us much nearer the truth. This addition gives us, in all, £20,417,500.

There, then, is the one more testimony that the Irish race lack neither industry nor perseverance. For the lengthened period of twenty-three years, something like £1,000,000 a year have been transmitted to their relatives and friends by the Irish in America. In twenty-three years, they have sent home over £20,000,000. Examine it; weigh it; study it: in whatever way we look at this astounding fact — whether we regard the magnitude of the sum, or the intense, undying, all-pervading affection which it represents — it stands alone in the history of the world.

The good — and bad — donors

The Temporary Relief Act, popularly known as the Soup-kitchen Act, was limited to 1 October 1847. The Government determined that, after its expiration, relief should be given through the poor law system only. In preparation for this arrangement, an Act (the 10th and 11th Vic. cap. 31) was passed in June, sanctioning outdoor relief.

The harvest of 1847 was a good one but, so utterly prostrate was every interest in the country, that the outdoor relief system soon expanded into alarming proportions. In February 1848, the cost of outdoor relief was £72,039, and in March it rose to £81,339. The numbers and cost were then both at their maximum and, according to the best estimate which can be formed, the number of outdoor poor relieved was 703,762 and of indoor 140,536, making an aggregate of 844,298 persons, irrespective of more than 200,000 school children who were, as stated above, fed and in part clothed by 'The British Association'. So that the total number receiving relief in March 1848 exceeded 1,000,000; being about one in every seven of the population.

In the short statement I am about to give, I follow Sir Charles Trevelyan's figures; being Secretary to the Treasury, he must have known the sums actually advanced by the Treasury, and the sums returned to it in payment of the loans granted.

Amount advanced from the Treasury	Amount finally charged under the Consolidated Annuities Act
	£ s d
Under 9th Vic. cap. 1.....	476,000 0 0
Under 9th and 10th Vic. cap 107,	
'The Labour-rate Act'	4,766,789 0 0
Under 10th Vic., cap 7 'The	
Temporary Relief Act'	1,724,631 0 0
Loans for building workhouses	1,420,780 0 0
Loans to pay debts of distressed unions	300,000 0 0
	2,231,000 0 0
	953,355 0 0
	122,707 0 0
	300,000 0 0

The Great Irish Famine

Grants by Parliament at various times:
1845, 1846, 1847, 1848 and 1849.....

Total	9,532,721	0	0	4,845,062	0	0
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During the years 1846, 1847 and 1848, the following sums were also

expended by the Board of Works:	£	s	d
for arterial drainage.....	470,617	10	3
Works under the Labouchere letter.....	199,870	9	2
for land improvement.....	520,700	0	0

Total	10,723,908	19	5
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In the above £10,700,000, it may be fairly assumed, we have all the moneys advanced by Government to mitigate the effects of the potato failure. Our next duty is to inquire how much of this sum was paid back by Ireland, and how much of it was a free gift from the Treasury.

The money advanced under the Labouchere letter for land improvement and for arterial drainage cannot, of course, be regarded as a free gift towards staying the Famine; arterial drainage and land improvement go on still, through money advanced by Government. The works under the Labouchere letter were, no doubt, intended to give reproductive employment during the Famine, but the cost of them was a charge upon the land and not a free gift.

The money spent on arterial drainage and land improvement, under the Labouchere letter and various drainage Acts, during the years 1846, 1847 and 1848, was, as given above, £1,191,187 19s. 5d. which, being deducted from £10,723,908 19s. 5d. leaves the sum of £9,532,721, of which there was finally charged to this country £4,845,062. Deducting this from the £9,532,721 we have £4,687,659 as the amount of money given by the Government as a free gift to Ireland to sustain the people through the Great Famine. To this, however, there is to be added a sum of about £70,000 paid for freights.

The American people, when they had collected those generous contributions of theirs and when they had resolved to send them in the form of food to Ireland, began to make arrangements for paying the freights of their vessels, but all trouble and anxiety on this head was removed by the action of the English Government which undertook to pay the freights of all vessels carrying to Ireland food purchased by charitable contributions. Those freights finally reached about £70,000. The addition of this sum brings the whole of the Government's free gift towards the Irish Famine to £4,757,659.

The good — and bad — donors

The amount collected and disbursed by charitable associations can be only approximated to. There is a list of those subscriptions, as far as they could be ascertained, given in the report of the Society of Friends. They amount to £1,107,466 13s., but the compiler of the report was of the opinion that the sums so collected and distributed could not have fallen far short of £1,500,000.

No effective means were taken to ascertain the moneys sent to Ireland by emigrants until the year 1848; however, Mr Jacob Harvey, a member of the Society of Friends, from inquiries made by him in New York, Baltimore and Philadelphia, computed the remittances from emigrants in 1847 at £200,000, but it is highly probable that the actual amount was far in excess of that; for we find in the next year, 1848, there came to Ireland through the banks and commercial houses alone, £460,180, which sum may also be regarded as a contribution towards the Irish Famine. I think we are justified in naming £300,000 for 1847, instead of £200,000, Mr Harvey's estimate. These two sums make £760,180, which being added to the acknowledged amount of public subscriptions, we have a total of £1,867,646, 13s. as the amount voluntarily and charitably contributed to our Famine-stricken people. But if we take £1,500,000 to represent the actual charitable subscriptions, as assumed by the report of the Society of Friends, and add to it the money sent by emigrants in 1847 and 1848, we will have the enormous sum of £2,260,180.

The most important of all the associations called into existence by the Famine was 'The British Association for the Relief of Extreme Distress in Ireland and Scotland'. There are about 5,550 distinct subscriptions printed in the appendix to its report but the number of individual subscriptions was far beyond this for many of the sums set down are the result of local subscriptions sent to the Association from various parts. This Association established about forty food depots in various districts. They were, of course, most numerous in the South and West — most numerous of all in Cork, the wild and difficult coast of which county was marked by a line of them, from Kinsale Head to Dingle Bay.

Noblemen and gentlemen of high position volunteered their services to the Association and laboured earnestly among the starving people. Amongst them may be named the Count Strezelecki, Lord R. Clinton, Lord James Butler and Mr M. J. Higgins, so well known in the London press by his *nom de plume* of 'Jacob Omnium'.

Besides the sums contributed directly to the Association, the Government gave it the distribution of the proceeds of two Queen's letters, amounting in the aggregate to £200,738 15s. 1d.

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In August 1847 when the Association was about to enter upon what it called the second relief period, it found itself in possession of a clear cash balance of £160,000. It had to consider how this sum could be most beneficially applied during the ensuing winter.

In that month the Secretary of the Treasury, Mr Trevelyan, wrote to the chairman, recommending the Association to select, through the Poor Law Commissioners, a certain number of Unions in which there was reason to believe the ratepayers would not be able to meet their liabilities, and that the Association should appropriate, from time to time, such sums as the Poor Law Commissioners might recommend for the purpose of assisting to given outdoor relief in certain districts of such Unions.

After much deliberation the Association accepted this advice and asked for the names of the most distressed union. A list of twenty-two was supplied to it in September. Some others were added later on. The grants of the Association were issued in food and the Assistant Poor Law Commissioners aided in the distribution of it. Under this arrangement the advances made by the Association from October to July amounted to £150,000.

A peculiar feature of this relief system, adopted and carried into effect by the advice of Count Strzelecki, was the giving of clothing and daily rations to children attending school. This was done in twenty-seven of the poorest Unions, and with the best results. By the first of January 1848 the system was in full operation in thirteen Unions and 58,000 children were on the relief roll of the Association. The numbers went on increasing until, in March, there were upwards of 200,000 children attending schools of all denominations, in twenty-seven western Unions, participating in this relief. The total sum expended on food for the children amounted to £80,854, in addition to which £12,000 was expended on clothing for them.

On 1 November 1848, £12,000 was still to the credit of the Association. By a resolution, it was handed over to the Poor Law Commissioners for Ireland; and so closed the labours of the British Relief Association, so vast in its operations, so well managed, so creditable to all engaged in it and such a lasting testimony to the generous charity of the subscribers.

Such frequent reference has been made in these pages to the 'Transactions' of the Relief Committee of the Society of Friends during the Famine, and so much use has been made of the information contained in that carefully compiled book that I will only here repeat the amount of the charitable offerings confided to them for distribution. It was £198,326 15s. 5d.

The General Central Relief Committee for all Ireland, which met in College Green, received in contributions £83,934 17s. 11d., but

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of this, £20,000 was given by the British Association. The Marquis of Abercorn, the Most Rev. Dr Murray, Archbishop of Dublin, the Lord Mayor, the Provost of Trinity College, Lord Charlemont, O'Connell, the Dean of St Patrick's and several other noblemen and gentlemen were members of this Committee. The president was the Duke of Leinster, then Marquis of Kildare. It remained in existence just one year, from December 1846 to December 1847.

'The chief source', said the 'Transactions' of the Society of Friends, 'whence the means at our disposal were derived, was the munificent bounty of the citizens of the United States. The supplies sent from America to Ireland were on a scale unparalleled in history.'

When authentic intelligence regarding the Irish Famine reached America a general feeling of sympathy was at once excited. Beginning with Philadelphia, in all the great cities and towns throughout the Union, meetings were almost immediately held to devise the best and speediest means of relieving the starving people of this country.

'All through the States an intense interest and a noble generosity were shown. The railroads carried, free of charge, all packages marked "Ireland". Public carriers undertook the gratuitous delivery of any package intended for the relief of the destitute Irish. Storage to any extent was offered on the same terms. Ships of war approached our shores, eagerly seeking not to destroy life but to preserve it, their guns being taken out in order to afford more room for stowage.'

The total contributions received from America by the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends, were: Money, £15,976 18s. 2d.; Provisions 9,911 tons, valued at £133,847 7s. 7d. Some 642 packages of clothing were also received, the precise value of which could not be exactly ascertained. The provisions were carried in ninety-one vessels, the united freights of which amounted to £33,017 5s. 7d.'

The total number of ships which carried provisions, the result of charitable contributions, to Ireland and Scotland in 1847, is set down at 118; but as only four of these went to Scotland, 114 of them must have come here. The total freightage paid to those ships by Government was £41,725 8s. 5.5d; but as I find in another part of the Blue Book that between £60,000 and £70,000 was paid by Government for freights on the cargoes of provisions consigned to the Society of Friends and to the British Association, and which I have above assumed to be £70,000, we may take it for granted that something like 20,000 tons of provisions were consigned to both Societies, the money value of which was about £280,000.

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Two American ships of war, the *Jamestown* and *Marstonian*, carried cargoes of provisions to Ireland, for which no freight was charged. The *Jamestown*, a sloop of war lent by the government for the voyage, was treacherously reached by the people of Massachusetts with 8,000 barrels of flour. She sailed from Boston on 28 March 1847 and arrived at the Cove of Cork on 12 April, after a most prosperous voyage. The people of Cove immediately held a public meeting and adopted an address to her Commander, Captain Forbes, which they presented to him on board. The citizens of Cork addressed him a few days later, and the members of the Temperance Institute gave him a soiree, at which the Rev. Theobald Mathew assisted.

The *Marstonian*, another ship of war, arrived later on, conveying about 550 tons of provisions, a portion of which was landed in Scotland. Both ships were manned by volunteers.

On the appearance of the potato blight scientific men earnestly applied themselves to discover its cause, in the hope that a remedy might be found for it. Various theories were the result. There was the Insect Theory; the Weather Theory; the Parasitical Theory; the Electrical Theory; the Fungus Theory; the Fog Theory. But whilst philosophers were maintaining their different views; whilst Sir James Murray charged electricity with being the agent of destruction, and Mr Cooper cast the blame upon the fogs; whilst Professors Lindley, Playfair and Kane were busy with their tests and retorts and alembics; and whilst others again — microscope in hand — were in active pursuit of the *Aphis vastator*, or *Thrips minutissima*, a not inconsiderable class of persons, departing widely from all such speculations, discovered, beyond all doubt, that Poperi was the true cause of the potato blight.

'As this predicted system' (popery), said a pamphleteer, 'is an idolatrous one, any treaty with it must be opposed to God's will, and call down his wrath upon those nations who have commerce with it: more particularly upon nations wherein its hideous deformities are most signally manifested. Now, how have we seen in the first part of this work, that He has repeatedly punished? By famine and pestilence! Oh, beloved countrymen of every diversity of creed, in the heart-rending scenes around us do we witness punishment for national idolatry, systematic assassinations, performed occasionally with a refinement of cruelty worthy of incarnate devils.'⁴

'This much is certain', wrote a public journalist, 'that our country is scourged with famine.' Three causes were then given for the scourge; the second of which was 'idolatry in the professing people of God, especially when sanctioned by the rulers of the country'. After quoting examples from the Old

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Testament of the manner in which God punished idolatry, he proceeded: 'If [idolatry] is just as true of the millions of Ireland as it was of the millions of Judah: "They worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made." And to complete the resemblance to apostate Israel, and fill the measure of our national guilt, the prevalent idolatry is countenanced and supported by our government. The Protestant members of the Houses of Lords and Commons have sworn before God and the country that Popery is idolatrous; our Queen, at her coronation, solemnly made a similar declaration, yet, all have concurred in passing a Bill to endow a college for training priests to defend, and practise, and perpetuate, this corrupt and damnable worship in this realm. The ink wherewith the signification of royal assent was given to that iniquitous measure was hardly dry when the fatal rot commenced its work of destruction; and as the stroke was unheeded, and there was no repentant effort to retrace the daring step of the first iniquity, but rather a disposition to multiply transgression, we are now visited with a second and severer stroke of judgment.'⁵

The Rev. Hugh McNeill preached a 'Famine' sermon in St Jude's, Liverpool, and published it under the title of 'The Famine, a rod; a rod that was meant to scourge England for tolerating Popery, of which he said: "That it is a sin against God's holy law to encourage the fables, deceits, false doctrines, and idolatrous worship of Romanism, no enlightened Christian — no consistent member of the Church of England can deny."'⁶ 'She [England] is fondly anticipating, as the result of generous concession, that she shall witness Roman Cooperation in general Liberty! Alas, for the Romans! With equal reason might she expect the Ethiopian to change his skin, or the leopard his spots. With the rich and responsible inheritance of an open Bible before her, and with free access to the illustrations of authentic history, this absurdity is England's sin, England's very great sin. There can be little doubt, that except repentance and amendment avert the stroke, this will prove England's plague, England's great plague, England's very great plague.'⁷

Let us hear another and a very different stamp of man. 'I don't know whether I have mentioned before, wrote Charles Dickens, 'that in the valley of the Simphon, hard by here, where (at the Bridge of St Maurice over the Rhone), this Protestant canton ends and a Catholic canton begins, you might separate two perfectly distinct and different conditions of humanity, by drawing a line with your stick in the dust on the ground. On the Protestant side, neatness; cheerfulness; industry; education; continual aspiration; at least, after better things. On the Catholic side, dirt; disease;

ignorance, squalor, and misery. I have so constantly observed the like of this, since I first came abroad, that I have a sad misgiving, that the religion of Ireland lies as deep at the root of all her sorrows even as English misgovernment and Tory villainy."⁸

Charles Dickens is looked upon not only as the strenuous denouncer of vice but as the happy exponent of the higher and purer feelings of human nature also. For three-fourths of his life he wrote like a man who felt he had a mission to preach toleration, philanthropy, universal benevolence. He had travelled much. He had been over Belgium and France; he was through the Rhenish Provinces, in all which places the people are Catholics; they have received the highest praise from travellers and writers for their industry, their thrift, their cleanliness; Charles Dickens saw all this, but it never occurred to him to credit their religion with it. When the contrary occurs, and when fault is to be found, Popery, like a hack-block kept for such purposes, is made responsible and receives a blow.

He had, indeed, a sad misgiving that the religion of Ireland lay deep at the root of her sorrows. Surely this is enough to try one's patience. We have passed through and outlived the terrible codes of Elizabeth and James and Anne and the first two Georges, under which gallosh-shoes were erected on the hillside for our conversion or extinction; we have even survived the iron heels and ruthless sabres of Cromwell's sanclimonious troopers; and we can go back upon the history of those times calmly enough now. But this 'sad misgiving' of Mr Dickens; this patronising condescension; this contemptuous pity, is more than provoking.

It is probable he had not the time or inclination to read deeply into Irish history but he must have had a general knowledge of it more than sufficient to inform him that there were causes in superabundance to account for the poverty and degradation of our people, without going to their religion for them. Instead of doing so, he should have confessed with shame and humiliation that his own countrymen, for a long series of years, did everything in their power to destroy the image of God in the native Irish, by driving them like beasts of chase into the mountains, and bogs and fastnesses and over the Shannon. Our people suffered these things and much more for conscience sake; inflicted, as they were, by Mr Dickens' countrymen, in the name of religion; in the name of conscience; in advancing, as they pretended, the sacred cause of the right of private judgment. He makes Popery responsible for the results.

Those who held that Popery was the real cause of the potato-rot were influential, if not by their numbers, at least by their wealth; so they set about removing the fatal evil energetically.

Large sums of money were collected, and a very active agency was established throughout the West of Ireland for this purpose; with it would seem, very considerable success. But whilst those engaged in the work maintained that the conversions were the result of instruction and enlightened investigation, others believed that most of the converts were like the poor woman mentioned by the late Dr Whately, in a conversation with Mr Senior.

In 1852, Mr Nassau Wm. Senior was on a visit with the Archbishop, at his country house, near Stillorgan, five miles from Dublin. Mr Senior asked him to what cause the conversions made during the famine were attributable. The Archbishop replied that the causes must be numerous. Some, he said, believed or professed to believe that the conversions were purchased, this of course was the Catholic view. He then related the following anecdote on the subject:

'An old woman went to one of my clergy, and said, "I'm come to surrender to your Reverence — and I want the leg of mutton and the blanket". "What mutton and blanket?" said the clergyman. "I have scarcely enough of either for myself and my family, and certainly none to give. Who could have put such nonsense into your head?" "Why, Sir", she said, "Father Sullivan told us that the converts got each a leg of mutton and a blanket; and as I am famished and starving with cold, I thought that God would forgive me for getting them."

Dr Whately was president of the 'Society for Protecting the Rights of Conscience', and he indignantly denied that any reward or indemnity had been held out, directly or indirectly, by that Society to persons to induce them to profess themselves converts; and he added: 'not only has no case been substantiated — no case has been brought forward'. This may be true of that particular society, but to deny that neither money nor food were given, to induce persons to attend the Scripture classes and proselytising schools, is to deny the very best proven facts.

In the *Trake Chronicle* of 19 November 1852, Archdeacon O'Sullivan of Kenmare published an abstract of a report of one of those Missionary Societies which fell into his hands. The expenditure of a single Committee was £3,557 1s. 9d. The salaries of clerical and lay agents are set down at £382 Os. 11d. What became of the remainder of the money?

But here is testimony that Dr Whately himself would scarcely impugn: Dr Forbes, in his *Memorandum made in Ireland* in 1852, visited Connought and examined many of the proselytising schools. He spoke without any doubt at all of the children who attended those schools receiving food and clothing. It did not seem to be denied on any side. Here is an extract: 'I visited two

of the Protestant Mission Schools at Clifden, one in the town and the other lending to the mouth of the bay. In the former, at the time of my visit, there were about 120 boys and 100 girls on the books, the average attendance being about 80. Out of the 80 girls there were no less than 56 orphans, all of whom are fed and clothed out of the school funds, and a large proportion provided with lodgings also. Only two of these girls were children of Protestant parents, and in the boy's school there was only one born of parents originally Protestant At the probationary girl's school there were 76 on the books, at the time of my visit, their ages varying from eight to eighteen years. They are all Catholics, or children of Catholic parents; and out of the number no fewer than 40 were orphans. All the children at this school receive daily rations of Indian meal; 45 of them one pound, and the remainder half that quantity. Whether this is exclusive of the *strawout breakfast I saw preparing for them in the school*, I forgot to ask. All the children of these schools read the Scriptures and go to the Protestant Church, Catholic and Protestant alike.¹⁰

But I turn with pleasure from this uninviting and uncongenial subject to one more elevating — to the all but unlimited private charity which was called forth by the Irish Famine. I have already endeavoured to give some idea of it but of course an imperfect one. The feelings evoked and the almost unasked alms bestowed with a noble Christian generosity, during that awful time, can be fully known only to Almighty God, the Great Rewarder. The Merciful Rewarder has recorded them and that is enough, at least for the givers.

However, there were some amongst them who should not be passed over in silence. Baring Brothers & Co.; Rothchild & Co.; Smith, Payne & Smith; Overend, Gurney & Co.; Truman, Harbury & Co.; The Duke of Devonshire; Jones, Lloyd & Co.; an English friend (in two donations); and an Irish landlord (for Skibbereen) subscribed £1,000 each.

Irish landlords did not contribute very munificently to the Famine-fund; but here is £1,000 from one, and for a special locality. Who was the retiring but generous donor? The following extract of a letter will answer the question; and throw light upon another remarkable offering sent every month to Skibbereen for more than a year.

'The first case of death clearly established as arising from starvation', wrote Mr McCarthy Downing, 'occurred at South Reen, five miles from the town of Skibbereen. The case having been reported to me, as a member of the Relief Committee, I procured the attendance of Dr Dore, and proceeded to the house

where the body lay; the scene which presented itself will never be forgotten by me.

'The body was resting on a basket which had been turned up, the head on an old chair, the legs on the ground. All was wretchedness around. The wife, emaciated, was unable to move; and four children, more like spectres than living beings, were lying near the fire-place, in which apparently there had not been fire for some time. The doctor opened the stomach and, repugnant as it was to my feelings, I, at his solicitation, viewed its contents, which consisted solely of a few pieces of raw cabbage undigested.

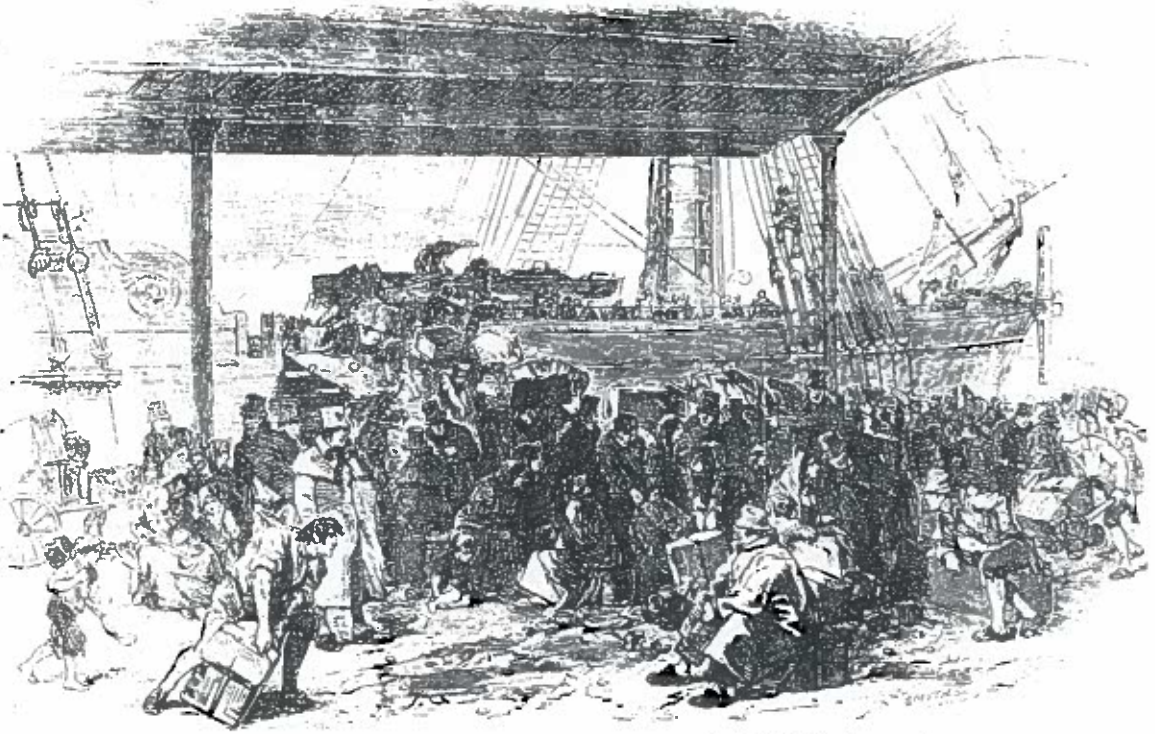
'Having visited several other houses on the same townland and finding the condition of the inmates therein little better than that of the wretched family whom I had just left, I summoned the Committee and had a quantity of provisions sent there for distribution by one of the relieving officers; and then published in the Cork and Dublin papers a statement of what I had witnessed.

'Many subscriptions were sent to the Committee in consequence, and I received from an anonymous correspondent a monthly sum varying from £6, to £8, for a period of more than twelve months.

'One subscription of £1,000 came from another anonymous donor and for years the Committee knew not who those generous and really charitable parties were; but I had always a suspicion that the giver of the £1,000 was Lord Dufferin. The grounds for my supposition were that, during the height of the sufferings of the people, I heard that two noblemen had been in the neighbourhood, visiting some of the localities. One was Lord Dufferin, then a very young man, who alluded subsequently in feeling terms to the wretchedness and suffering which he had witnessed; the other, I heard, was Lord John Manners.

'In some years after, I met at the house of Mr Joshua Clarke, QC, in Dublin Mr Dowse, then a rising barrister, now a Baron of the Court of Exchequer, who addressed me, saying, "We are old acquaintances"; to which I replied that I thought he was mistaken, as I had never the pleasure of meeting him before. He said: "That is quite true, but do you remember having received monthly remittances during the severe pressure of the Famine in Skibbereen?" I answered in the affirmative; and thereupon he said, "I was your correspondent, I remitted the moneys to you, they were the offers of a number of the students of Trinity College".

'I need scarcely say that the incident created in me a feeling



Irish emigrants embarking at Liverpool for the fearful Atlantic crossing.

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of esteem and regard for Mr. Dowse, which has continued to the present moment.

During the passing of the Land Bill through the House of Commons, in the year 1870, I proposed several amendments, in consequence of which I received a letter from Lord Dufferin, asking for an interview, which subsequently took place at his house and lasted more than three hours. When about to leave, I said that I had a question to put to his Lordship which I hoped he would not refuse to answer; and having received his assent, I said: "Lord Dufferin, are you the anonymous donor of a subscription of £1,000 to the Relief Committee at Skibbereen twenty-three years ago?" And with a smile, he simply replied "I am."

I left with feelings of high admiration for the man.¹¹ To conclude. Every reader will, doubtless, form his own views upon the facts given in this volume; upon the conduct of the people; the action of the landlords; the measures of the Government; those views may be widely different; but of the bright and copious fountains of living charity which gushed forth over the Christian world during the Great Irish Famine history has but one record to make — posterity can hold but one opinion.