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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Jessica Kay Lumsden entitled "Emerging from the Shadow of Death: The Relief Efforts and Consolidating Identity of the Irish Middle Classes During the Great Famine, 1845-1851." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of the Arts with a major in History.

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Emerging from the Shadow of Death:
The Relief Efforts and Consolidating Identity of the Irish Middle Classes During the Great Famine, 1845-1851

A Thesis
Presented for the
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Degree
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Jessica Kay Lumsden
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Dedication

This thesis project is dedicated to my grandmother, Madeline Kay Braswell, my greatest fan and Dr. John Bohstedt, my favorite professor and good friend.

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Abstract

This project argued that the leadership of the Irish middle classes was essential in providing relief to the destitute during the Great Irish Potato Famine, 1845-1851. It further argued that middle class leadership in the Famine period translated into a greater class consciousness and subsequent political leadership. Records from the transactions of relief projects from the Society of Friends, pamphlets written by contemporary British and Irish men of the middle and upper classes, and workhouse records illuminated the role of the middle classes in relief efforts. This project joins that primary research to secondary scholarship on the growing political role of the middle classes in the two decades following the end of the Famine.

The evidence showed that the middle classes stepped into a void of leadership created by landlord absenteeism and provided crucial local structures for effective organization distribution of relief. Further the middle classes gained a sense of identity forged in the shared experience of leadership in the Famine. With this common history, the middle classes were able to imagine themselves as a class with similar political interests and goals which they expressed through increasingly powerful national lobbying organizations.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In both the din and hush of the Famine, members of the middle classes were constantly present. To the poorer classes they represented both relief and despair. As estate agents and small landowners they passed out both charity and eviction. As Poor Law Guardians they made decisions about who received relief outdoors or indoors and how much. The workhouses also employed men and women of the middle classes as the masters or matrons, teachers, medical doctors, and clerks. Members of the middle classes worked in the soup kitchens of 1847 and some ran their own; merchants brought Indian corn and meal purchased by the government to the Irish coastline; bakers made the breads to feed the thousands that depended on that daily, if meager, supply of food. Clergy and doctors worked tirelessly among the sick and the dying, dispensing medicine, relief and hope to the suffering poor.

No doubt abuses of power occurred, heartless evictions, merchants who cheated customers through hoarding, dilution of the goods, and unethical practices, and farmers who profited in the long term from the Famine. The shift in the size of farms towards larger holdings, the elimination of a vast portion of the conacre peasantry and the reduction in number of laborers needed to run a farming operation all testify to the last point. It is not the primary aim of this paper to discuss the negative face of the middle classes during the Famine. Rather, I examine the neglected face of the middle classes and how they

functioned as the primary distributors of relief. I argue that their participation was essential to the relief efforts and that government programs could not have functioned without them acting as local agents.

I also contend that as a part of this position of being mediators between the government and the poorer classes the middle classes became more sharply defined both economically and socially. The Famine in effect was a first step towards a more coherent understanding of a common identity of the middle classes that bound individual members politically and socially. Using methodological insights from the works *Imagined Communities* (2006 edition) by Benedict Anderson[1] and *Peasants into Frenchmen: the Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (1976)[2] by Eugen Weber, I evaluate how the Irish middle classes identified themselves and how that identity subtly changed during the course of the Famine. In the end the experience of the Great Famine altered the structure of the middle classes in such a way that they were prepared in the 1870s as they came under threat from increased rents and crop losses to defend themselves as a coherent class through the Land Wars.

Historiography

To date, the historiography of the Great Irish Famine has largely ignored the middle classes, mentioning them in passing and mostly for their negative roles during the Famine – hoarding, evictions, and so on. A mythology about the

[1] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism,* Revised ed. (London: Verso, 2006).

[2] Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

middle classes as greedy co-conspirators in a plot of restructuring Ireland has thus emerged and persisted. My paper reconsiders the middle classes and tries to place them in their context as part of Famine society, a part that I argue was critical to the survival of many of the poorer classes. It is a departure from previous scholarship.

For a century after the Great Famine began in 1845, nationalist journalists and amateur historians dominated the historical record. In their view, the Irish Potato Famine signified a symptom of the greatest problem in Irish history: British misgovernment. John Mitchell represented this style of history in his monographs *United Irishmen*, published in 1848, and *The Last Conquest of Ireland (perhaps)*, printed in exile in 1860. He charged the British government with a systematic conspiracy aimed at mass death among the cottier and laboring classes. His passionate language particularly targeted Charles Trevelyan, the Treasury Undersecretary. As such, Charles Trevelyan held the authority to dispense British monies for relief. Mitchell also pioneered the powerful idea of "death in abundance:" the notion that there was no scarcity of food production, but that crops even in surplus were deliberately exported.[3]

R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams published the first scholarly work on the Irish Famine in the twentieth century. *The Irish Famine: studies in Irish history 1845-1852*, a collection of essays by Irish scholars,

[3] Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: the Irish Famine 1845-1852*, 2nd ed. (Dublin: Gil and Macmillan, 2006), xxxvi-xxxvii.

appeared in 1956 in Ireland and 1957 in America.[4] Cecil Woodham-Smith's *The Great Hunger* followed and responded to Edwards and Williams in 1962.[5] The De Valera government had funded the research for *The Irish Famine* to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the appearance of the blight and the beginning of the Famine. The project purposefully left the politically sensitive issues of excessive mortality and responsibility aside to prevent creating tensions with a British audience. The Irish government feared that a British audience would read articles that addressed these subjects as accusations and Irish nationalist propaganda. It sparked little new interest or debate in the field.[6] Woodham-Smith's account, on the other hand, was highly controversial and that controversy caused an explosion of revisionist work countering Woodham-Smith's arguments.[7] Like Mitchell, Woodham-Smith wrote in a popular historical narrative style and blamed both Charles Trevelyan and *laissez-faire* ideology for the failure of the British government to intervene effectively against mass deprivation. According to American historian James Donnelly, *The Great Hunger* was and remains the greatest selling Irish history book.[8] Other historians, critical of its thesis, have dubbed it merely a "great historical novel."

After this point, the academic world largely ignored the Great Famine as an event of Irish history. From the first appearance of the *Irish Historical Journal*

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[4] R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams, ed, *The Irish Famine: Studies in Irish History, 1845-1852* (Washington Square: New York University Press, 1957).

[5] Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger: Ireland, 1845-1849* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

[6] James S. Donnelly, Jr, *The Great Irish Potato Famine* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 2001), 17.

[7] Kinealy, *Great Calamity*, xx-xxi.

[8] Donnelly, *Great Irish*, 14.

in 1938 until its fiftieth anniversary only five articles were published on the Famine.[9] The paucity of works also extended to monographs and research projects. Significantly, the works that did get published typically had revisionist outlooks, exonerating the British of responsibility in the Famine.[10] Revisionist historians, who strove for value free interpretations, held impersonal factors such as the conacre system and population increase responsible for the catastrophe. In a classic example of revisionism Louis Cullen's *Irish Agricultural Production: Its Volume and Structure* (1966) blamed the Irish Famine on the lowest classes' over-reliance on the potato.[11] Notable exceptions to the trend of revisionism before the 1990s include James Donnelly's *The Land and People of Nineteenth Century Cork* in 1975[12] and Brendan Bradshaw's article in the *Irish Historical Studies* journal in 1989.[13] James Donnelly reverted to earlier rhetoric, saying, "Because of the inadequacy of relief measures and the inefficacy of food riots and food stealing, labourers and cottiers perished by the thousand."[14] Bradshaw's critique was more directly aimed not at the British government but at revisionist historians themselves for circumventing blame and reducing the tragedy of the Famine, namely that it could have been prevented. Because culpability for the Famine

[9] Ibid., 11-12.
[10] Mary Daly, "Revisionism and the Great Famine." *The Making of Modern Irish History: Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy*, ed. D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day (London: Routledge, 1996), 83.
[11] Louis Cullen, *Irish Agricultural Production: Its Volume and Structure* (Cork, 1966).
[12] James Donnelly, *The Land and People of Nineteenth Century Cork: The Rural Economy and the Land Question* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).
[13] Brendan Bradshaw, "Nationalism and Historical Scholarship in Modern Ireland," *Irish Historical Studies* 24, 106 (1989), 329-351.
[14] Donnelly, *Land and People*, 5.

typically fell on the highest or lowest classes, the middle classes were left out of the overall picture of the Famine period.

Christine Kinealy attributed the silence on the events of the Irish Famine to various factors in the introduction to her recently published second edition of *This Great Calamity*. Kinealy's primary explanation for the dearth in writing about the Famine was the tense contemporary political situation in Ireland in relation to the British state and Northern Ireland. This was especially relevant after the beginning of the Troubles in Northern Ireland in 1969, where discussion of the Famine that blamed Britain was propaganda for the Irish Republican Army. Kinealy presented the particular type of grief and guilt associated with genocide as a second reason. These two factors left descendants and survivors unable to talk about the Famine until recently. That Kinealy considered the Great Irish Famine a genocide can not be doubted. She alternately refers to the event as the Irish 'holocaust' and explained her view on the silence through the similarities to the Holocaust of the Second World War. Her conclusion was also a scathing indictment of the British government for using the crop failure as a means of inducing Famine to bring about a "hidden agenda" of massive economic restructuring of Ireland, away from a peasant economy and toward an English-style capitalist agriculture.[15] Her final paragraph summed up her argument thus:

> In conclusion, therefore, the response of the British government to the Famine was inadequate in terms of humanitarian criteria and, incredibly after 1847, systematically and deliberately so. … This relatively small group of people [Trevelyan and other British Government officials], taking advantage of a passive establishment, and public opinion which was opposed to further financial aid for Ireland, were able to manipulate a

[15] Kinealy, *Great Calamity*, 356-357.

> theory of free enterprise, thus allowing a massive social injustice to be perpetrated within a part of the United Kingdom. … Instead the government pursued the objective of economic, social, and agrarian reform as a long-term aim, although the price paid for this ultimately elusive goal was privation, disease, emigration, mortality, and an enduring legacy of disenchantment.[16]

Finally, she cited an unspoken official policy of silence indicated by the lack of Famine memorials in Ireland until the late twentieth century and the absence of a curriculum on the Famine in Irish schools.[17] Diaspora countries like Canada and the United States did have memorials for Famine victims and doctors beginning in the early twentieth century, so that Ireland was the exception and not the rule.

If Kinealy was correct in her estimation of the Famine as genocide then her argument implicitly indicts the middle classes along with the British government. If, for example, "Within Ireland itself, there were substantial resources of food"[18] then are the farmers not partially to blame as well? Are the merchants not culpable in this estimation for exporting food and material away from the relief efforts for their own business interests? What of those middlemen and landowners of the middle classes who did not defend the poorer classes against evictions? The charge of genocide must be leveled at more people than the government, because without a compliant Irish population these policies and their hidden agenda would have been rendered ineffective.

The view of the Famine as genocide was controversial however. Support has come from the Holocaust Commission, James Mullen, Jack Worral, and

[16] Ibid., 359.
[17] Ibid., xviii.
[18] Ibid., 359.

Congressman Mendez and Governor Pataki of New York.[19] Scholarly support also came from Joel Mokyr's *Why Ireland Starved: A Quantitative and Analytical History of the Irish Economy, 1800-1850*.[20] Like others before him, Mokyr found the source of the Famine in over-population and an over-reliance on the potato among the masses. Yet other current Famine historians like Cormac O'Grada, Mary Daly, and James Donnelly, Jr. rejected the idea in their works as does the British government and press. These detractors contend that it was an unfortunate combination of factors that produced the Famine more than a political agenda. The severity of the blight and its frequent recurrence over a period of six years combined with the inadequate resources and current economic ideologies and culminated in the brutality of the Famine. They argued that the impact of the Famine could have been further softened by the British government but not averted altogether.

Whatever the cause of the silence, it ended with the sesquicentennial commemoration of the Famine sponsored by the government of the Republic of Ireland Free State (although not by British Prime Minister John Major[21]) in 1995. Famine scholarship abounded in the last decade, mostly post-revisionist but with some reversion to more nationalist rhetoric. The works of the last decade broadened the questions asked about the Famine away from who is to blame to a spectrum of approaches. Cormac O'Grada's *Black '47 and Beyond*, for example, placed the Great Irish Famine in a world context by comparing it to other Famines

[19] Kinealy, *Great Calamity*, xxix-xxx.
[20] Joel Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved: A Quantitative and Analytical History of Ireland, 1800-1850* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983).
[21] Kinealy, *Great Calamity*., xxvi.

in various countries. O'Grada's work utilized modern famine theories to analyze the extent of the Famine and the effectiveness of British and Irish efforts in alleviating the suffering. New writers made efforts to capture the scale of the devastation and suffering of the poor in Ireland on an emotional level. These works placed emphasis on the intensity of suffering by individuals. One way to accomplish this was to recover the folk memory of the events of the Great Famine. Among these works were the collections by Cathal Póirtéir, Liam Swords, and David Fitzpatrick respectively entitled *Famine Echoes* (1994),[22] *In Their Own Words: the Famine in North Connacht, 1845-1849* (1999),[23] and *Oceans of Consolation* (1994).[24] The first two works on the impact of the Famine compile results of interviews and government questionnaires made in the 1880s and in the early twentieth century. The last is a compilation of letters sent by emigrants to Australia back home and some letters from Ireland to emigrants in Australia. Kerby Miller's work, *Emigrants and Exiles* (1985),[25] which assessed emigration as a means of relief by easing the pressure on resources, injected new life into studies of the Diaspora. Gerard MacAtasney and Christine Kinealy have returned to the question of Famine in Ulster and have concluded that the Famine affected that region as well. They also traced the impact of the Famine across lines of class and religion. The unusual but immensely informative study of Liam Kennedy, Paul S. Ell, E. M. Crawford and L. A. Clarkson, *Mapping the Great*

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22 Cathal Póirtéir, *Famine Echoes* (Dublin: Gil and Macmillan, 1995).

23 Liam Swords, *In Their Own Words: The Famine in North Connacht, 1845-1849* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1999).

24 David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation: Discourse of Irish Emigration to Colonial Australia* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995).

25 Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

Irish Famine: A Survey of the Famine Decades (1999),[26] supported these conclusions through statistical information plotted on maps. These maps visually tracked the incidence and impact of the famine and include studies of the occurrence of specific diseases, emigration, marriages and births, the impact of the blight, mortality maps, and surveys of holding size.

The number of local studies, including the works on Ulster, has dramatically increased in the past decade. Since the sesquicentennial celebration, a plethora of works have focused on a particular county, city, town or Poor Law Union. These works echo James Donnelly, Jr.'s monograph on the economy and rural communities of Cork during the "short" nineteenth century from the end of the Napoleonic Wars through the Famine and the Second Land War ending in 1892. The recent local works by both academics and amateur historians hold immense value in examining the implementation and effectiveness of relief legislation and the contribution of local societies to the aid of the poor. Patrick Hickey's *Famine in West Cork* (2002),[27] Anne Coleman's *Riotous Roscommon* (1999),[28] Seamus O'Brien's *Famine and Community in Mullingar Poor Law*

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[26] Liam Kennedy and others, *Mapping the Great Irish Famine: A Survey of the Famine Decade* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), 125.

[27] Patrick Hickey, *Famine in West Cork: The Mizen Peninsula Land and People, 1800-1852, a Local Study of Pre-Famine and Famine Ireland* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 2002).

[28] Ann Coleman, *Riotous Roscommon: Social Unrest in the 1840s. Maynooth Studies in Local History* ed. Richard Gillespie (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1997).

Union (1999),[29] and Robert James Scally's monograph *The End of Hidden Ireland* (1995)[30] are included in this category.

The bulk of Famine historiography has revolved at least on one level around the argument of intentionalism versus functionalism. Scholars who argued for intentionalism claimed that the British Government promoted the Famine in an effort to eliminate a sizeable portion of the Catholic population to strengthen the economy of Ireland and decrease social unrest. Functionalists argued that the Famine was caused by the convergence of economic and social structures and processes such as conacre wages instead of money, peasants' overdependence on potatoes, and the slump after the Napoleonic War that hit in shipping, grain markets, and textile demands. Britain's industrialization simultaneously eliminated hand-loom weavers' jobs in Ireland. Scholars have debated the contributions of the British government, the agents of that government like Charles Trevelyan, and the upper classes of Irish society, primarily the landlords, in aiding or alleviating the Famine.

Despite this recent flurry of activity, very little work has been done on the classes that existed between the extremes of landlords and cottiers and laborers, including the large Catholic merchant population, the clergy, professionals, smaller landlords, and farmers of more than one to two acres. Christine Kinealy noted this neglect in her introduction to *This Great Calamity*. She designated the

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[29] Seamus O'Brien, *Famine and Community in Mullingar Poor Law Union, 1845-1849: Mud Huts and Fat Bullocks. Maynooth Studies in Local History* ed. Richard Gillespie (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1997).

[30] Robert James Scally, *The End of Hidden Ireland: Rebellion, Famine, and Emigration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

middle classes as one of many new areas open to research, although she claimed that they were in fact beneficiaries of the Famine.[31] Colm Tóibín agreed that the middle classes had been beneficiaries of the Famine. He further claimed that nationalist writers obscured the class divisions in Ireland during the Famine in order to create a picture of an undivided Ireland suffering at the hands of the British. Still he too pointed to these classes as a subject that remained unstudied.[32] Another historian, Robin Haines, mentioned the lack of history about the middle classes in the introduction to his biography of Charles Trevelyan, a work largely aimed at reestablishing his character as a benevolent official and not an agent of ethnic cleansing. He noted the silence on class division in Ireland during the famine period and quoted Tóibín. He then simply stated that life for many of the middle classes went on as usual in the Famine.[33] My paper contests this statement and seeks to fill the hole in the historiography noted by all three scholars by arguing that the middle classes not only participated but were in fact the decisive element in the efforts to provide relief.

In making my argument I draw on a widely varying collection of primary sources. My source material consists of the first and second Poor Law reports of Sir George Nichols in 1836 and 1838, a series of pamphlets published during the Famine in London and Dublin, the transaction records of the Society of Friends' Central Relief Committee in Dublin, reports of investigators and private citizens,

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[31] Kinealy, *Great Calamity*, xli.

[32] Colm Tóibín and Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Irish Famine: a Documentary* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), 7.

[33] Robin Haines, *Charles Trevelyan and the Great Irish Famine* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), 17.

like Asenath Nicholson, who toured the Irish country side during the Famine period, letters sent to and from the government's Central Relief Committe and selections from responses to government questionnaires preserved by the Folklore Commission. The Poor Law Reports of Sir George Nichols provide information about the planned function of the workhouses as well as information on the state of Irish poverty on the eve of Famine. The pamphlets, numbering over two hundred in the collection, reveal the views of the middle and upper classes of both Britain and Ireland on who is to blame for the Famine and how to solve the problem of mass poverty and starvation.

The *Transactions of the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends* is a unique source. Written and edited by Jonathan Pim, the Committee's chief secretary it contains four distinct types of information. First it offers the reader, presumably a donor to the Committee's efforts, an explanation of why help is needed and a description of the despair in Ireland. Second, the volume gives sections of accounts from investigators sent to find suitable local channels to distribute Quaker aid. Third is an annotated copy of the accounts of the Friends' Central Relief Committee from its establishment in 1846 until the end of 1847. Finally it extracts letters sent from American donors and lists their subscriptions. This source provides important information on the operation of local relief structures and the presence of the middle classes in relief. It also gives an inside look from a reasonably unbiased perspective on the conditions of many workhouses.

The Folklore Commission's records include accounts from Famine survivors and their descendants. I try to limit my quotations and citations in this paper to those stories and comments told by the survivors themselves. Often, however, the testimonies of descendants could illuminate Famine mythology. The vivid details of their recollections and their reluctance to discuss certain aspects (for example, whether their ancestors went into the workhouse during the Famine period) also give an impression of the deep impact the Famine had on Irish society.

Chapter Two: Background Information

In this paper, I define the middle classes with precision: those people who existed economically above the level of the conacre peasant and socially below the level of the landlords. In the years preceding the Famine and for a time thereafter, Irish farmers used the conacre system as a means of providing payment to seasonal laborers. In exchange for his work on the farm, a conacre peasant received a patch of land, usually less than an acre, which would grow enough potatoes to sustain the peasant and his family for one year. The rents for these plots reached as high as £8 or £10.[34] A conacre peasant used several methods to pay off a debt this large without currency: he paid in his seasonal labor and by means of a pig. Included in the price of rent, the peasant family raised a pig each year that provided them with fertilizer for their plots. At the end of the year, the pig returned to landlord who could sell it or eat it. A new piglet went back to the conacre farm to be raised the next year. Should both the piglet and the labor fail to cover the rent, the conacre peasant added some of his potatoes, which landowning farmers used for animal feed.[35] Conacre peasants are excluded from the middle classes because they did not deal with currency in any regular fashion, due to the fact that their plots did not produce sellable surpluses.

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[34] Steven J Campbell, *The Great Irish Famine: Words and Images from the Famine Museum, Strokestown Park, County Roscommon* (Strokestown: Famine Museum, 1994), 15.
[35] Ibid.

I use the term classes instead of class, because despite their commonality in being above economic subsistence and below the social status of landlords, there were also clear internal divisions in terms of property and status. For example many of the largest landowners in the middle classes were graziers.[36] They did not subdivide their property in the same manner as tillage farmers, because they used land as pasture for their livestock. Tillage farmers' lands could include hundreds of conacre plots, but such use of property for potato growing would consume needed acres for pasturage. Also raising livestock required less labor than tillage farming. Therefore the conacre system was less prevalent among graziers. Tillage farmers often competed with graziers for lands open to be rented. Since tillage farmers did not rent such large pieces of property as graziers and needed to pay wages in some form to more laborers, they often grouped together into little cooperatives known as clachans.[37] The clachan farmers and laborers formed a village or rundale[38] and farmed the rented township communally.[39]

After the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, the demand for the grains that Irish farmers produced dropped dramatically leaving many farmers with too many laborers and an overabundance of crops with no sufficient market. Then in 1839, just a few years before the Famine, a series of three years of bad harvests set back the tillage farmers even further. The number of conacre plots increased at that time because their high rents enabled farmers to produce rent for their own

[36] O'Brien. *Mullingar,* 11.
[37] Campbell, *Strokestown,* 15.
[38] Rundale is the Irish term for the village of farmers in a cooperative settlement or clachan.
[39] Campbell, *Strokestown,* 15.

holdings while sales of crops were down.[40] This middleman system was in existence before these bad harvests with wealthier tillage farmers renting from the landowning class and subdividing their acreage among smaller claims – including conacre plots.[41] Still, by 1845 the economy was recovering and the number of conacre plots was again on the decline. The middle classes did not only exist on the farms however. "Ireland supported a flourishing class of doctors, surgeons, and apothecaries,"[42] as well as merchants, millers, bakers, and shopkeepers, whether small or large. I also include clergymen as among the middle classes because they were literate and the tithes and collections of their churches provided them with an above subsistence income.

Instead of relying purely on economics to divide the lower middle classes from the laboring classes, I also use social criteria for two reasons. The first is that a small farmer holding one to two acres could have closely resembled a laboring or conacre peasant in his appearance to the outside world. His hut would have consisted of mud and thatch with the addition of a piece or two of furniture. Sometimes rooms were divided by the hen house or a piece of furniture.[43] His diet would have been very similar to that of the laboring peasant as well, consisting primarily of potatoes, but with the addition of oatmeal.[44] Yet these additions of oatmeal and furniture created two key distinctions: the first was simply a mental divide; the second would become important in the first years of

[40] Ibid., 11-12.
[41] Ibid., *Stokestown*, 14.
[42] Ibid., 35.
[43] "Ned Buckley, Knocknagree, Co. Cork" in *Famine Echoes* ed. Cathal Póirtéir (Dublin: Gil and MacMillan, 1995). 28.
[44] Ibid., 52.

the Famine: farmers had property that could be sold for currency, which they could then use to buy food. [45]

Seán Ó Duinnshleibhe of County Cork recalled the larger farmers' dwellings this way:

> The farmers' houses were much bigger and much better kept. There were three rooms on the floor: the kitchen in the centre, large accommodations, but the manure was again stored in front and back. Seldom a flowerpot was seen at the front door. The houses were well lighted and at least one room was lofted. In many of the farmers' houses there were half-lofts in the kitchen, having a bed in each for a workman.[46]

According to Ned Buckley sometimes even these homes would be made of mud.[47] To the British eye, even these homes might have looked poor, but they served as a reminder of status to the Irish community. More important however than the similarities were the differences. The separation of rooms by design, the addition of the loft for housing laborers, and the attention to light and occasional flowerpot mark another economic distinction. These economic distinctions in turn produced wide gulfs in the farmers' minds between themselves and the laborers that were expressed in social customs. Men of the middle classes spoke English. They were the mediators in personal disputes of the lower classes.[48] Other signs were indistinguishable to outside eyes, but were present nonetheless. Hats, for example, were a marker of distinction between classes in Ballykilcline. Now out of fashion in the urban environment and among elites, these hats had

[45] Laborers too would have had a few goods to sell, bedding for example, but it would not be enough to provide sufficient food for the entire season before a new planting.
[46] "Seán Ó Duinnshleibhe of County Cork" in *Famine Echoes* ed. Cathal Póirtéir (Dublin: Gil and MacMillan, 1995). 24.
[47] "Ned Buckley," *Echoes,* 28.
[48] Scally, *Hidden Ireland,* 30-31.

been bought by farmers and their wives and children for a few pennies. Still even a few pennies were more of a luxury than laborers could afford.[49] Those elements of the middle classes who existed outside of farming (business men, professionals, and clergy) would have lived in houses which would have reflected their income levels.

One of the most important lines of distinction between the lower middle class farmers and conacre peasants and the laboring classes was the need for charity. For the poor, mendicancy was a way of life and the workhouse, though unpopular, was an option in times of need. On the other hand, reports sent to Sir George Nicholls for the compilation of the 1838 blue books, or government reports, stated that the small farmers were less likely to enter the workhouses. The reason was the psychological need to place distance between themselves and the lower classes and the maintenance of social status.[50] An Irishman in Bristol "seemed to think it a reproach to the national character to suppose that there would be a willingness to enter the workhouses."[51] This mentality persisted even during the Famine and there were numerous reports that farmers would cling to their land "with the energy of a drowning man"[52] and starve rather than go into the workhouses. This mentality caused many deaths after the introduction of the Gregory Clause in 1847. The Clause denied relief to any farmer holding over a quarter acre of land and forced them to choose between relief or keeping what

[49] Ibid., 32.
[50] George Nichols, *Poor Laws- Ireland. Second Report of George Nichols, Esq. to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department* (London: Charles Knight and Co., 1838)
[51] Ibid., 65.
[52] Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends, *Transactions during the Famine in Ireland 1846-1847* (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1852).

remained of their land. Many chose the land even if it meant death for themselves and their families.

In the same vein, Edward McGrane from County Donegal told about a small farmer whose death shocked his neighborhood. He died of eating the indigestible skins of potatoes, in order to feed his children the inside. McGrane says, "He had a horror of the workhouse and would do anything rather than go there."[53] This distaste for being associated with the workhouses and the need to receive relief carried over into the later memories of the famine. Mrs. G. Kirby from County Laois was born in 1945, but remembered being told that

> for many years after the Famine people didn't wish to talk about it, as it was considered a disgrace if it could be said of any family that their people took soup from the soup kitchens, or took the Indian meal or that any member of a family died of hunger; but they were considered martyrs if they died of the fever.[54]

Beyond charity, the rarity of marriage between the children of farmers and laborers underscored that mental divide. Irish society considered such unions unnatural. Also, the arranged marriages and dowries in the middle classes prevented marriages between a farmer and a laborer. A son due to inherit the family property must marry "when his father decided, and he must marry a woman able to enhance the value of the land and ensure its succession – he must,

[53]"Edward McGrane, Ballina, Co. Donegal" in *Famine Echoes* ed. Cathal Póirtéir (Dublin: Gil and MacMillan, 1995), 98.
[54] "Paddy Sherlcok, b. 1865, The Green, Stradbally, Co. Laois" in *Famine Echoes* ed. Cathal Póirtéir (Dublin: Gil and MacMillan, 1995), 112.

in short, marry the bride of the old man's choice."[55] This assertion reiterated the statement in a diary of 1839 which recorded that in marriage, there was:

> apparently very little love or sentiment between the interested pair, the whole affair being conducted and concluded by the parents and friends on both sides in quite a businesslike manner, just as they would dispose of their stock or swap a farm.[56]

This gulf only widened after the famine when class gaps would be amplified by the decrease in population, particularly of the lower classes[57].

At the other end of the spectrum similar divides of both an economic and social nature existed. A "great number of landlords [were] 'needy men.'"[58] These "needy men" were in fact bankrupt. Their estates were already encumbered or in debt and their collected rents had been defaulted to the Court of Chancery.[59] This being the case, many merchants, large farmers, graziers, and professionals might easily have been wealthier than men of the landlord class when debts are taken into account. The records of the Society of Friends contain many letters with phrases similar to the following: "Two-thirds exactly of this parish is the property of two absentee proprietors, both of whose properties are in Chancery for debt. (County of Donegal);"[60] "This district has the misfortune of being on the estate of an absentee nobleman, whose embarrassments have placed

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[55] K. H. Connell, "Peasant Marriage in Ireland: Its Structure and Development Since the Famine." *Ecomonic History Review,* ser. 2 xiv, no .3 (April 1962), 502-523, cited in Donnelly, *Land and People*, 222.

[56] J. Kegan, *A Young Irishman's Diary (1836-1847) being extracts from the early journal of John Kegan of Moate,* edited with preface and notes by Rev. Wallace Clare, n.p., 1928. cited in Donnelly, *Land and People*, 221.

[57] Joseph Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society, 1848-1918.* (Dublin: Gil and Macmillan, 1973), 4.

[58] Friends, *Transactions*, 10-11.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid., 212.

the entire property in the hands of his creditors, and it is now being sold under the courts to satisfy their demands (County Wicklow);"[61] and "The rents of three of the largest townlands of the parish, have been received for the last thirty years by a receiver under the Court of Chancery."[62]

Nevertheless distinct social lines existed between the middle classes and the landlords. First, the majority of the landlords were Protestant and the majority of the middle classes were Catholic – the descendants of the old Anglo-Irish gentry and Irish lords from before the conquests of Cromwell, 1649-1652 or peasants who had earned a higher social class. A second large difference was that these proprietors of estates were largely absentee[63]– whether in another part of Ireland, in England, or on the Continent. Third, the landlord was the traditional "enemy" of the farming classes, because he was the one who collected their rent payments. A final difference was the ability of these men to stand successfully for Parliamentary positions. O'Connell, a Catholic from a landed family and a professional lawyer, had successfully lobbied for Catholic Emancipation in the 1820s. This Emancipation benefited only an elite group of Catholics, however,

[61] Ibid., 213.
[62] Ibid., 213.
[63] Figures for absentees are largely unknown and hard to calculate. One scale that might be used to measure is the number of first class housing in Ireland. In the 1841 census, Connacht had less than one percent of its land in first class houses. Munster had less than two percent. And only Dublin had more than eight percent of its houses considered first class. Generally in Leinster and Ulster two to four percent of houses were first class in ranking. These figures are drawn from Kennedy et al. *Mapping*, 80.
Equally relevant is the perception that the majority of landlords were absentee – a perception held through the majority of southern and western Ireland and parts of the Eastern counties as well.

and political power remained predominantly held by the Protestant landed gentry.[64]

The disdain of the upper classes of landlords and Protestant elites formed another social division. Although a minority in the population, the atmosphere depicted by Irish Famine historians is one of severe distaste for the Irish lower and middle classes on the part of the elites as well as their counterparts on the main island of Great Britain. This appears perhaps most forcefully in the depictions of *Punch* magazine in Britain, which always shows the rural Irish as ugly, deformed, and decidedly poor. Contempt of the Irish landlords for their tenants is evident in pamphlets written in the 1840s about how to improve the state of Ireland. Typical among these is the pamphlet "Remedies for Ireland, A Letter to the Right Honorable Monteagle on the Fallacy of the Proposed Poor Law, Emigration, & Reclamation of Waste Lands as Remedies: Being a postscript to 'How to Reconstruct the Industrial Condition of Ireland" by James Ward, Esquire.[65] He argued that the present state of Ireland in 1847 as created by the potato and the priests. The potato encouraged laziness among the Irish peasants by being both easy to grow and cheap to purchase. Meanwhile priests "confirm the moral laxity of early marriage," because they are dependent on the marriage fees.[66] The Marquis of Sligo echoed his argument about the potato saying: "Both

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[64] Sean Duffy, *The Concise History of Ireland* (Dublin: Gil and Macmillan, 2005), 148-149.

[65] James Ward, esq. *Remedies for Ireland, A Letter to the Right Honorable Monteagle on the Fallacy of the Proposed Poor Law, Emigration, & Reclamation of Waste Lands as Remedies: Being a postscript to 'How to Reconstrcut the Industrial Condition of Ireland* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1847).

[66] Ibid., 8-9.

of these classes [mendicants and conacre peasants] were fed in idleness or in desultory and almost useless labor."[67]

The dichotomies in Ireland between elite and commoner and rural and urban were not unique. They closely resembled the attitudes of contemporary societies on the continent. The contempt of the urban elite for the rural poor and middle classes was in fact everywhere. Eugen Weber opened his first chapter by quoting a Parisian touring the rural parts of the province of Burgundy in the 1840s, "You don't have to go to America to see savages."[68] Protestant landlords and Englishmen touring the Irish countryside would have said much the same thing about the people in Ireland. They stereotyped the Irish as having the same "ignorance, apathy, slackness, inertia, a brutal grasping, dissembling, and hypocritical nature" that Weber's urban Frenchmen used to describe their peasantry.[69] Like the Irish peasants mentioned above contemporary peasants of Ariège depended on migration for seasonal work, plus mendicancy to supply the wants their own holdings could not provide. Begging was an accepted part of both cultures.[70] This dependency only confirmed the negative image of peasants in upper class minds in both nations.

Between these two sides, the haves and the have-nots, stood the middle classes. In a way they were the bridge between two wholly separate worlds; they did not really belong in either. The middle classes of pre-Famine Ireland were

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[67] Marquis of Sligo. *A Few Remarks and Suggestions on the Present State of Ireland,* (London: Andrews and Co., 1847). 14.
[68] Weber, *Peasants,* 3.
[69] Ibid., 6.
[70] Ibid., 63.

similar to the middle classes of pre-World War I France described by Weber. They found themselves unable to relate to the laboring classes in terms of shared culture because they had a higher standard of living, more resources, and access to literacy. On the other hand they were as distinct from the upper classes in Ireland as rural middle classes of France were from Parisians. The upper classes of Ireland were Protestant and largely absentee. They often looked down upon all Irish men, even those Protestants who resided there, as inferior in every respect. Ironically, the large proportion of them who were absentee would have removed themselves from the chance to know their neighbors at first hand – that could only heighten stereotypes and alienation.

During the Famine the role of the middle classes as the bridge between the upper and lower classes was highlighted as the middle classes bore most of the burden of organizing and implementing relief strategies for the poor. Their bridging role resembled that of the Creole pioneers of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities.*[71] Both the creoles and the Irish middle classes shared a common language with the classes arranged above them on the social scale. Like Anderson's Creole pioneers who formed an administrative backbone of the colonies, the middle classes of Ireland received their directions from the British government in Dublin Castle and carried out the administration of the plan on behalf of the people.[72] Both classes were in a position of leadership over the lower classes, particularly for the Irish during the Famine period. Even before the Famine period however, these middle class men occupied local leadership

[71] Anderson, *Communitites, 47-65*
[72] Ibid.,, 58-60.

positions as magistrates, clergy, and Poor Law Guardians. But both the Creoles and the middle classes of Famine Ireland also feared their lower classes.[73] The Creoles feared the might of an uprising and violence by the natives. The Irish middle classes feared that the lower classes might attack their property to gain food. But they were even more fearful of sinking into these lower classes themselves.

Despite sharing this pivotal and common role between the governing, landowning upper classes and the laboring peasants, the middle classes of Ireland had not formed a consciousness of themselves as a political and social "imagined community" with collective causes and needs. The early stage of development of Irish society, the lack of an industrial revolution to stimulate capitalism, the lack of urbanization, a small and regional press, the alien government in Dublin castle, the undersized university system, and the want of quality roads, canals, and ports for shipping and easy travel all inhibited the middle classes from forming a class identity, as in the French case discussed by Eugen Weber.[74] Weber said that "before culture altered significantly, material circumstances had to alter."[75]

What the middle classes lacked prior to the Famine that Benedict Anderson's model of the "imagined community" defined as essential was a feeling of deep horizontal kinship. The middle classes felt their Irishness acutely. It separated them from the British and the Protestant landlords, rendering them inferior in the eyes of the state. This same Irishness, however, did not necessarily

[73] Ibid., 48.
[74] Weber, *Peasants*.
[75] Ibid., 206.

engender a feeling of commonality with others of their economic status; and it absolutely did not foster a horizontal connection with the laboring classes. For one thing the Irish middle classes were too scattered in rural villages with no functional relationship to each other. The way this gap was filled, according to Eugen Weber, was that middle classes' individuals gained a common history by experiencing something significant together. With a common history they could begin to build a common identity.[76]

The Famine as an event accomplished both of these changes for Ireland: the shared experience of the middle classes in the Famine made them aware of each other on a national level and provided a common history of shared experience. As a result they began to coalesce into political movements. The Famine induced a huge material change on the face of Ireland, removing large numbers of the poor, the smallest farmers, and small merchants, as well as implementing new systems of roads, railways, piers, and canals. The years 1845 - 1851 also produced sharper divides and more visible delineations between the middle classes and laborers. This period eliminated by death or emigration a large percentage of the laboring poor and the very bottom tiers of the lower middle classes. The survivors of the middle classes then experienced windfalls of recovery; open land available for purchase, opportunity to shift from tillage to livestock, fewer laborers to feed and smaller family sizes all combined to produce a period of prosperity. No longer would the diet and dress of a laborer and a

[76] Weber, *Peasants*, 486.

farmer be too similar for an unfamiliar eye to distinguish.[77] While cheap grains imported into Ireland from America and the regions around the Black Sea increased the amount of Indian meal and wheat in laboring diets and the increase in livestock made milk a regular staple, middle-class diets saw improvement as well. They had regular access to tea, sugar, some meats, butter and other goods still beyond the means of the common laboring classes.[78] It was during this period that the middle classes began to form the associations, like the Tenant Right Leagues of the early 1850s that would enable them to start perceiving themselves as a distinct political and social class.

A Brief Sketch of Pre-Famine Ireland

To understand how the devastation and relief processes of the Great Irish Potato Famine caused such great change in the society of Ireland it is necessary to first survey how that society functioned just prior to the Famine. Before the arrival of the potato blight, that crop was the cheapest source of food available and as such was *the* means of providing nourishment to well over half of Ireland's eight million people.[79] An adult working man in the laboring classes and the lowest rungs of the middle classes consumed approximately fourteen pounds of potato a day.[80] People were crowded, particularly in southern and western Ireland, onto small spaces of land. Cormac O'Grada reckoned the average figure

[77] Donelly, *Land and People,* 244.
[78] Ibid., 245-247.
[79] Cormac O'Grada, *The Great Irish Famine* (Houndsmills: The Economic History Society, 1989), 11.
[80] Donnelly, *Great Irish*, 1.

to be about 700 inhabitants per square mile of land – a figure comparable to the most densely populated (but industrialized) nation in the twenty first century.[81] Even in Ulster, the statistics remain close to the universal picture of Ireland.

The province of Ulster often was separated from the rest of the country in written histories because of its high Protestant and loyalist population as well as its superior commercial development in the nineteenth century. However, in the years leading up to the Famine the domestic linen and flax industries had experienced a decline. *The Vindicator*, a newspaper out of Belfast reported that in Ballymacarrett of the 285 looms in the village, 164 were idle.[82] The rise of industrialization in Britain was the direct cause of these problems. Machines worked faster than human hands and with fewer workers. When the Irish linen industry mechanized in the 1830s handloom weavers and hand spinners were the first victims. Some of the hardest hit counties were in Ulster, particularly Donegal and Tyrone where the number of those employed in cottage industry was highest.[83] The statistics from the 1831 census compiled by Sir George Nichols also reflected a similar number of families in agriculture in Ulster compared to the other provinces. Unfortunately he does not then divide the agriculture families into those who produced by tillage from the graziers or give any statistics relating to the dependence of these families on the potato.[84]

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[81] O'Grada, *Great Irish*, 12.

[82] "Famine in Ulster" in *The Famine Decade, Contemporary Accounts, 1841-1851*, edited by John Killen (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1995), 60-61.

[83] Donelly, *Great Irish*, 7.

[84] Sir George Nichols, *Poor Laws- Ireland. Second Report of George Nichols, esquire to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State from the Home Department* (London: W. Clowes and Sons, Stamford-street, 1838), 78.

Sir George's report on the Poor Laws also contains information about the pre-Famine poor law system. It was supported through the collection of local rates, which provided relief to community poor with the exception of city institutions and Union workhouses. He divided his findings into two categories: Dublin and outside of Dublin. In describing destitution he included: the elderly, the sick, the disabled, and those suffering from consistent and seasonal poverty. The estimated number of destitute relieved in Dublin by infirmaries, hospitals, and charitable societies in the year of 1836 he recorded as 5,646 persons.[85] He did not include returns for the area outside of Dublin in his report, but projected their total number to approach 77,160 persons.[86]

The conclusion of Nichols' report strongly recommended to the British Parliament that that an Irish Poor law system be extended in case of some form of national disaster.[87] He recommended one hundred and thirty workhouses, and they began to be built and opened. By the beginning of the Famine, 118 of these had opened.[88] The presence of the middle classes connected with the workhouses and institutions for the sick poor from 1845-1851 would include those men who collected the rates, in areas where rates were in fact collected, workers in the

[85] Ibid., 84-85.
[86] Ibid., 86.
[87] Ibid., 89.
[88] Christine Kinealy, "The Poor Law During the Great Famine: An Administration in Crisis," in *Famine: the Irish Experience 900-1900 Subsistence Crises and Famines in Ireland* ed. E. Margaret Crawford, (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1989), 159.

workhouses, about 3,600 medical personnel nationwide at the outset of the Famine,[89] the clergy, and private and public charities.

The Poor Law structured on Nichols' report formed one of three levels of relief, all of which included administrators and workers of the middle classes. It set up two types of relief – indoor and outdoor – to provide for the destitute poor. The system organized Poor Law Unions as local units. These Unions did not correspond necessarily to existing boundaries. Typically, an Irish Poor Law Union covered a central townland and its outlying areas. Due to the pervasive rural nature of Ireland, Irish Poor Law Unions covered approximately three times as much territory as English Unions. This meant that the nearest center of relief could be more than ten miles distant from conacre peasants and laborers under its jurisdiction.[90] Indoor relief meant a pauper entered the workhouse and became a dependant of the community fed and housed through the Poor Rate. Outdoor relief referred to a ticket allowing work on the Public Works for a daily wage that kept laborers at or just above subsistence level. Later, outdoor relief took the form of soup kitchen rations or handouts of ready-made food, but these kitchens only operated during and after 1847. In between, indoor and outdoor relief were the county hospitals and infirmaries also financed by the local rates for the temporary relief of sick paupers.

All of the national administration for the Poor Law systems resided in Dublin, as a part of the Dublin Castle administration. The workhouses were

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[89] Peter Froggatt, "The Response of the Medical Profession to the Great Famine" in *Famine: the Irish Experience 900-1900 Subsistence Crises and Famines in Ireland* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1989), 135-136.

[90] Friends, *Transactions,* 13-15.

administered generally, while the Public Works had a specific central committee known as the Board of Works. Although the Kingdoms of Ireland and Great Britain united in 1801, Ireland retained an anomalous national government administration at Dublin Castle. The Castle had been staffed perennially before and after the Famine with Protestants who had come to Ireland from Great Britain and Scotland. During the initial construction of the workhouses and the Famine crisis, the British Treasury subsidized the poor law rates. The Undersecretary of the Treasury, therefore, controlled how much money was available to each Irish Union because he had power to issue or deny grant and loan requests.

When the potato blight appeared in 1845, it was immediately evident that the workhouse system still under construction and the public works needed an additional source of revenue. The British Government provided for a Central Relief Committee, specific to the Famine. This Committee was housed in Dublin with two main responsibilities: they raised money through subscriptions and created lists of sufficiently destitute paupers eligible for relief through the Poor Law System. Beyond these tasks, the Committee also distributed information, how to cook Indian corn meal for example, and regulations handed down from the British Cabinet and Treasury to the local relief committees.

The Famine also produced a number of private charitable organizations. Most had a national organization that kept track of where local chapters existed and solicited grants from both the Government, private citizens, and the Society of Friends – a group discussed separately below. These groups include the British Relief Association and the Dublin Relief Association, who collected subscription

money and issued small grants to specific private relief efforts: locally run soup kitchens in 1847 for example. Ladies Commissions also existed. Ladies organizations specialized in clothing drives and setting up industrial schools to teach working-class women job skills – lace making, for example.

The Society of Friends managed its own organization that far exceeded the size of other private charities. It kept a Central Relief Committee of twenty four members in Dublin.[91] It had four Auxiliary Committees based in Cork, Waterford, Clonmel and Limerick. Each Auxiliary Committee was charged with finding projects suitable for Friends' Contributions and reporting on the state of destitution in their area.[92] The Central Relief Committee meanwhile sent out innumerable letters to Quakers in America, Canada, Australia, Great Britain, and Ireland asking for donations. These donations then funded soup kitchens, private relief efforts, seed for planting to those who could not afford it, and subsidized local relief committees set up by the Poor Law.

[91] Friends, *Transactions,* 129.
[92] Friends, *Transactions,* 130.

Chapter Three: Emergence of the Middle Classes as Local Leaders, 1845-1851

The coming of the blight in 1845 and its return in 1846 drove the middle classes into the central position of administrators. In all the organizations listed above the middle classes filled a void left by the missing upper class elites. Members of the middle classes controlled the local relief structures. They composed the local relief committees set up in 1845 under the Central Relief Committee in Dublin Castle. Local Committees raised subscriptions of private donations and oversaw the disbursement of government supplies which the local committees purchased at cost price. Each of the local committees ran the efforts of a Poor Law Union and supplied alongside the Poor Law Guardians funds for workhouses, corn depots, and the Public Works.

The British Government intended for these committees to consist of a combination of men from the upper and middle classes. Government guidelines handed down from Dublin Castle listed the desired members as county lieutenant, the magistrates, the Officer of the Board of Works, clergy, Chairman of the Poor Law Union, Poor Law Guardians, coastguard officer, and resident magistrate.[93] The Central Committee sent out letters to the primary landlord, or to the parish priest in absence of information regarding that landlord's present address,

[93] Patrick MacManus, "Letter of parish priest of Kilgeever, Co. May to Relief Commission" Louisburgh: 27 April, 1846 in *The Irish Famine: A Documentary History* ed. Noel Kissane (Dublin: National Library of Ireland, 1995), 34.

requesting that committees be formed. The Lieutenant of the County, or primary landholder, already responsible for appointing local administrators such as the Justice of the Peace, should also appoint the committee members.

In Ulster, the concentration of men from upper class backgrounds made local committees drawn from a resident landowning class possible. In other parts of Ireland, the absence of enough landlords meant men of the upper middle classes, magistrates, doctors, professionals, and clergy, formed the local relief committees. In the poorest Unions, particularly those in Connacht, any available men of the middle classes, whether they were small farmers or small shopkeepers, filled the void and joined local committees. Wherever they formed, members of the committee needed to be literate, because a major part of their job included corresponding with the Poor Law's Central Relief Committee through reports and grant applications. The committees also applied to privately- funded charity organizations such as the Dublin Ladies Society and the Society of Friends. The records of the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends contained many letters that indicated how difficult it could be to form these committees in poverty stricken areas could be. One letter from Roscommon particularly stands out:

Our electoral division is so destitute at present, that there is no poor law guardian.

> We have never received any government grant, and all the societies refuse us aid except yours, on account of our not having a committee. There are no gentlemen in the neighbourhood to form one.[94]

[94] Friends, *Transactions,* 214.

Another letter to the Relief Commission informed the committee that the men of that Poor Law Union could not locate their Lieutenant in England and had formed an impromptu committee of the most able men: "Mr. James Garvey, Doctors Fergus and Durkin, Messrs John Comber, George Lynch, and Michael Carroll, along with the local clergy."[95] One of the factors that contributed to the myth that the Famine did not affect Ulster was a notable absence of relief committees in regions of that Province. Unions in the counties of Armagh, Down, Derry, Fermanagh, or Tyrone did not establish local relief committees in 1845, because the local rates collected enough money to finance their workhouses and Public Works.[96] Between 650 and 700 committees had been set up across Ireland by the end of the second year of the Famine both through local initiative and through the efforts and demands of the Central Relief Committee.[97] Membership came almost exclusively from the middle classes because of the scarcity of landlords. Where landlords were present their taxes paid to fund the Poor Law prevented the need for a local committee to form.

Once formed, the local relief committee raised money for its territory: a task that was an extreme challenge but of vital importance. The committee forwarded its lists to subscriptions lists to the British Treasury department. The Treasury then issued grants that matched local donations to at least fifty percent in 1845. Committees used several methods for accomplishing this task. First they mailed subscription letters written by committee members. Landlords of the area,

[95] MacManus, "Letter" in Kissane, *Famine*, 35.
[96] Kinealy, *Great Calamity*, 44.
[97] Donnelly, *Great Irish*, 49 and Kinealy, *Great Calamity*, 44.

strong resident farmers, clergy, and agents of absentees all received letters. The results were encouraging in some areas and lackluster in others. Lack of response from landlords often frustrated committee members. Following failed subscription drives, local committees made requests for grants to the Central Relief Committee, the Society of Friends, and other private charitable organizations. An example from Galway County reads:

> The landed proprietors are all absentees, nor have they contributed a penny towards relieving their tenants since the distress commenced. We have neither gentry, nor a second person in the character of a large farmer within the parish. Population, 10,000.[98]

Similar letters came in from Mayo, Clare, Longford, and Queen's County.[99] Galwary, Mayo, and Clare were in the impoverished Western provinces.

Committees expressed their frustration with non-contributors in more direct ways as well. They partnered with local newspapers – run by members of the middle classes – and published their subscription lists in the local newspapers as a form of social pressure. The community viewed these and then passed along by word of mouth the names of thrifty farmers and landlords who had failed to contribute to the illiterate. An Edward Cooper of Markrea Castle received a threat from the Relief Committee of the upper half barony of Leyny that his name would be published along with other unforthcoming landlords. He replied angrily that his tenants had no need of his assistance.[100] Charles Trevelyan also threatened

[98] Friends, *Transactions*, 214.
[99] Friends, *Transactions*, 212-216.
[100] Edward Cooper, *Re: 'Threatening Letter.'* 6 July, 1846 in *In Their Own Words: The Famine in North Connacht* ed. Liam Swords (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1999), 43.

Viscount Palmerston of Sligo with such exposure after seeing his name in the reports sent to Dublin Castle.[101]

Local relief committees, where present in Ulster, used similar tactics in the northern newspapers. One famous example was the exchange between the papers and Lord Londonderry. In a subscription drive in 1848, Londonderry donated £20, while his wife contributed £10. The *Londonderry Standard* reported these contributions, which were by no means significantly lower than other contributions, but then recorded that in the same year the Londonderry family had spent over £15,000 to renovate their home in Mount Stewart.[102] Lord Londonderry felt enough pressure that he issued a statement regarding his donations in the *Londonderry Sentinel* in which he said: "My conscience aquits [sic] me of ever having wrongly acted as a proprietor, a landlord, or a Christian." Not giving up, the *Londonderry Standard* replied in an editorial that "His Lordship is then in a most enviable state of inward blessedness for we imagine that some of the Apostles themselves could scarcely have made such a declaration."[103] Other times newspapers emphasized the good works of local middle classes in comparison with landlords as when it was printed that in Carigeen farmers raised £45 in subscriptions and landlords raised only £26.[104] By whatever means it happened, the subscription drives of the committees had initial success, collecting approximately £98,003 1s 2½d nationwide by the end of the

[101] Haines, *Trevelyan*, 283.
[102] Christine Kinealy, *A Death Dealing Famine: the Great Hunger in Ireland* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 97.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Brendan Ó Cathaoir, *Famine Diary* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1999), 71.

summer of 1846.[105] Cork City raised the largest amount by a single committee -- £2,300.[106]

Such relief donations –multiplied (or not) by proportional treasury grants could literally be matters of life and death. As a result, while middle class committees and newspapers used the threat of public exposure to shame recalcitrant landlords and farmers into making a contribution, "Captain Starlights" added another dimension through the threat of agrarian violence. "Captain Starlights" posted notices and sent menacing letters to the offender. These "Captain Starlight" threats recalled an earlier era of agrarian violence by working-class men against property holders publicly viewed as exploiting their workers. Merchants accused of extorting market price also received these threats during the Famine. Even relief committees whose distributions were considered parsimonious risked the ire of "Captain Starlight."[107] Hence relief donations acted as an informal political test with scores being kept and consequences for men who did not meet social expectations.

The work of the middle classes in raising funds, through whatever method, was vital. As John Ball[108] pointed out in his pamphlet entitled *What is to Be Done for Ireland?,* the amount of money subscribed to relief subscriptions was a primary concern for all classes. It was the means of life for those who were dependent on government or private charities for survival. Money had a direct

[105] Kinealy, *Great Calamity*, 45.
[106] Ibid., 46.
[107] Cormac O'Grada, *Ireland's Great Famine: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Dublin: University of Dublin Press, 2006), 11.
[108] John Ball was formerly an assistant poor law commissioner.

impact on the size and the consistency of relief rations being handed out to the poor whether they received indoor or outdoor relief.[109] Areas whose donations were deficient could only provide relief to a certain amount of people, or would be forced to terminate relief efforts because they could not buy necessary supplies. Committee members, by supplying money to cover deficiencies in the rates and government funds saved lives and enabled thousands to receive relief.

Beyond raising money, local relief committees distributed grain imported by the government. In 1845, the Conservatives controlled Parliament, and therefore the Treasury, under Sir Robert Peel. He looked toward the Irish with a paternalistic eye. In November 1845, confronted with rising grain prices and a tide of reports of potato crop failure, Peel authorized the purchase of £100,000 worth of corn and meal from the United States.[110] This British government stored this grain in depots across Ireland. Relief committees then purchased it at cost price for distribution to the people. No depots opened in the province of Ulster in 1845-1846, because the government deemed them unnecessary in the north of Ireland.[111] In 1846, the Whigs took over the Government under Sir John Russell. Russell subscribed to a doctrinaire form of *laissez-faire* and the principle of *noblesse oblige,* later expressed as Irish property responsible for Irish poverty.[112]. Under his administration, the Treasury in Ireland decided that corn and meal should be sold at market price and not cost price to undercut government

[109] John Ball, *What is to Be Done for Ireland?* (London: James Ridgway, Piccadilly, 1849), 112.
[110] Donnelly, *Great Irish,* 49.
[111] Ibid., 48.
[112] O'Grada, *Great Irish,* 53.

expenses.[113] The corn and meal could then be sold at cost price to eligible paupers. The men who ran the relief committees however had the power of how to implement this new requirement. In many cases the committee chose to employ this new practice slowly, partially or not at all in response to the level of destitution in their communities.[114] These delays in conforming to the new government policy allowed many to remain outside the workhouses in 1846.

Another relief effort that could only be realized through the mobilization of the middle classes was the Public Works. The Public Works, a time-tested strategy, had been used to alleviate distress in previous food shortages. Cormac O'Grada recorded the presence of public works as a means of relief in Irish famines as early as 1740.[115] The British Government established a central Board of Works in Dublin with local branches before the beginning of the harvest failure of 1845.[116] It entered into the relief schemes of the Famine in December of that year with a grant of £5,000 from the government to establish new projects that would provide unemployed laborers with subsistence wages. The British Cabinet held a second hope for the project, that it would regenerate the Irish economy, through the building of better roads, railroads, piers and harbors.[117] Money for Public Works projects came from local poor law rates matched by Treasury grants and supplemented by subscriptions to the local relief committees. That caused the first issue with the Board of Works. A veritable flood of letters requested grant

[113] Kinealy, *Death Dealing,* 61-62.
[114] Kinealy, *Great Calamity,* 50.
[115] O'Grada, *Great Irish,* 19.
[116] Donnelly, *Great Irish,* 54
[117] Ibid., 54.

money. In one year, £602,000 had been granted by the Treasury for road building and other useful works.[118] The Treasury had not forseen an expenditure of this magnitude on the Public Works. Treasury Under-Secretary Charles Trevelyan began looking for ways to limit programs. The second problem arose from the same cause: with so many applications, the Board had trouble finding men in Britain or Ireland qualified to render decisions on whether the works were useful and how to complete them. In general, the Board of Works had recourse to the military for the necessary engineers and organizers, especially drawing upon coastguard officers and retired army officers still resident in Ireland.[119] With few exceptions these men were members of the Irish middle classes. And again, they represented additional expenditure to the Treasury who paid them. These engineers worked with the relief committees. The committees' job was to provide the list of men eligible for employment. This was the third and most controversial problem, because the lists were composed not only of able-bodied poor but also small farmers. Administrators in Dublin and Westminster accused the local relief committees of jobbing – providing Public Works employment to create patronage and wasting relief money on farmers with an already sufficient income.

The lists made up by the relief committees gave employment on a scale never anticipated by the British Government or the British Treasury in Dublin Castle. By August of 1846, approximately 100,000 workers were employed by the Board of Works in various projects on a wage of roughly ten drachma a

[118] Kinealy, *Great Calamity,* 55.
[119] O'Grada, *Black '47,* 63.

day.[120] The Treasury appointed inspectors, often ex-army officers like Captain O'Brien and the infamous Captain Wynne, from the literate, business-minded Irish middle classes. These inspectors were not local men ensuring that they would adhere to the letter of the Poor Laws.[121] To correct the problem caused by the committee lists, the Treasury instituted a system of inspection to ensure that those employed were truly destitute in accordance with the Poor Law. This formed the crux of the third problem (the list of eligible paupers). Many of the small farmers on the lists would not qualify for relief if the dictates of the Poor Law were applied strictly. They held too much property. The Gregory Clause instituted in 1847 declaring no man holding more than a quarter acre ineligible for relief would only increase this problem.

Captain Wynne, an ex-army officer from the Irish middle class, became notorious in Clare County when he stirred up crises among the local relief committees. He accused the clergymen and committee members of employing men to create patronage and nepotism rather than because of relief needs. He struck hundreds of names off the lists of the eligible.[122]

Other inspectors like Captain O'Brien mentioned above had milder methods and earned great respect among the masses. Although aware that such jobbing was in fact occurring in many districts, O'Brien believed that sensationalism was overtaking reality in the reports of other inspectors of rampant laziness and nepotism of the laboring and farming classes. After Captain Wynne

[120] Kinealy, *Calamity,* 58.
[121] O'Grada, *Black '47,* 61-63.
[122] Ibid., 62.

had been forced to leave County Clare by Trevelyan, Captain O'Brien re-inspected the Clare lists. He then wrote to Charles Trevelyan of the British Treasury that the revised lists enclosed did not include names of any who were not truly destitute. O'Brien also recommended that the government implement additional measures soon, because the public works' wages and the numbers capable of being employed were both insufficient to meet the need of relief. Further the wage paid by the works was starting to fall below the subsistence level, especially in 1846 when the Public Works began paying by task work instead of a daily wage; as workers grew hungrier and sicker their work and wages went down. [123] Investigators, drawn from the middle classes, stifled many accusations from the British government against local relief committees by substantiating or correcting their lists.

The number of farmers employed on public work schemes supplied the most obvious target of criticism for inspectors. Several things must be taken into account when rendering judgment on these farmers. First, the smallest farmers were usually as dependent upon the potato crop as their laboring and conacre counterparts. Undoubtedly, some farmers who went to the public works for employment in order to receive cheap grain instead of from dire need. Given their aversion to being associated with such charity, it seems highly probable that only farmers desperately in need would seek charity in such a publicly visible way. It seems inconsistent with the mental divide and need for social status already established in the earlier section of this paper.

[123] Ibid., 63-64.

Moreover, in the defense of the small farmers employed on the works it is also important to understand that by late 1846, the potato crop had not only failed, but had now failed two years in a row, the second year completely. If a first blight left conacre peasants stricken, a second appearance in 1846 hit small farmers and small business men especially hard.[124] They had sold their belongings, cows, and pigs already in 1845 to buy food and had nothing left to bargain with in 1846. Now after the harvest they had lost their conacre rents, their potato crops, some of their salable corn and wheat crop to provide food for their families, and had to pay their portion of the poor rate.[125] As Captain O'Brien himself noted, production on tillage farms had come to a standstill in 1846 after the total destruction of the potato crop. Small farmers could not afford the wages of laborers to replant lost crops. These small farmers in turn could not expect to find employment on large farms, because large farmers could not afford to pay enough in wages to support small farmers in their lifestyle.[126]

As a secondary result of the crop failure, business in wholesale and merchant trade had decreased in Ireland itself. The demand for manufacture and building had dropped leaving many carpenters, masons, and tradesmen in building supplies unemployed. Other sectors also suffered similar fates including clothing manufacturers. The Society of Friends noticed an increase in the number of tailors, seamstresses, and shoemakers in need of aid by 1846.[127] So the

[124] Friends, *Transactions,* 52-53.
[125] Donnelly, *Land and People,* 100-101
[126] Ibid., 65.
[127] Friends, *Transactions,* 53.

combination of harvest failure and business slump spread destitution widely. Joseph Crosfield, a Quaker investigating the state of Ireland in 1846, wrote:

> On the line of road between Athlone and Roscommon, the number of men and boys at work [on the Public Works] indicated the extent of distress in this region; there being no fewer than 900 upon the fifteen miles between these two towns; the total number receiving pay from government in the county of Roscommon being not less than 40,000 [an average number of workers per county in the Public Works]. Many of these persons rent land, from one to five or six acres each; but from their crops of potatoes having altogether failed, they are in no better condition than the common labourers.[128]

If the state of the public works looked bleak in 1846, it only got worse in 1847 as more farmers and small business men fell into dire financial straits. The number employed on the works increased from 560,000 at the peak in 1846 to approaching 900,000 in 1847, or nearly double.[129] Another potato shortage in 1847 resulted from the inability of the small farmers to plant in 1846 rather than the fungus *phytophthora infestans.* Kinealy recorded numbers of at least 42, 134 people who relied on the works by the summer of 1847 in County Cork alone. She also recorded a significant but lower numbers for the Ulster counties. The lowest number was the county of Antrim which paid only 270 workers.[130] These numbers probably did not include the 12,000 officials paid by the Board of Works to oversee the schemes.[131] The works that had been of utility had mostly been completed by this point. Public Works completed after this were "Famine roads" which started nowhere and led nowhere. "Cutting hills and filling hollows were

[128] Friends, *Transactions*, 145.
[129] Kinealy, *Great Calamity*, 27-28, 95-96.
[130] Ibid., 98.
[131] Donnelly, *Great Irish*, 71.

the main tasks,"[132] James Donnelly noted. Laborers preformed for monotonous tasks and received wages for how much they had completed. O'Brien reported:

> …certainly, the patience and self-denial of the people have been beyond all praise. The labourers [here referring to those on the public works, as opposed to of the lower classes] work for their wages, but seeing clearly that what they are doing on the public roads is of no clear value, their heart, they say is not in it. Naturally quick in feeling and acute in intellect, they have no lively interest in the completion of a task which, though it keeps them from starvation, is manifestly unproductive.[133]

Whether their hearts were in it or not soon ceased to be the issue but rather whether they had the strength to continue to work. Malnutrition, exhaustion, and growing physical disabilities due to deprivation weakened the workforce considerably. This in turn cut their wages as they were paid by the amount of work done and not by the time at work. As public works wages receeded, the business slump deepened undercutting the economic well being of many middle class entrepreneurs and professionals.

The second branch of the Poor Law system devised in 1838 and instituted on the recommendations of Sir George Nichols depended on the middle classes for administration. Only through the active participation of many members of the middle classes could the Poor Law funded workhouses function. They ran exclusively on local rates collected by the Poor Law Guardians and relief committee subscriptions matched in 1845-1846 by British Treasury grants. During the Famine local relief committees worked to supplement these rates through the collection of subscriptions. Often the same men formed both

[132] Ibid.
[133] Quoted in O'Grada, *Black '47,* 63.

committees in the most rural parts of the nation. It should also be noted that these men were volunteers and not paid for their work on either committee. The Guardians ran the workhouses and supervised outdoor relief through selling grain at cost price and distributing pre-cooked food made in soup kitchens. The British Treasury hired investigators to inspect the workhouses like those who inspected the Board of Works. Again mainly ex-military personnel from the Irish middle classes received these appointments. In the beginning of their great charitable works of 1847, the Society of Friends sent their own inspectors to determine the aid they should give in every union. These inspectors were Quakers from Ireland and abroad. Private citizens mostly from middle class backgrounds from various nations also traveled through the country and reported on the conditions of the poor. Inspectors typically investigated the workhouse records, the workhouse facilities, the employment provided for the poor, the food, and other workhouse proceedings such as admissions and burial services. The findings of each variety of inspectors were usually published in pamphlet form or excerpted in a bound volume.

Compliments for the efficiency of particular workhouses and Poor Law Guardians were as abundant as complaints. The most frequent objections raised against the workhouses were their being overcrowded, dirty, and in the earliest years of Famine, providing relief to those who did not need it. Other criticisms had a more serious nature, such as this one made by Reverend Osbourne, a Protestant parson:

> Let me say here what I might equally well have said elsewhere, that I heartily wish the authorities would forbid the use of hunting whips by the officers; I have seen it in more house than one, and seen the abuse of it. If the porters or wardsmen must carry a weapon of offence, a cane would be a better thing; the people in these masses are already too much kenneled; one needs only the whip to make the comparison stronger.[134]

Even so, life in the workhouse was good enough relative to other options that the punishment for serious transgressions was expulsion from the workhouse.[135] By November 1846, all workhouses were considered full. Still, numbers continued increasing after 1847, a certain indicator that those outside the workhouse fared worse than those within its walls.[136] The Gregory Clause was added to the tests for destitution in an effort to decrease dependence on the over-strained workhouses. This clause stipulated that any man holding more than ¼ acre of property was ineligible to enter workhouses. This clause added to the stigmatism for farmers to seek relief by demanding that they abandon their land and their status as part of the middle classes. Despite this the numbers kept rising. Some landlords even used this clause to clear their land of small farmers and tenants of modest acreage, by evicting them for rent in arrears.[137]

The middle classes assumed leadership in the workhouses as well and provided all the important staff positions. At a minimum, the workhouses employed a master, a matron, a physician, and a clerk. The station of master, clerk, and physician had to go to men from the middle classes for their education

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[134] S. G. Osbourne, *Gleanings in the West of Ireland* (London: T. & W. Boone, 1850), 95.

[135] Michelle O'Mahony, *Famine in Cork City: Famine Life at the Cork Union Workhouse* (Douglas Village, Mercer Press, 2005), 57.

[136] This might seem surprising considering the prevalence of fever in the workhouses from 1846 onwards, but fever claimed many victims outside as well. In the workhouse, at least, an inmate was assured some kind of food daily, albeit meager.

[137] Donnelly, *Great Irish*, 110-111.

and contacts with the business world. Inmates of the workhouse often took on the role of the matron, assistant masters, and other menial tasks. Some unions employed farmers' sons, townsmen, or men and women in the workhouse for other specific tasks – burying the dead and cooking the meals, for example. Every position paid a salary, with a large distinction made between the positions held by those who lived inside and outside the workhouse. In Cork City, the clerk received the highest salary - 37 pounds, 10 shillings per quarter. The assistant master, an inmate, earned one pound, nineteen shillings a quarter.[138] The attachment of the salary to a position in the workhouse did not diminish the importance of the work or the quality of the leadership. Exposure to disease and the overwhelming amount of work necessary to provide for the rising number of inmates made the job extremely time consuming and hazardous. Workhouse staff did not have the time or the energy to hold down other jobs simultaneously.

Many of the Treasury officials deemed the salaries of workhouse employees as too high, even for the paupers, and again accused the middle classes of jobbing and favoritism. However, the workhouse positions had many drawbacks especially exposure to the Famine diseases and fevers. Men who owned a horse and cart got special contracts to transport fever victims to workhouses or infirmaries. Thomas O' Flynn and John Melody, both Famine survivors from County Mayo told this story to the Folklore Commission:

> Here it may be well to give an account of the contract given by 'the power that be' in charge of the auxiliary workhouse to a local who had the only horse and cart in the immediate neighbourhood. He was paid at so much per head to convey the sick to the workhouse. The patient was put in a

[138] Ibid., 163.

> sack, feet first, and the sack was tied closely at the neck and labeled. Up to seven or eight patients were laid out in the body of the cart which then set off on its cogglesome journey to the workhouse. Few ever returned. But the cart did not return empty for the bottomless coffins were ready tenanted, and the driver proceeded to the graveyard at Bonnifinglas and the corpses were deposited in the same grave. … The contractor received the name of 'Sack Them Up' from the fact of putting the patients in sacks.[139]

Another interviewed Irishman, Peter O'Brien, set the figure of pay at 1/6 per body, but he was born in 1860 and got his information secondhand.[140] Conditions inside the workhouse often deteriorated to such a point that many Poor Law Guardians refused to meet near the walls. Instead, they removed to town halls and other fever-free meeting places for discussions of admissions or workhouse diet. Christine Kinealy wrote of one such example in Enniskillen:

> Even the Armagh union, frequently referred to as having the best managed workhouse in Ireland, was finding it difficult to meet the increased and sudden demands on it. … By March 1847, the workhouse was described as 'crowded and unhealthy'. Not only were many inmates ill, but some of the workhouse officers had also caught the fever including the medical officer himself. To protect themselves, the guardians started to hold their weekly meetings at the court house rather than the workhouse.[141]

The salaries of the positions, however, enabled the workhouse staff to continue to hold their place in society and compensated them for the dangers faced by being constantly in the workhouse environment.

Another charge of mismanagement leveled at workhouse masters, Poor Law Guardians, and local relief committees by visiting inspectors was that of

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[139] "Thomas O' Flynn, John Melody, Attymass Balina, Co. Mayo" in *Famine Echoes* ed. Cathal Póirtéir (Dublin: Gil and MacMillan, 1995), 118.
[140] "Peter O' Brien, b. 1860, Clonmore, Tinahely, Co. Wicklow" in *Famine Echoes* ed. Cathal Póirtéir (Dublin: Gil and MacMillan, 1995), 122.
[141] Kinealy, *Great Calamity,* 131.

sanitation. In judging the quality of leadership and the ability of these men, an allowance must be made for the unexpected nature of the blight and the rapidity with which it ate up the resources of a large portion of the population. A workhouse that had operated with a minimal number of inmates before 1845 was overrun by 1846. The number of people in workhouses in Ireland more than doubled between 1845 and 1846, rising from 114,205 people in 123 workhouses to 243,933 people in 130 workhouses. In 1847, an additional 173,206 people (total 417,139) crowded into 131 workhouses and auxiliary buildings.[142] The number of people on indoor relief in Ireland peaked at 932,284 in 1849, but they still lived mainly in just131 workhouses and auxiliary buildings.[143] These conditions did not permit even minimal sanitary conditions. This of course led in turn to increased incidence of disease among the inmates, which was the real killer of the Famine.

Still disease also impacted the middle classes and retaining an image of being above the poverty line remained as important during the Famine as it had been before 1845. Earlier a quote from Mrs. G. Kirby of County Laois recalled that:

> for many years after the Famine people didn't wish to talk about it, as it was considered a disgrace if it could be said of any family that their people took soupfrom the soup kitchens, or took the Indian meal or that any member of a family died of hunger; but they were considered martyrs if they died of the fever.[144]

[142] Kennedy et al., *Mapping*, 125.
[143] Ibid.
[144] "Mrs. G. Kirby, Stradbally, Co. Laois, in 1945" in *Famine Echoes* ed. Cathal Póirtéir (Dublin: Gil and MacMillan, 1995), 112-113.

"The Fever" in the Famine period provided a blanket term in workhouse and parish death records for a host of diseases that claimed high fever as a symptom, including typhus and relapsing fever. The Fever in its various forms created martyrs among the Irish middle classes as well as victims because these diseases were not nutritional or starvation diseases. If a relative died of fever it did not immediately denote a class status, because fevers existed outside the workhouse and crossed the boundaries of age, sex, and class. A person who died of Fever therefore did not necessarily die primarily from the hunger – or as a result of being unable to provide food for themselves.

The Fever also made medical personnel into visible leaders in the community because of the sheer number of patients treated; it likewise associated the idea of martyrdom with doctors who died from this important work. One in every thirteen doctors died during the Great Famine, or 380 victims.[145] While these men worked closely with fever victims, fear of contracting disease set checks on charitable works from the rest of the middle classes. Before the Famine, beggars could expect charity from farmers' homes and laborers often lived in lofts above the farmers' kitchens. During the Famine, Paddy Sherlock of Co. Laois recollected that, "If a poor man went to a farmer's house to look for work he would be refused, as the farmer would say, "I smell the sickness from you, and I can't take you into my house', and that was the reason why so many

[145] Froggatt, "Medical Men", 146.

people lay down and died by the roadside."[146] In reaction to this harsh spirit, the *Freeman's Journal* printed an article which ended,

> Need we wonder that fever, coming forth from the dens of squalid misery where it usually lurks assails, 'as a giant refreshed from wine', the highest classes; and, like the destroying angel, slays a victim in almost every house, when those higher classes tamely look on the deeds that are being done in the case of the poor? It should seem to be a wise ordination of providence that, when the higher classes permit famine to slay the poor, pestilence arises from the slaughter and slays the higher classes in turn.[147]

Not all effects of the fear of typhus by the middle classes were negative. The fear of the Guardians and workhouse staff of contracting the fever led to the creation of fever sheds, new hospital facilities, and the quarantining of fever patients.[148] While fever sheds and quarantines made temporary improvements to the workhouse conditions, the new hospital facilities benefited their unions and counties for many years afterward.

Despite the valor and leadership of Famine doctors, their remedies and practice of medicine should perhaps be listed as a contributing factor to the deaths of many victims. Cormac O'Grada looked at these doctors' actual prescriptions, focusing on those used in Dublin. Doctors in Dublin used wine, opium, bleeding, mercury, and ingesting various powders as cures for all sorts of ailments of the bowels and fevers.[149] However, the nature of disease and bacteria was so little understood during this period that doctors cannot be wholly blamed for their unfortunate prescriptions and remedies. Also the medical professionals during the

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[146] Paddy Sherlcok, b. 1865, The Green, Stradbally, Co. Laois" in *Famine Echoes* ed. Cathal Póirtéir (Dublin: Gil and MacMillan, 1995), 113.
[147] *The Freeman's Journal,* 27 July 1847.
[148]O'Grada, *Great Irish*, 21.
[149] O'Grada, *Black '47,* 95.

Famine placed checks on the practices of their peers. Physicians who made critical errors in the practice of medicine received public censure from their contemporaries. For example, colleagues of Dr. Bell in the Lurgan/Portadown Union removed him from his position of workhouse physician in 1847. His faults included putting more than two cholera patients in a bed, forcing the head of one to be at the foot of the bed and recycling the clothes and blankets of dead patients to the living without an intervening wash.[150]

By 1847, the Treasury turned to another initiative run by a middle class workhouses. With the workhouses filled beyond capacity and in such terrible conditions, the Treasury and the relief committees could no longer avoid providing it outdoor relief of free or nearly free food. In this period a new middle class group emerged at the forefront of relief efforts: the Society of Friends. The Quakers pioneered the national soup kitchen as a direct relief movement and supplied 294 boilers to workhouses and private soup kitchens across Ireland as well as quantities of soup ingredients. Their project started in 1846 on a small scale; however, the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends organized funds for further ventures through subscription letters written by Jonathan Pim, the Committee's secretary.[151] Historians of the Famine consistently have acknowledged that the efforts of the Society of Friends saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

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[150] Gerard MacAtasney, *This Dreadful Visitation: The Famine in Lurgan/Portadown* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1997), 50-58.
[151] Friends, *Transactions*, 129.

The Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends, composed of members from the middle classes, raised £20,700 through subscriptions collected from Quakers in Ireland, Great Britain, and America. They made 1,280 cash grants to local relief committees and private charities. They bought and distributed 7,884 tons of food and 168,482 pounds of seeds for the cultivation of green vegetables.[152] The Quakers' Central Relief Committee modeled their project in a way similar to the British government's administration of local relief committees through the British Central Relief Committee. Local committees and the central committee collected funds through subscriptions. The Central Relief Committee (Quaker) then distributed aid using local men and groups already in place: merchants, local relief committees, benevolent landlords, and farmers.[153] The Quakers involved in this project came from largely the business sections of the Irish middle classes.

Grants made by the Quakers often went to private farmers and businessmen as a means of providing soup in those areas where local relief committees did not exist or focused their energies only on the workhouse and public works.[154] Records of grants from the Society of Friends, newspaper articles, preserved notices posted by landlords, and folk memory verified the existence of soup kitchens operated by private citizens. One posted notice alerted the "labourers and poor householders on Lord Caledon's estate" that three kitchens would be open to supply bread and soup six days a week. This particular

[152] Rob Goodbody, *A Suitable Channel: Quaker Relief in the Great Famine* (Old Bawn: Pale Publishing, 1995), 88-89.
[153] Friends, *Transactions*, 13.
[154] Friends, *Transactions*, 56.

advertisement stated that a modest price would be charged for the soup, but also offered payment for gleanings to be used as livestock feed. It was posted by Lord Caledon's agent on December 19, 1846.[155] The *Illustrated London News* described a Depot operated in Cork City that fed more than a thousand people daily at a cost of a halfpenny per quart of soup. The drawing by James Mahony that accompanies it showed well dressed men in top hats passing out bowls of soup to a long line of children and mothers.[156]

The *Transactions of the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends* left more examples. Dean Hoare wrote to the Central Relief Committee to report additional subscriptions but also added this information in hopes of attaining a grant:

> At my own glebe house I have established a depot at my own cost. I payed [sic] 4d per cwt for carriage, being 10 miles from the mills. The same sum is allowed for loss in weighing and for the payment of the woman who weighs it out. I sell it for 1d per stone above the price I pay to the mills. I sell about two tons a week, whereby the poor are saved going four or five miles to a market town and obtain the meal at a less price than it is sold for at the hucksters… I occasionally give a free ticket to a poor person to be paid for by myself… I am altogether unassisted in this undertaking and desirous to extend the plan to other parts of the district.[157]

It is not recorded whether he received his grant. The Reverend J. Garrett sent a request to the Society of Friends for four boilers. His intention was to establish

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[155] Henry L. Prentice, "Notice." (Armagh: J. M. Watters, 1846). The text begins [Notice: to the tenants of Lord Claredon…] and was found in a collection of Irish pamphlets dated 1846 in the Newberry Library.

[156] *Illustrated London News*, 13 March 1847.

[157] Swords, *Own Word*, 102.

five soup kitchens, at the present date he had one in the Corran with a boiler provided by the Irish Association.[158]

Folk memory recorded the good deeds of men and women of the middle classes leading the struggle to procure enough food. Mrs. Peter Strafford of Co. Westmeath, born in 1895, told of the remembered works of Brien Geoghegan:

> For some of the time they were able, through the good offices of Brien Geoghegan of Archerstown, a kind, enlightened, and patriotic farmer to get rice. This they boiled with oatenmeal and made into a porridge. There was a relief depot opened at Archerstown. It was then owned by a man named Doyle. There was a large boiler erected at Doyle' premises and Fr. Dowling, the Parish Priest, put Briend Geoghegan in charge of the depot. This good man, Geoghegan, went every day to Doyle's to see that the Indian meal was cooked clean and right and he himself distributed it to the poor who came for it from as far away as fore.[159]

A survivor of the Famine, Seán Ó Beirne of Malin also related the works of Reverend Canning of the Church of Ireland who ran the soup kitchen at Willie Starret's house and the Young family of landlords in Culdaff who gave free soup to their tenants daily.[160] Despite the good memories of many, there were others who recalled kitchens that mixed chalk, lime, or other inedible products in the free soup to make it appear thicker.[161]

Overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of people in need, the Quakers terminated their own soup kitchens project in 1847. The Friends' Central Relief Committee issued a statement saying that no single organization could sustain the

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[158] Ibid., 129.
[159] "Mrs. Peter Strafford, b. 1895, Delvin, Co. Weastmeath" in *Famine Echoes* ed. Cathal Póirtéir (Dublin: Gil and MacMillan, 1995), 137.
[160] "Sean Mac Cuinneagain, Scoil Mhín an Aodhaire, Carrick, Co. Donegal" in *Famine Echoes* ed. Cathal Póirtéir (Dublin: Gil and MacMillan, 1995), 141.
[161] Póirtéir, *Echoes*, 132-150.

amount of expense and effort needed to provide this direct relief of food. The Quakers working on soup kitchen projects were physically and emotionally exhausted in the face of such destitution. Despite their exhaustion, the Quakers did not conclude all their efforts in Ireland at the same time, but switched their focus to the distribution of seed, small grants, and the revival of the fishing industry. They also spent £7,469 7s 9d in an attempt to provide more work opportunities in County Mayo through farming purely with spade laborer. While none of these projects matched the tremendous success of the soup kitchen scheme, each provided valuable resources to local communities utilizing and improving structures already in place.

For a brief time in 1847, the British Government also ran soup kitchens made possible by the support of the middle classes. Primarily the government used workhouses as central locations to distribute soup and bread. Workhouses did not reach all the outlying districts however and the Treasury issued grants to private citizens as well. These grants enabled many large farmers, landlords, and charitable organizations to set up personal kitchens.[162] These groups still remained eligible for Quaker grants and often depended upon both to run their operations.[163] The government enacted the Destitute Poor (Ireland) and the Temporary Relief Acts in 1847 to provide 'soup or gruel' or 'any food cooked in a boiler' on a combination of rate money and government funds.[164]

[162] O'Grada, *Great Irish,* 45.
[163] Friends, *Transactions,* 44-49.
[164] O'Grada, *Great Irish,* 45.

Officials planned to overlap the opening of these soup kitchens with the closure of the public works.[165][166] The switch to outdoor provision of soup also gave workhouses some respite from the influx of starving persons. They could distribute food directly without increasing the population of their main buildings and annexes.[167] Like the Quaker project, workhouse soup kitchens were ordered closed at the end of 1847 because of Union bankruptcy and the extraordinarily high numbers taking soup.[168] The Treasury based their orders for termination on the supposition that those receiving food on a dole did not take further initiative in finding work. If the soup kitchens closed therefore, the economy would improve and the number of paupers dependent on the government would decrease, because laborers would return to active employment and not wait for food handouts. These predictions turned out to be highly inaccurate. Despite orders for workhouses to end their soup kitchen projects in 1847, not all workhouses complied. Local relief committees either delayed responding to this order or ignored it for as long as possible. Many workhouse soup kitchens remained open until the end of 1847. After 1847, only soup kitchens run by private citizens remained open. These soup kitchens, whether run by Quaker organization, local relief committees, or from the private homes of farmers and landlords relied on the middle classes to collect food, cook the soup and bread, and organize the distribution. Without the middle classes, the kitchens could not have operated and

[165] The public works in 1847 had opened to all classes due to the increasing need among artisans and other skilled workers for relief, therefore the expense had reached unprecedented levels. The alarmed Treasury thought the scheme might go on forever if not terminated.
Friends, *Transactions,* 59.
[166] Kinealy, *Death Dealing,* 102.
[167] Kinealy, *Great Calamity,* 112.
[168] Kinealy, *Great Calamity,* 185.

many more deaths would have been added to the million people who perished in the Famine.

The middle classes stepped into the void created by the absence of sufficient government structures and a paternalist landowning to alleviate the distress caused by the Great Irish Potato Famine. They undertook positions of responsibility in every government initiative (the workhouses, the Public Works, grain distributions, and soup kitchens). Other farmers, merchants, clergy, and professionals added their support in private ways through subscriptions to relief committees and charity given from their homes. Without the unceasing efforts of the middle classes, the British government and the administration at Dublin Castle could never have reached so many people and saved as many lives as they did.

Problematic Figures: Farmers, the Clergy, and Merchants

The efforts of the middle classes rarely appeared in historical writing and never as a central investigation. Part of recovering the neglected face of the middle classes in the Famine, how they emerged as leaders and preformed necessary service, lies in dispelling the mythologies that have built up around them. The mythology rests on accusations of hardened hearts and callous profiteering amongst some professions. High on the list of those who "reaped the benefits" of the Famine are the farmers and the merchants. The clergy too fall into this category of problematic figures, for hardheartedness to the cries of the poor as well as using the Famine to exacerbate sectarian tensions. In this section the roles of these groups are examined and the mythology is dispelled.

By the census of 1851 the average size of farms had increased considerably and it would continue to expand over the next fifty years. Classifications for holding sizes in 1845 ended with the category of 50+ acres, in 1851 the largest category had expanded to 200+ acres. But where did these increases come from when farmers were supposed to be in financial crisis and unable to maintain laborers? The Famine essentially eliminated the conacre peasants of Ireland. Although they still existed in Ireland, by 1851 the number of farms spanning one acre or less had fallen to 37,728 across the country. In 1845 the census had counted 135,314 farms of strictly less than one acre. As stated before the return of the potato blight in 1846 devastated the small farmer. Farmers with the least property, holding one to five acres of land, fell to the status of day laborers after the Famine.[169] Farmers with five to fifteen acres of land sold pieces of their property to larger farmers.[170] Each higher standard of farmer filled numbers of farms directly below his original category as they lost land during the famine. After the Famine rising agricultural production and higher demands for Irish agricultural products enabled these farmers to increase their holding sizes beyond their original limits.

More substantial farmers, holding fifteen to thirty acres, experienced a decrease in profits if not in holding size. They lost the rents from conacre plots paid in labor, potatoes and proceeds of pigs raised by the conacre peasant during the year. Once conacre peasants entered the workhouse, however, they ceased paying rents. Second farmers turned to eating their cash crops in place of the

[169] O'Brien, *Bullocks,* 53.
[170] Ibid.

potatoes consumed by the blight. Finally, the value (read size) of a holding determined the amount of money owed to the poor rates. The poor rates increased annually during the Famine to support the workhouses.[171]

In view of these difficulties, many farmers emigrated: to North America if they could afford it or to other parts of the Empire if they could not.[172] By 1846, farmers accounted for the majority of people fleeing the country. The *Freeman's Journal* reported that of people gathered to take the ship from Ireland to America and perhaps the overland trip to Oregon, all were farmers of a respectable appearance.[173] John Ball corroborated this statement in his report's concluding observations on Ireland in 1849, adding that the farmers departed in the night to avoid paying the last of their rents.[174] Those farmers who stayed in Ireland had the opportunity of accumulating more land and many used this lull in the planting of fields to switch from tillage to pasture and livestock production. Still, farmers did not profit as a group during the years 1845-1851. All varieties of farmers from the smallest to the sturdy had their own difficulties to overcome.

A mythology developed about farmers not only for profiting from the Famine but for being particularly vicious towards the starving who tried to take food from their fields. It appeared cruel to deprive fellow humans of food; and in their methods, perhaps the farmers earned some of their reputation. Fear of poverty, the need to consume part of their crops, and the sheer numbers of the poor led farmers to devise brutal methods of protection to prevent their produce

[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid., 53-54.
[173] *The Freeman's Jounral,* 1 April 1846.
[174] Ball, *What*, 125.

and livestock from being completely decimated by poor in search of food. The folk memory most vividly retained the ruthless "man traps" constructed in fields to capture thieves. A "man trap" consisted of a large hole covered with straw and grass and often filled with water. The water drowned the caught man before help came. Other farmers had more benevolent methods, such as hiring guards to watch over their fields- a method affording both protection and employment.

Protection measures did not arise from spontaneous callousness on the part of the farmers. In Mullingar Union, in the more prosperous province of Leinster, graziers experienced a decline of 23.4% or nearly a quarter of their sheep and cattle in 1847-1849. These animals did not go for sale but got slaughtered by starving men.[175] Damages to livestock included another method to produce food: bleeding. The blood of the animal mixed with meal, grain, or even grass made a substance known as black pudding.[176]

The starving presented the greatest threat to the farmers as a group among the middle classes. Crimes against property focused on the theft or destruction of livestock and harvested grains. It is likely that farmers considered extreme measures such as 'man traps' necessary because they created an impersonal barrier. While guards, even armed guards, presented a risk to those desperate for food, they had sympathy for the suffering. Beyond the difficulties of man traps, farmers' houses offered places of spontaneous charity. The charity, never written down, did not survive in quantifiable numbers. Still folk memory recalled many instances of the poor being allowed to glean the fields for leftover crops missed in

[175] O'Brien, *Bullocks*, 53.
[176] Poirteir, *Echoes*, 68-84.

the harvest.[177] Further, some remembered times where laborers could come into the home and cook their scavenged vegetables in the farmer's pot. Recipients of such charity duly separated their meal by a layer of cabbage from the farmer's own.[178]

Along with the farmers, the clergy represented another group of middle class men whose deeds, both positive and negative, cannot be enumerated precisely. The clergy of both Catholic and Protestant confessions actively participated in all the official charitable efforts listed above. Equipped with the ability to read and write, the clergy interceded with the government on behalf of their people of whatever creed. Parish priests and curates wrote many of the letters received by the government, newspapers, and charitable organizations. In many parishes, the Catholic and Protestant clergymen united in their efforts to bring consolation and physical relief to the poor. Asenath Nicholson reported in her journals of her travel through Ireland that she called on a priest in Louisburgh to find him dining at home with the Protestant curate.[179] However, in other unions, when local clergy could not put aside sectarian antagonisms, relief efforts ground to a halt.

During the Great Famine both the Anglican and the Catholic Church went through periods of revival. Evangelical Protestants entered Ireland with a new missionary zeal in the late 1830s. These missionaries distributed Irish-language Bibles, taught reading classes for adults through the Scripture, and in some

[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Asenath Nicholson, *Lights and Shades of Ireland in Three Parts* (London: Houlston and Stoneman, 1850), 357.

locations practiced souperism. Souperism survived in folk memory as a pervasive phenomenon, but historians categorized the phenomenon as a Famine myth. Only in a few places did food get traded for conversion. These Protestant converts then founded communities including the Dingle colony. Still no one recorded the success or failure of these communities after the Famine and so evidence the viability of the conversion was lost. Folk memory held that souperism existed, but cast it as a clever Irishman's joke on Protestants rather than a viable program. The stories concentrated on how ingenious Irish laborers imposed themselves on Protestant soupers while maintaining their Catholic identity. Others recalled the jumpers, or converts, as subjects of severe harassment by the community at large. This harassment typically led to their re-conversion or their jumper leaving town.[180] The latter view was probably the more accurate.[181] It cannot be stressed enough that souperism was not a pervasive phenomenon and occurred in only isolated locations if it truly occurred at all.

The Catholic clergy also played controversial roles in the Famine period. While the Young Ireland newspaper, *The Nation,* accused priests of remaining silent in the face of suffering, the British government in Ireland claimed that priests incited the people to violence.[182] Evidence exists for both positions. The bishops did not officially chastise the British government for the excessive mortality in Ireland, but they contributed to charitable efforts and championed

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[180] Desmon Bowden, *Souperism: Myth or Reality? A Study in Souperism* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1970), 80-83.

[181] Irene Whalen "The Stigma of Souperism" *Great Irish Famine* ed Cathal Póirtéir (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1985).

[182] Cathaoir, *Diary* , 136.

generosity in relief. Several priests continued with construction projects rather than channeling the money to another purpose, but like the soupers these men were exceptional.[183] The facts stay inconclusive on the charge of provoking the people against the government. Because of the dominance of the Catholic religion, priests took a prominent leadership role in local communities and this time period saw increasing riots and social unrest.[184] Still direct connections between priests and unrest remain obscure. The British Government did connect a priest to the murder of Major Denis Mahon in 1847. This connection did not diminish public support for priests as Mahon had recently evicted scores of peasants already in the most abject condition.

Like private charity in farm houses, the daily role of priests has resisted documentation in precise figures and is remembered mostly through the folk memory and personal records of clergymen. Similar to the doctors, many priests (and some 40 curates) fell victim to the Famine fevers because of their constant presence among the sick. Donal Kerr reproduced the text of an account of Fr. Hugh Quigley of Killaloe in which the priest wrote about rising at four to hear confessions for thirteen hours in an effort to prepare the poor to die. Fr. Quigley found the dinner hour even more challenging, however, as while he ate, starving people would call out to him for food. He said of this, "In truth the priest must

[183] O'Grada, *Black '47,* 59.
[184] Ibid., 59.

either harden his heart against the cry of misery, or deprive himself of his usual nourishment to keep victims from falling at his door."[185]

Merchants left a problematic record as well. Folk memory recorded the merchant as a man of many tricks and much prosperity in the period. Three examples from the collection *Famine Echoes* presented the merchant class in the general view of folk memory. Charles Clarke of Bailieboro spoke of a workhouse milk supplier who substituted chalk mixed with water. He cancelled his contract but in the following auction of the right he won the bid. It is believed that he provided real milk on the second occasion.[186] Kathleen Hurley transcribed the story of a Famine survivor, a man described as near ninety years old. His father, a baker, used to wash himself in the workhouse kitchen before leaving the building for fear that people would see the flour on his body and eat him.[187] Also, people declared that millers stayed busy during the Famine and it was the dearest ambition of the landlords to marry the miller's daughter.[188]

The middle classes criticized the merchants as much as the lower classes. The editors of the *Waterford Freeman* reported on the Dungarvan export protest in October of 1846 and implicated the merchants (along with the British government) in inducing the famine. The quote printed in this article was one of the most well known:

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[185] Donal Kerr, *A Nation of Beggars? Priests, People, and Politics in Famine Ireland, 1846-1852*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 40-42.
[186] "Charles Clark, b.1873, Tullynaskeagh, Bailieboro, Co.Cavan" in *Famine Echoes* ed. Cathal Póirtéir (Dublin: Gil and MacMillan, 1995), 125..
[187] "Kirby", *Echoes*, 128.
[188] Póirtéir, *Echoes*, 68-84.

> Merchants are closing their stores, already counting their gains, and gloating over the misery by which they hope to enrich themselves. If provision depots were thought necessary last season, how much more so are they needed now, when there is scarcely a single sound potato in the land?[189]

This image however does not give an accurate picture. In the first place, the food did not all sail away from Ireland; plenty of food stayed at home and in the marketplaces. The problem was the lack of money to purchase it. Table 1 shown below compared he ratio of exports to imports recorded in the famine years. This chart reveals that in the critical years of the Great Famine the tonnage of imports heavily outweighed that of exports. In fact, in 1846, exports shrank by nearly fifty percent. A similar table could be made of the exports and imports of grains as documented by Cormac O'Grada.[190] Another point that O'Grada made was that if the exports had been banned, the merchant classes and farmers would have suffered financially for it.[191]

Also, all the Indian corn and meal imported into Ireland by the British government, the Quakers or the private charities passed through the hands of Irish merchants. American ships did not carry insurance that covered travel on Ireland's dangerous Western coastlines, so Irish merchants had to transfer the grains to their own ships and complete the journey. Moreover, once in the coastal areas, it had to be transported across Ireland to the inland areas.[192] The British

[189] "Riot in Dungarvan," *Waterford Freeman,* 3 October 1846.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid.,125.
[192] Haine, *Trevelyan,* 181.

Table 1: Export to Import Ratios, 1844-1848[193]

Year	Exports (in Tons)	Imports (in tons)
1844	424,000	30,000
1845	513,000	28,000
1846	284,000	197,000
1847	146,000	889,000
1848	314,000	439,000

Treasury covered the expense of steamers.[194] Merchants were able to sustain this practice because supplies of grain were sent piecemeal in low quantities that could be shipped with other cargo. Most importantly, however, the imports brought in by merchants in the Famine years consisted of the same Indian meal and other cheap grains that fed millions.

Finally, a financial crisis in the year 1847 impacted merchants' ability to make sound profits. The crisis was concentrated mainly in Britain, but runs on banks created a situation in which credit prices rose. Bank runs also dramatically decreased the money in circulation from 7,303,366 notes to 4,078,255 notes between 1846 and 1850.[195] Numerous businesses filed for bankruptcy in these four years. While profiteering did occur as a result of the Famine, the merchant class as a group followed a similar pattern to that of the farming classes. They experienced significant problems with smaller holders folding under the financial crisis, the drop in currency circulation, and the decrease in spending during the Famine years.

While folk memory and even the newspapers have recorded instances of individual profiteering, the middle classes as a group did not profit during directly

[193] O'Grada, *Black 47*, 122-124.
[194] Ibid.
[195] O'Grada, *Great Irish*, 46-47,

from the Famine. Economic recovery came soon after the end of the Famine and many were much more prosperous with new land opening and with higher wages for laborers, but during the years 1845-1851 profits were rare across the board.[196] These mythologies that have persisted so long in the historic record are exactly that: myths that obscured the actual place of the middle classes in the forefront of relief efforts.

[196] O'Grada, *Black '47,* 122-156.

Chapter Four: Emergence of the Middle Classes as a Political Factor, 1851-1881

Not only did the middle class farmers, doctors, merchants, and clergy emerge as local leaders during the Famine, the radical social impact of the Famine catapulted the middle classes to a new political prominence on a national scale. In the 1820s led by Daniel O'Connell, Irish Catholics campaigned for the right to vote. The Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 not only permitted Catholics to become MPs; it also tightened voting regulations and disfranchised more than 80% of Ireland's voters. To qualify for the vote, a man was now required to hold property, whether land or business, worth £10 or more. The bureaucracy of registration, the subsequent inspection of property ever eight years, and the question of exactly what was £10 of property, however, prevented large numbers of voters from being listed.[197] Therefore the landlords' votes continued to outweigh those of the middle classes. Near the end of the Famine in 1850, the British Parliament passed a second reform act to more accurately define who was eligibile to vote. Irish politics did not change immediately after this second reform. Ireland's middle classes continued to be absorbed by the Famine relief efforts. Also this reform shared the same problems of registration with the previous reform. Then between 1852 and 1853, a third Irish reform act passed the

[197] K. Theodore Hoppen, *Elections Politics, and Society in Ireland, 1832-1885* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1984), 2.

British Parliament. This time the property qualification rose to £12 and the registration process was streamlined.[198]

Now decisive changes could occur in Irish politics resulting from the impacts of the Famine. Men of the middle classes, due to recovery windfalls in agricultural and industrial markets after the Famine, now qualified in large numbers for the vote. Average farm sizes increased significantly after the Famine. Irish graziers bought out the encumbered estates of old landlords. Other farmers purchased lands abandoned by emigrants or cleared of cottiers and conacre peasants. The population of farmers with the vote was steadily increasing. Also in 1853, the Crimean War began and Irish merchants and tillage farmers profited by selling grains and supplies to the army.[199] As the chart below demonstrates, the new legislation opened up the electorate to middle class voters so that by 1853 the middle classes held the largest percentage of votes in the county elections. (See Table 2.)

The middle classes, in particular, farmers in the rural areas soon dominated elections. They also formed the base membership for new movements towards social and political changes.[200] Still the urban middle classes did not go unheard in elections. The Dublin electorate in 1842 was composed of 26% "Gentlemen," 11% "Professionals" 11% "Merchants and commercial," 22% Shopkeepers" and 17% "Artisans." Despite this the urban middle classes had

[198] Ibid, 21.
[199] Lee, *Modernization,* 40.
[200] Hoppen, *Elections,* 104-105.

Table 2: County Electorate in 1853 Classed by Property Value [201]

Property Value	Percentage of County Electorate
£8 to £24	62.9
£25 to £49	23.7
£50 +	13.4

fewer numbers than the rural middle classes. Surprisingly urban middle classes did not mobilize as effectively for political causes. Political and social movements found individuals of the urban middle classes most useful in providing the organization and leadership for mobilizing working classes in support of causes.[202]

Parallel to this new prominence in the electorate, the Catholic middle classes increased their numbers in government and civil positions. In 1833, for example, Catholics totaled about a quarter of the Justices of the Peace (JPs); but by the early 1850s they held almost half of the positions.[203] Catholic voters returned Catholic Members of Parliament (MPs). In 1832, the electorate sent twenty-six Catholic and forty-nine Protestant MPs to Westminster. But in 1852 the number practically reversed with forty-three Catholics and twenty-two Protestants sent to Parliament. By the 1870s, the Protestants became the minority with nineteen Protestant representatives to fifty-one Catholics.[204]

The Famine reorganized society by increasing the numbers of the middle classes in the subsequent period of prosperity. It also changed Irish politics in three ways. First, it gave nationalism a new and more solid hold on the minds of

[201] Chart based on chart provided in Hoppen, *Elections*, 21.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Ibid., 262
[204] Ibid., 264.

Irish intellectuals, not exclusively but more often than not Catholic.[205] Second, it created a newly prosperous and largely conservative rural middle classes who tended to be suspicious of towns and radical politics. Finally, it indirectly created the Tenant League of 1850-1853.

Nationalism on the Rise: Daniel O'Connell, Young Ireland, and the Fenians

The Famine furnished the middle classes with a common history, but to form a class conscious identity they also needed common cause. Nationalist causes existed in Ireland before the Act of Union in 1801 that created the United Kingdom among the educated classes. They had created movements such as the 1798 rebellion and heroes like Wolfe Tone. The Act of Union produced a new nationalist drive for the Repeal of Union. After the Emancipation Act of 1829, Catholic middle classes had Catholic representation for their interests in the British Parliament, but after the Famine these classes backed their interests with new political influence. The question of Repeal had several advantages in consolidating the middle classes' identities into a more cohesive unit. First, the question promised benefits to the middle classes. Repealing the Act of Union would give Irish merchants and farmers freedom from British trade restrictions. Daniel O' Connell launched an association, the Repeal Association, in April of 1840, to create political agitation supporting the cause of Repeal. This association utilized the same tactics that had won the Catholic Emancipation Act. Second, the timing coincided with increasing political power among the middle classes to

[205] Hoppen, *Elections,* 116.

help them drive the issue. Finally, the issue could unite voters from the middle classes across all the provinces, although nationalism was less popular in Ulster's heavily Protestant counties.

In order to create and maintain momentum among Irish voters, the middle classes needed groups to discuss Repeal politics, create propaganda, and organize demonstrations. In doing so, they could unite working class support behind middle class issues. The Repeal Association's token fee kept membership open to all classes. Unlike Catholic Emancipation, the Repeal movement also targeted Protestants and strove for nonsectarian membership in the vein of previous movements like the United Irishmen. Repealers founded a second organization to disseminate O'Connell's politics in the North: the Belfast Repeal Association. In all Ireland, the working classes formed backbone of the association in terms of numbers while the middle classes served as the intellectual core and leadership cadre.

The Repeal movement spread propaganda through newspapers targeted at the middle classes and mass meetings organized by members of the middle class. Not yet in the ascendancy, the middle classes had to express their interests through visible numbers in demonstrations and meetings. Information passed through the nationalist newspapers and stimulated interest in the nationalist cause. That men from middle class backgrounds produced these newspapers and could use them to simultaneously promote other middle class issues only increased their utility in bringing about a new sense of identity. Nationalist newspapers each targeted specific regions. For example, the *Freeman's Journal* reported in the

south while the *Vindicator* sold subscriptions in Belfast. Later, *The Nation*, the mouthpiece of the Young Ireland movement had a national audience. The Repeal Associations set up "repeal reading rooms" that kept copies of these and other newspapers as well as nationalist pamphlets and books. These reading rooms ensured that the working classes also had access to these media despite subscription costs. Admission to the rooms was free.[206]

Despite these efforts among the middle classes progress remained slow and the issue of Repeal made no headway in the British Parliament. Also O'Connell's politics, increasingly sectarian, held up progress in recruitment. That O'Connell would push the Catholic nature of nationalism was unsurprising, since the majority of his supporters and constituents were Catholic. Still it was not a satisfactory development, particularly among intellectual idealists.[207] A revolutionary, non sectarian strain of the Repeal Association formed under the name Young Ireland. Eventually in 1846, this group separated from the Repeal Association and became an independent and militant movement. This split, the death of O'Connell in 1857, and the disastrous impact of the Famine on the working and middle classes spelled the end of the Repeal Association. By 1847 it had ceased its activities.

Nationalism did not die among the middle classes after their Repeal Association split up in 1847. Young Ireland continued to flourish during the next year. Several crucial differences kept it alive after the death of the Repeal

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[206] Catherine Hirst, *Religion, Politics, and Violence in Nineteenth Century Belfast: The Pound and Sandy Row* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), 57.
[207] Ibid., 60.

movement. First, it was international. Since Young Ireland appealed to force to remove the British Government from Irish soil, its cause attracted many former Irish emigrants abroad, particularly in America. Unfortunately, these contacts did not yield as much aid as they would later provide the Fenian movement and the IRA.[208] Second, as the Repeal Association became more Catholic, the Young Ireland movement remained decidedly nonsectarian. As a result, members of the Protestant Operatives Association and the Orange Order harassed Repeal Associations meetings, but they left Young Ireland gatherings unmolested.[209] Non-sectarian in their policies allowed Young Ireland to continue to draw support from the middle classes from all four provinces and all religious denominations.

The Young Ireland movement drew on a highly motivated leadership drawn from the middle classes. They formed the intellectual core of the group which constructed its objectives. The Young Ireland group used this middle class interest to fuel a separate political movement known as the Irish Confederation.[210] The Confederation party led by Smith O'Brien, John Lawlor, and Gavan Duffy loosely associated with the Irish Party led by upper-class landlords.[211] The Confederation created a Council which consisted of thirty-nine members all drawn from the middle classes: clergy, Catholic MPs, JPs, and the Young Ireland leaders.[212] Unofficially the Irish Confederation became known as the "war party"

[208] Richard Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement* (Dublin: Gil and MacMillan, 1987), 2.
[209] Hirst, *Belfast*, 65-66.
[210] Davis, *Young Ireland*, 116-117.
[211] Ibid., 117.
[212] Ibid., 119.

while O'Connell's followers represented the "peace party."[213] Completely outnumbered and shunned as political allies the Repeal party continued to make no headway. Therefore, in 1848, the year of revolutions, Young Ireland staged its own rebellion in July.

The effect of following in the wake of France, however, was entirely negative. Excesses of the rising middle classes there against the French elites and government alarmed Protestant elites across the country. In Britain Lord John Russell was ever on the alert and almost fearful for an Irish Rebellion. The excess of the Revolution in France also took a toll on middle and working class public opinion in Ireland as well. Negative associations with revolutionary nationalism siphoned sympathy away from the Young Ireland movement until practically none remained. Even the clergy withdrew its support.[214] Claredon wrote in a letter: "The priests…are now like Frankenstein. They recoil at the monster of their own creation."[215] This lack of approval and even rebuke from the Catholic clergy constituted a major blow to the Young Ireland rebellion and greatly reduced the numbers that actually joined the fight in July.[216] The rebellion did not last long and the last fires were extinguished by police headquartered in Widow McCormack's house.[217]

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[213] Hirst, *Belfast*, 60.
[214] The only clergy man to turn out for the rebellion was a Fr. Edmund Prendergast of Ballingarry. Kerr records him as a "senile [old man]…who cheerfully marched off at the head of the rebel army and returned to fraternize as happily with the soldiers a few days later."
Kerr, *Beggars*, 153.
[215] Kerr, *Beggars*, 151.
[216] Ibid., 152-155.
[217] Ibid. 153.

Again, despite the fiasco, the involvement of the middle classes in nationalism in Ireland did not completely die. Those survivors of the Young Ireland movement not imprisoned began the Fenian organization.[218] The leaders of the Fenians came from lower middle class backgrounds, or blue collar workers: Stephens was a civil engineer, Rossa, a grocer, Duffy, a shopkeeper and Nolan was a commercial traveler.[219] The Catholic Church establishment immediately proscribed the Fenians because they were a secret society[220] Nevertheless the Fenians recruited large numbers to their cause. At its height in 1865, the group recorded 50,000 members from all classes: shopkeepers, tradesmen, clerks, artisans, white collar workers, blue collar workers, skilled and unskilled laborers, even soldiers.[221] Like Young Ireland the group relied on international membership and support, especially from America. The Fenians also staged an abortive rebellion in 1867 when they declared an Irish republic. The survivors from this fiasco would continue the nationalist cause by building new revolutionary groups.[222]

Unlike the Young Ireland movement, this group represented a new development in the nationalist bands. The British Government kept a closer eye on Irish nationalist groups in the wake of the 1848 Young Ireland rebellion and the continental revolutions. The militant revolutionary nature of the Fenian groups therefore imposed the risk of prison, exile, or even death for its

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[218] Hirst, *Belfast*, 94.
[219] Lee, *Modernization, 57.*
[220] Hirst, *Belfast*, 95.
[221] Ibid., 97.
[222] Alan O' Day and John Stevenson, ed., *Irish Historical Documents since 1800* (Gil and MacMillan, 1992), 74-75.

members.[223] The Fenians also caused trouble by repeatedly clashing with equally violent secret Protestant societies in the Ulster province. A nationalist identity may have been trendy without real commitments beyond a newspaper subscription, but now the Fenians had graduated to an earnest endeavor.

The Nationalist causes whether Repeal, Young Ireland, or later Fenians gave two advances to a cohesive middle class identity. Members of the middle classes constructed the intellectual core of these movements. They gained common cause in the belief that the removal of British law and forces from Ireland would grant them new political and social powers currently denied. For example, Irish business concerns in the food and wool markets could operate free from the control of English and Scottish interests. Taxes on imports and exports would be determined in Dublin. The middle classes also organized on a national level not in the desperation caused by the Famine but for political purposes. Although class consciousness did not immediately bloom, the middle classes had taken a first step.

The Tenant League, the Land League, and the Question of Tenant Rights

A second political cause excited nationwide support from the middle classes between 1851 and 1881: tenant rights. This movement shared several characteristics with the Nationalist movement. Political power through rising middle class presence in the electorate forced British politicians to take the movement seriously. Achieving the goals of the movement again meant benefits

[223] Hirst, *Belfast,* 97-100.

to the middle classes, specifically farmers. Also the cause itself crossed regional borders and lines of religion, even if individual groups did not. Finally the middle classes' interest in this cause did not end in 1881. Unlike nationalism, however, agitation from the middle classes on the issue of tenant rights secured political concessions from the British Parliament.

Two members of the Catholic clergy, Shea and O' Keeffe, began the work of establishing a movement to protect the rights of Tenants in 1847 and 1848.[224] Their attempts failed for a number of reasons: first the priests initially attempted to form groups in Munster. The southern counties of Munster had fewer men of the middle classes necessary to organize and contribute funds than the eastern counties where the first successful groups formed. Second, even had there been a group of men able to organize and mobilize their communities, these were the worst years of the Famine. What capable men were available were consumed with survival and relief efforts or were urban dwellers with no interest in Tenant Rights.

In 1849, the two priests established the Tenant Right Group in County Kilkenny. This county had a higher percentage of strong farmers – the group most likely to be interested in the political cause. By July 1850, not only had the original group succeeded but the priests had founded another twenty societies in Ireland.[225] Groups drew membership mainly from strong farmers whose holdings were greater than ten acres.[226] In August, three professionals in the newspaper

[224] Lee, *Modernization,* 39.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Ibid., 40.

business – Gavan Duffy of Young Ireland's *Nation*, Sir John Grey of the *Freeman's Journal*, and Frederick Lucas of the *Tablet* - formed an umbrella organization to coordinate these individual groups on a national scale: the Tenant League Association.[227] The League had a goal of achieving legislation guaranteeing the three F's, or fixity of tenure, fair rents, and the right of free sale, sometimes known as Ulster Custom in the north. The Tenant League Association claimed that it had united all Irish hearts, Catholic and Protestant alike behind the question of Tenant Rights and so was sometimes referred to as the League of North and South.[228]

This statement was not necessarily true. The issue of land reform only affected farmers of the middle classes who would benefit from security of tenure. Also while it gave benefits to both Protestant and Catholic farmers, the question of Tenant Rights did not completely supersede sectarian tensions. Ulster farmers had a vested interest in the three F's particularly that of free sale, which had been a custom in the province from time immemorial. Free sale allowed a tenant on the brink of eviction to sell the right to rent to the next tenant and thus gain compensation for any improvements which he had made to the property. The legislation sought by the Tenant Right League would set Ulster Custom in stone and prevent Ulster landlords from changing their current policies. On the other hand, Belfast's Catholic and Protestant sections had divided violently over sectarian issues. Particularly virulent sections of the city were known as the Pound (Catholic) and Sandy Row (Protestant). Working class societies constantly

[227] Ibid., 39.
[228] Hoppen, *Elections,* 266.

fueled the fire of sectarianism through acts of aggression. The reappearance of the Catholic Ribbonmen and the Orange Order and the rhetoric of clergy on both sides against the other side also exacerbated tensions.[229] Hearts united behind the concepts of free sale, fair rent, and fixity of tenure but in separate Protestant and Catholic Tenant Leagues in the Ulster Province.

Many of the farmers, while they understood the benefits of the reforms, joined the group in the 1850s due to poor harvests. Fields yielded only portions of what they had produced in recent years. Agriculture in Leinster and Ulster rested on wheat and barley; and since 1847 the output of these crops had been remarkably low.[230] The wheat and barley shortages had not yet caused panic on the same scale as the potato crop failures, but with the Famine still in recent memory these issues seemed increasingly important. The National League did what the local groups couldn't have done: they captured national attentions in the early 1850s. The new electorate had a large percentage of strong farmers and accordingly their representatives took their concerns to the British Parliament.[231]

The legislation desired by these leagues did not materialize in the 1850s, because the movement fizzled. In 1853 with profits coming in the wake of the start of the Crimean War and with a recovery in the percentages of wheat and barley harvested, the farmers lost interest in the Tenant Leagues membership declined significantly.[232] The British Parliament also resisted the three F's because they assumed that granting them in Ireland would cause demand for them

[229] Hirst, *Belfast*.
[230] Lee, *Modernization,* 39, 41.
[231] Edgar Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli* (London: Arnold, 2000), 208.
[232] Lee, *Modernization,* 42.

in England. Also the Irish upper classes did not support the measures. They viewed the League with hostility because the three F's affected the rights of the landlords. At the same time, the lower classes were indifferent to the cause and again almost hostile. One farm laborer remarked that "The farmers are well enough off."[233]

Still the question of tenant rights as a middle class issue would reappear two decades later for similar reasons. The successor to the Tenant Leagues arrived in 1877 when yet another bad harvest threatened Irish agriculture. Both the wheat and potato crops repeatedly failed in 1877, 1879 and 1880. Beyond these failures, domestic grain prices declined because of an influx in imports of American and Ukrainian grains at cheap rates. The Famine was still close enough in memory that mobilization of the middle classes began immediately. Mobilization was made all the more effective by the experience of the failed Tenant Rights' League. The resulting movement, called the Land League, began as a national group. It still represented the interests of the rural middle classes but on a more widespread basis and with more interest from the smaller farmers no longer in the crisis of the Famine years.[234]

Having learned from the failure of the Tenant League, the movement still called for the three F's but national objectives overrode local chapters' aims.[235] This structure enabled the national authority and the local organizers to keep the

[233] Hoppen, *Elections,* 101.
[234] K. Theodore Hoppen, *Ireland Since 1800: Conflict and Conformity* (London: Longman, 1989), 96.
[235] Lee, *Modernization,* 95.

First Land War as it was termed alive long enough to create results.[236] Also, by 1870, the spread of literacy and personal wealth had reached a point that most towns supported two or three newspapers by 1870.[237] Backed by an increasing political nationalism and what Joseph Lee terms the "revolution of rising expectations"[238] the League gained the momentum to make waves in Parliament even as its predecessor had done in 1852. This time however, the effect was more potent. Prime Minister William Gladstone ran for office in 1889 on the motto "My mission is to pacify Ireland." Gladstone was driven in the pursuit of a solution to the so called Irish problem by both Irish momentum and his own sense of responsibility towards Ireland. When in office he tried to achieve this end by pushing through the first Land Acts of 1880 which became law in 1881. Making these reforms into British Law ended Gladstone's government but it started the land reform that the middle classes had been seeking since the Famine days.

[236] Hoppen, *Ireland*, 95.
[237] Hoppen, *Elections*, 459.
[238] Lee, *Modernization*, 70.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

In this paper, I have made two arguments: first, the middle classes were an essential part of the official and private relief efforts during the Great Famine. Second, I contended that this role in the relief efforts formed a first step in building increasingly cohesive strata of middle classes more conscious of their common social and economic identity. This interconnectedness formed during the Famine years expressed itself almost immediately in the formation of political groups aimed at achieving goals perceived as beneficial to the middle classes, namely Repeal of the Union and the Tenant Leagues.

In seeking to prove the first point I acknowledged the fact that the middle classes were by no means the perfect purveyors of charity, having their own interests to look out for in a time of crisis. However, they did take the leading position in the administration of Famine relief. This leadership of the efforts was natural because the men of the middle classes were already in place while landlords were largely absentees. The Poor Law system had been created in the 1830s and so Poor Law Guardians were already established in their positions. As middlemen for larger landlords or as landlords themselves to their subtenants, men of the middle classes who formed local relief committees in the rural areas had an intimate familiarity with the dependent nature of the laboring and conacre classes. Also these men could read and write and ran their own businesses whether farms, shops, or services. These characteristics allowed the assumption

that they could and would run relief operations on principles of efficiency. Finally, as neighbors and members of the same community circles, particularly in small rural areas, the relief committee members were able to place social checks on stinginess of those solvent enough to contribute to the subscription letters. As shown above, those found to be derelict in the duty of providing for the poor were shamed by the publication of newspaper reports of their parsimony.

Although the middle classes covered a wide range of professions and levels of affluence, the tendencies enumerated above remained consistent in all four provinces. Leinster and Ulster, having larger middle classes, still had a social structure that relied on conacre plots and created a class of laborers dependent on cheap food staples, particularly the potato. Only the lesser degree of dependence on Treasury loans to maintain relief works differentiated Leinster and Ulster from Connacht and Munster. A larger concentration of middle and upper classes, and a higher concentration of newspapers to discourage miserliness, allowed for the rates and subscriptions to amass larger sums in the northern and eastern counties. In Ulster it was later a matter of local pride that many of their own workhouses had never been subsidized by a government loan.[239]

As the men on the front lines of the government relief efforts, both indoor and outdoor, members of the middle classes made the decisions of how rigidly to enforce the policies and workhouse tests handed down by British government officials, how much meal and soup to distribute and at what price. This position

[239] Kinealy, *Calamity,* 44.

of being the men in charge of relief in a local setting had two qualities that were crucial for changing the middle classes' sense of their identity. First, it gave them an opportunity to form contacts through merchants, Quakers, and investigators outside their own community in the struggle to procure and dispense relief. Second, the experience of the Famine in Ireland was universal to the middle classes on the frontlines of relief and therefore provided the shared experience of Weber's definition of community. This experience established the middle classes as leaders in their communities, filling the place of the absent landlords. The middle classes later utilized this position to organize and mobilize the working classes for political causes. The Famine created a common history that allowed later generations of merchants, farmers, and professionals to imagine themselves as part of a larger community in a distinct position between the government and the people.

The Famine also highlighted the social boundaries of class in Irish society. The middle classes ran relief operations with limited support of the landlord class. The Encumbered Estates Act of 1849 forced landlords to sell by depriving them of the ability to maintain their lifestyle through debts on their estate. Those landlords who retained their property still embodied the traditional image of being the enemy in popular imagination. Meanwhile, the lands sold by the Act were not bought by foreign or English landlords as had been intended, but more often by larger Irish farmers, graziers, or conglomerates of farmers. The purchase of these lands increased their social standing and enabled them to make larger profits in the immediate boom of prosperity which followed the Famine.

On the other end of the spectrum the Famine cemented the lines between the working and middle classes. The removal of the lowest orders of the middle classes left a substantial gap between those who had wealth and those did not. Emigration of the lowest middle classes in order to find employment or better opportunities would continue to thin the population and widen this gap for decades after the Famine. Meanwhile, the prosperity ushered in after the Famine increased the profits of businessmen and farmers across the board, while the excess money from sales did not necessarily bolster the laborers' wages at the same rate. Conacre plots still existed after the Famine ended and since these men still did not handle currency, they continued to remain significantly below the line dividing the lower and middle classes.

If the Famine period changed the economic and social landscape of Irish society, it combined with the new policies on the electorate to fundamentally alter the political landscape as well. The middle classes, holding property valued between £8 to £49 comprised over three quarters of the county electorates after 1850. The percentage of Catholic middle class men in local Irish government grew rapidly in the same period of time. Now the middle classes had attained the political clout with which they could make their own particular issues heard in government.

Articulating their grievances allowed the middle classes to discover common cause on a national level, for example in Repeal and Tenant Rights. This was critical to the formation of a class identity but the process was not completed in a few short years. Instead it was a development in the longer

progression. The fact that both organizations dissolved before attaining their long term goal was proof of this. The Famine itself interrupted the drive for Repeal of Union. The faltering of the Tenant Leagues of the 1850s was even more telling. When the food crisis was over, the momentum died and the Leagues fell apart. The agitation of the 1850s desired more to create protection against crises similar to the Famine they had recently faced than to secure political rights for the middle classes.

These national middle class endeavors in the Tenant League and the Repeal Association, although failing themselves, prepared the way for later initiatives. The Tenant League's failure exposed the need for articulated national interests to preserve momentum driven not by many local fires but by paramount central ideas. When the Land Wars began in the 1870s, the Land Leagues organized themselves first nationally with local chapters, instead of the reverse, as had been the case in the Tenant League where the umbrella group came after the formation of more than twenty local initiatives. Ultimately, this group succeeded in achieving the three F's through the Land Reform of 1880-1 under Gladstone; however, the groups did not dissolve and the Land War continued for several more years as the League pushed for further reforms. The middle classes had moved one step closer to perceiving themselves as a community with common interests instead of an association of property owners striving toward a common goal until it was achieved.

The lessons of the nationalist movements were perhaps less clear. The cause of nationalism, although prevalent in the middle classes of Ireland at this

time, had diverse goals and methods. These two issues in particular prevented the movement from achieving political unity: how far should nationalism go? And how was it to be achieved? On the one hand, the Repeal Association and parliamentary nationalism of the type practiced by O'Connell reached first for Home Rule. On the other hand, groups like Young Ireland, and later the Fenians, pushed for complete independence. O'Connell's parliamentary nationalists desired to use peaceful political agitation; revolutionary nationalists like Young Ireland saw no alternative but eviction of the British by force.

While, the Tenant League's failure to achieve results in legislation taught immediate and apparent lesson in organization, namely the unifying national cause must take precedence of local causes, the nationalist movement continued to be plagued by the two problems mentioned above (and in some respects, still are plagued in Northern Ireland). The Fenians' abortive rising of 1867, pursued by too few men in the face of overwhelming odds, was followed by the Easter Rising of 1916, which arguably would have been just as forgotten as the rebellion of 1867, had the British not pursued such harsh punitive measures. Parliamentary nationalists also repeatedly suffered set-backs and defeats, culminating in the postponement of the finally achieved Home Rule for the duration of the Great War.

Yet all this came later in the long nineteenth century. As for the Famine, the event had a wide-ranging impact that went far beyond the million who died and the second million and a half who left the country. The years 1845-1851 saw the middle classes of Ireland take shape and assume responsibility providing local

relief for a national disaster. In return for taking this essential role the middle classes gained a new common history as men who had struggled against the dearth of potatoes and the deficiency of government funds and aid. This common history significantly altered the course of Irish history by consolidating the middle classes of Ireland and awakening them to their unique position between the government and the people. The Famine established nation wide connections and fostered national causes that furthered the class development and ushered in a period in which the middle classes increasingly dominated the politics of Ireland.

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