

The Great Famine: Contemporary Voices

The Great Famine of 1845 - 1847 forever changed Ireland, England and the United States. The population of Ireland declined by two and a half million people, and the population of America cities like New York exploded with Irish immigrants, and the already hostile relations between England and Ireland worsened. Collected here are quotations from various sources in Ulster contemporaneous with the famine years.

"We had a field of potatoes that year in the back lane, and in one night they were struck with the blight and both tops and roots were blackened." James Brown, **Tyrone**.

"I have not words to describe the state of destitution of this quarter of the country from want of a supply of food for sales The Relief Committee most earnestly desire me to call your humane and immediate attention to the situation and utter destitution of the people." Rev. James Ovens, **Donegal**.

"It strikes the people as being very unfeeling on our part to keep corn in the store without issuing it ... I hope I may soon get authority to issue." Deputy-Assistant-Commissary-General Gem, **Donegal**.

"It would be impossible to exaggerate the awful destitution that exists in the town of Clones and neighborhood ... The number of deaths in the Clones workhouse, during the last week, has been twenty-five, at the lowest." The **Fermanagh** Report, 1846

"Landlords of Antrim! will you - can you, in the face of all these facts, compel us to sell our cows, or part with the only portion of bread which remains for the support of our families, in order to satisfy your claims? ... Landlords, ye are men, and thiak, and feel, and pity, and love as men." **Antrim**.

"The very small farmers, I am sorry to say, are now compelled to commence consuming the small stack of corn they had intended for seed for this year's crop, and in most instances, their stack-yards will be completely empty in the month hence." Captain Brereton, **Down**.

"I do not exaggerate when I tell you that from the moment I open my hall door in the morning until dark, I have a crowd of women and children crying out for something to save them from starving." George Dawson, **Derry**.

"The people thrown out of work have no resource whatsoever, hundreds spend days without food, and in the absence of proper subsistence have recourse to most unwholesome diet. Their deserted and wretched cabins, their forlorn and distressing look, with pain and sickness so dreadfully depicted in every countenance, is horribly painful to look at; and with all this human misery, there is no person putting his shoulder to the burthen - no proper efforts are being made to relieve the people. How it will end, God only knows." 1847, **Monaghan**.

"It now a thing of daily occurrence to see haggard, sallow and emaciated beings, stricken down by fever or debility from actual want, stretched prostrate upon the footways of our streets and villages." Belfast News Letter, 1847.

"I have frequently heard of the horrors of Skibbereen quoted, but they can hardly have exceeded these." Temporary Inspector D'Arcy, **Fermanagh**.

"That million and a half men, women and children, were carefully, prudently, and peacefully slain by the English government." Rev. John Mitchell.

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