

Chapter 3

Ireland Famine

ABSTRACT

*Irish Potato Famine, which took place between 1845 and 1852, had devastating effects both in the period and in the following years. One of the most important effects of this was related to human losses without doubt. Even today, Irish population has not reached pre-famine numbers. The fungus named *Phytophthora infestans*, which caused this famine, was actually seen in potatoes in other countries in Europe during that time. But this did not cause any great destruction as it has caused in Ireland. Human losses as a result of this disaster were due to deaths and migrations. There have been great migrations from Ireland to countries such as Australia, Canada, and especially to USA. The inhumane policies of the British government that did little to prevent or ease the famine, even stating that the Irish themselves were at fault, created such hatred that it fueled the Irish War of Independence in 1919-1921.*

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, Ireland has always been economically, politically and socially dependent on the British government and the throne. In the 1800s, Ireland had only one textile factory in the North, in Dublin there were the “Guinness Brewery” and the “Jacobs Biscuit Factory”. Ireland mostly provided cheap raw materials for the United Kingdom. Among the products shipped were mostly timber, beef, vegetables and marble. In Ireland, whose economy was largely based on agriculture, the peasants who made their

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-6505-9.ch003

living from potatoes, from which they bought the most, had to pay money to the British administration in order to own land. From the time they first conquered Ireland, British Kings have given Irish land to famous people or generals who faithfully served the British throne. The landlords who acquired most of the land in Ireland in this way actually lived in England. Especially during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, English immigrants were settled on Irish lands, which were turned into “plantations”, and the Scottish region in the northeast of Ulster, one of the most important cities of the country, was also colonized. The main purpose of the British government, which followed an expansionist policy, was to consolidate its economic superiority and to expand and strengthen its dominance over the country by placing the British and Protestant aristocracy on the island. British government tried to achieve this aim with the Penal Laws, under which Ireland was governed throughout the eighteenth century. Since the Irish were prohibited by the Penal Code from buying land, the islanders had only obtained the right to lease the land from these landowners. Besides, these landowners did not allow the Irish to speak their own language which caused a decline in their culture. Middle-class Irish farmers (Middlemen) who leased their large landholdings gained power and status, as most landlords did not live on their estates in Ireland. This group has generally had a good life. Some workers were working seasonally for low wages at harvest time. The wives and children of the workers who went to work in other places other than the harvest time, took care of the products in these rented lands. The lands of the peasant farmers, who were relatively better off than the workers, were generally around 20 acres. These farmers were raising wheat and other grain crops, also raised potatoes for themselves, like workers in addition to livestock. At the end of the season, they were selling their products to pay their rent. These peasant farmers sometimes split up their fields and sold them to workers growing potatoes (Thornton, 2004; Gribben, 1999).

Within the existing land system, the bulk of the Irish people was dependent on the land. While Irish farmers were completely dependent on potatoes. Potatoes both yielded more crops than wheat in the field, and the climate of the island of Ireland, acidic and moist soils provided a more favorable environment for the cultivation of this product. Potatoes were also a major source of income for the villagers. Because land rents were high, Irish farmers could not find time to grow their own crops. That's why they were growing

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