

# THE IRISH POTATO FAMINE

## *AN GORTA MÓR*

OF 1845/1846

AND ITS AFTERMATH

IN NEW ENGLAND

(IN A BROAD CONTEXT)



"Until Ireland can be famished, it cannot be subdued."  
— Edmund Spenser



It is my judgment that most treatments of the Irish “potato famine” years of the 1840s neglect to situate this famine in its context. It is the intention here to remedy that defect. We will determinedly insist on the famine’s context within the history of famine, and within the history of the nightshades (SOLANACEAE such as potato, tomato, etc.), and within the history of America, as well as within the history of Ireland.

We will come to the conclusion that since the microorganism that causes this potato blight hides inside the tomato plant, and seems to have arrived in Ireland at about the same time that the tomato was probably being introduced there, that the tomato is likely to have been the vector by which infection was communicated — and that therefore the famine came about, speaking in generalities, because while the Irish poor needed to eat potatoes in order to survive, their British overlords enjoyed putting tomatoes in their salads. Henry David Thoreau almost discovered this, I will offer.

This story is in three parts. First we will explore how the Irish potato famine came about (which is to say, how on earth we set ourselves up for such a thing to happen). Then we will explore the great potato famine itself, not sensationalistically or voyeuristically but in the context of the world as it existed during 1845/1846. Finally, we will examine how our world has been changed by this great die-off. Beginning with the first part...



PART THE 1ST: HOW ON EARTH

COULD WE HAVE SET OURSELVES UP

FOR SUCH A THING AS AN GORTA MÓR TO HAPPEN?

1295

[Famine](#) in England.<sup>1</sup>

1314

From this year into 1317, widespread [famine](#) in large parts of western Europe.

1315

From this year, in which less than half the normal crop was harvested, through the year 1317, large parts of western Europe would experience what has been to date its worst [famine](#). Farm families were consuming their seed supply before the next spring. Wheat prices were soaring. With more than 50% of the livestock dead, the poor were starving. By 1318 bodies would be being disinterred, in Ireland, for food.

1. Over the centuries England has averaged a [famine](#) of sorts every 14th year.



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1316

[Famine](#) in large parts of western Europe.

1454

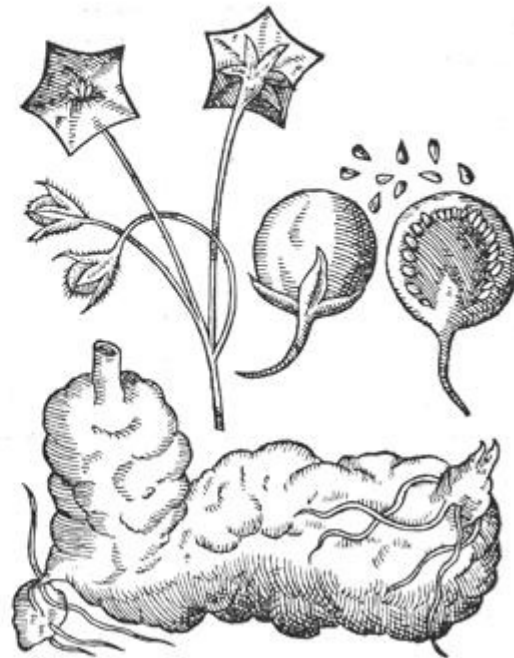
The growing season in the Northern Hemisphere appears to have been a predecessor of the summer of the year 1816 (“eighteen-hundred-and-froze-to-death”), for the [Chinese](#) wheat crop was destroyed by frosts after a winter in which the Yellow Sea had frozen along the coast to as much as a dozen miles out from shore. The [famine](#) that was the consequence of this bad weather –and the people who froze to death in unheated buildings in climates that were ordinarily Florida-like during the colder portion of that episode– all that is attributable to the volcanic explosion of the previous November or December in the South Pacific, and the clouds of dust and gas that had been thrown into the atmosphere.

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1531

In the mountains of Perú, Francisco Pizarro “discovered” the Incas cultivating many varieties of an edible tuber, *Solanum tuberosum* (genus *Solanum* of the family *Solanaceae*, the 48-chromosome, tetraploid “[potato](#)”). He sought the permission of the King of Spain to bring back home some of these dormant tubers. This was a poor harvest year for Europe, threatening [famine](#). The monarch would approve.





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1550

During the second half of the 16th Century, dormant tubers of the genus *Solanum* of the family *Solanaceae* (the 48-chromosome, tetraploid “[potato](#)”) were being introduced into Europe in what the Encyclopædia Britannica refers to as “a haphazard mixture of varieties.” Unpacking that encyclopædic remark and the silences which surround it, what the EB indicates is that the white intrusives were collecting in a happy-go-lucky manner, basically just carrying off from their new colonies whatever happened not to be nailed down, and this utter ignorance and inane negligence would cause problems later at home because, evidently, only a small fraction of the genetic material had been represented in the samples,<sup>2</sup> but, nevertheless, this white neglect –which would have the gravest consequences in the 19th Century– was entirely at the responsibility of the red indigenous farmer of the Peruvian-Bolivian Andes, who obviously lacked wisdom about this plant resource which had been being developed there for more than two millennia.

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2. *S. indigenum*, for one instance, apparently having been entirely unrepresented among the *S. tuberosum*.



1577

Late in this year, Francis Drake left England with five ships, with the cover story that the little fleet was on a trading expedition to the Nile River.

A

## Chronological TABLE

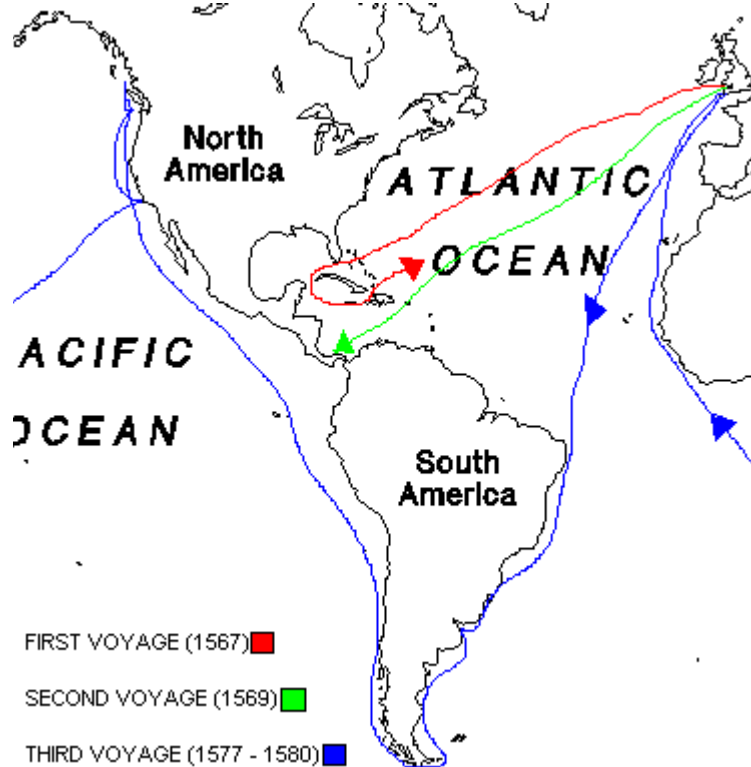
*Of the most remarkable passages in that part of  
America, known to us by the name of NEW-  
ENGLAND.*

*Anno Dom.*

1577. Sir *Francis Drake* began his Voyage about the  
*World.*

When they reached the coast of Africa, to the dismay of some of the accompanying gentlemen and to the alarm of the sailors, their actual destination was revealed to be the Pacific Ocean by way of the Strait of Magellan. He had secret instructions to poach in the Pacific Ocean. He was to go through the Straits of Magellan and attack the Spanish ships and towns on the West Coast of South America. He was to find people there who weren't under the control of Spain and enter into trade agreements with them. He was to see if there wasn't a continent somewhere in the South Pacific. He was look out for a western end to the Northwest Passage through

North America. From this year into 1580 they would be sailing round the world.



While they were still in the eastern Atlantic, they captured a Portuguese merchant ship and its pilot, and then they crossed the Atlantic, by way of the Cape Verde Islands, until they sighted the coast of Brazil.

While the expedition was running down the coast of South American, they would encounter storms, separations, dissension, and a fatal skirmish with natives. Before leaving the Atlantic, Drake would lighten the expedition by disposing of two unfit ships and by trying and executing one of the English gentleman for mutiny. After rallying the men under his command by means of a remarkable speech, Francis Drake renamed his flagship, the *Pelican*, as the *Golden Hind*. This image, from the Hondius broadside map of circa 1595, is

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perhaps the *Golden Hind*:



The expedition would come upon a [potato](#) being grown in Chile; however, by this point in all probability potatoes were already being cultivated back in European soil, on the Iberian peninsula.







## Chronological observations of America

*November* the 17th Sir *Francis Drake* began his voyage about the world with five Ships, and 164 men setting sail from *Plimouth*, putting off *Cape de verde*. The beginning of *February*, he saw no Land till the fifth of *April*, being past the line 30 degrees of latitude, and in the 36 degree entered the River *Plates* whence he fell with the streight of *Magellan* the 21 of *August*, which with three of his Ships he passed, having cast off the other two as impediments to him, and the *Marigold* tossed from her General after passage was no more seen. The other commanded by Capt. *Winter* shaken off also by Tempest, returned thorow the Streights and recovered *England*, only the Pellican, whereof himself was Admiral, held on her course to *Chile*, *Coquimbo*, *Cinnama*, *Palma*, *Lima*, upon the west of *America*, where he passed the line 1579 the first day of *March*, and so forth until he came to the latitude 47.

From the year of the World

to the year of Christ 1673.

BY John Josselyn Gent.



**Chronological observations of America**

*From the year of the World*

Thinking by those North Seas to have found passage to *England*, but fogs, frosts and cold winds forced him to turn his course South-west from thence, and came to Anchor 38 degrees from the line, where the King of that Countrey presented him his Net-work Crown of many coloured feathers, and therewith resigned his Scepter of Government unto his Dominion, which Countrey Sir *Francis Drake* took possession of in the Queens name, and named it *Nova Albion*, which is thought to be part of the Island of *California*.

*to the year of Christ 1673.*

Sir *Martin Frobisher's* second voyage.

**BY John Josselyn Gent.**

1580

There are reports that Sir Walter Raleigh was having [potatoes](#) planted on his estates in western [Ireland](#). (But by this point these edible tubers from the New World had already become a kitchen staple in Seville, Spain, and we don't have an actual confirmation of potatoes in Ireland prior to the year 1586.)



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The colonists of Sir Walter's settlement on Roanoke Island off the coast of what has become North Carolina, not to be outdone, sent samples of the American [ground-nut](#) to Queen Elizabeth I.



(Did the English queen try to eat them? –Thoreau would consider them to taste better boiled than baked.)

1586

This was in general a poor harvest year in Europe. [Potatoes](#) may or may not have been introduced to [Ireland](#) at an earlier point in time, but we know for a fact that they were present as of this year.

1591

The [potato](#) *Solanum tuberosum* as depicted in this year by Gaspard Bauhin:



1595

[Samuel Daniel](#)'s THE FIRST FOWRE BOOKES OF THE CIVILE WARRES BETWEENE THE TWO HOUSES OF LANCASTER AND YORKE, an historical poem in ottava rima on the subject of the Wars of the Roses (eventually this would be five books).

[William Hunnis](#)'s HUNNIES RECREATIONS, CONTEYNING FOURE GODLIE AND COMPENDIOUS DISCOURSES, INTITULED ADAM'S BANISHMENT, CHRIST HIS CRIB, THE LOST SHEEPE, THE COMPLAINT OF OLD AGE. WHEREUNTO IS NEWELY ADJOYND THESE TWO NOTABLE AND PITHIE TREATISES, THE CREATION OR FIRST WEEKE, THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JOSEPH, COMPILED BY WILLIAM HUNNIS ONE OF THE GENTLEMEN OF HIR MAJESTIES CHAPPELL, AND MAISTER TO THE CHILDREN OF THE SAME (Printed by P.S. for W. Jaggard, and are to be sold at his shoppe at the east end of St. Dunstans church).



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Vincentio Saviolo, an Italian fencing master living in England, published HIS PRACTICE IN TWO BOOKS. A manual of Italian rapier fencing featuring dialogue between the master and student, it was much despised by George Silver and the Masters of Defence.

Across Europe, the previous harvest had been a catastrophe. This would be the 1st of the three so-called “dear years” of England, during which not only meat but even dairy products were in such low supply that they commanded such a price as to be entirely out of the reach of the poor.<sup>3</sup> In these years wheat flour would often need to be augmented by grinding and boiling the root of the cuckoopint, *Arum maculatum*, until even wheat would become too dear for regular consumption by the poor and the many would shift their menus in the direction of “Horsse corne, beanes, peason, otes, tare and lintels.”<sup>4</sup>

1596

L. Shih Chen published *PEN TS'AO KANG MU*, the most well-known and praised of Chinese herbals.

This was a poor harvest year in Europe. Caspar Bauhin published a short notice on the [potato](#) *Solanum tuberosum*.

PLANTS

This was the 2d of the three so-called “dear years” of England, during which not only meat but even dairy products were in such low supply that they commanded such a price as to be entirely out of the reach of the poor.<sup>5</sup> In these years wheat flour would often need to be augmented by grinding and boiling the root of the cuckoopint, *Arum maculatum*, until even wheat would become too dear for regular consumption by the poor and the many would shift their menus in the direction of “Horsse corne, beanes, peason, otes, tare and lintels.”<sup>6</sup>

IRELAND

3. A. Appleby, [FAMINE](#) IN TUDOR AND STUART ENGLAND (Stanford CA: Stanford UP, 1978), page 5.

4. J.C. Drummond and A. Wilbraham, THE ENGLISHMAN'S FOOD: A HISTORY OF FIVE CENTURIES OF ENGLISH DIET (London: Jonathan Cape, 1958), page 88.

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**1597**

The Queen's printer John Norton had commissioned a Dr. Priest to prepare an English-language translation of a popular herbal by Rembert Dodoens but then, Dr. Priest having died, the press had recruited [John Gerard](#) to carry the project through to its completion. Gerard added as-yet-unpublished material by the herbalist l'Obel.

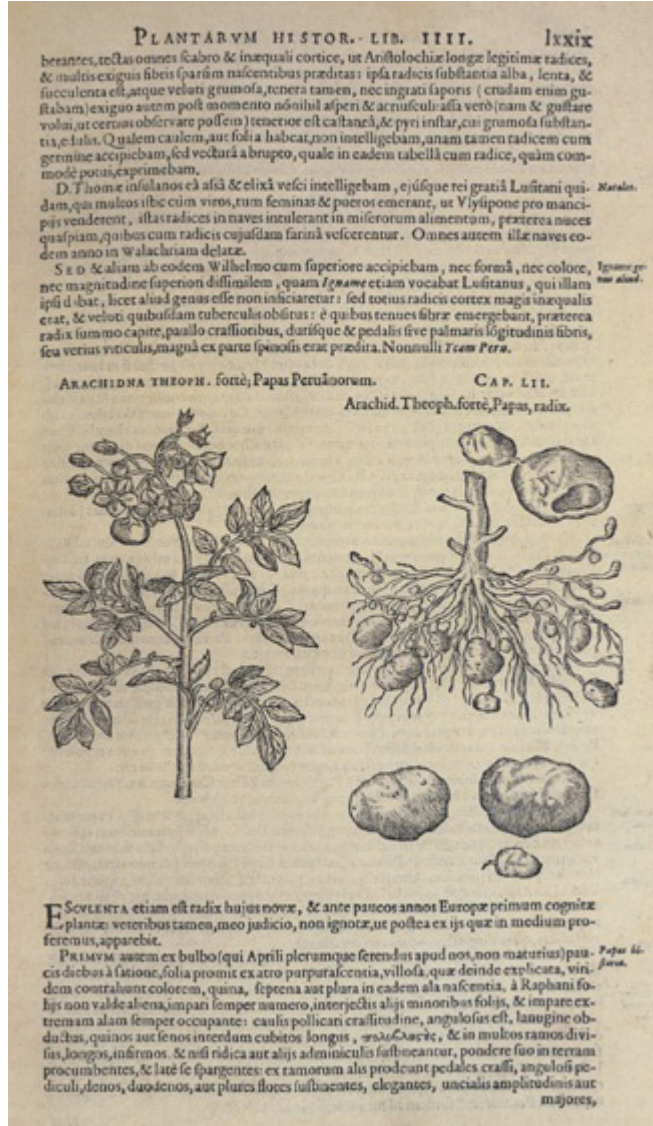
**BOTANIZING**

We don't know how much of this famous GREAT HERBALL, OR GENERALL HISTORIE OF PLANTES of 1597 (the earliest English publication to describe the [potatoes](#) of Peru) had been completed by Dr. Priest before he died,

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versus how much of this amounted to a fresh contribution by Gerard.



GREAT HERBALL OF 1597

PLANTS

In this year Gerard was appointed Junior Warden of the Barber-Surgeons.





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This was another poor harvest year in Europe and was the 3d of the three so-called “dear years” of England, during which not only meat but even dairy products were in such low supply that they commanded such a price as to be entirely out of the reach of the poor.<sup>7</sup> In these years wheat flour would often need to be augmented by grinding and boiling the root of the cuckoopint, *Arum maculatum*, until even wheat would become too dear for regular consumption by the poor and the many would shift their menus in the direction of “Horsse corne, beanes, peason, otes, tare and lintels.”<sup>8</sup>

Willem Barentsz, a Dutch navigator, died on his return from Nova Zembla, having attempted to find a northeast passage to the [Spice Islands](#).

1647

When a garrison of [Irish](#) troops were slaughtered, the victorious English descried among the corpses “divers that had tails near a quarter of a yard long.” When their account was challenged, 40 of these soldiers swore an oath that they had personally inspected the tails of the dead Irish bodies. Go figure.

1655

Some [Irish](#) people, thinking that they were being allowed to emigrate to [Boston](#), found themselves being sold into bondage.

1657

In the period since the Irish Catholic defeat in 1652, the victorious English colonists had brought about the sale by drovers and other intermediaries, of some 35,000 to 40,000 defeated [Irish](#) warriors, to the armies of foreign powers. In addition, as these defeated warriors were being transshipped out of Irish ports, some 6,000 [Catholic](#) priests, Irish Catholic women, and Irish Catholic boys had been sent along with them for free, in order to be disposed of them locally, without any separate record being maintained. In this year this Irish [slave](#) trade was brought to a completion. There was no-one left unobjected, to sell and deport. The remainders of the Irish Catholics would have to stay at home to be oppressed.<sup>9</sup>

INTERNATIONAL SLAVE TRADE

7. A. Appleby, [FAMINE](#) IN TUDOR AND STUART ENGLAND (Stanford CA: Stanford UP, 1978), page 5.

8. J.C. Drummond and A. Wilbraham, THE ENGLISHMAN’S FOOD: A HISTORY OF FIVE CENTURIES OF ENGLISH DIET (London: Jonathan Cape, 1958), page 88.

9. As a footnote, a pointy reminder by Theodore W. Allen: “It is only a ‘white’ habit of mind that reserves ‘slave’ for the African-American and boggles at the term ‘Irish slave trade’.”

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1670

The Royal Society had had its reasons for recommending, in 1663, the planting of potatoes. Their idea had been, disaster relief: a greater percentage of the laboring force would survive the next period of *famine*. Certain of the advantages of the *potato* began also to be noted at this point by the *Irish*: growing underground, it was less readily noted and taxed by the English; the plant would grow on marginal land such as on bogs and on rocky hillsides; the fact that it would not store for long periods meant that it functioned better as a local subsistence crop than as a marketable commodity; the bulk of the tuber would make it inconvenient for these overlords to transport it long distances to their cash markets. The plant seemed to offer something to everyone.



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1688

Annie “Goody” Glover of Salem, an [Irish](#) immigrant to [Boston](#), Massachusetts, was tried for [witchcraft](#) and convicted. She confessed to the charges and would be hanged.



Another woman was complained against in Boston, in this same year, and some formal step such as petition or deposition was taken toward prosecuting her also for [witchcraft](#), and the woman was required to appear before a court as a preliminary to a witch trial, but in fact in this 2d case the trial never would take place. A 3d and a 4th woman were similarly accused, but there seems to have been no action at all in regard to these 3d



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and 4th accusations.

### Major American Witchcraft Cases

1647	Elizabeth Kendall, Else Young	1663	Mary Barnes
1648	Margaret Jones, Mary Johnson	1666	Elizabeth Seager
1651	Alice Lake, Mrs. (Lizzy) Kendal, Goody Bassett, Mary Parsons	1669	Katherine (Kateran) Harrison
1652	John Carrington, Joan Carrington	1683	Nicholas Disborough, Margaret Mattson
1653	Elizabeth “Goody” Knapp, Elizabeth Godman	1688	Annie “Goody” Glover
1654	Lydia Gilbert, Kath Grady, Mary Lee	1692	Bridget Bishop, Rebecca Towne Nurse, Sarah Good, Susannah Martin, Elizabeth Howe, Sarah Wildes, Mary Staples, Mercy Disborough, Elizabeth Clawson, Mary Harvey, Hannah Harvey, Goody Miller, Giles Cory, Mary Towne Estey, Reverend George Burrough, George Jacobs, Sr., John Proctor, John Willard, Martha Carrier, Sarah Good, Martha Corey, Margaret Scott, Alice Parker, Ann Pudeator, Wilmott Redd, Samuel Wardwell, Mary Parker, Tituba
1655	Elizabeth Godman, Nicholas Bayley, Goodwife Bayley, Ann Hibbins	1693	Hugh Crotia, Mercy Disborough
1657	William Meaker	1697	Winifred Benham, Senr., Winifred Benham, Junr.
1658	Elizabeth Garlick, Elizabeth Richardson, Katherine Grade	1724	Sarah Spencer
1661	Nicholas Jennings, Margaret Jennings	1768	—— Norton
1662	Nathaniel Greensmith, Rebecca Greensmith, Mary Sanford, Andrew Sanford, Goody Ayres, Katherine Palmer, Judith Varlett, James Walkley	1801	Sagoyewatha “Red Jacket”

1699

By the end of the 17th Century, the few [potato](#) plants fetched from the Andes had created a major [Irish](#) crop.<sup>10</sup>



1719

Spring: The first settlers of Derry, New Hampshire arrived, led by Reverend MacGregor of Londonderry, [Ireland](#). They called their settlement not Derry but Nutfield, New Hampshire. They immediately planted the potato seedstock they had brought with them — these were the 1st [potatoes](#) to be planted in the soil of what would become the United States of America, and the 1st potatoes to be planted in the New World by white intrusives rather than by indigenous red Americans.

10. By 1845, approximately  $\frac{1}{3}$ d of the tillable land in Ireland would be devoted to this crop and approximately  $\frac{2}{5}$ ths of the population would be relying upon this tuber, along with skim milk or buttermilk, as their main source for calories and vitamins and minerals and protein. This was not only because potatoes could be grown on marginal land, such as on bogs and on rocky hillsides, but also because, growing underground, the crop was less liable to seizure by the English overlords and tax collectors than, say, an above-ground crop such as wheat or Indian maize, and because the bulk of the potato and the fact that it could not be stored for long periods meant that it functioned better as a local subsistence crop than as a marketable commodity. These righteous overlords were therefore referring to it as “the lazy crop.” The spud was seen to be overly compatible with two things which these notables considered as the notable crimes of the “potato people” — their indolence and their incessant begetting of children.

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1720

The Declaratory Act gave the British Parliament power over [Ireland](#).

Noting that some [Irish](#) had arrived on a ship and were “presuming to make a settlement,” the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay colony allowed them six, maybe seven, months to get the hell out — before they were thrown out. [Boston](#) was for Anglo-Saxon stock only.<sup>11</sup>



“With the sole exception of a little band of French [Huguenot](#) refugees ... none but English immigrants were admitted to the [Massachusetts Bay] colony; even the Huguenots were here for half a century before they were naturalized.”




— Tourtellot, Arthur Bernon, *THE CHARLES*  
NY: Farrar & Rinehart, 1941, page 294

11. The [Irish](#) would not, in fact, go away. How presumptuous the [Boston](#) Irish are!



1723

According to the Anglo-Norman law of England, murder is not actionable if the victim can be shown to have been of the [Irish](#) persuasion. Similarly, according to a law which Virginia enacted in this year, “manslaughter of a [slave](#) is not punishable”:

If from the beginning of the 18th Century in Anglo-America the term “negro” meant [slave](#), except when explicitly modified by the word “free,” so under English law the term “hibernicus,” Latin for “Irishman,” was the legal term for “unfree.” If African-Americans were obliged to guard closely any document they might have attesting their freedom, so in Ireland, at the beginning of the 14th Century, letters patent, attesting to a person’s Englishness, were cherished by those who might fall under suspicion of trying to “pass.” If under Anglo-American slavery “the rape of a female slave was not a crime, but a mere trespass on the master’s property,” so in 1278 two Anglo-Normans brought into court and charged with raping Margaret O’Rorke were found not guilty because “the said Margaret is an Irishwoman.” If a law enacted in Virginia in 1723 provided that “manslaughter of a slave is not punishable,” so under Anglo-Norman law it sufficed for acquittal to show that the victim in a killing was [Irish](#). Anglo-Norman priests granted absolution on the grounds that it was “no more sin to kill an Irishman than a dog or any other brute.” If the Georgia Supreme Court ruled in 1851 that “the killing of a negro” was not a felony, but upheld an award of damages to the owner of an African-American bond-laborer murdered by another “white” man, so an English court freed Robert Walsh, an Anglo-Norman charged with killing John Mac Gilmore, because the victim was “a mere Irishman and not of free blood,” it being stipulated that “when the master of the said John shall ask damages for the slaying, he [Walsh] will be ready to answer him as the law may require.” If in 1884 the United States Supreme Court, citing much precedent authority, including the Dred Scott decision, declared that Indians were legally like immigrants, and therefore not citizens except by process of individual naturalization, so for more than four centuries, until 1613, the Irish were regarded by English law as foreigners in their own land. If the testimony of even free African-Americans was inadmissible, so in Anglo-Norman Ireland native Irish of the free classes were deprived of legal defense against English abuse because they were not “admitted to English law,” and hence had no rights that an Englishman was bound to respect.” 

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1739

In this year about 500,000 people would die in [Ireland](#) due to a widespread failure of the [potato](#) crop. Per the memoirs of [Benjamin Franklin](#), the itinerant preacher George Whitefield came from [Ireland](#) to Philadelphia:



FAMINE





*In 1739 arrived among us from Ireland the Reverend Mr. Whitefield, who had made himself remarkable there as an itinerant preacher. He was at first permitted to preach in some of our churches; but the clergy, taking a dislike to him, soon refus'd him their pulpits, and he was oblig'd to preach in the fields. The multitudes of all sects and denominations that attended his sermons were enormous, and it was matter of speculation to me, who was one of the number, to observe the extraordinary influence of his oratory on his hearers, and bow much they admir'd and respected him, notwithstanding his common abuse of them, by assuring them that they were naturally half beasts and half devils. It was wonderful to see the change soon made in the manners of our inhabitants. From being thoughtless or indifferent about religion, it seem'd as if all the world were growing religious, so that one could not walk thro' the town in an evening without hearing psalms sung in different families of every street.*

*And it being found inconvenient to assemble in the open air, subject to its inclemencies, the building of a house to meet in was no sooner propos'd, and persons appointed to receive contributions, but sufficient sums were soon receiv'd to procure the ground and erect the building, which was one hundred feet long and seventy broad, about the size of Westminster Hall; and the work was carried on with such spirit as to be finished in a much shorter time than could have been expected. Both house and ground were vested in trustees, expressly for the use of any preacher of any religious persuasion who might desire to say something to the people at Philadelphia; the design in building not being to accommodate any particular sect, but the inhabitants in general; so that even if the Mufti of Constantinople were to send a missionary to preach Mohammedanism to us, he would find a pulpit at his service.*

*Mr. Whitefield, in leaving us, went preaching all the way thro' the colonies to Georgia. The settlement of that province had lately been begun, but, instead of being made with hardy, industrious husbandmen, accustomed to labor, the only people fit for such an enterprise, it was with families of broken shop-keepers and other insolvent debtors, many of indolent and idle habits, taken out of the jails, who, being set down in the woods, unqualified for clearing land, and unable to endure the hardships of a new settlement, perished in numbers, leaving many helpless children unprovided for. The sight of their miserable situation inspir'd the benevolent heart of Mr. Whitefield with the idea of building an Orphan House there, in which they might be supported and educated. Returning northward, he preach'd up this charity, and made large collections, for his eloquence had a wonderful power over the hearts and purses of his hearers, of which I myself was an instance.*

*I did not disapprove of the design, but, as Georgia was then destitute of materials and workmen, and it was proposed to send them from Philadelphia at a great expense, I thought it would have been better to have built the house here, and brought the children to it. This I advis'd; but he was resolute in his first project, rejected my counsel, and I therefore refus'd to contribute. I happened soon after to attend one of his sermons, in the course of which I perceived he intended to finish with a collection, and I silently resolved he should get nothing from me, I had in my pocket a handful of copper money, three or four silver dollars, and five pistoles in gold. As he proceeded I began to soften, and concluded to give the coppers. Another stroke of his oratory made me asham'd of that, and determin'd me to give the silver; and he finish'd so admirably, that I empty'd my pocket wholly into the collector's dish, gold and all. At this sermon there was also one of our club, who, being of my sentiments respecting the building in Georgia, and suspecting a collection might be intended, had, by precaution, emptied his pockets before he came from home. Towards the conclusion of the discourse, however, he felt a strong desire to give, and apply'd to a neighbour, who stood near him, to borrow some money for the purpose. The application was unfortunately [made] to perhaps the only man in the company who had the firmness not to be affected by the preacher. His answer was, "At any other time, Friend Hopkinson, I would lend to thee freely; but not now, for thee seems to be out of thy right senses."*



*Some of Mr. Whitefield's enemies affected to suppose that he would apply these collections to his own private emolument; but I who was intimately acquainted with him (being employed in printing his Sermons and Journals, etc.), never had the least suspicion of his integrity, but am to this day decidedly of opinion that he was in all his conduct a perfectly honest man, and methinks my testimony in his favour ought to have the more weight, as we had no religious connection. He us'd, indeed, sometimes to pray for my conversion, but never had the satisfaction of believing that his prayers were heard. Ours was a mere civil friendship, sincere on both sides, and lasted to his death.*

*The following instance will show something of the terms on which we stood. Upon one of his arrivals from England at Boston, he wrote to me that he should come soon to Philadelphia, but knew not where he could lodge when there, as he understood his old friend and host, Mr. Benezet, was removed to Germantown. My answer was, "You know my house; if you can make shift with its scanty accommodations, you will be most heartily welcome." He reply'd, that if I made that kind offer for Christ's sake, I should not miss of a reward. And I returned, "Don't let me be mistaken; it was not for Christ's sake, but for your sake." One of our common acquaintance jocosely remark'd, that, knowing it to be the custom of the saints, when they received any favour, to shift the burden of the obligation from off their own shoulders, and place it in heaven, I had contriv'd to fix it on earth.*

*The last time I saw Mr. Whitefield was in London, when he consulted me about his Orphan House concern, and his purpose of appropriating it to the establishment of a college.*

*He had a loud and clear voice, and articulated his words and sentences so perfectly, that he might be heard and understood at a great distance, especially as his auditories, however numerous, observ'd the most exact silence. He preach'd one evening from the top of the Court-house steps, which are in the middle of Market-street, and on the west side of Second-street, which crosses it at right angles. Both streets were fill'd with his hearers to a considerable distance. Being among the hindmost in Market-street, I had the curiosity to learn how far he could be heard, by retiring backwards down the street towards the river; and I found his voice distinct till I came near Front-street, when some noise in that street obscur'd it. Imagining then a semi-circle, of which my distance should be the radius, and that it were fill'd with auditors, to each of whom I allow'd two square feet, I computed that he might well be heard by more than thirty thousand. This reconcil'd me to the newspaper accounts of his having preach'd to twenty-five thousand people in the fields, and to the antient histories of generals haranguing whole armies, of which I had sometimes doubted. By hearing him often, I came to distinguish easily between sermons newly compos'd, and those which he had often preach'd in the course of his travels. His delivery of the latter was so improv'd by frequent repetitions that every accent, every emphasis, every modulation of voice, was so perfectly well turn'd and well plac'd, that, without being interested in the subject, one could not help being pleas'd with the discourse; a pleasure of much the same kind with that receiv'd from an excellent piece of musick. This is an advantage itinerant preachers have over those who are stationary, as the latter can not well improve their delivery of a sermon by so many rehearsals.*

*His writing and printing from time to time gave great advantage to his enemies; unguarded expressions, and even erroneous opinions, delivered in preaching, might have been afterwards explain'd or qualify'd by supposing others that might have accompani'd them, or they might have been deny'd; but litera scripta monet. Critics attack'd his writings violently, and with so much appearance of reason as to diminish the number of his votaries and prevent their encrease; so that I am of opinion if he had never written any thing, he would have left behind him a much more numerous and important sect, and his reputation might in that case have been still growing, even after his death, as there being nothing of his writing on which to found a censure and give him a lower character, his proselytes would be left at liberty to feign for him as great a variety of excellence as their enthusiastic admiration might wish him to have possessed.*



*...I turn'd my thoughts again to the affair of establishing an academy. The first step I took was to associate in the design a number of active friends, of whom the Junto furnished a good part; the next was to write and publish a pamphlet, entitled Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania. This I distributed among the principal inhabitants gratis; and as soon as I could suppose their minds a little prepared by the perusal of it, I set on foot a subscription for opening and supporting an academy; it was to be paid in quotas yearly for five years; by so dividing it, I judg'd the subscription might be larger, and I believe it was so, amounting to no less, if I remember right, than five thousand pounds. In the introduction to these proposals, I stated their publication, not as an act of mine, but of some publick-spirited gentlemen, avoiding as much as I could, according to my usual rule, the presenting myself to the publick as the author of any scheme for their benefit. The subscribers, to carry the project into immediate execution, chose out of their number twenty-four trustees, and appointed Mr. Francis, then attorney-general, and myself to draw up constitutions for the government of the academy; which being done and signed, a house was hired, masters engag'd, and the schools opened, I think, in the same year, 1749. The scholars increasing fast, the house was soon found too small, and we were looking out for a piece of ground, properly situated, with intention to build, when Providence threw into our way a large house ready built, which, with a few alterations, might well serve our purpose. This was the building before mentioned, erected by the hearers of Mr. Whitefield, and was obtained for us in the following manner. It is to be noted that the contributions to this building being made by people of different sects, care was taken in the nomination of trustees, in whom the building and ground was to be vested, that a predominancy should not be given to any sect, lest in time that predominancy might be a means of appropriating the whole to the use of such sect, contrary to the original intention. It was therefore that one of each sect was appointed, viz., one Church-of-England man, one Presbyterian, one Baptist, one Moravian, etc., those, in case of vacancy by death, were to fill it by election from among the contributors. The Moravian happen'd not to please his colleagues, and on his death they resolved to have no other of that sect. The difficulty then was, how to avoid having two of some other sect, by means of the new choice. Several persons were named, and for that reason not agreed to. At length one mention'd me, with the observation that I was merely an honest man, and of no sect at all, which prevail'd with them to chuse me. The enthusiasm which existed when the house was built had long since abated, and its trustees had not been able to procure fresh contributions for paying the ground-rent, and discharging some other debts the building had occasion'd, which embarrass'd them greatly. Being now a member of both setts of trustees, that for the building and that for the Academy, I had a good opportunity of negotiating with both, and brought them finally to an agreement, by which the trustees for the building were to cede it to those of the academy, the latter undertaking to discharge the debt, to keep for ever open in the building a large hall for occasional preachers, according to the original intention, and maintain a free-school for the instruction of poor children. Writings were accordingly drawn, and on paying the debts the trustees of the academy were put in possession of the premises; and by dividing the great and lofty hall into stories, and different rooms above and below for the several schools, and purchasing some additional ground, the whole was soon made fit for our purpose, and the scholars remov'd into the building. The care and trouble of agreeing with the workmen, purchasing materials, and superintending the work, fell upon me; and I went thro' it the more cheerfully, as it did not then interfere with my private business, having the year before taken a very able, industrious, and honest partner, Mr. David Hall, with whose character I was well acquainted, as he had work'd for me four years. He took off my hands all care of the printing-office, paying me punctually my share of the profits. This partnership continued eighteen years, successfully for us both.*



## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

*The trustees of the academy, after a while, were incorporated by a charter from the governor; their funds were increas'd by contributions in Britain and grants of land from the proprietaries, to which the Assembly has since made considerable addition; and thus was established the present University of Philadelphia. I have been continued one of its trustees from the beginning, now near forty years, and have had the very great pleasure of seeing a number of the youth who have receiv'd their education in it, distinguish'd by their improv'd abilities, serviceable in public stations and ornaments to their country. ...another projector, the Rev. Gilbert Tennent, came to me with a request that I would assist him in procuring a subscription for erecting a new meeting-house. It was to he for the use of a congregation he had gathered among the Presbyterians, who were originally disciples of Mr. Whitefield. Unwilling to make myself disagreeable to my fellow-citizens by too frequently soliciting their contributions, I absolutely refus'd. He then desired I would furnish him with a list of the names of persons I knew by experience to be generous and public-spirited. I thought it would be unbecoming in me, after their kind compliance with my solicitations, to mark them out to be worried by other beggars, and therefore refus'd also to give such a list. He then desir'd I would at least give him my advice. "That I will readily do," said I; "and, in the first place, I advise you to apply to all those whom you know will give something; next, to those whom you are uncertain whether they will give any thing or not, and show them the list of those who have given; and, lastly, do not neglect those who you are sure will give nothing, for in some of them you may be mistaken." He laugh'd and thank'd me, and said he would take my advice. He did so, for he ask'd of everybody, and he obtained a much larger sum than he expected, with which he erected the capacious and very elegant meeting-house that stands in Arch-street.*

1740

Fall: This was a poor harvest year all over Europe. For the 2d year in a row, the [potato](#) crop failed in [Ireland](#). There was meanwhile [famine](#) in Russia and France, with the people reduced to eating the roots of grass. There was a prison riot in Paris in protest of a cut in the bread ration, and in the putting down of this riot 50 prisoners were killed. Proportionate to the population levels of that era, it is possible that this famine was in Ireland even worse than what has become known to us as the "Great Famine," of 1845-1852. Nearly 400,000 [Irish Catholics](#) were dying — which would have been approximately one out of every five. Some parents were blinding their children in order to make them more suitable objects for charity, it being considerably more difficult to ignore, and to allow to slowly starve, psychologically, a blind child than a sighted child.

The famine in northern [Ireland](#) was instituting a 3d wave of emigration from Ulster, one made up of one quarter of the population. These Scotch-Irish settlers began moving into the western part of Pennsylvania, Virginia, and [North Carolina](#).

1741

Fall: For the 3d year in a row, the [potato](#) crop failed in [Ireland](#).

FAMINE



## AN GORTA MÓR

## THE LATE BLIGHT

October 29: There was a report in the Boston Weekly News-Journal that a shipload of Irish immigrants had arrived in port, who having eaten all their candles had been reduced to consuming the bodies of passengers who had died.

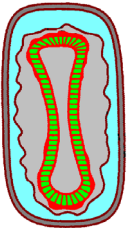
FAMINE

1742

Fall: An adequate potato crop was obtained in Ireland for the 1st time since the crop of 1738. There had been no general famine because the peasantry had not yet become totally dependent on this one crop.

1769

The monsoon failed. Over this year and the next, a quarter to a third of the population of Bengal, India would starve to death, some 10,000,000 souls. The ecological crisis would be exacerbated by the monopoly which the British held over the existing rice stores, by their determination to maintain their “reasonable profit” for the benefit of stockholders even if this meant increasing the demands it was making upon the surviving population, and by an epidemic of the small pox.



This was to become the worst famine thus far recorded in human history.

1770

In this year there were enough potatoes being grown in England, that a few were beginning to appear on the public market. The potato was still, however, a quite unfamiliar foodstuff, and in this year, when Frederick the Great’s response to a famine at Kolberg was to send a wagonload of potatoes, the starving peasants would not know what to do with them and would let them rot.

PLANTS

1783

Following two eruptions of Asama Yama on the island of Honshu in Japan, the first in May and the second in August, from this year into 1788 there would be severe famine (Japanese historians refer to this as the Tenmei famine; over a period of four years some 300,000 died).

## THE LATE BLIGHT


## AN GORTA MÓR

1799

By the end of the 18th Century, the few potato plants fetched from the Andes had created not only a major [Irish](#) dependency upon one crop, but a major dependency in the western regions of England, and a major dependency in the regions of Central Europe which would become Germany. The months of June, July, and August were becoming known as “the meal months,” during which folks needed to eat “stirabout” instead of the usual [potatoes](#) and buttermilk because the old stores of potatoes had been exhausted while the new crop was not yet ready to be dug from the ground.<sup>12</sup>


FAMINE

1800

 In this and the following year, there would be another severe food crisis in [Ireland](#). The “meal months” during which the old stores of [potatoes](#) had become exhausted while the new crop was not yet ready to be dug from the ground would be extended far beyond the usual June, July, and August.<sup>13</sup>

FAMINE

1816

 August: After a rainy summer, the [potato](#) crop in [Ireland](#) failed. (West Ireland potato famines: 1739, 1816, 1821, 1822, 1831, 1835, 1836, mid-1840s.) In this and the following three years, there would be another severe food crisis in Ireland. The “meal months” during which the old stores of potatoes had become exhausted while the new crop was not yet ready to be dug from the ground would be extended far beyond the usual June, July, and August.<sup>14</sup>

FAMINE

12. [Potatoes](#) are generally not fully mature in Ireland until October.

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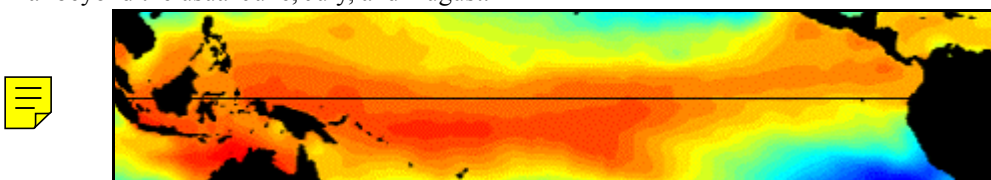
1817

Largest Scale Global Weather Oscillations around 1817

	Southern Oscillation	South Pacific current reversal
1814	strong	warm El Niño strong
1815	absent	cold La Niña
1816	absent	cold La Niña
1817	moderate +	warm El Niño moderate +
1818	absent	cold La Niña
1819	moderate +	warm El Niño moderate +
1820	absent	cold La Niña
1821	moderate	warm El Niño moderate
1822	absent	cold La Niña
1823	absent	cold La Niña

The southern ocean / atmosphere “seesaw” links to periodic Indonesian east monsoon droughts, Australian droughts, deficient Indian summer monsoons, and deficient Ethiopian monsoon rainfall causing weak annual Nile floods. This data is presented from Tables 6.2-6.3 of Quinn, William H. “A study of Southern Oscillation-related climatic activity for AD 622-1900 incorporating Nile River flood data,” pages 119-49 in Diaz, Henry F. and Vera Markgraf, eds. EL NIÑO: HISTORICAL AND PALEOCLIMATIC ASPECTS OF THE SOUTHERN OSCILLATION. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.

The weather in [India](#) this year would be even worse than the extremely heavy rains and flooding of the year 1815, and the food situation there worsened radically. In the Western world, the food crisis in [Ireland](#) also worsened radically during this year. The “meal months” during which the old stores of [potatoes](#) had become exhausted while the new crop was not yet ready to be dug from the ground on that island would be extended far beyond the usual June, July, and August.<sup>15</sup>



FAMINE

There would be a population migration during the traveling season of this year, but this migration, known as “[Ohio](#) fever,” was due rather to the failed crops of the previous growing season during the cold summer of

15. [Potatoes](#) are generally not fully mature in Ireland until October.

## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

1816, rather than to the weather during this summer of 1817.

1818

➡ The food crisis in [Ireland](#) continued in all its severity. The “meal months” during which the old stores of [potatoes](#) had become exhausted while the new crop was not yet ready to be dug from the ground would be extended far beyond the usual June, July, and August.<sup>16</sup>

FAMINE

1819

➡ The food crisis in [Ireland](#) was continuing in all its severity. The “meal months” during which the old stores of [potatoes](#) had become exhausted while the new crop was not yet ready to be dug from the ground would be extended far beyond the usual June, July, and August.<sup>17</sup>

IRISH POTATO FAMINE

1820

➡ [Zachariah Allen](#) began, on a worn-out plot of 40 acres in [Smithfield, Rhode Island](#) which he was unable to lease any longer even as pasture, an experiment in silviculture that now seems to us to have been the first such attempt in New England and perhaps in the entire United States (this woodlot has become part of the present-day Lincoln Woods State Park). He planted trees and began a 67-year period of keeping careful track of expenses. The cost of planting these trees was \$45 and the plot had been appraised to have a value of \$600.

At about this time, the American potato and eggplant members of the nightshade family (*Solanacea*) already having gained a widespread acceptance, the [tomato](#) (*Lycopersicon esculentum*) member of that family was also beginning to gain acceptability in the USA as a food for civilized people. In [Newport, Rhode Island](#) Michel Felice Corne again attempted to grow the tomato in his garden – and this time, unlike in his Salem MA garden in 1802, the plant would grow very well and produce a succulent harvest. Soon his neighbors would be planting tomatoes as well! During this decade, several cookbooks would be including tomatoes in recipes. William Cobbett, your originary journalist with a penchant for fighting lost battles, having lost the bones of Tom Paine (!), decided to warn against the influence of the [potato](#). Nobody, of course, paid the slightest attention, not because he had lost his hero’s bones, nor because over-reliance on a single staple crop can’t be an exceedingly risky business proposition — but because you’ve got to join them you simply can’t fight them.

FAMINE

THOMAS PAINE

### THE NIGHTSHADES (SOLANACEAE)

16. [Potatoes](#) are generally not fully mature in [Ireland](#) until October.

17. [Potatoes](#) are generally not fully mature in [Ireland](#) until October.



## AN GORTA MÓR

## THE LATE BLIGHT

- — *Solanum tuberosum*
- — *Tomato Lycopersicon esculentum*
- — chili peppers
- — eggplant
- — deadly nightshade
- — *Nicotiana tabacum*
- — henbane
- — Jimson weed
- — petunia
- — plus some 2,000 other species grouped into 75 genera

1821

➔ When the [potato](#) crop again failed in Ireland as it had in 1800-1801 and in 1816-1819, the nature of [Irish](#) emigration began to change drastically. Previously the immigrants to America had come from families of Protestants in the North who could afford the transatlantic fare. Suddenly the British government was organizing mass emigration from the South in order to avert [famine](#) in the counties of Mayo, Clare, Kerry, and Cork. Some 50,000 would starve or die of starvation-related diseases from Donegal to Youghal (the years of the West Ireland potato famines: 1739, 1816, 1821, 1822, 1831, 1835, 1836, mid-1840s). The goal of the Colonial Office was to provide 2,000 “assisted places” per year. At first the poor Irish Catholics assumed that the grim ships were “transportation”, taking their friends and relatives to what would amount to penal servitude in Australia — which, given the climate of British opinion in regard to the Irish as would be witnessed for instance soon in the early published attitudes of Thomas Carlyle, would not in those times one would have to acknowledge have been an altogether unrealistic suspicion.








## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

According to Simon Heffer's *MORAL DESPERADO: A LIFE OF THOMAS CARLYLE* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995), page 42:

In the ten years between the 1811  and 1821  censuses the population of Britain rose by 17%, from 12,000,000 to 14,000,000. Wages, which had risen steadily in real terms since the start of the Napoleonic Wars, were now beginning a downward progress that would not be stopped until after the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 – three years after [Thomas Carlyle](#) had railed against the economic and social conditions in England in *PAST AND PRESENT*. The political establishment was unsteady, the King mad, his son the Prince Regent dissolute and disliked. High stamp duties, of 4d on a newspaper, limited the circulation of opinions hostile to the Tory government or Lord Liverpool. A rash of prosecutions for seditious libel, and for the defamation of the King and his ministers, also occurred in 1817,  as another means of encouraging conformity. A fall in demand immediately after the war led to a great rise in unemployment, exacerbated by the reduction in manpower of the army and navy. Sporadic rioting, and disturbances even among the middle classes, fed the Tory establishment's fear

Soon, however, letters would begin to arrive from the new continent, explaining that in fact they had not been taken around the world to Australia, that there were not very many [anti-Catholic](#) riots or lynchings going on in America, or at least not at that moment, that it was relatively easy to slip across the border from the United States of America to freedom in Canada, that it was relatively easy and risk-free for white people to walk away from the indenture systems then in effect in the USA and assume new identities, etc.

### Population Trends

	England / Wales	Ireland
1821	12,000,000	6,800,000
1831	13,900,000	7,770,000
1841	15,920,000	8,180,000
1845	about 16,700,000	about 8,300,000 (blight, then famine, fever, and emigration)
1851	17,930,000	6,550,000
1861	20,070,000	5,800,000
1871	31,629,299	5,410,000
1881	35,026,108	5,170,000



1822



July 12: The food crisis in [Ireland](#) was continuing, although this [famine](#) was not turning out to be so severe as the ones of 1800/1801 and of 1816/1819. In Dublin, “Orangemen” (supporters of English rule) were as usual peaceably decorating the statue of their King William on College Green when the [Catholic](#) population began to riot against them.

POTATO

The Sydney, Australia [Gazette](#) posted an alert that Thomas Brooks off the transport *Grenada*, John Heyburn off the transport *Minerva*, and John Creardon off the transport *Lord Sidmouth* were unaccountably absent from their posts of obligation and presumably at large among the public using false documents.

Gullah Jack and others were [hanged](#) in Charleston, South Carolina for having assisted Denmark Vesey in his ill-fated conspiracy to create a servile insurrection (the total of those hanged was rising to 34).

It had come to be reward-yourself time. The economist David Ricardo, accompanied by his wife, two younger daughters, a couple of maidservants and a courier, departed from London on a 5-month broadening “Grand Tour of the Continent.” They would pass through Calais and Brussels into Holland, stay at the Hague and Amsterdam, journey up the Rhine River to Bâle and tour Switzerland, cross from Geneva into Italy for excursions to the Mer de Glace and the Great St Bernard, and go over the Simplon pass to the Italian Lakes, Milan, Venice, and Florence. On their return they would pass through Pisa, Genoa, and Turin on their way to Paris. The trip would be memorialized and it is clear that a good time had been had by all.



## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

**WALDEN:** If I wished a boy to know something about the arts and sciences, for instance, I would not pursue the common course, which is merely to send him into the neighborhood of some professor, where any thing is professed and practised but the art of life; -to survey the world through a telescope or a microscope, and never with his natural eye; to study chemistry, and not learn how his bread is made, or mechanics, and not learn how it is earned; to discover new satellites to Neptune, and not detect the motes in his eyes, or to what vagabond he is a satellite himself; or to be devoured by the monsters that swarm all around him, while contemplating the monsters in a drop of vinegar. Which would have advanced the most at the end of a month, -the boy who had made his own jack-knife from the ore which he had dug and smelted, reading as much as would be necessary for this, -or the boy who had attended the lectures on metallurgy at the Institute in the mean while, and had received a Rodgers' penknife from his father? Which would be most likely to cut his fingers? -To my astonishment I was informed on leaving college that I had studied navigation! -why, if I had taken one turn down the harbor I should have known more about it. Even the **poor** student studies and is taught only **political** economy, while that economy of living which is synonymous with philosophy is not even sincerely professed in our colleges. The consequence is, that while he is reading Adam Smith, Ricardo, and Say, he runs his father in debt irretrievably.

PEOPLE OF  
WALDEN

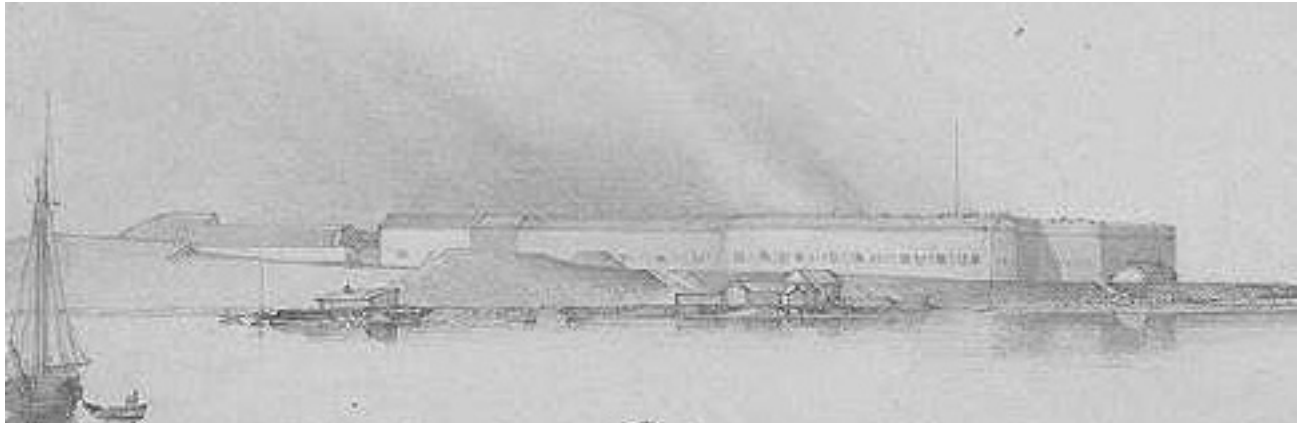
ADAM SMITH

DAVID RICARDO

JEAN-BAPTISTE SAY

1824

➡ Beginning of construction of Fort Adams guarding [Newport](#) Harbor, at 60 acres the 2nd largest along our nation’s coastline. Of course, cheap desperate [Irish](#) immigrant labor would be utilized to cut and move and position all the stone required.



What’s not to like about this [Rhode Island](#) fortress? It might as well be a 60-acre goat pasture with a great stone wall around it to make sure goats don’t get out. None of its 468 cannon would ever be fired in anger — they might as well be sticks of wood, “Quaker Cannon”:



(Meanwhile a whole bunch of [Irish famine](#) kiddies would be getting food shoved into their mouths! —As I commented, what’s not to like about this?)

## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

1825

➡ The millennialism of the [Irish](#) “Rockites” would be absorbed because the 1771 prophesy based upon the interpretation of the Apocalypse of St. John by [Bishop Charles Walmsley Pastorino](#), that God would destroy all Protestantism by this year 1825 – a prophecy that had been credited by these lower-class [Catholic](#) rock throwers since 1821– had become no longer functional.

In England, the [Catholic](#) Relief Bill was defeated in the House of Lords.

The [Catholic](#) pro-cathedral was opened in Marlborough Street, Dublin. Some 50,000 [Irish](#) were applying for some 2,000 assisted places on shipping to America, in a British Colonial Office scheme to depopulate the southern counties.<sup>18</sup>



More than a hundred periodicals had appeared by this point in the United States, three out of every four religious in nature. Of these roughly 75 American religious periodicals, fully half were [anti-Catholic](#). During the first half of the 19th Century, American [Know-Nothing](#) nativists would produce a vast amount of propaganda against the Roman Catholic Church, propaganda which focused on the same core reason why the [Nazis](#) would be so hostile to Jews. Just as the Nazis would consider themselves to be inherently nationalistic and patriotic and Jews to be essentially internationalists and therefore implicitly disloyal and the most deadly enemy of the Fatherland, so also these [American nativists](#) were considering themselves to be patriotic nationalists and considering Roman Catholics to constitute our most mortal threat, any Catholic being essentially internationalistic, and merely another sworn servant of a foreign potentate — the Pope in Rome. The great number of Catholic immigrants, mostly German and Irish, who were finding new homes in what we now refer to as “the Midwest,” caused the Know-Nothings and other nativists to fear that the power of the Pope might be able to find a new homeland there.

18. By the end of the potato [famine](#), 1/3rd of the surviving Irish population would be in the USA.

1826

➡ At this time about 97,000 people lived in Rhode Island, about 600 of them Roman Catholics, but by 1865 after the Irish Famine and emigration, there would be 50,000 Catholics (by 1885 the population of the state would have risen to 304,000 of whom at least 92,000 had an Irish parent).

RHODE ISLAND RELIGION

1829

➡ By this point mass meetings in Ireland organized by Daniel “The Liberator” O’Connell’s Catholic Association, and O’Connell’s election as a MP, had frightened the British overlords to the point at which they passed an Emancipation Act, rescinding the prohibition of Catholics in Parliament and in other governmental offices, and Catholic Relief Act, to remove remaining effects of the Penal laws for upper and middle class Irish.

The act of Catholic Emancipation began to allow Catholics to be elected to, and to serve in, the British Parliament. Suffrage was, however, restricted. During this period in Ireland, lasting until 1845, with the exception of Ulster, the previous system of racial or ethnic oppression was being superseded and renewed by a system of national oppression.

Lace manufacturing began in Limerick, Ireland.

In New Hampshire, Derry Bank was incorporated.

1830

➡ There was another food crisis in Ireland. The “meal months” during which the old stores of potatoes had become exhausted while the new crop was not yet ready to be dug from the ground would be extended beyond the usual June, July, and August.<sup>19</sup>

FAMINE


19. Potatoes are generally not fully mature in Ireland until October.



## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

1831

 The potato crisis continued in Ireland, but this famine was not turning out to be so severe as the ones of 1800-1801 and of 1816-1819.

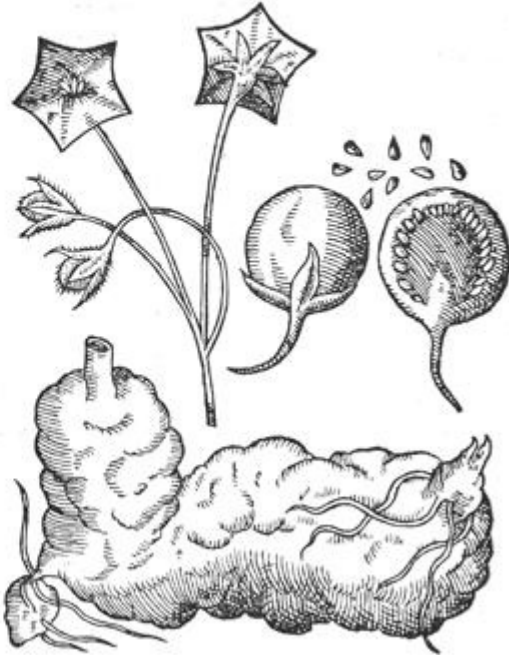
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**AN GORTA MÓR**

**THE LATE BLIGHT**



# THE LATE BLIGHT

# AN GORTA MÓR

1833



The British government advanced to [Harriet Martineau](#) the sum of £600 and opened its records to her so that she could create a series of stories depicting the corruptness of the system of poor relief. The moral of these just-so stories was to be that the deserving poor rapidly became, when helped in any way in their helplessness, hopelessly shiftless, hopelessly indolent, hopelessly depraved — they became transformed into the undeserving poor. What data served this cynical political agenda was to be utilized, what did not serve it was to be ignored. This would prepare the way, it was hoped, for a new Poor Law for 1834, one with a wise Malthusian agenda and flashes of Benthamite inspiration. The 1st of the 10 volumes of the author’s POOR LAWS AND PAUPERS ILLUSTRATED appeared.

FAMINE



1834

The [tomato](#), *Solanum lycopersicon*, and the [potato](#), *Solanum tuberosum*, are so close genetically that, rather than merely being in the same family, actually they may be in the same genus. Some species of *Lycopersicon* can in fact hybridize with some species related to the white potato. In this year it is reported that a tomato stem was successfully grafted onto a potato root: a plant grew, from which both some smallish potatoes and some smallish tomatoes were harvested. Might this have been the fatal experiment which allowed a crossover of the organism which causes the Irish Potato Blight, from the tomato as a host species to the potato as a host species — resulting in the Great Irish Famine?



(The answer to this question is of course as yet not known, but what must be pointed out at the present juncture is, this is a question which to date we have simply never allowed ourselves to pose! It is unthinkable that the [Irish Potato Famine](#) possibly was something which our incautiousness had brought upon us.)

## THE NIGHTSHADES (SOLANACEAE)



## AN GORTA MÓR

## THE LATE BLIGHT

- — *Solanum tuberosum*
- — *Tomato Lycopersicon esculentum*
- — chili peppers
- — eggplant
- — deadly nightshade
- — *Nicotiana tabacum*
- — henbane
- — Jimson weed
- — petunia
- — plus some 2,000 other species grouped into 75 genera

1838

The Holy See issued a statement condemning the [international slave trade](#), but most of the [Catholic](#) bishops in America interpreted this as of course not applying to [slavery](#) itself.<sup>20</sup>

20. Clearly, there's a terminology problem here. In an effort to resolve this terminology issue, at the Republican National Convention in New-York during August 2004 –at which the Republican Party would for four days make an effort to strip from its face its mask of hostility to the plight of the downtrodden and reveal its true countenance of benevolent conservatism and concern– these people would be sensitively referred to by a Hoosier Republican running for the US Senate as “involuntary immigrants.”

So, perhaps, this is a good point at which to insert a story about involuntary immigrants that has been passed on to us by Ram Varmha, a retired IBM engineer whose father had briefly served as Maharaja after the independence of Cochin. He relates the story as narrated to him by his paternal grandmother who lived in Thripoonithura, Cochin: “When my grandmother (born 1882) was a young girl she would go with the elder ladies of the family to the Pazhayannur Devi Temple in Fort Cochin, next to the Cochin Lantha Palace built by the Dutch (Landers = Lantha), which was an early establishment of the Cochin royal family before the administration moved to Thripoonithura. My grandmother often told us that in the basement of the Lantha Palace, in a confined area, a family of Africans had been kept locked up, as in a zoo! By my Grandmother's time all the Africans had died. But, some of the elder ladies had narrated the story to her of ‘Kappiries’ (Africans) kept in captivity there. It seems visitors would give them fruits and bananas. They were well cared for but always kept in confinement. My grandmother did not know all the details but according to her, ‘many’ years earlier, a ship having broken its mast drifted into the old Cochin harbor. When the locals climbed aboard, they found a crewless ship, but in the hold there were some chained ‘Kappiries’ still alive; others having perished. The locals did not know what to do with them. Not understanding their language and finding the Africans in chains, the locals thought that these were dangerous to set free. So they herded the poor Africans into the basement of the Cochin Fort, and held them in captivity, for many, many years! I have no idea when the initial incident happened, but I presume it took place in the late 1700s or early 1800s. This points to the possibility that it was, in fact, a slave ship carrying human cargo from East Africa to either the USA or the West Indies. An amazing and rather bizarre story. Incidentally, this is not an ‘old woman's tale’! Its quite reliable. My grandmother would identify some of the older ladies who had actually seen the surviving Kappiries.”

# THE LATE BLIGHT

# AN GORTA MÓR

The Bishop of New-York, John Joseph Hughes, who was [Irish](#) and had been superintendent of a slave plantation in [Maryland](#) in his youth, spoke of slavery as “an evil” rather than as “evil,” because this arrangement of human society had positive consequences — it allowed blacks who would otherwise remain mired in darkness to benefit from contact with good white Christians.



During this year 19 American [negreros](#) would clear from Havana on their way to the coast of Africa in order to rescue blacks who would otherwise have remained mired in darkness and allow them to benefit from contact with us good white Christians (HOUSE DOCUMENT, 26th Congress, 2d session V, No. 115, page 221).



The [negrero](#) *Prova* spent three months refitting in the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina. When it sailed out of this harbor it was intercepted by a British warship and discovered to be carrying a cargo of 225 [slaves](#) (HOUSE DOCUMENT, 27th Congress, 1st session, No. 34, pages 121, 163-6).

During this year (or possibly during the subsequent year) the American-built [negrero](#) *Venus*, although owned by Spaniards, would be manned by a crew that was made up in part of American citizens (HOUSE DOCUMENT, 26th Congress, 2d session V, No. 115, pages 20-2, 106, 124-5, 132, 144-5, 330-2, 475-9).

INTERNATIONAL SLAVE TRADE

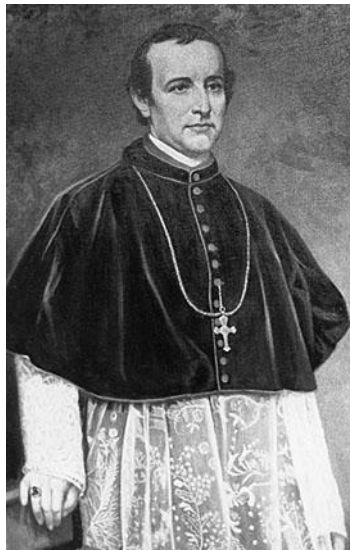
1839

Distress in [Ireland](#), particularly in the south.

FAMINE

1840

In Ireland, the Repeal Association was founded by Daniel O’Connell. Archbishop John Joseph Hughes of the Roman Catholic church in New-York (who would, like most Catholics of the northern states, strongly support the war to preserve the Union, while vigorously opposing the abolition of human slavery) pointed out to O’Connell that while he had many friends in America, “you have some who are much displeased with certain of your public remarks.”



When the Irish patriotic leader inquired what he had said that had so seriously offended the Irish of America, the archbishop advised him that “they think you are too severe upon ... slavery.” O’Connell’s response was characteristic of the man: “It would be strange indeed if I should not be the friend of the slave throughout the world — I who was born a slave myself.” Later the American archbishop commented that he had found such a response unpersuasive.<sup>21</sup>



“It is simply crazy that there should ever have come into being a world with such a sin in it, in which a man is set apart because of his color – the superficial fact about a human being. Who could want such a world? For an American fighting for his love of country, that the last hope of earth should from its beginning have swallowed slavery, is an irony so withering, a justice so intimate in its rebuke of pride, as to measure only with God.”



– Stanley Cavell, MUST WE MEAN WHAT WE SAY? 1976, page 141

21. Obviously, the good archbishop should have been persuaded, since O’Connell’s attitude that while any person of color remained unfree, the Irish would not be free, was an attitude which flows directly out of the religious injunction “What ye do unto the least of these my brethren, ye do unto Me” — a religious injunction which supposedly ought to be considered unobjectionable by any and all of the archbishops of the True Church.



## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

Although by the period of the 1840s the [Irish](#) growers had developed some 200 commercial varieties of the [potato](#) plant, these cultivars were undergoing a rapid degradation perhaps because potato viruses were evolving to adapt to local conditions almost as rapidly as the potatoes themselves. By the time of the appearance of the late blight, most of the peasants in the areas that would be hit the hardest were growing only what they called the “lumper,” one single cultivar which, although contemned by both humans and livestock for its “watery” taste, was proving to be the most productive amid the rocks and in the general wetness of the west of Ireland. Potatoes were making up like 60% of the entire national food intake. Even the bogs were being planted, by the technique known as the “lazy bed,”<sup>22</sup> in order to obtain adequate nutrition, which had resulted in the derogatory epithet “Bogtrotter” being applied to designate a poor Irish potato farmer. The stage was thus set for an infestation which would be rapid, virtually total, and devastating. In Ireland even today, mass graves are turning up, the most probable death estimate for these dark years indicating an average of 30 corpses per square mile of land surface.

During the years of this decade, Holyoke would be becoming the site for a planned industrial city and work would be beginning on the plan, the dam, and the [canal](#). [Irish](#) laborers would begin to arrive, in great numbers.

22. On land so wet that a grain crop might “lodge,” that is, lie flat upon the ground, one may expect to produce six tons of potatoes per acre by the use of such “lazy beds,” the seed potatoes being laid out in rows upon the surface of the ground along with manure and seaweed, and then covered over with soil dug from drainage trenches between these rows.

## AN GORTA MÓR

## THE LATE BLIGHT

July 9, Thursday: Steerage conditions on a ship escaping the famine in [Ireland](#), per [The London Illustrated Weekly](#):

The coward would reduce this thrilling sphere music to a universal wail, –this melodious chant to a nasal cant. He thinks to conciliate all hostile influences by compelling his neighborhood into a partial concord with himself, but his music is no better than a jingle, which is akin to a jar, –jars regularly recurring. He blows a feeble blast of slender melody, because nature can have no more sympathy with such a soul, than it has of cheerful melody in itself. Hence hears he no accordant note in the universe, and is a coward, or consciously outcast and deserted man. But the brave man, without drum or trumpet, compels concord everywhere by the universality and tunefulness of his soul.



FAMINE

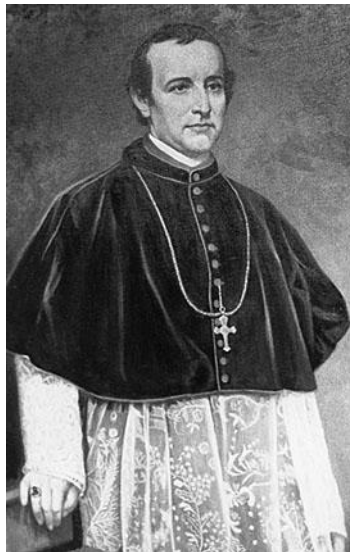
Some Irish escape the famine in [The London Illustrated Weekly](#) of July 9, 1840

1842

Distress in [Ireland](#), particularly in the west.

IRISH POTATO FAMINE

For so long as Daniel O’Connell lived, he spoke endlessly for the principled abolition of the “hideous system” of human [enslavement](#). In fact he had probably been the most active and prominent advocate of abolition, in the entire world. From Ireland, the leader Daniel O’Connell sent an appeal that Americans of Irish extraction should all become abolitionists. “They are the only consistent advocates of Liberty.” He simply refused to comprehend how this amounted to his whistling into the wind, as Irish Americans had become by this point, almost to a man –under the lash of direct economic competition with free Americans of color– dedicated Democrats and “nigger haters.” Hard squeezed between his racist parishioners and the teachings of Jesus, the [Catholic](#) prelate of New-York, Archbishop John Joseph Hughes, would find his “out” in the principle of local sovereignty:



“I am no friend to slavery, but I am still less friendly to any attempt of **foreign origins** to abolish it.”

The official repeal organization in [Ireland](#), the Loyal National Repeal Association, had worked hand in hand with the Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society. When O’Connell’s Irish Address urged Irish-Americans to unite with the abolitionists, the majority of the signers of that petition were Catholics, the hierarchy of the Church in Ireland being very much in sympathy with abolition, but none of this meant diddly-squat to the Irish who had managed to establish themselves in America. If they were not in favor of [slavery](#) because they hated black people, they were in favor of slavery because they were in favor of the US Constitution, which accommodated slavery. It was for these curious reasons that the Irish-American abolitionist James Canning Fuller, very much on the outs with all his compeers, commented sadly in this year that “however true to liberty an Irishman’s heart is, when it beats on his own soil, ... on his emigration to America, circumstances and influences by which he becomes surrounded, in too many cases warp his judgment, and bias his heart.” We need to take into careful consideration precisely how it came about that the [Irish](#), in transiting from Ireland to America, were able so readily to transform themselves from the most abject haters of ethnic oppression into the most abject of white supremacists. The experience of ethnic oppression in Ireland, rather than creating in these people a principled



opposition to oppression, caused them at their first opportunity to affiliate on the new continent with the oppressors, and participate in the abuse of the racially oppressed. The Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland had been equivalent to the doctrine of White Supremacy in the United States, and despite this the starving Irish Catholic immigrants immediately sold out. For instance, a Young Irishman by the name of John Mitchel declared that Daniel O’Connell, next to the British Government, was “the worst enemy that Ireland ever had, or rather the most fatal friend.” Because, Mitchel’s racist Citizen newspaper expounded:

We deny that it is a crime, or a wrong, or even a peccadillo, to hold slaves, to buy slaves, to keep slaves to their work by flogging or other needful coercion.... [W]e, for our part, wish we had a good plantation, well-stocked with healthy negroes.

What a long long way for the Irish spirit to come! O’Connell’s attitude, that while any person of color remained unfree the Irish would not be free, was an attitude which flows directly out of the religious injunction “What ye do unto the least of these my brethren, ye do unto Me,” an attitude supposedly acceptable even to a Catholic bearing a cudgel, and yet what the American Irish were saying to their leader at home was in effect that while any American of color remained unenslaved, the American Irish would not yet be freed.



Following the defeat of the Irish-Jacobite cause in the brief war of 1689-1691, the Protestant Parliament of Ireland embarked on a 70-year program of Penal Law enactments to rivet the Protestant Ascendancy in place. In due historical course, Edmund Burke analyzed and arraigned Protestant Ascendancy as a “contrivance,” an invention unexcelled in the history of statecraft “for the oppression, impoverishment, and degradation of a people.”



The America to which these Irish immigrants came was already constructed on the principle of racial oppression, including the white-skin privileges of laboring-class European-Americans. If Irish-Americans rejected the heritage represented by O’Connell and the Address, and if they were frequently identified with the most hostile actions against Negroes in the Northern cities, it was basically because they –like immigrants from Germany, France, England, Scotland and Scandinavia– accepted their place in the white-race system of social control and claimed the racial privileges entailed by it.... The presumption of liberty distinguished the poorest of European-Americans from the free African-American. Under the white-race system of social control, even the most destitute of European-Americans were expected to exercise this racial prerogative by supporting the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave law. The United States Constitution implicitly made immigration a white-skin privilege, when in Article I, Section 9, Europeans were classed as migrants whilst Africans were classed as imports.

It would seem that the two options open in such circumstances, to either a.) make common cause or b.) seek an invidious distinction, are on more of an equal footing, from a standpoint of political practicality, than any understanding of the situation based merely upon principle would ever be prepared to grasp!



March 26, Saturday, 1842: I thank God that the cheapness which appears in time and the world — the trivialness of the whole scheme of things — is in my own cheap and trivial moment. I am time and the world.... In me are summer and winter — village life and commercial routine — Pestilence and famine and refreshing breezes — joy and sadness — life & death.... Why does not God make some mistake to show us that time is a delusion. Why did I invent Time but to destroy it.

FAMINE

## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

Spring: It became possible for American Irish families to visit the offices of Thayer and Warren in Boston, and purchase prepaid passages for their relatives also to come over from [Ireland](#).

### FAMINE



We don't know precisely how many people have starved to death or, weakened by starvation, succumbed to diarrhea and fever or to [cholera](#) in [Ireland](#) during the ensuing period, but we do know that the first great die-off would occur during the winter of 1846-1847. A table prepared after the fact by Census Commissioners, presented here, in all probability under-estimates the mortality because of the manner in which they collected data: for a family all of whose members succumbed zero deaths would be tabulated. Of the total number of deaths, which would be between 500,000 and 1,500,000, the percentage of that total which would occur in each



## AN GORTA MÓR

## THE LATE BLIGHT

year probably worked out to something like this:

### Mortality, expressed as %ages of the 1841 Population

Year	%
1842	5.1%
1843	5.2%
1844	5.6%
1845	6.4%
1846	9.1%
1847	18.5%
1848	15.4%
1849	17.9%
1850	12.2%

The figures shown for 1849 are the result of a [cholera](#) epidemic in Connacht, Leinster, and Munster, as well as of the general starvation.

## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

July: In “Rogue Island,” as their payoff for supporting the Law and Order party and helping to deny the right to vote to adult white males (mostly [Irish](#) machine tenders) without \$134.<sup>00</sup> in property during the unrest of October 1841, the black adult males of [Rhode Island](#) (well, any of them who could show they held property worth \$134.<sup>00</sup>, which would be, today, say, roughly the value of a two-year-old Toyota) were granted the right to vote, a right which they still could not exercise in Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, or Ohio, and which they had only to a limited degree in the state of New York. See, it sometimes does pay off to cut a deal with the powers that be! This event is known in our history books as the “[Dorr War](#)” and what is being said of it is that it “forced the state’s conservatives to abolish the Charter of 1663 and expand suffrage.”<sup>23</sup>

### READ EDWARD FIELD TEXT

During this month Daniel O’Connell spoke on the issue of [race slavery](#) at a meeting of the Irish Repeal Association in reply to some remarks made by a Mr. Garahan of Mobile, Alabama. This is the manner in which O’Connell’s speech would appear in the pages of William Lloyd Garrison’s [The Liberator](#) on October 7th:

**Extract from a Speech of Daniel O’Connell,  
At a meeting of the Irish Repeal Association, July,  
1842, in reply to Mr. M’Garahan, of Mobile, Ala-  
bama.**

The Lord Mayor said he felt it to be an imperative duty to arise, after the speech of the highly respectable and reverend gentleman who had just concluded. He was sorry that it was his duty to comment in any terms, except of praise, on anything falling from that Rev. gentleman, but he would be untrue to the sacred cause of freedom, with which he was identified, if he were to sit silent and hear any apology for slavery, even from the best of motives, offered in his presence. He was glad that the meeting had heard the Reverend gentleman with

ican, was kept three years only among them in a state of slavery, and such were the dreadful effects of it, that he lost the use of the English language altogether, and spoke a sort of jibbering tongue, half English, half Arabic; nay, he was six months in England before he was restored to his full faculties, or the possession of the English language. Such was the effect of slavery; and yet although 800,000 negroes were emancipated by England, not one of them was found applying for relief under a poor law, or for charity of any kind, but supported themselves by their own industry. (Hear, hear.) They were, he admitted, a little too fantastic in their dress, they were fond of gay and lively colors; but they bought their own cotton, with which they clothed themselves,

23. My own attitude is that this ludicrous episode of [Rhode Island](#) history ought to be referred to as “Douglass’s Triumph” rather than as “Dorr’s War,” because I suspect that although local historians have always treated [Frederick Douglass](#)’s black presence in the state during this period as if he had been merely some sort of naive “native informant,” going around telling white people how bad slavery was (in this sort of historical writing blacks only react, they only display affect, they never take action or exercise control, because they are, of course, merely black, and everybody knows that it is the white man who makes history), actually he was operating as a skilled politician and organizing the entire sweet package deal by which local black men gained the franchise in return for helping to prevent the immigrant Irish laboring men from exercising the franchise. I suspect that while he remained under cover and in all appearance innocuous, the whole thing was Douglass’s scheme and his great accomplishment.

## AN GORTA MÓR

## THE LATE BLIGHT

meeting had heard the Reverend gentleman with such attention and patience, for both as a stranger and as a clergyman, he was entitled to every possible indulgence at their hands. (Hear, hear.)

He came there as a friend of the cause in which they were engaged, to offer them the sympathy and support of his fellow-countrymen, and in doing so he had felt it his duty to offer some remarks in favor of the system of slavery as carried on in America.— He had stated that the slaves were well fed, well taken care of, and sleek in their appearance, and there could be no doubt that such was the fact; but if the Reverend gentleman went to the house of the greatest tyrant in the country, he would find his horses plump and well taken care of, and for precisely the same reason as that which the Rev. gentleman had assigned for the good condition of the slaves, because it was the interest of the owner to have them so. (Loud cries of hear, hear.) But let passion burst forth—let violence disturb him, and the master of that horse, notwithstanding that it is his own interest to use the animal gently and kindly, will treat it brutally and cruelly. (Hear, hear.) Although the general rule was in favor of the slave, yet, he was liable to suffer from the effects of intoxication and ill temper; he was liable to be separated from the wife of his bosom, and the children of his tender affection. They may be sold as slaves, and sent to one quarter of the globe, while he himself was sent to the other; and while that state of things existed, he would be its most determined enemy, whatever was the consequence—whether he got the sympathy or support of their American friends, or continued to be subjected to the gross guilt inflicted on his country by a continuance of the Union.— (Cheers.) He could not hear slavery praised or palliated. *Every nerve within him trembled at the idea of one man being the property of his fellow-man—of a human being treated as so much chattels, or that a being with an immortal soul should be bound to the will of any master, be he a tyrant or otherwise in the exercise of his authority.* (Cheers.) He could not bring himself to the very idea of such a state of things, and as much as he valued the sympathy and support of America in the present constitutional struggle, if it be the slightest apology for slavery, he at once abandoned it. (Cheers.) The Rev. gentleman has eloquently expressed his fears for what the result of freedom to the slaves in America might be, and the danger which existed if it should take place, of what he (the Lord Mayor) abhorred, for he never would sanction the shedding of one drop of human blood. He talked of violence, of the ven-

their own cotton, with which they clothed themselves, and if there was found a glitter around them, it was the produce of their own industry. (Hear, hear, and a laugh.) Not one of them could be found who was not perfectly able to take care of himself.— (Hear, hear.) Then as to the question of blood, if a revolution took place among the negroes, produced by their emancipation, he would give up the case if he could be shown that one drop had been shed by those who were admitted to their freedom. Not one had been shed—not a single case of violence had occurred, or of retaliation on their masters. O yes, they refused to take off their hats for those who were cruel to them. (A laugh.) But he stood there a historian of severity, and the assertor of that fact in the presence of Europe and of America. (Cheers.) He proclaimed that instance of peace and good order among the negro population who were set free, and he defied any one to contradict him, or to show the least particle of violence. No assault or outrage had been committed, or a single drop of blood shed. (Cheers.) Were not the negroes in America the same race—were they not of the same class? And what fears could be entertained of them? Let it be recollected that when the experiment of emancipating the slaves in the British colonies was made, it was made under unfavorable auspices, because purchased by twenty millions of the public money, one farthing of which was not given to the negro but to his masters. They were insulted by the manner in which they received their freedom, because it was not given them as a right to which they were entitled, but purchased for them from their masters. Yet no crime was committed—no violence was resorted to—no blood was shed; and oh! may the happy day arrive when America shall be convinced of these truths, and be induced to follow the example of England. (Hear, hear, and loud cheers.) She followed her 'bitter bad' example in the introduction of slavery in the first instance, (and England could not but blush at its continuance in that land)—nay, the Americans were almost coerced to introduce it: and that England should have to answer for it was just before man and Divine Providence. But Ireland was free from the foul stain—for no one slave ship ever sailed from any port in Ireland, except one which carried Irishmen themselves. (Cheers and laughter.)

He (the Lord Mayor) sincerely hoped the Rev. gentleman was convinced he spoke to him with the utmost respect—that he was not the less grateful for his coming amongst them with the happy communication of which he had been the bearer—that he was not the less grateful for the support of the

## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

geance which the slaves would take upon their masters if they were liberated, and of their incapacity to attend to their own affairs, or to take care of themselves. If he (the Lord Mayor) had heard that doctrine propounded for the first time, coming as it did from the revered lips and the sacred character of him who put it forward—if he had, he repeated, heard it for the first time, it might, perhaps, have staggered his judgment; he might have thought that he knew more of the matter, and that his evidence was that of description which was derived by personal knowledge and actual judgment. But he had the pleasure to tell him that he had heard that argument before—that it was brought forward in the English Parliament previous to the passing of the bill for the emancipation of the slaves in the British colonies; and blessed be God, he raised his humble voice to turn eight hundred thousand slaves into eight hundred thousand freemen—to give the mother the happiness of blessing her little one in her arms instead of trembling for its future state—to give her an assurance that, instead of its being separated from her pressing heart, he was a little freeman, and that she could say to him, 'You will yet be my protector.' (Loud cheers.) He heard it said before, 'beware of what you do; if you emancipate them it will create bloodshed; they are utterly unfit to take care of themselves, and there will be nothing but confusion throughout the length and breadth of our multitudinous islands. All this will end in blood.' And though the parties did not openly say the abolitionists in Parliament sought for blood, yet they insinuated that such was their intention. The experiment was, however, tried, and what was the consequence? (Hear, hear.) In Demerara alone, the emancipated negroes purchased three estates for which they gave ninety thousand pounds, and in Jamaica they were buying up property from day to day. 'Take care of yourselves!' Let them only try the experiment, instead of having human nature degraded by the fact of a man being held in slavery. It was as old as the days of Homer, who said that when a man was a slave, half his worth was taken from him. It was then at least three fourths, and the evil was not confined to that, for they had it on record that when the English and French governments remonstrated with the Arabs on the coast of Africa, and called on them to give up the traffic, and discontinue the practice of seizing Europeans, their answer was, that these Europeans were so degraded as scarcely to resemble man, and that they were a kind of monkey race.—'There they are, exclaimed the Arabs, for the last eight or ten years, and did you ever see so stupid a race?' (A laugh.) A man named Adams, an Amer-

American friend of Ireland, if he kept back the expression of his feelings on the subject. (Hear, hear.) He perceived that the Rev. gentleman had alluded to a circumstance which was also reiterated in the American papers—that they, in their address for the abolition of slavery, called on the American people to join the abolitionists. Then the ill conduct of the abolitionists is set forth, and the enemies of slavery in this country were censured for the part they had just taken. When he (the Lord Mayor) signed that address, he did not mean any particular party, much less one who would act improperly or insultingly, for it was quite against the interests of those whom they called their clients to have recourse to so improper a proceeding. They did not mean to say by that phrase that the Americans ought to become what was termed 'abolitionists' in their land—they did not mean to say that they should join in any combination that would injure the property of man, but a combination which should have liberty for its object, and morality, truth, and purity of motives as its aim. (Loud cries of hear, hear.) *Man ought not to be a slave!* God had mixed and implanted in his soul, equality at his birth. All were born in the same nakedness and subject to the same infirmities—no distinction existed at that moment between the peer and the peasant, and both would descend with the same inanity to the grave. He would struggle there against every description of tyranny and despotism wherever he found it to exist; he would struggle to bring men to a constitutional equality, not to that equality which did not recognize rank or station, but to that place and equity known to the law, and to which he was entitled. (Cheers.) That equity which entitled a servant to hire with a master, and go away at the expiration of his period of service, if he chose to do so—that equity which enabled the laborer to receive the wages he was justly entitled to for his labor, and to discharge himself if that were not paid, or if he could improve his condition. But the slave gave up his labor to others—he was the property of others; and come what would, *he hated slavery in all its forms*—he would never truckle to others, or yield up the detestation in which he held it. (Cheers.) He would insult no man, but his heart was devoted to liberty, and so long as slavery existed in any quarter of the globe, he would be found among the ranks of its bitterest and most decided enemies. (Loud cheers.)

1843

In [Ireland](#), Daniel O’Connell was staging Monster Meetings (he would be imprisoned on account of his patriotism).

The black smut of the late blight fungus was observed on potato leaves near Philadelphia. For a long time we had presumed that this must have originated in the central highlands of Mexico, in the vicinity of the Toluca Valley where it has always afflicted a number of Mexican plants of the same genus and where even today it is quite impossible to grow potatoes. (We now know, based on genetic markers, that it is more likely to have originated in Peru.) It is probable that this fungus had made its way to Europe from the New World by way of a plant collector, perhaps one like the Poinsett who would bring back the poinsettia from the war against Mexico, a collector who lived in the northeastern United States. At this time the government of the province of West Flanders began to import fresh varieties of potatoes from both North and South America, and to make field trials of these novel cultivars. These field trials would continue during the growing seasons of 1844 and 1845, up to the point at which all such crops were being destroyed by the “late blight” fungus which had been introduced from the Americas.



Human selection of [potato](#) and [tomato](#) cultivars for lessened bitterness may have resulted in greater vulnerability to [infection](#) by *Phytophthora*. Native potatoes and wild tomatoes possess much higher levels of the phytoalexin alkaloid and tend to be much more resistant to infection. However, among the infection organisms, *Phytophthora* in particular seems to have evolved a way in which to slip past the poisonous potato and tomato steroidal alkaloids which are effective in protecting these plants against many other varieties of microorganisms. We should beware of the scare stories which have it that Europeans were simply being foolish in the 16th Century, when they resisted the introduction of potatoes and tomatoes to their diet — as the potatoes then and the tomatoes then may have been substantially more bitter and substantially more poisonous and allergenic than the potatoes and tomatoes being grown nowadays. One of our attempts to breed a less vulnerable potato, the Lenape, has had to be withdrawn from the market because it proved to be far too toxic to humans. There is a substantial correlation between the very serious *spina bifida* and *anencephaly* birth defects and years in which potato blight has been widespread in the British Isles. Were potatoes to be introduced today as a new and novel food crop, they would have to be subjected to a long and careful period of evaluation by our Food and Drug Administration. After a year in which people have been reduced to eating deteriorated potatoes, there is ordinarily a year in which significant numbers of human infants are stillborn or born deformed. The suspicion is that this is caused by an accumulation of the chemical *solanidine* in the mother’s liver, and its liberation and transfer to her fetus during the 3d or 4th week of gestation while the fetus’s neural tube is closing. The concentrations of this dangerous alkaloid are highest in the spring after winter storage of the potato crop, and highest in the vicinity of the potato’s eyes while it is sprouting. It has been noticed that stored potatoes which have been infected by *Phytophthora infestans* begin to sprout earlier in the spring than uninfected potatoes. After a blight year, in the late spring just at the point at which the food need is highest and the last of the old stored potatoes are about to be replaced by the first of the new potatoes, the risk of generating deformed babies reaches its peak.



## THE LATE BLIGHT

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### THE NIGHTSHADES (SOLANACEAE)

- — [\*Solanum tuberosum\*](#)
- — [Tomato \*Lycopersicon esculentum\*](#)
- — chili peppers
- — eggplant
- — deadly nightshade
- — [\*Nicotiana tabacum\*](#)
- — henbane
- — Jimson weed
- — petunia
- — plus some 2,000 other species grouped into 75 genera





**Therefore it is strongly recommended that girls, and women who are not yet out of their reproductive years, should never nowadays (except of course under conditions of absolute starvation) consume potatoes from which they have had to rub off the sprouts with their hands (as a Thoreau uncle was described, in Walden, as having done):**

**WALDEN:** Breed's hut was standing only a dozen years ago, though it had long been unoccupied. It was about the size of mine. It was set on fire by mischievous boys, one Election night, if I do not mistake. I lived on the edge of the village then, and had just lost myself over Davenant's Gondibert, that winter that I labored with a lethargy, -which, by the way, I never knew whether to regard as a family complaint, having an uncle who goes to sleep shaving himself, and is obliged to sprout potatoes in a cellar Sundays, in order to keep awake and keep the Sabbath, or as the consequence of my attempt to read Chalmers' collection of English poetry without skipping. It fairly overcame my Nervii. I had just sunk my head on this when the bells rung fire, and in hot haste the engines rolled that way, led by a straggling troop of men and boys, and I among the foremost, for I had leaped the brook. We thought it was far south over the woods, -we who had run to fires before, - barn, shop, or dwelling-house, or all together. "It's Baker's barn," cried one. "It is the Codman Place," affirmed another. And then fresh sparks went up above the wood, as if the roof fell in, and we all shouted "Concord to the rescue!" Wagons shot past with furious speed and crushing loads, bearing, perchance, among the rest, the agent of the Insurance Company, who was bound to go however far; and ever and anon the engine bell tinkled behind, more slow and sure, and rearmost of all, as it was afterward whispered, came they who set the fire and gave the alarm. Thus we kept on like true idealists, rejecting the evidence of our senses, until at a turn in the road we heard crackling and actually felt the heat of the fire from over the wall, and realized, alas! that we were there. The very nearness of the fire but cooled our ardor. At first we thought to throw a frog-pond on to it; but concluded to let it burn, it was so far gone and so worthless. So we stood round our engine, jostled one another, expressed our sentiments through speaking trumpets, or in lower tone referred to the great conflagrations which the world has witness, including Bascom's shop, and, between ourselves we thought that, were we there in season with our "tub", and a full frog-pond by, we could turn that threatened last and universal one into another flood. We finally retreated without doing any mischief, -returned to sleep and Gondibert. But as for Gondibert, I would except that passage in the preface about wit being the soul's powder, -"but most of mankind are strangers to wit, as Indians are to powder."



FIRE

PEOPLE OF  
WALDEN

INSURANCE

ALEXANDER CHALMERS

BASCOM & COLE



## THE LATE BLIGHT

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These toxic compounds are not removed by boiling, and in fact seem to be concentrated by the process of frying in oil. Also, therefore, they should never ingest such foods as “fish and chips” and “french fries,” for such commercially prepared potatoes may have been purchased for bulk processing because they were cheap, low-grade “old crop” potatoes which had begun to sprout: their sprouts would be automatically knocked off by peeling machinery. Tests using golden hamsters suggest that infant deformation may be minimized by ensuring that every woman or girl who might become pregnant receives constant elevated levels of vitamin C — perhaps because the C vitamin has a tendency to clear these toxic accumulations of solanidine from the liver.<sup>24</sup>

24. For more on this challenging topic, consult J.H. Renwick’s “Our Ascorbate Defense Against the *Solanaceae*,” pages 567-76 in D’Arcy, William G. (ed.), *SOLANACEAE: BIOLOGY AND SYSTEMATICS* (NY: Columbia UP, 1986).



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October 6, Friday: [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#) went for a hike in the bucolic Concord countryside:



*I took a solitary walk to Walden Pond. It was a cool, north-west windy day, with heavy clouds rolling and tumbling about the sky, but still a prevalence of genial autumn sunshine. The fields are still green, and the great masses of the woods have not yet assumed their many-colored garments; but here and there, are solitary oaks of a deep, substantial red, or maples of a more brilliant hue, or chestnuts, either yellow or of a tenderer green than in summer. Some trees seem to return to their hue of May or early July, before they put on their brighter autumnal tints. In some places, along the borders of low and moist land, a whole range of trees were clothed in the perfect gorgeousness of autumn, of all shades of brilliant color, looking like the palette on which Nature was arranging the tints wherewith to paint a picture. These hues appeared to be thrown together without a design; and yet there was perfect harmony among them, and a softness and delicacy made up of a thousand different brightnesses.*

*Walden Pond was clear and beautiful, as usual.*

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(Did he see what Cindy Kassab saw, that is depicted in her painting?)



In the course of his excursion the author discovered something of great interest and relevance, that even some [Irish](#) day-laborers have a life and loved ones and need to have somewhere for their families to lay their heads ([see next page](#)). According to the author's AMERICAN NOTEBOOKS, he got lost on his way home to the Old Manse:



*According to my invariable custom, I mistook my way, and emerging upon a road, I turned my back, instead of my face, toward Concord, and walked on very diligently, till a guide-board informed me of my mistake. I then turned about, and was shortly overtaken by an old yeoman in a chaise, who kindly offered me a ride, and shortly set me down in the village.*

This has now all been replayed for us, on the last page of Part II: TRAVELING IN STYLE of the [Los Angeles Times Magazine](#) for October 16, 1994. The anonymous article, allegedly or ostensibly dealing with early literary appreciation of the aesthetics of hiking through the woods to “**Walden Pond**,” is facing an advertisement of a cruise from La-La Land to Puerto Vallarta, Mazatlán<sup>25</sup>, and Cabo San Lucas on the good ship *Nordic Prince*, and a cruise to Catalina and then Ensenada on its sister ship *Viking Serenade*, and headlines the idea that

25. Minus, of course, the Spanish acute accent in the [Times](#) newspaper, which does not truck with foreigners or their languages.



## Thoreau Didn't Invent This Celebrated Body of Water.

### Years Before He Moved There, Another Noted Writer Enjoyed Its Charms.

Following such an egregious headline, the article in the [L.A. Times](#) inserts anonymous remarks in italic type:

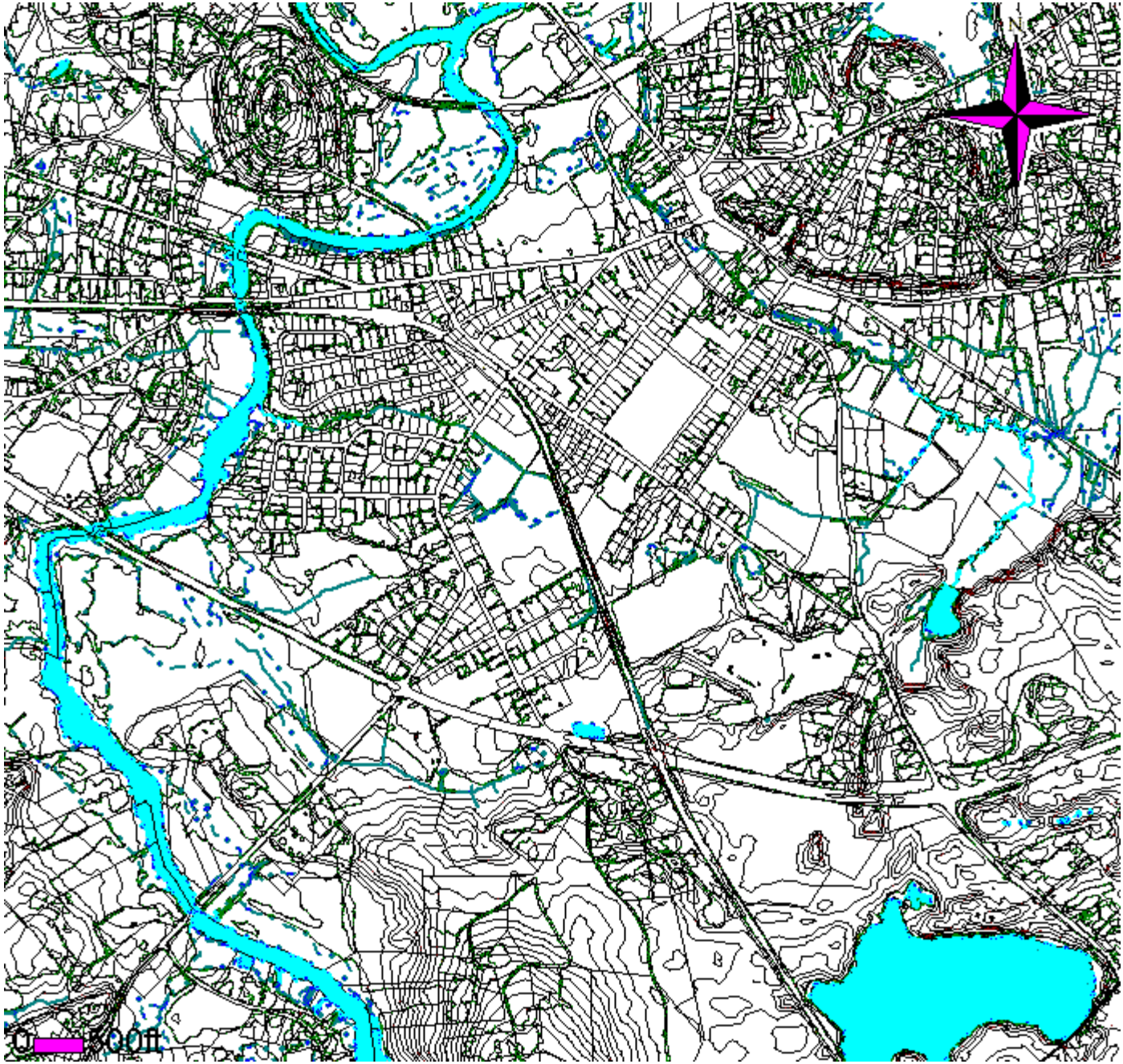


*Sometimes the footsteps of the famous overlap. When Henry David Thoreau built his cabin in 1845 at Walden Pond, near Concord, Mass., the pond itself and the surrounding woods were already well-known to his contemporaries. Ralph Waldo Emerson owned the land on which the pond stood, and Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, the writer and editor Margaret Fuller and other literary lights of the time frequented the area. In the edited excerpt below, Hawthorne (1804-1864) -who had not yet written THE SCARLET LETTER, THE HOUSE OF SEVEN GABLES, THE MARBLE FAUN and the other books by which he is remembered- describes a stroll through the autumn-bright woods and a visit to the pond in the early 1840s. The most surprising aspect of the account, which was written in 1843, is the author's discovery of a small settlement of environmentally sensitive Irish railroad workers living at the edge of the pond.*

Well, one shouldn't come down too hard on the efforts of some newspaper peckerwood, who is obviously merely attempting to draw a paycheck by devising some sort of "news-hook" for a freebie citation from public-domain 19th Century sources, intended merely as another page-filler between the pretty travel ads. –But who, in the first place, is it, specifically, by name, who has had this idea that is here headlined, that Thoreau did “**Invent**” Walden Pond, that “**Celebrated Body of Water**”? And why precisely is it, that we should now be temporizing about the First Literary Appreciation of a body of water that has existed in that precise spot since the melting of the buried blocks of ice left behind by the latest glacial era, something like 10,000 years ago? And how is it that this news maven has created the perception that before Thoreau went out to Walden Pond to build his shanty in late March of the following spring season, it was “*literary lights of the time*” such as [Waldo Emerson](#), [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#), and [Margaret Fuller](#) who had “*frequented the area*”? Presumably this newsie is unaware that [Henry Thoreau](#) was “frequencing” that pond and those woods as a little

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child as much as two decades before Hawthorne had ever even visited Concord:



**WALDEN:** When I was four years old, as I well remember, I was brought from Boston to this my native town, through these very woods and this field, to the pond. It is one of the oldest scenes stamped on my memory. And now to-night my flute has waked the echoes over that very water. The pines still stand here older than I; or, if some have fallen, I have cooked my supper with their stumps, and a new growth is rising all around, preparing another aspect for new infant eyes. Almost the same johnswort springs from the same perennial root in this pasture, and even I have at length helped to clothe that fabulous landscape of my infant dreams, and one of the results of my presence and influence is seen in these bean leaves, corn blades, and potato vines.

and presumably this newsie is likewise unaware that it was the adult surveyor of woodlots Thoreau who had in fact recommended to Emerson that he purchase these several woodlots with some frontage on Walden Pond,<sup>26</sup> and is likewise unaware that Thoreau had had his little homemade boat *Red Jacket* on Walden Pond for some years and had, long before, taken literary light Fuller for a row on this pond in this boat, and is likewise oblivious to the fact that Thoreau had written about his experiences at Walden Pond many, many times in his journal before the Hawthornes ever considered moving to Concord for the cheap rent at the vacant Old Manse,<sup>27</sup> and writing about his daily experiences in his own unpublished journal, not to speak of the fact that at the juncture at which Hawthorne witnessed these oh-so-picturesque shacks for the first time, these families of “railroad workers” which they had sheltered from the elements were needing –quite unbeknownst to the self-centered Hawthorne– to abandon their habitations and shoulder what of their scant possessions they could carry upon their backs, and trudge on down the American tracks which they had helped to construct and beneath which some of them in fact lay buried — because the heavy work in this area had been completed and they were all by that time without steady work and, if they had elected to remain there in bucolic Walden Woods next to bucolic Walden Pond, beyond the Concord Alms House and Poor Farm to which they were of course not eligible to have recourse, they would have eventually starved or frozen (whichever came first). Perhaps the newshawks are also innocent of an understanding that, as Thoreau most carefully described in *WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS*, one of these shanties Hawthorne saw, the one pertaining to the departing James Collins family, would be purchased by Thoreau for its construction materials to use in the creation of

26. Not, incidentally, “*the land on which the pond stood*,” a phrase which is quite remarkable not only as an impoverished simplification but also as an impoverished metaphor. And anyway, Emerson did not begin to purchase these woodlots with money from his dead wife’s estate until about a year after this initial visit by [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#), so here again our hapless news flack has gotten his or her chronology back-assward.

27. Not all of which he bothered to pay, by the way.



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*In a small and secluded dell, that opens upon the most beautiful cove of the whole lake, there is a little hamlet of huts or shanties, inhabited by the Irish people who are at work upon the rail-road. There are three or four of these habitations, the very rudest, I should imagine, that civilized men ever made for themselves, constructed of rough boards, with protruding ends. Against some of them the earth is heaped up to the roof, or nearly so; and when the grass has had time to sprout upon them, they will look like small natural hillocks, or a species of ant-hill, or something in which Nature has a larger share than man. These huts are placed beneath the trees, (oaks, walnuts, and white pines) wherever the trunks give them space to stand; and by thus adapting themselves to natural interstices instead of making new ones, they do not break or disturb the solitude and seclusion of the place. Voices are heard, and the shouts and laughter of the children, who play about like the sunbeams that come down through the branches. Women are washing beneath the trees, and long lines of whitened clothes are extended from tree to tree, fluttering and gambolling in the breeze. A pig, in a sty even more extemporary than the shanties, is grunting, and poking his snout through the clefts of his habitation. The household pots and kettles are seen at the doors, and a glance within shows the rough benches that serve for chairs, and the bed upon the floor. The visiter's nose takes note of the fragrance of a pipe. And yet, with all these homely items, the repose and sanctity of the old wood do not seem to be destroyed or prophaned; she overshadows these poor people, and assimilates them, somehow or other, to the character of her natural inhabitants. Their presence did not shock me, any more than if I had merely discovered a squirrel's nest in a tree. To be sure, it is a torment to see the great, high, ugly embankment of the railroad, which is here protruding itself into the lake, or along its margin, in close vicinity to this picturesque little hamlet. I have seldom seen anything more beautiful than the cove, on the border of which the huts are situated; and the more I looked, the lovelier it grew. The trees overshadowed it deeply; but on the one side there was some brilliant shrubbery which seemed to light up the whole picture with the effect of a sweet and melancholy smile. I felt as if spirits were there -or as if these shrubs had a spiritual life- in short, the impression was undefinable; and after gazing and musing a good while, I retraced my steps through the Irish hamlet, and plodded on along a wood-path.*





his own anti-desperation shanty, on the hill-edge down on Bay Henry, etc., etc.



**A 19th-Century Irish shanty in the Merrimack Valley**

Such analyses seem entirely to avoid the fact that one object of Thoreau's constructing this shanty was to demonstrate that it was possible, with care, to construct a healthful and clean and comfortable abode at an expense that anyone might afford, **and thus to furnish these impoverished refugees of the potato famine with an inspirational model for imitation.**<sup>28</sup> And if "*the surrounding woods were already well-known to his [Henry Thoreau's] contemporaries*" then we are left with an interesting "how-cum" about Hawthorne getting himself so turned around and lost in these surrounding woods at the end of this quoted piece from his AMERICAN NOTEBOOKS that, as the newspaper confesses, he had to ask for directions and had to be offered a lift back home to civilization! Just precisely how compatible is that with such terminology as "*already well-known*"?—Face it, most members of the Brahmin overcaste of "*literary lights of the time*," with which Thoreau the offspring of a peasant or tradesfamily had to deal, wouldn't have been able to find their own asses had they been privileged to hunt for them with both hands. Over and above all that, we may marvel at the casualness of the newspaper's characterization of these desperately poor families of refugees of a foreign famine, forced to attempt to live on this sandy, virtually barren soil among the pines in dark Walden Woods where they could not conceivably have created productive cottage gardens, while their men had labored for like \$0.<sup>73</sup> the day for 18 hours of exhausting and quite dangerous rude labor, as, now get this, "*environmentally sensitive*." Come on, newspaper people, "*environmentally sensitive*," that's for proper WASPs whose lives are not at constant risk, people who suppose that they can save the planet by sorting out their green empties from their clear empties — people like the ones who purchase your cruise tickets on the *Viking Serenade* and the *Nordic Prince* and the *Love Boat*! While one is at this sort of historical redactionism one might as well characterize the nigger-hating, nigger-baiting "Plug Ugly" Irish mob actions of the Boston urban hub of this period as having been, in actuality, mere prototype protests against the wickedness of chattel slavery! As a retort to this sort of newspaper-PC rewriting of history, a retort which might also be able to pass muster as an attempt at good humor, we might mention that among these "*environmentally sensitive*" Irishmen it was little Johnny Riordan of Concord's Riordan Family who was the most environmentally sensitive of all — because in the New England turn of seasons it was getting cold and his little toes were turning blue.<sup>29</sup> If one perceives anything at all about "sensitivity" in the quoted passage from Hawthorne's literary notebook, it is not sensitivity but insensitivity which one perceives — originally, we can

28. In fact [Waldo Emerson](#) eventually sold Thoreau's empty shanty to one of them, his drunken [Irish](#) gardener Hugh Whelan, to shelter this man's family.

here perceive very starkly that author’s notorious insensitivity to the problems of others, and, now, we are given an opportunity to perceive this news person’s utter insensitivity to Hawthorne’s having chosen to depict the plight of these refugees as merely picturesque.<sup>30</sup>



And in fair days as well as foul we walked up the country — until from Merrimack it became the Pemigewasset that leaped by our side — and when we had passed its fountain-head the wild Amonoosuck whose puny channel we crossed at a stride guiding us to its distant source among the mountains until without its guidance we reached the summit of agiocochook.

But why should we take the reader who may have been tenderly nurtured — through that rude country — where the crags are steep and the inns none of the best, and many a rude blast would have to be encountered on the mountain side. (FD 82-83)

We don’t know precisely how many people have starved to death or, weakened by starvation, succumbed to diarrhea and fever or to [cholera](#) in [Ireland](#) during the ensuing period, but we do know that the first great die-

29. Refer to Thoreau’s poem about Johnny’s plight during the early winter of 1850 and to his carrying a cloak to Johnny in the late winter of 1851-1852: “I found that the shanty was warmed by the simple social relations of the Irish.” Thoreau’s good attitude of compassion and involvement contrasts sufficiently with [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#)’s attitude of aestheticism and disengagement to remind one of the following distinction which Simone Weil drew during WWII in her New York notebook:



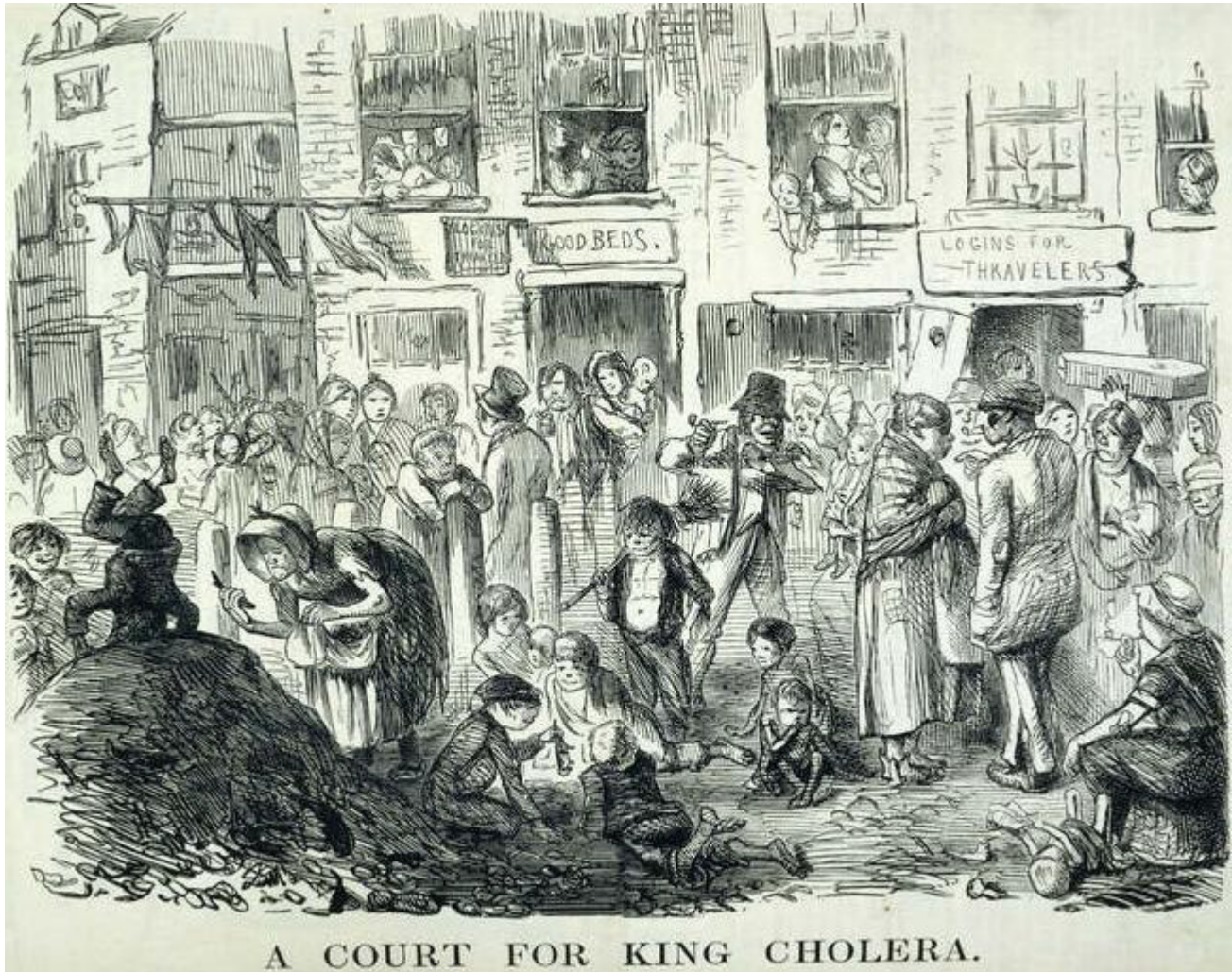
Natural piety consists in helping someone in misfortune so as not to be obliged to think about him any more, or for the pleasure of feeling the distance between him and oneself. It is a form of cruelty which is contrary only in its outward effects to cruelty in the ordinary sense. Such, no doubt, was the clemency of Caesar. Compassion consists in paying attention to an afflicted man and identifying oneself with him in thought. It then follows that one feeds him automatically if he is hungry, just as one feeds oneself. Bread given in this way is the effect and the sign of compassion.

30. Professor Walter Roy Harding considered that [Thoreau](#), in [WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS](#), wrote disparagingly of the [Irish](#), although, as he got to know them personally, he changed his mind about them and became their defender. He commented that why Thoreau did not then excise his disparaging remarks is not known. So the question would be, **did** Thoreau in fact write disparagingly of the fugitives from this ecological disaster, the [Irish Potato Famine](#)? Or was Harding quite mistaken here, misconstruing for derogation what in fact was mere frank description? And, was the impact of this episode in our human history the direct result of the ecological disaster, the late blight, or was it instead the direct result of a mean and contemptible English social policy — and was Thoreau aware of and contemptuous of this political causation?

## AN GORTA MÓR

## THE LATE BLIGHT

off would occur during the winter of 1846-1847. A table prepared after the fact by Census Commissioners,



presented here, in all probability under-estimates the mortality because of the manner in which they collected data: for a family all of whose members succumbed zero deaths would be tabulated. Of the total number of deaths, which would be between 500,000 and 1,500,000, the percentage of that total which would occur in each year probably worked out to something like this (the figures shown for 1849 are the result of a [cholera](#)



## THE LATE BLIGHT

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epidemic in Connacht, Leinster, and Munster, as well as of the general starvation):

### Mortality, expressed as %ages of the 1841 Population

Year	%
1842	5.1%
1843	5.2%
1844	5.6%
1845	6.4%
1846	9.1%
1847	18.5%
1848	15.4%
1849	17.9%
1850	12.2%

1844

In the Presidential elections of this year, the New York vote had been crucial in placing Polk in the White House over Clay:

[I]t is fair to say that New York's Irish-Americans, who (far more than German-Americans) voted solidly for the Democrats, decided the outcome of the national election.

The Irish-American's hatred for black people had become, in America, the tail that was wagging the dog. The losing VP candidate, Theodore Frehlinghuysen of New York, would express this situation succinctly: "It is an alarming fact that this foreign vote has decided the great question of American policy."

In this year the Enoch Train Line was founded to carry those Irish families, which could pay, away from the terrible potato blight and to their safe harbor in Boston — despite the fact that as the teflon sage of Concord had pointed out "it cannot be maintained by any candid person that the Irish have ever occupied or do promise ever to occupy any very high place among the good families of Boston," and despite the fact that according to this teflon sage their pitiful plight in the famine constituted "the strongest proof" of their real inferiority as human beings to us true representatives of the Caucasian race, with our **energy** before which these starving Irish men and women and children "have quailed and done obeisance."<sup>31</sup>

IRISH POTATO FAMINE

# AN GORTA MÓR

# THE LATE BLIGHT

A number of reports appeared in [Irish](#) newspapers, of a blight (now known as *Phytophthora infestans*) which had attacked the potato crops in America for the 2d consecutive growing season. This was not a known disease



such as “the curl” or “the dry rot,” but something new. We don’t know precisely how many people have starved to death or, weakened by starvation, succumbed to diarrhea and fever or to [cholera](#) in Ireland during the

31. I do drip with sarcasm, don’t I? Well, when I come across stuff like this, I can’t help myself, a demon takes over my keyboard and the screen echo comes across this way even if what I am typing is the alpha string “Hail Mary full of grace.” The point is that if [Henry Thoreau](#) had ever been guilty of writing something like this, we would long ago have burned every existing copy of WALDEN and none of us in this generation would ever have heard of the guy. And that would be only right. [Waldo Emerson](#), however, is invulnerable, is teflon, nothing ever sticks to him. Or, perhaps, it is the Emerson scholars who are invulnerable, or heedless or something. That quote I attributed to Emerson, repeated below, needn’t be characterized as a piece of Emersoniana at all! It could be characterized, instead, as Emerson in the 19th Century merely –somehow– “channeling” the geist of Alfred Rosenberg (the philosopher of the [Nazis](#) in our 20th Century).

I think it cannot be maintained by any candid person that the African race have ever occupied or do promise ever to occupy any very high place in the human family. Their present condition is the strongest proof that they cannot. The Irish cannot; the American Indian cannot; the Chinese cannot. Before the energy of the Caucasian race all the other races have quailed and done obeisance.



ROSENBERG / EMERSON

HDT

WHAT?

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# THE LATE BLIGHT

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ensuing period, but we do know that the first great die-off would occur during the winter of 1846-1847. A table



prepared after the fact by Census Commissioners, presented here, in all probability under-estimates the mortality because of the manner in which they collected data: for a family all of whose members succumbed zero deaths would be tabulated. Of the total number of deaths, which would be between 500,000 and 1,500,000, the percentage of that total which would occur in each year probably worked out to something like this:

IRISH POTATO FAMINE

Mortality, expressed as %ages of the 1841 Population

Year	%
1842	5.1%
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1847	18.5%
1848	15.4%
1849	17.9%
1850	12.2%



## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

October 28, Monday: The [Reverend Horatio Wood](#) left his church in Tyngsborough, Massachusetts to become a Minister-at-Large in nearby Lowell, just started.<sup>32</sup> Many if not most of the people flocking to the new mills would be immigrant [Irish](#) escaping the potato blight, a large proportion of them unable to read or write (population in 1830, 6,474; in 1840, 20,796; in 1850, 33,383). During the 24 years of his administration he would be offering evening schooling at the Free Chapel on Middlesex Street, teaching some 12,000 pupils by his own count, and during that time he would be absent but one single evening — to attend the funeral of his mother. In order to obtain students from the largely Irish [Catholic](#) labor force, it would be necessary for the Reverend to pledge that he would never offer any religious instruction.

### LOWELL, MIDDLESEX

The initial issue of [Theodore Foster's and Guy Beckley's Signal of Liberty](#), published by the Michigan Anti-Slavery Society of Ann Arbor.

32. Between 1844 and 1852, inclusive, 12 ministries-at-large would be organized in New England; 3 in Boston making 5 in that city, and 9 in other cities (in 1850 the Reverend Wood would sponsor an "Association of Ministers-at-Large in New England").





**AN GORTA MÓR**

**THE LATE BLIGHT**

## **PART THE 2D: THE IRISH POTATO FAMINE**

### **AN GORTA MÓR OF 1845/1846**

**1845**

The attorney John Mitchel had begun writing for The Nation, so when Thomas Davis died, Charles Gavan Duffy invited Mitchel to join the newspaper as an assistant editor. This publication was in favor of the power of “moral force” over violence. He would author masterly descriptions of the [Irish Potato Famine](#), add a life of Hugh O’Neill to THE LIBRARY OF [IRELAND](#), and edit the poems of Davis and James Clarence Mangan — up to the point at which this insistence upon the power of “moral force” over violence would become just unbearably offensive to him.

The Young [Ireland](#) movement was founded.

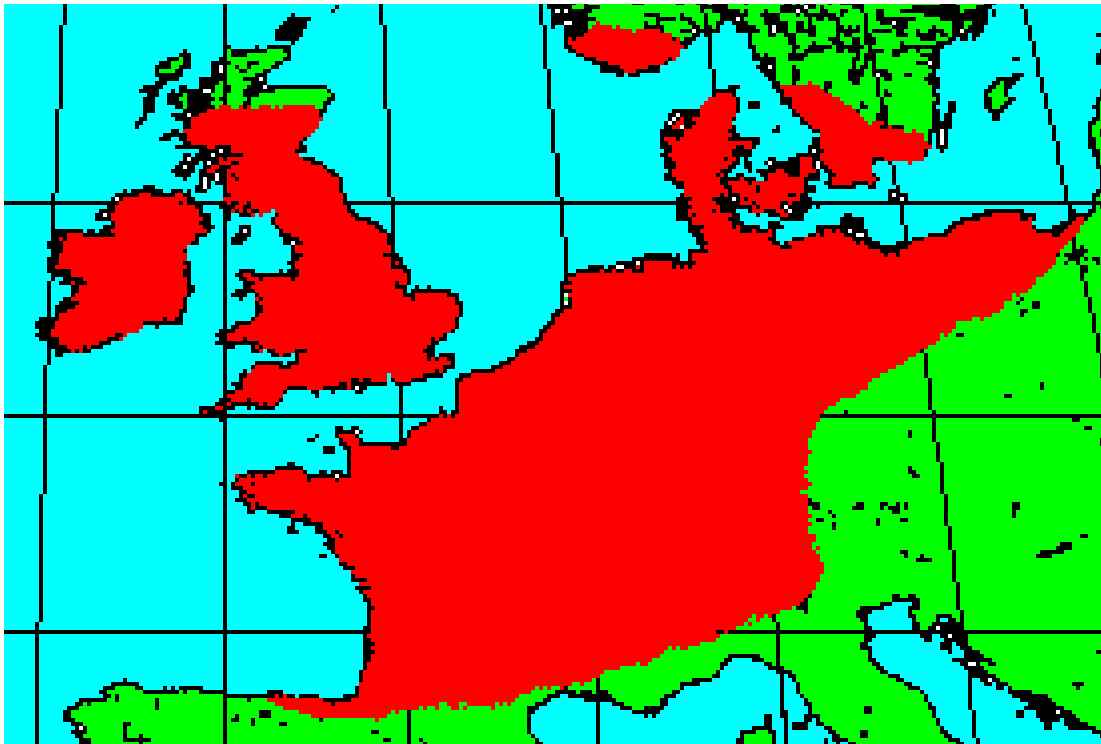
## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

From this year into 1850, in the [Irish Potato Famine](#), the problem presented to the English overlords of [Ireland](#) by the intransigent native Irish [Catholics](#) would be being in part resolved, unfortunately by means of starvation, by means of disease, and by means of mass emigration, with the assistance of a “late blight” of



*Phytophthora infestans* which would be causing apparently sound and meaty white [potato](#) tubers to suddenly disintegrate into black slime just as they were becoming ready to harvest. A million of these Irish people who were in the way of the English would die and eight million more of these Irish people who were in the way would be forced from their homeland.





We know that, largely because of this famine, in 1845 a domestic servant could be hired for \$1.<sup>25</sup> per week in New England, because [Sophia Peabody Hawthorne](#) was able to retain a woman for this wage. (Her sister Mary was able to rent a house in Hingham MA for \$75.<sup>00</sup> annually.

**Population Trends**

	England / Wales	Ireland
1821	12,000,000	6,800,000
1831	13,900,000	7,770,000
1841	15,920,000	8,180,000
1845	about 16,700,000	about 8,300,000 (blight, then famine, fever, and emigration)
1851	17,930,000	6,550,000
1861	20,070,000	5,800,000
1871	31,629,299	5,410,000
1881	35,026,108	5,170,000

During a period in which the population of virtually every other country in Europe was Dublin, the population of Ireland would lose 3.1 million people. This was a trauma with which it was most difficult to deal. For instance, we all know that Australia was settled largely by “British criminals” who had been “transported” during this period, but few of us are aware that a very significant percentage of these “British criminals” actually were mere Irish men and women who had become concerned, and who had thus made themselves politically suspect. A special prayer was promulgated and was being read in all the churches of the Anglican communion, to entreat the Almighty God to spare the Irish people from the ravages of the famine. The term “[Potato](#)” not being grand enough for an occasion of speaking directly to Almighty God, for verbiage for herbage this recitation substituted the euphemism “Succulent Tuber.”

April 29, Tuesday: [John Leonard Knapp](#) died near Bristol, England. He would be buried at St. Helen, Alveston. Five volumes of unpublished drawings of British fungi are in the Natural History Museum. His herbaria is at Edinburgh and at the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery. Some of his letters are in the Smith correspondence at the Linnaean Society. There is a wax bust by Parker at Kew and a portrait in the Hunt Library. Three manuscript notebooks toward a possible revised edition of JOURNAL OF A NATURALIST and other papers are in the Buckinghamshire Record Office.

[Saunder’s News-Letter](#) for County Armagh, [Ireland](#) reported that after a warning had been passed to John O’Brien, Esq., of Hogan’s-pass in County Armagh, or some of his workmen, not to attempt to till certain fields near Rallyvillane about a mile from Nenagh, on Thursday night last a number of ploughs that had been brought there were destroyed by persons unknown. The [Monaghan Standard](#) of County Monaghan, Ireland reported that a few nights since, a gang of ruffians, calling themselves Molly Maguire’s chickens, went to the house of Abraham Sloan, a farmer near Scotstown in County Monaghan, and having broken the door, their leader, who called himself Captain Steelribs, ordered his “chickens” to drag the man of the house out of bed. This man was put upon his knees with a cocked pistol at to his breast, and presented with “a Romish Catechism.” He swore an oath that he would on the following morning give up possession of a farm that he held in dispute. “After



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threatening the most dreadful vengeance in the event of a non-compliance with this mandate, and after firing some shots about the premises, the miscreants decamped, by word of command, in military array.” The Enniskillen Correspondent for the Armagh Guardian reported that Mr. Arthur Leonard of Callowhill has been again served with a threatening notice by the “Molly Maguires,” and that there had been another murder, on Wednesday night last, the victim being a man named Ferguson who resided at Drumkeerin in County Leitrim. “While employed in his own house at some domestic business, he was shot at, and melancholy to relate it proved fatal. The cause assigned for this bloody deed is that the unfortunate man had a small plot of land let to some tenants, and was about taking it from them to occupy it himself. The ‘Molly Maguires’ it is said are the party accused of the murder.” This correspondent noted that since Thursday evening last there had been some refreshing showers which were tending greatly to improve the early-set potatoes: “The healthy appearance of the crops in the neighbourhood promise an abundant harvest.” Nevertheless, he wrote, the annual tide of emigration to America had just commenced in this county, and every week large numbers of the peasantry of our country were passing through Enniskillen on their way to the ports of Donegal, Derry, Sligo, &c. “The majority of those emigrating are Protestants.”

FAMINE

In the Huron Reflector of Norwalk, Ohio the term “top notch” was deployed apparently for the first recorded time, as a description for items of the highest quality. The citation offers no clue as to the manner in which this usage had originated:

J. WHYLER Has just arrived from the Great Emporium, with a Tremendous Cargo of Spring and Summer Goods, which he is now unloading at his Old Stand in Norwalk – consisting of the choicest selections he ever made – the top notch of Fashions and Patterns – and an extensive variety of DRY GOODS, to suit his Old Customers and every other person who will give him a call.



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June 24, Tuesday: Early in the month, out in Walden Woods, [Henry Thoreau](#) had planted *Phaseolus vulgaris* var. *humilis* common small navy pea bush white beans<sup>33</sup> for a cash crop, plus some peas and corn and [potatoes](#) for himself.



The problem begins with the transcendentalists, who believed that the American landscape was sacred – nature, Emerson held, was the symbol of Spirit. Once you have come to regard the landscape as a moral or spiritual space, altering it in any way – even gardening it – becomes problematic. This is what Thoreau discovered very soon after he planted his bean field at Walden. He was actually racked with guilt about pulling weeds, of all things....

– “Afterword” by Michael Pollan  
on page 262 of a coffee-table book  
KEEPING EDEN: A HISTORY OF GARDENING  
IN AMERICA, put out in 1992 by the  
Massachusetts Horticultural Society

### WALDEN

### THE BEANFIELD

It seems strange to hear someone allege that Thoreau “was actually racked with guilt about pulling weeds,” when a more careful analysis of the text and its context would indicate that Thoreau not only pulled weeds, but also, he experimented with eating such weeds as the purslane he had hoed from his corn rows, and then,

33. These are beans that ripen prior to harvest and are threshed dry from the pods. Only the ripe seeds reach market. Four main types are grown as follows: (1) the Pea or Navy which Henry was growing; (2) Medium type, which includes Pinto, Great Northern, Sutter, Pink Bayo, and Small Red or Mexican Red; (3) Kidney; and (4) Marrow. Seeds vary in size from about 1/3-inch long in Thoreau’s pea or navy bean to 3/4-inch in the Kidney. All these plants are of bush type. They are usually cut or pulled when most pods are ripe, and then vines and pods are allowed to dry before threshing. This is a bean thought to have originated in Central America from southern Mexico to Guatemala and Honduras. Evidence of the common bean has been found in two widely separated places. Large seeded common beans were found at Callejon de Hualylas in Peru, and small seeded common beans were found in the Tehuacan Valley in Mexico, with both finds carbon-dating as earlier than 5,000 BCE. This crop is associated with the maize and squash culture which predominated in pre-Columbian tropical America. In our post-Columbian era this bean has come to be grown in all areas of the world.

However, that’s only the literal bean, not the metaphorical or literary bean, and once upon a time in Europe, there had been a form of commercial counting in use very much like the abacus of the East, in which beans were used. In those days to “know how many beans make up five” was to be commercially numerate. --Sort of like today knowing how to count one’s change. It might be suggested therefore that Thoreau’s determination to know beans was a play upon this archaic usage in which not knowing one’s beans amounted to innumeracy, and in addition a play upon the common accusation “You don’t know beans about xxxxx!” It might also be suggested that this is scatological humor similar to Shakespeare’s — the following is from his “Comedy of Errors”:

A man may break a word with you sir; and words are but wind;  
Ay, and break it in your face, so he break it not behind.



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of all things, he wrote favorably about them after eating them:

**WALDEN:** I learned from my two years' experience that it would cost incredibly little trouble to obtain one's necessary food, even in this latitude; that a man may use as simple a diet as the animals, and yet retain health and strength. I have made a satisfactory dinner, satisfactory on several accounts, simply off a dish of purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*) which I gathered in my cornfield, boiled, and salted. I give the Latin on account of the savoriness of the trivial name. And pray what more can a reasonable man desire, in peaceful times, in ordinary noons, than a sufficient number of ears of green sweet-corn boiled, with the addition of salt? Even the little variety which I used was a yielding to the demands of appetite, and not of health. Yet men have come to such a pass that they frequently starve, not for want of necessaries, but for want of luxuries; and I know a good woman who thinks that her son lost his life because he took to drinking water only.

PEOPLE OF  
WALDEN

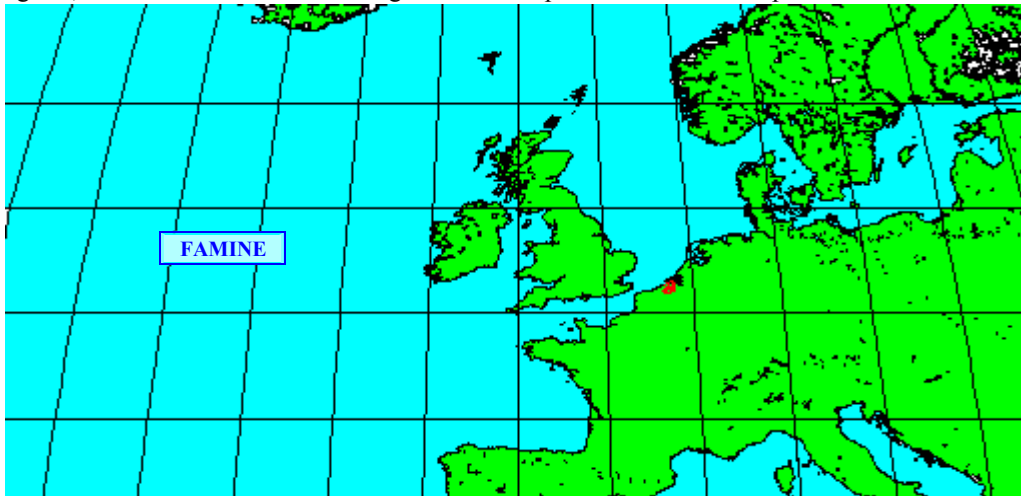
REUBEN KELSEY?

It takes a rather poor reader to miss this sort of reference!



Incidentally, since purslane is a late germinator in New England’s cool soils, the leaves beginning to appear only in July, we know that Thoreau would not have been making this experiment with using the plant as a vegetable until his rows of Indian maize were already well on their way, in July or August of 1845.

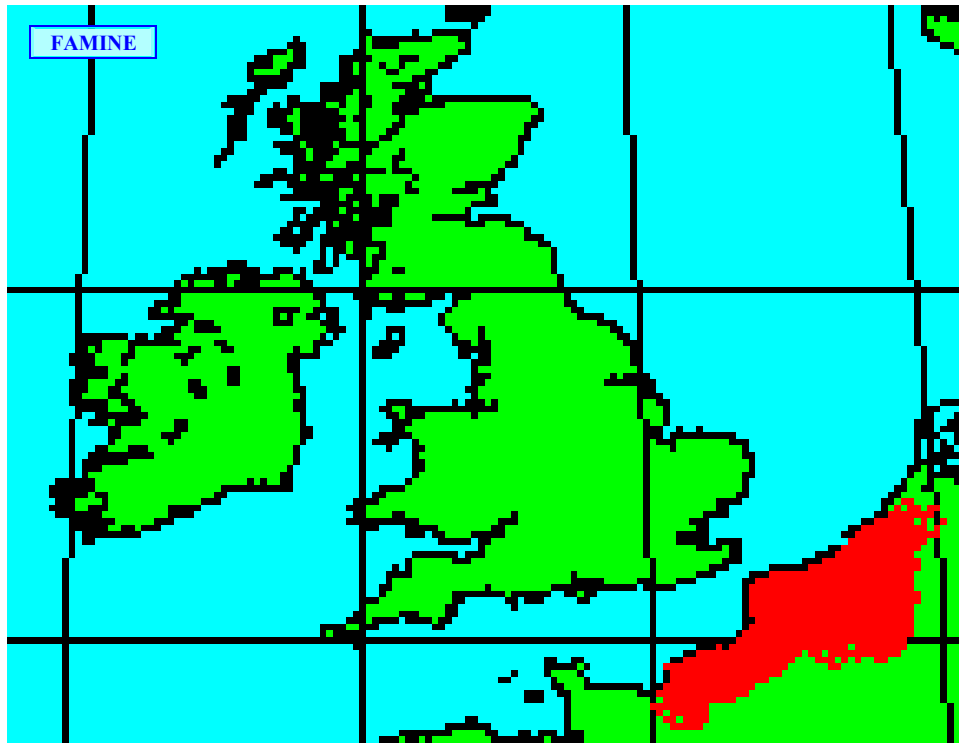
However this all may be, the late blight fungus that infected [potato](#) plants had by this point spread throughout northeastern North America. The discolored outside of the tuber indicated that when cut open, it would be seen to be full of a dark, corky rot. Potato crops were being destroyed — but then, neither Thoreau in particular nor America in general was solely relying upon the potato plant for human nutrition. In the Courtrai region of Belgium, the black smut of the late blight was seen upon the leaves of the plants.



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Mid-July: In northern Europe, there would be more than three weeks this month of “one continued gloom, the sun scarcely ever visible during the time, with a succession of most chilling rains and some fog” — ideal weather for the development and dispersion of a [potato](#) blight, each fungal lesion of which can disperse 300,000 spores every five days. The late blight was endemic in the potato fields of Flanders, and in border areas of the Netherlands and of France.





Tubers were being destroyed while still the size of marbles.



August: The American [potato](#) blight *Phytophthora infestans* appeared on the Isle of Wight and in the vicinity of Kent. Reports began to come in of this soot's appearance elsewhere as well, in Scotland, and in Belgium, and in Holland.

FAMINE

A Sunday in early September: Joseph Hosmer, Jr. related, long afterward, that "Early in September, 1845, (can it be so long,) on his [[Henry Thoreau](#)'s] invitation I spent a Sunday at his lake side retreat, as pure and delightful as with my mother. The building was not then finished, the chimney had no beginning — the sides were not battened, or the walls plastered.

EMERSON'S SHANTY

TIMELINE OF WALDEN

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**A 19th-Century Irish shanty in the Merrimack Valley**

*It stood in the open field, some thirty rods from the lake, and the "Devil's Bar," and in full view of it.... The entrance to the cellar was thro' a trap door in the center of the room. The king-post was an entire tree, extending from the bottom of the cellar to the ridge-pole, upon which we descended, as the sailors do into the hold of a vessel.... The cooking apparatus was primitive and consisted of a hole made in the earth and inlaid with stones, upon which the fire was made, after the manner at the sea-shore, when they have a clam-bake. When sufficiently hot remove the smoking embers and place on the fish, frog, etc. Our bill of fare included roasted horn pout, corn, beans, bread, salt, etc. Our viands were nature's own, "sparkling and bright." ... The beans had been previously cooked. The meal for our bread was mixed with lake water only, and when prepared it was spread upon the surface of a thin stone used for the purpose and baked, - (as illustrated.) ... When the bread had been sufficiently baked the stone was removed, then the fish placed over the hot stones and roasted - some in wet paper and some without- and when seasoned with salt, were delicious.*

[George William Curtis](#) and [James Burrill Curtis](#) were brothers who lived for a time on the Hosmer farm on Lincoln Road. They had helped [Henry Thoreau](#) build his shanty on Walden Pond and Thomas Blanding



suggests that they are likely candidates for the following tale from “The Village” in [WALDEN](#):

[WALDEN](#): Several times, when a visitor chanced to stay into the evening, and it proved a dark night, I was obliged to conduct him to the cart-path in the rear of the house, and then point out to him the direction he was to pursue, and in keeping which he was to be guided rather by his feet than his eyes. One very dark night I directed thus on their way two young men who had been fishing in the pond. They lived about a mile off through the woods, and were quite used to the route. A day or two after one of them told me that they wandered about the greater part of the night, close by their own premises, and did not get home till toward morning, by which time, as there had been several heavy showers in the mean while, and the leaves were very wet, they were drenched to their skins. I have heard of many going astray even in the village streets, when the darkness was so thick that you could cut it with a knife, as the saying is. Some who live in the outskirts, having come to town a-shopping in their wagons, have been obliged to put up for the night; and gentlemen and ladies making a call have gone half a mile out of their way, feeling the sidewalk only with their feet, and not knowing when they turned. It is a surprising and memorable, as well as valuable experience, to be lost in the woods any time.

PEOPLE OF  
WALDEN

BURRILL CURTIS

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

Since [George William Curtis](#) has related a similar incident, it seems likely that he was the companion mentioned in “The Ponds”:

[WALDEN](#): In warm evenings I frequently sat in the boat playing the flute, and saw the perch, which I seemed to have charmed, hovering around me, and the moon travelling over the ribbed bottom, which was strewn with the wrecks of the forest. Formerly I had come to this pond adventurously, from time to time, in dark summer nights, with a companion, and making a fire close to the water’s edge, which we thought attracted the fishes, we caught pouts with a bunch of worms strung on a thread; and when we had done, far in the night, threw the burning brands high into the air like skyrocket, which, coming down into the pond, were quenched with a loud hissing, and we were suddenly groping in total darkness. Through this, whistling a tune, we took our way to the haunts of men again. But now I had made my home by the shore.



## THE LATE BLIGHT

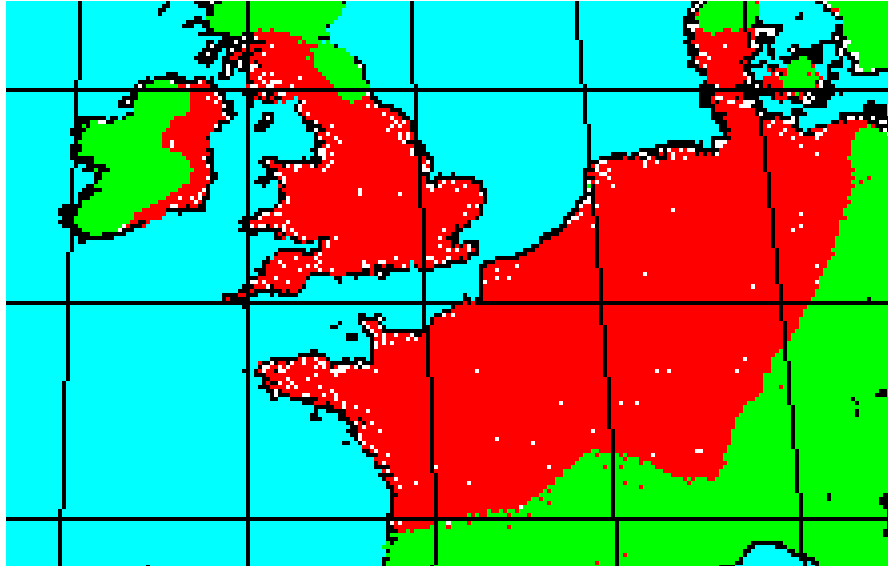
## AN GORTA MÓR

However, Thoreau's friend [George](#) would later remember this as having happened, not at the pond, but on the Concord River.

During a heavy thundershower either of the spring or of the fall ([Thoreau](#) does not specify which),

**WALDEN:** In one heavy thunder shower the lightning struck a large pitch-pine across the pond, making a very conspicuous and perfectly regular spiral groove from top to bottom, an inch or more deep, and four or five inches wide, as you would groove a walking-stick. I passed it again the other day, and was struck with awe on looking up and beholding that mark, now more distinct than ever, where a terrific and resistless bolt came down out of the harmless sky eight years ago.

September 16, Tuesday: Official confirmation of widespread blight in Irish potato patches across the entire eastern portion of the island.



Evidently the October crop was not about to be so abundant as had been anticipated:

**Acreage in Potatoes**

Year	Acres
1845	>2,000,000
1846	>1,000,000
1847	300,000
1848	700,000

Prior to this year the average daily intake of an Irish adult during a winter would have consisted of 10-12 pounds of potatoes, with buttermilk. We didn't know then precisely how many people would starve to death or, weakened by starvation, succumb to diarrhea and fever or to cholera in Ireland during the 1845-1851 period, and we still don't know now, but we do know that the first great die-off had occurred during the winter of 1846-1847. A table prepared after the fact by Census Commissioners, presented here, in all probability under-estimates the mortality because of the manner in which they collected data: for a family all of whose members succumbed zero deaths would be tabulated. Of the total number of deaths, which would be between 500,000 and 1,500,000, the percentage of that total which would occur in each year probably worked out to



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something like this:

### Mortality, expressed as %ages of the 1841 Population

Year	%
1842	5.1%
1843	5.2%
1844	5.6%
1845	6.4%
1846	9.1%
1847	18.5%
1848	15.4%
1849	17.9%
1850	12.2%

The figures shown for 1849 are the result of a [cholera](#) epidemic in Connacht, Leinster, and Munster, as well as of the general starvation.

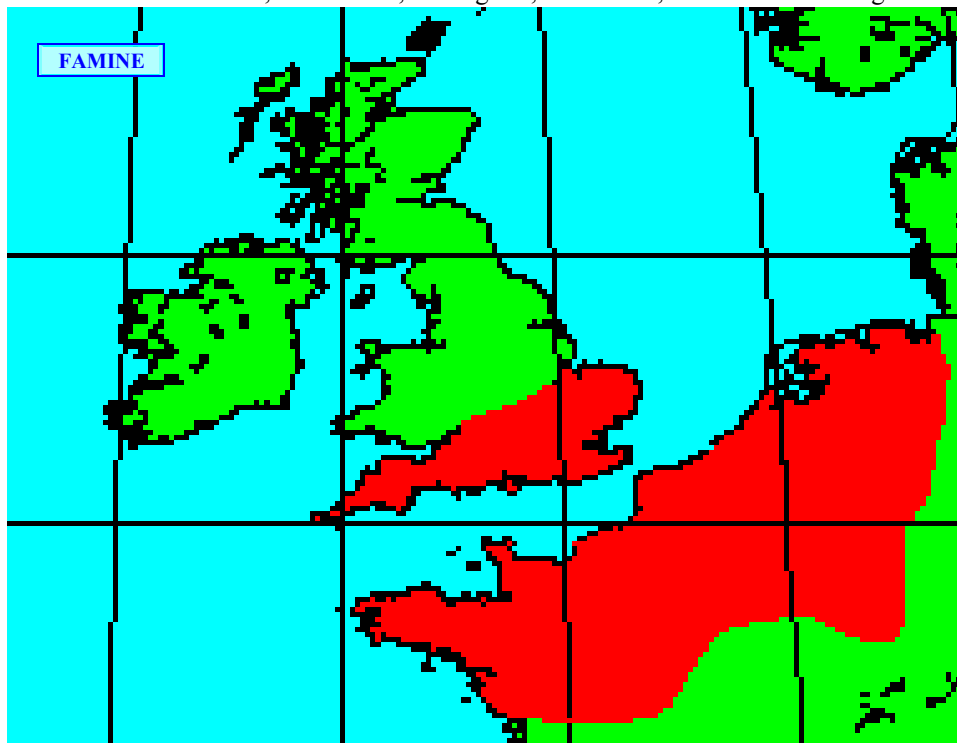
## AN GORTA MÓR

## THE LATE BLIGHT

Mid-August: The American [potato](#) blight *Phytophthora infestans* appeared on the Isle of Wight and in the Channel



Islands and in the vicinity of Kent and in the vicinity of Paris. Reports began to come in of this soot's appearance elsewhere as well, in Scotland, in Belgium, in Holland, across southern England....



August 23, Saturday: In England, John Lindley reported that “A fatal malady has broken out amongst the [potato](#) crop. On all sides we hear of the destruction.”

FAMINE

There had since Wednesday been showers and thunderstorms from Maine to New-York, breaking what had been in eastern Massachusetts a severe drought. The lightning strikes on this day in the vicinity of Littleton, ten miles to the northwest of Walden Pond, both in the morning storm and in the afternoon storm, were particularly devastating, initiating several woodlot fires and several structure fires (such as the Tremont Hotel), stunning cattle in the fields, killing a couple of people, etc. On this afternoon [Henry Thoreau](#) got caught in a rainshower and thunderstorm, as he would report in [WALDEN: OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS](#), and sought refuge in the isolated shanty of a local [Irish](#) immigrant family. The infant of the family would be described in [WALDEN](#) as still “cone-headed” by recent passage through the birth canal, and that girl baby had been born in May of this year.<sup>34</sup>

34. Note that “cone-headed,” an accurate medical description of a neonate condition, is not an epithet of derision.

**WALDEN:** I set out one afternoon to go a-fishing to Fair-Haven, through the woods, to eke out my scanty fare of vegetables. My way led through Pleasant Meadow, an adjunct of the Baker Farm, that retreat of which a poet has since sung, beginning,-

“Thy entry is a pleasant field,  
Which some mossy fruit trees yield  
Partly to a ruddy brook,  
By gliding musquash undertook,  
And mercurial trout,  
Darting about.”

I thought of living there before I went to Walden. I “hooked” the apples, leaped the brook, and scared the musquash and the trout. It was one of those afternoons which seem indefinitely long before one, in which many events may happen, a large portion of our natural life, though it was already half spent when I started. By the way there came up a shower, which compelled me to stand half an hour under a pine, piling boughs over my head, and wearing my handkerchief for a shed; and when at length I had made one cast over the pickerel-weed, standing up to my middle in water I found myself suddenly in the shadow of a cloud, and the thunder began to rumble with such emphasis that I could do no more than listen to it. The gods must be proud, thought I, with such forked flashes to rout a poor unarmed fisherman.



Sat Aug 23d I set out this afternoon to go a fishing –for pickerel to eke out my scanty fare of vegetables– From Walden I went through the woods to Fair Haven –but by the way the rain came on again and my fates compelled me to stand a half hour under a pine –piling boughs over my head, and wearing my pocket handkerchief for an umbrella –and when at length I made one cast over the pickerel weed, the thonder gan romblen in the Heven with that gristly steven, that Chaucer tells of –(the gods must be proud with such forked flashes and such artillery to rout a poor unarmed fisherman) I made haste to the nearest hut for a shelter. This stood a half a mile off the road and so much the nearer to the pond– There dwelt a shiftless Irishman John Field & his wife –and many children from the broad faced boy that ran by his father’s side to escape the rain to the wrinkled & Sybil like –crone-like infant, not knowing whether to take the part of age or infancy that sat upon its father’s knee as in the palaces of nobles and looked out from its home in the midst of wet and hunger inquisitively upon the stranger with the privilege of infancy The young creature not knowing but it might be the last of a line of kings instead of John Fields poor starveling brat –or I should rather say still knowing that it was the last of a noble line and the hope and cynosure of the world. An Honest hard working –but shiftless man plainly was John Field. And his wife she too was brave to cook so many succeeding dinners in the recesses of that lofty stove –with round greasy face and bare breast –still thinking to improve her condition one day –with the never absent mop in hand –and yet no effects of it visible anywhere– The chickens like members of the family stalked about the room –too much humanized to roast well– They stood and looked in my eye or pecked at my shoe– He told me his story –how hard he worked bogging for a neighbor –ten dollars an acre –and the use of the land with manure for one year– And the little broad faced son worked cheerfully at his fathers side the while not knowing alas how poor a bargain he had made. Living –John Field –alas –without arithmetic.– Failing to live– Do you ever fish said I– Oh yes– I catch a mess when I am lying by –good perch I catch– what your bait– I catch shiners with fish worms & bait the perch with them. You’d better go now John, said his wife with with glistening hopeful face– But poor John Field disturbed but a couple of fins while I was catching a fair string –& he said it was his luck –and when he changed seats –luck changed seats too. Thinking to live by some derivative old country mode in this primitive new country e.g. to catch perch –with





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shiner.

I find an instinct in me conducting to a mystic spiritual life –and also another –to a primitive savage life–  
Toward evening — as the world waxes darker I am permitted to see the woodchuck stealing across my path,  
and tempted to seize and devour it. The wildest most desolate scenes are strangely familiar to me

Why not live a hard and emphatic life? not to be avoided –full of adventures and work! Learn much –in it.  
travel much though it be only in these woods I some-times walk across a field with unexpected expansion and  
long-missed content –as if there were a field worthy of me. The usual daily boundaries of life are dispersed and  
I see in what field I stand.

When on my way this after noon shall I go down this long hill in the rain to fish in the pond “I ask myself”– and  
I say to my-self yet roam far –grasp life & conquer it– learn much –& live– Your fetters are knocked off –you  
are really free. Stay till late in the night –be unwise and daring– See many men far and near –in their fields and  
cottages before the sun set –though as if many more were to be seen– And yet much rencontre shall be so  
satisfactory and simple that no other shall seem possible Do not repose every night as villagers do– The noble  
life is continuous and unintermitting At least, live with a longer radius– Men come home at night only for the  
next field or street –where their house hold echoes haunt –and their life pines and is sickly because it breathes  
its own breath. Their shadows morning & evening reach farther than their daily steps. But come home from far  
–from ventures & perils –from enterprise and discovery –& crusading –with faith and experience and character.  
Do not rest much. Dismiss prudence –fear –conformity – Remember only –what is promised. Make the day light  
you and the night hold a candle –though you be falling from heaven to earth –“from morn to dewy eve a  
summer’s day.”

for Vulcan’s fall occupied a day but our highest aspirations and performances fill but the interstices of time.

Are we not reminded in our better moments that we have been needlessly husbanding somewhat –perchance –  
our little God-derived capital –or title to capital guarding it by methods we know? but the most diffuse  
prodigality a better wisdom teaches –that we *hold* nothing –we are not what we were–

By usurers craft –by Jewish methods –we strive to retain and increase the divinity in us –when the greater part  
of divinity is out of us.

Most men have forgotten that it was ever morning– But a few serene memories –healthy & wakeful natures  
there are who assure us that the Sun rose clear, heralded by the singing of birds

This very day’s sun which rose before memnon was ready to greet it.

In all the dissertations –on language –men forget the language that is –that is really universal –the inexpressible  
meaning that is in all things & every where with which the morning & evening teem. As if language were  
especially of the tongue. Of course with a more copious hearing or understanding –of what is published the  
present *languages* will be forgotten.

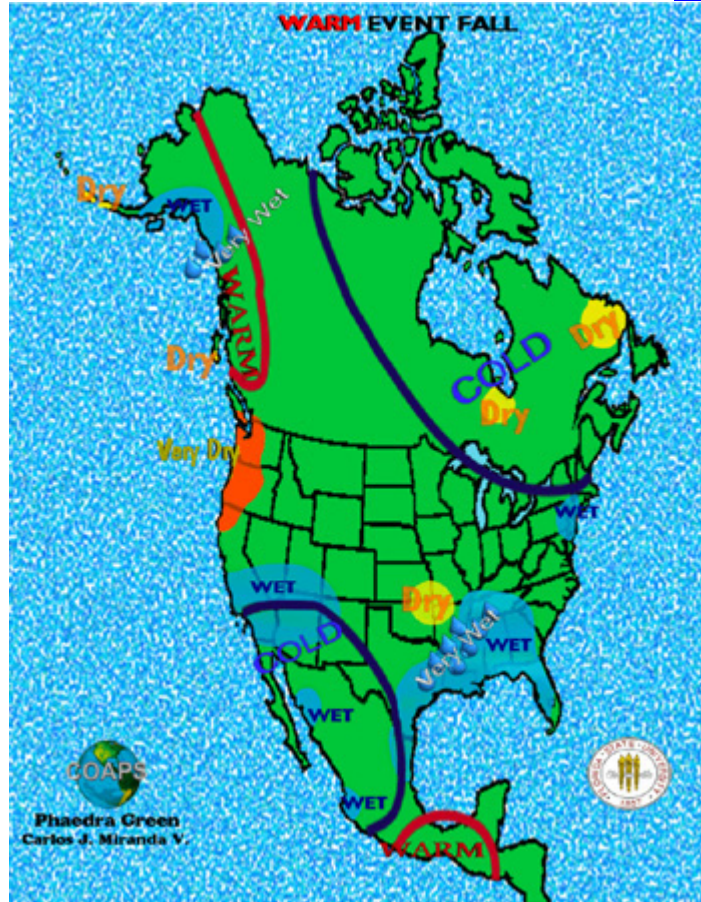
MEMNON

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The rays which streamed through the crevices will be forgotten when the shadow is wholly removed.

TIMELINE OF WALDEN



➡ Beginning of September: At the end of the usual “meal months” during which the old stores of potatoes had become exhausted while the new crop was not yet ready to be dug from the ground, the months of June, July, and August, the American potato blight *Phytophthora infestans* was reported as having spread to Ireland, but the plants were lush and green despite the summer having been unusually wet and cool, and an exceptionally abundant October crop was being anticipated.<sup>35</sup>

FAMINE

Mid-September: In England, John Lindley asked dramatically “[W]here will Ireland be, in the event of a universal potato rot?”

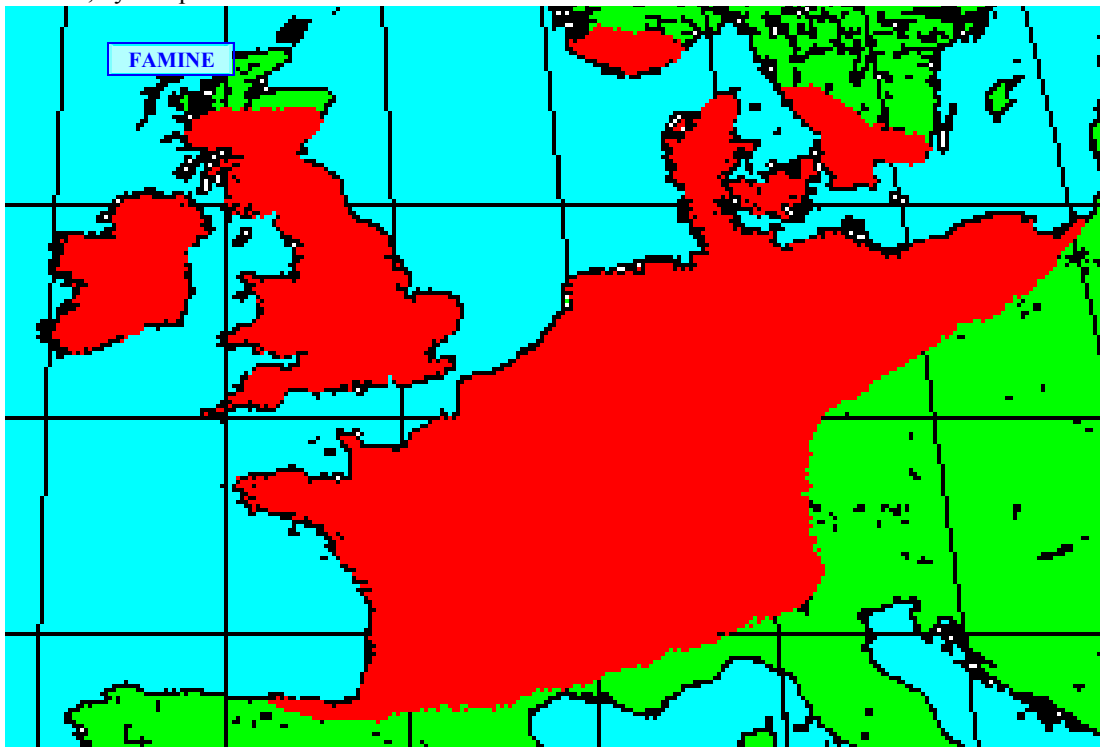
FAMINE

35. Potatoes are generally not fully mature in Ireland until October.

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Mid-October: The full magnitude of the year's [potato](#) disaster, and the repercussions which inevitably were going to follow, by this point had become all too evident:





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1846

A pamphlet appeared in [Boston](#) summarizing the munificence and beneficence of the 1,496 men in the commonwealth who were worth at least \$50,000, each.

### BOSTON'S FIRST MEN

Strict rules were utilized for the determination of benevolence. Since [Queen Victoria](#) had given \$900,000 for relief in the [Irish Potato Famine](#) out of her vast fortune, the size of which was approximately known — by computation a Boston laborer receiving an average wage would have needed to donate \$0.<sup>80</sup> in order “to be precisely as benevolent as Her Majesty.” Similarly, the editors knew of a Boston man with an annual income of \$20.<sup>00</sup> who annually gave \$0.<sup>50</sup> to charity. It was on the basis of this sort of “widow’s mite” high standard that only 375 of the 1,496 were being declared to be “more or less Benevolent”:

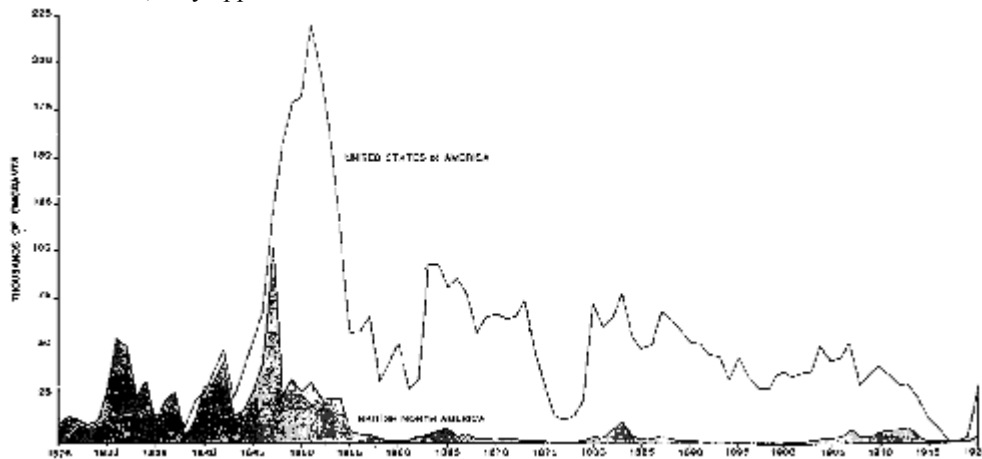
Amount of property owned	\$244,780,000
Number worth over one million dollars	18
Number worth just one million dollars	8
Number worth three fourths of a million dollars	10
Number worth half a million dollars	45
Number worth quarter of a million dollars	147
Number who began poor, or nearly so	705
Number who rec'd all, or the greater part, by inheritance or marriage	282
Number of rich Farmers	90
Number of rich Manufacturers (Cotton, Woolen, &c.)	53
Number of rich Merchants (and Various Traders)	463
Number of rich Lawyers (including Judges)	75
Number of rich Physicians	31
Number of rich Clergymen	12
Number of rich Brokers (including some speculators)	46
Number of rich Publishers	11
Number of rich Editors	4
Number of rich Shoe makers (and Dealers)	50
Number of rich Tailors (and Clothes-Dealers)	10
Number of rich Carpenters (and Ship-Builders)	15
Number of rich Masons	9

Number of rich Butchers (and Provision-Dealers)	13
Number of rich Distillers	14
Number ascertained to be more or less Benevolent	375
Number of rich Old Bachelors	68

While this benevolence was going on in [Boston](#) in the New World, in [Ireland](#) the apparently sound and meaty white tubers of the new [potato](#) crop, upon which so very much depended, suddenly again disintegrated into stinking black slime — just as they had in the previous harvest season. This episode of the “late blight” of *Phytophthora infestans* was merely as bad as before but the population was already in an emaciated condition.



Therefore a visit which had been planned for [Queen Victoria](#) would obviously need to be postponed. Of over 100,000 malnourished, [cholera](#)-ridden [Irish](#), off-loaded from the converted cargo holds of sailing ships into Canadian quarantine stations, one-third died within this year. Next to a wharf at Montréal, in a pit, 6,000 bodies were dumped and the cause of death was set down simply as “ship fever.” Spectators on the banks of the St. Lawrence noticed that, as survivors of the trans-Atlantic voyage were being barged upriver toward the Canadian interior, they appeared too weak to return the waves of children on shore.



We don't know precisely how many people have starved to death or, weakened by starvation, succumbed to diarrhea and fever or to [cholera](#) in [Ireland](#) during the ensuing period, but we do know that the first great die-off would occur during the winter of 1846-1847. A table prepared after the fact by Census Commissioners, presented here, in all probability under-estimates the mortality because of the manner in which they collected data: for a family all of whose members succumbed zero deaths would be tabulated. Of the total number of deaths, which would be between 500,000 and 1,500,000, the percentage of that total which would occur in each

# THE LATE BLIGHT

# AN GORTA MÓR

year probably worked out to something like this:

## Mortality, expressed as %ages of the 1841 Population

Year	%
1842	5.1%
1843	5.2%
1844	5.6%
1845	6.4%
1846	9.1%
1847	18.5%
1848	15.4%
1849	17.9%
1850	12.2%

Prior to 1845 the average intake of an [Irish](#) adult during a winter had consisted of ten to twelve pounds of potatoes, with buttermilk, daily. In the oncoming winter it would consist of one pound of Indian meal **or** one bowl of soup with one slice of bread — and to prove oneself worthy to receive such sustenance one would need to be doing daily hard labor.

In this year a painting was made of [Albert Edward, Prince of Wales](#). The 5-year-old appears well enough nourished.



A Mrs. Thynne brought some of the corals of Torquay to London “for the purpose of study and the entertainment of friends.” Each day, this lady’s housemaid<sup>36</sup> would need to spend thirty to forty-five minutes

36. Possibly, but of course not necessarily, an [Irish](#) woman.

# AN GORTA MÓR

# THE LATE BLIGHT

pouring the six gallons of salt water of the aquarium backward and forward before an open window, in order to keep it fresh. The “aquarium craze,” something that Brits would be referring to as “sea-gardening,” had fairly begun.

On a related note (?), the “Boston Museum” was constructed on Tremont Street in [Boston](#).<sup>37</sup> Many edifices of this type were in this period becoming economically possible, due in part to the wealth being generated by the sea trade and in part to of the eagerness of these [Irish](#) unfortunates to part with their labor for ridiculously low wages. —Hey, it’s an ill wind that blows **nobody** any good!

At this point John Mitchel and other Young Irelanders who had come to disdain the doctrine of “moral force” broke with Daniel O’Connell and founded the Irish Confederation, devoted to an agenda of the doing of harm so that good might result. —Hey, let’s give terrorism a chance!



[Thomas Carlyle](#) would be doing his part, from this year into 1851, by making a study of the situation in Ireland in order to inform curious Englishmen what they ought to make of it.

July: There were scattered reports of a reappearance of the blight in [Ireland](#), including some counties such as Wicklow which had been free of the soot on the leaves in the preceding [potato](#) season.



FAMINE

August 7: “The [potatoes](#) all about [Kingstown](#) are rotting.”

RHODE ISLAND

In one area between Dublin and Cork in [Ireland](#), travelers could smell the rotting [potatoes](#) even from the public highway.

IRISH POTATO FAMINE

37. This structure is not to be confused with the “Boston Museum of Natural History” which was constructed in 1863 in the newly filled Back Bay and which eventually became the Museum of Science. This structure wasn’t a museum at all, it was a 1,200-seat auditorium at which plays were regularly performed. It was termed a “museum” in order to reassure blue-blooded [Boston](#) clients who might have been reluctant to visit anything so vulgar as a “theater.”

# THE LATE BLIGHT

# AN GORTA MÓR

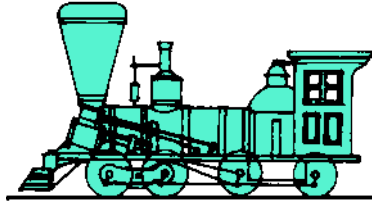
Mid-August: The new crop of [potatoes](#) was anticipated to be able to provide its first nourishment, and succor the [Irish](#) for the localized and variegated appearance of the blight in their previous year’s crop. However, the “soot” was in this year **everywhere** apparent on the strong green leaves of the plant.

[IRISH POTATO FAMINE](#)




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[HISTORY OF RR](#)



Or, this may have been what it looked like, since we know Baldwin’s company had begun to manufacture such a model for the Madison & Indianapolis Railroad:

(Would it be wrong to suggest, Thoreau was being haunted by what that old Indian had said to him on the dock in Oldtown in 1838? )





The cousin adventurers went by rail via Boston to Portland and then by night steamship to Bangor, by stagecoach to Mattawamkeag, by batteau up the Penobscot River into North Twin Lake and to Sowadahunk



deadwater, climbed Mount Ktaadn, and then Thoreau returned by ship. His notes of the climb at that point were no more than: “climb tree — torrent — camping ground — leave party — go up torrent — fir trees — lakes — rocks — camp — green fish — fire at night — wind up ravine.” He then wrote, but decided not to domesticate, a seven-page account of Agiocochook. (Instead, he expanded the Saddleback episode eventually for use in [A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS.](#))



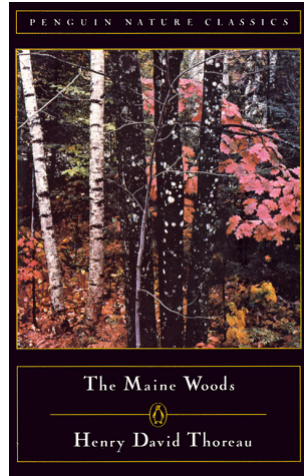
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 Aug 31st 1846 Concord to Boston— Rail road Station —tall man —sailors short of money —cars to Portland Passenger to Umbagog. Sea shore —Salem tunnel no water hay cocks —Portsmouth North Berwick 

THE LATE BLIGHT

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–Saco –Portland –Capt’s office –White head light –sailor –owls head Thomaston –Camden –Belfast –Bangor–



(The map prepared by Tom Funk which shows the route of this journey, and the one Thoreau would make in 1857, can be viewed on the following screens.)

In the “[KTAADN](#)” essay that would be based primarily on this trip, Thoreau would comment that a local farmer who seemed by inference to have been attempting also to grow tomatoes had even in that remote area been infected by the potato rot though he had used seed of his own raising!

I think he said that he was the first to bring a plough and a cow so far; and he might have added the last, with only two exceptions. The potato-rot had found him out here, too, the previous year, and got half or two thirds of his crop, though the seed was of his own raising. Oats, grass, and [potatoes](#) were his staples; but he raised, also, a few carrots and turnips, and “a little corn for the hens,” for this was all that he dared risk, for fear that it would not ripen. Melons, squashes, sweet-corn, beans, [tomatoes](#), and many other vegetables, could not be ripened there.

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Since the late blight caused by *Phytophthora infestans* affects both [potato](#) and [tomato](#) plants, it would be possible that the source of this isolated farm’s potato rot occurring in potatoes grown from local seed would have been that the farmer had brought in tomato seedlings containing the fungus.<sup>38</sup>

IRISH POTATO FAMINE

Irish Acreage in Potatoes

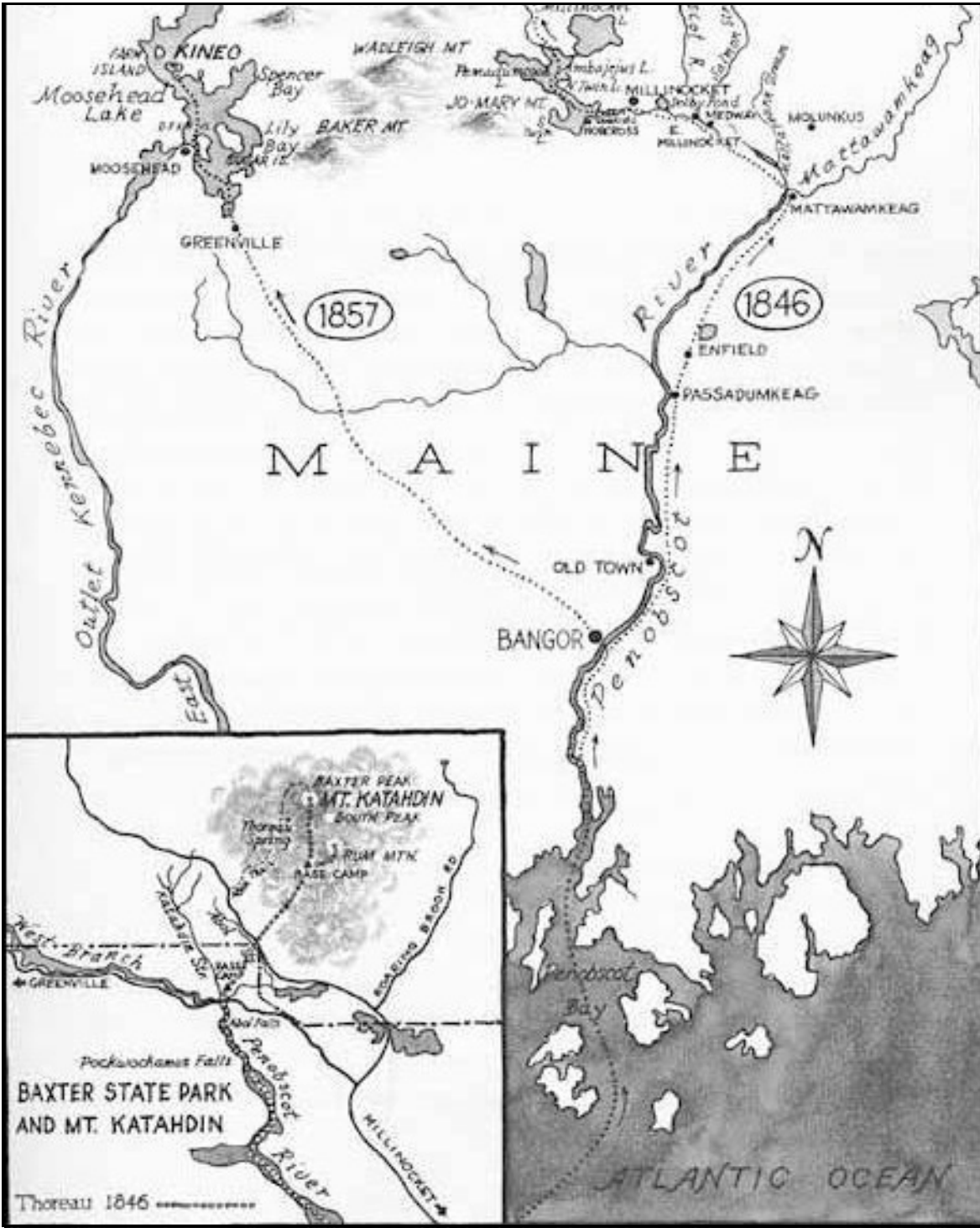
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THE LATE BLIGHT

AN GORTA MÓR





## HERE THEN IS MY NEW THEORY

Various scholars have alleged that in the [Irish Potato Famine](#), we have a case of genocide. Dr. Edward Brennan, Ireland's ambassador to Canada, has noted: "The Great Famine was Ireland's holocaust (which) condemned the Irish to be the first boat people of modern Europe."

Weary men, what reap ye? Golden corn for the Stranger.  
What sow ye? Human corpses that await the Avenger.  
Fainting forms, all hunger stricken, what see you in the offing?  
Stately ships to bear our food away amid the stranger's scoffing.  
There's a proud array of soldiers, what do they round your door?  
They guard our masters' granaries from the hands of the poor.  
Pale mothers, wherefore weeping? Would to God that we were dead.  
Our children swoon before us, and we cannot give them bread!  
We are wretches, famished, scorned, human tools to build your pride,  
But God will yet take vengeance for the souls for whom Christ died.  
Now is your hour of pleasure, bask ye in the world's caress;  
But our whitening bones against ye will arise as witnesses,  
>From the cabins and the ditches, in their charred, uncoffined masses,  
For the Angel of the Trumpet will know them as he passes.  
A ghastly spectral army before God we'll stand  
And arraign ye as our murderers, O spoilers of our land!

The Irish labor leader James Connolly alleged that "The English administration of Ireland during the 'famine' was a colossal crime against the human race." The allegation has repeatedly been made by Irish patriots that their nation did not starve for want of potatoes, but because still-available foodstuffs, 30 to 40 shiploads per day, were being removed while this removal process was being guarded by 200,000 British soldiers organized as what amounted to Food Removal Regiments. Be that as it may, apologists for British conduct during this period of food scarcity would do well to ponder the characterization of British colonialism in Ireland by William Makepiece Thackeray:

It is a frightful document against ourselves ... one of the most melancholy stories in the whole world of insolence, rapine, brutal, endless slaughter and persecution on the part of the English master ... no crime ever invented by eastern or western barbarians, no torture or Roman persecution or Spanish Inquisition, no tyranny of Nero or Alva but can be matched in the history of England in Ireland.

In 1861 in THE LAST CONQUEST OF IRELAND, John Mitchel wrote:

The Almighty indeed sent the potato blight but the English created the famine.

Mitchel further observed that:

... a million and half men, women and children were carefully, prudently and peacefully slain by the English government. They died of hunger in the midst of abundance which their own hands created. There was no famine. There can be no famine in a country overflowing with food.



## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

A London Times editorial of September 30, 1845, warned: “In England the two main meals of a working man’s day now consists of potatoes.” Grossly over-populated relative to its food supply, England’s overdependence on imported foodstuffs was similar to Ireland’s overdependence on the potato. In 1844 the European potato crop failed, causing food prices to rise, before in 1845 the blight hit the offshore potato crop. England was itself facing famine unless it could import vast amounts of alternative food but didn’t grab Irish food merely to save itself. It took this food in part in order to decimate the population of Ireland. Queen Victoria’s economist, Nassau Senior, would express a fear that the plan would “kill only one million Irish, and that will scarcely be enough to do much good.” Treasury Chief Charles Trevelyan refused entry to an American food ship and, when an eyewitness urged a stop, responded, “We must not complain of what we really want to obtain.” Thomas Carlyle exulted: “Ireland is like a half-starved rat that crosses the path of an elephant. What must the elephant do? Squelch it, by heavens, squelch it.” “TOTAL ANNIHILATION,” offered a London Times headline of September 2, 1846; and in 1848 an editorialist exulted that “A Celt will soon be as rare on the banks of the Shannon as a red man on the banks of Manhattan.”

Here, however, we have a new theory as to how the blight microorganism which caused the [Irish Potato Famine](#) originally made its way to [Ireland](#), and this new theory does not allege English purposefulness and therefore does not allege English genocide. It merely ascribes something to the English which we all know to be, anyway, utterly characteristic of them: unconsciousness.

We know that epidemiologically, the microorganism came from Mexico or Peru to the Eastern seaboard of the United States to the Low Countries to England and Ireland. That’s a given, extrapolated from the years in which the microorganism began to destroy [potato](#) crops in these various areas.

This is evidence that it seems unlikely, will ever be challengeable.

We believe we know, on the basis of the movement of infected potatoes, how the microorganism made its way from Mexico or Peru to the Eastern seaboard of the United States. We believe we know, likewise, on the basis of the movement of infected potatoes, how the microorganism made its way from the Eastern seaboard of the United States to the Low Countries of Europe. That historical research has been done. What we don’t have much evidence for, what to this point we have never bothered to research, is specifically how the blight microorganism then made its way across the English and Irish channels, to infect crops on these islands north of Europe.

The only existing theory is that the microorganism was wafted across these bodies of water on the cool winds. That is, the culprit was a cool season.

Nobody’s fault.

The only thing that this theory has had going for it, is that it has been the only theory in existence. This must have been what happened, we say, because there’s no other available explanation. The blight was blown by the wind. Nobody’s fault.

What has recently been noticed, however, is that the potato plant and the [tomato](#) plant, both *Solanaceas*, are both carriers of the microorganism. The microorganism blights potatoes but has no noticeable impact on tomatoes. Nevertheless, it is at least as easy for this particular microorganism to be carried from place to place, by the human transportation of tomatoes and of tomato plants, as it is for it to be carried from place to place, by the human transportation of potatoes and of potato plants. In fact, it is more likely that during the time period in question we would have indulged in the transportation of the blight microorganism by our relocation of healthy-seeming tomato materials, than that we would have indulged in the transportation of noticeably infected and inferior potato materials.

We have seen a situation in which there was an isolated potato farm in the backwoods of Maine, that for years during the potato blight was free of the microorganism. Then the farmer went to town and got some tomato plants and took them home in his wagon! The next year his potatoes turned to mush and he wondered why. (We know of this because Henry David Thoreau made a note of it in his journal of his trip to Maine, preparatory for his writing the series of articles we know as THE MAINE WOODS.)

During the period in question the potato was bulk food for the most vulnerable classes but the tomato was in an entirely different category of alimentation. The potato provided calories, vitamins, and minerals for the needy. The tomato was, however, a mere specialty food, a *salet* item relatively lacking in calories and in vitamins (yes, tomatoes are **low** in vitamins), a comestible for the delight of the well-to-do and easily bored. Roughly, that social distinction between the needy and the bored correlates, in the context of Ireland, with the gross social distinction

we think of as — the Irish versus the English.

If some well-to-do, easily bored English resident of Ireland had imported tomato plants to be grown in his or her garden on his or her estate in Ireland, either from the Eastern seaboard of the United States or from the Low Countries of Europe, during the period in question, that could have been an alternative vector for the transmission of the microorganism across the channels of water that isolate England and Ireland.

Therefore we now have two competing theories, not one unchallenged theory, for how the blight microorganism made its way to Ireland. The original theory, that the microorganism was wafted to Ireland on the cool winds of an unusual season, nobody’s fault—a theory that has never had any real evidence to support it, a theory that has stood unchallenged because it has been the only theory available— no longer stands alone and unchallenged.

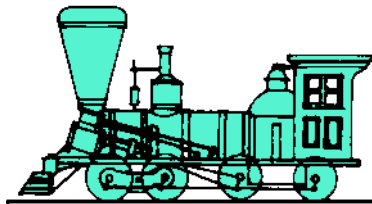
We badly need to do historical research into the movement of tomatoes and of tomato plants during the period in question. **Did** some English resident of Ireland import tomatoes or tomato plants into Ireland just prior to the Irish Potato Famine? **Was** the Irish Potato Famine induced among the poor Irish, unbenownst, merely in order to grace the tables of the English with a novelty *salet* item?

I myself take no position in this matter, other than to insist that further historical inquiry is now indicated. I make no accusation that, if tomato material was indeed the vector for the intrusion of this blight, and if English residents of Ireland brought this tomato material, that they did this **on purpose to destroy the improvident Irish** who, they were commenting at that time, were such a bother to them. (In such a case, the totality of the comment which I might personally make would be: “**How convenient it can be when we happen inadvertently to strike two birds with the same stone!**”)




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THE LATE BLIGHT

AN GORTA MÓR



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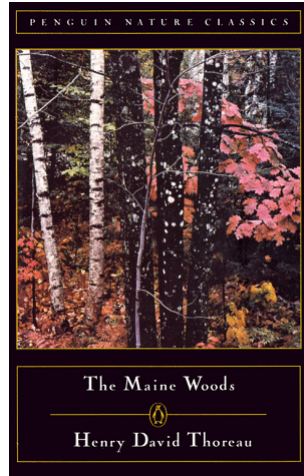


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IRISH POTATO FAMINE

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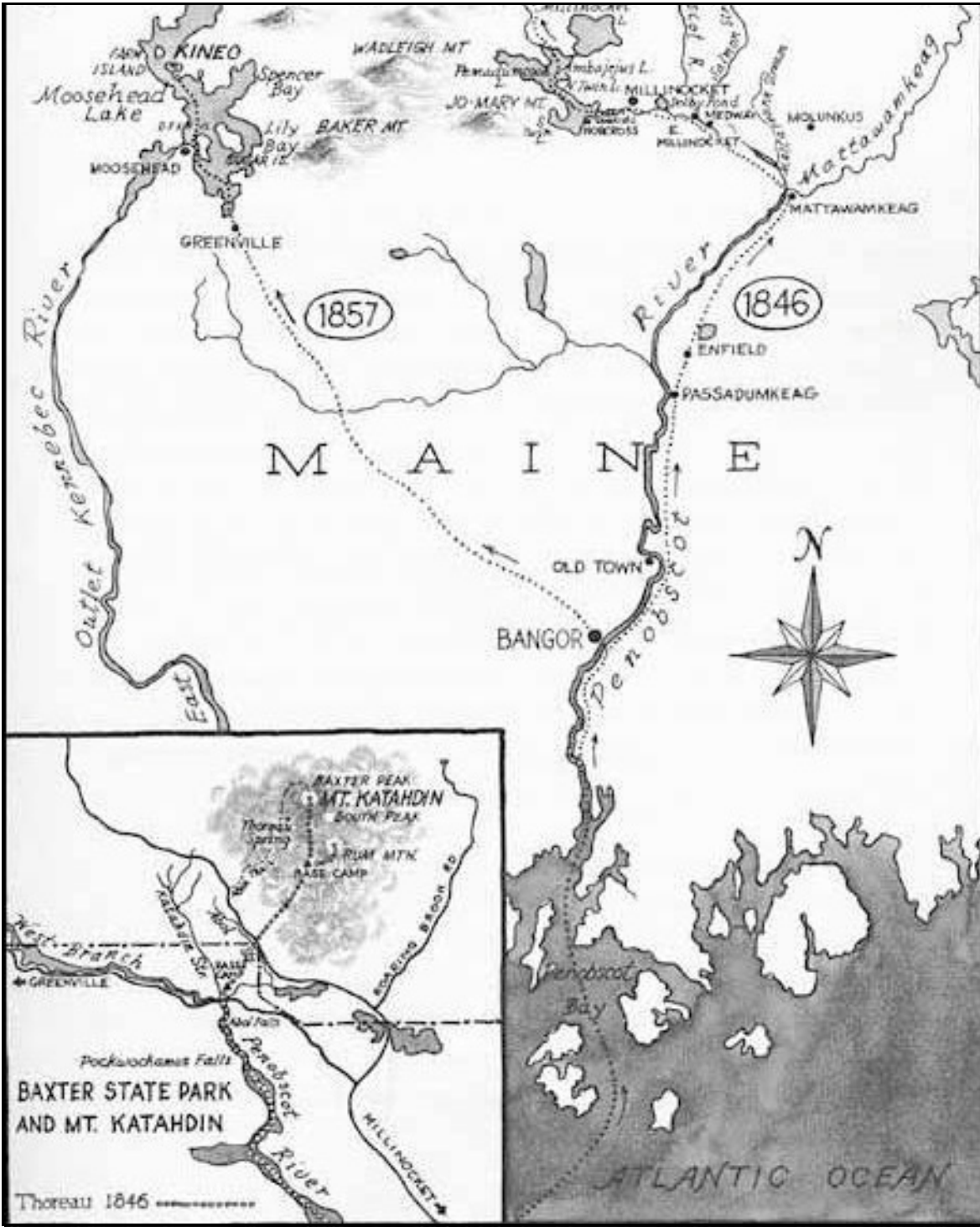
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The only existing theory is that the microorganism was wafted across these bodies of water on the cool winds. That is, the culprit was a cool season.

Nobody’s fault.

The only thing that this theory has had going for it, is that it has been the only theory in existence. This must have been what happened, we say, because there’s no other available explanation. The blight was blown by the wind. Nobody’s fault.

What has recently been noticed, however, is that the potato plant and the [tomato](#) plant, both *Solanaceas*, are both carriers of the microorganism. The microorganism blights potatoes but has no noticeable impact on tomatoes. Nevertheless, it is at least as easy for this particular microorganism to be carried from place to place, by the human transportation of tomatoes and of tomato plants, as it is for it to be carried from place to place, by the human transportation of potatoes and of potato plants. In fact, it is more likely that during the time period in question we would have indulged in the transportation of the blight microorganism by our relocation of healthy-seeming tomato materials, than that we would have indulged in the transportation of noticeably infected and inferior potato materials.

We have seen a situation in which there was an isolated potato farm in the backwoods of Maine, that for years during the potato blight was free of the microorganism. Then the farmer went to town and got some tomato plants and took them home in his wagon! The next year his potatoes turned to mush and he wondered why. (We know of this because Henry David Thoreau made a note of it in his journal of his trip to Maine, preparatory for his writing the series of articles we know as THE MAINE WOODS.)

During the period in question the potato was bulk food for the most vulnerable classes but the tomato was in an entirely different category of alimentation. The potato provided calories, vitamins, and minerals for the needy. The tomato was, however, a mere specialty food, a *salet* item relatively lacking in calories and in vitamins (yes, tomatoes are **low** in vitamins), a comestible for the delight of the well-to-do and easily bored. Roughly, that social distinction between the needy and the bored correlates, in the context of Ireland, with the gross social distinction



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we think of as — the Irish versus the English.

If some well-to-do, easily bored English resident of Ireland had imported tomato plants to be grown in his or her garden on his or her estate in Ireland, either from the Eastern seaboard of the United States or from the Low Countries of Europe, during the period in question, that could have been an alternative vector for the transmission of the microorganism across the channels of water that isolate England and Ireland.

Therefore we now have two competing theories, not one unchallenged theory, for how the blight microorganism made its way to Ireland. The original theory, that the microorganism was wafted to Ireland on the cool winds of an unusual season, nobody's fault—a theory that has never had any real evidence to support it, a theory that has stood unchallenged because it has been the only theory available—no longer stands alone and unchallenged.

We badly need to do historical research into the movement of tomatoes and of tomato plants during the period in question. **Did** some English resident of Ireland import tomatoes or tomato plants into Ireland just prior to the Irish Potato Famine? **Was** the Irish Potato Famine induced among the poor Irish, unbenownst, merely in order to grace the tables of the English with a novelty *salet* item?

I myself take no position in this matter, other than to insist that further historical inquiry is now indicated. I make no accusation that, if tomato material was indeed the vector for the intrusion of this blight, and if English residents of Ireland brought this tomato material, that they did this **on purpose to destroy the improvident Irish** who, they were commenting at that time, were such a bother to them. (In such a case, the totality of the comment which I might personally make would be: “**How convenient it can be when we happen inadvertently to strike two birds with the same stone!**”)

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Early October: With the [potato](#) harvesting season underway in [Ireland](#), Lord Lieutenant Lord Bessborough confessed to the Prime Minister of England

*“I verily believe that by Christmas there will not be a sound potato in the country.”*



[Margaret Fuller](#) was visiting [Thomas Carlyle](#). During her stay in London she commented, evidently not at all anent the potatoes of Ireland, “I accept the universe.” Carlyle made light of the comment, clearly not at all anent the potatoes of Ireland of the scarcity of which he would emphatically have approved — for it was considered bad form in the 19th Century for a **mere woman** to accept the universe, it was as distressing as the idea of a cheerleader taking on the football team since it was the masculine role to embrace, the feminine to

THE LATE BLIGHT

AN GORTA MÓR

FEMINISM

renounce.<sup>40</sup>

IRISH POTATO FAMINE



Fuller would come away from her encounter with this illuminated one with an understandable reaction: “the worst of hearing Carlyle is that you cannot interrupt him.” During her visit, the harangue which she had attempted to interrupt had been one in which [Carlyle](#) was carrying on about his pet idea that “if people would not behave well,” we ought simply to “put collars round their necks. Find a hero, and let them be his slaves.”<sup>41</sup>

Public Works Enrollment


October 1846	114,000
January 1847	570,000
March 1847	750,000

Fall: The government of the United Kingdom engaged a Mr. Erichsen as its agent, to import Indian corn, Indian corn meal, Egyptian wheat, barley, and barley-meal into [Ireland](#) and Scotland. Would these food supplies prevent Irish starvation or would they prevent English guilt?

FAMINE

November: The earliest deliveries of shiploads of Indian corn, Indian corn meal, Egyptian wheat, barley, and barley-meal were being anticipated along the coast of [Ireland](#).

FAMINE

40. Carlyle seems to have overlooked, however, that Fuller was merely negating the thesis of Ivan in THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV, “I do not accept the world.” Of course, it was unmanly for [Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevski](#) to have announced this through a male character, as unmanly as it would have been for him to have failed to have embraced a lady in distress, since it was the 19th Century gentleman’s role to seize every opportunity. We may also note that when, in Philadelphia PA in 1852 at the first Women’s Rights Convention, [Sarah Moore Grimké](#) proposed Fuller’s “Give me truth; cheat me by no illusion” as the motto of the movement,  she was proposing a motto very similar to this “I accept the universe” sentiment. Those who have incautiously repeated Carlyle’s defensive mutter seem to have neglected to notice that it is a very serious matter, in Christendom, for us to criticize an attitude of acceptance. And in particular we who are influenced by the life of Thoreau should be wary of criticizing an *amor fati*.

41. Compare this with the beloved “conservative” radio commentator Paul Harvey’s pet idea in our own time in our own nation, that what we ought to do with our criminals is get them off their asses and out of our prison systems by simply chaining them behind our garbage trucks.



November: Coming down out of the mountains south of Klamath Lake into the valley of the Sacramento River in the early winter, [Brevet Captain John Charles Frémont](#) made his purpose clear by attempting to foment patriotism among the emigrants from the United States of America. He was promising one and all that if it were to come to war with Mexico his military force would be “there to protect them.” He came very close to getting a battle going against the much larger forces of Mexican General José Castro near Monterey, California, and then discretion took the upper hand over valor and he fled with his expedition into the Oregon territory, making a camp at Klamath Lake.

Meanwhile an unexpected mountain snowstorm was trapping the 79 men, women, and children of the Donner Party, who had also been attempting to make their way across the final mountains and descend into the safety of the valley of the Sacramento River. By the time they got out of the snow, 34 of them would be dead, and some of the 34 would have been eaten. The pass in the Sierra Nevadas which they had attempted would eventually come to be known as the Donner Pass.

(The initial acts of cannibalism that winter were by whites upon the frozen bodies of other white members of the party, who had died natural deaths. Then the two Native American guides who were accompanying the party apparently feared that they were going to be next, for they attempted to make a run for it, and the whites caught and murdered these red deserters, and ate their bodies. It would appear therefore that white racism must have been a contributing factor in this tragedy which developed there on that Sierra summit in the deep snow.)

FAMINE

Winter: Prior to 1845 the average daily intake of an [Irish](#) adult during a winter had consisted of ten to twelve pounds of [potatoes](#), with buttermilk. This winter it consisted of one pound of Indian meal **or** one bowl of soup with one slice of bread — and to prove oneself worthy to receive such sustenance one needed to be performing daily hard labor.

IRISH POTATO FAMINE



Fall-Winter 1846/1847: ... The works of Landor –Coleridge –Wordsworth –contain quotable sentences –gems –in the midst of much that is dull and comparatively of little value– In Carlyle there is as little to quote as in the conversation of a vivacious and eloquent speaker– What you would quote is his vivacity.

THOMAS CARLYLE

1847

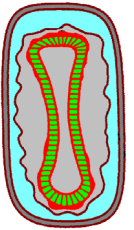
Hoping to provoke a [Boston](#) street battle, the Native American Party (white “[Know-Nothings](#),” not native Americans) staged a rally on Fort Hill, in the center of the tenement slums of new [Irish](#) immigrants. The [Catholic](#) hierarchy, getting wind of this in advance, had ordered all faithful to remain indoors. The provocation was foiled.



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After the epidemic of the [small pox](#) in the previous year in [Boston](#) and [Concord](#), Boston took over control of Deer Island in Boston Harbor. In the early 19th Century the island had been a popular summer resort, but this episode of variola had suggested the city's need for an isolated quarantine station. Over the next three years almost 5,000 [Irish](#) ecological refugees, therefore, many of whom would have taken ill during their long voyage across the stormy Atlantic in jammed substandard vessels without adequate provisions, would be processed through this quarantine facility, and 750 of these immigrants to our land of promise who had made it this far, a full 15%, would die and be buried here on our threshold.



The reality of the famine in [Ireland](#) was described to US readers, as “The Starvation in Ireland” appeared in the New-York [Evening Post](#).



IRISH POTATO FAMINE

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## AN GORTA MÓR

Emigration out of Ireland would double in this year due to governmental ineptitude or sheer politically motivated unwillingness to deal with the [Irish Potato Famine](#). During the years 1846-1852, during and immediately after this ecological disaster, a million to a million and a half, total, would emigrate, and in the subsequent two decades, perhaps yet another two million, and in the four decades subsequent to that, perhaps another four million. Eight out of ten of these frightened or disenchanted people chose the USA. There were wild scenes of families reuniting on American docks:



Who remained behind? According to one Census Commissioner, “the poor, the weak, the old, the lame, the sick, the blind, the dumb, and the imbecile and insane.” The [Irish](#) who were emigrating to the USA would be providing a great deal of, and an increasing amount of, assistance for their relatives on the old sod:

### Low Estimates for Total Remittances to Ireland

Year	Pounds
1848	£460,000
1849	£540,000
1850	£957,000
1851	£990,000

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[William Dicks](#) began to provide illustrations for popular publications such as Henry Noel Humphreys's THE POET'S PLEASANCE and Simms & M'Intyre's PARLOUR LIBRARY (until 1862).



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January 14, Wednesday: On the question of war taxes during the war on Mexico, William Wells Brown said that since the government would be taking the money by coercion, the individual taxpayer would not be blameworthy for the evil that would be done with the tax moneys. He would come to advocate that, if the government were to make a move to begin to conscript American blacks to fight in this war against Mexico, that seeing as how Mexico had outlawed [slavery](#) — that American blacks should, like the San Patricios, “fight against the United States.”

[WAR ON MEXICO](#)

Who were these “San Patricios”? — As Robert Ryal Miller’s *SWORD AND SHAMROCK* makes clear, many so-called San Patricios were [Irish](#) deserters from the US Army, most deserting because of ill treatment and from sympathy with the Mexicans as fellow [Catholics](#). This would lead to some problems after the war in punishing the men. Those who had deserted from the army after declaration of the war upon Mexico would be [hanged](#), but those who had deserted before the declaration of war would often merely be flogged and have their cheek branded with a “D.” (On the other hand, actually the bulk of the San Patricios were Mexican nationals, as this group included men of German, English, and Irish extraction who were living in Mexico.)

January 15, Thursday: Reports were coming in that there were people along the coast of [Ireland](#) who were attempting to subsist upon seaweed, and were unable to obtain even this sort of nourishment every day. There were also reports that people had consumed even the seeds and tubers which had been laid aside for the next year’s crops. But the British government was concerned that, were it to purchase any more Indian corn on the open market, this would again elevate the prices of foodstuffs. This was the height of the die-off of the Irish population, peaking in March.

[IRISH POTATO FAMINE](#)

### Public Works Enrollment

October 1846	114,000
January 1847	570,000
March 1847	750,000

February: This spring would be the height of the die-off of the [Irish](#) population, peaking in March.

[IRISH POTATO FAMINE](#)



March: In Scientific American magazine there appeared a report of a new product that “promises to be more useful and acceptable, at least to ladies.” This “Essence of Coffee” was put up in bottles at a low price.<sup>42</sup>

You have only to put a tea-spoon full into a cup of water containing the usual complement of sugar and milk, and you have a cup of superior coffee without further trouble.

This was an era in which physicians, generally, were disapproving of coffee as unhealthy.

Meanwhile, in Ireland, the starving were being put to hard labor. Swing a pick-ax all day, and then we’ll give you a bowl of something to fill your stomach with:

### Public Works Enrollment

October 1846	114,000
January 1847	570,000
March 1847	750,000

(During the famine it was common to see people with their limbs appearing as plump as sausages. This was famine oedema, an accumulation of fluid in the lymphatic system while the body’s tissues were consuming themselves. The condition was termed, by those who understood its true nature and outcome, “the ripening for the grave.” Elihu Burritt saw laborers who were at work on the roads in order to obtain the public dole, with their limbs “swollen to almost twice their usual size.” These parents would have literally been working themselves to death in exchange for something to give their children. He attempted in a pamphlet FOUR MONTHS IN SKIBBEREEN to induce residents of the United States to concern themselves in regard to this famine in Ireland.)

42. Since the turn of the century American consumption of coffee had increased by some 500%. At this point, while this new commodity, instant coffee, was appearing, the die-off of the Irish population was reaching its peak, while reports were coming out of that island of dogs wandering the streets of its towns, consuming the flesh of the uncollected dead:

#### IRISH POTATO FAMINE

[N]othing of life was seen or heard, excepting occasionally a dog. These looked so unlike all others I had seen among the poor – I unwittingly said – “How can the dogs look so fat and shining here, where there is no food for the people?” “Shall I tell her?” said the pilot to Mr Griffith, not supposing that I heard him. That was enough.

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April: Continued high mortality in [Ireland](#).



IRISH POTATO FAMINE

May: There was continued high mortality in [Ireland](#). The last of the ships carrying supplies of Indian corn, Indian corn meal, Egyptian wheat, barley, and barley-meal were off-loading their cargo along the coastline. Because of the fact that:

It is useless to disguise the truth that any great improvement in the social system of Ireland must be founded upon an extensive change in the present state of agrarian occupation, and that this change necessarily implies a long, continued and systematic ejection of small holders and of squatting cottiers.

the trend among the “improving” absentee landlords had become to hire gangs of thugs who would evict small tenants and tear the roofs from their cottages to make certain they could not come back:

### Families Evicted

Year	Families
1847	6,026
1848	9,657
1849	16,686
1850	19,949
1851	13,197



IRISH POTATO FAMINE





PART THE 3D: THE AFTERMATH OF THE GREAT

IRISH POTATO FAMINE

AN GORTA MÓR

Summer: The [Irish](#) refugees while in transit were sleeping on bunks which were six foot square, made of bare planking. They had to sleep four to the bunk, each adult being allocated 18 inches of the width. Children, traveling at half fare, slept eight to the bunk. Under such circumstances, without the opportunity to bathe, with only minimal sustenance, shipboard disease was spreading rapidly. At Grosse Isle, the quarantine station for the port of Québec, immigrants were dying of ship's fever at the rate of 50 per day, much too fast for individual graves to be contemplated, and, over the course of the summer, at Staten Island, the quarantine station for New-York harbor, some 2,000 interments would need to be arranged.<sup>43</sup> It is estimated that in this year's transportation one out of every five Irish emigrants to Canada died in transit.<sup>44</sup> For some reason, the children did not die at quite the same rate as the adults — there would be many orphans available for “adoption.”

At this late point, soup kitchens began to open in [Ireland](#).

FAMINE

43. The [Irish](#) refugees appeared to Americans to be poor. However, since passage to Québec port cost at least £3 and passage to Boston port or New-York port at least £4, these were not the poorest of the poor. Some of the poorest of the poor were committing crimes and offering themselves up in the hope that as criminals they would be transported free to Australia. In Ireland, the fatality rate for [typhoid fever](#) was currently two of every three of those infected — and no-one had any good way to prevent becoming infected.

44. Black slaves from Africa would warrant more direct **economic** consideration than these [Irish](#) famine refugees, because black slaves would have been worth money if delivered alive and not if delivered dead — but this transportation arrangement had been so structured, by way of payment in advance, that there was no **financial** incentive to the shipowner or the shipmaster, but only some supposed “humanitarian” incentive, to ensure that such passengers remained still alive at their point of debarkation.



## THE MASS GRAVES OF IRELAND, BY COUNTY

### Donegal<sup>45</sup>

- Carndonagh
- Dunfanaghy
- Milford
- Letterkenny
- Stranorlar
- Glenties
- Donegal
- Ballyshannon

### Derry

- Coleraine
- Limavady
- Derry
- Magherafelt

### Antrim<sup>46</sup>

- Lisburn
- Ballycastle
- Ballymoney
- Ballymena
- Larne
- Antrim
- Belfast (2 sites of mass graves)

### Down<sup>47</sup>

- Newtownards
- Banbridge
- Downpatrick
- Newry
- Kilkeel

### Tyrone<sup>48</sup>

- Strabane
- Gortin
- Castleterragh
- Cookstown
- Clogher
- Dungannon
- Omagh

### Armagh<sup>49</sup>

- Lurgan
- Armagh

45. This county was held under control by the English excise steamer *Comet*.

46. This county was held under control by the 3rd and 74th English Regiments.

47. This county was held under control by the 48th and 1st English Regiments.

48. This county was held under control by the 92nd English Regiment.

49. This county was held under control by the 49th English Regiment and 6th English Dragoons.



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## THE LATE BLIGHT

### Louth<sup>50</sup>

- Ardee
- Drogheda
- Dundalk

### Monaghan<sup>51</sup>

- Monaghan
- Clones
- Castleblaney
- Carrickmacross

### Cavan

- Bawnboy
- Cootehill
- Cavan
- Bailieborough

### Fermanagh<sup>52</sup>

- Lowtherstown
- Enniskillen
- Lisnaskea

### Leitrim

- Manorhamilton
- Mohill

### Sligo<sup>53</sup>

- Sligo
- Dromore West
- Tubbercurry

### Meath<sup>54</sup>

- Kells
- Navan
- Dunshaughlin
- Trim
- Oldcastle

### Dublin<sup>55</sup>

- Balrothery
- North Dublin
- South Dublin
- Rathdown

### Wicklow<sup>56</sup>

- Baltinglass

50. This county was held under control by the 17th English Lancers.

51. This county was held under control by the 57th English Regiment.

52. This county was held under control by the 48th English Regiment.

53. This county was held under control by the 69th English Regiment.

54. This county was held under control by the 52nd English Regiment.

55. This county was held under control by the English warship *Medusa*. In addition, these British units escorted food shipment through the Royal and Grand Canals to Dublin during the famine, for export:

2nd, 3rd, 13th and 60th English Regiment

13th English Dragoons

56. This county was held under control by the 71st English Regiment.



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- Rathdrum
- Shillelagh

### Wexford<sup>57</sup>

- Gorey
- Enniscorthy
- New Ross
- Wexford

### Longford<sup>58</sup>

- Granard
- Longford
- Ballymahon

### Westmeath<sup>59</sup>

- Castletown
- Delvin
- Mullingar
- Athlone

### Kildare<sup>60</sup>

- Celbridge
- Naas
- Athy

### Offaly<sup>61</sup>

- Tullamore
- Edenderry
- Birr

### Laois<sup>62</sup>

- Mountmellick
- Mountrath
- Abbyleix

### Kilkenny<sup>63</sup>

- Castlecomer
- Urlingford
- Kilkenny
- Thomastown
- Callan

### Waterford<sup>64</sup>

- Waterford
- Kilmacthomas
- Lismore
- Dungarvan

57. This county was held under control by the Coast Guard.

58. This county was held under control by the 13th English Dragoons and the 6th English Cavalry.

59. This county was held under control by the 2nd and 37th English Regiments, and the 7th English Hussars.

60. This county was held under control by the 2nd and 6th English Cavalry and the 3rd English Regiment.

61. This county was held under control by the 55th, 85th, and 13th English Regiments.

62. This county was held under control by the 47th English Regiment.

63. This county was held under control by the 64th, 83rd, and 75th English Regiment.

64. This county was held under control by the 47th and 67th English Regiments and the English warship *Dragon*.



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### Carlow<sup>65</sup>

- Carlow

### Cork<sup>66</sup>

- Mitchelstown
- Kanturk
- Fermoy
- Mallow
- Milstreet
- North Cork
- Middleton
- Youghal
- Cork
- Macroom
- Dunmanway
- Bandon
- Kinsale
- Bantry
- Clonakilty
- Skibbereen
- Schull
- Castletown-Berehaven

### Kerry<sup>67</sup>

- Listowel
- Tralee
- Killarney
- Dingle
- Caherciveen
- Kenmare

### Tipperary<sup>68</sup>

- Borrisokane
- Roscrea
- Nenagh
- Thurles
- Cashel
- Tipperary
- Clonmel
- Carrick-on-Suir
- Clogheen

### Limerick<sup>69</sup>

- Limerick
- Rathkeale
- Glin
- Croom

65. This county was held under control by the 64th English Regiment.

66. This county was held under control by the 6th, 26th, 67th, and 70th English Regiment, the 12th English Lancers, the 8th English Dragoons, the English excise steamer *Warrior*, and the English warship *Merlin*.

67. This county was held under control by the 1st and 8th English Dragoons.

68. This county was held under control by the 43rd, 59th, and 72nd English Regiments and the 8th English Hussars.

69. This county was held under control by the 55th, 59th, 64th, and 92nd English Regiments.



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- Newcastle
- Kilmallock

### Clare<sup>70</sup>

- Ballyvaughan
- Ennistymon
- Corofin
- Scariff
- Tulla
- Ennis
- Kildysart
- Kilrush

### Roscommon<sup>71</sup>

- Boyle
- Carrick-on-Shannon
- Castlerea
- Strokestown
- Roscommon

### Galway<sup>72</sup>

- Glennamaddy
- Tuam
- Mount Bellew
- Ballinasloe
- Galway
- Loughrea
- Portumna
- Gort
- Clifden
- Oughterard

### Mayo<sup>73</sup>

- Ballycastle
- Bellmullet
- Ballina
- Newport
- Swinford
- Castlebar
- Westport
- Louisburgh
- Claremorris
- Ballinrobe

70. This county was held under control by the 41st, 73rd, and 47th English Regiments, the English warship *Dee*, and the coast guard.

71. This county was held under control by the 75th English Regiment.

72. This county was held under control by the 49th, 41st, 63rd, and 40th English Regiments.

73. This county was held under control by the 49th and 69th English Regiments, the 18th and 7th English Hussars, the English excise steamer *Eliza*, and the English warship *Stromboli*.

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## THE LATE BLIGHT

September 12, Sunday: Not all the refugees of the [Irish Potato Famine](#) had proved willing to put up with the constant abuse they encountered in the United States of America. Some of the recent immigrants who had needed to enlist as cannon fodder in the US Army in order to survive had decided to make common cause with the Mexicans after the US Army got into Mexico. The unit of the Mexican army that had been formed largely out of these “deserters” had become known as the “San Patricios” (St. Patrick’s) because their leader was an Irishman. Such volunteers had been specially hunted down by the US forces and on this day, simultaneous with the raising of the US flag above the captured castle nearby, the US Army [hanged](#) 30 of these prisoners of war.<sup>74</sup>



(In a ceremony on September 12, 1997, Mexico would honor these volunteers on the 150th anniversary of their execution.)



74. Contrary to myth, not all the prisoners of war [hanged](#) in a row by the US Army on this day were Irish. Also, this fails to qualify as the [largest simultaneous execution](#) in United States history, because on the day after Christmas in 1862 President Abraham Lincoln would have 38 native Americans [simultaneously executed](#) at a similar military ceremony in Mankato, Minnesota.

# THE LATE BLIGHT

# AN GORTA MÓR

Fall: In [Ireland](#), the prospects for an 1847 [potato](#) harvest had appeared good, despite the continuing presence of some “soot” on the leaves.



However, the number of acres not planted, and the continuing presence of the blight, would mean a rather small dig that October.

FAMINE

## Acreage in Potatoes

Year	Acres
1845	>2,000,000
1846	>1,000,000
1847	300,000
1848	700,000

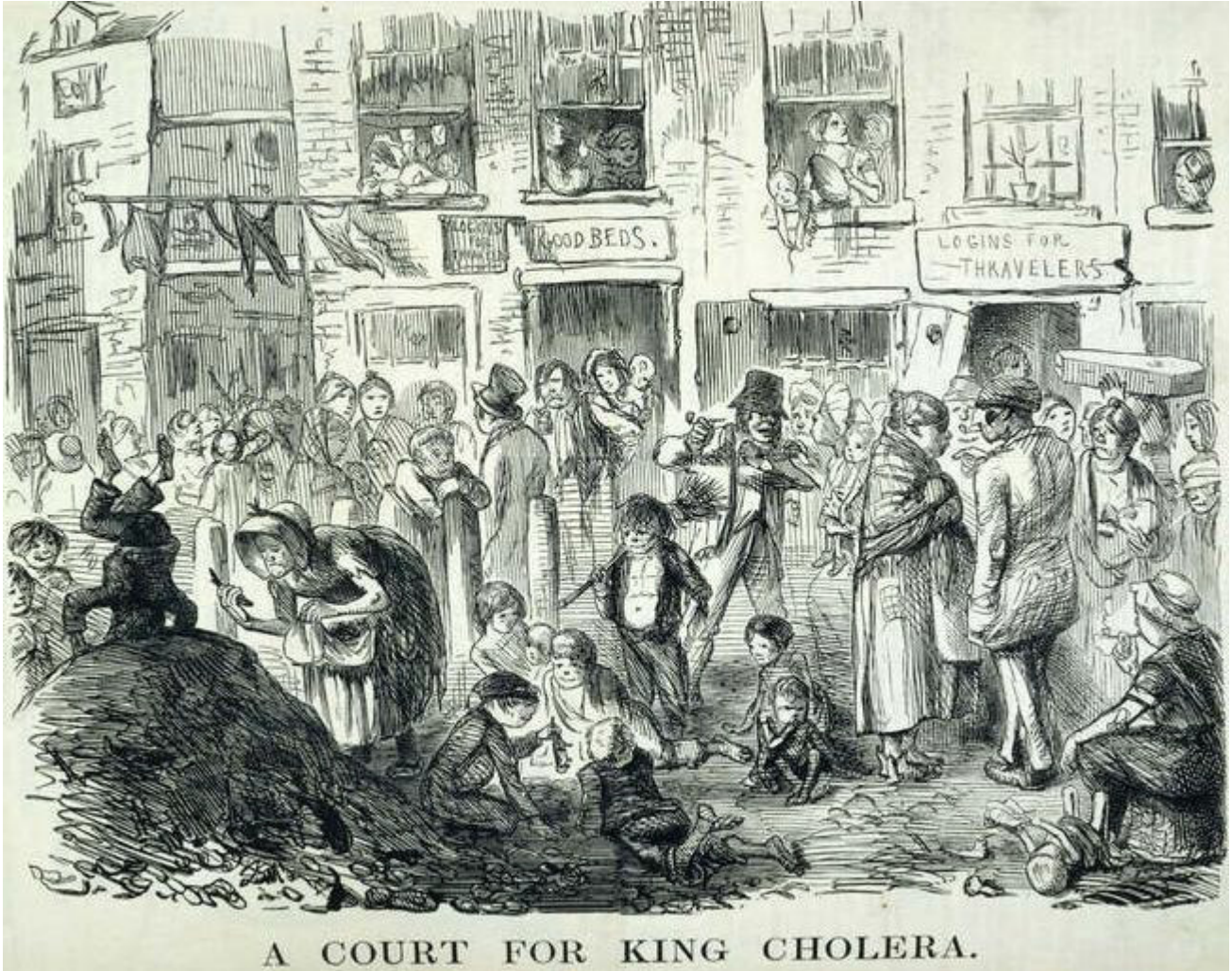
At this point the Relief Commissioners began to predict that neither home potatoes nor the wages needed to procure other sustenance were going to be available during the coming winter. Later on, –although we don’t know precisely how many people starved to death or, weakened by starvation, succumbed to diarrhea and fever or to [cholera](#) in [Ireland](#) during the period– we would be able to calculate that the first great die-off had occurred during the winter of 1846-1847. A table prepared after the fact by the Census Commissioners, presented here, in all probability under-estimates the mortality because of the manner in which they collected data: for a family



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all of whose members succumbed zero deaths would be tabulated.





Of the total number of deaths, which would be between 500,000 and 1,500,000, the percentage of that total which would occur in each year probably worked out to something like this:

### Mortality, expressed as %ages of the 1841 Population

Year	%
1842	5.1%
1843	5.2%
1844	5.6%
1845	6.4%
1846	9.1%
1847	18.5%
1848	15.4%
1849	17.9%
1850	12.2%

The figures shown for 1849 are the result of a [cholera](#) epidemic in Connacht, Leinster, and Munster, as well as of the general starvation.



One of the most important and highly regarded charitable organizations was the Society of Friends, or Quakers. They first became involved in the Irish Famine relief in November 1846, when some Dublin-based members of the Society decided to establish a Central Relief Committee. The Quakers had a long tradition of philanthropic activity and were well regarded for their avoidance of proselytism. Although the Quakers were numerically small in Ireland, their numbers did include a relatively high proportion of successful businessmen. They also had the support of co-religionists throughout the world. Initially, the role of the Central Relief Committee was to be mainly advisory, as they believed that it was important for accurate information to be provided by disinterested experts. They intended that any assistance which they gave was to be merely supplementary to other relief. However, in the early months of 1847, the relief provided by the Society of Friends often proved crucial in keeping people alive, as other systems of relief failed in this basic purpose. This was particularly so during the vacuum in relief provision following the closure of public works in some areas.

At the end of November 1846, two Englishmen, James H. Tuke and William Forster, with the assistance of local Quakers, commenced a tour of the most distressed parts of Ireland. During the course of this journey, they visited counties Roscommon, Leitrim, Fermanagh, Donegal, Sligo, Mayo, Galway, Longford and Cavan. The Quakers admitted that their extensive experience in working with distressed people in England had not prepared them for what they saw in Ireland. They reported to the Central Relief Committee



that they were appalled by the scenes which they witnessed and had never encountered such suffering before. Tuke was driven to record: "the scenes of poverty and wretchedness are almost beyond belief ... notwithstanding all my experience derived from my years service in the Poor Law Commission, three of which were spent in Yorkshire and Lancashire during the extremity of distress there."

A number of Quakers criticised the relief policies of the government, holding them to be inadequate and misjudged. As the Quakers who were touring the west of Ireland quickly realised, the distress was often most severe in the areas where the administrative machinery for the distribution of relief was most limited. They believed that absentee or irresponsible landlords were to a large extent responsible for this. Consequently, although the Quakers identified the most severe distress as existing in the province of Connacht, the amount of relief which they provided was restricted because of the absence of an interested middle and landlord class in some places through which to channel this assistance. Joseph Bewley, the Secretary of the Society of Friends, realised that government policies meant that the relief taxes were heaviest in the districts which were least able to afford them. He judged these policies to be short-sighted and incapable of bringing any long-term benefit to the people of Ireland. During his visit to Co. Donegal, Tuke was delayed for weeks by heavy snowstorms. He realised the implications that this had for people who were employed on the public works: bad weather reduced the amount of money which could be earned. Also, the effort to remain warm and dry -- through the wearing of warm clothes or the lighting of a small fire-- proved an additional drain on the limited resources of the people. Those who attempted to continue working during the bad weather invariably increased their propensity to fall ill. Apart from the relief provisions, Tuke was also critical of the social structures within Ireland. He regarded the abject poverty and wretchedness of the small farmers and cottiers as not being surpassed even in the "most barbarous nations." Tuke saved his most severe criticisms for the role played by absentee landlords, particularly those who, although they owned large estates, had not "subscribed one farthing" to help alleviate the suffering of their tenants.

The main form of relief provided by the Quakers in 1848 was the distribution of seed, primarily on behalf of the government. The Relief Commissioners had a supply of seed but the government would not permit them to become involved in the direct sale of it. Instead they requested the Quakers to distribute it in the most impoverished districts in Ireland. The Quakers agreed, as they felt that this would be of permanent benefit to the country. In total, they distributed nearly 200,000 lbs of seed which was estimated to result in the cultivation of approximately 800 acres of green crops. The vast majority of the seeds were turnip, although carrot, parsnip and cabbage seeds were also distributed....

The Society of Friends had undertaken to import supplies of food mostly from America into Ireland in 1847. Even before it arrived, it was obvious to Tuke and Forster that in many areas



more extensive and immediate assistance was required than that envisaged by their colleagues in Dublin. In each of the areas which they visited, Tuke and Forster distributed both food and cash. Although the Quakers had intended that their provisions should be sold at cost price, they realised that if they adhered to this, it would still be beyond the means of the most distressed people. Increasingly, the relief provided by the Quakers in the field was given gratuitously even though in doing so they offended both the central committee in Dublin and the Treasury. As far as possible, the Quakers worked through the local relief committees or local gentry or clergy. Money was not to be provided directly to the destitute people. The money which they provided was frequently used for the establishment of a soup kitchen, the purchase of seed, or the provision of local employment. In Dunfanaghy, for example, money was given to the local minister for the purchase of boilers for a soup kitchen and the purchase of materials for the local women to knit Guernsey shirts.

Apart from food and cash, the Quakers donated clothes and bedding. They also imported boilers for soup kitchens, being one of the first organizations to favour the use of soup kitchens as a means of providing large-scale relief. This was approved by the government, which disliked giving either money or uncooked food. The government, who regarded the involvement of the Quakers as very valuable, paid the freight and warehouse charges of all goods imported by the Quakers and waived all port duties. Most of the food was imported directly into the area where it was to be distributed. It included Indian meal, flour, rice, biscuits, peas, Scotch barley, American beef and tapioca. During 1846 and 1847, the Quakers provided approximately £200,000 for the relief of distress in Ireland, which was spent almost exclusively in the west of the country. The following statistics which refer to Co. Donegal provide an insight into the assistance afforded by the Quakers:

### Quaker Relief in Co. Donegal

Estimated number of grants:	266
Number of boilers:	19
Quantity of food, in tons:	400
Value of food and boilers:	£6,659 0s 0d
Amount of money grants:	£1,429 5s 9d
<b>Total Value</b>	<b>£8,088 5s 9d</b>

During the summer of 1847, as the Temporary Relief Act was implemented, the Quakers began to wind down their operations with a view to ending them totally when the extended Poor Law became operative in the autumn. Instead, they decided only to provide relief which would contribute to developing the industries and resources of the country. However, in the winter of 1847-8, the government asked them if they would consider again becoming involved in the provision of relief, particularly



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in the re-establishment of soup kitchens. The Quakers were reluctant to do so. As one official explained, providing this form of relief would be similar to “giving the criminal a long day.” They believed that it was better if they used their energies to contribute to the long-term improvement of Ireland and leave the provision of immediate relief to the government. In 1849, Trevelyan, at the request of the government, offered the Quakers £100 if they would provide direct relief as they had previously done, but again they refused.

October: The [Irish potato](#) harvest was generally healthy and, in many counties, the blight made no appearance at all. However, due to the [famine](#) die-off, in the hardest hit districts it had simply been impossible to plant or cultivate any significant crops, which meant that the yield was low, food prices remained high, and those in low-paying jobs were entirely unable to feed themselves:

### Acreage in Potatoes

Year	Acres
1845	>2,000,000
1846	>1,000,000
1847	300,000
1848	700,000



### SPROUTING POTATOES AND BIRTH DEFECTS

I have been studying the [Irish potato](#) famine of the 1840s, and as part of my background for this investigation I have consulted a technical treatise on the general family of plants which includes the potato, D'Arcy, William G. (ed.), SOLANACEAE: BIOLOGY AND SYSTEMATICS (NY: Columbia UP). This technical treatise was published in 1986, all of a decade ago, and yet it is the most recent book-length treatment which I have been able to locate. I have picked up some really quite startling observations from this tome, about dangers in a potato diet, which I would like to check out with someone on this list. I have seen the potato famine in Ireland linked to monoculture and to class and national antagonisms, and I have seen it linked to various epidemics which followed the starvation. I have not, however, seen it linked to birth defects in the manner depicted in this technical treatise. Here are some of the factoids which I have picked up in this reading, in their technical complexity:

- European selection of potato and tomato cultivars for lessened bitterness during the 16th-19th Centuries may have resulted in greater vulnerability to infection by the *Phytophthora infestans* microorganism (the “late blight” or “murrain” of the famine era). Native potatoes and wild tomatoes possess much higher levels of bitter phytoalexin alkaloid and tend to be much more resistant to infection. However, among the infection organisms, *Phytophthora* in particular seems to have evolved a way in which to slip past the poisonous potato and tomato steroidal alkaloids which are otherwise effective in protecting these plants against many other varieties of microorganisms. Therefore we should be somewhat skeptical of the popular stories which have it that certain parochial Europeans were simply being foolish in the 16th Century, when they resisted the introduction of potatoes and tomatoes to their diet – as potatoes then and tomatoes then may have been substantially more bitter and substantially more hyperallergenic than the potatoes and tomatoes we enjoy nowadays. One of our attempts to breed a less vulnerable potato, the “Lenape,” has had to be withdrawn from the market because it proved to be far too toxic to humans.
- There has been a substantial correlation between the very serious *spina bifida* and *anencephaly* birth defects in the British Isles in this century, and years in which potato blight has been a problem. In fact, were the potato to be introduced today as a new and novel food crop, the source points out, it would need to be subjected to a long and careful period of evaluation by our Food and Drug Administration before being approved for general use as a dietary supplement.
- After a year in which people have been reduced to eating deteriorated potatoes, the charts show that there is ordinarily a year in which significant numbers of human infants are stillborn, or born deformed. The suspicion is that this is caused by an accumulation of solanidine in the mother's liver, and the liberation and transfer of this chemical to her fetus during the 3rd or 4th week of gestation while the fetus's neural tube is in the process of closing.
- The concentrations of this dangerous alkaloid, solanidine, are highest in the spring after winter storage of the potato crop, and highest in the vicinity of the potato's eyes while it is sprouting. It seems to function in the potato as a natural insecticide to protect the young leaves. It has been noticed that stored potatoes which have been infected by the late blight *Phytophthora infestans* microorganism begin to sprout earlier in the spring than uninfected potatoes. After a blight year, in the late spring just at the point at which the food need of poor farm people is highest and the last of the old stored potatoes are about to be replaced by the first of the tiny new potatoes, the risk of generating deformed babies reaches its peak.
- Therefore in this literature it is strongly recommended that girls, and women who are not yet out of their reproductive years, should never nowadays (except I suppose of course again under conditions of absolute starvation) consume old potatoes from which they have had to rub off the sprouts with their hands.
- Such toxic alkaloid compounds are not removed by boiling, and in fact seem to be concentrated by a cooking process involving oil and high heat. Also, therefore, females should never ingest such preprepared foods as “fish and chips,” the source recommends, for such commercially prepared



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potatoes may have been purchased by a corporation for bulk processing because they were cheap, low-grade “old crop” potatoes which had begun to sprout: their sprouts would be automatically knocked off by the peeling machinery! (As an American rather than a Brit, I wonder whether this source’s recommendation against any consumption of fish and chips by those human females who might without their knowledge be in an early stage of pregnancy might not also extend to our own ubiquitous “burger and fries.”)

- Tests using golden hamsters suggest that infant deformation may be minimized by ensuring that every woman or girl who might become pregnant receives constant elevated levels of vitamin C – perhaps because the C vitamin has a tendency to clear these toxic accumulations of solanidine from the liver. REFERENCE: J.H. Renwick’s “Our Ascorbate Defense Against the Solanaceae,” pages 567-76 in D’Arcy, William G. (ed.), SOLANACEAE: BIOLOGY AND SYSTEMATICS (NY: Columbia UP, 1986).

So, has anyone ever seen literature in which the potato famine of the 1840s in Ireland, in addition to being linked to the epidemics which followed among the weakened and impoverished, was also linked to a spasm of birth defects?

Note that we are dealing here with both nutritional deficiency and chemical poisoning. It may be that potatoes are deficient in choline, or at least that has been suggested. The deficiency of Indian corn, maize, in the amino lysine is well known. And it is known that the standard diet of Ireland in the years before the famine was ten to twelve pounds of potatoes per day per person, eaten often with buttermilk and not supplemented by a whole lot of other foodstuffs – one simply wouldn’t be able to consume ten to twelve pounds of potatoes per day if one were eating in addition any quantities of any other foodstuff. Nutritional insufficiencies operate in quite a different manner from chemical poisons. One is an insufficiency of a chemical, the other an excess of a chemical. Fetuses generally feed first, that is, in cases of nutritional insufficiency it is generally the pregnant woman who is impacted before her fetus. This *spina bifida* and *anencephaly* however, by way of contrast, being the result of a specific toxin which has a specific effect on a specific vulnerable new tissue growth, that is to say, the initial closure of the new neural tube, is one which shows up in the stillborn or live birth by an apparently healthy mother.

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Winter: [Henry Thoreau](#) watched the ice-cutters, mostly [Irish](#), on Walden Pond.

The weather along the west coast of [Ireland](#) this winter was characterized as “one continuous storm.” The poorly nourished fishermen, due to [famine](#) weakness, were in general unable to row their frail *currachs* through the breakers so as to fish offshore, although some, driven by desperation, drowned while attempting such maneuvers.

Some of the visitors to the cloisters of Westminster Abbey were not of the usual kind, but were instead naturalists. They were coming to inspect a large collection of madrepores and sea sponges kept in seawater inside glass cases in the drawing-room of Ashburnham House. This constituted the 1st marine aquarium in England. The exhibit had been created by Anna Thynne, the wife of the Reverend Lord John Thynne, Sub-Dean of the Abbey. This lady’s housemaid (possibly, but of course not necessarily, an impoverished [Irish](#) woman refugee of the great [famine](#)) would need to spend 30 to 45 minutes each day pouring six gallons of salt water backward and forward before an open window, in order to keep it fresh. (The result would become a mania of the 1850s.)

Having given up his dental practice in Connecticut, apparently after a fatality, [Dr. Horace Wells](#) relocated to New-York and became addicted to [chloroform](#).



DENTISTRY



1848

Hugh Strickland's *THE DODO AND ITS KINDRED; OR, THE HISTORY, AFFINITIES, AND OSTEOLOGY OF THE DODO, SOLITAIRE, AND OTHER EXTINCT BIRDS OF THE ISLANDS MAURITIUS, RODRIGUEZ, AND BOURBON* (London: Reeve, Benham, and Reeve). There would be an anonymous review of this book in the January 1849 issue of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, which [Henry Thoreau](#) would read and comment upon in his journal.

### THE DODO AND ITS KINDRED

Frederick William Van Amringe's *AN INVESTIGATION OF THE THEORIES OF THE NATURAL HISTORY OF MAN, BY [WILLIAM] LAWRENCE, [JAMES COWLES] PRICHARD, AND OTHERS, FOUNDED UPON ANIMAL ANALOGIES: AND AN OUTLINE OF A NEW NATURAL HISTORY OF MAN, FOUNDED UPON HISTORY, ANATOMY, PHYSIOLOGY, AND HUMAN ANALOGIES* was published in New-York by Baker & Scribner. Because it signaled an unfortunate shift in scientific opinion in regard to race it would be enthusiastically reviewed at length in [The United States Magazine and Democratic Review](#) in 1850. The burden of this treatise of scientific racism was that, if the scientist fairly divides the human species into the four distinctive groups of the white, the yellow, the red, and the black races, and inquire into their histories, and on the basis of their histories into their relative prospects for progress beyond their current social and intellectual condition, he can reach only the "melancholy" conclusion that "the dark races are doomed to extinction by the gradual increase of the white race, by a progress similar to that which is now fast extinguishing the aborigines of North America." Did [Thoreau](#) read this paper in 1848 or 1849, or something like it, or the article in the *Democratic Review* in 1850 (26 n.s.:327-45, quotation from page 338) and is this what accounts for his alarming remark in his *JOURNAL*, Volume X, page 52 (1857?), that "The fact is, the history of the white man is a history of improvement, that of the red man a history of fixed habits of stagnation"?

Or, was it some other of the many, many manifestations of scientific racism that filled the literature of the era? For instance, here is an illustration from *HARPER'S WEEKLY: A JOURNAL OF CIVILIZATION*, designed to show that the "[Irish Iberian](#)" and the "Negro" were very similar to one another and utterly different from the "Anglo-Teutonic" — which was destined to triumph:



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According to Noel Ignatiev's **HOW THE IRISH BECAME WHITE**, "To be acknowledged as white, it was not enough for the Irish to have a competitive advantage over Afro-Americans in the labor market; in order for them to avoid the taint of blackness it was necessary that no Negro be allowed to work in occupations where Irish were to be found."



IRISH PHYSIOGNOMY.

According to the jokes that were going the rounds in those days among non-Irish white racists (the bulk of the population, actually), the Irish were "Negroes turned inside out" while the American free blacks were "smoked Irish."

It has been well said, that inside the charmed Caucasian chalk circle it is the sum of what you are not –not Indian, not Negro, not a Jew, not Irish, etc.– that make you what you are. And, that's as true now as it was then.

Ungrateful [Irish](#) laborers in Holyoke went on strike when the amount paid for canal labor was reduced from 75¢ to 70¢ daily. This wasn't personal –it was merely business– and nevertheless their attitude became "Dam gone to Hell by way of Willimansett."

In [Ireland](#), the "Young Ireland Rebellion." After the "Battle of Widow MacCormack's cabbage patch," Stephens fled to France.

In 1821 the New York State Constitutional Convention had required potential male voters of African origin to be freeholders worth \$250, a requirement that was not placed upon any other block of potential voters and a requirement that effectively had disenfranchised all or virtually all black New Yorkers. This racial discrimination between voters would not be brought to an end until 1870, because it so well served the purposes of Tammany Hall. For instance, in this year 1848, the 6th Ward, which was "the very citadel of Tammany," largely [Irish](#), produced the largest anti-Negro vote. (There's a factoid that most unfortunately must be pointed out in this connection: this phenomenon of scorn for the black citizen was very prominently an "Irish thing." Most of the voters in this heavily pro-Tammany area of the city were recent immigrants, and virtually without exception the immigrant Irish were racist. If you had been Irish-American during that period, and had expressed abolitionist sympathies, you would have been subjected to nothing but endless angry confrontations from your fellow Irish-Americans. Such a violation of solidarity would never have been tolerable. To espouse such an attitude might very well have been as much as your life was worth.)



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[William Henry Harvey](#)'s *PHYCOLOGIA BRITANNICA* (Plates 147-216) (London: Reeve & Banham). Also, his "Directions for Collecting and Preserving Algae," in [American Journal of Science and Arts](#) (II, 6: 42-45). He was appointed Professor of Botany of the Royal Dublin Society.

To the current regulations for emigration, the British parliament added a requirement that each vessel carrying more than 100 passengers must have aboard a surgeon. This would result in advertisements offering free passage to surgeons. A requirement was stated, that the emigrants were to be inspected for infectious diseases before embarkation, and that none who could not be certified as free of such diseases might be embarked. Each vessel carrying more than 100 emigrants was required to provide a cook and a cooking place.

At this point the [Irish](#) who had emigrated to the USA aboard the horrendous "famine ships," and survived, were beginning to provide a great deal of, and an increasing amount of, assistance for their relatives on the old sod:

## Low Estimates for Total Remittances to Ireland

Year	Amount
1848	£460,000
1849	£540,000
1850	£957,000
1851	£990,000

Because of the fact that:

It is useless to disguise the truth that any great improvement in the social system of Ireland must be founded upon an extensive change in the present state of agrarian occupation, and that this change necessarily implies a long, continued and systematic ejectionment of small holders and of squatting cottiers.

the trend among the "improving" absentee landlords of the island had become to hire gangs of thugs who would evict small tenants and tear the roofs from their cottages to make certain they could not come back:

## Families Evicted



Year	Families
1847	6,026
1848	9,657
1849	16,686
1850	19,949
1851	13,197



March 21, Tuesday: Subsequent to the failure of the “Young [Ireland](#)” uprising, John Mitchel was charged with treason for having published seditious articles in his [United Irishman](#), while William Smith O’Brien and future US Union general Thomas Meagher were charged with treason for having made seditious speeches at a meeting. Although treason was an offense that called for the convict to be hanged, drawn, and quartered, all three were released on bail because Her Majesty’s government simply had no intention of continuing this tradition of hanging, drawing, and quartering. The accused remained on bail while, “with the speed of an express train,” a new piece of legislation, the Treason Felony Act, was enacted by the Parliament, allowing that any person who “compassed the intimidation of the Crown or of Parliament” would be guilty of a felony punishable by transportation for 14 years to life.



Spring: The prospects for an [Irish potato](#) harvest appeared good. It ain’t over, of course, ’till it’s over, but — is it over?



Friendship has this peculiarity that it can never be talked about. It is never established –as an understood relation– Friends are never committed.

What it would say can never be expressed. All words are gossip– what has speech to do with it.

When a man approaches his friend who is thus transfigured to him, even his own hoarse salutation sounds



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prosaic and ridiculous and makes him least happy in *his* presence.

–It is an exercise of the purest imagination and the rarest faith– I will be so related to thee– I will spend truth on thee– the friend responds through his nature and life and treats *his* friend with the same divine civility–

There is friendship –but without confession –in silence as divine –

If the other is dull or engrossed by the things of the world and does not respond to this lofty salute –or from a lower platform –hears imperfectly– That friendship is by necessity a profound secret which can never be revealed– It is a tragedy that cannot be told. None ever knows what was meant.

There is no need that a man should confess his love of nature –and no more his love of man.– In any case what *sentence* is it indispensable should be framed and uttered Why a few sounds.

True love does not quarrel for slight reasons –such mistakes as mutual friends can explain away –but alas only for adequate & fatal & everlasting reasons, which can never be set aside.

That person is transfigured is God in the human form –henceforth– The lover asks no return but that the beloved will religiously accept & wear and not disgrace this apotheosis Whatever virtue or greatness we can conceive we ascribe to that one –of that at least his nature is capable –though he may {*leaves missing*}

Yet a fault may appear greater than it is in many ways.

I have never seen a person –who could bear criticism –who could not be flattered who would not bribe his judge.– Who would bear that truth should be loved always better than themselves ———

Mythology is ancient history or biography The oldest history still memorable becomes a mythus– It is the fruit which history at last bears– The fable so far from being false contains only the essential parts of the history–

What is today a diffuse biography –was anciently before printing was discovered ––a short & pithy tradition a century was equal to a thousand years. To day you have the story told at length with all its accompaniments In mythology you have the essential & memorable parts alone –the you & I the here & there the now & then being omitted– In how few words for instance the Greeks would have told the story of Abelard & Heloise instead of a volume They would have made a mythus of it among the fables of their gods and demigods or mortals –and then have stuck up their names to shine in some corner of the firmament– And who knows what Greeks may come again at last to mythologize their Love.– and our own deeds.

How many Vols folio must the life and labors of Prometheus have filled if perchance it fell in days of cheap printing!– What shape at length will assume the fable of Columbus –to be confounded at last with that of Jason –& the expedition of the Argonauts –and future Homers quoted as authority. And Franklin there may be a line for him in the future Classical dictionary recording what that demigod did.– & referring him to some new genealogy –

I see already the naked fables scattered up & down the history of modern –Europe– A small volume of mythology preparing in the press of time– The hero tell –with his bow –Shakspeare –the new Apollo — Cromwell –napoleon.

The most comprehensive the most pithy & significant book is the mythology

Few phenomena give me more delight in the spring of the year than to observe the forms which thawing clay and sand assume on flowing down the sides of a deep cut on the rail road through which I walk.

The clay especially assumes an infinite variety of forms–

There lie the sand and clay all winter on this shelving surface an inert mass but when the spring sun comes to thaw the ice which binds them they begin to flow down the bank like lava –

These little streams & ripples of lava like clay over flow & interlace one another like some mythological vegetation –like the forms which I seem to have seen imitated in bronze– What affects me is the presence of the law –between the inert mass and the luxuriant vegetation what interval is there? Here is an artist at work – as it were not at work but –a-playing designing –– It begins to flow & immediately it takes the forms of vines –or of the feet & claws of animals –or of the human brain or lungs or bowels– Now it is bluish clay now clay mixed with reddish sand –now pure iron sand –and sand and clay of every degree of fineness and every shade of color– The whole bank for a quarter of a mile on both sides is sometimes overlaid with a mass of plump & sappy verdure of this kind– I am startled probably because it grows so fast –it is produced in one spring day. The lobe of these leaves –perchance of all leaves –is a thick –now loitering drop like the ball of the finger larger or smaller so perchance the fingers & toes flow to their extent from the thawing mass of the body –& then are congealed for a night.

–Whither may the sun of new spring lead them on– These roots of ours– In the mornings these resting streams start again and branch & branch again into a myriad others– Here it is coarse red sand & even pebbles –there fine adhesive clay–

–And where the flowing mass reaches the drain at the foot of the bank on either side it spreads out flatter in to sands like those formed at the mouths of rivers –the separate streams losing their semicircular form and gradually growing more and more flat –and running together as it is more moist till they form an almost flat sand –variously & beautifully shaded –& in which you can still trace the forms of vegetation till at length in the water itself they become the ripple marks on the bottom

The lobes are the fingers of the leaf as many lobes as it has in so many directions it inclines to flow –more genial heat or other influences in its springs might have caused it flow farther.



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## THE LATE BLIGHT

–So it seemed as if this one hill side contained an epitome of all the operations in nature. So the stream is but a leaf What is the river with all its branches –but a leaf divested of its pulp – – but its pulp is intervening earth –forests & fields & town & cities– What is the river but a tree an oak or pine –& its leaves perchance are ponds & lakes & meadows innumerable as the springs which feed it. I perceive that there is the same power that made me my brain my lungs my bowels my fingers & toes working in other clay this very day– I am in the studio of an artist. This cut is about a quarter of a mile long –& 30 or 40 feet deep –and in several places clay occurs which rises to within a dozen feet of the surface.– Where there is sand only the slope is great & uniform –but the clay being more adhesive inclines to stand out longer from the sand as in boulders –which are continually washing & coming down. Flowing down it of course runs together and forms masses and conglomerations but if flowed upward it would dispersed itself more –& grow more freely –& unimpeded In the next 9 miles which completed the extent of the voyage for this day We rowed across several small lakes –poled up numerous rapids & thoroughfares, and carried over 4 portages– I will give the names and distances for the benefit of future tourists 1st after leaving Ambejisjis lake –a a quarter of a mile of rapids to the Portage or carry of 90 rods around Ambejisjis Falls. ——— Than a mile & a half through Passamagamet lake, which is narrow & river like to the falls of the same name – Ambejisjis stream coming in on the right ——— Then 2 miles through Katepskonegan lake.– to the carry of 90 rods around Katepskonegan Falls –which name signifies “carrying place” –Passamagamet stream coming in on the left ——— Then 3 miles through Pockwockomus lake –a slight expansion of the river to the carry of 40 rods around the falls of the same name Katepskonegan stream coming in on the left ——— The 3/4 of a mile through Aboljacarmegus lake, similar to the last to the portage of 40 rods around the fall of the same name ——— Then 1/2 mile of rapid water to the Sowadnehunk dead water & the Aboljacknagesic stream. This is generally the order of names as you ascend the river &c v 81

July: Farmers along the west coast of [Ireland](#) were beginning to notice blight on the leaves of their [potato](#) crop.



IRISH POTATO FAMINE

War wounded [Thomas Mayne Reid, Jr.](#) sailed back from Mexico to New-York with what remained of the 1st New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment.

WAR ON MEXICO


# THE LATE BLIGHT

# AN GORTA MÓR

August: The plan of the English government, to dispense with all relief efforts for those starving in [Ireland](#) as of August 15th, needed to be postponed when the blight was again discovered on the leaves of the [potato](#) plants.



IRISH POTATO FAMINE

The blight was already as pervasive as it had been in August  of 1846.

### Acreage in Potatoes

Year	Acres
1845	>2,000,000
1846	>1,000,000
1847	300,000
1848	700,000

"Until Ireland can be famished, it cannot be subdued."  
 – Edmund Spenser





## AN GORTA MÓR

## THE LATE BLIGHT

August 24, Thursday: The barque [Ocean Monarch](#) of the White Diamond Line burned on its Liverpool/Boston run, off the Great Orme's Head of North Wales at 53° 25' 40" N, 3° 35' 27" W, and out of a total of 398 passengers and crew, 178 perished (mostly emigrants). The captain would place the blame on smoking by some of the 322 passengers in steerage because, he said, he had been forced to confiscate some tobacco pipes down there.

[Henry Thoreau](#) wrote to [George A. Thatcher](#).

Concord Aug. 24[, ]<sup>th</sup> 1848.

Dear Cousin,  
If it is not too late  
I will thank you for your letter and  
your sympathy. I send you with  
this the Third Part, as they have chosen  
to call it, of that everlasting moun-  
tain story. I presume that the other  
two have reached you. They had bar-  
gained, as I thought to send me many  
copies for distribution, but I have  
received none. It should have been  
printed all together in some large  
newspaper – and then it would have  
gone down at one dose by its very  
gravity. I was sorry to hear  
that you came so near Concord  
without coming here. It always does  
us good to see you. Mr Emerson  
came home on the Europa 3 or  
4 weeks ago, in good health  
and spirits. I think that he has  
seen English men, such as are  
worth seeing, more thoroughly  
than any traveller. He has made  
them better acquainted with one  
another and with Americans.



## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

*He had access to circles which are inaccessible to most travellers, but which are none the better for that. He has seen the elephant – or perhaps I should say the British lion now, and was made a lion of himself. He found Carlyle the most interesting man –as I expected he would– Stonehenge the most interesting piece of antiquity – and the London Times Newspaper the best book which England is printing now a days. Travelling is so cheap at present that I am tempted to make you a visit – but then, as usual, I have so much idle business that cannot be postponed– if any will believe it! The probable failure of the melon crop this season is melon-choly– but fortunately our potatoes do not rot yet I feel somewhat encouraged at the political prospects of the country– not because the new party have chosen such a leader, but because they are perhaps worthy of a better one. The N.E. delegation seem to have managed affairs in a bungling manner– If they had gone prepared they might have had their own man–*

THE TIMES

*But who is he? It is time to be done selecting available men; for what are they not available who do thus? –Father desires to be remembered to you & to Mrs Thatcher – and to the last named does also. Yours sincerely  
Henry Thoreau*

*[Address: Geo. A. Thatcher  
Bangor Me.  
Return Address: Henry Thoreau  
August 1848]*

December: [Cholera](#) appeared in the large [famine](#) workhouse at Belfast, [Ireland](#) and, as well, among the general population of the city. We don't know precisely how many people starved to death or, weakened by starvation,



succumbed to diarrhea and fever or to cholera during this period, and a table prepared after the fact by the Census Commissioners, presented here, in all probability under-estimates the mortality because of the manner in which they collected data: for any family all of whose members had succumbed, of course zero deaths would be tabulated. Of the total number of deaths, which would be between 500,000 and 1,500,000, the percentage which would occur in each year probably worked out to something like this:

**Mortality, expressed as %ages of the 1841 Population**

Year	%
1842	5.1%
1843	5.2%
1844	5.6%
1845	6.4%
1846	9.1%
1847	18.5%
1848	15.4%
1849	17.9%
1850	12.2%

(The figures shown for 1849 are the result of this outbreak of [cholera](#) as it spread in Connacht, Leinster, and Munster, as well as of the general starvation.)

# THE LATE BLIGHT

# AN GORTA MÓR

1849

A 2d dam was constructed at Holyoke, Massachusetts, in seven months. Meanwhile, the squalid conditions in the [Irish](#) neighborhoods of such laborers caused a [cholera](#) epidemic.





The [Irish](#) who had emigrated to the USA were providing a great deal of, and an increasing amount of, assistance for their relatives on the old sod:

**Low Estimates for Total Remittances to Ireland**

Year	Pounds
1848	£460,000
1849	£540,000
1850	£957,000
1851	£990,000

Because of the fact that:

It is useless to disguise the truth that any great improvement in the social system of Ireland must be founded upon an extensive change in the present state of agrarian occupation, and that this change necessarily implies a long, continued and systematic ejection of small holders and of squatting cottiers.

the trend among the “improving” absentee landlords of the island had become to hire gangs of thugs who would evict small tenants and tear the roofs from their cottages to make certain they could not come back:

**Families Evicted**

Year	Families
1847	6,026
1848	9,657
1849	16,686
1850	19,949
1851	13,197

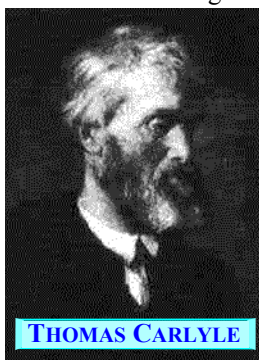
## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

March: [Cholera](#) appeared in the west of [Ireland](#). The rescheduled tour by [Queen Victoria](#), originally planned for 1846 and canceled then due to the famine, would need to be confined to the east of the island. In addition, this tour was declared not to be a state visit but a private one — so the monarch would not be required to take any posture in regard to [famine](#) or epidemic.<sup>75</sup>



Spring: [Waldo Emerson](#) had recommended Indian cornmeal to [Thomas Carlyle](#) as a substitute for the scarce and low-quality [potato](#) of this period, and had provided the Carlyles with an American recipe that removed some of the bitterness of this mash, which many farmers were refusing to feed even to their livestock.<sup>76</sup>



THOMAS CARLYLE

Carlyle was so impressed by the idea that a servant might be fed for as little as a penny per day that he wrote a short piece on this intending to put it in the [Times](#) of London. As it would turn out, he wouldn't be able to get it published there — but would be able to get such ruminations published in [Fraser's Magazine](#).

IRISH POTATO FAMINE

75. After the assassination attempt of 1839 and the two attempts of 1842, a 4th attack would occur during this year, and then attempts would be made in 1850, 1872, and 1882. What happened in this year was that an Irishman, William Hamilton, attempted to alarm Queen Victoria by discharging a pistol loaded only with powder in the direction of her carriage as it passed between Buckingham Palace and Hyde Park. Interestingly, nobody seems to remember on what day of the year this event took place! Hamilton would be awarded the maximum punishment under the 1842 act, of seven years in a penal colony.

76. [Emerson](#) and [Carlyle](#) were mistaken. A diet of Indian [maize](#) produces scurvy as this grain is not only deficient in the essential amino protein known as lysine but also deficient in Vitamin C. The ultimate effects of such a regimen are that one's gums bleed and teeth fall out, while one's limbs are covered with black sores. A death from scurvy is often hastened by gangrene — and this would be inevitable even were one able to force down enough cooked cracked corn mush to prevent any loss of weight! Had these gents themselves been obliged to subsist for any length of time upon the sort of cheapo regimen they supposed good enough for servants, they would of course have been obliged to become considerably more thoughtful.

April: Hundreds of Conestoga wagons left Missouri for California. In the crowded conditions along the Mississippi River, cholera ran rampant.



For instance, in the 2d, and most serious, cholera epidemic to strike St. Louis, more than 4,000 died.

Unbeknownst to these people, this month would turn out to have been the peak of the cholera epidemic in Ireland. We don't know precisely how many people were starving to death or, weakened by starvation, were succumbing to diarrhea and fever or to cholera on the island during this famine period, and the table prepared after the fact by the Census Commissioners, presented below, in all probability has underestimated mortality because of the manner in which they were tabulating such data: for a family all of whose members succumbed, zero deaths would of course have been reported. Of the total number of deaths, which would be between 500,000 and 1,500,000, the percentage of that total which would had been occurring in each year probably worked out to something like this:

IRISH

**Mortality, expressed as %ages of the 1841 Population**

Year	%
1842	5.1%
1843	5.2%
1844	5.6%
1845	6.4%
1846	9.1%
1847	18.5%
1848	15.4%



## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

### Mortality, expressed as %ages of the 1841 Population

Year	%
1849	17.9%
1850	12.2%

This would be decimation even in the etymological sense of that term. The figures shown for 1849 are the result not only of the general starvation but also of this outbreak of [cholera](#) as it spread in Connacht, Leinster, and Munster.

April 13, Friday: [Ellen Fuller Channing](#) gave birth to Walter Channing in their home on Main Street opposite the Thoreaus. They were living on an income of about \$400.<sup>00</sup> a year, most of it from proud grandpa [Dr. Walter Channing](#) — yet wages for domestics were so reasonable that they were able to utilize an [Irish](#) woman, Margaret.

July: The weather in Massachusetts was hot. Later, on June 11, 1851, [Henry Thoreau](#) would recollect this summer and write in his journal “I do not know but I feel less vigor at night —my legs will not carry me so far —as if the night were less favorable to muscular exertion —weakened us somewhat as darkness turns plants pale —but perhaps my experience is to be referred to being already exhausted by the day and I have never tried the experiment fairly. It was so hot summer before last that the [Irish](#) laborers on the RR worked by night instead of day for a while —several of them having been killed by the heat & cold water. I do not know but they did as much work as ever by day. Yet methinks nature would not smile on such labors.”

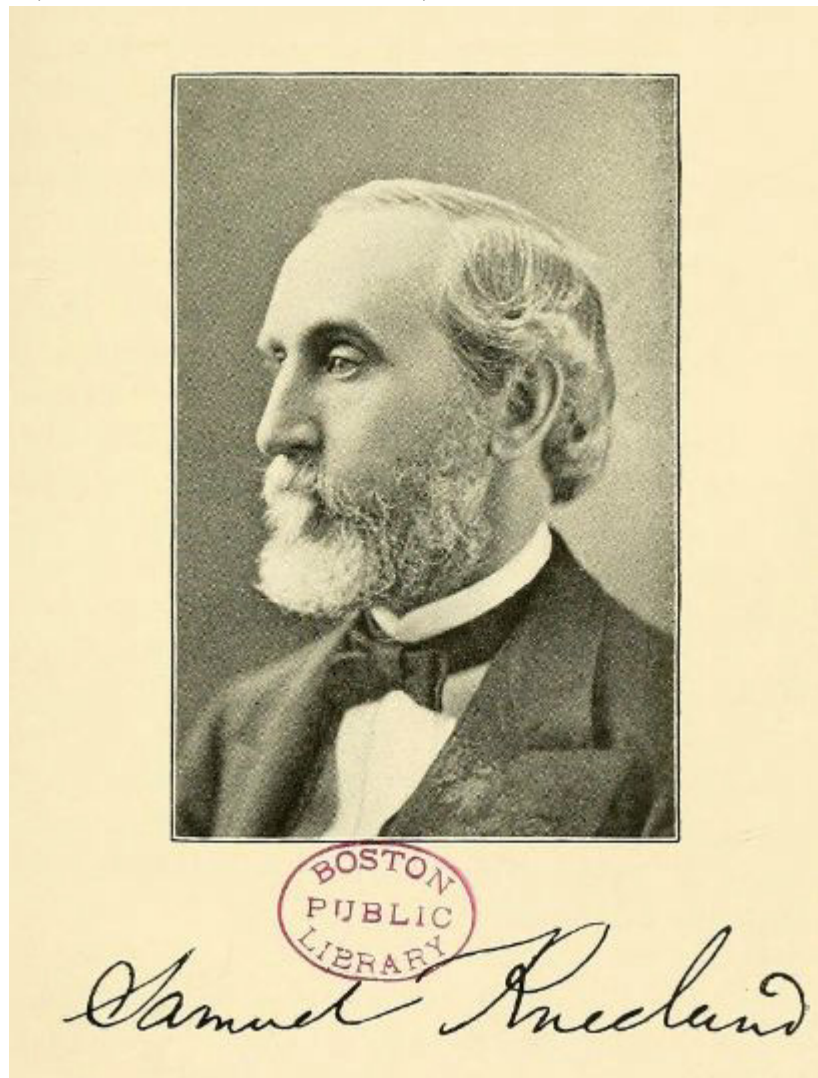
### THOREAU ON THE IRISH



August 1, Wednesday: In [New Bedford](#) during the late 1840s, bands and other marching groups and societies were turning out in force for parades on the anniversary of the emancipation of the slaves of the British West Indies, with the city's schoolchildren joining in as well.

EMANCIPATION DAY  
ABOLITIONISM

[Dr. Samuel Kneeland, Jr.](#) got married with Eliza Maria Curtis, daughter of Daniel T. Curtis, Esq. of Cambridge, Massachusetts, grand-daughter of General Paul Curtis of the American Revolution. They would have a son and a daughter, Samuel Kneeland on December 10, 1850 and Eliza Curtis Kneeland on October 21, 1852.



(We can be quite certain that in the case of this 1850 childbirth by Mrs. Kneeland, and in the case of this 1852 childbirth by Mrs. Kneeland, her murderous physician husband did not experiment to demonstrate yet again as he had proved in 1846, that “puerperal fever could be produced by the inoculation of a woman with fluid from a sick woman or from the body of one who had died after labor.” No, this particular mother was no charity patient — who might be killed for the improvement of science and her unfortunate infant left motherless. This one was the physician’s spouse, and the infant in question was the physician’s own child, and thus mother and infant would be awarded the very best of care! She, no, *she* was not injected.)



## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

The [cholera](#) was making an extraordinary visit to [Ireland](#). The [Morning Herald](#) editorialized that “A feeling is becoming very general that some mode of nationally supplying the DIVINE mercy should be immediately adopted, with reference to the pestilence which is now raging among us. It is no longer to be doubted or denied that not in our generation has a visitation of like severity been known. The worst periods of the cholera of 1832 did not approach in extent or intensity to that through which we are passing. We entirely accord with the feeling we have described, and trust that Parliament will not separate without some appeal being made to the heads of her Majesty’s Government as to the propriety of such a step. There is something exceedingly awful in the mysterious character of this pestilence. Nearly twenty years has it been a known disease, in one sense, throughout Europe; and yet, in another sense, it remains utterly unknown to this moment. Medical professors of the highest attainments are obliged to admit that they know not how or whence it comes; how or in what cases or circumstances it acts; or of what character the remedies ought to be. All the modes of dealing with it are little better than guesses. One insists on brandy, another prefers ice mixed with salt. Chloroform is the remedy here, bleeding there. Heat or cold, stillness or friction, all manner of differing or opposing modes of treatment, are advocated on all sides, and with equal zeal. The plainest facts are called in question. A Doctor H., at Liverpool, declares that in one week he effected 74 cures! All the other doctors of the town assert with decision, that he has effected no cures at all.” The [Limerick Chronicle](#) reported, on the bright side, that the supply of potatoes was looking up this year, so that although you might fear to die of the cholera this season, this season you need not fear to die of [famine](#): “Precisely at this time last year unmistakable symptoms of the potato disease were generally visible in our market. At present, we have sincere pleasure in announcing that no sign of any distemper affects the large supply now at market in Limerick.”

October: The [Irish](#) harvest was mostly healthy, with patches of blight isolated from one another, but the quantity of potatoes harvested was still below pre-Famine levels.

[IRISH POTATO FAMINE](#)

October 7 (?), Friday: At some point during the morning [Edgar Allan Poe](#) became too exhausted to continue his raving, sank back into his hospital bed in [Baltimore, Maryland](#) murmuring “Lord help my poor soul,” and died.

The brig *St. John*, full of [Irish](#) families fleeing the [Irish Potato Famine](#), hit the Grampus rock and broke up off Cohasset.

*A just man’s purpose cannot be split on any Grampus.*

Lord, help their poor souls.

1850

The Irish who had emigrated to the USA were providing a great deal of, and an increasing amount of, assistance for their Irish relatives on the old sod:

Low Estimates for Total Remittances to Ireland

Year	Pounds
1848	£460,000
1849	£540,000
1850	£957,000
1851	£990,000

Because of the fact that:

It is useless to disguise the truth that any great improvement in the social system of Ireland must be founded upon an extensive change in the present state of agrarian occupation, and that this change necessarily implies a long, continued and systematic ejectionment of small holders and of squatting cottiers.

the trend among the “improving” absentee landlords of the island had become to hire gangs of thugs who would evict small tenants and tear the roofs from their cottages to make certain they could not come back:

Families Evicted

Year	Families
1847	6,026
1848	9,657
1849	16,686
1850	19,949
1851	13,197



Meanwhile (just to show how parochial and limited such sympathy can be), in Burlington, Vermont, the first parish of French-Canadian [Catholics](#) in New England was being formed, but only over the vociferous objections of local Catholics of [Irish](#)-American extraction. In general, these Irish-Americans were hostile to competition, and in particular, therefore, they were even hostile to competition from other Catholics, if they happened to be French-Canadian Americans rather than of Irish extraction. These French-Canadian Catholics, such as for one example Alek Therien of [Concord](#), because they had not only an ethnicity problem in Anglo-Saxon New England but also a communication problem, would need to be willing to do harder work for longer hours per day, and for lower wages.<sup>77</sup>

They wouldn't be receiving any sympathy from Frederick Douglass, for in his experience, to be pro-[Catholic](#) was to be pro-slavery:



The two hundred years this curse has set in the sanctuary proves that there is no warfare between slavery and church.

For instance, the Dorr War of [Rhode Island](#), in the vehemence of its anti-[Irish](#) and anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant sentiments, was pure Frederick Douglass.

ANTI-CATHOLICISM

It is religious bigotry and politics, not the US Constitution, that has created today's monopoly public school system.

In about this decade of the 19th Century, it was Protestant ministers, people who regarded [Catholic](#) schools as an abomination, who launched a social movement to create exclusive, government-run public schools, and what they were after were schools controlled by good folks like themselves, Protestants, schools that immigrant Catholic kids could be herded into, in which they would be cleaned up and Americanized and indoctrinated and transformed into hordes of decent little Protestant Americans. The public school movement succeeded in defunding the Catholic schools of New-York, despite the fact that the popular, progressive governor of the state, William Seward, stood with the Catholics in demanding equal treatment for religious schools. Here is the course of instruction for Courtlandville Academy in New York, for the year 1850:

SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

**SUMMARY OF THE SEVERAL TERMS**

FIRST TERM	SECOND TERM	THIRD TERM	OF THE YEAR
Males———42.	Males———63.	Males———71.	Males———111.
Females——64.	Females——79.	Females——71.	Females——131.
Total———106.	Total———142.	Total———142.	Total———242.

**NOTICE**

**COURSE OF INSTRUCTION, AND TEXT BOOKS.**

77. It may be hard for use to imagine how there could have been harder work for longer hours per day for lower wages, than the [Irish Potato Famine](#) survivors were subjected to, or how people subjected to such conditions would meet with other than sympathy and commiseration — but evidently in this world **just any** hardship may be demanded.



**Ordinary Elementary Studies.**

Weld's and Brown's Grammars; Adam's Davies' University, and Colburn's Intellectual Arithmetics; Harris' Bookkeeping; Town's Analysis; Mitchell's Geography and Outline Maps; Parley's course of History; Sanders' Readers; Webster's Dictionary; Penmanship, Composition and Declamation.

**Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, &c.**

Robinson's and Davies' Bordon's Algebra; Davies' Legendre's Geometry and Trigonometry; Davies' Surveying and Analytical Geometry; Olmsted's Natural Philosophy; Burritt's and Olmsted's [Astronomy](#), with Mattison's Astronomical Maps<sup>78</sup>; Potter's Technology.

**Natural Science.**

Lincoln's and Wood's Botany; Hitchcock's Geology; Cutter's Human Physiology; Wistar's Pancoast's Anatomy; Johnston's Turner's Chemistry; Comstock's Mineralogy; Smellie's Philosophy of Natural History; Liebeg's Organic Chemistry.

**Intellectual, Moral, and Political Science.**

Boyd and Newman's Rhetoric; Kaime's Elements of Criticism; Robbins and Taylor's General, and Wilson's U.S. Histories; Wayland's Moral Science and Political Economy; Whateley's Logic; Paley's Natural Theology; — Young's Science of Government; Abercrombie's Intellectual Philosophy; Milton's Poetry, (for analysing.)

**Languages.**

Andrews and Stoddard's Latin Grammar; Arnold's Practical Latin Exercises; Arnold's Latin Prose Composition; Cooper's Virgil; Schmitz and Zumpt's Caesar; Anthon's "Cicero de Oratore";

Sallust and Horace; Folsom's Livy; Kingsley's Tacitus; Anthon's Classical Dictionary; Leverett's and Ainsworth's Latin Lexicon; Sophocles' and Fisk's Greek Grammar; Arnold's Practical Greek Exercises; Arnold's Greek Prose Composition; Leusden's Greek Testament; Casserly's Jacob's Greek Reader; Xenophon's Anabasis and Memorabilia; Felton's Homer's Illiad and Odyssey; Donnegan's Greek Lexicon; Noel and Chapsal's and Bollmar's French Grammars; "Corinne ou L'Italie"; Vie de Washington; Charles the Twelfth; Siege of Rochelle; Telemarque; Madame De Stael's Germany; La Fontaine's Fables; Boyer's Surenne, and Meadow's Dictionary.

The Text Books in the above list are believed to be best adapted to accomplish the design of this Institution, viz : to furnish a course of study at once thorough and comprehensive, and that shall prepare the Student to prosecute successfully a more extended course of study, or to enter upon the duties of active life.

The institution has a somewhat extensive and well selected Library, and a handsome set of Philosophical and Chemical Apparatus; all of which is open to the student free from charge.

The Academy buildings are nearly new and highly commodious. This school is located in one of the most healthful and pleasant villages in the State, and amid a society exempt from the vicious influences attending the great thoroughfares of travel. Parents and guardians are assured that no pains will be spared on the part of the instructors to promote the welfare of those entrusted to their care.

The advancement of pupil's in reading, speaking and composition writing, is deemed of prima-

78. [Elijah Hinsdale Burritt](#)'s THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE HEAVENS.... NEW ED. REV. AND ILLUS. BY HIRAM MATTISON.



## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

ry importance. Exercises in Declamation and Composition are held in the Academy Hall every Wednesday afternoon; and at the close of the winter term, as well as at the close of the Academic year is a public exhibition of the Students in original orations, disputations and essays. Upon all the exercises of the school, public or ordinary, the patrons of the institution, and the friends of education are invited to be present.

The patronage which this school has received, and the favor with which it is now regarded by our citizens, and the public generally, encourage the Trustees to anticipate for it continued and increased prosperity.

The Academic year is divided into three terms, of fourteen weeks each. The first term of the ensuing year will commence on the 4th day of April; the second on the 15th day of August; and the third on the 2d day of December.

THE PRICES OF TUITION in the various studies pursued, are for the Latin, Greek and French Languages, Natural Philosophy and Chemistry, with Lectures, Botany, Mathematics, History, Moral and Mental Philosophy, Rhetoric, &c

\$5.00 per Term,

Music in addition to other Studies,

\$10.00 per Term,

Use of Piano

\$2.00 per Term,

Painting and Drawing,

\$5.00 per Term,

English Grammar, Geography, Arithmetic, Reading, Writing, &c.,

\$3.75 per Term,

Young scholars in English branches,

\$2.50 per Term,

No bills will be made for less time than half a Term, and Tuition is payable in advance, or promptly at the close of each Term.

Board, including Room, Washing, &c., may be obtained in convenient situations, at prices from \$1 25 to \$2 per week.

JOSEPH REYNOLDS, President.

July 23, day: A letter from [South Kingstown, Rhode Island](#):

We have begun to cart in today & we are also in the midst of haying having got in 30 loads but there are at least 70 more to get in & two of my men have mutinied & gone off drunk ... but we have eight Irishmen & five natives left – How could the work of the country be done but for the Emerald Islanders?

IRISH

September 6, Thursday: In [South Kingstown, Rhode Island](#), “The potato rot is making great havoc here.”

IRISH POTATO FAMINE



Sept. 6: What a generation this is! It carries some brains in its hat with a couple of spare cigars on top of them– It carries a heart in its breast and a lozenge in its waistcoat pocket  
 John Garfield brought me this morning (Sep. 6th) a Young Great Heron Ardea Herodias which he shot this morning on a pine tree on the North branch– It measured 4 ft 9 inches from bill to toe–& 6 ft in alar extent–and belongs to a different race from myself and Mr Frost. I am glad to recognize him for an American citizen.  
 In the twilight when you can only see the outlines of the trees in the horizon–the Elm tops indicate where the houses are. I have looked afar over fields and even over distant woods and seen the conspicuous graceful sheaflike top (head) of an elm which shadowed some farm-house. From the N W? part of Sudbury you can see an elm on the Boston road–on the hill top in the horizon in Wayland 5 or 6? miles distant. The elm is a tree which can be distinguished farther off perhaps than any other. The wheel wright still makes his hubs of it–his spokes of white oak his felleys of yellow oak which does not crack on the corners.– In England ’tis said they use the ash for felleys.

October: The [Irish](#) harvest was mostly healthy, with patches of blight isolated from one another, such as in counties Clare and Limerick, but the quantity of potatoes harvested was still below pre-Famine levels. We don’t know precisely how many people starved to death or, weakened by starvation, succumbed to diarrhea and fever or to [cholera](#) in Ireland during this period, and a table prepared after the fact by the Census Commissioners, presented here, in all probability under-estimates the mortality because of the manner in which they collected data: for a family all of whose members succumbed zero deaths would have been tabulated. Of the total number of deaths, which would be between 500,000 and 1,500,000, the percentage of that total which would occur in each year probably worked out to something like this:

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1848	15.4%
1849	17.9%
1850	12.2%

The figures shown for 1849 are the result of this outbreak of [cholera](#) as it had spread in Connacht, Leinster, and Munster, as well as of the general [Irish](#) starvation.



## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

1851

In [Boston](#), one Bernard McGiniskin was hired as a policeman, then fired, then re-hired, and then re-fired.<sup>79</sup>

As an after-impact of the great [potato](#) famine, there was widespread blindness in [Ireland](#). The population of the island had fallen from 8,175,124 as of 1841 to 6,552,385 (whereas without the [Irish Potato Famine](#) and the accompanying epidemic and emigration the population of that island could have been expected at this point to have been something greater than 9,000,000).

### Population Trends

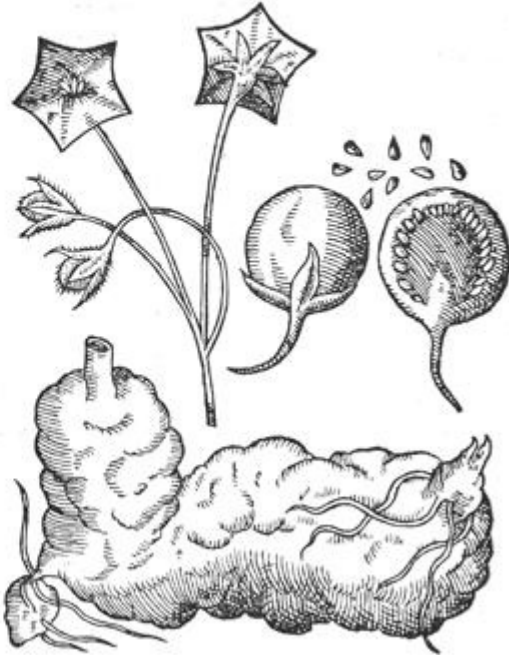
	England / Wales	Ireland
1821	12,000,000	6,800,000
1831	13,900,000	7,770,000
1841	15,920,000	8,180,000
1845	about 16,700,000	about 8,300,000 (blight, then famine, fever, and emigration)
1851	17,930,000	6,550,000
1861	20,070,000	5,800,000
1871	31,629,299	5,410,000
1881	35,026,108	5,170,000

79. He was the initial [Irishman](#), you see, on the force. This was just scandalous — it was like supposing one could fit a fox into a uniform and entrust to it the safety of one's chickens. Bostonians [*sic*, this means white non-Irish males] talked about it, in their barber shops they were saying it was as cunning as hiring a nigger boy [*sic*, these are 19th-Century white American men talking to 19th-Century white American men] to tend a garden full of watermelons. What is going to come of all this insane **liberalism**?



**AN GORTA MÓR**

**THE LATE BLIGHT**



# THE LATE BLIGHT

# AN GORTA MÓR

Accurate estimates of this sort of thing are of course rather hard to come by, but order-of-magnitude it is now being estimated that like a million people had starved to death. Reviewing these figures, however, the Census Commissioners of the time pronounced them “on the whole, satisfactory,” pointing out that lower population levels meant “the general advancement of the country.” The relatives who had emigrated to the USA were evidently unable to take such a sanguinary attitude, as they were providing continuously increasing assistance for the people they had left behind:

## Low Estimates for Total Remittances to Ireland

Year	Pounds
1848	£460,000
1849	£540,000
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Because of the fact that:

It is useless to disguise the truth that any great improvement in the social system of Ireland must be founded upon an extensive change in the present state of agrarian occupation, and that this change necessarily implies a long, continued and systematic ejection of small holders and of squatting cottiers.

the trend among the “improving” absentee landlords of the island had become to hire gangs of thugs who would evict small tenants and tear the roofs from their cottages to make certain they could not come back:

## Families Evicted

Year	Families
1847	6,026
1848	9,657
1849	16,686
1850	19,949
1851	13,197



What precisely was it, which had produced such a tragedy, or, such a travesty, as this famine and epidemic? Is an event of this magnitude to be understood as having been purely and simply an ecological disaster, a Malthusian inevitability, or must this be considered as having been primarily a piece of political opportunism, a Newt Gingrichian malignancy on the body politic, an opportunity to kick an entire people while they were down? Christine Kinealy has offered a refined analysis<sup>80</sup> involving some mixture of these possibilities:

80. Kinealy, Christine. THIS GREAT CALAMITY: THE IRISH FAMINE 1845-52. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1994



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The onset of the Famine was unexpected although partial crop failures and food shortages were not unusual. In 1845, therefore, the [potato](#) blight, regardless of the lack of understanding of either its origins or an antidote, was not regarded with undue alarm. Although approximately 50 per cent of the main subsistence crop failed in 1845-6, the consequence of the resultant shortages was not [famine](#), nor did emigration or mortality increase substantially. The role played by the government, local landlords, clerics, and various relief officials was significant in achieving this outcome. The second, more widespread, blight of 1846 marked the real beginning of the Famine. Ominously, the impact of the shortages was apparent in the period immediately following the harvest. Inevitably also, the people undergoing a second year of shortages were far less resilient than they had been twelve months earlier. The government responded to this potentially more serious situation by reducing its involvement in the import of food into the country and by making relief more difficult to obtain.

The distress that followed the 1847 harvest was caused by a small crop and economic dislocation rather than the widespread appearance of blight. The government again changed its relief policy in an attempt to force local resources to support the starving poor within their district. The government professed a belief that this policy was necessary to ensure that a burden which it chose to regard as essentially local should not be forced upon the national finances. This policy underpinned the actions of the government for the remainder of the Famine. The relief of [famine](#) was regarded essentially as a local responsibility rather than a national one, let alone an imperial obligation. The special relationship between the constituent parts of the United Kingdom forged by the Act of Union appeared not to extend to periods of shortage and famine.

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If the blight is judged to be an unforeseen ecological disaster, beyond the control of man, which struck [Ireland](#) at a particularly vulnerable time, it was especially important that the intervention of man (as represented by [Irish](#) merchants, landlords, and the policy makers within the British government among others) should compensate for the failings of nature. It was the failure of these key groups to meet the challenge and implement effective action which transformed the blight into a [famine](#).

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The contribution of outside charitable bodies was mostly confined to the early years of the Famine. By 1847, most of these sources had dried up or, as in the case of the [Quakers](#), they had decided to use their remaining funds to concentrate on long-term improvements rather than immediate relief. Significantly, the Quakers' men on the ground who toured the west of [Ireland](#) in the winter of 1846-7 were critical both of absentee landlords and of the policies pursued by the British government alike.

Page 353:

For landlords also, who were able to ride the storm of diminished



## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

rentals and heavy taxation, the Famine ultimately brought both social and financial benefits. As Lord George Hill, a “reforming” landlord who had attempted without success to consolidate his estates prior to 1845, admitted:

The [Irish](#) people have profited much by the Famine, the lesson was severe; but so rooted were they in old prejudices and old ways, that no teacher could have induced them to make the changes which this Visitation of Divine Providence has brought about, both in their habits of life and in their mode of agriculture.

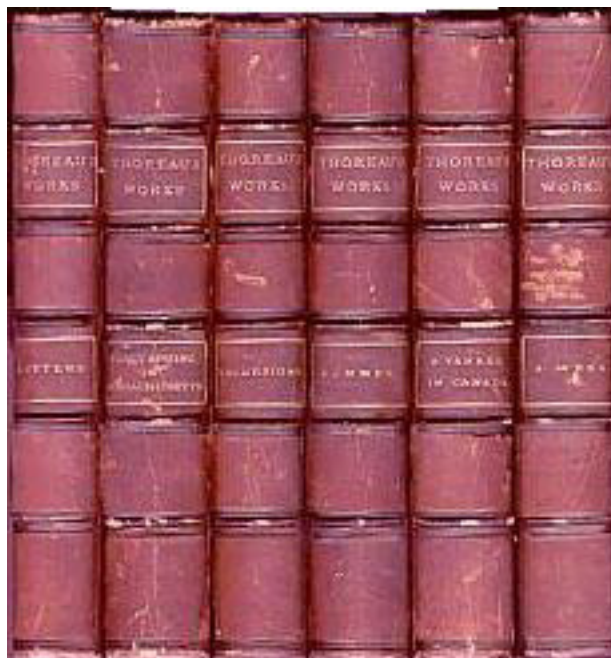
Page 359:

In conclusion, therefore, the response of the British government to the Famine was inadequate in terms of humanitarian criteria and, increasingly after 1847, systematically and deliberately so. The localised shortages that followed the blight of 1845 were adequately dealt with but, as the shortages became more widespread, the government retrenched. With the short-lived exception of the soup kitchens, access to relief –or even more importantly, access to food– became more restricted. That the response illustrated a view of [Ireland](#) and its people as distant and marginal is hard to deny. What, perhaps, is more surprising is that a group of officials and their non-elected advisors were able to dominate government policy to such a great extent. This relatively small group of people, taking advantage of a passive establishment, and public opinion which was opposed to further financial aid for Ireland, were able to manipulate a theory of free enterprise, thus allowing a massive social injustice to be perpetrated within a part of the United Kingdom. There was no shortage of resources to avoid the tragedy of a [famine](#). Within Ireland itself, there were substantial resources of food which, had the political will existed, could have been diverted, even as a short-term measure, to supply a starving people. 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.

End of this quoting. What I am wondering is whether anyone can offer insight into the Quaker disengagement cited by the author as having taken place in 1848. Was that a case of what nowadays we term “burnout”? In particular, where Friends spoke of their prior effort as having been equivalent to “giving the criminal a long day,” what was the significance of the deployment of such an idiom? Were the Friends at that point, in despair, becoming political “Newt Gingrichians”? What **was** it precisely, in that period, to “give the criminal a long day”?

1852

[The Riverside Press](#) (manufacturing division of Houghton-Mifflin) moved from Remington Street in Cambridge to the old Almshouse estate at Blackstone Street and the Charles River in Cambridgeport. It was a large employer and its establishment by Henry O. Houghton had coincided with the availability of the cheap labor of the [famine Irish](#). In addition, Houghton visited Glasgow, London, and Paris to recruit skilled printers. Originally a Vermont farm boy, Houghton had learned the printing business at the Burlington Free Press and had attended the University of Vermont. Some of this press’s earliest publications would be [The Atlantic Monthly](#), MERRIAM-WEBSTER’S UNABRIDGED DICTIONARY, and household editions of Charles Dickens. In the late 19th century, the Press’s great accomplishments would be the ten volumes of ENGLISH AND SCOTTISH BALLADS by Francis James Child, and Edward Fitzgerald’s “translation” of THE RUBAIYAT OF OMAR KHAYYAM, illustrated by Elihu Vedder. One of the most well-known artists associated with the Press would be Bruce Rogers, a typographical genius who preferred to use older, less commercial methods. In a small, bare studio Rogers would work side by side with an elderly, senior pressman, Dan Sullivan, whom he found indispensable. Together Rogers and Sullivan would produce, on a handpress, the Riverside Press Editions, truly extraordinary works. When Houghton Press would buy out Ticknor and Fields, it would acquire publishing rights to works by Samuel Clemens, Stephen Crane, [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#), Oliver Wendell Holmes, William Dean Howells, Sarah Orne Jewett, [Henry Wadsworth Longfellow](#), James Russell Lowell, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Friend [John Greenleaf Whittier](#), and, of course, [Henry Thoreau](#):



October: The [Irish potato](#) harvest this year was virtually free of the late blight. England had disbursed a grand sum total of less than 1/2 of 1% of **one** year’s annual Gross National Product in relief to sustain the Irish during this entire panicky [Irish Potato Famine](#) period of like eight years, and had begrudged even that level of assistance.<sup>81</sup>

## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

1853

The transportation of British convicts to Tasmania was ending in this year, after half a century with more than 65,000 convicts landed on the island.



As a political prisoner at large there on his own parole, the [Irish](#) convict John Mitchel had been writing away at an account of things which eventually would receive the title *JAIL JOURNAL, OR FIVE YEARS IN BRITISH PRISONS*, and still had friends capable of providing him with a swift horse (what he needed, of course, was friends who could give him a swift kick in the ass, to get rid of whatever bug it was that was up his ass, that was causing all this — but such wise friends are hard to come by). During this year he strode into the local magistrate's office to inform that startled gentleman "I will no longer be a prisoner on parole, I take back my word!" Dashing out of the office and leaping on the horse, he rode to the seacoast and boarded the American vessel upon which his convict son John C. Mitchel Jr. was already waiting.



They were bound for San Francisco, and eventually for New-York.

81. Which is to say, making a comparison with the past, that over a period of eight years they had been willing to spend to fight this famine only 10% of what they had felt required to spend **every** year in order to neutralize the armies of Napoleon. Or, looking at this thing compared to England's glorious future, the Treasury had with the greatest of reluctance disbursed only £8,000,000 for all the Irish, when in a few years it would be disbursing over £69,000,000 in order to fund a pointless and disastrous military foray into the Crimea.

September 5, Monday: During the Middlesex Cattle Show, two non-Irishmen and ten Irishmen engaged in an organized spading competition. One of these spaders was Concord's industrious man of County Kerry,

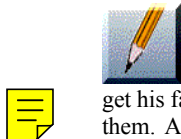


[Michael Flannery](#), the hired hand of Abiel H. Wheeler, and while one of the two non-Irishmen, Enoch Garfield, carried off the 1st prize, the 2nd prize of \$4.00 was won by Flannery. Wheeler would outrageously claim Flannery's prize money on the grounds that since it was he who employed Flannery, obviously anything that might pertain to Flannery would belong to him, and [Henry Thoreau](#) would draw up and circulate a petition in opposition to such abuse of a new guest in the community.

**THOREAU ON THE IRISH**

October 12, Wednesday: [Henry Thoreau](#) circulated a petition in Concord, in regard to abusive treatment [Michael Flannery](#) had received from the Concord citizen for whom he was working as a hired hand:

*Concord Oct 12<sup>th</sup> '53  
We, the Undersigned, contribute the following sums, in order to make up to Michael Flannery the sum of four dollars, being the amount of his premium for spading on the 5th ult., which was received and kept by his employer, Abiel H. Wheeler.*



October 12: To-day I have had the experience of borrowing money for a poor Irishman who wishes to get his family to this country. One will never know his neighbors till he has carried a subscription paper among them. Ah! it reveals many and sad facts to stand in this relation to them. To hear the selfish and cowardly excuses some make, -that if they help any they must help the Irishman who lives with them, -and him they are sure never to help: others with whom public opinion weighs, will think of it, trusting you will never raise the sum and so they will not be called on again; who give stingily after all. What a satire in the fact that you are much more inclined to call on a certain slighted and so-called crazy woman in moderate circumstances rather than on the president of the bank: But some are generous and save the town from the distinction which threatened it, and some even who do not lend, plainly would if they could.

**THOREAU ON THE IRISH**



December 19, Monday: Sometime after the incident of the spading competition, [Michael Flannery](#) had quit working for Abiel H. Wheeler and become a field laborer instead for Elijah Wood. At this point he discussed this new job with [Henry Thoreau](#) and told of his continuing efforts to get his family from Ireland. That evening Thoreau wrote to H.G.O. Blake:

An Irishman came to see me to-day, who is endeavoring to get his family out to this New World. He rises at half past four, milks twenty-eight cows (which has swollen the joints of his fingers), and eats his breakfast, without any milk in his tea or coffee, before six; and so on, day after day, for six and a half dollars a month; and thus he keeps his virtue in him, if he does not add to it; and he regards me as a gentleman able to assist him; but if I ever get to be a gentleman, it will be by working after my fashion harder than he does.

### THOREAU ON THE IRISH

From this day into December 21st, Thoreau would be surveying a Corner Spring woodlot that James P. Brown was selling to William Wheeler, which was cut in 1853-1854. (Brown lived near Nut Meadow Brook, and according to the Concord Town Report for 1851-1852, Thoreau had laid out a town road near his house and had been paid \$4.<sup>00</sup> for this by the town.)

View [Henry Thoreau](#)'s personal working drafts of his surveys courtesy of AT&T and the Concord Free Public Library:

[http://www.concordlibrary.org/scollect/Thoreau\\_Surveys/Thoreau\\_Surveys.htm](http://www.concordlibrary.org/scollect/Thoreau_Surveys/Thoreau_Surveys.htm)

(The official copy of this survey of course had become the property of the person or persons who had hired this Concord town surveyor to do their surveying work during the 19th Century. Such materials have yet to be recovered.)

View this particular personal working draft of a survey in fine detail:

[http://www.concordlibrary.org/scollect/Thoreau\\_Surveys/137.htm](http://www.concordlibrary.org/scollect/Thoreau_Surveys/137.htm)

Thoreau wrote to [Spencer Fullerton Baird](#) in regard to [Louis Agassiz](#)'s American Association for the Advancement of Science, to withdraw his name, pleading that he would be unable to attend meetings and explaining that the kind of science he was attracted to was the science of the Reverend [Gilbert White](#)'s

### [THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE](#)

and [Alexander von Humboldt](#)'s

ASPECTS OF NATURE





— as he understood very well that this was bound suitably to render him unattractive to them.<sup>82</sup>

In this letter Thoreau made reference to a poem that had been published anonymously in Punch, or the London Charivari, by [Thomas Hood](#), entitled “[The Song of the Shirt.](#)”

In this letter, also, Thoreau made reference to pamphlet of 10 pages of blue paper just put out by the Smithsonian Institution that was going to become part of his personal library, [Spencer Fullerton Baird](#)’s DIRECTIONS FOR MAKING COLLECTIONS IN NATURAL HISTORY, PREPARED FOR THE USE OF THE PARTIES ENGAGED IN THE EXPLORATION OF A ROUTE FOR THE PACIFIC RAILROAD ALONG THE 49TH PARALLEL.

**GOD IN CONCORD** by Jane Langton © 1992

**38**

*If you are going into that line, —going to besiege the city of God, —you must not only be strong in engines, but prepared with provisions to starve out the garrison.*

Thoreau, Letter to Harrison Blake,  
December 19, 1853

**H**omer took his convictions about Pond View to Police Chief James Flower.

**ISBN 0-670-84260-5 — PS3562.A515G58**

Viking Penguin Penguin Books USA Inc.

Concord Dec 19<sup>th</sup> 53  
Mr Blake,

*My debt has accumulated so that I should have answered your last letter at once, if I had not been the subject of what is called a press of engagements, having a lecture to write for last Wednesday, and surveying more than usual besides. — It has been a kind of running fight with me — the enemy not always behind me, I trust. True, a man cannot lift himself by his own waist-bands, because he cannot get out of himself, but he can expand himself, (which is better, there being no up nor down in nature) and so split his waist-*

82. Harding and Bode, CORRESPONDENCE, pages 309-10. He gave quite a different reason for not becoming a member in his JOURNAL: “*The fact is I am a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher to boot.*” Although it has been alleged many times that this reading had great influence on [Henry Thoreau](#), quite frankly I have been unable myself to verify that Thoreau took this species of nature writing as [Waldo Emerson](#) had, with any seriousness.



*bands, being already within himself.*  
*You speak of doing & being – & the vanity real or apparent of much doing – The suckers, I think it is they, make nests in our river in the spring of more than a cart-load of small stones, amid which to deposit their ova. The other day I opened a muskrats' house. It was made of weeds, five feet broad at base & 3 feet high, and far and low within it was a little cavity, only a foot in diameter where the rat dwelt. It may seem trivial – this piling up of weeds, but so the race of muskrats is preserved. We must heap up a great pile of doing for a small diameter of being. – Is it not imperative on us that we do something – if we only work in a tread-mill? and, indeed, some sort of revolving is necessary to produce a centre & nucleus of being. What exercise is to the body – employment is to the mind & morals. Consider what an amount of drudgery must be performed – how much hum-drum & prosaic labor goes to any work of the least value. There are so many layers of mere white lime in every shell to that thin inner one so beautifully tinted. Let not the shell fish think to build his house of that alone; and pray what are its tints to him? Is it not his smooth close-fitting shirt merely? whose tints are not to him, being in the dark, but only when he is gone or dead, and his shell is heaved up to light a wreck upon the beach, do they appear. With him too it is a song of the shirt – “work – work – work” – & this work is not merely a police in the gross sense, but in the higher sense, a discipline. If it is surely the means to the highest end we know, can any work be humble or disgusting? Will it not rather elevating as a ladder – the means by which we are translated? How admirably the artist is made to accomplish his self culture by devotion to his art! The woodsawyer through his effort to do his work well, becomes not merely a better woodsawyer, but measurably a better man. Few are the men that can work on their navels – only some Brahmens that I have heard of. To the painter is given some paint & canvass instead. – to the Irishman a bog, – typical of himself. – In a thousand apparently humble ways men busy themselves to make some right take the place of some wrong, – if it is only to make a better paste-blackening – and they are themselves so much the better morally for it.*  
*You say that you sit & aspire, but do not succeed much. Does it concern you enough that you do not? Do you work hard enough at it— Do you get the benefit of discipline out of it? If so, persevere. Is it a more serious thing than to walk a thousand miles in a thousand successive hours? Do you get any corns by it? Do you ever think of hanging yourself on account of failure?*  
*If you are going into that line – going to besiege the city of God – you must not only be strong in engines – but prepared with provisions to starve out the garrison. An Irishman came to see me today who is endeavoring to get his family out to this New World. He rises at half past 4 & milks 28 cows – (which has swollen the joints of his*



*fingers) & eats his breakfast, without any milk in his tea or coffee, before 6 – & so on day after day for six & a half dollars a month – & thus he keeps his virtue in him – if he does not add to it – & he regards me as a gentleman able to assist him – but if I ever get to be a gentleman, it will be by working after my fashion harder than he does – If my joints are not swollen, it must be because I deal with the teats of celestial cows before break-fast, (and the milker in this case is always allowed some of the milk for his breakfast) to say nothing of the flocks & herds of Admetus afterward.*

*It is the art of mankind to polish the world, and every one who works is scrubbing in some part.*

*If the mark is high & far, you must not only aim aright, but draw the bow with all your might. You must qualify your self to use a bow which no humbler archer can bend.*

*Work – work – work!*

*Who shall know it for a bow? It is not of yew-tree. It is straighter than a ray of light – flexibility is not known for one of its qualities.*

*Dec 22<sup>nd</sup>*

*So far I had got when I was called off to survey. – Pray read the Life of Haydon the painter – if you have not. It is a small revelation for these latter days – a great satisfaction to know that he has lived – though he is now dead. Have you met with the letter of a Turkish cadi at the end of Layard's "Nineveh & Babylon" that also is refreshing & a capital comment on the whole book which preceeds it – the oriental genius speaking through him.*

*Those Brahmins put it through, they come off – or rather stand still, conquerors, with some withered arms or legs at least to show – & they are said to have cultivated the faculty of abstraction to a degree unknown to Europeans, – If we cannot sing of faith & triumph – we will sing our despair. We will be that kind of bird. There are day owls & there are night owls – and each is beautiful & even musical while about its business.*

*Might you not find some positive work to do with your back to Church & State – letting your back do all the rejection of them? Can you not go upon your pilgrimage, Peter, along the winding mountain path whither you face? A step more will make those funereal church bells over your shoulder sound far and sweet as a natural sound*

*Work – work – work!*

*Why not make a very large mud pie & bake it in the sun! Only put no church nor state into it, nor upset any other pepper -box that way. – Dig out a wood-chuck for that has nothing to do with rotting institutions – Go ahead.*

*Whether a man spends his day in an extacy or despondency – he must do some work to show for it – even as there are flesh & bones to show for him. We are superior to the joy we experience.*

*Your last 2 letters methinks have more nerve & will in them than*

*usual – as if you had erected yourself more – Why are not they good work – if you only had a hundred correspondents to tax you? Make your failure tragical – by the earnestness & steadfastness of your endeavor – & then it will not differ from success – Prove it to be the inevitable fate of mortals – of one mortal – if you can. You said that you were writing on immortality – I wish you would communicate to me what you know about that – you are sure to live while that is your theme – Thus I write on some text which a sentence of your letters may have furnished. I think of coming to see you as soon as I get a new coat – if I have money enough left – I will write to you again about it. Henry D. Thoreau*

BENJAMIN ROBERT HAYDON

December 28, Wednesday: [Michael Flannery](#)'s predicament was still on [Henry Thoreau](#)'s mind, for he wrote in his journal:



E.W., who got the premium on farms this year, keeps twenty-eight cows, which are milked before breakfast, or 6 o'clock, his hired men rising at 4.30 A.M.; but he gives them none of the milk in their coffee.

A year later Thoreau would use a slightly revised version of this passage about local farmer "E.W." or Elijah Wood Jr. in a lecture he delivered before the [Nantucket](#) Athenaeum, "WHAT SHALL IT PROFIT" as one of several illustrations of money-grubbing.

[Paragraph 14] I know another farmer who keeps twenty-eight cows—whose hired man and boy rise daily at half past four in mid winter, and milk the cows before breakfast, which is at six o'clock by candlelight—and they get none of the milk in their coffee.

(The boy mentioned was in all likelihood [Michael](#)'s son [Johnny Flannery](#).)

THOREAU ON THE IRISH

1854

February 26, Sunday: [Henry Thoreau](#) was reading about [Dr. Elisha Kent Kane](#)'s expedition to find the remains of the expedition of [Sir John Franklin](#) in the Arctic.



U.S. GRINNELL EXPEDITION

THE FROZEN NORTH

In the afternoon he walked in the rain to Martial Miles's. Miles said he thought he had heard a bluebird.



## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

**WALDEN:** What does Africa, -what does the West stand for? Is not our own interior white on the chart? black though it may prove, like the coast, when discovered. Is it the source of the Nile, or the Niger, or the Mississippi, or a North-West Passage around this continent, that we would find? Are these the problems which most concern mankind? Is Franklin the only man who is lost, that his wife should be so earnest to find him? Does Mr. Grinnell know where he himself is? Be rather the Mungo Park, the Lewis and Clarke and Frobisher, of your own streams and oceans; explore your own higher latitudes, -with shiploads of preserved meats to support you, if they be necessary; and pile the empty cans sky-high for a sign. Were preserved meats invented to preserve meat merely? Nay, be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels, not of trade, but of thought. Every man is the lord of a realm beside which the earthly empire of the Czar is but a petty state, a hummock left by the ice. Yet some can be patriotic who have no *self-respect*, and sacrifice the greater to the less. They love the soil which makes their graves, but have no sympathy with the spirit which may still animate their clay. Patriotism is a maggot in their heads. What was the meaning of that South-Sea Exploring Expedition, with all its parade and expense, but an indirect recognition of the fact, that there are continents and seas in the moral world, to which every man is an isthmus or an inlet, yet unexplored by him, but that it is easier to sail many thousand miles through cold and storm and cannibals, in a government ship, with five hundred men and boys to assist one, than it is to explore the private sea, the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean of one's being alone.-

PEOPLE OF  
WALDEN

“Erret, et extremos alter scrutetur Iberos.  
Plus habet hic vitæ, plus habet ille viæ.”

Let them wander and scrutinize the outlandish Australians.  
I have more of God, they more of the road.

SIR JOHN FRANKLIN  
DR. ELISHA KENT KANE  
MERIWETHER LEWIS  
WILLIAM CLARK  
MUNGO PARK

Thoreau wrote Elijah Wood about beginning to forward to him  $\frac{3}{4}$ ths of Michael Flannery's wages. A comment made was that this was in repayment of “money lent him in some pinch.”

Concord Feb. 26<sup>th</sup> '54

Mr Wood,

I mentioned to you that Mr. Flannery had given me an order on you for  $\frac{3}{4}$  of his wages. I have agreed with him that that arrangement shall not begin to take effect until the first of March 1854.

yrs

Henry D. Thoreau

**THOREAU ON THE IRISH**

In a few years, upon returning to a friend a copy of [Dr. Kane](#)'s ARCTIC EXPLORATIONS: *THE SECOND GRINNELL EXPEDITION* IN SEARCH OF SIR JOHN FRANKLIN, 1853, '54, '55, [Thoreau](#) would remark that "most of the phenomena therein recorded are to be observed about Concord":



ARCTIC EXPLORATIONS, I

ARCTIC EXPLORATIONS, II

Eventually Thoreau would obtain his own personal set of these volumes and would make notes in his Indian Notebooks #8 and #10 and his Fact Book.

HDT

WHAT?

INDEX

# THE LATE BLIGHT

# AN GORTA MÓR



*E. C. Kane*





There was one Philadelphian book of the fifties that lay on countless parlour tables, acclaimed by Irving, Bancroft, Prescott and Bryant, the ARCTIC EXPLORATIONS of Dr. Elisha Kent Kane, who had reached the highest latitude, the furthest north. A surgeon in the navy in Oriental waters, he had previously explored the Philippines in 1844 more extensively than any traveller before him; then he led one of the expeditions in search of the British explorer Franklin, who had vanished with his ship and crew in the northern ice-fields. He spent two winters in the arctic zone, encountering with his comrades the utmost of hardship and danger that men can endure, beset by darkness, cold, scurvy and rats and the perils of lockjaw and floating ice, subsisting on blubber and the beef of walrus and bear. Obligated at last to abandon their brig, the party escaped on sledges, having found what they thought was an open polar sea, and Dr. Kane's record of these adventures, describing their daily arctic life, revealed a world that was all but unknown and new. It abounded in pictures of Eskimo customs, seal-stalking and walrus-hunts, and Dr. Kane sketched landscapes that Dante might have conjured up, so mysterious, so inorganic and so desolate they were. They appeared to have been left unfinished when the earth was formed. The moonlight painted on the snow-fields fantastic profiles of crags and spires, and the firmament seemed to be close overhead with the stars magnified in glory in the awful frozen silence of the arctic night. One felt amid these night-scenes as if the life of the planet were suspended, its companionships and its colours, its movements and its sounds.



Feb. 26. [Kane](#), ashore far up Baffin's Bay, says, "How strangely this crust we wander over asserts its identity through all the disguises of climate!"

Speaking of the effects of refraction on the water, he says: "The single repetition was visible all around us; the secondary or inverted image sometimes above and sometimes below the primary. But it was not uncommon to see, also, the uplifted ice-berg, with its accompanying or false horizon, joined at its summit by its inverted image, and then above a second horizon, a third berg in its natural position." He refers to Agassiz at Lake Superior as suggesting "that it may be simply the reflection of the landscape inverted upon the surface of the lake, and reproduced with the actual landscape;" though there was but one inversion.

He says that he saw sledge-tracks of Franklin's party in the neighborhood of Wellington Sound, made on the snow, six years old, which had been covered by the aftersnows of five winters. This reminds me of the sled-tracks I saw this winter.

Kane says that, some mornings in that winter in the ice, they heard "a peculiar crisping or crackling sound." "This sound, as the 'noise accompanying the aurora,' has been attributed by Wrangell and others, ourselves among the rest, to changes of atmospheric temperature acting upon the crust of the snow." Kane thinks it is rather owing "to the unequal contraction and dilatation" of unequally presenting surfaces, "not to a sudden change of atmospheric temperature acting upon the snow." Is not this the same crackling I heard at Fair Haven on the 19th, and are not most of the arctic phenomena to be witnessed in our latitude on a smaller scale? At Fair Haven it seemed a slighter contraction of the ice, -- not enough to make it thunder, This morning it began with snowing, turned to a fine freezing rain producing a glaze, -the most of a glaze thus far,-but in the afternoon changed to pure rain.



## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

P. M. -To Martial Miles's in rain.

The weeds, trees, etc., are covered with a glaze. The blue-curl cups are overflowing with icy drops. All trees present a new appearance, their twigs being bent down by the ice, - birches, apple trees, etc., but, above all, the pines. Tall, feathery white pines look like cockerels' tails in a shower. Both these and white [= pitch] pines, their branches being inclined downward, have sharpened tops like fir and spruce trees. Thus an arctic effect is produced. Very young white and pitch pines are most changed, all their branches drooping in a compact pyramid toward the ground except a single plume in the centre. They have a singularly crestfallen look. The rain is fast washing off all the glaze on which I had counted, thinking of the effect of to-morrow's sun on it. The wind rises and the rain increases. Deep pools of water have formed in the fields, which have an agreeable green or blue tint, - sometimes the one, sometimes the other. Yet the quantity of water which is fallen is by no means remarkable but, the ground being frozen, it is not soaked up. There is more water on the surface than before this winter.

March 6, Monday: [Henry Thoreau](#) was being written to by [Horace Greeley](#) / McElrath in New-York. In the afternoon he walked to Goose Pond. Greeley returned Thoreau's second \$2.<sup>00</sup> because a thief in the newspaper office had been apprehended.<sup>83</sup>

*Office of the Tribune[,]*  
*New York, 6 March 185[4]*  
*Mr. Henry D[.] Thoreau[ ]*  
*Sir:*  
*Yours of*  
*[3<sup>rd</sup>] to Mr[ ] Greeley is before us and*  
*we will send you the Tribune*  
*though the money has not reached*  
*us[.]*  
*Very [Resp<sup>y</sup>,]*  
*Greeley & [M<sup>c</sup>Elrath]*  
*[pr] S[.] Sinclair[e]*

*New York*  
*Mar. 6, 1854.*  
*Dear Sir:*  
*I presume your*  
*first letter containing*  
*the \$2 ~~has~~ was robbed*  
*by our general mail*  
*robber at New Haven,*  
*who has just been sent*  
*to the State Prison. Your*  
*second letter has probably*  
*failed to receive due at-*  
*tention, owing to a press*  
*of business. But I will*  
*make all right. You ought*  
*to have the Semi-Weekly,*  
*and I shall order it*  
*[Page 2]*

83. This thief would do time.

*sent you one year on trial; if you choose to write me a letter or s[o] some time, very well; if not, we will be even without that. Thoreau, I want you to do something on my [urging]. I want you to collect and arrange your Miscellan[i]es, and send them to me. Put in 'Katahdin,' 'Carlyle,' 'A Winter Wood,' and 'Canada,' &c. and I will try to find a publisher who will bring them out at his own*

[Page 3]  
*risk and (I hope) to your ultimate profit. If you have any thing new to put with them, very well; but let us have ~~the~~ about a l2 mo volume whenever you can get it ready, and see if there is not something to your credit in the bank of Fortune.  
 Yours,  
 Horace Greeley.  
 Henry D. Thoreau, Esq.  
 Concord, Mass.*

[Waldo Emerson](#) had advanced some money against subscription promises of various Concordians, including the Thoreau family, in order to enable [Michael Flannery](#) to send for his wife Ann and children from Ireland. At this point [Thoreau](#) was able to write the letter for this Irish laborer, sending for his family. He noted in particular Flannery's concern that his wife be careful and not let their children fall overboard due to the rocking of the ship.

### THOREAU ON THE IRISH



March 6. A cool morning. The bare water here and there on the meadow begins to look smooth, and I look to see it rippled by a muskrat. The earth has to some extent frozen dry, for the drying of the earth goes on in the cold night as well as the warm day. The alders and hedgerows are still silent, emit no notes.

P.M. — To Goose Pond. According to [G. Emerson](#), maple sap sometimes begins to flow in the middle of February, but usually in the second week of March, especially in a clear, bright day with a westerly wind, after a frosty night. The brooks--the swift ones and those in swamps--open before the river; indeed some of the first have been open the better part of the winter. I saw trout glance in the Mill Brook this afternoon, though near its sources, in Hubbard's Close, it is still covered with dark, icy snow, and the river into which it empties has not broken up. Can they have come up from the sea? Like a film or shadow they glance before the eye, and you see where the mud is roiled by them. Saw children checker berrying in a meadow. I see the skunk-cabbage started about the spring at head of Hubbard's Close, amid the green grass, and what looks like the first probing of the skunk. The snow is now all off on meadow ground, in thick evergreen woods, and on the south sides of hills, but it is still deep in sprout-lands, on the north sides of hills, and generally in deciduous woods. In sprout lands it is melted beneath, but upheld by the bushes. What bare ground we have now is due then not so much to the increased heat of the sun and warmth of the air as to the little frost there was in the ground in so many localities. This remark applies with less force, however, to the south sides of hills. The ponds are hard enough for skating again. Heard and saw the first blackbird, flying east over the Deep Cut, with a tchuck, tchuck, and finally a split whistle.



March 8: I wrote a letter for an Irishman night before last, sending for his wife in Ireland to come to this country. One sentence which he dictated was, "Don't mind the rocking of the vessel, but take care of the children that they be not lost overboard."

MICHAEL FLANNERY

September 4, Monday: "I have provided my little snapping turtle with a tub of water and mud, and it is surprising how fast he learns to use his limbs and this world. He actually runs, with the yolk still trailing from him, as if he had got new vigor from contact with the mud. The insensibility and toughness of his infancy makes our life, with its disease and low spirits, ridiculous. He impresses me as the rudiment of a man worthy to inhabit the earth. He is born with a shell. That is symbolical of his toughness. His shell being so rounded and sharp on the back at this age. He [*sic*??] can turn over without trouble." Tortoise Eggs In the afternoon [Henry Thoreau](#) went to climbing fern, and at 7:30 PM he went by boat to Fair Haven Bay (Gleason J7).

Thoreau and other Concordians had lent [Michael Flannery](#) enough money to enable him to send for his wife Ann and children from Ireland, and Flannery was still repaying this advance by passing on to Thoreau three-quarters of the wages he was earning from Elijah Wood. On this day [Waldo Emerson](#) made an entry in his account book that the latest payment, of \$2.<sup>50</sup>, left a balance due of \$2.<sup>50</sup> on the funds that Emerson himself had advanced:

Sept. 4 Recd. from Henry Thoreau on a/c of cash loaned  
to Mr. Flanery [*sic*] last year 2.50  
balance still due 2.50

THOREAU ON THE IRISH

Dr. Bradley P. Dean has expressed the considered opinion on the basis of his research, that "It is likely that Emerson and a few others who had signed the subscription paper Thoreau had circulated on October 12, 1853, had lent Flannery a sum of money that was insufficient for his need, and that Thoreau had lent Flannery the difference. There is evidence that Michael worked for Mr. Thoreau's [graphite](#) business, and he very likely did so to earn money to pay off what must have been his substantial debts to Thoreau, Emerson, and his other neighbors. But Flannery's debt to Thoreau was, of course, more than money alone could repay, and this debt continued to mount. When Ann Flannery and her brood arrived from Ireland, the first house they went to was the Thoreaus' house on Main Street in Concord. There is no record of how long the Flannerys boarded with the Thoreaus before Michael was able to find accommodations for them elsewhere."

1855

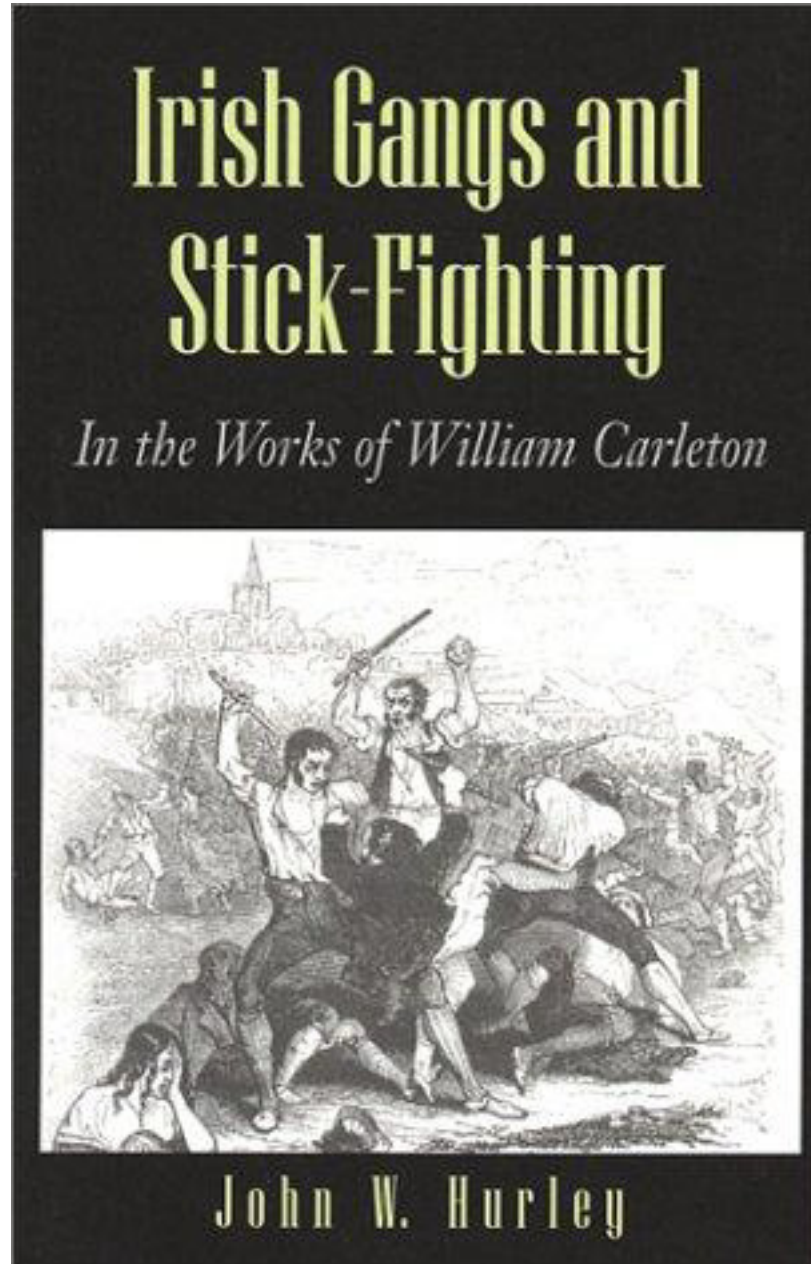
March 22, Thursday: Prejudice toward [Irish Catholic](#) immigrants, fanned by the [Providence Journal](#) (nowadays this paper is referred to locally as the “ProJo”), was using as its vehicle the American, or “[Know-Nothing](#)” party, a secret organization that was sweeping town, city, and state elections in the mid-fifties. In this year its candidate, William W. Hoppin, had captured the [Rhode Island](#) governorship. Some of the party’s more zealous adherents even planned a raid on St. Xavier’s Convent, home of the “female Jesuits,” supported by a fake rumor they were circulating to the effect that a Protestant girl, named Rebecca Newell, was being held against her will by the nuns of Sisters of Mercy.



The password of these [Know-Nothing](#) Protestant rioters was “show yourself.” (Is the password of the Ku Klux Klan “expose yourself”?)

ANTI-CATHOLICISM

In [Providence, Rhode Island](#) on this day, an angry mob instigated by the ProJo and the [Know-Nothings](#) dispersed when confronted with Bishop Bernard O’Reilly and an equally militant crowd of [Irishmen](#). On this day, God’s providence was definitely on the side of the big shillelaghs!



September: An American ship, the *Waverley*, was transporting a cargo of coolie laborers from South China toward a destiny of hard labor and, more often than not, early death, in South America. In the hold of the ship, when it was opened, were found the bodies of 260 coolies who had suffocated. This, of course, was terrible, because these [Chinamen](#), very much like black slaves from Africa and very much unlike [famine](#) refugees from [Ireland](#), were worth money if delivered alive, but were less than worthless if dead on arrival.

1856

March 19, Wednesday: Henry Thoreau made an entry in his JOURNAL that would become the basis for an interesting book titled WHAT BEFELL AT MRS. BROOKS'S: a "Seedling Book" which would be published in 1974 by Lerner Publications Company of Minneapolis MN. All text would be hand-lettered by George A. Overlie, the well-known artist who painted the watercolors that went along with this "charming tale." The picture of the Irish servant Joan, in this children's book, depicts her as the best-dressed of all the females, with a hoop frame with a very elaborate lace cover under her very full overskirt and long white apron, a ruffled undergarment over high hose, boots with high heels and cut-out insteps, and, get this, a very elaborate piled-on-top-of-head coiffure with long ringlets at the neck. One gathers that the apron was her one concession to having to tend other people's house for a living, for this girl fleeing the Irish Potato Famine is wearing a white lace neckband secured by a ribbon. The text provides no information as to whether she was covered by Workmen's Compensation in the event that her fall had rendered her permanently or temporarily unfit for the scullery. "The Devil in the Belfry" by Edgar Allan Poe, "The Boy's Ambition" by Mark Twain, and "The Whistle" by Benjamin Franklin completed this "Seedling Book" series which was designed to "foster an early interest in the exciting world of American literature" a world obviously completely detached from any America such an immigrant servant could have encountered. The text is on the following screen:

[Next Screen]

Thoreau's JOURNAL for March 19th.<sup>84</sup>

84. Opodeldoc is a lineament, a substance that is rubbed into the skin to alleviate pain from bruises and sprains.



1857

May 24, Sunday: [Friend Daniel Ricketson](#) in Concord, to his journal:



*Sunday fine and warm – wind light. Thermometer at 86 above zero north side Mr. Thoreau’s house at 2 P.M. Rowed upon the river with Thoreau this forenoon. Walked up Lee’s Hill and visited the old Lee farm, the house having been lately burned. The barn and hen-houses are very complete affairs. Dined at Mr. Thoreau’s; spent part of the P.M. in my room at Channing’s house talking with Thoreau upon various topics. Took a long walk this P.M., leaving at four and returning at seven to the cliff with Mr. and Mrs. Emerson, their two daughters, Ellen and Edith, son Edward, and my friend Thoreau; had tea and spent the remainder of the evening with the Emersons. Much pleased with Mrs. E.’s fine sense and sensibility as well as humanity, topics relative to which were the principal part of my conversation with her on the walk this P.M.*

- [ELLERY CHANNING](#)
- [WALDO EMERSON](#)
- [LIDIAN EMERSON](#)
- [ELLEN EMERSON](#)
- [EDITH EMERSON](#)
- [EDDIE EMERSON](#)



May 24. A. M.—To Hill.

White ash, apparently yesterday, at Grape Shore but not at Conantum. What a singular appearance for some weeks its great masses of dark-purple anthers have made, fruit-like on the trees! A very warm morning. Now the birds sing more than ever, methinks, now, when the leaves are fairly expanding, the first really warm summer days. The water on the meadows is perfectly smooth nearly all the day. At 3 P. M. the thermometer is at 88°. It soon gets to be quite hazy. Apple out. Heard one speak to-day of his sense of awe at the thought of God, and suggested to him that awe was the cause of the potato-rot. The same speaker dwelt on the sufferings of life, but my advice was to go about one’s business, suggesting that no ecstasy was ever interrupted, nor its fruit blasted. As for completeness and roundness, to be sure, we are each like one of the laciniae of a lichen, a torn fragment, but not the less cheerfully we expand in a moist day and assume unexpected colors. We want no completeness but intensity of life. Hear the first cricket as I go through a warm hollow, bringing round the summer with his everlasting strain.

IRISH POTATO FAMINE

November 18, Wednesday: After an afternoon visit to Dam Meadows, [Henry Thoreau](#) recorded that [Michael Flannery](#) was the hardest-working man he knew: “Before sunrise and long after sunset he is taxing his unweariable muscles. The result is a singular cheerfulness. He is always in good spirits.”

THOREAU ON THE IRISH



November 18, Wednesday: P.M. –To Dam Meadows. Going along the Bedford road at Moore’s Swamp, I hear the dry rustling of seedy rattlesnake grass in the wind, a November sound, within a rod of me. The sunlight is a peculiarly thin and clear yellow, falling on the pale-brown bleaching herbage of the fields at this season. There is no redness in it. This is November sunlight. Much cold, slate-colored cloud, bare twigs seen gleaming toward the light like gossamer, pure green of pines whose old leaves have fallen, reddish or yellowish brown oak leaves rustling on the hillsides, very pale brown, bleaching, almost hoary fine grass or hay in the fields, akin to the frost which has killed it, and flakes of clear yellow sunlight falling on it here and there, –such is November.





The fine grass killed by the frost, withered and bleached till it is almost silvery, has clothed the fields for a long time.

Now, as in the spring, we rejoice in sheltered and sunny places. Some corn is left out still even.

What a mockery to turn cattle out into such pastures! Yet I see more in the fields now than earlier.

I hear a low concert from the edge of Gowing's Swamp, amid the maples, etc., –suppressed warblings from many flitting birds. With my glass I see only tree sparrows, and suppose it is they.

What I noticed for the thousandth time on the 15th was the waved surface of thin dark ice just frozen, as if it were a surface composed of large, perhaps triangular pieces raised at the edges; i. e., the filling up between the original shooting of the crystals –the midribs of the icy leaves– is on a lower plane. Flannery is the hardest-working man I know. Before sunrise and long after sunset he is taxing his unweariable muscles. The result is a singular cheerfulness. He is always in good spirits. He often overflows with his joy when you perceive no occasion for it. If only the gate sticks, some of it bubbles up and overflows in his passing comment on that accident. How much mere industry proves! There is a sparkle often in his passing remark, and his voice is really like that of a bird.

Crows will often come flying much out of their way to caw at me.

In one light, these are old and worn-out fields that I ramble over, and men have gone to law about them long before I was born, but I trust that I ramble over them in a new fashion and redeem them.

I noticed on the 15th that that peculiar moraine or horseback just this side of J.P. Brown's extends southerly of Nut Meadow Brook in the woods, maybe a third or a half a mile long in all.

The rocks laid bare here and there by ditching in the Dam Meadows are very white, having no lichens on them. The musquash should appear in the coat of arms of some of the States, it is so common. I do not go by any permanent pool but, sooner or later, I hear its plunge there. Hardly a bit of board floats in any ditch or pondhole but this creature has left its traces on it.

How singularly rivers in their sources overlap each other! There is the meadow behind Brooks Clark's and at the head of which Sted Buttrick's handsome maple lot stands, on the old Carlisle road. The stream which drains this empties into the Assabet at Dove Rock. A short distance west of this meadow, but a good deal more elevated, is Boaz's meadow, whose water finds its way, naturally or artificially, northeastward around the other, crossing the road just this side the lime-kiln, and empties into the Saw Mill Brook and so into the main river.

There are many ways of feeling one's pulse. In a healthy state the constant experience is a pleasurable sensation or sentiment. For instance, in such a state I find myself in perfect connection with nature, and the perception, or remembrance even, of any natural phenomena is attended with a gentle pleasurable excitement. Prevailing sights and sounds make the impression of beauty and music on me. But in sickness all is deranged. I had yesterday a kink in my back and a general cold, and as usual it amounted to a cessation of life. I lost for the time my rapport or relation to nature. Sympathy with nature is an evidence of perfect health. You cannot perceive beauty but with a serene mind. The cheaper your amusements, the safer and saner. They who think much of theatres, operas, and the like, are beside themselves. Each man's necessary path, though as obscure and apparently uneventful as that of a beetle in the grass, is the way to the deepest joys he is susceptible of; though he converses only with moles and fungi and disgraces his relatives, it is no matter if he knows what is steel to his flint.

Many a man who should rather describe his dinner imposes on us with a history of the Grand Khan.

1858

May 11, Tuesday: [Waldo Emerson](#) recorded the conversation of the previous day, with [Henry Thoreau](#) at Walden Pond, in his journal:

*Yesterday with Henry T. at the pond ... I hear the account of the man who lives in the wilderness of Maine with respect, but with despair.... Henry's hermit, 45 miles from the nearest house, [is not] important, until we know what he is now, what he thinks of it on his return, & after a year. Perhaps he has found it foolish & wasteful to spend a tenth or a twentieth of his active life with a muskrat & fried fishes.*

*My dear Henry,*

*A frog was made  
to live in a swamp,  
but a man was not  
made to live in a  
swamp. Yours ever,*

*R.*

HERMITS





## AN GORTA MÓR

## THE LATE BLIGHT

On the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup>

Mrs. Brooks's Irish girl  
Joan fell down the  
cellar stairs, and  
was found by  
her mistress  
lying at the bottom,  
apparently lifeless.

Mrs. Brooks ran  
to the street-door  
for aid to get her up,

and asked a  
Miss Farmer,  
who was  
passing,  
to call  
the blacksmith near by.

The latter lady turned  
instantly, and, making  
haste across the road  
on this errand,  
fell flat  
in a puddle of melted snow,

and came back  
to Mrs. Brooks's,  
bruised and dripping  
and asking for  
opodeldoc.

Mrs. Brooks again  
ran to the door  
and called to  
George Bigelow  
to complete  
the unfinished errand.

He ran nimbly  
about it  
and fell flat  
in another puddle  
near the former.

but, his joints  
being limber,  
got along without  
opodeldoc  
and raised the blacksmith.

He also  
notified  
James Burke,  
who was passing,

and he, rushing in  
to render aid,  
fell off one side  
of the cellar stairs in the dark.

They no sooner  
got the girl up-stairs  
than she came to  
and went raving,  
then had a fit.

Haste makes waste.  
It never rains but it pours.

I have this from those  
who have heard  
Mrs. Brooks's story,  
seen the girl,  
the stairs,  
and the puddles.

# THE LATE BLIGHT

# AN GORTA MÓR

One of the children of [Alexander William Doniphan](#) had already died from accidentally ingesting a poison. The other of his children, 17-year-old Alexander William Doniphan, Jr., a student at Bethany College in West Virginia, at this point drowned in a flood-swollen river.

John Mitchel, who after his fight with the Catholic hierarchy in New-York had relocated to Knoxville, Tennessee where he had tried to become a farmer and had then begun a newspaper named the [Southern Citizen](#), was admitted to the Montgomery Commercial Convention. He was admitted over the objection of Edmund Ruffin, apparently because Ruffin had encountered Mitchel only as a Northerner and had not yet been made sufficiently aware of this [Irish](#) gentleman's one redeeming feature, his intense racism.)



According to Noel Ignatiev's **HOW THE IRISH BECAME WHITE**, "To be acknowledged as white, it was not enough for the Irish to have a competitive advantage over Afro-Americans in the labor market; in order for them to avoid the taint of blackness it was necessary that no Negro be allowed to work in occupations where Irish were to be found."



IRISH PHYSIOGNOMY.

According to the jokes that were going the rounds in those days among non-Irish white racists (the bulk of the population, actually), the Irish were "Negroes turned inside out" while the American free blacks were "smoked Irish."

It has been well said, that inside the charmed Caucasian chalk circle it is the sum of what you are not -not Indian, not Negro, not a Jew, not Irish, etc.- that make you what you are. And, that's as true now as it was then.



1859

Publication of the anonymous volume POPE OR PRESIDENT? STARTLING DISCOVERIES OF ROMANISM AS REVEALED BY ITS OWN WRITERS.

SURVEY OF AMERICAN ANTI-CATHOLICISM

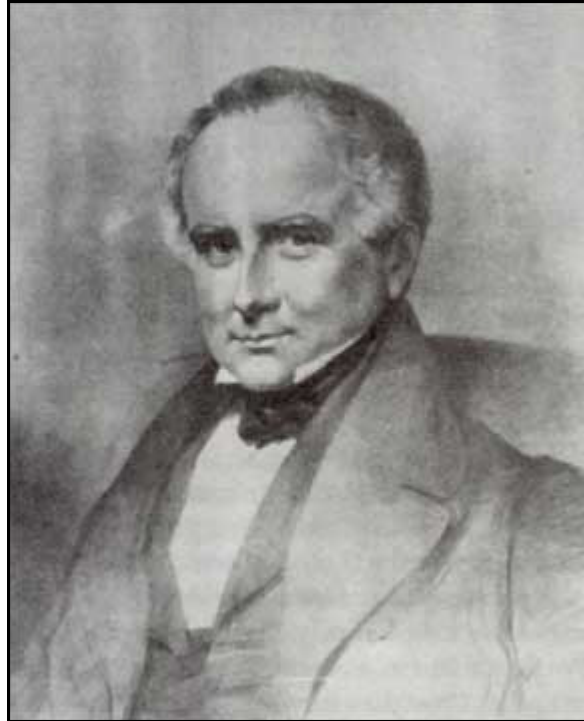
In the Eliot Public School in [Boston](#)'s North End, a [Catholic](#) student, required to recite the Ten Commandments as per the King James translation of the BIBLE,<sup>85</sup> caused a furor by refusing his teacher's demand. The teacher of course punished this student, the known ringleader of a group of students who had sadly fallen under the influence of one Father John Wiget, a parish priest. After about half an hour of being struck across the palm with a rattan cane, young Thomas Wall found that he had become able to read from the King James BIBLE — but on the following day some 300 [Irish](#) children would be truant.

85. The [Catholic](#) and Protestant translations of the commandments differ in significant details, such as in their numbering, and both differ substantially from Jewish interpretations, a Jewish reading of “Thou shalt not steal,” for instance, being that this one did not originally have to do with the theft of objects, which was covered adequately under “coveting one's neighbor's possessions,” but dealt instead probably with such activities as kidnapping.

## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

[Thomas Chandler Haliburton](#) was elected the Member of Parliament for Launceston, Cornwall as a member of the Tory minority.



Robert Stephenson engineered the Victoria Bridge over the St. Lawrence waterway at Montréal, at 1,668 yards the longest in the world. It was a tubular structure similar to the Conway and the Britannia bridges, and carried the Grand Trunk railway of Canada.<sup>86</sup> Workers on this bridge would go on strike until it was relocated to avoid a shoreside pit full of human bodies, [Irish](#) victims of the great migration thrown off the [famine](#) ships upon their arrival in the New World, victims of a euphemism known as “ship fever” which had claimed a very significant

86. Also, in this year, over the Tamar River in southwest England, the Royal Albert Bridge by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, completed after his death.

%age of those emigrating from Ireland.<sup>87</sup>



Professor [Henry Youle Hind](#) attempted but failed to persuade the British government to finance an expedition into the northwest.

NORTH-WEST TERRITORY. REPORTS OF PROGRESS; TOGETHER WITH A PRELIMINARY AND GENERAL REPORT ON THE ASSINIBOINE AND SASKATCHEWAN EXPLORING EXPEDITION, MADE UNDER INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE PROVINCIAL SECRETARY, CANADA, BY [HENRY YOULE HIND](#), M.A. ... PRINTED BY ORDER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY. (Toronto: Printed by J. Lovell).

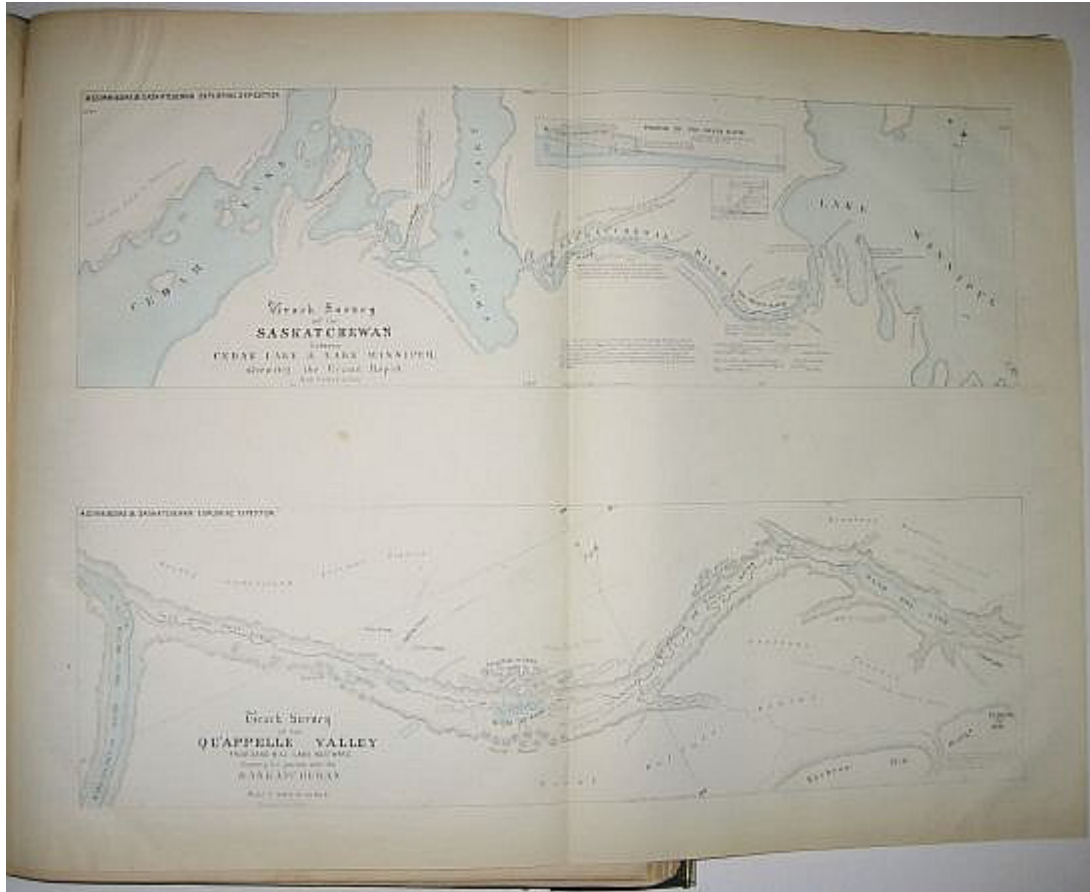
REPORTS OF PROGRESS  
REPORTS OF PROGRESS

87. Canadian historians have been generally uninterested in these bodies because, although the represented emigrants toward Canada, they did not represent immigrants into Canada. Some bodies just “slipped through the cracks” or “fell between chairs” at the port. Some thousands of bodies, stacked up like unclaimed luggage after an air disaster.

# THE LATE BLIGHT

# AN GORTA MÓR

[Hind](#)'s reports would be in the personal library of Franklin Benjamin Sanborn and would be consulted by [Henry Thoreau](#) in 1860. Thoreau would copy some of the information into his 2d Commonplace Book and his Indian Notebook #12.



Hind's preliminary sketches indicate contributions made by native or half-breed American guides (although,



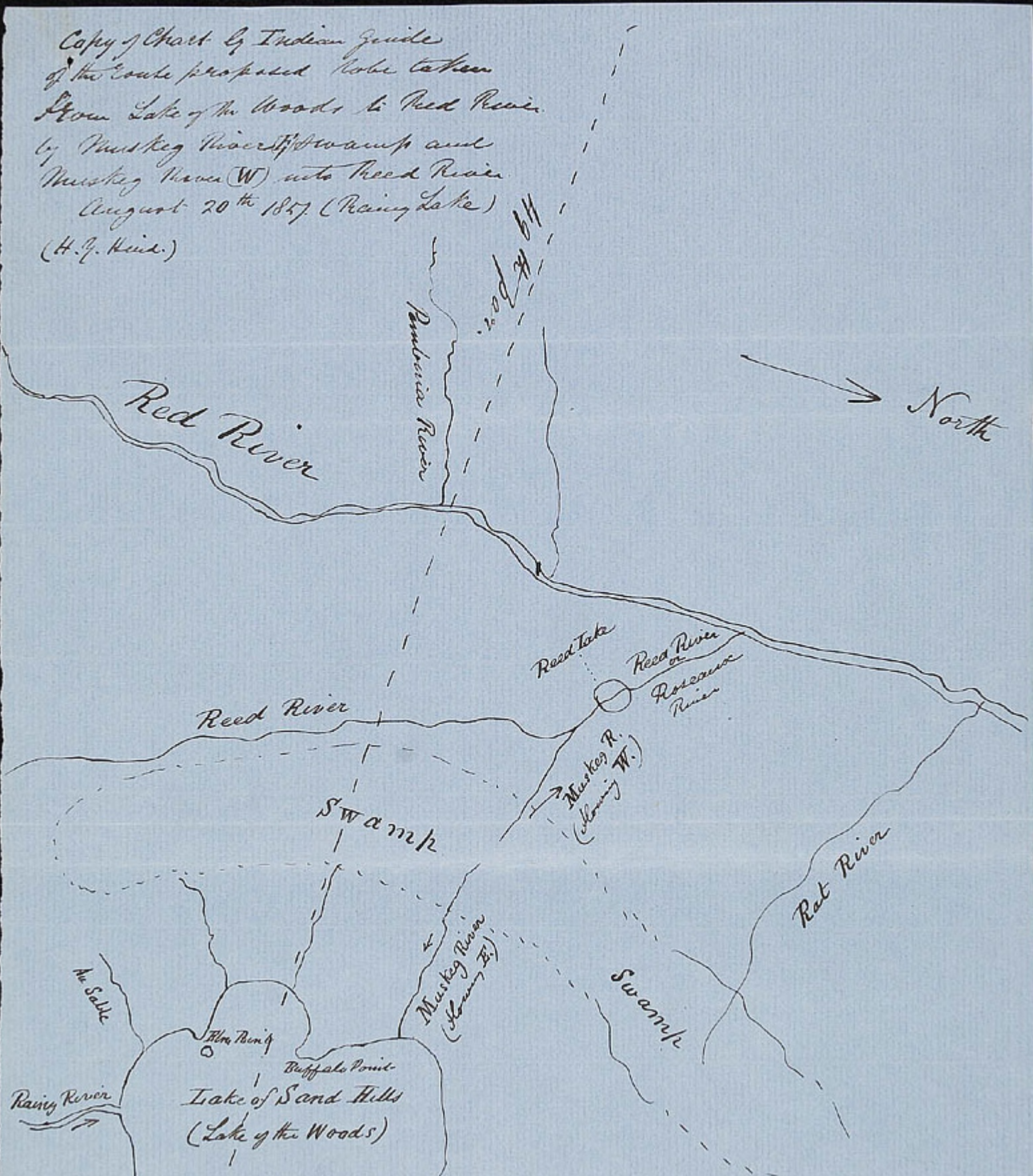
of course, his published materials offer no hint of such assistance).



# THE LATE BLIGHT

# AN GORTA MÓR

Copy of Chart by Indian guide  
 of the route proposed to be taken  
 from Lake of the Woods to Red River  
 by Muskeg River, St. Joseph's Swamp and  
 Muskeg River (W) into Reed River  
 August 20<sup>th</sup> 1857 (Rising Lake)  
 (H. J. Kirk.)





1861

The Irish population had fallen from 8,175,124 as of 1841 to some 5,800,000 at this point, due to the Irish Potato Famine and the accompanying epidemic and emigration.

Population Trends

	England / Wales	Ireland
1821	12,000,000	6,800,000
1831	13,900,000	7,770,000
1841	15,920,000	8,180,000
1845	about 16,700,000	about 8,300,000 (blight, then famine, fever, and emigration)
1851	17,930,000	6,550,000
1861	20,070,000	5,800,000
1871	31,629,299	5,410,000
1881	35,026,108	5,170,000

The poor whites of the American South were in a peculiar psychic position carefully calculated to render it impossible for them ever to make common cause with their fellows being likewise exploited:

Unlike the Protestant tenant in Ulster, or the homesteader in the West, or the skilled craftsman in industry, the intermediate status of the poor whites hung by a single thread: the enslavement of the Negro and the concomitant fact of their own non-slave status. That did, of course, carry the privileges of keeping weapons, marrying, moving about freely in the public domain, becoming literate if they could, voting at elections, and the male white privilege of assuming familiarity with Negro females; but that all meant nothing in the way of property status or economic security. As one eastern Virginia plantation owner, "Civis," wrote of most of the poor whites in his area of the country, they had "little but their complexion to console them for being born into a higher caste." Yet that one tie bound them to the plantation owners like hoops of steel, and made them "always ready to respond to any call of race prejudice, [so that they] voted with the planter, though the economic interests of the two parties of white men were as separate as the poles." Because of this about one million Southern poor whites marched off to a war from which more than one out of four would not return. Those who did return found that the very foundation of their social status had been blasted away: the Negro was free, too.



# THE LATE BLIGHT

# AN GORTA MÓR



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IRISH PHYSIOGNOMY.

According to the jokes that were going the rounds in those days among non-Irish white racists (the bulk of the population, actually), the Irish were "Negroes turned inside out" while the American free blacks were "smoked Irish."

It has been well said, that inside the charmed Caucasian chalk circle it is the sum of what you are not -not Indian, not Negro, not a Jew, not Irish, etc.- that make you what you are. And, that's as true now as it was then.

May 18: The Catholic Archbishop of New-York, John Hughes, declared that if the federal government moved to abolish human **enslavement**, it would be setting aside its Constitution. If such was President Lincoln's intent, he suggested, the man ought to resign his office forthwith.

IRISH

1871

Edith O’Gorman’s TRIALS AND PERSECUTIONS OF MISS EDITH O’GORMAN.

SURVEY OF AMERICAN ANTI-CATHOLICISM

Friend [John Greenleaf Whittier](#)’s MIRIAM AND OTHER POEMS.

When she found that [Friend John](#) and Lucy Larcom had included an Italian poem in CHILD LIFE, [Lydia Maria Child](#) informed him that this had been a mistake for such material might have the effect of seducing a Protestant child into [Catholicism](#)! But Friend John had not included the material because of any sympathy for [Popery](#): “Ireland is cursed with Popery. The Protestant section of the island never starves and never begs.” The victims of the [Irish Potato Famine](#), it appears, had come to pester us here in America because their superstitious religion had caused them to become lazy beggars!

ANTI-CATHOLICISM



“To understand is not to forgive. It is only to understand. It is not an end but a beginning.”

— Rebecca West



Population levels had continued their decline in Ireland due to the after-effects of the [Irish Potato Famine](#) and its accompanying epidemic and emigration, from 8,175,124 as of 1841 to some 5,410,000 at this 1871 point. And, they would continue to decline:

Population Trends

	England / Wales	Ireland
1821	12,000,000	6,800,000
1831	13,900,000	7,770,000
1841	15,920,000	8,180,000
1845	about 16,700,000	about 8,300,000 (the year of the blight, to be followed by famine and then by fever and emigration)
1851	17,930,000	6,550,000
1861	20,070,000	5,800,000
1871	31,629,299	5,410,000
1881	35,026,108	5,170,000

1872

July 31, Wednesday: At some point during the summer [Sophia Elizabeth Thoreau](#) had moved from Concord, Massachusetts to Bangor, Maine. Upon her departure, she had left with Franklin Benjamin Sanborn the outstanding note of obligation pertaining to a debt that the Flannery family of Concord owed to the Thoreau family, representing some of the money that [Henry Thoreau](#) had loaned to [Michael Flannery](#) in 1854, fully eighteen years before, so that he could bring his wife [Ann](#) and his little children over from Ireland as he so longed to do. Both [Michael and Ann Flannery](#) were still living, and they were in Concord, and all their children were now mature, and there seemed no reason why they should continue and continue to owe the remainder of this money. She had instructed Sanborn that if, for any reason, either inability to pay or unwillingness to pay, he was unable to collect on this note from the Flannery family, Sanborn should simply make a present of the note to them, thus discharging their obligation forever.<sup>88</sup> Sophia wrote on this day from Bangor to her cousin Marianne (or Mary Anne) Mitchell Dunbar of Bridgewater about having left Concord, as well as about the Emerson home having burned.

[This is what the Emerson home looked like after it had been burned and restored:]

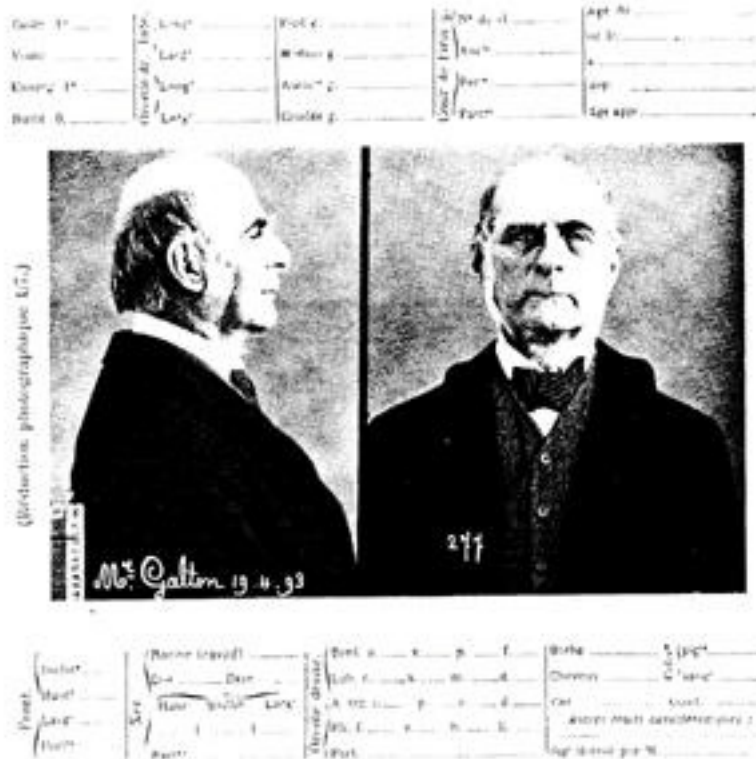


88. When asked later about [Thoreau](#), by historians collecting impressions, after both [Michael and Ann Flannery](#) were deceased, one of the Flannery sons and one of the grandsons would speak contemptuously of him: he had been lazy and insulting. Neither of these ingrates would refer to the manner in which Henry had helped their parents, or to the respect in which he had held [Michael](#), or to the friendship that had existed between them, or take any notice at all of this forgiven family debt.

THOREAU ON THE IRISH

1873

In his essay on “Hereditary Improvement,” Sir Francis Galton, the data-faking founder of the pseudoscience of human **Eugenics**—the discipline which would eventually “cash out” during the eugenicist years of Virginia, California, Indiana, Vermont, and 27 other states as a legitimator of the sterilization of the institutionalized and then during the **Nazi** regime in Germany as a legitimation of genocide—demonstrated that one result of the **Irish Potato Famine** was that the “Irish type of face” had become noticeably “more like the Negro type of face.” That is, the surviving **Irish**, because they had been selected by starvation for “a low or coarse organization,” had developed the type of protruding (prognathous) lower jaw that was typical of our primitive ancestors and is still typical of the present-day inferior races. “These people lead with their chin — which is why we have to strike them.”



SLAVERY  
PEONAGE

# THE LATE BLIGHT

# AN GORTA MÓR



According to Noel Ignatiev's **HOW THE IRISH BECAME WHITE**, "To be acknowledged as white, it was not enough for the Irish to have a competitive advantage over Afro-Americans in the labor market; in order for them to avoid the taint of blackness it was necessary that no Negro be allowed to work in occupations where Irish were to be found."



IRISH PHYSIOGNOMY.

According to the jokes that were going the rounds in those days among non-Irish white racists (the bulk of the population, actually), the Irish were "Negroes turned inside out" while the American free blacks were "smoked Irish."

It has been well said, that inside the charmed Caucasian chalk circle it is the sum of what you are not -not Indian, not Negro, not a Jew, not Irish, etc.- that make you what you are. And, that's as true now as it was then.

1877

Harvest: In [Ireland](#), failure of the [potato](#) crop. Would there be another [famine](#)?

1878

In the worst [famine](#) thus far on record, some 10,000,000 [Chinese](#) starved.





1879

In [Ireland](#), there was a [famine](#) scare. The Land League was founded by Davitt. The Land War started. From this year into 1882, Parnell would be encouraging the boycott of repressive landlords.

[John Boyle O'Reilly](#)'s novel MOONDYNE.

1880

March: The USS *Constellation* was carrying relief supplies to victims of yet another [famine](#) in [Ireland](#), until June. To modify the vessel for this mission, her armament and some ballast had been removed, and carpenters at the New York Navy Yard had built bins on the orlop deck in which were stowed over 2,500 barrels of [potatoes](#) and flour.

Continuation of serial publication of [Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevski](#)'s THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV in [The Russian Herald](#): Continuation of Book IX. (Dmitry is taken away.)

April 20, Tuesday: The USS *Constellation* arrived off Queenstown, to offload its cargo of [potatoes](#) and flour onto lighters, for relief of the [Irish famine](#). The vessel would take on ballast for the return trip, and after return, would be re-fitted for its training mission, and depart on its annual midshipman cruise.

In Central Asia, a symphonic poem by Alyeksandr Borodin composed for the silver jubilee of Tsar Alyeksandr II, was performed for the initial time, in Kononov Hall, St. Petersburg, conducted by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Also premiered were the closing scene from Modest Musorgsky's opera Khovanshchina, along with the premiere of Musorgsky's Mephistopheles' Song of the Flea for solo voice and piano to words of [Goethe](#) (tr. Strugovshchikov).

1881

Population levels had continued their decline in Ireland due to the aftereffects of the [Irish Potato Famine](#) and its accompanying epidemic and emigration, from 8,175,124 as of 1841 to some 5,170,000 at this point:

Population Trends

	England / Wales	Ireland
1821	12,000,000	6,800,000
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1861	20,070,000	5,800,000
1871	31,629,299	5,410,000
1881	35,026,108	5,170,000

However, during this decade a simple treatment effective in controlling the *Phytophthora infestans* or American potato blight would be being developed. This sooty fungus would turn out to be more or less controllable with a simple solution of copper sulfate. Well, gee, **too bad** we didn't figure this out as of 1845!



1907

February 18, day: 600,000 tons of grain were shipped through New York to help relieve a [famine](#) raging in Russia.




## AN GORTA MÓR

## THE LATE BLIGHT

1916

At age 33, Kahlil Gibran's feelings of Levantine nationalism and resentment of Ottoman rule grew as [famine](#) ravaged the land of his birth. He helped raise funds in the US to aid the starving. Through his friendship with a Jungian, James Oppenheim, he became associated with a new literary journal, SEVEN ARTS, in which as a distraction from his wartime frustrations he was able to place several prose poems in English.

1932

 The worst [famine](#) in Russian history went entirely unreported in Western media (it was as if we didn't much care).

1937

In Germany, Mohler found [M. tuberculosis](#) to be alive and virulent in butter that had been in cold storage for six months.

“Éire” constitution enacted in the [Irish](#) Free State, infamous Articles 2 and 3 included...

In this timeframe the [potato](#) variety “Virgil” was being introduced with great fanfare, as a “blightproof” cultivar — no more potato [famines](#) because the potato breeders (!) had obtained one R-gene from *Solanum demissum*. This was going to be the biggest thing since beer was put in cans! Well, events would reveal that the iron laws of epidemiology are not so readily to be overcome — the new potato would succumb to newly evolved varieties of the pathogen *Phytophthora infestans*, once again demonstrating the validity of the BIBLE's commonsense observation that as food is increased, so is increased they that eat of it.

1945

Summer: Severe [famine](#) struck [Hanoi](#) and surrounding areas, eventually resulting in 2,000,000 deaths from starvation (out of a population of 10,000,000, this would amount to one of every five persons). The famine would generate political unrest and peasant revolts against the [Japanese](#) and the remnants of French colonial society. Ho Chi Minh would capitalize on the turmoil in the spreading of his Viet Minh movement.

WORLD WAR II



## THE LATE BLIGHT

## AN GORTA MÓR

1966

April 1, Friday: Flan O'Brien's last and perhaps greatest work was left unfinished at his death on April Fool's Day of this year. In this comic masterpiece, the protagonist blames everything that is wrong in Ireland upon the [potato](#) plant, including putative [Irish](#) personality characteristics such as baseness, grovelingness, and backwardness. A wealthy American widow of Irish extraction, in SLATTERY'S SAGO SAGO, is allowed to essay to convert the island into a paradise by the plantation of vast plantations of the sago palm. Not only will this introduced species feed the multitudes, she offers, it is going to soften the climate. We will have monkeys and exotic birds frolicking in the treetops. Freed from the downward growth of the tuber, the Irish are going to grow straight and true. The manuscript reminds me of a German who opined after the end of the Second World War, that the only problem with the *Führerprinzip* had been that we had selected a crazy man as our *Führer* — let's do it again, he implied, but this time we need to get it right by selecting a sane guy to be our *Führer*.

1970

A new strain of corn blight evolved, and, because the major portion of the American corn crop in that year had been raised from seed consisting of six well-sold varieties of hybrid, lacking genetic diversity, this blight was able to destroy fully 15% of the US maize harvest.

FAMINE

1975

The Provisional Irish Republican Army staged a bomb campaign in Great Britain. De Valera died. Merlyn Rees became Secretary of State for Northern [Ireland](#). A new Northern [Ireland](#) convention was proposed.

An integrated pest management program named BLITECAST, running on mainframe computers at the University of Maine, began to attempt to forecast whether weather conditions were likely to be such as to cause the [late potato blight](#) to become a problem in the current potato-growing season. This was intended to assist farmers in deciding whether to complete the traditional routine series of six serial weekly applications of expensive and dangerous fungicides (farmers could hope to increase profits through reducing spraying; for instance if a farmer growing 50 hectares of potato crop would be able with confidence to skip three of his six sprayings, he would have his potato cash crop worth \$144,000 while putting an additional \$2,850 in foregone costs directly into his pocket as profit, the only question being how he was going to be able to fall sleep until this crop was safely harvested and sold).



## AN GORTA MÓR

## THE LATE BLIGHT

The virus section of the US Army's Center for Biological Warfare Research at Fort Detrick, Maryland was renamed as "The Fredrick Cancer Research Facilities" to suggest falsely to American voters that this facility was engaged in research into saving the lives of people by developing a cure for cancer rather than in research into how to kill people by causing them to develop cancer. For extra-deep "cover," this bio-war facility was placed under the supervision of the National Cancer Institute — an agency not normally associated in the public mind with the taking of human life. It would be at that facility that a special virus cancer program would be initiated by the US Navy, purportedly to develop new sorts of virus that would cause cancer. It would also be there that retrovirologists would isolate HTLV (Human T-cell Leukemia Virus), a virus for which we have no present immunity.



1983

Bill Cronon's CHANGES IN THE LAND: INDIANS, COLONISTS, AND THE [ECOLOGY](#) OF NEW ENGLAND.

Northern [Ireland](#) Assembly formed. During this year, while the [Irish](#) Republican Army was stepping up its Catholic terrorist violence, David R. MacKenzie was publishing "Application of Modern Approaches to the Study of the Epidemiology of Diseases Caused by *Phytophthora*" in D.C. Erwin's *PHYTOPHTHORA: ITS BIOLOGY, TAXONOMY, [ECOLOGY](#), AND PATHOLOGY*. St. Paul MN: The American Phytopathological Society, pages 303-13: According to these plant pathologists, the causal agent of potato late blight, *Phytophthora infestans*, has a quite narrow host range in being limited to the potato and to the tomato plants. Epidemics of blight have long been associated with persistence factors such as potato cull piles and transmission factors such as infected seed pieces; nevertheless, by tradition, potato sanitation has not been considered to be greatly helpful in controlling the outbreaks of this infection. Why this is so is not know, but in the northeastern United States, reduction of initial inoculum by cull pile destruction was practiced for like half a century with results that were not really worth the effort (my hypothesis would be that this might be because tomato plants have also been acting as reservoirs of infection, as carriers and perpetrators of the inoculum — that if these sanitation measures had been extended from the potato fields into tomato fields as well, they might have been more effective).

1994

May: In regard to the [Enola Gay](#) exhibit, Director Harwit answered John T. Correll's April story in [Air Force Magazine](#): "War Stories at Air and Space" offered, among other things in defense of the NASM, that the magazine article was "opt[ing] for silence" on central matters.

WORLD WAR II

The Famine Museum opened in Strokestown, County Roscommon, [Ireland](#), where in 1847 Major Denis Mahon had evicted thousands of tenants, forcing them to live in hastily dug out "scalps" in the roadside ditches — and had then been assassinated.

IRISH POTATO FAMINE

June 8, Sunday: About a century and a half too late to help the sufferers of the [Irish Potato Famine](#), researchers at Purdue University discovered that a gene found in another member of the nightshade family (*Solanaceae*), [Nicotiana tabacum](#), could be transferred to [Solanum tuberosum](#) to help them resist the sort of blight which caused the catastrophe of the mid-19th Century. Well, gee, **too bad** we didn't figure this out as of 1845! The tobacco gene in question codes for osmotin, a molecule produced by many plants when under stress. These scientists not only found a way to implant this gene within the [potato](#) genetic materials, but also had been able to transfer it multiple times so as to multiply the production of that protein molecule. These large amounts of osmotin would enable genetically altered potatoes to resist late blight infections for an additional day or two (this blight organism being still endemic around the world), which, the researchers alleged, might well be all that is required to have a significant impact upon world nutrition — better living through genetic chemistry. Reassuringly, their press release indicated that although the health impact of starvation upon humans is **not unknown** (emphasis added), osmotin as a naturally occurring chemical has no **known** (emphasis added) health impact upon humans.



#### THE NIGHTSHADES (SOLANACEAE)

- — [Solanum tuberosum](#)
- — [Tomato Lycopersicon esculentum](#)
- — chili peppers
- — eggplant
- — deadly nightshade
- — [Nicotiana tabacum](#)
- — henbane
- — Jimson weed
- — petunia
- — plus some 2,000 other species grouped into 75 genera



During this year the government of Ireland established a committee to fund events and works commemorating the Famine's 150th anniversary. In a recently republished "Transactions of the Society of Friends during the Famine in Ireland" the [Irish](#) Government minister in charge of the National Commemoration of 150th Anniversary of the Great Famine had this to offer:

On behalf of the Government, I wish to tender our thanks to the Society of Friends for their effort -past and present- in constructing a dignified Christian society in Ireland. We greatly value and cherish your presence here and we acknowledge with heartfelt gratitude your enormous contribution during the famine.... I note too how modern the Quakers were in their attitudes to poverty - seeing it as a structural problem, rather than blaming the poor for their own poverty. Such enlightened attitudes powered the moral imperative to feed the hungry and clothe the naked which constitutes the Quakers glowing achievement in those bitter years.

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"It's all now you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago."

- Remark by character "Garin Stevens"  
in William Faulkner's INTRUDER IN THE DUST



Prepared: August 30, 2013

ARRGH AUTOMATED RESEARCH REPORT

GENERATION HOTLINE



This stuff presumably looks to you as if it were generated by a human. Such is not the case. Instead, upon someone's request we have pulled it out of the hat of a pirate that has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot "Laura" (depicted above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of data modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture. This is data mining. To respond to such a request for information, we merely push a button.





## AN GORTA MÓR

## THE LATE BLIGHT

Commonly, the first output of the program has obvious deficiencies and so we need to go back into the data modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and do a recompile of the chronology – but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary “writerly” process which you know and love. As the contents of this originating contexture improve, and as the programming improves, and as funding becomes available (to date no funding whatever has been needed in the creation of this facility, the entire operation being run out of pocket change) we expect a diminished need to do such tweaking and recompiling, and we fully expect to achieve a simulation of a generous and untiring robotic research librarian. Onward and upward in this brave new world.

First come first serve. There is no charge.  
Place your requests with <Kouroo@kouroo.info>.  
Arrgh.



## THE TOMATO AS POSSIBLE VECTOR

I don't know much about tomato production in Europe at that time, especially in the countries you mentioned. The late blight fungus does not survive well in the winter in soil - at least in the presence of the single mating type. So, we have considered infected potato tubers as the most likely source of new infections each year. I have never seen any research to suggest that it is seed-borne on tomato seeds. It is possible that it could have been transported on tomato plant material, but it usually destroys foliage quite rapidly and would probably kill a seedling long before it could be transported very far. I guess I would still think that potato field transport across Europe is the most likely explanation, but I've never been satisfied with the explanation of how the fungus first left Mexico. Some say that it went to North America, others that it went to South America and then left from there- probably on tubers. There is an interesting reference at the end of the late blight lesson at the website I sent you ([www.scisoc.org](http://www.scisoc.org)) which discusses the early history and theories. Do you have any historical information about the possible transport via tomatoes or about tomato production in Europe in the 1840s? Gail Schumann

At 03:30 PM 4/12/98 -0700, you wrote:

> Has there been any thought given to the idea that the 1840s  
> migration of the blight might actually have been by way of  
> tomato seeds and seedlings that were being carried by humans  
> from country to country, rather than by way of cool winds from  
> the Low Countries to England and Ireland?

>At 02:18 PM 4/12/98 -0400, you wrote:

>> Thanks for your note. I'm not sure what publication you are  
>> referring to because there have been so many media contacts  
>> on this subject recently and not all the results are so  
>> accurate. However, I wonder if you have seen the internet  
>> presentation on Late Blight from the American  
>> Phytopathological Society at <http://www.scisoc.org/>.  
>> I think most scientists agree that the fungus originated  
>> in Mexico. The recent reports have been concerned about  
>> the movement of the second mating type which  
>> seems to have appeared in areas outside of Central America  
>> only since the 1970s. The epidemics in the 1840s were caused  
>> by the other mating type, which seems to have been the primary  
>> late blight agent throughout the world before these recent  
>> migrations. It is a long and interesting history!

On Mon, 13 Apr 1998, Gail Schumann wrote:

> ...I don't know much about tomato production in Europe at that  
> time, especially in the countries you mentioned....

It appears that nobody does. It appears to me that the issue of transportation and introduction of tomatoes has not been carefully studied. What little evidence I have been able to obtain as yet indicates that the tomato may well have been



introduced to the gardens of English estates in Ireland, as a variety item for the delectation of the well-to-do, shortly before the destruction of the main food item of the poor. It even seems to me, pardon me for suspecting this, that there has been a certain reluctance to investigate such a highly charged issue, especially since the explicit attitude being taken by these English in Ireland at the time was uniformly that these Irish poor cottagers, "bog-trotters" in the idiom of the time, living on or near their estates were a bother to them which they would very much like to see eliminated. I will not regale you with the sort of expression of attitude that was going on at the time, except to say that a number of the nice parlor jokes of the period centered on whether or not the Irish, under their baggy rags, had or did not have tails. Suffice it to say that had the well-to-do English in Ireland at that time been informed, that the importation of the delectable tomato as a "salet" item might seriously impact the lives of these bog-trotters, they would surely have responded "You mean we can kill two terns with a single stone?"

> ...It is possible that it could have been transported on tomato  
> plant material, but it usually destroys foliage quite rapidly  
> and would probably kill a seedling long before it could be  
> transported very far....

Pardon me, here I seem to have displayed my scientific ignorance. I had been presuming that the blight may take a form which is relatively benign on tomato plants and yet virulent on potato plants.

The recommended procedure for control of the blight has always been to destroy all potato tuber and plant residues overwinter, and that recommenced procedure has always been, admittedly, ineffective. This points us to a hypothesis that there may have been another, non-potato haven for the microorganism overwinter. What better haven might there be than the residues of another, unwatched, uncontrolled, Solanacea?

> ...potato field transport across Europe is the most likely  
> explanation...

Yet this is not an explanation that I have seen offered for how the blight made its way across the English and Irish channels. The only explanation I have ever seen to have been offered was that the blight blew across on cool winds.

> Do you have any historical information about the possible  
> transport via tomatoes or about tomato production in Europe  
> in the 1840s?

Henry David Thoreau in his journal record of one of his visits to the Maine wilderness tells of the case of an isolated potato farmer in the woodlands of Maine, who was pleased always to be able to raise a good crop of potatoes despite the blight utterly destroying crops in less isolated fields nearer the coast and nearer towns, until, that is, he brought home a wagonload of tomato seedlings -- and in that season his crop likewise was



## THE LATE BLIGHT

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ruined.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

This is a very interesting subject and one that, no doubt, has a lot of political and emotional conflicts. However, late blight is a serious disease of both tomatoes and potatoes. We usually consider debris from either crop to be a potential source of infection of new crops, but tubers are the most likely overwintering food source. Once debris has dried out in winter weather, the fungus usually dies. In fact, it is sometimes recommended to spread infected tubers in a thin layer across a field where they will freeze and then rot, to destroy the overwintering fungus (as opposed to leaving them in a deep pile where some might survive). The disease is called "late blight" because it generally attacks relatively mature crops- probably because that is when the leaf canopies become dense and hold the moisture needed for infections. Both crops can be killed within 3 weeks during conducive weather. Even though it is now known that old crop debris is the source of new infections and people do try to eliminate them, this fungus is capable of reproducing with astonishing speed which is why farmers even today rely on fungicides to control the disease. The [Irish Potato Famine](#) was the official beginning of the science of plant pathology because it was finally accepted that the fungus was the CAUSE not the RESULT of the disease. Thus, no one knew its role, its life cycle, nor its host range during the famine years. So, I suspect that wind and/or infected tubers are the most likely cause of the spread of the disease into England and Ireland. Infected tomato fruits usually succumb to soft rot and do not travel well.

>Henry David Thoreau in his journal record of one of his visits  
>to the Maine wilderness tells of the case of an isolated potato  
>farmer in the woodlands of Maine, who was pleased always to be  
>able to raise a good crop of potatoes despite the blight utterly  
>destroying crops in less isolated fields nearer the coast and  
>nearer towns, until, that is, he brought home a wagonload of  
>tomato seedlings -- and in that season his crop likewise  
>was ruined.

Is this easily available to read? It is an interesting possibility, but could also be coincidental. Weather patterns change so much from year to year. In the recent epidemics caused by the arrival of the new strains of the fungus, we had epidemics throughout the northeastern U.S. and Canadian provinces. Please understand that I am not trying to dismiss these theories- just trying to consider all the possibilities.

And I still am not satisfied with an explanation of how the fungus left Mexico, so I think that other Solanaceous plants could be a reasonable explanation. Unfortunately, tracing the history of such an event when people had no appreciation for what caused diseases is difficult and frustrating.