

Henry Carey on the British Empire's Enslavement of the Irish People

Henry C. Carey (1793-1879), President Abraham Lincoln's chief economic advisor, promoted the American industrial model around the world. The work excerpted here, is from The Slave Trade, Domestic and Foreign: Why It Exists and How It Can Be Extinguished, Chapter XIII, "How Slavery Grows in Ireland and Scotland" (1853). Some punctuation and paragraphing have been added; all emphasis in original. (For the complete work, see <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/8000>).



Henry Carey was the 19th Century's leading proponent of the American System of economics, against the Adam Smith school of monetarism and free trade.

The government which followed the completion of the Revolution of 1688, pledged itself to discountenance the woollen manufacture of Ireland, with a view to compel the export of raw wool to England, whence its exportation to foreign countries was prohibited; the effect of which was, of course, to enable the English manufacturer to purchase it at his own price. From that period forward, we find numerous regulations as to the ports from which alone woollen yarn or cloth might go to England, and the ports of the latter through which it might come; while no effort was spared to induce the people of Ireland to abandon woollens and take to flax.

Laws were passed prohibiting the export of Irish cloth and glass to the colonies. By other laws Irish ships were deprived of the benefit of the navigation laws. The fisheries were closed against them. No sugar could be imported from any place but Great Britain, and no drawback was allowed on its exportation to Ireland; and thus was the latter compelled to pay a tax for

the support of the British government, while maintaining its own. All other colonial produce was required to be carried first to England, after which it might be shipped to Ireland; and as Irish shipping was excluded from the advantages of the navigation laws, it followed that the voyage of importation was to be made in British ships, manned by British seamen, and owned by British merchants, who were thus authorized to tax the people of Ireland for doing their work, while a large portion of the Irish people were themselves unemployed.

While thus prohibiting them from applying themselves to manufactures or trade, every inducement was held out to them to confine themselves to the production of commodities required by the English manufacturers, and wool, hemp, and flax were admitted into England free of duty.

We see thus that the system of that day in reference to Ireland looked to limiting the people of that country, as it limited the slaves of Jamaica, and now limits the people of Hindostan [India—ed.], to agriculture alone, and thus depriving the men, the women, and the children of all employment except the labour of the field, and of all opportunity for intellectual improvement, such as elsewhere results from that association which necessarily accompanies improvement in the mechanic arts.

During our war of the Revolution, freedom of trade was claimed for Ireland; and as the demand was made at a time when a large portion of her people were under

arms as volunteers, the merchants and manufacturers of England, who had so long acted as middlemen for the people of the sister kingdom, found themselves obliged to submit to the removal of some of the restrictions under which the latter had so long remained. Step by step changes were made, until at length, in 1783, Ireland was declared independent, shortly after which duties were imposed on various articles of foreign manufacture, avowedly with the intention of enabling her people to employ some of their surplus labour in converting her own food and wool, and the cotton wool of other countries, into cloth.

Thenceforward manufactures and trade made considerable progress, and there was certainly a very considerable tendency toward improvement. Some idea of the condition of the country at that time, and of the vast and lamentable change that has since taken place, may be obtained from the consideration of a few facts connected with the manufacture of books in the closing years of the last century. The copyright laws not extending to Ireland, all books published in England might there be reprinted, and accordingly we find that all the principal English law reports of the day, very many of the earlier ones, and many of the best treatises, as well as the principal novels, travels, and miscellaneous works, were republished in Dublin, as may be seen by an examination of any of our old libraries. The publication of such books implies, of course, a considerable demand for them, and for Ireland herself, as the sale of books in this country was very small indeed, and there was then no other part of the world to which they could go. More books were probably published in Ireland in that day by a single house than are now required for the supply of the whole kingdom.

With 1801, however, there came a change. By the Act of Union the copyright laws of England were extended to Ireland, and at once the large and growing manufacture of books was prostrated. The patent laws were also extended to Ireland; and as England had so long monopolized the manufacturing machinery then in use, it was clear that it was there improvements would be made, and that thenceforth, the manufactures of Ireland must retrograde. Manchester had the home market, the foreign market, and, to no small extent, that of Ireland open

to her; while the manufacturers of the latter were forced to contend for existence, and under the most disadvantageous circumstances, on their own soil. The one could afford to purchase expensive machinery, and to adopt whatever improvements might be made, while the other could not.

The natural consequence was, that Irish manufactures gradually disappeared as the Act of Union came into effect. By virtue of its provisions, the duties established by the Irish Parliament for the purpose of protecting the farmers of Ireland in their efforts to bring the loom and the anvil into close proximity with the plough and the harrow, were gradually to diminish, and free trade was to be fully established; or, in other words, Manchester and Birmingham were to have a monopoly of supplying Ireland with cloth and iron. The duty on English woollens was to continue twenty years. The almost prohibitory duties on English calicoes and muslins were to continue until 1808; after which they were to be gradually diminished, until in 1821 they were to cease. Those on cotton yarn were to cease in 1810. The effect of this in diminishing the demand for Irish labour, is seen in the following comparative view of manufactures at the date of the Union, and at different periods in the ensuing forty years, here given:—

| | | | | | |
|------------|---|------|-----------|------|------|
| Dublin | Master woollen manufacturers | 1800 | 91 | 1840 | 12 |
| | Hands employed | 1800 | 4,918 | 1840 | 602 |
| | Master wool-combers | 1800 | 30 | 1834 | 5 |
| | Hands employed | 1800 | 230 | 1834 | 63 |
| | Carpet manufacturers | 1800 | 13 | 1841 | 1 |
| | Hands employed | 1800 | 720 | 1841 | none |
| Kilkenny | Blanket manufacturers | 1800 | 56 | 1822 | 42 |
| | Hands employed | 1800 | 3,000 | 1822 | 925 |
| Dublin | Silk-loom wearers at work | 1800 | 2,500 | 1840 | 250 |
| Balbriggan | Calico looms at work | 1799 | 2,500 | 1841 | 226 |
| Wicklow | Hand-loomers at work | 1800 | 1,000 | 1841 | none |
| Cork | Braid weavers | 1800 | 1,000 | 1834 | 40 |
| | Worsted weavers | 1800 | 2,000 | 1834 | 90 |
| | Hoosiers | 1800 | 300 | 1834 | 28 |
| | Wool-combers | 1800 | 700 | 1834 | 110 |
| | Cotton weavers | 1800 | 2,000 | 1834 | 220 |
| | Linen cheek weavers | 1800 | 600 | 1834 | none |
| | Cotton spinners, bleachers, calico printers | 1800 | thousands | 1834 | none |

“For nearly half a century, Ireland has had perfectly free trade with the richest country in the world; and what,” says the author of a recent work of great ability,—

“Has that free trade done for her? She has even now,” he continues, “no employment for her teeming population except upon the land. She ought to have had, and might easily have had, other and various employments, and plenty of it. Are we to believe,” says he, “the calumny that the Irish are lazy and won’t work? Is Irish human nature different from other human nature? Are not the most laborious of all labourers in London and New York, Irishmen? Are Irishmen inferior in understanding? We Englishmen who have personally known Irishmen, in the army, at the bar, and in the church, know that there is no better head than a disciplined Irish one. But in all these cases that master of industry, the stomach, has been well satisfied. Let an Englishman exchange his bread and beer, and beef, and mutton, for no breakfast, for a lukewarm lumpner at dinner, and no supper. With such a diet, how much better is he than an Irishman—a Celt, as he calls him? No, the truth is, that the misery of Ireland is not from the human nature that grows there—it is from England’s perverse legislation, past and present.”¹

Deprived of all employment, except in the labour of agriculture, land became, of course, the great object of pursuit. “Land is life,” had said, most truly and emphatically, Chief Justice Blackburn; and the people had now before them the choice between the occupation of land, *at any rent, or starvation*. The lord of the land was thus enabled to dictate his own terms, and therefore it has been that we have heard of the payment of five, six, eight, and even as much as ten pounds per acre. “Enormous rents, low wages, farms of an enormous extent, let by rapacious and indolent proprietors to monopolizing land-jobbers, to be relet by intermediate oppressors, for five times their value, among the wretched starvers on potatoes and water,” led to a constant succession of outrages, followed by Insurrection Acts, Arms Acts, and Coercion Acts, when the real remedy was to be found in the adoption of a system that would emancipate the country from the tyranny of the spindle and the loom, and permit the labour of Ireland to find employment at home.

That employment could not be had. With the sup-

1. “Sophisms of Free Trade,” by J. Barnard Byles, Esq.

pression of Irish manufactures the demand for labour had disappeared. An English traveller, describing the state of Ireland in 1834, thirteen years after the free-trade provisions of the Act of Union had come fully into operation, furnishes numerous facts, some of which will now be given, showing that the people were compelled to remain idle, although willing to work at the lowest wages—such wages as could not by any possibility enable them to do more than merely sustain life, and perhaps not even that.

CASHEL.—“Wages here only *eightpence a day*, and numbers altogether without employment.”

CAHIR.—“I noticed, on Sunday, on coming from church, the streets crowded with labourers, with spades and other implements in their hands, standing to be hired; and I ascertained that any number of these men might have been engaged, on constant employment, at *sixpence per day* without diet.”

WICKLOW.—“The husband of this woman was a labourer, at *sixpence a day*, *eighty* of which sixpences—that is, eighty days’ labour—were absorbed in the rent of the cabin.” “In another cabin was a decently dressed woman with five children, and her husband was also a labourer at *sixpence a day*. The pig had been taken for rent a few days before.” “I found some labourers receiving only *fourpence per day*.”

KILKENNY.—“Upward of 2,000 persons totally without employment.” “I visited the factories that used to support 200 men with their families, and how many men did I find at work? ONE MAN! In place of finding men occupied, I saw them in scores, like spectres, walking about, and lying about the mill. I saw immense piles of goods completed, but for which there was no sale. I saw heaps of blankets, and I saw every loom idle. As for the carpets which had excited the jealousy and the fears of Kidderminster, not one had been made for seven months. To convey an idea of the destitution of these people, I mention, that when an order recently arrived for the manufacture of as many blankets for the police as would have kept the men at work for a few days, bonfires were lighted about the country—not bonfires to communicate insurrection, but to evince joy that a few starving men were about to earn bread to support their families. Nevertheless, we are told that Irishmen will not work at home.”

CALLEN.—“In this town, containing between four and five thousand inhabitants, at least one thousand are without regular employment, six or seven hundred entirely destitute, and there are upward of two hundred

mendicants in the town—persons incapable of work.”—*Inglis's Ireland* in 1834.

Such was the picture everywhere presented to the eye of this intelligent traveller. Go where he might, he found hundreds anxious for employment, yet no employment could be had, unless they could travel to England, there to spend *weeks* in travelling round the country in quest of *days* of employment, the wages for which might enable them to pay their rent at home. “The Celt,” says the *Times*, “is the hewer of wood and the drawer of water to the Saxon; The great works of this country,” it continues “depend on *cheap labour*.” The labour of the slave is always low in price. The people of Ireland were interdicted all employment but in the cultivation of the land, and men, women, and children were forced to waste more labour than would have paid twenty times over for all the British manufactures they could purchase. They were passing rapidly toward barbarism, and for the sole reason that they were denied all power of association for any useful purpose. What was the impression produced by their appearance on the mind of foreigners may be seen by the following extract from the work of a well-known and highly intelligent German traveller:—

“A Russian peasant, no doubt, is the slave of a harder master, but still he is fed and housed to his content, and no trace of mendicancy is to be seen in him. The Hungarians are certainly not among the best-used people in the world; still, what fine wheaten bread and what wine has even the humblest among them for his daily fare! The Hungarian would scarcely believe it, if he were to be told there was a country in which the inhabitants must content themselves with potatoes every alternate day in the year.

“Servia [sic] and Bosnia are reckoned among the most wretched countries of Europe, and certainly the appearance of one of their villages has little that is attractive about it; but at least the people, if badly housed, are well clad. We look not for much luxury or comfort among the Tartars of the Crimea; we call them poor and barbarous, but, good heavens! they look at least like human creatures. They have a national costume, their houses are habitable, their orchards are carefully tended, and their gayly harnessed ponies are mostly in good condition. An Irishman has nothing national about him but his rags,—his habitation is without a plan, his do-

mestic economy without rule or law. We have beggars and paupers among us, but they form at least an exception; whereas, in Ireland, beggary or abject poverty is the prevailing rule. The nation is one of beggars, and they who are above beggary seem to form the exception.

“The African negroes go naked, but then they have a tropical sun to warm them. The Irish are little removed from a state of nakedness; and their climate, though not cold, is cool, and extremely humid.

“There are nations of slaves, but they have, by long custom, been made unconscious of the yoke of slavery. This is not the case with the Irish, who have a strong feeling of liberty within them, and are fully sensible of the weight of the yoke they have to bear. They are intelligent enough to know the injustice done them by the distorted laws of their country; and while they are themselves enduring the extreme of poverty, they have frequently before them, in the manner of life of their English landlords, a spectacle of the most refined luxury that human ingenuity ever invented.”

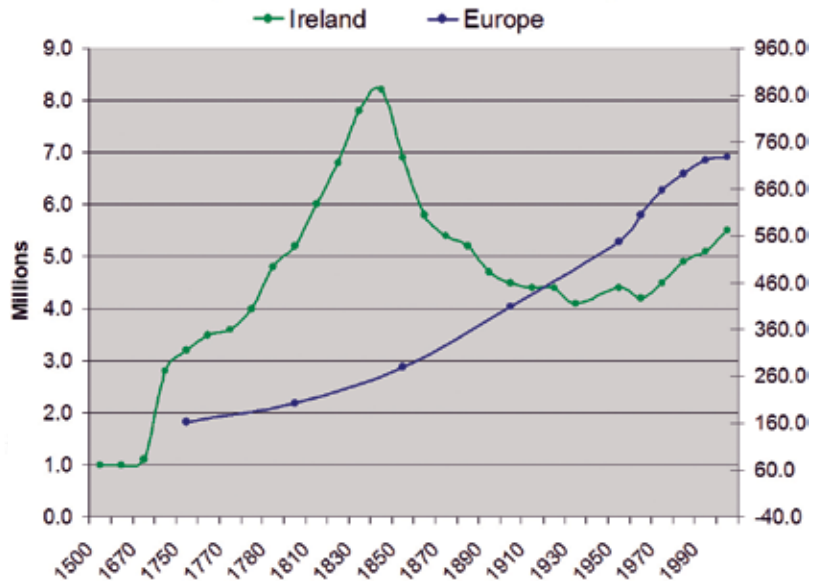
—*Kohl's Travels in Ireland*.

It might be thought, however, that Ireland was deficient in the capital required for obtaining the machinery of manufacture to enable her people to maintain competition with her powerful neighbour. We know, however, that previous to the Union she had that machinery; and from the date of that arrangement, so fraudulently brought about, by which was settled conclusively the destruction of Irish manufactures, the *annual* waste of labour was greater than the whole amount of capital then employed in the cotton and woollen manufactures of England. From that date, the people of Ireland were thrown, from year to year, more into the hands of middlemen, who accumulated fortunes that they *would* not invest in the improvement of land, and *could* not, under the system which prostrated manufactures, invest in machinery of any kind calculated to render labour productive; and all their accumulations were sent therefore to England for investment.

An official document published by the British government shows that the transfers of British securities from England to Ireland, that is to say, the investment of Irish capital in England, in the thirteen years following the final adoption of free trade in 1821, amounted to as many millions of pounds sterling; and



Population of Ireland and Europe



Images from the period of the British rape of Ireland, second half of the 19th Century. Clockwise from top left: a scene from the great potato famine (1845-51); a chart showing the catastrophic collapse of the Irish population, beginning around 1850, and continuing for a century; an Irish family bids farewell to emigrants; a poster of the Land League, which organized against the looting of Ireland's once-productive agriculture, and forced evictions, by British landlords.



Deprived of all employment, except in the labour of agriculture, land became, of course, the great object of pursuit. 'Land is life' had said, most truly and emphatically, Chief Justice Blackburn; and the people had now before them the choice between the occupation of land, at any rent, or starvation....

—Henry Carey



thus was Ireland forced to contribute cheap labour and cheap capital to building up “the great works of Britain.” Further, it was provided by law that whenever the poor people of a neighbourhood contributed to a saving fund, the amount should not be applied in any manner calculated to furnish local employment, but should be transferred for investment in the British funds. The landlords fled to England, and their rent followed them. The middlemen sent their capital to England. The trader or the labourer that could accumulate a little capital saw it sent to England; and he was then compelled to follow it. Such is the history of the origin of the present abandonment of Ireland by its inhabitants.

The form in which rents, profits, and savings, as well as taxes, went to England, was that of raw products of the soil, to be consumed abroad, yielding nothing to be returned to the land, which was of course impoverished. The average export of grain in the first three years following the passage of the Act of Union was about 300,000 quarters, but as the domestic market gradually disappeared, the export of raw produce increased, until, at the close of twenty years it exceeded a million of quarters; and at the date of Mr. Inglis’s visit, it had reached an average of two and a half millions, or 22,500,000 of our bushels. The poor people were, in fact, selling their soil to pay for cotton and woollen goods that they should have manufactured themselves, for coal which abounded among themselves, for iron, all the materials of which existed at home in great profusion, and for a small quantity of tea, sugar, and other foreign commodities, while the amount required to pay rent to absentees, and interest to mortgagees, was estimated at more than thirty millions of dollars. Here was a drain that no nation could bear, however great its productive power; and the whole of it was due to the system which forbade the application of labour, talent, or capital to any thing but agriculture, and thus forbade advance in civilization. . . .

“Throughout the west and south of Ireland,” said an English traveller in 1842, four years before the exhaustion of the soil had produced disease among the potatoes—

“The traveller is haunted by the face of the *popular starvation*. It is not the exception—it is *the condition* of the people. In this fairest and richest of countries, men are suffering and *starving by millions*. There are

thousands of them, at this minute, stretched in the sunshine at their cabin doors with *no work*, scarcely any food, no hope seemingly. Strong countrymen are lying in bed, ‘*for the hunger*’—because a man lying on his back does not need so much food as a person afoot. Many of them have torn up the unripe potatoes from their little gardens, and to exist now must look to winter, when they shall have to suffer starvation and cold too.”

—*Thackeray*.

“Everywhere,” said the *Quarterly Review*, “throughout all parts, even in the best towns, and in Dublin itself, you will meet men and boys—not dressed, not covered—but hung round with a collection of rags of unrivalled variety, squalidity, and filth—walking dunghills. No one ever saw an English scarecrow with such rags.”

The difference in the condition of these poor people and that of the slave—even the slave of Jamaica at that day—consisted in this, that the negro slave was worth buying, whereas the others were not; and we know well that the man who pays a good price for a commodity, attaches to it a value that induces him to give some care to its preservation; whereas he cares nothing for another that he finds himself forced to accept. “Starving by millions,” as they are here described, death was perpetually separating husbands and wives, parents and children, while to the survivors remained no hope but that of being enabled at some time or other to fly to another land in which they might be permitted to sell their labour for food sufficient to support life.

The existence of such a state of things was, said the advocates of the system which looks to converting all the world outside of England into one great farm, to be accounted for by the fact that the population was too numerous for the land, and yet a third of the surface, including the richest lands in the kingdom, was lying unoccupied and waste.

“Of single counties,” said an English writer, “Mayo, with a population of 389,000, and a rental of only £300,000, has an area of 1,364,000 acres, of which 800,000 are waste! No less than 470,000 acres, being very nearly equal to the whole extent of surface now under cultivation, are declared to be reclaimable. Galway, with a population of 423,000, and a valued rental of £433,000, has upward of 700,000 acres of

waste, 410,000 of which are reclaimable! Kerry, with a population of 293,000, has an area of 1,186,000 acres—727,000 being waste, and 400,000 of them reclaimable! Even the Union of Glenties, Lord Monteagle's *ne plus ultra* of redundant population, has an area of 245,000 acres, of which 200,000 are waste, and for the most part reclaimable, to its population of 43,000. While the Barony of Ennis, that abomination of desolation, has 230,000 acres of land to its 5000 paupers—a proportion which, as Mr. Carter, one of the principal proprietors, remarks in his circular advertisement for tenants, 'is at the rate of only one family to 230 acres; so that if but one head of a family were employed to every 230 acres, there need not be a single pauper in the entire district; a proof,' he adds, 'THAT NOTHING BUT EMPLOYMENT IS WANTING TO SET THIS COUNTRY TO RIGHTS!' In which opinion we fully coincide."

Nothing but employment was needed, but that could not be found under the system which has caused the annihilation of the cotton manufacture of India, notwithstanding the advantage of having the cotton on the spot, free from all cost for carriage. As in Jamaica, and as in India, the land had been gradually exhausted by the exportation of its products in their rudest state, and the country had thus been drained of capital, a necessary consequence of which was that the labour even of men found no demand, while women and children starved, that the women and children of England might spin cotton and weave cloth that Ireland was too poor to purchase.

Bad, however, as was all this, a worse state of things was at hand. Poverty and wretchedness compelled the wretched people to fly in thousands and tens of thousands across the Channel, thus following the capital and the soil that had been transferred to Birmingham and Manchester; and the streets and cellars of those towns, and those of London, Liverpool, and Glasgow, were filled with men, women, and children in a state almost of starvation; while throughout the country, men were offering to perform the farm labour for food alone, and a cry had arisen among the people of England that the labourers were likely to be swamped by these starving Irishmen: to provide against which it was needed that the landlords of Ireland should be compelled to support their own poor, and forthwith an act of Parliament was passed for that purpose. Thence arose, of course, an increased desire to rid the country of the men, women, and children whose labour could

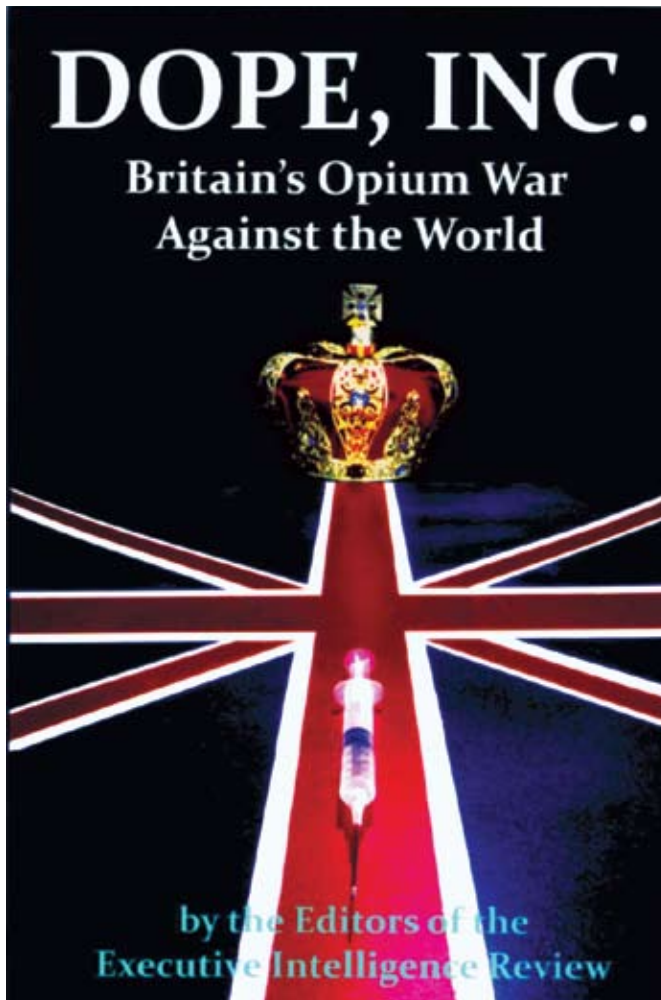
not be sold, and who could therefore pay no rent. The "Crowbar Brigade" was therefore called into more active service, as will be seen by the following account of their labours in a single one of the "Unions" established under the new poor-law system, which in many cases took the whole rent of the land for the maintenance of those who had been reduced to pauperism by the determination of the people of Manchester and Birmingham to continue the colonial system under which Ireland had been ruined.

"In Galway Union, recent accounts declared the number of poor evicted, and their homes levelled within the last two years, to equal the numbers in Kilrush—4,000 families and 20,000 human beings are said to have been here also thrown upon the road, houseless and homeless. I can readily believe the statement, for to me some parts of the country appeared like an enormous graveyard—the numerous gables of the unroofed dwellings seemed to be gigantic tombstones. They were, indeed, records of decay and death far more melancholy than the grave can show. Looking on them, the doubt rose in my mind, am I in a civilized country? Have we really a free constitution? Can such scenes be paralleled in Siberia or Caffraria [South Africa—ed.]?"

A single case described in a paper recently published by Mr. Dickens in his "*Household Words*," will convey to the reader some idea of an eviction, that may be taken as a specimen, and perhaps a fair one, of the *fifty thousand* evictions that took place in the single year 1849, and of the hundreds of thousands that have taken place in the last six years.

"Black piles of peat stood on the solitary ground, ready after a summer's cutting and drying. Presently, patches of cultivation presented themselves; plots of ground raised on beds, each a few feet wide, with intervening trenches to carry off the boggy water, where potatoes had grown, and small fields where grew more ragwort than grass, enclosed by banks cast up and tipped here and there with a brier or a stone. It was the husbandry of misery and indigence. The ground had already been freshly manured by sea-weeds, but the village, where was it? Blotches of burnt-ground, scorched heaps of rubbish, and fragments of blackened walls, alone were visible. Garden plots were trodden down and their few bushes rent up, or hung with tatters of rags. The two horsemen, as they hurried by, with gloomy visages, uttered no more than the single word—EVICTION!"....

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