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## “The Heart of this People is in its right place”: The American Press and Private Charity in the United States during the Irish Famine

# ABSTRACT

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The potato blight that struck Ireland in 1845 led to ineffable suffering that sent shockwaves throughout the Anglosphere. The Irish Famine is deemed to be the first national calamity to attract extensive help and support from all around the world. Even though the Irish did not receive adequate support from the British government, their ordeal was mitigated by private charity. Without the donations from a great number of individuals, the death toll among the famished Irishmen and Irishwomen would have been definitely higher. The greatest and most generous amount of assistance came from the United States. In spite of the fact that the U.S. Congress did not decide to earmark any money for the support of famine-stricken Ireland, the horrors taking place in this part of the British Empire pulled at American citizens' heartstrings and they contributed munificently to the help of the Irish people. Aiding Ireland was embraced by the American press, which, unlike major British newspapers, lauded private efforts to bring succour to the Irish. Such American newspapers as the *Daily National Intelligencer*, the *New York Herald* and the *Liberator* encouraged their readers to contribute to the relief of Ireland and applauded efforts to help the Irish. The aim of this essay is to argue that the American press, in general, played a significant role in encouraging private charity in the United States towards the Irish at the time of *An Gorta Mór* and, thus, helped to save many lives.

**Keywords:** Ireland, Famine, 19<sup>th</sup> century, American press, private charity.

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The Great Irish Famine (1845–52) was a terrible tragedy that resulted in the loss of many lives and transformed Irish society irrevocably. The mass starvation on the shores of Ireland triggered an exodus of the Irish, the majority of whom chose to set sail to North America. The crisis in Ireland sent shockwaves throughout the Anglosphere and evoked sympathy in different corners of the world. Due to the mass emigration of the Irish to the United States the failure of the potato crop in Ireland impacted profoundly American society. Furthermore, the misery of the inhabitants of Ireland tugged at Americans' hearts and they responded to the Famine showing their sympathy and magnanimity. This was possible due to the fact that the crisis in Ireland was widely covered in the American press and American newspapers praised and encouraged Americans in their efforts to bring succour to the Irish. This essay examines the role of three American newspapers: the *Daily National Intelligencer*, a prominent conservative newspaper published in Washington, DC, the weekly abolitionist newspaper the *Liberator* and the penny paper the *New York Herald*.

Many publications dealing with the Irish Famine focus on the role of the British government and the measures it undertook to alleviate the crisis. By and large, historians point out that the British establishment did not do enough to help the sister island, which since 1801 had been an integral part of the United Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> The failure of the British politicians was acknowledged in 1997 by Tony Blair, who at the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Hunger apologized for British government's inertia in the time of need (Marks). Another culprit that allowed this humanitarian crisis to take place on the doorstep of the mighty British Empire was the British press. The British periodicals, such as the *Times* and *Punch*, did not empathize with the Irish, but preferred to emphasize their alleged indolence and ingratitude (Kinealy, *A Death-Dealing Famine* 130–34). Unlike the British journals, many American newspapers sympathized with the misery of the Irish, which must have contributed to the fact that the Society of Friends, which was actively engaged in fund-raising for the victims of the Famine in Ireland, reported that “[t]he supplies sent from America to Ireland were on a scale unparalleled in history” (qtd. in Bruce 16).

There were a few differences between the British and American periodicals. In order to inform their readers about the crisis in Ireland the American journals relied heavily on the British and Irish periodicals, which

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<sup>1</sup> See Ciarán Ó Murchadha, *The Great Famine: Ireland's Agony 1845-1852* (London: Continuum, 2011); Joel Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved: A Quantitative and Analytical History of the Irish Economy, 1800–1850* (London: Routledge, 2006); Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine 1845–52* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1994).

were brought on steamers crossing the Atlantic loaded with passengers and European newspapers. To ensure that American readers were supplied with up-to-date developments in the United Kingdom American publishers gleaned news items from foreign newspapers. The newspapers published in remoter places, which, as a result, found it harder to access European newspapers relied, in turn, on the major American titles. To be more competitive some of the American newspapers had correspondents who delivered firsthand accounts. Sometimes information was taken from government officials, who were likely to portray the calamity in Ireland in a rather subjective way. There were also correspondents who accosted Irish newcomers and provided reports based on their perspective of the Famine. The story of the Famine was also disseminated through the letters to the editor, which were sent by the Irish, people who visited Ireland at that time, and those who witnessed the ordeal of the Irish immigrants (Hogan 155–79). Despite being dependent on information from the European titles, the American press offers an additional and valuable insight into the Irish Famine and a different perspective on the tragedy in Ireland.

Due to the fact that information about the potato blight that struck Europe in 1845 was taken from the European press, there were contradictory reports concerning the imminence of the famine, as it was believed that the Irish were exaggerating the extent of the damage. On 6 October 1845 the *Daily National Intelligencer* reported that the potato crop in Britain and the Continent was considerably injured (“Fifteen Days Later from Europe” 3). In early December, the *New York Herald* noted, however, that “the *Dublin Evening Mail* contends and quotes respectable proofs for the correctness of the assertion, that the cry about the injury done to the potato crop has been greatly and wilfully exaggerated” (“Further Extracts from the Foreign Papers” 1). In December the *Daily National Intelligencer* published a letter from an Irishman, dated 30 November 1845, in which he states that

[a] great deal of the potato crop has rotted; but even if one-fourth of the whole was lost, (which I doubt,) there is yet an average one remaining sound, as, in the memory of man, there has never been such an abundant one, both as to the quantity planted and the return from the planting. (“The Potato Crop in Ireland” 3)

What is more, some American publishers tried to take advantage of the crisis and make a profit. For example, James Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald* was criticized for not publishing news about the potato failure immediately in order to sell it to speculators (Hogan 159). Some papers also underlined the fact that the Famine was an opportunity to

sell grain to the British and make a profit (Farrell 4-5). The contradictory nature of the reports about the state of Ireland and the belief that the Irish were not trustworthy were disadvantageous to the Irish in Britain, as well as in America (Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine* 34).

Even though the potato crop failure proved partial in 1845, the crisis galvanized people to collect money for the Irish in such far-flung places as Calcutta and Boston, Massachusetts. In India, the Calcutta Relief Fund, spearheaded by British-born residents, had collected an amount in the region of £14,000 by the end of 1846 (Kinealy, *Charity* 45). In Boston, local Repealers, the supporters of Daniel O’Connell and the abrogation of the Act of Union, formed a committee to raise funds. The committee convened a meeting in December

to take into consideration the awful calamity that threatens the Irish people, by the shortness of the crops in that unhappy country at the present time, and to devise means towards the relief of the suffering thousands who will inevitably perish from starvation in case aid is not sent them. (“Meeting for the Relief of the Irish” 3)

The Bostonians managed to collect \$750 at a meeting held in December 1845. Because it was organized by a politicized group, Britain was denounced as the culprit responsible for the tragedy in Ireland. The Boston initiative was, however, brief and petered out in early 1846 due to the widespread belief in the exaggerated nature of the reports from Ireland (Kinealy, “Saving the Irish Poor”).

With more and more reports on the havoc wreaked by the potato blight the British papers devoted a considerable amount of space to texts discussing possible ways of salvaging diseased potatoes.<sup>2</sup> Due to the fact that the cause of the potato rot was not established until the 1890s, these deliberations were futile.<sup>3</sup> In addition, many articles were devoted to the question of the repeal of the Corn Laws, which was supported by the British Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, and what measures should be taken to mitigate the situation in Ireland. The British press, by and large, was against any direct relief and underlined the responsibility of Irish landlords for the crisis (Hamera 65–81). Conversely, the *New York Herald* censured Britain for the handling of the disaster in Ireland and stressed that saving people’s lives should be a priority. In one of its features the journal states that

<sup>2</sup> See “The Potato Disease,” *The Times* 18 Nov. 1845: 7; “The Potato Disease,” *The Times* 21 Nov. 1845: 6.

<sup>3</sup> See Miller (444-62).

[t]he Irish must eat. They cannot wait for the end of the discussion. Six million of people cannot be allowed to perish while a committee of doctors of political economy arrive at a conclusion that the laws, which deprive them of food, ought to be suspended. Feed them first, and discuss afterwards. (“The Crisis in Affairs on the Other Side of the Atlantic” 1)

Apart from the initiatives in Boston and Calcutta the incomplete crop failure in 1845 did not evoke too much sympathy towards the Irish. As a result, there were no major efforts to bring relief to Ireland. This started changing in 1846, especially when reports detailing the ordeal of starving Irish families were becoming omnipresent. News items underling the despair and suffering of the Irish were also printed in the American papers at the time.<sup>4</sup> Although accounts of the plight in famine-stricken Ireland were published quite frequently in the press in 1846, in November the *Daily National Intelligencer* published a letter from a person from County Roscommon in Ireland to a citizen of Washington, DC upbraiding Americans for their callousness. The author of the letter shames Americans stating that

[n]ever had we such accounts to send as in this present year. Ireland is visited from north to south, from east to west, with a most direful famine; the poor are living in many parts on cabbages and salt, and many of them dying on the highroads, in the fields, and in the towns, of Irish cholera and various other complaints, in consequence of such food, and very many have not even much of that sort, bad as it is. The potatoes *in toto* perished; indeed, they are totally extinct in Ireland. . . . I am astonished that the Americans, mixed with Irish as they are, never manifested the least sympathy for us in our present deplorable condition, more especially as in India the Irish there entered into the matter very cordially, and made up a considerable sum in Calcutta, say £11,000, towards the relief of the poor Irish, which was remitted to Dublin, and they are still adding to it their contributions monthly—many, very many a poor man was relieved from the Calcutta fund. (“Deplorable Picture” 3)

The letter did not fall on deaf ears and drew interest. A few days later the *Daily National Intelligencer* reprinted a commentary from the *Pittsburgh Gazette and Advertiser*. The Pittsburgh paper refers to the letter saying:

We blushed when we read the last paragraph in the above article, to think that nothing had been done in Pittsburg [sic] to relieve our suffering

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<sup>4</sup> See “The Suffering in Ireland,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 8 May 1846: 4; “Arrival of the Hibernia,” *The Liberator* 27 May 1846: 3.

fellow-men, and, thousands here may say, their suffering fellow-kindred, from absolute starvation. Where are our bowels of compassion? How can we sit down at our tables ladened [sic] with the bounties of Providence, and not reflect hundreds of thousands of Irishmen are pinning in hunger, dying, yes, absolutely *dying of starvation?*. . . . Let a meeting be called at once, and a ship load of flour and corn be sent from Pittsburg [sic] before the canal closes. (“Washington” 3)

The letter published in the *Daily National Intelligencer* called for Americans’ goodwill and made an impression in America. Moreover, there were other letters and features on the predicament of the Irish that evoked sympathy and spurred Americans to help Ireland. The *Liberator* published a letter from William Lloyd Garrison, the famous abolitionist who was at that time visiting Great Britain, in which he comments on his visit to Ireland. Garrison makes an indelible description of the situation in Ireland stating that

I was frequently melted to tears, and for the first time in my life saw human beings, especially women and children, in a situation that made me almost lament their existence. Yet I was assured that I saw the best portion of the laboring poor in Ireland! Alas! for them, with the famine which is sorely pressing them, in consequence of the entire failure of the potato crop—the food on which they have subsisted from time immemorial. Multitudes, beyond a doubt,—in spite of all that the government can do to give relief,—will miserably perish for the want of the absolute necessaries of life. O, the poor women! O, the poor children! O, the poor babies! Heaven send them speedy succor! (“Letter from Mr. Garrison” 3)

The question of whether to help Ireland was raised on the floor of the U.S. Senate. It was Senator Samuel Chase who for the first time referred to the plight of the Irish in the U.S. Congress on 2 June 1846. He suggested a less restrictive tariff policy claiming that England was in need of American goods. Arguing for a less stringent tariff policy he quoted excerpts from the *Daily National Intelligencer* in which it was noted that “[i]n many places there are no potatoes left . . . the wretched sufferers are in vain endeavouring to get provisions in time that their children may not die” (“The News by the Cambria” 3; Sarbaugh 8). After Chase’s speech the Irish Famine had not been discussed in the U.S. Capitol for a few months (Sarbaugh 10). Then on 8 February 1847, Congressman Washington Hunt from New York proposed a bill requesting \$500,000 for food and its transportation to Ireland. The *Daily National Intelligencer* published an appeal to Congress, whose author points out that the proposed sum is

too small and calls for greater benevolence towards the hapless Irish. The author also tried to appeal to readers' emotions underscoring that

[e]ven while I am writing children are dying in their mothers' arms for want of sustenance; and the dead bodies are unburied through stress of poverty, disease, and famine among the surviving. . . . They are our friends; they look to the people of the United States as their benefactors. Let them not cry to us in vain! ("An Appeal to Congress" 2)

Despite the author's conviction that the bill would be passed easily, the popular proposal, eventually, died in a committee (Kinealy, *Charity* 120).

A similar bill demanding the same amount of money was proposed on 26 February 1847 by Senator John J. Crittenden of Kentucky. Despite vociferous opponents of the bill, who emphasized that it was the duty of the British government to help Ireland, the Senate passed the bill and sent it to the House of Representatives. In the House some Congressmen raised objections to the bill and it was directed to the Ways and Means Committee (Sarbaugh 11–13). Crittenden's bill was generally supported by the Whigs, the American political party, but came into the cross hairs of some politicians and the public, as they viewed it as a stratagem to win the Irish vote (Kinealy, *Charity* 121). In addition, President James Knox Polk, who deemed the bill unconstitutional, made it clear that if the bill had made it out of the committee he would have vetoed it. In the end, the bill, as in the case of the previous one, did not come out of the committee (Sarbaugh 13). To redeem itself, the American government passed a bill providing two men-of-war to transport donations to the shores of Ireland. President Polk, possibly in order to avoid alienating Irish Americans, spurred U.S. citizens to make private donations and personally contributed \$50. Despite the fiasco of the bills allocating money to bring relief to Ireland, Americans answered Polk's call and gave magnanimously to the relief of the famished Irish (Sarbaugh 13–14).

Bringing help to the Irish was embraced by the American press, which, unlike the British newspapers, lauded private efforts to bring succour to Ireland. The London *Times*, for example, tried to convince its readers that the Irish were taking advantage of the benevolence of the British. In one of the editorials it is noted, for example, that the Irish "find it pleasanter to live on alms than on labour" (*The Times*, 26 Mar. 1847: 4). In 1849, when the situation in Ireland was deplorable, the *Times* portrayed charitable efforts to raise funds to help the Irish as another attempt to fleece the British. The English journal states that

the begging-box will soon have to be sent round the country to abate the mortality and famine of Ireland. . . . The ears of women are to be stimulated by the most touching appeals to mercy, charity, and religion.



Scenes of horror are to be conned by rote, and then dressed up according to the tact of orators and the taste of audiences; and a handsome return is calculated on. (*The Times*, 15 May 1849: 5)

The American periodicals, on the other hand, highlighting the distress in Ireland encouraged Americans to be generous.<sup>5</sup> In November 1846 the *Daily National Intelligencer* addressed its readers stating

[a]nd should we, as fellow beings of this same people, remain insensible to so much suffering; or shall we not “feel another’s wo,” because we do not hear his cries of distress? No; this would be to belie the generous humanity which has ever marked the American character. (“Distress in Ireland” 3)

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In late 1846 the first committees and meetings to collect money and other goods for the Irish started to be convened in such cities as New York, Boston, Washington and Philadelphia (Kinealy, *Charity* 222). A gathering organized in the City Hall in Washington was, for example, supported by the *Daily National Intelligencer* which expressed hope that “those who have the means will also have the disposition to contribute to the relief of a people whose sufferings are so appalling and whose wants are so urgent and universal” (“City News” 23 Nov. 1846: 1).<sup>6</sup> The efforts to give assistance to the Irish intensified in 1847. The *Daily National Intelligencer* notes in a piece dated 17 February 1847 that “[m]ovements are being made in various sections of the Union with a view to administer relief to the starving population of Ireland” (“Relief for Ireland” 4). Throughout 1847 articles reporting on meetings for the relief of the suffering Irish were ubiquitous.<sup>7</sup> They were intermingled with reports on the horrors and hardships that people in Ireland had to endure (“Ireland,” 2 Feb. 1847: 3).

The American papers extolled endeavours to bring relief to Ireland. The *Daily National Intelligencer* praised Irish labourers who remitted money to their countrymen (“The Suffering Poor of Ireland” 3). On

<sup>5</sup> See also Farrell (13–16).

<sup>6</sup> See also “Young Men’s Ball for the Relief of the Sufferers in Ireland,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 23 Dec. 1846: 1.

<sup>7</sup> See “Great Meeting for the Relief of Ireland,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 11 Feb. 1847: 3; “Public Meeting for the Relief of the Suffering Poor in Ireland,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 12 Feb. 1847: 3; “Collections for the Relief of Ireland,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 13 Feb. 1847: 3; “The New Orleans Tropic,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 15 Feb. 1847: 3; “The Relief of Sufferers in Ireland,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 20 Feb. 1847: 3; “Food for Suffering Ireland,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 25 Feb. 1847: 3.



11 January 1847 the *Daily National Intelligencer* published a short text entitled “Praiseworthy” in which it is underlined that a correspondent of the *New York Courier and Enquirer*

has ascertained that the immigrant Irish population have remitted during the year 1846 *eight hundred and eight thousand dollars!* Of this sum \$175,000 have been remitted within the last two months. A prouder testimonial of the intensity and permanency of home affections could not be raised on behalf of any people in the world. (“Praiseworthy” 4)

The newspapers in America made an effort to emphasize the contributions of American citizens. The *Daily National Intelligencer* applauded two Washingtonians, an owner of a theatre, as well as an owner of a Bowling Saloon, who decided to donate some of their proceeds to “the relief of the sufferers by famine in Ireland” (“Praiseworthy and Deserving of Imitation, Also Praiseworthy and Worthy of Imitation” 1).<sup>8</sup> The journal praised and acknowledged the contribution of \$5 by the pupils of Wayne Lyceum school in North Carolina, the Reporters in Congress, and the officers and cadets of West Point (“From the City of New York” 3; “Multiple News Items,” 12 Feb. 1847: 4; “Multiple News Items,” 19 Feb. 1847: 3). Furthermore, the *Liberator* published lists with names of people who donated money for the starving people of Ireland and sometimes excerpts from donors’ letters were included as well.<sup>9</sup> For instance, in one of them it is written that “[m]y four children, after hearing the account of the suffering Irish in the last *Liberator*, at their own request, send [sic] four half dimes” (“Donations for the Starving People in Ireland,” 5 Mar. 1847: 3).<sup>10</sup> The American press took pride in charity towards Ireland, especially because, as noted by the *Daily National Intelligencer*, it was an occasion to show people around the world that Americans were generous and concerned about the suffering of other people. The newspaper states in one of its articles:

Whatever in our country, may be the occasional faults of our General or State Governments, or the errors or excesses of party, the Heart of this People is in its right place, and throbs in unison with that of

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<sup>8</sup> See also “City News,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 24 Feb. 1847: 1; “City News,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 26 Feb. 1847, 1.

<sup>9</sup> See “Donations for the Starving People in Ireland,” *The Liberator* (26 Feb. 1847: 3, 5 Mar. 1847: 3, 12 Mar. 1847: 3, 19 Mar. 1847: 3, 26 Mar. 1847: 3, 2 Apr. 1847: 3, 9 Apr. 1847: 3, 30 Apr. 1847: 3, 7 May 1847: 3, 21 May 1847: 3, 4 June 1847: 3, 18 June 1847: 3, 25 June 1847: 3, 25 July 1847: 3).

<sup>10</sup> See also “A Generous Donation,” *The Liberator* 12 Mar. 1847: 2.

suffering humanity, whenever and wherever (as in the case of Ireland) that suffering is intelligibly communicated to it. . . . We rejoice in all this, not merely as adding to our already unfeigned respect and affection for our countrymen, but because we are proud of the answer which affords to those persons in foreign lands whose habit it is to represent Brother Jonathan (as they style us) as a sordid and mercenary personage. (“The Famine in Ireland” 3)

Furthermore, the American journals emphasized the gratitude of the recipients of their generosity, which was “warmly expressed with all the exuberance of the Irish heart” (“The Gratitude of Ireland” 3). The *Daily National Intelligencer* reprinted from the *Albany Evening Journal* a letter by Father Theobald Matthew, the Irish leader of the Temperance Movement, in which it is underscored that “[t]he magnificent humanity evinced by our beloved brethren in the States for the suffering Irish has inspired every heart in this Island with ardent gratitude. We shall ever regard America as our deliverer in the hour of bitter calamity” (“A Letter from Father Mathew” 3).<sup>11</sup> The *Daily National Intelligencer* published also a lengthy account of a public dinner organized in gratitude to American captains in charge of the U.S. man-of-war *Jamestown*, which was leased by the U.S. Government to bring relief to Ireland (“Kindness Reciprocated” 2). The journal also acquainted its readers with an address from the Dublin authorities thanking for sympathy and help coming from the United States (“Irish Gratitude for American Kindness—Address of the City of Dublin” 3).<sup>12</sup> The British press, on the other hand, highlighted the ingratitude of the inhabitants of the sister island. The London *Times*, for instance, in an editorial published in August 1848 stresses that Ireland will again require help from England and “all she [England] is likely to get in return is railing, curses, and ingratitude” (*The Times*, 29 Aug. 1848: 4).

By and large, the private charity efforts in the United States fizzled out by the end of 1847 (Kinealy, *Charity* 222). Similarly, in Britain the sympathy towards the ordeal of the Irish was short-lived. Some Famine scholars point out that compassion fatigue, that is the lessening of compassion due to the omnipresence of reports about tragedy and misery, took hold among the British (Ó Gráda 43). It seems that also in the case of

<sup>11</sup> The letter was published in many other American papers, see also “Letter from Father Matthew,” *The Boston Daily Atlas* 27 Apr. 1847: 2; *The Cleveland Herald* 28 Apr. 1847: 2; “Letter from Father Mathew,” *Daily Sentinel and Gazette* 4 May 1847: 2; “Domestic,” *Vermont Chronicle* 5 May 1847: 3.

<sup>12</sup> See also “Tribute of Gratitude from Ireland,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 30 Oct. 1847: 3; “Tribute of Gratitude from Ireland,” *The New York Herald* 30 Oct. 1847: 1.

the American newspapers and American public opinion the efforts to help the Irish waned as the papers generally ceased publishing accounts of the contributions to the relief of Ireland by the end of 1847. Over the course of 1847 the lists with the names of donors published in the *Liberator* were becoming shorter. An author of a letter published in the *New York Herald* in October 1847 observes giving an account of a public meeting held to procure help for Mormons in Iowa that “prejudice was strong and public charity had well nigh exhausted itself in the relief of the famine stricken Irish, and in assistance to the poor around us” (“The Destitute Mormons in the Far West—The Ladies’ Tea Party for their Relief” 3–4). In addition, the *Daily National Intelligencer* published a report stating that over a million of dollars was spent for the relief of the starving in Ireland (“Donations to Ireland” 3). News items such as these probably allowed American citizens to be content with their efforts and to feel complacent that they did what they could. Moreover, the correspondent of the *New York Herald* complains in a letter published in the paper that “America has done her share, for which she has received only hard words, threats and curses, from the [British] press and ministry” (“Herald Foreign Correspondence” 1). Thus, the journal indicated that the British government should finally shoulder its responsibility and look after its people.

Even though the British government proclaimed the Famine to be over in 1847, the crisis continued till the early 1850s. The prevailing suffering in Ireland was acknowledged by the American papers. In February 1848 the *New York Herald* notes, for example, that “[t]he condition of Ireland seems not to improve in the slightest degree. On the contrary, her fortunes seem to be getting dimmer and dimmer” (“Condition of Ireland” 2). The *Liberator* reprinted a letter from the Dublin *Evening Packet* in which it is underlined that “[t]he famine years of 1846, 1847 and 1848, were halcyon years when contrasted with the dismal year of 1849! The sandbanks about me are studded with the bodies of the dead!” (“State of Ireland—Famine in Mayo” 4). The *Daily National Intelligencer* defended its publication of pieces on the suffering of the Irish by pointing out that “such details should be submitted to the reader, as well to excite a due degree of sympathy as to make him appreciate by contrast the many blessings he enjoys” (“Destitution of Ireland” 3).

In spite of such reports highlighting the prevalent distress in Ireland American society no longer felt compelled to go to great lengths to help the Irish. Christine Kinealy states that this change of heart in America might be attributed to the false belief that the Famine was over, the belief that sending relief to Ireland was futile, and to the incessant influx of the Famine Irish (Kinealy, *Charity* 222). Taking into account the fact that the newspapers kept on informing their readers about the plight of the Irish, it is very likely

that the reason behind the cessation of charity efforts in America was that Americans became inured to the accounts on the suffering of the Irish. This is evinced in a report from Ireland published in the *New York Herald*, in which it is noted that “[f]rom Ireland we have the usual quantity of misery and crime, but there is nothing of special importance” (“Ireland,” 5 May 1849: 1). James M. Farrell has also shown that many American periodicals stressed the unceasing arrivals of diseased Irish, who were portrayed as a threat which might pauperize and demoralize American society (28–34). Such reports definitely brought about hostility towards the victims of the Famine. There were, however, papers such as the *New York Herald* which actually welcomed unfortunate Irish newcomers (“Emigration” 5).

Even though the charitable spirit towards the Irish people was not sustained throughout the whole period of the Great Irish Famine, the American papers, unlike the British journals, in general, exhibited great sympathy towards the Irish. Stressing the suffering of the Irish and praising efforts to donate to the relief for Ireland the American press contributed to the fact that, through private endeavours, the United States gave more than any other country to famine-stricken Ireland and American donations saved many lives. It is worth noting that the United States was engaged at that time in the Mexican-American War, which was an extremely newsworthy event. Nonetheless, the American press devoted a considerable amount of space to the tragedy in Ireland. One can only hypothesize that if the British papers, especially *The Times*, had shown as much sympathy as the American periodicals, the Irish Famine would not have been so disastrous.

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