The World of the Cavan Cottier during the Great Irish Famine

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In 1845, on the eve of the Great Irish Famine, the cottier class numbered some three million people. Despite such large numbers we know little of the individual experience of cottiers as they are absent from both the historiography and the social memory of the period. At the bottom of the social and economic pyramid, and entirely dependent on the potato as their staple diet, the cottier class remain hidden in the Famine narrative, mainly because of the supposed paucity of sources. And so the cottier class remains the largest body of people in nineteenth-century Ireland about whom we know the least. This essay considers the world of the cottier, using recently discovered primary sources from County Cavan as a case study. Theirs was a precarious existence and one which was often determined by outside factors, beyond their control. Yet, the question remains: who was ultimately responsible for them when the Famine crisis commenced. Landlords, at the top of the economic pyramid or the small farmer class who had facilitated their existence?

In Cavan the poor are unemployed and starving. Inflammation of the stomach and diarrhoea are frequent, and attributable to the use of bad potatoes. Insufficiency of food is the cause of present disease, and fever will break out to a frightful extent, in the event of scarcity of food.¹

During what came to be known as ‘Black 47’, 1847, the worst year of the Great Irish Famine, those, like the cottier Catherine Brady near Cootehill, County Cavan were rather forthright in their assessment of the chances of surviving another winter, claiming that she would ‘inevitably starve’.² Brady’s claim was not unique and numbering more than three million people in the early 1840s, the ‘cottier’ class were amongst the first to succumb to the hunger and disease which the Famine

¹ Quoted in Sydney Morning Herald, 25 Jul. 1846.
² Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses & Estates, Maynooth University, Lucas-Clements Archive [LCA], ‘Petition of Catherine Brady, (1847)’.

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brought. Naturally given their numbers and role in agriculture they were central to the Irish rural economy on the eve of the Famine. They were central also to much of the pre-Famine agitation which characterised rural Ireland as access to land was a recurring grievance across the country. These claims for land were all the more pronounced following the introduction of the Irish Poor Law Act of 1838 which made provision for, amongst other things, the creation of the workhouse system. It was the cottier class who were predominantly targeted for expulsion as landlords and their agents wished to remove poverty from sight, safe in the knowledge this numerous cottier population would find sanctuary in the workhouse. At Strokestown in County Roscommon, for example, the removal of cottiers was carried out in order to provide land for a proposed railway line, while for others it was the embellishment or creating of demesnes.

Despite such large numbers we know little of the individual experience of cottiers as they are absent from both the historiography and the social memory of the period. At the bottom of the social and economic pyramid, and entirely dependent on the potato as their stable diet, the cottier class remain hidden in the Famine narrative, mainly because of the supposed paucity of sources. Indeed, since most were deemed to have been illiterate or have received little education, they were unlikely in the first place to have left any written account of their lives behind. Moreover, largely because of the landholding system in nineteenth-century Ireland, with cottiers pitted at the bottom of the pyramid, they frequently do not appear in estate or public documents. Their ‘nomadic’ nature (houses were temporary structures and moved with the work) meant that the majority did not hold leases, pay rent or contribute to the landed estate in such ways, and so they remain the great ‘hidden’ class of nineteenth-century Ireland. As a result it is difficult to reconstruct their everyday lifestyle. Remaining on the ‘outside’, cottiers do not appear on land valuation surveys of the early nineteenth-century carried out by landlords, or indeed in the governments’ ‘Tithe Applotment Surveys’ of the 1820s and 1830s. In some instances they do not appear in parish registers (births, marriages or death records) thereby furthering alienating them from the historical record. And so the cottier class remains the largest body of people in nineteenth-century Ireland about whom we know the least.

This paper, then, attempts to reconstruct a cottier community in County Cavan during the Great Famine using a unique set of records (the Lucas-Clements archive) which were generated by the people themselves. In the main these papers which form part of the Lucas-Clements archive highlight how cottiers reacted to, and were helped, once the Famine commenced in the mid-1840s. Taking the

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3 O’Danachair estimated that there were 768,000 cottier families in 1841, meaning almost 3.9 million people, or almost half the population of Ireland. See O’Danachair, 1980–81, 154.
4 Reilly, 2014a, 51.
6 Reilly, 2014b, 8.
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barony of Tullygarvey as a case study, this paper identifies how landlords and relief committees attempted to provide assistance for this teeming population in the midst of crisis. Significantly, this cottier population comprised Catholics and Protestants, thereby challenging casual assumptions about rural poverty. This paper will also highlight the role played by cottier women and the varying attitudes towards them. In the pre-Famine decades cottiers had supplemented their incomes and indeed managed to survive mainly on the ‘cottage industries’ which were carried out in the home. In Cavan these industries included spinning, weaving, shoemaker, basket making, flax dressing, milling and dressmaking. Where in the pre-Famine decades women were prominent in the production of items which were sold outside the house, their role or value diminished with the downturn in the economy and the onset of Famine. In many cases the excess of women became somewhat of a burden on individual cottier families.

Part of the reason for the lack of understanding of the world of the cottier is the difficulty there is in trying to define the term, which even to cotemporaries was ‘imprecise’ and ‘often vague’. Moreover, the fact that the term was interchangeable with ‘landless labourer’ meant that it was easy to confuse these numerous sections of the community. When the British Government undertook a Poor Inquiry of Ireland in the 1830s they found that the term was ‘variously employed and understood’ throughout the country. Somewhat mistakenly however, the report found that the cottier system was largely ‘undergoing dissolution’ but that it still prevailed in counties Tyrone, Fermanagh, Monaghan, Wicklow, Queen’s County, King’s County and Kilkenny. And even within these counties there were regional variations and the term ‘cottier’ was used to describe holders of land from a quarter of an acre to five acres. Likewise, in the barony of Tullygarvey in County Cavan, the term cottier was variously used; indeed even the people themselves referred to each other as ‘cottars’ and ‘cottagers’.

The increased cottier population centred on the development of Irish agriculture following the boom period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, when during the Napoleonic Wars Ireland was effectively the ‘granary’ of Britain. By 1800 most Irish farmers prospered because of the labour of the cottier class which enabled them to work larger tracts of land with this overabundance of cheap labour. By extension, the small farming class used these ‘bound’ labourers as a means of carrying out contract work on larger farms and other manual labour. As a means of countering the downturn in the economy and maximizing profit from the land, Irish agriculture also underwent a period of improvement from 1815 onwards, particularly in areas of drainage and land reclamation. Most of this manual and cumbersome work was carried out by the cottier. The earl of Charleville at Tullamore, King’s County, for example, reclaimed 5,000 acres in the 1830s which until that point

8 For the purposes of this study, I define a cottier as the holder of a quarter acre of land or less, and usually no land at all.
was not part of the estate map or survey.\(^9\) However, despite their central role in this ‘silent’ reclamation revolution, cottiers were at the bottom of the social and economic pyramid, living on marginal land and themselves often occupying the edges of bogs, mountain and undrained land. Eking out an existence on the tiny patch of ground, or ‘potato garden’ as it was commonly called, there was little effort placed in the construction of their cabins for cottiers moved with the work. Each cottier was provided with a small portion of land in front of the cabin to sow potatoes. In return for this ‘small holding’, the cottier repaid the farmer by work in kind, usually 200 days in the year. In doing so they were ‘bound’ by an unwritten contract, which could be terminated by either part at a moment’s notice and without recourse to the law. For this reason, as O’Tuathaigh argues, cottiers were ‘the most insecure class’.\(^10\)

What made the system so detestable was that farmers could charge as high a rent as they liked, demanding so many days labour in return, and in turn offered as little ‘potato ground’ as they liked. Naturally, such arrangements gave rise to dispute and fuelled much of the agrarian tension and crime. The nature of this ‘bound’ contract meant that the cottier rarely handled cash and so was perpetually in debt to the small farmer. Indeed, on the eve of the Famine the Devon Commission, which reported into the \textit{State of Land and Occupation in Ireland} believed that want of capital for farmers to pay cottiers was a serious problem.\(^11\) The Devon Commission also suggested that landlords should take responsibility for the cottier labourers and ensure that they had a house and adequate ground to grow a crop. Failing this, the commissioners suggested that fines should be imposed on small farmers who neglect the needs of the cottier.\(^12\) This system of perpetual debt was criticised by the British M.P. and social commentator, Edward Wakefield, in 1812 when he wrote:

> The cotter tenant hires a cabin, the worst in the country, with a small patch of potato land, at a rent of thirty shillings per annum…. At the same time he works for his landlord at the small wage of 5d per day; but when he comes to settle, he receives nothing, as the food of his few sheep is set off against what he charges per labour. In this manner the poor cotter must toll without end, while his family eats up the produce of the small spot of land he has hired. This is called by the lower classes of the Irish ‘working for a dead horse’, that is to say getting in debt.\(^13\)

Wakefield was not alone in condemning such practices and pre-Famine social commentators regularly made a point of this. So too did writers of fiction, from William Carleton to Canon Joseph Guinan and those who used the memory of the

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\(^9\) Belfast, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland [PRONI], Charleville Papers, T/3069/B/19. ‘Statement of the value and location of the Charleville estates in Ireland, c.1830.’

\(^10\) Ó Tuathaigh, 1972, 133-4.


\(^12\) Report on the Occupation of Land in Ireland, 605-6: xix, 1, 35–6.

\(^13\) Wakefield, 1812, i, 253.
Famine as the backdrop to their novels. The miserable condition of cottiers was also frequently noted by travel writers who toured Ireland on the eve of and during the Famine. In Galway, for example, the Scottish philospher, Thomas Carlyle, unsympathetically remarked upon the cottiers’ dependence on begging:

poor cottier digging his little plot of them, three or four little children eagerly “gathering” for him: pathetic to look upon. From one cottage on the way side, issue two children **naked** to beg; boy about 13, girl about 12, ‘naked’ literally, some sash of rag round middle, oblique-sash over shoulder to support that, stark-naked would have been as decent (if you had to jump and run as these creatures did) and much cleanlier. **Dramatic,** I take it, or partly so, this form of begging: ‘strip for your parts, there is the car coming!’ Gave them nothing.

With the downturn in the Irish economy after 1815 and the collapse of cottage industries, cottiers became almost entirely dependent on the potato crop for their survival. A year of scarcity or the failure of the crop brought obvious hardships but the cottiers managed to overcome these short-term setbacks. This resilience had been honed over several generations; from 1700 to 1845 Ireland had experienced twenty-seven failures of the potato crop. However, each of these years was followed by a bountiful harvest allowing the cottier and his family to recover. Thus, the sustained failure of the potato crop (commonly referred to as *phytophthora infestans*) in the late 1840s and early 1850s in Ireland disproportionately affected cottiers. However, outside factors, often beyond their control, had hastened the demise of the cottier in the years preceding the Famine and had greatly diminished their resilience. For example, the ‘Night of the Big Wind’ in 1839, Ireland’s most violent recorded storm, wreaked havoc on the cottiers’ makeshift homes. Moreover, the failure of the harvests of 1840 to 1842 meant that an already impoverished community were on the brink of disaster.

In County Cavan cottiers formed a large body of the population, more than one-third in the county’s eight baronies. Located on the edge of Ulster, on the eve of the Famine the 2,500 acre Lucas-Clements estate at Tullyvin, near Cootehill had a significant number of cottiers. Indeed at the height of the Famine it was estimated that the Tullygarvey relief committee, which catered for the Lucas-Clements tenants, provided assistance to almost 2,000 cottiers who were given a pint of ‘good soup’ three times a week. Initially, with the coming of the potato blight in September 1845, there was little cause for concern in Tullygarvey and the cottier community, it was believed, had a store of potatoes to last winter. By the spring of 1846 however there was a realisation amongst the local gentry that alarm had

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14 See for example, Carleton, 1847; Guinan, 1910.
15 Carlyle, 1882, 188.
16 In the barony of Castlerahan in County Cavan, for example, some 2,842 cottiers made up 37% of the population; in Crosserlough 2,817 cottiers amounted to 34% of the population, while in the small parish of Denn there were 365 cottiers, or 31% of the population.
17 LCA, ‘Minute book of the Rathkenny Relief Committee, 1847.’
turned to panic amongst the cottier community. In April 1846 it was reported that
typhus was raging in Cootehill where most had gone in search of food and relief.
According to a report:

The potatoes are run out with many families and there is no means of procuring meal;
each farmer being able do more than the work of his own farm, leaves no employment
for the poor. Fever is raging to an alarming extent: it commences with the poor, but has
extended its ravages to persons in more comfortable circumstances. I have buried a
man on yesterday, on whose exertions fifteen or sixteen persons depended for support.
His widow, with eleven of his family, may enter the poor-house soon as they are able, if
admitted, for the Guardians are unwilling to admit persons rising out fever.\(^\text{18}\)

Even at this early stage of the crisis it was the cottiers who were disproportionately
affected by the Famine, reflected in the voluminous petitions for support, charity
and relief which were sent to the relief committees. For example, the plight of
families such as the Shevlins who were said to be ‘nearly starved to death’ and
the Donnochos [sic] who were ‘almost starved to death’ were representative of
this poverty. These were of course some of the fortunate ones who could pen or
have a petition written on their behalf. By the end of the year a travel writer passing
through County Cavan in early 1847 noted that ‘the county of Cavan I found very
bad, almost every part, and little or no labour done the small farms, the Work-
houses all full.\(^\text{19}\)

The unavailability of work on the small farms naturally drove the cottier class
to commit crime, a fact reflected by Philip Smyth, secretary of the Larah relief
committee who lamented that the ‘Famine has made sad savages among its
poor’.\(^\text{20}\) Now with starvation looming they turned to the public works for survival.
Primarily aimed at men because of the nature of the work, the public works schemes
also included women and children. An examination of these schemes provides a
unique insight into the world of the cottier during the Famine years. Those put to
work ranged from fifteen to seventy years, although the average age was forty-
two. These ‘cottiers’ had little alternative than to apply to the relief works and an
examination of their holdings suggested that they needed alternative employment
for survival. For example, throughout County Cavan there were regional variations:
in the parish of Drung the average holding of those engaged in relief works was
1.76 acres, whereas in Drumheriff it was 0.9 acres and even less (0.45 acres)
in Cornakill. The willingness to engage in labour on the public works schemes
distinguished them from their counterparts elsewhere where something of a culture
of dependency on food relief had existed since the early 1830s.\(^\text{21}\)

\(^\text{18}\) Dublin Evening Post, 18 Apr. 1846.
\(^\text{19}\) Northern Whig, 19 Jan. 1847.
\(^\text{20}\) Dublin, National Archives of Ireland [NAI], RLFC 3/2/4/23. Philip Smyth, Secretary of the Larah
Relief Committee to Lord Lieutenant, Dublin Castle, 23 Feb. 1847.
\(^\text{21}\) Reilly, 2014b, 27.
The Rathkenny relief committee were particularly adamant that those employed on the public works schemes were those who held less than three acres of land and possessed no cows or corn. In most cases the petitions seeking employment on the public works came from the ‘poor cottier class’.22 Indeed, it is interesting how within the cottier community there were varying ways of describing their own poverty with some claiming that they were ‘quite destitute’; ‘destitute of anything’ and ‘very destitute’. And there were numerous examples of this hardship. John Gulshannon, for example, petitioned for help as he had his mother, a woman aged eighty and confined to a bed, to support and two sisters who could not get work.23 Others like Michael Barlow of Lamgelton petitioned for help as he had ‘very little food’ and his ticket for the public works had been taken from him.24 The petitions also highlight another important aspect in the lives of the cottier class. The onset of Famine significantly altered the role of women and many were portrayed as being a burden on the family unit. Indeed, the number of women in a household was frequently used to highlight the plight of a family. Indeed, this problem of having too many girls was exactly what perturbed Ann and Mary Shalvey in 1847. Seeking work on the public works, the Shalveys’ noted that their circumstances were particularly acute because there was ‘five of them without a father’.25 The findings for the parishes of Rathkenny, Tullyvin East and Tullyvin West largely reflect other areas of the county, including the barony of Castlerahan where cottier families had an average of five people per household. However, there were individual circumstances where families were substantially bigger and it was not uncommon for some to have twelve or thirteen people. Where families of this size were predominantly female it caused serious concerns for survival. William Moore, for example, a poor cottier, informed the relief committee that he had ‘no food these many days only cabbage’ and as a father of ten children, four of whom were unable to work, he desperately sought assistance.26

Poverty in Famine-time Cavan did not know religious bounds. Indeed, an examination of the cottier population in Tullygarvey would suggest that there were a significant number of Protestants, as opposed to other areas of the country where the cottier class were predominantly Catholic. While it is difficult to ascertain to what extent Catholic cottiers were members of their church, the evidence suggests that they were ‘outside’ their communities, and only further analysis of parish records would accurately determine this. However, the fact that there were very few petitions written on behalf of cottiers by priests, suggests perhaps that they did not turn to the clergy in a time of crisis. It was less so with members of the Church of Ireland who sought the help of the Revd. Beresford and others in penning petitions. By

24 LCA, ‘Petition of Michael Barlow to T. Lucas-Clements’, nd.
extension the cottier population benefited little from the relaxing of the penal laws and subsequent introduction of national school education in Ireland in the 1830s and remained very much outside the community of education. They possessed little education compared to the small farmer class, some of whom could read and/or write. This isolation within the community posed a number of problems for the cottier population when the Famine struck and merely identifying themselves proved to be one of the biggest challenges they faced.

The survival of the cottier community in the barony of Tullygarvey depended largely on the local relief committees which were formed. Playing an important role in these committees was Theophilus Lucas-Clements, a prominent member of the Grand Orange Lodge and resident landlord. Crucially for the success of the committees, Lucas-Clements worked closely throughout the 1830s and 1840s with resident gentry, clergy and others in providing relief. However, despite doing so much, even Clements and other landholders realised that the amount of relief granted was insufficient to ‘answer the calls of destitution’. In some parts of the barony relief was not enough to prevent large scale mortality and the decline in population was staggering. In Drung, for example the population declined by 36%; in Tullyvin West by 29%; in Tullyvin East by 36%, while in Rathkenny it declined by 18%. This latter figure might suggest greater relief measures close to Lucas-Clements’ demesne at Rathkenny, but nonetheless the task which the relief committees faced was significant. The scale of relief measures in the barony provides an insight into the level of destitution which prevailed. For example, during ‘Black 47’ the Rathkenny Relief Committee oversaw the distribution of more than 9,000 daily rations to a starving population.

On a practical level the relief committee was determined that its resources should stretch as far as possible and provide for the thousands of cottiers who inhabited the barony. In order to do so, tenders were issued for yellow meal and oatmeal, whereby merchants were asked to submit samples of the food before being offered the contract. This food was distributed at the outdoor relief station set up at Tullyvin parsonage. Rations were generally distributed in two groups: first, to those under nine years of age and secondly to those over nine. To safeguard against theft, the committee ensured that the boiler and the cooking materials were kept secure at all times. In most instances it was deemed advantageous to provide cooked food to the cottiers as they did not possess the means or the knowledge to cook. In late May 1847, conscious that their efforts were not enough to stem the tide of hunger, the committee decided to increase the rations given to the poor by supplying eight ounces of bread with the quart of ‘stirabout’ or soup.

Perhaps their greatest energies were spent entering and deciding on names to be included on the relief lists, an indication that not everyone claiming assistance...
was deemed ‘deserving’. To counteract fraudulent claims those in receipt of relief were given a ticket in order to properly identify them, but in most cases it was difficult to identify cottiers such was their nomadic existence up until this point and many were simply unknown to the relief committee members. For this reason many chose not to describe themselves as cottiers when applying for relief. It was with this in mind that the relief committee imposed stricter measures for inclusion on the public works and also in the issuing of relief. Realising this cottiers soon scrambled to have character references written to vouch for their character or indeed simply to identify them as belonging to the district; indeed, one poor cottier described how his family were resident in the same area ‘since the wars of Ireland’ (meaning the 1689-91 wars).  

However, even where people were given character references there were still considerable problems with ascertaining the legitimacy of claims. Those like Patrick Donoho [sic] claimed that certain people were ‘men of large properties who can live very well without it’. To address such claims the relief committee appointed a number of men to visit and inspect the legitimacy of claims. For example, when Robert Bannon visited and examined the ‘capital’ of Edward Donoho, he was happy to declare that the latter was ‘destitute of food – he is in great distress’. However, other surveys such as at the townland of Cohaw in 1847 revealed that many of those in receipt of relief had cows and sacks of oats and corn, despite their claims of destitution.

Although the general assumption is that these were merely works which benefited the landlord or that the work was merely ‘roads going nowhere’, in Tullygarvey thousands depended on it for their survival. Certainly mortality would have been far greater were it not for the judicious management of the public work schemes. Importantly too, the public work scheme at Rathkenny also catered for cottier women, those, for example, like Margaret Dunn who looked to be included as with eight children she was in ‘great distress’, and Ann Martin who was willing to carry out any work in an effort to provide for her family. Not everyone, however, was enamoured by the public works overseers and predictably there were charges of dishonesty and fraud levelled against them. Of course tenants removed from the public works list felt particularly aggrieved and accusations of bias and sectarianism abounded. Thomas Little, for example, in particular took umbrage at the fact that several overseers were also employing their sons, paying themselves extensive wages while there were ‘many distressed creatures not employed’. Another outspoken critic of the public works was the Revd Peter Clarke, PP of Drung,

\[29\] LCA, Peter & Pat Brady to T. Lucas-Clements, 11 Nov. 1846.  
\[30\] LCA, Patrick Donoho to T. Lucas-Clements, nd.  
\[31\] LCA, Robert Bannon to T. Lucas-Clements, nd.  
\[32\] See, e.g., LCA, Robert Graham to T. Lucas-Clements, 1 Dec. 1846.  
\[33\] LCA, William Anderson to T. Lucas-Clements, 25 Nov. 1846.  
\[34\] See, e.g., LCA, ‘Petition of Michael Gilligan and Michael Haughey to T. Lucas-Clements’, nd.  
\[35\] LCA, Thomas Little to T. Lucas-Clements, nd.
who although a member of the committee was critical of some of the measures implemented. There was also particular ire amongst the cottier population that the small farmer class were included on the public work schemes, arguing that they were not ‘the deserving poor’. Indeed, even Lucas-Clements agreed with this point, arguing that the destitute who had farms would be better served working on them as there was ‘little or no labour going on especially in the small farms’.

The relative success of the Rathkenny and Tullygarvey relief committees was commendable, helped by the fact that there was collective effort, both Catholic and Protestant, and little squabbling over religious and political issues which were a feature elsewhere. Earlier crises, such as in 1822 when the government initiated a public works scheme, meant that the relief committee understood what needed to be done, although they did not have the resources to prevent mortality everywhere. In providing relief, the committee relied heavily on local subscriptions which by the summer of 1847 were almost exhausted. From July a considerable number of people were struck off the relief lists and work schemes after it was found that they had been getting relief elsewhere. Ultimately, those that bore the brunt of these new stringent guidelines were the cottier population. By the end of December 1847 just over 300 men remained in employment on the Tullygarvey relief scheme, only a quarter of the number who had been active in the public works at the beginning of the year. Likewise, within the barony, the Rathkenny relief works had ceased and the Drumgoon relief committee disbanded in the same month. However, it was apparent to all that poverty and distress still prevailed to a large extent. Naturally, the cessation of works had a dramatic effect on this starving population. A family of five, for example, reported how they were left to support themselves on three pence worth of turnips. For others in a ‘deplorable state’ their prospects were bleak, ‘dying of dysentery accompanied with slow fever, faster than they can be buried’.

The cottier class in Cavan, and elsewhere, were obliterated by the Famine. As Thomas Carlyle noted in 1849 while touring Ireland ‘Moor, moor, brown heather, and peat-pots, here and there a speck reclaimed into bright green, - and the poor cottier oftenest gone’. For some contemporary commentators there was no lament for the removal of the cottier class who were blamed for many of the social ills of the country. It was probably this that the Parnellite MP, Justin McCarthy had in mind when he commented that ‘terrible as the immediate effects of the Famine are it is impossible for any friend of Ireland to say that, on the whole, it did not

36 LCA, T. Lucas-Clements to Robert Graham, 1 Jun. 1847.
37 Reilly, 2014a, 70–1.
38 The rules of the relief committee were straightforward about eligibility. According to the regulations laid out for the relief committees, gratuitous relief was only to be given to three groups: the destitute helpless; the destitute, able bodied and not holding land, and holders of small portions of land. In addition, the waged were not to be given any relief and those that were, were means tested.
39 Dublin Evening Post, 23 Sept. 1847.
40 LCA, unsigned letter to T. Lucas-Clements, 17 Jan. 1848.
41 Carlyle, 1882, 197.
bring much good with it'. Somewhat more curtly, the County Kildare middleman, Charles Carey remarked that the removal of thecottier class in general would ‘weed the country of whores, pickpockets, robbers and murderers and make a complete hell in America’. Likewise, for Hugh Dorian and others, the removal of such large numbers of the poor gave ‘the remainder, though few, a chance of thinking for themselves’. For cottiers theirs was a precarious existence and one which was often determined by outside factors, beyond their control. In many ways the world of cottier remained ‘outside’ of religion, education, and the local community alienating them further when the Famine struck in the mid-1840s. Yet, the question remains: who was ultimately responsible for them when the Famine crisis commenced. Landlords, at the top of the economic pyramid or the small farmer class who had facilitated their existence?

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42 Quoted in Bew, 2007, 213.
43 Reilly, 2014c.
44 MacSuibhne & Dickson, 2000, 172–3.


