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The Irish Potato Famine and its Effects on the Irish Peasants in the mid-19th Century

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The Irish Potato Famine and its Effects on the Irish Peasants in the mid-19th Century

Thomas Olszewski, HIS 300

Background Information

The subject of this research project is the Great Irish Potato Famine that took place between 1845 and 1852. Ultimately, the goal of this project was to describe the effects of the famine on the Irish peasants while also looking at the relationship between the Irish and British. The first section of the research paper describes what life was like for the Irish peasants before the Great Famine began. During this time, the Irish peasants relied solely on the potato as their source of food and this crop was unreliable. Between 1740 and 1845 famines occurred regularly but the potato was still the only source of nutrition for the peasants. This would inevitably lead to the Great Famine which decimated the peasant population in Ireland.

Starvation

In 1845 a disease began afflicting the potato crop which caused the harvest for that year as well as the years following it to fail. The loss of the potato yielded devastating results for the Irish peasants who relied on it for their survival. While efforts were made by the British to alleviate the effects of the famine, they were not enough to keep Irish deaths to a minimum. As a result, millions of Irish peasants found themselves without the only source of food they had at the time.

Disease

While initially the main effect of the Famine on the Irish peasants was starvation another problem began to arise in the form of disease. During this period diseases began to spread among the peasants because they were gathering to receive relief. *The Dublin quarterly journal of medical science* wrote that “the same reasons that caused typhus fever to spread, and commit such dreadful ravages in 1846 and 1847 will produce a like effect with regard to cholera.” These diseases combined with widespread starvation to cause the deaths of thousands of Irish peasants.

Emigration

After years of dealing with starvation and disease many Irish peasants made the decision to leave the country altogether. According to the book *The Great Famine in Ireland and a Retrospect of the Fifty Years 1845-95* “the number of the Irish population who emigrated to the United States and British North America was 1,174,311.” By the end of the famine a significant percentage of the Irish population either died or left the country completely due to the famine conditions.

British Response

The Great Famine occurred at a time when Ireland and Britain were unified. This was crucial because it meant the British had to help the Irish with any problems that afflicted them. As a result, the British were asked to send relief when the famine began to destroy the potato crop. The British implemented various relief systems which included the introduction of Indian corn, the Labour Rate Act, and other monetary donations. While these efforts provided short term relief, they did not do enough to keep the Irish people from dying in significant numbers. The result of this failure was the death and subsequent departure of a substantial percentage of the Irish peasant population.

Final Thoughts

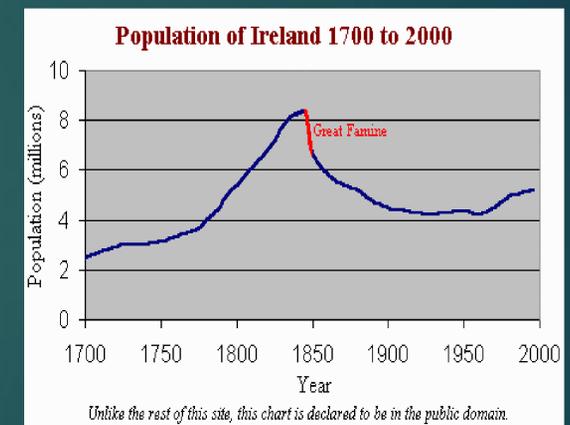
Overall, The Irish Potato Famine was a devastating event that occurred due to various factors. These include the Irish peasant's overreliance on the potato as well as the shortcomings of the British relief plans. As a result, many peasants either died or emigrated to another country to pursue a better life.

References

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Infected potato
<http://blogs.smithsonianmag.com/science/files/2013/05/potato.jpg>



Irish population from 1700 to 2000
https://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/famine/demographics_pre.html