THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY CORK

The Rural Economy and the Land Question

James S. Donnelly, Jr.

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Volume 5

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To my father

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ABBREVIATIONS

C.C.	*Constitution; or Cork Advertiser.*
C.E.	*Cork Examiner.*
H.C.	House of commons.
N.L.I.	National Library of Ireland.
n.p.	no place of publication.
P.R.O.	Public Record Office of England.
P.R.O.I.	Public Record Office of Ireland.
S.P.O., C.S.O.	State Paper Office of Ireland (Dublin Castle), Chief Secretary's Office.
W.C.E.	*West Cork Eagle and County Advertiser.*

Note: For other abbreviations used in footnotes, see 'Rules for contributors to *Irish Historical Studies*', second edition, by T. W. Moody, in *Irish Historical Studies*, supplement I (Jan. 1968).

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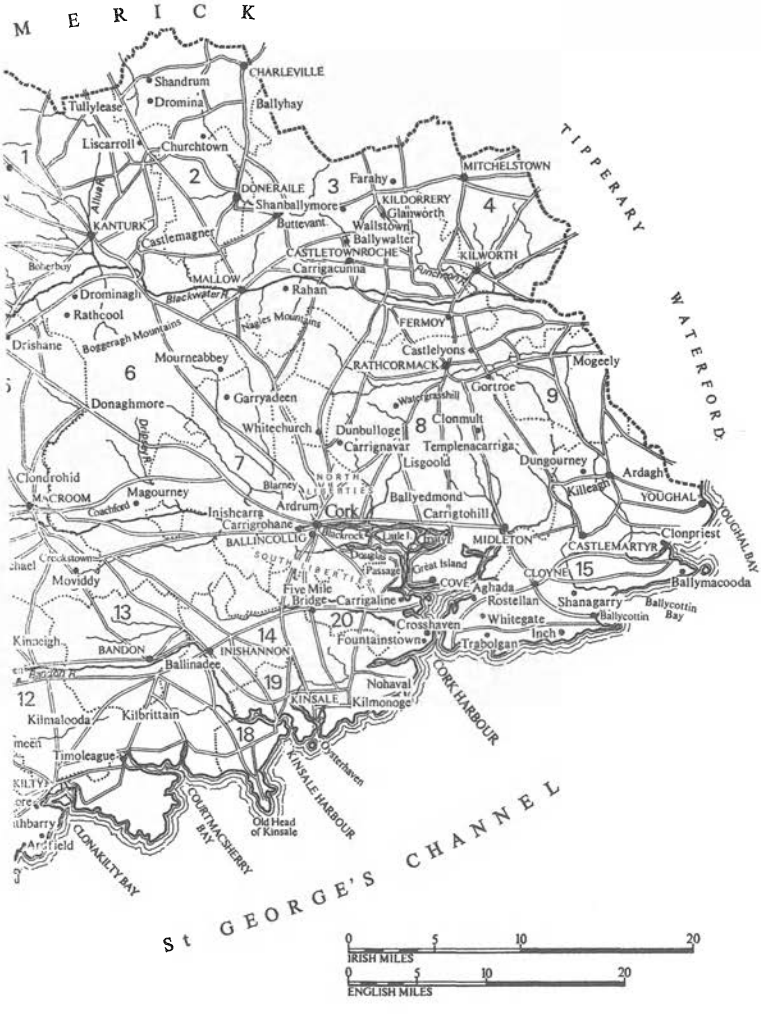
JAMES S. DONNELLY, JR.

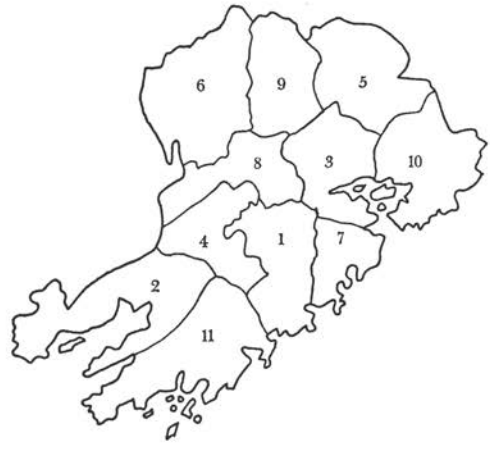
The University of Wisconsin, Madison


Baronies
1 Duhallow
2 Orrery and Kilmore
3 Fermoy
4 Condons and Clangibbon
5 West Muskerry
6 East Muskerry
7 Barretts
8 Barrymore
9 Kinnatalloon
10 Bear
11 Bantry
12 East Carbery
13 Kinalmeaky
14 Kinalea
15 Imokilly
16 West Carbery
17 Ibane and Barryroe
18 Courceys
19 Kinsale
20 Kerrycurrihy
KERRY
NEWMARKE
KINGWILLIAMSTOW
Nohavaldaly
Knocknagree
MILLSTREET
Ballyvourney
Derrynasaggart Mts
Sullane R.
Inchigeelagh
Kenmare R.
Glengarriff
Shehy Mountains
Kilmurr
COULAGH BAY
Knocknagree
Allihies Copper Mines
Hungry Hill
Kilcaskan
Whiddy Island
Kealkill
Castleto
Ballydonegan Bay
CASTLETOWN BEARHAVEN
Bear Haven
Bear Island
BANTRY
DUNMANWAY
Drimoleague
Drinagh
Dromdaleag
Kilmocomoge
BANTRY BAY
Durrus
Caheragh
Castleventry
Kilcrohane
Sheep's Head
DUNMANUS BAY
Ballydehob
Abbeystrowry
SKIBBEREEN
Myross
Rosscarbery
Skull
Castletownsend
Castlehaven
Goleen
Crookhaven
Tullagh
Creagh
Mizenhead
ROARING WATER BAY
Calf Islands
Baltimore
CASTLEHAVEN BAY
Clear Island
Sheep's Head
BALTIMORE HARBOUR

MAP I Cork

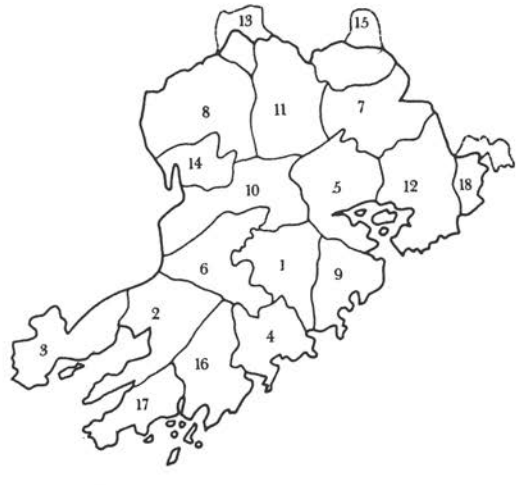

M E R I C K
CHARLEVILLE
Shandrum
Tullylease
Dromina
Ballyhay
Liscarroll
Churchtown
DONERAILE
Shanballymore
Buttevant
Farahy
MITCHELSTOWN
KILDORRERY
Glanworth
Wallstown
Ballywalter
CASTLETOWNROCHE
KILWORTH
TIPPERARY
KANTURK
Castlemagner
Allua R.
Boherboy
MALLOW
Carrigacunna
Blackwater R.
Rahan
Dromina
Rathcool
Drishane
Boggeragh Mountains
Nagles Mountains
FERMOY
Castlelyons
RATHCORMACK
Mogeely
Mourneabbey
Garryadeen
Donaghmore
Gortroe
Clonmult
Dunbulloge
Whitechurch
Carrignavar
Templenacarriga
Lisgoold
Dungourney
Ardagh
Killeagh
YOUGHAL
YOUGHAL BAY
WATERFORD
Clondrohid
MACROOM
Magourney
Coachford
Inishcarra
Ardrum
Cork
Blarney
Ballyedmond
Carrigtohill
Carrigrohane
BALLINCOLLIG
Blackrock
Little I.
Passage
MIDLETON
CASTLEMARTYR
Clonpriest
Crookstown
Douglas
Great Island
COVE
Aghada
CLOYNE
Ballymacooda
Moviddy
Five Mile Bridge
Carrigaline
Rostellan
Shanagarry
Ballycottin
Ballycottin Bay
Whitegate
Crosshaven
Fountainstown
Trabolgan
Inch
Kinsale
BANDON
Ballinadee
INISHANNON
Bandon R.
Nohaval
Kilmonoge
CORK HARBOUR
Kilmalooda
Kilbrittain
Timoleague
Castlehaven
KINSALE HARBOUR
COURTMACSHERRY BAY
Old Head of Kinsale
CLONAKILTY BAY
St GEORGE'S CHANNEL
IRISH MILES
ENGLISH MILES
0 5 10 20

1 Bandon
2 Bantry
3 Cork
4 Dunmanway
5 Fermoy
6 Kanturk
7 Kinsale
8 Macroom
9 Mallow
10 Midleton
11 Skibbereen



(a) Cork poor-law unions, pre-1850

1 Bandon
2 Bantry
3 Castletown
4 Clonakilty
5 Cork
6 Dunmanway
7 Fermoy
8 Kanturk
9 Kinsale
10 Macroom
11 Mallow
12 Midleton
13 Milford
14 Millstreet
15 Mitchelstown
16 Skibbereen
17 Skull
18 Youghal



(b) Cork poor-law unions, post-1850

MAP 2

Source: *First report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the number and boundaries of the poor law unions and electoral divisions in Ireland, with appendix and plans* [1015], H.C. 1849, xxiii, 369.

INTRODUCTION

NINETEENTH-CENTURY IRISH history has largely been the preserve of students of politics and government, and, more narrowly, of those fascinated by the leading political personalities and their movements or parties. This trend in modern Irish historical scholarship has produced several biographical works of outstanding merit on prominent political figures and equally stimulating analytical studies of nearly all the great political movements—catholic emancipation, repeal, Young Ireland, the Tenant League, Fenianism, and home rule. Rarely, however, as Nicholas Mansergh points out, has the question been asked, what was the relation of these personalities and movements to the social and economic conditions of their times?

> Is it not deserving of consideration whether Parnell—to take the classic example—was in part at least the product of a particular environment and, if so, why? Could he have emerged as a leader twenty or thirty years earlier, in the fifties or the sixties? . . . Had the tenant farmers accumulated enough capital, and in consequence did they possess the necessary minimal independence, in those earlier years, to make the politico-social struggle of the eighties under Parnell's and Davitt's leadership possible? Did Parnell attain his position because of or in spite of emigration? Could he have maintained the struggle without American funds? Would those funds have been forthcoming twenty years earlier, before the Irish emigrants were established in the United States? Even the asking of such questions suggests the lacunae in historical knowledge which overmuch dependence on political narrative may leave.[1]

The 'vast expanses of virtually unworked territory' in the field of Irish economic history have now been widely recognized, as has the need for local studies, although the ground that must be recovered is indeed great.[2]

[1] Mansergh, *Ir. question*, p. 291.

[2] T. W. Moody, 'A new history of Ireland' in *I.H.S.*, xvi, no. 63 (Mar. 1969), pp. 244–5.

This study seeks to cover a portion of that ground by focusing on two central and interrelated themes of nineteenth-century Irish history—the rural economy and the land question—from the perspective of the country's southernmost county, Cork. The choice of Cork was determined by several considerations. As the largest and most populous of the thirty-two counties, covering some 1,850,000 acres, or almost 10 per cent of the country's total area, and containing 850,000 inhabitants in 1841, or slightly more than 10 per cent of its population, Cork accounted for substantial fractions of both the land and the people of nineteenth-century Ireland.[3] Moreover, neither the quality of the land nor the manner of life of the people was uniform throughout the county. Just as the east and west of Ireland manifested substantial differences with respect to population density, soil fertility, and patterns of landholding and land use, so too did East and West Cork.[4] The county has therefore some claim to be regarded as a microcosm of the entire country. To have chosen one of the naturally impoverished counties of Connaught or one of the Leinster counties richly endowed by nature would have entailed the loss of this microcosmic quality.

Although this work is concerned almost exclusively with rural life and takes cognizance of urban developments only in a few cases where they impinged directly on the rural economy, the presence of an urban metropolis further enhanced County Cork's attractiveness as an area of investigation. With nearly 81,000 inhabitants in 1841, Cork city on the River Lee was not only Ireland's second largest town but also the great agricultural mart for the six counties of Munster province. Drawing on the large produce of a wide hinterland, its grain warehouses and livestock yards, its provision stores and bacon-curing factories, its distilleries and breweries, and above all its world-famous butter market made Cork city the third largest Irish port in trade volume after Dublin and Belfast.[5] The city's two outstanding newspapers, the catholic and nationalist *Cork Examiner*, and the protestant and conservative *Cork Constitution*, provided a wealth of information relating to the economic and social circumstances of their rural constituency.

If there are sound reasons for selecting County Cork as the area of inquiry, the choice of the rural economy and the land question as the central themes was virtually predetermined by socio-economic realities. 'The catholic of Ireland', wrote the French

[3] *Census Ire., 1841* [504], H.C. 1843, xxiv, 1, pp. 169, 190.

[4] T. W. Freeman, *Pre-famine Ireland: a study in historical geography* (Manchester, 1957), pp. 203, 226, 229, 236.

[5] Ibid., pp. 203, 225, 227.

traveller Gustave de Beaumont in 1839, 'finds only one profession within his reach, the culture of the soil; and when he has not the capital necessary to become a farmer, he digs the ground as a day labourer. . . . He who has not a spot of ground to cultivate, dies of famine.'[6] And Karl Marx observed in 1870 that 'the *land question* has hitherto been the *exclusive* form of the social question in Ireland, because it is a question of existence, *of life and death*, for the immense majority of the Irish people'.[7] Outside the northeast, there was very little factory industry, although much domestic spinning and weaving of wool and linen. The classification of the Irish population by occupations in 1841 showed that 66 per cent of all families depended upon farming for their livelihood.[8] In County Cork in the same year, slightly more than 70 per cent of all families—almost 98,000 out of a total of 133,000 families—were employed in agriculture.[9]

Despite their supreme importance, the rural economy and the land question have claimed relatively little scholarly attention. The half-century leading up to the great famine is much better known and understood in this respect than the second half of the century, thanks largely to the work of Kenneth H. Connell and a few other researchers. Both in his pioneering study, *The population of Ireland, 1750–1845* (Oxford, 1950), and in subsequent articles, Connell has deftly explored the concatenation of factors—the expansion of tillage, the fragmentation of holdings, the spread of the potato, and the earliness of marriage—which he believes were responsible for the great population explosion that led ultimately to the famine catastrophe. In so doing, he has corrected several errors of interpretation in the old but still useful survey by George O'Brien, *The economic history of Ireland from the union to the famine* (London, 1921). Connell's views on the importance of early marriages and the spread of a potato diet as well as on the unimportance of inoculation against smallpox have been challenged, however, and these questions still remain open to debate. Irish economic underdevelopment attracted wide attention among contemporary British and foreign economists. Their perceptions of the outstanding problems have been analysed comprehensively in R. D. Collison Black's *Economic thought and the Irish question, 1817–1870* (Cambridge, 1960), which

[6] G. de Beaumont, *Ireland: social, political, and religious*, ed. W. C. Taylor (London, 1839), i, 262.

[7] K. Marx to S. Meyer and A. Vogt, 9 Apr. 1870, quoted in Mansergh, *Ir. question*, p. 100.

[8] Freeman, *Pre-famine Ireland*, p. 75.

[9] *Census Ire., 1841*, p. 191. Cork city is not included in these figures.

shows the influence of these theoreticians over the Irish policies of British governments as well as the counterinfluence of Irish realities upon the theoreticians.

Certain subjects discussed in the present study of County Cork have received excellent treatment from a national perspective. The second chapter has been greatly influenced in organization and argumentation by Mrs Cecil Woodham-Smith's *The great hunger: Ireland, 1845–1849* (New York, 1962) and even more by the scholarly contributions to *The great famine: studies in Irish history, 1845–52*, edited by R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams (Dublin, 1956). The discussion of agriculture throughout this work is heavily indebted, despite disagreement at a number of points, to John O'Donovan's *The economic history of live stock in Ireland* (Cork, 1940) as well as to Raymond D. Crotty's more recent *Irish agricultural production: its volume and structure* (Cork, 1966). While Crotty's work is too theoretical in approach and weak and confusing on the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century background, his illuminating observations on rents, land tenure, and agricultural investment, as well as his painstaking compilation of the first price series for the principal farm products before 1840, have proved extremely helpful. Equally instructive is Crotty's account of post-famine structural changes in agriculture, although in treating the years from 1850 to 1900 as a single unit, he blurs the important distinction that should be made between agricultural conditions before and after 1876. The exploration of this vital distinction is one of the outstanding merits of Barbara L. Solow's *The land question and the Irish economy, 1870–1903* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971). Mrs Solow has clearly demonstrated the substantial improvements made in Irish agriculture between the famine and the late 1870s. Moreover, she has argued quite convincingly that the land-tenure system during those years was not a significant obstacle to agricultural progress. Her study is a much needed corrective to the misleading treatment of the economic background of the land war found in nearly all previous works concerned with that great socio-political upheaval.

Hopefully, the present work will also help to clarify the fundamental changes which took place in both the rural economy and the land question during the nineteenth century. This study begins by showing why rural society became engulfed after 1815 in a crisis of appalling dimensions. Special emphasis is given at the very outset to the middleman system of estate management because of its crucial role in fostering fragmentation of holdings and population growth that in the case of the agricultural labourers and cottiers outstripped

the land's capacity to produce anything more than a bare subsistence diet of potatoes. Also explored is the extent to which this system, along with the severe deflation that followed the close of the Napoleonic wars, reduced the incomes of landowners and retarded the proper development of their estates. Agriculture, burdened with the serious difficulties imposed by population pressure, fragmented holdings, depressed prices, and dwindling overseas markets, is nevertheless shown to have responded strongly to these challenges through greatly expanded output in the tillage sector and through significant advances in farming techniques. Whether producers responded quickly enough to changing prices and market conditions that favoured a greater emphasis on livestock for export to Britain from the 1830s cannot yet be resolved conclusively, but this question is important and receives consideration. One possible solution to many of these pressing difficulties lay in a thorough revamping of estate administration. The fall in landowners' revenues after 1815 provided the incentive for this, and the decay of the middleman system in the 1830s and early 1840s furnished the opportunity. The widespread movement for the reform of estate administration before 1845 is examined, along with the considerable obstacles to change imposed by popular resistance, unexpired old leases, the deep indebtedness of many landowners, and the heavy weight of past neglect.

The great famine, with its horrifying toll of starvation, disease, death, and emigration, provided its own drastic answers to the problems of Irish agrarian society and left enduring marks on the rural economy and the land question. Chapter II shows that commercial farming in County Cork, oriented towards dairying and dry cattle, was strengthened by this human disaster, while subsistence agriculture was largely destroyed. Because of the inadequacy of relief measures and the inefficacy of food riots and food stealing, labourers and cottiers perished by the thousand. How landowners met or failed to meet the enormous difficulties of collecting rent and paying increased charges for poor rates and employment is discussed in some detail. Also examined are the ways in which they seized what seemed to them a great opportunity to pursue the reform of estate administration by ousting bankrupt middlemen, clearing their estates of paupers, weeding out broken tenants, and enlarging the holdings of those who remained. The geographical and social incidence of mortality and emigration is closely analysed in order to determine how drastically the famine altered the class structure and distribution of the population.

In their optimistic analysis of the rural economy and the land

question in the years between the great famine and the agricultural crisis of the late 1870s, Chapters III and IV confirm and extend recent challenges to the long accepted pessimistic interpretation. The third chapter shows that with the exception of the early 1860s, these years witnessed almost unparalleled prosperity for Cork farmers. Rising population and the benefits of the industrial revolution pushed the British demand for imported food steadily upward. With the shortage or absence of foreign supplies of meat and butter, the prices of Irish agricultural exports to Britain soared. The fourth chapter seeks to demonstrate that while estate management in Cork was deficient in some respects, most notably in the character of land agency, rack rents were far from being characteristic between 1850 and 1880. Indeed, increases in rent lagged far behind the price rise, as most Cork landowners displayed surprising moderation in their financial demands. Another objective of Chapter IV is to show that in so far as insecurity of tenure was an economic problem in Cork, it was largely the product of extraordinary pre-famine circumstances, that it had abated substantially by 1870, and that it was further modified by the land legislation of that year. By 1880, in fact, a solid majority of Cork tenants were leaseholders. And Cork landlords generally recognized the tenant's possessory interest in his holding, at least *de facto*, although, as is explained, they usually imposed restrictions upon the sale of that interest to an incoming tenant. The sale of goodwill and tenure arrangements in Cork were both affected by Gladstone's land act of 1870. While generally accepting Mrs Solow's new interpretation of the results of this legislation, the present study argues that Gladstone's ill-conceived measure helped to generate grievances that did not exist before.

The conventional view of the land war as the product of an intolerable, rapacious land system which finally cracked under the weight of a severe agricultural crisis in the late 1870s is rejected in this study of County Cork. Chapter V lays the basis for an alternative interpretation which largely attributes the land war to a 'revolution of rising expectations', or, in other words, to the conviction of tenant farmers that their impressive material gains in the preceding quarter-century could and must be preserved by a determined stand against the customary rents. The postponement of marriage, emigration, and agricultural prosperity are shown drastically to have changed the quality and style of rural life for the better. In order to demonstrate this far-reaching improvement in living standards, attention is focused upon capital accumulation in the form of bank savings and livestock as well as upon such important criteria as housing, diet, and education. The struggle of the agricultural labourers, whose progress

lagged behind that of tenant farmers, to achieve a fairer share of this increased prosperity is given special consideration.

The final two chapters of this work provide an extensive treatment of the land war in County Cork. Throughout, an attempt is made to take full advantage of the work of political historians by interweaving the political narrative with the story of a great national social movement which hastened the passing of the landlord from the Irish landscape. The immediate economic background is reconstructed at length and with extreme care because of its complex role in shaping the course and determining the tempo of events. On the whole, the character of economic causation presented in these chapters is quite different from that suggested by political historians. While the agricultural crisis of 1877–9 is given due prominence, the accepted view of the agrarian struggle as a revolt of semi-starved peasants is rejected. The improvement in economic conditions that began in mid-1880 is shown to have created a favourable atmosphere for a great assault against landlordism in which the techniques of agitation ranged from rent strikes and boycotting to violent 'moonlighting' and agrarian outrage, sometimes verging upon anarchy. While the 1881 land act, the suppression of the Land League, and the 'Kilmainham treaty' are shown to have helped to cause the simmering of agrarian strife from 1882, unaccustomed emphasis is also placed upon economic factors leading to this result. The local administration of the land legislation is examined to demonstrate its limited impact on rents and estate revenues in County Cork. But the influence of the first phase of the agitation in destroying the former credit standing of landlords and in depressing the market value of their estates is underscored.

The second phase of the land war (1884–92), like the first, is shown to have been rooted in economic difficulties, but the precise problems were different in kind or degree from those experienced earlier. Attention is called to major droughts in 1884 and 1887 as well as to the causes of the sharp downturn in agricultural prices, which previous writers on this period have often either overlooked completely or explained inaccurately. Chapter VII also assesses the influence of the extra-legal National League courts and of greatly extended boycotting in restraining the violence that had marked the land war's initial phase. In concept as well as in practice, the National League's 'Plan of Campaign' is shown to have been patterned upon earlier rent strikes, although these were notably less successful than the nationally organized resistance that began in October 1886. The operation of the Plan of Campaign in County Cork, and the countermeasures taken by the conservative govern-

ment and by the landlords' Cork Defence Union are analysed at length. In particular, the fascinating story of the protracted, bitter struggle on the Ponsonby estate is recounted in detail, as this property was the premier showcase in Ireland for Arthur Balfour's efforts to destroy the Plan through landlord victories on 'test estates'. In the winding down of the land war, an assessment is made of the local effects of the government's stern law enforcement and remedial land legislation, but equally strong emphasis is placed upon economic fluctuations. The notorious O'Shea divorce case of November 1890, with its disastrous political repercussions on Irish politics, is viewed as delivering the *coup de grâce* to a languishing agitation and preventing its revival. In the conclusion, an attempt is made to summarize the significance of the land war in the complex history of the nineteenth-century Irish land question.

In doing the research for this study, I have made extensive use of census data and agricultural returns, which are the most important of a whole series of statistical collections made by the highly efficient English administrative bureaucracy in Ireland. Much invaluable information has also been gathered from parliamentary inquiries, reports, and returns, beginning with the famous poor-law inquiry of 1835–6 and the Devon commission's voluminous investigation of the land question from 1843 to 1845. By far the most important sources for this study, however, were local newspapers and estate records—letter books, valuations, rentals, leases, etc. Unfortunately, as a result of human carelessness and Ireland's turbulent history, only a relatively small quantity of estate records has survived, especially for the pre-famine period. Moreover, the surviving material is often very fragmentary for individual estates. Nevertheless, after exhaustive searches in public and private archives in England and Ireland as well as in attics, cellars, stables, and barns throughout County Cork, enough has been discovered to furnish a solid basis upon which to reconstruct the framework of estate administration and to measure its impact on the rural economy and the land question. These records often suggest a course of events and causation that conflict with contemporary polemical assertions and with the views later adopted by historians of the period.

I

THE RURAL ECONOMY, 1815–45

ESTATE ADMINISTRATION, LAND TENURE, AND LABOUR

THE CENTRAL PURPOSE of this chapter is to explore certain aspects of the economy of County Cork between 1815 and 1845, beginning with the system of estate administration and land tenure. An understanding of this system and the alterations it underwent is essential for an accurate assessment of the various other forces determining economic and social change in this period. Pre-famine Cork may have had only about 1,000 landed proprietors, or head landlords.[1] But because of the prevalence of the middleman system, there were several times as many intermediate landlords as there were head landlords. During the eighteenth century, the most common method of managing large estates in Ireland was to split them into considerable tracts of from 100 to 1,000 acres or more, and then to give them to middlemen on long leases. The 'lower and middling sort' of protestant gentlemen made an easy but not untroubled living by taking, redividing, and subletting such land, usually to the tenants who actually occupied it, but sometimes to other intermediate

[1] The category of landed proprietor was unfortunately omitted from the classification of occupations given in the 1841 census, and the break-up and sale of many large estates under the incumbered estates act of 1849 greatly increased the number of landowners during the next twenty-five years. According to an official return of 1876, there were 1,763 owners of 100 acres or more in County Cork; the total number of persons owning property of one acre or more outside the towns of the county was 2,381 (*Copy of a return of the names of proprietors and the area and valuation of all properties in the several counties in Ireland, held in fee or perpetuity, or on long leases at chief rents . . .*, H.C. 1876 (412), lxxx, 395, p. 73).

landlords. Middlemen held by leases for various terms. Some leases were for a term of ninety-nine years or for even longer terms of years amounting to a perpetuity, but ordinarily they were for either two or three lives of young persons named in the lease, sometimes with a concurrent term of thirty-one or sixty-one years, and at other times with a reversionary term of twenty-one or thirty-one years that became operative after all the lives had 'dropped', or died.[2] Until 1778 catholics were prohibited from taking leases either for any term of years exceeding thirty-one or for lives, under a penal law of 1704. Saville's relief act of 1778, however, allowed them to take leases for any fixed term of years not exceeding 999 or for any number of lives up to five.[3] After the passage of this measure, many wealthy catholic farmers and merchants exercised their restored rights by becoming middlemen in increasing numbers for about a generation.[4]

The reason most frequently advanced by contemporaries for this curious system of estate management was that the occupying tenants generally lacked the means of making the needed but expensive permanent improvements. The likelihood was much greater, it was alleged, that middlemen of substance would carry them out. In a country largely without resident, improving landowners, the next best thing was resident, improving intermediate landlords. As the argument was crudely put to Arthur Young during his tour of Ireland in the late 1770s, the middleman would 'at least improve a spot around his own residence, whereas the mere cottar can do nothing'.[5] Young, who could find nothing good to say about the system, objected that middlemen very frequently were neither resident nor the progressive promoters of improvement that their defenders claimed. London, Bath, Dublin, and the country towns of Ireland, said Young, were full of non-resident middlemen. Indeed, he found that 'these men very generally were the masters of packs of wretched hounds, with which they wasted their time and money, and

[2] J. Barry, 'The duke of Devonshire's Irish estates, 1794–1797: Reports by Henry Bowman, agent, with a brief description of the Lismore Castle MSS in the National Library' in *Anal. Hib.*, no. 22 (1960), pp. 275–6.

[3] Formerly, catholics had been debarred not only from purchasing land but even from inheriting it by primogeniture. The relief act, however, permitted them to inherit and bequeath land on the same terms as protestants (17 & 18 Geo. 3, c. 49; Beckett, *Mod. Ire.* (New York, 1966), p. 214).

[4] Even before 1778, while they were still restricted to short leases for terms not exceeding thirty-one years, catholics seem to have often become middlemen. For examples of this, see *Kenmare MSS*, pp. 184–5, 211–15 229–30, 254–62.

[5] A. Young, *Arthur Young's tour in Ireland (1776–1779)*, ed. A. W. Hutton (London and New York, 1892), ii, 25.

it is a notorious fact that they are the hardest drinkers in Ireland'.[6] Characteristics that appeared damning to Young, however, were not necessarily deprecated by late eighteenth-century Irish landowners, who valued middlemen for relieving them of the always troublesome collection of rent from a horde of seemingly rude and often poverty-stricken tenants.

The middleman system underwent an important change beginning in the 1790s. The simple picture of intermediate landlords who were either protestant gentry or wealthy catholic farmers and merchants became much more complex. In 1793 the parliamentary franchise was widened to include in the county electorate catholic leaseholders for lives as well as catholic forty-shilling freeholders.[7] The extension of the vote to catholic leaseholders for lives had considerable economic significance. Not all landowners, of course, had delegated the management of their estates to middlemen; some preferred to deal directly with the ordinary occupying tenants. These landowners, generally desiring local political influence, were encouraged by the legislation of 1793 to grant leases to their tenants under which the latter could qualify for the vote. This was in fact done to such an extent that most occupying tenants in County Cork who held their farms directly from the proprietor rather than from some middleman seem by the early 1800s to have been leaseholders, not yearly tenants.[8] Invariably, at least one franchise-qualifying life was inserted in the stated term of the lease. Despite the fact that by the early 1800s the general trend in cases of new lettings was towards short leases either for one life or for a term of twenty-one or thirty-one years, whichever lasted longer,[9] the Rev. Horatio Townsend observed that in the baronies of East and West Carbery 'the usual leases are for three lives, those of thirty-one years being discontinued since the extension of the elective franchise'.[10] The possession of a lease gave many occupying tenants the opportunity to join the ranks of the middlemen.

Head landlords expected that middlemen who leased large tracts

[6] Ibid., ii, 26.

[7] Beckett, *Mod. Ire.*, p. 250.

[8] In his discussion of the forms of tenure in different parts of Cork, Townsend mentions yearly tenants or tenants at will only once: some landholders in the baronies of Barrymore and Kinnatalloon depended upon 'the will of the landlord' (H. Townsend, *Statistical survey of the county of Cork, with observations on the means of improvement; drawn up for the consideration and by the direction of the Dublin Society* (Dublin, 1810), p. 584; hereafter cited as Townsend).

[9] Ibid., pp. 253, 468, 617.

[10] Ibid., p. 321.

of land from them would subsequently relet this land to the occupying tenantry, and therefore rarely inserted a covenant against subletting in their leases.[11] Nor did those proprietors who increasingly let their estates directly to the occupiers on long or short leases often insist upon such a covenant before 1815. Consequently, no legal obstacle existed to prevent these occupiers from becoming small middlemen in their own right by yielding either to the pressure of the population explosion on land resources during the Napoleonic wars, or to the need which they felt to augment their incomes during the long period of deflation following the wartime boom. Both the non-resident middleman of gentle birth and the occupying farmer with a lease tended to practise subletting because in the short run at least they succeeded in augmenting their incomes. The landowner who recognized that in the long run much of the security for the payment of the head rent was being seriously jeopardized by this injurious practice was very often powerless to correct the situation.

Probably a clear majority of Cork landowners found themselves at the mercy of long leaseholders up to the 1820s and 1830s, to a greater or lesser extent. As much as 65 per cent of the earl of Bandon's rent roll of £23,000 in 1821 was drawn from lessees for two, three, or four lives, 22 per cent from those with still longer terms, and only 13 per cent from those with shorter terms or from yearly tenants.[12] A similar pattern was evident on Viscount Midleton's estates. No less than 83 per cent of Midleton's rental of £15,000 in 1828 was paid by lessees for three lives, 9 per cent by those with equivalent or yet longer terms, and a mere 8 per cent by those with shorter leases or yearly tenures.[13] The earl of Kenmare's agent Christopher Gallwey informed the Devon commission that up to 1835 'all his lordship's estates in the barony of Bantry were held by middlemen at a very low rent, and yielding to them a very large beneficial interest'.[14] The earl of Egmont's agent Edward Tierney remarked in June 1835 that 'almost the entire of the estate is underlet, a great part on old leases for lives that soon may be expected to fall in'.[15] Lord Audley's whole estate had been let to a single

[11] Guildford Muniment Room, Surrey, Midleton papers: T. Foley to H. Marshall (extract and copy), 30 July 1842.

[12] Doherty papers, Cork Archives Council: Rent roll of the earl of Bandon's estates, Nov. 1821.

[13] Guildford Muniment Room, Midleton papers: Rent roll of Viscount Midleton's estates, 1828, with schedule of tenancies. The above percentages exclude most of the income from town property.

[14] *Devon comm. evidence*, pt iii [657], H.C. 1845, xxi, 1, p. 735.

[15] Barry papers, Printed copy of documents of respondents presented to the English court of chancery, *Egmont v. Darell* (1861): E. Tierney to

middleman on a ninety-nine-year lease in 1755, and the lease was not scheduled to expire until 1854.[16]

Careless, inefficient estate administration in general and the middleman system in particular furnished a hospitable framework within which the forces of the population explosion and the expansion of tillage farming brought about a striking and extremely dangerous increase in small holdings. Existing holdings were divided to provide the tenant's children with settlements when they married, or were sublet to augment the intermediate landlord's income from the rents of poor cottiers. New holdings were created through the reclamation and colonization of waste land. Viscount Midleton's estates, where the middleman system was entrenched until the 1830s, provide an extreme example of the encouragement which that system gave to subdivision and subletting. As the valuer Charles Bailey critically observed in his report of April 1840,

> many of the townlands are incumbered by an over population created by the improvident subdivisions and sublettings, and in several cases the pernicious system has been carried to such an extent as to create mouths sufficient to swallow up the whole of the produce, leaving nothing for rent.[17]

The holdings of middlemen swarmed with poor cottiers and cabin dwellers. The Rev. William Greene, himself a subtenant of thirty-seven acres, had 'allowed 45 cottages and cabins to be erected on the side of Ballynacurragh road, for which he receives the annual rent of £147 13*s*. 6*d*.'.[18] Joseph Haynes, who paid an annual rent of £73 for forty-six acres, had permitted sixty-four persons 'to build cabins on this holding and to occupy them, paying from 20*s*. to 25*s*. each as ground rent'.[19] On the sixty-six-acre farm of the Leahys, no less than ninety-eight cabins had been thrown up on the sides of a road. 'It is difficult to suggest what should be done with these cabins', Bailey commented; 'they are a nuisance to the property and a nursery for increasing the population.'[20] The thirty acres held by James Baggs under an old lease at a rent of less than £9 per

[16] W. N. Hancock, *On the causes of distress at Skull and Skibbereen during the famine in Ireland: a paper read before the statistical section of the British Association, at Edinburgh, August 2nd, 1850* (Dublin, 1850), p. 5.

[17] P.R.O.I., ref. no. 978, Midleton papers: Charles Bailey's summary report on the valuation of the Midleton estates, 6 Apr. 1840.

[18] Ibid.: Valuation of Viscount Midleton's estates, 1840, p. 16.

[19] Ibid., p. 52.

[20] Ibid., pp. 56–7.

W. Woodgate, 29 June 1835, pp. 204–6; hereafter cited as *Egmont v. Darell, documents of respondents* (in the possession of Charles M. Barry and Son, Solicitors, Cashel, Co. Tipperary).

annum had been entirely sublet at £4 an acre, and on a portion of the holding thirty-seven cabins had been built.[21] John Scanlan, who paid an annual rent of £85 for forty-six acres, had underlet almost all of it to five other tenants for £146, and also collected £30 from ten cabin holders.[22] Much larger farms had also been minutely subdivided. A number of joint tenants of the lands known as Ballyannan had sublet to many others, 'making together 63 occupiers on 292½ acres'.[23] A tenant named Wigmore had divided a large tract of 400 acres between his two sons, Thomas and William; Thomas Wigmore's portion had been further divided among eight tenants and his brother William's among seven. The Wigmores paid a combined rent of only £69 under an old lease for three lives, but collected £321 from the fifteen undertenants.[24]

The encouragement which the system of long leases gave to the population explosion was painfully evident on other estates. A 750-acre tract on the Rathcool property of Sir George Colthurst, which had originally been let to a middleman on a lease for three lives sometime before 1770 and then sublet to two other tenants, came out of lease in late 1845. Colthurst's agent, Peter Fitzgerald, found that 'instead of two tenants and their families, with the proportionate number of labourers, there were on these lands over 300 inhabitants'.[25] Fitzgerald, who owned practically all of Valentia Island off the southwestern coast of Kerry, also suffered from the mistaken predilection of one of his ancestors for the middleman system. He explained the circumstances to Lord Cloncurry in December 1847:

> My estate was let in 1795 . . . on thirteen leases of 3 lives, to 13 substantial middlemen—those tenures average four to five hundred acres each. The [middlemen] tenants, after building houses and performing nominally a few other covenants, violated their engagements of improvement and became nearly altogether absentees, sub-dividing and sub-letting their lands, the fruit of which has been the augmentation [of the population] from something like 400 to above 3,000 persons. Of the leases originally granted, but three have fallen in after a lapse of 52 years.[26]

Table 1—based on the 1841 census—shows that almost 65 per cent of all Cork holdings of one acre or more did not exceed fifteen acres.[27]

[21] Ibid., p. 74.
[22] Ibid., p. 75.
[23] Ibid., pp. 33–4.
[24] Ibid., pp. 282–3.
[25] *C.C.*, 30 Apr. 1846.
[26] P. Fitzgerald to Lord Cloncurry, 8 Dec. 1847, quoted in *C.E.*, 22 Dec. 1847.
[27] *Census Ire., 1841*, pp. 454–7.

TABLE 1 Number and percentage of holdings of over one acre according to farm size, 1841

size of holdings (acres)	Cork (no.)	(%)	Ireland (no.)	(%)
1–5	13,683	30·0	310,436	44·9
5–15	15,790	34·7	252,799	36·6
15–30	10,362	22·8	79,342	11·5
over 30	5,691	12·5	48,625	7·0
total no. of holdings	45,526		691,202	

Contemporaries noted, however, that there was a very wide discrepancy between the size of holdings indicated in the census and that shown by a similar return made by the poor-law commissioners to the Devon commission a few years later. Many regarded the poor-law return as being nearer to the truth, because it was calculated as a basis for taxation and was subject to periodic revision.[28] As Table 2 illustrates, the poor-law return gave a version of farm size radically different from that of the census, even though the categories were altered slightly.[29]

TABLE 2 Number and percentage of persons with holdings of over one acre according to farm size, 1844

size of holdings (acres)	Cork (no.)	(%)	Ireland (no.)	(%)
1–5	7,468	14·5	181,950	22·7
5–10	7,659	14·9	187,909	23·5
10–20	11,075	21·5	187,582	23·5
20–50	14,842	28·9	141,819	17·7
over 50	9,021	17·6	70,441	8·8
unclassified joint tenancies	1,340	2·6	30,433	3·8
total no. of persons	51,405		800,134	

The discrepancy between the poor-law return and the census is greatest with respect to holdings of from one to five acres. Both in County Cork and in Ireland as a whole, the poor-law return revealed only about half as large a percentage of holdings in this category as the census had indicated. Recently, P. M. Austin Bourke

[28] *Devon comm. digest*, i, 393–6.
[29] *Devon comm. evidence*, pt iv [672], H.C. 1845, xxii, 1, pp. 280–3.

has argued that in the census, farm size was predominantly expressed in terms of the larger Irish acre (1·62 statute acres) and that waste land was ignored in computing the size of each holding, thus creating the greatly exaggerated and traditionally accepted picture of the smallness of holdings before the famine.[30] On the basis of Bourke's thorough analysis of the available evidence, it may safely be concluded that the census figures do indeed grossly overstate the fragmentation of holdings and that the poor-law return gives a close approximation to the facts of farm size in the early 1840s. From both returns it is clear that the dangerous subdivision of holdings did not proceed so far in County Cork as it did in Ireland generally or in the counties along the western seaboard in particular. This divergence is partly attributable to the dominant role of dairying, which tended to obstruct the progress of subdivision, within the agricultural economy of Cork. A slower rate of population growth in Cork than in the country as a whole may also have been an important contributing factor. Even so, some Cork estates, such as Viscount Midleton's, suffered as much from the evil of subdivision as the most badly fragmented properties of Galway and Mayo, and relatively few landowners could boast of having eliminated or even greatly mitigated the abuse before the 1830s.

The tiny plots of agricultural labourers constituted the last stage of subdivision. The 1841 census recorded over 145,000 labourers and farm servants in County Cork as compared with less than 41,000 farmers.[31] The relationship between the farmer and his hired, or bound, labourer was based essentially on the exchange of land for work. Thus the 'cash nexus' detested by Carlyle was generally inoperative. Describing the typical arrangement in Cork, a witness from the parish of Dromdaleague remarked before the poor-inquiry commission in 1835:

> The agreement between the landlord and cottier tenant is generally of this kind: the farmer agrees to employ such a man as a regular labourer. He then sets him a house, engaging to give him every year a certain portion of ground, from half [an acre] to an acre, on which to put his manure for a potato garden; he generally also allows him to keep a couple of sheep on the farm, at 2*s*. a quarter each for their grazing; sets him a portion of bog for turf, and tillage for flax. For all these the tenant has to pay by his labour. . . .[32]

[30] P. M. A. Bourke, 'The extent of the potato crop in Ireland at the time of the famine' in *Stat. Soc. Ire. Jn.*, xx, pt iii (1959), pp. 20–6; *idem*, 'The agricultural statistics of the 1841 census of Ireland: a critical review' in *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, ser. 2, xviii, no. 2 (Aug. 1965), pp. 377–81.

[31] *Census Ire., 1841*, pp. 172–88.

[32] *Poor inquiry (Ireland): Appendix (E) containing baronial examinations*

In many parts of the county, however, the labourer struck two separate bargains, the first of which was for the cabin, a kitchen garden used to grow cabbages, the liberty to cut turf and collect dung on the farmer's lands, and the run of a pig.[33] The charges for the cabin and these customary privileges generally ranged from £1 10*s.* to £2 per annum, although prices as high as £3 were not unknown.[34] The labourer made a second, distinct agreement for his potato ground, and this was of course his most pressing concern. The rents of potato gardens varied from about £2 or £3 per acre when the labourer himself manured the land and cultivated it with the spade to £4 or £6 when the farmer prepared the ground for the crop.[35] In return for his cabin, privileges, and potato garden, the labourer was obligated to work for the farmer whenever he was called. On those days he worked, the labourer was credited with having earned 6*d.* to 8*d.*, or only 4*d.* to 6*d.* if he was 'dieted' by the farmer.[36] Accounts were kept usually in writing, but frequently on tally sticks, and in neither case very carefully, with the inevitable result that many wage disputes were adjudicated at quarter sessions. At year's end, when the farmer compared wages credited against charges debited, the labourer sometimes found himself with a small favourable balance, but it rarely amounted to more than a few pounds.[37]

Distrust and acrimony very often poisoned the relations between farmers and their bound labourers. This is scarcely surprising in view of the grossly exorbitant rents farmers charged for cabins and potato gardens. Labourers' cottages were generally miserable excuses for dwellings; they were poorly thatched and sometimes even lacked doors and windows. The initial outlay for these cabins was so small that many farmers recovered the expense of throwing

[33] *Poor inquiry, supplement to appendix E*, pp. 173, 179, 187.

[34] Ibid., pp. 163–209, answers to question 14.

[35] Ibid., pp. 173, 179, 198–9; *Devon comm. evidence*, pt iii, p. 96; *Devon comm. digest*, i, 485.

[36] *Poor inquiry (Ireland): Appendix (D) containing baronial examinations relative to earnings of labourers, cottier tenants, employment of women and children, expenditure; and supplement containing answers to questions 1 to 12 circulated by the commissioners* [36], H.C. 1836, xxx, 1, answers to question 4 (hereafter cited as *Poor inquiry, supplement to appendix D*), pp. 163–209.

[37] *Copies of papers relating to experimental improvements in progress on the crown lands at King William's Town, in the barony of Duhallow, in the county of Cork . . .*, H.C. 1834 (173), li, 69, pp. 62–3.

relative to food, cottages and cabins, clothing and furniture, pawnbroking and savings banks, drinking; and supplement containing answers to questions 13 to 22 circulated by the commissioners [37], H.C. 1836, xxxii, 1, p. 179 (hereafter cited as *Poor inquiry, supplement to appendix E*). See also *Devon comm. digest*, i, 484, 487.

them up in only two years. Double or even triple the rent that farmers paid for the same land was exacted for labourers' potato gardens. The earl of Carbery stated to the poor-inquiry commission that 'the cottier tenant frequently suffers hardship from the farmer not fulfilling his engagements, not keeping the house well thatched, or giving the quantity of land promised for potato culture, or the full portion of work'.[38] The earl of Bantry's agent, the Rev. Somers Payne, remarked before the Devon commission, 'I have been a long time in the commission of the peace, nearly thirty years, and I never sat a court day without witnessing some act of oppression on the part of the farmer on his labourer'. The farmers' worst offence was that of 'leaving the houses uncovered', said Payne; 'I have known a [labouring] man's potatoes left without dung for weeks and even months'.[39] In the complaint book for the Ballineen petty-sessions district, covering the period from 1825 to 1840, disputes between farmers and their hired labourers recur with startling frequency, much more often in fact than disputes between farmers and their landlords. Labourers were constantly hauling farmers before petty sessions to have them answer charges of withholding wages, refusing to draw out manure or plough potato ground, failing to re-thatch cabins, or illegally taking possession of potato gardens, dung, sheep, or pigs.[40]

Even though their relations with their employers were often acrimonious, bound labourers at least enjoyed much greater security and much steadier employment than unbound agricultural workers. The great and constantly growing mass of casually employed labourers was being crushed under the weight of the increase in its own numbers and represented the most critical aspect of the population problem after 1815. Cork had been a principal centre for the provisioning of the British military effort during the Napoleonic wars as well as an important centre of army and navy recruitment. At the end of the wars, the labouring population in Cork as elsewhere in Ireland was swelled 'by the return of the thousands of men who

[38] *Poor inquiry, supplement to appendix E*, p. 192.

[39] *Devon comm. digest*, i, 486.

[40] Of course, not all labourers were without fault. From some labourers, farmers could obtain neither work nor rent nor possession of their cabins. Before petty sessions, farmers charged labourers with overholding possession of their cabins, 'making off with the surface of a kitchen garden', and unlawfully rescuing dung, sheep, or pigs distrained for non-payment of rent (Conner papers: Ballineen petty-sessions complaint book, 1825–40; in the possession of the executors of the late Henry L. Conner, Manch House, Ballineen, Co. Cork).

had joined the British army'.[41] Moreover, the decline of small-scale factory and domestic industry, particularly the weaving of coarse linens and cottons in the towns of West Cork during the late 1820s and the 1830s, must have added several thousand displaced hand-loom weavers to the already overcrowded agricultural labour market.[42] In Bandon alone, the number of weavers was reduced from about 2,000 in 1825 to only a few score by the early 1840s.[43]

At the same time that the supply of rural labour was mushrooming after 1815, the demand for it was shrinking. As farms became smaller through subdivision, the dependence on family as opposed to hired labour grew. To weather the long deflation that followed the wartime boom, farmers were forced to cut their labour costs. There was little regular employment in the parishes of Drinagh and Kilcrohane near Bantry in 1835, because 'the chief work of farmers is done by themselves and their servants, and in the spring and harvest the neighbours assist each other, giving an interchange of work'.[44] A protestant clergyman from the parish of Drinagh stated to the poor-inquiry commission that constant employment scarcely existed, 'except for well grown boys, who hire by the quarter with farmers, living with the family and doing, in fact, the work of a man at very low wages'.[45] The decline in wheat growing and the expansion of sheep farming beginning in the 1830s were also detrimental to the labourer's already tenuous position.[46] Technical improvements to be discussed below, such as the spread of better ploughs, the drilling of potatoes, and the use of the scythe instead of the sickle in harvesting grain, further curtailed the demand for labour.[47]

Labourers employed by the day endured a precarious existence. Whereas bound labourers generally received half an acre to an acre of potato ground in return for giving their labour whenever it was required, casually employed labourers had no choice except to hire land on which to grow their food. This practice was known as 'taking land in conacre', or simply as 'taking potato garden'. Such land, when manured and cultivated by the labourer, was sometimes let gratuitously or at only a nominal rent. It was said in 1835 that in the mountain district near Rosscarbery, 'land is sometimes let for a potato crop without any rent or consideration, save only that it

[41] K. Danaher, *Irish country people* (Cork, 1966), p. 109.

[42] *Poor inquiry, supplement to appendix E*, pp. 168, 172–3, 181, 200.

[43] Freeman, *Pre-famine Ireland*, pp. 87–8. See also W. A. Spillar, *A short topographical and statistical account of the Bandon union, with some observations on the trade, agriculture, manufactures, and tideways of the district* (Bandon, 1844), pp. 36–7; hereafter cited as *Bandon union*.

[44] *Poor inquiry, supplement to appendix D*, p. 164. [45] Ibid., p. 175.

[46] See below, pp. 34, 43–4. [47] See below, pp. 31, 37–9.

should be manured, the landlord finding his remuneration in the subsequent corn crop'.[48] Near the town of Kinsale at the same time, it was customary for the poor to

> collect dung, which the farmer draws out on his ground without any charge for rent or draught; the person who finds the dung provides seed potatoes and attendant labour, and thus the farmer gets his ground prepared for subsequent crops at no expense but drawing out the dung.[49]

Unless there were exceptional facilities for gathering manure or fertilizer in a particular district, however, farmers commonly refused to let unprepared land in conacre, because the poor labourer tended to manure inadequately and to leave the land too exhausted to produce good corn crops. Thus, even though labourers would generally have preferred cheap, worn-out pasture or unmanured land, they were increasingly forced to take valuable ley ground or manured land much less suited to their requirements and to pay dearly for it.[50]

Conacre rents varied according to the quality of the land and the cost incurred by the farmer or landlord in preparing it for a crop. The protestant clergyman, the Rev. Thomas Gollock, who farmed a demesne at Forest near Macroom and who had to have lime drawn from a distance, let potato gardens at £8 8*s*. per acre in 1840.[51] Only £6 was charged for prepared ground in the parishes of Nohaval and Kilmonoge, not far from Kinsale and Oysterhaven, where fertilizing kelp and sand were raised from the bay.[52] Even unmanured potato gardens brought 35*s*. to 50*s*. in four parishes near Cork city, however, and prepared land was let at an average of £7 per acre.[53] In one sense, conacre rents in the vicinity of towns should have been moderated by the accessibility of town dung; but the availability of cheap manure was more than counterbalanced by excessive competition for the limited amount of land. Foreign travellers in Ireland and English observers were frequently amazed at the price of conacre land, which occasionally commanded as much as £10 or £12 per acre near very populous towns.[54] They

[48] *Poor inquiry: Appendix (F) containing baronial examinations relative to con-acre, quarter or score ground, small tenantry, consolidation of farms and dislodged tenantry, emigration, landlord and tenant, nature and state of agriculture, taxation, roads, observations on the nature and state of agriculture; and supplement* [38], H.C. 1836, xxxiii, 1, p. 177. (hereafter cited as *Poor inquiry, supplement to appendix F*)

[49] Ibid., p. 199. See also ibid., pp. 186, 188.

[50] *Devon comm. digest*, i, 522.

[51] Gollock papers: Demesne account book, 1838–43, 1 May 1840, p. 164 (in the possession of Mr Thomas H. M. Gollock, Monkstown, Co. Cork).

[52] *Poor inquiry, supplement to appendix F*, p. 199.

[53] Ibid., p. 107. [54] *Devon comm. digest*, i, 521–2.

quickly became convinced that when such high rents were exacted, the crop could not possibly repay the conacre men. Undoubtedly, population pressure had driven rents to almost 50 per cent, and sometimes more, of the market value of a potato crop taken from prepared ground by the 1840s. Still, the market value of six tons of potatoes (the normal produce of an acre) was nearly £15 at the average price of about 2*s.* 6*d.* per cwt prevailing in 1830 and 1840.[55] The sad truth was, however, that in their effort to grow what was mainly their food and not a cash crop, the conacre men were forced to take a desperate gamble. R. N. Salaman has recorded no less than fourteen partial or complete failures of the potato crop in Ireland between 1816 and 1842.[56] Because of these repeated failures and the virtual impossibility of collecting conacre rents after such an event, farmers often demanded payment of the whole or a substantial part of the rent before the crop was harvested.[57] This demand may have considerably reduced the amount of land that labourers could afford to hire.[58]

Pitifully small wages were another facet of the unbound labourer's marginal existence. The wages of unbound labourers in County Cork ranged from 4*d.* to 8*d.* per day in ordinary times, with an increase to 10*d.* or 1*s.* 2*d.* at the harvest and during potato planting and digging.[59] Women were employed at 3*d.* or 4*d.* per day in digging or picking stones from pasture and meadow land, and in weeding potato plots; at busy times they occasionally earned 5*d.* or 6*d.* in planting or gathering potatoes and in binding corn.[60] The demesne-farming gentry usually paid their daily labourers in cash; they also gave steadier employment and somewhat higher wages than ordinary farmers. Farmers seldom provided steady work and rarely paid wages entirely in money; at least in part, they paid wages in conacre land or provisions and generally dieted their daily labourers, with a corresponding reduction in the rate of wages.[61] There was some geographical variation in the cost of labour. The

[55] *Irish Farmers' Gazette*, 1 Nov. 1879. See also *Poor inquiry, supplement to appendix F*, p. 192; *C.E.*, 16 Jan. 1846.

[56] R. N. Salaman, *The history and social influence of the potato* (Cambridge, 1949), pp. 603–8.

[57] *Devon comm. evidence*, pt iii, p. 101; *Devon comm. digest*, i, 521, 523.

[58] Of the thirteen labourers to whom the Rev. Thomas Gollock let land in 1840, only four could afford to hire as much as an acre or more, and the average letting was only about half an acre. Gollock required full payment in advance (Gollock papers: Demesne account book, 1838–43, 1 May 1840, p. 164).

[59] *Poor inquiry, supplement to appendix D*, pp. 163–209, answers to question 4.

[60] Ibid., pp. 163–209, answers to question 6.

[61] Ibid., pp. 166, 173, 199.

Mallow poor-law guardians noted the following rates in their locality in 1845:

> Males 8*d.*, females from 4 to 6 without diet; during harvest and potato planting . . . , males from 10*d.* to 12*d.* and occasionally more, females' wages at some times higher, but not in proportion. In some districts men can now be got for 4*d.* wages, near the town always higher.[62]

In the Kanturk district, however, workers received 5*d.* to 6*d.* per day with diet, even 'in the most hurried season of the year, and that for the best class of labourers'.[63] And in the parish of Inishannon, daily wages were only 4*d.* with diet, and from 6*d.* to 7*d.* without diet.[64]

Not only were their wages miserably small, but daily labourers rarely enjoyed regular employment. It is difficult to interpret many of the replies contained in the *Poor inquiry* to the question of how many labourers in particular parishes were in 'constant' or merely 'occasional' employment. It appears, however, that at least one-third, and perhaps as many as one-half, of all agricultural workers in Cork were employed only 'occasionally'.[65] They could find scarcely any work during midwinter, from the beginning of December to the end of February, or during midsummer, from the middle of June to the middle of August.[66] Staggering underemployment existed in the southwestern part of the county, where the population was extremely dense, especially along the seacoast. In the parishes of Rosscarbery and Kilkerranmore, not more than 100 labourers out of nearly 1,100 had constant work; in the parish of Creagh (including the town of Skibbereen), only fifty-five out of 341 labourers were permanently employed; and in the parish of Skull, only 100 or 200 labourers out of perhaps 2,000 had regular work.[67] The problem was much less acute in the northern and eastern parts of the county. One-half of the labourers in the parish of Fermoy, two-thirds of those in Castlemagner, and seven-eighths of those in Rathcormack and Gortroe were permanently employed.[68] Large numbers of casual labourers were concentrated in the narrow lanes and on the outskirts of towns throughout Cork. As many as 311 out of 908 families

[62] Archives Council, Cork: Minute book, Mallow board of guardians, 1844–6, 26 Dec. 1845, p. 337. (All minute books of boards of guardians cited in this work are in the custody of the Cork Archives Council.)
[63] *Devon comm. evidence*, pt iii, p. 103.
[64] *Poor inquiry, supplement to appendix D*, p. 198.
[65] Ibid., pp. 163–209, answers to question 1.
[66] Ibid., pp. 163–209, answers to question 5.
[67] Ibid., pp. 177, 181–2.
[68] Ibid., pp. 170, 183–4.

of labourers living in the lanes of Youghal in late 1845 were headed by a man who worked less than six months of the year.[69] T. C. Foster, a correspondent for *The Times*, reported in November 1845 that 120 families out of a total of 600 to 700 in Bantry were without a livelihood. 'I am assured that about 50 families live entirely by begging', observed Foster; 'the rest get a job to do when they can, and live by a bit of garden and a pig, and by raising coral-sand and sea-weed out of the bay, which they sell.'[70]

In spite of serious underemployment, abysmally low wages, and high conacre rents, there was wide disagreement over the change in the economic position of the labouring population since 1815. Most of the upper-class respondents to the poor-inquiry commission claimed that the labourers' condition had improved or at least remained stationary during the twenty years since the peace. Many of these respondents believed that they had seen an improvement in the clothing, housing, and diet of the poor. They attributed this to the removal of the tithe burden from labourers' potato gardens and to an increase in real wages. Money wages, they said, had remained about the same or fallen less than the price of clothing or provisions.[71] Their reasoning, however, is unconvincing. Far more persuasive are the arguments of Cork parish priests. The Rev. M. Sheehan, P. P., Killeagh, was certain that the labourers' condition had deteriorated,

> owing to the fall of wages, which during the war were 10*d.* per day; and also owing to the fall of the price of pork, the pig being the chief means by which the labourers provide clothing and other necessaries; [and] to the increase of population.[72]

The Rev. John Ryan, P. P., Drimoleague, also pointed to a deterioration. Before 1815, he noted,

> the labourers received a higher rate of wages, and the farmers were enabled to give them more constant employment; whilst the potato gardens, . . . then attended to by their wives and children, are now attended to by themselves, for the want of general employment.[73]

It is difficult to imagine how the housing and diet of the labouring population could have been worse before 1815 than it was during the 1830s and early 1840s. Both in the towns and villages and in the country, the labourers and their invariably large families were

[69] *C.E.*, 13 Feb. 1846.

[70] T. C. Foster, *Letters on the condition of the people of Ireland* (2nd ed., London, 1847), p. 402. See also Freeman, *Pre-famine Ireland*, pp. 24–5.

[71] *Poor inquiry, supplement to appendix E*, pp. 163–209, answers to question 18.

[72] Ibid., p. 194. See also ibid., p. 204.

[73] Ibid., p. 179. See also ibid., p. 181.

squeezed into one-room cabins without windows. There were nearly 16,000 such wretched habitations in Cork in 1841, accounting for almost 50 per cent of the occupied dwellings in the county at that time. All along the coast, from Bantry Bay almost to Cork harbour, the density of the labouring population was painfully apparent from the high proportion of these one-room cabins. They represented more than 80 per cent of the total habitations in the baronies of Bere and Courceys.[74] Foster described the hovels on the outskirts of Bantry as consisting

> usually of a single room, a hole for a window with a board in it, the door generally off the hinges, a wicker-basket with a hole in the bottom or an old butter-tub stuck at one corner of the thatch for a chimney, the pig, as a matter of course, inside the cottage, and an extensive manufacture of manure . . . [taking place] on the floor.[75]

The cabins were as bad in the country as they were in the towns. Those in the parish of Drinagh were 'the worst that can well be conceived'. A handy labourer usually built the walls and roof with

> rough field stones and clay mortar; a few rough sticks, procured generally out of the bogs, which serve to support a bad covering of straw; sometimes interlined with heath for want of a sufficiency of straw, and seldom renewed while it is possible to inhabit it.[76]

The cabins in the parishes of Castlehaven and Myross were 'very wretched', said the Rev. James Mulcahy; 'humanity would assign better accommodation to the beasts of the field'.[77] Often neither airtight nor waterproof, these cabins cost next to nothing to build, and their impermanence was shown by the ease and speed with which they were demolished during and after the famine. Not surprisingly, the cabins were meagrely furnished: a large, black iron pot used to boil the 'praties', an uncovered box for meal, a board attached to the wall serving as a table, a few fir stumps serving as stools, and perhaps a dresser. The bedsteads and bedding were woefully insufficient.[78] Bedsteads were not uncommon, but for many labourers some straw placed on the floor had to suffice. The Rev. Charles O'Donovan remarked to the poor-inquiry commission:

> When called upon to administer the last consolations of religion, it has often been my lot to see the poor labourers of these parishes [Kilmeen and Castlehaven] in the agonies of death, with no bed but the wisp of straw, no

[74] *Census Ire., 1841*, pp. 172–88.
[75] Foster, *Condition of the people*, p. 402.
[76] *Poor inquiry, supplement to appendix E*, p. 175.
[77] Ibid., p. 179.
[78] Ibid., pp. 163–209, answers to question 15.

pillow but a piece of fir raised in some neighbouring bog, and no other bed-clothes than the tattered rags in which they were accustomed to labour in the fields.[79]

If their housing was generally miserable and unhealthy, the same could not be said about the labourers' staple foods, potatoes and milk, at least not when they had them in sufficient quantity and quality. Unfortunately, this was becoming less and less the case after 1815. It was generally agreed that with the exception of the summer and autumn months, labouring families drank little milk by the 1830s.[80] They could no longer afford to pay £5 per year for the grass and hay of a cow, although a group of labourers occasionally joined in purchasing part interest in a cow and its feed.[81] When they were dieted by farmers, the most that labourers could expect to receive was four or five pounds of potatoes and one quart of sour milk twice a day.[82] 'Their ordinary diet, when employed by farmers, is potatoes and salt fish, occasionally a little milk . . . .'[83] But milk was definitely a luxury. During four or five months of the year, labouring families ate dry potatoes with either 'meal and water, salt and water, salt herring, or something as a relish, which they call kitchen; in some instances potatoes and salt only, but this is rare'.[84] Meat and bread were almost never eaten, except on a few feast days, a chance Sunday, or at a wedding or christening.[85]

Even the quality of the potato used by most labourers had deteriorated. Two old varieties, the minion and the apple, made excellent table potatoes, and the apple was especially valued for its keeping qualities. But Townsend had observed that in the barony of Duhallow the apple was being superseded by the more prolific variety known as the cup.[86] By the 1840s the cup seems to have been replaced in most parts of Cork by the coarse, watery, yet even more prolific white potato, or 'lumper', commonly described as 'the people's food' or 'the poor man's crop'. Lumpers did not keep well and always went bad in early August, leaving the poor without their staple food until a new crop was ready for digging in early October.[87] Many labourers, unable to obtain sufficient land, found

[79] Ibid., p. 179.

[80] *Poor inquiry, supplement to appendix D*, pp. 163–209, answers to question 3.

[81] Gollock papers: Demesne account book, 1824–6, 24 Dec. 1824, p. 71; 16 Apr. 1826, p. 191.

[82] *Poor inquiry, supplement to appendix D*, pp. 173, 185.

[83] Ibid., p. 181. [84] Ibid., p. 184.

[85] Ibid., p. 166; *Devon comm. digest*, i, 489. [86] Townsend, p. 407.

[87] *C.E.*, 20 Oct. 1845; *C.C.*, 17 Mar. 1846, 31 Aug. 1848; E. R. R. Green, 'Agriculture' in Edwards & Williams, *Great famine* (New York, 1957), p. 96.

their supply of potatoes exhausted at the beginning of June or even earlier in some cases.[88] During these 'hungry months', labouring families often survived on a variety of cabbage, nettles, seaweed, and fish. Some subsisted on an occasional meal of potatoes from more fortunate friends, but 'they would not allow this to be considered begging; they do not allow a man to be put down as an actual beggar until he shall carry a bag on his back and beg for potatoes'.[89] Others sold their pigs and sheep, pawned their clothes (if they had clothes fit to be pawned), and bought potatoes or obtained meal on usurious terms. Surely, many half starved.[90]

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

The middleman system of estate management, by strongly encouraging the reckless subletting and subdivision of farms, stimulated the rapid growth of population that was primarily responsible for the impoverishment of agricultural labourers after 1815. At the same time, however, subdivision and population growth helped to bring about a great expansion of both the land area under cultivation and agricultural output during and after the Napoleonic wars. K. H. Connell has carefully studied the reclamation of waste land in Ireland between 1780 and 1845. He concludes that 'during the French wars and in the following thirty years, while there was probably no county which did not experience a fair amount of reclamation, in many there may well have been an astonishing amount'.[91] Cork seems to fall into the latter category.

A small part of the work of reclamation in County Cork was performed by landowners like Charles Colthurst, who brought into cultivation some 160 acres of bog near Ballyvourney during the early 1840s.[92] Most of the reclamation, however, was done by poor cottiers primarily for potato growing. Landlords frequently encouraged them by charging insignificant rents. The earl of Mountcashel gave a large tract of mountain land to 'poor people, who have built houses upon it'; he rented the land 'so exceedingly cheap that they contrived by degrees to bring in one acre in one year, and another in another'.[93] When a large holding on an estate near Macroom came out of lease in 1835, the agent James Carnegie

[88] *Poor inquiry, supplement to appendix D*, pp. 173, 179.
[89] Ibid., p. 183.
[90] Ibid., pp. 164, 172, 179, 182.
[91] K. H. Connell, 'The colonization of waste land in Ireland, 1780–1845' in *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, ser. 2, iii, no. 1 (1950), p. 45.
[92] *Devon comm. digest*, i, 616–19.
[93] Quoted in Connell, 'Colonization of waste land', p. 51.

'removed the under-tenants to the mountains and gave them from twenty to fifty acres each, rent free for seven years'.[94] The valuer Charles Bailey reported in 1840 that the subtenants of a middleman on Viscount Midleton's estate had enclosed a considerable portion of mountain, claiming that the middleman had 'permitted them to do so, and that the rents for the same are included in the sums paid for their other holdings'.[95] On another part of Midleton's estate, seven tenants holding altogether fifty-seven acres had 'enclosed and cultivated many acres of the south mountain, without paying any rent for the same'.[96]

Even though statistical proof is lacking, other evidence points to a substantial amount of reclamation in many parts of Cork. 'Great quantities of land have been brought into cultivation since 1812' in the parish of Clondrohid near Macroom, stated a report in the late 1830s.[97] A large portion of the parish of Kilmocomoge (including the town of Bantry) was also said to have been brought into a profitable state since 1815.[98] In the parish of Ardfield near Clonakilty, there were reportedly 800 acres 'wholly in the occupation of poor people who have enclosed it'.[99] In the parish of Creagh (including the town of Skibbereen) in the late 1830s, there were 'few fields where the rock does not appear, but there is scarcely an acre which does not afford some pasture or tillage, which is carried even to the top of the hills'.[100] In the parish of Dunbulloge at the same time, the reclaimable mountain was 'constantly being brought into cultivation or planted'.[101] Charles Bailey observed in 1840 that much of the mountainous tract known as Walshtown More on Viscount Midleton's estate 'has been reclaimed within the last three years . . . , but there are about 180 acres [out of 302] still unreclaimed'.[102] He also stated that the middleman's tenants on the holding known as Coome Fitzgerald had 'enclosed from the north and south mountains immense tracts of land'.[103]

The construction of new roads on a large scale in Cork after 1815 fostered reclamation, which heavily depended upon the accessibility

[94] *Devon comm. digest*, i, 463.
[95] P.R.O.I., ref. no. 978, Midleton papers: Valuation of Viscount Midleton's estates, 1840, p. 403.
[96] Ibid., p. 406.
[97] Lewis, *Topog. dict. Ire.*, i, 355.
[98] Ibid., i, 164.
[99] Ibid., i, 50.
[100] Ibid., i, 432.
[101] Ibid., i, 567.
[102] P.R.O.I., ref. no. 978, Midleton papers: Valuation of Viscount Midleton's estate, 1840, p. 302.
[103] Ibid., p. 382.

of cheap fertilizers. These new roads made it feasible to work formerly dormant limestone quarries and to transport kelp, shell gravel, and coral sand far into the interior. The government, in a largely successful effort to promote the maintenance of public order, carried out by far the most significant road building in northwest Cork and northeast Kerry following serious uprisings there during the famine of 1821–2. The principal branches of the network connected Listowel and Newmarket (thirty-two miles), Newmarket and Charleville (fourteen miles), and Castleisland and Killarney with Mallow (forty-two miles).[104] 'Since the construction of the new government roads, lime has been extensively used as manure, and the state of agriculture greatly improved', it was said of the Kanturk district in the late 1830s.[105] The many new roads built under grand-jury presentments also stimulated agricultural development. In the parish of Kilmeen near Clonakilty, 'about half of the land has been brought into tillage . . . since new roads were opened in 1820'.[106] In the parish of Drinagh near Dunmanway, 'great improvements have been recently made in agriculture by the opening of new lines of road'.[107] Enormous quantities of kelp and coral sand were dredged by lightermen from the bays at Youghal, Crosshaven, Kinsale, Clonakilty, and Bantry, and then conveyed, very often along these new roads, as much as fifteen or twenty miles into the interior.[108] The Red Strand at Clonakilty bustled with activity in the late 1830s: 'More than 1,000 horses and carts may be reckoned at the strand in one day. This sand is esteemed the best on the southern coast, except the Bantry sand.'[109]

Cheap fertilizers, new roads, and waste-land reclamation lay behind the rapid growth of potato production in the half-century before the famine. Potatoes were already grown so widely throughout Cork in Townsend's time that after feeding their families and livestock, farmers and labourers in many districts had some available for export.[110] In the next thirty-five years, population growth raised output even further, and by 1845 the land area devoted to this vital subsistence crop in Cork is estimated to have

[104] *A copy of any reports on the experimental improvements on the crown estate of King William's Town in the county of Cork, submitted to her majesty's commissioners of woods and forests since the 8th day of August 1844* . . . , H.C.1851 (637), 1, 437, p. 3.
[105] Lewis, *Topog. dict. Ire.*, i, 509.
[106] Ibid., ii, 177.
[107] Ibid., i, 497.
[108] Ibid., i, 162, 182, 590; ii, 26.
[109] Ibid., ii, 489.
[110] Townsend, pp. 230–2.

reached no less than 394,000 acres. P. M. Austin Bourke's map of potato-crop densities shows that 287 acres of potatoes were planted in that year for every 1,000 acres of crops and pasture, thereby giving Cork a higher density than any other county in Ireland.[111] Cork's pre-eminence in potato cultivation is partly due to the early introduction of this crop in that part of the country. The old tradition that Sir Walter Raleigh introduced the potato into Ireland from South America at his Myrtle Grove seat near Youghal is probably spurious.[112] Quite apart from the Raleigh tradition, however, the growing of potatoes in the Youghal district from the seventeenth century is well attested.[113] Cork was also favoured geologically for potato cultivation. Most of the county's soil consists of old red sandstone, 'flanked by accumulations of local detritus, which yields sandy loams well suited for tillage and dairying',[114] but not herbage luxuriant enough to fatten cattle or sheep. Cork's long coastline afforded potato growers unusually good facilities for heavily fertilizing their crops with kelp and sea sand, and this factor was largely responsible for the prominence of Skibbereen, Kinsale, and Carrigaline as potato-growing districts. In the tillage rotations of farmers, the potato became the universally accepted restorative crop rather than turnips or mangels, even though for restorative purposes there is little to choose between them. Aside from its superior advantages as human food, the potato was preferred, partly because until the 1830s there was almost no market for fat sheep fed on turnips.[115] Dairy farmers were prejudiced against turnips, because butter made from the milk of cows fed on them had a turnip taste, while their pigs throve on dairy refuse and potatoes. All of these factors help to account for the fact that nearly 30 per cent of the cultivated land in the county was devoted to this one crop on the eve of the famine.[116]

[111] Bourke, 'Extent of the potato crop', p. 7.

[112] Lewis, *Topog. dict. Ire.*, ii, 728; W. H. McNeill, 'The introduction of the potato into Ireland' in *Jn. Mod. Hist.*, xxi, no. 3 (Sept. 1949), pp. 218–22.

[113] W. D. Davidson, 'The history of the potato and its progress in Ireland' in *Dept. Agric. Jn.*, xxxiv (1937), p. 290.

[114] J. R. Kilrose, 'The soils of Ireland' in W. P. Coyne (ed.), *Ireland, industrial and agricultural* (Dublin, 1902), p. 32.

[115] Crotty, *Irish agricultural production*, p. 27.

[116] Cullen suggests that heavy dependence upon the potato for human food occurred earlier in the southwest of Ireland than elsewhere, because the expansion of dairying up to the 1770s drove the cottiers to smaller plots and less fertile soil. This development presumably laid a solid foundation for the simultaneous advance of potato cultivation and population soon after 1780, when the shift to tillage farming began (L. M. Cullen, 'Irish history without the potato' in *Past and Present*, no. 40 (July 1968), p. 77).