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The Irish village of Moveen was one of many places where tenant-farmers were ejected from their homes. With no place to live, no means to earn a living and little-to-no food to feed their families, the predicament of Irish peasants was dire. This image depicts the abandoned village of Moveen, with its many roofless houses, as it appeared in the December 22, 1849 issue of *The Illustrated London News*. Click on the image for a larger view.

Death, from "The Great Hunger," had descended on the Emerald Isle.

People everywhere were dying. By January 16, 1847, an eyewitness reported reported there were unattended bodies by the roadside and in homes. Surviving family members had neither the strength nor the money to care for their deceased loved ones. Some people were dead as long as 11 days before they were buried.

So many people died the coroners were overwhelmed. Burdened beyond their capacity, they stopped holding inquests for people who died in the streets. Funerals, when they were held, had few mourners. People weren't strong enough to attend.

There wasn't enough wood to make coffins. Undertakers developed coffins with sliding bottoms so they could be reused after people were buried in mass graves. Later, the Sliding Cross Memorial was made from one of those temporary boxes.

Mothers who had no food to give their children gave them seaweed. Ireland, the beautiful country with some of the best farm land in the world, had become a place that was littered with bodies and abandoned villages. Families began to think they had no other option but to leave Ireland.

A reporter and artist, working for *The Illustrated London News*, witnessed an entire village of people who were leaving their homeland. The story and sketch is in the ILN's May 10, 1851 issue:

...I came to a sharp turn in the road, in view of that for which we sought, and of which I send you a sketch, namely, the packing and making ready of, I may say, an entire village- for there were not more than half-a-dozen houses on the spot, and all their former inmates were preparing to leave.

Immediately that my rev. friend was recognised, the people gathered about him in the most affectionate manner. He had a word of advice to Pat, a caution to Nelly, a suggestion to Mick; and he made a promise to Dan to take care of the "old woman," until the five pounds came in the spring to his 'Reverence' to send her over to America.

Then ensued a scene of tears and lamentation, such as might have softened a much harder heart than mine or that of the priest. He stood for awhile surrounded by the old and the young, the strong and the infirm, on bended knees, and he turned his moistened eyes towards heaven, and asked the blessing of the Almighty upon the wanderers during their long and weary journey.

Many were the tears brushed quietly away from the sunburnt cheeks of those who there knelt, and had implicit faith that the benediction so fervently and piously asked, would be vouchsafed to them.



IRISH EMIGRANTS LEAVING HOME.—THE PRIEST'S BLESSING.

Many others who had survived the famine and desperation shared the same thought:

Leave the country.

Within four years, about 1 million people did just that.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/DEATH-AND-DYING-Great-Hunger-Irish-Potato-Famine>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/DEATH-AND-DYING-Great-Hunger-Irish-Potato-Famine>

Questions 2 Ponder

When Disaster Overwhelms a Country Is Leaving the Best Remedy?

As the years of famine dragged on, and potato crops continued to fail, the Irish began to leave their country to live elsewhere. Within four years, about 1 million people had left their homeland.

Their decision to leave was less a choice about where to live but more a response to a seemingly hopeless situation. They could stay in their own country, without knowing when the famine would end and the potato blight would be extinguished, or they could try to find a better life somewhere else.

Do you think uncertainty about when the blight and the famine would end, for the Irish people, has any parallels in the 21st century? Explain your answer.

Are there situations today when people similarly leave their homelands because it seems to be the best (or only) remedy for their families? Explain your answer.

When people leave their countries, to escape an overwhelming disaster, what challenges do they face in a new place?

Media Stream

Irish People Forced to Leave Their Villages

Even after the potato blight was no-longer ruining the crops of Ireland's tenant farmers, villagers could not cope with the ongoing impact of their economic distress.

A reporter and artist, working for *The Illustrated London News*, witnessed an entire village of people who were leaving their homeland. The story and sketch (shown above) is in the *ILN's* [May 10, 1851 issue](#). The following is an excerpt from the article: *...I came to a sharp turn in the road, in view of that for which we sought, and of which I send you a sketch, namely, the packing and making ready of, I may say, an entire village—for there were not more than half-a-dozen houses on the spot, and all their former inmates were preparing to leave.*



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Many were the tears brushed quietly away from the sunburnt cheeks of those who there knelt, and had implicit faith that the benediction so fervently and piously asked, would be vouchsafed to them.

It is hard to fathom the depths of despair which these people had to endure, both those who left and those who stayed behind.

Click on the image for a better view.

Illustration, and quoted passage, from the May 10, 1851 issue of The Illustrated London News.

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