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# **Queen Victoria and the Great Famine in Ireland**

Královna Viktorie a Velký hladomor v Irsku

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## Anotace

Bakalářská práce se zabývá obdobím Velkého irského hladomoru v letech 1845-1849. Hlavní pozornost se upíná k přístupu britské vlády k řešení této krize a postoji královny Viktorie. Úvodní část nastíní politické, hospodářské a sociální poměry v Irsku a stav Unie před vypuknutím hladomoru a také představí královnu Viktorii a její vztah k Irsku. Hlavní část práce popíše průběh krize a vysvětlí povahu a cíle vládních intervencí a jejich praktický dopad na situaci postiženého obyvatelstva. Na základě odborných poznatků a dostupných soudobých zdrojů autorka posoudí, jak vnímala tuto, z dnešního pohledu humanitární, katastrofu královna Viktorie a do jaké míry se snažila osobně přispět k jejímu řešení. Práce zmíní také královninu návštěvu Irska v roce 1849, úsilí o stabilizaci poměrů v Irsku v prvních letech po hladomoru a dopad krize na irsko-britské vztahy.

## Abstract

The aim of the bachelor thesis is to provide an insight into the circumstances surrounding the Great Famine of 1845-1849. The main focus is on the British government's approach to dealing with this crisis and the attitude of Queen Victoria. The introductory part outlines the political, economic and social conditions in Ireland and the state of the Union before the outbreak of the famine and also introduces Queen Victoria and her relationship to Ireland. The main part of the thesis will describe the course of the crisis and explain the nature and objectives of government interventions and their impact on the situation of the affected population. Drawing on expert findings and available contemporary source, the author will assess how Queen Victoria perceived this, from today's perspective, humanitarian disaster and the extent to which she sought to make a personal contribution to its resolution. The thesis will also mention the Queen's visit to Ireland in 1849, the efforts of the government to stabilise the situation in Ireland in the early years after the Famine, and the impact of the crisis on British-Irish relations.

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# 1. Introduction

This bachelor thesis is to provide an overview of the Great Irish Famine. The aim of this thesis is to determine whether Queen Victoria played some role in the Great Irish Famine and, if so, what. For that to answer, it is important to mention Queen Victoria's life and her relationship towards Ireland. The visit of Ireland in 1849 will also be mentioned as it played significant role for both, Britain and Ireland. The main focus is on the government interventions and their efforts to alleviate the situation caused by the Famine. It is important to answer the questions of whether the situation in Ireland before the outbreak of the Famine contributed to the crisis and whether the Famine had an impact on the British-Irish relations.

Sources are mainly of the secondary type. The exception is Queen Victoria's letters, which provide insights into the Queen's relationship to Ireland and show her attitude to the Great Famine. The journals of Queen Victoria are to show her thoughts on significant occasions, such as her coronation. Secondary sources provide insights into the Famine and also the government interventions.

## 2. Queen Victoria

### 2.1. Predecessors

It is no secret that Victoria becoming Queen was just a coincidence. If one of her uncles had a marriage that would be consistent with the Royal Marriages Act of 1772 [this act says that "no member of the Royal Family could marry without their father's permission"<sup>1</sup>] and a child, she would have never been the Queen of England.

Victoria's grandfather, King George III, was a very popular and respected king. He was the first king to have been born in England since James II. George III was the third ruler in the so-called Hanoverian Dynasty, which was founded in 1714. The first ruler of this dynasty was George I, who was, in effect, a foreigner because he was born in Hanover, Germany.

George III had seven sons, which meant many successors to his throne. In addition to seven sons, he also had six daughters. He "was blind for the last ten years of his" long reign (1760-1820) and "had been raving mad" since the beginning of the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> He is now

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, A.N. (2015). *Victoria: A Life*. London: Atlantic Books, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, p. 5.

known as the “mad king who lost America”.<sup>3</sup> For many years, it was believed that this madness was caused by a disease called porphyria, which is a “genetic blood disorder, however, a new research project [...] has concluded that George III did actually suffer from mental illness after all”.<sup>4</sup> It is currently assumed that he suffered from bipolar disorder. Queen Victoria, her prime ministers, and even her husband Albert were afraid that the royal madness was hereditary because there were certain similarities in the behaviour of Victoria and George III. None of these concerns were proven to be true.

Pivotal events of the reign of George III definitely include the American War of Independence, which lasted from 1775 until 1783. “The British government continued to think of the colonists as British subjects.”<sup>5</sup> The British did not consider American colonists equal. The faiths of the Americans were mostly decided in Britain, where the situation was quite different from that of the United States. But among many reasons for the War of Independence to begin, belonged taxes. American colonists thought it was unlawful for the British to decide on the height of taxes. This opinion divided the whole of Britain. The first important dispute about taxation culminated in 1773, which is known as the Boston Tea Party. “[...] a group of colonists at the port of Boston threw a shipload of tea into the sea rather than pay tax on it”.<sup>6</sup> The answer of the British government was rather harsh than reasonable. They decided to close the port. Many other disputes ensued, culminating in the war. The result was a defeat for the British and the loss of the American colony. Only Canada remained. The independence of America was acknowledged in 1783 in the Treaty of Paris. For the whole of Britain, as well as for King George III, was this war disastrous. By losing it, Britain lost one of its largest colonies. Another crucial event for the British future was the Napoleonic Wars, which lasted from 1803 until 1815. In 1793 Great Britain decided to go to war with France, but just to prevent any unrest and to protect Dutch allies. Among England’s strengths was certainly the navy, that was the reason, why the Britons fight France at sea led by Admiral Nelson, who was the commander of the British fleet, whose most significant battle was at Trafalgar in 1805, where he was killed, however. He is considered a national hero. But the decisive event was at Waterloo, where the Duke of Wellington, a great commander of the British, defeated Napoleon in 1815 with the Prussian army of its side.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> BBC. (2013) What was the truth about the madness of George III?. *BBC News*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-22122407>.

<sup>4</sup> BBC

<sup>5</sup> McDowall, D. (1989). *An Illustrated History of Britain*. London: Pearson Education Ltd, p. 112.

<sup>6</sup> McDowall, p. 112.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 125-129.

George III was, as we have already learned, almost insane at the end of his reign. When this happened, his oldest son, George (future King George IV) became the regent in his absence. He was his regent from 1811 until 1820 when George III died and George became the new king, George IV. The most pivotal political event during his reign was in 1829. The Catholic Relief Act of 1829 made it possible for Catholics to become members of parliament.<sup>8</sup>

George IV was unpopular because of his behaviour toward his queen, Caroline Brunswick. He hated her and was long not living with her at the time of his succession. They separated shortly after the birth of their only child; a daughter named Charlotte. She was the only legitimate child to the throne after his death. According to Wilson “Charlotte was the nation’s bright future, the figure in whom the British people could rest their hopes.”<sup>9</sup> She would be a pleasant change for the empire. It was established that Charlotte should marry Leopold, the King of Belgium. He was also offered the Greek throne, but he refused. Charlotte suffered two miscarriages, but it appeared that her third pregnancy would be successful. She gave birth to a boy on 5 November 1817, but he was born death.<sup>10</sup> She was exhausted because the birth lasted more than fifty hours, and died on 6 November 1817, aged only twenty-one.<sup>11</sup> It was after Charlotte’s death, when it became clear that either the Duke of Kent, the Duke of Clarence, or the Duke of Cambridge had to marry and had to bring heirs into the world.<sup>12</sup>

It was apparent that George IV would not have any other legitimate offspring. He secretly married, Maria Fitzherbert. However, the marriage was not legitimate, because he did not get his father’s consent, which is necessary according to the Royal Marriages Act and also, he was not twenty-five years old. After his marriage was annulled, he married Caroline Brunswick. Only after Caroline’s death did he renew his relationship with Maria Fitzherbert.

Frederick, the Duke of York, was next in the line to inherit the throne after George IV. He married Frederica of Prussia, but they did not have any child, (more importantly, he had a mistress). He died before his brother, George IV, so William, the Duke of Clarence, became a new heir to the British throne. He had many children with an actress, but none of them were legitimate. Later in his life, when it was apparent that he would become king, he married Princess Adelaide of Saxe-Meiningen. They had a daughter, who unfortunately lived only a

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<sup>8</sup> McDowall, p. 141.

<sup>9</sup> Wilson, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 22-23.

<sup>11</sup> Strachey, L. (1993). *Královna Viktorie*. Praha: Mladá fronta, p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> Harrod-Eagles, C. (1998). *Já Viktorie: memoáry britské královny*. Praha: Brána, p. 20.



few hours.<sup>13</sup> Their second daughter lived only three months.<sup>14</sup> In 1830, the Duke of Clarence became William IV, the new king of the empire. His reign was not long; he ruled only seven years, but he made an impact on many lives. He introduced several laws which improved the conditions of workers. In 1833, he abolished slavery in the whole British Empire. In the same year, he “limited the number of hours that women and children were allowed to work”.<sup>15</sup>

William IV was the third son of George III, so it would be natural to think that his fourth son, the Duke of Kent, would be the successor to the throne after him. But he died before his brother, the King. However, the Duke of Kent led a very bohemian life. He had no value of money. When he died, he left his wife and daughter with huge debts. For a quarter of a century, he had had an intimate relationship with Julie de Saint-Laurent, also known as Therese-Bernardine Montgenet. Their relationship began in 1791 and he loved her, but when he found out that he could become king, he split up with her and was trying to find a woman to marry so that the marriage would be lawful and he could become king. He found one, she was the sister of Prince Leopold. Her name was Marie Luise Victoria. She had already two children from her previous marriage; Charles, who was born in 1804, and Feodora born three years later. “She [Marie Luise Victoria] was only seventeen when they married her off to Prince Emich Charles Leiningen [...] on 21 December 1803.”<sup>16</sup> This marriage was very unhappy for her. Her husband was much older than her and when he died, he left her as “a poverty-stricken widow”.<sup>17</sup> She married the Duke of Kent on 29 May 1818 in Amorbach. Another wedding ceremony was held at Kew Palace in Britain; it was a ‘double’ wedding. The Duke of Clarence and Adelaide of Saxe-Meiningen was the second couple to be married at Kew Palace. Victoria had never had the opportunity to meet her father. The Duke of Kent died when she was only eight months old. He had a cold and was treated by a royal doctor Matet. His treatment involved only leeches.<sup>18</sup> Her father had been a soldier trained in Germany, and after spending six years in Hanover, he had been sent to Canada. Here, the opinions differ. Victoria viewed her father as virtuous and valiant, whereas an event from 1803 showed her father in a different light. He was sent to Gibraltar to restore order to the crew. He, in fact, did so but in a terrible way. One man was flogged to death, the other one

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<sup>13</sup> Harrod-Eagles, p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> Strachey, p. 28.

<sup>15</sup> McDowall, p. 154.

<sup>16</sup> Wilson, p. 28.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>18</sup> Harrod-Eagles, p. 34.

invalid after his flogging. A wave of resentment swept over her father and he was eventually placed out of active duty. He was forced to return to England with a reduced salary.<sup>19</sup>

It almost appeared that all sons of George III led an imprudent life. Apart from having mistresses, there is the Duke of Sussex, who married twice contrary to the Royal Marriages Act. The Duke of Cumberland was immensely unpopular; he then became the King of Hanover. The Duke of Cambridge, the youngest son, had never had a wife.<sup>20</sup>

On 20 June 1837, William IV died, and Victoria became Queen. Since the reign of George I, Hanover and England had had the same ruler, but according to Salic law, the ruler in Hanover had to be a man. That meant that Victoria could not be the Queen of Hanover. So when William IV died, (on 20 June 1837), the thrones separated and the Duke of Cumberland became the King of Hanover. The question of regency arose. It was impossible for a foreign ruler to be Regent to Victoria, so the Duke of Cumberland fell out of the game and Victoria's mother became her Regent.<sup>21</sup>

The time in which Victoria came to the throne was difficult. Her predecessors, such as George III, who had lost America as a colony of Britain and later decided to enter the Napoleonic wars, or George IV, whose Catholic Relief Act was unpopular among the British people, left a problematic legacy. Although George III is today known as the king who lost the American colony, it must not be forgotten that he was very enlightened sovereign. During his reign, the industrial revolution took place, "a network of canals was gradually extended over many districts" which strengthen the maritime position of the Empire.<sup>22</sup> George III found himself in very difficult position. His reign is marked by a series of wars but one cannot remember only his military achievements or failures; we must not forget his enlightened thoughts. There was a ray of hope with the succession of William IV, whose laws helped many people, but he reigned for only seven years. Victoria's predecessors and the history of Britain, which was also very complicated and dark at some points, made it difficult for Victoria. There was an uneasy task ahead of her. She was a queen after a long period of kings. The world was changing dramatically and rapidly. There were many conflicts that changed the whole nature of Europe and she had to take the reins and be the ruler of one of the most powerful empires in the world.

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<sup>19</sup> Harrod-Eagles, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Strachey, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Harrod-Eagles, p. 71.

<sup>22</sup> Trevelyan, G.M. (1963). *A Shortened History of Britain*. Penguin Books, p. 449.

## 2.2. Childhood

Victoria was born on 24 May 1819 at Kensington Palace. When her mother was eight months pregnant, it was decided that Victoria should be born in England because the Duke of Kent was convinced that she would be Queen one day. If she were born abroad, the legitimacy of her succession could be questioned.<sup>23</sup>

Victoria's christening took place on 24 June 1819 in the Copula Room of Kensington Palace. "The original name chosen was Georgina".<sup>24</sup> The opinions differ whether Georgina was after her uncle, George IV, as Harrod-Eagles says, or after the Duchess of Devonshire, as Wilson claims.<sup>25</sup> The second name her father chose was Alexandrina after the Russian Tsar Alexander. But here a problem arose. George IV insisted that "If the child were to be Alexandrina, then she must have no other name".<sup>26</sup> Eventually, she was named Alexandrina Victoria. "The mother's name, Victoria was given almost as an after thought".<sup>27</sup> The christening was conducted by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

After her father died, she lived with her mother at Kensington Palace. She described her childhood as unhappy and melancholy. She had no ideal relationship with her mother, and after Victoria became Queen, she did not visit her mother very often. She led a secluded life before becoming Queen, life according to the so-called 'Kensington System'. Its purpose was to detach her from the Court and the rest of the Royal Family. More importantly, John Conroy, the creator of the system, wanted Victoria to be "utterly dependent upon the Duchess of Kent [Victoria's mother] and [himself]".<sup>28</sup> Conroy was the comptroller and private secretary to Victoria's mother, who became completely dependent on him, and adored him. He was very intelligent, ambitious, overconfident, and eager.<sup>29</sup> His main aim was to become the private secretary of Victoria after her coronation. Victoria never met his requirements, even at a time when she was sick and weak. He tried to give her a document to sign that would appoint him as her private secretary, but she never signed any.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Harrod-Eagles, p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> Wilson, p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> Harrod-Eagles; Wilson.

<sup>26</sup> Wilson, p. 37.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>29</sup> Harrod-Eagles, p. 60.

<sup>30</sup> Wilson, p. 69.

Conroy and her own secluded life may have been the reasons why she felt that her childhood was unhappy, as we can see in Harrod-Eagles.<sup>31</sup> But it is important to bear in mind that her mother loved her. She learned to speak English because of her and provided Victoria with a proper education. Victoria had many toys, always had something to eat and a beautiful home. Victoria was not alone either; she had her half-sister, Princess Feodora, and they were very close. She had an excellent relationship with her governess Louise Lehzen and Baroness Späth. Wilson shows us the other side of Victoria's, so-called unhappy childhood.<sup>32</sup> Although she was kept in total ignorance and was, in fact, detached from the rest of her family, there is no evidence that her childhood was so unhappy as described in her journals. The Duchess of Kent never forgot her grandchildren's birthday, she often sent presents and wrote letters to Victoria. Victoria emotionally neglected her mother and invested all her love into her marriage. She kept telling herself a story of how miserable her childhood was and never stopped blaming her mother for not keeping Conroy under control.<sup>33</sup>

Victoria's father had always been saying that she would become queen and that was exactly her attitude. She was very diligent and prepared for the role of queen since her childhood.

The main concern of her education was her language. Her mother barely spoke English, Victoria's mother tongue was German. To make Victoria's English excellent was the task of George Davys, who was the dean of Chester in 1831. She had many teachers who oversaw her education, such as Henry Barez.<sup>34</sup> Victoria started to write journals at the age of thirteen. Many journals were destroyed by her youngest daughter Baby and her oldest son Bertie. The journals that were rewritten and edited serve as a valuable source of Victoria's life. Bertie also had Victoria's letters destroyed. "She was one of the most prolific letter writers of the nineteenth century." She wrote up to sixty million words. Her diaries reflected not only her personal life but also politics or foreign affairs. She also very much criticised her family.<sup>35</sup>

### 2.3. The early years of Victoria's reign

Victoria's coronation took place on 28 June 1838 in St Edward's Chapel.<sup>36</sup> She wrote in her diary:

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<sup>31</sup> Harrod-Eagles.

<sup>32</sup> Wilson.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

It was a fine day, and the crowds of people exceeded what I have ever seen; many as there were the day I went to the City, it was nothing – nothing to the multitudes, the millions of my loyal subjects who were assembled in *every spot* to witness the Procession. Their good humour and excessive loyalty was beyond everything, and I really cannot say *how* proud I feel to be the Queen of such *Nation*.

Then followed all the various things; and last (of those things) the Crown being placed on my head; - which was, I must own, a most beautiful impressive moment.

At about half past 5 I re-entered my carriage, the Crown on my head and Sceptre and Orb in my hand, and we proceeded the same way as we came – the crowds if possible having increased. The enthusiasm, affection and loyalty was really touching, and I shall ever remember this day as the proudest of my life. I came home at a little after 6, - really *not* feeling tired.<sup>37</sup>

Her coronation was more modest than that of her uncle, George IV. It cost £79,000.<sup>38</sup> On 13 July 1837, Victoria left Kensington Palace and moved to Buckingham Palace. She was the first monarch to live there. The palace had been purchased as a residence for Victoria's grandmother, Queen Charlotte.<sup>39</sup>

Victoria was finally free. She was no longer answerable to her mother, she was no longer under the influence of Conroy, she was herself. Victoria was the Queen of the United Kingdom. She was very stubborn and tried to force personal preferences into politics all her life. That caused her many troubles with her prime ministers. Her first Prime Minister was William Lamb, known as second Viscount Melbourne. Victoria called him Lord Melbourne. Before becoming the Prime Minister, he was Home Secretary during the reign of George IV.<sup>40</sup> He represented the Whig party. Lord Melbourne was not only her Prime Minister but also her tutor. He was Victoria's Prime Minister from 1837 until 1841. He was fifty-eight years old and Victoria eighteen years old when she became Queen. She was inexperienced and he was her adviser. When Victoria ascended to the throne, no one knew anything about her. Whenever she had been in society, her mother had been the centre of attention.<sup>41</sup> She discussed almost every matter with Lord Melbourne. According to Strachey, Lord Melbourne was almost a God to Victoria.<sup>42</sup> He was a great orator, interested in literature; he was wealthy, and charming. Wilson shows us Melbourne's dark side. He describes him as a sado-masochist because he liked flogging.<sup>43</sup> Not much information is known about his wife. Her name was Caroline Ponsonby, she was mentally unbalanced, had an affair, and was an alcoholic. She

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<sup>37</sup> Queen Victoria. (n.d.) Victoria (r. 1837-1901). *Historic royal speeches and writings*. Available at: <https://www.royal.uk/sites/default/files/media/victoria.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> Wilson, p. 85

<sup>39</sup> Harrod-Eagles, p. 106.

<sup>40</sup> Wilson, p. 81.

<sup>41</sup> Strachey, p. 54.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Wilson, p. 83.

died in 1828.<sup>44</sup> It is not, however, important how we now see Lord Melbourne, for Victoria, he was her first love. Her early years of reign were very happy. “[H]er journals reflect the pair [Victoria and Lord Melbourne] riding together, laughing together, jesting”.<sup>45</sup> It almost seemed that she had little interest in the condition of England. Her head was full of Lord Melbourne. She spent almost every day with him. Her uncle Leopold could also be considered as her adviser. They exchanged letters several times a week. He tried to influence her, but she did not let herself be influenced so easily.

In 1841 the Whigs lost the election, and Sir Robert Peel became the Prime Minister. He was the leader of the Tory Party. Peel was very shy toward women; that was one of the many reasons why he failed to build a relationship with the Queen. She did not like him at all. Lord Melbourne said about him that he was “clumsy”.<sup>46</sup> According to Lytton Strachey, it was no secret that Victoria “was a Whig by birth, by upbringing, by every association, public and private”.<sup>47</sup> That was no surprise considering that “she was raised allied with the Whigs”.<sup>48</sup> She hated the Tories, and all her ladies-in-waiting were, in fact, Whigs. The issue of Victoria’s ladies was a thorn in both, Victoria and Peel’s side. This issue is now called The Bedchamber Crisis.<sup>49</sup> This dispute was about Peel telling Victoria she had to make some changes in the ladies, some of the ladies must be Tories as well, but she refused. Conroy once called Victoria “ignorant little child”, and according to Wilson, he was not so wrong.<sup>50</sup> She did, in fact, act very childish. She had a preference for Whigs and was not willing to make concessions to her Prime Minister. Another affair when Victoria’s behaviour seemed very immature was the Lady Flora Hastings affair. She was a lady-in-waiting to the Duchess of Kent. There was a rumour that she was pregnant; the Queen herself spread the rumour and sent a royal doctor, Sir James Clark, to examine her. He came to the conclusion that the unmarried Lady Flora was pregnant. In reality, she was dying from a tumour in her abdomen.<sup>51</sup> These two affairs show us how inexperienced and immature the Queen was in her early years of the reign. She was unwilling to accept advice from her Prime Minister, just because he was a Tory and because she did not like him. When she was older, she regretted causing Lady Flora so much

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<sup>44</sup> Wilson, p. 81.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Strachey quoted in: St John, I. (2003) Queen Victoria as a Politician. *Historian*, (80), p. 25.

<sup>48</sup> St John, p. 25.

<sup>49</sup> Wilson, pp. 90-94.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>51</sup> c.f. Wilson, Harrod-Eagles, Strachey.

trouble. Victoria behaved like a child, spreading gossip and not thinking about consequences. She did not act like a queen.

Peel was behind the establishment of police in London in 1829 and the abolishment of the Corn Law in 1846.<sup>52</sup> The Corn Law of 1815 divided not only the whole society but also the government. “Peel was a Tory, and many Tories felt that his repeal of the Corn Laws [in 1846] was a betrayal of Tory Beliefs. Peel had already made himself very unpopular by supporting the right of Catholics to enter Parliament in 1829.”<sup>53</sup> He was a great politician. He tried to avoid political and social disaster by abolishing the Corn Law and by letting the Catholics enter Parliament.<sup>54</sup>

The Corn Laws had been the cause of strong dissension for the first half of the nineteenth century. After 1815 “the landowning farmers’ own income had suffered because of cheaper imported corn. These farmers persuaded the government to introduce laws to protect locally grown corn and the price at which it was sold.”<sup>55</sup> The government came up with a solution. The Corn Laws “imposed a tariff on the import of cheap grain”.<sup>56</sup> Peel had a feeling that these laws burdened the working class. However, the landowners thought that the repeal of the Corn Laws was aimed at them and tried to wreak an act of revenge on Peel. He was forced to resign, and Victoria had to ask Lord John Russell and the Whigs to form a new government.<sup>57</sup>

#### 2.4. Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha

Albert was born on 26 August 1819 as Albert Augustus Charles Emmanuel. His mother was the Princess Louise of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg and his father was Ernest I, the Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. His mother was fourteen years younger than her husband and she was only sixteen when she married Ernest. He cheated on her several times. She was described as charming, intelligent, and kind-hearted. Albert adored her, but she had to leave without saying goodbye because she had an affair. She then secretly married her lover but died aged thirty.<sup>58</sup> Albert had also a brother named Ernst.

It was on 15 October when Victoria proposed. According to tradition, she had to do it and could not wait for him to express his feelings. She was the monarch and had to propose,

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<sup>52</sup> McDowall, p. 136.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>56</sup> Wilson, p. 89.

<sup>57</sup> Harrod-Eagles, pp. 260-261.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

which is quite unusual. The feelings were mutual, and the wedding took place on 10 February 1840 at the Chapel Royal, St James's Palace.<sup>59</sup> There was no pattern by which the wedding should be conducted. The last wedding of a reigning queen had been the wedding of Mary Tudor, and that had been almost three hundred years earlier.<sup>60</sup>

At the beginning of their marriage, Albert felt very lonely. He left his beloved Rosenau and came to England, where everyone and everything was strange to him, language, customs or even nature. He was not even allowed to have a German secretary. Even against his wishes, George Anson was appointed as his private secretary, because he had British origin.<sup>61</sup>

Albert may have not realised that the monarch in England is just a figurehead, a pure symbol. One of the main disputes between him and the Queen was about him not being able to discuss political matters with her. He did not want the power at all, he just wanted to assist her and be able to support her. He did, however, wish to have more political influence than he actually did. At the early stages of their marriage, Albert was only her husband and was not allowed to discuss politics with her. Victoria wanted to reign alone and felt uncomfortable discussing political matters with him. When she was a little child, she had no power at all and when she became the Queen of England, she wanted the power for herself and did not want to be told what to do. It was not easy for her to share some of her responsibilities with him. When she needed political advice, she asked Lord Melbourne or uncle Leopold. Albert also had no power at the Court. The household was under the influence of Baroness Lehzen and she did everything in her power to cross Albert's path. As soon as Albert became part of Victoria's life, he and Lehzen started to argue. Lehzen was very important to Victoria, but after some time, she released her because of a quarrel arising between her and Albert.<sup>62</sup>

Albert did accomplish great things in life. The Great Exhibition in 1851 belongs to his greatest accomplishments. The idea for the Great Exhibition resulted from a visit of Henry Cole and other members of the Society of Arts in 1849. They went to see an exhibition in Paris. They wanted to make in London the largest exhibition that the world had ever seen. Their aim was to display everything that had been done since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. The Great Exhibition was also supposed to be the celebration of free trade. Cole expressed the opinion that a project of this size needs to be regulated with the help of the Royal Commission. Prince Albert took the chair of this Commission in January 1850. The

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<sup>59</sup> Wilson, pp. 101-106.

<sup>60</sup> Harrod-Eagles, p. 159.

<sup>61</sup> Wilson, p. 104

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.



Commission contained, among others, Sir Robert Peel, Lord John Russell or the architects Thomas Cubitt and Charles Barry. The main designer of this project was expected to be Joseph Paxton.<sup>63</sup> There were many questions associated with such a large project, such as: “Where would the Exhibition be held exactly? Who was to pay for it?”<sup>64</sup> The answer to the last question was especially problematic. Some money was collected from the member of the Society of Arts and some was raised in the city. The Exhibition was a great success. Many famous personalities visited the Crystal Palace, such as Charlotte Brontë. The original Crystal Palace in Hyde Park was demolished and rebuilt in Sydenham.<sup>65</sup>

The Queen was very proud of her beloved husband, as we know from her diary. On the day of the Great Exhibition, she noted in her diary:

This day is one of the greatest and most glorious days of our lives, with which to my pride and joy the name of my dearly beloved Albert is forever associated!

The tremendous cheering, the joy expressed in every face, the vastness of the building, with all its decorations and exhibits, the sound of the organ (with 200 instruments and 600 voices, which seemed nothing), and my beloved Husband the creator of this great ‘Peace Festival’, uniting the industry and arts of all nations of the earth, all this, was indeed moving, and a day to live forever. God bless my dearest Albert, and my dear Country which has shown itself so great today.<sup>66</sup>

Albert’s vision, one could say dream, was united Germany. This idea was later adopted by his daughter Victoria.<sup>67</sup> Many politicians feared that Albert would favour Germany and its interests over the interests of England. And although it is indeed true that Albert loved his native land, he never put Germany before England. Albert was a great politician. He was well-educated, hard-working, and politically involved. He cared for the working classes, supported liberal Protestantism and free trade liberalism, and loved arts and science.<sup>68</sup> Although he was not the official Private Secretary of Victoria, he did a lot of work for her.

Although Wilson puts emphasis on Albert being underrated, Strachey and Harrod-Eagles do not pay so much attention to that fact. Wilson states in his book that “Britain had failed to see his excellence” and that Albert “had been so little understood in his lifetime by the British Establishment”.<sup>69</sup> It is not so surprising that Britain did not value him adequately. He had German roots, and everyone was very sceptical about him being a member of the Royal

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<sup>63</sup> Wilson, pp. 155-157.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>66</sup> Queen Victoria, n.d.

<sup>67</sup> Wilson, p. 206.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

Family. Victoria also did not consider him a strong politician. He had no responsibilities for the first years of their marriage. This fact is highlighted by Harrod-Eagles. Victoria had a sense of duty and responsibility, and according to Harrod-Eagles, these two qualities did not allow her to share her powers with anyone, including Albert.<sup>70</sup> Strachey states that after Peel became Prime Minister, Albert started to intervene actively in state affairs. He also notes in his book that everyone accepted that Albert was the real regulator of royal power and royal functions.<sup>71</sup>

Wilson shows us all the things Albert did for the British nations, e.g., programmes of social housing in Kennington, the creation of the Royal Horticultural Garden, the Great Exhibition of 1851, the foundation of Wellington College, and many others.<sup>72</sup> He took the title Prince Consort in 1857.<sup>73</sup> According to the English tradition, if the male monarch marries someone, she is automatically called the Queen, but it does not work the other way around. That means that Prince Albert was just a Prince and not the King. But if he had been the monarch and married Victoria, she would have been called the Queen anyway. Victoria tried to change this law many times, but the only thing she achieved for Albert was the title of Prince Consort.

Albert had the feeling that he did not accomplish anything in his life, hence he worked more and more. "There is abundant evidence that Albert was suffering for years before his death from 'nervous' stomach attack."<sup>74</sup> Albert was meticulous and hard-working, every triviality put him under pressure. Victoria was not helpful at all. She was quick-tempered and her tantrums occurred on a daily basis. Albert feared that Victoria would become mad, as did her uncle George III. Albert died on 14 December 1861, aged only 42. After his death, the Queen wretched herself in mourning.

After Albert's death, she wrote to her uncle Leopold:

... to be cut off in the prime of life – to see our pure happy, quiet domestic life, which alone enabled me to bear my much disliked position, cut off at forty-two – when I had hoped with such instinctive certainty that God never would part us, and would let us grow old together ... is too awful, too cruel!<sup>75</sup>

Both Albert and Victoria did not accept very well the fact that they were supposed to be just figureheads and their active involvement should be little. They both, especially Victoria, had

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<sup>70</sup> Harrod-Eagles, p. 176.

<sup>71</sup> Strachey, p. 121.

<sup>72</sup> Wilson, p. 218.

<sup>73</sup> Harrod-Eagles, p. 335.

<sup>74</sup> Wilson, p. 247.

<sup>75</sup> Queen Victoria, n.d.

quarrels with the prime ministers. It was also very common that the Foreign Office and the Queen opposed one another in many cases, e.g., the Danish claims over the Schleswig-Holstein Duchies. She was on the side of Schleswig-Holstein because she had relatives living there. “[H]er sister was married to the Augustenburg claimant to one of the Duchies.”<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, Albert, his brother and many other relatives wanted to protect the Holstein Duchy from Denmark’s invasion. Lord Palmerston’s point of view was very different. Palmerston was at that moment the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. He wanted an alliance with Scandinavia, especially because his attitude toward Russia became aggressive. There were many other occasions when the Crown and the Foreign Office had a completely different point of view. (e.g., over the diplomat Cowley; he was a diplomat in Germany, but Palmerston wanted him in St Petersburg. Victoria and Albert disagreed very much.) The main problem arose from the fact that the Queen gave weight to European interests, whereas her prime ministers asserted British interests.<sup>77</sup>

## 2.5. Widowhood

After Albert’s death, the period of long mourning began for Victoria. He was her true and only love, and he was gone forever. She was very lonely and unable to do her daily tasks for some time.

There were many important events in the period after Albert’s death. Many influential personalities visited Victoria and several crucial events were happening. Perhaps the most controversial occurrence was John Brown. He was a gillie coming from Scotland. He was humorous and saw Victoria as a human being, not as the Queen. However, he respected her, protected her, and was devoted to her. Both Albert and Victoria loved Scotland and were always pleased to visit it. They also bought a house there, called Balmoral Castle. John Brown and Victoria met at Osborne in December 1864. Osborne House was their residence on the Isle of Wight. The 1860s were the most depressing years of her life, and John Brown tried to help her overcome sorrow. On the fourth anniversary of Albert’s death, the Queen and the Royal Family gathered at the Frogmore Mausoleum, where Albert was buried and for the first time Brown came too. Many members of the family did not like Brown and saw their relationship as strange. What they did not see was the fact that Brown was very helpful and important to her.

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<sup>76</sup> Wilson, p. 148.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 148-149.

The Queen had a period of seclusion after the Prince's death. She did not stop meeting other monarchs or the highest officials, nor did she stop working. She withdrew from public life because she needed time to overcome her bereavement. She found public life and meeting others to be very difficult.<sup>78</sup> The Queen shrank from public duties, not from state or foreign affairs. "[...] she watched the international scene, and monitored the situation in Indian, Afghanistan and Egypt".<sup>79</sup> "When she did make one of her rare public appearances, she scandalized the politicians by invariably having Brown in tow."<sup>80</sup> Brown was by her side all the time and was with her when she had to appear in public, which was very surprising, if not shocking.

There were rumours that Victoria was having an affair with John Brown. Although Wilson is the only author who mentions it.<sup>81</sup> According to Harrod-Eagles, Brown was just her faithful friend who helped her overcome her pain after losing her husband.<sup>82</sup> Strachey also does not pay much attention to Brown.<sup>83</sup> However, Wilson focuses on how the Royal Family and others saw her relationship with Brown. Vicky, Victoria's daughter, thought that the relationship of Queen with Brown was just "[...] namely an embarrassingly close monarch-servant relationship".<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, Sir Charles Grey, her private secretary, was strongly convinced that she had an intimate relationship with Brown. The Queen and Brown spent a lot of time together, so maybe that was the reason why the servants and Grey thought they had an affair. Another, possible 'evidence' presented by Wilson, is the statement of Normand Macleod. He had told his sister, Miss Macleod that he had wedded Victoria to John Brown. Miss Macleod then told this news to the wife of Ponsonby, who was the private secretary of the Queen. According to Wilson it makes no sense that either Miss Macleod or Norman Macleod made this story up, but to this day it is not clear whether Victoria and John Brown had been married.<sup>85</sup> From my point of view, it is quite hard to believe that the Queen married John Brown because her devotion to Albert was immense. She fell into depression, avoided public life, and almost lost her mind after his death, so it is quite unimaginable that she fell in love with Brown.

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<sup>78</sup> Wilson, p. 279.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 320.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 321.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Harrod-Eagles.

<sup>83</sup> Strachey.

<sup>84</sup> Wilson, p. 324.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 326.

King Edward II, Victoria's son, destroyed more than 300 letters by Victoria. These letters were in the possession of George Profeit, the son of Dr Alexander Profeit, a doctor at Balmoral, who blackmailed the King. It is not known what these letters were about, but it is assumed that the content of the letters revealed more about Brown and Victoria's relationship. Doctor Reid was entrusted by King to purchase these letters. After some time, he managed to get them. According to Reid's daughter, Queen Victoria had intimate relationship with Brown, and she believed that they could have been married.<sup>86</sup> I believe that Brown was just her faithful friend who helped her overcome her bereavement, grief, and sadness, and because of her devotion to Albert, it seemed absurd for her to get married again. She implied many times, as we learn from her biographies written by Harrod-Eagles, Strachey, or Wilson, that she had contempt for widows who remarried.

The power of the Crown declined rapidly after 1861. There were many reasons for that. The first was Victoria's withdrawal from public life. The Queen used her depressions as an excuse to avoid meetings with her Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone. In 1869, she was supposed to open a bridge, but she refused to do so due to hot weather.<sup>87</sup> On another occasion, she was to attend an opening of the Royal Albert Hall on 29 March 1871, but she said a few words and then left.<sup>88</sup> Gladstone felt that this was just an excuse for avoiding public life. According to "Gladstone and all the males around her, she was behaving deplorably".<sup>89</sup> And the British nation felt detached from their Queen.

All the other reasons, responsible for her growing unpopularity, arose from her avoidance of the public. The nation began to wonder if the monarchy was the right thing for them. The thoughts of republicanism were obvious.<sup>90</sup> The Queen was very stubborn and "she stubbornly resisted the attempts by politicians to make her into a modern 'constitutional monarch'".<sup>91</sup> She refused any changes and the monarchy seemed for the nation old-fashioned. Many people called for a change. And not only the nation, but also Prime Minister Gladstone feared "whether [the Queen] was any longer willing or capable of doing the work of a constitutional monarch".<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Wilson, p. 422.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 317.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 344.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 317.

<sup>90</sup> Strachey, p. 221.

<sup>91</sup> Wilson, p. 293.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 311.

Due to the Civil List<sup>93</sup>, a demonstration in Hyde Park occurred. The demonstration was mainly due to Victoria being the richest person in Britain. The Queen was receiving £385,000 annually from the Civil List. “In 1852, she had been left £250,000 by a miser named Nield”.<sup>94</sup> However, this amount of money was nothing in comparison to her income from the Duchy of Lancaster. Her nation wanted an explanation of what the Queen does with all that money she was receiving. Victoria wanted to secure her children and grandchildren financially, and quite often there were disputes about the Civil Lists for her offspring. The aforementioned demonstration in Hyde Park was against Prince Arthur receiving his annuity of £15,000. There were some attempts to reform the Civil List, but it was always rejected. At the time of the Queen’s death, her private property was believed to be approaching £2,000,000.<sup>95</sup>

In 1857 Victoria took the title of Empress of India. She loved India and had many servants from this country. She was surrounded by Indian servants, and she enjoyed their company. There were, however, few disputes between her and her Indian servants. A strange incident occurred in 1890 that involved one of the Queen’s Indian servants. She was travelling to her Summer Cottage wearing a brooch, a present from the Grand Duke of Hesse. On her way back, she noticed that the brooch was missing. She accused her dresser of forgetting the brooch. A massive search was conducted at the dresser's house, but nothing was found. A footman on duty told her that he had seen Karim’s [Indian servant] brother-in-law Hourmet Ali lurking around the Cottage, where the Queen was enjoying her cup of tea. Ali stole the brooch and tried to sell it.<sup>96</sup> The Queen was furious. Ali found the brooch lying on the ground and picked it up – in India, it was not considered a crime. Queen replied: “This is what you English call justice”.<sup>97</sup> We can see here clearly that a part of her heart was never in England. By calling them English, she may have been emphasizing the fact that she had never considered herself entirely British. She was German and never considered England to be her home although she had just celebrated the Golden Jubilee and would also celebrate the Diamond Jubilee as the Queen of England and spent all her life there. However, it is

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<sup>93</sup> “Civil List, in the United Kingdom, the list of sums appropriated annually by Parliament to pay the expenses of the sovereign and his or her household.” Quoted in: Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. Civil List. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Civil-List>. [Retrieved 31 March 2022].

<sup>94</sup> Wilson, p. 341.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., pp. 341-345.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 479.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 480.

important to bear in mind that she never made any distinction between her English and Indian servants.<sup>98</sup>

The last years of her reign must have been very challenging for her. Victoria had a stroke, which she survived, but she was blind, and everyone knew her end was approaching. She mentioned her blindness in one of her final entries, and she noted on 4 January 1901: “From not having been well, I see so badly, which is very tiresome.”<sup>99</sup>

In the final published entry, she briefly mentioned that she had had a good sleep and felt better despite the bad weather and the deterioration of her health. In the undermentioned passage, it is clear that she was weak because she wrote only simple, short sentences. “Had a good night and could take some breakfast better. Took an hour’s drive at half-past two ... It was very foggy, but the air was pleasant.”<sup>100</sup> She died on 22 January 1901 at Osborne House. Her family gathered around her as she was dying.

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<sup>98</sup> Wilson, p. 480.

<sup>99</sup> Queen Victoria, n.d.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

## 2.6. The Children and Grandchildren of Victoria

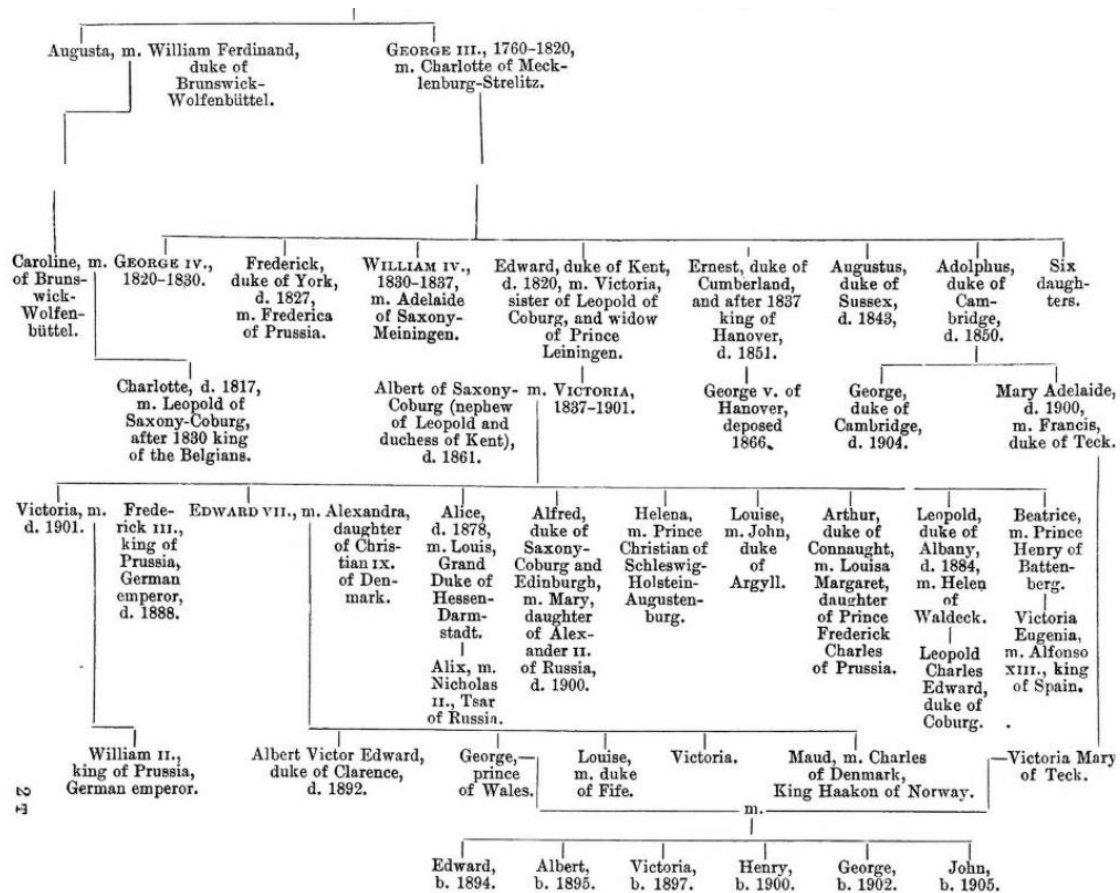


Figure 1 House of Brunswick-Hanover

Victoria and Albert had nine children together, as we can see in the picture above. It is believed that because Victoria had married her cousin Albert, her children inherited a disease called haemophilia. Some of her own children passed away due to that disease and not only her children, but unfortunately her grandchildren as well. Victoria called it “the cursed gene”.<sup>101</sup>

Victoria and Albert raised their children very strictly, especially their firstborn son Albert. Bertie, as they called him, was nothing like his father. Victoria wrote in her journal that Bertie was causing them enormous concern.<sup>102</sup> The Queen maintained her hostility to Bertie until she died. She was constantly finding faults in him. She said that he was not good-looking. Vicky, Victoria’s firstborn daughter, tried to express her thoughts about the Queen’s inappropriate behaviour toward Bertie once, but it was useless.<sup>103</sup> The Queen believed that Albert’s death had been Bertie’s fault. Mostly because shortly before his death, they found out about Bertie’s

<sup>101</sup> Wilson, p. 270.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 238.



affair. He eventually married Princess Alexandra of Denmark. I cannot simply understand Victoria's hostility to her own son. She wanted him to be a clone of his father, but it was impossible. Bertie did not learn easily; he was indolent.<sup>104</sup> After the death of Queen Victoria, he became King of England.

There was no doubt that Victoria loved and adored her children. But she very much criticised her family in the journals. She was very strict and placed immense demands on her children. With the help of her children and grandchildren, she was able to connect many parts of Europe.

Interestingly, Wilson pays considerable attention to the Queen's children and grandchildren.<sup>105</sup> On the contrary, Strachey and Harrod-Eagles do not mention her offspring very frequently.<sup>106</sup> I prefer Wilson's attitude because her offspring are crucial to history. Not to mention their involvement in foreign countries. Thanks to Victoria's marriage politics "the British royal family was connected by marriage with most of the non-Catholic dynastic rulers of Europe".<sup>107</sup> There were two pivotal marriages, the first one being the marriage of Vicky to Crown Prince Frederick of Prussia and the marriage of Alfred to the Grand Duchess Maria Alexandrovna being the second one.

### 3. Queen Victoria's Relationship with Ireland

Queen Victoria had never made any secrets of her hostility to Ireland. To fully understand her hostile attitude, we must explore the causes of this complicated and one might say problematic relationship of Queen Victoria with her Irish people. There were times, when the Queen expressed kindness to the Irish, but over her long reign, her attitude towards the Irish was increasingly hard and distrustful.<sup>108</sup> The causes of that cannot be precisely determined because she never stated, understandably, the reasons of her hostile attitude, so we can only argue, why she developed this relationship towards the Irish.

One cause might be found in her childhood. The previously mentioned John Conroy was an Irishman, but it cannot be said, whether his nationality played some role in her adulthood and

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<sup>104</sup> Wilson, pp. 132-133.

<sup>105</sup> Wilson.

<sup>106</sup> Strachey; Harrod-Eagles.

<sup>107</sup> Taylor, M. (2020) – 'The Bicentenary of Queen Victoria', *Journal of British Studies* 59 (January), DOI: 10.1017/jbr.2019.245, p. 129.

<sup>108</sup> Kelly, R.J. (2009) 'Queen Victoria and the Irish Post-Famine Context: A Royal Visit', *Studies in Victorian Culture* 7, p. 3.

in her forming relationship towards Ireland. She was just a child when she met him, and she spent her childhood in seclusion because of him. He deprived Victoria of a good relationship with her uncles.<sup>109</sup> It was his personality that bothered her and not his nationality, at least in her childhood. While developing her relationship towards Ireland, John Conroy might play some role, because she was affected by him all her life. She hated him and said that he was her tormentor. John Conroy might seem insignificant in wider context but when these insignificant things built up, they might form her relationship.

Many assaults and attacks happened to the royal family. At least two of them were conducted by the Irish. The first one took place in May 1849. The shooter's name was William Hamilton. Queen Victoria was not hurt at all and as Loughlin stated she "was more conscious of the fact that he was Irish than that he was insane".<sup>110</sup> The second attack happened in Sydney, where the Duke of Edinburgh, the fourth child of Queen Victoria, was shot in the back by an Irishman, whose name was O'Farrell.<sup>111</sup> The circumstances of these attacks are not known, but from the statement relating to the Hamilton's attack on Queen Victoria, she did not even care why the attack happened in the first place, she was only furious because he was an Irish.

Religion played pivotal role in her developing relationship to her Irish people. Queen Victoria was the head of the Church of England and, after the Act of Union in 1800, she was also the head of the Church of Ireland. Since England was Protestant and Ireland was predominantly Catholic, there were many disputes in terms of religion. These disputes involved her directly, as she was the head of the Churches. She did not sympathize with the Catholics, but she was not harsh either. The King of Belgium, her beloved uncle Leopold, was Roman Catholic and such thing made her to accept, at least partly, the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>112</sup> She did, however, favour the Protestant Church over the Catholic.

John Brown, as already mentioned, was her faithful companion and after her husband died, she spent much time with him. John Brown came from Scotland, and she expressed her affection for this country many times. One time, she noted that there are "beautiful human beings and scenery"<sup>113</sup> in Scotland. Although there is no evidence that the Queen made some decisions based on John Brown, she did, in fact, decided to donate money for the Famine

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<sup>109</sup> Harrod-Eagles, p. 58.

<sup>110</sup> Loughlin, J. (2002) 'Allegiance and Illusion: Queen Victoria's Irish Visit of 1849', *History* 87:288. DOI: 10.1111/1468-229X.00238, p. 513.

<sup>111</sup> Wilson, p. 309.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

relief, after she discovered, that the money would go also for the relief of Scots.<sup>114</sup> The main difference between the Scots and Irish can be seen on the Act of Union. Whereas the Act of Union in 1707 between England and Scotland was considered to be successful, the Irish did not want to form such a union with England. There were major differences between the British and Irish, e.g. in terms of religion. On the other hand, the Scots had never experienced any difficulties identifying themselves as members of the Empire.<sup>115</sup>

The attitude of Queen Victoria to Ireland may have played some role, particularly in deciding how much money she would provide to help the suffering people in Ireland. As we learn further in the text, she did donate money for the relief, and she expressed her support and sympathy for Ireland during the visit of 1849.

#### 4. The Royal Visit to Ireland in 1849

The visit to Ireland in 1849 was the first she made. Although the visit had been suggested already in 1846, it took place three years later. The Queen stated in her letter to Lord John Russell on 3 August 1846 that the visit to Ireland is essential because the people speculate “whether she [even] *dare* visit one part [Ireland] of her dominions”<sup>116</sup> and she, understandably, did not want these speculations to spread. She declared that for a visit to be associated with success, the long-term good effect must outweigh the short-term one. Victoria then said that the Civil List cannot cover all the costs. Lord John Russell agreed with her but mentioned that the expenses cannot be covered entirely by the Irish or by the British nation.<sup>117</sup>

The Queen undertook a total of four visits to Ireland; the first one took place in 1849, followed by the visits of 1853, 1861 and the final one in 1900.<sup>118</sup> She spent five weeks in total in Ireland, in comparison to almost seven years that were spent in Scotland.<sup>119</sup> Earl of Clarendon, the Irish Lord Lieutenant,<sup>120</sup> was informed by Lord John Russell on 23 June 1849

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<sup>114</sup> Kinealy, C. (2013). *Charity and the Great Hunger in Ireland*. London: Bloomsbury. Quoted in: Bartlett, T. (2018). ‘The Great Famine and its Aftermath’, in J. Kelly (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Ireland* (The Cambridge History of Ireland), pp. 637-730. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 661.

<sup>115</sup> Gillissen, C. (2014) ‘A United Kingdom? Ireland, the Union, and Government Responses to the Great Famine’, *Études anglaises*, (67):3. DOI:10.3917/etan.673.0332, pp. 332-333.

<sup>116</sup> Queen Victoria. (1908). *The Letters of Queen Victoria, Volume 2 (of 3), 1844-1853 A Selection from Her Majesty's Correspondence Between the Years 1837 and 1861*. Edited by A.C. Benson and Viscount Esher. London: John Murray. Available at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/24780/24780-h/24780-h.htm>, Ch. XV (n.d.)

<sup>117</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, Ch. XV (n.d.)

<sup>118</sup> Kelly, p. 3.

<sup>119</sup> Loughlin, p. 493.

<sup>120</sup> Coogan, T.P. (2012). *The Famine Plot: England's role in Ireland's greatest tragedy*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 95.

about the Queen's intention to visit Ireland. She was to travel from Cork to Dublin and finally to Belfast. After spending a few days in Belfast, her intention was to continue her voyage to Scotland.<sup>121</sup> The Queen's plan was to stay two days in Cork and five days in Dublin.<sup>122</sup> The itinerary of the royal journey was planned in detail and in such a way that the Queen would see no signs of people suffering from the Famine.<sup>123</sup> However, she mentioned in her diary that "the men are very poorly, often raggedly dressed"<sup>124</sup> so the aim of preventing Victoria from seeing any poor Irish had failed. The conditions for the visit were not ideal; the Famine was raging and there were outbreaks of various diseases.<sup>125</sup> The people were still suffering, and the Queen was blamed for not having made this visit earlier. As mentioned before, there were speculations that Queen Victoria feared to visit Ireland, but the Earl of Clarendon was more than happy to welcome the Queen.<sup>126</sup> He promoted the visit forcefully, although he expressed some concerns about the Queen's reception by the Irish people.

The beginning of Victoria and Albert's journey was not great at all. The Queen suffered from seasickness. Victoria and Albert disembarked at the port of Cobh on 2 August 1849. Following the tradition of George IV who named the port of Dunleary Kingstown, the Queen renamed the port to Queenstown. This was because Dunleary was for the king George IV the first place he had visited in Ireland and the port town of Cobh was the first place for Victoria.<sup>127</sup> The name of the port city of Queenstown was changed back after Ireland became independent.<sup>128</sup> The Queen received a warm welcome, both from the people of Cork and Queenstown and from "the local political and ecclesiastical dignitaries".<sup>129</sup> She was surprised to find that Cork looked different from most English towns.

After Cork, she sailed to Dublin, where she received a warm reception, and the people of Dublin were enthusiastic to see her and her husband. She spent four days in total in Dublin and the royal pair was admiring the Irish architecture and meeting with political and religious figures. The Queen met with the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr Daniel Murray, and also with the

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<sup>121</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, Ch. XVIII (n.d.)

<sup>122</sup> Connolly, S. J. (2012) 'Like an old cathedral city: Belfast welcomes Queen Victoria, August 1849', *Urban History*, (39):4. DOI:10.1017/S0963926812000375, p. 573.

<sup>123</sup> Kelly, p. 5.

<sup>124</sup> Queen Victoria. (1868). *Leaves from the Journal of our Life in the Highland*, ed. Arthur Helps. Quoted in: Loughlin, p. 501.

<sup>125</sup> Kelly, p. 4-5.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Loughlin, p. 501.

<sup>128</sup> Wilson, 144.

<sup>129</sup> Kelly, p. 5.

Duke of Leinster at his Carton residence.<sup>130</sup> The Queen noted in a letter to the King of the Belgians that the Irish had “such beautiful black eyes and hair and such fine colours and teeth”.<sup>131</sup>

The Queen, along with Prince Albert, arrived at Belfast on 11 August 1847. It was initially suggested that Belfast should be omitted from the itinerary as there were outbreaks of conflicts and the city of Belfast was described as dull.<sup>132</sup> The disturbances were caused by growing resentment between Catholics and Protestants.<sup>133</sup> The arrival of the royal family was scheduled for morning. The people had been gathering since the early hours of 11 August. The Irish nation showed its loyalty by standing many hours in rain waiting for their Queen to arrive.<sup>134</sup> The visit of Belfast lasted only five hours, in comparison with the whole day spent in Cork and five days that the Queen spent in Dublin. In both Dublin and Cork, the Queen had received a warm welcome, but this was not the case in Belfast. The city of Belfast received her reluctantly and Queen Victoria had sensed this, and the tone of the visit was set. In a letter to her uncle Leopold, she wrote that the visit of Belfast was as successful as the two previous visits. Her diary, however, showed something else. She wrote that the reception was “not quite as enthusiastic as in Dublin”.<sup>135</sup>

The visit of the Queen should provide some kind of relief to the suffering people from the Famine. She was to show her sympathy and affection with the poor. One of the aims of the royal visit was to symbolically confirm British dominion over Ireland.<sup>136</sup> The visit was nothing more than a parade of the royal family. It brought nothing other than feeling of the Irish that they are also a part of the British Empire. How could one visit convince the people of Ireland that they are equal partners of the Empire? The answer is easy; it could not. The Queen showed maybe her affection towards Ireland, but no one paid attention to the Famine. The organizers of this visit failed to show Ireland in its true light. Their goal was to avoid all the places affected by the Famine, so the Queen did not see any of its consequences.<sup>137</sup> What was the point of the visit for the Irish people? The Queen had no chance to see the truly devastating consequences of the Famine. One cannot but wonder what would have happened if the Queen had seen the suffering people. She might have fought for bigger relief measures,

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<sup>130</sup> Loughlin, p. 502.

<sup>131</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, Ch. XVIII (n.d.)

<sup>132</sup> Connolly, p. 574.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 580.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 576.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 586.

<sup>136</sup> Kelly, p. 11.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

or she would have simply been more sensitive to the subject. As Richard J. Kelly has put it, the visit “offered a brief respite; but once it was over, the effect was soon a memory with somewhat confused, even surreal message”,<sup>138</sup> and I couldn’t agree more with this statement.

## 5. The State of Ireland Before the Outbreak of the Famine

Ireland was quite different from its neighbour, England. The population growth was marked also in England, but the people there moved from villages to cities in order to find better work. There was no such thing in Ireland. The land was predominantly rural, people were mostly in the countryside and even if they did want to move from a village to a city, there was no work for them. People in Ireland were “heavily involved in agriculture”<sup>139</sup> whereas Britain was “on the verge of industrial and imperial ascendancy”.<sup>140</sup> The population growth in Ireland was enormous; “the Irish population had grown by approximately 50 per cent in the four decades since the Act of Union”.<sup>141</sup>

Religion played an important role in every land in the nineteenth century and England, together with Ireland was not different. As far back as the fifteenth century, there were disputes between the Irish church and the representatives of the church in Britain. When Henry VIII divorced his wife in order to marry Anne Boleyn, it led to many changes; Ireland continued to be a Catholic nation and England was formed into a Protestant state. By divorcing his wife, Henry VIII opposed the pope, which had adverse consequences mainly for Ireland. Land had been taken from Ireland and Irish people “would also be forced to pay for the upkeep of the Protestant clergy.”<sup>142</sup> Catholic power in Ireland ended in 1690, when King James II was defeated by William of Orange.<sup>143</sup> Since then, the religion was causing many disputes between the Irish and the English government and because the British monarch is also the head of Church of England, these conflicts concerned the sovereign directly. England in the nineteenth century was a Protestant nation, whereas Ireland was predominantly Catholic. The series of Penal Laws, we may call them ‘anti-Catholic Laws’, were directed at Catholics. The Penal Laws started already in the seventeenth century and continued for a very long time. The main purpose of these laws was Catholic oppression in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which paradoxically did not lead to conversion, but it made the Catholics

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<sup>138</sup> Kelly, p. 13.

<sup>139</sup> Bartlett, T. (2010). *Ireland: A History*. Cambridge: CUP, p. 272.

<sup>140</sup> Kinealy, p. 46.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>142</sup> Coogan, p. 18.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

stronger and eager to demand their rights throughout the nineteenth century. The Catholic question was an unpleasant development for the English government. There were many acts in the series of the Penal laws, e.g. Act issued in 1697 was focused on ordering Catholic bishops out of Ireland. Catholics could not buy or inherit land and were forbidden to be educated at home or in a foreign country, which prevented them from having better professions. Laws targeted at landowners resulted in seven hundred owners converting.<sup>144</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, a number of Catholic Relief Acts ensued. The Catholic Relief Acts of 1779 and 1782 had made it possible for Catholics to be part of political affairs. They still did not have the right to vote in elections, nor did they have the right to a seat in the legislature. Some improvement came with the Relief Act of 1793, that “gave Irish Catholics the vote in county elections on the same terms as Irish Protestants”.<sup>145</sup> With the Catholic Relief Act of 1829 introduced by George IV, the Catholics gained the right to become members of the Parliament.<sup>146</sup> Religious disputes were quite often because the Catholics wanted the same rights as the Protestants. In 1845 the Famine struck, and the religious arguments were suddenly in the background.

There were approximately 8.5 million people living in Ireland in 1845 and over 4.7 million were dependent on potato crops. Circa 3.3 million of those dependent on potatoes “had a diet consisting more or less exclusively of potatoes”.<sup>147</sup> A majority of those “were landless agricultural labourers, cottiers (the smallest landholders), and other tenants with less than 20 acres of land”.<sup>148</sup> The potatoes represented for the people in Ireland an essential item in their diets. Not only humans in Ireland needed potatoes in order to survive the day but also animals. Potato crops were thus crucial for the inhabitants of Ireland. Ireland produced not only potatoes but also corn, which would allegedly feed over two million people every year. The surplus was then exported to Britain.<sup>149</sup> There were benefits of growing just one particular crop, in the Irish case, potatoes. It was quite easy for the farmers to grow potatoes and also to cook them. The weather does not matter in order to grow potatoes.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Bartlett, *Ireland: A History*, pp. 141, 163-5.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>146</sup> McDowall, p. 141.

<sup>147</sup> Bourke, P.M.A. (1993). ‘The visitation of God’? : The potato and the great Irish famine, ed. Jacqueline Hill and Cormac Ó Gráda. Dublin. Quoted in: Donnelly, J.S. (2001). *The Great Irish Potato Famine*. Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd, p. 8.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> Kinealy, C. (1995) *This great calamity: the Irish famine 1845-52*. Boulder: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, p. 40.

<sup>150</sup> Kinealy, p. 48.

Ireland was a land that was “vulnerable to Disaster” for many cases.<sup>151</sup> The first one being the overdependence on one crop, then the still growing population and also the awful “living conditions of the lowest social classes”.<sup>152</sup> This remark is also made by Thomas Bartlett, who claims that because of the poverty that was obvious in Ireland, “the Irish people [were] vulnerable to Famine” but the poverty “was not the fault of the British government”.<sup>153</sup>

## 6. The Course of the Crisis

There had been potato crop failures even before the Great Famine but mostly for one year. What makes the Great Famine different, was its longevity and severity. As mentioned before, there had been localized famines in the nineteenth century, mainly in “1800, 1817, 1822, 1831, 1835 and 1842”.<sup>154</sup> The government did provide some temporary relief measures, as well at the beginning of 1845 when everyone thought the Famine would last only short time. The summer months in Ireland were known as “hungry months” because new potatoes were not planted yet and the food supplies from the previous months were long gone.<sup>155</sup> The people were suffering long before the Famine had begun. The first appearance of potato blight was recorded in September 1845.<sup>156</sup> Although the initial date of the Famine is quite easy to determine, the problem occurs regarding the end of the Hunger because the date is less clear. There are historians who claim that the Famine ended in 1849 but others argue that the end is marked with the year 1852. The government measures officially ended 1849 as there was no relief after that.<sup>157</sup> This statement supports the theory that the Famine ended 1849. Kinealy argues that “the special relief measures” lasted until 1852.<sup>158</sup> The end of the catastrophe is also placed in 1852 because the potato crops were “healthy and virtually free from potato blight” in that year.<sup>159</sup> Determining the end of the Famine depends on the aforementioned criteria, such as the healthy potato crops.

They year 1847 became known as the “Black ‘47” because the situation in Ireland was at its worse and the death rates were the highest.<sup>160</sup> There were potato failures in crops but also the

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<sup>151</sup> Bartlett, ‘The Great Famine and its Aftermath’, p. 641.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Bartlett, *Ireland: A History*, p. 288.

<sup>154</sup> Coogan, p. 20.

<sup>155</sup> Bartlett, ‘The Great Famine and its Aftermath’, p. 642.

<sup>156</sup> Kinealy, p. 81.

<sup>157</sup> Gillissen, p. 344.

<sup>158</sup> Kinealy, p. 19.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 411.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 356.



coldest winter on record for over a hundred years.<sup>161</sup> People started to emigrate in order to survive.<sup>162</sup> They were desperate, and they rather risked their lives crossing the ocean than slowly dying of hunger in their homes. The phenomenon that resulted from the Black '47 carried the name “coffin ships”. The ships were many times overcrowded and various disease were spreading aboard. The crew was not prepared for that, and the people were dying in masses. The ships sailing to Canada, or the United States were then named coffin ships, as the mortality was enormous, and the people were buried right on the board or thrown in the sea. The name had originated in 1832. The coffin ships in that year were carrying timber and the Irish saw an opportunity to flee to North America. The mortality was very high as the ships were not designed to carry people.<sup>163</sup> After the horrendous year of 1847, Charles Trevelyan<sup>164</sup> declared that the famine was over, and the relief was to end. This was heavily supported by the British.<sup>165</sup> As we now know, the Famine was not over.

The most affected counties included “Clare, Cork, Galway, Kerry and Mayo”,<sup>166</sup> where the death rates were the highest. The year 1847 was crucial for the inhabitants because almost 250,000 people died that year. The death rates dropped in 1848 to 208,000 deaths a year, but the following year marked over 240,000 deceased.<sup>167</sup> When the potato crop failed in September 1845, Ireland counted some eight million people and six years later, almost one-fourth of the population had disappeared. Either due to starvation, illnesses or emigration.<sup>168</sup>

Many personalities played an important role in this calamity. The first one was Sir Robert Peel, the Prime Minister from 1842 to 1846. His successor was Lord John Russell, who was replaced in 1852 by George Hamilton-Gordon. Peel did show some sympathy towards the Irish and that could be caused by the fact that he was Irish Chief Secretary and also Home Secretary. He saw, at least partly, the consequences of the lack of food.<sup>169</sup> These men were responsible for adopting some relief measures. The available sources make it evident that the costs of the relief measures exceeded £8,300,000 but “a large portion of this money (over

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<sup>161</sup> Abbott, R. (2020) *Ireland's Great Hunger and the Irish Diaspora*. [Documentary]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMNqaNERDr4>.

<sup>162</sup> Coogan, pp. 187-188.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., pp. 187-188, 202.

<sup>164</sup> Sir Charles Trevelyan was “the assistant secretary to the Treasury and in effect the permanent head of the Civil Service. [...] it was Trevelyan who had control of Irish famine expenditure”. (Coogan, p. 47.)

<sup>165</sup> Bartlett, ‘The Great Famine and its Aftermath’, p. 654.

<sup>166</sup> Kinealy, p. 356.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 356.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

half) was provided as a loan”.<sup>170</sup> Kinealy states that the English administration provided £10 million to relieve the Irish although a part of it was provided as a loan.<sup>171</sup>

## 7. Nature and Objectives of Government Interventions and their Impact on the Situation of the Affected Population

As mentioned before, there were outbreaks of famine throughout the nineteenth century. After the Act of Union, Ireland was united with England and the Irish parliament was dissolved.<sup>172</sup> The English government decided about the fate of the Irish nation. Britain viewed Ireland as a burden rather than an equal partner.<sup>173</sup> There were some six hundred members in the parliament but only one-sixth was represented by the Irish, who appeared to be quite unsuccessful.<sup>174</sup> The main thought of the Act of Union between Ireland and England in 1800 was that Ireland was an equal partner, “an integral part of the United Kingdom, in the same way as Wales and Scotland<sup>175</sup>. This was nothing more than mere fantasy. As the government interventions showed, Ireland was not regarded as an essential part, because it was believed that “Irish property [should] support Irish poverty”.<sup>176</sup> By such statement, it was suggested that the British government did not want to interfere in this calamity. The Great Famine represents one of the darkest parts in Irish history. It led to massive emigrations and also to enormous death rates due to starvation or illnesses. Ireland was dependent on Britain’s interventions. The opinions differ whether the interventions were sufficient enough or not. It is important to bear in mind that the Great Famine was a very unusual one, in terms of its length and severity. The question is whether the British government was even able to provide aid for such a long period of time. Outbreaks of famine had occurred before but they had lasted for only a short period of time. Poor laws, which should have helped those in need, were introduced already during the reign of Elizabeth I.<sup>177</sup> From then, the altered versions of Poor Laws were presented quite regularly. The Poor Laws were, however, new to Ireland. They had no experience with such laws whatsoever, so one cannot but wonder if the Poor Law was really to help the Irish inhabitants or if it was just a gesture by the British

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<sup>170</sup> Kinealy, p. 412.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 482.

<sup>172</sup> Bartlett, ‘The Great Famine and its Aftermath’, p. 639.

<sup>173</sup> Kinealy, p. 36.

<sup>174</sup> Coogan, p. 28.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>176</sup> Kinealy, p. 263.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

government.<sup>178</sup> The Poor Law for Ireland was introduced in 1838; it meant that the whole Ireland “was divided into 130 new administrative units known as ‘unions’ and [e]ach union was to have its own workhouse, centrally situated near a market town.”<sup>179</sup> Each union was to be self-financed but it was just a mere vision. The rates were collected within the workhouse but the living conditions there were awful. People were starving and diseases were spreading.<sup>180</sup>

“The Royal Commission on Poor Laws in England” was established and their task between 1832 and 1834 was to make an inspection of poor relief in the country.<sup>181</sup> The results of this inquiry had an impact on the later crisis of 1845-1852. The Commission found that “all poor relief, [...] especially outdoor relief, was extremely demoralising”.<sup>182</sup> Queen Victoria played her role in forming the opinions on helping the poor. According to her, “the poverty was a self-inflicted wound, incurred through bad habits”.<sup>183</sup> This set the tone to the crisis which ensued.

The nature of government intervention was influenced, among others, by the work of Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (1776). He promoted the tactic of non-interference and free trade. When a problem occurs, such as the famine, the government interventions should be minimal. He supported the self-help of a nation and believed “that if this philosophy was adopted, it would bring increased wealth to the whole country”.<sup>184</sup> His ideas are also known by the expression of *laissez faire*. Lord John Russell, the Prime Minister from 1846 to 1852, was influenced by these ideas although his “understanding of it was sometimes simplistic and dogmatic”.<sup>185</sup> It was believed that the government interventions would have “demoralising effect on the recipients”.<sup>186</sup> It is now known that the relief officials in Ireland were given the work of Adam Smith and “they were encouraged to read [it] in their spare time”.<sup>187</sup> The copies were supposed to serve as a guidebook for questions relating to feeding of the

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<sup>178</sup> Coogan, p. 37.

<sup>179</sup> Kinealy, p. 71.

<sup>180</sup> Abbott.

<sup>181</sup> Kinealy, p. 58.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Coogan, p. 37.

<sup>184</sup> Kinealy, p. 51.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 266.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 52

famishing inhabitants.<sup>188</sup> It was believed that only by embracing Smith's philosophy could be Ireland helped.<sup>189</sup>

There had been some opinions that the Famine was, in fact, inevitable. This view was promoted by Thomas Malthus. The population of Ireland was approximately four million people in 1800 but before the famine struck, Ireland had a population of eight million people.<sup>190</sup> The population was still growing, and Thomas Malthus predicted "that overpopulation must lead to famine" because there will be no food for those people.<sup>191</sup> Malthus was an adherent of Adam Smith. He was a supporter of the philosophy of non-interference and his thoughts were even harsher. He stated that it was, in fact, dangerous to support the paupers on the grounds that "poor relief [...] exacerbated the problem of population growth by encouraging the poor to breed recklessly".<sup>192</sup> He argued that the poor should not expect to be helped and that famines "should be used as a deterrent".<sup>193</sup> The English Poor Law Act of 1834 was heavily influenced by the philosophy of Thomas Malthus. He pointed out, among other things, that poverty in Ireland could have dire consequences for England, such as the influx of people into England. That having in mind, the Poor Law Act of 1834 was issued not because the English government wanted to help, but because they were scared about the potential consequences of the poverty in Ireland, as Thomas Malthus had predicted.<sup>194</sup> From today's point of view, the politics "of laissez-faire led to countless thousands of deaths [...] in Ireland during the 1840s".<sup>195</sup>

As mentioned before, religion played a significant role in the nineteenth century Ireland, so the statement that it was God, who sent the potato blight,<sup>196</sup> was not as unbelievable as it seems now. It was believed that God created the blight in order to punish the Irish and "to teach the Irish people a lesson".<sup>197</sup> Peter Gray shares the same insight as mentioned in Kinealy. He stated that "[t]he almighty, indeed, sent the potato blight, but the English created the Famine".<sup>198</sup> This might suggest that the English had, in fact, created the Great Hunger by their lack of interventions. Ireland, in times of the Famine, needed direct interventions and

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<sup>188</sup> Coogan, p. 40.

<sup>189</sup> Kinealy, p. 266.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>191</sup> Coogan, p. 40.

<sup>192</sup> Kinealy, p. 56.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>194</sup> Coogan, p. 42.

<sup>195</sup> Donnelly, p. 123.

<sup>196</sup> Kinealy, p. 354.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> Bartlett, 'The Great Famine and its Aftermath', p. 671.

help from the British government. The question is whether England had done enough to help their Irish counterparts.

### 7.1. Government interventions between 1845-1846

The government response in the two first years of the famine was considered effective. Although one might praise Peel for the effective help,<sup>199</sup> there were, on the other hand, people who criticised Peel for not having paid strong attention to the calamity. There were opinions that the crop failure was not so serious, and that people were simply exaggerating.<sup>200</sup> The measures adopted by Sir Robert Peel were similar to those introduced in previous years of the outbreaks of famines. They were initially successful because they were to be temporary. No one could have known at the beginning that this Famine would be drastically different from the previous ones hence the same, temporary measures. The first measure introduced by Peel was the purchase of corn, which had not been, however, available until next year. Along with Henry Goulburn, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, they bought £100,000 worth of corn.<sup>201</sup> The corn was sent from the United States in November, but people did not find out about the shipment until the beginning of 1846. It was calculated that the government “had spent £185,000 by August 1846” for the shipments of food to Ireland.<sup>202</sup> An important role was played by the relief commission that was set up in November 1845. The chairman was Sir Randolph Routh. The aim of this committee was to inform the government about the situation and to allocate the food from the government.<sup>203</sup> The food depots, where the food was to be distributed, were planned to open in May, though by then, there were hundreds of starving people, so the government decided to open them in some unions already in March. The date chosen for the closing of food depots was 15 August.<sup>204</sup>

Public works were set up in 1846 in order to provide work for the Irish. There were at least two benefits of the public works scheme. The works were hoped to strengthen “the Irish economy while furnishing temporary relief”.<sup>205</sup> When it was obvious that the potato crop had

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<sup>199</sup> Kinealy, p. 89.

<sup>200</sup> Donnelly, p. 53.

<sup>201</sup> Kinealy, p. 89.

<sup>202</sup> Donnelly, p. 54.

<sup>203</sup> Kinealy, pp. 92-97.

<sup>204</sup> Routh to Trevelyan. (4 June 1846). ‘Correspondence explanatory of the measures adopted by Her Majesty’s government for the relief of distress arising from the failure of the potato crop in Ireland’, p. 206. Quoted in: Kinealy, p. 104.

<sup>205</sup> Donnelly, p. 59.

failed again, the government was reluctant to offer some relief. They did not want to interfere in the market.<sup>206</sup>

The repeal of the Corn Laws caused Peel's resignation and the succession of a new Whig government led by Lord John Russell. The government measures in 1845 and 1846 were meant to be temporary as no one had thought the Famine would be longer than one year.

## 7.2. Government interventions between 1847-1849

In January 1847 the British Relief Association was founded and the Queen herself donated £2000 for the relief.<sup>207</sup> Another organisation which made an impact bore the name the Society of Friends, also known as the Quakers. They made a significant impact. It was a "highly regarded charitable organisation".<sup>208</sup> The Quakers visited the destitute people of Ireland and stated that they were horrified about the conditions of the famishing nation. They reported this to the Central Relief Committee, which they often criticised for not providing sufficient measures.<sup>209</sup> In November 1846 the Quakers formed "the Society of Friends Relief Committee" and their main merit was the opening of Soup Kitchens.<sup>210</sup> The government followed the example of the Quakers and issued an act called "The Soup Kitchen Act" in February 1847, which is also known as the Temporary Relief Act.<sup>211</sup> The main idea standing behind this act was that the "relief would be provided in the form of food while works would be wound down".<sup>212</sup> The soup kitchens helped many famishing people. They were opened in the spring and summer but there were some delays. Public Works Acts were to be abandoned in August 1846 even though the government made a decision to start closing the public works in March.<sup>213</sup>

Because the potato crops in 1847 bore almost no signs of blight, the government came to believe that the Famine was over as we can see in the declaration of Charles Trevelyan in previous chapter. The Poor Law Extension Act of 1847 worsened the situation for some Irish. There was a clause in the Poor Law Extension Act called "Gregory clause" or "the quarter-act", which meant difficulty for many people.<sup>214</sup> It was ordered that the people who had "more

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<sup>206</sup> Bartlett, 'The Great Famine and its Aftermath', p. 648.

<sup>207</sup> Gillissen, 340.

<sup>208</sup> Kinealy, p. 239.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>210</sup> Coogan, p. 6.

<sup>211</sup> Gillissen, p. 340.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Kinealy, p. 167.

<sup>214</sup> Gillissen, p. 343.

than a quarter of an acre” could not ask for help.<sup>215</sup> They either had to “abandon[...] their holding and their home for good, or they denied themselves the only official relief available” in order to be given some relief.<sup>216</sup> The direct consequence of this Clause were massive evictions that followed after the Clause was introduced. It was surprising that the Gregory Clause had passed through the Irish members of the parliament and “only two, in fact, voted against it”.<sup>217</sup> Coogan claimed that the British government absolved itself of the responsibility for any help by the Poor Law Extension Act.<sup>218</sup>

There was an interesting phenomenon in the evictions. Before 1848, the counties most affected by the evictions were the most prosperous ones, such as the counties of Armagh, Antrim, Leitrim and Monaghan, but after 1840 this trend made a turn because the evictions were highest in the “poorest” counties of Clare, Galway, Limerick, Mayo and Tipperary.<sup>219</sup> The systematic evictions were apparent already in 1846 when it was obvious for the landlords that their tenants were unable to pay their rents. Tim Pat Coogan stated that the evictions could “have been described as premeditated manslaughter and, at worst, as culpable homicide”, as the landlords had evicted their tenants in cruel manner, throwing their belongings from windows and whole families found themselves out on the street in the freezing cold.<sup>220</sup>

The Poor Law Extension Act also permitted, for the first time since the outbreak of the Famine, outdoor relief for the most destitute people, which was a step in the right direction, because it helped many inhabitants. However, in order to get help in the workhouse, one had to be utterly poverty-stricken.<sup>221</sup> In October 1847, the soup kitchens were closed, and the only relief was to be found in the workhouses.<sup>222</sup>

The reappearance of potato blight in 1848 was devastating. Almost two-thirds of the potato harvest was damaged, and people were still suffering and starving to death.<sup>223</sup> The government interventions were almost non-existent after 1848. The royal visit of 1849 left its marks on the whole nation. One of the main purposes of the visit was to provide an illusion that Ireland was worth the royal visit and that the British were concerned about the situation

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<sup>215</sup> Gillissen, p. 343.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Kinealy, p. 316.

<sup>218</sup> Coogan, p. 181.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>220</sup> Coogan, p. 87.

<sup>221</sup> Kinelay, p. 315.

<sup>222</sup> Coogan, p. 6.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

in Ireland. The following years were affected by evictions and emigration. It was estimated that over 210,000 people emigrated in 1850 and another 250,000 left in 1852.<sup>224</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss whether the British government was even able to provide sufficient relief for the Irish. Bartlett says that “any government in the nineteenth century however well disposed would have found it difficult to meet, and overcome, the huge challenges posed by that catastrophe.”<sup>225</sup> The Great Irish Famine was very unusual in every matter. There were revolutions throughout Europe in the year 1848. There was a very difficult task ahead of the British government. The Famine was the cruellest in 1847 and in addition to the Famine that was raging in Ireland with no end in sight, the government had to be prepared for a revolution. Throughout the reign of Victoria, people questioned the meaning of the monarchy and when the King of France was overthrown in 1848, the Royal Family naturally feared they would suffer the same fate. The government, led by Sir Robert Peel and later by Lord John Russell, was occupied by many affairs throughout the whole Famine. The British Empire was enormous, and the Great Hunger in Ireland was only a small portion of affairs that kept the government occupied. One cannot but wonder what the Famine would have looked like if there had been no theories of Adam Smith or Thomas Malthus and if the relations of Britain and Ireland had been different.

## 8. The Perspective of Queen Victoria on the Great Famine and her Effort to Help

There can be no doubt that the government could have done more but the question is how the Queen could have helped. To answer this question, we need to know what powers Victoria as a monarch had, that means whether she was even able to provide some help or relief. As I have already mentioned, the Queen, along with her husband Prince Albert, did not want to be just figureheads but they wanted to play an active role in politics. The Queen made objections many times regarding her prime ministers and the governments they had represented, but she did not have the power to either make a new government, or to dissolve the current government. St John lists some of her powers, which included:

The right to be informed of all significant government decisions and see all governments papers.

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<sup>224</sup> Coogan, p. 7.

<sup>225</sup> Barlett, *Ireland: A History*, p. 288.



The right to refuse a dissolution of parliament if requested by her Prime Minister.

The right to decide whom she would ask to form government. she could not choose which *party* the individual came from (except in cases of very hung parliaments). But she could choose, from among the leaders of the majority party, *who* to ask to form a government.

The right to encourage and warn ministers in their actions.<sup>226</sup>

Otherwise, the royal prerogative, which is a complex of powers of the British monarch. It was in the nineteenth century, when it was decided that the sovereign needed the advice of the prime minister or the cabinet in order to applicate the prerogative. Among the prerogative powers of a monarch belonged the right to dissolve the parliament, which was normally applied at the appeal of the prime minister and the parliament. The Queen exercised her prerogative when appointing the prime minister, but this prerogative power was debatable. In reality, she was appointing the leader of a winning party and she could not choose someone she favoured. Other prerogative powers included the prerogative of mercy, the power to declare war or to annex some territory.<sup>227</sup> As we can see from her powers, the Queen was more or less an advisor rather than an active participant in politics. Loughlin compares Victoria's growing hostile attitude towards the Irish with her powers and role in the constitution.<sup>228</sup> David Cannadine argues that the Queen, together with Prince Albert, wanted to increase the powers of a sovereign. According to Cannadine, Albert with Victoria saw themselves "in the institution [as] the only true representative[s] of the national interest" whereas the political parties sought only "selfish and sectional interests".<sup>229</sup> This means that in order to be successful in fulfilling those interests, the monarch should play an active part and be above the politics of the government. The ideal state of allegiance, according to Victoria, was one in which the subjects were straightforwardly subordinate to the monarch and when the Irish acted deplorably and treasonably, "the 'insult' would be felt personally and directly, rather than symbolically".<sup>230</sup> The nature of her relationship towards Ireland was formed by many events beyond her control. She developed antipathy towards her Irish nation because of some conception of hers and because she took every insult or grievance upon herself.

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<sup>226</sup> St John, p. 25.

<sup>227</sup> Wikipedia contributors. (2022, March 29). Royal prerogative in the United Kingdom. In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Royal\\_prerogative\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom&oldid=1079994345](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Royal_prerogative_in_the_United_Kingdom&oldid=1079994345). [Retrieved 16 April 2022].

<sup>228</sup> Loughlin, p. 495.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 496.

## 8.1. The Donation of Queen Victoria

In the climax of the Famine, the Irish nation gave her the nickname the “Famine Queen”<sup>231</sup> and the question is, whether the nickname was justified or not. She represented Britain as a nation that should had helped the destitute and poor people in need. She took every complain personally and that belonged to one of the many reasons that formed her relationship to Ireland, because the only thing that she heard in times of the Famine were complaints and lamentations. The people in Ireland were suffering and were, understandably, complaining about their conditions. As mentioned before, her powers were limited, so she could not tell the government what to do and how to help. She could only provide financial or emotional, supportive help or relief. The emotional and supportive help was provided by the visit of 1849. The financial help was provided by her donation of £2000 through the British Relief Association that was founded in January 1847. It was a private charity that was supposed to finance the relief interventions.<sup>232</sup> £2000 was almost nothing compared to the planned donation of the Sultan of Ottoman Empire, who allegedly wanted to donate £10,000 but it was suggested by the Queen that he should donate less money than herself. The result was that he donated only £1000 for the relief.<sup>233</sup> The Queen was receiving annually over £380,000 from the Civil List<sup>234</sup> so one might question the sum of her donation. Because of her donation, no one was allowed to donate a larger sum of money than her. By that, she prevented potential donors from donating more money, as the Sultan of Ottoman Empire wanted to do. Wilson stated that it was unfair to call her the “Famine Queen” since she donated such a large sum of money and tried to encourage her nation to contribute as well.<sup>235</sup> I have to agree with Wilson that it was, in fact, unfair to call her the “Famine Queen” but on the other hand, with such properties, she could have donated a larger sum, and more frequently. Peter Grey mentions that the Queen was more than happy to donate the sum of the £2000 after “hearing the distressed Highlands of Scotland would also be included”.<sup>236</sup> She showed her affection for

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<sup>231</sup> Wilson, p. 145.

<sup>232</sup> Gillissen, p. 340.

<sup>233</sup> Çelik, S. (2015). ‘Between History of Humanitarianism and Humanitarianization of History. A discussion on Ottoman Help for the Victims of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-1852’, *Werkstatt Geschichte*, (68), p. 17.

<sup>234</sup> Wilson, p. 341.

<sup>235</sup> Roger Swift and Christine Kinealy (eds.), *Politics and Power in Victorian Ireland*, p. 14. Quoted in: Wilson, p. 145.

<sup>236</sup> Kinealy, C. (2013). *Charity and the Great Hunger in Ireland*. London: Bloomsbury. In: Bartlett, ‘The Great Famine and its Aftermath’, p. 661.

Scotland many times. There was a rumour that she donated only £5 but it is known to be false. She, in fact, donated around £2,500 for the relief.<sup>237</sup>

## 8.2. The Perspective of Queen Victoria on the Famine

In April 1845 a problem arose in Ireland apart from the Famine. This problem was related to the Maynooth Grant, which the Queen was rather ambiguous about. Sir Robert Peel, the Prime Minister at that time, wanted to pass a bill that would increase the grant to the College of Maynooth, but the problem, according to Victoria, was that this college was Roman Catholic and since she was Protestant, she expressed some thoughts on that. The Queen showed her sympathy towards Ireland when she said that even the Catholics should have a chance to an education and that “Peel ought to be *blessed* by all Catholics for the manly and noble way in which he stands forth to protect and do good to poor Ireland”.<sup>238</sup> On the other hand, she did not want to give money that was in the possession of the Protestant Church to a Roman Catholic Church. This example makes the complex and complicated relationship of Victoria to Ireland quite evident.

The Famine struck in September 1845, but it is clear from the available sources that Victoria first mentioned the Irish Famine almost two months later. It is possible that she had already become conscious of the situation earlier but this information I cannot confirm. She first mentioned the Famine in a letter to Sir Robert Peel on 28 November 1845. She wrote to him that the unity of government was imperative during this calamity.<sup>239</sup> At the time of writing this letter, she was in her newly purchased house in Osborne, which she mentioned for the first time in March 1845. From the memorandum by Prince Albert on 7 December that year, it was evident that on 1 November, Peel had been informed about the potato blight. He had convened his Cabinet to discuss the matter of the failing potato crop. The Queen’s statement about this meeting is not known. At the beginning of September 1845 Victoria, along with her husband Prince Albert, visited Coburg and on 8 September, they made a visit to France. After their return, the Famine was in full force and the Corn Laws resonated at the end of 1845 and at the beginning of 1846.<sup>240</sup> The Repeal of the Corn Laws caused the collapse of the Conservative administration and the succession of the Whig government led by Lord John

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<sup>237</sup> Loughlin, p. 497.

<sup>238</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, Ch. XIV (n.p.).

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

Russell.<sup>241</sup> On 7 December 1845 the Queen accepted Peel's resignation.<sup>242</sup> Queen Victoria expressed sadness when Peel was leaving. Victoria said that Peel was loyal, and it was a great loss for her and for the nation. George Hamilton-Gordon, known as Earl of Aberdeen, said that the timing for Peel was unfortunate. If the Famine had never taken place, he would have been successful and he would not have had to resign.<sup>243</sup> Queen Victoria expressed some doubts about the new government led by Lord John Russell. In a letter to the King of the Belgians she wrote that "[t]he present government is weak, and I think Lord J. [Lord John Russell] does not possess the talent of keeping his people together".<sup>244</sup>

In *The Letters of Victoria*, there are only few mentions of the Great Hunger. The Queen mentions affairs in Portugal, France or India. There are only few inputs regarding Ireland in the year 1847, when it is believed the Famine was at the hardest. The first being a letter of the Prime Minister to Queen Victoria in a matter of the Irish elections and the Queen answered him briefly. There is, however, no mention of the Famine in these two letters. On 14 October 1847, Lord John Russell mentioned briefly in a letter to Victoria the matter of the Poor Law Commission because he found it difficult to appoint somebody as the head of the Commission. The Queen wrote in a letter to Russell that there was no way that the government could be "responsible for a crisis [the Famine], which it has in no way either brought on or been able to avert".<sup>245</sup> Queen Victoria thought that the government interventions were sufficient and by issuing such proclamation, she was in effect expressing her view that the Famine could not be averted and she was just looking for excuses that it was completely alright not to deal with the Famine. She did not sympathize enough with the suffering people because if she had, it would never have occurred to her that the Famine could not be prevented.

## 9. Efforts to Stabilise the Situation in Ireland in the Early Years After the Famine

In 1849, the official government relief measures ended but the Famine ended in 1852 as the potato crops were without any signs of blight.<sup>246</sup> To be able to focus on the efforts of the

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<sup>241</sup> Trevelyan, p. 480.

<sup>242</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, Ch. XIV (n.p.).

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. XV (n.p.).

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>246</sup> Kinealy, p. 411.

government, it is important to list some of the consequences of the Famine and how England tried to mitigate the impact of the crisis. The first direct consequence of the Famine is emigration. This was not, however, something new for Ireland. People had been leaving Ireland long before the start of the crisis. Over 250,000 people fled from Ireland to the United States in the eighteenth century. This trend of emigration then dropped at the beginning of the nineteenth century, mainly because of the Napoleonic wars but after the wars, people started to emigrate again. It is believed that approximately one million of Irish inhabitants left Ireland between the years 1815 and the beginning of the Great Famine.<sup>247</sup> The emigration had some advantages, such as the influx of people in the British colonies, and it was also believed that “emigration would relieve Ireland of her excess population”.<sup>248</sup> The government chose not to get involved in the processes of emigration, so the Irish had to finance the journeys themselves. There was, however, an interesting phenomenon and that was the “landlord-assisted emigration”, which “accounted for only about 5 per cent of the total movement”.<sup>249</sup> Although the leading economists did not support the state-assisted emigration, the landlords did actually support it.<sup>250</sup> Landlords got involved in assisted emigration because it was cheaper for them to send their pauper occupants away than to pay for them in their workhouses. Some landlords argued that there were so many paupers that it would be impossible for the landlords to provide work for all the poor in their workhouse.<sup>251</sup> The Irish emigrated most frequently to the United States, then to Britain, Canada and Australia.<sup>252</sup> The emigration from Ireland could be divided into two periods. The first period was between 1845 and 1855, and the second period lasted until 1900. The second era was more acute than the first one because a total of six million people left the country in this period.<sup>253</sup> The Earl Grey Scheme is definitely worth mentioning. It was named after Sir George Grey who was the Home Secretary in the Famine years. The aim of the scheme was to take Irish orphans to Australia. Since Australia was the penal colony for the British, the majority of the population consisted of men and the idea was to bring women from the Irish workhouses or from orphans to Australia.<sup>254</sup> It was suggested by “the Governor of South Australia” to use “a portion of the South Australian Land funds [...] to assist emigration to the colony”.<sup>255</sup> It was decided that

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<sup>247</sup> Kinealy, p. 414.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., p. 424.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., p. 422.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., pp. 423-424.

<sup>251</sup> Donnelly, p. 143.

<sup>252</sup> Kinealy, p. 414.

<sup>253</sup> Bartlett, ‘The Great Famine and its Aftermath’, p. 666.

<sup>254</sup> Abbott.

<sup>255</sup> Kinealy, p. 438.

the expenses should be paid by the Irish administration rather than the British government. As mentioned before, the emigration carried many benefits. It was also claimed that emigration was essential for the amelioration of the Irish agriculture and for the improvement of the most pauperized unions.<sup>256</sup> The influx of the paupers from Ireland was not, however, always welcomed. For example, the Americans feared that the Irish would take their jobs, spread various diseases and also, that the Irish put a strain on the tax system.<sup>257</sup> One might say that the emigration was, in fact, an effort of the British government to stabilise the situation in Ireland because emigration made an impact. The fewer people in Ireland, the less money the government had to spend on its population. Although Russell's administration did not organise massive, assisted emigration, it supported the Earl Grey Scheme. The Poor Law Commissioners were convinced that this scheme would bring long-term advantages. It would also help the most impoverished unions to get rid of paupers.<sup>258</sup>

The information regarding official government relief measures is missing for one particular reason. There were no further efforts of the British government to help Irish inhabitants. There were no signs of the administration to mitigate the consequences of the calamity. The post-famine period is marked by efforts and demands for Home Rule, i.e. the self-government for the Irish. Britain was hence occupied by suppressing all uprisings and rebellions. The only effort of the British government to alleviate the Famine consequences was the support of emigration. It was done not because Russell's administration wanted better life for its Irish inhabitants but because they wanted to lower the number of people living in Ireland,<sup>259</sup> so they did not have to give that much money to the people.

## 10. The Impact of the Crisis on British-Irish Relations

There are many consequences arising from the Famine and many of them had an impact on the British-Irish relationship. As we have already learned, the relationship between these two counterparts was not ideal and the Queen with her attitude towards Ireland was not helpful at all. The relationship worsened by the Act of Union which was something that the Irish did not wish. The expectations of the Irish were not met because the Act of Union was to guarantee that Ireland was an equal partner. The reality was, however, different and the opinions on the need of the Union changed rapidly after the Great Famine. The Irish people were under the

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<sup>256</sup> Kinealy, p. 415.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., p. 420.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., p. 439.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., p. 424.

impression “that the Union had failed them in their hour of need, at best because of a callous neglect of what the British government perceived as second-class subjects of the United Kingdom, at worst through a deliberate policy of genocide.”<sup>260</sup> According to Kinealy, the Famine cannot be viewed as genocide because it “was not deliberate, not pre-meditated, not man-made”.<sup>261</sup>

As already mentioned, the demand for self-government resonated through the post-famine era. Irish people experienced the Great Famine, and the government did little in order to alleviate the situation. That was one of the many reasons why they wanted Irish government, which was taken away by the Act of Union. The need for Home Rule dominated the post-famine politics but the British administration viewed this idea “as a dangerous absurdity [that needs] to be resisted at all costs”.<sup>262</sup> Russell’s administration had to give the Irish something in order to suppress these culminating ideas. Some electoral laws ensued, such as in 1850 the Parliamentary Voters Act that caused the increase in Irish electorate “from some 45,000 to over 163,000 voters”.<sup>263</sup> In 1872 the government introduced secret ballot.<sup>264</sup> This was because the 1850s resonated with the Irish demands for the repeal of the Union. There were many groups supporting the repeal of the Union; one of them carried the name the Young Irelanders led by Daniel O’Connell.<sup>265</sup> O’Connell viewed the repeal as the only possibility to reverse the grievances committed on the Catholic population.<sup>266</sup> He had many disputes with the Young Irelanders, mainly because he wanted a non-violent achievement of goals and after his death in 1847, many members formed “the Irish Confederation”.<sup>267</sup> There was a rebellion in 1848 organised by the Young Irelanders opposing the Union. This rebellion was influenced by revolutions happening in that year but unlike the revolution in France, this one in Ireland was not successful. The government answered to this rebellion with arrests. James Stephens, who belonged to one of the leaders of the Young Ireland, fled to France where he spent several years exploring the courses of the successful revolutions of 1848. When he came back, he set up in 1858 a new organisation called “IRB”. It is unclear what the initials stands for. The first possibility is “Irish Republican Brotherhood”, and the second “Irish Revolutionary

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<sup>260</sup> Gillissen, p. 333.

<sup>261</sup> Kinealy, p. 27.

<sup>262</sup> Bartlett, *Ireland: A History*, pp. 300-301.

<sup>263</sup> Hoppen, K.T. (1984). *Elections, politics, and society in Ireland, 1832-1885*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 17-18. Quoted in: Bartlett: *Ireland: A History*, p. 689.

<sup>264</sup> Bartlett, ‘The Great Famine and its Aftermath’, p. 690.

<sup>265</sup> Coogan, p. 173.

<sup>266</sup> Bartlett, *Ireland: A History*, p. 277.

<sup>267</sup> Bartlett, ‘The Great Famine and its Aftermath’, p. 656.

Brotherhood”.<sup>268</sup> John O’Mahony escaped after the 1848 rebellion just as James Stephens did but he fled to the United States where he found an organisation called “the Fenian Brotherhood”.<sup>269</sup> The main difference between the Fenians, IRB and the Young Irelanders was that the Fenians were sworn to achieve their goals through violence. The first important achievement of these groups fighting for self-government was in 1898 when the government introduced “the Local Government (Ireland) Act”.<sup>270</sup> The main purpose of this was to give the Irish something to compensate their demands for self-government with, and local government seemed like a good idea. It was later proved that this act had done more harm than good but it was a concession on the part of the British government. As said before, the British government did not want self-government for Ireland, and they were dedicated to do everything they could to suppress these thoughts, even with some concessions in the form of local government.<sup>271</sup> All these attempts for self-government were viewed rather negatively in Britain and did not help to improve the deteriorating relationship between Ireland and England.

The aforementioned emigration had more than one impact on Ireland. The first, and one might say indirect consequence was the fight for independence of Ireland. It is believed that the Irish emigrants in the United States “supported the move for Irish independence”.<sup>272</sup> It was the Fenians, founded by John O’Mahony, that were supported by the Irish Americans. This affected the Easter Rising which took place in 1916. It was, however, unsuccessful and the leaders were executed, which was heavily disapproved of by the Irish but also by people in Britain. In 1918 the republicans declared Ireland a republic after they overwhelmingly won the election.<sup>273</sup> They were to meet in the British parliament but they instead gathered in the Dail in Dublin, which was supposed to serve as their parliament. A guerrilla war ensued which resulted in “The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921” but peace was still not in sight. Civil war emerged from this Treaty. In the Anglo-Irish Treaty was said that southern Ireland is to be independent whereas the area of Ulster was supposed to remain within the United Kingdom.<sup>274</sup> The new independent Ireland was not, however, completely independent as the monarch was still the head of the state. The civil war resulted in Ulster, later known as Northern Ireland, remaining within the British Empire. It was in 1937 when southern Ireland

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<sup>268</sup> Bartlett, *Ireland: A History*, p. 300.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., p. 360.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., pp. 300-301.

<sup>272</sup> Coogan, p. 225.

<sup>273</sup> McDowall, p. 163.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.



was declared a republic, which meant that the monarch was no longer the head of the state in Ireland.<sup>275</sup> What followed next is immensely important for the history of Ireland and Britain but not for this thesis. The independent Republic of Ireland can be considered as the consequence of not only the Irish Famine but also the common British-Irish history.

There cannot be doubt that the British-Irish relations were, at best, poor long before the beginning of the Great Irish Famine. It is difficult to set an exact date when the relationship began to deteriorate but the Act of Union of 1800 worsened the situation.<sup>276</sup> The result of the poor relations between Ireland and Britain is the independent Republic of Ireland with only Northern Ireland remaining a part of the United Kingdom.

## 11. Conclusion

Queen Victoria was only twenty-six years old when she came to the throne. She found herself in a difficult position. She succeeded to the throne as very young and was a queen after a long period of kings. As we can see in the chapters dedicated to her, she sometimes behaved unreasonably in the first years of her reign. The Bedchamber Crisis or the Lady Flora Hastings affair serve as good examples for her rash behaviour. She could not, however, influence the political matters in Ireland very much so her, sometimes, immature behaviour did not seem to be so significant, but it had influence on her image in this part of her reign.

To answer the first question of whether Queen Victoria played some role in the relief measures of the government, it is important to focus on the powers of hers listed here. It has been showed that she did not have, in fact, the powers to interfere in the government's relief measures. She was just to advise her prime ministers, but they did not decide upon her suggestions.<sup>277</sup> With that being said, the following question can be answered and that is, if her relationship towards Ireland played a role in the relief measures. It has been shown that she was more or less an adviser, rather than an active participant but she could have, in fact, contributed to the relief measures. She did oppose her prime ministers many times and had disputes with them over many things, such as the Danish claims over the Schleswig-Holstein Duchies. She expressed her feelings about those topics, and her prime ministers did the same, but the decision was made by the prime minister and not the Queen. She had limited powers and that is important to bear in mind when answering the question of the role of Queen Victoria in the Irish Famine. As it turned out she did develop a hostile attitude towards the

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<sup>275</sup> McDowall, p. 164.

<sup>276</sup> Gillissen, p. 333.

<sup>277</sup> St John, p. 25.

Irish although there were some bright moments during her reign when she expressed sympathy towards her Irish people, as the visit of 1849 suggests. The Queen made four visits to Ireland in total, which seems from today's perspective not enough, considering her long reign. She was aware of that but stated that Scotland and other parts of England were instrumental in getting the Queen to visit them. Queen Victoria saw the Irish as disorderly people, who did not act well. Her attitude to Ireland was influenced by many factors that helped to build her relationship, which was changing over time. Demands for the Home Rule worsened Queen Victoria's perception of the Irish in the 1860s but on the other hand, she appreciated the Irish who fought in the Boer War (1899-1902).<sup>278</sup> Her opinions on the Famine were rather peculiar. She expressed her thoughts on the topic and said that the government had done everything they could in order to alleviate the suffering.<sup>279</sup> As for the answer to the question whether her attitude towards the Irish did have an impact on the relief, it is still not easy to respond. She did make a contribution herself towards the relief measures in Ireland and she did express her sympathy towards the Irish nation with the visit she made in 1849, but was it enough? She could have contributed much more, that is without doubt. But she encouraged the British to contribute by themselves.<sup>280</sup> So it may seem that her personal aversion stayed in the background, and she proved to be a good sovereign, although her remark that the government had done enough seems rather way off the mark. It cannot be forgotten that she was very young, and she had never experienced such catastrophe as this one.

The Queen's perception of the Irish has been shown, but it is also significant to mention the Irish perception of Queen Victoria. When Victoria ascended the throne in 1837, many Irish falsely thought that she approved the repeal of the Act of Union.<sup>281</sup> The visit of 1849 showed the Irish as loyal subjects standing hours in rain just to see their Queen. They were more than happy to welcome Queen Victoria, although the Queen was received, during her final visit in 1900, less optimistically. Andrea Bobotis makes an apt remark that the Queen rejected the idea of self-government in Ireland and simultaneously, fiercely criticised the Irish nationalism on the grounds that the nationalism may have appeared as a threat to Britain.<sup>282</sup> James H. Murphy notes that also the Irish nationalists were unfavourable to the monarchy and after the

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<sup>278</sup> Bobotis, A. (2006). Rival maternities: Maud Gonne, Queen Victoria, and the reign of the political mother. *Victorian Studies*, 49(1), pp. 66.

<sup>279</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, Ch. XV (n.p.).

<sup>280</sup> Gillissen, p. 340.

<sup>281</sup> Bobotis, p. 67.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

Irish gained independence in 1922, there were feelings of hostility among the British classes to the Irish.<sup>283</sup> *Celtic Monthly*, a journal published throughout Ireland, featured an issue in 1880 where the Queen was viewed as “selfish, mean and vixenish”.<sup>284</sup> That was, however, only one perception of the Queen. Many Irish were loyal to her, although after her final visit in 1900 numerous Irish felt abashed at the idea that the Queen used the visit as recruitment for the Boer War. Although the Queen’s donation of £2000 might seem insignificant from today’s point of view, the Queen did not, in fact, decide on the amount of the donation. Lord John Russell indicated that Queen Victoria should donate this sum of money. This donation then served as an example for others when deciding how much money they wanted to donate.<sup>285</sup> From the available sources, I was unable to learn about the Irish perception of Queen Victoria’s donation but it may have served as a gesture of affection on the Queen’s part. Just as the Queen’s relationship with Ireland was complicated and intriguing, so too was the Irish relationship with the Queen.

The government introduced a series of relief measures, such as the Poor Law Act, the Temporary Relief Act, the administration provided some shipments of food, mainly Indian corn, and they also introduced the workhouse scheme. The government measures were, however, not sufficient enough, as the enormous death rates affected the whole period of the Irish Famine. All relief interventions were meant to be temporary and many of them failed shortly after their introduction, including the Poor Law Act.<sup>286</sup> To sum up the government interventions, it is significant to understand way of thinking that influenced them. There is no doubt that the interventions were influenced by many factors, including the philosophy of Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus, the state of the whole Europe in the years of the Famine and also by the relationship of England and Ireland. The religion also played a part. The British government could have done more, such as the permitting of the outdoor relief much earlier in the crisis or to secure more food for its inhabitants. The Soup Kitchens were very helpful, but the government decided to close them too soon. As we have learned from the previous chapters, the government expenses on aid to Ireland were enormous, but it is important to bear in mind that almost half of these expenses were meant to be a loan.<sup>287</sup> About a quarter of the Irish population disappeared due to the Famine and the consequences of this

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<sup>283</sup> Murphy, J. H. (2001). *Abject loyalty: nationalism and monarchy in Ireland during the reign of Queen Victoria*. CUA Press.

<sup>284</sup> Bobotis, p. 66.

<sup>285</sup> Murphy, p. 64.

<sup>286</sup> Coogan, p. 37.

<sup>287</sup> Kinealy, p. 412.

calamity were horrendous. The question of government interventions is very complex and intriguing. The Famine was very difficult to deal with, there were other matters that the government had to solve, but the British Empire at that time was one of the most prosperous and wealthiest in the world so it was very unusual that England had done so little in order to help the Irish. There were some opinions that the Famine was inevitable and there is no doubt that the state of Ireland before 1845 had made Ireland vulnerable to any catastrophe. But no famine is inevitable. It is the task of the government to prevent any outbreaks of famine and to help its inhabitants and the British government failed them. It failed to alleviate the escalation of the situation. If they had been successful, there wouldn't have been so many deaths. The government's policy of non-interference was wrong, but Adam Smith or Thomas Malthus are not the ones to put the blame on; it was the government that was inspired by these theories and decided not to make big interventions.

It is interesting to compare the recurrent famines in India with that of in Ireland. There had been outbreaks of famine in Ireland but if we compare them with the outbreaks of famine in India, the situation in India was much more severe. Between the years 1850 and 1899, there were twenty-four famines in India which resulted in millions of deaths. The response of British government was changing over time. There was an outbreak of famine in 1874, to which the government responded quite briefly by providing rice to the Indians. However, when the famine struck in 1879, the British government did not respond and did not provide sufficient relief, because by the end of 1879, millions of people had died due to the famine.<sup>288</sup> The fact that the famines in India were recurring so frequently might suggest that the British response was not sufficient. The lack of aid to India can be explained in different ways. The British government faced many obstacles when providing relief, such as cultural or the one of proximity. A significant number of people in India refused to accept food or other assistance.<sup>289</sup> The proximity definitely played some role. It was difficult to provide shipments of food from Britain when India was distant. The politics of non-interference proved to play its part also in Ireland, as well as in India. These factors suggest that the British government failed to provide sufficient help to Indians. It was not just Ireland where Britain failed to alleviate the situation, it was in India as well.

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<sup>288</sup> Ertem, Ö. (2015). British Views on the Indian and Ottoman Famines: Politics, Culture, and Morality. *RCC Perspectives*, (2), pp. 17–28. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26241313>.

<sup>289</sup> Sourabh, N.C. & Myllyntaus, T. (2015). "Famines in Late Nineteenth-Century India: Politics, Culture, and Environmental Justice." *Environment & Society Portal, Virtual Exhibitions*, (2), Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society. Available at: [doi.org/10.5282/rcc/6812](https://doi.org/10.5282/rcc/6812).

The consequences of the Famine are even more dreadful. The emigration and mass starvation are the reasons why the population of Ireland decreased rapidly. The Great Famine had not only short-term consequences such as emigration and evictions but there was also the long-term aftermath of the Famine, dominated by the demand for independence. From the Act of Union in 1800, the Irish had had a feeling that they were not equal and that they were not as important as other parts of the British Empire.<sup>290</sup> After the outbreak of the Famine, the situation even worsened. The post-famine politics was characterised by the demands for Home Rule and the Irish sought “a redress of grievances within the Union”.<sup>291</sup> It later resulted in the independent Republic of Ireland whereas Northern Ireland remained a part of the British dominion.

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<sup>290</sup> Gillissen, p. 333.

<sup>291</sup> Bartlett, ‘The Great Famine and its Aftermath’, p. 689.

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