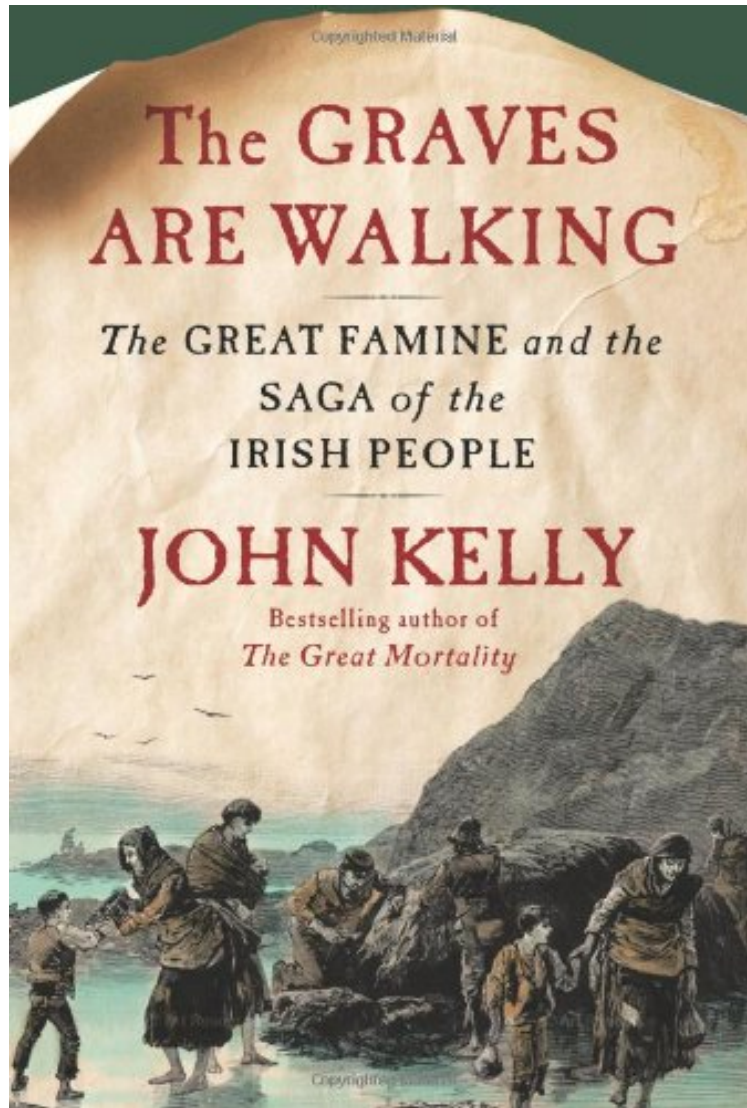


[Free pdf] The Graves Are Walking: The Great Famine and the Saga of the Irish People

# The Graves Are Walking: The Great Famine and the Saga of the Irish People

John Kelly

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**John Kelly : The Graves Are Walking: The Great Famine and the Saga of the Irish People** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Graves Are Walking: The Great Famine and the Saga of the Irish People:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A perfect storm of failureBy R. W. LevesqueJohn Kelly has written a very readable book about a very traumatic time in Ireland's history. What makes Kelly's book good is because he

looks at all the factors that led to the years of starvation at the end of the 1840s. Of course no book on the famine would be complete without addressing the United Kingdoms central role in setting the local policies and social structure that exacerbated many of the factors that caused the famine and increased the suffering. From the UK leaderships philosophies on government and their opinions of the Irish, to mismanagement, to incompetence, to an inability to understand the extent of the problem, and to deliberate action and inaction that led to more starvation than would have been otherwise, Kelly addresses all these issues. At the same time Kelly examines the issues of the effects of bad weather, not just in Ireland but across Western Europe, which had the effect of reducing crop yields in other countries thereby increasing the demand for food around the world. This led to increased demand and pressure on existing grain sources of all types, which, given the potato blight that affected all of Europe, caused nations to turn to alternative foods. Of course, Kelly also examines the potato blight and the fact that Ireland virtually, although not totally, relied on a single crop, the potato, and when the crop was destroyed year in and year out, the major source of food for Ireland disappeared. Naturally there was an international trade in food, but even that last grain crops in America had disappeared and there were periodic shortages of available shipping. At the same time, the distribution system within Ireland was archaic with many parts of the country virtually unreachable. Railroads had only been developed in the previous decade and had not yet become the major way to move goods overland they would later become. This meant the nation relied on poor roads that were greatly affected by the weather. As long as enough food could be produced locally, that wasn't really a problem, but when the potato failed for several years, the lack of infrastructure made it difficult if not impossible to supply some towns. And, again, underlying all of these integrated problems was poor British policy. The government failed to understand, or deliberately ignored the extent of the problem. This meant they failed to follow through on successful policies, usually because they didn't want to fund them, or they refused to implement solutions at all. This was because of philosophical beliefs on government, or racist beliefs about the Irish as a people. While the government as a whole may not have pursued ethnic cleansing as a policy, certainly the effect of their policies was to cause Ireland to lose one million dead and two million to flee the country, causing Ireland to lose approximately one-third of its population. What makes this book is that Kelly examines all these issues and paints a more complex picture of the famine years. All these issues came together in an almost perfect storm of suffering.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. I believe that the author presents a fairly objective insight to Ireland during the great hunger in a manner that allows the reader or scholar to form their own opinion on the matter. More importantly, I found that Kelly presented the information in a manner that introduces those with little understanding of the famine to the topic, but the book also provides intricate details for those who are more familiar with this short period of Irish History. I initially came across this book when it was assigned as a reading for one of my courses a few years ago and will be incorporating it into my thesis research.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Brilliant, engrossing, conversational! By davidmarks There are those times when a book finds a place of personal rapture in one's desires. I'm reading John Kelly's *The Graves Are Walking*, and it's a stunner of an accomplishment. I often gesture queries to the rhetorical, wondering why the Irish are so destined and blessed with passion and soul. We all need that Irish in us, deep, nestled within our truest selves; a refrain I tend to glance at more than occasionally. This book reads like an unforgettable conversation with an inspirational professor, a dear friend, and if ever there were lessons of history lost to education so American, it is the Irish potato famine of the 19th century. *The Graves Are Walking*, a masterfully rich literary triumph—the desperation of will; of a people, who, through the agony of purpose and the resolve of near rebirth, transform themselves in the end, to conquer the evils of near annihilation.

A magisterial account of one of the worst disasters to strike humankind—the Great Irish Potato Famine—conveyed as lyrical narrative history from the acclaimed author of *The Great Mortality*. Deeply researched, compelling in its details, and startling in its conclusions about the appalling decisions behind a tragedy of epic proportions, John Kelly's retelling of the awful story of Ireland's great hunger will resonate today as history that speaks to our own times. It started in 1845 and before it was over more than one million men, women, and children would die and another two million would flee the country. Measured in terms of mortality, the Great Irish Potato Famine was the worst disaster in the nineteenth century—it claimed twice as many lives as the American Civil War. A perfect storm of bacterial infection, political greed, and religious intolerance sparked this catastrophe. But even more extraordinary than its scope were its political underpinnings, and *The Graves Are Walking* provides fresh material and analysis on the role that Britain's nation-building policies played in exacerbating the devastation by attempting to use the famine to reshape Irish society and character. Religious dogma, anti-relief sentiment, and racial and political ideology combined to result in an almost inconceivable disaster of human suffering. This is ultimately a story of triumph over perceived destiny:

for fifty million Americans of Irish heritage, the saga of a broken people fleeing crushing starvation and remaking themselves in a new land is an inspiring story of revival. Based on extensive research and written with novelistic flair, *The Graves Are Walking* draws a portrait that is both intimate and panoramic, that captures the drama of individual lives caught up in an unimaginable tragedy, while imparting a new understanding of the famine's causes and consequences.

A readable and nuanced history of the famine. *Times Literary Supplement* *The Graves are Walking* is a history of the famine vividly narrated by a master story teller. *Dublin of Books* [Kelly] leaves us with an exceptionally vivid sense of the famine's enormity and the epic cruelty it inflicted on the Irish poor. Ciaran O'Murchadha, *History Today* A vivid and intimate account of the suffering and injustice . . . [Kelly] offers acute and tempered but still damning judgments of the governing elite. Cormac O'Grada, *BBC History Magazine* An engrossing narrative of the famine, vividly detailing Victorian society and the historical phenomena (natural and man-made) that converged to form the disaster. *The Economist* A moving account of the famine . . . Kelly has produced a powerful indictment of the British mind-set in the 19th century, and of the British policy that resulted from it. *The New York Times Book* This fine book is sourced largely from contemporaneous accounts and is thoroughly documented. It is a witheringly bleak portrayal, extraordinarily detailed and gracefully written. Everyone who holds a policy-making position in government today or tomorrow should study this book. *The Washington Independent of Books* Magisterial . . . Kelly brings the horror vividly and importantly back to life with his meticulous research and muscular writing. The result is terrifying, edifying and empathetic. *USA Today* Though the story of the potato famine has been told before, it's never been as thoroughly reported or as hauntingly told. *New York Post* Kelly intersperses the nitty gritty of the shifting Irish economic situation with horrific glimpses of its human toll. Laura Miller, *Salon* In humanising the complexities of the Great Famine, John Kelly's emotional history of the time makes for a compelling and heartbreaking read . . . Kelly doesn't shy away from the kind of vivid descriptions and heightened language more often associated with poetry than historical writing. *The Irish Times* An incredibly well-researched analysis of the Great Famine . . . The book reads like a novel, making the reality of this particular bit of history all the more haunting. *Shelf Awareness* Mr. Kelly's moving, powerfully narrated account of the tragedy and its aftermath brings it alive in all its horror. *The Washington Times* An upsetting, enlightening, necessary book that deserves multiple, durable audiences [and] stands as a testament to the resilience of a people under some of the greatest duress the world has ever seen. *History News Network* John Kelly gives heartbreaking detail to the Great Famine that seared itself into the memory of the Irish people, and sheds fascinating new light on the policy decisions that made it even worse. *The Graves are Walking* is a cautionary tale for all who would risk calamity--human, economic, or ecological--in the name of scoring an ideological victory. President Bill Clinton This is a wonderful book about a terrible event. It's also a rare combination of compelling writing, excellent scholarship, and insightful analysis that ranges over the full scope of--and goes beyond--the potato famine itself, from agricultural science, through the English politics that contributed so much to the death toll, to the impact of Irish immigration in America. A truly outstanding book. John M. Barry, author of *The Great Influenza: The story of the deadliest pandemic in history* and *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul: Church, State, and the Birth of Liberty* Kelly (*The Great Mortality*) traces a path of misery and devastation as he documents one of the 19th century's worst disasters, a nightmarish six years that left twice as many dead as the American Civil War... [Kelly's] exhaustive research covers every aspect, threading the gruesome events into a huge panoramic tapestry that reveals political greed lurking behind the pestilence. *Publishers Weekly* (Starred ) *The Graves Are Walking* is compelling reading. Once again John Kelly illuminates a dark time, removing it from the shadows of legend and hearsay into the bright light of history. Even among the graves of Irish famine, he finds vivid life. Richard Rhodes, Pulitzer Prize winning author of *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* and *John James Audubon: The Making of an American* John Kelly is one of America's great historians and storytellers. He has a new one out now: the essential *The Graves Are Walking*. It's a brilliantly rendered account of the Great Irish Potato Famine of the 1840s. The prose sizzles with deep intelligence, hard research, and an inspiring compassion for the millions who died of hunger. It was an honor to read such first-rate nonfiction. Highly recommended! Douglas Brinkley, author of *The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America* and *The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast* I wish more people wrote history like this: fast-paced but carefully documented, lively as a novel but tackling, head on, one of the great human catastrophes of nineteenth-century Europe. Kelly's portrait of a tragedy rooted in a superpower's imperial arrogance has echoes for the world we are still living in today. Adam Hochschild, author of the *New York Times* bestseller *To End All Wars* *The Graves Are Walking* is an engrossing chronicle of an historic tragedy that forever changed Ireland, Britain, and America. Kelly conveys the rawness of Irish suffering with a powerful intimacy--an entire nation reduced to a single wish: survival. Amanda Foreman, author of the acclaimed *A World on Fire: an Epic History of Two Nations Divided* and the international bestseller *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire* John Kelly vividly writes the compelling story of the horror of Ireland's potato famine, with intimate portraits of those who died and those who fled. Most illuminating is how he captures, in devastating detail, British leaders, who, imbued with religious fervor and ideological blinders, decided to use the plague as an occasion to teach

the Irish good work habits, responsibility, and to rid them of their dependence on government. An extraordinary book, and a lesson for our times. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, Senior Advisor to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, founder of the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award, and author of *Failing America's Faithful: How Today's Churches Mixed God with Politics and Lost Their Way* Kelly deftly conveys the enormity of what was at stake. *The Graves Are Walking* seeks accountability for those responsible for the human toll from a shortage of everything--even coffins. Booklist Kelly's work is written with the verve of a good novel... his powerfully argued conclusion is that the British were guilty of neglect rather than malice, allowing religion and ideology to overrule their common humanity. ... At the height of the famine, a British official received a report of the latest casualties and scribbled a single word underneath: why? This book provides as good an answer as we are likely to get. Daily Business Post (Dublin, Ireland) A cogent and forceful history [of the famine] and 'an accessible, engrossing history of horror'. The Washington Post John Kelly does an excellent job of sketching the background [of the famine] in *The Graves are Walking*... [He] tells his dismal story in vivid prose, with crisp pen portraits of leading figures and a mix of anecdote and analysis. The Spectator (UK) John Kelly's extraordinary history of the Famine, *The Graves Are Walking*, [is] a vivid and moving illustration of what Ireland was like when its apocalypse arrived. It is heavy on stats, yet never loses sight of the individual lives who comprised them. The Irish Times, "Cultural Highlights of 2012" About the Author John Kelly is the author of the acclaimed bestseller *The Great Mortality: An Intimate History of the Black Death, the Most Devastating Plague of All Time* and *Three on the Edge: The Stories of Ordinary American Families in Search of a Medical Miracle*. He has written about medicine, history, and psychology for many years. He lives in New York City and Berkshire County, Massachusetts. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. CHAPTER ONE The Savage Shore: Three Englishmen in Ireland Late on a September afternoon in 1845, when the sky was low and the wind close, a horseman with a rooster's plume of red hair and an indefinable air of Englishness about him stood on a road in Donegal, surveying the empty landscape. Near Lough Derg, the rider had passed two dirty peasant children selling rudely carved wooden crucifixes and a peeling window poster proclaiming the Sacred beauty of Jesus, and near Ballyshannon, a knot of half clad, shoeless peasant women lifting panniers of turf onto the back of an ancient ass. Then, the wind died, the ubiquitous castle ruins palimpsests of conquest and loss vanished from the landscape and the rider passed from human to geological time. Savage rock and cold mountain surrounded him now, and the only sound to be heard in the perfect stillness of the afternoon was the gravel crunching under the weight of his horse. Out over the Atlantic, silos of angry black storm clouds were billowing skyward over a white-capped sea. By the time the rider arrived in Gweedore, it would be raining again. Even for Ireland, the weather had been unusually mutinous of late. Heat, rain, cold and sunshine succeed each other at a confusing rate, the Dublin Evening Post had complained the other day. Monday last was extremely wet, Tuesday was beautifully dry; yesterday ... both wet and dry, and to-day again is equally variable. During harvest season, the weather was always a major preoccupation in Ireland, but this season the news from Europe had made the preoccupation all-consuming. In June, a mysterious potato disease had appeared in Flanders; by the end of July, scarcely a sound potato was left between Silesia and Normandy; then, in early August, the Channel Islands and England were infected. Now there were rumors that the disease had appeared here. In a country where two thirds of the population lived by the aphorism Potatoes in the morning Potatoes at night And if I got up at midnight It would still be potatoes. the appearance of the new disease could be catastrophic. The rider was unworried, though. In Dungloe, he had passed fields heavy with healthy-looking potatoes, and last week, in County Fermanagh, the luxuriant potato fields had stretched all the way to the horizon. The Irish were an excitable people. The news from Europe, and the weather, had them on edge. Mr. Thomas Campbell Foster's journey to Ireland had begun with a summons. Earlier in the year, he had been called to Printing House Square, home of his former employer, The Times of London, and offered a challenging assignment. In the forty-four years since the formation of the Anglo-Irish Union, Britain had grown steadily wealthier and mightier, while her partner, Ireland, had grown steadily poorer and more disorderly. The editors of The Times wanted Mr. Thomas Campbell Foster to cross the Irish Sea and answer a question that had eluded the best efforts of one hundred and fourteen government commissions, sixty-one special committees, and fifty years of study by almost every leading political economist of the age: Why was Ireland collapsing? It was now several months later, and as Mr. Foster made his way northwest to Donegal, he found himself thinking what a sad, poor country Ireland was. Every road crowded with paupers entombed in rags and filth; every field crowded with slatternly little farms, undrained bogs, roofless barns, broken fences, and mud cabins that defied every architectural principle Mr. Foster was aware of: smoke poured out through a hole in the front of the cabin where the door ought to be, rain poured in through the roof, and wind whistled through cracks in the mud walls. In front of almost every dwelling sat a pig in a puddle and a pile of dung, and behind many dwellings, a line of somber, untreed hills. The Irish hill was one of the most forlorn things Mr. Foster had ever seen. In the 1830s and early 1840s, Ireland occupied the same place in the western mind that Haiti, the Congo, and Somalia occupy today. The very long parade of Irish experts that Mr. Foster joined the morning he accepted the Times assignment included not only government commissioners, members of Parliament, and political economists, but also some of the most famously enlightened personalities of the Victorian age, among them Alexis de Tocqueville, Sir Walter Scott, William Makepeace Thackeray, Anthony Trollope, Thomas Carlyle, and the well-known German travel writer Johann Kohl.

On visits to Ireland, the celebrity experts would poke and probe every facet of the Irish economy, the Irish mind, the Irish family, the Irish work ethic, the Irish agricultural system, the Irish procreation rate, then return home in despair and write a book explaining why Ireland was the worst place in the world. I used to pity the poor Letts of Livonia, declared the German Kohl. Well, pardon my ignorance, now, I have seen Ireland. The Scot Carlyle came back to London proclaiming that he had seen hell: The earth disowns it. Heaven is against it. Ireland should be burnt into a black unpeopled field rather than this should last. Most contemporary analysis of Irish poverty began with Irish demography. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, population growth accelerated everywhere in Europe but nowhere so sharply as in Ireland. Between about 1745 and 1800, the population doubled, from two and a half million to five million; then, between 1800 and 1845, it almost doubled again, from five million to nearly 8.2 million. During the French Wars 1793 to 1815 British demand for Irish foodstuffs and manufactures provided enough revenue to support the expanding population. In the early 1800s, the better sort of Irish farmer often lived nearly as well as his English counterpart. There was a sturdy two-story stone house, a wife and daughters dressed in imported clothes, and a cupboard full of tea, tobacco, and other luxury items. For a few decades, the smooth glide of history even made the life of the eternally poor Irish peasant more tolerable. With the country awash in British money, the peasant could afford to supplement his traditional bowl of potatoes with extras like buttermilk, meat, and herring. The official who called Napoleon the best friend the Irish farmer ever had exaggerated but not greatly. Waterloo brought an end to the happy time. In the postwar years, British demand for Irish goods weakened, agricultural prices fell, and the domestic economy contracted. In the 1820s, when tariffs between the Union partners were lifted, the contraction intensified. An influx of cheap machine-made goods from the mills of Lancaster devastated the Irish textile industry outside Ulster. Thousands were thrown out of work, and, in the pockets of southern Ireland where the industry survived, wages fell precipitously. In 1800, at the height of the wartime boom, a weaver in Drogheda, a town north of Dublin, earned between 14 shillings and 21 shillings (1.1) per week. A generation later, a Drogheda weaver earned a quarter to a half of what his father had: 4 shillings per week for plain goods and 8 shillings for fancy goods. In Limerick, John Geary, a physician, told a visiting English commission about his recent encounter with a former textile worker; the man was lying in bed next to his wife, who had typhus. I begged him to get up, said Geary, and I shall never forget so long as I live his answer to me, Ah sir, if I get up and breathe the air and walk about I will get an appetite ... and I have nothing to eat and not a penny to buy anything. Between 1821 and 1841, shipbuilding, glass making, and other domestic industries followed textile manufacture into oblivion, and the portion of the Irish workforce employed in manufacturing plummeted from 43 percent to 28 percent. At a trade show in Dublin in the early 1850s, almost all the machinery on exhibit was British. A net for confining sheep on pasture was one of the few examples of Irish technology. The industrial collapse pushed people onto the already crowded land. In the 1820s and 1830s, Irish agriculture went where Irish agriculture had never gone before up mountainsides, down to the thin sandy soils of the seashore, out onto wild, windswept cliffs. For a time, Irish rents also went where Irish rents had never gone before, and although they stabilized in the years before 1845, the Irish farmer was slow to feel the stabilization. People are forced from want to promise any rent, a land agent in Galway observed. I know a man named Laughlin, who outbid his own brother and took a farm for more than it ever was or ever will be worth. The intense land hunger produced a granular subdivision of the Irish countryside. Unable to make the rent, the four-acre farmer would sublet two acres to another farmer, who would rent half an acre of potato ground to an agricultural laborer. By 1841, 45 percent of the agricultural holdings in Ireland were under five acres, and as subsistence farming grew, living standards fell. Milk disappeared from the peasant diet or became bulls milk unsifted oats fermented in water. Meat, eggs, butter, herring also vanished. And the cow that had formerly attended the peasants cabin was replaced by the pig, less expensive and easier to convert into rent money. Asked why he allowed his pig to sleep in the family cabin, one peasant replied, Its him that pays the rent, aint it. Peasant dress also grew meaner; clothing was mended, remended, then mended a third, fourth, and fifth time. The kaleidoscope of patched elbows, knees, and bottoms in peasant Ireland astonished the German traveler Kohl. The Irish look like a nation of broken down dance masters, he declared. As liv...