

## 特別寄稿

# Queen Victoria and the Irish Post-Famine Context: A Royal Visit

Richard J. Kelly (Kinki University)

Queen Victoria, whose reign spanned sixty-four years from 1837 to 1901, had a complex and intriguing relationship with Ireland. She expressed interest, even affection for Ireland at times; but as her reign continued into the later nineteenth century, Irish historical and social circumstances grew more nationalistic and republican and her attitude to the Irish became more hardened and mistrusting. In this paper, I will examine the background, circumstances and achievement, real and apparent, of her first visit to Ireland. It took place in 1849 just one year after the Irish Potato Famine of 1845-8, which resulted in more than one million of the population perishing from hunger and at least another million taking the emigrant path to the Americas and elsewhere with a number of them not surviving the long sea journeys. The purpose of the paper is twofold: (a) to discuss the facts pertaining to the visit; and (b) to offer some critical insights on the actual impact the visit may have had on an impoverished country that had just been ravaged by a severe famine.

Queen Victoria made four official visits in all to Ireland; the other three took place in 1853, 1861 and 1900. Her first visit was the most significant, as it was portrayed in terms of a young Queen Victoria showing her solidarity with the destitute and starving Irish. Yet the famine became a catalyst for historical and social change in Ireland that proved to be irreversible. One significant example was the increase in tenant farmers due to the irreparable decline of the landed gentry who were considered directly responsible for the social causes that made the famine catastrophe even worse; this new and emerging social group was becoming increasingly nationalistic and oppositional to British rule.

The circumstances in 1849 for a state royal visit were far from perfect. Many prominent figures in Ireland considered it inappropriate because of the terrible famine that had just ravished the country causing large-scale depopulation through death and forced emigration. The famine had multiple causes, but two were to the fore: one was the failure of the staple potato crop due to blight; the other was the inadequate social response from the authorities in Dublin and London. The queen felt she needed to respond to the tragedy and was determined to visit the country to see for herself. She had never been to Ireland and if she did not go the rumour might circulate that she was reluctant, even frightened, to come. Such hearsay would further buttress the separatist movements that were beginning to burgeon in Ireland. The Irish Viceroy, Lord Clarendon, was eager to support and facilitate the visit. Although apprehensive as to how Ireland may welcome the queen, he felt that it was a perfect opportunity for Victoria to show compassion for her Irish subjects:

Everything tends to secure for the Queen an enthusiastic reception, and the one drawback, which is the general distress of all classes, has its advantages, for it will enable the Queen to do what is kind and considerate to those who are suffering.<sup>1</sup>

The queen's trip to Ireland caused her some personal anxiety. On the sea journey across the choppy Irish Sea aboard the royal yacht, Victoria and Albert, she suffered considerably from seasickness, and the greater Dublin area endured a cholera outbreak while she was there. She first arrived at the port town of Cobh located at the entrance to Cork Harbour on 2 August 1849; she briefly disembarked and renamed it Queenstown to honour it as the spot where she first set foot on Irish soil. It later in the century became known as the 'Holy Ground' because it was the final point of departure for those leaving Catholic Ireland for the Americas; the town changed back to the original name of Cobh after Irish independence in 1922.<sup>2</sup> The royal party then sailed in their yacht up the Lee estuary to Cork, which is a picturesque journey as it is one of the largest natural harbours in the world. The public response to the visit appeared to be a success from the outset. The ordinary citizens of Queenstown

and Cork enthusiastically welcomed the royal party, as did the local political and ecclesiastical dignitaries. Queen Victoria was so thrilled by the scale of her welcome in Ireland's second city that she knighted the Mayor of Cork, William Lyons, on the deck of the royal yacht.

The queen had a keen sense of observation of both people and landscape. As she journeyed through Cork, she interestingly later recorded in her diaries:

I cannot describe our route, but it will suffice to say that it took two hours; that we drove through the principal streets; twice through some of them; that they were densely crowded, decorated . . . with flowers and triumphal arches; . . . that our reception was most enthusiastic; and that everything went off to perfection, and was very well arranged. Cork is not at all like an English town. [It] . . . looks rather foreign. The crowd is a noisy, excitable, but a very good-natured one, running and pushing about, and laughing, talking and shrieking.<sup>3</sup>

She seemed impressed at the way the city was decorated in her honour, but she was also keenly aware that Cork was 'rather foreign' and not like an English city.

While the itinerary was arranged to hide the worst realities of the famine, Queen Victoria did observe as she journeyed in Ireland that 'men are very poorly, often raggedly dressed.'<sup>4</sup> Her diaries also reveal a knowledge of aspects of Irish history. On the way to Waterford on 4 August, for example, she described how she and her party 'passed a little fort called Duncannon Fort, whence James II embarked after the Battle of the Boyne.'<sup>5</sup> While she was a young princess, her personal tutor, Baroness Louise Lehzen, taught her aspects of Irish history and geography. Her education from her tutor was comprehensive to a point, but it lacked instruction in classical literature, philosophy and foreign affairs.

Her popular reception in Dublin seemed to have been the most euphoric: 'An immense multitude had assembled, who cheered most enthusiastically, the ships

saluting and the bands playing and it was really very striking. It was a wonderful and striking scene, such masses of human beings, so enthusiastic, so excited, yet such perfect order maintained . . . a never-to-be-forgotten scene; when one reflected how lately the country had been in open revolt and under martial law.’<sup>6</sup> In addition to having been overawed by the welcome she received, she lauded the architectural beauty of Dublin, especially the public buildings. The city authorities did everything possible to make the visit a success, and her diary entry supports this where she gives an impressive prosaic account of her entry to the city:

There are no gates to the town, but temporary ones were erected under an arch; and here we stopped, and the Mayor presented me with the keys with some appropriate words. At the last triumphal arch, a poor little dove was let down into my lap, with an olive branch round its neck, alive and very tame.<sup>7</sup>

The royal stay in Dublin lasted for a period of four days and involved visits to public institutions and meetings with civic and religious dignitaries, which included an address from the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. Daniel Murray. The final day of the Dublin itinerary was a trip to Carton House, the residence of the Duke of Leinster. This visit especially impressed the queen because of the perceived harmony that existed in the hierarchical relationship within this household; she remarked ‘the Duke is so kind to them, that a word from him will make them do anything.’<sup>8</sup> The Irish dancing performed for the queen’s entertainment at Carton was by members of Father Mathew’s temperance movement; this was the reputable image of Ireland that the royal visit was hoping to encourage.

Belfast was the final stopover on Victoria’s first Irish visit. On her way to Belfast, she had a special interest in Carrickfergus because it was where King William III landed with his army in Ireland. As in the previous three cities, she received a warm reception in Belfast, which was perhaps all the more significant given the mistrust that flourished between Ulster’s religious and political entities. In Belfast, she upheld the same non-bipartisan policy of not visiting exclusively Protestant charit

-able institutions. However, Belfast seems not to have impressed Victoria as much as Dublin and several saw her visit there as little more than a stopping off point before journeying to the Scottish Highlands, which seemed to have been her favourite place in the world. Her final entry in her diary about her first Irish visit was to express her admiration for the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), ‘. . .all Irish, and chiefly Roman Catholics; and not one of whom, during the trying times last year, fraternized with the rebels.’<sup>9</sup> The fact that they kept loyal to the crown despite the insurgencies that were occurring throughout the country in the wake of the Great Famine reinforced for Queen Victoria that official institutions in Ireland remained loyal to her as head of state, no matter what revolutionary headwinds prevailed.

The queen’s satisfaction at the achievement of her Irish visit is evident not only in her diary but in other royal actions and documents. She conferred the title ‘Earl of Dublin’ on her oldest son Edward, Prince of Wales, and gave Prince Arthur, born in 1850, the name Arthur Patrick. Victoria’s Irish experience signified a certain reassurance for her about fidelity of the Irish to the crown and constitution. Prince Albert’s observations of the visit are insightful and complementary to those of Victoria. He commented on Cork that ‘delighted affection was everywhere seen’ and that Waterford was ‘alive with loyal enthusiasm.’<sup>10</sup> Both cities were infamous for uprisings and insurrections since the end of the Great Famine in 1848. Prince Albert focused on loyalty in his oration to the Royal Dublin Society; he praised it for its constructive contribution to the productive industriousness of the country as a whole. Lord Lansdowne was similarly enthused and commented that ‘the Queen herself, has, by her manner, given universal satisfaction, omitting nothing that could please, so that the feeling in her favour has gone on crescendo from the moment of her arrival.’<sup>11</sup> This is important confirmation that Irish loyalty was possibly enhanced by the visit.

Dignitaries such as Edward Carpenter and Lord Dufferin, who were in Dublin for the visit, also confirmed this eagerness.<sup>12</sup> Irish nationalist opinion was hostile to the visit at the outset but seemed more receptive as it progressed; in fact, the *Freeman’s*

*Journal* referred to Dublin 'like a city rose from the dead.'<sup>13</sup> A certain uneasy accord seems to have endured between the rival religious and political entities in Ulster even after the visit ended; this was most welcome. As the queen departed from Kingstown, she herself lowered the royal standard three times in appreciation of the warm reception she had received from the people of Dublin. Lord Clarendon commented that 'there is not an individual who does not take it as a personal compliment to himself.'<sup>14</sup> The anthem 'God Save the King/Queen' was first composed in honour for the Catholic King James II and it was the descendants of his Irish subjects who were chanting it as a tribute to a Protestant monarch.<sup>15</sup> Even the militant revolutionary leader of 1848, John Mitchel, had to concede that 'the debased nation set its neck under her feet in a paroxysm of fictitious "loyalty". It is painful to relate, but it is the disgraceful fact.'<sup>16</sup>

Lord Clarendon justifiably regarded the queen's reception as positive progress against Irish disloyalty to the crown. It marked a new dawn for Ireland which he said was 'a turn in the tide of their affairs after four years of suffering, with an unprecedented influx of strangers and expenditure of money, and as they will contrast this year with the last, their conclusion must be unfavourable to political agitation.'<sup>17</sup> The royal visit was a marked success, but it did not herald the metamorphosis in Anglo-Irish relations that Clarendon initially enthused about. Therefore, two questions need to be asked: What exactly did the visit achieve? How can it be estimated?

Socio-political theory on the role and function of ritual gives certain insight into ceremonial, including royal ceremonial. It interprets ritual as reinforcing the integration of a society around a common set of values. However, religious and political values were so divided between Britain and Ireland that this view is too simplistic to objectively comprehend the real situation. The social anthropologist, Michael Mann, interestingly argues that this apparent show of consensus in 1849 is largely explainable in terms of the absence of clearly defined values and beliefs that would provide such minority groups with a tangible oppositional focus.<sup>18</sup> Ireland was not hege-

monic in the wake of the famine catastrophe and lacked effective leadership at the societal, political and religious levels to mobilize.

This insight by Mann clearly has some merit in comprehending aspects of the royal visit of 1849. However, strong and focused opposition to the existing constitutional order was dynamic and extant. The structures that conveyed these oppositional movements rather than the ideologies they promulgated can better explain why their effectiveness was impeded. Nationalist movements in the later nineteenth century did mobilize successfully with efficient and concrete results. Mann's focus on the need for a more refined appreciation of the social context in which ritual takes place gives an important understanding of the visit.

The environment of 1849 had a certain surreal aura about it. Set in the aftermath of the Great Famine, the royal visit occurred as a kind of flight of conjecture with little in common with the environment in which it took place. Part of the success of the visit may have been because it occurred at a transitional period in Irish history. The famine changed the traditional rural social order. The new order consisted of a tenant-farmer class whose interests were anti-royal and nationalistic; but it only developed dynamically in that regard after 1879 when inspired by the tradition of Parnellite patriotism.<sup>19</sup> With both revolutionary and constitutional nationalism in disarray in the wake of the famine catastrophe, the royal visitors not only experienced no major resistance to royalty, but also were able to diminish elements of O'Connellite ideology that was found wanting in both focus and resolve.<sup>20</sup>

The queen was a young, attractive and fashionable woman with a pleasant personality. She had highly refined communication skills, which she used to maximum effect in Ireland. The response she received from the Irish peasant classes was one of fascination, awe and celebrity appeal. To say whether it was genuine or not is asking the wrong kind of question. The queen's journey was a formal type of public pageant with carefully managed public exposure; it yielded the desired effect of exhibiting public signs of loyalty. Carefully choreographed contact to maximize an

awe of the royal presence is not just unique to European monarchy. One of the good enduring examples of royal awe is Emperor Hirohito of Japan in the 1930's. His presence was so revered that citizens were obliged to close the blinds of the windows as the royal carriage passed by in the streets of Tokyo. Queen Victoria had a certain skill in theatrical performance and did actually participate in amateur productions. Therefore, her lowering the royal standard to acknowledge the crowds at Kingstown as she departed Dublin is an example of Victoria the performer.<sup>21</sup>

What was the long-term effect of royal visit? Lord Clarendon, when he considered this question, was more pessimistic of any ensuring success. He believed that law and order would have to be rigorously enforced if Ireland was to become a civilized society in the Victorian age. One royal visit alone could not bring about such a social metamorphosis or unravel the deep-seated mistrust that existed for centuries among the Irish peasant classes. A certain objectivism needed to prevail to counteract some of the hysteria that existed in the wake of the visit. This proved to be justified when one read some of the commentary in the English media about the visit. The influential magazine *Punch* wrote critical articles on the effectiveness of Victoria sojourn in Ireland, describing the public displays of loyalty as 'aspirational' at best.<sup>22</sup> It was a nice ideological goal to believe in an Ireland that would be respectful of the English crown, but few were acknowledging or addressing the complex problems that were the undercurrent of Irish society at the time. The events of the late nineteenth century proved that the *Punch* analysis was correct. It was only a matter of time before the oppositional forces in Ireland would effectively group and organize an act under effective leadership. This leadership was provided by such charismatic figures as Charles Stewart Parnell, Daniel O'Connell and Michael Davitt.<sup>23</sup>

John Berger interestingly states concerning the effectiveness of public gatherings that 'Demonstrations express political ambitions before the political means necessary to realise them have been created.'<sup>24</sup> This is exactly how O'Connell achieved success with his so-called 'monster meetings'. In a similar way, there is some merit

in applying this paradigm to Victoria's visit. The queen was the symbol of constitutional order; by visiting her Irish subjects, she gave a public legitimacy to this. However, this symbolism had a certain kinetic uncertainty to it. Symbols not only convey meaning, they also provide the capacity to make meaning. One can share the symbol but not the meaning of that symbol. This is a key insight in that symbols can be manipulated according to prevailing movements, so what is positive at one time can be considered negative at another time.

One of the principal purposes of the visit was to symbolically legitimize British rule in a part of the British Empire that had generally shown disapproval of this form of governance. To achieve this, it largely ignored the complexity of problems that formed part of that rule which continually yielded conflict and division. The militant revolutionary, John Mitchel, who vehemently opposed the royal presence, stated that this was not a display of authentic loyalty but rather the natural courtesy of the people who were amused and bemused by the spectacle. He went on to state that certain favours were given to the Irish Catholic middle class in order to manipulate them as well as the hope of freeing the 1848 insurrectionists. This view may be extreme, but it contains certain grains of legitimacy in that much was concealed in order to facilitate the smooth orchestration of the event.

The most significant glossing over was the effects of the famine, which attracted widespread ethical criticism from across the political and religious spheres. Other forms of suppression were less contentious like the veiling of nationalism. But this did not force the nationalists to abandon their activities completely. They had been weakened by the collapse of the 1848 rebellion, which was a source of embarrassment and shame. The queen's visit provided a chance for them to regain some of what they had lost. A network of nationalists began to gather arms and plan a rising and a kidnap attempt on the queen during her time in Dublin. This was more of a propaganda exercise rather than something of real substance intended at embarrassing the queen and her entourage. Young nationalist leaders like Charles Gavan Duffy considered the strategy unworkable. The plan was abandoned when no more

than a few hundred men organized with the intention of taking over the stronghold of Dublin Castle.<sup>25</sup> This had little or no impact on the royal visit and certainly did not impede it in any way.

A more complex and interesting area of ambiguity was the attitudes of the Irish Catholic hierarchy and the queen.<sup>26</sup> The welcome by this group was not uniform with only thirteen of the twenty-seven bishops signing the Catholic address to the queen. There were deep divisions between the three archbishoprics of Dublin, Tuam and Cashel.<sup>27</sup> Archbishop John MacHale of Tuam, on the more radical side of the hierarchy, wanted to brief the queen directly on the true state of deprivation in Ireland. In the western part of Ireland where Tuam is located, thousands and thousands of poor peasants died of hunger in the years preceding the visit. He was not successful in this quest. The archdiocese of Dublin, led by the more moderate Archbishop Daniel Murray, held more sway; therefore, the address delivered to the queen was both bland and conciliatory. In protest, the archbishop of Tuam along with the Archbishop Michael Slattery of Cashel boycotted her reception in Dublin. Disunity was also present in the Protestant side when the Ulster Presbyterians expressed anger over the fact that the Catholic address seemed to have been more favourably received by the queen than their address. What this implies is that the religious divisions that existed were not solved by the presence of Queen Victoria; they were still simmering near a surface that have been smoothed over as much as possible for the occasion.

The queen represented different things to different religious groups. Within the Protestant community, she had a secular and divine significance. She was both head of state and divine head of their Established Church of Ireland. The Presbyterian congregation, with its more Puritan ideology, would also have regarded her as having a divine symbolism for them but with somewhat less fervour. She had no divine symbolism for Catholics, but just a head of state only. The pope fulfilled that role. The papacy was regularly in conflict with Britain over the jurisdiction of Catholic dioceses and the power of bishops as local ordinaries.<sup>28</sup> This ongoing tension

between the papacy and the British state fueled much on the anti-Catholic and anti-Irish sentiment that the English media were not averse to propagating; as Victoria's reign progressed, she became more and more supportive of it for comprehensible reasons.<sup>29</sup>

Prejudice was not only religious in nature. A number of assassination attempts on the British Royal family were perpetrated by Irishmen. The best-known incident was when William Hamilton shot at the queen in Constitution Hill as she was going home from her official birthday celebrations. Hamilton was found to have been insane and his gun as actually unloaded, but the fact that he was Irish did not go unremembered.<sup>30</sup> The 'Famine Queen' myth was developed as part of nationalist propaganda in the late nineteenth century and is still associated with Queen Victoria in the contemporary Ireland of today.<sup>31</sup> The label appears not to have harmed the queen's standing as a model of English domestic and family values, which likewise appealed to the Irish middle classes that included members of the Fenians.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, what was the overall impact of this royal visit?

The royal visit of 1849 was a well-organized and choreographed event that had all the trappings of a pageant about it. Its sense of occasion lifted the Irish from the drudgery and despair that was commonplace in their day-to-day lives. It offered a brief respite; but once it was over, the effect was soon a memory with a somewhat confused, even surreal, message. Tension and conflict was never far from the surface, and that was most clearly seen in the attitude of church leaders within their respective church and between their churches. The Great Famine had initiated permanent social, economic and political changes in Ireland. By 1849, these changes were not yet realized because they were just in the wake of the event and the various oppositional groups to British rule had yet to organize under effective leadership. This did eventually happen as the century progressed and Queen Victoria was portrayed more and more in a negative light, even being dubbed the 'Famine Queen' by Irish nationalists. She made three more subsequent visits to Ireland (1853, 1861 and 1900) and the changing circumstances resulted in these being of a more private than

public affair. The final visit in 1900 did have some of the pageant of her first visit but the socio-political climate had been completely metamorphosed with Irish independence from Britain not being a matter of how but when it would be realized. Ireland gained independence from Britain in 1922 after a war of independence and a short but divisive civil war.

### Endnotes

1. Martin (1875-9), II, p. 192
2. This was a precedent set by George IV in September 1821, whose landing at Dún Laoghaire, Co. Dublin, led to the town being renamed Kingstown.
3. Helps (1868), p. 251.
4. Ibid, pp. 261-2.
5. Ibid, p. 252.
6. Ibid, pp. 254-5.
7. Ibid, pp. 255-6; see also The Times, 8 August 1849.
8. Ibid, pp. 258-63.
9. Ibid, pp. 264-8.
10. Martin (1875-9), vol. 2, pp. 205-6.
11. Gooch (1925), vol. I, p. 235.
12. Edward Carpenter (1844 –1929) was an English socialist poet, anthologist, early gay activist and socialist philosopher; Frederick Temple Hamilton-Temple-Blackwood, 1st Marquess of Dufferin and Ava (1826 –1902) was a British public servant and prominent member of Victorian society.
13. *Freeman's Journal*, 10 August 1849.
14. Ibid, 11 August 1849.
15. See Dimot (1953).
16. Mitchel (1913), p. 6; John Mitchel (1815-1875) was editor of *The United Irishman*.
17. See Lukes (1977), pp. 56-62.
18. On the sociology of Michael Mann, see Hall and Schreoder (2006).
19. On Charles S. Parnell (1846-1891), see Lyons (1977).
20. On Daniel O'Connell (1775 – 1847), see Cusack (1877).
21. See Rowell (1978).
22. See Hone (1963), p. 501.
23. On Michael Davitt (1846-1906), see King (2001).
24. See Berger (1972), p. 249.
25. This revolutionary group soon disintegrated and had nothing to show expect a small attack on a military garrison at Cappoquin, County Waterford, on 16 September 1849, one month after the queen's departure.
26. See Kerr (1994), pp. 203-5.

27. The See of Armagh was vacant at the time of the visit because of the death of Archbishop Crolly. Only after the visit was over were the hierarchy's addresses to both Victoria and the Prince Consort published; see *Freeman's Journal*, 13 Aug. 1849.
28. See Bowen (1978), 230-1; Larkin (1980), pp. 3-95
29. See Garvin (1981), pp. 55-7; Lyons (1973), pp. 116-25.
30. See Longford (1964; repr. 1987), p. 192.
31. Charles Stewart Parnell first developed this controversial theme for an Irish-American audience during a visit to the U.S.A. 1880; see Tynan (1894), pp. 147-8.
32. On the Irish Fenian Movement, see Comerford (1985) and Kelly (2006).

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