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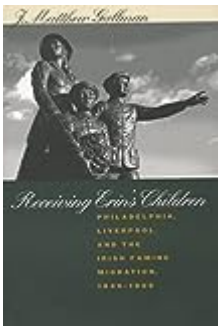

F. Matthew Gallman. *Receiving Erin's Children: Philadelphia, Liverpool, and the Irish Famine Migration, 1845-1855.* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000. xii + 306 pp. $59.95(cloth), $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-2534-1; $27.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-4845-6.

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In 1845 the potato blight appeared, and in 1846 the potato crop failed. In October 1846, there was a food riot in the capital–sufficient warning to the government that, if steps were not taken, worse might occur. A member of the government, who was also a physician, was put in charge of famine relief. He collected information on harvests and grain prices throughout Europe, and, with his advice, the government bought, in good time, supplies of wheat, oats, maize, and beans. In March 1847 the physician ordered an inventory to be made of selected items of stored food in every community; the government was thus able to predict which families might find themselves in difficulty as the crisis developed.

In order to assess the volume of the next year's crop, the physician collected information from every community, acreage sown in grain and planted in potatoes, seed needed, and average yields. What the government feared most was a repetition of the widespread famine that had occurred in 1816-17; with the physician's guidance, famine was averted. The physician's name was Johann Rudolph Schneider, and the government in question was the cantonal government of Bern, in Switzerland. Meanwhile, in the 1840s, in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, they managed these things in rather different ways.

Salaman gave us in 1949 the foundations of a social history of the Potato; we still do not have a comparative social history of the potato blight, though the material is there to write one. Only one part of that material is the extraordinary database that Dr. Schneider bequeathed to historians of nutrition. The potato crop failed throughout Europe. But famine did not appear throughout Europe. If we continue the implied comparison between Bern and Ireland–and perhaps Bern and Ireland are the extremes–two differences strike us: scale and policy.

Scale? It is possible to argue, and it has been argued, that no nineteenth century government could have coped adequately with a crisis of the size of the Famine in Ireland. Policy? But policy comes from philosophy and attitude. And the attitude of the Swiss democracies towards their hungry citizens was certainly unlike the attitude of the London government towards its Irish fellow subjects. London was guided by "political economy"–that odd mix of theology, social science, and social distance.

There are many extraordinary gaps in Irish historiography, in the history of the Irish Diaspora, and in the study of the Irish Famine and its consequences; I have, perhaps, said enough about such gaps elsewhere. But there are complex processes underway. We can think of these processes as having two parts. First, there is

the task of finding, and redefining, the areas in which study of the Irish Famine might take place–and this is, in part, a search for new sources and new approaches. Second, there is the task of re-integrating the study of the Irish Famine within the study of Irish history, with its many sub-departments. Noting, in turn, that those sub-departments will have connections with areas of scholarship outside Irish history–and that these may well, in turn, regard the Irish Famine as an uninteresting anomaly. I think I have indicated that, in my view, the study of the Irish Famine and its consequences will be inter-disciplinary and comparative. And it will be difficult.

Broadly, British policy in Ireland gave the problem of the consequences of the potato blight – not to the atomized, selfish individual of economic theory but to poor Irish families. These families, collectively and severally, launched a most unusual response in the history of responses to famine crises–a mass migration across very great distances. The famine migration occurred because the famine migration was possible; this is more than a truism. As Robert Scally has pointed out, with his notion of "the Liverpool system," there was a transport network in place for these Irish families to use. And very often these Irish families were trying to reach other members of the family, already based outside Ireland. The famine migration occurred because there was already in place a scattered Irish diaspora that could be appealed to for help. If we want a simple outline of what these Irish families were trying to do–and this perception comes from the work of Frank Neal and Marianna O'Gallagher–they were trying to save the children.

Of course, I was intrigued to be asked to comment on J. Matthew Gallman, *Receiving Erin's Children*. Gallman's specialism is the history of Philadelphia, USA. And, I deduce, seeing how much material there was in the archives about the consequences of the famine refugee influx in Philadelphia, he developed the notion of comparing Philadelphia's experiences with those of another city. The city he chose, for purposes of comparison, was Liverpool, England. This book is not so much about the famine refugees themselves, though they are in the pages treated with sympathy and understanding. The famine refugee migration is like a natural disaster, a typhoon or an earthquake, and the interest for the historian of cities is to see how these two cities, at the mid-point of the nineteenth century, responded to and coped with the crisis.

Gallman's book has seven chapters. A first, general chapter, "Immigrants and Hosts" looks at the cities of Philadelphia and Liverpool before the famine refugee migrations. The next chapter, "Migration and Reception," looks at the welcome, or otherwise, that the refugees met in the two cities and the concerns their arrival raised. Then are launched the five chapters that form the core of the book, very detailed studies of local government in action in the areas of Poor Relief, Medical Care, Environmental Reform, Sectarian Conflict and Education, and Public Order. I was impressed by Gallman's mastery of the arguments and the detail here–and his book is certainly to be recommended to anyone interested in the fine detail of those aspects of urban history.

However, about halfway through, the reader begins to feel uneasy. Is the book ever going to contrive to more than a history of those five themes of social policy and practice in Philadelphia, interleaved with a history of those five themes in Liverpool? The book becomes a very hard, and sometimes confusing, read in ways that do not do justice to the writer's knowledge. Gallman knows the Philadelphia material very well, of course, and he has clearly worked hard to master the material on Liverpool, as anyone familiar with the sources and the scholars of Liverpool's history must generously acknowledge. It is sad that, evidently, Gallman completed his text before the publication of Peter Gray, *Famine, Land, and Politics: British Government and Irish Society, 1843-50*, and Frank Neal, Black '47, Britain, and the Famine Irish_, which deal more substantially with the issues raised in this review. Though, Frank Neal's articles are a constant influence.

Gallman's main difficulty–and one wonders if this struck the writer, as he wrote, with mounting horror–is not so much that Philadelphia and Liverpool are different. It is always possible to find differences, but are they, in the classic phrase, differences that make a difference? Is this a comparison that really illuminates?

What strikes the reader, as Gallman acknowledges frequently, is how very alike the two cities were in their responses to this typhoon, this earthquake, this refugee influx. The cities were at very similar stages of development in countries driven by very similar ideological debates. The approach that Gallman does try to develop is the one about American exceptionalism and commitment to voluntarism, but even here he finds himself quarrelling with himself. Witness the revealing parentheses on page 47: "Liverpool's officials turned to Parliament for answers. The Philadelphians had no such assumptions about their federal government. (Of course, Parliament did not share Liverpool's assumptions about

national intervention.)" Here the United Kingdom Parliament, the USA federal government, and the City of Philadelphia seem to be in agreement. Frank Neal has shown, in great detail, how the decisions of the British government forced back on to local government the costs of the crisis. Liverpool had cause to complain.

There are ways in which, as I have already indicated, Liverpool was different from Philadelphia. And this difference is signaled from the very first page of Gallman's book in a way that I find intriguing. I have said that, in the crisis, Irish families appealed to members of the family already settled outside Ireland. I asked for new sources, and Gallman brings them to us–in the archives of a Philadelphia shipping company, H. & A. Cope, bundles of steerage tickets, originally bought in Philadelphia by a family member or friend, sent to Ireland, used by a young person to make the voyage from Ireland to Philadelphia, collected there and stored. Very often, the purchaser of the ticket scribbled some words of advice on the back, before posting it to Ireland; very often, the tickets are ripped in half, by the company's agent, leaving us with only half the message. On the back of the ticket used to voyage to Philadelphia by eighteen year old Ann Murphy, of Belfast, in July 1847, the purchaser, Theodore Wilson (an Irishman living in Philadelphia) has squeezed in much useful advice. Including this: "Get put on board the steamer for Liverpool." As far as the famine refugee migrations are concerned, comparing Philadelphia with Liverpool is like comparing a spoke with a hub.

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