

CORRESPONDENCE

From July, 1846, to January, 1847,

RELATING TO

THE MEASURES ADOPTED

FOR THE

RELIEF OF THE DISTRESS IN IRELAND.

COMMISSARIAT SERIES.

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1847.

Sir R. ROUTH to Mr. TREVELYAN.

The Castle, Dublin, December 16, 1846.

I BEGIN to see that the plan of inspecting officers will throw a vast accumulation of correspondence upon me, which I hope I may be able to meet. It is impossible to send you the letters as I have done; they must remain here one or two days. In the midst of all this I must be careful that it does not draw me too much away from the Commissariat part of my duties, which must be first attended to, and I must confess I have my apprehensions about quantity. The want of shipping is so great in the United States that they never will have the means of sending the half of what they could supply. Have we no old 74's that might be employed for a trip on such a duty. Some unusual step must be taken to prevent our being surprised by a real famine. To be secure against such a calamity, no one would complain even if our pledge were partially infringed. With 4,800 tons in store, I am really afraid of the result. Pray, therefore, do not think me importunate or troublesome if I repeat to you my anxiety to see a further reserve of as much more in the naval magazines at Haulbowline.

I was much pleased to hear that the Treasury were going to advance money to proprietors to improve their own estates. This is meeting the danger in face, and I shall be most anxious to see the terms. I am very much pleased with this decision.

I know nothing of the person employed in County Kerry that you speak of. We have only three persons employed, who had been previously serving with Mr. Hewetson—Mr. Hughes, whom you know, and Mr. Hill, employed last season at Cork, and Mr. Nash, who was in a merchant's counting house at Cork; and C. C. M'Clintock goes down to-morrow night from my office to take charge at Castleton Beerhaven.

All our out-ports are now complete, except to prepare military protection in

County Donegal. I presume you approve of the course adopted last year of appointing the temporary clerks at 5s. locally; and if in this or in any other way I am overstepping your intentions, pray inform me at once that I may desist, for the last thing I wish is patronage.

I have just been called by Mr. Labouchere, who is very anxious about the reports from Skibbereen, and desired me to add a 100% to the Ceylon subscription, and to apply it at once to the relief of the poor in such charitable means as can be suggested. I write, therefore, this night to Commissary-General Hewetson to detach Mr. Inglis to Skibbereen, where he will meet Captain Reid, to whom I also write, and, in conjunction with Mr. Hughes, to organize a plan for the relief of the distress, and to remain there until it is organized; and I have written to Captain Reid to proceed to Baltimore, Skull and Crookhaven, and in like manner to relieve the destitution there. Both Mr. Inglis and Captain Reid are to report daily, as well as Mr. Hughes, on the departure of the former, and Mr. Hughes is exactly the man to be useful on such occasions.

Mr. TREVELYAN to Sir R. ROUTH.

Treasury, December 18, 1846.

Mr. ANAMS presented himself at the Treasury yesterday, and will proceed to Ireland after he has undergone a short preparation. I expect that he will render you valuable assistance, and I think your plan is to keep him at head quarters to support you in conducting your immensely voluminous correspondence.

Another officer, Captain Bellew, late of the East India Company's service, has been recommended by Lord Lansdowne, and will proceed to Dublin, to place himself under your orders as soon as he has read the correspondence.

I now proceed to notice the remarks in your letters of the 12th, 15th, and 16th instant, in the order in which they occur.

Three hundred and seventy tons of barley meal are now being shipped to Dublin, over and above the supplies destined for that port, of which you had received advice when you wrote your letter to me of the 12th instant; and as freight had been already engaged for this additional quantity by ordinary Dublin traders, who would not undertake the voyage to the western coast of Ireland, their destination could not be changed. You will, I hope, be able to store the whole at Banagher and Longford, which may then be considered as safe for some time to come, or, at the worst, a portion of it may remain for a time at Dublin.

I have already stated to you the objection to our storing meal at Haulbowline. If we were prepared to undertake the responsibility of supplying that part of Ireland, it would be a convenient arrangement, but as it is, it would inevitably place us in a false and painful position. Deptford, and still more, Portsmouth and Plymouth, are, with the assistance of the Admiralty steamers, available as store-houses, and then there are the store ships on the west of Ireland, which, excepting the one in the Shannon, are not yet filled, and our store-houses on shore which may be increased, if necessary.

I have requested Mr. Erichsen to send another cargo of a hundred tons of Indian meal from Plymouth to Clifden, and the same to Belmullet, and if there should be a difficulty in obtaining shipping at Plymouth, other measures will immediately be taken for the same purpose.

I await the intimation of your wishes regarding the "Rhadamanthus," and if Clifden and Belmullet may be considered as having been sufficiently supplied for the present, by the two cargoes already sent, and the two additional cargoes now about to be sent, this large steam-vessel will be able to leave supplies at any of the other minor depôts at which they may be immediately required. The arrangements made for the supply of the Scotch depôts, will, I hope,

place us at ease in regard to them for some time to come, in which case the "Rhadamanthus" and "Stromboli" will be appropriated to carrying meal from Plymouth to your depots.

The whole of the barley meal and wheaten meal consigned to you is kiln dried.

You ask me to consider that important word "quantity." I can assure you that it has occupied our anxious attention ever since the commencement of our operations. Our own purchases have, as I have more than once informed you, been carried to the utmost limit, short of seriously raising the price in the London market; and the quantity secured is so large, that it must have had this effect, if we had not carefully watched our opportunities, and availed ourselves of every opening which enabled us to forward our object without acting directly upon prices.

You have 4800 tons in store, and you will see from the accompanying estimate that you may expect about 2770 tons more in the course of the next month; making altogether 7570 tons, besides the current produce of our mills, which I calculate at about 1000 tons a month, but as this is divided between Scotland and Ireland, you must not expect the whole of it.

You observe that you ought not to open your depôts with a less quantity than 8,000 tons, that that quantity last year only lasted two months, and that February, March, April, and nearly the whole of May, will be severe months.

If we open our depôts in the unrestricted manner we did last year, five times the above-mentioned quantity would not be sufficient to prevent them from becoming prematurely exhausted, leaving the people to all the horrors of a real famine, unmitigated by the degree of private exertion which would have taken place if we had not interfered.

It is to be feared, that although February, March, April, and May, will be severe months, June, July, and August will be severer still.

These opinions are founded partly upon our experience last year, and partly upon the numerous indications which reach us on the best official and other authority from various parts of Ireland; and as the experience of the past is a matter of positive fact and certainty, I have had those parts of the printed correspondence which bear upon this part of the subject selected and reprinted, and I will shortly send copies for your use, and that of your principal officers.

As the great pressure upon our depots last season, took place in the months of June and July, I presume that in excepting these months from those which require the most serious attention, you are influenced by the expectation of the arrival of large supplies from America.

That large supplies will arrive, there can be no doubt; but on the other hand, the almost entire destruction of the accustomed food of four or five millions of people, is a new phenomenon, the effects of which have yet to be seen. A small country like Holland, may derive great part of its sustenance from abroad, but as some of the gentlemen in the North of Ireland have lately remarked at their meetings, for a numerous people like the Irish to be fed from foreign countries, is a thing unheard of. I hope it may turn out on trial to be easier than I expect, but my fears are stronger than my hopes.

The ordinary mercantile machinery even of the greatest trading nation in the world, is unequal to such a novel emergency, as is proved by the quantity of corn stored at Odessa, New York, and elsewhere, for the conveyance of which to Ireland ships cannot be obtained; and will it be much better in the spring, in the face of the competition of the spring trade? And even supposing it to have arrived on the shores of Ireland, in sufficient quantity, can it be brought into consumption in all the different parts of the interior in sufficient time to meet the wants of the people?

The ordinary social machinery by which the necessary supplies of food are distributed in other countries is, as you well know, lamentably deficient in Ireland; but the only available means of gradually creating such a machinery have been adopted by the establishment of Relief Committees to provide food in each locality, and sell it in detail at not less than cost price.

The practical conclusion is, that you must carefully watch the sales from our depots and keep them under an effectual check, taking care, in every possible case, to adhere to the rule of placing the local Committees between us and the people, in order to prevent that direct pressure of the populace upon our stores which must speedily exhaust them, and to draw out the resources of

the country before we make our own issues. In the execution of this important duty you must be prepared to act with great firmness and to incur much obloquy; but you should remember that, while others only look to their immediate wants, you are bound to look to the future, and that any present abuse that may be heaped upon you is as nothing compared to the just reprehension to which you would be liable, both on the part of Government and the public, if you were to allow your depots to become exhausted. Any dole, however inadequate, would be better than immediate sufficiency followed by subsequent total destitution.

These principles must be kept in view in reference to what is now going on at Skibbereen, for if we were to commence by a lavish issue there, we might find it difficult to adopt a safe course elsewhere.

We attach the highest public importance to the strict observance of our pledge, not to send orders abroad which would come into competition with our merchants and upset all their calculations.

I am happy to inform you that another Admiralty steamer, the "Birkenhead," much larger than either the "Stromboli" or "Rhadamanthus," will be placed at our disposal for the conveyance of our meal; and these three will be more than sufficient to convey, with remarkable promptness and certainty, the whole produce of our naval and other mills in this country to the places at which it may be required in Ireland and Scotland.

Captain Hamilton is to send me a naval officer, Captain Baynton, ordinarily employed in the Admiralty surveys, who, he says, is well qualified to assist us in Ireland, as one of your inspecting officers.

The estimate we want is one precisely similar to that furnished to Parliament at the close of last session, carrying on that estimate from the 15th of last August to the 15th of next August. Pray let me have this as soon as you can, according to the best data at your disposal.

I have continued to forward the plan of a private subscription, as far as it lay in my power, both in Ireland and England, and Sir George Grey has rendered his more powerful assistance; I think it will be brought to bear. The only point on which I am disposed to modify my opinion, is that instead of the produce of the subscription being handed over to you at once, to be distributed by you among the Relief Committees where it is most required, I think it must be placed by a Committee, to be formed for the purpose in London, at the disposal of another independent Committee in Dublin, to be dealt with by them as may be arranged between the two Committees; but I have no doubt that the money will be actually appropriated according to your advice, with reference to the information centralised in your office from all parts of the country, almost as much as if it were handed over to you in the first instance; this modification of my opinion, I need not add, is not in the least owing to any doubt of your being equal to the task, but to a more full consideration of the nature of such a private subscription, and of the established practice on such occasions.
