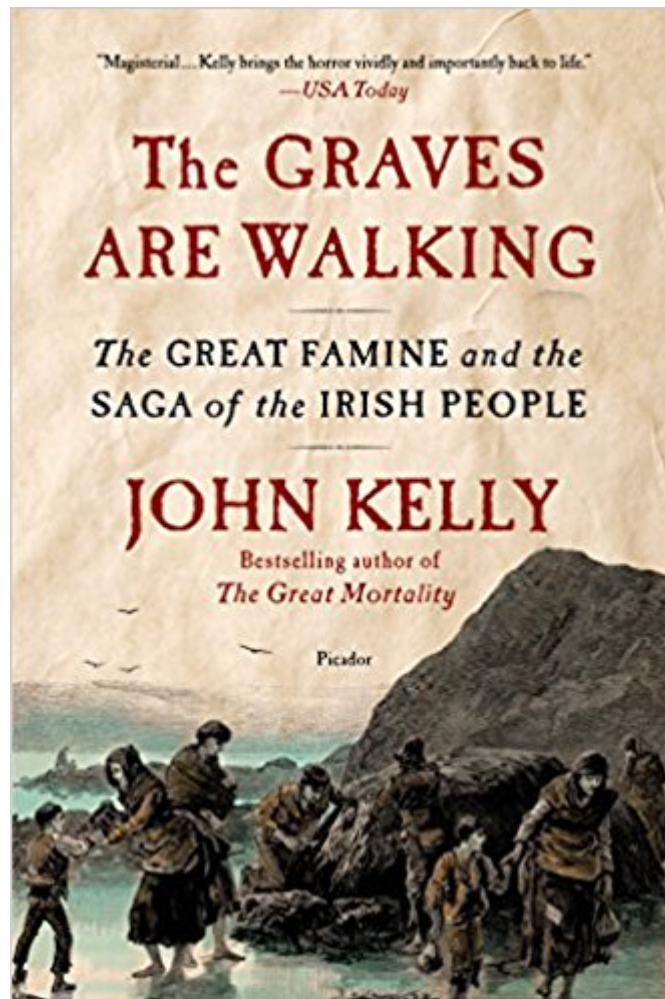


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The Graves Are Walking: The Great Famine And The Saga Of The Irish People



Synopsis

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*. In this masterful, comprehensive account of the Irish Potato Famine, delivered with novelistic flair, Kelly gives us not only the startling facts of this disaster--one of the worst to strike mankind, killing twice as many lives as the American Civil War--but examines the intersection of political greed, bacterial infection, religious intolerance, and racism that made it possible. Kelly brings new material to his analysis of relevant political factors during the years leading up to the famine, and the extent to which Britain's nation-building policies exacerbated the mounting crisis. Despite the shocking, infuriating implications of his findings, *The Graves Are Walking* is ultimately a story of triumph--of one people's ability to remake themselves in a new land in the face of the unthinkable.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"By the summer of 1847, newspaper readers in North America and Europe could be forgiven for thinking the only thing the Irish knew how to do any more was die." That sums up the horrific story of the Irish Potato Famine of 1845-1848ish, a dreadful event that was sadly in need of a new and readable history. That is what John Kelly has delivered -- in spades. He does the world a service by not arguing that the collapse of the potato crop was artificially manufactured and created by the British with the express purpose of triggering what ended up becoming the equivalent of a genocide of the Irish, nor does he romanticize life in pre-famine Ireland. What he does do is deliver a crisp, well-researched and authoritative history of the cataclysm and its consequences. In Kelly's eyes, the

English are clearly responsible for the astonishing fatality -- about a million died; another million emigrated -- but it's of a different kind than that assumed by those who say the intent was genocidal. As Kelly makes very clear, the intent of English policies of the era was not benign; certainly, a series of politicians and civil servants saw the crisis as an opportunity to exercise some "tough love" (for want of a better phrase) and force the Irish into what they viewed as a better way of life. That they were wrong in their prescriptive approach appears probable from Kelly's comments (within a few decades, land ownership once again was widely dispersed, with small plots being at the heart of the agricultural system). Were they wrong in their analysis?

On the last page of the text, page 338, Mr. Kelly refers to the 19th century British government policies towards the Irish and writes this penultimate sentence: "The intent of those policies may not have been genocidal, but the effects were." The trouble with that sentence is that it is contradicted by the previous 337 pages of Mr. Kelly's book. It is simply impossible to read the first 337 pages of this book and conclude that the mass starvation of the Irish was unintentional. Even the author is conflicted. He first is very forceful defending the British. On page 173, he boldly writes: "British relief policy was NEVER deliberately genocidal." [emphasis added]. Note the word "never." By the time he gets to the penultimate sentence of the book, his tone has shifted and he is far less forceful: "the intent of those policies MAY not have been genocidal . . ." [emphasis added] It is telling that Mr. Kelly now uses the word "may." From "never" to "may." Yet one in three Irish were gone by 1850, the author tells us. On its face, it is hard to believe that this was mere happenstance. Indeed, the contrary evidence is on every page: On page 3, Mr. Kelly disagrees with other scholars, such as Cecil Woodham-Smith, that British overlords of Ireland exported food from Ireland during the famine. Yet, curiously, on the same page 3, Mr. Kelly writes, "With the EXCEPTION of one critical period in late 1846 and early 1847, famine Ireland imported more food than she exported." [emphasis added] Assuming arguendo (assuming without admitting) that Mr. Kelly is right and Cecil Woodham-Smith is wrong, isn't this "critical period in late 1846 and early 1847" a huge exception?

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