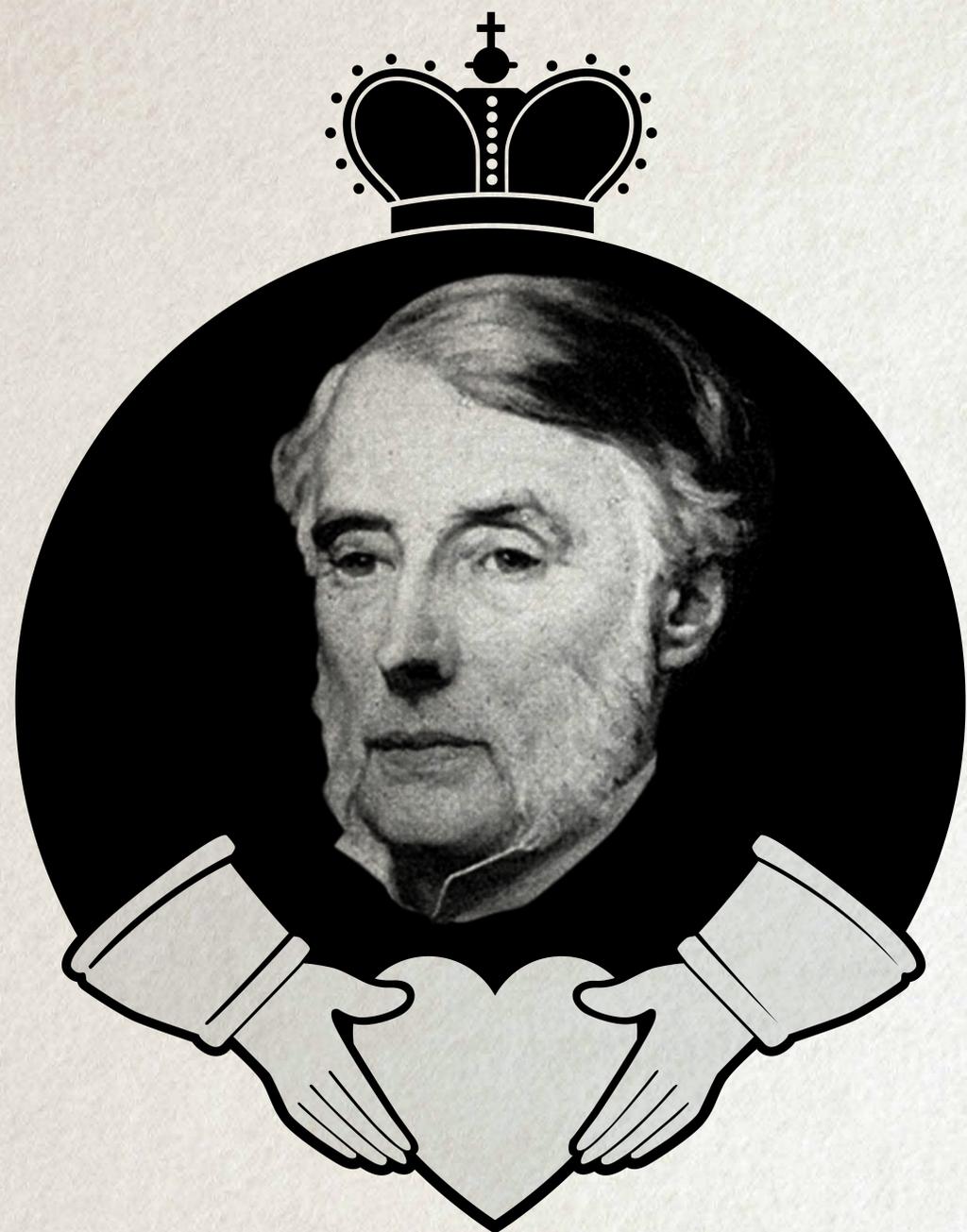


James Hack Tuke—A Quaker Philanthropist



Fleeing From Famine

JAMES HACK TUKE
A philanthropist in the west of Ireland



James Hack Tuke was born in York on Sept. 13, 1819, the son of Samuel Tuke, a successful tea merchant. The Tukes were members of the Society of Friends and heavily involved in philanthropy. They also helped establish a lunatic asylum, known as The Retreat, the first of its kind in England. James was strongly associated with society activities. He was a frequent visitor to the United States and Europe. In 1871, Tuke and other society members were sent to Paris in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War to provide relief. At this time, he had changed careers and lived in Hitchin, Hertfordshire, having become a partner in the banking firm of Sharples & Co.

Tuke is best remembered as a philanthropist and friend of the poor in Ireland. From his visit in 1846 with his friend, W.E. Forster, he became an ardent critic of landowners and government in their failure to support the people and provide relief. When he visited Galway in 1846, he wrote harrowing accounts of what he witnessed. On his return the following year, he concentrated much of his efforts on Connemara and Mayo, called for land to be reclaimed, and fishing and textiles to be encouraged.

Throughout the 1850s, Tuke continued his interest in Ireland, in particular education and medical facilities along the west coast. However, it was the reappearance of famine in 1879–82 that prompted him to seek permanent solutions to the perennial problems of poverty, destitution

and food shortages. Assisting families to emigrate was seen as a short-term remedy to overcrowding and unviable farms, but this had to be combined with government intervention to harness the economic potential of the region. He refused the offer of a knighthood for his work in the west of Ireland. Tuke died on Jan. 13, 1896, and was buried at Hitchin. Never had a single person done so much for the poor of Ireland.

Tuke and the Great Famine



Fleeing From Famine

JAMES HACK TUKE
A philanthropist in the west of Ireland

Following the second failure of the potato crop in 1846, the Quakers in Dublin formed a relief committee that, for two years, was to be at the center of an international network of philanthropic efforts. British and Irish Quakers traversed Ireland providing relief and, by doing so, placed themselves at considerable risk of contracting disease.

James Hack Tuke first traveled at the end of 1846 to Erris in County Mayo, an area devastated by the loss of the potato. He returned there the following autumn, at a time when the Irish people were facing their third consecutive year of shortages. His eyewitness accounts were harrowing, describing the poor as “living skeletons... barely able to crawl.”

In his published account, Tuke defended the Irish against accusations of indolence:

“In offering this view of the character and condition of the Irish people, I wish to guard myself against being misunderstood...All that I assert respecting the Irish peasantry, and which I think the evidence here adduced goes far to establish, is that they are not the helpless vagabond intractable people which they are

often said to be; but that, on the other hand, amidst all their faults, they have many excellent features of character;—that they are capable of being raised in their moral and physical condition, and that under proper treatment they would work hard and supply an amazing amount of capital for the development of the dormant riches of Ireland’s soil and sea.”



The Forgotten Famine of 1879–81



Fleeing From Famine

JAMES HACK TUKE
A philanthropist in the west of Ireland

The potato failure that occurred in the western counties between 1879 and 1882 represented the most comprehensive subsistence crisis since the time of the Great Hunger. Moreover, along with the food shortages, the areas were experiencing sustained and heavy rainfall, which had damaged not only the crops, but also the peat supply. Nonetheless, the appeals to the government, to landlords and to other elites for assistance went largely unheeded. As had been the case over 20 years earlier, it was largely left to private charity to come to the assistance of the starving people.

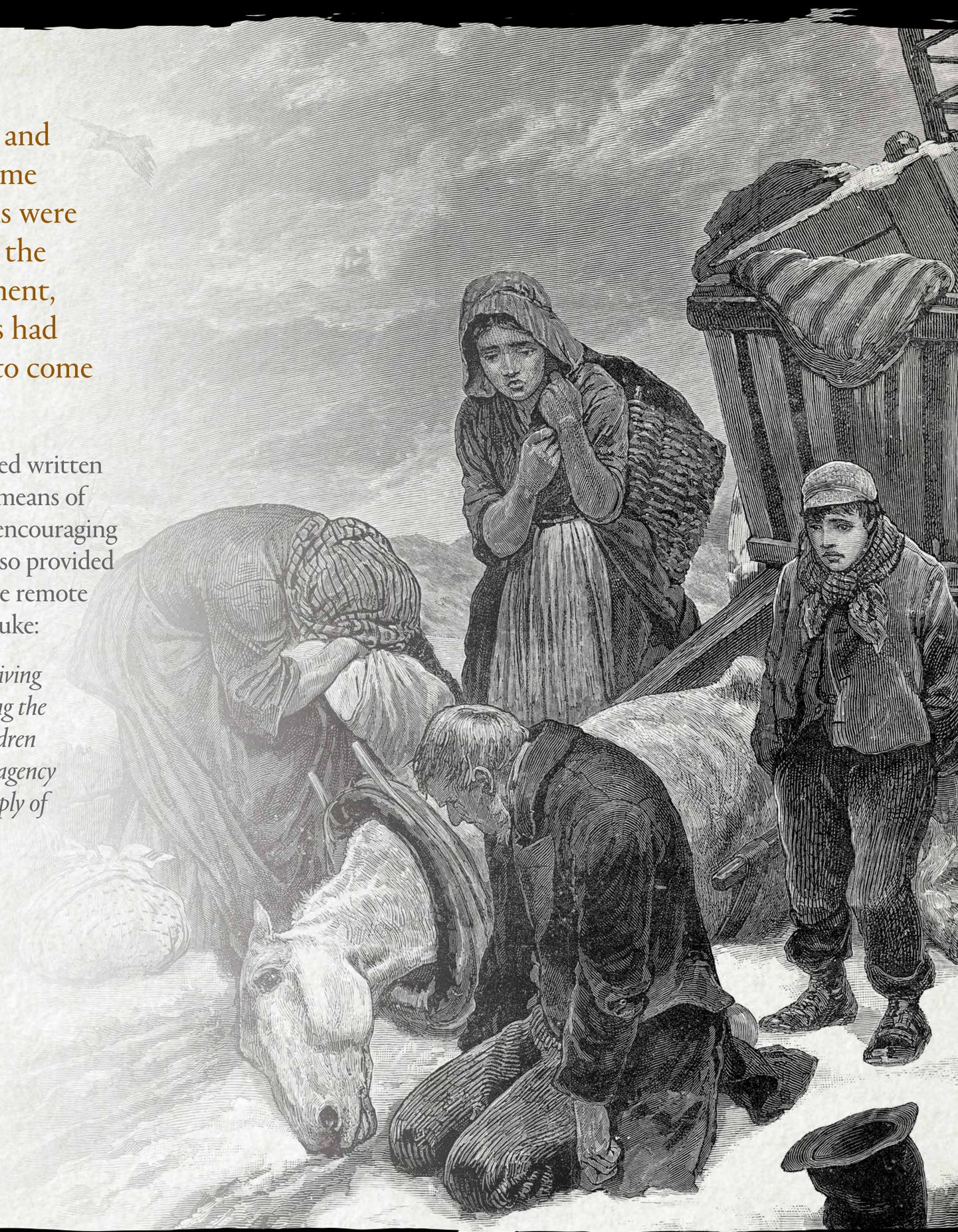
Writing in October 1879 from Oughterard in County Galway, William O'Brien, an Irish journalist, asserted:

“It is time for those who are responsible for the lives of our people to be a-stirring...Are they going to heed no cry of agony from Connemara until it comes from the coffinless graves?...I now deliberately raise the cry of famine in Connemara, and I take all the responsibility of employing that terrible word. It is not a day too soon for the alarm. It is not when men are turning to corpses for want of food that the public mind should be nerved for what is before us.”

James Hack Tuke traveled to Ireland in February 1880, initially to Dublin but from there to undertake a fact-finding mission in the west, thus largely retracing the route that he had

taken in the 1840s. Again, he provided written accounts of what he witnessed, as a means of authenticating the suffering and of encouraging more charitable interventions. He also provided practical assistance. After visiting the remote mountain villages near Ballinrobe, Tuke:

“...left a sum of money to be applied in giving employment to the able-bodied, assisting the sick, and giving a meal daily to the children who attended the school. Through the agency of the Dublin Ladies’ Committee a supply of clothing was also sent.”



Tuke's Tours of the 1880s



Fleeing From Famine

JAMES HACK TUKE
A philanthropist in the west of Ireland

In February 1880, James Hack Tuke traveled to Ireland, at the request of Quakers in England, to report on the famine. Over the next six weeks, he visited the west, where his earlier reports occurred in 1846 and 1847, and quickly realized that there had been no improvement in the people's condition. They still lived at a subsistence level with the slightest change in circumstances resulting in famine.

From Camus in Connemara, Tuke wrote,

"I wish I could produce that rocky coast and the wild miserable village, or rather introduce it into England for a while, so that English people might realise how, in these remote places, so many thousands of people are living."

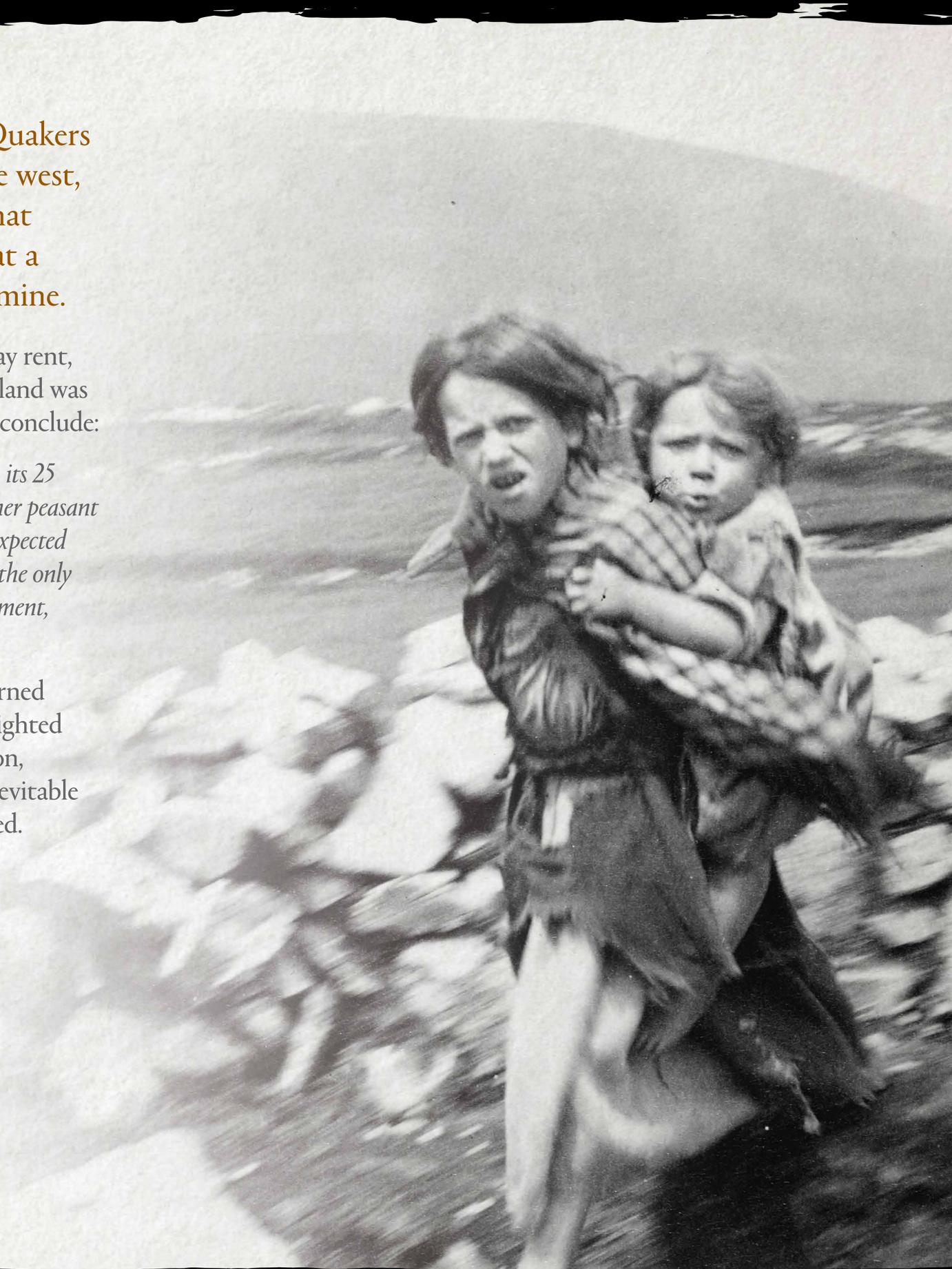
During his six-week tour, Tuke's objective was not just to highlight the famine, but inform his audience of the general conditions under which the people lived. His report from Errismore, Connemara, in April 1880 stated:

"It seems incredible that any sustenance can be gained at all amidst this wilderness of rock, rivaling Petra in its barrenness, and which, at any rate, would seem only to afford food for goats; and yet here, in some places, a large population exists."

Even if tenants owned land or did not pay rent, they were unable to survive because the land was poor and farms unviable, leading him to conclude:

"To the dwellers at Camus or Carraroe, with its 25 miles of alternative huts and boulders, neither peasant proprietorship nor 'fixity of tenure' can be expected to prove remedial measures, and...For these the only alternative means, in the absence of employment, appear to be 'emigration' or 'scattering.'"

Over the following two years, Tuke returned on seven occasions and constantly highlighted the precarious existence of the population, concluding that further famines were inevitable unless remedial measures were introduced.



The Tuke Fund and Emigration



Fleeing From Famine

JAMES HACK TUKE
A philanthropist in the west of Ireland

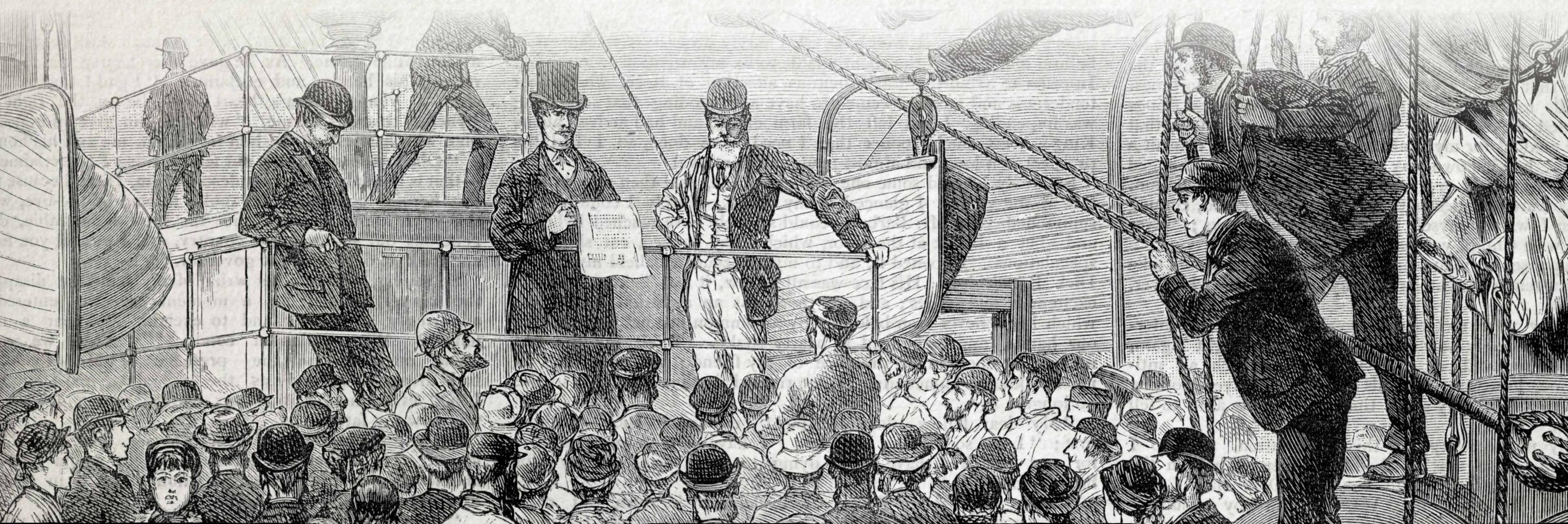
James Hack Tuke's tour of the west of Ireland in 1880 convinced him that the removal of part of the population was the immediate panacea to the problem of overcrowding, endemic poverty and intermittent famine. To advance this objective, Tuke traveled to Canada and the United States in the summer of 1880 and held discussions with a number of prominent individuals as to the feasibility of sending emigrants to North America, resulting in the publication of an article in the *Nineteenth Century* journal in April 1881 entitled "Irish Emigration." In it, Tuke proposed that families be assisted to emigrate as this would lead to the vacated farms being divided among the remaining tenants, which, in turn, would create viable farms.

His proposals led to the establishment of the Tuke Committee on March 31, 1882, with Tuke traveling to Clifden to implement the scheme. He found the demand for emigration overwhelming, "At Roundstone, at Cashel, and at Carna, I was told, and I found it was a fact, that many would gladly emigrate...all of them begged to be assisted to emigrate." While Tuke had hoped to extend the scheme

to Oughterard and Newport, he was unable to do so because the demand in Clifden was so great, and the local Poor Law guardians had refused to honor a prior agreement to provide funds for emigration.

Nonetheless, over the following seven weeks, Tuke assisted 1,276 people from the Clifden Poor Law Union to emigrate to Boston and Quebec: the emigrants

left on the S.S. Austrian, the S.S. Lake Nepigon and the S.S. Lake Winnipeg. In a letter to his daughter he wrote, "At Galway the first cargo of 300 men, women and children were sent off comfortably in spite of the blinding storms of hail and rain."



The Emigration Schemes 1882–84



Fleeing From Famine

JAMES HACK TUKE
A philanthropist in the west of Ireland

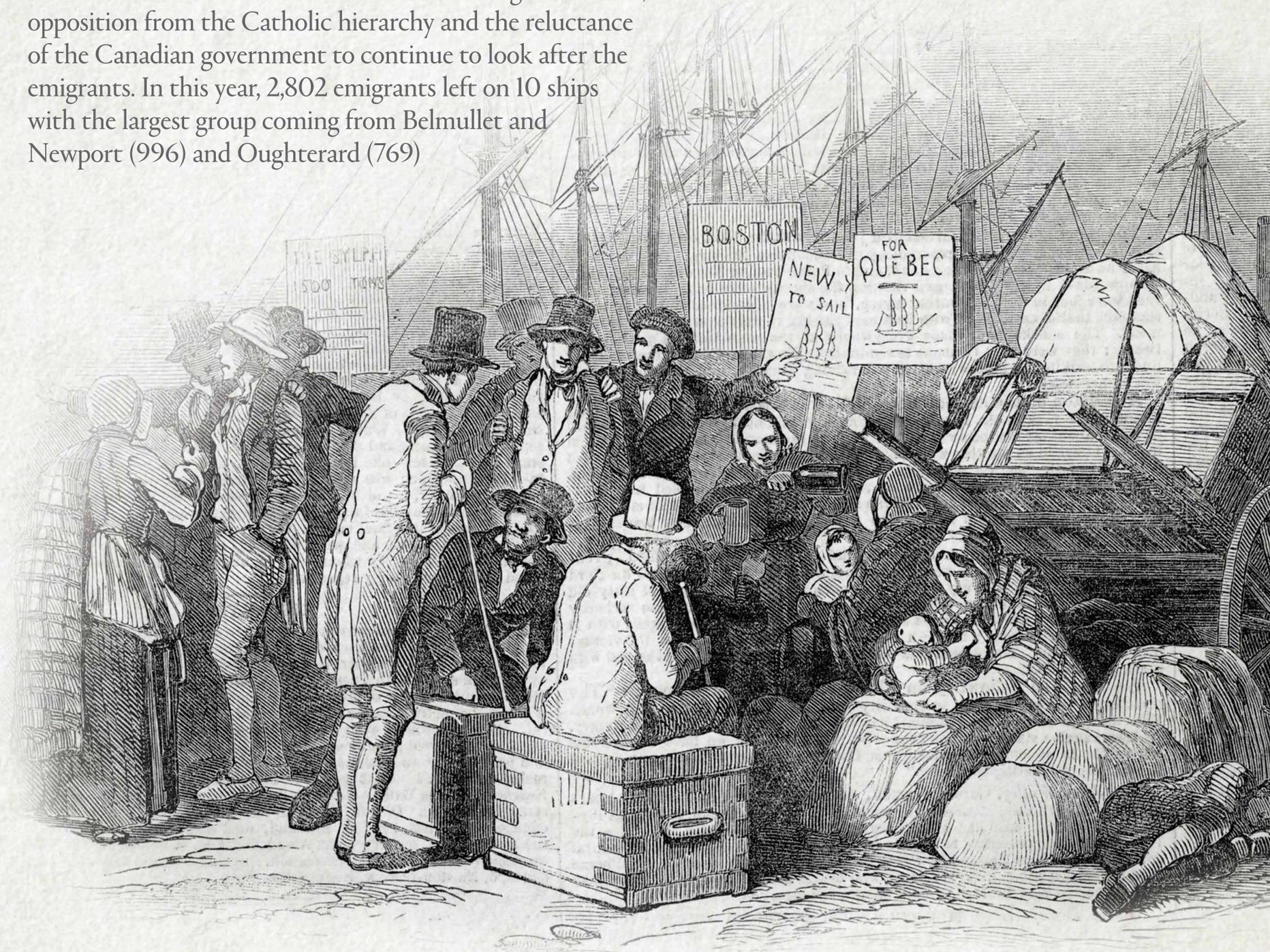
Between 1883 and 1884, the British government provided £150,000 toward assisted emigration in response to the Tuke Committee explaining, “...there is now a very considerable widespread desire to emigrate on the part of a large section of the population in the most poverty-stricken districts.” The committee stated that it was beyond the ability of a private organization to provide large-scale funding.

The Tuke Committee initially took on responsibility for the Clifden, Belmullet, Newport and Oughterard Poor Law Unions and, in 1884, Swinford Union was added. The committee had responsibility for every aspect of the process: selecting and interviewing candidates, the provision of suitable clothing, travel to the ports of departure in Galway, Blacksod Bay and Westport, the voyage to Boston and Quebec, and the onward journey to the final destinations in North America.

Again, demand for places exceeded expectations and Tuke’s wife, Georgina, noted that when they arrived in Carna on February 27, 1883, “[it] was lively enough, in spite of gloomy weather...was thronged with emigrant folk, and the moment we got out of the carriage we found ourselves in the centre of a crowd of 300 or 400 people.”

In 1883 alone, over 5,300 people were assisted by the Tuke Committee, leaving on 23 ships. The work was time consuming and arduous, with Tuke informing his daughter when the work ended, “It is curious the infinite amount of detail which our work causes. I think every name must be entered in one way or another 12 or 14 times. Poor things, it is worth the trouble and much more to deliver them from their woes.”

The number assisted in 1884 declined due to a good harvest, opposition from the Catholic hierarchy and the reluctance of the Canadian government to continue to look after the emigrants. In this year, 2,802 emigrants left on 10 ships with the largest group coming from Belmullet and Newport (996) and Oughterard (769)



How the Emigrants Fared in North America



Fleeing From Famine

JAMES HACK TUKE
A philanthropist in the west of Ireland

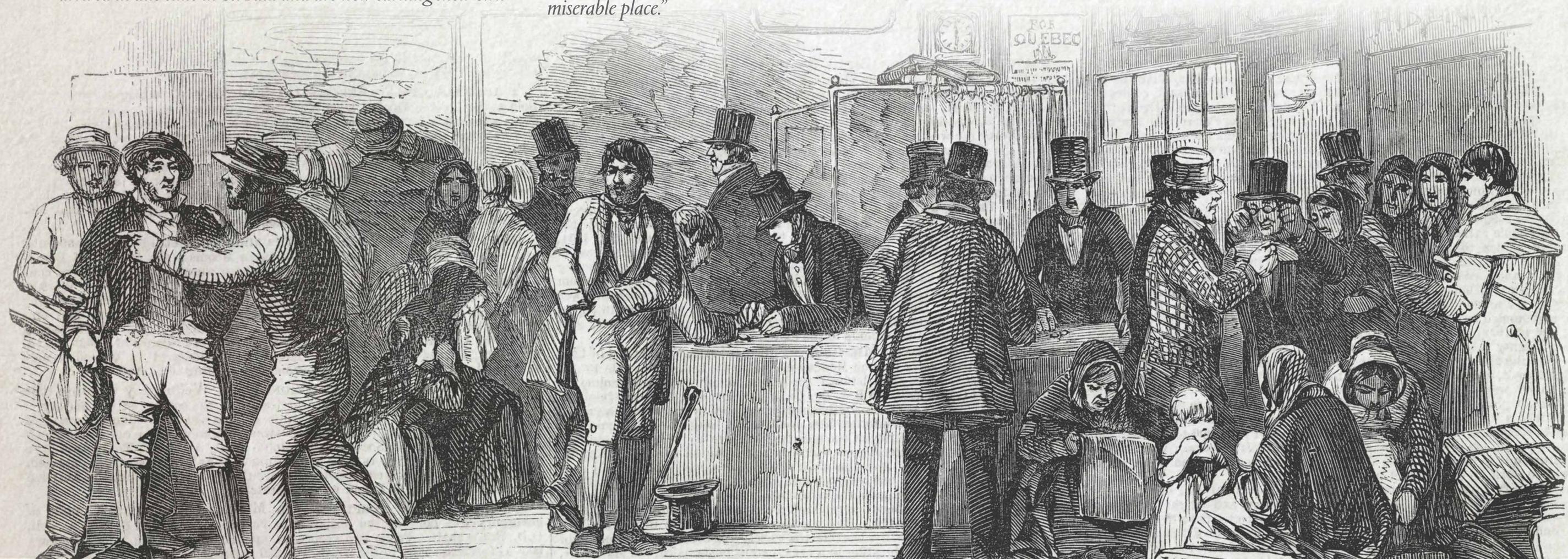
In total, James Hack Tuke helped more than 9,400 people emigrate to Canada and the United States between 1882 and 1884. Tuke learned from previous emigration experiences, and consequently, the emigrants went to 218 destinations, ensuring they integrated and faced no hostility from the local communities. Those with friends and relations who were prepared to support them were sent to the United States, while the others traveled to Canada where the government provided for them.

Emigrants to the U.S. were mainly sent to rural areas rather than the large eastern cities because wages were higher and demand for labor greater. The main states where the emigrants settled were Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Connecticut, Manitoba and Ontario. Bishop John Ireland of St. Paul, Minnesota, accepted large numbers of Tuke emigrants who were then catered for by priests in each parish. In August 1883, Ireland wrote, "Your last batch of emigrants arrived in due time in St. Paul and are now earning their own

living. All your emigrants sent to Minnesota are, without a single exception, doing well...Next spring we are ready for fresh instalments if you continue in the good work."

Shortly after their arrival in North America, emigrants were writing to friends and relations in Ireland giving positive accounts. One emigrant wrote from South Minneapolis, "This is a good country. There is plenty of work and good wages...I mean to let you know that I can sit at a table as good as the best man in Belmullet. Thank God that I left that miserable place."

Others encouraged friends to join them where they would have a better life and could remit money back to Ireland. One girl from Crumpaun, Connemara, urged her sister to join her in Chicago, "So father can sit down by the fireside then and let the rough day pass him and us earning lots of money for him in this country where there is plenty of it."



Tuke and the 1885–86 Crisis in the West



Fleeing From Famine

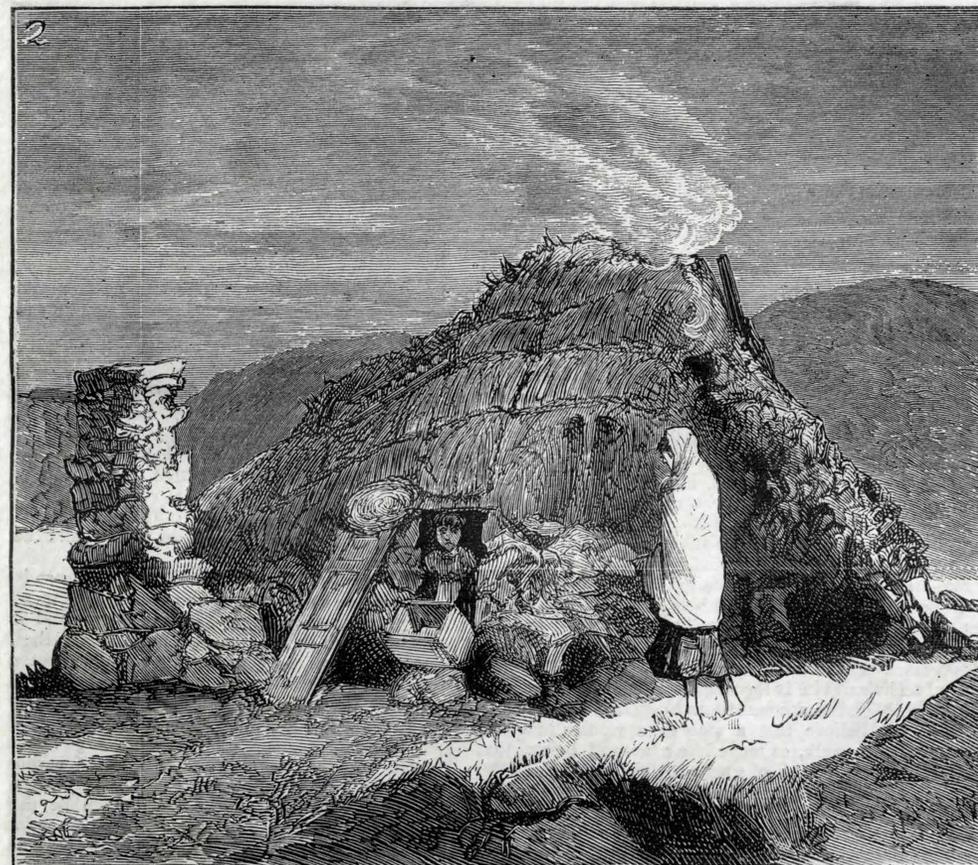
JAMES HACK TUKE
A philanthropist in the west of Ireland

In 1885, the potato crop once again failed due to continuous rains in August. Again, the crisis was most severe in the west of Ireland. Farmers consumed their seed potatoes leading to the fear the problem would extend into the following year as there were no potatoes to plant. James Hack Tuke wrote in February 1886, *“It is the old story, the entire failure of its potato crop; the complete absence of employment, and the inability of small holders of land to provide seed potatoes for the crop for the ensuing year. The question has arisen once more, ‘What can be done to meet the emergency?’”*

The government privately asked Tuke to raise subscriptions toward the purchase of seed potatoes for distribution among those farmers most in need. He contacted friends and acquaintances, many of whom had given donations to the Tuke Fund, and in this way collected £5,207. Tuke then headed for Achill Island, where he encountered widespread privation and destitution. On March 15, he reported, *“Visited Dooega*

East and West, two small villages on the seashore, containing 110 houses, more like dirty cattle sheds, and 600 or 700 persons. With the exception of nine families, two of whom had out-door relief, all were receiving fortnightly allowances of meal from the Relief Committee.” Tuke purchased 1,425 tons of seed potatoes from Scotland and 375 tons were sent to Achill and 480 tons to nine areas in the Clifden region, including Cleggan, Carna, Cashel and Roundstone.

Tuke’s intervention in supplying seed potatoes averted a major crisis in Mayo and Connemara, and the gratitude of the local population was evident. As the relieving officer in Achill told Tuke, *“The recipients are grateful to you for your charity, and look upon it as the only way ‘to put us on our legs again,’ and hundreds of ‘God Bless Mr. Tuke’ are given.”*



Tuke and the Congested Districts Board



Fleeing From Famine

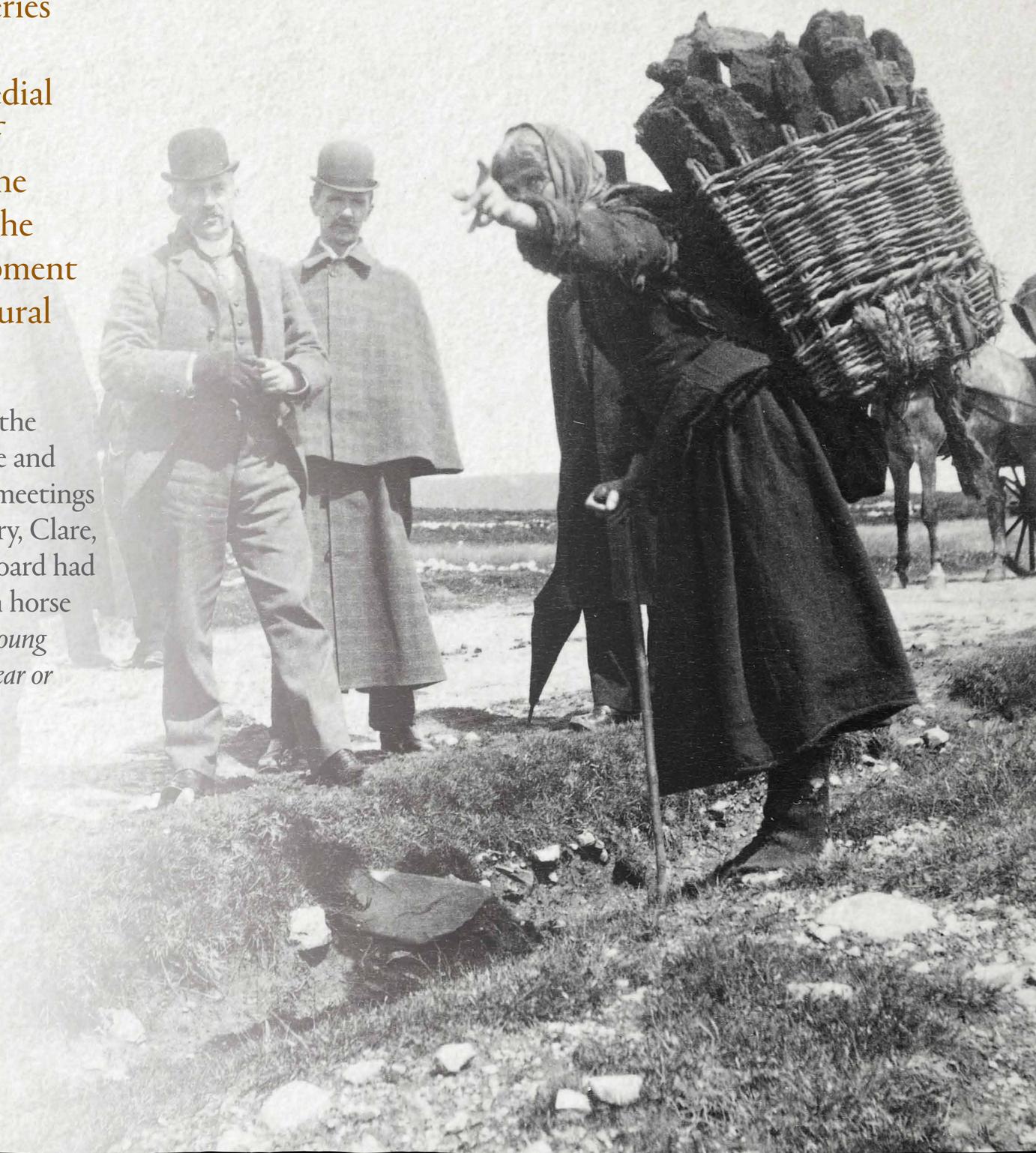
JAMES HACK TUKE
A philanthropist in the west of Ireland

While James Hack Tuke had promoted emigration, he also advocated economic development. In a letter to the London Times in May 1889, he called for the construction of a rail link from west Donegal so that the region's rich fisheries could be sent to British markets and better prices secured for fishermen, "The primary measure, and that upon which the success of any other remedial legislation depends, is, beyond all doubt, the development and extension of the railway system." Tuke's influence on government policy in relation to the poor parts of the western seaboard can be seen with the establishment of the Congested Districts Board in 1891. The board promoted economic development through the provision of grants for the fishing industry, for better agricultural husbandry, home industry, tourism and the building of light railways.

In the months leading up to the establishment of the board, the Irish chief secretary, Arthur Balfour, asked Tuke's advice and opinions. Tuke was the only English-born commissioner appointed to the board, indicating his influence in government circles and his acceptance in Ireland. He saw the board's activities as the only approach to improving the people's standard of living.

His commitment and determination to the board's objectives can be seen in the time and effort he put in: constantly traveling to meetings in Dublin and visiting sites in Cork, Kerry, Clare, Galway, Mayo and Donegal where the board had invested money. On a trip to the Clifden horse show in 1893, he noted, "*The price of the young foals has already risen from £3.10 to £6 last year or £10 this year.*"

"I had a most agreeable [meeting] with Mr. Balfour... It was a delight [to hear] that they were disposed to carry out plans for improving the West of Ireland on a very liberal scale. It more than reached to my dreams for the improving of the congested districts."



Emigration and Refugees Today



Fleeing From Famine

JAMES HACK TUKE
A philanthropist in the west of Ireland

Emigration has been an integral part of the Irish story in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, with each agricultural failure or economic crisis resulting in a new generation of emigrants leaving the land of their birth, usually never to return. The majority left to escape poverty and prejudice in their home country, only to encounter it in their new homes. It could take a few generations before the new arrivals were truly integrated and accepted. The Irish experience of emigration and integration, has many parallels with the experiences of other displaced people.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the number of displaced people in the world is estimated to be 60 million—higher than ever before. It is an issue that challenges politicians, policy makers and the general public. While the plight of the Syrian refugees is well known, there are migrant crises in Eritrea, Burundi, Libya and elsewhere. According to Professor Maria Cristina Garcia, many people believe:

“the anti-immigrant discourses are unique to their day. But when they study history, when they examine migration and policy over a longer period of time, they see patterns emerge. History, and the humanities in general, remind us to look for those patterns, to look for the similarities and the disjunctures, to see what conclusions we might reach.”

The compassion and clarity that James Hack Tuke applied to his emigration schemes, in assisting poor Irish families to emigrate with dignity and decorum, remains a shining example of how one person can make a difference.

