AID TO IRELAND,

*Committee Rooms, Prime's Building, 54 Wall-st.,*

New York, May 28th, 1847.

At a meeting of the General Relief Committee Mr. Van Schaick in the chair, it was

*Resolved*, That a Committee be appointed by the chairman to prepare a report, for publication in pamphlet form, of the proceedings of the General Relief Committee from the day of their appointment, including therein such correspondence and particulars as may be deemed necessary for the satisfaction of their contributors, and that such report, after it shall have been submitted to the General Standing Committee, be published, under their direction, with a view to distribution.

The chairman appointed Messrs. John Jay, James G. King and Stewart Brown, such Committee.

An extract from the minutes.

John Jay, *Secretary*.

*Attest*.

Report

of the

General Irish Relief Committee

of the

City of New York

In presenting to their constituents and the public an account of their proceedings from the date of their appointment in February, 1847, to the 1st February, 1848, various reasons have combined to induce the Committee to make their report more complete and voluminous than might at first sight have seemed either necessary or proper.

Originally appointed by the inhabitants of the City of New York, with full discretionary power to devise efficient measures for the relief of the starving poor of Ireland, to collect and transmit funds and provisions, and to do such other acts as they might from time to time think expedient, they were soon invested with similar authority by thousands of benevolent individuals, and various associated bodies, (throughout the length and breadth of our land,) until at last from being the representatives of a single City, they became the almoners as will appear from the contributions they now acknowledge, of large numbers of their fellow. countrymen in the states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa,

Michigan and Ohio, as well as of residents in Canada and the District of Columbia of officers and sailors attached to our navy on foreign stations and of the Choctaw tribe of Indians in the far West.

The gifts thus gathered from these wide and varied sources, have come to them through many channels attended with no little risk, and probably, but few of the donors, not only of money, but especially of provisions and clothing, which latter necessarily passed through numerous hands, and were subject to greater delays and contingencies, have received any satisfactory account of the actual receipt of their bounty by this Committee, or of the ultimate disposal which has been made of it in Ireland.

It is true that the Committee have at intervals published in the newspapers of the City of New York, detailed and exact statements of their receipts and shipments, and the letters which have come to them from their Irish correspondents---but these publications can have reached comparatively but a small proportion of those who were interested in their contents. The Committee therefore regard it as due not only to their constituents but to themselves, to publish in a compact form complete schedules of their receipts of money, provisions and clothing, and to accompany these with full accounts of the disposal made of them, the manner of their transmission to Ireland, the character of the agents employed to distribute them, the instructions given, the course pursued, and the results which followed.

There are also other reasons which, in the opinion of the Committee, render such a publication advisable, and afford grounds for believing that its influence will be useful. It will serve to correct erroneous impressions that have obtained to some extent in Great Britain, in regard to the character and motives of the popular movement in America in behalf of the poor of Ireland, and it will preserve a true record, so far as it is exhibited in the transactions of this Committee, of an act of hearty popular benevolence, unconfined

confined in its locality, disconnected with party, creed or sect, and coupled with no selfish end or aim.

Whether we look at the kindly instinct and Christian principle which gave it birth, or at the thousands whom it saved from starvation- or at the new bond of cordial friendship with which it connects us beyond the seas, or at the impulse it has given to our own love of country, the new tie it has created between the dwellers in distant parts of our own land, by animating them with the same spirit, and uniting them in the same work, or at the happy influence which it is calculated to have upon our future character--in all of these aspects, it is right that the act should be fairly represented and not lightly forgotten.

During the summer of 1846, several benevolent gentlemen of the City of New York, united in the endeavor to procure exact information of the state of Ireland, fearful that a famine was impending over that unhappy country, and with a view of instituting measures of relief.

On the 13th of November, 1846, the Central Committee of Friends in Dublin was organized, twenty-one in number, with a view to mitigate the widely spread distress then prevailing, and a circular was soon afterwards issued by that body, to the members of the Society of Friends, exhibiting the appalling prospects that awaited their country, when the small remnant of the potato crop, so unexpectedly blighted, should be generally consumed, presenting the solemn consideration that impelled them to ward off as far as possible, the threatening evil, and briefly stating their proposed plan of operations.

Copies of this circular were sent to America, and it is believed that several remittances of money were immediately made in consequence, principally by members of the Society of Friends.

On the 16th of January, advices were received of a more alarming character, announcing the rapid spread of famine and of death. On the 27th of January, a meeting was had,

and measures were adopted to furnish the newspapers of this City with full and accurate accounts of the distress in Ireland, in order to prepare the way for prompt and generous action.

After a few days had been devoted to the diffusing of information, and to personal consultation with leading merchants and professional gentlemen, in regard to the best course to be adopted, on the 7th of February a subscription list was opened by M. Van Schaick.

On the 10th of February a meeting was held pursuant to previous notice, "to take into consideration the famishing condition of the poor of Ireland," when a Standing Committee was organized, with M. Van Schaick as Chairman, with power to enlarge their number.

Invitations to a yet larger number of influential citizens were immediately issued by the Committee, to meet at Prime's Buildings, in Wall street, where rooms had been generously offered to the Committee free of rent, on the 12th February. This meeting was respectably attended and a general plan of operations was agreed upon. A Special Committee, consisting of Messrs. Jacob Harvey, George Griffin, Theodore Sedgwick and John Jay, was appointed to draft an address to the public, and another, consisting of Messrs. Robert B. Minturn, George Barclay, Alfred Pell and James Reyburn, to call a general meeting of citizens, at the Broadway Tabernacle, and a third, consisting of Messrs. George Barclay, Robert B. Minturn, James Reyburn, William Redmond and George McBride, Jr., to provide a place for the reception of provisions and clothing and the Secretary was ordered to address a letter to the Clergy of all de. nominations in the City requesting them to make collections in their respective churches for the starving poor of Ireland, and to transmit the amounts to the Treasurer.

The address to the public which will be found in the appendix, was extensively published in the City papers, and was responded to promptly and warmly.

The meeting of citizens at the Tabernacle was held on

the 15th instant, when that large building was densely crowded with a most respectable and earnest audience.

M. Van Schaick was called to the chair, and after briefly stating that a number of their fellow-citizens haying combined their influence for the purpose of providing extensive aid to the famishing poor of Ireland, now invited their sympathy and co-operation-referred to their intended plan of operations in the transmission of food and money to the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends at Dublin, and mentioned that about $20,000 had been already subscribed.

For some time the Committee met daily their collections were urged forward and constant evidence was presented of the strength of the public feeling in behalf of the movement, by the liberal donations they received, and by various tenders of their services by individuals and societies.

Among these may be mentioned an offer from the Musical Societies through Dr. Hodges to give a Concert- the gift of a piano from Mr. Worcester, which was subsequently disposed of by Messrs. A. T. Stewart & Co., for the large sum of

81275- a barge offered by Walter S. Griffith, which was very useful--the tender of the Richmond Hill Theatre the offer of the Rt. Rev. Bishop Hughes to deliver a lecture at the Tabernacle- the proposal of Mr. DeLaforest the Consul General of France to convene a meeting of French citizens in aid of their object--the offer of Mr. Joseph Naylor of his store No. 18 Broadway, as a receiving depot for the Committee on Provisions, and of the Mercantile Library Association to lend their assistance.

The application to the Clergy was readily responded to, and from all denominations of Christians and also from the Jewish Synagogues came cheerful and in some cases very liberal gifts--and occasionally rings and other articles of jewelry were included in the church collections, gifts of the poor, whose own penury forbade them to assist in sending food to the wretched of Ireland, save by the sacrifice

willingly made of cherished pledges of friendship and affection.

The Committee immediately after their organization had with great unanimity, determined to employ as their agents in Ireland, the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends in Dublin, as from their general knowledge of that Committee, a personal acquaintance with some of them, and a careful examination of their plans, they had great confidence in their integrity and impartiality, in the excellence of their system of observation and management, and the faithful discharge of the laborious duties they had undertaken.

On the 23d February, the Committee remitted to Dublin a part of the proceeds of their first collections, amounting to €3000 sterling, thinking that the aid thus afforded might be seasonable and useful in alleviating immediate distress, before a cargo of provisions could reach that City or be distributed in the interior. This remittance was acknowledged by Messrs. Jonathan Pim and Joseph Bewley, the Secretaries of the Central Committee of Ire-land, in a letter dated the 1st April, in which they remark:--

"Whilst we sensibly feel the responsibility which devolves upon us, in endeavoring, as we are bound to do, to carry out faithfully and with due promptitude, the designs of those who are thus pleased to make us the almoners of their bounty, we can gratefully appreciate the confidence of a community to whom we are comparatively unknown."

After a frequent and intimate correspondence with these gentlemen, the Committee feel bound to remark, that the pledge thus early and distinctly given, has been uniformly and faithfully kept by the Friends in Dublin; and that the prudence and exactness with which their plans of benevolence have been conducted--the careful regard they have shewn to the wishes of American contributors whenever they have been expressed, and the character of their communications to this country, have inspired the Committee and the public generally with an increased regard for their Society.

The remittance of €3000 sterling was soon followed by the despatching of the Brig Victor, for Dublin, laden with provisions, which the Committee chartered for the purpose and as will appear from their letter of the 24th February, they proposed that the freights of all provisions should be paid in Ireland, out of the moneys already remitted, or from the proceeds of a portion of the provisions to be sold for the purpose. This arrangement, however, was suspended in consequence of a regulation of the British treasury, which relieved the Dublin Committee from all the charges attending the freight, landing, storage, agency, and internal transit of provisions consigned to their care from America. In accordance with these regulations, which were carried into effect by the British government in the most liberal manner, the Dublin Committee were enabled by a machinery already organized and in full operation, to effect the distribution of food from America without delay, risk or expense, excepting only the charge for insurance, " so that," in the language of the Dublin Committee, " the food put on board at New York might be considered as laid down almost at the doors of the sufferers for whom it was intended, without any material diminution from the expenses attending its transport across the Atlantic, or the cost and delay inseparable from its conveyance into the remote mountainous districts of Ireland, where the distress was of the most severe character, and the channels of internal communication very imperfect."

The moneys collected by the Committee and transmitted to them from other places, were converted into provisions almost as rapidly as they were received, under the direction of the Special Committee appointed for that purpose. Great care was taken not only in the choice of the food, but in the selection of vessels, and the gratifying result has been, that no vessel chartered or employed by the Committee has been lost, and no cargo has been damaged.

From the first opening of the Northern canals, large

quantities of breadstuffs and many packages of clothing continued to arrive from the North and West, and were consigned to the care of the Committee, a full report of which will appear in the Appendix.

In the shipment of these consignments the same care and despatch were had, as in the transmission of food purchased in New York.

Of the feelings with which these gifts of the people of the United States were acknowledged by the Friends in Dublin, and of the happy results which followed in the alleviation of bitter distress and the preservation of thousands of lives, ample evidence will be found in their correspondence.

"We can truly say," they remark on the 19th April, "that the munificence of your City, and its vicinity, and of the citizens at large in many other parts of the United States, as exhibited by the immense supplies of food they are sending for our starving people, surpass all the expectations we had ventured to form on the subject."

On the 10th May, they write: " the evidence furnished us by each successive arrival from America, of the untiring kindness of her benevolent citizens towards our poor suffering people, whether in their native land or when they seek an asylum on your hospitable shores, as they are now doing by thousands, is indeed remarkable, and contributes not only to strengthen our hands by your munificent and most seasonable supplies, but to animate us to pursue our engagements, in which, from the commencement of our la-bours to the present time, we have been surrounded with difficulties and discouragements, of which we are compelled to say we can as yet see no prospect of an early termination. \* \* \* We can safely assure you that in the course of the few days which have elapsed since the first arrival, many thousand barrels of your excellent meal have been allotted in free grants in some of our most remote and distressed districts of the country; and some of our correspondents do not hesitate to assure us *that the large distribution*

*thus made, has been instrumental under Providence in saving thousands of lives."*

"We have also to record the grateful sense we entertain of the confidence thus placed in our fidelity and discretion, and to express how deeply we feel the responsibility which devolves on this Committee to carry out in the most prompt and efficient manner, such measures of relief as may best comport with the designs of the generous donors. The Secretaries are directed to transmit a copy of this minute for publication in the United States, as the only means available to us for conveying to individual contributors of these supplies, our sense of the noble and generous spirit in which they have come forward to the relief of Ireland, under the present awful visitation of famine."

On the 3d of June, after referring to the contributions raised at home and in Great Britain, amounting to about £50,000 sterling, they say: *"But latterly, we are chiefly, indeed almost wholly, working with the supplies so bountifully entrusted to us from your favored land."*

Similar acknowledgments and declarations will be found in the later letters of the Dublin Committee, and afford gratifying evidence that the supplies from this country small as they were in comparison with the extent of the famine in Ireland, were of untold value in alleviating its horrors.

The pamphlet circulars issued from time to time by the Committee in Dublin, have given full details of their plan of operations, with copious extracts from their extensive correspondence, the narratives of their agents and reports of local committees their receipts of money, provisions and clothing, and their grants to the numerous districts in each county with the name of the grantee, the object of the grant, and the amounts appropriated. “Their exertions,” in the language of the Dublin Freeman's Journal, "have been taxed to the uttermost, involving a duty and responsibility such as never had been imposed on similarly constructed bodies in the history of the world."

"How the Central Relief Committee," adds the same journal, " and the noble Society of Friends passed through the furnace, the grateful feelings of the Irish people are the best and proudest record. If occasional murmurs in localities borne down by the accumulated weight of famine and sickness, were uttered against the tardiness which appeared to withhold assistance, the complaints were of short dura-tion, for the relief came almost with the demand- the operative rule of these charitable bodies being, that profundity of suffering alone entitled to priority of aid. Testimonies of their promptitude and liberality have been afforded by all the representatives of local wretchedness; and it must be a consolation and keen satisfaction to the minds of those gentlemen who have made such sacrifices of time and thought in the cause of charity, that their labours should be rewarded by the universal gratitude of their country."

The Committee feel it to be their pleasing duty to bear similar testimony to the disinterested and honorable exertions of the gentlemen upon whom has devolved the chief charge and management of the trusts confided to them. Mr. Myndert Van Schaick one of the earliest movers and most active promoters of the scheme of aid to Ireland, acted from the first organization of the Committee in the double capacity of Chairman and Treasurer of the "General Standing Committee,” until the 28th June. During that period he devoted himself with untiring and cheerful energy to the work, and to his labours, influence and example, the Committee feel themselves largely indebted for the good they have been enabled to accomplish.

To Mr. George Barclay the Chairman, and to other members of the " Committee on Provisions and Clothing,” great credit is due for their prompt and continued attention for many months to their official duties.

Mr. James Reyburn a member of that Committee succeeded Mr. Van Schaick in the office of Treasurer, and has had much labour to perform, in consequence of the arrival

of large quantities of bread stuffs from the Western States during the Summer and Autumn.

For the judicious arrangements made in relation to the purchase of bread stuffs by order of the Committee, and for the selection of the best and most seaworthy vessels we are indebted to the zeal and intelligence of Mr. Robert B. Minturn.

Amid our happy homes in this land of plenty, we learned that the shadow of death had fallen upon Ireland, and the bitter cry of distress from that land so suddenly made desolate, came to us across the ocean, and appealed with irresistible force to the heart of the United States.

In the language of Burke,[[1]](#footnote-1) uttered in reference to a famished province in semi-barbarous Asia, and which he little imagined could ever be applicable to his own green Isle--"it was a people in beggary-a nation which stretched out its hands for food "\_and it was right that America should freely give, as she has, some of the overflowings of her granaries--for the cause of humanity demanded the offering, and it has brought back to our land--the chiefest of all blessings-the blessings of those that were ready to perish.

It was well said by[[2]](#footnote-2) an eloquent American pleading for the relief of Ireland: « Let Ireland's extremity be America's opportunity to teach the nations a magnificent lesson in human brotherhood by her mighty deeds of brotherly love."--To some extent that lesson had been given--and whatever may be its effects upon the great family of nations in their estimate of our national character or in the regulation of their own conduct, we know that our donations insignificant as they were in comparison with our resources, have been "received by warm hearted Ireland with a gratitude boundless as her wants--inconceiveable as her sufferings"--and we may with a reasonable confidence unite in the trust expressed

pressed by one of their own Committee, that "the generous sympathy which has extended throughout the Union, springing from the brotherly feelings which a common language, a common origin and kindred institutions naturally inspire, will have effects long out lasting the misfortunes which have drawn it forth, and may hereafter tend to neutralize the jealousies which conflicting interests must occasionally create."

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| John Jay |  |
| James G. King | Committee |
| Stewart Brown |  |

1. Quoted by George Griffin, esquire, in his eloquent speech at the Relief Meeting in the Tabernacle. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Elihu Burritt--in one of his appeals in behalf of Ireland. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)