

local organizations and the Ministry of Health struggled to contain the epidemic without support from the central government. In the course of this epidemic, the clock turned back, and many Peruvians came to accept that the achievement of good health is an individual matter, and not the responsibility of the state.

Clearly argued and accessibly written, *The return of epidemics* presents a vivid case for state sponsored public health systems. The book's title refers to the feedback between poverty and disease—a reading understandable when seen in the twentieth-century context, yet it might be read differently, as referring to a return of epidemic crises after a period of stability or equilibrium in Peru's disease ecology. While much of the relevant social and economic history (less of the political) appears interwoven in the text, a broader introduction, explaining something of Peru's disease history before 1900, and setting out the path of the country's social, economic and political development across the twentieth century, would have provided useful background for an international readership.

Anne Hardy,

The Wellcome Trust Centre for the
History of medicine at UCL

L A Clarkson and E Margaret Crawford,
*Feast and famine: a history of food and
nutrition in Ireland 1500–1920*, Oxford
University Press, 2001, pp. x, 325, £25.00
(hardback 0-19-822751-5).

Few if any European countries have had a more dramatic—indeed, a more catastrophic—modern history of famine and disease than Ireland. And today there are probably few more experienced historians of that history than Leslie Clarkson and Margaret Crawford. Since the 1970s both have been producing pioneering books and

articles on aspects of diet, nutrition, disease and population in Ireland. Thus their collaboration on a major study of Irish food from the sixteenth to the twentieth century is most welcome.

It is not possible in a short review to do justice to the rich fare contained within these pages; a menu and a small sample must suffice. The authors pursue five main themes: changing patterns of food and drink consumption; class differences in diet; the much-debated question of whether famine was inevitable in Ireland; the relationship between diet, nutrition, health and demography; and, finally, state regulation of food supplies.

The first third of the book is devoted to a detailed account of Irish diets between 1500 and 1920, with particular consideration given to how food supply affected demography. Discussion of the potato, not surprisingly, looms large in these chapters. Since the publication in 1950 of K H Connell's pioneering book, *The population of Ireland, 1750–1845*, historians have hotly disputed, among other issues, when exactly the potato became the staple of the Irish poor, with suggestions ranging from before 1630 to after 1800. In a detailed, lucid and persuasive discussion, Clarkson and Crawford opt for between the 1750s and 1770s, but stress that this dependence continued to increase up to the 1830s.

There follow two chapters on famine, mainly focusing on the Great Famine of the late 1840s, but also containing valuable discussions of earlier Irish famines. Crawford has previously published extensively on famine-related diseases and this expertise is very evident here. During the Great Famine far more people died of disease than starvation. Clarkson and Crawford chronicle in fascinating, if grim, detail the many and various ways in which hundreds of thousands of Irish died during the so-called “great hunger”. More disturbingly, they speculate on the long-term effects that malnutrition may have had on the health and development of those

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who were born or aged under five during the late 1840s.

But this book is not satisfied with just examining food and famine, for it goes on to study the issue of nutrition, rightly observing that the nutritional value of diets is a major determinant of health. Here again much attention is devoted to the potato. This time Clarkson and Crawford explore the controversial issue of the relationship between diet, marriage and population growth. Rejecting Connell's argument that the Irish pre-famine population explosion was to a large extent caused by early marriage, they instead highlight the role of the nutritionally-rich potato in guaranteeing health and fertility, as well as laying the economic basis for near universal marriage.

Finally, there is an interesting chapter surveying government efforts to regulate and control food supply. Irish historians have studied famine relief in some detail, but Clarkson and Crawford range far more widely than this, examining conflicting priorities: the government's desire to maximize tax revenue, on the one hand, as against its need, on the other, to avoid civil unrest by guaranteeing cheap, adequate and unadulterated food.

Titled *Feast and famine*, there is no doubt into which category this book falls: it offers a veritable feast for those interested in food, famine and disease in Ireland and elsewhere. Clearly we have here the definitive book on the subject of Irish food and nutrition.

Elizabeth Malcolm,
University of Melbourne

Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell,
The four horsemen of the Apocalypse: religion, war, famine and death in Reformation Europe, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. xiii, 360, illus., £42.50, US\$64.95 (hardback 0-521-46135-9), £15.95, US\$22.95 (paperback 0-521-46701-2).

This fascinating book attempts to do what is too rarely done: to integrate the physical histories of life and death with the mental and spiritual worlds that gave meaning to such terminal events.

Cunningham and Grell have set themselves the task of describing the frightening ways in which Europeans sickened and died in what they call Reformation Europe. During the decades between 1490 and 1650, roughly speaking, most of Europe coped with several new threats to daily life: new or fairly new diseases (syphilis, siege disease, the English Sweat, continuing outbursts of plague); newly destructive warfare on a new and larger scale; and new outbreaks of famine and starvation after the relatively abundant decades of the fifteenth century. Even the weather failed to cooperate, and Europe slid into what some have called a "Little Ice Age". Most Europeans believed that they were being attacked or chastised more severely and more lethally than ever before. And so they were understandably attracted to the notion that the reason for their current distress was the anger of God and the impending Second Coming of Christ, the Apocalypse, so mysteriously described by St John's Revelation.

Cunningham and Grell have organized their book so that we first learn about the various apocalyptic expectations of late medieval and early modern people and the ways in which they understood the awesome image of four distinct horsemen: the riders of the white, red, black, and pale horses of final destruction. This is a useful organizing device and allows the authors to summarize the latest findings of military historians, demographers, and historians of medicine. In certain respects they do more than merely summarize, for the level and interest of specialized information from Danish and Dutch sources goes well beyond what one could easily learn in the latest research literature. Basically, they point repeatedly to the extreme conditions of the period 1490–1650, and reinforce the idea that life was indeed harsher and less forgiving