

CENTENARY OF THE CORK BUTTER MARKET *

As with the present Irish butter season ends the first century of the Cork butter market, which was established in the spring of the year 1769, a few facts and figures connected with this, the greatest butter market in the world, may be acceptable to our readers. The port of Cork is the natural outlet for the produce of the most fertile district of the South of Ireland, extending over the whole of the county of Cork, the largest county in Ireland, and including portions of four other Munster counties—a district of about 3,000,000 statute acres, which, from a combination of favourable conditions, of climate, soil, and geological formation, is perhaps unequalled as a pasturing country. The climate of this, southern district of Ireland is peculiarly genial and favourable to vegetation, partly owing to the influence of the Gulf stream, the warm waters of which break on its shores, and raise the temperature 3° higher than the northern parts of the island, a difference in temperature that is, generally speaking, uniform throughout the year, its influence being more perceptible in the spring, when the vegetation is considerably in advance of that of other parts of the country. A portion of the county of Cork enjoys a spring temperature of 50°, about the highest in the British islands, and 3° higher than the county of Kent, which is nearly in the same latitude. The rainfall is great, owing to the moist and warm southwesterly winds, the vapour of which in passing over the land is changed into genial showers, increasing its fertility. The soil is principally on the old red sandstone formation, and is free from the bog or morass so prevalent in other parts of Ireland. The mild and open winters, allowing the longest period for grazing, render it most suitable for the rearing of cattle and the production of butter. The early rise of the Cork market may be attributed to its position in relation to this fertile district, to the constant and frequent communication between Cork and the different ports of England, and to the foreign and colonial trade created by the favourable geographical position and safety of Cork harbour, now better known as Queenstown. The total quantity of butter received into the Cork market for the century amounts to nearly twenty-five million packages; the actual number being upwards of 24,500,000, or over a million tons, a quantity more easily spoken of than conceived. The Cork butter market is held daily, with the exception of about fifteen days' interval in March or April between the old and the new seasons, and a few holidays. There are, therefore, about 290 markets held in the year. The average supply is now 1400 firkins per day, or 400,000 firkins annually. Within the last dozen years the exports to the colonies, which used to be large, have fallen off, owing to various causes, principally the increase of their own produce. The foreign trade is now small, the great bulk of the supply of Cork butter coming to the English markets. The Cork butter market is an indication of the great agricultural resources of Ireland—resources which, in the judgment of competent authorities, are capable of large development and increase, with rich promise, under wise and considerate legislation, of much prosperity and happiness to the people of a country so highly favoured by nature.

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