

This famine-cropped garden

*Gleanings in the West of Ireland*

Lord Sidney Godolphin Osborne

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*The Queen reads, — “ Can such things be,  
And in my dominions ?”  
Play not yet published.*

Some of the matter contained in the following pages has already been published, in the columns of the “ Times” newspaper. I have added to it a good deal of detail, as to the condition of the people, in the West of Ireland ; which I think it important to publish, but which would not have been acceptable to the generality of the readers of a newspaper. I desire, however, to place on record, in a form easily accessible, the results of the inquiries I have made into the nature of the treatment, to which the peasantry of the distressed districts are exposed, within and without the workhouses. A newspaper, when once read, is usually put aside, and then, very often accidentally, or purposely misquoted. Those who may attempt to refute the statements I have felt it my duty to make, and those who may desire to lend their aid to obtain redress for the grievances I have proclaimed, will, I trust, in these pages, find a ready source of reference to those facts, on which I ground my appeal for the consideration of all who love mercy and justice, to the oppression, and the suffering, of the people of this part of the Queen’s dominions.

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Castlebar—Workhouses— Execution in the Houses—Earl of Lucan’s Farming operations—  
Ballina—Seizure and sale of Workhouse property—Rescue by Mr. Gurney—Funeral of  
pauper children—A very cautious banker.

Between Westport and Castlebar there are but too many proofs of the old evil—eviction ; but there is also some evidence that it has not been so wantonly done as elsewhere ; not only have farms been consolidated, but as yet they seem to have been treated so with this effect—the land is improved—there are large fields under heavy cropping ; these must have given employment and so far I hope the last state of many of the evicted has been better than their former. It was market-day at Castlebar, and seemed to be a very busy market ; the appearance of the town and people was much improved from what it was last year. Very heavy drainage works are being here carried out ; these, and the large amount of money paid by Lord Lucan in the carrying out of his farming operations, I have no doubt powerfully affect the prosperity of the town. I found the workhouses certainly improved in their details from what they were last year ; the inmates looked healthy, with the exception of some of the boys and men ; they were on the whole fairly clad. The total numbers in all the houses were 2,512, of whom 190 were on the sick lists. Able-bodied working males, 201 ; ditto, females, 693 ; boys and girls above nine and under fifteen years of age, 1010 ! The average mortality per week of the month ending 30th of March last, was 4.9 ; a low mortality compared with very many Unions. The only building which has more inmates in it than it was estimated to accommodate, is the parent house. I was much struck with the clean appearance of the girls at the parent house. There were some objectionable points with regard to the state of the inmates of the probationary wards, who had been in some days ; but on the whole, it would be captious to find fault in small details, where generally there was so much to praise. The fever hospital, and the sick wards generally, were very clean. I must say here, what I might have said with more reason elsewhere, that I do think nothing should ever justify the putting four or even

three children in one bed, when, to do so, it is necessary to make them sleep, some with their heads at one end, some at the other ; in cases of dysentery I think it most cruel to do so. I believe it to be against the rules of the Medical Inspector ; unless my notes deceive me, I saw one case of it in this house ; I know I saw it again and again in other houses.

There are two “ monster” permanent single story wards or sheds being built in connection with the parent house, one more than 200 feet long, the other nearly 200. The object of the Board, a very wise one, viz. to try and do without auxiliary houses as soon as they can. The number of persons dependent on out-relief is 2,443. I think it was in this house that I saw the bread for the dinner put into the other food, in order to *sop* it, to make it an unsaleable article outside the walls.

The parent house stands within walls enclosing a large space of ground ; this is very nicely laid out in a sort of pleasure ground fashion, with a great extent of flower border, and broad gravelled walks ; not only has it been so laid out with no little taste, but it is very neatly kept, and was well cropped with annuals and other plants ; there were also in connection with the hospital, gardens similarly laid out and cropped. Not only am I convinced that there is sound policy in thus surrounding the Workhouse with ground so laid out as to secure a certain amount of neatness and cleanliness, but that it is politic as well as humane, to have the means of thus giving the children occasional exercise, under circumstances which tend to give them tastes of higher nature, than can be given in the crowded, walled, barren yards. Again, it did one’s heart good to see some of the convalescent patients, walking about in a scene which must have been most refreshing to their every sense, after the confinement of the sick wards.

It may easily be conceived that the office of a Guardian is not a bed of roses in these Unions. A small body of police, I was told, are here regularly in attendance on the Board on admission days ; applicants are very apt to be violent when refused altogether, or relieved in a way not according to their own views. It has happened that a Guardian has been severely wounded as he sat, by a stone thrown by one of these unruly spirits.

At this moment, though all is apparently in fair order, there is an execution in every Poor House of this Union ; the cost to the Union of the bailiffs in possession being not less than 17s 6d per week. On the doors of some of the wards are pasted printed notices, to the effect, that the contents of such ward belongs to one “ Charles Malley” a contractor, who has made what is called a friendly seizure, *i.e.* I presume, having secured the property, he is content to wait till he can be paid his debt.

In the immediate neighbourhood of Castlebar is the mansion of the Earl of Lucan ; it is in itself a place not pretending to be any thing more than a country gentleman’s country house. Within half a mile of it are the farm buildings to which public attention has more than once been called. They are on an extensive scale, substantially built. They contain all the necessary conveniences for working a large amount of ground. The resident manager, who went with me over them, was an intelligent Scotchman, who evidently understood his business. Lord Lucan’s aim has been to do away with the old system of very small holdings with their attendant low farming, and to introduce the very best English or Scotch plans of large farming operations, carried on upon the best known system. He has accordingly, here and on other parts of his estate, made most wholesale “ clearance,” and has now embarked a very large amount of capital in the cultivation, on the new system, of the land thus cleared.

In connection with these particular buildings, he has 1,000 acres under high tillage, carrying between 700 and 800 head of cattle, including 110 cows giving milk ; his flock of sheep exceeds 700, 220 are Leicester ewes ; he has forty-six cart horses in work, fourteen young

horses coming on, has now about 100 men employed—has had 500 ; he pays each fortnight, about £41. wages, for farm work ; about the same sum for draining operations ; he has, I believe, taken up large sums under the Act for this object ; he seems to spare no pains or expense in improving his stock ; he has some very fine Leicester rams, some high bred short homed bulls ; I was told he was importing more.

There is a well appointed dairy, in which we saw cheese-making going on ; the cleanliness and apparent activity of the dairy staff, and its appointments, would have done credit to Cheshire. There is a large bone-crushing mill, and all the other usual accompaniments to a first-rate modern bread and beef factory. On other parts of his property he has about 4,000 acres of land, which he has laid out in three or four farms ; having worked it into good heart, he has put up suitable buildings on two of these farms, and would find buildings for every good tenant he could command ; at present they are unlet. He has established a “tilery,” making his own draining tiles. The average wages of the farm labourers are from 9d to 1s a day. I was told, that like all other labouring men on farms, they required looking after ; but that they were quick at acquiring skill, and by practice made good servants. The lands were laid out in large fields, but not hedged the one from the other. The crops looked very heavy and very clean; but I did not go over them. The soil appeared to be very good.

The reader must bear in mind, in order to estimate the spirit of this undertaking, that it was begun under every possible discouragement, and has been continued in the face of ruinous poor rates, falling—or rather no markets. There was not only the un-popularity of the process by which he took possession of the land, but he had to work out his schemes, in the teeth of every conceivable local prejudice. He had to revolutionize a wide-extended system, to which long use, idle habits, and ignorance had wedded the whole country round him—he himself, the sole conspirator. Failure must be a dear-bought ruin ; success could only be purchased by first treading the very confines of ruin. He had to prove that certain things could be done even by instruments opposed to their doing. Amateur farming in England has all the excitement of racing ; the aristocracy of the stall and the arable have excitement, fully equal to that purchased by the frequenters of the ring and the stable. I was born and bred very near Newmarket ; I have now lived for some years near my friend Huxtable, and others of known arable and stall craft. I have seen him, and them, fully as much engrossed in a rivalry of beasts, pigs, and swedes, as I ever saw the leviathans of the course in the comparative merits of their studs.

Lord Lucan is farming where the burden of the Poor-rate falls on the proprietary ; the town divides him from the Union House, from the records of which I took it, that it *is now insolvent*, there are now within and without the houses, actually relieved 5,400 paupers ! This in the teeth of all the work, he, the drainage works, and all other sources of employment, are affording. This is no mere library and anti-luncheon amusement, to be followed out each day by lively post-prandial discussion with brother white-waistcoated agriculturists ; discussing theories over claret, and matching pigs and swedes, in all the comfort of a well-appointed social neighbourhood. He had to build his success, in its very foundation, on ground, unavoidably poisoned in the process. The courage he has shewn, makes me desire to feel, that when he evicted, he saw so great an amount of eventual good to a future race, that for this he was content to bear the burden of odium, his conduct to the present race of peasantry would produce. If he did the deeds I have abhorred in many, I must admit that he proved in earnest in pursuing the end for which he avowed he did them. There was no cowardly wantonness in his work ; he chose his line ; at every cost of fortune and of comfort, to much present cost of character ; he boldly pursued it. I for one, try and forget the cost of the experiment, in admiration of the courage of the man ; in the belief that he has achieved a great movement in a most valuable direction.

From Castlebar I went to Ballina ; the scenery, for a considerable part of the way, is very beautiful. The pass at Pontoon, between the two lakes Cullin and Conn, and the road for some miles on the banks of Lake Conn, carries the traveller through some lovely scenery. It is throughout very thinly populated. Ballina was the extreme point of my journey : my readers will not be sorry to hear that its workhouses are the last I shall have to describe.

Perhaps few, if any. Unions have had heavier trials than that of Ballina ; I wish I could say it was altogether out of them. The paupers now in the houses amount in numbers to 3,788. The parent house was very clean, and the inmates in good order. The women, young and old, seemed healthy. The clothing of the women and the children was pretty good. In the sick wards there were a good many very distressing cases ; the old story, dysentery—the result of want. The Medical officer reported as remaining under his care—sick—the previous week 479 ; he had had, in that week, 13 deaths. In the fever hospital 60 cases remained under treatment : two deaths in the week. Outside the house there were some 150 so-called able men and lads, breaking stones, *i.e.* hitting at stones with hammers ; they were a wretched spectacle ; a good many were late admissions, and had come in, in the last state of weakness. I was told that the stone breaking, in their ease, was made more a plea to get them out into the air, than to exact work from them; in fact, anything like real work they could not do. There is a certain amount of ground under tillage ; the crops were heavy ; from the manure we saw in use it does not surprise me that they were so. Every endeavour is made to promote industrial employment, and a good deal of the clothing is manufactured in the houses.

My attention was called to the fact of so many of the articles of furniture—beds, tables, &c. being marked with the initials S. G. ; on inquiry, I found that last year some of the creditors, or some one of them, made a seizure of the whole property in the houses, and forced a sale ; I believe nothing was left unsold but the beds under fever patients, and that on condition they were not to be used for fresh patients. It so happened that Mr. S. Gurney, Sir E. Buxton, and others, were travelling in Ireland at the time ; with the help of a sum subscribed by one of the Guardians, a sum of money was raised by them, and a great deal of the property bought ; the things have been marked with Mr. Gurney's initials, and are by him *lent* to the Union, to preserve them from a second seizure. There are some auxiliary workhouses here, built on a different plan from any I have seen elsewhere; they are merely thatched long sheds, the walls tolerably substantial, running round the four sides of square yards. They are inhabited by many hundreds of boys and girls ; the boys, many of them, looked wretched objects. There were a great many distinct famine cases amongst them; some were wretchedly clothed—they all looked cold and miserable. From the absolute want of tins at this house, one portion of these wretched creatures we saw waiting, shivering round the hall door, whilst another class was fed : this, to me, is most cruel. Children with such frames, such debilitated constitutions, are the very last between whose meals there should be any unnecessary delay. At an auxiliary we visited afterwards, in which there were some 600 able-bodied women, they had not more than 30 tins for the whole number to eat out of ; we were there when one relay was being fed, and a more savage, noisy, turbulent scene I have seldom ever witnessed.

The girls and the little children at the “ shed auxiliary,” were, as they ever are, better clad, and looking in far better healthy than the boys. The women also looked strong and healthy ; there was a certain sort of industrial employment going on amongst them, but to a very limited amount. The “ bridge auxiliary” was to all appearance very crowded ; and though the dormitories were clean, the crowding of the day rooms, and the evident disorder at the meals, gave one a sad insight into the evils of this massing of women in a confined space, without even the staff that could control them, or a sufficiency of the common necessaries of civilized life.

Two children, one six months, the other ten months old, died here two days before our visit ; the previous day to the said visit I happened to be in the Abbey burying-ground, very near this house ; I saw there two women squatting on the ground, beside two coffins ; four workhouse boys, with long spades, were scratching out a sort of grave ; I returned a few hours afterwards, and found they had put the coffins about seven inches underground, some loose stones and soil above them ; this was the funeral of the above two children. There was no ceremony whatever ; it was in the afternoon, in a very public part of the town ; two dogs could not have been buried with less respect. I found, on inquiry, neither of these children had been dead twenty-four hours, one not eighteen. It was, I was informed, against rules to bury paupers in the Abbey ground ; however, the pauper boys must have had leave from one of the houses to play at sexton. The women were the mothers of the children. I will say no more here, as I must presently enter at length into the subject of the treatment of the dead.

It is satisfactory to know, that in a country which has acquired very great notoriety for the reckless disrespect generally shewn to the question of money, there are yet in existence some men of money, whose prudence and caution shine forth brightly, in an atmosphere of extravagance and wanton credit giving. I went with my friend into a certain Bank at Ballina, and asked a clerk, whether they would kindly cash a small cheque for me on a London bank ; I told him who I was. A partner, a man of years, came forward from some counting-house back settlement, and asked me, “ if I was known to any one in the town ?” I said, “ I feared I was known by name but too well ; I was known personally to Captain Hamilton, the Poor-law Inspector, living in the town.” “ Had I any introduction from him ?” “ Certainly not, but I could get one in the evening ; he was now out of town, having just called on me ; but then the Bank would be closed, and I wanted to leave for Balinasloe early in the morning.” The provincial Rothschild heard with all due courtesy the proof I tendered of my own identity ; he said, “ how glad he was to make the acquaintance of one whose writings he so admired,” &c. &c. &c. ; drawing large bills on my self-love—very large ones—so large as to seem to require no slight demand on my gratitude, to honour them on the spot ; still, no admission of my identity ; he evidently did not care, if he threw his praise in the way of an impostor ; it cost the firm nothing ; but as to money, it was another thing. However, he did so paint my excellency, that in common decency he could not refuse gently to fathom my need : “ How much did I want ? who was my London banker ?” “ £15 ; Glyn and Co.” “ A small sum—excellent house ; it was quite painful to him, that he only knew me on my own introduction.” No offer of the accommodation ; had I shewn him the mark on my handkerchief, he might have justly argued, it was possible I might have become *accidentally* possessed of S. G. O.’s China silk. I do not think he would have believed me, had I shewn him the said too well known initials on the corner of my shirt ; he was so civil, however, he would, perhaps, have only suggested, “ Laundresses sometimes make mistakes.” I left him well paid for my visit, in admiration of “ real prudence” in such high preservation in Connaught. O Ireland, “ si sic omnes !” there would then have been no “ Encumbered Estates Bill.” Long may he live, a very prince of banking diplomacy. One who, I believe, would not stretch a rule of the firm to serve the Lord-Lieutenant ; but who would as soon be gazetted a bankrupt in gold, as in the means of paying over the counter in civil terms—*very civil terms*—any and every applicant for any the smallest, *out of the question*, pecuniary accommodation.

Colonel Knox Gore lives closely adjoining the town ; he is a large proprietor, and an honour to his property. Foreseeing the probable force of the coming storm, he determined to prepare to meet it, at any sacrifice. He reduced his establishment to the lowest possible point ; gave up every luxury, scarcely allowed himself the commonest comforts of life ; making himself his own superintendent of labour ; he has given an enormous amount of employment, paying the men with his own hand, according to the value of their work ; he has thus laid out very large sums of money ; has improved a large portion of his estate, and been the means of

doing a great deal of substantial enduring good : he speaks hopefully of the future ; but evidently does not think the crisis over. It is for the sake of such men one would indeed hail better times. Sincerely do I hope he may live to see the first of the self-sacrifice he has shewn. From Ballina I returned to Dublin, by Hollymount, Tuam, Balinasloe, Athlone, Mullingar, and the Midland Railway : every step eastward shewed improvement : the land more cropped ; the people better clad ; fewer evictions—still a good many ; much less mendicancy.

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How does the poor-law treat paupers with reference to their moral and social character—Population equal to English towns in Irish workhouses—Their treatment—Neglect of the rules and orders of commissioners—Want of sympathy to dying—Tight officers—Want of reverence in burials—Jobbing in the contracts.

I WOULD now entreat the attention of my readers, to some remarks upon the condition of the pauper population of Ireland, with reference to the effect upon their social and moral character, which I affirm their present treatment must have, as regards those who may survive it, and those who are dying under it. To beg, is now a punishable offence in Ireland, on the grounds, that the destitute are provided for by the Poor-law ; the peasant may be without shelter and without food ; but if he is destitute of the means of obtaining either of these for himself, he is, by law, entitled to obtain both within the workhouse.

The law then, which makes it penal to beg, takes upon itself the responsibility of feeding, clothing and sheltering, the starving, naked and houseless : how does the law as now carried out do this ?

I have shewn in the former chapters, the chief features of the practical working of that law ; I must now again allude to those features, that I may prove, how far in the operation of this law of relief, to mere temporal necessity, mischief is done to the entire social and moral character ; admitting, that my fellow creatures are fed and sheltered and clothed in some degree as *animals*, needing those processes for the sustainment of life ; I have to regard how far they are treated as animals, having *the responsibilities of human beings, in a civilized, Christian country*.

In eleven Unions I visited—one had 8000 paupers on indoor relief. Four, had more than 4000. Three, more than 3000. Three, more than 2000. It is difficult to bring home to the minds of readers, not accustomed to think on these subjects, the real import of these numbers, in reference to the subject they concern. 8000 persons are more than double the population of many large county towns in England. 4000 persons are at least, the full amount of population, in very many such county towns. I will take the county in which I am now writing—Dorsetshire. Weymouth with Melcombe Regis, a sea-port, and fashionable watering place, does not in its population, by the last census, return a number equal to that in the workhouses at Limerick. Blandford—Sherborne—Shaftesbury and Dorchester, are not one of them equal in population, to the numbers in any one of four Unions I visited. Poole, a large and important sea-port, returning a Member to Parliament, has not the population of the Limerick workhouses. Dorchester, returns two Members, Shaftesbury one, neither of these have a population equal to that either in the Galway or Kiltrush Union-houses.

I ask my readers then to suppose the population of a large English county town, to be shut up within walls ; to be daily allowed air only in yards ; and fed and found in the bare necessities of life ; even the hospitals and the places of worship for this population being within

the enclosures. Again, be it remembered, that the whole population of the Workhouse, is one, of a grade, generally, far lower as to ignorance and want, than any to be found in the worst streets and lanes of any of the said towns. Still farther, it is to be borne in mind, that a very large proportion of the said workhouse population, consists of children and young women, either orphans or absolutely deserted. Again, a very large part of the population so walled in, have come within the walls, as well in a state of almost nudity as in a state of debility, which they can scarcely hope ever to recover.

Food, clothing, shelter, education, medicine, religious teaching, industrial teaching, are to be found for this mass ; grave-ground for a very large portion of it : the law has undertaken this monster-task : what the law deliberately undertakes, every subject of the realm has a right to demand, that the law shall do its best to fulfil : a “ Poor-law” is the paupers “ charter,” it gives him certain rights, when he obtains them not he is wronged.

To feed a man, means to give him what will support him in health—to shelter a man, means to guard him from exposure to weather, without exposing him to disease in the manner of doing so—to clothe, means to cover, all of the human body that healthy and decency, require to be covered—education, means the process which shall cultivate man’s reasoning power, to fit him for his station—medical aid, means to give him, when in a state of disease, or debility, or when injured physically, the benefit of the curative art of the physician, the surgical skill of the surgeon—religious education, regards, the submission of the reasoning powers, to the guidance of those whose holy province it is to teach the responsibility of the soul—industrial education, aims at the early inculcation of habits, the early teaching in ways, by which the man, or woman, or child, may by industry, or the use of their physical powers, acquire the means of earning their own support.

I have before me a certain small Green Book—“ The General Order of the Commissioners for Administering the Laws for the Relief of the Poor in Ireland, for regulating the Management of the Workhouses, and the duties of the Workhouse Officers, 5th of Feb. 1849,” (set forth within these eighteen months). This General Order is sent out with all the weight of the highest authority. The names of every Union to which it applies are given ; it is “ *sealed with our seal*” i.e. the seals of E. T. B. TWISTLETON, *Chief Commissioner*, and T. N. REDINGTON, *Under-Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant*. There is the Proclamation of the Lord Lieutenant at the foot of it, approving the Order. It has, in fact, all the force and authority of an Act of Parliament.

Were the Rules and Orders of this document carried out, I have no hesitation in saying, I should, on the whole, think the indoor paupers of Ireland fairly dealt with. I have, however, no hesitation in asserting, that they are very generally in the West of Ireland grossly neglected, cunningly evaded, or openly defied. By these rules all I have said above, as to things fitting to be found for the paupers in the houses, are clearly laid down as *to be found for them by the Guardians*. The former chapters of this little work will prove, how these orders are carried out, or rather with what open contempt they are treated.

Suppose, reader, that you had a population, equal to that of an English county town of some magnitude, shut up within walls ; you would, I presume, at once admit, that to preserve order amongst them, especially when they were of the class I have described, you would have a sufficient staff of trustworthy, well paid officers. You would not place 700 or 800 women under the care of one woman, at a low salary, with an unpaid assistant or two of the same sex, with the further aid of a low paid man, or a pauper unpaid, called a porter or wardsman, armed with a stick or whip to force, *by force*, order at meals, &c. You would not place 500 or 1000 boys or girls under some two or three, at the most, *very young*, very low paid, young

women or men, and call this education, when you have not even given these instructors the commonest necessities of a school ; leaving to these young men or women, with the aid perhaps of an adult pauper or two, the whole management and supervision, by day and by night, of these numbers of children, sick or well.

You would not so regulate departments of your walled up community, that women with the most loathsome diseases, should be herded with the rest, or at best, only imperfectly separated ; you would not allow children, eat up with vermin, evidently affected with contagious disease, to mingle in the massed hundreds of your schools. You would not stow away by night your men, your women, and your children, each in three separate departments, so crammed on the mattresses, on the dormitory floors, that when all are on the ground, those floors present thick masses of hot, steaming life—all decency defied, the weak at the mercy of the tyranny of the strong—in the scramble for room to rest. Knowing the common necessities of our nature, you would not adopt insufficient disgusting expedients to meet them at night, or, as sometimes is the case, have no provision whatever for these necessities ; you would not, by day, leave the same necessities to seek relief under circumstances of publicity and scanty provision, which outrage every sense of decorum or cleanliness.

If you had many hundreds of children suffering from chronic diarrhœa or dysentery, I presume you would not place them by 30, 40, 50, or 60 in a ward, two, three, sometimes four in the same bed : sometimes four so placed, in a narrow bed, that two of them have their heads on the pillow, two their heads on the foot of the bed ; this, even when the disease is dysentery!

Water is not an expensive article. Cleanliness, when the people are in masses, becomes a necessary element to the common safety. You would not, then, leave many, very many hundred children utterly unwashed for weeks and weeks together ; you would not leave them in filthy rags, as well as unwashed. You would not herd hundreds, more or less, of women, infants at the breast, children, with here and there an idiot, in wards, with no choice but to crouch down on the bare floor of the one small day room, or on the bare ground of the one confined yard ; keeping them for weeks in the dirt and filth in which they sought shelter from you, causing them to sleep at night naked, or in their rags—their beds foul mattresses thrown on a shed floor, with a foul blanket their only covering : the hours of each night to be thus spent—these people, of various ages, left each night to seek rest in this filth, this promiscuous, almost naked contact.

When the meals were to be served, say to a class of some hundreds of women, you would not have them served by men with sticks in their hands, to keep them, as men do pigs, from the trough, till each is served in turn ; you would not suffer the periods of serving the meals to be such times of disorder, that when I told one official I had just seen the women being fed in one of his workhouses struck with sticks by men, his reply was,—“ I am glad of it, it is time something was done to keep order.” I say, reader, no one possessed of common sense, common humanity, would permit such ways to exist in the walled communities of which we are speaking ; and yet, I assert, many of such ways are common to very many Unions. I must, however, add, that all of this is directly in opposition to the clearly laid down rules of the Green Book, sealed by Messrs. Twisleton and Redington, approved by the Earl of Clarendon. They are, then, abuses of the law, and as such, on the part of these wretched paupers, I protest against them.

If every class of these thousands, above nine years of age, are only to be fed twice in the four and twenty hours, is it justifiable that there should be such gross inequality, between the means of so feeding them, and their numbers, that, again and again, many hundreds have to

wait twelve, fourteen, sixteen hours between their meals, and when fed, have but too often to be hurried, that they may make way for the hungry crowd waiting to rush into their places ? In many of these Unions the halls are scarce ever unoccupied, the coppers are ever going ; classes have to wait until ten, eleven, even twelve at night before they get their dinner ; those fed at four in the afternoon see no more food until perhaps ten or twelve the next day. Never shall I forget the looks of those famished boys at Ballina, herding round the door of a half empty hall, waiting till the few *tins* of the establishment were at liberty from the class being fed, that they might feed.

As for industrial occupation, with some few exceptions, it is very little regarded; and yet the Green Book lays down excellent orders regarding it. To be fed as they can, to sleep as they may, to squat in groups, close packed, for hours together, seeking a little sun in the yards, or warmth from closing on each other ; when driven in by weather, to crowd the one day room, still in idleness ; this is the lot and life of many thousands of adult women in the workhouses I visited. It is mere animal vegetation, it is not human life, in any common accepted sense of the term.

As to religious instruction and public worship, the Green Book orders provision to be made for it : a Chaplain is to be appointed, service is to be performed, the children are to be catechised, the sick ministered to. I have no doubt that mass is regularly performed in the parent houses, and in some auxiliaries ; but I know very well only a very limited number of the inmates can attend it. I had it from the best authority that, in some auxiliaries, there is no religious service. As to the regular catechising of the children, why the numbers utterly forbid it, even if there were teachers enough, and books, &c. by which the children could be prepared for the priests. There is, I admit, in many Unions, very praiseworthy attempts made by the priests to carry out a good deal of what their church considers it right to enforce in and from the people ; but the testimony of every priest I spoke to on the subject, was, that the numbers, the want of discipline, the whole economy of the Unions, utterly forbids anything like a real carrying out of religious instruction, religious visitation, the public, proper administration of religious rites.

And here I must speak with pain, what I with pain observed. I have been in the houses at all hours ; last year, when the cholera, and fever, and dysentery, were all at work amongst the people ; and in my late tour, when many hundreds were still ever crowding the infirmary and sick wards ; I have passed through, I should suppose, some miles of wards, to every two feet of which there was a sick or dying human being. I saw the extreme rite of the Church administered in a few instances last year ; but neither then, or now, have I ever seen one single human being giving any other consolation to a sick or dying person. I believe, in the West, very few Protestants are ever found in the workhouses ; I am told, and I believe it, that when once an adult member of the Catholic Church has received her last rites, he has no farther desire for any more spiritual help ; he is as one waiting for death, in the full persuasion that he is fit to die. I have no reason to doubt but that, in the case of the adult, except when death is very sudden, he has generally been thus prepared ; for I know the intense desire of the people for this rite, and the readiness of the priests to administer it. I therefore try to believe, that, according to their faith, they have in this matter what they desire, though I so seldom saw proof of it ; but I wish for them something more ; I should wish to see these afflicted creatures made objects of commiseration to individuals, whose higher condition in life and education would give their sympathy weight, their words, authority. There is something to me very fearful, in having one fellow-creature after another, shewn to me as dying, *shrived*, but then left to die, with no farther regard to the feelings of the dying, than what the chance kindness of some other patient, or some officer of the house, may bestow.

I can, however, endeavour to believe, that what I have been told on this subject, corroborated to some degree, as it has been, by what I have seen, is still, less lamentable than I think it is ; I will allow it to be assumed, that I speak in some ignorance about adults ; that they may all have power to attend mass, the confessional, &c. &c. ; but there is one class of inmates, whose condition I know to be, as I shall now, with no little indignation, paint it from the life—or, rather, the death.

Of the very many hundred young children I have seen lying in the sickness which writes on them, that “ it is unto death ;” passing, as I have done, through those long lanes, hedged by beds, crowded with children in the worst stages of dysentery, fever, small-pox, famine ; I have never yet chanced to find one single instance of any one person doing any one office to them, but those mere offices which hired or appointed nurses are compelled to do. I have seen these, the young blighted of our kind, under every varying shade of physical comfort, or discomfort. In some instances, in beds clean and not very crowded, in wards well ventilated, and with evident attention to the details of personal cleanliness. In others, I have seen them in long wooden sheds, on mattresses of unquestionable dirty hue, spread thick on the floor, on each side ; two, three, and even four children on each ; many of the children either shirtless, or in very dirty, scanty linen ; the bed-covering filthy.

In one respect I found all alike ; I never saw one solitary instance of any one attempt to cheer these little ones, in any one of the very many ways in which we know children, sick and dying, can be cheered.

I am not speaking in the religious view of the subject, but only as regards the utter absence of practical acts of sympathy ; it is rare to see death in any shape left to do its work on its victim, with none near to try and cheer and comfort that victim ; it is still more rare to see the young, the very young, left to die, without many a kind attempt to throw some light, from human lips, on the darkened page of that lesson they are then prematurely reading.

The cold-blooded sneerer at the sympathies of our kind may scoff at the mother, who hides her tears, forces down the emotion of her heart, as she holds some gilded, painted toy, before the eyes of the child, whose little foot is on the edge of its little grave : she, however, knows the value of the faint smile she may thus provoke ; if she can banish an instant’s fear, a moment’s pain, from its breast, she is well repaid ; she is dealing with a child ; she knows toys to be no small elements in childhood’s philosophy.

I admit these children lie tearless, as they are smileless ; but, because I see neither pain nor pleasure speaking in their little disease-sunken faces, am I to believe, that the former does not exist, that something of the latter might not be produced ?

Twice only have I seen emotion of any sort, in any of these cases ; once, when I removed for a moment a kitten from a little shrunken arm ; again, when I took a kitten from the floor, and placed it on a sick child’s pillow,

I am told that there are “ Sisters of Charity” in some of the towns, who pay regular visits to the schools, and to the women’s wards. What I would pray to see, would be, *mothers*—women who have learned at their own breasts, on their own knees, the language, the character of childhood ; making these poor suffering things, objects for practical works of love, I want to see the pillow smoothed, the medicine sometimes given by other than mere hurried hired hands. This famine-cropped garden, in which the fading flowers, the broken flowers, are for ever for a time, however brief, in contact with the dead flowers, needs kind hands and hearts to support and cheer the living, even as hired hands weed out the dead.

I could have forgiven the crowding, for I could try and believe in the necessity which crowds these wards of sick children ; I cannot forgive my fellow-creatures, that so few, if any, are found to face these scenes of pain, where they might, at the little cost of a few very brief little offices, do so much to cheer those who are dying unheeded, amidst every surrounding circumstance repulsive to every feeling of their age.

From the very limited number of officers in these houses, and, therefore, the little real inspection which they can give over the doings of the inmates ; from the necessity which thus exists of employing paupers in very many offices ; I *know* that very great tyranny, dishonesty, and cruelty result. *I know no such tyrant as a pauper dressed in authority*, I have heard it from sources on which I can rely, that not only are the weak for ever robbed of their food and rest by the strong, but that there is a regular market within the houses, and without the houses, for food stolen from the rations. To get “ tight” officers is a great object with the Guardians ; and certainly, when such numbers, of such a class, are to be ruled by so few officers, despotism must do the work. These “ tight” officers choose “ tight” paupers to assist in the hall, the kitchen, &c. ; they are little likely to listen to any complaint against them ; and these official paupers are as little likely to let complainants pass unpunished ; the rod they hold has, indeed, many ways of giving its blows.

But I think I hear it said, there are Visitors appointed for the express purpose of seeing that the rules of the Green Book are carried out ; it is true this is the case, and they have certain questions each week to answer in a book set apart for the purpose. If they do visit at all, they must either be determined not to see or hear anything which may displease them ; or, hearing and seeing, they do not choose to record the truth. It is very rare to find the answers put to the questions at all ; I have reason to know, it is not rare for the page to be signed, when little, if any of the duty has been performed.

The sum of the whole matter is simply this ; these houses, as now very generally ordered, are theatres, in which much gross cruelty is for ever enacted ; they are rank schools of evil ; no human ingenuity could contrive more powerful machinery to degrade human nature than that now contained, and at full work, within the houses for the relief of the poor, in very many of the Unions in the West of Ireland.

As to the diet and cost of the paupers, it may readily be conceived what it is, when the average cost per head per week may be put at 10*d*. The dietary of the Green Book runs things near enough ; but I do not believe, in many houses, what are called the healthy adult classes get even the quantity ordered, to say nothing of the questionable quality of much of what they do get. Bread, or rather cakes, of half rye-meal, half barley-meal, is food utterly unfitted for the proper healthy support of human beings, under so many sanitary disadvantages. I have again and again seen the inside of these cakes, nothing better than a sticky black dough. The bread is made in the houses ; and when it is admitted, that the coppers must be kept going all day, it is fair to presume that the bakehouse department is equally hurried ; I am satisfied, that such bread as I saw in several of the Unions, would not be allowed in any jail in the United Kingdom.

Let us leave the living, and see how the dead are treated. I know I shall be contradicted on this point, but I challenge inquiry—fair inquiry, as to the facts. The journey from the bed to the grave is one very frequently indeed made under twenty-four hours, very often under twelve. Nay, one who ought to know, assures me, that sometimes the body has been warm in the dead-house, scarcely cold in the coffin ; conveyed to the grave in the morning, having died in the night. I am not speaking of persons dying of contagious diseases. When the burial-ground is at any distance, there is a sort of hearse, or black covered cart, which goes, in many

Unions, at least once a-day to it ; some paupers are told off for the purpose ; they just go with it, and see the coffins put in the ground, and covered up or not, as the pit may require more to complete its complement.

*No religious service whatever is observed at the burial of the dead.* Not only is no reverence shewn in pauper burials, but the grave-ground, in nine cases out of ten, might be used for any other purpose, so far as any outward mark exists to distinguish it from other ground. This to me is a gross outrage on all decency. A dead pauper will rise from the grave on an equality with the risen sovereign. I am no admirer of lead, and velvet, and gilded furniture, binding up the life-read pages of the rich departed, to make them worthy of those subterraneous well-kept receptacles, in which the rich are pleased to place their dead. Let marble say what it may to the living, the closed vault can make no appeal to us, by the voice of the splendour in which its dead are encased. Still, the corpse was the tenement of a soul—of an immortal existence ; and I never can think it right that the ruins of that tenement should be just put away, with no more ceremony in the act, and no more respect to the place than we should bestow on the putting away of the carcasses of mere animals, and on the places in which we put them away. I am told, the pauper burying-grounds are consecrated. I suppose, therefore, they may be ; this makes me wonder the more, that the priesthood, especially of the Catholic Church, do not with one voice protest against this leaving of these grounds in the state in which I saw several of them. I only saw one with a wall around it, and at the end of this one, some thrifty agriculturalist had got a crop growing, I think, of flax, on a spot to which the burials, and they had been above a thousand, had not yet reached. I am informed that when a Protestant dies the regular service is read. I know this to be the case in some Unions ; but this does not affect the question of the state of the “ burial-grounds.” They should be walled in, have proper gates ; there should be a large stone cross, or some religious emblem or other, indicative of the solemn purpose to which the ground has been set apart ; placed conspicuously in, or about it. It should be kept at least as clean as the other ground around it, instead of being as it sometimes is, full of the coarsest weeds, and the worst filth.

The consequence of the present neglect of these common decencies to the dead is, that the friends will try to get the bodies away from the workhouses how they can—on all manner of excuses ; carry them away in the most unheard-of—out of Ireland—methods ; one or two coffins tied on a donkey at night, are driven to some of the old church grounds, and so long as they are put beneath that, to the survivors, holy soil, they care not how shallow the grave ; hence horrors, quite unfit to relate.

As to the respect shewn to the bodies after they are buried, even in regular burying-grounds, I saw enough last year to cause me to communicate with one of the highest authorities on the subject. In this, my last tour, my friend and myself saw quantities of fresh coffin wood in the abbey ground of Ballina ; the explanation given of this by a man who lived close by, was, that the ground was so crowded ; that often to get a fresh body in, they had to “ knock the wood off” one that had been lately buried, so as the more conveniently to force the new coffin down into the hole.

A gentleman, in whom I can perfectly trust, lately told me that he himself saw, in a churchyard in the West of Ireland, a coffin of a person of the higher class exposed on the open ground ; he saw by the plate it was that of a Miss —— ; it was so damaged that he could see the body in it ; it had been dug up to make room for another corpse, and left on the ground. If it is true that want of respect for the dead is a sign of barbarism, of a truth, civilization is in rapid decay in the part of the world of which I am now writing.

It seems, after what I have just been relating, a trifling matter to talk of any features of this state of things, of so comparatively trivial importance, as those which concern the finance department of these Unions. With 4000, 6000, or 8000 inmates, the reader may easily believe, that to keep these masses in any decent pretension to existence; to clothe them, however sparingly ; is yet to open a very large market. Shut up Weymouth, or Poole, or Dorchester within walls ; put the population under lock and key, taking the responsibility of supplying, in any sort of way, the necessaries of existence ; do this by contract—and it is not difficult to believe, that to obtain such contracts will become a matter of severe interested competition. The contractor cares little where his money comes from—the Union—the Government—the Rate-in-Aid— all are alike to him; if the Union is bankrupt, and at his mercy, so much the better, they must accede to his terms ; if not, he can seize and sell.

However it may have come to pass, that hundreds may be slain by the abuse of the law's operation, at the hands of hard Shylocks in the shape of agents, (by the by, they would be long on many an estate before they could find *a pound of human flesh*), we have not yet arrived at that point of barbarism, which will suffer those to be deliberately starved in the houses, who have been starved into them. The contractors know this, and play their cards accordingly. I own I have misgivings about friendly seizures ; they seem to me something of the nature of aforesailing of all future contracts : a friendly office in which self is not forgotten. It is rather suspicious, that on contract days, the Board Room is crowded ; on admission days, just three Guardians, the legal *quorum* can alone—very often, be found to attend.

That very much of the grossest jobbing has been again and again exposed, is notorious ; like the old “ presentment to make roads,” which found money to build many a well known demesne wall, a good deal of neighbourly feeling is shewn in these matters ; indeed, where Government money is concerned, this sort of “ help me and I will help you” game, has been so long the practice, that it is a stereotyped virtue. I do not think it at all improbable, that some very considerable amount of property, sold under the Encumbered Estates Act, will be purchased out of fortunes, made by contractors for workhouse supplies. This will be one of the many curious social phenomena, the future historian will have to relate. A Cheshire farmer would, I think, be puzzled to make out, how a given number of cows, on very ordinary diet, have been known to supply the large quantity of milk, they have professed to do, for successive months, in some Unions. The cows cannot multiply their own quarts of produce ; however at the rate, I saw in one place, that it had been multiplied, I am not at all surprised, that so small a dairy, so soon enables its owner, to buy, in fee, pasture ground for double the number of animals.

Gleanings in the West of Ireland (1850)

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