

A Journey in Ireland 1847

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*Narrative
Of
A Recent Journey
Of
Six Weeks In Ireland,
In Connection with
The subject of supplying small seed
To some of
The remoter districts :
With
Current observations on the depressed
Circumstances of the people,
And The
Means presented for the Permanent improvement
Of their social condition.*

“ Nor will I give the slightest countenance to any consideration of Ireland as a thing separate and apart from ourselves.” — Old MS.

By

William Bennett.

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“ In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand ; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that.” — ECCLESIASTES xi. 6.

ADVERTISEMENT.

The following record of a simple individual effort is from memoranda and letters written principally to my sister, one of the working members of the Ladies' Irish Clothing Committee of London. It is not that an additional testimony is needed to the depth and extent of the visitation which has been permitted to desolate our sister-isle ; nor to their patient endurance of sufferings, which it is believed are unparalleled among any other people, at least in Europe and in modern times. It is simply, that in a protracted period of such severe and wide-spread calamity, the field is open to every variety and extent of labour, while the humblest contribution is kindly received. In the prosecution of the object, likewise, some spots have been visited which had not before obtained the same degree of personal investigation. Some account is also felt to be due to those who have lent their aid and sympathy, and to the general interest and inquiry which have now been awakened in the way of information on whatever

may concern the present state or more permanent welfare of Ireland ; and which is disposed to look with indulgence on every practical effort to mitigate one pang of her accumulated and varied sufferings, to counteract in any degree those causes which have left her peasantry without resource on the constant verge of famine, or to grapple with the evils resulting from her social condition.

Should these notes and observations, which the writer feels have been crudely put together under much difficulty, create any additional interest in the state of some of the remote and neglected corners of the sister-land—in the wide field there offered for humanity and usefulness—in the means of her permanent improvement—in the features of her attractive and magnificent scenery,—should they have any effect in abating one prejudice—in awakening any fresh sympathy, or in keeping up any warmth of feeling and affection, he will be amply repaid and his object answered. They have been written out rather as a debt ; and, the journey having extended from north to south, and twice from east to the extreme west of the island, over a distance of not less than 1,500 miles, much beyond what was at first anticipated, they have unconsciously swollen under his hands. Having often enjoyed her simple and social hospitality, it is felt as a tribute not less due in this her hour of deep tribulation and anguish, of humility and woe. The whole journey has been a painful, but now upon the retrospect, a most deeply interesting one. He has endeavoured to confine these Letters to such details only as are characteristic of something in the state and circumstances of the people, or otherwise closely connected with his subject : and it was never his intention to have written a book.

The proceeds will be devoted to Irish relief.

London, 1st of 7th mo. 1847.

LETTER I.

BALLINA

6th—13th of 3rd mo. 1847.

Apprehending there could not be a much greater service, or more beneficial appropriation of some small funds, than in the purchase of seeds for green crops, and the distribution of them in some of the most remote districts of Ireland, where they could not otherwise have been obtained by the poor people, I started on this mission, accompanied by my eldest son, on the 6th day of the 3rd month. I had previously conferred with the Relief Committee of the Society of Friends in London, in the hopes they would give the subject a wider range, by taking it on their own hands. They kindly gave me every personal encouragement ; but were too full-handed, and, as a Committee, did not feel at liberty to take it up any further. A Friend, too well known for his unbounded liberality and large contributions through almost every channel opened for Irish subscriptions to need being mentioned by name, on hearing of my object, immediately sent an authority which *doubled* the sum I had been able to appropriate to this purpose. Several other Friends kindly sent me smaller amounts. The Ladies' Irish Clothing Committee placed at my disposal £50, and three of their largest bales of clothing, besides a box of arrow-root and ginger, for distribution wherever I saw need. These unsolicited and substantial proofs of sympathy in the object were a great encouragement, but they added much to my feeling of responsibility in entering upon the undertaking.

Thus strengthened, we proceeded direct to Belfast ; spent two or three days in obtaining information, seeing parties, and attending the Quarterly Meeting for Ulster, held at Lisburn ;

and left for Dublin on the 10th. It was a heavy snow storm on the way to the train, but did not continue long. We heard the most distressing accounts of the state of the Lurgan poor-house, and of the mortality within its walls. Along the road there was a fair quantity of agricultural labour going forward ; and from all our inquiries, we have reason to believe there is a considerably greater breadth of land under corn, and likewise of the better qualities, in this part of the country, than usual ; and far more potatoes were likely to be set than had been anticipated. The Mourne mountains came out grand, and almost alpine, under their canopies of snow, which remained on all the higher ground. One could fancy the towns looked dull, and many shutters were observed up in passing through, but there was no marked appearance of distress along the public road.

I attended the sitting of the Central Relief Committee in Dublin on the 11th. Their organization and mode of transacting business appeared complete ; and it was said they had as extensive a correspondence to conduct as any mercantile counting-house in Dublin. Some Friends devote almost their whole time, giving up day and night to its concerns and management, and to the work of the sub-committees. The supply of seed, however, they thought a very questionable mode of rendering relief, and requiring great caution. An opinion was even expressed, that all which had been done for Ireland in the way of relief has only acted injuriously. The unwearied labours and devotedness of the Committee themselves bespeak another hope and sentiment. Some statements on the great saving in human food, amounting to a large per centage—a most important consideration in times like these—that would be effected by the use of “ whole meal” instead of fine flour, were made by a Friend, whose opinion likewise, on its greater wholesomeness for all classes, is entitled to no small weight, as a member of the medical profession.

My arrangements for the supplies of seed were made with the house of W. Drummond and Sons, Dawson-street, whose agricultural museum at Stirling I had the opportunity of visiting last summer with great interest. I have to acknowledge the readiness and liberality with which the resident partner entered into my views, and afforded every information and assistance, in the way of recommending the best and most suitable sorts, which their great local knowledge and extensive experience enabled them to do. They had facilities likewise for subsequent transmission to the different remote localities ; and they sent a copious supply of their simple printed directions for sowing and cultivating each particular sort. My selection consisted of the several varieties of turnip, principally Swedes, the white Belgium carrot, and mangel-wurzel. A small quantity of cabbage, in sorts, some flax, and some parsnip seed, were afterwards added. Two hundred weight, in proportions of each, were packed up to take with us, being as much as could very conveniently be carried by coach ; and a few agricultural pamphlets of their recommendation for distribution.

Thus equipped, we left Dublin on the 12th, by day-coach, for Boyle. The provision-boats on the canal near Mullingar were guarded by policemen on board, needlessly as it seemed to me. The first evidence of the extreme distress of the times we witnessed was in the spectacle of a corpse exposed in the public road, death having apparently been the work of starvation. Not far from this, in an angle of the way side, under a low temporary erection of straw, was a poor family down in fever. We met along the road multitudes of emigrants, mostly on foot, with their bundles on their backs, proceeding to Dublin. A few had more than they could thus carry ; and it was an affecting sight to observe numerous whole families, with their worldly ALL packed up on a donkey-cart, attempting to look gay and cheerful, as they cast a wistful glance at the rapidly passing by coach-passengers ; and thus abandoning a country which should have nourished them and their children. We met several hundreds in the course of this morning only, and the guard assured me it was the same every day, and thicker at the week's

commencement. Except in the increased beggary in the towns,—always great in Ireland,—wherever the coach stopped, and which was particularly importunate in Longford, there was no other unusual appearance of poverty along this line of road.

The land, however, was evidently much neglected, or lying wholly waste. The absence of pigs was also a remarkable feature to an eye accustomed to Ireland. The difference in the face of the country, and in the appearance of the peasantry and their habitations, from the influence of a resident benevolent and kind-hearted family, was particularly evident about Edgeworth's-town, and again in the neighbourhood of Lord Lorton's, before entering Boyle.

Our guard was one of those shrewd, intelligent, well-informed, clear-thinking men, not unfrequently met with in that and similar capacities in Ireland. A gentleman who got up on the coach, full of the one-sided views and oblique mode of reasoning so common among a certain class, had no chance with him in argument, on the subject of Ireland's grievances. He quoted Latin and Shakspeare with great fluency and appropriateness. Land is let in this part at £ 5, £ 7, £ 12, and £ 14 per acre, on the *conacre* plan. I afterwards heard of £ 20 per acre, but was not able to substantiate so high a rental. The word "Gombien," and prevalence of the "Gombien system," was new to me ; though I find it exposed and commented on in the able letters of the "Times Commissioner," No. 20. I cannot but think that it only requires to be fully brought out to the light, and generally known, to cease to exist altogether. The poor cottier having taken his plot of ground on *conacre*,—that is, for the present crop, and no further interest in it,—requires seed, and having no money to purchase it, he goes to a Gombien man. This man sells him potatoes, or oats, or whatever else it may be, on the *credit of the harvest*, taking his I. O. U. at 50, 70, and even 100 per cent profit, according to circumstances, on the current market value of the article. Under any accident or failure, or even in fair seasons, he is often unable to pay this exorbitant price when the time comes round. The Gombien man enters his process for the recovery on the I. O. U., and generally gets the full amount awarded, and often forces the sale of the crop, or anything else the poor fellow possesses, to *himself*, at his own price. Not only is seed-corn, but meal for his present subsistence, often purchased in this way. The poor fellow is hopelessly ground down by this system, which is sufficiently calculated to feed and encourage his natural recklessness and improvidence, and is the fruitful source of innumerable disputes and heart-burnings. I was happy to hear that one of the assistant barristers in the county of Roscommon had set himself resolutely against the system, refusing to award more than fair market price at the time of contract, with customary interest. The practice is prevalent all over the west, and particularly in Mayo.

The want of any direct and permanent interest in the improvement of the soil, and the non-requital of the actual cultivator, arising from the land being usually the only source from which several grades of holders have to extract all the profit they can,—falling therefore with accumulated weight on the last or actual occupier,—is one of the sorest evils of Ireland. While large tracts of land have been let on low terms, and underlet, or leases sold for lives renewable *for ever*—so that the great proprietor has little interest in, or power over them,—they get divided and subdivided, each at an increased rental, until the small holder pays those enormous rates we hear of under the *conacre* system. The average rent in Ireland at which arable land is let, is probably more than double the same in England ; so that what with *conacre* rent for his land, and Gombien price for his seed, and ditto for his food, while he tills the land, it is not surprising that the Irish peasant has been kept at the lowest verge of pauperism ; for all inducement to industry, beyond the barest living, is in fact withdrawn. A poor man got up on the coach who held 1½ rood taken from the bare bog, for which he paid 30*s.* at first ; built himself a cabin, and was now raised to 35*s.* ; and did not doubt he would have

his rent again raised, or be turned out, if he *improved it any more*. His immediate landlord paid 7s, 6d. per acre *under lease*.

From Boyle we took a car across the country to Ballina. The shores of Lough Garra are wild and dreary, and the whole district increasingly so on approaching the small town of Tobercurry. We here first encountered the public works so called. These consisted in making new roads and altering old ones, in many cases worse than useless, and obviously undertaken without judgment, for the mere sake of employment. Independently of the moral effects of useless labour,—which it is impossible should be otherwise than listlessly pursued,—it was melancholy and degrading in the extreme to see the women and girls withdrawn from all that was decent and proper, and labouring in mixed gangs on the public roads. Not only in digging with the spade, and with the pick, but in carrying loads of earth and turves on their backs, and wheeling barrows like men, and breaking stones, are they employed. My heart often sunk within me at the obviously deteriorating effects of such occupation, while the poor neglected children were crouched in groups around the bits of lighted turves in the various sheltered corners along the line. I need scarcely say that the soil was totally neglected here. I conversed with several of the men, and the overseers in many of the gangs,—the car with great difficulty getting along, and having to go walking pace over miles of alterations. The pay was 6d. and 7d. per day to the girls and women, and 8d. to the men ; which being the lowest we met with anywhere, though never exceeding 10d., I shall not have occasion to mention again.

Thrashing out corn in the *middle of the public road* where every wheel must necessarily pass, was a novelty to me, and clearly indicated the wasteful, as well as backward state of agricultural ideas, and the want of farm buildings.

The country became very dreary, and but thinly inhabited, soon after leaving Tobercurry. It is a cross road but little frequented, winding up among wild hills until it reaches the solitary elevation of Lough Talt,—bounded by the bleak repulsive heights of Slievh Gamph—the northern shore of which it skirts, and then descends into the plain, extending to the shores of Lough Conn, beyond which the eye rested on the broad shoulders of the Nephin range.

At Ballina our first enquiry was for our dear friend Wm. Forster, and his companions, Joseph C. Harvey and Abraham Taw, whom, to our great pleasure, we found had not left the town. W. F. had been engaged a day or two at Killala and Ballycastle, and had only just returned. We lost no time in communicating with them.

LETTER II.

BALLINA—BELMULLET.

14th—16th of 3rd mo. 1847.

This was First-day morning. At 11 o'clock we went to sit down with Wm. Forster and his companions at their hotel. It was probably the first time a Friends' Meeting had been held in this place ; and the circumstances were such as to awaken many deep reflections. I think I was never more sensible of the value and privilege of our simple views, in the belief that acceptable worship may be performed, where “two or three” are gathered together in silence and retirement, without dependence upon place, or building, or appointed ministration.

We returned to spend part of the afternoon and evening with them. It did not require to be long in their company to become conscious of the great personal labour our dear friend had undertaken which indeed he could hardly have got through but for very able assistance. Wm. Forster's mind seems wholly occupied with his mission ; which only those who are able to

enter into a little of its working and details can have any idea of the weight and burden of. Besides the journeyings and various labours of the day, the filling up needful arrangements, and the necessary writing and correspondence usually occupied them far into the night. W. F. introduced me to a gentleman residing in one of the extreme corners of Erris, of whom I shall have occasion to say more hereafter.

Next morning, under the guidance of Abraham Taw, we proceeded to visit a widow lady about four miles off, on the old Killala road, who had called upon them, and whose case had much interested them, though not coming exactly within their province. We found a small, but neatly-furnished cottage, with signs of having been used to comfort and even elegance. She held about forty acres, on three lives and thirty-one years, and had come to the property, I think, since the decease of her husband. Her tenants had all deserted her in arrear ; and the land was consequently lying waste and neglected, being all thrown upon her own hands, without the means of cropping it, and no rental whatever. She had little doubt of being able to obtain labour if she had seed. Here then commenced our first distribution. We left with her sufficient to cover about one-fourth of her land, if carefully and economically laboured, with the printed directions for the culture of green crops, as everywhere else where they were not much known. In Ballina we found a Protestant clergyman who was doing all he could to influence the poor people not to neglect their land, and had commenced employing eight whom he knew in preparing their respective plots, in the hope of procuring them seed. We had much pleasure in giving him a supply of such as we had ; in this, as well as in every future case, taking an acknowledgment of the purpose for which they were given, and requesting a return of results, under the several heads.

Ballina has more the appearance of one of the new-born American cities than perhaps any other place in Ireland. There is a fine river, broad quays, large newly-built piles of warehouses, and a country around it still in the rough. It had a rising trade, and was rapidly increasing, until checked by the present calamity. In the afternoon we took the mail-car to Belmullet, in Erris.

It is an old saying concerning this remote district of Ireland, that “ he who goes into Erris once will certainly go there again.” I think the saying may have originated in the exceeding rarity of any one going there *at all* ; for until within comparatively these very few years there was no road whatever into any part of this “ ultima thule” of the British isles. I know not how this may be, but certain it is that very few have ever visited any portion of the far west of Ireland without having had their admiration drawn forth by its wild and noble scenery, and their best affections awakened for its simple and kind-hearted peasantry, not unmingled with the deepest sympathy. I have sat round the basket of potatoes, in the wilds of Connemara, or among the mountains of Donegal, on some old log or broken stool, in friendly equality with the whole family,—pig and cow inclusive, while they had them,—without guide or protection of any kind ; and partaken of their simple but hearty hospitality, with the greatest unwillingness on their part to accept of the smallest return ; and on leaving, often attended, to be shown the way further “ for the love of your honour’s company.” I have watched the progress of the present calamity, too well knowing what the loss of the potato must be to them. The truly pristine state of the country may be best illustrated by the following anecdote, which we heard as a fact, with names, and not a witty invention.

The carriage of the engineer who constructed the present post road was the first wheeled vehicle that had ever been seen in the Mullet. How it got there was a mystery to the good people ; but it was not accomplished without taking sufficient planks with them, which were placed down before the carriage, step by step, for it to be dragged over the bogs. At the

further extremity of the Mullet, he was not a little surprised and delighted to find a most respectable lady and her daughters living in the best style circumstances around them enabled. The young ladies were charmed beyond measure with the novelty of the carriage, amusing themselves greatly by running up and down, in and out, shutting each other in, and such like gambols. They were acquainted with six different languages, could paint, sing, and play on the piano, but had never seen *a tree, a bridge, a flight of stairs, or a wheeled carriage of any kind*. Their accomplishments were accounted for by the circumstance of a foreign vessel having been driven in distress some years before, and landed a young artist, who acted as tutor, with a piano, and other auxiliaries.

The afternoon proved stormy and wet. The driving mist and rain, really painful with the violence, of the blast, front which there is no protection in these open cars, hid the view of Lough Conn and the bases of the great Nephin mountains ; but their summits were occasionally seen looming above the clouds. We found in Father——, Roman Catholic priest in Belmullet, our only fellow-passenger, a gentleman who gave us much local information concerning this capital, that is, the *only town* in the wide barony of Enis.

The poor little town of Crossmolina exhibited great wretchedness. Beyond this there is not a tree to be seen. The country becomes one dreary waste of bog and moorland, here called “mountain,” while the more elevated ground is designated “hill.” The barony of Erris is entered at Corragh bridge, just where the Owenmore, coming down from the northern hills, crosses the road, and makes a sharp turn to the left, to avoid Nephin Beg, and the still nearer and loftier Slievh Cor. The deep winding ravine through which the Owenmore now forces its way, and accompanies the road to Bangore, is wild and romantic in many parts. This river was said to be one of the most attractive in Ireland for the angler. Lough Carrowmore, which drains into it further on, but two miles from the sea, is also “full of the finest fish,” including abundance of salmon, uncaught for want of skill and the requisite appliances. We lost the beautiful views of Broadhaven on the one hand, and Blacksod Bay on the other, with the mountains of Achill, and the many islands and promontories indenting the ocean, for want of daylight.

The whole of this wild country is full of traditions of old heroes and giants, and of the doings of the fairies, and of the “good people” or “gentry,” so called ; and certainly no tract or region could seem to be better adapted to a belief in their freaks and vagaries. A sensible man who rode some way by the side of the car, one of the small independent farmers, who was wishing to sell what he had, and be off to America while he had anything left, told us of a skeleton he had himself found, fourteen Irish feet in length, while occupying a part of the island of Inniskea, off the coast.

The car was hailed by a voice, somewhat startling at that time of night and place, calling me by name, which proved to be that of a man-servant, kindly sent on the look out by our friend residing within about a mile of the town, and whose thoughtful hospitality, with even this little shortening of the journey, we were truly glad to make certain of, in exchange for the chance and unknown accommodation that might be met with in the town.

Our friend was the rector of Kilcommon, with whom we had had much correspondence on the state of this district, from the first of the calamity assuming its more dreadful forms. The parish under his charge is 22 miles from north to south, 16½ from east to west, containing 146,000 Irish acres, and is therefore about the size of the county of Middlesex. It contains (*contained*) 20,000 inhabitants, of whom about 450 are Protestants. He had estimated the deaths in his vicinity from absolute starvation, up to this period, at *upwards of one thousand*.

The morning burst upon us in great beauty. Immediately beneath my window lay the sparkling estuary of Broadhaven, stretching right and left, like a great American river. On a sand-bank left by the tide, near the centre, three or four seals were disporting themselves. The contemplation of the beauty of Nature was, however, soon broken into, by evidences that we were indeed in the land of woe. From early daylight the poor people began to crowd the door. During breakfast they thronged the windows, which presented framed pictures of living groups of want and wretchedness, almost beyond endurance to behold ; yet to keep them off the family had long found impossible. One of the valuable bales of clothing from the Ladies' Committee of London had just been received ; and the first thing after breakfast we had the pleasure of seeing it partly distributed by the minister's wife and sister. The difficulty of selection was very great, where the supply, though so good and serviceable, was but a drop in the rolling ocean of destitution and nakedness ; and of course there was a reserve made for known cases at home. We next visited the soup-kitchen, which they had set up themselves, on a small scale at first, in one of their own out-houses, and now extended by assistance received from Wm. Forster and Friends. The lady had also recently instituted employment for thirty poor women in spinning, and the manufacture of a coarse flannel, for which she pays them 2*s.* per week, and proposes to sell the flannel at as cheap a rate as she can to keep the employment going, or according to the support she may obtain. We saw them at work ; and she spoke of the improved appearances of the poor women already, their cheerfulness and gratitude for the help and shelter thus afforded, and the circumstance of being employed.

We now proceeded to Belmullet, kindly accompanied by the minister. The miserably clad female forms we met along the public road were disgraceful,—disgusting. This is probably the newest town in Ireland, having just attained its majority of twenty-one years, within which time it has sprung up entirely. Its site is most advantageous, precisely on the narrowest part of the isthmus connecting the Mullet with the main land, here not above three quarters of a mile over. Through this isthmus it is intended to cut a canal thus giving the town the advantage of the transit, as well as the two sea-boards. Broadhaven on the north is navigable for small craft only. Blacksod Bay, on which the town more properly stands, is capable of sheltering any navy in the world. The town is regularly built, with a centre, and streets radiating in each direction towards the sea ; and possesses a neat quay, an hotel, a school-house, stores and shops supplying most useful articles, and several places of worship.

Our first visit was to the station for curing fish, lately established by Government, for the encouragement of the fisheries, and as a model for private enterprise,—having a parcel of fishing-tackle, from a Friend of Dublin, for the superintendent. We found this gentleman—sent for from Scotland for the purpose—intelligent and obliging, and ready with any information required. The object is to open a market for the poor fishermen, by purchasing their fish, which the officer is prepared to do, in any quantities brought in, at a fair price, but not to interfere with any other channel, if they can find sale elsewhere. The fish is cured and sent to distant markets for sale. He spoke of the establishment having been quite successful, even thus far, in point of profit ; and that Government were most desirous of exciting private enterprise in this branch of industry, for which they would lend every practical assistance. In the curing-vats we saw magnificent specimens of ling and haddock. Cod and turbot abound on the banks a little further out ; an improvement in the craft, and the application of skill and a little capital, being all that is requisite to open an abundant field of industry, and insure an ample return.

The school was attended by about ninety children,—two-thirds Catholics. The priest does not object to the simple Scriptures being used. It is supported principally by the aid of the rector. A description of the scenes within the Mullet I must defer to the next letter.

LETTER III.

BELMULLET.

16th of 3rd mo. 1847.

We now proceeded to visit the district beyond the town within the Mullet. The cabins cluster the road-sides, and are scattered over the face of the bog, in the usual Irish manner, where the country is thickly inhabited. Several were pointed out as “ freeholders ;” that is, such as had come wandering over the land, and “ squatted” down on any unoccupied spot, owning no fealty, and paying no rent. Their neighbours had probably built them the cabin in four and twenty hours ; expecting the same service in turn for themselves should occasion require it, —which a common necessity renders these poor people always willing to do for each other. Whatever little bit of ground they may reclaim around the cabin is necessarily done as much by stealth as possible ; and the appearance of neglect and wretchedness is naturally carried out to the utmost ; for should there be any visible improvement, down comes the landlord or his agent, with a demand for rent. The moral effect of such a state of things is obvious to the least reflecting mind. How far does its existence lie at the very basis of the low social condition of the people ? I mention it here not as peculiar to this district. It is an element pervading large portions of Ireland ; entering into the very growth of a population ever—by habit and education—on the verge of pauperism, and of whom the landlord, rarely coming near the property, knows little, and unfortunately in many instances cares less. The superior landlord, —the nominal owner of a wide domain,—has often very little interest, and no direct influence ; or from incumbrances and limitations,—perhaps ever since it came into his possession,—he finds it a disagreeable and vexatious property, and dislikes it ; or is really poor, and yet cannot relieve himself by reason of these difficulties. Here is society dislocated at *both ends*. Is Irish disorganization anything surprising ? The natural influences and expenditure of property in creating artificial wants and means of livelihood, withdrawn from their own sources, and the people thrown back entirely upon the soil, with a bounty upon the veriest thriftlessness and least remove above the lowest animal conditions of life ! Under such a state of things,—not the accident of to-day, but the steady and regular growth of years and a system,—a population is nurtured, treading constantly on the borders of starvation ; checked only by a crisis like the present, to which it inevitably leads, and almost verifying the worst Malthusian doctrines.

Many of the cabins were holes in the bog, covered with a layer of turves, and not distinguishable as human habitations from the surrounding moor, until close down upon them. The bare sod was about the best material of which any of them were constructed. Doorways, not doors, were usually provided at both sides of the bettermost—back and front—to take advantage of the way of the wind. Windows and chimneys, I think, had no existence. A second apartment or division of any kind within was exceedingly rare. Furniture, properly so called, I believe may be stated at *nil*. I would not speak with certainty, and wish not to with exaggeration,—we were too much overcome to note specifically ; but as far as memory serves, we saw neither bed, chair, nor table, at all. A chest, a few iron or earthen vessels, a stool or two, the dirty rags and night-coverings, formed about the sum total of the best furnished. Outside many were all but unapproachable, from the mud and filth surrounding them ; the same inside, or worse if possible, from the added closeness, darkness, and smoke. We spent the whole morning in visiting these hovels indiscriminately, or swayed by the representations and entreaties of the dense retinue of wretched creatures, continually augmenting, which gathered round, and followed us from place to place,—avoiding only such as were known to be badly infected with fever, which was sometimes sufficiently perceptible from without, by the almost intolerable stench. And now language utterly fails me in attempting to depict the state of the

wretched inmates. I would not willingly add another to the harrowing details that have been told ; but still they are the facts of actual experience, for the knowledge of which we stand accountable. I have certainly sought out one of the most remote and des-titute corners ; but still it is within the bounds of our Christian land, under our Christian Government, and entailing upon us—both as individuals and as members of a human com-munity—a Christian responsibility from which no one of us can escape. My hand trembles while I write. The scenes of human misery and degradation we witnessed still haunt my im-agination, with the vividness and power of some horrid and tyrannous delusion, rather than the features of a sober reality. We entered a cabin. Stretched in one dark corner, scarcely visible, from the smoke and rags that covered them, were three children huddled together, lying there *because they were too weak to rise*, pale and ghastly, their little limbs—on re-moving a portion of the filthy covering—perfectly emaciated, eyes sunk, voice gone, and evidently in the last stage of actual starvation. Crouched over the turf embers was another form, wild and all but naked, scarcely human in appearance. It stirred not, nor noticed us. On some straw, soddened upon the ground, moaning piteously, was a shrivelled old woman, im-ploring us to give her something,—baring her limbs partly, to show how the skin hung loose from the bones, as soon as she attracted our attention. Above her, on something like a ledge, was a young woman, with sunken cheeks,—a mother I have no doubt,—who scarcely raised her eyes in answer to our enquiries, but pressed her hand upon her forehead, with a look of unutterable anguish and despair. Many cases were widows, whose husbands had recently been taken off by the fever, and thus their only pittance, obtained from the public works, entirely cut off. In many the husbands or sons were prostrate, under that horrid disease,—the results of long-continued famine and low living,—in which first the limbs, and then the body, swell most frightfully, and finally burst. We entered upwards of fifty of these tenements. The scene was one and invariable, differing in little but the number of the sufferers, or of the groups, occupying the several comers within. The whole number was often not to be dis-tinguished, until—the eye having adapted itself to the darkness—they were pointed out, or were *heard*, or some filthy bundle of rags and straw *was perceived to move*. Perhaps the poor children presented the most piteous and heart-rending spectacle. Many were too weak to stand, their little limbs attenuated,—except where the frightful swellings had taken the place of previous emaciation,—beyond the *power of volition when moved*. Every infantile expres-sion entirely departed ; and in some, reason and intelligence had evidently flown. Many were *remnants of families* crowded together in one cabin ; orphaned little relatives taken in by the equally destitute, and even strangers, for these poor people are kind to one another to the end. In one cabin was a sister, just dying, lying by the side of her little brother, just dead. I have worse than this to relate, but it is useless to multiply details, and they are, in fact, unfit. They did but rarely complain. When inquired of, what was the matter, the answer was alike in all,—“ *Tha shein ukrosh* ”—*indeed the hunger*. We truly learned the terrible meaning of that sad word “ *ukrosh*,” There were many touching incidents. We should have gone on, but the pitiless storm had now arisen, beating us back with a force and violence against which it was difficult to stand ; and a cutting rain, that drove us for shelter beneath a bank, fell on the crowd of poor creatures who continued to follow us unmitigatedly. My friend the clergyman had distributed the tickets for meal to the extent he thought prudent ; and he assured me wherever we went it would be a repetition of the same all over the country, *and even worse* in the far off mountain districts, as this was near the town, where some relief could reach. It was my full impression that *one-fourth* of those we saw were in a *dying state*, beyond the reach of any relief that could now be afforded ; and many more would follow. The lines of this day can never be effaced from my memory. These were our fellow-creatures,—children of the same Parent,—born with our common feelings and affections,—with an equal right to live as any one of us,—with the same purposes of existence,—the same spiritual and immortal natures,—the same work to be done,—the same judgment-seat to be summoned to,—and the same eternal goal.

In returning through the town we called on Alfred Bishop, the Government commissariat, whose affecting letter, describing similar scenes to those we had witnessed, is published in the Report of the Belfast Ladies' Relief Association for Connaught. I had much conversation with him, and he afterwards came to spend the evening with us at the minister's. This gentleman had been in all parts of the world. He had been among the native tribes of the most uncivilized countries. In answer to my enquiries, as to whether he had ever seen a people living in so low and degraded a condition as the poor Irish had evidently long been suffered to remain, he replied, "No, not even the Ashantees or wild Indians." He was much grieved that the stores recently landed by the Society of Friends, the only food—among considerable supplies that had now been poured into the town—for gratuitous relief, should for one moment be lying unavailable, as was stated to be the case at that time, for want of powers, or any one in authority to distribute, while this frightful distress was raging around them.

Several of the gentlemen I much wished to see were absent just then. A disgraceful action, in which he was cast in heavy damages, was going on at the Castlebar Assizes, against one of the great landed proprietors, which had required the presence of most in the neighbourhood. This rather shortened my stay in the Mullet. It is hardly necessary to say that the soil—some, perhaps, as fine as any in the country for the growth of green crops—was lying wholly neglected; and nothing could more affectingly illustrate the deep-sunk poverty of the peasantry than the total absence of live stock, aforesaid so teeming in the cottages. One solitary pig, a single ass, no cow, one pony, and a few fowls, were all we saw in the whole morning's round. The few dogs were poor and piteous, and had ceased to bark. We left with the minister, and the neighbouring agent of the principal proprietor, a considerable quantity of carrot, turnip, and mangel-wurzel seed, for the benefit of such of the poor as they could influence and control; and £10 with the minister's wife, from the Ladies' Committee of London, for the promotion of her adult school of female industry, whose number, we soon afterwards heard, was increased to forty.

Before closing this letter, I should like to mention one other cause of the increase of a pauper population, in those districts where they are mostly Roman Catholics, as is the case to an overwhelming majority in the west. It is the encouragement of early marriages by the Catholic priests. Being the principal source from which they derive their income, this is almost inevitable under the present constitution of things. It is well known there is scarcely a greater sin than depriving the priest of his dues. We are aware this is not peculiar to the Catholic Church, but it is more a personal thing, where there is no State maintenance. While these early connexions are a source of great evil, as promotive of reckless and improvident habits, the fee attached to the solemnization of the rite, which the most indigent always manage to scrape together for the purchase of the blessing on these occasions, operates greatly on the vigilance of the priests on the side of morality. The Protestant clergy discourage early marriages.

Narrative of a recent journey ... in Ireland, in connexion with the subject of supplying small ... (1847)

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