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# SUGGESTIONS

FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF

## THE IRISH POOR LAW.

BY

WILLIAM FIELD.



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## THE POOR-LAWS.

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*“ Things will not bear to be badly governed.”*

THIS is not a political question, but a social problem, to be economically worked out by governing material relief under certain reproductive conditions, calculated to induce good habits and moral effect. If our poor possessed votes, social influence, literary ability, or representative power, the law would, ere this, have been assimilated with that of England and Scotland, and the present exceptional Irish system could not have endured. Yet poverty is all enduring. Our Lord was born in a stable, because there was no room for Him in the inns at Bethlehem. He said “The poor ye will have with you always,” and nineteen centuries after, we have no room for them save by isolation. Circumstances imperatively demand that public attention should be at once focussed to the amendment of clumsy legislation, which allows injudicious management through inefficient, costly machinery. To command attention and thereby ensure amendment, this state of things must be calmly examined in a purely commercial manner—debited with costs, and credited with results. Sentiment has no share in our legislation, which is more or less guided by class interests rather than national wants, and the requirements of the poor have been overlooked alike by all parties.

Nowhere in Christendom outside the United Kingdom is poverty accentuated by law, emphasised by usage, and boycotted socially. As compared with the Continent, our unfavourable climatic influences, and the limited number of popular resorts, prevent the mixing of different grades in extern places. The scarcity of museums and galleries, the internal arrangements of every house of worship, draconian society laws, and domestic prejudice, preclude intern familiarity. Further, difference in calling,

occupation, profession, or religion, all tend to raise up artificial barriers between classes. This explains the absence of the *bonhomie* and mutual kindness which is exercised in a practical, helpful manner all over Europe, thus obviating the need which here exists of providing maintenance for the destitute by costly legal means, rather than by inexpensive voluntary effort. At home, professing Christians have been heard to denounce all ill-clad people as "beggars," and to declare that separate hours of business should be allotted for their dealings, so that snobbish respectability should not come in contact with "God's poor." What wonder, therefore, that paupers are put away out of sight and unremembered. This invisibility does not solve the problem, but their removal rather increases the difficulty of solution. Apparently it is the outcome of vaunted civilisation to produce poverty in certain proportions, according as the neglected factors of want and destitution are carelessly allowed to exist and quietly fructify. If this dry rot in our social system continues to spread, without a little more remedial care from "the powers that be," unpleasant consequences will probably follow.

Let us examine the existing organisation originated by government, after the suppression of the monasteries in England (see Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*), transplanted to Ireland with considerable pruning, supported by taxation, and called the Irish Poor-law. As it now stands, the Irish law appears to read that guardians cannot be compelled to give outdoor relief unless the workhouse is full, but they have discretionary power in the following cases; (1) The aged and infirm; (2) When the earner is disabled through accident or illness; (3) Widows with two legitimate children. Remembering that some boards have built increased accommodation even within the past year, that many do not allow the exercise of any discretionary power, it may be taken for granted that the general spirit and practice is to discourage and disallow outdoor relief; that is to say, all persons in distress requiring legal aid, must go into the workhouse, although English and Scotch guardians enjoy full privilege

of outdoor relief. The majority of Irish Poor-law guardians (who should be philanthropic, independent, humane gentlemen), are, strange to say, content to occupy an inferior status, accepting the shadow for the substance; though some boards have strongly protested against such unequal treatment.

Following the latest noble English demonstrator of arithmetical liberalism (as applied to Irish plebeian necessity) dealing with flesh, blood, and feeling, in a mercenary method, let the present Indoor System be analysed. Let a Debit and Credit be drawn, as per experience, audit the items, and see how it "pays."

*Dr.*

- (1) Defective in principle, legally, morally, financially.
- (2) Ineffective in working.
- (3) Disastrous in results.
- (4) Costly in administration.

*Cr.*

Pauperism imprisoned to a certain extent.

*(1) Rigid Indoor System Defective in Principle.*

If the principle be not sound, the practice cannot possibly be true. If the outdoor principle is unsound, why is it granted in England and Scotland, where it is not so badly required, and yet denied here, where sometimes it is an absolute necessity? At all times, in certain cases, its judicious exercise would save the rates and prevent contagious example. Why this difference in the law? When residence is strictly enforced, practically carrying out the legal theory, the workhouse becomes a prison where the inmates are compelled to stay by reason of hunger.

"Laws are a contract entered into between man and man; it is imperative that they should be founded on the strict principles of equity and justice, affording equal protection to all, and acknowledging no difference in their application." Who represented the poor in the passing of those enactments governing their condition?

*Limitation of Relief, sec. 9.*

“And be it enacted, that no relief given under the authority of this Act shall be given from the poor-rates of any union to any person not being within the union when so relieved.”

Does the mere fact of requiring temporary relief justify imprisonment? Is the breaking up of home and severing of domestic ties a moral obligation accompanying the want of assistance for a short time?

Has nineteenth century English legal acumen no better resource than *confinement* for Irish distress; and a side-wind declaration that poverty is a crime, entailing punishment? Why is this doubtful equity applicable only to Ireland (for confinement is punishment)? Does public opinion consider it wise that discontent, disaffection, and disloyalty should be manufactured by legal machinery through the imposition of an almost impossible condition (*vide* “Reports of interviews between unemployed labourers and rural boards of guardians.”) Is it politic or reasonable that a certain percentage of inhabitants should be compelled to stay amongst demoralising influences, if a few weeks’ sustenance is asked, because outdoor relief is open to abuse under existing loose management, through want of personal local supervision, or or that the rates would rise. If bread-winners are forced into the workhouse, when employment opens they probably may lose the chance of recovering work. Further, they are rather likely to become a lasting source of expense. So that Poor-law janitors, by their hard and fast rule of denying outdoor relief, are foolishly guilty of financial suicide, by their “penny wise and pound foolish” practice.

Except in cases of sickness, incurable disease, broken down old age, or permanent, unrelievable distress, through incapacity for work, the strict indoor doctrine is not sustainable by reason, nor proven by practice; it is, eventually, more costly than outdoor relief honestly administered; therefore, on all grounds, the principle is defective, legally, morally, and financially.

(2) *Rigorous Indoor Practice Ineffective in working.*

Regarding effectiveness, it must be remembered that (partly owing to hostile legislation, and mainly to the want of development and native support) our country is deplorably deficient in manufactures, or any permanent indoor labour. Consequently, during any period of severe frost and snow, or continuous heavy rain, when outside employment is generally stopped, widespread and deep distress must ensue, even amongst the sober, hardworking, labouring classes. Yet no effort whatever is made by the very expensive poor-law legal officialism to relieve temporary, though dire want, save *the offer of going into the workhouse*. Thus the onus of immediately meeting the emergency is thrown altogether on charitable societies, local relief funds, and private generosity. The stringent condition of residence renders the law practically inoperative at the time it is most required, unless to sick applicants not able to bear removal. Even under pressure, boards are exceedingly slow to grant outdoor relief, and then it is but grudgingly doled out, and the names of the recipients are afterwards advertised by posters in every district. In the frequent event of refusal, the decent poor (naturally objecting to leave their cabins and destroy family ties for the sake of a little sustenance) are subject to forced imprisonment and stern bumbledom. They prefer, almost, to starve in freedom, than keep body and soul together on such conditions.

Boards are responsible for the lives of the poor, yet thousands would have died from legal starvation during the past severe, snowy, frosty, winters (because the workhouses could not contain half the people in extreme need) only that the wonderfully active charity of co-operative Christianity saved such a disgraceful calamity. It is doubtful if the needy would go to fill the unions, and even then it is more doubtful if certain boards would grant outdoor relief. Amidst great general distress, an application for temporary outdoor relief was made a short time since to one of the most "gentlemanly Boards of Guardians," governing, perhaps, the largest county Union in Ireland. Although undeniable

evidence was submitted, yet by manipulation the publication of the appeal was suppressed, no explanation was vouchsafed, save a short, curt acknowledgment, impressed with "the insolence of office." This was the treatment accorded by the guardians of the poor to an honorary secretary representing gentlemen actively and successfully engaged for years past in saving their rates.

It is not expected that the Poor-law could or should meet every case of distress; this would be manifestly impossible; but, it might at least endeavour to keep abreast of its legal work, and prevent occurrences which really advertise its general ineffectiveness.

### (3.) *Restrictive Indoor System Disastrous in Results.*

The system is disastrous, by *creating, increasing, and perpetuating* pauperism. It creates paupers thus:—when decent people are forced by temporary want into the Union and obliged to remain there some time (because home is deserted and furniture gone, clothes and bedding pawned, and family scattered), they are very often drawn into idleness, and educated into bad habits individually, by old, hardened residents; then they despair to regain their old position (for the poor-house is looked on as a degradation), and they continue permanent paupers. Some of their connexions are driven in under similar circumstances, and they also remain. Mark! when persons get the habit of going into the workhouse, they are never after so good for constant labour; be they men or women, old, young, or middle-aged, the moral influence is unhealthy, and the companionship is dangerous. Immorality and vagabondism are hard to classify, still harder to restrain. Abuses can, do, and will occur inside workhouses, which cannot be recommended as the dwellings of law, order, and morality; observe the many enquiries by the Local Government Board, whose inspectors are generally capable. Suggestions of radical reform must come from outsiders, and be enforced by public opinion in a constitutional though energetic manner. The Latins said, "There is nothing so great as the collection of the minute." In immense workhouses, the plan of crowding increases the difficulties of proper classification, and causes an absence of regular work.

Thus loose habits are engendered, and hopelessness as to worldly future also are the perceptible natural effects of these evident systematic causes. In this way, by the very means adopted, and the institutions intended to relieve it, is pauperism created, increased, and perpetuated.

Many people advocate the abolition of workhouses ; but it is better to utilise, reorganise, reconstruct, and economise the existing system, until it is established on an entirely new basis. This will not be easy of accomplishment, as an opposing officialism has a direct monetary interest in its continuance, although the system is most disastrous in its results.

#### (4) *Costly Administration.*

The Guardians are honorary, the officials are numerous and well paid, and the buildings large and expensive. Foreigners quote—“There’s something rotten in the state of Denmark,” remarking that our constitution seems to produce poverty and lunacy ; because, either the immense ugly union or the big regular asylum is generally the leading architectural feature in county towns ; instead of the fine church or cathedral, the handsome maison de ville, and the pleasurable, instructive galleries to be found in other countries. Of costly administration it is not easy to speak, for although the names of poor people receiving relief are printed, posted, and advertised for universal curiosity and criticism, yet the ratepayers do not receive any report for private satisfaction. Information can be obtained by application ; as the accounts are passed by a government auditor. *On dit*, every pauper costs £45 per annum, or thereabouts, according to district ; but the mixing up of cattle compensation in the return makes it puzzling. The two rates should be distinct and altogether separate, and the “vaccination” and “registration” should not be included. Figures are purposely omitted, as they are never voluntarily furnished, either by a single union to its ratepayers, or as a total by the executive. Consequently, it is useless commenting further than to say that the rates are in general very heavy, and ratepayers believe that by far the greater proportion goes to pay expenses.

Returns should, and will, no doubt, be demanded in Parliament, so that the average cost of every pauper in Ireland could be ascertained—giving details and particulars as to the cost of officialism; and approximating rent, and all necessary expenditure; showing the actual sum spent on clothes, provisions, stimulants, and medicine; so that it may be seen what per-centage of the levied rates finds its way really to relieve the pauper, in the shape of lodging, clothing, and food; fixing the precise amount paid away for other purposes, identifying items, and each officer's salary. When this tabulated statement is furnished, it will probably be found that the Irish Poor-law is tremendously costly in its exceptional and extraordinary administration.

*Cr.—Pauperism imprisoned to a certain extent.*

As to Credit. There appears to be little to show, except the above. Still, some allowance must be made for guardians, most of whom faithfully endeavour to work even with tied hands as the unpaid acting deputies of an executive indisposed to come up to the level of national wants, as proved by the last government circular on this subject.

*Remedies.*

It is foolish to condemn without suggesting a remedy. Ours shall be contained in five suggestions.

1st.—The Government should immediately grant to the Irish authorities equal laws to those of England and Scotland; as well as similar privileges to the guardians.

2nd.—(a) Ex-officio guardians should be abolished. (b) The voting for Poor-law guardians should be by ballot, under English and Scotch regulations and qualifications as to election. (c) None but active, philanthropic men, recognising responsibility, should be chosen. Very many now accept honorary office simply from ambitious motives. Men are now returned as rate protectors, having little sympathy with the poor, and utilising the present law to save their pockets in the time of emergency—throwing the burden of relief on those not so well able to bear it, and without considering the misery thereby

caused, or the danger to the community at large, either of which contingencies is more important than mere personal monetary consideration.

3rd.—Guardians should be elected to administer the Poor Law only. Cattle compensation, vaccination, and registration of births, deaths, and marriages, should be eliminated from their duties.

4th.—*Indoor Management*—(a) The existing unions should be utilised as infirmaries, hospitals, and workshops; (b) as houses of Refuge, on the French system for the aged and those prematurely broken down; (c) as real Workhouses, for the able-bodied men and women without a home. The men could be made to work on the land (which could be provided), stone-breaking, or in workshops. The women could knit, make mats, sew, and make up the paupers' clothes, or make baskets. The children could be taught trades. Every one able to work should be made to labour at something or other. Some recreation should be allowed according to diligence. Lazy people unwilling to work should be under-fed or confined. Moral destitution should be classified and educated into correct views, if possible; if not, strong measures should be adopted with the ne'er-do-weels. Training schools should be established for girls between fifteen and nineteen years of age; and they should not be allowed to mix with the adult women, more particularly in the larger workhouses. It has been said that some unions have paid a great proportion of their expenses by the labour of their inmates. (d) Classification to be carried out as far as possible. Immoral females, or known vicious characters, should be kept to themselves. Every one in the world earns a character of some sort, and generally deserves it. (e) Discipline should be strictly enforced, but not in a harsh manner without reference to individual necessity. Small unions should be preferred, as immense crowded buildings are difficult to manage. Large unions are least satisfactory.

5th.—*Outdoor Management*.—Free, indiscriminate relief is most demoralising, and liable to the greatest abuse; yet (with wise safeguards in committee management and principle, when honestly administered) it saves the rates, and prevents permanent

pauperism and its accumulation. (a) WORK should be the basis, as far as practicable, of all outdoor relief. In temporary widespread distress, there is no town but requires road cleansing, or some local improvement—no country place but something could be done at roads, drains, ditches, or other necessary labour, profitable to the neighbourhood. Women could get yarn to knit stockings, make mats, straw covers for bottles, etc. This work should be paid for by food, per order on local purveyors : money should not be given. (b) The fashionable policy of invariably centralising meetings, and of crushing important business into a short space of time should be abandoned. Besides, the functions of guardians should be confined solely to the relief of the poor, excluding vaccination, registration, and cattle compensation : the consideration of which often takes great time.

In large unions it is impossible that the majority of the board could well understand distant local wants, or afford time for explanation. Local committees (under the guidance of resident poor-law guardians, should be formed) consisting of a minister, who could act as warden, from every religious denomination, and a certain number of respectable men, nominated by the board, and acting under definite rules and bye-laws. Such committees could provide labour through personal knowledge ; and, by gangers or deputy, carry out the works needful to meet any sudden emergency. The few more lasting cases of poverty would be easily dealt with. A parochial committee so constituted would not be easily deceived, particularly when aided by an efficient relieving officer, through whom the payment (per scrip) for food would be given. The committee should be responsible, and report by their own guardians to general meetings of the board. This proposition is quite feasible. It would sub-divide the work, and have it infinitely better done—counteract the evil effects of free relief, as well as diminish the cost of officialism ; at the same time producing a better feeling amongst all classes. The accounts of every union should be advertised at the end of each year ; so that the public might know how the system worked and what it cost.

*Impending Distress.*

As already shown, it is manifest that the present Poor-law regime (under existing rules) is totally inadequate to cope with general distress. Yet, it appears to be the only organisation which the executive intend to use as a means to meet impending distress. Red tape ties up the portfolio of humanity, and the managing body intend to play the same old part, disbelieving the reality of impending distress; consequently, funds are not to be had. History tells us that twenty millions were spent to free the slaves. Yet, money is now too valuable, and political philanthropy rather scarce, to co-operate in relieving the bondage of Irish workhouses. Large sums have been spent, and life freely wasted in unnecessary foreign, savage wars; yet short-sighted economy is the order of the day, as regards reproductive works required for the preservation of Christian lives at home. The scientific frontier in India was mainly preserved by Irish brains and imperial co-operation; yet those forces are not now available for the protection of the race which has provided brave soldiers and most eminent generals for the English army. The passage of trade through Egypt is regarded as essential and priceless, and has been kept open by an Irish leader, at an outlay of four millions sterling, not directly repayable; yet the passage of a number of his countrymen into misery, want, and perhaps famine, is regarded as a trifle not worth a loan.

The country which controls our destinies is a land overflowing with riches, to which we have contributed by the export of taxation and rents, which do not return—taxes paid and enforced beyond the proportion settled by solemn contract, when the "Union" was forced by fraud, bribery, and corruption. Immense Irish rentals swell the incomes of English landlords, who never visit their estates, and scarcely expend a farthing in the land which provides the money. Under those circumstances, the demand of this country to give grants for reproductive labour is not begging; it is simply getting a share of our own. A good deal is said and written about dismemberment

and disintegration of the Empire ; but Ireland is not managed in the same manner as the remaining integral portions of English dominion. It is already separated by exceptional legislation and special treatment. Why not allow us to settle our own local affairs, unhampered by stringent rules not applied to any other part of the Empire? Then we should have a fair chance to make the Poor-law, like the Irish Prison System, a model for Europe. Longfellow sings "To stay at home is best," yet emigration is the universal panacea, although Bismark, a competent authority as a statesman, deploras it in Germany. 'Tis said that we are over-populated; yet the average per square mile is less than that of any European country having temperate climate, fertile land, and natural resources. "*The primary duty of a Government is to preserve its people;*" yet a cycle of forty years has reduced our population one-half; still we are too many. The Roman pagan matron truly called her children "her treasures, her jewels," but our Christian, paternal rulers disbelieve the doctrine, and seem to practice its antithesis. Surely the policy of non-intervention in a crisis cannot be dignified with the appellation of statesmanship. It seems a commercial English dogma that Ireland is benefited, and the kingdom enriched, by the emigration of its bone and sinew! Some countries value every able-bodied immigrant as a clear gain of £20. The *Times* said memorably, "They are gone with a vengeance:" it might be useful to remember that they are likely to return in the same spirit whenever a favourable opportunity offers. Is it prudent to increase the number of emigrants and intensify their hatred, considering that even now they are a disturbing element to the peace of nervous Englishmen?

In very distressed localities, where the people are poverty-stricken through no fault of their own, some comprehensive scheme of reproductive work is required. There are many things to be done, such as the making of roads, railroads, arterial drainage, river drainage, reclamation of waste lands, re-afforesting, harbours, labourers' cabins, etc. These works would be more promptly and efficiently carried out by local committees, acting in union with appointed overseers and engineering staff. Let

measures be granted such as would be asked for and not denied to England or Scotland under similar circumstances of trial and emergency. Those guiding the councils of the Executive may profitably remember "*Bis dat qui cito dat*," when adopting the words of Israel's King: "Blessed is the man who considereth the poor."



## EXTRACTS FROM THE PRESS.

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The *Tablet* is very emphatic on the subject of the pending distress in Ireland. It sees weighty reasons upon which the action of the Government in view of the impending distress is open to merited condemnation, as outdoor relief is altogether denied to the Irish sufferers, most of whom are destitute through no fault of their own, but by a visitation of Providence. We trust, therefore, that the Government may reconsider their declared determination to confine relief within the hard and fast line of the existing poor-law and its administration, and impart elasticity to both, so as to suit them to the present emergency, and render them in accord with the feelings and habits of the Irish poor. Many schemes of public works have been proposed, all of them having claims to consideration on their own merits, but none of them suitable for the relief of the impending distress. The reclamation of millions of acres of mountain, the deepening of a few great rivers, as the Shannon, the Suck, and the Barrow, to improve drainage, or the making or extension of a few lines of railway—none of these can supply local employment over the 20 or 35 poor-law unions in which distress will be most keenly felt. Employment must be brought within reasonable walking distance of the homes of those who seek it.

### THE TULLA GUARDIANS AND THE "RELIEF" CIRCULAR.

The following is an extract from the minutes of the proceedings of the board of guardians of the Tulla (county Clare) Union, at their meeting on the 19th inst. The circular from the Local Government Board on the subject of "apprehended distress," with a copy of a letter which had been written by direction of the Lord Lieutenant on that subject, having been read, the following reply was proposed by Mr. Boland and unanimously adopted :—

"The guardians of this union are not disappointed at the course proposed to be taken by the British Government toward the relieving distress in Ireland. They should be much surprised if any attempt of a humane or paternal character were adopted. The guardians wrote a month ago in reply to circular No. 1 that all that might be expected was more circulars. It appear that they were right, but they thought

the country might at least be spared an exhibition of the bitter hypocrisy of our rulers as expressed in these heartless documents. The gushing solicitude for the welfare of the Irish poor is very hard to bear with, and the idea of these officials, in the irony of the language used in these circulars, impressing upon Irish boards of guardians to do this, that, and the other thing to relieve the poor, is highly tragical. The English Government, by their cruel laws, have completely tied down the hands of the Irish guardians in case they should think of affording a particle of relief to the labourers, or to the still more unfortunate class, the small farmers. And all this to uphold landlordism, and to drive the people into the poor-houses or out of the country. As far as guardians of this union are concerned, they will do everything in their power to save the poor of the union from hunger, despite the mocking sneers of pampered officialism. They ask the Local Government Board not to send them any further circulars on the subject of apprehended distress.

#### TULLAMORE BOARD OF GUARDIANS AND DISTRESS.

"A special meeting of the Tullamore Guardians was held in the boardroom yesterday for the purpose of considering the joint circular on the subject of "apprehended distress" from the Lord Lieutenant and the Local Government Board, and devising some immediate means for relieving those in the union who are actually in want of food, fuel, and clothing. The members in attendance were—Mr. James Lynam (chairman), and Messrs. Joseph Ryan, Daniel Kane, James Calvin, Bartle Yarr, Edward Henry, William Arnott Gowing, Martin Neill, Joseph Cummins, James Coyne, James Moran, James Roe, Patrick Galvin, &c. On the circulars been read by the chairman, emphatic exception was taken by the entire board to the allegation that the expenditure of money in public works would tend to demoralise the people, and, after a lengthy discussion (during which a labourer entered the boardroom and said himself and children were almost starving, but would die on the roadside before he would enter the workhouse) the following resolution was proposed and unanimously adopted—"That this board having before them letters from the Local Government and Lord Lieutenant regarding the repeated applications from the board of guardians of many unions in Ireland concerning the expenditure of public money to assist the poor, who are, many of them, starving, they, after due consideration, beg leave to express their stern repudiation of the expression that the expenditure of

of money in public works for the relief of the poor would be demoralising. The members of this board think such an expression an insult on a people who have only asked a small moiety to assist them in the many pressing wants imposed upon the ratepayers by insufficient and bad enactments which only tend to injure the people and drive them into the workhouses."

#### THE DISTRESS IN MOHILL UNION.

At the usual weekly meeting of the guardians of the Mohill Union, the members present were—Messrs. Felix Quinn (in the chair), T. Hayes, Wm. Dobson, M. Reynolds, J. Richardson, R. B. Coote, J. Farrell, P. McGivney, P. Comboy, and T. Blessing. The clerk read a copy of the letter which the Lord Lieutenant had addressed to Glenties Union, declining to take any steps for the relief of the distress except through the machinery of the ordinary poor-law. Mr. Farrell said the Government wanted to starve the people out of the country. Mr. Hayes—The farmers of the country should avail themselves of the Board of Works, and borrow money for the improvement of their farms and thereby give employment to the labouring classes. Mr. Reynolds—If the Government don't start public works, the people will be very badly off about here. Mr. Hayes then proposed the adoption of a petition to the Lord Lieutenant, praying that as there would be a surplus from the moneys generously appropriated for the purpose of the Arrears Act, the Government should apply it to wiping out the loans incurred by unions in scheduled districts under the Seeds Supply Act. Clerk—Everyone thought the seed rate would never be asked for, and it would be a good thing to have it remitted. Chairman—It would do no harm to adopt the memorial. The board unanimously agreed to the adoption of the memorial.

#### NAAS BOARD OF GUARDIANS.

The weekly meeting of the board was held to-day, Major R. H. Borrowes, D.L., in the chair. Guardians present—Baron de Robeck, D.L.; G. P. L. Mansfield, D.L.; E. Fenelon, P. Driver, E. Brophy, E. Doyle, R. H. Tracy, M. Tallon, J. M'Grath, J. Dillon, P. Halligan, T. P. Fitzpatrick, Major St. Leger Moore. A resolution was read from the Limerick Board of Guardians in favour of loans for public works to meet the impending distress, which the Limerick board anticipates will be much more severe than that of 1879. The resolution was unanimously adopted. Referring to an intimation

that the board would have to employ a Parliamentary agent in connection with the compulsory taking of certain lands near Naas for a public cemetery, Mr. Fenelon said he hoped they would all live to see the day when such a state of things would be put an end to, and the people would have the power in their own hands. Baron de Robeck agreed that such matters, could be transacted very well at home.

#### NUNS IN WORKHOUSES.

At the meeting of the Board of Guardians to-day forty-two members of the board were in attendance, Mr. P. J. Power presiding. The committee appointed to consider the appointment of a nun as matron, sent in their report, strongly recommending the appointment of a Sister of Mercy, on the grounds of expediency and of charity to the inmates.

Dr. Scott, *pro forma*, moved the adoption of the report, which was seconded by Mr. Brennan.

Mr. Elliot, J.P. opposed the motion, which he looked on as a sectarian one. The position was not a fit one for a lady vowed to chastity. A lady who was matron would have to go amongst the inmates of the separate wards, and the illegitimate children. The appointment of a nun would also increase the expenses of the union by necessitating new officers. He moved, as an amendment, that they should not approve of the report, as its adoption would give to the house a sectarian character, which would not be right, and would add to the increase in the amount of the rates and the number of the officers.

#### ARMAGH BOARD OF GUARDIANS.

At the usual weekly meeting of the Armagh Board of Guardians yesterday, the relieving Officer, in reply to the Local Government Inspector, stated he expected there would be some distress during the winter. The Guardians considered that he was sufficient to attend to the duties.

#### THE ABOLITION OF WORKHOUSES.

At the usual weekly meeting of the Armagh Board of Guardians yesterday, Mr John S. Riggs presiding, the other guardians present being Messrs. J. Best, Joseph Gibson, W. Simpson, and W. Naye, a circular was read from the clerk of the Ballymoney Union, enclosing

a resolution passed in favour of the abolition of some of the work-houses in Ireland, and that a conference, composed of two members from each Board in the North should be held in Belfast for the purpose of considering the subject. After some discussion it was agreed that the matter should be adjourned for a fortnight, when there would be a larger attendance of the Guardians.

#### THE DISTRESS IN BALLINASLOE.

At the meeting of the Ballinasloe Town Commissioners held to-day, M. F. A. Harpur, J.P. occupied the chair. Mr. P. Corcoran drew the attention of the Board to the great distress which at present exists in the town and vicinity, not only amongst the labouring classes, but amongst the small farmers. Owing to the unusually severe weather experienced for the last three weeks, there was no possibility of work of any description being done. The Suck had greatly swollen, and the drainage which was been carried on lately had to be entirely abandoned. The poor people were without food and without fuel, and their position was most deplorable. He proposed that as the Government had again deserted them in their hour of need, they would form themselves into a relief committee, with the view to solicit subscriptions, &c. to relieve the distress as promptly as the exigencies of the case demand. Mr. M'Goverin seconded the resolution, which was adopted. A committee was then formed, consisting of the clergy of all denominations, for the purpose of relieving the distress by private subscriptions.

#### LOUGHREA BOARD OF GUARDIANS AND DISTRESS.

At the meeting of the Loughrea Board of Guardians yesterday, Major Rogers presided. A great number of people applied for relief, but being able-bodied it could not be granted. The chairman said if the Government did not step in and save the people, the consequences would be fearful, as they would not go into the workhouse. A memorial was adopted to the Lord Lieutenant praying that he might take the present state of distress into consideration with the view of relieving it reproductive works.

#### THE IMPENDENT DISTRESS.

The following letter appeared in the *Times* of yesterday :—

“SIR,—I hope you will kindly allow me to appeal against the decision arrived at by the Irish Government not to relax the work-

house test, but to insist upon the conditions laid down by statute—namely, that the workhouse shall be full or infected before the able-bodied can be relieved outside. This means, in plain English, the refusal of all aid in the great majority of cases. No one knows better than the able and experienced vice-president of the Local Government Board that the people will suffer any privation, short of actual starvation, and even that in some instances, sooner than break up their homes and enter the house. If this were not so the test would be worthless, for there is not a union in the West of Ireland which would suffice to accomodate even 100 families seeking admission, without having recourse to the fatal expedient of 1847, in putting up temporay sheds and cramming the people into them, without any regard to decency or health.

“It is not necessary, in my opinion, to accuse the Government, as Mr. Parnell has done, of a desire to force the people to emigrate; neither emigration nor migration can possibly operate before March or April, and the real question is, shall these poor people, whose means of existence are about to be exhausted, receive under due supervision, and with or without a labour test, such an amount of relief in food and fuel as will leave them able to avail themselves of either of the alternatives offered as a means of escape from what everyone allows is an untenable and unendurable a position for thousands; or shall they be left to struggle on with such assistance as charity may afford them, depriving themselves and their children of sufficient nourishment, laying the seeds of disease and weakness, just as in 1847 and 1848, and be told by those whose mission it is to inspire hatred of the English Government and people, that they are being knowingly and wilfully left to suffer. I confess, sir, to have expected very different action, from the tone of Mr. Trevelyan’s speech, when the subject was discussed. My impression was that he was prepared to take the responsibility of going beyond the letter of the law, and to trust to Parliament for an indemnity, and that seemed to be the impression made upon Mr. Forster. I would still hope that this unfortunate circular may be cancelled, and discretion given to the Boards of Guardians to forego the house test, subject to the sanction of the Local Government Board, thus placing the poor in Ireland in the same position as in England.

“I am, sir, yours obediently,

“DAVID COLTHURST.

“Monaco, 20th December.”

## GREAT DISTRESS IN COUNTY SLIGO.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE *Freeman*.

"Castlecomer, County Sligo, 20th December.

"DEAR SIR—No matter what is to be the result, 'when his flock seems to be doomed, the pastor must speak out. For the past two months the Guardians of the in Poor this Union (Dromore West)—men differing in religion as well as in politics—have been, with one voice, warning the Local Government Board of the impending distress, now unhappily at their doors. While this cry was joined in by all the unions in the West—from Glencolumbkille to Skibbereen—we had been hoping that our rulers might abandon their impracticable policy and hearken to those who had the advantage at least of seeing the condition of the people, and knowing their feelings. But, alas, for those hopes! They have been, shall I say, cruelly dashed by the late famous circular; and on the approach of the great Christian festival that suggests 'Peace on earth to men of good will' we are destined once more to witness the sad and harrowing spectacle of our people 'dying down in the ditches, howling for bread.'"

## IRISH DISTRESS AND OUTDOOR RELIEF.

(From the *Daily News*.)

Mr. Trevelyan left Dublin yesterday morning for Donegal, accompanied by an inspector of the Local Government Board, and by a private secretary. When the announcement was made by the Irish Executive that in no case would outdoor relief be given to able-bodied men except where the workhouse was full, or the presence of disease made the reception of inmates dangerous, we expressed some misgiving as to the prudence and policy of this universal negative. The maxims of an abstract political economy are only one among many elements which determine conduct. They do not constitute either the whole duty of man for individuals or the whole art of government. For statesmen do declare that the workhouse is open for peasants, who would die sooner than enter its walls, is like the ecclesiastical policy of declaring that Protestant churches were open for Roman Catholics, or the establishment of butchers' shops to adopt Sydney Smith's parallel among a people whose religion debars them from animal food. Our correspondent writing

from Donegal testifies not only to the poignant distress there existing but to the general reluctance of the people to enter the workhouse, a reluctance which amounts to a firm resolution. It is merely desirable in the present circumstances of Ireland, especially when we are promising her local self-government, to allow the discretion to boards of guardians in their respective districts which is given to English boards of guardians in all circumstances. Mr. Gladstone has declined to allow his policy to be shaped by the political economy of Georgium Sidus, a political economy which might be sufficient among a population of A's or B's or C's and X's and Y's and other letters of the alphabet, without either hearts or stomachs, but which does not suit the mixed modes of human nature. What may be true as an element in policy is often false if treated as the whole of it.

#### SOUTH DUBLIN UNION SCHOOLS.

Mr. Guinness, in accordance with notice, moved:—

“That the Roman Catholic schools of this union be placed in charge of the Sisters of Mercy as instructors under the National Board. That the Roman Catholic girls who have reached the age of fifteen years in the workhouse schools be kept in a separate department under the Sisters of Mercy, instead of being allowed to mix with the inmates in the body of the house.”

He had always been in favour of placing their schools under the National Board. The teachers under the National Board had all to pass a certain standard of training before they were allowed to teach. They would have a capitation grant of 1s. a quarter if they were under the Board, and one monitor would be allowed to a certain number of pupils. There was also a great encouragement to the girls to become proficient, and there was also the encouragement afforded by results fees. He thought that, as to the qualifications of the Sisters of Mercy there could be no question. Thousands of children were taught by them in many schools in the city, and the results were eminently favourable. He would be glad, too, if in addition to ordinary instruction—book-knowledge—they could give them information on subjects that would enable them to earn their livelihood. The second portion of his resolution was perhaps the most important—namely, that which had reference to the management of girls of the age of fifteen years. There was a general concurrence of opinion on this subject. He believed that this house had

become very little short of a training house for the streets (oh, and order).

Sir George Owens—I rise to order.

The Chairman—I must ask you to withdraw that. It surely cannot go forth that this statement has any foundation. It must be withdrawn.

Mr. Guinness—I withdraw it, then. He would read a letter on the subject from a gentleman who gave his name, but he would not like to mention it.

#### MR. J. COWEN, M.P., ON IRELAND.

Emigration has lessened the population, but it has leavened you with principles intensely antagonistic to those of the men who bartered their independence for paltry bribes and more paltry decorations, and whose descendants have abandoned a career of noble national effort for one of ignoble ease. The clearances have crowded the towns with paupers. While sweeping away the shopkeepers' customers they have added largely to their rates. As their outgoings have increased their capacity to meet them has decreased. . . . Liberty is not the daughter but the mother of order. It is not want of right feeling on the part of Englishmen, and certainly no desire to deal unjustly, that prevents a change. It is want of knowledge and consequent indifference. Sidney Smith was not a rebel, and he said that the moment Ireland was mentioned, English politicians bade adieu to common sense, and acted with the barbarity of tyrants and the fatuity of idiots. If Englishmen would study the origin of Irish grievances, let them reflect on the miseries and mischief these grievances produce.

#### VERY REV. DR. KAVANAGH ON THE SITUATION.

Mr. H. Gladstone has announced a great truth, and proclaimed before the world that English rule in Ireland is the worst form of government in Europe. Turkey is in Europe, and the form of government in Turkey is oppressive and despotic, but according to Mr. Herbert Gladstone, it is not so bad as the Government of Ireland. Russia is in Europe. The Government of Russia is proverbially cruel and oppressive and has driven the unhappy people of Russia into the excesses of Nihilism, but according to Mr. Gladstone the Government of Russia is not as bad as the Government of Ireland, for the Government of Ireland is the worst in Europe. Mr. Gladstone is

right, and if he needed proof of his statement he might point to the recent "Emigration or Workhouse Circular." There is no other Government in Europe that would he believed, publish the starvation edict. That document could come from only one civilised Government, and that Government is the rule of England in Ireland.

#### A CRY FROM CONNAUGHT.

From the *Presbyterian Missionary Herald*.

We call attention to the annexed extract letter of one long located in Connaught and thoroughly acquainted with its wants—Rev. Mr. Keegan of Newport. If his appeal should meet the ear of any of our readers able and willing to assist in the relief of the present distress, we guarantee that their benefactions will be well and wisely applied. Mr. Keegan writes :—

"I am not and never was an alarmist, but I fear that Mayo is once more doomed to suffer extreme distress this season. Already the sufferings of the poor are very great, and to my own personal knowledge some are on the point of starvation. Though Connaught has, alas ! been stained with awful crimes of late, yet the vast majority of the poor are as innocent of blood as we are, and I hope these will not be allowed to starve because of the satanic doings of a few. True, the Government have made a promise to help ; why do they not do it at once ? But they are not proverbially slow to move. Had it not been for private charity during the last distress, the scenes of '47 would have been witnessed in Connaught, and if the charitable public shut up their bowels of compassion, and listen not to the wail of the destitute, it is to be feared that many will now sink into premature graves. While writing, a number of the most wretched creatures have made their appearance at my hall door, half naked and starved. It is hard to say that you have no help for them. My heart pities, but I am unable to afford assistance except in a very small way. May the Lord send us help in His own good time."