

A LECTURE  
ON THE STATE OF SOME OF THE  
CHARITIES OF BELFAST,

DELIVERED IN THE  
VICTORIA HALL, BELFAST,  
ON MONDAY, 19<sup>TH</sup> NOV., 1860,

BY  
CAPTAIN DYER, R.N.

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AND SOLD BY ALL BOOKSELLERS.





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Houses of the Oireachtas



## THE CHARITIES OF BELFAST.

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A PUBLIC LECTURE was delivered in the Victoria Hall, Belfast, on Monday evening, Nov. 19th, 1860, by Captain DYER, R.N., on the state of some of the Charities of the town. The Hall was filled with a respectable audience, which comprised, among others, merchants, members of the Town Council, Poor Law Board, Water Board, General Hospital Committee, and Belfast Charitable Society.

Captain DYER, after opening the proceedings with reading the 34th Psalm and offering up prayer, said—Fellow-citizens of Belfast, I greet you well. I long desired an opportunity of bringing to your notice the state of several charities in this town, with which, during my four years' residence, I have connected myself. Although such is the case, I consider this, at the present time, is not mine own seeking. It has been forced upon me. I have been assailed from several quarters, and I am now on my defence. As yet I have not had a hearing, and therefore I have been placed in a false position. I have written letters to the governing bodies of some of your charitable institutions ; and not merely have I had no reply, but in one instance that I know of, a member of a certain body advised that Captain Dyer's letters should be put into the fire and burnt, without any reply having been sent. It seems that advice was acted on, as they are not to be found. In another instance, I wrote four or five letters to the managing committee of a charity, and I never received an answer to any of them. I must, however, exonerate that committee from blame in one instance, as a letter of mine is entered on the minutes, with directions that it should be acknowledged. I wish to say that I have called this meeting on my own responsibility. I have purposely abstained from seeking the advice or taking the opinion of any one ; for I am firmly persuaded in my own mind—(you may call it fanaticism if you like)—that the Lord has put it upon me as firmly as Luther, when his friends endeavoured to dis-



*not* suade him from going to the Diet of Worms, said, that if there were as many devils in it as there were tiles on the houses, he would go there in spite of them. In fact, many of my friends have done all they could to dissuade me from appearing before you this evening, and it is in spite of their protest that I do so. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you or of man's judgment; yea, I judge mine own self. I have now been nearly four years among you; but, on account of the uncertainty of my wife's health, I did not become a full citizen of this town until a month ago. I then took a house in Donegall Pass. Having attained the rights and privileges of a citizen of Belfast, I intend to exercise them. I am a man which art a citizen of Belfast, a town in Ireland—a citizen of no mean city. Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence, which I make now unto you. Hear me for my cause, and be silent that ye may hear. In bringing these important matters to your notice, I am running, it would appear, some risk; for two gentlemen of position in Belfast have told me that a party, or parties, of rank, influence, and station, have said that, if Captain Dyer continued to interfere with the Charities of Belfast, he or they would have him removed, as he was not the man for it. In other words, that, if Captain Dyer chose to subscribe to the Charities of Belfast, and dared to inquire as to the application of his money, and to see that it was properly accounted for, he should be sent out of it. If that be so, the sooner the better, say I. But come on, ye bishops, priests, and deacons!—ye moderators, ministers, and elders!—ye publishers, editors, printers, with your devils! Come on, I say—come one, come all—one at a time—and with the simple sling, and stone of truth and fact, I defy the whole of you! I wish it to be understood that I am Captain of my own ship—that I have here no Commanding Officer—and that, if any party attempt to interrupt me, I must cause them to depart. Should any such attempts be made, be pleased to leave the matter in my hand, and I will undertake to make short work of their removal.

Captain DYER then read copies of several letters which he had written to various parties, stating that it was probable he might allude to them by name in the course of his Lecture; and that, if they would acquaint him of their intention to attend the delivery of it, he would take care that they were properly accommodated.—Upon his inquiring whether any of the parties appeared, there was no response.

Captain DYER then resumed his Lecture, as follows:—It is most important that the dates of some other letters should be kept in mind, as they will show that they were written previously to recent public outbursts, of which I had no previous knowledge. I am considered by many to have gone out of my way purposely to find fault with what are generally believed to be most valuable Charities.



Before I conclude this Lecture, I hope to disabuse your minds upon that point; only premising that, except to attend the annual meeting, and to see the Steward, I have scarcely been once at the Old Poor-house for the last two years. I was never through the house but once in my life. Up to last night, when I went to see a patient—a little deaf and dumb girl—I have not been in one of the wards of the Hospital for twelve months. I know that I am looked upon in some quarters as a kind of Don Quixote in search of adventures, and as a sort of self-constituted redresser of all manner of evils and wrongs, both real and imaginary. I hope to show you that any evils I may descant upon have been brought to my notice without my seeking for them. And here let me say that it is not for the purpose of vituperation or declamation that I bring these matters before you, but for the purpose that we may draw a moral from them, and see how we can for the future profit by past experience. *Experientia docet.* It is my habit, whenever I have occasion to find fault, to inform, in the first instance, those parties who are able to correct it. If they do not put the matter right, then I advance another step. For instance: when I perceived what I considered wrong at the Old Poor-house, I wrote and informed the Committee of it. Finding that my letters were unnoticed (recollect I was a member of their Corporation at the time), I printed them for private circulation. They were so headed, and also put into the body of the pamphlet. Several parties connected with the newspapers of Belfast requested me to allow the letters to appear in their journals. I refused every application of the kind, because, I said, I wished to make them known only to the inhabitants of Belfast, who had the power of making the Committee of that Charity do right. I considered that Belfast was in too much bad odour with the country at large to wish to add to it. But no sooner did it appear in print, headed, "For Private Circulation only," when the Committee authorised one of their members (the Rev. Wm. Bruce) to put forth a reply (answer it was not). I shall have occasion to bring his letter under your notice. Though I could not foresee in what exact form I should make public what I am about to state, yet there were three things that I considered indispensable, and should have insisted on, viz.:—

1. That there should be a meeting, open to every one to attend.
2. That the gentlemen of the public press should be permitted to attend, and to take down the proceedings.
3. That the meeting should be at such a time and in such a place as the greatest number of persons could be present.

The first Charitable Institution which I shall bring under your notice is the Sailors' Home. If I did not take an interest in the sailor, it would certainly be very strange, because I was born in the Royal Hospital for Seamen at Greenwich. I was brought up among sailors. Almost the first thing I remember was my having



been taken in the nurse's arms to see the funeral of Admiral Lord Nelson. It was a striking scene, which I never shall forget. It is now 45 years since I first entered the Royal Navy, and from that time till the present I have always felt a warm interest in my brother seamen. They are, it is true, a very peculiar people, and require particular management. It seems that the Sailors' Home here was instituted in 1852, and so soon as I came to Belfast I went to visit it. I connect myself with Sailors' Homes wherever God has placed me, because I know something of their value; and I can say that, of all the Sailors' Homes that I have ever seen, the one in Belfast is by far the best. It is really a home to the sailor. The Chairman of the Committee of the Home is our worthy and respected Resident Magistrate, W. S. Tracy, Esq., and the Treasurer is Edward Coey, Esq. These gentlemen take the warmest interest in the Home, and are exceedingly anxious for its prosperity. I attribute a great deal of the success which has attended the institution to the indefatigable exertions of my friend Mr. John M'Clean, the efficient Superintendent of it. I am not ashamed to call him my friend. If ever there was a man who adapted himself to the circumstances of those placed under his care and protection, he is Mr. M'Clean. For his kindness and attention to the inmates of the institution, I am particularly grateful. I think that the claims of this and other local institutions are not put as strongly or as often before the public as they should be. The matter of support to this charity or to the General Hospital is too often viewed as a duty between man and man, instead of considering it as one between God and man. Fifteen ministers of our respective Churches had promised to preach sermons and take up collections on behalf of the Sailors' Home, but as yet only three of them have done so. Now, I suppose most of you are aware of what the Sailors' Home is, and that it offers great advantages to the seaman. If you have not, however, this knowledge, I would advise you to visit the one we have in Corporation Street. In it you will see nothing very ornamental, but you will see everything plain and substantial. We have no strait-laced regulations, and we allow Jack, when he comes in, to have his fling and enjoy it. There is nothing stronger than tea and coffee drunk in the Home.

The next charity in which I interested myself on coming to Belfast was the Ragged School on Donegall Quay. The gentleman who had been the superintendent of that school was about to leave, and finding that there was no other person inclined to come forward, rather than allow the school to be broken up, I volunteered to be the superintendent; and as long as it was on Donegall Quay, when I could go to it during the day, I continued to act in that capacity, and I must say I had my reward. Sometimes we had between 300 and 400 children attending it. Scarcely any of them had a shoe



or stocking to their feet, and they were literally ragged. On admission the first thing we did with them was to scrub them—to give them a good washing from top to toe—and then supply them with a piece of bread. We taught them first a short prayer, then the Lord's Prayer, the Commandments, Apostles' Creed, and then the National Anthem, "God Save the Queen." I was "fond of this sort of thing," and I have endeavoured in all the schools with which I have been associated to teach them to the children. I must say I have been greatly pleased with the gratitude that those poor creatures manifested in return, and the time that I devoted in this way I am sure has not been misspent. When the children took sick I always endeavoured to visit them; and on one occasion I found that one of the scholars was absent from sickness. I went to visit him. I found him living in a miserable, wretched place.—His father, who was a painter by trade, was laid up from paralysis in the hand. I gave him a job of painting a door in the school-house, but this brought on a severe attack of his complaint, and the man was compelled to go to the Union Hospital, where he unfortunately contracted fever and died, leaving a widow behind him. I then said to the woman that I considered I had been accessory, however involuntarily, to her becoming a widow, and I asked her what I could do for her children. She said she had a little boy, and I inquired his age. She was not herself able to tell me, but referred me to a person in whose house the boy had been baptized, and whose surname he bore. I went to this person's house, in one of the back lanes off Little York Street, and discovered the person I sought. She was a woman, and a cripple; and having got the information I required from her, she asked me had I anything to do with the Old Poor-house. I replied, I did not even know of such a place. It appeared that she maintained herself by educating her neighbours' children for a trifle, and had been doing so for a number of years. She described the Old Poor-house to me, and said it was situated at the top of Donegall Street. I told her that I would inquire about it. She said she had applied for admission into that house, but had received no answer to her application. It was then a few days before the annual meeting of the Charitable Society, and I resolved to attend the meeting. Accordingly, I did so, but I cannot say that I derived much information from having done so. After the meeting was over, one of the gentlemen of the Committee of Management, at my request, kindly showed me through the building. He first took me into the dining-hall, where I found the inmates at dinner. There were no cloths on the tables, and the inmates were perfectly silent. I inquired the cause of the silence, and was told that silence was enjoined upon them. Now, for my part, if I had not a little talk at my dinner every day, I should not enjoy it very much. I was then taken into



a room or ward (on the ground floor), which I was told was occupied by married people. There were three or four beds close together, without any partition or division between them. A woman, who was ill, was lying on one of them. I expressed my horror and disgust at such a state of things. We went up stairs on the female side. The first room we entered was a large front one, looking out on the lawn. I was told that was set apart for sick children; but there were none in it at that time. The next was a much smaller room, with several beds huddled together, where there were old women. Further on was the hospital for them—a close, confined place, with no ventilation. The privy was very filthy, and the women had to go down a steep ladder, exposed to the rain and frost, to get to it. Up stairs were the girls' school-room (a front room looking on the lawn) and their dormitory, which were clean and well ventilated. On going through the corridor on the male side I perceived a woman come out of a door, and empty a basin of water outside, and instantly a steam arose from beneath. On examination I found a pig-stye, with a quantity of rotten manure in it.—This was close to the men's hospital. The boys' school-room was a fine room, looking out upon the lawn. Their dormitory was well kept and ventilated. From this we came to a door, at which the gentleman who accompanied me knocked. Getting no answer from within after three repeated knocks, the steward, who was with us, did the same, but with similar success. I then opened the door, and upon doing so I perceived the figure of a man with a moustache, dressed in a *robe de chambre*, sitting in an arm-chair, smoking a cigar. The room was filled with tobacco smoke. On inquiry I learnt this person was one of the paupers who was allowed to occupy this room by himself. I found the out-houses in a very filthy state, particularly one, where I was told the straw for the bedding of the inmates was kept. I inquired, and learnt that the straw for their beds had not been changed for nine months (subsequently I heard that it was eighteen months). As I considered that it was impossible that the gentlemen of the committee could be aware of the state of things in this institution as I had found them (the day of the Anniversary Meeting, when it is to be presumed everything bore its best appearance), I considered it my duty to report to them what had come under my observation. Learning there was no visitors' book kept, I obtained pen, ink, and paper, and wrote all down, and addressed the letter to the Chairman of the Charitable Society. In a few days after this I met several gentlemen at dinner, of whom some were members of the Committee of the Society, and among them Mr. John Clarke. He said to me, "Oh! Captain Dyer, we are exceedingly obliged to you for the letter you sent us." I replied I was glad to hear it, and that I was not aware that they had received the letter. "What!" said he; "have you not received



"an acknowledgment?" I said I had not. Then said he, "The Chairman of the Committee received instructions to thank you for the communication." I told him that I had another letter for the Committee in my pocket. "What is it about?" said he. I replied, I had looked into the Act of Parliament by which their society was incorporated, and could not see any authority the Committee had for admitting children to the institution. "Oh, yes," said he, "children are particularly and specially mentioned in the Act of Incorporation." I replied that that ended the argument; for that, if they were specially named in the Act, there was no more to be said about the matter; but that I had looked into the Act, and could not find any mention of it. Now, I wish to tell this meeting that the Old Poor-house was intended for the natives of Belfast, and I assure you that there are a great many persons in that establishment at present who do not belong to Belfast at all. It is a Belfast charity. I will show this before I sit down. For the information of the meeting, and of all who take an interest in the charities of Belfast, I may state that the foundation-stone of the Belfast Charitable Society was laid in the year 1771. Prior to that time, and as far back as 1756, the accommodation for the poor of the town was made the subject of earnest consideration, as may be seen from an extract which I shall take from the *Belfast News-Letter*, under date of December 3, 1756. It is as follows:—

*"A Scheme for the Relief and Support of the Poor Inhabitants of the Town of Belfast."*

"First—That there be a general meeting of the inhabitants at the Market-house, on Thursday, the 16th of December inst., at noon, and that twenty gentlemen be then appointed overseers of the poor.

"Second—That the directors of the scheme shall consist of the Earl of Donegall, the Sovereign and Burgesses, the clergy of the Church, of the three meeting-houses, the twenty gentlemen first appointed overseers, and of such as shall hereafter be appointed to succeed them; any nine of these to make a Board.

"Third—That a Board be held at the Market-house on Thursday, the 23rd inst., to divide the town into ten wards or districts, to nominate two overseers for each ward, and to elect a treasurer and clerk.

"Fourth—That these overseers shall go through their respective wards on Thursday, the 30th inst., taking an exact account of the families therein, of all stations; separating into three columns those who are able to give charity, those who are able only to support themselves by their own industry, and such as are real and suitable objects of charity; these last to be marked with the figures 1, 2, 3, or 4, to enable the directors to judge of their different circumstances, and determine the measure of their allowance.

"Fifth—That there be eight classes of those who contribute to the charity, the members of which are to pay monthly as follows:—No. 1, 6½d.; 2, 1s. 1d.; 3, 2s. 8½d.; 4, 5s. 5d.; 5, 8s. 1½d.; 6, 11s. 4½d.; 7, 16s. 3d.; 8, £1 2s. 9d.

"Sixth—That there be a Board held on Monday, the 6th January, to receive the returns of the overseers, to class the objects of the charity, and the contributions to it, agreeably to their instructions.

"Seventh—That the usual public collections be on the same footing, and



at the same disposal, as formerly, it being presumed that, as the ordinary town poor will be by the scheme provided for, those of the parish, living out of the districts, will be considered as chiefly entitled to the said collections.

"Eighth—That the directors, having a computation of the sums to arise monthly by this scheme, shall, upon casting up the number of objects in the different classes, proportion the allowance to be given to those of each class, which allowance to be paid once a fortnight.

"Ninth—That the directors shall draw up rules at one meeting, to be confirmed at the next, according to which this scheme is to be conducted and executed. The said rules to be entered in a book, in which all their transactions are to be recorded, which book to be with the treasurer, open for the perusal and inspection of every contributor.

"Tenth—That there shall be a Board held at the Market-house, on the first Thursday of every month, at which Board the lists of the poor and the treasurer's cash-book are to be produced and examined, and then signed by the chairman.

"Eleventh—That new overseers shall be elected from time to time, according to the rules hereafter to be established by the directors."

"General Meeting of the Subscribers of Charitable Loan."—*Jan. 4th, 1765.*

"Several gentlemen of this city, moved by the distresses of the poor in this severe season, have not only contributed themselves to the relief of the most needy, but have gone about the town to solicit the benefactions of others for the same charitable purpose, and to find out and relieve the most needful ones."

This project shows the deep interest the inhabitants of the town took in providing suitable accommodation for the poor, about one hundred years ago. The wants of the poor were then very great, so far as a proper asylum, in which they could be comfortably attended to, was concerned; and the scheme which I have just read to you shows that the people of Belfast were most anxious to make every exertion in their power to carry out the laudable object they had in view. The principle of voluntary contributions was the one upon which they acted; and so successful was it, that when the Irish Parliament passed the law of 1771, giving power to establish Charitable Corporations in each county, for the maintenance of the poor, the funds that had then accumulated, by voluntary subscriptions, contributions, and other sources, and were available for the purposes of charity, amounted to £8,000. With that sum of money in hands, the town of Belfast was enabled to proceed with the building of the Old Poor-house.

I have stated that the Old Poor-house was established in 1771. In that year the 11th and 12th Geo. III., c. 30, was passed by the Irish Parliament. The preamble to that Act was—"Whereas strolling beggars are very numerous in this kingdom, and whereas it is become equally necessary to give countenance and assistance to those poor who shall be found disabled, by old age or infirmities, to earn their living, as to restrain and punish those who may be able to support themselves by labour and industry, and yet may choose to live in



idleness by begging." It was entitled, "An Act for badging such Poor as shall be found unable to support themselves by Labour, and otherwise providing for them, and for restraining such as shall be found able to support themselves by Labour and Industry, from Begging." By the Act a Corporation was created in every county, the president of which was to be the Protestant Bishop of the Diocese; and power was given to take lands and erect buildings thereon. The buildings were to be divided into four parts. The first part was for the accommodation of helpless men, the second for helpless women, the third for vagabond men, and the fourth for disorderly women. Children under ten years of age, unprovided for in the license given to the parents, were to be sent to the Charter School nursery, and those above that age were to be apprenticed.

In the *News-Letter*, under date of August 2, 1771, we read:—

"Yesterday a large body of the principal inhabitants of this town assembled at the Market-house, from whence they proceeded to the ground allotted for the Poor-house and Infirmary, when Stewart Bankes, Esq., Sovereign of Belfast, laid the first stone of that edifice, on which is the following inscription:—'The foundation-stone of a Poor-house and Infirmary for the town and parish of Belfast was laid on the 1st day of August, 1771, and in the eleventh year of his Majesty George III. Arthur Earl of Donegall, and the principal inhabitants of Belfast, founded this Charity; and his Lordship granted to it in perpetuity eight acres of land, on part of which this building is erected.'"

Such, then, was the origin of the Belfast Charitable Society. In the year 1774, the Act of 1771 was amended by the 13th and 14th Geo. III., cap. 46, sec.—, from which I will read this extract:—

"And whereas the said Act (11 and 12 Geo. III., cap. 30, sec. —. Irish) for the badging the poor in this kingdom extends only to the creating of Corporations for the purposes of said Act within Counties at large, or in Counties of Cities or Counties of Towns in this kingdom; and whereas the town of Belfast, in the County of Antrim, is a populous and wealthy town, and the said town and parish thereof contain as many inhabitants as several of the Cities or Counties of Towns in this kingdom, but, not being a County within itself, cannot have the benefit of the said law in as ample and full a manner as is found necessary; and whereas the inhabitants of the said town and parish of Belfast have by voluntary subscriptions and contributions raised a fund of money for the support of the poor within the said town and parish, and, for the better answering of that laudable intention, have erected a Poor-house and Infirmary for the reception of the said poor, and of sick persons, on certain grounds adjoining the said town, which have been granted by the Right Hon. Arthur Earl of Donegall to certain trustees for the uses aforesaid, and the inhabitants are desirous that the said Hospital and Infirmary, and the grounds whereon the same is built, so granted by the said Earl of Donegall to said trustees, hereafter named, and that a body corporate should be formed and to continue for ever, for the better carrying into execution, under proper regulations, the charitable and humane design of maintaining the poor of the said town and parish: Be it enacted, by the authority aforesaid, that from and after the 1st June, 1774, the Right Hon. Arthur Earl of Done-



gall, James Lewis, the Sovereign of the said town of Belfast, and his successors for the time being, Henry Skeffington and George Hamilton, Esqrs., representatives in Parliament for said town, and the representatives for the time being, and the vicar and churchwardens of the said parish, and their successors for the time being, James Mackay, William Laird, and Jas. Crumly, and such persons as shall contribute to such charity as hereinafter mentioned, shall for ever hereafter be in name and fact one body corporate in law, for the charitable purposes aforesaid, and shall have perpetual succession, and be called and distinguished by the name of the President and Assistants of the Belfast Charitable Society; and that the said Arthur Earl of Donegall shall be President thereof during his life; and that they, the said President and his Assistants, shall be enabled to plead and sue, and to be impleaded and sued by that name in all his Majesty's Courts of Justice; and shall and may appoint a common seal and seals for the use of the said Corporation; and shall have power and authority to meet together as often as there shall be occasion; and the said President and Assistants, or any five of them, being so assembled, shall have power to make such reasonable laws, rules, orders, and regulations for the better government and management of the said Infirmary and Poor-house, as they shall think necessary and convenient, and to revoke or alter the same at their discretion; and that it shall be lawful for the said President and Assistants to make such and the like bye-laws and regulations, and to exercise such powers with respect to the poor and all idle and sturdy beggars, as well as for enlarging the said Infirmary and Poor-house, or taking any other house or piece of ground in or near said town of Belfast, which the majority of the said Corporation should think most convenient for the maimed, sick, and infirm persons who are to receive the benefit of the said Infirmary and Poor-house."

In 1774, public medical relief was afforded to the poor of the town by the Charitable Society, as we learn from Malcolm's "History," page 32. It says:—

"Public medical relief was given by the Charitable Society for the first time to the poor in 1774. That society had built the present Old Poor-house for the accommodation of the destitute, and here they received medical care many hundreds annually. This, then, was the first, and, for a long time, the only provision for affording medical relief to the sick poor of the town."

"An account of moneys received and disbursed by the Belfast Charitable Society for the maintenance and relief of the poor of the town and parish of Belfast, from the 1st of February, 1782, to the 1st Feb., 1783.—Receipts, £1,103 15s. 8½d.: Disbursements, £1,162 2s. 4d. State of the account for the aid of poor housekeepers in the year ending February, 1783.—Receipts, £484 11s. 1½d.; Disbursements, £468 6s. 9½d.

"*General State of Provision made for the Poor in and out of the house in February, 1783*:—In the house—Aged poor, maintained with every necessary, 49 women, 38 men; total, 87; in the infirmary at this time, 2; children maintained as above, and taught to read and write, 31 boys, 18 girls, 49; two old couples lodged in the house, and provided with firing, 4; besides seven little cabins belonging to the society, given to poor families. Out of the house—Poor housekeepers supplied monthly in the town, 294; in the country, 52. Total, 488.

"As the subscriptions to the Poor-house for the present year will be immediately collected, the Committee of the Charitable Society beg leave to remind the public that the necessities of the poor are much more pressing at this time than they have been at any period since the establishment of the



institution; and, consequently, there is a great addition to the number of objects to be relieved. It is, therefore, hoped that the subscribers to the charitable fund will increase their liberality with cheerfulness. It is also requested that the inhabitants of Belfast will not suffer themselves to be prevailed on by the clamorous importunities of idle, strolling vagrants (many of whom at present infest the town) to prostitute their alms to intemperance and sloth. Every effort exerted by the Committee of the Charitable Society to prevent the influx of such impostors has been ineffectual, and ever will be so, unless the inhabitants resolve to reserve what they choose to give in charity to be thrown into the general fund for the relief of the real poor of this town and parish, who are justly entitled to it."—*News-Letter*, Tuesday, Feb. 18th, to Friday, 21st, 1783.

"Poor-house, April 17th, 1782—Rev. Wm. Bristow, Vice-President, Resolved.—That the Sovereign, accompanied by the Committee, will occasionally go through the streets in the town for the purpose of taking up and putting in confinement all strolling beggars; that the Vice-President be requested (in the call for a town meeting to consider of establishing a Dispensary) to desire a general meeting of the subscribers of this institution, for the purpose of having better provision made for poor housekeepers, and clearing the town of strolling beggars."

Again, in the *News-Letter* of May 4, 1782, we read:—

"Resolved,—That the following notice be given to the public:—The Belfast Charitable Corporation, having employed the greatest part of an extensive building in providing a retreat for the aged and helpless, in accommodating a number of poor children, and in supplying a spacious ward for the reception of the sick, it was resolved, at the last General Board, that the centre building, yet unoccupied, should be employed in a plan for general inoculation."

"About one hundred aged poor and fifty children are supported in a comfortable manner in the Poor-house, and nearly 600 housekeepers supplied with money."—*Aug. 1st, 1783. (Famine year.)*

In Malcolm's "History," page 26, we find that

"The sole medical relief publicly afforded to the indigent of the town prior to this date (1792) was rendered through the instrumentality of the Belfast Charitable Society, and that this was necessarily limited to those of the poor who received shelter and sustenance within the walls of their institution."

At page 39 there is this paragraph:—

"On the 30th of July, 1792, arrangements were entered into with the Charitable Society, whereby the committee were to obtain the use of rooms for the accommodation of the apothecary, medical officers, and patients, free of expense."

In the same History, at page 51, we read:—

"An arrangement was at this time (1797) effected between the Charitable Society and Fever Hospital, whereby the medicines supplied to the Poor-house Infirmary would be paid for by that Society."

I quote these extracts for the purpose of showing you what was



the original character of the Charitable Society, as contrasted with it at the present time. In the Report of the Society for 1830, it is stated that 18 adults were admitted to the house as hospital patients; and in the Report for 1834, mention is made of persons being admitted, for a time or permanently, as hospital patients. This fact is confirmed by the Report for 1848, and by my own published statements in 1858, 1859, and 1860. In the Appendix to the first Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland, published in 1836, the Old Poor-house is described as

“An asylum for the destitute old and young . . . and the sick attended by medical gentlemen, one of whom attends the male and the other the female department.”

The manner in which the poor were put into the Old Poor-house in former times may be learned from the extract which I shall now read:—

“On Saturday the Sovereign and the Committee of the Poor-house perambulated the streets, and took up a number of beggars, part of whom were sent to the Poor-house, the rest to their respective parishes, as the society is determined in future to prevent vagrants from begging in this town.”—*News-Letter*, June 19th, 1792.

This was done pursuant to a resolution of the Committee passed on April 20, 1792; but as far back as Dec., 1778, we find—

“The Committee of the Belfast Charitable Society have come to a resolution of putting the law strictly in force against all strolling, vagrant beggars who shall dare to infest the streets. To that end, a place of confinement is fitted up at the Old Poor-house.”

Lord Donegall, in 1795, gave to an additional grant of land, upon which the old Water Works are situated. Formerly the water was brought in carts into the town, and sold in the way the Cromac water is now disposed of. The power to do so was granted to the Charitable Society by almost one of the last Acts passed in the Irish House of Commons—(40 Geo. III., cap. 37). The Society was enabled by it to raise rates upon water sold for its support, and that power continued till 1817, when the Spring Water Commissioners were formed (57 Geo. III., cap. 57); and they by that Act were required to pay £750 per annum to the Charitable Society. Those Commissioners continued to act until 1840, when an Act was passed establishing the present Water Board (3 Vic., cap. 79); and by the 3rd section they were required to pay £800 per annum to the Belfast Charitable Society. By an arrangement in 1817, the Spring Water Commissioners were to pay yearly to the Charitable Society the sum of £750. Now, the ori-



ginal intention of the Act of 1771 was, that the Old Poor-house was designed for the support of the pauper and the sick poor ; but by the Poor Law Act of 1841, that which was hitherto a local law became a general law to affect the whole country, and the £800 payable annually by the Water Commissioners to the Belfast Charitable Society should be now paid to the treasurer of the Poor Law Union to the credit of the electoral division of Belfast. In other words, the inhabitants of Belfast are paying the ordinary poor-rate for the support of the paupers in the Union Workhouse, whilst they are, at the same time, paying £800 per annum for the maintenance of the poor in the Old Poor-house.

In the year 1850, an application was made by the inhabitants of High Street for high-pressure water, and the answer given by the Water Board was, that they could not accede to the application ; for, if they did, there would be no demand for the low-pressure water, and the Board would not be able to pay the £800 per annum to the Charitable Society. The Royal Commissioner, Mr. Copinger, stated that this was a most extraordinary decision. I contend, therefore, that the people who were in the Old Poor-house, and the class who were intended for it, have gone to the union workhouse, or ought to go there. It is a well-known fact, that when the union workhouse was opened, there were nearly 500 persons in the Old Poor-house, and the half of them were at once sent to the union workhouse. I also wish you to bear in mind that you are now paying water-rates for the maintenance of persons who do not belong to Belfast at all. On this point do not rest alone upon my word. I will give you the word of the Committee themselves, as represented by the Rev. Wm. Bruce, who was instructed on their behalf to reply to my letter. He says (June 30th, 1858) :—

“ Thus, too, the passing of the Irish Poor Relief Act obviated the necessity of admitting persons whose only claim was destitution, and admitted of keeping this charity as an asylum for a more respectable class of poor that might be reduced from a better standing in society to the dependence of poverty ; not restricting admission to *natives*, but giving them a preference from this circumstance, if others were equal. The committee, however, have always reserved to themselves the power of admitting, at any period, cases that seemed to have peculiar claims upon the charity. One of these is the case referred to by Captain Dyer :—The son of a gentleman of large property, who had enjoyed the highest civic situation in the town, who was connected with some most respectable families, who was a subscriber to the charity during his life, and left a large bequest at his death—the son of this gentleman was so reduced in his circumstances that he sought for an asylum in this house. Will any one say that this request should have been refused ? He was admitted on the express condition of being amenable to all the rules of the house as any other inmate, and he has been so without murmur or complaining. He has no ‘ suite of apartments comfortably furnished ; ’ but he is permitted to occupy a separate sleeping-room till it is required for other inmates, and allowed, as other inmates are, to wear the clothes he brought with him as long as they last.”



Now, I have shown to you that, by the Act of Incorporation, the Old Poor-house was intended for the natives of Belfast, and that no other persons had a right to partake of the benefits of the institution; whereas you have people now in it who do not belong to the town, and who have no right whatever to be in the house. At the time that place was built, there were not more than 10,000 inhabitants in Belfast; but there are now supposed to be 150,000; and will any person tell me, that out of such a population there cannot be found a sufficient number of the natives of the town and parish requiring admission into the house? I say it is absurd on the face of it. I think it is material to know who are there and who are not—who have a right to be there and who have not. Now I will give you the case of one man who was admitted into it this year. In my office (Government Emigration Office) I found entered on the books some letters relating to this man, and to cases in which he was concerned that will illustrate his character. I dare say there are many persons here assembled who recollect my predecessor, the late Lieut. Stark, who was an upright and straightforward British officer. He prosecuted this man, who, as I told you, was admitted this year as an inmate of the Old Poor-house.—I will now read extracts from some of the letters.

*“Government Emigration Office, Belfast, 4th Oct., 1843.*

“SIR,—I beg to acquaint you that two poor people came yesterday to my office, and complained that they had engaged with J. H. Shaw for a passage to New York in a ship called the *Liverpool*, to sail upon the 5th prox.; but that they had since discovered that that individual had no authority to engage passages for that ship. I saw Shaw, asked if he had authority, and if so, requested him to produce it. He insolently said that he had authority, but that he would not produce it. As the poor people had only a few hours before the steamer would sail, I waited upon the magistrates, and demanded a summons upon him for a breach of the 21st section of the Act; but this was declined, unless I could obtain further proof of his delinquency than his mere refusal to produce the required document. I then suggested that, by producing the real agent of the ship and his authority, I could convict him. Accordingly, I got a summons at sight against Shaw, and one upon the real agent. The consequence was an immediate compromise with the poor people, in the expectation that the matter would drop; but I insisted upon a conviction for the offence, and the man was fined in the mitigated sum of 20s.; but nothing could exceed his insolence, for which he was very severely reprimanded by the Bench.—I am, &c.,

“P. STARK.

“S. Walcott, Esq.

“P.S.—There is not a doubt but that the poor people would have been adrift in Liverpool, without its being at all in the power of Lieut. Henry to afford them redress. I suspect Shaw to be playing the rogue extensively; but I will keep my eye upon him.”

Extract from a letter of 26th Oct., 1843 :—

“In regard to Shaw, he is the individual whose misconduct I reported in my letter of the 4th inst., in whom no person here places the smallest reliance.—I am, &c.,

“P. STARK.

“S. Walcott, Esq.”



"Belfast, 26th May, 1844.

"SIR,—I beg to acquaint you, for the information of the Board, that I yesterday took two complaints before the magistrates against J. H. Shaw, passenger broker here—one at the instance of Mr. M'Culloch, his wife, and mother, and another at the instance of John Morrow. M'Culloch engaged with J. H. Shaw for himself and wife to sail upon the 10th April in the *Lady Mary* for Prince Edward's Island. He was afterwards informed that a much finer ship called the *Arabian* was on the berth at Belfast, and would sail upon the 25th April, which induced him to take a passage in her for his mother, paying a deposit of 28s; tired of waiting, he came into Belfast, and complained to me. I took the case before the magistrates; found, through the owner of the *Arabian*, that not the shadow of a treaty had ever been entered into in regard to the ship in question, and that in fact the *Arabian* had sailed three weeks ago for New York. It came out in the evidence that there are upwards of 200 poor people in the County of Monaghan similarly taken in, and awaiting to be ordered into Belfast. In this case the magistrates ordered a return of the deposit, and inflicted a fine of £5.

"The case of Morrow was, that he had engaged for a son of his to go to Quebec, in the brig *Larrick*, with Mr. Shaw, after that vessel had been cleared and mustered by me; that upon going down, the master refused to admit him, and that in consequence he had been kept in Belfast thirteen days on expenses. Mr. Shaw refusing to return the money (£1 8s.) ordered to be returned, together with 13s. of subsistence money, I issued two summonses under 21st and 22nd sections. The magistrates felt every desire to comply with my request of depriving Shaw of his license; but, as I understood then, in consequence of its not being set forth that the prosecution was at my instance, they deemed they had not the power, but that if any of the other parties should come forward, then the summons can be so worded as to admit of their taking it from him. The man has, I believe, absconded, at least he has not been seen in Belfast for a fortnight. The magistrates will now distrain his effects (if he has any), to proceed as the 29th section points out. The poor people sail to night for Liverpool to go to Quebec, but they are to empower me to receive their money for them (should it ever be recovered), and to send me their address from America.—I am, &c.,

"S. Walcott, Esq."

"P. STARK.

"Belfast, 4th June, 1844.

"SIR,—I beg to acquaint you that I this day took the case of John Hughes, another of J. H. Shaw's unfortunate Prince Edward passengers, before the magistrates, who fined him (Shaw) in £5, as compensation to Hughes, together with the return of the passage money, amounting to £7 10s.; also, the sum of £5 for fraud; and have likewise deprived him of his license. In the case reported in my letter of the 26th, Shaw not being forthcoming, a distress warrant was issued, but no effects found, and I have no doubt it will be the same in the present case. I will thank you if you will apply to the Commissioners to know whether it is their wish that I should take any other steps in this matter, and what, or in any way apprise the poor people of the futility of their coming to Belfast, a distance of fifty miles, which is only adding to their expenses and misery, without a shadow of a prospect of doing themselves good. I have every reason to believe that Shaw is in Liverpool.—I am, &c.,

"P. STARK.

"S. Walcott, Esq."

"9, Park Street, 8th June, 1844.

"SIR,—I am directed by the Board to acknowledge the receipt of your letters of the 4th, communicating the result of another prosecution against J. H. Shaw, in the case of the Prince Edward passengers, and asking for in-



structions as to your future proceedings. In reply, I am to inform you that in the case in which the warrant of distress has been issued and returned without effects, the Board consider you ought to apply to the magistrates for a warrant of commitment, under 29th section of the Act. If the magistrates grant the warrant, and Shaw continues absent from Belfast, it can remain in the hands of the police, to be executed on the event of his returning to that city.

"S. WALCOTT."

"Lieut. Stark."

"Belfast, 11th June, 1844."

"SIR,—With reference to your letter of the 8th inst., conveying instructions as to my future proceedings in the case of Shaw, I beg to acquaint you that it was fully understood by the magistrates that the whole rigour of the law should be enforced. My application to the Commissioners was in the hope that something might be suggested that would put it in my power to bring the delinquent to justice. The police, who are on the look-out for him, have information that he has sailed from Liverpool to America, which, I think, is very likely.

"PETER STARK."

"S. Walcott, Esq."

Now, after all this, Shaw was taken, this year, into the Old Poor-house, when it was not open for other parties, and receives his dinner from the officers' table. I have been only once through the house; but I never saw such a dinner given to any person. Some time since, I went to the institution on a Sunday. It was a bitterly cold day; and it being the dinner hour, all that was laid out for the old, respectable inmates, was some "baps" and buttermilk. If they do not consume all the food at the time, they are not permitted to take any of it away. I asked the Steward why such a meal was given to the poor people on Sundays, and he said it was done to prevent the necessity of cooking on the Sabbath. At that moment I thought I smelled something very nice cooking elsewhere; and I went into an adjoining room, and found a leg of mutton roasting at the fire for the Steward's own dinner! Now, gentlemen, I tell you that I endeavour to have as little work on the Sabbath-day in my own house as possible, and I get everything done on the day before that can be accomplished; but I confess I think it is not acceptable to God to make old persons dine on the Sabbath-day on a piece of dry bread and some buttermilk, rather than on a hot potato, an egg, or a bowl of soup. The sort of treatment to which I have just alluded, as prevailing in the Old Poor-house, I call cant and hypocrisy.

It is generally supposed by the people of Belfast that I am fond of finding fault. Let the following remarks, copied from the visitors' book of the Hospital, testify. (I was the person who first suggested that there should be such a book kept in the porter's lodge):

"December 26th, 1859."

"To see the resident surgeon.

"The statement of accounts, as set forth in the last Annual Report (ending the 31st August, 1859) is most explanatory and satisfactory.

"G. S. DYER."



Now, this last entry shows that I was satisfied with the Annual Report for the year ending Aug., 1859; but I did not then examine the particulars, and I have since found out it is all "bosh."

In the pamphlet I published in June, 1858, I complained of the mismanagement of the Charitable Society. I made a number of charges, but have never been called upon for my proofs of them; and yet the Rev. Mr. Bruce states that, as respects one of them, there was no proof, only a suspicion:—

"The case of the schoolmaster was carefully investigated at the time.—There was some *suspicion*, but no *proof*, of intoxication; but there was medical testimony that the state of insensibility in which he was found was caused by some congestion of the brain, aggravated by exposure at that inclement season. There is not the slightest foundation for the insinuation of immorality implied in the words which Captain Dyer has printed in italics—that he was found drunk, 'without his shoes, on the female side' of the house.—He was, for a considerable time, under medical treatment at home for this diseased state of the brain, and the further consideration of his case was postponed till his return—when, under all the circumstances, it was thought unfair to blast his character by an immediate dismissal, and he was allowed to remain till the end of the quarter, at which time he had manifested so strong a desire to commend himself to the Committee, by his correctness and his sedulous attention to the duties of his office, that they have not thought it necessary to make any change."

Now, if I had been called upon to substantiate the charge I preferred, the first witness I should have called would have been the Steward himself, who was the person who gave the Schoolmaster in charge to the police constable—M<sup>r</sup> Nicholl, No. 11. Then I should have called that constable who took him (on Sunday, Jan. 10th, 1858) to the cell, and have produced a copy of the police-sheet for that day, which I have now before me, which states that he was brought to the police-office for being found at the rere of the Old Poor-house at 9, A.M., and kept in custody until 5, P.M.; but, on depositing 5s., and paying 6d. for a car for bringing him from the Old Poor-house to the police-office, he was allowed to depart. It should be borne in mind that the schoolmaster messes with the Steward, his sister the Matron, and the schoolmistress; and yet his face was so disfigured with dirt (for he had been lying by the ash-pit, with his face downwards) that not one of the numerous parties who saw him recognised him; and no one was more amazed when the policeman informed him, at 3, P.M., who it was, than the Steward, who had given him in charge!

I could have proved each and every charge which I made in the pamphlet had I been called upon so to do. In the 88th Report of this Society, the last one printed, that for the year ending November, 1859 (query October, *vide* page of Report 14), my name does not appear, although I paid a subscription of £1 1s. on the 11th Nov., and another £1 1s. on the 16th Nov.; whereas I paid my first an-



nual subscription of £1 1s. on the 4th Dec., 1857, and my name appears in the Report *up to Nov.*, 1857—thus Capt. G. S. Dyer, R.N., one year's subscription, *to Nov.*, 1857—and afterwards I was applied to for another £1 1s. subscription *to Nov.*, 1858. This same *ruse* was tried by the Belfast General Hospital, when I held the Treasurer's receipt for a guinea annual subscription to that Charity, up to Sept., 1859; but my name appeared in the Report for 1858, and then I was applied to for another one, to which I had already paid, and for which I held the Treasurer's Receipt.

Shortly after receiving the printed Report in *Feb.* of this year, I went to the Steward of the Poor-house, and asked him to allow me to inspect the counterfoil of the collector's book for the past year. He referred me to the collector, and upon my going to the latter and stating my business, and that I called upon him by the Steward's directions, he replied that he was very sorry to refuse me my request, but that he had been ordered, by one of the members of the Committee not to show me the counterfoils of the receipts, nor any papers whatever.

In the 83rd Annual Report there is the following item, in the abstract of the Treasurer's account:—"Annual subscriptions, including arrears received too late for insertion in the last Report, £107 8s. 6d.," with which sum the other side of the account is made to balance, whereas the true amount, according to the particulars given in the Report itself, is £207 9s.

I complain that one gentleman's name is retained on the list of the Committee after he had given in his resignation, whereby I, who was next on the poll, was excluded from the Committee, though I was willing to act. I complain that gentlemen were elected to serve on the Committee who were not at the time, nor never had been, members of the Corporation. I complain of the system of not publishing the Annual Reports and Accounts for many months after the Annual Meeting. I complain that no notice was taken of my letters addressed to the Committee, asking for information respecting the Society. I complain of errors and blunders in the accounts. I complain of statements in the Annual Reports, inconsistent with the statements in other Annual Reports, regarding the objects for which the Society was incorporated. I complain that children, for which it was never intended, are admitted into the institution, to the exclusion of more adults. I complain that persons who are not inhabitants of the town are admitted into the institution, to the exclusion of natives of Belfast, for whom the Society was founded. I complain that individuals, whose destitution was brought on by their own misconduct, have been received into the house. These, then, gentlemen, are some of the complaints which I prefer against the Society. Some of the evils I wish to see remedied are evidently of an old date; for in the



Report of the Select Committee, appointed to take into consideration the state of the poorer classes in Ireland, published in 1830, I find it stated at page 31—

“At Belfast the original objects of the institution of the Poor-house seem to have been departed from, and it has been considered more desirable to appropriate the funds of the house of industry to the relief of the indigent at their own habitations.”

I have stated that, at the time of the opening of the union work-house, in 1841, one-half of the inmates of the Old Poor-house were transferred to the new establishment; and I have told you I complain that natives of Belfast are excluded from the Charity, whilst others, who are not natives, are received into it. Now, in regard to these matters, I beg the meeting will bear with me while I read an extract from the *News-Letter*, under date of Dec. 3rd, 1841. It says:—

“On Tuesday last, the Annual General Board of the Belfast Charitable Society was held in the Poor-house—Thomas Verner, Esq., Sovereign, in the chair. The Rev. A. C. M‘Cartney read the Report, by which it appeared that in consequence of the opening of the New Workhouse, the charge of the poor was partly removed from this ancient establishment, and on this account the managers had not only suspended admissions to the house, but were enabled to discharge some of the former inmates, by which means the members of the house have been reduced from 490 to 280; but even this number, from their present diminished resources, was more than they could safely undertake to support. In the course of some time, however, they hoped to be able to admit inmates, AND THEN THE CANDIDATES WOULD ONLY BE SUCH AS HAD BEEN BORN IN THE TOWN, HAD CONDUCTED THEMSELVES HONESTLY AND CORRECTLY, AND WHO HAD NOT, BY BAD BEHAVIOUR, BROUGHT THEMSELVES TO DESTITUTION.”

The Treasurer of the General Hospital contended, at the Annual Meeting of that charity, that, although there was a discrepancy of £12 between the amount with which he had debited himself in the abstract of his account (page 53) in the last Report, and the amount of particulars given (from pages 23 to 52), viz., £896—1st—“That there was no error at all;” 2nd—“If there were any errors at all in the printed Report, he was not accountable for them.”

I think I have now given you some information which most of you did not previously know. Regarding Charities in general, it might not, perhaps, be inappropriate if I should read you a letter which I had the honour to address to Lord Naas, when Chief Secretary for Ireland, touching the management of Charities in this country. Here it is:—

“TO THE RIGHT HON. LORD NAAS, CHIEF SECRETARY FOR IRELAND.

“2, Upper Gardiner-Street, Dublin, Oct. 18th, 1858.

“MY LORD,—I take advantage of your permission to address you further, respecting the management and control over the Public Charities of Ireland.



"I have read in the *Daily Express* of the 13th inst. a report of a communication which the Hon. Secretary of the Dublin Parochial Association made to your Lordship on that subject on the 9th inst. I would add to their suggestions—

"1st—That the accounts be audited by parties unconnected with the charity (the Dublin Hospital accounts used to be audited by the Audit Board. See reply to query 749, in the Report of Select Committee appointed to take into consideration the state of the poorer classes in Ireland, to be found in the library of the Royal Dublin Society.)

"2nd—The accounts should be required to be kept in a uniform manner, similar as much as possible to the plan of the Poor Law Relief Act.

"3rd—Facilities should be given for public inspection of the accounts.

"4th—Security should be required from those who receive and disburse the moneys.

"5th—All supplies should be by open competition.

"6th—No vacant office to be filled until after public advertisement.

"7th—Every person concerned in the administration of a charity should be debarred from deriving any benefit therefrom, except by salary.

"8th—Besides the notice now required to be published in the *Dublin Gazette* of all charitable bequests, notice should also be given in the newspapers of the localities to which those bequests pertain.

"9th—There should be at least half-yearly general meetings of public charities, in the same manner as those of railway companies are called and held.

"As a general rule all meetings of trustees of charities should be open ones not merely for the public press, but those who may feel interested in the administration of them.

"Of course no one would be allowed to take part in the proceedings but those entitled so to do.

"A copy of every Report of a Charity should be required to be sent to the Commissioners of Bequests in Dublin.—I am, my Lord, your obedient servant,

"GEORGE S. DYER, Capt. R.N."

It is generally supposed by the inhabitants that the Charitable Society's institution was originally intended for those only who had been in comfortable circumstances, but through age, &c., had become reduced. But are the inmates very comfortable? and is their treatment of a character superior to what is afforded to the paupers in the union workhouse? I have already mentioned the "silent system" at dinner, and the "bap" and buttermilk which constitute their afternoon meal on the Sabbath. In corroboration of this, I may tell you that the cost for the maintenance of each inmate, *per diem*, is only 2½d., whilst that for the maintenance of the pauper in the union workhouse is 2½d.! The latter is supplied by open competition, the other not. Certainly, there is no ground for charging the Committee with extravagance in the expense of dietary in the Old Poor-house—nor, I understand, for even the cost of providing knives and forks.

Now for the practical application.

With respect to the Sailors' Home, I would suggest that at the beginning of next year, when the election will take place, those only be returned members who are favourable to the removal of the Local



Marine Board and the Shipping Office to the Sailors' Home. The Shipping Office, most of you know, is a place where sailors, when they come to this port, are paid their wages; and if you wish to protect the seaman, and prevent him from being defrauded, the best thing you can do is, to have the Shipping Office under the same roof with the Sailors' Home. In a book which I have in my possession, there are statements made by the Shipping Officers in London and Liverpool, speaking in the strongest terms of the great advantages to be derived from having the Shipping Office and Sailors' Home placed under the same roof. That, therefore, is the practical matter regarding the Sailors' Home.

I will now say a few more words to you respecting the Ragged School. The Society under which it was, in the first instance, established and managed, had determined on giving up the school; but the ladies of Belfast—to their honour be it told—said, “No; we will not give it up. We will see if we cannot maintain it.” They then transferred it to its present place, in Barrack Street, where no fewer than from 300 to 400 children are now daily receiving the benefits of a Christian education. It would be well worth the while of any of you to visit it. All that I can say is, that I heartily commend it to your consideration and support. I have no official connexion with it now, but I can strongly recommend it to you. Go to it—see it—inspect it yourselves; and I shall be greatly mistaken if it will not receive your most hearty support.

With respect to the Old Poor-house, it is a Belfast charity, and no one but a native of the town has any right or title whatever to partake of its advantages. One thing I would suggest respecting all charitable institutions, and that is, that the same plan shall be pursued in them that is followed by law by railway companies—that is followed out, according to the requirements of the law, by the Poor Law Guardians, the Belfast Harbour Board, and the Belfast Water Commissioners. The rule with each of those bodies is to allow a certain interval to take place after the report has been signed, and the accounts are made up, so that parties who have contributed to their funds can inspect them and satisfy themselves that all is correct. And surely the funds and accounts of a charitable institution should be the most open to inspection. Another matter which I desire to state is, that in my opinion all moneys belonging to charities should be invested in Government Securities. Now, I know that the treasurer of the General Hospital applied this year to the Accountant of the Commissioners for Charitable Bequests and Donations in Ireland, asking him if it were possible to take the principal of moneys out of the Government Funds, and place them in some other way of investment. I confess if such a proposition had been made known to me before the last Annual Meeting, I would have brought the case



forward ; and although I might have received some opposition from persons present, I would have discountenanced such a thing.\* I read in this morning's papers that a large sum of money was lately paid to the treasurer, and that he had stated he was looking out for some good investment for it. But let me tell you that if you get a larger rate of interest, you will have a greater measure of risk. The funds of a charity should be placed in as little risk as possible. The object should not be so much the interest you will get as the security you ought to have. In Saunders's Dublin newspaper of Oct. 11, 1858, there is an extract from the Select Committee on Bank Act and Commercial Distress. £9,500 of stock was held by Evans's Charity, of Kilkenny. The trustees entrusted their seal to their Secretary (the Secretary of the Protestant Bishop). He used that seal for the purpose of transfer, and it was witnessed by two magistrates of Kilkenny. It was considered a forgery, and the money was recovered from the Bank of Ireland.

We of this generation should not be paying for a future one. I would not trench upon the principle of a Charity at all—I think we should maintain it intact. And why should we pay for our children's children, and let our present generation suffer? When I suggested that there should be better counterpanes, chairs, and other articles in the Hospital, the answer I received was, "We cannot afford it." I went a few days ago to visit a little deaf and dumb girl in the General Hospital, and whilst there I saw the female patients going to the water-closet in their night dresses, with naked feet, while the floors of the wards were being washed. Each patient should be supplied with addressing-gown and a pair of slippers. I visited the poor child again, and I found a pane of glass entirely out, and quite a puddle of wet in the water-closet; so that, when the Patients are seated, the wind must blow on the back of their heads, whilst their feet were in a puddle of water. It was otherwise in a filthy state.

It was my desire to have made these things known to you before ; but I was afraid lest I might injure your excellent Charities. God forbid I should do such a thing! My wish is to support them ; but I think it right to tell you the treatment in the General Hospital is not such as I have been accustomed to witness elsewhere. I have had a great deal of hospital experience in my time, and (for I was always fond of that sort of thing) when I had nothing else to do, I used to visit the poor and the sick, and the afflicted ; and I have been always ready and willing to give the benefit of all the experience I have had in these matters to the Belfast Charitable Institution. Respecting the ap-

\* There is also a memorandum in the hospital books to the effect that Mr. James Girdwood had returned a bond which he had borrowed.



pointment of life governors to the General Hospital, I say none shall be appointed, according to 2nd General Rule, but donors of £50 at any one time. It so happens (he continued) that there are several life governors of the institution whose £50 is included in the money given for the building in 1813-17, and 1819, and also for the extension of 1842 and 1844. Now the second name upon the tablet in the General Hospital is the Harbour Commissioners, who, it would appear by the tablet, gave £300. The Report of the Committee of the hospital states that in 1848 they made application to the Harbour Commissioners for assistance, and that the answer they received from the Harbour Commissioners was, that their Act did not allow them to give any. The truth is, that £300 was not given by the Harbour Commissioners; but by the Act respecting the old Ballast Board, that Board was required to pay all their surplus money to the Old Poor-house. In 1817, they paid that sum to it, which was afterwards given by the Committee of that institution to the General Hospital. Therefore, to put upon the tablet "The Harbour Commissioners, £300," is not giving credit to whom credit is due. Again, the tablet contains an acknowledgment of Mrs. Malcolmson's munificent gift of £400; and yet there is not the slightest allusion made to it in the list of donations and bequests, which ought to be a transcript of the tablet in the hospital. These donations are neither in alphabetical order nor in order of date, nor in order of amount; and the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Goldschmidt (£50), alluded to in the Report of the Committee, is omitted. Among the life governors there are two or three who have given £50 each, but their names are included in the list of subscriptions for the building of 1813-17, and 1819.—For instance, the Mayor, for the time being, the two M.P.'s, and the Bishop of Down and Connor, do not appear to have given £50 at any one time. Therefore, I cannot understand why their names should be set down as life governors. Nor can I understand why the clerical element is to be confined to the Prelatical order, because the Lord Bishop of Down and Connor cannot be said to represent more than twenty clergymen, for there are not so many as twenty altogether in Belfast, and I suppose there are not more than ten Roman Catholic priests here. I heard Dr. Cooke, on one occasion, say that he was a bishop, and if the Bishop of Down and Connor, and the Right Rev. Dr. Denvir, are life governors, why not the Moderator of the Belfast Presbytery for the time being, who represent not merely the ministers of his denomination, but the laity also; and the chief representative of the Wesleyan Methodist Churches be also included. If the Bishop of Down and Dr. Denvir have contributed their £50 each, by all means let them be on the list the same as any other donor; but it appears they have not,



and, therefore, they should not be considered life governors. Besides, if it be as it was stated by a clergyman lately in a newspaper of this town, that the special duties of the clergy were of such weighty importance, and so numerous, and of so sacred a character, that no layman could perform, (which I admit,) and the clergy are so few, whilst the population is so great, then let the clergy confine themselves to their special duties (*Sutor, ad crepidam*), and let the laymen carry out the remainder.

About a month since, I went to the Belfast Hospital to obtain a Report in order to show that in my opinion the funds of the Old Poor-house belong to the General Hospital. On looking over the Report I found my name not inserted as a subscriber. I asked a friend to look over the list and see if he could discover my name, and he could not. Another friend, a collector of the hospital, called at my office, and I informed him of the matter. They called at Mr. Girdwood's and told him. He said, "You two gentlemen heard Captain Dyer speaking disrespectfully of me." They said, "No; quite the contrary; for he feels, in common with the other inhabitants of Belfast, greatly indebted to you for the onerous and responsible post you have taken in the Hospital, and it must be very painful to you that such a thing should have occurred." I determined to go home, think over the affair, and then, the next morning I would go with the receipt and the Report to the treasurer, in order to get an explanation. When I came to my office the next morning, I found a letter from Mr. Girdwood calling upon me for the date of my subscription, if I had got the receipt, and telling me that I should hear from his solicitor in the morning. I did no more. My intentions were frustrated, and at the end of six days I heard from his solicitor. The letter which I received from Mr. Girdwood I put into my solicitor's hands, and I have heard nothing more about it since. Several persons have told me that the treasurer informed them that I had made an humble apology to him, and paid his law costs. I deny that. I have done neither the one nor the other. I have written a most pacific letter, stating that I wished bygones to be bygones, and that we should now endeavour to profit by past experience; but although sent to the newspapers, none of them have inserted it. We should all insist on having a receipt for our money. At the Sailors' Home my colleague, as Hon. Secretary to it, collects the subscriptions, gives a list of the names of the contributors to it, with the respective amounts, to the treasurer, who immediately sends receipts, signed by himself, to the parties. One gentleman says he is not in the habit of giving a receipt, because he says that then he would be responsible. The treasurer says he is not responsible. And the question now is, "Who is responsible?" That is the question the inhabitants of



Belfast should ask and have answered. I have paid a guinea subscription to the General Hospital six weeks ago, and I have asked for a receipt several times, and have not yet obtained it. I do not say who is accountable; but surely it is a *desideratum* to know when we pay our subscriptions, who is the responsible party. The last printed abstract of the treasurer's account of the General Hospital states that the amount received is £884, whereas, by the entries, it is £896. I have read the report in the newspapers of the Annual Meeting of the General Hospital, held on Nov. 3rd, 1859, by which it appears the treasurer stated that he had that day received some of the collectors' books, with, I presume, the amount. I may, however, mention this curious fact to you. The Annual Meeting of the subscribers to the General Hospital was held on 3rd November, 1859, and the abstract of the accounts is dated November 10th, 1859; just one week after!! The Committee, I know, are desirous of incurring as little expense as possible. They advertised for printers, giving the preference to the lowest tender. The consequence was, they got one of the cheap ones, and, as it turned out, not a good one. He was a "small" man, had very little type, and was compelled to "set up" the Report bit by bit, and when the separate parts were put together, they did not tally properly, and so I suppose the account had to be cooked to make them balance. As I said before, I am willing now that bygones should be bygones, and that we should take a lesson from the past for future good.

I am told the people of Belfast stand shoulder to shoulder when their town is in question. I admire them for it, up to a certain point; but do not give the cold shoulder to a stranger, who, instead of wishing to injure your charities, desires to correct their abuses, and to turn them to the ends for which they were founded. I maintain that a person located in a town, for a season, is *bound* to identify himself, as much as possible, with its interests. I believe in the Word of God and desire to take it as my standard or rule of life. There I read, Gal. vi. 9, 10—"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, (whilst we have time) let us do good unto all men." I should have thought that the merchants of Belfast had learnt the necessity of looking into its public affairs, by the severe lesson they have had to commit to memory of late; but, so far as I can perceive, they are in general so engrossed, in their commercial pursuits, as to leave their public affairs to take care of themselves. If such be the case, then the stranger, who is said "to be fond of that sort of thing," and is willing to devote any leisure he may have to that purpose, should not be snubbed, muzzled, silenced! I have never as yet been allowed to have my say out, without being inter-



rupted, and perhaps put down. It is true that I am not familiar with the forms of procedure of public meetings, but perhaps I may attempt to go too straight ahead to gain my point. I am not sufficiently acquainted with the manœuvres of politics, for I am no politician—I am a TRUE BLUE for my Queen and country. It is time I had finished, but I cannot do so without first declaring in the most positive manner I can, that I bear malice to no one, although I have been accused of it; but it is as a lover of this country, and a desire to be a useful citizen in this town—that I tell you that which I know. It is said that I am an impracticable man; well *Fas est ab hoste doceri*. I will profit by the accusation, and try, if I can, in each case, to suggest some practical good. It is also said that my manner is impetuous. However that may be, what I accuse myself of is that, having known, for such a length of time, the matters I have dilated upon, and burning with indignation, as I have during that time, that I have not exposed them long before. In my profession it does not answer to say to a sailor—I'll thank you to let go that rope, nor please haul in the main brace; but what I have been accustomed to is—"Ready; oh, ready. Helm's a lee. Tacks and sheets. Haul well taut. Mainsail haul. Of all, haul."

Let us now take a warning for the future. Let us all unite to effect some practical good; to remedy those evils which I have brought under your notice, and to promote and advance in every way possible the prospects of the Charitable Institutions of Belfast.

As yet I have not had access to the records of the Charitable Society, although the Royal Commissioners gave an order that I should, and to which the Steward told me if her Majesty Queen Victoria (whom may God bless) were to come herself in person with a like order, he would not obey her!! By the newspaper Report of the Annual Meeting of that Corporation, held in 1841, I find a Mr. M'Clery put the question to know if a member of the Corporation were *entitled* to inspect the records; he was informed by Dr. M'Gee and Mr. John Bates that every member of the Corporation had that RIGHT.

And yet, when I endeavour to exercise my right as one of the "assistants" of the Corporation, and request the collector of it to show me the blocks or counterfoils of his receipts, he tells me that he is ordered by a member of the Committee not to allow me to see them!!

I shall, however, in due time, gain my point, and no thanks to the Committee for that privilege.

Apologizing for delaying you so long, let us conclude, by singing the National Anthem. After which the meeting broke up.