

THE WEST OF IRELAND – ITS EXISTING CONDITION, AND PROSPECTS

BY

HENRY COULTER

Introduction

The contents of this document are abstracted from “The West of Ireland – its existing condition, and prospects” by Henry Coulter. The complete book consists of the Letters of the Special Correspondent of Saunders’s Newsletter from the West of Ireland in relation to the condition and prospects of the people, consequent on the partial failure of agricultural produce caused by unfavourable harvest during the previous two years.

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Any website purporting to describe the heritage of the Corrib catchment would not be complete in the absence of the content of this vivid account of the west of Ireland.

Only three chapters relevant to the Corrib catchment are presented here.

Chapter X deals with Connemara, Maam and the Joyce country west of the Corrib.

Chapter XI deals mainly with Tuam but is included as it provides a vivid picture of life around the Corrib in 1861 and 1862, some twelve years after the famine.

Chapter XII deals mainly with Cong, Ashford Castle and the Corrib navigation.

Michael J. Hynes

March 2013

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BY HENRY COULTER,

CORRESPONDENT OF SAUNDERS'S NEWS-LETTER.

(BY PERMISSION.)

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NOTICE TO THE READER

The pages which form this work, contain the Letters of the Special Correspondent of SAUNDERS'S NEWS-LETTER from the West of Ireland, in relation to the condition and prospects of the people, consequent upon the partial failure of agricultural produce, caused by unfavourable harvests during the last two years.

These Letters are now published as they appeared in SAUNDERS'S NEWS-LETTER in the latter part of 1861 and the beginning of 1862, without any material alteration. The reader must not expect to find a complete narrative of travel, but a careful compilation of facts referring mainly to the subject that caned for the Commission.

Some omissions may therefore occur, which a more extended examination of the several districts would have supplied, and for which the indulgence of the reader is solicited. The great object of the writer has been to ascertain the truth, and to represent the state of the country as the several circumstances came under his personal observation during an inquiry which extended over a period of four months, and embraced the greater portion of seven counties.

Some of the illustrations, though not specially referred to in the text, have been introduced as characteristic of the country and the people.

THE EDITOR.

April, 1862.

CHAPTER X.

Climate of Connemara — Scenery — The Twelve Pins — Letterfrack — Killery Harbour — Maam — Joyce's Country — A Connemara farmer — Distress of the small holders — Oughterard.

Maam December 26th 1861.

Having fully reported the present state of the districts immediately adjoining Clifden, I proceeded from that town through Letterfrack, Kylemore, and Leenane, posing along the shore of Killery Bay to Maam, which is situate at the head of Lough Corrib, and on the border of the territory known as the Joyce Country. This route, which is usually followed by tourists, brings the traveller into the midst of the wildest and most picturesque scenery of this wonderful region of mountain, moor, and lake.

In expatiating on the delights of driving on a bright autumn evening among the mountains and lakes of Connemara, Miss Martineau says that the air is like "breathing champagne or breathing cream", having the best qualities of the sea and land breeze at once. I can fully believe in the truthfulness of the eulogy thus enthusiastically expressed ; for although my visit was made at a season when travelling, except by railway, is generally accompanied by much hardship and discomfort, I found the atmosphere of Connemara warm and agreeable, compared to that of other places in Ireland, and experienced but little inconvenience, save that arising from the too copious fall of rain, with which this locality, in common with the entire of the western coast, has been visited during the latter half of the present year. We have had some sharp and fierce hail-storms within the last three weeks, but these were exceptions to the usual mildness of the climate which prevails in this portion of the country.

From Clifden to Letterfrack we pass through a district of mountain and bog, with the sea ever in view, giving variety and animation to scenes that would otherwise present too sterile and desolate an appearance. After proceeding thus for several miles, the road suddenly sweeps round the base of a hill, and a landscape of surpassing beauty bursts like magic on the sight. To the east of the spectator the bronzed moorland extends as far as the eye can reach ; to the west is Ballinakill Bay, bounded by a chain of hills, and looking like an inland lake, whilst immediately in front lies a broad and lovely valley, with green fields scattered here and there, relieving and softening, without detracting from, the natural wildness of the scene ; and above all towers the magnificent range of mountains popularly known as the Twelve Pins, unrivalled in variety of outline and striking effect. I was peculiarly fortunate in the day on which I viewed this remarkable scene. The atmosphere was mild and balmy, the sea was smooth as glass, and reflected the deep blue of the sky above, some light fleecy clouds floated lazily in the air, throwing their shadows on the lofty peaks and rugged sides of the Twelve Pins, and the summits of the northern hills were covered with snow. In short, everything was present that was requisite to constitute a perfect picture ; and so exquisitely did every feature harmonize, that the absence of trees, which in general contribute so greatly to the charm of landscape scenery, was not perceptible.

A mile or two further on brings us to one of the gems of Connemara, the pretty little village of Letterfrack, with its handsome houses and neat cottages, forming a perfect oasis in the surrounding waste of mountain and of moor. Letterfrack is admirably situated near Ballinakill Harbour, with high hills encompassing it on almost every side; but its great attraction is that which it derives from the taste and industry of man. Some years ago several members of the Society of Friends settled here on a spot which was previously a solitude, and by their energy they have transformed the red bogs and bare rocks, which are the natural features of the place, into a scene of cultivated beauty, resembling a model English village, in the order, neatness, and cleanliness which are everywhere apparent. One gentleman, Mr. Butler, whose house is situated at a short distance from the village, has accomplished a great deal, and expended a large sum in fencing, draining, and planting.

Whilst I admire the enterprise and taste which have made Letterfrack what it is, I am bound to say that believe the outlay has not proved remunerative; the expense incurred in thoroughly reclaiming the bogs has been so great, that, in a pecuniary point of view, a serious loss has been unquestionably sustained. This, however, is no just cause of discouragement in the work of reclamation and improvement which remains to be effected throughout Connemara. Without going so expensively to work as the founders of Letterfrack have done, the landowners of this district, profiting by the example which has been set them, might largely increase the value of their property by a judicious outlay of capital on certain obvious improvements which could be easily carried out. About three miles from Letterfrack we enter the Pass of Kylemore, resembling in some measure the Gap of Dunloe, and drive along the margin of the lake—a fine sheet of water, embosomed amongst lofty hills, whose sides are in some places thickly clothed with the natural wood, showing that they might be planted with success. The lake abounds with salmon and white trout; and in the summer season Mr. Duncan's hotel, built within a few yards of the water's edge, is a favourite resort of anglers, who rarely fail to carry away with them pleasing recollections of excellent sport and of some agreeable hours spent in the society of their genial and accomplished host.

After leaving the hotel, a drive of a few minutes brings us to a scene which presents to our view nothing but the brown moor sprinkled with tufts of heath, two or three small lakes, and the chain of gloomy mountains that encompasses the whole, and seems to shut it off completely from the outer world. As we proceed we catch a glimpse of a substantial lodge built on a rock projecting into a large sized lake ; and this is the romantic retreat where one of our distinguished surgeons, antiquaries, and men of letters, Dr. Wilde, snatches a brief interval of rest from the engrossing labours of his profession.

Shortly after losing sight of Dr. Wilde's lodge, Killery Harbour, with its grand mountain range, breaks upon the sight. The scenery here is sublime from its solitude and vastness. The bay runs fully ten miles inland, and seems in many places to be scarcely half a mile wide ; the mountains, which are the highest in the west of Ireland, spring almost precipitously from the water's edge; no human habitation is visible, and on the occasion of my last visit to

this locality, the only indications of life for some time perceptible, were the cormorants winging their swift flight along the surface of the sea, or darting beneath it in pursuit of their prey. As I progressed a little further, I saw a revenue steamboat at anchor in the bay, on the look out for smugglers, and afterwards observed several fishing boats which had come from Leenane in pursuit of the herrings for which these waters are celebrated. Leenane is a miserable looking village, situated near the northern extremity of Killery Harbour at the point where the road branches off on the right to Maam and on the left to Westport. Before reaching Leenane, we leave Connemara behind, and enter into the region known as Joyce Country.

Inglis, in his journey through Ireland, says: " The scenery of Maam, at the head of Lough Corrib, is fine — very fine. If a lake filled the hollow of the mountains, Killarney might tremble for its supremacy, for the outline of the mountain range surpasses in picturesque form any of the ranges that bound the Lakes of Killarney". This praise is by no means exaggerated. I reached Maam late at night, so that when I arose next morning, and stepped out of the little hotel, built at the base of a high hill, and within a short distance of Lough Corrib, the scene burst upon me quite unexpectedly, and struck me as one of the grandest that I had ever witnessed. The hotel was' originally built by the celebrated Nimmo as a fishing lodge. Immediately in front of it, a neat bridge spans the river that flows into the lake, and from this bridge an excellent road runs directly through the heart of the mountains to the Recess and Ballinahinch. There are only two or three houses visible from the hotel, and the plain, which is set in so magnificent a framework of hills, consists of a vast expanse of unreclaimed bog, having a gradual inclination towards the lake,. so as to afford facilities for draining at a cost that would prove remunerative. The hotel has but one sitting-room, and is utterly inadequate for the accommodation of the crowds of tourists who visit it in the summer season. The proprietor of it, however, has no lease, and, of coarse; will not expend money on improvements Without having some security that he will be permitted to enjoy-them ; and it is rumoured that Lord Leitrim, the owner of the soil, intends converting the building into a fishing lodge or summer residence for his own use.

On a small island in the lake, at the distance .of about a mile and a half from the hotel, are the picturesque ruins of the Hen's Castle, which, some centuries ago, was one of the chief places of strength in Connaught. When destroyed during Cromwell's protectorate, it was in the possession of the O'Flahertys. It derives its name from a curious legend, that it was built in one night by a hen and her chickens.

I have ventured to dwell on the physical features of the country through which I passed on my way from Clifden to Leenane, because the greater portion of it is altogether without inhabitants. Shortly after leaving Clifden the miserable hovels become fewer and fewer, until they completely disappear; and the same observation is applicable to the district lying between Letterfrack and Leenane, the houses that one meets with belonging to gentlemen who have recently settled there, and not to the farmers or peasantry of the country. Indeed, with the exception of a few small villages situate far back in the recesses of the mountain

valleys, the interior of Connemara is little better than a desert waste. From Leenane to Maam, a distance of eight miles, the country is more thickly inhabited. On a rough estimate there are about 400 families living in this district, which, at an average of five each, would give a population of 2,000 persons. There are no mere cottiers or labouring men living here; all are holders of land, some to a large and others to a very small extent. The latter of course greatly predominate, and include a considerable number whose yearly rent does not exceed five or six pounds. There are some half-dozen or so paying from £150 to £200 a-year. These are all large grazing farmers, and in consequence of the high prices of stock at present and for some time past, they are in a very prosperous condition, and many of them are wealthy men. I saw one old man reputed to be worth several thousand pounds, trotting home on his stout Connemara pony from one of his farms near Clifden, to which he had been paying his regular visit of inspection. He wore the ordinary frieze coat, and his appearance was in no respect different from that of a small farmer of the humblest class, although he is the owner of several farms, including large tracts of mountain pasturage on which he rears numerous herds of cattle and Socks of sheep. He owes his success to his own active industry, sagacity, and knowledge of business, there being no more competent judge of stock in the country, and no one who knows better the exact time when to buy and when to sell. Notwithstanding his large means and the comfortable position he has always occupied, this shrewd and clever old gentleman does not speak English, and rather prides himself on his ignorance of the language of the Sassenach.

A short time ago some hotly-disputed question arose at a local board of which he is a member, and when the votes came to be taken, it was insisted, with much show of reason, that he was not entitled to vote inasmuch as he did not understand the language in which the discussion had been carried on. It was decided, however, that his vote should be taken, the question at issue having been explained to him in Irish ; and Paddy (this is his real Christian name, his patronymic is that of one of the most illustrious of Irish chieftains), could only signify the side which he wished to espouse by pointing to the chairman, and saying: " I'll go with him". The man to whom I refer is, perhaps, the richest farmer in the whole of Connemara and Joyce's Country, but there are others who are very well off, such as the sons of old John Joyce, lately deceased, who was celebrated for his gigantic size and strength, and the family of the Kings, all intelligent and industrious men, knowing not only how to make money, but how to keep it.

The class below these - namely, the farmers paying from £25 to £50 a-year for their holdings, include but few persons who have not accumulated sufficient means to enable them to meet, without difficulty, any losses they may have sustained by the failure of their potato crop. The small holders here, as elsewhere, are the persons by whom the pressure will be most severely felt. They depend almost entirely on the potato for food, and, in ordinary years, would have enough of money left after the payment of the rent to purchase meal or other provisions for the month or six weeks previous to the coming in of the new crop. The potato is cultivated here solely for home use. Scarcely any corn is grown; and the

small farmer generally pays his rent with the sum realized by the sale of a few sheep, a pig, a foal, a calf, or a two-year old beast. Some of them have two or three milch cows, sufficient to keep the family in milk and to make a little butter; many also possess one of those hardy little horses, the Connemara pony, which need but little care, and will thrive on the coarsest pasturage.

Comparing the return of the potato crop with that of former years, there is a deficiency of over one-third in this district, and the remainder is of inferior quality, and can only be used by mashing the potatoes with cabbage or other vegetables, and making colcannon. The small farmers who have suffered so severe a loss by the failure of their staple food will have to commence purchasing meal before the time calculated on in ordinary seasons, and many of them will not have the means to do this except by selling their stock at a great sacrifice, which is always of a poor description even in summer, and of course the condition of their cattle in winter is much lower and their value necessarily diminished. Besides, they will find it difficult to dispose of their stock at all; inasmuch as most of the extensive farmers are already fully supplied, and are not likely to overstock themselves.

The pinch will begin to be felt in March or April, after which time much distress and privation may be anticipated amongst the class of whom I now speak. That potatoes in the neighbourhood of Leenane are not nearly exhausted yet, may be inferred from the fact, that up to the present time very few persons have purchased any meal at the store kept by Dr. Foreman, the proprietor of the neat little hotel there. The price of potatoes in the market is also a good criterion of their scarcity or otherwise; and the prices just now are not very high, viz., 41d. per stone of 14 lbs. in Clifden, 4d. and 5d. in Oughterard, 5d. in Cong, and 4d. in Westport - the two latter places being in the county of Mayo. Indian meal can now be had for 9s. or 10s. per cwt.; and as long as the price of this article remains at its present rate, I cannot look forward to any very general or intense distress amongst the inhabitants.. A war with America, so much to be deplored on every account, would be most disastrous to these people, as it would probably have the effect of doubling or largely increasing the price of Indian meal.

Under the most favourable circumstances, the poorer class of farmers, who, I trust, will be able to struggle through the year, will have their resources so much exhausted that another bad season must ruin them outright; but the buoyant spirit and recuperative power of the Irish race is so great, that if we are blessed with a favourable harvest next year, they will recover from their present state of depression with marvellous rapidity, and the country will resume that career of prosperity to which the last two seasons have given a temporary check.

With respect to fuel, there is no turf saved, and none within reasonable distance to be purchased. Everywhere, within a few minutes walk of every cottage, abundance of turf could have been obtained, if the people had cut and secured it before June, but afterwards the removal of it from the bogs became impossible. At Leenane I entered a cottage where a good turf fire burned upon the hearth - the only really good fire that I had seen in any

similar habitation during my tour through the west. One of the women who sat warming themselves at the cheerful glow, said rather querulously, in reply to my questions, that "the Joyces had enough of turf to supply the parish"; and it was strongly suspected that she had laid their store under contribution to supply her wants. The Joyces are the family that I have mentioned above, and like prudent men as they are, they not only got home their turf early in the season, but had a reserve from the previous year. This, however, is an exceptional case. The mass of the people have no turf at all, and the women and children are at present constantly employed in collecting heather, brambles, rushes, coarse grass, and anything they can procure to cook their food.

Having been informed when at Maam that distress in Oughterard had become very intense, and that a woman had actually died there from destitution, I determined to pay a brief visit to that place for the purpose of ascertaining the facts. I accordingly proceeded to Cong, and crossed Lough Corrib in a turf boat - the distance from Cong to Oughterard by water being about ten miles, whilst by the road it is nearly forty. Almost the first thing the careless boatmen did was to run the boat against a rock, and during the remainder of the passage, which was rough and disagreeable, as heavy showers accompanied by strong gusts of wind came down frequently from the mountains at the head of the lake, they kept continually assuring me that only for the "wakeness" of the boat, which had seen much service and stood badly in need of repairs, they would shake out the reefs and take me across in an incredibly short space of time. However, we arrived safely at Oughterard, and I commenced making inquiries as to the state of matters in that district, and soon found that the rumours which I had heard were much exaggerated.

The population of Oughterard is about five hundred, and includes a large proportion of very poor labouring men, who are suffering from the want of fuel at present, and apprehend a scarcity of food in the course of a month or two. There was no foundation, however, for the reported death from the effects of deficient nutriment and warmth. A coroner's inquest was held upon a woman who had died rather suddenly ; but it was clearly proved that her death was caused by disease in the ordinary course of nature. She was a professions beggar, who could have obtained relief in the workhouse if she had applied for it, and she was not without the means of procuring food, for some pence were found in her pocket.

There can be no doubt that in the mountain district of Lettermore, Glantrasna, and towards Rossmuck, where there are little villages of fifteen or twenty houses each, the people feel intensely the want of fuel; and if the coming season should prove a wet one, there will be extreme distress in all these places. Coals might be sent from Galway to Camus Bay, which would bring relief within six, four, and three miles of the localities to which I allude. In the village of Oughterard and its neighbourhood a few gentlemen, including Mr. G. F. O'Flaherty, J.P., and Mr. Martin, J.P., are giving employment with a view to help the poor; and a relief committee has been formed, who have already distributed a considerable quantity of coals at 1s. per cwt., and some meal at 1s. per stone - in both cases much under

the cost price. There is a large growth of hazel and brushwood on the property of Mr. Martin, who allows the people to carry it away for firing.

I may mention that a railway has been projected from Galway to Oughterard, and the residents are, of course, most anxious to have it carried out. The Law Life Insurance Company has been asked to subscribe to the undertaking, because the line would pass through and benefit their property; but the directors here refused to encourage the project, believing that it could not pay under any circumstances. This refusal; which appears to me to be perfectly justifiable, has increased the dislike with which the company is regarded, and was probably the immediate cause of a series of denunciatory resolutions, which were passed respecting that body at the recent road sessions at Oughterard.

CHAPTER XI

Tuam — Its Suburbs — Poverty and misery of the inhabitants — The Fuel Fund — The two Committees — Village of Carrowpeter — Condition of the people of Headford. — The Quarter-acre clause — The Rev. Peter Conway.

Tuam, January 4, 1862.

This town, the second largest in the county Galway, contains a population numbering close upon 4,600 persons, and derives its importance from its central position with respect to the counties of Galway, Mayo, and Roscommon. Hitherto it may be said to have been the key to the county of Mayo, the traffic from the south and east of Ireland to the north-west of Connaught having always passed through it, as offering the shortest and most convenient route. The line of railway from Athlone to Roscommon, and from thence by Castlerea, Ballyhaunis, and Claremorris, to Castlebar and Westport, will necessarily, when completed, produce a considerable change in this respect; but Tuam will always retain, by virtue of its geographical position, a prominent place amongst the towns in the West of Ireland. The great annual three-day fair, held here in October, is second only to that of Ballinasloe, and affords the stockmasters and graziers of Mayo, Galway, and Roscommon, a more central and convenient market for the sale and purchase of stock than they can obtain elsewhere. Tuam is also a corporate town, governed by town commissioners; and it is honoured by the residence of two well known prelates, the Right Rev. Lord Plunket, Bishop of Tuam, and the Roman Catholic Archbishop, the Most Rev. Dr. MacHale. Although a good business town, the houses, generally speaking, present rather a shabby appearance. To my eye a want of neatness and cleanliness was apparent in many directions; though, at the same time, much improvement has been effected within the last five or six years. Footpaths have been made, flagways laid down, many neat houses erected by Lord Plunket, and the town has been recently lighted with gas.

In an architectural and artistic point of view, the Roman Catholic cathedral, a really handsome Gothic structure, is the only building in Tuam which possesses the slightest merit, and it reflects much credit on those by whom it was erected. The Protestant cathedral of St. Mary's is a small unattractive building, but through the zealous exertions of the vicar, the Rev. Charles Seymour, it is about to be replaced by a beautiful new church, designed by Sir Thomas Deane and Son, the estimated cost of which will be £10,000; of which over £3,000 has been already obtained, including a grant of £2,000 from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners of Ireland, and donations of £500 from the Bishop, £100 from His Grace the Lord Primate, and £100 from the Vicar of Tuam. It is proposed to raise the remaining £7,000 by a general public subscription.

An interesting feature in the present church is the beautiful porch and doorway by which the building is now entered. Dr. Petrie, in his work on the Round Towers of Ireland, remarks that the arch which forms this doorway is, perhaps, "the most magnificent specimen of its kind remaining in Ireland". It has been ascertained by means of an inscription upon an

ancient Irish cross, that this porch and doorway once formed the chancel and chancel-arch of a church built in the year 1130; and in the design of the new cathedral, it has been made an essential point to preserve in all its remaining entirety, this most interesting antiquarian and ecclesiastical relic.

Writing to the architect on this subject, Dr. Petrie says: "You appear to me to have accomplished this (the preservation of the chancel of the ancient church) with the greatest judgment, in the proposed mode of incorporation with the new structure. The destruction, or even the partial preservation, or the want of judgment in the mode of preservation, of such an interesting, and, as I may truly say, unique historical relic of ancient Irish architectural art, would give deep pain to all existing cultivated and patriotic minds, and would surely be regarded by future generations as a barbarism disgraceful to our times. Nor, in my opinion, would the application of such an epithet be undeserved; for, however truly our predecessors might have pleaded ignorance as an excuse for similar Vandalic acts, we can offer no such excuse. For we know the history of this interesting remain - that its highly ornamental arch, which not many years since was believed to be a mere doorway, was truly the *arms triumphalis*, or triumphal arch, which led into the chancel of a church erected at a period when Ireland was generally supposed to have been ignorant of the finer arts of civilization, known to and practised by its neighbouring nations; that this church was beyond doubt a structure of the early part of the twelfth century, and erected by Turlogh O'Conor, the last but one of the native monarchs of Ireland - a vigorous and able prince, who was distinguished eminently for his magnificent patronage of the fine arts, as shown by the beautiful processional cross of Tuam, now preserved in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy, as well as by the great stone cross of Tuam, and this remaining fragment of this beautiful church. And yet further we know that the great feature of this remaining fragment - its chancel arch - though it exhibits in a general way the characteristics of the Romanesque or Anglo-Norman style, its ornamentation is essentially native, or that designated by antiquaries by the term *Opus Hibernicum*, and I know of no other architectural specimen of that style of ornamentation now remaining in Ireland". The building of the new cathedral, which is designed in the earliest style of our Gothic or pointed architecture, will probably be commenced in February, and a good deal of employment will thus be afforded to the people at a time when it will be much needed.

Tuam is remarkable for the extent of its suburbs, which are larger in proportion than those of any other place that I have visited; and I regret to say that much poverty exists among the people who inhabit them. Rows of mud cabins extend in various directions, some to a distance of fully one mile from the town, and the aspect which they present is miserable in the extreme. Occasionally we meet with one that has a good thatch, whitewashed walls, and decent windows, contrasting vividly with the squalor, dirt, and discomfort of the adjoining hovels; but these exceptional cases are very few. The mass - I may say the whole of the cottages constituting the extensive suburbs of Tuam - are neither water-tight nor air-tight, and are unfit for the habitation of human beings, more especially in a season of

severity like the present. The back lanes and streets within the town are occupied by artisans and labourers of the poorest class; the houses are of the most inferior description, and in many of them two or three families are congregated together, where they "suffer in foulest rags each dire disease", and drain the bitter cup of poverty to its dregs.

Several instances have been mentioned to me of persons who have not attended divine worship for weeks, or crossed the threshold of their homes, except at night, in consequence of having been obliged to pawn their clothes in order to procure food. I visited one poor hut, in company with an active member of one of the committees which have been formed here for the purpose of providing fuel for the people at a reduced price. In this place there were but two small rooms occupied by four families. In the outer one a shoemaker was working at his trade. I noticed that his dress was peculiar, and not such as would usually be worn by a person in his class of life. The explanation given was, that this man had been almost naked, having had nothing to cover him but an old wrapper of some kind, until he was supplied with several articles of cast-off clothing by the charity of the gentleman who accompanied me. The other occupants of the rooms were women and children, and their neglected, ragged, dirty appearance denoted a condition of much wretchedness. With reference to two of these women, it is right to say that they owed some of their misery to their own improvidence, having squandered the allowance granted to them by a relative who is in comfortable circumstances and resides in a distant part of the country.

Other instances of destitution which came under my observation were obviously cases for the workhouse, such as widows with no ostensible means of obtaining a livelihood. But there are numerous persons of a different class, able-bodied men, who with their families would have been obliged to resort to that last refuge for the destitute, but for the assistance afforded them by the relief committee, which has now been in active operation for a period of five weeks. I refer to the "fuel fund", which was established at a public meeting held in this town, when the distress arising from the want of fuel became so urgent as to call for immediate action on the part of the wealthier classes of the community, with a view to alleviate the condition of the poor, who are suffering under this terrible privation. The committee then constituted consists of Mr. Charles Blake, chairman of the town commissioners; Mr. John F. Browne, J.P.; Mr. Thomas Higgins; the three Roman Catholic clergymen of the parish; and several of the principal shopkeepers of the town who distribute coals at reduced rates to all persons who are deserving objects of such charity. The town is divided into seven districts for this purpose and coals are distributed once a week to the inhabitants of each district, under the superintendence of two members of the committee connected with the locality.

There are over 600 families, numbering at least 2,000 persons, at present receiving relief from the committee, who sell coals at the rate of 6d. per cwt. to widows, and 9d. per cwt. to others who are better able to pay, being in the latter case about one-half of the cost price. The committee by whom the town and suburbs are thus relieved may be termed by way of distinction the Roman Catholic committee, although Protestants have subscribed to it, and

although they distribute fuel without any sectarian distinction. Unfortunately, in consequence of the very active spirit of religious antagonism which has prevailed for some time past in Tuam, there has not been that amalgamation and cordial union of the two religious sections which I have found to exist in other places, where the Protestant and Roman Catholic clergymen are working side by side in the cause of charity. This is a circumstance much to be regretted, but I cannot undertake to say on which side the blame lies. In all probability there may have been faults on both sides; but, however this may be, the fact is unquestionable that there exists a most decided state of mutual repulsion and want of confidence between the Roman Catholic and Protestant parties in this town. It is not to be wondered at, however, that Lord Plunket should feel reluctant to connect himself in any way with a party by whom he may consider, whether rightly, or wrongly, that he has been badly treated. There can be no doubt that latterly his lordship has enjoyed the unenviable distinction of being the best abused man in Ireland; but, from what I have learned of his character, I believe he is not a man who can be induced to swerve from any course he may think right, by any amount of popular excitement. In saying this, I offer no opinion as to the religious feuds which have prevailed in Tuam. With sectarian or party differences I have nothing to do; but I could not avoid referring to these matters, which are notorious, in explanation of the fact that in Tuam, and in Tuam alone, there are two separate and distinct committees engaged in providing fuel for the poor.

The Roman Catholic committee confines its operations to the town and the suburbs. The other committee, to which Lord Plunket and his family have subscribed, and which is principally managed by Mr. Day, J.P., and Mr. Arthur Netterville Blake, J.P., in addition to relieving some of the towns-people, has undertaken to supply the poor in the country parts who are equally destitute of the essential article of fuel. This committee, I understand, was first in the field, and had commenced the distribution of coals before the public meeting was held at which the other body was constituted. Both committees are doing good, and I only regret that circumstances have occurred to prevent that united action of all parties in this benevolent work which would insure the most effectual relief of the distress which unhappily exists. Mr. Denis Kirwan, of Castle-Hacket, a Protestant and conservative gentleman, who deservedly occupies a high place in the estimation of all classes and sects in this county, together with Mr. John Dennis, J.P., of Birmingham, who is most popular in this neighbourhood from his many excellent qualities, and Mr. David Rutledge, J.P., Barbersford, are contributors to the funds of both committees.

I may mention that some of the gentry in this neighbourhood are assisting the people, by thinning their plantations, and selling the timber at a reduced price. Mr. Denis Kirwan was in the habit of giving away the loppings of his woods gratuitously every year, and he has now four men constantly employed felling timber, which he sells at from 9d. to 2s. 6d. per load, which is about one-third of its real value. He has also given his tenants orders on a coal merchant for coals, at the rate of 1s. 4d. per cwt., advising them to purchase five cwt. at a time, and allowing them long credit for the amount; but only two or three of his tenants

have as yet availed themselves of the privilege, though they are all well able to pay for any amount they may require.

In speculating upon the prospects of the people for the next five months, the state of the weather forms a most material element for our consideration. In any case, there will be more than usual distress in the winter and spring months; but in the event of a wet season, there will be extreme destitution amongst a very large class. As a general rule, the greatest destitution will prevail in the small towns and villages, where a vast amount of poverty is concentrated, and where the people depended chiefly or altogether on their conacre crop of potatoes. Tuam is surrounded by villages containing a very poor population, such as Ballinaphuil, Ballynastuckan, Cloonascragh, Cloontoo, Cloonfush, and Carrowpeter. The last named village, which is a type of the others, is situated about a mile from the town. It contains about fifty small houses with little gardens attached, each house and garden being valued at a few shillings a year by the Ordnance valuation; but the rent actually paid is much higher, although they are all of the most miserable kind. Their occupants are labouring men, some of whom sowed conacre in a field belonging to a Mr. Mullins. They were to pay £5 an acre per year, and to have the land for two years. They manured it with guano last year and sowed potatoes, which, if the crop had yielded an average return, would have kept their families in food up to the middle of June or July at all events. The second year, they would have sowed oats, and the sum realized by the sale of this crop would, in ordinary circumstances, enable them to purchase a sufficiency of potatoes or other provisions. The potatoes, however, turned out very badly, and Mr. Mullins allowed them to be dug out without charging any rent. This was a liberal act; but, on the other hand, he has the benefit of the manure which was put into the land, whilst the unfortunate tenant loses altogether the price of the guano. In the majority of cases the guano used by conacre tenants was obtained on credit, and this debt is now hanging over their heads.

In many places fields of potatoes are yet undug, and I have been told of some instances in which they have become better by having been allowed to remain in the ground until very lately. The danger of late digging is that a heavy frost would in all probability destroy the potatoes which had not been dug out and properly pitted ; and were it not for the risk thus involved, I think it would be advisable in all cases where the tubers are found to be soft and watery in the months of September and October, to allow them to remain undug a month or two longer. Considering the unquestionable failure of the potatoes, the wonder is that, up to the present, there have been no marked indications of a deficiency of food amongst the labourers and small farmers. I speak generally, for the returns were as usual most various, depending on the character of the soil, and the lateness or earliness of the sowing. The failure, however, was universal; and I have heard the fact that the potatoes are not yet exhausted, accounted for by the circumstance that the quantity sown last year was much greater than usual, in consequence of the favourable season of 1860, when the crop was most abundant, and large sums were made by sending them by railway to Dublin. Thus the half or three-quarter crop of the last season was larger than it would have been if there had

been a similar loss sustained during any of the three or four preceding years. It is not always safe to rely on the popular estimate in these matters, for the people of Ireland have suffered so terribly from famine that the dread of it is always before their eyes, and sometimes causes them to cry out before they are hurt. Thus in October, 1860, it was currently stated in Headford that the ravages of the blight had been so destructive that there would not be a potato in the town or district at Christmas. The fact, however, turned out to be, that up to May and June the people were sending tons of potatoes every week to Dublin by the Tuam railway. This time the cry of distress is but too well founded. The land about Headford, bordering on Lough Corrib, is a light limestone soil, well suited for the growth of wheat and potatoes. The deficiency in both of these crops has been very great; and with respect to fuel, the people are most unfortunately circumstanced, because they always depended in previous years on obtaining their turf across the lake from Connemara - a source of supply that has now completely failed them.

The country immediately surrounding Tuam is inhabited by a number of small farmers, whose rents are, generally speaking, fully equal to the value of the land. There are some instances in which the rents are exorbitant, and where the severest pressure is put on the tenants. The latter have made great efforts to pay the May gale, which is usually paid in November, and the information I have received leads me to believe that there will be no deficiency worth mentioning in the liquidation of that gale. When the November gale becomes payable the distress now apprehended will have fully developed itself; and I think the landlord in this part of the country who succeeds in obtaining full payment from all his tenants may esteem himself particularly fortunate. I was told by a gentleman who is himself a proprietor of land, and has some agencies in this county, that when paying the May rent many of the tenants assured him that they would not be able to meet the November gale, which is payable in March or April. My informant is a gentleman of high character and intelligence, whose position has afforded him an opportunity of making himself acquainted with the actual condition of the people, and he is of opinion that the fears thus expressed by the tenants of their inability to meet the next gale day *are bona fide*, and not assumed to deceive their landlords and obtain remissions or abatements to which they are not fairly entitled.

In endeavouring to ascertain the actual condition of the country, I have sometimes found considerable difficulty in deciding between the opinions expressed by two classes of persons - one taking the sanguine and the other the gloomy view of affairs. I incline to the former, and believe that if we are blessed with a favourable spring, and the "cloud in the West" blows over, the farming classes will be encouraged to exert themselves to make up the losses of the past two seasons, and will give such an amount of employment as will greatly mitigate the anticipated distress. There will be ample scope for private benevolence, and it is to be hoped that the committees which have been formed in this and other places will not relax their exertions as long as suffering of any kind - whether from want of fuel or of food - remains to be alleviated. I confess I cannot see how government assistance, which is so

loudly invoked, could at present be given here, since there are no works of a reproductive character to be carried out, and the old system of relief, which was so frightfully jobbed and exercised so demoralising an influence on our people, is not to be thought of for a moment. The reply given by the Lord Lieutenant to the memorial from the Corporation of Dublin (which appears to be a very proper answer to a general statement unaccompanied by any definite suggestions) does not preclude the government from affording aid if a case of urgent necessity should hereafter arise.

The Tuam union is the largest in Galway, and comprises an area of 190,649 statute acres. The population in 1851 was 51,194, and the poor law valuation £75,433. The number of paupers in the workhouse on Saturday, the 28th December, was 240, as compared with 205 in the corresponding week of the previous year, showing an increase of 35. The contract prices of provisions for the next three months are : First flour, £18 12s.; Indian meal, £9 7s.; and oatmeal, £14 10s. per ton. In 1860 the prices were: Flour, £16 5s.; Indian meal, £9 8s. 6d.; and oatmeal, £16 10s. per ton. The highest rate struck is 2s. in the pound, for the electoral division of Tuam, and the lowest 5d., for the division of Abbey East. I was present at the last meeting of the guardians, and had an opportunity of hearing a discussion on the cases presented for admission to the house, and for outdoor relief by the relieving officer of the Headford electoral division. The condition of the inhabitants of Headford has been for some weeks past a subject of controversy at the Tuam board of guardians; the Roman Catholic clergyman of the parish having made the most strenuous exertions to introduce the system of outdoor relief amongst his parishioners, insisting that the destitution is very great, and that the people ought to be relieved at their homes instead of being forced into the workhouse. By the law, as it stands at present, the guardians have no power to give outdoor relief except to sick and infirm persons, whose removal to the workhouse would be attended with danger; and this fact must be satisfactorily established by a medical certificate. This state of the law is very well known, nevertheless, week after week the same parties apply to the relieving officer at Headford, and when he submits their application to the board, with the recommendation of the local committee of guardians that they should be admitted to the workhouse, they do not attend; showing that their condition is not so bad as it has been represented.

The last report presented by the relief officer of the Headford division contained twenty-eight applications for relief. Of these the local committee recommended outdoor relief to nine; eight of the applicants refused to go to the workhouse; nine did not appear at the Board to claim admission; and the consideration of the remaining two cases was deferred. In the case of John Reany, the officer reported: "This man's wife and three children are in fever. He has two acres of land, but. has no means to support his family, except 8d. per day which he gets from Mrs. Kilkelly for labour". The local committee recommended that 5s. per week should be given to this man, and Mr. Higgins moved that the recommendation be confirmed by the board. In the course of the discussion which ensued, Dr. Brodie, poor law inspector, called attention to a circular issued by the commissioners in May, 1848, in

reference to the quarteracre clause, by which it appears that the fact of the head of a family holding land does not preclude the members of his family, if destitute, from receiving relief. Mr. Higgins, however, was of opinion that this case did not come within the operation of the circular; the words of which are, that the members of the family of a man occupying more than a quarter of an acre of land can be legally relieved in the workhouse of the union, or if the workhouse be full, the guardians may relieve them out of the house. In the present case, the house is not full, and the persons requiring relief being in fever, cannot be safely removed. This is an extreme case, and yet it is doubtful whether the guardians can legally give the relief so urgently required. Mr. Higgins, however, with the view of bringing the question before the commissioners and the public, moved that the sum ordered by the local committee should be affirmed, which was done in this particular instance by the board, and the clerk was directed to write to the commissioners on the subject.

Another case was that of Edward Flaherty, respecting whom the officer reports: "This man cannot get sufficient employment to support his family, and is very destitute. He is a labouring man, forty years of age, with a wife and six children, of whom the eldest is fourteen, and the youngest three years of age". The local committee ordered him 2s. 6d. per week, but this was refused by the board, on the ground that it was illegal. A third case was that of a pensioner named James Smith, aged sixty years, married, but without children. He has a pension of 6d. a day, and pays 1s. a week for his room; he is a weaver by trade, but, in consequence of being both infirm and blind, is unable to work. The local committee ordered him 1s. a week for one month, but this also was disallowed by the board, the case not coming within the class to which they are authorized to give outdoor relief, whilst the workhouse remains comparatively empty.

The Rev. Peter Conway, who is supposed to have something to do with these numerous applications from the Headford district, and the refusals of the applicants to enter the workhouse, is well known to be an active, zealous, and benevolent man. His charity is unbounded, but his best friends are of opinion that his zeal sometimes outruns his discretion. His strong feeling and fervid imagination have led him to make statements as to the extent of the distress in Headford, which he doubtless believes to be accurate, but which persons equally well informed and equally truthful regard as exaggerated. The minute book of the Tuam workhouse contains the following letter from the reverend gentleman, and the reply of the relieving officer, which I leave to speak for themselves:—

St. Mary's, Headford, Saturday night, Dec. 21, 1861.

To Mr. Curran, Relieving °per of the Headford Electoral Division of the Tatum Union.

Sir - I send you by a special messenger this official note to your own house, at this late hour of the night, a distance of six miles, to acquaint you that I am just after administering the last rites of our holy religion to a poor woman, dying on the road side under the canopy of Heaven, in the townland of Shiveroe, sixteen miles from the Tuam workhouse. On receipt of it you will judge whether it is your duty or not to come at once and take with you a spring

cart, such as the poor-law commissioners have ordered, and which I have no doubt you have ready, so as to convey her in it to the Tuam workhouse, or give her whatever other relief the law allows her; and thus "allow outdoor relief to creep amongst the poor, despite the opposition of any unchristian guardian". Should she die here, or on the way to Tuam, or in the workhouse, I have no doubt you will consider it your duty to the community to get the coroner to hold an inquest on her body. Yours truly, Peter Conway, P.P.

The relieving officer in his report, dated 1st January, says :—

"On the receipt of the Rev. Mr. Conway's letter, in reference to the woman he anointed at Shiveroe, I proceeded at once to the house. I gave her provisional relief at that time, and on the 23rd December the relief committee ordered 2s. 6d. for a week. On Saturday last I went to visit her, and found she had removed to the Ballinrobe union".

Chapter 12

Cong, Co. Mayo — Its Traffic. — The " Pigeon Hole" — The Abbey. — Benjamin Lee Guinness, Esq. — The Relief Committee. — Lord Plunkett Circular.

CONG, January 4,1862.

This village, inhabited by between four and five hundred persons, is situated in the county of Mayo, just within the boundary line between that and the adjoining county of Galway. Mr. Burke's hotel, and one or two other houses, are the only respectable ones in the place, all the others being miserably poor and mean ; but, as the proprietor of of the town, Captain Elwood, is now in a position to give long building leases, we may soon expect to see much improvement effected. The distance from Tuam to Cong is about eighteen miles, and the intervening country presents the greatest variety in the character of the soil. Sometimes we meet with pasturage of extraordinary richness, and close beside it, land of inferior quality, covered with rocks and stones, and apparently of the most barren nature. With the exception of the demesnes of Castle Hacket, the residence of Mr. Denis Kirwan, and of Dalgan House, near Shrule, the property, by recent purchase, of Lady De Clifford, the country is almost destitute of trees, which, combined with the scarcity of the houses and wretched cultivation of the land, gives the scene rather a bare and desolate appearance. The village of Shrule, nearly midway between Tuam and Cong, is, like the latter, just within the boundary of the county Mayo. There is some land of excellent quality surrounding it, but as we proceed we enter on a tract of country that, in appearance at least, is poor and unproductive. However, as the geological formation is principally limestone, the soil is better than it looks; and though tillage is carried on with difficulty in some places, the return in ordinary years is sufficiently ample to reward the labours of the husbandman.

Cong is beautifully situated on the borders of the giant Lough Corrib, and is the key on the Mayo side to Joyce's Country, as Oughterard, on the opposite side of the lake, is the key to Connemara from Galway. From Maam, where Joyce's Country begins, the distance to Cong is twelve miles. The road runs for a great part of the way along the margin of the lake, which affords admirable facilities for water carriage to Galway. In the summer season the traffic is considerable, and the steamer plies constantly during that period of the year from Galway to Cong and Maam for the accommodation of tourists, who find this a most convenient way of entering on their tour through Joyce's Country and Connemara. The steamboat Father Daly (whose reverend sponsor, director, and chief manager is now under so heavy an ecclesiastical cloud) at present plies twice a-week between Cong and Galway; but it has been found so inadequate for the increased goods traffic, that Mr. Thomas Persse, of Galway, Mr. Benjamin Lee Guinness (who is the proprietor of large estates in the vicinity of Cong), and some other gentlemen, have made arrangements for placing another steamer on the lake on the 1st of March next.

The imports consist of corn for the supply of three large mills that are in constant work here; guano, which is extensively used by the farmers ; coals, iron, timber, slates, and seaweed, also much used as manure by the small farmers in the interior of the country; while the exports consist of oats, potatoes, and cattle. Mr. Guinness, Mr. Simson, of Cloonagh Castle, near Ballinrobe - the largest and best agriculturist in the county - and other gentlemen, send large numbers of cattle by this route to the Dublin market.

The facilities that Lough Corrib affords as a means of inland navigation have not, however, been taken advantage of by the people of this country to the full extent to which they might be made available. The opening of the Eglinton Canal from the harbour of Galway through the town to the lake, was an important step, and has been productive of many beneficial results: still, the capabilities of this fine sheet of water are, comparatively speaking, as yet undeveloped. Lough Corrib comprises an area of 50,700 statute acres. Its length from Galway to Maam by Cong, is about twenty-five, and its greatest breadth about fourteen miles. A ridge of land three miles broad, separates it from Lough Mask, the waters of which, having a level at least twenty-two feet higher, are poured into Corrib by subterraneous channels, constituting one of the most remarkable features of this locality. The area of Lough Mask and of Carra, which is an offset from it, is 26,265 acres, and its height is eighty feet above the level of the sea. To bring these three lakes into navigable communication with each other and with the sea, there would only be required about three miles of canal. "The direct length of navigation opened", says Sir Robert Kane, " would be about fifty miles, and a coast of nearly two hundred miles would have a cheap and ready outlet for its agricultural produce". In the famine years this project was actually commenced, and the canal was cut from Lough Corrib to Lough Mask, and also from the latter to the town of Ballinrobe. Hastily undertaken, it was abandoned with equal precipitation, and remains in its unfinished state, a melancholy memento of the many abortive schemes begun in that period of terrible distress.

In the existing circumstances of the country it is impossible that the large sum of money requisite for the completion of this canal could be obtained; but it would be highly desirable if the cut were deepened for the length of a furlong, so as to be navigable from the quay where the steamer now stops, to the bridge of Cong, on the Ballinrobe road. At present there are no stores at the quay, nor is there any space available at that point for the erection of stores or shedding sufficient for the traffic. It would obviously be a matter of great convenience to passengers to and from Galway, as well as most important for the development of the goods traffic, that boats should come up to the town, where ample storage accommodation can be provided. The mere deepening of this small portion of the canal, which would serve all purposes at present, would not cost more than £1,500 or £2,000. If this work were carried out, it would supply the wants of the barony of Kilmaine and the southern part of the county, whilst the railway in progress by Claremorria to Castlebar will be available for the accommodation of the northern baronies of this part of the county Mayo. The inhabitants of the north-western shores of Lough Mask, including the

people of Joyce's Country, would derive great benefit from the improvement of the navigation to Cong, and already, even in its imperfect state, they are taking advantage of it. They cross Lough Mask in boats, and are then within three miles of Lough Corrib, from which the steamer brings them in a few hours to the "City of the Tribes".

I understand that the steamboat Father Daly, notwithstanding the rather irregular and capricious way in which it has been managed, has proved a profitable speculation, yielding a dividend of not less than fourteen per cent. on the capital invested in it. There is reason to believe that the new boat, shortly about to be placed on the lake, will prove even more successful, and in all probability there will be ample traffic for both.

Cong is a place possessing many features of interest to the antiquary, the man of science, and the simple pleasure seeker, who can content himself merely with enjoying the beautiful scenery and inspecting the strange natural phenomena which are here presented to him. The ground on which the village is built is completely cavernous. The waters of Lough Mask find their way into Corrib by several subterranean channels, some of which spring up to the surface near the village, whilst others pursue their underground course the entire way. These subterranean rivers may be seen in several places where some convulsion of nature has caused an opening in the ground. The most remarkable of these, called "the Pigeon-hole", from the number of wild pigeons that formerly frequented it, is about a mile from the village. You descend a flight of steps some forty or fifty feet deep, and on reaching the bottom, find yourself on the brink of a pool of clear brown water, issuing from underneath the limestone rock, and flowing quickly away through a cavern, which the old woman, who generally acts as a guide, can penetrate when the water is low, nearly as far as Cong. The sides of the pit or shaft are picturesquely clothed with many-coloured lichens, moss, ivy, and other creeping plants; whilst the cavern through which the water flows with a gentle murmuring sound is lost in impenetrable gloom, until the guide, waving a torch of wheaten straw, illuminates its rugged sides and deep recesses with a fitful glare, producing a singularly wierd-like and striking effect. Another cavern of similar formation is interesting from the large number of stalactites depending from its roof; and attached to all these curious places are numerous romantic legends with which the guides entertain or bore the visitor, as the case may be.

The old abbey of Cong, situated in the village, is one of the most interesting remains of the ancient ecclesiastical architecture of Ireland. This venerable ruin, with which many historic associations are connected, has suffered sadly from Time's "effacing fingers". When Dr. Petrie first saw the abbey, its cloisters were in existence, though hastening to decay: they are now almost obliterated. Other portions of the building have also sustained great injury from the corroding influence of the weather, neglect, and, I fear, the damage thoughtlessly done from time to time by some of the people in the neighbourhood. A few years more of such neglect would have irreparably injured this now most picturesque and interesting relic of antiquity; but fortunately the ground on which the abbey stands has recently passed into the possession of Mr. Guinness, who, with that taste and public spirit which have received

so splendid an illustration in the restoration of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, has commenced a similar work here, and rescued the Abbey of Cong from all risk of further dilapidation.

A former proprietor had blocked up the entrance doors and some of the windows with unsightly masses of masonry; these will be removed, and the parts that threatened to give way supported by light iron bars, which will effectually sustain the ancient stonework without impairing its appearance. The fine eastern window, which was fast mouldering away, is now in process of restoration. The object of Mr. Guinness is to preserve what remains, and arrest the progress of decay ; and we may be satisfied that everything carried out under his direction will be characterized by propriety and good taste. I may here mention, as another instance of his munificent liberality, that he has expended £800 in the erection of a beautiful spire to the new church of Cong, the work being admirably executed by Mr. Murphy of Dublin, who is now engaged in the rebuilding of St. Patrick's.

Amongst other objects of antiquity in Cong is, or rather was, a stone cross, erected in the market-place. The original base only remains, on which an Irish inscription testifies that the cross was erected in memory of two abbots of Cong, who ruled in the abbey many hundred years ago, and for the repose of whose souls a prayer is solicited from the passerby. It appears that the old cross was wantonly destroyed some years ago, by a reverend Vandal who resided here. The famous wooden cross of Cong, now one of the most precious possessions of the Royal Irish Academy, was sold to some gentlemen acting on behalf of that body, by the Roman Catholic clergyman to whom it had been handed down as the representative of the abbots, an act which excited much dissatisfaction amongst his parishioners, who were accustomed to regard it with feelings of superstitious reverence.

I have mentioned the name of Mr. Benjamin Lee Guinness in connection with this locality; but the position he occupies here is so important, and the good he is doing so great, both in extent and character, as to justify more than a mere passing notice. Mr. Guinness is the largest landed proprietor in the district, the several estates that he has acquired within the last twelve years comprising about 9,000 Irish acres. He first became the purchaser of the Ashford estate, immediately adjoining the village, from Lord Oranmore, and subsequently bought the Doonas estate from Sir Richard O'Donnell, the Cong estate from Mr. Alexander Lambert, and lastly he purchased the Ross-hill estate, the joint property of the Earls of Charlemont and Leitrim. He has thus become owner of a large tract of land extending from the shores of Lough Corrib to those of Lough Mask, besides having property beyond Maam and in other places. Mr. Guinness has displayed as a landed proprietor the same energy, enterprise, judgment, and liberality, which characterise the management of the gigantic commercial establishment over which he presides. He found the Ashford estate in a most neglected condition, with an impoverished tenantry, living in those miserable and filthy hovels that are so great an eyesore and disgrace to our country. The land adjoining the house had also been much neglected, and a considerable portion of it was overspread with a thick growth of underwood, useless except as a cover for game. Mr. Guinness set to work

to remedy these things with characteristic energy. He allowed a portion of the old house to remain, and built extensive additions to it, so as to form a spacious and comfortable edifice. The situation is delightful, being separated from the village by a rapidly flowing river, and commanding most charming views of the lake studded with thickly-wooded islands, and bounded by the picturesque mountain ranges of Connemara and Joyce's Country. The brushwood, which covered so large a portion of the estate, was all grubbed up, an immense quantity of stones removed, and the soil thoroughly drained and well cultivated, until it has been finally converted into good meadow and pasture land.

Mr. Guinness took a large number of -the tenants' holdings into his demesne, which he has enclosed by a well-built stone wall ; but the tenants thus dispossessed have been compensated by obtaining equally large, and in some cases larger, holdings of better land on another part of the estate, so that they will benefit by the change. Mr. Guinness is trying the experiment of improving the tastes and habits of his tenantry, by erecting good substantial dwelling houses for them, provided with offices suitable to the size of each farm. The new houses are two stories high, slated, and very neat in appearance; they cost from £120 to £150 each, and it is intended to charge £5 per cent. on the outlay incurred in their construction - a rent which the tenants will be easily able to pay, inasmuch as all Mr. Guinness's land is let at a low rate. In fact, his rental could be largely increased if he demanded rents equal to those generally obtained throughout the counties of Galway and Mayo for land of a similar description. It is intended to erect cottages of a smaller size for a lower class of tenants than those who are to occupy the two-storied houses; but the least of these will be a palace compared to the squalid cabins in which these people have hitherto been contented to dwell. These improvements are carried out under the active superintendence of Mr. William Burke, of Strand Hill, Cong, who is agent to Mr. Guinness and other proprietors in this district.

It would be difficult for me to enumerate all the improvements which Mr. Guinness has effected and all the good he has done since he became the owner of these estates. He has made roads, built largely, reclaimed much land, planted extensively; and the amount of employment which he has thus afforded to his tenants, and the labouring population generally, has been very considerable. At present the number of persons employed by him in reclaiming land, in drainage, planting, farmwork, the erection of tenants' houses, wall-building throughout the estate for the protection of young plantations, and in other occupations, is not less than 260. These are all paid good wages, and for a considerable time past Mr. Guinness's labour bill has averaged £70 a week. He has thus been the means of relieving much destitution in the country; and there can be no doubt but that, if his example were followed by other large proprietors, no cry of distress would emanate from Cong and its vicinity. I should add, that Mr. Guinness has thrown open the wood of Ballykine to his tenants, who have largely availed themselves of permission to carry away the brushwood for fuel, which is as scarce and dear in this as in any other part of Ireland. He has also chartered a large vessel laden with coal for distribution amongst his tenantry primarily, and

also to others who may require such assistance. The relief of the "fuel famine" in the village and its immediate vicinity was commenced nearly three weeks ago by a committee, consisting of Captain Elwood, the Protestant and Roman Catholic clergymen of the parish, and others connected with the locality. At their first meeting a sum of £35 was subscribed, to which the Most Rev. Dr. MacHale was a contributor of £5. The committee have imported coals from Galway, and are selling them at two-thirds of the cost price. This has already had the effect of lowering the price of turf - the reductions amounting to 4s. on an ass load, 5s. on a cart load, and 8s. on a boat load, besides bringing a larger quantity into the market..

The failure of the potato crop in this district was very great; but as it was more extensively sown last year than at any former time since the famine, there is yet a considerable quantity available for consumption. In the year 1860 this crop was peculiarly good and abundant, and all who had planted largely realized a considerable amount by the sale of potatoes, which were sent by boat from Cong to Galway. So great was the exportation of potatoes from this and the adjoining districts, that one man sent cargoes to the value of ten thousand pounds to persons in Dublin, on whose behalf he had purchased. The profits of the year were so large, that the people were tempted to sow potatoes in every perch of land they could rent, hoping that they would have an equally favourable season. They took a great deal of conacre at the rate of £7 and £8 an acre for this purpose, and manured the potatoes with guano, which they obtained on credit. The stimulating properties of the guano caused the stalks to grow up quickly and luxuriantly, whilst the tubers were but partially developed, and afterwards the combined influences of the blight and the wet weather prevented them from reaching maturity, and hence resulted a serious deficiency in the crop and a consequent heavy loss upon all who had cultivated it extensively. They have no potatoes for export, so they are deprived of the resource on which they calculated for the payment of the high rents and the price of the guano; but, nevertheless, the general opinion seems to be that there will be enough of potatoes to supply seed and food for a couple of months.

The other crop principally grown here is wheat, and the return in almost every case is lamentably deficient. The oat crop was a fair average. There can be no doubt that a failure so great must press with intense severity on the holders of two, three, and four-acre farms; that in April and May they will be much pinched and straitened for food; and that great destitution may be expected in some individual cases.

I mentioned that on my way from Tuam I passed through the village of Shrule, about eight miles distance from Cong. The following is the substance of a communication from a gentleman residing in that parish, and well acquainted with the condition of its inhabitants : "There are some persons here who have not more than one-tenth the amount of food from the potato crop which they would have had in ordinary years; but there are others who have two-thirds, and the average in the whole parish is one sixth. The oat crop was nearly as good as that of last year (1860). The wheat crop was bad, and it was by wheat many paid their rents, so that the failure in it will cause great embarrassment and distress to those who must pay. Lady De Clifford has given timber to her tenants here, and some money has been

contributed to purchase fuel for those who were in need of it. I anticipate great distress in winter and spring if something be not done to give the people employment, so that they may earn the price both of food and fuel". Employment, not eleemosynary aid, is the real want of the people, and the only beneficial mode of assisting them through their present difficulties. It is but too probable that a large amount of distress will manifest itself as the season advances, for the relief of which public benevolence (rarely appealed to in vain) may be fairly and properly solicited. It is a matter of public importance, no less than an act of charity and kindness, to give such assistance to a struggling artisan or labourer as will save him and his family from becoming inmates of a workhouse. I perceive that a subscription has been opened in Dublin for the relief of the poor in the West of Ireland, and it is to be hoped that the appeal thus made will be liberally responded to.

Towards the close of the month of November last the Lord Bishop of Tuam (Lord Plunket) being anxious to ascertain the true state of the case with regard to the degree of destitution, either actually existing, or to be reasonably apprehended, in the West of Ireland, addressed a circular letter to the clergy of the united dioceses of Tuam, Killala, and Achonry, containing a number of questions which they were requested to answer. His lordship was rightly of opinion that a careful report, collected from the fair and dispassionate returns of a body of men such as the clergy of his dioceses, would form an important document, in which the truth would suffer neither from concealment nor exaggeration. He therefore requested the clergymen to institute a searching inquiry into the matter, and ascertain not only from the members of their own Church, but from persons of all denominations in their respective parishes, the information requisite to enable them accurately to answer the queries appended to this circular. The queries are as follow :

1. How many persons are at present in the poorhouses of your parish or district, and how many did they contain this time last year?
2. Bearing in mind both the extent and quality of the potato crop, what proportion does the amount of food derivable from it bear to that of last year?
3. What is the proportion (according to a similar calculation) of the oat crop ?
4. What proportion will the amount of fuel (obtainable by the poor during the next six months) bear to that of last year?
5. On the whole, which of the following four results do you anticipate as regards the poor of the parish during the approaching winter and spring, in the event of a wet or dry season respectively?
 1. Not more than usual distress.
 2. More than usual distress.
 3. Extreme destitution.
 4. Famine.

In reply to this circular, Lord Plunket has obtained returns from fifty three parishes or districts, extending over the counties of Galway and Mayo, and portions of Sligo and Roscommon.

In addition to answering the several queries, each clergyman has appended some general remarks, expressing more fully his opinion respecting the condition and prospects of the people in his parish, and stating such facts as appeared to him to bear on the subject of the bishop's inquiries. Through the courtesy of his lordship's chaplain, the Rev. William C. Plunket, I have been permitted to see these returns, and having carefully examined them and compared the reports from the districts that I have visited, with the results of my personal observation, I have no hesitation in stating that the information thus supplied by the clergy of the dioceses of Tuam, Killala, and Achonry may be implicitly relied on. Their general remarks are characterized by candour and truthfulness, whilst their replies to the specific queries approach as nearly as possible to the actual facts of the case. Some of the reverend gentlemen take a more gloomy, others a more cheerful view, than that of the majority; but these diversities of opinion, arising from differences of temperament and tone of mind, are not greater than I have found to exist amongst persons of all classes with whom I have been in communication during my present tour.

The general opinion appears to be, that there will be more than usual distress in the winter and spring months, under the most favourable circumstances, and that there will be extreme destitution amongst the poor in the event of a wet season. The idea of FAMINE is rejected by all but six clergymen, who anticipate that result in the spring months, if the weather should turn out wet and unfavourable. There are none sanguine enough to believe that there will not be more than usual distress in spring, should the season be wet, and only one who thinks that the poor of his parish will not suffer more than usually in the winter months under similar circumstances, viz., a wet, inclement season putting a stop to employment, and rendering it more difficult to obtain even the scantiest supply of fuel.

The following are the results of Lord Plunket's inquiries, derived from a careful calculation made by his lordship's chaplain of the whole of the returns:

The average increase of paupers in each of these fifty three parishes or districts in the month of December, 1861, over the number receiving poor law relief in the corresponding period of 1860, is fourteen. The average proportion which the potato crop of 1861, having regard both to extent and quality, bears to that of the previous year, is three-sevenths, or something less than one-half. The average proportion (according to a similar calculation) of the oat crop is six-sevenths. In many places this crop was heavier than that of the previous year, but the quality of the grain inferior. In the event of a dry season, the proportion of fuel obtainable by the poor during the next six months amounts on an average to two-sevenths of that of last year, and in the event of a wet season to about one-tenth. In the event of a dry season, not more than usual distress is anticipated during the winter months by eight clergymen; more than usual distress by fifty-eight; extreme destitution by four; famine by none. In the spring months, if the weather should prove favourable, not more than usual

distress is anticipated by six; more than usual distress by fifty-three ; extreme destitution by eleven; and famine by none. In the event of a wet season during the winter months, not more than usual distress is anticipated by -only one clergyman; more than usual distress by twenty-four; extreme destitution by forty-four; famine by one. In the spring months no one ventures to say that, if the season should be wet, there will be not more than usual distress, whilst nineteen anticipate more than usual distress, forty-five extreme destitution, and ix famine.