

A Little Indulgence

Evils of the state of Ireland : their causes, and their remedy, a poor law

John Revans

[183-]

Dublin. F. 227.—Though most of the small occupiers and labourers grow apples and cups, they do not use them themselves, with the few exceptions mentioned, except as holiday fare, and as a little indulgence on particular occasions. They can only afford to consume the lumpers or coarsest quality themselves, on account of the much larger produce, and consequent cheapness, of that sort. The apples yield 10 to 15 per cent, less than the cups, and the cups 10 to 13 per cent, less than the lumpers, making a difference of 20 to 30 per cent, between the produce of the best and the worst qualities. To illustrate the practice and the feeling of the country in this respect, the following occurrence was related by one of the witnesses :—A landlord, in passing the door of one of his tenants, a small occupier, who was in arrears with his rent, saw one of his daughters washing potatoes at the door, and, perceiving that they were of the apple kind, asked her if they were intended for her dinner. Upon being answered that they were, he entered the house, and asked the tenant what he meant by eating apple potatoes when they were fetching so good a price in Dublin, and while he did not pay him (the landlord) his rent ?

An annual famine in Ireland is the immediate consequence of the use of the potatoe for the subsistence of the people.

There are two circumstances connected with the potatoe which make it wholly unfit for the principal food of a nation.

First, Even the best quality becomes unfit for human food in less than a twelvemonth, and, consequently, a period precedes each crop, during which the population are compelled to be content with food unwholesome in quality, as well as insufficient in quantity. The old potatoe begins to decay generally about the end of June, whilst the new crop does not come to maturity till the beginning of September ; the length of the time of scarcity, depends both on the time that the old crop will keep, and the season at which the new crop comes in.

The second objection to the potatoe as the principal food for a people, is its bulkiness, and consequent difficulty and expense of conveyance. In Ireland potatoes are often comparatively cheap twenty miles only from a place at which a famine exists. To carry potatoes that distance, even on a good road, enhances their price 50 per cent.

During the months of June, July, August, and September, the whole of the labouring population suffer the severest privation, few of them having a sufficient quantity even of a food which has begun to decay, and many being obliged to stay the cravings of hunger by resorting to the use of weeds in mixture with the half putrid potatoe. At this season *starvation* sometimes occurs in those parts of Ireland in which all are equally necessitous, as in the Connemara district of Galway, in the district of Erris in Mayo, and in parts of Kerry.

Death from inanition, however, is almost as little known in Ireland as in Great Britain, and can only occur during this season, as at other times no person would be refused a meal, so charitable are the peasantry. But though death from inanition is so rare as to be almost unknown the cases of premature old age, arising from scanty and bad food, are frightfully

abundant. Fatal fevers from the same cause are annually numerous, and dropsy is commonly generated thereby, even in very young children, a disease which rarely occurs in England to persons under 40 or 50 years of age.

So severe are the sufferings of the peasantry during the months of June, July, August, and September, that even the most quiet and best disposed, yield to the cravings of nature ; and remarkable as the Irish peasantry are for patient endurance of misery, they are then continually driven to commit depredations. Provisions of every description are stolen by them ; and pits and outhouses containing potatoes are frequently broken open. Potatoes, cabbages, and turnips, are rooted up whilst growing. Provision boats on the canals, and provision carts on the roads are either robbed, or the sale of their contents enforced to prevent them from leaving the district. Sacks are cut whilst standing in the markets, or in carts on the roads, and the provisions thus strewn on the ground. Corn stores and bakers' shops are broken into, and cows are milked during the night.

Robberies which are punishable with imprisonment and even with transportation are numerous during these months, and sufficient in number to crowd the prisons. But no one will in such cases prosecute. All seem to recognise the severity of the distress which can instigate the peasantry to such acts, and consequently anger gives place to pity.

The labourer, if prosecuted, must associate with felons, because he will not starve, and society must run the risk of those evils which may be expected to follow from the demoralization of himself and his children.

Galway, Parish Tuam. A. 364.—Numbers would rather starve than expose themselves to the shame of a prison, a feeling, however, which increasing distress is wearing away. Some few instances are known of persons having been guilty of robberies with a view to relieving themselves from want.—*Dr John Hale.*

Parish Killimore. A. 360—They often steal turf, potatoes, and cabbage, when in great want; I have caught persons stealing my own. I did not prosecute them ; common humanity prevented me, for I knew that it was want caused them to do it.— (*Egan.*)

Mayo, Barony Tyrawley. A. 366.—“ Plunder,” says *Duffy*, “ and such business has often brought an honest man to transportation. Many a mischief is done in poverty and distress that would not be done but for them. When I am hungry and want a meal, I will go out at night, and do what I would never do if hunger did not drive me. When a man is hungry, the shame goes off him ; many a mischief is done to gentlemen of the country that they must overlook, when they know the poverty of the people ; and the poor man's potatoes and cabbage suffer, too ; and *If I saw my own suffering, I would take my eyes of the man when I knew his distress.*”—*Cooper* says. “ When a man has nothing to eat, and nothing to do but to sit by the fire (if he has one) and think of his misery, many strange thoughts will be running through his head, and it is hard for him to keep them out.”—*Mr Costello, Mr Verschoyle, Mr Caldwell, &c.* say, “ It is a common practice here to root potatoes from the ridge; or the pit and out-offices, where potatoes were stored, have frequently been broken open by night and plundered.”

Roscommon, Parish Boyle. A. 388.—*Mr Lloyd* stated that he once saw a man cutting a large hole in the side of the road, which he said he was doing to obtain manure. “ If you persist, I shall be compelled to send you to gaol.”—“ Indeed, then, your honour, I should be extremely obliged to you if you would.”—“ It is not uncommon,” said *Mr Crofton*, “ to hear the poor jesting upon their having such a last resort, but the instances where it is put into

practice are exceedingly rare. Potatoe pits, in scarce seasons, have been known to be broken open, but dishonesty is not fairly chargeable upon any class of the poor, except the hardened beggars ; starvation is, generally speaking, not heard of.”

Sligo, Parish Kilmacshalgan. H. 392.—There are not many instances of persons being driven to commit robberies to relieve themselves from destitution. Some years ago, at a time of great distress, there were robberies of provisions, and certainly from hunger solely.

Parish Aghade. A. 394.—The petty robberies of potatoes which frequently are committed arise altogether from destitution and want, not from immoral feelings, and never to procure their being sent to prison for food.

Co. Cork, Par. St Mary's, Shandon. A. 443.—Sometimes you see the children of the poor stealing hay and straw from the carts on the quay, and thus grow up to be thieves and pick-pockets.

Parish Killeagh. H. 435—Potatoes, notwithstanding the expense of carriage, would be often brought from where they are abundant and cheap, to parishes where they are very dear, but for a dread that they would be stopped in some intermediate parish, and forcibly compelled to be sold.

Carlow—Carlow. A. 394—They do not commit offences for the purpose of being sent to gaol where they would get food, they prefer begging. But Mr Butler states he has heard a woman exclaim from the dock when acquitted she would rather go back to prison, as she had no means of support.

The poor have been known to attack bakers' shops and boats with provisions, in times of great scarcity and distress.

Half the petty thefts are from distress. “ Many,” says Mr *Butler*, “ have been brought before me as a magistrate, under such circumstances. It is to us all a matter of wonder how they bear their situation with half the patience they do.” *Kenna* says, “ There were five stone of potatoes stolen from him to day, five barrels of potatoes have been taken from the same cause in one night : *Kenna* observes, my cow has been often milked in the night to serve the children.

Byrne and *Kennie* say, If under such circumstances they took half what we possess in the world, we would not prosecute. They have not committed outrages, though left most destitute. All the witnesses agreed that without doubt the amount of evil thus created and propagated was greater than any that would arise from giving them direct support.

Par. Ludlow. A. 599.—None have committed offences for the sake of being supported in gaol ; but many declare their disposition to do so to obtain food, which they would rather do than starve. Many are guilty of small thefts, chiefly of taking potatoes by night out of the pits. Mr J. Murphy has had his cows milked three or four times this summer, as he believes, from mere distress ; and he also lost in one night two barrels of potatoes. The destitute have not been guilty of outrages upon persons for the purpose of preventing starvation. Unquestionably society suffers more by demoralization thus created than it would by directly supporting them.

Par. St Mullins. A. 596.—Instances are not wanting where great distress has driven poor people to steal potatoes and other provisions. Dr *Wilcocks* is induced from what he has heard,

to think the practice very frequent ; and the Rev. Mr *Saunders* stated,—“ I have at the present moment a man in my employment who robbed me of potatoes four or five years ago, when labouring under sheer privation, for which reason I did not prosecute him.”

A. 395.—Messrs *O'Neill, Dowling, &c.* say, “ they know many instances of labourers out of employment threatening to commit offences, that they may be sent to gaol, if they could not procure some food for their wives and families.”

Kildare, Par. Kilcock. A. 399.—Mr *Hughes* states—“ If they were to break all the windows in Kilcock, not a soul would send them to gaol, well knowing their real wants and distress.” And he farther adds, “ there is no act to which a destitute starving people may not be driven, naturally thinking that any change must be for the better. The poor here do not steal anything.” Mr *Hughes* says, “ they would rather go beg it from the farmers than steal. Though they are not guilty of any outrages on person, but for the most part depend upon the neighbours, yet during the month of July 1830, a time of great distress, the canal boats were stopped and robbed of provisions.”

Carberry. A. 397.—They steal potatoes when in great distress ; and in the neighbouring parishes outrages have been committed by plundering boats and provision carts. Society suffers much more from such outrages and constant pilfering than it would by a tax.

Par. Naas. A. 400.—It is a matter of frequent occurrence to find able-bodied persons committing trifling offences for the purpose of being sent to gaol, and getting food and shelter there, and, of course, must mix with the worst characters, and suffer by contamination with their vices.

Captain *Connor* states, during seasons of great want, when any provisions are stolen, the magistrates direct the police to go to the houses of those labourers whose destitution is well known ; and the provisions, if not discovered within the house, are always secreted near it.

Pat *Byrne*, now a labourer, formerly a farmer of 60 acres, says, I have often stolen potatoes from my mother in order to give them to men whose families I knew to be starving.

Meath, Par. Clonard. A. 406.—There are many instances of stealing from destitution. Mr *Flood* says, I perfectly recollect three or four instances.

Dublin, Balrothery.—Potatoe fields indeed have been pilfered, sacks cut in the markets and on carts, and other petty robberies committed, but all of potatoes and other articles of food.

Meath, Kells.—When scarcity existed, the people stopped carts and cut the sacks containing potatoes, which they strewed on the road, not with the object of plundering, but to prevent strangers from coming to purchase, and take them out of the country.

Meath, Mayfeuragh.—Disturbances have become more frequent in years of scarcity only as far as these disturbances related to provisions ; in such seasons, the labourers stole bread, and broke open potatoe stores, and stopped corn and potatoe carts in the mid-day and on the high road. *Gilshimmon* recollected that in the last year of the scarcity of potatoes, the working classes broke open his potatoe house, and some of his neighbours' barns ; and that some sent their corn into the town stores for safety.

Louth, Dundalk.—Disturbances have arisen from the scarcity of potatoes, only as far as related to food. This was the case in the year 1826 and 1830 and other years of general scarcity, during which, the labouring classes were obliged to beg for potatoes or meat, and in some cases where they were refused they took them forcibly.

Kerry, Truck. 7.—In 1822 and 1823 the country was disturbed, and potatoes were very dear. In 1816 the country was tranquil and potatoes were dear. In 1825 also they were dear, and the country was quite tranquil. We do not expect disturbances because we foresee a scarcity of food.—(*O'Keefe.*)

Limerick, Conmallue.—Mr *Boyse* says, I know several instances where disturbances that became very important originated in this way. For instance, during years of scarcity, labourers have collected and gone round the district administering oaths to provision merchants and farmers, which afterwards ended in very general disturbances. Mr *Blennerhasset* says, in 1821 the first acts of violence were entering into houses and insisting on the price of milk ; afterwards these disturbances spread to other objects. Captain *Dickinson* says, I consider that men who are badly clad and whose houses are badly roofed and careless, whether they are out patrolling at night or not. Mr *Boyse* says, I know men who have committed petty thefts for the purpose of being transported.

Londonderry. Par. Drumachose. A. 469.—Henry *Greir* knew one man who was driven through destitution to steal some potatoes for his wife and family ; he was sent to gaol, but is now an industrious man, caretaker to a gentleman near this, and his wife and children bear an excellent character. No misery, in 99 cases out of 100, leads them to commit offences. They scarcely if ever steal, and then only sufficient of potatoes to prevent starvation.

Bar : Loughinsholin. A. 471.—*Bradley* says, the poor would all but starve ; they would live on half a meal a day before they beg, much less before they would steal. Potatoe pits have been occasionally in scarce times opened by destitute persons, but not since Mr *Holmes* came ; he had found frequently his potatoe pits broken open, but generally traced it to thieving rather than to want.

Londonderry, Par. Upper Cumber. A. 468.—Potatoes have sometimes been stolen in hard times, to relieve immediate destitution, but very few offences of this nature have been committed. *Millar*, however, said, I have heard a man declare when he was in great distress, that he wished he was in gaol, for there he would be fed, at least. But no instance was known where persons had endeavoured for this reason to be sent to gaol. Very few thefts, and no outrages, have been committed owing to destitution.

City of Londonderry. A. 473.—Paupers do not steal, but householders, through fear of starvation, have been known to open potatoe pits ; this is very rare, and only occurs in hard seasons. No outrages have occurred from want here.

Par. Dungiven. A. 470.—Of the few who have been sent to gaol for trifling offences caused by destitution, almost all become again industrious. They will do all but starve, and that is as much as any man can require. (*Irwon.*)

The unwillingness to prosecute sufficiently explains one of the most striking circumstances, established by the almost invariable assurance of the wealthier classes, that the poor, even whilst suffering under the severest want, do not seek the food and shelter of a prison ; they are permitted to take those things for which alone they could desire such a refuge. So strong are those assurances as at first to create astonishment at the extremely high morality of

the people ; a morality which in England is not even enforced, as the proof of a theft being urged by immediate starvation usually screens the culprit.

To offend against the laws, or to lie down and perish, is the bitter choice open to the Irish peasantry. Those crimes which in England and in many countries are dictated by the immoral desire to live a life of luxury and dissipation without undergoing the toil of industry, are almost unknown in Ireland, as burglary, highway robbery, sheep, horse, and cattle stealing. The highest credit is undoubtedly due to the peasantry of Ireland for their honesty. Wretched as their condition is at all times, it is almost incredible, that they are seldom guilty of robbery, but to appease the cravings of the moment. Since, however, famine is of annual recurrence, since there are at all times and in all districts persons unable to procure food, in no country can property of that description be less secure. Distress is no doubt frequently aggravated by the insecurity which thus exists in the transmission of food. Those who would find it to their interest to convey it to districts in which it is scarce, are constantly deterred by the risk of its being plundered by the starving population amongst whom it must pass.

Did corn form the principal food of Ireland, famine would be as little known as it is in Great Britain. Most descriptions of corn will remain sound during four or five years under proper treatment, and thus the surplus of a fine harvest becomes available in a year of scarcity. The facility, and consequently the cheapness with which corn can be conveyed, is another material quality in its favor, from which famine is almost impossible within a few miles of abundance. A hundred weight of potatoes will only maintain a man eight days, whilst one cwt. of meal will maintain him from 50 to 56 days. (See App. D. Irish Report.) As corn in bulk is more portable than meal, it can be transported more cheaply, and at one-seventh or one-eighth the expense of potatoes. There are but few parts of Ireland now in which the state of the roads would be an impediment to the transport of food, the roads being in most parts nearly as good as those of England.

It might perhaps be difficult to estimate with accuracy the comparative cost, on an average of years, of potatoes and corn, as a food. Against the potatoes must be placed, first, the cost of producing that portion of the crop which perishes before it can be consumed, which in some years must be important, because, the produce of successive years being very different, it is always necessary to plant as much ground as will, under fair circumstances, yield a sufficient quantity of food for the coming year. Should the season prove more than ordinarily favorable the surplus may amount to a fifth or a sixth of the whole crop. Secondly, a very large allowance is requisite to meet the destruction of the crops during growth. The peasantry being constantly compelled, from the deterioration of their stock and their inability to purchase meal, to dig portions of the growing crop prematurely. Sometimes they dig it when the produce is not more than a fourth of what it would have been at full growth. Sometimes they raise the stalks, take the young potatoes off when about the size of a marble, and replace the stalks upon the chance of their producing a full crop.

Galway. E 1.—The longer the time that intervenes between the failure of the old crop and the coming in of the new, the greater the distress of the peasantry. Some are obliged to take out the potatoes when not the size of a pigeon's egg ; and many who have not the new potatoes to dig, are reduced to one meal of potatoes, and a meal of cabbage, in the day.

F 3.—It is not uncommon to see the poor anticipate their crops, and dig them not only before they have acquired their full growth, but whilst they are still absolutely as unwholesome as when too old.—(Rev. Mr *Hughes*, p.p.)

Leitrim. F 4.—Those who can afford to have an opinion as to the quality of their potatoes, consider that they begin to deteriorate about the beginning of June, and that they have become positively unwholesome by the end of the month ; however, the poor stick to them as long as they last, and that is in general until the middle of July.—(Rev. *T. Maguire*, p. p.)

The greater portion of the new crop is not fit for use until the 15th of August, but long before that time the labourers have begun to dig theirs, especially if they wish to avoid going on credit.

Mayo. E. 5.—After the beginning of August the old potatoes are not considered good. The Rev. Mr *Dwyer*, p. p., states that, “ then the people believe they begin to be unwholesome, but they would be very glad to get them, nevertheless. The main crop of potatoes is not fit for digging or for storage till November, when the stalks begin to wither. However, the digging of potatoes for daily use commences after Garlick Sunday, but not to such an extent as to prevent a great rise in the price ; and a considerable quantity of that crop is prematurely used, and much loss thereby incurred ; but the people cannot wait when their last year’s crop has been exhausted.” — (Sir *S. O’Malley*, Bart.)

Sligo. F. 7.—The shortest period known to have intervened between the old crop becoming unfit, and the new crop becoming fit, for human food, is a fortnight, but with many it extends to two months ; and in proportion to its length is the distress that prevails, and the debt incurred by the necessity of living on credit.”—(Mr *Dodwell*.)—“ I have known those who could not get credit to dig their new potatoes whilst the roots were not bigger than plums. I should say that the too early use of the new potatoe is worse than the too long use of the old. I am sure, that in the first month’s digging of new potatoes there is as much destroyed, as, if allowed to arrive at full growth, would have sufficed for three months’ consumption.—(Rev. Mr *Yates*.)—There are no means known of making the superabundant crop of potatoes of one year provide for the scarcity of the next.—(Mr *Lumey*.)

Kings. F. 13.—Mr *Odiun* states, that at the end of summer potatoes are generally consumed ; and he further stated, “ I have frequently known the poor man to suffer severely, being obliged to dig his potatoe ground, where he would have more than three times the produce in six weeks after ; this is often a matter of great suffering.” A month is sometimes known to intervene, after the old crop is consumed, before the new one is fit for use, during which period the distress is greatly aggravated, inasmuch as the deficiency of one year’s potato crop cannot be supplied by the surplus of the former ; for potatoes cannot be kept over from year to year as corn can.

Louth. F. 14)—The distress of the peasantry is almost always very great at this season, from the united causes of the want of potatoes, and the absence of employment, the month of July and the first half of August being a time during which work is extremely scarce. In fact, it may be said to amount, for those who have large families and not regular work, to an annual return of temporary famine. Those persons are under the necessity of beginning to take up their new crop of potatoes long before they come to maturity, and as they are frequently at that time not larger than marbles or walnuts, the dread of encroaching on their next year’s means of subsistence, induces them to put themselves upon the shortest possible allowance which will support nature.—(Mr *W. Hackett*, Mr *Trainer*.)

Meath Kells. F. 16.—The witnesses, and other persons of all classes, gave the Assistant Commissioners the most appalling accounts of the dreadful state to which the want of food, between the two crops of potatoes, had reduced the poor in many former years. Privation (the usual allowance of potatoes being curtailed by one-half or two-thirds) was the common lot of

almost all labourers only occasionally employed, but numerous families were obliged to live on a few pennyworths of meal, weekly (which they begged, or borrowed, during that time;,, made up into a kind of soup, by boiling it with the weed commonly called *prassagh* in Ireland, and *charlock* (wild mustard) in England. This plant is decidedly unwholesome, and when eaten in the manner just described, is said to render the skin nearly as yellow as its own flower. To such an extent is this practice carried in seasons of scarcity, and such are its noxious effects on the health of the poor, that the clergy were obliged to forbid their eating this weed ; and in some cases the priests and farmers set persons to prevent them from gathering it.

In a number of cases the Assistant Commissioners found families subsisting entirely on their new crop of potatoes. The average size of the potatoe did not, at the time, exceed the size of a walnut ; and, as they were thus consuming their crop about ten times as fast as if it had maintained its full maturity, the effect of such a knowledge must have been (and, it is well known, always is) to enforce the smallest possible allowance on those of whom that crop was to form almost the sole means of subsistence for the ensuing year. Independently of the ocular proofs of this lamentable anticipation of the crop, which the Assistant Commissioners had, by seeing the new potatoes boiling, or being eaten in a number of the cabins which they visited, the existence of the practice was confirmed, in many other cases, by seeing women and boys in the act of digging them up, and by occasionally meeting with ridges already partly cleared of their produce.

Tyrone. F. 37.—In July the potatoe usually becomes unfit for food. Instances were mentioned of the cottiers being obliged to dig out potatoes in one month which would have been sufficient provision for three months, if the poor cottiers could afford time for the potatoes to ripen.

The opinion of all the farmers was, that an acre of potatoes contains three times the quantity of human food than an acre of corn contains.

By the premature digging of the crop, not only is great destruction and consequent expense caused, but the chance of famine during the following season greatly increased.

Another item in the calculation is, that the low feeding to which the peasantry are reduced during this and other seasons makes them weak, and thus their labour is rendered inefficient, and therefore dear. It appears that they are frequently too weak from bad or insufficient food to perform their work. More men therefore are usually assigned to a quantity of work than in England.

Mr *Condon* says, “ A labourer of mine has a severe affection of the bowels annually at the season when he begins to eat young potatoes. He suffers so much that it considerably lessens his strength ; indeed I am so well aware of it that I never give him such hard work to do then as at any other season of the year. None of my labourers are so strong when they first begin to eat young potatoes as at any other season, and it is commonly remarked among themselves. They also know that the white potatoe, commonly grown for its prolific and hardy qualities, is not such strong food, nor so supporting as ‘ cup’ potatoes. This is shown by their different effects upon cattle ; white potatoes will not make a bullock so fat as the ‘ cup’ sort.”

It is frequently asserted that choice rather than poverty induces the peasantry of Ireland to resort to the potatoe as their staple food. The use of meal and of flour being rare, they have not the utensils or skill with which to make them palatable, especially to make flour into bread. They make it into a badly baked dough, in which shape it is, of course, far less agree-

able than the potatoe. In the towns in which there are bakers, they use bread on holidays, as a great treat ; and those of the Irish who come to England or go to America feed upon bread as much as do the English or the Americans, though they might easily obtain a supply of potatoes.

Galway, Kilconnell.—When it was asked “ Whether the peasantry preferred potatoes to meal or bread,” John Ginessey and others exclaimed, “ Arrah then. Sir, why should we prefer that, that we feed our pigs on to better food, don’t you like it better yourself, and why shouldn’t we ? Never believe them that would want to make you think that we’d eat wet lumpers if we could get good bread.” There is no reason to suppose that the peasantry in any degree prefer potatoes to bread ; whenever they can afford it they substitute meal, but in general they only use wheaten bread on certain festivals and occasions of rejoicing, such as marriages, &c. (Rev. Mr *Hughes*.)

Mayo, Murrish.—The small occupiers present declare their dislike to an unmixed diet of potatoes. Some of them exclaimed, “ Just try potatoes for six months and you’ll never wish to eat another.”

Sligo, Carberry.—The peasantry seem most in favour of a mixed diet consisting of both meal or bread and potatoes. We like potatoes very well, but we don’t like never to get any thing else. If a labouring man had even apples instead of wet lumpers or ‘ cups,’ he would not grumble much.—(*James Gorman*.)

Meath, Moyfuragh.—All the labourers both in court and elsewhere, said that they were tired of living on potatoes alone, and would much rather have meal and bread, but they would like to have some of each for a change. “ Potatoes,” they said, were not “ staying enough” (nourishing) for a man to work hard upon.

Truaghanacmy, Kerry.—They would prefer bread for breakfast and potatoes for dinner. (*Murphy Connor*.)

The reasons which the peasantry assign, however, are high rents and low wages. It may be inferred, that if the production was increased the peasantry would be enabled to use corn ; but if the production were instantly increased four-fold, they would be as poor as they now are, and would give precisely the same reason why they use the potatoa as a staple food. The Irish peasant’s contract is a bare subsistence of the cheapest food. His anxiety for land and for employment would be then what it is now, and competition would cause him to make the same contract. If this be not the case, why do not the peasantry on the rich lands feed on corn ? Those lands yield twice and three times as much as the mountain and bog lands, on which others equally ill fed are located.

The next evil to society, which arises from the anxiety of the peasantry for land, acting through a system of nominal rents, is the production of a large class of mendicants, wandering about the country seeking food and shelter.

Under the most favourable circumstances in which health and vigour can place the peasantry of Ireland, they are barely able to retain even sufficient of the cheapest food ; it is therefore impossible for them to provide against those contingencies to which as human beings they are subject—old age and prolonged sickness—and, in the event of their premature decease, against destitution in their widows and children. An extensive body, consisting of aged persons, orphan children, and women with young families, are, therefore, through destitution, compelled to wander about the country begging for food and shelter.

Of the vagrants, widows with young families and orphan children form an immense proportion : men past work and their wives form another portion ; and the wives and children of the “ casual labourers,” who have been distinguished as the third class of peasantry, form the remainder. The wives and children of the “ casual labourers” only beg during the summer months, when their con-acre potatoes are exhausted, and when their husbands go to England or wander about Ireland in search of employment. Able-bodied men rarely beg ;—first, because they are either at work or seeking work ; and, secondly, because their appearance would be prejudicial to the success of their families, who generally represent themselves as widows and orphans. When they accompany their wives, they generally stay out of sight and carry the bag. Under the head of widows, those women who have young families and have been deserted by their husbands are included.

Instances frequently occur of men deserting their wives and families, because their feelings will not permit them to witness in those whom they love sufferings which they cannot avert or alleviate. Society forbids a man to leave his wife and his children, principally because they should look to him for support. But when he is unable to afford them any assistance this object cannot be frustrated by his absence. In the peculiar circumstances of the Irish peasantry, it is difficult to determine whether the act of the man leaving his family is most to be condemned, or the good feelings which urges him to that extremity, to be applauded. It is evident, however, that the poverty must be hopeless, which can induce the Irish peasant in whom family attachment is so strong, to leave those who are nearest and dearest to him—his wife and his children.

Roscommon, Par. Moore. A. 390.—There are only two instances recollected of men deserting their wives and families ; one was a labourer, and the other a tradesman, both went to America. Poverty drives persons into many crimes which they otherwise would not have been guilty of.

Roscommon, Par. Boyle. A. 358.—Women with families are never abandoned by their husbands owing to distress ; there are in a few cases, other motives which may produce this result.

Galway, Par. Tuam. A. 363.—There are some instances of women with families being deserted by their husbands, but not many among the labouring classes.—(Archbishop *Tuam*.)

Sligo, Par. A. 393.—There are one or two instances, however, where men under the pressure of distress, have abandoned their families and not since been heard of. Their families are now confirmed mendicants.

Londonderry, Par. Mayhern. A. 393.—There are many instances where women with families have been abandoned by their husbands.

Londonderry, Par. Drumachase. A. 469.—Few parents or husbands intend to desert their families, but many, especially of late, have left to go in search of work, and never returned. They sometimes send for their families. Henry Greer knew two cases of total desertion in two years.

Meath, Par. Clonard. A. 406.—Mr *Langle* remembers two or three cases where it has occurred.

Kildare, Par. Naas. A. 400.—Mr *Hardy* states, during the cholera I was going along the road, and saw a woman lying in a ditch with six children round her ; I gave her a drink of

water and had her removed to the fever hospital, where she died in three days ; this woman I knew had been abandoned by her husband, he not being able to get work, and not having the heart to see his family famishing.

Kildare, Par. Naas. A. 400.—Families are occasionally abandoned by men out of work, who cannot bear to see them starve.

Carlow, Carlow. A. 394.—In this parish there are no instances of husbands deserting the family on account of destitution, but in an adjoining parish one instance was told by Byrne to have occurred : a man deserted his family, a wife and four children, about four years ago ; he could not get employment, and could not bear to see them starving around him : he had been industrious, the family became beggars.

Carlow, Par. Tullow. A. 396.—There are numerous instances of husbands deserting their families. *James Keely Mason* stated, that about a month ago my son-in-law, who was a blacksmith, finding himself without employment for five weeks, deserted his wife and three children, who returned to me for support.

It may be asked why widows do not, by industry, earn subsistence for their families. The answer is, that considering the limited extent of employment, and the low rate of wages, a woman, particularly if she has a family of young children, cannot possibly maintain herself, much less a family, by her industry. Those who earn their subsistence are peculiarly circumstanced, and form a small minority. In farming there is not any employment for them, excepting during a few weeks in the Spring and Autumn, in sowing potatoes, saving turf, pulling flax, sheaving, weeding, and hay-making, which do not occupy more than two months ; when some earn sixpence to a shilling a day. But those who earn such wages are generally peculiar for their strength and skill. Knitting and spinning are the only occupations which are general, and to be had throughout the year ; at these occupations, however, the great majority cannot make more than 1½d. a day, or 9d. per week. Till within late years the linen trade had always afforded a full subsistence to women. In many cases they could make by it more than a man could by field labour.

It mostly happens that a woman, when first deprived of her husband, retains the land he held, as well as a pig, and if he was a small farmer, perhaps a cow, or a horse. So long as she is able to pay the rent the land is not taken from her. In many cases, more leniency is shown towards widows in the payment than towards any other class. There are some instances in most districts of the landlord even granting a cabin, with a small piece of land rent-free, to the widows of the labourers, who had long been in his employment. In cultivating their lands, widows receive great assistance, as it is a common custom throughout Ireland for the labourers to assemble on Sunday mornings before service, on holidays, and before and after their own hours for working, to dig the plots of ground, and to get in the crops of widows. But with their utmost exertions and the assistance thus afforded them, widows are not often able to struggle for more than one or two years. They gradually part with the few things that remained at the death of their husbands, and when they cease to be able to pay the rent, their holdings are taken from them. Frequently when a widow is ejected, the neighbours build her a hut by the road-side, on the borders of a bog, or on waste land, and she at first goes from cabin to cabin, receiving a few potatoes or a meal from one, and a few potatoes or a meal from another. With the scanty assistance which their neighbours and relations are able to afford them, and by occasional donations from the trifling collections made at the different congregations, they sometimes struggle against mendicancy till their children are old enough to assist them. Some who are particularly active and clever, turn to huxtering, others resort to the sale of illicit whiskey.

Keeping what are in Ireland termed Shebean houses is nearly confined to widows, who cannot otherwise earn a subsistence. They have no choice but to starve or to live by acts which are deemed by them disgraceful. To defraud the revenue is rarely esteemed crime by the poorer classes in any country. They avoid doing so only because punishment attaches to the act, and not because they deem it immoral. No one appears to be injured, and therefore it is viewed as distinct from theft, and of minor turpitude. According to Mr Miler, of Mayo, they think it “ is more creditable to go into gaol for it than for theft, or to beg the world.”

Mayo, Parish Aughavale. A. 121.—Mr *Large* goes on to say, if they can escape detection, dealing in illicit whiskey is a more profitable business than any other they can engage in. There is little reluctance to engage in it. It is considered no disgrace, and it must be a very tempting trade when, having been confined three months in gaol for the offence, they are found committing it again. Mr Miler says, the temptation is that they have no other means of earning their bread, and it is more creditable to go into gaol for it, than go in for theft, or to beg the world.

Carisk Kilgrevar. A. 124.—Mr *Evily* says, widows and wives sell illicit spirits : it is the only profitable employment an industrious woman can find.

Barony Trawley. A. 129. and 23.—Two of those visited were inhabited by widows. One of them who had six young children and an aged father to support, being questioned as to her means of support : “ That,” said she, pointing to a whiskey bottle, “ is my sole dependence ; I have no means on earth to keep my children inside the door with me, but to borrow 1s. from one neighbour or other, and buy a drop of poteen to sell again. She was all but naked, and stated that she had no other clothes than what she then wore, not even a cloak good or bad. She described herself and family as often not tasting food more than once in twenty-four hours, and not having even then a full meal. “ I would sometimes” said she, “ go out and beg, but I have no sort of covering for myself and children ; we would be famished to death with the cold if we went with such clothes as we have.”

Kildare, Parish Kilcock. A. 135.—None of the widows in this parish sell illicit spirits, but in Newton parish adjoining there are three or four instances of widows who keep Shebean houses. They are driven to the sale of illicit spirits : and this is one of the greatest nuisances in the parish, from which much vice proceeds.

Londonderry, Parish Coleraine. A. 181.—A few widows are remarkable for being driven to the sale of illicit spirits as a means of obtaining subsistence.

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