

## Vagrancy in Kildysart 1835

PROVINCE OF MUNSTER — COUNTY CLARE.

Examinations taken by P. F. Johnston, Esq. ; E. B. Molloy, Esq.

PARISH OP KILDYSART. — BARONY OP CLONDERALAW.

Persons who attended the Examination—James Bourke, baker ; M. Cahill, a small farmer, with about nine acres ; John Carrig, labourer ; Anthony Curry, process-server ; Rev. Michael Dynon, Roman Catholic curate of Kildysart ; the Rev. Michael Fitzgerald, Protestant rector of Kildysart ; Dr. Geary, dispensary physician ; Timothy Gorman, a small farmer, with about 12 acres ; Denis Hurly, shopkeeper ; John Kinnahan, labourer ; Patrick M'Cabe, weaver ; Mark M'Mahon, grocer in the village of Kildysart ; Mr. M'Namara, post-master, and extensive farmer ; Patrick M'Mahon, farmer, steward to Bindon Scott, esq. ; Michael Myers, a small publican and labourer ; Michael O'Brien, labourer ; James O'Dea, broker in the village ; Daniel O'Grady, esq. an extensive gentleman farmer ; Michael O'Shaughnessy, victualler ; Henry Ross Lewin, esq. J. P. ; Sergeant Scott, police sergeant ; the Rev. P. Sheehy, P. P. of Kildysart.

The Assistant Commissioners requested some of the witnesses to count the mendicants residing in the parish, and Myers, the publican, said, that in Cruverahan there were three ; in Ballymore two, and scattered up and down the parish there are about at least 15 more ; making not less than 20 persons who live on the charity of their neighbours : and besides those, there is not a day in the week on which six or seven do not come asking him for alms that he never saw before. And Hurley, the shopkeeper, observed, that one day with another, he counts at least eight or ten strangers going about begging ; he also agreed with Myers as to the number of resident beggars ; and indeed, the computation of this class by all the witnesses only varied from 15 to 20.

There was the most unaccountable discrepancy in the statements of the different persons as to the increase or decrease of vagrancy, and the causes of it. The Rev. Mr. Sheehy asserted that it had decidedly diminished, that there was more employment then than formerly, in consequence of the extensive reclaiming of lands, and that the people every day were getting more industrious. On the contrary, Hurley observed, that he saw much more beggars passing by now than formerly, and that many of his neighbours who used in their day to work hard are now forced to beg. Curry also remarked, that he had travelled the barony for the last eight or ten years, and he saw two to one more than he used. The poor creatures are turned out of their cabins and their ground ; their things are canted, and what have they left but to live on charity ? Hurley remembered the time when they were paid 13*d.* a day, and well treated ; and now they only get 8*d.* without diet, and that not regularly. Myers observed, that he was not employed more than half the year, and that he would be well inclined to work for 6*d.* a day. When the meal was distributed during the scarcity a few years ago. the people worked cheerfully during a long summer's day for 3*d.* without breakfast or dinner. Mr. M'Namara said he would undertake to have 2,000 labourers ready by the next morning to work for 6*d.* a day.

Vagrancy is most common from the 1st of May to 15th August, but July is far the worst month ; in that month those who have potatoes left, said Hurley, think it too much to feed themselves. The potatoes are then getting scarce everywhere ; and it goes so far in this parish, that the priest is often obliged to tell the people from the altar not to give charity to strange beggars, for that it was enough for them to support their own poor. Though there are 20 persons in the parish whose only means of subsistence are alms, it by no means happens that

each of these, or perhaps even one of them, calls on many individuals of the parish each day. Many of these resident mendicants are in some degree supported by their friends, and sometimes get as much in one day as will keep them for several ; but by far the greater amount is given away to strangers ; and Hurley said, that if they had only to give to their own poor it would be but little. Timothy Gorman, a small farmer, said, that he sees many strong able-bodied fellows going about who would be able to work if they were willing ; but the greater number of beggars are women, with, for the most part, three or four children ; and he cannot help believing them when they tell him that they are widows, for out of 10 persons that would call on him, not more than one would be a single man, and he seldom sees even an old man. Sometimes he asks the women with growing-up children with them, why they do not send them to service, at a farmer's for instance, and they tell him they must keep them to carry about the young infants. The reason why the majority are women is, that while they are begging in one place, their husbands will be either looking for work or actually working elsewhere ; but it is not the custom for labouring men belonging to that parish to send out their wives to beg, at least at home. The greater number of male vagrants are infirm old men ; on the whole, however, the proportion of men to women is trifling. Very few are to be seen at chapel on Sundays, and those who do attend are not resident in the parish : some have even been known to have had work during the week. The Assistant Commissioners observed, that the practice of cottier tenants or employed labourers begging was very rare. They made many inquiries before they could discover a single instance of it ; but at last Myers said, he recollected having seen two cottiers of that place begging in the neighbouring parish of Kilfidane ; both were idle fellows, who were much given to drinking, but they still had decency enough to be ashamed to be caught begging at home. There is Michael Nash, says he, “ who has no potato-ground ; he earns only 6*d.* a day, and has a wife and seven children to support on that, and I never yet saw any of them begging, and I am sure I do not know how they avoid it sometimes. There is Jem Daly, too, with a large family. He takes his own boat up to Limerick with turf, and for going and coming, and spending may be seven days in Limerick, while the wind is against him, all he can earn is, perhaps, 2*s.* 6*d.* ; yet I never saw any of his family begging either.” Gorman, the small farmer, said, “ I know some men of this neighbourhood who hold two or three acres of ground, and who go off to the strong farmers in Tipperary or Limerick to make their harvest : they save what they can to pay for their ‘ mock ground’ at home, of which the rent is from 6*l.* to 8*l.* an acre. I know no able-bodied person going off from this place to beg ; but I know many who want employment sadly. I seldom see tradesmen begging ; they are extremely averse to doing so in public. They often get petitions drawn up, and go about privately to gentlemen's houses ; but they will not go to a poor man's house, they would be ashamed to do so.” Servants, also, are rarely to be seen begging ; they are more apt to set up a public-house, or some other little shop, upon what they have saved ; and if they have not saved anything, they will try to begin on credit. When cottier tenants are driven to beggary, they are sure to go elsewhere, but in the course of nine or ten years, Burke did not know of three persons who had gone to beg where they were known. Of the strangers who pass through, it is believed that many of them are in the possession of small pieces of ground at home ; but that from the sterility of the soils, and perhaps in a few cases from illness, they have had resort to wandering about and living on charity for at least a portion of the year ; that is, until their potatoes are fit to dig. None of the small farmers have been known to give up their property to their children for the express purpose of begging : and though many are alive who have resigned their land to their children, yet there is but one such person in the parish who has been reduced to mendicancy : this was a poor old woman of the name of Bridget King. On the death of her husband, she gave up eight acres of land, a cow, and a horse, to her son. He soon got married to a girl who brought him a fortune of 60*l.* ; but she would not agree with his mother, and she forced him to turn her out on the highway. His uncle then gave the old woman a cabin ; but such was the spite of the daughter-in-law, that she induced him to have it thrown down. The poor old woman has now nothing to live on but charity. The country people generally give lodgings for nothing to those going to England for work ; but in the villages they are obliged to pay 2*d.* for their beds. They mostly get their

virtuals for nothing) wherever they go, and the Rev. Mr. Sheehy said that if they have any money, they generally hide it.

The greater number of the strange beggars that visit Kildysart come from the county of Kerry, said M'Mahon, "and they are seen in crowds of a fair-day crossing the ferry between Cahircon and Spring Rice's place, at Mount Trenchard ; they pay nothing when they are coming over ; but on their return (if they have made a good day of it,) they give the ferryman 1*d.*, or some potatoes, if they have not collected any money ; they are for the most part natives of the country." On the witnesses being asked how they could distinguish a countryman from a townsman, they said that they would readily know them by the latter wearing gentlemen's cast-off clothes, and especially by their speaking good English ; in the remote parts of this parish the English language is hardly if at all spoken, and many individuals are to be met who speak nothing but Irish.

Hurley observed, relative to the proportion of vagrants who are themselves the children of vagrants, " Joseph Nash came here begging with his two daughters ; he took the fever and died. Michael Hallaran gave his children a cabin ; and one of them jince has had three children by several men up and down ; and both she and her sister have nothing to live on but begging. These two women are the only grown beggars in the parish, who are the children of beggars. As to the strange ones, we cannot tell who they are." As to the different classes of vagrants, some have become infirm through old age ; others are the widows of day-labourers who had not any ground ; and a few have been pauperized by being turned out of their farms. Margaret Carmody, a middle-aged woman, whom the Assistant Commissioners met begging, accompanied by three children on foot, whilst she carried two infants on her back, stated, " that she never asked anybody for as much as a potato until about three years ago ; up to that time her husband held a farm in Kilmurry M'Mahon, but he gave it up, and took another of about ten acres, which at first had been vacated ; but the first night they entered on it the Terryalts came, and after beating him in a dreadful manner and breaking one of his arms, they swore him to surrender the farm ; he was then unable to get back his first farm, and since then they have had nothing to live on but charity." They afterwards met her husband, who was begging on the same road with two more children, and he confirmed her story by giving the same account. Rev. Mr. Sheehy stated that he did not know one of the resident beggars who was able to earn his livelihood ; but a great many vagrants pass through who would be able to work if they were made. Halloran observed, that ten beggars called on him the Saturday before ; of these six were women with children, and the other four were men ; and of them, but one was a man, he would say, that was able to work.

Hurley stated, that at this time of the year, (November) whilst the potatoes were digging, a beggar with two children will, after eating enough, have three stone over in the day ; but times may be that he could not spare one stone ; and in summer he would not get much more than he could eat. Those who travel the country are not able to carry what they get from one day to the other, they therefore sell it as soon as they can find a purchaser. Those who live in the town get as much in one day sometimes as will do them for two, and they are then able to stay at home when the weather is bad ; these latter collect much less in the end than strollers. Sergeant Scott, of the police, said. " that he and his men were in the habit of buying the greater part of the potatoes they consume from the beggars, and that they find a great convenience, as there is no market in the village. Frequently one beggar has as much as ten stone to sell, and that they cannot sometimes carry all on their backs. They generally sell higher than the current price, taking advantage of there being no market. An able-bodied man would not get much more than he could eat ; if he called at the house while the people were at meals, he would be asked to take his share ; but they would give him nothing to take away, or at the most they would give him a little wool to make a pair of stockings. If he were to stop at a strong farmer's, however, he would not be allowed to boil any of the potatoes he had with him, but he would be fed whilst he remained. Gorman said, " I saw my wife refuse alms to a

woman yesterday ; and I asked her why she refused on a Monday (a thing we consider unlucky for the rest of the week) ; she said the woman had been coming to her for the last three days, and that she had a stout able-bodied son who would not work, but preferred living on the sale of what his mother collected." There is but one public car at Kildysart, and the beggars do not find it worth their while to attend it Hurley observed, that he did not think that any beggars would get more than 3*d.* at the chapel ; there were but two there the day before at last mass, and they did not get much, as the priest was making a collection for a family sick of a fever up the mountains.

Hurley observed, that they make a great difference between a large family and a small one, and he knew that the country people would often give a large family as much as half a stone of potatoes. He further added, " In the village we could not stand giving as much as some of the folks in the country do ; we have more beggars calling, and we must decide as well as we can what we have to give them ; but we always feel for a family of children." At the post-office, perhaps, forty or fifty persons will call in the day, and every one will get something from that house. Those independent persons sometimes say, when they have not got enough, " May you not get over this day twelve-months ;" but most of the beggars pray for me, whether I give it or not, adding, " If you have not it for us now, you will have it some other time." The men who look sickly, and who are followed by the young children, always get more alms. It is not usual for beggars to divide their families into different parties in winter, when provisions are plentiful ; but in a dear summer they often see them splitting (dividing) ; they will make one family into two and take different directions. And M'Namara said, " When we see an old man with a child, we suspect that there is a wife on some other road, or not very far behind ; and it often happens that she will call some time after her husband ; this is the kind of imposition most generally practised in summer ; and when my wife discovers this, she refuses to give a second time." The best illustration of the feelings of the farmers upon the point of the relative quantities given to an able-bodied person and to an infirm one, was thus given by M'Mahon : " The able-bodied person I should not feel for ; I would tell him (except perhaps in July, when the potatoes are exceedingly scarce for employed labourers) that he could turn himself to some employment ; to the old person I should always feel well inclined, and may be if the children were at their meals, I should ask him to come in and sit down, and share it with them." Notwithstanding the above remark, all present agreed that, generally speaking, the following observation by Hurley would hold good : " I think the able-bodied man (not a young man, but a fellow of 45 or 50) would have most to spare at the end of the day. The poor woman with children, each of whom might have a bag, would collect most, but then she would require more for her own use, and that the able-bodied man would sell most."

He also added, " They always sell the surplus over what they want, and some of them make up the price of a handkerchief or gown ; but the men will buy tobacco or shoes. They come to me often to buy herrings, which they sell for a halfpenny a piece, or 1½*d.* a couple ; or a grain of meal to make a drink (gruel) for themselves." Gorman observed, " There would be some respect for the person well clad who was unable to work, and I would like him the better for being clean in his person ; but if he went into the mountain parts of the parish, the people there would say, ' By the law he is better dressed than myself, and I will not give him anything.' It would not do for a young person to be well dressed. I would tell him or her they ought to go to service sooner than beg." Sergeant Scott observed, that he frequently saw some of the old people who were known to the parish make themselves look as clean as possible ; but he invariably observed that the strangers whom he met in the out-of-the-way parts of the parish were badly dressed, and too frequently unnecessarily dirty in their persons. M'Namara said, that the itinerant beggars do not require to save in summer, for they will invariably collect more potatoes in winter than they want ; he has known them succeed in getting enough in winter to do for three days, during which they are often obliged to stay at home, from the stormy state of the weather.

M'Namara also stated upon this subject, that the majority of the vagrants being women with children, do not find it necessary to represent themselves as unable to find employment, they generally say that they have been left widows, and claim compassion for their orphan children ; others allege that they are quite unable to support their large families whilst they stay at home. However, when an able-bodied fellow begs, he is sure to state that he is unable to find work, and, unfortunately, as we have many hands unemployed at home, we are always unable to put him to the test by offering him anything to do. The Rev, Mr. Sheehy said, with regard to their fostering their wretchedness in order to excite compassion, that it was unnecessary for the resident beggars to cherish the appearance of being worse off than their abject poverty compelled them to be. It rarely occurs that clothes are given to them, but when they have been, he observed, however, that they were made use of, and that they even took care of them. [1] "I have never had any reason to suppose," said he, "that vagrants have produced sores for the purpose of exciting compassion ; but about six weeks ago, a woman, the lower part of whose face was enveloped in a cloth, apparently saturated with a sanious discharge, was very successful in collecting alms from the congregation as they came out of mass. In the course of the day I had reason to suspect that she was an impostor, from the rapidity with which she devoured a very abundant dinner which was given to her by a charitable individual. I had the bandage forcibly removed from her face, and she was found not to labour under any disease whatsoever. As a caution to the by-standers, I pointed out the deceit which had been practised on them, and I had the greatest difficulty in preventing them laying violent hands upon her." Mr. O'Grady said, that few strangers come to this part of the country, with recommendations either forged or genuine ; sometimes what is called "a genteel beggar" will go about with a petition, to which those who give him anything attach their names, with the sums which they have given ; and sometimes also a man who is known in the neighbourhood, and who has suffered any misfortune, such as if his cabin had been burnt, or his horse or his cow had been killed, will get a document drawn up to that effect, and will solicit charity, and generally with success, on the strength of his loss.

Dr. Geary observed that he never knew an instance of mendicants refusing to have their sores cured ; pregnant women are observed to be much averse to passing the afflicted and diseased objects of the kind. But though they frequently complain of suffering much injury from them, and express fears that "what they carry will be the worse for it," yet he could not recollect an instance where he had been able to trace mischief to such sights ; nevertheless he thought them quite capable of producing serious harm in women of weak and irritable dispositions. No offer has ever been made in that parish to afford asylums for the blind, crippled, deaf and dumb children of beggars. Hurley observed, that it was only a trick of town beggars to take their children afflicted in that manner about in the wet and cold. And Gorman said, that sometimes in bad weather vagrants have asked him permission to leave their children in his house whilst their parents went about seeking for provisions for them. He also stated that "there is a class of beggars distinct from common wanderers, who pursue their trade mostly at fairs, and travel about from one such place of meeting to another. They invariably appear to labour under some infirmity, and are notorious for their audacity, and for the lusty voice with which they proclaim their misfortunes. They manage to collect a good deal from the charitable ; but the people are at length beginning to believe that they are for the most part impostors. Last fair-day we had a great many such characters ; and the morning after I had occasion to be up at four o'clock, before it was light, and on the hill above the town, I met nearly twenty of them, with their asses and cars, which they had left at a distance during the fair ; and they were preparing to go off ; and even at that hour some of them were drunk."

Most of the resident beggars are decent, well-behaved people, whom distress has reduced to their present condition. There are many thefts committed by strollers, and no later than last assizes, a Kerry woman observed Sergeant Scott, with three or four children, who had stolen a blanket from one Patrick M'Auley, who had given her a night's lodging, was tried and transported for Stealing some yarn, which she knew Mr. Scott of Cahircon sometimes pur-

chased, and which she offered to him for sale. The quantity she offered excited his suspicion, so he detained her, and was able to trace the theft. Nevertheless, common strollers are not observed in general to be a dissolute class ; and he did not remember having seen any of them drunk. But those who take their stations at fairs are a most disorderly set, and have often fixed houses of call at which they spend whole days in every kind of debauchery ; and wondered how the people who knew this are such fools as to give them anything.

The Assistant Commissioners were not able to learn that any kind of beggars had been concerned in outrages on the person, but it was generally suspected that they acted as carriers of intelligence for those who took part in the Terryalt disturbances. Myers observed, “ that they would be the last people in the world that would be willing to emigrate ; they find themselves comfortable enough at home without the trouble of working. The confirmed vagrant is never known to go to England in search of work. Mr. Sheehy stated that the greater number of vagrants whom they see in Kildysart are persons bred up in the country, and he never observed any remarkable degree of unkindness in them towards their children ; he could not, however, help thinking that a woman or man is fond of their children, when he sees them on a hot summer’s day carrying two or three of them on their backs, besides what potatoes they may have collected. It is not thought that beggars are disposed to share their earnings with one another, on the contrary, their constant endeavours and anxiety to acquire are little calculated to dispose them to give away without a consideration what they have had considerable difficulty in obtaining.

Myers, Gorman and Hurley observed, “ we have an impression that one class of beggars do hoard, namely, sweeps and tinkers, for whilst they are working, their wives are begging, and between them they must save something.”

Rev. Mr. Sheehy said, “ Last winter I was on a visit with a brother clergyman in Wexford, and he delivered into my hands the sum of 70*l.* which had been given to him by an old beggar-woman on her death-bed, in order to be forwarded to her son, who was a poor idiot living on charity in the neighbouring parish of Ennis. This old woman had been in want of something to drink on her death-bed, and would not consent to procure it for herself, saying, ‘ that she was without a penny.’ He gave the money to her son, but he has since understood that he has been duped out of it by his depraved associates in the town.”

Gorman observed that many old women go through the town with infant children that cannot possibly be theirs from their ages. If there be an old grandmother, however, in a distressed family she will be apt to take the young children to beg whilst the son and the wife remain at home. Last summer, said he, “ a woman passed through with six children, two of which, being young twins, she carried in a blanket behind her ; we afterwards, however, discovered that she had borrowed these from another beggar-woman who was unable to travel, having sprained her ankle, and who was confined to a man’s house who had taken her in through charity.” Most beggars have large families ; very few are to be observed without children, however they may come by them. Single persons rarely appear in the character of mendicants, and it cannot therefore be ascertained whether the recklessness produced by vagrancy tends towards early marriages. Mr. Sheehy stated that he had married but one beggar couple during the last five years, and both the parties were old. Many, however, of this class apply to him to marry them, but he is very cautious in complying with their requests, lest he should be accessory to their committing the crime of bigamy, otherwise he would be rather disposed to encourage their early marriages, in order to stop promiscuous concubinage, for he had much reason to suspect that most of the children of strange mendicants are illegitimate. Hurley observed, “ that previous to fairs he generally sees a great many hearty young women coming into town, who pretend to be begging for charity, but he knows them to be of bad character, for he sees them after it is dark walking about with young men. The morality among beggars has not been observed to be either greater or less than in the ordinary classes

of the population ; they generally live better than the labouring man, and vagrant beggars have in many instances attained a great age. Myers stated, “ that this time last year a beggar-woman came here, and she was suddenly taken sick. Bidy Kennedy took her into her house, and gave her everything she wanted ; and when she died a small collection was made for her among the neighbours, and she was buried as decently as any person could be. She had plenty of candles burning at her wake, and the priest charged nothing for the mass he said for the repose of her soul.”

It was agreed on all hands that the condition of the labourer with children was inferior to that of the able-bodied beggar with a family, but if alone, the able-bodied man would not get much by begging. Hurley said, “ I know there are many labouring men much worse off than beggars. Now, there are Michael Nash and John Myers, and Moran and Horrigan, hard-working, industrious men with large families, and many calls upon their 6*d.* a day. They have to pay rent for their cabin and ‘ mock ground ;’ they have to buy a quart of milk, or may be some kitchen for their herrings, none of which the beggar has to do. He gets his lodgings free ; he gets potatoes more than he can eat, and milk too ; and when he sells his potatoes, he has money to buy whatever he may want There cannot be a doubt but that the man who is independent in spirit, and stays in his cabin, has hard work sometimes to live. M‘Mahon said, “ A poor man would surely collect more by begging than by labouring. We see the beggars come in sometimes twice a day to sell their potatoes ; there is one of them of the name of Lillis, who goes about with his wife who is blind, and we see him frequently selling three or four stone of potatoes at the scales, sometimes even seven or eight stone. I bought three stone from him myself to-day. Yesterday morning I saw a beggar cleaning the scales and balancing them, to see that he did not lose by the bargain. I hear the small farmers and labourers often say, when too many beggars call on them, ‘ By Gor, my honest woman, you are better off than ourselves.’ In short, destitution is not to be sought for among the beggars.”

It is seldom attempted to ascertain the character of strangers, as they pass by but once. It would be impossible to rely on their statements.

M‘Namara said, “ that private charity has not been observed to produce very ill effects on the morals of the labouring population.” As the greater number of vagrants are infirm through age or disease, it would be difficult to ascertain whether they would prefer mendicancy to a life of labour with equal earnings ; as for the women, what they could earn by industry would never equal what they could collect by begging. Able-bodied vagrants are in general decidedly lazy ; when work has been offered to them, they have made all manner of excuses, such as they are going to the salt-water to bathe, or that they were returning from it, &c. They are disinclined to accept work, because if they were known once to do any, they would cease to be considered objects of charity.

Such a precaution as inquiring into the characters of applicants is never taken. Alms are given indiscriminately, without asking any questions.

It seldom occurs that a wandering beggar is able to obtain a night’s lodging gratuitously in the neighbourhood of the village, or in the country ; he would be more likely to be received by a labourer or a cottier than a farmer. In the village itself a vagrant seldom asks for lodging, because he knows he would not get straw to lie on there. Many of the resident mendicants pay 3*d.* or 4*d.* a week for their lodgings. Clothes are seldom given to beggars, except by the upper classes, and relief of that kind is exceedingly limited in that parish. M‘Cabe observed, “ that the parish priest will sometimes give a shirt or some other article, and to deserving objects he sometimes gives a suit of new clothes.

The usual form in which charity is given is potatoes ; hardly ever is meal given, even at the houses of the more wealthy.

Hurley observed, “ that almost every beggar carries a tin can ; and in the summer, when milk is plenty, most people give it to them. In the winter this can serves to contain broth, cabbage, &c. and it is seldom to be found quite empty. Farmers prefer giving food to money, because they have not the latter so readily ; very little is left after paying the rent. Gorman observed, “ that most of the transactions in that district, between the labouring classes, were carried on without the aid of money, merely by the exchange of labour. Rent also, in many cases, was paid by giving work for it, for which a very low rate of wages was allowed.” Myers said, “ that it was insufferent to the beggars there whether they got food or money ; they would prefer food there, because as there is not any market they can strike their own bargain for their surplus, which they offer for sale. Sergeant Scott said, “ You will seldom see a young woman with children selling her potatoes ; it is generally the middle-aged, who have left off their work, and can scold and wheedle. This kind it is who generally sell to the police.”

It did not appear that in any house in the country parts there is any limit to the number who shall receive alms, except perhaps in the cabin of the very poor man, whose store may be run out. Hurley said, “ In the interior of the country, where there is not such a fall of beggars as here in the village, they give to all ; but here the people are sometimes tired out of all patience, and often refuse towards the latter end of the day ; the strong man, who can go up into the mountains, gets the most in the long run.” M‘Namara stated, “ that if a single woman with a large family came, she would probably get a double handful ; but if a single man comes he certainly will not get more than one handful, and sometimes perhaps not even that. There is not an individual in the parish who owes his entire support to any one family or person ; but there are several who are in the habit of receiving an occasional meal at the houses of the charitable.

M‘Namara said, “ he gives away, in the course of the day, quite as much as would support two additional workmen ; but as potatoes are but  $1\frac{1}{2}d.$  a stone, not as much as would amount to the hire of an additional labourer.” Gorman and others agreed in this statement, making the same distinction between the amount given and its value. Gorman added, “ that he had heard many farmers complain of the constant interruption to which their women servants were liable from beggars, without at all adverting to the quantity distributed Hurly said, “ that the shopkeepers in Kildysart were not in the habit of giving regular relief ; they are on a very small scale, and the relief given by them in kind does not often pass a small bit of tobacco, or perhaps half a herring or a grain of meal.

Burke, the baker, said, “ that without any doubt the burthen of the beggars fell upon the small farmers, shopkeepers and labourers, because that class are more numerous and more in the way of being applied to. It presses more heavily on those in the vicinity of the village than those far off in the country. John Murtagh, a beggarman, said, “ that he would sell his chance of all he could get in the week from great gentlemen for  $6d.$  but that he never comes away empty-handed from the poor. M‘Namara said that a labourer of his of the name of Kelly, lives opposite to him. When this man is digging his potatoes, said he, “ I see him throwing them into the open sack of the beggar, without even looking to see what was in the bag before. I am sure at that time of the year he often gives a stone to one person, and if the beggar humours him, perhaps two.” Even the labourers possessing no ‘ mock ground’ (con-acre,) and who are obliged to buy their potatoes, never refuse alms ; however, it is more usual for such classes of persons to exercise their charity in giving a night's lodging to the wanderers, a practice to which the upper classes of farmers are becoming every day more disinclined.

If the wants of a beggar are to be measured solely by the quantity of food which he can consume, it may safely be stated that all get as much as they require, and the greater number get more. Sergeant Scott said, “ that in six cases out of ten they are able to sell something,



and that there were more waiting often at the police-barrack gate than the men can buy from. It cannot be said that provisions are wasted ; they are sold, and the money thus produced by them is all the beggar in this rural district has to purchase anything.

It is thought that there is scarcely a 10-acre farmer in the parish who does not give away, one day with another, nearly a stone of potatoes ; in the season for giving them he often gives away three or four stone. M'Mahon said, " We do not set much value upon what we give during the winter, but in summer we are hard set for it ourselves ; if six or seven sets were to call on me I could not give them less than a stone, or a stone and a half amongst them." The shopkeepers present agreed that they gave away about *2d.* a day in food and money. As the people give in small quantities each day, according to the number of persons who call on them, they are able to check their hands when their stock falls low, or when they have reason to fear any scarcity. The general opinion of the farmers with whom the Assistant Commissioners had an opportunity of conversing, and still more extensively among the small shopkeepers of the village, was, that it would be their interest, and that they would save considerably by making a fixed annual payment, and by being freed from the present influx of beggars. They would be still more disposed to such payment were they assured that it would be devoted solely to the relief of their own poor, who constitute by far the smaller portion of those who seek their bounty. Some said, that their only objection to such a mode of provision for the poor was, the probability of a misapplication of the funds levied ; and they added, that they would rather continue to dispose personally of what they thought proper to give. Finnucane observed, " I would rather have the dividing of it myself, to see that those persons who wanted it got it ; I know how it would be if we were taxed."

The fear that the individual seeking relief may be suffering under privation cannot often, except perhaps in summer or in a scarce season, be the motive which induces the giver to accede to his request. Such an idea would be often checked by the appearance of the full wallet of the mendicant. The real motive is religious feeling, continued and supported to a considerable extent by habit, and by the custom of the district. Many of the labouring classes assured them, however, that the motive would cease as soon as any sure sources of relief were opened to the vagrant " Under such circumstances," said the Rev. Mr. Sheehy, " I would think it my duty to dissuade my flock from almsgiving. Females," said he, " may be sometimes terrified into giving charity by a sturdy beggar when alone in the country, a class of vagrants which is gradually disappearing, and whose curse would not frighten a child now-a-days, though some people think a great deal of his blessing."

" When beggars are refused," said M'Namara, " though they may be sulky enough, they seldom persist in their demands ; and still less have they ever given reason to think that they ever had recourse to violence, in revenge for a refusal."

As to the dissemination of disease. Dr. Geary said, that a kind of tetter or running sore had frequently been propagated by beggars ; and he has repeatedly known it to have arisen in that parish from intercourse with beggars, who in the poorer houses are admitted not only to the same room, but often to the same straw bed as the inhabitants. The dissemination of fever and small pox is of frequent occurrence where vagrants have been lodged ; and amongst mendicants they find those mischievous individuals who contribute to the spreading of small-pox, by inoculating with the matter of that disease.

As to the influence of strollers on the moral condition of the labouring classes, it is not very prominent in this rural parish, where persons of that kind are rarely harboured for more than one night

There is no reason for supposing that a confirmed vagrant ever will return to industry, but it is presumed that many of the poor cottiers who come there in the winter return in summer

to the tilling of their farms. M'Mahon observed that mendicants ultimately become quite a different class ; and that if a beggar had 20*l.* to give his daughter, he would not get her a husband, unless another beggar. Rev. Mr. Sheehy considered that this remark only applied to the confirmed vagrant, who becomes notorious throughout the country, and in his old age degenerates into the " boccough."

Persons have never been indicted in Kildysart for vagrancy, and it is much doubted whether the laws as they now stand would authorize it, except where the vagrant has been guilty of any crime. Both Mr. Scott and Major Ross Lewin agreed that it would be inhuman, and indeed nearly impossible to put them into execution, unless there were more alternatives offered to the beggar ; if there were such as support in a workhouse or otherwise, they say that there is not any reason to suppose that they would meet with any difficulty in putting repressive measures into operation ; and they add, that they have reason to think that the exertions of the magistrate in this respect would be seconded by the feelings of the people, who would soon see the advantage of being relieved from a source of imposition and fraud. Wandering beggars are often detected in petty larcenies, but they are not the class amongst whom destitution exists. Major Ross Lewin did not recollect a case of outrage attributable to destitution. There are no houses of industry nearer than Ennis, a distance of 18 miles. There was the most decided unwillingness expressed by the beggars to become inmates of a house, where the food and lodging should be equal to what they usually get. They are all impressed with the idea that severe and harsh measures enter into their ordinary discipline. The Assistant Commissioners represented to many that they would be provided with an abundance of what is now their ordinary food, and that they would have a warm house and a fire to stay by, instead of wandering about as at present. However, as a mendicant is never without enough to eat, they could not find that the additional comforts held out as inducements were sufficient to tempt them to consent to the loss of their liberty. This reluctance has been in some respects produced by the exertions of a dissolute woman who, having been once in the Limerick workhouse, seizes every opportunity of inveighing against the treatment she received there. They discovered that she had been turned out of it for misconduct.

[1] Major Ross Lewin observed that this remark did not apply to strange beggars, whose clothes were patched in such a manner that there would not be one piece in them larger than a square inch, and would have the appearance of being put together in this ingenious manner in order to give the appearance of poverty.

Selection of Parochial Examinations Relative to the Destitute Classes in Ireland. (1835)  
Author : Great Britain Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland  
Publisher : Milliken  
Year : 1835  
Language : English  
Digitizing sponsor : Google  
Book from the collections of : New York Public Library  
Collection : americana  
Notes : Reproduction of original from Goldsmiths' Library, University of London.

Source : Internet Archive  
<http://archive.org/details/selectionparoch00irelgoog>

Edited and uploaded to [www.aughty.org](http://www.aughty.org)  
Jan 7 2013