

long, the name of Skibbereen became the representative of the worst horrors of the Famine. That desolate district was one of the longest to suffer, and the slowest to recover, for in none other was there a greater destruction of human life. Throughout the entire west of the county Cork, it was a common occurrence to see from ten to a dozen funerals in the course of the day, during the close of 1846.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Society of Friends—Their Reports on the Condition of the Country and State of the People—Frightful Mortality.

THE Society of Friends in Ireland commenced their beneficent labours in December, 1846, and sought the cooperation of their brethren in Great Britain and throughout the United States. Their appeal was attended with the best results in both cases, but with extraordinary success in the United States. The account of their operations is recorded in a most interesting volume, published in 1852, the Report being from the able pen of Mr. Jonathan Pim. From the Appendix, which contains a number of highly valuable documents, I shall select some extracts, which will exhibit, in simple and unexaggerated language, the sad condition to which the mass of the population was reduced.

The Friends in London deputed certain members of their body to visit the distressed districts of Ireland, and to report upon the actual state of things in that country. Joseph Crosfield, writing from Roscommon on the 3rd of December, 1846, says:—

. . . The total number receiving pay from Government in the county of Roscommon is not less than 40,000. Many of these people rent land from one to five or six acres each; but from their crops of potatoes having failed, they are in no better condition than the common labourers. The price of provisions is extremely high in this part of the country, the poor paying 2s. 9d. per stone of 14 lbs. for meal, and, when they buy it in smaller quantities, 3s. 4d. per stone for it; so that a man who has a wife and family of five or six children to support out of 8d. per day, is scarcely removed from starvation.

From Boyle he writes on the 5th of the same month:—

The condition of the poor previously to their obtaining admission into the workhouse is one of great distress; many of them declare that they have not tasted food of any kind for forty-eight hours; and numbers of them have eaten nothing but cabbage or turnips for days and weeks. This statement is corroborated by the dreadfully reduced state in which they present themselves, the children especially being in a condition of starvation, and ravenous with hunger.

From Carrick-on-Shannon, he writes on the 6th:—

Our first visit was to the Poor-house; and as the Board of Guardians were then sitting for the admission of applicants, a most painful and heart-rending scene presented itself; poor wretches in the last stage of famine imploring to be admitted into the house; women, who had six or seven children, begging that even two or three of them might be taken in, as their husbands were earning but 8*d.* per day; which, at the present high price of provisions, was totally inadequate to feed them. Some of these children were worn to skeletons, their features sharpened with hunger, and their limbs wasted almost to the bone. From a number of painful cases, the two following may be selected. A widow with two children, who for a week had subsisted on one meal of cabbage each day; these were admitted, but in so reduced a state, that a guardian observed to the master, that the youngest child would trouble them but a very short time. Another woman with two children, and near her confinement again, whose husband had left her a month before to seek for work, stated that they had lived for the whole of this week upon two quarts of meal and two heads of cabbage. Famine was written in the faces of this woman and her children. . . . A great number were necessarily refused admittance, as there were but thirty vacancies in the house. . . .

Throughout this journey, it was William Forster's observation, that the children exhibit the effects of famine in a remarkable degree, their faces looking wan and haggard with hunger, and *seeming like old men and women*. Their sprightliness is entirely gone, and they may be seen sitting in groups by the cabin doors, making no attempt to play, or to run after the carriages. To do the people justice, they are bearing their privations with a remarkable degree of patience and fortitude; and very little clamorous begging is to be met with upon the roads.

William Edward Forster thus describes the town of Westport, and other places, as he saw them on the 18th, 19th, and 20th of January, 1847:—

The town of Westport was in itself a strange and fearful sight, like what we read of in beleaguered cities, its streets crowded with gaunt wanderers sauntering to and fro with hopeless air and hunger-struck look; a mob of starved, almost naked women, around the poor-house, clamouring for soup-tickets; our inn, the head-quarters of the road-engineer and pay-clerks, beset by a crowd of applicants for work.

Early next morning we proceeded to the small village of Leenane, where we found a large body of men engaged in making a pier under the Labour-rate Act. This village appeared to me, comparatively speaking, well off, having had in it public work for some weeks, and the wages at pier-making being rather better than those earned on the roads. Still, *even here*, the men were weak, evidently wasting away for want of sufficient food.

Bundorragha, the village of which we had heard so bad an account the previous evening, being on the other side of the harbour, I took a boat to it, and was much struck by the pale, spiritless look and air of the boatmen, so different from their wild Irish fun, when I made the same excursion before.

Out of a population of 240, I found 13 already dead from want. The survivors were like walking skeletons; the men stamped with the livid mark of hunger; the children crying with pain; the women in some of the cabins too weak to stand. When there before, I had seen cows at almost every cabin, and there were, besides, many sheep and pigs owned in the village. But now all the sheep were gone, all the cows, all the poultry killed; only one pig left; the very dogs which barked at me before had disappeared; no potatoes, no oats. We ordered a ton of meal to be sent there from Westport, but it could not arrive for some time. I tried to get some immediate help for those who were actually starving; there was hardly enough of meal in the village to fill my pockets, and I was compelled to send a boat four miles to Leenane, to buy a small quantity there.

I met here with a striking instance of the patience of these sufferers. The Bundorragha men had been at work for three weeks on the roads, and the men at the neighbouring village for five weeks; owing to the negligence or mistake of some officers of the works, with the exception of two of the gangsmen, who had gone themselves to Westport the end of the previous week, no wages had until this morning been received. While I was there, the pay-clerk sent a messenger over, but still only with wages for a few; and it was wonderful, but yet most touching, to see the patient, quiet look of despair with which the others received the news that they were still left unpaid. I doubt whether it would have been easy to find a man who would have dared to bear the like announcement to starving Englishmen. . . .

We learned that their wages did not average, taking one week with another, and allowing for broken days, more than 4s. 6d. per week; in fact, for the most distressed localities of Mayo and Galway, I should consider this too high an average. To get to their work, many of the men had to walk five, or even *seven Irish miles!* Four and sixpence per week thus earned, the sole resource of a family of six, with Indian meal, their cheapest food, at 2s. 10d. to 4s. per stone! What is this but slow death—a mere enabling the patient to endure for a little longer time the disease of hunger? Yet even this was the state of those who were considered well off—*provided for*; and for this provision the people were everywhere begging as for their lives. In some districts there were no public works; and even where they were, we found that though the aim was to find employment for one man to every five or six souls, it really was not given to more than one man in nine or twelve.

Writing from Clifden, on the 20th of January, Mr. Forster says:—

On arriving at the small town of Clifden, we heard of four cases of death there from want, within the last three or four days. One woman, who had crawled the previous night into an out-house, had been found next morning *partly eaten by dogs*. Another corpse had been carried up the street in a wheelbarrow; and had it not been that a gentleman, accidentally passing by, had given money for a coffin, it would have been thrown into the ground merely covered with a sheet. Of burials without coffins we heard many instances; and to those who know the almost superstitious reverence of the Irish for funeral rites, they tell a fearful story.

Of the village of Cleggan, a near point of Clifden, he says:—

The distress was appalling, far beyond my power of description. I was quickly surrounded by a mob of men and women, more like famished dogs than fellow-creatures, whose figures, looks, and cries all showed that they were suffering the ravening agony of hunger. . . . I went into two or three of the cabins. In one there were two emaciated men lying at full length on the damp floor, in their ragged clothes, too weak to move—actually worn down to skin and bone. In another, a young man lying ill of dysentery; his mother had pawned everything, even his shoes, to keep him alive; and I shall never forget the resigned uncomplaining tone with which he told her that *the only medicine he wanted was food*.

Writing from Galway on the 25th of January, Mr. Forster says, 'It was comforting to observe how cordially Roman Catholics and Protestants both lay and clerical, were uniting together in common efforts to save their poor neighbours.'

In the Claddagh, a district of the city of Galway exclusively inhabited by the fishermen and their families, he witnessed the following example of the charity of the poor to the poor, the destitute to the destitute:—

In one small wretched hovel, in which were huddled together three families, I saw a young mother, whose rags were really no covering, much less a protection against the weather; but even here I found an instance of charity that would shame many a wealthy home. A poor blind woman was crouching upon the floor; and my companion told me she was no relation to the other inmates, but that they supported her and gave her house-room out of kindness. Even the very nets and tackling of the poor fishermen were pawned.

Writing of the general impressions of his melancholy tour, Mr. Forster says:—

When we entered a village, our first question was, how many deaths? '*The hunger is upon us,*' was everywhere the cry, and involuntarily we found ourselves regarding this hunger as we should an epidemic; looking upon starvation as a disease. In fact, as we went along, our wonder was not that the people died, but that they lived; and I have no doubt whatever that in any other country the mortality would have been far greater; that many lives have been prolonged, perhaps saved, by the long apprenticeship to want in which the Irish peasant has been trained, *and by that lovely, touching charity which prompts him to share his scanty meal with his starving neighbour. . . .*

Like a scourge of locusts, '*the hunger*' sweeps over fresh districts, eating up all before it. One class after another is falling into the same abyss of ruin.

From Burncourt, near Clogheen, county of Tipperary, the Friends are informed that deaths from starvation were of daily occurrence, and that corpses were buried at night without coffins. From Cork county the reports are even worse. The report of the Cork Auxiliary Committee, written from the city of Cork, and addressed to the Central Relief Com-

mittee in Dublin, dated February the 20th, 1847, has this true picture of the effects which the general starvation, and the terrible familiarity with death, produced upon a people who, above all others, are most remarkable for their reverence for the dead:—

History records some affecting instances of the disruption of social relations, and the severance of domestic ties, in the depth of a nation's extremity; and it is truly humiliating to witness, in one day, the blighting effects of this calamitous visitation in the character and habits of our afflicted peasantry; no mourning for the dead, and in many instances but little attention paid to the dying; whilst funerals—once the noted occasions of their humble display—but rarely attract the interest of surviving relatives and friends.

Skibbereen is described as '*one mass of famine, disease, and death,*' the poor rapidly sinking under fever, dysentery, and starvation. Here, so early as the first week in February, 1847, there was constant use for a coffin with movable sides, in which the dead were borne to the grave, and there dropped into their last resting-place. But as weeks and months rolled on, the mortality was multiplied. Skibbereen, which had sent large quantities of agricultural produce to other markets, in the year before the fatal blight, now depended altogether on foreign food for the daily support of its inhabitants.

A gentleman writing from the county of Armagh on the 23rd of February, shows that things in that county were as bad as in other parts of Ireland. In the parish of Tartaraghan, he saw 'the living lying on straw by the side of the unburied dead, who had died three days before.'

From Ballyjamesduff in the county of Cavan, this terrible statement is made:—

The report of one dispensary doctor this day (February 28) is, that 200 persons in this district are dying of destitution, and that fifty of them are so far gone that little hope remains of their recovery. Many deaths from destitution have already occurred. At first, this sad fact was verified by the verdict of the coroner; but now he is seldom sent for, as it would entail unnecessary expense on the county.

Richard D. Webb, of Dublin, addressed a series of interesting letters to the Central Relief Committee whilst on a visit of inspection to Erris. Writing from Belmullet, Co. Mayo, on the 28th of May, he says:—

Many who saved money for no other purpose, were careful to preserve a hoard to defray their funeral expenses. Few of the popular customs appeared more firmly rooted than this; but it has been swept away like chaff before the wind. . . . Funerals are now rarely attended by more than three or four relatives or friends; they excite little attention, and apparently less feeling. Whole families are exterminated by dysentery, fever, and starvation; and this catastrophe has been so common in the west of Connaught, that it excites no more notice than would have been occasioned two years ago by the death of an individual.

On a retrospect of the misery I have witnessed among thousands of our fellow-creatures, who at this time never enjoy a full meal, and cannot tell to-day where to turn for sustenance to-morrow, I am surprised at the absence of outrages amongst them. Between to-day and yesterday, I saw the corpses of a girl, a man, and an old woman, who died of hunger. This day I saw a woman sinking into a faint, while I was giving out relief to some peculiarly wretched families. I saw thousands to-day of the most miserable people I have ever seen.

In Erris whole families were swept away by starvation, or fever, or both. In one cabin I saw six children lying heads and points on their miserable beds on each side of the turf fire, while the father and mother, wasted and emaciated, sat crouching over the embers. In another cabin I saw the father lying near the point of death on one side of the fire-place; over the ashes sat a wretched little boy wholly naked—and on the opposite side of the hut, beneath a ragged quilt, lay the body of an old woman, who had taken shelter there and died. As she belonged to nobody, there was nobody to bury her; and there had been many instances of bodies lying five or six days unburied, before anyone could be induced by threats or rewards to bury them. I saw many graves made within a few yards of the cabin door. In some places, bodies have been interred under the floors on which they died; and in others they have been covered by the ruins of the cabins they occupied; this mode of burial being resorted to as the least hazardous, troublesome, and expensive.

The following extracts from the correspondence of Father Mathew with Government officials, while indicating the deplorable state of things in his adopted city, evince his cease-

less efforts to mitigate the horrors of the famine, and protect the lives of the people:—

To MR. TREVELYAN.

Cork: February 4, 1847.

The soup kitchens are affording very great relief, and have lightened in an unexpected degree the pressure upon the corn and flour markets.

We are in a deplorable state in Cork from the influx into the city of more than 10,000 foodless, homeless people, young and old, from several counties around us. I am in a horror whilst I walk the streets, and I return to my besieged dwelling in sadness and hopelessness. The workhouse has been closed, and there is no refuge for these miserable creatures. . . .

As I have been much through the country latterly, I can assure you, and with great pleasure, that agriculture has not been neglected. The quantity of wheat sown is as large as usual. . . . In the fond hope of preserving a supply for seed, the poor con-acre peasants allowed the potato gardens to remain undug. . . . I would gratefully accept from you one of your improved querns, as a model for the instruction of our mechanics. . . . It should be incumbent on soup committees to introduce flesh-meat, fish, or milk, into their soup; otherwise it will not be fit food. The multitudinous deaths in the workhouses, especially amongst children, are to be attributed to the want of animal food.

I fervently pray that the Lord may grant you every spiritual and temporal blessing.

To SIR R. ROUTH.

Cork: February 5, 1847.

For the last six months I have been distributing soup to the destitute, having proved its permanent utility during former periods of partial scarcity. We find beans, peas, and biscuit the best ingredients to add to the liquor of flesh-meat. Occasionally, and always on Friday, we use salt fish. If this latter were given twice a week to the inmates of the different workhouses, it would be a great advantage to our, I may term them, infant fisheries.

I am delighted with Lord John's measures, and I shall have no apprehension about the future fate of the Irish people when once they come into operation. Independent of the beneficial effect the distillery laws will produce, by promoting temperance, I rejoice in it for the sake of humanity, on account of the immense quantity of grain it will save from destruction.

To MR. TREVELYAN.

Cork: March 4, 1847.

To encourage our soup committees to give gratuitous food to be consumed on the premises, now that our workhouse is closed against admissions, I have presumed to give to them the three boilers you so considerably presented to me. Mr. Bishop has promised to give me a very fine copper cooking apparatus, with which I expect to be able to rival M. Soyer. My great anxiety is, to teach our unhappy simple people to manage to advantage their scanty means. The potato deluge, if I may so term it, during the last twenty years, swept away all other food from amongst our cottagers, and sank in oblivion their knowledge of cookery.

Last week I travelled to Limerick, and returned yesterday; and you will be gratified to hear, that in all directions the plough is at work, and oats, barley, and potatoes, are being sown in large quantities. . . . I am full of hope, and rely with unbounded confidence in the mercy of God. We are in His Almighty hands, and not in the hands of men. He will in due season reward, with abundance, the resignation to His Divine will of the most patient and religious people on the face of the earth.

The famine now raged in every part of the afflicted country, and starving multitudes crowded the thoroughfares of the cities and large towns. Death was everywhere—in the cabin, on the highway, in the garret, in the cellar, and even on the flags or side-paths of the most public streets of the city. In the workhouses, to which the pressure of absolute starvation alone drove the destitute, the carnage was frightful. It was now increasing at a prodigious pace. The number of deaths in the Cork workhouse, in the last week of January 1847, was 104. It increased to 128 in the first week of February, and in the second week of that month it reached to 164—or 396 in three weeks! During the month of April, as many as 36 bodies were interred in one day, in that portion of Father Mathew's cemetery reserved for the free burial of the poor; and this mortality was entirely independent of the slaughter in the workhouse. During the same month, there were 300 coffins sold in a single street in the course of a fortnight, and

these were chiefly required for the supply of a single parish. From the 27th of December 1846, to the middle of April 1847, the number of human beings that died in the Cork workhouse was 2,130 ! And in the third week of the following month the free interments in the Mathew Cemetery had risen to 277—as many as 67 having been buried in one day.

The destruction of human life in other workhouses of Ireland kept pace with the appalling mortality in the Cork workhouse. According to official returns, it had reached in April the *weekly* average of 25 per 1,000 inmates ; the actual number of deaths being 2,706 for the week ending the 3rd of April, and 2,613 in the following week. Yet the number of inmates in the Irish workhouses was but 104,455 on the 10th of April—the entire number of houses not having then been completed.

More than 100 workhouse officers fell victims during this fatal year to the Famine Fever, which also decimated the ranks of the Catholic clergy of the country. Mr. Trevelyan gives the names of 30 English and Scotch priests who sacrificed their lives to their zealous attendance on the immigrant Irish, who carried the pestilence with them in their flight to other portions of the United Kingdom.

The pestilence likewise slew its victims in the fetid hold of the emigrant ship, and, following them across the ocean, immolated them in thousands in the lazar-houses, that fringed the shores of Canada and the United States.

In meal, and coffins, and passenger ships, was the principal business of the time. A fact may be mentioned which renders further description of the state of the country needless. The Cork Patent Saw Mills had been at full work from December 1846 to May 1847, with twenty pairs of saws constantly going from morning till night, cutting planks for coffins, and planks and scantlings for fever sheds, and for the framework of berths for emigrant ships.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The People rush from the Country into the Towns—Instances of the Destruction of Life amongst them—An awful Spectacle—Father Mathew in his Element—He warns the People against Intemperance—America sends Food to Ireland—The public Measures of Relief—An honourable Testimony.

THE destruction of life amongst those who rushed into the towns, scared by the naked horrors of the starved country districts, was almost beyond belief. A single instance will afford an idea of this frightful carnage.

In a small house in one of the lanes off Clarence Street, a crowded thoroughfare of Cork, some two or three families from the country had sought refuge. The writer was in the company of another gentleman of the city, when his attention was directed to this wretched abode of famine and pestilence. A tall man, of once powerful frame, stood leaning against the door-post, and apparently indifferent to everything in this world—even to the moans and cries which proceeded from a kind of closet, a few feet from where he stood. Every trace of expression, save that of blank apathy, had been banished from his face ; and the skin of his face, neck, and breast—for his discoloured shirt was open in front—was more of the hue of a negro than of a white man. It was the dark colour of the famine. In the front room, lay, stark and stiff, stretched on the bare floor, the dead bodies of two of his children—one a girl of thirteen, the other a boy of seven ; and in the closet, on a heap of infected straw, raving and writhing in fever, lay