

Letters to the editor of the Times, on the reform poor law.

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THE REFORM POOR LAW

BY

J BOWEN.

1837 - 38.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES, ON THE
REFORM POOR LAW.

"I am no orator as Brutus is:
"But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man,
"That love my friends;
"For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
"Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech,
"To stir men's blood; I only speak right on."

Julius Cæsar, act 3, scene 2.

SIR,

I am induced, by reasons which will appear in the following pages, to offer you, for publication in *The Times*, a short series of letters on the Reform Poor Law, with some account of its working in the Bridgwater Union. I make this offer under an almost overwhelming sense of the importance of the subject, and under a deep conviction, to use your own words, "that no man, whatever his rank, station, or calling may be, can employ himself with more credit in the eyes of God or man than in using his utmost endeavours to procure a mitigation of the cruel, the inhuman, and the unchristian administration of the New Poor Law."

I would, Sir, even at this first step, guard myself from being considered an advocate for any of the abuses of parochial administration, which were so prevalent under the former system; but in doing this, I protest against these abuses being pleaded in the nature of "a set off," as they daily are, by the interested agents of the Reform Poor Law and its admirers. These men adopt the course taken by the apologists of Marat and Robespierre; they defend the atrocities of the new system by citing the defects of the old one. When the imprisonments, starvations, banishments, and dishonoured graves, consequent upon the Malthusian Poor Law are protested against, the throats of the whole school are strained in a declamation against the abuses of the old system. When they have rendered these sufficiently black, they proceed in argument as if all persons who disapprove of their new abuses must, of course, be partisans of the old ones; as if all those who reprobate a system of heartless cruelty ought to be considered as advocates for idleness, imposition, and turbulence.

"I admit that the necessities of these new-light philosophers do compel them to this base and contemptible fraud. Nothing can reconcile men to their proceedings and projects but the supposition that there is no third option between them and some other odious tyranny. This prattling of theirs hardly deserves the name of sophistry; it is nothing but plain impudence."—*Burke*.

Have these gentlemen never heard of anything between a grinding despotism and a mob pampered into idleness and turbulence? Have they never heard of justice administered with firmness and tempered with mercy? It is in such a spirit that the reformation of abuses should be dealt with. But while I would give up all proved abuses of the former system; I would not yield or compromise one iota of the legal rights of the poor: that these rights have been audaciously subverted; that this subversion has been followed up by cruelties previously unknown amongst us, and that the infliction of these cruelties has been solemnly ratified by authority under the cloak of a pretended *inquiry*, are some of the points to which the attention of the public is proposed to be called.

It is essential to a right feeling on this subject that the character of the testimony which paved the way for the introduction of the Reform Poor Law should be kept before the public eye. It should never be lost sight of until this monstrous specimen of legislative injustice is repealed or amended, that the most provident and industrious population in the world had their rights subverted by the Legislature under the pretence of their being, generally, worthless, profligate, vicious, improvident, turbulent, and incendiaries. The public judgment having been thus debauched, the Poor were given up without a struggle to the tender mercies of their defamers, and in a state of utter helplessness thrown into the clutches of mercenaries who, having devised the calumny, were now, under various official designations, to revel in the spoil.

However detestable the mass of falsehood collected out of doors, it was eagerly responded to by kindred spirits within. The Lord Chancellor Brougham, the organ of the Reform Administration in the House of Lords, is exhibited in a pamphlet (said to be published by himself as his speech on the Poor Laws) echoing, in his peculiar style, the out-door calumnies. Frantic in his denunciation of the poor, and exhibiting in this pamphlet-speech a contempt for truth which has seldom been equalled by the most depraved of mankind, this man, who ought to have been a personification of calm and deliberative justice—this man, who was receiving the revenues of a prince from the sweat of the labouring poor, denounced them as being so vicious, so lazy, and so degraded, that “the destruction of all property,” as a consequence of this alleged criminality, “was staring us, and at no great distance, in the face.”

I have in another publication* substantially refuted some of these calumnies; but the poor, and especially the agricultural poor, are now suffering under the consequence of the falsehoods. The law which was introduced by this wicked vituperation has gone forth in all its harshness and severity, without being redeemed by one single kindly feature. This could never have been effected had not the public mind been most grievously prejudiced against the poor, who were by their defamers stripped of every virtue, accused of every vice, and offered up a polluted and helpless sacrifice to sordid Mammon, “The least erected spirit that fell from Heaven.”

Not only have the accumulated masses of calumny heaped on the poor been used to cover the introduction of an unjust and cruel law, but these calumnies have been made the pretext for persecuting the poor with a rigour *even beyond that law*. On the Bishop of Exeter’s motion in the House of Lords, “that there be laid before this House a copy of any rule or rules made by the Poor Law Commissioners preventing the pauper inmates of workhouses from attending divine worship in their separate parish churches on the Lord’s day,” Lord Melbourne is reported to have said, “he would recommend to the commissioners, as a general rule, that not only should not the inmates of a workhouse be allowed to go out on Sunday, but *that they should not be allowed to go out at all*.”

Here is a sentence of unmitigated, perpetual, and hopeless incarceration, prayed for by Her Majesty’s Prime Minister against the whole body of his helpless fellow-subjects. Perhaps no reckless idler of time, paid for by the people, has ventured on a more heartless proscription since the mandates of Tiberius were hatched in the sty of Capreæ and fulminated in the Capitol.

* A LETTER TO THE KING IN REFUTATION OF SOME OF THE CHARGES PREFERRED AGAINST THE POOR. PUBLISHED BY HATCHARD AND SON, PICCADILLY.

But as it is a principle in the nature of such misrepresentation as that with which the poor have been assailed to pall on the public ear, it is essential that the calumny should be renewed at intervals. My Lord John Russell, acting on this principle, made an opportunity, in the course of his late speech "on a system of Poor Laws for Ireland," to revivify the calumny heaped on his countrymen, by panegyricizing the foresight and prudence of Irish labourers, at the expense of English ones. The 20,000 Irish labourers, who are said to come from Dublin annually, to assist in getting in the harvest in England, "carry back with them," said his Lordship, "from £5. to £15. each. While if an Englishman received from £4. to £5. at once, it *generally* happened that the sum was all but lost to him, from being expended, in the course of two or three days, in dissipation and debauchery." Here we have "dissipation and debauchery" set up as "*generally*" characteristic of the English labourer, in contradistinction to Irish "foresight and prudence," and set up too by Her Majesty's leader of the House of Commons:—the exploded thunder of the woolsack squeaked through a penny trumpet!

Does not this sorry trumpeter know that the English labourers whom he so wantonly libels as *generally dissipating* their earnings have providently invested a larger sum in Savings Banks and Friendly Societies than appears to have been so invested in all the rest of Europe? Has he not read the account published by the Poor Law Commissioner of the "foresight and prudence" of these Irish mowers and reapers?

"No person," says the reporter, "who has not seen, could have a notion of the crowds of Irish applying at Liverpool to be relieved and passed to Dublin, or of the poverty and wretchedness which they generally exhibit. Yet there is no doubt that many of the applicants *are able to pay for their passage*, but choose to make the experiment of applying for a passage at the expense of the county; husbands send their wives and families to beg a passage; men trust their clothes and money to a companion, and present themselves in apparent destitution; others conceal their money in their cravats or stockings."

Is this the "foresight and prudence" trumpeted forth as an example for the "generally dissipated and debauched" English labourer? Does not this trumpeter know that there are many thousands of his calumniated countrymen who work for 7s. a-week? Does he not know that 7s. a-week is £18. 4s. for 52 weeks; that £18. 4s. for the whole year is only £3. 4s. more than he gravely represents the Irishman to have *saved* out of his harvest wages? It is, perhaps, assuming too much to suppose that he does know this, but surely he ought to know it.

Such is a sample of the trashy assertions with which the English poor are assailed by the Broughams, the Melbournes and the Russells, to justify the enormities of the Reform Poor Law! My unfortunate brethren have been denounced as dissipated, lazy, and degraded incendiaries, by a band of needy mercenaries, who, having succeeded in quartering themselves on the half-fed labourer, must now laugh in their sleeves at seeing their calumnies spouted second-hand by the mountebanks of the State. But, however monstrous these calumnies are, they have done their work on the English poor with terrific effect. The gruel and the cell, hunger, disease, and premature death, attest the extent to which the public mind has been debauched by the charlatans who denounce the English poor as monsters of dissipation and iniquity. Such *was* the first step in the Reform Poor Law, and such have been the fatal consequences.

Bridgwater, Dec. 20, 1837.

LETTER II

"Wo unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed; to turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the RIGHT from the poor of my people."

Isaiah, chapter x.

SIR,—Having in my last shown the means by which the public mind was prepared for despoiling the poor of their RIGHT—having shown that similar means are now resorted to by men in office for perpetuating the delusion and aggravating the wrong, I proceed to the consideration of the right which has been so subverted. It would be irksome to refer to the many acts of Parliament which directly admit, or inferentially allude to, the right of the English poor to relief in their necessities. The principle has been repeatedly laid down in the broadest manner by the judges of the land; and as it would be absurd to talk of a right which could not be enforced, ample means were provided for its exercise. The poor man, if refused relief in his necessities by the overseer, had a ready appeal to the laws of his country, which by a summary process could enforce his right.

That such right of appeal was frequently abused, is acknowledged, while it is contended that such abuse affords no excuse for the abrogation of the right itself, that would not apply to all other rights which are occasionally abused. The great practical fact is, that up to the passing of the Reform Poor Law the poor man's right to relief was as clearly under the protection of the law of the land as the rich man's right to his rent. A good title was essential to the legal exercise of each of these rights: the poor man's title was his necessity. Even the Administration which despoiled the poor admitted the right through their organ in the House of Lords. The admission was indeed made in a whirlwind of vituperation; still it was made. "The right," said my Lord Brougham, "to share in a fixed fund, is the grand mischief of the Poor Laws." This long-established right of relief, so denounced, is now utterly subverted. The helpless poor, instead of having to apply to the overseer in their own parish, with the power of appealing against his decision to a magistrate, may be driven to an interested board of guardians ten miles off, to whose voluntary good will and pleasure the sufferers are left for that relief to which they once had a legal right.

I have formerly endeavoured to demonstrate the odious injustice of this spoliation, but instead of going over the same ground, I would rather solicit attention to the following judicious remarks, in an article on the New Poor Law, contained in the 103d number of the *Quarterly Review*:—

"The ancient right of the poor of England to be relieved in destitution at the cost of their parishes is then so far abrogated; they can no longer demand support, even when in absolute necessity; they can only ask it as beggars, and, if it be refused, they have no available means of redress. The ancient laws—laws as ancient as the titles to 9-10ths of the estates of the kingdom—compelled certain officers to support the poor, and gave the magistrates the power and ministerial function of seeing that those officers performed their duty. This act compels no one to support the poor; it says, that certain individuals may give relief, but does not say that they shall give relief; nor does it empower any one to see that they do give relief. Is not this a total repeal of the poor man's rights and securities—rights and securities as sacred, as ancient, as fully recognized by statute, and by judicial authorities, as any right to property, to title, or to prerogative, possessed by the highest in the land?"

Such is the broad, uncompromising manner in which the right of the poor, and the fact of its total abrogation by the Reform Poor Law, were insisted on in the *Quarterly Review*. It is well and truly said, that "This act compels no one to support the poor; it says that certain individuals may give relief, but does not say that they shall give relief: nor does it empower any one to see

that they do give relief." But it was urged by the advocates for the bill that necessity, the tyrant's plea, called for the violation of the right; that in some parts of England, particularly in Kent and Sussex, the magistrates and overseers were overpowered by sturdy paupers, subjected to insolence and extortion, and prevented, by intimidation, from a due administration of the law. Such outrages, it was said, proved that the duties intended to be performed by these functionaries could only, under such circumstances, be safely intrusted to a numerously constituted board, from whose decision there should be no appeal. Admitting all these allegations, admitting that the necessities of the case called for some special restrictions on the exercises of the right, should these restrictions be established as the rule, when the alleged necessity has ceased to exist? Should such restrictions become the rule, where no such necessity has existed? If so, the innocent and the guilty, the present and the future population, are to be equally crushed under a sweeping proscription, not justified on any general principle, but advocated on the plea of certain outrages having been committed at some particular time and place. Such are the pretences under which the poor of England have been despoiled of "rights as sacred, as ancient, as fully recognized by statute, as any right to property, to title, or to prerogative, possessed by the highest in the land."

I admit, Sir, that in the progress of states public exigencies do arise so overwhelming as to be paramount to all right. But how have these extreme cases, which threaten the frame of society, been usually provided for in this country? Not by general enactments, intended to take a permanent station in the statute book, as applicable to the whole kingdom at all times; but by some stringent provisions, adapted to the necessities of the case, and only to be called into action on the occurrence of the exigency which they were intended to meet. Volumes of extracts from such enactments might be collected, but a late example will sufficiently elucidate the course usually taken.

On its being represented that conspiracies existed in Ireland, which impeded the due administration of the law, an act materially trenching on the rights of the subject was passed. It was alleged in the recital (3d William IV., chapter 4th) that a conspiracy existed against the rights of property and the administration of the law, and that such conspiracy materially impeded the due and ordinary course of public justice. To meet this exigency the Lord-Lieutenant was empowered to take certain stringent measures trenching on the general rights of the subject. But it was not enacted that these insulters of magistrates, and impeters of public justice, should have their rights subverted for ever. It was not enacted that the whole peasantry should be proscribed for the outrages committed by a few. To prevent the necessity of any sweeping proscription, the Lord-Lieutenant was empowered to declare any county or any portion thereof to be in such a state as to require the application of the act. These extraordinary powers were only granted for a limited period, with a provision that every court instituted under the authority of the act "should be an open court."

Here we have legislative provisions for meeting an alarming exigency; but these provisions are limited in their operation, both as to time and place. The extraordinary power of interfering with established rights was only granted for the period comprised between April, 1833, and August, 1834, and was only to be exercised in places which were in such a state as to require the application of the law. Such was the respect properly paid to the rights of the subject in Ireland during a period of massacre and devastation; while in England some local disturbances and abuses have been made the pretext for subverting the long-established rights of the poor for ever.

The destitute, however excellent their character, or undeserved their sufferings, are now to solicit, as beggars, relief from a fund on which they had a legal claim, older and better than that which can be set up by nine-tenths of the present possessors. They are now practically withdrawn from the protection of the law, and left to the mercy of a secret tribunal, the members of which have a pecuniary interest in their death, and from whose decision they have no appeal.

This daring violation of right is one of the most perilous experiments which has ever been made on the forbearance of mankind. Some of the wicked calumnies by which the public were deluded into this act of spoliation have been already denounced; it remains, in a future communication, to consider some other of the pretences set up by those who have turned aside the needy from judgment, and taken away the right from the poor of the people.

Bridgwater, Jan. 3.

LETTER III.

"The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment. He hath swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again. According to his substance shall the restitution be, and he shall not rejoice therein; because he hath oppressed the poor, and violently taken away an house which he builded not."—*Job*, chap. xx.

SIR,—The pretexts on which the spoliation of the poor was insisted on, and is now justified, are principally founded on some alleged advantages which the other orders of the State were to derive from appropriating to themselves a few millions annually, on which the necessitous had a legal claim; and likewise on the very wonderful boon which would be conferred on the poor, by thus taking away their right to relief in their necessities, and leaving them to their own resources and the voluntary system. Such is the general spirit of the pretexts pleaded by interested persons, who regulate their sympathies with metaphysical subtlety, not soaring up to the pure fountain of right and justice, but flickering about, like unclean things, in the dubious twilight of an assumed expediency.

This expediency has, under the name of necessity, been advocated in so many forms, and supported by so many allegations, that only a small proportion of them can be noticed in the space to which I must confine myself. That profound discoverer, my Lord Brougham, feelingly anticipated a personal as well as a state necessity for despoiling the poor. Under the influence of this natural feeling, he pleaded his apprehension of becoming "a Westmoreland pauper, as I very soon shall," said his honest Lordship, "if the present system continues." The right of the poor to share in a fixed fund must be subverted; "for it is an obvious principle, a self-evident proposition, that no man has a right to food which he does not earn." So said his Lordship. The plea was admitted, the right was subverted, the gruel and the cell were brought into action, and the Lord High Chancellor of England was for a time rescued from the threatening jaws of pauperism. He has, it is true, since become chargeable, after a long four years' service, at only £14,000. a-year; but not exactly on the scale, or under the designation, of a pauper.

It is with pretexts of a somewhat different character that I have next to deal. It was urged, that landed proprietors were on the point of being utterly annihilated by the pressure of the poor-rate—a falsehood too palpable to require a detailed refutation. That some properties, particularly circumstanced, were oppressed for a time, by an abusive administration of the poor laws, is undeniable; but that fact furnishes no argument for subverting the right of the poor, although it may prove the necessity of a better administration, and per-

haps of a more general assessment. If the expenses of the army and navy had been raised on any particular property, and any portion of that property was on the point of sinking beneath the burden, would it be a legitimate conclusion that no army or navy should be supported? Englishmen would by common consent scout such a conclusion. They would declare that the means of defence must be provided; and that if any of the properties which had hitherto sustained the charge were so circumstanced as to be unable to bear that charge, other properties, equally dependent on the general welfare, must be called upon to contribute their quota. So likewise as to the established provision for the necessitous. If the local fund should, in some cases, be unable to meet the local demand, the fact affords no legitimate argument for subverting the general right; but rather calls for a more extended assessment, to relieve from any undue pressure that description of property which the Legislature originally charged with the obligation, when scarcely any other property existed.

Equally futile is the attempt to justify the spoliation of the poor on the alleged ground of poor-rates having diminished agricultural capital. The amount of poor-rate levied on an estate, as far as mere money is concerned, is a matter between the owner of the soil and the labourer who renders that soil productive. The farmer, who employs his capital, for a limited period, in hiring both the soil and the labourer, has but little pecuniary interest in the matter. The higher the wages and the poor-rate, the lower his rent, and *vice versâ*. The farmer may, for a time, derive some advantage from the reduction of rates, but the duration of that period will be determined by the length of his term. Estates ever have been and always will be let in reference to all the outgoings. An estate charged with £50. a-year to the relief of the poor will, as a matter of course, let for an annual £50. more than if it were charged with £100. per annum for that object. This is so obvious, that it would be superfluous to recur to it, had not an alleged diminution of agricultural capital been impudently charged, not on the 100 millions a-year paid for rent and taxes, but on the four or five millions legally claimed by the poor in their necessities.

As to the arguments advanced in proof of the wonderful boon intended to be conferred on the poor, by stripping them of their right to relief, and leaving them to the voluntary system, these arguments, although ingenious, are by no means original. It has been said that vast benefits would accrue to some other orders of society by subjecting them to the salutary process of spoliation. The plunder of the fundholder has been frequently proposed, under the name of an equitable arrangement. There could not, it was said, be any injustice in the case, as the whole body of fundholders would gain more by the general improvement consequent on such equitable arrangement than they would lose by the partial confiscation. The landholder has likewise come in for a share of this amiable philanthropy. A more equal division of landed property has been advocated on many pleas; and among others, that several hundred thousand acres, devoted to ornamental purposes, and to preserves, may be divided among the people, to the evident advantage of the present possessors, who would thereby be relieved from an incumbrance which calls for a heavy expenditure.

The holders of church property, too, have been invited, with a profession of tender solicitude for their welfare, to submit their funds to the regenerative process. The clergy, it was said, would be enabled to realize all the advantages connected with a more evangelical condition, and would place their interests on a reformed basis, by approximating to the primitive simplicity of the carpenter and the fisherman.

These propositions for the subversion of established rights were received by honest men with indignation, as well as contempt. Such men felt that the insidious plea put forward to justify spoliation was an insult to their understandings, scarcely less offensive than the meditated subversion of right. Are these flimsy pretexts more applicable to the rights of the poor than to those of the rich?

But let us now, Sir, pass over the compendious frauds which were so contemplated, and merely glance at two late attempts at a fraudulent subversion of right, namely, the appropriation clause in the Irish Tithe Bill, and the proposal for confiscating a part of the episcopal revenues in the Church Rate Bill. My Lord John Russell, whilst urging these measures, strove to enlighten the world on the advantages which the parties immediately interested would derive from the spoliation of their revenues. Passing over the palpable absurdity of his figures, the men of light and learning in England firmly took their stand on the principle that these proposed measures were violations of prescriptive right. These men said, and truly said, that the amount was a matter of but little consequence compared with the precedent sought to be established by the proposed abrogation. They felt and asserted, that if the principle was admitted, the parties who were then insidiously crying up the equity of the measures would not be slow to plead the precedent in favour of a more extended spoliation. This assertion did not rest on conjecture or analogy, but on positive proof; for the subverters of right, whilst chuckling over the probable success of the measures, hinted broadly that at no very distant period they should be enabled to avail themselves more fully of the principle involved. The opponents of the new-light philosophy in the Legislature felt this, I say, and what was more, the great body of the people felt it too; not merely from a personal sympathy with the parties proposed to be despoiled, but from a conviction that the violation of right in these instances would lay all other rights, prescriptive and statutory, open to the spoiler. On these occasions there were found high-minded men who denounced the contemplated fraud, and defended the right. "I will not consent to your resolution," said the great Conservative leader. "It will unsettle those foundations of property which are built upon prescription, and which are more secure than those on which you are erecting your new system of spoliation."

I ask again, Sir, are the flimsy pretexts of these spoilers more applicable to the rights of the poor than to those of the rich—a question involving considerations of a somewhat fearful character. The threatened rights of the fundholder, of the landholder, of the Irish, and of the English church, have been preserved from spoliation by the firmness of uncompromising patriotism. The pretexts under which such plunder was urged were repudiated with contempt. The spoilers, stripped of their meretricious frippery by the wand of truth, stood out in naked infamy, detected, but not repentant, like Satan touched by the spear of Ithuriel. The right was triumphant. But is it to go down to posterity that it was so triumphant, not because it was the right, but because the parties in possession were great and powerful? Is it to be avowed that rights may be safely subverted, where the legal claimants are the helpless and suffering poor? If this is to be the doctrine, I would invite attention to the probable consequences, as stated by an authority which has ever been the constant and able advocate of the throne and the altar.

"There is no little danger, in the present times, in thus trenching upon the acknowledged rights of the poor. If these are not respected by the rich, their rights will not long escape invasion by the poor. The security which the

humbler classes in this country have so long enjoyed, for relief in necessity, has been the best and strongest security for the ease, peace, and property of the wealthy classes. The first safeguard cannot be abrogated without greatly endangering the last."*

Such may, or may not, be the consequences. I have only to deal with the fact, at present, that rights "as sacred, as ancient, as fully recognized by statute, as any right possessed by the highest in the land," have been utterly subverted, to the pecuniary advantage of those who have "violently taken away an house which they builded not."

Bridgwater, January 8.

LETTER IV.

"Nothing can be conceived more hard than the heart of a thorough-bred metaphysician. It comes nearer to the cold malignity of a wicked spirit than to the frailty and passion of a man. It is like that of the principle of evil himself—incorporeal, pure, unmixed, dephlegmated, evil."

"When such men come to understand one another, and to act in corps, a more dreadful calamity cannot arise out of hell to scourge mankind."—*Burke*.

SIR,—Having exhibited the means by which the public mind was prepared, by metaphysical mercenaries, for a subversion of the rights of the poor; I proceed to consider the provisions made for securing the greatest pecuniary advantages, which could be realized from this subversion, without rousing the public indignation. This golden harvest could only be secured by shrouding, as far as possible, the whole operation in secrecy and silence, as the practical working of the code could not bear the light of heaven to be let in upon it. To realize this grand desideratum, secret tribunals were established, with powers scarcely less compendious than those with which the Inquisition was formerly invested. By means of power so invested the law of Parliament was to be partially repealed, and, in the case of the poor, was no longer to be the law of the land. An *imperium in imperio* was created under the designation of a Board of Commissioners, whose edicts were, for all practical purposes, to possess the force of laws.

Here we have not only a subversion of right, but a dispensing power over the laws of the land to a considerable extent, with ample powers for enacting other laws, not subjected to the salutary process of public discussion in the course of their progress to maturity. These monstrous enactments, under the name of regulations, are to spring forth at once from the prolific hotbed of Somerset-house, matured and potent, like Pallas issuing from the skull of Jupiter, frowning on, threatening, and terrifying the nations. Tremendous as such an absolving and legislative authority would be in any case, it is, in the case of the helpless poor, crushing and irresistible, equally capable of effecting the most extensive proscription, and of dictating the most annoying and tyrannous details.

Here was an extraordinary *Power*, set up for doing that which Parliament could not do. Parliament could not make provisions in detail for wantonly shutting out from the light and air of heaven aged and helpless persons, accused of no crime but that of having been unfortunate. Parliament could not devise a series of petty annoyances and vexatious insults, intended, in their aggregate effect, to render the alternative of death less terrible to the wretched than the receipt of relief from a fund on which they had a legal claim. Par-

liament could not cut down the allowance of the helpless poor to the last ounce of oatmeal, supposed to be necessary to the support of existence. But a board, invested with absolute legislative powers, and substituting metaphysical principles for the principles of Christianity, could do all this, although Parliament could not. No man would have dared to look his constituents in the face, after having perpetrated such outrages on the helpless; except, indeed, such shameless traders in falsehood as the indignant satirist describes Arturius and his colleagues to have been —

“Unblushing villians, who, in truth’s despite,

“Can white to black transform and black to white.”

Juvenal, Sat. 3.

With such humiliating exceptions, which cannot be numerous in any representative assembly, men could not be found in Parliament to devise in detail all the minutiae of an elaborate system of torture, nicely adjusted to the realization of those Pactolian streams, which were to flow from the subversion of the rights of the poor. Hence the necessity of a practically irresponsible junta, comprising within itself the monstrous combination of executive and legislative authority, united with original and appellat jurisdiction. Such was the Cerberean power set up in the centre of modern Babylon for worrying the poor of England on the most approved principles.

The provincial machinery provided, by the Reform Poor Law, for carrying these principles into practice, consisted of several hundred boards of “Guardians of the Poor,” as they were somewhat strangely called. These boards of guardians were to represent all the holders of real property in England and Wales, and are empowered to sit in judgment on all claims made on themselves and their constituents by the necessitous, having, in nine cases out of ten, an older claim on the same fund. Thus the very persons once bound to answer this class of legal claimants (I say nothing of sturdy impostors urging false claims) were invested with power, either to pay as little as they pleased, or to withhold payment altogether, according to their own good will and pleasure; from which there was no available appeal, except in some few special cases. This was the reformed mode of meeting the long established claims of the necessitous on the land of their birth!

The nefarious character of the principle on which these boards were established, for dealing with one class of claimants, may be elucidated by applying the same principle, and the reasoning on which it has been supported, to other classes of claimants. My Lord John Russell, on a late occasion, bespoke the protection of the House of Commons for the principles embodied in the Reform Poor Law, by asserting that the new system had effected a saving of 2,400,000*l.* a year; and that Mr. Somebody, who had since been made a commissioner, of some kind or other, had declared that many estates were doubled in value by the operation of the law. Now, Sir, imagine my Lord John addressing a popular assembly, for the purpose of advocating an application of the above principles and reasoning to the case of other claimants.

“The landlord and tithe-owner,” his Lordship may say, “have long had considerable claims on the landed property of England and Wales, which claims, when resisted, they have hitherto had the power of enforcing by an appeal to the law. This power having been sometimes abused, under various pretences, it is desirable that all provisions for legally enforcing the same should be rescinded; and that a central rent and tithe commission be appointed, with provincial boards, elected by the tenantry, to be called ‘GUARDIANS OF THE LANDLORDS AND TITHEOWNERS;’ that such provincial boards of guardians be

empowered to lock themselves up, in bodies of 30 or 40, if they please, and then and there to determine the amount which *may* be individually paid to the respective claimants, or whether *anything* shall be paid, or not. Let the decree of these boards of guardians be final, for it has been found that the privilege of appealing to the law is inconvenient to the debtor, and liable to abuse. By the adoption of this simple principle, great *savings* may be effected: Mr. Tomkins, who has furnished my right hon. friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with some formulæ applicable to the subject, and who may possibly be prevailed upon to act as one of the commissioners, anticipates an annual saving of 50,000,000*l.* to the *present* payers, by substituting the voluntary will of provincial boards, acting under the superintendence of a central tithe and rent commission for the harsh provisions of the statute."

Now, Sir, monstrous as Mr. Tomkins's scheme for plundering the land and the tithe-owners of 50,000,000*l.* annually may appear, it is only a strict application of the principles on which the rights of the poor have been withdrawn from under the protection of the law of the land, and their legal claims left to the arbitrary disposal of a board, representing the persons who were once liable for the amount of these claims, but who now evade or refuse payment with impunity, by virtue of the authority vested in them as "guardians of the poor!" Such is the constitution of the provincial boards, created for carrying out the provisions of the Reform Poor Law!

But even these boards, so anomalously constituted, are to be dictated to, and tampered with, by itinerant stipendiaries, lest the kindly spirit of the English gentleman should revolt at becoming the mere executioner of the Somerset-house sentences. Such a probable contingency was to be carefully provided for, by the creation of an order of functionaries hitherto unknown in this country, or in any other not under the immediate control of the Inquisition. These familiars (I speak of their functions only) were to form a link for connecting the letters prepared for the people of England. The central and provincial boards were to be brought into closer communication by this connecting link, and to be more exquisitely adapted to the operation of grinding the poor.

The Reform Poor Law provided for the appointment of nine of these itinerant functionaries only, "unless the Lord High Treasurer, or the Commissioners of His Majesty's Treasury for the time being, or any three or more of them, shall consent to the appointment of a greater number." Such an opportunity of exercising unlimited patronage, at the expense of the poor, would not of course be permitted to remain dormant, and we find, in the miscellaneous estimates, laid before the House of Commons, that under the fructifying influence of the Treasury, the nine embryo functionaries had become—

"21 Assistant-Commissioners at £700. a-year each	£14,700
"Their travelling and incidental expenses, including clerks, £800 a-year each	16,800
"Additional assistant-commissioners and clerks	2,264

"£33,764"

Here is an annual 33,764*l.* worth of itinerating agency provided for the purpose of, at once, coercing the provincial boards and the poor on metaphysical principles. The manner in which these duties are generally performed may be inferred from evidence given, before the select committee of the House of Commons, by Mr. John Napper, the chairman of the Petworth board of guardians:—

"Question 795. Supposing any charitable lady in the neighbourhood were desirous of giving the children a dinner on Christmas-day, could you as chairman of the board, allow anything of that sort to be done?"

Answer.—"No, I could not."

"796. What would be the course that you would take in a case of that kind; would you think it your duty to ask leave of the board?

Answer.—"It was asked of the assistant-commissioner.

"797. Such a case did occur?

Answer.—"Yes; my wife asked Mr. Hawley, whom she knew very well; he said he did not think proper to allow it!

"828. What dinner was it that the lady proposed to give to the children at Christmas?"

Answer.—"I do not know what it might be; it was a Christmas dinner.

Trivial as this incident may appear, it aptly illustrates the character of that agency which could, in so short a time, reduce an English Gentleman to such a state of pitiable insignificance in his own district. The lady of a chairman of a board of guardians, could not obtain permission to treat the children in the workhouse with a bit of Christmas pudding! Mr. William Henry Toovey Hawley, one of the £33,764. worth "did not think proper to allow it!" On this last example of metaphysical legislation, operating by means of delegated power, I rest for the present; this part of the subject requires a more extended illustration.

Bridgwater, Jan. 11, 1838.

LETTER V.

"Nothing can be conceived more hard than the heart of a thorough-bred metaphysician. It comes nearer to the cold malignity of a wicked spirit than to the frailty and passion of a man. It is like that of the principle of evil himself—incorporeal, pure, unmixed, dephlegmated evil."

"When such men come to understand one another and to act in corps, a more dreadful calamity cannot arise out of hell to scourge mankind."—*Burke*.

SIR,—In continuation of the subject of my last letter, I proceed to illustrate the nature of the duties intended to be performed by the £33,764. worth of itinerating agency, so considerably provided by a no-patronage Government for coercing the boards of Guardians and pinching the poor. Perhaps the nature of these duties may be best ascertained by a reference to the standard of qualification set up in the report of the Poor Law Commissioners of Inquiry and its appendixes. To avoid the charge of having selected an unfavourable specimen, I shall commence with Mr. Mott, whom the commissioners distinguished by their special commendation, as "a witness of the most extensive practical experience of any witness examined under this commission," in a report addressed "To the King's Most Excellent Majesty;" and who, being so distinguished, may of course be considered an assistant-commissioner *par excellence*.

This evidence stated, that he was a contractor for feeding the paupers of Newington, Alverstoke, and Lambeth. After detailing the ruinous consequences of scouring one scale with brickdust and leaving the other dirty, of boiling large and small joints of meat the same length of time, and of not attending to the necessary quantity of materials for a Christmas pudding, the following question and answer appear in the report:—

Question by Mr. Chadwick.—"If a system of combined management were to be established, do you think that local authorities or visitors might be intrusted with the power of modifying the dietaries?"

Answer.—"I am decidedly of opinion that no such authority can be beneficially exercised, even by the local manager and superintendant of any place; whatever deviation there is in the way of extra indulgence has a tendency to extend and perpetuate itself, which cannot be resisted. If you give to particular people an extra allowance on special grounds, all the rest will exclaim 'Why should not we have it as well as they?' and too often they get it. . . . I may mention as an

instance, that about two years ago Mr. Randal Jackson, one of the county magistrates, visited Lambeth workhouse, and humanely distributed some small parcels of tea to several of the old inmates; and, at the same time, suggested the propriety of allowing to several of the old and deserving inmates a trifle per week for such comforts (tea and sugar); I *remonstrated* with some of the officers against the adoption of this proposal, as I well knew from experience that it had a *dangerous tendency*. The answer was, that they could not do otherwise than fall in with the suggestion of such a person. They have ever since allowed 95 old inmates 6d. each per week in addition to their allowance of food."—Prodigious!

Here we have an embryo assistant-commissioner "of the most extensive practical experience" awfully impressed with the "dangerous tendency" of allowing, in a parish of 87,000 inhabitants, a morsel of tea and sugar to a few "old and deserving inmates." He "remonstrated" against the indulgence, he tells us, and he asserted that, within his own experience, nine cases out of ten of persons reduced to want, were so reduced "by an ungovernable inclination for fermented liquors!" and that not one case in 20 arose from failure of employment. There was a time when the utterer of such trash would have been dismissed from a public inquiry with pity; but in this reformed age this very trash is held to constitute the requisites for an assistant Poor Law Commissioner!

But, however low this person's estimate of the enduring and laborious classes may be, he has most elevated notions of the dignity of workhouse-keepers and contractors.

"A respectable person," says Mr. Mott, "ought, I think, to get for his labour in the management of 200 or 300 persons (if he attends to them properly) as much as a parish must pay for the keep of 50 persons."

Thus, for the management of 200 or 300 persons, the poorhouse-keeper is to be allowed the sum "which the parish must pay for the keep of 50 persons," and this, at the rate of the contract for the poor of Lambeth, would be about £500. a-year; while a weekly 6d. to some of the "old and deserving inmates" is contemplated with horror, as having a "dangerous tendency!"

But in estimating at the above rate the value of workhouse-keepers' services, the gentleman, it seems, was a disinterested evidence.

"I beg to add, that I consider myself in a great degree a disinterested witness, as I have now many engagements on hand; and it is very improbable that I shall take any other contract after the expiration of the present Lambeth contract. On this account I shall not renew the Gosport contract, which I have held for the last 10 years."

Notwithstanding the "many engagements on hand," means were devised to overcome this amiable coyness. The contractor was prevailed upon to become one of the £33,764. worth, and is specially appointed to enlighten the board on the "regulation of the dietaries of workhouses, respecting which (he says) misconceptions exist, arising from a want of information as to the quantities of food *necessary for the support of human life*, or from the properties of food not being sufficiently known."*

How far the expectation of the commissioners, founded on this minute knowledge of "the quantity of food necessary to the support of human life," have been realized, can only be discovered by examining the death-books of the several union workhouses;—a point which I will not press on your readers for the present, but solicit attention to another qualification which appears to be a requisite. In your report of some poor law proceedings in the parish of St. George, Southwark, Mr. Mott, who attended to audit the accounts, is repre-

* Mr. Mott, Appendix B. second report of Poor Law Commissioners.

sented as having said that he had been informed "one of the paupers, instead of having bread, had had hot rolls of a morning." And on its being said that the board was the best judge to whom out-door relief ought to be given, he declared that "the Poor Law Commissioners are the best able to judge upon that subject, for they obtain information from sources which a board of guardians cannot."

Here, Sir, is an admission of the existence of a system of espionage which was previously unknown in this country. To be qualified for an assistant-commissioner it is, it seems, necessary to have all the requisites for a spy, in a higher degree than they appear to have been possessed by Vidocq himself; and these qualifications not to be exercised in the detection of guilt, or the prevention of crime, but in ferreting out of the cells of misery and wretchedness a half-penny roll or an extra potatoe! Innumerable examples of the manner in which this qualification has been exercised may be produced. In the examination of Mr. W. H. T. Hawley before the select committee of the House of Commons I find the following:—

Question 1,202 (by Mr. Walter.)—"You say that the money which is frequently dissipated in one night, by an improvident father at a beer-shop, would, if applied to this purpose, be sufficient to insure him independent medical advice throughout the year for his whole family, be it ever so numerous; can you state how much you have ever known an improvident father spend in the beer-shop in one night?"

Answer.—"Not from actual observation, merely from what I have heard."

Question 1,203.—"But you say particularly that 'the money which is frequently dissipated in one night by an improvident father at a beer-shop would, if applied to this purpose, be sufficient to ensure him independent medical advice throughout the year?'"

Answer.—"I have no doubt of it, in my own mind, that they would drink and gamble 11s. away, and 11s. would provide him and his family medical relief during the year."

Question 1,264.—"How much do you suppose that a family of six children and the parents would spend in medical relief throughout the year."

Answer.—"I think I should state, generally, about 11s."

Question 1,205.—"Do you think a man can drink to the amount of 11s. in one night?"

Answer.—"Drink and gamble away that amount."

Question 1,206.—"Do you think it possible; how much can a man drink?"

Answer.—"He will not drink 11s. worth of beer; I say the money 'dissipated in one night.' I had my eye upon gambling when I used the word 'dissipated.' There are instances where they have gambled their whole week's earnings away at beer-shops in one night."

I admit, Sir, that there may possibly be such "instances." There have, unfortunately, been instances of both peasants and peers committing murder; but he that would impeach the general character of either of these classes of society on such "instances" must be a genius of no common order. It is a trite observation that the most distinguished geniuses cannot be equally great in everything. Even Mr. Hawley, who is so knowing in the concerns of the poor and the beer-shop, is profoundly ignorant of the amount of the allowances which the Reform Poor Law has put him in possession of.

Question 1,160 (By Mr. Walter.)—"You have stated that you receive only 700*l.* a-year. By Parliamentary vote there is 800*l.* a-year voted to each assistant commissioner; did you receive that?"

Answer.—"Not as a part of the salary."

Question 1,161.—"Did you receive 800*l.* in addition to the 700*l.*?"

Answer.—"I am *not able* to answer that question, as to the amount."

Question 1,162.—“The vote says, travelling and incidental expenses, when absent on service, including clerks, and their travelling expenses, 800*l.*; did you receive that?”

Answer.—“I am *not able* to state what sum I received; that I received a sum is certain, of course.” *

Thus men who can gather and treasure up the secrets of a beer-house or of a roll-shop, who know to a farthing the earnings and expenditure of a labourer's half-starved family, are *not able* to give an account of their own share of the 33,764*l.*! That they do “receive a sum is certain, *of course*,” but as for the amount, “*Non mi recordo!*”

You will observe, Sir, that so far I have allowed this new order of functionaries to speak for themselves, not having been disposed to adopt the system of espionage, hearsay, and tittle-tattle, which they have brought to bear on the suffering poor with such terrific effect. For the present I close my remarks on the general question, purposing, in some future communications, to illustrate by particular examples the working of the principles and agency of the Reform Poor Law. I have already glanced at some of the cruel calumnies which were devised to pave the way for this law—at the subversion of the right of the poor, which was effected by the law itself—at the nefarious principle embodied in the constitution of the provincial boards, which invests the holders of the poor man's fund with authority to reject his long-established claim, thus converting a party having a pecuniary interest into a irresponsible judge in his own case; and, finally, I have glanced at that itinerating agency, worse than useless for any purpose connected with the relief of the poor, but immeasurably powerful for strengthening the arm of the oppressor, and for protecting the destroyers of the helpless by outraging every principle of justice, under the specious semblance of control and inquiry. For such purposes that agency is irresistible, as sweeping in its career as a hurricane or a pestilence; it strikes equally at the little indulgences voluntarily proffered to childhood, at the sustenance necessary for the adult, at the wants of disease and of old age; and, unsatiated by all these, strikes even at the cherished usages by which a Christian public testifies its reverence for the ashes of the dead. Connecting in one unholy brotherhood the spy of the beer-house and the roll-shop with the Parliamentary babblers, who term the spoils of the poor “savings,” this concentrated mass press forward on their vaunted, infallible, metaphysical principles; thus affording a practical illustration of Mr. Burke's view “of the heart of a thorough-bred metaphysician,” and again exemplifying the fact, that “when such men come to understand one another, and to act in corps, a more dreadful calamity cannot arise out of hell to scourge mankind.”

Bridgwater, January 15, 1838.

* Contrast this kind of evidence with the searching scrutiny instituted by the committee into the poor man's earnings and expenditure, and with the manly candour of the answers:—

Examination before the select committee, of James Slements, a labourer, with a wife and six children

“2,316. What number of hours do you labour in the day?—Answer. 12 hours.

“2,317. What time are you allowed for your meals?—Half an hour at breakfast, and an hour at dinner, and half an hour at 4 o'clock.

“2,318. Then you work altogether 10 hours?—Yes.

“2,319. In the harvest month, and when you are engaged in hay making and mowing, do you work any greater number of hours?—Yes; from 3 in the morning until 8 or 9 at night.

“2,320.—Then you are at work 18 hours, deducting the time that you get for your meals?—Yes.

LETTER VI.

"Ye, not unconscious of this awful age,
 "Now mark what *new* conflicting systems rage,
 "Systems which laugh to scorn th' avenging rod,
 "And hurl defiance to the throne of God;
 "Shake *pestilence* abroad with madd'ning sweep,
 "And grant no pause—but everlasting sleep!
 "Blood-guiltiness their crime." *Pursuits of Literature.*

SIR,—Having already endeavoured to exhibit the principles embodied in the Reform Poor Law, and the agency by which these principles were to be carried into operation, I now proceed to re-examine the working of this Law in the Bridgwater Union. I have stated in a former publication that with a view of obtaining information on the operation of the Poor Laws under the old system, and with a hope of somewhat improving their administration, I consented to act as one of the Overseers of the Poor for the Parish of Bridgwater for four years. On the formation of the Bridgwater Union in May 1836, I was solicited by some influential persons to consent to act as one of the Guardians which I then declined. At the close of the parochial year some of the Guardians both elected and ex-officio who had zealously advocated the cause of the Poor expressed to me their extreme disgust at the unfeeling course pursued, and their determination to withdraw from the Board; amongst these gentlemen was a distinguished and most venerated magistrate holding a high judicial appointment. Under these circumstances I reluctantly consented to take my turn as Guardian for one year, and was without opposition elected for the Parish of Bridgwater. On taking my seat at the Board, I distinctly denied being in any manner bound to secrecy on its proceedings, asserting my unquestionable right as one of the representatives of nine thousand persons at that Board to inform those persons individually or collectively on any points connected with the duties which I was sent there to perform; and claiming as an Englishman the *right* of appealing through the public press to the justice of my countrymen. On other occasions when it has been solemnly propounded at that Board, by authority, that not even a whisper on its proceedings should be permitted to escape the lips of the Guardians out of doors, and "that we should rather seem to think aloud than to speak" I have protested against so skulking and cowardly a course as being only adapted to the concealment of cruelty and injustice; and have avowed my unalterable determination of appealing to the public on the transactions of that Board, in any manner, which, on due deliberation, I might consider most likely to be effective in drawing the attention of my countrymen to the injuries inflicted on the poor.

"2,321.—So that you give more time for your wages?—Yes; very nearly two days for one.

"2,322.—You have stated that you receive 11s. 6d. a-week, and that you expend for flower and yeast, and rent and fuel, 10s. 3d. of that money, leaving 1s. 3d.?—

Answer.—"Yes, and I will tell you what I do with that.

"2,323.—You have 1s. 3d. left wherewith to feed yourself, your wife, and five children. State in what way you expend that money?—

Answer.—"3d. for half a pound of soap, and half a pound of candles, 3½d.; half a pound of sugar, 3d.; a pennyworth of tea, and half a pound of butter.

"2,324.—How much is that?—5½d.

"2,325.—Anything for beer?—

Answer.—"No, there is nothing left for any beer.

"2,326.—Then all the drink that you and your wife and family have is the tea that you make out of a penny?—

Answer.—"Yes; I have had nothing more for three months."

Acting on the determination so deliberately formed and openly avowed, I published a brief statement of some transactions connected with the administration of the Reform Poor Law, in the Bridgwater Union, and cited cases, which I conceived to be undeniable, of several helpless persons, having been brought to an untimely death in the Workhouse of that Union. I stated the appalling fact that, 30 persons had died in that Workhouse in nine months, out of an average of 94 inmates, and I further showed from the records of the Board, that a nauseous and fatal disease, which at length became infectious, raged in the house; that it was ascribed to the Gruel, by the medical attendant, and that the Board, heedless of the fatal consequences, wilfully poured, month after month, a new stream of victims into the Pest-house, to be subjected to the operation of the gruel system, and exposed to the deadly disease which raged there. These statements you were pleased to republish in the *Times*. Although no notice was taken of the original pamphlet by the Poor Law Commissioners, as soon as the matter appeared in the *Times* they directed certain enquiries to be instituted, of which notice was given to the Guardians by the following circular.—

BRIDGWATER UNION.

SIR.—I am instructed by the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales, to call the attention of the Board of Guardians to the article purporting to be “some account of the working of the new Poor Law in the Bridgwater Union,” contained in the *Times Newspaper* of the 21st instant, which is a copy of a pamphlet lately published by Mr. Bowen, one of the Guardians for Bridgwater parish.

I am also instructed by Mr. Weale, assistant Poor Law Commissioner, to inform every member of the Board, that he has been directed by the Poor Law Commissioners, to institute an enquiry into the allegations contained in the said pamphlet, and that he will attend the Board for that purpose on Friday the 4th of August next.

Bridgwater, July 27th, 1837.

I am, sir, your obedient servant,
ROBERT UNDERDOWN, Clerk.

Two distinct enquiries seem to have been contemplated, the one to be instituted by the Board of Guardians, the other by the Assistant-Commissioner. The parties thus converted into judges in their own case, require a separate notice, and first as to the Board of Guardians. If the governor of the Workhouse, the relieving officer, or the medical attendant had been charged with having brought certain persons to an untimely death, it might possibly have been an allowable course for the Board to have been directed by the Commissioners to enquire into the conduct of their own officers so impeached; but no charge was made against the officers. The Board was charged in its collective capacity with having deliberately adopted, and wilfully pursued, a system which led to the unhappy results detailed. To constitute them judges of their own case under such circumstances, was to make a mockery of justice, and to hold up its sacred name to contempt and ridicule. Strongly impressed with the pernicious character of such a proceeding, and convinced that its only possible corrective was the public voice, I addressed the following letter to the Poor Law Commissioners.

Bridgwater, July 29, 1837.

GENTLEMEN,

I learn by the enclosed letter, from the clerk to the Bridgwater Union, that Mr. Weale, Assistant Poor Law Commissioner, has been directed by you, to institute an enquiry into the allegations contained in a Pamphlet published by me, purporting to be some account of the working of the New Poor Law, in the Bridgwater Union.

It is alleged, in the Pamphlet to be so enquired into, that many of our unfortunate fellow-creatures have been brought to an untimely death in the Bridgwater Work-house. An enquiry, on so grave a charge, cannot, it is submitted, be conducted to a satisfactory termination with closed doors; neither can the ends of public justice be so attained; with this conviction I take leave respectfully to request that you will be pleased to issue such directions as will prevent the public from being excluded during the progress of the enquiry.

I am, gentlemen,

To the Poor Law Commissioners
for England and Wales.

Your obedient humble servant,
JOHN BOWEN.

To this communication, the following answer was received.

Poor Law Commission Office, Somerset-house,
2nd August, 1837.

SIR,

I am directed by the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales, to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 29th ult., in which you request them to give such directions as will prevent the public from being excluded during the progress of an enquiry directed to be made into the allegations contained in a pamphlet purporting to be "some account of the working of the New Poor Law, in the Bridgwater Union."

I am instructed to inform you in reply that, the Commissioners do not consider it expedient to interfere with the discretion of the Board of Guardians, as to the mode in which they may conduct the enquiry in the case adverted to.

I have the honor to be, sir,

Your obedient servant,

To John Bowen, Esq.,
Bridgwater.

H. N. PARKER,
Assistant Secretary.

Here, Sir, was a refusal to a request for an open enquiry, and that refusal attempted to be glozed over by equivocation. In stating that they "did not consider it expedient to interfere with the discretion of the Board of Guardians," they left it to be inferred that the Board was free to exercise such a discretion. Not only has the general practice been opposed to such an inference, but these very Commissioners published, in an appendix to their second report, a laboured manifesto against the exercise of any such discretion!

"The Commissioners" says Mr. Chadwick, "direct me to state, that they have never yet thought it necessary to make any order constituting the Boards of Guardians open courts, but, on the contrary, under the existing circumstances of the Union, have refused to accede to applications made to them to order Boards of Guardians to admit strangers to be present at their proceedings."

And again, in the same manifesto.

"The Commissioners, therefore, feel it to be their duty to decline sanctioning an alteration in the existing practice."

Thus instead of directing a full and open enquiry on a specific charge, openly made, or of manfully rejecting the application for such an open enquiry, they slip behind an implied discretion, which they had distinctly decided against, and had circulated their decision at the expence of the public, amongst all the Boards of Guardians in the kingdom.

The accused, having been constituted judges in their own case, and being thus left in possession of all doors, locks, bolts, and bars, which they might consider necessary for shutting out unfavourable evidence, sat in undisturbed judgment on themselves, charged, as they were, with having wilfully pursued a system, by which a number of their unfortunate fellow-creatures had been brought to an untimely death. To have appeared at such an impudent mockery of justice, was out of the question; but I am informed that an adjournment

was moved by the Hon. P. P. Bouverie (said to be a near connection of an Assistant-Commissioner), and that, on the second day of the farce, after a spirited protest had been made by some members of the Board, the following resolution was carried.

BRIDGWATER UNION.

Friday, August 18th, 1837.

The Board having examined into the several allegations of cruelty and oppression charged *upon it* by Mr. John Bowen, in his pamphlet entitled "The Reform Poor Law, with some account of its working in the Bridgwater Union," and having examined such witnesses *as it thought necessary*.

Resolved,—That the allegations of cruelty and oppression, made against the Board, are unfounded. The inferences drawn from the extracts of the books belonging to the Board, being incorrect and incapable of being substantiated. The Board therefore determine to take no further steps till called before Parliament, when the Board will enter fully into the several charges, and court the most complete investigation into all its proceedings.

That a number of persons, so charged, and left to decide on their own case, should cry out *not guilty* is natural enough; but that they should substitute general expressions for specific charges, is a somewhat unusual course. These tender Guardians of the Poor were not simply charged with anything so absurdly vague and indefinite as "cruelty and oppression." They were specifically charged on evidence adduced. They were and *are* charged with having deliberately sent a number of helpless persons, *in whose death they had a pecuniary interest*, to a Workhouse in which a fatal disease was raging; and which disease was officially reported to have been produced, and kept up, by the new system of Workhouse diet. They were, and *are* charged with having wilfully persevered in this destructive system for many months, although the awful consequences were distinctly, and repeatedly pressed upon their notice. In reply to these *specific accusations*, supported by names, dates, and references to records, they cry out, not guilty of "cruelty and oppression;" the Poor Law Commissioners catch at the verdict, and express their satisfaction, in the following congratulatory epistle.

Poor Law Commission Office, Somerset-house,

SIR,

22nd August, 1837.

The Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales have to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 19th inst., and with reference thereto, the Commissioners have to express their satisfaction with the investigations made by the Board of Guardians of the Bridgwater Union, into the statement contained in an article which appeared in the *Times Newspaper* of the 21st ult., and which purported to be some account of the working of the new Poor Law, in that Union.

The Commissioners request that they may be furnished with copies of the depositions taken by the Board of Guardians during the investigation adverted to.

Signed, by order of the Board,

To the Clerk of the
Bridgwater Union, Bridgwater.

E. CHADWICK,
Secretary.

Passing over, for the present, the destructive operation of the principle involved in the Commissioner's approval; I would remark on the matchless absurdity of a controlling Board expressing their "satisfaction" with such an investigation, and *then* requesting "that they may be furnished with copies of the depositions taken by the Board of Guardians during the investigation adverted to." Thus they acknowledge their utter ignorance of the matter with which they avow themselves to be so perfectly satisfied. Such is the absurd course

pursued by the Poor Law Commissioners in a question of the most fearful import, and such the result of one of the enquiries directed to be instituted into, "an article which appeared in the *Times Newspaper*," charging a Board of Guardians with having wilfully pursued a system, by which many of our unfortunate fellow-creatures were brought to an untimely death. These Commissioners first commit themselves to an unqualified approval of the verdict, and then ask for a sight of the evidence !

Bridgwater, January 15th, 1838.

LETTER VII.

"To offend, and judge, are distinct offices,
And of opposed natures." *Merchant of Venice,*

"We do believe,
Induced by potent circumstances, that
You are our enemy; and make our challenge
You shall not be our judge; for it is you
Have blown this coal;—
Which God's dew quench!—Therefore we say again,
We utterly abhor, yea, from our souls,
Refuse you for our judge:—whom yet once more
We hold our foe, and think you not at all
A friend to truth." *Henry the 8th,*

SIR,—Having shewn the gracious manner in which the verdict of acquittal given by one of the accused parties, in favor of itself, was received at Somerset-house, I proceed to consider the character and consequences of the enquiry directed by the Poor Law Commissioners to be instituted by Mr. Weale. Whether this assistant-commissioner was in a condition to enter on an unbiassed and impartial enquiry on the suffering alleged to have been inflicted, or not, must depend on whether he was previously expected to take any official cognizance of the working of the Poor Law in the district said to be *entrusted to his care*. If he were not expected to do so; if it is to be understood that he was to draw his share of the £33,764. for residing at Clifton

"Watching the idle waters babbling by,"

and that he had nothing whatever to do with the working of the New Poor Law, except when specially directed to institute an enquiry; there would *then* be little to remark upon but the manner in which that special duty was performed. But if it be any part of his duty to keep himself informed on the administration of the Poor Law in his district; if these fine books, which were said to have been provided for inspection, were actually intended to be looked into by him, why then he was to all intents and purposes a party in the crime charged. The appalling number of deaths in the Bridgwater Workhouse;—the frightful extent to which a fatal disease raged there;—the letter of the Medical Attendant, ascribing that disease to the Commissioners' gruel; the fact that the use of the gruel was still obstinately persevered in, and that a regular stream of fresh victims was poured into the house month after month, all stand on the records of the Board. These facts were within his reach, and if it were any part of his duty to have interposed under such frightful circumstances, then is he a party to the suffering so cruelly inflicted on the poor, and incompetent, on any principle of justice, to sit in judgment on the alleged facts which the Poor Law Commissioners directed him to enquire into,

But whether Mr. Assistant-Commissioner Weale is to be considered as having anything to do with watching the administration of the Poor Law in *his* district, or not, he did so sit in judgment, taking some depositions, on oath, *secretly*, and others at the Board of Guardians; thus to a certain extent connecting the two enquiries. On the nature of the evidence so taken I shall have to remark in examining the different allegations to be enquired into; at present it is only necessary to state that no report on Mr. Weale's enquiry has been presented to the Board of Guardians, or, as far as I can learn, to any of the parties interested. Considering it of vital importance to the poor of this district, that some official expression of opinion, on the enormities charged, should be recorded at the Board of Guardians; and having waited more than a reasonable time for such an official declaration, I addressed the following letter to the Poor Law Commissioners.

Bridgwater, Dec. 2nd, 1837.

GENTLEMEN,

Mr. Weale, Assistant Poor Law Commissioner, having been directed by you to institute an enquiry into "An Article purporting to be some Account of the working of the New Poor Law in the Bridgwater Union, contained in the *Times Newspaper* of the 21st July; said to be a copy of a Pamphlet published by Mr. Bowen, one of the Guardians for Bridgwater Parish:" and your Assistant-Commissioner having appointed the 4th of August last for the commencement of such enquiry; I have been for some time in expectation of obtaining his report on the subject.—I cannot learn that any copy of such report has been received by the Board of Guardians of the Bridgwater Union; and as the allegations, to be enquired into, involve matter of the most serious nature; I am induced to request that you would be pleased to furnish me with a copy of the report or reports of your Assistant-Commissioner on the subject of the said allegations.

I am, Gentlemen,

To the Poor Law Commissioners
for England and Wales.

Your obedient humble servant,
JOHN BOWEN,

One of the Guardians of the Poor for the Parish of Bridgwater.

After the authorities at Somerset-house had taken nearly a week to consider this request, I was favored with an answer of which the following is a copy.

Poor Law Commission Office, Somerset-house,
9th Dec., 1837.

SIR,

I am directed by the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 2nd instant, and to inform you that they do not furnish copies of their official documents, and that they decline complying with your request for a copy of the report from their Assistant-Commissioner adverted to in your communication. I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

To John Bowen, Esq.,
Bridgwater.

(Signed)

E. CHADWICK,
Secretary.

Such is the incomprehensible result of Mr. Weale's having been directed by the Poor Law Commissioners to institute an enquiry into certain allegations which appeared in the *Times Newspaper*! Not a single atom of information has been elicited. The parties charged, after having been made judges in their own case, take refuge in the sanctuary of Somerset-house, where their abortion is carefully shrouded from the light, and swaddled up in the mantle of unconstitutional authority. Such are the mockeries, by which Englishmen are now insulted, with impunity, under the name of enquiries!

Being thus unable to obtain Mr. Weale's report, I have only to deal with the resolution of the Board of Guardians as a joint stock affair, in which the

assistant-commissioner is at once a speculator and an actuary. The public cannot, in this bubble any more than in others, dive into the private accounts of the directors, who "do not furnish copies"; neither can they obtain information on the proceedings at the secret meetings of the select, where the official enquirer, and the leading parties implicated, conspire to devise means for hushing up such awkward affairs as may expose the character of the concern. But although such information cannot be obtained, it is known that Mr. Weale was an actor in the farce performed at Bridgwater under the name of an "Enquiry"; that he administered oaths to several persons;—that he took upon himself the examination of the witnesses;—that he recorded the proceedings, and furnished the board of guardians with copies of the depositions; and doubtlessly he assisted in concocting the resolution which embodied the verdict of "Not Guilty". Let us now, Sir, proceed to examine from copies of these affidavits so attested by the assistant-commissioner, the evidence on which the verdict against my allegations was founded.

While selecting facts for the purpose of bringing the working of the Reform Poor Law before the public, I endeavoured to keep in view the formidable obstacles, which an interested junta would oppose to the progress of truth. To provide against the sorry equivocations and sweeping denials, which were to be expected from such a source; I stated but little on mine own evidence, and rejected nearly all testimony which was not official; well knowing that had I taken the evidence of the sufferers themselves, I should be the means of subjecting them to the arts of pettifogging quibblers who possessed an almost unlimited power of annoyance and persecution. I therefore determined, although it materially narrowed my ground, to take my principal facts and cases from the RECORDS of the board, without making any further remarks than appeared necessary for connecting the facts, and tracing their general bearing on the system. The books principally referred to by me, are the "Medical weekly return," kept by the Medical attendant, and the "Visitors book," kept by the Visiting committee of the board of guardians; one of whom is expected to insert weekly, answers to certain printed questions, connected with the condition of the paupers.—Both these books are brought forward for examination every board day. From these official documents, so fully under the cognizance of the board, I made the following extracts; on which some of my remarks were founded.

North Petherton Workhouse.

October 25th. Twenty Children in the Measles. These Children cannot use the common diet of the house, should therefore be allowed a little tea and butter. *Medical Weekly Return.*

28th. Tea and sugar has been ordered by the Medical Officer, but it has *not* been supplied. And again "The orders of the Medical Officer respecting a different diet for the Invalids" have *not been attended to.* *Visitors' Book.*

February 14th. Harriet Bindon should be allowed tea and butter, and three children should have milk. *Medical Weekly Return.*

February 17th. Harriet Bindon still continues ill in bed. The tea and sugar ordered by the Medical Officer *has not been provided.* *Visitors' Book.*

March 10th. There has been occasionally much delay in sending the articles entered as "Necessaries" for the Patients. In *many instances*, although ordered by the board, a week *or more* has elapsed, and I believe in one case, at least, they were not sent at all. *Medical Weekly Return.*

It should be noticed that the entries selected as above include a period of nearly five months. The Union had been in operation about ten months, when the medical attendant declared that in "many instances" a week or more had elapsed before the articles, marked as "Necessaries" for the sick, had been provided. This statement was deliberately made by a medical officer in the execution of his duty, who is still employed by the board;—and the entries in the visitor's book were made, not by a suspicious hand, but by a Clergyman and Magistrate of the County, favorable to the Reform Poor Law, and acting as an appointed visitor of the Workhouse. Now, Sir, mark how the assistant commissioner deals with this matter in the course of the enquiry, which he is directed to institute.—He does not examine the Gentlemen who made these entries but he brings forward two witnesses to set up against their statements: Harriet Bindon one of the sufferers, and Amy Ellis, the then mistress of the Workhouse, who had farmed the poor of North Petherton parish. This pauper contractor is made to swear point blank that "Since the commencement of the Union, no inmate has suffered any hardship or deprivation whatever"! !! The other evidence for propping up the case of the board, poor Bindon, distinctly negatives this; she deposes that the surgeon

"Ordered tea and sugar and butter, which was provided for her, and she had it during the whole of her illness, except the first *two or three days*."

Believes that two or three days elapsed after Mr. Tilsley, (the Medical Officer) said she should have tea and sugar before it was given her—then Mr. Tilsley gave her some for two or three days, when she was told the Matron had received some for her from Bridgwater.

Further states that when she first went into Bridgwater Workhouse, in her work, she could have eaten a little more.

Further saith that she never made any complaint to any one, of her not having sufficient food, and to the best of her knowledge she never mentioned the subject till to day."

Such was the evidence brought forward to bolster up the administration of the Reform Poor Law in the Bridgwater Union! A Workhouse-keeper who swears that "no inmate has suffered any hardship or deprivation whatever," and an inmate of the same Workhouse who, while deposing to a short diet when at work, and a cruel deprivation on a bed of sickness; declares that she never made any complaint of her not having sufficient food to any one! It is thus that suffering and enduring creatures, like this poor widow, above making complaints, are dragged forward to testify for a system, under which they have been worked hard in the Poorhouse; kept on a short allowance of food, and, when reduced to a sick bed, kept for two or three days without tea, and for two or three other days left dependant on the charity of a half-paid Medical attendant.

I will not occupy your columns in remarking on evidence which speaks so unequivocally. Important as such matter is, Sir, the principles developed in the proceeding are still more so. The Magistrate who made the entry in the visitor's book was at the Board during the enquiry; the Medical Officer was likewise in attendance; but instead of adopting the obvious course of calling on these gentlemen to substantiate their own statements, deliberately made in the execution of their several duties, the Mistress of the Workhouse is brought up to make a contradictory affidavit! And this is an official enquiry conducted by an Assistant-Commissioner under the authority of the Reform Poor Law! The neglect imputed might, by some mere possibility, admit of palliation, but the outrage perpetrated by such a proceeding under the name of an enquiry, instituted by an authority having the terrific power of making Laws for the helpless portion of Her Majesty's subjects, is at once a mockery and a fraud demanding further consideration.

Bridgwater, January 19th, 1838.

LETTER VIII.

Enter THE THREE WIZARDS.

1st Wizard.—Round about, the cauldron go,
In the racking 'gredients throw.

2nd Wizard.—For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.

3rd Wizard.—Double, double, toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.

Hecate.—Oh well done! I commend your pains,
And every one shall share i' the gains.

All.—Double, double, toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.

Macbeth.

SIR,—The fearful extent of the injury inflicted on society, by such mockeries as have been already remarked on, will I presume force itself on attention, as I proceed to establish the charges on which the offenders, having sat in judgment on themselves, pronounced a verdict of not guilty. Soon after the formation of the Bridgwater Union, the Poor Law Commissioners directed that the paupers, “who may, now or hereafter be received and maintained in the Workhouse or Workhouses of the said Union, shall, during the period of their residence therein, be fed, dieted, and maintained, with the food, and in the manner, described and set forth in the schedule annexed.”

Signed T. FRANKLAND LEWIS.
JOHN GEORGE SHAW LEFEVRE.
GEORGE NICHOLLS.

The fatal notoriety which these schedules have obtained renders it unnecessary for me to re-publish the one elected; suffice it to say that it was dietary No 3. I shall be sparing in my remarks on the “quantity and quality” of food, as Mr. Mott, the assistant-commissioner specially selected to remove “misconceptions which” he says “exist as to the quantities of food necessary to the support of human life,” has officially declared that

“the dietaries recommended by the Board, for adoption in the different Unions, are sufficient both in quantity and quality; and that those who condemn them as insufficient, are totally unacquainted with the subject on which they so loudly declaim.”

Having no intention of adding to the number of declaimers “totally unacquainted” with the requisite quality and quantity of food, I shall confine myself as closely as possible to matter of fact occurrences officially reported. The first meeting of the Guardians of the Bridgwater Union was held on May the 12th, 1836;—the dietary appears to have been fixed on June the 14th, but for sometime after the introduction of the new system, it appears from the visitors’ book, that the prescribed dietary was not rigidly observed. Milk was used at the recommendation of the medical officer, instead of the pint and half of gruel prescribed by the Commissioners; and during this time the inmates are reported generally healthy. But I am informed that the indulgence of milk was violently opposed at the Board, as being too great a deviation from the regulations of the Commissioners to be tolerated. Rigid obedience was enforced; and the following entry appears in the visitors’ book, for the last time, on the 16th of August.

Question 10 —Is the established dietary duly observed, and are the hours of meals regularly adhered to?

Answer.—Yes, except in the use of milk as recommended by the medical officer *in lieu of gruel*.

On the 23rd of August the indulgence ceased, as appears by the following entry.

August 23rd. Inmates generally healthy. *Gruel is now used* instead of milk.

That fatal Diarrhœa which appears to have followed the introduction of the Commissioners' gruel in other places, soon appeared in the Bridgwater Workhouse, alternating with, and increasing the violence of, other diseases. The Medical report for September contained several cases of Diarrhœa, and the Visitors' book thus alludes to the prevalence of the disease in the Workhouse.

September 27th. The aged Poor are afflicted with Colic and Diarrhœa, and the children suffering from the same complaint.

The Bridgwater Workhouse was now to afford an awful illustration of the fact, that diseases, having their origin in local causes, become infectious wherever many sufferers are congregated in a mass. A large proportion of the inmates became reduced to mere skeletons by this loathsome disease. The sufferers, however cleanly in their former habits, involuntarily voided their fœces. The Governor, in describing the effect of the gruel, said that

It did not affect the poor people so much at first, but after the use of it for a few days they became terribly bad; it ran away from them while they were standing upright as they took it. It affected them upwards and downwards.* All the way down the stairs across the Hall, and down the garden path was all covered every morning, and the stench was horrible all through the house; making the people ill and sick who had not got the Diarrhœa.

Thus a nauseous pestilence appears to have pervaded the whole house, not confined to those who took the gruel, but infecting others who were obliged to breathe an atmosphere saturated with fœtid exhalations.† The family of the governor were attacked; the governor himself although previously a healthy and a powerful man, became unable to go into the paupers' apartments without being violently affected; and the Medical Attendant, after repeated attacks of Diarrhœa, and temporary respites, was at length obliged to relinquish his post to another.

* This strikingly accords with Mrs. Legg's evidence before the select committee of the House of Commons, on the effect of the gruel in the West Hampnett Workhouse.

Question.—(by Mr. Walter).—Did you observe that the gruel had any particular effect on the children in general?

Answer.—Yes.

Question.—What effect did you observe that it had?

Answer.—It used to purge them, both upwards and downwards.

Question.—Generally upon the children it produced that effect?

Answer.—Yes.

Question.—(by Chairman).—You say that the gruel disagreed generally with the children in the Workhouse; Did the grown up people eat any of this gruel?

Answer.—Yes.

Question.—Did it disagree with them?

Answer.—Yes.

† Sir John Pringle, Drs. Haygarth, Russel, and Lind, agree in considering the effluvia of dysentrie and other putrid excrements, among the most active agents of contagion.

It would require too much space to give a copy of the Medical Weekly Return; I shall therefore give a few short extracts from the "Visitors Book."

October 25th. There is much sickness amongst the children and the old people. There are 33 cases under the care of the Medical Gentleman. 96 inmates in the House.

On the day that the above entry was read at the Board, the following letter was received from the Medical Officer of the Bridgwater Workhouse.

"To the Board of Guardians of the Bridgwater Union

GENTLEMEN,

On resuming my duties at the Workhouse I found that the Board had ordered that Oatmeal should be used for the children instead of milk. For some days I watched the result, which was given to the Visiting Committee *as producing Diarrhœa*. Some days after, many of the children became affected with the white mouth, the result of irritation of the stomach and bowels.* In this state many were seized with the measles; the complication made the cases very serious and troublesome. In this condition the children required constant attention and good nursing, this they had *not*, and many suffered severely in consequence. Taking the above into consideration I proposed, sanctioned by the kindness of Mr. W. Baker, (one of the Visiting Committee,) that the children should return to milk diet, that proper nurses should be in attendance day and night; that the sick should be separated from the healthy, and that the sick wards should not be scrubbed. The alteration I am certain, will tend to the recovery of most, and the future comfort of all. Trusting that the Board will be pleased to sanction it;

I remain, gentlemen, your obedient servant,

(Signed) ABRAHAM KING.

Bridgwater, October the 25th, 1836.

I would here solicit special attention to the fact that the Medical Officer of the Workhouse, a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, deliberately states, in the above official letter to the Board of Guardians, that he had "*watched*" the effect of the gruel for "*some days*;" and that he had stated the result to the Visiting Committee, "*as producing Diarrhœa*." About this time the disease raged violently in the house; many were confined to their beds, utterly unable to help themselves; some children had died and others were said to be dying.

It will scarcely be believed, that under such frightful circumstances, all the indulgence which could be obtained by the representations of the surgeon, and some members of the Visiting Committee, was confined to the victims who were actually on the sick list.

"The Board desired me," says an active and humane member of the Visiting Committee, whose statement will appear in the sequel, "The Board desired me to inform the Medical Officer that they wished every necessary comfort to be granted to the sick, but declared that they could not make any alteration in the dietary for those who were not actually on the sick list."

This statement accords with a letter to the Board, from Mr. John Evered Poole, a Medical Practitioner who acted for Mr. King, when prevented by illness from attending the Workhouse. But while the urgent representations

* In the case of the inmates of the Penitentiary who were gruelled into Diarrhœa, Dr. Roget stated before the select committee, appointed to report on the consequence of that fatal disease, that "The Diarrhœa tended to produce irreparable organic mischief in the intestines." This he discovered on dissection.

Dr. Granville, too, declared that on 14 or 15 post mortem examinations of the Diarrhœa cases in the Penitentiary, the intestines were found in a state of ulceration in a majority of cases.

of Mr. King, and of the Committee, had obtained "necessary comforts" for the sick, they had entirely failed to remove the alleged cause of the Diarrhœa. On the very 25th of October, when the awful state of the helpless Poor in the house was pressed on the Board, and ascribed to the use of Oatmeal, on that very day, a fresh supply was ordered to be sent into the house. That the use of the gruel was wilfully persevered in does not rest on the statement of an individual member of the Visiting Committee, or of the Medical Officer, however unexceptionable the testimony of these gentlemen may be. The fact may be traced through the records of the Board. The visitors' book contains entries to the following effect, from the 25th of October to the end of the year.

Question.—Is the established dietary duly observed?

Answer.—Yes, with respect to the healthy inmates; but for the sick, rice milk and arrowroot have been substituted for gruel, by order of the Medical Officer.

Here is unquestionable evidence that the fatal gruel was regularly administered to the helpless Poor, although it had been distinctly declared to the Board, by the Medical Officer, that it produced Diarrhœa, and that irritation of the stomach and bowels produced other distressing effects! A considerable number of these cases terminated fatally, yet the Commissioners' deleterious compound continued to be perseveringly administered to those who were not yet seized with the prevailing disease. The wretched inmates of the Workhouse were GRUELLED up to the very day of attack, when the poor sufferers were considered to be legally entitled, under the regulations of the Board, to the rice milk &c., prescribed by the Surgeon, for the sick! But until they were attacked, and placed on the sick list, the rules, regulations, and dietary table were to be inexorably observed, although the house had been so frightfully ravaged by Diarrhœa, deliberately and officially declared to have been produced by the Commissioners' gruel.

From the first appearance of the Diarrhœa, on the introduction of the gruel, to the end of the parochial year, the entries in the visitors' book attest the distressing state of the Poor in the Bridgwater Workhouse; while the weekly lists of articles, ordered by the Board for the use of the unhappy inmates of that house, will show the recklessness with which the use of the gruel was persisted in.

1836.

August 16th. No peculiar sickness. The dietary is observed except in the use of milk, as recommended by the Medical Officer in lieu of gruel.

23rd. Inmates *generally* healthy. Gruel *now* used instead of milk.

Sept. 27th. The aged Poor are affected with Colic and Diarrhœa, and the children are suffering from the same complaint.
(Gruel used according to the dietary.)

October 25th. There is much sickness amongst the children and the old people. There are 33 cases under the care of the Medical Gentleman. 96 inmates in the house.

25th. For some days I watched the result (of the gruel) which was given to the Visiting Committee as producing Diarrhœa.

Signed by the Medical Officer.

25th. *One hundred-weight of Oatmeal ordered.*

Nov. 1st. There is still much sickness.

1st. *Half-a-hundred-weight of Oatmeal ordered.*

29th. Still much sickness.

22nd. *One hundred-weight of Oatmeal ordered.*

- Dec. 13th. Much sickness is still prevalent in the house,
 6th. *One hundred-weight of Oatmeal ordered.*
 20th. *Half-a-hundred weight of Oatmeal ordered.*
 27th. *One hundred-weight of Oatmeal ordered.*
 Jan. 3rd. The inmates again unhealthy, particularly the children who have
 1837. had the measles.
 10th. *One hundred-weight of Oatmeal ordered.*
 31st. GENERALLY unhealthy.
 31st. *One hundred-weight of Oatmeal ordered.*
 February 14th. GENERALLY unhealthy.
 14th. *One hundred-weight of Oatmeal ordered &c. &c.*

Thus the gruel cauldron and the Diarrhœa, the cause and effect, were kept in full reciprocal action by the Board. There are intermediate entries which shew transient improvements in the general health of the Poor sufferers. On the 21st of February, it is said, "generally improved in health but the Diarrhœa is still *very prevalent*." This improved state appears to have continued but for a short time, when the fatal disease resumed its former virulence. During the whole awful period comprised between the first death from Diarrhœa, which took place in September; to the end of the following March, the termination of the Parochial Year, the Board wilfully persisted in sending a regular succession of helpless victims to breathe the poisonous atmosphere of that Pesthouse, saturated with the effluvia of putrid excrements, and to be GRUELLED in precisely the same manner as that which had occasioned such extensive suffering, and produced such fatal results. So far I have proceeded, either on the records of the Board, or on the testimony of its officers and members; I am now to commence on my own knowledge; having on the 31st of March taken my seat at the Board as one of the Guardians for the Parish of Bridgwater.

LETTER IX.

"There is DEATH in the Pot."

2nd Kings, chap. 4.

— Go, boast of this;
 And if thou tell'st the heavy story right,
 Upon my soul, the hearers will shed tears;
 And say,—Alas, it was a piteous deed!

Henry 6th, part 3rd.

SIR,

The first meeting of the present Board of Guardians was held on the 31st of March 1837; the routine business consequent on the commencement of a New-year occupied the day. The second meeting was, with slight exceptions, of a similar character.* Having been appointed a member of the visiting

* At this Meeting I took an opportunity of stating, that, as I was known to be opposed to the principle of the Bill, I considered myself bound to declare the course which I should pursue at that Board, where nothing but a painful sense of duty could have induced me to appear, labouring, as I was, under great bodily and mental suffering. I declared that whatever my opinion of the measure, abstractedly considered, might be, no man at that Board was more determined to assist in working the New Law fairly, to uphold the proper authority of the Chair, and to labor in the business of the Board earnestly, and honestly. But, opposed as I was to the principle of the Law, I would not call out suspicion on any measure, by becoming the proposer of a resolution.

committee, and informed myself, by personal inspection, on the state of the Poor then in the Bridgwater Workhouse, I went carefully through the obituary, the visitors' book, the Medical Weekly Return, and such other documents as would fairly bring under my view the past and present condition of the inmates of the Workhouse.

At this time the general appearance of the Poor in the house was haggard and emaciated beyond description. On the 14th of April there were twelve cases of Diarrhœa on the Medical Weekly Return; several of the wretched sufferers had been seized in the course of the week. Under these alarming circumstances the Visiting Committee requested the Medical Officer to attend them at the Workhouse; when that gentleman again strongly urged the necessity of making an alteration in the diet. He proposed that gruel should be no longer administered, but that instead of it milk should be used for breakfast, and that rice and milk should be substituted for bread and cheese dinners, on two days in the week. The Visiting Committee unanimously agreed to recommend the suggestions of the Medical Attendant to the Board of Guardians, and a reverend member of the Committee, who was the appointed visitor for the week, made the following entry in the Visitors' book in reply to one of the printed questions.

Question.—Are the inmates generally healthy, or is there any sickness prevalent among them? If so, state particulars, and especially if any dangerous or highly infectious case of illness exists in the house.

Answer.—There is still Diarrhœa and a disposition to increase. The Medical Officer recommends rice and milk as a substitute for bread and cheese dinners, on two of the days.

The members of the Visiting Committee proceeded to the Board of Guardians to support the recommendation of the Medical Officer. The reverend gentleman who was the visitor for the week, was considered the most proper person to state the reiterated opinion of the Surgeon, and the distressing condition of the inmates, to the Board. This he did with the temper and earnestness of a christian pastor urging his brother men to the performance of a solemn duty. The recommendation of the surgeon was strongly and feelingly advocated and the fact stated, that the old people who were allowed tea had suffered less from Diarrhœa than the other inmates. Another member of the Visiting Committee, with documents in his hands, to which he referred in proof of his assertions, urged on the board the appalling fact, that 30 persons had died in the Workhouse in nine months, out of an average of 94 inmates, while in the same house, on the old dietary, only 9 persons had died in the parochial year ending March 1836, and the same number in the previous year, out of an average of 66 residents. He further insisted on the strong probability afforded by the rapid progress of the disease, during the previous fortnight, that it would soon acquire all its former virulence.

So far were these statements from effecting any amelioration in the condition of the unfortunate inmates of the Workhouse, that the recommendation of the surgeon was not even put to the meeting, or any communication made to him on the subject! The matter was not only passed by, as altogether unworthy of attention, but it was authoritatively declared from the chair, that a resolution embodying such a recommendation could not be entertained;—that the Medical man had *gone out of his course* in making such a recommendation;—that although it was competent for him to prescribe diet for the sick, he could not be permitted *to make experiments on the diet of those who were not actually on his list*;—

that the dietary was an important part of the regulations of the Poor Law Commissioners, and that the Board might as well talk of altering the Poor Law altogether, as of making any alteration in the dietary.* The immutability of the Commissioners' dietary table being thus authoritatively propounded by the Chairman, was reluctantly received by the Board as a *legal* decision on the subject. No vote was taken, and thus a number of helpless men, women, and children, were deliberately given up to the further operation of the fatal gruel.

Not being disposed to acquiesce in that reading of the Law which had been so solemnly propounded, I attended the Workhouse on the next Board day, Friday 21st of April, as one of the Visiting Committee. The disease had now made so fearful a progress that the forebodings of the past week had fallen short of the awful reality. The Medical Weekly Return recorded the following, among other cases, some of them of a complicated character, and several of them appearing to be past all hope of recovery.

* This silly doctrine is as much opposed to common sense as it is abhorrent to humanity. Cases, like the above, involving questions of immediate life and death, are taken out of the beaten path: such awful visitations are not only held to justify, but imperiously to demand, a deviation from ordinary rules. When the introduction of the gruel system had infected the inmates of the Penitentiary with Diarrhœa; although the deaths were only in the proportion of about one-fourth of what they were in the Bridgwater Workhouse; not only were two additional Physicians appointed, who instantly changed the diet, but the Secretary of State directed, as may be seen in the following letter, the case of the unhappy sufferers to be fully enquired into.

“Whitehall, June 23rd, 1823.

Sir,—In consequence of the illness which has long prevailed in the Penitentiary, and the difference of opinion which has been expressed by medical men of considerable eminence, with respect to the causes of the disorder, and the nature of the remedies which it is proper to apply, I am induced to request that you will bring the subject under the consideration of the College of Physicians, and that you will have the goodness to move the appointment of a Committee for the purpose of visiting the Penitentiary, and of reporting to me their opinion upon the nature of the disorder which prevails in that Establishment, and upon the probable efficacy of the present course of medical treatment.

Sir H. Halford, Bart.,
&c. &c. &c.

I have, &c.,
(Signed) R. PEEL.”

“In compliance with the request of the Right Honourable Secretary of State for the Home Department, we the undersigned members of a committee, appointed by the College of Physicians, have visited the Penitentiary at Milbank, examined the state of the patients there, heard the accounts given by the medical attendants; and do report upon the two questions submitted to our investigation, as follows;
&c. &c. &c. (Signed)

“College of Physicians,
June 27th, 1823.

“HENRY HALFORD.
“HENRY AINSLIE.
“EDWARD ASH.

“W. G. MATON.
“THOMAS TURNER.
“PELHAM WARREN.”

The objects of this just consideration were, be it remembered, convicted criminals; while the wretched victims, who were left to perish by pestilence, in the Bridgwater Workhouse, were helpless children, and worn-out labourers, who had, by a life of unmitigated toil, helped to enrich the persons who persisted in racking out their entrails with the Commissioners' gruel.

Extract from the Weekly Return of the Sick in the Bridgwater Workhouse, during one week, from April 14th to April 21st, 1837.

N.B. The first eight were complicated cases, accompanied by, or connected with, severe Diarrhœa.

Names.	Age.	Disease.	Subsequent Remarks.
Burge, Henry - - - -	10	- - cough and diarrhœa - -	
Feltham, John - - - -	11	- - - - colic - - - -	
Cox, George - - - -	3	- - cough and diarrhœa - -	died May 4th
Kidner, Betty - - - -	44	- - colic and fever - -	
Cogle, John - - - -	44		died April 16th
Tucker, Mary - - - -	77	- - cough and debility - -	died July 28th
Coombes, (Infant) - - -		- - bowel affection - -	died July 11th
Pocock, James - - - -	80	- - bowel affection - -	died July 25th
Board, William - - - -	2	- - - - diarrhœa - - - -	
Adams, Margaret - - - -	24	- - - - diarrhœa - - - -	
Bailey, Sarah - - - -	23	- - - - diarrhœa - - - -	
Wilkins, Flora - - - -	4	- - - - diarrhœa - - - -	died May 16th
Caddick, James - - - -	7	- - - - diarrhœa - - - -	
Caddick, Thomas - - - -	4	- - - - diarrhœa - - - -	
Parker, James - - - -	60	- - - - diarrhœa - - - -	
White, Mary - - - -	40	- - - - diarrhœa - - - -	died May 21st
Rowsell, James - - - -	57	- - - - diarrhœa - - - -	died December 14th
Bulpin, Betty - - - -	66	- - - - diarrhœa - - - -	
Crate, George - - - -	37	- - - - diarrhœa - - - -	
Sellick, Martha - - - -	55	- - - - diarrhœa - - - -	died November 13th
Perry, Henry - - - -	85	- - - - diarrhœa - - - -	died October 11th
Harden, Mary - - - -	24	- - - - diarrhœa - - - -	

Such was a part of the awful catalogue subjected to the inspection of the Committee, while the gruel pot had scarcely ceased bubbling for the day. The fœtid stench throughout the whole house was so intolerable that an intelligent and humane member of the visiting committee, who had commenced an examination of the house, declared himself "utterly unable to inspect the wards," and reluctantly gave up the attempt. He assured me that nothing could induce him to repeat the effort, "as he was entirely overcome." The wards were however minutely inspected, and seldom has a more distressing and offensive exposure of human infirmity been exhibited. The loathsome and heart-rending spectacle defied all description. A number of persons of all ages suffering intense agony: others involuntarily voiding their fœces, apparently worn out by the operation of the disease. Those who were not yet affected bearing in their countenances the strongest marks of terror and apprehension; and all breathing and absorbing a heavy fœtid atmosphere, saturated with the poisonous effluvia of putrid excrements.* The effect of this mass of suffering was heightened by the consideration, that it was to be ascribed to a wilful and deliberate disregard of representations repeatedly made by the surgeon, and by members of the Visiting Committee.

* I partly concur with the following observations on the above detail, recently made by an able writer on the working of the New Poor Law; but in the course of this, our pilgrimage, there are sometimes offensive duties to be performed.

"We find ourselves unable to go on with these details. They are of a species of horror so nauseous and disgusting,—they are so degrading to the sufferers, and infer such inhumanity in the perpetrators,—they are altogether so disgraceful to the country, and so humiliating to human nature itself, that on better thoughts we find it more advisable to throw a pall over the hideous spectacle, and leave it to the general conceptions of our readers."—*Church of England Quarterly Review*, January, 1838.

The member of the Committee who undertook to inspect the wards reported on his return the pitiable condition of the inmates, and distinctly declared that the Committee would be sanctioning a further wholesale destruction of the helpless Poor, if they *permitted* their own urgent representations, and those of the Medical Attendant, to be again smothered and passed over;—that they were bound to make another, and an importunate, appeal to the Board, on behalf of the wretched sufferers; and that if they again failed to procure a decent attention to the frightful condition of their perishing fellow creatures, that they should solemnly protest against the course so obstinately pursued, and withdraw from any further participation in the crime. I declared, on my own part, that, whatever the determination of the Committee might be, “if decisive means were not taken to check this murderous system, in which by acquiescence we should all become accessories,” I would on that day withdraw from the Committee, and appeal in the strongest manner I was able to the Public.

The course of proceedings thus urged upon the Committee, was readily adopted by them. They went directly from the Workhouse to the Board of Guardians; where, the Chairman not being present, they escaped the infliction of another long lecture on the incompetency of the surgeon to propose, and of the Board to entertain, any resolution condemnatory of such an important element of the new Poor Law, as the Commissioners’ gruel. After a lengthened discussion, which principally turned upon what the Poor Law Commissioners might possibly say and do, in case their dietary regulations were infringed, it was determined, as appears by the following extracts from the Minute Book, to give up the deadly compound.

Minute Book, April 21st.

On reading the minutes on the Bridgwater Visitor’s Book, it appeared that Diarrhœa still prevailed in the House, and that the inmates were not generally healthy. It was thereupon moved by Mr. William Pitman King, and seconded by the Rev. Noblett Ruddock, that the Medical Officer be requested to attend the Board, for the purpose of giving information as to the state of the health of the paupers relative to the minute above stated.

Mr. Abraham King, Medical Officer, was thereupon sent for, who soon after attended the Board, and confirmed the report of the Visiting Committee, and stated that the paupers above sixty who were allowed tea and sugar, did not suffer from Diarrhœa as much as those who were dieted on gruel, and recommended that, for the present, rice be substituted for gruel, which the Board agreed to.

Thus, by the decided tone of the Visiting Committee, after many months of strenuous exertion on the part of others, and even six months after the Medical Attendant had solemnly called the attention of the Board to the fact that the Commissioners’ gruel had produced a most distressing complication of diseases;—after this long and frightful period of torture and death, a reluctant permission was extorted to abate the deadly nuisance. The effect, as recorded in the Visitor’s Book, on the next Board day, surpassed the most sanguine anticipations.

Question.—Is the established dietary duly observed?

Answer.—Milk has been substituted in lieu of gruel, for breakfast, and rice (for bread and cheese) for dinner, two days in the week, by order of the Medical Officer.

Question.—Are the inmates generally healthy, &c. &c.?

Answer.—The inmates are not generally healthy; but there is a great improvement since the last report, occasioned by the change of diet. Diarrhœa has decreased from 18 to 3 cases since the last report.

April 28th, 1837.

(Signed)

W. P. KING.

The proposal, for relieving the helpless Poor from the torture inflicted by the gruel system, having been so long considered as being too daring to be entertained, the result of such relief, after eight months awfully crowded with suffering and death, was carefully watched by the Visiting Committee; and on the 12th of May, the following entry appears in the Minute Book.

Bridgwater Union, May 12th, 1837.

In consequence of an alteration in the diet of the inmates of the Workhouse having been considered necessary for the improvement of their health, by the Medical Officer, and such alteration having been acted on with good effect,

It was moved by Mr. W. P. King, and seconded by the Rev. N. Ruddock, that in future, a dietary be substituted agreeable to the annexed table, in lieu of table No. 3, now in use, and that the Clerk be directed to write to the Poor Law Commissioners for their sanction to such alteration.—Carried unanimously.*

The Commissioners were pleased to comply with this request. From the 21st of April, when the fatal gruel ceased to be administered, the health of the inmates of the Workhouse progressively improved, and although Diarrhœa has since returned on several of the former victims, and carried them off, there have been scarcely any recent cases. The following persons were among the sufferers by the deadly disease which was so pertinaciously kept up.*

Names.	Age.	Reported Disease.	Remarks.	From Sept. 1836; to May, 1837.
Brown, Elizabeth	2½	measles	These were cases of Diarrhœa coming within the remarks contained in the letter of the Medical Attendant. "Many of the children were affected with the white mouth the result of irritation of the stomach & bowels, in this state they were seized with measles."	died Oct. 21st
Palmer, Elizabeth	2	measles		died Oct. 26th
Symes, James....	1	measles		died Oct. 29th
Bown, John.....	1	measles		died Oct. 29th
Vokins, Mary Ann	4	measles		died Nov. 2nd
Hoyle, Emma...	1	measles		died Nov. 9th
Davey, John....	2	inflammation of lungs	These were cases preceded by, or accompanied with, severe Diarrhœa.	died Jan. 2nd
Wride, John....	1	inflammation of lungs		died Jan. 4th
Cox, George....	2	tubercles on the lungs		died May 4th
Wilkins, Flora...	2	ulcer in the bowels		died May 16th
Woolcott, George.	½	marasmus	Excessive Debility from Diarrhœa.	died Feb. 8th
Woolcott, Theresa	4	marasmus		died Feb. 11th
Furber, James...	1½	marasmus		died March 4th
Stacey, Mary....	78	natural decay		died Oct. 18th
Mullins, Sarah..	23	consumption	Some of these cases died at the North Petherton Workhouse; where many persons afflicted with Diarrhœa were sent from the Bridgwater House.	died Nov. 11th
Partridge, Thomas	62			died May 18th
Cogle, John....	44	rupture of bloodvessel		died April 16th
Sheppard, Martha	68	diarrhœa		died Mar. 14th
White, Mary....	39	diarrhœa		died May 21st
Arthur, William..	1	diarrhœa		died Sept. 28th
Pyke, William..	67	diarrhœa		died Nov. 7th
Diment, Henry..	2½	diarrhœa		died Nov. 24th
Farthing, George.	60	diarrhœa		died Nov. 27th
Biss, Loman....	2½	diarrhœa		died Jan. 21st
Adams, William..	4	diarrhœa		died Jan. 23rd
Dowden, Mary..	26	diarrhœa		died Feb. 28th
Bindon, John....	1½	diarrhœa		died March 2nd

* During the time that Diarrhœa raged in the Penitentiary most violently, Dr. Granville states the deaths to have been about 7 per cent. of the prisoners confined in the house:—while that disease was instrumental in carrying off about 30 per cent. of the average number of inmates of the Bridgwater Workhouse in eight months!

This list of victims, awful as it is, only indicates a part of the suffering inflicted. Since the date of the latest death recorded above, several of the old cases have died in the house, and the ravages of the disease have been partly concealed, by ascribing such deaths to "debility of old age" &c. Some died after having left the house, and others have, in the words of Cuvier, used on a similar occasion, "exchanged an active disease for a mortal languor." Let this melancholy calendar be contrasted with the statement made by Lord John Russell, (in his speech of the 23rd of March last) on the abolition of the punishment of death in certain cases. His Lordship congratulates himself and the nation, on the fact, that only seventeen persons had been executed in all England and Wales, during the year 1836. Thus the number of executions for murder, rape, incendiarism, and robbery; for all the awful and destructive crimes that ravage society, falls far short of the deaths occasioned by meal and water, and a poisonous atmosphere in ONE Workhouse; under the dietary and regulations of the Poor Law Commissioners. Such were some of the statements which were directed by these Commissioners to be enquired into by the very parties who had wilfully persisted in this destructive system after it had been demonstrated that there was "DEATH IN THE POT."

Bridgwater, January the 27th, 1838.

LETTER X.

Master Shallow, choose what office thou wilt in the land; 'tis thine. Be what thou wilt, I say! The laws of England are at my commandment. Happy are they which have been my friends!

Henry 4th, 2nd part.

Although we lay those honors on these men,
To ease ourselves of divers galling loads,
They shall but bear them as the Ass bears gold;
To groan and sweat under the business,
Either led or driven, as we point the way;

Julius Cæsar.

They'll take suggestions, as a Cat laps milk;
And tell the Clock to any business that
We say befits the hour.

Tempest.

SIR,—I shall now endeavour to lay before you, for the information of the people of England, some materials for forming an estimate of the manner in which an official enquiry was conducted, into allegations which charged the untimely deaths of many unoffending persons, in the Bridgwater Workhouse, on the Gruel System of the Poor Law Commissioners, and on the recklessness of the Board of Guardians, who continued for many months to send poor helpless creatures into a Workhouse, where an infectious and fatal disease was raging.

Previously to the commencement of the enquiry it was buzzed about, that the charges made against the Board of Guardians "must come to nothing," as the Poor Law Commissioners had *authority* to make whatever Laws they liked for the management and *feeding* of the Poor. That although it might be true that some paupers had died of the Gruel, still Mr. Weale would be able to *put all that matter right*. That he had had great experience in managing evidence, and was known to be exceedingly clever in such operations. That

private meetings had been held of the little knot of Master Shallows who had occasioned all this destruction of human life by plotting amongst the small renters who had been elected Guardians, and thus obtaining the means of outvoting the rest of the Board; that this little knot of Gruelling Dictators had declared that they were secure of a majority, and that, with their good friend Mr. Weale's clever management, there could not be a doubt of the result. Such was the chatter of the day, not coming in any authentic form, but dimly shadowing out, an indistinct notion of arbitrary power in the parties implicated, and an unprincipled determination to use that power in concealing truth and frustrating the ends of justice.

It has been already stated that Mr. Weale took some depositions in secret, and others in the presence of the Board of Guardians, who declare, in the verdict of acquittal passed on themselves, that in the enquiry "into the several allegations of cruelty and oppression, charged upon *it* by Mr. John Bowen," *it*, (the said Board) "examined such witnesses as *it thought necessary!*"

The witnesses which *it*, and Mr. Weale, did *think necessary* to examine on the alleged destruction of human life by Diarrhœa, were Mr. John Evered Poole, a Surgeon, who acted for the Medical Attendant during his illness; Mr. Underdown, the Clerk of the Union, and Mr. Gover, the Governor of the Workhouse. There were, on the principle of throwing out a tub for the Whale, other witnesses examined at considerable length on some allegations of comparatively trivial import;* but it does not appear, either on the minutes of the Board, or in the copies of depositions furnished to the Board of Guardians by Mr. Weale, that any other persons were examined on the subject of the Diarrhœa in the Bridgwater Workhouse.

Deposition of Mr. John Evered Poole.

John Evered Poole, Surgeon, of Bridgwater, deposes that, he acted with Mr. King, the Medical Officer for the Bridgwater District, during the greater portion of the time when Influenza and Diarrhœa prevailed. Amongst the inmates at that time there were many diseased persons, and during the prevalence of disease, and in a very sickly season, he considered the house was too thickly inhabited, and to this, added to the dietary then in use, he attributes the prevalence of Diarrhœa.

On the 25th Oct. 1836, Mr. King recommended a change of diet, by a letter to the Board of Guardians, and on the 1st of November, deponent addressed a letter to the Board, expressing his satisfaction at the change of diet, and reported that, the sick were daily improving, and were then surrounded with every necessary comfort.

Remarks.

In thus attributing the "prevalence of Diarrhœa" to the crowded state of the house, and "to the dietary then in use," Mr. Poole establishes the whole case against the Board of Guardians. This gentleman, be it remembered, is their own witness, and one of their Medical Attendants.

In this letter Mr. King states, that the gruel produced Diarrhœa, and that he had so stated to the Visiting Committee. He was informed that he could order what he pleased for the sick, but that no alteration could be permitted in the dietary of those who were not on the sick list. See pages 26 and 29.

* I have refrained from examining the evidence brought up on these minor allegations, lest by so doing, attention should be diverted from the more important matter, but I am prepared for again going into them on a fitting occasion.

Deponent further states that, after this period, he never made any communication to the Board on the subject of the dietary; if any thing in particular occurred to deponent, he mentioned it to the Visiting Committee, but he certainly never made any communication to the Board.

Deponent further states that he does not think gruel, in the proportion as directed by the diet table, to be productive of disease in healthy persons.

(Signed) JOHN EVERED POOLE.

Taken on oath, at Bridgwater, 17th August, 1837, By me,

(Signed) ROBERT WEALE,
Assistant Poor Law Commissioner.

Minute Book.

Bridgwater Union,
Friday, August 4th, 1837.

Mr. Poole, Surgeon, was sent for, who appeared before the Board and deposed as follows: that he had, on several occasions in the last year, attended on the poor in the Workhouse, for Mr. Abraham King, who was then Medical Officer of that Establishment, that he attributed the sickness that prevailed in the house, to the dietary that was then used, but that he did not make any statement in writing to the Board to that effect, but that he had stated his opinion to the Visiting Committee, that he considered himself at liberty to order different diet for the sick.

He further stated that, during the time sickness prevailed in the house, it was also very prevalent out of the house, and that children frequently died of the Measles.

*Mr. Robert Underdown, Clerk of the
Bridgwater Board of Guardians,*

Deposes that he was Assistant-Overseer for the Parish of Bridgwater for 8 years and upwards, previous to the formation of the Union, during the whole of which time he was also Governor of the Workhouse, that the average number of inmates was 78, and that the largest number of pauper inmates was 103, and that at the formation of the Union, the Building Committee reported that it would contain 140. During the period that deponent was Governor

The Board cannot succeed in setting up the plea of ignorance. They were kept in full knowledge of the ravages of the disease, by the Medical Weekly Return, the Death Book, the Visitor's Book, and by the representations of individual Members of the Visiting Committee.

Mr. Poole reconciles this opinion with his former and subsequent positive declarations, by stating that there were *no healthy persons* in the Workhouse, and consequently, his opinion, given on an assumed case, was not applicable to the inmates of *that* house, among whom, there were seldom more than one man and five women *said* to be able bodied, and these were feeble, weakly, dispirited persons, peculiarly susceptible of disease.

Here Mr. Poole again distinctly attributes "the sickness that prevailed in the house *to the dietary that was then used.*"

The poor children who are entered as having the Measles when they died, had been "washed out" by Diarrhœa (I use the words of the Medical men) these innocent victims of rapacity were "all but gone," when, by a merciful dispensation, Measles put an end to their suffering. See Mr. King's letter, page 26.

The question which has been raised is not as to the number of persons which it may be possible to cram into this house; but whether it is not a criminal exposure of human life, to send *any* helpless persons into a house, in every part of which, a deadly pestilence is known to be raging? The yearly deaths on the old system were about nine, on Mr. Underdown's declared average of 78 inmates; while, under the regulations of the Poor Law Commissioners, and the management of the Board of Guardians, out of an average of 94 inmates,

of the Workhouse, various diseases such as Small Pox, Measles, and occasional Diarrhœa, prevailed, but the Surgeons never reported that the house was too full or crowded.

Here follows some matter not connected with the charge under consideration.

Deponent further states that on the Board of Guardians passing a resolution for an amended dietary, he forwarded the same to the Poor Law Commissioners, and before the expiration of a week he received the amended dietary from them confirmed and sealed.

Further deposes that he has examined the Minute Book, and that he has not found any motion submitted to the Board by Mr. Bowen, on any of the subjects alluded to in his Pamphlet, nor did that gentleman ever, to the deponent's knowledge or belief, submit any proposal or motion whatever, on the subject of the dietary, the want of servants or nurses, or of illness of the inmates of the Workhouses, from the period of his being elected a Guardian in March last, to the appearance of his Pamphlet in Bridgwater.

(Signed) ROB. UNDERDOWN.

Taken on oath, at Bridgwater, the 18th day of August, 1837, By me,

(Signed) ROBERT WEALE,
Assistant Poor Law Commissioner.

* The frightful amount of deaths in the Bridgwater Workhouse, can only be properly estimated by comparison. To assist the reader in forming this estimate, the following rate of mortality has been calculated, from data supplied by public documents.

	Persons.	Deaths.	Rate per Cent.
Returns of the General Military Hospital Fort, Pitt, Invalid Depôt,	20,720	899	4 . 3
Patients treated in 19 Hospitals,	65,523	2,523	3 . 8
House of Correction. Sick Prisoners on an average of three years, out of 8,708 Prisoners,	660	23	3 . 4
Prisoners in the Hulks, daily average of 2 years,	2,800	65	2 . 3
Deaths in all England, per cent.,			2 . 1
Deaths in the British Navy, in the latter years of the late Wars, per cent.,			2 . 5
BRIDGWATER WORKHOUSE, average number of inmates,	94	39	41 . 4

Whoever contemplates this almost unparalleled destruction of human life in the Bridgwater Union, will be prepared for the fact that, in an official statement of the *savings* in six Unions in West Somerset, under the new system, the Bridgwater Union is distinguished by taking the lead. It is asserted to have *saved* last year no less than £4,712. 7s. 1d., or 35, 20 per cent. on the previous three years' average!

FORTY two persons died between July the 15th 1836, and July the 28th 1837.* And this almost unparalleled destruction of human life is attempted by a public functionary, to be slurred over by enquiring whether the Poor were not "occasionally" diseased under the old system; and whether the Surgeon then reported that the house was too full !!!

This was eight months after the house had been ravaged by a disease ascribed by the Medical Attendants to the dietary established by these Commissioners.

It is true that I never was the actual *proposer* of any resolution at the Board; but from the 31st of March, the day on which I was informed of having been appointed a Guardian, to the 21st of April, when the gruel system was exploded, I laboured unremittingly, at the Board, in the Visiting Committee, and with some able and influential Guardians out of doors, to banish the deadly gruel from the House, and to effect that improvement in the diet, which was *proposed* by the Rev. Noblett Ruddock, as Visitor of the day, on the 14th of April, and rejected, and which was followed up on the 21st of April and carried. Thus in the short space of three weeks a destructive system was put an end to which had triumphed over all opposition for eight months. See note to page 28, and pages 29, 31, &c.

*James Gover, Governor of the
Bridgwater Workhouse.*

This witness, after deposing at some length to matters not connected with this part of the enquiry,

States that he was attacked with Diarrhoea five several times during the months of February and March last, although he did not confine himself to the gruel diet.

Deponent further states that the gruel supplied was very good in quality.

(Signed) JAMES GOVER.

Taken on oath, at Bridgwater, the 17th day of August, 1837, By me,

(Signed) ROBERT WEALE,
Assistant Poor Law Commissioner.

Minute Book.

August the 4th, 1837.

Mr. James Gover stated that he had been very ill himself, but did not believe that it was occasioned by partaking of the gruel.

It does not appear from these official documents, that they ventured to ask their own Master of the Workhouse, one single question, on the apparent cause, the extent, the progress, or the consequences of that destructive disease which carried off so many of the helpless inmates of the house! The poor victims are not even alluded to!

Neither do they appear, on the face of their own documents, to have enquired the cause to which this previously healthy and powerful man's five attacks of Diarrhoea were ascribed. But they insult him and the common sense of mankind by asking whether these attacks were occasioned by his *partaking of the gruel*; when it had been expressly declared that an infectious disease pervaded the house, and that the Governor had been repeatedly attacked, while aiding the poor sufferers in their rack-ing necessities.

Such was the evidence, which it was "thought necessary" to call, and on which the Board of Guardians magnanimously pronounced itself to be not guilty! After having cautiously threaded a maze of perplexing and harrowing detail, I am now arrived at that part of this distressing subject which is of paramount importance to my humble fellow subjects. It is from this point, that I would most earnestly solicit you, Sir, as a public censor exercising vast influence, on the public mind, to take a retrospective view; and after looking back with a calm, but searching, scrutiny into the charges urged, and the documents cited in their support, I would ask you again to read over the evidence which the accused parties brought forward to exculpate themselves. I would ask you to consider that this most injurious and insulting mockery was conducted by a man, eating the bread of the people, and specially directed to institute an enquiry into allegations which charged, the untimely deaths of many persons on the dietary of the Poor Law Commissioners; and further charged, that while the foetid exhalations from the immediate sufferers infected the whole house; the Board of Guardians wilfully persisted in sending in other poor helpless persons from the villages of the Union; who were, in their turns, either infected by, or gruelled into, Diarrhoea. And how have these charges been met, Sir? Not by examining Mr. King, the Medical Attendant of the Workhouse, who informed the Board, by letter, that the gruel occasioned Diarrhoea;—not by examining that excellent member of the Visiting Committee, to whose persevering exertions Mr. King bears testimony, in his letter to the Board;—not by examining the Matron, who was hourly amongst the sufferers, whose family were attacked, and who was herself almost worn to a skeleton;—not by examining any of the few surviving Sufferers, or of the poor creatures, who attended on the crowds of dying;—not by examining any of these, but, by calling the gentleman who officiated for Mr. King during his attacks, their own Clerk of the Union, and their Governor of the Workhouse.

Let me not be misunderstood; there can be no exception taken to the general characters of the witnesses so called; and I take none to their evidence. They could only answer to such questions as were put to them, by the managers of the enquiry; and these questions were artfully contrived for concealing, rather than for eliciting the truth.

On Mr. Poole's evidence it is unnecessary to make any further remarks than, that he attributes the Diarrhœa *to the dietary in use*. They do not appear to have asked him any questions respecting the extent of the suffering, or the number of fresh inmates sent in; on these points he is therefore silent, but his evidence is conclusive against the Board as far as it goes.

To their next evidence, the Clerk of the Union, they do not put a single question *directly* bearing on the principal allegations to be enquired into. The fatal Diarrhœa, the extent of its ravages, and the fresh victims with which it was supplied, were all tabooed subjects; concealed, as Cannibals are said to conceal their initiatory rites from those who will not participate in the abomination of their feast.

The evidence of their other witness, the Master of the Workhouse, is, *as reported*, of a still more extraordinary character. He was in charge of the Workhouse, during the whole time the disease raged there, and was brought up for the avowed purpose of being examined on allegations, connected with that disease, and the deaths ascribed to it. Still the enquirers into these allegations, specially called to that duty by the Poor Law Commissioners, do not *appear* to have asked this competent witness one question on the subject!

But, Sir, although no such matter *appears* on the record, Mr. Gover asserts that when he was examined on oath, by Mr. Weale, in the Clerk's Office, and afterwards at the Board of Guardians, he distinctly stated, that there was no doubt of the Diarrhœa having been occasioned by the gruel; that the house was so far infected, that no nurses or servants could be hired to attend the sick and dying at any rate; and that he was consequently obliged to do so himself, and that in the performance of that duty he *caught* the Diarrhœa five times. Now, Sir, if Mr. Gover did state this, not one word of which appears on the record; then has this Assistant-Commissioner garbled evidence given on oath, and withheld statements, to an extent of which, there are, fortunately for mankind, but few examples.

But, suppose Gover has wrongfully made the above statements; suppose he laboured under some hallucination, that he was never asked, and did not state, anything to the above effect, suppose all this; and what follows? Why, that a Public Functionary, holding a confidential and lucrative appointment, specially directed by his Superiors to institute an enquiry into certain allegations, betrayed the trust reposed in him, by not asking one question on the principal subject which he was specially delegated to enquire into. Whether he thus evaded the whole question, involving the alleged untimely deaths of more than 30 helpless creatures, or whether he withheld the evidence, an indignant public must determine. In either case he is utterly unfit to be continued in *any* office of trust, especially in one where the lives of hundreds of our suffering fellow creatures, may be left to his *management*.

There was a time when such a stream of innocent blood would not have been permitted to sink into the earth unnoticed;—when such a dereliction of duty in a public functionary would have been denounced in thunders in the British Parliament;—when a system under which such enormities *could* be perpetrated and defended, would be indignantly proscribed as an outrage on eternal justice,

and incompatible with the spirit of a free People, whose lives are *said* to be as *equally* sacred in the eye of the Law as they are in the eye of their Creator.
Bridgwater, February the 5th, 1838.

LETTER XI.

I can compare our hard misers to nothing so fitly, as to a Whale; 'a plays and tumbles, driving the poor fry before him, and at last devours them all at a mouthful. Such Whales have I heard on a' the land, who never leave gaping till they've swallowed the whole parish, church, steeple, bells and all.—*Pericles*.

— Show charity to none;
But let the famished flesh slide from the bone,
Ere thou reliev'st the beggar; give to dogs
What thou deny'st to men; let prisons swallow them,
And diseases lick up their bloods! *Timon of Athens*.

SIR,—In establishing against the Familiars of the New Poor Law, and their tools at the Board of this Union, a series of enormities for which we shall in vain look for a parallel in any Christian Country, I have hitherto confined myself as closely as possible, to the records of the Board, to the testimony of their own servants, and to the evidence which that Board brought forward in its own exculpation. As that evidence not only fully establishes the enormities charged, but fixes on the managers of that enquiry, the commission of an odious fraud, I could be well content to rest the whole case which I have brought forward, on their own evidence *as recorded by themselves*; but this being a question in which the lives of thousands of my humble brethren are hourly involved, I do not feel justified in withholding from the public, the testimony of an unimpeachable eye witness, and of such further remarks as the enormities charged may appear to require.

In the letter of the Medical Attendant, to the Board of Guardians, informing them that the gruel produced Diarrhœa,* that gentleman expresses his obligations to Mr. Baker, a member of the Visiting Committee, for his kindness and attention at the Workhouse. From this circumstance, and from a long and intimate knowledge of the discretion and perseverance evinced by my excellent friend in the cause of suffering humanity, I solicited him to favor me, at his convenience, with his recollections of the circumstances connected with the Diarrhœa in the Bridgwater Workhouse. The following is the result of my application.

MY DEAR BOWEN,

To enable me the better to reply to your enquiries respecting my recollection of the circumstances connected with the state of the Poor in the Bridgwater Workhouse during the time I was a Member of the Visiting Committee, I have referred to a rough statement which I drew up for another purpose. It happened that I was more acquainted with the condition and treatment of the inmates of the Workhouse, during the greater part of the parochial year 1836 and 1837, than any other Guardian; for notwithstanding, several of the Committee attended often, as may be seen by their weekly reports; yet, as I lived much nearer the house than any other member of the Board, the Medical Officer and the Governor generally applied to me as circumstances occurred that required the advice or support of one of the Committee.

I find that in August, 1836, oatmeal gruel was strictly used instead of milk. Soon after the inmates became very ill, many were afflicted with Diarrhœa, and

the Medical Officer informed me that he believed the oatmeal gruel occasioned the complaint. Application was made to the Board for permission to alter the diet, but it was objected to on the ground that the order was imperative, not to depart from the diet table fixed on, except for the sick. The Board desired me to inform the Medical Officer that they wished every necessary comfort to be granted to the sick, but declared that they could not make any alteration in the dietary for those who were not actually on the sick list.

The house was considered infectious for a long time, and I believe none of the Guardians visited the sick wards for two or three months. The Medical Officer assured me that he had several times caught the Diarrhœa in the performance of his duty there. He advised me not to go in the bedrooms, and also advised the Governor and Matron to go into them as seldom as possible. Still with every precaution the Governor's children were attacked with Diarrhœa; and he himself was so far reduced by repeated attacks, that he was allowed leave of absence to go from Bridgwater for some time, for the purpose of changing the air. Repeated attempts were made to hire nurses and workwomen, without success, and I have no doubt that the dangerous state of the house deterred persons from undertaking those employments. The number of deaths which occurred, and the generally unhealthy state of the inmates, were so alarming that I was induced to apply to the Clerk of the Board for information on the usual mortality of the house during the many years that he had the care of it as Assistant Overseer. This information I obtained, and took it to the Board, and, with the Death Book in my hand, contrasted the few deaths under the old system, with the awful number recorded in the obituary of the Board. I implored the Guardians not to send any more paupers into the house while so dangerous a disease prevailed there. But to no purpose.* The reply given, was, that the Law must be carried into effect as far as possible: and that the house would hold still more, according to the report made of it, when taken for the Union. I was so strongly impressed with the danger of receiving fresh inmates, that I prevailed on some who were ordered in the Workhouse, to keep out for a little while, and gave them money to support them until the next Board day.

About the middle of December seven or eight children were removed to the Petherton Workhouse, in consequence of the crowded and diseased state of the Bridgwater house: while on the same day, a man, his wife, and five children came into the house already so crowded, by order of the Board. There was not one bed unoccupied at the time, every bed and bedstead that could be spared having been sent to Petherton with the children. On that occasion I attended the Matron at eight o'clock at night. She wished me to provide for this family out of the house for a few days at least. This I endeavoured to do but could not immediately succeed, and accommodation was made for a part of them by removing the body of a female pauper from the bed on which she had just expired.

On the first Board day after this occurrence, I entered in the Visitors' Book, in an unusual manner, the admission of this family, in order that the Board might know, that that which had been attempted to be effected by the removal of the children to Petherton, had been entirely counteracted by this large family having been sent into the house.

* Here is a Member of the Visiting Committee with the Death Book in his hand, urging a consideration of the awful destruction of human life on the Board; and "*implored* it not to send any more persons into the house while so dangerous a disease prevailed there. *But to no purpose.*" Surely the guilt of sending helpless persons to a place where they *must* take poisonous vapours into their lungs, cannot be less than that of consigning them to a place where they *must* take poisonous substances into their stomach. In both cases the sufferer is exposed to the chance of being brought to an untimely death: and that chance, in the former case, is in proportion to the crowded state of the apartment. Dr. Haygarth, in his observations on infectious fevers, states that, in close crowded rooms, about 26 persons out of 27 are liable to be infected by some contagious poisons, while the same poisons are comparatively inert in apartments not crowded.

I would further remark that in the early part of the year, tea and sugar were granted to the females who attended the sick, or assisted in doing the work of the house, as neither nurses nor servants were hired for these duties. In a short time this indulgence was objected to, as being contrary to the rules of the Poor Law Commissioners. When the inmates became very unhealthy, and nursing the sick became most laborious and offensive, the Governor was again requested by some of the Visiting Committee to grant tea and sugar as before, to those women who most required it; but this departure from the rules was again objected to, and the Committee held a Meeting on the subject, at which I was present. I expressed my feeling of the hardship and difficulty of going on in strict conformity with the rules laid down for us, while the house was in such a state of disease, and implored the Members of the Committee to sanction this departure from them.* There was great objection made to my request, but the Meeting broke up without making any report or coming to any resolution, and therefore the Governor went on granting the indulgence occasionally, at the request of those Members of the Committee who were most frequently at the house.

I have thus generally stated my recollections, of which you are at liberty to make what use you please. When the enquiry was held on your former statements, I was informed that my evidence would be required by the Board; but after having expressed my willingness to attend, and keeping myself in readiness for two days, they did not call me. Earnestly hoping that your laborious exertions in this most important cause may be productive of all the benefit to society that you contemplate,

I remain, my dear Bowen,

Ever truly, your's,

Bridgwater,
January the 19th, 1838.

WILLIAM BAKER.

Here we have the direct evidence of an eye witness to facts which have been already deposed to, and to some others of a horrible nature. It should be specially remembered that the foregoing is the statement of a Member of the Visiting Committee, who held on at the Workhouse, with a desperate perseverance, when the little knot who, with the aid of their underlings, persisted in keeping up the deadly disease, shrunk back from the infection. The Surgeon was infected; the Governor's family were infected; the Governor was infected several times, and at length obtained leave of absence. Neither nurses nor servants could be prevailed on to enter the pestilential den, still these *Guardians* of the Poor, who durst not go round the house themselves, sent 127

* I dare not even allude in detail to the laborious and offensive duties these harassed victims had to perform for their perishing fellow creatures, until infected and worn out, they became, in turn, objects for the care of others, who were speedily, in their turns, to increase the *savings* of the Union, by their untimely deaths. The *rules* which prescribed a scanty diet and denied a sup of small beer, or an atom of tea, to poor fainting creatures, under such terrific circumstances, were even fortified by a special mandate.

"To the Clerk of the Taunton Union."

SIR,—I am directed by the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales to request that you will call the attention of the Board of Guardians to the practice of increasing the allowance of food to paupers employed in the domestic and household work of Union Workhouses, with a view of its discontinuance if it exists in the Taunton Union, &c. &c. &c.

Signed, by Order of the Board,
E. CHADWICK, Secretary."

Mr. Baker has not been proceeded against for disobeying the Laws of this new Estate of the Realm, but there cannot be the smallest doubt of his having subjected himself to the penalties of fine and imprisonment, with or without hard labour, as awarded in the 98th clause of the Poor Law Amendment Act, against "*any person who shall wilfully neglect or disobey any of the Rules, Orders, or Regulations of the said Commissioners or Assistant-Commissioners,*" &c.

helpless persons, *in whose death they had a pecuniary interest*, into that, and the Petherton house, between the 29th of September 1836, and the 25th of March 1837,* during which time no less than 31 persons died, according to their own statements: and I again repeat, Sir, that they had a *pecuniary interest*, in the death of every one of these victims. Every death contributed its quota to the *savings* of £4,712. 7s. 1d.

What language can be applied to this wilful perseverance in a system so destructive of human life? There cannot be a question but that a crime of the highest magnitude has been committed, although it may be difficult, under the provisions of the New Poor Law, to give that crime a strictly legal designation. The moral guilt of murder has been decidedly incurred, but not the legal. It may not even be manslaughter, in the eye of the Law, to subject the helpless poor to poisonous effluvia, and to diet them to the death, provided it be done in obedience to the Somerset House Regulations, which are declared to be as valid and binding as the Laws of this Realm. Without the authority of these Regulations it would, indeed, be a very different matter. It was only in September last, that a man was charged, before the Central Criminal Court, with having caused the death of his apprentice; by unwholesome and insufficient diet, and "by allowing the deceased to languish in sickness, in a certain filthy and *unwholesome room*, without providing him with proper attendance and nourishment, he being at the same time sick and diseased in body." The prisoner pleaded his want of means; but the jury, under the direction of Mr. Justice Patteson, as to the law of the case, found him "GUILTY OF MANSLAUGHTER," on the first count of the indictment, and he was sentenced to twelve months imprisonment. Can there be the smallest doubt that a crowd of persons have been brought to an untimely death in the Bridgwater Workhouse, by "unwholesome rooms," poisonous effluvia, and bad diet? But on whom is the crime to be charged? Not on the Surgeon who, in the zealous performance of his duty, subjected himself to repeated attacks of the prevailing disease;—not on the Governor who in attending on his perishing fellow creatures, was seized five times and dangerously reduced himself;—not on the Overseers, who have no kind of authority in the Workhouse;—not on the Board of Guardians in their collective capacity; a considerable number of them being individually opposed to the perpetration of the crime. Thus while the master of a parish apprentice is convicted of MANSLAUGHTER for bringing a single individual, of whom he has charge, to an untimely death by "*bad diet and unwholesome rooms*," a whole host of helpless creatures may be so brought to an untimely death, by a Board of Guardians, not only with impunity but with profit; and thus that fundamental principle of English Law is violated which declares that, "there shall be no injury without its redress."

Under the old Law, the Overseers would have been *responsible* in their own persons for such a destruction of human life: and now we are flippantly told by My Lord Howick, that instead of "*irresponsible Overseers*,"

* I cannot ascertain the exact proportion sent into the Bridgwater house; but I believe about 84 persons were passed through that pest house in these six months, either to their graves, or to infect the surrounding Villages; and now the Board inform us, in a printed statement, that they have *saved* £4,712. 7s. 1d. That is, they boast of having screwed these thousands out of a labouring population; whose wages has been returned, by that very Board, at the miserable pittance of *seven shillings* a week; and in a district where, notwithstanding these starvation wages, the Poor Rates, *before this saving*, were only 16½d. in the pound on the rental assessed in 1815.

"There was now in every district, a body representing the interests of that district, a body of Guardians and paid Overseers appointed for the administration of relief, and above them there were the Commissioners and Assistant-Commissioners, whose duty it was to punish all instances of neglect of the really destitute and suffering poor. It was known that the power of those authorities had been usefully exerted. Any cases of neglect of the sick, or impotent, or destitute poor, was brought before the Commissioners, and promptly inquired into, and redressed by prompt punishment of the guilty."

Here is the avowed substitute for *legal responsibility*! Why this vaunted substitute is the very agency, whose *irresponsible* operation in thinning out the poor, I have been tracing, through unwholesome diet, neglect, pestilence, and death. In tracing the operation of this *irresponsible* agency, I have shown that allegations were published, under the signature of a member of the Board of Guardians, to the effect that, a crowd of helpless poor had been brought to an untimely death in the Bridgwater Workhouse; and that, long after the awful fact had been stated to the Board, they wilfully persisted in the course which had brought these poor victims to their graves. The Poor Law Commissioners, "whose duty," Lord Howick says, "it was to punish all instances of neglect," saw these allegations. And what course did they take thereon? Did they profess to make light of them as an idle statement? No such thing. They seem to have felt that some appearance of enquiry was necessary, to beguile the public. And to whom do they entrust this enquiry? Why to the very parties who were implicated in the crime, to the Board of Guardians, and to the Assistant-Commissioner of the district, who had, or ought to have had, official cognizance of the dark transaction. Under these circumstances, so disgraceful to the character of the country, I respectfully applied to the Commissioners, to issue such directions, as would prevent their professed enquiry into the untimely deaths of so many helpless creatures, from being smuggled up under closed doors; and this request was met by an evasive refusal.

Here, then, was an official enquiry into alleged enormities of the most frightful character and extent, conducted by the very parties accused, who were invested, by the Poor Law Commissioners, with authority to exercise the functions of witnesses, judge, and jury, in their own case! These incompatible functions were, as I have shewn, exercised by the Board and the Assistant-Commissioner, in a manner equally mean and criminal; the parties having either garbled the evidence in their written statements, or otherwise slunk back from asking a single question on the subject of the principal allegations which they were directed to enquire into.

The report made to the Poor Law Commissioners, on the evidence so *managed* by their Assistant Mr. Weale, has not been allowed to transpire. The Commissioners have refused to grant a copy of that report, and thus the farce of a mock-enquiry into the untimely deaths of about 30 helpless persons, having been rehearsed under closed doors, has been stifled by the Poor Law Commissioners. In the face of this daring conspiracy against the justice of the Country, we are told by one of her Majesty's Ministers, that

"Any cases of neglect of the sick, or impotent, or destitute poor, was brought before the Commissioners, and promptly enquired into, and redressed by prompt punishment of the guilty."

The other party to this mock-enquiry, the Board of Guardians, informed the Commissioners that it had called such witness "*as it thought necessary*" and

had acquitted itself.* The delighted Commissioners, so prompt to redress the injuries of the sick and impotent poor, catch at the verdict of acquittal with

* The little knot of conspirators who, with their underlings, *manage* the Board, brought forward their dependants to declare *on oath*, that representations made by the Medical men, or members of the Visiting Committee were immediately attended to, and that no inmate of the Workhouse had suffered any hardship or deprivation whatever!!! Having already shown that not the least attention was paid, to repeated applications and implorings, in a case involving the lives of a crowd of helpless creatures; it may not be superfluous to state that their own records prove them to have adopted a similar course in matters of less importance.

Repeated applications were made for the appointment of a person or persons to attend on the sick, that they might not be left to the care of casual paupers or washer-women, hired for a few days, who were totally ignorant of the duties required; but to no purpose. More than 18 months elapsed, and 73 of our fellow creatures miserably perished, before the Board consented to reduce their *savings* £15. per annum by offering that sum for a nurse. The Union was formed in May 1836, a nurse was advertised for on the 29th of December 1837. In the interval the obituary records the death of 73 persons!

Even the sum of two shillings and sixpence for rescuing the heads of 64 poor children from ulcers and vermin appears by the following entries in the Petherton Visitors' Book, to be an expenditure which this prompt and liberal Board was not readily disposed to authorize.

Question.—Do the inmates of the Workhouse, of all classes, appear cleanly in their persons, &c.

Sept. 17th. Answer.—Yes. The Matron has paid 2s. 6d. for having the children's hair cut, with my sanction. In future hair to be cut by a pauper from the Bridgwater Workhouse.

(Signed) R. KING MEADE KING.

May 2nd. Some person wanted immediately to cut the children's hair, without which they cannot be kept clean.

(Signed) R. KING MEADE KING.

June 29th. The children's hair require cutting.

July 4th. No one has been sent to cut the children's hair as requested last week.

(Signed) R. KING MEADE KING.

July 13th. No attention has been paid to the repeated requests of the Visitors and the Matron, with regard to the hair cutting of the children.

(Signed) H. PARSONS.

July 21st. No one has yet been sent to cut the children's hair as requested for several weeks.

Sept. 27th. The children's hair *must* be cut, a person should be sent from Bridgwater Workhouse as usual to do it.

(Signed) R. KING MEADE KING.

Oct. 4th. The children's hair *is* cut, but some have *bad heads*.

(Signed) H. PARSONS.

Having enquired what was meant by "bad heads," I was informed that the heads of these poor children had been eaten into sores by vermin, from the neglect of that *thirty-pence* worth of hair cutting, "without which" Mr. King informed the Board, "they cannot be kept clean". Here are two Magistrates of the County, one of them the late deputy chairman of the Board of Guardians, unable to wring two shillings and sixpence from that Board by repeated weekly expostulations; and not disposed again to incur the grave *responsibility* of authorizing such an expenditure. In the face of these entries and many similar ones, dependants were brought forward to make such depositions *on oath* as have been already submitted to an indignant public!

such eagerness that they write by return of post, to express their high *satisfaction* without knowing one word of the evidence on which these worthy Guardians had acquitted themselves. Thus the Commissioners having sent a charge of blood-guiltiness to be enquired into by the parties accused, become accessories after the fact, and congratulate these very parties on the verdict of self acquittal which they had pronounced.

Not one word of disapprobation has been addressed to the Board, by these prompt redressers of injury, to whose tender mercies the lives of all the poor in the Kingdom are consigned. They have not even suggested to the Board that it would have been somewhat more decent to have refrained from subjecting persons in whose death they had a pecuniary interest, to the necessity of breathing poisonous effluvia. So far from endeavouring to prevent a recurrence of such compendious slaughter, they do, by that silence which is construed as giving consent, actually hold out an encouragement for the perpetration of similar enormities. They virtually say to all the Boards of Guardians in the Kingdom;—if you have a highly infectious and fatal disease raging in your Workhouse, send in as many of the helpless poor as you can to be subjected to the deadly infection; and if any complaint should be made of their having been got rid of in this way, we will refer the charge to yourselves. Examine such witnesses as you “*think necessary*,” and when you have acquitted yourselves, as you will of course do, we will express our entire satisfaction at the verdict, and hush up the whole affair by refusing to grant any information on the subject. Thus the “sick and impotent and destitute poor” of England may be thinned out to any assignable extent; not only with impunity, but with profit and applause.

Such are the lessons virtually taught by these Commissioners. That they have not been barren lessons, taught in vain, I shall, in my next communication, demonstrate, to the conviction of your readers. In the mean time I would ask them to remember that, the annual deaths of Convicts in the Hulks, as returned to Government by the Superintendant, were under two and a half per cent; while, during the last year, the deaths in the Bridgwater Workhouse amounted to more than FORTY ONE per cent on the average number of the inmates! I would further ask them to remember that the Convicts were solemnly sentenced in an *open court*, after an impartial investigation and unanimous conviction, by a *disinterested* jury; while an *irresponsible and secret assembly*, secured by closed doors, were permitted to consign to a poisonous pest house this crowd of helpless old age and innocent childhood; *in whose death it had a pecuniary interest!*

Bridgwater, February the 24th, 1838.

LETTER XII.

“I vow to God I would sooner bring myself to put a man to immediate death, and so to get rid of him at once, than to fret him with a feverish being, tainted with the jail-distemper of a contagious servitude, to keep him above ground, an animated mass of putrefaction, corrupted himself, and corrupting all about him.”

Burke.

SIR,—It is essential to a right understanding of some additional facts, by which I purpose to exhibit, the compendious evils of the destructive system, adopted by the Board and the Commissioners, that I should briefly advert to

some circumstances connected with the Medical Relief of the Poor, in the Bridgwater Union. And it is thus essential, because there is nothing, except the daily bread of the poor, which is so intimately connected with their necessities, as the bearing skill and knowledge of the Professional men who have to afford them assistance under the diseases and accidents to which they are so peculiarly liable. "Every attempt at unduly depressing the condition of such men is an indirect attack on the suffering poor, whose very existence depends on Professional assistance being rendered with that promptitude, and continued with that perseverance, which nothing short of Professional zeal can supply." Under this conviction I proceed to state that on the formation of the Union, the resident Practitioners of the Town and neighbourhood were employed to attend the poor, at a low rate, with an understanding that, the experience obtained in the first year, should be a guide for determining the amount of their future remuneration. At the end of their engagement, in June 1836, the Medical Officers declared that they could not, in justice to the poor and to themselves, continue their charge at the salaries proposed, and required a more liberal remuneration for their further services. This the Board thought proper to refuse, and advertised, throughout the Kingdom, for strangers to come and oppose the established professional men of the district who had received the public commendation of that Board for their zealous and able services.* One stranger, who was brought from the other extremity of the Kingdom, by these advertisements, was employed for the Bridgwater district, including the Union Workhouse, at £17. 11s. 9d. per annum less than was asked by resident Medical men. The person so employed, produced the following epitome of his pretensions, as his *card*; from one of which, duly treasured among the documents of the Board, the following is copied.

* The Medical Officers, in a written communication to the Board, "distinctly declare that they have no wish, individually or collectively, to receive anything beyond a moderate remuneration for their attendance on the poor; the amount to be determined after a fair enquiry on the extent and nature of their past services. To prevent the poor from suffering by the delay consequent on the course taken by the Board of Guardians, the Medical Officers are ready to continue their professional attendance on the poor gratuitously, until some other arrangement can be made, provided such arrangement be effected within a reasonable period." This liberal offer was rejected, and they were requested to take charge of the poor on the terms of *Private Patients*, until further advertisements could be issued and replied to. Being asked what would be their charge, it appears on the Minutes of the Board that the Medical men stated, that under such circumstances, 'their charge would be the same as in the case of any other *Private Patients*.' Payment of these bills, made out on the principle selected by the Board, was refused, and the following resolutions stand on the Minute Book.

"Moved by the Honorable P. P. Bouverie, That to those of the Medical Officers who are now under contract to the Board, a tender be made for their services for the three weeks that intervened between their first and second contract, at *double the rate* for which they have contracted for the remaining 49 weeks of the current year.—Carried.

Minute Book, Friday, October 27th, 1837."

This singular resolution was carried, as it is said, by a majority of *one*! But to obtain the services of Professional men on *one* principle, and then, having received all the advantages of these services, to turn round and offer them payment on *another* principle, which was never even alluded to at the time of agreement, seemed to be going *rather* too far, even for the Board of Guardians, as may be inferred by the following.

"Minute Book, Friday, December 15th, 1837.

Moved by Mr. John Dalley, and seconded by Mr. W. P. King, That the resolution passed at this Board, on the 27th of October last, concerning the bills of the Medical Officers while they attended the paupers as *Private Patients*, from the 24th of June to the 14th of July last, be *rescinded*.—Carried.

"Mr. John Rodney Ward, Graduate in Medicine and Surgery of the University of Leyden, and Member of the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries in London; late *Consulting Surgeon Accoucheur* to the Royal Maternity Society Doctor's Commons; *Surgeon* to the Royal Infirmary for Diseases of Children; *Consulting Surgeon Accoucheur* to the Southwark Childbed Society Guy's Hospital, and Honorary Member of the Physical Society Guy's Hospital, &c. &c.* At home for Consultation on all Diseases incident to Women and Children every morning from 8 till 12 o'clock, and evenings after 7 o'clock. Advice gratis, on Tuesdays and Saturdays, from 8 till 10 o'clock. 60, Pilgrim-street, Newcastle-upon-Tyne."

The managers of the Board plumed themselves beyond measure, at having attracted to Bridgwater this constellation of dignities, from Newcastle, by the tempting bait of £130. per annum. Thus, to add £17. 11s. 9d. a year to their *savings*, they deprived the diseased poor of the important advantages to be derived from a united Medical staff, well known to the whole neighbourhood, generally disposed to assist each other, and intimately acquainted with the wants, habits, character, and circumstances of the laboring population.

The attention of the public having been called to the ravages of Diarrhœa, in the Workhouse, by my publication on the subject, it appears to have been determined, on the accession of the new Medical dynasty, that no more persons should die of Diarrhœa, in that house. Several persons who had been reduced to a most distressing state by that disease, were carried off, after being entirely racked out. On referring to the Obituary, and to the Medical Weekly Return, in which the Medical Officer is directed to "insert *the cause and circumstances* of every death among the paupers under his care;" my attention was particularly called to the following entries, among others of a similar character, from a knowledge that, the unfortunate subjects of these entries had long been severe sufferers from Diarrhœa.

Date of Death.	Names.	Age.	Alleged cause of Death in Medical Weekly Return.	Alleged cause of Death in Obituary.
1837. July 25th.	Pocock, James,	80	debility of old age,	natural death.
28th.	Tucker, Mary,	76	debility of old age,	ditto ditto.
October 11th.	Perry, Henry,	86	old age,†	natural decay.

Believing that these entries did not truly record "*the cause and circumstances*" of the deaths of these poor old creatures, I applied to the Governor, the Matron, and the woman who had attended them up to the time of their deaths, for *their* account. From the united evidence of those persons, in which there was not the smallest discrepancy, it appeared that Diarrhœa had re-

* The "British Medical Almanack" for 1837, has neglected to publish Mr. Ward's name among those of the Metropolitan Consulting Surgeons; but it has, possibly by mistake, inserted the name of J. R. Ward, at the bottom of the list of *Assistants* of the "Royal Maternity Society." Perhaps this is an error of the press, in the Almanack, and CONSULTING Surgeon, should be read instead of ASSISTANT Surgeon? The gentleman himself should surely know.

† The entry of "death by old age," in an Obituary, or a Medical Journal, leaves the reader to presume the absence of active disease. An acute writer on mortality well observes, that "few, even of the oldest, die purely from gradual decay. Some positive disease usually comes on and overwhelms the small remains of vitality." That overwhelming disease in the above cases, was the Diarrhœa, by which the whole house was infested, while the official entries are calculated to delude the public into a belief that those poor victims died from "old age."

turned with great violence on these miserable sufferers, and carried them off. The Matron's account was to the following effect, and fully borne out by others.

Mr. Ward said, for some time, that there was no such thing as Diarrhœa in the house: then he said they were all cases of Diarrhœa *returned*, and that he would send me some astringent powders, of which I was to give two or three a day, as occasion required. I did do so, until Mr. Ward told me not to give any more, as the powders had lost their effect: and that he would send something else. After that he sent some draughts which I gave occasionally.

I told him Mary Tucker's was an old case of Diarrhœa *returned*. He ordered me to give Tucker powders, which he called astringent powders. I used sometimes to give them twice or three times a day: at last they lost all power; Tucker was quite lost in her head; lay in a terrible mess without knowing it, and was changed continually by Mary Reed.

James Pocock, too, died of a *return* of the Diarrhœa; confined to his bed, unable to help himself. He was lost to everything; his motions passed without his knowing it; for some time before his death, we used to change him three or four times a day.

Henry Perry died in a horrible state, from a *return* of Diarrhœa. He was very bad indeed; confined in bed by Diarrhœa some weeks; as soon as he was clean it was only to clean him over again.*

But this is not the only evidence. This Consulting Surgeon, in repeated entries, records the presence of Diarrhœa, and then reports the Deaths, for the information of the Board and the public, as having been occasioned, not by disease, but by *age*. Your readers, Sir, are desired to form their own estimate of the credit due to the alleged cause of death in this abode of misery, when the fatal termination of such protracted cases of disease as the foregoing is officially ascribed to "old age." Such deceptive documents, instead of throwing any protection over the lives of the helpless persons immured in these pestilential dens, serve only to conceal the truth and mislead the public. But it may be said that these entries having been made in the prescribed *form*, by the claimant of so many Professional distinctions, the Board had a right to presume that they were *correctly* made. Be it so. Let these false entries stand for nothing more, than an example of the utter worthlessness of such records, and a proof that the actual ravages of Diarrhœa materially exceeded the official returns.

In proceeding to exhibit the fatal consequences of the course pursued, it may not be irrelevant to state, that the inquiry on my allegations was not a solitary example of such mockery. The Medical Association of this place published, certain charges imputing cruelty and neglect to the Board, to which publication the Committee affixed their names. These gentlemen offered to substantiate their charges by evidence, and some of the Guardians who assisted at the enquiry, strongly urged the necessity of permitting them to do so.

"This proposal," the Medical men say, "so evidently essential to the cause of justice, was overruled by the Assistant-Commissioner, who proceeded to examine the Relieving Officers, and such two or three other parties only as these interested persons brought forward. * * * Not only are the parties accused of these cruel proceedings made judges in their own case, contrary to every principle of justice, but they are permitted to judge in private, with closed

* Most of the cases of Diarrhœa which proved fatal in the Penitentiary, after the introduction of the gruel system, were stated by the Physicians to be cases of Diarrhœa "returned."

doors, and allowed to determine that not a single evidence should be called likely to convict themselves. For what avowed purpose was this paid servant of the public, this Mr. Assistant-Commissioner, sent down? Did he avow that he was sent to smother all proceedings, to cut off all hope from the suffering poor of having their wrongs enquired into? Did he avow that his object was to make out a case which would elude justice, and screen the guilty from opprobrium? Did he make such avowals? No, he stated that he should be at Bridgwater; and he avowed that he should be there 'for the purpose of instituting an enquiry into the charges brought against the Board of Guardians by the Medical men.' And how does this public functionary act upon this recorded avowal, circulated by authority among the Guardians? Why, he refuses to call a single evidence likely to make out the truth of the charges:—and this, remember, is a hired servant of the public, eating the bread of the people, and employed to enquire and to report!"*

While this mockery was pending, Mr. Weale, *the official enquirer*, was a visitor at the house of one of the *managers* of the Board, who, on the following morning was the mover of a resolution, doubtlessly concocted between them, acquitting the little knot of Master Shallows who had contrived to mislead the Board, and in the true bobadil style referring the matter to no less a jurisdiction than that of—Parliament!† Thus the prompt enquirer into, and the redresser of the injuries of the Poor, the man "whose duty" Lord Howick says, "it was to punish all instances of neglect," not only makes a mockery of this duty by refusing to hear evidence, but outrages the public sense of justice by ostentatiously identifying himself with parties implicated. This disgusting display was, of course, followed by that determined perseverance in wrong, which a sense of impunity never fails to engender in vulgar minds. Every thing was left by the Commissioners to Mr. Weale, and Mr. Weale could manage every thing for his good friends and companions at the Board. Such is my Lord Howick's *responsible* tribunal, set up to redress the wrongs of the suffering poor! But it is only by a recurrence to other cases in which the lives of the poor have been sacrificed, that the consequences of these audacious proceedings can be estimated.

Previously to entering on these further sacrifices, it is proper to observe that, having considered the course adopted by the Board, in the pretended enquiry into my allegations, entirely precluded me from again acting with them, I no longer attended the Meetings of that body. Towards the end of December last, having seen several pauper funerals pass my window, I

* FACTS CONNECTED WITH THE MEDICAL RELIEF OF THE POOR IN THE BRIDGWATER UNION. PUBLISHED BY J. W. RUMSEY, WELLINGTON STREET, STRAND, LONDON.

† In both these mock enquiries the secret concocters of the resolutions, after acquitting themselves, slink behind Parliament. One scarcely knows which to admire most, the easy assurance displayed by thus evading the question, or the gross ignorance exhibited of the functions of Parliament. Parliament does not sit as a Court for persons accused to exculpate themselves before. As well might the Burkers have referred the charge against them, to the Committee then sitting on the Anatomy Bill. Parliament is instituting an enquiry, not for the punishment of offenders, but for the amendment of a Law. "If," said the first constitutional authority of the Realm, "if the habit were to prevail of carrying offences, real or supposed, into the legislative bodies, who shall establish themselves into courts of criminal equity, (so the star chamber has been called by Lord Bacon,) all the evils of the star chamber are revived. It signifies nothing whether a Court for this purpose be a Committee of Council, or a House of Commons, or a House of Lords; the liberty of the subject will be equally subverted by it. The true end and purpose of that House of Parliament which entertains *such a jurisdiction* will be destroyed by it."

called at the old Workhouse to obtain some information on the subject. I was there informed that some frightful disease had, in a short time, swept off many of the old inmates. On inspecting the Minutes of the Board, the Medical Weekly Return, and the Visitor's Book, I found that not the slightest allusion had been made to this terrific visitation. Even the Obituary, out of ELEVEN DEATHS, consecutively recorded, only contained TWO ENTRIES in the column headed "Reference to Surgeon's Book," and in one of these two cases, the death was ascribed to *natural decay*! On enquiring into all this suspicious concealment, it appeared that on the 3rd of November the inmates of the House were unusually free from disease. On the 4th, a wandering Vagrant, lousy, itched, and in a high fever, described as follows, appears for the first time in the "Medical Weekly Return," among the helpless old inmates of the Workhouse, who had no opportunity of escaping beyond the reach of infection.

Name.	Age.	Disease.	Observations.
Briffet, John,	28	congestion of brain	This man will in all probability not recover.

Briffet did however ultimately recover; but James Rosehill, a poor man who was appointed to attend on him, was seized *with the same disorder*, and died after a few days illness. Another poor man, George Parish, who nursed Rosehill, was seized in his turn, and was carried off with four other persons; all declared by the Governor, the Matron, and the woman who assisted in nursing, to have been seized in nearly the same manner. It providentially happened that this terrific disease, so wantonly introduced, broke out among the aged poor just as the Board were on the point of removing the inmates to the New Union Workhouse, otherwise the consequences might have been too frightful to contemplate, as all who were seized perished, with one exception.* The dates of seizure and of death are as follows.

Names.	Age.	When seized.	Died.
Rosehill, James, (nursed Briffet)	57	November 24th.	December 14th.
Jarman, Edward,	75	November 29th.	December 24th.
Gill, William,... ..	76	December 2nd.	December 7th.
Watts, Esau,	74	December 4th.	December 11th.
Starkey, Nicholas,... ..	85	December 4th.	December 7th.
Parish, George, (nursed Rosehill)	58	December 19th.	December 27th.

It will scarcely be believed that, the records of the Board contain no observations, directly or indirectly, bearing on this appalling visitation; by which

* This awful disease appears by the Governor and Matron's description, to have been somewhat similar to that which carried off Mr. Smith, one of the Relieving Officers of the White Chapel Union. On the Coroner's inquest, which was held on February the 16th, Mr. Read, the Parish Surgeon of White Chapel, deposed, that the deceased was attacked by fever, caught in the discharge of his duty. After a few days, determination of blood to the head took place, which brought on delirium. Another Relieving Officer was stated by the Coroner to have died of violent fever, caught in the discharge of his duty, in the Stepney Union. The Parish Surgeon of White Chapel further deposed, that a number of the Nurses in the Poor Houses had died from fever, and it was a singular fact that *scarcely one of them* who had been attacked by the disease had recovered.

six of our unfortunate fellow creatures were carried off in twenty days. Thus, while the Regulations, under which the poor were gruelled to death, were declared from the Chair to be *imperative*; those, unfavorable to the ravages of Pestilence, were considered a dead letter. The destruction of a litter of curs could not have been passed over with more indifference. No enquiry, either by Inquest or otherwise, was instituted, and the seizure of the poor victims is merely noticed in the Medical Weekly Return, as follows.

Names.	Nature of Disease.	Days when attended.	Observations.
Rosehill, ...	Congestion of the head.	From Nov. 24 to Dec. 13	Dead.
Jarman, ...	Determination of blood to the head.	Nov. 29 to Dec. 21	- - -
Gill,	- - - - -	Dec. 2nd to the 7th	- - -
Watts,	Ague.	Dec. 4th to the 12th	Dead.
Starkey, ...	No disease.	Dec. 4th to the 7th	- - -
Parish,	Inflammation.	Dec. 19th to the 27th	Dead.

It should be observed that in the cases of Rosehill, Jarman, Watts, and Parish, there are second entries under the head of "Nature of Disease." The other two victims have not another word given to them, neither is the existence of that unsparing pestilence by which, the Governor, Matron, and Nurse, declare these victims were carried off, alluded to in any manner whatever! The order for the Medical Attendant "to *record* and to *report* without delay to the Board of Guardians, the *cause and circumstances* of every death which may take place in the Workhouse," is thus treated with profound contempt. Out of the above six deaths which took place in 20 days, under such appalling circumstances, only three of them are carried out in the column for "observations" as being "*dead*". The other three are managed to be lost sight of by this monopoliser of Metropolitan distinctions. One of the victims, poor Gill, a decayed tradesman, who was nearly blind, has neither disease nor death marked against his name, and another, who was seized on the 4th of December and died on the 7th, has, marked against him, "*NO DISEASE*" but not the slightest notice is taken of his death in that return where the death, the "*cause and circumstances*" are directed to be entered by the Medical Attendant. Thus while the *savings* of the Board are secured by all the elaborate contrivances of treble inspection, check and vouchers, there are no vouchers considered necessary, by the Managers of that Board, for the due expenditure of the lives of these helpless creatures. They are first immured beyond the reach of public controul, exposed to the poison of malignant fever, consigned to the care of any stranger who happens to be the lowest bidder; and then passed to their graves without a reckoning!

I will not trust myself with any remarks on these mysteries of yon "Prison House;" or ask *why* the *managers* of the Board connived at all this concealment. If I were to do so, they would most probably be *again* directed to sit in judgment on themselves. The Honorable P. P. Bouverie might *again* declare in print, that the Board of Guardians is the "*ONLY TRIBUNAL*" by which such atrocities "*could* be enquired into." Mr. Weale might *again* receive orders

"to institute an enquiry," and after junketting with the other parties implicated, might concoct a verdict of acquittal, and offer to thrust some garbled details of the dark transaction into the chaos of a *general* Parliamentary enquiry. I will not, willingly, become a party to an audacious mockery, calculated to inflict an indelible disgrace on my Country, and to effect the enormous mischief of impressing the minds of the People with the dangerous belief that, they must not look to authority for the redress of injuries. To this fatal conclusion my unhappy brethren must inevitably arrive, if such disgusting mockeries as have been already exhibited are to be substituted for substantial justice.

But the frightful event thus slurred over without notice by these *Guardians* of the poor, is not a solitary example of the consequences of that sanction given by the Poor Law Commissioners, to the practice of exposing our helpless fellow creatures to the poison of malignant diseases. This new element of Workhouse economy has, under official patronage, expanded itself into a fruitful source of wealth. The New Union Workhouse, although it has only been in operation a few weeks, has contributed liberally towards another £4712. 11s. 1d. by the death of no less than THIRTEEN helpless creatures between the 17th of January last and the 1st of March! Upwards of FIFTY persons have been returned at one time, as laboring under various diseases; exclusive of a still greater number of concealed cases, being mostly those of Children confined to their beds by a violent eruption.* The Nurse, which the Board was at length induced to hire, (only on the 26th of January last;) lies at this moment in Typhus Fever, caught in the performance of her duty. In addition to Inflammatory Sore Throat and Congestion of the Brain, terminating fatally, there are, entered in the weekly reports of Mr. John Rodney Ward, a sufficient variety of fevers to furnish employment for a new School of Nosologists. There is "FEVER." "FEVER (SIMPLE)." "INFLAMMATORY FEVER." "SCARLET FEVER." "FEVER WITH ERUPTION." "FEVER WITH COUGH." "FEVER WITH DEBILITY." "FEVER WITH GREAT DEBILITY." "TYPHUS FEVER." "PUTRID FEVER." &c. &c.

And, to the eternal disgrace of human nature, be it stated, that into a house thus infested with some of the most formidable Plagues which ever assailed humanity, the helpless poor of the Bridgwater Union, containing forty Parishes, were ordered, when, in a season of terrific pressure, they implored relief from the united attacks of cold and hunger. Thus, a fraudulent advantage was taken of starvation wages and a winter of awful severity, to set up the appre-

* *Extract from the Visitor's Book.*

Question.—Are the inmates generally healthy, or is there any sickness prevalent among them?

January 5th.—They are generally healthy.

JAMES SOMERS.

Under this entry, is written by a Visiting Magistrate,

"I went round the house with Mr. Ward, the Medical Officer, on the 31st of December, and found that no less than 63 children were afflicted with the Itch, some of them in a great degree.

H. PARSONS."

Thus, the *regular* Visitor of the day declares the inmates to be "generally healthy," and the Medical Attendant conceals the existence of a disease in which, it is discovered by a *casual* Visitant, that no less than SIXTY THREE poor children are laid up!

hension of pestilence as one of the *tests of destitution*. The operation of this infamous system may be contemplated in the following abstract.

Week's ending.	Persons ordered into the House.	Persons admitted.	No. on the Sick List.	No. in the House.
1838.				
January 19th, - -	- 44 -	- 9 -	- 21 -	- 200 -
— 26th, - -	- 25 -	- 8 -	- 50 -	- 195 -
February 2nd, - -	- 16 -	- 6 -	- 54 -	- 191 -
— 9th, - -	- 73 -	- 14 -	- 35 -	- 191 -
— 16th, - -	- 17 -	- 18 -	- 37 -	- 206 -
— 23rd, - -	- 13 -	- 14 -	- 59 -	- 223 -
March 2nd, - - -	- 15 -	- 6 -	- 62 -	- 225 -
	- 203 -	- 75 -		

Thus, with an unexampled variety of Fevers, with an average of nearly 50 on the Sick List, and no less than THIRTEEN DEATHS in about six weeks, upwards of 200 of the suffering poor who asked for bread, were ordered into a house so infested! Here we have the true "Workhouse test of destitution," sanctioned by authority, and reduced to practice! The requisite instructions are equally brief and compendious. Employ the cheapest Medical aid you can procure;—get the Typhus Fever, and an assortment of other Plagues into your Workhouse;—be careful that no Medical survey be allowed;—call no second advice or assistance;* thus may your Fevers stand a better chance of having a clear course, and your returns be easily *managed*. In addition to the *direct* savings of this system by deaths, you will find, if your Fevers happen to work well, that even under the pressure of the most inclement season, out of 203 applicants for bread, 128 may be so terrified, by your offering them this new *test of destitution*, that they will prefer begging, pilfering, or famishing out of the house, to the more immediate destruction by Pestilence which threatens them within.

Here is a practical explication of the principles which the Poor Law Commissioners deliberately established by sending a charge of blood-guiltiness to be enquired into by the very parties implicated in the crime;—by officially expressing their "*satisfaction*" at the self-acquittal of these parties, without having seen one word of the evidence;—by withholding the report of their Assistant on the fatal transaction; and by neglecting to express any disapprobation on the misconduct of those persons whose *wilful* perseverance in wrong brought so many of their helpless fellow creatures to an untimely grave. By this course of conduct deliberately adopted, the Poor Law Commissioners I repeat, virtually said to all the Boards of Guardians in the Kingdom;—if you have a highly infectious and fatal disease raging in your Workhouse, send in as many of the helpless poor as you can to be subjected to the deadly infection; and if any complaint should be made of their having been got rid of in this way, we will refer the charge to yourselves. Examine such witnesses as

* When disease appeared among the Convicts in the Penitentiary, two extra Physicians were appointed; and soon after, a general Medical enquiry instituted: but this was for Convicts! The helpless poor, when assailed by pestilence, are left to the solitary care of the lowest bidder; who may, without incurring the slightest notice of the Board, slur over the Deaths in the Workhouse, in any manner which may happen to be the most convenient.

you "*think necessary*," and when you have acquitted yourselves, as you will of course do, we will express our *entire satisfaction* at the verdict, and hush up the whole affair by refusing to grant any information on the subject.

Such is the lesson deliberately taught by the Legislative assembly of Somerset House. The fatal results having been carefully copied from their own records; it now remains to be seen, how long the lives of our helpless fellow creatures are to be entrusted to *irresponsible* mercenaries, who have adopted for their principle of action, not only the spirit, but the very letter of Timon's malediction.

Let the famished flesh slide from the bones
Of the Needy; *or prisons swallow them,*
And diseases lick up their bloods.

Bridgwater, March the 4th, 1838.

P. S. Having brought the foregoing series of harrowing facts down to the present day, I now, Sir, offer You my grateful thanks for having enabled me to proclaim these fatal outrages to an extent which could not otherwise have been effected. I do likewise beg to offer my acknowledgments to the Conductors of other departments of the Public Press, who, while they differ widely in political opinion, have agreed in promulgating the foregoing statements, in the most liberal and disinterested manner. For this zealous co-operation and generous confidence, I can make no other return than to declare, that although I have already given scrupulous attention to the matter detailed, I hold myself bound to justify the confidence of the Public Press, by entering on a re-examination of any statement made by me which may be questioned by competent authority.

J. B.

May 20th







