Sydney Godolphin Osborne was born in Stapleford on 5 February, 1808. He was the third son of Baron Godolphin, and was educated at Rugby and Brasenose College. He served as rector of Durweston/Bryranstown, Dorset, from 1841 to 1845. As well as becoming a writer and crusader, S. Godolphin Osborne acted as an inspector of hospitals at Scutari. He came to Ireland during the famine in 1849 and wrote a series of articles for the Times. He returned to Ireland in the following year and went on to write his book *Gleanings of the West of Ireland*, based on his experiences in this country. When he died on 9 May, 1889, the magazine *Punch* paid him this warm poetic tribute:

S.G.O.
(Lord Sydney Godolphin Osborne, Died, May 9, Aged 81.)

Another long-heard voice at last is stilled!
Warm heart, which to all tales of suffering thrilled.
Sound head, which social problems loved to face,
You will be missed from your peculiar place,
Held long ere Bitter Cries found echoes free,
And aid of rhetoric, if not remedy;
When not all men were Socialists, and not
All eyes were open to each bane and blot
Found in the body-politic. E'en then
That sympathetic eye, that potent pen
Were dedicate to service of your kind,
To true benevolence, ardent, yet not blind,
And bettering of the village and the town.
Now, many wandering voices
As Social Oracles. But *Punch* looks back
With praise upon his honourable track
Of useful days who thirty years ago
Was known, and loved, by him as S.G.O.

Early in the summer of the year 1849, I was much struck with an account I read in the "Times" newspaper of the very large mortality from cholera, in the workhouses of the Ballinasloe Union, in the County of Galway, in the west of Ireland; I was also, with many others, much shocked with a discussion, which took place about the same time, in the House of Commons, relative to the effects of the famine, in that part of the sister country.

Circumstances, early in life, turned my attention to the condition of the poorer classes in England, and I had for many years taken an active and somewhat public part, with those who were seeking to ameliorate that condition. I could not but feel, that having devoted myself to this task of seeking the good of my poorer fellow creatures; I had no right to confine my work, to those of my own immediate country, if I could see any prospect of aiding the same class, in a country so closely connected with my own, and so easily accessible as Ireland. I therefore determined to go myself, and see how far what I had heard to be the case was true; and if true, to judge how far any individual effort could prove of benefit. The result of the tour I then made was kindly published for me in the columns of the "Times" newspaper; and I have reason to believe such publication proved at least of this much benefit; it brought public opinion to bear on many of those matters of detail, in the treatment of the poor, on which, the effect of that opinion is always most valuable.

This year again determined to devote my month's annual holiday to a second tour in the west of Ireland; I was this time accompanied by a friend, who wished to...
of Ireland are studied with more ease at this moment, by a traveller seeking to
cast man in men, women, and children, 
than perhaps in any country in the world; 
such a large proportion of the population 
being actually in the workhouses. I will 
here give a scale of the population, 
according to the census of 1841, of the 
Unions we visited, with a return of the 
average number of persons relieved 
weekly in the workhouses, in the quarter 
ending March 30, 1850.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Union</th>
<th>Population in</th>
<th>Relieved on an average each week 1841 in the Quarter ending March 30, 1850, in the Workhouse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limerick</td>
<td>132,067</td>
<td>6,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilrush</td>
<td>82,353</td>
<td>3,327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ennis</td>
<td>77,840</td>
<td>3,057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gort</td>
<td>71,774</td>
<td>2,246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballinasloe</td>
<td>99,026</td>
<td>2,284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway</td>
<td>88,973</td>
<td>3,712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clifden</td>
<td>33,465</td>
<td>1,932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westport</td>
<td>77,952</td>
<td>3,465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castletar</td>
<td>61,065</td>
<td>1,674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballina, including Belmellet, Dromore West, Killala</td>
<td>120,787</td>
<td>3,597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuan</td>
<td>74,974</td>
<td>2,627</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the districts to which I am about to 
call the reader's attention, the estimated 
amount of accommodation, i.e. that 
relative proportion of inmates to their 
rooms, was, perhaps, the most 
cruelly and disgracefully crowded. 

The first Union-house we visited was 
that at Limerick. Last year, when I 
went over it, I found it clean and in good order; I 
now found the reverse. In the 
parent and auxiliary houses there was no 
less a number than 8,000 paupers; every 
department, except the fever hospital, 
shewed evident symptoms of gross 
eglect. I have no words with which I can 
give any real idea of the sad condition 
of these large yards at the 
parent house, in which were a very large 
number of young female children; many of 
them were clothed in the meanest 
and ragged, and of these they wore a very scanty 
allowance; they were as the dirt collected 
on their persons for many weeks; there 
was not about them the slightest evidence 
of any the least care being taken of them; 
as they filed before me, two and two, they 
were a spectacle to fill any humane heart 
with indignation: sore feet, sore hands, 
sore heads; ophthalmia evident in the case 
of the great proportion of them; some of 
them were suffering from it in its very 
most cruelly and disgracefully crowded.
eloquent address made by a Guardian to his brethren, founded on a report he read of the condition of their poor; a report, which really almost did that horrid condition justice. I had also the amusement of hearing an eloquent, personal, hard-hitting debate carried on, in connection with the simple question — whether the paupers being without clothes, and the contractor unable at once to supply them, the Board should study the paupers’ need, and get calico at once elsewhere — or the contractor’s convenience, and wait his time? I had the pain of afterwards hearing the contractor’s interest won the day.

I went from the Board-room in company with the Medical officer, to visit an auxiliary-house in Clare Street, Limerick, there were about 800 able-bodied women in it — a few days before there had been 822 — for whom the Guardians had provided 267 beds! Let me here observe, that a considerable space in the dormitories was occupied as an infirmary — very many of the cases were of a description which in any decent public asylum would be rigorously separated from communication with the other inmates; these beds had only, as far as I myself observed, one person in each, so that the division of the rest of the beds amongst the inmates must have been very minute indeed. The sick ward, including all cases, had, however, according to the Board’s own admission, 115 patients in 88 beds, so that there were left 179 beds to 707 people, all adults!! It was acknowledged that many of the inmates had slept for weeks without beds or covering.

One would have supposed, with such crowding of the majority, and with such a number of sick, that sanitary measures — so far as regards the cleansing of the wards and linen, if not the persons, of the paupers — would have been strenuously enforced. Reader, it is but too true, that for weeks together neither soap or candles had been allowed to this house; for one month, at least, no linen was washed; for many months the matron had not been allowed any brushes, or any of the absolutely necessary articles to cleanse the wards. With regard to the house itself, it has already been the scene of one sad catastrophe; on an alarm of fire, a rush by the inmates was made to the staircase of a dormitory, and a great many lives were lost; such was the evident state of the walls, roof, and floors the day we visited it, except in the matter of apparently caring less for their lives than most men do for their dogs.

At another auxiliary-house, called I believe Mount Kennet, I found a very large number of boys; here there was a state of things nearly as bad. Since I was at Limerick these youths broke into open rebellion, and ‘the police force with fixed bayonets had some difficulty in subduing them. At another “auxiliary” the state of things amongst an immense body of children was most disgraceful; for weeks the bed linen had not been changed or washed, in fact, no soap had been allowed; the poor children had from time to time to lie naked in bed whilst their shirts, &c., were washed, when they were fortunate enough to have even this chance of cleanliness; we found some thus naked, and this was the excuse made. The infirmary, or sick ward, was a most piteous sight; to see these poor children suffering from dysentery and other diseases, the direct result of physical depression from want; in this suffering left so dirty, and so evidently neglected, was no small aggravation of the sense at which I had already arrived of the wanton abuse of their office shewn by the authorities of this union. The rain, as I stood by the side of one poor sufferer, called convalescent, was coming through the roof on the bed in which he was laid. I had heard the excuse made at the Board in the morning, for the evident want of clothing at the parent house, amongst the children; “that they had none to put on” — and yet, I found on strict inquiry, that shirts and shifts had been sent to one of the other auxiliaries, in which the children were, whilst I was at the Clare-street house. Can it be, that children were stripped at one establishment, and their clothes sent to hide from the visitor, the nakedness in another? If eloquence could clothe, I could easily believe in the power of this Board, with words to cover the naked; but in the absence of this extraordinary means, I am yet at a loss to know, whence came the shower of little shirts and shifts that afternoon.

As to the state of discipline in which these 8,000 paupers are held, a short time before I was in Limerick, the women and
children broke out of several of the houses, and actually marched bodily into the streets of the town; to the great disgust and terror of the quiet inhabitants.

I would wish now to state, that this Limerick Union, is by no means in any real financial difficulty; as a proof of it, at the time the “Rate in Aid” bill was passed, before it had received the royal assent, the Guardians actually struck a rate to carry them over two years, that they might thus evade the provisions of the Act. I will not argue on the honesty, or the policy of this measure; but I do argue from it, that a Union which has now a very large amount in the course of collection, notoriously collecting the rate with little difficulty, has no right to plead poverty against an accusation of an amount of neglect of duty, to which any amount of poverty would be no answer. At the end of last March, they had still £33,435 of the rate struck, yet uncollected.

I took some pains to ascertain, how such a Union, with a resident nobleman for chairman, could get into such a state of shameless disorganisation. I could get no satisfactory answer; my own impression, from all I heard and saw, is simply this - To feed, clothe, &c. 8,000 paupers, at the expense of a solvent Union, creates so large a demand, for the necessaries of the starving poor, that the wealthy, or the property-holders of the surrounding districts, feel it not safe, or desirable, to purchase their consumption elsewhere, but to resort to the poorhouses; such merits being weighed in the balance, the equilibrium of which owed its disturbance, more to the friendship, or hostility, of the parties, who were to decide on the acceptance of the tenders, than on the comparative quantity or value, of the samples tendered. I should much like to see the result of an inquiry into the receipts and disbursements of this Union, for the last two years; I only know one power which could be applied, with any hope of success, to such an investigation - the same Committee, or the same accountants, employed on the great Hudson railway inquiry.

To give the reader some idea of the spirit in which the Board business is conducted, I will quote from a published Report of a meeting of the Board, Lord Clare in the chair, held, I believe, the very day after I left Limerick; the concluding sentence of the concluding speech, was, “Having been in turn ushered in by the porter and some assisting paupers, some of whom, I observed, had sticks in their hands. The cases were disposed of with such celerity, that I presume the relieving officers had taken no common pains to ascertain the different features of each applicant’s case. I was shewn over the parent house and auxiliaries by the Clerk to the Union and the Medical officer; the numbers in the houses were 4,802. One of the first departments we entered was the Infirmary. I do not think my travelling companion will ever forget this his first introduction to the stern reality of famine. (Gleanings of the West of Ireland by the Hon. and Rev. E. Godolphin Osborne, London, 1850).