

POVERTY AND THE POOR LAW IN IRELAND 1850–1914. By Virginia Crossman. Pp 272. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. 2013. £75.

What emerges from this very welcome book is a story that is somewhat more reassuring than the dark picture of *teach na mbocht* with which we are all familiar. Virginia Crossman shows that once the Poor Law was firmly established in Ireland, it was continually adapted and modified to suit local circumstances and to cope with popular demand. An able and scholarly research team of three – Olwen Purdue, Seán Lucey and Georgina Laragy – enabled Crossman to attempt a comprehensive sweep of the Poor Law in the country as a whole, while an in-depth study of thirteen unions in representative parts of the country illustrates the day-to-day practical workings of several aspects of the relief.

The study zooms in and out skillfully, always holding the reader's attention. It focuses sometimes on individuals like single mother Bridget L. of Thurles, who, along with her children, used the workhouse very occasionally over the span of a decade (1901–10). It draws attention to six schoolboys who escaped over the wall of Westport Union to go to the races in 1866, and to the sexual abuse of boys by older men in Youghal workhouse in 1888. But the 'big-picture' information collected on the country as a whole is fascinating too, and prompts many questions. Why did both impoverished Connacht and parts of prosperous Ulster have such comparatively low expenditure on relief (indoor and outdoor) until the end of the century? Why were an increasing number of lunatics relieved in the workhouses instead of being sent to purpose-built asylums? Outdoor relief is easily explained – although a perversion of Poor Law philosophy, it was cheaper on a per-head basis than maintenance in the house, and less objected to across the social spectrum. Usually granted to those who had 'social capital' (defined by Crossman as a good reputation, and a network of friends and relatives in the locality) it brought its own challenges to administrators. Sometimes the relief doled out was only one of a number of sources of income, and the Relieving Officers recognised this – why else would a Mountmellick R.O. in 1910 have agreed to a woman's request that he leave the money with a neighbour while she was 'at work'? (p. 96).

A similar sense of entitlement developed about the workhouse itself, which tended to be used, as the century wore on, more for short stays and temporary relief than for long-term residence. Whole families rarely entered, Crossman shows; mothers and children were the usual family units to come in, while fathers were away looking for work or otherwise absent. Much misery must have remained in the system, therefore, because mother-and-child separation would usually have been more difficult than husband–wife or father–child separation. But mothers (married or single) and their children normally used the workhouse only as a temporary expedient to tide them over bad times. Individual unions developed their own interpretations of the Poor Law, even their own traditions and practices. In Glenties, for example, the children of unmarried mothers were (contrary to regulations) known by the surnames of their putative fathers – reminding us that unwed paternity in tightly-knit rural communities was often acknowledged by fathers themselves. Limerick and Tipperary Boards of Guardians were early adopters of generous outdoor relief in the 1860s and 1870s, probably because of the need to keep a pool of labour available to farmers. As standards of health care rose, workhouse infirmaries and lunatic wards also absorbed an increasing amount of the Guardians' energies and resources. Guardians also fretted about classifying and confining women who drifted in and out of the prostitute category, while they put the skids under others, mainly men on the move. Regarding vagrants, Crossman reaches more or less the same conclusion I did: that they were a category created by Poor Law and police, and never really existed as a distinct group.

Health care, 'fallen' women and vagrants are each the subject of a long and fascinating chapter, carefully rooted in statistical analysis and illustrated with lively and colourful stories about individual people. But these stories, we are reminded, tell us only about the few paupers who excited comment and caused controversy. Arthur Seymour in Cork

workhouse in the 1870s was one such: he complained (among other things) that he was not allowed to go to the Catholic chapel one Sunday and the Protestant service the next, but his confidence (like his free-thinking) was exceptional: 'He is well educated and might be sent on his business if it were not for the fact that his bodily deformity renders it difficult for him to find employment', the *Guardians* commented resignedly (p.154). Most inmates' complaints – when they made them – were more mundane.

Crossman's central argument, sustained throughout in a lively narrative, is that there were no great differences between England and Ireland in the day-to-day operation of the Poor Law. Her findings also support Niall O Ciosáin's argument in his essay in Tadhg Foley and Seán Ryder (eds) *Ideology and Ireland in the nineteenth century* (Dublin, 1998) that so-called 'ordinary' Irish people, and not just their 'betters' and/or English equivalents, made a clear distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor.

This excellent book deserves to become the standard and long-awaited text on the Poor Law in Ireland. Liberally supplied with tables and graphs, it will be raided for tutorial and seminar discussions, and its case histories and elegant, accessible style will make it attractive not only to students and academics, but to the general reader.

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THE GREEN AND THE GRAY: THE IRISH IN THE CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA. By David Gleeson. Pp 307. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2013. \$35.

The topic of the Irish in America remains a fascinating subject, and this intriguing study confirms Gleeson's leading role in twenty-first century scholarship examining ethnicity and identity during the Civil War era. This book joins an outstanding and pioneering body of work, including Susannah Ural's *The harp and the eagle: Irish-American volunteers and the Union army, 1861–1865*, Christian Samito's *Becoming American under fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the politics of citizenship during the Civil War era*, and Damian Shiels's *The Irish in the American civil war*. Gleeson's study highlights his topic's centrality to Irish history, demanding increased emphasis, especially as the American Civil War (after the First World War) is the conflict in which the highest number of Irish died in combat.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the majority of Irish immigrants arrived on American shores without any substantial means, but a significant minority became men of property and standing within the predominantly Protestant south. Catholic planters and leaders did not shy away from buying and selling slaves, including Bishop Patrick Lynch of Charleston, South Carolina, who would be sent to Rome in 1864, enlisted to plead the cause of Confederate diplomatic recognition to Pope Pius IX (who met with Lynch, but declined diplomatic overtures). Many Irish advocates of Confederate independence drew parallels between the secessionists of 1861 and Irish rebels in 1798. Although many, like Lynch, found their advocacy for southern independence challenged by the stumbling block of slavery.

Patriotism and pragmatism lured Irishmen into military service. Many of the 20,000 who joined the Confederate army enlisted in Hibernian units – the Emerald Guards or Shamrock Guards. Military service accelerated assimilation, but Gleeson also features messier aspects, for example high rates of desertion and draft resistance. Irish units might confront one another in combat, as when Union commander Thomas Francis Meagher led his troops up Marye's Heights at the Battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862. During this famous charge, the Irish Brigade were decimated by southern troops, including an Irish unit from Georgia, the Lochrane Guards. Gleeson is particularly adept at tracing how Irish ambiguity during the war shape-shifted into battlefield glorification during the post-war period,