time he felt certain he should be able, in the course of the present session, to bring forward a measure on the subject, and it was his confident belief that it would pass into a law this session. He should only advert briefly to the third point. He felt that the practitioners of Scotland and Ireland were subjected to great hardship by the interpretation put on the act with reference to English practitioners, and that some legislative measure was called for on that particular point.

IRISH MEDICAL CHARITIES.

On the motion of Mr. French, Mr. French, Lord Eliot, Mr. Attorney-General for Ireland, Mr. George Hamilton, Viscount Jocelyn, Lord Courtenay, Mr. Young, Colonel Acton, Mr. Villiers Stuart, Mr. Gregory, Mr. William S. O'Brien, Dr. Boyd, Captain Archdall, Captain Taylor, and Sir William Somerville, were appointed a select committee to inquire into the state of the medical charities in Ireland, and to report what alterations appear necessary for the purpose of improving the system under which they are conducted, and for extending their advantages more generally amongst the people.—*Times*.

ALLEGED NEGLECT ON THE PART OF THE BEDMINSTER UNION GUARDIANS.

TO THE EDITORS OF THE PROVINCIAL MEDICAL JOURNAL.

GENTLEMEN,—A case having recently occurred in this neighbourhood, of alleged neglect on the part of the Board of Guardians of the Bedminster Union, of a family who were suffering from want and sickness, I submit to your notice the following details of the affair:—

In the parish of Tickenham, in the above union, dwelt a man of the name of John Durbin, by trade a sawyer, not a very strong man, and earning upon an average about twelve shillings per week; moreover, his wife had for years been a weakly woman, and subject to frequent alarming attacks of asthma. In January last, a daughter (Charlotte Durbin) was taken ill in fever, when the man applied to me to attend her, and she was attended unremittingly by my assistant, Mr. George Adams, from that time until she became convalescent in March; her attack was of a very dangerous nature, and accompanied with symptoms of extreme prostration; the father frequently sat up with her by night, which of course incapacitated him from his usual daily labor, and he expended what little money he had in purchasing wine and other necessaries for the poor girl. By his nightly watchings and constant anxieties his strength became reduced, and by the expences incidental to his daughter's illness his resources were exhausted, when in the month of March, before the recovery of Charlotte was completed, his own health became impaired; he was soon confined to his bed, and symptoms of urgent prostration set in. About the same time two younger children fell ill, with whom also symptoms of rapid prostration manifested themselves. In this state of things it seemed desirable that parochial relief should be obtained, for although the man was in a club which paid him seven shillings per week, and found him in medical attendance rendered by myself, yet the three sick children re-

quired constant medical care, whilst both the children and the father needed stimulating and nutritious diet, which could only be obtained by putting them under the care of the medical officer of the district; their residence being out of my district, my assistant advised the mother, about Saturday, the 18th of March, to apply to the relieving officer of the district for subsistence and an order for medical relief. He was applied to on the Monday following, and visited them the same day, but was afraid to enter the house lest he should convey contagion home to his own family; he, however, ascertained all important particulars, and reported them accurately to the board the next day, Tuesday, March 21. They were to this effect—"John Durbin, ill in fever (average earnings, twelve shillings per week); wife sickly; three children ill in fever; man entitled to seven shillings per week and medical attendance from club; subsistence wanted for wife and children; medical relief wanted for three children; ordered by the board two and sixpence and three loaves of bread by way of loan; *medical relief refused*." Within a day or two of this board meeting I met the relieving officer, and asked him how it was that this family were allowed to die for want of the necessaries which their situation required; his answer was, "I cannot go beyond my instructions from the board—namely, to lend them two and sixpence and three loaves of bread." I said, "Bread is of no use to them, for they cannot eat it; they want wine, &c." I added, as I drove on, "It is poor economy; the end will be that the poor fellow will die, and the parish will have to maintain his widow and family." Before the week was over, one child and the father died, and soon after the other child. On the Monday following, March 27, an order for medical relief was given to the medical officer of the district, who attended, and the necessary dietary was ordered; but a third child has since sickened and died, and another child is now very ill.

The affair excited attention from some of the neighbouring gentry, and animadversion was made upon the case. Discussions occurred at the board, when the chairman declared that the whole blame rested on my shoulders, that I ought to have memorialised the board in favor of this family, that I had done so in other instances, and that I was aware I might have done so successfully in this, or words to this effect. Upon this a gentlemen rose and said, that so grave a charge being made against me in my absence, it seemed to him desirable that a request be forwarded to the commissioners to send down an assistant commissioner to investigate the case; this was seconded by another county magistrate, and acquiesced in generally. Thursday, April 20, was fixed for the investigation before the assistant commissioner, who, arriving the day before, was invited to the chairman's house, dined with him, slept at his house, breakfasted with him in the morning, and was his companion in his carriage and pair from his residence to the union house. Far be it from me to insinuate that there was anything out of place in this arrangement, but I am not the only person who smiled at witnessing this *ruse* of the worthy chairman. I should, however, hope that the chairman was too honorable a man to take any advantage of this opportunity for making an *ex parte* statement to the assistant commissioner, whilst I

should trust that the latter would have too great a respect for the interests entrusted to him by the public to permit such a statement to be made to him; but I do think it would have been more decorous and straightforward had their first salutations been exchanged upon the threshold of the board-room, for fair play is a jewel so precious in the eyes of every true born Briton, that its brilliancy should not be sullied even by the breath of suspicion. Well, the investigation came on—a star chamber inquiry of course. As an accused party I objected to be put upon my oath, and my statement was given upon honor. The commissioner was very inquisitive to know if I was in the habit of ordering a dietary for my club patients; what he was driving at I do not know, nor could I make out whether any body else in the room besides himself and the chairman understood his drift. When I stated that my assistant had advised Durbin's wife to apply to the relieving officer, the chairman asked me very unceremoniously how I could be sure that my assistant told the truth. I answered, "because he is a gentleman, and I dare not doubt his word." Surely the chairman must have felt his case a very lame one if such quibbles and props were to be brought forward to support it. However, the broad stone of accusation against me must be fairly exposed. It appears, that at the memorable meeting of the board on the 21st of March, the request by the relieving officer for medical relief for the three children of poor Durbin was negatived by three very decided and very rapidly uttered "Noes" from the chairman, so that unless he can shift the saddle upon some other back, it will be found a good fit for his own; and the board, collectively, are only so far to blame as they allowed the chairman to utter his opinions so decidedly and rapidly, knowing as they must that his opinions are occasionally hastily formed, quickly uttered, and tenaciously adhered to. Now there is yet another back to put the saddle on, and that is my own, so the chairman declares that I ought to have addressed the board in favor of this family—that my not having done so is the cause of all the evil that has arisen in the case—that I had done so in other instances, which he was prepared to prove—and how does he prove it?—by bringing forward, as a *precedent*, a note of mine, addressed to a relieving officer of another district, recommending meat and beer for a convalescent, which note is dated more than *two weeks* after the application to the board for Durbin—viz., April 7. An *ex post facto* occurrence as a *precedent*! If there was any *precedent* in the case, Durbin's affair was a precedent for this note; and truly such a tragedy might have justified any application of the kind. But let us sift this matter a little further, and let us see how far, even barring the anachronism, the cases are parallel. The note alluded to was written under the following circumstances:—I had attended one William Barnett, a club patient, at Walton, in Gordano, for two months, in acute rheumatism. He was convalescent, but very weak, and in this condition applied to the relieving officer of the district for relief; the relieving officer requested the medical officer of the district to visit the man, and report his necessities; the medical officer of the district, however, thought I could better state the man's requirements, as I had been his regular

attendant; told the relieving officer this, and afterwards requested me to write a statement for him to the relieving officer of what diet the patient stood in need, which I did on the 7th of April, and thus furnished to the chairman a precedent for what had occurred two or three weeks previously, and under diametrically opposite circumstances! "Oh! (says the chairman) but this may be only the last link of a chain of which the former links may be in existence in other places." "Then wait, sir (I answered), until you have discovered the other links, and then, but not till then, forge the chain to hang around my neck." In fact, I am positive I have never given any order for meat, wine, or other necessaries, without having previously received a medical order from the relieving officer or other competent authority. In the present instance, the relieving officer so promptly visited the applicants, and so accurately reported their necessitous condition to the board, that the only wonder is how the board could stop their ears and steel their hearts to such a tale of misery; and if the relieving officer durst speak his opinion he must acknowledge he was petrified with astonishment at the thrice repeated "*no*" from the chairman to the application for medical relief. One observation of the chairman, in answer to my defence before the assistant commissioner, I must not pass over, as it either condemns himself or the system; I think the former. He said the relieving officer's report came before them as a mere ordinary case, and was passed over, as twenty others might be. What a chairman, thus to pass over catalogues of misery, want, destitution, disease! or what a system, thus to put into any chairman's power the opportunity to disregard the miseries of his fellow-creatures, unless, perchance, some officious individual goes out of his way to corroborate the graphic statements of the officer whose duty it is to make all preliminary inquiries, and report them to the board.

And now, Sir, having made my statement, I have only to add that towards the chairman, *personally*, I have not a spark of unkind feeling; in fact, I believe him to be a kind-hearted man; but he is, as I have before stated, sometimes a little too hasty in forming his opinions. In a moment of inconsiderateness he said "*no*," when he ought to have said "*yes*;" and few of us, however much we may believe in the fallibility of human nature as it exists in others, are willing to acknowledge its existence in ourselves, or, if we allow it in the abstract, we cannot bring ourselves to allow it in particulars. I cannot, therefore, be surprised that in the instance above alluded to the chairman should pounce upon me as the scape-goat for his error; when I remember that I am a medical officer of the union, and that this is not the first time that the active magistrate and attentive chairman who figures in this business has entertained a different opinion from myself upon the subjects at issue before the board.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

THEODORE DAVIS.

Tickenham-house, near Bristol,
April 21, 1843.