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**Distress and Benevolence on
Gertrude Fitzgerald's Limerick Estate in the 1840s**

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Distress and Benevolence on Gertrude Fitzgerald's Limerick Estate in the 1840s

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In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the author acquired about 30,000 letters written mainly in the 1840s. These pertained to estates throughout Ireland managed by James Robert Stewart and Joseph Kincaid, hereafter denoted SK. Until the letters - called the SK correspondence in what follows - became the author's property, they had not seen light of day since the 1840s. Addressed mainly to the SK office in Dublin, they were written by landlords, tenants, the partners in SK, local agents, etc. After about 200 years in operation as a land agency, the firm in which members of the Stewart family were the principal partners - Messrs J.R. Stewart & Son(s) from the mid-1880s onwards - ceased business in the mid-1990s.

Since 1994 the author has been researching the SK correspondence of the 1840s. It sheds many new insights into economic and social conditions during the decade of the great famine, and into the operation of Ireland's most important land agency during those years. It is intended ultimately to publish details on many of the estates managed by SK in book form. The proposed title is *Landlords, Tenants, Famine: Business of an Irish Land Agency in the 1840s*, a draft of which has now been completed.

A majority of the letters in the larger study from which the present article is drawn are on themes some of which one might expect: rents, distraint (seizure of assets in lieu of rent); "voluntary" surrender of land in return for "compensation" upon peacefully quitting; formal ejectment (a matter of last resort on estates managed by SK); landlord-assisted emigration (on a scale more extensive than many historians of Ireland in the 1840s appear to believe); petitions from tenants; complaints from tenants, about both other tenants and local agents; major works of improvement (on almost all of the estates managed by SK); applications by SK, on behalf of proprietors, for government loans to finance improvements; recommendations of agricultural advisers hired by SK, etc.

During the 1840s SK managed three estates in west and southwest Limerick. These were those of John Stratford in the Robertstown district on the Shannon estuary¹, of Sergeant Warren near Ballingarry, and of Mrs Gertrude Blakeney Fitzgerald. The SK correspondence provides more detail on the Fitzgerald estate than on the other two. Although there was distress in all three

districts throughout the 1840s, in each case SK's treatment of the tenantry must be considered generally humane.

Mrs Fitzgerald and the Mount Blakeney Estate

The Fitzgerald lands were between Charleville and Kilmallock. They included most of Mount Blakeney (563 statute acres) and the contiguous townland of Thomastown (953 statute acres)². These lands were generally known as the Mount Blakeney estate. Mrs Fitzgerald resided about 60 (English) miles away, at Whitegate House near Cloyne in southeast Cork. SK commenced as her agent circa 1843. John Murnane, a tenant on the nearby Bruce estate, was appointed as bailiff on Mrs Fitzgerald's Limerick property³.

The previous agent for the Mount Blakeney estate was named Penrose, who was related to Mrs Fitzgerald. That Penrose was the agent in the early 1840s is indicated by the following extract from a letter dated 23 October 1844 to Mrs Fitzgerald, from Maurice Foley of Thomastown: "Stewart and Kincaid are making a claim on me for a gale of rent that became due during the Agency of Mr Penrose. That gale I did conceive Mr Penrose if he had continued the Agent would have considered me entitled to be allowed for my great outlay in Draining, Ditching and Manuring Mr Penrose ... will tell you that notwithstanding my great outlay in above improvements it is set at too high a rent to enable me to pay you".

Links between SK and Gertrude Fitzgerald involved more than business alone. On 21 June 1841 Thomas Stewart wrote to Kincaid: "Tell me if there is any proper legal form of appointing an Agency & if there is pray send me one directed to Whitegate House Cloyne, for ... my young Lady". The writer was the same Thomas Stewart who was listed by Walford in 1860. Walford informs as follows⁴:

STEWART, Thomas Blakeney-Lyon, Esq. (of Whitegate House)
Fourth son of the late Henry Stewart ... by Elizabeth, eldest dau. of 2nd Lord Longford; b. 1802; ... m. 1855 Anne, 4th dau. of James Penrose ... co. Cork; assumed the additional names of Blakeney and Lyon in 1855 ... on succeeding to the Mount Blakeney estates Heir Pres., his brother James Robert, b. 1805; m. 1835 Martha Eleanor, dau. of R.B. Warren.

The above-mentioned James Robert was the J.R. Stewart of SK. In the 1840s, a close bond between Gertrude Fitzgerald of Whitegate House, and J.R. Stewart, was indicated by the fact that her letters to SK were almost always directed to him, who she usually addressed "my dear friend". His brother Thomas was also friendly with Gertrude Fitzgerald in the early 1840s; however, Thomas succeeded to the Mount Blakeney estate through his marriage to

a daughter of James Penrose.

Details on how Gertrude Fitzgerald's properties passed to Thomas Stewart are unclear. The following hypotheses are plausible: Mrs Gertrude Blakeney Fitzgerald was nee Blakeney or Penrose; she married a Fitzgerald⁵ of Whitegate House but was a widow by the early 1830s; she died circa 1850, at which time her close relative Anne (who may have been her younger sister) inherited the properties; it was through his marriage to this Anne that Thomas Stewart succeeded to the properties.

Reallocation of Land and the Case of John Callaghan

Mount Blakeney townland is isolated. There is no road which cuts fully through it. Thomastown is intersected, from east to west, by the main road from Kilmallock to Charleville, and another road intersects the townland from south to north. These roads were already in place by the early 1840s.

The leases of some middlemen expired around the time at which SK commenced management of the Mount Blakeney estate. There was some "pyramiding" in the structure of middlemen: in at least one case there were two middlemen between the head landlord and the ultimate tenants⁶. SK decided to get rid of the middlemen whose leases had expired, and to rationalise [i.e. "square"] the structure of holdings. This meant that the firm was able to get rid of undertenants, at least some of whom were compensated for surrendering their land. It seems that most of those who left at the time of squaring had been undertenants to the former middlemen⁷. There were also some adjustments in the mearings of those who were allowed to stay. Thus, on 29 March 1844 James Donovan, who was hungry for land⁸, wrote to Mrs Fitzgerald informing her that Kincaid had been on the estate the previous day, and that he had "taken from me the Best two acres I had of my former holdings ... and has given them to my Brother". In order to facilitate squaring among the tenants who were allowed to stay, SK insisted that certain tenants would have to compensate other tenants for their transfer of interest in holdings.

In 1844, abatements in rent were granted to some of the tenants on the new holdings⁹: presumably, it was intended that these would partly offset "restart" costs. In at least one case an ejectment decree, which was not executed, was obtained, apparently in order to expedite resettlement on the estate. Thus, on 16 April 1844 John Russell of Thomastown wrote to SK: "I did not think that the Costs of Ejectment [£13-odd] would be so high". Russell agreed to pay these costs, and he was allowed to stay on the estate¹⁰.

A policy of population reduction was recognised among the

tenantry by March 1844. One of the earliest letters in the SK correspondence about the estate is from John Walsh to Mrs Fitzgerald, 18 March 1844, in which he pleaded: "John Walsh ... has paid Twenty Five Pounds Sterl. in advance for that part of Mt Blakeney lately occupied by Michl. Fitzgibbon ... and most humbly implores your compassion and mercy towards him, and not have him now removed from this place". On 20 March, Walsh sent a similar plea addressed to "Henry Stewart" (J.R. Stewart's father, who had died a few years earlier) at the SK office in Dublin. In this he added that both his father and grandfather had been tenants on the estate, and that his land amounted to about 5 acres. Walsh's letter of 18 March contained an addendum in his support written by his parish priest, Rev David Nagle; that of 20 March contained a similar supportive addendum written by Henry Rose, rector of the Church of Ireland Parish of Kilbreedy Minor. He was not successful in his pleas that he be allowed to stay. On 26 March 1845 Murnane wrote that "Walsh gave up the possession immediately without any trouble".

In at least one case in 1844, a tenant departing from the estate appears to have received assistance to enable him to go to America. Thus, on 29 April, Michael Bernard, who had surrendered his land and had received money from SK, wrote to SK that he had "not words to express my gratitude for your kindness. I have also received the enclosed from C Grunshaw and Co. [Passenger Agents¹¹], Liverpool with whom I had engaged to carry us out I had not sufficient money to buy clothing I ... hope your honor will forward me your order".

In connection with squaring the lands, John Callaghan was a troublesome tenant. The broad facts in regard to him were as follows: Early in 1844 he received £15 from SK on the understanding that he would promptly surrender his land. Around the same time, John Bernard was assigned a portion of Callaghan's land. Furthermore, it was agreed that John Bernard would pay Callaghan £4 for having planted crops there. But by March 1844 Callaghan had changed his mind: he now refused to surrender the farm. On 21 March, Murnane reported to SK: "I got possession from Keefe and Michael Bernard and paid them their money. I gave Bernards part to his Brother Callaghan will not give up the possession If you send me Walsh and Reddy's money I think the[y] will give up".

Callaghan wrote to Mrs Kincaid, c/o the SK office in Dublin, on 24 March: "From the reply of your respected Husband [Joseph] Kincaid Esqr. that my letter of the 8th Inst. did not meet his or your Ladyship's approbation ... I am now deprived of any future hope for my poor wife and six helpless children I did not think it imprudent to solicit your Ladyship's intercession on my behalf to Mr Kincaid If pity ever was extended towards an honest industrious and indignant family, let it now prevail Say something in my favour".

On 31 May, Murnane wrote to SK stating that he had arranged settlements with or between certain named tenants; however "John Callaghan would not settle by any means except he would get his land. Therefore you must follow the Ejectment against him". On 9 August, Murnane reported to Kincaid that "Callaghan was up with Mrs Fitzgerald this week". Two days later Callaghan sent Kincaid a petition, which "Sheweth":

That ... petr. went and saw Lady Fitzgerald at Whitegate and remonstrated ... on the grounds of memorialist and ancestors being always tenants to her illustrious family on the lands of Mount Blakeney Memorialist stated to her Ladyship that the fifteen pounds handed by your honour to Memorialist at the surrendering of his lands that he would now return the same to your honr. In reply her Ladyship has referred Memorialist to your honrs. consideration Memorialist most humbly pray yr. honr. will ... continue Memorialist as tenant Otherwise Memorialist and six helpless children has no other resource but the workhouse.

Recall that apart from receiving £15 from SK conditional on surrendering his land, Callaghan had agreed to accept £4 from the incoming tenant on part of his land, John Bernard. However, Callaghan refused to allow Bernard to occupy the land assigned to him (Bernard). Bernard therefore sought legal action against Callaghan, who wrote to Kincaid on 11 August 1844: "Bernard summoned him to Kilmallock Petty Sessions on Friday last for malicious trespass, and a second charge for being in dread of killing him and setting fire to his house. But memorialist [Callaghan] was at once acquitted".

On 12 August 1844 John Bernard wrote to SK: "I am now ready to pay Callaghan the four pounds that you ordered me to give him, but ... I fear that ... he or his people-in-law (the Carrolls) intend to take the Crop He, Callaghan, has his horse on the land still and positively forbids me to turn my Cow on the land". Bernard was correct in his anticipations. On 3 September 1844 John Stewart, an agricultural adviser hired by SK (not a close relative of J.R. Stewart), wrote to SK from Mount Blakeney: "This morning ... Callahan (that is the man that got £19 for to leave the land) and his Brother in law got a party of about 200 men and cut a field of oats and carried it off. Murnane was there & three of the Police but they struck the Police with stones They have taken the ringleader & three others of the rioters & 17 Police have come since and taken more".

Although it differed in details, Murnane's report to SK on the next day was broadly similar: "Callaghan and the Carrolls ... cut two acres and half of Bernards oats yesterday and carried it off the lands. I went myself on the lands to protect the oats being

carried off, but all in vain. I had three of the police from Kilmallock with me and ... we were beattin off with stones and sickels. They were in number more than 70 men and women I went from the lands to Kilfinane [about 8 miles away] to get more police Four of them were taken and bailed for friday which is the Court day in Kilmallock". The SK correspondence does not reveal what happened at the Kilmallock petty sessions. However, a letter to SK from Murnane, 27 September 1844, reported that "John Bernard caut [caught] Callaghan a second time by night taking his oats".

On 12 March 1845 Murnane wrote to SK that "Callaghan is still holding out". On 26 March, Bernard wrote to SK: "John Mournane, and me, Went on yesterday, to get the possession from Callaghan, of that part of the lands of Mount Blakeny, which your Honour promised I should get on the 25th March ... which possession he has Overheld, and Refused giving". Murnane provided further details in a letter of the same date: "John Griffin [Sergeant Warren's bailiff] went with me to John Callaghan and begged of him to give up the possession Callaghan took a pike in his hand and swore he would run any person that would come near him".

Little had changed in regard to Callaghan by 12 May, when Murnane reported to SK that "he told me ... not to dare come inside the farm". Callaghan made a further plea to SK on the next day when he wrote: "Is there anything more unfair ... than to take the part of one man having a large family and whose Ancestors have lived on this Estate for the last Century, and hand it over to another [John Bernard] ... who has no original claim, save his being a Lot holder ... to the late Thomas White¹² [a middleman] Leave me my little holding and you shall be honestly repaid what money you gave me".

On 12 June 1845 Mrs Fitzgerald wrote to SK that she was "very sorry that Callaghan is giving you both such trouble. I hope you will conquer him peaceably". Murnane, however, was soon contemplating more drastic action: on 10 July he wrote to SK that "I think I will be able to have Callaghan in Limerick [prison] snug before you when you come to the assizes". Upon the receipt of this letter in Dublin on 11 July, SK noted on the back of it: "We wrote to him [Murnane] yesterday on the subject of a compromise with Callaghan". Details here are unclear. However, on 10 July, Mrs Fitzgerald's solicitors in Cork City, Colburne and Bennett, wrote to SK, in a letter which was received in Dublin on 11 July: "Limerick assizes are fixed for the 17th inst. Mr Kincaid who got up possession from Callaghan, and put him back again, is our Chief Witness". On 13 July, Murnane wrote to SK, presumably in response to the firm's proposal of a compromise with Callaghan: "He give no settlement unless he got his Crops together with £10-0-0 which of course I would not consent to. I will have him arrested". Callaghan was in prison on 16 July, when Murnane wrote to SK from Limerick City: "I lodged Callaghan

in the County prison He told me he would sooner be hanged than settle I have arrested him [more accurately, had him arrested¹³] in his Bed this morning at 5".

The exact charges against Callaghan are unknown. But the plaintiffs did seek an ejectment decree. On 18 July, Bennett the solicitor saw technical difficulties and urged SK to give Callaghan £30 for surrender of the land. Stewart Maxwell, a senior employee of SK, declined this proposal and decided to visit Callaghan in jail. He reported that "the fellow is in a wretched state of mind and says that ... he does not care very much what happens to him"; however, "he at last consented to take 15£ and to get his potatoes" in return for quietly giving up possession. It seems, following further pressure from Bennett, that the case against Callaghan was struck off the list¹⁴.

Although it does not seem to have gone before the Court, the legal costs incurred in July 1845, associated with the case against Callaghan, were at least¹⁵ £14. The case was settled before 30 July, when Mrs Fitzgerald wrote to SK that "although I deeply regret your having had so much trouble with Callaghan ... you but carried out my wishes in expelling him quietly".

On 7 August 1845 Murnane informed SK that he had "got the possession from John Callaghan and turned every farthings worth belonging to him out off [of] the house and lands and left seven men in care of the place last night". On 10 August he wrote to SK indicating the state of Callaghan's former lands, as follows: "2 acres of Bad oats, 1½ ditto of potatoes, ½ meadowing, 3 1/4 ditto pasture or waist land".

News of Callaghan's surrender spread quickly. As early as 26 July 1845 Edmond Kelliher, who described himself as "the most Solvent tenant on the Estate", sought Callaghan's farm. On 31 July, John Bernard wrote to SK: "Some of the Tenants ... are tampering with your Honours respecting Callaghans Holdings, which your Honour told me I was to get, when I before paid Callaghan four pounds for the seed and labour for Same, besides being Watchful Day and Night. Nothing could Induce me to believe any other person would get it". But on 10 August, Murnane recommended that a person named John Hickey be assigned an acre of Callaghan's farm. Thus, it can only be presumed that John Bernard became tenant on part of Callaghan's land.

Maxwell subsequently indicated sympathy for Callaghan. On 6 December 1845 he wrote to SK from Limerick City: "Stewart [the agriculturalist] hints throughout [a letter received from him] of John Murnane being behaving very ill ... and states ... that poor John Callaghan against whom we had to bring Ejectments last assizes was put up by Murnane to set the part he did. I trust that Mr Kincaid will be there to investigate the matter and if he is not I shall do my utmost to get at the Truth and have

already taken active steps at coming at it". Callaghan was, however, still on the estate early in 1846, though not as an immediate tenant of Mrs Fitzgerald: in March, Murnane reported that "Callaghan ... lives in one of John Keeffes Cabins".

Other Pre-Famine Developments on Mount Blakeney

The tenants on the estate usually paid rent in the form of cash. In the period before the famine, there were some instances in which they paid rents through bank transfers to SK. Murnane also used the banking system to transfer rent receipts to Dublin, and SK, in turn, used letters of credit to transfer rental income, dispatched to Dublin, to Mrs Fitzgerald's account at the Bank of Ireland in Cork City¹⁶.

The pre-famine SK letters do not provide a single example in which we can be certain that an ejectment decree was executed in connection with non-payment of rent on the Mount Blakeney estate. There were several cases of "voluntary" surrender of land. In a sense, this suited both the tenant (who usually received compensation, and who avoided possible legal costs associated with ejectment) and the landlord (who avoided the time-consuming and expensive process of obtaining ejectment decrees and of having such decrees executed). Distraint, and placement of keepers on tenants' lands in order to prevent clandestine sale of farm produce, were the usual means of extracting rents due from those in arrears. Thus, on 9 August 1844 Murnane wrote to SK: "There is no chance of getting any money from the Defaulters before the end of September. Would you advise me to put keepers on Sullivan for Crops is near at hand". On 21 August, Murnane reported to SK: "I distrained Sullivan He has but two acres of oats I have ... liberty to thrash the oats and will go and send to market I have laid one man by day and two by night [as keepers] By these means I will be able to get one years rent from him". On 27 September 1844 Murnane wrote to SK: "If you allow me to place two or three keepers on all the Defaulters I would be able ... to send you all the back rents". Distraint and placement of keepers in 1844 - a year in which the harvest on the estate was poor - seems to have borne fruit: on 7 January 1845 SK were able to transfer £400 to Mrs Fitzgerald's bank account.

On 27 September 1844 Murnane informed SK that "the potatoes are very bad with most of the tenants". A letter from John and James Keeffe of Thomastown, 28 October 1844, reported "the total failure of five acres of Potatoes We are ... sending a Memorial to her Ladyship". The Keeffes were not the only tenants who petitioned Mrs Fitzgerald in October 1844. On 30 October she wrote to Kincaid: "I enclose a Letter which I received ... from Maurice Foley I hope you will excuse my troubling you with it, as I am persuaded you will both act impartially, and allow

the Tenants any reasonable indulgence you may think them entitled to. Since I wrote the above I received the accompanying Petition from John and James Keefe ... which I leave to your better judgement".

On 12 March 1845 Murnane informed SK that he had "offered to take one quarters rent from the Keffes which the[y] are not able to pay. The[y] have not one single potatoes to put in the ground nor for their own use. If nothing cannot be done for them you must Eject". On 13 April he wrote that "the Defaulters on the Estate is worse off now There is no means". Thus, following a partial failure of the potato crop on the Mount Blakeney estate late in 1844, distress seems to have been severe early in 1845. Because certain tenants in arrears had no means, an attempt to distrain would have been pointless. However, during the Summer of 1845 keepers were placed on the lands of some of those who did have means. For example, on 14 June 1845 Murnane informed SK: "I put keepers on Duane, James Donovan and the Twohys for the balance of May 44 [rents] I have broken up the Combination [against payment of rent] and will be able to remitt a large sum before long".

Distrain and placement of keepers annoyed tenants, who were obliged to pay costs. Thus, on 14 June 1845 "James Donnovan" sent SK "an Order on the National Bank of Ireland for £13-17s-3d being the Ballance due of the last Nov. Rent". He added that there had been "a Notice Served on me by Mournane stating my being Distrained. He ought go to School to learn to draw a more Correct One Mournane has Compelled me to pay Six Shillings Cost. Will your Honors Allow such Conduct".

Murnane was correct in his anticipation that placement of keepers early in June 1845 would speedily yield results. As already indicated, James Donovan paid up almost immediately, and the representatives of "Joseph Keeff" (to May '44), the representatives of "John Twohy" (to May '44), as well as "Jeremiah Keeffe", paid within two weeks. On 24 July 1845 SK sent a letter of credit for £500 to the Bank of Ireland in Cork City, for Mrs Fitzgerald's account.

As crops ripened, Murnane placed keepers on other holdings in the Autumn of 1845. However, there was little danger that the widow Ambrose would be able to sell her crops clandestinely. On 4 November, Murnane informed SK that he had employed "a keeper on the widow Ambrose effects as she is in a dying way¹⁷ There is two years rent due of her the first of November".

The only other interesting developments on the Mount Blakeney estate, recorded in the SK letters of the pre-famine period, are about improvements. Until the Summer of 1845 these consisted of small-scale drainage projects for which tenants were granted allowances against rent. In the Autumn of 1845 John Stewart the

agriculturalist was on the estate supervising repairs to a road. Arthur Vincent, the SK agent on the Stratford estate in the Robertstown district, came to inspect this road, and on 2 September he wrote stating that "it will be a very great convenience to the tenants".

Following the poor harvest (including partial failure of the potato) in 1844, John Stewart was optimistic in regard to the 1845 harvest. In a letter from Mount Blakeney to SK dated 1 September 1845, he stated that "the Crops on this Estate are very good". However, on 10 October, Bennett the solicitor wrote that "the failure of the potatoe ... will rather militate against your success in obtaining next March gales from the poorer class of subtenants".

The Year 1846 on the Mount Blakeney Estate

Following the partial failure of the potato in the Autumn of 1845, many proposals were made for treating the rot. John Stewart thought that keeping potatoes dry and ventilated would prevent further decay. In February 1846 he reported that the tenants at Mount Blakeney were "worse off" than those at Robertstown, and he criticised them for covering potatoes with "heavy coats of earth" rather than with straw to facilitate ventilation. In December 1845 Mrs Fitzgerald wrote to J.R. Stewart: "I send you a receipt [recipe] ... for boiling the diseased Potatoes ... whereby they are rendered perfectly good". But none of the various proposals, advanced in the late 1840s for counteracting the potato rot, had significant effect.

It does not seem that the partial failure of the potato in the Autumn of 1845 had much immediate impact on rent receipts from the Mount Blakeney estate. Similar observations apply in connection with other estates managed by SK. In mid-January 1846 the firm of SK was able to send £500 in half notes to the Bank of Ireland in Cork for Mrs Fitzgerald. By means of a letter of credit, SK transferred a further £500 to the same account at end-July. But in comparison with the same period in 1845, rent receipts from the estate almost certainly declined in the second half of the year.

The SK correspondence indicates very few cases of distraint on the estate in 1846. The fact that it contains only one reference to distraint, until the harvest months, possibly reflects lack of means among those in arrears. In a letter to SK dated 23 September, Elizabeth Twohy of Thomastown complained:

There was keepers placed on me by John Murnane ... with the advice of my co-tenants. I had one load of corn fit for Market ... to buy some provision, to feed myself and my six young fatherless children. But the

keepers would not allow me dispose of it and consequently myself and themselves are starving I am so distressed ... in consequence of the entire failure of my potatoe crop last year and this year and the expense as well as the loss of burying my husband I am trusting that your honors kindness will remove the keepers from me and ... will forgive me the eight pound arrears If you will comply with this request you will prevent myself and my six helpless children from being thrown on the wide world.

This letter contains an addendum by David Nagle, Parish Priest of Effin, confirming "great distress" of the widow and her family. But it does not seem that the keepers were withdrawn until the rent was paid: on 3 October she sent to SK "eight pounds together with a receipt of work for 1£-13-2 which ... makes up my half years rent". The only subsequent reference to keepers on the estate in 1846 is in a letter of 18 November, in which Murnane informed SK that "Russell ... is not inclined to pay If you permit me I will lay keepers on him and ... he will pay instantly".

The SK correspondence for 1846 contains no references to ejectment from the Mount Blakeney estate, and only a single instance of "voluntary" surrender there. This was the case of John Hickey who, on 7 March, informed SK:

The time appointed for me to give up that part of Bernard's house which I have occupied some years past is just at hand I am the Father of six helpless children, and have no means whatever to provide the common necessaries of life At present famine is staring me in the face. I have neither clothing for day or night nor even the most remote prospect of a house to shelter my poor family, from the morning of the 25th Inst., as on that day I am fully determined to give up the house Mr Kincaid ... had the kindness of holding out some encouragement to me, in the event of my giving up ... peaceable possession of the house.

Hickey did receive compensation: On 23 March, Murnane wrote to SK that "Hickey is leaving the Estate ... so you may send me the five pounds and I will not give him one penny until he is off".

In a letter dated 29 January 1846 from Limerick City to SK, W.H. Hall referred to "the wretchedness of the undertenants many of whom have been affected with Fever, which disease has not left Tuohys premises for many months". The Tuohy mentioned by Hall may have been one of the persons of that surname on the Mount Blakeney estate. If we could be certain that this was the case, it would be inferred that fever was present on the estate at an

early stage in the famine years. This would not be surprising, in view of the fact that the potato had partially failed there in both 1844 and 1845.

On the Mount Blakeney estate in 1846, SK intervened against market forces in two respects: First, there was provision of lime and probably seed potato; second, there were improvements in the topography of the landscape.

John Stewart the agriculturalist visited Mount Blakeney in February 1846, and on the 24th of that month he recommended that the tenants there should be encouraged "to draw some lime for to assist the scanty supply of manure". On 27 March, Mary Hannon of Kilmallock provided him with a tender for supply of "one hundred pounds worth of Lime at one shilling and two pence per Barrel". It is probable that the Mount Blakeney tenants obtained the lime on easy terms from SK: John Stewart had written from Robertstown to SK on 21 March, stating that he knew that many of the tenants on the Mount Blakeney estate "could not buy 5 barells lime". He had added the recommendation: "Let the Mt. Blakeney Tenants have lime".

On 5 March 1846 Murnane informed SK that "the potatoes are getting very bad It is ... feared the seed will fail". Letters to SK from Vincent, 7 and 13 May 1846, considered the question of supplying seed potatoes to the most distressed tenants on the estate. In the first of these he suggested that either the seed should be supplied gratis, or "allow it in any work which may be carried on this summer". The amount (if any) of seed potato supplied by SK is unknown.

John Stewart spent about two weeks on the Mount Blakeney estate in February 1846 "inspecting Drains and laying out Drains for some of the Tenants that are beginning". On 13 February he reported to SK: "A good many of the Tenants are thro. [thorough] Draining and they are doing the work very well". It seems that they received rent allowances for this labour¹⁸. On 1 April, John Stewart informed SK that "most of the drains on Mt. Blakeney are finished by the tenants"; he added, however, that "the potatoes are going very fast There is no exception among them. They are all alike bad".

A relief committee was established at a meeting held in the Catholic Chapel of Effin on 26 April 1846. David Nagle, the Parish Priest, was treasurer. He quickly set about soliciting subscriptions from the landowners, "to relieve the awful Distress". In a letter dated 29 April to Mrs Fitzgerald seeking a subscription, he stated: "The farmers of the parish tho suffering most severely from losses in their potatoes ... have cheerfully subscribed a cess [tax] of one shilling per acre to meet the present alarming crisis I request ... a reply at your earliest convenience, as the government grant will be in

proportion to the paid up subscriptions in each locality". On Mrs Fitzgerald's behalf, SK sent Nagle £20 on 6 May.

Given the prospect of a very hungry Summer, in mid-May 1846 Vincent wrote to SK referring to the Mount Blakeney tenants. He ended his letter with the view that provision of employment by SK "will be necessary particularly where it can be found both for the advantage of Landlord and Tenant".

A tenant on the estate named Catherine Blakeney sent Mrs Fitzgerald the following petition on 26 May 1846:

At a former period, I took the liberty of humbly addressing you through the medium of Petition, handed to you by one of my Sons. It contained a statement of these distresses peculiar to the forlorn Widow to which helpless class it has pleased an ... omnipotent God to class me God has added another affliction to these already felt and suffered. He ... deprived a ... good Son of health. I see him now languishing upon the bed of Sickness At the period alluded to you had the kindness to make my Son a promise that you would ... remember me in the plenitude of that bounty that distinguishes and exalts you above the generality of your sex and upon which my poor Brother Robert Blakeney is a pensioner for years back Humbly beseeching you to whom the helpless never applied in vain, to remember the Widow who has no other Anchor.

Mrs Fitzgerald forwarded the petition to SK. Although it bore the signatures of Thomas Downes the PP of Kilmallock, David Nagle the PP of Effin, and John Evans, JP, there is no evidence of any response from SK. However, Mrs Fitzgerald did continue to assist Catherine Blakeney's brother Robert: In a letter dated 31 March 1847 she instructed J.R. Stewart to "please give Robt. Blakeney a couple of pounds extra for this year only". Why Mrs Fitzgerald gave a pension to Robert Blakeney is unknown. He may have been a distant blood relative: recall that her full name was Gertrude Blakeney Fitzgerald.

On the Mount Blakeney estate in the Summer of 1846, relief works organised by SK commenced around the end of June: on the 18th of that month, John Stewart at Robertstown informed SK that he was about to "go to Mt. Blakeney ... and set the men to work". On 9 July he reported that he had road and river works in progress there. The workers were paid every two weeks in cash, thereby enabling them to buy food¹⁹. The road works were near completion on 27 July, when Stewart wrote to SK: "I can only employ 10 men from this [date] forward to spread the gravel It will be a very good road I have ... trouble in turning the men off as every one of the small Tenants crowd about me and says they

are entitled to get work". Similar examples of overcrowding at sites of work can be found in the SK correspondence on other estates.

The river works on the Mount Blakeney estate, for which the men were paid about a shilling per day, were completed around mid-August²⁰. It does not seem that SK initiated any further works there in the second half of the month. The remaining period before the harvest was difficult. In response to a call for rent payments, Maurice Foley of Thomastown wrote to SK on 18 August: "It is too early for you to expect it, as no one here has done any reaping yet, and my own corn will not be fit for the sickle sooner than 8 or 10 days, but as soon as I reap, I will begin to thrash and sell ... and I surely will send up a satisfactory remittance by the 20th of next month. You cannot ... think how bare I am ... after buying food for a large family for the last 3 months, since my Potatoes rotted, and the prospect before us is worse, as the new crop is failing fast.

It seems, during the hungry months of mid-1846, that the Limerick Protestant Orphan Society assigned some of its funds to assist destitute Catholics, conditional on their conversion to Protestantism. The SK correspondence contains a letter dated 21 August 1846 from Godfrey Massey, Vicar of Bruff (about eight miles from Mount Blakeney) and secretary of the Society, seeking financial aid. Some extracts from this letter are as follows:

Permit me ... to request ... in behalf of 260 protestant children ... & of many Converts from the Church of Rome ... under the Care of the Limerick Protestant Orphan Society The Work House affords no or eligible asylum for Protestant Children²¹ & they must therefore perish or become Romanists. Hence the necessity for the protestant Orphan Society which educates the children in the pure Word of God For 13 years The Lord has enabled us to maintain this Charity Now that the universal distress of our R. C. fellow country men absorbs all our resources ... our balance in hands ... has been exhausted.

Massey went on to list five "donations already rec'd" from England, totalling £167. It does not seem that SK made any contribution to the Society.

The SK correspondence contains no reference to any public works in the Mount Blakeney district during the first nine months of 1846. The almost total failure of the potato crop in the Autumn made such works imperative. On 3 October, Murnane informed SK that "publick works will begin nex[t] week", and on 18 November he requested SK to use influence with the Board of Works to obtain "some respectable situation" for him on the works.

Destitution in the Mount Blakeney district at the end of 1846 was extreme. One of the Catholic curates had fallen into fever. On 22 December, Rev David Nagle wrote to SK explaining why he had forgotten to send a statement of the receipts of the local relief committee. Thus, he wrote that "one of my Clergymen was ... in the greatest possible danger of death from a most malignant and contagious fever. The excitement ... caused this ... blunder".

By the end of the year, there was little prospect that rents would be paid. Furthermore, violence had broken out amongst the starving populace in Charleville, three miles from the estate. In his last letter in the SK correspondence, Murnane reported on 30 December: "There is no thinking of paying any rent in this country at present. The mob of Charleville is ... breaking opened the shops and taking away everything". Murnane died early in 1847. On 31 March, Mrs Fitzgerald wrote to J.R. Stewart: "Give Murnane's Widow the half year's salary, £4, that would have been due to her husband had he lived this month". Edmond Bourke, who lived near Kilmallock, replaced Murnane as bailiff.

The Years 1847 and 1848: Emigration

Several of the letters about the estate in '47 and '48 refer to emigration. It seems that by the Spring of 1847, many of the tenants had lost hope for their future if they were to stay in Ireland. Some of them, therefore, did not take good care of the lands which they held. At end-March 1847 Mrs Fitzgerald wrote to J.R. Stewart: "I was glad to hear that you were encouraging the tenants to cultivate their ground, and that you had ordered a Turnip sowing Barrow for their use You should enable any of the Tenants who wished it to emigrate provided the expense to me would not be very great, & that you thought it would be advantageous to both parties".

Mrs Fitzgerald's finances constrained the extent to which she could assist tenant emigration. True, she received rents from Mount Blakeney, but such receipts were probably very small in the Spring of 1847. She also depended on the degree of prosperity in the Whitegate/Cloyne district: she was beneficiary of a jointure, the financing of which depended on rent receipts there. In the Spring of 1847, ability to pay rents in that district depended on programmes of public works. However, on 1 May 1847 Mrs Fitzgerald wrote from Whitegate House to Stewart: "400 Labourers have been dismissed from the public works in this vicinity and an attack on Cloyne is expected ... but I suppose they will not do more than take Bread from the Shops, which happened once already"²². She again wrote to Stewart on 14 August 1847, indicating her financial difficulties:

I send you an accompanying letter which I received yesterday from some of my tenants [apparently, seeking

assistance to emigrate]. Requesting you to act for the best, but at the same time must inform you that I have not yet got a farthing of my last half years jointure. Therefore feel almost afraid to incur such an expense this year as sending a family to America I have not heard if you and Mr Kincaid have been successful in collecting my rents, and your silence on the subject makes me fear the worst. I shall thank you to answer the accompanying letter, as I always send such letters to you, besides my not liking to interfere between my agents & tenants. I should be greatly annoyed by the latter if once I commenced a correspondence with them.

A letter from Gertrude Fitzgerald to Stewart, 21 August 1847, indicates improvement in her finances. In this she thanked SK for receipt of £300, "and your advice respecting the Misses Russell²³ [who sought assistance to go to America], whom I commit to your discretion. I have not yet been paid any part of my last half year's jointure, Mr P [P for Penrose²⁴] Fitzgerald [a family related to Gertrude] having found much difficulty in collecting his rents".

The 1847 correspondence on the Mount Blakeney estate contains only one other letter. Again Mrs Fitzgerald had a visit from one of her tenants, and again she asked Stewart to deal with the matter. Thus, on 7 September she informed him of an "accompanying Letter sent me ... by one of my Tenants. He came here [to Whitegate House] a few days previous, but I would not go to hear his complaint knowing that I should be tormented by them all if I did so. The young person I sent to him gave my message only not to come here, but to write if he pleased, but that I would refer ... all of them to your and Mr Kincaid's decision, knowing that you would act justly always, and leniently if you considered the Tenant was really distressed".

One of the earliest surviving letters from the estate in 1848 was from Mary Sullivan, an undertenant. To Mrs Fitzgerald dated 15 March, it stated that "Memorialist her two Sons and One Daughter were lying in Sickness for the last Six Months when it pleased the Almighty God to take her Daughter Aged Fifteen years Memorialist has no way of supporting her two Sons ... and rather than put them in the poor House Memorialist most humbly prays your Ladyship may take them into your Ladyships School".

Mrs Fitzgerald did support education at Whitegate²⁵. In effect Mary Sullivan wanted her to provide for her sons' maintenance. Mrs Fitzgerald forwarded the letter to Stewart on 20 March 1848. In her accompanying letter from Whitegate House she informed that "Mrs Sullivan ... wants me to admit her two sons into my School Let her know that if I had one at Mount Blakeney she would be welcome to send them to it, but that I could not undertake the

care of them here". The same letter from Mrs Fitzgerald contained details of three sisters who sought assistance to emigrate. Thus, her letter of 20 March continued:

Miss Russel arrived, to say that you & Mr Kincaid had signified your intention of enabling two of her sisters to emigrate to America, and that there is a third sister most exceedingly anxious to accompany them, that she wants nothing but her passage money (Miss R said it was £5) and that if you approved of it her brother [presumably, the tenant on the Mount Blakeney estate named John Russell mentioned earlier] would advance it, provided you allowed him to deduct half from the next payment he makes of his Rent, & the remainder the payment after. Please write by return of post as Miss R said that the packet is to sail for Dublin on Monday & that she & her two sisters (the 2 that are going to America & the one that wants to go) will come down to me from Cork on Saturday to know your decision.

This letter was written on a Monday. The fact that the Russell sisters hoped to leave Cork one week later indicates the speed with which emigrants were willing to leave. Similar examples have been noted elsewhere in the SK correspondence.

Two of the Russell sisters seem to have left Cork, on route to America, close to the date which they had planned for their departure. It seems that they were content with whatever assistance they got from SK on behalf of Mrs Fitzgerald who, on 27 March 1848, informed Stewart: "I have just had a second visit from Miss Russell the elder, & one of her sisters, they are well satisfied now with your decision, as a relative of theirs has taken the 3rd Sister to reside with her. You will smile when I deliver a message from the elder Miss R, namely to request that you will desire the Physician on board the Ship in which her sisters are going to America, to take particular care of the eldest of the two as her health is delicate".

On 8 March 1848 Stewart wrote to Kincaid: "I think I must send Sankey [an employee of SK] to spend a week on Mt Blakeney & Sergt Warrens Estates as there are ... emigrants to be got off & Haberes to Execute". The reference to Haberes strongly suggests that there were some ejections on the Fitzgerald and/or Warren estates in 1848, though some or all of these could have been against middlemen. The emigration of the Russell sisters was not an isolated event: in the Spring of 1848 SK organised a programme of emigration from the estate.

On 18 March 1848 Stewart informed Kincaid: "Sankey getting out a lot of the Mt Blakeney People, but it will cost a good deal". Two days earlier, Sankey had reported to Stewart:

I went ... to Mt Blakeney yesterday and reserved my visit to Mr Saunders' farm until today when I think he will accompany me and see that the tenants [Saunders' undertenants on Thomastown] give proper possession. John Bernard and his Wife are ready to go but want 30/- for clothes. They certainly are very poor and must get some assistance David Fitzgibbon is anxious to go but his wife being in the family way he will not be ready to start for 6 weeks. He will require some money for clothing as he and his family (in all 4) are naked. If I can get possession of his holding I will allow him to remain as caretaker till after his wife's confinement. I next visited Finns and saw Thomas' family in all 7. I offered £10 on the part of Mrs Fitzgerald if the Brothers would give the balance ... of cost of sending them out. They seem ready to assist but I fear when the cost of clothing be added, that £40 will hardly cover all I think I may increase Mrs F's donation to £15 As the 2 [Keeffe] families number 14 it will take about £70 to send them out Money must be given for clothing but I think a small sum in this way will induce many to go and we shall get the lands in time for a crop.

On 17 March 1848 Sankey informed SK: "I write ... surrounded by Emigrants I have settled with the Keeffes to go²⁸ ... to Dublin to be shipped to America. I have also arranged with the Finns to give me Bills for £25 towards sending their brother out, Mrs F to bear the balance of expense. The Mahonys will not be ready till Tuesday week so that the only ones leaving this now are the 2 Fitzgibbons, J Bernard and family and the Ambroses".

The last letter requesting assistance to emigrate from the Mount Blakeney estate is dated 4 April 1848. Written by Thomas Sullivan, it stated:

I cannot retain the lands ... and tho it is a grievous thing to leave the land of my birth ... I have determined to leave this ill fated country but fear I have not the means of doing so without your generous assistance. I am ready to hand you over your Lands provided you give me assistance. My family consists of Seven children myself and wife ... and of course we could not be pennyless on landing in a Strange Country that we should have something to carry us into the interior My farm is well circumstanced with a comfortable house near an acre cropped with Barley and wheat and near three acres prepared fit for oats and the rest for potatoes.

Issues of compassion aside, it seems that further thinning of the population on the estate in 1848 was part of a programme of

improvements. On 15 March, SK applied to the Board of Works for a loan of £700, sanctioned only towards the end of the year, to finance improvements on the estate²⁷. In other respects, progress on Mount Blakeney in the second half of 1848 was slow. SK encountered difficulties in finding solvent tenants on lands which had badly deteriorated. On 10 June, Sankey reported to SK that a new tenant named Bennett "has already put a new face on the Keeffes farm. In another year it will be all right again. He intends writing about J Bernards and Moloneys²⁸ lots which are quite run out. If you could get him to give £2 p. acre by offering some allowance towards putting the land in heart it would be the best. At present it is not worth 30/- p. a."

J.R. Stewart was not optimistic when he visited the estate in December 1848. On the 13th of that month he wrote to Kincaid: "I fear Russel [Russell] & Foly [Foley] will not stand [solvently] but I hesitate in forcing them away while land is so depressed Bennett declares he would not give the Rent he does for Keeffes if now to be let He is working away at Keeffes farm & I think if matters were a little better would take more land". Thus, developments on the Mount Blakeney estate in '47 and '48 were in many respects similar to those on other estates under SK's management.

The foregoing text has mentioned the names of several tenants on the Mount Blakeney estate in the 1840s. Griffith's *Valuation*²⁹ indicates that few of them were there in 1851. Among those still there were Henry Bennett (who held 173 statute acres in 1851), James and Patrick Donovan, Maurice Foley, Edmund Kelleher and John Russell.

Concluding Observations

Mrs Fitzgerald was a caring proprietor who sought to improve her estate. She presumably sought such improvements for two reasons: from the standpoint of her own economic self-interest, and because works of improvement gave employment. Such works enabled tenants to buy food. But they also enabled some tenants to pay rents which would not otherwise have been forthcoming; thus, by means of productive works, landowners recouped some of what they spent, not only in the long run, but in the short run also.

Mrs Fitzgerald received petitions from tenants. She usually passed these on to SK. She did however indicate that although the ultimate decisions in regard to such petitions should generally be at SK's discretion, she expected her agents to respond "impartially", "justly always, and leniently if" the firm considered that a tenant was "really distressed". At Whitegate House, Mrs Fitzgerald had several visits from her Mount Blakeney tenants. These probably involved round trips, on foot, of over 100 miles. She did not like such visits: she feared that

precedence would lead to much pestering, with aggrieved or distressed tenants arriving at unexpected times.

Ejectment decrees were obtained against tenants on the estate during 1845-8. It seems, however, that few (if any) of them were executed. SK did seek to thin the population of Mrs Fitzgerald's estate, especially in 1848 when solvent tenants were wanted. The firm sought to get the financially weaker tenants peacefully to surrender their holdings. All or most of them received financial incentives to leave. In several cases the compensation involved payment, in part or in full, of a family's passage to America, along with sums for purchase of clothing. In some cases tenants themselves asked to be sent to America. In regard to the treatment of the tenants on the Mount Blakeney estate, neither Gertrude Fitzgerald nor SK fit the caricatures often portrayed of Irish landowners or their agents in the 1840s.

Acknowledgement

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Notes and References

1. Details on Stratford's Limerick estate will be found in my chapter "Stratford's Robertstown Estate in the 1840s", in a forthcoming book by Thomas Culhane on the history of that district.
2. *County of Limerick, Barony of Coshma ... Primary Valuation*, Dublin 1851, pp. 69, 70.
3. James Donovan to Gertrude Fitzgerald, 27 March 1844.
4. Edward Walford, *The County Families of the United Kingdom*, London 1860, p. 610.
5. There was probably a marital link between the Penroses and the Fitzgeralds some years before the famine. See Pat Fitzgerald, *Down Paths of Gold*, Middleton, Co Cork, 1993, p. 135, for which reference I thank Anne Ahern of Whitegate. The historian of the rural economy of Cork in the nineteenth century has written that "James Penrose Fitzgerald apparently began his career [sometime before 1870] as an agent on the 5,300 acre Whitegate property of his brother Robert". See James S. Donnelly, Jr, *The Land and People of Nineteenth-Century Cork*, London and Boston 1975, p. 179, note 25, and p. 186.

6. Christopher Ready to SK, 17 March 1844; Simon Brown to SK, 20 March and 3 May 1844. Multiple layers of middlemen were infrequent on estates managed by SK in the early 1840s; however, several layers of them were common on other estates. See Donnelly, p. 9 and, more particularly, R.B. MacCarthy, *The Trinity College Estates 1800-1923*, Dundalk 1992, Chapter 5.
7. John Ryan to Kincaid, 30 March 1844.
8. On 27 March 1844 James Donovan wrote to Mrs Fitzgerald: "Such of the tenants as are going out of possession I would take their Lands, and become tenant for the Entire".
9. Murnane to SK, 7 April 1844; Martin Touhy, James Touhy and Jeremiah O'Keefe to SK, 28 September 1844; Maurice Foley to SK, 12 February 1845.
10. Murnane to SK, 26 March 1845; John Russell to SK, 2 April 1845; Murnane to SK, 7 August 1845.
11. I. Slater, *National Commercial Directory of Ireland ... to which are added Classified Directories of Important English Towns*, Manchester and London 1846, Section on Liverpool.
12. Daniel Binchy of Mount Blakeney has informed me that his own dwelling was once the residence of a family named White. Thus it seems that the lands farmed by Callaghan were close to Daniel Binchy's extended residence.
13. The person who made the arrest was named William Maloney: see Maloney to SK, 29 July 1845, in which he sought his fees.
14. Maxwell to Kincaid, 18 and 19 July 1845.
15. Maxwell to Kincaid, 19 July 1845; William Maloney to SK, 29 July; W.C. Bennett to Maxwell, 10 October 1845.
16. Patrick Donovan to SK, 3 January 1845; Maurice Foley to SK, 12 February 1845; James Donovan to SK, 14 June 1845; Murnane to SK, 23 June, 26 July, 20 September, 18 October and 4 November 1845; Bank of Ireland, Cork, to SK, 7 January and 26 July 1845.
17. It is not certain that the widow Ambrose died around the end of 1845. A letter to SK from a Catherine Ambrose of Thomastown, 12 October 1846, enclosed "a Bank order for £9-7s-6d Sterling in Lieu of a half years rent deducting 9s-6d abatement which your Honour promised to allow me and which was allowed to the rest of the Tennantry heretofore".
18. The SK correspondence of early 1846 makes no explicit reference to drainage allowances. However, Maurice Foley was allowed £2 for planting "quicks" (for hedgerows). See Foley to

SK, 13 January and 2 March 1846.

19. John Stewart to SK, 13 and 27 July 1846; Arthur Vincent to SK, 27 July 1846.

20. John Stewart to SK, 10 August and 11 November 1846.

21. This statement might be an exaggeration. The Poor Law Relief Act of 1838 had provided for appointment of Protestant chaplains to the workhouses.

22. Donnelly, p. 90, refers to an attack on Cloyne for food late in 1846.

23. Probably dependents of the tenant on Thomastown named John Russell, mentioned earlier.

24. A letter from Mrs Fitzgerald to J.R. Stewart, 17 March 1848, refers to Mr Penrose Fitzgerald. For some details on the Penrose Fitzgeralds of the Whitegate district, see Pat Fitzgerald, Chapter 9.

25. Writing of Whitegate in 1837, Lewis reported that "here are ... a female and an infants' school, maintained by Mrs Blakeney Fitzgerald, by whom the school-houses were erected". See Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, London 1837, Vol. 2, p. 714.

26. John and James [O'?] Keefe had surrendered their holdings by 23 March 1848, when William Mahony wrote to SK offering £1-17-6 "per plantation acre for every acre contained in that part of the lands of Mount Blakeney lately held by John and James O'Keefe". However, the land of James Keefe (who received at least £20 from SK following its surrender) was assigned to a tenant named Bennett. Though they were no longer Mrs Fitzgerald's tenants, it seems that John and James Keefe, and their families, were still in the Mount Blakeney district on 1 May 1848. They probably went to America a short time later. See Edmond Bourke to SK, 8 April and 1 May 1848.

27. Office of Public Works to SK, 7 October and 27 November 1848, and to Mrs Fitzgerald, 7 December 1848; J.R. Stewart to Kincaid, 15 December 1848.

28. The reference here is presumably to the lands of Patrick Moloney who, in May 1848, agreed to quit the estate, for which he obtained compensation. See Edmond Bourke to SK, 1 May 1848.

29. *County of Limerick, Barony of Coshma ...*, pp. 69, 70.