

**SUBSTANCE OF A SPEECH DELIVERED  
IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS, ON  
FRIDAY, THE 26TH OF MARCH, 1847,  
ON THE MOTION FOR A COMMITTEE  
ON IRISH POOR LAWS**

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Substance of a speech delivered in the House of lords, on Friday, the 26th of March, 1847, on the motion for a committee on Irish poor laws by Richard Whately

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**RICHARD WHATELY**

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DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS,

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ON THE MOTION FOR A

COMMITTEE ON IRISH POOR LAWS.

BY

RICHARD WHATELY, D.D.

ARCHBISHOP OF DUBLIN.

Ἀσφάλεια δὲ τὸ ἐπιβουλεύεσθαι, ἀποροῦντος πρόφασιν  
εὐλογος· καὶ ὁ μὲν χαλκαίων, πιστὸς αἰεὶ· ὁ δ' ἀγγέλων  
αἰετῶ, ὑποκρινόμενος.—THUCYD. b. iii. c. 82.

To re-advise for the better security, was held for a fair pretext  
of tergiversation. He that was fierce was always trusty; and he  
that contradicted such a one, was suspected.

HOMER'S THUCYDIDES, p. 185.

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Gift of

Chas. E. Norton

(76. 26. 1846.)

On Friday, the 26th of March, 1847, it was moved by Lord MONTAGLE, pursuant to notice, that a Select Committee be appointed, to consider and to report on the recommendations of the several parliamentary committees and commissions on the state of the Irish poor, as relating to the expediency of introducing permanently the system of out-door relief for the able-bodied labourer; and on the effect of such a measure on the well-being of Ireland, the interests of the poor themselves, and the immigration of Irish paupers into Great Britain; and also to consider and to report on the effects of enlarging the present electoral divisions, for the purpose of raising and levying the assessments under the Poor Law.

## P R E F A C E.

I HAVE been induced by the earnest recommendations of several competent judges, to lay before the Public the following pages, in the hope that some weight may be allowed to the testimony, and some attention paid to the arguments, of one who is known to have been long occupied with the subject; to have had access to the best sources of information; to have been always wholly unconnected with party; and to have never shrunk, through fear of obloquy, or desire of popularity, from avowing his real convictions.

I have nothing indeed to adduce, either of facts or reasons, beyond what is already known, or easily may be known, by any one who takes an interest in the subject. But, unhappily, in a period of strong and general excitement like the present, men are more ready to decide and to act, than to

investigate, to reason, and to reflect; and more under the dominion of passion than of calm judgment.

To the truly admirable benevolence and self-denying liberality of my countrymen towards their famishing fellow-subjects in Ireland, I am ready to do full justice.\* But it cannot be denied—perhaps it is less to be wondered at than lamented—that in a large proportion of the English people, the feeling of compassion for the Irish poor has assumed the form of a blind and uncontrollable rage against the supposed authors of all the distress, the landlords; a rage so indiscriminate and so unreflecting, that it is with difficulty men can be brought to listen to anything relative either to the grounds of their indignation, or the probable consequences of their acts. For the sake of punishing the Irish landlords, they are ready not only to confound the innocent with the guilty,—to “destroy the city, notwithstanding there are fifty righteous therein,”—but to bring much more severe and irremediable sufferings on the Irish poor themselves, whom it is the object to relieve, than on any other class of persons; and even ultimately to involve England itself in more than double the expense and distress from which the English are now impatient to be relieved.

\* On this point I have expressed myself strongly in an “Address to the Members of our Church,” lately published.



It happens most unfortunately that some of the worst feelings of our nature are occasionally disguised from us, by being associated with the best and most amiable; that *vindictive* passions will assail the heart under the veil of compassionate *benevolence*; and that resentment against wrong-doers will blind men to the suggestions, not only of sound reason, but of justice, and even of enlightened humanity.

I verily believe that if, at the next general election, a candidate were asked—as many probably will be—whether he will pledge himself to “*make* the Irish landlords support entirely the Irish poor,” and were to reply that he will be ready to do so as far as this is *possible*, and as far as is consistent with the best *interests of the poor* themselves, many would try to whoot him down. “Possible,” and “right,” are no words in the vocabulary of an excited multitude; and a candidate so situated, will be strongly tempted to say inwardly what Terence’s Micio declares, when he is prevailed on by his family to take a step which he is convinced is most absurd and improper: “he will do so,” he says, “since they so very much wish it.”

*Etsi hoc PRAYOM, ABSURDUM, INEPTUM, atque alienum a  
vitâ meâ*

*Videtur, tamen SI TANTOPERE VOS ISTOC VOLTIS, fiat.*

TERENCE, *Adelphi* (Last Scene.)

But the time will come when men will judge more calmly, and will decide accordingly; when their understanding being no longer blinded by excited feelings, their sentiments of justice, of humanity, and of regard for their country's welfare, will have fair play. They will learn—the wisest and best, speedily, and the mass of the people not long after—how to distinguish, and to appreciate, those who have sought to enlighten them, and those who have preferred pandering to their excited passions; those who have honestly and boldly adhered to, and defended, the course which is most for their country's good, and those who, from timidity, or for the gratification of selfish ambition, have consented to swim with the stream, and to abandon the principles which their own deliberate judgment approves.

## SUBSTANCE OF A SPEECH,

&c.

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ALTHOUGH your Lordships have been already addressed by far more practised debaters and abler speakers than myself, yet I feel myself called on not to give a silent vote on this occasion, on account of the peculiar connexion I have had with the subject now under discussion; a connexion not courted by myself, but, I may say, in a manner forced upon me by the public voice. I was, as your Lordships will recollect, one of the Commissioners appointed several years ago for inquiring into the condition of the Irish Poor. I was appointed to that office not at my own desire, but purely by the spontaneous selection of the then Government of the country.

That Ministry may perhaps have considered that the experience I had had in England, as one of the Governors of a Poor-Law Union, might in