

**POOR LAWS FOR IRELAND, A
MEASURE OF JUSTICE TO ENGLAND;
OF HUMANITY TO THE PEOPLE OF
BOTH ISLANDS; AND OF SELF-
PRESERVATION FOR THE EMPIRE**

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Poor laws for Ireland, a measure of justice to England; of humanity to the people of both islands; and of self-preservation for the empire by R. Montgomery Martin

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R. MONTGOMERY MARTIN

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POOR LAWS FOR IRELAND,

MEASURE OF JUSTICE TO ENGLAND;

OF

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AND OF

SELF-PRESERVATION FOR THE EMPIRE.

WITH

A PRACTICAL DEVELOPMENT

OF

AN IMPROVED SYSTEM OF SETTLEMENT,
ASSESSMENT, AND RELIEF.

BY R. MONTGOMERY MARTIN,

Author of "Ireland as it Was,—Is,—and Ought to Be," &c.



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TO THE READER.

ALTHOUGH but a brief period has elapsed since the Author has had the honour of appearing before the bar of public opinion in advocacy of the maintenance of order, and in defence of the lawful enjoyment of property in Ireland, he has again to request the attention of an enlightened community to a cause no less sacred than that of property,—he means the few and scanty rights of the Poor.

Volumes might have been written on this distressing subject: perhaps, however, the condensed matter in the following pages will be more efficacious than lengthened details; and in consigning those pages to the calm consideration of the intelligent and humane representatives of Great Britain and Ireland, he would earnestly hope that the Sword of Justice, now suspended over his unfortunate and misguided countrymen, may have the Angel of Charity for its precursor, and that the beneficent Being who in His mercy sustaineth the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, will so influence their hearts as to induce them to prevent man, the noblest of His creatures, from perishing in the midst of plenty.

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POOR LAWS FOR IRELAND, &c.

CHAPTER I.

JUSTICE TO ENGLAND DEMANDS THE ENACTMENT OF A SYSTEM OF POOR-LAWS FOR IRELAND;—THE DEPLORABLE RESULTS OF DELAYING THEM DEPICTED BY PARLIAMENT.

THE compulsory assessment of a provision for the sick, impotent, and unemployed poor in England, and the absence of a similar enactment in Ireland, is one of the most melancholy instances of partial and defective legislation which can be found in the annals of jurisprudence. That the rate-payers of this country should so long have patiently borne the immigration of myriads of pauper labourers from the sister island, with a redundancy of labour and a heavily increasing assessment at home, is indeed a fact highly creditable to the splendid liberality of the British public; a time has however arrived, when a feeling of generosity, however laudable in itself, must give place to the instinctive duty of self-preservation;—a duty which is happily connected with no selfish ideas, but which in its fulfilment embraces the amelioration of the condition of the poor and destitute in Ireland, as well as in England. It requires but little foresight to perceive that a brief interval will elapse before

the poor laws of the older civilized state must be abolished, or the enactment of an improved system be decreed for Ireland, or the importation of Irish paupers into England be totally prohibited. If one county in Great Britain were devoid of any provision for the destitute poor, and that its population annually augmented in an almost incredible manner, would not the neighbouring county, with an existing surplus labour and a heavy rate of assessment for the support of the unemployed population,—would not that neighbouring county speedily have a rapid extension of pauperism, and be forced by dire necessity to prevent the immigration of its neighbours, or insist on the Legislature compelling them to support their own poor? The parallel stands good between the two islands. The evils resulting from such an anomalous state of things have been clearly foreseen and lamented by the several Parliamentary Committees that have investigated the state of the poor for the last ten years. The Select Committee on Emigration, in 1826, state :—

“ Your Committee cannot too strongly impress upon the House, that between countries so intimately connected as Great Britain and Ireland, two different rates of wages, and two different conditions of the labouring population, cannot permanently co-exist. One of two results appear to be inevitable,—the Irish population must be raised towards the standard of the English, or the *English depressed towards that of the Irish*. The question, whether an extensive plan of emigration shall or shall not be adopted, appears to Your Committee to resolve itself into this simple point, Whether the *wheat-fed* population of Great Britain shall or shall not be supplanted by the *potatoe-fed* population of Ireland; whether Great Britain, in reference to the condition of her lower orders, shall or shall not progressively become what Ireland is at the present moment.”

That no Government system of emigration will be resorted to is clear, and unless the condition of the Irish be raised above their present state, the English must certainly sink to the level of their neighbours; a process, indeed, which is now in execution. The Committee, after the foregoing passage, give in their report an abstract of the testimony of Mr. Malthus, who had been examined before them, and whose evidence, although elicited in reference to emigration, is strikingly conclusive on the subject to which this work refers:

“ Mr. Malthus was asked, whether he had taken into consideration what may be the effect of the continued increase of the population of Ireland, upon the condition of the labouring classes of England? He stated, that, in his opinion, the effect will be *most fatal to the happiness of the labouring classes in England*, because there will be a constant and increasing emigration from Ireland to England, which will tend to *lower the wages of labour in England*, and to prevent the good effects arising from the superior prudence of the labouring classes in this country. He stated, that he has understood that in the western parts of England and Scotland, in the manufacturing districts, particularly in Manchester and Glasgow, the wages of labour have been lowered essentially by the coming over of the Irish labourers; which opinion, your Committee beg to observe, is confirmed by the evidence that has been given by witnesses resident in those districts. Mr. Malthus is of opinion, that this emigration will tend materially to alter the habits of the labouring class