

ON
THE ECONOMIC
LEVYING AND APPLICATION
OF THE
IRISH POOR RATE:

BEING
A PAPER READ BEFORE
THE DUBLIN STATISTICAL SOCIETY:

BY
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DUBLIN:
PUBLISHED FOR THE SOCIETY BY HODGES AND SMITH,
104, GRAFTON STREET.

1849.

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On the Economic Levying and Application of Irish Poor-rate. By
H. J. MAC FARLANE.

GENTLEMEN,

As I am not aware that the Irish poor law has been directly submitted to the consideration of this society, I would take a hasty glance at its common history and general working throughout the United Kingdom, before alluding to its introduction to this country, and considering what mode more economic than the present might be adopted in levying funds for poor law purposes; in order to impress upon all classes how closely identified are their mutual interests, and by encouraging the good agriculturist, so raise up and increase the demand for *labour*, as to improve the condition of the *labourer*.

In sketching the history of poor law, we must look for its origin in that theocracy whose divine institutions, full of benevolent designs, breathed forth the holy principle of brotherhood, and failed not to provide for the alien stranger as well as the fatherless and widow. In ancient Greece, Rome, and Persia, and in almost all civilized nations of modern times, the right of the poor *to be supported* seems to have been recognized, though a right *to claim* support was not so generally acknowledged.

In England, so early as Richard II., the statutes declared those rights of the poor, and even provided a law of settlement; but till Henry VIII. no provision was made, nor indeed was it very necessary till the monastic institutions were closed. However, in a few years after legal provision was made, it is stated that mendicancy had strangely increased—a remark made in this country too since a poor law was legalized, and occasioned, I should think, by the poor law not being equally well administered in all parts of the country. Edward VI. found it necessary to provide bridewells for the sturdy beggars. The 43rd of Elizabeth first appointed overseers in every parish, to raise levies for the necessary relief of the infirm, and to find employment for such as were able to work, a duty too often badly performed and much complained of. The same year it was enacted, that if two justices perceive that the inhabitants of one parish are not able to support their poor, the hundred may be rated. Thus, *relief* for the destitute and *work* for the able-bodied have been the spirit of the English poor law ever since, though much abused in its administration. One reason assigned for this abuse was that the funds were distributed by irresponsible agents, who contributed but little of the rate them-

selves. But certainly the poor law was conducted so badly in England, and so abused for many years, that it was stated by high authority the effect was to make "the poor idle, and the industrious poor." Something of the same kind is occasionally whispered in Ireland.

It is startling to find that the poor rate in England, not many years ago, amounted to more than £8,000,000, though levied entirely off the occupier, who pays the whole of the rate, and should therefore exert himself the more in keeping down pauperism; but an excuse already stated was that "he who paid the rate had not the distribution of it." The late amendments have reduced it considerably, but there is much to complain of still, and justly, at finding so much relief administered of necessity in a country so rich, and providing such an abundance of employment for men, women, and children of the tenderest age, as the following statements will evince. From the report of schools in the midland districts, for committee of council in 1846 and 1847, we find that out of 10,000 children inspected, only *one-sixth* could read. The average time they continued at school was less than two years; the average age of going to school was steadily *sinking*. An opinion unfavourable to education, and the disposition to employ them from the earliest period, is extending to the agricultural from the manufacturing districts, where few children of the workmen are sent to school after ten years of age. Some result of this may be found in the statistics of Preston house of correction, where, in 1846, out of 3,700 inmates, there were 2,120, or nearly *two-thirds*, unable to read; 1598, or nearly one half, knew not the name of the reigning sovereign; and there were nearly as many who had never prayed to God!

This, after a series of abundant harvests, great prosperity, and demand for wholesome labour!*—blessings turned to a curse! A deplorable state of things for England, which I can only solve by the fact and on the principle, that "the sabbath was made for man," who, to fulfil his end, required "rest," and that premature deformity and infirmity of mind and body are the evils entailed on the posterity of a population, effected by the demoralizing system prevailing too much amongst avaricious parents, as well as employers, careless whether the infant is preparing for the treadmill or the workhouse. It is hoped that the exertions to provide education for the masses, and the recent enactments to regulate factory hours, may have a wholesome effect on the moral and physical condition of that portion of the population, and prevent their being thrown on the parish at so early an age.

The great saving which has been effected in England has been by abandoning, as far as possible, the system of out-door relief,

* Labour

"the primal curse,
But softened into mercy; made the pledge
Of cheerful days, and nights without a groan."—*Cowper*.

which has reduced the expenditure one-third, or from £8,500,000 to £5,300,000.

In Scotland, till the last few years, the poor law was conducted more in the manner of private alms, or a parish fund, distributed by the clergy and laity annually elected. I wish to be more particular in noting the poor law statistics of that country, as they appear to be less generally known here than might be expected. As to getting a poor law, properly so called, she has been little in advance of Ireland, and somewhat similar in her requirements.

In 1836, the amount of relief raised in Scotland was	£171,042
Ten years after, in 1846, the amount had nearly doubled, being	£225,232
1847, (an increase on 1846 of £249,102)	£433,915
1848, (an increase on 1847 of £110,419)	£544,334

Besides, there were grants in aid to Scotland of a large amount not here calculated. It is not considered that this is an absolute increase of pauperism; but, besides the effects of the potatoe failure, that which was formerly contributed in alms and church collections, and particularly by the labouring population in supporting their aged and infirm relatives, is now raised by rate, and falls on other classes of the community. The total number relieved in Scotland for the year ending

Feb. 1st, 1845, was	63,070, or 1 in 42 of population.
1846 ,,	69,432, — 1 in 38 do.
1847 ,,	146,370, — 1 in 17 do.
1848 ,,	227,647, — 1 in 11 do.

Average cost of each pauper in 1847 was	£4 10 9
Ditto	£3 19 7½

There are only nine workhouses in Scotland, but there is a demand for more, as the general impression there is that the system of out-door relief tends to spread pauperism. Another great cause of pauperism is the imperfect system of education provided in the towns.

We have now evidence of the ill effects of out-door relief, as administered in England and Scotland. In Ireland, poor law was first established in 1838, (1 & 2 Vic. c. 56) and amended last in July, 1847, when out-door relief was authorized to able-bodied paupers. This is one of the distinguishing principles between it and the poor law of England or Scotland, where labour is provided for the able-bodied; in the former country by law, and in the latter by recommendation of the central board of supervision. The other principle peculiar to the Irish poor law is, that the occupier only contributes one moiety of the rate; and the landlord the other, for all holdings valued above £4. Those valued under £4 (*where pauperism and fever, or cholera, are almost exclusively generated*) have both moieties paid by the landlord. The reaction of this £4 clause is most injurious to both landlord and tenant in their mutual relations. The amount of rate collected in Ireland, during the year ending Dec. 1848, was nearly £1,700,000.

For the past year in England,	5,300,000.
Scotland,	544,000.

The proportion of cost for each pauper is in England £3 10s., to £2 7s. in Scotland, and to £2 in Ireland.* There is a difficulty in making a true calculation of the classification of paupers to population throughout the kingdom, and proportion to valuation; but taking the whole number relieved, there has been for

England,	one in ten of population relieved,
Scotland,	one in eleven and half ditto.
Ireland,	one in ten ditto.

The proportion to *valuation* has been 1s. 7d. in the pound for England, 1s. 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. for Scotland, and 2s. 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. for Ireland. This is the official calculation, and is valuable so far as it goes, but it is not exactly a true calculation to frame data from. Ireland appears to have paid during the last year poor rate in the proportion to England of 1 to 3, but the capacity of Ireland to bear taxation is only as 1 to 9.

Interesting information on the subject of taxation statistics was drawn up some years ago by a leading and very accomplished statesman of the present day,† showing that when certain additional taxes were assessed in Ireland, from which £3,000,000 of revenue was anticipated, a direct loss of half a million of revenue was the result of the erroneous data on which these assessed taxes were projected.

There seems one unanimous demand affecting many parts of this country, which must be met, to economize relief, viz. employment for the labourer. In England, work must be provided for the able-bodied. In Scotland, the central board recommend parochial boards (although not obliged by law to relieve the able-bodied) to provide him and his dependants with employment, and to give in return for their labour relief in cooked food; hence it appears that at present throughout the United Kingdom the great poor law problem is the profitable employment of the able-bodied paupers. The solution of this question may be much simplified, if suggestions which appear in the Report of the Boundary Commissioners be adopted, by which the extent of electoral divisions will be arranged so as to leave in each division such an amount of labour as may be necessary for its improvement, having regard to the capabilities it may possess. It has been laid down by Adam Smith, that "taxation should be so arranged, as not to obstruct the industry of the people, or discourage what would give employment." Holding the converse of this as directly applicable to taxation for the special and direct support of pauperism arising from want of employment, and it being generally admitted that the proper cultivation of our

* This calculation followed up would show the benefit of quartering those regiments in Ireland, which must be kept up for the reliefs at our colonies, &c. and, followed out a little further, would show the saving that would accrue to the credit of the consolidated fund, from the reduction in constabulary, &c. without increasing our army estimates more than a fraction.

† Hansard, vol. 7, p. 1050.

soil forms a most important element in our social condition, as also, that the amount of employment provided, even on tillage farms, is in proportion to the quantity of land each year under green crops; I would, in levying rates for ordinary purposes in rural districts, adopt the following scale for a period of seven years. My own experience, and the opinions of many intelligent practical men, induce me to believe it would tend much to improve the system of agriculture, and of necessity increase the demand for labour, by allowing every occupier to deduct from the general valuation of his farm £3 for each acre of green crops (*not potatoes*) that he cultivated to the satisfaction of any two guardians that might be selected, to go round the electoral division at a particular time of year for the purpose of inspection. An account might be kept at the union, of each farm over five acres, as follows:—

Name of Occupier.	Contents of Farm.			Quantity of flax* or green crop, not potatoes.	Value of farm in rate book.	Deduct for green crop at £3 per acre.	Rateable value of farm for 1849.	Amount of rate at 1s. in the pound.	
	A.	R.	P.						
No. 1. M. Doyle.	50	0	0	4	0	0	75	0	0
2. Patrick Dunne.	10	0	0	2	0	0	20	0	0
3. John Martin.	40	0	0	3	0	0	60	0	0
4. James Macken.	15	0	0	2	2	0	25	0	0
5. T. M'Cann.	100	0	0	0	0	0	150	0	0

- Observations, No. 3. Turnips not once hoed, and so extremely badly cultivated, did not pass inspector.
- „ 4 has two labourers constantly at work, and will have four acres of green crop next year.
- „ 5 has only one herd employed, having his land in grass; he holds 400 acres of prime land in next parish.

With such a mode of raising or levying poor rate, great encouragement would be afforded to the industrious cultivator of the soil; and the small farmer would combine with the law in preventing distress; and (if electoral divisions receive the proposed alterations, and the £4 rating clause be removed,) under this system of levying rate, the principle of the present poor law might remain untouched. A general good system of tillage, giving an abundant and natural supply of employment, would follow, and supersede the necessity of making any distinction in levying rates for infirm or able-bodied paupers. And whatever course of cropping each farmer pursued, would be subject to the inspection of an intelligent guardian; or if such were not to be had, a vice-guardian might fulfil the duty throughout several unions; and if fit for his appointment, would be a first class practical instructor as well as inspector, and show them by degrees that the allowance of poor

* Nearly half a million goes out of the country annually for flax. The cultivation and manufacture of one acre of flax will give employment to sixty individuals for twelve months.

rate was the least part of the benefit arising from green crops, increasing the quantity of their resources and diminishing their taxes. It would tend materially to reduce the quantity of land at all times left uncultivated, under the name of summer fallow, or land "lying to rest;" neither of which old practices, the remnants of an age when population was insufficient to cultivate the ground, require the assistance of manual labour. I conceive that the plan I have proposed has no practical difficulties, and would confer permanent and reciprocal benefit on all classes, would go far in providing the quarter-acre cottier with daily labour for money wages, and impress on him also how much his interests are mixed up with those of the landholder who employs him.

With such encouragement for reproductive labour infused into the present law, no further law of settlement need hamper it. Emigration, to the extent it could be of use, would be a waste of public funds, as well as of other capital, being an expense entailed in removing a source of wealth. But the more pernicious result of emigration, when not of private arrangement, is that of providing for the youthful able-bodied, and leaving behind an undue proportion of population aged, delicate, infirm, and unsound in mind or body; from and through whom we are to have perpetuated all the ills and ailments to which poor human nature is heir, instead of using our endeavours so to elevate the social and physical condition of our poorer brethren, that the next generation will have even a larger (instead of smaller) proportion of energetic, intelligent labourers, and with as much sinew and bone as will otherwise be only found in our colonies.

A much larger sum was expended for poor relief in Scotland and Ireland this year than was levied. About £200,000 was received from the British Association, government, &c. in aid of distressed unions.

I will not enter on the political or economical causes of distress in those districts, or how it has occurred that poor rate is not there recognized in its legal position as *a first charge* on the land;* but I would offer some statistical information, hoping the subject may be further investigated by those who feel the intimate connexion which exists between social and pecuniary prosperity, and perhaps may have already considered those economical causes.

I will commence with BALLINA, where £10,000 only was collected from September, 1847, to September, 1848, though one most important piece of statistics, those valuable tables of agricultural produce, would assist any person who knows the country, its markets, and exports, in finding that beyond £200,000 worth of crop was raised in that union at the harvest of 1847, besides the cattle grazed on near half a million of acres of feeding and mountain land. The duties in the town alone some years ago on snuff

* A case came lately before a Master in Chancery, to know if the rate collector might not get poor rate from a receiver.

and tobacco amounted to £8,000 per annum; 5,479 tons of shipping were employed in importing English and foreign goods; the salmon fishing of one river let at £1500; and 150,000 barrels of agricultural produce have been exported from its quays.

BALLINROBE had, in 1847, 40,000 barrels of wheat, which, with other produce, might be valued at £200,000. The rate collected this union was about £8,000.

CLIFDEN has improved from the exertions made after and ever since the great distress of 1822, when a friend of mine then there told me there was not a barrel of corn grown for exportation; yet the beneficial results of the exertion consequent on that year of distress are worthy of investigation; for when Mr. Nicholls, the poor-law commissioner, visited it in 1836, the exports had reached 10,000 barrels, and the revenue then collected was £7,000. The poor-rate collected last year amounted to only £2,529.

WESTPORT was in much the same condition previous to 1822; but the year Mr. Nicholls visited it, the exports had reached 230,000 barrels of corn, and 5,140 cwts. of flour. The poor-rate collected last year was £6,013.

GALWAY, the year before Mr. Nicholls visited it, exported 240,000 cwts. of flour, collected customs and excise in the town to the amount of £82,000, collected rate in 1847 and 1848 to the amount of £7,400, or about 1s. 4½d in the pound of valuation. The proportion of population to area was one to four acres; proportion of population to valuation, one to 25s. I could name other unions with a much greater proportion of population to area and valuation, which are comparatively well off. The landlords are a good deal embarrassed, but generally they have good agents, or are themselves resident.