

**WHAT PROTECTION DOES
FOR THE FARMER AND
LABOURER: A CHAPTER OF
AGRICULTURAL HISTORY**

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What Protection Does for the Farmer and Labourer: A Chapter of Agricultural History by I. S. Leadam

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PRICE ONE SHILLING.

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A Chapter of Agricultural History.

BY

I. S. LEADAM, M.A.,

BARRISTER-AT-LAW; LATE FELLOW OF BRASENOSE COLLEGE, OXFORD.

Author of "Farmers' Grievances"; "Agriculture and the Land Laws," &c.

FIFTH EDITION.

Revised and Enlarged.



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DEDICATION OF THE FIRST EDITION.

¶

JAMES HOWARD, ESQ., M.P.

FOR THE COUNTY OF BEDFORD,

CHAIRMAN OF THE FARMERS' ALLIANCE,

**A FAR-SEEING AND STRENUOUS ADVOCATE OF THE
FARMERS' TRUE INTERESTS,**

These Pages are inscribed.

November 9th, 1881.

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION.

(REVISED.)

THE continued and accelerated fall of prices, the consequent but more gradual decline in rents and the incipient reductions of wages since the year 1881, when this pamphlet was first published, have naturally increased the unrest and dissatisfaction of the commercial and industrial world. From these feelings the Fair Traders have reaped what harvest they can lay claim to. As though the events of history had never happened or had never been recorded, they appeal to the hopes of those whose profits they promise to raise, or to the discontent of those who have fallen behind in the race of competition. To the manufacturer and farmer they offer the bait of increased returns to capital, to the labourer a rise in wages, unmindful of the fact that to their fathers and grandfathers the same hopes were held out and the same promises falsified. It is intelligible that to men unversed in abstract speculation *a priori* reasoning is not always convincing, and it has been observed with truth that all the dialectics of Cobden might have been fruitless but for the stern lesson impressed by the Irish famine. I rest the case against Protection to agriculture, therefore, in the main upon experience, though I endeavour to reinforce experience by showing the necessities out of which it issued, and by deducing the moral which it points. "Experience," said Benjamin Franklin, "keeps a dear school, but fools will learn in none other, and scarce in that." My hope is that the penal discipline of their

forefathers may be a sufficient lesson for the existing generation.

The two former editions of this pamphlet have received some not unfriendly criticisms from Protectionist Farmers. "It is impossible," says one critic in a letter which was communicated to me, "to follow him in his argument that, because prices were augmented by Protection, Farmers sustained a loss instead of a gain, as he begs the question all the way through. In the first place, Rents were not fixed on the assumption that wheat would make the maximum price, but by supply and demand." It is a curious commentary on this statement that another Protectionist Farmer, writing about the same time, says, "Sir Robert Peel made a *promise* that wheat should never be under 56s. a quarter"—a striking indication of the interpretation assigned by Farmers to the anticipated effects of a Protective tariff. But, indeed, so far have I been from begging the question, that to any one who will take the trouble to read the evidence of the Farmers themselves it is clear to demonstration that Rents were fixed in expectation of a steady maximum. See in the evidence before the Committee of 1821 that of Mr. Custance (p. 3); before the Committee of 1833, of Mr. Oliver (p. 51); of Mr. Hope of Fenton Barns and of Mr. Howden (pp. 61-3) before the Committee of 1836. I heard not long ago from a landed proprietor a confirmatory tradition on the side of the Landowners. He told me that he remembered his father saying that as soon as the Corn Law of 1815 was passed the steward was sent round the estate to raise the Rents. Unless human nature is greatly changed both in Farmers and Landlords, which will scarcely be contended, the phenomenon which regularly recurred under the Corn Laws would to a certainty reappear under a new one. And how little human nature has changed on the Farmer's side is shown by the illusory imaginings in which one of

my critics still indulges : " I must say it would be well to legislate now so as to keep corn up to 56s. a quarter and meat up to 8d. a pound, and thereby enable the Farmers to live and pay fair rents."

Others, again, of the Protectionist Farmers with whom I have come in contact have adopted a *role* of self-sacrificing patriotism. Starting with the assumption that it would really be advantageous for the country to double its wheat area, they have criticised my conclusions as to changes in the distribution of wealth which would assuredly ensue. " It is invidious," they have argued, " to insist upon the moral certainty that the Landlords will appropriate the entire gain. A beneficial result will have been attained which in the long run extends to the whole community. Men of real public spirit will, therefore, abstain from inquiries which have only the effect of 'setting class against class.'" They forget, however, that their initial assumption is more than questionable. It certainly cannot be shown from the point of view of practical economics that an artificial extension of the wheat area is desirable. If such an extension were economically profitable, it would take place without legislative forcing. The military argument is disposed of by our experience of the time when Napoleon was master of the wheat-exporting granaries of the Continent. But even were their assumption justified, the analysis of the changes in distribution arising out of Protection is not out of place. The main argument addressed to Farmers and Labourers is based on nothing else than prophecies that the consequence of Protection would be to put more into their pockets, to distribute to them a larger share than before of the national wealth. This is the challenge thrown down by the Protectionists themselves, and this challenge I take up. It is too late, then, for them to retreat from their chosen position in a cloud of evasive heroics.

There is another class of argument of which I have said nothing in the text, as not being strictly germane to my topic. It is asserted by Fair Traders, and the doctrine is embraced by Lord Randolph Churchill in his Fair Trade as distinguished from his Free Trade speeches, that the imposition of import duties would give a healthy stimulus to the revenue. But investigation of the effects of a tariff upon revenue shows its imposition to be followed in general, if not by an absolute decline, at least by a decline in the rate of increase. Some who have pretensions to rank in political life, like Mr. Chaplin, seriously suggest, in the face of the everyday experience of commercial men, to say nothing of common sense, that the duties are paid by the foreign exporters. The simple commercial transactions which I have selected for illustration on p. 90 is sufficient refutation of this obvious fallacy. Others who think that the country will be relieved by a tariff seem to suppose that duties are paid by miracle. "He omits," says one of my critics, "one important item, viz., the relief of taxation by the import duty. If a duty of 5s. a quarter on wheat and 4s. a quarter on barley and maize, and 3s. a quarter on oats were imposed on importations at the present time, something like £8,000,000 per annum would be received and might be applied to national purposes." Be received—yes, but from whom? My friend, like Lord Randolph Churchill, who is the first Chancellor of the Exchequer since Addington untinged by Political Economy, would do well to read that simple chapter of Bastiat on "That which is seen and that which is not seen." The transfer of them from one pocket to another may be a relief, as this pamphlet shows, to one class of the community, but it cannot be a lightening of the national burdens.

August 31, 1887.