

**THREE LECTURES ON THE RATE  
OF WAGES, DELIVERED BEFORE  
THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,  
IN EASTER TERM, 1830 PP. 1-61**

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Three Lectures on the Rate of Wages, Delivered Before the University of Oxford, in Easter Term, 1830 pp. 1-61 by Nassau William Senior

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ON THE  
RATE OF WAGES,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,  
IN EASTER TERM, 1830.

WITH A PREFACE

ON THE  
CAUSES AND REMEDIES OF THE PRESENT  
DISTURBANCES:

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*Bellicæ causas et vitia et modos  
Tractas, et incedis per ignes  
Suppositos cineri doloso.*

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By NASSAU WILLIAM SENIOR,

OF MAGDALEN COLLEGE, A.M.;  
LATE PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL ECONOMY.

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## PREFACE.

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THE following Lectures contain little that is not well known to many of my readers, and still less that is peculiarly and exclusively appropriate to the present emergency. They were written and delivered in a period of profound tranquillity; but we are now in a state which may require the exertions of every individual among the educated classes, and many may have to assist in executing, or even in originating measures for the relief of the labouring population, who are not yet sufficiently familiar with the principles according to which that relief is to be afforded.

Under such circumstances, it has appeared to me that advantage might be derived from a short explanation of the ambiguities and fallacies which most obscure the subject of wages—the most difficult and the most important of all the branches of political economy.

My principal object, however, has been to draw attention to the elementary proposition, that *the rate of wages depends on the extent of the fund for the maintenance of labourers, compared with*



*the number of labourers to be maintained.* This proposition is so nearly self-evident, that it may appear scarcely to deserve a formal statement ; still less to be dwelt on as if it were a discovery. It is true that it is obvious and trite ; but, perhaps, on that very account, its practical consequences have been neglected. In the first place, if this proposition be admitted, many prevalent opinions respecting the effects of unproductive consumption, of machinery, and of free-trade, must be abandoned ; and to show this, is the object of the second and third of the following Lectures. And in the second place, it must also follow that the rate of wages can be raised, or, what is nearly the same, the condition of the labouring classes improved, only by either increasing the fund for their maintenance, or diminishing the number to be maintained.

The principal means by which the fund for the maintenance of labourers can be increased, is by increasing the productiveness of labour. And this may be done,—

*First,* By allowing every man to exert himself in the way which, from experience, he finds most beneficial ; by freeing industry from the mass of restrictions, prohibitions, and protecting duties, with which the Legislature, sometimes in well-meaning ignorance, sometimes in pity, and some-

times in national jealousy, has laboured to crush or misdirect her efforts; and,

*Secondly*, By putting an end to that unhappy system which, in the southern counties, has dissociated labour from subsistence—has made wages not a matter of contract between the master and the workman, but a right in the one, and a tax on the other; and, by removing the motives for exertion, has rendered, as far as it has been possible, the labourer unworthy of his hire.

The only effectual and permanent means of preventing the undue increase of the number to be maintained, is to raise the moral and intellectual character of the labouring population; to improve, or, I fear we must say, to create habits of prudence, of self-respect, and of self-restraint; to equalize, as by nature they are equal, the wages of the single and the married, and no longer to make a family the passport to allowance. But these are necessarily gradual measures—they are preventive, not remedial. The only *immediate* remedy for an actual excess in one class of the population, is the ancient and approved one, *coloniam deducere*.

It is of great importance to keep in mind, that not only is emigration the sole immediate remedy, but that it is a remedy preparatory to the adoption and necessary to the safety of every other.

The principal cause of the calamities that we are witnessing, has been the disturbance which the poor-laws, as at present administered in the south of England, have created in the most extensive and the most important of all political relations, the relation between the employer and the labourer.

The slave (using that word in its strict sense) cannot choose his owner, his employment, or his residence; his whole services are the property of another, and their value, however high, gives him no additional claim. On the other hand, he is entitled to subsistence for himself and his family: clothing, lodging, food, medical attendance—everything, in short, which is necessary to keep him in health and strength is provided for him, from the same motives, and with the same liberality, that they are provided for the other domestic animals of his master. He is *bound* to labour, and has a *right* to be maintained. Extreme idleness may subject him to the lash, but extraordinary diligence cannot better his condition. He is equally incapable of being benefited by self-restraint, or injured by improvidence. While single, he receives a bare subsistence; if he have a family, his maintenance rises in precise proportion to his wants: the prudential check to population does not exist,—it is kept down, if at all, by oppression