

**THREE DIALOGUES ON THE  
CORN LAWS,  
BETWEEN A CLERGYMAN  
AND A PARISHIONER.**

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Three Dialogues on the Corn Laws, between a Clergyman and a Parishioner. by Francis Litchfield

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THREE DIALOGUES

ON

THE CORN LAWS,

BETWEEN

A CLERGYMAN AND A PARISHIONER.

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BY THE

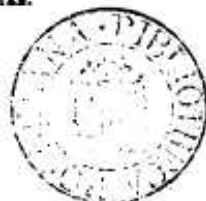
REV. FRANCIS LITCHFIELD,

RECTOR OF FARTHINGHOE, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE.

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"Ye little know what illa ye court,  
When changes are your wish."—BURNA.

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1839.

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## TO THE READER.

THESE Dialogues represent with additions a conversation that actually took place at a meeting between the Depositors of my Clothing Club and myself, in the month of February. As such, they may possibly prove useful to gentlemen, clergymen, farmers, and others, desirous of guarding the labourers of England against the delusive, and—if not obviated—destructive cry of “CHEAP BREAD.” It is often a difficult thing to ascertain, according to the order in which they arise, the statements formed by men so imperfectly educated as the agricultural labourers, on such an important and personal matter as the Corn Laws. It is perhaps scarcely less difficult to some, to know the proper way of answering objections, and of remedying errors, to which ignorance in such a case too commonly gives birth. These considerations have induced me to profit by the opportunity presented me, and, with a view to wider usefulness, to publish the results of my own experience. Some persons may think that the argument of these Dialogues might have been better arranged, and more strongly put. I have no doubt of it, and shall be glad to see it done. Indeed, I would have done it myself had I been able, or had time, which happened to press, permitted. Others may think that some topics have been omitted that might have been properly introduced, and some perhaps introduced that might better have been excluded. To that I assent as both possible and probable, but with this remark, that in conversing with the labouring poor, care should be taken not to oppress them with matter beyond their comprehension, and especially not to bewilder their minds with intricate statements, calculations of figures, and such terms as ‘chambers of commerce,’ ‘exports’ and ‘imports,’ ‘graduated scales’ and so forth. As to the language of these Dialogues it may perhaps not seem plain enough. The truth is, few persons

that have not made the attempt can have a notion, how difficult it is in writing a Dialogue of this kind, to make the questions and answers sufficiently simple, short, natural, and connected. I mention this, as an excuse for imperfections that will probably appear to many, and also on the other hand, as a caution to persons who in preferring a different language and method of expression, may miss the mark of a labourer's mind, and thus fail altogether in attaining the desired object.

Some persons may think a regular address to the poor man preferable on a matter so interesting to him as the Corn Law question. I do not agree in this. I am convinced that till successive questions have elicited a labourer's thoughts, no person is competent to construct an address properly adapted to them. And, after all, some expression may occur in the outset of such an address that, by not being rightly understood, or not agreed to, may render the remainder of such an appeal altogether ineffectual. This may be the case, however much a labourer, in deference to the station of the speaker, may declare himself, or appear to be, convinced. There are persons, perhaps, who may think that the labourer requires no advice, and no information on the subject of these Dialogues. "The repeal of the Corn Laws"—they may say—"is so plainly destructive to the interests of the agricultural poor, that no man among them of common sense and the least reflection can fail to perceive it." From the opinions of such persons I totally and strongly dissent. The labouring poor feel much more than they reason, and every person of observation must have remarked that in the newspapers and speeches of the Anti-Corn Law advocates, a cry, or a strong assertion, and not an argument, has been chiefly attempted, as indeed is almost uniformly the case in every democratic appeal to the humbler classes of society. But, that I might convince myself how the matter really stood respecting the labourer, I have lately examined, at the Journal Office of the House of Commons, the various Petitions for and against the Repeal of the Corn Laws, that have proceeded from that part of the country in which I reside—a district, be it observed, almost purely agricultural. What has been the result? Why, that the signatures and marks of agricultural labourers have been far more numerous in



favour of altering the Corn Laws, than against it. No doubt much of this may be attributed to the fact, that the farmers have not attempted to obtain the signatures of their labours, and have even (unwisely I think) refused marks when offered. But, on the other hand, I would ask, whether signatures gained by mere request, still more by compulsion, could be depended on in case of that encreased agitation with which the manufacturers, backed, I am grieved and ashamed to see, by some of Her Majesty's Ministers, are now threatening the country. I must say, I think not, unless the farmer (which rarely happens) has first made himself well acquainted with the subject, so as to explain it fully to the satisfaction of the labouring man. I say, I think not, and, as one of those who are convinced that the Corn Law Agitation has too many *party* as well as irreligious and republican objects in view, to be easily abandoned, I confess myself extremely anxious that every endeavour should be made to place the question not only before the labourer but the *farmer*, in such a popular and familiar form, that the tone of conversation in the public houses and in private society in humble life, may at once be leavened against repeal. This has been my motive for publishing these Dialogues, and in their present cheap form, as well as for now prefixing an address, of which the object is to induce others to act upon the plan I recommend, and to place these Dialogues, if approved, as widely as possible before the eye of the farmer and the labouring man. That the case of destitution here supposed, is carried to the furthest limits, is acknowledged. But so also is that put by the Manufacturers which it is intended to meet, who seldom fail to paint in the strongest colours, the future distress of the country, provided their Petitions are not acceded to, or rather, if their *threats* are not regarded. With more moderate opponents I would claim a right to insist, that the tendency of any diminution of that necessary protection which is now enjoyed by the Farmer, is to produce more or less such a state of things as I have here described, in proportion as foreign corn is found to supersede what is now grown by means of English and *Irish* labourers at home.

FRANCIS LITCHFIELD.

Farthinghoe Rectory, March 26th, 1839.



## CORN LAWS AND THE POOR.

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### DIALOGUE FIRST.

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Between the Rector of Farthinghoe and Richard Newman, a Parishioner, in the room of the Clothing Club, with all the Depositors assembled.

*Richard Newman.*—Please sir, if I may be so bold as to ask, we should all of us like to know what you think about the Corn Law?

*Rector.*—I will tell you, Richard, with a great deal of pleasure. In the first place, I think, there is nothing so difficult to make as a good Corn Law, and that nothing is so valuable to a poor man when it is made. The Corn Law of a country may be said to fix the price of all that the poor man buys and sells.

*Richard.*—Sells, sir! A poor man has'nt much to sell. I wish he had.

*Rector.*—Indeed, Richard, he has, and is always at market with it.

*Richard.*—How, Sir?

*Rector.*—Why he sells his labour every day to those that want it, and to those that will pay him the best for it. The money he gets for his labour he lays out in paying for his food, his firing, his clothing, and his cottage. Thus, the more he receives, the more he will have to buy with. Is it not so?

*Richard.*—Why, yes, I can't say but it is.

*Rector.*—Thus, you see, Richard, that a good Corn Law is every thing to a poor man. He finds it out every day first in his wages, and then in all that he eats, and drinks, and feels, and wears, that are bought by his wages.

*Richard.*—Then I'm sure a poor man ought to have the best Corn Law that can be made.