

**SIX LECTURES ON THE CORN-LAW
MONOPOLY AND FREE TRADE:
DELIVERED AT
THE LONDON MECHANICS' INSTITUTION
SOUTHAMPTON BUILDINGS, CHANCERY
LANE**

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Six Lectures on the Corn-Law Monopoly and Free Trade: Delivered at the London Mechanics' Institution Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane by Philip Harwood

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PHILIP HARWOOD

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BY
PHILIP HARWOOD.

"I am persuaded that no man, and no combination of men, for their own ideas of their particular profit, can, WITHOUT GREAT IMPIETY, undertake to say that man shall not eat his bread by his labour; that they have no sort of right, either to prevent the labour, or to withhold the bread."—BURKE.

LONDON :
JOHN GREEN, NEWGATE STREET;
C. FOX, PATERNOSTER ROW;
AND
SAMUEL CLARKE (LATE H. HOOPER), 13, PALL MALL EAST.
1843.

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LECTURE I.

MONDAY, 23rd JANUARY, 1843.

THE PRESENT STATE OF THE QUESTION.

I HAVE been asked by the Anti-Corn-Law Committee of the Metropolitan Boroughs, to address you on that question which now stirs to its depths the heart of England; that question between the selfish interests of the few—the very few—and the plain, broad rights of the many; that question, whether Britain shall henceforth be a great country or a little country; whether it shall recover from the debility and exhaustion under which it now labours, to run a new race of glory and happiness, or whether it shall finally and for ever succumb at the feet of a miserable monopolising minority—that question of questions which is shortly summed up in the words, “Corn-Law Monopoly and Free-Trade.” With the resoluteness of men who know that they are right, that they have truth and justice at their back; with the fixity of purpose and the force of faith befitting men who know that right, truth and justice carry the day at last against all Parliamentary majorities, oligarchical obstructions, ministerial expediencies, plausibilities, tricks and shifts whatsoever; and with the cheerful hope inspired by past successes which, however valueless in themselves, are important as recognitions of a principle,—the movers in this Anti-Corn-Law Agitation are determined to make a good finish of that which they have well begun, to come into closer and closer contact with the intellects and hearts of their countrymen, to send this agitation on and on in an ever-widening and deepening cur-

rent—till it shall have flooded the whole length and breadth of the empire, and swept away the last fragment of that monopoly-barrier which a tyrannous and sordid legislation has interposed between industry and its righteous reward, between hunger and its needed food, between the wants of one people and the superfluities of others, between the commercial and manufacturing energies of this mighty nation and the open market of the world. Of the ultimate result of this agitation no man can doubt who knows what a principle is, and what power there is in right to work itself victoriously through all the obstructions and entanglements of wrong. All things help it, as they help every cause that has on its side facts of experience and laws of nature. Good harvests and bad harvests, financial deficit, and income-tax to fill up that deficit (which does not fill it up), landlord violence and unreason, and ministerial moderation and plausibility—all things help us, if we will but help ourselves at the same time. Much work is to be done—a work of conviction for the yet unconvinced, and excitement for the apathetic; we must go on accumulating our facts and our reasonings, informing ignorance, and rending sophism; we must all work together, in a cause which is the cause of all, with warm English hearts and cool English heads—and the end will come, as surely as the rising of the morrow's sun will come.

And this is what I wish to show you this evening; that the end will come, and is coming. It is not my purpose in this lecture so much to expose the iniquity of monopoly legislation, or to illustrate, in any detail, the mischiefs which it inflicts on all our economical and social interests, as to examine the present state of the question between monopoly and free trade; to show you how far we have got in this controversy, and whereabouts we now are; to compare the state of the question now with what it was when this agitation began. We shall find that the progress of events has amazingly simplified and cleared the matter. A whole battalion of fallacies and sophisms has been routed and demolished. All along the lines of monopoly, we have posts formally surrendered

to us, or maintained against us with but a faint show and make-believe of resistance, that had used to be relied on as towers of strength. Principles are enunciated, by monopoly's chosen advocates, which contain the whole of our case, and of which nothing is wanted but the honest application. By the *dicta* of a monopolist Ministry, and the acts of a monopolist Parliament, one heavy blow and great discouragement after another has been dealt to the monopoly power,—the fraud has been stripped of one disguise after another, and there it stands tottering to its fall, awaiting but one breath of an honest national indignation to bring it all down together. We are every day coming nearer and nearer to the point at which every man, woman and child in Great Britain will see the landlord monopoly to be a naked, unadulterated wrong and nuisance.

From the recent history of this controversy, we may make out a pretty long list of dead or dying fallacies,—fallacies once solemnly paraded before the world as elementary truths,—now for ever branded as stupid blunders, or impudent lies. I mean now to go over some of the chief of these; not intending so much to refute them, as to show how, in the natural course of events, they have refuted themselves, and, having done all the service they ever can do, are gone their way to the limbo of vanities.

First in the rank of these self-exploded fallacies, is that notion on which the whole of our landlord legislation is based, *of its being possible to fix by law the price of corn*. This is what legislation has been at for hundreds of years past, and never succeeded in doing yet. The more elaborate and ingeniously complicated have been the means used, the more signal has been the failure, the more manifest the impossibility—*now* the confessed and avowed impossibility. Within the last three centuries, some scores of Acts of Parliament have been made with a view to fix prices—sometimes to fix them high, sometimes low—and by the most whimsically diversified expedients;—sometimes by imposing duties on importation, sometimes by offering bounties on exporta-

tion, sometimes by bounties on importation, sometimes by prohibiting importation and exportation both—and finally, by the dexterous juggle of the sliding scale. All in vain; the experiment has invariably failed; and the latest and most ingenious experiment has failed the most signally. Mr. Labouchere, in the Corn-Law Debate of 1840, thus sums up the operation of the sliding scale of 1828; which sliding scale was intended to keep prices at 64*s.* a quarter. Of the twelve years from 1828 to 1839 inclusive—

“Wheat had been sold at an average price under 40*s.* during 17 months; at an average between 40*s.* and 50*s.* for 23 months; between 50*s.* and 60*s.* for 48 months; between 60*s.* and 70*s.* for 38 months; between 70*s.* and 80*s.* for 16 months; and between 80*s.* and 90*s.* for one month.”

So it is now coming to be understood that Acts of Parliament cannot fix prices, any more than they can fix that on which prices depend—wind, rain and sunshine; it is understood and acknowledged. The fundamental postulate of landlord legislation is declared to be a blunder. That Statesman whose whole public career, from the day that he first tied himself to the chariot-wheels of the Orange ascendancy, to the hour when he declared it to be sound political economy to “buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest;”—whose whole career has been a series of reluctant concessions, grudging retractations, and forced, tardy half-conversions; that Statesman who always looks one way and moves another, and whose only unviolated pledge as yet is the pledge to sliding scales, and slippery averages, with details indeterminate—declared on the 24th of February last year, that “it is impossible to fix the price of food by any legislative enactment”—declared this at the very moment that he was making a law whose professed aim was to keep the price of corn between 54*s.* and 58*s.* There is the fallacy renounced, repudiated—at the very instant that it is taken for the basis of a legislative act; an admitted absurdity, a confessed impossibility is selected, after six months’ anxious meditation, as the groundwork of a great political fabric. Will this last?—this tinkering up of the legislation of Deity, this meddling, by

tricky Acts of Parliament, with the beautiful, divine simplicity of Nature and natural law. Nature, science, commerce, civilization, have resources for preventing sudden and ruinous fluctuations of price. Widen the field from which you draw your supplies, depend not on one climate but on all climates, let casual deficiencies here be compensated by casual superfluities there—this is Nature's "system of averages:" but Sir Robert Peel and Nature are not of the same mind. It will not last: the ministerial architect proclaims to the world the rottenness of his own foundation: "it is impossible to fix the price of food by any legislative enactment."

How much we had used to hear once about the *importance of the agricultural interest*, meaning by "agricultural interest," the rental of owners of arable land; the importance of the agricultural interest; the dependence of national prosperity on landlords getting great rents; the national need of cherishing and coddling the rent-interest, as the great payer of taxes, the parent and benefactor of all other interests. Well! all this is settled, done with,—gone to the bottomless pit of detected and exploded lies. Within the memory of the youngest man living, we have made two sets of experiments on this question of the connexion between the rent-interest and the commercial, manufacturing and fiscal prosperity of the country:—and each time, with results which no man living can forget. These results are nowhere more lucidly expressed than in a quarter where it must be allowed one must not always look for verities—in royal speeches. On the 24th of February 1835, King William opened Parliament with congratulations on "*the satisfactory state of the trade and commerce of the country, AND OF THE PUBLIC REVENUE,*" at the same time "*deeply lamenting that the agricultural interest continued in a state of great depression.*" And on the 4th of February 1836, we find his Majesty addressing Parliament thus:—

"*The state of the commerce and manufactures of the United Kingdom is HIGHLY SATISFACTORY. I lament that any class of my subjects should still suffer distress; and the difficulties which continue to be felt in important branches of agriculture may deserve your inquiry.*"