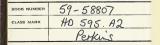


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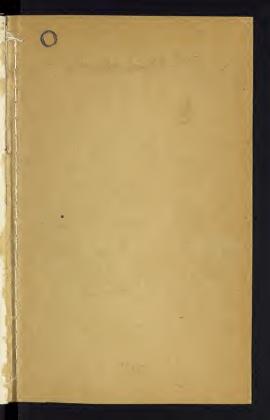
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LORD WESTERN'S

LETTER

то

THE PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS

Chelmsford Agricultural Society,

STATE OF THE COUNTRY.

FOURTH EDITION.

N43



LETTER

THE PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS

OF THE

Chelmsford Agricultural Society,

UPON THE CAUSES OF THE

DISTRESSED STATE OF THE AGRICULTURAL CLASSES

OF THE

UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND.

BY LORD WESTERN.

FOURTH EDITION.

LONDON :

JAMES RIDGWAY AND SONS, PICCADILLY.

MCCCXXXV.



A LETTER, &c.

SIR,

I ADDRESSED a Letter to you some little time ago, as President of the Chelmsford Agricultural Society, suggesting a plan, by which some little relief might, I thought, be obtained for the Agricultural interest, under its *present overwhelming* difficulties.* I then only hinted at the cause of that pressure,

* This proposition is simply to allow the bonding of British Malt and British Spirits under the King's lock, without payment of duty till taken out for consumption .--- Malt will keep two or three years, with little or no loss of quality ; Barley will not ; it will not malt so well even during the latter part of the malting season ; but it is obvious that the duty forces an immediate sale of these articles -whereas, if they were allowed to keep them without duty till they were brought into market, they would form a deposit upon which the owners might found a credit, thus bringing their property into immediate activity, instead of loading the markets at one time, sinking the price, and increasing the consequent loss ; the credit taken upon these deposits would add a little to the circulating medium of the country, and in that way be productive of some advantage. There should be power to bond British Spirits also, as well as foreign, which would also enable the Distiller to employ his capital to better account, and Spirits improve in quality by keeping, and become less noxious to the health.

which for years has weighed down the Agriculture of the country, and which now presses with such increasing severity as to occasion very serious and general alarm. I have again and again pointed out the cause to be the Currency Act of 1819, and however discouraging the inattention to it, I never will cease to avail myself of every opportunity to strive to awaken the public mind to its destructive consequences, because I am more and more convinced there can be no permanent relief to the industrious classes till it is materially altered. Ministers have nibbled at it several times, though they will not acknowledge it. They have counteracted its influence repeatedly, but they have done nothing effectual. It is not that any violent proceeding is necessary, such as many persons apprehend by an alteration of that Act, but an alteration upon a sound and safe principle is indispensablenothing else is wanting, nothing else can avail. Total continued neglect of it is frightful.

Our alarming difficulties are, in truth, owing to the state of the markets and the fall in the price of corn since that Bill passed, comparatively with what it bore during upwards of twenty years preceding. Taxes and Tithes, excess of population, and various other causes I have heard alleged, have nothing to do with it. This is a bold assertion, but I shrink not from it. But, before I proceed to shew the extent and consequences of this fall of the markets, I feel it necessary to premise that I do utterly protest against any desire to raise the market price

again by diminishing the supply of corn. I never have been guilty of the unpardonable folly of ascribing to productive seasons any portion of our distress. I do not complain of the increasing supplies to England from Ireland; so far from it, I rejoice in the improved and improving cultivation of Ireland as I should in that of any other integral part of the Empire. I say abundance never did any harm, but exactly the reverse, and I shall ever hail with joy and gratitude those seasons which render the earth productive. Then why not (somebody will say) admit foreign corn ? Why, because, if it produces a temporary abundance, it will, I firmly believe, lead to a future scarcity, and subject us to the mercy of foreign countries for our food ; such, at least, would be the consequence under the present financial condition of the country, or rather under the pressure of that monetary system established in 1819. Give us a copious, but carefully guarded supply of the medium of exchange, and our powers of competition with foreign countries would be considerably increased, the Ports would fly open under the provisions of the present Corn Law in a very short time, for the MONEY price of corn would speedily advance, ave, and remain at a higher standard than at present, even with OPEN PORTS : I may be told, that the people can hardly pay the price of corn now, how would they THEN ? My answer is, the price COULD NOT advance till money had begun freely to flow into their pockets. The corn market MUST be governed by the MEANS

of the MULTITUDE as well as by the supply of corn. The consumption of the rich cannot, of course, have any material influence : a large proportion of the wealth of the rich, or comparatively rich, must get into the pockets of the multitude, BEFORE the corn and flour markets can, by any possibility, advance, unless, indeed, there is a defective supply of corn ; then the price rises, or rather the quantity of corn, for the same money is diminished, or if a larger aggregate of money is drawn from their pockets for food, they must give up other comforts or necessaries. God forbid, therefore, that I should contemplate for one moment a rise of price consequent upon a DIMINISHED SUPPLY; instead of a DIMINISHED supply of corn, I want an INCREASED SUPPLY OF MONEY : I want to see money so plentiful that a quarter of wheat may purchase considerably more than it does now, for money is as much purchased by wheat as wheat is by money ;* I want to enable the labourer to purchase with his

* Mr. Hume, in his Essay on Money, observes, that the prices of every thing depend upon the proportions between commodities and meney : that any considerable alteration in either, has the same effect; heightening or lowering the price; increase the commodities, they become cheaper; that is, they become purchaseable with less money. Increase the moregi--the money becomes cheaper, and the commodities rise in value; that is, will command more money. Mr. Locke asys that persons who will take the trouble to look a little beyond names, will find that money, like all other commodities, is liable to the same changes; and if the quantity is increased, or lessened, the alteration of value is in the money, not the commodities. labour, 14s., 16s., or 20s., with his week's work, instead of 7s., 8s., 10s., or 12s. Let us only be supplied with money freely, and I am confident the agriculture of the country would speedily be relieved from all difficulty; PLENTY OF EMPLOY-MENT FOR ALL OUR SUPPOSED EXCESS OF POPULA-TION, AND PLENTY OF FOOD, WOLLD BE CONSE-QUENT UPON PLENTY OF MONEY, and in conjunc tion with all the other industrious classes, we should find the genial warmth of the sun as it were again revivify the face of nature, enliven all our faculties, and sweeten all our labours with that success which industry, skill, and perseverance are so justly entitled to command.

I shall now proceed to show you, by a very simple statement (on the correctness of which I challenge enquiry), the marvellous change produced in the condition of the practical farmer; and the consequence upon the country at large will be obvious at once.

I suppose a farm of one hundred acres, of fair, good arable land well cultivated upon the four course system, the produce of wheat, at $3\frac{1}{2}qrs$. per acre, barley, 5qrs., beans and peas, $3\frac{1}{2}qrs$. Wheat, during nearly a quarter of a century from 1797 to 1819, had *averaged* 80s. the quarter; 15 years preceding 1819, 85s.; the renat founded upon these data, I take at 35s. per acre; the moment the Bill passed, the markets fall 30 or 40 per cent., and in the 15 years succeeding, the average price has been, as near as may be, 55s; it has subsequently fallen still lower, and is, I believe, now only 40s. I therefore consider the price of wheat to have fallen, on the average, 30s. per quarter; barley, 20s.; beans and peas, 20s. Upon these grounds, I estimate the reduction of the money receipts of the farmer upon 100 acres to amount annually to £325. The reduction of price upon clover, tares, and turnips, is loosely estimated, but moderate. I take no notice of the change of price of various minor articles, the produce of such a farm. This aggregate and enormons difference in his return, I think, I clearly establish, upon the following calculation; —I take the produce on the four course system to be as under—

Acres Qrs.	Diminution.
Wheat 25 -31 per acre	30s. per qr £131 15s.
Barley 25 -5 ditto	20s. ditto . 125
Beans and Peas 121-31 ditto	
Clover 121-	15 -
Turnips& Tares 121-	
And fallow 121-	
Acres 100.	£325 15s.

The extraordinary change here exhibited, and I may say proved, surely calls for the most serious consideration of those who direct the Councils of the Kingdom.* It will hardly be now denied that

 If £325 is thus withdrawn from the circulation of the country, upon every hundred acress of land in tillage, it will be found that upon a fair account of the total arable land of the united empires, £55,000,000 sterling annually are lost to the circulation from that this change which was at all events coincident as to time to a moment with the passing of the Currency Act was caused by that measure. If this is not to be altered, our Statesmen should, at all events, shew the means of restoring the financial equilibrium of the country, so rudely shaken. First, what reductions are necessary to the farmer ? I will touch upon rent,—to begin :—

If the landlord reduces 15s. per acre, or in other words, reduces his rent from ± 175 . to ± 100 , the tenant has ± 75 . to set against ± 325 .; if the landlord sinks his rent 20s. the acre, and, instead of a rent of ± 175 . puts up with a rent of ± 75 , the tenant has ± 100 . to set against ± 325 . I will not stop to comment upon the situation of the landlord under such circumstances—it must be too obvious to need any observations. I will go on to suppose the entire rent done away : the tenant will still be under the necessity, singular as it may appear, to reduce his expenditure in other ways, to the extent of ± 150 , to make up, with the rent ± 175 , the loss of ± 325 , to put himself upon the footing on which he stood prior to the year 1819. I cannot

source. I take the wheat consumers at 15,000,000 persons, at a quarter per head : divide by three quarters, and multiply by four years (wheat being grown only once in four years) and we have 20,000,000 aress, or £200,000, which multiplied by £325, amounts to £65,000,000. If this calculation is said to be vague and exaggerated, which, however, I think it is not, the reader must see that upon any calculation the total of money withdrawn from circulation by the loss proved upon 100 acres must be enormous; and must not the country shopkcepters feel it as much as the farmers, and must not the manifacturers who supply the shopkcepters \hat{r} discern where he can look to means at all adequate to effect this reduction, even if I give him the Malt Tax wholly repealed into the bargain. When I ascribe it all to the Currency Act, which is vulgarly still called Peel's Bill, it is by no means with a view of throwing particular blame upon him: it was inflicted by the singularly mistaken views of *certain Statesmen*, who took the lead on the *Opposition* as well as on the Treasury Benches, at that time, and to whom, indeed, more perhaps than the Tories, the mischief may be attributed.

Upon looking at the result of this simple statement, I have again and again thought I must be wrong, for , it is difficult to comprehend how the enlivation of the country can be carried on at all under these circumstances; that there must be annually a sacrifice of capital in many cases, if not all, is indisputable, unless, indeed, my statement can be overthrown, which, upon repeated examination, I believe is impossible.* Here we see at once the cause of the labourers' distress...The farmers, so shorn of means, and many as it were at the last gasp, can by no possibility give employment to the same number of men; they are irresistibly driven to shifts, which reason does not justify, but necessity enforces. The labour market

* The only question that can be raised upon the propriety of my statement, that occurs to me, is the reduction of price upon barley and beans to be 20.5, per quarter each, instead of 15.5, which would be the just proportion to wheat, in which case the difference would be 311.5.5. in barley—107.105, in beans. But wheat has faller nearer 400, than 300. cannot be sustained when the farmer is so reduced-the labourers, finding no adequate demand for their sole commodity, are deprived of their independence, and cruelly transformed into beggars and paupers, the fatal consequence of which is that their moral character is injured. The human mind cannot bear such an infliction as that I have described without being inflamed and irritated in the first instance, and, when inured to begging and pauperism, degraded and debased. Too evidently have these lamentable changes already taken place. I am aware that calculations are made to shew that labourers are better off now than they were before Peel's Bill; if they are, it is clear that it must be at the sacrifice of the capital of their employers. But these calculators, relying upon the nominal daily wages and comparative price of provisions, never consider the number of days men are unemployed and the number altogether out of work, besides which, it is absurd to suppose that, when the labourer is obliged almost to go upon his knees to the farmer to give him employment, that he can command the adequate wages for his labour which he can when his commodity is eagerly sought after; and equally absurd to suppose that the man can be well off when the master is subject to so severe a pressure as I have thus, I think, unanswerably shewn to be his fate.

There are many opulent land-owners who look no further than the audit-day to judge of the condition of the farmer, and who never dream of, and hardly believe if told, of the farmer's sacrifice of capital to meet bis landlord's demands. There are others, landed Grandees of boundless extent, who say they never have a vacant farm; but they have plenty of applications, at as good rent as before, and their thoughts and their knowledge go not beyond the Land-Surveyor's or Steward's report, which may be satisfactory in consequence of Their Lordships' former Steward having very possibly, twenty-one years ago, taken a premium of the farmer and let the farm at half the proper rent, or, perhaps, so inordinately rich are they, and so cradled in the lap of fortune, that they cannot believe that any body is, or need be, poor.

Besides which, great farmers under these great Lords have various advantages, which cannot be fairly estimated, hardly comprehended within the limit of any legitimate calculation, and certainly not within the compass of the dry products of the ordinary cultivator of the soil : extensive and fine-breeding grounds, flocks and herds upon which no expenditure is required, capitals to avail themselves of the best periods of market, which makes them also dealers in corn, hay, and live stock, and numberles's little douceurs which the little tenant of the lesser landlord knows nothing of; and even these mighty men have begun some time since to bow their heads, and are staggering under the increased difficulties of the present moment.

Independent, however, of these circumstances, the owners good convertible land, well situated for market will have candidates for vacant farms as long as it is possible to carry on the cultivation of the soil, or any portion of it, at all; they enter upon their farms, too, at HALF the expense their often-ruined predecessors did fifteen or twenty years ago, and, after all, these new men can with great difficulty make both ends meet, and indeed, often fail in their expectation, even under the advantages just described. The farmers cannot change to other employments, and they actually take their farms very often solely upon the prospect of more favourable times, and, in that confidence, if they are men of capital, cheerfully submit to a present loss. Of all the grievous inflictions that ever visited an industrious people, that Act of 1819, which unfortunately for Sir R. Peel has taken his name, certainly has been, and continues to be, the most destructive. How should it be otherwise? During very near a quarter of a century the produce of the labour, skill, and capital of the farmer and other industrious classes, yielded a given proportionate annual money amount; every business transaction and all money engagements in life were founded upon it ; industry met with its due reward in the multitudinous occupations of life; when, at one single stroke of the pen, as it were, that money amount of their annual produce is reduced one half, and their capital of live and dead stock, equally, if not more degraded in price, and this reduction permanent, even increasing at this hour.

How is it that the Statesman does not see in this revolution of property, the change of temper of the industrious classes, and the general dissatisfaction which still prevails, and the consequent danger that awaits us ?-How is it that he does not see that all the political changes which have occurred since that time, whether for good or evil, have, in truth, their origin in the distress occasioned by Peel's Bill ? Whilst the industrious classes were flourishing; they would listen to no counsel for CHANGE, either for good or bad; awakened by distress, they listened to some good counsel, and directed their energies to some useful, and one supremely important measure ; this acquisition, however, brought no relief, from the insidious workings of that truly revolutionary monetary infliction : and they now cast their eyes wildly about, and seem resolved to effect a political revolution, in the vain hope of relieving themselves from the very painful revolution they have undergone in their individual conditions. Nothing can appease them whilst they continue to be robbed of the legitimate rewards of industry; grant to them that, and Government would have little to fear ; employment, with adequate remuneration, would supersede all complaints both here and in Ireland ; without it, vain all reforms of every description that can be thought of.

The Malt Tax repeal, if it benefited directly the barley farmer 4s. per quarter, it is as much as would be his share, which upon his annual average growth of barley, 125 quarters, would amount to £25, and in regard to tithes I cannot give him more than £10, upon the change of his probable composition into a commutation, if taken in kind it is another matter, from the possibility of which I trust, however, we shall soon be relieved. Thus we find upon the repeal of the Malt Tax, and a commutation of Tithes, we gain £45, which, deducted from £325, leaves £280; if we strike out the rent, £175, £105 remains still to be squeezed out of the labourers and tradesmen.

I do not make light of Taxes and Tithes by any means, but they are old grievances under which we have prospered, and I only implore you not so to busy yourselves therewith as to overlook the real millstone which is fast sinking us all. Six-andthirty millions of annual taxes have been taken off since the war. Have they given relief? So far from it, the remainder press with infinitely greater severity than did the full amount before any reduction. How can this difficult problem be solved but by a reference to the working of Peel's Bill?

The extraordinary pertinacity of some persons leads them still to talk of the transition from war to peace as the cause of the fall of the markets. I cannot stop to combat now these so often refuted and mischievous opinions; suffice it to call the farmer's recollection to the years 1817-18, just at the moment of this transition upon which they dwell, and which was, perhaps, the best farmer's year that ever was known-plenty of corn and plenty of money.*

Another set of persons, with equal pertinacity, insist upon it that Peel's Bill cannot now be amended-perish the country, live Peel's Bill. Herein, I am sorry to say that many, if not most, of our Statesmen take a lead-perish the Country rather than they should admit their having made so terrific a mistake. The weight of their authority overpowers the diffident and deferential judgment of the people generally; but I hope you will, in your Society, assert the supremacy of your own understandings : you are just as well able to judge rightly upon such a subject as any Cabinet Minister; it is altogether within the reach of common sense, of which most useful quality I think Ministers do not often evince so large a share that we need altogether succumb to their dictation.

* If the prices of that period had been caused by war, assuredly other wars would have occasioned some advance of price, but we see by the reference here given that no such effect was produced :---

	The War of the Revolution from 1683 t	o 1	697	£2	10	8	
	1698 to 1701, Peace of Ryswich			2	12	6	
	1702 to 1712, War of Spanish Successi	ion		2	4	11	
	1713 to 1739, Peace of Utrecht			2	0	4	
	1740 to 1748, War of Flanders		÷.	1	15	5	
	1749 to 1754, Peace of Aix la Chapelle			1	18	2	
	1755 to 1762, War of America		:	2	1	10	
	1763 to 1774, Peace of Paris		÷.	2	9	5	
	1775 to 1782, War of America	:		2	1	11	
	1783 to 1792, Second Peace of Paris			2	6	2	
4	aking on the whole the price of Wheat	in	peace	highe	r tł	an in	i.

waking on the whole the price of W heat in peace higher than in war. Deeply and painfully have I reflected upon the consequence of this dogged opinion of the impossibility of altering Peel's Bill, for I plainly see, in the total *inaptitude* of its provisions to the ACTUAL condition of the country, the most fatal consequences, and anxiously have I watched the direful changes which it is making—and, I am afraid I must say, has made—in the moral and political character and temper of the people.

The difficulties (extreme they have been and still are) under which ALL the industrious classes. from the most wealthy to the lowest operatives and agricultural labourers, have struggled, are surely too evident to be denied. I am astonished that the afflicting results which I contemplate do not more forcibly strike the understanding of the statesmen who have successively held the reins of Government, and that they seem to be perfectly insensible to the mighty effect which the aptitude or inaptitude of the medium of exchange has upon the condition of society at large, and the general prosperity, peace and happiness of a country. They seem to view it only as a question between debtor and creditor-debtor versus creditor-as some imagine that agriculture and trade are the one versus the other. I am thoroughly convinced, and I think it may be proved to the satisfaction of any candid and enlightened creditor, carrying his views to a very limited perspective, that he is as much interested in an alteration of Peel's Bill, and in an adaptation of our monetary system to our actual condition, as the debtor ; or,

in other words, that all those who have a lien, and, in truth, their sole lien, upon the products of the industry of the people, viz. the Government and the public and private creditor, have as deep an interest in a proper conformation of our present inapplicable system, as the industrious classes themselves. They have undoubtedly, in the first place, as strong a general political interest in restoring that harmony between the different classes of society, which has most indisputably been disturbed by that unexampled change in all our money relations which was produced by Peel's Bill. Look at the conditions of the landlord, tenant, and labourer, notwithstanding all the kindly feeling which has generally prevailed between the British landlord and his tenant, and the landlord's regard. also, for the laborious classes. So strongly do their interests and wants clash, that unavoidably painful feelings have grown up between them. The Landlord cannot but believe the tenant might pay more rent, and save him from degradation, and exile from his family residence, or country ; . his fate is inevitable if his estate is heavily burthened. The tenant still thinks he pays too much, for his net returns are hardly adequate to cover his most economical expenditure, even under favourable seasons. The labourer considers the sweat of his brow ill requited, and, above all, the honest and industrious man complains that he is often distressed beyond measure for want of employment, though he is able and anxious to work, whilst

nobody charges him with idleness, or can impeach his character in any way.

The different classes, ignorant of the true cause of their sufferings, become painfully hostile to each other, and those delightful results of harmony and mutual confidence, which did so happily prevail in England, are no longer experienced ; dreadfully changed indeed are the tempers and dispositions of the working-classes towards the higher. Where is the country, besides this, in which farmers cannot go to bed without the fear that their blazing stacks may rouse them from their midnight slumbers ! How curious it is that Mr Locke should, in 1691, have described exactly these miseries, as consequent upon the lessening the quantity and raising the value of money; in other words, contracting the Currency. The aggregate quantity of money being reduced, it follows, he says, of course, the share of each individual must be reduced also. The people, not seeing it is gone, begin quarrelling among themselves, each thinking his neighbour has got more than his share. The struggle is generally first between the agricultural and commercial classes, and then between the masters, workmen, and labourers, which latter can hardly maintain the struggle against the richer classes, unless when some common and great interest, uniting them in one universal ferment, makes them forget respect, and emboldens them to carve for their wants with force, and then they may probably break in upon the rich, and carry all before them, and sweep all like a deluge. To this ex-

tremity there are persons urging on the multitude at this hour, and have been at the work some years. They are persons of talent and power applicable to such a purpose, and contribute mainly to the promotion of such a catastrophe, as Mr. Locke anticipates, upon the continuance of so painful a struggle as that which unhappily now prevails. Here I shall close this letter, already too long, and in a future, perhaps, endeavour to shew that our monetary system may be adapted to the condition of the country, without injury to any class of the people, that is to say, upon the balance of advantage and disadvantage, and I am sanguine enough to believe that, if such was effected, the brightest scene of prosperity would open to us, even yet, that ever was enjoyed by any country in the world

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your faithful and obedient Servant,

WESTERN.

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