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TO THE  
FARMERS  
OF  
THE UNITED KINGDOM.

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GENTLEMEN,

IT is my intention, should no other Member of more influence and experience undertake the task, to propose, in the approaching session of Parliament, a revision of the Corn Laws, upon the principle of gradually abolishing all restriction, and all duties, upon the importation of the products of foreign agriculture. In the mean time, permit me to solicit your attention while I state, in as few words as possible, the grounds upon which I confidently anticipate, that, in endeavouring to carry through a measure, upon which the prosperity of all the industrious classes of the community essentially depends, I shall receive, from the enlightened agriculturists of the United Kingdom, not opposition, but support.

It is the interest of the farmer, no less than of the manufacturer, that the rate of profit should be high. The cultivator of the soil, like every other producer, is prosperous when his returns considerably exceed his expenses, and is depressed and embarrassed as the return he obtains bears a diminishing proportion to the capital he lays out. Now I undertake to show, by proof amounting to demonstration, that a free importation of the products of foreign agriculture, without restriction and without duty, would render the rate of profit, in all the branches of British industry, agriculture included, permanently high. Should I succeed in this undertaking, may I not expect to receive from the farmer, as well as from the manufacturer and trader, cordial support and co-operation, while endeavouring to obtain the sanction of the Legislature for a gradual introduction of a perfectly free and untaxed trade in all the first necessaries of life?

It was proved before a committee of the House of Commons, and it is a fact which must be fami-

liar to every practical farmer, that the soils under cultivation in this country vary very widely from each other in fertility; some lands, as stated in evidence before the Select Committee of the Commons, yielding no more than from eight to nine, and others producing as much as from thirty-six to forty bushels of wheat per acre. The expense of cultivating bad land is greater than that of cultivating good land. I will, however, concede this point; I will admit that cold reluctant soils are tilled at no greater cost than alluvial mould; and I will assume, for the sake of illustration, that on every quality of land the farmer's annual outlay, in cultivating his farm, consists of ten bushels, or the value of ten bushels of wheat per acre.

These things being premised, we will assume that, in consequence of the free importation of foreign corn, the demand for farms is so limited that the farmer can obtain, for a very small, or merely nominal rent, land yielding an annual crop equivalent to 20 bushels of wheat per acre. Under these circumstances, the farmer will pay rent for those lands only which yield *more* than 20 bushels per acre; and for these lands all the produce above 20 bushels per acre will go to rent. The farmer, therefore, for all the lands which he cultivates, will obtain, after the deduction for rent, a produce of 20 bushels per acre; and as his expenditure is only 10 bushels per acre, his profit will be 10 bushels, or cent. per cent. upon his capital.

Let us now suppose that an increasing population requires an increased supply of corn; that a protecting duty limits importation; and that, in consequence, the demand for farms becomes such, that that quality of land, which the farmer can obtain at a nominal rent, yields only 15 bushels of wheat per acre, and that, on other lands, the excess of product above fifteen bushels per acre is paid as rent. His profits are reduced from one hundred to 50 per cent. Laying out 10 bushels per acre in cultivation, he obtains a return of 15 bushels,

Should increasing supplies of food continue to be required, and high protecting duties upon importation continue to be imposed, then no lands may be obtainable at a nominal rent, except those which, cultivated at an expense of 10 bushels of wheat per acre, yield respectively no more than 11 or even 10 bushels per acre. It is self evident that, on the lands yielding 11 bushels per acre, the farmer's profit would be reduced to one bushel per acre, and that on those yielding only 10 bushels per acre, the profit would altogether disappear.

Upon the supposition that the expenses of cultivation can be accurately represented by a given quantity of the produce obtained, it can be established by proof, simple and obvious, and amounting to strict demonstration, that restrictions imposed on the importation of foreign corn lower the rate of profit upon the capital employed in domestic agriculture. I am fully aware, however, that the intelligent practical agriculturist may object, that this supposition is not sufficiently conformable to fact and experience to render the inductions from it completely satisfactory. Hence the question, whether the rate of profit upon the capital employed in domestic agriculture, is raised or lowered by restrictions on the importation of foreign corn, becomes one of considerable complexity, involving, as it does, considerations respecting the value of farm produce and of manufactured articles, in relation to each other and to currency. I entreat the patient attention of the intelligent farmer, while I endeavour to disentangle this complicated question, and to present it to him reduced to its simple elements.

For this purpose, I assume that the expense of cultivating an acre of land consists of the labour of one man, to whom seed and food, equivalent to five bushels of wheat, and implements and clothing, equivalent to five yards of cloth, are advanced; while the cost of procuring 60s. in money also consists of the labour of one man, to whom the same identical

advance is made. By this supposition, the produce of an acre of land, paying only a nominal rent, will sell for 60*s.*, whatever the quantity of such produce may be. The reason why the varying quantity of produce thus obtained from an acre of land will always sell for the same price is this. The principle of competition constantly tends to bring the rates of profit, obtained in different trades, to an equality; and profits cannot be equal, unless products obtained at equal cost are, on the average of years, of equal value.

While the produce of an acre of land, paying a nominal rent, sells for 60*s.*, I suppose further, that the cost of producing 15 yards of cloth consists of the labour of one man, to whom raw material and food, equivalent to five bushels of wheat, and tools and clothing, equivalent to five yards of cloth, have been advanced. On the principle, that goods produced at equal cost are of equal value, 15 yards of cloth will be equivalent to the produce of an acre of land, and will always sell for 60*s.*, or at 4*s.* per yard.

On these data, the question—in what manner restrictions upon the importation of foreign corn affect the profits of the farmer—becomes one of simple arithmetic. And let me here distinctly state, that I have assumed these data, not because they are in any peculiar way favourable to the conclusion which I wish to establish, but merely because *some* data must be taken, in order to state the complicated questions we have to consider with clearness and precision.

### CASE I.

The farmer occupies, at a nominal rent, a tract of land yielding an annual crop equivalent to 30 bushels of wheat per acre. Upon the data assumed, wheat must, in this case, be 2*s.* a bushel, because the same cost which raises 30 bushels procures 60*s.*

**Question,** What is the rate of the farmer's profit?

## EXPENDITURE, PER ACRE:

Farm produce, seed and food, <i>s.</i>	<i>s.</i>
five bushels of wheat, at 2 <i>s.</i>	
per bushel .....	10
Wrought goods, implements,	
and clothing, equal to 5 yards	
of cloth .....	20
	<hr/>
	30

## RETURN:

Produce, per acre, 30 bushels	
at 2 <i>s.</i> .....	60
	<hr/>
	60
	<hr/>
Profit .....	30

## CASE II.

The farmer's profit being cent. per cent., when he cultivates, at a nominal rent, land yielding 30 bushels per acre, we have now to ascertain what the rate of his profit will become, should restriction on the importation of foreign corn create such a demand for farms, that the land which can now be obtained at a nominal rent, yields only 20 bushels of wheat per acre, and that on the superior lands all the produce above 20 bushels per acre is paid as rent. In this case, as 20 bushels per acre constitute the farmer's nett return, 20 bushels will be worth 60*s.*; in other words, the price of wheat will rise from 2*s.* to 3*s.* the bushel. *Question*, What will be the farmer's profit?

## EXPENDITURE, PER ACRE:

Farm produce, as before, 5 <i>s.</i>	<i>s.</i>
bushels of wheat, at 3 <i>s.</i> .....	15
Wrought goods, as before .....	20
	<hr/>
	35

## RETURN:

Twenty bushels, at 3 <i>s.</i> .....	60
	<hr/>
Profit .....	25

## CASE III.

Increasing population, and continued obstructions to the importation of foreign corn, create such a demand for farms that the capitalist who wishes to engage in cultivation can obtain, at a nominal rent, land yielding only 15 bushels per acre, and is obliged to pay, as rent, all the surplus above 15 bushels per acre yielded by lands of a superior quality. As 15 bushels per acre will in this case be the farmer's nett return, after the deduction of rent, 15 bushels will be worth 60*s.*, and wheat will be 4*s.* per bushel. *Question*, What is now the farmer's profit?

## EXPENDITURE, PER ACRE :

	<i>s.</i>	<i>s.</i>
Farm produce, as before, 5 bushels of wheat, at 4 <i>s.</i> per bushel .....	20	
Wrought goods, as before .....	20	
	<hr style="width: 50px; margin-left: auto; margin-right: 0;"/>	40

## RETURN :

Produce, 15 bushels, at 4 <i>s.</i> per bushel .....	60
	<hr style="width: 50px; margin-left: auto; margin-right: 0;"/>
Profit .....	20

Thus we see that restrictions on the importation of foreign agricultural produce, and the consequent increase in the cost price of wheat, from 2*s.* to 4*s.* per bushel, have reduced the rate of profit upon the capital applied to domestic agriculture, from cent. per cent. to 50 per cent. Let the population continue to increase and the restrictive system to be enforced, until the land, which can be obtained at a nominal rent, yields only seven and a half bushels of wheat per acre, and until, on all superior lands, the excess above seven and a half bushels is paid as rent. In this case, seven and a half bushels, being the nett return upon the farmer's capital after the deduction of rent,



will be worth 60*s.*, and the price of wheat will have risen to 8*s.* per bushel. *Question*, What now will be the farmer's profit upon the capital he invests in cultivation?

CASE IV.

EXPENDITURE :	
Farm produce, as before, 5 <i>s.</i>	<i>s.</i>
bushels of wheat, per acre, at	
8 <i>s.</i> per bushel .....	40
Wrought articles, as before.....	20
	60
RETURN :	
Produce, seven and a half bush-	
els, at 8 <i>s.</i> per bushel .....	60
	60
Farmer's Profit.....	<i>nil.</i>

Thus it appears, with all the certainty of demonstration, that those restrictions on the importation of the products of foreign agriculture, which, in ignorance or in fraud, are represented as beneficial to the class investing their capital in domestic agriculture, have a direct and necessary tendency to lower the rate of the farmer's profit. But the full extent of the injury, which such restrictions inflict upon the industry of the country, cannot be seen until we have traced the manner in which they affect the profits of the artisan and the manufacturer.

It will be remembered that, in order to state the question under consideration with distinctness and precision, I have assumed as data, that the same identical expenditure that serves to cultivate an acre of land, may likewise serve either to procure 60*s.* in money, or to prepare fifteen yards of cloth, which are taken as equivalent to that quantity of wrought goods which is expended in cultivating three acres of land. It must also be borne in mind that, on this supposition, it follows, from that principle of competition which tends to equalize the rate of profit, that the varying quantity of produce raised from one acre, the constant

quantity of goods employed in the cultivation of three acres, and 60s. will all be of equal value. Now, if the results obtained by the employment of equal capitals are of equal value, then, in the first of the preceding cases, when land paying a nominal rent yields 30 bushels of wheat, selling at 2s. per bushel, the profit of the manufacturer, as well as of the farmer, will be cent. per cent. For the account of the manufacturer employing a capital equal to that with which the farmer cultivates an acre of land will stand thus :—

EXPENDITURE :

	s.	s.
Food and raw material, equal to five bushels of wheat, at 2s. per bushel .....	10	
Clothing and implements, equal to 5 yards of cloth .....	20	
	30	30

RETURN :

Fifteen yards of cloth .....	60	
Profit.....	30	30

In Case III., in which restrictions on the importation of foreign food and material have created such a demand for farms, that a nominal rent is obtained for land yielding only 15 bushels of wheat per acre, and when, therefore, corn is at 4s. per bushel, the manufacturer's profit will have sunk from cent. per cent. to 50 per cent. His amount will now stand thus :—

EXPENDITURE :

Food and raw material, 5 bushels of wheat, at 4s. per bushel ...	20	
Wrought goods .....	20	
	40	40

RETURN:	
Fifteen yards of cloth.....	60
	<hr/>
Profit.....	20

In Case IV., when increasing population, and restrictions on the importation of food, have caused a nominal rent to be paid for land yielding only seven and a half bushels, then the profits of the manufacturer, as well as those of the farmer, altogether disappear. The account of the master manufacturer, employing a capital equal to that employed in cultivating one acre, will stand thus:—

EXPENDITURE :

Food and raw material, 5 bushels	s.	s.
of wheat, at 8s. per bushel...	-40	
Wrought goods .....	20	
	<hr/>	60

RETURN :

Fifteen yards of cloth.....	60
	<hr/>
Profit.....	<i>nil.</i>

It is this necessary fall in manufacturing profits which prevents the farmer from obtaining more than a temporary benefit from a permanent rise in the value of corn; and which, by the principle of competition, converts into rent all the produce of the land which exceeds what is necessary in order to give the cultivator the same rate of profit obtained by other capitalists.

But the gradual reduction, and ultimate extinction of profit, in all the branches of industry, form the smallest portion of the evil inflicted on the country by that iniquitous system which deprives the people

of cheap supplies of foreign food. As the profits of the capitalist diminish, interest urges, necessity drives him to resort to expedients for producing the same quantity of goods at a less expense. But, if he be a farmer, he cannot, without still greater loss, reduce the quantity or quality of his seed, or dispense with his plough and his team; and if the capitalist be a manufacturer, he cannot "make bricks without straw;" he cannot fabricate the same quantity of wrought goods with a less quantity of material, and with inferior machinery. The cost of production can be diminished only by reducing wages. On the labourer, therefore, the calamity falls with grinding pressure. He is trodden to the earth, without the possibility of recovering his lost position. When things have arrived at that state at which the capitalist, in order to realize a living profit upon the capital he employs, is driven to the necessity of reducing wages, every effort of self-preservation on the part of the working people, serves but to aggravate their misery. This is a point of vital—of fearful interest. Let us consider it more in detail.

In the preceding Cases, when the farmer, in cultivating an acre of land, advanced seed and food equivalent to five bushels of wheat, and implements, and clothing worth 20s., it is assumed that the food and clothing, received by the working man, were just sufficient for his comfortable support. Now, when the farmer cultivates land, which will not yield a produce sufficient to replace the expenditure, with a living profit, it is plain that he must either reduce wages, or abandon tillage. If the working people submit to a reduction of wages, their condition is degraded; if they struggle to escape this degradation, and resist the reduction of wages, the land cannot continue to be cultivated, and the demand for their labour ceases altogether. By our restrictions on the importation of food, and by our tithes, and other taxes on production, the portion of the produce of industry, left to the producers, is so small, that it is

insufficient to afford, at one and the same time, a living profit to the capitalist, and adequate wages to the labourer. Collision is the consequence. The capitalist and labourer are brought together, like two shipwrecked mariners upon a plank incapable of supporting both. Self-preservation urges them to a deadly contest against each other. Every where the struggle of despair is carried on. In the towns we have seen the manufacturer become a Truck Master, forcing the labourers to receive arbitrary payments in kind, while the labourers have formed themselves into Trades Unions, in order to escape from what mistaken suffering fancies to be the injurious influence of capital. In the rural districts, the farmers have reduced their labourers to the state of parish paupers, and the labourers have become incendiaries, in order to terrify the farmer into the payment of adequate wages. Where is this to end? Is it too much to say, that, if a speedy remedy be not found for these deep-seated evils, a servile war—the dissolution of society, is at hand?

Were a total stranger to the institutions of this country cast upon our shore,—were he made to understand the practical operation of our corn laws, tithes, and other taxes upon industry, and desired to estimate the character of the legislature by the tendency of its enactments, to what conclusion would a strict induction from the facts conduct him? Certainly it never could occur to him, that those who had brought us to the verge of social dissolution, should oppose themselves to change, upon the grounds that “the system had worked well.” This stranger to the state of society in England could not be persuaded to believe, that the oligarchy which had employed the legislative power for the purpose of raising the rent of land, by depressing the profits of capital almost to nothing, should have ventured to put forth, to those who employed their capital in the business of cultivation, the gross delusion, that their interest would be sacrificed by extending to the in-

dustrious class a control over the laws by which industry is regulated. Nor could it "enter into the heart of our stranger to conceive," that any portion of the working people should be so debased by ignorance, as to view with indifference an extensive measure of reform, taking power from the faction which had deprived the people of cheap bread, and placing it in the hands of ten-pound householders, who, whether they live upon the profits of their capital, or on the wages of their labour, have a direct, and a common interest, in causing the necessaries of life to be procured at the least possible expense.

When a wrong course has been pursued, difficulty and embarrassment are experienced in getting right. A fall in the price of corn, *after* the farmer has invested his capital in cultivation, would, in the first instance, reduce his profits. Should the farmer, under a restrictive system, have cultivated, at a nominal rent, land yielding 15 bushels of wheat per acre, and have paid a rent of five bushels per acre for land yielding 20 bushels; then, as in Case III., wheat would be 4s. per bushel, the rate of agricultural profit would be 50 per cent. But a sudden opening of the ports, and admission of foreign corn, duty free, reducing the price of wheat to 2s. per bushel, instead of raising the profit of the farmer to cent. per cent., as in Case No. I., when wheat was also at 2s. per bushel, would immediately involve him in absolute loss; for his account would now stand thus, for the land yielding 15 bushels, and held at a nominal rent:—

EXPENDITURE PER ACRE:	
Seed and food—5 bushels of s.	10
wheat, at 2s. per bushel .....	10
Implements and clothing .....	20
	30

**RETURN:**

Fifteen bushels of wheat, at 2s.	
per bushel .....	30
<b>Profit</b> .....	<u>nil.</u>

With respect to the land yielding 20 bushels per acre, and held at a rent equivalent to five bushels per acre, when wheat was 4s. per bushel, the farmer's account, upon the fall of prices from 4s. to 2s. per bushel, would be still more calamitous. It would stand thus:—

**EXPENDITURE PER ACRE:**

	s.
Seed and food—5 bushels at 2s.	10
Implements and clothing .....	20
Rent—5 bushels, at 4s. per bushel .....	20
	50

**RETURN:**

Twenty bushels at 2s. per bushel .....	40
Farmer's loss .....	10

Upon the data assumed, it is not until all lands yielding less than thirty bushels per acre have been abandoned, and the rents of the lands yielding only thirty bushels per acre have been reduced to a merely nominal consideration, that the opening of the ports, and the reduction in the price of wheat from four to two shillings per bushel can have the effect of raising the rate of profit from fifty to a hundred per cent. Nay, unless the process of withdrawing capital from the inferior land, and of bringing down the rent upon the superior, should be extremely gradual; great loss would, in the first instance, be incurred, and great temporary suffering experienced. To prevent this loss, and to avert this suffering, the

return to a free trade in foreign agricultural produce should be made step by step, and should be preceded by the repeal of all taxes upon industry, particularly by the abolition of that most injurious of all taxes—the iniquitous tax of tithes. I have already given notice of a motion for the repeal of all such taxes, and for substituting in their stead a regulated property tax; and I trust I shall be able to follow up this motion, by presenting, for the favourable consideration of the Farmers of the United Kingdom, a measure for a return to a perfectly free trade in all the products of foreign agriculture, so cautious and so gradual, as ultimately to increase the profits of capital, and the wages of labour, throughout all the branches of national industry, without occasioning any immediate loss to the farmers, who have now invested their stock in tillage, or any throwing out of the labour actually employed upon this soil. I entertain, indeed, a full conviction, that a judicious return to a free trade in corn would so increase the general opulence and prosperity of the country, as to tend to raise, rather than to lower the rent of the landed proprietor. The grounds of this conviction I have already presented to the public\*, and it is not necessary that I should here repeat them. My present purpose will be fully effected, if I shall be found to have succeeded in demonstrating to the intelligent farmer, that the necessary tendency of restrictions on the importation of foreign agricultural produce is, to reduce the rate of profit upon the capital, which seeks employment in domestic agriculture.

I have the honour to be,

Your obedient, humble servant,

R. TORRENS.

Chatham, Nov. 28, 1831.

\* *Essay on the Corn Trade*, p. 156.

FINIS.

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