

Transcription, February 2015:

*The Times* (London) No. 30383 (21 Dec. 1881): 11d.

[p. 11d]

‘To the Editor of *The Times*.’

Sir,—Mr. Wallace, having first invoked your assistance to enable him to discuss the question whether “the system of cultivation which produces the greatest return with the smallest expenditure of labour is best for this country under its present system of land tenure, and without any regard to collateral result on the wellbeing of the people,” now announces that “the subject is far too wide and too difficult to be adequately discussed in the columns of a newspaper,” but consoles us with the assurance that he has “a volume ready for the press in which the facts and the arguments are systematically, though briefly, set forth, and the remedy to which they all logically point is fully explained.”

Under these circumstances, it may be hardly worth while to continue a discussion by a method which the disputant who originally adopted it has discovered to be inappropriate, but, at the risk of Mr. Wallace’s disapproval, I should like in my own name to make a few more observations upon his letters.

I have had no communication with Mr. Caird, direct or indirect, on the subject under review; but if my words do represent his opinions I shall be confirmed in my belief that I am right, as I know no man in whom I should have greater confidence. If “opinions and conclusions” of an alien character “are now,” as Mr. Wallace asserts, “steadily making their way among the working classes,” I can only say that I am sorry for it, and that if the working classes would take counsel with so wise an instructor as Mr. Caird they would in all probability see cause to alter their views.

Mr. Wallace puts the case of half a million of labourers being discharged from the farms—the whole number of this class amounting as it does to about a million—and “at the same time” all other industries being equally affected by labour-saving machinery and half the labourers being dispensed with, to the tune of about two millions more; and then says “this is not an impossible case.” To this I can only reply that if this be not an impossible case, what is. What we have to deal with is not an impossible or highly improbable case, but the actual case; and I say that the process which has been going on for the last 40 years, and, in fact, ever since the time when palæolithic knives and axes were the only “labour-saving” instruments, has been and is a process attended with beneficial results.

“More wages,” says Mr. Wallace, “prove little, unless we have the whole of the accompanying circumstances.” Unfortunately, however, he contributes very little to our knowledge; for all he tells us that 40 years ago the labourers had land for gardens, more use of commons and wastes than at present, and skim milk for little or nothing. Surely they have more land now, for the practice, now so general, of allotment gardening was then in its infancy, and so far as I know there has been no marked abstraction of cottage gardens from the cottages with which they have been held. Commons and wastes are not generally considered to be conducive to regular industry, although the “domestic animal” generally to be seen there still in most cases consumes his habitual thistle. As to the skim milk argument, I regret, as I dare say Mr. Wallace does, that the children of the English poor are so ill supplied with milk; but there is no reason, so far as I know, to believe that they were better supplied 40 years ago, and the rise of all

wages which has taken place in that period would enable a labourer to find his family in skim milk to any reasonable extent, even if he had to buy it, and still to retain a considerable surplus.

Mr. Wallace further relies on an alleged increase of pauperism. I cannot trace the source of his figures showing only a slight decrease in the last 12 years as compared with the years 1849-1860; but I see by the “Statistical Abstract” of last year (p. 146) that on January 1, 1866, there were in England and Wales 149,320 adult able-bodied paupers to a population of under 20 millions, whereas on January 1, 1881, there were only 111,169 to a population of 25 millions. “All other paupers not vagrants” had similarly diminished from 771,024 to 691,957; so that, on the whole, pauperism in England and Wales had decreased numerically about 13 per cent.

I do not presume to trespass further on your space, but I ask to be allowed to supply Mr. Wallace with a few more figures, quoted from the *Economist*, with which to deal in his forthcoming work:—

1. Consumption Per Head of Population of the Following Articles.

<u>Articles</u>	<u>Consumption per head.</u>		
	<u>1869.</u>	<u>1874.</u>	<u>1880.</u>
Cocoa, per lb. ... ..	0.19	0.27	0.31
Coffee ... ..	0.94	0.96	0.92
Sugar ... ..	42.56	56.37	63.68
Tea ... ..	3.63	4.23	4.69
Tobacco ... ..	1.35	1.44	1.43
Spirits (imported) per gallon ... ..	0.27	0.33	0.25
Do. (British) ... ..	0.71	0.94	0.84

2. Deposits in Savings Banks.

1869 ... ..	£51,078,000
1874 ... ..	64,624,000
1880 ... ..	77,721,000

3. Distribution of Incomes Under Schedule D.

<u>Classes.</u>	<u>Number of Persons in Classes.</u>				
	<u>1876.</u>	<u>1877.</u>	<u>1878.</u>	<u>1879.</u>	<u>1880.</u>
£150 to £200 ...	92,593	132,833	143,845	147,950	150,426
200 to 300 ...	90,239	93,198	100,057	102,711	102,000
300 to 500 ...	53,164	59,723	64,000	65,296	64,408
500 to 700 ...	20,933	21,447	22,365	22,109	20,861
700 to 1,000 ...	10,424	10,638	10,867	10,974	10,506
1,000 to 2,000 ...	12,679	12,846	13,003	12,837	12,011
2,000 to 5,000 ...	6,861	6,880	6,929	6,562	6,156
Above 5,000 ...	3,292	3,122	3,055	2,896	2,690

These last figures, also quoted from the *Economist*, serve to show that while the larger incomes have been diminishing, the smaller incomes have been increasing; while the previous items, as it appears to me, convincingly prove that Professor Cairnes, and Mr. Wallace, who adopts his opinion, in stating that “the large addition to the wealth of the country has gone neither to profits nor to wages, nor yet to the public at large,” assert what is not only inaccurate, but diametrically opposite to the actual state of facts. I am, Sir, yours, &c.,

J. A. Hardcastle.

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*The Alfred Russel Wallace Page*, Charles H. Smith, 2015.