

2<sup>nd</sup> July

Memory verse

**One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts.** Psalm 145:4

All about food and farming – with some maths!<sup>1</sup>

In a letter written on July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1767, a traveller described the state of farming in the countryside near Gloucester.

“The course of crops is: 1, Barley. 2, Clover for two years. 3, Wheat. 4 Peas. What grass they have they mow; very few beasts are grazed, and but few dairies, except in the vale, where they have all that fine breed of hogs, which are called *Shropshires*; with exceeding long carcasses, and long slouching ears which almost trail upon the ground, to make way for their noses.

“Oxen are much used for all purposes of husbandry; never less than six in a plough, frequently eight. They are reckoned the most profitable by some farmers, and horses by others; but it is generally agreed, that when a man keeps two teams, it is ever the most profitable to have one of the oxen.”

In the same letter he gives details of the wages paid on the farms, and of the price of food and implements.

“In winter, etc., to hay-time, 8d., 9d. and 10d. a day. The stoutest fellows often want work for 9d. And cannot readily get it.

In hay-time for mowing 1s. and 1s 2d.

In harvest 1s. 8d.

Reaping wheat, 4s. and 5s. per acre.

Mowing spring corn, 10d. and 1s. a day.

PROVISIONS

Bread 4d. per lb.

Mutton 4½d. Per lb.

Butter 7d. per lb.

Beef 3½d. and 4d. per lb.

Bacon 8d per lb.

IMPLEMENTS

A stout wagon costs from £16 to £20, and a plough ironed complete for half a guinea, which is amazing.”

In order to understand all this you need to know:

d stands for pence (12 to the shilling).

s stands for shilling (twenty to the £ so equivalent to five modern pence).

Set this out in a table in order to understand what follows.

lb stands for pound (weight about 400grams).

With this information I calculated an equivalent price for bread of 5p for 1200g. What would an equivalent labourer's wage be at various times of year? Notice how dear bread is in comparison to meat. Find out the comparative prices today. What was the cheapest food listed in 1767? Which of

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Owen, Evan, *What Happened Today* Volume 2, available on the *Mothers' Companion* Flashdrive. <https://motherscompanion.weebly.com> and *The Story of God's Dealings with our Nation* Volume 2 which is available here: <https://www.creationresearchstore.com/s/search?q=The%20Story%20of%20Gods%20Dealings%20with%20our%20Nation>.

these foods is cheapest today?



Work out how much food a labourer would be able to buy each day at various times of year. A farm labourer would also grow vegetables in his garden. His family would engage in spinning and weaving which would bring in extra money. He would have the right to collect wood for fuel and to pasture his own animals on common land.

However, even in 1767 this was changing. James Hargreaves had invented the Spinning Jenny in 1764, the first step in moving spinning out of cottages and in 1784 Cartwright would bring out his power loom. Weaving would move out of cottages and into factories. Common land which was vital for poor people to graze their animals and collect fuel was under pressure too. If landlords enclosed it into fields they could get better returns from their land. Both land and labour were used more efficiently when the land was enclosed but

there is no doubt it was a painful process for agricultural workers.

After the Napoleonic wars things became even worse. The population of Britain had been increasing during the period 1790 to 1815 although the reasons for this are not clear.<sup>2</sup> Napoleon's continental system<sup>3</sup> resulted in a decrease in the amount of grain that could be imported from abroad to feed this growing population. It was difficult to produce enough grain in Britain itself to feed everyone and so the price of bread rose until a four pound loaf<sup>4</sup> cost one shilling and sixpence.<sup>5</sup> At this time an agricultural worker could expect to earn about eight to ten shilling per week. How much had prices and wages had risen since 1767? Which had risen the most?

If at the end of the war the importation of grain had been resumed, the price of bread may have dropped. This would have been against the interests of the landowners, however. They did not want the price of home grown wheat to be driven down by imports. Since landowners dominated parliament, a Corn Law was passed in 1815 forbidding the import of wheat unless the price of English wheat rose to above 80 shillings a quarter.<sup>6</sup> This was intended to stabilise the price of grain. In fact it had the opposite effect. Poor people could not afford bread and so the demand for grain actually decreased. Some farmers could not sell their grain and there was uncertainty about how much should be grown.

Huskinson and the Duke of Wellington made attempts to ameliorate the corn laws by introducing a sliding scale of duties on corn imports but parliament was not inclined to vote for these measures. Unrest in the country followed as people were driven by hunger to desperate deeds. The most serious incident of this kind occurred in Manchester in 1819 when a vast crowd<sup>7</sup> assembled at St. Peter's Fields to hear an orator called Hunt speak. The magistrates, frightened by the huge numbers and afraid of a riot, ordered the Yeomanry to arrest Hunt. They then feared that the Yeomanry were being jostled by the huge crowd and ordered the Cavalry to disperse the crowd. Several people were killed as the Cavalry rode into the crowd and many more wounded. The magistrates, it must be remembered, had no police force on which to call and no modern methods of crowd control. The government congratulated the magistrates on the promptness of their action and showed no

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2 Some say improvements in medical science caused a decrease in the death rate. It seems unlikely that the majority of poor people would benefit much from improvements in medicine, however. A decrease in the death rate is all the more remarkable as the poor were now beginning to crowd into the unhealthy slums in the cities.

3 A method of blockading Britain to prevent imports.

4 Four pounds is equivalent to about 1600g.

5 Seven and a half pence in new money.

6 £4 for about 200 kg.

7 Estimates of the numbers vary from 50,000 to 100,000.

sympathy whatsoever for the dead and injured. This caused great bitterness among the Radicals and among other people who were concerned about the need for reform. Good Christian people were divided in their opinion about the action of the magistrates at Peterloo. Many, like Wilberforce, believed that their conduct did not require an inquiry. Others like William Gadsby<sup>8</sup> (1773-1844), who ministered in the Manchester slums, were indignant at the “unexpected and unnecessary violence by which the meeting was dispersed.”<sup>9</sup>

During the 1840s, much attention was focused on the problem of the high price of bread. The Anti-Corn-Law League was formed in the belief that it was the Corn Laws that were responsible for keeping the price of bread high. That highly priced bread hit poor families hard, especially when harvests were bad, was undeniable. It was not only the poor themselves who had an interest in lower bread prices. Manufacturers also saw that if bread prices were lower, demand for higher wages would be less. Workers would also be left with more money to spare to spend on manufactured goods. This in turn would benefit manufacturers. The manufacturers accordingly supported the League. Whether the high price of bread was really caused by the Corn Laws is debatable. The world price of wheat was high at the time in any case due to a shortage. The sliding scale of duties imposed on corn aimed at stabilising the price of corn at 56 shillings for a quarter of a ton. In 1856, when the corn laws had been abolished for ten years, the price was still 53 shillings and five pence a quarter.

Whatever the reason, however, it was clear that dear bread was a problem. The Anti-Corn-Law League formed a focus for much discontent. It tended to steer people away from the kind of political agitation that could have led to revolution, focusing instead on the single issue of the price of bread. It also presented the repeal of the corn-laws as “... a sort of patent medicine, guaranteed to cure all ills ...”<sup>10</sup> and this tended to divert attention and effort away from the work of the Christian social reformer, Lord Shaftesbury, and his supporters who were trying to get parliament to improve the very harsh working conditions in the factories, mines and other industries. Unlike movements for parliamentary reform, the Anti-Corn-Law League had money behind it provided by the Manchester Chamber of Commerce and was run by men with sound business sense.

It was Robert Peel (1788-1850) who finally abolished the Corn Laws. As a Tory, the prime minister, Robert Peel had been elected to protect the landlords and farmers by maintaining the Corn Laws. But Peel believed in free trade<sup>11</sup> and he became convinced that maintaining the Corn Laws was the wrong policy. In 1846 there was a famine in Ireland. The poor Irish peasants subsisted on potatoes. When this crop failed because of blight, they had literally nothing else to eat. Peel therefore decided that cheap corn was needed to save them. It is doubtful whether this was the case. Although the poor Irish tenants were starving, the more prosperous parts of Ireland continued to actually export corn and butter throughout the famine. The peasants who subsisted on potatoes were so poor that they had no savings whatever on which to draw in time of famine. They could not buy grain whatever the price and were faced with complete starvation. Peel went ahead with the abolition of the corn laws nevertheless, convinced that he was doing the only thing possible.

The application of steam power to ocean-going ships in the 1860s enabled America and Canada to export wheat to Britain in quantities which had previously proved impossible. It was then that the effect of the repeal of the Corn Laws began to be felt strongly on British farming. Then followed the invention of refrigeration and refrigerated ships began to carry cheap meat from Australia and New Zealand to Britain as well. This further destroyed agriculture in Britain and the traditional way of

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8 There is a lesson about the Peterloo Massacre and William Gadsby on August 16<sup>th</sup>. You may like to look at it today if you are likely to be on holiday in August.

9 *Declaration and Protest* drawn up by leading Manchester citizens quoted in Shaw, I.J., *High Calvinists in Action* (Oxford, 2002).

10 Bready, J. W., *Lord Shaftesbury and Social-Industrial Progress* (London, 1926) p.209.

11 The trading of goods between nations without custom duties and tariffs to restrict trade.

life in the countryside began to disappear. Many more labourers made their way to the towns where manufacturing made the nation richer but “the national life, increasingly urbanised and congested, was immeasurably impoverished.”<sup>12</sup> Britain now became completely dependent on foreign food.

### Map work

Compare these two population density maps carefully. The Optional Resources files today include a population density map from 1851.<sup>13</sup> Compare it with this map:

<https://medium.com/@briskat/england-wales-population-density-heat-map-26a28a2b6091>

What do you notice?

### Something to do

This would also be the perfect excuse to get out your toy farm animals, if you have some, and set them out. Perhaps you could make some fences for them out of garden twigs?<sup>14</sup>



### Something to read aloud

The novel *John Halifax Gentleman* by Mrs Craik is set during the time of bread riots and the anti-corn-law league. The Christian Prime Minister Spencer Percival even gets a mention in the story. It is a long book but good for serial reading aloud.<sup>15</sup>

### A remarkable story to read



During the period of agricultural change you have been reading about above, there lived in Croydon a tinman and brazier called Francis Covell who worked with his father in a little shop on the high street making and repairing kettles and tinware. Francis was afflicted with a stammer that made it difficult for people to understand what he said, but he was a kind young man and fond of dancing at which he was so good that he gave free dancing lessons to his young friends. He attended the parish church

regularly and sometimes had the feeling that he was a sinner in God's sight. Then he would try to do better, give money to the poor, watch his language and go at set times to his bedroom to repeat each day a certain number of prayers. After a time, he became so pleased with himself because of these efforts that he used to think to himself that he was so pleasing to God that if only two people from Croydon went to heaven, he would be one of them!

Then one Sunday as he was reading his prayers in his room, he suddenly felt horribly afraid. Without him at all wanting to think about them, he began to remember all his secret sins. Unbidden, they marched across his thoughts until he groaned out loud for mercy. This experience changed his

<sup>12</sup> McElwee, William, *History of England* (London, 1960) p.163.

<sup>13</sup> Map used by kind permission on Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure. Via email 12/04/21.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.firstpalette.com/printable/farm-animals.html> has templates for farm animals which can be made to stand up using clothes pegs!

<sup>15</sup> If you do not have a copy it can be found here: <https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/craik/john/john.html>

attitude. He began to take walks in the fields about Croydon praying, “God be merciful to me a sinner” yet there was no one to explain the way of salvation to him.

Feeling the need to improve his skills in the family business he went off to London to learn at a large manufacturing firm. But he was still afraid of hell. One day he felt he could stand it no longer. He fell down at the end of his bed in the room where he was staying in utter despair. To his amazement he found a sense of peace in his heart and the Lord Jesus gave him faith to believe that He had died for *his* sins. How happy he was now!

Francis went home to Croydon very happy, but he could no longer enjoy the preaching at the parish church which was all about being good and going to heaven through one's own good deeds. No one in Croydon understood what he had gone through and his father was horrified. How could his son think he knew better than the Parson! He would not have Francis in the house and so he went back to London for a time.

Then Francis heard a great Manchester preacher at Gower Street Chapel in London. It was William Gadsby, the minister who had been so upset at the treatment of the Peterloo protesters. Now Francis understood what had happened to him. When Mr Gadsby came to describe from Roman's 8:28<sup>16</sup> what sinners are called *from* and what they are called *to*, Francis was so excited to hear such an accurate description of the very thing that had happened to him that he had great difficulty in holding himself back. He wanted to stand up in the chapel and cry out “I am called! I am called!”

Francis went back to Croydon. His father changed his mind and now welcomed his son. Francis and his wife started a little meeting in their own home since there was no sound gospel preaching nearby and about ten other people joined with them. Francis longed to tell others about the saving work of the Lord Jesus. How he would love to be a preacher! But alas, his stammering, stuttering voice was just not suitable. Just imagine Whitefield with a stammer! Two people would find it hard to understand Francis Covell, let alone 20,000.<sup>17</sup>

One evening, when the few friends who met at his house for prayer and Bible reading were about to leave, Francis wanted to repeat a text to them which had been on his mind. So although the little meeting had been closed with prayer and was over, he said the text, “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another,” which is from Titus chapter three. He carried on for a few verses more

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour...

and then he began to explain the passage; he knew by experience what it was all about. He spoke on for about *an hour* and “never failed or faltered in his speech!”

Francis Covell was baptised on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1850. He became a preacher in Croydon and God used him to bring many people to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus – his stammer had gone!<sup>18</sup>

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16 Look up the text in your Bible.

17 See yesterday's lesson.

18 Retold from an account by Ebenezer Wilmsburst (1850-1906) re published in Ramsbottom, B A, *Six Remarkable Ministers* (Harpden, 1994)