

Transcription, March 2015:

[p. 5h]

*The Western Daily Press* (Bristol) (No. 7740) (24 March 1883): 5h (Alfred Marshall).

‘Progress and Poverty.’

*(To the Editors of the Western Daily Press.)* Gentlemen,—Mr Wallace does not understand my position with regard to wages a hundred years ago. In my lecture I admitted that a peck of wheat would purchase more animal food and more of a few other things a hundred years ago than now; and I admitted that he still retained some fragments of privileges which he has now lost. But I contended that a peck of wheat will now buy many things of great importance for the physical, mental, and moral wellbeing of the labourer and his family, which it would have cost him very many pecks of wheat to purchase a hundred years ago. I concluded that his real income has risen in at least as great a ratio as his wages measured in wheat have. Mr Wallace has looked only at one side of the shield, and even in this he has pointed out nothing that I had not taken account of. The quotations he now gives do not appear to traverse my statements. It is not necessary for me to inquire in how narrow a sense the term peasantry is to be interpreted in Mr Brodrick’s statement that it was once an almost universal custom among the peasantry to rent two or three acres of ground. The custom had disappeared a hundred years ago nearly as completely as it has now.

There is no reason, in our present land system, to prevent its being revived now. Mr Wallace cannot desire its revival more heartily than I do.

Again, he mistakes my point with regard to wages in Asia. It is true that while the English labourer has not enough clothes, the South Sea Islander has as many as he wants, because he wants scarcely any. No doubt those who desire a more animal existence can have it for very little labour in a tropical climate where population is sparse. But the economists whom Mr George assails use the term real wages to mean the amount of food, clothing, houseroom, and other necessaries, comforts, and luxuries of life which the money wages will purchase. Using it in this sense, I am not contradicted by Mr Wallace when I assert that wages in India and China are lower than in England, while interest, allowing for risk, is higher.

Yours, &c., Alfred Marshall

[\[Return\]](#)

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