

## WAGES AND PRICES IN ENGLAND, 1261-1701.

ANY comparison of wages and prices in mediæval England must be based upon the data collected by Thorold Rogers. We have no other authority that can claim anything approaching statistical accuracy. Rogers's work in this field is unique. The six quarto volumes of the *Agriculture and Prices* employed his best energies for twenty-seven years. Five years were spent upon the first two volumes, which appeared in 1865, sixteen years upon the third and fourth, published in 1881, and six upon the fifth and sixth, which were given to the public in 1887, shortly before the author's death. The facts presented were gathered with unsparing pains and patience from documents preserved in the British Museum, in the Public Record Office, and in the muniment rooms of the Oxford and Cambridge colleges. The most fertile sources of information were the rolls of farm bailiffs and the accounts of receipt and expenditure rendered by college bursars and wardens. The material so collected is presented in tables filling three bulky volumes and furnishes a rich store of information to the student of industrial history. In volume i., covering the years 1259 to 1400, corn prices are given for five hundred and thirteen distinct localities. Every shire in England is represented save the thinly settled counties, Cornwall, Lancashire and Westmoreland. To secure the data contained in volume iv., dealing with the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which afford but scanty records, eighty thousand documents were consulted. Such an array of evidence goes far toward justifying Rogers's own confidence in his results. "I hope it is not too much to say that the evidence supplied in the following pages is so large that if an equal mass could be subsequently discovered, no considerable effect would be induced upon the averages which have been derived from the facts before the reader."

The inferences Rogers draws from his facts have been justly challenged. He was an antiquarian, not a theorist. His mind was not of the philosophic type. He is not infrequently prejudiced, dogmatic, inconsistent. His doctrine is a curious medley of the tenets of the Manchester School in which he was bred, and the conclusions impressed upon him by the study of industrial conditions. But his statistics are beyond challenge and these we may accept quite apart from his theories. In the preface to volume iv., Rogers anticipates the

discriminating judgment pronounced upon his work by Prof. W. J. Ashley and other critics. "My labor has been entirely unassisted and costly beyond my expectations. But I have achieved the most important part of my object, and am able to put before the public information which others may be able to make better use of than I have made myself; for I reiterate that all genuine facts are far more valuable than the inferences of any individual who uses them."

Rogers proposed to himself the task of collating statistics of wages and prices from 1259 to 1793. This would have brought the record down to the point at which Tooke and Newmarch take it up, but his work was cut short by death. We still lack any such continuous record for the eighteenth century. King, DeFoe, Young, and Eden furnish contemporary evidence of great value, but their statistics are fragmentary.

The following figures are derived from Rogers's copious tables. The prices averaged are those given for six agricultural products, wheat, oats, barley, beans, peas, malt; the wage average represents the earnings of skilled artisans, viz.: carpenters (high and medium), masons, and tilers. A wider range would be desirable, but continuous data were not to be had.

Date.	Prices per quarter.		Wages per day.	Date.	Prices per quarter.		Wages per day.	
	s.	d.	d.		s.	d.	s.	d.
1261—1270	4	3.5	—	1481—1490	4	2.23	s.	6.06
1271—1280	4	1.71	—	1491—1500	3	4.71		6.94
1281—1290	3	8.18	3.65	1501—1510	3	7.33		5.94
1291—1300	4	5.5	3.16	1511—1520	4	6.17		6.37
1301—1310	4	.08	3.56	1521—1530	5	1.51		6.19
1311—1320	5	8.06	4.56	1531—1540	5	2.91		7.19
1321—1330	5	6.46	4.	1541—1550	6	6.45		7.56
1331—1340	3	5.23	3.87	1551—1560	10	11.75		10.75
1341—1350	3	8.14	3.97	1561—1570	9	10.1		10.81
1351—1360	4	8.23	4.97	1571—1582	11	6.04		11.56
1361—1370	5	3.43	5.03	1583—1592	15	5.21	I	.10
1371—1380	3	11.86	5.78	1593—1602	21	2.66	I	.07
1381—1390	3	9.79	5.44	1603—1612	20	6.1	I	.64
1391—1400	3	10.33	5.87	1613—1622	22	7.21	I	.79
1401—1410	3	9.63	6.25	1623—1632	24	9.75	I	1.49
1411—1420	3	9.21	5.87	1633—1642	24	3.83	I	3.33
1421—1430	3	9.46	6.06	1643—1652	28	10.96	I	6.73
1431—1440	4	3.79	6.46	1653—1662	25	7.5	I	7.30
1441—1450	3	2.46	6.56	1663—1672	22	4.29	I	8.12
1451—1460	3	4.71	6.31	1673—1682	24	7.87	I	10.32
1461—1470	3	5.23	6.25	1683—1692	24	6.75	I	8.84
1471—1480	3	3.83	6.	1693—1702	27	3.10	2	1.08

The accompanying chart will facilitate comparisons. The full line indicates the variation of prices, the broken line that of wages. In order to render the variations more apparent and bring the two lines into immediate comparison, pence are represented as shillings in the wages line. The chart makes evident the effect of the Famine and the Black Death in the fourteenth century, as well as the relative rise of wages which made the fifteenth century the golden age of the English laborer. The marked rise in prices during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was due to depreciation of the coinage and to the influx of silver from the New World. The concurrent rise in wages does not keep pace with the increased cost of food. The ratio between the average price and the average wage in the first decade of the sixteenth century is 7.2:1, while in the first decade of the seventeenth, it is 19.4:1. There is a relative rise in wages in the latter half of the seventeenth century. In the last decade, we have a ratio of 12.5:1. We are nearing another prosperous epoch for the working classes, but the showing is not yet so favorable as that of the fifteenth century where the ratio averages 7.1:1. Throughout the five and a half centuries represented on the chart, the movement of wages is comparatively sluggish. We recognize the effects of wage tariffs, of custom, far more binding in the middle ages than to-day, and of those legal restraints on change of habitation which continued into modern times the mediæval immobility of labor.

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