

Progress and Poverty (George) — Chapter VI: Population and subsistence

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Chapter VI Population and subsistence

The doctrine to which [Malthus](#) has given his name is that population naturally tends to increase faster than subsistence. It was formulated by him in the proposition that, as shown by the growth of the North American colonies, the natural tendency of population is to double itself at least every twenty-five years, thus increasing in a geometrical ratio, while "the subsistence for man which the earth affords... under circumstances the most favourable to human industry could not possibly be made to increase faster than in an arithmetical ratio" - that is, being increased every twenty-five years by a quantity equal to what it (the earth) at present produces." (1)

"The necessary effects of these two different rates of increase, when brought together," Mr. Malthus naively goes on to say, "will be very striking." And thus (Chapter I) he brings them together: "Let us call the population of this island eleven millions; and suppose the present produce equal to the easy support of such a number. In the first twenty-five years the population would be twenty-two millions, and the food being also doubled, the means of subsistence would be equal to this increase. In the next twenty-five years, the population would be forty-four millions, and the means of subsistence only equal to the support of thirty-three millions. In the next period the

population would be equal to eighty-eight millions, and the means of subsistence just equal to the support of half that number. And, at the conclusion of the first century, the population would be a hundred and seventy-six millions, and the means of subsistence only equal to the support of fifty-five millions; leaving a population of a hundred and twenty-one millions totally unprovided for. Taking the whole earth, instead of this island, emigration would of course be excluded; and, supposing the present population equal to a thousand millions, the human species would increase as the numbers 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, 256; and subsistence as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. In two centuries the population would be to the means of subsistence as 256 to 9; in three centuries, 4,096 to 13, and in two thousand years the difference would be almost incalculable."

Such a result is of course prevented by the physical fact that no more people can exist than can find subsistence, and hence Malthus's conclusion is that this tendency of population to indefinite increase must be held back either by moral restraint upon the reproductive faculty, or by the various causes that increase mortality and these he resolves into vice and misery. Such causes as prevent propagation he styles the preventive check; such causes as increase mortality he styles the positive check. It is not worth while to dwell upon the fallacy involved in the assumption of geometrical and arithmetical rates of increase. For this assumption is not necessary to the Malthusian doctrine, the

essence of which is that population tends to increase faster than the power of providing food.

The doctrine may thus be stated in its strongest and least objectionable form: That population, constantly tending to increase, must, when unrestrained, ultimately press against the limits of subsistence, not as against a fixed, but as against an elastic barrier, and this makes the procurement of subsistence progressively more and more difficult. Thus, wherever reproduction has had time to assert its power, and is unchecked by prudence, there must exist that degree of want which will keep population within the bounds of subsistence.

(1) [Thomas Robert Malthus](#), M.A. (1766): [An Essay on the Principle of Population](#), or a View of its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness with an Inquiry into our Prospects Respecting the Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils which it Occasions" (1796).

Inferences from facts

Seemingly backed by an indisputable arithmetical truth - that a continuously increasing population must eventually exceed the capacity of the earth to furnish food or even standing room - the Malthusian theory is supported by analogies in the animal and vegetable kingdoms, where life everywhere beats wastefully against the barriers that hold

its different species in check. It is apparently corroborated by many obvious facts, such as the prevalence of poverty, vice and misery amid dense populations, the general effect of material progress in increasing population without relieving pauperism, the rapid growth of numbers in newly settled countries and the evident retardation of increase in more densely settled countries by the mortality among the class condemned to want.

The Malthusian theory furnishes a general principle which accounts for these and similar facts, and accounts for them in a way that harmonizes with the doctrine that wages are drawn from capital and with all the principles that are deduced therefrom. According to that doctrine, wages fall as increase in the number of labourers necessitates a more minute division of capital. According to the Malthusian theory, poverty appears as increase in population necessitates the more minute division of subsistence. It requires but the identification of capital with subsistence, and number of labourers with population to make the two propositions as identical formally as they are substantially.

Ricardo furnished the theory an additional support by calling attention to the fact that rent would increase as the necessities of increasing population forced cultivation to less and less productive lands, or to less and less productive points on the same lands, thus explaining the rise of rent. In this way was formed, as it were, a triple combination, by which the Malthusian theory has been buttressed on both

sides. The previously received doctrine of wages and the subsequently received doctrine of rent exhibit in this view but special examples of the operation of the general principle to which the name of Malthus has been attached, the fall in wages and the rise, in rents which come with increasing population being but modes in which the pressure of population upon subsistence shows itself.

Like the theory of wages by which it is supported and which it in turn supports, the Malthusian theory harmonizes with ideas which, in older countries at least, generally prevail among the working classes. To the mechanic or operative the cause of low wages and of the inability to get employment is obviously the competition caused by the pressure of numbers; and in the squalid abodes of poverty what seems clearer than that there are too many people?

Malthusian theory exonerating the rich

But the great cause of the triumph of this theory is that instead of menacing any vested right or antagonizing any powerful interest, it is eminently soothing and reassuring to the classes who, wielding the power of wealth, largely dominate thought. At a time when old supports were falling away, it came to the rescue of the special privileges by which a few monopolize so much of the good things of this world; it proclaimed a natural cause for the want and misery which, if attributed to political institutions, must condemn every government under which they exist.

The Essay on Population was avowedly a reply to William Godwin's Inquiry concerning Political Justice, a work asserting the principle of human equality; and its purpose was to justify existing inequality by shifting the responsibility for it from human institutions to the laws of the Creator. There was nothing new in this, for Wallace, nearly forty years before, had brought forward the danger of excessive multiplication as the answer to the demands of justice for an equal distribution of wealth. But the circumstances of the times were such as to make the same idea, when brought forward by Malthus, peculiarly grateful to a powerful class, in whom an intense fear of any questioning of the existing state of things had been generated by the outburst of the French Revolution.

Poverty alleged to be inevitable

Now, as it did then, the Malthusian theory parries the demand for reform, and shelters selfishness from question and from conscience by the interposition of an inevitable necessity. For poverty, want and starvation are by this theory not chargeable either to individual greed or to social maladjustments - they are the inevitable results of universal laws with which if it were not impious it were as hopeless to quarrel as with the law of gravitation. And thus reforms which would interfere with the interests of any powerful class are discouraged as hopeless. Since the moral law forbids any forestalling of the methods by which the natural law gets rid of surplus population and thus holds in check a

tendency to increase potent enough to pack the surface of the globe with human beings as sardines are packed in a box, nothing can really be done either by individual or by combined effort to extirpate poverty, save to trust to the efficacy of education and preach the necessity of prudence.

In one form or another, the Malthusian doctrine has received in the intellectual world an almost universal endorsement, and in the best as in the most common literature of the day it may be seen cropping out in every direction. It is endorsed by economists and by statesmen, by historians and by natural investigators, by social science congresses and by trade unions, by churchmen and by materialists, by conservatives of the strictest sect and by the most radical of radicals. It is held and habitually reasoned from by many who never heard of Malthus and who have not the slightest idea of what his theory is.

Facts against Malthus's theory

The main body of the Essay on Population is taken up with what is in reality a refutation of the theory that is advanced in the book, for Malthus's review of what he calls the positive check to population is simply the showing that the results which he attributes to over-population actually arise from other causes. Of all the cases cited in which vice and misery check increase by limiting marriages or shortening the term of human life (and pretty much the whole globe is passed over in the survey) there is not a single case where

the vice and misery can be traced to an actual increase in the number of mouths over the power of the accompanying lands to feed them; but in every case the vice and misery are shown to spring either from unsocial ignorance and rapacity, or from bad government, unjust law or destructive warfare.

Nor what Malthus failed to show has any one since him shown. The globe may be surveyed and history may be reviewed in vain for any instance of a considerable country in which poverty and want can be fairly attributed to the pressure of an increasing population. Whatever be the possible dangers involved in the power of human increase, they have never yet appeared. Whatever may sometime be, this never yet has been the evil that has afflicted mankind. Population always tending to overpass the limit of subsistence! How is it, then, that this globe of ours, after all the millions of years that man has been upon the earth, is yet so thinly populated? How is it, then, that so many of the hives of human life are now deserted - that fields once cultivated are rank with jungle, and the wild beast licks her cubs where once were busy haunts of men?

As to Africa there can be no question. Northern Africa contains scarcely a fraction of the population that it had in ancient times; the Nile Valley once held an enormously greater population than now, while south of the Sahara there is nothing to show increase within historic times, and

widespread depopulation was certainly caused by the slave trade.

Malthusianism predicated a universal law - that the natural tendency of population is to outrun subsistence. If there be such a law, it must, wherever population has attained a certain density, become as obvious as any of the great natural laws that have been everywhere recognized. How is it, then, that neither in classical creeds and codes, nor in those of the Jews, the Egyptians, the Hindoos, the Chinese, nor of any of the peoples who have lived in close association and have built up creeds and codes, do we find any injunctions to the practice of the prudential restraints of Malthus? On the contrary, the wisdom of the centuries, the religions of the world, have always inculcated ideas of civic and religious duty that are the very reverse.

But let us advance to a more definite inquiry. I assert that the cases commonly cited as instances of overpopulation will not bear investigation.

Poverty in India

In India from time immemorial, the working-classes have been ground down by exactions and oppressions into a condition of helpless and hopeless degradation. For ages and ages the cultivator of the soil has esteemed himself happy if, of his produce, the extortion of the strong hand left him enough to support life and furnish seed. Capital

could nowhere be safely accumulated nor be used to any considerable extent to assist production. All wealth that could be wrung from the people was in the possession of princes (or their farmers or favourites) who were little better than robber chiefs quartered on the country and it was wasted in useless or worse than useless luxury, while religion, sunken to an elaborate and terrible superstition, tyrannized over the minds as physical force did over the bodies of men. Under these conditions, the only arts that could advance were those that ministered to the ostentation and luxury of the great. The elephants of the rajah blazed with gold of exquisite workmanship, and the umbrellas that symbolized his regal power glittered with gems; but the plough of the ryot was only a sharpened stick. The ladies of the rajah's harem wrapped themselves in muslins so fine as to take the name of woven wind, but the tools of the artisan were of the poorest and rudest description, and commerce could only be carried on, as it were, by stealth.

Famines due to corrupt government

The Rev. William Tennant, a chaplain in the service of the East India Company, writing in 1796, two years before the publication of the Essay on Population, says in his Indian Recreations, volume I, section 39:

When we reflect upon the great fertility of Hindostan, it is amazing to consider the frequency of famine. It is evidently not owing to any sterility of soil or climate;

the evil must be traced to some political cause, and it requires but little penetration to discover it in the avarice and extortion of the various governments. The great spur to industry, that of security, is taken away. Hence no man raises more grain than is barely sufficient for himself, and the first unfavourable season produces a famine.

The Mogul government at no period offered full security to the prince, still less to his vassals; and to peasants the most scanty protection of all. It was a continued tissue of violence and insurrection, treachery and punishment, under which neither commerce nor the arts could prosper, nor agriculture assume the appearance of a system. Its downfall gave rise to a state still more afflictive, since anarchy is worse than misrule. The Mohammedan government, wretched as it was, the European nations have not the merit of overturning. It fell beneath the weight of its own corruption, and had already been succeeded by the multifarious tyranny of petty chiefs, whose right to govern consisted in their treason to the state, and whose exactions on the peasants were as boundless as their avarice. The rents to government were, and where natives rule, still are levied twice a year by a merciless banditti, under the semblance of an army, who wantonly destroy or carry out whatever part of the produce may satisfy their caprice or satiate their avidity, after having hunted the ill-fated peasants from

the villages to the woods. Any attempt of the peasants to defend their persons or their property within the mud walls of their villages only calls for the more signal vengeance on those useful, but ill-fated, mortals. They are then surrounded and attacked with musketry and field pieces til resistance ceases, when the survivors are sold, and their habitations burned and leveled with the ground. Hence you will frequently meet with the ryots gathering up the scattered remnants of what had yesterday been their habitation, if fear has permitted them to return; but oftener the ruins are seen smoking, after a second visitation of this kind, without a human being to interrupt the awful silence of devastation. This description does not apply to the Mohammedan chieftains alone; it is equally applicable to the rajahs in the districts governed by Hindoos.

Early British rule in India

To this merciless rapidity, which would have produced want and famine had the population been but one to a square mile an the land a Garden of Eden, succeeded, in the first era of British rule, as merciless a rapacity, backed by a far more irresistible power. Says Macaulay, in his essay of Lord Clive: "Enormous fortunes were rapidly accumulated in Calcutta, while thirty millions of human beings were reduced to the extremity of wretchedness. They had been accustomed to live under tyranny, but never under tyranny

like this. They found the little finger of the Company thicker than the loins of Surajah Dowlah.... It resembled the government of evil genii, rather than the government of human tyrants.... Sometimes they submitted in patient misery. Sometimes they fled from the white man, as their fathers had been used to fly from the Mahratta; and the palanquin of the English traveller was often carried through silent villages and towns through which the report of his approach has made desolate."

Upon horrors that Macaulay thus but touches, the vivid eloquence of Burke throws a stronger light - whole districts surrendered to the unrestrained cupidity of the worst of humankind, poverty-stricken peasants fiendishly tortured to compel them to give up their little hoards, and once populous tracts turned into deserts.

The persistence of famines

But the lawless license of early English rule having long been restrained, the strong hand of England gave to all that vast population a more than Roman peace. The principles of English law were extended by an elaborate system of codes and law officers, designed to secure to the humblest of these peoples the rights of Anglo-Saxon freemen. The whole peninsula was intersected by railways, and great irrigation works were constructed. Yet, with increasing frequency, famine succeeded famine, raging with greater intensity over wider areas.

Is not this a demonstration of the Malthusian theory? Does it not show that no matter how much the possibilities of subsistence are increased, population still continues to press upon it? Does it not show, as Malthus contended, that to shut up the sluices by which superabundant population is carried off is but to compel nature to open new one, and that unless the sources of human increase are checked by prudential regulation, the alternative of war is famine? This has been the orthodox explanation. But the truth is that these famines are no more due to the pressure of population upon the natural limits of subsistence than was the desolation of the Carnatic when Hyder Ali's horsemen burst upon it in a whirlwind of destruction.

It is only the most superficial view that can attribute want and starvation to pressure of population upon the ability of the land to produce subsistence. Could the cultivators retain their little capital, then industry, reviving and assuming more productive forms, would undoubtedly suffice to keep a much greater population. There are still in India great areas uncultivated, vast mineral resources untouched, and it is certain that the population of India does not reach, as within historical times it never has reached, the real limit of the soil to furnish subsistence nor even the point where this power begins to decline with the increasing drafts made upon it. The real cause of want in India has been, and yet is, the rapacity of man, not the niggardliness of nature.

The truth about Ireland

Ireland, of all European countries, furnishes the great stock example of over-population. The extreme poverty of the peasantry, the Irish famine and Irish emigration have been constantly referred to as a demonstration of the Malthusian theory worked out under the eyes of the civilized world. I doubt if a more striking instance can be cited of the power of a preaccepted theory to blind men as to the true relations of facts. The truth is, and it lies on the surface, that Ireland has never yet had a population that the natural powers of the country, in the existing state of the productive arts, could not have maintained in ample comfort. At the period of her greatest population (1840-45) Ireland contained something over eight millions of people.

But a very large proportion of them managed merely to exist, lodging in miserable cabins, clothed with miserable rags, and with but potatoes for their staple food. When the potato blight came, they died by thousands. But was it the inability of the soil to support so large a population that compelled so many to live in this miserable way and exposed them to starvation on the failure of a single root crop? On the contrary, it was the same remorseless rapacity as robbed the Indian ryot of the fruits of his toil and left him to starve where nature offered plenty. A merciless banditti of tax-gatherers did not march through the land plundering and torturing, but the labourer was just as effectually stripped by as merciless a horde of landlords, among whom the soil had been divided as their absolute possession, regardless of any rights of those who lived upon it.

Not over-population but extortion

Consider the conditions of production under which this eight million managed to live until the potato blight came. Cultivation was for the most part carried on by tenants-at-will, and they, even if the rack-rents they were forced to pay had permitted them, did not dare to make improvements, which would have been but the signal for an increase of rent. Labour was thus applied in the most inefficient and wasteful manner and labour, that with any security for its fruits would have been applied unremittingly, was dissipated in aimless idleness. But even under these conditions, it is a matter of fact that Ireland did more than support eight millions. For when her population was at its highest, Ireland was a food-exporting country. Even during the famine, grain and meat and butter and cheese were carted for exportation along roads lined with the starving and past trenches into which the dead were piled. For these exports of food, or at least for a great part of them, there was no return. So far as the people of Ireland were concerned, the food thus exported might as well have been burned up or thrown into the sea, or never produced. It went not as an exchange, but as a tribute - to pay the rent of absentee landlords; a levy wrung from producers by those who in no wise contributed to production.

Had this food been left to those who raised it, had the cultivators of the soil been permitted to retain and use the wealth their labour produced, had security stimulated

industry and permitted the adoption of economical methods, there would have been enough to support in bounteous comfort the largest population Ireland ever had. The potato blight might have come and gone without stinting a single human being of a full meal. For it was not, as English economists coldly said, "the imprudence of Irish peasants" that induced them to make the potato the staple of their food. Irish emigrants, when they can get other things, do not live upon the potato, and certainly in the United States the prudence of the Irish character, in endeavouring to lay by something for a rainy day, is remarkable. They lived on the potato because rack-rents stripped everything else from them.

Had Ireland been by nature a grove of bananas and bread-fruit, had her coasts been lined by the guano deposits of the Chinchas and the sun of lower latitudes warmed into more abundant life her moist soil, the social conditions that have prevailed there would still have brought forth poverty and starvation. How could there fail to be pauperism and famine in a country where rack-rents wrested from the cultivator of the soil all the produce of his labour except just enough to maintain life in good seasons; where tenure-at-will forbade improvements and removed incentive to any but the most wasteful and poverty-stricken culture; where the tenant dared not accumulate capital, even if he could get it, for fear the landlord would demand it in the rent; where in fact he was an abject slave who, at the nod of a human being like himself, might at any time be driven from his miserable

mud cabin, a houseless, homeless, starving wanderer, forbidden even to pluck the spontaneous fruits of the earth, or to trap a wild hare to satisfy his hunger?

No matter how sparse its population, no matter what its natural resources, would not pauperism and starvation be necessary consequences in any land where the producers of wealth were compelled to work under conditions which deprived them of hope, of self-respect, of energy, of thrift; where absentee landlords drained away without return at least a fourth of the net produce of the soil; and when, besides them, a starving industry had to support resident landlords, with their horses and hounds, agents, jobbers, middlemen and bailiffs, and an army of policemen and soldiers to overawe and hunt down any opposition to the iniquitous system?

If we turn from an examination of the facts brought forward in illustration of the Malthusian theory to a consideration of the analogies by which it is supported, we shall find the same inconclusiveness.

False analogies

The strength of the reproductive force in the animal and vegetable kingdoms - considering that a single pair of salmon might in fact, if preserved from their natural enemies for a few years, fill the ocean; that a pair of rabbits would, under the same circumstances, soon overrun a

continent; that many plants scatter their seeds by the hundredfold, and some insects deposit thousands of eggs; and that everywhere each species constantly tends to press against the limits of subsistence and evidently does press against them when not limited by the numbers of its enemies - is constantly cited as showing that humankind likewise tends to press against subsistence. Accordingly, when population is unrestrained by other means, its natural increase must necessarily result in such low wages and want or (if that will not suffice and the increase still goes on) in such actual starvation as will keep population within the limits of subsistence.

But is this analogy valid? It is from the vegetable and animal kingdoms that man's food is drawn, and hence the greater strength of the reproductive force in the vegetable and animal kingdoms than in man simply proves the power of subsistence to increase faster than population. Does not the fact, that all things that furnish man's subsistence have the power to multiply many-fold - some of them many thousandfold, and some of them many million or even billionfold - while he is only doubling his numbers, show that, let human beings increase to the full extent of their reproductive power, the increase of population will never exceed subsistence?

Of all living things, man is the only one that can give play to the reproductive forces, more powerful than his own, which supply him with food. Beast, insect, bird and fish

take only what they find. Their increase is at the expense of their food. When they have reached the existing limits of food, their food must increase before they can increase.

Man produces his food

Unlike that of any other living thing, the increase of man results in the increase of his food. If bears instead of men had been shipped from Europe to the North American continent, there would now be no more bears than in the time of Columbus; possibly fewer, for by the bear immigration bear food would not have been increased nor would the conditions of bear life have been extended, but probably the reverse. Yet within the limits of the United States alone there are now millions of men where then there were only a few hundred thousand and there is now within that territory much more food per capita for the millions than there was then for the few hundred thousand. It is not the increase of food that has caused the increase of men; it is the increase of men that has brought about the increase of food. There is more food simply because there are more men.

There is a difference between the animal and the man. Both the jay-hawk and the man eat chickens, but the more jay-hawks the fewer chickens, while the more men the more chickens. Both the seal and the man eat salmon, but when a seal takes a salmon there is a salmon the less, and were seals to increase past a certain point salmon must diminish;

while by placing the spawn of the salmon under favourable conditions man can so increase the number of salmon as to make up for more than all he may take. Thus, no matter how much men may increase, their increase need never outrun the supply of salmon. In short, while all through the vegetable and animal kingdoms the limit of subsistence is independent of the thing subsisted, with man the limit of subsistence is, within the final limits of earth, air, water, and sunshine, dependent upon man himself. And this being the case, the analogy it is sought to draw between the lower forms of life and man manifestly fails.

The danger that the human race may increase beyond the possibility of finding elbow room is so far off as to have for us no more practical interest than the recurrence of the glacial period or the final extinguishment of the sun. Yet, remote and shadowy as it is, it is this possibility that gives to the Malthusian theory its apparently self-evident character. But if we follow it, even this shadow will disappear. It also springs from a false analogy. That vegetable and animal life tend to press against the limits of space does not prove the same tendency in human life.

Further differences between man and beast

Granted that man is only a more highly developed animal, that the ring-tailed monkey is a distant relative who has gradually developed acrobatic tendencies, and the hump-backed whale a far-off connection who in early life took to

the sea; granted that back of these man is kin to the vegetable and still subject to the same laws as plants, fishes, birds and beasts. Yet there is still this difference between man and all other animals - he is the only animal whose desires increase as they are fed; the only animal that is never satisfied. The wants of every other living thing are uniform and fixed. The ox of today aspires to no more than did the ox when man first yoked him. The seagull of the English Channel that poises himself above the swift steamer wants no better food or lodging than the gulls that circled round as the keels of Caesar's galleys first grated on a British beach. Of what nature offers them, be it ever so abundant, all living things save man can take and care for only enough to supply wants that are definite and fixed. The only use they can make of additional supplies or additional opportunities is to multiply.

But not so with man. No sooner are his animal wants satisfied than new wants arise. Food he wants first, as does the beast; shelter next, as does the beast; and these given, his reproductive instincts assert their sway, as do those of the beast. But here man and beast part company. The beast never goes further; the man has but set his feet on the first step of an infinite progression - a progression upon which the beast never enters; a progression away from and above the beast. Give more food, open fuller conditions of life, and the vegetable or animal can but multiply; the man will develop. In the one, the expansive force can but extend

existence in new numbers; in the other, it will inevitably tend to extend existence in higher forms and wider powers.

Logical error of Malthus

Whichever way it be turned, the reasoning by which this theory of the constant tendency of population to press against the limits of subsistence is supported shows an unwarranted assumption, an undistributed middle, as the logicians would say. It is as unfounded, if not as grotesque, as an assumption we can imagine Adam might have made had he been of an arithmetical turn of mind and figured on the growth of his first baby from the rate of its early months. From the fact that at birth it weighed ten pounds and in eight months thereafter twenty pounds, he might, with the arithmetical knowledge which some sages have supposed him to possess, have ciphered out a result quite as striking as that of Mr. Malthus - namely, that by the time it got to be ten years old it would be as heavy as an ox, at twelve as heavy as an elephant, and at thirty would weigh no less than 175,716,339,548 tons. The fact is, there is no more reason for us to trouble ourselves about the pressure of population upon subsistence than there was for Adam to worry himself about the rapid growth of his baby.

Forces influencing the birthrate

In new settlements where the struggle with nature leaves little opportunity for intellectual life, and among the

poverty-bound classes of older countries who in the midst of wealth are deprived of all its advantages and are reduced to an all but animal existence, the proportion of births is notoriously greater than it is among the classes to whom the increase of wealth has brought independence, leisure, comfort and a fuller and more varied life.

If the real law of population is thus indicated, as I think it must be, then the tendency to increase, instead of being always uniform, is strong where the perpetuity of the race is threatened by the mortality induced by adverse conditions; but it weakens just as the higher development of the individual becomes possible and the perpetuity of the race is assured. Any danger that human beings may be brought into a world where they cannot be provided for arises not from the ordinances of nature, but from social maladjustments that in the midst of wealth condemn men to want.

Alleged niggardliness of nature

Manifestly the question whether increase of population necessarily tends to reduce wages and cause want is simply the question whether it tends to reduce the amount of wealth that can be produced by a given amount of labour. The theory is that the more that is required from nature the less generously does she respond, so that doubling the application of labour will not double the product; and hence, increase of population must tend to reduce wages

and deepen poverty, or, in the phrase of Malthus, must result in vice and misery. To quote the language of John Stuart Mill:

"A greater number of people cannot, in any given state of civilization, be collectively so well provided for as a smaller. The niggardliness of nature, not the injustice of society, is the cause of the penalty attached to over-population. An unjust distribution of wealth does not even aggravate the evil, but, at most, causes it to be somewhat earlier felt. It is vain to say that all mouths which the increase of mankind calls into existence bring with them hands. The new mouths require as much food as the old ones, and the hands do not produce as much. If all instruments of production were held in joint property by the whole people, and the produce divided with perfect equality among them, and if in a society thus constituted, industry were as energetic and the produce as ample as at present, there would be enough to make all the existing population extremely comfortable; but when that population had doubled itself, as, with existing habits of the people, under such an encouragement, it undoubtedly would in little more than twenty years, what would then be their condition? Unless the arts of production were in the same time improved in an almost unexampled degree, the inferior soils which must be resorted to, and the more laborious and scantily remunerative cultivation which must be employed on the superior soils, to

procure food for so much larger a population, would, by an insuperable necessity, render every individual in the community poorer than before. If the population continued to increase at the same rate, a time would soon arrive when no one would have more than mere necessities, and, soon after, a time when no one would have a sufficiency of those, and the further increase of population would be arrested by death. (Principles of Political Economy, Book I, chapter 13, section 2.)

All this I deny. I assert that the very reverse of these propositions is true. I assert that in any given state of civilization a greater number of people can collectively be better provided for than a smaller. I assert that the injustice of society, not the niggardliness of nature, is the cause of the want and misery which the current theory attributes to over population. I assert that the new mouths which an increasing population calls into existence require no more food than the old ones, while the hands they bring with them can in the natural order of things produce more. I assert that, other things being equal, the greater the population, the greater will be the comfort which an equitable distribution of wealth would give to each individual. I assert that in a state of equality the natural increase of population would constantly tend to make every individual richer instead of poorer. The question of fact into which this issue resolves itself is not in what stage of population most subsistence is produced, but in what stage of population the greatest power of producing wealth is

exhibited. For the power of production, wealth in any form is the power of producing subsistence - and the consumption of wealth in any form, or of wealth-producing power, is equivalent to the consumption of subsistence.

Where productive power is greatest

There is no necessity for abstract reasoning. The question is one of simple fact. Does the relative power of producing wealth decrease with the increase of population?

The facts are so patent that it is only necessary to call attention to them. We have, in modern times, seen many communities advance in population. Have they not at the same time advanced even more rapidly in wealth? We see many communities still increasing in population. Are they not also increasing their wealth still faster?

Where will you find wealth devoted with the most lavishness to non-productive use - costly buildings, fine furniture, luxurious equipages, statues, pictures, pleasure gardens and yachts? Where will you find in largest proportion those whom the general production suffices to keep without productive labour on their part? Is it not where population is dense rather than where it is sparse? Whence is it that capital over-flows for remunerative investment? Is it not from densely populated countries to sparsely populated countries?

These things are apparent wherever we turn our eyes. On the same level of civilization, the same stage of the productive arts, government, etc., the most populous countries are always the most wealthy.

The richest countries are not those where nature is most prolific; but those where labour is most efficient - not Mexico, but Massachusetts; not Brazil, but England. The countries where population is densest and presses hardest upon the capabilities of nature are, other things being equal, the countries where the largest proportion of the produce can be devoted to luxury and the support of non-producers; they are the countries where capital overflows, the countries that can upon exigency, such as war, stand the greatest drain.

Whether we compare different communities with each other, or examine the same community at different times, it is obvious that the progressive society, which is marked by increase of population, is also marked by an increased consumption and an increased accumulation of wealth, not merely in the aggregate, but per capita. And hence, increase of population, so far as it has yet anywhere gone, does not mean a reduction, but an increase, in the average production of wealth.

Look simply at the facts. Can anything be clearer than that the cause of the poverty which festers in the centres of civilization is not in the weakness of the productive forces?

In countries where poverty is deepest, the forces of production are evidently strong enough, if fully employed, to provide for the lowest not merely comfort but luxury. Want appears where productive power is greatest and the production of wealth is largest - it is this very fact that constitutes the enigma which perplexes the civilized world. It is this that we are trying to unravel. Evidently the Malthusian theory, which attributes want to the decrease of productive power, will not explain it.

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