WHY DO MEN STARVE?

BY C. BRADLAUGH.

WHY is it that human beings are starved to death, in a wealthy country like England, with its palaces, its cathedrals, and its abbeys; with its grand mansions, and luxurious dwellings, with its fine enclosed parks, and strictly guarded preserves; with its mills, mines, and factories; with its enormous profits to the capitalists; and with its broad acres and great rent rolls to the landholder? The fact that men, old, young, and in the prime of life; that women, and that children, do so die, is indisputable. The paragraph in the daily journals, headed "Death from Starvation," or "Another death from Destitution," is no uncommon one to the eyes of the careful reader.

In a newspaper of one day, December 24th, 1864, may be read the verdict of a London jury that "the deceased, Robert Bloom, died from the mortal effects of effusion on the brain and disease of the lungs, arising from natural causes, but the said death was accelerated by destitution, and by living in an ill-ventilated room, and in a court wanting in sanitary requirements;" and the verdict of another jury, presided over by the very Coroner who sat on the last case, "that the deceased, Mary Hale, was found dead in a certain room from the mortal effects of cold and starvation;" as also the history of a poor wanderer from the Glasgow City Poor House found dead in the snow.

In London, the hive of the world, with its merchant millionaires, even under the shadow of the wealth pile, starvation is as busy as if in the most wretched and impo-

verished village; busy indeed, not always striking the victim so obtrusively that the coroner's inquest shall preserve a record of the fact, but more often busy quietly, in the wretched court and narrow lane, up in the garret, and down in the cellar, stealing by slow degrees the life of the poor.

Why does it happen that Christian London, with its magnificent houses for God, has so many squalid holes for the poor? Christianity from its thousand pulpits teaches, "Ask and it shall be given to you," "who if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?" yet with much prayer the bread is too frequently not enough, and it is, alas! not seldom that the prayer for bread gets the answer in the stone of the paved street, where he lays him down to die. The prayer of the poor outcast is answered by hunger, misery, disease, crime, and death, and yet the Bible says, "Blessed be ye poor." Ask the orthodox clergyman why men starve, why men are poor and miserable; he will tell you that it is God's will; that it is a punishment for man's sins. And so long as men are content to believe that it is God's will that the majority of humankind should have too little happiness, so long will it be impossible effectually to get them to listen to the answer to this great question.

Men starve because the great bulk of them are ignorant of the great law of population, the operation of which controls their existence and determines its happiness or misery. They starve, because pulpit teachers have taught them for centuries to be content with the state of life in which it has pleased God to call them, instead of teaching them how to extricate themselves from the misery, degradation, and ignorance which a continuance of poverty entails.

Men starve because the teachers have taught heaven instead of earth, the next world instead of this. It is now generally admitted by those who have investigated the subject, that there is a tendency in all animated life to increase beyond the nourishment nature produces. In the human race, there is a constant endeavour on the part of its members to increase beyond the means of subsistence within

their reach. The want of food to support this increase operates, in the end, as a positive obstacle to the further spread of population, and men are starved because the great mass of them have neglected to listen to one of nature's clearest teachings. The unchecked increase of population is in a geometrical ratio, the increase of food for their subsistence is in an arithmetical ratio. That is, while humankind would increase in proportion as 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, 256, food would only increase as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. The more the mouths the less the proportion of food. While the restraint to an increase of population is thus a want of food, and starvation is the successful antagonist of struggling human life, it is seldom that this obstacle operates immediately—its dealing is more often indirectly against its victims. Those who die of actual famine are few indeed compared with those who die from various forms of disease, induced by scarcity of the means of subsistence. If any of my readers doubt this, their doubts may be removed by a very short series of visits to the wretched homes of the paupers of our great cities. Suicide is the refuge mainly of those who are worn out in a bitter, and, to them, a hopeless struggle against accumulated ills. Disease, suffering, and misery are the chief causes of the prevalence of suicide in our country, and suicide is therefore one form, although comparatively minute, in which the operation of the law of population may be traced.

From dread of the pangs of poverty, men, women, and children are driven to unwholesome occupations, which destroy not only the health of the man and woman actually employed, but implant the germs of physical disease in their offspring. A starving woman seeking food mixes white lead with oil and turpentine for a paltry pittance, which provides bare existence for her and those who share it; in a few weeks, she is so diseased she can work no longer, and the hospital and grave in turn receive her. Men and women are driven to procure bread by work in lead mines; they rapidly dig their own graves, and not alone themselves,

but their wretched offspring are death-stricken as the penalty; the lead poisons the blood of parent and child alike. Young women and children work at artificial flower-making, and soon their occupation teaches that Scheele's and Schweenfurth green, bright and pleasing colours to the eye, are death's darts too often fatally aimed. The occupation may be objected to as unhealthy; but the need for food is great, and the woman's or child's wages, wretchedly little though they are, yet help to fill the mouths at home: so the wage is taken till the worker dies. Here, again, the checks to an increase of population all stop short of starvation—the victims are poisoned instead of starved. So where some forty or fifty young girls are crowded into a badly ventilated work-room, not large enough for half the number, from early in the morning till even near midnight, when orders press; or in some work-room where slop clothes are made, and twenty-five tailors are huddled together in a little parlour scarce wide enough for three—they work to live, and die slowly while they work. They are not starved, but is this sort of asphyxiation much better? The poor are not only driven to unhealthy, but also to noisome dwellings. There are in London, Liverpool, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Manchester, and other large cities, fearful alleys, with wretched houses, and small ill-ventilated rooms, each room containing a family, the individuals of which are crowded together under conditions so wretched that disease, and often speedy death, is the only possible result. In the East of London, ten, eleven, and, in some cases, fourteen persons have been found sleeping in one wretched little room. Is it wonderful that some of these misery-stricken ones die before they have time to starve? From poverty the mother, obliged to constantly work that the miserable pittance she gets may yield enough to sustain bare life, is unable properly to nurse and care for baby-child, and often quick death, or slow but certain disease, ending ultimately in the grave, is the result.

The poor live by wages. Wages popularly signify the

amount of money earned by the labourer in a given time; but the real value of the money-wages is the amount in quantity and quality of the means of subsistence which the labourer can purchase with that money. Wages may be nominally high, but really low, if the food and commodities to be purchased are, at the same time, dear in price. An undue increase of population reduces wages in more than one way: it reduces them in effect, if not in nominal amount, by increasing the price of the food to be purchased; and it also reduces the nominal amount, because the nominal amount depends on the amount of capital at disposal for employ, and the number of labourers seeking employment. No remedies for low wages, no scheme for the prevention and removal of poverty can ever be efficacious until they operate on and through the minds and habits of the masses.

It is not from rich men that the poor must hope for deliverance from starvation. It is not to charitable associations the wretched must appeal. Temporary alleviation of the permanent evil is the best that can be hoped for from such aids. It is by the people that the people must be saved. Measures which increase the dependence of the poor on charitable aid can only temporarily benefit one portion of the labouring class while injuring another in the same proportion; and charity, if carried far, must inevitably involve the recipients in ultimate ruin and degradation by destroying their mutual self-reliance. The true way to improve the worker, in all cases short of actual want of the necessaries of life, is to throw him entirely on his own resources, but at the same time to teach him how he may augment those resources to the utmost. It is only by educating the ignorant poor to a consciousness of the happiness possible to them, as a result of their own exertions, that you can induce them effectually to strive for it. But, alas! as Mr. Mill justly observes, "Education is not compatible with extreme poverty. It is impossible effectually to teach an indigent population." The time occupied in the bare struggle to exist leaves but few moments and fewer opportunities for mental cultivation to the very poor.

The question of wages and their relation to capital and population, a question which interests a poor man so much, is one on which he formerly hardly ever thought at all, and on which even now he thinks much too seldom. It is necessary to impress on the labourer that the rate of wages depends on the proportion between population and capital. If population increases without an increase of capital, wages fall; the number of competitors in the labour market being greater, and the fund to povide for them not having increased proportionately, and if capital increases without an increase of population, wages rise. Many efforts have been made to increase wages, but none of them can be permanently successful which do not include some plan for preventing a too rapid increase of labourers. Population has a tendency to increase, and has increased, faster than capital; this is evidenced by the poor and miserable condition of the great body of the people in most of the old countries of the world, a condition which can only be accounted for upon one of two suppositions, either that there is a natural tendency in population to increase faster than capital, or that capital has, by some means, been prevented from increasing as rapidly as it might have done. That population has such a tendency to increase that, unchecked, it would double itself in a small number of years—say twenty-five—is a proposition which most writers of any merit concur in, and which may be easily proven. In some instances, the increase has been even still more rapid. That capital has not increased sufficiently is evident from the existing state of society. But that it could increase under any circumstances with the same rapidity as is possible to population, is denied. The increase of capital is retarded by an obstacle which does not exist in the case of population. The augmentation of capital is painful. It can only be effected by abstaining from immediate enjoyment. In the case of augmentation of population precisely the reverse obtains. There the temporary and immediate pleasure is succeeded by the permanent pain. The only pos-

sible mode of raising wages permanently, and effectually benefitting the poor, is by so educating them that they shall be conscious that their welfare depends upon the exercise of a greater control over their passions.

In penning this brief paper, my desire has been to provoke amongst the working classes a discussion and careful examination of the teachings of political economy, as propounded by Mr. J. S. Mill and those other able men who, of late, have devoted themselves to elaborating and popularising the doctrines enunciated by Malthus. While I am glad to find that there are some amongst the masses who are inclined to preach and put in practice the teachings of the Malthusian School of political economists, I know that they are yet few in comparison with the great body of the working classes who have been taught to look upon the political economist as the poor man's foe. It is nevertheless amongst the working men alone, and, in the very ranks of the starvers, that the effort must be made to check starvation. The question is again before us—How are men to be prevented from starving? Not by strikes, during the continuance of which food is scarcer than before. No combinations of workmen can obtain high wages if the number of workers is too great. It is not by a mere struggle of class against class that the poor man's ills can be cured. The working classes can alleviate their own sufferings. They can, by co-operative schemes, which have the advantage of being educational in their operation, temporarily and partially remedy some of the evils, if not by increasing the means of subsistence, at any rate by securing a larger portion of the result of labour to the proper sustenance of the labourer. Systems of associated industry are of immense benefit to the working classes, not alone, or so much from the pecuniary improvement they result in, but because they develop in each individual a sense of dignity and independence, which he lacks as a mere hired labourer. They can permanently improve their condition by taking such steps as

shall prevent too rapid an increase of their numbers, and, by thus checking the supply of labourers, they will, as capital augments, increase the rate of wages paid to the labourer. The steady object of each working man should be to impress on his fellow-worker the importance of this subject. Let each point out to his neighbour not only the frightful struggle in which a poor man must engage who brings up a large family, but also that the result is to place in the labour market more claimants for a share of the fund which has hitherto been found insufficient to keep the working classes from death by starvation.

The object of this pamphlet will be amply attained if it serve as the means of inducing some of the working classes to examine for themselves the teachings of Political Economy. All that is at present needed is that labouring men and women should be accustomed, both publicly and at home, to the consideration and discussion of the views and principles first openly propounded by Mr. Malthus, and since elaborated by Mr. Mill and other writers. The mere investigation of the subject will of itself serve to bring to the notice of the masses many facts hitherto entirely ignored by them. All must acknowledge the terrible ills resulting from poverty, and all therefore are bound to use their faculties to discover if possible its cause and cure. It is more than folly for the working man to permit himself to be turned away from the subject by the cry that the Political Economists have no sympathy with the poor. If the allegation were true, which it is not, it would only afford an additional reason why this important science should find students amongst those who most need aid from its teachings.

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