

CHAPTER 2 INFERENCES FROM FACTS

The general acceptance of the Malthusian theory and the high authority by which it is indorsed have seemed to me to make it expedient to review its grounds and the causes which have conspired to give it such a dominating influence in the discussion of social questions.

But when we subject the theory itself to the test of straightforward analysis, it will, I think, be found as utterly untenable as the current theory of wages.

In the first place, the facts which are marshaled in support of this theory do not prove it, and the analogies do not countenance it.

And in the second place, there are facts which conclusively disprove it.

I go to the heart of the matter in saying that there is no warrant, either in experience or analogy, for the assumption that there is any tendency in population to increase faster than subsistence. The facts cited to show this simply show that where, owing to the sparseness of population, as in new countries, or where, owing to the unequal distribution of wealth, as among the poorer classes in old countries, human life is occupied with the physical necessities of existence, the tendency to reproduce is at a rate which would, were it to go on unchecked, some time exceed subsistence. But it is not a legitimate inference from this that the tendency to reproduce would show itself in the same force where population was sufficiently dense and wealth distributed with sufficient evenness to lift a whole community above the

There is no evidence that population tends to increase faster than subsistence.

necessity of devoting their energies to a struggle for mere existence. Nor can it be assumed that the tendency to reproduce, by causing poverty, must prevent the existence of such a community; for this, manifestly, would be assuming the very point at issue, and reasoning in a circle. And even if it be admitted that the tendency to multiply must ultimately produce poverty, it cannot from this alone be predicated of existing poverty that it is due to this cause, until it be shown that there are no other causes which can account for it—a thing in the present state of government, laws, and customs, manifestly impossible.

This is abundantly shown in the “Essay on Population” itself. This famous book, which is much oftener spoken of than read, is still well worth perusal, if only as a literary curiosity. The contrast between the merits of the book itself and the effect it has produced, or is at least credited with (for though Sir James Stewart, Mr. Townsend, and others, share with Malthus the glory of discovering “the principle of population,” it was the publication of the “Essay on Population” that brought it prominently forward), is, it seems to me, one of the most remarkable things in the history of literature; and it is easy to understand how Godwin, whose “Political justice” provoked the “Essay on Population,” should until his old age have disdained a reply. It begins with the assumption that population tends to increase in a geometrical ratio, while subsistence can at best be made to increase only in an arithmetical ratio—an assumption just as valid, and no more so, than it would be, from the fact that a puppy doubled the length of his tail while he added so many pounds to his weight, to assert a geometric progression of tail and an arithmetical progression of weight. And, the inference from the assumption is just such as Swift in satire might have credited to the savants of

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Malthus’ “Essay on Population” is worth reading as a curiosity, starting with an unsupported assumption

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a previously dogless island who, by bringing these two ratios together, might deduce the very "striking consequence" that by the time the dog grew to a weight of fifty pounds his tail would be over a mile long, and extremely difficult to wag, and hence recommend the prudential check of a bandage as the only alternative to the positive check of constant amputations. Commencing with such an absurdity, the essay includes a long argument for the imposition of a duty on the importation, and the payment of a bounty for the exportation of corn, an idea that has long since been sent to the limbo of exploded fallacies. And it is marked throughout the argumentative portions by passages which show on the part of the reverend gentleman the most ridiculous incapacity for logical thought—as, for instance, that if wages were to be increased from eighteen pence or two shillings per day to five shillings, meat would necessarily increase in price from eight or nine pence to two or three shillings per pound, and the condition of the laboring classes would therefore not be improved, a statement to which I can think of no parallel so close as a proposition I once heard a certain printer gravely advance—that because an author, whom he had known, was forty years old when he was twenty, the author must now be eighty years old because he (the printer) was forty. This confusion of thought does not merely crop out here and there; it characterizes the whole work.¹ The main body of the book is taken up with what is in reality a refutation of the theory which the book advances, for

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¹ Malthus' other works, though written after he became famous, made no mark, and are treated with contempt even by those who find in the *Essay* a great discovery. The *Encyclopædia Britannica*, for instance, though fully accepting the Malthusian theory, says of Malthus' *Political Economy*: "It is very ill arranged, and is in no respect either a practical or a scientific exposition of the subject. It is in great part occupied with an examination of parts of Mr. Ricardo's peculiar doctrines, and with an inquiry into the nature and causes of value. Nothing, however, can be more unsatisfactory than these discussions. In truth Mr. Malthus never had any clear or accurate perception of Mr. Ricardo's theories, or of the principles which determine the value in exchange of different articles."

The results which Malthus claims to be due to overpopulation, he actually shows are due to other causes— ignorance and rapacity, or bad government, unjust laws, or destructive warfare.

Malthus' review of what he calls the positive checks to population is simply the showing that the results which he attributes to overpopulation actually arise from other causes. Of all the cases cited, and pretty much the whole globe is passed over in the survey, in which vice and misery check increase by limiting marriages or shortening the term of human life, there is not a single case in which the vice and misery can be traced to an actual increase in the number of mouths over the power of the accompanying hands 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 laws or destructive warfare.

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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 country² 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 some time 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 thousands, and it is now thought millions, of years that man has been upon the

²I say considerable country, because there may be small islands, such as Pitcairn's Island, cut off from communication with the rest of the world and consequently from the exchanges which are necessary to the improved modes of production resorted to as population becomes dense, which may seem to offer examples in point. A moment's reflection, however, will show that these exceptional cases are not in point.

earth, is yet so thinly populated? How is it, then, that so many of the hives of human life are now deserted—that once cultivated fields are rank with jungle, and the wild beast licks her cubs where once were busy haunts of men?

It is a fact, that, as we count our increasing millions, we are apt to lose sight of—nevertheless it is a fact that in what we know of the world's history decadence of population is as common as increase. Whether the aggregate population of the earth is now greater than at any previous epoch is a speculation which can deal only with guesses. Since Montesquieu, in the early part of the last century, asserted, what was then probably the prevailing impression, that the population of the earth had, since the Christian era, greatly declined, opinion has run the other way. But the tendency of recent investigation and exploration has been to give greater credit to what have been deemed the exaggerated accounts of ancient historians and travelers, and to reveal indications of denser populations and more advanced civilizations than had before been suspected, as well as of a higher antiquity in the human race. And in basing our estimates of population upon the development of trade, the advance of the arts, and the size of cities, we are apt to underrate the density of population which the intensive cultivations, characteristic of the earlier civilizations, are capable of maintaining—especially where irrigation is resorted to. As we may see from the closely cultivated districts of China and Europe a very great population of simple habits can readily exist with very little commerce and a much lower stage of those arts in which modern progress has been most marked, and without that tendency to concentrate in cities which modern populations show.³

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³As may be seen from the map in H. H. Bancroft's "Native Races," the State of Vera Cruz is not one of those parts of Mexico noticeable for its antiquities. Yet

Parts of Europe had larger populations in the past than today.

Be this as it may, the only continent which we can be sure now contains a larger population than ever before is Europe. But this is not true of all parts of Europe. Certainly Greece, the Mediterranean Islands, and Turkey in Europe, probably Italy, and possibly Spain, have contained larger populations than now, and this may be likewise true of Northwestern and parts of Central and Eastern Europe.

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America also has increased in population during the time we know of it; but this increase is not so great as is popularly supposed, some estimates giving to Peru alone at the time of the discovery a greater population than now exists on the whole continent of South America. And all the indications are that previous to the discovery the population of America had been declining. What great nations have run their course, what empires have arisen and fallen in "that new world which is the old," we can only imagine. But fragments of massive ruins yet attest a grander pre-Incan civilization; amid the tropical forests of Yucatan and Central America are the remains of great cities forgotten ere the Spanish conquest; Mexico, as Cortez found it, showed the superimposition of barbarism upon a higher social development, while through a great part of what is now the United States are scattered mounds which prove a once relatively dense population, and here and there, as in the Lake Superior copper mines, are traces of higher arts than

Hugo Fink, of Cordova, writing to the Smithsonian Institution (Reports 1870), says there is hardly a foot in the whole State in which by excavation either a broken obsidian knife or a broken piece of pottery is not found; that the whole country is intersected with parallel lines of stones intended to keep the earth from washing away in the rainy season, which shows that even the very poorest land was put into requisition, and that it is impossible to resist the conclusion that the ancient population was at least as dense as it is at present in the most populous districts of Europe.

were known to the Indians with whom the whites came in contact.

As to Africa there can be no question. Northern Africa can contain but 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 wide-spread depopulation was certainly caused by the slave trade.

Certainly Africa once had a larger population,

As for Asia, which even now contains more than half the human race, though it is not much more than half as densely populated as Europe, there are indications that both India and China once contained larger populations than now, while that great breeding ground of men from which issued swarms that overran both countries and sent great waves of people rolling upon Europe, must have been once far more populous. But the most marked change is in Asia Minor, Syria, Babylonia, Persia, and in short that vast district which yielded to the conquering arms of Alexander. Where were once great cities and teeming populations are now squalid villages and barren wastes.

as did Asia.

It is somewhat strange that among all the theories that have been raised, that of a fixed quantity to human life on this earth has not been broached. It would at least better accord with historical facts than that of the constant tendency of population to outrun subsistence. It is clear that population has here ebbed and there flowed; its centers have changed; new nations have arisen and old nations declined; sparsely settled districts have become populous and populous districts have lost their population; but as far back as we can go without abandoning ourselves wholly to inference, there is nothing to show continuous increase, or even clearly to show an aggregate increase from time to time. The advance of the pioneers of peoples has, so far as we can

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discern, never been into uninhabited lands—their march has always been a battle with some other people previously in possession; behind dim empires vaguer ghosts of empire loom. That the population of the world must have had its small beginnings we confidently infer for we know that there was a geologic era when human life could not have existed, and we cannot believe that men sprang up all at once, as from the dragon teeth sowed by Cadmus; yet through long vistas, where history, tradition and antiquities shed a light that is lost in faint glimmers, we may discern large populations. And during these long periods the principle of population has not been strong enough fully to settle the world, or even so far as we can clearly see materially to increase its aggregate population. Compared with its capacities to support human life the earth as a whole is yet most sparsely populated.

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There is another broad, general fact which cannot fail to strike any one who, thinking of this subject, extends his view beyond modern society. Malthusianism predicates 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 which 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 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; but that, on the contrary, the wisdom of the centuries, the religions of the world, have always inculcated ideas of civic and religious duty the very reverse of those which the current political economy enjoins, and which Annie Besant is now trying to popularize in England?

If there be a natural tendency for population to outrun subsistence, how is it that no civilization's creed or code encourages the practice of the prudential restraints of Malthus?

And it must be remembered that there have been societies in which the community guaranteed to every member employment and subsistence. John Stuart Mill says (Book II, Chap XII, Sec. 2), that to do this without state regulation of marriages and births, would be to produce a state of general misery and degradation. "These consequences," he says, "have been so often and so clearly pointed out by authors of reputation that ignorance of them on the part of educated persons is no longer pardonable." Yet in Sparta, in Peru, in Paraguay, as in the industrial communities which appear almost everywhere to have constituted the primitive agricultural organization, there seems to have been an utter ignorance of these dire consequences of a natural tendency.

And, there have been societies which guaranteed subsistence to every member.

Besides the broad, general facts I have cited, there are facts of common knowledge which seem utterly inconsistent with such an overpowering tendency to multiplication. If the tendency to reproduce be so strong as Malthusianism supposes, how is it that families so often become extinct—families in which want is unknown? How is it, then, that when every premium is offered by hereditary titles and hereditary possessions, not alone to the principle of increase, but to the preservation of genealogical knowledge and the proving up of descent, that in such an aristocracy as that of England, so many peerages should lapse, and the House of Lords be kept up from century to century only by fresh creations?

And, if there is an overpowering tendency to multiplication, how is it that families, even in which want is unknown, so often become extinct?

For the solitary example of a family that has survived any great lapse of time, even though assured of subsistence and honor we must go to unchangeable China. The descendants of Confucius still exist there, and enjoy peculiar privileges and consideration, forming, in fact, the only hereditary aristocracy. On the presumption that population tends to

double every twenty-five years, they should, in 2,150 years after the death of Confucius, have amounted to 859,559,193,106,709,670,198,710,528 souls. Instead of any such unimaginable number, the descendants of Confucius, 2,150 years after his death, in the reign of Kanghi numbered 11,000 males, or say 22,000 souls. This is quite a discrepancy, and is the more striking when it is remembered that the esteem in which this family is held on account of their ancestor, "the Most Holy Ancient Teacher," has prevented the operation of the positive check, while the maxims of Confucius inculcate anything but the prudential check.

Yet, it may be said, that even this increase is a great one. Twenty-two thousand persons descended from a single pair in 2,150 years is far short of the Malthusian rate. Nevertheless, it is suggestive of possible overcrowding.

But consider. Increase of descendants does not show increase of population. It could only do this when the breeding was in and in. Smith and his wife have a son and daughter, who marry respectively some one else's daughter and son, and each have two children. Smith and his wife would thus have four grandchildren; but there would be in the one generation no greater number than in the other—each child would have four grandparents. And supposing this process were to go on, the line of descent might constantly spread out into hundreds, thousands and millions; but in each generation of descendants there would be no more individuals than in any previous generation of ancestors. The web of generations is like lattice-work or the diagonal threads in cloth. Commencing at any point at the top, the eye follows lines which at the bottom widely diverge; but beginning at any point at the bottom, the lines diverge in the same way to the top. How many children a man may have is problematical. But that he had two parents is certain,

Although one couple may have thousands of descendants,

and that these again had two parents each is also certain. Follow this geometrical progression through a few generations and see if it does not lead to quite as “striking consequences” as Mr. Malthus’ peopling of the solar systems.

they also do have thousands of ancestors.

But from such considerations as these let us advance to a more definite inquiry. I assert that the cases commonly cited as instances of overpopulation will not bear investigation. India, China, and Ireland furnish the strongest of these cases. In each of these countries, large numbers have perished by starvation and large classes are reduced to abject misery or compelled to emigrate. But is this really due to over-population?

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Comparing total population with total area, India and China are far from being the most densely populated countries of the world. According to the estimates of MM. Behm and Wagner, the population of India is but 132 to the square mile and that of China 119 whereas Saxony has a population of 442 to the square mile; Belgium 441; England 442; the Netherlands 291; Italy 234 and Japan 233⁴. There are thus in both countries large areas unused or not fully used, but even in their more densely populated districts there can be no doubt that either could maintain a much greater population in a much higher degree of comfort, for in both countries is labor applied to production in the rudest and most inefficient ways, and in both countries great natural resources are wholly neglected. This arises from no innate deficiency in

Density of population in India and China is far less than England, Belgium, and other prosperous countries.

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⁴ I take these figures from the Smithsonian Report for 1873, leaving out decimals. MM. Behm and Wagner put the population of China at 446,500,000, though there are some who contend that it does not exceed 150,000,000. They put the population of Hither India at 206,225,580, giving 132.29 to the square mile; of Ceylon at 2,405,287 Or 97.36 to the square mile; of Further India at 21,018,062, or 27.94 to the square mile. They estimate the population of the world at 1,377,000,000, an average of 26.64 to the square mile.

due to the form
of social
organization.

the people, for the Hindoo, as comparative philology has shown, is of our own blood, and China possessed a high degree of civilization and the rudiments of the most important modern inventions when our ancestors were wandering savages. It arises from the form which the social organization has in both countries taken, which has shackled productive power and robbed industry of its reward.

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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 or to any considerable extent be used to assist production; all wealth that could be wrung from the people was in the possession of princes who were little better than robber chiefs quartered on the country, or in that of their farmers or favorites, and was wasted in useless or worse than useless luxury, while religion, sunken into an elaborate and terrible superstition, tyrannized over the mind 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 plow 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.

Thus poverty is
due to tyranny
and insecurity,
and

Is it not clear that this tyranny and insecurity have produced the want and starvation of India; and not, as according

to Buckle, the pressure of population upon subsistence that has produced the want, and the want the tyranny⁵. Says 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":

"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 unfavorable 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 off 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 property within the mud walls of their villages only calls for the more signal vengeance on those useful, but ill-fated mortals.

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governments.

⁵"History of Civilization," Vol. 1, Chap. 2. In this chapter Buckle has collected a great deal of evidence of the oppression and degradation of the people of India from the most remote times, a condition which, blinded by the Malthusian doctrine he has accepted and made the cornerstone of his theory of the development of civilization, he attributes to the case with which food can there be produced.

“They are then surrounded and attacked with musketry and field pieces till 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 the appearance of a human being to interrupt the awful silence of destruction. This description does not apply to the Mohammedan chieftains alone; it is equally applicable to the Rajahs in the districts governed by Hindoos.”⁶

To this merciless rapacity, which would have produced want and famine were the population but one to a square mile and the land a Garden of Eden, succeeded, in the first era of British rule in India, as merciless a rapacity, backed by a far more irresistible power. Says Macaulay, in his essay on Lord Clive:

“Enormous fortunes were rapidly accumulated at Calcutta, while 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 Maharatta, and the palanquin of the English traveler was often carried through silent villages and towns that the report of his approach had 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 human kind, poverty-stricken peasants fiendishly tortured to compel them to give up their little hoards, and once populous tracts turned into deserts.

⁶"India Recreations," by Rev. Wm. Tennant. London, 1804, Vol. 1, Sec. XXXIX

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

In modern times in India the abuses have ceased, and the just principles of English law applied, and major railway and irrigation improvements made. Yet famines continue.

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 ones, 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, as may be seen in the facts brought forth in recent discussions of Indian affairs in the English periodicals, is that these famines, which have been, and are now, sweeping away their millions, 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.

Is not this a demonstration of the Malthusian theory?

The millions of India have bowed their necks beneath the yokes of many conquerors, but worst of all is the steady, grinding weight of English domination—a weight which is literally crushing millions out of existence, and, as shown by English writers, is inevitably tending to a most frightful and widespread catastrophe. Other conquerors have lived in the land, and, though bad and tyrannous in their rule, have un-

derstood and been understood by the people; but India now is like a great estate owned by an absentee and alien landlord. A most expensive military and civil establishment is kept up, managed and officered by Englishmen who regard India as but a place of temporary exile; and an enormous sum, estimated as at least £20,000,000 annually, raised from a population where laborers are in many places glad in good times to work for 1½d. to 4d. a day, is drained away to England in the shape of remittances, pensions, home charges of the government, etc.—a tribute for which there is no return. The immense sums lavished on railroads have, as shown by the returns, been economically unproductive; the great irrigation works are for the most part costly failures. In large parts of India the English, in their desire to create a class of landed proprietors, turned over the soil in absolute possession to hereditary taxgatherers, who rackrent the cultivators most mercilessly. In other parts, where the rent is still taken by the State in the shape of a land tax, assessments are so high, and taxes are collected so relentlessly, as to drive the ryots, who get but the most scanty living in good seasons, into the claws of money lenders, who are, if possible, even more rapacious than the zemindars. Upon salt, an article of prime necessity everywhere, and of especial necessity where food is almost exclusively vegetable, a tax of nearly twelve hundred per cent. is imposed, so that its various industrial uses are prohibited, and large bodies of the people cannot get enough to keep either themselves or their cattle in health. Below the English officials are a horde of native employees who oppress and extort. The effect of English law, with its rigid rules, and, to the native, mysterious proceedings, has been but to put a potent instrument of plunder into the hands of the native money lenders, from whom the peasants are compelled to borrow on the most extravagant terms to meet

their taxes, and to whom they are easily induced to give obligations of which they know not the meaning. "We do not care for the people of India," writes Florence Nightingale, with what seems like a sob. "The saddest sight to be seen in the East—nay, probably in the world—is the peasant of our Eastern Empire." And she goes on to show the causes of the terrible famines, in taxation which takes from the cultivators the very means of cultivation, and the actual slavery to which the ryots are reduced as "the consequences of our own laws"; producing in "the most fertile country in the world, a grinding, chronic semi-starvation in many places where what is called famine does not exist."⁷ "The famines which have been devastating India," says H. M. Hyndman,⁸ "are in the main financial famines. Men and women cannot get food, because they cannot save the money to buy it. Yet we are driven, so we say, to tax these people more." And he shows how, even from famine stricken districts, food is exported in payment of taxes, and how the whole of India is subjected to a steady and exhausting drain, which, combined with the enormous expenses of government, is making the population year by year poorer. The exports of India consist almost ex-

Florence Nightingale shows the causes of the famines to be taxation, which takes from the cultivators the very means of cultivation.

The problem is that the English are draining away much of the wealth produced in India.

⁷Miss Nightingale ("The People of India," in *Nineteenth Century* for August, 1878) gives instances, which she says represent millions of cases, of the state of peonage to which the cultivators of southern India have been reduced through the facilities afforded by the Civil Courts to the frauds and oppressions of money lenders and minor native officials. "Our Civil Courts are regarded as institutions for enabling the rich to grind the faces of the poor, and many are fain to seek a refuge from their jurisdiction within native territory," says Sir David Wedderburn, in an article, "Protected Princes in India," in a previous (July) number of the same magazine, in which he also gives a native state, where taxation is comparatively light, as an instance of the most prosperous population of India

⁸See articles in *Nineteenth Century* for October, 1878, and March, 1879.

Hyndman shows relentless taxation of a miserably poor population.

clusively of agricultural products. For at least one-third of these, as Mr. Hyndman shows, no return whatever is received; they represent tribute—remittances made by Englishmen in India, or expenses of the English branch of the Indian government.⁹ And for the rest, the return is for the most part government stores, or articles of comfort and luxury used by the English masters of India. He shows that the expenses of government have been enormously increased under Imperial rule; that the relentless taxation of a population so miserably poor that the masses are not more than half fed, is robbing them of their scanty means for cultivating the soil; that the number of bullocks (the Indian draft animal) is decreasing, and the scanty implements of culture being given up to money lenders, from whom “we, a business people, are forcing the cultivators to borrow at 12, 24, 60 per cent.¹⁰ to build and pay the interest on the cost of vast public works, which have never paid nearly five per cent.” Says Mr. Hyndman: “The truth is that Indian society as a whole has been frightfully impoverished under our rule, and that the process is now going on at an exceedingly rapid rate”—a statement which cannot be doubted, in view of the facts presented not only by such writers as I have referred to, but by Indian officials themselves. The very efforts made by the government to alleviate famines do, by the increased taxation imposed, but intensify and extend their real cause. Although in the recent famine in Southern India six millions of people,

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⁹ Prof. Fawcett, in a recent article on the proposed loans to India, calls attention to such items as £1,200 for outfit and passage of a member of the Governor General's Council; £2,450 for outfit and passage of bishops of Calcutta

¹⁰Florence Nightingale says 100 per cent. is common, and even then the cultivator is robbed in ways which she illustrates. It is hardly necessary to say that these rates, like those of the pawnbroker, are not interest in the economic sense

it is estimated, perished of actual starvation, and the great mass of those who survived were actually stripped, yet the taxes were not remitted and the salt tax, already prohibitory to the great bulk of these poverty-stricken people, was increased forty per cent., just as after the terrible Bengal famine in 1770 the revenue was actually driven up, by raising assessments upon the survivors and rigorously enforcing collection.

In India now, as in India in past times, 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—could they be released from the drain which, even in non-famine years, reduces great masses of them to a scale of living not merely below what is deemed necessary for the sepoys, but what English humanity gives to the prisoners in the jails—reviving industry, 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, or 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.

What is true of India is true of China. Densely populated as China is in many parts, that the extreme poverty of the lower classes is to be attributed to causes similar to those which have operated in India, and not to too great population, is shown by many facts. Insecurity prevails, production goes on under the greatest disadvantages, and exchange is closely fettered. Where the government is a succession of squeezings, and security for capital of any sort

In India, want is not due to pressure of population upon the ability of land to produce.

Were cultivators able to retain their capital, a much greater population could undoubtedly be supported.

In China, too, insecurity prevails, production goes on under great disadvantage, and exchange is fettered.

Under such conditions, poverty and famine would result no matter how sparse the population.

China has much uncultivated land, and large coal deposits. Coal is not food, but could readily be exchanged for food.

Therefore, in both China and India, it is not dense population which causes poverty and starvation.

They are due to causes which prevent labor from securing its full return.

must be purchased of a mandarin; where men's shoulders are the great reliance for inland transportation; where the junk is obliged to be constructed so as to unfit it for a sea boat; where piracy is a regular trade, and robbers often march in regiments, poverty would prevail and the failure of a crop result in famine, no matter how sparse the population.¹¹ That China is capable of supporting a much greater population is shown not only by the great extent of uncultivated land to which all travelers testify, but by the immense unworked mineral deposits which are there known to exist. China, for instance, is said to contain the largest and finest deposit of coal yet anywhere discovered. How much the working of these coal beds would add to the ability to support a greater population, may readily be imagined. Coal is not food, it is true; but its production is equivalent to the production of food. For, not only may coal be exchanged for food, as is done in all mining districts, but the force evolved by its consumption may be used in the production of food, or may set labor free for the production of food.

Neither in India nor China, therefore, can poverty and starvation be charged to the pressure of population against subsistence. It is not dense population, but the causes which prevent social organization from taking its natural development and labor from securing its full return, that keep millions just on the verge of starvation, and every now and again force millions beyond it. That the Hindoo laborer thinks himself fortunate to get a handful of rice, that the Chinese eat rats and puppies, is no more due to the pressure of population than it is due to the pressure of population that the Digger Indians live on grasshoppers, or the aboriginal inhabitants of Australia eat the worms found in rotten wood.

¹¹The seat of recent famine in China was not the most thickly settled

Let me be understood. I do not mean merely to say that India or China could, with a more highly developed civilization, maintain a greater population, for to this any Malthusian would agree. The Malthusian doctrine does not deny that an advance in the productive arts would permit a greater population to find subsistence. But the Malthusian theory affirms—and this is its essence—that, whatever be the capacity for production, the natural tendency of population is to come up with it, and, in the endeavor to press beyond it, to produce, to use the phrase of Malthus, that degree of vice and misery which is necessary to prevent further increase; so that as productive power is increased, population will correspondingly increase, and in a little time produce the same results as before. What I say is this: that nowhere is there any instance which will support this theory; that nowhere can want be properly attributed to the pressure of population against the power to procure subsistence in the then existing degree of human knowledge; that everywhere the vice and misery attributed to overpopulation can be traced to the warfare, tyranny, and oppression which prevent knowledge from being utilized and deny the security essential to production. The reason why the natural increase of population does not produce want, we shall come to hereafter. The fact that it has not yet anywhere done so, is what we are now concerned with. This fact is obvious with regard to India and China. It will be obvious, too, wherever we trace to their causes the results which on superficial view are often taken to proceed from overpopulation.

Ireland, of all European countries, furnishes the great stock example of overpopulation. The extreme poverty of the peasantry and the low rate of wages there prevailing, the Irish famine, and Irish emigration, are constantly referred to as a demonstration of the Malthusian theory worked out un-

Nowhere is there any example which will support Malthus' theory.

Ireland is sometimes cited.

In 1840-45, it contained over eight million people, many living very poorly.

Much of their produce was taken by landlords.

Cultivation was carried on by tenants at will, who did not dare to make improvements which would have been but the signal for an increase in rent. Labor was therefore used inefficiently.

der 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 which 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 that 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 laborer 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.

Consider the conditions of production under which this eight million managed to live until the potato blight came. It was a condition to which the words used by Mr. Tennant in reference to India may as appropriately be applied—"the great spur to industry, that of security, was taken away." Cultivation was for the most part carried on by tenants at will, who, even if the rackrents which 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. Labor was thus applied in the most inefficient and wasteful manner, and labor

was dissipated in aimless idleness that, with any security for its fruits, would have been applied unremittingly. 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 capital their labor 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, and the potato blight might have come and gone without stinting a single human being of a full meal. For it was not the imprudence “of Irish peasants,” as English economists coldly say, which 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 endeavoring to lay by something for a rainy day, is remarkable. They lived on the potato, because rackrents stripped everything else from them. The truth is, that the poverty and misery of Ireland have never been fairly attributable to overpopulation.

But even under such conditions, Ireland supported not only its population of eight millions; it exported food.

The poverty and misery of Ireland have never been attributable to overpopulation.

McCulloch, writing in 1838, says, in Note IV to “Wealth of Nations”:

“The wonderful density of population in Ireland is the immediate cause of the abject poverty and depressed condition of the great bulk of the people. It is not too much to say that there are at present more than double the persons in Ireland it is, with its existing means of production, able either fully to employ or to maintain in a moderate state of comfort.”

McCulloch wrote in 1838 that Ireland could support about 4 million people, half of its population then.

As in 1841 the population of Ireland was given as 8,175,124, we may set it down in 1838 as about eight millions. Thus, to change McCulloch's negative into an affirmative, Ireland would, according to the overpopulation theory, have been able to employ fully and maintain in a moderate state of comfort something less than four million persons. Now, in the early part of the preceding century, when Dean Swift wrote his “Modest Proposal,” the population of Ireland was about two millions. As neither the means nor the arts of production had perceptibly advanced in Ireland during the interval, then—if the abject poverty and depressed condition of the Irish people in 1838 were attributable to overpopulation—there should, upon McCulloch's own admission, have been in Ireland in 1727 more than full employment, and much more than a moderate state of comfort, for the whole two millions. Yet, instead of this being the case, the abject poverty and depressed condition of the Irish people in 1727 were such, that, with burning, blistering irony, Dean Swift proposed to relieve surplus population by cultivating a taste for roasted babies, and bringing yearly to the shambles, as dainty food for the rich, 100,000 Irish infants!

But in 1727, when Ireland had just 2 million people, they were in abject poverty.

It is difficult for one who has been looking over the literature of Irish misery, as while writing this chapter I have been doing, to speak in decorous terms of the complacent attribution of Irish want and suffering to overpopulation which is to be found even in the works of such high-minded men as Mill and Buckle. I know of nothing better calculated to make the

blood boil than the cold accounts of the grasping, grinding tyranny to which the Irish people have been subjected, and to which, and not to any inability of the land to support its population, Irish pauperism and Irish famine are to be attributed; and were it not for the enervating effect which the history of the world proves to be everywhere the result of abject poverty, it would be difficult to resist something like a feeling of contempt for a race who, stung by such wrongs, have only occasionally murdered a landlord!

Whether overpopulation ever did cause pauperism and starvation, may be an open question; but the pauperism and starvation of Ireland can no more be attributed to this cause than can the slave trade be attributed to the overpopulation of Africa, or the destruction of Jerusalem to the inability of subsistence to keep pace with reproduction. 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 rackrents wrested from the cultivator of the soil all the produce of his labor 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

No matter how fertile the land,

how could there fail to be pauperism and famine where the cultivator could not keep the produce of his labor, and had no access to natural resources?

a wild hare to satisfy his hunger? No matter how sparse the population, no matter what the natural resources, are not pauperism and starvation necessary consequences in a land where the producers of wealth are compelled to work under conditions which deprive them of hope, of self-respect, of energy, of thrift; where absentee landlords drain away without return at least a fourth of the net produce of the soil, and when, besides them, a starving industry must support resident landlords, with their horses and hounds, agents, jobbers, middlemen and bailiffs, an alien state church to insult religious prejudices, and an army of policemen and soldiers to overawe and hunt down any opposition to the iniquitous system? Is it not impiety far worse than atheism to charge upon natural laws misery so caused?

What is true in these three cases will be found upon examination true of all cases. The increase of numbers has never yet decreased the relative production of food.

What is true in these three cases will be found upon examination true of all cases. So far as our knowledge of facts goes, we may safely deny that the increase of population has ever yet pressed upon subsistence in such a way as to produce vice and misery; that increase of numbers has ever yet decreased the relative production of food. The famines of India, China, and Ireland can no more be credited to overpopulation than the famines of sparsely populated Brazil. The vice and misery that come of want can no more be attributed to the niggardliness of Nature than can the six millions slain by the sword of Genghis Khan, Tamerlane's pyramid of skulls, or the extermination of the ancient Britons or of the aboriginal inhabitants of the West Indies.