

obtained it as a valuable thing well suited to send abroad in payment for goods supplied from other markets than the home market. It would be a remarkable and a miraculous event if either Governments or individuals could thus obtain much wealth without any seeming cost or sacrifice. And that the miracle will not work is proved by the increase in prices.—The Writer of the "Notes."]

POVERTY AND POPULATION

(To the Editor.)

SIR,—In this controversy let me say right here that I am not at all prepared to defend everything that Malthus has written in the *ESSAY ON POPULATION*. In the light of present-day knowledge this book contains a mass of matter that must be discarded. I am in agreement with the fundamental theorem of Malthus which I would put thus in the words of the Right Hon. J. M. Robertson:—

"I. Population is necessarily limited by means of subsistence.

"II. Population invariably increases where the means of subsistence increase, unless prevented by some very powerful and obvious checks.

"III. These checks, and the checks which repress the superior power of population, and keep its effects on a level with the means of subsistence, are all resolvable into moral restraint, vice, or misery."

That, I take it, is the essence of Malthusianism in the minds of present-day reformers and has no relationship to any *Wage Fund Theory*.

In this connection I would not like to think that *PROGRESS AND POVERTY* would be condemned as a whole by a school of thinkers because George's opinions on the Population and Interest questions were found to be untenable.

Mr. Lester says "the issue is clear. Malthus attributes poverty to the pressure of population on subsistence. George attributes it to unjust man-made laws." Do unjust man-made laws not constitute a hindrance to the production of the necessities of life? "Malthus declares that his argument 'depends entirely upon the differently increasing ratios of population and food.' Clearly, then, if it can be shown that the capacity of food production per head of the population increases with the growth of population Malthus's argument and all that has been built on it falls to the ground."

Not so fast, Mr. Lester! You must not assume that Malthus was such a silly blunderer as all that! Mr. Lester's statement is a worse futility than any fallen into by Malthus. He, Malthus, constantly pointed out that, while the food yield of the planet could undoubtedly be very much increased if mankind bent itself intelligently to the task, there is not a shadow of ground for believing that it ever will be increased at such a rate as to keep pace everywhere with the increase of population that would take place if the preventive checks were for a time removed. Moral restraint, therefore, I contend, there must be, if population is not to be constantly restrained physically. I would bring the argument to a point by saying that, save where men have learned to guard against the results of thoughtless instinct, human procreation *always* goes on faster than the increase of the available means of subsistence in terms of the average standard of comfort.

But, says Mr. Lester, our land laws could be altered so that subsistence in its broadest sense could be brought within the reach of all. Can Mr. Lester point me to any considerable country in the world's history where reform *ever* kept pace with the needs of the people? What likelihood is there that it ever will? Certainly the history of our own country yields little hope of early betterment. The mirage of the *Golden Age* is ever in front of us, and we are hoping always as to its realisation despite the perpetual disillusionment of our hopes!

I was interested, like Mr. Lester, in the alleged discovery of the extraction of nitrate from the atmosphere. In the light of what has gone before, of what avail will this be to the man in the street? Meantime what? Until the brotherhood of man is realised through the Single Tax is there to be no recognition of pressure of population on subsistence?

Some years ago Dr. Ogle, Superintendent of Statistics in the General Register Office, gave evidence before the Labour Commission as to "the enormous mortality of infants and children in the working class. In Preston it was so high that insurance societies refused to insure infant life." The former statement was corroborated by pages of figures which show how population is kept down by wholesale premature death.

Besides pushing on the advent of the Single Tax I am all for saving this holocaust of infants which is the obvious expression of the check of misery on the principle of population.

Those who, like Mr. Lester, suppose they are refuting Malthusianism by saying that wealth does increase faster than population are not taking hold of the most awful fact of the case, namely, that population is being kept down to-day, and has always been kept down, by wholesale premature death.

We must bear in mind that every country in the world is imperfectly developed, as measured by intellectual expert opinion; but it is the merest truism to say that a country can only be developed up to the level of the intelligence of its population in the mass. In other words, in a country whose resources are imperfectly developed, population, as Malthus professed to show, presses against the actual developed resources. Until the undeveloped resources waiting to be taken advantage of, as, say, the abstraction of nitrogen from the air, is this age-old massacre of the innocents to go on? Mr. Lester says, "But I refuse to believe that, given equality of economic opportunity, there need be any fear of this 'unbridled exercise' of sexual instinct," and to hark back to his original article wherein he says "so long as we can look around on locked-up resources on every hand it is idle indeed to write learned articles on the over-population peril." Does this mean that until the advent of the Single Tax this terrible wastage of life must just go on?

Does Mr. Lester think there is any cause save increase of population which makes recourse to inferior soils necessary? Is the recourse to lower quality soil, *other things remaining equal*, not a general lowering of the standard of comfort? The productiveness of human labour is progressively lessened by the necessity to recourse to less and less fertile land, and less productive natural agents generally. Progress in the arts of life gets used up in this way instead of adding to our wealth or leisure.

George recognises this, and we will see where his argument leads us. "Even if the increase of population does reduce the power of the natural factor of wealth, by compelling resort to poorer soils, &c., it yet so vastly increases the power of the human factor as to more than compensate. Twenty men working together will, where Nature is niggardly, produce more than twenty times the wealth that one man can produce where Nature is most bountiful. The denser the population the more minute becomes the subdivision of labour, the greater the economies of production and distribution, and, hence, the very reverse of the Malthusian doctrine is true, and, within the limits within which we have any reason to suppose increase would still go on, in any given state of civilisation, a greater number of people can produce a larger proportionate amount of wealth, and more fully supply their wants than can a smaller number."

Bastiat, I may say, made great play with this argument before George.

If density of population *in itself* leads to economical subdivision of labour, then apply these "twenty men working together" to the *fertile acres*! In the terms of the case the whole show is given away by admitting the compelling power of population to force resort to poorer soils!

As one writer has observed: "That it is to growth of organisation and not to mere increase of numbers that increased productiveness is due is obvious. Unless we admit the absurd supposition that the whole world can be supplied from the produce of an acre, there must be a limit to the productiveness of the soil somewhere. But if there is a limit, what we have to do with is not a hypothetical limit determined by conceivable improvements, but the actual limit immediately attainable. Up to this limit, growth of population may contribute to growth of organisation; but if it is passed, organisation must retrograde. If at the maximum of productiveness one cultivator can provide for ten persons, when the margin is passed a certain stage one will only be able to provide for nine, and at another stage for eight. Thus the resources of distribution of labour and of organisation will steadily diminish if population grows more rapidly than improvement in industrial art."

Let us now come to Mr. Lester's elephant illustration and his appeal to Darwin as against Malthus. I am afraid Mr. Lester has been reading the lesson of evolution backward. However, as the appeal is to Darwin, then to Darwin we will go.

In the *ORIGIN OF SPECIES*, Chap. III., Darwin says:—"A struggle for existence inevitably follows from the high rate at which all organic beings tend to increase. Every being, which during its natural lifetime produces several eggs or seeds, must suffer destruction during some period of its life, and during some season or occasional year, otherwise, on the principle of geometrical increase, its numbers would quickly become so inordinately great that no country could support the product. Hence, as more individuals are produced than can possibly survive, there must in every case be a struggle for existence, either one individual with another of the same species, or with the individuals of distinct species, or with the physical conditions of life." It is the doctrine of Malthus applied with manifold force to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms; for in this case there can be no artificial increase of food, and no prudential restraint from marriage. Although some species may be now increasing, more or less rapidly, in numbers, all cannot do so, for the world would not hold them.

"There is no exception to the rule that every organic being naturally increases at so high a rate, that, if not destroyed, the earth would soon be covered by the progeny of a single pair. Even slow breeding man has doubled in twenty-five years, and at this rate, in less than a thousand years, there would literally not be standing room for his progeny. . . . The elephant is reckoned the slowest breeder of all known animals, and I have taken some pains to estimate its probable minimum rate of natural increase; it will be safest to assume that it begins breeding when thirty years old, and goes on breeding till ninety years old, bringing forth six young in the interval, and surviving till one hundred years old; if this be so, after a period of from 740 to 750 years there would be nearly nineteen million elephants alive, descended from the first pair." And so on.

I have said that I think Mr. Lester has read the problem of evolution backward. I am thinking he has done more than that. His is the satisfied mind that sees in the curve of the horse's back Nature's wonderful adaptation of it for the curve of the saddle! Mr. Lester says I do not challenge a certain point in his first article wherein he says, if poverty is really due to over-population *all* of us should in greater or less degree be poor. This is quite true. The Malthusian theory accounts for the persistence of poverty, but not for the simultaneous increase in wealth of certain portions of the community. There is nothing in the Law

of Population to account for any person becoming *richer* while the majority of those by whom he is surrounded grow *poorer*. For a solution of this part of the problem we must go to one of the greatest geniuses who ever wrote on political economy, David Ricardo.

However, that's another story. What I set out to show was that Mr. Lester's claim for George's examination of Malthusianism was too extravagant. It is true there are a number of points in both Mr. Lester's present and former article that I have not touched, but later on these may be tackled.—I am, &c.,

R. WHYTE.

(To the Editor.)

SIR,—It seems to me the idea both Mr. George and Mr. Lester wish to convey that the pressure of population upon the *existing* means of subsistence has nothing to do with the *existing* poverty. As to whether it would or not is not in question, the fact is we have the poverty and not the "Malthus" pressure; further argument seems unnecessary.

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THE CONSCRIPTION OF RENT

A week or two ago the papers had big headlines about "A Longsight Doctor," wherein it was stated that Dr. J. W. Greenwood, when before the Manchester Stipendiary on a charge of not reporting himself to the military authorities, had defended himself "on political grounds." To one of our reporters the doctor explained that this was an entire misrepresentation.

"I never made any such defence," said Dr. Greenwood. "Before the passing of the Conscription Bill I had offered my services to the Army. I had previously served in the South African War."

"Then why were you not accepted?"

"They could not at the time find room for me. Meanwhile service became compulsory, which altered my attitude, but only in this way: I was quite willing to fight, but I would only fight on the condition that those who owned the country for which I and others had to fight, should foot the bill. I was not going to both fight now, and then pay after the war."

"Then you would have war paid for as it proceeds?"

"Certainly, and it could easily be done by the Government conscripting all Land Values (rents). It is a case of equal sacrifice—the soldiers to give their blood, the land-owners to surrender their rent-rolls. When conscription was first mentioned, the Labour party said they would agree to it only if wealth was conscripted at the same time. What altered their attitude I don't know. Perhaps they found out that 'wealth' was too vague a term. It is altogether different with rent. That is definite enough. The Government could not collect wealth, but they could collect rent. We have Herbert Spencer's authority for saying:—

"Such a doctrine is consistent with the highest state of civilisation; may be carried out without involving a community of goods; and need cause no very serious revolution in existing arrangements. The change required would simply be a change of landlords. Separate ownership would merge into the joint-stock ownership of the public. Instead of being in the possession of individuals, the country would be held by the great corporate body—society. Instead of leasing his acres from an isolated proprietor, the farmer would lease them from the nation. Instead of paying his rent to the agent of Sir John or his Grace, he would pay it to an agent or deputy agent of the community. . . . A state of things so ordered would be in perfect harmony with moral law. Under it all men would be equally landlords; all men would be alike free to become tenants."