

The Single Tax, November, 1901

Progress and Poverty in Japan.

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PART II.

FROM our brief survey of the economic conditions prevailing in Japan, it will be seen that they were specially favourable to the establishment and development of our Western system of manufacturing industry. Hence, though for centuries Japan had been an almost purely agricultural country, in which such industries as there were may be well described as home industries (or *la petite industrie*), we cannot be surprised that it has so quickly developed into a manufacturing country, in which industry on a large scale has been established and developed with phenomenal rapidity.

Imports and Exports.

The following figures will give our readers some idea of the rapidity of Japan's commercial and industrial development. In 1868 the total trade of Japan, imports and exports, amounted in round figures to £2,625,000 ; in 1893 it had increased to £17,800,000; and in 1898 it had reached the respectable total of £44,325,600 : that is, in five years, between 1893 and 1898, the trade of Japan had more than doubled, almost trebled, during the same period the trade of Great Britain had only increased 12-1/2 per cent.

The Cotton Industry.

The figures relating to the cotton industry are even more telling and significant. In 1865 the first cotton mill, of some 6000 spindles, was established in Japan. Fifteen years later, in 1880, another mill was opened. Twelve years later, in 1892, there were 39 different establishments working some 385,114 spindles. Five years later, in 1897, there were 74 establishments working 970,054 spindles. Two years later, at the end of 1899, there were 80 companies, and the number of spindles had increased to 1,130,273.

In 1893 Japan exported to China about ,£5000 worth of manufactured cotton goods; five years later, in 1898, Japan exported to China manufactured cotton goods to the value of ,£1,500,000 ; and up to the time of the recent disturbances this trade was steadily increasing.

In view of such figures it is surely 110 exaggeration to say that to-day Japan is commencing to challenge the supremacy of the Western Nations in the great cotton markets of the far East. As compared with those of Great Britain, her production and trade may still be quite insignificant. But when we consider what Japan has achieved in less than a single generation; when we reflect on her many economic advantages, amongst others, her advantageous position to supply such markets: we can but hope that, in the years that are to come, our Lancashire weavers may be fully employed satisfying the wants of a free prosperous home population, and not be entirely dependent on the requirements of those who may have no need of their services. To day our own people have to go insufficiently clad whilst our manufacturers are crying aloud for fresh customers, and wars are encouraged and defended on the grounds that they may open out new markets. On the other hand, almost every nation is, like Japan, steadily developing its own industries, eagerly desirous not only to manufacture to supply its own wants, but to compete in the markets of the world. Woe to the nation who allows itself to become entirely dependent on manufacturing for foreign nations, who allows its people to be divorced from the soil, its land to drift out of cultivation, and to become the pleasure grounds, the game preserves, and so on of a limited privileged class! Events march quickly in our days; and the consequences of such actions may overtake them before they are aware of their folly.

The Condition of the People.

Of course, the sudden economic transformation of Japan has had a marked effect on the social condition of the whole people. To supply the demands of the great factories, a proletariat, a wage-earning, working-class had to be created. The towns could not supply them in anything like sufficient numbers, and recruiting agents were sent to every part of the country, making all sorts of fair promises to attract the people into the towns, into the newly-established mills and factories.

'To quote Mr. Siegfried's words—"As life in the rural districts was very hard, many let themselves be tempted, and from month to month and year to year the insatiable industry drains into the towns a whole army of workers." Hence it is not a matter of surprise that the agricultural industries, though not as yet absolutely diminishing, are not developing in anything like the same manner as the manufacturing industries: in bad years Japan has already to rely on the importation of food stuffs, more especially of rice and beans. The towns are becoming enormous— Tokio has nearly 1,800,000 inhabitants ; Osaka, 800,000 ; Nagoya, 250,000 ; Kobe, 215,000 ; Yokohama, 193,000. " When approaching Osaka, the Japanese Manchester, smoke obscures the heavens, a forest of chimneys appears on the horizon, one can well believe himself near some big industrial town of Europe. If one enters the factories the illusion does not vanish : machines, machines, and still more machines, tending which men, women, and children, pale and tired, work night and day amidst the noise and bustle of the workshop." In the cotton mills the majority of the "hands" are young girls, between 15 and 20 years of age, who work, alternately night and day, for ten to twelve hours in order to save daily twopence to threepence. These girls are recruited from the country districts, and are boarded by their employers, who, to this end, deducted to two pence a day from their earnings of from threepence to sixpence The worst abuse in the Japanese factories, however, is the employment of children. "How many times," writes Mr. Siegfried, "have I not seen in front of machines little children from eight to ten years of age working their eight hours a day for a salary of twopence! In the match factories it is still worse. I well remember in Osaka a long room divided, like a chess board, into little compartments, in each of which was a little child busily engaged making matches. I took notice of one and asked his age. Six years, I was told, and when I asked his salary, I was informed that he was engaged on piecework which enabled him to earn about seven-tenths of a penny (seven centimes) a day. Poor little baby, did he understand what working on piecework really meant! The fact is, however, that he was cleverly using his baby fingers, the others did the same, laughing and singing, and the room gave no impression of overwork or of depression as one might have expected."

Rate of Wages.

Though perhaps lacking the patience and assiduity of the Western worker, Japanese workmen are active, intelligent, and clever, just as capable of directing and working machinery as the European. The necessities of life are cheap, their requirements are small, consequently the rate of wages is much below that of their Western prototype. In the cotton mills the average earnings of men is about one shilling a day—the figures range from fourpence to two shillings ; of women about sixpence—the figures range from threepence to one shilling; young girls, who form the vast majority, earn from threepence half-penny to fivepence a day. In other trades skilled artisans—such as carpenters, compositors, blacksmiths, miners, &c.—earn from tenpence to one shilling and threepence a day. Of course, some few specially skilled workmen earn more, some ship's carpenters earn two shillings, and some forgers and rivetters half-a-crown ; but these, we are told, are such exceptional cases that in a factory employing two to three hundred hands there would not be a dozen drawing such a princely salary.

Cost of Living.

A working class family of three—father, mother, and child—suffering no privations, but living with the strictest economy, require at least thirty shillings a month. Hence we see that the man's salary of one shilling a day is but just sufficient to enable them to exist; and even if his wife also works, there will be little margin for recreation or emergencies. During the past ten years wages have steadily increased—in 1887 men were receiving only threepence and women only twopence a day—but so have the prices of all the necessities of life; so it is very doubtful whether the workers as a whole are any better off than when money wages were lower. Thus the Japan Times, of September 28th, 1897, tells us that whereas a family of six belonging to what may be called the lower middle class could in 1889 maintain itself with an outlay of about thirty-five shillings (43 francs) a month ; in 1899. to secure the same standard of living would require about fifty-two shillings and sixpence (70 francs). This amount represents the necessary expenditure of an artisan or middle-class family. Of course, few working-class families can afford to spend as much ; their monthly expenditure

amounts to from thirty shillings to two pounds per month. Moreover, in the large towns a considerable portion of the population earn much less than this; incredible though it may appear, it is estimated that a Japanese family of five of the lowest class can manage to maintain existence on an expenditure of about six shillings a month.

Gaiety of the People.

After describing at length the life of the lowest classes of the large Japanese towns, Mr. Siegfried continues:—

"And still the impression one receives is neither a dismal nor even a depressing one. It seems to me that the Japanese people are always joyous and gay. As I wandered about the lowest quarters I was followed by half-naked, laughing children, whose parents, though doubtless wanting many necessities of life, had found means to supply them with sweets and toys. . . . Everywhere superfluities, even where necessities were wanting; everywhere manifest signs of the careless gaiety of a people who live from day to day without troubling about the morrow."

Prospects of the Future.

Factory laws have as yet no existence in Japan. No law regulates the conditions of labour or the hours of labour, and the youngest child may be employed in their factories without the State taking any steps to watch over or to protect them. The employer is sole master in his own house; and though many of them do not abuse their power, still, there are some factories in which the workers are exploited without mercy. In their haste to be rich, and their feverish anxiety to profit by the abnormal industrial activity, many employers seem to forget that their "hands" are human beings. In order to compete, others have to follow their example; hence they, too, have to exploit the labour of little children who ought to be playing in the sunshine, and to keep their "hands" at work during whole days and nights. Hitherto the governing classes have manifested no desire to promote, or even willingness to sanction, any legislation that would tend to benefit the industrial masses, who themselves have no voice in the government, and as yet

no means of making known their needs, their desires, and their aspirations. There are, however, many signs that the more thoughtful, more ethical, and more progressive amongst the educated Japanese have already realised the necessity for some change that will tend to secure to the masses of their fellow-citizens some participation in the material advantages of their advancing civilisation. They may still be in doubt as to the means by which this could most speedily, most effectively, and most surely be accomplished. But our belief in the future of the Japanese nation is strengthened by the knowledge that some of their best minds are finding inspiration and direction in the immortal works of our great master, Henry George.