

SUPPOSED EXAMPLES OF THE MALTHUSIAN
DOCTRINE EXAMINED.

Let us take the two stock examples. They will be enough.

1. The Orissa famine in India. We may note, first, that in this case the people in question had not entered on the third or progressive stage of existence, and so we might expect that the Malthusian doctrine *would* apply; for we do not dispute its application as a general rule in the two earlier stages of existence. But as a matter of fact it did not apply.

In Orissa there existed a population practically cut off by want of proper communications and a low industrial condition from the outer world, and subsisting directly on the land.

If under these circumstances the expected rains do not fall, and, if the tropic sun beats down for months upon a baking soil, the crops will wither, the food supply will fail, and the people will die. If they are 10,000, the 10,000 will die. If they are 10,000,000, the 10,000,000 will die. If they are only ten, the ten will die. For as they all live directly from the land, the food supply will be proportionate to the people. The more the people the greater the food supply, the fewer the people the less the food supply. Had they "prudentially" limited their own numbers to half, there would have been only half the number of labourers, therefore only half the ground put in, therefore only half the crop. Be they many or be they few, if the crop fails they will die. Their numbers, or their rate of increase, has nothing to do with the matter.

2. The Irish famine. In the Indian case, the famine was real; that is, the food was actually non-existent. But in the case of Ireland there was no famine at all in the strict sense of the word; that is, the food was there, only the people had not the money to buy it. It was not the food supply as such

that failed, but only one particular branch of it, the potato crop. There was plenty of corn, roots, dairy produce, pigs, cattle, sheep, recognised food-products in plenty in the country. Corn was actually being exported from Ireland while the people were dying. The farmer might have hundreds of bushels of wheat and families be starving all around him, but he had his living to make and his expenses and his rent to meet, and therefore he had to sell his wheat elsewhere. Even had it not been so, there was abundance of food of all sorts close by in England, and, unlike Orissa, the communications were ample, and food could have been poured in faster than it was wanted.

The so-called famine did not fall on the country like a thunderclap from a clear sky; it gave due warning of its approach. The potatoes were known to be rotting, and they took weeks to rot. Any quantity of food might have been on the spot and ready for distribution before the pinch came. The people died, not through Nature's niggardliness, but man's injustice.

Had these unhappy creatures not been rack-rented to the uttermost; had they not been driven off the fertile lands to make way for the rich man's cattle, and crowded on to the barren mountains and seashore, to choose between rocks and bog; had they been secured in possession of the homes which they had made, and in the fruits of their own labour; had they been protected and encouraged to work and to save; they would not have been driven to depend on the potato for subsistence, and so would have had other produce to fall back on when the potatoes failed, and they would have had a little money to buy other food if their alternative produce ran short; as the potatoes grew scarce, corn would have risen a few pence per bushel in the afflicted districts, and it would have come pouring in spontaneously in reply to "effective demand." There would have been no disaster; charitable people would

have kept their money, and England would have been spared her deep disgrace.

But as it was, the disease did its work, the people had no potatoes and no money, and they died. Had they been ten times as many they would have died; had they been times as few they would have died. Their numbers, their rate of increase, had nothing to do with the matter. Landlordism destroyed them, and would have destroyed them equally had they, by "prudential restraint," limited their numbers to half; for the limitation of their numbers would not have limited the landlord's power over them—his power to drive them off the fertile lands into the bogs and mountains; his power to rack-rent, to evict, to confiscate; his power to plunder and oppress, and to reduce them to a diet of potatoes which disease might destroy, spreading desolation and death among them.

3. As for Malthus's remedy, the attempt to carry it out would make matters worse, not better. For the remedy is offered to the poorer classes where want threatens, not to the rich who are secure; and no one imagines that the whole body of the poor would adopt it at once. There must be a beginning; and the men and women who would begin would be the intelligent who could realise the situation and the argument, the strong-willed who could control their instincts, the unselfish and public-spirited who were ready to deny themselves for the good of the generations yet unborn; in a word, the best. And these best would consequently leave no children to transmit their excellencies; and the inferior would have just so much more room in which to multiply, and so much less reason for restraint, and would multiply just so much more. It would be a case of survival of the least fit—of the degradation of the race.

But if you want a practical test, take France, where Malthusianism is practised, with result—that wages are even

lower there than in England, where it is *not* practised, and the struggle for existence among the poor is quite as severe, while there is a lament throughout France that she is falling behind other nations in population, in power and prosperity, in consequence of the practice.