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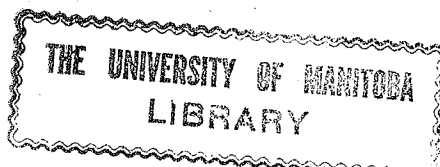
"THE PROBLEM OF POPULATION."

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## THE PROBLEM OF POPULATION.

The subject of population may be studied in regard to its size and composition at a given time, or in regard to the principles which control it as to size, composition and growth. In other words, we may after careful observation and enquiry, classify the principal features which it presents, and give in tabulated form "the totality of human beings existing within a given area at a given moment of time, according to sex, age, conjugal condition," etc. (En. Britt. Art. Pop.), or we may investigate the system of causes which produce these characteristic features, and attempt to discover the laws governing the forces, both physical and moral, which determine the growth of population. The former method is of interest to the statistician principally, and is usually carried on under government supervision, while the latter belongs, more particularly, to the province of economics, forming one of the most important departments of political economy, and ~~depriving~~ that subject of a great deal of its abstractness.

*relying* It shall be the object of this essay to deal with the subject of population, having regard mainly to the moral and physical laws by which the growth of numbers is determined. No attempt will be made to enter minutely into the discussion of this important question, which has occupied the attention of the ablest minds in almost every age, but the principal views that have been advanced on the subject will be stated and examined. In doing this, we shall, as far as possible, follow the historical method, tracing the growth of the study of the problem down through its various stages of development, and applying the principles enunciated to the facts, as they are found in the various classes of society.

The study of the "movement" of population is by no means a merely modern one. It has, in some form or other, occupied the minds of all thinkers in all periods of the world's history. "To its influence, often unavowed, sometimes not even clearly recognized, we can trace a great part of the rules, customs and ceremonies that have been enjoined in the Eastern and Western World by law-givers, by moralists, and those nameless thinkers, whose far-seeing wisdom has left its impress on national habits." (Marshall, p 229). These rules and customs were sometimes directed to increase the growth of population, and sometimes to retard it, according as circumstances seemed to warrant. It is clear that those charged with maintaining the welfare of the State recognized that the "movement" of population could to a certain extent be regulated, and that at certain times it should be controlled. But, while in a vague form this problem received some attention in ancient times, still it may be asserted that those who framed laws regulating the growth of population did so more because of the practical results than because of their knowledge of the principles operating in the "movement." We must admit however that some of the ancient thinkers, such as Plato and Aristotle, had seriously considered the problem of population, and embodied in their teaching, principles calculated to "remove the causes that impeded the progress of mankind towards happiness." (Malthus)(p. 1)

From these early times down to the present day, more or less attention has been given to the subject, and now we have certain well-defined principles, agreed upon by most political economists, as determining the growth of population, and it is to a brief study of these that we now turn our attention.

Among the various nations of the world, both ancient and modern, different opinions have been held as to whether an increase in the number of citizens was a source of strength or otherwise. In ancient Greece, where the city-state was the unit, Plato and Aristotle both maintained that the state should exer-

cise a firm control over the growth of numbers, so that the city should not become too large to control, and the citizens too numerous to be happy. They have had many followers, but the weight of opinion has been in favor of the state giving every encouragement to the growth of population, the argument, as stated by Child, being, that "most nations in the civilized parts of the world, are more or less rich or poor proportionably to the paucity or plenty of their people and not to the sterility or fruitfulness of their land." (Dis. on Trade, Cap. x). The prevailing tone among political writers was that population could not be made to grow fast enough. No doubt this idea arose from the ceaseless demand for men to recruit the armies decimated by the presence of constant war. Another factor tending to augment the desire for an increased population was the advent of many new inventions, by which manufacturing developed enormously, thus creating a great demand for labor. So strong was the opinion in favor of a large increase of population that we find, even Pitt, in 1796, declaring that the father of a large family had a claim on the state to assist in their education.

While politicians and rulers were endeavoring, by every possible means, to encourage the increase of numbers, thinking thereby to enhance the security and happiness of the nation, there was a growing belief among others, who had given the matter more serious thought, that the mere increase in population may prove more a curse than a blessing to a nation. About the middle of the eighteenth century an intellectual revival set in, and in this movement political economy had an important share, with the result that the subject was brought more prominently before the people and was more popular than ever before.

In France there was formed the first school of economists, known as the Physiocrats. The dependence of population on subsistence, and the tendency of population to overtake, if not to exceed subsistence, was the doctrine of this new school, as stated by Quesnay, its founder. Other members of the school expressed the same view regarding the tendency of population to a maximum.

The subject was also receiving attention in England. The outstanding economist was undoubtedly Adam Smith, although some others, such as David Hume, and Richard Cantillon, writing before him had anticipated many of the doctrines later ascribed to him. Both Hume and Cantillon, who seem to have held some of the views later presented by Malthus and Ricardo, saw that, "where there is room for more people they will always arise," (Hume, Essay I. 427) Adam Smith also observed the tendency of population to increase up to the limit of subsistence, and in his "Wealth of Nations" expressed himself in these words: "Every species of animals naturally multiplies in proportion to the means of their subsistence, and no species can ever multiply beyond it." (I. 8).

It was not, however, until 1798, when Malthus published the first edition of his "Essay on the Principle of Population," that the question began to arouse general public interest. While many of the views advanced were not new, yet Malthus made as great an impression as if he were stating the principles for the first time. Although the essay excited great discussion, and called forth many replies, the doctrines set forth in it, were soon adopted, with little modification, by both the French and English schools of political economy.

The severe criticisms passed upon his work led Malthus to travel extensively on the continent, gathering evidence to verify his statements. The result was that in 1803 he published a second edition of his essay, eliminating conclusions that had been arrived at hastily and adding much that made it "more worthy of the public's attention, by applying the principle directly and exclusively to the existing state of society." (Malthus Tract on "High Price of Provision") The interest aroused by Malthus' "Essay" was undoubtedly due to the fact that it had such a direct bearing on the current English economic policy, and struck so forcibly at prevalent abuses. There was much suffering among the working classes, caused by a series of bad harvests and the French

War. To relieve this distress it was found necessary to give some measure of assistance to those in need. But, since there was a growing demand for recruits for the army and navy, tenderhearted people were disposed "to be somewhat liberal in their allowances to a large family, with the practical effect of making the father of many children often able to procure more indulgences for himself without working, than he could have got by work, if he had been unmarried or had only a small family." (Marshall P. 243) Against these and similar abuses Malthus protested.

The fundamental proposition with Malthus is that "there is the constant tendency in all animated life to increase beyond the nourishment prepared for it." (Bk I, Chap I. p. 2.). There are always two forces at work, tending to counteract each other. On the one hand we have the tendency and power of individuals to propagate their species, and on the other the constant struggle for life which destroys vast numbers of the young before they reach maturity and even of the mature. In the human species are found the same power and instinct to reproduce its kind, the same forces to counteract that tendency, and in addition many other influences limiting the growth of population. Having established his general position Malthus next proceeds to show that nature, after a certain point has been reached, will not continue to yield an increase proportionate to the increase in population. "Because of the limited powers of the soil, no form of life can continue to increase even for a single generation, without meeting enormous forces of opposition, which destroy great numbers and set a limit to the species." (Fetter p 1, 186) In other words, population can in no case exceed the margin of subsistence, for whenever it approaches that point such checks as will produce equilibrium inevitably present themselves.

It has been observed that mankind in common with plants and animals possesses this "tendency to increase beyond food," and if there was not in man something other than there is in animals to counteract this instinct, there would be crowded into this world fresh lives which must surely perish from starvation. The voice of reason interrupts, "and asks him whether he may ~~not~~ bring beings into the world, for whom he cannot provide the means of support." (Malthus, Bk I, Chap 1, p. 2.)

Therefore, although in mankind the power of increase is indefinite, the actual increase is kept far behind the capacity, because of "impulses superior to mere animal instincts," which have regard for the future, and the well-being of the race. It might be said that in proportion as mankind rises above the condition of the beast, population is governed by rational restraint, so that those causes which operate among the lower animals to retard the growth of numbers are seldom, if ever, seen in actual operation among mankind, thus leading many to dispute their presence or at least to maintain that they have "no relation to the times in which we live, or to any which are near at hand." (Bowen, p. 134).

To see just what would result if the power of population were left to exert itself with perfect freedom, we would require to find a state where all obstacles were removed, and where reason had no need to interfere. Since such a condition is unknown the nearest approach to it will answer our purpose. There would have to be, first, absolute plenty, so that starvation would be impossible, and, second, immunity from vice and its attendant evils. The best example of such a condition is furnished by the early settlers on this continent. "In the Northern States of America, where the means of subsistence have been more ample, the manners of the people more pure, and the checks to early marriage fewer than in any of the modern states of Europe, the population was found to double itself, for some successive periods, every twenty-five years." (Malthus p. 3). Such was the conservative estimate of Malthus, but others have shown that population, in the agricultural districts of new countries, is capable of doubling itself in twenty or even fifteen years. Perhaps