

POPULATION: ITS LAW OF INCREASE

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649232482

Population: Its Law of Increase by Nathan Allen

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Cover @ 2017

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NATHAN ALLEN

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LAW OF INCREASE.

BY

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READ AT THE MEETING OF THE WESTERN SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION,
IN CHICAGO, NOVEMBER 12, 1868.

LOWELL, MASS. :
STONE & HUSE, BOOK AND JOB PRINTERS, NO. 21 CENTRAL STREET.
1870.

POPULATION,—ITS LAW OF INCREASE.

READ AT THE MEETING OF THE WESTERN SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION
IN CHICAGO, NOVEMBER 12, 1868.*

THE increase of Population as governed by fixed laws or principles seems never to have attracted any public attention till near the close of the Eighteenth Century. The French Revolution prevailing at that period, gave rise to some bold and speculative inquiries concerning the progress and perfectibility of man, the origin and extent of human government, as well as the existence and power of a Creator of all things.

In 1793, William Godwin published a work upon Political Justice, respecting the unequal distribution of the good things of this life and the causes of so much poverty, misery and suffering in the world, which must, in the very nature of things, seemingly cast reflections either upon human or divine government. The Rev. Thomas R. Malthus, connected at that time with the University of Cambridge, in an accidental conversation with a friend in respect to the merits of Godwin's views, was prompted to make some criticisms which led to the publication, in 1798, of an "*Essay on the Principle of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society.*" This Essay was afterwards greatly improved, and passed through several editions in the form of two large, octavo volumes.

The principles embodied in this work, had at the time, and have since had a most powerful influence. While on the one hand they were readily adopted by large numbers, and have been extensively incorporated into works upon Political Economy, on the other hand, they have been controverted by many of the ablest minds in Great Britain. From the year 1800 to 1830, several works were published,

* In a discussion at the close of this convention upon the publication of its proceedings, the Rev. Edward Beecher, D. D., in a speech advocating the measure, remarked that, "The papers read were generally good, but that of Dr. Allen's on the Increase of Population, if published at an expense of twenty thousand dollars, would return one thousand fold, so great are the underlying principles of our natural and national life so ably treated in that document."

opposing, criticising and condemning the doctrines of Malthus in the severest way. At the same time many elaborate articles appeared in the quarterly reviews and monthly magazines upon Population, some of them approving and commending these doctrines, while others exposed and denounced them in the most bitter manner.

In 1841, Thomas Doubleday published in London a work entitled, "*The True Law of Population shown to be connected with the Food of the People;*" and, in 1852, Herbert Spencer published in the Westminster Review an able article, introducing a "*New Theory of Population,*" deduced from the general law of animal fertility. Neither of these theories has ever made a very great impression on the public, or commanded the confidence of those most interested in this subject. While the doctrines of Malthus have been gradually losing their hold on the public mind, and most important changes in Society have been taking place in respect to the progress, character and destiny of the race, no attention, comparatively, has of late been given to the laws which directly regulate its increase. In fact, for the last thirty years there has been no general or thorough discussion of this subject. But there are new agencies coming into existence, and changes occurring in the status of different communities and nations, that will ere long compel attention to this most important question.

Facts connected with emigration and the intermixture of races, together with census returns, registration reports, mortuary statistics, &c., are constantly coming to light, which demand explanation, and can be satisfactorily accounted for, only by referring them to some fixed laws of human increase. The materials upon which a portion of these facts are based have been accumulating for a long time, while some of them are so new and startling, and are of such a nature and magnitude that they must be investigated. The *rationalité* of these facts must be brought to the test; the lights of Science challenge such a scrutiny; the interests of an advancing civilization demand it. This will appear evident when we pass in review some of those facts like the following:—It seems from the census and registration reports of France, that the population of that great nation has become almost stationary, and that the number of births there has been steadily decreasing for the last fifty years. At the commencement of the present century the average number of children to each marriage in France was five, but it is estimated that the average number at the present day in the rural districts will not exceed three, and in Paris, not much over two. Now, it is a well

established fact that no nation can increase in population with a much less average than three children to each marriage. In confirmation of the same fact it is found that the birth-rate in France has been reduced to one in thirty-seven persons. It is also an established fact that for any nation to be in a prosperous condition or gain in population, the birth-rate must range between one in thirty to thirty-five; but with a birth-rate less than that—say one in thirty-eight to forty, such a nation, having the usual amount of mortality, must diminish in population. The changes that have already taken place in France cannot be satisfactorily accounted for by the drafting of young men into the army, nor by the emigration of young people out of the country, nor by the diminution of marriages. If the births or birth-rate, therefore, should continue to decrease in France for the next fifty years, as they have for the last half-century, what will be the result?

A similar class of facts is found to prevail with the descendants of the first settlers of New England. The Puritans were originally a prolific people. They had on an average for several successive generations from six to ten children to each married couple, but within the present century, the average has dropped down from six to about three, and the birth-rate of the original stock in some cities has been even less than it is in France. Had not the older cities received recruits from the country or additions from the foreign element, their population would have been seriously affected.

By census returns taken in 1765 and 1865, there are now found only about one-half as many children under fifteen years of age, relatively, to the adult population, as there were one hundred years ago. It is beginning to be admitted that there is, at the present time in most parts of New England, no increase of the strictly native population. This change is not at first very apparent, partly from the fact that a large foreign element is constantly immigrating to its shores, and partly, that this foreign class is wonderfully prolific, having nearly three times as many children as the Americans. This constant addition by immigration and births to the population of New England makes a fair show of increase on paper—but when an analysis is made of its character, it shows at once that all or nearly all this increase arises from foreign descent. If the average number of children among the Americans to each marriage should continue to decrease, so that they will not make good the places of the producing stock, and a larger and larger number of persons every year shall see fit to live a single life, it is evident that the *native* stock must rapidly

diminish and, at no distant day, comparatively *must run out!* Is it possible, says some one, that the Puritan—the best stock that the world ever saw, under what would be considered the best family training, the highest order of educational influences, and the purest religious instruction—should thus *run out* in New England, and give place to a people of foreign origin, with far less intelligence and a religion entirely different? When we come to consider all the causes of this radical change in New England population, it may not seem so surprising.

The Census of the State of New York taken for 1865, discloses some curious facts. The method of taking this Census was different from that of all others in this respect:—that it was taken *by families* with particular reference to children. In answer to the inquiry put to every woman who was or had been married (in all 842,562), how many children she had had, whether present or absent, living or dead,—there were 115,252 women who responded that they never had had a child; 124,317, only one child; 123,319, two, and 108,324, three children. Here we find 471,772,—more than one-half of all the married women in the great State of New York,—who will average only one child and seven-tenths to each woman. These figures include both the foreign and American classes; but, as the foreign have generally the most children, the American compose undoubtedly by far the largest proportion of the families here mentioned. Now, if the law, settled by mortuary statistics, that two-fifths of all children born die before reaching adult life, be applied to these facts, scarcely is one child here raised for each woman—that is, as far as these 471,772 married women in the great State of New York are thus far reported. It is true that a large number of children might afterwards be born to these same married women,—possibly as many as here returned in the census,—but even then that would make an average of only about 2 to each married woman. It should also be borne in mind that these returns of the census include the foreign element as well as the strictly American; and, when it is considered that the former are far more prolific than the latter, it will be seen at once, that the American, at this rate, would not begin to keep the original stock good.

In the County of New York—which is mostly made up of the city—reporting about one-half of its population as foreign—we find this remarkable fact:—While nine hundred and sixty-five American women had each ten children and upwards, there were twenty-eight hundred and fifty foreign women having each ten children and up-

wards—making three times as many. The compiler of this census states that he is convinced that there is, at the present time, no increase of population among the descendants of the first settlers of the State of New York.

There is another class of facts gathered by way of comparison, which is somewhat curious and difficult of solution. If we compare the number of children born by the strictly American, with that of the Irish, the Scotch, the English and the German, the difference is surprising. We find that the latter, both in Europe and in this country, have on an average two, if not three times as many as the former, even though both classes may live in the same locality and under the same general influences.

Again: if we make the comparison between the present generation in New England, and their ancestors living one hundred years ago, we find the number of children at that period averaged two or three times as many as in the same number of families at the present day. Here the comparison is made between a people of the same stock, living on the same ground, under the same climate and free institutions. A most singular fact analogous to these is found stated in the Registration Report of Vermont for 1858. It states that while the producing part of the population, say from the age of fifteen to fifty, was in Vermont almost precisely in the same proportion to those under and over these ages as that in England, the birth-rate in Vermont was one to forty-nine, and in England the same year it was one in thirty-one; and should the foreign element in Vermont be separated, the birth-rate would be still lower—in fact only about one-half as large as that of England. Considering that the comparison here made is between a people—occupying the healthiest part of New England, engaged principally in agricultural pursuits and scattered in settlement—and a population situated as that of England is—living mostly in cities and thick settled places, as well as composed largely of the extremes in society—the result is certainly extraordinary.

Now, how can these various facts be explained? How can they be accounted for upon any well-known theories or principles of population? Why should there be such a difference between the number of children of married people at the present day, and families of the same stock fifty or one hundred years ago? Why should the Irish, the Scotch, the English and the German, living in our country, have two or three times as many children as the same number of our American women? There must be some radical

causes for these changes or differences. It is justly said that the population of New England has been very much affected by constant emigration to the West and elsewhere, but when a careful examination is made as to the actual numbers emigrating, and then, as to what should have been the *natural* increase, it does not account satisfactorily for all the changes in its inhabitants. Moreover it should be borne in mind that the comparison here instituted, is between the same number of married women, whether living now or one hundred years ago, of the same stock, or between the same number of families of different races living at the present time.

It has been alleged by writers upon this subject, that unfavorable climate, bad government, want of food, epidemic diseases, war, want of marriages and prudential considerations, have always been found to be the principal causes in preventing an increase of population. But it will not be pretended for a moment that the four first named causes, viz:—climate, government, famine and pestilence, could have had any effect in the cases here mentioned—and war could not prior to 1860, and then only for a few years; neither could the want of marriages, as the marriage rate has fallen off comparatively but little from former times and is almost equal to that of European nations or of their representatives in this country. Modern times disclose the fact that it is not the number of marriages, but the fruitfulness of this relation that tells on the increase of population. The only remaining cause—*prudential considerations*—cannot be passed over so lightly. These have had their influence in a great variety of ways; in postponing marriage till a later age in life; in regarding the care and expense of children as a burden, as well as in preferring pleasure and fashion to domestic duties and responsibilities. To such an extent has this “prudence” been carried that a great variety of means has been adopted to prevent conception, and in case of pregnancy, to produce abortion. This practice has been carried on so extensively as to affect somewhat the increase of population—partly by its direct effects, but, more indirectly, by its injury to the health and constitution of its victims. But passing by for the present the deep criminality and fearful extent of this practice, why should such a crime become so prevalent in all classes of society—even with married women among the intelligent, the refined and the religious? Why, too, should the *natural instincts of women* be so changed in regard to offspring? Why should so low an estimate be placed upon the value of human life? Why should such a persistent effort be made to defeat one of the most important objects of the marriage institution,