

**THE MALTHUSIAN HANDBOOK.
DESIGNED TO INDUCE MARRIED
PEOPLE TO LIMIT THEIR
FAMILIES WITHIN THEIR MEANS**

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The Malthusian handbook. Designed to induce married people to limit their families within their means by Anonymous

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Introduction.

In every civilised State the problem of poverty is one which presses for solution. In some European countries it has, at times, locally assumed a critical and menacing form, threatening the very foundations upon which society is based. Revolutions have sprung from the fact that people needed food and could not obtain it; and, even in our own "highly favored" land, honest, industrious men are often driven to despair because they can neither get work nor food.

Occasional outbreaks and demonstrations, however, are by no means the true measure of national poverty. Beneath the glittering surface of society there lies a seething mass of want and misery. The victims suffer in silence and make no sign, but their existence constitutes a permanent danger to the general welfare. Destitution is in numberless instances the parent of crime and prostitution, with their chain of disastrous consequences; overcrowding, semi-starvation and squalor are the fruitful sources of disease which scruples not to travel beyond its birthplace and to infect the homes of the wealthy. Modern society may be fitly compared to a magnificent palace reared in a miasmatic swamp, which fills the air with its death-dealing exhalations. No cunning artifices of builders or engineers can afford protection in such a case. In like manner, society cannot hope to escape from the influences which make for corruption and ultimate dissolution whilst it suffers poverty to remain in its midst.

It is, indeed, unnecessary to insist upon the evils and the national dangers arising from poverty; for they are admitted upon all hands. The problem is: How can

poverty be abolished? Upon this vital point opinions differ widely. The evil is so complex and many-sided that observers are apt to be misled by a partial view of the symptoms. For example, a total abstainer, concentrating his attention upon instances in which poverty has been brought about by excessive indulgence in alcoholic liquors, urges that drink is the "cause of poverty." The Socialist asks "Why are the many poor?" and answers that the remedy consists in the nationalisation of land and the instruments of production, the abolition of competition, etc. Others attribute the existence of poverty to idleness or to want of thrift amongst the workers. In no case, however, is the alleged cause equal to the palpable effect; and it is necessary to extend the enquiry in another direction if we are to discover the cause which, above and beyond all others, produces the want and misery that everybody desires to remove.

The purpose of this little work is, first, to show that an *excessive increase of population* is the source from which these evils arise. In the second place, the means by which population may be kept under control will be explained, for it is useless to warn people of a danger if they are kept in ignorance of the means by which it may be avoided. Above all, it is to the *poor* that this knowledge must be conveyed, for, as we shall show in the following pages, the indigent class multiplies far more rapidly than the well-to-do, and it is upon themselves that the consequent misery necessarily falls.

Experience teaches that almost all the ills which afflict mankind can be obviated by a careful study of nature and by conduct based upon due observance of natural laws. In the darkness of ignorance men must stumble into many pitfalls; but in the clear light of reason and knowledge they can discern the path which leads to *freedom and happiness*.

The Malthusian Handbook.

CHAPTER I.

MALTHUS AND THE LAW OF POPULATION.

If it be desired to discover a remedy for an admitted evil, the first step must necessarily be to ascertain its *cause*. All schemes for the mitigation of the *effects* of poverty must in the long run end in failure, no matter how ambitious may be the undertakings of those who engage in this futile work. The captain of a sinking vessel does not confine his attention to the pumps, he seeks without delay to stop the inrush of water. And in dealing with the question of poverty it is essential that its root-cause be discovered before any hope of arriving at a solution of the problem can reasonably be entertained.

An enquiry into the facts of nature will show that all forms of vegetable and animal life are capable of reproducing themselves in almost boundless profusion. Darwin, in his work on *The Origin of Species*, points this out with the greatest clearness. He says: "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 with the progeny of a single pair. Even slow-breeding man has doubled in twenty-five years; and at this rate, in a few thousand years, there would literally not be standing-room for his progeny. Linnæus has calculated that if an annual plant produced only two seeds—and there is no plant so unproductive as this—and their seedlings next year produced two, and so on, then, in twenty years there would be a million plants." After giving the example of the slow-breeding elephant, he continues: "Still more striking is the evidence from our domestic animals of many

kinds which have run wild in many parts of the world; if the statements of the rate of increase of slow-breeding cattle and horses in South America, and latterly in Australia, had not been well authenticated, they would have been incredible. So it is with plants: cases could be given of introduced plants which have become common throughout whole islands in less than ten years. Several of the plants, such as the cardoon and a tall thistle, now most numerous over the wild plains of La Plata, clothing square leagues of surface almost to the exclusion of all other plants, have been introduced from Europe; and there are plants which now range in India, as I hear from Dr. Falconer, from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas, which have been imported from America since its discovery. In such cases, and endless instances could be given, no one supposes that the fertility of these animals or plants has been suddenly and temporarily increased in any sensible degree. The obvious explanation is that the conditions of life have been very favorable, and that there has consequently been less destruction of the old and young, and that nearly all the young have been able to breed. In such cases, the geometrical rate of increase, the result of which never fails to be surprising, simply explains the extraordinarily rapid increase and wide diffusion of naturalised productions in their new homes. In a state of nature, almost every plant produces seed, and among animals there are very few that do not annually pair. Hence we may confidently assert that all plants and animals are tending to increase at a geometrical ratio; that all would most rapidly stock every station in which they could anyhow exist, and that the *geometrical tendency* to increase must be checked by destruction at some period of life."

It was the observation of this striking fact in nature which led an English clergyman, the Rev. Thomas R. Malthus, to study deeply the question of poverty, and to formulate as "the principle of population" that which is now almost universally regarded as a *law* of nature. Before he published his great work the view was generally accepted that the wealth of a country was in proportion to its population; and statesmen frequently *attempted to stimulate*, by the distribution of bounties *to the parents of excessively large families*, the natural

rate of increase. A few far-sighted men, such as the elder Mirabeau, Quesnay, and Adam Smith, partially perceived the true doctrine; but it remained for Malthus to examine the question in all its bearings, and to collect patiently and laboriously an overwhelming array of facts which established his contention beyond all reasonable doubt. It will be well here to give some account of this remarkable man and of the work with which his name is indissolubly associated.

Thomas Robert Malthus was born at Dorking, Surrey, in 1766. At the age of thirty-one he became a Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, and shortly afterwards took orders, officiating in a small village in Surrey.

In the closing years of the eighteenth century, the minds of men in England were powerfully influenced by the great social upheaval taking place in France, and political views in this country were entering upon a new phase. The rights of man were coming to be regarded as something more than a phrase, and a generous desire to promote the welfare of the people was gradually taking the place of selfish indifference. Condorcet in France, and William Godwin in England, promulgated the view that the happiness of mankind depended chiefly upon the justice of political institutions, and that national welfare could be indefinitely promoted by just government. Daniel Malthus (the father of Thomas Robert), a man of sanguine and romantic temperament, warmly espoused the ideas set forth by Godwin, and frequently discussed the subject with his son. The younger man, however, by no means shared the paternal enthusiasm, and, following the lines suggested by Hume, Adam Smith, and other writers, he maintained that vice and misery were two powerful obstacles to the improvement of society, and urged, further, that the tendency of mankind to increase more rapidly than the means of subsistence gave rise to these evils. His arguments made a deep impression upon the mind of Daniel Malthus, who requested his son to put them in writing. This was accordingly done, and in 1798 T. R. Malthus published the first edition of his work: *An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it affects the future Improvement of Society; with Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, Mr. Condorcet and other Writers.* (London: 1798. One volume.)

This book aroused a lively controversy, the writer's theories and conclusions being attacked and defended by various writers. The great interest excited by his essay caused Malthus to enquire still more deeply into the phenomena of poverty, and he determined to travel through Europe for the purpose of collecting facts bearing upon the subject. In 1799 he visited the continent, passing through Denmark, Sweden, and part of Russia, and, later, Switzerland and Savoy. The results of his researches furnished overwhelming proof of the accuracy of his contention; and in 1803 he published a second and much enlarged edition of his *Essay*, in two volumes. During the remainder of his life, Malthus thrice edited new editions of his work, which to this day remains the greatest monument of his honorable career. He died on 29th December, 1834.

It is not intended here to give an exhaustive analysis of Malthus's *Principle of Population*.* We are concerned only with his theory of population and the conclusions to which that theory points. "The principal object of this essay," says the author, "is to examine the effects of one great cause intimately connected with the very nature of man, which, though it has been constantly and powerfully operating since the commencement of society, has been little noticed by the writers who have treated this subject. The cause to which I allude is the constant tendency in all animated life to increase beyond the nourishment prepared for it.

"Dr. Franklin has observed that there is no bound to the prolific nature of plants or animals but what is made by their crowding and interfering with each other's means of subsistence. Were the face of the earth, he says, vacant of other plants, it might be gradually sowed and overspread with one kind only—as, for instance, with fennel; and were it empty of other inhabitants, it might in a few ages be replenished from one nation only, as, for instance, with Englishmen.

"This is incontrovertibly true. Through the animal and vegetable kingdoms Nature has scattered the seeds of life abroad with the most profuse and liberal hand;

* This has already been admirably done in two pamphlets by Dr. C. R. Drysdale, President of the Malthusian League: (1) *The Life and Writings of Malthus*; (2) *The Population Question*.