POPULATION

H. WRIGHT

CAMBRIDGE ECONOMIC HANDBOOKS

POPULATION

BY

HAROLD WRIGHT

M.A.

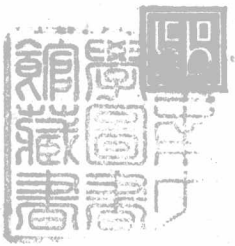
PEMBROKE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

WITH A PREFACE BY

J. M. KEYNES

M.A., C.B.

FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE



NEW YORK

HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY

Printed in the U. S. A.

PREFACE

A BELIEF in the material progress of mankind is not old. During the greater part of history such a belief was neither compatible with experience nor encouraged by religion. It is doubtful whether, taking one century with another, there was much variation in the lot of the unskilled laborer at the centers of civilization in the two thousand years from the Greece of Solon to the England of Charles II or the France of Louis XIV. Paganism placed the Golden Age behind us; Christianity raised Heaven above us; and anyone, before the middle of the eighteenth century, who had expected a progressive improvement in material welfare here, as a result of the division of labor, the discoveries of science and the boundless fecundity of the species, would have been thought very eccentric.

In the eighteenth century, for obscure reasons which economic historians have not yet sufficiently explored, material progress commenced over wide areas in a decided and cumulative fashion not previously experienced. Philosophers were ready with an appropriate superstition, and before the century was out Priestley's view was becoming fashionable, that, by the further division of labor,—"Nature, including both its materials and its laws, will be more at our command; men will make their situation in this world abundantly more easy and comfortable; they will prolong their existence in it and will grow daily more happy."

It was against the philosophers of this school that

Malthus directed his Essay. Its arguments impressed his reasonable contemporaries, and the interruption to progress by the Napoleonic wars supplied a favorable atmosphere. But as the nineteenth century proceeded, the tendency to material progress reasserted itself. Malthus was forgotten or discredited. The cloud was lifted; the classical Economists dethroned; and the opinions of the Vicar of Wakefield, who "was ever of opinion that the honest man who married and brought up a large family did more service than he who continued single and only talked of population," and of Adam Smith, who held that "the most decisive mark of the prosperity of any country is the increase of the number of its inhabitants," almost recovered their sway.

Nevertheless, the interruption to prosperity by the war, corresponding to the similar interruption a hundred years before, has again encouraged an atmosphere of doubt; and there are some who have a care. The most interesting question in the world (of those at least to which time will bring us an answer) is whether, after a short interval of recovery, material progress will be resumed, or whether, on the other hand, the magnificent episode of the nineteenth century is over.

In this volume of the *Cambridge Economic Handbooks* Mr. Harold Wright summarizes the data, and outlines the main features of the Problem of Population. It is no part of the purpose of this Series to present ready-made conclusions. Our object is to aid and stimulate study. The topic of this particular volume is one about which it is difficult, for anyone who has given much thought to it, not to feel strongly.

But Mr. Wright has avoided propagandism and has been concerned to display in a calm spirit the extraordinary interest, difficulty and importance of his subject, rather than to advocate any definite policies. His object will have been accomplished if he can do something to direct the thoughts of a few more students to what is going to be not merely an economist's problem, but, in the near future, the greatest of all social questions,—a question which will arouse some of the deepest instincts and emotions of men, and about which feeling may run as passionately as in earlier struggles between religions. A great transition in human history will have begun when civilized man endeavors to assume conscious control in his own hands, away from the blind instinct of mere predominant survival.

J. M. KEYNES.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

EARLY POPULATION THEORIES

CHAPTER II

MALTHUS

CHAPTER III

POPULATION THEORIES IN CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES

CHAPTER IV

FOOD AND RAW MATERIALS

CHAPTER V

COAL AND IRON

CHAPTER VI

THE GROWTH OF POPULATION

CHAPTER VII

INTERNATIONAL POPULATION PROBLEMS

CHAPTER VIII

THE QUALITY OF POPULATION

CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

POPULATION

CHAPTER I

EARLY POPULATION THEORIES

"Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new? It hath been already of old time, which was before us."
Ecclesiastes i. 10.

§ 1. *Introductory.* "The view once widely held that the principle of population must inevitably keep the mass of the people close to the verge of the bare means of subsistence was no statement of a desirable ideal. It was a nightmare; a nightmare none the less, though it may haunt us yet." So wrote Mr. Henderson in the first volume of this series; and it is the purpose of this, the fifth volume, to explain what is meant by "the principle of population"; to examine its validity as a universal economic law, and to inquire how far the truth in this matter is a menace to the progress of mankind; a nightmare which must haunt us yet.

Economists have often been accused of being too little guided by the actual experience of mankind. Sometimes, no doubt, they have been guilty of this fault. At other times, however, the tendency has been to err in the other direction and to mistake the peculiar conditions of a particular period in the evolution of human society for the permanent and inevitable results of the working of economic laws. This latter

tendency has always been very much in evidence with regard to questions about population. When small communities have sought to maintain exclusive possession of large and fertile lands, their learned men have naturally taught them that an increasing population was an unmixed blessing, since it provided more hands to till the soil and more soldiers to defend the fields. When, on the other hand, a community found itself confined to a certain definite area, and that area was well supplied with human beings, a wise man would arise and point out that the means of subsistence were limited and that a further increase in the population must inevitably involve hunger and misery, unless an outlet could be found in other lands. Both doctrines were perfectly sound in their application to the circumstances of the particular peoples to whom they were addressed; but the doctrines were frequently couched in general terms, as though they must neccessarily apply to all nations at all times, which they certainly do not. Even T. R. Malthus, whose essay on *The Principle of Population*, first published in 1798, still holds the field as the classic exposition of this subject, owed much of his early fame to the special economic circumstances of Great Britain in the early years of the nineteenth century, and suffered a partial eclipse owing to changes which did not in any way invalidate his main argument.

§ 2. *Greek and Roman Population Theories.* The ancient Greeks characteristically approached the population question from the point of view of the ideal City State. They made up their minds first as to the number of citizens that would produce the most satisfac-

tory political and social unit, and then took steps to keep the population up to the desired level and to prevent it from increasing beyond it. They took account of the quality as well as of citizens, and endeavored to eliminate the unfit from their societies. In Sparta there seems to have been little fear of over-population, except in regard to the slaves, whose numbers were kept in check by such devices as infanticide. Frequent wars took their toll of young freemen, and created an urgent demand for more. Thus, in Sparta, the State regulations respecting marriage and procreation were mainly directed towards a high birth-rate of healthy children. Every Spartan was expected to marry for the good of the State. Bachelors were subjected to social indignities as well as to legal and political disabilities. Marriages were supervised with a view to the production of children sound in body and mind, and the fathers of three or more sons were publicly rewarded.

In Athens, the regulation of marriage was less rigid than in Sparta. There, too, laws existed against celibacy; but in times of peace these were not enforced, and late marriages were advocated. The Athenian remedy for over-population was emigration, but infanticide was also a recognized custom. Malthus remarks that "when Solon permitted the exposing of children, it is probable that he only gave the sanction of law to a custom already prevalent"; adding with characteristic shrewdness:

"In this permission he had without doubt two ends in view. First, that which is most obvious, the prevention of such an excessive population as would cause universal poverty and discontent; and, secondly, that of keeping the pop-

ulation up to the level of what the territory could support, by removing the terrors of too numerous a family and consequently the principal obstacle to marriage."

In addition to those two motives, the Greeks were inclined to look favorably upon infanticide as a eugennic device; for weakly or deformed children were exposed in Sparta by order of the State, a practice which Plato and Aristotle both approved.

Malthus was clearly justified in saying that infanticide was frequently adopted among primitive peoples as a means of keeping the population within the means of subsistence. In Polynesia, for instance, the islands being small though the climate is favorable to the production of food, the custom was generally observed. In the Hawaiian Islands all children after the third or fourth were strangled or buried alive. At Tahiti, fathers had the right (and used it) of suffocating their newly born children. The Areois, in the Society Islands, imposed infanticide upon the women members by oath. In fact, although a religious sanction is often given to the slaughter of infants among savage tribes, this practice or others restricting increase seem to be generally prevalent among those peoples who have reason to fear that their food supply may prove insufficient for their support, while in some countries infants are destroyed in times of scarcity only. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that some fear of over-population played a part in originating this custom among the ancient Greeks.

Infanticide was prevalent among the Romans also, but it is improbable that the practice was encouraged by their rulers. As a conquering race they were always

obsessed with the need for soldiers and colonists. Their legislation respecting marriage and parenthood was therefore directed towards an increase in population. As in Sparta, rewards were given to the fathers of families and penalties imposed upon bachelors. Plutarch says of Camillus that "as the wars had made many widows, he obliged such of the men as lived single, partly by persuasion and partly by threatening them with fines, to marry the widows." Whether any Roman Weller stood out against this terrifying edict is not recorded! In the early days of the Empire, the population question appears to have caused considerable anxiety. Augustus resorted to elaborate legislation. He enacted that men and women must be married and have children before the men were twenty-five and women twenty. Those who disobeyed this law by remaining unmarried were disqualified from becoming heirs or receiving legacies. Those who married but had no children could receive only half of any property left to them, and could bequeath only one-tenth of their property to their widows. On the other hand, honors and privileges were bestowed upon prolific parents.

The object of this legislation seems, however, to have been the preservation of the patrician families rather than the increase of the numbers of the whole people. If this was the intention, it was defeated by the luxury and vice that prevailed among the upper classes in imperial Rome.

§ 3. *The Influence of the Early Christians.* Early Christian morality was in its nature a reaction from the immorality of Rome, and by its insistence upon the vir-

tues of chastity and virginity it treated marriage as an inferior state, to be tolerated but not to be encouraged. There were slight differences between the various sects and preachers as to the degree to which marriage fell off from perfection, but all agreed in regarding it as a concession to human frailty. Political and economic considerations were completely disregarded by the Fathers, some of whom did not desire the human race to continue on the earth. Thus Methodius writing *On Virginity* says:

"For the world, while still unfilled with men, was like a child, and it was necessary that it should first be filled with these, and so grow to manhood. But when thereafter it was colonised from end to end, the race of man spreading to a boundless extent, God no longer allowed man to remain in the same ways, considering how they might now proceed from one point to another and advance nearer heaven, until having attained to the greatest and most exalted lesson of virginity they should reach to perfection; that first they should abandon the intermarriage of brothers and sisters and marry wives from other families; and then that they should no longer have many wives, like brute beasts as though born for the mere propagation of the species; and then that they should not be adulterers; and then again that they should go on to continence, and from continence to virginity, when, having trained themselves to despise the flesh, they sail fearlessly into the peaceful haven of immortality."

The effect of the early Christian view of marriage and procreation upon imperial policy is shown by the fifth-century church historian Sozomen, who says that the Emperor (Constantine):

"deeming it absurd to attempt the multiplication of the human species by the care and zeal of man (since nature always

receives increase or decrease according to the fiat from on high), made a law enjoining that the unmarried and childless should have the same advantages as the married. He even bestowed peculiar privileges on those who embraced a life of continence and virginity."

§ 4. *Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Writers on Population Problems.* From this brief survey of the attitude of the ancient world towards population problems, we must now jump to modern Europe and take an equally hasty glance at the views of those writers who preceded Malthus in the consideration of these matters.

In Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, as in the ideal commonwealths of the ancient Greeks, it is considered important to maintain a constant population:

"Lest any city should become either too great or by any accident be dispeopled, provision is made that none of their cities may contain more than six thousand persons besides those of the country round. No family may have less than ten or more than sixteen children, but there can be no determined numbers of children under age. This rule is easily observed by removing some of a more fruitful couple to any other family that does not so abound in them. By the same rule they supply cities that do not increase so fast from others that breed faster; and if there is any increase over the whole island they draw out a number of their citizens from the several towns, and send them over to a neighbouring continent, where . . . they fix a colony. . . . Such care is taken of the soil that it becomes fruitful enough to supply provisions for all, though it might otherwise be too narrow and barren."

If the influence of Plato, or his own insight, led Sir Thomas More to regard excessive population as an evil, no such calculation was sanctioned by his contemporary, Luther, whose views on this subject had