

Poverty

AS TREATED IN A CERTAIN HIGH SCHOOL TEXT BOOK

ALL writers on social science agree that any violation of economic laws brings to certain individuals, classes or to whole communities widespread deprivation of material comforts. And all recognize that this deprivation is itself the cause of many evils that afflict, not only individuals, but society at large. Thus in "Problems of American Democracy," a text book for high schools by Henry Reed Burch and S. Howard Patterson, (hereinafter mentioned as "B. and P."), we read that small families, emigration, development of slums, child labor, crime, intemperance and the divorce evil are each caused in part, at least, by economic impoverishment. Without criticising the limited number of these effects or their unscientific classification, we observe that the authors regard "The Problem of Poverty," to quote the name of one of the chapters, as extremely important.

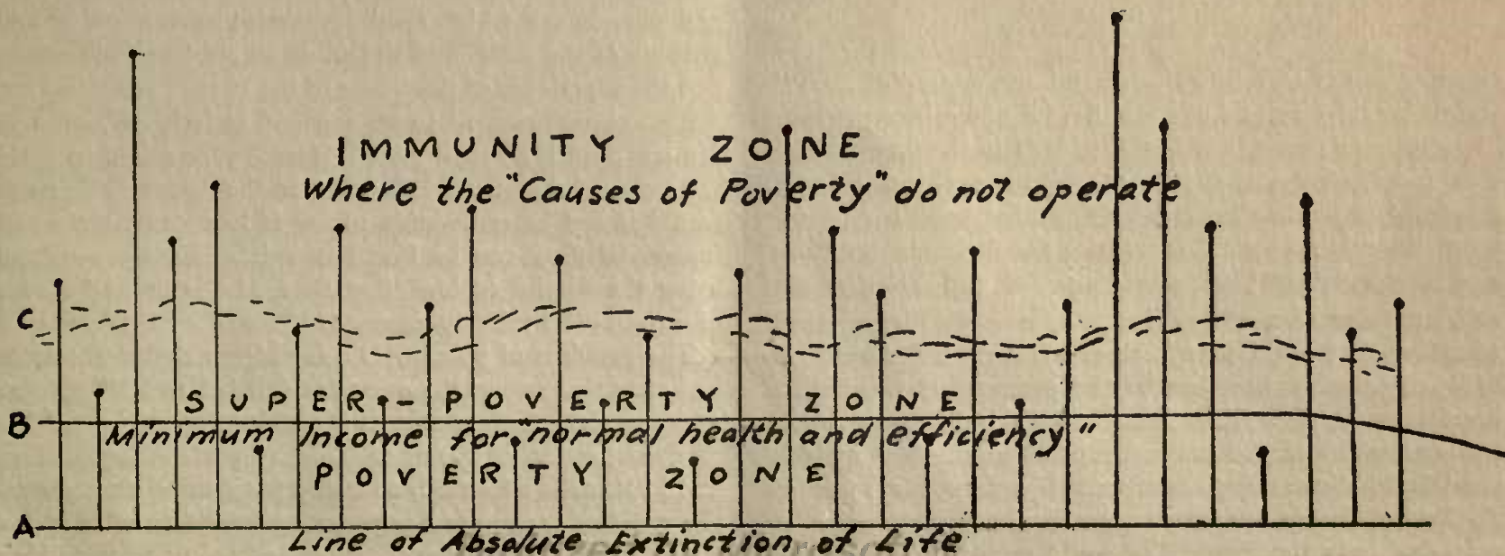
The word "poverty" is defined at the outset. Not the fact of having less wealth than one's neighbors, nor even the condition of one whose contribution to society in goods or services is greater (or even much greater) than the recompense rendered by society, "poverty" is "the condition of only that group whose income, and therefore standard of living, is so abnormally low that neither normal health nor efficiency can be maintained." Though the terms may be given too narrow a meaning here, according to popular usage, we must concede the right to sociologists to so employ the word, as many of them do, as long as it is used with the same meaning in every case. Concerning the figure of income below which a man, a family or a class becomes part of the "poverty" group, our authors are properly quite vague, although to give an idea of the extent of "poverty" they quote the expression, "the submerged tenth" as being fairly descriptive of the country as a whole. Thus, while accepting the defini-

tion of "poverty" given above, but without attempting to fix its boundary in terms of money income, we may draw a diagram to make clear the relation of the "poverty" class to others in economic society.

Vertical lines (as many as you like) represent individual lives or economic units; their upper ends, their present economic status above starvation line A. Line B of varying height, according to time and place, is higher in the United States than in Europe generally and dips even lower, as it were, through Asia and other eastern lands. It may be argued that line A should also show a varying level, according to time and geographical factors, but this is not vital to our discussion. It is plain that anything which brings down the economic status of a man or a group below this line B can be called a "cause of poverty" and our authors list a number of these "causes" as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Environmental: | 2. Individual: |
| a. Physical environment | a. Degeneracy |
| b. Economic " | b. Disease |
| c. Social " | c. Intemperance |
| d. Defects in government | d. Crime |
| e. Defects in education | e. Desertion |
| | f. Death of main support |
| | g. Old age |
| | h. Defectives |
| | i. Indolence |

It is evident that large numbers of people barely above line B are in imminent danger of falling into the "poverty zone" by reason of any of the causes noted above, especially those under "Individual." Then, according to the accepted definition of "poverty," were a man with his nose an inch, so to speak, above line B to commit some indiscretion listed here, even in ever so slight a degree, and were he thereby to be submerged below line B only one thirty-second of an inch he would then be in the "poverty" class!



All these "causes of poverty" would be perfectly rational as causes if they operate upon all men alike. But do they? What rich man was ever reduced to "poverty" by temporary unemployment? Or by being sick abed? Or by breaking a leg? Or by old age? It is evident that the "causes of poverty" are operative upon only a portion of the super-"poverty" group. Many, if not every one of these listed causes, making hardly a ripple in the current of some men's lives, are sufficient to put other men far below the line of income necessary to maintain "normal health and efficiency." People of means can, and do, easily obviate some of these causes, such as unfavorable environment, in their own cases. "The destruction of the poor is their poverty" is not a complete enough statement of the truth. The destruction of the near-poor, unless they walk the chalkline of prudence, thrift, industry, temperance and all the other observable virtues, is their near-"poverty." Thus there is needed in our diagram a new line which we may call C between which and line B are those forever with their noses to the grindstone, fearful of making a misstep and numbering, all will agree, a large fraction of the total population. Line C is, for obvious reasons, neither a straight line nor one with a definite position, as either A or B, hence the peculiar manner of its rendering in the diagram.

Now the strange thing about all this discussion in "B and P" is that the cause of near-"poverty" is never even mentioned; it is no problem of their kind of sociology that a man far above the lowest in wealth producing efficiency receives less wealth than he creates,—as long as he barely holds his head above the line B; nowhere a word that the "science" they teach concerns itself with impoverishment (I do not say "poverty") in its broad aspect; that it has to do with lowered incomes of *all* workers, no matter how high in the diagram the vertical lines representing them may reach. Nowhere do "B and P" raise the question (nor apparently do they wish their student-readers to ask it): "Does any wealth producer, as such, get all that he earns?"

It will at once occur to any thoughtful person that the classification of men into "poverty" and super-"poverty" groups is arbitrary and unscientific, for like causes produce like effects on one side of line B as well as the other. Except for charity organizations and welfare-workers who must "draw the line" somewhere as a limit to their operations, there is no logical reason for the distinction. Here is a sample of the "science" which "B and P" give us:

"A number of social reformers have made the error of assuming that poverty had but one cause. Thus Malthus believed poverty was due to the pressure of population upon food supply. Karl Marx sought its explanation in the ownership of the instruments of production by the capitalistic class. Socialism was therefore his remedy. To Henry George, poverty was the result of the rise in rent, and only the Single Tax could remove it. Poverty,

however, is a complex phenomenon and its causes are manifold."

Then follows the list of "causes of poverty," already quoted. It is presumed that "B and P" have read the works of the authors referred to. However, any one with even a superficial knowledge of these philosophers knows that they dealt with causes which (they claimed) reduce the incomes and scales of living of *all* workers; causes which, while not necessarily bringing the unfortunates below the arbitrarily staked-off minimum of "normal health and efficiency," nevertheless are the premises and the arguments for the remedial measures that Malthus, Marx, and George proposed. Unless "B and P" are grossly ignorant of the doctrines of these philosophers, they have by their reference to them committed the sin, unpardonable in a scientific work, of using the word "poverty," a strictly technical term, in two senses. Malthus, Marx and George proposed no remedy for "poverty" in the sense in which it is used; they would readily have agreed with "B and P" that any one of the "causes of poverty" mentioned (and a few more picayune ones thrown in for good measure) may reduce a family income from \$1200.01 to \$1199.99, (if the intermediate figure be taken as the deadline), and thus "cause poverty." I am sure that Marx would have admitted that an extra glass of beer has been the cause of many a man's "poverty," and that George would have agreed that "poverty" has often been caused by a man's stubbing his toe.

It is only fair to "B and P" to say that this is but a sample of the reasoning often put into text-books for students,—and in the holy name of "Social Science"! The list of offenders against common sense and elemental logic in sociological discussions is a long one. And yet, strange as it may seem to certain teachers of the science for us to say so, the world of thinking people, conscious of economic injustice somewhere and blindly groping its way for the amelioration of wrongs, has almost no interest in "poverty" and its thousand-and-one relatively trifling "causes." It *is* tremendously interested in those forces and phenomena which spell economic deprivation at any altitude of the scale, and which, as all students will admit and the experience of the "man in the street" corroborates, bring lessened returns to all engaged in industry, even to the comparatively well paid. If one were asked to state the cause of a person's being within the "poverty" group, would it not be reasonable to lay it to those large social forces,—if they can be found to exist, of course,—which bring the victim so low (line B) that the listed "causes of poverty" begin to operate?

The problem of poverty is a far bigger and much more inclusive thing than the one to which "B and P" give so much space. And as so many problems of our social life arise, in part at least, out of this very state of deprivation in which, as is admitted, so many people find themselves, the problem assumes an importance second to none in the whole domain of sociology. A high school text book which

recognizes this fact may not "sell" as well as the other kind, but it will, at least, be free of that quality which caused a well-known critic to remark, apropos of a similar work: "If this is social science, give me tiddledy-winks!"

—HENRY W. HETZEL.

An Interesting Reminiscence

I LIKE a back number. I don't know anyting that interests me much more than back numbers if they are far enough back. Rummaging in the attic of *The Batavia Times*, I made a find that I would like to tell LAND AND FREEDOM about, for I am sure some of your readers who are in the reminiscent age will be interested.

I found twelve numbers, Numbers 1 to 12 inclusive, of *Spread the Light*, the dates running from March, 1885 to November, 1886; publisher, M. Battle, 9 Spruce Street, New York: 42 years ago, if I substract right.

"Land Restorationists", the Land Taxers called themselves in those days.

Number 1, of Volume 1, of this little paper tells of a Land Restoration Dinner at Beraza's restuarant, Duane Street. It gives the names of those who attended, and Louis F. Post's name leads all the rest. Then follow: Henry George, James Redpath, Dr. Smith, Aug. A. Levey, Col. H. Beeny, John G. Huhn, M. Battle, H. E. Sharpe, F. P. Williams, Robert Blissert, W. B. Scott, Jerome O'Neil, Richard George, Prof. L. E. Wilmarth, R. Victor, O. H. Wilmarth, Wm. McCabe, C. H. Baildon, A. J. Steers, S. Pearsall, Prof. J. P. Brophy, T. L. McCready, John Beverly Robinson, Henry George Jr.

A motto at the top of page one of *Spread the Light* reads: "Rent for Land is an Immoral Tax upon the Industry of a People."—Michael Davitt.

Each number of the paper contains a biographical sketch of some tax reformer, together with his picture. Besides Henry George and Louis F. Post, the following appear: John Beverly Robinson, Alphonso J. Steers, Antonio M. Molina, Dr. E. B. Foote, Augustus A. Levey, James D. McDade, Rev. Edward McGlynn, D. D., Wm. Camm, Capt. J. M. McGregor.

In those days, as now, thoughtful people were asking the cause of the increase of crime. Mr. Post writes an article on this subject.

Mr. Post concludes that the genesis of crime is coincident with the robbery of labor, and that its increase is in a parallel line with the depression of wages.

The September number tells that Henry George has been asked to stand as a candidate for Mayor, and that he agrees to run if 30,000 voters express their wishes by petition that he should run.

Mr. George, we are told, cast his first vote for Abraham Lincoln. When the question of slavery was settled, he voted for Greeley, being a member of the Baltimore Convention, and one of the committee that delivered the

nomination to Greeley. After that he stumped California for Tilden.

Another find in our attic was twelve numbers of *The Freesoiler*. These go back to April, 1884. The publisher was John Beverly Robinson, and the paper was published as the organ of the American Free Soil Society, at fifty cents a year.

Mr. Post was president of the organization and there were vice presidents as follows:

George Pyburn	from California
F. O. Stewart,	" Colorado
Chas. W. Peckham,	" Connecticut
Wm. Rose,	" Illinois
R. Spencer,	" Iowa
E. V. Boutwell,	" Kansas
Christopher Moore,	" Kentucky
J. H. Ralston,	" Maryland
M. R. Thomas,	" Massachusetts
J. G. Malcolm,	" Michigan
Otto Haesse,	" Minnesota
Frank C. Butze,	" Missouri
Thomas Skelly,	" New Jersey
A. J. Steers,	" New York
E. M. Leonard,	" Ohio
Robert Stephens,	" Pennsylvania
John Collins, M. D.,	" Texas
John Kelly,	" Wisconsin

Rev. R. Heber Newton was treasurer of the society.

The April number tells that Mr. George is expected to return to this country in May and that a reception will be held for him at Cooper Union.

I would like to place these back numbers where they will be the most available at any time to any person who may be writing the history of reform movements. I would like suggestions from the readers of LAND AND FREEDOM.

—CHESTER C. PLATT.

Malthus Again

THE Manchester (Eng.) *Guardian*, June 3rd, publishes a report of The Economic Conference of the League of Nations at Geneva.

It says "One speaker after another said his country was overpopulated, and advocated high tariffs as a solution of unemployment."

So it appears that War, Doctors and Famine have so far failed to keep down population—or maybe to keep down liars.

Great Britain, for example, has less than 600 persons to the square mile (although two-fifths of Scotland is in deer parks). If there were 600 to the square mile still it would give each family of four persons nearly five acres.

Europe appears to be over-populated only with big land-holders and big liars.