

Fact for Statisticians: Harry G.

The Christmas season has a special significance for the student of social problems who keeps up with the daily papers. It is not only the season when the stores crowd the newspaper pages with offerings of goods beyond the reach of many, but it is also the season when the newspapers reach into the closets of their cities to take out for a time the rattling skeletons of case histories for Christmas fund appeals.

These case stories of abject destitution, of individuals struggling against overpowering odds, of family groups that chance and abstract social forces have plunged into misery, should bring home to the objective student that problems in the social sciences are not mere exercises in the intellectualistic satisfactions; they are challenges to his highest powers, to his most ennobling emotions.

Pigou once wrote something to the effect that the sandals of human sympathy were fine gear to bring one to the temple of science, but once at the portals he who would seek truth within must shed them. And truly must he shed them lest he trip while ministering to the pure, white flame.

But truth will not countenance from her ministers the detachment of the zombie; he is a poor devotee who tends the altar without understanding, without the knowledge that the series A which he plots by ritual upon his chart is a succession of identical cases of Harry G.'s. Take the case of Harry G.:

"For the sake of his family Harry G., at 23, is giving up his youth. He works eighteen hours a day driving a bakery truck, but after deducting the weekly payments on the wagon, the garage bill and the payments for the cakes he sells, there is not much left.

"What there is goes to his parents and their three younger children, Marjorie, who is 14, Herman, 13, and Martin, 8; for more important to Harry than his dreams is his determination that 'the kids must not be bums.'

"The father used to make \$22 a week as handyman in a bakery, but

climbing five flights of stairs to the top-floor apartment—taken because the rent was cheap—aggravated the condition of his varicose veins until, early this year, he collapsed. The family pawned what it could, borrowed what it could, then went without.

"A teacher stopped in one day to see why Marjorie, one of her brightest pupils, had not been at school. She discovered that there was no food in the house, that Mr. G. was in a hospital, and that Marjorie had stayed at home because she had no coat to wear.

"Harry is gamely carrying on, but his earnings must be supplemented if his brothers and sisters are to have their chance."

If his brothers and sisters are to have their chance! To have their chance to be Harry G.s, working eighteen hours a day with not much

left for wages and climbing five flights to a home where youth must be sacrificed at the shrine of privilege if younger kin are to have their chance . . .

When the economist talks of freeing labor and industry by the abolition of taxation, of opening up natural opportunities and forces to all by the socialization of rent, he means releasing the Harry G.s of the world from economic slavery. When he proves by scatter diagrams, or by correlation tables, or by abstruse operations in the calculus that the economic returns to the laborer and the capitalist must fall as the exaction of the monopolist rises, he is proving why Harry G.'s wages are so low and why the return on his capital investment is so infinitesimal they must be supplemented by begging.

—W. L.

See: "Progress and Poverty," pp. 340-341.