

## POVERTY AND DISEASE

The Manly Report on Industrial Relations shows that the death rate of children whose fathers earn less than \$10 a week is 256 per thousand while those whose fathers earn \$25 or more per week die at the rate of only 84 per thousand. Thus the poor die at three times the rate of the fairly well-to-do.

That poverty is the cause of many diseases has long been recognized. Of tuberculosis it is claimed by high authority (see Report of Public Health Service on Tuberculosis in American Cities,) that "the great factor underlying the entire problem is seemingly that of economic conditions." In the tenement districts of Cincinnati the tuberculosis death rate was found to be three times as great as in the better sections. A similar situation was discovered in Pittsburg.

Col. Wm. C. Gorgas, Surgeon-General U. S. A., has recounted the result of his observations in Panama showing the connection between improvement in wage conditions and the health of the people. He says:

"At Panama shortly after our arrival we increased the wages of the common laborers from eleven cents an hour to twenty cents an hour. This was nearly four times the wages of the laborer in the surrounding countries. The laborer knew that every fourth man would die each year of diseases prevalent on the Isthmus and it took strong inducements to get him to come at all.

This large increase in wages caused a great general improvement in all living conditions,—more room to live in, better food, and better clothing. I am satisfied that to this improvement in social conditions, caused by our high wages, we principally owe our extraordinary improvement in general health conditions. It is a health officer's duty to urge forward in his community those measures which will control individual diseases, but my long experience has taught me that it is still more his duty to take that broader view of life which goes to the root of bad hygiene, and do what he can to elevate the general social conditions of his community. This, my experience has taught me, can best be accomplished by increasing wages."

## POVERTY AND CRIME

That poverty breeds crime statistics abundantly testify. Much the larger proportion of girls and boys in reformatories and houses of refuge come from homes of poverty. In the New York Reformatory School for Girls not one came from a home where the father earned more than a thousand dollars a year. The Senate Vice-Committee of the Illinois legislature after investigation said, "That poverty is the principal cause, direct and indirect, of prostitution." This same committee were unable to learn of a single prostitute in Illinois who had come from a home of even modest prosperity.

<sup>1</sup>Public Health Bulletin 73, Washington, D. C.

It is sometimes urged that drink is the cause of crime, but while some crimes may be traced to this cause it is obviously not logical to infer that because most criminals drink that such indulgence makes them criminals. Eighty per cent. of the male population of New York State drink. Less than one per cent of this number are criminals. It seems absolutely certain that serious crimes have but little or no relation to the use of alcohol—such crimes as murder, burglary, arson, grand larceny, forgery, bigamy, etc.

A writer in the *Forum* for August, 1916, thus sums up the argument: "In recent years the concensus of opinion among criminologists is that the chief cause of crime is not drink but poverty."

In a pamphlet printed by the Publicity Bureau of the Joseph Fels Fund of America and entitled *Institutional Causes of Crime*, the author, Louis F. Post, now Assistant Secretary of Labor, says:

"In the monopoly of the planet therefore, we may find the underlying and all inclusive institutional cause of crime.

Not that there are no other institutional causes. There may be many. Not that there are no hereditary, educational, or other personal causes. There are many. But in a generalization of causes, this one either comprehends most of the others, or would do duty for them all if the other social causes were abolished and all the personal causes were cured."

### COST OF LIVING

The most notable advance in prices (as pointed out by Prof. Scott Nearing) has been in minerals (tin, lead and zinc) and in timber and farm products. Prof. Nearing shows that the rise in prices in the last few years is much greater with commodities directly dependent on land for their production.

The Professor then turns his attention to what he calls a "striking circumstance" and seeks the cause. He finds it impossible to determine whether mineral lands have risen greatly in price, since figures for such increase are lacking. As to timber lands he finds from the Federal Bureau of Corporations that "the increase has been nothing less than enormous." The values of timber lands in the great lumber regions have increased from 300 to 1,000 per cent. in ten years. Wheat and flour, eggs and butter, meat and cheese have led the procession of a rise in prices. In this case, too, Prof. Nearing finds a corresponding increase in land values.

Farm lands in this period (1900 to 1910) have increased 108 per cent, the middle Atlantic states 19 per cent, the mountain states 13 per cent. This increase is, by some, accounted for by reason of the increased cost of farming, and sometimes attributed to the increased productivity of the land, but Professor Nearing says that an appeal to the facts shows that the value of Western land has increased out of all proportion to the increased productivity.

The relation of high cost of living to high land values is a close one, though it may not be always easy to trace it. But speculative rent is a tax on production. By encouraging the holding of land out of use, production is lowered relatively to effective demand for commodities, and this scarcity is reflected in high prices.