

HAVE WE ENOUGH TO EAT?



N the August number of *La Nouvelle Revue* M. Oscar Comettant discusses the negative side of the foregoing question, and therein finds what he considers the true solution of the social problem. He maintains that in every period of the history of mankind hunger has been its most unrelenting foe, and, until man succeeds in conquering this degrading enemy, all the discoveries of science will be but so many mockeries of his sad lot.

"To what purpose," he says, "do we talk to a people weakened by privation, of liberty, of equality, of legislative reform, of eternal happiness in another world? So long as the hungry have nothing on their plates the instincts of the brute will prevail over human sentiments. They must eat before all."

"Hunger unsatisfied, the last expression of the poor, will not be silenced by an increase of money in circulation, by any method of its distribution, by the development of industries, nor by the application of any of the socialistic theories which are but forms of spoliation more or less disguised. The remedy must be sought elsewhere."

"At the outset let us lay down this truth: that if every person does not eat enough it is because there is not enough for every person to eat. The rich have stomachs similar to those of the poor. The digestive organs of the one perform the same amount of work as do those of the other. An equal supply of nourishing food is needed by both. Since no portion of our food is thrown into the sewer; since, on the contrary, we utilize even the very refuse of the restaurants and other eating houses, which is sold to the poor in large cities; we must conclude that since large numbers of the human race suffer from want of food, it must be because the supply is not in proportion to their needs."

In support of his contention that it is not money that the poor require to procure the necessaries of life, M. Comettant makes two suppositions. Firstly: "Suppose that all the gold and all the silver in circulation were equally divided among the inhabitants of the earth. The amount of gold is estimated at 18 billions of francs, that of silver at 20 billions. The population of the earth being one and a half billions, in this division each person would receive 25.23 francs. Everybody would then be poor, and suffer more or less of hunger. Not because each would have a small amount of money to buy food, but because the supply of food, remaining the same, would be, as at present, insufficient." Secondly: "Suppose that by a phenomenon of nature a large quantity of gold and silver fell upon the surface of the earth, and that all that was necessary was to stoop and pick it up. Everybody would then become a millionaire. But would there be any change in the general situation? A loaf of bread would then cost about 1000 francs, an egg about 500 francs, and everything else in proportion. The wages of the workman would undoubtedly rise; but the price of the necessaries of life would experience a corresponding increase, and the ratio between income and expenditure would remain unchanged. At one time in Paris the same kind of boots which cost to-day 12 francs could be bought for 12 sous. Yet the poor of that period walked in their patched leather boots which soaked up the mud and melted snow of the streets."

"No," M. Comettant asserts, "it is not because money is more or less abundant, more or less equally distributed, that poverty has become universal. It is because the food which nourishes man is not produced in proportion to his needs." Henceforth," he says, "let us not delve into the interior of the earth for precious metals; let us obtain our subsistence from its surface which alone is able to satisfy our wants. Since the portions of the earth already cultivated are not capable of