

OVER POPULATION AND FOOD SUPPLY.

A DISTINGUISHED savant and social reformer, Prince Krapotkine, has been recently, according to the Boston Herald and New York Medical Times pointing out possibilities of soil cultivation and production which should calm those who have fears of over population—of excess of consumers over possibilities of supply; who even, sometimes, question the wisdom of efforts to save and prolong life, and who pronounce war on a large scale to be one of the necessary and effectual among the “preventive checks” opposed by Providence against the otherwise inevitable overgrowth of population beyond the means of subsistence. Remove it they say, and the disturbed balance will have to be redressed in some way perhaps still more terrible. “Progress in medicine and sanitation—improvements in arts and manufactures—colonization of the darkest regions of the globe—the widest spread of unrestricted commerce—all the blessings, in short, which the most advanced civilization can carry in its train—will only add to the burden of misery ever weighing upon the masses of mankind, if these are to go on multiplying as at present, without a corresponding increase in their power of food production.” Any means which shall be discovered towards fulfilling the latter condition—making waste places to blossom as the rose, and vastly increasing the productive capacity of the area at present under cultivation, must therefore, says the New York Medical Times, be hailed as infinitely more important than all labor-saving inventions put together.

As an illustration of the productive capacity of the earth under proper treatment, the prince gives a number of instances borrowed from the experience of market gardeners in the country districts around Paris, where the soil, even in the hands of relatively ignorant men, has been utilized so as to be enormously productive.

He refers to one farm of 2.7 acres in extent, from which there are annually taken 125 tons of market vegetables of all kinds. The farmer in this case—and he is but a sample of his class—has found out a part of the secrets of nature, and, as a consequence, has his little farm constantly in a productive condition from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31. He and his market gardeners around Paris make their soil, and Prince

Krapotkine says it does not in the least matter what the soil is from which they originally start, for a French market gardener would in two years time raise an abundance of vegetable products from an asphalt pavement as a foundation. He goes on to speak of one French gardener, who has covered over a half acre tract of ground with a glass roof, and has run steam pipes, supplied by a small steam boiler, at intervals under the ground thus sheltered. As a result, he has been able for ten months out of every year to cut each day from this little tract of ground from 1,000 to 1,200 large bunches of asparagus; that is the productive capacity of his land has been increased more than a hundred fold. Even this result has been surpassed by an English gardener, who has entered into the cultivation of mushrooms.

Prince Krapotkine maintaining that, even at the present time, with their only partially instructive methods, the French gardeners could easily raise enough both in animals and vegetables, to supply all that would be needed for the sustenance and protection of life at the rate of 1,000 human beings to the square mile; or, in other words, under a method of intense and properly directed culture, it will be easy for the State of Massachusetts to sustain within her own borders a population of not less than 9,000,000 human beings, and this be it remembered, is but the beginning, for no one knows the limit to set upon the productive capacity of the soil.

Taking his statement as a basis, it is easy to see that assertions concerning the present congestion of population refer rather to the lack of knowledge on the part of mankind, or to vicious laws restricting the distribution of land than to what might be termed natural obstacles. Great Britain and Ireland have, by the last official estimates, a population of 37,000,000 souls; but, on the basis of sustenance given by Prince Krapotkine, the land area in the united kingdom, throwing out one-sixth as mountainous and hence unsuited to agriculture, ought to be able to support, without importation from abroad, quite 100,000,000 human beings; on similar estimate, the United States has the natural resources needed to sustain a population of fully 3,000,000,000, or twice the present population of the entire world; while Canada could sustain at least as many more.