

must either die in infancy through bad conditions or grow up to earn low wages—to go on in this fashion *till the social system is reformed*, or to teach all men and women how to limit their families, and bring to the task of reform the freer and happier energies of men and women not weighed down to the dust by their burdens? Does the reader believe that the weary and the wretched are better able to reform the world than the strong and the cheerful? That seems to be the opinion of some professed Socialists, who say that the misery of the poor is “motive power.” Could there be a more lamentable delusion? To talk so is really to make out that misery is more progressive than comfort, and sickness wiser than health. Misery may rebel, but it cannot reform. Only wisdom joined with strength can compass that.

Let it be asked how a lowering of their birth-rate would affect the condition of the workers, and the case will become clear enough. First, the worker with a small family has so far a more comfortable life than he would have with a large one. He will get the same wages. It is sometimes argued that if his family is smaller, his wages will fall to the smaller need; but that is a delusion. The bachelors get the same rate of wages as the married men, other things being equal. True, if the workers, in lessening their families, did not raise their standard of comfort, making the home life better all round for the fewer children—if they consented to take as little as they could live on, then wages might fall. But that is not how wage-earners would act in such a case. What drives down wages is over-abundance of labor in proportion to the demand for it. And the lessening of workers' families would not lessen the total demand for labor. It might lessen the demand for cheap children's clothing, but it would permit of a greatly increased demand for better things. Finally, when the supply of apprentices and factory girls fell off by reason of there being fewer poor men's children, wages per head would rise; and as the purchasing power per head would thus increase, the whole working class would be in better case than before.

I do not for a moment pretend that this change alone would solve the whole industrial problem. There can be no final solution of that short of the socialism of all sources of wealth, which can only be reached by gradual steps, such as Old Age Pensions, Graduated Income Tax, Nationalization of Railways, of Mining Rents, of Land, and so on. But as all misery and poverty are waste of power, because they are waste of life, all immediate lessening of them is not only a good in itself but a help towards further progress. The most efficient workers for that are those who work for it freely and intelligently, not as “dumb driven cattle,”—driven by the goads of hunger and hate. It is indeed difficult to believe that any Socialist in his heart doubts this. Rather the Socialist opposition to family prudence seems to come of that dangerous perversity which refuses all light save what comes from within one's own party. And the result of this perversity is that saving knowledge is withheld from thousands of women whose lives might be lightened and brightened