

CHAPTER XXV--THE HUNGER WAIL

"My father has more stamina than I, for he is country-born."

The speaker, a bright young East Ender, was lamenting his poor physical development.

"Look at my scrawny arm, will you." He pulled up his sleeve. "Not enough to eat, that's what's the matter with it. Oh, not now. I have what I want to eat these days. But it's too late. It can't make up for what I didn't have to eat when I was a kiddy. Dad came up to London from the Fen Country. Mother died, and there were six of us kiddies and dad living in two small rooms.

"He had hard times, dad did. He might have chucked us, but he didn't. He slaved all day, and at night he came home and cooked and cared for us. He was father and mother, both. He did his best, but we didn't have enough to eat. We rarely saw meat, and then of the worst. And it is not good for growing kiddies to sit down to a dinner of bread and a bit of cheese, and not enough of it.

"And what's the result? I am undersized, and I haven't the stamina of my dad. It was starved out of me. In a couple of generations there'll be no more of me here in London. Yet there's my younger brother; he's bigger and better developed. You see, dad and we children held together,

and that accounts for it."

"But I don't see," I objected. "I should think, under such conditions, that the vitality should decrease and the younger children be born weaker and weaker."

"Not when they hold together," he replied. "Whenever you come along in the East End and see a child of from eight to twelve, good-sized, well-developed, and healthy-looking, just you ask and you will find that it is the youngest in the family, or at least is one of the younger. The way of it is this: the older children starve more than the younger ones. By the time the younger ones come along, the older ones are starting to work, and there is more money coming in, and more food to go around."

He pulled down his sleeve, a concrete instance of where chronic semi-starvation kills not, but stunts. His voice was but one among the myriads that raise the cry of the hunger wail in the greatest empire in the world. On any one day, over 1,000,000 people are in receipt of poor-law relief in the United Kingdom. One in eleven of the whole working-class receive poor-law relief in the course of the year; 37,500,000 people receive less than 12 pounds per month, per family; and a constant army of 8,000,000 lives on the border of starvation.

A committee of the London County school board makes this declaration: "At times, when there is no special distress, 55,000 children in a state of hunger, which makes it useless to attempt to teach them, are in the

schools of London alone." The italics are mine. "When there is no special distress" means good times in England; for the people of England have come to look upon starvation and suffering, which they call "distress," as part of the social order. Chronic starvation is looked upon as a matter of course. It is only when acute starvation makes its appearance on a large scale that they think something is unusual

I shall never forget the bitter wail of a blind man in a little East End shop at the close of a murky day. He had been the eldest of five children, with a mother and no father. Being the eldest, he had starved and worked as a child to put bread into the mouths of his little brothers and sisters. Not once in three months did he ever taste meat. He never knew what it was to have his hunger thoroughly appeased. And he claimed that this chronic starvation of his childhood had robbed him of his sight. To support the claim, he quoted from the report of the Royal Commission on the Blind, "Blindness is more prevalent in poor districts, and poverty accelerates this dreadful affliction."

But he went further, this blind man, and in his voice was the bitterness of an afflicted man to whom society did not give enough to eat. He was one of an enormous army of blind in London, and he said that in the blind homes they did not receive half enough to eat. He gave the diet for a day:-

Breakfast--0.75 pint of skilly and dry bread.

Dinner --3 oz. meat.

1 slice of bread.

0.5 lb. potatoes.

Supper --0.75 pint of skilly and dry bread.

Oscar Wilde, God rest his soul, voices the cry of the prison child, which, in varying degree, is the cry of the prison man and woman:-

"The second thing from which a child suffers in prison is hunger. The food that is given to it consists of a piece of usually bad-baked prison bread and a tin of water for breakfast at half-past seven. At twelve o'clock it gets dinner, composed of a tin of coarse Indian meal stirabout (skilly), and at half-past five it gets a piece of dry bread and a tin of water for its supper. This diet in the case of a strong grown man is always productive of illness of some kind, chiefly of course diarrhoea, with its attendant weakness. In fact, in a big prison astringent medicines are served out regularly by the warders as a matter of course. In the case of a child, the child is, as a rule, incapable of eating the food at all. Any one who knows anything about children knows how easily a child's digestion is upset by a fit of crying, or trouble and mental distress of any kind. A child who has been crying all day long, and perhaps half the night, in a lonely dim-lit cell, and is preyed upon by terror, simply cannot eat food of this coarse, horrible kind. In the case of the little child to whom Warder Martin gave the biscuits, the child was crying with hunger on Tuesday morning, and utterly unable to eat the bread and water served to it for its breakfast. Martin went out after the breakfasts had been served and bought the few sweet biscuits

for the child rather than see it starving. It was a beautiful action on his part, and was so recognised by the child, who, utterly unconscious of the regulations of the Prison Board, told one of the senior wardens how kind this junior warden had been to him. The result was, of course, a report and a dismissal."

Robert Blatchford compares the workhouse pauper's daily diet with the soldier's, which, when he was a soldier, was not considered liberal enough, and yet is twice as liberal as the pauper's.

PAUPER	DIET	SOLDIER
3.25 oz.	Meat	12 oz.
15.5 oz.	Bread	24 oz.
6 oz.	Vegetables	8 oz.

The adult male pauper gets meat (outside of soup) but once a week, and the paupers "have nearly all that pallid, pasty complexion which is the sure mark of starvation."

Here is a table, comparing the workhouse officer's weekly allowance:-

OFFICER	DIET	PAUPER
7 lb.	Bread	6.75 lb.
5 lb.	Meat	1 lb. 2 oz.
12 oz.	Bacon	2.5 oz.
8 oz.	Cheese	2 oz.

7 lb.	Potatoes	1.5 lb.
6 lb.	Vegetables	none.
1 lb.	Flour	none.
2 oz.	Lard	none.
12 oz.	Butter	7 oz.
none.	Rice Pudding	1 lb.

And as the same writer remarks: "The officer's diet is still more liberal than the pauper's; but evidently it is not considered liberal enough, for a footnote is added to the officer's table saying that 'a cash payment of two shillings and sixpence a week is also made to each resident officer and servant.' If the pauper has ample food, why does the officer have more? And if the officer has not too much, can the pauper be properly fed on less than half the amount?"

But it is not alone the Ghetto-dweller, the prisoner, and the pauper that starve. Hodge, of the country, does not know what it is always to have a full belly. In truth, it is his empty belly which has driven him to the city in such great numbers. Let us investigate the way of living of a labourer from a parish in the Bradfield Poor Law Union, Berks. Supposing him to have two children, steady work, a rent-free cottage, and an average weekly wage of thirteen shillings, which is equivalent to \$3.25, then here is his weekly budget:-

s. d.

Bread (5 quarterns)	1	10
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Flour (0.5 gallon)	0	4
Tea (0.25 lb.)	0	6
Butter (1 lb.)	1	3
Lard (1 lb.)	0	6
Sugar (6 lb.)	1	0
Bacon or other meat (about 0.25 lb.)	2	8
Cheese (1 lb.)	0	8
Milk (half-tin condensed)	0	3.25
Coal	1	6
Beer	none	
Tobacco	none	
Insurance ("Prudential")	0	3
Labourers' Union	0	1
Wood, tools, dispensary, &c.	0	6
Insurance ("Foresters") and margin	1	1.75
for clothes		
Total	13	0

The guardians of the workhouse in the above Union pride themselves on their rigid economy. It costs per pauper per week:-

	s.	d.
Men	6	1.5
Women	5	6.5
Children	5	1.25

If the labourer whose budget has been described should quit his toil and go into the workhouse, he would cost the guardians for

s. d.

Himself 6 1.5

Wife 5 6.5

Two children 10 2.5

Total 21 10.5

Or roughly, \$5.46

It would require more than a guinea for the workhouse to care for him and his family, which he, somehow, manages to do on thirteen shillings. And in addition, it is an understood fact that it is cheaper to cater for a large number of people--buying, cooking, and serving wholesale--than it is to cater for a small number of people, say a family.

Nevertheless, at the time this budget was compiled, there was in that parish another family, not of four, but eleven persons, who had to live on an income, not of thirteen shillings, but of twelve shillings per week (eleven shillings in winter), and which had, not a rent-free cottage, but a cottage for which it paid three shillings per week.

This must be understood, and understood clearly: Whatever is true of London in the way of poverty and degradation, is true of all England. While Paris is not by any means France, the city of London is England. The frightful conditions which mark London an inferno likewise mark the

United Kingdom an inferno. The argument that the decentralisation of London would ameliorate conditions is a vain thing and false. If the 6,000,000 people of London were separated into one hundred cities each with a population of 60,000, misery would be decentralised but not diminished. The sum of it would remain as large.

In this instance, Mr. B. S. Rowntree, by an exhaustive analysis, has proved for the country town what Mr. Charles Booth has proved for the metropolis, that fully one-fourth of the dwellers are condemned to a poverty which destroys them physically and spiritually; that fully one-fourth of the dwellers do not have enough to eat, are inadequately clothed, sheltered, and warmed in a rigorous climate, and are doomed to a moral degeneracy which puts them lower than the savage in cleanliness and decency.

After listening to the wail of an old Irish peasant in Kerry, Robert Blatchford asked him what he wanted. "The old man leaned upon his spade and looked out across the black peat fields at the lowering skies. 'What is it that I'm wantun?' he said; then in a deep plaintive tone he continued, more to himself than to me, 'All our brave bhoys and dear gurrils is away an' over the says, an' the agent has taken the pig off me, an' the wet has spiled the praties, an' I'm an owld man, an' I want the Day av Judgment.'"

The Day of Judgment! More than he want it. From all the land rises the hunger wail, from Ghetto and countryside, from prison and casual ward,

from asylum and workhouse--the cry of the people who have not enough to eat. Millions of people, men, women, children, little babes, the blind, the deaf, the halt, the sick, vagabonds and toilers, prisoners and paupers, the people of Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales, who have not enough to eat. And this, in face of the fact that five men can produce bread for a thousand; that one workman can produce cotton cloth for 250 people, woollens for 300, and boots and shoes for 1000. It would seem that 40,000,000 people are keeping a big house, and that they are keeping it badly. The income is all right, but there is something criminally wrong with the management. And who dares to say that it is not criminally mismanaged, this big house, when five men can produce bread for a thousand, and yet millions have not enough to eat?