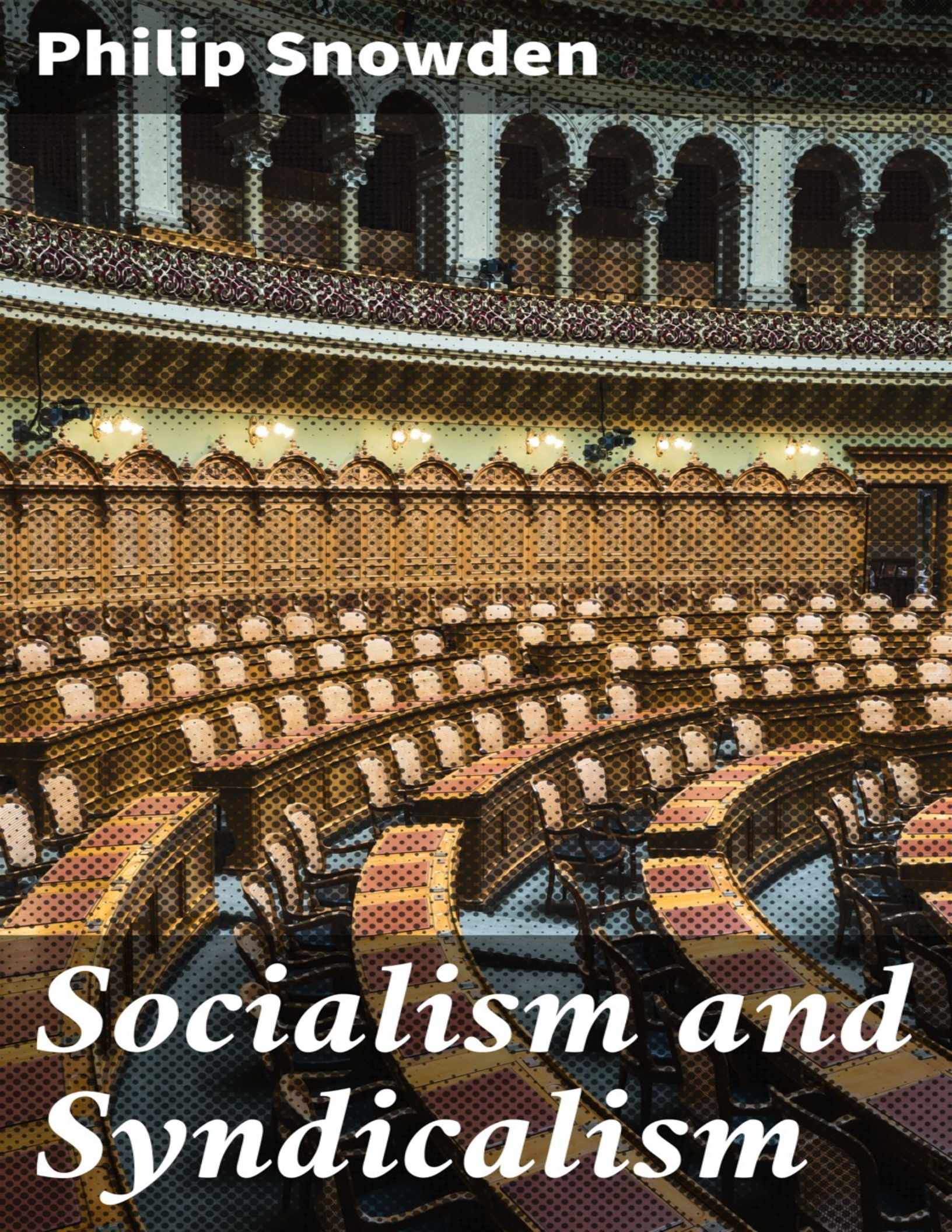
Philip Snowden



Socialism and Syndicalism

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CHAPTER I
THE SOCIAL PROBLEM AND THE SOCIAL CONSCIENCE

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The Social Condition of the People is the dominating question of the age. In all the industrial countries of the world the problems of labour and capital, of poverty and wealth, and of the innumerable issues which arise out of the consideration of these subjects, are forcing themselves upon the attention of statesmen, moralists, religious teachers, and all who have any regard for their own interests or for the welfare of their fellows. In every Parliamentary country the Labour Question is constantly forcing itself upon the attention of the Legislature, and in an ever increasing measure the time of statesmen and politicians is devoted to dealing with industrial and social questions. Political parties compete with each other in offering proposals for solving the problem of poverty, and in all Parliamentary countries the election issues are practically confined to questions of industrial reform and social reorganisation.

There have been times of great social unrest in the past, but never before has there been such universal attention given to the question of social reform, and never before has there been such widespread discontent with undesirable and undeserved conditions of poverty. A feature which distinguishes the unrest of the present time from former periods of disaffection is the extent to which the working-

classes are assisted by innumerable organisations, composed largely of cultured and leisured people, formed for the purpose of scientific inquiry into the various aspects of the Social Problem. The Universities have been caught in the movement of the age, and both in their corporate capacity, and to a greater extent by the voluntary association of individual members, are making invaluable contributions to the general stock of knowledge upon economic and social questions. The Churches of all denominations have largely abandoned the former attitude of ‘other worldliness,’ and are realising that if that institution is to justify its existence, and to command the support of the democracy, it will have to concern itself with the social condition of the people, and will have to actively advocate such reforms in our industrial and social life as will permit men and women to develop their physical and moral faculties.

The revolt against the existence of degrading poverty and against the sordidness and ugliness of life is by no means confined to those who accept one explanation of the causes of the existing state of things. There are in all the advanced countries innumerable organisations and societies for reform, many of which exist to deal with one only of the many social evils, and even among such societies there are often different organisations holding widely differing views as to the nature of and the remedy for that particular evil. Though there is still a great lack of agreement as to the real character of the Social Problem, and an unfortunate absence of unity of action in dealing with it, it is in a measure satisfactory, and in a large measure hopeful, that

the consciences of so many men and women of all classes are impressed by the need of reform in some direction, and are ready and anxious to devote themselves to such work. But there are abundant signs that, as a result of the experience gained in their work, those who have been long engaged in some reform movement of a limited or restricted nature, are rapidly beginning to see the essential unity of all social questions, and the futility of forcing reform in one direction without a corresponding advance of all the parts of the social mechanism. In another respect, too, a change has come over the methods of the sectional and the general social reformer; he has begun to see the need for finding out causes, instead of spending his time and energy in dealing with results. The increasing recognition of the unity of the Social Problem, to which reference has just been made, is illustrated by the change of attitude and method which has come over the greatest of the sectional reform movements in recent years, namely the Trade Unions, the Co-operators, and the Temperance Party. In none of these movements to-day is the claim made that it alone is capable of solving the problem of poverty, and by the triumph of its principles making any other reforms of an industrial and social character unnecessary. But there was a time when the trade unionist believed that the voluntary association of the workers in trade unions could give to labour such a power as could enforce a full remuneration for labour, and could secure all that was desired in the way of hours and conditions. But no intelligent trade unionist thinks that now; and the knowledge of the limitation of the power of voluntary organisation has made the intelligent trade

unionist into a reformer of a far more comprehensive sort. The co-operator, too, has been forced by the facts of experience to recognise that there is a limit to the power of voluntary co-operation, and that knowledge has forced him to seek the application of his principles in wider and less restricted fields. Once the whole question of Poverty was explained by the temperance advocates by the one word Drink; but without in any way weakening the strength of the temperance case, its advocates now realise that the problem of poverty is not capable of such a simple explanation, nor can it be solved by the simple expedient of universal abstinence from liquor.

The last quarter of a century has seen an extraordinary change in the character of reform work. This change is due to the better understanding of the causes of the evils it is sought to ameliorate or remove. Reform movements formerly dealt with the individual as a unit, and sought to destroy the evil by changing the individual. Poverty itself was believed to be largely the result of individual thriftlessness, and the idea was very generally held that by making the best of his opportunities every man might raise himself into a position of reasonable comfort. With such an idea dominating, all reform movements naturally were aimed at individual reformation, and such collective effort as was encouraged was advocated as a means of ‘self’ help, and not for social advancement. The idea that the main cause of poverty is in economic and social law, which more or less definitely is now held by all reformers, is largely the development of the last generation, so far as those who do not definitely accept the Socialist creed are concerned. This

change of idea is of the utmost importance. It is a revolution. Its possibilities are tremendous. It is a preparation of the community to do the work which economic and social development is fast ripening for the sickle.

Apart from the definite Socialist movement there is a great Social Movement actively operating in all the great industrial nations, and it presents in all countries features of the same character. It is stirring every class. It is revivifying old enthusiasms. It is changing old faiths. It is transforming the character of politics and political life, giving to them new aims and new ideas. A revived conception of the solidarity of society is taking possession of the minds of men. The impelling force of this new movement is ethical; but the guiding and restraining control is a knowledge that the industrial system is at fault, and that the shameful contrasts of wealth and poverty which obtrude themselves from every point are due to causes which it is in man's power to change, and which the awakened social conscience of a civilised nation will attack. This new spirit has not yet to any great extent driven men to abandon old political parties and old religious bodies, but it is working a revolution from within parties and societies already existing. But as yet no party, no creed, no organisation, confines or expresses the breadth and volume and power of this world-wide movement. The first effect of this new consciousness of individual responsibility for the health and happiness of the race is to create a thirst for knowledge, to stimulate the inquiring mind, to collect and study social facts. To aid this desire for knowledge new theories and new proposals are

advanced, and a thousand organisations are ready to give their help. All this leads to much confusion, to much overlapping, to much waste of effort; but out of the welter and confusion of it all there is gradually being evolved a clearer conception of the true nature of the problem, the various pieces are being sorted from the heap of accumulated knowledge which are needed to form a part of the mechanism of a complete and orderly social system.

The present-day Socialist differs from the great bulk of earnest men and women who are engaged in political and social work only in the definiteness of his conviction of the nature of the Social Problem, and in the definiteness of his views as to the means which must be adopted to gain the end which he desires, which is an object which is desired by uncounted millions who have not yet formed definite conclusions. Sympathy with the suffering of the poor, and a desire to see the establishment of a social order in which there shall be neither rich nor poor, are not the monopoly of conscious Socialists. Such sympathy and desire come not from an intellectual knowledge of economic laws or of the historical development of social classes, but from something deeper and more universal,—from that touch of nature which makes the whole world kin. But unless that sympathy and desire to advance the well-being of the race are directed by knowledge they may lead to results as bad in their effects as actions which are committed deliberately from base and selfish motives.

Though the vast mass of reforming zeal which is still outside the definite Socialist movement is generally conscious in a way that it is the industrial system which is

wrong, unlike the Socialist it has no scientific justification for its vague opinion, nor any clear idea of how to set to work in an effective way to bring about the desired change. In this vast world-movement for social betterment there stands forth one section which has been given a clearer vision of the task before humanity, and that is the men and women, a great and growing army in all lands, who have realised that Socialism, based upon the impregnable rock of history, economy, and morality, can alone explain the causes of existing industrial and social evils, and alone submits a coherent, intelligent, scientific, and practical scheme of change.

No apology needs to be made in asking for a sympathetic consideration of the claims of Socialism. The great mass of unformed opinion which is impressed by the horror of the existing state of things, that quickened social consciousness which is creating a desire for action in uncounted millions, is ready to welcome any contribution, however humble, which may throw some light upon the darkness in which their aspirations are now enveloped. A movement like Socialism, which numbers among its adherents and apostles many of the greatest scientists, economists, divines, poets, painters, writers, sociologists, and statesmen, is entitled to claim the attention and consideration of all who profess any regard for the welfare of humanity. Though Socialism is primarily the cause of the working-class it is not in its aim and object a class movement. It seeks the overthrow of classes, and the establishment of a society in which there shall be one class, with full and equal opportunities for individual effort and for the enjoyment of a rational and cultured human life.

Socialism is as much the cause of the rich man, who, if he has any conscience, cannot enjoy his riches in the knowledge of the misery of the men and women and children around him, as it is the cause of the poor widow struggling in the labour market to feed her fatherless children. It is to the cultured and leisured class that Socialism makes, perhaps, its strongest appeal, for they have been given exceptional opportunities of being of service to their generation. The establishment of Socialism, as we hope to show, will offer to that class richer opportunities of service and enjoyment than are possible under a system where one man’s pleasure is obtained by the suffering of others, and where wealth, honours, and social position are too often not the reward of industry or of virtue, but are obtained by the tyrannical and oppressive exploitation of one’s fellows.

CHAPTER II
THE FACTS AND FIGURES OF THE PROBLEM

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Not the least valuable of the work which Socialists have done has been to collect and to publish the real facts in regard to the social condition of the people. There has been much truth in the past in the old saying that one half the world knew not how the other half lived. But the facts and figures which have been made public by Socialist investigators and statisticians have left little excuse for the person who reads remaining in ignorance of the facts of the actual lives of the people and of the conditions of their work. Any system must be judged by its results. Socialists demand the abolition of landlordism and capitalism, not because these institutions are inherently wrong, but because of the industrial and social results for which they are responsible. If under a system of private landowning and private capitalism, the condition of every individual in the community was all that could be desired, there would be no argument for a change of the system. The first step then, in building up the case for Socialism is to prove that the existing state of things is unfair and unjust by an appeal to the actual facts of the situation. The first thing to do is to prove the existence of a state of things in regard to the distribution of wealth and the prevalence of poverty which no honest or fair-minded person can defend as having any right to exist in a civilised community. Having proved that

the widest disparity prevails in the distribution of wealth, and that as a result millions of our population are underfed, underclothed, stunted in body and in mind, and that vice, immorality, drunkenness, insanity, and unutterable misery and suffering are the direct results of this unequal distribution of wealth, it will be necessary to consider if any real and permanent reform can be brought about without a radical change in our industrial system. If we come to the conclusion that it is hopeless to expect a real change without what some Socialists call a Social Revolution, we shall require to prove that the evils of the present system are due to the private ownership of land and industrial capital, and that the substitution of that system by one in which land and capital shall be owned and controlled collectively is essential in order to bring about the abolition of poverty, and the establishment of equality of opportunity for all.

The late Sir Robert Giffen once said, ‘No one can contemplate the social condition of our people without wishing for something like a revolution for the better.’ Socialists are constantly impressing the facts of the condition of the people upon the nation in order to create that desire for a revolution. In the opening chapter of his *Progress and Poverty*, the late Henry George asks what a scientist of the eighteenth century would have imagined would be the result of the scientific and mechanical discoveries and inventions which we know to-day, if he could have foreseen them in his imagination. If he had known that within the next century the productive power of labour was going to be increased twenty, fifty, a hundred

fold, he would have come to no other conclusion than that this increased power to produce the necessaries of life would result in abolishing all poverty, and in lightening men's toil almost to the extent of making their lives a perpetual holiday from manual work. But writing fifty years after the harnessing of steam power to new machinery, John Stuart Mill said it was doubtful if all our labour-saving machinery had lightened the day's toil of a single individual. This statement may put the experience of that fifty years in an exaggerated form, but there is considerable substance of truth in his words. The machine age has not brought the abolition of poverty—it has not materially shortened the hours or lightened the labour of the masses. We have probably a larger number of people in hopeless poverty to-day—though the percentage of the whole population may be less—than there has been at any previous period of our industrial history. The advantages which have been brought by these scientific discoveries and mechanical inventions have not gone to the masses of the people, but have been appropriated by a small section of the nation, and have made them rich beyond the dreams of an Arabian romance.

The poverty of the poor is certainly not due to an insufficiency of wealth in the country. It does not spring from the niggardliness of nature. It does not arise from the over-population of the world, for the increase of wealth is growing faster than the increase of population. The total value in pounds of the wealth produced, and of the services rendered annually in the United Kingdom is not actually known, but the investigations of a number of eminent economists and statisticians have given us figures which

may be taken as approximately correct. In his book, *National Progress in Wealth and Trade*, Professor Bowley, Teacher of Statistics, University of London, says that the estimate of the National Income of the United Kingdom as being £1,600,000,000 in 1891 has never been seriously questioned. From that basis he estimated that the total in 1903 would be very little short of £2,000,000,000 (two thousand millions). Following the method adopted by Professor Bowley of estimating the increase from the increase in population and the amount of income observed by the Inland Revenue Commissioners, it brings out the conclusion that in 1911 the total National Income would be not less than £2,250,000,000. Sir Robert Giffen's estimate is somewhat less than that of Professor Bowley, he estimating the total at £1,750,000,000 in 1903. Mr L. G. Chiozza Money has made an estimate for the year 1907 which puts the total at £1,710,000,000. This is obviously a very low estimate, and is not supported by any other statistician. The material for estimating the capital value of the wealth of the United Kingdom is insufficient to arrive at a close computation. It is generally taken as being about £15,000,000,000 (fifteen thousand millions). The addition to the capital wealth of the United Kingdom is at the rate of £200,000,000 a year.[1]

The question now arises as to how this huge National Income and this stupendous volume of national wealth is divided among the population. The Inland Revenue Commissioners are able to account for £1,045,000,000. of the National Income. That is the gross total of the income which came under their observation in 1911. In his evidence

before the Dilke Committee on Income Tax, the Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue estimated the number of individuals who came within the Income Tax limit at 1,100,000. This, with their families, represents a population of about 5,000,000. That brings out the fact that one-ninth of the population enjoy one-half of the National Income. The incomes of the class who compose the one-ninth vary enormously, the great bulk of the number having incomes below £700 a year. Out of the 1,100,000 persons assessed to Income Tax, 750,000 belong to this class.[2] On the other hand it was estimated[3] that those with individual incomes of over £5000 a year absorbed £200,000,000 of the National Income. The number of such is about 11,000.

We have reliable statistics as to the incomes of that great body of the labouring class, which, with their families, number forty millions of the population of the United Kingdom. In a lecture delivered in May, 1911, Professor Bowley estimated that about 8,000,000 men are employed in regular occupations in the United Kingdom, and that their full weekly wages when in ordinary work were as follows: 4 per cent. under 15s.; 8 per cent. between 15s. and 20s.; 20 per cent. between 20s. and 25s.; 21 per cent. between 25s. and 30s.; 21 per cent. between 30s. and 35s.; 13 per cent. between 35s. and 40s.; 7 per cent. between 40s. and 45s.; and 6 per cent. over 45s. Thirty-two per cent. of the number earn, according to this estimate, less than 25s. a week. But an examination of the Board of Trade Returns on Wages shows conclusively that Professor Bowley has largely over-estimated the number of better paid workmen. In the cotton trade, 40·4 per cent. of the adult men earn less than 25s. a

week. In the woollen trade, 67·4 per cent. of the men earn below 30s. a week. In the linen trade, 44·4 per cent. of the men earn less than 20s. a week. Taking all the textile trades of the United Kingdom, the actual earnings of the adult men in September, 1906, show that 48·3 per cent, earned below 25s. a week. Of bricklayers' labourers, 55·9 per cent. are paid under 25s. a week; of masons' labourers, 67·6 per cent, under 25s.; and builders' labourers below that figure are 51·7 per cent. of the whole class.[4] The wages of women employed in some of the largest and most profitable trades are very low. In the textile trades 17·7 per cent. of the adult women are paid less than 8s. a week, and 55·7 per cent. earn below 15s. a week.

The ownership of the capital wealth of the United Kingdom is distributed in a similar proportion between the several classes as the National Income is distributed. In 1910 there were 39,429 estates for probate or administration of a net value exceeding £100. The total net value of these 39,429 estates was £283,662,000. Only one person in sixteen who died left property worth over £100. But of the 39,429 persons who left property in 1910, 17,767 left less than £1000 each. The total net value of these estates amounted to just over £12,000,000, that is to say that the other half of this 39,429 left £270,000,000. The great bulk of the wealth left at death is owned by a small percentage of those who leave any property at all. In 1910 there were 1963 persons died and left between £10,000 and £20,000, but only 434 whose estates were valued at between £20,000 and £25,000. The number of people who left over £100,000 was only 288; and there were five

millionaires' estates, the total value of which was £24,000,000—that is to say at that one end, five persons left twice as much as the 17,767 at the other end. Taking all the persons who died in that year, over 700,000, we find that one of these five millionaires left more wealth than 700,000 others put together.

This unequal division of income and wealth naturally results in wide social inequalities, and in the case of the rich, to the expenditure of large sums upon luxury and vice, and in the case of the poor, to all the misery and suffering which are invariably associated with poverty. The insufficiency of the husband's income leads to the necessary employment of married women in factories with all the physical injuries which such labour brings, when accompanied by the additional burden of household duties and child rearing. The insufficient wages of the father causes the children to be taken away from school before they have received an education equipping them for industrial life or civic duties. The children of the working-classes when born, have not one-half the chance of surviving that the children of the well-to-do have. The infantile death-rate in the working-class quarters of an industrial town is from one and a half to two and a half times that of the infantile death-rate in the quarters of the richer classes. Figures supplied by Dr Dukes to the Commission on Physical Training (Scotland), show that when fully grown the children of the working-classes are about 2½ inches shorter and 16 pounds lighter, on the average, than the children of the well-to-do. The evidence given before the Committee on Physical Deterioration (England), in 1904

revealed an appalling state of physical condition among the working-classes, due to insufficiency of nourishing food, bad housing, and ignorance,—all the direct outcome of poverty. In the five years 1904-8, no less than 107,000 recruits for the Army were rejected as being unfit.

The liability to accident and premature death is far greater among the poor than among the rich. The number of fatal industrial accidents in the United Kingdom from January, 1910, to June, 1912, was 11,566. The poverty of the workers drives them into overcrowded and insanitary tenements, where disease and death find their natural prey. Three great and wealthy towns in the North of England (Newcastle, Gateshead, and Sunderland), had at the Census of 1901 over 30 per cent. of the population living in a state of overcrowding. The Scottish towns were in a much worse condition. In Glasgow, 54 per cent. of the population were living more than two persons to one room, and in Dundee 49 per cent. In the great and wealthy city of Glasgow, 16·2 per cent. of the whole population were living in one-roomed tenements. Dr Leslie Mackenzie has published the results of his examination of children from these one-roomed tenements in Glasgow. He examined 72,857 children, and discovered that the average height of a boy from a one-roomed tenement was 4·7 inches below that of a boy coming from a four-roomed tenement. Investigations made by the Medical Officer of Liverpool have produced results of a similar character, showing how the poverty of the parents and the unwholesome conditions under which the children are reared rob them of height and weight and general physical development.

The insufficient incomes of the working-class are not assured to them in return for a willingness to work. There is always the prospect of unemployment before the eyes of the working man. Over a number of years, 5 per cent. of the organised workers are on the average unemployed. The lowest percentage of unemployment for the United Kingdom is about 2·5. When this unusual figure is reached it means, spread over the whole working population of fourteen millions, an unemployed army of 350,000 persons. The privation which is involved in even a short period of unemployment to a family which is never in receipt of an income more than enough to meet the daily necessities, cannot be imagined by those who have never had such a painful experience. In addition to the liability to unemployment, there is the risk of disablement, as a result of which the workman and his family are thrown upon the hated Poor Law system. Over a period of 15 years up to the end of 1911, the average number of persons always in receipt of Poor Law relief has been over a million. The Old Age Pensions Act has proved that with very few exceptions the workers who pass the age of 70 are without means of support, having been unable by a long life of useful labour to save enough to keep them in the bare necessaries of life when no longer able to work. It was stated in the Report of the Royal Commission on the Aged Poor, that practically one-half of the workers who reach the age of 65 were dependent upon the Poor Law; and, as the experience of the Old Age Pensions Act has shown, of the rest, the great proportion were maintained by the self-denial of children and friends little better off than themselves.

The poverty and hardship of the life of the working-classes lead them into crime, and drive them to drink and to suicide, and send them to insane asylums. In the year 1909 there were 735,604 persons apprehended and prosecuted in England and Wales for crimes of all descriptions. There were over 50,000 cases of larceny, and 12,000 cases of burglary, housebreaking, and shopbreaking. There has been in recent years a very notable increase in the number of serious crimes against property. The number of cases of suicide is increasing at an alarming rate. The increasing severity of the struggle to make a living is largely responsible for this, and for the increase in the number of insane. In 1891, the number of suicides was 2459; in 1901, it was 3106; and in 1911, it had risen to 3544. In the last ten years there has been an increase of 22·5 per cent. in the number of persons detained in lunatic asylums. In their Report for 1907, the Commissioners of Lunacy say 2 per cent. of the increase was due to ‘privation,’ and 19·3 per cent. to ‘mental stress.’ Below the ordinary working-class whose condition of life is one of unceasing struggle to obtain the bare necessaries of life, and a struggle which in such a large proportion of cases does not avail to avert actual privation, there is a submerged class of homeless, vagrant, unemployable, criminal persons, who are the refuse heap of our social system,—the products of a system which makes these beings at one end as the price of millionaires at the other. The London County Council has undertaken five censuses of London’s homeless poor, and on the last occasion in 1910, on a cold and bitter night in February, there were found 2700 men and women and children crouched on staircases,