

# Why a Poor Man or Child Hasn't a Fair Chance

By C. W. SALEEBY, M.D.

**BEGIN** with the physique of the poor, for reasons which, as I see them, are abundantly adequate. There is no overweening human interest in fine animals as such. They are to be seen any day in the big cat house of the Gardens of the Zoological Society. Anyone inclined to read more than a vaguely symbolic meaning in the giant children of Mr. Wells' "Broomford" may be recommended to contemplate the exploits of Japan.

Our interest in the physique of the poor depends upon the fact that the physical qualities are the root qualities in which all others, mental and moral, inhere, and without which all others must necessarily—even if they exist—run an abbreviated and crippled career. Even if it be possible, on occasion, to find the mens sana without the corpus sanum, the output of that mind must inevitably be adversely affected in quantity, if not in quality.

Let us, then, consider the initial fact, which there is certainly no need to labour, that the poor of our great cities are very far from being even fine animals, and let us first observe an obvious fallacy, which may vitiate the interpretation of this, as of so many other statistical facts. Before we inquire into the conditions which determine the fact that the poor are physically inferior, let us fully recognise that a certain, and, probably by no means small percentage are poor because they were not fine animals in the first place.

Physically inferior by reason of causes which will later be considered, they are unfit to do an adequate amount of work, or to do that inadequate amount adequately well. The point is obvious enough, but it must not be ignored—for the significance and utility of hospitals and dispensaries in relation to poverty are closely bound up with it. We must recognise the existence of a vicious circle. The man who is imperfect as a physical machine, whether by reason of inherited constitution or bad habits or disease, or any combination of these, is compelled, being inefficient, to live under conditions which aggravate his inefficiency. But here, very often, the hospital may intervene.

But having duly considered this point, we must recognise that the wretched physical state of the great majority of slum-dwellers is produced by the conditions under which they live.

The poor of our great cities live under conditions which outrage every known law of common sense and of science. From the first lachrymose breath of their entry into the abominable environment which their day and generation have provided for them to that last imperfect respiration with which they expire, many of them never breathe a cubic inch of un-polluted air. Solid impurities in air—sterile dust—are bad enough; far worse are the living bacteria, every known condition for the full vitality of which is rigorously complied with in the dwellings of the poor; far worse, also, are the gaseous impurities exhaled from the lungs and skin of all animals, human or other. The reader knows all this as well as I do.

What I ask is this: Are the elementary facts as to the significance of air hammered daily, or even annually, into the head of every child that attends a public school? If not, in the name of common sense, common decency, and our common humanity, why not?

If there is any antidote to filthy air it is the light of day, the sunlight which is vital to man, lethal to his most deadly foes. The reader needs no telling that in the slums dirty air does its dirty work in darkness. But of what use is it to preach about this in a city where men think fog funny?

In naming, first, bad, and second, lack of sunlight, I have indicated the essential causes of which overcrowding is only a proximate expression. The reader knows, of course, that, in general, curves of death-rate and of overcrowding coincide. But overcrowding is not an evil

as such; man's society, indeed, is essential to man's health; overcrowding is an evil because it entails bad air and lack of sunlight.

The poor are destroyed and maimed directly by foul air and darkness; but these also destroy and maim indirectly by the microbes which they breed. With the curves of general death-rate and of overcrowding, the curve of tuberculosis closely corresponds. The influence of the tubercle bacillus upon the physique of the poor would be hard to over-estimate. It is not merely that this microscopic plant kills some one in seven of all who die upon the earth, nor that its ravages are far greater among the poorer than the more fortunate classes.

Type of a protean disease, tuberculosis often disables where it does not kill. In the form of lupus it disfigures a girl's face and makes it impossible for her to get work; as chronic disease of the hip or elbow or knee, it incapacitates thousands; yet these and many other forms of tuberculosis are as nothing compared with its ravages in the form of consumption, from which one person dies in London alone every three quarters of an hour, day and night, year in, year out—



"The poor are destroyed and maimed directly by foul air and darkness."

each such death terminating a period of, on the average, some four years' incapacity.

Yet the public has still to learn that the chief function of sanatoria in a modern state is not the cure of consumption, but the prevention of it, by the segregation of patients in the most infectious stages of the disease.

For all these evils—and be it remembered that the possession of a very small income is not an evil in itself—there are known and adequate remedies. The tuberculosis death-rate has been steadily falling for many years past. Typhus fever, once familiar, and always to be seen in Whitechapel, has been banished therefrom by improved sanitation.

A former medical officer of health for that district told me, on my last visit, that he had not seen a case for some years, whereas a quarter of a century ago he could at any time have shown me two or three cases within five minutes' walk of his house. Of tuberculosis, His Majesty the King, when presiding over a meeting of the National Association for its prevention, has said: "If preventable, why not prevented?" Tuberculosis, one of the fruits of overcrowding, is being prevented; but with 12,000 deaths a year in London alone, can we say that His Majesty's question as to the prevention of the disease has yet been creditably answered?

No one can produce any satisfactory evidence to show that the national physique is declining, save in so far as overcrowding and the other evils of cities

are increasing. But we know that 77 per cent of our population now lives in cities, whereas 51 per cent was the figure 50 years ago. The wretched physique of the poor—i.e., of the majority among city dwellers—whether due to disease or to merely degrading conditions, is a product of the present conditions of city life.

The cry, "Back to the land," well meaning as it is, must be criticised in the light of sociological science. Not only is the transition from agriculture to manufacture a natural evolution, but there is a great distinction as to the demand for the two. A given population needs only a finite quantity of food; but its demand for products of manufacture is obviously indefinite. The city, therefore—the maker of poverty—is an inevitable fact.

## The Mystery of a Lightning Calculator.

The skill of certain rapid calculators has been a subject of wonder even for scientists. Through what mental mechanism do such extraordinary persons succeed in repeating from those armies of figures and make in a few seconds by some mysterious power calculations which would take any other person a great deal of time and serious attention?

One lightning calculator is now in Paris. She is a young Greek, Mlle. Urenie Diamanti, and she has been examined carefully in scientific circles. M. Manouvrier, the eminent professor at the School of Anthropology, has tried to

visually, diagonally, backwards, upwards, etc. She adds the five rows together, makes subtractions, multiplications, squares any of the figures, etc.

M. Manouvrier, after long observations, has found that the series of figures are learned by heart. But here we come to the peculiarities which characterize the "visual" type of memory. As soon as they are learnt the figures appear to this young lady as written on a kind of imaginary tableau.

That tableau is made with the help of an unvarying scheme, and consists in the visual representation of the series of figures, forming a frame round an open space in which are projected all the figures of immediate interest, and in which, as it were, the various operations are made.

Mlle. Diamanti "saw" this tableau for the first time when she was fifteen. It has never altered since.

"Someone tells me a figure, or when I think one," she declared to M. Manouvrier, "I see it in the frame of the tableau. But as soon as I have to use it, it detaches itself and places itself in the centre."

She sees that tableau two or three steps before her, and it is of the size of the average blackboard.

M. Manouvrier considers that this phenomenon, which has so often puzzled science, is derived from a great intensity of visualisation, helped by a retentive memory.

"Any intelligent person, endowed with a good memory of the eye," says M. Manouvrier, "could become, after a few months of training, a virtuoso of mental calculation."

One of the leading comedians of the Frankfurt Theatre in Germany went to the director and asked for an advance on his week's salary. The books showed that the whole amount had already been drawn, and the director said "No." "Very good," said the actor; "then I shall refuse to go on to-night." The director saw that it was dangerously near curtain time, and reluctantly gave the actor the amount asked for, but said: "Remember, sir, this is nothing short of extortion, and a cowardly one at that." "Not at all, Herr Director," said the actor, stuffing the money in his pocket, "my name is not on the bill for to-night, anyway."



**THE NACANT-HOBSON CAR**  
is built of the finest material combining lightness consistent with strength, embracing speed and silence, a car that has produced more favourable comment than any other.



**THE HOBSON-POGNON PLUG**  
which has now obtained a world-wide reputation, and commands the largest sale of any sparking plug, is used by the leading motor-car manufacturers, and is guaranteed for one year.



**THE JENATZY TYRE**  
Manufactured by Monsieur Jenatzy the world-famous racer, is the outcome of practical experience combined with his knowledge as an expert in rubber.

Correspondence Invited.  
No. 25, WOODCOCK STREET,  
25, Vauxhall Bridge Road, LONDON, E.C.4.