

Annotations.

THE POVERTY LINE.

The most important book dealing with poverty which has appeared since Mr. Charles Booth's classic on "Life and Labour of the People in London," is that by Mr. Seebohm Rowntree, which is an exhaustive statistical analysis of the working class homes—those homes, that is to say, in which a servant is not kept—of the city of York. There are in York some 11,560 working class families, and of these all but about 5 per cent. have supplied full particulars as to their income, rent, size of family, etc. The result of these investigations is to prove that 27.84 per cent. of the whole population were living in absolute want and squalor, an estimate which is much the same as that of 30 per cent. which Mr. Booth gives for London.

By a process of exhaustion Mr. Rowntree has arrived at what may be termed the "poverty line." He enquires upon how little a family can live with good management and rigid economy, including only necessary expenditure on rent, clothing, and food, and allowing nothing for drink, tobacco, tram fares, holidays, newspapers, etc. In regard to diet, Mr. Rowntree takes that prescribed for workhouses by the Local Government Board, from which he eliminates meat altogether to diminish the cost, so that it consists mainly of bread, porridge, bacon, pease, cheese, treacle, margarine and tea. On this minimum, with clever management, he calculates that it costs 3s. 3d. a week to feed a man, 2s. 9d. a woman, and 2s. 3d. an average child. With regard to clothing, he finds that 26s. a year, or 6d. a week, will clothe a man or woman so as to keep in health without being absolutely disreputable, and 5d. a week a child. He calculates 1s. 10d. per week per family for fuel, and 2d. a head for sundries. He thus arrives at the following necessary scale of weekly expenditure:

- For one man or woman, 7s.
- For a childless married couple, 11s. 8d.
- For a married couple with one child, 14s. 6d.
- For a married couple with two children, 18s. 10d.
- For a married couple with three children, 21. 8d.
- For a married couple with four children, 26s.

Out of 11,560 working class families in York, no fewer than 1,465 families live below

the "poverty line" thus defined. Can we wonder that the "cry of the poor" from time to time makes itself heard in insistent, if not always wise, language?

CHILD LABOUR.

Under the chairmanship of Mr. H. H. S. Cunynghame, an exhaustive enquiry was held early in the year by the Home Office and Education Department Committee respecting the employment of children for wages during school hours in cases which do not come under any existing Acts of Parliament and the report of this Committee has now been issued. Attention was first drawn by the late Mrs. Hogg to the fact that hundreds of thousands of children under eleven and twelve years of age are protected neither by the Factory Acts nor by the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act, and are worked for appallingly long hours.

The investigations of the Committee prove that the lowest number of children thus employed is 300,000, and that nearly half of these have to work for twenty hours a week in addition to their school hours, while in many instances the hours are forty-three, fifty-two, and even seventy-three a week. The worst cases of overworking little girls were found in small laundries exempt from the Factory Acts, while in the case of boys the worst form of shop work was that of the lather-boys in barbers' shops who, as a rule, work five hours every evening after school, fifteen hours on Saturday, and often six or eight on Sunday.

While it will be realised that children who work for these long hours after school, and whose bodies are often insufficiently nourished, must come to their lessons with a physical craving for rest, and with brains too tired to assimilate knowledge, yet the Committee reject the idea of prohibiting child labour entirely. They find that it is better from the mental, moral, and physical point of view that children should be at work for a few hours a day, but recommend that the work should be regulated by the county and borough councils except in the case of work in the children's own homes, and that in the case of street sellers the regulations should be enforced by means of a system of licensing. It is only just that helpless children should be protected by the State from over-work.

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