
Mankind in a Bad Way

by Eugene V. Debs

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Mr. Alfred Russell Wallace, in the *Fortnightly Review*, refers to his latest conversation with Darwin, when the eminent naturalist “expressed himself gloomily on the future of humanity, on the ground that in our modern civilization natural selection had no play, and the fittest did not survive. Those who succeed in the race for wealth are by no means the best or the most intelligent, and it is notorious that our population is more largely renewed in each generation from the lower than from the middle and upper classes.”¹ And an American writer is quoted as saying that “We behold the melancholy spectacle of the renewal of the great mass of society from the lowest classes, the highest classes to a great extent either not marrying or not having children. The floating population is always the scum, and yet the stream of life is largely renewed from this source. Such a state of affairs, sufficiently dangerous in any society, is simply suicidal in the democratic civilization of our day.”²

Such facts must indeed be very discouraging to philanthropists who deplore the fact that the highest classes do not marry extensively, or, if they do marry, prefer lap dogs to children; as a consequence, bearing children and obeying the command to “multiply and replenish the earth”³ is left to what is designated the “lowest classes,” the “scum,” and the “American writer” is quoted as regarding that sort of

¹ Alfred Russell Wallace, “Human Selection,” *Fortnightly Review*, new series vol. 48 (Sept. 1890), pp. 325-337. Quotation is from pg. 325.

² Hiram M. Stanley, “Our Civilization and the Marriage Problem,” *The Arena*, vol. 2, no. 1 (June 1890), pg. 97. Quoted by Wallace, “Human Selection,” pg. 325.

³ Reference to *Genesis*, chapter 1, verse 28: “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”

increase of population as “dangerous” anywhere, and “suicidal in the democratic civilization of the day.”

It is such pestiferous stuff, constantly published in the magazines, that poisons the fountains of healthy thought, than which nothing could be more vicious.

In England, where Mr. Darwin lived, and where Mr. Alfred Russell Wallace lives, there are “upper classes,” classes recognized by law. To say nothing of the Queen, who for a time was amazingly prolific, the “upper class” of England do not have many children. They care little for children, their preference being, as a general proposition, for horses and hounds. The middle class, to which Mr. Darwin belonged, and which includes merchants and bankers, traders, and “well-to-do people,” guard against a numerous progeny. As a consequence, the replenishment of population is left to the lower classes, but for whom England would be without either sailors or soldiers.

Mr. Wallace is of the opinion that the fact that what he calls the “lower class,” the “scum,” are addicted to having children, acts as a “check to progress,” and he regards the problem as serious because it has “attracted the attention of some of our most thoughtful writers, and has quite recently furnished the theme for a perfect flood of articles in our best periodicals.” Mr. Wallace, it will be noted, says “the floating population is always the scum,” and that the “stream of life is largely renewed from this source,” and the fact is attracting “the attention of some of the most thoughtful writers,” and that periodicals are flooded with articles upon the subject.

It may be well to remark just here, that whatever may be true in England, where Mr. Darwin discovered that God did not create man at all, nor anything else, for that matter, the “floating population” is the “scum,” but it is not true in the United States. Since Noah’s ark rested on Ararat, and man was permitted to touch dry land again,⁴ he has been a “floater,” necessarily so. Naturally a man is a nomad. When Columbus discovered America, Europeans began floating to the New World and have kept it up ever since, and after reaching its shores, they began floating across the continent. They are still floating westward. The floating population is still engaged in subduing the wilderness — in making farms, in building towns and cities, and in laying the foundations of empire states. They move on from place to place, and instead of being a “check to progress,” there would be no

⁴ Reference to *Genesis*, chapter 8, verse 4: “And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat.”

progress without them. And it so happens that these floaters have children and rear families. To designate them as the “scum” may suit the fancy of the “upper class” and the “middle class,” as such classes exist in Europe, but here in America they constitute the bone and sinew, the strength and glory of the country.

We do not doubt that there are those in the United States who regard themselves the “upper class” and the “middle class,” and that these two classes fancy there is a class below them, whom they, as readily as Mr. Wallace, call the “scum.”

We do not doubt that there are people in the United States who may be properly designated as the “scum” or the “dross.” They are to be found in all of the large cities, and are the class from which the New York Central draws its Pinkerton thugs when it wants to quiet dissatisfied railroad employees with bullets. We do not doubt that these people have children, too many perhaps, but when it is charged that the “stream of life is largely renewed from this source,” a monstrous slander is perpetrated, for which the facts furnish no excuse.

It is doubtless true that the working classes, men engaged in physical labor, rear the largest families — and it is well that such is the case — indeed it is shown that of the 13 million families in the United States, about 11 million belong to that class who must work for a living, and of these 11 million families it would be simply villainous to intimate that any considerable number should be classed as the “scum” of our population, or to state as a fact that they are “checking progress” by having children.

It has been held by men who were supposed to understand the subject that “education, hygiene and social refinement had a cumulative action, and would of themselves lead to a steady improvement of the civilized races,” and it is said by Mr. Wallace “that view rested on the belief that whatever improvement was effected in individuals was transmitted to their progeny, and that it would be thus possible to effect a continuous advance in physical, moral, and intellectual qualities without any selection of the better or elimination of the inferior types. But of late years grave doubts have been thrown on this view, owing chiefly to the researches of Galton and Weismann⁵ as to the fundamental causes to which heredity is due. The balance of opinion among physiologists now seems to be against the heredity of any qualities acquired by the individual after birth, in which case the

⁵ Reference to **Friedrich Leopold August Weismann** (1834-1914) and Francis Galton (1822-1911), two leading writers on heredity during the late 19th Century.

question we are discussing will be much simplified, since we shall be limited to some form of selection as the only possible means of improving the race." Just here comes into prominence the conclusion of scientists (?): "Education, hygiene, and social influences are no longer to be trusted," and "some form of selection" is to be introduced whereby a better type of children is to be produced. Manifestly, the "upper class" will not select from the "middle class" or the "scum," hence if an "improvement" is to come by "selection" the "scum" must select from the superior classes. The "scum" must look up and demand entrance to higher social circles.

Mr. Herbert Spencer, it is said, in a remarkable essay on the theory of population, comes to the rescue and shows by the "phenomena of the whole animal kingdom" that those animals which have the shortest lives produce "the greatest number of offspring," and the "upper" class doubtless regard such phenomena as proof that the "scum" is short lived. It will be seen at once that Mr. Herbert Spencer's idea is to compare the "lower classes" with the lowest type of animals, rabbits and rats and the like, and this is called science; and the authors of such drivel are known as scientists, investigators, men who hew out new highways of progress, men who have discovered at last that education, hygiene, and social refinement will not answer the requirements of progress, and that the hope of the world centers in "selection."

As matters now stand, it is held that population is increasing too rapidly, and "hygiene," while it promotes increase, does not improve the progeny; but, says the writer, "the facts accord with the theory, that highly intellectual parents do not as a rule have large families, while the most rapid occurs in those classes which are engaged in the similar kinds of manual labor." And in this we have the final conclusion that men engaged in "manual labor" are the "scum" who have "large families" and are responsible for renewing the "stream of life."

Such is the logic of so called science, which designates the men engaged in "manual labor" as the "scum," and deplors the fact that they rear large families.

This sort of writing floods our "best periodicals," and seeks through such avenues to degrade labor. The "upper class" is the rich, the "scum" is the poor, the toiler, the wealth creator, the taxpayer, those who build everything and preserve everything from wreck and ruin.

And here, we ask, what is the labor press of the country doing to counteract the growth of such pernicious doctrines? Much we hope. Certainly much it can do, and much it must do, if the time is ever to come when the badge of labor is to be something besides the insignia of degradation, and scientists (?) are to be taught the truth of Burns' philosophy that

A prince can mak a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, and a' that;
But an honest man's aboon his might,
Guid faith, he maunna fa' that. ⁶

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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⁶ From the hymn "A Man's a Man for A' That" (1795), by **Robert Burns** (1759-1796).