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EDITORIAL

AND THESE ARE “PICKED”.

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THE Eighteenth Annual Report of the Federal Commissioner of Labor, for 1903 is just out. It is a thick, 865-page book of the usual tallness. Its cover is red, but its contents are “thrilling enough for yellow covers”. Its subject matter is “the cost living of workingmen’s families for one year”, and is intended to prove prosperity in diagrams. The publication contains tables enough to make one’s head swim, and subdivisions enough to make one’s head reel. After one has overcome the first swimming and reeling impression, the work of buckling down “to find out” amply repays the labor.

In approaching the work of “finding out” certain elements, essential to the establishment of the existence of prosperity, must be constantly kept in mind. The bulk of those elements is summed up in the question: What is the family condition of the family? This question in turn divides into three others:

1st, Is the father’s income sufficient to support the family?

2nd, Is the wife afforded the opportunity to be what she should be in the scheme of nature and of the happy home—the priestess at the hearth of her household, the center from which radiates the blessings of wifehood, the ministry of motherhood?

3rd, Have the children the opportunity to enjoy the pleasures of childhood, to acquire the physical and mental vigor to fit them for manhood?

Applying these questions to the tables furnished by the report, a state of things is found to prevail in the country answering the questions clip and clear. What that state of things is may be summarized by probing the figures for the four leading states of the Union—New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois and Ohio.

As to New York, the following facts appear: Of the total of 4,559 families reported, with only 5—3 Belgians, 1 Mexican and 1 Turkish—does the husband’s

earnings suffice for the family's needs. In other words, 4,554 of the 4,559 families labor under a deficit, so far as the head of the family's earnings are concerned. The deficit is generally made up through wife and child labor. In only 48 of the 4,559 families does the wife stay at home; and only 15 of the 4,559 families is free from the scourge of child labor. Moreover, 937 out of the 4,559 families stagger under the weight of an absolute deficit, despite wife and children being harnessed to the chariot of toil.

As to Pennsylvania, the facts are these: Of the total of 3,702 families reported, with only 13—8 Canadians, 3 Russians, 1 Greek and 1 Norwegian—does the husband's earnings suffice for the family's needs. In other words, 3,689 of the 3,702 families labor under {a deficit, so far as the head of the family's} earnings are concerned. The deficit is generally made up through wife and child labor. In only 184 of the 3,702 families does the wife stay at home; and only 7 out of the 3,702 families is free from the scourge of child-labor. Moreover, 593 out of the 3,702 families stagger under the weight of an absolute deficit, despite wife and children being harnessed to the chariot of toil.

As to Illinois we find: Of the total of 1,633 families reported, with only 3—2 Belgians—does the husband's earnings suffice for the family's needs. In other words, 1,631 of the 1,633 families labor under a deficit, so far as the head of the family's earnings are concerned. The deficit is generally made up through wife and child-labor. In only 94 of the 1,633 does the wife stay at home; and only 16 out of the 1,633 families is free from the scourge of child-labor. Moreover, 388 out of the 1,633 families stagger under the weight of an absolute deficit, despite wife and children being harnessed to the chariot of toil.

Finally, also Ohio: Of the total of 1,800 families reported, with only 35—34 Norwegians and 1 Dane—does the husband's earnings suffice for the family's needs. In other words, 1,765 of the 1,800 families labor under a deficit, so far as the head of the family's earnings are concerned. The deficit is, here as elsewhere, generally made up through wife and child-labor. In only 255 of the 1,800 families does the wife stay at home; and only 21 out of the 1,800 families is free from the scourge of child-labor. Moreover 241 out of the 1,800 families stagger under the weight of an absolute deficit, despite wife and children being harnessed to the chariot of toil.

Two more facts will complete the illumination of the picture. The Census figures for 1900 show that the average wages of the workingmen is \$436 a year. Now then, few, very few are the heads of families in the report for any state as low as the Census average. And so far as the four states just analyzed are concerned, there is not one instance of so low an earning. All the husbands quoted in these four states receive higher wages than the census average; most of them more than \$100 in excess; many more than \$200 in excess. The second fact is that the 25,440 families that form the basis of the report are, in the language of the report, "normal families", that is to say, "a husband, a wife, not more than five children, no one of whom was over 14 years of age". Accordingly, the child-labor patented in the report is the labor of infants; the size of the families is not excessive; and the earnings of the head of the family are above the average, in most cases away above the average actually earned.

The three questions that test the prosperity of the land, as reflected by the report, receive answers that indict the "intellectuals" and "moralists" who uphold the present social system. The home is smashed; the child is sacrificed; the wife is unsexed—such is the picture cast by "picked" families, how picked may be judged from their exceptionally higher wages. What must not be the state of things with the "unpicked" mass, that produces the bulk of the nation's wealth, themselves plundered of almost all!

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