**LECTURE ON THE POPULATION QUESTION.**

On Saturday evening a lecture was delivered in Philips Hall, Bury, on the above-named subject, by Dr. Drysdale, senior physician to the Metropolitan Hospital, London. There was a numerous audience present. Councilor Slater occupied the chair. The lecturer treated his subject in an able manner, and it was free from any objectionable feature.

The CHAIRMAN briefly opened the proceedings, and said that when in Sheffield the previous day he found that the now condemned book “The Fruits of Philosophy” had been stereotyped, and with a slightly different title was being extensively sold.

Dr. DRYSDALE commenced his remarks by giving a history of the population question. At the close of last century, a writer dealt with pauperism, and enunciated certain views connected with the question. The Rev. Mr. Malthus took up the question, and investigated it thoroughly. He visited the different countries in Europe, gathered statistics, and in 1798 published his celebrated work showing that poverty was in a great measure due to over population. He showed that the population of a country was capable of being increased with much greater rapidity than food, and consequently, where population was rapidly increased there must be suffering. Population was however kept down in several ways – by wars, by disease, by lack of food, and by the general bad conditions of life which surrounded the weaker and poorer portions of any population. He showed that the same law affected human beings as affected the lower animal world, which could increase only in proportion to its means of subsistence, and whose numbers were regulated by the food available and the number of them consumed by a higher class of animals. Mr. Malthus was a clergyman of unblemished life, but his views met with great opposition, though the only remedy he advocated was late marriages; a man being recommended to marry at about forty years, and a woman at about thirty. No doubt this practice would effect great changes in the number of a population born; but then it had its serious drawbacks. Celibacy was an evil, and late marriages robbed a man or a woman of the love and affection to which they were entitled until they had reached an age at which they were almost unable to appreciate these virtues. Men who did not marry did not always live pure lives, and many and serious evils proceeded from celibacy. After dealing with the Malthusian doctrine at considerable length, and saying that if the audience once admitted that the population could increase with greater rapidity than the growth of food the whole question at issue was given up, the lecturer went on to point out the enormous rapidity of the increase of the population in the United States. In 1790 there were in the States four millions of people; in 1810 there were 7 ¼ millions; in 1820 there were 9 ½ millions; in 1830 there were 13 millions; in 1840 there were 17 millions; in 1850 there were 22 millions; in 1860 there were 31 millions; and in 1870 no less than 38 millions. According to the above figures the population had doubled itself in 20 years, and that not through emigration, but by the mere power of the population to reproduce themselves. The population of England had been doubled during this century in about 52 years: and if they took it for granted that the population could double itself in 20 years, the whole question as to why there was so much poverty was solved. Germany doubled itself in about 60 years, but France remained almost stationary, and the effect of this was very important. The powers of the human race to reproduce itself were enormous the speed being like that of a race horse, and if the same rate of progress went on in the future as in the past, under favourable conditions the continent of America in another century might be as thickly populated as was the continent of Europe. The causes which checked the increase of the population in England were the immense death rate among children, the great number of unhealthy trades, war, and the host of celibate persons in our midst. We had no less than three-quarters of a million of unmarried women in our midst, and but for this fact our population would increase much more rapidly than it did. Mr. John Stuart Mill was one of the most devoted followers of Mr. Malthus, and in his “Political Economy” he wrote warmly on the question, and on the future of the working classes; and he thought that there would be no poverty whatever if the working classes had a thorough knowledge of the population question. The question was growing, as he (Dr. Drysdale) know, for he had lectured to nearly every working men’s club in London on the question, and every one of them was a Malthusian Institution. On the check to population caused by the enormous death rate among children, the lecturer said that Mr. Ansell had written to many members of the wealthy and professional classes to ascertain the death rate among their children, and he found that of every 100,000 children born of these well-to-do classes, but 8,000 died during the first year of life; but from the Registrar-General’s statistics for the whole kingdom he found that 18,000 per 100,000 of the children died during the first year, and in Liverpool that number was as high as 24,000 per 100,000, or three times as numerous as among the children of the wealthy classes. Thus poverty and neglect killed three times as many children as in those classes who could care for them. It was also a sorrowful thing to say that there was little compensation for the poor man in this world, for Mr. Ansell’s statistics showed that whilst the average age of life in the richer classes was 55 years, that among the poorer classes was but 35 years. Thus wealth prevented not only much misery, but aided longevity to the extent of 20 years. He contended, as he did when a witness on the Bradlaugh and Besant trial, that if we had but plenty of food and favourable conditions people ought to live upon an average 80 years. This was his beau ideal, but we could not live so long if we were always miserable, for a man who was always miserable could not live a long life. Then there were the unhealthy trades and war. Another thing which limited the growth of our population was the alarming amount of celibacy. He objected to celibacy, and asked if anything could be conceived more distressing than for persons to live a single life, unblessed with affection and love, and then for them to pass away friendless and unmourned. The number of women who took refuge in nunneries was also a check to population, but he imagined that was not an agreeable life. In France the population question was studied, and the words of the Mayor of Amiens addressed to the working men on the necessity of exercising the virtues of industry, economy, and prudence in the number of their families were quoted. In France it was rare that married people had more than two children, for a Frenchman know that if he had a large family he would have to divide his land amongst his children until there would not be enough for them to live upon. The population of France remained almost stationary owing to this prudence of the people, notwithstanding that the Catholic Church set itself against any practices which should limit population. In 1870, when the Ecumenical Council sat at Rome, the Vatican was applied to do away with the law on this question, but he infallible Pope declined. Nevertheless in spite of all the power of the priests the Catholics of France opposed the priests and adopted the principles of commonsense on this question, and completely emancipated themselves from the priesthood. The lecturer referred to the famine in Ireland, and it was the scenes which he witnessed then, when studying at Dublin, that converted him to the Malthusian doctrines. Out of a population of eight million in Ireland two millions died or fled away across the Atlantic, and Ireland to-day was better off and stronger with a small population, because they were better fed and clothed, than she was with a large population. He was in Ireland at the time of the Irish famine, and he never could forget the misery and destitution he then saw, caused by trusting too much to the priests, who condemned any limitation of the population. It might be said that the fall of France in the Franco-Prussian war was due to this limitation of the population; but this he denied. The war was not a war of the people, but a war of the emperors. Napoleon was not popular at Paris, and he must needs get up an external war to avoid a revolution at home. The Germans were increasing too fast, and must be poor, for they could not save their capital as could the French. It was not enough for a nation to be populous; it must be well fed and clothed. Other things being the same, if the Germans had a family of six and the French a family of two the Frenchman would save the most and be the richest, and be the better prepared for even war. After dealing with the question at length the lecturer referred to the late trial of Mrs. Besant and Mr. Bradlaugh. He said it had been coming on far many years. He referred to the Knoulton pamphlet and one of Mr. Robert Dale Owen; also to Mr. Robert Owen’s experiment at Lanark. He said that the Lord Chief Justice’s ruling in the late trial could not be understood, for he left it to the jury to say whether the pamphlet was obscene or not. Now if the question of what a man should write or what he should say was to be left entirely to a jury – for there was no written law on the questions, the proceedings being taken under the unwritten law of England – then there was no liberty of the press or liberty of speech, for a man did not know what he might say or write. The law ought to be defined and not left to the decision of any jury. Professor Bain wrote to him the other day on this question, and said very similar things. If the prosecution intended to put down the book they had made a mistake, for a work that was little known before was now widely spread, and a question that was little understood was now talked of everywhere. Some of the most eminent medical men in the metropolis endorsed the views of Dr. Knoulton, among them Sir Henry Thompson, who said it was all fudge to call the book indecent.

After several questions had been answered votes of thanks were passed to the lecturer and the chairman.