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THE INDIAN PEOPLE

NUTRITION AND DISEASE

POPULATION TRENDS

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—There has been much fruitless recrimination about the recent famine in Bengal instead of arguing about the symptoms, let us face the facts of the disease itself.

(1) The mortality in India at all ages is four to eight times ours; the expectation of life at birth is 26 years instead of our 62; only half the people born reach 22 years, instead of 59 with us.

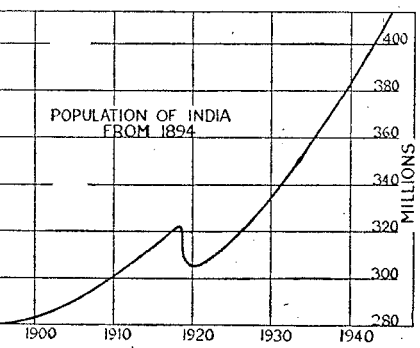
(2) Ill-health is correspondingly prevalent; between 100 and 200 million people, out of 400 millions, suffer from malaria every year; tuberculosis, cholera, small-pox, plague, guinea-worm and filarial infection, yaws, kala-azar, and many other diseases take their annual toll of life and health.

(3) A large part of the population is undernourished, according to any reasonable standards more than half; of these, many millions are living near the verge of starvation.

(4) Chronic malnutrition acts with disease in a vicious circle, producing poverty and inefficiency.

(5) In spite of all this, the population of India is increasing now by about 6,000,000 a year, about 15 per thousand per annum.

There is nothing new about disease and under-nourishment in India: indeed the present population trend is a sign that they have their less effect than formerly. The graph shows what has happened to the population of



India in the last half-century and what is happening now. The striking kink in 1918-19 was due to influenza, and illustrates the effect of an acute epidemic on a population chronically underfed. Already about 50 per cent. more food is needed in India: can agriculture by present methods catch up and cope with the expanding population?

It is idle to talk of family limitation, except as a long-term policy; and the present need is acute. The factor of safety indeed in India is very low. Disorganization or disorder would lead to frightful tragedy. Cooperation by all men of good will, in the wholehearted development of India's resources by modern scientific methods, is the only hope of averting disaster.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
A. V. HILL.