

OUR DAILY BREAD

By Dr. Edwin E. Slosson,

The white man is habituated to wheat bread, while the yellow race is accustomed to the more expensive and less nutritious rice, and the black race may get along on corn or manioc, the amazing expansion of the whites in recent centuries has been made possible by the extension of the area devoted to wheat and by improved methods of cultivation.

The vital question then arises how long can this expansion keep^{up}/without a shortage of our daily bread. Professor Griffith Taylor of Sydney University has figured out that if the white people fill the regions of the world open to them as densely as Europe is now populated, relatively to their resources, they would number about 1,340 million, of which North America would hold 700,000,000, Europe 400,000,000, South America 100,000,000, South Africa 80,000,000, and Australia 60,000,000.

But the food supply from any conceivable sources would not nearly suffice for such a number. According to the calculations of Professor Raymond Pearl of Johns Hopkins the food shortage would become serious in about two centuries.

A similar conclusion is reached by O.E. Baker, economist of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in a careful study of "The Potential Supply of Wheat" in the first issue of Economic Geography. He foresees an increase of the white race from four hundred millions at present to double that at the end of the century. They would require some 7,400 million bushels of wheat a year, or almost treble the present production of the white man's world.

This requirement might theoretically be met, for about one acre in ten of the land area of the earth will grow wheat and less than one acre in a hundred is now devoted to that crop. But it is not likely that more than three per cent. of the land will ever be used for wheat growing. And to meet the need of such an expanding population for much longer than a century would demand more efficiency and energy, more of a spirit of peace and cooperation than the human race has yet shown. Judging by the past history, it is more likely that increased crowding will lead to a gradual lowering of the standard of living or to catastrophic wars and famines. As regards our own country Mr. Baker's conclusion is:

"Not many people will starve; but, as in Europe recently, the death rates will rise, especially the infant death rates, while the hours of labor will lengthen and the lower standard of living will make people more susceptible to disease.

"It is certain that if the population of the United States continues to increase for more than another century as it has during the past century, there is no means by which the present standard of living can be maintained, except by importation of foodstuffs from other lands - which will need their foodstuffs even more than we. And looking forward 200 or 300 years, which is a shorter span of time than that elapsed since the settlements of Jamestown and Plymouth, it seems necessary to recognize not only a stationary population in this country, but also throughout the world. Whether this stationary state will be one of misery for the majority of the people, as in China and India today, or one of well-being and happiness will depend largely upon voluntary restriction of population."
