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CHARLES BOOTH.

By the death of the Rt. Hon. Charles Booth on November 23 last, the Sociological Society lost one of its most distinguished members. Born at Liverpool in 1840, he took an active part with his brother Alfred in building up great industrial organizations on sea and land, in England, in China, in South America and in the United States. But he did not allow his success in business to narrow his sympathies; he devoted a large part of his time to an investigation into the lives of his less fortunate or less able fellow-citizens with a view to ameliorating their lot; and it is to this that he owed his fame as a Sociologist.

For some generations, the importance of statistics—of definite numerical data—had been recognized; and as the store of recorded figures grew so did the hopes of social investigators. But result did not equal anticipation. A knowledge of quantity was of little use without a knowledge of quality. It was, *e.g.*, not very instructive to know that there were a million peasant proprietors in a country unless the situation of those peasants in other respects was known. Lord Beaconsfield triumphantly proved from the Census that there had been no decay of English yeomen, because there were as many freeholders in Buckinghamshire in his time as in Hampden's, disregarding the fact that the freeholders of the nineteenth century were not farmers, but largely villa residents from London. What wonder if the cynic remarked that you could prove anything by statistics! But already, in the middle of the nineteenth century, the genius of Le Play had proposed a new method to obviate this danger. He combined the description of typical instances with collective enumeration, and made the dry bones of statistics live. In his *Tableau*, published in 1851, he ranged throughout the countries of Europe, selecting his proletary families in each, and giving full and vivid details of their life and work. I do not know how far Charles Booth consciously followed the plan of Le Play, but no one has applied that method so consistently and on so vast a scale. Taking practically the whole of London, he investigated it district by district and almost street by street, at once covering the whole immense field and yet introducing us to a series of pictures of family life—at once accurate in detail and yet rich in human interest. Enlightened by these, the reader could turn to his wonderful map, with its black streets of crime, its dark and light blue of varying degrees of poverty, and

so on through the varied colours that denoted the unskilled labourer of steady but insufficient wages, the artizan, the comfortable, the wealthy, with all their intermediate shades, and have before him a bird's eye view of the economic life of London.

Of this great work, "Life and Labour of the People of London," the first section, "Poverty," was published in 1891, and the second, "Industry," in 1897. These were followed, in 1903, by "The Religious Influences of London," each of the three consisting of several volumes. In the course of his investigations, Charles Booth lived for a time in the East End in the family of a workman, and he had the capacity to gather around him a band of skilful helpers and inspire them with his own spirit. He was not afflicted with the narrow Puritanism or the disinclination to look facts in the face, so common among social workers. It was noticeable that his account of the religious life of London made an even more gloomy impression than the statistics of attendances at church collected by the *Daily News*. The latter were bad enough, but in Booth you got not only the poor result, but the immense pains, the self-denial, the devotion, the hope and endeavour of clergy and workers which had so little reward. Nor must it be forgotten, in estimating the work of Booth, that it was the example of his method—tried on so vast and difficult a scale—that encouraged so many others to apply it, as, for instance, in Mr. Seebohm Rowntree's survey of York, and Mr. Freeman's study of Boy Life in Birmingham.

I am not sure that Charles Booth was not somewhat lacking in the historical spirit; but, on the other hand, he was not influenced by any idle or pedantic curiosity. Behind his careful survey was the burning desire to promote the happiness of the poor and the suffering. Passing his early life amid homely surroundings, in modest sufficiency rather than luxury, he was more impressed by the instability than by the hardship of a life of poverty. For a man to live with only his week's wages between his family and destitution, seemed to him the greatest of all miseries. It was this that made him in his latter years incline to Tariff Reform, as a possible means of regulating the fluctuations of trade. But it also impelled him to his crusade in favour of Old Age Pensions, the provision of an assured future for those who had passed their lives in toil. On this subject he issued: (1) "Pauperism: a Picture of the Endowment of Old Age" (1892); (2) "The Condition of the Aged Poor" (1894); and (3) "Old Age Pensions" (1899). In his original scheme, the pensions were to be given to all. Even as ultimately carried out, though confined to those whose incomes fell below a certain amount, the previous economic position of the recipients (save that for a time paupers were excluded) was neglected. There was, therefore, no creation of a servile class. It

is probable that few reforms have produced so much happiness and so little evil.

Near the close of his life, in 1913, he issued a vigorous pamphlet, "Industrial Unrest and Trade Union Policy," in which he suggested that the trade unions should become judges, and not only penalize the bad masters, but give the good ones their countenance and support. It was, I think, in the same year that, at the house of the late Professor Beesly, I met Charles Booth for the last time. I was struck by his intellectual vigour and alertness. He propounded this question to me :—Are the workers or the rich the happier. I answered that, in my opinion, the workers were happier in youth, the rich in maturity and old age. He at once agreed, but when we came to draw the line of demarcation, differences arose. I thought the scale turned, when the workman found himself involved in the care of a family; Booth was inclined to think the workman the better off till about forty, when he would find his strength less equal to his task, just as his richer fellow-citizen was arriving at a position of power and dignity—whether in business or public life. It was a most stimulating discussion, and a farewell not unhappy.

S. H. SWINNY.