

## CHAPTER X

### IMMIGRATION, THE LABOUR UNION, AND POVERTY

IT should be plain that there is a minimum wage below which the American workingman cannot work. This minimum must be at least sufficient to meet the cost to him of producing his labour, that is, to buy his food and clothes and pay his rent. If this cost were the same for all workers, wages could not fall below the minimum thus set. It varies, however, among different groups. The lowest cost is set by the group having the fewest wants, and these are the mere physical demands for existence. If there were no inflow of labourers from other countries having a lower cost of living, the minimum wage would rise with that tendency for an increase in the wants of the native workers which is continually going on. The presence of immigrant labour in most of our industries, however, prevents this rise in wages—it checks the increase in effective wants.

Where a high and a low cost of living compete unrestrained in the same industry, there can be but one of two possible results: Either the worker with the higher cost must sink to the lower, or the worker with the lower cost must be raised to the higher. The forces bring-