

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE HUMAN CLAIMS OF LABOUR

§ 1. The validity of the human law of distribution is well tested by considering the light it sheds upon the modern claims of Labour and the Movement which is endeavouring to realise these claims. For the significance of the Labour Movement will continue to be misunderstood so long as it is regarded as a mere demand for a larger quantity of wages and of leisure, important as these objects are. The real demand of Labour is at once more radical and more human. It is a demand that Labour shall no longer be bought and sold as a dead commodity subject to the fluctuations of Demand and Supply in the market, but that its remuneration shall be regulated on the basis of the human needs of a family living in a civilised country.

At present most sorts of labourers are paid according to the quantity of labour-power they give out, and according to the market-price set upon a unit of each several sort of labour-power. This means that the actual weekly earnings of some grades of labourer are much higher than those of other grades, not because the work takes more out of them, or because it involves a higher standard of living, but because some natural, some fortuitous, or some organised scarcity of supply exists in the former grades, while there is abundance of supply in the latter.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the weekly earnings for any of these sorts of labour will vary from week to week, from month to month, or year to year, with the variations of Supply and Demand in the Labour Market. The income of the working family will thus vary for reasons utterly beyond its control, though its requirements for economic and human efficiency show no such variation. Thus there is no security for any class standard of living.

Within each class or grade of labour there will be variations

<sup>1</sup> The width of variations in the weekly earnings, involving in most instances a nearly corresponding variety of family income, may be illustrated by the following