"Men accept the doom, the blessing of work; they do not dispute the necessity of the struggle with Nature for existence. They are willing enough to work; but even good work does not necessarily insure a proper human subsistence, and when they protest against this condition of things they are told that their aims are too 'materialistic.' Give them relief from their materialistic anxiety; give them reasonable certainty that their essential material needs will be met by honest work, and you release infinite stores of human energy for higher efforts, for nobler ideals, when

"'Body gets its sop, and holds its noise, and leaves soul free a little.'"

Mr. Justice Higgins,
High Court of Australia, Melbourne.
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The war has torn the scales from our eyes, and forced us to see things as they really are, and by the light of this clearer vision we have come to regard many conditions as intolerable which before had only seemed inevitable. This is especially true of the conditions in which unskilled labourers, both in industry and agriculture, were living before the war. There is no denying the fact that the wages of the great majority of them were not, in any true sense, living wages. They did not provide for the reasonable human needs of men and women living in a civilized community.

As a nation, however, we acquiesced in this state of things. We were so familiar with it that its evils failed to impress us. Even in our progressive and sanguine moods, the utmost
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that we hoped for was a very gradual and a very tentative improvement.

But the war has changed all this. We have completely revised our notions as to what is possible or impossible. We have seen accomplished within a few brief months or years reforms to which we should have assigned, not decades, but generations.

I do not believe for a moment that in the future we shall allow millions of our fellow-countrymen, through no fault of their own, to pass through life ill-housed, ill-clothed, ill-fed, ill-educated. But if their conditions are to be remedied, the present scale of wages for unskilled labourers must be materially raised.

What are the human needs of labour? At what cost can they be supplied? Can industry bear this cost? and, if not, can it be met in any other way? These are the questions I attempt to answer in this book.

I first ask for how many people a man’s wage must provide, or, more particularly, what proportion of married men have children dependent upon them for some period of their lives; how
many children, and for what number of years. We must know the answer to these questions before we can rightly assess the needs of the workers.

I next consider the amount of food necessary to keep the body in health, and the cost of supplying it.

Similarly, I consider the question of minimum necessary expenditure for housing, clothing, fuel, and sundries.

A chapter is devoted to minimum wages for women. I discuss the extent to which women workers are responsible for the maintenance of dependants, and give the results of some original investigations into the question. I also ask whether allowance should be made for the maintenance of dependants when fixing women's minimum wages.

In the last chapter I indicate roughly the level at which minimum wages should be fixed after the war, in order to meet the requirements of a household of five persons. I also suggest a means of dealing with larger families which it may be necessary to adopt until industry has become so
productive that their needs can be met through the ordinary channel of wages.

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B. SEEBOHM ROWNTREE.

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