

## Mr. Malthus

Below are excerpts from the Poem *Mr. Malthus* by Canadian writer and satirist, Stephen Leacock (1869-1944). It was said in 1911 that more people had heard of Stephen Leacock than had heard of Canada.

“MOTHER, Mother, here comes  
Malthus,  
Mother, hold me tight!  
Look! It's Mr. Malthus, Mother!  
Hide me out of sight.”

This was the cry of little Jane  
In bed she moaning lay,  
Delirious with Stomach Pain,  
That would not go away.  
All because her small Existence  
Over-pressed upon Subsistence;  
Human Numbers didn't need her;  
Human Effort couldn't feed her.  
Little Janie didn't know  
The Geometric Ratio.  
Poor Wee Janie had never done  
Course Economics No. 1;  
Never reached in Education  
Theories of Population, —  
Theories which tend to show  
Just how far our Food will go,  
Mathematically found  
Just enough to go around.

This, my little Jane, is why  
Pauper Children have to die.  
Pauper Children underfed  
Die delirious in Bed;  
Thus at Malthus's Command  
Match Supply with true Demand.  
Jane who should have gently died  
Started up and wildly cried, —

“Look, mother, look, he's there again  
I see him at the Window Pane,  
Father,—don't let him,—he's  
behind

That shadow on the window  
blind,—”

In vain the anxious parents soothe,—  
What can avail their useless Love?

“Darling, lie down again; don't mind;  
Branches are moving in the Wind.”

With panting Breath, with Eyes that  
stare,

Again she cries, “He's there, he's  
there!”

The frightened Parents look, aghast,  
Is it that something really passed?  
What is it that they seem to scan,  
Ghost or Abstraction, Dream or  
Man?—

That long drawn Face, the cloven  
Lip,

The crooked Fingers all a-grip,  
The sunken Face, cadaverous,  
The dress, Ah, God deliver us!  
What awful Sacrilege is that?  
The Choker and the Shovel Hat,

The Costume black and sinister,  
The dress of God's own minister!  
What fiend could ever urge a Man  
To personate a Clergyman!  
The Father strides with angry fist  
“Out, out! you damned Economist!”  
His wife restrains his threatening  
Paw,—

“William, it's economic Law!”  
She shrieks,—“Oh William! don't  
you know

The Geometric Ratio?—  
William, God means it for the best  
Our Darling's taken! we've  
transgressed—”

And crying, “Two times two makes  
four,”

She crashes swooning to the Floor.

And when her Senses come again  
Janie had passed from mortal Pain  
And scowling Malthus had moved on  
Murm'ring, “That's one more Infant  
gone,”

To other Windows, one by one;—  
Later he came and took their Son.  
With Jane and John gone, out of  
seven,

They kept at five and just broke even.  
“Mary,” the chastened Father said,  
“I feel God's wisdom; two are dead  
The world has only food for five,  
Quintuplets are the thing that thrive.”  
She sobbed,—“We'll do it if we can!  
But, oh that awful Malthus Man.”