

Lecture 2: Urban imperatives and rural idylls

Structure of the lecture:

- Victorian cities and Victorian anxieties
- the suburb and the city
- The Slum
- rural idylls – paternalism, model industrial villages, garden cities, land reform.

Key theme: use of the 'city' as a term is somewhat misleading = the city was always under stress and was never an organic 'whole'.

Task 1: Analyse these fictional descriptions of early Victorian cities. What were Disraeli and Gaskell trying to argue, and what were their solutions to the problems?

Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil: or the Two Nations* (1845), book II, chapter 5:

"It is their condition everywhere; but in cities that condition is aggravated. A density of population implies a severer struggle for existence, and a consequent repulsion of elements brought into too close contact. In great cities men are brought together by the desire of gain. They are not in a state of co-operation, but of isolation, as to the making of fortunes; and for all the rest they are careless of neighbours. Christianity teaches us to love our neighbour as ourself; modern society acknowledges no neighbour."

"Well, we live in strange times," said Egremont, struck by the observation of his companion, and relieving a perplexed spirit by an ordinary exclamation, which often denotes that the mind is more stirring than it cares to acknowledge, or at the moment is capable to express.

"When the infant begins to walk, it also thinks that it lives in strange times," said his companion.

"Your inference?" asked Egremont.

"That society, still in its infancy, is beginning to feel its way."

"This is a new reign," said Egremont, "perhaps it is a new era."

"I think so," said the younger stranger.

"I hope so," said the elder one.

"Well, society may be in its infancy," said Egremont slightly smiling; "but, say what you like, our Queen reigns over the greatest nation that ever existed."

"Which nation?" asked the younger stranger, "for she reigns over two."

The stranger paused; Egremont was silent, but looked inquiringly.

"Yes," resumed the younger stranger after a moment's interval. "Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in

different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws."

"You speak of -- " said Egremont, hesitatingly.
"THE RICH AND THE POOR."

Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (1855), chapter XVII, 'What is a Strike?'

'Why do you strike?' asked Margaret. 'Striking is leaving off work till you get your own rate of wages, is it not? You must not wonder at my ignorance; where I come from I never heard of a strike.'

'I wish I were there,' said Bessy, wearily. 'But it's not for me to get sick and tired o' strikes. This is the last I'll see. Before it's ended I shall be in the Great City--the Holy Jerusalem.'

'Hoo's so full of th' life to come, hoo cannot think of th' present. Now I, yo' see, am bound to do the best I can here. I think a bird i' th' hand is worth two i' th' bush. So them's the different views we take on th' strike question.'

'But,' said Margaret, 'if the people struck, as you call it, where I come from, as they are mostly all field labourers, the seed would not be sown, the hay got in, the corn reaped.'

'Well?' said he. He had resumed his pipe, and put his 'well' in the form of an interrogation.

'Why,' she went on, 'what would become of the farmers.'

He puffed away. 'I reckon they'd have either to give up their farms, or to give fair rate of wage.'

'Suppose they could not, or would not do the last; they could not give up their farms all in a minute, however much they might wish to do so; but they would have no hay, nor corn to sell that year; and where would the money come from to pay the labourers' wages the next?'

Still puffing away. At last he said:

'I know nought of your ways down South. I have heerd they're a pack of spiritless, down-trodden men; welly clemmed to death; too much dazed wi' clemming to know when they're put upon. Now, it's not so here. We known when we're put upon; and we'en too much blood in us to stand it. We just take our hands fro' our looms, and say, "Yo' may clem us, but yo'll not put upon us, my masters!" And be danged to 'em, they shan't this time!'

'I wish I lived down South,' said Bessy.

'There's a deal to bear there,' said Margaret. 'There are sorrows to bear everywhere. There is very hard bodily labour to be gone through, with very little food to give strength.'

'But it's out of doors,' said Bessy. 'And away from the endless, endless noise, and sickening heat.'

Urbanisation:

1801 34% of the population lived in towns [3.5 million people]

1851 54% “

1901 78% [29 million– an eightfold increase from 1801]

London:

1801 over 1 million population.

1901 over 6.5 million.

Density of housing rose from 1,764 to 10, 446.

Migration:

In London, 25% of newcomers came from the four closest counties to the capital, with another 25% coming from the next most proximate counties. In 1871, of those who were born in Hertfordshire but living elsewhere, 60% were to be found in London.

Charles Booth's analysis of Sultan Street in Camberwell, London: In 1871, out of 104 households for every 6 Londoners there were 4 provincial immigrants and Irish. In 1881, 36% of heads of households and their wives were born outside London; by 1901 the figure had fallen to 26%. Only 8% of the children enumerated in Sultan Street in 1871 were born outside London (and less than 2% in 1901).¹

The proportion of skilled to all labourers in Camberwell fell only slightly (62% to 54% 1871-1901) but in Sultan Street it was halved in these thirty years (62% to 32%).²

Task 2: Analyse this extract from Engels's description of Manchester. How did his observations influence his theories on class?

F. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Classes in 1844*, p. 55.

Beyond this belt of working class houses or dwellings lie the districts inhabited by the middle classes and upper classes. The former are to be found in regularly laid out streets near the working class districts – in Chorlton and in the remoter parts of Cheetham Hill. The villas of the upper classes are surrounded by gardens and lie in the higher and remoter parts of Chorlton and Ardwick or on the breezy heights of Cheetham Hill, Broughton and Pendleton.

¹ H.J. Dyos and M. Wolff, eds., *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, II (1973), p. 373.

² *Ibid.*, p. 376.

The upper classes enjoy healthy country air and live in luxurious and comfortable dwellings which are linked to the centre of Manchester by omnibuses which run every fifteen or thirty minutes. To such an extent has the convenience of the rich been considered in the planning of Manchester that these plutocrats can travel from their houses to their places of business in the centre of the town by the shortest routes, which run entirely through the working class districts, without even realising how close they are to the misery and filth which lie on both sides of the road. This is because the main streets which run from the Exchange in all directions out of town are occupied almost uninterruptedly on both sides by shops...

Chartist Land Plan

Formed by Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor – National Land Company
Subscribers were entered into a ballot to 'win' a plot of land with a house

- 1846 Rickmansworth, Herts = O'Connorville
- Minster Lovell, Worcs = Charterville

Attracted 70,000 shareholders, predominantly from northern industrial districts, but failed legally and financially by 1851.

'Model' industrial villages:

- New Lanark (1799-1829), Lanarkshire, Scotland - Robert Owen.....
- Copley (1849-53) and Akroyden (1861-3), West Riding of Yorkshire - Colonel Edward Akroyd, textile manufacturer.....
- Saltaire (1850-63), near Bradford, West Riding – Titus Salt.....
- Merseyside: Bromborough Pool (1853) - Price's Patent Candle Company; Aintree (1888) - Harley's Jam Company; Thornton Manor and Port Sunlight (1891) - William Hesketh Lever, chemical manufacturer.....
- Bournville (1898-1905), near Birmingham - George Cadbury, Quaker chocolate manufacturer.....

Garden Cities:

Ebenezer Howard, *Tomorrow, a Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898)
1903 Letchworth Garden City
1905 Hampstead Garden Suburb
1906 [check] Welwyn Garden City

Land Reform:

1881 Land Nationalisation Society;
Henry George, *Progress and Poverty* (1881) proposed huge taxes on land;
1884 English Land Restoration League;

1885 Joseph Chamberlain's 'Unauthorised Programme' – proposed to give local authorities greater powers to purchase land compulsorily in order to let out allotments and smallholdings;

1887 Allotments Act.

Preservation movement:

1865 - Commons preservation society

1883 – Lake District Defence Society

1884 – National Footpaths preservation society

1889 – Society for Protection of Birds

1907 – National Trust Act allowed Trust to declare land inalienable.

Further reading:

J. Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change in England since 1800* (2002)

H.J. Dyos and M. Wolff, eds., *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, 2 vols (1973)