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Ebenezer Howard

Excerpt

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TO-MORROW.



INTRODUCTION.

“New forces, new cravings, new aims, which had been silently gathering beneath the crust of re-action, burst suddenly into view.”
—Green’s “Short History of the English People,” Chap. x.

“Change is consummated in many cases after much argument and agitation, and men do not observe that almost everything has been silently effected by causes to which few people paid any heed. In one generation an institution is unassailable, in the next bold men may assail it, and in the third bold men defend it. At one time the most conclusive arguments are advanced against it in vain, if indeed they are allowed utterance at all. At another time the most childish sophistry is enough to secure its condemnation. In the first place, the institution, though probably indefensible by pure reason, was congruous with the conscious habits and modes of thought of the community. In the second these had changed from influences which the acutest analysis would probably fail to explain, and a breath sufficed to topple over the sapped structure.”—*The Times*, 27th November, 1891.

In these days of strong party feeling and of keenly-contested social and religious issues, it might perhaps be thought difficult to find a single question having a vital bearing upon national life and well-being on which all persons, no matter of what political party, or of what shade of sociological opinion, would be found to be fully and entirely agreed.

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Discuss the temperance cause, and you will hear from Mr. John Morley that it is "the greatest moral movement since the movement for the abolition of slavery"; but Lord Bruce will remind you that "every year the trade contributes £40,000,000 to the revenue of the country, so that practically it maintains the Army and Navy, besides which it affords employment to many thousands of persons"—that "even the teetotalers owe much to the licensed victuallers, for if it were not for them the refreshment bars at the Crystal Palace would have been closed long ago." Discuss the opium traffic, and, on the one hand, you will hear that opium is rapidly destroying the *morale* of the people of China, and on the other that this is quite a delusion, and that the Chinese are capable, thanks to opium, of doing work which to a European is quite impossible, and that on food at which the least squeamish of English people would turn up their noses in disgust.

Religious and political questions too often divide us into hostile camps; and so, in the very realms where calm, dispassionate thought and pure emotions are the very essentials of all advance towards right beliefs and sound principles of action, the din of battle and the struggles of contending hosts are more forcibly suggested to the on-looker than the really sincere love of truth and love of country which, one may yet be sure, animate nearly all breasts.

There is, however, one question in regard to which one can scarcely find any difference of opinion. It is well-nigh universally agreed by men of all parties, not only in England, but all over Europe and America and our colonies, that it is deeply to be deplored that the people

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should continue to stream into the already over-crowded cities, and should thus further deplete the country districts.

Lord Rosebery, speaking some years ago as Chairman of the London County Council, dwelt with very special emphasis on this point :—

“There is no thought of pride associated in my mind with the idea of London. I am always haunted by the awfulness of London : by the great appalling fact of these millions cast down, as it would appear by hazard, on the banks of this noble stream, working each in their own groove and their own cell, without regard or knowledge of each other, without heeding each other, without having the slightest idea how the other lives—the heedless casualty of unnumbered thousands of men. Sixty years ago a great Englishman, Cobbett, called it a wen. If it was a wen then, what is it now? A tumour, an elephantiasis sucking into its gorged system half the life and the blood and the bone of the rural districts.”—March, 1891.

Sir John Gorst points out the evil, and suggests the remedy :

“If they wanted a permanent remedy of the evil they must remove the cause ; they must back the tide, and stop the migration of the people into the towns, and get the people back to the land. The interest and the safety of the towns themselves were involved in the solution of the problem.”—*Daily Chronicle*, 6th November, 1891.

Dean Farrar says :

“We are becoming a land of great cities. Villages are stationary or receding ; cities are enormously increasing. And if it be true that great cities tend more and more to become the graves of the physique of our race, can we wonder at it when we see the houses so foul, so squalid, so ill-drained, so vitiated by neglect and dirt ?”

Dr. Rhodes, at the Demographic Congress, called attention to

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“the migration which was going on from the English agricultural districts. In Lancashire and other manufacturing districts 35 per cent. of the population were over 60 years of age, but in agricultural districts they would have over 60 per cent. Many of the cottages were so abominable that they could not call them houses, and the people so deteriorated in physique that they were not able to do the amount of work which able-bodied persons should do. Unless something was done to make the lot of the agricultural labourer better, the exodus would go on, with what results in the future he dared not say.”—*Times*, 15th August, 1891.

The Press, Liberal, Radical, and Conservative, views this grave symptom of the time with the same alarm. The *St. James' Gazette*, on June 6, 1892, remarks :

“How best to provide the proper antidote against the greatest danger of modern existence is a question of no mean significance.”

The Star, 9th October, 1891, says :

“How to stem the drift from the country is one of the main problems of the day. The labourer may perhaps be restored to the land, but how will the country industries be restored to rural England?”

The Daily News, a few years ago, published a series of articles, “Life in our Villages,” dealing with the same problem. Trade Unionist leaders utter the same note of warning. Mr. Ben Tillet says :

“Hands are hungry for toil, and lands are starving for labour.”

Mr. Tom Mann observes :

“The congestion of labour in the metropolis is caused mainly by the influx from the country districts of those who were needed there to cultivate the land.”

All then are agreed on the pressing nature of this problem, all are bent on its solution, and though it would

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doubtless be quite Utopian to expect a similar agreement as to the value of any remedy that may be proposed, it is at least of immense importance that, on a subject thus universally regarded as of supreme importance, we have such a consensus of opinion at the outset. This will be the more remarkable and the more hopeful sign when it is shown, as I believe will be conclusively shown in this work, that the answer to this, one of the most pressing questions of the day, makes of comparatively easy solution many other problems which have hitherto taxed the ingenuity of the greatest thinkers and reformers of our time. Yes, the key to the problem how to restore the people to the land—that beautiful land of ours, with its canopy of sky, the air that blows upon it, the sun that warms it, the rain and dew that moisten it—the very embodiment of Divine love for man—is indeed a *Master-Key*, for it is the key to a portal through which, even when scarce ajar, will be seen to pour a flood of light on the problems of intemperance, of excessive toil, of restless anxiety, of grinding poverty—the true limits of Governmental interference, ay, and even the relations of man to the Supreme Power.

It may perhaps be thought that the first step to be taken towards the solution of this question—how to restore the people to the land—would involve a careful consideration of the very numerous causes which have hitherto led to their aggregation in large cities. Were this the case, a very prolonged enquiry would be necessary at the outset. Fortunately, alike for writer and for reader, such an analysis is not, however, here requisite, and for a very simple reason, which may be stated thus :—Whatever may have been the causes which have operated in the past, and are operating

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now, to draw the people into the cities, those causes may all be summed up as "attractions"; and it is obvious, therefore, that no remedy can possibly be effective which will not present to the people, or at least to considerable portions of them, greater "attractions" than our cities now possess, so that the force of the old "attractions" shall be overcome by the force of new "attractions" which are to be created. Each city may be regarded as a magnet, each person as a needle; and, so viewed, it is at once seen that nothing short of the discovery of a method for constructing magnets of yet greater power than our cities possess can be effective for re-distributing the population in a spontaneous and healthy manner.

So presented, the problem may appear at first sight to be difficult, if not impossible, of solution. "What," some may be disposed to ask, "can possibly be done to make the country more attractive to a work-a-day people than the town—to make wages, or at least the standard of physical comfort, higher in the country than in the town; to secure in the country equal possibilities of social intercourse, and to make the prospects of advancement for the average man or woman equal, not to say superior, to those enjoyed in our large cities?" The issue one constantly finds presented in a form very similar to that. The subject is treated continually in the public press, and in all forms of discussion, as though men, or at least working-men, had not now, and never could have, any choice or alternative, but either, on the one hand, to stifle their love for human society—at least in wider relations than can be found in a straggling village—or, on the other hand, to forego almost entirely all the keen and pure delights of the country. The question

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is universally considered as though it were now, and forever must remain, quite impossible for working people to live in the country, and yet be engaged in pursuits other than agricultural, as though crowded unhealthy cities were the last word of economic science, and as if our present form of industry, in which sharp lines divide agricultural from industrial pursuits, were necessarily an enduring one. This fallacy is the very common one of ignoring altogether the possibility of alternatives other than those presented to the mind. There are in reality not only, as is so constantly assumed, two alternatives—town life and country life—but a third alternative, in which all the advantages of the most energetic and active town life, with all the beauty and delight of the country, may be secured in perfect combination; and the certainty of being able to live this life will be the magnet which will produce the effect for which we are all striving—the spontaneous movement of the people from our crowded cities to the bosom of our kindly mother earth, at once the source of life, of happiness, of wealth, and of power. The town and the country may, therefore, be regarded as two magnets, each striving to draw the people to itself—a rivalry which a new form of life, partaking of the nature of both, comes to take part in. This may be illustrated by a diagram of “The Three Magnets,” in which the chief advantages of the Town and of the Country are set forth with their corresponding drawbacks, while the advantages of the Town-Country are seen to be free from the disadvantages of either.

The Town magnet, it will be seen, offers, as compared with the Country magnet, the advantages of high wages, opportunities for employment, tempting prospects of advancement,

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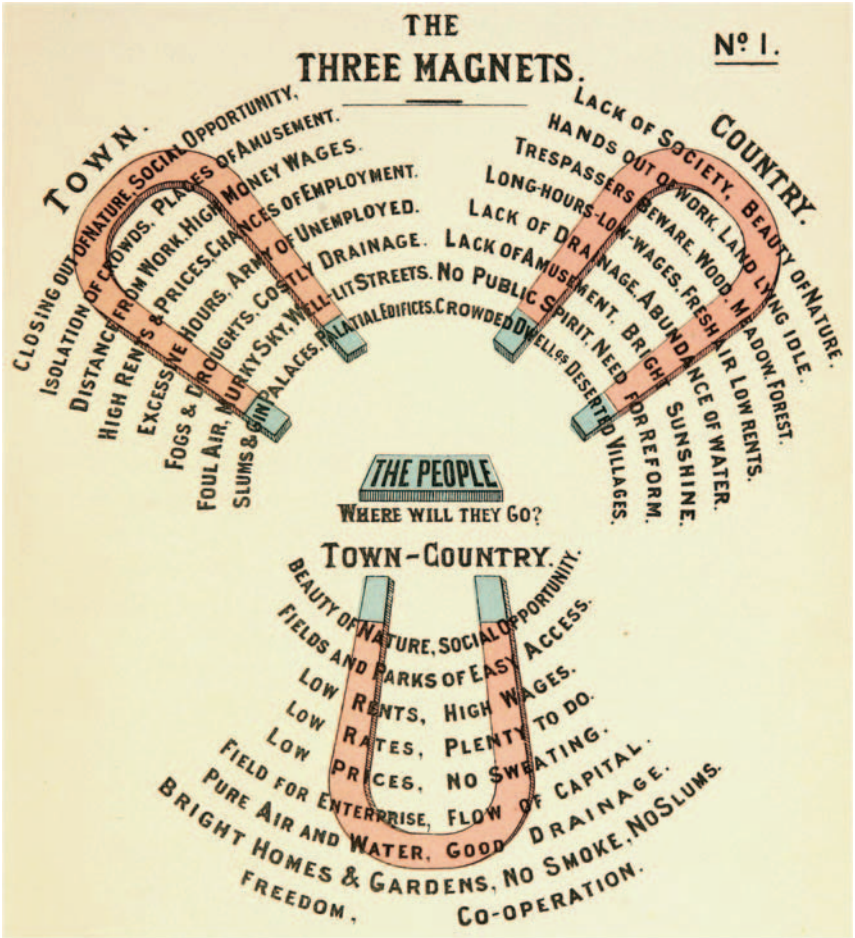
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but these are largely counterbalanced by high rents and prices. Its social opportunities and its places of amusement are very alluring, but excessive hours of toil, distance from work, and the "isolation of crowds" tend greatly to reduce the value of these good things. The well-lit streets are a great attraction, especially in the winter, but the sunlight is being more and more shut out, while the air is so vitiated that the fine public buildings, like the sparrows, rapidly become covered with soot, and the very statues are in despair.¹ Palatial edifices and fearful slums are the strange, complementary features of modern cities.

The Country magnet declares herself to be the source of all beauty and wealth; but the Town magnet mockingly reminds her that she is very dull for lack of society, and very sparing of her gifts for lack of capital. There are in the country beautiful vistas, lordly parks, violet-scented woods, fresh air, sounds of rippling water; but too often one sees those threatening words, "Trespassers will be prosecuted." Rents, if estimated by the acre, are certainly low, but such low rents are the natural fruit of low wages rather than a cause of substantial comfort; while long hours and lack of amusements forbid the bright sunshine and the pure air to gladden the hearts of the people. The

¹ "Last year the layer of platina upon the equestrian statue of Lord Napier of Magdala was taking on a velvet coat, but a black, greenish tint had formed, and there was none of that delicate, velvety brown tint which ought to be there. Indeed the warrior seemed by his very attitude to recognise the fact, for he was turning, field-glass in hand, away from the Athenæum Club as if perfectly conscious that in the present state of the London atmosphere he was beyond the aid of science, and would soon become sooty black like the occupants of adjoining pedestals."—Professor Roberts Austen, C.B., F.R.S., *Journal Society of Arts*, 11th March, 1892.

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one industry, agriculture, suffers frequently from excessive rainfalls; but this wondrous harvest of the clouds is seldom properly ingathered, so that in times of drought, there is frequently, even for drinking purposes, a most insufficient supply.¹ Even the natural healthfulness of the country is largely lost for lack of proper drainage and other sanitary conditions, while, in parts almost deserted by the people the few who remain are yet frequently huddled together as if in rivalry with the slums of our cities.

But neither the Town magnet nor the Country magnet represent the full plan and purpose of nature. Human society and the beauty of nature are meant to be enjoyed together. The two magnets must be made one. As man and woman by their varied gifts and faculties supplement each other, so should town and country. The town is the symbol of society—of mutual help and friendly co-operation, of fatherhood, motherhood, brotherhood, sisterhood, of wide relations between man and man—of broad, expanding sympathies—of science, art, culture, religion. And the country! The country is the symbol of God's love and care for man. All that we are, and all that we have comes from it. Our bodies are formed of it; to it they return.

¹ Dr. Barwise, Medical Officer of Health for the County Council of Derbyshire, giving evidence before a Select Committee of the House of Commons, on 25th April, 1894, on the Chesterfield Gas and Water Bill, said, in answer to Question 1873: "At Brimington Common School I saw some basins full of soapsuds, and it was all the water that the whole of the children had to wash in. They had to wash one after another in the same water. Of course a child with ring-worm or something of that kind might spread it through the whole of the children. . . . The schoolmistress told me that the children came in from the playground hot, and she had seen them actually drink this dirty water. In fact when they were thirsty there was no other water for them to have."