

## CHAPTER XXI.

### CITY AND COUNTRY.

COBBETT compared London, even in his day, to a great wen growing upon the fair face of England. There is truth in such comparison. (Nothing more clearly shows the unhealthiness of present social tendencies than the steadily increasing concentration of population in great cities.) There are about 12,000 head of beef cattle killed weekly in the shambles of New York, while, exclusive of what goes through for export, there are about 2100 beef carcasses per week brought in refrigerator-cars from Chicago. Consider what this single item in the food-supply of a great city suggests as to the elements of fertility, which, instead of being returned to the soil from which they come, are swept out through the sewers of our great cities. The reverse of this is the destructive character of our agriculture, which is year by year decreasing the productiveness of our soil, and virtually lessening the area of land available for the support of our increasing millions.

In all the aspects of human life similar effects are being produced. (The vast populations of these great cities are utterly divorced from all the genial influences of nature.) The great mass of them never, from year's end to year's end, press foot upon mother earth, or pluck a wild flower, or hear the tinkle of brooks, the rustle of grain, or the murmur of leaves as the light breeze comes through the

woods. All the sweet and joyous influences of nature are shut out from them. Her sounds are drowned by the roar of the streets and the clatter of the people in the next room, or the next tenement; her sights are hidden from their eyes by rows of high buildings. Sun and moon rise and set, and in solemn procession the constellations move across the sky, but these imprisoned multitudes behold them only as might a man in a deep quarry. The white snow falls in winter only to become dirty slush on the pavements, and as the sun sinks in summer a worse than noonday heat is refracted from masses of brick and stone. Wisely have the authorities of Philadelphia labeled with its name every tree in their squares; for how else shall the children growing up in such cities know one tree from another? how shall they even know grass from clover?

( This life of great cities is not the natural life of man. He must, under such conditions, deteriorate, physically, mentally, morally. Yet the evil does not end here. This is only one side of it. This unnatural life of the great cities means an equally unnatural life in the country. Just as the wen or tumor, drawing the wholesome juices of the body into its poisonous vortex, impoverishes all other parts of the frame, so does the crowding of human beings into great cities impoverish human life in the country.

( Man is a gregarious animal. He cannot live by bread alone. If he suffers in body, mind and soul from being crowded into too close contact with his fellows, so also does he suffer from being separated too far from them. The beauty and the grandeur of nature pall upon man where other men are not to be met; her infinite diversity becomes monotonous where there is not human companionship; his physical comforts are poor and scant, his nobler powers languish; all that makes him higher than the animal suffers for want of the stimulus that comes from

the contact of man with man. Consider the barrenness of the isolated farmer's life—the dull round of work and sleep, in which so much of it passes. Consider, what is still worse, the monotonous existence to which his wife is condemned; its lack of recreation and excitement, and of gratifications of taste, and of the sense of harmony and beauty; its steady drag of cares and toils that make women worn and wrinkled when they should be in their bloom. Even the discomforts and evils of the crowded tenement-house are not worse than the discomforts and evils of such a life. (Yet as the cities grow, unwholesomely crowding people together till they are packed in tiers, family above family, so are they unwholesomely separated in the country. The tendency everywhere that this process of urban concentration is going on, is to make the life of the country poor and hard, and to rob it of the social stimulus and social gratifications that are so necessary to human beings.) The old healthy social life of village and townland is everywhere disappearing. In England, Scotland and Ireland, the thinning out of population in the agricultural districts is as marked as is its concentration in cities and large towns. In Ireland, as you ride along the roads, your car-driver, if he be an old man, will point out to you spot after spot, which, when he was a boy, were the sites of populous hamlets, echoing in the summer evenings with the laughter of children and the joyous sports of young people, but now utterly desolate, showing, as the only evidences of human occupation, the isolated cabins of miserable herds. In Scotland, where in such cities as Glasgow, human beings are so crowded together that two-thirds of the families live in a single room, where if you go through the streets of a Saturday night, you will think, if you have ever seen the Tierra del Fuegians, that these poor creatures might envy them, there are wide

tracts once populous, now given up to cattle, to grouse and to deer—glens that once sent out their thousand fighting men, now tenanted by a couple of gamekeepers. So across the Tweed, while London, Liverpool, Leeds, Manchester and Nottingham have grown, the village life of "merrie England" is all but extinct. Two-thirds of the entire population is crowded into cities. Clustering hamlets, such as those through which, according to tradition, Shakespeare and his comrades rollicked, have disappeared; village greens where stood the May-pole, and the cloth-yard arrow flew from the longbow to the bull's-eye of the butt, are plowed under or inclosed by the walls of some lordly demesne, while here and there stand mementos alike of a bygone faith and a departed population, in great churches or their remains—churches such as now could never be filled unless the congregations were brought from town by railroad excursion trains.

So in the agricultural districts of our older States the same tendency may be beheld; but it is in the newer States that its fullest expression is to be found—in ranches measured by square miles, where live half-savage cowboys, whose social life is confined to the excitement of the "round-up" or a periodical "drunk" in a railroad town; and in bonanza farms, where in the spring the eye wearies of seas of waving grain before resting on a single home—farms where the cultivators are lodged in barracks, and only the superintendent enjoys the luxury of a wife.

(That present tendencies are hurrying modern society toward inevitable catastrophe, is apparent from the constantly increasing concentration of population in great cities, if in nothing else.) A century ago New York and its suburbs contained about 25,000 souls; now they contain over 2,000,000. The same growth for another century would put here a population of 160,000,000. Such a city

is impossible. But what shall we say of the cities of ten and twenty millions, that, if present tendencies continue, children now born shall see?

On this, however, I will not dwell. I merely wish to call attention to the fact that this concentration of population impoverishes social life at the extremities, as well as poisons it at the center; that it is as injurious to the farmer as it is to the inhabitant of the city.

(This unnatural distribution of population, like that unnatural distribution of wealth which gives one man hundreds of millions and makes other men tramps, is the result of the action of the new industrial forces in social conditions not adapted to them. It springs primarily from our treatment of land as private property, and secondarily from our neglect to assume social functions which material progress forces upon us.) Its causes removed, there would ensue a natural distribution of population, which would give every one breathing-space and neighborhood.

It is in this that would be the great gain of the farmer in the measures I have proposed. (With the resumption of common rights to the soil, the overcrowded population of the cities would spread, the scattered population of the country would grow denser.) When no individual could profit by advance in the value of land, when no one need fear that his children could be jostled out of their natural rights, no one would want more land than he could profitably use. Instead of scraggy, half-cultivated farms, separated by great tracts lying idle, homesteads would come close to each other. Emigrants would not toil through unused acres, nor grain be hauled for thousands of miles past half-tilled land. The use of machinery would not be abandoned: where culture on a large scale secured economies it would still go on; but with the breaking up of monopolies, the rise in wages and the better distribution

of wealth, industry of this kind would assume the coöperative form. Agriculture would cease to be destructive, and would become more intense, obtaining more from the soil and returning what it borrowed. Closer settlement would give rise to economies of all kinds; labor would be far more productive, and rural life would partake of the conveniences, recreations and stimulations now to be obtained only by the favored classes in large towns. The monopoly of land broken up, it seems to me that rural life would tend to revert to the primitive type of the village surrounded by cultivated fields, with its common pasturage and woodlands. But however this may be, the working farmer would participate fully in all the enormous economies and all the immense gains which society can secure by the substitution of orderly coöperation for the anarchy of reckless, greedy scrambling.

That the masses now festering in the tenement-houses of our cities, under conditions which breed disease and death, and vice and crime, should each family have its healthful home, set in its garden; that the working farmer should be able to make a living with a daily average of two or three hours' work, which more resembled healthy recreation than toil; that his home should be replete with all the conveniences yet esteemed luxuries; that it should be supplied with light and heat, and power if needed, and connected with those of his neighbors by the telephone; that his family should be free to libraries, and lectures, and scientific apparatus, and instruction; that they should be able to visit the theater, or concert, or opera, as often as they cared to, and occasionally to make trips to other parts of the country or to Europe; that, in short, not merely the successful man, the one in a thousand, but the man of ordinary parts and ordinary foresight and prudence, should enjoy all that advancing civilization can bring to elevate and expand human life, seems, in the

light of existing facts, as wild a dream as ever entered the brain of hashish-eater. Yet the powers already within the grasp of man make it easily possible.

In our mad scramble to get on top of one another, how little do we take of the good things that bountiful nature offers us! Consider this fact: To the majority of people in such countries as England, and even largely in the United States, fruit is a luxury. Yet mother earth is not niggard of her fruit. If we chose to have it so, every road might be lined with fruit-trees.