

# THE MODERN CITY

## CHAPTER I

### THE CITY AND CIVILIZATION

THE city has always been the centre of civilization. Civilization does not exist among a nomad people. In sparsely settled regions it is only rudimentary. Even to-day in the rural districts it does not progress beyond the simplest forms.

The great epochs of civilization have always coincided with a highly developed city life. This was true of Athens in the time of Pericles, of Rome during the early empire, of Italy during the Renaissance. It was true of the Netherlands and of Germany in the Middle Ages, when liberty came to life after centuries of disorder, just as it is true of the last fifty years, which coincide with the development of the modern city.

With the city came education, culture, and a love of the fine arts. They only exist under an urban environment. For education and the fine arts come with leisure and accumulated wealth, which in turn are city-born.

Science, invention, industry, are also urban. They, too, depend upon the division of labor and the wealth which such division makes possible. They involve

the harnessing of power, the conversion of coal and water into steam and electricity, as well as the specialization of activities and talents, which are only possible under urban conditions. And the larger the city and the more minute the specialization, the greater the co-operation and the more easy the production of wealth.

### **The City and Co-operation.**

The city had its beginnings with co-operation, with mutual help. This, with the division of labor, made civilization possible. Co-operation began when one man tended the fields and another went to war. Others produced the tools with which the farmer tilled the soil and the soldier protected the state. Exchanges followed. The products of the field and the shop found their way to the *agora*, or marketplace. Community began to trade with community. This was the beginning of commerce. Surplus wealth made its appearance, which enabled society to support teachers and artists.

Taxation was introduced, which enabled the division of labor to be carried still further. This marked the beginning of compulsory co-operation. Then many services became accessible to all that had previously been confined to the few. Streets and highways facilitated the transportation of goods, and this widened the life of the community still further. A standing army was provided, which relieved many men from the necessity of carrying arms. This widened freedom and increased the productiveness of labor and the time devoted to peaceful pursuits.

Taxation is one of the greatest agencies of civilized life.

**Co-operation Only Possible in City.**

It was not possible to develop co-operation to any appreciable extent under rural conditions. It is not possible to this day. There is almost as wide a gulf between the routine life of the ranchman of Dakota and the clerk of New York as there is between that of the farmer of to-day and the husbandman in the times of the Pharaohs. City life for even the poorest is socialized to a wonderful extent. And as society changes from the country to the town, and from the town to the great city, the element of co-operation becomes more and more important. It involves a change from the doing of all sorts of things by each individual to the doing of many things by the community and the consequent freeing of the individual, so that he may pursue his own calling and enjoy his own leisure. Co-operation, according to Prince Kropotkin, is a law of progress even in the animal world. In his *Mutual Aid* he says:<sup>1</sup>

“Life in societies is the most powerful weapon in the struggle for life—enabling the feeblest insects, the feeblest birds and the feeblest animals to protect themselves from the most terrible birds and beasts of prey. It permits longevity; it enables the species to rear its progeny with the least waste of energy; it enables gregarious animals to migrate in search of new abodes.

“Therefore combine—practice mutual aid—that is the surest means for giving the greatest safety, the

<sup>1</sup> Pages 57 and 75.

best guarantee of existence and progress, bodily and intellectual and moral.

“The species in which individual struggle has been reduced to its narrowest limits and the practice of mutual aid has attained its greatest development are invariably the most numerous, prosperous and open to progression. Mutual aid allows the attainment of old age, the cumulation of experience, higher intellectual development, etc. The unsocial species on the contrary are doomed to decay.”

The city can only live by co-operation; by co-operation in a million unseen ways. Without co-operation for a single day a great city would stand still. Without co-operation for a week it would be brought to the verge of starvation and be decimated by disease.

The city has destroyed individualism. It is constantly narrowing its field. And in all probability co-operation, either voluntary or compulsory, will continue to appropriate an increasing share of the activities of society.

### **The Machine of Machines.**

The city is a machine of machines. The changes wrought by steam, electricity, and transportation, the mastery of nature and the multiplication of human hands through the harnessing of power, are the fruits of urban life. So are the college and the press. All these are city-born, just as they were two thousand years ago. The city is to civilization what the steam-engine was to domestic industry. It is the greatest machine of all. No discovery of man, no

conquest of power can be compared with the achievements and potentiality of the city.

The city is the counter on which the wealth of the world is displayed; it is the clearing-house to which the most inaccessible quarters of the earth contribute. Here the destinies of people are determined, not by a powerful potentate, but by the subconscious needs and demands of the people themselves. The desires of the city direct the life of the shepherds on the mountain-side, the fishermen in Alaska, the pearl-divers of India, the plantations of the tropics, the wheat-fields of America and Russia, and the sheep and cattle ranges of Australia and Argentina. They direct the wine-growers of France as well as the mill operatives of Pittsburgh. To its needs the ears of monarchs, statesmen, financiers, and captains of industry are attuned. To its wants the hands of hundreds of millions of workers respond. The twentieth-century city is the brain of a cosmic machine; it is the heart and sensory system of the world as well.

### **The Changing City.**

To many people the city is an evil that exacts so terrible a tribute of misery that they would have us "return to the land." They dream of an age of rural simplicity in which wealth and want no longer stare each other in the face. They would stem the tide to the city and turn back the movements of a century and re-establish the conditions of our fathers. To them the city is not the hope, it is the despair of civilization.

But the tide will never turn. Back to the land is an idle dream. We can no more restore the pastoral age than we can go back to the spindle and the loom. Undoubtedly there will be changes in farm life. Denmark and Wisconsin are making agriculture both profitable and alluring. And the farm itself will change, for it, even more than the city, is in a state of arrested development. Agriculture, with all its advances, has not been specialized; it has not responded, as has industry, to the division of labor and the co-operative movement.

The city, too, will change, for the city is what it is because political thought has not kept pace with changing conditions. The city has grown more rapidly than has social science; more rapidly than has industrial democracy. In the first place, our political machinery has not been adjusted to the performance of the city's task. It is clumsy, indirect, complicated. Almost always, too, the city has been under the control of a class that has used its power to enrich itself by laws at the expense of others. And these laws can be altered, just as they were created, as rapidly as the city becomes conscious of its possibilities and acquires the power to correct these evils through political democracy.

For half a century constitutions and laws, city charters, methods of nomination and election, have been so complicated that they prevented the free expression of the popular will. But this is rapidly changing. The city is being placed on a democratic basis. Home rule is being granted. Charters are

being simplified. The caucus and convention are being abolished and the ballot is being shortened. The initiative, referendum, and recall are being added. With these changes it is no longer necessary for the city to be a behemoth, a thing to be feared. For the first time in history the great gains of science and industry, the economic and industrial possibilities of the city, are open to conscious social direction and control by the people. And under this new democracy the city will be able to develop a life that has had no prototype in history.

### Summary.

The city is the greatest agency of civilization as it is its most portentous problem. For the city enabled men to specialize through the division of labor; it made education, culture, and the fine arts possible.

It was the co-operation of many men dividing up the work to be done according to the fitness of each that enabled surplus wealth to be accumulated. This division of labor in turn led to co-operation both voluntary and involuntary; the co-operation on the part of the community itself through the use of taxation and the co-operation of countless private agencies in the production, distribution, and exchange of wealth. Civilization advanced through these means. And as the city increases in size the possibilities of co-operation increase as does the production of wealth, which in turn makes possible greater and greater leisure and expenditures for the refinements of life.

Even the evils of the city are not necessarily inherent in urban life. They are due to the backwardness of political thought and social science and the

failure of co-operation to keep pace with the needs of the community. This in turn is partly due to the fact that the political machinery of the city has been inadequate to the expression of the popular will and the execution of that will when it seeks to realize itself.