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TOWNSMAN AND COUNTRYMAN:

TWO WAYS OF LIFE

THE BRIGHT LIGHTS. The lure of the big city. The human warmth of its crowds. The fun. The adventures. The amusements. The "best people". Their culture. The worst people. The slums. The human ant-heap. The Sodoms of the land. Think of as many phrases as he may, one will hardly exhaust the list. The great city has been, is and will be, a world in itself, a huge magnet that draws all to it, rolling up relentlessly larger as the generations go by.

The quiet countryside, its unassailed peace, a thing of beauty and a joy forever, a healer of men's ills, renewer of their vitality. The trees, and the mountains beyond them, and the seas beyond the mountains. There is a pleasure in the pathless woods, in the forest primeval and in the ocean's deep-voiced neighbouring roar. There is society where none intrudes, where men may live in idyllic peace, in promised lands abounding in milk and honey. Poets have sung about it, some people have loved it, and sunk themselves into it.

Unremitting toil, the filth and stink of animals, the crude habitations—and cruder manners—the scant rewards, the cup dashed all too often from lips because of the weather's vagaries, the slavery of the women, born to child-bearing and subordination. The narrowness, the self-satisfied ignorant complacency, the gawking rustic on the margins of civilization, the eternal peasant, field-hand, serf or slave. This picture too has often been painted.

The three paragraphs call up images of two extremes that men dream of, and two conditions of human life. The picture is heightened, but city and country, the urban and the rural, the complex and the simple, the civilized

and the primitive, such terms sharpen the antithesis. They indicate two highly contrasting states under which life may be lived.

It is hard to tell at what precise point rural values pass into urban. Perhaps as soon as a household or two separates itself from the necessity of soil on land or sea and begins to live by other means, such as "services". At whatever point it is made, the separation into two life styles is real, and while rural values may persist in quite fair-sized communities, they persist only in part, cut off from their roots. Eventually they fade away and gradually die as the urban complex, whatever it is, gets bigger and bigger. In the great world-wide, they have disappeared—except from the hearts of those who cherish them as the memories of youth.

No theme in literature or social history, surely, is commoner than this juxtaposition of town and country, and the rivalry of values that it involves. Our day, with the urban monster gulping down the countryside in unparalleled mouthfuls, none can be more apposite. Little new can be said about it, but many aspects of it may be looked at, the patent and obvious factors in it noted and perhaps thought stirred on what makes the whole thing go on, what is, on the ultimate mystery, growth, which is life.

The mark of the urban nucleus, once it gets beyond small dimensions, is its dependence on a countryside for food, for most of the materials for shelter and for the raw materials that it can work up for profit. As the words are used here, the sea itself may be a "countryside". Some see in this link of dependence the ultimate nature of the relationship. The urban community (call it village, town or city) assumes a predatory relationship to the country round about it. Fishers, hunters, agricultural peasants, may be self-sufficient, raising their own food, making their own shelter and their own tools. Even a mine attracts round it a community directly dependent on its mineral for livelihood. Such a community may become quite large, but the miners and their families will not have a genuine urban outlook. The true urban community has to find its supplies outside itself. Tension between it and the countryside cannot be avoided, though by one device or another it may be relaxed. The end-result of the relationship is usually city-domination, though this may be disguised by various intermediate factors. The city gets out of the country what it needs and from this basic fact arise innumerable life-patterns, ranging up to government, states, empires, and civilizations.

The inhabitants of the country are "on the receiving end" of it all and may sink lower and lower in the scale, from independent self-sufficiency to servility and slavery. Land-holding aristocracies may slow down the evolu-

tion, especially if the pace of technical development be not swift, but they cannot terminate it. An intermediate stage in the evolution is offered by the yeoman, an independent small land-holder, with much self-sufficiency about him, but partially drawn into the network of affairs radiating out from the city. The ultimate fate of the yeoman, some think, is either to be completely caught up in the general capitalist pattern (as, for example, a modern poultry "farmer") or to be replaced by capitalistic enterprise, like the late Roman *latifundia* or the modern American "company farms". Whatever else happens, domination of the countryside, that is, of nature, by the city goes relentlessly on at all periods of human history—sometimes, as with Rome, to fall of its own weight.

These considerations supply a thesis:—demand centres seek out supply regions and use them in any way that seems advantageous to themselves. This chain of demand-supply widens constantly until the whole world is embraced in a tangle of unravellable complexity. Just as the first settlers in a forest region cut off the trees in their immediate neighbourhood for fuel or cabins and then have to keep going farther and farther away to get more of them, so the city gets its food and its other supplies as nearby as it can and then has to go farther and farther away for them. Eventually "food" (which may consist, as it were, in iron ore) comes from the ends of the earth, wherever it can be got. The devices, conscious and unconscious, by which cities or urban regions get their necessities, are infinite: trade and piracy, war, colonization, and many others. These make up a good part of the history of the world, lead into all of the complexities of trade and a good many of those of politics and culture also. They drastically affect the psychological attitudes of the individuals and groups of individuals concerned. How trace them out without resorting to a degree of detail that would be boring? How paint the picture in bold strokes?

II

Human relationships go back far beyond our knowledge. Among them, trade, exchange for mutual benefit, no doubt has always been conspicuous. Let us say that it begins at the flint hammer stage. Its intricacies gradually mount. They bring forth the trading post, village, town, city, eventually the world-city or metropolis. Among the complexities, one strand stands out clearly, forcefully tying metropolis and hinterland together: this is the staple article, which is the parent of the staple trade.

According to the dictionary, a "staple" is any chief item of trade reg-

gularly stocked and in constant demand. "A principal market or trading centre" is given as an archaic meaning. The term has long been used in such senses, but usually loosely: only within modern times have full and satisfactory definitions and descriptions been given of what is comprised in it. A "staple" or staple commodity is not only regularly stocked and in constant demand, but there must be reliable supply and reliable quality. The commodity must not only be available in large amounts but capable of "grading", so that buyers can know what they are getting, preferably without needing to see it. Staples and staple trades are innumerable. To name a few, we think of fish, furs, wine, wheat, wood, wool, rice, copper, diamonds, pepper, oil, tin. Staples are mostly raw materials not brought far into a manufactured state, and the most important of them in the world's history have been foodstuffs. They have involved every conceivable problem of transportation and have caused to arise their own special types of transport, from camels to Great Lakes bulk carriers. They have built up systems of buying and selling that have become bound by rigid rules, and their financing has called into existence banks, banking houses, bills of exchange and all the apparatus of the financial world. Many a society has been founded upon a great staple, has become rich and powerful in its grading, selling and buying. At one end of the human scale men have been enslaved because of a staple (such as sugar) and at the other end, the wealth that it has produced has brought forth aristocracies which have sustained cultures and great states. The Peruvian staple, gold, sustained for generations the great world power of Spain. Looking at staples and staple trades takes the spectator far beyond hum-drum counting houses into the midst of the intricate web called human civilization.

The difficulty of the subject is that it is at once obvious and elusive. We know an overwhelming amount about the external nature of what we call "growth" and little convincing about the internal process. We seem to think, for example, if public pronouncements have any weight in evidence, that people produce growth, whereas "growth", that is, opportunities for life, more probably produces people. If the opportunity for life is there, life, animal or vegetable, will arise to take it. For man, one could say, "jobs make people, rather than that people make jobs".

The readiest keys lie in geography and in history. Geography tells much about growth, especially about the growth of cities. There are river-mouth cities, harbour cities, port-of-call cities, straits cities, and many other types of city. Wherever there is a great river, at its mouth or near it there is usually a city, probably a great city—Shanghai, Calcutta, New York, Montreal,

New Orleans, Buenos Aires, come at once to mind. The pattern is not completely regular: there are no great cities at the mouths of the Volga or the Danube, or indeed, the Amazon. Some small river mouths have great cities, such as London and Hamburg. The term "harbour cities" immediately calls up Rio de Janeiro, Melbourne, San Francisco, among others. A good harbour alone will not make a great city, but it helps. New York comes into both categories. Port-of-call cities have arisen where the exigencies of trade, mostly modern trade, have demanded stopping places. Cape Town and Singapore are the conspicuous instances here. Singapore also comes under the heading "straits city", as do Copenhagen and Constantinople. Some of the cities of central Asia stand where trade routes cross, as do also Strasbourg, St. Louis and Paris. Geographical explanations for the rise of cities are many, and all of them complicated by the presence of other factors. In general, the geographical situation must present some definite advantage, commercial or otherwise. Cities do not "just grow".

Some cities are built mainly on politics. Rome at once comes to mind. Why did the miserable little collection of huts on a muddy little river grow into the ruler of the world? Here is a mystery indeed which all the libraries of books written to explain it have yet never explained. There are other Romes. Paris itself is one. As the American geographer, Whittlesey, has shown in his *Man and the State*, Paris grew not only out of the luck of the Capetian kings in begetting sons for three hundred years without a break, but also out of the successive escarpments to the east that have given it a series of defensive walls against the invader and out of its position midway between north and south, astride the watersheds, in communication down the Seine, the Rhone and the Loire. In Asia, Delhi is a "power-city", or rather, the successive Delhis, from remote ages through Hindu to Mohammedan, from Mohammedan to British and back again to Hindu. Seven successive cities, they say, have risen at that dominating spot on the water courses of the Ganges, not far from the dryness of Rajasthan (Rajputana) on the west and the impassable Himalayas on the north. Each of the seven cities represents a conquest and a regime.

No one factor explains the rise of a city, still less of a metropolis or world city. There must be something to stimulate natural or acquired advantages and bring them to life. That something may be a man, as Alexander and the city that he founded at the mouth of the Nile, or Peter the Great and the city that he founded. It takes a wise man to found a great city. Alexander must have had as good an eye for a city as for a battlefield, and Constantine

also, although Constantine had the benefit of the long preceding experience of Byzantium, the ancient Greek town at the exit from the Black Sea. But all these men saw more than mere geography. They saw the possibilities of control and of trade and exchange. Alexander saw both up the Nile and across the sea. It is the veriest cliché to exclaim that in human affairs there must always be men (though the elementary fact often seems lost to the sight of the scholars of the abstract), men with their infinity of motives, not least of which is domination, men acting upon nature, who build all our human structures. "Man is the measure of all things". To explain and explore that statement would be to explain and explore civilization: it would be to write an encyclopaedia of universal biography. But how solve that mystery which was Rome? Did not Rome's neighbours have men? Men as good as the Romans? Was the grandeur that was Rome all the accident of the ford in that little river, the Tiber?

III

Nature's share is not merely geographical conformation: it is also, and perhaps mainly, useable materials. It is the flow of wealth through some kind of channel bringing about trade. But trade in turn depends upon the demand for useable natural wealth. Demand stimulates trade and trade draws on the resources of any region possessing any. A "region" may be complete wilderness, or it may be a partially occupied area, or settled country containing states having a way of life and civilization of their own. A "region" may be anything which will supply the demands of a centre and whose supplies that centre by some means or other succeeds in securing. When in the sixteenth century Europe sent out its fishermen to the Banks of Newfoundland, many of them did not go ashore: they fished in the wilderness of the open sea and returned, supplying some of the demands of the home market. For the metropolitan countries, the sea—the western ocean—was a "region". When Europeans landed in America, they found tracts virtually empty of human life. America for them was a "region". When they went to Africa, another "region", they found more numerous populations and in some parts, settled peoples: these populations they soon managed to turn into an important staple—slaves! When they went to India, they found a land of ancient civilizations, filled with good things. This land they eventually subjugated. All these areas were supply regions and in nearly every case, it is the supply region that comes off second best. The North American Indian was pushed back. The pine woods of the northern continent were slashed down and often a wilderness of

stumps left behind. The mines of this country and of that were exhausted and deserted. The logical, if not the invariable result of the demand centre's exploitation of the supply region is the ghost town.

Every nodal point, whether close to or far from its supply region, has the same sociological tendencies. Long before its men have crossed the seas, it turns to the exploitation of its own immediate neighbourhood, and cajoles or coerces country dwellers to bring in their produce, thus building up in peasant minds the idea of a surplus beyond their own needs, a surplus that can be exchanged for that invention of the peasant's devil—money. With money, the city can ensnarl the peasant in debt—the sorry tale that marks so much of India's history—or it can take some of his produce away from him through tolls or taxes, or having entangled him in debt, its leading men can take over his lands and set up as feudal lords. By armed force, it can ward off attempts by other cities to exert control over its district. Moreover the peasant, everywhere in history, has contributed to his own downfall. He has never understood the slavery of debt, but he has invariably entered into it. Now and again there has been a "new deal", such as Solon attempted for the Athenians and the Gracchi for Rome. "New Deals", however, do not last long, and the debts excused in one generation are once more fastened upon another. In return for domination, the city has offered "law and order", which means that it has tried, after a fashion, to keep off other intruders and has offered to its surrounding districts the protection of its walls and its fortress.

The country districts forge their own chains in another way, for they send their sons and daughters to the city. The country boy with his rude health and his physical vigour has been coming to town throughout history, and often he has remade the city, though not in his own image. Since the land can only sustain so many, the annual "crop" must go away. Before modern times this annual crop was not large: war and pestilence saw to that. Only at exceptional times were there rapid increases in population. In the five centuries after the Norman Conquest, the population of England only increased by perhaps a million and a half, from about two and a half million to about four. But the cities, whether in England or elsewhere in Europe, took what surplus there was, for there was no more empty land (except in the extreme east), took the surplus of sons for soldiers or apprentices, of daughters for servants or prostitutes, or, for the more fortunate, for places at court, in church or monastery.

From whatever angle it is examined, the simple people of the countryside seem invariably to have got the worst of it, and their attempts to shift the

burden have invariably failed, as they did, for example, in the Peasants' Revolt of the 1380's. Only as modern times have approached, with their improvement in agricultural methods and the rapid growth of cities needing food, has a class of farmers, neither peasants nor country gentlemen, arisen. This class is the yeoman, so typical of England, that favoured isle uncursed by invasion, and the dominant figure up to the present in the countryside of North America.

"A bold peasantry, their country's pride, when once destroyed can never be supplied", the poet tells us. Bold peasantries, nevertheless, always seem destined for destruction. This is partly because they have little capacity for collective action. It is only with difficulty that even the modern farmer can be organized, and over the stretch of history, country dwellers have not been able to get together. They have feuded among themselves (blood feuds have often lasted for centuries); they adhere rigidly to status. They are unbendingly conservative. The new thing, the new method, the new belief, is *ipso facto* evil. Yet out of all this there builds up a way of life that poets have sung about and moralists commended: virtue, bluff honesty, manly attitudes, physical vigour, expressed in song and dance, and the immemorial customs of the countryside, not only hallowed by age, but adjusted as with a precision instrument to local needs. Peasantries will always exist, for it will surely never be possible for men so to organize the globe that they will co-ordinate the humble completely out of existence, but they will not dominate. As our current urban civilization marches on, they will be shoved off into the remote hillsides, the distant mountain valleys, the off-shore islands. There, in the slow march of the centuries, they may survive, and many of their ancient values with them. Then, as the eternal clash between the rural and the urban goes on repeating itself, they may rest waiting until the day comes for them once more to sally forth and occupy and beget, when the proud cities have suffered that fate which all our human experience tells us proud cities sooner or later do suffer and have become "one with Nineveh and Tyre".