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Sketch XI. A Great City considered in Physical, Moral, and Political Views.

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S K E T C H X I.

A GREAT CITY considered in Physical, Moral,
and Political Views.

IN all ages an opinion seems to have been prevalent, that a great city is a great evil, and that a capital may be too great for the state, as a head may be for the body. Considering however the very shallow reasons that have been given for this opinion, it should seem to be but slightly founded. There are several ordinances limiting the extent of Paris, and prohibiting new buildings beyond the prescribed bounds; the first of which is by Henry II. ann. 1549. These ordinances have been renewed from time to time, down to the 1672, in which year there is an edict of Louis XIV. to the same purpose. The reasons assigned are, "First, That by enlarging the city, the air would be rendered unwholesome. Second, That cleaning the streets would prove a great additional labour. Third, That adding to the number of inhabitants would raise the price of provisions, of labour, and of manufactures. Fourth, That ground would be covered with buildings instead of corn, which might hazard a scarcity. Fifth, That the country would be depopulated by the desire that people have to resort to the capital. And, lastly, That the difficulty of governing such numbers would be an encouragement to robbery and murder."

These reasons for confining the city of Paris within certain bounds are wonderfully shallow. The most important of them conclude

conclude justly against permitting an increase of inhabitants: the second and fourth conclude only against enlarging the city; and these, at the best, are trifling. The first reason urged against enlarging the city, is a solid reason for enlarging it, supposing the numbers to be limited; for to prevent crowding is an excellent preventive of unwholesome air. Paris, with the same number of inhabitants that were in the days of the fourth Henry, occupies thrice the space, much to the health as well as comfort of the inhabitants. Had the ordinances mentioned been made effectual, the houses in Paris must all have been built, like those in the old town, story above story, ascending to the sky like the tower of Babel. Before the great fire *anno* 1666, the plague was frequent in London; but by widening the streets, and enlarging the houses, there has not since been known in that great city, any contagious distemper that deserves the name of a plague. The third, fifth, and last reasons, conclude against permitting any addition to the number of inhabitants; but conclude nothing against enlarging the town. In a word, the measure adopted in these ordinances has little or no tendency to correct the evils complained of; and infallibly would enflame the chief of them. The measure that ought to have been adopted, is to limit the number of inhabitants, not the extent of the town.

Queen Elisabeth of England, copying the French ordinances, issued a proclamation *anno* 1602, prohibiting any new buildings within three miles of London. The preamble is in the following words: “ That foreseeing the great and manifold inconveniencies
“ and mischiefs which daily grow, and are likely to increase, in
“ the city and suburbs of London, by confluence of people to in-
“ habit the same; not only by reason that such multitudes can
“ hardly be governed to serve God, and obey her Majesty, with-
“ out constituting an addition of new officers, and enlarging their
“ authority; but also can hardly be provided of food and other
“ necessaries



“ necessaries at a reasonable price; and finally, that as such mul-
 “ titudes of people, many of them poor, who must live by beg-
 “ ging, or worse means, are heaped up together, and in a sort
 “ smothered, with many children and servants, in one house or
 “ small tenement; it must needs follow, if any plague or other
 “ universal sickness come amongst them, that it would presently
 “ spread through the whole city and confines, and also into all
 “ parts of the realm.”

There appears no deeper penetration in this proclamation, than in the French ordinances. The same error is observable in both, which is the limiting the extent of the town, instead of limiting the number of inhabitants. True it is indeed, that the regulation would have a better effect in London than in Paris. As stone is in plenty about Paris, houses there may be carried to a very great height; and are actually so carried in the old town: but there being no stone about London, the houses formerly were built of timber, now of brick; materials too frail for a lofty edifice.

Proceeding to particulars, the first objection, which is the expence of governing a great multitude, concludes against the numbers, not against the extent of the city. At the same time, the objection is at best doubtful in point of fact. Tho' vices abound in a great city, requiring the strictest attention of the magistrate; yet with a well-regulated police, it is much less expensive to govern 600,000 in one city, than the same number in ten different cities. The second objection, viz. the high price of provisions, strikes only against numbers, not extent. Beside, whatever might have been the case in the days of Elizabeth, when agriculture and internal commerce were in their infancy; there are at present not many towns in England, where a temperate man may live cheaper than in London. The hazard of contagious distempers, which is the third objection, is an invincible argument against limiting the extent of a great town. It is mentioned above, that from the year

year 1666, when the streets were widened, and the houses enlarged, London has never been once visited by the plague. If the proclamation had taken effect, the houses must have been so crowded upon each other, and the streets so contracted, as to have occasioned plagues still more frequently than before the year 1666.

The ministry of the Queen's immediate successors were not more clear-sighted than she and her ministers were. In the year 1624, King James issued a proclamation against building in London upon new foundations. Charles I. issued two proclamations to the same purpose; one in the year 1625, and one in the year 1630.

The progress of political knowledge has unfolded many bad effects of a great city, more weighty than any urged in these proclamations. The first I shall mention is, that people born and bred in a great city are commonly weak and effeminate. Vegetius (*a*) observing, that men bred to husbandry make the best soldiers, adds what follows. “ Interdum tamen necessitas exigit, etiam urbanos ad arma compelli: qui ubi nomen dedere militiæ, primum laborare, decurrere, portare pondus, et solem pulveremque ferre, condiscant; parco victu utantur et rustico; interdum sub divo, interdum sub papilionibus, commorentur. Tunc demum ad usum erudiantur armorum: et si longior expeditio emergit, in angariis plurimum detinendi sunt, proculque habendi a civitatis illecebris: ut eo modo, et corporibus eorum, robur accedat, et animis.*” The luxury of a great city descends

(a) De re militari, lib. 1. cap. 3.

* “ But sometimes there is a necessity for arming the townspeople, and calling them out to service. When this is the case, it ought to be the first care, to enure them to labour, to march them up and down the country, to make them carry heavy burdens, and to harden them against the weather. Their food should



descends from the highest to the lowest, infecting all ranks of men; and there is little opportunity in it for such exercise as renders the body vigorous and robust. This is a physical objection against a great city: the next regards morality. Virtue is exerted chiefly in restraint: vice, in giving freedom to desire. Moderation and self-command form a character the most susceptible of virtue: superfluity of animal spirits, and love of pleasure, form a character the most liable to vice. Low vices, pilfering for example, or lying, draw few or no imitators; but vices that indicate a foul and unrestrained character, fail not to produce admirers. Where a man boldly struggles against unlawful restraint, he is justly applauded and imitated; and the vulgar are not apt to distinguish nicely between lawful and unlawful restraint: the boldness is visible, and they pierce no deeper. It is the unruly boy, full of animal spirits, who at public school is admired and imitated; not the virtuous and modest. Vices accordingly that show spirit, are extremely infectious; virtue very little. Hence the corruption of a great city, which increases more and more in proportion to the number of inhabitants. But it is sufficient here barely to mention that objection; because it has been much insisted on in antecedent parts of this work.

The following bad effects are more of a political nature. A great town is a professed enemy to the free circulation of money. The current coin is accumulated in the capital: and distant provinces must sink into idleness; for without ready money neither

“ should be coarse and scanty, and they should be habituated to sleep alternately
 “ in their tents, and in the open air. Then is the time to instruct them in the ex-
 “ ercise of their arms. If the expedition is a distant one, they should be chiefly
 “ employ’d in the stations of posts or expresses, and removed as much as possible
 “ from the dangerous allurements that abound in large cities; that thus they may
 “ be enervated both in mind and body.”

arts



arts nor manufactures can flourish. Thus we find less and less activity, in proportion commonly to the distance from the capital, and an absolute torpor in the extremities. It may be observed beside, that as horses in a great city must be provided with provender from a distance, the country is robbed of its dung for the benefit of the rich fields round the city. But as manure laid upon poor land is of more advantage to the farmer than upon what is already highly improved, the depriving distant parts of manure is a loss to the country in general. Nor is this all: The dung of an extensive city, the bulk of it at least, is so remote from the fields to which it must be carried, that the expence of carriage swallows up the profit.

Another bad effect of accumulating money in the capital is, to raise there the price of labour; and the temptation of high wages, making every one flock to the capital, robs the country of its best hands. And as they who resort to the capital are commonly young people, who remove as soon as they are fit for work, distant provinces are burdened with their maintenance, without reaping any benefit by their labour.

But of all, the most deplorable effect of a great city, is the preventing of population, by shortening the lives of its inhabitants. Does a capital swell in proportion to the numbers that are drained from the country? Far from it. The air of a populous city is infected by multitudes crowded together; and people there seldom make out the usual time of life. With respect to London in particular, the fact is but too well ascertained. The burials in that immense city greatly exceed the births: the difference some affirm to be no less than ten thousand yearly: by the most moderate computation, not under seven or eight thousand. As London is far from being on the decline, the consumption of so many inhabitants must be supplied from the country; and the annual supply amounts probably to a greater number than were needed annually for recruiting our armies and navies in the late war with



France. If so, London is a greater enemy to population, than a bloody war would be, supposing it even to be perpetual. What an enormous tax is Britain thus subjected to for supporting her capital! The rearing and educating yearly for London 7 or 8000 persons, require an immense sum.

In Paris, if the bills of mortality can be relied on, the births and burials are nearly equal, being each of them about 19,000 yearly; and according to that computation, Paris should need no recruits from the country. But in that city, the bills of mortality cannot be depended on for burials. It is there universally the practice of high and low, to have their infants nursed in the country, till they be three years of age; and consequently those who die before that age, are not inlisted. What proportion these bear to the whole is uncertain. But a guess may be made from such as die in London; which are computed to be one half of the whole that die (*a*). Now giving the utmost allowance for the healthiness of the country above that of a town, Paris children that die in the country before the age of three, cannot be brought so low as a third of those that die. On the other hand, the London bills of mortality are less to be depended on for births than for burials. None are inlisted but infants baptized by clergymen of the English church; and the numerous children of Papists, Dissenters, and other sectaries, are left out of the account. Upon the whole, the difference between the births and burials in Paris and in London, is much less than it appears to be on comparing the bills of mortality of these two cities.

At the same time, giving full allowance for children that are not brought into the London bills of mortality, there is the highest probability that a greater number of children are born in Paris than in London; and consequently that the former requires fewer recruits from the country than the latter. In Paris, dome-

(*a*) See Dr Price, p. 362.



stic servants are encouraged to marry: they are observed to be more settled than when bachelors, and more attentive to their duty. In London, such marriages are discouraged, as rendering a servant more attentive to his own family, than to that of his master. But a servant attentive to his own family, will not, for his own sake, neglect that of his master. At any rate, is he not more to be depended on, than a servant who continues a bachelor? What can be expected of idle and pampered bachelors, but debauchery and every sort of corruption? Nothing restrains them from absolute profligacy, but the eye of the master, who for that reason is their aversion not their love. If the poor-laws be named the folio of corruption, bachelor-servants in London may well be considered as a large appendix. And this attracts the eye to the poor-laws, which indeed make the chief difference between Paris and London, with respect to the present point. In Paris, certain funds are established for the poor, the yearly produce of which admits but a limited number. As that fund is always pre-occupied, the low people who are not on the list, have little or no prospect of bread, but from their own industry; and to the industrious, marriage is in a great measure necessary. In London, a parish is taxed in proportion to the number of its poor; and every person who is pleased to be idle, is entitled to maintenance. Most things thrive by encouragement, and idleness above all. Certainty of maintenance, renders the low people in England idle and profligate; especially in London, where luxury prevails, and infects every rank. So insolent are the London poor, that scarce one of them will condescend to eat brown bread. There are accordingly in London, a much greater number of idle and profligate wretches, than in Paris, or in any other town in proportion to the number of inhabitants. These wretches, in Doctor Swift's style, never think of posterity, because posterity never thinks of them: men who hunt after pleasure, and live from day to day,



have no notion of being burdened with a family. These causes produce a greater number of children in Paris than in London; tho' probably they differ not much in populoufness.

I shall add but one other objection to a great city, which is not flight. An overgrown capital, far above a rival, has, by numbers and riches, a distressing influence in public affairs. The populace are ductile, and easily misled by ambitious and designing magistrates. Nor are there wanting critical times, in which such magistrates, acquiring artificial influence, may have power to disturb the public peace. That an overgrown capital may prove dangerous to sovereignty, has more than once been experienced both in Paris and London.

It would give one the spleen, to hear the French and English zealously disputing about the extent of their capitals, as if the prosperity of their country depended on that circumstance. To me it appears like one glorying in the king's-evil, or in any contagious distemper. Much better employ'd would they be, in contriving means for lessening those cities. There is not a political measure, that, in my opinion, would tend more to aggrandize the kingdom of France, or of Britain, than to split its capital into several great towns. My plan would be, to confine the inhabitants of London to 100,000, composed of the King and his household, supreme courts of justice, government-boards, prime nobility and gentry, with necessary shopkeepers, artists, and other dependents. Let the rest of the inhabitants be distributed into nine towns properly situated, some for internal commerce, some for foreign. Such a plan would diffuse life and vigour thro' every corner of the island.

To execute such a plan, would, I acknowledge, require the deepest political skill, and much perseverance. I shall suggest what occurs at present. The first step must be, to mark proper spots for the nine towns, the most advantageous for trade, or for manufactures.

manufactures. If any of these spots be occupied already with small towns, so much the better. The next step is a capitation-tax on the inhabitants of London; the sum levied to be appropriated for encouraging the new towns. One encouragement would have a good effect; which is, a premium to every man who builds in any of these towns, more or less, in proportion to the size of the house. This tax would banish from London, every manufacture but of the most lucrative kind. When, by this means, the inhabitants of London are reduced to a number not much above 100,000, the near prospect of being relieved from the tax, will make every householder active to banish all above that number: and to prevent a renewal of the tax, a greater number will never again be permitted. It would require great penetration to proportion the sums to be levied and distributed, so as to have their proper effect, without overburdening the capital on the one hand, or giving too great encouragement for building on the other, which might tempt people to build for the premium merely, without any further view. Much will depend on an advantageous situation: houses built there will always find inhabitants.

The two great cities of London and Westminster are extremely ill fitted for local union. The latter, the seat of government and of the noblesse, infects the former with luxury and with love of show. The former, the seat of commerce, infects the latter with love of gain. The mixture of these opposite passions, is productive of every groveling vice.

S K E T C H

