

**CITIES
ARE ABNORMAL**

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Cities are abnormal by Various

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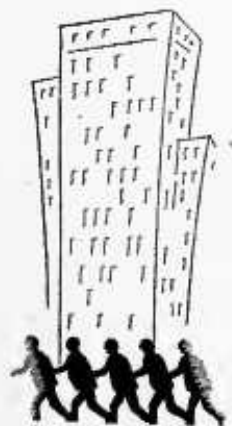
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Foreword

EMPIRES and commonwealths are born of farms. Must they die of cities? The amazing year 1875 was at once a pivot and an usher of great events for the United States. One event was the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, a milestone in our industrial progress. Telephone, electric trolley cars and lights, the agricultural settlement of the Great West, the exploitation of forest and mine—such were the more notable achievements which came in quick succession, to be followed by countless other inventions and enterprises which we today have at our disposal.

These were things for all to see. But within the impersonal array of census figures was the evidence of something still more fateful—a revolution behind a revolution. During the decade of the eighteen seventies the population of this great agricultural nation became predominantly urban. Nourishment continued to come from the farms but the growth which it fed flowered in cities. The expressions of urban activity became overwhelmingly vocal. Not even Bryan's silver tongue could prevail against them. The castigation of the Seven Devils of Wall Street by the Populists Peffer and Weaver left no mark upon a brashly growing urban pattern. The forms and folklore of city living began to set the mold of our thoughts and aspirations. Rural education, and even higher education in rural states, became a sort of pedagogical cream-separator, pouring the richest of its products into the stream of urban life.

Superficially this might seem to be nothing more than what had happened often enough before, although on a far smaller scale. It had happened in Rome between the days of

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Cato and those of Augustus, in Palestine between the time of David and that of the prophets. We still do not know whether this change, in these places and elsewhere, was the symptom or the cause of decay. But we do know that never before our own day had the process of urbanization been facilitated by such instruments as we have. No man can yet say whether we possess them or are possessed by them.

The city today is not merely an aggregation of men and women with highly specialized functions. In addition, by virtue of modern technology, it represents an engulfing process of standardizing multiplication. It does not confine itself within bounds. The great forcing pens of genetically uniform and scientifically fed domestic animals, vast plantings of wheat, cotton, and fruit, whose products are handled on an assembly-line basis—what are these but a penetration of the urban pattern into rural life?

We are forced to take notice of many consequences of this concentration and forcing; for instance, we know that they greatly increase the dangers of animal and plant disease by reason of crowding and unnatural environment.

Nature gives ample notice of her abhorrence of such interference with her own system of what superficially seems to be heterogeneous placement, but which actually is orderly, because it distributes risk in such matters as reproduction and health, instead of being governed by rectangles, abstracts of title, or geographical and political patterns. She refuses to put all her eggs in one basket. She operates no central incubator or commissary.

Furthermore, nature has never given notice that she has set mankind apart, to be governed by a set of rules wholly different from those governing all other living things.

Within the city, intensity of conflict, the dangers of pestilence and of economic disaster have been multiplied. Human mutual relationships and valid, well-rounded personal development become more difficult. Within the urbanized,

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mass-production rural areas new problems of unbalance, of epidemic, and of the destructive enemies of animal life have arisen. Our scientific advances in agriculture have not been able to offset these consequences. In at least one great agricultural state, such advances have merely served to maintain, without increase, the average per-acre yield.

We have employed science with an amazing cleverness and facility to accomplish the things we wanted most immediately, but without sufficient thought of the larger course of scientific compulsion within which we must work. In this respect we have not been unlike a man who scrupulously observes municipal ordinances while doing violence to national statutes and the great tradition of the common law.

Scientists are fairly well agreed on the order of magnitude of the greater landmarks in earth history. Our records of life go back certainly well over a billion years. The age of humanity is not more than a few thousandths of that interval, by the longest reckoning. Conceding man to be at least a million years old, the period of modern urbanization in our country, from 1875 to the present, represents the kind of infinitesimal fraction that is safely ignored in the beautiful operations of the calculus.

True enough, the life of man is measured by the quality of his experience and not by the clock. But in nature the intervals of time have a meaning which we cannot neglect. During the enormously long time before man's coming, through trial and error and survival, the relationships of living beings to the world about them were established. We have to take these relationships as we find them and build upon them. They apply to ourselves no less than to the plants and animals which serve our purposes. We must look to these principles for our first predication in all human enterprise. Yet there are those who would cast all education, all living, and all values into the mold of modern urban experience.

It is convenient for historians to judge vast human move-