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CITIES AND COUNTRYSIDE

According to G. Childe, the history of mankind is dominated by two great revolutions: the invention of agriculture and the birth of cities. From the same socio-historical point of view, R. Redfield is inclined to think that the consequences of the invention of agriculture have been less decisive than the urban revolution. Hence, he is led to classify all civilisations in two categories: the 'pre-urban', and those that have known a greater or lesser urban development.

In pre-urban civilisation, men live in isolated communities which rarely consist of more than fifty or a hundred households. These communities are held together by a highly developed sense of solidarity; outsiders, those who do not belong to the community are considered not fully human, but rather specimens of an inferior race who need not be taken into account. The unity of such a community is based on a deep-seated agreement on the fundamental values of life and man's ultimate goals. Economic life itself has a non-economic basis, with the individual's impulse to work stemming from tradition or from a feeling of obligation rooted in religious and moral considerations as well as in the position of each individual

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within the social system. The essential social tie could not be economic, since everybody takes part in the acquisition of food and there are no full-time specialists. Hence, personal relations cannot be based on mutual utility but on a knowledge of all the aspects of one's neighbour's personality. Rapidly sketched, this is the image of the 'folk society' according to R. Redfield.

The birth of cities causes a radical change in these pre-urban communities, and they become 'peasant communities'. In fact, as long as there is no city there are no peasants, only 'savages'. The peasants are autochtonous rural people who live in the zone of influence of a city with which they have economic and intellectual relations. As distinguished from the 'savage', the peasant knows that outside his group there are other men, and he recognises them as his equals. These foreigners are not necessarily his enemies; the village, in fact, develops institutions designed to maintain relationships with them. Until recent times, the peasants were illiterate (while the 'savage' is pre-literate), but in every village there were specialists who knew how to read and write and who were in charge of keeping in contact with the city and the city authorities. In this sense it is possible to say that 'folk society' is the opposite of peasant society.

The city gives birth to specialisation and universalism. The first Maya cities, for example, were essentially religious centres characterised by the formation of a class of priests who were the first specialists devoting all their time to one single activity, religion. The Maya priests worked out a scholarly religion which was valid for the whole people and tended to take the place of the local cults in the old communities. Specialisation and universalism make the city the dynamic element in a given society. 'Urban civilisation is a conquering civilisation', E. Labrousse has said. The city is the motor of progress; technical inventions, revolutionary ideas and new ways of life, which will subsequently spread to the countryside around, are born in the city.

What was true of the Mayas remains true of contemporary France, as G. Le Bras has masterfully shown. The Gaul was first evangelised in the cities, and it is in the cities, especially Paris, that the movement of dechristianisation started, gradually spreading to the countryside around Paris and to other regions of France during the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, however, the Church begins to revive, and this revival starts in the cities, with new forms of missionary and communal Christianity cropping up in Paris, in Lyons, and in Limoges. The small towns play an ambivalent role in this movement; on one hand they are

the stopping places of the action started in the big cities, while on the other they function as 'small capital cities' exposed to the influence of the 'flat country' around them. 'To the extent to which it is small, the city resembles the countryside.'

It is also from the city that the peasant receives his amusements. In pre-urban society, dramatic and lyrical arts are inseparable from religion and local myths. Secular amusements and professional entertainers are a creation of urban society. The roving entertainers who were typical of medieval Europe, as they still are of contemporary India, can be replaced by the cinema, but, since such amusements are born in the city, they cannot but bring to the countryside the images and models of the city. The Mexican peasant calls upon roving musicians and circuses to enliven his *fiestas*, and the more urbanised the city from which they come, the greater the prestige of the village.

The fact that rural people borrow a great number of their social models from the city and that they tend to emulate city-dwellers does not mean, however, that they imitate and admire them in every respect. Peasants the world over are deeply convinced that, as far as certain essential qualities are concerned (physical stamina, passion for work, honesty, sexual morality) the peasant is superior to the city-dweller.

The opposition of city and countryside, on the other hand, is only partial, since, in certain respects, city and country people form a single society. They have a culture in common, sharing as they do the same beliefs and the same amusements. They also have an economic market in common, exchanging the products of their respective activities, which complement each other. Finally, the cities are full of rural people. In an average French town like Auxerre, 45 per cent of the population is of rural origin. This phenomenon raises the question as to the position of the rural world in an essentially urban civilisation like ours. Should rural emigration be considered a normal phenomenon of social progress in a single society? This would be tantamount to considering rural people the lowest of classes. Or should we admit the existence of two cultural *milieus* in the social body which, structurally speaking, are to be distinguished from each other?

In examining a Walloon village, H. Turney-High distinguishes three classes, each of which consists of three sub-classes, a pattern that applies not only to Château-Gérard but the whole of Belgium, according to him. For example, Mr. Turney-High puts 'small landowners who cultivate their land without the help of wage-workers' and white-collar folks in the same class, while he places skilled workers, foremen, and all those who

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live by farming without owning land in another. It seems, then, that the only division within Château-Gérard is that of social classes, a fact that makes of that village a miniature mirror of Belgian society in general.

In considering the whole of France rather than a village or a particular region, P. Coutin shows that only too often one tends to regard the peasantry as a homogeneous unit, whereas there exists, according to him, a peasant society with its own stratifications which is different from that of society as a whole. Between these parallel hierarchies, however, the exchanges usually occur within corresponding social groups: 'rural people who leave their village may become unskilled workers, but also station-chiefs or railway inspectors, depending on the social level from which they started. The woman who leaves her village to marry a doctor or a pharmacist is not the daughter of a labourer, but of a big landowner.'

It is interesting to note that the peasant shows a marked repugnance for factory and mine. A. Cholley has documented this fact in connexion with conditions in the Lorraine metallurgical region during the nineteenth century. One or two generations had to pass after families had moved to the cities, before their offspring began to work in factories, as a result of their having mixed with workers and changed their attitude. In Auxerre, as C. Bettelheim has shown, while 45 per cent of the population is of rural origin, only 18 per cent come from farming families. The sons of the peasants find it more or less difficult to adjust to industrial life, depending on whether they have themselves been working in the fields or not; hence professional instability is much greater among workers of agricultural origins than among the others. Usually the peasant comes to the city seeking the security and stability of the small civil servant. The attraction that a policeman's or customs officer's cap has for a Norman or Morvan peasant is well known. There is no doubt that in many respects the peasants are closer to the middle class than to the workers. J. Daric has supplied us with a startling demographic confirmation of this fact, showing that the death rate among industrial managers and farmers is about the same, while there is a considerable difference in this respect between these two groups and the industrial workers. It is hence normal that the peasants should try to integrate themselves in a group whose way of life, ideology and life expectation are the least different from their own.

The fast pace of industrial development in the nineteenth century has brought with it the creation of the 'tentacular cities'. At present, however, the progress in the means of transportation permits the construction of immense urban zones which are not really cities. On the other hand, new

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sources of energy make possible the decentralisation of industry. As a result we have an urbanisation of the countryside paralleled by a ruralisation of the cities. This double trend leads M. Augé-Laribé to worry about what he calls 'the suburbanisation of France', while E. Juillard, speaking of Alsace, makes the following remark: 'The rural imprint had marked everything in the past, even the cities. Urbanisation is now going to penetrate everywhere, even the countryside.'

In the United States, the gigantic urban zone stretching for about 350 miles from Boston to Washington, or the less extensive but more homogeneous (because more recent) zone of Los Angeles, are good illustrations of this trend, which brings social changes with it. For example, the neighbourhood takes on a new importance. Until now the urban centre formed the core of the community, while the residential sections had no life of their own. At present, a local spirit is developing, together with a feeling of identification with the neighbourhood rather than with the community at large. Ways of life are changing accordingly, with clothes, for example, losing the importance they had acquired in the average towns, and informality becoming the rule.

In Europe this trend is less advanced. Regions like Liege, Darmstadt and Strasbourg show a disintegration of the village community which is partly due to the infiltration of urban life, with peasants forming a homogeneous group in contrast to workers and business people, who are considered agents of city culture. In the Alsatian villages, not only has intermarriage between the two groups come to a stop, but they do not even mix on Sundays to play cards at the café. They go to Church together, but separate as soon as they have stepped beyond the Church portal. In the villages, primary family and neighbourhood relations have been replaced by secondary relations based on economic and cultural interests. One no longer goes to visit one's neighbour after dinner. The son goes to the playground, while his father goes to the meeting of the co-operative or the union. The old system of mutual help based on an exchange of unremunerated services is disappearing; in order to till his own field, the worker rents the horses of a big landowner. The disintegration of the traditional village society, and the economic basis of social relationships, become more marked the nearer one gets to the city.

In these three regions, there is practically not a single village which workers do not leave in the morning in order to go to work in town. Very often these workers own a little land. Until there are objective studies of these dormitory-villages, arguments in favour or against such a mixed

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way of life can go on indefinitely. H. Turney-High describes the picturesque local railway serving Château-Gérard, and the social connexions that are made on it, a real society being created twice a day on the commuters' train. On the other hand, the distance from the place of work has serious effects not only on the social life of the village, but on the mentality of the individuals exposed to such double conditioning, and on family life, whose internal harmony is threatened. H. Koetter has shown that in all the communities he has studied around Darmstadt, more than 70 per cent of the inhabitants want to continue to live in the country, basing their choice on tradition, low prices, the calm of the countryside, and the tranquillity of the small landowner. As we get nearer to the city, however, the people who want to go to work there become more numerous. What these people want is to combine the advantages of country life with a high salary, a strict working schedule and the varied resources of the city. On the other hand, it seems that a deeper knowledge of urban life has the effect of reawakening or reinforcing the appreciation of country life.

These considerations lead us to think that it would be wise to reform our stereotyped notions of city and countryside in order to adapt them to the actual evolution of the social structures in which men are living at present. This is what G. Friedmann has in mind in proposing the notions of 'natural environment' and 'technical environment', defined on the basis of their different psychological, sociological and technological conditioning of the individual. In the 'natural environment', the individual reacts to stimuli most of which come from natural elements, while his tools are a direct extension of his body; in the 'technical environment', on the contrary, the individual is caught in a web of complex techniques which tend toward automatism and supply him with stimuli that differ essentially from those of the natural environment, as modern psychology has shown. To give just one example, the notion and the perception of time are not the same in the two environments. A recent study by the French Institute of Public Opinion has shown how much greater the pressure of time is on the inhabitants of the big city as compared with the peasants. However, there are important cities which are still involved in the natural environment as were medieval towns, while there are small towns whose life is already fully caught in the technical environment. In certain respects, the farmer himself becomes technologically minded. Being as he is in harmony with the elements rather than in conflict with them, the Hopi peasant feels that he is working with nature, not against it, while the modern farmer exploits nature by trying to dominate it. Modern agricultural sciences give

man a control over natural phenomena similar to that with which indus-
trial techniques provide city people.

There is little doubt that, stated in such terms, the problem becomes
clearer. The distinction between natural environment and technical
environment supplies us with an excellent analytical instrument to investi-
gate the main trends of our civilisation.

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