

# METROPOLIS

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# METROPOLIS

or

## The Destiny of Cities

by

PAUL BANKS



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# Introduction

DISCUSSING one of the contentions of this book, that London receives an excessive proportion of the actual income of Great Britain, a friend asked if I had worked this out statistically. I replied that statistics would be less convincing than the look round which the book was intended to give. If the London School of Economics has finished its survey of the poor of London—which appears in no degree designed to cure the poverty of London—before London is sacked by an invading people, it may then devote itself to the following proposition: When the rent of any piece of land increases above a certain datum line, on that piece of land it is possible to collect an excessive proportion of the income of the locality of reference.

This book originated as the result of my journeying about England, and my involuntarily contrasting the drawn and worried faces of all classes, including employers and employed, which I met there, with the gay irresponsibility I meet in London, in spite of the financial difficulties in which much of London's industry, productive and non-productive, is involved. It seemed to me to augur ill for the country's

future that economic disaster should not be evident in the metropolis at a time when it was strangling many boroughs and industries in the country. Bankrupt farmers apparently made no difference to the prosperity of Covent Garden. Immense strikes produced no effect on London, which, I realised, had no real sense of its responsibility as metropolis to the community as a whole. From that I looked round at other things.

During the last two weeks, while making another journey across the South West and West of England it has become plainer than before that this book is certainly not guilty of over-statement. Signs of prosperous activity were almost limited to the places chosen as car-"parks" and charabanc stations, which are practically new suburbs of London of the worst type. Here perpetually moving metropolitans of all classes as regards wealth, and apparently of one class as regards culture, are supplied with corner-house pastries or intoxicants in imitation West End establishments thrown up by the wayside. The country is thick with them, so that the whole land appears to have been annexed by London as a vulgar fun-fair. The visible population appears to have been degraded to menials disciplined by anticipation of tips from metropolitans, giving, as a vision of the future human standard, the London taxi-cab driver and waiter. The roads are thick with metropolitan motor-cars, and the air with the smell of petrol, the whirring of engines, dust, and

the noises which metropolitans with leisure regard as the music of gaiety. Everywhere the most vulgar metropolitan standards exercise dominion over the otherwise deserted country-side.

Professor Rostovtzeff recently asserted that culture was an aristocratic monopoly, and blamed the democratization of Rome for its downfall. The Roman Empire, he said, resulted from the alliance of the lower classes with the bourgeoisie, as the French Republic followed the French monarchy. Later the Roman aristocracy was almost annihilated, the motive of Claudius being to set up a democracy of city business-men, who would wield power throughout the Empire. These produced a plutocracy and an individualism which destroyed culture, and hastened the downfall of the Empire.

We find in history the reflection of our own minds. Whether Rostovtzeff accurately diagnosed the cause of the fall of Rome or not, he certainly projected an accurate reflection into its history of some of the causes of the wretchedness of Europe in general, and of Great Britain in particular. Whether culture is necessarily an aristocratic monopoly or not, England has been governed too long on the principle that the powerful have no duty but to increase their own wealth, which inevitably benefits everybody. "It's everyone for himself and God help us all, as the elephant said when he danced in the chicken-run" has proved itself a mad principle for the conduct of a community. Excessive taxation

does not prove oppression of the rich; it merely proves bad creation and distribution in the past of taxable resources. England badly needs a new body which will contemplate the future of the nation as an integral part of the world, not from the point of view of imperial dominion, but from that of folk-well-being and world function. It is this aristocratic affirmation of communal responsibility which matters most now. The renewal of culture, if it is not the same thing, would be an effect. As no existing corporation, group, or party, shows itself adventurously responsible in action, the affirmation will have to be made by influential individuals. Otherwise England is far advanced in decline, and her necessary internal readjustments will be made violently.



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