

Industrialism: Progress or Decline?
(*Norton Anthology II* pp. 1696-1719)

In 1835, the French writer Alexis de Tocqueville wrote of the great English manufacturing city Manchester: “From this foul drain the greatest stream of human industry flows out to fertilise the whole world. From this filthy sewer pure gold flows. Here humanity attains its most complete development and its most brutish; here civilization makes its miracles, and civilised man is turned back almost into a savage.”

The *Norton* selections offer a variety of perspectives from 1830 to 1894, but the selections focus primarily on the negative results of industrialization. It is ironic that the industrialization that has made possible our own middle-class life, including higher education, continues to exploit poor people in much the same way as in the 19th century - many of them are still living in similar conditions, though the industrialization has become more globalized.

Note that the renaming of the British liberal party from “Whig” to “Labour” reflected the increasing franchise of wage-working *men*, who were first allowed to vote in the nineteenth century, and whose political views have typically been liberal rather than conservative.

1. Was the machine age a blessing or a curse?

- a. Paradox: suffering of workers, pollution, and exploitation of natural resources was offset by high production of mass-made goods, which made possible the growth of large, prosperous middle class.
- b. Progressives like Macaulay argued that the gains outweighed the losses. This is essentially progressivist conservatism.
- c. Novelists and non-fiction writers, including Dickens, Marx and Engels, Mayhew, and Gaskell, wrote fiction and analytical tracts about the poor and disenfranchised and analyses of the structure of industrialist capitalism.
 - i. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, European immigrants living in London, critique “capital,” the idea that resources are held in the power of a few, and that most laborers do not own capital and thus are mere cogs in a giant system that exploits their alienated labor. The economic system we call “capitalism” in which capital (money) is permitted to free flowly in a free-enterprise system, was emerging at the time Marx and Engels write their works.
 - ii. Henry Mayhew was an early sociologist whose “London Labor and the London Poor” interviewed poor people and reported scathingly about their living conditions.
 - iii. Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell wrote about industrial life, Gaskell in Manchester and Dickens in London.
- d. Anti-industrialists reached back to an idealized, pre-factory world in which hierarchy prevailed and people were not alienated from the products of their labor (William Morris, the Arts & Crafts movement in England and America, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood of painters and poets [PRB], the writers Thomas Carlyle,

John Ruskin). This is essentially nostalgic conservatism.

2. Thomas Babington Macaulay (1830): excerpt from “A Review of Southey’s *Colloquies*”

- a. TBM argues that poet Robert Southey’s *Colloquies* (1829) had sought to expose the evils of industrialization.
 - i. TBM argues that Southey marshals no facts - is not “factual” but romantic in support of anti-industrialism - “he does not stoop to study the history of the system which he abuses, to strike the balance between the good and evil which it has produced, to compare district with district, or generation with generation” (1699).
- b. TBM argues his case using demographic data
 - i. for example, though urban mortality is high, it’s not as high as it was 50 years before - **refutation?**
- c. TBM emphasizes “the natural tendency of the human intellect to truth, and on the natural tendency of society to improvement” (1700). He claims that no society has gone backward - **refutation?**
- d. TBM claims historians and others have always catastrophized and that humanity has managed to survive, and civilizations to thrive, in spite of it. **Refutation?**
- e. TBM ends by saying that the State should not intervene, but that “the prudence and energy of the people” will prevail.

3. Friedrich Engels (1844), excerpt from “The Great Towns”

- a. Engels considers the big British cities, which have become transformed by the emigration of workers from the countryside who once were agricultural and small-shop laborers, and now work in factories.
 - i. London:
 - (1) Condensation of population is unhealthful and unaesthetic, and leads to an increase in social conflicts over resources and space
 - (2) Most Londoners are poor and live in shamefully ramshackle houses and streets.
 - (3) Growth of slums is uncontrolled and chaotic, so the city spreads out willy-nilly without any planning
 - ii. Manchester:
 - (1) heart of industry in the UK; “Manchester Exchange” controls everything; here the “division of labor has been pushed to its fullest. He claims, “I know more about it than most of its inhabitants.”
 - (2) The slums are divided from the more affluent areas.
 - (a) Lots of Irish workers - very poor (this is *before* the Famine)
 - (b) new “crammed in” tenements supplement old unrefurbished places, so that housing is poorly designed and falling down
 - (c) Everything is blackened by soot; raw sewage runs in the streets; the River Irk itself is filthy.

4. **Charles Kingsley, excerpt from the novel *Alton Locke* (1850).**
 - a. Description of a slum in London; narrator admonishes reader “Go, scented Belgravian [a resident of a posh suburb in South Central London], and see what London is. . . . See what science says this London might be!” (1710).
 - b. Description of miserable, sick residents, who have not earned enough money to have a fire that night.

5. **Charles Dickens, excerpt from *Hard Times* (1854)**
 - a. Description of Coketown, an imaginary manufacturing town that is the center of this dystopian novel. Also critiques Utilitarianists - philosophers who were extreme rationalists and strove to define everything and everyone in terms of “usefulness.”
 - b. “You saw nothing in Coketown but what was severely workful. If the members of a religious persuasion built a chapel there - as the members of eighteen religious persuasions had done - they made it a pious warehouse of red brick, with sometimes (but this is only in highly ornamented examples) a bell in a birdcage on the top of it” (1712).

6. **Anonymous, “Poverty Knock”**
 - a. A poem/song whose meter and rhyme scheme mimic the rhythm of a shuttle or loom, describing the desperation and victimization of the workers, who labor in appalling conditions and are often neglected or injured and receive no attention.
 - b. This lyric was first collected by a folklorist and published in 1967.
 - c. Compare this lyric to the well-known slave songs that were sung in the fields in the American south, especially “Let My People Go,” and “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.” What do the two kinds of lyrics have in common? How are poor/laboring people picturing their situations? Imagining escaping from those situations?

7. **Henry Mayhew, excerpt from *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851)**
 - a. Mayhew’s work started as a series of reports for a newspaper, The Morning Chronicle, in which he interviewed poor people. (Note that Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes story “The Man with the Twisted Lip” may have been inspired by the reporter Mayhew, who did some of his fascinating work ‘undercover.’)
 - b. Testimony of an “inmate of a casual ward.”
 - i. He began as a textile worker, but was orphaned and disliked authority, and so went “on the road” to seek his fortune in London. We would now term him a ‘street boy’ or “homeless.”
 - ii. He begs for a living, and has several observations about begging. He notes that illness is prominent among beggars.

8. **Annie Besant, “The ‘White Slavery’ of Match Workers”**
 - a. She begins by noting the enormous dividends (23-25%) paid to the stockholders of Bryant and May, a match company.
 - b. The girls work 12 hours a day, 6.5 days a week.
 - c. They earn four shillings a week, which is hardly enough to pay for food and

clothing, and this wage is further diminished by fines imposed by the employer for petty offenses including an “untidy bench” and lateness.

- d. When the machines injure them, the workers are fined.
- e. The highest wage earned is about 13 shillings per week.
- f. When Bryant, co-owner of the factory, erected a statue in honor of Prime Minister Gladstone, he financed the statue by charging each employee one shilling and furloughing without pay them a half-day. Many showed up at the unveiling and hurled bricks at the statue, which they argued they had paid for.
- g. Besant concludes that we need a “people’s Dante” to describe this modern “inferno.” At least people should refrain from using the company’s matches or enjoying the dividends paid by the stocks.

9. Ada Nield Chew, “A Living Wage for Factory Girls at Crewe, 5 May 1894”

- a. Letter to the editor of the *Crewe Chronicle*, one of a series by this author articulating “the grievance of the class - that of tailoresses in some of the Crewe factories - to which I belong?”
- b. She argues that while working men’s deprivations are freely acknowledged, there is much less discourse about the abuse of “factory girls.” She argues that silence is often interpreted as acceptance.
- c. The work week is long, they are paid almost nothing, they basically just “exist.” “A living wage? Ours is a lingering, dying wage.” She blasts the notion that the girls should spend their Sundays improving their minds - she says they are so exhausted they can hardly do their domestic chores.
- d. Ironically, the publishing editor notes “our correspondent writes a most intelligent letter; and if she is a specimen of the factory girl, then Crewe factory proprietors should be proud of their ‘hands.’”