

Urban Life during the Industrial Revolution

Name _____

Block _____

Industrial workers lived under conditions that were extremely bad. Because of poor transportation, workers had to live near the place where they worked. Businessmen put up row after row of cheap housing for them around the new factories and mines.

People flocked to the city from the country districts to find jobs in industry. Therefore, there was usually a shortage of housing for workers. Landlords were able to charge high rents and make large profits. Because of the high rents, an entire family usually occupied a single room.

a. A Typical "Apartment House"

The description of a house below was published in 1801. The poor housing conditions it reveals were common in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution.

A large number of the dwellings of the poor contain as many families as rooms. On the ground floor the master of the house usually lives with his family. If it is pretty numerous, it sometimes lives in the whole of the floor. If not, the back room is rented to another family. This apartment is, in many instances, scarcely large enough to hold a bed and a fireplace. The rooms at the front of the house are usually larger, but large families often live in them.

The rooms in the middle and upper part of the house are very uncomfortable. However, they are in every way better than those in the lowest apartment or the cellar. The darkness dirt, and stale air combine to increase all the evils resulting from such a situation.

Adapted from T. A. Murray, "Remarks on the Situation of the Poor in the Metropolis" from M. D. George (ed.), *English Social Life in the Eighteenth Century*. 1923, p. 50.

b. An Industrial City

As industry grew, the industrial areas of older cities expanded. New industrial cities -- located near raw materials, water power, and low-cost transportation -- sprang into existence. In time, the cities held a majority of England's population. They eventually became more important than the countryside. The industrial areas rapidly became terrible slums.

Manchester has no building law, so each owner builds as he pleases. A row of cottages may have bad drainage. The streets may be full of holes, stale water, and dead cats and dogs. Yet no one can complain.

As long as this and other great manufacturing towns were prosperous, new workers found employment, good wages and plenty of food. As long as the families of working people were well-fed, they maintained their health in a surprising manner. They even remained healthy in cellars and other close dwellings. Now, however, the case is different. Food is dear, work is scarce, and wages are very low. As a result, disease and death are doing unusual damage. Unpaved streets, poor sewerage, narrow alleys and stuffy courts and cellars are common in the manufacturing districts. During a depression such as this one, these evils clearly show their influence.

Manchester has no public park or other grounds where the population can walk and breathe fresh air. Every advantage of this nature has been sacrificed to get more money in rents.

Adapted from A. E. Bland et al (ed.), *English Economic History: Selected Documents*, 1914.

Questions Part I

Answer the following questions:

1. Make a list of descriptive phrases which illustrate what living conditions were like.

2. Between 1801 and 1831 (30 years), some of the larger industrial cities like Manchester, Glasgow, Liverpool and Leeds, doubled in sizes; while at the same time, Britain's total population had increased by only half. How do you account for such an increase in the cities?

Comparing Districts

A COTTAGE DISTRICT

Daniel Defoe is the author of Robinson Crusoe. He toured England in 1724. Later, he wrote about his travels. Here is his description of a cottage district in northern England:

From Blackstone Edge to Halifax is eight miles; and all the way is up hill and down.

The nearer we came to Halifax, we found the houses thicker, and the villages greater in every valley. The sides of the hills, which were very steep, were spread with houses.

In short, after we had mounted the third hill we found the country one continuous village. Hardly a house stood out of a speaking distance from another. As the cleared up, we could see at every house a frame, and on almost every frame a piece of cloth, kersie, or shalloon; which are the three items of this country's labour.

We found at every house a little gutter of running water. If the house was above the road, it came from it, and crossed the way to run to another. If the house was below us, it crossed us from some other distant house above it. These little streams were so guided by gutters or pipes, that every house had one.

After using this water, the houses released it filled with dye, soap, oil and other things used in the making of cloth. The lands through which it passes are enriched by it.

Every clothier must keep one horse, at least, to fetch home his wool and his goods from the market, to carry his yarn to the spinners, his cloth to the mill, and when finished, to the market to be sold. Everyone also keeps a cow or two for his family.

We saw houses full of workers, some at the dye-vat, some at the loom; the women and children carding or spinning. All were employed from the youngest to the oldest.

Adapted from: Schultz, Mindella, Inquiring About Technology, p. 54 - 56.

A FACTORY DISTRICT

A German visitor in 1844, J. G. Kohl, described Manchester in the following way:

I know of no town in Great Britain, except London, which makes so deep an impression upon the stranger as Manchester. London is alone of its kind, and so is Manchester. Never since the world began, was there a town like it, in its outward appearance, its wonderful activity, its mercantile and manufacturing prosperity.

It cannot be said that Manchester is either an ugly or a beautiful town, for it is both at once. Some quarters are dirty, mean, ugly and miserable looking to an extreme; others are interesting, peculiar, and beautiful in the highest degree.

Let us take a short walk together through these various scenes. We set out from the broad, stately and imposing Market Street which runs through the heart of the town.

This street is always busy, noisy and interesting, and contains numbers of splendid shops, and street lamps make it almost painfully dazzling to eyes not yet accustomed to these nightly illuminations of the great English cities.

Let us now turn into one of the by-streets which diverge from Market Street. Here stand the great warehouses, five or six stories high, all large and imposing, some of them stately and elegant. At night these warehouses are all brilliantly lighted from top to bottom. On the ground floor are the counting-houses, where the merchants and clerks are busy all day long.

From the streets of warehouses, we pass on to the banks of the rivers which run through the city. Here the scene varies. The rivers are intersected by an immense number of large and small bridges, in every form and direction. Standing upon one of these bridges, let us look around us a little. What an extraordinary spectacle! There stand rows and groups of huge factories. See how eagerly these manufactories suck up, through pumps and buckets, the river water-which dirty as it is, is invaluable to them, which they pour back into the river, in black, brown, and yellow currents, after it has served their purposes. The river pours on its thick muddy current through the streets of the city to satisfy other thirsty manufactories further on. The blue heavens above are hidden from us by the thick smoke of the huge factory chimneys which weave a close impenetrable veil of brown fog between the city and the sky.

The great establishments are built in various ways; some piled story on story; others on the straight line system, in long successive rows; others like huge green houses, all on one floor, lighted from the top. From these huge and oddly shaped buildings rise immense chimneys of all heights and diameters, and sometimes architecturally ornamented with stone garlands, bas-reliefs and pedestals. Just as, in former times, the huts of the vassals surrounded the castles of their lords; so now, in the neighborhood of the great manufactories, are seen the dwelling-places of the work-people, mean-looking little buildings, huddled together in rows and clusters. These quarters are the most melancholy and disagreeable parts of the town, squalid, filthy and miserable, to a deplorable degree. Here stand the abominable beer-houses, dramshops and gin palaces, which are never without customers. Here the streets are filled with ragged women and naked children. Whole rows of houses stand empty, while the remainder are overcrowded; for in some places the inmates have been expelled by the owners for non-payment of rent, while in others they have voluntarily given up their dwelling in order to live cheaper, by sharing that of another family.

Through these poorer quarters pass many broad, splendid streets, which lead out through the suburbs to Victoria Park, and other more fashionable vicinities, where splendid villas and gardens congregate as closely as chimneys on the river banks. Thither drive, ride and walk at the close of the day, the wealthy

merchants and manufacturers, to rest from their mental and bodily fatigues, and enjoy in the bosoms of their families a few hours of ease and refreshment, amidst the splendid acquisitions of their laborious hours.

Adapted from: Kohl, J. G. Ireland, Scotland and England. P. 106-107, 13-134.

Questions Part II

A Cottage District" as described by a traveler in 1724 (before the Industrial Revolution and "A Factory District") (a description of Manchester by another traveler some 120 years later.

1. What major differences can you find between the two districts?

2. What attitudes do the two writers have toward the "districts"

3. What does this indicate about what they value?

Review Questions

1. Why do you think people would live in such conditions like those found in the cities?

2. What alternatives do you think were open to the workers?
