THE DEVELOPMENT OF LONDON AS A CENTRE OF CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

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Of all forms of historical writing, that which deals with particular places is perhaps the most pregnant with the possibilities of boredom, for the general reader can seldom hope to share the parochial enthusiasms by which the study of local history is so often inspired. But local history, and particularly urban history, can be approached from two different points of view. It can seek to portray the changing pattern of life within the few square miles which it takes for its field of study. Or it can endeavour to interpret that changing pattern as a symptom of greater changes in the nation as a whole. For, as the sociologists are never weary of reminding us, a town is essentially a social product. It is brought into being by forces external to it. It continues to exist because, and only so long as, it serves a social purpose. During the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the population of London and its immediate suburbs grew much more rapidly than the population of the country as a whole. Confronted by that fact, one of the obvious tasks of the historian is to make clear the purposes which that metropolitan expansion served; to indicate the wider developments of which it was a symptom; and to explain why, to contemporaries, it appeared as a symptom of disease rather than of health in the body politic. For that the growth of London was widely considered to be a morbid growth is incontestable. Topographers and chroniclers might write with admiration and affection of the city whose contours they described and whose history they told. But the pride of the city fathers was tinged with dismay at the problems of housing, public health and poor relief which they saw mounting before them. And outsiders were openly abusive. 'Soon,' wrote King James, whose dislike of the city was notorious, 'London will be all England', and for once he echoed the sentiments of a large proportion of his subjects.

The major reason for the growth of the metropolis is obvious enough, and needs to be mentioned merely in order to give the rest of the story some degree of perspective. Giovanni

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Botero, the translation of whose work on the magnificence and greatness of cities is itself indicative of the rising interest in urban problems, confidently laid it down that the largest towns were always based on trade and usually built on the banks of navigable rivers.[1] To that generalization, London was clearly no exception. All contemporary descriptions emphasized its commercial importance. Most of them pointed out the degree to which that importance was due to the river on which the city stood. In that respect, the growth of London was a symptom both of the expansion of English trade as a whole and of the concentration of that trade upon the Thames. It was widely held to be a morbid symptom, for many contended that London waxed fat at the expense of the outports, and grew rich only by sucking the wealth of the country to itself. To explain that expansion and concentration and to examine that contention would, no doubt, be fruitful tasks, but would lead into more purely economic fields than that with which this paper is concerned.

For the city and its suburbs had a second function. Not only did they constitute a centre of production where substantial incomes were earned from industry and trade; they were also a centre of consumption where men expended the revenues which they had acquired elsewhere. During the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries a number of factors combined to swell the volume of that expenditure. Irrigated by the fertilizing tide of provincial money, the metropolitan economy not only expanded but began to bear new fruit. And to that extent the development of the capital became a symptom of something more than the nation's commercial progress. The factors which combined to produce that result are not far to seek. Botero postulated three conditions under which cities tend to develop as centres of consumption. Each of those conditions can be shown, not only to have existed in Tudor and Stuart London, but to have considerably increased in influence. In the first place,

> It doth infinitely availe to the magnifyinge and making Cities greate and populous [to have] the Residency of the Prince therein, . . . for wheare the Prince is resident there also the Parliaments are held and the supreame place of justice is kept. All matters of importance have recourse to that place, all Princes and all persons of account, Embassadores of Princes and of Common weales . . . make theire repaire thither . . . All such as aspire and thirst after offices and honors run thither

[1] G. Botero, *A Treatise Concerning the Causes of the Magnificencie and Greatness of Cities* (trans. R. Pearson, 1606), ch. x.

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> overcome with emulation and disdaine at others. Thither are the revenues brought that appertain unto the state, and there are they disbursed out againe.[1]

Many years ago Professor Tout pointed out the importance in London history of the fact that the seat of government was established at Westminster.[2] As the policy of centralization increased the work of that government, and as the mounting extravagance of court life increased its social expenditure, so the significance of that fact grew.

In the second place, Botero insisted upon the economic implications of the law courts.

> Cities, that have Courts of Justice must needs be much frequented as well for concourse of people that have cause of Suite unto it as also for the execution of Justice. For it cannot be ministered without the help of . . . advocates, proctors, sollicitors, notaries and such like. Nay more than that (which it greeves me to think on) Expedition of justice cannot be made these our daies without ready money.[3]

Judicial history is a field in which a mere economic historian must obviously hesitate to tread, but at least there seems to be a prima-facie case for arguing that the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries saw a significant increase in the amount of judicial business conducted in the capital. Looking back from the later seventeenth century, Hales noted a long-term tendency for common law cases to be heard at Westminster rather than in the provinces. If the volume of extant records is any criterion, there was a substantial growth in the work of Chancery. Clearly, the age of the Tudors and early Stuarts was the heyday of the prerogative courts. And on two points, at least, contemporary comment leaves no room for doubt. The first was the growth in the number and wealth of London lawyers—a growth which it is difficult to explain except as the result of a similar growth in the volume of the business which they handled. The second was the vital importance to the economy of Westminster of the tide of men and money that flowed in with every term.

But it is Botero's third postulate that throws most light upon the factors which were operating to mould the pattern of London life.

> Experience teacheth that the residence of noblemen in cities makes them to be more glorious and more populous, not onely

[1] Botero, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

[2] T. F. Tout, *The Beginnings of a Modern Capital; London and Westminster in the Fourteenth Century* (British Academy, Raleigh Lecture, 1923).

[3] Botero, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

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> by cause they bring their people and their families unto it, but also more by cause a nobleman dispendeth much more largely through the accesse of friends unto him and through the emulation of others in a Citie where he is abiding and visited continually by honourable personages then he spendeth in the country where he liveth amongst the brute beasts of the field and converseth with plaine country people and goes apparelled among them in plain and simple garments.[1]

A significant feature of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was the increasing extent to which the revenues spent in London were the revenues of that junior branch of the nobility, the country gentry. If the rise of the squirearchy to social and political pre-eminence was a major theme of the history of those times, their growing urbanization was a minor theme upon which contemporary comment was abundant and which the historian cannot afford to ignore.

It was a curious development, for it sprang from two immediate causes that were contradictory, although in a sense they shared a common origin. By the early seventeenth century two streams of gentry can be seen converging upon the capital, the one carried along by its growing wealth, the other driven by its growing poverty. It was, no doubt, the former who inspired Hume's comment that ' could humanity ever attain happiness, the condition of the English gentry at this period might merit that appellation '. And Professor Tawney has recently shown how, faced by a secular rise in prices, a substantial section of that class not only held their own but raised themselves to new levels of affluence, partly at the expense of the Crown, the Church and the peerage whose estates they acquired, partly at the expense of the tenants whose rents they raised and whose faces they ground.[2] But as they acquired the estates of their betters, so they took on some of their social habits. As their revenues rose, so their eyes turned citywards and they established ever closer social contacts with the capital.

In many cases, those contacts began early in life for, by the early seventeenth century, London had become an important educational centre and more than one country squire obtained his first taste of London life as a schoolboy. Some may have gone to St. Paul's ; some certainly went to the Merchant Taylors' School ; more probably went to Westminster, although the imperfections of the records make

[1] Botero, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

[2] R. H. Tawney, ' The Rise of the Gentry, 1558–1640 ', *Economic History Review*, xi (1941), pp. 1–38.

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generalization dangerous. But, in addition to those foundations, there were private schools which catered for the sons of the nobility and gentry. Of these by far the best known is that of Thomas Farnaby, who, after an adventurous youth spent voyaging with Drake and Hawkins and soldiering in the Low Countries, became a leading classical scholar of his day and established a school in Goldsmith's Alley where he is said to have had upwards of three hundred noblemen and others under his care.[1] Farnaby was no doubt exceptional both in the reputation which he acquired and in the colourful life which he led, but he was not unique in his occupation. Nor was a London education a masculine monopoly. For Sir Simon D'Ewes tells us that his sisters were sent to school in Walbrook,[2] and the niece of Andrew Overton, among others, was sent to London to learn 'her needle, dauncing, and such qualities becoming a gentlewoman'.[3]

For most of the gentry, however, the significant introduction to the capital must have come when they enrolled at one of the Inns of Court, partly to obtain that minimum knowledge of the law essential to a landowner and justice of the peace, but principally to acquire that modicum of the social graces without which no gentleman's education could be considered complete. The role of the Inns of Court as schools of law and manners was not, of course, new. But in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the number of their students rose. Admissions to Gray's Inn, for example, which had amounted to only two hundred in the third decade of the sixteenth century, had risen to seven hundred and ninety-nine in the last and to twelve hundred and sixty-five in the ten years between 1611 and 1620.[4] Already by the middle of Elizabeth's reign three of the four great Inns were faced by that too familiar symptom of educational expansion, an accommodation problem that could not be solved by the obvious device of doubling up in chambers.[5] By the reign of Charles, that champion of right thinking, Archbishop Laud, was insisting upon the necessity of appointing proper officials in the Inns because 'almost all young gentlemen spend part of their time in one or other of the Inns of Court and afterwards, when they return to live in their several counties, steer

[1] See the article on 'Farnaby' in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

[2] *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Sir Simonds D'Ewes* (ed. J. O. Halliwell), i. 157.

[3] Chancery Proceedings, Chas. I, bdle. 6, no. 3. Cf. Star Chamber Proceedings, Jas. I, bdle. 116, no. 1, and *Cal. S.P.D., 1637*, p. 422.

[4] J. Foster, *Register of Admission to Gray's Inn, 1521–1889* (1889).

[5] S.P.D. Eliz., xcv. no. 91.

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themselves according to such principles as in those places are preached to them '.[1] Under Elizabeth, Sir Humphrey Gilbert had complained that 'the estate of gentlemen cannot well traine upp their children within this Realme but eyther in Oxford or Cambridge', where 'they utterly lose their tymes if they doe not follow learning merely, for there is no other gentlemanlike qualitie to be attained'.[2] In 1615 Sir George Buck could write with some justification of a third University, the University of London, which offered a range of studies as extensive as it was peculiar.[3] Although they might still waste part of their youth on the banks of the Isis and the Cam, by the reign of Charles I the majority of the country gentry were spending the most impressionable years of their lives on the banks of the Fleet and the Thames, in an area admirably situated for tasting the pleasures of both the City and the Court, and in institutions which, far from following learning only, were sufficiently of the polite world to cultivate a taste for music and the drama and sufficiently broad-minded to finance that taste by turning their libraries into gambling saloons.[4]

Once settled on his family estate, there was a multitude of reasons why the thoughts of the country squire should constantly return to the capital. In one of the greatest ages of land speculation in English history, London was the very centre of the land market; for the estates that were being sold were above all those of the Crown, and the normal method of sale was through the agency of London financiers. In an age of universal borrowing, London was the great money market and London merchants the great lenders. In an age when a judicious marriage was often the easiest way to fortune, London was not unimportant as a marriage market, and the widows and daughters of citizens were not the least attractive stepping-stones to affluence. In an age of furious litigation, a substantial number of the gentry sooner or later found themselves involved before one or other of the courts at Westminster. Above all, in an age which was characterized by the successful assertion of the claims of the gentry to a share in political power, Westminster was the very centre of the political map. To say that the thoughts of the gentry constantly turned to the metropolis is not, of course, to argue that their bodies always followed. Lands could be bought, money could be borrowed, marriages could be arranged and

[1] *Cal. S.P.D. 1633–4*, p. 340. [2] Lansdowne MSS., xcviii, no. 1.
[3] J. Stow, *Annales* (ed. E. Howes, 1631), pp. 1063–87.
[4] *Cal. S.P.D. 1631–3*, p. 215; *1639–40*, pp. 304–5.

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lawsuits could be fought without the physical presence of the landowner concerned. But three generalizations may be made with confidence. The squire who stayed in the country when such questions were at issue had of necessity to be represented by an agent in town; an agent who was likely to be a member of his own family. Whoever the agent might be, his employment entailed the expenditure of money which helped to develop the capital as a centre of consumption. Above all, far from being reluctant to visit London on business, a substantial number of the gentry were anxious to do so even when business offered no pretext. 'I am resolved to spend the greatest part of the rest of my lyf for the wynter and springe quarter abowt london,' wrote John Wynn of Gwydir in 1605, and in so resolving he was no more than conforming to a fashion already well established.[1] Whatever else they may have learned from their sojourn at the Inns of Court, it had revealed to the landowners of England that rural delights did not span the whole gamut of human pleasures. By the early seventeenth century, in fact, there had developed a clearly defined London season which began in the autumn, reached its climax at Christmas, and was over by June. The Duchess of Newcastle, for example, has left it on record that her sisters spent nearly every winter in London.[2] Two sisters, no doubt, do not make a season. But from her account of their normal activities when in town it is clear that, in paying their annual visit, they were following less some personal idiosyncrasy of their own than the social habits of their class. Not every squire went to London every winter, or necessarily stayed for the whole season when he did go. But, by the early seventeenth century, from October to June London always contained a substantial population of rural landowners. And the more regular that system became the more it grew, for the more men could rely upon finding company to their taste.

The townward migration of the gentry, however, was not a purely seasonal phenomenon, and by the reign of Charles I a significant number had become permanent residents of the city and its immediate neighbourhood. And it is at this stage that the story becomes more complicated, for it is here that the second stream of the gentry begins to appear—the stream of those who were driven citywards by their poverty.

[1] Wynn MSS., no. 348. The Wynn MSS., in the National Library of Wales, are an invaluable source for illustrating the relations of a county family with the capital.

[2] H. B. Wheatley and P. Cunningham, *London Past and Present*, iii. 295.

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It is reasonable to suppose that the bulk of the seasonal visitors were comparatively affluent and came because their revenues provided a surplus which could be spent on the pleasures of the town. Some, no doubt, who came to take up permanent residence did so from deliberate and unfettered choice. But many were driven by compulsion. For though the gentry as a class emerged victorious from the difficulties into which they had been plunged by the rise in prices, the struggle had not been bloodless and the victims had not been confined to the ranks of the peasantry and the peerage. More than one county family found its expenses rising above its income, and the author of *The Commonweal of this Realm of England* explains how many of them sought a way out of their dilemma. 'Seeinge,' he says, 'the charges of howsehold so much as by no provision they can make can be holpen, they give over their howseholds and get them chambers in London or abowte the courte, and there spend there time, some with a servaunte or 2, wheare he was wounte to kepe 30 or 40 persons daily in his house.' [1] By the early seventeenth century it had become a commonplace that landowners were moving to London in order to save the charges of housekeeping in the country, although not all who did so were reduced to living in a single room, Moreover, even those families that successfully weathered the storm often did so only by means of a rigorous system of primogeniture. It was a system which often bore heavily on widows, and more than one moved Londonwards to ease the strain upon her scanty means. In particular, it was a system which bore heavily upon the younger sons who, to use Thomas Wilson's inelegant but expressive phrase, had only 'thatt which the catt left on the malt heape, perhaps some smale annuytie during his life or what please an elder brother's worship to bestowe upon us if wee please him and my mistress his wife'.[2] To such, London had obvious attractions. Thus the permanent residents which London recruited from the landowning classes were by no means a homogeneous group. Some were wealthy and able to support themselves with style if not with ostentation. Others were merely concerned to eke out a modest income. Others sought to supplement an income that was woefully inadequate to their needs. The efforts of this last group constitute a not unimportant factor in English history. On the one hand, they fertilized both commerce and the professions. On the other, they were largely responsible for the rash of patents

[1] *A Discourse of the Commonweal of this Realm of England* (ed. E. Lamond), p. 81.
[2] *Camden Miscellany*, xvi (1936), p. 24.

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and monopolies which from time to time disfigured the political and economic complexion of England. Those who succeeded in making or mending their fortunes must, by that very fact, pass largely beyond the scope of this paper. For to them London became the milieu in which they earned an income rather than spent revenues acquired elsewhere. But to ignore them completely would be an error. For many continued to draw some income from the provinces and, in so far as they retained the tastes and habits of the class from which they came, they served to reinforce the influence which their more fortunate kinsmen had upon the pattern of London life.

Neither the chronology nor the volume of that townward drift is easy to determine. It had existed in some measure during the Middle Ages. A few attempts were made to check it in the first three-quarters of the sixteenth century. But if the volume of contemporary comment may be taken as a criterion, it reached significant proportions in the last two decades of that century, two generations after the rise in prices had burst upon the landowning classes and at a period when the processes of eviction, enclosure and rack-renting and the sale of royal and monastic lands had all progressed sufficiently for the factors outlined above to have had some effect. By the early seventeenth century it had become great enough to inspire James to an ungallant outburst against 'those swarms of gentry who, through the instigation of their wives and to new-model and fashion their daughters (who, if they were unmarried, marred their reputations, and if married, lost them) did neglect their country hospitality, and cumber the city, a general nuisance to the kingdom.'[1] More important, it led to a series of prohibitory proclamations which not only stirred to fury the gentry with whose social activities they interfered, but also stirred to remonstrance the city in whose economic life that influx had come to play a part of some moment. According to Salvetti it had become, by the early years of Charles's reign, the custom for the greater part of the gentry to winter in town.[2] Since both Wilson at the beginning of the century and King at the end estimated the total number of gentle families at between sixteen and seventeen thousand, that statement, if true, would imply a seasonal influx of thousands of individuals. To take it literally would, no doubt, be naïve; diplomatists are notoriously bad statisticians, and the Italians were worse than most. But at least it suggests that the numbers concerned were of some magnitude,

[1] I. Disraeli, *The Curiosities of Literature* (1849 ed.), iii. 402.
[2] *Cal. S. P. Venetian 1632–6*, p. 38, note.

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and the same conclusion is borne out by the fact that, in 1632, some two hundred and fifty peers, baronets, knights and gentlemen were prosecuted in the Star Chamber for having been found in London after a proclamation had ordered them home.[1] For it would surely be to underestimate both the law-abidingness and the ingenuity of their class to suppose that a much larger number had not either obeyed that proclamation or else escaped detection when it became clear that the government intended to act.

By the early seventeenth century, therefore, the economy of London and its suburbs was called upon to adapt itself to a substantial seasonal immigration of rural landowners, many of them accompanied by their families. It had to accommodate itself to an ever-changing and steadily growing student body which had already, under Elizabeth, exceeded a thousand. It had to absorb an uncertain but not inconsiderable number who, from either poverty or choice, from either boredom or ambition, had abandoned their country seats for permanent residence in the town. The incomes of those immigrants no doubt varied, but their total revenues must have been substantial. The result of their expenditure was to create a series of demands which it became an important function of the metropolis to fulfil and which significantly increased the influence that the Court had for long exerted on the pattern of London life. As Botero had pointed out, an invariable characteristic of the gentleman come to town was his ostentatious display. Or, in the more homely words of Ben Jonson, ' First, to be an accomplished gentleman—that is, a gentleman of the time—you must give over housekeeping in the country and live together in the city amongst gallants where, at your first appearance, 'twere good you turned four or five acres of your best land into two or three trunks of apparell '.[2] From that tendency towards conspicuous consumption the luxury trades of the city inevitably waxed fat. As in all ages, the gentleman come to town required transport, and it was during the early seventeenth century that the coach became a familiar part of the London scene. By the reign of Charles I, not only were hackney coaches to be found in their hundreds, but the cab rank had become an institution and the sedan chair was ceasing to be a curiosity.

What was of greater moment than either luxuries or transport, the gentleman come to town needed entertainment. Some, no doubt, he found at Court. But the facilities of the

[1] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, ii. 288–92.
[2] C. Knight, *London*, i (1841), p. 378.

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Court were limited, and by the Civil War the visiting and resident gentry had begun to build, or to help build, the leisure institutions that were to be characteristic of polite society in London at least until the end of the eighteenth century. The origin of English club life, it has been argued, is to be found in the associations of gentlemen, usually organized upon a county basis, who regularly met in their favourite taverns to drink, talk and criticize the government in the manner common to all club men at all times. By the reign of James, the gentry were already manifesting that taste for parks and pleasure gardens that one normally associates with a later age. By the reign of Charles, Hyde Park, which had still been used for hunting under James, had become a parade ground for the coaches of the fashionable, and, although Ranelagh and Vauxhall still lay in the future, the Spring and Mulberry Gardens were indicating the form which they were to take. That the Spring and Mulberry Gardens were both, strictly speaking, part and parcel of the royal parks is no doubt true. But that they were becoming commercialized is obvious from the contemporary descriptions which survive. As Garrard wrote to Wentworth in 1634:

> The Bowling in the Spring Garden was by the King's Command put down for one day . . . there was kept in it an ordinary of six shillings a meal (when the King's proclamation allows but two elsewhere) continual bibbing and drinking of wine all day long under the trees, two or three quarrels every week. It was grown scandalous and insufferable; besides, my Lord Digby being reprehended for striking in the King's Garden, he answered that he took it for a common bowling place where all paid money for their coming in.

When, in the next year, the Spring Garden was closed to the public, the immediate result was the opening of a new one as a private business venture.[1] Above all, there was the theatre. Lord Keynes is reported once to have said that England obtained Shakespeare when she could afford him. Presumably his meaning was that Shakespeare could flourish only in a commercial theatre, and that a commercial theatre could flourish only when there was sufficient surplus wealth to pay for it. If that argument is valid, then perhaps the urbanized and semi-urbanized gentry of Elizabeth and the early Stuarts may claim at least some share of reflected glory, for it was their demand for entertainment that helped to bring the commercial theatre into being. Describing how, in the days of

[1] Wheatley and Cunningham, *op. cit.*, iii. 294–5.

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Charles I, her sisters spent their London seasons the Duchess of Newcastle wrote: 'Their customs were in the winter time to go sometimes to plays or to ride in their coaches about the streets to see the concourse and recourse of people, and in the springtime to visit the Spring Garden, Hyde Park and the like places, and sometimes they would have music and cup in barges upon the water.'[1] It was a routine which would have seemed familiar to the eighteenth century. It would have been incomprehensible to the fifteenth.

Moreover, not only did the demands of the newly urbanized country gentry for entertainment lead to a pattern of leisure activities that was to persist for generations, but their demand for accommodation eventually opened a new chapter in the history of architecture. To a large extent, of course, that demand was for purely temporary accommodation and was met by the expansion of what would now be called the hotel and catering trades, and references abound to the great inns that were going up in and around Holborn and to the taverns and cookshops to which the gentry proved such good customers. But of more interest to the historian was their demand for permanent accommodation, for by the time of Charles I that demand was being met in ways which were to leave a lasting imprint upon London topography. On the one hand, those who were content to live near rather than in the metropolis began to build up the old villages of Clerkenwell and Islington, Hampstead and Chelsea as residential suburbs. On the other, those who wished to be in the centre of things settled in the area which was being developed in the parish of St. Giles-in-the-Fields. As Mr. Summerson has recently pointed out, in developing that area Inigo Jones, the Earl of Bedford and William Newton laid the foundation-stones of two centuries of London taste. Lincoln's Inn Fields, Covent Garden and Great Queen Street inspired the work of the great builders of the eighteenth century. The character of the Georgian town house was fixed under Charles I, and it was fixed to meet the needs of the country gentry who were becoming townsmen.[2]

To discuss at length the process by which the spending of these rural revenues gradually modified the pattern of London life in one detail after another would, however, be to lapse into that parochial enthusiasm which the local historian should never parade in public. But two general remarks may perhaps be permitted. The new urban society that was growing up in the city and its suburbs, a society that still had its financial

[1] Wheatley and Cunningham, *op. cit.*, iii. 294–5.
[2] J. Summerson, *Georgian London*, ch. ii.

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roots and many of its interests in the countryside, created an environment which helped to foster two of the most interesting phenomena of Tudor and Stuart England. The first was the development of the lay professions. Of all the unexplored fields of English economic history, none is less known than the story of the English professional classes, and where the historian knows little it behoves him to say less. But clearly, when that story comes to be written, an important chapter in it will of necessity be devoted to the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, for those years saw, not only the spectacular rise of the lawyers, but also a significant development of the doctors and architects, the scriveners and journalists. Nearly the whole of that development took place in London and Westminster, for it was only in the capital that the demand for professional services was sufficiently great to make their provision on any scale a source of profit. And a not unsubstantial part of that demand came from the gentry. In the second place, it was this period that saw firmly established the connection between the capital and scholarship, both professional and amateur ; the Academy which met weekly from 1572 to 1604 stands on record as the first of the learned societies of London.

By comparison with the rural tide which flowed towards the capital after the Restoration, this earlier movement may seem modest. To an age which takes urban life for granted, it may reasonably appear as a sign of economic progress. But to contemporaries it was a phenomenon of ill-omen. Some of the opposition which it encountered was, no doubt, inspired by motives which do not appear on the surface. For, as the Venetian ambassadors pointed out, an order that the gentry should disperse to their country homes could on occasion serve as a means for breaking up a Parliamentary opposition or as an instrument of taxation. But the major roots of official disapproval lay deeper, for the migration of the gentry towards London offended against some of the major social principles of the time. In an age when both economic and religious theory demanded a régime of some austerity, the gentleman come to town indulged in luxuries which not only threatened him with personal ruin but which endangered that favourable balance of trade to which so great importance was attached. In an age when the problems of city government were becoming ever more acute, the responsibility for those problems was in large measure laid at his door. For, it was argued, where the gentry went there the idle and dissolute among the lower orders were bound to follow. And in following the gentry to

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the capital they created problems of housing and poor relief, disease and high prices, which were intolerable in a well-ordered commonwealth. Above all, in an age when every social class was deemed to have its obligations as well as its rights, the gentry threatened to become parasites upon the body politic. As the Attorney-General argued in the Star Chamber:

> For where by their residency and abiding in several Counties where their Means ariseth, they served Your Majesty in several places according to their Degrees and Ranks in aid of Government, whereby, and by their Housekeeping in those Parts, the Realm was defended and the meaner sort of Your People were guided, directed and relieved; but by their residency in the said cities, and parts adjoining, they have no employment, but live without doing any service to Your Majesty or Your People.[1]

By so neglecting their traditional functions, the gentry threatened to undermine the whole structure of local government. Consequently it is not surprising that sporadic efforts were made to discourage the new fashion, efforts that became more vigorous and more frequent as the fashion grew. Sometimes, those efforts were indirect. 'We have very plausible Things done of late,' wrote Gerrard to Wentworth in 1634. 'To encourage Gentlemen to live more willingly in the Country, all Game Fowl, as Pheasant, Partridges, Ducks, as also Hares are by Proclamation forbidden to be dressed or eaten in any Inns, and Butchers are forbidden to be Graziers.'[2] More often, however, the method used was that of ordering the gentry back to their country residences. That in the long run those methods failed is obvious. But the efforts of the Crown were not entirely devoid of results. For the resentment which those orders aroused must be counted among the minor causes of the growing rift between the landowning classes and the monarchy.

[1] Rushworth, *op. cit.*, ii. 289.
[2] W. Knowler, *The Earl of Straffordes Letters and Dispatches*, i (1739), p. 176.

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