

**Excerpt from *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844***

**Friedrich Engels**

**1844**

*Manchester, in Northern England, rapidly rose from obscurity to become the premier center of cotton manufacture in England. This was largely due to geography. It was connected to the nearby Atlantic port of Liverpool by one of the earliest rail tracks. It was also close to power sources – at first water power from the streams of the Pennine mountain chain, and later the coal mines of central Lancashire. As a result, Manchester became perhaps the first modern industrial city.*

*Friedrich Engels' father was a German manufacturer and Engels worked as his agent in his father's Manchester factory.*

Manchester lies at the foot of the southern slope of a range of hills ... on the left bank of the Irwell [River], between that stream and the two smaller ones, the Irk and the Medlock, which here empty into the Irwell ... [Manchester] contains about four hundred thousand inhabitants, rather more than less. The town itself is peculiarly built, so that a[n upper class] person may live in it for years, and go in and out daily without coming into contact with a working-people's quarter or even with workers, that is, so long as he confines himself to his business or to pleasure walks ... [T]he working people's quarters are sharply separated from the sections of the city reserved for the middle-class ...

[In the old town of Manchester], the streets, even the better ones, are narrow and winding ... [T]he houses dirty, old, and tumble-down, and the construction of the side streets utterly horrible. [A] row of old-fashioned houses ... are remnants of the old pre-manufacturing Manchester, whose former inhabitants have removed with their descendants into better built districts, and have left the houses, which were not good enough for them, to a population strongly mixed with Irish blood. Here one is in an almost undisguised working-men's quarter, for even the shops and beer houses hardly take the trouble to exhibit a trifling degree of cleanliness. But all this is nothing in comparison with the courts and lanes which lie behind, to which access can be gained only through covered passages, in which no two human beings can pass at the same time. Of the irregular cramming together of dwellings in ways which defy all rational plan, of the tangle in which they are crowded literally one upon the other, it is impossible to convey an idea. And it is not the buildings surviving from the old times of Manchester which are to blame for this; the confusion has only recently reached its height when every scrap of space left by the old way of building has been filled up and patched over until not a foot of land is left to be further occupied.

[On the south bank of the River Irk] a multitude of covered passages lead from the main street into numerous courts, and he who turns in thither gets into a filth and disgusting grime, the equal of which is not to be found ... which contain unqualifiedly the most horrible dwellings which I have yet beheld. In one of these courts there stands directly at the entrance ... a privy without a door, so dirty that the inhabitants can pass into and out of the court only by passing through foul pools of stagnant urine and excrement ... Below it on the river there are several tanneries which fill the whole neighbourhood with the stench of animal putrefaction ... [T]he only entrance to most of the houses is by means of narrow, dirty stairs and over heaps of refuse and filth ... The view from [Ducie B]ridge ... is characteristic for the whole district. At the bottom flows, or rather stagnates, the Irk, a narrow, coal-black, foul-smelling stream, full of debris and refuse, which it deposits on the shallower right bank.

In dry weather, a long string of the most disgusting, blackish-green, slime pools are left standing on this bank, from the depths of which bubbles of miasmatic gas constantly arise and give forth a stench unendurable ... [S]lime and refuse accumulate and rot in thick masses.

Above the bridge are tanneries (leather factories), bone mills, and gasworks, from which all drains and refuse find their way into the Irk, which receives further the contents of all the neighbouring sewers and privies. It may be easily imagined, therefore, what sort of residue the stream deposits. Below the bridge you look upon the piles of debris, the refuse, filth, and offal from the courts on the steep left bank; here each house is packed close behind its neighbour and a piece of each is visible, all black, smoky, crumbling, ancient, with broken panes and window frames ... On the lower right bank stands a long row of houses and mills; the second house being a ruin without a roof, piled with debris; the third stands so low that the lowest floor is uninhabitable, and therefore without windows or doors. Here the background embraces the pauper burial-ground, the station of the Liverpool and Leeds railway, and, in the rear of this, the Workhouse, the "Poor-Law Bastille" of Manchester, which, like a citadel, looks threateningly down from behind its high walls and parapets on the hilltop, upon the working-people's quarter below.

Above Ducie Bridge ... the condition of the dwellings on both banks grows worse ... [N]othing but narrow, filthy nooks and alleys ... Everywhere half or wholly ruined buildings, some of them actually uninhabited, which means a great deal here; rarely a wooden or stone floor to be seen in the houses, almost uniformly broken, ill-fitting windows and doors, and a state of filth! Everywhere ... a stench which alone would make it impossible for a human being in any degree civilized to live in such a district ... Passing along a rough bank, among stakes and washing-lines, one penetrates into this chaos of small one-storied, one-roomed huts, in most of which there is no artificial floor; kitchen, living and sleeping-room all in one. In such a hole, scarcely five feet long by six broad, I found two beds - and such bedsteads and beds! - which ... exactly filled the room ... Everywhere before the doors refuse and offal; that any sort of pavement lay underneath could not be seen but only felt, here and there, with the feet ...

... [I]n most of the working-men's quarters of Manchester, the pork-raisers rent the courts and build pig-pens in them. In almost every court one or even several such pens may be found, into which the inhabitants of the court throw all refuse and offal, whence the swine grow fat; and the atmosphere ... is utterly corrupted by putrefying animal and vegetable substances ...

Such is the Old Town of Manchester, and on re-reading my description, I am forced to admit that instead of being exaggerated, it is far from black enough to convey a true impression of the filth, ruin, and uninhabitableness, the defiance of all considerations of cleanliness, ventilation, and health ... And such a district exists in the heart of the second city of England, the first manufacturing city of the world. If any one wishes to see in how little space a human being can move, how little air - and such air! - he can breathe, how little of civilization he may share and yet live, it is only necessary to travel ... [t]o this *Hell upon Earth* ... Everything which here arouses horror and indignation is of recent origin, belongs to the industrial epoch.

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