

Meller, H. E. *Leisure and The Changing City, 1870-1914*. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976. Pp. 308. Index, selected bibliography, notes, tables, illustrations, pictures. \$22.00.

Attempts to transform Ph.D. dissertations into book form are rarely attended by success. Fortunately Dr. Helen Meller has succeeded where others have failed. She has used the material from her dissertation on Bristol, England to examine “the social and cultural environment of a large city at a time, in the nineteenth century, when cities had become the dominant, social environment of the nation” (Preface). With commendable insight the author recognized that in tackling a relatively new area of English social history it was necessary to establish boundaries in order to clearly focus the discussion. The result is an in-depth analysis of the attempts made by certain citizens and social groups to create leisure and cultural facilities in the city of Bristol. However the successful definition of delimitations is dependent upon the questions being asked. The decision to limit the book to a case study of Bristol is clearly justified because the few attempts to compare the Bristol experience with other English cities fails to add anything beyond interesting hypotheses. With respect to the emphasis upon various social groups she clearly traces their central role in the growth of leisure and cultural facilities.

Dr. Meller’s main thesis is that “the modernization of the city contributed to a new self-consciousness about urban civilization.” (p. 237) This is examined in the heart of the book, chapters 3-7 (pp. 40-205) in which the early role of the governing elite of Bristol in the provision of symbols of culture; museums,

libraries, and art galleries, is traced. The municipalization of these cultural institutions in the 1890's paralleled the involvement of the Town Council in the provision of libraries, recreational and sporting facilities. Concomitant with the shift in responsibility from the elite to the middle classes was the involvement of various groups in missionary work among the poor—Y.M.C.A., temperance movement, and adult education. Dr. Meller identifies the groups involved, their social and religious background and the predominant ideology that underlay all their approaches to leisure. If this were the sum total of the response of society to the urban process then this book would have achieved its ends. There is little doubt as to the important role played first, by the elite then the middle classes but the question remains as to how successful they were in imposing their values upon the city as a whole. At the end of the nineteenth and early in the twentieth century the institutions that are central to the analysis played a decreasingly important role in the provision of urban recreation and it is at this juncture that the author's analysis runs into trouble. She recognizes clearly that the social reformers attempt to fill the leisure time of the urban masses must be seen against the development of alternative leisure time entertainments. (p. 206) Without a full consideration of these factors it is impossible to answer the basic questions posed in the first sentence of the paragraph. There is no doubt that Dr. Meller recognizes this failing and attempts to remedy it in Chapter 8 'Urbanization and Leisure—The Secular Culture of City and Suburb' while recognizing that this "can only be given on a superficial level." (p. 206) Yet by the early twentieth century this new response was far more pervasive than all the efforts of social reformers. The result, therefore, is an incomplete and perhaps inaccurate final analysis in Chapter 9.

Perhaps this problem can be best illustrated, and most appropriately for this review, by the references to organized sport. The municipal provisions for recreation and sport (p. 109-117) are clearly stated and understood, the creation of parks and public swimming pools being the brainchilds of the elite and the middle classes. It is with the introduction of organized sport that the author gets into trouble. As she states the turning point for the YMCA came in 1879, "A new development came to their rescue, which was to solve all their problems, then and in the foreseeable future. It was, in a word, sport." (p. 146) This clear recognition of the importance of sport was followed by a brief, one page, superficial analysis of "Muscular Christianity." In other words sport is dismissed without the indepth analysis that pervades the rest of the book. This cavalier treatment of sport is continued in Chapter 8 in the sections on "Popular Amusement of the People" (p. 206-214) and "The Pursuit of Organized Sport" (p. 225-236). In both cases the author provides some data and interesting insights—but the level of analysis present in the rest of the book is lacking. This, of course, simply reflects the state of sport history in England, embryonic at best and non existent at worst. Dr. Meller uses the

only two sources, Malcolmson and Dunning, and has even used some American sources. However, the fact remains that the section on sport is incomplete. The question is to what degree does this detract from the central thesis of the book?

In the concluding chapter on "Social Development and the City" the author attempts to analyze the development of a new self consciousness about urban civilization. With respect to the role of the middle classes in the adaption to urban life there is no doubt that the author has succeeded in providing a clear and provoking analysis. At the same time, this is always within the context of the middle class value system. She clearly points out the changing concept of the city and community but in all instances the evidence is that of the educated middle class. Whether this affected real change among the mass of society is certainly open to question. The lack of a meaningful analysis of sport and popular entertainment leaves a most important gap. Is it possible to say that sport would simply reflect the same trends? I suggest that given the increasingly important role of organized sport amongst all segments of the population it is dangerous to make statements about urban leisure without an understanding of its role and function in society. Perhaps more than anything this excellent book by Dr. Meller has served to focus attention upon the need to undertake in-depth research into the growth of organized sport in urban centres.

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