

Immersion, construal and ideology in urban squalor

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Take a tram from Victoria to Vauxhall Station. Get out under the railway arch which faces Vauxhall Bridge, and there you will find Kennington Lane. The railway arch roofs in a din which reduces the roar of trains continually passing overhead to a vibrating, muffled rumble. From either end of the arch comes a close procession of trams, motor-buses, brewers' drays, coal-lorries, carts filled with unspeakable material for glue factory and tannery, motor-cars, coster-barrows, and people. It is a stopping-place for tramcars and motor-buses; therefore little knots of agitated persons continually collect on both pathways, and dive between the vehicles and descending passengers in order to board the particular bus or tram they desire. At rhythmic intervals all traffic through the arch is suspended to allow a flood of trams, drays, and vans, to surge and rattle and bang across the opening of the archway which faces the river.

At the opposite end there is no-cross current. The trams slide away to the right towards the Oval. In front is Kennington Lane, and to the left, at right angles, a narrow street connects with Vauxhall Walk, leading farther on into Lambeth Walk, both locally better known as The Walk. Such is the western gateway to the district stretching north to Lambeth Road, south to Lansdowne Road, and east to Walworth Road, where live the people whose lives form the subject of this book.

They are not the poorest people of the district. Far from it! They are, putting aside the tradesmen whose shops line the big thoroughfares such as Kennington Road or Kennington Park Road, some of the more enviable and settled inhabitants of this part of the world. The poorest people – the river-side casual, the workhouse in-and-out, the bar-room loafer – are anxiously ignored by these respectable persons whose work is permanent, as permanency goes in Lambeth, and whose wages range from 18s. to 30s. a week.

Maud Pember Reeves, *Round About a Pound a Week* (1913)

Key references

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