

CSS – 2000

Make a précis of the following passage in about one third of its length. Suggest a suitable title also. (20)

Besant describing the middle class of the 19th century wrote " In the first place it was for more a class apart. "In no sense did it belong to society. Men in professions of any kind (except in the Army and Navy) could only belong to society by right of birth and family connections; men in trade—bankers were still accounted tradesmen—could not possibly belong to society. That is to say, if they went to live in the country they were not called upon by the county families and in the town they were not admitted by the men into their clubs, or by ladies into their houses... The middle class knew its own place, respected itself, made its own society for itself, and cheerfully accorded to rank the deference due." Since then, however, the life of the middle classes had undergone great changes as their numbers had swelled and their influence had increased. Their already well –developed consciousness of their own importance had deepened. More critical than they had been in the past of certain aspects of aristocratic life, they were also more concerned with the plight of the poor and the importance of their own values of society, thrift, hand work, piety and respectability. Thrift, hand work, piety and respectability as examples of ideal behavior for the guidance of the lower orders. Above all they were respectable. There were divergences of opinion as to what exactly was respectable and what was not. There were, nevertheless, certain conventions, which were universally recognized: wild and drunken behaviors were certainly not respectable, nor were godlessness or avert promiscuity, not an ill-ordered home life, unconventional manners, self-indulgence or flamboyant clothes and personal adornments.

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Changing Role of the Middle Class in Society

The author described the middle class of 19th century as a separate class, as they did not belong to high society, except by birth and family connection. Therefore, the middle class recognized their importance and formed their own society where they respect one another. However, the life of the middle class changes with the increase of their number and influence. They developed their own importance, unlike before they had been criticized by different aspects of aristocratic life. They promoted thrift, hardwork, piety and respectability, as guiding principles for others. Respectability was their hallmark, a concept defined by the avoidance of vulgarity, immoral behavior, laziness and flashy displays.