

The Case for Town Planning

(By SIR LAURENCE GOMME.)

In a recent article on Mr. H. R. Alridge's book—*The Case for Town Planning*—in *The London Standard* Sir Laurence Gomme gives some very interesting views on Town Planning. The following extracts show that the writer fully grasps the larger meaning of this important subject. Sir Laurence is clerk of the London County Council.—Ed.

"The almost sudden claims of town planning are not due entirely to professional advocates. They proceed from deeper origins than this, and the principal cause is the consciousness slowly but surely growing that city-life is to be the basis of Western civilization in the future, as it was in the ancient civilizations. The war has done this amount of good: it has broken down the last illusions that government and human existence can be based upon the traditional country life of England, where lord and peasant live side by side, working out a colorless, if peaceful, mode of passing from the cradle to the grave. The new Imperialism which is assuredly coming will be peaceful and democratic, not the work of the tyrant prince appointed by himself as the friend of a divinity created by himself. And the city is the centre of this new Imperialism."

LOCAL PATRIOTISM.

"Town planning is beginning its work. Its possibilities are great if handled in the right spirit. We cannot afford to let it die out. It must relieve cities of their slums and their ugly spots. It must make them places to live in joyfully and healthily. It must stand out as one of the greatest products of our age, meeting the requirements of inhabitants of the future city civilization. No one can call this a small or unimportant part to take in the new life that is coming, and the one thing to bear in mind is to base town-planning schemes and town-planning imagination upon a sufficiently high ideal. It would be a disaster if the Roman model were followed by which the chessboard system was reproduced in every city, but it would be an equal disaster if the modern attempts at town planning were allowed to dominate all thought in the future. There is danger here. On the Continent a general sameness is apparent. Paris set the fashion which Berlin has attempted to follow, with its comprehensive ignorance of all that is artistic, and lesser cities are, to a not inconsiderable extent, following the same course. Just as every city of antiquity had its own anonymous hero or its own god to represent it wherever representation was needed or could be introduced, so the modern city has its own destiny and ideal to be represented. Its town planning should represent this destiny and ideal. As one gets out of the Waverley Station at Edinburgh the Scott memorial is the first thing to meet the eye. "Waverley and "Scott" make Edinburgh understood by the veriest stranger on his way from railway station to hotel. They represent the speaking soul of the Scottish capital city, and they stand as examples of what other cities should aim at producing. Even the worst of modern cities has a soul hidden somewhere amongst its rubbish centres. London has it, but it is lost in the ignorance of its citizens. Statues of modern kings—Charles I, James II, the Georges, and some others—are to be seen without producing a sensation. The Nelson Monument is dominant, but is national, not local. And yet the greatest monarch that ever reigned, anywhere and anywhen, Alfred the Great, made modern London, and is, in truth,

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portional to their numerical weight. These, though very necessary reforms of procedure, are subsidiary to the great essential, at once the basis and the product of democracy—the development of a widespread intelligence and goodwill, which will make as many people as possible, if not (as Pericles said of the people of Athens in his day) "originators, yet good judges of policy."

To this end, free expression and circulation of ideas, the facing of facts, the testing of explanations by first hand evidence, the organization of a consistent body of thought, are as necessary for the state as for the individual. For both, they are the conditions of sanity and freedom.

its great hero representative. But London does nothing to show this proud fact in her history.

EXPERT ADVICE NECESSARY.

There is one final word to say, and it should be said with all frankness and with great care for the feelings and ambitions of those whom it concerns. It concerns the important question as to whether professional help outside the official architect or surveyor should be sought. The answer to this question is written in the streets of every village in the country, in the roadways of every township and urban centre. And the answer is decisive, namely, that outside help is absolutely necessary. Town planning is a specialized art resulting from training and inspiration. Every local official does not possess these necessary qualifications. Experts in drainage, in the ordinary ways of village or town life, cannot suddenly turn to the varied requirements of town planning, besides which local authorities have too frequently neglected their greatest duty, namely, that of appointing the best qualified officials, even though it costs them more in salaries. An example may be quoted from a village in Buckinghamshire, Tudor in character, and containing many charming remnants of this period. It has had thrust upon it the cheap villa architecture, with its garish attempt at ornamentation, and has had its twelfth-century abbey, now a dwelling-house, absolutely destroyed. One does not blame either architect or owner for these follies. It is the system which is at fault, the system which is proclaimed from the council chamber of the parish authority that inadequate salaries are more important than adequate meeting of all requirements. There is only one way out of such a deplorable state of things, the recognized policy of obtaining adequate professional advice from those whose qualifications are certain, and we gladly endorse the views put forward in this respect in the book before us.

FIRE PREVENTION vs. FIRE PROTECTION.

"Locking the barn-door after the horse has been stolen," is a time-honored expression; but it applies with peculiar emphasis to many of our supposedly modern municipal governments. Especially is this true in the matter of the fire loss.

While enormous sums are spent annually in the equipment and upkeep of fire departments for the purpose of controlling and extinguishing fires, it is almost a novelty to find a municipality with a department charged with the inspection, and with authority to enforce the correction, of conditions favorable to fires. In some of our larger cities some progress has been made by the fire departments, which have set apart small details of their staffs, charged with inspection work. The result of their work is minimized, however, by the fact that the inspectors have not sufficient authority.

The fire chiefs have it in their power to advance the fire prevention campaign and secure results. If a fire chief's record depended upon his keeping down the number of fires, instead of his ability to handle fires after they have broken out, there would be greater effort at inspection. Fire chiefs should insist upon sufficient men for inspection work; these men should be held responsible for the inspection and correction of dangerous conditions, and, to make their work effective, the inspectors should be clothed with fire marshal authority, in order that any fire breaking out in their inspection districts might be thoroughly investigated and the cause definitely assigned. In this way an inspector's reputation for thoroughness would be at stake, and, with the knowledge that a fire would be investigated by one familiar with the conditions, there would be fewer fires of a suspicious character or due to carelessness.

Municipalities can well afford to make generous appropriations for fire-preventive inspection work. It is an investment which will yield large returns, not only in reduced fire loss but in reduction in the cost of upkeep of fire departments and equipment.—Conservation.

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