

TOWN PLANNING. BEAUTY A HUMAN DOCUMENT.

THE "GRAND MANNER" FOR SOUTH AFRICA.

BY MR. HERBERT BAKER.

The Imperial Health Conference and Exhibition, which was held at the Imperial Institute in May last, under the auspices of the Victoria League, was notable in exemplifying the practical character of the work which the League is pursuing in the Dominions. At the opening session, after the Countess of Jersey, who is the president of the League, had welcomed the delegates, the Conference was opened by Mr. Harcourt, Secretary of State for the Colonies, and then an address was given by Lord Beyer, late our Ambassador to the United States. Subsequent sessions were devoted to the discussion of the three subjects which the Conference had been called to consider. They were: Housing and town-planning, the care of child-life, and the child as wage-earner. South Africa made a substantial contribution to the discussion in the paper on town-planning by Mr. Herbert Baker, and that on workmen's houses and model dwellings in South Africa by Mr. J. M. Solomon.

Mr. Baker's paper was as follows:—

A New Science, but an Old Art.

In Greece the city, which was there the State, was defined as a place "where people live a common-life for noble ends." To the ever-widening tendency of the national entity due to the political growth of nations and the shrinkage of the world, resulting from the inventions of mechanical science, and the consequent weakening of civic patriotism, the difficulties in the way of the creation of beautiful cities can no doubt be largely attributed. Against this loss of civic patriotism can be set, as a gain, the increased knowledge of the subject of civic hygiene and town-planning, which has grown by such leaps and bounds during the present generation. It is a new science, but the Renaissance of an old art.

From the hygienic point of view, the problem is a less acute one in the new countries of the Empire than in the old. There have been few restraints in the selection of sites for the cities of the nations of the new world. Those which have been chosen for reasons of defence, as in older civilisations, have been the exception rather than the rule. The cramped sites which the enclosing walls of fortifications demanded, with their attendant evil of narrow winding streets, have therefore in the main been avoided. Air and sunlight is, or could be, the birth-right of every Colonial-born child. We Colonials must be thankful for all this. But the rocks ahead are none the less, and this congress will have proved of inestimable value to the Empire if, by helping to forewarn, it may teach the

citizens of the Dominions to forearm themselves against dangers which a want of knowledge and foresight may so easily bring upon them in the future.

We were told at the International Town-Planning Conference of 1910 that in the most congested area of New York there are 750 or 8,000 persons per acre, in Paris 430, and in London, which we all know is bad enough, 360. Who, two generations ago, could have thought that New York, which must then have been almost a garden city, would have become at the present day, in parts at least, the most overcrowded city in the world? We have learned on good authority that much of the enormous sums spent annually by London's schemes of progress would not have been necessary had the splendid plan for rebuilding and replanning the city compiled by Wren, after the great fire, been adopted; or if two or three generations ago even, inspired by his plans and ideals as to what the city should have been, they had created Schools and Commissions of Town-Planning.

We have read quite recently that, even in beautiful Paris, in spite of all that the French genius achieved after the destruction which revolutions brought upon the city, the authorities have found it necessary to authorize an expenditure of forty millions, mainly for the purpose of correcting the blunders of the past. These are examples, out of multitudes, of want of foresight. On the other hand, the capital of the United States was saved by the wisdom of General Washington, who, when the city was founded, employed a French architect, L'Enfant, trained in the great school of Le Notre, the French master of landscape design, to lay out a comprehensive plan for the new Washington. It is noteworthy that a recent committee of experts reported that L'Enfant's plan could not even now be improved upon. Unfortunately, the ideals inspired by Washington and worked out by L'Enfant soon faded away, and a period of short-sighted commercialism and individualism followed. The land on the great squares and vistas, as designed by L'Enfant, was sold to the highest bidder, and used for the most inappropriate purposes, without any regard to the common weal or to the big idea. The result has been that vast sums have been recently spent on expropriation and rebuilding. A railway even had to be moved, and a new one tunnelled under the hill of the Capitol at enormous cost.

Where Municipal Committees Fail.

We can learn from every page of the history of town-planning that there is no art which in the long run is more profitable to a city, nor any field in which good seed, well sown, will ultimately reap a richer harvest. But the husbandman must relax his efforts neither in the summer of enthusiasm nor in the winter of discontent which must inevitably follow. Continuity of a definite policy spread over a long period is the essential of success. Commissions of the best men, as some English and many more American cities have come to realise, must take the place of ephemeral Municipal committees, the members of which, however excellent public servants in other respects, are not often elected for their expert knowledge nor for their long vision. The cities of our Dominions should ponder

well over the fate of the older cities of Europe, and even the comparatively modern New York, or a like fate may overtake them—nay, will most certainly do so, when their hopes of prosperity are realised, unless each city contains a body of patriotic and long-sighted citizens, who have a prophetic vision, and have the courage to work long and persistently for its realisation.

The British people have one fortunate tradition in their favour. This is the principle of "one house one family"—the cottage instead of the tenement unit—enshrined in their hearts, and it is their boast that "Every Englishman's house is his castle." At the Conference mentioned above, foreign representatives were very insistent on the value of this principle, which they looked upon as a great national asset, and advised Englishmen jealously to guard against any encroachment upon it. The Germans at the Conference pointed out that, although their tenement system produced greater uniformity of street planning, which might seem better in theory, yet it did not in practice lead to civic beauty nor to the welfare of their citizens. American experts attributed the growth of slums and unhealthiness of many of their cities to the baneful system of flats. Fortunately a sound British prejudice has prevented its introduction to any serious extent into the colonies.

The author must apologise to the Congress for the somewhat discursive and sketchy nature of this article. He attempts to deal with town-planning less from the scientific and hygienic, and more from the idealistic and artistic point of view. He is well aware, however, that art and science cannot be separated. Beauty and hygiene are as interdependent in the organism of a city as beauty and health in the human body.

Anyone who has attempted to plead the cause of Art in the city with representatives of governments and municipalities knows that he is usually met with the answer, "Oh! you can't expect us all to be artists." Now, that answer is based on a misconception of the true meaning of art. This misconception accounts for so much that is wrong at the present day in our relation to art generally, and especially to civic art. In her excellent book in the Home University Library on "Art and Ritual," Miss Harrison has shown that all art was originally based on the ritual dance, of which our old English Maypole is, or was, a survival. These dances were at their beginning the expression of the emotions of all the inhabitants of the community—hamlet, village, or town—in what was of common interest to them, change of season, fecundity, birth and death or war. Such common interests of the social unit are not entirely dead, in spite of all the adverse influences of modern civilisation, and our common feeling as a social community should still seek some expression in the creation of beautiful cities. Art is the interpretation and the expression of the life of the people; it has no real permanent existence apart from this "life"; it has primarily little to do with the aesthete, the connoisseur, or the dilettante. "Art for Art's sake" is an alluring but a dangerous doctrine, which has helped little the progressive cause of art in its higher mission. It may lead us along "the primrose paths of dalliance," but not "up the steep and thorny road to heaven." Art in its wider application

includes everything which man creates for the common joy and the common weal. The well-meaning Philistines, therefore, who are too often responsible for the creation of our cities, are, in spite of their protestations to the contrary, artists after all, but, alas! very bad ones. Their work does hold "the mirror up to nature," but mirrors only the more practical or material side of our lives as citizens. The soul, or the higher and more spiritual side, too often goes unexpressed in the work of art, which is our city.

The Culture of the Greeks.

The ruins of the old cities of Greece still bear eloquent testimony to the culture of the Greeks; those of the Roman Empire to the civilisation which flowed over the world from the fountain source of Rome, and the romantic glory of mediævalism can still be read in most of the old cities and villages of Europe. It is good for us at times to cast the mind forward and reflect what will history record of the ideals of the citizens of the British Empire of to-day.

Modern democracies, who now wield the powers once held by the more autocratic builders of the great cities of the world, have yet to realise that the political changes which have given them the power have also imposed on them corresponding obligations. They have yet to learn to emulate the taste and skill and love and pride in their city of the old despots, to whose patronage of the arts and of artists we owe those beautiful cities which are still the wonder and admiration of the world.

Mr. John Burns, the late Secretary of the Local Government Board, than whom no one has done more to advance the cause of the architectural beauty in its wider sense, which includes both the building and its setting, has said: "It is not an accident that the beautiful manor house, the restful vicarage, the stately homes of England, and the beautiful public schools and colleges, have turned out the Miltons, the Ruskins, the Kingsleys, the Morrises, the Nelsons, the Newtons. Environment in youth has an enormous influence on the personal and civic education of the future citizen." When the Town Planning Conference visited Cambridge, where the group of colleges by the river is one of the finest examples of architectural setting in the world, a French representative, on entering the great courts of Trinity College, exclaimed, "Now I understand how England gets its great men." If this necessity of artistic environment is felt so strongly in the old countries, which are comparatively overwhelmingly rich in art, how much more must the need be felt in our new civilisations in the making, which the British people are building up over the seas. While we all admire the independence and strength of character of the sons of the Dominion, we must admit that they are sometimes a little deficient in reverence and respect for what is outside their immediate lives and environment. An upbringing and training amidst surroundings of orderly architecture and landscape gardening would undoubtedly be a great factor in correcting this deficiency in their character.

It may be thought that in the new countries with their "great spaces washed

with sun," which surround every town, beauty within the city is of less importance. The love of wild nature is of comparatively modern growth. It has been generated by the intolerable oppression of the overgrown and overcrowded European cities. We know the often-quoted example of the Italian artist, Benvenuto Cellini, who, when travelling through Switzerland saw nothing but harshness and ugliness in the mountains, which is a common-place with us to regard as so beautiful. It is significant that Ruskin, with all his passionate enthusiasm for nature, should have written: "No scene is continually and untiringly loved, but one rich by joyful human labour; smooth in field, fair in garden, full in orchard; trim, sweet and frequent in homestead; ringing with voices of vivid existence." This was called forth by his attempt to imagine some mountain scenery in the Italian Alps, which grew out of its base of foothills and valleys rich in human effort and history, transported to the wild, untamed Rocky Mountains, where to him all its beauty seemed to vanish like "the baseless fabric of a vision."

The most beautiful wild natural scenery, love and value it as we must, does not wholly supply the place of beautiful cities in the training of men and nations. It cannot give us "the common life for common ends." The art and culture of Athens grew out of such a community of city life. It was the same in Alexandria and the Hellenic cities and the towns of Italy and the Netherlands. The present reaction in favour of a country life, which is caused by the ugliness and congestion of our modern cities, can, and has been, it may be thought, carried to an extreme. It is the full life in the ideal city, rather than that of the country, in spite of all its blessings, which is destined, we may well believe, to carry civilisation and culture up on to the higher plains of future progress.

New Cities of the Empire.

Nature has modelled nothing finer in scale, line, form, and colour, in stretch of plain, range of mountains, and sweep of curving sea-shore, than the view over the Cape Flats, which divide the mountains of the Peninsula of the Cape of Good Hope from those of the mainland. Yet for the completion of this beautiful picture we must wait for man to bring in the magic of his art. Until then this landscape will never make quite the same high appeal, as where art has fulfilled its mission of perfecting nature. We may compare, for instance, the valley of the Po, and, in smaller scale, the Wealds of Kent and Sussex, or for pictorial example, turn to the landscapes of Turner, which almost invariably are full of human life and art. The Cape Flats, as they are, would not have inspired Shelley with his exquisite poem written from the Euganean Hills, which look over the city and hamlet-studded plains of Padua towards the distant towers and domes of Venice. The inspiration of Table Mountain is more to prompt us, as it prompted Cecil Rhodes, to be up and doing. And it was from this base on the slopes of the mountain that he conceived the "taking of the North."

Into our new cities of the empire we want to bring the humanizing and reverent influences of art. It is not enough to turn the country into the town.

We want also the embodiment in art of the expression of man's dominance over nature. Not merely the skill of the engineer, who harnesses nature for utilitarian benefits, but that of the artists, whose highest aim is to lift and elevate mankind.

"Man is all that nature is, and more;
And in that more lies all his hopes of bliss."

In this principle of perfecting and controlling nature lies the essence of ground planning and landscape gardening. There will always be controversy between the rival claims of nature and art; yet so many good books have been written on these subjects, that no one, who carefully studies them, will have any difficulty in avoiding the falsehood of extremes between the natural and formal schools. Bacon, in his essay on Gardens, states a principle which holds good for the designing of gardens for towns, as well as of houses. In the design of gardens, he says in effect, formal art should be strictly adhered to in the immediate surrounding and setting of the house. The design should then grow less and less formal until the art of man's control of nature ultimately loses itself in nature herself. The same principle applies to city gardening. "Rus in Urbe," which inspired the early Victorian ideal, is not the best principle to follow. There may be more justification for its application in England, where nature, in her delicacy of detail, is always in herself a garden. But in drier and hotter countries, less favourable for the art of the gardener, a natural garden in the midst of a city too often degenerates into an untidy shrubbery. The attempts at "Le jardin Anglais," which have been fashionable in Continental towns, are far from encouraging. The open garden heart of Paris, from the Champs Elysees to the Bois de Boulogne, is a better example for our sunnier colonies to follow. It is the simple formal lines and masses which form a setting for and give scale and proportion to architecture and sculpture, and harmonise nature with man's handiwork.

Town planners must not be put off by the cry of extravagance. It has been shown that artistic foresight may lead to ultimate economy. Considering the problem, moreover, from the point of view of immediate economy, we find that the money lavished in most of our cities on buildings is wasted, because so little thought is given to their surroundings. We all know how beautiful gems can be ruined by bad craftsmanship in the setting. In many of our cities the most beautiful buildings lose their value for want of design and orderly arrangement in their surroundings. The town planner is the setter of architectural gems. Even a bad building may sometimes be enhanced in value by its setting at the end of a vista, by its framing in studied masses of foliage, or by its reflection in water.

Arranging New Townships.

In dealing with the simple case of the unambitious new township, it should not be a very difficult or expensive matter for the supervising engineer or surveyors, who should be trained in a school of town planning, to arrange that all public buildings for which provision must be made—church, school, hall—should have spaces left for them at the end of vistas or of open spaces, or where they

would most tell in the general effect. In the gridiron plan, which is most commonly adopted in our Colonial towns, all we usually see at the end of the much-vaunted long straight streets is a mass of wires, poles and iron verandah posts, or the dust or nothingness of distance. The facades of buildings are seldom seen as the designer intended. In looking along a street, the perspective is so sharp that it is only the simplest architectural features that have any value, and these only, if they are not lost, as is too often the case, in a riot of wasteful ornament.

The town planner in the Southern Dominion of the Empire generally has to deal with excessive sunshine and a dry climate. This emphasises the need that the city should have something of the character of an oasis in the desert. The problems which he has to deal with are those which faced the Roman and the Mohammedan Empire in the South and East. Arab poets have recorded the love they felt for the beauty of the "Garden City" Damascus, encircled by its desert hills. We can well imagine their enthusiasm for Palermo, "the shell of gold," where, as they sang, "the oranges hung in the gardens like golden lamps in an emerald sky."

Every South African or Australian who wishes to design a garden in a dry, hot climate should read Mrs. Villiers Stuart's book on "The Garden of the Great Moghals." In it she describes the gardens of the north of India. She rightly points out that the design of the plans, which produce such beautiful results, were primarily based on the need of irrigating, by means of flooding the beds and lawns, without the untidy water leads or "shuts" which are generally inseparable from an irrigated garden. She recalls how Babar, half-Turk and half-Mongol, the founder of the great Moghal Empire in India, who spent his youth alternately in hunting and being hunted by his enemies in the desert highlands of Central Asia, was so captivated by the beauties of the garden city of Samarkand, during a short occupation after his conquest of it, that later in life, when he ruled India, he himself planned and laid-out gardens such as had not been seen in India before. The Taj Mahal, so justly famed for its beauty, may be equalled or surpassed in mere skill of architecture by many Mohammedan tombs in Persia or Egypt. The amazing appeal, which the Taj Mahal at Agra makes to the imagination of all who see it, is probably less due to its architecture and the romance of its building than to its effect as a whole, the jewelled buildings in their magic setting of its formal garden.

Rhodes' Doctrine of Ransom.

Shall we, with our English birthright of beautiful gardens, fall short of the Arab and the Turk in our share of man's great duty of leaving the earth more beautiful than we found it? This sense of creating an ordered oasis in the desert was very strong in Cecil Rhodes. At Kimberley, during the siege, he laid out a mile of avenue of vines and orange trees, nourished by water pumped from a mine. Had he lived, he intended to build an open white marble column temple enclosing a pool of water, the whole embowered in lotus, papyrus, and the bright flowering canna—like another "fountain Arcthusé" of the Greeks at Syracuse. It was a

part of Rhodes' "doctrine of ransom" that those who defaced the fair features of nature for their own profit should put back some of the wealth they obtained from her in adding to her beauty in the form of art. May his noble example thus inspire other great men in the untamed lands, which are waiting for the civilising touch of human art in the great inheritance of the British Empire.

Mrs. Browning beautifully and truly says, "God's finger touched, but did not press, in making England." But in making the new countries of the Empire beyond the Seas, the Great Artificer has "pressed" and moulded into Titanic forms the great rough landscape of mountain and prairie, kopje and veld. It is there the greater duty of man to use to the full the divine gift of art with which he has been so highly endowed. He must employ the bigger and simpler methods which are known as "the grand manner" in his landscape and civic art. Those who live in such climates know how the clear atmosphere of midday destroys all sense of scale and perspective in a landscape. Ranges of hills, perhaps miles apart, appear often in the same plane. Frame these toneless landscapes with architecture or tree masses, give them scale by objects of architecture or sculpture or planting, and then, as if by magic, they all take on a different aspect. It has been interpreted and focussed to our human understanding.

It is often our experience that where Nature does least, man, according to his means, does most. Where the endowments of nature have been most lavish, we often find an absence of that restlessness or divine discontent which spurs us on to great achievement. There is hope, therefore, in the human material. Knowledge and enlightenment alone are wanted, and the Victoria League is to be congratulated on the help which it has given by means of this Congress towards the advancement of civic and landscape art in the British Empire.

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