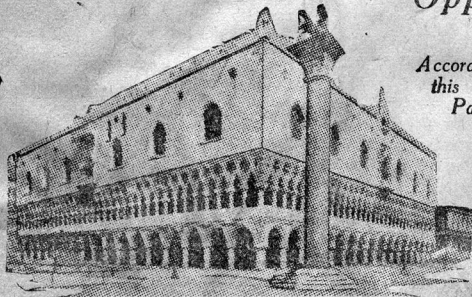


THE TRAGEDY of CAPE TOWN: Missed Opportunities



According to the writer of this article, the Doge's Palace in Venice (shown on the left), one of the finest buildings in the whole world, would not be allowed under "our absurd building regulations!"

By GERARD MOERDIJK
The South African Architect

In the course of a recent lecture in the Transvaal, Mr. Moerdijk made some criticisms of the architectural lay-out of Cape Town, and now, at the request of *The Week-End Argus*, he has amplified his statement in the form of an article.

SIR FRANCIS DRAKE said: "This cape is a most stately thing and the fairest cape we saw in the whole circumference of the earth."

Poor Sir Francis! How deeply disappointed he would be if he could return to-day and see how man has treated this fair cape. On this site, unparalleled on the Riviera—even Naples herself cannot boast so grandiose a setting—instead of an inspiring city raising its towers within the shelter of the mountain, Sir Francis would see a jumble of buildings, a city built without vision.

Imagine the scene that might have greeted the eye of the visitor as he approached Table Bay. The great amphitheatre laid out in the form of half a spider's web, its centre somewhere near the bottom of the present Adderley-street, with radiating avenues and concentric streets, roughly following the contour of the mountain and laid out in terraces, each higher terrace overlooking the one beneath, every house with a glimpse of the bay and the land beyond. Somewhat different, however, is the scene that greets him now.

When a butcher wants to cut up a carcass he sets about it according to some definite plan, else he would have more waste than profitable joints. How much more so should not this be the case with the building of a city, where the mistakes of to-day cannot be stuffed into oblivion, but remain to become the eyesores of to-morrow. Cape Town creates the impression of having been built bit by bit, a new piece being added when the old was full, with no thought of unity or appearance.

The only conscious attempt at a layout which the city can boast of dates back to the time of the early Dutch colonists, and even they considered only a small portion of the present city. They regarded Cape Town as a tavern by the sea, and none but a few dreamers, no doubt, ever thought of the possibility of a big city arising in this furthest corner of the continent. One visitor was heard to remark that all the beauty Cape Town possesses was created by the Lord and the Hollanders. He was prejudiced, no doubt, but when one looks at the fine old avenues, the pride of every Cape Town dweller, and considers that they are the work of Simon van der Stel, one begins to wonder, more especially if one then walks down modern Adderley-street, with its noble rows of bedpost columns

on either side, whether there isn't a good deal of truth in the remark.

SOUTH AFRICANS have had a wonderful opportunity of building a city famous for its beauty the world over, and they have failed lamentably. This dream city is lost forever; only a dictator could do what is required to be done now, a dictator with no regard for personal property or vested interests. And yet, the possibility of improvement still exists. One realises im-

mediately, of course, that no definite plan can be brought forward until a thorough civic survey has been made of the whole city site. Yet even so, a few suggestions crop up at once of how the most blatant monstrosities could be remedied.

The setting back of the building line above the first floor level, forced upon us by an altogether wrong and antiquated building law, which was designed for a climate quite different from ours, is responsible for the ramshackle appearance of South African towns. The Doge's Palace in Venice, one of the finest buildings in the whole world, would not be allowed under our absurd building regulations.

Still, without very drastic alterations, we could even now create arcaded streets like those of the Italian town Bologna, by which means we could beautify our cities without obstructing any necessary light or air. A zoning law should be framed and certain districts reserved for certain types of buildings, which would retain uniformity without necessarily creating monotony. Underground tramways starting in Adderley-street and emerging somewhere near Groote Schuur would eliminate much unnecessary business traffic around the mountain. A similar underground service should connect up the other suburban districts with the centre of the city. This would do away with all the noise and inconvenience of electric traffic in the busy streets.

The bottom of Adderley-street is a disgrace to any town. One really cannot find excuses for some of its

abominations. How could a crime against good taste like the War Memorial be allowed in a city which possesses two of the finest monuments in the world, namely the Van Riebeeck Statue and the Rhodes Memorial at Groote Schuur? The South African Railways are the chief offenders, however. Valuable sites are being left idle or turned into veritable eyesores by terrible goods sheds. The proceeds of the sale of this ground would provide ample funds to erect a station, with a fine facade facing the parade ground, which would form a worthy and monumental gateway to the hinterland of Africa.

BIG cities in the United States are finding it profitable to do away with their slums, and are creating beauty spots instead. Many of the finest sites near Cape Town, with glorious views, are made unsightly to-day by slum dwellings of all sorts and conditions. Surely the owners of such districts could be prevailed upon to improve their properties, or a law could be passed which would make slum property unprofitable. In our democratic days the interests of the community as a whole are regarded as more important than the profits of the individual.

It is really time that Cape-tonians woke up to the fact that their city needs beautifying, and the sooner a general survey of the whole city is made, with this object in view, the better for present and future generations, as well as for the reputation of the "fairest cape."