

NEW TOWNS FOR OLD

CLINTON ROGERS WOODRUFF

IN reply to a question in the House of Commons, the Right Hon. Neville Chamberlain, Minister of Health, said that "285 Urban Authorities have prepared or are preparing town-planning schemes, a number of which extend to portions of other urban areas. The number of Urban Authorities with a population of 10,000 or over in whose areas formal steps have not, so far as I am aware, been taken in the preparation of town planning schemes is 281."

This statement gives some idea how strong in Old England is the movement for the substitution of old towns for new, and John Nolen's new book, which bears the title of this article, tells how the movement is progressing in America, not statistically, but from the point of view of the principles involved. This volume is significant, as Harlean James of the American Civic Association points out, in its emphasis on "the need for planning the small community to be a small community, and not the nucleus of a future metropolis." The pressure of modern city life, in her opinion, is bringing out a reserve action. Our people, she says, are now turning from the crowded city streets to the residential suburbs or existing near-by villages. Improvements in transportation have each year widened the radius of the residential suburbs of our great cities, which in the last decade have a tendency to become self-contained towns. John Erskine, in his latest volume of essays, whimsically points out that marriage is likely to be happier near the soil than in the city, and by inference in the small community rather than in the large ones. He adds, too, that city folk, who fall deep in love and have a noble vision of comradeship between man and woman, can realize that dream best in the country, and again by inference, in the small community rather than in the large one. Indeed there is to be seen a tendency to change in the distribution of population—not in the direction of the city to the country, for the city population continues to grow at the expense of the country, but rather from the greater to the smaller urban community. To be sure, the tendency is really towards the suburban community.

At a town planning conference and exhibition in Birmingham, as at Letchworth, Mr. Chamberlain referred to the potentialities of the garden city as a remedy for congestion in the towns.

His contention that the work-place as well as the residence must be removed from the crowded industrial area raises, in his judgment, the crux of the whole question. So far, however, the garden city has found many difficulties. Most manufacturers here as well as abroad need a great deal of persuasion before they transfer their undertakings to a district whence the transit of goods requires time and money to take them to a selling centre, and where they may be far removed from an open labour market. Nor is it easy to meet the housing situation. Until houses are erected, employers are sceptical about their "labour turnover"; and country builders are doubtful about risking their capital in the absence of positive assurances that tenants or purchasers will be forthcoming. In passing, it is of interest to point out that Mr. Chamberlain, before achieving Imperial fame, achieved a solid reputation as a municipal administrator and leader. As Minister of Health he also has the oversight of town planning, a rather suggestive and helpful combination.

The garden city tends to develop into the garden suburb; and while this may have its advantages, it is by no means a solution of the problem of congestion. In some aspects it increases rather than diminishes it. This is a question that will be answered in various ways by various students of the problem. Miss James, for instance, feels that suburban developments may in time become self-contained communities. On the other hand, the movements for metropolitan and regional planning indicate that the large centres tend inevitable to become larger.

Twenty-five years ago, efforts for local civic improvement were usually entitled "The City Beautiful Movements", and their purpose was to remove the grosser offences to the eye and to cover up those that were not easily removed. Except in a few places, these movements represented little more than a dressing-up process, with little or no attention to what was behind or underneath. Nevertheless, in most instances, they also represented an aspiration for something better and in time for something finer and eventually for a more wholesome community life in every aspect. If one wishes to grasp the fulfilment of this general movement as applied to the smaller community, by general consent called the town, he will find it embodied in that most suggestive and helpful leaflet of the American Civic Association entitled *Civic Improvement in Your Town*. Here we find compact in forty pages what may be regarded as the essential principles for wholesome and enjoyable living. This pamphlet and John Nolen's new book are to be heartily commended for their practical common sense, wisdom and sound

advice. The purpose of both is to present a small number of representative examples of civic improvement actually carried out. Neither is a treatise or outline or summary of town planning. Their scope is intentionally limited to dealing with a few selected places only, and with them mainly from the point of view of showing results accomplished and the methods employed. They furnish what textbooks so often lack, concrete illustrations of fundamental principles.

Another suggestive volume is to be mentioned here: Stephen Child's *Landscape Architecture*. In a series of letters he deals with such general problems as metropolitan parks and city planning, and such concrete situations as "modest home grounds, a group of little homes and a neighborhood of modest homes."

Town planning, which may be described as the application of the larger principles of city planning to the smaller communities, is coming to be acknowledged in the United States, as in England, to be an indispensable art. Its value, however, depends upon the success with which it can be applied. As Dr. Nolen points out, city planning commissions and the general public are often impatient for results; but in a subject so difficult and complex, results come slowly. Changes in existing towns cannot be made in a day, and new towns are usually of comparatively slow growth. In his book his story of achievement, set forth in word and plan and picture, is based upon a record of about a decade and makes one optimistic for the future.

Dr. Nolen has further purposes in his latest contributions. One is to draw attention to the economic and social advantages of towns or relatively small cities (especially if well connected as satellites of greater population centres) and to the ease with which they can be improved. Cohasset and Walpole are fair examples. Another purpose is to plead for more new towns, skilfully planned in favourable locations better to meet modern requirements and higher standards. The account of the places he has selected for description is highly illuminating, especially in the records and photographic illustrations of such new communities as Kingsport, Tenn., and Mariemont, Ohio.

Kingsport is a striking illustration of American ability to create a truly fine urban community. In 1912 there were only two farm houses where stands now a splendidly planned and constructed city with ten first-class industries. I feel a sort of parental interest in the place through my friendship with Joseph H. Sears, one time head of D. Appleton & Co., and now at the head of the Kingsport press, as well as head of J. H. Sears & Co., publishers, of New York.

Sears is one of those men who combine business acumen with a strong tendency to dream. He dreamed of some such community long years ago, and finally interested his friends in the idea, and when the idea developed and a plan was needed, he and his friends turned to John Nolen, whose book on *Town Planning* in the "National Municipal Series" (of which I was editor) was published by the Appletons. Sears read the book, and at once realized that Nolen was the man to plan the new town. With Sears to think was to act, and the result has been the development of what has with justice been termed "one of the best planned industrial communities in the annals of modern town planning". It is remarkable by reason of the harmonious co-operation of several independent agencies in an achievement that may well be called ideal in the quality of their respective fruitions: industrial, economic, hygienic, civic, cultural and aesthetic.

Primarily undertaking it as a business enterprise with profitable returns in contemplation, those in charge had enlightened views as to the direction in which true self-interest lay, and the results have shown the soundness of their judgment. In the words of one of those associated in the undertaking, "These men decided that Kingsport should be as nearly an ideal manufacturing city as human agencies could make it. They realized that living conditions greatly affect the morals of a town, and that general contentment and the elimination of worries go far toward producing the spirit so necessary to the accomplishment of good work. Men who are worried because they have sick children at home, and men and women who cannot make ends meet because they have lost wages through sickness or accident, are prone to become discontented and make trouble. Improper housing, insufficient amusement, lack of care in illness, poor food—all these things tend to lower industrial efficiency. Mr. Johnson and the men working with him saw that Kingsport alone could not provide the means of making itself the city they wanted it to be. So they decided on the insurance plan, whereby they really formed a partnership with the life-insurance company for the purpose of bringing Kingsport up to their expectations."

Each employing corporation sent out to its employees a statement setting forth a general plan of insurance. This statement announced that an arrangement had been made with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company of New York for life, health and accident insurance for each employee who was at work on the previous July 1, the insurance becoming automatically effective from that date. The entire cost of this insurance is borne by the em-

ploying corporation. Incidentally, it may be remarked that "the insurance company regards the Kingsport undertaking as of great value in demonstrating what may very wisely be done". "We propose to show the nation", it said, "what it is possible to accomplish in the preservation of health and life in an intelligent community when the proper steps are taken." Some idea of the industrial development of the town may be gathered from an enumeration of the ten concerns located there: The Kingsport Hosiery Mill; the Kingsport Extract Corporation; the Kingsport Tannery, Incorporated; the Clinchfield Portland Cement Corporation; the Kingsport Press; the Kingsport Stores, Incorporated; the Kingsport Farms Corporation; the Kingsport Brick Company; the Kingsport Utility Company. To these must be added the municipality, itself an employer.

Successful town planning calls for versatility, special knowledge and, above all, cordial co-operation. For town planning "is engineering *plus* something; architecture *plus* something." And that *plus* is as indispensable as the direct professional equipment in the more usual and better recognized fields. So it has been with the execution of this Kingsport and other projects. The town planner would have little to present if he had failed to secure in each place the help and co-operation of architects, landscape architects and engineers. Special mention is therefore made of the architectural work of Clinton Mackenzie and the landscape gardening work of Miss Lola Anderson.

Town planning, while difficult, is comparatively simple when applied to a brand new community, like Kingsport, as compared with an old established one. That, however, is another and a long story, as is the story of the attempts to remake or remodel, or perhaps I should say to correct, the errors of the past in the big, old established communities like New York, Philadelphia and Chicago in the New World, and London in the Old. A heroic effort is being made in New York to plan for the development of the whole New York region. A similar effort has been inaugurated in Philadelphia. In other words, the city planning movement has developed into the metropolitan planning, and that in turn has developed into regional planning, oftentimes involving several states and innumerable local jurisdictions.

As the *Herald-Tribune* said in commenting on *Planning the New York Region*, one of its most interesting items is not New York's congestion, but its wide-open spaces. The Regional Plan pictures without difficulty a population of 20,000,000 within the metropolitan area, while it reminds us that one-fifth of the area of Brook-

lyn, two-fifths of the Bronx and nearly three-fifths of Queens is as yet unimproved land. It is not space which is at a premium in New York, it is arrangement; and it is not the lack of room which crowds the traffic arteries, but that oddity of plan whereby "New York seems expressly laid out invariably to draw the maximum of people into the minimum of space at the most inconvenient of hours."

On the other side of the picture may be quoted the comment of the *New York Times*: "Once in a while someone bids the city pause in its bustling life and survey the whole scene of its activities. The latest report of the Regional Plan of New York and its Environs takes us up into one of our high towers and spreads this scene before us; 5,528 square miles of territory, 9,000,000 people, 60,000 manufacturing plants, 868 piers, 13 railroads, 1,800 miles of waterfront, 9,000 miles of city streets, 900,000 motor cars, 3,000,000 commuters. Add tenements and skyscrapers, slums and parks, subways and traffic jams, and you get some notion of the stuff the city is made of, and the problems that face it. Tilting against these problems come the architect, the engineer, the sociologist, the economist and the lawyer, and out of the impact emerges the plan" which the Committee, fathered by the Sage Foundation, hopes to publish during the coming year.

Some idea of the complication of the London problem may be gathered from an address which Mr. Chamberlain delivered in December (1926) before a gathering of representatives of 154 local bodies acting within the 200 square miles that comprise the London traffic Area or Greater London Region. That conference enthusiastically decided to recommend the setting up of the Advisory Joint Town-Planning Committee for the whole region.¹ The great majority of authorities have signified their assent, and representatives have been appointed by the existing regional groups.

Twelve joint planning committees have been established in the region, covering practically the whole of it save the county of London and a small section in the north-east corner. Of the twelve committees, those for West Middlesex, Thames Valley, North West Kent, South West Kent, North-East Surrey, and West Kent have completed plans and reports, and those of the first two named have been published. The South Essex Committee has also approved a preliminary report setting out some of the facts of the situation, and the guiding principles to be followed in the preparation of their plans. Hertfordshire, West Surrey, Mid-Surrey, North-West Surrey, North Middlesex and South Bucks

¹ The city planning movement in Great Britain is generally referred to as town planning, irrespective of the size of the problem involved.

and Thames side committees are all engaged in preparing reports and plans. Other joint town-planning committees are operating just farther out.

If these can all be brought into a harmonious and effective whole, what a great gain there will be! I am referring to the undertaking, however, to illustrate the greatness and complexity of the problem, which is also illustrated in Beniot Levy's new brochure *Paris Spreads Out*.

Not only is Paris spreading out, but all the cities here and abroad are expanding their boundaries, increasing in population and developing generally, and the question each one must answer is: Will this growth and development be along wise, scientific and artistic lines, with an eye to the future as well as the present, and with the needs and aspiration of *all* the people held clearly in mind? To an increasing and encouraging degree the answer is "Yes".