CHAPTER XVII

THE SPIRIT OF CITIES

After our Civic Survey and Exhibition are undertaken, and the preparation of our Town Plan begun, what next? Each is but a beginning, a preparatory study of the city, a draft towards its improvement and extension. Both in these ameliorations which are more or less needed by all our modern towns at present, and beyond these, we have to realise and keep in view the spirit and individuality of our city, its personality and character, and to enhance and express this, if we would not further efface or repress it.

How may this spirit be brought out and expressed? Our survey may be helpful to the city's Pageant, beyond this to its more interpretative Masque, while beyond this again literature and all the arts combined must utilise our civics and sociology towards its veritable Epic. In every way, then, a School of Civics is needed in every city, and in some this is already arising.

Of the spirit of cities, and the bearing of a perception of this towards the discernment of their respective possibilities, concrete examples are needed. Single example here chosen for brief and partial outline, that of Chelsea—Past and Possible.

We may now suppose our Civic Survey has been brought up to date, and prepared for planning beyond it. It is at any rate in progress, and upon all levels of age and responsibility, from primary school and college, museum and library, to the town-house itself in its various departments; and thus on many lines it is reaching the mass of homes, the body of citizens. May we now leave this hard-pressed subject, and with confidence that all has been done that need be?

Yes and no. The exhibition over, the Town Planning Committee (if it has waited so long) may then instruct their borough engineer to make out his town plan; but he has doubtless been sketching this out already in his own way, well or ill. True, he and his committee may now accept from our Town Planning Exhibition what ideas of the city's growth aud structures and needs their majority permit, or an active minority impose; and thus our trouble will not have been wholly wasted. Still, this done, the plan, after due correspondence with the L.G.B. and adjustment to its criticisms, will obtain official approval, and the towu's future for a generation (and in part for ever) is thus simply settled on; perhaps even proceeded with.

Yet all we have so far been accumulating are but materials towards our history, studies towards our picture, drafts towards our design. Of this first exhibition it is a uain success to have demonstrated its own incompleteness: our present documentation is but a beginning, and our needed comparisons with other cities are little more than broached.

For all this the practical man will now say he cannot wait, and so far rightly; though he has waited long and without complaint before. So while work begins, research should continue; and beyond this, the need arises of reconstructive imagination, and this for past, for present, and for future alike.

We visualise and depict our city from its smallest begiunings, in its immediate and wider setting, as of

valley, river, and routes; we spread it upon its plain, tower it upon its hills, or throne it more spaciously by the sea. Our synoptic vision of the city, for each and all of its growth-phases, thus ranges through region to homes, and back again, and with pictured completeness as well as plans: first a rough jewel on the breast of Nature, then the wrought clasp upon her rich-embroidered garments of forest, vineyard, or orchard, of green pastures or golden fields.

As with geography, so with history: we design or renew the city's pageant, scene by scene. No minuteness of local archæologist and antiquarian can be spared, no contact with the outer world of which the general historian tells; yet the main task is too commonly missed between these—the problem of history proper—the essential story of the city, the presentment of its characteristic life at each period. We have to see it as it lived in pre-Roman, Roman, and barbarian times, in early and later medieval days, and at the Renaissance, as well as in its modern industrial growth since the steam-engine and the railway. The too purely spectacular pageant of a city—with its loosely strung succession of incidents, themselves too often of external contacts—despite its splendour, has failed to satisfy the public. But here we come in sight of its next development—that of the more interpretative masque of the city's life; the seven ages, as it were, of its being—though happily not too closely corresponding to Shakespeare's individual ones, themselves sadly degenerate from a

nobler tradition. And though at many points our masque must still be eked out with pageant, at others it may well rise towards epic. Here, in fact, a new form of epic begins to appear : that of each and every city and region throughout the ages.

We are thus reaching the very portal of literature ; yet, thanks to our outdoor survey and its exhibition, we can look back from it upon life, which everywhere creates it. We realise for ourselves how this dull town has had beauty and youth. We see how it has lived through ages of faith and had its great days of fellowship ; how it has thrilled to victory, wept in defeat, renewed its sacrifices and strifes, and so toiled on, through generation after generation, with ever-changing fortunes, and in mind and spirit more changeful still. But since in the mass of prosperous English and American cities we too readily forget our historic past, and think only of our town in its recent industrial and railway developments, we have come to think of this present type of town as in principle final, instead of itself in change and flux.

It is a blind view of history, as something done elsewhere and recorded in books—instead of being, as it is, the very life-process of our city, its heredity and its momentum alike—which delays the perception of civic change among the intelligent, and still retards comprehension of it among even the progressive. Where even the theologian has too much failed to awaken to the current judgment-day, with its inexorable punishments, its marvellous rewards, we

cannot wonder that the economist should have been slow to realise the limitation of his paleotechnic age; to analyse, yet correlate its complex of evils, its poverty- and luxury-diseases, its vices and crimes, its ignorances and follies, its apathy and indolence; or conversely, to appreciate and to support its neotechnic initiatives and quests.

From past romancers to modern realists—Sir Walter to Zola, Reade to Bennett—the stuff of literature is life; above all, then, city-life and region-life. Ideas, as Bergson rightly teaches, are but sections of life: movement is of its essence. This life-movement proceeds in changing rhythm initiated by the genius of the place, continued by the spirit of the times, and accompanied by their good and evil influences. How else should we hear in our survey as we go, at one moment the muses' song, at another the shriek of furies!

Our survey, then, is a means towards the realisation of our community's life-history. This life-history is not past and done with; it is incorporated with its present activities and character. All these again, plus such fresh influences as may arise or intervene, are determining its opening future. From our survey of facts we have to prepare no mere material record, economic or structural, but to evoke the social personality, changing indeed so far with every generation, yet ever expressing itself in and through these.

Here, in fact, is the higher problem of our surveys, and to these the everyday purposes of our previous chapters will all be found to converge. He is no true

town planner, but at best a too simple engineer, who sees only the similarity of cities, their common network of roads and communications. He who would be even a sound engineer, doing work to endure, let alone an artist in his work, must know his city indeed, and have entered into its soul—as Scott and Stevenson knew and loved their Edinburgh; as Pepys and Johnson and Lamb, as Besant and Gomme their London. Oxford, Cambridge, St Andrews, Harvard, have peculiarly inspired their studious sons; but Birmingham and Glasgow, New York or Chicago, have each no small appeal to observant and active minds. In every city there is much of beauty and more of possibility; and thus for the town planner as artist, the very worst of cities may be the best.

Hence at the end of this long volume we are but at the beginning of the study of cities in evolution. We should now pass through a representative selection of cities. We need to search out sociological interpretations of all these unique developments; indeed it is for lack of such concrete inquiries that sociology has been so long marking time, between anthropology and metaphysics, and with no sufficient foothold in social life as it is lived to-day in cities. We need to search into the life of city and citizen, and the inter-relation of these, and this as intensively as the biologist inquires into the interaction of individual and race in evolution. Only thus can we adequately handle the problems of social pathology; and hence again rise to the hope of cities, and with clearer

beginnings of civic therapeutics, of social hygiene. In such ways, and through such studies, the incipient civic renascence is proven to be no mere utopia; and its needed policy may be more clearly discerned, even devised. Thus we return, upon a new spiral, to town planning as City Design. City by city our civic ideals emerge and become definite; and in the revivance of our city we see how to work towards its extrication from its paleotechnic evils, its fuller entrance upon the better incipient order. Education and industry admit of reorganisation together, towards sound mind and vigorous body once more. This unification of idealistic feeling and of constructive thought with practical endeavour, of civic ethics and group-psychology with art, yet with economics, is indeed the planning of Eutopia—of practical and practicable Eutopias, city by city. Such, then, is the vital purpose of all our surveys: and though their completion must be left to others, fresh chapters for city after city—indeed sometimes a volume for each—might here be added, with their Surveys, of things as they are and as they change, passing into Reports, towards things as they may be.

Every town planner is indeed moving in this direction more or less; no one will now admit himself a mere procrustean engineer of parallelograms, or mere draughtsman of perspectives; but long and arduous toil and quest are still before us ere we can really express, as did the builders of old, the spirit of our cities. Spiritually, artistically we are but in the

day of small things, however big be our material responsibilities. Hence the justification of the inner rooms of our Outlook Tower, and of the Cities and Town Planning Exhibition, with their drafts, sketches, and sometimes beginnings towards the realisable Eutopia of cities, as of Edinburgh and Dunfermline, of Chelsea or Dundee, of Dublin or Madras.

Through such large civic endeavours as that of the town planning of Dublin, this correlation of Survey and Eutopia may be made plainer to other cities; and this as appealing to all parties, classes, occupations, and individuals. In such ways city surveys and exhibitions and plans are actually generating a new movement of education, that towards a School of Civics, as in Dublin, and soon in every city. How this might be helped by school and college, by studio, gallery, and library, has been fully suggested already: but now it may be plainer that it may help these in turn. For what is a Civic Exhibition if not a fresh step towards the Civic University; and with this towards the City Renewed?

Without such increasing, deepening, and generally diffusing realisation of the character and spirit of our city, our town planning and improvement schemes are at best but repeating (though no doubt in better form and upon a further spiral) those "bye-law streets" with which the past generatiou was too easily content, but with which we are now becoming so thoroughly disenchanted, as but slums after all, and in some ways the worse for being standardised.

At this point more than ever we require concrete illustrations, and these from city after city. But space forbids: for, say, Edinburgh or Dublin alone one would need this whole volume and more: indeed, for the far smaller and necessarily less complex Dunfermline, the writer has already found a doubly crowded one insufficient.

Still, some example must be given, though of the briefest. As a mere indication of the fields of inquiry and of reflection needed to disengage the spirit of a city, and of the forecasts, initiatives, and endeavours which even a glimpse of this spirit will awaken, as the School of Civics in any city or borough works and grows, may be submitted the following brief and much abridged sketch towards opening a discussion of Chelsea—Past and Possible.

The exploration of Chelsea is crowded with interest, full of significance; and detailed instructions for setting about this, in ramble after ramble, are to be found in no mere summary as of Baedeker, but in the admirable guide-book of Mr Reginald Blunt.

Chelsea Church and its memorials, Church Street and its associations, are more or less known to every Chelsean, and so with each of our main assets. But it is easy to undervalue the secondary ones; thus the reverent visitor of the Old Church often passes by the new Parish Church with utter indifference, if not with a remark upon the tameness of its modern Gothic. Yet this is one of the notable buildings not

only of the borough but of the nineteenth century, since it is the first modern church with a stone-vaulted roof—that is, the first real attempt to construct a Gothic edifice since the close of the Middle Ages. No wonder it is not completely satisfactory; it is rather a wonder it is so good; and even if we may no longer feel our fathers' enthusiasm for modern Gothic, we see that this edifice has none the less its place, and that an initiative one, in one of the influential movements of recent history.

Even in the nooks of Chelsea, in its retreats from the general stream of local and national life, we find points ranging from individual interest to world significance, to history in its largest aspects, temporal and spiritual. Thus the Cavalier associations of Chelsea are familiar to all its citizens; bnt from Lindsey House, once Count Zinzendorf's chateau, it is but a step in thought to the Thirty Years' War—and from the quiet little Moravian meeting-house with its austere cemetery, to one of the greatest and best of Puritan movements in history. Even their tiny disused schoolhouse, dingy though it be, is more than a mere surviving landmark for progress. It has a tradition of its own, older than that of any of our schools and colleges, than those of Sonth Kensington to boot; for among the educators of history there are few more significant and perhaps none at this moment more vividly modern, more directly indicative of the twofold needs of progress of sciences and humanities together, than the Moravian pedagogue

and bishop Comenius, author of the *Orbis Pictus*, yet also of the *Pilgrimage of the Soul.*

Our historic houses are well known. There Turner spent his last year and died, there Rossetti, there Whistler, and each after revolutionising his generation. Fill in minor names, at least of the thirty mighty men who attain not unto the first three—say, from Cecil Lawson onwards and back—and see what a wealth of artistic associations. Here in our own day are more painters than ever, and though none be a prophet in his own borough, and the old excellences be gone, new excellences are surely appearing. We may regret the vanishing of the old Pottery with its dainty figures; but we have now in progress, and in more studios than we can number, the expression of a higher idealism, of a more varied realism than that of old, upon a far greater scale and in more enduring forms. It is time to recognise that even now our Chelsea sculptors are initiating an Art movement which may before long be recognised throughout the land as not less vital and significant in its way than those of the great painters we are wont here to recall.

In Chelsea (and in More's garden of all places) our local memories of the Renaissance are not likely to be forgotten, nor how the advent of the New Learning in England would have had a far less easy progress but for the couvinced and persuasive ally whom Erasmus found in the hospitable Chancellor. But hardly less significant, though less remembered,

is the later, yet completer development (since including also the scientific movement of the later Renaissance), which we owe to More's successor in the same home and neighbourhood, Sir Hans Sloane. Many beyond Chelsea know his Botanic Garden; but it is sometimes forgotten that to his collection the British Museum itself owes its origin; and more often forgotten still how stately and generous was Sloane's design — for had that been carried out, his historic mansion would even now be in existence; and this as the centre of the nation's treasure-honses, not crowded out of sight in Bloomsbury, but displayed like the Louvre, perhaps indeed better, in park as well as on river. Hence, perhaps tbrough the inward fitness of things, a vast group of museums has returned to our immediate neighbourhood; so that we need now no longer refuse morally to incorporate into at least the outer court of our sacred enclosure South Kensington itself, albeit so long the mere hinterland of Chelsea.

This tracing of traditions, as all Chelseans, all historians know, might be continued and amplified. I need not even speak of the local record in literature, in criticism, in affairs; it is time to draw to our conclusions. First, that we are here well on in the fourth centnry of a focus of thought, a cloister of meditation, a centre of learning, a creative home of art, and, above all these, a radiant centre of moral and social idealism, arising in the joyous sunburst

of the Utopia, but never wholly dying away. To recall once more only a few of the greater names of Chelsea, who can doubt but that this local association of imagination and humour since More, and since Erasmus's *Encomium Moriæ*, must have stirred in turn the passionate imagination, the fierce humour of Swift, and the heroic visions, the blazing satire of Carlyle. Or, again, after these first three, has not the same Utopian tradition aroused the generous ardour of Kingsley?—and strengthened the lucid optimism of Thomas Davidson?—whose whilom Chelsea Brotherhood has grown into what has been one of the most potent groups of Utopians of our day and generation, the Fabian Society; and whose later teaching is so manifest in that renaissance of educational and civic idealism which withstands the omnipotence of mammon even in New York.

Next, our civic conclusion. Here in Chelsea, albeit one of the minor boroughs of London as regards area, wealth, population, and other crude quantitative measurements, we have a city in its own way second to none, and in general view claiming to be reckoned after the City and Westminster themselves as making up the main triad of Central London. True, the City stood for commerce, for material wealth, financial greatness, and Westminster for sacred traditions and for governing powers, when this was but a country village. Yet when the Reformation closed the story of Westminster as a medieval cloister of thought, the

history of Chelsea opened; as in its turn the cloister-city of ideals, those of the Renaissance. Since then it has afforded, once and again, a needed subjective counterpart to the material and political greatness of the two metropolitan cities. This position, in Chelsea but individually and sporadically realised, has been more fully and more consciously taken as well as educationally applied by Oxford; but while that has been mainly a citadel of the causes and ideals of the past, the record of Chelsea lies essentially in its initiatives, of new ideals, of constrnctive movements. Here in fact has long been established, not indeed More's "Utopia," yet another and practically contemporary one, that "Abbey of Thelema" in which each lives his own life to such purpose as he may.

Our record of local history and achievement is no mere retrospect of sporadic genius, but a perpetual renewal of certain recognisable elements. Though to historians and their readers the past may too often seem dead, a record to be enshrined in libraries for the learned, it is of the very essence of our growing sociological re-interpretation of the past to see its essential life as continuous into the present, and even beyond, and so to maintain the perennation of culture, the immortality of the social soul. The definition of culture in terms of "the best that has been known and done in the world" is but half the truth, that which mourns or meditates among the tombs; the higher meaning of culture is also nearer its primitive

sense, which finds in the past not only fruit but seed, and so prepares for a coming spring, a future harvest. History is not ended with our historian's "periods"; the world is ever beginning anew, each community with it, each town and quarter. Why not, then, also this small town of ours, this most productive cloister of thought and art in what is now the vastest of historic cities?

How, then, shall we continue the past tradition into the opening future?—that is now the problem of Eutopia. A civic union, a Chelsea Association, has for years past been struggling into existence; and may yet unite our scattered endeavours and feelings after more active citizenship, and this in no mere limited sense, of gas and drains and taxes. We are surely as capable here of aspiring to more Athenian ideals of Citizenship as to cultural efforts, like our recent pageanting, our arts balls, our marvellous flower-shows. Why not also a more associated yet correspondingly more individual life? We have the tradition of many culture-activities, the essentials of a University City in the general sense; for as the community in its religious aspect was the Church, as the community in its political aspect is the State, so also the community in its cultural aspect will be the University. Here and beside us, moreover, in our own day, has been developing a university quarter in the literal sense; why not now bring these two beginnings together? Might not that be a fresh impulse to ourselves in Chelsea—and why not one of

value to London by and by—as at once to its University, which has its collegiate growth before it? Towards all this, the re-erection of Crosby Hall, well-nigh the last surviving relic of Old London, upon

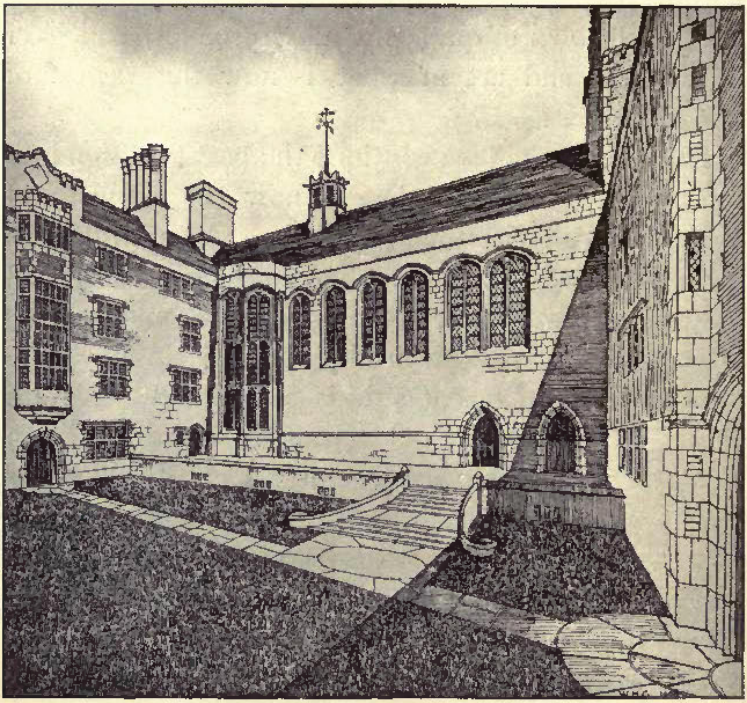

FIG. 53.—Crosby Hall, Chelsea: rebuilt in 1909–10 for University Hall of residence.

More's garden, is no mere act of archæological piety, still less of mere "restoration," but one of renewal; it is a purposeful symbol, a renewed initiative, Utopian and local, civic and academic in one. It is first of all a renewed link with the past and its associations; it is also of daily uses, both public and collegiate;

and these above all as preparing the future, not simply dignifying the present and commemorating the past. Here, then, is a new link between Chelsea Past and Chelsea Possible; a centre at once studious and practical, uniting thought and action, civic retrospect and civic future.