CHAPTER XVIII

ECONOMICS OF CITY BETTERMENT

Criticism of preceding treatment of Chelsea, and its answer: corresponding yet divergent development of other cities with neotechnic progress; a hopeful augury.

How far can housing and town planning be considered as a business proposition? Or how far must these depend on political action? Main steps of past progress have not simply been on either line. As so often with other advances, they have involved initial idealism, costly to their promoters, yet in time have become economic, as of course may public action also. Example from Irish Agricultural movement: better housing, better living, better business.

Constructive Consols, and other incipient elements of Social Finance: opening promise of this.

Civics and Eugenics: their necessary association. Cities in Evolution with people in Evolution.

Of the suggestion towards the development of Chelsea with which the previous chapter closed, the criticism may be made that this was but a poor example, since too academic to be of much general interest. To this there are several answers. First, that one may best speak of what one knows, and has worked at: second, that even in our existing order there are cities such as Oxford, Cambridge, St Andrews, to which the university is a main asset, and more to which it is a not inconsiderable secondary one: third, that as neotechnic culture advances, wealth more and more takes the form of educating

the younger generation towards skill and efficiency, and this of many kinds ; and that this can and must go on, till higher education and specialised skill become common instead of rare. Again, that the obviously associated and already not inconsiderable higher industries, such as printing, etc., must naturally increase ; and so on. Yet even for Chelsea the suggested collegiate development was but one among several important elements also more or less capable of increase, as notably its eminent horticultural tradition and present efficiency, or yet more its two thousand artists. So, for Edinburgh again ; we might readily enter the current discussion of its industrial future, as to which there are two fairly distinct schools—the first simply clamouring to Jove for "new industries," of any or every sort (and not getting them) ; the second more disposed to consider the whole situation—the existing place, work, and people, with their existing advantages and aptitudes, limitations and possibilities ; and thence thinking out the further development and better correlation of these. The same inquiry seems more urgent for Dundee ; more urgent still for Dublin ; and so on ; yet the lines of development most promising will be found to be largely different, indeed this increasingly as our surveys and studies of these cities grow more and more clear. Even for purposes of strictly economic development (if strict economic development there be) the paleotechnic view of cities, as nowadays broadly similar,

and with their differing pasts alike practically negligible, turns out on examination to be deeply unpractical, wasteful, and unproductive; and that the future developments of cities will be again upon lines of divergence and neotecbnic differentiation, may be boldly affirmed. Town-plan and "industrial brief" are thus in Dublin progressing simultaneously.

Here, in fact, is a great and opening field for civic statesmanship in association with civic sociology; and it may be fairly hoped that as these advance together their substantial fruit may become as manifest as that of the association of wise practice with sound theory on simpler levels of science, both pure and applied; while of the superior spiritual fruit there can surely be no question. Hence Edinburgh is not permanently destined to professional fossilisation, legal and other; Dundee need not accept ruin by Oriental competition at the lowest level of subsistence; Dublin will not further subside into squalor, nor Belfast into bitterness; but each and all revive, through fuller appreciation of their respective possibilities and cultivation of their advantages, and towards completer and higher inter-civic co-operation.

But it is time to return to the more simple and immediate problems of the present volume; and to make at least some beginning of an answer to the questions the reader may once and again have been asking. How far can all these fine things of housing and town planning survive?—how can they be made

to pay?—are they to be considered as a business proposition, or are they not? Let us see.

It is not a little significant to note that the various steps of housing progress above indicated (in Chapter VII.) have not arisen automatically, as so many natural and profitable developments one froun another on ordinary economic lines; nor yet as political advances; though these are the two alternatives between which most modern minds are confined, even of those who desire further housing and city improvement. The actual development has not been so simple. Each main advance has arisen with outcry or protest against the prevalent state of things; and has developed from dreams and schemes which have invariably aroused counter-protest and outcry, those of "unpractical" and "Utopian." Yet these "unpractical dreams" have none the less become resolve and effort, and those "Utopian schemes" have developed with the toil and sacrifices of some one or two or more, but at first few individuals. It is time that this history of pioneering were adequately written, for it is still needed to arouse our cities and our fellow-citizens to day. But here can only be set down a few notes and suggestions. Among the first who attempted the arousal and uplift of the paleotechnic city from its complacent progress into squalid overcrowding, and this appropriately in Glasgow, we must recall Dr Chalmers with his "Christian Economy of Cities"; as also his practical endeavours,

from one of which, for instance, what is now known as "the Elberfeld system" was directly derived. Within the same industrial region of the Clyde, Robert Owen's rare union of speculative and practical endeavours for a time exercised a world-influence, as has been recalled in Mr Podmore's recent biography. As among the foremost pioneers of labour betterment through legislation, Lord Shaftesbury's strenuous life story has also heen well told. As Owen was Communist, so Godin was a Fourierist. Carlyle was himself for a time half St Simonian, and his vigorous attacks upon the futilitarian economists and paleotechnic order generally, as, for single instance, on "Hudson's Statue," were continued by Kingsley, our English Lamennais, and later by Ruskin, who was also largely aroused by Sismondi; and all these idealists have aided the growing disillusionment, the still slower reconstruction, long though these have been of coming, and still imperfect though they be. Octavia Hill's work for housing arose too in factorship for Ruskin as her first property owner; and his "St George's Guild," though unsuccessful, was none the less a project whose ideas and ideals are still suggestive.

Return to the early hygienists, Simon, Parkes, and others, whom we have to thank for pure water, public cleansing, domestic sanitation, and the lowered death- and disease-rates which these imply; and consider what idealism carried them on for their generation of ardent toil, through towns of material filth and

grime unparalleled in history; and against apathy and opposition even denser. So even the decent dulness of our bye-law streets expresses more idealistic efforts against heavy odds than we nowadays remember; while of the succession of model tenements and improving suburbs and artisan villages the philan-

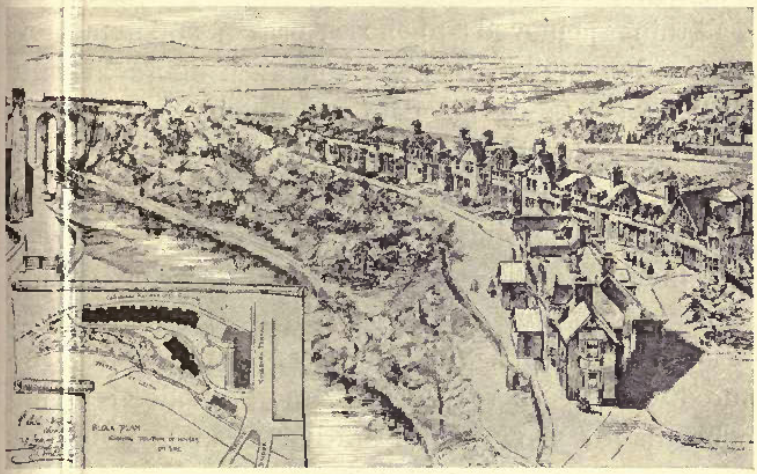

FIG. 54.—Small garden village, utilising picturesque situation at Roseburn on Water of Leith, towards outskirts of Edinburgh. An early endeavour, in progress since 1892.

thropic endeavours have been already mentioned. Ebenezer Howard with his Garden City is thus but a culminating type of this long succession of practical Eutopists; while his faithful band of Garden Cities Association shareholders, who, like all other true experimentalists, have waited years for the modest dividend only at length beginning, must also not be forgotten.

Yet the torch must ever be kept alight and passed

on, if we would not lapse anew, as has so often happened already; as, for instance, after what was in its day the no less world-wide renown and influence of Robert Owen. True, the torch is now in the hands of a hundred architects and town planners; and, after finding its first statesman in John Burns, it is now and henceforth a matter of practical politics. Yet "all things achieved and chosen pass"; and in matters of housing and town planning, even more literally than in others, we have no continuing city. What, then, of further ideals and ideas do we still require?

Are better housing and town planning, then, always to remain enterprises of idealism and sacrifice, or are they settling down to solid business and profitable return? In short, will they pay? And how? Assuredly yes, as there are yearly more dividend-paying coucerus to show—Co-operative Tenants doubtless for choice, but many others as well. It is as with Sir Horace Plunkett's Irish Agricultural movement: there are, and always must be, idealists at the front, with little or nothing beyond their trouble for material reward; but what they have sown, others already reap. Plunkett's watchword, of "better farming, better business, better living," though for a time incredulously sueered at, now appeals to the Irish peasant by tens of thousands: so why should not "better housing, better living, better business" appeal even more widely in its turn, since true for townsfolk everywhere?

True, there are none of the brilliant inducements of a really popular City prospectus of the familiar paleotechnic type, with its fluent promises of great

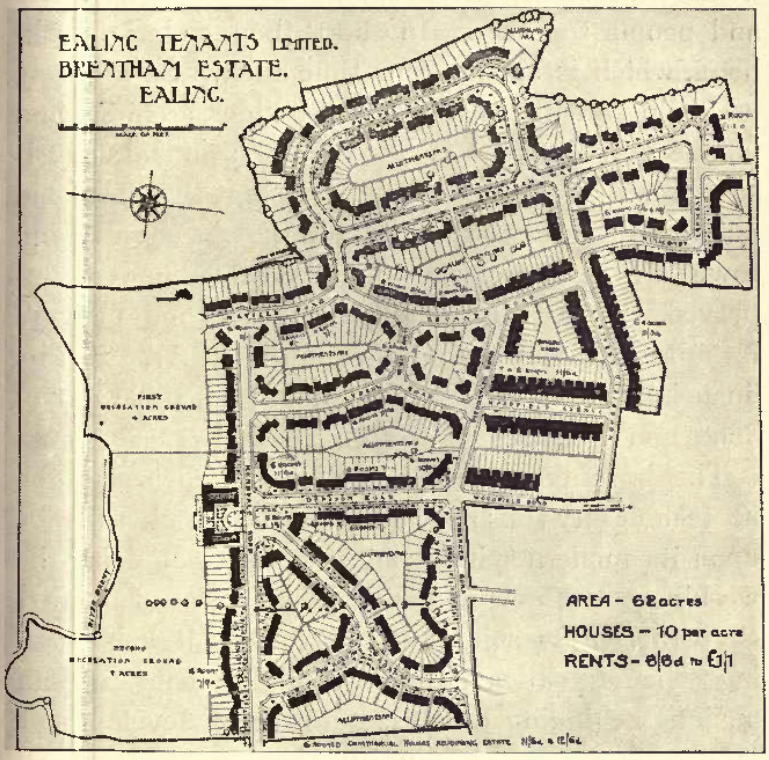

FIG. 55.—Ealing Co-operative Tenants, Ltd.: Example of a progressive development, from conventional "bye-law streets" in 1901–2 to garden village type at its best in 1911. (The growth has been from right to left.)

and speedy returns to investors, and its promoters' too frequent performance, of division of their spoil. In sound and steady agriculture, no man makes speedy fortune, be he labourer, farmer, or squire; and but few any fortune to speak of: yet each looks to have

congenial and honourable occupation, with healthy home, and effective family; each leaves the land better than he found it; and so in every way helps to make the nation's fortune, and this at its best, place and people together. In short, then, he has a livelihood, which is at the same time a life. So precisely it should be with bricklayer and builder, architect and planner: in the past it has been so; and already it sometimes is (paleotechnic housing-scandals and building-disputes notwithstanding). As country and town are in these ways maintained, renewed, improved, real wealth steadily increases, and in ways far more material than those of the "City," with its financial utopias, its pecuniary notations, so largely of debts and dreams.

The dawning economic practice and theory of the neotechnic city thus recalls that of the old physiocrats, upon its modern spiral; but this does not delay the working out of new and appropriate forms of finance. Constructive Consols, as we may fairly call such growing schemes as government building-loans, are an obvious beginning of this; and their development affords no small opportunity for the Treasury, at present and for a generation to come. The principle of organisation and growth of an agricultural bank remains a mystery to the true "City" mind, often too sunk in the cult of personal gain to grasp even the possibility, let alone the rationality and the prosperity of such banks everywhere, with their awakening of social solidarity towards the constructive rural uses

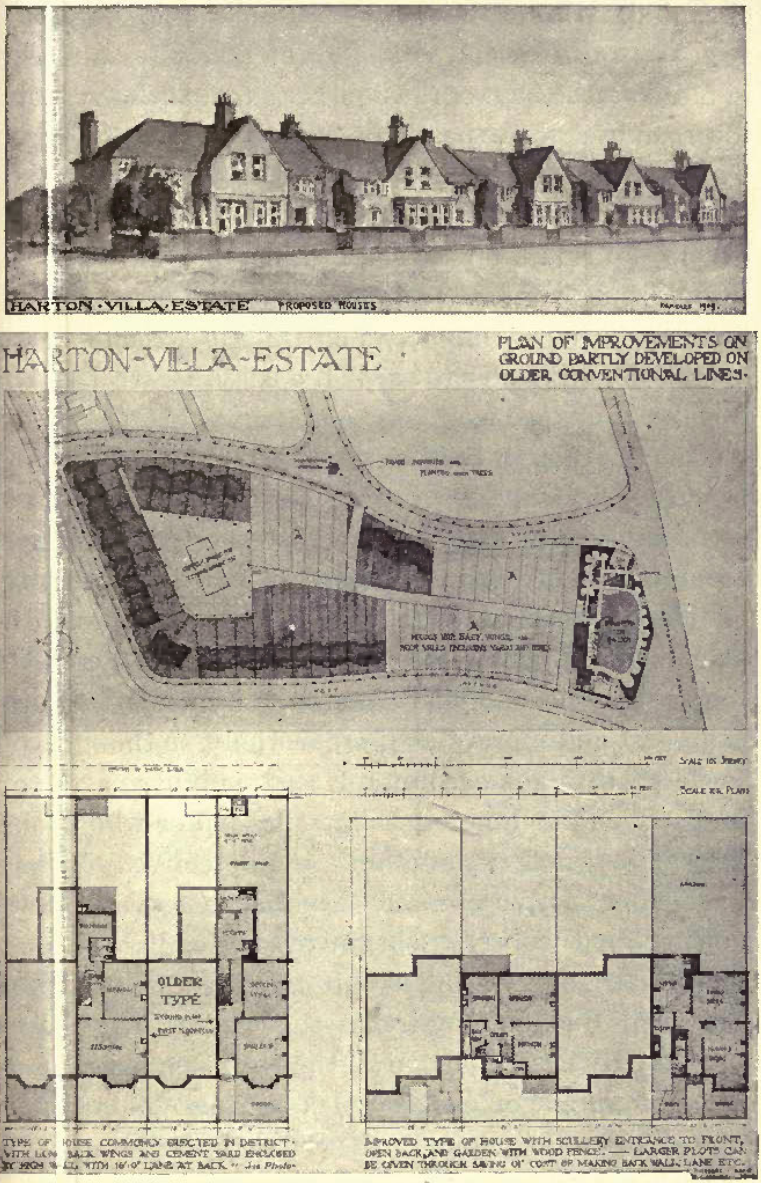

FIG. 56.—Harton Estate, South Shields. Example of changes from conventional plan and lay-out of former years; type easily adaptable to bye-law streets anywhere.

of capital. But as the reorganisation of cities becomes seen as an urgent and vital line of policy (as already in Dublin), the banker must either adapt such methods to urban use, devise better ones, or give place to better bankers who can. The Civic Bank is coming, and the Civic Trust might here be enlarged on as by far the brightest inspiration of Mr Carnegie's many philanthropic endeavours. In fact new forms of socialised finance without number, and all in friendly co-operation and rivalry towards the common weal. All this social finance is of course not simply a matter of sentiment (though that is needed to win battles), but of science also, and with new types of bank directors accordingly—the engineer and physicist with their economy of energies, the hygienist with his economy of life, the planner with his economy of cities. In paleotechnic finance, the financier with his "credit" reigns supreme, and lends where the immediate return is highest and more and more without a thought of social results; the accountant, that public analyst of industry and commerce, is but the doctor who looks after him, if not, as sometimes, the detective. But as neotechnic activities and experience advance, we constructive workers will increasingly discern that financial resources, and credit too, are essentially of our own making; and that the banker, whom we accordingly need, is above all the clear and statesman-like accountant of our complex mutual co-operation and division of labour on the creation of the city's wealth as weal.

After so much sentiment of cities, so much talk of the future, is it still needful to answer the "practical" paleotect who is convinced that "sentiment doesn't pay," that "human nature is fixed" (in his image), and so on? But the future is already here, as plainly as are next spring's buds; and though he may probably never have noticed these either, that blindness will not prevent their opening. This eutopian, constructive, and neotechnic reorganisation of industry, in city and country alike, is shaping, on plan and in place alike; it is even beginning to survive against the paleotechnic confusion, and this in terms of its own doctrine, that of struggle for existence, and survival of the fitter; in this case the more socially and vitally organised. To turn wheels for hire as labourer, and to turn pence for profit as a capitalist, has no doubt been going on so long, and in such large crowds, as to hypnotise their members from seeing what better things are now waiting to be done, and how much more life as well as livelihood may be had from doing them. But let those laugh who win: will it not here be those of direct mind who are set on making better homes and surroundings for wife and weans, and thus get them more speedily? Not those of indirect mind, who at best set out towards these better conditions through money-wages or profits; and have thus been going on for generations in bad or worse conditions for all their pains.

Along with the coming in of civics we shall have that of social finance, based on the creation of real

and material securities, but with it individual and family survival, and this in increasing health. Here, then, we have come to eugenics: and this eugenics proper, free from those elements of fatalism, of crude Darwinism, if not reactionary sophistry, which from time to time reappear to discourage the uplift of the people with the improvement of their conditions.

The idea of Civics and Eugenics in association, and no longer studied apart, as separate specialisms, nor advocated as if they were rival panaceas, might well occupy a new chapter. Suffice it, however, to state two or three main points of experience and conviction without here arguing them. First, that many of those whom eugenists are apt to think of and to tabulate as "degenerates" in type and stock are really but deteriorates, and this in correspondence to their depressive environment. Next, that such types and stocks, which our wholesale paleotechnic experiment of slum-culture has proved most sensitive or adaptive to its evils, should correspondingly no less respond to better conditions, and thus rise above average, as they now fall below. These are not, of course, new hypotheses: they are doctrines experimentally confirmed throughout history, and at least as old as the gospels and prophecies, which (even their exponents seem sometimes to forget) came largely to express them. The only freshness of treatment now possible (apart from the greatness of the scale of endeavour that slum and super-slum provide) is to restate these doctrines, independently of feeling or tradition; and

this in the teeth of the crudely Darwinian eugenists above referred to, and on fuller scientific grounds than theirs, biological, psychological, and social, and of observation, experiment, and reasoning alike; and to appeal for that fuller experiment accordingly, which no scientific antagonist can fairly refuse. Added arguments may appeal to different outlooks; to some the economy of hospitals and asylums, of board schools, public schools, and barracks, of reformatories, police courts, and prisons, and so on; and to others that of sport and gambling, of drink-shops and vice-shops; and to others again of the lower press, of the idling-clubs, of the bureaucratic institutions, and of course of the professions, all, though variously, concerned with the preceding. A complemental line of argument is also to be derived from the moral or material values and productivities of individuals and stocks thus transplanted in course of civic and regional renewal.

If further economic considerations be desired, one more may be offered, and with no less confidence and emphasis. Recall for the last time our too largely paleotechnic working-towns with their ominous contrasts of inferior conditions for the labouring majority, with comfort and luxury too uninspiring at best for the few. Contrast again, with these working-towns, the deeper and more deteriorating correlation of the crude and crowded luxury of the great spending-towns, with the yet more deteriorative labour-conditions which such luxury so especially cultivates

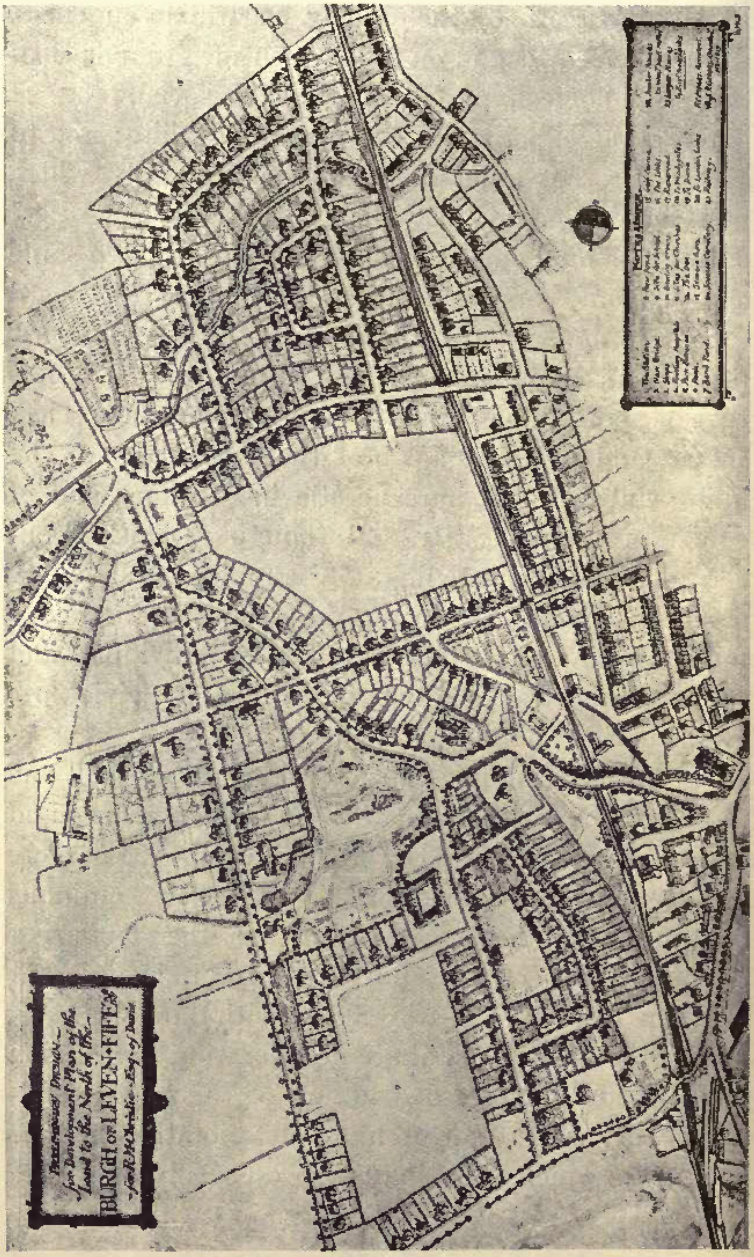

FIG. 67.—New Leven. Design for garden suburb of a small Fifeshire town.

and increases. In both these predominant types of our modern community the conditions are thus tending towards deterioration—deterioration obviously more comprehensive and complex than that which military recruiting statistics so tragically express. Hence the

FIG. 58.—The contemporary renewal of Dublin: design for seal of Civics Institute (the body promoting Dublin Civic Exhibition of 1914).

Housing and Town Planning movement must at all costs be speedily advanced, our existing cities, towns, and villages improved, with new garden villages and suburbs where need be, and small garden cities as far as possible. This vast national movement of reconstruction must be faced, were it but to create the needful sanatoria of our paleotechnic civilisation; but, happily, it is also superior in productive efficiency and survival value in itself, and thus demonstrable by

the accountant and banker as he escapes from the city and learns his work. Healthy life is completeness of relation of organism, function, and environment, and all at their best. Stated, then, in social and civic terms, our life and progress involve the interaction and uplift of people with work and place, as well as of place and work with people. Cities in Evolution and People in Evolution must thus progress together.