CHAPTER XIV

THE STUDY OF CITIES

How best can we set about the study of cities? Personal endeavours of the writer, as examples of the many approaches to civics; with an outline of beginnings of the needed civic observatory, museum, study, and laboratory in the Edinburgh Outlook Tower, etc.

We have seen that many, and in all countries, are awakening to deal with the practical tasks of citizenship. Indeed never, since the golden times of classic or mediæval cities, has there been so much interest, so much good-will as now. Hence the question returns, and more and more frequently, How best can we set about the study of cities? How organise speedily in each, in all, and therefore here and there among ourselves to begin with, a common understanding as to the methods required to make observations orderly, comparisons fruitful, and generalisations safe? It is time for sociologists—that is for all who care for the advance of science into the social world—to be bringing order into these growing inquiries, these limitless fields of knowledge.

The writer has no finally formulated auswer, since his own inquiries are far from concluded; and since no bureaucrat, he has not a cut-and-dried method to

impose meanwhile: nor can he cite this from others: he may best begin with his own experience. The problem of city study has occupied his mind for thirty years and more: indeed his personal life, as above all things a wandering student, has been largely determined and spent in restless and renewed endeavours towards searching for the secrets of the evolution of cities, towards making out ways of approach towards their discovery. And his interests and experiences are doubtless those of many. The nature-lover's revolt from city life, even though in youth strengthened and reinforced by the protest of the romantics and the moralists, of the painters and the poets, may be sooner or later overpowered by the attractions, both cultural and practical, which city life exerts. Studies of economics and statistics, of history and social philosophy in many schools, though each fascinating for a season, come to be felt inadequate. An escape from libraries and lecture-rooms, a return to direct observation is needed; and thus the historic culture-cities—classic, medieval, renaissance—with all their treasures of the past—museums, galleries, buildings, and monuments—come to renew their claim to predominate attention, and to supply the norms of civic thought.

Again the view-points of contemporary science renew their promise—now doctrines of energetics, or theories of evolution, at times the advance of psychology, the struggle towards vital education, the renewal of ethics—each in its turn may seem the safest clue

with which to penetrate the city's labyrinth. Geographer and historian, economist and æsthete, politician and philosopher have all to be utilised as guides in turn; and from each of these approaches one learns much, yet never sufficient; so that at times the optimist, but often also the pessimist, has seemed entitled to prevail.

Again, as the need of co-ordination of all these and more constantly makes itself felt, the magnificent prosynthetic sketch of Comte's sociology or the evolutionary effort of Spencer reasserts its central importance, and with these also the historic Utopias. But all such are too abstract constructions, and have as yet been lacking in concrete applications, either to the interpretation or to the improvement of cities; they are deficient in appreciation of their complex activities. Hence the fascination of those transient but all the more magnificent museums of contemporary industry which we call International and Local Exhibitions, centering round those of Paris in 1878, '89, and 1900, or claiming to culminate at San Francisco in 1915; with their rich presentments of the material and artistic productivity of their present, alike on its paleotechnic and neotechnic levels, and in well-nigh all sub-stages and phases of these.

As we return from these, at one time the roaring forges of industrial activity of Europe and America must seem world-central, beyond even the metropolitan cities which dominate and exploit them. Yet at another time the evolutionary secret seems nearer

through the return to Nature; and we seek the synoptic vision of geography with Reclus, or of the elemental occupations with Le Play and Demolins, with their sympathetic study of simple peoples, and of the dawn of industry and society with the anthropologists. And thence we return once more, by way of family unit and family budget, to modern life; and even to its statistical treatments, up to Booth and Rowntree for poverty, to Galton and the eugenists, and so on. In such ways and more, ideas accumulate, yet the difficulties of dealing with them also; for to leave out any aspect or element of the community's life must so far lay us open to that reproach of crudely simplified theorising, for which we blame the political economist.

One of the best ways in which a man can work towards this clearing up of his own ideas is through the endeavour of communicating them to others: in fact to this the professoriate largely owe and acknowledge such productivity as they possess. Well-nigh every teacher will testify to a similar experience: and the inquirer into sociology and civics may most courageously of all take part in the propaganda of these studies. For here as yet there are no established authorities to interfere, and no conventions to be broken; while perhaps nowhere is it more true that "the people perish for lack of knowledge," and that even the little we can give may be of service. Such teaching, moreover, aids observation, even demands it. Thus are gradually rising here and

there mutually helpful and stimulating groups, which may be again the condition of further progress, as so often in the history of intellectual and social movement.

Another of the questions — one lying at the very outset of our social studies, and constantly reappearing — is this; What is to be our relation to practical life? The looker-on sees most of the game; a wise detachment must be practised; our observations cannot be too comprehensive or too many-sided. Our meditations too must be prolonged and impartial; and how all this if not serene?

Hence Comte's "cerebral hygiene," and Mr Spencer's long and stoutly maintained defence of his hermitage against the outer world, his abstention from social responsibilities and activities, even those faced by other philosophers. Yet there is another side to all this: we learn by living; and as the naturalist, beside his detached observations, and even to aid these, cannot too fully identify himself with the life and activities of his fellow-men in the simple natural environments he wishes to investigate, so it may be for the student of societies. From this point of view, "when in Rome let us do as the Romans do"; let us be at home as far as may be in the characteristic life and activity, the social and cultural movements, of the city which is our home, even for the time being—if we would understand its record

and its spirit, its qualities and defects, and estimate its place in civilisation.

Still more must we take our share in the life and work of the community if we would make this estimate an active one; that is, if we would discern the possibilities of place, of work, of people, of actual groupings and institutions or of needed ones, and thus leave the place in some degree the better of our life in it; the richer, not the poorer, for our presence. Our activity may in some measure interrupt our observing and philosophising; indeed must often do so; yet with no small compensations in the long run. For here is that experimental social science which the theoretic political economists were wont to proclaim impossible; but which is none the less on parallel lines and of kindred experimental value to the practice which illuminates theory, criticising it or advancing it, in many simpler fields of action—say, engineering or medicine for choice. It is with civics and sociology as with these. The greatest historians, both ancient and modern, have been those who took their part in affairs. Indeed with all sciences, as with the most ideal quests, the same principle holds good; we must live the life if we would know the doctrine. Scientific detachment is but one mood, though an often needed one; our quest cannot be attained without participation in the active life of citizenship.

In each occupation and profession there is a freemasonry, which rapidly and hospitably assimilates

the reasonably sympathetic new-comer. Here is the advantage of the man of the world, of the artist and art-lover, of the scholar, the specialist of every kind; and, above all, of the citizen who is alive to the many-sidedness of the social world, and who is willing to help and to work with his fellows.

Moreover, though the woof of each city's life be unique, and this it may be increasingly with each throw of the shuttle, the main warp of life is broadly similar from city to city. The family types, the fundamental occupations and their levels may thus be more generally understood than are subtler resultants. Yet in practice this is seldom the case, because the educated classes everywhere tend to be specialised away from the life and labour of the people. Yet these make up the bulk of the citizens; even their ever emergent rulers are but people of a larger growth, for better and for worse. Hence a new demand upon the student of cities, to have shared the environment and conditions of the people, as far as may be their labour also; to have sympathised with their difficulties and their pleasures, and not merely with those of the cultured or the governing classes.

Here the endeavours of the University Settlements have gone far beyond the "slumming" now happily out of fashion; but the civic student and worker needs fuller experiences than these commonly supply. Of the value of the settlement, alike to its workers and to the individuals and organisations they influence, much might be said, and on grounds philanthropic

and educational, social and political; but to increase its civic value and influence a certain advance is needed in its point of view, analogous to that made by the medical student when he passes from his dispensary experience of individual patients to that of the public health department.

In all these various ways, the writer's ideas on the study of cities have been slowly clearing up, throughout many years of civic inquiries and endeavours. These have been largely centred at Edinburgh (as for an aggregate of reasons one of the most instructive of the world's cities, alike for survey and for experimental action), also at the great manufacturing town and seaport of Dundee, with studies and duties in London and in Dublin, and especial sympathies and ties in Paris, and in other Continental cities and also American ones—and from among all these interests and occupations a method of civic study and research, a mode of practice and application, have gradually been emerging. Each of these is imperfect, embryonic even, yet a brief indication may be at least suggestive to other students of cities. The general principle is the synoptic one, of seeking as far as may be to recognise and utilise all points of view—and so to be preparing for the Encyclopædia Civica of the future. For this must include at once the scientific and, as far as may be, the artistic presentment of the city's life: it must base upon these an interpretation of the city's course of evolution in the present: it must increasingly forecast its future possibilities; and thus

it may arouse and educate citizenship, by organising endeavours towards realising some of these worthy ends.

Primarily in this way, yet also from the complemental side of nature studies and geography, there have been arising for many years past the beginnings of a Civic Observatory and Laboratory in our Edinburgh Outlook Tower. A tall old building, high upon the ridge of Old Edinburgh, it overlooks the city and even great part of its region; and of the educative value of this synoptic vision every visitor has thus a fresh experience. Hence, for at least two generations before its present use, it has been a resort of tourists; and its camera obscura, which harmonises the striking landscape, near and far, and this with no small element of the characteristic qualities of the best modern painting, has therefore been retained; alike for its own sake and as an evidence of what is so often missed by scientific and philosophic minds, that the synthetic vision to which they aspire may be reached more simply from the æsthetic and the emotional side, and thus be visual and concrete. In short, here, as elsewhere, children and artists may see more than the wise. For as there can be no nature study, no geography worth the name apart from the love and the beauty of Nature, so it is with the study of the City.

Next, a storey below this high Outlook of the artist, and its associated open-air gallery for his scientific

brother the geographer, both at once civic and regional in rare completeness, there comes—upon the

FIG. 49.—Outlook Tower, Edinburgh.

main platform of the level roof, and in the open air —the "Prospect" of the special sciences. Here, on

occasion, is set forth the analysis of the outlook in its various aspects—astronomic and topographical, geological and meteorological, botanical and zoological, anthropological and archæologic, historical and economic, and so on. Each science is thus indicated, in its simple yet specialised problem. This and that element of the whole environment is isolated, by the logical artifice of science, from the totality of our experience. The special examination of it, thus rendered possible, results in what we call a "science," and this with a certainty which increasingly admits of prevision and of action. Yet this science, this body of verifiable and workable truths, is a vast and wholesale suppression of other (and it may be more important) truths, until its reintegration with the results of other studies, into the geographic and social whole, the regional and civic unity before us. Here in brief, then, is our philosophy of civics, and our claim for civics in philosophy. Thus upon our prospect the child often starts his scientific studies, the boy scout his expedition. Yet to this the expert must return, to discuss the relation and applications of his own science with the philosopher as citizen and the citizen as philosopher.

The storey below this prospect is devoted to the City. Its relief-model maps, geological and other, are here shown in relation to its aspects and beauty expressed in paintings, drawings, photographs, etc.; while within this setting there has been gradually prepared a Survey of Edinburgh, from its prehistoric

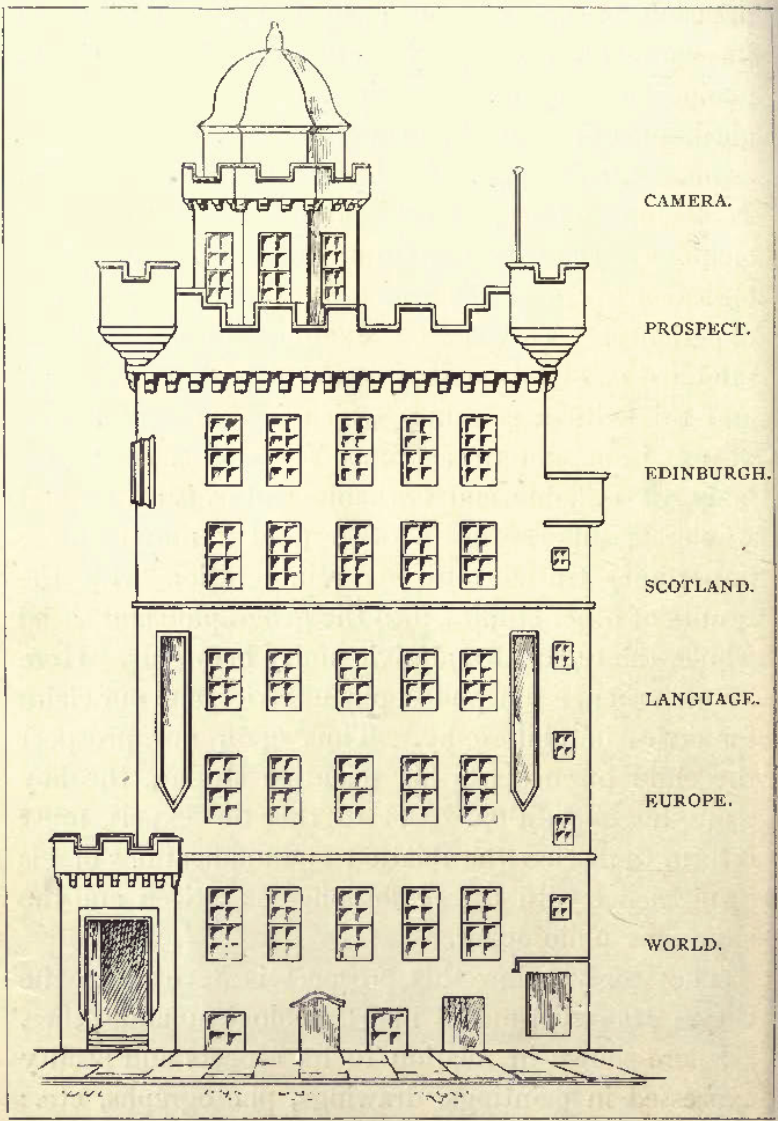

FIG 50.—Outlook Tower in diagrammatic elevation, with indications of uses of its storeys—as Observatory, Summer School, etc., of Regional and Civic Surveys; with their widening relations, and with corresponding practical initiatives.

origins, and throughout its different phases, up to the photographic details of the present day. In this way the many standpoints usually divided among specialists are here being brought together, and with educative result to all concerned.

The next lower storey is allotted to Scotland, with its towns and cities. The next to Greater Britain, indeed at times to some representation of the whole English-speaking world, the United States no less than Canada, etc., the Language being here taken as a more sociological and social unity than can be even the bond of Empire. The next storey is allotted to European (or rather Occidental) civilisation, with a general introduction to historical studies and their interpretation, and also with the work of a Current Events Club, with its voluminous press-cuttings on many subjects, largely international and general; and furthermore to the comparison of Occidental cities. Finally the ground floor is allocated to the Oriental civilisations and to the general study of Man, departments naturally as yet least developed. But the general principle—the primacy of the civic and social outlook, intensified into local details with all the scientific outlooks of a complete survey; yet all in contacts with the larger world, and these successively in enlarging social zones, from that of the prospect outwards—will now be sufficiently clear; and of course be seen as applicable to any city. It may be experimented with in any city, in anyone's study, even begun upon the successive shelves of a

book-case, or still better, in the co-operative activity of a Current Events Club; and this again, if possible, along with a Regional and Civic Survey Committee. On any and every scale, personal or collective, it will be found to reward a trial.

What now of practical applications? Returning for the present purpose to the City's storey alone, though the main presentment is that of a survey, an exhibition of facts of past and present, a Civic Business-room adjoins this. Here has been for many years in progress the main practical civic work of this Tower — its various endeavours towards city betterment. Largely the improvement of those slums, already referred to as the disgrace and difficulty of Old Edinburgh; a work of housing, of repair or renewal, of increase of open spaces and when possible of gardening them; of preservation of historic buildings, of establishment of halls of collegiate residence with associated dwellings, and so on. Each piece of work has been undertaken as circumstances and means allowed; yet all as part of a comprehensive scheme of long standing, and which at an increasing rate of progress may still be long of accomplishment. Briefly stated, this scheme is of the preservation and renascence of historic Edinburgh, from the standpoints both of town and gown; that is, at once as City and as University, and each at their best. This demands the renewal —and within this historic area especially, dilapidated and deteriorated though it at present be—of that

intimate combination of popular culture and of higher education, and of that solidarity of civic and national spirit, with openness and hospitality to the larger world — English, Colonial, American, Continental—which are among the best traditions of

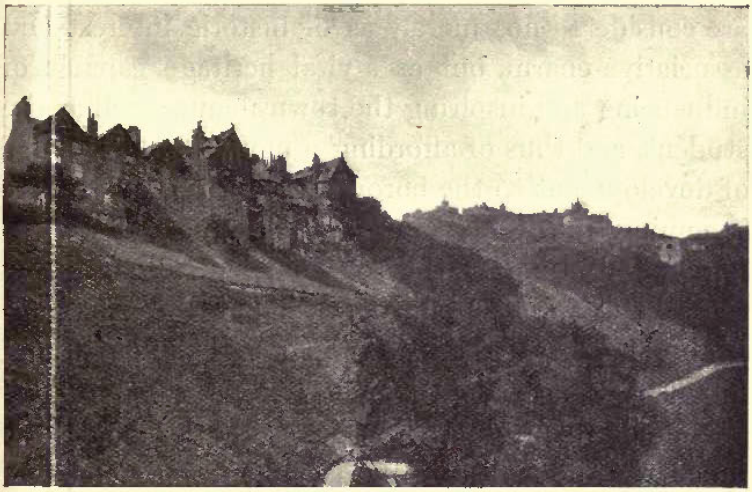

FIG. 51.—Ramsay Garden, University Hall, Edinburgh.

Edinburgh, indeed of Scotland, with her historic universities and schools.

An analogous centre has also long been struggling towards a foothold in London. This includes the germ of a Department of Civics, at first in temporary premises at the University of London, and next more largely housed through the recent reconstruction of Crosby Hall in connection with a University Hall of Residence upon Sir Thomas More's garden at Chelsea; schemes which have alike been fortunate in

finding co-operation, both practical and studious. The studious point of view, and civic aim of action, here unite towards the recovery of the best traditions of Chelsea, which are only second to those of the two great cities of London and Westminster themselves, and in some respects surpass them. These traditions are considered not merely as of historic interest and associative charm, but as a vital heritage, capable of influencing and inspiring the townsman as well as the student, and thus of affording a new yet natural line of development to the borough: no less than that of becoming a veritable collegiate city, and correspondingly of affording to the too cold individualism and too isolated intellectuality of London University the beginnings of the social advantages and cultural impulse of the associated life.

But all this, it may be said, is too academic, too much the mere record of a wandering student, and of his changing outlooks and view-points, his personal experiments and endeavours. What of other than university cities? How are civic surveys and endeavours to be applied more generally? A fair question, to which an answer will be attempted in the next chapter.