

CHAPTER XVI

CITY SURVEY FOR TOWN PLANNING PURPOSES, OF MUNICIPALITIES AND GOVERNMENT

All these surveys are but preliminary to action upon the municipal and the national scale. Limitations of recent "Land Report" and kindred literature of surveys, now increasingly of political influence and approaching application; indications of needed fuller development of such inquiries, to regional surveys.

Recommendations of the Sociological Society (Cities Committee). Dangers of Town Planning before Survey. Methods and uses of this survey; with outline scheme for a City Survey and Exhibition. Examples already in progress.

HITHERTO we have been occupied with the preliminaries of town planning, through regional and civic surveys and civic education generally; yet merely with the occupation of strategic points, like the public museum and library, preparatory to the reduction of the town-house; and of the primary school and training college towards a march upon Whitehall itself. To make these larger designs perfectly clear, let us first offer a criticism of the limitations of the recent "Land Report" of 1914, which, although unofficial, has been commonly understood as preparatory to Government action; and thereafter offer to the consideration of municipal authorities and their town planners a final and

reasoned argument for civic survey before town planning, with suggestions in outline for initiating and conducting this.

First, then, the "Land Report," and with special appeal to the distinguished writer to whose methods and suggestions it is understood to be much indebted.

It is no discourtesy, among either scientific or practical men, to recognise that the expert analyst of a given soil, or the skilled valuator of its present crop, may not equally have acquainted himself with the rocks below, nor fully considered the future growths this soil may yet be brought to bear. First, then, we recognise in Mr Seeböhm Rowntree the very foremost of social surveyors, who not only from his "Poverty" survey of York has thrown new light upon the question of poverty everywhere, but who also, in his yet more intensive and comprehensive study of rural Belgium, has surpassed the Belgians themselves. We thus cannot fail of appreciation of the "Land Report," which is so plainly indebted to his methods and guidance, and look with corresponding hopefulness for a companion Towns Report, soon to be in preparation upon more or less similar lines. Yet in view of the assured and desirable influence which such vast masses of conveniently arranged information, such clear and persuasive summary, such suggestions for future policy, must have upon opinion and even upon approaching legislation, it is needful here to interject a warning word, even an expostulation, as to the limitations of the methods which Mr Rowntree's

example has been defining for further inquirers, and is establishing for the statesman's practical use.

No modern city, and probably York less than most, is to be adequately understood, as he has treated it, apart from its past history, even as regards the problems of poverty and of irregularity of employment which seem so modern. With fuller space, of a chapter for each city, it would be possible to justify this criticism for city after city in detail. In Edinburgh or in Dundee, in Belfast or in Dublin, in Bruges or in Ghent, it is easy to see and prove the persistence of historic factors, in each case widely different, which profoundly modify the local situation, and which are, to the contemporary factors upon which Mr Rowntree so ably specialises, as differing warps to similar woofs; and thus give us different social fabrics accordingly.

Still less are the rural provinces of Belgium, so admirably described in another notable volume of Mr Rowntree's, really to be understood, without the light of other correspondingly careful volumes, dealing with those world-historic city-developments, of many and mingled types, which are the crowded foci of these same provinces: nor are all these together adequately intelligible for study, still less utilisable for comprehensive statesmanship, without corresponding surveys of the new industrial town developments and the "black country" associated with them. Rustic and urban relations must thus be restudied, interpreted together, in past and in present, and for

province by province; for Bruges and Ghent with West and East Flanders, or Liège with its antique prince-bishopric and its modern industrial valleys alike. Similarly for York, and yet more for Leeds; they need study along with Yorkshire: for it is not in Belgium only that the modern relations of town and country can be seen together in a single flash-light, as "*Les Villes Tentaculaires: Les Campagnes Hallucinées.*"

Such regional geography has long been familiar in French science, literature, and political discussion, and has been aiding those increasing measures towards decentralisation, of which the renewal of French provincial universities during the last generation was but a beginning. But it is constantly the insular misfortune of England to learn but tardily from France. We remember how her ironclads and screws, her smokeless powder, her submarines and aeroplanes were each well-nigh perfected before our Admiralty could be persuaded to recognise their existence; but in these days of better mutual understanding, it is surely not too much to hope of our statesman of peace, our advancing legislators and their expert inquirers, to be acquainting themselves more fully than heretofore with the recent advances, in France especially, of regional geography. As they do this, they cannot but appreciate and adopt its lucid and comprehensive methods, and be aided by its pregnant conclusions.

All this is no mere fault-finding with good and so

far legitimately specialised work ; it is but pointing how it needs to be complemented in the immediate future. It therefore cannot be dismissed by the practical politician with the customary sneer of "academic," still less as "sentimental," as he is wont (contradictorily) to say in a different mood. It is a definite claim for fuller and more scientific treatment, and this not simply upon historic considerations, but also upon geographic grounds. It is that of yet more comprehensive studies ; not only of countries and of towns separately to-day, in which Mr Rowntree is so far a master, nor even of their past in relation to their present, and conversely : it is the study of town in country, and of country in town, and these through past and present alike. It is the appeal of regional unities, yet also of these as regional diversities. It is the protest, not of the academic man against the practical one, but for the more general view which is necessary to thought and action alike, against what is really a too academic over-specialism. It is time, then, to be ending the ancient feud, the artificial separation of town and country, the isolation of town councils and county councils ; and to be seeing that town-mouse and country-mouse have too long been treated as distinct species, and are henceforth, as of old, but one. Land Reports and Urban Reports have thus to be completed and combined, yet also analysed, into Regional Reports, and this for vital statement, for effective treatment also. In these we must end the isolation of our present facts from the

past ones which have so often given them birth. Only thus may be put an end on one hand to our present too dead documentation as history, and to our too hasty journalism and hastier party speechifying on the other. Hence before inadequate (though wholesale) national bill-drafting, and its resultant interminable bill- and act-amending, all too inadequate still, let us advance beyond even rustic and urban reports, and be getting these into the stage of regional surveys. With these social diagnoses, the corresponding local treatment and revivance will also progress; and our statesmen may then far more clearly see how best to accelerate advance, regionally and throughout.

We come now to the need of City Surveys and Local Exhibitions as preparatory to Town Planning Schemes. It may but bring our whole argument together, and in a way, we trust, practically convincing to municipal bodies, and appealing also to the Local Government Boards—which in each of the kingdoms have to supervise their schemes—if we here utilise with slight abbreviation, a memorandum prepared in the Sociological Society's Cities Committee, and addressed to the authorities concerned, local and central alike.

§ I.—SUMMARY OF THE CITIES COMMITTEE'S WORK

We welcomed and highly appreciated the Town Planning Act, and we early decided that it was not

necessary for this Committee to enter into its discussion in detail, or that of its proposed amendments. We have addressed ourselves essentially to the problem of Town Planning itself, as raised by the study of particular types of towns and districts involved; and to the nature and method of the City Survey which we are unanimously of opinion is necessary before the preparation of any Town Planning Scheme can be satisfactorily undertaken. Schemes, however, are in incubation, alike by municipal officials, by public utility associations, and by private individuals, expert or otherwise, which, whatever their particular merits, are not based upon any sufficient surveys of the past development and present conditions of their towns, nor upon adequate knowledge of good and bad town planning elsewhere. In such cases the natural order, that of town survey before town planning, is being reversed; and in this way individuals and public bodies are in danger of committing themselves to plans which would have been widely different with fuller knowledge; yet which, once produced, it will be too late to replace, and even difficult to modify.

We have therefore, during the past few years addressed ourselves towards the initiation of a number of representative and typical City Surveys, leading towards Civic Exhibitions; and these we hope to see under municipal auspices, in conjunction with public museums and libraries, and with the co-operation of leading citizens representative of

different interests and points of view. In Leicester and Saffron Walden, Lambeth, Woolwich, and Chelsea, Dundee, Edinburgh, Dublin, and other cities progress has already been made: and with the necessary skilled and clerical assistance, and moderate outlays, we should be able to assist such surveys in many other towns and cities. Our experience already shows that in this inspiring task, of surveying, usually for the first time, the whole situation and life of a community in past and present, and of thus preparing for the planning scheme which is to forecast, indeed largely decide, its material future, we have the beginnings of a new movement — one already characterised by an arousal of civic feeling, and the corresponding awakening of more enlightened and more generous citizenship.

§ II.—RECOMMENDATION BY THE COMMITTEE

The preparation of a local and civic survey previous to the preparation of a Town Planning Scheme, though not actually specified in the Act, is fully within its spirit; and we are therefore most anxious that at least a strong recommendation to this effect should form part of the regulations for Town Planning Schemes provided for the guidance of local authorities by the Local Government Board. Without this, municipalities and others interested are in danger of taking the very opposite course, that of planning before survey. Our suggestion towards

guarding against this is hence of the most definite kind, viz. :—

Before proceeding to the preparation of a Town Planning Scheme, it is desirable to institute a Preliminary Local Survey—to include the collection and public exhibition of maps, plans, models, drawings, documents, statistics, etc., illustrative of Situation, Historic Development, Communications, Industry and Commerce, Population, Town Conditions and Requirements, etc.

We desire to bring this practical suggestion before local authorities, and also to ventilate it as far as may be in public opinion and through the press, and in communication to the many bodies whose interest in Town Planning Schemes from various points of view has been recognised in the Third Schedule of the Act, as lately amended by the Government in response to representations from our own and other societies.

§ III.—DANGERS OF TOWN PLANNING BEFORE TOWN SURVEY

What will be the procedure of any community of which the local authorities have not as yet adequately recognised the need of the full previous consideration implied by our proposed inquiry, with its Survey and Exhibition? It is that the Town Council, or its Streets and Buildings Committee, may simply remit to its City Architect, if it has one, more usually to its

Borough Surveyor or Engineer, to draw up the Town Planning Scheme.

This will be done after a fashion. But too few of these officials or of their committees have as yet had time or opportunity to follow the Town Planning movement even in its publications, much less to know it at first hand, from the successes and blunders of other cities. Nor do they always possess the many-sided preparation—geographic, economic, artistic, etc.—which is required for this most complex of architectural problems, one implying, moreover, innumerable social ones.

If the calling in of expert advice be moved for, the Finance Committee of the Town Council, the rate-payers also, will tend to discourage the employment of an external architect. Moreover, with exceptions, still comparatively rare, even the skilled architect, however distinguished as a designer of buildings, is usually as unfamiliar with town planning as can be the town officials; often, if possible, yet more so. For they have at least laid down the existing streets; he has merely had to accept them.

No doubt, if the plan thus individually prepared be so positively bad, in whole or in part, that its defects can be seen by those not specially acquainted with the particular town or with the quarter in question, the L.G.B. can disapprove or modify. But even accepting what can be thus done at the distance of London, or even by the brief visit

from an L.G.B. advisory officer, the real danger remains. Not that of streets, etc., absurdly wrong perhaps; but that of the *low pass standard*—that of the mass of municipal art hitherto; despite exceptions, usually due to skilled individual initiative.

Town Planning Schemes produced under this too simple and too rapid procedure may thus escape rejection by the L.G.B. rather than fulfil the spirit and aims of its Act; and they will thus commit their towns for a generation, or irreparably, to designs which the coming generation may deplore. Some individual designs will no doubt be excellent; but there are not as yet many skilled town planners among us. Even in Germany, still more in America (despite all recent praise, much of which is justified), this new art is still in its infancy.

As a specific example of failures to recognise and utilise all but the most obvious features and opportunities of even the most commanding sites, the most favourable situations, Edinburgh may be chosen. For, despite its exceptional advantages, its admired examples of ancient and modern town planning, its relatively awakened architects, its comparatively high municipal and public interest in town amenity, Edinburgh notoriously presents many mistakes, disasters, and even vandalisms, of which some are recent ones. If such things happen in cities which largely depend upon their attractive aspect, and whose town council and inhabitants are relatively interested and appreciative, what of towns

less favourably situated, less generally aroused to architectural interest, to local vigilance and civic pride? Even with real respect to the London County Council and the record of its individual members, past or present, it must be said that this is hardly a matter in which London can expect the provincial cities to look to her for much light and leading as a whole, while her few great and monumental improvements are naturally beyond their reach.

In short, *passable* Town Planning Schemes may be obtained without this preliminary Survey and Exhibition which we desire to see in each town and city; but the best *possible* cannot be expected. From the confused growth of the recent industrial past, we tend to be as yet easily contented with any improvement: this, however, will not long satisfy us, and still less our successors. This Act seeks to open a new and better era, and to render possible cities which may again be beautiful: it proceeds from Housing to Town (Extension) Planning, and it thus raises inevitably before each municipality the question of town planning at its best—in fact of city development and city design.

§ IV.—METHOD AND USES OF PRELIMINARY SURVEY

The needed preliminary inquiry is readily outlined. It is that of a City Survey. The whole topography of the town and its extensions must be

taken into account, and this more fully than in the past, by the utilisation not only of maps and plans of the usual kind, but of contour maps, and, if possible, even relief models. Of soil and geology,

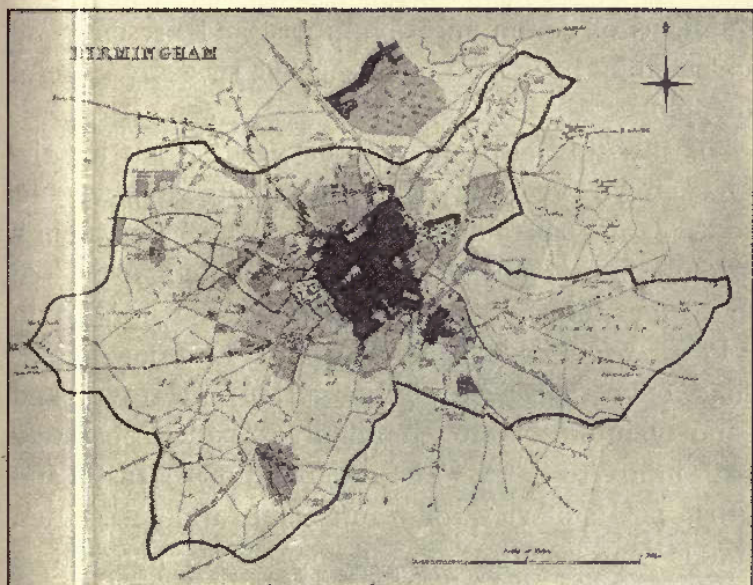


FIG. 52.—Birmingham in 1832, with its Parliamentary boundary (dark line).

climate, rainfall, winds, etc., maps are also easily obtained, or compiled from existing sources.

For the development of the town in the past, historical material can usually be collected without undue difficulty. For the modern period, since the railway and industrial period have come in, it is easy to start with its map on the invaluable "Reform Bill Atlas of 1832," and compare with this its plans in successive periods up to the present.

By this study of the actual progress of town developments (which have often followed lines different from those laid down or anticipated at former periods) our present forecasts of future developments may usefully be aided and criticised.

Means of communication in past and present, and in possible future, of course need specially careful mapping.

In this way also appears the need of relating the given town not only to its immediate environs, but to the larger surrounding region. This idea, though as old as geographical science, and though expressed in such a term as "County Town," and implicit in "Port," "Cathedral City," etc., etc., is in our present time only too apt to be forgotten, for town and country interests are commonly treated separately with injury to both. The collaboration of rustic and urban points of view, of county and rural authorities, should thus as far as possible be secured, and will be found of the greatest value. The recent agricultural development in Ireland begins to bring forward the need of a more intelligent and practical co-operation of town and country than has yet been attempted; and towards this end surveys are beginning, and are being already found of value.

Social surveys of the fulness and detail of Mr Booth's well-known map of London may not be necessary; but such broader surveys as those of Councillor Marr in his *Survey of Manchester*, or of Miss Walker for Dundee, and the like, represent

the very minimum wherever adequate civic betterment is not to be ignored.

The preparation of this survey of the town's Past and Present may usually be successfully undertaken in association with the town's library and museum, with such help as their curators can readily obtain from the town-house, from fellow-citizens acquainted with special departments, and, when desired, from the Sociological Society's Cities Committee. Experience in various cities shows that such a Civic Exhibition can readily be put in preparation in this way, and without serious expense.

The urgent problem is, however, to secure a similar thoroughness of preparation of the Town Planning Scheme which is so largely to determine the future.

To the Exhibition of the City's Past and Present there therefore needs to be added a corresponding wall-space (*a*) to display good examples of town planning elsewhere; (*b*) to receive designs and suggestions towards the City's Future. These may be received from all quarters; some, it may be, invited by the municipality, but others independently offered, and from local or other sources, both professional and lay.

In this threefold Exhibition, then—of their Borough or City, Past, Present, and Possible—the municipality and the public would practically have the main outlines of the inquiry needful before the preparation of the Town Planning Scheme clearly before them; and the education of the public, and of their repre-

sentatives and officials alike, may thus—and so far as yet suggested, thus only—be arranged for. Examples of town plans from other cities, especially those of kindred site or conditions, will here be of peculiarly great value, indeed are almost indispensable.

After this exhibition—with its individual contributions, its public and journalistic discussion, its general and expert criticism—the municipal authorities, their officials, and the public are naturally in a much more advanced position as regards knowledge and outlook from that which they occupy at present, or can occupy if the short and easy off-hand method above criticised be adopted, obeying only the minimum requirements of the Act. The preparation of a Town Planning Scheme as good as our present (still limited) lights allow, can then be proceeded with. This should utilise the best suggestions on every hand, selecting freely from designs submitted, and paying for so much as may be accepted on ordinary architectural rates.

As the scheme has to be approved by the L.G.B., their inspector will have the benefit of the mass of material collected in this exhibition, with corresponding economy of his time and gain to his efficiency. His inspection would essentially be on the spot; any critic who may be appointed would naturally require to do this. His suggestions and emendations could thus be more easily and fully made, and more cheerfully adopted.

The selection of the best designs would be of

immense stimulus to individual knowledge and invention in this field, and to a worthy civic rivalry also.

§ V.—OUTLINE SCHEME FOR A CITY SURVEY AND EXHIBITION

The incipient surveys of towns and cities, above referred to, are already clearly bringing out their local individuality in many respects, in situation and history, in activities and in spirit. No single scheme of survey can therefore be drawn up so as to be equally applicable in detail to all towns alike. Yet unity of method is necessary for clearness, indispensable for comparison; and after the careful study of schemes prepared for particular towns and cities, a general outline has been drafted, applicable to all towns, and easily elaborated and adapted in detail to the individuality of each town or city. It is therefore appended, as suitable for general purposes, and primarily for that Preliminary Survey previous to the preparation of a Town Planning Scheme, which is the urgent recommendation of this Committee.

The survey necessary for the adequate preparation of a Town Planning Scheme involves the collection of detailed information upon the following heads. Such information should be as far as possible in graphic form, *i.e.* expressed in maps and plans illustrated by drawings, photographs, engravings, etc., with statistical summaries, and with the necessary descriptive text; and is thus suitable for exhibition

in town-house, museum, or library ; or, when possible, in the city's art galleries.

The following general outline of the main headings of such an inquiry admits of adaptation and extension to the individuality and special conditions of each town and city.

SITUATION, TOPOGRAPHY, AND NATURAL ADVANTAGES :—

- (a) Geology, Climate, Water Supply, etc.
- (b) Soils, with Vegetation, Animal Life, etc.
- (c) River or Sea Fisheries.
- (d) Access to Nature (Sea Coast, etc.).

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION, LAND AND WATER :—

- (a) Natural and Historic.
- (b) Present State.
- (c) Anticipated Developments.

INDUSTRIES, MANUFACTURES, AND COMMERCE :—

- (a) Native Industries.
- (b) Manufactures.
- (c) Commerce, etc.
- (d) Anticipated Developments.

POPULATION :—

- (a) Movement.
- (b) Occupations.
- (c) Health.
- (d) Density.
- (e) Distribution of Well-being (Family Conditions, etc.).
- (f) Education and Culture Agencies.
- (g) Anticipated Requirements.

TOWN CONDITIONS :—

- (a) HISTORICAL : Phase by Phase, from Origins onwards.
Material Survivals and Associations, etc.

- (b) RECENT: Particularly since 1832 Survey, thus indicating Areas, Lines of Growth and Expansion, and Local Changes under Modern Conditions, *e.g.*, of Streets, Open Spaces, Amenity, etc.
- (c) Local Government Areas (Municipal, Parochial, etc.).
- (d) PRESENT: Existing Town Plans, in general and detail.
 - Streets and Boulevards,
 - Open Spaces, Parks, etc.
 - Internal Communications, etc.
 - Water, Drainage, Lighting, Electricity, etc.
 - Housing and Sanitation (of localities in detail).
 - Existing activities towards Civic Betterment, both Municipal and Private.

TOWN PLANNING; SUGGESTIONS AND DESIGNS:—

- (A) Examples from other Towns and Cities, British and Foreign.
- (B) Contributions and Suggestions towards Town Planning Scheme, as regards:—
 - (a) Areas.
 - (b) Possibilities of Town Expansion (Suburbs, etc.).
 - (c) Possibilities of City Improvement and Development.
 - (d) Suggested Treatments of these in detail (alternatives when possible).

A fuller outline for city activities in detail would exceed our present limits; moreover, it will be found to arise more naturally in each city as its survey begins, and in course of the varied collaboration which this calls forth. The preparation of such more detailed surveys is in progress in some of the towns above mentioned; and is well advanced, for instance, in Edinburgh and Dublin: and though these surveys are as yet voluntary and unofficial, there are indications that they may before long be found worthy of

municipal adoption. The recent example of the corporation of Newcastle-on-Tyne, towards establishing a Civic Museum and Survey, may here again be cited as encouraging, and even predicted as likely before long to become typical.

The question is sometimes asked, How can we, in our town or city, more speedily set agoing this survey and exhibition without the delay of depending entirely on private and personal efforts? Here the services of the Cities and Town Planning Exhibition may be utilised, as notably in the case of Dublin (pp. 258-9). In this way the city's survey is initiated in consultation with the local experts of all kinds; and the broad outline thus prepared is capable of later local development in detail, with economy of time and convenience of comparison with other cities. The Exhibition, with its civic surveys from other places, is also suggestive and encouraging to local workers: while the variety of examples of town planning and design from all sources are of course helpful to all interested in the preparation of the best possible local schemes.