

**SOUTH AFRICAN
ARCHITECTURAL
RECORD**

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Study by W. D. Howie

SOME HOUSING ASPECTS

By F. GERHARDT, Dipl.Eng., M.I.A.

Whatever pre-War experience may have taught us in the wide sphere of housing, all that can only be regarded as preliminary efforts towards a superior and systematic solution of the still imperfectly solved housing problem, particularly as regards the needs of the workers and the poorer classes of the community.

In the era, or rather epoch, of social transformation which we contemporaries have both the honour and the difficulty of facing, the question of adequate housing of the vast masses of our urban and suburban population must represent a feature of national importance.

The humanly understandable attitude of certain authorities in connection with housing, namely, that everything in the garden is lovely, cannot obscure the fact that, in comparison with existing need, practically nothing has been done. The glossing over of this utter failure of our authorities is sociologically indefensible, and the housing conditions of the poor will not improve until those administering public funds have the courage to face the position understandingly, and to deal with it resolutely.

For this reason it is, perhaps, germane to deal generally with some aspects concerning the "small house" and housing schemes for the poor classes.

Despite considerable divergency arising from varying country conditions, types and classes of people, and their respective employments, we can to-day properly describe and define both the nature and character of the small house. However, it is essential to give the subject a close and systematic study. Whether low wage earners can afford the rents for a small house will depend upon a thorough knowledge of conditions governing the building of the small house; its size and the size of the garden area to be allotted must also form a basic consideration.

Other questions, such as the provision of either a combined kitchen and living room, or a separate parlour, and the number of bedrooms, type of sanitary conveniences, the provision of out-buildings, and the provision of facilities in order to make the allotted garden space as useful and agreeable as possible, provisions to foster home industries and to combat rare diseases are all of vital importance, not only to the tenant concerned, but also to the well-being of the community as a whole.

Having decided on the type of small houses, the lay-out of the housing scheme will have to be considered. In this connection, the placing of houses on a given piece of land is one of the primary factors, i.e., it must be decided whether the houses shall be single, detached or semi-detached. Then follows the sub-

division of the land as may be desirable for the respective dwelling units, and the grouping of these single plots in a manner which favours the provision of roads and amenities in the most suitable way for the general lay-out.

In selecting types of roads that will prove adequate to serve a housing scheme comprising small houses, it will be essential to carefully determine the width of road required, the type of road construction, adaptation to existing contours and to prevailing direction of wind, rain, etc.

Further, the distribution of open spaces, shopping centres, administration and communal buildings and such other factors as constitute a proper lay-out must be considered. Upon their correct solution will depend the success of a housing scheme. The provision of transport facilities need not be discussed here, since experience has in numerous instances proved their importance.

Dealing with the architectural solution of the actual housing units and the housing scheme as a whole, it would seem desirable to abandon altogether the forms represented in our existing housing schemes, as these forms neither lean on tradition nor express any contemporary conception of an adequate dwelling for the poor classes.

Since it is incontrovertible that the same amount of money can build a beautiful architectural creation, or a stereotyped tawdry shed, there should be every reason to secure competent advice and to reject such low-grade housing schemes as, with few exceptions, are to be found throughout the Union of South Africa.

It is not for me to examine whether, and if so, to what extent the blame for the pitifully low standard of housing the poor in the Union lies at the door of our responsible and highly qualified architects. It is sufficient to draw the attention of the profession once again to the appeal made by King Edward VIII, at the annual banquet of the R.I.B.A., in April, 1935, when, as Prince of Wales and guest of honour, he said:

“I want to request your great profession, which is so intimately connected with the building of the homes of the people, to make a special study of the great housing problem, and to see what can be done, not only to lessen the cost of those living conditions, but to raise their quality and their amenities.”

In order to be constructive, therefore, and to improve housing for the poor classes, I would suggest the formation of a co-operating group of highly qualified architects interested in housing. This group might work either independently or jointly with the Provincial Institutes and the Central Council. When considering the formation of such a group of architects, it should be borne in mind that here, as in many other countries, the construction of small houses is subsidised almost 100 per cent. from public funds, towards which every architect contributes in the

form of revenue. Sufficient reason thus exists to put a stop energetically to dilettante experiments in housing, as exemplified in South Africa to-day.

The public at large is bound to appreciate the efforts of those architects who view the housing problem as a matter of social and professional responsibility, instead of permitting it to remain the happy hunting ground of political manoeuvres, dilettante experiments and vested interests.

Moreover, the favourable influence of an aesthetically harmonious and sociologically adequate housing scheme upon the lives of the inhabitants must not be forgotten. Not only will the educational value of such building schemes popularise the building art, but it will develop a sense of home life and result in a soil-bound new generation.

The essential simplicity proper to the design of small houses should be aided by simplified and efficient building regulations. At present these regulations are adapted to the needs of an archaic and obsolete building system. In framing new regulations, it is essential that experienced architects should be consulted. The adaptation to our needs of building regulations now in force in many advanced European countries would simplify this problem.

Referring to financial aspects governing the erection of small houses in the Union, we find that practically 100 per cent. of the cost of these is being contributed from public funds. The Public Health Act 36/1919, the Housing Act 35/1920, the Slums Act 53/1934, with their amendments, make certain provisions as to the financing of housing schemes by local authorities and non-profit public utility companies. A striking contrast, however, is provided by the legislation of the Union in comparison with that of advanced European countries. In the Union up to 80 per cent. of the building capital may be obtained from the Government on first mortgage, and the remaining 20 per cent. from other sources on second mortgage. In other countries, however, up to 90 per cent. of the necessary capital is advanced by the Government on second mortgage and 10 per cent. only must be procured from other sources on first mortgage.

This fundamental difference of outlook on the part of our authorities on the housing problem for the poor indicates clearly that the actual importance of housing has been insufficiently comprehended by our legislators.

It is by no means clear, for instance, why public utility companies should go round begging for funds for public purposes which, from a private commercial standpoint, offer little attraction. Also, this unsatisfactory legislative provision distinctly degrades the status of public-spirited citizens who serve on the boards of non-profit utility companies to the ill-conceived principle of public charity.

I suggest, on the contrary, that the provision of small houses for workmen and the poor is a task for the State to undertake, and not one that should be made dependent upon public philanthropy.

I could understand it if the above proportions were reversed, since in the Union of South Africa the need for rehousing is not less clamant than in other countries, whose crystallised experience cannot be ignored if we treat the matter responsibly.

In view of the fact that housing in the Union is in its infancy, it may be regarded as undesirable to discuss other acute aspects of housing in detail. Mere headlines will suffice:—

Whether independent building societies should participate in the provision of small houses; on what principle their calculations should be based; whether the inhabitants of small houses should become owners of the property or remain lessees; whether public utility companies or companies on shares can work more efficiently; whether the construction of houses should be left entirely to private contractors or be supported by the active co-operation of prospective tenants; what constructional elements should be standardised; whether and how a panel system of architects should be applied; these, and many other questions must constitute the main foundations of our future housing policy.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that the provision of small houses for the poorer classes within the urban and suburban—but not agricultural—areas of the Union will involve, according to present needs, some 60,000 dwellings, at a cost of approximately £20,000,000, in which figure the yearly demand due to natural increase of population is not included.

Once responsible members of the architect's profession are convinced, in principle, of the necessity of a clear-cut policy, I suggest that sufficiently vigorous steps will be taken to attain the desired end.



Parthenon West Front
photo / R. M.

AN UNENDING STRIFE AGAINST THE SEA

By NANCY COURTNEY ACUTT.

The fight is unending, for the encroaching sea has to be kept from devouring the coast in half the flat country of Holland. The scenery, in some parts, consists of boats and sails—each picture more lovely than the last—a constant joy to artists, to those from other countries as much as those who claim the same blood as the far-famed masters of mediaeval days.

The land is tilled and cultivated, whenever possible, right to the edge of canals and waterways. The earthworks stretch as far as eye can see, for there man has built against his immortal foe—the sea, that he chooses to hold and to bind. Year after year he renews his defences and reinforces his strongholds.

There is space in that overcrowded land. Space apparently immeasurable, with a dome of cloudy sky, bound only by canals and trees—rows and rows of trees. Masts of boats on the canals, with white sails fluttering, and trunks of trees on the shore, with branches bowing to the breeze. It is a delight to wander through the country on a clear day, watching the movement of barges, the swing of opening bridges, the drifting of boats.

Season after season the people work, reclaiming and dredging and keeping the land that would otherwise be lost in the rough seas that ever battle against the gentle shores.

How else would they be but obstinate, the men whose lives go on forever striving? The land breathes resistance to them; their cradles are rocked to the sound of the sea beating against the dykes; their life is always a fight. Roads, bridges, railways, canals and dykes; their repair is constant in that country whose foundations are on the water.

They are not lethargic in temperament, but always artists in form and line, perhaps not so in colour. Nothing seems to be hopeless to the Netherlanders. No waste is irreclaimable to those who have claimed portions of the sea. Stubborn they may be, unyielding it is likely, for they are the folk who never yielded to the strongest forces of Nature.

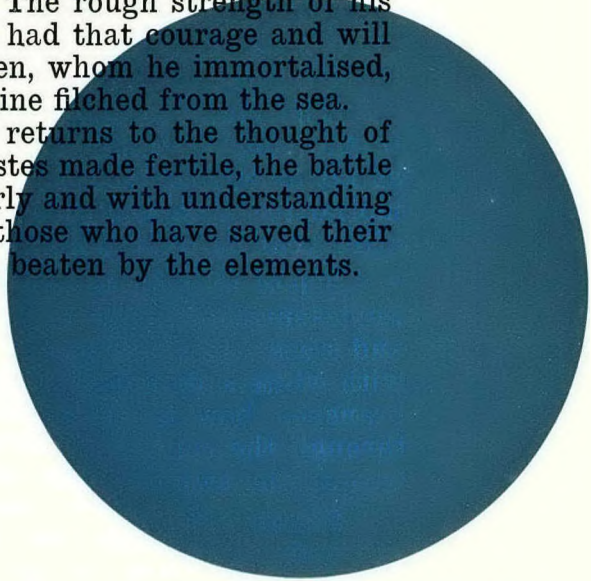
When they build their towns on the flat lands they must first drive down huge piles to make a foundation. Roads and railways are made like causeways on the marshy places. From the air the appearance is charming. Geometric designs form always beneath the eye—designs which they weave into carpets and fabrics with the utmost simplicity. Essentially Holland is a country to be viewed from the air, which has given us a new viewpoint to scenery—a fresh idea of what constitutes beauty.

Who else but these serious folk would consider such a stupendous project as damming up the sea, as they have accomplished

with the Zuyder Zee dyke? Determination to conquer lies in that considered temerity that has lain a barrier across the ocean—the culmination of centuries of endeavour. Centuries of moulding have gone to give man strength to pit himself against seemingly overwhelming odds.

Van Gogh, a god amongst earth-bound mortals, has drawn his people, bending over their crops, piling up the soil, forever working and striving with the land. The rough strength of his pencil and crayon shows that he, too, had that courage and will to persist, that inspires his countrymen, whom he immortalised, when living his saintly life on a coastline filched from the sea.

The abiding memory of Holland returns to the thought of that strife against Nature, the salt wastes made fertile, the battle on the marshes. To eyes that see clearly and with understanding a new respect is engendered towards those who have saved their soil from the tides and have not been beaten by the elements.



EXHIBITION OF DESIGNS AT THE R.I.B.A.

This is an instructive exhibition because it includes not only the work of United Kingdom competitors, but of one or two South African practitioners as well.

The conditions were clear and straightforward, and contained in addition to the usual schedule of accommodation a good deal of indication as to the wishes of the promoters. It was suggested that the main entrance should be on the axis of Jameson Avenue, and should provide a suitable background for the Jameson statue; that the main front should face west and be well set back from the roadway; that a symmetrical treatment was desirable; that straightforward and economical planning would be given special consideration; and that the elevations might suitably follow the classic tradition, modified to suit local and climatic conditions. A further note stated that the Minister "has in mind" that a central feature such as a tower or dome might form part of the design as a fitting termination of the vista along Jameson Avenue, and there was a suggestion that planning should be of the open type, with courts, verandahs and gardens, etc., while competitors were reminded that in this latitude the north is the sunny side. Two important notes indicated that the price of 2s. per foot cube was considered adequate for "the better parts of the building," and that the second floor need not be planned in detail nor plastered or finished internally.

The site is a rectangular one, approximately level, some 500 ft. by 800 ft. in extent, of which the larger dimension runs north and south; there are wide roads on each side, and the main approach (Jameson Avenue) faces the middle of the west side; in fact, the conditions read perhaps more like a prize programme than for a public competition, where the competitor is usually faced with an irregular site, sloping the wrong way, with awkward approaches and other difficulties.

It is, therefore, interesting to see how the various competitors deal with it.

VARYING TYPES OF PLAN.

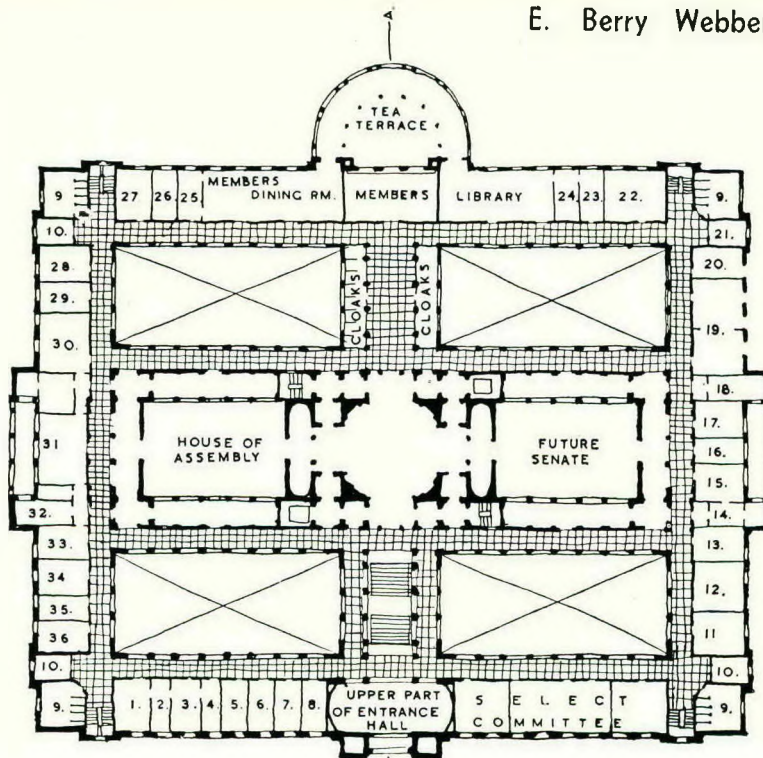
Generally the suggestions have been followed, probably because they seemed reasonable, though in some designs (which includes one commended set) the plans and elevations are distinctly more modern than "following the classic tradition," and in several designs the idea of the tower or dome to close the vista has been discarded in favour of two towers—presumably to mark the dual function of the building, which will eventually accom-

Winning Design

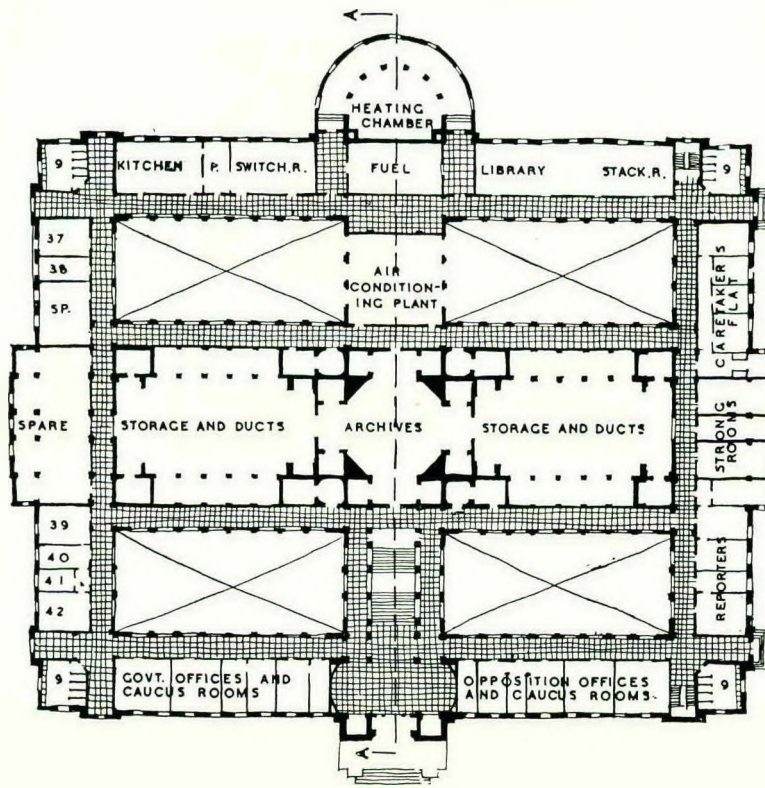
E. Berry Webber

KEY TO ACCOMMODATION.

- 1: Speaker's Room
- 2: Robing Room
- 3: Deputy Speaker
- 4: Speaker's Secretary
- 5: Minister's Rooms
- 6: Minister's Rooms
- 7: Minister's Rooms
- 8: Minister's Secretaries
- 9: Lavatories
- 10: Messengers' Rooms
- 11: Members' Writing Room
- 12: Members' Room
- 13: Leader of Opposition
- 14: Robing Room and Lavatory
- 15: President: Second Chamber
- 16: Clerk
- 17: Leader: Second Chamber
- 18: Waiting Room
- 19: Senate Committee Rooms
- 20: Black Rod
- 21: Cleaners' Room
- 22: Members' Writing Room
- 23: Librarians' Room
- 24: Book Room
- 25: Service Room
- 26: Lavatory and Cloaks
- 27: Lady Members
- 28: Spare Room
- 29: Prime Minister's Secretary
- 30: Prime Minister
- 31: Cabinet Room
- 32: Waiting Room
- 33: Typist
- 34: Records Room
- 35: Enquiry Office
- 36: Waiting and Interviewing Room
- 37: Native Staff Common Room
- 38: Cleaners' Room
- 39: First and Second Assistant Clerks
- 40: Sergeant at Arms
- 41: Changing Room
- 42: Clerk of the House



First Floor Plan



Ground Floor Plan

modate both the **House of Assembly** and the **Senate**. None of these is quite successful in both plan and elevation, though some of the elevations would be attractive on a site where these towers could be properly seen. This appears unlikely in the present case, as the approach is along the central avenue, with **Government buildings** already existing on each side of it, to the west of the selected site.

Similarly those plans in which the two **Halls**—of **Assembly** and of the **Second Chamber**—are not placed on the north and south axes of the building, with the remainder grouped round them, do not provide such direct and easy access from the two main **Halls** as is possible in the more conventional arrangement. And some plans which have considerable merit fail because they are not of a sufficiently monumental character. Others, again, fail because they do not group the essential features, **Ministers' rooms**, **committee rooms**, and so on, on the same floor as the two **Halls of Assembly**.

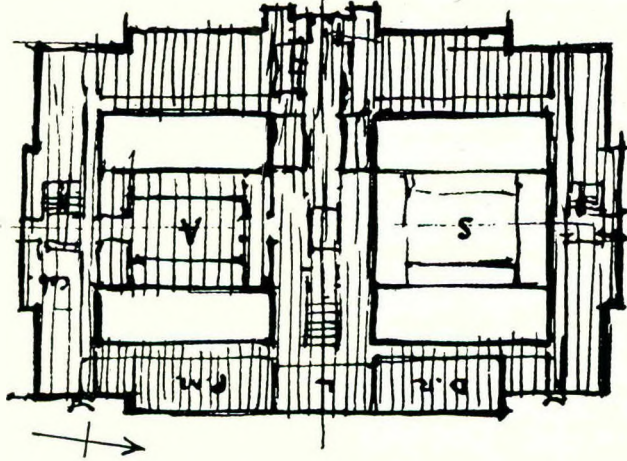
Here, owing to the limitations of space, we can only refer to general lines and give one or two brief notes on a few of the designs submitted. The exhibition, however, is well worth a visit by all those interested in architectural competitions, and the designs as a whole reach a high standard.



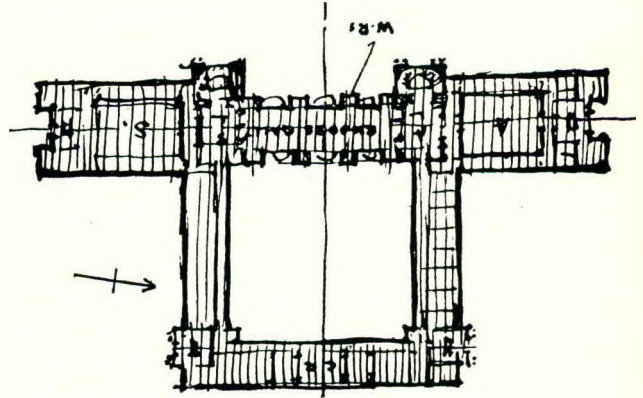
Winning Design

E. Berry Webber

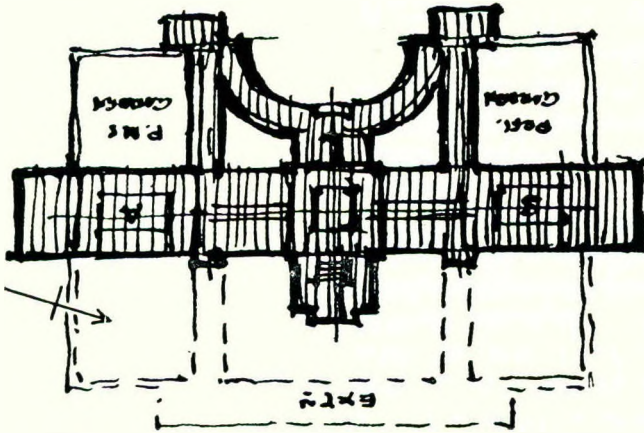
HON. MENTION DESIGN (No. 26) BY MR. H. B. VAN DER RIET,
A.R.I.B.A., M.S.A.



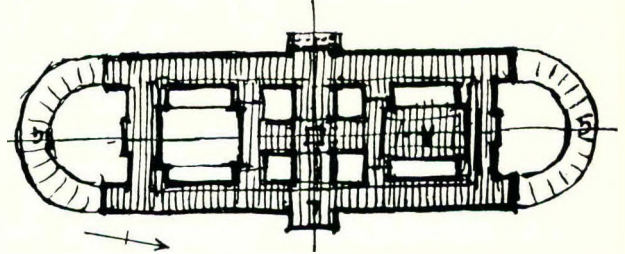
DESIGN PLACED FOURTH (No. 30), BY MESSRS. CARR AND HOWARD.



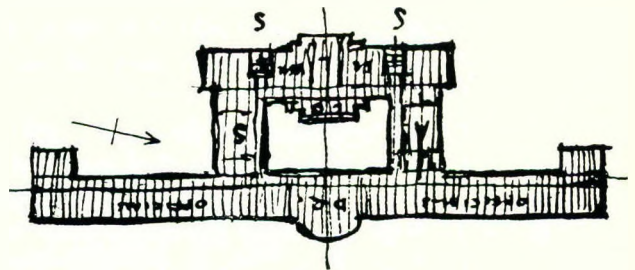
HON. MENTION DESIGN (No. 10), BY MR. W. A. MELLON.



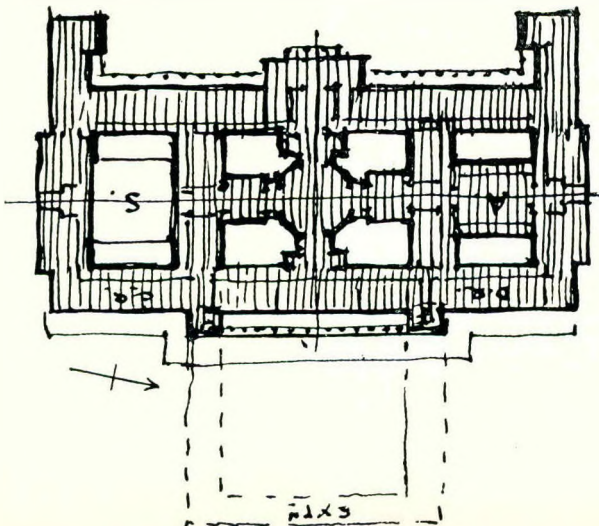
HON. MENTION DESIGN (No. 27), BY MESSRS. JOHN PERRY
AND LIGHTFOOT.



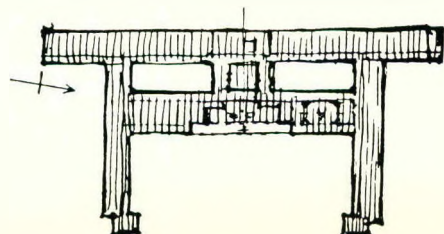
DESIGN 31, BY MR. W. WALCOTT.



HON. MENTION DESIGN (No. 14) BY MR. VERNER O. REES, F.R.I.B.A.



HON. MENTION DESIGN (No. 1), BY MESSRS.
OAKES AND JORDAN, A.R.I.B.A.



THE PREMIATED DESIGNS.

Winning Design (No. 3).—Mr. E. Berry Webber wins on a plan (published in "The Builder" for May 15) where everything seems to be in its right place. The two Chambers are well shut off from public corridors and have adequate lobbies, etc. The Cabinet Room is just behind the Speaker's lobby, and all important rooms are on the first floor. Future extension would be on the second floor.

Second Premiated Design (No. 12).—Mr. H. G. Porter has a good plan which has a certain resemblance to the winning set, but has a long open court in the centre. The two Chambers are placed on a central axis, well shut off from public corridors, but access to official rooms is well arranged. The elevations are good and marked by excellent proportion, with local feeling. Extension blocks are suggested north and south of the forecourt of main building.

Third Premiated Design (No. 19).—Mr. G. Grenfell Baines has an interesting plan, with a large central Hall or concourse, and the placing of committee rooms, etc., in relation to Chamber is well managed. The two Chambers and chief offices of the Government are placed on the ground floor, with the administrative offices on the first and future extension on second floors. The elevations (and the plan) are definitely modern in conception: the former are not very happy in their proportions, but the arrangement in receding planes would make for an effective composition in the mass. There is no tower or dominating central feature.

Fourth Premiated Design (No. 30).—Messrs. Carr and Howard have a plan which shows a good deal of imagination, and the central "Rhodes" gallery (on the west front) has projecting bays which form waiting rooms on each side. Assembly Hall and Senate are on this axis in the north and south wings. Committee rooms, etc., are grouped to the east of this, round a longer open court. All these are on the first floor, with Library, Dining, Members' and Writing-rooms and Administrative Offices on ground floor. The main defect of the plan is the lack of sufficiently direct communication between committee rooms and offices and the two Chambers. The elevation, with twin towers, is a simple yet original treatment in South African style.

OTHER DESIGNS.

Some brief notes with diagrams must suffice for the five designs which are awarded "Hon. Mention," and we take these in alphabetical order.

No. 10, by Mr. W. A. Mellon.—This shows an interesting plan with a curved central portion on the west front, providing opportunities for the elevation which do not appear to have been

fully appreciated. The plan suffers from a lack of direct communication between the various parts: the two large enclosed gardens for the use of the Prime Minister and the President of the Senate are rather attractive features. A proposed extension is shown at the rear (east side). The Chambers and chief rooms are placed on the first floor.

No. 1, by Messrs. Oakes and Jordan.—This shows an original type of plan, with Hall of Assembly and Senate on first floor, which has, however, several defects. The chief is that the Hall of Assembly is not sufficiently cut off from the public corridors; officials would also have a considerable amount of walking exercise to get from north to south wing.

No. 27, by Messrs. Perry and Lightfoot.—This Capetown firm have their halls and chief rooms at first-floor level. The plan looks rather confused at first sight, but is really well thought out, though it is a little cramped. The lighting of some of the main corridors appears to be rather inadequate. An unusual and, we think, not altogether satisfactory feature of both plan and elevation is the scheming of the garages to form semi-circular ends, with a court inside, north and south of the main block. The elevations are rather monotonous and are swamped by the large central feature, which is a combination of a dome and a tower. Future extensions are shown on the east side of the first floor, and on second floor over whole building.

No. 14, by Mr. V. O. Rees.—This shows a good plan which tends to be over-elaborate. The two Chambers and Government offices are on the ground floor, and there is, perhaps, a defect in the fact that the former are not sufficiently shut off from public corridors.

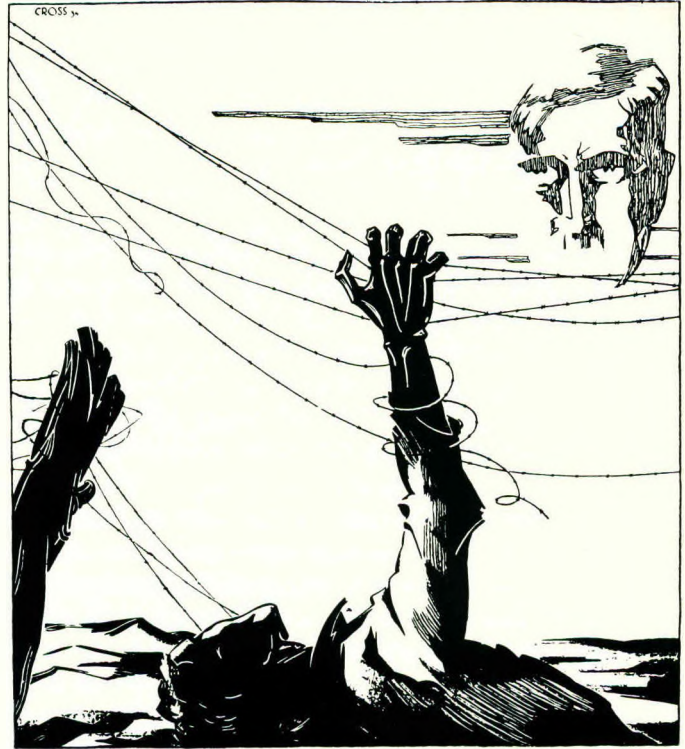
No. 26, by Mr. Van der Riet.—This Transvaal architect shows a well-arranged scheme which, however, has the defect that while the Hall of Assembly and Senate, together with their adjuncts, are placed on the ground floor, the committee rooms, library, etc., are on the first floor with the administrative offices. The elevations are rather small and fussy in scale, and would gain considerably if they were somewhat simplified.

Among the unplaced designs, many are of considerable merit, but only two can be mentioned.

No. 48, by Messrs. Wornum and Cathcart.—This has a good many defects in plan, but the elevations have a real charm and character and the details are certainly worth studying.

No. 31, by Mr. W. Walcot.—This has an extremely interesting and well-proportioned elevation, which is most skilfully indicated in a pen-and-ink drawing. The plan is practical, but it lacks any monumental character and the staircases appear inadequate.

(With acknowledgments to "The Builder," London, August 21, 1936. The illustrations on pages 423 and 424 are from "The Architects' Journal," May 14, 1936.)



WILFRED CROSS—THE MAN AND HIS WORK

Getting away from the common delusion that the fact of bad drawing and worse composition is enough to create what is called a "modern" masterpiece, Wilfred Cross, contrives to combine the breadth and elasticity of the modern with good drawing and generally sound technique.

In the examples reproduced here he is tied, to a large extent, by the exigencies of time and space, and it is chiefly in the cartoons such as "Heil! The Hitler Purge" that the artist's own personality gets an opportunity to assert itself. Apart from its qualities of line and colour, the picture embodies, with realistic effect, the policy of steel and wood which the Fuehrer appears to symbolise. The scheme is simple, but direct, with a great economy of line which, of course, adds to the effect and gives a feeling of hidden reserves that is borne out in other work by this artist.

Another cartoon, "Armistice Day 1934: A Memory and a Menace," shows an armoured skeleton holding a sword with a cleverly suggested group of figures, with a tombstone and laurel wreath, unobtrusively but boldly drawn, to the right of the big,

central figure. Another cartoon, "Peace, perfect peace," shows "Holism" with an episcopal hand raised in blessing over the words "We have hammered out Peace," and above appear some cleverly arranged fragments of broken walls and barbed wire trenches, with the words "On a new basis." Right on top of the whole conception stars look down. At first sight the cartoon seems a little incoherent; it is decidedly ironic, but on closer scrutiny it is full of meaning and forms a compact if rather too complex whole. In these days of abortive Leagues and broken treaties, these outspoken drawings may not always be popular, but the moral is clear. Strength rather than beauty characterises a great deal of the artists' work, the strength of talent that is trying to find an outlet, but talent undoubtedly of a kind that thinks for itself.

The lino engraving "Drought" seems to me an excellent impression, apart from its more obvious technical merit. Dejected figures, some scooping up the few remaining pools of precious fluid; hard, blinding sunlight pouring down on the trees stripped bare from lack of moisture, and thrusting out a few surface roots as if in desperation, an instinctive recoil from the all-pervading dryness. The artist gives a striking effect of heat and glare and of the rugged South African landscape.

The third picture, suggested by the myth of Baldur the Beautiful, shows the hero in the grip of the mistletoe. With his fall came the victory of the powers of evil and the seeming death of the world. Yet in the legend, after a long winter of cold and darkness, Baldur returned from the under-world to inaugurate a new era of happiness and peace. A curious sense of Baldur's gradual absorption by the evil plant is given, not only in the claw-like forms that clasp his body and absorb and row into his limbs, but in the branch that hangs on to his face, and that he vainly attempts to push away with his twig-like arm. One would have liked to see a set of illustrations of the beautiful story.

Not that I think that Cross is merely an interpreter. He has his own, a very active and original, personality—one that at present is feeling for forms and modes of expression and for what all artists require and few get in full measure, the opportunity to express himself. Unfortunately, the opportunities in South Africa for a cartoonist, even such as existed some 20 years ago, are very limited. A curious position in a country and among a people to whom pictorial expression makes a very definite appeal. To realise this you have only to meet some of the quite considerable number of people who treasure newspaper cuttings and a few originals by Holland, Quip or Robinson, to name some of the leaders in the palmy (comparatively) days of cartoons and cartoonists.

But, remembering the legend of Baldur, the cartoonists' Spring may come again. Only time is fleeting and artists are mortal.

Usually, in writing of our artists, I emphasise the personal note—advisedly. Without marked individuality, few artists, if any, will do anything lasting, and many well-known artists, in South Africa as elsewhere, seem to fail before this acid test. But Cross has technique and personality. With a little recognition, he should go far.

The artist in any medium has the sorry consolation that no man (with rare exceptions) is a prophet in his generation. Some even of the superior artists never saw fame in their lifetimes, some pandered to the Philistine and weakened their art as a consequence. But some have made their way, none the less. Richard, Sickert, Steer and others are modern living examples whose talent has won recognition, in spite of many obstacles, perhaps because of them.

There is one other thing where, I think, Cross, at his best, is particularly happy. He adopts a broad, modern technique to more conventional purposes, leaving out the exaggeration of the modern poseur who follow—at a long distance—the great modern names in art and architecture. I shall not insult my readers' intelligence by enumerating them. Cross seems to have used "modern" ideas in what I would call an intelligent way. It seems to me an argument in favour of the work of the moderns as a practical contribution to artistic effort, representing, as it does, a compromise between the old and the new, a compromise which appears effective and convincing.

D.L.



Drought



Baldur

TOWN PLANNING TECHNIQUE

NEIGHBOURING UNITS AS NEW ELEMENTS

A paper on "Neighbouring Units as New Elements of Town Planning" was read by Mr. Eugen C. Kaufmann, late Director of Housing, Frankfurt-am-Main, before the Summer School of the Liverpool School of Architecture.

"Town planning as an acknowledged subject of science and art has, as you know, not been very long in existence," commenced the lecturer. "We have had town growth practically as long as history dates back, and we have had some form of town planning in various peak periods of human development in the past. But we have only begun to approach the problem of organising massed dwellings with all the technique of modern science since we found ourselves at the end of the 19th century landed with a complete mass and muddle caused by an unforeseen and practically unmanageable inflation of urban development at the expense of the countryside; and in the short period of our generation we have not had time to do much more than try to prevent the greatest evils. Although in theory we may be a little more advanced, in practice we are not doing any more than engineering more or less inadequately a continuance of city growth without too much immediate danger to its inhabitants. Legislation has also been chiefly concerned with this aspect of town planning, its main objects being preventive police measures to protect the general public without seriously interfering with the unchallenged and yet hardly restricted rights of the private land-owner.

"Yet there is a growing feeling that with things continuing as at present our cities will become uglier and more unpleasant to live in every day. With uncontrolled urbanisation going on in the country in the neighbourhood of towns (and as motorisation of transport becomes universal there is hardly any open country left which is not drawn into the zone of urban influence), so one might say that practically all open country is being spoilt and reduced to exploitation grounds for money-hunting individuals or concerns. To bring about a decisive change in these matters is, no doubt, more a political than a technical question. And it may seem Utopian to talk about tackling the enormous problem of fundamentally replanning and rebuilding our cities while society is still organised on lines which hardly allow any quick and radical changes in this field, involving, as they would, the zoning for specific uses of all land and consequently a serious danger to very large vested interests. But if, as conscientious architects and townplanners, we are convinced that things should not be allowed to drag on as they do, we ought at least to be perfectly clear in our minds about what we consider should be

done with our towns and countryside. For some day, maybe in not too far a future, conditions will be ripe for a change and political leaders will come to us for advice. We should then be able to give such advice in a practical and useful manner, having worked out in good time at least the main lines of approach.

TOWN PLANNING AND THE HUMAN ASPECT

“ We are certainly not in such a position to-day. Town planning to a large number of architects still is, in the main, a question of aesthetics, of road front elevations, of squares, of dominating public buildings; to the engineer, a matter of street sections, of drainage and of transport problems; to the speculator, a question of so many houses to the acre. And while these experts handle their routine work, the town dweller as a human being and as a citizen receives a very poor service. But, after all, it is this human aspect that should really matter.”

Towns had in the past, he continued, always been very sincere expressions of the economic and social needs of mankind, and as centuries go by they clearly reflected all the changes which affect the conditions of society. The mediæval town, for instance, crystallised around a market square, which in most cases was an economic nucleus of its development, and surrounded itself with a strong line of fortifications, thus indicating that in those days of robbery on the roads “ collective security ” seemed to have been the watchword of the town dweller, as it had again become the watchword of nations in these days of international insecurity. And actually this collective security within the walls of fortified towns had (at least, on the Continent) remained the governing principle of town layout even up to the days of actual planning in the 17th and 18th centuries. Within the greatly modified character of the defence—structures following upon the improvement of offensive weapons—the dominating features of the town were then no longer the cathedral and the town hall, but the palaces of the monarchs and the gentry. But the principle of the growth of these towns was still dictated by military considerations of a kind very much the same as they had been in the Middle Ages. For this, in the ideal form, a circular town continued to push out its boundaries from time to time by building a new ring of fortifications further afield. And in the 19th century, when walls and ramparts gradually ceased to offer any effective protection, the same principle of growth was followed even by entirely open towns as though they were still surrounded by invisible walls.

“ But apart from this continuation of an outlived principle,” declared the lecturer, “ the 19th century city, with all its elements marking a decline in the art of town planning, in its turn represents very truly the all dominating idea of the time: to let every private individual do exactly as he pleases. The period from

after the world war is decidedly a different one. Most nations that have taken part in it are now unwilling to return to exactly the position where they left off before the great catastrophe happened. Most countries, whether they actually lived through revolutionary upheavals or not, were now willing to accept a far larger measure of public control in matters of public welfare than ever before, because it was realised all too clearly that the liberalism of the preceding period gave freedom of action chiefly if not exclusively to the 'haves,' but left the 'have-nots' in greater helplessness and destitution than they had been in earlier ages. This explains the rise of the Labour movement and the Co-operative movement in this country, and it finds, as far as town planning is concerned, its expression in a number of Acts of Parliament, which put on to the shoulders of public bodies, such as local authorities, the burden of responsibility for working-class housing.

"But we feel more and more that this is not enough. It is one thing to define standards of accommodation and to outlaw what is found to be below this standard—certainly in itself a remarkable step forward—and it is another to press effectively for a replanning of large urban areas and of entire cities. There is as yet no legislation to enforce such replanning, and under these circumstances all attacks on overcrowding and the slums are doomed to remain comparatively unimportant from the point of view of the town as a whole, and may even prove to become obstructions of a new kind to any wholesale readjustment, if this should one day become possible.

THE FUNCTIONAL APPROACH TO TOWN PLANNING

"If we discard aesthetics for a while as the supreme principle to guide us in this new venture of replanning, because it would be an outward and one-sided approach to a human problem, it seems to be indicated to look out for a more scientific method, which takes into account the social needs of the population. I think it should be the same method which, as architects, we usually apply in designing a house for the specific needs of some future inhabitants. There is, as you know, the elder school of architects who approach the problem with some preconceived idea of 'period' design. If they are good architects they may even then achieve something which, apart from being a more or less attractive aesthetic solution, is also a possible place to live in. But the designer who makes it his business to study the needs and the workings—in short, the functions of his house first and foremost, and is a good and clear-minded architect at the same time—will inadvertently not only achieve a house in which it is delightful to live, but a new sort of beauty as well. And this functional method, if I may so call it, is obviously also the right approach to our new town planning problems."

While in designing a house we had to study the activities of all the individuals who were going to live there, in designing a town or a town area we had to satisfy the needs of groups of individuals and to study the nature of their group activities. That led us without difficulty on to an investigation into the criteria of groupings and to the relative size and importance of each of them compared with the total number of inhabitants. The most obvious groupings were: families and ages.

However great the changes might be which society might undergo during the next 50 or 100 years, the family was likely to remain more or less what it was: a self-contained unit with the main object (from the point of view of society) of raising children. We might have more women working in professions and we might have fewer children per family if the present tendency continued. But even in Soviet Russia, where a few years ago the family was regarded as a more or less backward bourgeois institution, it seemed now more firmly established than ever, and it was a well-known fact that communal dwelling-houses in which the parents live separated from their children, who had quarters of their own in an adjoining block, had not been able to gain much ground, although they had for a number of years been strongly advocated by the Government. If this was so within a country where conditions for a re-forming of the traditions of family life were more favourable than anywhere else in the world to-day, we were safe in assuming that the family unit as we knew it would in this country persist for the length of period which our planning could hope to cover. It was another question whether the small detached or semi-detached cottage, the house in a terrace, or the dwelling unit in a block of flats, were the more likely future forms of dwelling for the masses of the population. It was impossible to decide that question offhand. But he would say that, however great may be the advantages for children to grow up in a house with a garden immediately adjoining it, it was quite certain that a block of flats lent itself ever so much better to a centralisation of services.

VALUE OF CENTRALISED SERVICES.

“Can we imagine,” asked the speaker, “a future form of dwelling without such centralised services as heating, warm water, mechanical laundry and, very possibly, centralised catering in some form or another? That for the moment dwellings in blocks of flats are, generally speaking, in this country, more expensive than houses does not necessarily imply that this will always be so. In a number of countries on the Continent the opposite is the case. It seems to be purely a matter of adequate building organisation and the working out of building methods suitable for the purpose and for the working conditions in this country. I am confident that it is only a question of time for a

change in this direction to be brought about. And as for the children, I am not so sure whether for the baby a balcony is not just as good as a garden, and perhaps more convenient for the mother—and surely proper playing fields within easy reach of the dwellings are for the bigger children a more suitable solution of their outdoor needs than the cramped individual garden. And as for the gardening, allotments in close connection with blocks of flats have hardly yet received the attention which they obviously deserve.”

The next step in our investigations had to be the determination of sizes of families and the average percentage of ages for which we had to plan. For the grouping of our families would depend in the first place on the number and size of institutions of public welfare and education required for the children of the community. So far schools only had become an acknowledged public service, and it was not a hundred years since this important social progress, obligatory schooling for all, had been introduced in most civilised countries. It did not now need any prophetic inspiration to foresee that within the next 50 years we should have creches and nursery classes or children's houses for all, as well as schools. Our schools probably would be larger than they were to-day, for the school-leaving age would, no doubt, be raised and continuation classes and courses in adult education would become a normal part of the educational system. The large playing fields and open spaces which these educational institutions would require should play an important part as rallying grounds for the whole of the population in view of the large increase of everybody's leisure hours, which again did not appear to be too optimistic to predict. “Here, then,” said the speaker, “we have the main elements of what I should like to call a ‘neighbourhood unit’: the dwellings, together with their communal, technical and catering services, the educational buildings, those for public welfare and playgrounds and open spaces. All this may not appear to be in any way outstanding and extraordinary, and it seems only natural that one should go about the planning or replanning of urban areas on the lines which I have tried to indicate. And there are, no doubt, already a number of housing schemes which have been equipped with at least a part of the public and communal institutions which would compose a properly organised neighbourhood unit. But what has not been generally realised yet is the new outlook on town planning at large which we can gain by looking upon a neighbourhood unit as a new and more or less standardised element of town planning. I can feel how all those immediately begin to shudder to whom standardisation is the equivalent of monotony and lack of beauty. To these I need only say that rhythm is an acknowledged element of aesthetic composition and that the very essence of rhythm is standardisation.

“ Besides, there is hardly any other field for the application of standardised elements where there is less danger of monotony than town planning—through the changing conditions of the site, the contours, the natural scenery, advantages which will be carefully observed and underlined by the skilled planner. So much for standardisation in general.

THE STANDARDISED NEIGHBOURHOOD UNIT.

“ I feel that having come so far I should mention that this idea of the standardised neighbourhood unit as an element in town planning is no personal invention of mine, but that we are indebted for it to our Russian colleagues who, in their scientific approach to the problems of building entire new cities as part of the economic reconstruction of their country, have gone the way which I have tried to describe to you: to arrive at some programme formula for a limited dwelling area based on the group functions of the people to be housed. And even though perhaps not much of this has actually been carried out in Russia (as, since 1931, when the idea was first developed and largely discussed, the pendulum has swung into another direction in that country), the idea remains, and I consider it to be the most valuable contribution to town planning which we have witnessed in recent years. It is clearly an advance in thinking to visualise a town built up from standardised housing groups of the smallest order, with their technical and educational services going on to groupings of a larger order which require additional services to be shared by a larger section of the inhabitants and so forth to city districts, city regions—the whole town. It is, to my mind, an advance in thinking, because for the first time in the history of town development and town planning the supreme law for the new town is to be the welfare of the inhabitants as members of the community.

“ We have had, as I mentioned before, in mediæval towns, crystallisations around a market or fair. The highly developed civic spirit of those days concentrated on cathedrals, town halls and the works of defence, but left housing comparatively undeveloped. And we have had the planned towns of the times of the Renaissance and of the 17th and 18th centuries. They show a remarkable advance in the conception of a whole town as a work of art, but it was all designed to further glorify the one or the few mighty princes whose ambition took to building in order to create for themselves an everlasting monument. But neither Petersburg nor Karlsruhe—to mention but these two outstanding examples—ever took any notice of the housing problems of the masses of the population as they were cities built to house the aristocracy in the first place. The 19th century has made things worse instead of better by developing a routine for town enlargement consisting of the designing by mostly insufficiently trained

engineers of a framework of roads, the filling in of which was left entirely to the discretion of the casual future leaseholder or owner. The 20th century has so far produced but one decisive contribution: the idea of decentralisation as a reaction against the increasing congestion and drabness of the ever-growing large cities. This idea, which found its expression in the garden city movement and in the propaganda for satellite towns, is a real step forward, for while setting up a new idea of a sort of marriage between town and country, it keeps on pointing to the necessity of planning at large. But it is felt more and more that even though garden cities and satellite towns might be a great help, provided that the transport problem proves soluble, there remains the nucleus of the old city which cannot be just left to its fate.

“ And on the other hand what leading idea is there to guide a town planner who designs a garden city or a satellite town? Is it the idea of building houses for workers on one side of a railway line and those for the more well-to-do people on the other side, as it has unfortunately been done in one of the most well-known garden cities? Or it is just to adapt oneself to the contours and to existing natural amenities and curve the roads and design pretty cul-de-sacs to make the whole thing as romantic and beautiful in an old-world sense, but at the same time as haphazard and in a way as lifeless as possible? No, I do feel that these garden cities, garden suburbs, satellite towns, replanned city areas and slum clearances require some other kind of principle to govern their layout, which will help to bring into existence a real community life.”

Though the literature on the subject which formed the topic of this lecture was rather meagre, quite recently a publication had appeared in England which should be mentioned in this connection; that was “ Manchester Made Over,” in which Sir A. P. Simon, the author, gave voice to very independent views on the future development of his own town and of town planning in general. He had been pleased to find in the chapter dealing with “ Planning for Working-class Family Requirements ” a description of the basic idea of the “ neighbourhood unit,” which in all essentials coincided with what he (the speaker) had said before. This was all the more astonishing as apparently the author had no detail knowledge of the work done in the Soviet Union, of the Russian publications and discussions on the subject, as otherwise he would, no doubt, have referred to them.

The author of the book had determined the area of his units by relating the number of houses to the capacity of the corresponding educational units and suggested to base future density regulations for such large units on 1,200 houses to 100 acres, rather than on 12 houses to one. This might be a disputable point as far as the actual figures are concerned. For all the density

regulations might require to be checked and revised for large-scale planning. But it was the principle which represented an extremely useful suggestion, not only in view of the provision of playgrounds and open spaces, but also of a suitable mixture of low and high buildings, of houses and flats, or of three and 16 story blocks (as, for instance, at Drancy, near Paris). This sort of approach would accustom the authorities who handle the regulations to think in bigger areas, in town planning categories of a high order, and it would give to the planner a wider scope through the greater variety of purposes for which he would be able to make provision. He would be able to satisfy within one "neighbourhood unit" the needs of a section of the population which might be composed of large and small families, of single living professional and of old people, and this very mixture of needs would provide a natural basis for characteristic groupings, so that without any petty attempt at decorative design would be an opportunity for creating real architectural values by contrast in height and rhythm in spacing. "I am quite certain," concluded the lecturer, "that we need not be afraid of monotony if town planning can proceed on such lines."

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