Planning the City
Our Cities To-Day and To-morrow: A Survey of Planning and Zoning Progress in the United States. by Theodora Kimball Hubbard; Henry Vincent Hubbard; The City of Tomorrow, and Its Planning. by Le Corbusier; Frederick Etchells
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PLANNING THE CITY

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When Harvard University, through the Milton Fund for Research, made a grant for "a survey and analysis of city planning and zoning progress in the United States" the study was wisely entrusted to the direction of Professor and Mrs. H. V. Hubbard, both experienced in reporting city planning. The limitations of the project, as drafted, required that completeness be sacrificed to haste, else a contemporary view of cities and towns throughout the country could not be obtained. Housing, public utility engineering, and planning of new towns were eliminated from the study for one reason or another. As finally defined the survey included "zoning, control of land subdivision, major street systems, mass transportation, rail, water and air terminals, park and recreation areas, aspects of the city's appearance, with legal and administrative means of affecting city and regional planning and with the education of the public to support planning measures," or, in other words, "the elements of planning most commonly dealt with to-day by the competent general practitioner of city planning."

Some 120 cities and districts were selected for examination—selected on the basis of population, function, location, and success or failure of planning experience.

Data gathered by the field representative has been assembled in categories almost identical with the groupings mentioned above. Supplementary facts, gained by the authors in their previous experience with city planning procedure, round out the study. The volume thus represents far more than a presentation of the findings of a five months' investigation. Appendices carry notes and comments taken directly from the schedules, and also a descriptive directory of the cities and regions visited. They provide much specific and detailed information to accompany the general conclusions set forth in the chapters preceding them.

The material is well organized and effectively presented. Professor and Mrs. Hubbard are to be commended for their impartial viewpoint. Undue optimism has not been evidenced. Nor has there been any attempt to minimize the obstacles hindering the progress of efficient city planning.

This volume raises again the question as to the relative value of the cursory survey. Can any investigator visiting 120 cities in 42 states within a period of approximately 150 days possibly verify the information supplied him? Can he get other than limited observations on the matters studied? To be sure, when the informant is the official in charge of whatever is being surveyed one expects replies to be accurate and final. However, answers involving opinion, and still more, those concerning individual interests and activities, are almost certain to take on a subjective bias, even when obtained from authoritative sources. The alternative procedure, of course, is narrowing the study and deepening it, or increasing its cost and putting more field representatives to work. The underlying issue seems to
be not merely a question of methodology, but of the meaning of "research."

On the other hand a study of this kind is valuable in many respects. It is a convenient reference manual on city planning. It will be helpful to students of municipal government in supplying concrete data to support theoretical discussions. It ably carries out, as far as the limitations imposed upon it have permitted, the authors' purpose that it be a bird's eye view of planning and zoning procedure in this country.

Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, a French architect, writing under the pseudonym Le Corbusier, sets for himself an altogether different planning problem in "The City of Tomorrow." Along with a discussion of what one might call the philosophy of city planning, he deduces the premise, that the city is a lumbering historical machine, breaking down physically under demands of the present age, and through its inefficiency wearing out millions of human beings. It is imperative that a change be made. So he comes forward boldly with a plan for the complete reconstruction of city structure; that is, for the elimination of "the anachronistic persistence of the original skeleton of the city" which "paralyzes its growth," and for the erection in its stead of a "model" city. For Paris he elaborates a separate plan dealing with a rearrangement of the centre of the city.

Le Corbusier's scheme is based upon proper planning of housing, since "security of the dwelling is the condition of social equilibrium;" of the street, since it is "a sort of factory for producing speed traffic;" and of open spaces, for "this is the only way to ensure the necessary degree of health and peace to enable men to meet the anxieties of work occasioned by the new speed at which business is carried on."

Cruciform skyscrapers in the central district will provide all facilities for work. They will be used solely for business and industry. Near these skyscrapers will be placed the shops and cafes, public buildings and theatres, all relatively low in height. Residential quarters, built on the "set-back" or "cellular" system, accommodating families in standardized apartments, equipped with standardized furniture, will occupy the second zone. The suburbs or garden cities will provide for additional homes. All buildings will be set in green open spaces so that the city will be a veritable park. Arterial streets, 50 yards wide, intersecting at distances of 400 yards, are designed with several levels, each having its separate function. Streets will be straight and built for speed. "The winding road is the Pack Donkey's Way, the straight road is man's way." This street arrangement will guard against congestion. Skyscrapers as planned will allow for population density.

Buildings throughout the city, patterned according to a "universal standard," and uniform in detail, will engender "serenity and joy" and "lift high" the mind, according to Le Corbusier's theory. City dwellers will find pleasant the life in this efficient machine, with its opportunities for work in comfortable surroundings, its ease of transportation, and its ample provision for amusements. All is designed that there may "never come a time when people can be bored in our city."

A revolutionary scheme such as the one described can be considered only as idealistic. This affects to a decisive extent its applicability to city conditions in the United States. It is true that certain features of the "programme" are already familiar to us. "Rectilinear cities" we have a plenty. Quadrangular blocks of
houses, streets of two and three levels are not uncommon. The skyscraper is an American invention. Though some features are well known, the extent to which they are used, and their arrangement, make Le Corbusier’s model city different in kind, rather than different in degree, from our present types of cities. No one, not even the author, expects any of our city planning commissions to be so daring, or to have power enough, to attempt to execute the proposed plan in its entirety, or even in half or a fourth of its entirety.

Yet, who doubts that some city builders may follow it, albeit from afar off? Twenty years ago who would have prophesied a Radburn?

Readers of “The city of Tomorrow” will be charmed with its literary style. It is so fascinating that its most radical theories seem plausible when couched in Le Corbusier’s phrases. The illustrations and maps are attractively done and generous in number. In form and make-up the volume is a work of art—a credit to the craft of bookmaking.

“SUPERSTITION AND ITS ANTIDOTE”

FRANK H. HANKINS


In 1894 Professor Giddings sounded a warning against the optimistic assumption that the long and hard-fought battle for academic freedom had been finally won. He saw danger in the increasing control of education by the unenlightened masses. He foresaw that the fervid social democratic movement would compel an increasing subserviency of “the high to the low.” Thirty-two years later he was able to say that, in spite of universal education, “we remain superstitious, afraid of knowledge, bigoted and intolerant.” He here goes on to distinguish two kinds of education: one that is experimental and scientific and one that is traditional and sacrosanct. One “is a child of intellectual courage” and “fights in defense of mystery-dispelling knowledge and of intellectual liberty.” The other “is a child of fear;” “it harks back to incantations and sorceries;” “it is vouched for by the doctors of magic;” “it crushes intellectual liberty” and “hates scientific knowledge.”

“By selections and eliminations traditional education has fashioned superstition, magic, and necromancy into occultism, which it conserves and propagates.” There follows these phrases one of the most forth-right, penetrating and readable essays on current educational thought and practice that has ever been written.

Giddings writes from a high plane. He speaks soberly and earnestly, and he means what he says. He sees in knowledge and scientific modes of thought the only hope of an attractive human future. He sees that the classical education has become antiquated and that a new genuinely liberal education must take its place. The new will teach that the end of life is not the glorification of God, nor yet the salvation of an immortal soul, but living, and especially enjoyable living. It will cultivate a scientific and experimental attitude toward all problems, and not least toward the profounder problems of life (that is, living). Right conduct is that which is physiologically, psychologically, and sociologically right, as shown by actual experience. “Adjustment of personal life to reality, ultimate and