

The survey of cities.

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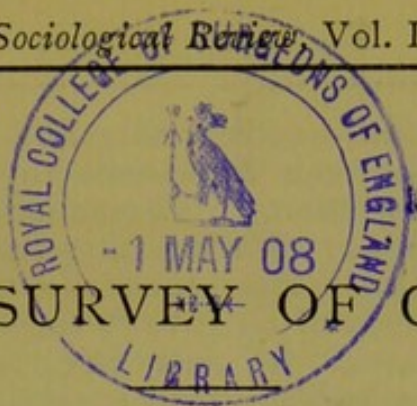
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THE SURVEY OF CITIES.

The problem before the student of Cities is obviously of the greatest complexity. Amid such vast and varied centres, such a crowded phantasmagoria of life, how shall we agree upon any orderly methods of observation and description, such as that required in each and every department of science? How shall we compare our observations and generalise them? And if we here or there reach some penetration of analysis, some generality of view, some depth of insight, how are we even to communicate our ideas to each other in adequately scientific terms? Yet how many are interested in the observation of their own and other cities? How many must have speculated on the resemblances and differences among these, or at least discussed their respective qualities and defects? How many, too, and in all countries, are awakening to deal with the practical tasks of Citizenship, ever increasingly pressing as these are? Never since the golden times of cities has there been so much interest, so much goodwill as now; it is the right moment, therefore, and surely in a Sociological Society and Journal, if anywhere, to raise the question: How best can we set about the study of Cities? How organise if possible, in each, in all, at any rate here and there among ourselves to begin with, some such common understanding as to the methods required to make observations at all, and to compare and generalise them?

As regards the description of Cities there are vast materials in literature; travellers and geographers, archæologists and historians, artists and art-critics, are all available to us. From Herodotus to Gibbon, from Pausanias to Schliemann and Arthur Evans, or from John Ray to Ruskin, indeed to the latest writers, there is no lack of help towards visualising cities, whether past or present, nor even of entering into their life, be this buried or no. The present unparalleled wealth of illustrated monographs, the activity of the daily Press, the availability of Murray and Baedeker, are alike bringing the consciousness of our own city and of other cities more and more fully into being. It is surely time, therefore, for Sociologists—that is for all who care for the advance of science into the social world—to be taking counsel as to the ways and means of bringing an increasing order into all this growing accumulation of knowledge.

We are not entitled as yet to postulate any but the very simplest and common elements of knowledge, much less of accepted belief or doctrine; our experiences of cities are still too

personal and individual, and are, therefore, so far isolated and uncomparated. Still less can we assume any common ground or starting point towards action, for all manner of regional and local circumstances isolate us; differing interests and divergent tendencies divide us also. How then can we proceed towards proving a scientific study of cities to be practicable, even towards making this general,—as it must obviously become,—if our comparisons are to be fruitful, or our generalisations safe?

Here plainly is no easy problem; it has largely occupied the writer's life these twenty-five years or more, in constantly renewed endeavours towards finding some adequate method of approach towards its solution. Historic cities, actual cities, incipient towns or cities, great or small, have each in turn promised to yield their secret; museums and galleries with their treasures of the past, local and international exhibitions with their encyclopædic presentments of the activities of the present, even utopias of the future, have each suggested some clue to the city's labyrinth. Geographer and historian, economist and aesthete, politician and moralist have each been utilised as guides: here the optimist, there the pessimist has seemed the truer. Sometimes, too, it has seemed that it must be by the fullest detachment of purely scientific outlook, or in seeking to devise the needed Civic Museum, that the synoptic vision of the City must be reached; yet again, through other years, the hope has seemed more fruitful of attaining this through participation in the many-sided life of actual Citizenship. Now the statistical method has seemed to be the fundamental one, in its development from Quetelet to Booth; again the fundamental occupations, the family unit, and family budget, with Le Play; and so on: hence it is only of late years that he has been able to reach even such imperfect outlines towards a study of cities as are to be found in the three volumes of "*Sociological Papers.*" Acceptance of these cannot be assumed from the present reader, nor even knowledge of them: it is best, therefore, within these limits of mere preliminary suggestion especially, to start afresh, as the Sociological Society is itself doing, with its newly-formed "*Cities Committee.*" Without here entering into that general discussion of municipal organisation, of social life and betterment which is bringing forward the city problem everywhere, and making the scientific study of cities increasingly urgent, it may be enough here, for the present, to indicate some of the main practical steps which have led up to the formation of this Cities Committee.

I. Like other professional bodies, the Museum Curators of Great Britain have their Annual Congress: this took place in Dundee last year. Having listened to the natural and proper lamentations of the curators as to the deficient support of their institutions, and to various expressions of their anxiety to increase public interest accordingly, the writer threw his paper into the form of a practical proposition, which may be summed up somewhat as follows:—

You lament that you have not sufficient funds adequately to maintain your Museums and still less to increase them. Is it not needful to discover some way adequately to advertise your institutions—(of course properly and legitimately, in due curatorial fashion)—by making them interesting to a larger proportion of your community? At present your antiquities attract only the antiquarians, a dwindling class. Thus you have here your admirable City history collection, your town in 1800, 1700, 1600, 1500, and yet beyond, to the primitive Celtic hill fort or its Roman transformation; and this does naturally attract the antiquarians. But the value of this collection depends upon each of these exhibits having had actuality in its day. It is its authenticity which gives its interest. Why should this collection now lack actuality in *our* day? Why no adequate exhibit of this city in 1900, in 1907? Why not give it this, and add to your Museum of the Past a corresponding exhibit of the Present? How can this be done? Easily. See for instance Booth's "Life and Labour in London" with its great map; see the corresponding surveys of other cities, York, Manchester, Dundee, and the like. Do something of the same for each city now. Obtain more pictures and photographs, of its present beauty, and ugliness; obtain statistics and other particulars from the Town House, the registrars, and so on, so that any and every active citizen shall henceforth find in your Museum the most ready and convenient place for getting up all he wants to know about his city. In this way your Museum will gain a new set of frequenters, each a future friend, for you will soon find that you can count on their support and that increasingly. Nor is this all you can do; besides the few antiquarians and the many more practical men, who are interested in the past and the present respectively, you have a third class, small, yet important and increasing, those who are beginning to dream of the future. These wish to see some progress in their town, some actual betterment, the cleansing of its slums, the erection of new buildings and institutions, the supply of open spaces, and above all, the planning of its future extensions—its practicable Utopia—Eutopia in fact. Add, therefore, to your Galleries of the Past and of the Present a third room, or at least a screen or two for this concrete exhibition of your City's Future, and you will thus bring to the Museum a third and new class of supporters. Hence, even if you do not care for your City, if you do not feel any impulse of citizenship, consider this proposal as at least of a new attraction, a legitimate form of public appeal, and see whether it does not before long reward you to carry it out.

This proposal, almost in so many words, was warmly encouraged by the President of the Congress, and was actively discussed at a special meeting, at which a large number of the Museum Curators of the United Kingdom spoke warmly in its favour, and decided to see what could be done towards

carrying this out for their own cities in their Museums. The preceding proposal applies to Libraries and Librarians, no less than to Museums and Curators. How then are we as sociologists to aid in this movement as well as to learn from it? Is it not time that curators and sociologists were joining hands to discuss methods as well as to collect materials, and thus in fact form in and for each particular city, as well as in the greater centres—say the three national capitals at least, and perhaps also the main regional ones—a Cities Survey Committee?

II. Next, since there is to be a section of Social Science in the approaching Franco-British Exhibition 1908, may we not at once widen our proposed co-operation a step farther? Given Museum and Libraries, with collections illustrative of the past of their cities, of their present, and sometimes even of the incipient future, might they not send the Franco-British Exhibition a characteristic exhibit, condensing this threefold view of their towns? French cities, too, would generously respond, even with a greater wealth of interesting matter than our British industrial cities can as yet supply.

Thus would arise the beginnings of a "Cities Exhibition," the germ of a future "*Towneries*," of great interest in itself and of course provoking innumerable comparisons and suggestions. Representatives of different cities would be curious to come; they would speak and write about this when at home, and thus interest in and knowledge of cities would be popularised.

III. To the "Town Planning Congress," at the Guildhall, on October 25th, 1907, the writer was appointed a delegate of the Society. After the Lord Mayor's initial benediction and the Chairman's official introduction, the opening to the discussion was given by Councillor Nettlefold of Birmingham, a leading authority and impulse among members of British municipalities upon this subject. He opened with a survey of the Acts which have been passed since Lord Shaftesbury's first Housing Improvement Bill in 1851—twenty-eight in little more than half a century.

Being next called on to speak, as a delegate of the Sociological Society, the writer limited himself to urging one point, namely, that if 28 Bills had admittedly been insufficient to meet the evils of our towns, it was surely time that this 29th one should take the geographical and social sciences into its counsels, unless it were to have its insufficiency demonstrated in its turn like its predecessors. Even the Town Planning information from Germany and the like which Mr. Horsfall and others are so admirably supplying is good, but not definite enough. Designs from other cities are convincing in some ways, yet inapplicable; like the diagrams with which

Mr. Ebenezer Howard, a few years ago, explained his ideal of a Garden City, but which are now usefully superseded by actual and local plans at Letchworth and Hampstead.

Again, most who speak and write of the planning of our towns have not before them the needful materials, first of all an adequate collection of maps. Let us begin at least with (1) the Reform Bill Atlas of the English towns in 1832 with their Parliamentary boundaries indicated, and with the similar atlas of the Scottish towns. Next, (2) set beside these the maps of those towns a generation later, in 1860-1870, when the industrial expansion was in full swing; and again, (3) maps of towns in our own day. Here, then for each town and city in the land, is an exhibit alike of local and of general interest, which shows the expansion of two generations, the improvement, and still more frequently, the mischief which has been done. Is it not needful that before planning new suburbs, we should have before us a comprehensive survey of this kind?

Again, on what principle are we to plan? It is good to have maps of recent German improvements, but we cannot simply copy these; each city is, or should be, a unique and individual growth, an organic development; its extension is not simply a mechanical addition, it is not simply a matter of material accretion, however much the last patch be better than the old garment.

Finally, it was suggested that this Town Planning Congress should not disperse without leaving, among its permanent results, an impulse towards the formation of a *Cities Survey Committee*. This would attract and supply Town-Planners with the basis of knowledge which they require, and help towards civic interpretations as well. It would advance positive opinion in every city, and be of great use in London also. Might not only the Sociological Society, but other bodies, Geographical, Statistical, Architectural, &c., all become interested in the formation of such a Committee, in which their particular interests should be duly represented?

These proposals found cordial approval. A large number of the leading workers in the subject put down their names at once as willing to join such a Committee.

IV. In course of further discussion it was agreed to report progress to the Council of the Sociological Society, to ask them to form a *Cities Survey Committee*, and arrange, if possible, for the co-operation of other bodies and the co-optation of individuals likely to be interested. After consideration of the methods required for such a study of Cities, and for arranging these as far as possible in orderly and similar ways, yet with due regard to the many-sided individuality of each, it was suggested that a more general meeting might be held, at which the case for City Surveys might be stated and the suggested methods submitted, the results of existing surveys such as

those of Mr. Booth and others might be brought together and set forth, the case for city surveys stated, and the methods discussed. The usefulness and need of such surveys would also become more apparent, and fresh beginnings perhaps made towards extending these, to representative towns and cities throughout the land.

V. This proposed Cities Survey has now been fully discussed by the Council of the Sociological Society, who accordingly resolved at their meeting of December, 1907, to form a "CITIES COMMITTEE to promote the Survey and Investigation of Cities, and the Study of Civics."

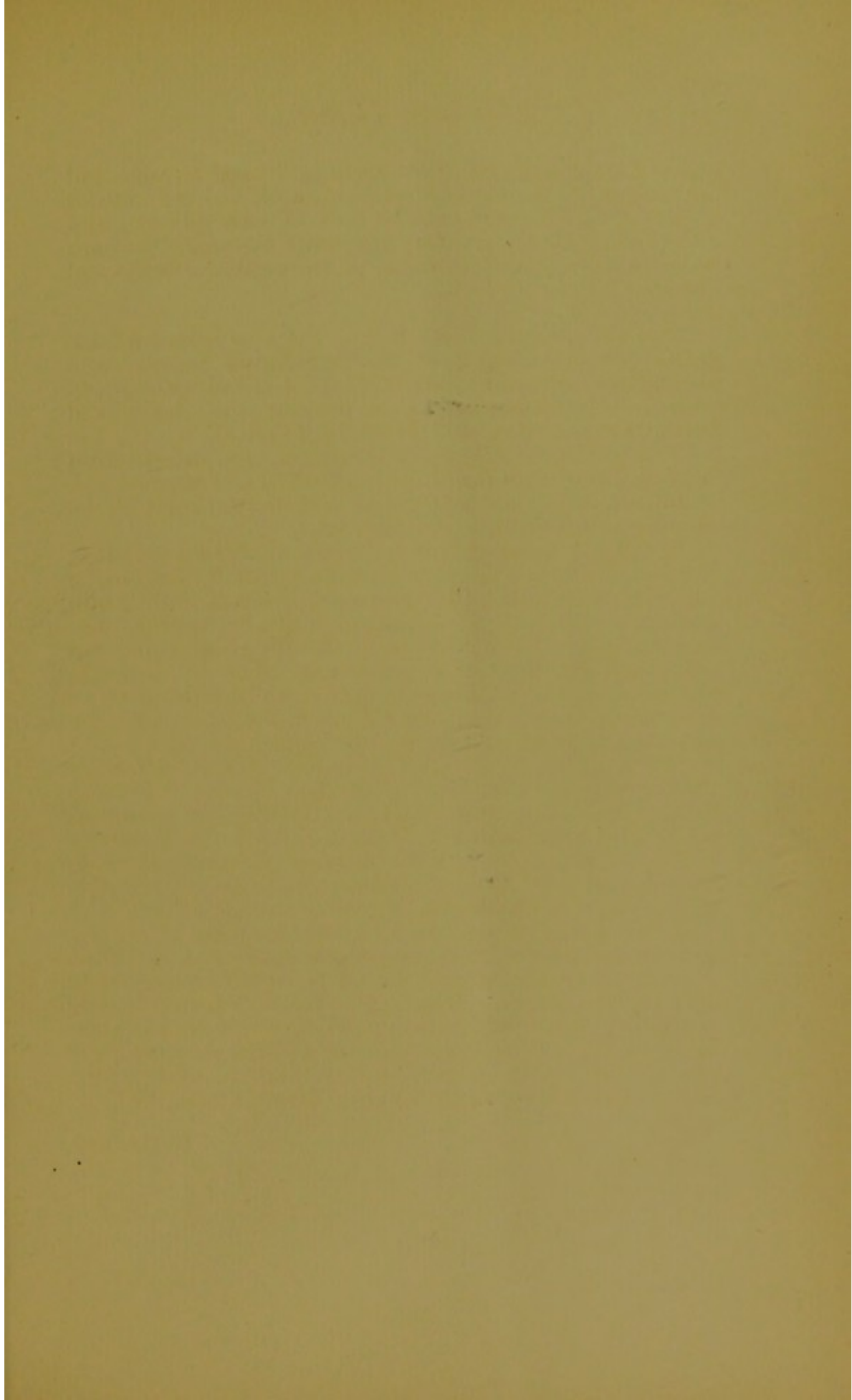
This will be concerned with the geographical and historical development of Cities, with their industrial and other present conditions, with their advantages and defects, and with the conditions of their future development.

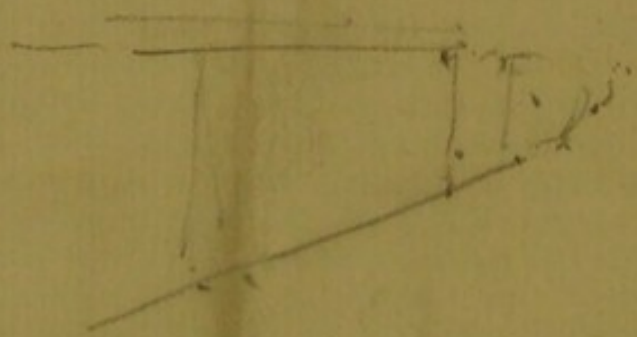
For this purpose it will endeavour to advance the Study of Cities, in the first place by promoting Civic Exhibitions, of plans, pictures, and other illustrative material dealing with past and present conditions, and prospective betterment. For this purpose it will communicate with the members in other cities including the various constituent cities and boroughs of London, and with curators of museums, librarians, directors of Schools of Art, and others likely to be interested, who may thus act as sub-committees, correspondents, etc.

It will seek to promote the formation of Civic Museums and to advance the teaching of civic history and duties independently from party politics. It will act with Associations for City Betterment of all kinds, and will also co-operate as far as practicable with the organisers of exhibitions, congresses, pageants and other endeavours having an educative value towards the awakening of civic consciousness.

This "Cities Committee" may be thus taken as entering upon its activities with the present year 1908; and its scheme of work and actual endeavours will be reported from time to time in this Journal. Members of the Sociological Society and others interested, either in the survey of any particular town or city, or in the investigation as a whole, are accordingly invited to communicate with the Convener, Cities Committee, Sociological Society, 24 Buckingham Street, Strand, W.C.

P. GEDDES.





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