

THE REBUILDING OF LONDON.

By DR. JOSEPH PARKER.

IF London could be rebuilt in any adequate sense, the problem of the unemployed would be laid to rest for at least half a century. That would certainly be a distinct and satisfactory advance upon the present social condition. The mere prospect would enkindle special interest in almost any suggestion or scheme that seeks to realise such an issue. It would seem to be perfectly clear that something must be done; what that something is may perhaps be discovered by threshing out two or three schemes that bring with them at least a *prima facie* claim to attention. The scheme proposed by this paper is nothing less than the vast and costly process of rebuilding London. Such a scheme (like all similar schemes) will have to fight its way through such epithets and sneers as "romantic," "chimerical," "visionary," "insane," and "impossible," and if it cannot do that it will be proved that another scheme must displace it.

The main proposition is: The Rebuilding of London offers the most adequate alleviation of present economic and social difficulties.

As to methods, times, purchases, and co-operations, these must clearly be referred to independent and competent experts. This paper is not a Parliamentary Bill; at best it is but a series of suggestions which may serve as hints to any draughtsman who may undertake the formal elaboration of such a document.

When Brunel was consulted about some difficult and expensive engineering operations, he declared that engineers had only one real difficulty to cope with, and that was money. In this case the money difficulty would not arise. If the Chancellor of the Exchequer were to ask for twenty-five millions, or four times that amount, at a very moderate interest (for it must be remembered that we have to deal with unemployed wealth as well as with unemployed men), the money would be

subscribed within a good deal less than a week.

For the purpose of rebuilding, London might be divided into eight or ten principal centres in some such way as this—

1. CIVIC: Mansion House, Guildhall, minor courts, County Council Offices, departmental bureaux; the whole constituting a crescent of magnificent buildings.

2. RAILWAYS: All the railways to be brought to one centre, say Ludgate Circus (as best for all the points of the compass), where, of course, would be erected stations, warehouses, offices, and all other necessary buildings.

3. FINANCIAL: All the banks, exchanges, insurance offices, clearing-houses, and similar institutions. The Bank of England would, of course, have to be rebuilt, and during the rebuilding of such a pile Newgate Jail (which has no business in the City) could easily be so adapted as to bring the inconvenience within the narrowest limits.

4. MARKETS: Smithfield, Covent Garden, Fish Market, Mincing Lane, Mark Lane, and others.

5. POSTAL: General Post Office, Money Order Office, Central Telegraph Office, International Cable Offices, residences, libraries, news rooms, and savings banks.

6. LITERARY: Abolish Paternoster Row; begin Fleet Street at some point on the Thames Embankment, from which it could be extended right through to Holborn, thus running north and south instead of east and west; to Fleet Street bring booksellers, publishers, stationers, printers, and all that belongs to them.

7. EDUCATIONAL: University buildings, public schools, museums, art galleries, polytechnics, School Board Offices, academies, and schools of music. The British Museum might be one of the lines of this centre.

8. DRAMATIC AND RECREATIONAL: Theatres, concert-halls, entertainment

galleries and chambers, lyric clubs, and the like, the whole constituting a new and glorified Leicester Square.

9. **POLITICAL:** Party clubs and kindred institutions forming three sides of Trafalgar Square; or this might be called the club centre—a thorough embodiment of the club life of to-day—metropolitan, national, and international.

The shipping centre is, of course, determined by the river.

It is absurd to suppose that any centre will absorb and represent everything that comes under its own designation. The scheme can only be laid down on general lines. There will always be necessary exceptions, branches, local advantages, and so forth, yet these need not seriously impair the unity or prestige of any centre. Paternoster Row represents the book trade wherever the English language is spoken, yet no one imagines that all publishers are to be found in that particular lane alone. That may illustrate the use of the term *centre* for the purpose of the present inquiry.

Such an arrangement of centres would require a large intra-mural use of electric railways, with a subway so arranged and managed as to get rid of the miserable spectacle to be seen any morning between nine and ten along the whole length of Oxford Street and other principal thoroughfares, such as orange-boxes, pails, flagons, tubs, coal-boxes, and all manner of unsightly receptacles filled with ashes and various refuse. This disgraceful state of the best thoroughfares in London can only be remedied by an adequate adaptation of subways. Can anything be less agreeable than to see dustmen bringing loads of refuse through cookshops and restaurants?

Much of the material used in the rebuilding of London might, with obvious advantage, be brought from Aberdeen, Portland, Bath, Derbyshire, and other great quarries, thus extending the quickening impulse to distant and outlying places, and perhaps suggesting the possible rebuilding of other great cities. London would bear an immense infusion of granite and Portland stone, and could well dispense with miles of depressing stucco.

The multiplication of commercial arcades, with well ventilated crystal roofs, the whole sufficiently lighted and heated,

would do much to cope even with the severest frosts or the wildest weather. Imagine Regent Street so roofed and warmed!

It will not be supposed, of course, that the rebuilding of London can be begun to-morrow morning, nor is it to be supposed that the whole scheme can be begun in its entire length and breadth this day twelvemonth. The vital point is that whenever the scheme is begun, the part, however limited, must be done with a view to the whole; that is to say, a start can be made with one centre, and made with such foresight that other centres could work up to it in the development of architectural coherence and symmetry. Why not begin with the railway centre or the market centre? But to do this properly the whole conception of the rebuilding should be reduced to plan and scale, so that there would be no danger of patchwork, or of doing and undoing by the rule of thumb. It would thus be understood from the outset that all the streets radiating from each centre should be built in keeping with their point of origin, though the reconstruction of every street might not take effect for half a century.

In connection with each centre it might be good political economy to establish a labour settlement. We hear of labour members, labour journals, labour unions, labour churches: why boggle at labour settlements? The connection with the centre need not be determined by distance. The Whitechapel settlement might be related to the financial centre. The settlement at Bermondsey might enjoy the co-operation of a rich relative by being connected with the railway centre. Along this line may lie the equalisation of rates and taxes, and the interblending of interests too often in needless collision. Why should not the new Leicester Square—the rendezvous of refinement and luxury—have its affiliated labour settlement in the New North Road or in the lowlands of Lambeth? It is one thing to dine with poor relations and another to send them a postal order.

The discussion of such matters is rendered absolutely necessary by actual social conditions. Is it too much to describe them as in a sense tragical? We are not cutting out and painting a few paper toys, or making shot answers to trivial conundrums. We are in a severe social crisis,

and on all hands we wish to deal wisely with it. Something must be done. Something must be done quickly. That something must be audacious, sweeping, statesmanlike, and perhaps unprecedented in daring and ambition. But even ambition may be patriotic and beneficent.

Suburban London would not be overlooked in a sufficient rebuilding scheme. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that suburban London is a disgrace to civilisation. Jerry-building is about the most criminal outrage that can be perpetrated. And here, as always, it is the poor who have to suffer; not the pauper class, but men trying to make both ends meet when one of the ends is a small income and the other a large family. The poor man's house should, on its own scale, be as well built as the rich man's castle, and would be so under a proper rebuilding scheme.

Supposing the idea of centres to be substantially adopted, there should almost necessarily follow a great scheme of light and water. In every centre there should be a fountain, as in Trafalgar Square (around which could be grouped figures of eminent Englishmen, not only heroic, but social and civic), which could be banked with flowers and green stuff. It might even be practicable to bring a sea-canal to London; certainly a river-way could be cut down to Brighton. The issues of such a connection with the coast no one can foresee and estimate; and who can doubt the attractiveness of a residential use of the riverside? It is beyond all doubt that London could be so rebuilt as to bring back thousands who now travel miles daily between the City and the suburbs. With noble crescents and squares, on a scale unknown at present, London might offer supreme residential attractions.

Is it too much to hope that mechanical genius will discover a means of warming the inner circles of London so as to abate or counteract the deadly effects of a long and bitter frost? It ought at all events to be comparatively easy so to regulate the water-mains as to render a water-famine impossible. And is there no way of getting rid of so-called watering-carts in summer? With electric railways intersecting underground London, could not some arrangement be contrived by which a water-train could pass under the main thoroughfares (say, twice a day

at fixed hours) and thoroughly drench the roads? They would, indeed, be fountain-trains. There are already openings from the underground railways communicating with the outer air. Can the idea not be so adapted as to secure larger uses?

As to contracts and prices, why should not the local government (whatever it may be) contract directly with all labour agencies? Then there could be no possibility of strikes and labour wars. But what about the great building firms? So much the better for them, for they could be engaged as inspectors, surveyors, or directors, whose work would be to see that all contracts were efficiently carried out in the letter and spirit of the specifications and estimates. Along with architects and designers of every name they would constitute the genius of the whole undertaking. There need be no loss of dignity and independence on their part, while there would be considerable access of status and responsibility on the part of labour. Or there is another view, Labour must go somewhere for its materials—stone, timber, iron, glass—why not go to the great building firms? And why should not the great building firms let for proper loan and rental such necessities as scaffolds, ladders, barrows, cranes, and other apparatus? By this arrangement the building firms would not suffer loss of income, yet they would get rid of many a worry and vexation. This question, however, would settle itself if a general agreement could be established as to the desirableness of rebuilding London. The greatness, the utility, and, indeed, the poetry of the whole scheme might happily affect the sense of duty all round.

Rebuilt London would solve many problems, notably the style and compass of government best suited to altered conditions. This paper does not concern itself with contending views of metropolitan government. Probably something strong is to be said for every view. But a new London would mean a rearrangement of powers and jurisdictions. Every centre might have its own mayoralty, corporation, vestry, and other official representation; or it might have all these for local use, leaving what may be called imperial questions for a central council or legislature. It is quite evident (and to this point attention must revert again and again, even at the risk of tediousness) that the occasion calls for strenuous measures. A pill for an earthquake is an outworn

policy. If we had to deal with unemployed men only, the case would be one-sided. But we have to deal also with unemployed capital—with idle millions. We have to consider an all-round situation. Business is in a pitiable plight. Competition has become aggravated into war. England is in danger of becoming less and less every day. In view of such a social condition, it is worse than ridiculous to imagine that the pressure can be relieved by a revival and extension of the stone-breaking industry. Nor can it be adequately relieved by building a few more

ships. But in the rebuilding of London all classes without exception would be included and benefited — architects, navvies, builders, designers, painters, decorators, quarrymen, colliers, seamen, and every class of mechanic, labourer, artist, and artisan, would be in full and remunerative employment. All that is merely spasmodic and fitful must be discouraged, because of the necessary and disastrous reaction. In the rebuilding of London the rational thoroughgoing revolution would proceed upon legitimate and healthy lines.





Photo by London Stereoscopic Company.

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