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CONTENTS

	Page
Background to National Planning	31
British Birds. By Seton Gordon, C.B.E.	35
The Message of the Garden. By Sir Frederick Keeble, C.B.E., F.R.S.	36
Chemical Engineering Experiments. By Prof. H. E. Watson	37
Geology and Geologists in the National War Effort. By Prof. H. H. Read, F.R.S.	39
Mechanisms of Vision. By Prof. Selig Hecht	40
Reconstruction in China. By Zing Yang Kuo	42
Obituaries :	
Viscount D'Abernon, P.C., G.C.B., G.C.M.G., F.R.S. By Sir Edward Mellanby, K.C.B., F.R.S.	43
Mr. T. E. Barr Smith. By Sir Charles Martin, C.M.G., F.R.S.	44
News and Views	45
Letters to the Editors :	
Lactic Dehydrogenase of Yeast.—S. J. Bach, Dr. Malcolm Dixon and Dr. L. G. Zerfas	48
Decrease in Glycogen Phosphorylation in Muscles <i>in vitro</i> after Adrenalectomy and Restoration with Desoxycorticosterone.—Prof. F. Verzár and C. Montigel	49
Trace-elements and 'Potato-sickness'.—Dr. C. Ellenby	50
Cotton Seed Disinfection in War-time.—A. S. Boughey	50
Scattering of Neutrons in Deuterium.—Prof. C. K. Sundarachar and Dr. J. F. Streib	51
Anomalous Viscosity of Lubricating Oil at High Velocity Gradients.—Dr. S. M. Neale	51
Research Items	52
Heterothally as an Outbreeding Mechanism in Fungi. By Dr. K. Mather	54
Halley's Work as a Geographer. By Dr. J. N. L. Baker	56
Nomenclature of <i>Cl. welchii</i> 'Toxins' Type A	56
Recent Work on the Gephyrea	57

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BACKGROUND TO NATIONAL PLANNING

THE need for reconstruction, using the word in its largest sense, is world wide. Nevertheless, it must be realized that in many ways, as Mr. Anthony Eden implied in his broadcast talk on January 4 dealing with his recent visit to the U.S.S.R., the internal affairs of any country are peculiar to that country. Schemes of reconstructions suitable for one country might therefore not be appropriate elsewhere. Here it is proposed to consider recent literature dealing with the subject in Great Britain.

The summary report recently issued of the Oxford Conference of the Town and Country Planning Association* held last spring emphasizes, if that were needed, that the value of the Conference would emerge over a period, rather than in tangible results registered during the week-end. The volume makes available for the first time a clear and comprehensive account of the six sessions and relates them to the main aim of the Conference, namely, to crystallize and carry a stage further the national planning policy outlined in the nine agreed points of the Report of the Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population. In doing so it provides an admirable yardstick by which progress can be measured, and in this respect can well be compared with Gilbert and Elizabeth McAllister's "Town and Country Planning" (see NATURE, Sept. 27, p. 353).

The need for such a background in considering the approach to post-war reconstruction, as well as for something of a yardstick for assessing progress, tends to grow rather than diminish. Such a measuring rod is essential in maintaining a sense of perspective in the growing literature of pamphlets, many of which are wholly admirable, and of the reports and studies of special aspects of the subject which are now appearing. It is also invaluable in assessing the actual proposals which may be formulated by the Government in the Bill to implement some of the findings of the Uthwatt Committee, and by local or professional authorities or institutions. The background provided by volumes of the type of the report of the Town and Country Planning Association is essential for the development of the principles by which the new pattern must be constructed and individual contributions assessed.

One of the happiest efforts to provide such a background has been Mr. F. J. Osborn's "Overture to Planning" in the Rebuilding Britain Series†, in

* Replanning Britain : Being a Summarized Report of the Oxford Conference of the Town and Country Planning Association, Spring 1941. Edited by F. E. Towndrow. Pp. 173. (London : Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1941.) 7s. 6d. net.

† Overture to Planning. By F. J. Osborn. (Rebuilding Britain Series, No. 1.) Pp. 29. (London : Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1941.) 1s. net.

which he emphasizes the need for clarifying standards of planning before they can be applied by a central department, as well as the necessity for founding planning firmly in the permanent needs of humanity. Towns must be shaped to answer to the needs of the family and industry and of the social life which enfolds them. Accordingly, it is imperative that there should be a clear idea of the new social pattern in which reconstruction will take place and of the several planes of social organization—the individual, the family, the local community, the region, the nation, and the commonwealth or family of nations.

The broadsheet "The New Pattern" in which such ideas are developed is one of the many valuable contributions which Planning (P E P) has made to the problem of re-integration and to planning for reconstruction which really meets contemporary needs and in which the several parts form a harmonious whole. In a more limited sphere the same conception inspires a pamphlet "Britain Must Rebuild" in the Democratic Order Series by Mr. Frank Pick*, whose death will be a great loss to Great Britain. While nothing short of regional planning offers the opportunity for a stable settlement, even deeper than the need for new demographic survey is that for an understanding of the social unit upon which democracy is to be built. That unit must involve all classes and carry within it no class distinction. Mr. Pick believed in the need for a correct and natural conception of the social unit, without which the social structure cannot be secure, and he emphasized the distinction between town and country. There must be a radical break between town and country; neither can be fittingly or properly built up until the social unit is defined.

This stress on the place of agriculture in planning policy—the insistence that as a first step no land may on any account be taken out of agriculture, and no land suitable for agriculture may be used for any other purpose—is a reminder that the necessity for planning agriculture for food supply makes some concrete measure of reconstruction and planning in the relations of town and country essential. Without at least the negative approach of resolute prohibition, neither utility nor amenity will be served in country or in town.

It would be unfair to characterize Mr. Pick's pamphlet as negative, but it is full of warnings as to the dangers which attend a policy of neglect or drift. A definite change in the national attitude must at some moment be realized, and the introduction of the expected Reconstruction Bill may well be the moment. Beyond the details of compensation and betterment, the interests of the

people must override the interests of the owners, and a sharp, firm line must be drawn and maintained; the needs of agriculture, amenities and recreation must be provided for before we turn to planning and the location of industry, as "Replanning Britain" abundantly makes plain.

In regard to industry, Mr. Pick insists on the concentration and not the dispersal of industry, taking the trading estate as the model. He advocates compact housing and a new approach to regulation which eliminates fixed by-laws but visits severe penalties on the builder who tries to slip through them. The basis of any plan for rebuilding Britain is transport, and here again Mr. Pick concentrates attention on the function and purpose which the road or street is to serve, and on designing it to that end, subservient to the plan or scheme for the region. He visualizes the railway station as a nuclear point and stresses the conception of the city as a social organism, the vital organs of which should be aptly placed and proportional to the work they have to do. The awkward problem of blending town and country is met by a device of wedges of park and wood tapering inward and of houses and buildings tapering outwards around the central core.

In the planning of cities and towns, site control, sentimental fondness for the old, and the lack of an architectural style are still the three major difficulties. In regard to the first, the recommendations of the Uthwatt Committee have already indicated the line of advance. The second difficulty is being shattered by enemy bombardment as well as by the general disturbance of civil life caused by evacuation, dispersal of industries and the like. The third difficulty is one primarily for the architect through his professional associations, though not for him alone. The clients as well as the architects need education and imaginative insight if we are to develop a living architecture which finds expression in appropriate cultural forms in all the new and old materials which now are to our hand.

Mr. Pick had very clear ideas on the danger inherent in functional building, on the importance of planning the countryside, including its buildings, as country, the treatment of farms and the necessity of clearing away the ruins of decayed industry as well as of avoiding either sectional settlement of building or the tyranny of the expert or bureaucrat. He gives us a vision of the possibilities once we have chosen a pattern and address ourselves resolutely to the co-operative task of achieving it; and his concluding suggestion regarding the classification and labelling of buildings according to their fitness and suitability, if not of architectural merit, might well supply a practical incentive at little cost to better planning and building.

* Britain Must Rebuild: a Pattern for Planning. By Frank Pick. (The Democratic Order, No. 17.) Pp. 64. (London: Kegan Paul and Co., Ltd., 1941.) 1s. net.

The work of educating public opinion and clarifying the issues is clearly proceeding apace, and on the whole it is probably true that in this, as in some other fields, such as production, opinion is ripe for much more drastic and resolute action than the Government has yet proposed. Moreover, not merely are the principles and background of planning being vigorously explored, but also much of the detailed investigation incidental to the framing or execution of any reconstruction plans is being actively pursued. Already three interim reports have appeared from the Reconstruction Committees of the Royal Institute of British Architects, and a recent report of the Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants makes a further contribution in this field.

The first of the reports of the Royal Institute of British Architects deals with planning and amenities, and reiterates the arguments in favour of a national planning authority. For post-war operation, any plan must be mainly constructive rather than restrictive in character, and for this reason the present exemptions from planning are undesirable. As the recent P E P broadsheet on "Publicly Owned Land" indicates, although the Forestry Commissioners, the Duchy of Lancaster, and the Commissioners of Crown Lands are not subject to the existing planning Acts, in practice they consult or co-operate with local planning authorities. Nevertheless there is much to be said for bringing the Crown lands and all other State-owned lands within the purview of the planning Acts in the normal way.

The interim report of the Royal Institute of British Architects indicates the machinery essential for a national plan, and the matters with which experts responsible for the preparation of such a plan must be concerned. The national authority should include the Ordnance Survey, at present under the Ministry of Agriculture; the value of a new map on a scale of about three inches to the mile for the purpose of a national plan, fully contoured, is stressed. The authority should include the present planning department of the Ministry of Health, but not the detailed work of housing, the trunk roads and new roads, at present dealt with by the Ministry of Transport, as well as railways, ports, canals and public utilities, essential agricultural reservations, national and regional open spaces, approval and reservation of aerodrome sites. It should be supported by regional offices to deal promptly with these matters on lines laid down by the central authority as well as by regional groupings of the local authorities, which will decide as to suitable local planning areas and any necessary financial adjustments.

This outline alone indicates how important a

contribution the establishment now of a national planning authority might well make not merely to post-war reconstruction but also to the co-ordination of our war effort.

This is equally true of the proposals, in the second interim report, on war-time housing, and in the report issued by the Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants. Both these reports emphasize the way in which present and post-war needs are related and the importance of greater co-ordination among the authorities responsible for war-time housing. The report of the Royal Institute of British Architects recommends that in new *war-time* housing the single-family *peace-time* standard house should be abandoned in favour of hostel dwellings providing minimum living and sleeping accommodation with communal facilities for feeding, heating, washing and relaxation. The choice between permanent and temporary types of building should be governed by long-term as well as by immediate considerations. Of the permanent types, two- or three-storied structures should be built with the maximum amount of standardization, and this accommodation should be designed so as to provide for conversion later to peace-time housing standards.

The same conception of new housing of a permanent nature designed to give a high degree of protection, standardized to ensure speed of erection and utilize unskilled labour and capable of being adapted later as family homes and post-war housing is found in the Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants' report, "Why Wait for the Blitz?". Much of this report is concerned with provision of rest centres and feeding-centres in and outside the towns, and with the administrative work required, including the establishment of regional councils representing local authorities, trades' councils and Government departments, with full powers to execute schemes and to organize pools of labour and materials on a regional basis. It also includes a description of the blast- and splinter-proof housing devised by Mr. O. N. Arup in the scheme prepared for Clyde-side to illustrate how it can be converted to a peace-time housing design.

The advantage of designing new war-time buildings to serve post-war needs in this way is obvious, but it may be lost entirely unless such construction is planned in harmony with long-term national and not merely sectional needs. Similar considerations give urgency to the recommendations in the Royal Institute of British Architects' first report regarding the control of design and the immediate investigation of the possibilities in the distribution of hot water and heat on an area basis, the saving of waste and salvage of useful material, the utilization of spoil heaps, disposal of refuse matter on a

mechanical basis and the avoidance of atmospheric pollution. Moreover, as the Committee points out, investigations into many aspects of both urban and rural life, such as rates and rating, public and private roads and public ownership of land are essential as a preliminary to the legislation which is already recognized as inevitable.

Since the publication of the Uthwatt Report, the memorandum on compensation and betterment submitted to that Committee by a special committee of the Royal Institute of British Architects has been published in the *Journal* of the Institute. This suggests a method of dealing with this difficult problem which will at the same time be fair to owners and retain the essential of private initiative. Like all other proposals, it insists on a plan as the first essential, and that all land should be deemed to be covered by a planning resolution. For developed land suitable areas can be readily defined for special rating for special improvements, but for undeveloped land the theory of the acquisition of development rights is unacceptable, and if any form of nationalization is to be considered it must not be allowed to be the subject of long years of argument and negotiation.

The really significant feature in the present situation is indeed, as the P E P broadsheet points out, that the question of land ownership and management has been taken to a remarkable extent out of party politics and is being considered on its merits. It is at last possible to tackle the problems of agricultural and urban land on something of a rational basis and to outline the beginnings of a twentieth-century land policy for Great Britain as a whole. This much has been achieved as a result of the P E P report on the location of industry, the Barlow Commission report and the combined effect of submarine warfare, which brought home the folly of neglecting farm and forest land, and bombing, which has at last compelled Parliament to consider extricating the cities of Great Britain from the strait-jacket of an anachronistic system which should long since have been recast.

That the Government is alive to the relation of agriculture and the reconstruction of town and industry is shown by some of Lord Reith's utterances, as well as by Mr. Greenwood in his introduction to the McAllisters' book, or indeed by Mr. Hudson's recent statement in the House of Commons regarding speculation in agricultural land and the issue of a defence regulation to prevent such speculation. That regulation is designed to prevent fresh obstacles arising to the acquisition or scheduling of land for planning purposes, and at the same time to avoid disturbance to the campaign for increased home food production. The scanty reference to such matters in the King's speech at the opening of Parliament, however, may

well indicate that it will require all the interest and force of intelligent public opinion to ensure that legislation is not unduly delayed, and that it gives full expression to the hopes which have already been aroused, and uses to the full the opportunities which the War has brought.

Moreover, the third and most recent report of the Royal Institute of British Architects' Reconstruction Committee, on structural building legislation, indicates further directions in which immediate legislation is required. Its first recommendation is the establishment of one national building code for the whole country, formulating, on a scientific basis, standards of stability, fire resistance, and methods, details and materials of construction. There should be in London one central office for general administration with local administration of the national building code. The final and most important recommendation is the setting up forthwith of a national building board as an independent authority responsible to Parliament without being incorporated in the machinery of a Government administration. This board, which might be developed from the Building Research Board and the British Standards Institution, would be responsible for developing a national building research organization, the direction and co-ordination of research on materials and methods of construction and the formulation of the national building code.

These are constructive proposals, though it may be open to doubt whether such a board should not be part of the central planning authority. In this matter of reconstruction and of replanning Britain, however, education, inquiry and action must proceed side by side. Public opinion has already been prepared for advances, and is becoming aware of the importance of land policy and its possibilities. Whether in the war years we are to lay the foundations of a constructive policy of planning town and country side by side, which will use those opportunities and enable us after the War to build a new and healthier Britain, the towns and countryside of which will serve the needs of the new social pattern and contribute to new standards of health and nutrition and living and economic security, depends on whether we bring now to that task the courage, vision and knowledge it requires. The report of the Oxford Conference of the Town and Country Planning Association is a substantial contribution to that task of education. Although it may bring to the scientific worker little in the way of new knowledge, it should at least stimulate him to take a larger share in the task of educating his fellow-citizens, a task which must proceed side by side with the numerous investigations already attempting to gather the detailed facts and knowledge upon which alone a national planning policy can be based.