DEPARTMENT OF PUBLICATIONS

I. BOOK REVIEWS

PRACTICAL TOWN PLANNING. By J. S. Nettlefold. London: St. Catherine Press. 2 shillings net.

In this book there is much theory, for it deals with the future; but the theory is constantly supported by evidence drawn from experience; the personal experience of the author who for many years has been one of the most influential leaders in housing reform in Birmingham, of all English cities perhaps the one that has actually accomplished the most. The most heart-felt criticism of the book will come from practical men, men whose methods it discusses. The greatest volume of criticism will possibly come from those students of housing—for to Mr. Nettlefold as to most Englishmen the purpose of town planning is to improve housing—who look for royal roads, who wish to be told that if some broad and general policy is adopted housing problems will solve themselves.

The book is not easy reading. It is a storehouse of fact and opinion from which other and more popular writers are sure to draw freely. Statements of policy or principle are commented upon from every point of view and supported or declared wanting on the basis of evidence from many sources. It is easy to base an argument upon one statistic, or even upon many statistics from one city. For no matter how large or old or cosmopolitan the city its evidence is necessarily one-sided. It is much more difficult to base—or to follow—an argument on statistics furnished by many cities, as Mr. Nettlefold does. To illustrate, he sets himself the task of reaching a conclusion on the vexed question of tax reform. English experience with the rating system—taxing real estate not on its capital value, but on the income it produces—has been so unhappy in some respects that English hous-

ing reformers have been known to jump to the conclusion that taxing on capital value—the American system—would go a long way, if not the whole way toward solving their problem of land overcrowding. Their argument is similar to that of our single taxers who wish us to put the whole burden on the land. They point to large undeveloped areas held out of use, because producing no income they bear no tax burden, until pressure of population forces their selling value up to exorbitant figures. With only English experience, *i. e.*, negative experience, as a guide, their belief in a capital tax seems justified. Mr. Nettlefold, while sharing this belief, examines its promises in the light of experience in cities that have tried taxation on capital value. He finds that in Paris the builder, in order to make a profit, must erect many-storied tenements instead of the English single family houses. So too in Berlin. So he goes a step further and advocates that the building be separated from the land and each taxed separately—as is done in New York, our most tenemented city.

Apparently then levying a capital tax and a heavier tax on land will, by itself, make land overcrowding worse. So he goes on and proposes that having levied the tax on the capital value of the land the government shall at the same time limit the permissible building density on that land. So we are caught between the two horns of a dilemma: Is it worse to have undeveloped areas, open spaces, in and around a city, due to the fact that the land bears a low tax or none at all and the owner consequently has little beside interest charges and perhaps special assessments to meet, or is it better to have the city built up to the limit, with pressure constantly exerted to increase the limit,

because the tax burden forces the owner to utilize his land as quickly and as thoroughly as possible? In both cases, practical experience shows, it is necessary for the government to set a limit to building density, once building has begun.

Again he takes up the question of the effect of type of dwelling upon rent. There is the constant argument of a certain kind of real estate developer that if he is permitted to overcrowd his land, pack his houses so close together that light and air can reach their windows only with difficulty, if he is permitted to stack family above family in tall tenements so that one lot will support the dwellings of an army, economy will be achieved and rents will be lowered. Testimony is produced from Brussels, Paris and Berlin. From it all he reaches two conclusions:

"1. Vital points like the restriction of building density and the consequent regulation of land values should be settled by general legislation and not left to be settled by administration.

"2. Fewer houses per acre means lower land values and lower house rents."

Though the chapter headings give an inadequate idea of the contents, they will perhaps give as clear an impression of the author's argument as could be framed. They are: Adequate access to cheap land, site values, the preparation of town planning schemes, savings, examples, delay and its causes, the need for further legislation and better administration, town planning and city extension, slum reform—incentives to landlords. All these are, of course, written with English conditions in mind; but the statement of principles, the argument, the examples quoted, are of general application.

The book is written by a man who believes in the use of new methods designed to secure higher standards of housing than are now to be found in the cities of either the new world or the old, but a man who has had long practical experience, who has subjected many of his proposals to the test of actual use, who believes in evolution rather than revolution, who accepts no plan that does not seem to him economically sound. To give even a superficial

view of all his proposals would mean to write another book. The best that can be done is to quote his own summary:

The policy and methods enunciated in the foregoing chapters may be very briefly summarized as follows:

1. Open up cheap land for building and other purposes by means of new roads and improved waterways.

2. Protect it from excessive rises in value by forbidding land sweating.

3. Protect the ratepayers against exorbitant prices for land required for public purposes by making price, not purpose, the governing factor in state or municipal land purchase.

4. Lease land (not sell it) to the workers for housing, allotments and small holdings at a price to cover cost plus a small margin of safety.

5. Reform the rating system so as to relieve industry and put a reasonable charge on those who allow land to lie idle.

6. Repeal antiquated legislation such as mortmain and entail.

7. Put town planning administration in good hands, and not in the charge of men who have axes of their own to grind, or too many friends in land-jobbing circles.

8. Appoint a strong central authority, not steeped in the old methods, but fully conversant with town planning on modern lines, armed with sufficient powers, and endowed with the necessary courage to reject bad schemes.

9. Give this central authority an adequate staff to cope with the work and compel local authorities to attend to their business instead of neglecting it.

JOHN IHLDER.

New York.

CARRYING OUT THE CITY PLAN. By Flavel Shurtleff, in collaboration with Frederick Law Olmstead. New York: Survey Associates. \$2.00.

"The practical application of American law in the execution of city plans" is the sub-title of this timely and invaluable volume. Its introduction begins thus: "The reason for preparing this book is the astonishing variation in the practical