

There still remains the problem how such a commission could be kept from ultimate, if slow, petrefaction. Even a body of experts will need the jog which a body politically responsible to the electorate, and feeling the pulse of the people, is designed to give. The ways and means of best developing the popular stimulus are deserving of the most careful study. Thus in New York Mr. Justice Cardozo has advocated the establishment as a separate State department of a Ministry of Justice to act as a clearing-house for the development of suggestions for law reform generally. In England Lord Birkenhead has pointed out in a series of essays the advantage of having the highest judicial officer of the Crown a political officer

amenable to the people as are other members of the English Cabinet.¹ But until the jog-administering technique is more thoroughly developed, it would seem that the general supervisory power of Congress, which would create the commission, could be relied on to keep it geared to action.

So far, then, as the American Bar Association proposal tends towards the development of a more modern procedure under the control of experts it is a step in advance. But since there is a legitimate doubt that such result would surely follow the adoption of the proposal, would it not be sounder policy to provide for direct and imperative, rather than indirect and problematical, expert control?

City Planning

THE NEW WASHINGTON

BY ELBERT PEETS

THE great importance to American architecture of the construction programme shortly to be undertaken in Washington for the housing of the executive departments lies not merely in the number and size of the proposed buildings, but also in the fact that the architectural ideas that shape them will gain thereby a prestige that will inevitably influence subsequent building in Washington and throughout the country. Unfortunately, it looks now as if that prestige will be given to conceptions of architecture and civic art no longer current and valid—as if a phalanx of turgidly formal boxes of sham masonry will be set up, a permanent monument to unlearned lessons.

The present plan of the Public Buildings Commission is based on the report of the Park Commission of 1901, which advised that future department buildings be concentrated around the White House. One group was to surround Lafayette Square. Another was to lie in the triangle between Pennsylvania avenue and B street, parallel with the Mall. The architectural style was

fixed in general conformity with the Capitol and a standard block plan was established, in effect, through its use in most of the buildings shown in the commission's drawings. It is the type, until recently always used for large "monumental" public buildings, in which the externally solid-seeming cube is cut to practicable room-depths by the use of interior light courts.

Burnham's commission of 1901 left a good deal of room around the proposed buildings, perhaps for the sake of the rendered plan, perhaps because it thought wide separation increased the monumental effect. The inevitable tightening of the demand for space has squeezed out these strips of lawn. The plan of the Public Buildings Commission brings most of the buildings to the sidewalk and treats as immediate or future building sites several open spaces in the older plan.

The commission of 1901 crowded the department buildings around the White House because the Constitution divides the government into legislative, judicial

¹ See a suggestive article by Professor E. R. Sunderland, "The Machinery of Procedural Reform," 22 *Michigan Law Review*, 293 (1924)

and executive branches, and because the department heads constitute the President's official family. Once a week, if it isn't too warm, the President and his Cabinet sit together for an hour or two. Therefore a hundred thousand men and women must pour in every morning from Chevy Chase, Cabin John and Anacostia, and jam themselves into twenty squares in the heart of Washington, the hottest part of the city, a business, theatre and hotel district already crowded with shoppers, tourists, job hunters and all the rest of the varied fauna of an imperial capital. As compensation the clerks will have the pleasing thought that the President can take a visiting maharajah to his window and say, "Servants' quarters—very convenient."

If there is one thing now plain about the planning of big cities it is that beyond a certain intensity concentration is wasteful, and that modern transportation makes such concentration unnecessary. Washington is ideally laid out for the distribution of traffic-objectives and for convenient communication between them. The departments are as autonomous as so many universities. They ought to be widely spaced, even on the suburban hills, where sensible offices could be built, and where the personnel could walk to work or come in their cars without producing intolerable traffic and parking congestion—where, too, an architect could make his own design, not having to follow a set of official templates.

See what the official plan is doing to Lafayette Square. In the repertory of civic art no element is fuller of æsthetic satisfaction than the plaza, an open space architecturally planned and framed. Washington has a flock of monument sites and parklets, but hardly a plaza beside this open space north of the White House. The commissioners of 1901 were admirably solicitous to restore L'Enfant's mall, but for his best surviving square—or Jefferson's, for Jefferson cut its original broad area to the present proportions—they had their own ideas. One, incredibly, was to

put the President's office building in the middle of it. That project died in the printing, but hardly more sympathetic was their proposal, now well toward execution, to surround the square with department offices.

The White House is a small building depending for its impressiveness on the difficulty of comparing it with other buildings and on the sharp contrast of its white color. Both these means of distinction will be seriously weakened when Lafayette Square is lined with fourteen hundred feet of limestone façade, more than half again as high as the White House. That is wrong both in form and in feeling. The White House is a residence and few things look more uncomfortable than a residence surrounded by non-residence buildings. Lafayette Square ought to be a transition or point of contact between the White House and the residence district of the city. It ought to have about it the residence scale and atmosphere. The houses might be used by clubs and organization headquarters that do not induce tides of population and traffic, but they ought to be of red brick and safely under the scale of the White House.

Further, if Washington is ever to be more than a swell place for an Al Sirat convention we must save some traces of the real men who have lived and worked there. The Stockton house and the Corcoran house, where Webster lived, at the north-west corner of Lafayette Square, were torn down to make room for the United States Chamber of Commerce. The homes Richardson built for Henry Adams and John Hay still stand, though quite discounted by this great glittering neighbor. One wonders whether, when it comes to the point, Washington will allow the destruction of these stately houses and of St. John's Church, on the other corner of Sixteenth street, built by Latrobe in 1816. There are two equal dangers—that they will be torn down and that they won't be. Brave designers they were who risked their plan on the willingness of the public to

make such sacrifices. But as yet they have won. There is a lot of talk about respecting the sacred plan made by L'Enfant and Washington, but not a voice is raised when some architectural Brahmin signs a fat contract and sends a wrecking crew to make rubbish of the honest work of a father of his own guild, a building that in Avila or Bangkok would be preserved without question as a national shrine.

The other group, south of Pennsylvania avenue, does not come into conflict with such a jewel in the Washington plan as is Lafayette Square. On the contrary, it is up against the knottiest sort of problem the debonair L'Enfant left in his inspired sketch—the correlation of a tangential avenue with ordinate streets. The problem is a true dilemma: a large building on an avenue must either be queer-shaped or it must stand at an angle with the avenue. The Public Buildings Commission has hit on a statesmanlike solution. Between Fifteenth street and Fourth, along Pennsylvania avenue, will be six public buildings. Three will stand parallel with the avenue and three at an angle of twenty degrees!

This enormous group—for there will be fifteen large public buildings in the triangle south of Pennsylvania avenue—might make the Imperial Fora, the palace of Diocletian, the Louvre-Tuileries and the Escorial look like Boy Scout stuff. But it won't. The Buildings Commission does not group its buildings; it parks them. The plan thumbs its nose at the concept of axiation, the soul of architectural grouping. It has never heard of the connections between buildings, the modulations of height and interval that give charm to the group at Nancy—and to Mount Vernon. As for fine courts and plazas, I suspect that they were disdained as un-American. The one opening that resembles an architectural square bears the apologising label, "Site for Future Building." The plan has the æsthetic tone of a baker's window—neat rows of nicely-frosted cakes.

Lest this seem the emotional reaction of an erratic taste in window-dressing, let me

give reasons. A group of buildings uniform in height and material, neatly laid down between gridiron streets, shows a certain primitive sense of order. More advanced peoples, the ancient Mayas, for instance, and the Modern Swedes, are not content with so naïve a design. They see that the streets chop the group into self-sufficient cubes, that there is really no unity in the place. So they cut and shape these chunks of clay until there appears a single unified organism with front and back, ends and middle. Almost invariably there is at the center of the group a large open space, capable of mastering the buildings and secondary spaces around it. The furnishings of this great room and the form and color of its walls make of it a unique and living work of art.

That there is nothing unique or alive about the present official plan is due to two general causes. First, the men who made the basic sketch thought too much in terms of general monumental atmosphere and too little about specific architectural organizations, a tendency favored by the absence of a definite programme. Second, members of the Cabinet like buildings all their own and it is easier to get appropriations, make plans, and let contracts for separate structures. These last ideas are the more difficult to dislodge because they have their cranial seats in the very men who will make the final decisions. But they are almost wholly mental bunkers which a good swing with the psychic brassie would easily overcome. The loss of the moated castle could be made only partial by clever designing and would be more than compensated for by participation in a real architectural knock-out. The planning would mean only a little more careful work and forethought. Practically, it would be an advantage to use connected buildings housing several departments. Each department or large bureau should have its separate entrance and permanent nucleus of administrative offices, but where the space of one department ends and another begins is no Balkan boundary to be

fought over. Every few years the construction of a new group or wing would make it possible to take up without waste the normal variations of space requirement. A single construction and maintenance bureau should operate the whole group, just as if it were a private office building in which the departments rented space.

As architecture the present plan is an anachronism, a travesty on the most brilliant national group of architects in the world—unless, to be modest, we except the Finns. There is no recognition in it of the California fairs of 1915, of the new Tech buildings, the Harvard Medical School, of the extension plans for the universities of Illinois and Minnesota, nor of other splendid groups of buildings in every part of the country. A comparison of the plans submitted in the Wisconsin capitol competition with those entered in the Nebraska competition should prove the folly of building now on a block plan sketched in 1901 and rendered still further out of date by incompetent revisions.

Simple Christian charity and elementary civic engineering condemn the concentration of these buildings. But if it must be done it should be done in a way that will win the beauty that may come from concentration. How to bring our architectural capacity to bear on the problem? Perhaps there is a hint in the German institution,

the *Ideen-Wettbewerb*, often limited to general plans, economically rendered. In our competitions a heavy overlay of mosaic and snappy shadows obscures the general ideas, if any. These scandalously perfect rendered drawings are not made for architects: to them a 2B sketch would often be as clear. They are made to influence the committee and to set the public agog. They have the same relation to architecture that an attorney's address to the jury has to justice. If a competition is held the programme ought to be very liberal, for it is precisely in the drafting of the programme that imagination and freedom from bureau tradition are most needed.

Competitions are a nuisance, but it is a crime to ruin this group of buildings just because of a timid desire to pass around the plums. Personality expressed in the æsthetic vitality of the finished work is the thing that counts, not the bold signature on the rendered plan. The masterly plan of the San Francisco fair somehow got itself made, though its authorship must be distributed among a dozen architects of very different predilections, not to mention Wren and Bernini and various forgotten builders of Spain, Italy and India. It is pleasant to avoid dissension and to be quite fair and to have everybody happy, but the really important thing is to get a good design.

CATHAY ON THE COAST

BY IDWAL JONES

FEELING that I would take a sympathetic interest in the obsequies, Lee Fan, a rattan-ware merchant of my acquaintance, piloted me through the dark and rain to the joss-house. This one, Wong Sim's in Brenham alley, San Francisco, is unvisited by the police and ignored by the Chinatown guides. Properly speaking, indeed, it isn't a joss-house at all, but a sort of funeral parlor and club combined.

Five very old Chinese, with soft hats on, were sitting in the gloom on kitchen chairs and playing stridently on reed flutes. This was the mourning music for bachelors, and very sad to listen to. The coronach was enlivened with brisk rakings on the banjo by a bespectacled sophomore in a pinch-back suit. Now and then the ancient corpse-washer who mooned in the corner, sucking at a pipe, pounded a brass gong with handsome effect.

Laid out in a row between the celebrants were five tea boxes, each swathed in burlap, corded with split bamboo, and marked with the chop of a tong. Inside were the jumbled bones of fifty-six deceased Chinese bachelors.

"Just came yesterday," whispered Lee Fan. "We are giving them a send-off before they get buried all proper in China."

The bones had been reposing in Chinese graveyards along the Coast for ever so many years, and after being diligently collected, had arrived in San Francisco in barrels, loaded on a truck. They would, without doubt, have been quite forgotten if the tottering old registrar at the Six Companies hadn't come across some hints of them in a sheaf of long-lost records.

It appeared that eleven of the late brothers had been house-boys in Red Bluff, Marysville and Grass Valley back in the far sixties. A few others had lived in mining camps in the Sierras. One, the records deposed, was Hong Wing, the benevolent, who spent a lifetime in building a bridge so that people might cross over a mountain stream without drowning, which happened often in his camp when they were drunk. Some were coolies who had reworked the placer tailings in Mariposa. Others had kept grocery shops on the muddy, steaming banks of the Sacramento. The rest were cooks—of uncommon gifts, so mature citizens of Ukiah will tell you with regret, for it is a deplorable fact that good cooks are scarce these days. In this one respect, at least, the Exclusion Act was a calamity.

Salut aux morts! A fat little priest came in, folded his umbrella, tinkled a bell, scattered colored paper on the boxes and drank tea over them. One sip for each dead Chinaman, fifty-six sips for the whole ghostly company.

Wong Sim's staff was slightly flustered by the magnitude of the obsequies, for as a rule only two or three dead men get the accolade at one time. Such occasions, indeed, are no longer so festive as they used to be, when *ng-ka-py* and other cheering and corrosive liquids were wont to flow, when Prohibition Agents were not, and pig was cheaper. This time the funeral baked meats were only a handful of lichee nuts. Veterans with sparse hairs on their fallow chins, and gone vacant in the head, stood in the doorway and babbled over the identity of the deceased celibates. No-