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Town Planning in the Devastated Regions of France

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IT is generally known that on March 14, 1919, the French Parliament voted a compulsory town planning law. In the devastated regions there are at least 2,600 towns and villages for which new town plans must be made and approved before any permanent reconstruction can be authorized. During 1919 practically no permanent reconstruction was started, except for the rebuilding of certain factories in the North.

During the last two months of 1919 I made an investigation for La Renaissance des Cités of the progress of town planning in these 2,600 towns and villages. At least a thousand of them had not yet succeeded in finding anybody who could make their plans for them, for all the architects, engineers and surveyors are already loaded down with more work than they can handle.

Up to December 31, 1919, about four hundred plans had been made and approved by the local town councils and submitted to the Préfet of the Department. It was estimated that nearly a thousand or more plans were in preparation. As soon as these plans were received at the Préfecture the Préfet would announce that he would open a public hearing in the village on such and such a date. These public hearings, according to the law, continue for fifteen days. Up to December 31, 225 plans had been presented at public hearings, and about 65 plans had been returned to the

Préfecture with all hearing formalities completed.

These plans with their dossiers were then presented to the Departmental Town Planning Commission, of which there was one in each of the ten liberated departments. Up to the end of the year there had been about fifty meetings of these various commissions, at which about thirty plans had been studied. There were four departments in which the commissions had not met at all.

Up to the end of the year only four plans had been definitely approved by the departmental commissions, and thirteen more had been approved tentatively. Only three plans had actually been put into effect by the municipalities. These were for Maurupt and Heiltz-le-Maurupt in the Marne, and a small village in the Nord.

The plans of all towns of over ten thousand inhabitants must be sent to the superior Town Planning Commission attached to the Ministry of the Interior at Paris. Up to February, 1920, no plan had been submitted to the Superior Commission. Meanwhile, however, the Superior Commission has had several meetings, and has issued instructions to the departmental commissions tending to improve and standardize town planning practice.

The town plans that have already been made are in about half the cases the work of architects and in the other half the work of local surveyors. In several departments,

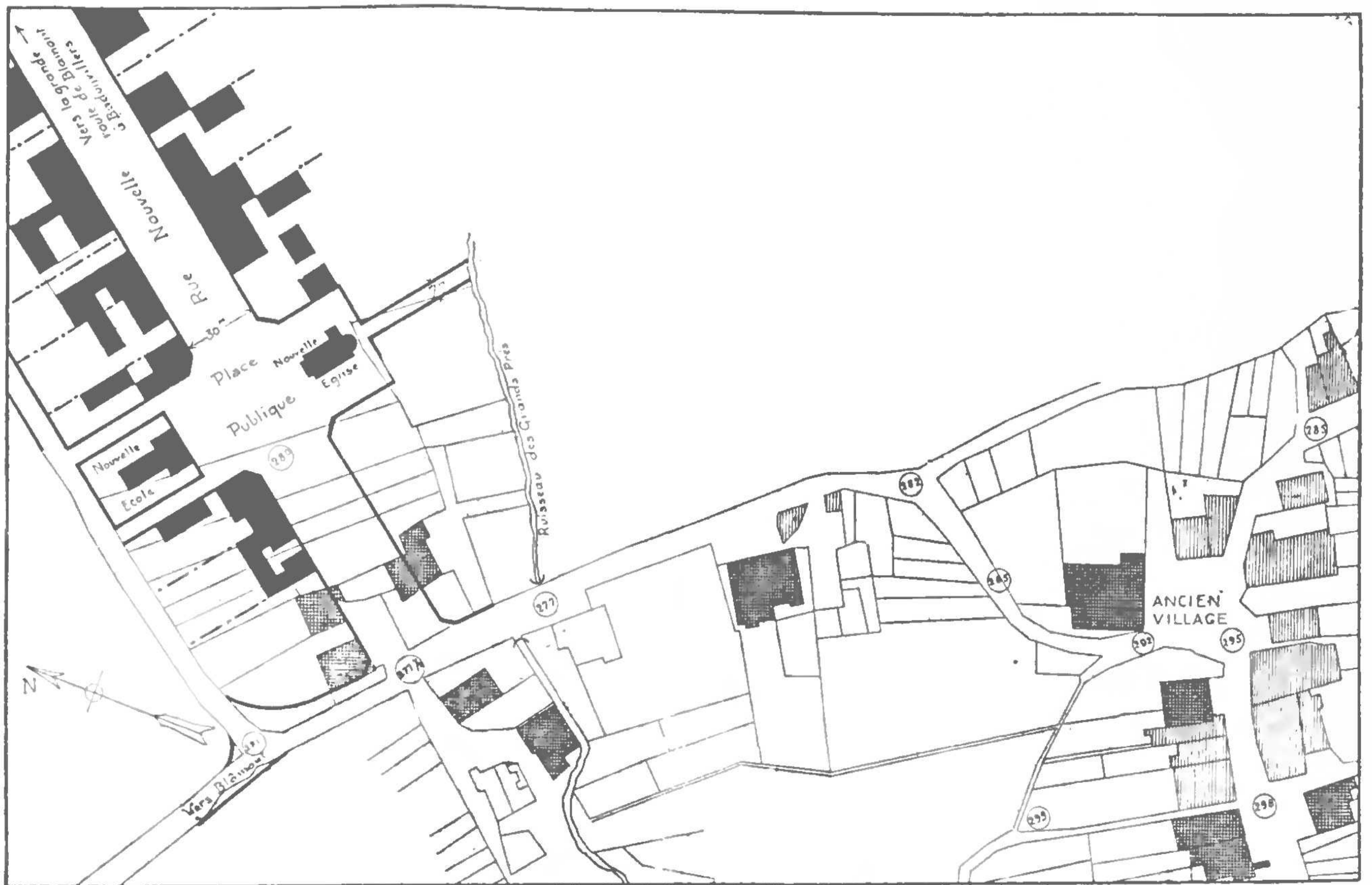
especially Pas-de-Calais, the government engineers of roads and highways have systematically made plans for new street alignments. In about half of the departments the government architect-in-chief, or his assistant, has made some sixty town plans.

Until recently the practice differed widely in the various departments as to whom the Préfet would delegate the criticism of the plans received by him, but now in almost every department both the architect-in-chief and the engineer-in-chief present their criticisms to the Departmental Town Planning Commission.

Unfortunately there was very little progress during the month of January, 1920. The towns and villages have a constantly increasing difficulty in finding competent people to make their plans. This is due to the fact that very few architects or engineers understand town planning in the sense that it is understood in England and America, and also to the fact that the town plans are not as attractively paid for as most of the other work that the French architects or engineers can do. The Minister of Liberated Regions, M. Ogier, is

seriously studying the problem now, because he realizes strongly—as do many who are interested in town planning—that unless a solution is found soon the pressure to rebuild will become so strong that the town plans will have to give way and the great advantages of the law will be lost by default. Unfortunately, also, for the devastated regions, the big competition for a new town plan for Paris, which terminated on February 1, 1920, has for months absorbed the best energy of some two hundred of the best town planners of France.

Among the four hundred plans for the towns and villages which have already been submitted to the Préfectures, there are a few that are excellent, notably the plan for Armentières by M. Bourdiex, the plan for Béthune by M. Mulard and his associates of the Groupe Cordonnier, the plan for Bapaume by La Cité Nouvelle, the plan for Noyon by M. Mars, the plans for the villages of Sissy, Regny, Mezières, and Châtillon, in the Marne, by M. le Guen, the plans for Anizy-le-Château, and Pinon, by M. Abella, the plans for Dormans by M. Fournier, the plans for Bar-le-Duc, Va-



THE VILLAGE OF HALLOVILLE, REMOVED TO A NEW SITE

New buildings are indicated by solid black; those that are still usable, by the heavy shading; the lighter shading indicates buildings totally destroyed



MAIN PORTION OF NEW PLAN FOR THE VILLAGE OF EMBERMENIL

With the consent of the property owners, the narrow, unsanitary lots, where the houses were often five rooms deep, with three interior dark rooms, are all being widened out and the whole town reparcelled.

rennes and Montfaucou by M. Remaury, the plans for a group of villages around Lunéville by M. Deville, and the plans for Rheims by La Renaissance des Cités.

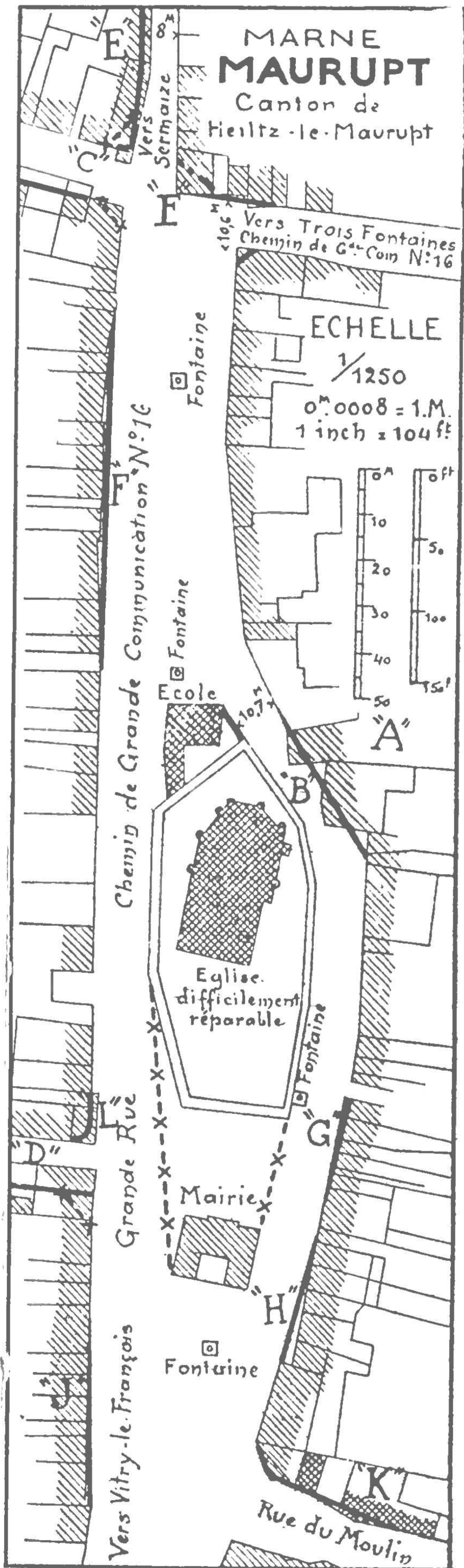
These plans have all been studied intelligently and conscientiously; the architect in each case has tried to improve circulation, hygiene, social amenity, and the appearance of the town—all with the maximum of economy and labor. Most of the other plans have fallen far short of what is recognized as good practice in England and America. Either the author has tried to make an elaborate academic plan, usually quite amateurish, or he has contented himself with straightening out all the kinks in the streets, thereby losing all the personality and the charm of the town. Both sorts of plans are wasteful, giving small value for money expended.

In various of the larger towns the town engineer or surveyor has made the plan. From the standpoint of common engineering practice, these plans are not bad, but they are quite lacking in breadth of view, in preparation for the economic and social growth of the community, and in amenity in general. This applies particularly to the plans for Arras, Rheims, Liévin and Verdun, and even to the plans made so far for

Nancy and Lille, altho Lille has recently taken a fresh start and is preparing for a competition shortly. Lille has also worked out recently a most interesting scheme for the improvement of her railroad and terminal situation.

Aside from the big town planning competition in Paris, competitions have been or are about to be held for Chauny, Longwy, Soissons and Lille. The competition for Chauny, which was held by La Renaissance des Cités, resulted in the submission of twenty or more interesting projects, and the prize scheme of Monsieur Rey is now being put into execution.

There are at least ten villages that have voted definitely to rebuild on an entirely new site, either because the former site was taken by the Government as a historical monument, as at Montfaucou; or because the town was too far from the railroad, as at Pinon in the Aisne; or because the former site was too marshy, as at Boureilles in the Meuse; or because the town was too inaccessible from the railway, as at Halloville and at Flirey in the Meurthe-et-Moselle; or because it is physically impossible to rebuild on the old site, as at Vauquois in the Meuse, where the whole top of the hill on which the town formerly



A TYPICAL CASE OF STREET ALIGNMENT IMPROVEMENT

The providing of a Place Publique and a school playground is one of the most pressing problems in the work of reconstruction. This has been thru all the stages of approval and is now law, and permanent reconstruction can be started anywhere

stood has been shot into the air so that not a vestige of the town can be found to-day.

One of the displaced towns, Pinon, has recently been adopted by La Renaissance des Cités with a view to creating on the new site a model town which will serve as an example to the whole devastated region of how a community can profit by its destruction to the great advantage of future generations.

We have heard a great deal in the newspapers about the "adoption" of towns in the devastated regions, but so far, with very few exceptions, the money which has been given has been used only for immediate relief. The only village that has been completely rebuilt is Vitrimont in the Muerthe-et-Moselle, near Lunéville, which has been reconstructed as a model village by Mrs. Crocker and Miss Polk of California. The plan, which was made by M. Charbonnier, the Architect-in-chief of the Department of Muerthe-et-Moselle, has resulted in many improvements in sanitation and comfort, especially in the removal of the manure piles from the fronts of the houses, and in replacing them by rows of trees. In the town of Hatton-Châtel in the Meuse, Miss Skinner of Holyoke, Mass., has put in a water-supply and many other improvements. The Daughters of the American Revolution are planning similar improvements in Tilloloy in the Somme, the town of Holyoke, Mass., at Aprémont in the Meuse, and the American Committee for Devastated France at Anizy-le-Château. Such adoption presents many possibilities of usefulness, for it can pay the supplementary cost over and above the war damages received from the state, needed to make local improvements.

The new Minister of the Liberated Regions, Monsieur Ogier, has been for many months the Préfet of the Meuse, and has thus had a first-hand acquaintance with the problems of the devastated regions. He is quite sympathetic with the aims and ideals of the town planners, and there is every reason to hope that town planning in the devastated regions will receive a new impetus. His assistant in charge of town planning and permanent reconstruction is M. Chiffot, the well-known French architect and Grand Prix de Rome. With his collaborators, the architects-in-chief in each of the ten liberated departments, he is now reorganizing the architectural and town planning service of the Ministry.

A number of the members of the French town planning society have taken an active part in making town plans for the devastated regions. A group of nine of them, under the name of the Bureau Technique des Plans de Villes, have made many projects. The Musée Social has been most helpful with its conferences and publications on town planning and allied subjects. At the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Monsieur Jaussely has been giving a series of lectures on town planning. The Ecole Supérieure d'Art Publique has been giving courses of lectures on town planning. The Garden City Association has conducted a most useful propaganda for improved housing and town planning.

The Office Publiques des Habitations Bon Marchés, under the leadership of M. Sellier, is creating five garden suburbs around Paris, and is at present holding a big exhibition of town planning and housing. The city of Lyons is preparing a similar exhibition.

La Renaissance des Cités, which has brought together a number of the leading specialists and authorities on town improvement, has for three years been conducting an educational campaign in the devastated regions and giving free advice of the best sort to government and town officials and others to help them improve their town plans, hygiene, social welfare and their legal or administrative operation.

I began work with La Renaissance des Cités in October, 1919. Before that time the organization had helped on the plans for Chauny, Albert and Tracy-le-Val. Since October I have spent all of my time traveling up and down the devastated regions, working unofficially but directly with the departmental and local authorities, trying to help them improve the plans that have been submitted to them. Whenever possible I have submitted these plans to the Technical Commission of La Renaissance des Cités for their criticism. Meanwhile, wherever I have found a plan that was typical of what to do, or what not to do, I have copied it, with comments and criticisms attached, and La Renaissance des Cités has made prints which have been sent out to the Government and local authorities to serve as object lessons for

town planning improvement. Ten such studies have already been sent out, and twenty more are in preparation.

I have also prepared for La Renaissance des Cités a short handbook of the fundamental principles of town planning, based on the problems that I found to be recurrent in the plans already submitted at the préfectures. This is now being printed, and will be widely distributed. Several of the préfets of the liberated departments have asked us to take part in the deliberations of the departmental town planning commissions as technical advisers. Many local authorities have come to us for technical advice.

The Town Council of Rheims, at the suggestion of the Reconstruction Coöperative Society of Rheims, has asked us to take in hand the plan for Rheims, which was refused and sent back by the Departmental Commission on November 12, 1919. At the unanimous request of the Town Council we are now making a general plan in which we are trying to coördinate all that is best in the plans heretofore submitted. Our preliminary scheme has already been unanimously adopted by the Town Council, and the public hearings began on February 23.

Meanwhile, La Renaissance des Cités is an advisory and not a creative body, and does not wish in any way to replace the professional town planners. We have created a Commission of Experts for Rheims, consisting of M. Portevin, M. Rédont, M. Sue and M. Abella. Together, we hope before the middle of April to have completed a model plan which will serve as an object lesson for the whole devastated region. Plans are already under way for a number of cities in the interior of France, such as Nice, Lyons, Clermont-Ferrand, Aix-les-Bains, and many others.

In general, the future is very bright, but it is necessarily taking a long time to get started, because while France has a wonderful background on the esthetic side of town planning, she has had comparatively little experience with the social or economic phases—at least as they are understood in England and America. Any documents that England or America can send her on these lines are eagerly devoured.