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Fundamental ideas governing the construction of blocks of flats in our towns

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by Werner M. Moser

The continual expansion of built-up areas (e. g. in the canton of Zürich 11.27 sq.km. from 1939 to 1947), the increase in population (in Switzerland by 10% since 1930) the increasing proportion of urban population (7.4% in 1850 and already 31% in 1941), the restriction of free areas in the interiors themselves of the communities (in Zürich 50 ha. per year), all result in a "land consumption" ever more considerable, which is becoming an urgent problem: if this continues, in a century our whole country will be nothing but land choked by factories and houses. The checking of the urban development by administrative measures (certificates of registration) would menace our democratic liberties. The question is then whether it is not better to construct dense colonies of dwelling houses on the periphery of urban agglomerations. Obviously there is no question of repeating the errors of the end of the 19th. century which produced those unfortunate tenements that by their very existence are a warning of what we must not do. But, on the other hand, the "pyramidal" conception favoured up to now (tall buildings in the centre only, becoming lower towards the outside, and with, at the circumference, rows of one storied houses) results in a far too great waste of ground for it to be considered desirable. If only the matter is dealt with by a united effort between architects and authorities to raise the standard architecturally and technically, the big tenement house also may have its advantages: the economy of land, drainage, ways of access and all kinds of facilities for the users. It is certain that houses which are too high (8 to 12 stories) – a purely speculative project according to some – would aggravate the situation from the human point of view and would probably threaten the harmony of the districts as a whole. But buildings of from 4 to 6 stories (with terraces replacing the gardens), providing they are adjusted to a well drawn-up plan of urbanism, should be given serious consideration. Furthermore, in spite of the conservative attitude they tend to evoke, it cannot be said that tall buildings in themselves are incapable of satisfying the needs of the moment. We can learn something from the example of the "towers" (10 to 12 stories with a very restricted base area) employed in nordic lands (even though in Scandinavia these towers have been too mass produced and, moreover, house tenants who are socially equal, in spite of the fact that experience teaches us that the best basis for a good understanding between co-tenants is that they should belong to different social classes). On the other hand, the big tenement houses at Lausanne and Geneva (Champel, St. Jean) show how much this type of building transforms a site. In Switzerland in particular the irregularity of the land would demand, if the "architectural collaboration" of nature is to be retained, the construction of "mixed zones", that is with different types of buildings ranging from the bungalow to the high and even very high building. And what is more, this method would avoid the monotony which is so continually evident in many recently constructed housing districts, especially if care is taken to arrange a sufficient number of free areas between the high buildings.

To sum up: (1) The tenement house of from 6 to 12 stories (including the "apartment house" type) constitutes a type of dwelling which answers the present demand. In order to avoid erecting "barracks" in the likeness of the old blocks of flats the same qualities of forethought and execution as are devoted to our best one-storied houses must also be applied to these high buildings. (2) The type of high building which allows of a reasonable utilisation of the ground space should not be worked out without at the same time planning

extensive free areas round it, or there is a risk of creating new slums. (3) If the high building has the advantage of breaking up the uniformity which is frequently to be found in our new districts, and of contributing to a desirable variety in the tenants, its size claims that the plans shall not be put into effect before the most careful scrutiny of all the architectural and urban problems involved.

The Painter Willy Suter

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by Edouard Müller

W. S., who is just thirty years old, was introduced to the public during the war in an exhibition at the Moos galleries in Geneva. Since then our confidence and admiration of his efforts have increased by leaps and bounds. The soundest of principles were instilled in him by Ernst Gubler at the School of Arts and Crafts at Zürich. He started his quest of light at Geneva and has lately continued his search in Italy and Provence. S's art, which scorns the anecdote as well as gratuitous and intellectual enigmas, achieves its unity and continuity through a personal conception of painting and style. He expresses himself through a plastic vocabulary which is eminently human because his way of expressing his desires and sense of order is all his own.

Georges Froidevaux

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by J. M. Nussbaum

The town of Chaux-de-Fonds, a centre of the watch-making industry and thus preoccupied with technical matters, is nevertheless the home of one of the most progressive art schools in Switzerland. G. F. is one of its most worthy representatives. He was born of a family of watch-makers in 1911 and at an early age became passionately fond of drawing. After attending for a brief period St. Charles' School at Romont, which he soon had to leave because of restricted circumstances, he started work as a nickel-plater, which he has been for 22 years. He enrolled for the afternoon and evening classes in the Art School and was taught by the sculptor Léon Perrin. All his leisure hours were taken up by painting; he did not leave his town except for a brief stay of two months at Chartres, and another stay, also of two months, at Paris, where he worked with Colarossi and at the Louvre. He married in 1940 and once more became a craftsman. For three consecutive years (1944, 1945, 1946) he received a Federal Bursary. The most recent National Exhibitions at Berne and Geneva included his work and he was thus enabled to realise his dream of working only in the morning and painting for the rest of the day. The fundamental law of F.'s art is simplicity. Everything in it is reduced to unity of composition and style, which are themselves created by the coloration alone with no attention paid to the subject: the painting is all that counts. The conception is fundamentally cubist but this does not prevent F. from endeavouring at the same time to rediscover that which is human. His is an exacting creation in which are united the intellectual virtues of pure art, the beauty of a severe and refined sensibility and a surprising charm.

Marcel Poncet

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Born at Geneva in 1894, studied at the Collège de Calvin, at Beaux-Arts under Eugène Gilliard – lived in Paris, at Chartres became enraptured by the art of stained-glass windows. Windows of St. Paul's at Geneva, Lausanne Cathedral, Gstaad, Schlieren, St. Ouen, Wynigen, St. Maurice: mosaics at Lyon, Gstaad, Paris and Lausanne. Lives at Vich near Lausanne.