

DISCUSSION.

Mr. J. B. Barlow (the President of the Institute of Architects) said he was very glad to take part in the discussion on this able, exhaustive, and most opportune paper. Some time ago, in an address to the members of the Institute of Architects, he had had occasion to say some very strong things about civic mismanagement, but the author had said much stronger things. The gentlemen who write to papers, and the papers themselves, had now joined in the censure, and all the people were very indignant and very wrathful, but he felt certain that had the plague died out six weeks ago that three months hence things would have resumed their usual course. We would have gone on on the same old course and the same old policy of drift. The pestilence has barely had time to become epidemic here, but there was one plague that was epidemic in Sydney, and that was the plague of apathy, and this was more difficult to deal with than the bubonic variety. He would not waste time in speaking of insignificant things, and would not say much about the City Council, but the more one thought of it the less one thought of it. The Council stood to-day on the very verge of municipal extinction, but with characteristic fatuity they seemed unable to realise their position. The speaker was very glad to see the author's well-merited compliment to Mr. Lyne for his recent wise and statesmanlike action in practically assuming control of the city. The Darling Harbour resumptions were undoubtedly a large step towards the regeneration of the city, but it should be looked upon merely as a preliminary to the whole remodelling eventually of the whole city. Of course, it was not possible to remodel the whole of Sydney in any limited time, but it was quite possible to have plans prepared and the work to go forward little by little, and as the old structures became uninhabitable the new buildings could be erected

with the new alignment, and made to meet the requirements of the new plan; but such a scheme would be only possible with a County Council or some such form of government as could then be consummated. We should not allow a penny of the public money to be spent on any scheme which did not provide for advancement in a systematic way. The author referred to the custom we had unhappily fallen into of looking to the Government for everything needed, and suggested as a remedy that there should be a multiplication of Boards, such as the Water and Sewerage Board and the Railway Commissioners, but the speaker could not agree with him. It seemed to him that there were too many Boards already, and what was required was unification, not multiplication. It might be advisable, till we could have a County Council, to resuscitate the City Improvement Board, with larger powers, but certainly not—as recently suggested—with two members of the City Council upon it, and that one of the members on the present Board might resign his seat in favour of Alderman Dean. Such a movement would be fatal to any advancement, but this would be only temporary, as there would then be divided control, and this was the cause of the present trouble. He believed a Harbour Trust to be an absolute necessity. This measure of reform had been delayed too long, and during that time of delay we had done nothing but spoil that which Nature had made so fair. He was glad to see that engineers, who were supposed to be so practical as opposed to sentimental, take such an apparently absorbing interest in city affairs, and he hoped that in the constitution of the Harbour Board both the architectural and engineering professions would be represented. Men like his auditors and himself should take an interest in these things, and ability should be recognised, and acknowledged men should fill these positions of responsibility rather than social guinea-pigs and—what should he say?—political rouseabouts. He thanked the Association for the invitation to be present.

Mr. Benjamin Backhouse, M.L.C., said he had not intended to speak, but the President of the Institute, with which he had for many years been associated, had given him confidence to speak on one or two things. The paper

was most instructive, the early part being a history of no uncommon interest, and the author, with his long experience, had done what many other men could not do so well. It was on the whole one of the best-written and well-thought-out papers the speaker had read for a long time. He would like to say a word or two on the low-level sewerage scheme. About 16 or 17 years ago, when the present system was being initiated, Sir James Martin wrote some capable letters upon the matter under the heading, "The Pestilence that Walketh in Darkness, the Destruction that Wasteth at Noonday." In consequence of these letters the speaker wrote to Captain Lieuruer, who was then initiating his pneumatic system of sewerage, and in the city there was a great deal of agitation at the time, with the result that the present system was adopted, with the blundering result of not dealing with the sewer gases, that was not making them harmless, as they should be. The author referred to what was called "Thornton's Smelling Bottle," and drew attention to the fact that the furnace there provided had never been used. A short time ago Mr. McGarvie Smith was instructed by the Water and Sewerage Board to make a report, and a hundred guinea fee was paid on the question of dealing with sewer gas, which the Board had found extremely troublesome., That report was furnished, and practically thrown under the table. It was still in existence. He remembered some recent occurrences in Waverley that were brought under the notice of the House, where some ventilators had been placed close against windows, and in consequence of belching foul gases into the houses had occasioned illnesses. As showing that the Courts might hold the municipality responsible, he had just read in the "Saturday Review" where £600 compensation had been obtained by the executors of a man who had died under similar circumstances. It was incumbent upon the authorities to prevent the gases from accumulating in the sewers. In reference to Lieuruer's system, some years ago when in London the speaker had been introduced to Haekslow, and this gentleman said: "I have never doubted that Captain Lieuruer's system would act well so long as it should be intelligently managed." When in Berlin it was

found that the sewage farms a few years ago had so saturated the vicinity that the river was filled with the matter that the farms could not deal with. One of the remedies for municipal apathy and maladministration was the extension of the franchise.

Mr. Reid (President, School of Arts) congratulated the Association on its premises. It had for many years been connected with the School of Arts, and personally he regretted that the connection had not continued. He was pleased to read the aesthetics of this matter mentioned in the paper, and also the references to that extraordinary structure in George-street—the so-called Market Buildings. He thought such an enormous amount of money would have been better spent in the erection of an Art Gallery. The author had pointed out that the site and building were valued at £700,000, and the revenue was something like £60,000 or £70,000 a year. To the speaker's mind the shops were not shops at all, and the basement was not convenient. It was extraordinary that the aldermen, who would never do such things in their individual capacity, should as a body act in such an unintelligent manner. He was sorry that it should be necessary to find fault with the City Council. The tendency now-a-days was to extend the powers of the municipality, but in Sydney the tendency seemed to be to restrict them, and the State had stepped in to do what the Corporation could do itself. The paper deserved to be very widely read, and he hoped the effect would be to stir up the apathy of the citizens of Sydney to do something better in the future.

Captain Vine Hall said there was one point in the paper that he desired to say something about, and which perhaps he was justified in mentioning, and that was the harbour question. He had no doubt that many of those in the room had often admired and been struck with the extraordinary development of shipping facilities which are afforded to the shipping community and the city generally in the port of Liverpool. On the northern side there were six or seven miles of splendid dock accommodation, with warehouses and a railway, and he believed an overhead railway; and the southern side was as well equipped. The Mersey Docks and Harbour Board

which managed this vast business obtained its money to invest in these matters by means of debentures, which it was authorised to raise at a very low rate of interest. Such an organisation was this that it was the blue ribbon of a ship owner's, merchant's, or shipping man's career to be elected a member of the Board. The Board was consequently managed by men of the keenest business intellect to be found in that great northern city of Liverpool, and remarkably well managed to. Of course, it must be understood that the business was managed through the ability of the most able technical assistants they could obtain in England. The assets of this vast shipping property were very large, and where large assets were to be handled there must be brains if they were to be handled successfully. The Mersey Docks and Harbour Trust had and paid for brains, and their property was handled successfully.

Mr. C. McAlister said we were all very prompt at censuring the policy of the local authorities, but we must consider that where great things had been done municipally they were in older cities, whilst Sydney was so young. A city to be in any way up to date must have its periods of infancy, growth, and maturity. The present circumstances were the first compulsory ones Sydney had had to front to any extent. Sydney had had a bad start to begin with; it was not laid out—it simply grew from time to time. Another advantage that we had not was a population of leisured men, as in Great Britain. All the people in this city had to bustle more or less for their living, and had no time to study the aestheticism of municipal improvements and the laying out of streets, etc. The Liverpool and Hull Docks had taken nearly a hundred years to bring to their present state of perfection, and Sydney would in the gradual process of evolution take on the same characteristics. The first qualification for any man to fill a position was brains, and he did not believe in the election of men to fill positions where brains were requisite. The best way was to appoint a man who had been a proved success and whose fame had become national, and offer him an inducement in the shape of three or four or five thousand pounds per year, but to stop at nothing rea-

sonable with a proved and able man. If he had his way the present councillors would be thrown out on their ears at once.

Mr. J. L. C. Rae said he had read the paper with the greatest of interest, as he had often read his able letters in the newspapers, all distinctly for the good of the colony in some shape or other, and containing suggestions that, if acted upon, would certainly have made the city of Sydney far and away better than she was to-day. At a time like the present, when there was a dread disease amongst us, it behoved all of us to think seriously about what should be done to bring things into a better condition, and not only to think, but to voice their thoughts and help those who through lack of opportunity are unable to think and speak for themselves. Cleanliness was next to Godliness, and they should do all in their power to do away with uncleanness. The Hon. Mr. Backhouse had quoted Scripture, and that reminded the speaker of the quotation, "He that is filthy let him be filthy still." But the age had gone by for any such thought, and now it was rather, "He that is filthy let him be made clean." And it became them all, with more or less knowledge in scientific professions, to do all that they could in electing men who had the government of the city and suburbs in their hands who were the ablest, absolutely irrespective of any personal thoughts whatever.

The Hon. B. Backhouse, referring to the laying out of streets, said that in the meantime when a Trust was formed they should have power in this direction, although when a Greater Sydney scheme was carried into being ample powers should be given.

Mr. Selve said that he had been called upon to read a paper at short notice—he supposed as a kind of forlorn hope—and he chose this topic as the most immediately interesting. Mr. Barlow had rather misunderstood the reference to the multiplication of Boards. The reference was intended for Boards for Sydney, Goulburn, and other cities, or in another way the initiation of local government, and the trend was against the division of local authority. In part of the paper he spoke of the overlapping—for instance, the City Improvement Board

clashing with the City Council. There were at present five or six separate authorities, all of them with power to pull up the streets, and some day, what with the gas mains, hydraulic mains, tramways, etc., there would be a great sensation in George-street. He had long before the electric tram advocated a subway for the hydraulic pipes, sewer pipes, electric cables, etc. Money had been spent in making a cable subway, and very little extra would have prevented the pulling up of the streets. A Greater Sydney Board would have sole control of the streets in that way. Mr. Backhouse had referred to the Lieurner system of sewage disposal, which was the partial vacuum principle, and the system was becoming a great success. The whole of the sewage was discharged by exhaustion, and there was no possibility of leakage. A modification was being brought into use here in the shore system, where the sewage was lifted from the low level to the high. In our sewerage system immense sums of money had been spent in show work. He meant in work that was highly necessary, but performed in an unnecessarily costly manner. For instance, in the Bondi sewer there were bricks used at a cost of £6 per thousand, whilst in the case of similar work in Great Britain the bricks costs only 15s. per 1000. He wished to point out that in the Liverpool docks, so well spoken of by Captain Vine Hall, they had the advantage of a tidal estuary. Mr. Rae, as the apostle of cleanliness, was on the right track. Speaking of the scheme of resumption, he thought the better plan would be to mature a great scheme into which it was not necessary to hastily enter, and should be performed in sections. The scheme should have the full light of public opinion before being brought into force. No one man has the necessary knowledge to say what is the best course to pursue in remodelling Darling Harbor. He thanked them for their reception of his paper.

The meeting then terminated.