



Building Guilds.

Their Working in England.

An enquiry into the working of the Building Guilds in England by Mr. Ernest Selley at the instigation of *Garden Cities and Town Planning* has been published in the June issue of that paper. Mr. Selley is not connected with the Guild movement, but gives his report as a skilled, unbiassed investigator on similar subjects. As such the report makes excellent reading, and we feel sure our readers will be intensely interested in this movement which looks as if it held the key to the solution of so many of our labour difficulties. The writer says:—

A year ago bodies of building trade operatives in various districts were passing resolutions in favour of Building Guilds. Many people thought these resolutions were mere expressions of pious opinion; but to-day Building Guild contracts are being carried out in different parts of the country, and the experiment is being watched with intense interest.

With a view to placing on record some of the results already obtained by the Guilds, I visited a number of the sites where Guild contracts were being carried out. It is too early, however, to submit the Guild schemes to a complete test; this will not be possible until some of the contracts have been completed and the accounts settled.

THE AIM OF THE GUILDS.

The Building Guild is an entirely new type of industrial organisation. One of its fundamental principles is declared to be the establishment of complete democratic control within the industry. The final control "rests with the people who do the work, and not the people who put up the money." The Guild guarantees continuous pay to its workers during wet time, frost, sickness and holidays, and devotes the whole of its surplus earnings not to dividends, but to the improvement of its service. It regards capital as "the hired equipment of industry to be paid for, if required, at limited rates without powers of control." Moreover, it maintains complete publicity as to costs, charges and prices.

The watchword of the Guild is "Organised Public Service." The idea is to unite all branches of the industry—administrative, technical, clerical and operative—for a common purpose: the service of the community. The immediate aim is to build as rapidly and economically as possible the houses so urgently needed by the working classes. This should provide plenty of work for Guildsmen in the near future. They do not, however, intend to dissolve the Guilds, or to cease operations, when the housing shortage has been met: they mean to

contract for any kind of building work—churches, cinemas, public buildings, and even jobbing or repair work. (The Manchester Guild has completed £1,500 worth of plumbing.) They claim that the Guild will be able to tackle any job usually undertaken by the ordinary contractor. They say that the way to solve the problem of production is to substitute enthusiasm for fear as the driving force in industry. The speed at which the men work directly affects labour costs. The Guilds, it is said, will set up a new and better industrial order, in which those who work with their heads and those who work with their hands will co-operate freely in producing those things which the community needs. Co-operation will take the place of disunion. The team spirit will supersede the instinct of the horde. No one is to be in the industry to get what he can out of it for himself: rivalries will occur in the giving of service, not in the getting of it. Labour is not to be a mere commodity to be bought and sold, or used or cast aside indifferently. Guildsmen are to have a new status as free men, working in a democratic comradeship of service. Last, but not least, the Guilds are to revive the true craft spirit of the Middle Ages. The Modern Guild organisation is to provide scope for the craftsman which no industrial order has provided since the time of the Mediæval Guilds.

Guildsmen claim that, apart from theory, experience so far proves:

1. That industrial control by Guild workers has been successfully established;
2. That houses are being built quicker, better, and cheaper by the Guilds than by private contractors.

The object of this inquiry was to ascertain (as far as it can be discovered at present) whether the Guilds were making good these claims.

THE SCOPE OF THE INQUIRY.

It was not possible to visit all the schemes. London and Manchester were selected as representative areas. Five Guild housing contracts were inspected, and the work thoroughly investigated. The schemes visited included sites at Walthamstow and Greenwich (London Guild), Walkden (Bolton Guild), and Clayton and Weaste (Manchester Guild). These five contracts involve the building of 986 houses, with a possibility of additional contracts involving a further thousand houses if the work on the existing contracts is carried out expeditiously and economically. At the time of the inquiry (March and April, 1921) no houses had been completed on any of these schemes; but at Walthamstow, Greenwich and