

New Ulm Review.

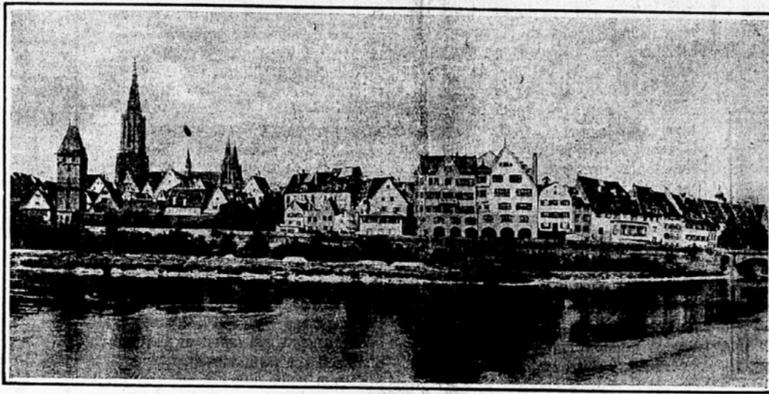
EASTER



NUMBER



Mayor Von Wagner



Ulm on the Danube

A Study in Municipal Land Policy and Its Provision for Workingmen's Homes



City Architect Holch

Ulm, a city of some 58,000 inhabitants, on the Danube, in the German state of Wuertemberg, just across the line from Bavaria, is an ancient free city of the old Empire, "the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation," proud of its age and former glories in wealth, art, and architecture, equally proud of its present position and its future prospects; proud of its achievements as a land owner and builder of homes; proud, too, of the distinguished Oberbuergermeister Dr. von Wagner, under whose leadership great and, perhaps one may safely say, almost unique achievements have been accomplished.

Ulm finds mention in 854 as the seat of a Carolingian palace, which indicates that even at that early day it had a peculiar significance. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries it was one of the most important imperial cities of South Germany, being famed on account of its wealth as well as its grand cathedral, the Muenster, as is well brought out in the lines:—

"Venediger Macht, Augsburgs Pracht,
Nuernberger Witz, Strassburger
G'schuetz,
Ulmer Geld geht durch die Welt!"

Which is translated in one of the city's publications prepared for English speaking visitors, as follows:

"Venice's Power, Augsburg's Splendor,
Nuernberg's Wit, Strassburg's Guns,
Money of Ulm goes through the World!"

I have already mentioned the situation of Ulm. The Danube is navigable for small craft from here downward, and is joined at this point by two other rivers, the Blau and the Iller; so that we have the water views without which a city always lacks something. The country is one of hills, forests, valleys, rivers, pleasing and picturesque, but not grand—a sort of landscape amid which it is good to live year in and year out. Delightful streets wind through the city to ends picturesquely closed; here and there old courts still hold the forms in which skilled artisans gave expression to their love of the quaint and the beautiful; and at many a turn are fascinating

buildings showing the ancient craftsmen's joy in their work.

The city charms us as perhaps no modern city does. It may not be altogether easy to explain our feelings; but after all a little reflection will help us to understand why we are thrilled when seeing Ulm on a beautiful day. Here is the mellow beauty which age and age alone gives to a city—softened and blended colors, smoothed corners and lines, art and nature fused into an harmonious whole. We find "Nature assisted," as she always should be in cities, with wise discretion. This is seen in the green turf and in the shrubs and bushes, not too closely trimmed, which appear to belong precisely where they are. The city seems to have grown out of the ground, as it were, and to have been only touched here and there gently and lovingly by the hands of man.

The engineer has been at work, but he has himself been an artist or dominated by the artist. The untamed engineer, as we see him in many a modern American city, knows only straight lines and grades on one even ascent or decline. He loves uniformities. Sidewalks must always be so many inches from the lot line. Trees must always be outside the sidewalk and at one uniform distance from the curb; all this regardless of topography—up-hill and down-hill, hill-top and valley—regardless of views and vistas that are destroyed or that might be called into existence but are not. If the views and vistas do not fit into mechanical uniformities, why, so much the worse for the views and vistas! The untamed engineer attacks his urban problem with violence; the artist-engineer woos nature caressingly. He knows that every street has its own problem, every elevation, every river, every lake front; and, recognizing the place of utilitarian straight lines, still he does not forget that the curve is the line of beauty. A small hill need not always be pierced; perhaps a better effect is produced by going round it, or by a winding and gentle ascent. Rivers and lakes present rare opportunities for beautiful treatment, which must be used with painstaking and loving care, to combine the utilitarian purposes of commerce and manufactures with the aesthetic effects never to be lost sight of in our strivings for the "city beautiful."

Parts of picturesque walls and old city gates are retained, and moats otherwise useless long ago add attractive touches to Ulm. Quaint low buildings on the walls still afford homes and connect the old with the new.

But modern economic life is not neglected. Indeed, German cities vie with American cities in rapid development; in them industry is sought and cherished, and a pulsating, vigorous life, is forging ahead often setting examples to the New World.

The Common Interest.

In Ulm we find private activity supplemented by public activity showing a common thought, a common life, a love in common for the affairs in common. An illustration is afforded by the Rathaus or City Hall, in its building and in its rebuilding. It dates from the four-

teenth century, but was restored in the present century. Happily, it was found possible to restore the interesting old paintings on the buildings and also the verses under them, when the Rathaus was repainted with mineral colors. The entire structure presents a most artistic appearance. It charms us with the old, the quaint, the picturesque, and yet combines all this with cleanness, neatness, and such a good state of preservation that we can hardly realize the great age of the structure. The Rathaus embraces a fine residence for the mayor, and, strange as this would seem in the United States, it strikes me as most fitting; for he lives at the very heart of those municipal activities to which he has devoted his life.

Another interest is the Muenster, which has the highest church tower in the world, and is the largest Gothic church in Germany with the single exception of the Cologne cathedral. It was begun in 1373, nearly one hundred years before the discovery of America and generation after generation even to the present have poured into it their labor, their treasure, their affection, making it an expression of the common life.

The city's emblem is the sparrow with a straw in its beak, as the bird showed the builders at a critical juncture how to continue their work. The problem was to get a beam through an opening not so wide as the beam was long. The mayor and city councilors struggled in vain with the problem. Wise men from other cities were called in, but all their good advice proved unequal to the task. When lo! one day a sparrow approached with a straw carried crosswise in his beak. Near a very narrow opening in the Muenster through which he must pass to his nest, he turned the straw lengthwise and went through easily. Thus we know that the problem was solved and that the work then went on; for do we not see the great church today standing completed? So even animals were taken into the common life, for that was a naive age.

And this common stream of life flows on, the feeling and the thinking in common. And we find Mayor von Wagner buying land for the city, and buying

more and more land, encountering opposition at times; which, however, gradually diminishes; and we find the municipality and its foundations (e. g., the hospital) owning three-fourths of the land within the city boundaries and energetically building homes for the working people and the less well-to-do generally, selling the houses outright to encourage home ownership, but selling them under many restrictions, carefully worked out, having as their aim the well-being of all the purchasers as well as the health, safety, security, and beauty of the city as a whole. Interests are wisely co-ordinated in a harmonious development of parts, which promotes the general esthetic appearance of the city.

This all suggests a contrast painful to the American, who is forced as he admires Ulm to think of the haphazard, planless development of nearly all cities in our country, where frequently the absence of a building line gives opportunity to the greedy and egotistic to push out their buildings beyond others, even to the ruin of the beauty of an entire square; and, where the absence of regulations on the common interest makes possible the injury of beautiful houses by stables, to say nothing of structures of all kinds altogether out of place in their environment, and where all is done in the name of liberty—liberty meaning to many the right to use their property as to injure that of their neighbors as greatly as possible.

Landownership.

Let us consider the situation of Ulm with respect to landownership. In the olden time a part of the wealth of the Imperial free city flowed into landed property, and Ulm was early a great

proprietor. The city also was a large owner of buildings. Public foundations, such as the hospital, likewise owned land and buildings. But one bad effect of wars as seen in contributions and forced payments was the necessity of selling part of this real estate. Nevertheless, in 1802, when Ulm became part of the kingdom of Bavaria (it became part of Wuertemberg in 1810) the forests owned by the city and its public foundations amounted to nearly 25,000 acres; the city also owned 242 buildings, of which 177 were along the most.

But the nineteenth century up to the close of the eighties witnessed a diminution of the area of the publicly owned land. For this there appears to have been several reasons. The mayor says that increase of the money capital of the city was desired, and also that the municipal administrative authorities lost a due appreciation of the economic and social significance of a well thought out landownership policy. It is highly probable that we have here to do with one of the evil consequences of a false economic philosophy, the *laissez-faire* policy, which spread from France and England throughout the world. It was not until another economic system began to overcome the practical consequences of this philosophy that Ulm again commenced to increase the area of municipally owned land.

Ulm is interesting to students of the history of economic theories because here we can put our finger on precise dates, showing the ascendancy now of one social philosophy, now of another. The English *laissez-faire* theory appears to have reached its culmination on the continent of Europe in general, but more particularly in Germany, about 1870. This resulted in the policy of selling publicly owned land both by states and cities. For as early as 1776 Adam Smith had condemned public ownership of land and said that no revenue flowing into the public treasury was more costly than the revenue such land yielded.

The year 1837 witnessed the disastrous effect of English economic thought as seen in the land policy of Ulm, when the city sold two tracts (the bleaching

grounds), comprising 84 acres, for about \$17,000. But though the English *laissez-faire* theory had been earlier discredited and discarded, it was not until 1892 that the new economic social philosophy, the philosophy of regulated social relations, showed itself in large purchases of land. Then these same grounds were repurchased at a cost of approximately \$105,000. And in spite of sales in pursuance of its social and economic policies, the city has constantly increased its land since that time.

City Owned Acreage.

The area bought from 1891 to 1909 amounts to 1,100 acres, and the number of acres sold, to nearly 400, giving a gain in land of 700 acres. But the land sold has brought the city over a million marks more than all the land purchased; so this land, as well as the million marks, are profit, yet only the minor part of the gain to the city. And now it has been clearly recognized that large ownership of land is a part of the policy of a well developed city, although naturally the public buildings in Ulm will decrease relatively with the policy private ownership of homes, even if the city does improve favorable opportunities to purchase land.

Although the city authorities of Ulm now regard large ownership of land as essential to a sound and healthy development of a municipality, the chief among the purposes which the city had in view in its change of policy was improvement in the homes of the people.

But at this point it is well to let Mayor von Wagner describe in his own words the advantages of a large ownership of land by the city: "Not only does a large ownership of land enable the city to create institutions of all kinds designed to promote general welfare, such as pleasure parks, playgrounds, skating rinks, school gardens, gardens to be leased to people of small means etc.; it puts the city in a position to influence building development so as to promote favorable social, hygienic, and constructional policies. Furthermore, it enables the city to draw to it industrial enterprises which give promise of a good development, and likewise to discourage and repress unhealthy and swindling promotions; still further, it makes it possible to set limits to specu-

(Continued on last page.)



Rivers Pleasing And Picturesque

Parts of Picturesque Walls And Old City Gates are Retained. Quaint Low Buildings On The Walls Still Make Homes For Workingmen

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