

Architecture and Social Reform in Late-Victorian London by Deborah E.B. Weiner. Manchester: Manchester UP; New York: St. Martin's, 1995. xii, 244 pp. ISBN 0 7190 3914 2. \$79.95 (cloth).

Most of this study is devoted to a discussion of the extraordinary creation in the last part of the nineteenth century of 500 new elementary schools in London in the wake of the passing of W.E. Forster's Education Act of 1870. They made a considerable mark upon the metropolis, particularly in the East End, where the three stories of the new buildings would arise, each a modern castle, out of the endless rows of poor housing. But was it one of learning or of dominance? Weiner quotes the exchange of 1892 between Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson:

"Look at those big, isolated clumps of buildings rising above the slates, like brick islands in a lead coloured sea."

"The Board Schools."

"Lighthouses, my boy! Beacons of the future! Capsules with hundreds of bright little seeds in each, out of which will spring the wiser, better England of the future." (p. 5)

The promise and the particular concern of this study is the relationship of the architecture of these buildings to their purpose. Most of the readers of the book will know something of the general history that brought about this outburst of building, or, to put it another way, the general history can easily be discovered elsewhere and does not draw upon the expertise of the author as an architectural historian. It seems to me that the special contribution here should have been an even more detailed study of the buildings and their designers. This is provided to an extent, and that is what is most interesting in the study. The easy, and no doubt valid, attitude taken is that those who were building the buildings were patronizing towards those for whom the buildings were built. The classic difficulty is that in taking that position the author risks patronizing these figures of the past. The dogooders and the government no doubt wanted the poor to be orderly and not to cause trouble, but they were also concerned to educate them. Of course, they might well pursue that object in a heavy-handed way, such as prosecuting parents who would not send their children to school, assuming that education was more important than the parents' desire for their children to help out at home or to go out to work.

What is most suggestive here is the intriguing contrast between the outside and the inside of these new schools. The buildings, generally in Queen Anne style, but also in some cases built as if they were country manors, seemed to suggest that the children were entering into the world that characterized the schools and style of life of their betters. One would have welcomed further discussion of the thinking behind this style. Was it just a style of the time, as in Bedford Park, or was it meant to convey something more? But the inside of the schools was much more utilitarian, designed to bring the children back to reality, as if the façades were a