

## HOUSING

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At the present time the question of housing is of interest to all of us as citizens, but is of more particular interest to Municipal Engineers and those dealing with transportation problems and manufacturing.

From an engineering standpoint our housing methods are uneconomical. People are allowed to build where and how they will and tremendous sums of money are often wasted in serving with public utilities, large areas which have only a small and scattered population. It is very necessary for economic reasons that there should be devised a proper system of control over the housing methods of the people.

From a health standpoint also there is much to be desired. We overcrowd some areas with dwellings and foster conditions which almost compel overcrowding in the houses themselves. On the other hand, we allow the erection and use of unhealthy dwellings on the outskirts of our cities, where living conditions are often as bad, and even worse than they are in the densely populated downtown districts.

From the aesthetic standpoint we fail badly. Instead of preserving the natural beauty of a site, we cut down our hills, fill up our valleys, and add the further monotony of a plain surface to an already monotonous and rigid gridiron plan.

We allow our streets to be filled with poles and wires, with street signs and advertisements and we do not even exercise control over the architecture and general arrangement of our houses. So that many of our streets have a most deadening effect on the people who live in them.

And all this must almost necessarily be, so long as we build merely for the individual. We shall not easily get away from it until we plan for the Community, build for the Community and control our streets, in the interests of the Community.

Some attempts at collective housing have been made in Toronto within recent years by the Toronto Housing Co., and the Toronto Housing Commission. The former built a number of dwellings which are described as cottage flats, some six years or so ago. These have quite a nice appearance and individually are quite well planned, but as a whole the scheme can hardly be called housing. The location at Bain Avenue is not by any means ideal and the houses are crowded together on much too small an area, except for use merely as flats, not as family houses. The density of population on this site is about 140 persons per acre, which is nearly double the average density of the ward, the most thickly populated portion of Toronto. It will easily be seen that such a scheme is capable of only very limited use, and is not a move towards a proper solution of the housing problem.

The Toronto Housing Commission, which came into being in 1919, have done better. They obtained some fairly large sites and have built a number of very good semi-detached six roomed houses, to each of which is a small garden. Individually the houses are good, but the scheme is wanting in the general planning. Although built as a complete scheme, the houses are to be purchased by the individual occupiers and consequently there remains with the purchaser no community interest in the scheme as a whole. A rather greater part than is necessary of the area built on is given up to roads, where as it might have been so planned that some of the road space would be saved to provide a community playground without diminishing the area of the lots.

The writer's experience as a purchaser from the Housing Commission will illustrate the need of such a playground. Purchasers were allowed to occupy the houses for a few months before they were completed. The fences between the lots were about the last things to be completed, and the children consequently had the run of practically the whole block as a playground. Naturally, this would not be fully appreciated by an enthusiastic gardener, especially if he had no children of his own, but from the children's standpoint it was splendid, and it was delightful to see their freedom, good friendship, and the nice way they all played together. The parents too met easily and exchanged visits across the lots and in a very short time there sprang up the beginning of a true community spirit. Then the finish of the work came. Picket fences were put up between the lots, the feelings of mutual interest and responsibility were nipped off short, the street became the only common meeting ground and the only playground, the occupants of the houses are now merely an aggregation of individuals, instead of a community, and the general appearance of the gardens is rather that of a lot of cattle pens.

What is badly wanted is some common meeting place other than the street, both for grown-ups and children, and this should never be overlooked in any housing scheme.

Scientific planning is absolutely necessary to really good housing and along with this, collective responsibility in order to foster a community spirit and the right kind of public conscience in our citizens.

Not only is housing of interest to the Municipal Engineer and the Town Planner, but it is very essential that all engineers and scientific men should be fully acquainted and take their part in this and other matters affecting our social welfare.

The laws of nature demand that every human being, in order to live, must have both food and shelter, and these must be of the best if we would continue to exist as highly developed beings. In the interest of the race we cannot any longer afford to leave such things to chance, to be provided or not provided, according to the physical and mental ability of the individual, and also depending on accidents of birth or other circumstances over which the individual has no control.

In our work as engineers we have to recognize the fundamental laws of nature and we realize that our material structures will fail unless we implicitly obey those laws. We would not leave to chance the strength of any part of a bridge, the soundness of timbers used in a structure, or the adequacy of the foundations for the support of a building. These must all be fit for their work, of the best quality, tested and inspected to insure their fitness to perform their particular function. It is otherwise with our Social Structure, with all that most concerns our mental and moral development and the well being of the race. If a member fails through any disability, we perhaps feel sorry that he is so unfortunate, but we little realize how unfortunate it is for humanity that a member has failed to perform his function, which failure results in a loss to and weakening of our whole social system. When we find a defective member in an engineering structure, we immediately proceed to remove and replace it, that it may not endanger the whole work. To what extent this may be applied in our social structure it is difficult to say, but at least we should recognize the importance of seeing that each member is fitted as well as possible to perform his particular function.

As with our engineering structures so, we may be sure,

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