

HAVE you ever thought of the problem of the city? It is the problem of keeping pure and strong the life in the crowded centres, so that life in the whole nation may be worthy. Though it is true that in an agricultural district financial and industrial prosperity is dependent upon the proper management of the farms, it is equally true that intellectual, moral and social conditions depend upon the ordering of life in the cities and towns.

The Growth of the Cities

One of the most noticeable things in our civilization is the disproportionate development of the centres of population. While the rural population has been barely holding its own, the population of the towns, and especially the larger cities, has been growing by leaps and bounds. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the United States had only six cities of 8,000 or more, but in 1900 it had 545 cities of this class. In 1800 less than 4 per cent. of the population was urban, and in 1900, 33 per cent. was urban. In 1800, Montreal had a population of 7,000, and one hundred years later its population was almost 400,000. In 1834, Toronto had 9,000 inhabitants, and in 1907 it had 250,000. The growth of the Western cities—Winnipeg, Vancouver, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Calgary—has been even more remarkable. Nor has this growth been confined to the American continent. In Europe the same thing has happened. The growth of such cities as London and Berlin is quite as phenomenal as anything on this side of the Atlantic. It has been thought by some that this is only a passing phase in our civilization, but short consideration will show that the change is permanent and that the cities will continue to increase in numbers until the population is much greater than at present.

The Causes of Growth

There are three outstanding reasons why people are leaving the country for the towns. The first is, that the manufacture of agricultural machinery has improved so that it is possible for a smaller number of people to do the work that is necessary on a farm. The farms now under cultivation are able to supply the world with all of its necessary food. Were the number of farms to be increased, the prices for farm produce would be lowered, and some agriculturists would be unable to live. There is a necessary balance between production and consumption. While it is possible to increase the comforts of the rural community, it is impossible to greatly increase the number of farms without making the business unprofitable to all.

The second cause that has led to the crowding of the cities is the improvement of machinery. The factory has taken the place of the home. People go where things are to be made. They group around the factories. If the wage to the factory worker is low, the small tenement house and the hovel soon surround the workshop. It is not likely that conditions will improve, for the reason that the tendency is ever towards larger manufacturing concerns, and therefore towards greater congestion of the factory population.

In the third place the railways have made city growth possible, for it is easy for people to travel from one point to another, and to obtain easily whatever is grown or manufactured in distant parts. To live in the city is to live near the department store, the market, the places of entertainment, the places where companionship may be found. This is one of the greatest attractions of the city.

The Nature of Growth

It is evident that the growth on the material side, as measured by wealth and population, is much greater than the moral and intellectual growth. There is always a danger where moral growth does not hold

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its own, and observation of the conditions in any of our modern cities will convince any one how great the danger is at the present time. As a city grows populous and rich, the administration of its various interests affords increasing opportunities for the corrupt use of money, there is therefore an increasing need of officials of moral character and absolute incorruptibility. It will be much harder to maintain a high moral standard in a nation of cities than in a nation where a majority of the people are close to the soil.

The City not an Ideal Place

The heart of a great city is not an ideal place for children or grown people to spend their days and nights. There are the tenements with their dark rooms and their miserable filthy air-shafts. There are the dark hallways and the ten-foot yards knee-deep with filth. "Many cellars have the floor covered with dirt and rubbish from a small layer upward to two and a half feet." Such dwellings are the breeding places of disease. Where sunlight does not enter, the doctor must. Such tenements spread moral as well as physical contagion. "They are centres of disease, poverty, vice and crime. All the conditions make for unrighteousness."

The street in the down-town section is no better than the home. Far removed from the green fields, the running streams, it is an unnatural playground for growing children. It is indeed a playhouse instead of a playground, for it is full of prohibitions. The policeman becomes an enemy, and there is open hostility to law and authority.

The shop windows create desires, only a small part of which can be gratified. They generate discontent, which leads to theft or extravagance. Obscene literature and indecent pictures abound.

Then there is the saloon—which is not only a drinking place, but the centre of varied activities—It is reading room, club room, clearing-house for athletic and sporting news. Often it is the poor man's bank.

Hardship and Loneliness

It is no wonder that with such environment childhood degenerates. This degeneracy is assisted by other causes—defective nutrition, child labor, lack of play, corruption of character through familiarity with vice and crime. To rob the children of normal childhood is to rob society, to wrong civilization, to impoverish the future. Nor is it surprising that young manhood and young womanhood decline. Unskilled workers with short seasons of work, and with small salaries, often faint from hunger, or find it easy to take the shorter way to comfort. Nothing is more lonely than the loneliness of the young man and woman in the great city. Walter Besant writes "In the evening my room was absolutely silent. Sometimes it got on my nerves and became intolerable. I would then go out and wander about the streets for the sake of animation, or I would go half-price to the pit of the theater. There are thousands of young fellows today who find as I found every evening the silence and loneliness intolerable."

The More Hopeful Side

The great cities are not wholly given over to squalor, vice and misery. Just as life in the slums is very much worse than anything pictured in the last two paragraphs, so life in the favored sections is much more pleasing. The city is the centre of education, art, and philanthropy: Its goodness and beauty radiate in these days to the last home on the prairie. Without it life even in the remote

regions would soon become intolerable. Therefore, as the city is necessary to national life, as it has come to stay and to grow to even greater proportions, as its influence must continue to increase while that of the country must decrease, everything should be done to make the forces for good triumphant. Then will the city be a fitting home for its own residents, and a centre of good influence for the whole community.

The Transforming Force

To transform the city from ugliness to beauty, from sin to righteousness, from filth to cleanliness, three great institutions must conjoin their efforts. The home, the school, the church acting directly by education and indirectly through legislation, can solve every problem. In a book that has caused no little comment in educational circles—the Montessori Method—there is given a beautiful description of the transformation of a portion of a great European city, by the erection of sanitary and cleanly-kept buildings, instead of the squalid quarters so common in Italian down-town districts. These buildings are under close supervision, and retention of quarters is conditional upon good behaviour. There is a home in each building or group of buildings where children are kept for the day under a trained nurse-teacher. This very thing is possible in any city. All that is necessary to bring about the reform is for a beginning to be made. Supervised activity of children is the beginning of all permanent improvement. The supervision and education can begin in early childhood—must so begin if the city is to be saved from ignorance, sin and want.

There are two classes of unfortunate people in every great city—the homeless poor and the homeless rich. Everything should be done to give people possession of their own little home. It is the home that breeds filial affection and civic loyalty and devotion.

The second force that makes for the salvation of the city is the public school. It is doing a great work in unifying the diverse elements of the population in spreading sweetness and light. Yet because of the crowded conditions in the class rooms its influence is greatly curtailed. It is better for a country to support schools than prisons. Prevention is better than cure. The cities of Western Canada are liberal in their support of elementary education. They will make no mistake in doubling their tax for this purpose. It is the cheapest and wisest form of expenditure. A director of education serves as honorable and useful an office as a judge of the Supreme Court.

The third force working for good is the Church. It is gratifying to note that this institution is modifying its methods so as to get efficiency. It must modify them still more. No effort is too great, no innovation too radical, if only the multitudes will be reached, and goodness made common. Unless the Church will modify its methods and its aims it is bound to lose its power. It is for Christianity to supply the leaven of righteousness. Sometimes the leaven appears to have lost its fermenting power.

As the home, the school and the church erect their transforming influence, legislation and public administration are improved, and private beneficence becomes more common. These three seeds are not reached directly. Good laws will not be made by men who lack intelligence and moral principle. Honest administration is possible only when the administrator is honest. Philanthropy will be practiced only by him whose heart and conscience have been quickened by contact with that Eternal Heart which felt the world's sorrows and sins.

So the solution of the city problem is in better homes, better schools, churches that are more alive to their mission and to their possibilities.