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M. B. TOUTLOFF, Editor

BRANCH OFFICES:

MONTREAL—171 St. James Street,
E. R. Milling, Representative.

WINNIPEG—336 Qu'Appelle Street,
F. C. Pickwell, Representative.

NEW YORK—156 Fifth Avenue.
A. R. Lowe, Representative

CORRESPONDENCE.—All correspondence should be addressed to "CONSTRUCTION," Corner Richmond and Sheppard Streets, Toronto, Canada.

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The Housing Situation

The wide newspaper publicity and sustained interest in the housing situation indicates the importance of the problem with which the Ontario Government and the Toronto authorities are now attempting to deal. The committees appointed both by the government and the City Council are now seeking information with a view to learning more or less accurately the extent of the house shortage which really exists. In the meantime numerous proposals are being brought forth suggesting various possible remedies. These range all the way from the single tax theory down to questions involving the removal of restrictions, cheaper lands, loans and guarantees, transportation, and the utilization of vacant city-owned property.

While all these suggestions will be of value to the authorities in their endeavor to arrive at some satisfactory solution, their chief importance lies in the fact that they show that housing is a many-sided problem which must be worked out on a careful and intelligent plan. In fact, those who have given the subject close attention claim that the only proper solution lies in the adoption of a comprehensive town planning scheme. It is pointed out that this conforms to the more advanced views in England and European countries which have had the benefit of greater experience in undertakings of this kind, and does not imply an immediate programme of general reconstruction, but rather the gradual development of housing according to a definite preconceived general plan.

Just what will be done or the manner in which it will be done, however, still remains to be seen. The committee will undoubtedly base their survey on the data now being gathered before deciding on any course of action. The unfortunate part of the whole thing is the apparent apathy of the architects in the matter. Of the various suggestions which have come forth not one has emanated from the ranks of the architectural profession, and it would seem that a grand opportunity is thus to be let go simmering. Possessed of advantages which their special training gives them, and imbued with the spirit necessary to the success of such an enterprise, the members of the profession could render a most necessary and excellent service, and their co-operation should be of the greatest value in assisting the committees to determine the best course to adopt.

The government fund available for the purpose amounts to the sum of two million dollars. This is to be loaned to municipalities with the proviso that the local authorities provide an additional twenty-five per cent. to the sum borrowed. Allowing for structures which could be built at a minimum of twenty-five hundred dollars each, this will only provide for one thousand houses altogether. In Toronto alone there are at present over two thousand condemned houses, and according to the Medical Health Officer there are at least five thousand additional houses which are tenanted by from two to in some cases five and six families. Considering this, the present proposal will be decidedly limited in scope and will be undertaken with a view to giving immediate relief. However, this is no reason why it should not be considered and carried out in relation to a permanent future scheme. It would certainly be gratifying to see the architects agitate toward this end, and be more satisfying still to know that their services and ability were being recognized and utilized in reference to such an important undertaking.