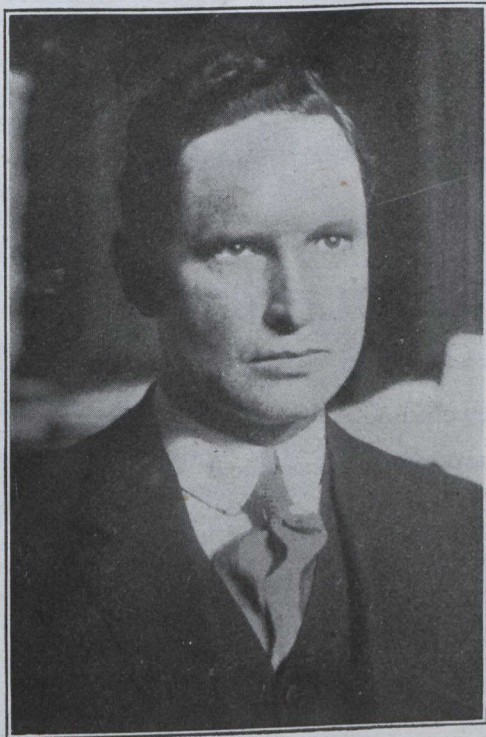


Practical Housing

By THOMAS ADAMS.



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Our Opportunity in Canada.

There is great opportunity in Canada to make our housing conditions right, because it is a new country. In older countries like England attention is being devoted to the solution of a housing problem that arises from bad conditions which we can prevent in this country. It is obviously a much easier operation to prevent bad conditions than it is to remedy them after they have become established.

Some idea of the enormous problem in England may be gathered from proposal to build under Government agency from three hundred to four hundred thousand houses at a cost of from \$2,500 to \$4,000 each, involving a possible loss to the country of several hundred million dollars. Here in Canada we are still in the formative stage. Rapid as our growth has been; great as has been the development, still our biggest housing problem is to prevent bad conditions in the future that are characteristic of the slums of older European cities. We cannot delude ourselves with the idea that we have not begun to create the germs of slums in our big cities. Without a doubt the conditions already existing in our few big cities are comparable with some of the worst conditions in European cities.

In both the United States and Canada we have the beginnings of slums, and a similarity of conditions that enables us to compare them to our mutual advantage and the solution of the housing problem depends most largely on applying right methods of planning and developing the land and on the extent to which these methods lessen the evils that arise from land speculation. All our cities are surrounded by scattered and somewhat disorderly developments and one difference between a Canadian city and a city in the Mother Country is that whereas our new suburban developments are among the worst we have, the bad housing conditions in the English city have been mostly handed down from the past. If you want to see the worst conditions in Ottawa, for instance, you must go not to Lower Town or to the centre of the city, but just over the city boundaries, in what is practically a "no man's land" between the city and the country and where there is a lack of sufficient control and interest to secure proper conditions.

One of the interesting movements in England is the Garden City at Letchworth near London. It proves the advantage of town planning as a basis for practical housing improvement. We started at Letchworth de novo; we considered the problem right from the beginning and commenced the building of a new city unhampered by existing vested interests. The scheme was started for the purpose of establishing certain principles; and to take advantage of a prevailing tendency of manufacturing industries to migrate from large centres of population to rural districts—a tendency which is very prevalent in this country also.

This problem of the decentralization of industry has been in existence for the last twenty or thirty years in Britain. Big industries have been moving out of London and other large centres to the country districts, and the originators of the garden city movement said: "Let us take hold of this movement. Let us start a new city and offer attractions to these industries that are looking for new locations. Let us group these manufacturers together and build houses for their employees. Let us give them up-to-date transportation and other facilities. Let us conserve the whole of the unearned increment of the value of the land created by the inhabitants for their own benefit; and see if we can establish a city which will be a model in connection with both the housing question and the land question."

Well, they have been comparatively successful. Three thousand eight hundred acres were purchased at about \$200 an acre. The promoters planned the site of the city, they put in an electrical installation, gas works and a pure water supply. They prescribed that there would not be more than seven or eight houses to the acre. They put all the industries in one part of the estate where the prevailing winds took the smoke away from the town. They improved the transportation system. The worker in Garden City lives within five minutes walk of his place of employment; no costly transportation system takes him from a point ten miles out in the suburbs to a plant in the centre of the city, requiring him to spend two or three hours a day in going to and from his work.

And this is one of the matters which has a distinct bearing upon the number of hours a day that an employee can reasonably give to his work. A man may work eight or nine hours a day in a factory, but if he spends two or three hours a day hanging on to a strap, going to and from his work, he is going to continue pressing for the reduction of the time he gives to productive forms of labour, and is going to continue to be a less efficient instrument of production. So that this very question of the number of hours that the workman wastes each day in unnecessary travelling, as a result of unregulated distribution of industries and population, has a definite bearing upon the question of efficiency and output of labour.

Unearned Increment Value Reserved for Inhabitants.

In the Letchworth scheme, the unearned increment in the value of the land, is conserved for the benefit of the community. While the land was purchased at \$200 an acre, the value has now increased to \$1,000 and \$2,000 an acre, and the whole of that increase in value is conserved for the benefit of the inhabitants of Letchworth. There can be no private property in land in Letchworth. You can only acquire a lease for ninety-nine years with the right to renew at the end of that period, subject to revaluation. The land was purchased by a Company, as a trust for the inhabitants, which laid down the conditions that the whole of the increase of value due to the conversion of the land from agricultural to building purposes should be conserved for the benefit of the community. But it has to be pointed out that the people of Letchworth have been able to make their largest profits in the earlier years of development on account of the efficiency with which they are able to distribute gas, electricity, water and the other necessities of life—because of proper planning. The control of these things is often handed over without thought, by franchise to a private concern.

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