



Slum children in Canada are fairly healthy specimens, but that doesn't justify the slum.

THE CITY SLUM PROBLEM

By M. L. HART

FOR years Canada has been rejoicing that there was no slums in her beautiful cities. And even while we rejoiced, the slums came. They are here. Immigration from the crowded centres of Europe has been proceeding at a tremendous rate, and the slums came with them. Of course, conditions were favourable for the development of the disease. They are always favourable in growing cities, unless the municipal authorities are active.

The worst feature of slum life is the effect upon the children—the future citizens of the state. Improper food does harm, and lack of fresh air and cleanliness accentuates that harm. At the International Congress for the Protection of Infants, held in Britain recently, Nathan Strauss, of New York, said that plans in the course of development would save the lives of 125,000 United States infants annually. Are similar plans being made here, or has Canada need for similar plans. This is a question which every citizen should be prepared to answer.

TO the average Canadian the question of slums is a startlingly new one. How foreign the idea is to most of us is seen in the difficulty experienced in finding data regarding the housing of citizens in congested centres, in which localities slums usually materialize.

However, two reports of great bearing on the matter have come before the Canadian people almost simultaneously, and it is to the credit of the press and public generally that the conditions which these reports lay bare, have aroused on all sides a desire for such action as will remove as speedily as possible all that is ugly and unsanitary in the dwelling places of thousands of our people. One of these reports is from Dr. Hodgetts, of Ottawa, Medical Adviser to the Public Health Committee of the Commission on Conservation; the other is from Dr. Hastings, Medical Health Officer for Toronto.

Dr. Hodgetts tells of conditions in many parts of Canada and gives comparisons from different countries of Europe. Dr. Hastings deals with Toronto directly, giving results of a recent extensive inspection in several sections of the city which come fully under the classification of slums.

A striking paragraph from the report of Dr. Hodgetts reads as follows:

"After attention has been directed to some of the unsanitary housing conditions now existing in Canada and their causes, it may properly be asked what are the health authorities doing that such evils should exist? It may be argued that, even under existing laws and by-laws, local medical officers of health might have minimized the unsanitary conditions now existing. Yet this officer is not always to blame, for, as a rule, he has to take his cue from the local board, and too often is it found that the members of a board are more ward politicians than sanitarians, and the health officer, being a general practitioner, having to earn his living in the community for which he acts, often without pay, the net result is that no notice is taken of these matters. Thus it is that evil starts, and under this sanitary inertia it grows and luxuriates, greatly to the joy of the landlord, be he an individual or a



A familiar sight.



Does this appeal to You?



The door-step is a miserable playground

company. It is profitable fun for him, but slow death to the unfortunate tenants."

This puts the matter in a nut-shell. The blame for slums lies not with the people who live in them, but with those who permit them through negligence and create them through greed. The carelessness of civic authorities and the rapaciousness of grasping landlords are two factors so apparent from Dr. Hodgetts' investigations that further enquiry is unnecessary. People do not live in unhealthy houses and with hideous surroundings from choice. Poverty and its accompaniments are first causes, and laxity in those whose duty it is to see that established laws are maintained, together with the industry of those who make a luxurious living for themselves out of the huts and tumble-down tenements which they let to the powerless submerged dwellers of the slums, do the rest.

HOW quickly a slum quarter may be established to such extent and thoroughness that dealing with it becomes a great problem is evidenced by the experience of Toronto, a city little more than a century old. Toronto's slum sections are in old St. John's ward, and in a district between the Don and the Lake shore. There, in the heart of the city, may be seen unsightly old rookeries, many little shops with every variety of ill-smelling and unsavory offerings, narrow lanes leading into back streets, and rows of still worse rookeries, wagon loads of old mattresses and broken furniture, carts in which meat meant for food is standing exposed to all the menace of a city's microbes, women sitting in groups about the doors and children finding their playground in the unhealthy and unattractive street.

These women and children are the victims of circumstances. The women sit at their doors because the close, crowded and forbidding interior of the place they call home drives them out to get a breath of the air and a ray of the sunshine that nature meant should be a common heritage. The children play in the streets for the same reason, and because, until very recently, nothing else had been provided for them. If women become lazy and indifferent housekeepers and children in time become a menace and a burden to the community under such conditions, it is not they themselves who are to blame, but the authorities who permitted this congestion of people, until it became like tentacles from which there is no escape.

Almost unbelievable conditions have, from time to time, been discovered in Toronto's slum district. For instance, in the record hot spell of the past summer it was found that the refuse and rubbish of last winter was still in the lanes.

Dr. Hastings' report gives facts and figures sufficient to enlighten even the most incredulous. Large tracts of land for suburban homes for working men and cheap car-rates to transport them are amongst the remedies he suggests.

Dr. Hodgetts' paper is luminous with the details of plans carried out with successful results in the cities of the United States, Great Britain, and countries in Europe. The issue seems to lie now with the civic officials. Here is a chance for them to glorify themselves and earn the recognition of the people who have placed them in position and who look for some returns.

THERE is one phase of the slum problem that does not present itself to all and yet is one which in time will affect the nationhood of Canada to as great an extent as any problem with which she is confronted. Governments and corporations are holding out many inducements to people of the British Isles and Europe to come to our shores, but Canadians as individuals are not wholly enthusiastic over the coming of these people. Young Canada especially is not favourable to the influx of immigrants, and this prejudice is greatly owing to the fact that the unexperienced judge many and sometimes an entire people by a certain type that has come under observation. Thus our slums have given rise to a prejudice in some quarters both against English immigrants and foreigners.

The British immigrant straight from the land of ancestral castles and the neatest cottages in the world does not love shacks or live in them from choice. Neither does the Italian, every one of whom has the artistic temperament of generations flowing through his veins. Neither does the Hebrew, the glory of whose Temple is still one of the world's wonders, neither does the Russian, whose country presents a court so splendid that it ranks amongst the most brilliant of the world.

Yet the lesson of the slums gives to young Canada an impression so distasteful as to create a wrong estimate of the people themselves and the countries from which they came. This is unfair to the new-comers and unfortunate for the country.