

Spectator, a dream that others have dreamed and built great things upon—and one that I some day—somewhere, have resolved to place upon a practical basis and watch it grow into a splendid reality.

Every child to his garden! Sounds ideal—does it not? And yet why not—every child to his garden?

And as I write by my open window, with a shaft of spring sunshine across my table, with the soft warm air quivering among the curtainfolds, and beyond a long stretch of meadow land to rest mine eyes upon, it is not of my children nor of your children that I am thinking—nay; for the “Small Boys” always have a garden if mother can arrange it so; and you—when April merges into May—you take your little people in the garden and mark each one a plot, and set your little gardeners to work—each on a garden of his very own—don’t you? Yes, I am sure you do.

So you see I am not particularly thinking of your children, nor of my children as I write.

I am thinking of the little people in the alleys and by-lanes of the city streets—the children of the poor.

Often of a spring day I have walked along a dirty, narrow street where the little frame houses stand wedged together; where the backyards are spaced so that a refuse barrel may stand there and where the children play upon the streets; where they follow the water carts and duck to get a sprinkling! and when after the wagon has flushed the roadway and the water swells along the curbing on its way to the sewers the children in high glee dance about placing sticks and chips upon the eddy tide and watch their ships go down! Yes, I have often watched them so, and have felt to wondering how would it be to place their enthusiasm, their vitality to work—each in a garden of his very own.

What I mean is that every city of any size should have little gardens for the children of the poor; these should be placed upon a practical basis and the children not allowed to play therein, but rather taught how to work therein.

In every city there are vacant lots or arable land, and in every city there are boys and girls who would glory in the chance to become gardeners—boys and girls who should be given the chance.

In Chicago they have a City Gardens Association—one that was formed in 1909, the International Harvester Company offering some unused ground for the purpose of planning a “poor man’s market garden” on.

This was the first attempt; since then the first “garden” has given way to many “gardens” scattered throughout Chicago. Every spring citizens of wealth become more and more interested, and are placing ground and money to the furthering of the splendid project.

The Chicago City Gardeners’ Association takes charge of the ground, divides it into gardens of one-eighth of an acre, and rents each plot out for the season in consideration of the sum of \$1.50, except where families are without means. Experience has shown, however, that nearly all pay the rental if only by installments. So far the average yield per garden each season has amounted to \$25.

The society places one or more trained market gardeners in supervision over the gardens, and also provides roots, seeds and plants for each family plot. Not only are these little farms eagerly sought out by the father of the family, but “big brothers” and “big sisters” eagerly present themselves at the society’s door in their effort to secure a garden of their own. And early morning finds them on their way to shop and mill spending a few moments in the garden spaces “watching things grow.” Early evening finds them there raking, spading and seeding; after school hours the children, under the head gardener, fix their individual plots, while the little house-mother, who, with such an incentive before her, has hurried her household tasks, sits in the sunshine surrounded by the babies watching her boy Tommy learn how to become a master of the land. To my way of thinking the Chicago City Gardeners’ Society is doing a splendid work, and the idea is such that many a city might take it up without a thought of failure; for the children it would prove a boon; to the grown people an incentive; beside, giving practical assistance where it is needed, and at the same time making the people work for it, which is quite the sanest method after all.

“Every child to his garden”—ideal; yes; but also very practical and sane if placed upon a good basis. Don’t you think so?