

## HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING\*

BY THOMAS ADAMS

*Town Planning Adviser to the Dominion Cabinet*

WE have a 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 that they have to deal with in England may be gathered from the fact that they propose to build under government agency from 300,000 to 400,000 houses at a cost of from \$2,500 to \$4,000 each, involving a loss to the country—when they come to make up the difference between the cost of the houses and their value as an investment, likely to result from the fall in prices which will take place in a few years—of several hundred million dollars.

They are facing this loss at a time when they have not very much money to spare for anything which is not an absolute necessity. That is because the problem in England has been neglected too long. Here in Canada we are still in the formative stage as a country. Rapid as our growth has been, great as has been the development in the last 20 years, still our biggest housing problem is to prevent bad conditions of growth in the future rather than to correct the evils of the past.

We have a chance to prevent such a catastrophe as that of handing down to the future citizens of this country the evils that are characteristic of the slums of older European cities. We cannot delude ourselves with the idea that we



GOVERNMENT HOUSING SCHEME AT WELL HALL, WOOLWICH

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. These existing evils must be attacked and some remedy found for them, but it is still true that with us the greater task and the greater respon-

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sibility is to prevent the further growth of these evils by preventive measures.

In both Canada and the United States we have the beginnings of slums, and we have a similarity of conditions that enables us to compare them to our mutual advantage. One of the things of which housing experts and town planners are convinced is that 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.

One of our chief tasks is the prevention of bad condi-



WORKMEN'S COTTAGES AT GRETNA

tions in the new suburbs of our cities, without diminishing our efforts to remove the evils prevailing in the centres of the cities. All our cities are surrounded by scattered and somewhat disorderly developments, and one difference between a Canadian city and a city, say, 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. With us, some of the worst conditions are those which we are creating to-day, in the form of unsanitary shacks in the suburbs of our cities. 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.

## Garden City at Letchworth

One of the movements in England of great interest to housing reformers is the Garden City at Letchworth, near London. It proves the advantage of town planning as a basis for practical housing improvement. If there is any experience in my own life which I look back upon as having the most value to me as a town planner, it is the experience I had during the few years that I was connected with the building up of that garden city. We started *de novo*; we considered the problem right from the beginning and commenced the building of a new city unhampered by existing vested interests. That scheme was started for the purpose of establish-

ing 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.

## Industrial Decentralization

I have just been making some investigations in connection with housing conditions in Toronto, and one of the things we are inquiring into is the extent to which the movement of industrial plants from the city proper out into