

HOUSING AND HEALTH. (Continued.)

modern housing conditions, the health of the people of our cities must be still further safeguarded by the adoption of efficient methods to prevent pollution. This is a problem that must always be considered when we are dealing with the health of the inhabitants of our cities.

As it is with water, so it is in regard to light and air. In the building up of cities, we have prevented the masses of people securing the full benefit of these essentials to a healthy life, these preventatives against disease, and what we do give them is like the water, contaminated. For the purpose of improving the conditions and, in some degree, giving a touch of rural life to the masses, there has been devised what is known as "town planning." Now, town planning is all very good and, in a country like Canada, it should be made compulsory on all municipalities in their development that a system suitable to our climate and conditions should be adopted and carried out. The principals are right and, if carefully planned to the wants of each municipality, will do more to improve the health of our people and so assure a higher standard of physical efficiency than perhaps any other single measure that can be suggested. But—there is always a but in everything human and certainly in everything governmental, it will not avail us much from the standpoint of health if we permit the present slum conditions to continue.

As an example of what evils may exist in a country which ostensibly was pre-eminent in town planning, a reference may not be out of place to the Kingdom of Prussia, which in many respects is comparable with England, indeed, the Germans were fond of making the comparison, and, in doing so, take a wide field for comparison.

"They would point to large industrial towns of England with their miles of mean streets, their slums, and other bad features, and boast that they had nothing of the sort in Germany. Travellers would go to Germany, note the handsome and orderly appearance of the streets, the profusion of fine buildings and other external signs of well-being in Berlin and other towns and come back with the same tale.

"Then there was a great deal of talk about town-planning, with Germany as the model; it was all the rage. Go below the surface, however, and you get a very different result. I cannot go into details, but some summary facts will show the true state of the case.

"The population are pretty nearly equal (36 to 40), and Prussia is the most advanced German State. In the five years before the war, the average death-rate was:—England, 13.9; Prussia, 16.1; the infantile death-rate:—England, 109, Prussia, 165; the deaths from consumption:—England, 38,000; Prussia, 61,000; from scarlet fever:—England, 2,316; Prussia, 5,592; from diphtheria:—England, 4,749; Prussia, 9,144.

"These figures are fully explained when one goes below the surface and examines the actual conditions. Beneath attractive and imposing exteriors one finds essential conditions distinctly inferior to those in our dingy-looking towns. There is far more overcrowding, for instance, with lack of space, air, light and conveniences; water supplies are less abundant and less pure; public health services and isolation hospitals are less complete; sewage disposal is less efficient."

For the last two decades, we have been intensifying the evils which surround our housing conditions in all of the cities of Canada. Not a city is guiltless, and, as a consequence, we have very rapidly lowered the vitality of our people. In lowering our vitality, we have decreased our national efficiency, until, at the present time, at least one man in three is a physical unfit. Unfit to fight the battle for freedom and honor, and therefore unfit to efficiently assist to build up this young nation in its struggle for supremacy in the markets of the world.

What would be the percentage of unfits amongst the women of Canada and how marked would be the impress of degeneracy on the physical condition of our children would make an object lesson which, I fear, would cause us to hang our heads in shame.

And how has it all been brought about? In part by our own indifference and in part by our own ignorance, which, unitedly, have resulted in a mere national drift. The rocks surround us everywhere in city and country districts alike, though in different degrees, for the blessings of

sunlight and air certainly are to be placed to the credit of the dwellers of the villages and rural districts, not perhaps through any act of their own. The outstanding dangers exist in the crowded centres where we have the accumulation of all the evil features of overcrowding, the replicas of every nation under the sun whose representatives have come to us on the tide of immigration. It is to our lasting disgrace and shame that we have, through our indifference, suffered them to take root. Having taken root, they have grown like weeds, and, alas, the longer they grow, the more difficult and more expensive they are to eradicate.

Your little Italies, your nests of polacks, and dens of whatever foreign element you have in your city are the evil deeds and the longer they remain, the greater evil they become. I once visited a row of houses in a sea port city where the bows of our great ocean liners overhung the back yards. What did I find? These once happy and healthy one-family homes were the abode of settlers from the British Isles—some eighteen families in all. These unfortunates were meted out by nature the fresh air and sunlight which were the portion normally of less than one-sixth their number, and this in a country which heralded abroad that there were homes for the toiling millions of Europe.

In the eight years which have elapsed, I can find no improvement in the housing conditions of that city. On the other hand, the inhabitants point with pride to the fact that a very large sum of money has been raised through the activity of its citizens and a magnificent institution for tuberculous patients has been erected. An example of municipal folly: Crowd the inhabitants into packing boxes, give them no opportunity to enjoy to the fullest that which costs the people nothing, viz., God's sunlight and fresh air, and, if by any act of Providence, they fall victims to the White Man's plague, then give them, when it is too late, the blessings of sunlight and fresh air in a sanatorium.

When will we learn that there is a right time and a right place for municipal authorities to take full advantage of these natural bounties? In our homes and all the time!

Give the maximum of sunlight and fresh air to the expectant mother, the nursing mother and her babe, and then to all through youth and manhood and womanhood, all through the years when most required to produce a virile people. Do not intensify the present horrible housing conditions of the masses and then parade our good works and laud our charitable organizations, and give both by tax levies and public subscriptions to aid those who, by reason of our own sinning, have become the innocent victims of disease and vice.

Let us get down to the bottom of the cause and no longer pursue a policy of drift. Let us strive to eliminate the evil housing conditions which make for lessened human efficiency and, by so doing, make more happy the lot of each man, woman and child in Canada.

The movement for the garden suburbs and cities is commendable, but it is only a small part of the problem of good housing. I fear it will be a long time before the benefits arising from the Government expenditure of twenty-five million dollars on the present basis will benefit the tens of thousands of the working people in our centres of population, whose conditions have not improved one whit during the last decade.

To assist government officials in the erection of a garden suburb undoubtedly is most commendable, but it seems like misplaced assistance, particularly if one considers for a moment the slums of Toronto and Montreal, the forced residence of many good citizens who long for something better and brighter.

As Letchworth has not appreciably lessened the evils of the housing conditions of London, neither will the garden city the similar evils to be found in our Canadian cities. If we are to look for results and ameliorate the existing damning slum conditions, we must attack this hydra-headed monster where it lives and thrives, viz., in the slums, which you and I and all of us who are Canadians permit to flourish.

We allow human beings to live—no to, exist—in hovels not fit for pigs, and expect them to give to their employers a good day's work, offering them charity when they or their children become ill. What is a strange