

HOUSING IN ST. JOHN

Revival of Interest in Subject of Great Importance—Recommendations That Were Made as Result of Survey in Section of City

The discussion of the housing problem by the Associated Charities this week will revive the interest in the housing survey and report made jointly by the board of trade housing committee, headed by W. F. Burditt, and the board of health, through the hearty cooperation of Dr. G. G. Melvin, the medical health officer, who superintended, with Mr. Burditt, a housing survey of the area bounded by Union and Brussels street and Courtney Bay. The recommendations made by Mr. Burditt as a result of the survey and the work of his committee are of the most timely interest and are here printed in full.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Garbage Collection.

The facts stated in a paragraph under the heading "Yards and Garbage," point forcibly to the need of a municipal system of garbage collection and removal. It is evident that the law prohibiting the accumulation of garbage and refuse is not enforced, and cannot reasonably be enforced against poor people who barely have the means of subsistence and cannot afford to pay for garbage removal or buy fuel for its incineration. Facilities for removal of garbage being provided by the city, the law could be and should be enforced.

Model Houses.

To those who have studied the housing problem more or less superficially, the first remedy for existing evils which suggests itself is to provide, either in model tenements or separate cottages, a better class of dwellings for working people in which every necessary requirement for life and health will be provided at a minimum cost. The idea being that if such provision were made the slums would be deserted, the insanitary and dilapidated quarters now occupied by the poor would become unrentable, and the evils complained of would speedily disappear. This unfortunately is not the teaching of experience. While the erection of such dwellings, if upon a sound financial basis, may be of indirect benefit by way of example and setting of a higher standard, those who build houses for profit are not usually influenced to any great extent by demonstrations of what can be done on a basis of "philanthropy and five per cent," and the number of people who can be directly provided for in that way, is but a

fraction—the least needy fraction—of the whole. Commendable, therefore, as are those semi-philanthropic building enterprises, they touch only the fringe of the housing problem as affecting the conditions under which the lowest wage-earners and the very poor are compelled to live. There will be no general exodus from the slums to the suburbs. The cost of transportation added to the minimum rent charge possible, would be prohibitive in the majority of cases; and the people who can only afford to pay from three to eight dollars per month rent, would still be crowded into dark and dangerous, unventilated and insanitary tenements. The problem, therefore, is how to alleviate the existing conditions from which this class of people cannot escape by flight, but must and will endure until the law sets a minimum standard of health and comfort below which no human habitation shall be allowed to fall. No property-owner should have the right to profit by the ill, the misery, the very lives of his tenants, while at the same time taxing the whole community with an added burden for fire loss and the maintenance of jails and hospitals.

Regulation by Law.

Regulation by law, it has been shown by the experience of other cities, is the only radical remedy for most of the evils of bad housing, and hence many cities and states are enacting what are termed housing laws. While our board of health regulations, and building regulations deal to a certain extent with matters germane to the subject, an adequate housing law will embrace much more than has yet been provided for in existing regulations. Rules XIX to XXVIII of the Provincial Board of Health regulations making provision for sewerage disposal, forbidding the accumulation of refuse matter, governing the keeping of animals, abatement of nuisances, etc., relate incidentally to housing conditions; and the plumbing regulations provide that plumbing work shall be installed in a manner that will be perfectly safe and sanitary. But, it is only at these points that housing conditions are touched by the existing board of health regulations, the greater part of which have to do with the prevention and control of contagious diseases. On the other hand, the act relating to



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The medical health officer should have power to determine the number of occupants, sleeping, which any room may accommodate, and to enforce his mandate except on permit from medical health officer after ascertaining that suitable provision is made therefore.

- For the periodical inspection of dwellings, particularly multiple dwellings.
- The health officer with power to order necessary repairs to dwellings and the cleaning of dwellings and premises, and in default to employ men to do the work at landlord's expense.
- That lodgers may not be accommodated except on permit from medical health officer after ascertaining that suitable provision is made therefore.
- For the periodical inspection of dwellings, particularly multiple dwellings.
- The health officer with power to condemn and order the vacation of insanitary and dilapidated dwellings that are unfit for human habitation.
- That cellars shall not be occupied as human habitations under any circumstances, and basements only under conditions prescribed by the law, and upon permit of medical health officer.
- That multiple dwellings shall be in charge of a janitor or other person resident therein, who shall have general supervision over the whole and be responsible to the authorities for compliance with the law.
- For proper maintenance of dwellings with regard to external repairs.
- For the disposal of rainwater, and the surface drainage of yards and premises.

(D)—Measures for reducing the risk from fire: The provision which it may be necessary to make for this purpose in a housing law will depend upon the extent to which the same object has been achieved by means of building regulations; but avoidance of undue risk from fire is a necessary condition of the suitability of buildings for habitation as dwellings; therefore, if provision is not otherwise made, a housing law should include the following:

- That no multiple dwelling, or that no dwelling designed to accommodate more than a limited number of families should be built of wood or any combustible material.
- That all buildings over two and one-half stories high in populous districts must be built of brick or other non-combustible material.
- That dwellings over three stories high should be as far as practicable fire-proof.
- That multiple dwellings should have two independent means of egress from each floor.
- That multiple dwellings over two stories and a half in height should be provided with external fire escapes and ladders of iron, extending to the roof.
- That staircases, stair-halls and passages used for entrance and exit to multiple dwellings over two and one-half stories in height and occupied by two or more families on each floor, must be of adequate width, with stairs of incombustible material and enclosed between fireproof partitions.
- That the storage or accumulation of combustible materials, or engagement in any hazardous or offensive business in any dwelling or building occupied in part as a dwelling, be prohibited.
- With regard to the execution and enforcement of the law.

Included in the foregoing enumeration of matters which might be dealt with by a housing law, are some which are already covered by our existing board of health regulations. Provisions are also made in the public health act for the enforcement of the regulations and for the infliction of penalties when the law is not complied with, but the law does not appear to have been very rigidly enforced. This is believed to be in part due to the fact that the force at command of the medical health officer is entirely inadequate for general inspection of dwellings, or usually initiated on the complaint of some aggrieved individual who desires the abatement of a nuisance. After inspection the offender is notified and allowed time to correct the matter complained of. There may be several notifications, warnings and extensions of time before there is a legal prosecution, and when the matter is finally brought into court the offender is sometimes dismissed with another warning and an order to do that which he neglected to do on the order of the board of health officer.

It seems important therefore that in any legislation designed to control and prevent undesirable housing conditions, officials responsible for carrying out the law should be clothed with ample authority, that there should be provided an

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adequate force of inspectors, and that the prosecution of offenders should be made in some cases mandatory upon rather than optional, with the officials who are responsible for the enforcement of the law.

The law should also designate what particular official is to be responsible for the enforcement of its several provisions. For certain regulations it would be the building inspector or similar official, for others the chief medical health officer, and for others the chief of the fire department; but the law should definitely place the responsibility upon one particular official for the enforcement of each of its provisions.

It is not pretended that the foregoing suggestions as to what a housing law should provide for, are by any means complete or comprehensive, on the other hand they are merely intended to indicate in barest outline some of the more important matters with which housing legislation should deal. They result mainly from a study of the English Housing Act of 1909, and "A Model Housing Law" by Lawrence Veller, to whom acknowledgements are due for most of the information upon which the suggested remedial measures are based. No better authority can be consulted by any one interested in housing reform, or view might safely follow very closely the Model Law which Mr. Veller has prepared as a result of many years experience in dealing with housing problems.

The English Act, while making provision for the condemnation and closing of insanitary and dilapidated buildings, prohibiting the occupation of cellars as human habitations, etc., has a much wider scope, and not only provides for the wholesale demolition of slum areas, as well as individual buildings, but is also constructive in character, and besides clothing municipalities with the authority and power to provide improved housing accommodation to replace that which is condemned, requires that they shall do so. It is doubtful if conditions in this country at the present time call for or would warrant the exercise of such extensive powers, but the fact that these powers are granted to English municipalities is evidence of the importance which the central legislature of the empire and the "Mother of Parliaments" attaches to the subject of housing reform.

Instruction of Tenants.

Education should go hand in hand with legislation. There are responsibilities of the tenant as well as those of the landlord, but tenants frequently fail to recognize that fact, and many a landlord who has been willing and desirous

to provide for the comfort and convenience of his tenants, has been discouraged by their failure to appreciate the value of property and their disregard of the owner's rights. This is often due to lack of knowledge rather than to wanton destructiveness; and experience has shown that when improved conveniences and appliances have been provided for people previously unaccustomed to them, it pays to furnish at the same time some measure of training and education in the proper use and care of such improvements.

It was the recognition of this fact which many years ago prompted Octavia Hill in the City of London to start that system of friendly rent collecting which has since become associated with her name and has been found in many cities to be so beneficial in bringing about a recognition of the mutual interests and the mutual responsibilities of landlord and tenant, incalculating at the same time lessons in domestic economy, frugality and cleanliness; a plan which wherever adopted, has had the effect of vastly improving the condition and circumstances of the tenants, while facilitating compliance with sanitary laws and largely increasing the net returns from property.

An Octavia Hill Association, properly organized, would find in St. John ample scope for its activities, and could accomplish a great deal of good, not only for the particular subjects of its care, but for the entire community.

In submitting this report the committee realizes that the war in which our country and empire are engaged, and the outbreak of which occurred while this report was in preparation, must necessarily absorb the attention of every British community to the almost complete exclusion of all other matters until it is over, but it is hoped that a happy conclusion of the terrible conflict in which the nation is now engaged, may before long enable our people once again to turn their attention, with renewed interest and the enhanced spirit of self-sacrifice born of war, to the subject of community welfare.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the committee,
W. F. BURDITT,
Chairman.

Rudyard Kipling: "At the present time all the powers in the world that have not been bribed or bullied to keep out of it have been forced to join in one international department to make an end of German international thuggery. For the reason that if it is not ended this on this planet will become insupportable for human beings."

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the construction of buildings, which embody what are known as the city building regulations, provides solely for the structural strength of buildings and protection against fire. Doubtless these building regulations enacted in the year of the great fire, 1877, need revision to better adapt them to present day conditions, even to the purpose for which they are intended, but recently many modern cities embrace many matters that it was not thought necessary to deal with at the time the St. John law was framed. The object and purpose of a building code or set of building regulations is to better adapt them to the safety of buildings, rather than with their habitability and the health and comfort of the occupants.

Some cities have enacted what are termed tenement house laws, but tenement houses are not the only kind of buildings, and a law dealing only with houses occupied by three or more persons is not wide enough in its scope. All kinds of houses should be included in the provisions of a housing law.

Under the first heading (A) relating to the creation of new buildings, a housing law should provide:

- For prevention of land overcrowding, by limiting the proportion of the lot that may be occupied by buildings.
- For adequate light and ventilation of dwellings, by prescribing minimum dimensions of rear yards, side yards and courts, and a minimum space between buildings.
- For room lighting and ventilation, by providing a minimum proportion of window area to floor space, that windows must open directly upon street, yard or court, and must have movable sashes.
- For rooms of adequate size, by fixing minimum floor space and height.
- For lighting and ventilation of halls and staircases of multiple dwellings.
- For adequate means of egress from each floor of multiple dwellings.
- For lighting and ventilation of water closets.
- For separate water closet accommodation for each family.
- For the prohibition of cellar water closets, except under special conditions approved by health officer.
- For adequate and convenient water supply for each family.
- For effective drainage of courts, yards and areas.
- That no multiple dwelling shall be erected and no building be occupied as a multiple dwelling where no connection can be had with proper sewerage system.
- Reconstruction of and alterations to existing buildings:

It is manifest that regulations which may reasonably be applied to the construction of new buildings, cannot be applied excepting with considerable modification to existing buildings, but where such buildings are altered or enlarged, the same, or similar, regulations may and should to a large extent apply. It would be unfair, for instance, to limit a new building to half the lot area, and allow an old building to be so extended as to cover two-thirds of the lot area. In similar manner if a provision were made requiring all new buildings over three stories in height to be of fire-

proof construction, it would manifestly be unfair to allow an existing wooden building to be so altered as to exceed that height.

Regulations, therefore, looking to the accomplishment of the same objects as enumerated under the previous heading (A) but in modified form to suit the conditions, should be made to apply to the improvement, alterations and extension of existing buildings or the conversion of other buildings into dwellings. In addition provision should be made for certain compulsory improvements to old dwellings, such as for:

- The lighting and ventilation of rooms, with the object of doing away as far as possible with existing dark and gloomy rooms.
- Lighting of hall and staircases.
- Lighting and ventilation of existing water closets.
- Introduction of water service where not supplied.
- Installation of sanitary water closets for each family.
- The removal of woodwork, ground water closets and sinks, and the replacement of insanitary fixtures.
- Clearing out and coating of privies and gesspools, within a time limit, wherever sewerage connection is possible. (Much has already been accomplished in this connection by the board of health under powers conferred by the public health act, 1913.)
- Adequate means of egress from each floor of multiple dwellings.
- Occupation and Maintenance.

Under this heading a housing law should provide:

- Against the overcrowding of rooms.

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