

OTTAWA'S HOUSING PROBLEM.

It stand patent to all that one of the chief items in the increase of cost of living which now bears so heavily upon all Canadians, but for special reasons bears with particular severity upon civil servants, consists in the high rents now asked for houses. Any saving effected in this field of expenditure would bring a very considerable relief to the debilitated exchequer of many a civil servant, since the proportionate outlay upon rent is so great. The lowest rent for which a decent house can be secured to-day in Ottawa is from \$24 to \$27 a month, and the competition for such houses is so great that he who gets one may consider himself fortunate. The same class of house rented for some \$17 to \$20 five years ago. \$300 a year for keeping a roof over the family head is a large item. It means in most cases perhaps 25% of the total income, and civil servants, who still remain under a pre-adamite dispensation in the matter of salaries, feel the pinch accordingly.

Altogether, it is an horrific item. One-fourth or more of total income for bare walls and a gluttonous furnace in the cellar! Compare this with the English maxim, that he who pays more than 10% of income for rent is a bad economist. One had indeed of the toughest bowels not to pity the civil servant of Ottawa, who is, "par excellence," a payer of rents. Most of us enter the service with hope and two suits of clothes — nothing more. Anon hope departs, but not before the advent of love and the babies. Under such circumstances, house-ownership is impossible, and the average civil servant becomes and remains a renter (not a *rentier*; please distinguish) for the rest of his days.

And furthermore, — Canada is to-day one of the most expensive countries in the world, and although the new Civil Service Act will provide better salaries at some more or less distant date, we are talking about the

present and actual. With boundless natural resources, with wood for fuel and building abundant, with land a-plenty, and the fruits thereof of the best in nature, we sit as if enchanted, deprived of the benefits of all these elemental stores of good things. Building material is high in price; so is coal and other fuel; so are meats and fish, groceries and provisions, and corn and oil generally. Every year the ice-man, grown humorous for his own profit, utters his wonted jest about the failure of the ice crop. Economic conditions are partly the cause of this general state of affairs, but when all is said and done, one cannot but marvel at the splendid combinations that flourish to-day in some departments of trade, and effectively maintain such top-heavy prices. Such, at any rate, are the conditions: everything high in price beyond precedent; but the highest of these is houses.

One effect of this is to make Ottawa the "City of Magnificent Distances," truly enough. Centre-town rents being too expensive, and houses too scarce, there is continual migration to outlying parts. There are flying wings of Ottawa being formed, not only, as might be expected, Glebe-wards, but in New Edinburgh, Rideauville, Hintonburg, not to mention Hull, Rockcliffe and Britannia. Year by year the centre of gravity changes, but rents change *pari passu*.

If there were no remedy for, or alleviation of this state of affairs, there would be no good purpose served by thus dwelling upon the conditions. But it is worth while considering whether civil servants cannot aid themselves a little by concerted action. It should be remembered that this is no passing phase of Ottawa life; on the contrary, it will remain for many years to come substantially as at present. There is no prospect of a building boom here such as will materially lessen rents. Material of all kinds is too high in price, and so