

(October 13)

Garden Suburbs and Town Planning.

BY MR. HENRY VIVIAN, M.P.*

ADDRESSING a special meeting of the Canadian Club on "Garden Suburbs and Town Planning," Mr. Henry Vivian, M.P., of Birkenhead, England, said:

Mr. President and Gentlemen,—Let me first thank the Canadian Club of Toronto for being good enough to extend to me the privilege of speaking here to-day. In the course of what I have to say—for I must be brief; you are busy men with work to do, and wisely limit the time of your speakers—I shall dispense with many of the arguments—those can be taken for granted in addressing such a gathering as this—and proceed with facts, even though it may appear somewhat dogmatic.

We, in the old land, are becoming stirred up over the housing and town planning problems which are presenting themselves to many of our citizens. We have ascertained by the reports of experts that there is a close and immediate relation between the conditions under which the people live and their efficiency as working people and citizens. As the community transplants from agricultural to industrial surroundings, and as more and more become city dwellers, the problem becomes more and more important. We have come to the conclusion that the time has arrived when the development of city life should be ordered and organized and result from conscious effort rather than from the anarchy of forces responsible for the growth of many of our cities.

There are one or two facts, not without interest as showing the necessity for action and arousing the people to a realization of what their obligations are and what it means to the country that they shall be grappled with. Physicians and other experts who have turned their attention to a study of actual conditions find that children who are brought up under

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healthy conditions, with ample accommodation for exercise and physical development are inches taller than those who have been brought up under unhealthy conditions in the slums. Moreover it affects their weight. The child brought up under healthy conditions averages 30 pounds heavier at 14 years of age than his less fortunate brother. The difference between the two kinds of conditions is really vital to the physical development of the people. Dr. Newman, the medical health officer of Finsbury, states that the death rate among people who live in the one-roomed home is three to four times as large as the death rate among people who live in the four-roomed home. Thus you see the mere addition of home room will reduce the death rate from three to four fold.

And from our investigations we are satisfied that this slaughter of the innocents is covering the whole country. We conducted enquiries in Edinburgh, Liverpool, Birmingham, London and York. The size of the evil can be more fully realized when I tell you that the last census showed that over half a million homes consisted of one room only, while two million homes had just two rooms.

With these figures and the reports before us we came to the conclusion that if such conditions produced such a frightful havoc on the physical side, the injury to the mental power and moral purpose must also be very great. So we determined to get to work. We were stimulated to action not only by the melancholy facts to which I have just made reference, but by the brighter side—the result of experiments made by enterprising employers and careful organization. We had the example of Port Sunlight, where Lever Brothers had established a community with every facility for healthy development. Then there was Bournemouth established by Cadbury Brothers, near Birmingham. These industrial villages pointed the way. Then followed an examination of the model city of Letchworth in the making, which is an example of a city laid out to accommodate 30,000 in healthy and comfortable conditions. These examples stimulated thought and prompted action.

Yet there are limitations with us. There is the difficulty of lack of space in the old land, and the enormous difficulty of getting factories to transfer their operations into the district. Here you in Canada have a big advantage in taking hold of this problem. You have not the double task to perform of getting up the economic driving force and securing the space to organize on sound health lines. You have an opportunity that is not ours. This word in passing.

I have alluded to the results of inadequate housing on the physique of the people. But the housing is not the only factor responsible for this deterioration. Other evils contributing are overcrowding, lack of exercise and open air. In England we are finding by bitter experience that these conditions have an effect on the death rate. I spoke a moment ago of the increase in the death rate. Let me give you some figures. In the case of one-roomed houses the death rate is 40 per 1,000; with two-roomed houses, 20 per 1,000; with three-roomed houses, 15 per 1,000, and with four-roomed houses, 8 to 10 per 1,000. In the case of infantile mortality the rate is two or three times as large in the case of one-roomed houses as with those of four rooms.

These remarkable figures show that as the breathing space of a house increased, the death rate diminished. We are realizing in England that this is a problem affecting millions of people, and is the greatest contributing quantity to the inefficiency of the race.

Now, however, there is a bright side to the case. The establishment of model cities such as Letchworth, which is an example of how a city should be built, with accommodation for 30,000 people, having bowling greens, a garden to every house, artistic effects, and the factories so situated as to give the minimum of injury to the health of the people.

In London we now have two model villages in the suburbs, one in Ealing and one in Hampstead. Here they see that the number of houses to each lot is limited, provision is made for children, so that there is no danger of their being run over by the street cars, and where at the same time they will be sent out of the way of their mothers. Hampstead, I believe, will soon be the finest suburb in the world, and already it has a population of over 30,000 people.

It was while visiting Hampstead that Earl Grey first got the idea of inaugurating the campaign in your country, and having me visit Canada. While there his Excellency, with Hon. Sydney Fisher, were struck with the bright faces of the people with whom they chatted and had their tea. They became interested in our co-partnership-in-housing movement. They found we had also model villages in Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Liverpool, Stoke-on-Trent, Leicester, Manchester and at Newcastle-on-Tyne where the authorities have offered a stretch of ground 200,000 acres in extent, for the purpose of a model town.

These towns are developed in a peculiar manner. Every citizen is encouraged to become a stock-holder in the company,

there being a fixed interest. The result is that before long a man owns the house in which he lives. But should a man decide to leave the village for Canada or elsewhere the money is paid back to him at par. But I do not think that persons living in these villages are likely to emigrate to Canada.

These individual efforts resulted in the town-planning act. Hitherto county councils had not had the power to handle the difficulties arising from town development. But this act gives the county council power to lay out in advance all the area beyond the town, including that which may ultimately be brought in. The chief or principal city in a county becomes the chief authority, and takes the initiative in inviting the co-operation of the smaller towns for the forming of a plan providing for the improvement of the whole area in the district, with a view to the regulation of the street railways, the building of houses, etc., so that when a town grows up it is not necessary to buy up areas at enormous expense to clear them away.

In Germany this idea had been in vogue long before it was put into practice in England. In the city of Frankfort the district all round the city has been planned out for the next twenty years, providing for gardens, parks, residences, and public buildings, so that if the town grows it grows upon these lines.

Not only are these things being done from a health standpoint, but also with a view to improving the architecture of the city as a whole. We are thinking in towns instead of in streets or houses. Effect can be added to a town by choosing well the sites for its public buildings, instead of having them dumped down anywhere.

And right here, you must pardon me if I presume to give some advice. Big mistakes, it seems to me, have already been made in Canada. I have in my mind a city with a population of 26,000, which will surely have a hundred thousand inside of twenty years, and yet the main street is less than sixty feet wide. The town is so badly planned that, inside of twenty years, it will become a death trap unless enormous expense is made, and the problem is increasing in importance as time goes on. Automobiles are coming on to the streets, running from factory to factory, travelling at twenty miles an hour. What does that mean to the pedestrian? If there is not provision made for foot-paths and opportunity for crossing, in twenty years the modern city will be intolerable. In Toronto and Montreal the problem is enormous and is daily increasing, is it not?

As Raymond Unwin has pointed out, the introduction of the co-partnership principle marks a new era in housing; for not only is the individual likely to procure for himself a better house and a larger garden by obtaining them through a co-partnership society than by any other means, but the introduction of co-operation opens up quite a new range of possibilities. For through the medium of co-operation all may enjoy a share of very many advantages, the individual possession of which can only be attained by the few.

The man who is sufficiently wealthy may have his own shrubberies, tennis court, bowling green, or play places for his children, and may, by the size of his grounds, secure an open and pleasant outlook from all his windows; but the individual possession of such grounds is quite out of the reach of the majority. A co-partnership association can, however, provide for all its members a share of these advantages and of far more than these. In fact, the scope of the principle is limited only by the power of those who associate to accept and enjoy the sharing of great things in place of the exclusive possession of small things.

In exceptional cases some enlightened owner or company may so lay out an estate as to provide for the common enjoyment of some of the advantages of the site; but usually everything is sacrificed which will not produce a revenue, and which cannot be divided up into the individual self-contained plots, marked by the maximum degree of detachment, which are so desired by those who know only of individual possession and have not learned the joys of sharing.

Where a site is not being developed on co-partnership lines the whole position is changed. Instead of thinking and planning only for a chance assortment of individuals there is now a whole to be thought of. A home is to be planned for a community having something of organized life. A centre is needed for this life: institutes, schools, clubs, or places of worship may form such a centre, towards which the design can be made to lead. The site can be thought of and planned as a whole; and the certainty of some degrees of co-operation will enable spots of natural beauty and distant views of hill and dale to be preserved for common enjoyment. Play places and shelters for the children, greens for tennis, bowls, or croquet, can be arranged, with the houses so grouped around them that while they provide the occupants with ample recreation ground, they also afford more pleasant prospects from the windows and more attractive views for the streets.

In this way instead of the buildings being mere endless rows, or the repetition of isolated houses having no connection one with the other, they will naturally gather themselves into groups and the groups again clustered round the greens will form larger units, and the interest and beauty of grouping will at once arise.

The principle of sharing, therefore, not only causes each individual house to become more attractive, but gives to the whole area covered that coherence which, springing from the common life of the community, expresses itself in the harmony and beauty of the whole. The harmony of outward expression must in turn react on the life that flourishes under its influence, at once stimulating the growth of co-operation and giving wider opportunities for its practice. How much the architectural beauty of old cities and villages sprang from their being the outgrowth of an organized civil life is perhaps little realized, but the ugliness and dreariness of the towns and suburbs which have resulted where such common life is lacking are but too evident to all. I look for the principle of co-partnership to give us again, in a new form, a commercial civic life which will once more infuse harmony and beauty into the homes and into the suburbs and villages, which, with the necessary public buildings for general use, will be the outward expression of the life of these communities.

All this has its meaning to you Canadians. You are, in many cases, particularly in your great west, in the beginning. Look well to your future and you will be indeed well advised.