

**THE DUBLIN HOUSING QUESTION.—SANITARY AND
INSANITARY.**

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So much attention has been devoted to the insanitary condition of certain quarters of our City that it appears to me that the work which has been done for the providing of sanitary and comfortable dwellings for the workers has been almost completely overlooked. In the first place, I desire to point out what has been done for the providing of Sanitary dwellings. In the second, I shall deal with what are called the Slums. Amongst the greatest of pioneers and reformers in the housing of Dublin stands the Corporation.

What has it done? It has itself erected several blocks of well-constructed dwellings for the working classes; these are capable of accommodating hundreds of families, meaning seven thousands of people. These houses are under the supervision of proper caretakers, a precaution by the way I deem absolutely necessary where there are many occupiers, and, where, as in most cases, the adults must be absent for the greater portion of the day. This supervision insures cleanliness and the protection of property.

In addition to its own work, the Corporation has availed of powers to encourage owners of premises valued at and under £8 to keep their property in repair by making a reduction of 25 per cent. off the municipal rate in all cases where these premises are certified by the Public Health Department to be in sanitary condition—and it has put at the head of this Department, the greatest authority on public health matters in the three kingdoms, Sir Charles Cameron, with ample funds at his command. Could the Corporation do more? But it has done more by facilitating the operations of other agencies. From the statistics at my disposal I can enumerate a number of these agencies. Let me mention some.

It was the Corporation that, by granting almost a free site, enabled the Artizans' Dwellings Co. to start the great housing work. Then there is the Association for the Housing of the Very Poor, I may say started by Sir Charles Cameron; the Civil Service Society, the Merchant Warehouse Society, the Derby and Everton Building

Society, the Working Men's Building Society, the Alexandra College Society, and one I am particularly glad to mention, the "Trinity College Social Service Society." I wish other Universities and Colleges would follow this example, for none are more suited for social reformers than young, ardent and educated men. Now, I am aware that these companies and societies provide many thousands of families of the workers with healthy and comfortable dwellings.

The action is not, however, confined even to the societies and companies. Individuals with capital have taken up the good work. The munificent family of Guinness, both Lords Ardilaun and Iveagh, is foremost in the work. There is another Dublin nobleman, whose name is inseparably connected with the housing and recreation of the workers, I allude to the Earl of Meath. Even before he assumed his present title, "Brabazon Place," its dwellings, and its playgrounds, told what this philanthropic nobleman had done. And then private capitalists, like the late Mr. Thomas Vance, to whose work I shall refer further on, have done much, and the rate books are full of lists of dwellings supplied for the workers, all in sanitary condition, by the proprietors of such estates as, the Pile; the O'Donoghue; the Hammond, and many others all kept in certified sanitary condition and affording accommodation to hundreds of families. How then can it be said Dublin has been backward in this matter?

But nevertheless there is no doubt that Dublin, like every other large and old city, has its insanitary areas, called

"SLUMS"

In this respect it is by no means singular. They abound in many parts of London. Some of them I myself have often visited, but in the vast registration area of London, embracing some millions of people, the well-to-do and well-housed so predominate over the ill-housed, that the high death rate (in many cases over 30 per 1,000 living), is lost sight of. The very contrary is the case with Dublin. Its area is narrow and congested, and the poor and ill-housed classes predominate in numbers, and all this results in the high death rate of which we hear so much.

Nevertheless, the efforts of the Public Health Department have worked wonders. I well remember in the time of our distinguished citizen and corporator, Mr. E. D. Gray, and of his still more illustrious father, Sir John Gray, who secured for us one of the greatest sources of public health, the sparkling waters of the Vartry, we were pleased when the death rate was under 40; we are now startled when it is over 20. This remarkable progress is

seldom adverted to. Truly it requires some study and long experience to understand this housing question in Dublin, and to ascertain what has been done, and still more important—what yet remains to be done

What remains to be done is to get rid of the great blot, or, in other words, of the

SLUMS,

so often referred to by the learned Recorder. Let us thrash this question out—what are slums?—how did they grow?—how can they be rectified? A slum district consists generally of neglected and dilapidated streets, where houses once the residence of one family, with appliances only for that one, are vacated by the migration of their former occupants to suburban and even to more distant regions. These old houses instead of having been adapted for the use, not of one but many families, were allowed to fall into the hands either of poor people or of hard-hearted, well-to-do owners. They are generally let to a numerous shifting, and partially employed class, and so on account of these circumstances no proper appliances or maintenance can be supplied.

But there are other makers of slums, and those are occupiers who get dwellings in fair order, but by dirt and destruction allow them to become the worst of slums. I do not find from the Bench or other quarter any condemnation of these creators of the slums. Such people should be punished more severely than they are, and they should be advised by those in influential positions to practice cleanliness and to respect property. There is another preventive, Ownership. In Belgium, and in some British towns, house Ownership leads to comfort and sanitation. Though Belgium is not much larger than one Irish province, it has a population of 8,000,000, nearly all of whom dwell in their own houses. Then a Law of Deportation such as exists in Great Britain and which enables local authorities to send back immigrants to their own Unions is not in force in Ireland. Hence the waifs and strays from all the towns in the United Kingdom can come into this City, filling its streets with mendicants, the Poor Houses with inmates and its Asylums with lunatics. It is necessary to remark that the absence of legislation on this head is not the fault of the Corporation, because it sought for such powers in a Bill which was strenuously opposed by influential classes in this City that it had to be abandoned.

Now, my idea is that our slums could have been largely prevented, if, in time as the residential streets became

vacant, from the causes I have mentioned, the houses they contained were adapted to their new requirements. I have myself seen, and I am still seeing, every day, in most respectable districts, houses of this class, quite capable of reconstruction, going from bad to worse, and yet even those interested in the localities will not invest a penny in their adaptation. It is well to advocate, as does Lady Aberdeen, Town Planning and Garden Cities, but the best benefactor in the existing circumstances would be the person who would in time buy up these houses, and reconstruct them for their new use.

In support of this reconstruction policy I am able to quote the opinion expressed by the Secretary of the Glasgow Workmen's Dwellings Company to the deputation from the Corporation of Dublin, who lately visited their City. He says, "the Company's work has been upon the two main lines—erection of new and reconstruction of old buildings, all being for the struggling working people." "The financial return," he says, "from *new* buildings is distinctly lower than from *reconstructed* ones." As examples of financial success in building and reconstruction all the companies I have mentioned pay dividends—the Artizans' Dwelling at least 5 per cent., and as for individual effort when Mr. Thomas Vance showed me over his reconstructed dwellings in Bishop Street, I saw every appliance for sanitation and comfort, but he showed me his rent book also, which recorded a handsome yearly profit. That was thirty years ago—but I am glad to say that although Mr. Thomas Vance is gone, the Vance Estate still remains, and under admirable management (up to the other day that of Mr. W. E. Peebles), continues the same comforts to the many tenants, while its admirable order is a tribute to the tactful caretaker, Mr. Nolan. In his powerful address at the meeting of the "Association for the Housing of the Very Poor," on the 18th April last, Sir Lambert Ormsby, in proposing the adoption of the report, said:—"The very poor are obliged to live in tenements which reek with disease, and sap the very strength and vitality out of the wretched people, thereby imperilling the health of the whole community." And he further stated how 2,000 very poor families, whose weekly wages ranged from 5s. to 12s., were compelled to live in tenement houses which "reek with disease." No wonder there is a high death rate. How different the story is where sanitary conditions prevail. Sir Charles Cameron seconded the motion. He said that the education of the tenement people had improved, but there was a great deal yet to be done. The only way they could have tenement houses,

even the new ones, kept in proper order was by the education of the people. The houses taken over by the Social Service Association of Trinity College showed no loss, and the same result would be gained if the tenement houses were taken over by either municipalities or companies.

At their last meeting the Chairman of the Artizans' Dwellings Company stated that the death rate amongst their tenants was only 11.21 in a population of 16,000, as compared with 21.8 in the registration area, and he quoted the fact how his Association by reconstructing old dwelling had changed them from slums into healthy habitations. But here he had to complain of want of support from those who have plenty of means, but prefer to criticise the evil, instead of investing capital to arrest it.

But if capitalists will do nothing, if hard-hearted owners won't, and pauper occupiers can't, then, I agree with Mr. Finlay Heron, that the State should step in. We must have a Town Act as well as a Land Act. Only the other day Mr. Asquith declared that the Government proposed before long to devote its attention to the Housing problem in connection with Rural life. Surely this question is as keen and pressing in its Urban aspect? The lives of the people must not depend upon voluntary action, be it public or private. The workers are the foundation stones of society, their health and their comfort must no longer be left to voluntary action, and therefore I share the view of that great novelist, that great reformer, Charles Dickens, and I conclude this paper by commending it to your serious attention. He says:—

“I have systematically tried to turn fiction to the good account of showing the preventable wretchedness and misery in which the masses of the people dwell and of expressing again and again the conviction founded upon observation, that the reform of their habitations must precede all other reforms, and *without it all other reforms must fail.*”