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ARTICLE X.

THE HOUSING QUESTION AND SCIENTIFIC REFORM.[1]

BY PROFESSOR WILLIAM CALDWELL, M.A., D.SC.

IT seems fitting that a Conference like the present should be conscious to some extent of the relation of the special topic of its consideration to social science as a whole, and to the whole course of contemporary social evolution, and to the science of reform—if there be such a science—to scientific reform. The very fact that this conference is held under the auspices of a University Settlement, and of settlement workers, and philanthropists, and public officials, is enough to prove to the general public that the topic of our consideration is a rational one, one that is thoroughly in line with the best modern tendencies of economic and social reform. The people who meet here to consider this topic of the Housing of our Working-Classes cannot, by their very existence, be mere visionaries, or mere revolutionists, or mere sentimentalists, or mere busybodies and agitators. Taking, then, all this for granted, I wish, ladies and gentlemen, with your permission, to bring before you *some*—I do not say all—some of the principles of social evolution and reform on which this movement for the better housing of working-people may be said to rest. A movement that could not bear inspection in the light of scientific principles of human nature, and that might be out of harmony with social evolution,—which is a thing we

[1] An opening address before Improved Housing Conference, at Northwestern University Settlement, 252 West Chicago Avenue, Chicago, February 1 and 2, 1897.

may help to mould, but not wholly or arbitrarily control,—would be condemned as irrational, unreal, unworthy of the consideration of scientific and serious people, as not destined to have a future.

But the first thing that may be said about the proposal to insure better homes for people in the crowded part of our cities is, that it strikes a fundamental note, so far as both human nature and social science are concerned. It proposes, that, if anything is to be done for the people in crowded districts of cities, we should proceed by trying to organize or reorganize civic life by taking hold of the fundamental unit of society—the family. No person outside the family life, no person who has nothing at stake in the process of social evolution, can understand that very process. No person who is unacquainted with the evolution of the family in the social process and progress of humanity can have an adequate idea of the importance of this movement of modern cities to strengthen the very roots of family life by seeking, in a measure, to insist that families shall live in places where family life can take real roots. It may be that some people in our midst think, with some socialists, and some utopists, and some would-be devotees of the ideal of complete personal freedom, of the family as a transitional institution. To such people I can only say, in the name of social science, that the tendency of the best social reform in regard to the development of all classes of society, of the free and enlightened, and of the average citizen, and of the so-called laboring-classes, and of the so-called abnormal classes of society—dependents and delinquents and degenerates—is to emphasize the importance of the upbringing and training of individuals in the stable ethical family, and of the assumption, by the effective portion of modern men and women, of the duties and responsibilities of the life of the stable ethical family. In strengthening the roots of family life in house and home, the housing-re-

form movement strengthens all the reality, and all the value, and all the healthful influence of the ethical family for our modern life.

Again, in thinking of social evolution, we must always think of two factors: the so-called subjective or personal or human factor, and the so-called objective or material or environment factor. There can be no normal, ethical, effective family life for people who live, or are allowed to live, in dwellings which do not constitute the environment rational and sane and safe for the development of family life, the environment that is also safe and sanitary from the point of view of society as a whole, and of political and economic development. There can be no proper family development where there is not possible a certain minimal "standard of comfort," even so far as the mere physical development of two or three or four or six or more individuals of the two sexes is concerned. There can be no nursery for civic life in homes where the evils of loose morality, "sweating," the non-observance of civic provisions about sanitary and other matters, want of cleanliness of body, want of free air-space, want of play-space for children, utter absence of motives to purify and beautify the family domicile,—where all these evils are manifest in all their dismal bitterness. The ideal of the housing-reform movement is that the various grades of our toiling citizens, of our humble and dependent and ignorant citizens, should be taught to feel the civic and uplifting value of private, healthy, adequate, and pleasant domiciles; and not only to feel the value of adequate houses or homes, but to feel this so strongly that they would strive, at personal sacrifice, to obtain such houses or homes. It is true that the housing-reform movement began out of the efforts of society to protect itself from slums and congested living areas,—blocks of unhealthy human habitations that bred disease and degeneracy, crime and discontent, apathy, ignorance; that

permitted selfish men to make a living out of the huddling together of creatures too helpless to help themselves; that led to the perpetuation and the multiplication and the spreading of conditions utterly at variance with the conditions of national and human and civic development. But it is true that the experience of cities in tearing down insanitary and bad tenement-houses and blocks, and rear and basement dwellings, very soon led people to see that the best way of attacking the housing problem was to attack it in such a way as to insure the best coöperation of the working and economically weak people themselves, in such a way as to enlist the ambition and effort, moral and economic and vital, of these people themselves. In short, the second thing about the housing-reform movement of modern times is, that it recognizes the objective or the environment conditions of family life, as well as the subjective or personal conditions.

And the third is, that while society is compelled, in the interests of self-protection—of the survival of its own life as greater than that of any mere section of it,—to consider the housing of its members, the housing-reform movement has not hitherto neglected the fact, that the individual family ought to be willing to undergo struggle and sacrifice for its own perpetuation and advancement; that the motive of self-help and the factor of personal effort and ambition ought to be borne in mind in seeking to uplift people by bettering their environment. People ought to be made to desire a better environment for themselves. A word or two will make this apparent.

It has been found that the best way to reform people through proper housing is to begin with the better class of the occupiers of tenement-houses. Indeed, the movement naturally begins to take effect there. True it is, that insanitary dwelling-areas have been condemned and demolished by municipalities acting in accordance with govern-

ment or state provisions, and that such municipalities have seen to the thereby displaced people by building and renting house accommodations for them only out of a sense of justice, and not directly out of any socialistic or philanthropic impulse. But, generally speaking, even municipalities and private individuals or companies who have put up new housing accommodations have always put up better accommodations than had previously existed—such accommodation, in fact, as is dictated by modern science, by the economic motives of making profitable investment. The houses put up were such as would prove attractive, and modern, and economical, to all who thought of occupying them, which would draw a good kind of tenant, a tenant who would be thrifty, and reliable, and apt to be inspired with the desire of personal improvement in consequence of living in model quarters. Cities as a rule have first endeavored to induce private parties to purchase the land of condemned areas, and to build model houses which would at once yield a good return on investment, and also exhibit to some extent the philanthropic and scientific and the civic purpose. That is, they have tried to induce certain citizens, if only out of a first mere desire of profitable investment, to become individually and indirectly the benefactors of their fellow but less fortunate citizens. It has been found, too, that families, after being in model tenement-houses, begin to have the desire to acquire and own independent houses of their own, possibly somewhat removed from the immediate centers of their industrial occupations. The housing-reform movement thus goes hand in hand with the movement for cheap transit facilities in cities for the great mass of toilers. New York is recognizing this fact, and already thinking of improved independent private dwellings for workingmen at some distance from the actual business centers of the city. Towns in Great Britain have found a connection between the putting up

of improved tenement-houses and of improved lodging-houses, and the desire of workingmen to acquire finally homes for themselves.

It is a noteworthy thing, by the way, that the kind of coöperation which has best succeeded in the United States is not that of coöperative production (as in France), or of coöperative distribution (as in Great Britain), or of peoples' banks (as in Germany), but that of building associations. Workingmen have already to a considerable extent in this country been helped by building associations to the erection of independent houses in large numbers. The first occupiers, in short, of model tenement-blocks are generally apt to be the better, the self-helping portion of the working-classes, and the dwellings that they leave—partly through a fall in rent—are resorted to by the section immediately beneath them in social and economic effort. And if the first occupiers of model dwelling-houses are led finally to seek in some way houses of their own, there would thus be a double grading-up rendered possible, a grading-up which would finally affect stratum after stratum of our congested populations. And many workingmen have become actual investors in the improved dwellings they live in, and in other philanthropic enterprises connected with the housing movement. The rigid enforcement of rules about the payment of rent and the observance of sanitary laws, the increased social intercourse, the furtherance of intellectual life and development, of civic feeling, the growth in self-respect and ambition which adequate housing accommodation seems to foster:—these things, and the things to which they naturally lead, all show, in the fourth place, that the housing movement does not fly in the face of what is roughly called *Darwinism*, the natural struggle to which all individuals are, and ought to be, subjected in the development of their lives.

A good field is opened up for the work of citizens who

have leisure to help the owners—whether individual, municipal, or corporate—of model dwelling-houses in collecting the rents from the inhabitants when they fall due. By voluntarily performing this routine duty they relieve at once tenant and landlord of the undesirability of meeting through an objectionable or unscrupulous middleman or tax-gatherer, and become the means of extending the social horizon of the occupiers of tenement-dwellings. The purchase, on the instalment plan, of self-contained dwellings by workingmen can very easily be combined with the obligation of taking out at the same time an insurance policy. So that in various ways the motive of self-effort after increased welfare is called forth by the housing-reform movement.

But, fifthly, the philanthropy of housing reform is a modern, scientific, economic enterprise, which, irrespective altogether of the future of the benefited individuals and the community, from the business point of view, may be, has been, and is, a strictly financial success, an eminently good investment for people with capital, or for working-people themselves. Dr. Gould's investigations[1] into the improved-dwellings movement in America and Europe show that more than eighty per cent of such enterprises have been, and are, a financial success. This immediate business success of the movement, and the possibility it reveals of the coöperation of rich and poor in this matter, and the decreased death-rate in districts where improved dwellings have been put up, and the removal of the environment conditions of civic and national disobedience, crime, dependency, physical debility of children, immorality, political corruption, and so on, surely show the movement to be more than justifiable from the standpoint of the community, the money of the tax-payer. I should be the last to

[1] See Eighth Special Report of the Commissioner of Labor, 1895, The Housing of the Working-People.

deny a certain amount of inevitable moral and physiological degeneration caused by the excessive activity and overstraining of modern life, and also the last to deny the danger of adding to state and municipal machinery while the conditions of human nature remain what they are. But the housing-reform movement is a plea for self-help on the part of workers themselves, and for the voluntary interest of all the members of a community in each other, for business reasons if for no other. "Civilization," says Professor Giddings, "is menaced by dangers perhaps as grave as those that overshadowed it at the beginning. It was threatened then by the barbarians beyond its walls. To-day it is threatened by savagery within its gates."[1] All barbarism, ladies and gentlemen, all barbarism must be fought! If the present barbarism is not fought, the barbarians in our midst will overturn us or drag our society down into ruins upon which humanity or God himself may erect some better form of civilization. Society, it must be remembered, must struggle to preserve itself against all the forces that are tending to overthrow it.

America, of all countries, should take the lead in this very matter. Why should we deliberately allow areas of dwellings to be erected that will have—at the cost of the public money, and to the public shame, with a view to public safety—to be mown down to the ground. European cities have grown from small beginnings, from the bottom upwards. American cities we begin to build with all the resources of modern science, all the experience of the Old World, all our unspeakable and justifiable civic and national pride behind us, and with the unspeakable future of humanity before us. The American democracy, if it is to go on governing itself, makes the greatest possible demand upon the average citizen. It demands the most enlightened citizenship in the world, and by beginning at the home, the nursery of all the virtues in this world, all the character and all the force, by beginning in a proper, natural, justifiable, considerate, enlightened manner with the housing problem we shall begin with one of the most important factors in economic and social development.

[1] Principles of Sociology, p. 351.