CO - OPERATIVE PERMANENT BUILDING SOCIETY

Twelve in Search of a House

ESIGN FOR
RITAIN

TWELVE IN SEARCH OF A HOUSE

A SYMPOSIUM

SIXPENCE
NET

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INTRODUCTION

The Co-operative Permanent Building Society, so far as the circumstances of War permit, plans to issue a series of reasoned statements on building societies and the position they should occupy when peace is restored. The enquiry arises from a belief that building societies and their work should not be allowed to recede from the public view. Even within the limits imposed by the Building Societies' Acts, they have contributed much towards home-making during the past half century. In the age of Reconstruction to follow the War, it is believed that building societies have a more important part to play than heretofore. It is hoped that this investigation of Planning and Housing, conducted by well-known authorities whose knowledge in a wide field may add to the sum of wisdom, will shed light in dark places.

This booklet is one of two Series by architects, artists, authors, economists, medical and sociological authorities, and town planners, in which it is hoped to cover every aspect of town and rural planning and the home. It cannot be too widely known that building societies, designed to give effect to principles of mutual aid, possess the organisation, the means, and the experience from which effective reconstruction and better planning can derive vitality.

Controversial questions will be raised. For the nature of these debatable matters, and the way in which they are presented, the Directors of the Co-operative Permanent Building Society are in no sense responsible. Their part is almost finished when they maintain that a good purpose is served by provoking discussion on issues so important as better housing for the people. There are not many lines of thought more urgently required than educated opinion concerning town, village, and home planning. This publication, together with its companions in these Series is, therefore, governed by three reservations only. The Directors of the Co-operative Permanent Building Society contend that builders in the future should not encroach upon good taste in town and country planning; infringe simple rules designed to ensure the use of land and buildings to their greatest social advantage; nor fail to encourage every rational attempt to construct houses at minimum expense to the community. Saving these controlling principles the authors of the statements published in these booklets are free to write as they please.

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(Second Series)

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F.S.S., F.R.Hist.S.

Co-operative permanent building society.

TWELVE IN SEARCH OF A HOUSE

A SYMPOSIUM

by

A Charlady
An Agricultural Worker
A Typist
A Medical Practitioner
An Elementary School Teacher
A Miner
A Woman of the Middle Class
A Vicar of the Church of England
A Woman Journalist
Two Engineers
and
A Railwayman's Wife

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THE EDITOR.

EDITOR'S FOREWORD

If there be anyone who could read, without a tremor of emotion, the human documents which compose this pamphlet, that man or woman must have a hard heart. Among those who write for these pages are some on whom life has smiled in fairly kindly fashion; none is rich and all the relatively well-to-do lead laborious lives. But most of this strangely assorted Twelve have to grapple with the harsher forms of reality, at every moment of their working days. If some of the contributors incline to look at the housing problem solely from the standpoint of an individual, asking only for personal convenience and comfort, there are others who perceive with a clarity which is compelling that neither public nor private health, a peace of mind that spells serenity, nor that constructive imagination which, scorning self, dwells upon the means of a country's greatness, have a shadow of a chance of true fulfilment till housing conditions in Britain are vastly improved.

These pages have something more than interest for housing reformers. In terms which suffer from their brevity they present a succession of psychological types—the introvert and extrovert, the self-centred man or woman and the so-called utopist dreamer whose gaze is fixed not on things as they are, but on social arrangements and institutions as he contends they could be. Whether it be done by private effort, by public enterprise, or by a combination of those lines of action so wrongly deemed to be in unbridgeable conflict, when a nation proposes to house its people, as Britain must rehouse half her inhabitants when this war ends, it then is necessary to build for many types of persons and for a varied assortment of tastes. Therein lies a danger. The size of the task and its complications are so impressive that, for its simplification, we are apt to turn to enforced similarity and repetition. Against that we have to be on guard; even though we take avail of any sensible and useful aid prefabrication can afford.

That danger is perceived by those who write on the respective merits of flats and houses. Whichever the type of dwelling that is preferred, their advocates ask for variety in construction. On the vital need for prevision and method in planning the kitchen they all agree. That is a demand which expands the idea that a woman's freedom, in great part, consists in the degree of her release from kinds of household labour which can be done more rapidly with mechanical aid. Work for work's sake is not a doctrine that appeals to women of this age. Ready as ever to perform what the moralist

calls her duty, she moves so far towards emancipation that she declines to admit her duty is discharged unless the piece of work, immediately beneath her hand, can be carried through in so short a period that time remains for the performance of other duties or for leisure.

The house or flat controversy is not to be settled by those considerations alone. In some quarters it is suggested that aversion to tenement dwellings would pass if all the amenities, now to be found in "luxury flats," were introduced in flats of the kind where some of our contributors dwell. That may be so. But who can suppose, without a revolution in our system of land ownership and the mode of issuing credit—new purchasing power for building construction—that the London County Council will build in Poplar, spacious, elegant and convenient suites of rooms of a kind that are as yet inhabited only by tenants who pay their hundreds of guineas per annum for the pleasure of residence near Hampstead Heath, or in easy reach of Whitehall? Architects and housing reformers who write in that strain should address themselves to problems of land and money ownership. They must point the way by which escape can be found from the power those forms of ownership exercise. Not until that way is found will housing for the people assume, even approximately, the character of that which is enjoyed by their social superiors.

Occupation and Income

Among outstanding facts that emerge from a study of this symposium is the stress that is laid, by several contributors, on the greater advantages which flats provide in comparison with small houses. The question is decided by the tenant's occupation and social position. Widows who must work for a livelihood, elderly spinsters and younger persons unmarried, all state their preference for flats. Side by side with that concession to the attractions of aggregation several deny, unexpectedly perhaps, that while every possible labour-saving device should be introduced in each separate flat the communal laundry and restaurant have anything to offer that should not be discouraged. As the scale of income rises so does readiness to share in the common meal become apparent. The representative wage-earner of Great Britain is still a pronounced conservative on matters affecting home life. Their men and women agree, however much the work entailed for women folk, that meals should be taken at home and their washing be done on their own premises. The proposition for a communal dining room for them, is redolent of the canteen and the cafeteria; and of those perversions of decent methods of feeding they have had more than enough in the war.

When a professional man or woman speaks objection to the

restaurant (provided it does not present a common table) is not heard. Nor do they object to collective arrangements for clothes washing though, it should be remarked, the middle class seldom speak of such primitive and closely natural things. They pay a limited liability laundry company to tear their clothes to pieces because they can afford the cost. These are the issues that grow large where housing is discussed by the overcrowded and discontented. On these issues, so hotly contested, the views that are held are so diverse that only by the supply of many kinds of accommodation can the solution of housing questions be approached.

Doubt and Mistrust

One other matter, important to building societies, makes its appearance in the pages which follow. Widespread doubt, sometimes actual mistrust, is expressed as to the wisdom of attempting house purchase. That view is stated by labourers, the wives of men subject to unemployment, by clergymen and doctors who know the wage-earning-class. As the social investigator moves upward in the range of income opinion changes, radically. Where an income is assured, or is in definite proportion with personal effort which has met with success, house purchase and dealings with building societies take on a different and more welcome aspect. It may be urged that this division of opinion is proof, more or less conclusive, that purchase with the aid of a building society is designed for that ill-defined section of the community ordinarily designated "middle class." In latter years building societies have striven to create another impression. On their behalf it has been maintained that the artisan, now to be found residing in Council dwellings and paying no more than a subsidised rent, can and should be encouraged to take up a loan and thus acquire another status in society. The views which some of our contributors advance suggest that the proposition needs elaboration. With hard stern vision, that comes from a constant struggle to make one's earnings sufficient for necessary expenditure, first they doubt their ability to maintain the payments of principal and interest as they fall due; and next they entertain deeply-rooted suspicions as to the methods building societies pursue.

That the instalments, if regularly paid, may amount to nothing more than the periodical payment of rent makes but a scanty appeal. In doubt whether regular payments can be maintained they hear of cases, so they contend, where the house was forfeit after the mortgagor had paid nearly as much as he borrowed originally. Devotees of building societies—and there are some who support and defend their methods with a fervour which, in a former age, was reserved for the furtherance of religion and wholly virtuous living—maintain that these sceptical opinions depend upon exaggeration buttressed by

ill-informed antipathy. Possibly. If that be so, inaccuracy as to the benefits which occupying ownership confers on individuals and on the community will not be removed by reiterated assertion of the number of houses constructed by means that building societies provided between the wars, with or without assistance from public funds. Exaggeration and antipathy were never yet confuted by irrelevancy. Nor are the doubts and fears discounted by reference to the magnitude of the funds at the disposal of building societies. In some quarters those stupendous figures breed alarm. They are regarded as preponderating evidence of the growing power of a congeries of organisations which, by agreement as to the rate of interest paid to shareholders, and identity of the rate of interest charged to borrowers, aim at establishing a gigantic financial power not to be distinguished from other practical monopolies of our time.

Let the Subject Be Ventilated

Wherever error is heard there is but one way to meet its rasping voice. More publicity, and ever more publicity, is the remedy. Not enough is known about the structure of building societies, their control and management, the actual cost of the services they perform. Though they comply with statutory requirements, official publications present no more by way of information than a skeleton without flesh. Neither the balance sheets nor the persuasive "literature" which societies issue in their quest of client-borrowers supply more than a thin scraping of actual fact about the real expense of house purchase. Of voluntary associations in Great Britain there are several kinds. It is indeed a truthful assertion that the freedoms they enjoy are among the principal advantages conferred by the British form of political and social democracy. Of all other popular voluntary organisations—trade unions, co-operative societies and friendly societies, in particular—there is wide knowledge among their members and the outside public as to their methods, the expense entailed by action in concert, and the source and final destination of their funds. No such popular understanding prevails for the just appraisement of building societies' operations. In all large towns there are people, by the hundred thousand, who dread the sense of defeat that would overtake them after the regular payment of instalments if their expectations of house ownership were then destroyed by unemployment, sickness, or some other adversity engendered by our social system and wholly beyond their powers of control or prevention. It is conceivable that the payments made, month by month, amounted to not more than would have been paid in rent. But great expectations were built up. Ownership of the house was anticipated. When those expectations are destroyed it ill becomes a nation to regard with indifference the psychological result of reverses of that order.

In these pages the dread of that state of mind is very manifest. Throughout the contributions there runs a view, half hidden, only vaguely uttered, but very audible to one who knows his fellow men. It is the view that small savings, which are all the savings the huge majority of men and women can ever possess, should be adequately protected and that saving should not be so expensive to the thrifty borrower. It is well to remember that without his need the care and forethought indicated by the postponement of expenditure would bring no monetary advantage to those who conserve their cash.

The State and Voluntary Effort

Facts and moods of these disturbing kinds demand attention. Is it not possible that the State, from the welter of ideas aroused by a call for reconstruction, in conjunction with a chain or pool of building societies, more efficiently and democratically organised, could frame a financial system for the construction of houses, their rental and their ownership, on lines that would effect our contributors' aspirations in a fashion more liberal than private money-lending has yet been able to adopt? Whoever should traverse that path, whether they be statesmen, administrators concerned to mould the course of local government, or building society directors would, perforce, have to work together. Should such an example of the union of compulsory and voluntary powers presently be offered this nation that experiment will be conspicuous in history.

TWELVE
IN SEARCH OF A HOUSE

"SEARCHING FOR IT ALL MY LIFE"
by
May Pavitt

As a working-class housewife I have often wished I could compel the persons who design our houses to live and bring up a family in one of them. They cannot know how the want of many little conveniences have resulted in numbers of women being nervous wrecks by the time the children are grown up. At last, if the brave new world we are promised comes to fruition, I may get the house that I consider right.

Flats may suit some people, but give me a front and back door with a bit of garden near both, just big enough for one person to keep going.

I should not mind a terrace house, although a semi-detached is to be preferred. If the terrace type of house is the only one I can obtain, there should be a means of access to the back, apart from going through the house and any steps to or from it should not be more than six inches high. Its walls should be insulated to prevent one hearing all the details of your neighbours' lives.

I should like to buy the house if possible. But always the difficulty is the money one has to pay as a first instalment. Working people never have any money until the children are grown up. If municipalities built houses enough, and of more kinds than they do now, it might be possible to let the tenants pay an agreed rent until the house was paid for. If the house is your own there is much more satisfaction in the work you put into it. Also it is natural for the family to take more care, seeing that Father has to make good the damage. The man will do a lot more in the way of decorating, painting and repairs, than he will do for a landlord. If the landlord owns the house when Father is asked to see to a ceiling or make a draughty door weather-proof, he says, "What do we pay rent for?

Let the landlord do it." That makes the woman despair of making the place nice.

The house should be planned so that when you open the front door a visitor does not see the back garden. The front door should open into a square hall. Under the stairs the pram or bicycle could be kept. A small cupboard at the foot could hold the children's toys, or shoes. All doors should be so placed that there is no draught. Ventilation should be controlled but not as is so often the case through badly fitting doors and windows. How many builders ever think of windows? They should be fixed so that they can be easily cleaned from the inside. There is no fun in a buxom woman squeezing herself through half a window on the top floor so that she can sit on a narrow ledge and clean from the outside. Stairs are important. They should have a wide tread instead of the steep and narrow that are so prevalent.

Heating and Cupboards

There should be three bedrooms of a fair size, with a bathroom and separate lavatory on the top floor. In two bedrooms there should be a fireplace. Many people complain about coal fires as dirty but there is not much cleaning to be done if the fireplaces are tiled. They forget that although gas or electricity may warm a room the house itself remains cold, as there is no warm chimney running through it. Also the cost of either gas or electricity in sickness runs to big figures.

A house should have cupboards; one in each room large enough to hang wearing apparel. The bathroom cupboard should be large enough to hold the hot water tank, on top of which should be shelves for linen to be aired. The height of all rooms should be nine feet, at least. One gets very depressed when ceilings are low, and all wainscots should have rounded corners so that cleaning is easier.

The ground floor should be level. A step down anywhere means a jerk to the spine sometimes a hundred times a day, and is most exasperating. My house ought to have a large living room with a square bay window, where one could see to read or write. In that room there should be a built-in cupboard, narrow at the top with glass doors and shelves underneath to hold books. I would have two shelves for glass and china not in use; and there ought to be a cupboard with wooden doors. The tiled fireplace would be at the centre of the wall, not across a corner.

The kitchen would also be a good size, with a bay window and hinged seats that could be let down, and a portable table such as is used in railway carriages, so that one could have meals without using too much space. I need a small kitchen stove with oven, and an electric cooker which would make for economy in summer or winter.

Then there is the sink which people who build houses have only just begun to think about. It must be a deep sink, the right height for comfortable use. When one has been using a sink much too low for years we know what the difference between the right and wrong height really means.

Over the sink there must be taps for hot and cold water, with plate rack above. The only right place for the larder is on the north wall, well away from the stoves. It should have one shelf of marble, stone or slate, for food that should be kept cool and an opening covered with zinc gauze to keep out flies. A cupboard with shelves and hooks for crockery in everyday use is absolutely necessary and also one for brooms, brushes and saucepans. Between the stove and the sink an enamel top table should be placed with two small and two long drawers for cutlery, dusters and the other things a woman needs, when working.

That Indispensable Outhouse

Outside, at the back, an outhouse should be supplied, large enough for coals, electric washer, or gas boiler, so that washday steam could be kept out of the house. It could also be used as a workshop where boots could be mended and other little jobs be done. It would be the place to keep the tools, paints, steps, pegs and the mangle, all of which are needed in the running of a house. The sight of them round you in present day houses is enough to get on your nerves. An outhouse is as necessary as any other part of the house.

Light and heat, other than coal fires, should be electric. It is clean and economical. Every municipality ought to see that a point for an electric lamp is in every room and in the outhouse and that your radio, cleaner, iron or fire can be fixed where you want it. Hot water difficulties could be eradicated by an electric heater in the tank, to be switched off and on with a minimum of waste.

This is the kind of house I have been searching for all my life. Will I get it?

AN AGRICULTURAL LABOURER'S COTTAGE

by

Robert Harrison

I am glad to write a few notes on rural housing because, as an agricultural worker, I have lived in the countryside all my life and know what the conditions of life are in such a county as Norfolk, conditions which may well be reflected in other counties.

First, in the matter of the type of house. I have lived for a number of years in an old cottage which was ultimately condemned and pulled down, but I should like to state at once that to allow such a dwelling to fall into continual disrepair and be finally ruinous was altogether wrong and wasteful. Had the landlord effected repairs as they were needed the place would have been habitable today; in fact, there is no reason, as far as I can see, why modern amenities, such as electricity and a piped water supply, should not have been introduced and made the cottage really attractive.

I am now living in a Council house based on a design recommended by the Ministry of Health. I hope this particular design was only experimental, because in many details the house is very inconvenient. The parlour room and kitchen are too small and there is a rather ridiculous cupboard-like alcove meant for a bath, which of course does not exist. I understand that this design has been abandoned and that the more recently built Council houses have been designed by a very competent architect and give genuine satisfaction.

Where there is a piped water supply and drainage, space for a bath and proper means for heating the water at a kitchen range should be supplied; but where these necessities do not exist, at least let us have a copper of suitable size in a scullery or washhouse of reasonable dimensions. It is strange that the people engaged in the dirtiest work are given the least facilities for washing.

Another strange omission in Council dwellings is the absence of sheds for bicycles or garden tools. They give us good garden space but nowhere to house the above-mentioned necessities. Hence, we throw up a shed on our own account and at once "get wrong" with the Town Planning Authority for unsightly obstructions!

I feel I must write a word about hopes deferred in the shape of electric current and a piped water supply. Some years ago both these amenities seemed to be within the grasp of every country cottage

or at least of a very large majority of country dwellings, but profits, apparently, were not sufficiently adequate for the electrical supply companies; so many parishes are just left out unless they are fortunate enough to be within the zone of a public undertaking such as the Norwich Corporation.

Again, not many years back the Exchequer offered liberal grants for installing a piped water supply throughout this rural area. The opportunity was actually refused by the District Council and only pressure from the Ministry of Health compelled the Council to insert a partial piped water system, a policy they have since had every reason to bitterly regret.

It is very difficult to deal with the question of rent and rates on a war-time basis. The pre-war assessment seems pretty fair, a rent of three shillings a week for agricultural workers plus one shilling and sixpence for rates. This represents a fair pre-war average of what the tenant could pay, normally speaking.

The question is often raised whether there is any advantage to the cottager in owning his house. To a wage-earner there is very little advantage in owning a cottage. The question of up-keep and repairs arise at once and there is also the uncertainty attached to livelihood, generally through fluctuations both in wages and prices. If ownership of a house is acquired through mortgage or by borrowing from a building society, considerable risks are at once incurred. Even the ordinary obligations for internal decoration, which fall to a tenant of a Council house, may become a burden under certain circumstances. The entire ownership of a property, where the responsibility for all dilapidations fall on the owner-occupier, is a still more doubtful poceeding unless the said owner happens to be a skilled tradesman and can do his own repairs.

To my way of thinking there is no question who is the best landlord, the private owner or the local authority. The latter every time. We, who live in the country, know what is the effect of the private landlord on the life of the worker. Cottage property is bought as an investment without the slightest consideration for the obligations and responsibilities attached to ownership, the result being steady deterioration of the property until a "Demolition Order" is issued against it.

Finally, I should not care to say that the design of existing Council houses in rural areas cannot be improved; there is room for improvement in many details. As I have suggested, the difficult question of sites must be reconsidered. Spacing and general lay-out should be planned in relation to the effect which future building will have on the countryside. Above all, both the Ministry of Health and the rural district councils must realise that the lowest contract and therefore the cheapest materials, when tendering, do not represent an economic proposition. The tendency with local bodies always seems to be "penny wise and pound foolish."

MIDDLE CLASS

by

Freda B. Clayden

One of the first essentials in my conception of a well-planned post-war home, is the utilisation to the best advantage of all available light and space. Thus, my house would have wide deep windows, all corners and angles as far as possible eliminated, and their space filled with useful cupboard room. I purposely say "useful" as I have seen built-in cupboards, probably erected with the very idea I have in mind, but so shallow that for all practical purposes they are useless.

My own personal preference is for a bungalow, in a country district, within an hour or so of Town. The advantage of this over a house is the elimination of a considerable amount of work and fatigue in constantly running up and downstairs, and a greater measure of safety where there are small children.

I should like either one very large living room running the whole length of the house, or a living room of about two-thirds of the available space, with the remaining third used as a separate dining room. I do not care for a dining recess or folding doors, as the general effect of the room when opened full length is usually unbalanced. The living room should have french windows leading to the garden. This room should be so placed as to get the afternoon and evening sun, and the bedrooms and kitchen in the morning.

The kitchen is the room that to my mind calls for the most improvements and alterations on existing conditions for people of my income. I should like to have the sink under the window, with cooker one side of it and refrigerator the other. The opposite wall should be lined with cupboards with sliding doors, for storage of such foods as do not need to go into the refrigerator. Cupboards should also be supplied for such cumbersome articles as brooms, electric sweepers, mops and buckets. There should be a wall bracket over both the cooker and the refrigerator so that when light by the window is dim or unavailable the housewife can go on with her work conveniently. All other lights should be placed with that end in view.

I want a separate washing room approached from the kitchen with a copper, indoor drying facilities, and an Ideal boiler for the domestic hot-water system. In my opinion the boiler in the kitchen is both inartistic and generally too warm.

Other facilities available by direct access under cover from the kitchen should be storage accommodation for coal and coke, garden tools, bicycles and pram. Dustbin should also be under cover, and I think an outside toilet desirable if possible.

As regards heating I have a very definite preference for a coal fire in the living room, with points for gas or electric fires elsewhere. Given the choice I should prefer heating and cooking by gas rather than electricity, but it is not a point over which I should be disposed to argue too much.

I should like three bedrooms with built-in wardrobes in the two principal ones, and the light fixed over the most obvious place for the dressing table with points for reading lamps by the bedside. I should also like to see heat and lighting points in every room so that portable heating and lighting arrangements can be utilised to suit circumstances, such as the changing round of furniture.

The bathroom should be tiled with chromium fittings throughout, built in bath and separate lavatory. I should like a geyser in the bathroom so that there is no need to light the boiler daily in the hot weather. I am, of course, thinking ahead to the time when a weekly bath of five inches is no longer a patriotic necessity!

Doors should be unpanelled and all fitments such as window-sills and mantelpieces as plain as possible to save dirt collecting. If this were done, white paint throughout the house would not be so uneconomic as it sounds; as it is the constant washing required to get the dust out of awkward corners which makes it wear away too quickly for the average household to afford.

I should also like the largest possible entrance hall with a built-in wall electric fire. This creates a happy impression of space and warmth on entering, and does much to warm the house throughout. A large cupboard built in here could be used for the storage of linen.

I should like a small front garden, mainly for decorative purposes, with as large a plot as possible at the back, and so fenced in that privacy is attained together with the maximum safety for children playing unattended.

With regard to the financial side, I should wish to purchase my home, through the medium of a building society rather than to rent it. Possibly the "snags" of house-owning are many, but if good material is used in the first place, and care is taken by the owners, the cost of upkeep need not be prohibitive. On the other hand, if a home is rented one may, or may not, get a landlord whose opinion of what is necessary coincides with one's own! It is also a happy thought that when the home is finally one's own one has a legacy to leave one's family, to live in, or dispose of as they think fit.

ONE-FAMILY HOUSE

by

Dr. Harry Roberts

In a recent review of a book, called *The Parents' Responsibility For Their Children,* I referred to the horror felt by some of those provincial hosts and hostesses on whom children evacuated from the slums of East London and other great cities were billeted. That these children were not average specimens of slum children is true enough; that the housing conditions of the East Ends of our great industrial cities do inevitably yield a certain proportion of children with terribly "foul" habits is also true. I have practised medicine in the Borough of Stepney since 1906; and I know intimately the conditions that obtained in that Borough when I first went there. In the course of years things improved a good deal, but the improvement was nothing to write home about. In a work entitled *Towards a National Policy,* published by John Murray in 1911, I described a not uncharacteristic confinement (for several years I attended over ten of these cases a week).

> "The patient was lying on a dirty bed, on which lay also a three-year-old child suffering from pneumonia. On a little palliasse in another corner was the body of a one-year-old child who died two days previously from pneumonia. In the intervals between her pains the woman called to a little five-year-old child who was playing in the room not to keep fingering the dead body in the corner. Here we had three of the children of England. About half an hour later we had a fourth."

Can it be pretended that children born and bred amidst such surroundings are likely ever to become decent, self-supporting, self-respecting, clean, wholesome English men and women? It is impossible. You cannot raise decent horses or decent dogs, or even decent cabbages, on such lines.

But for the majority of the people living in these slums I came to feel a great affection, and I developed for them a strong sense of responsibility. These people or their parents or their grandparents were originally country folk, not only recent immigrants; for many

of them came of families who had lived in Stepney since it was a village; when Limehouse Fields really consisted of fields and Stepney Green was a real green; when "The Experienced Fowler" was the inn to which the sporting citizen went on his duck-shooting expeditions in the river marshes, and the "Load of Hay" tavern saw the hay-wains draw up. Lloyd George's Health Insurance Act gave great opportunity for supplementing the work of the sanitary authorities as well as for helping a medical man like myself to help his neighbours; but more than half the opportunity was wasted, one field in which practically nothing was done being that of planned re-housing.

Married Woman at Home

Early in October of 1943, Sir William Beveridge said that in his opinion, "For a very long time to come, in this country marriage and motherhood is going to be the most important career for women. For the next twenty-five years the housewives of this country will have a vital work to do in ensuring the adequate continuance of the race, and therefore of civilization. A century ago, we had a Lord Shaftesbury trying to clean up factory conditions. Today we want a Lord Shaftesbury of the home to improve working conditions there," With this sentiment the great majority of English people, rich and poor, will agree. It should be borne in mind in any scheme for the rebuilding of homes for the workers in the East Ends of our big cities. The kitchen is the woman's home workshop. In the kitchen, the married working woman, except when she is ill, spends nearly all her waking hours at home.

In mid-October, 1943, the London Plan for the rebuilding of the districts covered by the L.C.C. was illustrated in an exhibition opened at the Whitechapel Art Gallery by Mr. Lewis Silkin. The Stepney Reconstruction Group, under the chairmanship of Dr. J. J. Mallon, the Warden of Toynbee Hall, made it clear that Stepney did not want its population reduced from 200,000 to the 94,000 proposed in the plan; and that Stepney has a preference for houses rather than for flats. My long experience both confirms and explains this almost universal preference. The enquiry recently made by MASS OBSERVATION reinforces it still further. For the generality of working men, life in a flat is life in a sort of comfortable prison. They are deprived of pets—dogs and cats are usually not allowed—they have no garden, no rabbit-hutch, no backyard workshop, no fowls, no chat with neighbours. In old age, all this is emphasized. The stairs cannot

be tackled more than once or twice a day, even the chair beside the street-door is barred out; and the old people have little to do but sit by the fire—if the flat is not centrally heated—and wait for the undertaker.

Fully nine-tenths of the "family" population of the parts of Stepney with which I am most familiar prefer the one-family house to even the most sanitary flat—that is, the house with rooms on the ground floor, a separate entrance in the public road, and some private garden space. This would allow a rate of density of population of fifty persons per acre, but many people would like more garden space than this. At half this density—that is, twenty-five persons per acre—a population of 50,000 could be accommodated in an urban area of 2,000 acres—that is, within a circle with a radius of one mile. Taking into account "neighbourly" ties and associations, units of East London and probably of other parts of London, could easily be plotted of this size. I, certainly, could map such a plot about the clinic in which I worked for so many years. For about one-tenth of the population, it may be that flats would meet both needs and wishes. Single folk and the childless married might have little use for the typical English "home," though many of these would rather carry their heterodoxy a step further and live in hostels or boarding-houses.

Homes as Well Equipped as Factories

What nearly all wives would like to see as a part of their homes is a really sizeable, well-lit, cheerful kitchen-living-room, furnished with all available labour-saving devices. They would also like to have sufficient bedrooms for their existing and potential families, so that, at any rate, the sexes might not be herded into common rooms, and that the parents might have a bedroom to themselves. The factories in which many of them work are well equipped with every technical invention calculated to reduce the demand for human labour. They would like to see—as is done in the houses of the rich—a fraction of this care and forethought devoted to their domestic needs.

HUNTING FOR A HOME

by

Alice Kirson

I am twenty-four years old and live with my family of father, mother and two young sisters in East London. It's an old and inconveniently built place we live in, with no garden or bathroom and with only one living room where all the family, their friends and relatives foregather against the perpetual background of the radio. If I want to write a letter or do any work needing concentration I wait until everybody has gone to bed.

I have a boy friend in the Army, and when he comes home we hope to be married. Recently I decided that if I could find a suitable flat I should leave home and thus overcome my present need for peace and a measure of privacy with the future need for a decent place to start our married life.

So I started to hunt. What kind of place was I looking for? Well, I bore in mind the following qualifications:

My wages not being those of the mythical £7 or £8 a week war-worker, I could not afford more than about 15s. a week on rent. For this I wanted one or two large rooms and access to a bathroom. I was prepared if I couldn't find a furnished flat, which was extremely unlikely, to take an unfurnished flat and buy secondhand furniture, supplemented with utility furniture.

I work five and a half days a week and must be at work at 8 a.m., so wherever I lived I must have a good bus or train service to Central London, with the bus stop or railway station within a few minutes' walk.

As I should be at work all day it must also be near a good shopping centre so that I could either leave my grocery orders to be delivered or do my shopping immediately after work.

For twenty-four years I have lived in a house with small, poky, overcrowded rooms. I have always yearned for large rooms, not cluttered up with furniture, where it wouldn't be necessary to move

carefully to prevent accidents. Again, I longed to get away from the narrow tree-less, foetid streets of this crowded borough, so I sought a place with a garden if possible, in a spacious street, near an open heath or common or park, and with no factories belching out their noise and smoke all around me.

My flat must have a bath (I didn't object to sharing one), a cooker in the kitchen, preferably lots of electric points for wireless, heater, iron, reading lamp, and so on. In view of the difficulties of getting and storing coal, the trouble I invariably have in lighting a fire, and the fact that very often I would spend only a few hours a day at home, I must have, in addition to an open grate, a gas or electric fire—unless, of course, the place was centrally heated—a most unlikely luxury for the rent I could afford to pay. In-built cupboards, shelves, light-coloured walls and large windows were all additional advantages.

"Cramped, Dark or Dirty"

I didn't set out to look for the impossible, but I wanted a sense of privacy in my new home, and this meant sound-proof walls and, if possible, a separate entrance.

A lot for the money, you say? Perhaps so, but I didn't expect to find anything that would fulfil *all* my requirements.

However, armed with a copy of *Dalton's Weekly,* several local papers and a list of "Rooms to Let" compiled from a tour round some dozens of tobacconists' notice-boards, I started out.

Within a very short time, I was resigned to the usual reply of "Sorry miss, already taken"; with an occasional variation to, "Well, I really want someone who'll stay in during the evenings and keep me company"; or "Of course, I should prefer to let the whole house, not just one or two rooms."

Apart from these instances, I found on the whole that for any decently furnished, comfortable and conveniently situated flats, the rents were far and away above the reach of any working girl. Where the rents were within my means, the rooms were either hideous or cramped, dark or dirty. In these places there was hardly ever a bathroom; often one had to share a cooker or kitchen. Rarely was there any sense of seclusion, and usually the stricture was announced, "No animals or babies." Yet despite these disadvantages the landlady invariably remarked sometime during the inspection, "Better take it now. It'll be gone tomorrow." And she was probably right.

Unfurnished flats were not quite so bad although the shortage was still great. There was not a single vacancy in any large block of flats, whether L.C.C., luxury flats, or any other kind. The difficulty also with unfurnished flats is to get sufficient and cheap enough furniture to make them habitable and attractive, a task I found beyond my scope.

Requisitioning ?

So I am still with my family and still hunting. What I and thousands of others will do after the war remains to be seen. Certainly the housing shortage will become more and not less acute. So it behoves us all to think hard about what can be done, both during and after the war.

During my travels I observed that despite the desperate need for more houses, there were large numbers of big, empty buildings standing idle. I know there has been talk of requisitioning these, but my experience leads me to believe that very little has been done and it is time more drastic action than talking was carried out. Again, I came across many bombed-out houses which, with repairs, could be made quite habitable.

As regards the future, it seems to me that for the single person living alone, or for the childless married couple, the labour-saving flat is the obvious solution—not rooms in a converted house, but flats with all the convenience and economy that communal living makes possible. Central heating, lifts, a restaurant, gardens and a community centre for the residents. In other words, luxury flats, but not at luxury rents.

Wishful thinking? I don't think so. Government control of the land to avoid speculation, and sensible and far-sighted planning can make it a reality. The L.C.C. plan for London is the plan for me.

PRIVACY FOR THE HOME

by

The Rev. G. H. Isaacson, M.A.

In 1931 the building of a new borough council housing estate on the outskirts of London was commenced. That same year my Bishop asked me to take charge of this new parish. Twelve years have since elapsed. What were open meadows is now a parish with a population of some 12,000. The majority found work in factories, and I would put the average weekly wage at about £3 10s. (pre-war). The experiences I have gained by living in this parish for the last twelve years must be my qualifications for adding a contribution to this pamphlet.

It has often been said that "an Englishman's home is his castle." Now a castle is surrounded by strong walls—so thick and so high that you cannot see through them or look over them. People who live in castles are not overlooked. Nor are they overheard. To use one word, they have privacy. We do not, of course, wish to build our new houses just like the old castles. But I do want to see them so planned that, in common with the castles, they secure privacy for their occupants. Lack of privacy is the cause of much friction, and frequent unpleasantnesses which gradually wear down the housewife (she has to live with them all day long) and tend to mar the happiness of the home. Therefore, if I look at the construction of new houses in terms of privacy it is because I look further, and see the home within the house. Some of my suggestions will add to building costs —but I still believe it abundantly worth while to put them into effect, because I interpret them all in terms of human happiness.

With this requirement of privacy in our minds, let us look first at the outside of our new house. We shall regard with disfavour the proposal to provide one communal garden for a group of houses. The average working man probably is not a gardener, but he likes to grow his own "bit of flowers"; he wants a corner for his chickens or rabbits, and his wife wants the washing to have a "good blow." They want their own private piece of ground. And let this garden be

separated from neighbouring gardens by a wooden fence at least five feet high. What use are three strands of wire stretched across posts barely three feet high? I know that hedges can be grown, roses can be trained, runner beans can be planted—but it's the wooden fence that gives privacy. Further, let each house have its own gate and its own pathway leading to its own doors. Then a man can lean on his own gate and smoke his evening pipe in peace, without being disturbed by neighbours coming and going.

There are usually two back doors for the average small house. One opens out from the kitchen, and I have known it so placed that, every time it is opened, the next door neighbour can look right in and see everything in the kitchen. The housewife wants privacy in her own kitchen. It could be secured for her by placing the door in a better position. The other door leads to the water closet, and for similar reasons I would urge that this should be entered from inside the house.

"Their Own Bedroom"

The number of rooms required will depend largely upon the size of the family; but considerations of privacy should be given their full weight. Schoolchildren with homework will need a room where they can be quiet. When young people bring their friends home they will not always want the old folk in with them as well. The housewife also wants a room where she can invite her visitors. It is seldom convenient to ask them into the living room. So two rooms and a kitchen are the very least on the ground floor. And similarly for upstairs. It is by no means uncommon that growing girls have to share the same bedroom as their grandmother, and grown-up daughters with their elderly mothers. I know these younger people feel they are being denied something they have the right to have—the privacy of their own bedroom. The only answer is an extra room —extra cost, yes, but extra happiness.

In such a house, we shall not be overlooked. But shall we be overheard? This presents us with a very difficult problem—one that is felt more acutely in flats than in houses. It is amazing how even small sounds in one flat can be heard in another. And so far, attempts to render dwellings sound-proof have not been very effective. However, a great deal of research work is being done with new materials, and there is reason to hope that this acoustic problem will be

satisfactorily solved. But, until this success is achieved, I strongly advocate the small house in preference to the flat.

Tenant or Owner-Occupier ?

Is our house to be rented or purchased? I am decidedly in favour of renting the house. On the one hand it is so easy to under-estimate the full cost of purchasing and owning a house. On top of the weekly repayment there are the extra costs of rates, taxes and repairs. These are sometimes much higher than anticipated. Further, nobody can be sure that the wage earner will continue to be employed during the long period of repayment, or that his wages will not decrease. I think of one family where for the past three years they have only been able to pay interest on the money still owing; nor are the prospects of the next three years any brighter. On the other hand, I know what excellent services tenants of Council houses can receive. All decorations, interior as well as exterior, are carried out regularly. Repairs are executed quickly. There is an emergency service whereby, to take an example, a fused electric cooker is repaired within a couple of hours. Tenants know exactly how much they have to pay each week, and they know they will not be asked for a penny more.

Such considerations as these would be very much in the forefront of my mind if I were in search of a house.

WHY I DO NOT WANT A HOUSE

by

Emily Millings

I am a widow with three sons. The eldest is eighteen and he is going in the Navy. In this L.C.C. flat where I live there are three rooms, a living room, two bedrooms and a scullery kitchen. The lavatory is separate from the kitchen, as it should be, but the only space I have for coal holds no more than five hundredweight. If I had more room for coal I could buy it in the summer when coal is cheaper. As it is, I must buy nearly all the coal I want in the winter when it is dear. That is a hardship for all who, like me, have only a little money to spend.

In the kitchen there is a sink, a bath with a lid on top which we use for a table, a copper and a washing machine and a stove. There ought to be more cupboards and there ought to be room enough for another table. It is so crowded out that I don't know which way to turn when I have to do my washing. And then when the boys come home. They come home at all sorts of times and perhaps one of them wants a bath. While he is in the bath I want to get in my kitchen and I can't. That is not convenient. Or perhaps a visitor has come and we are in the living room and I want to make a cup of tea and my son is in the bath. At times like that I think how happy people must be who have everything they want right to their hand. I live in hopes that I shall be like that some day.

Since my husband died, who was a soldier, I have had to work as a cleaner in a big technical college. I ought to be very thankful because I have a good job. Eight hours a day I work and it is constant. The money is not much and I could not pay a lot of money for rent. But at least my boys and me can live decently and I am near my work. I have twelve offices to look after and make their teas. I prefer a flat as I have no time for a house and garden. As for buying a house such fine things are beyond me. I am on the ground floor and I don't think I would like to live higher than the first floor. If there were lifts they would be helpful for people who have to live a long way up but old people should not live in block dwellings. If we had lifts I think they might be dangerous for children. If the Council could not afford to have the lifts worked by a man in charge the children might do all sorts of mischief and injure themselves.

Before I came to live in North London I had a nice flat at Fulham when my husband was alive. He was a soldier in the last war and had trench fever. Before that I had some rooms on the ground floor behind a butcher's shop and the rooms over the shop, but there were so many rats and I was so afraid they would attack the children that I gave that up. Then I came here eleven years ago. What has always been first with me was living near to my husband's work when he was alive, so that he could get home to his meals and did not have to waste a lot of time and money on trains and buses to get to his work. I think like that now.

I like to live near my work so that I can get home and so that the boys can get home for their meals. I don't believe in all this shop food which is not good for growing boys and girls. For one thing it breaks up the home. I like to have all the members of my family so pleased with their home that they don't want to go out again as soon as they get in. If only the rooms are large enough I think a nice flat is more cosy and comfortable than a house. Though nearly everybody in these buildings says she would like a house with a garden.

Outside these groundfloor flats there is a piece of ground where the Council asks us to grow some food. One day I gave my boys a bit of money and they bought some seeds. They got busy in digging up the ground and set the seeds and everything went on nicely while the things were growing. On Saturday afternoon after we had been saying we would have some nice peas for dinner on Sunday I went out shopping. When I came back all the peas were gone and everything else we could have eaten. Since then my boys haven't had any heart to do anything with that bit of ground. It's just mud now when it rains.

What Fire-watchers Do

Of course, we can't have everything we want, but it would be a good thing if the bigger boys had something to occupy their minds in the evenings. I am on the ground floor and they stand about round my front door step-pushing and shoving each other like sillies. Children's noises never trouble me, but I don't like to see young men growing into hooligans. It isn't good for the country. I don't think it helps to make them useful citizens and good fathers and this country wants them. While the war has been on they have not been such a trouble. Some have gone in the Army and some of them will not come back again. I pity their poor mothers from the bottom of my heart. Then fire-watching has helped to make it quieter. They go away to a flat that has been reserved for fire-watchers and put on their tin hats and they play draughts. When this dreadful war is over something must be done so that the young people don't have to stand

about in the streets wandering up and down like they do now, and did more before the war started. It seems to me quite a lot of young people work very hard to forget their homes and their work and yet they don't enjoy their pleasure.

Washing at Home

One day a gentleman asked me if people who lived in flats interfered more with each other than people who lived in separate houses. I told him it didn't make much difference where people lived if they were time-wasters and the interfering sort. Some people spend half the day talking over a garden fence. In tenements some women know all about everybody's business and tell it to anyone who listens. I think it's the nature of some people to go on like that wherever they are. It's their way of letting the work try to do itself and then they wonder why it isn't done. It isn't the buildings, it's their nature that's all wrong.

Another day a gentleman asked me if I would like a large dining room in these tenements where my boys could go and have their meals to save me the trouble of cooking. He asked me if I thought that women had too much housework to do. And would I like a laundry, he said, where we could wash our clothes with no end of fine machinery to help us. What he called labour-saving plans. And perhaps, he said, the women would like an institute and a hall where the tenants could have their own meetings and concerts. I told him that if a dining room was opened I wouldn't go near it, nor my boys. I am their mother and I want to see to their meals. As for a laundry I don't believe in washing clothes with all sorts of people's garments round about. That's the way to get fever, I think, though I know a lot of people take the risk. But I prefer to wash at home.

As for a hall for meetings and concerts, that doesn't appeal to me very much because I have no time to spare. It might be a good thing for those who do not have to work so hard, though it seems to me that in North London there are plenty of concerts and plays where people can go if they want to.

I like a flat best, though I wish the rooms were larger and had more cupboards with a nice linen cupboard with hot pipes. But there, I can't pay any more rent and when the war ends perhaps my work will end. I do think there ought to be more playgrounds for the children.

TEACHER'S POINT OF VIEW

by

Olive M. Chamberlin

A child should have a clean, healthy, happy and comfortable home. If he starts on his way through life well equipped he is better able to cope with any situation affecting his mental, physical and social development. One who comes from a well-run and happy home will in time become a useful citizen, able to take his part in the social affairs of the day. In my daily work, again and again I find proof of the truth of this statement. The ravages which a poor home and inferior housing make on the mind and body of a growing child represent a loss to the nation which is immeasurable.

The basic unit of our national life is the family. How can we ensure this unit is preserved in a form that makes for the national good? Surely, by providing the best type of house and home to suit the special needs of each section of the community and by encouraging the homemaker to do her supremely useful part.

Many inhabitants of these islands are born with an instinct of possession and there is a large number of British families for whom their greatest joy is to own their house and home. Others prefer to invest in small parcels of Government or Municipal Stock. Or they buy a motor-car, or spend a large part of a moderate income on music or books. The child from such a home will be taught from its earliest years to respect and value what is the family's—the home is cared for, less damage is done to it—it is beautified, enlarged, and each renovation has to be thought out, planned and saved for. Thus an aim in life is created.

Not everyone can buy a house; for a large part of the population the cash deposit required by trustworthy building societies is beyond the possible savings of the wage or small salary earner. For them it would seem agencies other than building societies must make provision. Nor is it wise for a husband and his wife, without careful calculation as to their income and the kind of life they intend to live, to incur a burden of instalment payments for a house that is more than the rent they would normally pay. Should that heavier charge be incurred the children will suffer—they go short of proper accommodation; the food and clothes the parents can provide are inferior, or there is a deficiency of holidays and rational pleasure.

If they find themselves able and ready to borrow money to meet the cost of house purchase and have recourse to a building society, financially well-conducted, the arrangement will be safe and stable so long as the periodical repayments are maintained. If there is any prospect of unemployment it is doubtful whether house purchase should be embarked upon.

Of course, purchase calls for effort, but if the effort can be carried through, ownership will provide its compensations. Moral persistence is engendered in the parents and their resolution to achieve a stated end is reflected in the lives of their children. Not only will they be more careful in the use of a property which the family owns. Throughout their childhood and in early adolescence—a period of supreme importance in the development of the future citizen—they will have perceived the worth of a discipline that derives from any considered attempt to achieve a socially desirable purpose. All kinds of discipline have a value in business and in the school, but their greatest potential source of strength is in the home.

By these means, in time, house-owners may become the greater part of the nation. With the aid of the local authorities, by these means, we can contribute to prevent an extension of slumdom, always provided we see to it that houses are built to suit the needs of the particular community—no more rows of monotonous dwellings, houses in terraces, for example, or buildings in stereotyped patterns.

We want young people to be alert, and interested, keen to see and appreciate what is good, beautiful and wholesome in life. For these reasons we must start with the decent house and home.

I would like to see every family in Britain owning the house it lives in. That would be true National Saving. People would settle down and take an interest in local affairs; they would be more alive to the events going on. The child would be more likely to grow up with a knowledgeable constructive idea of the world around him; he would not have to grope his way later on in life.

Now for the type of semi-detached house with garden which would be the most suitable. Special care should be given to the aspect. The house should contain a sunny kitchen, spacious family living room, two or three bedrooms, upstairs lavatory and bathroom, and downstairs a lavatory and wash basin.

The kitchen must be built on the sunny side of the house, with its window facing the garden. A housewife spends most of her time here and she wants a cheerful and pleasant outlook, besides the room being convenient for her to watch baby in his pram or playpen outside.

There should be as many cupboards as possible and a big larder with tiled shelves, facing the colder side of the house, with refrigerator and wired food cupboards. A gas stove on legs, a gas copper, if liked,

a point for an electric iron, a deep but high sink, clothes-airer, a good sized table or wall flap, and any other labour-saving device that would ease the housewife's daily round and facilitate smooth working.

Most important of all is the coke boiler. A constant supply of hot water to heat inside pipes and radiators in each room during much of the year is absolutely necessary. That the heat should be turned off in the summer is obvious—a consideration that raises the question whether it could not be supplied by a central authority. A safety guard with adjustable top for stove, electric lighting for the whole house, points for wireless and heating stoves are the amenities of a modern dwelling. All pipes should be built inside the house.

Inside the backdoor porch should be a spacious coal and coke cupboard on one side, and a lavatory and wash-basin on the other.

The spacious living room should extend from back to front of the house, with windows at each end. An alcove for dining-table (flap) and chairs, with a service hatch on the kitchen wall side seems the best solution for a dining-living room. An open fireplace, alternating with kitchen boiler to save fuel for heating water in summer and winter, easy chairs, and plenty of floor space for the children's quieter play, should make this room the real family centre. Children doing homework could study at a separate table in a quieter corner of the room, if a small slip room upstairs is not available.

One large bedroom for the parents should be provided. The rest of the bedroom space should be used for two or three small rooms for the children. Little people do not require much in their bedrooms, only a bed and a fitted cupboard—as they only use this room for sleep—no fireplaces are needed. These single rooms ease the "getting to sleep" question. What joy and pride is found in possessing one's own room!

A tiled bathroom with lavatory and a linen cupboard on the landing complete the upstairs floor.

The front flower garden helps to beautify the road, the vegetable garden provides work and produce for the family. There should be a paved path leading right round the house from the gate to the back door—a lean-to shed at rear, sheltered by the house, for cycles and pram, and a sand bin in it for toddlers when the garden is damp. A tool shed with bench for father, helps the home to run smoothly.

Our children will be healthier, our community brighter and our nation the richer when these better homes become available.

THE MINER'S HOME

by

Charles R. Gill

I write on housing with an intimate personal knowledge of the miner's home life conditions in South Wales and in Scotland. In my view all that has been said and written about many thousands of the hovels, which colliery companies erected for their tied miners, fall short as adequate descriptions of most of the houses in mining districts. While the Sankey Commission was receiving evidence rather more than twenty years ago and for some time after its report was published, miners' housing and the state of the dwellings in colliery districts generally, made sensational copy for the papers and served as materials for politicians to use in making eloquent and moving speeches—what working men call "sob stuff."

That phase passed away. After the last war for a period, we slowly drifted along with nothing to help us to live in the slums of the Durham coalfields, or the black spots of the Rhondda Valley, but the glamorous promises that had been made to miners while the war was on. Is that to be our fate again? Not if the people are to be more sensible than they were. If only they bestir themselves in their trade unions and co-operative societies and take an active part as citizens in political affairs there is no need why anyone should be ill-housed. That there should be closer association between building societies and municipal housing authorities is one of the things we should work for. But any money made available for housing ought to be cheap and not be loaded down with encumbrances and restrictions. Otherwise rents, or the price at which the house is sold, will be high. All our housing projects would then come to grief.

The extreme need of coal for war is now continually demonstrated. It will be equally necessary in peace and in the Reconstruction of Industry, homes for miners must play an important part. The Mining Industry must be made attractive enough for men to remain at coal getting and for new entrants to be attracted to it.

Miners, generally, have had a pretty raw deal in housing. Often, as already said, the houses were erected by a colliery company, or by a subsidiary company formed by the colliery proprietors. Though the houses were considered as part of the colliery works, very little consideration was given for those who were compelled to live in them.

The miner's wife was, and still is in many cases, a virtual slave in the house; especially where husbands, sons and lodgers, each on different shifts, left the house and arrived back at different hours spread throughout the twenty-four hour day. Each brought into the house pit grime attached to their clothing and each one had to bathe his naked body in a tub before the kitchen fire. To some extent that disgraceful state of things has been obviated where pit-head baths have been provided. But in a large number of colliery villages and districts these conditions still exist.

The miner's home has therefore to be considered in two categories. In the many areas where bathing facilities are not available, additional accommodation should be provided at the house. It frequently happens that there are several men, father, sons and lodgers living in one house. Even in the dryest and best conditioned mines, large accumulations of dust attach to the miners' clothing. If they work in wet mines they bring into the house large quantities of mud. Atmospheric conditions in most mines is such that profuse perspiration takes place. Damp pit clothing is the inevitable result.

This dust, mud and sweat ought not to be carried into the home. A separate bathroom, with drying cupboards should be provided as an annex to the house on the ground floor. From a central heating arrangement hot water, and heat for drying the working clothing should be supplied. The bathroom should also include the washhouse, as pit clothing should be washed separately and apart from ordinary household linen. In districts where this grievous problem is reduced by pit head bath arrangements a parlour type house, of adequate dimensions, would be equally suitable for miners as for other workers.

Rooms of Sufficient Size

I definitely refer to " adequate dimensions " as some pre-war housing plans which local authorities were compelled to accept were monstrosities in respect of the accommodation and convenience they provided. They must not be repeated. Economic cramping cannot provide real " homes." Very stringent improvements must be made to assist the miner's wife. Her kitchen should be equipped with all modern labour-saving appliances; hot and cold water laid on to the sink, draining boards, plate racks, and adequate window space to give light and ventilation.

Heavy industries and a good and clean home life are not altogether congenial companions. Miners' homes should not verge on pit banks, where smoke and fumes from burning colliery debris heaps are ever present. Being generally domesticated miners are also garden lovers. Their homes should therefore have sufficient land where the vegetables which the family need can be grown, and flowers. Thus there would

be brought to the miner's door a profitable and healthy recreation that would be a set-off from the vitiated atmosphere of the mine in which he worked his shift.

Miners and House Ownership

In the complete reorganisation that is to take place and its far-reaching effects on component surface and by-product workers, the mining industry should gain a degree of stabilisation unknown, up till now, in the colliery districts and the trades that depend upon them. With larger security in employment greater security in home life will prevail. Facilities should then be granted for Home Ownership. Local authorities in mining areas should include suitable homes for miners in their postwar programmes. They should help to afford an opportunity for personal ownership where that is desired.

This could be done by either of two methods. The Government could provide still greater financial assistance for constructing the house for sale, whether the purchase money is in part provided by local authorities or through a building society only. Or local authorities could build and sell under the small Dwellings Acquisition Act. Prospective miner-owners, however, might prefer the terms offered by building societies if the amount of cash, in proportion to the valuation, they were prepared to advance was considerable and the rate of interest was low. With added security of employment in the industry, building societies might very well add to the benefits they have already conferred. A special quotation in interest and repayment rates might become possible, as satisfactory and more stable conditions come to prevail in mining. If miners, with aid from building societies, could obtain a greater share of home comfort than has been their lot hitherto that would go a long way towards convincing an essential part of Britain's industrial workers that at last they begin to secure the recognition they deserve.

ELDERLY WOMAN'S CASE

by

Carol Creed

Among all the grandiose schemes for the rebuilding of Britain after the war, I can find no mention of homes for the elderly spinster and the elderly widow. These women, whose members will unfortunately increase as a result of the war, find no champions among the planners of our future homes. Why? Because they are not considered an asset to the country. They are unlikely to add to the population; they are not wanted in commerce; and the unspoken thought in the minds of the Town and Country Planning Committee is, that they occupy room which could be better used as homes for the workers and people with children: in other words, they are superfluous.

Because they are unassertive and one might almost say reconciled to being overlooked, they are apt to be ignored. Usually, they have neither the time nor the money needed to make themselves heard. Nevertheless, they form a large proportion of our population and are entitled to consideration.

Three things are common to these elderly women, loneliness, fear of illness, and lack of means. These spectres are always with them and one is forced to admire the uncomplaining braveness with which they face them. In all our towns they can be found living in top back rooms with no conveniences—modern or otherwise—paying rents out of all proportion to the value they receive and eking out their modest means with skill learned in a hard school. It is a saddening picture.

Surely a country as prosperous as ours, which is prepared to spend millions upon its public buildings and arterial roads, can allocate a sum of money sufficient to build homes for these deserving women; the aunts and grandmothers of Britain.

Because companionship is the great need of elderly people the best place for the town-bred woman to live is in a flat. It is impossible to live in a block of flats without getting to know someone. A bed-

room and sitting room, or bed-sitting room, a kitchenette with modern equipment and a bathroom would be ideal. (I am aware that large numbers of these flats have already been built and more are being planned, but not, I think, for the *exclusive* use of elderly women.) The woman who has lived all her life in the country would never be really happy in a town, and I am afraid she is unlikely to have the benefit of a flat. Indeed, I do not advocate flats in the country. The buildings themselves look preposterous out of a town setting and are quite foreign to the spirit of country life, especially to the elderly. Small cottages are the most suitable for her, and her friends are the people she has known all her life.

A Quiet Home

In the block of flats which I like to visualise, a stringent set of rules would be laid down. At an agreed time all radios would be turned off at a main switch in the caretaker's room. No child would be allowed to sleep in the building. This sounds drastic I know, but a moment's thought will show that it really is a necessity. Elderly people want quietness, especially at night, and one noisy baby can keep a whole block of flats awake. It goes without saying that there would be a lift. There would be a house telephone in every flat and thus the dread of being ill and unable to call help would be much diminished. There would be no washing and drying rooms—the tenants wouldn't use them—their modest washing would be dried on the hot pipes in the bathroom. There would be central heating, of course.

Perhaps it is too ambitious to aspire to a restaurant where light meals could be bought. Women who live alone notoriously "snack" and it isn't good for them. A British Restaurant would do, but one entrance would have to be from inside the flats. It could be open to the public to help pay its expenses, as could the bakery and general shop which would be on the ground floor.

The modern cooking equipment might be a little frightening at first because of its unfamiliarity, but once it was mastered its advantages would be a matter of pride. Although there would be portable electric fires in every room—with a separate slot meter—there must be an open grate for a coal fire. Electric fires are so soulless and self-sufficient: a coal fire is good company.

The comfort of flat dwellers depends to a great extent upon the caretaker. Too often he is a surly individual who regards the tenants

as enemies; I know several such. For every small service he expects to be lavishly tipped and he is insolent to visitors. In my dream flat he would be required to clean all windows at a small fixed charge. Replacing tapwashers and unblocking sinks would be his job, and paid for in his wages. His wages would be good enough to make him satisfied and he should be forbidden, on pain of dismissal, to take tips. I fear he will remain a dream.

A Slogan

I am afraid that flats solely for the use of the elderly widow and the elderly spinster will never be built because, although the tenants would have an old-fashioned respect for rent day and little tendency to "flit" at the first touch of financial trouble, and although the repairs bill would be light, the small rent which they would be able to pay—something under a pound a week—would be insufficient to make their erection an attractive proposition for private enterprise.

The only hope is that the local Councils will develop a conscience about the housing of these respectable members of their community. Maybe they could be persuaded to rebuild the Council offices in a less opulent style and spend less on the new town hall.

I suggest a slogan, to be hung in the offices of the Ministry of Works and Planning—"Homes for our Aunts and Grandmothers." Old age should be a beautiful and tranquil stage and "home" is the word which, gloriously, must be linked with it.

ENGINEERING HOUSING

by

Arthur C. Meeke and John Russell

Rather more than one hundred and twenty years have gone by since Charles Dickens, then "a queer small boy of nine" as he described himself, first saw Gadshill, the Kentish house which he made famous overlooking the land that figures in *Great Expectations*. Precisely thirty-five years later he became the owner of Gadshill and continued to live there till his death. In the huge, smoke-laden city of Sheffield the Corporation developed several housing estates between the wars while private enterprise, largely with the aid of building societies, must have erected several thousand houses. Most of the latter were for sale, however, and whether it is a fact which pleases, or causes displeasure, it has to be admitted that the Town Council has played the chief part in housing the people who lived on restricted incomes. Nevertheless, for all they have done they never caught up with the real demand for houses. People apply for a dwelling-place in which they hope to reside and their names are entered on the Council's lists. That some have waited many years and even then were not invited to the Municipal Estates Office to receive a door key, has caused the notion to be widespread that a generation can pass before one's hopes may be fulfilled. Between that long spell and Dickens's thirty-five years there is not much to choose though it should be remembered that the great novelist's success had enabled him to occupy some very agreeable houses in the years between his boyhood and that morning when his pen was laid down and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* was left unfinished.

On every hand it is agreed that after the war we must build houses more rapidly and in greater number than ever before. At least among the mass of the people it is also agreed that houses, whoever constructs them, should be more convenient, more spacious and of more varied types. A man and woman should be able to obtain the house they really want. Some want a bungalow with three bedrooms, a living room and a drawing room—separated by a roller-shutter screen so that, if they wished, they could have one large room—a kitchen, a bathroom, and provision for a study-library and a nursery. Whether the house is of the bungalow type which, it is granted, can disfigure the countryside when they are scattered about without rhyme or reason as though they had fallen from a pepper-pot, or whether they run to one or more stories, every house should be centrally heated,

or by electric radiators, a kind of energy which should also be employed for cooking. An electric refrigerator is indispensable. In every house there should be plugs for the gadgets that are now essential for comfortable living—for ironing, wireless, and for vacuum cleaning.

On the other hand there is a deal to be said for a real coal fire in the living room. It speaks a note of welcome which a stove cannot utter. Mechanical heating does not engender companionship, and that is the spirit which turns a house into a home—a very important distinction we are in some danger of neglecting under the stress for quickly provided new accommodation. Warmth and lighting naturally march together. The house should be sited and its windows so placed that full avail is taken of sunshine and daylight. In the bedrooms and bathroom there should be fluorescent lighting.

Flats and tenements we shall have to build but most men and women prefer a house and a bit of garden. In these times when noise and innumerable contacts with persons whom we do not know fill our daily life privacy has become an absolute need. Much of our time is spent in haste and scurry and it naturally follows, therefore, that a great many, when their scanty leisure has been won, wish to enjoy privacy and quietude. Provision must be made for that growing desire. Round the garden there should be a hedge of some kind which the occupiers, or tenants, on every housing estate should be required to keep in order. Elementary obligations of that sort are the beginning of that necessary planning which there must be if we are to get away from the ugliness and confusion which are the bane of almost all modern towns and villages. And if we speak of gardens we should not forget that somewhere, outside the house, there must be a substantially built structure where a washing machine could be under cover, which could house a perambulator, a cycle, and where repairs could be done. The small house of today is not large enough to accommodate all these essential goods. Nevertheless, we may rest assured that, if we insist enough, architects and builders will give us what we want.

One matter that closely affects future housing prospects is the extent to which priority will be granted in respect of materials and labour for small house construction. Are building societies and municipal authorities powerful enough to influence decisions on that subject? When building houses for sale is once more allowed and that, it may be supposed, will be after the demand for houses to let has been satisfied in some degree, can some means be found to make it unnecessary to ask for so large a deposit of cash by the borrower? These are questions that will affect the mobility of labour and the extent to which the well-paid artisan ventures on house purchase. Whether he buys a house, or wants to sell it he should be able to buy or sell easily, without having to find his way through a tangle of legal difficulties and charges and a whole set of difficulties of another

kind arising from the fact that, though he bought a house in Newcastle he now has to go to Leeds to earn his wages. If there are to be houses enough in both Leeds and Newcastle early priorities must be forthcoming for materials and for building trades labour. Otherwise, how can labour be mobile enough to play its part without intense discomfort, in the reorganised industrial shape of Great Britain?

That question leads to another. Cannot the building societies and the local housing authorities work together to establish some sort of a housing exchange between all the towns and rural districts in this country? If a man's place of work is changed he generally has to move himself, and his family, on account of causes over which he has no control. He paid rent for twenty years in London. When his work calls him to Manchester the authorities which build, or finance building in that huge town, should be in a position to ensure him good house-room in the Manchester area. The Housing Exchange should be as much a part of civil organisation as the Labour Exchange has become this last thirty years.

Finally, if we are to get houses in anything near the number required new methods will have to be adopted. Mass production need not mean a surrender to monotony. As engineers we duplicate machines, motor-cars, vacuum cleaners, cycles and typewriters by the hundred thousand. The jigs we construct to produce them ensure their accuracy to the thousandth part of an inch. The materials we use guarantee their capacity to stand all stresses and strains—So why not houses? We cannot expect builders to work to tiny fractions of an inch, but there is no reason why they should not produce good houses in hundreds of thousands, much nearer to the plumb-line and legal specifications than on some estates we have known.

All of which may be true, it will be urged. But there is more to be done. Builders should pull together. What a fine thing it would be if the Housing and Estates Committees of the City and County Councils, building societies of good repute and with a sense of civic responsibility, Carnegie and Peabody Trusts, and all the other folk who want to house the people in beautiful, convenient and honestly-built dwellings were to get together for tackling this housing question.

If that were the spirit houses would certainly be produced. We should cut away competition for sites. Building materials would be cheaper and labour would be mobilised to the best advantage. That spirit would produce more than houses. Communities would take shape, instead of suburbs. People would be brought together. They would demand social amenities and obtain them—because they would themselves provide them. Suburban snobbery would disappear. A passage in John Ruskin's *Crown of Wild Olive* leaps in memory. How many times before have we said the golden words? "In that day all your art, your literature, your daily labours, your domestic affection and citizen's duty will join and increase into one magnificent harmony. You will know then how to build well enough. . . ."

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