EVERY social problem, whether it be intemperance, crime, the street child, marriage and divorce, public education, civic improvement, municipal government, even religion, all that makes for or tends to destroy public and private morality and right living, if followed to a logical conclusion, leads straight to the home. Hence a nation's ultimate preservation, or destruction, is intimately connected with the housing question, making it the social subject of paramount importance.

As a rule, the income of the average well-to-do family is sufficient for its needs and a respectable surplus. It is upon the wage-earning class, the class which forms the backbone of every country, that the evils of bad housing fall most heavily, for the masses must live near their work, which nowadays is in factories, or for large corporations and firms doing business in cities.

House building has not kept pace with the growth of municipalities anywhere, and so to-day the large cities the world over are confronted with a serious situation resulting from the lack of housing accommodations for the people. Nowhere is this distress more acute than in England, not only in the cities, but in small towns and villages, and even in the country. In all England there are not enough houses to accommodate the population either urban or rural.

England is a small country; much of the land is entailed and can not be sold, while the little which may be bought is so valuable that few can afford to purchase even a tiny piece of it. The land owners, representing but a small proportion of the population, may be divided into two classes, the proprietors of large interests and the small owners. The enormous estates of the very wealthy make unnecessary any provision for their increase; consequently, instead of building houses for rent, acres upon acres are laid out as private grounds, or kept as game preserves. The Duke of Westminster owns such vast estates that he has been prohibited by law from buying more land in England. The Duke of Bedford is buying so much that, unless his purchasing power is curtailed, he will, before long, own the entire
HOMELESS ENGLAND

county of Middlesex, a large portion of which lies within the metropolitan city of London. In the country, such men provide homes for their farm laborers only, feeling absolutely no responsibility for other families who live on or near their estates. In London, where land is too valuable to lie idle even though owned by such a Croesus, entire blocks of barrack-like buildings are erected, and let at high rentals far beyond the wage-earner’s purse. Moreover, tenants are required to keep up repairs; and the exteriors must be repainted every year, the interiors every two years, all at the tenant’s expense.

The small land owner is usually a country gentleman who lives up to the British characteristic of holding on, like grim death, to whatever is once acquired; as a rule, he has not the capital with which to build, and he is loath to sell off enough land to get the ready money which he needs to develop the balance of his property. There is, however, something to be said for the small owner. The wages of farm laborers who form the tenant class in the country are too low to tempt property owners to go to the expense of cottage building, since the small rentals would not enable owners to realize enough profit on the investment.

Therefore, in the country, new houses are rarely built, the people occupying old ones until they literally tumble about their heads. Then they either crowd in with neighbors, or go to the city in the hope of finding work and shelter, which is but jumping from Scylla into Charybdis.

Whenever a new cottage is built there are numberless applicants for it. For six, recently built in a certain county, there were forty applications long before they were finished.

THERE are hundreds of cottages throughout England, condemned by the local authorities as unsafe and unfit for human habitation, whose tenants can not be compelled to move, for the very good reason that there is no other place for them to go. Dickens’s story of Little Jo is as true now as the day it was written: homeless England has no choice but to “move on,” meaning, too often, nights spent under the stars upon park benches, or in the fearful charity lodging houses.

England’s housing problem is no new thing. It dates back to the time of Queen Elizabeth. During her reign the authorities became so alarmed at the increase of London’s population that a law was passed
forbidding further house building in what was then the city, hoping in this way to check its growth. Times changed and so did the laws, some being repealed, others becoming dead letters, and the migration from country to city kept steadily onward without further thought until less than one hundred years ago. About the year 1830, the first systematic inquiry was made concerning the homes of the working classes in London. From that time on until 1845 many important investigations were made, revealing conditions truly appalling. Dr. Southworth, one of the investigators, states in his report that the homes of the people were in dark and winding streets, too narrow to afford ventilation, in dilapidated houses "crowded thickly upon refuse saturated land." A considerable portion of Bethnal Green was a swamp, whole streets being under water in rainy weather. He found in one small room six persons ill with typhus fever; in the same locality, having a population of 77,000, there were, in one year, 14,000 cases of fever, almost 13,000 of them fatal.

When such facts were made public, Lord Ashley, afterward Lord Shaftesbury, whose name is indissolubly connected with every worthy effort for social reform, entered heart and soul into the agitation for improved housing. In 1851 he introduced the first housing bill into Parliament, later on another, both of them becoming laws. Lord Shaftesbury had the unique pleasure of guiding these two bills through both Houses of Parliament, first in the House of Commons, as Lord Ashley, later as Lord Shaftesbury, in the House of Lords.

At this time municipal housing was not definitely contemplated, it being thought that all would be well if the cupidity of landlords could be checked and proper sanitation required by law. Many improvements were made and a number of companies formed for the purpose of erecting improved tenements, among them the well-known Artisans’, Labourers’, and General Dwellings Company, the East End Dwellings Company, and the Peabody Trust and Guinness Trust.

With the development of the factory system, however, the urban population increased so rapidly that private companies could not cope with it, and it has been found necessary for municipalities to supply the great deficiency, while of late years local county councils have gone into the real estate business upon a gigantic scale.

Since 1866 housing has received its share of legislative attention and many acts have been passed by Parliament, their more important
provisions being the power bestowed upon local authorities giving them the right to condemn, purchase, and destroy houses unfit for human habitation, and to rebuild upon the same site, making every reasonable effort to rehouse the dispossessed so far as possible.

Houses may be condemned as unhealthy if the streets are too narrow, the buildings overcrowded or too close together. County councils may purchase such property outright, paying for it at the rate of its normal value, with no allowance for the higher rental value because of overcrowding, or the fact that the sale is compulsory. It is argued that a reputable landlord will not rent such premises; ownership of them implies disregard for human life and decency and, therefore, the landlord is undeserving of consideration; in other words, that the public weal is more important than the private interests of the individual. Legislation also regulates the height of buildings, thickness of walls, amount of air space, and requires the provision of proper sanitary conveniences.

Municipal family dwellings consist of four types—block dwellings, tenements, cottage flats, and cottages. Block dwellings are from four to five stories high, and provide for a number of families in each house, entrance hall and conveniences to be used in common. While they bring together a great many persons under one roof, they permit of much architectural diversity, inside and out. They are always erected in groups, and, by the judicious placing of each house, as a whole they bear a harmonious relation to one another. The application of civic improvement ideas, setting out trees, planting flower beds, putting down good sidewalks and pavements, have given to certain properties a park-like appearance similar to high class residential sections. Average rentals in block houses are from two to three shillings (fifty to seventy-five cents) a week for a room.

Tenements are from two to three stories high, arranged in rows, each attached house, with separate entrance, containing from four to six families who use halls and conveniences in common. These differ from block dwellings in height and construction of main walls, interior arrangement, and are intermediate between houses of this type and cottage flats.

Cottage flats are only two stories high and are intended for still
COTTAGES JOHN BURNS HELPED TO BUILD FOR LONDON WORKING PEOPLE

PAVED COURT PLAYGROUND FOR LIVERPOOL IMPROVED TENEMENT
fewer families in each house. The cottages, usually built in the suburbs, have small garden plots and vary in size and plan. Single families are meant to occupy them at higher rates than houses of the other types.

Taking London first, because greater congestion there has necessitated a program more elaborate than in other cities, the County Council has, during the past few years, done a tremendous work for housing reform; by confining its activities chiefly to slum districts, it has transformed most disreputable localities, formerly the abiding places of criminals and prostitutes, into respectable, attractive neighborhoods.

A creditable instance of this kind is the Millbank Estate, a group of block dwellings on the site of the old Millbank prison, within a stone's throw of the Houses of Parliament.

Years ago this locality was infested with thieves and footpads, whose depredations were so bold that, as late as the eighteenth century, the Vestry of St. John, Westminster, found it necessary to employ a Sunday watchman, at five shillings a week, to pilot church-goers to and from service. To-day this former plague spot is covered with well-built houses, accommodating four thousand four hundred and thirty respectable persons.

The Boundary Street Estate, in the East End, consists of twenty blocks of houses giving decent accommodations for reasonable rentals. John Burns, who lives in Battersea, has done much to secure better houses for his borough, with notable success since he has been a member of the London County Council. Many of the Battersea houses are of the cottage type, and it is safe to say they surpass all others in point of modern improvements, reasonable rents, and general attractiveness.

Wherever situated, the London municipal houses have plenty of light and air, wide paved courts for children to play in, and connected with some of them there are workshops adjoining for the convenience of tenants who wish to engage in small industries such as upholstery, regilding and making picture frames, carpentry, shoemaking, etc.

Other improved areas correspond to the types mentioned, plans and cost of construction varying according to local needs. Altogether, the London County Council has undertaken thirty-four housing enterprises, twelve of them alone comprising three hundred and fifty
acres, the houses costing seventeen million dollars, and accommodating seventy thousand five hundred and twenty-two persons.

NOTWITHSTANDING London’s great achievements much yet remains to be done, for it is unfortunately true that the city has failed to accomplish what it set out to do, so far as re-housing the dispossessed is concerned. A very small percentage of former occupants live in the new houses; instead, they are occupied by a better class. Few of the workshops are rented to tenants; none of them are vacant, but the workers live in cheaper houses.

There are two reasons for the failure. In the first place, when old buildings are demolished, lack of house room forces tenants to crowd in with dwellers in other unsanitary quarters that fringe the improved area; that is, all who can find a spot there. Of the remainder, some become tramps, some emigrate, some end the struggle for existence by jumping into the river; entire families have been known to apply for admission to the workhouse because no other shelter was open to them; nobody knows what does become of them all. From the housing standpoint, they are scattered beyond recall. The second reason is, that the new houses rent for a trifle more, and are eagerly taken by those who are able and glad to pay the difference for the modern improvements.

Even though the municipal houses have failed of their purpose in a measure, they are nevertheless a step forward since they do relieve congestion among the working class, and, to a certain extent, among the poor. If nothing more had been accomplished, it is unquestionably a good thing to let in the light in criminal infested, degraded areas.

Liverpool is doing more to solve the housing problem than any other English city, because greater regard is paid to rehousing the dispossessed. New buildings, sufficiently commodious to house those who must vacate condemned property, are made ready for occupancy before tenants are notified to move out. More than eight thousand houses have been destroyed and rebuilt by the city; in one group of one hundred and forty-five buildings, seventy-one per cent. of the old tenants are rehoused.

Wherever possible, the courts in the rear of the Liverpool houses are made into playgrounds for children. In narrow streets, one sidewalk is made double the usual width to give children a place to play; blind alleys are sometimes entirely paved for the same purpose, and
the park department, by placing growing shrubs in large boxes along these streets, relieves the dreary monotony which seems inevitable in the surroundings of the poor.

Birmingham, Manchester, and other cities are equally as active in housing reform, because the need for it is equally as great.

The brightest ray of light in England’s housing problem is the present tendency to induce people to go into the suburbs by building the most attractive houses beyond the area of greatest congestion and increasing rapid transit facilities. Already there are workmen’s trains in the early morning and late afternoon, when the fare is reduced one-half, and the future will see greater developments in this direction.

Cities have come to stay, and there remains to be done only one of two things—either to build them from the start, or to remodel those already in existence with reference to future growth and according to sanitary, scientific plans, as the Garden City is now being made twenty-five miles from London; or to form Garden Suburbs according to the plan of Mrs. Barnett of Toynbee Hall.

A modification of Mrs. Barnett’s idea is embodied in the Co-partnership Housing Tenants’ Council, an association which buys land and builds houses on the co-operative plan. Shares in the company are sold to prospective tenants, each share representing the right to a house as long as the holder wants it and pays his rent; he practically owns his home. Rents are fixed by votes of members of the association, so there is no danger that they will be arbitrarily raised.

Agitation, past and present, has dispelled ignorance about housing conditions and English people are now fully aroused to the importance of better homes for the masses. Long ago social students saw the moral, intellectual, and physical deterioration undermining the working class because of the way they must live. Much was written, much was said about it in public meetings and in the daily press, but the written and spoken words fell upon deaf ears in high places. The thing which made England wake up was the startling fact that, during the South African war, sixty per cent. of the men desiring to enlist in the army were rejected because physically unfit. It was then seen and acknowledged that overcrowded homes for the people are a distinct menace to national prosperity, and that, if England hopes to hold her high prestige, she must put an end to bad housing conditions.