

SLUMS AND SLUMMERS

A SOCIOLOGICAL TREATISE ON THE
HOUSING PROBLE

BY

C. R. A. MARTIN, M.R.SAN.I., A.M.INST.S.E.
(Chief Sanitary Inspector, Whitstable)



LONDON

JOHN BALE, SONS & DANIELSSON, LTD.
83-91, GREAT TITCHFIELD STREET, W.1

—
1935

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
JOHN BALE, SONS AND DANIELSSON, LIMITED,
83-91, GREAT TITCHFIELD STREET, LONDON, W.1.

PREFACE

IN presenting this work, I am all too conscious of the abundance of housing literature; of the fact that in the last year or two at least a dozen books must have been written about the slums. A few months ago the subject was being sensationally featured by the daily press; the inquisitions held by the Ministry of Health, at the behest of ill-advised and illogical informers, in towns alleged to be in "default" as regards slum clearance, were given headlines on their front pages. To obtain copy, intrepid journalists, novelists and others toured the slums (bolder spirits even rented rooms in the danger zone). Numerous societies employed independent investigators and committees of inspection to view slum areas and issued lengthy reports on their findings. For a time, slums were a topic of discussion at women's clubs, luncheon parties and other social gatherings. They have, in fact, been so much inspected, investigated, examined, surveyed, reported upon, measured, drawn, photographed and filmed, that every time strangers approach these widely advertised areas, the residents look up and grin, as if to say "Here they are again!"

In short, the story of the slums has been told and re-told, but now that the blaze of publicity which ushered in the National Government's slum campaign has to a large extent faded away and the venturesome journalists and novelists have taken their pencils and notebooks elsewhere, it may be possible, without in any way decrying the laudable objects of slum clearance, to draw attention to its many practical difficulties; to tell the truth of those unfortunates who live in the slums; the fickle human element that has in the past sent many a well-organized scheme awry.

The principal object of this work is to do this frankly and without bias. It is not intended as a housing textbook or to present a solution of our housing evils. Rather is it an attempt to tell of what exists behind slumdom's foul front, to scratch aside some of the filth which hides the root-causes and, if nothing else, it may prove an antidote to the sentimental tosh preached about the subject. It comprises in a general way my own experience, what I have seen and heard over a period of many years passing in and out of the homes of the poor, together with information and help from friends and colleagues, which I gratefully acknowledge; but the opinions expressed on different aspects of the slum problem are entirely my own. I make no apology for them or for my misgivings regarding the future.

The present outcry against the slums, it should be noted, does not emanate from slum-dwellers themselves, but from those enjoying the comforts of home-life and the pleasures of a full stomach. Industrial cities have always had slums and bad housing, but in past years they had greatness, trade and wealth, and prosperity brings contentment. Acute trade depression, poverty and all the ill-health that goes with it, have drawn the attention of the general public to the slums, but the average individual has a purely sympathetic perspective, seeing only the sufferings of humanity and not its shortcomings. The slum problem is of far greater magnitude than the public believes it to be. Housing enthusiasts and all others who have turned the thing into a stunt, may run up and down the country proudly boasting to their audiences "The solution is in sight!"; but neither the five-year plan nor several multiples of it will see the land free of slums. Neither does the slum problem end when slums have been demolished and the people provided with good homes. They have got to be taught to live in them.

Industrial Britain, it must be agreed, has arrived at a stage in its history when rebuilding is urgently required. Its slums should be demolished and decent homes provided for the poor, so that they may at least have the opportunity of living clean and wholesome lives. If private enterprise cannot, or will not, build the houses, then others must, but whether present public housing is proceeding on the right lines is extremely doubtful. The principles may be right, but the campaign is being driven forward with incautious haste; its enormous difficulties are being underestimated. It would be better to adopt long-range planning, to explore more fully the resources for attacking the problem, even if it resulted in slower progress. In this highly organized country there *must* be the means of dealing with the problem, vast though it is, without imposing a large and ever-increasing financial burden upon the State and local authorities. The Church and other religious bodies, as well as philanthropic societies, should be asked to take a much larger share of the work, and greater experimental research of building materials and methods, such as is being done in Germany, Sweden and other countries, should be carried out. This would certainly reduce building costs.

A new England will arise from the social revolution in which we are now living and whether it shall be an England of wise planning and a sturdy independent people, or a legacy to future generations of mediocrity and confusion and a permanently pauperized lower class depends very materially upon how we deal with the slums.

C. R. A. MARTIN.

TANKERTON, KENT.

October, 1935.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. HISTORICAL SURVEY	1
II. SLUMS	29
III. SLUM-DWELLERS	72
IV. SLUM CLEARANCE	105
V. REHOUSING	131
VI. SLUMS IN THE MAKING	166

ILLUSTRATIONS

PLATE NO.	<i>Facing page</i>
I. SLUM COTTAGES HUDDLING ROUND RAILWAY VIADUCT	30
II. TWO TYPICAL COURTS	47
III. BACKYARDS OF SLUM COTTAGES BEFORE DEMOLITION. A CREEPER-CLAD COTTAGE OF THE RURAL AREAS	52
IV. A TYPICAL HOUSING SCHEME. BEFORE AND AFTER DEVELOPMENT	138
V. THE FIRST WING OF A TENEMENT BLOCK BUILT ON A SLUM AREA, SHOWING PIECE- MEAL DEVELOPMENT	139
VI. TWO LARGE TENEMENT BLOCKS	149
VII. DINGY NARROW STREET, NOT YET A SLUM, BUT SLOWLY AND SURELY BECOMING SO	168
VIII. SEASHORE DEVELOPMENT. A CAMP OF "TEMPORARY BUILDINGS"	169