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"WE MUST HAVE FLATS"

(continued from previous page)

nearer to the centres could cut the cost down. And that adds up to millions. Because you've got to add maintenance as well and all the wear and tear caused by transport to the suburbs."

"If you're suggesting that we should have smaller sections and jam our houses still closer than they already are. . . ."

"But I'm not. What I'm suggesting is a way to give us room for bigger sections in the suburbs and lots of green lawns and trees right in the city itself—and still make our towns a third less sprawling than they are."

"But you can't have it both ways."

"Oh, yes I can. See George, we can grow up instead of out. If we put a third of our present households into modern flats it would leave 40 acres vacant in every 100 that we build on to-day (Don't believe me; they're standard calculations). You could use up ten of those acres, say, in making sections bigger for the two-thirds of the people who still lived in separate houses. And even then, thirty acres and all the cost of roading them and paying transport to them would still be saved."

"And have the third of us who'd be living in flats coped up into tiny rooms and laid out side by side, cold as corpses in winter, shutting out each other's sun—the buildings, I mean!"

"Again you've got me wrong. 'Modern' flats—you heard the word—mean standard-sized rooms, with standard window-space (in fact more than standard), as well, of course, as better ventilation and heating and kitchen and bathroom facilities than any but the wealthiest single houses can afford. And 'modern' flats are placed so that every room in every block gets the maximum sunshine—far more than the average house does. They are varied in position and appearance so that they beautify and diversify the landscape. And they have lawns and gardens in between them so that they don't overshadow each other—there's more space and more light and more air available for everybody than anybody ever had before. And wait—I'll beat you to this objection—they cost less to build than the houses needed to accommodate the same number of people. Once a contractor gets his permanent plant built and his teams trained."

I paused to watch George capitulate.

"It's money, money, money all the time you talk," said he. "Haven't you any human feelings? I've told you I don't like flats."

* * *

[HAD no arguments left. So I shifted the onus of proof on to George.

"How would you end the housing shortage without creating endless new suburbs?"

"Essentially it's quite simple," said George. "Think of all the houses in cities and suburbs that are under-occupied. All those I mean where a

childless couple owns a full-sized house; or where young folk are baching with two bedrooms closed up; or where old people whose children are all grown up and away are still living in the family home. Sometimes the old couple just live in the kitchen. Sometimes they let rooms and wear themselves out looking after lodgers. It's easy. All you have to do is to shift these folk into the present flats and let the overcrowded families take over their houses."

"You mean compel them to shift?"

"I guess so. You don't see them shifting voluntarily, do you?"

"By George, I do," I cried. "But not into the places you people want to get out of. Who would go from a house and garden—even if both have grown too big for you to look after—into a couple of rooms opening on to the pavement? But if we had the sort of real flats I've described, every man and woman who hadn't kids to consider or an absolute passion for a garden all on his own, would dive for them. They'd combine company with privacy for the old folk. They'd combine simple house-keeping with handiness to town for the young folk. Quite one-third of the community must be in one or other of these classes. With modern flats available you'd have the young and the old—to both of whom flat life is ideal—living in flats, and the family people inhabiting roomier but handier suburbs!"

"So there'd be no young folk in the suburbs? What a prospect!"

"But who said that the flats must all be in town? I'd have a good half of them scattered around the inner suburbs (we're drawing in the outer suburbs quite a bit, you'll remember). That would distribute the young people round the suburbs a good deal more than at present and they'd do the local organising of community activities that family people are too tired and too tied up to do—though they'll go to a thing when it is organised. They'd diversify the landscape, too—the flats, I mean. You're quite right that people as they grow should change their abodes into ones that suit the current stage of their life-cycle. But it's only by making good flats as well as good houses available that you'll do it."

"But no children in the town flats."

"Not nearly as many, George, as are at present in town tenements and tumbledown houses without backyards, though I don't see why some families shouldn't stay on the ground floors of modern flats if Dad's work makes it necessary. They'd be healthier than they are now. What a prospect," I cried. "Petone, Arch Hill, Newtown, Freeman's Bay, Sydenham, and the North End Flat pulled down—before they fall down—and replaced with democratic palaces in people's parks! But of course you don't like. . . ."

" . . . having words put into my mouth, I've told you," George took them out of mine. "Who the heck gave you the idea that I don't like flats?"