

Why Garden Cities Should be Supported.

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I quite agree with Lord Islington as to the fundamental character of this housing problem. A nation is really formed by the houses that its people live in. If you live in a particular kind of house you are bound to get a particular set of habits, and that particular set of habits makes the difference between a savage and a civilised man. You can impose savagery quite confidently by giving that particular kind of house which imposes savage habits. I think the business of your Association is, in the first place, to get money for Mr. Ebenezer Howard and for the people who are practically trying to make garden cities. Perhaps I should not have introduced Mr. Howard's name in that way; for with a man of such an extraordinary power of getting whatever he wants and of getting schemes taken up without having any apparent resources, one really hesitates to ask people to give him money! However, our business is to get money for such practical work; but that is a comparatively small thing to the work of trying to arouse the conscience of the nation on the subject.

It really is incredible the way people in the past have been thoughtless with regard to the question of housing. For about six years of my life I took an active part in the local government of a London district. About ten minutes' walk up Gray's Inn Road you will come across an area you might do well to study on a fairly large scale map of London, because if you walk behind the walls you may walk for years and not know what is on the other side of them. If you take those three great railway sites, the Great Northern, Midland, and the London and North-Western, merely walking round the walls will give you no idea of the enormous areas inside, with their platforms, engine sheds, shunting yards, sidings, warehouses and so on. As far as I know, when these spaces were cleared it never occurred to anybody to make provision for the people dislodged. It was an overcrowded district before the railways came, but no one can imagine what it meant when it came to pulling the houses down, with no provision for the people who lived there. I believe that the only poor person living there who made anything out of it was a certain Mr. Chatterton, who was a seller of newspapers, and used to print them himself in his own garret. It happened that he had taken a room or a corner of a room in a house on the site of the Midland Station. He was a tenant of a workman who lived there, and came in a week before demolition commenced. His landlord told

him that it was no use his coming in because they were going to be turned out at the end of the week. Mr. Chatterton said it made no difference to him, so the landlord told him to do as he liked. An advance guard, as it were, of the demolition party called the following week and found Chatterton there in his corner. He said, "What are you doing here?" and Chatterton said, "I live here!" The official said, "You have got to turn out," but Chatterton said, "I will not turn out; I have seen my old mother and father sitting by that fireside and carried out of that door to the Kensal Green Cemetery. I have had my daughters grow up here and married to the men of their hearts, and I will not clear out." The official said, "Will you take £1 to go?" Chatterton said "Yes," and he took the £1 and went. I don't recommend his morality to you, but so far as I know he was the only working man who lived in that cleared district who got anything out of the clearance.

CLEARING WITHOUT RE-HOUSING.

At present a local authority can clear an area and must provide accommodation for the people who are cleared out. But the law is an absurdity as it stands. What they do is to re-house a half or two-thirds of the people and the rest have to crowd into the slums. Local authorities in re-housing and building new dwellings for people have to buy land in the open market and pay the market price for it. It is impossible to buy land in London at full market price and re-let it to poor people at a price that will pay. You cannot do it. What does the local authority do? What did I do when a member of a local authority? You put down in the accounts not what you really paid for the land but an absolutely idealistic and fantastic figure. You put down the value of the land for the purpose of housing the working classes. Of course it is very much less than you have actually paid, and who makes up the difference? The ratepayer does. He is told that the dwellings pay their way, but you see that the economic basis is entirely false.

I am quite persuaded that there would be no difficulty in local authorities making the business pay if they were empowered to deal with the whole question. For instance, if the Borough of St. Pancras, instead of having this power to build working class dwellings and to issue fantastic accounts, had been empowered to build larger houses, churches, halls, and other buildings: they would have made it pay handsomely.