

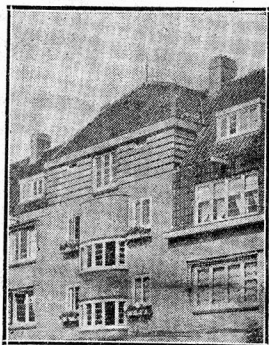
# THE SLUM PROBLEM

The Star.

2. April - 1929.

## HOLLAND'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SOLUTION

Housing schemes are afoot. The authorities are desirous of doing away with slums and creating surroundings and erecting dwellings that will convert the hitherto slack slum dweller into a tidy, self-respecting member of the community. Princess Alice has graciously interested herself in the question and has turned for some information to Holland. Her Royal Highness could scarcely have chosen a more suitable country. Holland is, to all appearances, succeeding in solving the slum question by erecting very efficient workmen's dwelling places.



A BUILDING IN UTRECHT.

During a recent visit to Europe, it was my good fortune to meet one of Holland's prominent architects, who very kindly showed me over one of these buildings, which had been designed by his firm. The keynote was efficiency, this object being attained by rigid simplicity of design—without crudeness of effect—and good planning. The buildings are mostly four to six-storeyed, built round a courtyard which is entered by archways on two or three sides. The buildings are divided into flats or apartments of different sizes to meet the requirements of various tenants.

### “ONLY SATISFACTORY WAY”

This housing method, though considered undesirable by some sentimental persons, who object to what they term “the absence of a separate home,” is the only solution of the slum problem. It has proved to be the best, in fact, the only satisfactory way of housing such people as, when left to the dictates of their own choice, drift into the most undesirable and meanest quarters of the big cities. These people must be put into surroundings which they cannot turn into slums. After they have learnt to appreciate an apartment and the recreation spaces provided round these big buildings, then perhaps they will be ready for the responsibilities which are of necessity placed upon the people who live in garden suburbs.

Besides being unsuited for a garden suburb, there are many other reasons why slum dwellers should be housed in large buildings, each surrounded by a park, instead of having a separate cottage with a small piece of ground allotted to each individual family. In the first place, there is the question of expenditure. To be successful in their object, undertakings of this nature must be governed by strict economy. One large building which can accom-

modate a hundred families is far more economical and efficient than a hundred small cottages.

To make such cottages a paying proposition—that is, to enable the owner to get just a fair percentage on his capital—they must be built in a cheap way and of cheap materials. The owner will, if he is a business man, consider the proposition not worthy of an architect or good planning. The result will be that we shall have rows of that nightmare type of building which spoils one's outlook from a train window wherever railway workmen have been housed.

### THE COTTAGE “MYTH”

The ideal picture of a nice little cottage, with a honeysuckle-covered porch and a lawn in front, on which a couple of rosy-cheeked children play contentedly, is just a myth. All that would be achieved by building cheap cottages would be new slums, more dirty backyards and front “lawns” on which no blade of grass would grow, but which would be used as a general dumping ground for all old pieces of broken furniture, rusty petrol tins and similar junk.

Far better is the Dutch plan of concentration. The large buildings cost less per family, and thus pay better; they can be well planned; enable strict supervision, so that there can be no accumulation of rubbish, besides providing comforts which modern civilisation is beginning to regard as necessities. Just a few facts need be mentioned in this connection: central heating, electricity or gas, proper sanitation, hot water, central laundries, baths and showers, and one or two large lifts—for furniture and other heavy articles only. Here we encounter a stumbling block. Most South Africans don't want to climb stairs. This will not be a permanent hindrance though, for human beings are all creatures of habit. Mounting stairs is very healthy exercise and when weighed against the many advantages which these buildings offer, will soon be regarded as a negligible detail.

### RECREATION SPACES

The recreation spaces and playgrounds for children which a park round the building provides, will soon prove a very strong attraction. Even the simplest man and woman likes a stretch of grass and shady trees. The slum dweller will grab at the opportunity of getting them, provided, of course, that he is not called upon to plant and cultivate them. Parks in South Africa need not be costly. Grass grows without attention or much watering, if a coarse variety is chosen, and such trees as blue gums and wattle very soon reach a shade-giving size.

A caretaker for the whole concern, who would be able to do all minor repairs, and another man to keep the grounds in order, would be all the service expenditure required. Worked out on a sound basis such a building should prove a good business investment, besides removing the stigma of “slum property owner,” which deters many a business man from putting money into dwelling houses for the poor.

It is time that we came down to tin tacks, and began to consider these housing schemes from a common sense point of view. Our age is termed “the material age,” in other words the matter of fact age. It is a compliment we don't deserve. We are being stupidly sentimental about the most blatantly evident matters. The sooner we stop painting visionary pictures of happiness for the poor and settle down to prepare hygienic, comfortable and economically possible schemes for housing them, the better.

GERARD MOERDYK.