

THE FAMILY PARLIAMENT.

[THE RULES OF DEBATE will be found on page 302. The Editor's duty will be to act as "Mr. Speaker;" consequently, while preserving due order in the discussion, he will not be held to endorse any opinions that may be expressed on either side, each debater being responsible for his own views.]

OUGHT THE STATE TO PROVIDE HEALTHY HOMES FOR THE POOR?

OPENER'S SPEECH.

MR. SPEAKER,

I think, Sir, I may with safety assert that there is no subject of more general social interest at the present time than that of the housing of our poor. Many of us know from personal experience in what wretched dens—to call them "homes" would be to make a mockery of the word—the poorer classes in our large towns live; and those who have not themselves seen these pestilential rookeries must have read of them and of the manner in which the tenants live. In wretched courts, reeking with poisonous gases, tumble-down houses of tiny rooms—eight feet square, many of them—are crowded together: all the houses resembling one another in these points—that they are filthy, dirt-begrimed, and practically staircase-less, window-less, and furniture-less. And in such uninhabitable habitations as these, families herded together—seven and eight in a room—and are often forced to pay for such accommodation nearly half their net weekly earnings!

This, Sir, is the deplorable condition of affairs which has led me to bring the present topic under the notice of this honourable House, in the hope that it may be unanimously decided that an immediate remedy for such a state of things is imperative; that the duty in the matter rests with the country at large—in short, that the State ought to provide healthy homes for the poor. To make my proposition a little clearer I will enlarge it thus: That the State proper, together with the various local authorities, who form part of the governing machinery of the State, should be bound to provide a healthy home for every wage-earning inhabitant of the country, at a rental in fair proportion to his wage-earning power.

Now, Sir, it is already admitted by the existence of our Poor Law System, that every human being existent in the country has a right to live—may justly demand sufficient food to support life—even though he may not be able to earn what he receives: surely, then, it is only logical to admit also that every willing worker has a right to shelter at a price fairly within his means.

Again, Sir, looking at the matter from another point of view, it is beyond dispute that the unsanitary conditions attending over-crowding affect not only the health of the inhabitants of the fever-dens, but also the wealth and prosperity of the country at large. For this reason, then, it is the duty of the State to interfere.

Now, that the State has to some extent recognised its responsibility in this matter is proved by the existence of the "Artisans' Dwellings Acts" (Mr. Torrens' Acts), the "Artisans' and Labourers' Dwellings Improvements Acts" (Sir Richard Cross's Acts), and the

"Labouring Classes' Lodging-houses Acts," all of which Acts give considerable powers to local authorities for dealing with unsanitary dwellings, for insisting on improvements and the abatement of nuisances, and for pulling down and rebuilding. Further than this, local commissioners may even purchase or rent land, and on such land may erect buildings suitable for lodging-houses for the labouring classes, and may convert any buildings into lodging-houses for the labouring classes, and may alter, enlarge, repair, and improve the buildings, and may fit up, furnish, and supply them with the requisite furniture, fittings, and conveniences. Large powers of various kinds have in fact been given to the local authorities by the State, but they have not been largely used—often, indeed, not at all—and for this reason: that a heavy burden would be entailed on the districts in which the Acts were enforced, in the shape of a considerable addition to the rates!

It should be clearly understood that in all thickly-populated towns it is practically impossible to let well-built sanitary dwellings at a rental which is both remunerative to the investors of capital, and within the means of the poorest of the labouring classes. This is shown by the fact that the Peabody trustees, with everything in their favour as to the purchase of land, and seeking only to gain 3 per cent. on their outlay, cannot let two rooms for less than about 4s. 4d. a week—a sum altogether beyond the means of a man with a family, striving to live on from 8s. to 15s. a week. I mention this because some seem to think the problem may be solved by merely insisting that private owners shall either make their tenements habitable, or be punishable by a heavy fine, forgetting that the owner has the power to charge any rent which he may please, and also that ground landlords cannot be compelled to erect houses sufficient to accommodate *decently* all the inhabitants of a town.

If, Sir, it may be granted for a minute that the State ought to provide healthy houses for the poor, I will now endeavour to show how the duty may be fulfilled.

Local authorities should be compelled by the State to see that there is sufficient healthy house accommodation in their districts for all the inhabitants, and at varying rentals, to meet the needs of all. Mr. Torrens' and Sir Richard Cross's Acts should be rigidly enforced against owners of unsanitary weekly tenements, and new lodging-houses, according to the necessities of each individual case, should be constructed to house those who may be too poor to pay the normal rents in the town, but who, being wage-earners, can pay something, and should therefore not be driven to the workhouse. The sums necessary to carry out all the work

involved in building, improving, &c., should be lent by the State at a low rate of interest—say 2½ per cent.—such interest to be paid out of the local rates. In this way the locality would have to contribute the difference between 2½ per cent. on the sums borrowed, and the net amount received for rents, thus sharing the burden fairly equally with the State.

Of course an objection may be raised that the local authorities will still evade their duties in the matter and save their pockets, and that Government will not easily be able to interfere. The enforcement of the Education Act—in the compulsory establishment of School Boards in districts with insufficient elementary school accommodation—affords abundant evidence of the futility of such an objection.

There is yet one other way, Sir, in which the State may and ought to help to fulfil its duty in this matter. Houses and rooms are much cheaper in the suburbs of towns than in the towns themselves, but on account of the cost of travelling the poorest classes cannot migrate to the suburbs, and pass to and fro to their work. Let the State grant aid to the railways, in the shape of the remission of the passenger duty, or in some other form, and in return bargain for early trains to carry the labouring classes at a fraction over cost price, or say at about the same rate as goods are carried. In this way something at least might be done.

Of course, Sir, I recognise that I have possibly weakened my argument as to State responsibility by attempting to show how the duty, once admitted, might be fulfilled; but nevertheless it seemed only fair to state, however crudely, my view of what might be done, if only to demonstrate that I have not set out with an abstract proposition, incapable of being carried into practical effect. Yet, Sir, however weak my schemes may be, I venture to maintain that the principle underlying them is indisputable—namely, the duty of the State to provide healthy homes for the poor.

OPPONENT'S SPEECH.

MR. SPEAKER,

It is, I trust, Sir, altogether unnecessary for me to state that I sympathise, quite as fully as the Opener of this debate, with the woes of those who are forced to herd together in our large cities, like pigs in a sty. My heart has often bled when I have witnessed their poverty and their sorrows, and I have pondered long and earnestly in what way relief might be sought and hoped for; and yet I cannot agree that the State ought to take upon itself any new responsibility in the matter, and I fear that if it were to do so, the step would be anything but conducive to the interests of the country at large.

Now, Sir, I cannot help feeling that in passing the existing Acts for the improvement of artisans' and labourers' dwellings the State has gone as far as is safe in the matter. By these Acts, local authorities have large powers over owners of unsanitary dwellings, and can exercise these powers with scarcely any cost to themselves. By an order obtained from the Justices of the Peace, the abatement of all nuisances can be

enforced; and if the Justices consider that the same or a similar nuisance is likely to recur, they may further prohibit its recurrence and direct the execution of the works necessary to prevent such recurrence; and if, in their judgment, the nuisance is such as to render any house unfit for human habitation, they may prohibit its being used for that purpose until it is rendered fit for habitation, and in that case the house may not be let or inhabited until by a further order the Justices have declared that it is habitable. Local authorities may also institute proceedings against owners for over-crowding, and in cases of persistent over-crowding the houses may be closed by order of the Justices.

Local authorities are, therefore, able to insist on the improvement of all unsanitary dwellings, and can guard against the evils and dangers of over-crowding without appreciable expense. That they have not taken advantage to any extent of later Acts, and insisted on purchasing the land and pulling down badly-constructed tenements, and erecting new ones of which they will be the responsible landlords, is not to be wondered at. Rates are already high enough all over the country, without the imposition of additional burdens resulting from ill-judged philanthropy on the part of trustees of public funds.

It seems to me, Sir, that the present evil will find its own remedy, since it is the result of a more or less abnormal state of things. It arises almost entirely from the excessive gravitation of the country people towards the towns, and from the vast increase of the population in the towns themselves—an increase altogether disproportionate to the extension of the fields of labour. That a fair week's work cannot be found for all the able-bodied inhabitants of our towns is practically admitted by the Opener of this debate, when he speaks of the earnings of a family as averaging only from 8s. to 15s. weekly. Three things will tend year by year to improve matters—education, migration, and emigration. Compulsory education has already done much in inculcating health laws and a higher code of morality; it is doing much, and has still more to do, in improving the value of all kinds of labour, and making it more productive. Migration back to the country, and to more thinly-populated districts, and a constant increase in the number of emigrants to our colonies and foreign lands, may reasonably be looked for, if the natural process is not disturbed by such action as is proposed by the honourable Opener—namely, the conversion, on the largest scale, of the State and the local authorities conjointly into a landlord of unprofitable weekly tenements.

Let us consider for one moment what would be the inevitable result of the adoption of such a scheme. Thousands of families in all our large towns would be induced to linger on in poverty, without any prospect of work, merely because they were allowed to live practically rent-free at the expense of others. Surely this would be throwing overboard all the recognised laws of political economy! If our Poor Law System be regarded as an incentive to pauperism, surely this new State Landlord scheme should be looked upon as

likely to encourage laziness and unthriftiness to a far larger extent. I do not know whether the problem which now confronts us has arisen in the great cities of the United States, but I am bold to assert that in that land of freedom—where every man is as good as his neighbour—even if the evil were twice as great as it is here, the authorities would never attempt to interfere in the manner now suggested. But if it may be hoped that time will work out a remedy for the excessive poverty of the lowest classes in the country, it remains to consider if any temporary measures of relief may be taken. I am inclined to agree that if the railway companies could be induced to carry workmen at lower rates something would be gained, since many of the better-paid artisans would avail themselves of country homes, and leave room, at reduced rents, for those half-employed, badly-paid classes who would never be able to rent country lodgings, even if the railway companies carried them to and fro gratis. If the country can afford to remit the passenger duty, and if a bargain can be made with the companies for something in exchange, in the shape of reduced workmen's fares, well and good. From several points of view, something would be gained, although I am afraid the result would not be all that the Opener of the debate seems to expect.

Artisans' Dwellings Companies—worked on strict business principles, to pay a moderate percentage on capital invested—may also be factors in the solution of the problem. If plenty of good and well-built healthy lodgings, consisting of two rooms, can be let for 4s. 4d. a week, we shall not hear much more of 2s. 6d. and 3s. being demanded for a squalid attic. The 2s. 6d.

or 3s. will soon be reduced by the ordinary laws of supply and demand to 1s.; and, by the coercion of the local authorities, the attic may be rendered habitable even for that. Private enterprise, assisted by charitable efforts; improved education; increased industry, thrift, and sobriety; emigration; and a resolute determination on the part of local authorities to insist on the perfect sanitary condition of all tenements, without however improving them off the face of the earth—these are the fit agencies to cope with an exceptional evil, and to render it needless to ask in years to come whether the State ought to provide healthy homes for the poor.

[RULES OF DEBATE.—*The course of debate is as follows:—Two principal speakers holding opposite views on the Question discussed are selected by the Editor. Readers of the MAGAZINE are then invited to express their own views on the subject, to the Editor, who will at his discretion select some of the most suitable and concise of these communications, or portions of them, for publication in a subsequent Part of the MAGAZINE. The Opener of the Debate is to have the right of reply.*]

TO OUR READERS.—The Editor will be happy to receive the opinions of any Readers on the above Question, on either side, with a view to the publication of the most suitable and concise communications in subsequent issues of the Magazine. The Debate will be resumed in the June Part. Letters should be addressed "The Editor of CASSELL'S MAGAZINE, La Belle Sauvage Yard, London, E.C.," and in the top left-hand corner of the envelope should be written, "Family Parliament." The speech should be headed with the title of the Debate, and an indication of the *side taken by the Reader*. All communications on the present Question must reach the Editor not later than April 15.

An Honorarium of £1 1s. will be accorded (subject to the discretion of the Editor) to the *best speech, which may be on either side of the Question*; no speech to exceed 50 lines (500 words).

KING BABY'S WARDROBE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE CHILDREN'S ROOM."



THE thought has often crossed my mind that there may be—nay, I am sure there are—many ladies to-day to whom a few words upon this important and pleasing subject may prove useful. At any rate, it is with this sincere hope that these lines are penned. In a short article like the present it is, of course, impossible to mention everything in the way of clothing requisite for a baby's use; but it is not at all necessary to do this, as there are many little details which may safely be left to the taste and discretion of the mother.

We are not all in a position to give an order to one of those important people who undertake to supply layettes, and so have no more thought or trouble in the matter until the things arrive all ready for use;

and I, for one, never envy those who can do so. I am always inclined to feel rather sorry for them, for those who do not know what it is to work, both with fingers and brains, for the dear little beings dependent upon them, miss one of the sweetest pleasures in life. I always look back upon the time when I was preparing for my own first little darling as one of the happiest times in my life. How quickly the days flew by, each one filled with some loving labour for the sweet little treasure who was coming to make our happy home still happier! Why, I was positively jealous of my baby's clothes! I could not endure other hands than my own to fashion them, for with every stitch I seemed to entwine some happy dream or hope for the future.

Supposing, then, that some one is going to follow my plan, and have baby's outfit made at home, let us consider the best and most economical way to commence. First of all, decide how many of each article are required, and carefully measure exactly how many yards of stuff will be wanted for the making of each. A great waste is often caused by the want of a little forethought in this respect.

Whenever possible, the materials should be of the

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* placed before a speaker's name denotes distinction in a former debate.

OUGHT THE STATE TO PROVIDE HEALTHY HOMES FOR THE POOR?

(Debate continued.)

J. EATON FEARN :—Mr. Speaker—The question, Sir, brought before the attention of this honourable House is one of the highest national importance, and I cannot help thinking that it has been nothing but gross negligence on the part of our State to have allowed such a disgraceful state of things to have existed so long. We boast of our civilisation, of our education, of our Christianity, and yet at the same time we have regarded with utter indifference as a nation, until quite recently, our fellow-creatures living in dirty, unhealthy hovels, that we should rightly deem unfit for even our pigs. The State considers it her duty to look after the education of the children belonging to the poorer classes, to levy a poor rate on behalf of the destitute in every parish, to provide a "house" in every fair-sized town for the aged and infirm; and, surely, if these things form part of her duty, she *ought* to provide, or at least assist in providing, respectable, healthy houses, for the accommodation of those people with large families whose earnings are but small, but yet who strive their very utmost to gain a livelihood. Money-grasping landlords, if the correspondence in our daily papers is to be credited, have charged exorbitant rents for wretched dens, and it is quite high time for the State to awake out of its lethargy and deal with the question in earnest. The honourable Opponent in this debate has asserted that such a scheme as the honourable Opener wisely suggested "would induce thousands of families in all our large towns to linger on in poverty, without any prospect of work, merely because they were allowed to live practically rent-free at the expense of others." I fail to see it. I contend, Sir, that the State would render help to the deserving alone, and those thus assisted would be compelled to be under the constant supervision of "house-officers." Neither would they live in the houses "practically rent-free." They would be expected to pay a *low* rental for a decent, healthy, and what, with a little pains, might be made into a comfortable home. If they abused their privileges they would be ejected—but not to return to their former haunts, which are undoubtedly the nursery-beds of crime and lawlessness. It is true that the State, or the respective parishes, would be losers in a pecuniary sense, but they would have for their money the satisfaction of knowing that they had not allowed their deserving poor to perish like brutes. And this to most would be compensation sufficient.

W. KING :—Mr. Speaker—The principle of State interference in the matter of dwellings for the poor needs no apology, being based on the first law of nature—self-preservation. While freely recognising, however, that the poor are a component part of the nation, and as such are entitled to their share of "preservation," I fail to see that as a whole the State would be the better for the adoption of the scheme promulgated by the hon. Opener. The object at which he aims will meet—is now, indeed, meeting—its fruition, not from a wholesale State-landlordism, but from the enforcement of present stipulations by local authorities. If these authorities shirk their responsibilities, I would say to the poor—the struggling multitudes we have been told of—"You have the *making* of your local authorities; make them of men who will carry out your wishes."

Another mode of relieving the pressure on space from which we suffer is daily gaining ground, but has not, perhaps, received the attention it deserves. I mean the establishment of branches

in the country by great "houses" in the congested centres of population. Where carried out, this plan has generally proved a success—financially to employers, physically to workmen. Wages are, perhaps, nominally lower, but means of living—especially house-room—are certainly correspondingly as low.

We have then, I think, good ground for hoping that the forces now at work will prove sufficient to cope with the evil, without extinguishing private enterprise by adopting the dangerous expedient of State-landlordism; remembering that gradual growth has always been better for *the State as a whole* than revolution, and "Rome was not built in a day."

H. NICHOLSON :—Mr. Opponent relies on improved education, increased industry, thrift, and sobriety, as fit agencies to remedy existing evils; but I would ask, what is to prompt, nay, what is to create, such agencies? I hold, Sir, that education must fail in its great end and aim, the formation of character, if home associations do not supplement school studies in the good work; and if home associations are degrading, and filth, dirt, and squalor supreme in the household, the greatest efforts of School Boards cannot be thoroughly successful, and children under such home influences must be demoralised. The case of the Peabody Trustees shows that it is not private enterprise or charitable effort that is needed, but prompt action by the State, which is a duty towards the nation.

T. P. GARBUTT :—The idea of the homes in the country is a grand one, and one that I should like to see carried out. No need, Sir, for me to paint the difference between a town and country life. No need to draw attention to the chubby faces and rosy cheeks of the country children, or to harrow the feelings by depicting the pale shrunken features of those reared in the towns. Alas! the difference is too well known. There are few parents but are yearning to remove their children from the demoralising influences of squalid courts and wretched hovels, where debauchery in all its hideous forms takes early hold of their young hearts—hearts strong and lusty, and heads and arms that would under other circumstances be a credit and a power to the country. Surely, these alone are worth trying to save, and would be a grand set-off against any little increase in our rates. It is a libel to say that the working classes cling to the town. Give them a chance to get away. For instance, provide them with cottages, the rent of which, and the railway travelling, shall not exceed the cost of rooms in an overcrowded court, and I am certain that thousands will avail themselves of the privilege. I am, however, of opinion—and I am not speaking without some authority—that the cost would be very much less, and that a small garden might also be included.

F. DOLMAN :—There is one remark made by the Opponent in this debate which may well be said to contain the whole gist of the matter under discussion. He declared that the agencies employed should be private enterprise, assisted by charitable efforts and improved education; and I am sure none can take exception to the statement. But would education itself ever have reached the present state of efficiency had not private agencies been very considerably augmented by the action of the State? And should we, as a nation, be feeling now the immeasurable benefits accruing from popular education had not that action been taken? I do not think there are many who will impugn the negation of this query.

JOHN C. BROWN :—The Government has already gone as far in this matter as considerations of prudence will permit. What is now required is a more rigid enforcement of the present law; greater facilities for emigration; increase of education; and more extensive operations on the part of the Christian churches and of the Christian and benevolent societies. The first can be done, as the leader on the negative side has pointed out, with far less expense than most people think, and provides powers for pulling down and re-building, and for the abatement or the removal of all nuisances. The second would obtain better wages, and, consequently, better means of improving their whole condition, both for those who emigrate and for those who remain. Education would give the people larger and more correct views of their social and economic duties; and the last requirement would increase their contentment, improve their moral tone, and thus guarantee a proper expenditure of all their resources.

* CHARLOTTE A. PRITCHARD :—Our honourable Opponent, in his very able and learned speech, says: "It is, I trust, altogether unnecessary for me to state that I sympathise quite as fully as the Opener of this debate with the woes of those who are forced to herd together in our large cities, like pigs in a sty;" and he goes on to say that his heart has often bled when he has witnessed their poverty and their sorrows. And yet, on the same page, he tells us that "the present evil will find its own remedy," and that "the State has gone as far as is safe in the matter." I can hardly conceive it possible that the same honourable gentleman could have put forth these contradictory statements; for, whether we admire his first sentiments, excusing the latter, or believe the latter, sublimely pitying the former, the fact remains the same: his arguments are contradictory, and therefore—worthless. "As far as is safe," indeed! What a generous, noble, unselfish State ours must be if it can consistently carry out this very generous, noble, and unselfish maxim—as far as is safe! when hundreds of our poor suffering fellow-creatures are daily dying in "poverty, hunger, and dirt," for lack of that very assistance which the State, perhaps, alone can give. And would England's sons and daughters—the mothers, wives, and husbands of this Heaven-favoured isle—would they begrudge the paltry tax which would raise so many of their less-favoured brethren from a state of degradation and distress to one of comparative peace and respectability? Ah, no! a thousand times, no! We already pay taxes for other things, which ought to be far less important to us than the sacred cause I am now pleading, viz., the healthy housing of our poor. The State alone has supreme authority. It is she, and she only, who can insist, firmly and irrevocably, on what shall or shall not be. And will she shrink from the task that lies before her? Will she, because the dangers seem many, the road all up-hill, the conquest uncertain, will she turn from that ever-beckoning goal on which she sees written in ineffaceable characters of warning this one word—"Duty"? Will she turn from her task? Ah, no! We believe better things of her. We believe she will follow out that which she knows to be right. We believe she will try her very utmost to relieve the fearful distress with which some of her proudest and fairest cities are teeming. And how can this be done? Simply by following out our enlightened Opener's suggestion that "the State proper, together with the various local authorities, who form part of the governing machinery of the State, should be bound to provide a healthy home for every wage-earning inhabitant of the country, at a rental in fair proportion to his wage-earning power."

ROBERT WALKER :—Who are the poor? Where will you draw the line between poverty and bare competency, seeing that it is quite as possible to be honestly poor on £100 a year, as it is to be comfortable comparatively on £25? It would astound us to know what are the incredibly small self-earned incomes of thousands of widows, who keep the semblance of absolute poverty away from their homes, as may be witnessed by the air of comfort and the cleanliness and order which pervade their surroundings. On the other hand, how many persons there are (City

clerks, say) whose incomes, if judged by figures only, would be deemed ample, and yet poverty pinches them hard, because the exigencies of their position compel them to make their surroundings smack of "respectability." If space afforded, other conditions might be stated to justify my assumption. Ah, Sir! poverty has many garbs—some strangely deceptive, but poverty for all that. There is a "bitter cry" elsewhere than in London slums, but it holds its handkerchief to its mouth!

ROBERT HIGGS :—Individual citizens may, and have already, done much to alleviate the condition of the poor, but they lack the power to carry on the work successfully, and call on the State to support them.

FANNCHEN.—If the duty to provide good homes for the working classes lies anywhere, it would seem to be rather with those who have the benefit of their services than with the State. If every employer were compelled, or could feel it to be his duty, to see all his workmen comfortably and decently housed, a great part of the evil would be removed. Supervision is certainly needful, both as to over-crowding and to building and sanitary arrangements; without it, good homes would in many cases be of no use, as was shown in a case in my own neighbourhood, where a house was improved to increase the comfort of a large family, and soon after it was found that two lodgers had been taken in, and the family huddled together as before. I feel with the Opponent that the State has gone as far as it can, and that it is not its duty to provide homes for the poor, and I think that more lasting good will be done by private effort, and the progress of public opinion in these matters.

J. J. HELLIER :—In my mind there is only one method of doing away with the existing evil, and that is in compelling the local authorities to see that all dwellings are put into proper sanitary order, and houses too far gone for repairs pulled down; if they did this—and they are empowered to do so by two Acts of Parliament—there would be an end to the evil at once, and at a far less cost than it would be if the State were to provide the dwellings.

H. K. JORDAN :—I venture, Sir, to submit that it would be impolitic for the State to enter into competition with private owners of existing sanitary industrial dwellings. For the purposes of debate let it be assumed that "State homes" were erected; they would of course be of a superior character, possessing comforts and conveniences which present dwellings of the poor have not, and the cost would necessarily be great. If the rent of these homes be fixed so as to yield a fair return upon the capital expended, it is obvious that the poor could not pay such rent, and the homes would be tenanted by a class of persons other than that for which they were erected. If, on the other hand, the rent was fixed at present current rates, the "State homes" would command a preference; in other words, being endowed and let for less than their value, unfair competition with, and grave injustice to, existing private interests would result.

The Editor has pleasure in announcing that the Honorarium of ONE GUINEA offered for the best short speech on this subject has been awarded to Miss A. M. BRUNSDON, Southernbank, Hereford, whose speech, together with the Opener's reply, concluding the debate, will be given in our next issue.

Other speeches supporting the Opener's argument, that the State ought to provide healthy homes for the poor, received from:—F. Maitland; W. C. Price; Aletheia; James Alexander; R. Burleigh Campbell. Total, 12.

Other speeches supporting Opponent's argument received from:—F. J. Steward; Alfred Crabtree; F. M. Holmes; P. A. Berrisford; Alfred C. Atkins; Callum Beg; J. Warren; M. Slade; Charles Reid; Kate Mary Lowe; Jessie Donisthorpe; John Stewart; C. Moore; J. H. S.; W. T.; A. J. Jakeman; James Cromar; W. S. K.; J. T. Woodward; J. Stanton; J. Baker, junr.; Annie Laurie; John Brook; W. Walker. Total, 33.

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OUGHT THE STATE TO PROVIDE HEALTHY HOMES FOR THE POOR?

(Debate concluded.)

* MISS A. M. BRUNSDON, Southernbank, Hereford:—
Sir,—It seems to me that people are forming a habit of thinking and speaking of the State as though it were possessed of boundless wealth, obtained by accident. Should it not be remembered that some part, at any rate, of the revenue is derived from people who have hard work to "make both ends meet?" Many of the middle classes exercise far greater self-control and self-denial than the labourers for whom it is proposed that the State should erect dwellings. Is it fair, then, thus to take money from the one class to give it to the other? Already the former contribute to the education of the latter in youth, and to their support in old age. Must they also help to provide a home for the years of their vigorous manhood? And would not this measure be contrary to all received principles of political economy? Its ultimate result would probably be a proportionate reduction of wages, and even immediately the labourer would be little benefited, as it would be likely to check emigration, and to give a stimulus to the migration from country to town. It would also encourage the early and improvident marriages that even now cause so much of the deep poverty which we all deplore. And if the State is to provide dwellings, why should it stop there? Food and clothing, if not furniture, are equally pressing needs.

If it be a duty to provide dwellings, surely, to be consistent, it ought to be asserted that it is also the duty of the State to find work for the unemployed. But if the State bestow this parental care, it will soon have also to exercise parental authority. Laws would in time have to be passed restricting marriage, and perhaps even to limit the young peasant's right to leave an agricultural district when labour is needed. But has not the time for these things passed away? Then let us as a nation banish the thought of State-erected dwellings for the poor.

Let existing laws, that require the renovation or removal of unsanitary tenements, be enforced. Let philanthropists be more diligent in aiding the sick, the aged, and the unfortunate, and more strenuous in promoting emigration. And above all, let the people themselves learn to be more self-reliant, self-denying, and thrifty; for without these qualities, whatever the State may do, there will always be a vast amount of extreme poverty and degradation.

* To this speech was awarded the Honorary of One Guinea, offered for the best short speech on this subject.

OPENER'S REPLY.

MR. SPEAKER,

When I was permitted to open this debate, I hardly dared hope, Sir, that my proposition would be carried by a large majority—so inherent in human nature is the principle of *laissez faire*, of non-interference, when expense or temporary inconvenience may possibly ensue from energetic action—but I certainly thought that more supporters would have rallied around me. However, after listening to the speeches of my honourable Opponent, and of those who followed him on the same side, I really find very little to answer that has not been dealt with by those who have taken my view of the question.

As I expected, the principal argument against action by the State has been that the State has already interfered as far as is wise in the matter, and that local authorities are already armed with sufficient powers to cope with the evils of excessive rent, over-crowding, and unsanitary dwellings. The simple answer to this is, that the condition of the homes of the poor has up to the present benefited little, if at all, by the Acts of Parliament at present in force, showing that a more drastic remedy is needed. Moreover, as one speaker has well said, this is, or ought to be, a question removed outside the cold calculations of political economists: it is a question, not of what is prudent, but of what is our duty to our fellow-men, and our responsibility in the sight of God.

Of course the State would need to be discriminating in its action. It would not provide homes rent-free for all who chose to live in them, as one honourable opponent seems to infer. It would confine itself to seeing that in every locality there were healthy homes at a low rental, sufficient in number for the poorest part of the population. People who could pay no rent at all would be dealt with as at present under our Poor Law system.

The argument that if the State is to provide dwellings, it should also provide food, clothing, furniture, and work for the unemployed, falls to the ground. The State does already provide all these things for the abject poor, but in the matter of healthy houses all that is needed is the same amount of support as has been accorded in the matter of education. Surely, Sir, this is not asking too much?

The speech received from T. P. Slider, Atlanta, U.S.A., arrived too late to be included in the debate. Steps will be taken to enable our American readers to take part in future debates.