

COMMUNITIES

"Friction of Space" Among 20,000,000

By GEDDES SMITH

IN Fargo, North Dakota, the other day, I saw some imperturbable Scandinavian-Americans ski-jumping. They toiled up a long flight of steps, shot down a slide, sailed through the air, landed on snow-covered earth a hundred feet below, and slid smoothly down the rest of the incline. I asked a grizzled veteran of many contests what he actually did at the moment of take-off to gain distance. "Why," he said, "I yump."

The Committee on a Regional Plan for New York and Its Environs has been toiling up its enormous hill for some four years (see *The Survey*, March 20, 1922) and it is getting mighty close to the take-off. Its friends are watching eagerly to see how it will "yump."

The annual report of progress which the Committee is just publishing forecasts the issuance, in the early months of 1928, of the final plan, on a specially prepared map showing New York and its environs on a scale of 2,000 feet to the inch. Most of the present report deals with the mounting toil of research and exploration to which the last four years have been devoted—years so full of fact-gathering and meticulous inquiry that more than one observer has wondered how much of all this accumulation the plan could carry when it came to the plunge. There can be no doubt, at least, of the importance of such studies as Robert M. Haig's summary volume on economic and industrial factors and trends in the region, which is "in its final stages of completion," and there should be much interest in the long-promised "density studies," which link the effect of sunlight and orientation on the occupants of buildings with a new plan for controlling building bulks. A monograph on the Relations of Housing to Regional Planning, also being made ready for publication, should be as timely as it is germane to the central purpose

of the whole project—"the betterment of living conditions."

The most interesting feature of the report, and one which perhaps presages most clearly how the committee will "yump," is a set of "basic principles and assumptions underlying the regional plan." To quote them in full is impossible, for they fill some six or seven pages of the report, and to summarize them is unfair, for they are themselves a carefully worded summary of much cogitation and discussion. Students of planning and those who care about the future of New York will study the full text, and I shall merely mention, snatching them from their context, some points which seem to me of special interest.

To the first of the basic assumptions I have already referred: the purpose of the plan is the betterment of living conditions. The improvement of housing should include "the erection of dwellings on comparatively cheap land in outlying areas, made accessible for this purpose . . ." and the opening up of traffic ways and the provision of more open spaces to improve deteriorated and overcrowded central areas. But "living conditions consist of means of livelihood as well as wholesome housing and recreation. Where the needs of business conflict with those of residence, a balance may have to be struck. For instance some degree of concentration of dwellings, which may not be unhealthy, may be a necessary concomitant to business. . . ."

A little further on we read: "The reasonable degree of concentration for business purposes that is desirable is that which will enable industry and business to function efficiently . . ." and this is developed in a section which should be quoted in full:

There is an increasing tendency in the region towards creating more "friction of space" (i. e., a greater degree of sepa-



Drawing by A. Walkowitz

Courtesy Our Gallery, New York

THE NEW YORK OF THE FUTURE

ration measured in terms of time, cost, discomfort, fatigue) between homes and places of work, which is injurious to both living conditions and business. Whatever may be said for or against what are called "centralization" and "decentralization," these terms should be avoided as they lead to confusion of thought. What is clearly desirable, in connection with the distribution of population and industry, is more even growth, a better balance between industry and residence, so that people may live nearer to their places of employment, a wider distribution of building bulks, and more space about buildings for all purposes throughout the city and the region. This may be promoted by encouraging the redistribution of functions (i. e., parts of industries) to the extent that is economically desirable, and by such measures as improved systems of transportation, more control of land development in the environs, greater stringency of zoning restrictions, and adequate measures to restrain the improper use of unhealthy or deteriorated structures in old sections of the city.

"The improved systems of transportation," it appears, should "encourage the by-passing of the most crowded centers and also promote more circumferential growth as a means of lessening overcrowding of land along radial lines of transportation." Moreover, such circumferential transportation, along with developments in power distribution, will encourage manufacturers to move away from crowded centers. In the now undeveloped sectors between the spokes of the wheel, which will thus be opened up, "opportunities will occur . . . for the promotion of new communities with varied industries," and "one or more of these should be artificially promoted and intelligently planned in advance as models of development." Here is a definite and welcome forecast of a garden city.

There is another interesting passage elsewhere in the report dealing with this question of concentration. Early in the course of the Russell Sage study, Raymond Unwin was called from London to advise the committee. He made a forthright plea for what he called decentralization. Here is what the present report has to say of it:

Mr. Unwin's insistence on decentralization as a guiding hypothesis has been questioned by other students of city congestion. Undoubtedly it is open to the qualification that centralization is desirable up to a certain point and in certain directions. The term decentralization itself leads to confusion of thought but so far as it means that a more even distribution of population, a better balance between open and built areas, and an improved localization of industry is desirable within the region, and so far also as it is not intended to question the value of a rational degree of concentration, it may be accepted as sound.

WHAT then is New York to look forward to? "There is no want of land," we read, "to enable 20,000,000 to live in spacious surroundings within twenty or twenty-five miles of Manhattan." By comparison with this, the proposal of the staff to plan for a prospective population of 20,000,000 in the entire region by the year 1965 seems moderate. Here is the trajectory of the "yump": by the application of forethought in those parts of the region where forethought still has a chance, and afterthought in those parts which are now pretty far gone, and by spreading us and our multiplying neighbors around "within the region," we are to make it possible for the expected community of 20,000,000 souls—more than double the present population—to live and work decently and with "ample spaciousness" in New York and its environs some forty years hence.

Such a prospect and such a definition of decentralization—a decentralization confined within a 50-mile circle—will arouse little enthusiasm among those who define regional

planning in bolder terms. Regardless of the way in which the twenty millions may be disposed within the region, do they belong in the region at all? Perhaps American cities, as one astute planner has pointed out, are past their stage of rapid growth now that immigration is checked and the farm population is drained almost to the bottom of the bucket, and should readjust their expectations. Perhaps the economic and even the cultural interests of the nation would be served best by the growth of other centers at the expense of New York. Perhaps New York itself has grown to a point where reasonable concentration has long since been buried out of sight and beyond recovery, and where the arrears of accumulated inconveniences, nuisances and wastes have become too vast for any rational Hercules to clear away. Perhaps the Frankenstein is out of hand. In any case, the postulate of continued concentration of population in the New York region needs the sharpest kind of critical examination—and doesn't get it here.

NOW it would be manifestly unfair to judge the still incomplete plan, as a technical product, by these preliminary assumptions. It may prove to be shrewd, skillful, constructive; and radical suggestions may lie concealed behind some of the exceedingly tactful phrases used in the present report—such as "greater stringency of zoning restrictions." But it is fair, I think, to take these general principles as a clue to the ideas which will underly the plan and will be put forward in explanation of it, and to ask what sort of psychological impact they will have on the public. For the plan must stand or fall not alone by the degree to which its detailed recommendations are accepted by the motley group of towns, cities, boroughs, counties and what-not to which they will be offered, but by the way it alters or fails to alter the currents of public understanding and desire. It may be more important to change the way New York thinks about itself—by a vigorous presentation of dynamic, even revolutionary ideas—than to lay out a thousand highways and define a thousand use areas. What sort of thinking is likely to be stirred up by these basic principles?

What does New York want for itself now? It wants the profits it has learned how to squeeze out of congestion—skyscrapers, strap-hangers, and all the rest—preferably without the accompanying inconveniences, but with them if necessary. It has, I fear, little interest in the distinction between reasonable and unreasonable concentration: it is hell-bent for all the concentration it can collect dividends on. Will not the tenderness of the planners for the reasonable variety be interpreted—however unjustly—as a defense of things as they are? Speculative profits talk louder than economic theory. In the long run, perhaps, the wastes of congestion will shout down the adding machines, but the going is still pretty good for what a distinguished city planner has aptly described as the vilest animal he knows—the "real estate Babbitt."

What is New York thinking about in the way of planning? Bridges and tunnels to bring more people in. A speedway down the river front that will deliver thousands of cars every hour into a section of the city already palsied and all but paralyzed by the choking of street traffic. A bus system that will multiply in geometric ratio the "friction of space" which the present report so justly deplors. Harvey Corbett's grotesque super-city fills the papers. It is not wholly accidental—even in the naïve *Evening Post*—

that an article on the Russell Sage project some months ago should have carried the subhead: "Committee to report soon on congestion and other features of planning for city 10 or 20 years from now." It is the greater, more complicated, more costly city of the future that catches the imagination of the man in the street and tickles the fancy of the realtor. Is it possible to wean New York from such poisonous toys by striking a judicious balance between just enough concentration and not too much? I doubt it.

Of course, the committee faces a practical problem. If you believe—as it is easy to believe—that New York is

going to keep on growing willy-nilly, it is practical to guide that growth as sensibly as possible. Perhaps that is all that human intelligence can do. But when I read the words of Daniel H. Burnham, quoted often by Charles D. Norton and again by the director of the Russell Sage planning staff—"Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood. . . . Make big plans"—I wonder if we must be content, after five years' investment of wealth and skill, with nothing bolder, more stirring, more radical if you will, than an orderly dilution of New York over a fifty-mile circle with double its present load of humanity.

The Slum Endures

By NELS ANDERSON

MAN has never built a city of a hundred thousand or more population that did not have slums, those residence quarters from which people flee if they can, where they stay if they lack vision and into which they gravitate if the fates are against them. Every city has its area of poor housing and poverty where society decays like the structures the people inhabit. We Americans talk a great deal and write no little about abolishing our slums. Here in New York, for instance, there have been hundreds of housing surveys and scores of programs for slum clearance. We have considered seriously every proposed solution from transporting the poor to the country to model housing. Yet we have made no impression on the slums.

Obviously most of this talk is meaningless. The slum is here to stay in spite of the building codes and housing schemes. It is as fundamentally native to the city as the back-yard to the country home. It can no more be wiped out by reform programs than Broadway or the Fashion Center can be legislated out of existence. It is an incident in the building of the city, created by the same general process that gives us Park Avenue and Chinatown. Nor is it too much to label it one of the functional units in the general arrangement of urban life. It is no more the creature of caprice or design than any other area. Neither can it be eliminated by design.

The slum we know is relatively new. It was discovered by humanitarians, popularized by fiction writers and news reporters, and wrestled with by housing experts and social workers. Whether it gets worse or better we can't say, but it has been the object of a considerable amount of emotionalism and unclear thinking. So well has the slum been press-agented that slumming has become a popular and profitable pastime. Slumming is such a craze, in fact, that it carries through the twenty-four hours of the day. There is the daylight crowd looking for sentiment and souvenirs, the white-light crowd dining in colorful restaurants till midnight, and the red-light crowd burning the candle at both ends till dawn. There is another emotional class who feel that the slum is a sore spot on the body urban, and they hope by organized effort to be rid of it. That is a big order and pathetically naïve.

THE more we know of all the types of slums the more we realize they are sewed in and interwoven with the larger life of the city. They are segments of that larger

life but in no sense isolated. Hobohemia is the most doleful of slums because of its womanless nature. It is an outcast province for hobos, tramps and bums ranging from the never-sweats to the ardent but hapless odd-job workers. They are the reserves in the labor market, like gold in the money market. By some strange coincidence the hobo area in most cities is side by side with the banking area. The hobo is the emergency man when short-stake hands are needed for the harvests, the woods; for fishing and building. But he fills emergencies in city life, shoveling snow, working as Santa Claus at Christmas, cleaning yards in the spring. When not needed, he is conveniently tucked away in these characteristic slums for men.

Equally native to the city is the childless couple, in fact urban life rewards the childless couple. Of these there are many varieties from the bon tons on the avenues to the denizens of the back streets, the people who live in suit-cases and feed out of paper sacks. The light-housekeeping slum is the center of chaotic, anonymous, tradition-destroying life. It is restless and transient. Speculation is high, energy is dissipated, the present is paramount. Youth is king in these sections, so convention waits. Frequently there is vice and crime. Low-priced white-collar workers, waitresses and shop girls, the peasants from the American hinterland, the young hopefuls from the freshwater colleges are numerous among the inhabitants. The houses were once the homes of the middle and upper-middle class but now the landlady has converted them into diminutive rooms and takes toll of all who pass. New York's Chelsea on the West Side is such an area and parts of Greenwich Village.

THE slums which disturb us are those occupied by the families of small income. Perhaps two million of the inhabitants of metropolitan New York dwell in such areas. Family slums are of many types; those inhabited by natives, those occupied by different national groups and those that are racial, of which Harlem is outstanding. No white slum in the city is more congested or poverty-burdened than some quarters of New York's black belt. For domestic help, for charwomen, for housemen this is the source of supply. What a tragedy to Manhattan if Harlem were moved twenty miles out!

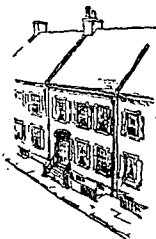
The slum settles where old buildings abound, where rents are low but where space values tend to rise. It is a period in house occupation, the (*Continued on page 829*)

SLUM CONDITIONS HOW DID THEY GROW?

1st STAGE

DEPRECIATION AND CHANGE IN USE STEPS:

1. Original neighborhood of prosperous families owning own homes.
2. Neighborhood begins to get old fashioned.
3. Prosperous families moved away poorer families took in roomers.
4. Several families moved into house abandoned by single family
5. HOUSES occupied by several families BROUGHT IN MORE RENT.
6. These houses could therefore be SOLD AT A PROFIT.



SLUM CONDITIONS HOW DID THEY GROW?

2nd STAGE

PROPERTY HELD AS INVESTMENT STEPS:

7. To GET HIS MONEY back, new owner had to charge more rent or put more families into houses
8. Vacant lots were "IMPROVED" with tenement houses which stole the light and air from low houses.
9. GREATER "RETURN" from the tenement houses forced up value of all land in neighborhood.
10. This made it profitable to buy old houses and hold them for increase in LAND VALUE ONLY



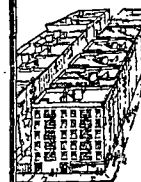
SLUM CONDITIONS HOW DID THEY GROW?

3rd STAGE

CON

STEPS:

11. The new owner heavily
12. He had to build enough to cover the land
13. Tenement blocks were built
14. Legislation was required
15. Improvement declined
16. Owners of old houses lost money and



Text and illustrations from *The Primer of Housing*, by Arthur C. Holden, in collaboration with Henry Wright, chairman of the Committee on Community Planning of the American Institute of Architects, and Clarence S. Stein, formerly chairman of the New York State Commission on Housing and Regional Planning. Preface by William J. Tracy, secretary-treasurer of the Building Trades Department of the American Federation of Labor. Published by the Workers' Education Bureau Press, 476 W. 24 St., New York.

Seven Stages in the Growth of a Slum

IN order to realize how a bad neighborhood got to be a bad neighborhood we must look back first to the time when it was newly built up and try to understand what happened that made it start on the road to dilapidation. The first picture shows the attractive old homes which were typical in New York City in 1820. The second stage of real estate development begins when property acquires a value for use beyond what its owner enjoys. He therefore "holds" it, hoping that it will grow more valuable. Then he sells it. The new owner has to get enough money in rents to cover carrying charges; one way is to erect higher buildings on the land. Each owner of course tries to get as much out of his land as possible, so where land is valuable he builds as much as he can on his lot. Each shuts out the other's light. As the neighborhood becomes less desirable, either rents must fall or the houses must hold more people. The result is room congestion.

Then comes expansion to cheap land. Those who go first to new districts have to put up with inconveniences such as fewer theaters and markets, longer travel and unpaved streets, but they get the newest type of houses and sometimes cheaper rents, and usually plenty of light and air because of the great number of vacant lots.

The war had a disastrous effect upon housing. Prices rose. Tenement houses couldn't be built at all except for people who could pay comparatively high rents. Around the large cities there was a rush for the suburbs where restrictions were less and where small frame houses could

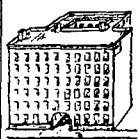
SLUM CONDITIONS HOW DID THEY GROW?

6th STAGE

THEN THE BUILDING BOOM PRODUCED 3 CLASSES OF HOUSES



1. HIGHEST CLASS VERY EXPENSIVE
FIRE PROOF APARTMENTS.



2. SIX STORY NON-FIRE PROOF NEW
LAW TENEMENTS. SMALL ROOMS.
RENTS TOO HIGH FOR 75% OF
POPULATION.

3. MILES OF FLIMSY ONE-FAMILY
HOUSES AND OTHER TYPES NOT
CONTROLLED BY TENEMENT HOUSE LAW.



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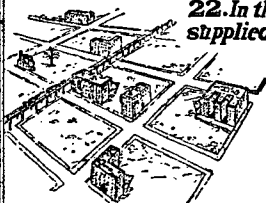
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SLUM CONDITIONS HOW DID THEY GROW? 4th STAGE EXPANSION

STEPS:

17. It cost more to build new law buildings.
18. Therefore it was necessary to put them ON THE CHEAPEST LAND obtainable.
19. Money had to be spent to improve transportation, lay out streets, sewers, and water and gas supplies.
20. The improvements raised the cost of new land and increased the taxes on old land.
21. People preferred the new law houses up town VACANCIES began to increase in the old law buildings.
22. In the new districts vacant lots supplied air spaces and playground.



SLUM CONDITIONS HOW DID THEY GROW? 5th STAGE AFTER THE WAR

STEPS:

23. BY DECREASING THE VALUE OF MONEY THE WAR INCREASED THE COST OF LABOR AND MATERIALS AS WELL AS THE COST OF THE USE OF MONEY.
24. SINCE MINIMUM STANDARDS WERE FIXED BY LAW, RENTS HAD TO BE HIGH IN TENEMENTS BUILT AFTER THE WAR.
25. THE SHORTAGE FORCED ALL RENTS UP UNTIL RENT LEGISLATION CHECKED THE MOVE
26. PEOPLE OF LOW INCOMES WERE FORCED TO GO BACK TO THE OLDEST HOUSES.
27. LAND STARTED OUT ON A GENERAL INCREASE IN VALUE.



Making of a Slum

be put up on very cheap land. Just as soon as people began to buy this land, however, its price began to go up.


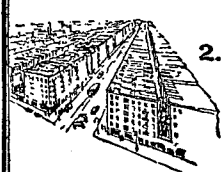

The pressure which has compelled greater height in high class buildings has taken advantage of light borrowed from neighbors' property. As higher land values force still more high buildings, the courts are made permanently dark and the desirability of the buildings is lessened. Popular demand forced legislation in 1926 which permits in New York City the power of condemnation to be used for assembling land for housing and getting rid of dilapidated buildings. The public is still too preoccupied; however, to realize that as cheap land is built up solidly with undesirable housing, new problems are created.

A housing problem and the modern city are virtually synonymous. The creation of Housing Boards and Commissions on Regional and Community Planning all represent an awakening on the part of both states and municipalities as to the question of housing. And yet these commissions cannot discharge the civic responsibility which rests upon the individual citizen to understand the whole question. While the character of the problem differs in various sections of the country it is probably not too much to say that housing does exist as a problem in every large urban center in America. Its solution will depend upon the general understanding that our citizenship has of its elements. This Primer doesn't pretend to solve the whole problem of housing but rather to show that there is no mystery about it.

The League of Mothers' Clubs in New York City wanted simple, explicit material on housing. At their request, the author of this Primer and his collaborators attempted to put some of the material which they had gathered into the form of posters. The successful use of these posters as part of an exhibit on housing under the United Neighborhood Houses of New York City suggested their publication in the form of the pamphlet which Mr. Holden prepared at the request of the Workers' Education Bureau.

SLUM CONDITIONS HOW DID THEY GROW? 7th STAGE

HOUSING PROBLEMS OF NEW YORK OF TO-DAY

1.  OLD LAW TENEMENTS ON EXPENSIVE LAND IN WORSE CONDITION THAN EVER BEFORE.
2.  SOLID BLOCKS OF NEW LAW HOUSES SAFER AND MORE SANITARY BUT SCARCELY MORE DESIRABLE FOR LIGHT, RECREATION, AND AIR THAN THE OLDER TYPE. A GROWING PROBLEM PLUS A TRANSPORTATION PROBLEM.
3.  A FIRE MENACE IN BUILDINGS OUTSIDE THE TENEMENT CLASS ESPECIALLY THE FLIMSY ONE AND TWO FAMILY DETACHED HOUSES. PLUS A TRANSPORTATION PROBLEM.

EDUCATION

Making the Most of Your Child's Intelligence

By JEANNETTE REGENSBURG

FROM every-day experience we recognize that physically humans differ enormously. We know by actual measurement the *average* height and weight for children of all school ages and for adult men and women; but we find that not *all* boys and girls eight years old weigh 48 pounds; their weights vary from 39 to 79 pounds. Such differences exist all through the physical field. Moreover, we make little fuss about these differences on the whole, accepting such variations as facts in real life to which we must adapt ourselves, unless they can in some way be modified by medicine, surgery or exercise.

In the same way we each possess our own personalities with feelings, attitudes and emotions peculiar to ourselves. Often we attempt to change personality traits in order to make more desirable members of society, but there are always certain characteristics which we cannot modify but to which we must adapt.

Since we have these limitations, what is the best way to deal with ourselves? The most workable attitude is always, "Is this person living up to his possibilities, using all the good qualities he possesses and using them to the maximum?" This sets a standard within ourselves, an ideal, but one we can hope to approach.

The third main angle from which we look at human life, the intellectual, deals chiefly, but not entirely, with ideas. Here, too, we encounter individual differences. In a school situation the biggest single factor is mental equipment, but even there we cannot omit consideration of the physical and emotional developments. It is a question of giving each field of growth its proper emphasis.

I am thinking of a boy of 15 who was in 8A, which means that somehow he had dropped behind about two years. At the time he first was referred to the Bureau of Children's Guidance, there were complaints from school that he was inattentive, slipshod, and careless. His father reported that the boy was impertinent to him, lazy and disobedient. The father owned a restaurant in which Edward "helped." The boy received no pay and often was tardy at school because he

had to do errands for the store between 7 and 9 in the morning. Testing proved him average in general intelligence, with good reading ability and poor mechanical ability. The doctor's examination showed him to weigh 202 pounds; he was fat, heavy-footed and very slow. The boy's personal history brought out that his mother and father disagreed about his upbringing, that he had frequent fights with his father which upset him so he could not concentrate in school and that the mother, who was not in love with her husband, took the boy's part against the father. Furthermore, the father scolded Edward constantly for breaking dishes while the boy's physical condition made the job of waiting on table almost impossible. The school history showed that Edward had been to six different schools in various states and that when he came to New York he had been demoted one and one-half years. Consequently this huge boy of 15 was in the same class as average-sized 13-year-olds. What were we going to do about it?

We finally advised that the boy should leave school and go to work, *not* in the restaurant. That meant transferring the use of his good intelligence from school to a job, which would relieve him of the humiliation of being in the same class with younger boys; it would mean receiving pay for work done; his father's nagging would cease; Edward would be doing work he was fitted for; and it would make him more independent of his over-devoted mother.

When our educational system first developed, we lacked much of our present knowledge. Educators of long experience had arrived at a rough estimate of what most children could do in a year's time studying the usual school subjects in the ordinary classroom. Therefore, for several hundred years teachers have done their valiant best to get everybody through the same program at the same speed with the same success.

It does not take parents very long to observe that three children have to be managed in three different ways. Similarly every teacher has experience with children who, in spite of an average general understanding, do not learn arithmetic, or reading, or



"What's the idea?"
"Aw, me mother don't appreciate me and I'm trying to get sick or somethin'."