

BETTER HOUSING FOR PENSIONERS

BY OSCAR LEONARD

It will not require much arguing here to prove that the Jews of what is generally called the ghetto are badly housed. This is true of those above or on the edge of the poverty line. It is necessarily as true of those who have fallen below the poverty line and who receive assistance from relief agencies. Not that relief workers or directors of relief organizations are content with the housing of the pensioners; but to make ends meet with the financial resources at their disposal they tolerate, often, bad housing. Of course, no relief worker or director of a relief organization will allow pensioners to live in extremely insanitary houses. But the housing of the poor is not what it should be. Nor can those interested in them make this housing all they would desire it to be. But desires and wishes cannot be transformed into cash and landlords will not listen to essays on the need of better housing among the poor. They want real cash, and when cash is limited the relief worker is compelled to place his people in quarters not entirely desirable to him.

One of the most valued directors of the St. Louis Jewish Educational and Charitable Association thinks he has a solution for St. Louis. He is a professional man, a physician of unquestioned ability, an editor and a lover of his fellow-men. He is genuinely interested in his work as a director and has pondered over the problem of housing the pensioners suitably. I shall not state here what I think of the plan. I wish to place it before my fellow social workers. I hope they will give their opinions about this plan, which I present here from the point of view of the man who has presented it to me and to some of my predecessors.

The gentleman argues as follows: We have a number of families and individuals whose rent we pay. We have others whom we pension regularly and who pay their own rent, either in full or in part, out of these allowances. They all live under housing conditions with which we are dissatisfied. Some of them are sick and need our visiting nurse and our physician. Conse-

quently our nurse and our physician have to trod all over the district to reach them. They lose a great deal of time making these visits. This time could be devoted to more and better work on the part of the nurse and physician. The volunteer friendly visitors, too, would find it easier to make their visits if they do not have to cover many blocks.

He therefore suggests that one or more houses, all adjoining, be rented by the Association for these "regulars." Such house or houses, he argues, would be put in the best possible condition. The plumbing would be good, premises kept clean by a person in charge, sanitary rules would be strictly observed. It would even be possible to heat the apartments from a central heating plant and thereby save time and money and give better heat and comfort. The vaults would be done away with and in their places modern sanitary appliances would be installed. Bathing facilities would be placed at the disposal of these families. In a word, our "regulars" would have what we cannot give them under the present conditions. In the long run it would probably even be cheaper to house them under these proper conditions than it is now. I have given the gist of his argument. Is he right or is he wrong? Would you as a social worker and a friend of the needy introduce such a scheme in your city? Tell why you would introduce it, or give your reasons why you would not do so.

Ghet Committee Appointed

That the abuse surrounding and accompanying the granting of rabbinical divorces, commonly known as *Ghets*, has grown to an alarmingly great extent is apparent. At a recent meeting of the Executive Committee of the Jewish Community of New York (*Kehillah*) the *Ghet* question was discussed. It was determined that the matter be considered with all possible diligence by a committee (special) composed of the following: Rev. J. L. Magnes, Rev. Dr. Ph. Klein, Judge Otto Rosalsky, Louis Marshall, Walter H. Liebmann and Monroe M. Goldstein.

A MORE SUBTLE METHOD NEEDED

Most social work is guided by moral, economic or hygienic considerations; that is to say, a case or a situation is studied with reference to vice, or poverty or health, and the problem is worked out through the data gathered with reference to these three criteria. Sometimes civic considerations and at others purely social factors are regarded; but these cases are rare, at least in the work of private philanthropies. In solving a family problem, the object generally is to find what the family ought to do in order to be "healthy and wealthy and wise," and this decision by outsiders becomes the bed in which the family must lie. The decision in most cases is good counsel; but Procrustes himself had no more trouble taking a nap than the average broken-down family in following what is undoubtedly best for it to do.

A family has a psychology as well as a physiology, and it is here that perhaps the methods of philanthropy fail. Not that the mental make-up of the maladjusted, to use the barbarous but expressive professional lingo, is slighted altogether. Far from it. Do we not fear to extend aid at times, lest almsgiving break down the beneficiary's power of resistance? Do we not calculate the effect of every act upon the feelings, habits and temperament of the person dealt with? This is done, but not as a factor of no less importance than the income of the family, or the health of the children. Indeed, all psychological approach to the consideration of these questions is made on the score of "common sense" and with little reference to the principles of psychology, or from its point of view. Social and philanthropic work has been altogether too much concerned with the outside, the physical aspect of social problems.

The following case, not altogether fanciful, may illustrate the point here brought forward: A widow with seven children ranging from infancy to two boys of working age is reported as having a feeble-minded child, unable to take care of itself, six years of age. The mother is a capable woman, who helps to support the family by selling goods on installments; two boys work and bring their earnings home. There is no question of income. The case comes

up, reported from the school truant officer, and upon investigation it is found that a twelve-year-old child remains at home, when the mother goes out, to take care of the feeble-minded child. The solution of the difficulty would be either through the mother's staying home or through the removal of the child to an institution for the feeble-minded. The mother declines a weekly stipend equal to the amount she says she earns, on condition that she remain at home with the child. She also declines to send the child away from home. Then begins a long campaign of social worker and truant officer and trained nurse, on the one hand, against the mother, on the other, for the better care and education of her children. The social forces feel that they are right as to what is best for all concerned; but the mother is unyielding. At last, after they have given up the battle in despair, the mother makes a complete *volte face* and not only asks but importunes that the child be removed to the institution. The institution is crowded; it takes time to get the child in; arrangements for the permanent care of the child are made, and finally the admission is made and the case marked closed. Everything else is in good shape. Six months pass, and the mother demands the return of the child, stating that she is now better able to take care of it, and that she was foolish in being prevailed on, and that if she is given the child there will be no cause for further complaint. Investigation shows that there is no change at home, nothing to warrant the belief that the child will be any better off at home than it was before; the child is doing well at the institution, and the superintendent warns that if the child is sent home it will not be again received. The woman is obdurate, and threatens to go to law unless the child is given to her. She is set down as a stubborn, willful woman, who prefers her own way to the good of the child, and who should be opposed in her present attempt against the welfare of the child to the bitter end.

On the paper record this decision is amply warranted. The woman has been troublesome and stubborn. She has resisted all plans of intelligent people to set her house