

Can Successful Battle Be Waged Against Our Slums?

They are Small and Scattered, without the outward aspects of typical city slums, but bad health places just the same

There are small or large slums in every part of Manila, the largest and most objectionable ones perhaps in Tondo. Manila slums, of course, don't duplicate in outward appearance the slums of American cities which are, typically, run-down neighborhoods of former business blocks and once proud residences turned into tenements. Manila slums hover about unimproved streets lacking gutters and sewers, even water mains; they are huddles of thatch cottages where, commonly, the cottagers pay a monthly rental for the ground on which their cottages stand. Refuse from the cottages finds lodgment in cesspools below the kitchens, where fowls often run and pigs are tethered by the ears.

No sward surrounds these cottages. Manila slums are bare except possibly of a tree here and there, an occasional bamboo clump and some hardy bushes planted by the cottagers for beauty's sake—as in an American tenement window a geranium is sunned and nurtured in a tomato can. As the best means of sanitation they know, the cottagers give their yards a daily sweeping, to invite the purging sunlight and the cleansing rains; and the sweepings, of course, clog and fill up the ditches at the edges of the unimproved streets that serve in place of gutters or sewers.

Manila's slums weaken and kill children, keep tuberculosis infection handy for adolescents and adults, and pneumonia and influenza on tap at all times for the aged. Architecturally they are not slums, hygienically they are. The bathing place in them is the city hydrant or an artesian well, also the common laundry. Each cottage has its open stove, smoke and soot from which defiles the roof and walls; and many have oil lamps instead of electric lights. Cottagers' children getting their home work done by the light or a coconut-oil or petroleum taper risk their eyesight in the strife for education. Privacy is out of the question.

Such is backstreet existence in Manila. What may be done about it is a problem no present agency is solving. Private enterprise is not solving it, government practically makes no attempt at solution of it.

The first difficulty arises in the people's gregariousness, their fond desire to live near one another furthering landlords' plans to have as many respayers on their property as possible; so a cottage is no farther than a meter or two from the cottages around it. In the dry season of the year, when fires come, whole blocks are devoured in a few minutes; and precious chattels, little in each cottage, but much in the aggregate, become ashes of discouragement. Cottagers in Manila's slums are shiftless; they are happy-go-lucky and live for the day and its joys, not for the more promising morrow toward which they think it futile to save or to plan.

Are they shiftless because they are slumites, or slumites because they are shiftless?

The *Journal* will reward with public notice, anyone who comes forward with a plan for materially alleviating conditions in Manila's slums that the publications committee of the chamber of commerce may deem practical and worthy of endorsement. No one will find the task easy, nowhere in the world are such tasks easy; but easy or not, there are places in the world where they are tackled, and Manila should be such a place.

When employers managing factories in Manila have sometimes attempted to take their employes out of the slums, the people's gregariousness has baffled them in some cases, shiftlessness has baffled them in other cases.

An actual case:

An American employing several hundred men in Manila put into effect, years ago, a home-buying plan. He bought the

land, built good wooden cottages on it, provided space, arranged that his workmen pay for these nice homes, and own them under registered title, by making small monthly payments to him over a period of 10 years. He wanted: (1) his money back with bank interest, not usurious interest, (2) his workmen to be reliable home-buyers with a special interest in keeping themselves steadily employed, (3) to elevate his workmen's place in life. At the end of the 10 years, *one workman owned his home*; all the others, hundreds, had defaulted along the way. This man no longer cares where his workmen live. The land he bought in a large tract and sold to them at about cost has become, not theirs—nor yet gone back to him, who would have enjoyed a material increment of its value—but has become the property of the workmen's usurious creditors.

"Why Pay Rent? Own Your Own Home!"

This cry of the realtor reached the ears of Manila's slumites about 10 years ago. Many succumbed to its blandishments. It was well-intentioned, but the experiment proved to have a fatal disadvantage for many families—cost of transportation to work, school and market offset the advantages of trying to pay for a home in the suburbs and eventually own it under clear title. Later appeals had to be addressed to classes above the slums, most slumites failed to make a go of it. Even without the generous write-ups of values realtors count into the retail prices of suburban lots, adding interest usually at not less than 12% on deferred payments; or even if a branch of the government should buy tracts and resell them at the cost plus bank-deposit rates, the people's native gregariousness, their imppecunious unthrift, and above all the cost of transportation from home to work and school, would no doubt make the venture fail.

The real practical problem, then, is the renovation of the slums; for it is there, convenient to their work, conveniently near one another, the slumites elect to live. What is the practical formula for this renovation of the city's unwholesome neighborhoods?

It is suggested that small parks, especially small parks north of the Pasig, would be a practical first step. These inexpensive breathing spaces should have two features, grass for children to romp on, concreted areas for them to roller-skate on; and some of them, if large enough, should have playground paraphernalia; those far from the sea, swimming pools making a charge large enough for the expense of operating them.

Foliage beautifies but should be limited, it is the exercise and open air that are needed. Besides, trees and shrubbery and flowers involve expense that, to make these proposed parks effective, is unnecessary. The skating areas would be most beneficial, exercising rickety limbs and building up vigor against tendencies to beriberi. It was noted that when Dewey boulevard was under construction (and being parked in a part of town that needs parks least), where traffic was temporarily kept off of concreted areas children of the rich and the poor alike went there every afternoon and evening to skate. All of them were immeasurably benefited, but the boulevard was soon completely *improved* and no skating places were left. It is suggested that as soon as presentable public parks relieve the squalor of the poorer and congested districts of Manila, the object lesson thus presented may lead to improved homes, less unthrift, and gradual abatement of the slums; whose growth with the city has been natural enough, but is not on that account, or for any reason, tolerable in a modern community such as Manila should take pride in being.