

The Housing Problem.

Big Conference in England.

Mr. HURST SEAGER, F.R.I.B.A., Writes a Paper.

Much interest naturally centres around the International Housing Conference arranged by the International Cities and Town Planning Association recently held in England. A number of New Zealanders were present at the Conference, including Mr. W. H. Gummer of Auckland and Mr. Hurst Seager of Christchurch, who wrote a paper for the Conference.

Time did not actually allow Mr. Seager to read his paper, but there was a generous supply of copies available for all the delegates. In the twelve minutes at his disposal, he showed a number of very attractive New Zealand slides, and he described New Zealand as an extremely beautiful country, worthy of all that could be done to make it all that could be wished from a garden city point of view—a country which it was worth while taking a great deal of pains to develop. From a geographical point of view it was rather peculiarly arranged, in that a series of plains was divided by a series of hills. It possessed a magnificent water-power, so that it will be possible to carry on industries by means of the electric power which the water companies will presently develop.

A Plea for Organised Control.

In his paper, Mr. Seager remarked that problems of housing in relation to industries is a world-wide one. "In New Zealand, with its broad, unoccupied acres, it is as acute as in the crowded areas of the Old World. It will require there, as here, the hearty co-operation of deep thinkers and hard workers before a satisfactory solution can be found. We started with the traditions and experience of the Old World to guide us, but those traditions have led us to allow the haphazard and individual growth of our towns and industries which has proved so disastrous to the workers in the old industrial centres. This unregulated development has led to conditions of life in some parts of our towns which must be remedied before we can take pride in our cities as a whole. A Housing Bill has been passed by Mr. Massey, and the New Zealand Government give favourable terms under the Workers' Dwellings Act for the erection of individual homes, but the larger issues involved in the industrial garden city and town-planning are not yet provided for. It is in the hope of being of some service in the development of the garden city that I am in England now. I wished to study at first hand the working out of the many and varied activities which are involved in the making of a perfect city—to see how the theories and ideas which had been so ably expressed were working out in practice; above all, to live in and study the conditions of life in the only example of a true industrial garden city, the garden city of Letchworth."

Still Falls Short.

As a result of that visit, Mr. Seager came away with an even greater admiration than before for the wonderful achievement of the promoters, and an unbounded feeling of gratitude to the man whose vivid imagination was the foundation on which the whole superstructure had been built. "It is unquestionably a brilliant success achieved under extraordinary difficulties—difficulties of finance, prejudice, vested interests, cheap cynicism, and apathy; and neglect on the part of the Government, who should have been the first to help. All these difficulties have been surmounted, and Letchworth stands before us to-day as an example worthy of being followed throughout England and the world. But it is not the end. It is as a signpost showing that we are on the right road. Letchworth is a success financially, a success from the point of view of the convenience and beauty of its development, and a great success from an industrial and social point of view when judged from the standpoint of industrial towns elsewhere; still, I am sure I am right in saying that it falls short of the complete purpose of the promoters. The exigencies of the case demanded that concessions should be made, that departures from the high standards set up should be allowed, in order to accommodate the scheme to individual rights and the practical views of those who were willing to form part of the community. This was wise; for without such concessions no progress could have been made."

Lacking Industrial Co-operation.

"We have regarded Letchworth as a model city in which every care and thought has been given (both in conception and realisation) in order that it may be possible to carry on industries under the most convenient and healthy conditions—a city where the workers may enjoy an advanced social life in healthy and beautiful environments. But if we view it in the light of the best modern thought and practice in industrial development, then we must admit that it falls short of the standard that could be reached. The whole of the framework is there, all that is required is that this excellent framework should be as quickly as possible filled in.

"Just as town-planners are rightly demanding that in all civic creation and improvements there must be the full co-ordination and co-operation between those who can help in the formation of the town, so sociologists and economists are demanding that in the modern industrial town there shall be the same thought and care expended upon the development and co-ordination of its industries. Thinking in terms of the individual must give way to thinking in terms of community welfare. Letchworth has to-day the industrial organisation that is common to our towns and cities, that is to say, it has no real industrial organisation of co-operation whatsoever. All its residents are thinking and working in terms of the individual, and strive for the success of the individual worker or the individual firm. Although so much has been written on the subject, it is not yet sufficiently realised that the success of the individual