

## HOW SLUM-OWNERS ARE ENCOURAGED AND REWARDED.

### THE TABARD STREET CLEARANCE SCHEME.

The London County Council have now before them a scheme for the clearance of slum properties, covering a total area of 16 acres, situated in Tabard Street and Grotto Place, Southwark, and in Crosby Row, Bermondsey, involving a capital expenditure of £473,000, and a net loss to the London ratepayers of £387,700. In other words, in order to get possession of some 16 acres of land to-day, a purely slum property, of the estimated value of £85,600, or, without provision of 5 acres for an open space, of £93,350, the London County Council proposes to pay no less a sum than £473,300.

The average yearly death rate per 1,000 from all causes was, period 1904-8, in London 14.9, in Southwark 18.2, in the Tabard Street area 36.8; from 1905-9 it was in London 14.5, in Southwark 17.5, in the Grotto Place area 39.1, in Bermondsey 18.9, and in the Crosby Row area 30.9. Hence no public-minded man can question the necessity for some "drastic action" being taken with reference to the areas under consideration. But they may well question the necessity for such action involving a loss to the ratepayers of London of a cash sum of £387,700, involving, such is the magic of compound interest, a total payment during the next fifty-nine years of over £785,000!

Under an order of reference, the Council must arrange that all outgoings, in respect of their dwellings, inclusive of capital charges, shall be met out of the rents received. Even after saddling a huge sum on the rates, by means of writing down the value of the land, the rents the Council is compelled to charge are more than the poor people who are displaced can pay. In this Tabard Street case, the value of the land has been written down from £473,300, the gross cost, to £85,600, the estimated value after the clearance. In the Clare Market scheme the value of the land was written down from £80,000 to £10,000. In 1902, Sir John Dickson-Poynder, M.P., L.C.C., said that "the last 25 years' operations in improvements and clearances had involved a net irrecoverable loss to the ratepayers of London of no less a sum than £1,206,000, arrived at by this artificial operation of writing down the values." The futility of these schemes for rehousing the displaced people is borne out by past experience. In the case of the Blackwall Tunnel, the works displaced 1,210 persons, accommodation was provided for 1,104, but only 9 of the original occupants availed themselves of the new dwellings. In the Boundary Street area, out of 5,719 persons, only 11 were original tenants. In the Falcon Court scheme only 40 of the 500 provided for were original occupants.

As reported in the Agenda Paper of the London County Council of Tuesday, November 1st, the Medical Officer of Health represented to the effect that—"The houses, courts, and alleys within the respective areas are *unfit for human habitation*: that the narrowness, closeness and bad arrangement of the streets and houses, the want of air, light, and ventilation, and other sanitary defects, are dangerous or injurious to health." Nor is this surprising; for the Tabard Street area is represented as about 13½ acres in extent, as containing 649 houses, inhabited by a population of 3,552 persons—that is, *over 40 people to each house*!—"nearly all of whom are persons of the working class." The characteristic feature of the area is the narrowness of the streets and the bad arrangements of both streets and houses. George Court is, in parts, only 3 feet wide; Little Britain, 5 feet. . . . Out of 32 streets in the area no less than 13 are *culs de sac*. The houses in Tabard Street are three storeys in height, but nearly all the other houses on the area consist of two storeys, and contain either two or four rooms. Many of the houses have backyards, which are small, and in which are situated the waterclosets and dustbins. . . . The houses generally are worn out; the walls of many of the ground-floor rooms present evidence of dampness, or have been match-boarded in such a way as to conceal the dampness; and the staircases are, in a number of instances, narrow, dark, and dangerous." The Grotto Place area comprises some 1½ acres, and contains 138 houses, mostly of one or two storeys in height. "The houses, with few exceptions, are quite worn out, and the inhabitants, who number 567, are of the poorer class." The Crosby Row area is about one acre in extent, and contains 88 houses occupied by 474 persons. "The houses generally are worn out, are surrounded by high buildings, and have insufficient space about them."

Such is the evidence of their own officials. But it is for these 875 houses, worth, according to this evidence, nothing or less than nothing, that the London County Council proposes to call upon the ratepayers of London to pay the sum of £387,700, or over £443 per house! The poor purveyor of diseased meat is held up to public execration, is hauled before our Courts as a criminal, fined, and his property seized, condemned, and destroyed. But the rich purveyor of such hotbeds of disease as those described above is not denounced as a criminal, is not hauled before our Courts, nor is his property seized, condemned, and destroyed. Quite the contrary, his nefarious enterprise is encouraged and rewarded, in this case, by a gift of £387,700, even though he has probably been the direct cause of more deaths than all the detected and undetected purveyors of diseased meat throughout the kingdom.

We are well aware that when undertaking any such scheme the London County Council is bound to act in accordance with Acts of Parliament; and that most Acts relating to "real estate" are framed with more regard to the interests, legitimate or illegitimate, of "property," than to the interests of the community or the health and well-being of the people. In this case they are acting under Part I. of the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890, as amended by The Housing and Town Planning Act, 1909, which provides, we believe, that "compensation for disturbance" has to be paid, not in proportion to the intrinsic value of the property taken over, but in proportion to its yield, in this case in proportion to the tribute it enabled them to extort from the unfortunate 4,588 of the poorest and most dependent of the landless classes crowded on these disease breeding spots. But we have a shrewd suspicion that the Council has other powers, powers entrusted to them to rid the district they govern from public nuisances, dangerous to the health of the people, to which they might have had recourse had they desired to do so. Over twenty years ago, according to their own report, their attention was directed to these dangerous areas. The worn-out houses were admittedly unfit for human habitation. Have the Council no power to have them closed on these grounds? Or, even if not, have they not Parliamentary influence sufficient to secure them such powers? The present House of Commons would have lent a willing ear to their petition, and just now the House of Lords would have been very reluctant openly to oppose it. But no! The Council prefer to act on the line of least resistance and greatest cost to the inarticulate and easily deluded ratepayers. But it is by such actions on the part of our governing bodies that the surplus wealth of the community is stealthily drained from those who have little, still further to swell the unearned incomes of those who have much, and that men are richly rewarded for creating such plague-breeding spots in the very heart of our Empire.

L.H.B.

## PORT OF LONDON AUTHORITY.

### PROTESTS AGAINST PORT RATES.

#### A WORKING MODEL OF PROTECTION.

On October 31st, a copy of a letter from a number of prominent London manufacturers to the Port of London Authority appeared in the Press. The letter contained a strong protest against the action of the Authority in fixing the Port rates on goods entering and leaving the Port of London at such high figures as those appearing in the Schedule of Port Rates. Apparently the rates payable in respect of goods imported are, almost without exception, over 65 per cent. of the maximum rates scheduled to the Port of London Act (1908), while the export rates are about 25 per cent. of the same maximum schedule. It appears that in fixing the rates at these high figures the Authority are attempting to levy the full limit of their revenue powers from this source. When the Bill was before the House of Commons, the President of the Board of Trade, Mr. Churchill, in fixing the limit of an annual revenue from port rates at £330,000, said that he wanted to give an adequate security that the interest on the port stock will be properly defrayed, and he had to choose some point which would leave a considerable margin, far more than needed, or likely to be needed." As the same time Mr. Churchill told the House of Commons that he wanted to give a general assurance to the traders of London and the metropolis of the very minute, not to say microscopic, character of the dues which would be levied, and he assured Parliament that nothing like £330,000 would be