Extracts from a paper presented by William Lever – October 1898

It is impossible for us to visit any of our thickly-populated centres without feeling that, whatever great strides we have made in political economy during the present century, as far as housing of the people is concerned, we are probably in as bad a condition to-day as at any period of our history.

As to the amount of work to be done, it is not only the grosser forms of overcrowding-the slums and alleys that require to be dealt with, but almost of equal importance is the question of the crowding of houses side by side with only 12 feet or 15 feet frontage, small yards, and six or eight feet back roads.

But there can be no reason why man should not make towns liveable and healthy, and if towns are made liveable and healthy they will be just as much subject to the beneficent influence of bright sunshine, fresh air, flowers, and plants, as the country.

In the worst parts of Liverpool at the present day 1,000 people are huddled on the space of one acre. At an inquest in Spitalfields, London, concerning the death of a child four months old, the evidence showed that the child, with six other children and its parents, had lived in a room 12 feet by 12 feet, for which 4s. 6d. a week rent was paid.

It is, in my opinion, simply ludicrous for us to spend millions a year in educating the young, whilst at the same time a very considerable proportion of them are compelled to live in houses, and under conditions which, as Lord Shaftesbury has pointed out, absolutely neutralize all the benefits to be derived from education.

To raise the tone of the mind by education, and to cultivate the intelligence by reading, then to force back both body and mind to live amidst squalor and under the most wretched conditions, can only have one result - the neutralizing of any good effects