

Municipal Column

Edited by the Village Manager

A Present Day Parable

(By Herbert S. Swan, secretary, Zoning Committee, New York City.)

A few years ago an apartment house invaded one of the choicest residence streets of a suburban town. It was a satisfactory apartment house, so far as apartments go, it had a magnificent entrance with iron doors, dazzling lights, marbled halls and all that, but instead of providing its own lawn and yards, it occupied the width of the whole lot, right up to the sidewalk, utterly disregarding the setback line established by the private houses on either side. Why should it equip itself with its own light and air when it might steal these from its neighbors? Why should it plant flowers and shrubs when these were so generously provided by adjoining owners? So instead of occupying only a quarter of its lot area, as had been done by the one-family dwellings, the apartment house left only a quarter of its plot open.

And in the beginning the operation proved a huge financial success. Being six stories high, the apartment house sheltered on its 50-foot lot more dogs and couples (families with children were not accepted as tenants) than any six blocks in the suburb. Situated in a park of private homes, it enjoyed all the advantages of both an apartment and a private dwelling without suffering the burdens of either.

The apartment took, took, took. It never gave. It had no gardens, but every window in it looked out upon trees and grass tenderly cared for by neighboring home-makers, presenting a view that never ceased to afford the tenants delight and joy. The trim houses gave green foliage and brilliant flowers; in return they got brick walls and asphalt. In violating the setback line it obtained a splendid vista, but it marred the appearance of the street for a mile. It enhanced the value of its own site but it ruthlessly destroyed the building values in a large area.

Now the tenants of the apartment house had little furniture and no children but they all ran their own cars, albeit the garage facilities in the neighborhood were not of the best. Most of the cars were stored at a distance in the poorer part of the suburb in small "batteries" of two or three portable garages erected back of workingmen's homes.

The apartment house had been built

two or three years when the owner of one of these "batteries" happened to think of what profits would bless the erection of a modern garage located conveniently to the apartment house. A survey of the real estate market demonstrated that the two dwellings on either side of the apartment house were the cheapest available. He forthwith bought one of these houses, demolished it, and built the garage which was to store the cars owned by the tenants of the apartment house.

The garage, so far as garages go, was all right; it was modern and all that with concrete floor, plaster

board, and wire lath. But the incidents following in its wake, the horns, the smell of escaping gasoline, incessant noise from motors and vulcanized rubber and burning fat, none of these were pleasing to the people in the apartments.

The "to let" and "for sale" signs which plastered the garage, the apartment house, and the dwellings in the block, we won't go into that—ours is only a story of an apartment house in a high-class residence district and of a public garage next to the apartment house in the high-class residence district.

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