

# *The Battle with the Slum*

Jacob A. Riis

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Title: The Battle with the Slum

Author: Jacob A. Riis

Release date: March 1, 2009 [eBook #28228]

Language: English

Other information and formats: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/28228

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THE BATTLE WITH THE SLUM ***

# THE BATTLE WITH THE SLUM





A VALIANT BATTLER WITH THE SLUM.

## THE BATTLE WITH THE SLUM

BY

**JACOB A. RIIS**

AUTHOR OF "THE MAKING OF AN AMERICAN," "HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES," ETC.

*ILLUSTRATED*

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
LONDON: MACMILLAN & CO., LTD.
1902

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Set up and electrotyped October, 1902.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing & Co.—Berwick & Smith
Norwood Mass. U.S.A.

## PREFACE

Three years ago I published under the title "A Ten Years' War" a series of papers intended to account for the battle with the slum since I wrote "How the Other Half Lives." A good many things can happen in three years. So many things have happened in these three, the fighting has been so general all along the line and has so held public attention, that this seems the proper time to pass it all in review once more. That I have tried to do in this book, retaining all that still applied of the old volume and adding as much more. The "stories" were printed in the *Century Magazine*. They are fact, not fiction. If the latter, they would have no place here.

"The Battle with the Slum" is properly the sequel to "How the Other Half Lives," and tells how far we have come and how. "With his usual hopefulness," I read in the annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science of my book three years ago, "the author is still looking forward to better things in the future." I was not deceived then. Not in the thirty years before did we advance as in these three, though Tammany blocked the way most of the time. It is great to have lived in a day that sees such things done.

J. A. R.

RICHMOND HILL,
August 27, 1902.

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# THE BATTLE WITH THE SLUM

## WHAT THE FIGHT IS ABOUT

The slum is as old as civilization. Civilization implies a race to get ahead. In a race there are usually some who for one cause or another cannot keep up, or are thrust out from among their fellows.

They fall behind, and when they have been left far in the rear they lose hope and ambition, and give up. Thenceforward, if left to their own resources, they are the victims, not the masters, of their environment; and it is a bad master. They drag one another always farther down. The bad environment becomes the heredity of the next generation. Then, given the crowd, you have the slum ready-made.

The battle with the slum began the day civilization recognized in it her enemy. It was a losing fight until conscience joined forces with fear and self-interest against it. When common sense and the golden rule obtain among men as a rule of practice, it will be over. The two have not always been classed together, but here they are plainly seen to belong together. Justice to the individual is accepted in theory as the only safe groundwork of the commonwealth. When it is practised in dealing with the slum, there will shortly be no slum. We need not wait for the millennium, to get rid of it. We can do it now. All that is required is that it shall not be left to itself. That is justice to it and to us, since its grievous ailment is that it cannot help itself. When a man is drowning, the thing to do is to pull him out of the water; afterward there will be time for talking it over. We got at it the other way in dealing with our social problems. The wise men had their day, and they decided to let bad enough alone; that it was unsafe to interfere with "causes that operate sociologically," as one survivor of these unfittest put it to me. It was a piece of scientific humbug that cost the age which listened to it dear. "Causes that operate sociologically" are the opportunity of the political and every other kind of scamp who trades upon the depravity and helplessness of the slum, and

the refuge of the pessimist who is useless in the fight against them. We have not done yet paying the bills he ran up for us. Some time since we turned to, to pull the drowning man out, and it was time. A little while longer, and we should hardly have escaped being dragged down with him.

The slum complaint had been chronic in all ages, but the great changes which the nineteenth century saw, the new industry, political freedom, brought on an acute attack which put that very freedom in jeopardy. Too many of us had supposed that, built as our commonwealth was on universal suffrage, it would be proof against the complaints that harassed older states; but in fact it turned out that there was extra hazard in that. Having solemnly resolved that all men are created equal and have certain inalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, we shut our eyes and waited for the formula to work. It was as if a man with a cold should take the doctor's prescription to bed with him, expecting it to cure him. The formula was all right, but merely repeating it worked no cure. When, after a hundred years, we opened our eyes, it was upon sixty cents a day as the living wage of the working-woman in our cities; upon "knee pants" at forty cents a dozen for the making; upon the Potter's Field taking tithe of our city life, ten per cent each year for the trench, truly the Lost Tenth of the slum. Our country had grown great and rich; through our ports was poured food for the millions of Europe. But in the back streets multitudes huddled in ignorance and want. The foreign oppressor had been vanquished, the fetters stricken from the black man at home; but his white brother, in his bitter plight, sent up a cry of distress that had in it a distinct note

of menace. Political freedom we had won; but the problem of helpless poverty, grown vast with the added offscourings of the Old World, mocked us, unsolved. Liberty at sixty cents a day set presently its stamp upon the government of our cities, and it became the scandal and the peril of our political system.

So the battle began. Three times since the war that absorbed the nation's energies and attention had the slum confronted us in New York with its challenge. In the darkest days of the great struggle it was the treacherous mob;[1] later on, the threat of the cholera, which found swine foraging in the streets as the only scavengers, and a swarming host, but little above the hog in its appetites and in the quality of the shelter afforded it, peopling the back alleys. Still later, the mob, caught looting the city's treasury with its idol, the thief Tweed, at its head, drunk with power and plunder, had insolently defied the outraged community to do its worst. There were meetings and protests. The rascals were turned out for a season; the arch-chief died in jail. I see him now, going through the gloomy portals of the Tombs, whither, as a newspaper reporter, I had gone with him, his stubborn head held high as ever. I asked myself more than once, at the time when the vile prison was torn down, whether the comic clamor to have the ugly old gates preserved and set up in Central Park had anything to do with the memory of the "martyred" thief, or whether it was in joyful celebration of the fact that others had escaped. His name is even now one to conjure with in the Sixth Ward. He never "squealed," and he was "so good to the poor"—evidence that the slum is not laid by the heels by merely destroying Five Points and the

Mulberry Bend. There are other fights to be fought in that war, other victories to be won, and it is slow work. It was nearly ten years after the Great Robbery before decency got a good upper grip. That was when the civic conscience awoke in 1879.

And after all that, the Lexow disclosures of inconceivable rottenness of a Tammany police; the woe unto you! of Christian priests calling vainly upon the chief of the city "to save its children from a living hell," and the contemptuous reply on the witness-stand of the head of the party of organized robbery, at the door of which it was all laid, that he was "in politics, working for his own pocket all the time, same as you and everybody else!"

Slow work, yes! but be it ever so slow, the battle has got to be fought, and fought out. For it is one thing or the other: either we wipe out the slum, or it wipes out us. Let there be no mistake about this. It cannot be shirked. Shirking means surrender, and surrender means the end of government by the people.

If any one believes this to be needless alarm, let him think a moment. Government by the people must ever rest upon the people's ability to govern themselves, upon their intelligence and public spirit. The slum stands for ignorance, want, unfitness, for mob-rule in the day of wrath. This at one end. At the other, hard-heartedness, indifference, self-seeking, greed. It is human nature. We are brothers whether we own it or not, and when the brotherhood is denied in Mulberry Street we shall look vainly for the virtue of good citizenship on Fifth Avenue. When the slum flourishes unchallenged in the cities, their wharves may, indeed, be busy, their treasure-houses

filled,—wealth and want go so together,—but patriotism among their people is dead.

As long ago as the very beginning of our republic, its founders saw that the cities were danger-spots in their plan. In them was the peril of democratic government. At that time, scarce one in twenty-five of the people in the United States lived in a city. Now it is one in three. And to the selfishness of the trader has been added the threat of the slum. Ask yourself then how long before it would make an end of us, if let alone.

Put it this way: you cannot let men live like pigs when you need their votes as freemen; it is not safe. [2] You cannot rob a child of its childhood, of its home, its play, its freedom from toil and care, and expect to appeal to the grown-up voter's manhood. The children are our to-morrow, and as we mould them to-day so will they deal with us then. Therefore that is not safe. Unsafest of all is any thing or deed that strikes at the home, for from the people's home proceeds citizen virtue, and nowhere else does it live. The slum is the enemy of the home. Because of it the chief city of our land came long ago to be called "The Homeless City." When this people comes to be truly called a nation without homes there will no longer be any nation.

Hence, I say, in the battle with the slum we win or we perish. There is no middle way. We shall win, for we are not letting things be the way our fathers did. But it will be a running fight, and it is not going to be won in two years, or in ten, or in twenty. For all that, we must keep on fighting, content if in our time we avert the punishment that waits upon the third and the fourth generation of those who forget the

brotherhood. As a man does in dealing with his brother so it is the way of God that his children shall reap, that through toil and tears we may make out the lesson which sums up all the commandments and alone can make the earth fit for the kingdom that is to come. [Back to Contents]

## CHAPTER I

### BATTLING AGAINST HEAVY ODDS

The slum I speak of is our own. We made it, but let us be glad we have no patent on the manufacture. It is not, as one wrote with soul quite too patriotic to let the Old World into competition on any terms, "the offspring of the American factory system." Not that, thank goodness! It comes much nearer to being a slice of original sin which makes right of might whenever the chance offers. When to-day we clamor for air and light and water as man's natural rights because necessary to his being, we are merely following in the track Hippocrates trod twenty-five centuries ago. How like the slums of Rome were to those of New York any one may learn from Juvenal's Satires and Gibbon's description of Rome under Augustus. "I must live in a place where there are no fires, no nightly alarms," cries the poet, apostle of commuters. "Already is Ucalegon shouting for water, already is he removing his chattels; the third story in the house you live in is already in a blaze. You know nothing about it. For if the alarm begin from the bottom of the stairs, he will be the last to be burned

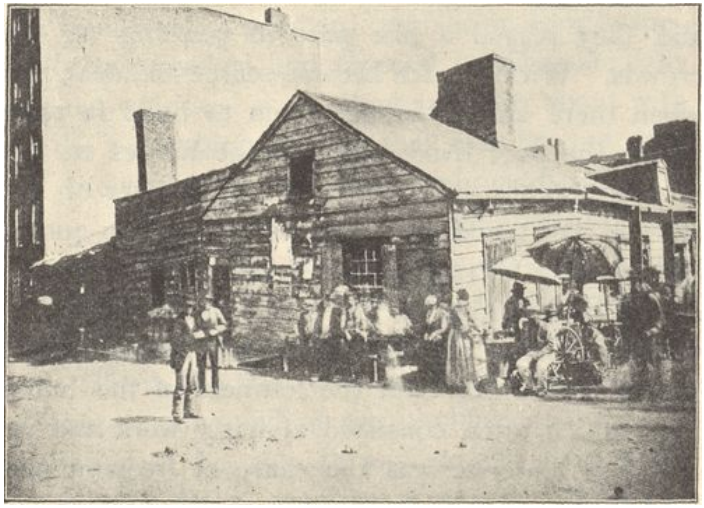
whom a single tile protects from the rain where the tame pigeons lay their eggs." (Clearly they had no air-shafts in the Roman tenements!) "Codrus had a bed too small for his Procula; six little jugs, the ornament of his sideboard, and a little can, besides, beneath it.... What a height it is from the lofty roofs from which a potsherd tumbles on your brains. How often cracked and chipped earthenware falls from the windows.... Pray and bear about with you the miserable wish that they may be contented with throwing down only what the broad basins have held.... If you can tear yourself away from the games in the circus, you can buy a capital house at Sora, or Fabrateria, or Frasino, for the price at which you are now hiring your dark hole for one year. There you will have your little garden ... live there enamoured of the pitchfork.... It is something to be able in any spot to have made oneself proprietor even of a single lizard.... None but the wealthy can sleep in Rome."[3]

One reads with a grim smile of the hold-ups of old: "'Where do you come from?' he (policeman?) thunders out. 'You don't answer? Speak or be kicked! Say, where do you hang out?' It is all one whether you speak or hold your tongue; they beat you just the same, and then, in a passion, force you to give bail to answer for the assault.... I must be off. Let those stay ... for whom it is an easy matter to get contracts for building temples, clearing rivers, constructing harbors, cleansing sewers, etc."[4] Not even in the boss and his pull can we claim exclusive right.

Rome had its walls, as New York has its rivers, and they played a like part in penning up the crowds. Within space became scarce and dear, and when there was no longer room to build in rows where the

poor lived, they put the houses on top of one another. That is the first chapter of the story of the tenement everywhere. Gibbon quotes the architect Vitruvius, who lived in the Augustan age, as complaining of "the common though inconvenient practice of raising houses to a considerable height in the air. But the loftiness of the buildings, which often consisted of hasty work and insufficient material, was the cause of frequent and fatal accidents, and it was repeatedly enacted by Augustus as well as by Nero that the height of private dwellings should not exceed the measure of seventy feet above the ground."

"Repeatedly" suggests that the jerry-builder was a hard nut to crack then as now. As to Nero's edict, New York enacted it for its own protection in our own generation.



One of the Five Points Fifty Years ago.

Step now across eighteen centuries and all the

chapters of the dreary story to the middle of the century we have just left behind, and look upon this picture of the New World's metropolis as it was drawn in public reports at a time when a legislative committee came to New York to see how crime and drunkenness came to be the natural crop of a population "housed in crazy old buildings, crowded, filthy tenements in rear yards, dark, damp basements, leaking garrets, shops, outhouses, and stables converted into dwellings, though scarcely fit to shelter brutes," or in towering tenements, "often carried up to a great height without regard to the strength of the foundation walls." What matter? They were not intended to last. The rent was high enough to make up for the risk—to the property. The tenant was not considered. Nothing was expected of him, and he came up to the expectation, as men have a trick of doing. "Reckless slovenliness, discontent, privation, and ignorance were left to work out their inevitable results, until the entire premises reached the level of tenant-house dilapidation, containing, but sheltering not, the miserable hordes that crowded beneath smouldering, water-rotted roofs, or burrowed among the rats of clammy cellars."[5]

We had not yet taken a lesson from Nero. That came later. But otherwise we were abreast. No doubt the Roman landlord, like his New York brother of a later day, when called to account, "urged the filthy habits of his tenants as an excuse for the condition of the property." It has been the landlord's plea in every age. "They utterly forgot," observes the sanitarian who was set to clean up, "that it was the tolerance of those habits which was the real evil, and that for this they themselves were alone responsible."[6]

Those days came vividly back to me last winter,

when in a Wisconsin country town I was rehearsing the story of the long fight, and pointing out its meaning to us all. In the audience sat a sturdy, white-haired, old farmer who followed the recital with keen interest, losing no word. When he saw this picture of one of the Five Points, he spoke out loud: "Yes! that is right. I was there." It turned out that he and his sister had borne a hand in the attack upon that stronghold of the slum by the forces of decency, in 1849 and 1850, which ended in the wiping out of the city's worst disgrace. It was the first pitched battle in the fight. Soon after he had come west and taken homestead land; but the daily repetition during a lifetime of the message to men, which the woods and the fields and God's open sky have in keeping, had not dulled his ears to it, and after fifty years his interest in his brothers in the great city was as keen as ever, his sympathies as quick. He had driven twenty miles across the frozen prairie to hear my story. It is his kind who win such battles, and a few of them go a long way.

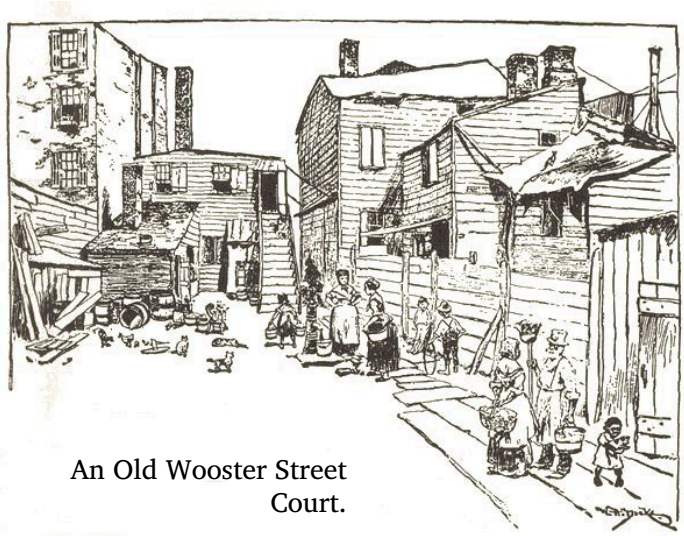


The "Old Church" Tenement.

A handful of Methodist women made the Five Points decent. To understand what that meant, look at the "dens of death" in Baxter Street, which were part of it, "houses," says the health inspector,[7] "into which the sunlight never enters ... that are dark, damp, and dismal throughout all the days of the year, and for which it is no exaggeration to say that the money paid to the owners as rent is literally the

'price of blood.'" It took us twenty-four years after that to register the conviction in the form of law that that was good cause for the destruction of a tenement in cold blood; but we got rid of some at that time in a fit of anger. The mortality officially registered in those "dens of death" was 17.5 per cent of their population. We think now that the death-rate of New York is yet too high at 19 or 20 in a thousand of the living.

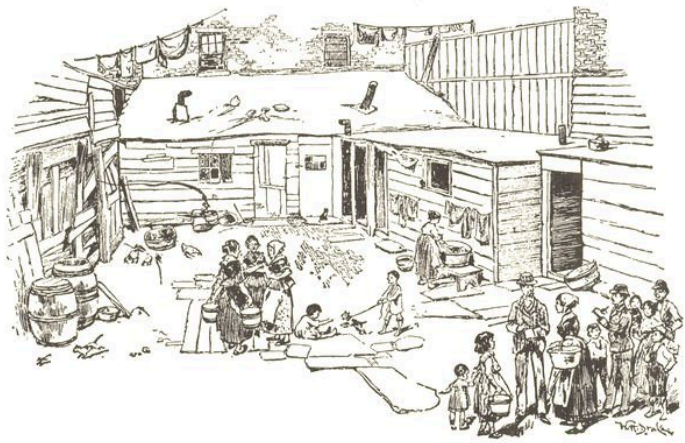
A dozen steps away in Mulberry Street, called "Death's Thoroughfare" in the same report, were the "Old Church Tenements," part of the Five Points and nearly the worst part. "One of the largest contributors to the hospitals," this repulsive pile had seen the day when men and women sat under its roof and worshipped God. When the congregation grew rich, it handed over its house to the devil and moved up-town. That is not putting it too strong. Counting in the front tenements that shut out what little air and sunshine might otherwise have reached the wretched tenants, it had a population of 360 according to the record, and a mortality of 75 per thousand!



An Old Wooster Street Court.

The sketches of the Fourth Ward and Wooster Street barracks are reproduced from an old report of the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor. They rightly made out, those early missionaries, that the improvement must begin with the people's homes, or not at all, and allowed no indifference on the part of the public to turn them from their path. It is worth the while of Chicago and the other Western cities that are growing with such joyful metropolitan ambitions, to notice that their slums look to-day very much as New York's did then. In fifty years how will it be? "The offspring of municipal neglect" the Assembly Committee of 1857 called our "tenement-house" system. "Forgetfulness of the poor" was the way a citizens' council put it. It comes to the same thing. Whether seen from the point of view of the citizen, the philanthropist, or the Christian, the slum is the poorest investment a city

can make, and once made it is not easily unmade. In a Mississippi river town, when pleading for the turning over to the people's use of some vacant land on the river-shore that would make a fine breathing space, I was told that by and by they would consider it. Just now it was too valuable for factory purposes. When the city had grown opulent, in say twenty-five years, they would be willing to hand it over. Fatal delusion! Men do not grow that kind of sense as they grow rich. The land will be always "too valuable." When we in New York were scandalized at last into making a park of the Mulberry Bend, it cost us a million and a half, and it had made the slum a fixture, not to be dislodged. No! the way to fight the slum is to head it off. It is like fighting a fire. Chasing it up is hard and doubtful work; the chances are that you will not overtake it till the house is burned down.



A Fourth Ward Colony in the Bad Old Days.

There were those who thought when the Civil War

was over, that a big fire would not be the worst thing that could happen to New York; and, if it could have burned sense into men's minds as it burned up the evidence of their lack of it, they would have been right. But forty per cent—the rent some of the barracks brought—is a powerful damper on sense and conscience, even with the cholera at the door. However, the fear of it gave us the Citizens' Council of Hygiene, and New York heard the truth for once.

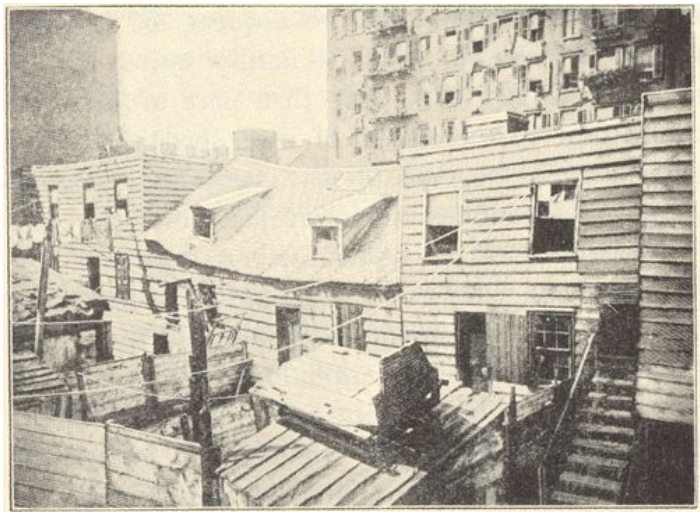
"Not only," it ran, "does filth, overcrowding, lack of privacy and domesticity, lack of ventilation and lighting, and absence of supervision and of sanitary regulation still characterize the greater number of the tenements; but they are built to a greater height in stories; there are more rear houses built back to back with other buildings, correspondingly situated on parallel streets; the courts and alleys are more greedily encroached upon and narrowed into unventilated, unlighted, damp, and well-like holes between the many-storied front and rear tenements; and more fever-breeding wynds and *culs-de-sac* are created as the demand for the humble homes of the laboring poor increases."[8] The Council, which was composed of sixteen of New York's most distinguished physicians, declared that by ordinary sanitary management the city's death-rate should be reduced thirty per cent. Its judgment has been more than borne out. In the thirty-five years that have passed since, it has in fact been reduced over fifty per cent.

Men and women were found living in cellars deep down under the ground. One or two of those holes are left still in Park Street near the Five Points Mission, but they have not been used as living-rooms for a generation. In cellars near the river the tide

rose and fell, compelling the tenants "to keep the children in bed till ebb-tide." The plumber had come upon the field, but his coming brought no relief. His was not a case of conscience. "Untrapped soil pipes opened into every floor and poisoned the tenants."

Where the "dens of death" were in Baxter Street, big barracks crowded out the old shanties. More came every day. I remember the story of those shown in the picture. They had been built only a little while when complaint came to the Board of Health of smells in the houses. A sanitary inspector was sent to find the cause. He followed the smell down in the cellar and, digging there, discovered that the waste pipe was a blind. It had simply been run three feet into the ground and was not connected with the sewer.

The houses were built to sell. That they killed the tenants was no concern of builder's. His name, by the way, was Buddensiek. A dozen years after, when it happened that a row of tenements he was building fell down ahead of time, before they were finished and sold, and killed the workmen, he was arrested and sent to Sing Sing for ten years, for manslaughter.



Dens of Death.

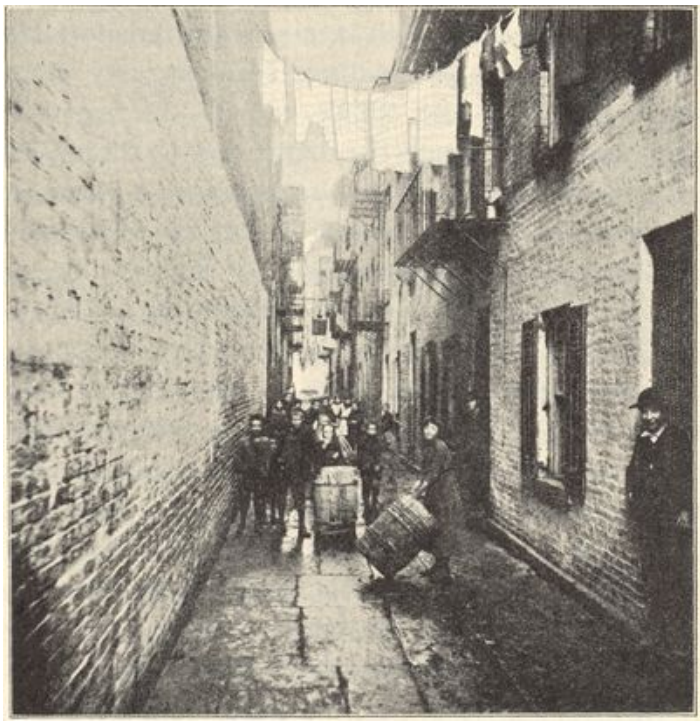
That time he had forgotten to put lime in the mortar. It was just sand. When the houses fell in the sight of men, the law was at last able to make him responsible. It failed in the matter of the soil pipe. It does sometimes to this very day. Knocking a man in the head with an axe, or sticking a knife into him, goes against the grain. Slowly poisoning a hundred so that the pockets of one be made to bulge may not even banish a man from respectable society. We are a queer lot in some things. However, that is hardly quite fair to society. It is a fact that that part of it which would deserve the respect of its fellow-citizens has got rid of its tenement-house property in recent years. It speculates in railway shares now.

Twenty cases of typhoid fever from a single house in one year was the record that had gone unconsidered. Bedrooms in tenements were dark closets, utterly without ventilation. There couldn't be

any. The houses were built like huge square boxes, covering nearly the whole of the lot. Some light came in at the ends, but the middle was always black. Forty thousand windows, cut by order of the Health Board that first year, gave us a daylight view of the slum: "damp and rotten and dark, walls and banisters sticky with constant moisture." Think of living babies in such hell-holes; and make a note of it, you in the young cities who can still head off the slum where we have to wrestle with it for our sins. Put a brand upon the murderer who would smother babies in dark holes and bedrooms. He is nothing else. Forbid the putting of a house five stories high, or six, on a twenty-five foot lot, unless at least thirty-five per cent of the lot be reserved for sunlight and air. Forbid it absolutely, if you can. It is the devil's job, and you will have to pay his dues in the end, depend on it.

And while you are about it make a note of a fact we let go unheeded too long to our harm, and haven't grasped fully yet. The legislative committee of 1857 said it: "to prevent drunkenness provide every man with a clean and comfortable home." Call it paternalism, crankery, any other hard name you can think of, all the same it goes down underneath the foundation of things. I have known drunkards to wreck homes a plenty in my time; but I have known homes, too, that made drunkards by the shortest cut. I know a dozen now—yes, ten dozen—from which, if I had to live there, I should certainly escape to the saloon with its brightness and cheer as often and as long as I could to brood there perhaps over the fate which sowed desolation in one man's path that another might reap wealth and luxury. That last might not be my way, but it is a human way, and it

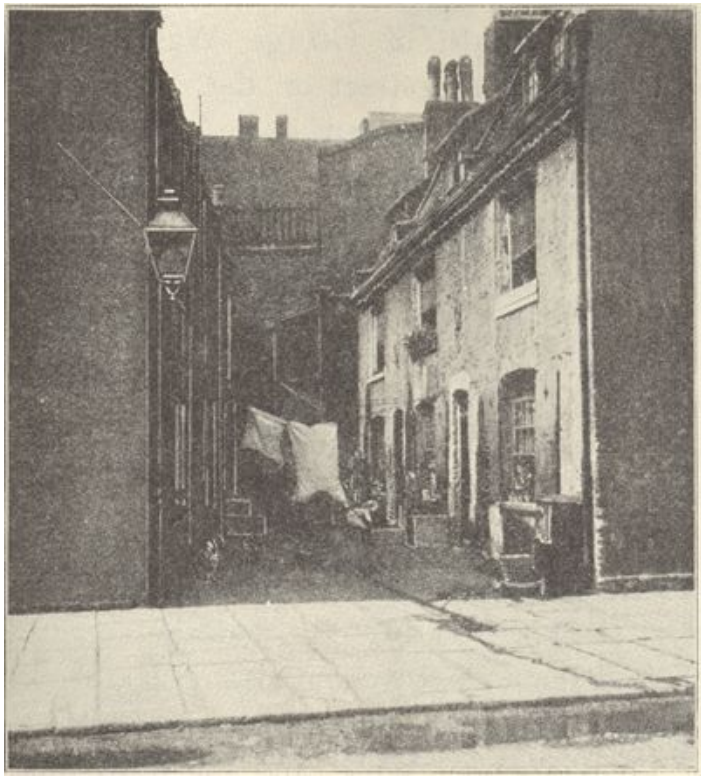
breeds hatred which is not good mortar for us to build with. It does not bind. Let us remember that and just be sensible about things, or we shall not get anywhere.



Gotham Court.

By which I do not mean that we are not getting anywhere; for we are. Look at Gotham Court, described in the health reports of the sixties as a "packing-box tenement" of the hopeless back-to-back type, which meant that there was no ventilation and could be none. The stenches from the "horribly foul cellars" with their "infernal system of sewerage" must needs poison the tenants all the way up to the fifth story. I knew the court well, knew the gang that

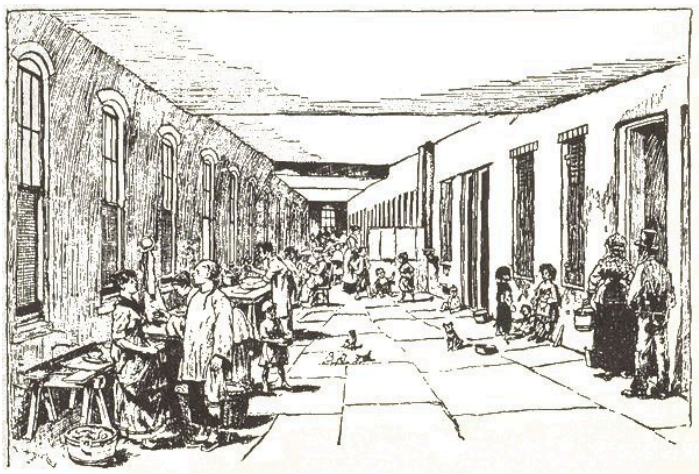
made its headquarters with the rats in the cellar, terrorizing the helpless tenants; knew the well-worn rut of the dead-wagon and the ambulance to the gate, for the tenants died there like flies in all seasons, and a tenth of its population was always in the hospital. I knew the story of how it had been built by a Quaker with good intentions, but without good sense, for the purpose of rescuing people from the awful cellar-holes they burrowed in around there,—this within fifty-one years of the death of George Washington, who lived just across the street on the crest of Cherry Hill when he was President,—and how in a score of years from the time it was built it had come to earn the official description, "a nuisance which, from its very magnitude, is assumed to be unremovable and irremediable."[9] That was at that time. But I have lived to see it taken in hand three times, once by the landlord under compulsion of the Board of Health, once by Christian men bent upon proving what could be done on their plan with the worst tenement house. And a good deal was accomplished. The mortality was brought below the general death-rate of the city, and the condition of the living was made by comparison tolerable. Only the best was bad in that spot, on account of the good Quaker's poor sense, and the third time the court was taken in hand it was by the authorities, who destroyed it, as they should have done a generation before. Oh, yes, we are getting there; but that sort of thing takes time.



Green Dragon Yard, London.

Going through Whitechapel, London, about the time we were making ready to deal with Gotham Court as it deserved, I photographed Green Dragon yard as typical of what I saw about me. Compare the court and the yard and see the difference between our slum problem and that of Old World cities. Gotham Court contained 142 families when I made a canvass of it in the old days, comprising over 700 persons, not counting the vagrants who infested the cellars. The population of Green Dragon Yard was greater than the sight of it would lead you to expect, for in Whitechapel one-room flats were the rule; but

with its utmost crowding it came nowhere near the court. Sullen discontent was the badge of it. Gotham Court was in an active state of warfare at all hours, for its population was evenly divided between Irish and Italians, with only two German families, who caught it from both sides. But there was hope in that, for they were on the move; before the court was torn down, one-third of its tenants were Greeks. Their slum over yonder is dead, black, given over to smoky chimneys and bad draughts, with red-eyed and hopeless men and women forever blowing the bellows on ineffectual fires. Ours is alive if it *is* with fighting. There is yeast in it, and bright skies without, if not within. I don't believe there is a bellows to be had in New York. Our slum, with its greater crowd, has more urgent need of sharp attention, chiefly because of the overflow of theirs which it receives. But after all, even that represents what still had courage and manhood enough to make it want to get away and do better. We shall "get there" if we don't give up. It sometimes seems to me that *their* only hope is to get here.



Flagged Hallway in the "Big Flat."

Speaking of the fair beginning of Gotham Court reminds me of the Big Flat in Mott Street, a mighty tenement with room for a hundred families that was another instance of reform still-born; by which I mean that it came before we were ready for it, and willing to back it up; also before we knew just how. That house was built by the philanthropists of those days on such a generous scale that it reached clear through the block to Elizabeth Street. It had not occurred to the builders that the neighborhood was one in which such an arrangement might prove of special convenience to the lawbreakers with which it swarmed. Thieves and thugs made it a runway, and decent people shunned it. Other philanthropists, with the will but without the wisdom that was needed, took it up and tried to make a workingwoman's home of it; but that end was worse than the beginning. The women would have none of the rules that went with the philanthropy, and the Big Flat lapsed back among the slum tenements and became the worst of a bad lot. I speak of it here because just now the recollection of it is a kind of a milestone in the battle with the slum. Twenty years after, A. T. Stewart, the merchant prince, set another in the Park Avenue Hotel which he intended for his working-girls; and that was a worse failure than the first, for it never served the purpose he intended for it. And now, just as I am writing this, they are putting the finishing touches to a real woman's hotel up-town which will not be a failure, though it will hardly reach the same class which the remodellers of the Big Flat had in mind. However, we shall get there, too, now we know the way.

Slowly, with many setbacks, we battled our way

into the light. A Board of Health had come with the cholera panic in 1866. The swine that ran at large in the streets, practically the only scavengers, were banished. The cholera and the yellow fever that had ravaged the city by turns never came back. The smallpox went its way, too,[10] and was heard of again only once as an epidemic, till people had forgotten what it was like,—enough to make them listen to the anti-vaccination cranks,—and politics had the health department by the throat again and held the gate open. We acquired tenement house laws, and the process of education that had begun with the foraging ground of the swine was extended step by step to the citizen's home. Short steps and cautious were they. Every obstacle which the landlord's cunning and the perversion of the machinery of the law to serve his interests could devise was thrown in the way. It was a new doctrine to that day that any power should intervene between him and the tenants who represented his income, and it was held to be a hardship if not downright robbery. The builder took the same view. Every tenement house plan was the subject of hot debate between the Health Board and the builder, or his architect. The smallest air-shaft had to be wrung out of him, as it were, by main strength. The church itself was too often on the side of the enemy, where its material interests were involved. Trinity, the wealthiest church corporation in the land, was in constant opposition as a tenement house landlord, and finally, to save a few hundred dollars, came near upsetting the whole structure of tenement law that had been built up in the interest of the toilers and of the city's safety with such infinite pains. The courts were reluctant. Courts in such matters record rather than lead the state of the public mind, and now that

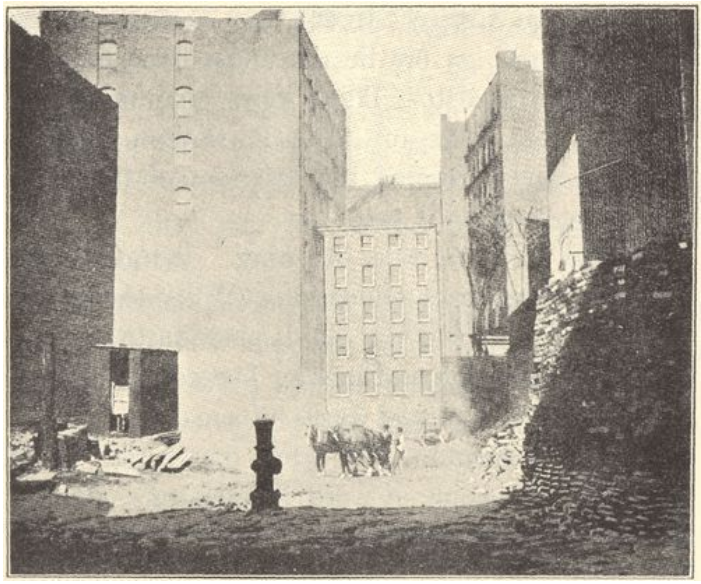
the immediate danger of an epidemic was over, the public mind had a hard time grasping the fact that bettering the housing of the poor was simple protection for the community. When suit was brought against a bad landlord, judges demanded that the department must prove not only that a certain state of soil saturation, for instance, was dangerous to health, but that some one had been actually made sick by that specified nuisance. Fat-boilers, slaughter-house men, and keepers of other nuisances made common cause against the new decency, and with these obstacles in front, the Sanitarians found the enemy constantly recruited from the rear. With the immense immigration that poured in after the Civil War, the evil with which they were struggling grew enormously. Economic problems other than the old one of rent came to vex us. The sweater moved into the East Side tenements. Child-labor grew and swelled.

The tenement had grown its logical crop. In the sweating conspiracy it is a prime factor. Its extortionate rates make the need, and the need of the poor was ever the opportunity of their oppressor. What they have to take becomes the standard of all the rest. Sweating is only a modern name for it. The cause is as old as the slum itself.



Jersey Street Rookeries.

However, the new light was not without its allies. Chief among them was the onward march of business that wiped out many a foul spot which had sorely, tried the patience of us all. A carriage factory took the place of the Big Flat when it had become a disgusting scandal. Jersey Street, a short block between Mulberry and Crosby streets, to which no Whitechapel slum could hold a candle, became a factory-street. No one lives there now. The last who did was murdered by the gang that grew as naturally out of its wickedness as a toadstool grows on a rotten log. He kept the saloon on the corner of Crosby Street. Saloon and tenements are gone together. Where they were are rows of factories, empty and silent at night. A man may go safely there now at any hour. I should not have advised strangers to try that when it was at its worst, though Police Headquarters was but a block away.



The Survival of the Unfittest.

I photographed that phase of the battle with the slum just before they shut in the last tenement in the block with a factory building in its rear. It stood for a while after that down in a deep sort of pocket with not enough light struggling down on the brightest of days to make out anything clearly in the rooms,—truly a survival of the unfittest; but the tenants stayed. They had access through a hallway on Crosby Street; they had never been used to a yard; as for the darkness, that they had always been used to. They were "manured to the soil," in the words of Mrs. Partington. But at length business claimed the last foot of the block, and peace came to it and to us.

All the while we were learning. It was emphatically a campaign of education. When the cholera threatened there was the old disposition to

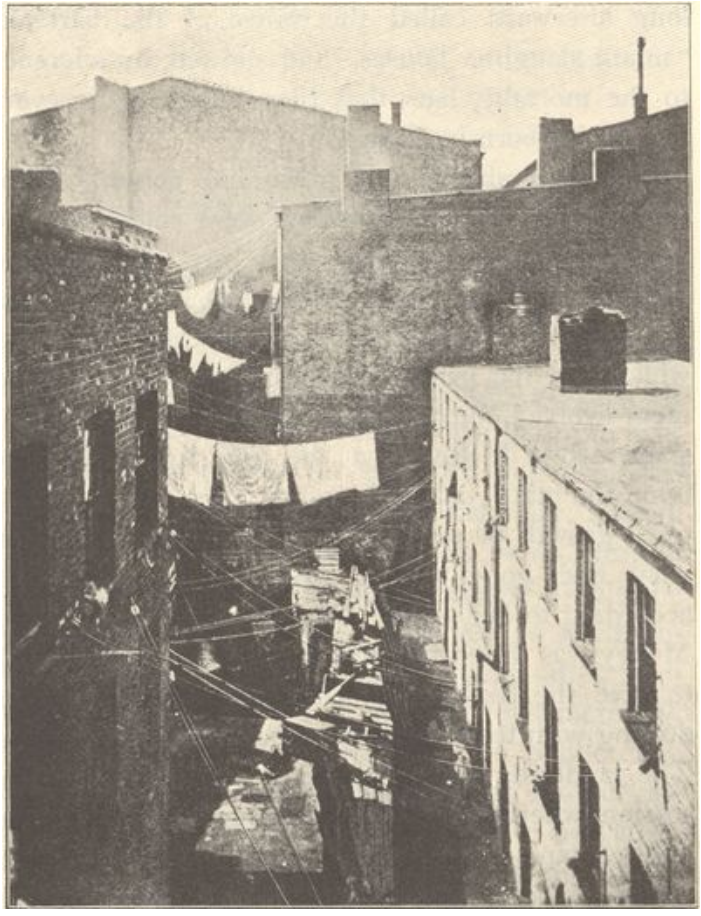
lie down under the visitation and pray. The council pointed to the fifteen hundred cases of smallpox ferreted out by its inspectors "in a few days," and sternly reminded the people of Lord Palmerston's advice to those who would stay an epidemic with a national fast, that they had better turn to and clean up. We pray nowadays with broom in hand, and the prayer tells. Do not understand me as discouraging the prayer; far from it. But I would lend an edge to it with the broom that cuts. That kind of foolishness we got rid of; the other kind that thinks the individual's interest superior to the public good—that is the thing we have got to fight till we die. But we made notches in that on which to hang arguments that stick. Human life then counted for less than the landlord's profits; to-day it is weighed in the scale against them. Property still has powerful pull. "Vested rights" rise up and confront you, and no matter how loudly you may protest that no man has the right to kill his neighbor, they are still there. No one will contradict you, but they won't yield—till you make them. In a hundred ways you are made to feel that vested rights are sacred, if human life is not. But the glory is that you *can* make them yield. You couldn't then.

We haven't reached the millennium yet. But let us be glad. A hundred years ago they hanged a woman on Tyburn Hill for stealing a loaf of bread. To-day we destroy the den that helped make her a thief.[Back to Contents]

## CHAPTER II

### THE OUTWORKS OF THE SLUM TAKEN

I said that we got our grip when the civic conscience awoke in 1879. In that year the slum was arraigned in the churches. The sad and shameful story was told of how it grew and was fostered by avarice that saw in the homeless crowds from over the sea only a chance for business, and exploited them to the uttermost; how Christianity, citizenship, human fellowship, shook their skirts clear of the rabble that was only good enough to fill the greedy purse, and how the rabble, left to itself, improved such opportunities as it found after such fashion as it knew; how it ran elections merely to count its thugs in, and fattened at the public crib; and how the whole evil thing had its root in the tenements, where the home had ceased to be sacred,—those dark and deadly dens in which the family ideal was tortured to death, and character was smothered; in which children were "damned rather than born" into the world, thus realizing a slum kind of foreordination to torment, happily brief in many cases. The Tenement House Commission long afterward called the worst of the barracks "infant slaughter houses," and showed, by reference to the mortality lists, that they killed one in every five babies born in them.



The Rear Tenement grows up. An Alley condemned by the Council of Hygiene.



Professor Felix Adler.

The story shocked the town into action. Plans for a better kind of tenement were called for, and a premium was put on every ray of light and breath of air that could be let into it. It was not much, for the plans clung to the twenty-five-foot lot which was the primal curse, and the type of tenement evolved, the double-decker of the "dumb-bell" shape, while it seemed at the time a great advance upon the black, old packing-box kind, came with the great growth of

our city to be a worse peril than what had gone before. But what we got was according to our sense. At least the will was there. Money was raised to build model houses, and a bill to give the health authorities summary powers in dealing with tenements was sent to the legislature. The landlords held it up until the last day of the session, when it was forced through by an angered public opinion, shorn of its most significant clause, which proposed the licensing of tenements and so their control and effective repression. However, the landlords had received a real set-back. Many of them got rid of their property, which in a large number of cases they had never seen, and tried to forget the source of their ill-gotten wealth. Light and air did find their way into the tenements in a half-hearted fashion, and we began to count the tenants as "souls." That is another of our milestones in the history of New York. They were never reckoned so before; no one ever thought of them as "souls." So, restored to human fellowship, in the twilight of the air-shaft that had penetrated to their dens, the first Tenement House Committee[11] was able to make them out "better than the houses" they lived in, and a long step forward was taken. The Mulberry Bend, the wicked core of the "bloody Sixth Ward," was marked for destruction, and all slumdom held its breath to see it go. With that gone, it seemed as if the old days must be gone too, never to return. There would not be another Mulberry Bend. As long as it stood, there was yet a chance. The slum had backing, as it were.

What was it like? says a man at my elbow, who never saw it. Like nothing I ever saw before, or hope ever to see again. A crooked three-acre lot built over with rotten structures that harbored the very dregs of

humanity. Ordinary enough to look at from the street, but pierced by a maze of foul alleys, in the depths of which skulked the tramp and the outcast thief with loathsome wrecks that had once laid claim to the name of woman. Every foot of it reeked with incest and murder. Bandits' Roost, Bottle Alley, were names synonymous with robbery and red-handed outrage. By night, in its worst days, I have gone poking about their shuddering haunts with a policeman on the beat, and come away in a ferment of anger and disgust that would keep me awake far into the morning hours planning means of its destruction. That was what it was like. Thank God, we shall never see another such!



A Cellar Dive in the Bend.

That was the exhibit that urged us on. But the civic conscience was not very robust yet, and required many and protracted naps. It slumbered fitfully eight

long years, waking up now and then with a start, while the Bend lay stewing in its slime. I wondered often, in those years of delay, if it was just plain stupidity that kept the politicians from spending the money which the law had put within their grasp; for with every year that passed, a million dollars that could have been used for small park purposes was lost.[12] But they were wiser than I. I understood when I saw the changes which letting in the sunshine worked. They were not of the kind that made for their good. We had all believed it, but they knew it all along. At the same time, they lost none of the chances that offered. They helped the landlords in the Bend, who considered themselves greatly aggrieved because their property was thereafter to front on a park instead of a pigsty, to transfer the whole assessment of half a million dollars for park benefit to the city. They undid in less than six weeks what it had taken considerably more than six years to do; but the park was cheap at the price. We could afford to pay all it cost to wake us up. When finally, upon the wave of wrath excited by the Parkhurst and Lexow disclosures, reform came with a shock that dislodged Tammany, it found us wide awake, and, it must be admitted, not a little astonished at our sudden access of righteousness.

The battle went against the slum in the three years that followed, until it found backing in the "odium of reform" that became the issue in the municipal organization of the greater city. Tammany made notes. The cry meant that we were tired of too much virtue. Of what was done, how it was done, and why, during those years, I shall have occasion to speak further in these pages. Here I wish to measure the stretch we have come since I wrote "How the Other

Half Lives," thirteen years ago. Some of it we came plodding, and some at full speed; some of it in the face of every obstacle that could be thrown in our way, wresting victory from defeat at every step; some of it with the enemy on the run. Take it all together, it is a long way. Much of it will not have to be travelled over again. The engine of municipal progress once started as it has been in New York, may slip many a cog with Tammany as the engineer; it may even be stopped for a season; but it can never be made to work backward. Even Tammany knows that, and gropes desperately for a new hold, a certificate of character. In the last election (1901) she laid loud claim to having built many new schools, though she had done little more than to carry out the plans of the previous reform administration, where they could not be upset. As a matter of fact we had fallen behind again, sadly. But even the claim was significant.

How long we strove for those schools, to no purpose! Our arguments, our anger, the anxious pleading of philanthropists who saw the young on the East Side going to ruin, the warning year after year of the superintendent of schools that the compulsory education law was but an empty mockery where it was most needed, the knocking of uncounted thousands of children for whom there was no room,—uncounted in sober fact; there was not even a way of finding out how many were adrift,[13] —brought only the response that the tax rate must be kept down. Kept down it was. "Waste" was successfully averted at the spigot; at the bunghole it went on unchecked. In a swarming population like that you must have either schools or jails, and the jails waxed fat with the overflow. The East Side, that

had been orderly, became a hotbed of child crime. And when, in answer to the charge made by a legislative committee (1895) that the father forced his child into the shop, on a perjured age certificate, to labor when he ought to have been at play, that father, bent and heavy-eyed with unceasing toil, flung back the charge with the bitter reproach that we gave him no other choice, that it was either the street or the shop for his boy, and that perjury for him was cheaper than the ruin of the child, we were mute. What, indeed, was there to say? The crime was ours, not his. That was seven years ago. Once since then have we been where we could count the months to the time when every child that knocked should find a seat in our schools; but Tammany came back. Once again, now, we are catching up. Yesterday Mayor Low's reform government voted six millions of dollars for new schools. The school census law that was forgotten almost as soon as made (the census was to be taken once in two years, but was taken only twice) is to be enforced again so that we know where we stand. In that most crowded neighborhood in all the world, where the superintendent lately pleaded in vain for three new schools, half a dozen have been built, the finest in this or any other land, —great, light, and airy structures, with playgrounds on the roof; and all over the city the like are going up. The briefest of our laws, every word of which is like the blow of a hammer driving the nails home in the coffin of the bad old days, says that never one shall be built without its playground.

And not for the child's use only. The band shall play there yet and neighbor meet neighbor in such social contact as the slum has never known to its undoing. Even as I write this the band is tuning up

and the children dancing to its strains with shouts of joy. The president of the board of education and members of the board lead in the revolt against the old. Clergymen applaud the opening of the school buildings on Sunday for concerts, lectures, and neighborhood meetings. Common sense is having its day. The streets are cleaned.

The slum has even been washed. We tried that on Hester Street years ago, in the age of cobblestone pavements, and the result fairly frightened us. I remember the indignant reply of a well-known citizen, a man of large business responsibility and experience in the handling of men, to whom the office of street-cleaning commissioner had been offered, when I asked him if he would accept. "I have lived," he said, "a blameless life for forty years, and have a character in the community. I cannot afford—no man with a reputation can afford—to hold that office; it will surely wreck it." It made Colonel Waring's reputation. He took the trucks from the streets. Tammany, in a brief interregnum of vigor under Mayor Grant, had laid the axe to the unsightly telegraph poles and begun to pave the streets with asphalt, but it left the trucks and the ash barrels to Colonel Waring as hopeless. Trucks have votes; at least their drivers have. Now that they are gone, the drivers would be the last to bring them back; for they have children, too, and the rescued streets gave them their first playground. Perilous, begrudged by policeman and storekeeper, though it was, it was still a playground.



It costs a Dollar a Month to sleep in these Sheds.

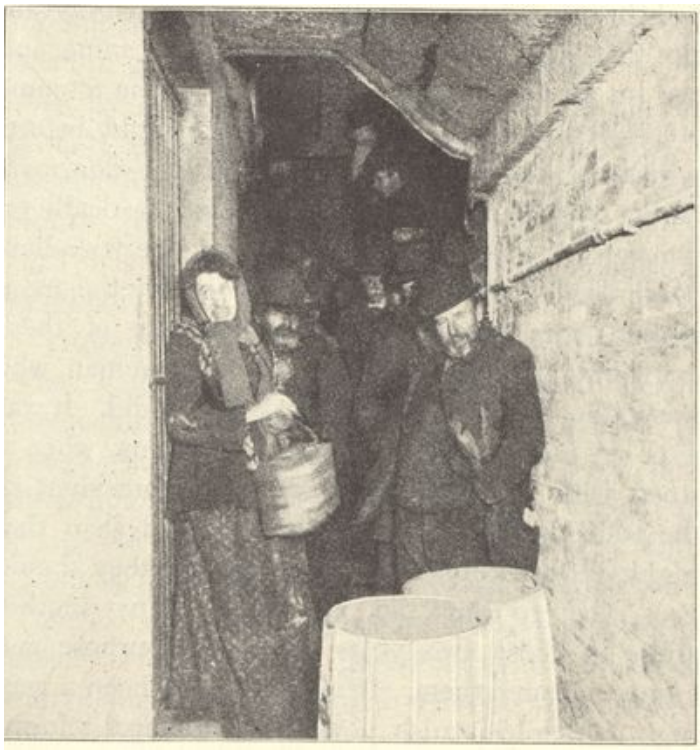
But one is coming in which the boy shall rule unchallenged. The Mulberry Bend Park kept its promise. Before the sod was laid in it two more were under way in the thickest of the tenement house crowding, and though the landscape gardener has tried twice to steal them, he will not succeed. Play piers and play schools are the order of the day. We shall yet settle the "causes that operated sociologically" on the boy with a lawn-mower and a sand heap. You have got your boy, and the heredity of the next one, when you can order his setting.

Social halls for the older people's play are coming where the saloon has had a monopoly of the cheer too long. The labor unions and the reformers work together to put an end to sweating and child-labor. The gospel of less law and more enforcement

acquired standing while Theodore Roosevelt sat in the governor's chair rehearsing to us Jefferson's forgotten lesson that "the whole art and science of government consists in being honest." With a back door to every ordinance that touched the lives of the people, if indeed the whole thing was not the subject of open ridicule or the vehicle of official blackmail, it seemed as if we had provided a perfect municipal machinery for bringing the law into contempt with the young, and so for wrecking citizenship by the shortest cut.

Of free soup there is an end. It was never food for free men. The last spoonful was ladled out by yellow journalism with the certificate of the men who fought Roosevelt and reform in the police board that it was good. It is not likely that it will ever plague us again. Our experience has taught us a new reading of the old word that charity covers a multitude of sins. It does. Uncovering some of them has kept us busy since our conscience awoke, and there are more left. The worst of them all, that awful parody on municipal charity, the police station lodging room, is gone, after twenty years of persistent attack upon the foul dens,—years during which they were arraigned, condemned, indicted by every authority having jurisdiction, all to no purpose. The stale beer dives went with them and with the Bend, and the grip of the tramp on our throat has been loosened. We shall not easily throw it off altogether, for the tramp has a vote, too, for which Tammany, with admirable ingenuity, found a new use, when the ante-election inspection of lodging houses made them less available for colonization purposes than they had been. Perhaps I should say a new way of very old use. It was simplicity itself. Instead of keeping

tramps in hired lodgings for weeks at a daily outlay, the new way was to send them all to the island on short commitments during the canvass, and vote them from there *en bloc* at the city's expense.



Mulberry Street Police Station. Waiting for the Lodging to open.

Time and education must solve that, like so many other problems which the slum has thrust upon us. They are the forces upon which, when we have gone as far as our present supply of steam will carry us, we must always fall back; and this we may do with confidence so long as we keep stirring, if it is only marking time, when that is all that can be done. It is

in the retrospect that one sees how far we have come, after all, and from that gathers courage for the rest of the way. Thirty-two years have passed since I slept in a police station lodging house, a lonely lad, and was robbed, beaten, and thrown out for protesting; and when the vagrant cur that had joined its homelessness to mine, and had sat all night at the door waiting for me to come out,—it had been clubbed away the night before,—snarled and showed its teeth at the doorman, raging and impotent I saw it beaten to death on the step. I little dreamed then that the friendless beast, dead, should prove the undoing of the monstrous wrong done by the maintenance of these evil holes to every helpless man and woman who was without shelter in New York; but it did. It was after an inspection of the lodging rooms, when I stood with Theodore Roosevelt, then president of the police board, in the one where I had slept that night, and told him of it, that he swore they should go. And go they did, as did so many another abuse in those two years of honest purpose and effort. I hated them. It may not have been a very high motive to furnish power for municipal reform; but we had tried every other way, and none of them worked. Arbitration is good, but there are times when it becomes necessary to knock a man down and arbitrate sitting on him, and this was such a time. It was what we started out to do with the rear tenements, the worst of the slum barracks, and it would have been better had we kept on that track. I have always maintained that we made a false move when we stopped to discuss damages with the landlord, or to hear his side of it at all. His share in it was our grievance; it blocked the mortality records with its burden of human woe. The damage was all ours, the profit all his. If there are

damages to collect, he should foot the bill, not we. Vested rights are to be protected, but, as I have said, no man has a right to be protected in killing his neighbor.



Night in Gotham Court.

However, they are down, the worst of them. The community has asserted its right to destroy tenements that destroy life, and for that cause. We bought the slum off in the Mulberry Bend at its own figure. On the rear tenements we set the price, and set it low. It was a long step. Bottle Alley is gone, and Bandits' Roost. Bone Alley, Thieves' Alley, and Kerosene Row,—they are all gone. Hell's Kitchen and Poverty Gap have acquired standards of decency; Poverty Gap has risen even to the height of neckties. The time is fresh in my recollection when a different kind of necktie was its pride; when the boy-murderer —he was barely nineteen—who wore it on the

gallows took leave of the captain of detectives with the cheerful invitation to "come over to the wake. They'll have a hell of a time." And the event fully redeemed the promise. The whole Gap turned out to do the dead bully honor. I have not heard from the Gap, and hardly from Hell's Kitchen, in five years. The last news from the Kitchen was when the thin wedge of a column of negroes, in their up-town migration, tried to squeeze in, and provoked a race war; but that in fairness should not be laid up against it. In certain local aspects it might be accounted a sacred duty; as much so as to get drunk and provoke a fight on the anniversary of the battle of the Boyne. But on the whole the Kitchen has grown orderly. The gang rarely beats a policeman nowadays, and it has not killed one in a long while.

So, one after another, the outworks of the slum have been taken. It has been beaten in many battles; even to the double-decker tenement on the twenty-five-foot lot have we put a stop. But its legacy is with us in the habitations of two million souls. This is the sore spot, and as against it all the rest seems often enough unavailing. Yet it cannot be. It is true that the home, about which all that is to work for permanent progress must cluster, is struggling against desperate odds in the tenement, and that the struggle has been reflected in the morals of the people, in the corruption of the young, to an alarming extent; but it must be that the higher standards now set up on every hand, in the cleaner streets, in the better schools, in the parks and the clubs, in the settlements, and in the thousand and one agencies for good that touch and help the lives of the poor at as many points, will tell at no distant day, and react upon the homes and upon their

builders. In fact, we know it is so from our experience last fall, when the summons to battle for the people's homes came from the young on the East Side. It was their fight for the very standards I spoke of, their reply to the appeal they made to them.

To any one who knew that East Side ten years ago, the difference between that day and this in the appearance of the children whom he sees there must be striking. Rags and dirt are now the exception rather than the rule. Perhaps the statement is a trifle too strong as to the dirt; but dirt is not harmful except when coupled with rags; it can be washed off, and nowadays is washed off where such a thing would have been considered affectation in the days that were. Soap and water have worked a visible cure already that goes more than skin-deep. They are moral agents of the first value in the slum. And the day is coming soon now, when with real rapid transit and the transmission of power to suburban workshops the reason for the outrageous crowding shall cease to exist. It has been a long while, a whole century of city packing, closer and more close; but it looks as if the tide were to turn at last. Meanwhile, philanthropy is not sitting idle and waiting. It is building tenements on the humane plan that lets in sunshine and air and hope. It is putting up hotels deserving of the name for the army that but just now had no other home than the cheap lodging houses which Inspector Byrnes fitly called "nurseries of crime." These also are standards from which there is no backing down, even if coming up to them is slow work: and they are here to stay, for they pay. That is the test. Not charity, but justice,—that is the gospel which they preach.



A Mulberry Bend Alley.

Flushed with the success of many victories, we challenged the slum to a fight to the finish in 1897, and bade it come on. It came on. On our side fought the bravest and best. The man who marshalled the citizen forces for their candidate had been foremost in building homes, in erecting baths for the people, in directing the self-sacrificing labors of the oldest and worthiest of the agencies for improving the condition of the poor. With him battled men who had given lives of patient study and effort to the cause of helping their fellow-men. Shoulder to shoulder with them stood the thoughtful workingman from the East Side tenement. The slum, too, marshalled its forces. Tammany produced its notes. It pointed to the increased tax rate, showed what it had cost to build schools and parks and to clean house, and called it criminal recklessness. The issue was made sharp and clear. The war cry of the slum was characteristic: "To hell with reform!" We all remember the result. Politics interfered, and turned

victory into defeat. We were beaten. I shall never forget that election night. I walked home through the Bowery in the midnight hour, and saw it gorging itself, like a starved wolf, upon the promise of the morrow. Drunken men and women sat in every doorway, howling ribald songs and curses. Hard faces I had not seen for years showed themselves about the dives. The mob made merry after its fashion. The old days were coming back. Reform was dead, and decency with it.




"In the hallway I ran across two children, little tots, who were inquiring their way to 'the commissioner.'"

A year later, I passed that same way on the night of election.[14] The scene was strangely changed. The street was unusually quiet for such a time. Men

stood in groups about the saloons, and talked in whispers, with serious faces. The name of Roosevelt was heard on every hand. The dives were running, but there was no shouting, and violence was discouraged. When, on the following day, I met the proprietor of one of the oldest concerns in the Bowery,—which, while doing a legitimate business, caters necessarily to its crowds, and therefore sides with them,—he told me with bitter reproach how he had been stricken in pocket. A gambler had just been in to see him, who had come on from the far West, in anticipation of a wide-open town, and had got all ready to open a house in the Tenderloin. "He brought $40,000 to put in the business, and he came to take it away to Baltimore. Just now the cashier of —— Bank told me that two other gentlemen—gamblers? yes, that's what you call them—had drawn $130,000 which they would have invested here, and had gone after him. Think of all that money gone to Baltimore! That's what you've done!"

I went over to police headquarters, thinking of the sad state of that man, and in the hallway I ran across two children, little tots, who were inquiring their way to "the commissioner." The older was a hunchback girl, who led her younger brother (he could not have been over five or six years old) by the hand. They explained their case to me. They came from Allen Street. Some "bad ladies" had moved into the tenement, and when complaint was made that sent the police there, the children's father, who was a poor Jewish tailor, was blamed. The tenants took it out of the boy by punching his nose till it bled. Whereupon the children went straight to Mulberry Street to see "the commissioner" and get justice. It was the first time in twenty years that I had known

Allen Street to come to police headquarters for justice and in the discovery that the legacy of Roosevelt had reached even to the little children I read the doom of the slum, despite its loud vauntings.

No, it was not true that reform was dead, with decency. We had our innings four years later and proved it; of which more farther on. It was not the slum that had won; it was we who had lost. We were not up to the mark,—not yet. We may lose again, more than once, but even our losses shall be our gains, if we learn from them. And we are doing that. New York is a many times cleaner and better city to-day than it was twenty or even ten years ago. Then I was able to grasp easily the whole plan for wresting it from the neglect and indifference that had put us where we were. It was chiefly, almost wholly, remedial in its scope. Now it is preventive, constructive, and no ten men could gather all the threads and hold them. We have made, are making, headway, and no Tammany has the power to stop us. They know it, too, at the Hall, and were in such frantic haste to fill their pockets this last time that they abandoned their old ally, the tax rate, and the pretence of making bad government cheap government. Tammany dug its arms into the treasury fairly up to the elbows, raising taxes, assessments, and salaries all at once, and collecting blackmail from everything in sight. Its charges for the lesson it taught us came high; but we can afford to pay them. If to learning it we add common sense, we shall discover the bearings of it all without trouble. Yesterday I picked up a book,—a learned disquisition on government,—and read on the title-page, "Affectionately dedicated to all who despise politics."

That was not common sense. To win the battle with the slum, we must not begin by despising politics. We have been doing that too long. The politics of the slum are apt to be like the slum itself, dirty. Then they must be cleaned. It is what the fight is about. Politics are the weapon. We must learn to use it so as to cut straight and sure. That is common sense, and the golden rule as applied to Tammany.

Some years ago, the United States government conducted an inquiry into the slums of great cities. To its staff of experts was attached a chemist, who gathered and isolated a lot of bacilli with fearsome Latin names, in the tenements where he went. Among those he labelled were the *Staphylococcus pyogenes albus*, the *Micrococcus fervidosus*, the *Saccharomyces rosaceus*, and the *Bacillus buccalis fortuitis*. I made a note of the names at the time, because of the dread with which they inspired me. But I searched the collection in vain for the real bacillus of the slum. It escaped science, to be, identified by human sympathy and a conscience-stricken community with that of ordinary human selfishness. The antitoxin has been found, and it is applied successfully. Since justice has replaced charity on the prescription the patient is improving. And the improvement is not confined to him; it is general. Conscience is not a local issue in our day. A few years ago, a United States senator sought reëlection on the platform that the decalogue and the golden rule were glittering generalities that had no place in politics, and lost. We have not quite reached the millennium yet, but since then a man was governor in the Empire State, elected on the pledge that he would rule by the ten commandments. These are facts that mean much or little, according to the

way one looks at them. The significant thing is that they are facts, and that, in spite of slipping and sliding, the world moves forward, not backward. The poor we shall have always with us, but the slum we need not have. These two do not rightfully belong together. Their present partnership is at once poverty's worst hardship and our worst blunder.[Back to Contents]

## CHAPTER III

### THE DEVIL'S MONEY

That was what the women called it, and the name stuck and killed the looters. The young men of the East Side began it, and the women finished it. It was a campaign of decency against Tammany, that one of 1901 of which I am going to make the record brief as may be, for we all remember it; and also, thank God, that decency won the fight.

If ever inhuman robbery deserved the name, that which caused the downfall of Tammany surely did. Drunk with the power and plunder of four long unchallenged years, during which the honest name of democracy was pilloried in the sight of all men as the active partner of blackmail and the brothel, the monstrous malignity reached a point at last where it was no longer to be borne. Then came the crash. The pillory lied. Tammany is no more a political organization than it is the benevolent concern it is innocently supposed to be by some people who never learn. It neither knows nor cares for principles.

"Koch?" said its President of the Health Department when mention was made in his hearing of the authority of the great German doctor, "who is that man Koch you are talking about?" And he was typical of the rest. His function was to collect the political revenue of the department, and the city was overrun with smallpox for the first time in thirty years. The police force, of whom Roosevelt had made heroes, became the tools of robbers. Robbery is the business of Tammany. For that, and for that only, is it organized. Politics are merely the convenient pretence. I do not mean that every Tammany man is a thief. Probably the great majority of its adherents honestly believe that it stands for something worth fighting for,—for personal freedom, for the people's cause,—and their delusion is the opportunity of scoundrels. They have never understood its organization or read its history.

For a hundred years that has been an almost unbroken record of fraud and peculation. Its very founder, William Mooney, was charged with being a deserter from the patriot army to the British forces. He was later on removed from office as superintendent of the almshouse for swindling the city. Aaron Burr plotted treason within its councils. The briefest survey of the administration of the metropolis from his day down to that of Tweed shows a score of its conspicuous leaders removed, indicted, or tried, for default, bribe-taking, or theft; and the fewest were punished. The civic history of New York to the present day is one long struggle to free itself from its blighting grip. Its people's parties, its committees of seventy, were ever emergency measures to that end, but they succeeded only for a season. There have been decent Tammany mayors,

but not for long. There have been attempts to reform the organization from within, but they have been failures. You cannot reform an "organized appetite" except by reforming it away. And then there would be nothing left of the organization.

For whatever the rank and file have believed, the organization has never been anything else but the means of satisfying the appetite that never will be cloyed. Whatever principles it has professed, they have served the purpose only of filling the pockets of the handful of men who rule its inner councils and use it to their own enrichment and our loss and disgrace. We have heard its most successful leader testify brazenly before the Mazet legislative committee that he was in politics working for his own pocket all the time. That was his principle. And his followers applauded till the room rang.

That is the Tammany which has placed murderers and gamblers in its high seats. That is the Tammany which you have to fight at every step when battling with the slum; the Tammany which, unmasked and beaten by the Parkhurst and Lexow disclosures, came back with the Greater New York to exploit the opportunity reform had made for itself, and gave us a lesson we will not soon forget. For at last it dropped all pretence and showed its real face to us.

Civil service reform was thrown to the winds; the city departments were openly parcelled out among the district leaders: a $2000 office to one,—two $1000 to another to even up. That is the secret of the "organization" which politicians admire. It does make a strong body. How it served the city in one department, the smallpox epidemic bore witness. That department, the pride of the city and its

mainstay in days of danger, was wrecked. The first duty of the new president, when the four years were over and Tammany out again, was to remove more than a hundred and fifty useless employees. Their only function had been to draw the salaries which the city paid. The streets that had been clean became dirty—the "voter" was back "behind the broom"—and they swarmed once more with children for whom there was no room in school. Officials who drew big salaries starved the inmates of the almshouse on weak tea and dry bread, and Bellevue, the poor people's hospital, became a public scandal. In one night there were five drunken fights, one of them between two of the attendants who dropped the corpse they were carrying to the morgue and fought over it. The tenements were plunged back into the foulness of their worst day; the inspectors were answerable, not to the Health Board, but to the district leader, and the landlord who stood well with him thumbed his nose at them and at their orders to clean up. The neighborhood parks, acquired at such heavy sacrifice, lay waste. Tammany took no step toward improving them. One it did take up at Fort George; and though the property only cost the city $600,000, the bills for taking it were $127,467. That is the true Tammany style. In the Seward Park, where the need of relief was greatest, Tammany election district captains built booths, rent free, for the sale of dry goods and fish. That was "their share." Wealthy corporations were made to pay heavily for "peace"; timid storekeepers were blackmailed. One, a Jew, told his story: he was ordered to pay five dollars a week for privilege of keeping open Sundays. He paid, and they asked ten. When he refused, he was told that it would be the worse for him. He closed up. The very next week he was sued for a

hundred dollars by a man of whom he had never borrowed anything. He did not defend the suit, and it went against him. In three days the sheriff was in his store. He knew the hopelessness of it then, and went out and mortgaged his store and paid the bill. The next week another man sued him for a hundred dollars he did not owe. He went and threw himself on his mercy, and the man let him off for the costs.

He was one of the many thousands of toilers who look with fear to the approaching summer because it is then the hot tenement kills their babies. Their one chance of life then depends upon the supply of ice that is hawked from door to door in small pieces, since tenements have rarely other refrigerator than the draughty air-shaft. The greed of politicians plotted to deprive them of even this chance. They had control of docks and means of transportation and they cornered the supply, raising the price from thirty to sixty cents a hundred pounds and suppressing the five-cent piece. Some of them that sat in high official station grew rich, but the poor man's babies died and he saw at last the quality of the friendship Tammany professed for him. The push-cart pedlers, blackmailed and driven from pillar to post, saw it. They had escaped from unbearable tyranny in their old home to find a worse where they thought to be free; for to their oppressors yonder at least their women were sacred.

It is difficult to approach calmly what is left of the diabolical recital. The police, set once more to collecting blackmail from saloon keepers, gambling hells, policy shops, and houses of ill fame, under a chief who on a policeman's pay became in a few short years fairly bloated with wealth, sank to the level of their occupation or into helpless or hopeless

compliance with the apparently inevitable. The East Side, where the home struggled against such heavy odds, became a sinkhole of undreamt-of corruption. The tenements were overrun with lewd women who paid the police for protection and received it. Back of them the politician who controlled all and took the profits. This newspaper arraignment published in January, 1901, tells the bald truth:

> "Imagine, if you can, a section of the city territory completely dominated by one man, without whose permission neither legitimate nor illegitimate business can be conducted; where illegitimate business is encouraged and legitimate business discouraged; where the respectable residents have to fasten their doors and windows summer nights and sit in their rooms with asphyxiating air and one hundred degrees temperature, rather than try to catch the faint whiff of breeze in their natural breathing places—the stoops of their homes; where naked women dance by night in the streets, and unsexed men prowl like vultures through the darkness on "business" not only permitted, but encouraged, by the police; where the education of infants begins with the knowledge of prostitution and the training of little girls is training in the arts of Phryne; where American girls brought up with the refinements of American homes are imported from small towns up-state, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Jersey, and kept as virtually prisoners as if they were locked up behind jail bars until they have lost all semblance of womanhood; where small boys are taught to solicit for the women of disorderly houses; where there is an organized society of young men whose sole business in life is to corrupt young girls and turn them over to bawdy houses; where men walking with their wives along the street are openly insulted; where children that have adult

diseases are the chief patrons of the hospitals and dispensaries; where it is the rule, rather than the exception, that murder, rape, robbery, and theft go unpunished—in short, where the premium of the most awful forms of vice is the profit of the politicians.

"There is no 'wine, woman, and song' over there. The 'wine' is stale beer, the 'woman' is a degraded money-making machine, and the 'song' is the wail of the outraged innocent. The political backers have got it down to what has been called a 'cash-register, commutation-ticket basis,' called so from the fact that in some of these places they issued tickets, on the plan of a commutation meal-ticket, and had cash registers at the entries."

Lest some one think the newspaper exaggerating after all, let me add Bishop Potter's comment before his Diocesan Convention. He will not be suspected of sensationalism:

"The corrupt system, whose infamous details have been steadily uncovered to our increasing horror and humiliation, was brazenly ignored by those who were fattening on its spoils; and the world was presented with the astounding spectacle of a great municipality whose civic mechanism was largely employed in trading in the bodies and souls of the innocent and defenceless. What has been published in this connection is but the merest hint of what exists—and exists, most appalling of all, as the evidence has come to me under the seal of confidence in overwhelming volume and force to demonstrate—under a system of terrorism which compels its victims to recognize that to denounce it means the utter ruin, so far as all their worldly interests are concerned, of those who dare to do so.

> This infamous organization for making merchandise of girls and boys, and defenceless men and women, has adroitly sought to obscure a situation concerning which all honest people are entirely clear, by saying that vice cannot be wholly suppressed. Nobody has made upon the authorities of New York any such grotesque demand. All that our citizens have asked is that the government of the city shall not be employed to protect a trade in vice, which is carried on for the benefit of a political organization. The case is entirely clear. No Mephistophelian cunning can obscure it, and I thank God that there is abundant evidence that the end of such a condition of things is not far off."

It was, indeed, coming. But Tammany, gorged with power and the lust of it, neither saw nor heeded. At a meeting of young men on the East Side, one of them, responding to an address by Felix Adler, drew such a heart-rending picture of the conditions prevailing there that the echoes of the meeting found its way into the farthest places: "Now you go," he said, "to your quiet home in a decent street where no harm comes to you or your wife or children in the night, for it is their home. And we—we go with our high resolves, the noble ambitions you have stirred, to our tenements where evil lurks in the darkness at every step, where innocence is murdered in babyhood, where mothers bemoan the birth of a daughter as the last misfortune, where virtue is sold into a worse slavery than ever our fathers knew, and our sisters betrayed by paid panders; where the name of home is as a bitter mockery, for alas! we have none. These are the standards to which we go from here." And then followed the whole amazing story of damning conspiracy between power and vice in those tenements before which a whole city stood aghast.

A meeting was called the following day by Dr. Adler, of men and women who had the welfare of their city at heart, and when they had heard the story, they resolved that they would not rest till those things were no longer true. One of their number was the Rev. Robert Paddock, the priest in charge of Bishop Potter's Pro-Cathedral, right in the heart of it all in Stanton Street. He set about gathering evidence that would warrant the arraignment of the evil-doers in his district; but when he brought it to the police he was treated with scorn and called liar.

The measure was nearly full. Bishop Potter came back from the East, where he had been travelling, and met his people. Out of that meeting came the most awful arraignment of a city government which the world has ever heard. "Nowhere else on earth," the Bishop wrote to the Mayor of New York, "certainly not in any civilized or Christian community, does there exist such a situation as defiles and dishonors New York to-day."

"In the name of these little ones," his letter ran, "these weak and defenceless ones, Christian and Hebrew alike, of many races and tongues, but homes in which God is feared and His law revered, and virtue and decency honored and exemplified, I call upon you, sir, to save these people, who are in a very real way committed to your charge, from a living hell, defiling, deadly, damning, to which the criminal supineness of the constituted authorities set for the defence of decency and good order, threatens to doom them."

The Mayor's virtual response was to put the corrupt Chief of Police in practically complete and

irresponsible charge of the force. Richard Croker, the boss of Tammany Hall, had openly counselled violence at the election then pending (1900), and the Chief in a general order to the force repeated the threat. But they had reckoned without Governor Roosevelt. He compelled the Mayor to have the order rescinded, and removed the District Attorney who had been elected on the compact platform "to hell with reform." The whole city was aroused. The Chamber of Commerce formed a Committee of Fifteen which soon furnished evidence without stint of the corruption that was abroad. The connection between the police and the gambling dens was demonstrated, and also that the police were the mere tools of "politics." In 237 tenements that were investigated 290 flats were found harboring prostitutes in defiance of law. The police were compelled to act. The "Cadets," who lived by seducing young girls and selling them to their employer at $25 a head, were arrested and sent to jail for long terms. They showed fight, and it developed that they had a regular organization with political affiliations.

The campaign of 1901 approached. Judge Jerome went upon the stump and rattled the brass checks from the cash-register that paid for the virtue of innocent girls, the daughters of his hearers. The mothers of the East Side, the very Tammany women themselves, rose and denounced the devil's money, and made their husbands and brothers go to the polls and vote their anger.[15] The world knows the rest. The "Red Light" of the East Side damned Tammany to defeat. Seth Low was elected mayor. Decency once more moved into the City Hall and into the homes of the poor. Croker abdicated and went away, and a

new day broke for our harassed city.

That, in brief, is the story of the campaign that discharged the devil as paymaster, and put his money out of circulation—for good, let us all hope. [Back to Contents]

## CHAPTER IV

### THE BLIGHT OF THE DOUBLE-DECKER

In a Stanton Street tenement, the other day, I stumbled upon a Polish capmaker's home. There were other capmakers in the house, Russian and Polish, but they simply "lived" there. This one had a home. The fact proclaimed itself the moment the door was opened, in spite of the darkness. The rooms were in the rear, gloomy with the twilight of the tenement although the day was sunny without, but neat, even cosey. It was early, but the day's chores were evidently done. The tea-kettle sang on the stove, at which a bright-looking girl of twelve, with a pale but cheery face, and sleeves brushed back to the elbows, was busy poking up the fire. A little boy stood by the window, flattening his nose against the pane, and gazed wistfully up among the chimney pots where a piece of blue sky about as big as the kitchen could be made out. I remarked to the mother that they were nice rooms.


Thomas S. Fogarty

"With his whole hungry little soul in his eyes."

"Ah yes," she said, with a weary little smile that struggled bravely with hope long deferred, "but it is hard to make a home here. We would so like to live in the front, but we can't pay the rent."

I knew the front with its unlovely view of the tenement street too well, and I said a good word for the air-shaft—yard or court it could not be called, it was too small for that—which rather surprised myself. I had found few virtues enough in it before. The girl at the stove had left off poking the fire. She broke in the moment I finished, with eager enthusiasm: "Why, they have the sun in there. When the door is opened the light comes right in your face."

"Does it never come here?" I asked, and wished I had not done so, as soon as the words were spoken. The child at the window was listening, with his whole hungry little soul in his eyes.

Yes, it did, she said. Once every summer, for a little while, it came over the houses. She knew the month and the exact hour of the day when its rays shone into their home, and just the reach of its slant on the wall. They had lived there six years. In June the sun was due. A haunting fear that the baby would ask how long it was till June—it was February then—took possession of me, and I hastened to change the subject. Warsaw was their old home. They kept a little store there, and were young and happy. Oh, it was a fine city, with parks and squares, and bridges over the beautiful river,—and grass and flowers and birds and soldiers, put in the girl breathlessly. She remembered. But the children kept

coming, and they went across the sea to give them a better chance. Father made fifteen dollars a week, much money; but there were long seasons when there was no work. She, the mother, was never very well here,—she hadn't any strength; and the baby! She glanced at his grave white face, and took him in her arms. The picture of the two, and of the pale-faced girl longing back to the fields and the sunlight, in their prison of gloom and gray walls, haunts me yet. I have not had the courage to go back since. I recalled the report of an English army surgeon, which I read years ago, on the many more soldiers that died—were killed would be more correct—in barracks into which the sun never shone than in those that were open to the light. They have yet two months to the sun in Stanton Street.

The capmaker's case is the case of the nineteenth century of civilization against the metropolis of America. The home, the family, are the rallying points of civilization. The greatness of a city is to be measured, not by its balance sheets of exports and imports, not by its fleet of merchantmen, or by its miles of paved streets, nor even by its colleges, its art museums, its schools of learning, but by its homes. New York has all these, but its people live in tenements where "all the conditions which surround childhood, youth, and womanhood make for unrighteousness."[16] This still, after forty years of battling, during which we have gone on piling layer upon layer of human beings and calling *that* home! The 15,309 tenements the Council of Hygiene found in 1864 have become 47,000, and their population of 495,592 has swelled into nearly a million and three-quarters.[17] There were four flights of stairs at most in the old days. Now they build tenements six and

seven stories high, and the street has become a mere runway. It cannot take up the crowds for which it was never meant. Go look at those East Side streets on a summer evening or on any fair Sunday when, at all events, some of the workers are at home, and see what they are like. In 1880 the average number of persons to each dwelling in New York, counting them all in, the rich and the poor, was 16.37; in 1890 it was 18.52; in 1900, according to the United States census, the average in the old city was 20.4. It all means that there are so many more and so much bigger tenements, and four families to the floor where there were two before. Statistics are not my hobby. I like to get their human story out of them. Anybody who wants them can get the figures in the census books. But as an instance of the unchecked drift—unchecked as yet—look at this record of the Tenth Ward, the "most crowded spot in the world." In 1880, when it had not yet attained to that bad eminence, it contained 47,554 persons, or 432.3 to the acre. In 1890 the census showed a population of 57,596, which was 522 to the acre. The police census of 1895 found 70,168 persons living in 1514 houses, which was 643.08 to the acre. The Health Department's census for the first half of 1898 gave a total of 82,175 persons living in 1201 tenements, with 313 inhabited buildings yet to be heard from. This is the process of doubling up,—literally, since the cause and the vehicle of it all is the double-decker tenement,—which in the year 1900 had crowded a single block in that ward at the rate of 1724 persons per acre, and one in the Eleventh Ward at the rate of 1894.[18] It goes on not in the Tenth Ward or on the East Side only, but throughout the city. When, in 1897, it was proposed to lay out a small park in the Twenty-second Ward, up on the far

West Side, it was shown that five blocks in that section, between Forty-ninth and Sixty-second streets and Ninth and Eleventh avenues, had a population of more than 3000 each. The block between Sixty-first and Sixty-second streets and Tenth and Eleventh avenues harbored 4254 when the police made a count in 1900, which meant 1158 persons to the acre.

These are the facts. The question is, are they beyond our control? Let us look at them squarely and see. In the first place, it is no answer to the charge that New York's way of housing its workers is the worst in the world to say that they are better off than they were where they came from. It is not true, in most cases, as far as the home is concerned; a shanty is better than a flat in a slum tenement, any day. Even if it were true, it would still be beside the issue. In Poland my capmaker counted for nothing. Nothing was expected of him. Here he ranks, after a few brief years, politically equal with the man who hires his labor. A citizen's duty is expected of him, and home and citizenship are convertible terms. The observation of the Frenchman who had watched the experiment of herding two thousand human beings in eight tenement barracks over yonder, that the result was the "exasperation of the tenant against society," is true the world over. We have done as badly in New York. Social hatefulness is not a good soil for citizenship to grow in, where political equality rules.

Nor is it going to help us any to charge it all to the tenant "who *will* herd." He herds because he has no other chance; because it puts money into some one's pockets to let him. We never yet have passed a law for his relief that was not attacked in the same or the

next legislature in the interest of the tenement-house builder. Commission after commission has pointed out that the tenants are "better than the houses they live in"; that they "respond quickly to improved conditions." Those are not honest answers. The man who talks that way is a fool, or worse.

The truth is that if we cannot stop the crowds from coming, we *can* make homes for those who come, and at a profit on the investment. That has been proved, is being proved now every day. It is not a case of transforming human nature in the tenant, but of reforming it in the landlord builder. It is a plain question of the per cent he is willing to take.

So then, we have got it on the moral ground where it belongs. Let the capmaker's case be ever so strong, we shall yet win. We shall win his fight and our own together; they are one. This is the way it stands at the outset of the twentieth century: New York's housing is still the worst in the world. We have the biggest crowds. We have been killing the home that is our very life at the most reckless rate. But, badly as we are off and shall be off for years to come,—allowing even that we are getting worse off in the matter of crowding,—we know now that we can do better. We have done it. We are every year wresting more light and air from the builder. He no longer dares come out and fight in the open, for he knows that public sentiment is against him. The people understand—to what an extent is shown in a report of a Tenement House Committee in the city of Yonkers, which the postman put on my table this minute. The committee was organized "to prevent the danger to Yonkers of incurring the same evils that have fallen so heavily upon New York and have cost that city millions of money and thousands of

lives." It sprang from the Civic League, was appointed by a Republican mayor and indorsed by a Democratic council! That is as it should be. So, we shall win.

In fact, we are winning now, backed by this very understanding. The double-decker is doomed, and the twenty-five-foot lot has had its day. We are building tenements in which it is possible to rear homes. We are at last in a fair way to make the slum unprofitable, and that is the only way to make it go. So that we may speed it the more let us go with the capmaker a while and get his point of view. After all, that is the one that counts; the community is not nearly as much interested in the profits of the landlord as in the welfare of the workers.

That we may get it fairly, suppose we take a stroll through a tenement-house neighborhood and see for ourselves. We were in Stanton Street. Let us start there, then, going east. Towering barracks on either side, five, six stories high. Teeming crowds. Push-cart men "moved on" by the policeman, who seems to exist only for the purpose. Forsyth Street: there is a church on the corner, Polish and Catholic, a combination that strikes one as queer here on the East Side, where Polish has come to be synonymous with Jewish. I have cause to remember that corner. A man killed his wife in this house, and was hanged for it. Just across the street, on the stoop of that brown-stone tenement, the tragedy was reënacted the next year; only the murderer saved the county trouble and expense by taking himself off also. That other stoop in the same row witnessed a suicide.

Why do I tell you these things? Because they are true. The policeman here will bear me out. They

belong to the ordinary setting of life in a crowd such as this. It is never so little worth living, and therefore held so cheap along with the fierce, unceasing battle that goes on to save it. You will go no further unless I leave it out? Very well; I shall leave out the murder after we have passed the block yonder. The tragedy of that is of a kind that comes too close to the everyday life of tenement-house people to be omitted. The house caught fire in the night, and five were burned to death,—father, mother, and three children. The others got out; why not they? They stayed, it seems, to make sure none was left; they were not willing to leave one behind, to save themselves. And then it was too late; the stairs were burning. There was no proper fire escape. That was where the murder came in; but it was not all chargeable to the landlord, nor even the greater part. More than thirty years ago, in 1867, the state made it law that the stairs in every tenement four stories high should be fireproof, and forbade the storing of any inflammable material in such houses. I do not know when the law was repealed, or if it ever was. I only know that in 1892 the Fire Department, out of pity for the tenants and regard for the safety of its own men, forced through an amendment to the building law, requiring the stairs of the common type of five-story tenements to be built of fireproof material, and that they are still of wood, just as they always were. Ninety-seven per cent of the tenements examined by the late Tenement House Commission (1900) in Manhattan had stairs of wood. In Brooklyn they were *all* of wood. Once, a couple of years ago, I looked up the Superintendent of Buildings and asked him what it meant. I showed him the law, which said that the stairs should be "built of slow-burning construction or fireproof material"; and he put his

finger upon the clause that follows, "as the Superintendent of Buildings shall decide." The law gave him discretion, and that is how he used it. "Hard wood burns slowly," said he.

The fire of which I speak was a "cruller fire," if I remember rightly, which is to say that it broke out in the basement bakeshop, where they were boiling crullers (doughnuts) in fat, at 4 A.M., with a hundred tenants asleep in the house above them. The fat went into the fire, and the rest followed. I suppose that I had to do with a hundred such fires, as a police reporter, before, under the protest of the Gilder Tenement House Commission and the Good Government Clubs, the boiling of fat in tenement bakeshops was forbidden. The Chief of the Fire Department, in his testimony before the commission, said that "tenements are erected mainly with a view of returning a large income for the amount of capital invested. It is only after a fire in which great loss of life occurs that any interest whatever is taken in the safety of the occupants." The Superintendent of Buildings, after such a fire in March, 1896, said that there were thousands of tenement firetraps in the city. My reporter's notebook bears witness to the correctness of his statement, and it has many blank leaves that are waiting to be put to that use yet. The reckoning for eleven years showed that, of 35,844 fires in New York, 53.18 per cent were in tenement houses, though they were only a little more than 31 per cent of all the buildings, and that 177 occupants were killed, 523 maimed, and 625 rescued by the firemen. Their rescue cost the lives of three of these brave men, and 453 were injured in the effort. And when all that is said, not the half is told. A fire in the night in one of those human beehives, with its terror

and woe, is one of the things that live in the recollection ever after as a terrible nightmare. The fire-chief thought that every tenement house should be fireproof, but he warned the commission that such a proposition would "meet with strong opposition from the different interests, should legislation be requested." He was right. It is purely a question of the builder's profits. Up to date we have rescued the first floor from him. That must be fireproof. We shall get the whole structure yet if we pull long enough and hard enough, as we will.

Here is a block of tenements inhabited by poor Jews. Most of the Jews who live over here are poor; and the poorer they are, the higher rent do they pay, and the more do they crowd to make it up between them. "The destruction of the poor is their poverty." It is only the old story in a new setting. The slum landlord's profits were always the highest. He spends nothing for repairs, and lays the blame on the tenant. The "district leader" saves him, when Tammany is at the helm, unless he is on the wrong side of the political fence, in which case the Sanitary Code comes handy, to chase him into camp. A big "order" on his house is a very effective way of making a tenement-house landlord discern political truth on the eve of an important election. Just before the election which put Theodore Roosevelt in the Governor's chair at Albany the sanitary force displayed such activity as had never been known till then in the examination of tenements belonging very largely, as it happened, to sympathizers with the gallant Rough Rider's cause; and those who knew did not marvel much at the large vote polled by the Tammany candidate in the old city.

The halls of these tenements are dark. Under the

law there should be a light burning, but it is one of the rarest things to find one. The thing seems well-nigh impossible of accomplishment. When the Good Government Clubs set about backing up the Board of Health in its efforts to work out this reform, which comes close to being one of the most necessary of all, —such untold mischief is abroad in the darkness of these thoroughfares,—the sanitary police reported 12,000 tenement halls unlighted by night, even, and brought them, by repeated orders, down to less than 1000 in six months. I doubt that the light burned in 1000 of them all a month after the election that brought Tammany back. It is so easy to put it out when the policeman's back is turned. Gas costs money. Let what doesn't take care of itself.

We had a curious instance, at the time, of the difficulties that sometimes beset reform. Certain halls that were known to be dark were reported sufficiently lighted by the policeman of the district, and it was discovered that it was his standard that was vitiated. He himself lived in a tenement, and was used to its gloom. So an order was issued defining darkness to the sanitary police: if the sink in the hall could be made out, and the slops overflowing on the floor, and if a baby could be seen on the stairs, the hall was light; if, on the other hand, the baby's shrieks were the first warning that it was being trampled upon, the hall was dark. Some days later the old question arose about an Eldridge Street tenement. The policeman had reported the hall light enough. The President of the Board of Health, to settle it once for all, went over with me, to see for himself. The hall was very dark. He sent for the policeman.

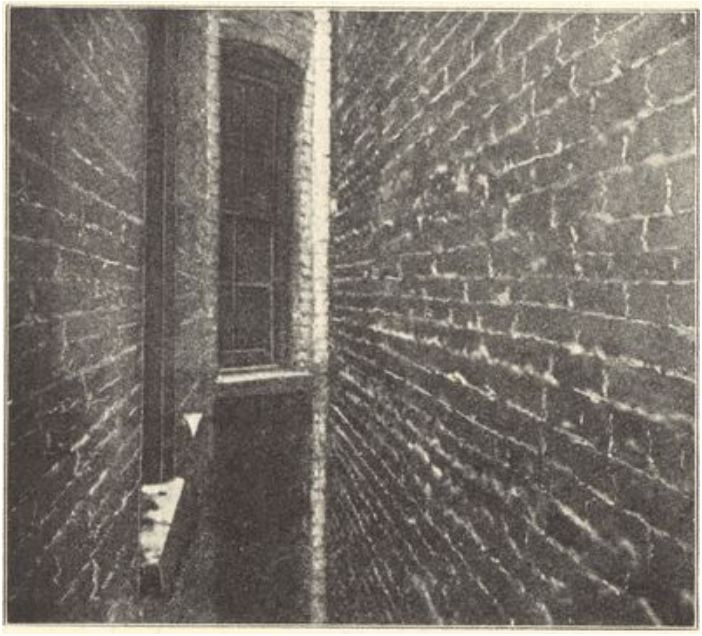
"Did you see the sink in that hall?" he asked.

The policeman said he did.

"But it is pitch dark. How did you see it?"

"I lit a match," said the policeman.

Four families live on these floors, with heaven knows how many children. It was here the police commissioners were requested, in sober earnest, some years ago, by a committee of very practical woman philanthropists, to have the children tagged, as they do in Japan, I am told, so as to save the policeman wear and tear in taking them back and forth between the Eldridge Street police station and headquarters, when they got lost. If tagged, they could be assorted at once and taken to their homes. Incidentally, the city would save the expense of many meals. It was shrewdly suspected that the little ones were lost on purpose in a good many cases, as a way of getting them fed at the public expense.



One Family's Outlook on the Air Shaft. The Mother said, "Our Daughter does not care to come Home to Sleep."

That the children preferred the excitement of the police station, and the distinction of a trip in charge of a brass-buttoned guardian, to the Ludlow Street flat is easy enough to understand. A more unlovely existence than that in one of these tenements it would be hard to imagine. Everywhere is the stench of the kerosene stove that is forever burning, serving for cooking, heating, and ironing alike, until the last atom of oxygen is burned out of the close air. Oil is cheaper than coal. The air shaft is too busy carrying up smells from below to bring any air down, even if it is not hung full of washing in every story, as it ordinarily is. Enterprising tenants turn it to use as a

refrigerator as well. There is at least a draught of air, such as it is. When fire breaks out, this draught makes of the air shaft a flue through which the fire roars fiercely to the roof, so transforming what was meant for the good of the tenants into their greatest peril. The stuffy rooms bring to mind this denunciation of the tenement builder of fifty years ago by an angry writer, "He measures the height of his ceilings by the shortest of the people, and by thin partitions divides the interior into as narrow spaces as the leanest carpenter can work in." Most decidedly, there is not room to swing the proverbial cat in any one of them. In one I helped the children, last holiday, to set up a Christmas tree, so that a glimpse of something that was not utterly sordid and mean might for once enter their lives. Three weeks after, I found the tree standing yet in the corner. It was very cold, and there was no fire in the room. "We were going to burn it," said the little woman, whose husband was then in the insane asylum, "and then I couldn't. It looked so kind o' cheery-like there in the corner." My tree had borne the fruit I wished.

It remained for the New York slum landlord to assess the exact value of a ray of sunlight,—upon the tenant, of course. Here are two back-to-back rear tenements, with dark bedrooms on the south. The flat on the north gives upon a neighbor's yard, and a hole two feet square has been knocked in the wall, letting in air and sunlight; little enough of the latter, but what there is is carefully computed in the lease. Six dollars for this flat, six and a half for the one with the hole in the wall. Six dollars a year per ray. In half a dozen houses in this block have I found the same rate maintained. The modern tenement on the corner goes higher: for four front rooms, "where the

sun comes right in your face," seventeen dollars; for the rear flat of three rooms, larger and better every other way, but always dark, like the capmaker's, eleven dollars. From the landlord's point of view, this last is probably a concession. But he is a landlord with a heart. His house is as good a one as can be built on a twenty-five-foot lot. The man who owns the corner building in Orchard Street, with the two adjoining tenements, has no heart. In the depth of last winter I found a family of poor Jews living in a coop under his stairs, an abandoned piece of hallway, in which their baby was born, and for which he made them pay eight dollars a month. It was the most outrageous case of landlord robbery I had ever come across, and it gave me sincere pleasure to assist the sanitary policeman in curtailing his profits by even this much. The hall is not now occupied.

The Jews under the stairs had two children. The shoemaker in the cellar next door had three. They were fighting and snarling like so many dogs over the coarse food on the table before them, when we looked in. The baby, it seems, was the cause of the row. He wanted it all. He was a very dirty and a very fierce baby, and the other two children were no match for him. The shoemaker grunted fretfully at his last, "Ach, he is all de time hungry!" At the sight of the policeman, the young imp set up such a howl that we beat a hasty retreat. The cellar "flat" was undoubtedly in violation of law, but it was allowed to pass. In the main hall, on the ground floor, we counted seventeen children. The facts of life here suspend ordinary landlord prejudices to a certain extent. Occasionally it is the tenant who suspends them. The policeman laughed as he told me of the

case of a mother who coveted a flat into which she well knew her family would not be admitted; the landlord was particular. She knocked, with a troubled face, alone. Yes, the flat was to let; had she any children? The woman heaved a sigh. "Six, but they are all in Greenwood." The landlord's heart was touched by such woe. He let her have the flat. By night he was amazed to find a flock of half a dozen robust youngsters domiciled under his roof. They had indeed been in Greenwood; but they had come back from the cemetery to stay. And stay they did, the rent being paid.

High rents, slack work, and low wages go hand in hand in the tenements as promoters of overcrowding. The rent is always one-fourth of the family income, often more. The fierce competition for a bare living cuts down wages; and when loss of work is added, the only thing left is to take in lodgers to meet the landlord's claim. The Jew usually takes them singly, the Italian by families. The midnight visit of the sanitary policeman discloses a state of affairs against which he feels himself helpless. He has his standard: 400 cubic feet of air space for each adult sleeper, 200 for a child. That in itself is a concession to the practical necessities of the case. The original demand was for 600 feet. But of 28,000 and odd tenants canvassed in New York, in the slumming investigation prosecuted by the general government in 1894, 17,047 were found to have less than 400 feet, and of these 5526 slept in unventilated rooms with no windows. No more such rooms have been added since; but there has come that which is worse.

It was the boast of New York, till a few years ago, that at least that worst of tenement depravities, the one-room house, too familiar in the English slums,

was practically unknown here. It is not so any longer. The evil began in the old houses in Orchard and Allen streets, a bad neighborhood, infested by fallen women and the thievish rascals who prey upon their misery,—a region where the whole plan of humanity, if plan there be in this disgusting mess, jars out of tune continually. The furnished-room house has become an institution here, speeded on by a conscienceless Jew who bought up the old buildings as fast as they came into the market, and filled them with a class of tenants before whom charity recoils, helpless and hopeless. When the houses were filled, the crowds overflowed into the yard. In one, I found, in midwinter, tenants living in sheds built of odd boards and roof tin, and paying a dollar a week for herding with the rats. One of them, a red-faced German, was a philosopher after his kind. He did not trouble himself to get up, when I looked in, but stretched himself in his bed,—it was high noon,—responding to my sniff of disgust that it was "sehr schoen! ein bischen kalt, aber was!" His neighbor, a white-haired old woman, begged, trembling, not to be put out. She would not know where to go. It was out of one of these houses that Fritz Meyer, the murderer, went to rob the poor box in the Redemptorist Church, the night when he killed policeman Smith. The policeman surprised him at his work. In the room he had occupied I came upon a brazen-looking woman with a black eye, who answered the question of the officer, "Where did you get that shiner?" with a laugh. "I ran up against the fist of me man," she said. Her "man," a big, sullen lout, sat by, dumb. The woman answered for him that he was a mechanic.

"What does he work at?" snorted the policeman,

restraining himself with an effort from kicking the fellow.

She laughed scornfully, "At the junk business." It meant that he was a thief.

Young men, with blotched faces and cadaverous looks, were loafing in every room. They hung their heads in silence. The women turned their faces away at the sight of the uniform. They cling to these wretches, who exploit their starved affections for their own ease, with a grip of desperation. It is their last hold. Women have to love something. It is their deepest degradation that they must love these. Even the wretches themselves feel the shame of it, and repay them by beating and robbing them, as their daily occupation. A poor little baby in one of the rooms gave a shuddering human touch to it all.

The old houses began it, as they began all the tenement mischief that has come upon New York. But the opportunity that was made by the tenant's need was not one to be neglected. In some of the newer tenements, with their smaller rooms, the lodger is by this time provided for in the plan, with a special entrance from the hall. "Lodger" comes, by an easy transition, to stand for "family." One winter's night I went with the sanitary police on their midnight inspection through a row of Elizabeth Street tenements which I had known since they were built, seventeen or eighteen years ago. That is the neighborhood in which the recent Italian immigrants crowd. In the house which we selected for examination, in all respects the type of the rest, we found forty-three families where there should have been sixteen. Upon each floor were four flats, and in each flat three rooms that measured respectively 14

× 11, 7 × 11, and 7 × 8-1/2 feet. In only one flat did we find a single family. In three there were two to each. In the other twelve each room had its own family living and sleeping there. They cooked, I suppose, at the one stove in the kitchen, which was the largest room. In one big bed we counted six persons, the parents and four children. Two of them lay crosswise at the foot of the bed, or there would not have been room. A curtain was hung before the bed in each of the two smaller rooms, leaving a passageway from the hall to the room with the windows. The rent for the front flats was twelve dollars; for that in the rear ten dollars. The social distinctions going with the advantage of location were rigidly observed, I suppose. The three steps across a tenement hall, from the front to "the back," are often a longer road than from Ludlow Street to Fifth Avenue.

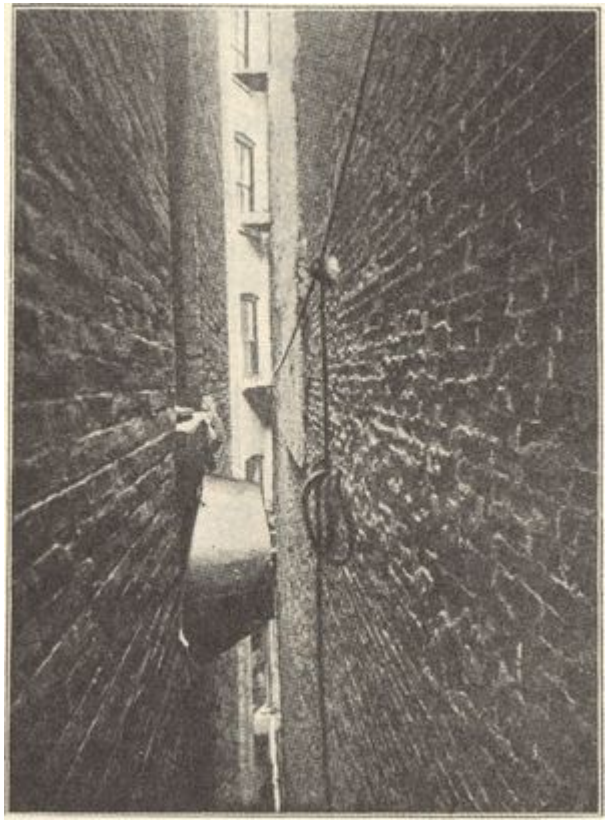
They were sweaters' tenements. But I shall keep that end of the story until I come to speak of the tenants. The houses I have in mind now. They were Astor leasehold property, and I had seen them built upon the improved plan of 1879, with air shafts and all that. There had not been water in the tenements for a month then, we were told by the one tenant who spoke English that could be understood. The cold snap had locked the pipes. Fitly enough, the lessee was an undertaker, an Italian himself, who combined with his business of housing his people above and below the ground also that of the padrone, to let no profit slip. He had not taken the trouble to make many or recent repairs. The buildings had made a fair start; they promised well. But the promise had not been kept. In their premature decay they were distinctly as bad as the

worst. I had the curiosity to seek out the agent, the middleman, and ask him why they were so. He shrugged his shoulders. With such tenants nothing could be done, he said. I have always held that Italians are most manageable, and that, with all the surface indications to the contrary, they are really inclined to cleanliness, if cause can be shown, and I told him so. He changed the subject diplomatically. No doubt it was with him simply a question of the rent. They might crowd and carry on as they pleased, once that was paid; and they did. It used to be the joke of Elizabeth Street that when the midnight police came, the tenants would keep them waiting outside, pretending to search for the key, until the surplus population of men had time to climb down the fire-escape. When the police were gone they came back. We surprised them all in bed.

Like most of the other tenements we have come across on our trip, these were double-deckers. That is the type of tenement that is responsible for the crowding that till now has gone on unchecked. For twenty years it has been replacing the older barracks everywhere, as fast as they rotted or were torn down.

This double-decker was thus described by the Tenement House Commission of 1894: "It is the one hopeless form of tenement construction. It cannot be well ventilated, it cannot be well lighted; it is not safe in case of fire. It is built on a lot 25 feet wide by 100 or less in depth, with apartments for four families in each story. This necessitates the occupation of from 86 to 90 per cent of the lot's depth. The stairway, made in the centre of the house, and the necessary walls and partitions reduce the width of the middle rooms (which serve as bedrooms for at least two people each) to 9 feet each at the

most, and a narrow light and air shaft, now legally required in the centre of each side wall, still further lessens the floor space of these middle rooms. Direct light is only possible for the rooms at the front and rear. The middle rooms must borrow what light they can from dark hallways, the shallow shafts, and the rear rooms. Their air must pass through other rooms or the tiny shafts, and cannot but be contaminated before it reaches them. A five-story house of this character contains apartments for eighteen or twenty families, a population frequently amounting to 100 people, and sometimes increased by boarders or lodgers to 150 or more."



The only Bath-Tub in the Block: it hangs in the Air Sha

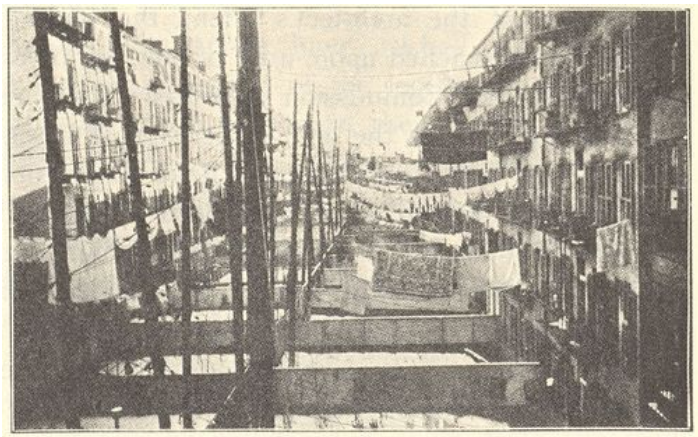
The commission, after looking in vain through the slums of the Old World cities for something to compare the double-deckers with, declared that, in their setting, the separateness and sacredness of home life were interfered with, and evils bred, physical and moral, that "conduce to the corruption of the young." "Make for unrighteousness" said the commission of 1900, six years later.

Yet it is for these that the "interests" of which the

fire-chief spoke have rushed into battle at almost every session of the legislature, whenever a step was taken to arraign them before the bar of public opinion. No winter has passed, since the awakening conscience of the people of New York City manifested itself in a desire to better the lot of the other half, that has not seen an assault made, in one shape or another, on the structure of tenement-house law built up with such anxious solicitude. Once a bill to exempt from police supervision, by withdrawing them from the tenement-house class, the very worst of the houses, whose death-rate threatened the community, was sneaked through the legislature all unknown, and had reached the executive before the alarm was sounded. The Governor, put upon his guard, returned the bill, with the indorsement that he was unable to understand what could have prompted a measure that seemed to have reason and every argument against it and none for it.

But the motive is not so obscure, after all. It is the same old one of profit without conscience. It took from the Health Department the supervision of the light, ventilation, and plumbing of the tenements, which by right belonged there, and put it in charge of a compliant Building Department, "for the convenience of architects and their clients, and the saving of time and expense to them." For the convenience of the architect's client, the builder, the lot was encroached upon, until of one big block which the Gilder Commission measured only 7 per cent was left open to the air; 93 per cent of it was covered with brick and mortar. Rear tenements, to the number of nearly 100, have been condemned as "slaughter-houses," with good reason, but this block was built practically solid. The average of space

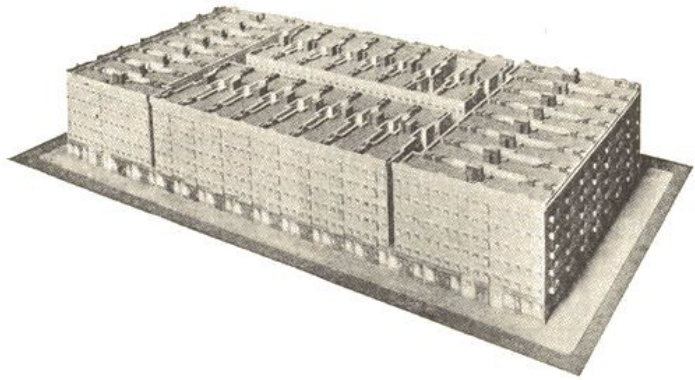
covered in 34 tenement blocks was shown to be 78.13 per cent. The law allowed only 65. The "discretion" that penned tenants in a burning tenement with stairs of wood for the builder's "convenience" cut down the chance of life of their babies unmoved. Sunlight and air mean just that, where three thousand human beings are packed into a single block. That was why the matter was given into the charge of the health officials, when politics was yet kept out of their work.



The Old Style of Tenements, with Yards.

Of such kind are the interests that oppose betterment of the worker's hard lot in New York, that dictated the appointment by Tammany of a commission composed of builders to revise its code of tenement laws, and that sneered at the "laughable results of the Gilder Tenement House Commission." Those results made for the health and happiness and safety of a million and a half of souls, and were accounted, on every humane ground, the longest step forward that had been taken by this community. For

the old absentee landlord, who did not know what mischief was afoot, we have got the speculative builder, who does know, but does not care, so long as he gets his pound of flesh. Half of the just laws that have been passed for the relief of the people he has paralyzed with his treacherous discretion clause, carefully nursed in the school of practical politics to which he gives faithful adherence. The thing has been the curse of our city from the day when the earliest struggle toward better things began. Among the first manifestations of that was the prohibition of soap factories below Grand Street by the Act of 1797, which created a Board of Health with police powers. The act was passed in February, to take effect in July; but long before that time the same legislature had amended it by giving the authorities discretion in the matter. And the biggest soap factory of them all is down there to this day, and is even now stirring up a rumpus among the latest immigrants, the Syrians, who have settled about it. No doubt it is all a question of political education; but is not a hundred years enough to settle this much, that compromise is out of place where the lives of the people are at stake, and that it is time our years of "discretion" were numbered?



As a Solid Block of Double-deckers. Lawful until now, would appear.

At last there comes for the answer an emphatic yes. This year the law has killed the discretionary clause and spoken out plainly. No more stairs of wood; no more encroachment on the tenants' sunlight; and here, set in its frame of swarming tenements, is a wide, open space, yet to be a real park, with flowers and grass and birds to gladden the hearts of those to whom such things have been as tales that are told, all these dreary years, and with a playground in which the children of yonder big school may roam at will, undismayed by landlord or policeman. Not all the forces of reaction can put back the barracks that were torn down as one of the "laughable results" of that very Tenement House Commission's work, or restore to the undertaker his profits from Bone Alley of horrid memory. It was the tenant's turn to laugh, that time. Half a dozen blocks away, among even denser swarms, is another such plot, where there will be football and a skating pond before another season. They are breaking ground to-day. Seven years of official red tape have we had since the plans were first made, and it isn't all

unwound yet; but it will be speedily now, and we shall hear the story of those parks and rejoice that the day of reckoning is coming for the builder without a soul. Till then let him deck the fronts of his tenements with bravery of plate glass and brass to hide the darkness within. He has done his worst.

We can go no farther. Yonder lies the river. A full mile we have come, through unbroken ranks of tenements with their mighty, pent-up multitudes. Here they seem, with a common impulse, to overflow into the street. From corner to corner it is crowded with girls and children, dragging babies nearly as big as themselves, with desperate endeavor to lose nothing of the show. There is a funeral in the block. Unnumbered sewing-machines cease for once their tireless rivalry with the flour mill in the next block, that is forever grinding in a vain effort to catch up. Heads are poked from windows. On the stoops hooded and shawled figures have front seats. The crowd is hardly restrained by the policeman and the undertaker in holiday mourning, who clear a path by main strength to the plumed hearse. The eager haste, the frantic rush to see,—what does it not tell of these starved lives, of the quality of their aims and ambitions? The mill clatters loudly; there is one mouth less to fill. In the midst of it all, with clamor of urgent gong, the patrol wagon rounds the corner, carrying two policemen precariously perched upon a struggling "drunk," a woman. The crowd scatters, following the new sensation. The tragedies of death and life in the slum have met together.

Many a mile I might lead you along these rivers, east and west, through the island of Manhattan, and find little else than we have seen. The great crowd is yet below Fourteenth Street, but the northward

march knows no slackening of pace. As the tide sets up-town, it reproduces faithfully the scenes of the older wards, though with less of their human interest than here, where the old houses, in all their ugliness, have yet some imprint of the individuality of their tenants. Only on feast days does Little Italy, in Harlem, recall the Bend when it put on holiday attire. Anything more desolate and disheartening than the unending rows of tenements, all alike and all equally repellent, of the up-town streets, it is hard to imagine. Hell's Kitchen in its ancient wickedness was picturesque, at least, with its rocks and its goats and shanties. Since the negroes took possession it is only dull, except when, once in a while, the remnant of the Irish settlers make a stand against the intruders. Vain hope! Perpetual eviction is their destiny. Negro, Italian, and Jew, biting the dust with many a bruised head under the Hibernian's stalwart fist, resistlessly drive him before them, nevertheless, out of house and home. The landlord pockets the gate money. The old robbery still goes on. Where the negro pitches his tent, he pays more rent than his white neighbor next door, and is a better tenant. And he is good game forever. He never buys the tenement, as the Jew or the Italian is likely to do when he has scraped up money enough to reënact, after his own fashion, the trick taught him by his oppressor. The black column has reached the hundredth street on the East Side, and the sixties on the West,[19] and there for the present it halts. Jammed between Africa, Italy, and Bohemia, the Irishman has abandoned the East Side up-town. Only west of Central Park does he yet face his foe, undaunted in defeat as in victory. The local street nomenclature, in which the directory has no hand,—Nigger Row, Mixed Ale Flats, etc.,—indicates the

hostile camps with unerring accuracy.

Up-town or down-town, as the tenements grow taller, the thing that is rarest to find is the home of the olden days, even as it was in the shanty on the rocks. "No home, no family, no manhood, no patriotism!" said the old Frenchman. Seventy-seven per cent of their young prisoners, say the managers of the state reformatory, have no moral sense, or next to none. "Weakness, not wickedness, ails them," adds the prison chaplain; no manhood, that is to say. It is the stamp of the home that is lacking, and we need to be about restoring it, if we would be safe. Years ago, roaming through the British Museum, I came upon an exhibit that riveted my attention as nothing else had. It was a huge stone arm, torn from the shoulder of some rock image, with doubled fist and every rigid muscle instinct with angry menace. Where it came from or what was its story I do not know. I did not ask. It was its message to us I was trying to read. I had been spending weary days and nights in the slums of London, where hatred grew, a noxious crop, upon the wreck of the home. Lying there, mute and menacing, the great fist seemed to me like a shadow thrown from the gray dawn of the race into our busy day with a purpose, a grim, unheeded warning. What was it? In the slum the question haunts me yet. They perished, the empires those rock-hewers built, and the governments reared upon their ruins are long since dead and forgotten. They were born to die, for they were not built upon human happiness, but upon human terror and greed. We built ours upon the bed rock, and its cornerstone is the home. With this bitter mockery of it that makes the slum, can it be that the warning is indeed for us?[Back to Contents]

## CHAPTER V

### "DRUV INTO DECENCY"

I stood at Seven Dials and heard the policeman's account of what it used to be. Seven Dials is no more like the slum of old than is the Five Points to-day. The conscience of London wrought upon the one as the conscience of New York upon the other. A mission house, a children's refuge, two big schools, and, hard by, a public bath and a wash-house, stand as the record of the battle with the slum, which, with these forces in the field, has but one ending. The policeman's story rambled among the days when things were different. Then it was dangerous for an officer to go alone there at night.

Around the corner there came from one of the side streets a procession with banners, parading in honor and aid of some church charity. We watched it pass. In it marched young men and boys with swords and battle-axes, and upon its outskirts skipped a host of young roughs—so one would have called them but for the evidence of their honest employment—who rattled collection boxes, reaping a harvest of pennies from far and near. I looked at the battle-axes and the collection boxes, and thought of forty years ago. Where was the Seven Dials of that day, and the men who gave it its bad name? I asked the policeman.

"They were druv into decency, sor," he said, and answered from his own experience the question ever asked by faint-hearted philanthropists. "My father, he done duty here afore me in '45. The worst dive was where that church stands. It was always full of

thieves,"—whose sons, I added mentally, have become collectors for the church. The one fact was a whole chapter on the slum.

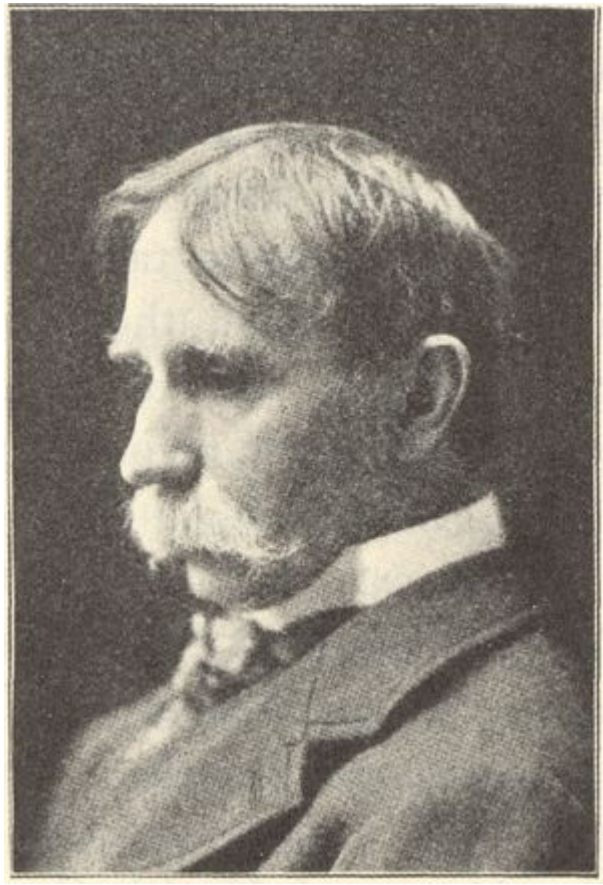
London's way with the tenant we adopted at last in New York with the slum landlord. He was "druv into decency." We had to. Moral suasion had been stretched to the limit. The point had been reached where one knock-down blow outweighed a bushel of arguments. It was all very well to build model tenements as object lessons to show that the thing could be done; it had become necessary to enforce the lesson by demonstrating that the community had power to destroy houses which were a menace to its life. The rear tenements were chosen for this purpose.

They were the worst, as they were the first, of New York's tenements. The double-deckers of which I have spoken had, with all their evils, at least this to their credit, that their death-rate was not nearly as high as that of the old houses. That was not because of any virtue inherent in the double-deckers, but because the earlier tenements were old, and built in a day that knew nothing of sanitary restrictions, and cared less. Hence the showing that the big tenements had much the lowest mortality. The death-rate does not sound the depths of tenement-house evils, but it makes a record that is needed when it comes to attacking property rights. The mortality of the rear tenements had long been a scandal. They are built in the back yard, generally back to back with the rear buildings on abutting lots. If there is an open space between them, it is never more than a slit a foot or so wide, and gets to be the receptacle of garbage and filth of every kind; so that any opening made in these walls for purposes of ventilation becomes a source of

greater danger than if there were none. The last count that was made, in 1900, showed that among the 44,850 tenements in Manhattan and the Bronx there were still 2143 rear houses left.[20] Where they are the death-rate rises, for reasons that are apparent. The sun cannot reach them. They are damp and dark, and the tenants, who are always the poorest and most crowded, live "as in a cage open only toward the front." A canvass made of the mortality records by Dr. Roger S. Tracy, the registrar of records, showed that while in the First Ward (the oldest), for instance, the death-rate in houses standing singly on the lot was 29.03 per 1000 of the living, where there were rear houses it rose to 61.97. The infant death-rate is a still better test; that rose from 109.58 in the single tenements of the same ward to 204.54 where there were rear houses.[21] One in every five babies had to die; that is to say, the house killed it. No wonder the Gilder commission styled the rear tenements "slaughter-houses," and called upon the legislature to root them out, and with them every old, ramshackle, disease-breeding tenement in the city.

A law which is in substance a copy of the English act for destroying slum property was passed in the spring of 1895. It provided for the seizure of buildings that were dangerous to the public health or unfit for human habitation, and their destruction upon proper proof, with compensation to the owner on a sliding scale down to the point of entire unfitness, when he might claim only the value of the material in his house. Up to that time, the only way to get rid of such a house had been to declare it a nuisance under the sanitary code; but as the city could not very well pay for the removal of a

nuisance, to order it down seemed too much like robbery; so the owner was allowed to keep it. It takes time and a good many lives to grow a sentiment such as this law expressed. The Anglo-Saxon respect for vested rights is strong in us also. I remember going through a ragged school in London, once, and finding the eyes of the children in the infant class red and sore. Suspecting some contagion, I made inquiries, and was told that a collar factory next door was the cause of the trouble. The fumes from it poisoned the children's eyes.



Richard Watson Gilder, Chairman of the Tenement Hou
Commission of 1894.

"And you allow it to stay, and let this thing go on?" I asked, in wonder.

The superintendent shrugged his shoulders. "It is their factory," he said.

I was on the point of saying something that might not have been polite, seeing that I was a guest, when

I remembered that, in the newspaper which I carried in my pocket, I had just been reading a plea of some honorable M. P. for a much-needed reform in the system of counsel fees, then being agitated in the House of Commons. The reply of the solicitor general had made me laugh. He was inclined to agree with the honorable member, but still preferred to follow precedent by referring the matter to the Inns of Court. Quite incidentally, he mentioned that the matter had been hanging fire in the House two hundred years. It seemed very English to me then; but when we afterward came to tackle our rear tenements, and in the first batch there was a row which I knew to have been picked out by the sanitary inspector twenty-five years before as fit only to be destroyed, I recognized that we were kin, after all.

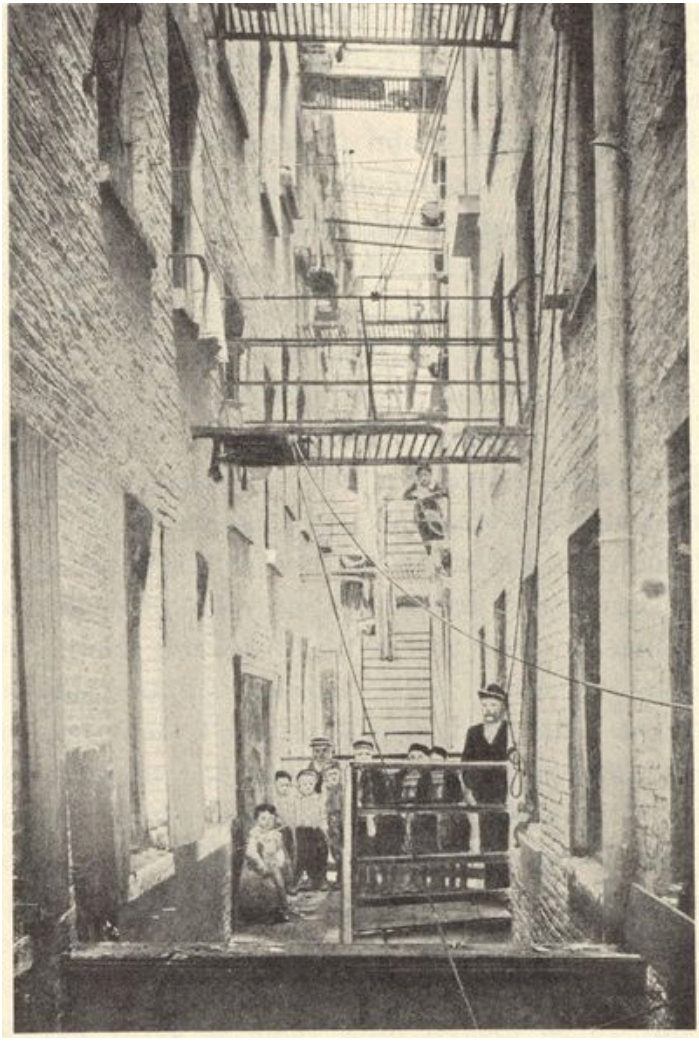
That was Gotham Court. It was first on the list, and the Mott Street Barracks came next, when, as executive officer of the Good Government Clubs, I helped the Board of Health put the law to the test the following year. Roosevelt was Police President and Health Commissioner; nobody was afraid of the landlord. The Health Department kept a list of 66 old houses, with a population of 5460 tenants, in which there had been 1313 deaths in a little over five years (1889-94). From among them we picked our lot, and the department drove the tenants out. The owners went to law, one and all; but, to their surprise and dismay, the courts held with the health officers. The moral effect was instant and overwhelming. Rather than keep up the fight, with no rent coming in, the landlords surrendered at discretion. In consideration of this, compensation was allowed them at the rate of about a thousand dollars a house, although they

were really entitled only to the value of the old bricks. The buildings all came under the head of "wholly unfit." Gotham Court, with its sixteen buildings, in which, many years before, a health inspector counted 146 cases of sickness, including "all kinds of infectious disease," was bought for $19,750, and Mullen's Court, adjoining, for $7251. To show the character of all, let two serve; in each case it is the official record, upon which seizure was made, that is quoted:

No. 98 Catherine Street: "The floor in the apartments and the wooden steps leading to the second-floor apartment are broken, loose, saturated with filth. The roof and eaves gutters leak, rendering the apartments wet. The two apartments on the first floor consist of one room each, in which the tenants are compelled to cook, eat, and sleep. The back walls are defective, the house wet and damp, and unfit for human habitation. It robs the surrounding houses of light."

"The sunlight never enters" was the constant refrain.

No. 17 Sullivan Street: "Occupied by the lowest whites and negroes, living together. The houses are decayed from cellar to garret, and filthy beyond description,—the filthiest, in fact, we have ever seen. The beams, the floors, the plaster on the walls, where there is any plaster, are rotten, and alive with vermin. They are a menace to the public health, and cannot be repaired. Their annual death-rate in five years was 41.38."



The Mott Street Barracks.

The sunlight enters where these stood, at all events, and into 58 other yards that once were plague spots. Of 94 rear tenements seized that year, 60 were torn down, 33 of them voluntarily by the

owners; 29 were remodelled and allowed to stand, chiefly as workshops; 5 other houses were standing empty, and yielding no rent, when I last heard of them. I suppose they have been demolished since. The worst of them all, the Mott Street Barracks, were taken into court by the owner; but all the judges and juries in the land had no power to put them back when it was decided upon a technicality that they should not have been destroyed offhand. It was a case of "They can't put you in jail for that."—"Yes, but I am in jail." They were gone, torn down under the referee's decision that they ought to go, before the Appellate Division called a halt. We were not in a mood to trifle with the Barracks, or risk any of the law's delays. In 1888 I counted 360 tenants in these tenements, front and rear, all Italians, and the infant death-rate of the Barracks that year was 325 per 1000. There were forty babies, and one in three of them had to die. The general infant death-rate for the whole tenement-house population that year was 88.38. In the four years following, during which the population and the death-rate of the houses were both reduced with an effort, fifty-one funerals went out of the Barracks. With entire fitness, a cemetery corporation held the mortgage upon the property. The referee allowed it the price of opening one grave, in the settlement, gave one dollar to the lessee, and one hundred and ten dollars to the landlord, who refused to collect and took his case into the courts. We waited to see the landlord attack the law itself on the score of constitutionality, but he did not. The Court of Appeals decided that it had not been shown that the Barracks might not have been used for some other purpose than a tenement and that therefore we had been hasty. The city paid damages, but it was all right. It was emphatically a

case of haste making for speed. So far the law stands unchallenged, both here and in Massachusetts, where they destroyed twice as many unfit houses as we did in New York and stood their ground on its letter, paying the owners the bare cost of the old timbers.

As in every other instance, we seized only the rear houses at the Barracks; but within a year or two the front houses were also sold and destroyed too, and so disappeared quite the worst rookery that was left on Manhattan Island. Those of us who had explored it with the "midnight police" in its worst days had no cause to wonder at its mortality. In Berlin they found the death-rate per thousand to be 163.5 where a family occupied one room, 22.5 where it lived in two rooms, 7.5 in the case of three-room dwellers, and 5.4 where they had four rooms.[22] Does any one ask yet why we fight the slum in Berlin and New York? The Barracks in those days suggested the first kind.

I have said before that I do not believe in paying the slum landlord for taking his hand off our throats, when we have got the grip on him in turn. Mr. Roger Foster, who as a member of the Tenement House Committee drew the law, and as counsel for the Health Department fought the landlords successfully in the courts, holds to the opposite view. I am bound to say that instances turned up in which it did seem a hardship to deprive the owners of even such property. I remember especially a tenement in Roosevelt Street, which was the patrimony and whole estate of two children. With the rear house taken away, the income from the front would not be enough to cover the interest on the mortgage. It was one of those things that occasionally make standing upon abstract principle so very uncomfortable. I confess I never had the courage to ask what was

done in their case. I know that the tenement went, and I hope—well, never mind what I hope. It has nothing to do with the case. The house is down, and the main issue decided upon its merits.

In the 94 tenements (counting the front houses in; they cannot be separated from the rear tenements in the death registry) there were in five years 956 deaths, a rate of 62.9 at a time when the general city death-rate was 24.63. It was the last and heaviest blow aimed at the abnormal mortality of a city that ought, by reason of many advantages, to be one of the healthiest in the world. With clean streets, pure milk, medical school inspection, antitoxin treatment of deadly diseases, and better sanitary methods generally; with the sunlight let into its slums, and its worst plague spots cleaned out, the death-rate of New York came down from 26.32 per 1000 inhabitants in 1887 to 19.53 in 1897. Inasmuch as a round half million was added to its population within the ten years, it requires little figuring to show that the number whose lives were literally saved by reform would people a city of no mean proportions. The extraordinary spell of hot weather in the summer of 1896, when the temperature hung for ten consecutive days in the nineties, with days and nights of extreme discomfort, brought out the full meaning of this. While many were killed by sunstroke, the population as a whole was shown to have acquired, in better hygienic surroundings, a much greater power of resistance. It yielded slowly to the heat. Where two days had been sufficient, in former years, to send the death-rate up, it now took five; and the infant mortality remained low throughout the dreadful trial. Perhaps the substitution of beer for whiskey as a summer drink

had something to do with it; but Colonel Waring's broom and unpolitical sanitation had more. Since it spared him so many voters, the politician ought to have been grateful for this; but he was not. Death-rates are not as good political arguments as tax rates, we found out. In the midst of it all, a policeman whom I knew went to his Tammany captain to ask if Good Government Clubs were political clubs within the meaning of the law which forbade policemen joining such. The answer he received set me to thinking: "Yes, the meanest, worst kind of political clubs, they are." Yet they had done nothing worse than to save the babies, the captain's with the rest.

The landlord read the signs better, and ran to cover till the storm should blow over. Houses that had hardly known repairs since they were built were put in order with all speed. All over the city, he made haste to set his house to rights, lest it be seized or brought to the bar in other ways. The Good Government Clubs had their hands full that year (1896-97). They made war upon the dark hall in the double-decker, and upon the cruller bakery. They compelled the opening of small parks, or the condemnation of sites for them anyway, exposed the abuses of the civil courts, the "poor man's courts," urged on the building of new schools, cleaned up in the Tombs prison and hastened the demolition of the wicked old pile, and took a hand in evolving a sensible and humane system of dealing with the young vagrants who were going to waste on free soup. The proposition to establish a farm colony for their reclamation was met with the challenge at Albany that "we have had enough reform in New York City," and, as the event proved, for the time being we had really gone as far as we could. But

even that was a good long way. Some things had been nailed that could never again be undone; and hand in hand with the effort to destroy had gone another to build up, that promised to set us far enough ahead to appeal at last successfully to the self-interest of the builder, if not to his humanity; or, failing that, to compel him to decency. If that promise has not been all kept, the end is not yet. I believe it will be kept.



R. Fulton Cutting, Chairman of the Citizens' Union.

The movement for reform, in the matter of housing the people, had proceeded upon a clearly outlined plan that apportioned to each of several forces its own share of the work. At a meeting held under the auspices of the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, early in the days of the movement, the field had been gone over thoroughly. To the Good Government Clubs fell the task, as already set forth, of compelling the enforcement of the existing tenement-house laws. D. O. Mills, the philanthropic banker, declared his purpose to build hotels which should prove that a bed and lodging as good as any could be furnished to the great army of homeless men at a price that would compete with the cheap lodging houses, and yet yield a profit to the owner. On behalf of a number of well-known capitalists, who had been identified with the cause of tenement-house reform for years, Robert Fulton Cutting, the president of the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, offered to build homes for the working people that should be worthy of the name, on a large scale. A company was formed, and chose for its president Dr. Elgin R. L. Gould, author of the government report on the "Housing of the Working People," the standard work on the subject. A million dollars was raised by public subscription, and operations were begun at once.

Two ideas were kept in mind as fundamental: one, that charity that will not pay will not stay; the other, that nothing can be done with the twenty-five-foot lot. It is the primal curse of our housing system, and any effort toward better things must reckon with it first. Nineteen lots on Sixty-eighth and Sixty-ninth streets, west of Tenth Avenue, were purchased of Mrs. Alfred Corning Clark, who took one tenth of the

capital stock of the City and Suburban Homes Company; and upon these was erected the first block of tenements. This is the neighborhood toward which the population has been setting with ever increasing congestion. Already in 1895 the Twenty-second Ward contained nearly 200,000 souls. I gave figures in the previous chapter that showed a crowding of more than 1100 persons per acre in some of the blocks here where the conditions of the notorious Tenth Ward are certain to be reproduced, if indeed they are not exceeded. In the Fifteenth Assembly District, some distance below, but on the same line, the first sociological canvass of the Federation of Churches had found the churches, schools, and other educational agencies marshalling a frontage of 756 feet on the street, while the saloon fronts stretched themselves over nearly a mile; so that, said the compiler of these pregnant facts, "saloon social ideals are minting themselves on the minds of the people at the ratio of seven saloon thoughts to one educational thought." It would not have been easy to find a spot better fitted for the experiment of restoring the home to its place.



Alfred Corning Clark Buildings.

The Alfred Corning Clark buildings, as they were called in recognition of the effort of this public-spirited woman, have at this writing been occupied five years. They harbor nearly four hundred families, as contented a lot as I ever saw anywhere. The one tenant who left in disgust was a young doctor who had settled on the estate, thinking he could pick up a practice among so many. But he couldn't. They were not often sick, those tenants. Last year only three died, and they were all killed while away from home. So he had good cause of complaint. The rest had none, and having none, they stay, which is no mean blow struck for the home in the battle with the slum. The home feeling can never grow where people do not stay long enough to feel at home, any more than the plant can which the child is pulling up every two or three days to "see if it has roots."

Half the tenement house population—and I am not sure that I ought not to say the whole of it—is everlastingly on the move. Dr. Gould quotes as an instance of it the experience of an assembly district leader in distributing political circulars among the people in a good tenement neighborhood. In three months after the enrolment lists had been made out, one-third of the tenants had moved. No doubt the experience was typical. How can the one who hardly knows what a home means be expected to have any pride or interest in his home in the larger sense: the city? And to what in such men is one to appeal in the interests of civic betterment? That is why every effort that goes to help tie the citizen to one spot long enough to give him the proprietary sense in it which is the first step toward civic interest and pride, is of such account. It is one way in which the public schools as neighborhood houses in the best sense could be of great help, and a chief factor in the success of the social settlement. And that is why model tenements, which pay and foster the home, give back more than a money interest to the community.

They must pay, for else, as I said, they will not stay. These pay four per cent, and are expected to pay five, the company's limit. So it is not strange that the concern has prospered. It has since raised more than one million of dollars, and has built another block, with room for 338 families, on First Avenue and on Sixty-fourth and Sixty-fifth streets, within hail of Battle Row, of anciently warlike memory. Still another block is going up at Avenue A and Seventy-eighth Street, and in West Sixty-second Street, where the colored population crowds, the company is erecting two buildings for negro tenants, where they

will live as well as their white fellows do in *their* model tenements,—a long-delayed act of justice, for as far back as any one can remember the colored man has been paying more and getting less for his money in New York than whites of the same grade, who are poorer tenants every way. The Company's "city homes" come as near being that as any can. There is light and air in abundance, steam heat in winter in the latest ones, fireproof stairs, and deadened partitions to help on the privacy that is at once the most needed and hardest to get in a tenement. The houses do not look like barracks. Any one who has ever seen a row of factory tenements that were just houses, not homes, will understand how much that means. I can think of some such rows now, with their ugly brick fronts, straight up and down without a break and without a vine or a window-box of greens or flowers, and the mere thought of them gives me the blues for the rest of the day. There is nothing of that about these tenements, unless it be the long play-yard between the buildings in Sixty-eighth and Sixty-ninth streets. It is too narrow to have anything in it but asphalt. But the rest makes up for it in part.

All together, the company has redeemed its promise of real model tenements; and it has had no trouble with its tenants. The few and simple rules are readily understood as being for the general good, and so obeyed. It is the old story, told years and years ago by Mr. Alfred T. White when he had built his Riverside tenements in Brooklyn. The tenants "do not have to come up" to the landlord's standard. They are more than abreast of him in his utmost endeavor, if he will only use common sense in the management of his property. They do that in the City and Suburban

Homes Company's buildings. They give their tenants shower-baths and a friend for a rent-collector, their children playrooms and Christmas parties, and the whole neighborhood feels the stimulus of the new and humane plan. In all Battle Row there has not been a scrap, let alone an old-time shindy, since the "accommodation flats" came upon the scene. That is what they call them. It is an everyday observation that the Row has "come up" since some of the old houses have been remodelled. The new that are being built aim visibly toward the higher standard.

The company's rents average a dollar a week per room, and are a trifle higher than those of the old tenements round about; but they have so much more in the way of comfort that the money is eagerly paid; nor is the difference so great that the "picking of tenants" amounts to more than the putting of a premium on steadiness, sobriety, and cleanliness, which in itself is a service to render. One experience of the management which caused some astonishment, but upon reflection was accepted as an encouraging sign, was the refusal of the tenants to use the common wash-tubs in the laundry. They are little used to this day. The women will use the drying racks, but they object to rubbing elbows with their neighbors while they wash their clothes. It is, after all, a sign that the tenement that smothers individuality left them this useful handle, and if the experience squashed the hopes of some who dreamed of municipal wash-houses on the Glasgow plan, there is nothing to grieve over. Every peg of personal pride rescued from the tenement is worth a thousand theories for hanging the hope of improvement on.

With $2,300,000 invested by this time, the company has built city homes for 1450 families, and

has only made a beginning. All the money that is needed for going on with its work is in sight. Nor are the rich the only investors. Of the 400 stockholders 250 have small lots, ten shares and less each, a healthy sign that the company is holding the confidence of the community. It has fairly earned it. No one could have done a greater and better thing for the metropolis than to demonstrate that it is possible to build homes for the toilers as a business and net a business interest upon the investment.

The statement is emphasized by the company's experience with the suburban end of its work. It bought sites for two or three hundred little cottages out on Long Island, but within the greater city, and only half an hour by trolley or elevated from the City Hall. A hundred houses were built, neat and cosey homes of brick and timber, each in its own garden; and a plan was devised under which the purchaser had twenty years to pay for the property. A life insurance policy protected the seller and secured the house to the widow should the breadwinner die. The plan has worked well in Belgium under the eyes of the government, but it failed to attract buyers here. Of those whom it did attract at the outset, not a few have given up and gone away. When I went out to have a look at the place the year after Homewood had been settled, seventy-two houses had found owners under the company's plans. After four years fifty-six only are so held, ten have been bought outright, and three sold under contract. Practically the company has had to give up its well-thought-out plan and rent as many of the houses as it could. Nine were vacant this last spring.

So what we all thought the "way out" of the slum seems barred for the time being. For there is no other

explanation of the failure than that the people will not go "among the stumps." Lack of facilities for getting there played a part, possibly, but a minor one, and now there is no such grievance. The simple fact is that the home-feeling that makes a man rear a home upon the soil as the chief ambition of his life was not there. The tenement and the flat have weakened that peg among the class of workers for whom Homewood was planned. I hate to say that they have broken the peg, for I do not believe it. But it has been hurt without doubt. They longed for the crowds. The grass and the trees and the birds and the salt breath of the sea did not speak to them in a language they understood. The brass bands and the hand-organs, the street cries and the rush and roar of the city, had made them forget their childhood's tongue. For the children understood, even in the gutter.

"It means, I suppose," said Dr. Gould to me, when we had talked it all over, "that we are and always shall be a tenement house city, and that we have got to reckon with and plan for that only."

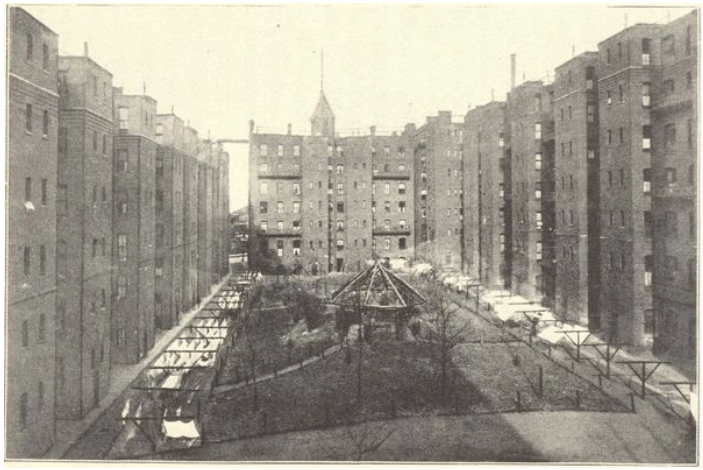
I think not. I believe he is mistaken. And yet I can give no other ground for my belief than my unyielding faith that things will come right yet, if it does take time. They are not right as they are. Man is not made to be born and to live all his life in a box, packed away with his fellows like so many herring in a barrel. He is here in this world for something that is not attained in that way; but is, if not attained, at least perceived when the daisies and the robins come in. If to help men perceive it is all we can do in our generation, that is a good deal. But I believe that before our children have come to the divide, perhaps before we are gone, we shall see the tide of the last

century's drift to the cities turn, under the impulse of the new forces that are being harnessed for man's work, and Homewood come to its rights, I say I believe it I wish I could say I knew; but then you would ask for my proofs, and I haven't any. For all that, I still believe it.

Meanwhile Dr. Gould's advice is good sense. If he is right, it is of the last importance; if I am right, it is still the way to proving me so by holding on to what is left of the home in the tenement and making the most of it. That we have taken the advice is good ground for hope, in the face of the fact that New York has still the worst housing in the world. We can now destroy what is not fit to stand. We have done it, and the republic yet survives. The slum landlord would have had us believe that it must perish with his rookeries. We are building model tenements and making them pay. Alfred T. White's Riverside tenements are as good to-day as when they were built a dozen years ago—better if anything, for they were honestly built—and in all that time they have paid five and six per cent, and even more. Dr. Gould found that only six per cent of all the great model housing operations which he examined for the government here and abroad had failed to pay. All the rest were successful. And by virtue of the showing we have taken the twenty-five-foot lot itself by the throat.

Three years ago, speaking of it as the one thing that was in the way of progress in New York, I wrote: "It will continue to be in the way. A man who has one lot will build on it; it is his right. The state, which taxes his lot, has no right to confiscate it by forbidding him to make it yield him an income, on the plea that he might build something which would

be a nuisance. But it can so order the building that it shall not be a nuisance; that is not only its right, but its duty."

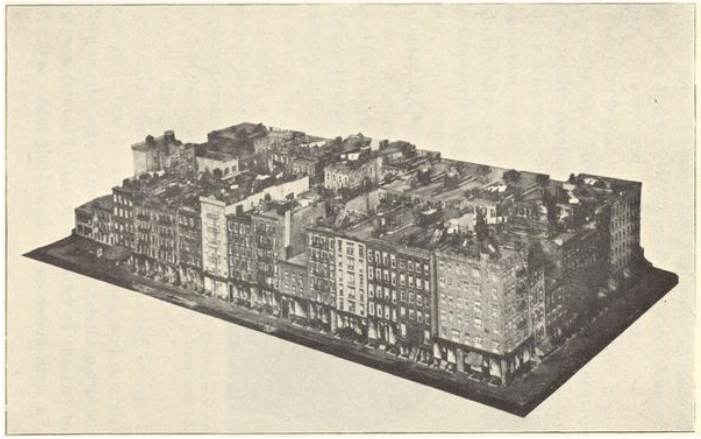


The Riverside Tenements in Brooklyn.

That duty has been done since; let me tell how. Popular sentiment, taking more and more firmly hold of the fact that there is a direct connection between helpless poverty and bad housing, shaped itself in 1898 into a volunteer Tenement House Committee which, as an effective branch of the Charity Organization Society, drew up and presented to the municipal authorities a reform code of building ordinances affecting the dwellings of the poor. But Tammany was back, and they would not listen at the City Hall. Seeing which, the committee made up its mind to appeal to the people themselves in such fashion that it should be heard. That was the way the Tenement House Exhibition of the winter of 1900 came into existence.

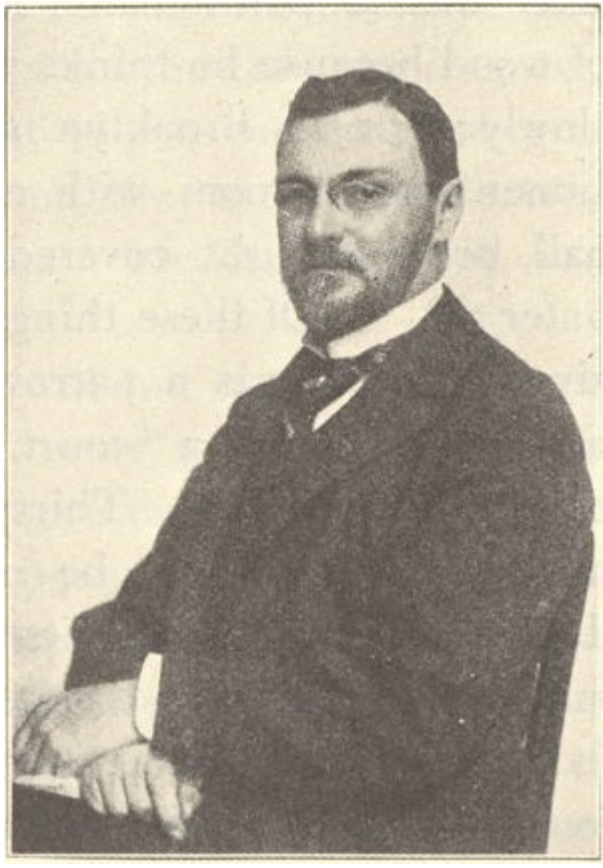
Rich and poor came to see that speaking record of

a city's sorry plight, and at last we all understood. Not to understand after one look at the poverty and disease maps that hung on the wall was to declare oneself a dullard. The tenements were all down in them, with the size of them and the air space within, if there was any. Black dots upon the poverty maps showed that for each one five families in that house had applied for charity within a given time. There were those that had as many as fifteen of the ominous marks, showing that seventy-five families had asked aid from the one house. To find a tenement free from the taint one had to search long and with care. Upon the disease maps the scourge of tuberculosis lay like a black pall over the double-decker districts. A year later the State Commission, that continued the work then begun, said: "There is hardly a tenement house in which there has not been at least one case of pulmonary tuberculosis within the last five years, and in some houses there have been as many as twenty-two different cases of this terrible disease. There are over 8000 deaths a year in New York City from this disease alone, at least 20,000 cases of well-developed and recognized tuberculosis, and in addition a large number of obscure and incipient cases. The connection between tuberculosis and the character of the tenement houses in which the poor people live is of the very closest."[23]



A Typical East Side Block.

A model was shown of a typical East Side block, containing 2781 persons on two acres of land, nearly every bit of which was covered with buildings. There were 466 babies in the block (under five years), but not a bath-tub except one that hung in an air shaft. Of the 1588 rooms 441 were dark, with no ventilation to the outer air except through other rooms; 635 rooms gave upon twilight "air shafts." In five year 32 cases of tuberculosis had been reported from that block, and in that time 660 different families in the block had applied for charity. The year before the Bureau of Contagious Diseases had registered 13 cases of diphtheria there. However, the rent-roll was all right. It amounted to $113,964 a year.



Robert W. de Forest, Chairman of the Tenement Hous
Commission of 1900.

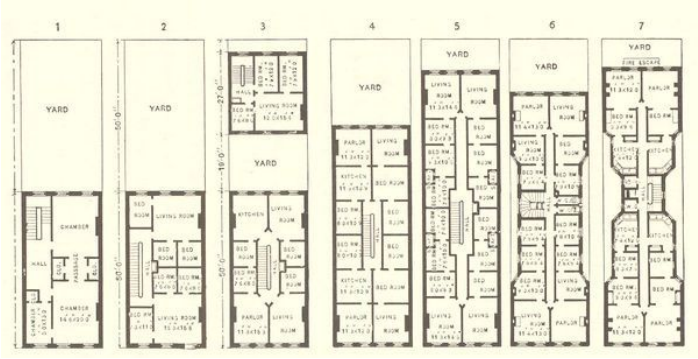
Those facts told. New York—the whole country—woke up. More than 170 architects sent in plans in the competition for a humane tenement that should be commercially profitable. Roosevelt was governor, and promptly appointed a Tenement House Commission, the third citizen body appointed for such purposes by authority of the state. Mr. Robert de Forest, a distinguished lawyer and a public-

spirited man, who had been at the head of the Charity Organization Society and of the relief efforts I spoke of, in time became its chairman, and commissioner of the new Tenement House Department that was created by the new charter of the city to carry into effect the law the commission drew up. At this writing, with the department not yet fully organized, it is too early to say with any degree of certainty exactly how far the last two years have set us ahead; but this much is certain:

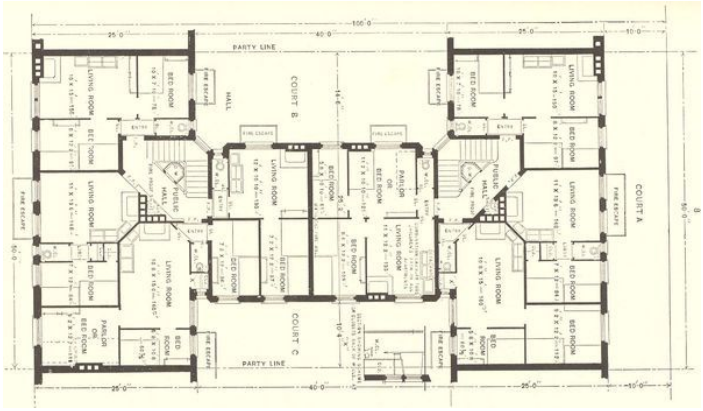
"Discretion" is dead—at last. In Manhattan, no superintendent of buildings shall have leave after this to pen tenants in a building with stairs of wood because he thinks with luck it might burn slowly; nor in Brooklyn shall a deputy commissioner rate a room with a window opening on a hall, or a skylight covered over at the top, "the outer air."[24] Of these things there is an end. The air shaft that was a narrow slit between towering walls has become a "court," a yard big enough for children to run in. Thirty per cent of the tenement-house lot must be open to the sun. The double-decker has had its day, and it is over. A man may still build a tenement on a twenty-five-foot lot if he so chooses, but he can hardly pack four families on each floor of it and keep within the law. He can do much better, and make an ample profit, by crossing the lot line and building on forty or fifty feet; in consequence of which, building being a business, he does so. In a lot of half a hundred tenement plans I looked over at the department yesterday, there were only two for single houses, and they had but three families on the floor.

So it seems as if the blight of the twenty-five-foot lot were really wiped out with the double-decker. And no one is hurt. The speculative builder weeps—

for the poor, he says. He will build no more, he avers, and rents will go up, so they will have to sleep on the streets. But I notice the plans I spoke of call for an investment of three millions of dollars, and that they are working overtime at the department to pass on them, so great is the rush. Belike, then, they are crocodile tears. Anyway, let him weep. He has laughed long enough.




1. Old Knickerbocker dwelling.
2. The same made over into a tenement.
3. The rear tenement caves.
4. Packing-box tenement built for revenue only.
5. The limit; the air shaft—first concession to tenant.
6. The double-decker, where the civic conscience began to stir in 1879.
7. Evolution of double-decker up to date.
8. Prize plan of Tenement House Exhibition, 1900 (fifty-foot lot).




Plan of a Typical Floor in Class First of the Competition in the C. O. S. Plans of Model Tenements.

Rentable area 2724.94° = 54.70% of lot
Free air-space (courts) 1500.25° = 30.01% of lot
Walls, partitions, and public space 764.81° = 15.29% of lot
Total 5000.00° = 100.00% = lot

3 two-room apartments
3 three-room apartments
2 four-room apartments

8 apartments. 23 rooms

As for the rents, he will put them as high as he can, no doubt. They were too high always, for what they bought. In the case of the builder the state can add force to persuasion, and so urge him along the path of righteousness. When it comes to the rent collector the case is different. It may yet be necessary for the municipality to enter the field as a competing landlord on the five-per-cent basis; but I would

rather we, as a community, learned first a little more of the art of governing ourselves without scandal. With Tammany liable to turn up at any moment—no, no! Political tenements might yet add a chapter to the story of our disgrace to make men weep. I have not forgotten the use Tammany made of the people's baths erected in the Hamilton Fish Park on the East Side—the Ham-fish, locally. They were shut from the day they were opened, I came near saying; I mean from the day they should have been opened; and two stalwart watchmen drew salaries for sitting in the door to keep the people out. That was a perfectly characteristic use of the people's money, and is not lightly to be invited back. Rather wait awhile yet, and see what our bridges and real rapid transit, and the "philanthropy and five per cent" plan, will do for us. When that latter has been grasped so by the tenant that a little extra brass and plate-glass does not tempt him over into the enemy's camp, the usurious rents may yet follow the double-decker, as they have clung to it in the past.

But if the city may not be the landlord of tenements, I have often thought it might with advantage manage them to the extent of building them to contain so many tenements on basis of air space, and no more. The thing was proposed when the tenement house question first came up for discussion, but was dropped then. The last Tenement House Commission considered it carefully, but decided to wait and see first how the new department worked. The whole expense of that, with its nearly two hundred inspectors, might easily be borne by the collection of a license fee so small that even the tenement house landlord could not complain. Lodging houses are licensed, and

workshops in the tenements likewise, to secure efficient control of them. If that is not secured in the case of the workshops, as it is not, it is no fault of the plan, but of the working out of it. I do not expect the licensing of tenements to dispose of all the evils in them. No law or system will ever do that. But it ought to make it easier to get the grip on them that has been wanting heretofore, to our hurt.[Back to Contents]

## CHAPTER VI

### THE MILLS HOUSES

Sitting by my window the other day, I saw a boy steering across the street for my little lad, who was laying out a base-ball diamond on the lawn. It seems that he knew him from school.

"Hey," he said, as he rounded to at the gate, "we've got yer dad's book to home; yer father was a bum onct."



A Seven-cent Lodging House in the Bowery.

Proof was immediately forthcoming that whatever the father might have been, his son was able to uphold the family pride, and I had my revenge. Some day soon now my boy will read his father's story[25] himself, and I hope will not be ashamed. They read it in their way in the other boy's house, and got out of it that I was a "bum" because once I was on the level of the Bowery lodging house. But if he does not stay there, a man need not be that; and for that matter, there are plenty who do whom it would be a gross injury to call by such a name. There are lonely men, who, with no kin of their own, prefer even such society as the cheap lodging house has to offer to the desolation of the tenement; and there are plenty of young lads from the country, who, waiting in the big city for the something that is sure to turn up and open their road to fortune, get stranded there. Beginning, perhaps, at the thirty-cent house, they go

down, down, till they strike the fifteen or the ten cent house, with the dirty sheets and the ready club in the watchman's hand. And then some day, when the last penny is gone, and the question where the next meal is going to come from looms larger than the Philippine policy of the nation, a heavy-browed man taps one on the shoulder with an offer of an easy job—easy and straight enough in the mood the fellow is in just then; for does not the world owe him a living? It is one of the devil's most tempting baits to a starving man that makes him feel quite a moral hero in taking that of which his more successful neighbor has deprived him. The heavy-browed fellow is a thief, who is out recruiting his band which the police have broken up in this or some other city. By and by his victim will have time, behind prison bars, to make out the lie that caught him. The world owes no man a living except as the price of honest work. But, wrathful and hungry, he walks easily into the trap.



They had a Mind to see how it looked.

That was what Inspector Byrnes meant by calling the cheap lodging houses nurseries of crime. I have personally, as a police reporter, helped trace many foul crimes to these houses where they were hatched. They were all robberies to begin with, but three of them ended in murder. Most of my readers will remember at least one of them, the Lyman S. Weeks murder in Brooklyn, a thoroughly characteristic case

of the kind I have described. A case they never heard of, because it was nipped in the bud, was typical of another kind. Two young Western fellows had come on, on purpose to hold up New York, and were practising in their lodging, but not, it seems, with much success, for the police pulled them in at their second or third job. When searched, a tintype, evidently of Bowery make, was found in the pocket of one, showing them at rehearsal. They grinned when asked about it. "We done a fellow up easy that way," they said, "and we'd a mind to see how it looked." They were lucky in being caught so soon. A little while, and the gallows would have claimed them, on the road they were travelling.

I mention this to show the kind of problem we have in our Bowery lodging houses, with their army of fifteen or sixteen thousand lodgers, hanging on to the ragged edge most of them, and I have only skimmed the surface of it at that. The political boss searches the depths of it about election time when he needs votes; the sanitary policeman in times of epidemic, when smallpox or typhus fever threatens. All other efforts to reach it had proved unavailing when D. O. Mills, the banker, built his two "Mills Houses," No. 1 in Bleecker Street for the West Side and No. 2 in Rivington Street for the homeless of the East Side. They did reach it, by a cut 'cross lots as it were, by putting the whole thing on a neighborly basis. It had been just business before, and, like the keeping of slum tenements, a mighty well-paying one. The men who ran it might well have given more, but they didn't. It was the same thing over again: let the lodgers shift as they could; their landlord lived in style on the avenue. What were they to him except the means of keeping it up?




Doorway of the Mills House, No. 1

The Mills Houses do not neglect the business end. Indeed, they insist upon it. "No patron," said Mr. Mills at the opening, "will receive more than he pays for, unless it be my hearty good-will and good wishes. It is true that I have devoted thought, labor, and capital to a very earnest effort to help him, but only by enabling him to help himself. In doing the work on so large a scale, and in securing the utmost economies in purchases and in administration, I hope

to give him a larger equivalent for his money than has hitherto been possible. He can, without scruple, permit me to offer him this advantage; but he will think better of himself, and will be a more self-reliant, manly man and a better citizen, if he knows that he is honestly paying for what he gets." That had the right ring to it, and from the beginning so have the houses had. Big, handsome hotels, as fine as any, with wide marble stairs for the dark hole through which one dived into the man-traps of old. Mr. Mills gave to the lodger a man's chance, if he *is* poor. His room is small, but the bed for which he pays twenty cents is clean and good. Indeed, it is said that the spring in it was made by the man who made the springs for the five-dollar beds in the Waldorf-Astoria, and that it is just the same. However that may be, it is comfortable enough, as comfortable as any need have it in Bleecker Street or on Fifth Avenue. The guest at the Mills House has all the privileges the other has, except to while away the sunlit hours in his bed. Then he is expected to be out hustling. At nine o'clock his door is barred against him, and is not again opened until five in the afternoon. But there are smoking and writing rooms, and a library for his use; games if he chooses, baths when he feels like taking one, and a laundry where he may wash his own clothes if he has to save the pennies, as he likely has to. It is a good place to do it, too, for he can sleep comfortably and have two square meals a day for fifty cents all told. There is a restaurant in the basement where his dinner costs him fifteen cents.

I will not say that the dinner is as savory as the one they would serve at Delmonico's, but he comes to it probably with a good deal better appetite, and

that is the thing after all. I ate with him once, and here is the bill of fare of that day. I kept it.

Soup One Meat Dish Two Vegetables

Dessert Tea, Coffee or Milk

15 cents

———

SOUPS

Consommé with Noodles Purée of Tomatoes

HOT MEATS

Roast Turkey, Cranberry Sauce

Roast Beef, Dish Gravy

Fricasseed Spring Lamb with Mushrooms

COLD MEAT

Boiled Fresh Beef Tongue

FISH

Fried Smelts, Tartare Sauce

Boiled Cod, Egg Sauce

VEGETABLES

Boiled Sweet Potatoes Mashed Potatoes

Cauliflower, Hollandaise Sauce Fried Egg Plant

Celery Salad

DESSERT

Plum Pudding, Hard or Lemon Sauce
Pumpkin Pie Baked Apples
Tea Coffee Milk

I will own the turkey seemed to me to taste of codfish and the codfish of turkey, as if it were all cooked in one huge dish; but there was enough of it, and it was otherwise good. And the fault may have been with my palate, probably was. It is getting to be quite the thing for clubs with a social inquiry turn to meet and take their dinners at Mills House No. 1 in Bleecker Street, so it must be all right. Perhaps I struck the cook's off day.[26]



Evening in One of the Courts in the Mills House, No. 1.

No. 1 is the largest, with rooms for 1554 guests, and usually there are 1554 there. No. 2 in Rivington Street has 600 rooms. Together they are capable of housing about twelve per cent of all who nightly seek the cheap lodging houses, not counting the

Raines law hotels, which are chiefly used for purposes of assignation. The Bowery houses have felt the competition, and have been compelled to make concessions that profit the lodger. The greatest gain to him is the chance of getting away from there. At the Mills Houses he is reasonably safe from the hold-up man and the recruiting thief. Though the latter often gives the police the Bleecker Street house as his permanent address on the principle that makes the impecunious seeker of a job conduct his correspondence from the Fifth Avenue Hotel or the Savoy, he is rarely found there, and if found, is not kept long. If he does get in, he is quiet and harmless because he has to be. Crooks in action seek crooked houses kept by crooked men, and they find them along the Bowery more readily than anywhere. There are the shows and the resorts that draw the young lads, who, away from home, are all too easily drawn, to their undoing. The getting them out of their latitude is the greatest gain, and this service the Mills House performs, to a salutary extent. The more readily since its fame has gone abroad, and the Mills House has become a type. There is scarcely a mail now that does not bring me word from some city in the West or East that a Mills House has been started there in the effort to grapple with the problem of the floating population. The fear that their reputation may help increase that problem by drawing greater crowds from the country is rather strained, it seems to me. The objection would lie against free shelters, but hardly against a business concern that simply strives to give the poor lodger his money's worth. As to him, the everlasting pessimist predicted, when the Mills Houses were opened, that they would have to "make bathing compulsory." The lodger has given him the lie; the average has been over 400 bathers

per day,—one in five,—and the record has passed 1000. No doubt soap may be cheap and salvation dear, but on the other hand cleanliness does and must ever begin godliness when fighting the slum, and no one who ever took a look into one of the old-style lodging houses will doubt that we are better off by so much. The Mills houses have paid four, even five, per cent on their owner's investment of a million and a half. It follows that the business will attract capital, which means that there will be an end of the old nuisance. Beyond this, they have borne and will bear increasingly a hand in settling with the saloon with which they compete on its strong ground —that of social fellowship. It has no rival in the Bowery house or in the boarding-house back bedroom. Every philanthropic effort to fight it on that ground has drawn renewed courage and hope from Mr. Mills's work and success.

Many years ago a rich merchant planned to do for his working women the thing Mr. Mills has done for lonely men. Out on Long Island he built a town for his clerks that was to be their very own. But it came out differently. The Long Island town became a cathedral city and the home of wealth and fashion; his woman's boarding house a great public hotel far beyond the reach of those he sought to benefit. The passing years saw his great house, its wealth, its very name, vanish as if they had never been, and even his bones denied by ghoulish thieves rest in the grave. There is no more pathetic page in the history of our city than that which records the eclipse of the house of Alexander T. Stewart, merchant prince. I like to think of the banker's successful philanthropy as a kind of justice to the memory of the dead merchant, more eloquent than marble and brass in the empty

crypt. Mills House No. 1 stands upon the site of Mr. Stewart's old home, where he dreamed his barren dream of benevolence to his kind.

His work lies undone yet. While I am writing this, they are putting the roof on a great structure in East Twenty-ninth Street that is to be the "Woman's Hotel" of the city and bear the name of Martha Washington. It is intended for business and professional women who can pay from seven or eight dollars a week up to almost anything for their board and lodging, and it is expected to fill so great a need as to be commercially profitable at once. That will be well, and we shall all be glad. But who will build the Mills House for lonely girls and women who cannot pay seven or eight dollars a week, and would not go to the Woman's Hotel if they could? The social cleft between Madison Avenue and Bleecker Street is too wide to be bridged by the best intentions of a hotel company. I doubt if they would know where to go in that strange up-town country. When as an immigrant I paid two dollars a day for board that was not worth fifty cents, in a Greenwich Street house, I might have lodged in comfort in a Broadway hotel for less money, had I only known where. There are hosts of half-starved women and girls living in cheerless back rooms,—or, rather, they do not live, they exist on weak coffee or tea, laying up an evil day for the generation of which they are to be the mothers,—to whom such a house would be home, freedom, and life. Ask any working girls' vacation society whence the need of their labor early and late, if not to put a little life and vigor into those ill-nourished bodies. Ask the priest, or any one who knows the temptations of youth, how much that bald and dreary life of theirs counts for in the fight he has on

hand. Who will build the working women's hotel somewhere between Stewart's old store and Twenty-third Street, east of Broadway, that shall give them their sadly needed chance? And while about it, let him add a wing, or build a separate house, such as they have in Glasgow, for widows with little children, that shall answer another of our perplexing problems,—a house, this latter, with nursery, kindergarten, and laundry, where the mother might know her child safe while she provided for it with her work. Who will be the D. O. Mills of these helpless ones?



Lodging Room in the Leonard Street Police Station.

Or is there but one Mills? I have heard it said that he has been waiting, asking the same question. Let him wait no longer, then, if he would put the finishing touch to a practical philanthropy that will rank in days to come with the great benefactions to mankind.



Women's Lodging Room in Eldridge Street Police Station.

I have dwelt upon the need of bracing up the home, or finding something to replace it as nearly like it as could be, where that had to be done, because the home is the key to good citizenship. Unhappily for the great cities, there exists in them all a class that has lost the key or thrown it away. For this class, New York, until three years ago, had never made any provision. The police station lodging rooms, of which I have spoken, were not to be dignified by the term. These vile dens, in which the homeless of our great city were herded, without pretence of bed, of bath, of food, on rude planks, were the most pernicious parody on municipal charity, I verily believe, that any civilized community had ever devised. To escape physical and moral contagion in these crowds seemed humanly impossible. Of the innocently homeless lad they

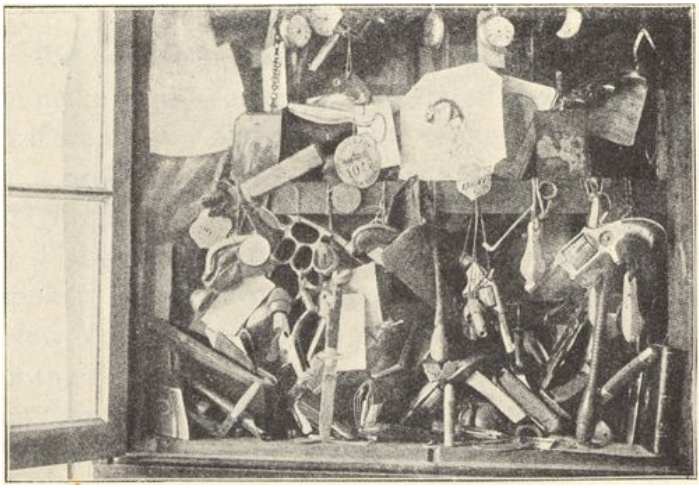
made a tramp by the shortest cut. To the old tramp they were indeed ideal provision, for they enabled him to spend for drink every cent he could beg or steal. With the stale beer dive, the free lunch counter, and the police lodging room at hand, his cup of happiness was full. There came an evil day, when the stale beer dive shut its doors and the free lunch disappeared for a season. The beer pump, which drained the kegs dry and robbed the stale beer collector of his ware, drove the dives out of business; the Raines law forbade the free lunch. Just at this time Theodore Roosevelt shut the police lodging rooms, and the tramp was literally left out in the cold, cursing reform and its fruits. It was the climax of a campaign a generation old, during which no one had ever been found to say a word in defence of these lodging rooms; yet nothing had availed to close them.



A "Scrub" and her Bed—the Plank.

The city took lodgers on an old barge in the East River, that winter (1896), and kept a register of them. We learned something from that. Of nearly 10,000 lodgers, one-half were under thirty years old and in good health—fat, in fact. The doctors reported them "well nourished." Among 100 whom I watched taking their compulsory bath, one night, only two

were skinny; the others were stout, well-fed men, abundantly able to do a man's work. They all insisted that they were willing, too; but the moment inquiries began with a view of setting such to work as really wanted it, and sending the rest to the island as vagrants, their number fell off most remarkably. From between 400 and 500 who had crowded the barge and the pier sheds, the attendance fell on March 16, the day the investigation began, to 330, on the second day to 294, and on the third day to 171; by March 21 it had been cut down to 121. The problem of the honestly homeless, who were without means to pay for a bed even in a ten-cent lodging house, and who had a claim upon the city by virtue of residence in it, had dwindled to surprisingly small proportions. Of 9386 lodgers, 3622 were shown to have been here less than sixty days, and 968 more not a year. The old mistake, that there is always a given amount of absolutely homeless destitution in a city, and that it is to be measured by the number of those who apply for free lodging, had been reduced to a demonstration. The truth is that the opportunity furnished by the triple alliance of stale beer, free lunch, and free lodging at the police station was the open door to permanent and hopeless vagrancy. Men, a good bishop said, will do what you pay them to do: if to work, they will work; if you make it pay them to beg, they will beg; if to maim helpless children makes begging pay better, they will do that too. See what it is to encourage laziness in man whose salvation is work.



What a Search of the Lodgers brought forth.

A city lodging house was established, with decent beds, baths, and breakfast, and a system of investigation of the lodger's claim that is yet to be developed to useful proportions. The link that is missing is a farm school, for the training of young vagrants to habits of industry and steady work, as the alternative of the workhouse. Efforts to forge this link have failed so far, but in the good time that is coming, when we shall have learned the lesson that the unkindest thing that can be done to a young tramp is to let him go on tramping, and when magistrates shall blush to discharge him on the plea that "it is no crime to be poor in this country," they will succeed, and the tramp also we shall then have "druv into decency." When I look back now to the time, ten or fifteen years ago, when, night after night, with every police station filled, I found the old tenements in the "Bend" jammed with a reeking mass of human wrecks that huddled in hall and yard, and slept, crouching in shivering files, all the way up the

stairs to the attic, it does seem as if we had come a good way, and as if all the turmoil and the bruises and the fighting had been worth while. New York is no longer, at least when Tammany is out, a tramp's town. And that is so much gained, to us and to the tramp.[Back to Contents]

## CHAPTER VII

### PIETRO AND THE JEW

We have seen that the problem of the tenement is to make homes for the people, out of it if we can, in it if we must. Now about the tenant. How much of a problem is he? And how are we to go about solving it?

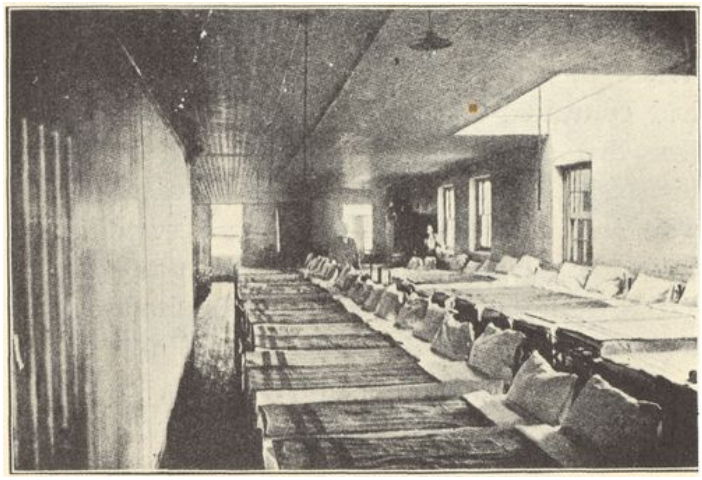
The government "slum inquiry," of which I have spoken before, gave us some facts about him. In New York it found 62.58 per cent of the population of the slum to be foreign-born, whereas for the whole city the percentage of foreigners was only 43.23. While the proportion of illiteracy in all was only as 7.69 to 100, in the slum it was 46.65 per cent. That with nearly twice as many saloons to a given number there should be three times as many arrests in the slum as in the city at large need not be attributed to nationality, except indirectly in its possible responsibility for the saloons. I say "possible" advisably. Anybody, I should think, whose misfortune it is to live in the slum might be expected to find in the saloon a refuge. I shall not quarrel with the other view of it. I am merely stating a personal

impression. The fact that concerns us here is the great proportion of the foreign-born. Though the inquiry covered only a small section of a tenement district, the result may be accepted as typical.

We shall not, then, have to do with an American element in discussing this tenant, for even of the "natives" in the census, by far the largest share is made up of the children of the immigrant. Indeed, in New York only 4.77 per cent of the slum population canvassed were shown to be of native parentage. The parents of 95.23 per cent had come over the sea, to better themselves, it may be assumed. Let us see what they brought us, and what we have given them in return.

The Italians were in the majority where this census-taker went. They were from the south of Italy, avowedly the worst of the Italian immigration, which in the eleven years from 1891 to 1902 gave us nearly a million of Victor Emmanuel's subjects. The exact number of Italian immigrants, as registered by the Emigration Bureau, from July 1, 1891, to June 1, 1902, a month short of eleven years, was 944,345. And they come in greater numbers every year. In 1898, 58,613 came over, of whom 36,086 gave New York as their destination. In 1901 the Italian immigrants numbered 138,608, and as I write shiploads with thousands upon thousands are afloat, bound for our shores. Yet there is a gleam of promise in the showing of last year, for of the 138,608, those who came to stay in New York numbered only 67,231. Enough surely, but they were after all only one-half of the whole against two-thirds in 1898. If this means that they came to join friends elsewhere in the country—that other centres of immigration have been set up—well and good. There is room for

them there. Going out to break ground, they give us more than they get. The peril lies in their being cooped up in the city.



Bedroom in the New City Lodging House.

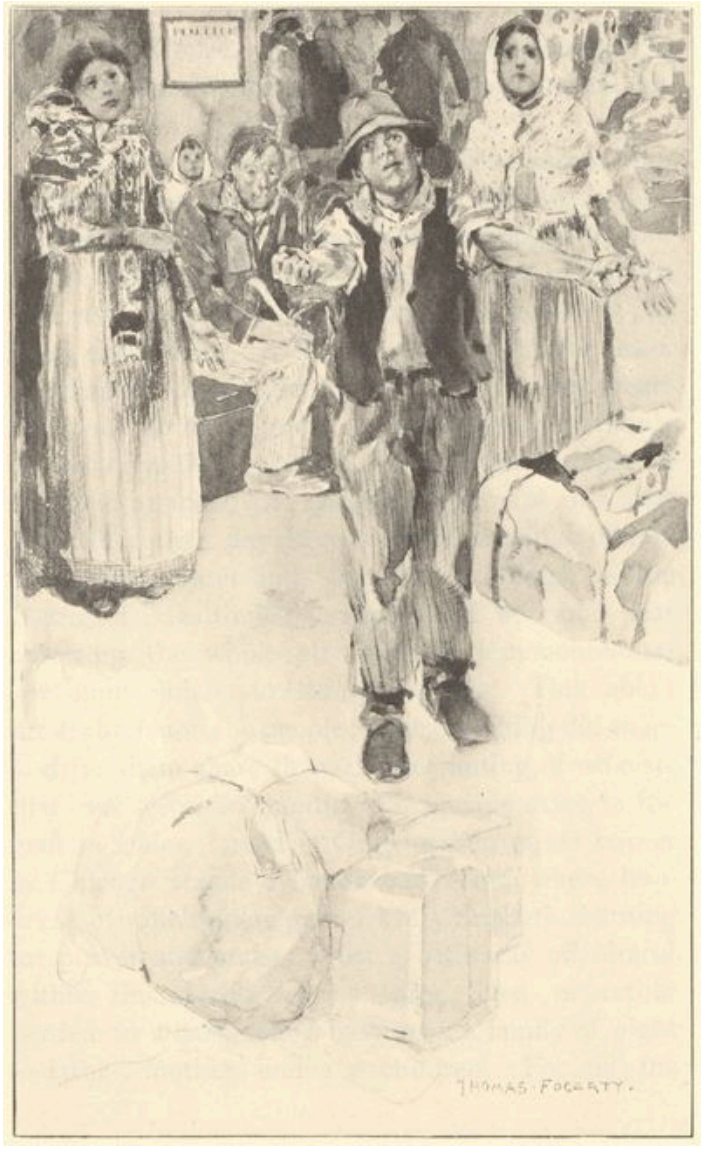
Of last year's intake 116,070 came from southern Italy, where they wash less, and also plot less against the peace of mankind, than they do in the north. Quite a lot were from Sicily, the island of the absentee landlord, where peasants die of hunger. I make no apology for quoting here the statement of an Italian officer, on duty in the island, to a staff correspondent of the *Tribuna* of Rome, a paper not to be suspected of disloyalty to United Italy. I take it from the *Evening Post*:

"In the month of July I stopped on a march by a threshing-floor where they were measuring grain. When the shares had been divided, the one who had cultivated the land received a single *tumolo* (less than a half bushel). The peasant, leaning on his spade, looked at his share as if stunned. His wife and their

five children were standing by. From the painful toil of a year this was what was left to him with which to feed his family. The tears rolled silently down his cheeks."

These things occasionally help one to understand. Over against this picture there arises in my memory one from the barge office, where I had gone to see an Italian steamer come in. A family sat apart, ordered to wait by the inspecting officer; in the group was an old man, worn and wrinkled, who viewed the turmoil with the calmness of one having no share in it. The younger members formed a sort of bulwark around him.

"Your father is too old to come in," said the official.




"Are we not young enough to work for him?"

Two young women and a boy of sixteen rose to their

feet at once. "Are not we young enough to work for him?" they said. The boy showed his strong arms.

It is charged against this Italian immigrant that he is dirty, and the charge is true. He lives in the darkest of slums, and pays rent that ought to hire a decent flat. To wash, water is needed; and we have a law which orders tenement landlords to put it on every floor, so that their tenants may have the chance. And it is not yet half a score years since one of the biggest tenement-house landlords in the city, the wealthiest church corporation in the land, attacked the constitutionality of this statute rather than pay two or three hundred dollars for putting water into two old buildings, as the Board of Health had ordered, and so came near upsetting the whole structure of tenement-house law upon which our safety depends. Talk about the Church and the people; that one thing did more to drive them apart than all the ranting of atheists that ever were. Yesterday a magazine came in the mail in which I read: "On a certain street corner in Chicago stands a handsome church where hundreds of worshippers gather every Sabbath morning for prayer and praise. Just a little way off, almost within the shadow of its spire, lived, or rather herded, in a dark, damp basement, a family of eight—father, mother, and six children. For all the influence that the songs or the sermons or the prayers had upon them they might have lived there and died like rats in a hole. They did not believe in God, nor heaven, nor hell, other than that in which they lived. Church-goers were to them a lot of canting hypocrites who wrapped their comfortable robes about them and cared nothing for the sufferings of others. Hunger and misery were daily realities."

No, it was not a yellow newspaper. It was a religious publication, and it told how a warm human love did find them out, and showed them what the Church had failed to do—what God's love is like. And I am not attacking the Church either. God forbid! I would help, not hinder it; for I, too, am a churchman. Only—well, let it pass. It will not happen again. That same year I read in my paper the reply of the priest at the Pro-Cathedral in Stanton Street to a crank who scoffed at the kind of "religion" they had there: kindergartens, nurseries, boys' and girls' clubs, and mothers' meetings. "Yes," he wrote, "that is our religion. We believe that a love of God that doesn't forthwith run to manifest itself in some loving deed to His children is not worth having." That is how I came to be a churchman in Bishop Potter's camp. I "joined" then and there.

Our Italian is ignorant, it is said, and that charge is also true, I doubt if one of the family in the barge office could read or write his own name. Yet would you fear especial danger to our institutions, to our citizenship, from those four? He lives cheaply, crowds, and underbids even the Jew in the sweat shop. I can myself testify to the truth of these statements. A couple of years ago I was the umpire in a quarrel between the Jewish tailors and the factory inspector whom they arraigned before the governor on charges of inefficiency. The burden of their grievance was that the Italians were underbidding them in their own market, which of course the factory inspector could not prevent. Yet, even so, the evidence is not that the Italian always gets the best of it. I came across a family once working on "knee-pants." "Twelve pants, ten cents," said the tailor, when there was work. "Ve work for dem sheenies,"

he explained. "Ven dey has work, ve gets some; ven dey hasn't, ve don't." He was an unusually gifted tailor as to English, but apparently not as to business capacity. In the Astor tenements, in Elizabeth Street, where we found forty-three families living in rooms intended for sixteen, I saw women finishing "pants" at thirty cents a day. Some of the garments were of good grade, and some of poor; some of them were soldiers' trousers, made for the government; but whether they received five, seven, eight, or ten cents a pair, it came to thirty cents a day, except in a single instance, in which two women, sewing from five in the morning till eleven at night, were able, being practised hands, to finish forty-five "pants" at three and a half cents a pair, and so made together over a dollar and a half. They were content, even happy. I suppose it seemed wealth to them, coming from a land where a Parisian investigator of repute found three lire (not quite sixty cents) *per month* a girl's wages.

I remember one of those flats, poor and dingy, yet with signs of the instinctive groping toward orderly arrangement which I have observed so many times, and take to be evidence that in better surroundings much might be made of these people. Clothes were hung to dry on a line strung the whole length of the room. Upon couches by the wall some men were snoring. They were the boarders. The "man" was out shovelling snow with the midnight shift. By a lamp with brown paper shade, over at the window, sat two women sewing. One had a baby on her lap. Two sweet little cherubs, nearly naked, slept on a pile of unfinished "pants," and smiled in their sleep. A girl of six or seven dozed in a child's rocker between the two workers, with her head hanging down on one

side; the mother propped it up with her elbow as she sewed. They were all there, and happy in being together even in such a place. On a corner shelf burned a night lamp before a print of the Mother of God, flanked by two green bottles, which, seen at a certain angle, made quite a festive show.

Complaint is made that the Italian promotes child labor. His children work at home on "pants" and flowers at an hour when they ought to have been long in bed. Their sore eyes betray the little flower-makers when they come tardily to school. Doubtless there are such cases, and quite too many of them; yet, in the very block which I have spoken of, the investigation conducted for the Gilder Tenement House Commission by the Department of Sociology of Columbia University, under Professor Franklin H. Giddings, discovered, of 196 children of school age, only 23 at work or at home, and in the next block only 27 out of 215. That was the showing of the foreign population all the way through. Of 225 Russian Jewish children only 15 were missing from school, and of 354 little Bohemians only 21. The overcrowding of the schools and their long waiting lists occasionally furnished the explanation why they were not there. Professor Giddings reported, after considering all the evidence: "The foreign-born population of the city is not, to any great extent, forcing children of legal school age into money-earning occupations. On the contrary, this population shows a strong desire to have its children acquire the common rudiments of education. If the city does not provide liberally and wisely for the satisfaction of this desire, the blame for the civic and moral dangers that will threaten our community, because of ignorance, vice, and poverty, must rest on the whole

public, not on our foreign-born residents." And Superintendent Maxwell of the Department of Education adds, six years later, that with a shortage of 28,000 seats, and worse coming, "it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the insufficiency of school accommodation in New York City is a most serious menace to our universal welfare."[27] For we have reached the stage again, thanks be to four years of Tammany, when, after all the sacrifices of the past, we are once more face to face with an army of enforced truants, and all they stand for.

He is clannish, this Italian; he gambles and uses a knife, though rarely on anybody not of his own people; he "takes what he can get," wherever anything is free, as who would not, coming to the feast like a starved wolf? There was nothing free where he came from. Even the salt was taxed past a poor man's getting any of it. Lastly, he buys fraudulent naturalization papers, and uses them. I shall plead guilty for him to every one of these counts. They are all proven. Gambling is his besetting sin. He is sober, industrious, frugal, enduring beyond belief; but he will gamble on Sunday and quarrel over his cards, and when he sticks his partner in the heat of the quarrel, the partner is not apt to tell. He prefers to bide his time. Yet there has lately been evidence once or twice, in the surrender of an assassin by his countrymen, that the old vendetta is being shelved and a new idea of law and justice is breaking through. As to the last charge: our Italian is not dull. With his intense admiration for the land where a dollar a day waits upon the man with a shovel, he can see no reason why he should not accept the whole "American plan" with ready enthusiasm. It is a good plan. To him it

sums itself up in the statement: a dollar a day for the shovel; two dollars for the shovel with a citizen behind it. And he takes the papers and the two dollars.

He came here for a chance to live. Of politics, social ethics, he knows nothing. Government in his old home existed only for his oppression. Why should he not attach himself with his whole loyal soul to the plan of government in his new home that offers to boost him into the place of his wildest ambition, a "job on the streets,"—that is, in the Street Cleaning Department,—and asks no other return than that he shall vote as directed? Vote! Not only he, but his cousins and brothers and uncles will vote as they are told, to get Pietro the job he covets. If it pleases the other man, what is it to him for whom he votes? He is after the job.

Here, ready-made to the hand of the politician, is such material as he never saw before. For Pietro's loyalty is great. As a police detective, one of his own people, once put it to me, "He got a kind of an idea, or an old rule: an eye for an eye; do to another as you'd be done by; if he don't squeal on you, you stick by him, no matter what the consequences." This "kind of an idea" is all he has to draw upon for an answer to the question if the thing is right. But the question does not arise. Why should it? Was he not told by the agitators whom the police jailed at home that in a republic all men are made happy by means of the vote? And is there not proof of it? It has made him happy, has it not? And the man who bought his vote seems to like it. Well, then?



The Play School. Dressing Dolls for a Lesson.

Very early Pietro discovered that it was every man for himself, in the chase of the happiness which this powerful vote had in keeping. He was robbed by the padrone—that is, the boss—when he came over, fleeced on his steamship fare, made to pay for getting a job, and charged three prices for board and lodging and extras while working in the railroad gang. The boss had a monopoly, and Pietro was told that it was maintained by his "divvying" with some railroad official. Rumor said, a very high-up official, and that the railroad was in politics in the city; that is to say, dealt in votes. When the job gave out, the boss packed him into the tenement he had bought with his profits on the contract; and if Pietro had a family, told him to take in lodgers and crowd his flat, as the Elizabeth Street tenements were crowded, so as to make out the rent, and to never mind the law. The padrone was a politician, and had a pull. He was bigger than the law, and it was the votes he traded in

that did it all. Now it was Pietro's turn. With his vote he could buy what to him seemed wealth; two dollars a day. In the muddle of ideas, that was the one which stood out clearly. When citizen papers were offered him for $12.50, he bought them quickly, and got his job on the street.

It was the custom of the country. If there was any doubt about it, the proof was furnished when Pietro was arrested through the envy and plotting of the opposition boss. Distinguished counsel, employed by the machine, pleaded his case in court. Pietro felt himself to be quite a personage, and he was told that he was safe from harm, though a good deal of dust might be kicked up; because, when it came down to that, both the bosses were doing the same kind of business. I quote from the report of the State Superintendent of Elections of January, 1899: "In nearly every case of illegal registration, the defendant was represented by eminent counsel who were identified with the Democratic organization, among them being three assistants to the corporation counsel. My deputies arrested Rosario Calecione and Giuseppe Marrone, both of whom appeared to vote at the fifth election district of the Sixth Assembly District; Marrone being the Democratic captain of the district, and, it was charged, himself engaged in the business of securing fraudulent naturalization papers. In both of these cases Farriello had procured the naturalization papers for the men for a consideration. They were subsequently indicted. Marrone and Calecione were bailed by the Democratic leader of the Sixth Assembly District."

The business, says the state superintendent, is carried on "to an enormous extent." It appears, then, that Pietro has already "got on to" the American plan

as the slum presented it to him, and has in good earnest become a problem. I guessed as much from the statement of a Tammany politician to me, a year ago, that every Italian voter in his district got his "old two" on election day. He ought to know, for he held the purse. Suppose, now, we speak our minds as frankly, for once, and put the blame where it belongs. Will it be on Pietro? And upon this showing, who ought to be excluded, when it comes to that?

The slum census taker did not cross the Bowery. Had he done so, he would have come upon the refugee Jew, the other economic marplot of whom complaint is made with reason. If his Nemesis has overtaken him in the Italian, certainly he challenged that fate. He did cut wages by his coming. He was starving, and he came in shoals. In eighteen years more than half a million Jewish immigrants have landed in New York.[28] They had to have work and food, and they got both as they could. In the strife they developed qualities that were anything but pleasing. They herded like cattle. They had been so herded by Christian rulers, a despised and persecuted race, through the centuries. Their very coming was to escape from their last inhuman captivity in a Christian state. They lied, they were greedy, they were charged with bad faith. They brought nothing, neither money nor artisan skill,—nothing but their consuming energy, to our land, and their one gift was their greatest offence. One might have pointed out that they had been trained to lie, for their safety; had been forbidden to work at trades, to own land; had been taught for a thousand years, with the scourge and the stake, that only gold could buy them freedom from torture. But what was the use? The charges were true. The Jew was—he still is—a

problem of our slum.

And yet, if ever there was material for citizenship, this Jew is such material. Alone of all our immigrants he comes to us without a past. He has no country to renounce, no ties to forget. Within him there burns a passionate longing for a home to call his, a country which will own him, that waits only for the spark of such another love to spring into flame which nothing can quench. Waiting for it, all his energies are turned into his business. He is not always choice in method; he often offends. He crowds to the front in everything, no matter whom he crowds out. The land is filled with his clamor. "If the East Side would shut its mouth and the West Side get off the saloon corner, we could get somewhere," said a weary philanthropist to me the other day, and made me laugh, for I knew what he meant. But the Jew heeds it not. He knows what he wants and he gets it. He succeeds. He is the yeast of any slum, if given time. If it will not let him go, it must rise with him. The charity managers in London said it, when we looked through their slums some years ago, "The Jews have renovated Whitechapel." I, for one, am a firm believer in this Jew, and in his boy. Ignorant they are, but with a thirst for knowledge that surmounts any barrier. The boy takes all the prizes in the school. His comrades sneer that he will not fight. Neither will he when there is nothing to be gained by it. Yet, in defence of his rights, there is in all the world no such fighter as he. Literally, he will die fighting, by inches, too, from starvation. Witness his strikes. I believe that, should the time come when the country needs fighting men, the son of the despised immigrant Jew will resurrect on American soil, the first that bade him welcome, the old

Maccabee type, and set an example for all the rest of us to follow.

This long while he has been in the public eye as the vehicle and promoter of sweating, and much severe condemnation has been visited upon him with good cause. He had to do something, and he took to the clothes-maker's trade as that which was most quickly learned. The increasing crowds, the tenement, and his grinding poverty made the soil wherein the evil grew rank. But the real sweater does not live in Ludlow Street; he keeps the stylish shop on Broadway, and he does not always trouble himself to find out how his workers fare, much as that may have to do with the comfort and security of his customers.

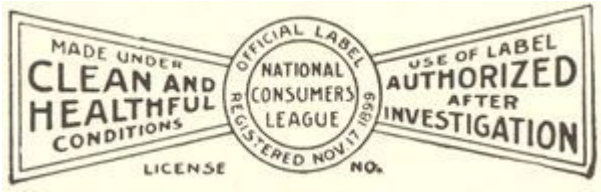
"We do not have to have a license," said the tenants in one wretched flat where a consumptive was sewing on coats almost with his last gasp; "we work for a first-class place on Broadway."

And so they did. Sweating is simply a question of profit to the manufacturer. By letting out his work on contract, he can save the expense of running his factory and delay longer making his choice of styles. If the contractor, in turn, can get along with less shop room by having as much of the work as can profitably be so farmed out done in the tenements by cheap home labor, he is so much better off. And tenement labor is always cheap because of the crowds that clamor for it and must have bread. The poor Jew is the victim of the mischief quite as much as he has helped it on. Back of the manufacturer and the contractor there is still another sweater,—the public. Only by its sufferance of the bargain counter and of sweat-shop-made goods has the nuisance

existed as long as it has. I am glad I have lived to see the day of its passing, for, unless I greatly mistake, it is at hand now that the old silent partner is going out of the firm.

I mean the public. We tried it in the old days, but the courts said the bill to stop tenement cigar-making was unconstitutional. Labor was property, and property is inviolable—rightly so until it itself becomes a threat to the commonwealth. Child labor is such a threat. It has been stopped in the factories, but no one can stop it in the tenement so long as families are licensed to work there. The wrecking of the home that is inevitable where the home is turned into a shop with thirty cents as a woman's wage is that; the overcrowding that goes hand in hand with home-work is that; the scourge of consumption which doctors and Boards of Health wrestle with in vain while dying men and women "sew on coats with their last gasp" and sew the death warrant of the buyer into the lining, is a threat the gravity of which we have hardly yet made out. Courts and constitutions reflect the depth of public sentiment on a moral or political issue. We have been doing a deal of dredging since then, and we are at it yet. While I am writing a Tuberculosis Committee is at work sifting the facts of tenement-house life as they bear on that peril. A Child Labor Committee is preparing to attack the slum in its centre, as we stopped the advance guard when we made the double-decker unprofitable. The factory inspector is gathering statistics of earnings and hours of labor in sweat shop and tenement to throw light on the robbery that goes on there. When they have told us what they have to tell, it may be that we shall be able to say to the manufacturer: "You shall not send out goods to

be made in sweat shop or tenement. You shall make them in your own shop or not at all." He will not be hurt, for all will have to do alike. I am rather inclined to think that he will be glad to take that way out of a grisly plight.




Label of Consumers' League.

For he has seen the signs of a flank movement that goes straight for his pocket-book, an organized public sentiment that is getting ready to say to him, "We will buy no clothes or wear them, or any other thing whatsoever, that is made at the price of the life and hope of other men or women." Wherever I went last winter, through the length and breadth of the land, women were stirring to organize branches of the Consumers' League. True, they were the well-to-do, not yet the majority. But they were the very ones who once neither knew nor cared. Now they do both. That is more than half the fight. Whatever may be the present results of the agitation, in the long run I would rather take my chances with a vigorous Consumers' League and not a law in the state to safeguard labor or the community's interests, than with the most elaborate code man has yet devised, and the bargain counter in full blast, unchallenged, from Monday to Saturday. Laws may be evaded, and too often are; tags betraying that goods are "tenement made" may be removed, and they make no appeal anyhow to a community deaf to the

arraignment of the bargain counter. But an instructed public sentiment, such as that of which the Consumers' League[29] is the most recent expression, makes laws and enforces them too. By its aid we have forced the children out of the factories, the sweat shops out of the tenements, and shut the door against the stranger there. Only to families are licenses granted. By its aid we shall yet drive work out of the home altogether; for goods are made to sell, and none will be made which no one will buy.



Josephine Shaw Lowell, Chairman of the Vagrancy Commit and one of the Strongest Forces in Charity Organization, th Consumers' League, and every other Healthy Reform Effort

Organized labor makes its own appeal to the same end. From this year (1892) on, the United Garment Workers of America resolved in national convention to give their stamp to no manufacturer who does not have all his work done on his own premises. If they faithfully live up to that compact with the public, they will win. Two winters ago I took their label, which was supposed to guarantee living wages and clean and healthy conditions, from the hip pocket of a pair of trousers which I found a man, sick with scarlet fever, using as a pillow in one of the foulest sweater's tenements I had ever been in, and carried it to the headquarters of the union to show them what a mockery they were making of the mightiest engine that had come to their hand. I am glad to believe those days are over for good; and when we all believe it their fight will be won. When the union label deserves public confidence as a guarantee against such things, it will receive it. When I know that insisting on a union plumber for my pipes means that the job will be done right, then I will always send for a union plumber and have no other. That is the whole story, and on that day the label will be mightier than any law, because the latter will be merely the effort to express by statute the principle it embodies.

Stragglers there will always be, I suppose. It was only the other day I read in the report of the Consumers' League in my own city that "a benevolent institution," when found giving out clothing to be made in tenement houses that were not licensed, and taken to task for it, asked the agents of the League to "show some way in which the law could be evaded"; but it is just as well for that "benevolent institution" that name and address were wanting, or it might find

its funds running short unaccountably. We *are* waking up. This very licensing of tenement workers is proof of it, though it gives one a cold chill to see thirty thousand licenses out, with hardly a score of factory inspectors to keep tab on them. Roosevelt, as governor, set the pace, going himself among the tenements to see how the law was enforced, and how it could be mended. Now we have a registry system copied from Massachusetts, where they do these things right and most others besides. An index is so arranged by streets that when the printed sheet comes every morning from the Bureau of Contagious Diseases, with name and house number of every case of smallpox, scarlet fever, diphtheria, etc. reported during the twenty-four hours, a clerk can check one off from the other in half an hour, and before noon have every infected flat quarantined. Word is sent to the manufacturer to stop sending any more supplies there, and the garments in the house are tagged till after disinfection. And by the same means all the cards are laid on the table. If a merchant in California or in Florida brags that he buys only factory-made goods, the customer can find out through the Consumers' League if it is true. If the register shows that the manufacturer has filed lists of the tenements where his goods are made up, it is not true. All of which helps.

But Massachusetts is Massachusetts, and New York is New York. A tenement-house population of more than two millions of souls makes its own problems, and there is no other like it. After all, the chief function of the license must, in the end, be to show that it cannot be done so—safely. Even with the active coöperation of the Board of Health, and with the nearly two hundred tenement-house inspectors

that are being turned loose this summer, full of new zeal and desire to make a record, we shall yet be whipping the devil around the stump until the public sentiment fostered by the Consumers' League and its allies heads him off on the other side. The truth of the matter is that the job is too big for the law alone. It needs the gospel to back it up. Together they can do it. [Back to Contents]

## CHAPTER VIII

### ON WHOM SHALL WE SHUT THE DOOR?

The Jew and the Italian have filled the landscape so far, because, as a matter of fact, that is what they do. Yesterday it was the Irishman and the Bohemian. To-morrow it may be the Greek, who already undersells the Italian from his push-cart in the Fourth Ward, and the Syrian, who can give Greek, Italian, and Jew points at a trade. The rebellious Slovak holds his own corner in our industrial system, though never for long. He yearns ever for the mountain sides of his own Hungary. He remembers, where the Jew tries only to forget. From Dalmatia comes a new emigration, and there are signs that the whole Balkan peninsula has caught the fever and is waiting only for cheap transportation to be established on the Danube to the Black Sea, when there is no telling what will be heading our way. I sometimes wonder what thoughts come to the eagle that perches over the great stone gateway on Ellis Island, as he watches the procession that files

through it into the United States day after day, and never ends. He looks out of his grave, unblinking eye at the motley crowd, but gives no sign. Does he ask: "Where are the Pilgrim Fathers, the brave Huguenots, the patient Puritans, the sturdy priests, and the others that came for conscience' sake to build upon this continent a home for freedom? And these, why do they come with their strange tongues—for gold?" True, eagle! but look to the roster of those who fought and died for the freedom those pioneers planted, who watered the tree with their life blood, and see how many you find inscribed there who came through that gate. Go to the public school and hear their children speak the tongue that is sweet to your ear; hear their young voices as they salute the flag that is *theirs*:



One Door that has been opened: St. John's Park in Hudson Street,—once a Graveyard.

"We give our heads and our hearts to our country. One country, one language, one flag!"

Fear not, eagle! While that gate is open let no one bar the one you guard. While the flag flies over the public school, keep it aloft over Ellis Island and have no misgivings. The school has the answer to your riddle.

About once a week I am asked: Would I shut out any, and whom and how and why? Sometimes, looking at it from the point of view of the tenement and the sweat shop,—that is to say, the city,—I think I would. And were that all, I certainly should. But then, there comes up the recollection of a picture of the city of Prague that hangs in a Bohemian friend's parlor, here in New York. I stood looking at it one day, and noticed in the foreground cannon that pointed in over the city. I spoke of it, unthinking, and said to my host that they should be trained, if against an enemy, the other way. The man's eye flashed fire. "Ha!" he cried, "here, yes!" When I think of that, I do not want to shut the door.

Again, there occurs to me an experience the police had a few years ago in Mulberry Street. They were looking for a murderer, and came upon a nest of Italian thugs who lived by blackmailing their countrymen. They were curious about them, and sent their names to Naples with a request for information. There came back such a record as none of the detectives had ever seen or heard of before. All of them were notorious criminals, who had been charged with every conceivable crime, from burglary to kidnapping and "maiming," and some not to be conceived of by the American mind. Five of them together had been sixty-three times in jail, and one no less than twenty-one times. Yet, though they were all "under special surveillance," they had come here without let or hindrance within a year. When I recall

that, I want to shut the door quick. I sent the exhibit to Washington at the time.



Dr. Jane Elizabeth Robbins, the "Woman Doctor."

But then, again, when I think of Mrs. Michelangelo, in her poor mourning for one child

run over and killed, wiping her tears away and going bravely to work to keep the home together for the other five until the oldest shall be old enough to take her father's place; and when, as now, there strays into my hand the letter from my good friend, the "woman doctor" in the slum, in which she wrote, when her father lay dead: "The little scamps of the street have been positively pathetic; they have made such shy, boyish attempts at friendliness; one little chap offered to let me hold his top while it was spinning, in token of affection,"—when I read that, I have not the heart to shut anybody out.

Except, of course, the unfit, the criminal, and the pauper, cast off by their own, and the man brought over here merely to put money into the pockets of the steamship agent, the padrone, and the mine owner. We have laws to bar these out. Suppose we begin by being honest with ourselves and the immigrant, and respecting our own laws. The door that is to be shut is over yonder, at the port where they take ship. There is where the scrutiny is to be made, to be effective. When the door has been shut and locked against the man who left his country for his country's good, whether by its "assistance" or not, and when trafficking in the immigrant for private profit has been stopped, then, perhaps, we shall be better able to decide what degree of ignorance in him constitutes unfitness for citizenship and cause for shutting him out. Perchance then, also, we shall hear less of the cant about his being a peril to the republic. Doubtless ignorance is a peril, but the selfishness that trades upon ignorance is a much greater. He came to us without a country, ready to adopt such a standard of patriotism as he found, at its face value, and we gave him the rear tenement

and slum politics. If he accepted the standard, whose fault was it? His being in such a hurry to vote that he could not wait till the law made him a citizen was no worse, to my mind, than the treachery of the "upper class" native, who refuses to go to the polls for fear he may rub up against him there. This last let us settle with first, and see what remains of our problem. We can approach it honestly, then, at all events.

I came into town on the Pennsylvania Railroad the other day just when the emigrant lighter had tied up at the wharf to discharge its west-bound cargo. For a full hour I stood watching the stream of them, thousands upon thousands, carrying knapsacks and trunks, odd in speech and ways, but all of them with hopeful faces set toward the great country where they were to win their own way. So they answered the query of the eagle at the island gate. Scarce an hour within the gate, they were no longer a problem. The country needs these men of strong arms and strong courage. It is in the city the shoe pinches. What can we do to relieve it?

Much could be done with effective inspection on the other side, to discourage the blind immigration that stops short in the city's slums. They come to better themselves, and it is largely a question of making it clear to them that they do not better themselves and make us to be worse off by staying there, whereas their going farther would benefit both. But I repeat that that lever must be applied over there, to move this load. Once they are here, we might have a land and labor bureau that would take in the whole country, and serve as a great directory and distributing agency, instead of leaving it to private initiative to take up the crowds,—something

much more comprehensive than anything now existing. There would still be a surplus; but at least it would be less by so many as we sent away. And in the nature of things the congestion would be lessened as more went out. Immigrants go where they have friends, and if those friends lived in Michigan we should not be troubled with them long in New York. If the immigration came all from one country, we should, because of that, have no problem at all, or not much of one at all events, except perhaps in the Jews, who have lived in Ghettos since time out of mind. The others would speedily be found making only a way station of New York. It is the constant kaleidoscopic change I spoke of that brings us hordes every few years who have to break entirely new ground. It seems to have been always so. Forty years after the settlement of Manhattan Island, says Theodore Roosevelt in his history of New York, eighteen different languages and dialects were spoken in its streets, though the future metropolis was then but a small village. "No sooner," says he, "has one set of varying elements been fused together, than another stream has been poured into the crucible." What was true of New York two hundred years ago is true to-day of the country of which it is the gateway.

In dealing with the surplus that remains, we shall have to rely first and foremost on the public school. Of that I shall speak hereafter. It can do more and better work than it is doing, for the old as for the young, when it becomes the real neighborhood centre, especially in the slums. The flag flies over it, that is one thing, and not such a little thing as some imagine. I think we are beginning to see it, with our Flag Day and our putting it out when we never

thought of it five or six years ago. And by the way, when last I was in Denmark, my native land, I noticed they had a way of flying the flag on Sunday, —whether in honor of the day, or because they loved it, or because they felt the need of flying it in the face of their big and greedy German neighbor, I shall not say. But it was all right. Why can we not do the same? It would not hurt the flag, and it would not hurt the day. They would both be better for it—we would all be. You cannot have too much of the flag in the right way, and there would be nothing wrong about that. Just go into one of the Children's Aid Society's ragged schools, where the children are practically all from abroad, and see how they take to it. Watch an Italian parade, in which it is always borne side by side with the standard of United Italy, and if you had any doubts about what it stands for you will change your mind quickly. The sight of it is worth a whole course in the school, for education in citizenship.



One Way of bringing the Children into Camp: Basket-weaving in Vacation School.

And then it looks fine in the landscape always. It always makes me think there that I added to the red and white of my fathers' flag only the blue of heaven, where wrongs are righted, and I feel better for it. Why should it not have the same effect on others? I know it has.

The school might be made the means, as the house to which all the life of the neighborhood turned, of enrolling the immigrants in the perilous years when they are not yet citizens. I know what they mean; I have gone through them, seen most of the mischief they hold for the unattached. That *is* the mischief, that they are unattached. A way must be found of claiming them, if they are not to be lost to the cause of good citizenship where they might so easily have been saved. I spoke of it in "The Making of an American." They want to belong, they are waiting to be claimed by some one, and the some one that comes is Tammany with its slum politics. The mere enrolling of them, with leave to march behind a band of music, suffices with the young. They belong then. The old are used to enrolment. Where they came from they were enrolled in the church, in the army, by the official vaccinator, by the tax-collector—oh, yes, the tax-collector—and here, set all of a sudden adrift, it seems like a piece of home to have some one come along and claim them, write them down, and tell them that they are to do so and so. Childish, is it? Not at all. It is just human nature, the kind we are working with.

The mere fact that the schoolhouse is there, inviting them in, is something. When it comes to

seek them out, to invite them to their own hall for discussion, for play, it will be a good deal, particularly if the women go along. And the enrolment of the schoolhouse could be counted as being for decency.

It makes all the difference what the start is like. "Excellency," wrote an Italian to his consul in New York, "I arrived from Italy last week. As soon as I landed a policeman clubbed me. I am going to write to Victor Emmanuel how things are done here. Viva l' Italia! Abbasso l' America!" I should not be surprised to find that man plotting anarchy in Paterson as soon as he got his bearings, and neither need you be.

There is still another alternative to either keeping them out or keeping them in the city, namely, to ship them away after they have reached the slum and been stranded there, individually or in squads. The latter way was tried when the great Jewish immigration first poured in, in the early eighties. Five colonies of refugee Jews were started in southern New Jersey, but they failed. The soil was sandy and poor, and the work unfamiliar. Thrown upon his own resources, in a strange and unfriendly neighborhood, the man grew discouraged and gave up in despair. The colonies were in a state of collapse when the New York managers of the Baron de Hirsch Fund took them under the arms and gave them a start on a new plan. They themselves had located a partly industrial, partly farming, community in the neighborhood. They persuaded several large clothing contractors to move their plants out to the villages, where they would be assured of steady hands, with much less chance of disturbing strikes; while on the other hand their workers would have steadier work

and could never starve in dull seasons, for they could work their farms and gardens. And, indeed, a perfect frenzy for spading and hoeing seized them when the crops appeared, with promise of unlimited potatoes for the digging of them. The experiment is still in progress. It is an experiment, because as yet the Hirsch Fund millions back the colonies up, and there is no passing of reasonable judgment upon them till they have stood alone awhile. To all appearances they are prospering, Woodbine, the Hirsch colony, especially so, with its agricultural school that has set out upon the mission of turning the Jew back to the soil from which he has been barred so long. Its pupils came out of the sweat shops and the tenement barracks of the Ghetto, and a likelier lot it would not be easy to find. One can but wish that the hopes of their friends may be realized in fullest measure. They have put their hands to a task that seems like turning back the finger of time, and snags of various kinds beset their way.

I remember the President of the Board coming into my office one day with despair written all over him: of a hundred families, carefully picked to go into the country where homes and work awaited them, when it came to the actual departure only seven wanted to go. It was the old story of objection to "the society of the stump." They wanted the crowds, the bands, the kosher butcher shops, the fake auction stores, and the synagogues they were used to. They have learned a lesson from that in the Jersey colonies, and are building entertainment halls for the social life that is to keep them together. Only a year or so ago an attempt at home-building, much nearer New York, at New Orange, just over the hills in Jersey, came to an abrupt end. It left out the farming end, aiming

merely at the removal of needle workers from the city with their factory. A building was put up for a large New York tailoring firm, and it moved over bodily with its men—that is, with such as were willing to go. Work was plentiful in the city, and they were not all ready to surrender the tenement for the sake of a home upon the land, though a very attractive little cottage awaited them on singularly easy terms. However that was almost got over when the firm suddenly threw up the contract. It proved to be costlier for them to manufacture away from the city, and they could not compete.

If there is yet an element of doubt about the Jew as a colonist, there is none about his ability to make ends meet as an individual farmer, given a fair chance. More than a thousand such are now scattered through the New England states and the dairy counties of New York. The Jewish Agricultural Aid Societies of New York and Chicago gave them their start, and report decided progress. The farmers are paying their debts and laying away money. As a dairy farmer or poultry raiser the Jew has more of an immediate commercial grip on the situation and works with more courage than if he has to wait for long, uncertain crops. In Sullivan and Ulster counties, New York, a hundred Jewish farmers keep summer boarders besides, and are on the highroad to success. Very recently the New York society has broken new paths upon an individual "removal plan," started by the B'nai B'rith in 1900. Agents are sent throughout the country to make arrangements with Jewish communities for the reception of workers from the Ghetto; and so successful have been these efforts that at this writing some five thousand have been moved singly and scattered over the country

from the Atlantic to the Pacific—that is, in not yet three years since the beginning. They are carefully looked after, and the reports show that over eighty per cent of all do well in their new surroundings. This result has been wrought at a per capita expense of twelve dollars, not a very great sum for such a work.

In its bold outline the movement contemplates nothing less than the draining of the Ghetto by the indirect process of which I spoke. "The importance of it," says the Removal Committee in its report for 1901, "is found, not in the numbers removed, but in the inauguration of the movement, which should and must be greatly extended, and which is declared to be of far-reaching significance. The experience of past years has proven that almost every family removed becomes a centre around which immediately and with ever increasing force others congregate. The committee in charge of the Russian immigration in 1890, 1891, etc., has evidence that cities and towns, to which but a very small number of newly arrived immigrants were sent, have become the centres of large Russian-Jewish communities. No argument is needed to emphasize this statement."

It is pleasing to be told that the office of the Removal Committee has been besieged by eager applicants from the beginning. So light is breaking also in that dark corner.

There is enough of it everywhere, if one will only look away from the slum to those it holds fast. "The people are all right," was the unvarying report of the early Tenement House Committees, "if we only give them half a chance." When the country was in the throes of the silver campaign, the newspapers told

the story of an old laborer who went to the sub-treasury and demanded to see the "boss." He undid the strings of an old leathern purse with fumbling fingers, and counted out more than two hundred dollars in gold eagles, the hoard of a lifetime of toil and self-denial. They were for the government, he said. He had not the head to understand all the talk that was going on, but he gathered from what he heard that the government was in trouble, and that somehow it was about not having gold enough. So he had brought what he had. He owed it all to the country, and now that she needed it he had come to give it back.

The man was an Irishman. Very likely he was enrolled in Tammany and voted its ticket. I remember a tenement at the bottom of a back alley, over on the East Side, where I once went visiting with the pastor of a mission chapel. Up in the attic there was a family of father and daughter in two rooms that had been made out of one by dividing off the deep dormer window. It was midwinter, and they had no fire. He was a pedler, but the snow had stalled his push-cart, and robbed them of their only other source of income, a lodger who hired cot room in the attic for a few cents a night. The daughter was not able to work. But she said, cheerfully, that they were "getting along." When it came out that she had not tasted solid food for many days, was starving in fact,—indeed, she died within a year, of the slow starvation of the tenements that parades in the mortality returns under a variety of scientific name which all mean the same thing,—she met her pastor's gentle chiding with the excuse: "Oh, your church has many that are poorer than I. I don't want to take your money."

These were Germans, ordinarily held to be close-fisted; but I found that in their dire distress they had taken in a poor old man who was past working, and kept him all winter, sharing with him what they had. He was none of theirs; they hardly even knew him, as it appeared. It was enough that he was "poorer than they," and lonely and hungry and cold.




The Children's Christmas Tree.

It was over here that the children of Mr. Elsing's Sunday-school gave out the depth of their poverty fifty-four dollars in pennies to be hung on the Christmas tree as their offering to the persecuted Armenians. One of their teachers told me of a Bohemian family that let the holiday dinner she brought them stand and wait, while they sent out to bid to the feast four little ragamuffins of the neighborhood who else would have gone hungry. And here it was in "the hard winter" when no one

had work, that the nurse from the Henry Street settlement found her cobbler patient entertaining a lodger, with barely bread in the house for himself and his boy. He introduced the stranger with some embarrassment, and when they were alone, excused himself for doing it. The man was just from prison—a man with "a history."

"But," said the nurse, doubtfully, "is it a good thing for your boy to have that man in the house?"

There was a passing glimpse of uneasiness in the cobbler's glance, but it went as quickly as it had come. He laid his hand upon the nurse's. "This," he said, "ain't no winter to let a fellow from Sing Sing be on the street."

I might keep on, and fill many pages with instances of such kind, which simply go to prove that our poor human nature is at least as robust on Avenue A as up on Fifth Avenue, if it has half a chance, and often enough with no chance at all; and I might set over against it the product of sordid and mean environment which one has never far to seek. Good and evil go together in the tenements as in the fine houses, and the evil sticks out sometimes merely because it lies nearer the surface. The point is that the good does outweigh the bad, and that the virtues that turn the balance are after all those that make for manhood and good citizenship anywhere; while the faults are oftenest the accidents of ignorance and lack of training, which it is the business of society to correct. I recall my discouragement when I looked over the examination papers of a batch of candidates for police appointment,—young men largely the product of our public schools in this city and elsewhere,—and read in them that five of the

original New England states were "England, Ireland, Scotland, Belfast, and Cork"; that the Fire Department ruled New York in the absence of the mayor,—I have sometimes wished it did, and that he would stay away awhile, while they turned the hose on at the City Hall to make a clean job of it,—and that Lincoln was murdered by Ballington Booth. But we shall agree, no doubt, that the indictment of those papers was not of the men who wrote them, but of the school that stuffed its pupils with useless trash, and did not teach them to think. Neither have I forgotten that it was one of these very men who, having failed and afterward got a job as a bridge policeman, on his first pay day went straight from his post, half frozen as he was, to the settlement worker who had befriended him and his sick father, and gave him five dollars for "some one who was poorer than they." Poorer than they! What worker among the poor has not heard it? It is the charity of the tenement that covers a multitude of sins. There were thirteen in this policeman's family, and his wages were the biggest item of income in the house.

Jealousy, envy, and meanness wear no fine clothes and masquerade under no smooth speeches in the slums. Often enough it is the very nakedness of the virtues that makes us stumble in our judgment. I have in mind the "difficult case" that confronted some philanthropic friends of mine in a rear tenement on Twelfth Street, in the person of an aged widow, quite seventy I should think, who worked uncomplainingly for a sweater all day and far into the night, pinching and saving and stinting herself, with black bread and chickory coffee as her only fare, in order that she might carry her pitiful earnings to her big, lazy lout of a son in Brooklyn.

He never worked. My friends' difficulty was a very real one, for absolutely every attempt to relieve the widow was wrecked upon her mother heart. It all went over the river. Yet would you have had her different?

Sometimes it is only the unfamiliar setting that shocks. When an East Side midnight burglar, discovered and pursued, killed a tenant who blocked his way of escape, not long ago, his "girl" gave him up to the police. But it was not because he had taken human life. "He was good to me," she explained to the captain whom she told where to find him, "but since he robbed the church I had no use for him." He had stolen, it seems, the communion service in a Staten Island church. The thoughtless laughed. But in her ignorant way she was only trying to apply the ethical standards she knew. Our servant, pondering if the fortune she was told is "real good" at fifteen cents, when it should have cost her twenty-five by right, only she told the fortune-teller she had only fifteen, and lied in telling, is doing the same after her fashion. Stunted, bemuddled, as their standards were, I think I should prefer to take my chances with either rather than with the woman of wealth and luxury who gave a Christmas party to her lap-dog, as on the whole the sounder and by far the more hopeful.

All of which is merely saying that the country is all right, and the people are to be trusted with the old faith in spite of the slum. And it is true, if we remember to put it that way,—in spite of the slum. There is nothing in the slum to warrant that faith save human nature as yet uncorrupted. How long it is to remain so is altogether a question of the sacrifices we are willing to make in our fight with

the slum. As yet, we are told by the officials having to do with the enforcement of the health ordinances, which come closer to the life of the individual than any other kind, that the poor in the tenements are "more amenable to the law than the better class." It is of the first importance, then, that we should have laws deserving of their respect, and that these laws should be enforced, lest they conclude that the whole thing is a sham. Respect for law is a very powerful bar against the slum. But what, for instance, must the poor Jew understand, who is permitted to buy a live hen at the market, but neither to kill nor keep it in his tenement, and who on his feast day finds a whole squad of policemen detailed to follow him around and see that he does not do any of the things with his fowl for which he must have bought it? Or the day laborer, who drinks his beer in a "Raines law hotel," where brick sandwiches, consisting of two pieces of bread with a brick between, are set out on the counter, in derision of the state law which forbids the serving of drinks without "meals"?[30] The Stanton Street saloon keeper who did that was solemnly acquitted by a jury. Or the boy, who may buy fireworks on the Fourth of July, but not set them off? These are only ridiculous instances of an abuse that pervades our community life to an extent which constitutes one of its gravest perils. Insincerity of that kind is not lost on our fellow-citizen by adoption, who is only anxious to fall in with the ways of the country; and especially is it not lost on his boy.

We shall see how it affects him. He is the one for whom we are waging the battle with the slum. He is the to-morrow that sits to-day drinking in the lesson of the prosperity of the big boss who declared with

pride upon the witness stand that he rules New York, that judges pay him tribute, and that only when *he* says so a thing "goes"; and that he is "working for his own pocket all the time just the same as everybody else." He sees corporations pay blackmail and rob the people in return, quite according to the schedule of Hester Street. Only there it is the police who charge the pedler twenty cents, while here it is the politicians taking toll of the franchises, twenty per cent. Wall Street is not ordinarily reckoned in the slum, because of certain physical advantages; but, upon the evidence of the day, I think we shall have to conclude that the advantage ends there. The boy who is learning such lessons,—how is it with him?

The president of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children says that children's crime is increasing, and he ought to know. The managers of the Children's Aid Society, after nearly fifty years of wrestling with the slum for the boy, in which they have lately seemed to get the upper hand, said recently, that on the East Side children are growing up in certain districts "entirely neglected," and that the number of such children "increases beyond the power of philanthropic and religious bodies to cope properly with their needs." In the Tompkins Square Lodging House the evening classes were thinning out, and the keeper wailed, "Those with whom we have dealt of late have not been inclined to accept this privilege; how to make night school attractive to shiftless, indifferent street boys is a difficult problem to solve."

Perhaps it was only that he had lost the key. Across the square, the Boys' Club of St. Mark's Place, that began with a handful, counts seven thousand members to-day, and is building a house of its own.

The school census man announces that no boy in that old stronghold of the "bread or blood" brigade need henceforth loiter in the street because of there not being room in the public school, and the brigade has disbanded for want of recruits. The factory is being more and more firmly shut against the boy, and the bars let down at the playground. From Tompkins Square, nevertheless, came Jacob Beresheim, whose story let me stop here to tell you.[Back to Contents]

## CHAPTER IX

### THE GENESIS OF THE GANG

Jacob Beresheim was fifteen when he was charged with murder. It is now more than six years ago, but the touch of his hand is cold upon mine, with mortal fear, as I write. Every few minutes, during our long talk on the night of his arrest and confession, he would spring to his feet, and, clutching my arm as a drowning man catches at a rope, demand with shaking voice, "Will they give me the chair?" The assurance that boys were not executed quieted him only for the moment. Then the dread and the horror were upon him again.

Of his crime the less said the better. It was the climax of a career of depravity that differed from other such chiefly in the opportunities afforded by an environment which led up to and helped shape it. My business is with that environment. The man is dead, the boy in jail. But unless I am to be my brother's jail keeper merely, the iron bars do not

square the account of Jacob with society. Society exists for the purpose of securing justice to its members, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. When it fails in this, the item is carried on the ledger with interest and compound interest toward a day of reckoning that comes surely with the paymaster. We have heard the chink of his coin on the counter, these days, in the unblushing revelations before legislative investigating committees of degraded citizenship, of the murder of the civic conscience, and in the applause that hailed them from the unthinking crowd. And we have begun to understand that these are the interest on Jacob's account, older, much older, than himself. He is just an item carried on the ledger. But with that knowledge the account is at last in the way of getting squared. Let us see how it stands.

We shall take Jacob as a type of the street boy on the East Side, where he belonged. What does not apply to him in the review applies to his class. But there was very little of it indeed that he missed or that missed him.

He was born in a tenement in that section where the Gilder Tenement House Commission found 324,000 persons living out of sight and reach of a green spot of any kind, and where sometimes the buildings—front, middle, and rear—took up ninety-three per cent of all the space in the block. Such a home as he had was there, and of the things that belonged to it he was the heir. The sunlight was not among them. It "never entered" there. Darkness and discouragement did, and dirt. Later on, when he took to the dirt as his natural weapon in his battles with society, it was said of him that it was the only friend that stuck to him, and it was true. Very early the

tenement gave him up to the street. The thing he took with him as the one legacy of home was the instinct for the crowd, which meant that the tenement had wrought its worst mischief upon him; it had smothered that in him around which character is built. The more readily did he fall in with the street and its ways. Character implies depth, a soil, and growth. The street is all surface. Nothing grows there; it hides only a sewer.



Jacob Beresheim.

It taught him gambling as its first lesson, and stealing as the next. The two are never far apart. From shooting craps behind the "cop's" back to filching from the grocer's stock or plundering a defenceless pedler is only a step. There is in both the spice of law-breaking that appeals to the shallow

ambition of the street as heroic. At the very time when the adventurous spirit is growing in the boy, and his games are all of daring, of chasing and being chased, the policeman looms up to take a hand, and is hailed with joyful awe. Occasionally the raids have a comic tinge. A German grocer wandered into police headquarters with an appeal for protection against the boys.

"Vat means dot 'cheese it'?" he asked, rubbing his bald head in helpless bewilderment. "Efery dime dey says 'cheese it,' somedings vas gone."

To the lawlessness of the street the home opposes no obstacle, as we have seen. Within the memory of most of us the school did not. It might have more to offer even now. But we have gone such a long way since the day I am thinking of that I am not going to find fault. I used to think that some of them needed to be made over, until they were fit to turn out whole, sound boys, instead of queer manikins stuffed with information for which they have no use, and which is none of their business anyhow. It seemed to me, sometimes, when watching the process of cramming the school course with the sum of human knowledge and conceit, as if it all meant that we distrusted Nature's way of growing a man from a boy, and had set out to show her a shorter cut. A common result was the kind of mental befogment that had Abraham Lincoln murdered by Ballington Booth, and a superficiality, a hopeless slurring of tasks, that hitched perfectly with the spirit of the street, and left nothing to be explained in the verdict of the reformatory, "No moral sense." There was no moral sense to be got out of the thing, for there was little sense of any kind in it. The boy was not given a chance to be honest with himself by thinking a thing

through; he came naturally to accept as his mental horizon the headlines in his penny paper and the literature of the Dare-Devil-Dan-the-Death-Dealing-Monster-of-Dakota order, which comprise the ordinary æsthetic equipment of the slum. The mystery of his further development into the tough need not perplex anybody.

But Jacob Beresheim had not even the benefit of such schooling as there was to be had. He did not go to school, and nobody cared. There was indeed a law directing that every child should go, and a corps of truant officers to catch him if he did not; but the law had been a dead letter for a quarter of a century. There was no census to tell which children ought to be in school, and no place but a jail to put those in who shirked. Jacob was allowed to drift. From the time he was twelve till he was fifteen, he told me, he might have gone to school three weeks,—no more.

Church and Sunday-school missed him. I was going to say that they passed by on the other side, remembering the migration of the churches up-town as the wealthy moved out of and the poor into the region south of Fourteenth Street. But that would hardly be fair. They moved after their congregations; but they left nothing behind. In the twenty years that followed the war, while enough to people a large city moved in down-town, the number of churches there was reduced from 141 to 127. Fourteen Protestant churches moved out. Only two Roman Catholic churches and a synagogue moved in. I am not aware that there has been any large increase of churches in the district since, but we have seen that the crowding has not slackened pace. Jacob had no trouble in escaping the Sunday-school, as he had escaped the public school. His tribe will have none until the

responsibility incurred in the severance of Church and State sits less lightly on a Christian community, and the Church, from a mob, shall have become an army, with von Moltke's plan of campaign, "March apart, fight together." The Christian Church is not alone in its failure. The Jew's boy is breaking away from safe moorings rather faster than his brother of the new dispensation. The Church looks on, but it has no cause for congratulation. He is getting nothing in place of that which he lost, and the result is bad. There is no occasion for profound theories about it. The facts are plain enough. The new freedom has something to do with it; but neglect to look after the young has quite as much. Apart from its religious aspect, seen from the angle of the community's interest wholly, the matter is of the gravest import.

What the boy's play has to do with building character in him Froebel has told us. Through it, he showed us, the child "first perceives moral relations," and he made that the basis of the kindergarten and all common-sense education. That prop was knocked out. New York never had a children's playground till within the last three years. Truly it seemed, as Abram S. Hewitt said, as if in the early plan of our city the children had not been thought of at all. Such moral relations as Jacob was able to make out ran parallel with the gutter always, and counter to law and order as represented by the policeman and the landlord. The landlord had his windows to mind, and the policeman his lamps and the city ordinances which prohibit even kite-flying below Fourteenth Street where the crowds are. The ball had no chance at all. We have seen in New York a boy shot down by a policeman for the heinous offence of playing

football in the street on Thanksgiving Day. But a boy who cannot kick a ball around has no chance of growing up a decent and orderly citizen. He must have his childhood, so that he may be fitted to give to the community his manhood. The average boy is just like a little steam-engine with steam always up. The play is his safety-valve. With the landlord in the yard and the policeman on the street sitting on his safety-valve and holding it down, he is bound to explode. When he does, when he throws mud and stones, and shows us the side of him which the gutter developed, we are shocked, and marvel much what our boys are coming to, as if we had any right to expect better treatment of them. I doubt if Jacob, in the whole course of his wizened little life, had ever a hand in an honest game that was not haunted by the spectre of the avenging policeman. That he was not "doing anything" was no defence. The mere claim was proof that he was up to mischief of some sort. Besides, the policeman was usually right. Play in such a setting becomes a direct incentive to mischief in a healthy boy. Jacob was a healthy enough little animal.

Such fun as he had he got out of law-breaking in a small way. In this he was merely following the ruling fashion. Laws were apparently made for no other purpose that he could see. Such a view as he enjoyed of their makers and executors at election seasons inspired him with seasonable enthusiasm, but hardly with awe. A slogan, now, like that raised by Tammany's late candidate for district attorney,[31] —"To hell with reform!"—was something he could grasp. Of what reform meant he had only the vaguest notion, but this thing had the right ring to it. Roosevelt preaching enforcement of law was from

the first a "lobster" to him, not to be taken seriously. It is not among the least of the merits of the man that, by his sturdy personality, as well as by his unyielding persistence, he won the boy over to the passive admission that there might be something in it. It had not been his experience.

There was the law which sternly commanded him to go to school, and which he laughed at every day. Then there was the law to prevent child labor. It cost twenty-five cents for a false age certificate to break that, and Jacob, if he thought of it at all, probably thought of perjury as rather an expensive thing. A quarter was a good deal to pay for the right to lock a child up in a factory, when he ought to have been at play. The excise law was everybody's game. The sign that hung in every saloon, saying that nothing was sold there to minors, never yet barred out his "growler" when he had the price. There was another such sign in the tobacco shop, forbidding the sale of cigarettes to boys of his age. Jacob thought that when he had the money he smoked as many as fifteen packs a day, and he laughed when he told me. He laughed, too, when he remembered how the boys of the East Side took to carrying balls of cord in their pockets, on the wave of the Lexow reform, on purpose to measure the distance from the school door to the nearest saloon. They had been told that it should be two hundred feet, according to law. There were schools that had as many as a dozen within the tabooed limits. It was in the papers how, when the highest courts said that the law was good, the saloon keepers attacked *the schools* as a nuisance and detrimental to property. In a general way Jacob sided with the saloon keeper; not because he had any opinion about it, but because it seemed natural. Such

opinions as he ordinarily had he got from that quarter.

When, later on, he came to be tried, his counsel said to me, "He is an amazing liar." No, hardly amazing. It would have been amazing if he had been anything else. Lying and mockery were all around him, and he adjusted himself to the things that were. He lied in self-defence.



Heading off the Gang. Vacation Playground near Old Frog Hollow.

Jacob's story ends here, as far as he is personally concerned. The story of the gang begins. So trained for the responsibility of citizenship, robbed of home and of childhood, with every prop knocked from under him, all the elements that make for strength and character trodden out in the making of the boy, all the high ambition of youth caricatured by the slum and become base passions,—so equipped he

comes to the business of life. As a "kid" he hunted with the pack in the street. As a young man he trains with the gang, because it furnishes the means of gratifying his inordinate vanity; that is the slum's counterfeit of self-esteem. Upon the Jacobs of other days there was a last hold,—the father's authority. Changed conditions have loosened that also. There is a time in every young man's life when he knows more than his father. It is like the measles or the mumps, and he gets over it, with a little judicious firmness in the hand that guides. It is the misfortune of the slum boy of to-day that it is really so, and that he knows it. His father is an Italian or a Jew, and cannot even speak the language to which the boy is born. He has to depend on him in much, in the new order of things. The old man is "slow," he is "Dutch." He may be an Irishman with some advantages; he is still a "foreigner." He loses his grip on the boy.

Ethical standards of which he has no conception clash. Watch the meeting of two currents in river or bay, and see the line of drift that tells of the struggle. So in the city's life strive the currents of the old and the new, and in the churning the boy goes adrift. The last hold upon him is gone. That is why the gang appears in the second generation, the first born upon the soil,—a fighting gang if the Irishman is there with his ready fist, a thievish gang if it is the East Side Jew,—and disappears in the third. The second boy's father is not "slow." He has had experience. He was clubbed into decency in his own day, and the night stick wore off the glamour of the thing. His grip on the boy is good, and it holds.

It depends now upon chance what is to become of the lad. But the slum has stacked the cards against him. There arises in the lawless crowd a leader, who

rules with his stronger fists of his readier wit. Around him the gang crystallizes, and what he is it becomes. He may be a thief, like David Meyer, a report of whose doings I have before me. He was just a bully, and, being the biggest in his gang, made the others steal for him and surrender the "swag," or take a licking. But that was unusual. Ordinarily the risk and the "swag" are distributed on more democratic principles. Or he may be of the temper of Mike of Poverty Gap, who was hanged for murder at nineteen. While he sat in his cell at police headquarters, he told with grim humor of the raids of his gang on Saturday nights when they stocked up at "the club." They used to "hook" a butcher's cart or other light wagon, wherever found, and drive like mad up and down the avenue, stopping at saloon or grocery to throw in what they wanted. His job was to sit at the tail of the cart with a six-shooter and pop at any chance pursuer. He chuckled at the recollection of how men fell over one another to get out of his way. "It was great to see them run," he said. Mike was a tough, but with a better chance he might have been a hero. The thought came to him, too, when it was all over and the end in sight. He put it all in one sober, retrospective sigh, that had in it no craven shirking of the responsibility which was properly his: "I never had no bringing up."

There was a meeting some time after his death to boom a scheme for "getting the boys off the street," and I happened to speak of Mike's case. In the audience was a gentleman of means and position, and his daughter, who manifested great interest and joined heartily in the proposed movement. A week later, I was thunderstruck at reading of the arrest of my sympathetic friend's son for train-wrecking up

the state. The fellow was of the same age as Mike. It appeared that he was supposed to be attending school, but had been reading dime novels instead, until he arrived at the point where he "had to kill some one before the end of the month." To that end he organized a gang of admiring but less resourceful comrades. After all, the planes of fellowship of Poverty Gap and Madison Avenue lie nearer than we often suppose. I set the incident down in justice to the memory of my friend Mike. If this one went astray with so much to pull him the right way and but the single strand broken, what then of the other?

Mike's was the day of Irish heroics. Since their scene was shifted from the East Side, there has come over there an epidemic of child crime of meaner sort, but following the same principle of gang organization. It is difficult to ascertain the exact extent of it, because of the well-meant but, I am inclined to think, mistaken effort on the part o£ the children's societies to suppress the record of it for the sake of the boy. Enough testimony comes from the police and the courts, however, to make it clear that thieving is largely on the increase among the East Side boys. And it is amazing at what an early age it begins. When, in the fight for a truant school, I had occasion to gather statistics upon this subject, to meet the sneer of the educational authorities that the "crimes" of street boys compassed at worst the theft of a top or a marble, I found among 278 prisoners, of whom I had kept the run for ten months, two boys, of four and eight years respectively, arrested for breaking into a grocery, not to get candy or prunes, but to rob the till. The little one was useful to "crawl through a small hole." There were "burglars" of six and seven years; and five in a bunch, the whole gang

apparently, at the age of eight. "Wild" boys began to appear in court at that age. At eleven, I had seven thieves, two of whom had a record on the police blotter, and an "habitual liar"; at twelve, I had four burglars, three ordinary thieves, two arrested for drunkenness, three for assault, and three incendiaries; at thirteen, five burglars, one with a "record," as many thieves, one "drunk," five charged with assault and one with forgery; at fourteen, eleven thieves and housebreakers, six highway robbers,—the gang on its unlucky day, perhaps,—and ten arrested for fighting, not counting one who had assaulted a policeman, in a state of drunken frenzy. One of the gangs made a specialty of stealing baby carriages, when they were left unattended in front of stores. They "drapped the kids in the hallway" and "sneaked" the carriages. And so on. The recital was not a pleasant one, but it was effective. We got our truant school, and one way that led to the jail was blocked.

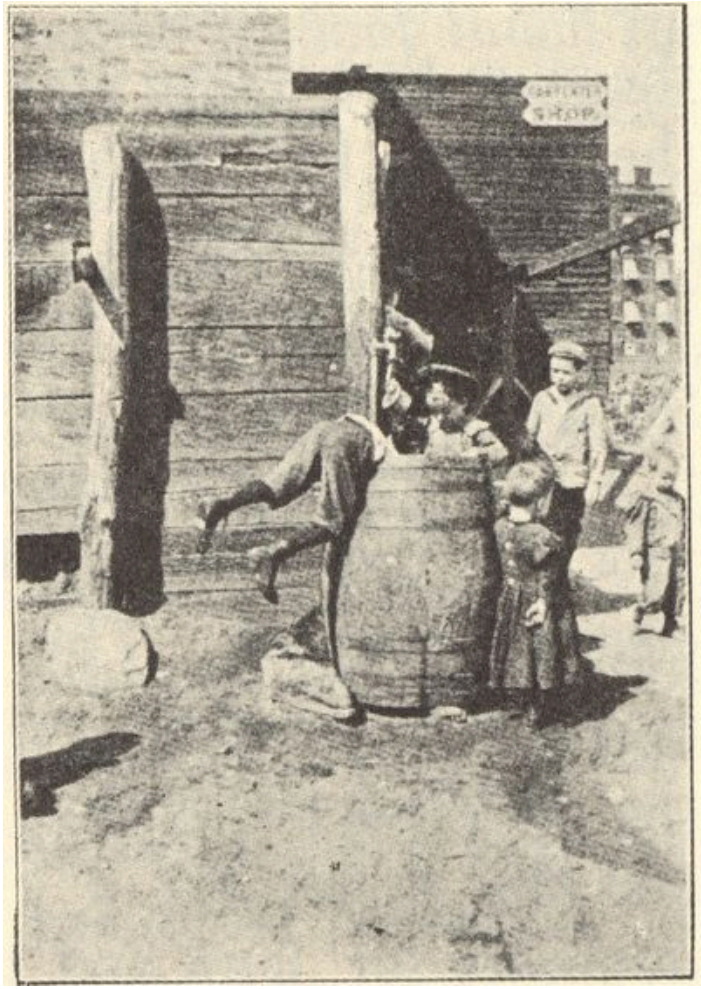


Craps.

It may be that the leader is neither thief nor thug, but ambitious. In that case the gang is headed for politics by the shortest route. Likewise, sometimes, when he is both. In either case it carries the situation by assault. When the gang wants a thing, the easiest way seems to it always to take it. There was an explosion in a Fifth Street tenement, one winter's night, that threw twenty families into a wild panic, and injured two of the tenants badly. There was much mystery about it, until it came out that the housekeeper had had a "run in" with the gang in the block. It wanted club room in the house, and she would not let it in. Beaten, it avenged itself in characteristic fashion by leaving a package of gunpowder on the stairs, where she would be sure to find it when she went the rounds with her candle to close up. That was a gang of the kind I have

reference to, headed straight for Albany. And what is more, it will get there, unless things change greatly. The gunpowder was just a "bluff" to frighten the housekeeper, an instalment of the kind of politics it meant to play when it got its chance.

There was "nothing against" this gang except a probable row with the saloon keeper, since it applied elsewhere for house room. Not every gang has a police record of theft and "slugging" beyond the early encounters of the street. "Our honorable leader" is not always the captain of a band of cutthroats. He is the honorary president of the "social club" that bears his name, and he counts for something in the ward. But the ethical standards do not differ. "Do others, or they will do you," felicitously adapted from Holy Writ for the use of the slum, and the classic war-cry, "To the victor the spoils," made over locally to read, "I am not in politics for my health," still interpret the creed of the political as of the "slugging" gang. They draw their inspiration from the same source. Of what gang politics mean every large city in our country has had its experience. New York is no exception. History on the subject is being made yet, in sight of us all.



Children's Playground. Good Citizenship at the Bottom of this Barrel.

Our business with the gang, however, is in the making of it. Take now the showing of the reformatory,[32] to which I have before made reference, and see what light it throws upon the matter: 77.80 per cent of prisoners with no moral

sense, or next to none, yet more than that proportion possessed of "good natural mental capacity," which is to say that they had the means of absorbing it from their environment, if there had been any to absorb. Bad homes sent half (47.79) of all prisoners there; bad company 97.60 per cent. The reformatory repeats the prison chaplain's verdict, "weakness, not wickedness," in its own way: "Malevolence does not characterize the criminal, but aversion to continuous labor." If "the street" had been written across it in capital letters, it could not have been made plainer. Less than 15 per cent of the prisoners came from good homes, and one in sixty-six (1.51) had kept good company; evidently he was not of the mentally capable. They will tell you at the prison that, under its discipline, eighty odd per cent are set upon their feet and make a fresh start. With due allowance for a friendly critic, there is still room for the three-fourths labelled normal, of "natural mental capacity." They came to their own with half a chance, even the chance of a prison. The Children's Aid Society will give you still better news of the boys rescued from the slum before it had branded them for its own. Scarce five per cent are lost, though they leave such a black mark that they make trouble for all the good boys that are sent out from New York. Better than these was the kindergarten record in San Francisco. New York has no monopoly of the slum. Of nine thousand children from the slummiest quarters of that city who had gone through the Golden Gate Association's kindergartens, just one was found to have got into jail. The merchants who looked coldly on the experiment before, brought their gold to pay for keeping it up. They were hard-headed men of business, and the demonstration that schools were better than jails any day appealed to them as

eminently sane and practical.

And well it might. The gang is a distemper of the slum that writes upon the generation it plagues the receipt for its own corrective. It is not the night stick, though in the acute stage that is not to be dispensed with. Neither is it the jail. To put the gang behind iron bars affords passing relief, but it is like treating a symptom without getting at the root of the disease. Prophylactic treatment is clearly indicated. The boy who flings mud and stones is entering his protest in his own way against the purblind policy that gave him jails for schools and the gutter for a playground; that gave him dummies for laws and the tenement for a home. He is demanding his rights, of which he has been cheated,—the right to his childhood, the right to know the true dignity of labor that makes a self-respecting manhood. The gang, rightly understood, is our ally, not our enemy. Like any ailment of the body, it is a friend come to tell us of something that has gone amiss. The thing for us to do is to find out what it is, and set it right.

That is the story of the gang. That we have read and grasped its lesson at last, many things bear witness. Here is the League for Political Education providing a playground for the children up on the West Side, near the model tenements which I described. Just so! With a decent home and a chance for the boy to grow into a healthy man, his political education can proceed without much further hindrance. Now let the League for Political Education trade off the policeman's club for a boys' club, and it may consider its course fairly organized.

I spoke of the instinct for the crowd in the man as evidence that the slum had got its grip on him. And

it is true of the boy. The experience that the helpless poor will not leave their slum when a chance of better things is offered is wearily familiar to most of us. One has to have resources to face the loneliness of the woods and the fields. We have seen what resources the slum has at its command. In the boy it laid hold of the instinct for organization, the desire to fall in and march in line that belongs to all boys, and is not here, as abroad, cloyed with military service in the young years,—and anyhow is stronger in the American boy than in his European brother,—and perverted it to its own use. That is the simple secret of the success of the club, the brigade, in winning back the boy. It is fighting the street with its own weapon. The gang is the club run wild.

How readily it owns the kinship was never better shown than by the experience of the college settlement girls, when they first went to make friends in the East Side tenements. I have told it before, but it will bear telling again, for it holds the key to the whole business. They gathered in the drift, all the little embryo gangs that were tuning up in the district, and made them into clubs,—Young Heroes, Knights of the Round Table, and such like; all except one, the oldest, that had begun to make a name for itself with the police. That one held aloof, observing coldly what went on, to make sure it was "straight." They let it be, keeping the while an anxious eye upon it; until one day there came a delegation with this olive branch: "If you will let us in, we will change and have your kind of a gang." Needless to say it was let in. And within a year, when, through a false rumor that the concern was moving away, there was a run on the settlement's penny provident bank, the converted gang proved itself its stanchest friend by

doing actually what John Halifax did in Miss Mulock's story: it brought all the pennies it could raise in the neighborhood by hook or by crook and deposited them as fast as the regular patrons—the gang had not yet risen to the dignity of a bank account—drew them out, until the run ceased. This same gang which, the year before, was training for trouble with the police!

The cry, "Get the boys off the street," that has been raised in our cities, as the real gravity of the situation has been made clear, has led to the adoption of curfew ordinances in many places. Any attempt to fit such a scheme to metropolitan life would result only in adding one more dead-letter law, more dangerous than all the rest, to those we have. New York is New York, and one look at the crowds in the streets and the tenements will convince anybody. Besides, the curfew rings at nine o'clock. The dangerous hours, when the gang is made, are from seven to nine, between supper and bedtime. This is the gap the club fills out. The boys take to the street because the home has nothing to keep them there. To lock them up in the house would only make them hate it more. The club follows the line of least resistance. It has only to keep also on the line of common sense. It must be a real club, not a reformatory. Its proper function is to head off the jail. The gang must not run it. But rather that than have it help train up a band of wretched young cads. The signs are not hard to make out. When a boy has had his head swelled by his importance as a member of the Junior Street-cleaning Band to the point of reproving his mother for throwing a banana peel in the street, the thing to be done is to take him out and spank him, if it *is* reverting to "the savagery"

of the street. Better a savage than a cad. The boys have the making of both in them. Their vanity furnishes abundant material for the cad, but only when unduly pampered. Left to itself, the gang can be trusted not to develop that kink.

It comes down in the end to the personal influence that is always most potent in dealing with these problems. We had a gang start up once when my boys were of that age, out in the village on Long Island where we lived. It had its headquarters in our barn, where it planned divers raids that aimed at killing the cat and other like outrages; the central fact being that the boys had an air rifle, with which it was necessary to murder something. My wife discovered the conspiracy, and, with woman's wit, defeated it by joining the gang. She "gave in wood" to the election bonfires, and pulled the safety valve upon all the other plots by entering into the true spirit of them,—which was adventure rather than mischief,—and so keeping them within safe lines. She was elected an honorary member, and became the counsellor of the gang in all its little scrapes. I can yet see her dear brow wrinkled in the study of some knotty gang problem, which we discussed when the boys had been long asleep. They did not dream of it, and the village never knew what small tragedies it escaped, nor who it was that so skilfully averted them.

It is always the women who do those things. They are the law and the gospel to the boy, both in one. It is the mother heart, I suppose, and there is nothing better in all the world. I am reminded of the conversion of "the Kid" by one who was in a very real sense the mother of a social settlement up-town, in the latitude of Battle Row. The Kid was driftwood.

He had been cast off by a drunken father and mother, and was living on what he could scrape out of ash barrels, and an occasional dime for kindling-wood which he sold from a wheelbarrow, when the gang found and adopted him. My friend adopted the gang in her turn, and civilized it by slow stages. Easter Sunday came, when she was to redeem her promise to take the boys to witness the services in a neighboring church, where the liturgy was especially impressive. It found the larger part of the gang at her door,—a minority, it was announced, were out stealing potatoes, hence were excusable,—in a state of high indignation.

"The Kid's been cussin' awful," explained the leader. The Kid showed in the turbulent distance, red-eyed and raging.

"But why?" asked my friend, in amazement.

"'Cause he can't go to church!"

It appeared that the gang had shut him out, with a sense of what was due to the occasion, because of his rags. Restored to grace, and choking down reminiscent sobs, the Kid sat through the Easter service, surrounded by the twenty-seven "proper" members of the gang. Civilization had achieved a victory, and no doubt my friend remembered it in her prayers with thanksgiving. The manner was of less account. Battle Row has its own ways, even in its acceptance of means of grace.



"The gang fell in with joyous shouts."

I walked home from the office in the early gloaming. The street wore its normal aspect of mingled dulness and the kind of expectancy that is always waiting to turn any excitement, from a fallen horse to a fire, to instant account. The early June heat had driven the multitudes from the tenements into the street for a breath of air. The boys of the block were holding a meeting at the hydrant. In some way they had turned the water on, and were splashing in it with bare feet, revelling in the sense that they were doing something that "went against" their enemy, the policeman. Upon the quiet of the evening broke a bugle note and the tramp of many feet keeping time. A military band came around the corner, stepping briskly to the tune of "The Stars and Stripes Forever." Their white duck trousers glimmered in the twilight, as the hundred legs moved as one. Stoops and hydrant were deserted with a rush. The gang fell in with joyous shouts. The young fellow linked arms with his sweetheart and

fell in too. The tired mother hurried with the baby carriage to catch up. The butcher came, hot and wiping his hands on his apron, to the door to see them pass.

"Yes," said my companion, guessing my thoughts, —we had been speaking of the boys,—"but look at the other side. There is the military spirit. Do you not fear danger from it in this country?"

No, my anxious friend, I do not. Let them march; and if with a gun, better still. Often enough it is the choice of the gun on the shoulder, or, by and by, the stripes on the back in the lockstep gang.[Back to Contents]

## CHAPTER X

### JIM

I used to think that it would have been better for Jim if he had never been born. What the good bishop said of some children—that they were not so much born into the world as they were damned into it—seemed true of Jim, if ever it was true of any one. He had had a father, once, who was kind to him, but it was long since. The one he called by that name last had been sent to Sing Sing, to the lad's great relief, for a midnight burglary, shortly after he married Jim's mother. His back hurt yet when he thought of the evil days when he was around. If any one had thought it worth while to teach Jim to pray, he would have prayed with all his might that his father might never come out. But no one did, so that he was

spared that sin. I suppose that was what it would have been called. I am free to confess that I would have joined Jim in sinning with a right good will, even to the extent of speeding the benevolent intentions of Providence in that direction—anyhow, until Jim should be able to take care of himself. I mean with his fists. He was in a way of learning that without long delay, for ever since he was a little shaver he had had to fight his own way, and sometimes his mother's. He was thirteen when I met him, and most of his time had been put in around the Rag Gang's quarters, along First Avenue and the river front, where that kind of learning was abundant and came cheap.

His mother drank. I do not know what made her do it—whether it was the loss of the first husband, or getting the second, or both. It did not seem important when she stood there, weak and wretched and humble, with Jim. And as for my preaching to her, sitting in my easy-chair, well fed and respectable, that would come near to being impertinence. So it always struck me. Perhaps I was wrong. Anyway, it would have done her no good. Too much harm had been done her already. She would disappear for days, sometimes for weeks at a time, on her frequent sprees. Jim never made any inquiries. On those occasions he kept aloof from us, and paddled his own canoe, lest we should ask questions. It was when she had come home sobered that we saw them always together. Now it was the rent, and then again a few groceries. With such lifts as she got, sandwiched in with much good advice, and by the aid of an odd job now and then, Mrs. Kelly managed to keep a bit of a roof over her boy and herself, down in the "village" on the river front.

At least, Jim had a place to sleep. Until, one day, our visitor reported that she was gone for good—she and the boy. They were both gone,—nobody in the neighborhood knew or cared where,—and the room was vacant. Except that they had not been dispossessed, we could learn nothing. Jim was not found, and in the press of many things the Kellys were forgotten. Once or twice his patient, watchful eyes, that seemed to be always trying to understand something to which he had not found the key, haunted me at my office; but at last I forgot about them too.

Some months passed. It was winter. A girl, who had been one of our cares, had been taken to the city hospital to die, and our visitor went there to see and comfort her. She was hastening down the long aisle between the two rows of beds, when she felt something tugging feebly at the sleeve of her coat. Looking round, she saw on the pillow of the bed she had just passed the face of Jim's mother.

"Why, Mrs. Kelly!" she exclaimed, and went to her. "Where—?" But the question that rose to her lips was never spoken. One glance was enough to show that her time was very short, and she was not deceived. The nurse supplied the facts briefly in a whisper. She had been picked up in the street, drunk or sick—the diagnosis was not clearly made out at the time, but her record was against her. She lay a day or two in a police cell, and by the time it was clear that it was not rum this time, the mischief was done. Probably it would have been done anyhow. The woman was worn out. What now lay on the hospital cot was a mere wreck of her, powerless to move or speak. She could only plead with her large, sad eyes. As she tried to make them say that which was in her soul,

two big tears rolled slowly down the wan cheeks and fell on the coarse sheet. The visitor understood. What woman would not?

"Jim?" she said, and the light of joy and understanding came into the yearning eyes. She nodded ever so feebly, and the hand that rested in her friend's twitched and trembled in the effort to grasp hers.

"I will find him. It is all right. Now, you be quite happy. I will bring him here."

The white face settled back on the pillow, and the weary eyes closed with a little sigh of contentment very strange in that place. When the visitor passed her cot ten minutes later, she was asleep, with a smile on her lips.

It proved not so easy a matter to find Jim. We came upon his track in his old haunts after a while, only to lose it again and again. It was clear that he was around, but it seemed almost as if he were purposely dodging us; and in fact that proved to have been the case when at last, after a hunt of weary days and nights through the neighborhood, he was brought in. Ragged, pale, and pinched by hunger, we saw him with a shock of remorse for having let him drift so long. His story was simple enough. When his mother failed to come back, and, the rent coming due, the door of what had been home to him, even such as it was, was closed upon him, he took to the street. He slept in hallways and with the gang among the docks, never going far from the "village" lest he should miss news of his mother coming back. The cold nights came, and he shivered often in his burrows; but he never relaxed his watch.

All the time his mother lay dying less than half a dozen blocks away, but there was no one to tell him. Had any one done so, it is not likely that the guard would have let him through the gate, as he looked. Seven weeks he had spent in the streets when he heard that he was wanted. The other boys told him that it was the "cruelty" man sure; and then began the game of hide-and-seek that tried our patience and wore on his mother, sinking rapidly now, but that eventually turned up Jim.



"'Oh, mother! You were gone so long!'"

We took him up to the hospital, and into the ward where his mother lay. Away off at the farther end of the room, he knew her, the last in the row, and ran straight to her before we could stop him, and fell on her neck.

"Mother!" we heard him say, while he hugged her, with his head on her pillow. "Mother, why don't you speak to me? I am all right—I am."

He raised his head and looked at her. Happy tears ran down the thin face turned to his. He took her in his arms again.

"I am all right, mother; honest, I am. Don't you cry. I couldn't keep the rooms, mother! They took everything, only the deed to father's grave. I kept that."

He dug in the pocket of his old jacket, and brought out a piece of paper, carefully wrapped in many layers of rags and newspaper that hung in dirty tatters.

"Here it is. Everything else is gone. But it is all right. I've got you, and I am here. Oh, mother! You were gone so long!"

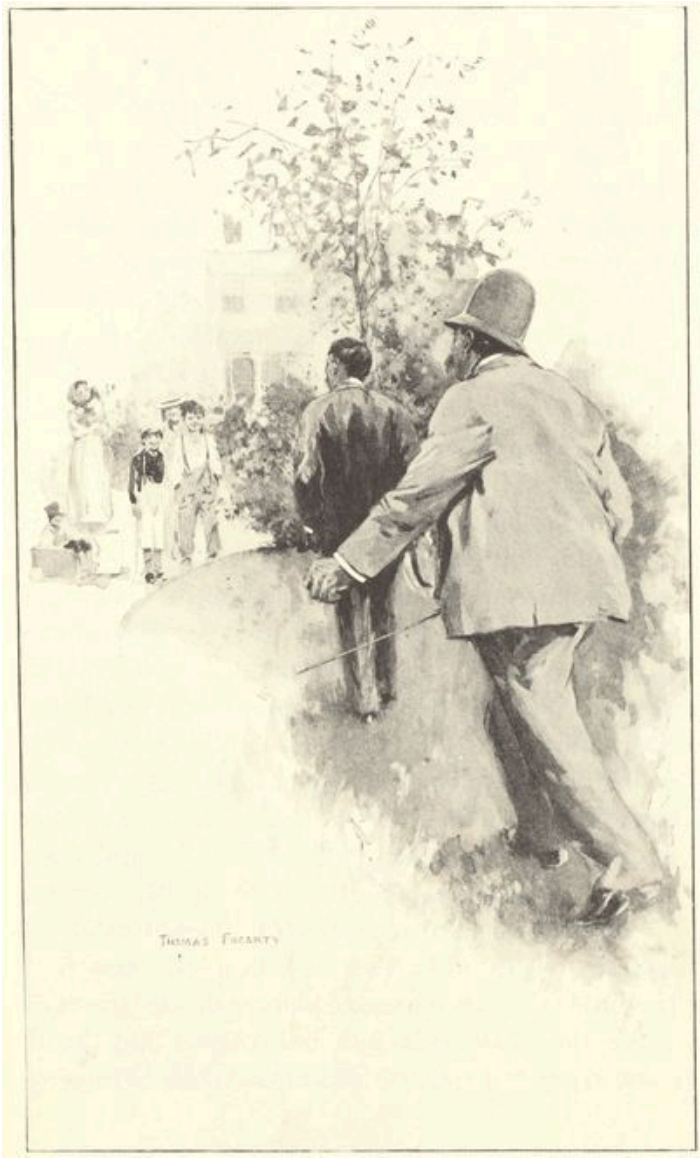
Longer—poor Jim—the parting that was even then adding another to the mysteries that had vexed my soul concerning you. Happiness at last had broken the weary heart. But if it added one, it dispelled another: I knew then that I erred, Jim, when I thought it were better if you had never been born!
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## CHAPTER XI

### LETTING IN THE LIGHT

I had been out of town and my way had not fallen through the Mulberry Bend in weeks until that morning when I came suddenly upon the park that

had been made there in my absence. Sod had been laid, and men were going over the lawn cutting the grass after the rain. The sun shone upon flowers and the tender leaves of young shrubs, and the smell of new-mown hay was in the air. Crowds of little Italian children shouted with delight over the "garden," while their elders sat around upon the benches with a look of contentment such as I had not seen before in that place. I stood and looked at it all, and a lump came in my throat as I thought of what it had been, and of all the weary years of battling for this. It had been such a hard fight, and now at last it was won. To me the whole battle with the slum had summed itself up in the struggle with this dark spot. The whir of the lawn-mower was as sweet a song in my ear as that which the skylark sang when I was a boy, in Danish fields, and which gray hairs do not make the man forget.




"Keep off the grass!"

In my delight I walked upon the grass. It seemed

as if I should never be satisfied till I had felt the sod under my feet,—sod in the Mulberry Bend! I did not see the gray-coated policeman hastening my way, nor the wide-eyed youngsters awaiting with shuddering delight the catastrophe that was coming, until I felt his cane laid smartly across my back and heard his angry command:

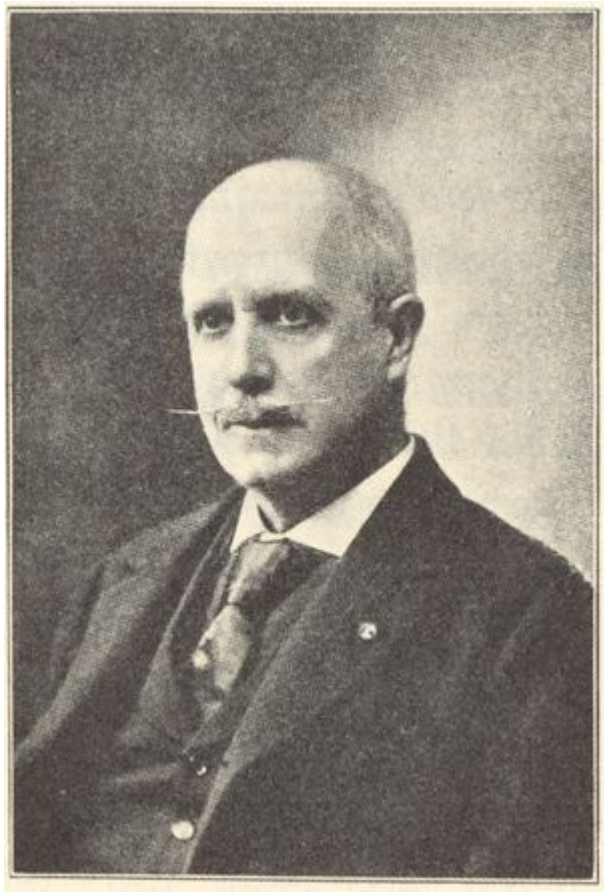
"Hey! Come off the grass! D'ye think it is made to walk on?"

So that was what I got for it. It is the way of the world. But it was all right. The park was there, that was the thing. And I had my revenge. I had just had a hand in marking five blocks of tenements for destruction to let in more light, and in driving the slum from two other strongholds. Where they were, parks are being made to-day in which the sign "Keep off the grass!" will never be seen. The children may walk in them from morning till night, and I too, if I want to, with no policeman to drive us off. I tried to tell the policeman something about it. But he was of the old dispensation. All the answer I got was a gruff:

"G'wan now! I don't want none o' yer guff!"

It was all "guff" to the politicians, I suppose, from the day the trouble began about the Mulberry Bend, but toward the end they woke up nobly. When the park was finally dedicated to the people's use, they took charge of the celebration with immense unction, and invited themselves to sit in the high seats and glory in the achievement which they had done little but hamper and delay from the first. They had not reckoned with Colonel Waring, however. When they had had their say, the colonel arose, and, curtly reminding them that they had really had no hand in

the business, proposed three cheers for the citizen effort that had struck the slum this staggering blow. There was rather a feeble response on the platform, but rousing cheers from the crowd, with whom the colonel was a prime favorite, and no wonder. Two years later he laid down his life in the fight which he so valiantly and successfully waged. It is the simple truth that he was killed by politics. The services which he had rendered the city would have entitled him in any reputable business to be retained in the employment that was his life and his pride. Had he been so retained, he would not have gone to Cuba, and would in all human probability be now alive. But Tammany is not "in politics for its health" and had no use for him, though no more grievous charge could be laid at his door, even in the heat of the campaign, than that he was a "foreigner," being from Rhode Island. Spoils politics never craved a heavier sacrifice of any community.



Colonel George E. Waring, Jr.

It was Colonel Waring's broom that first let light into the slum. That which had come to be considered an impossible task he did by the simple formula of "putting a man instead of a voter behind every broom." The words are his own. The man, from a political dummy who loathed his job and himself in it with cause, became a self-respecting citizen, and the streets that had been dirty were swept. The ash

barrels which had befouled the sidewalks disappeared, almost without any one knowing it till they were gone. The trucks that obstructed the children's only playground, the street, went with the dirt, despite the opposition of the truckman who had traded off his vote to Tammany in the past for stall room at the curbstone. They did not go without a struggle. When appeal to the alderman proved useless, the truckman resorted to strategy. He took a wheel off, or kept a perishing nag, that could not walk, hitched to the truck over night to make it appear that it was there for business. But subterfuge availed as little as resistance. In the Mulberry Bend he made his last stand. The old houses had been torn down, leaving a three-acre lot full of dirt mounds and cellar holes. Into this the truckmen of the Sixth Ward hauled their carts, and defied the street cleaners. They were no longer in their way, and they were on the Park Department's domain, where no Colonel Waring was in control. But while their owners were triumphing, the children playing among the trucks set one of them rolling down into a cellar, and three or four of the little ones were crushed. That was the end. The trucks disappeared. Even Tammany has not ventured to put them back, so great was the relief of their going. They were not only a hindrance to the sweeper and the skulking-places of all manner of mischief at night, but I have repeatedly seen the firemen baffled in their efforts to reach a burning house, where they stood four and six deep in the wide "slips" at the river.

Colonel Waring did more for the cause of labor than all the walking delegates of the town together, by investing a despised but highly important task with a dignity which won the hearty plaudits of a

grateful city. When he uniformed his men and announced that he was going to parade with them so that we might all see what they were like, the town laughed and poked fun at the "white wings"; but no one went to see them who did not come away converted to an enthusiastic belief in the man and his work. Public sentiment, that had been half reluctantly suspending judgment, expecting every day to see the colonel "knuckle down to politics" like his predecessors, turned in an hour, and after that there was little trouble. The tenement house children organized street cleaning bands to help along the work, and Colonel Waring enlisted them as regular auxiliaries and made them useful.

They had no better friend. When the unhappy plight of the persecuted push-cart men—all immigrant Jews, who were blackmailed, robbed, and driven from pillar to post as a nuisance after they had bought a license to trade in the street—appealed vainly for a remedy. Colonel Waring found a way out in a great morning market in Hester Street that should be turned over to the children for a playground in the afternoon. But though he proved that it would pay interest on the investment in market fees, and many times in the children's happiness, it was never built. It would have been a most fitting monument to the man's memory. His broom saved more lives in the crowded tenements than a squad of doctors. It did more: it swept the cobwebs out of our civic brain and conscience, and set up a standard of a citizen's duty which, however we may for the moment forget, will be ours until we have dragged other things than our pavements out of the mud.



A Tammany-swept East Side Street before Colonel Waring's Day.

Even the colonel's broom would have been powerless to do that for "the Bend." That was hopeless and had to go. There was no question of children or playground involved. The worst of all the gangs, the Whyós, had its headquarters in the darkest of its dark alleys; but it was left to the police. We had not begun to understand that the gangs meant something to us beyond murder and vengeance, in those days. No one suspected that they had any such roots in the soil that they could be killed by merely destroying the slum. The cholera was rapping on our door, and, with the Bend there, we felt about it as a man with stolen goods in his house must feel when the policeman comes up the street. Back in the seventies we began discussing what ought to be done. By 1884 the first Tenement House Commission

had summoned up courage to propose that a street be cut through the bad block. In the following year a bill was brought in to destroy it bodily, and then began the long fight that resulted in the defeat of the slum a dozen years later.



The Same Street when Colonel Waring wielded the Broom.

It was a bitter fight, in which every position of the enemy had to be carried by assault. The enemy was the deadly official inertia that was the outcome of political corruption born of the slum plus the indifference of the mass of our citizens, who probably had never seen the Bend. If I made it my own concern to the exclusion of all else, it was only because I knew it. I had been part of it. Homeless and alone, I had sought its shelter, not for long,—that was not to be endured,—but long enough to

taste of its poison, and I hated it. I knew that the blow must be struck there, to kill. Looking back now over those years, I can see that it was all as it should be. We were learning the alphabet of our lesson then. We could have learned it in no other way so thoroughly. Before we had been at it more than two or three years, it was no longer a question of the Bend merely. The Small Parks law, that gave us a million dollars a year to force light and air into the slum, to its destruction, grew out of it. The whole sentiment which in its day, groping blindly and angrily, had wiped out the disgrace of the Five Points, just around the corner, crystallized and took shape in its fight. It waited merely for the issue of that, to attack the slum in its other strongholds; and no sooner was the Bend gone than the rest surrendered. Time was up.

But it was not so easy campaigning at the start. In 1888 plans were filed for the demolition of the block. It took four years to get a report of what it would cost to tear it down. About once in two months during all that time the authorities had to be prodded into a spasm of activity, or we would probably have been yet where we were then. Once, when I appealed to the corporation counsel to give a good reason for the delay, I got the truth out of him without evasion.

"Well, I tell you," he said blandly, "no one here is taking any interest in that business. That is good enough reason for you, isn't it?"

It was. That Tammany reason became the slogan of an assault upon official incompetence and treachery that hurried things up considerably. The property was condemned at a total cost to the city of

a million and a half, in round numbers, including the assessment of half a million for park benefit which the property owners were quick enough, with the aid of the politicians, to get saddled on the city at large. In 1894 the city took possession and became the landlord of the old barracks. For a whole year it complacently collected the rents and did nothing. When it was shamed out of that rut, too, and the tenements were at last torn down, the square lay as the wreckers had left it for another year, until it became such a plague spot that, as a last resort, with a citizen's privilege, I arraigned the municipality before the Board of Health for maintaining a nuisance upon its premises. I can see the shocked look of the official now, as he studied the complaint.

"But, my dear sir," he coughed diplomatically, "isn't it rather unusual? I never heard of such a thing."

"Neither did I," I replied, "but then there never was such a thing before."

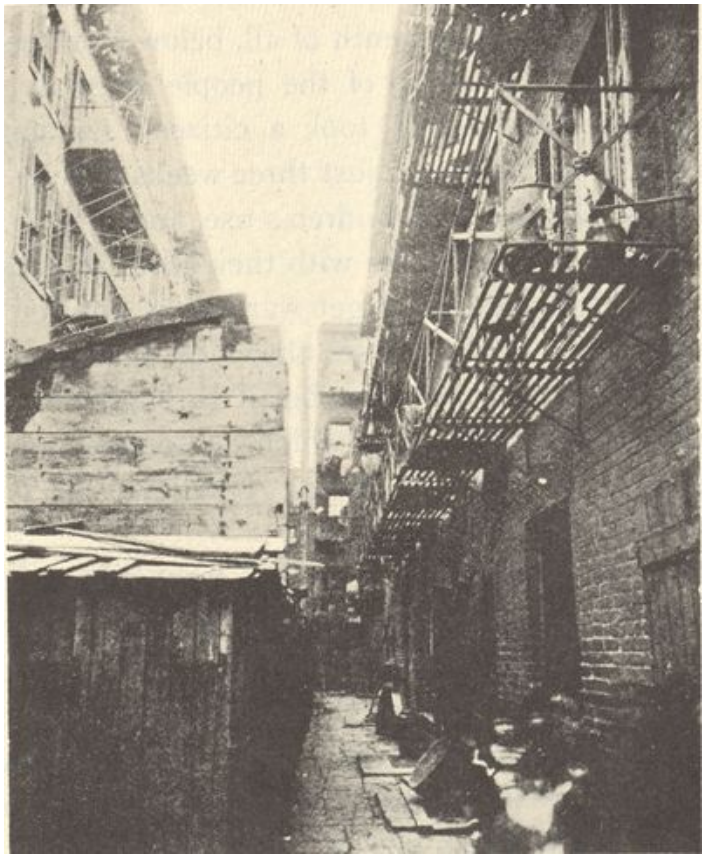
That night, while they were debating the "unusual thing," happened the accident to the children of which I spoke, emphasizing the charge that the nuisance was "dangerous to life," and there was an end. In the morning the Bend was taken in hand, and the following spring the Mulberry Bend Park was opened.



The Mulberry Bend.

I told the story of that in "The Making of an American," and how the red tape of the comptroller's office pointed the way out, after all, with its check for three cents that had gone astray in the purchase of a school site. Of that sort of thing we had enough. But the Gilder Tenement House Commission had been sitting, the Committee of Seventy had been at work, and a law was on the statute books authorizing the expenditure of three million dollars for two open spaces in the parkless district on the East Side, where Jacob Beresheim was born. It had been shown that while the proportion of park area inside the limits of the old city was equal to one-thirteenth of all, below Fourteenth Street, where one-third of the people lived, it was barely one-fortieth. It took a citizen's committee appointed by the mayor just three weeks to seize the two park sites for the children's use, and

it took the Good Government Clubs with their allies at Albany less than two months to get warrant of law for the tearing down of the houses ahead of final condemnation, lest any mischance befall through delay or otherwise,—a precaution which subsequent events proved to be eminently wise. I believe the legal proceedings are going on yet.



Bone Alley.

The playground part of it was a provision of the Gilder law that showed what apt scholars we had

been. I was a member of that committee, and I fed fat my grudge against the slum tenement, knowing that I might not again have such a chance. Bone Alley went. I shall not soon get the picture of it, as I saw it last, out of my mind. I had wandered to the top floor of one of the ramshackle tenements in the heart of the block, to a door that stood ajar, and pushed it open. On the floor lay three women rag-pickers with their burdens, asleep, overcome by the heat and beer, the stale stench of which filled the place. Swarms of flies covered them. The room—no! let it go. Thank God, we shall not again hear of Bone Alley. Where it cursed the earth with its gloom and its poverty, the sun shines to-day on children at play. If we are slow to understand the meaning of it all, they will not be. We shall have light from that quarter when they grow up, on what is truly "educational" in the bringing up of young citizens. The children will teach us something for a change that will do us lasting good.

Half a dozen blocks away, in Rivington Street, the city's first public bath-house has at last been built, after many delays, and godliness will have a chance to move in with cleanliness. The two are neighbors everywhere, but in the slum the last must come first. Glasgow has half a dozen public baths. Rome, two thousand years ago, washed its people most sedulously, and in heathen Japan to-day, I am told, there are baths, as we have saloons, on every corner. Christian New York never had an all-year bath-house until now. In a tenement population of 255,033 the Gilder Commission found only 306 who had access to bathrooms in the houses where they lived, and they would have found the same thing wherever they went. The Church Federation canvass of the Fifteenth

Assembly District over on the West Side, where they did not go, counted three bath-tubs to 1321 families. Nor was that because they so elected. The People's Baths took in 121,386 half dimes last year (1901) for as many baths, and more than forty per cent of their customers were Italians. In the first five months of the present year the Rivington Street baths accommodate 224,876 bathers, of whom 66,256 were women and girls. And this in winter. The free river baths have registered five and six millions of bathers in one brief season. The "great unwashed" were not so from choice, it would appear.

The river baths were only for summer, and their time is past. As the sewers that empty into the river multiply, it is getting less and less a place fit to bathe in, though the boys find no fault. Sixteen public bath-houses on shore are to take the place of the swimming baths. They are all to be in the crowded tenement districts. The sites for the first three are being chosen now. And a wise woman[33] offers to build and equip one all complete at her own expense, as her gift to the city.

Pull up now a minute, if you think, with some good folks, that the world is not advancing, but just marking time, and look back half a century. I said that New York never had a public bath till now. I meant a free bath. As long ago as 1852, just fifty years ago, the Association for improving the Condition of the Poor built one in Mott Street near Grand Street, and spent $42,000 in doing it. It ran eight years, and was then closed for want of patronage. Forty years passed, and it was again the Association for improving the Condition of the Poor that built the People's Baths in the same neighborhood. That time they succeeded at once.

And now here we are, planning a great system of municipal baths as the people's right, not as a favor to any one, and the old lie that the poor prefer to steep in their squalor is no longer believed by any person with sense. This month contracts will be given out for the fitting of nine public schools with shower-baths where we had one before, and notice is given that that one will be open to the people on Sunday mornings. No, we are not marking time; we are forging ahead. Every park, every playground, every bath-house, is a nail in the coffin of the slum, and every big, beautiful schoolhouse, built for the people's use, not merely to lock the children up in during certain hours for which the teachers collect pay, is a pole rammed right through the heart of it so that even its ghost shall never walk again. For ever so much of it we thank that association of men of splendid courage and public spirit. They fight to win because they believe in the people. They fight *with* the people and so they are bound to win.

Every once in a while these days a false note in it all jars upon me—a note of dread lest those we are trying to help get tired of the word "reform" and balk. Reform such as we have occasionally had is to blame for some of that. Certainly you do not want to reform men by main strength, drag them into righteousness by the hair of the head, as it were. And let it be freely admitted that the man on Fifth Avenue needs to be reformed quite as much as his neighbor in Mulberry Street whom he forgot,—more, since it is his will to mend things that has to be righted, while it is the other's power to do it that is lacking. But right there stop. Let us have no pretending that there is nothing to mend. There is a good deal, and it is not going to be mended by

stuffing the one you would help with conceit and ingratitude. Ingratitude does not naturally inhabit the slums, but it is a crop that is easily grown there, and where it does grow there is an end of efforts to mend things in that generation. You do not want to come *down* to your work for your fellows, when you go from the brown-stone front to the tenement; but neither do you want to make him believe that you feel you are coming up to him, for you know you do not feel that way. And moreover, it is not true, if you are coming at all. You want to come right *over*, to help him reform conditions of his life with which he cannot grapple alone, and it is as good for him, as it is for you to know that you are doing it. For that is the brotherhood. And now you can see how that is the only thing that really helps. Charity may corrupt, correction may harden and estrange,—in the family they do neither. There you can give and take without offence. Children of one Father! Spin all the fine theories you like, build up systems of profound philosophy, of social ethics, of philanthropic endeavor; back to that you get—if you get anywhere at all.

I did not mean to preach, I was just thinking that the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, in its fifty years of battling with all that makes the slum, has come nearer that ideal than any and all the rest of us. And the president of it these ten years, the same who with his brother tried to reform Gotham Court, is the head, too, of the citizens' union which is the whole reform programme in a nutshell. All of which is as it ought to be.

To return to the East Side where the light was let in. Bone Alley brought thirty-seven dollars under the auctioneer's hammer. Thieves' Alley, in the other

park down at Rutgers Square, where the police clubbed the Jewish cloakmakers a few years ago for the offence of gathering to assert their right to "being men, live the life of men," as some one who knew summed up the labor movement, brought only seven dollars, and the old Helvetia House, where Boss Tweed and his gang met at night to plan their plundering raids on the city's treasury, was knocked down for five. Kerosene Row, in the same block, did not bring enough to have bought kindling wood with which to start one of the numerous fires that gave it its bad name. It was in Thieves' Alley that the owner in the days long gone by hung out the sign, "No Jews need apply." I stood and watched the opening of the first municipal playground upon the site of the old alley, and in the thousands that thronged street and tenements from curb to roof with thunder of applause, there were not twoscore who could have found lodging with the old Jew-baiter. He had to go with his alley, before the better day could bring light and hope to the Tenth Ward.

What became of the people who were dispossessed? The answer to that is the reply, too, to the wail that goes up from the speculative builder every time we put the screws on the tenement house law. It does not pay him to build any more, he says. But when the multitudes of Mulberry Bend, of Hester Street, and of the Bone Alley Park were put out, there was more than room enough for them in new houses ready for their use. In the Seventh, Tenth, Eleventh, Thirteenth, and Seventeenth wards, where they would naturally go if they wanted to be near home, there were 4268 vacant apartments with room for over 18,000 tenants at our New York average of four and a half to the family. Including the Bend, the

whole number of the dispossessed was not 12,000. On Manhattan Island there were at that time more than 37,000 vacant flats, so that it seems those builders were either "talking through their hats," or else they were philanthropists pure and simple. And I know they were not that. The whole question of rehousing the population that had been so carefully considered abroad made us no trouble, though it gave a few well-meaning people unnecessary concern. The unhoused were scattered some, which was one of the things we hoped for, but hardly dared believe would come to pass. Many of them, as it appeared, had remained in their old slum more from force of habit and association than because of necessity.

"Everything takes ten years," said Abram S. Hewitt, when, exactly ten years after he had as mayor championed the Small Parks Act, he took his seat as chairman of the Advisory Committee on Small Parks. The ten years had wrought a great change. It was no longer the slum of to-day, but that of to-morrow, that challenged attention. The committee took the point of view of the children from the first. It had a large map prepared, showing where in the city there was room to play and where there was none. Then it called in the police and asked them to point out where there was trouble with the boys; and in every instance the policeman put his finger upon a treeless slum.

"They have no other playground than the street," was the explanation given in each case. "They smash lamps and break windows. The storekeepers kick and there is trouble. That is how it begins." "Many complaints are received daily of boys annoying pedestrians, storekeepers, and tenants by their

continually playing base-ball in some parts of almost every street. The damage is not slight. Arrests are frequent, much more frequent than when they had open lots to play in." This last was the report of an up-town captain. He remembered the days when there were open lots there. "But those lots are now built upon," he said, "and for every new house there are more boys and less chance for them to play."

The committee put a red daub on the map to indicate trouble. Then it asked those police captains who had not spoken to show them where their precincts were, and why they had no trouble. Every one of them put his finger on a green spot that marked a park.

"My people are quiet and orderly," said the captain of the Tompkins Square precinct.

The police took the square from a mob by storm twice in my recollection, and the commander of the precinct was hit on the head with a hammer by "his people" and laid out for dead.

"The Hook Gang is gone," said he of Corlear's Hook. The professional pursuit of that gang was to rob and murder inoffensive citizens by night and throw them into the river, and it achieved a bad eminence at its calling.



Mulberry Bend Park.

"The whole neighborhood has taken a change, and decidedly for the better," said the captain of Mulberry Street; and the committee rose and said that it had heard enough.

The map was hung on the wall, and in it were stuck pins to mark the site of present and projected schools as showing where the census had found the children crowding. The moment that was done the committee sent the map and a copy of chapter 338 of the laws of 1895 to the mayor, and reported that its task was finished. This is the law and all there is of it:—

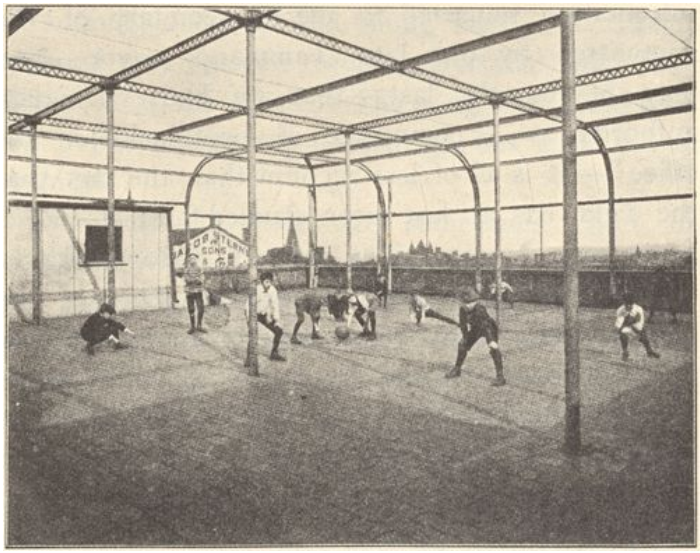
"The people of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:—

"Section 1. Hereafter no schoolhouse shall be constructed in the city of New York without an open-

air playground attached to or used in connection with the same.

"Section 2. This act shall take effect immediately."

Where the map was daubed with red the school pins crowded one another. On the lower East Side, where child crime was growing fast, and no less than three storm centres were marked down by the police, nine new schools were going up or planned, and in the up-town precinct whence came the wail about the ball players there were seven. It was common sense, then, to hitch the school playground and the children together. It seemed a happy combination, for the new law had been a stumbling-block to the school commissioners, who were in a quandary over the needful size of an "open-air playground." The roof garden idea, which was at the start a measure of simple economy to save large expenditure for land, had suggested a way out. But there was the long vacation, when schools are closed and children most in need of a chance to play. To get the playground on the roof of the school house recognized as the *public playground* seemed a long step toward turning it into a general neighborhood evening resort, that should be always open, and so towards bringing school and people, and especially the school and the boy, together in a bond of mutual sympathy good for them both.



Roof Playground on a Public School.

That was the burden of the committee's report. It made thirteen recommendations besides, as to the location of parks and detached playgrounds, only two of which have been adopted to date. But that is of less account—as also was the information imparted to me as secretary of the committee by our late Tammany mayor—and may he be the last—that we had "as much authority as a committee of bootblacks in his office"—it is all of less account than the fact that the field has at last been studied and its needs been made known. The rest will follow, with or without the politician's authority. One of the two suggestions carried out was for a riverside park in the region up-town, on the West Side, where the Federation of Churches and Christian Workers found "saloon social ideals minting themselves upon the minds of the people at the rate of seven saloon thoughts to one educational thought." "Hudson-bank"

(it is at the foot of West Fifty-third Street) has been a playground these three years, in the charge of the Outdoor Recreation League, and it is recorded with pride by the directors, that not a board was stolen from the long fence that encloses it in all that time, while fences all about were ripped to pieces. Boards have a market value in that neighborhood and private property was not always highly regarded. But this is "the children's"; that is why, within a year now, the bluff upon which the playground is will have been laid out as a beautiful park, and a bar set to the slum in that quarter, where it already had got a firm grip. Hard by there is a recreation pier, and on summer evenings the young men of the neighborhood may be seen trooping riverward with their girls to hear the music. The gang that "laid out" two policemen, to my knowledge, has gone out of business.

The best-laid plans are sometimes upset by surprising snags. We had planned for two municipal playgrounds on the East Side, where the need is greatest, and our plans were eagerly accepted by the city authorities. But they were never put into practice. A negligent attorney killed one, a lazy clerk the other. And both served under the reform government. The first of the two playgrounds was to have been in Rivington Street, adjoining the new public bath, where the boys, for want of something better to do, were fighting daily battles with stones, to the great damage of windows and the worse aggravation of the householders. Four hundred children in that neighborhood petitioned the committee for a place of their own, where there were no windows to break; and we found one. It was only after the proceedings had been started that we

discovered that they had been taken under the wrong law and the money spent in advertising had been wasted. It was then too late. The daily assaults upon the windows were resumed.

The other case was an attempt to establish a model school park in a block where more than four thousand children attended day and night school. The public school and the Pro-Cathedral, which divided the children between them, were to be allowed to stand, at opposite ends of the block. The surrounding tenements were to be torn down to make room for a park and playground which should embody the ideal of what such a place ought to be, in the opinion of the committee. For the roof garden was not in the original plan except as an alternative of the street-level playground, where land came too high. The plentiful supply of light and air, the safety from fire, to be obtained by putting the school in a park, beside the fact that it could thus be "built beautiful," were considerations of weight. Plans were made, and there was great rejoicing in Essex Street, until it came out that this scheme had gone the way of the other. The clerk who should have filed the plans in the register's office left that duty to some one else, and it took just twenty-one days to make the journey, a distance of five hundred feet or less. The Greater New York had come then with Tammany, and the thing was not heard of again. When I traced the failure down to the clerk in question, and told him that he had killed the park, he yawned and said:—

"Yes, and I think it is just as well it is dead. We haven't any money for those things. It is very nice to have small parks, and very nice to have a horse and wagon, if you can afford it. But we can't. Why, there

isn't enough to run the city government."

So the labor of weary weeks and months in the children's behalf was all undone by a third-rate clerk in an executive office; but he saved the one thing he had in mind: the city government is "run" to date, and his pay is secure.

It is a pity to have to confess it, but it was not the only time reform in office gave its cause a black eye in the sight of the people. The Hamilton Fish Park that took the place of Bone Alley was laid out with such lack of sense that it will have to be worked all over again. The gymnasium and bath in it that cost, I am told, $90,000, was never of any use for either purpose and was never opened. A policeman sat in the door and turned people away, while around the corner clamoring crowds besieged the new public bath I spoke of. There were more people waiting, sitting on the steps and strung out halfway through the block, when I went over to see, one July day, than could have found room in three buildings like it. So, also, after seven years, the promised park down by the Schiff Fountain called Seward Park lies still, an unlovely waste, waiting to be made beautiful. Tammany let its heelers build shanties in it to sell fish and dry-goods and such in. Reform just let things be, no matter how bad they were, and broke its promises to the people.

No, that is not fair. There was enough to do besides, to straighten up things. Tammany had seen to that. This very day[34] the contractor's men are beginning work in Seward Park, which shall give that most crowded spot on earth its pleasure-ground, and I have warrant for promising that within a year not only will the "Ham-Fish" Park be restored, but

Hudson-bank and the Thomas Jefferson Park in Little Italy, which are still dreary wastes, be opened to the people; while from the Civic Club in Richard Croker's old home ward comes the broad hint that unless condemnation proceedings in the case of the park and playground, to take the place of the old tenements at East Thirty-fifth Street and Second Avenue, are hurried by the Tammany Commission, the club will take a hand and move to have the commission cashiered. There is to be no repetition of the Mulberry Bend scandal.



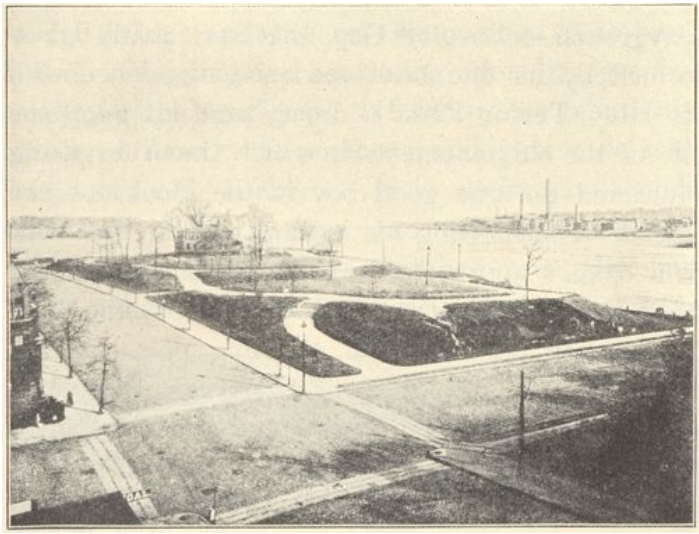
Kindergarten on the Recreation Pier, at the Foot of E. 24th Street.

It is all right. Neither stupidity, spite, nor coldblooded neglect will be able much longer to cheat the child out of his rights. The playground is here to wrestle with the gang for the boy, and it will win. It came so quietly that we hardly knew of it till we heard the shouts. It took us seven years to make up our minds to build a play pier,—recreation pier is its municipal title,—and it took just about seven

weeks to build it when we got so far; but then we learned more in one day than we had dreamed of in the seven years. Half the East Side swarmed over it with shrieks of delight, and carried the mayor and the city government, who had come to see the show, fairly off their feet. And now that pier has more than seven comrades—great, handsome structures, seven hundred feet long, some of them, with music every night for mother and the babies, and for papa, who can smoke his pipe there in peace. The moon shines upon the quiet river, and the steamers go by with their lights. The street is far away with its noise. The young people go sparking in all honor, as it is their right to do. The councilman who spoke of "pernicious influences" lying in wait for them there made the mistake of his life, unless he has made up his mind to go out of politics. That is just a question of effective superintendence, as is true of model tenements, and everything else in this world. You have got to keep the devil out of everything, yourself included. He will get in if he can, as he got into the Garden of Eden. The play piers have taken a hold of the people which no crabbed old bachelor can loosen with trumped-up charges. Their civilizing influence upon the children is already felt in a reported demand for more soap in the neighborhood where they are, and even the grocer smiles approval.

The play pier is the kindergarten in the educational campaign against the gang. It gives the little ones a chance. Often enough it is a chance for life. The street as a playground is a heavy contributor to the undertaker's bank account in more than one way. Distinguished doctors said at the tuberculosis congress this spring that it is to blame with its dust for sowing the seeds of that fatal disease in the half-

developed bodies. I kept the police slips of a single day in May two years ago, when four little ones were killed and three crushed under the wheels of trucks in tenement streets. That was unusual, but no day has passed in my recollection that has not had its record of accidents, which bring grief as deep and lasting to the humblest home as if it were the pet of some mansion on Fifth Avenue that was slain. In the Hudson Guild on the West Side they have the reports of ten children that were killed in the street immediately around there. The kindergarten teaching has borne fruit. Private initiative set the pace, but the playground idea has at last been engrafted upon the municipal plan. The Outdoor Recreation League was organized by public-spirited citizens, including many amateur athletes and enthusiastic women, with the object of "obtaining recognition of the necessity for recreation and physical exercise as fundamental to the moral and physical welfare of the people." Together with the School Reform Club and the Federation of Churches and Christian Workers, it maintained a playground on the up-town West Side where the ball came into play for the first time as a recognized factor in civic progress. The day might well be kept for all time among those that mark human emancipation, for it was social reform and Christian work in one, of the kind that tells.



The East River Park.

Only the year before, the athletic clubs had vainly craved the privilege of establishing a gymnasium in the East River Park, where the children wistfully eyed the sacred grass, and cowered under the withering gaze of the policeman. A friend whose house stands opposite the park found them one day swarming over her stoop in such shoals that she could not enter, and asked them why they did not play tag under the trees instead. The instant shout came back, "'Cause the cop won't let us." And now even Poverty Gap is to have its playground—Poverty Gap, that was partly transformed by its one brief season's experience with its Holy Terror Park,[35] a dreary sand lot upon the site of the old tenements in which the Alley Gang murdered the one good boy in the block, for the offence of supporting his aged parents by his work as a baker's apprentice. And who knows but the Mulberry Bend and "Paradise Park" at the Five Points may yet know the climbing pole and

the vaulting buck. So the world moves. For years the city's only playground that had any claim upon the name—and that was only a little asphalted strip behind a public school in First Street—was an old graveyard. We struggled vainly to get possession of another, long abandoned. But the dead were of more account than the living.



The Seward Park.

But now at last it is their turn. I watched the crowds at their play where Seward Park is to be. The Outdoor Recreation League had put up gymnastic apparatus, and the dusty square was jammed with a mighty multitude. It was not an ideal spot, for it had not rained in weeks, and powdered sand and cinders had taken wing and floated like a pall over the perspiring crowd. But it was heaven to them. A hundred men and boys stood in line, waiting their turn upon the bridge ladder and the travelling rings, that hung full of struggling and squirming humanity, groping madly for the next grip. No failure, no rebuff, discouraged them. Seven boys and girls rode with looks of deep concern—it is their way—upon each end of the seesaw, and two squeezed into each of the forty swings that had room for one, while a hundred counted time and saw that none had too much. It is an article of faith with these children that nothing that is "going" for their benefit is to be

missed. Sometimes the result provokes a smile, as when a band of young Jews, starting up a club, called themselves the Christian Heroes. It was meant partly as a compliment, I suppose, to the ladies that gave them club room; but at the same time, if there was anything in a name, they were bound to have it. It is rather to cry over than to laugh at, if one but understands it. The sight of these little ones swarming over a sand heap until scarcely an inch of it was in sight, and gazing in rapt admiration at the poor show of a dozen geraniums and English ivy plants on the window-sill of the overseer's cottage, was pathetic in the extreme. They stood for ten minutes at a time, resting their eyes upon them. In the crowd were aged women and bearded men with the inevitable Sabbath silk hat, who it seemed could never get enough of it. They moved slowly, when crowded out, looking back many times at the enchanted spot, as long as it was in sight.

Perhaps there was in it, on the part of the children at least, just a little bit of the comforting sense of proprietorship. They had contributed of their scant pennies more than a hundred dollars toward the opening of the playground, and they felt that it was their very own. All the better. Two policemen watched the passing show, grinning; their clubs hung idly from their belts. The words of a little woman whom I met once in Chicago kept echoing in my ear. She was the "happiest woman alive," for she had striven long for a playground for her poor children, and had got it.

"The police like it," she said, "They say that it will do more good than all the Sunday-schools in Chicago. The mothers say, 'This is good business.' The carpenters that put up the swings and things

worked with a will; everybody was glad. The police lieutenant has had a tree called after him. The boys that did that used to be terrors. Now they take care of the trees. They plead for a low limb that is in the way, that no one may cut it off."



The Seward Park on Opening Day.

The twilight deepens and the gates of the playground are closed. The crowds disperse slowly. In the roof garden on the Hebrew Institute across East Broadway lights are twinkling and the band is tuning up. Little groups are settling down to a quiet game of checkers or love-making. Paterfamilias leans back against the parapet where palms wave luxuriously in the summer breeze. The newspaper drops from his hand; he closes his eyes and is in dreamland, where strikes come not. Mother knits contentedly in her seat, with a smile on her face that was not born of the Ludlow Street tenement. Over yonder a knot of black-browed men talk with serious mien. They might be met any night in the anarchist

café, half a dozen doors away, holding forth against empires. Here wealth does not excite their wrath, nor power their plotting. In the roof garden anarchy is harmless, even though a policeman typifies its government. They laugh pleasantly to one another as he passes, and he gives them a match to light their cigars. It is Thursday, and smoking is permitted. On Friday it is discouraged because it offends the orthodox, to whom the lighting of a fire, even the holding of a candle, is anathema on the Sabbath eve.



In the Roof Garden of the Hebrew Educational Alliance.

The band plays on. One after another, tired heads droop upon babes slumbering peacefully at the breast. Ludlow Street—the tenement—are forgotten; eleven o'clock is not yet. Down along the silver gleam of the river a mighty city slumbers. The great bridge has hung out its string of shining pearls from shore to shore. "Sweet land of liberty!" Overhead the dark sky, the stars that twinkled their message to the shepherds on Judæan hills, that lighted their sons through ages of slavery, and the flag of freedom

borne upon the breeze,—down there the tenement, the—Ah, well! let us forget as do these.



Bottle Alley, Whyó Gang's Headquarters.

This picture was evidence at a murder trial. The X marks the place where the murderer stood when he shot his victim on the stairs.

Now if you ask me: "And what of it all? What does it avail?" let me take you once more back to the Mulberry Bend, and to the policeman's verdict add the police reporter's story of what has taken place there. In fifteen years I never knew a week to pass without a murder there, rarely a Sunday. It was the wickedest, as it was the foulest, spot in all the city. In the slum the two are interchangeable terms for reasons that are clear enough for me. But I shall not speculate about it, only state the facts. The old houses fairly reeked with outrage and violence.

When they were torn down, I counted seventeen deeds of blood in that place which I myself remembered, and those I had forgotten probably numbered seven times seventeen. The district attorney connected more than a score of murders of his own recollection with Bottle Alley, the Whyó Gang's headquarters. Five years have passed since it was made into a park, and scarce a knife had been drawn or a shot fired in all that neighborhood. Only twice have I been called as a police reporter to the spot. It is not that the murder has moved to another neighborhood, for there has been no increase of violence in Little Italy or wherever else the crowd went that moved out. It is that the light has come in and made crime hideous. It is being let in wherever the slum has bred murder and robbery, bred the gang, in the past. Wait, now, another ten years, and let us see what a story there will be to tell.

Avail? Why, it was only the other day that Tammany was actually caught applauding[36] Comptroller Coler's words in Plymouth Church, "Whenever the city builds a schoolhouse upon the site of a dive and creates a park, a distinct and permanent mental, moral, and physical improvement has been made, and public opinion will sustain such a policy, even if a dive-keeper is driven out of business and somebody's ground rent is reduced." And Tammany's press agent, in his enthusiasm, sent forth this pæan: "In the light of such events how absurd it is for the enemies of the organization to contend that Tammany is not the greatest moral force in the community." Tammany a moral force! The park and the playground have availed, then, to bring back the day of miracles.[Back to Contents]

## CHAPTER XII

### THE PASSING OF CAT ALLEY

When Santa Claus comes around to New York this Christmas he will look in vain for some of the slum alleys he used to know. They are gone. Where some of them were, there are shrubs and trees and greensward; the sites of others are holes and hillocks yet, that by and by, when all the official red tape is unwound,—and what a lot of it there is to plague mankind!—will be levelled out and made into playgrounds for little feet that have been aching for them too long. Perhaps it will surprise some good people to hear that Santa Claus knew the old alleys; but he did. I have been there with him, and I knew that, much as some things which he saw there grieved him,—the starved childhood, the pinching poverty, and the slovenly indifference that cut deeper than the rest because it spoke of hope that was dead,—yet by nothing was his gentle spirit so grieved and shocked as by the show that proposed to turn his holiday into a battalion drill of the children from the alleys and the courts for patricians, young and old, to review. It was well meant, but it was not Christmas. That belongs to the home, and in the darkest slums Santa Claus found homes where his blessed tree took root and shed its mild radiance about, dispelling the darkness, and bringing back hope and courage and trust.

They are gone, the old alleys. Reform wiped them out. It is well. Santa Claus will not have harder work finding the doors that opened to him gladly, because the light has been let in. And others will stand ajar

that before were closed. The chimneys in tenement-house alleys were never built on a plan generous enough to let him in in the orthodox way. The cost of coal had to be considered in putting them up. Bottle Alley and Bandits' Roost are gone with their bad memories. Bone Alley is gone, and Gotham Court. I well remember the Christmas tree in the court, under which a hundred dolls stood in line, craving partners among the girls in its tenements. That was the kind of battalion drill that they understood. The ceiling of the room was so low that the tree had to be cut almost in half; but it was beautiful, and it lives yet, I know, in the hearts of the little ones, as it lives in mine. The "Barracks" are gone, Nibsey's Alley is gone, where the first Christmas tree was lighted the night poor Nibsey lay dead in his coffin. And Cat Alley is gone.



The First Christmas Tree in Gotham Court.

Cat Alley was my alley. It was mine by right of

long acquaintance. We were neighbors for twenty years. Yet I never knew why it was called Cat Alley. There was the usual number of cats, gaunt and voracious, which foraged in its ash-barrels; but beyond the family of three-legged cats, that presented its own problem of heredity,—the kittens took it from the mother, who had lost one leg under the wheels of a dray,—there was nothing specially remarkable about them. It was not an alley, either, when it comes to that, but rather a row of four on five old tenements in a back yard that was reached by a passageway somewhat less than three feet wide between the sheer walls of the front houses. These had once had pretensions to some style. One of them had been the parsonage of the church next door that had by turns been an old-style Methodist tabernacle, a fashionable negroes' temple, and an Italian mission church, thus marking time, as it were, to the upward movement of the immigration that came in at the bottom, down in the Fourth Ward, fought its way through the Bloody Sixth, and by the time it had travelled the length of Mulberry Street had acquired a local standing and the right to be counted and rounded up by the political bosses. Now the old houses were filled with newspaper offices and given over to perpetual insomnia. Week-days and Sundays, night or day, they never slept. Police headquarters was right across the way, and kept the reporters awake. From his window the chief looked down the narrow passageway to the bottom of the alley, and the alley looked back at him, nothing daunted. No man is a hero to his valet, and the chief was not an autocrat to Cat Alley. It knew all his human weaknesses, could tell when his time was up generally before he could, and winked the other eye with the captains when the newspapers spoke of his

having read them a severe lecture on gambling or Sunday beer-selling. Byrnes it worshipped, but for the others who were before him and followed after, it cherished a neighborly sort of contempt.

In the character of its population Cat Alley was properly cosmopolitan. The only element that was missing was the native American, and in this it was representative of the tenement districts in America's chief city. The substratum was Irish, of volcanic properties. Upon this were imposed layers of German, French, Jewish, and Italian, or, as the alley would have put it, Dutch, Sabé, Sheeny, and Dago; but to this last it did not take kindly. With the experience of the rest of Mulberry Street before it, it foresaw its doom if the Dago got a footing there, and within a month of the moving in of the Gio family there was an eruption of the basement volcano, reënforced by the sanitary policeman, to whom complaint had been made that there were too many "Ginnies" in the Gio flat. There were four—about half as many as there were in some of the other flats when the item of house rent was lessened for economic reasons; but it covered the ground: the flat was too small for the Gios. The appeal of the signora was unavailing. "You got-a three bambino," she said to the housekeeper, "all four, lika me," counting the number on her fingers. "I no putta me broder-in-law and me sister in the street-a. Italian lika to be together."

The housekeeper was unmoved. "Humph!" she said, "to liken my kids to them Dagos! Out they go." And they went.

Up on the third floor there was the French couple. It was another of the contradictions of the alley that

of this pair the man should have been a typical, stolid German, she a mercurial Parisian, who at seventy sang the "Marseillaise" with all the spirit of the Commune in her cracked voice, and hated from the bottom of her patriotic soul the enemy with whom the irony of fate had yoked her. However, she improved the opportunity in truly French fashion. He was rheumatic, and most of the time was tied to his chair. He had not worked for seven years. "He no goode," she said, with a grimace, as her nimble fingers fashioned the wares by the sale of which, from a basket, she supported them both. The wares were dancing girls with tremendous limbs and very brief skirts of tricolor gauze,—"ballerinas," in her vocabulary,—and monkeys with tin hats, cunningly made to look like German soldiers. For these she taught him to supply the decorations. It was his department, she reasoned; the ballerinas were of her country and hers. *Parbleu!* must one not work? What then? Starve? Before her look and gesture the cripple quailed, and twisted and rolled and pasted all day long, to his country's shame, fuming with impotent rage.

"I wish the devil had you," he growled.

She regarded him maliciously, with head tilted on one side, as a bird eyes a caterpillar it has speared.

"Hein!" she scoffed. "Du den, vat?"

He scowled. She was right; without her he was helpless. The judgment of the alley was unimpeachable. They were and remained "the French couple."



The Mouth of the Alley.
*By permission of the Century Company.*

Cat Alley's reception of Madame Klotz at first was not cordial. It was disposed to regard as a hostile act the circumstance that she kept a special holiday, of which nothing was known except from her statement that it referred to the fall of somebody or other whom she called the Bastille, in suspicious proximity to the detested battle of the Boyne; but when it was observed that she did nothing worse than dance upon the flags "*avec ze leetle bébé*" of the tenant in the basement, and torture her "Dootch" husband with extra monkeys and gibes in honor of the day, unfavorable judgment was suspended, and it was agreed that without a doubt the "bastard" fell for cause; wherein the alley showed its sound historical judgment. By such moral pressure when it could, by force when it must, the original Irish stock preserved the alley for its own quarrels, free from "foreign" embroilments. These quarrels were many and involved. When Mrs. M'Carthy was to be dispossessed, and insisted, in her cups, on killing the housekeeper as a necessary preliminary, a study of the causes that led to the feud developed the following normal condition: Mrs. M'Carthy had the housekeeper's place when Mrs. Gehegan was poor, and fed her "kids." As a reward, Mrs. Gehegan worked around and got the job away from her. Now that it was Mrs. M'Carthy's turn to be poor, Mrs. Gehegan insisted upon putting her out. Whereat, with righteous wrath, Mrs. M'Carthy proclaimed from the stoop: "Many is the time Mrs. Gehegan had a load on, an' she went upstairs an' slept it off. I didn't. I used to show meself, I did, as a lady. I know ye're in there, Mrs. Gehegan. Come out an' show yerself, an' I'ave the alley to judge betwixt us." To

which Mrs. Gehegan prudently vouchsafed no answer.

Mrs. M'Carthy had succeeded to the office of housekeeper upon the death of Miss Mahoney, an ancient spinster who had collected the rents since the days of "the riot," meaning the Orange riot—an event from which the alley reckoned its time, as the ancients did from the Olympian games. Miss Mahoney was a most exemplary and worthy old lady, thrifty to a fault. Indeed, it was said when she was gone that she had literally starved herself to death to lay by money for the rainy day she was keeping a lookout for to the last. In this she was obeying her instincts; but they went counter to those of the alley, and the result was very bad. As an example, Miss Mahoney's life was a failure. When at her death it was discovered that she had bank-books representing a total of two thousand dollars, her nephew and only heir promptly knocked off work and proceeded to celebrate, which he did with such fervor that in two months he had run through it all and killed himself by his excesses. Miss Mahoney's was the first bank account in the alley, and, so far as I know, the last.

From what I have said, it must not be supposed that fighting was the normal occupation of Cat Alley. It was rather its relaxation from unceasing toil and care, from which no to-morrow held promise of relief. There was a deal of good humor in it at most times. "Scrapping" came naturally to the alley. When, as was sometimes the case, it was the complement of a wake, it was as the mirth of children who laugh in the dark because they are afraid. But once an occurrence of that sort scandalized the tenants. It was because of the violation of the Monroe Doctrine, to which, as I have said, the alley held most firmly,

with severely local application. To Mulberry Street Mott Street was a foreign foe from which no interference was desired or long endured. A tenant in "the back" had died in the hospital of rheumatism, a term which in the slums sums up all of poverty's hardships, scant and poor food, damp rooms, and hard work, and the family had come home for the funeral. It was not a pleasant home-coming. The father in his day had been strict, and his severity had driven his girls to the street. They had landed in Chinatown, with all that implies, one at a time; first the older and then the younger, whom the sister took under her wing and coached. She was very handsome, was the younger sister, with an innocent look in her blue eyes that her language belied, and smart, as her marriage-ring bore witness to. The alley, where the proprieties were held to tenaciously, observed it and forgave all the rest, even her "Chink" husband. While her father was lying ill, she had spent a brief vacation in the alley. Now that he was dead, her less successful sister came home, and with her a delegation of girls from Chinatown. In their tawdry finery they walked in, sallow and bold, with Mott Street and the accursed pipe written all over them, defiant of public opinion, yet afraid to enter except in a body. The alley considered them from behind closed blinds, while the children stood by silently to see them pass. When one of them offered one of the "kids" a penny, he let it fall on the pavement, as if it were unclean. It was a sore thrust, and it hurt cruelly; but no one saw it in her face as she went in where the dead lay, with scorn and hatred as her offering.

The alley had withheld audible comment with a tact that did it credit; but when at night Mott Street

added its contingent of "fellows" to the mourners properly concerned in the wake, and they started a fight among themselves that was unauthorized by local sanction, its wrath was aroused, and it arose and bundled the whole concern out into the street with scant ceremony. There was never an invasion of the alley after that night. It enjoyed home rule undisturbed.

Withal, there was as much kindness of heart and neighborly charity in Cat Alley as in any little community up-town or down-town, or out of town, for that matter. It had its standards and its customs, which were to be observed; but underneath it all, and not very far down either, was a human fellowship that was capable of any sacrifice to help a friend in need. Many was the widow with whom and with whose children the alley shared its daily bread, which was scanty enough, God knows, when death or other disaster had brought her to the jumping-off place. In twenty years I do not recall a suicide in the alley, or a case of suffering demanding the interference of the authorities, unless with such help as the hospital could give. The alley took care of its own, and tided them over the worst when it came to that. And death was not always the worst. I remember yet with a shudder a tragedy which I was just in time with the police to prevent. A laborer, who lived in the attic, had gone mad, poisoned by the stenches of the sewers in which he worked. For two nights he had been pacing the hallway, muttering incoherent things, and then fell to sharpening an axe, with his six children playing about—beautiful, brown-eyed girls they were, sweet and innocent little tots. In five minutes we should have been too late, for it appeared that the man's

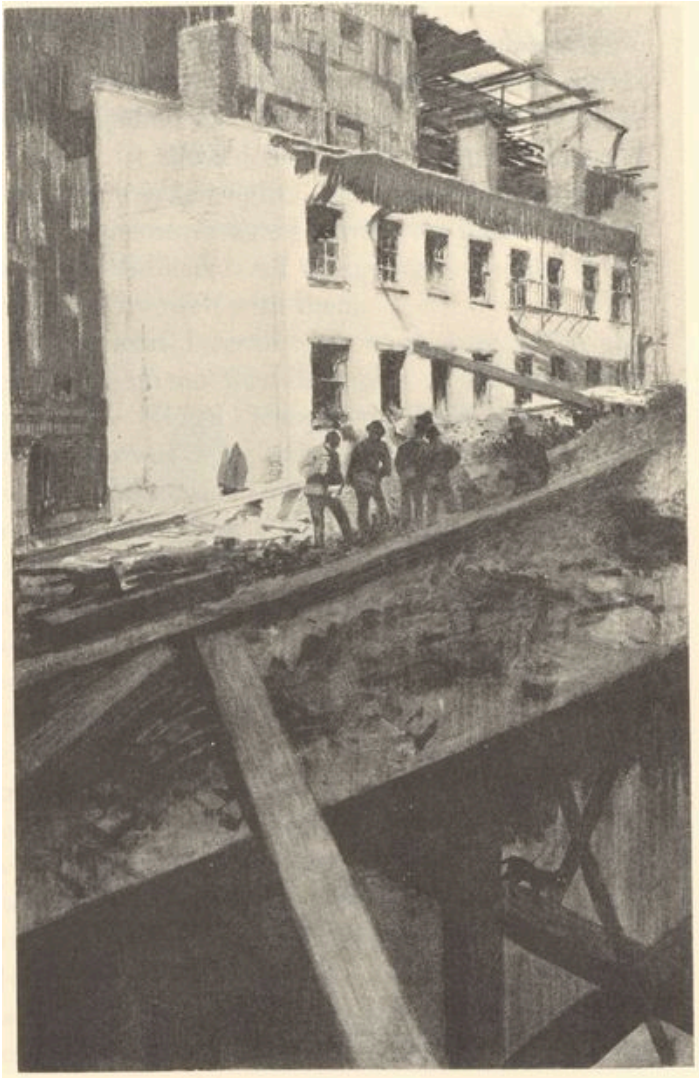
madness had taken on the homicidal tinge. They were better out of the world, he told us, as we carried him off to the hospital. When he was gone, the children came upon the alley, and loyally did it stand by them until a job was found for the mother by the local political boss. He got her appointed scrub-woman at the City Hall, and the alley, always faithful, was solid for him ever after. Organized charity might, and indeed did, provide groceries on the instalment plan. The Tammany captain provided the means of pulling the family through and of bringing up the children, although there was not a vote in the family. It was not the first time I had met him and observed his plan of "keeping close" to the people. Against it not the most carping reform critic could have found just ground of complaint.

The charity of the alley was contagious. With the reporters' messenger boys, a harum-scarum lot, in "the front," the alley was not on good terms for any long stretch at a time. They made a racket at night, and had sport with "old man Quinn," who was a victim of dropsy. He was "walking on dough," they asseverated, and paid no attention to the explanation of the alley that he had "kidney feet." But when the old man died and his wife was left penniless, I found some of them secretly contributing to her keep. It was not so long after that that another old pensioner of the alley, suddenly drawn into their cyclonic sport in the narrow passageway, fell and broke her arm. Apparently no one in the lot was individually to blame. It was an unfortunate accident, and it deprived her of her poor means of earning the few pennies with which she eked out the charity of the alley. Worse than that, it took from her hope after death, as it were. For years she had pinched and

saved and denied herself to keep up a payment of twenty-five cents a week which insured her decent burial in consecrated ground. Now that she could no longer work, the dreaded trench in the Potter's Field yawned to receive her. That was the blow that broke her down. She was put out by the landlord soon after the accident, as a hopeless tenant, and I thought that she had gone to the almshouse, when by chance I came upon her living quite happily in a tenement on the next block. "Living" is hardly the word; she was really waiting to die, but waiting with a cheerful content that amazed me until she herself betrayed the secret of it. Every week one of the messenger boys brought her out of his scanty wages the quarter that alike insured her peace of mind and the undisturbed rest of her body in its long sleep, which a life of toil had pictured to her as the greatest of earth's boons.

Death came to Cat Alley in varying forms, often enough as a welcome relief to those for whom it called, rarely without its dark riddle for those whom it left behind, to be answered without delay or long guessing. There were at one time three widows with little children in the alley, none of them over twenty-five. They had been married at fifteen or sixteen, and when they were called upon to face the world and fight its battles alone were yet young and inexperienced girls themselves. Improvidence! Yes. Early marriages are at the bottom of much mischief among the poor. And yet perhaps these, and others like them, might have offered the homes from which they went out, as a valid defence. To their credit be it said that they accepted their lot bravely, and, with the help of the alley, pulled through. Two of them married again, and made a bad job of it. Second

marriages seldom turned out well in the alley. They were a refuge of the women from work that was wearing their lives out, and gave them in exchange usually a tyrant who hastened the process. There never was any sentiment about it. "I don't know what I shall do," said one of the widows to me, when at last it was decreed that the tenements were to be pulled down, "unless I can find a man to take care of me. Might get one that drinks? I would hammer him half to death." She did find her "man," only to have him on her hands too. It was the last straw. Before the wreckers came around she was dead. The amazed indignation of the alley at the discovery of her second marriage, which till then had been kept secret, was beyond bounds. The supposed widow's neighbor across the hall, whom we knew in the front generally as "the Fat One," was so stunned by the revelation that she did not recover in season to go to the funeral. She was never afterward the same.



The Wrecking of Cat Alley.
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In the good old days when the world was right, the Fat One had enjoyed the distinction of being the one

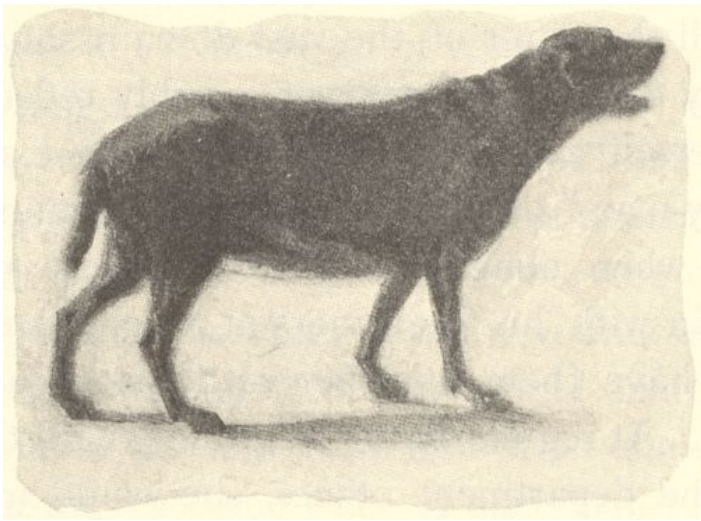
tenant in Cat Alley whose growler never ran dry. It made no difference how strictly Sunday law was observed toward the rest of the world, the Fat One would set out from the alley with her growler in a basket,—this as a concession to the unnatural prejudices of a misguided community, not as an evasion, for she made a point of showing it to the policeman on the corner,—and return with it filled. Her look of scornful triumph as she marched through the alley, and the backward toss of her head toward police headquarters, which said plainly: "Ha! you thought you could! But you didn't, did you?" were the admiration of the alley. It allowed that she had met and downed Roosevelt in a fair fight. But after the last funeral the Fat One never again carried the growler. Her spirit was broken. All things were coming to an end, the alley itself with them.

One funeral I recall with a pleasure which the years have in no way dimmed. It was at a time before the King's Daughters' Tenement House Committee was organized, when out-of-town friends used to send flowers to my office for the poor. The first notice I had of a death in the alley was when a delegation of children from the rear knocked and asked for daisies. There was something unnaturally solemn about them that prompted me to make inquiries, and then it came out that old Mrs. Walsh was dead and going on her long ride up to Hart's Island; for she was quite friendless, and the purse-strings of the alley were not long enough to save her from the Potter's Field. The city hearse was even then at the door, and they were carrying in the rough pine coffin. With the children the crippled old woman had been a favorite; she had always a kind word for them, and they paid her back in the way they knew

she would have loved best. Not even the coffin of the police sergeant who was a brother of the district leader was so gloriously decked out as old Mrs. Walsh's when she started on her last journey. The children stood in the passageway with their arms full of daisies, and gave the old soul a departing cheer; and though it was quite irregular, it was all right, for it was well meant, and Cat Alley knew it.

They were much like other children, those of the alley. It was only in their later years that the alley and the growler set their stamp upon them. While they were small, they loved, like others of their kind, to play in the gutter, to splash in the sink about the hydrant, and to dance to the hand-organ that came regularly into the block, even though they sadly missed the monkey that was its chief attraction till the aldermen banished it in a cranky fit. Dancing came naturally to them, too; certainly no one took the trouble to teach them. It was a pretty sight to see them stepping to the time on the broad flags at the mouth of the alley. Not rarely they had for an appreciative audience the big chief himself, who looked down from his window, and the uniformed policeman at the door. Even the commissioners deigned to smile upon the impromptu show in breathing-spells between their heavy labors in the cause of politics and pull. But the children took little notice of them; they were too happy in their play. They loved my flowers, too, with a genuine love that did not spring from the desire to get something for nothing, and the parades on Italian feast-days that always came through the street. They took a fearsome delight in watching for the big dime museum giant, who lived around in Elizabeth Street, and who in his last days looked quite lean and

hungry enough to send a thrill to any little boy's heart, though he had never cooked one and eaten him in his whole life, being quite a harmless and peaceable giant. And they loved Trilby.



Trilby.
*By permission of the Century Company.*

Trilby was the dog. As far back as my memory reaches there was never another in Cat Alley. She arrived in the block one winter morning on a dead run, with a tin can tied to her stump of a tail, and with the Mott Street gang in hot pursuit. In her extremity she saw the mouth of the alley, dodged in, and was safe. The Mott Streeters would as soon have thought of following her into police headquarters as there. Ever after she stayed. She took possession of the alley and of headquarters, where the reporters had their daily walk, as if they were hers by right of conquest, which in fact they were. With her whimsically grave countenance, in which all the cares of the vast domain she made it her daily duty

to oversee were visibly reflected, she made herself a favorite with every one except the "beanery-man" on the corner, who denounced her angrily, when none of her friends were near, for coming in with his customers at lunch-time on purpose to have them feed her with his sugar, which was true. At regular hours, beginning with the opening of the department offices, she would make the round of the police building and call on all the officials, forgetting none. She rode up in the elevator and left it at the proper floors, waited in the anterooms with the rest when there was a crowd, and paid stated visits to the chief and the commissioners, who never omitted to receive her with a nod and a "Hello, Trilby!" no matter how pressing the business in hand. The gravity with which she listened to what went on, and wrinkled up her brow in an evident effort to understand, was comical to the last degree. She knew the fire alarm signals and when anything momentous was afoot. On the quiet days, when nothing was stirring, she would flock with the reporters on the stoop and sing.

There never was such singing as Trilby's. That was how she got her name. I tried a score of times to find out, but to this day I do not know whether it was pain or pleasure that was in her note. She had only one, but it made up in volume for what it lacked in range. Standing in the circle of her friends, she would raise her head until her nose pointed straight toward the sky, and pour forth her melody with a look of such unutterable woe on her face that peals of laughter always wound up the performance; whereupon Trilby would march off with an injured air, and hide herself in one of the offices, refusing to come out. Poor Trilby! with the passing away of the alley she seemed to lose her grip. She did not

understand it. After wandering about aimlessly for a while, vainly seeking a home in the world, she finally moved over on the East Side with one of the dispossessed tenants. But on all Sundays and holidays, and once in a while in the middle of the week, she comes yet to inspect the old block in Mulberry Street and to join in a quartette with old friends.



Old Barney.

Trilby and Old Barney were the two who stuck to the alley longest. Barney was the star boarder. As everything about the place was misnamed, the alley itself included, so was he. His real name was Michael, but the children called him Barney, and the name stuck. When they were at odds, as they usually were, they shouted "Barney Bluebeard!" after him, and ran away and hid in trembling delight as he

shook his key-ring at them, and showed his teeth with the evil leer which he reserved specially for them. It was reported in the alley that he was a woman-hater; hence the name. Certain it is that he never would let one of the detested sex cross the threshold of his attic room on any pretext. If he caught one pointing for his aerie, he would block the way and bid her sternly begone. She seldom tarried long, for Barney was not a pleasing object when he was in an ugly mood. As the years passed, and cobweb and dirt accumulated in his room, stories were told of fabulous wealth which he had concealed in the chinks of the wall and in broken crocks; and as he grew constantly shabbier and more crabbed, they were readily believed. Barney carried his ring and filed keys all day, coining money, so the reasoning ran, and spent none; so he must be hiding it away. The alley hugged itself in the joyful sensation that it had a miser and his hoard in the cockloft. Next to a ghost, for which the environment was too matter-of-fact, that was the thing for an alley to have.

Curiously enough, the fact that, summer and winter, the old man never missed early mass and always put a silver quarter—even a silver dollar, it was breathlessly whispered in the alley—in the contribution box, merely served to strengthen this belief. The fact was, I suspect, that the key-ring was the biggest end of the business Old Barney cultivated so assiduously. There were keys enough on it, and they rattled most persistently as he sent forth the strange whoop which no one ever was able to make out, but which was assumed to mean "Keys! keys!" But he was far too feeble and tremulous to wield a file with effect. In his younger days he had wielded a bayonet in his country's defence. On the rare

occasions when he could be made to talk, he would tell, with a smouldering gleam in his sunken eyes, how the Twenty-third Illinois Volunteers had battled with the Rebs weary nights and days without giving way a foot. The old man's bent back would straighten, and he would step firmly and proudly, at the recollection of how he and his comrades earned the name of the "heroes of Lexington" in that memorable fight. But only for the moment. The dark looks that frightened the children returned soon to his face. It was all for nothing, he said. While he was fighting at the front he was robbed. His lieutenant, to whom he gave his money to send home, stole it and ran away. When he returned after three years there was nothing, nothing! At this point the old man always became incoherent. He spoke of money the government owed him and withheld. It was impossible to make out whether his grievance was real or imagined.

When Colonel Grant came to Mulberry Street as a police commissioner, Barney brightened up under a sudden idea. He might get justice now. Once a week, through those two years, he washed himself, to the mute astonishment of the alley, and brushed up carefully, to go across and call on "the general's son" in order to lay his case before him. But he never got farther than the Mulberry Street door. On the steps he was regularly awestruck, and the old hero, who had never turned his back to the enemy, faltered and retreated. In the middle of the street he halted, faced front, and saluted the building with all the solemnity of a grenadier on parade, then went slowly back to his attic and to his unrighted grievance.

It had been the talk of the neighborhood for years that the alley would have to go in the Elm Street

widening which was to cut a swath through the block, right over the site upon which it stood; and at last notice was given about Christmas time that the wreckers were coming. The alley was sold,—thirty dollars was all it brought,—and the old tenants moved away, and were scattered to the four winds. Barney alone stayed. He flatly refused to budge. They tore down the church next door and the buildings on Houston Street, and filled what had been the yard, or court, of the tenements with débris that reached halfway to the roof, so that the old locksmith, if he wished to go out or in, must do so by way of the third-story window, over a perilous path of shaky timbers and sliding brick. He evidently considered it a kind of siege, and shut himself in his attic, bolting and barring the door, and making secret sorties by night for provisions. When the chimney fell down or was blown over, he punched a hole in the rear wall and stuck the stovepipe through that, where it blew defiance to the new houses springing up almost within arm's-reach of it. It suggested guns pointing from a fort, and perhaps it pleased the old man's soldier fancy. It certainly made smoke enough in his room, where he was fighting his battles over with himself, and occasionally with the janitor from the front, who climbed over the pile of bricks and in through the window to bring him water. When I visited him there one day, and, after giving the password, got behind the bolted door, I found him, the room, and everything else absolutely covered with soot, coal-black from roof to rafters. The password was "Letter!" yelled out loud at the foot of the stairs. That would always bring him out, in the belief that the government had finally sent him the long-due money. Barney was stubbornly defiant, he would stand by his guns to the end; but he was

weakening physically under the combined effect of short rations and nightly alarms. It was clear that he could not stand it much longer.

The wreckers cut it short one morning by ripping off the roof over his head before he was up. Then, and only then, did he retreat. His exit was characterized by rather more haste than dignity. There had been a heavy fall of snow overnight, and Barney slid down the jagged slope from his window, dragging his trunk with him, in imminent peril of breaking his aged bones. That day he disappeared from Mulberry Street. I thought he was gone for good, and through the Grand Army of the Republic had set inquiries on foot to find what had become of him, when one day I saw him from my window, standing on the opposite side of the street, key-ring in hand, and looking fixedly at what had once been the passageway to the alley, but was now a barred gap between the houses, leading nowhere. He stood there long, gazing sadly at the gateway, at the children dancing to the Italian's hand-organ, at Trilby trying to look unconcerned on the stoop, and then went his way silently, a poor castaway, and I saw him no more.

So Cat Alley, with all that belonged to it, passed out of my life. It had its faults, but it can at least be said of it, in extenuation, that it was very human. With them all it had a rude sense of justice that did not distinguish its early builders. When the work of tearing down had begun, I watched, one day, a troop of children having fun with a seesaw they had made of a plank laid across a lime barrel. The whole Irish contingent rode the plank, all at once, with screams of delight. A ragged little girl from the despised "Dago" colony watched them from the corner with

hungry eyes. Big Jane, who was the leader by virtue of her thirteen years and her long reach, saw her and stopped the show.

"Here, Mame," she said, pushing one of the smaller girls from the plank, "you get off an' let her ride. Her mother was stabbed yesterday."

And the little Dago rode, and was made happy. [Back to Contents]

## CHAPTER XIII

### JUSTICE TO THE BOY

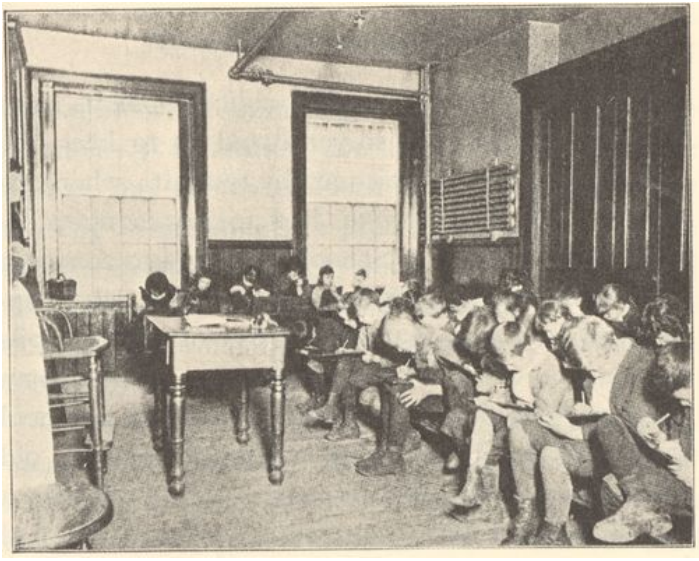
Sometimes, when I see my little boy hugging himself with delight at the near prospect of the kindergarten, I go back in memory forty years and more to the day when I was dragged, a howling captive, to school, as a punishment for being bad at home. I remember, as though it were yesterday, my progress up the street in the vengeful grasp of an exasperated servant, and my reception by the aged monster—most fitly named Madame Bruin—who kept the school. She asked no questions, but led me straightway to the cellar, where she plunged me into an empty barrel and put the lid on over me. Applying her horn goggles to the bunghole, to my abject terror, she informed me, in a sepulchral voice, that that was the way bad boys were dealt with in school. When I ceased howling from sheer fright, she took me out and conducted me to the yard, where a big hog had a corner to itself. She bade me observe

that one of its ears had been slit half its length. It was because the hog was lazy, and little boys who were that way minded—zip! she clipped a pair of tailor's shears close to my ear. It was my first lesson in school. I hated it from that hour.

The barrel and the hog were never part of the curriculum in any American boy's school, I suppose; they seem too freakish to be credited to any but the demoniac ingenuity of my home ogre. But they stood for a comprehension of the office of school and teacher which was not patented by any day or land. It is not so long since the notion yet prevailed that the schools were principally to lock children up in for the convenience of their parents, that we should have entirely forgotten it. Only the other day a clergyman from up the state came into my office to tell of a fine reform school they had in his town. They were very proud of it.

"And how about the schools for the good boys in your town?" I asked, when I had heard him out. "Are they anything to be proud of?"

He stared. He guessed they were all right, he said, after some hesitation. But it was clear that he did not know.



The Old.



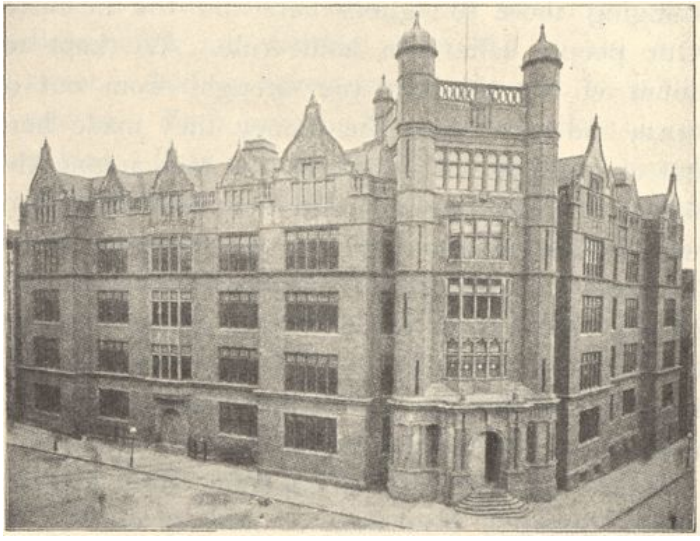
The New.

It is not necessary to go back forty years to find us in the metropolis upon the clergyman's platform, if not upon Madame Bruin's. A dozen or fifteen will do. They will bring us to the day when roof playgrounds were contemptuously left out of the estimates for an East Side school, as "frills" that had nothing to do with education; when the Board of Health found but a single public school in more than sixscore that was so ventilated as to keep the children from being poisoned by foul air; when the authority of the Talmud had to be invoked by the Superintendent of School Buildings to convince the president of the Board of Education, who happened to be a Jew, that seventy-five or eighty pupils were far too many for one classroom; when a man who had been dead a year was appointed a school trustee of the Third Ward, under the mouldy old law surviving from the day when New York was a big village, and filled the office as well as if he had been alive, because there were no schools in his ward—it was the wholesale grocery district; when manual training and the kindergarten were yet the fads of yesterday, looked at askance; when fifty thousand children roamed the streets for whom there was no room in the schools, and the only defence of the School Commissioners was that they "didn't know" there were so many; and when we mixed truants and thieves in a jail with entire unconcern. Indeed, the jail filled the title rôle in the educational cast of that day. Its inmates were well lodged and cared for, while the sanitary authorities twice condemned the Essex Market school across the way as wholly unfit for children to be in, but failed to catch the ear of the politician who ran things unhindered. When (in 1894) I denounced the "system" of enforcing—or not enforcing—the compulsory education law as a device to make

thieves out of our children by turning over their training to the street, he protested angrily; but the experts of the Tenement House Commission found the charge fully borne out by the facts. They were certainly plain enough in the sight of us all, had we chosen to see.

When at last we saw, we gave the politician a vacation for a season. To say that he was to blame for all the mischief would not be fair. We were to blame for leaving him in possession. He was only a link in the chain which our indifference had forged; but he was always and everywhere an obstruction to betterment,—sometimes, illogically, in spite of himself. Successive Tammany mayors had taken a stand for the public schools when it was clear that reform could not be delayed much longer; but they were helpless against a system of selfishness and stupidity of which they were the creatures, though they posed as its masters. They had to go with it as unfit, and upon the wave that swept out the last of the rubbish came reform. The Committee of Seventy took hold, the Good Government Clubs, the Tenement House Commission, and the women of New York. Five years we strove with the powers of darkness, and look now at the change! The New York school system is not yet the ideal one,—it may never be; but the jail, at least, has been cast out of the firm. We have a compulsory education law under which it is possible to punish the parent for the boy's truancy, as he ought to be if there was room in the school for the lad, and he let him drift. And the day cannot be delayed much longer now when every child shall find the latchstring out on the school door. We have had to put our hands deep into our pockets to get so far, and we shall have to put them in deeper yet a

long way. But it is all right. We are beginning to see the true bearing of things. Last week the Board of Estimate and Apportionment appropriated six millions of dollars for new schools—exactly what the battleship *Massachusetts* cost all complete with guns and fittings, so they told me on board. Battleships are all right when we need them, but even then it is the man behind the gun who tells, and that means the schoolmaster. The Board of Education asked for sixteen millions. They will get the other ten when we have caught our breath. Since the beginning of 1895[37] we have built sixty-nine new public schools in Manhattan and the Bronx, at a cost of $12,038,764, exclusive of cost of sites, furnishings, heating, lighting, and ventilating the buildings, which would add two-thirds at least of that amount, making it a round twenty millions of dollars. And every one of the sixty-nine has its playground, which will by and by be free to all the neighborhood. The idea is at last working through that the schools belong to the people, and are primarily for the children and their parents; not mere vehicles of ward patronage, or for keeping an army of teachers in office and pay.

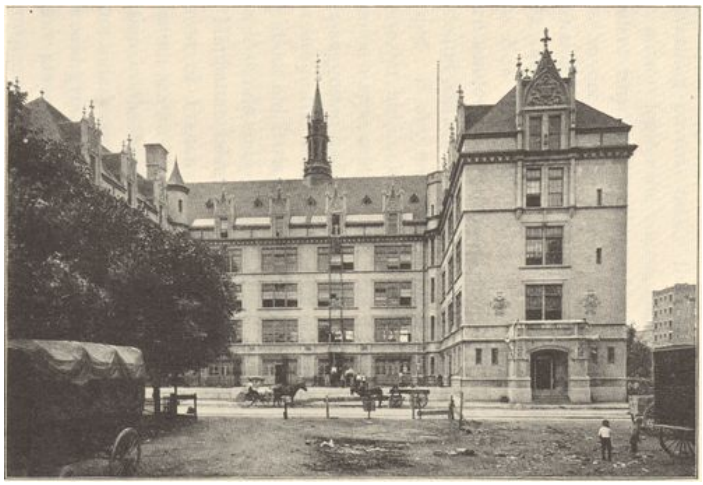


Public School No. 177, Manhattan.

The silly old régime is dead. The ward trustee is gone with his friend the alderman, loudly proclaiming the collapse of our liberties in the day that saw the schools taken from "the people's" control. They were "the people." Experts manage our children's education, which was supposed, in the old plan, to be the only thing that did not require any training. To superintend a brickyard demanded some knowledge, but anybody could run the public schools. It cost us an election to take that step. One of the Tammany district leaders, who knew what he was talking about, said to me after it was all over: "I knew we would win. Your bringing those foreigners here did the business. Our people believe in home rule. We kept account of the teachers you brought from out of town, and who spent the money they made here out of town, and it got to be the talk among the tenement people in my ward that their

daughters would have no more show to get to be teachers. That did the business. We figured the school vote in the city at forty-two thousand, and I knew we could not lose." The "foreigners" were teachers from Massachusetts and other states, who had achieved a national reputation at their work.

There lies upon my table a copy of the minutes of the Board of Education of January 9, 1895, in which is underscored a report on a primary school in the Bronx. "It is a wooden shanty," is the inspector's account, "heated by stoves, and is a regular tinder box; cellar wet, and under one classroom only. This building was erected in order, I believe, to determine whether or not there was a school population in the neighborhood to warrant the purchase of property to erect a school on."



Letter H Plan of Public School No. 165, showing Front on West 109th Street.

That was the way then of taking a school census, and the result was the utter failure of the compulsory

education law to compel anything. To-day we have a biennial census, ordained by law, which, when at last it gets into the hands of some one who can count,[38] will tell us how many Jacob Beresheims are drifting upon the shoals of the street. And we have a truant school to keep them safe in. To it, says the law, no thief shall be committed. It is not yet five years since the burglar and the truant—which latter, having been refused admission to the school because there was not room for him, inconsequently was locked up for contracting idle ways—were herded in the Juvenile Asylum, and classified there in squads of those who were four feet, four feet seven, and over four feet seven! I am afraid I scandalized some good people during the fight for decency in this matter, by insisting that it ought to be considered a good mark for Jacob that he despised such schools as were provided for him. But it was true. Except for the risk of the burglar, the jail was preferable by far. The woman into whose hands the management of the truant school fell, made out, after little more than a year's experience, that of twenty-five hundred so-called incorrigibles, the barest handful—scarce sixty—were rightly so named, and even these a little longer and tighter grip might probably win over. For such a farm school is yet to be provided. The rest responded promptly to an appeal to their pride. She "made it a personal matter" with each of them, and the truant vanished; the boy was restored. The burglar, too, made it a personal matter in the old contact, and the result was two burglars for one. I have yet to find any one who has paid attention to this matter and is not of the opinion that the truant school strikes at the root of the problem of juvenile crime. After thirty years of close acquaintance with the child population of London, Mr. Andrew Drew,

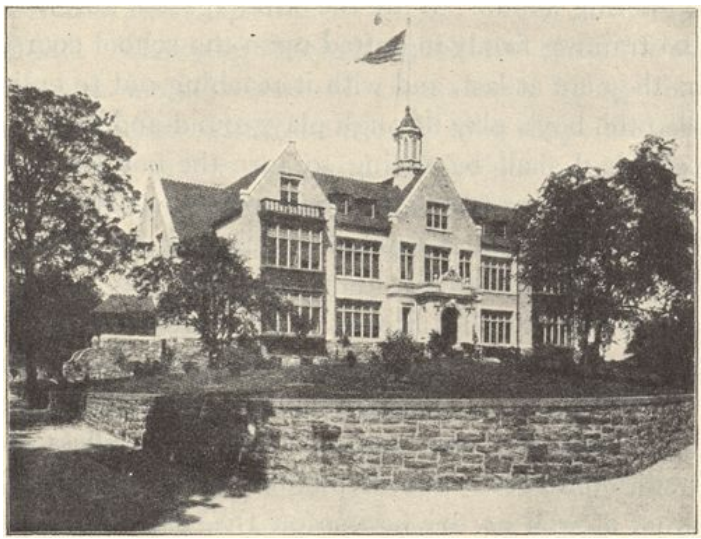
chairman of the Industrial Committee of the School Board, declared his conviction that "truancy is to be credited with nearly the whole of our juvenile criminality." But for years there seemed to be no way of convincing the New York School Board that the two had anything to do with one another. Even now it seems to be a case of one convinced against his will being "of the same opinion still," for, though the Superintendent of Schools speaks of that bar to the jail as preposterously inadequate, nothing is done to strengthen it.

Nothing on that tack. But there is a long leg and a short leg on the course, and I fancy Superintendent Snyder does the tacking on the long leg. Mr. Snyder builds New York's schools, and he does that which no other architect before his time ever did or tried; he "builds them beautiful." In him New York has one of those rare men who open windows for the soul of their time. Literally, he found barracks where he is leaving palaces to the people. If any one thinks this is overmeasure of praise, let him look at the "Letter H" school, now become a type, and see what he thinks of it. The idea suggested itself to him as meeting the demands of a site in the middle of a block, while he was poking about old Paris on a much-needed vacation, and now it stands embodied in a dozen beautiful schools on Manhattan Island, copies, every one, of the handsomest of French palaces, the Hôtel de Cluny. I cannot see how it is possible to come nearer perfection in the building of a public school. There is not a dark corner in the whole structure, from the splendid gymnasium under the red-tiled roof to the indoor playground on the street floor, which, when thrown into one with the two yards that lie enclosed in the arms of the H, give the

children nearly an acre of asphalted floor to romp on from street to street; for the building sets right through the block, with just such a front on the other street as it shows on this one. If there be those yet upon whom the notion grates that play and the looks of the school should be counted in as educational factors, why, let them hurry up and catch on. They are way behind. The play through which the child "first perceives moral relations" comes near being the biggest and strongest factor in it all to-day; and as for the five or ten thousand dollars put in for "the looks" of things where the slum had trodden every ideal and every atom of beauty into the dirt, I expect to live to see that prove the best investment a city ever made.

We are getting the interest now in the new pride of the boy in "his school," and no wonder. When I think of the old Allen Street school, with its hard and ugly lines, where the gas had to be kept burning even on the brightest days, recitations suspended every half-hour, and the children made to practice calisthenics so that they should not catch cold while the windows were opened to let in fresh air; of the dark playground downstairs, with the rats keeping up such a racket that one could hardly hear himself speak at times; or of that other East Side "playground" where the boys "weren't allowed to speak above a whisper," so as not to disturb those studying overhead, I fancy that I can make out both the cause and the cure of the boy's desperation. "We try to make our schools pleasant enough to hold the children," wrote the Superintendent of Schools in Indianapolis to me once, and added that they had no truant problem worth bothering about. With the kindergarten and manual training firmly ingrafted

upon the school course, as they are at last, and with it reaching out to enlist also the boy's play through playground and vacation schools, I shall be willing to turn the boy who will not come in over to the reformatory. They will not need to build a new wing to the jail for his safekeeping.



Public School No. 153, the Bronx.

All ways lead to Rome. The reform in school building dates back, as does every other reform in New York, to the Mulberry Bend. It began there. The first school that departed from the soulless old tradition, to set beautiful pictures before the child's mind as well as dry figures on the slate, was built there. At the time I wanted it to stand in the park, hoping so to hasten the laying out of that; but although the Small Parks law expressly permitted the erection on park property of buildings for "the instruction of the people," the officials upon whom I pressed my scheme could not be made to understand

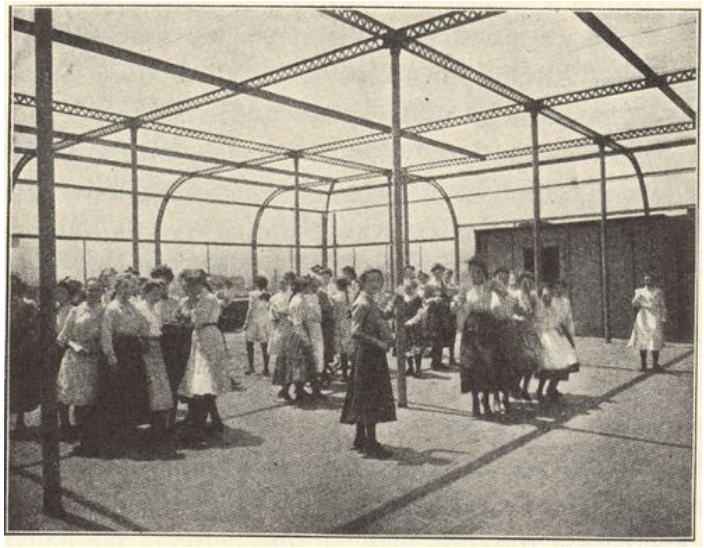
that as including schools. Perhaps they were right. I catechised thirty-one Fourth Ward girls in a sewing school, about that time, twenty-six of whom had attended the public schools of the district more than a year. One wore a badge earned for excellence in her studies. In those days every street corner was placarded with big posters of Napoleon on a white horse riding through fire and smoke. There was one right across the street. Yet only one of the thirty-one knew who Napoleon was. She "thought she had heard of the gentleman before." It came out that the one impression she retained of what she had heard was that "the gentleman" had two wives, both at one time probably. They knew of Washington that he was the first President of the United States, and cut down a cherry tree. They were sitting and sewing at the time almost on the identical spot on Cherry Hill where he lived when he held the office. To the question who ruled before Washington the answer came promptly: no one; he was the first. They agreed reluctantly, upon further consideration, that there was probably "a king of America" before his day, and the Irish damsels turned up their noses at the idea. The people of Canada, they thought, were copper-colored. The same winter I was indignantly bidden to depart from a school in the Fourth Ward by a trustee who had heard that I had written a book about the slum and spoken of "his people" in it.

Those early steps in the reform path stumbled sadly over obstacles that showed what a hard pull we had ahead. I told in "The Making of an American" how I fared when I complained that the Allen Street school was overrun with rats, and how I went out to catch one of them to prove to the City Hall folk that I was not a liar, as they said. We won the fight for the

medical inspection of the schools that has proved such a boon, against much opposition within the profession, from which we should have had only support. And this in face of evidence of a kind to convince anybody. I remember one of the exhibits. There had been a scarlet-fever epidemic on the lower West Side, which the health inspectors finally traced to the public school of the district. A boy with the disease had been turned loose before the "peeling" was over, and had achieved phenomenal popularity in the classroom by a trick he had of pulling the skin from his fingers as one would skin a cat. The pieces he distributed as souvenirs among his comrades, who carried them proudly home to show to their admiring playmates who were not so lucky as to sit on the bench with the clever lad. The epidemic followed as a matter of course. But though the Health Department put through that reform, when it came to inspecting the eyes of the children, we lost. The cry that it would "interfere with private practice" defeated us. The fact was easily demonstrated that not only was ophthalmia rampant in the schools with its contagion, but that the pupils were made both near-sighted and stupid by the want of proper arrangement of their seats and of themselves in their classrooms. But self-interest prevailed. However, nothing is ever settled till it is settled right. I have before me the results of an examination of thirty-six public schools containing 55,470 pupils. It was made by order of the Board of Health this month (August, 1902), and ought to settle that matter for good. Of the 55,470, not less than 6670 had contagious eye-disease; 2328 were cases of operative trachoma, 3243 simple trachoma, and 1099 conjunctivitis. In one school in the most crowded district of the East Side 22.2 per cent were so afflicted. No wonder the

doctors "were horrified" at the showing. So was the President of the Board of Health, who told me to-day that he would leave no stone unturned until effective inspection of the school children by eye-specialists had been assured. So we go, step by step, ever forward.

Speaking of that reminds me of a mishap I had in the Hester Street school,—the one with the "frills" which the Board of Education cut off. I happened to pass it after school hours, and went in to see what sort of a playground the roof would have made. I met no one on the way, and, finding the scuttle open, climbed out and up the slant of the roof to the peak, where I sat musing over our lost chance, when the janitor came to close up. He must have thought I was a crazy man, and my explanation did not make it any better. He haled me down, and but for the fortunate chance that the policeman on the beat knew me, I should have been taken to the lockup as a dangerous lunatic—all for dreaming of a playground on the roof of a schoolhouse.



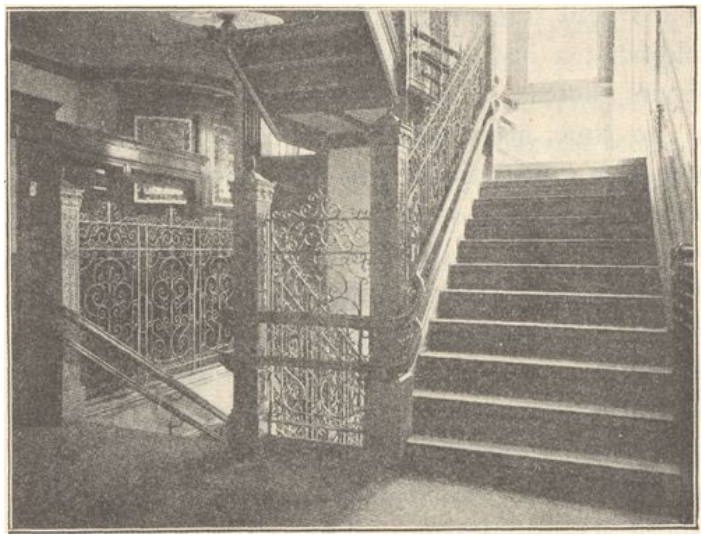
Girls' Playground on the Roof.

Janitor and Board of Commissioners to the contrary notwithstanding, the dream became real. There stands another school in Hester Street to-day within easy call, that has a roof playground where two thousand children dance under the harvest moon to the music of a brass band, as I shall tell you about hereafter—the joy of it to have that story to tell!—and all about are others like it, with more coming every year. To the indignant amazement of my captor, the janitor, his school has been thrown open to the children in the summer vacation, and in the winter they put a boys' club in to worry him. What further indignities there are in store for him, in this day of "frills," there is no telling. The Superintendent of Schools told me only yesterday that he was going to Boston to look into new sources of worriment they have invented there. The world does move in spite of janitors. In two short years our school authorities

advanced from the cautious proposition that it "was the sense" of the Board of Superintendents that the schoolhouses might well be used in the cause of education as neighborhood centres, etc., (1897), to the flat declaration that "every rational system of education should make provisions for play" (1899). And to cut off all chance of relapse into the old doubt whether "such things are educational," that laid so many of our hopes on the dusty shelf of the circumlocution office, the state legislature has expressly declared that the commonwealth will take the chance, which Boards of Education shunned, of a little amusement creeping in. The schools may be used for "purposes of recreation." To the janitor it must seem that the end of all things is at hand.

So the schools and their playgrounds were thrown open to the children during the long vacation, with kindergarten teachers to amuse them, and vacation schools tempted the little ones from the street into the cool shade of the classrooms. They wrought in wood and iron, they sang and they played and studied nature,—out of a barrel, to be sure, that came twice a week from Long Island filled with "specimens"; but later on we took a hint from Chicago, and let the children gather their own specimens on excursions around the bay and suburbs of the city. That was a tremendous success. And there is better still coming, as I shall show presently. It sometimes seems to me as if we were here face to face with the very thing we are seeking and know not how to find. The mere hint that money might be lacking to pay for the excursions set the St. Andrew's Brotherhood men on Long Island to devising schemes for inviting the school children out on trolley and shore trips. What if they all, the Christian Endeavor,

the Epworth League, and the other expressions of the same human desire to find the lost brother, who are looking about for something to try their young strength and enthusiasm on—what if they were to hitch on here and help pull the load that may get mired else? They need men and women in that work. Mere paid teaching will never do it. If they can only get them, I think we may be standing upon the threshold of something which shall bring us nearer to a universal brotherhood than all the consecration and all the badges yet devised. I am thinking of the children and of the chance to take them at once out of the slum and into our hearts, while making of the public school the door to a house of citizenship in which we shall all dwell together in full understanding. Without that door the house will never be what we planned. And there is the key, all ready-made, in the children.



The New Idea: a Stairway of Public School No. 170.

The mere contact with nature, even out of a barrel, brought something to those starved child lives that struck a new note. Sometimes it rang with a sharp and jarring sound. The boys in the Hester Street school could not be made to take an interest in the lesson on wheat until the teacher came to the effect of drought and a bad year on the farmer's pocket. Then they understood. They knew the process. Strikes cut into the earnings of Hester Street, small enough at the best of times, at frequent intervals, and the boys need not be told what a bad year means. No other kind ever occurs there. They learned the lesson on wheat in no time, after that. Oftener it was a gentler note that piped timidly in the strange place. A barrel of wild roses came one day, instead of the expected "specimens," and these were given to the children. They took them greedily. "I wondered," said the teacher, "if it was more love of the flower, or of getting something for nothing, no matter what." But even if it were largely the latter, there was still the rose. Nothing like it had come that way before, and without a doubt it taught its own lesson. The Italian child might have jumped for it more eagerly, but its beauty was not wasted in Jewtown, either. The baby kissed it, and it lay upon more than one wan cheek, and whispered, who knows what thought of hope and courage that were nearly gone. Even in Hester Street the wild rose from the hedge was not wasted.

The result of it all was wholesome and good, because it was common sense. The way to fight the slum in the children's lives is with sunlight and flowers and play, which their child hearts crave, if their eyes have never seen them. The teachers reported that the boys were easier to manage, more

quiet, and played more fairly than before. The police reports showed that fewer were arrested or run over in the streets than in other years. A worse enemy was attacked than the trolley car or the truck. In the kindergarten at the Hull House in Chicago there hangs a picture of a harvest scene, with the man wiping his brow, and a woman resting at his feet. Miss Addams told me that a little girl with an old face picked it out among all the rest, and considered it long and gravely. "Well," she said, when her inspection was finished, "he knocked her down, didn't he?" A two hours' argument for kindergartens or vacation schools could not have put it stronger or better.

It is five seasons since the Board of Education took over the work begun by the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor as an object lesson for us all, and I have before me the schedule for this summer's work, just begun. It embraces seventeen vacation schools in which the boys are taught basketry, weaving, chair-caning, sloyd, fret-sawing, and how to work in leather and iron, while the girls learn sewing, millinery, embroidering, knitting, and the domestic arts, besides sharing in the boys' work where they can. There are thirty-five school playgrounds with kindergarten and gymnasiums and games, and half a dozen of the play piers are used for the same purpose. In twelve open-air playgrounds and parks, teachers sent by the Board of Education lead the children's play, and in as many more public baths teach boys and girls to swim on alternate days. In Crotona Park, up in the Bronx, under big spreading oaks and maples, athletic meets are held of boys from down-town and up-town schools in friendly rivalry, and the Frog Hollow

Gang, that wrecked railroad trains there in my recollection, is a bad memory. Over at Hudson-bank on the site of the park that is coming there, teams hired by the Board of Education are ploughing up the site of Stryker's Lane, and the young toughs of the West Side who held that the world owed them a living and collected it as they could, are turning truck farmers. They are planting potatoes, and gardening, and learning the secret of life that the living is his who can earn it. The world "do move." No argument is needed now to persuade those who hold the purse strings that all this is "good business." Instead, the mayor of the city is asking the Board of Education to tell him of more and better ways of putting the machinery to use. The city will foot the bill, if we will show them how. And we will show them how.



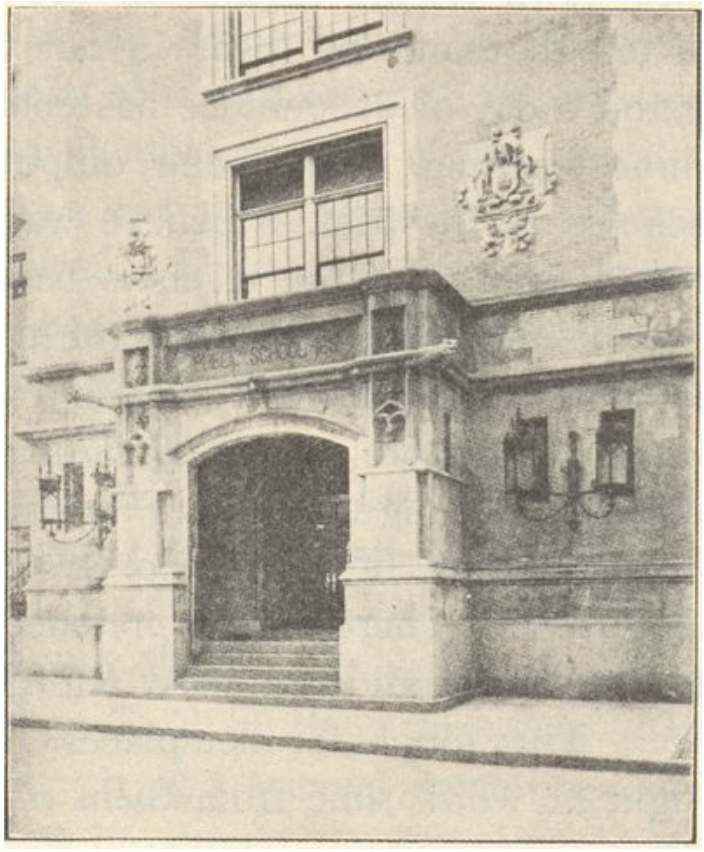
Truck Farming on the Site of Stryker's Lane.

The last four years have set us fifty years ahead,

and there is no doubling on that track now. Where we had one kindergarten when I was put out of the Fourth Ward school by a trustee for daring to intrude there to find out what they were teaching, we have a hundred and fifteen at this writing in Manhattan alone, and soon we shall have as many as five hundred that are part of the public school in the greater city. "The greatest blessing which the nineteenth century bequeathed to little children," Superintendent Maxwell calls the kindergarten, and since the children are our own to-morrow, he might have said to all of us, to the state. The kindergarten touch is upon the whole system of teaching. Cooking, the only kind of temperance preaching that counts for anything in a school course, is taught in the girls' classes. A minister of justice declared in the Belgian Chamber that the nation was reverting to a new form of barbarism, which he described by the term "alcoholic barbarism," and pointed out as its first cause the "insufficiency of the food procurable by the working classes." He referred to the quality, not the quantity. The United States experts, who lately made a study of the living habits of the poor in New York, spoke of it as a common observation that "a not inconsiderable amount of the prevalent intemperance can be traced to poor food and unattractive home tables." The toasting-fork in Jacob's sister's hand beats preaching in the campaign against the saloon, just as the boys' club beats the police club in fighting the gang.

The cram and the jam are being crowded out as common-sense teaching steps in and takes their place, and the "three H's," the head, the heart, and the hand,—a whole boy,—are taking the place too long monopolized by the "three R's." There was need

of it. It had seemed sometimes as if, in our anxiety lest he should not get enough, we were in danger of stuffing the boy to the point of making a hopeless dunce of him. It is a higher function of the school to teach principles than to impart facts merely. Teaching the boy municipal politics and a thousand other things to make a good citizen of him, instead of so filling him with love of his country and pride in its traditions that he is bound to take the right stand when the time comes, is as though one were to attempt to put all the law of the state into its constitution to make it more binding. The result would be hopeless congestion and general uselessness.



Doorway of Public School No. 165.

It comes down to the teacher in the end, and there are ten thousand of them in our big city.[39] To them, too, a day of deliverance has come. Half the machine teaching, the wooden output of our public schools in the past, I believe was due to the practical isolation of the teachers between the tyranny of politics and the distrust of those who had good cause to fear the politician and his work. There was never a more saddening sight than that of the teachers standing together in an almost solid body to resist

reform of the school system as an attack upon them. There was no pretence on their part that the schools did not need reform. They knew better. They fought for their places. Throughout the fight no word came from them of the children's rights. They imagined that theirs were in danger, and they had no thought for anything else. We gathered then the ripe fruit of politics, and it will be a long while, I suppose, before we get the taste out of our mouths. But the grip of politics on our schools has been loosened, if not shaken off altogether, and the teacher's slavery is at an end, if she herself so wills it. Once hardly thought worthy of a day laborer's hire, she ranks to-day with a policeman in pay and privilege. The day that sees her welcomed as an honored guest in every home with a child in school will break the last of her bonds, and do more for the schools and for us than any one thing I can think of. Until that day comes the teachers, as a class apart, will have interests apart, or feel that they have, and will be bound to stand together to defend them; and they will work for pay. But for the real work of a teacher no one can ever pay her.

The day is coming. The windows of the schoolhouse have been thrown open, and life let in with the sunlight. The time may be not far distant when ours shall be schools "for discovering aptitude," in Professor Felix Adler's wise plan. The problem is a vast one, even in its bulk; every year seats must be found on the school benches for twenty thousand additional children. In spite of all we have done, there are to-day in the greater city nearly thirty thousand children in half-day or part-time classes, waiting their chance. But that it can and will be solved no one can doubt. We have just *got* to, that is

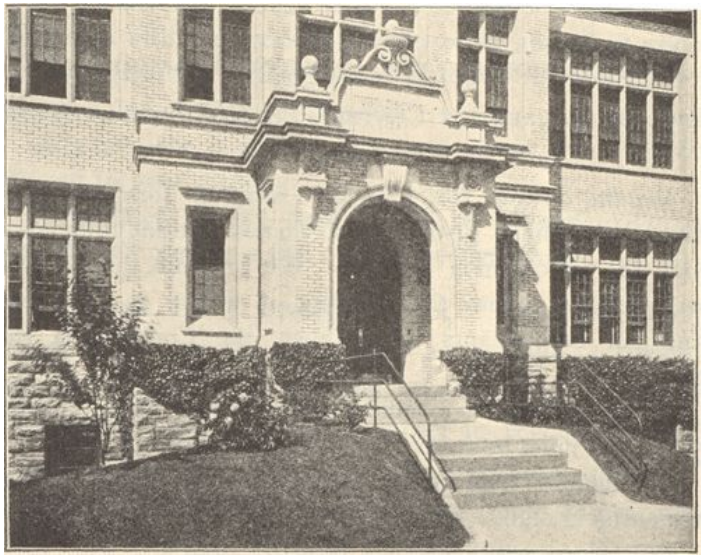
all.

In the solution the women of New York will have had no mean share. In the struggle for school reform they struck the telling blows, and the credit of the victory was justly theirs. The Public Education Association, originally a woman's auxiliary to Good Government Club E, has worked as energetically with the school authorities in the new plan as it fought to break down the old and secure decency. It has opened many windows for little souls by hanging schoolrooms with beautiful casts and pictures, and forged at the same time new and strong links in the chain that bound the boy all too feebly to the school. At a time when the demand of the boys of the East Side for club room, which was in itself one of the healthiest signs of the day, had reached an exceedingly dangerous pass, the Public Education Association broke ground that will yet prove the most fertile field of all. The Raines law saloon, quick to discern in the new demand the gap that would divorce it by and by from the man, attempted to bridge it by inviting the boy in under its roof. Occasionally the girl went along. A typical instance of how the scheme worked was brought to my attention at the time by the head worker of the college settlement. The back room of the saloon was given to the club free of charge, with the understanding that the boy members should "treat." As a means of raising the needed funds, the club hit upon the plan of fining members ten cents when they "got funny."

To defeat this device of the devil some way must be found; but club room was scarce among the tenements. The Good Government Clubs proposed to the Board of Education that it open the empty

classrooms at night for the children's use. It was my privilege to plead their cause before the School Board, and to obtain from it the necessary permission, after some hesitation and doubt as to whether "it was educational." The Public Education Association assumed the responsibility for "the property," and the Hester Street school was opened. The property was not molested; only one window was broken that winter by a stray ball, and that was promptly paid for by those who broke it. But the boys who met there under Miss Winifred Buck's management learned many a lesson of self-control and practical wisdom that proved "educational" in the highest degree. Her plan is simplicity itself. Through their play,—the meeting usually begins with a romp,—in quarters where there is not too much elbow-room, the boys learn the first lesson of respecting one another's rights. The subsequent business meeting puts them upon the fundamentals of civilized society, as it were. Out of the debate of the question, Do we want boys who swear, steal, gamble, and smoke cigarettes? grow convictions as to why these vices are wrong that put "the gang" in its proper light. Punishment comes to appear, when administered by the boys themselves, a natural consequence of law-breaking, in defence of society; and the boy is won. He can thenceforward be trusted to work out his own salvation. If he does it occasionally with excessive unction, remember how recent was his conversion. "*Resolved*, that wisdom is better than wealth," was rejected as a topic for discussion by one of the clubs, because "everybody knows it is." This was in the Tenth Ward. If temptation had come that way in the shape of a push-cart with pineapples—we are all human! Anyway, they had learned the right.

That was the beginning of a work of which shall, I hope, hear a good deal more hereafter. It is all in its infancy yet, this attempt on the part of the municipality to get the boys off the street and out of the reach of the saloon. A number of schools were thrown open, where the crowds were greatest, for evening play and for clubs, and sometimes they laid hold of the youngster and sometimes not. It was a question again of the man or the woman who was at the helm. One school I found that surged with a happy crowd. It was over at Rivington and Suffolk streets, No. 160. Oh, how I wish they would soon stop this hopeless numbering of our schools, and call them after our great and good men, as Superintendent Maxwell pleads, so that "the name of every school may in itself be made a lesson in patriotism and good citizenship to its pupils." There they would be in their right place. One alderman got the idea during the Strong reform administration, but they hitched the names to the new parks instead of the schools, and that turned out wrong. So they have the Ham Fish Park for Hamilton Fish, the "Sewer" Park for William H. Seward, the Thomas Jefferson Park up-town which no one will ever call anything but the Little Italy Park, and the good name of De Witt Clinton put to the bad use of spoiling beautiful "Hudson-bank." Only, the effort will be wasted. The old name will stick. How different if the new schools had been called after these statesmen! And what a chance to get their pupils interested! In the "Alexander Hamilton School," for instance, where "the Grange" and his thirteen trees abide yet.



Main Entrance of Public School No. 153.

But that is another story. I was thinking of the Jackson Pleasure Club of boys from eleven to thirteen which I found in session in No. 160, and of its very instructive constitution. I am going to print it here entire for the instruction of some good people who don't understand. The boys got it all up themselves with the help of a copy of the United States Constitution and the famous "Stamp Act."

CONSTITUTION OF THE JACKSON PLEASURE CLUB

EVENING RECREATION CENTRE P. S. NO. 160, NEW YORK CITY

We the boys of the J. P. C. in order to form a perfect club, we establish justice insure domestic tranquillity provide for the common defence. We promote the general welfare and secure the blessing

of liberty to ourselves and our descendants to establish the Constitution for the J. P. C.

No boys can be members who are less than thirteen years and must be from the 7th Grammar on.

No member can be President or Vice President unless 6 months in club.

All officers will keep their term six months.

The officers can not commit a law until it is passed by the members. If it is an important one it will be passed by votes. By this I mean that if $^5/_8$ of the members pass it is passed if $^1/_2$ is passed it is not passed.

Several committees are appointed to look over these rules which seldom happen on the streets.

If any member or officer is seen gambling, smoking or fighting a fine of $0.02 will be asked and must be paid the next meeting.

Special meetings will be held each month. Meetings will be held at 8 o'clock P.M. to 9 P.M.

No secrets or slang language or nicknames allowed or a fine of $.03 is asked.

If any body recites a recitation and makes a mistake he is not to be laughed at or a fine of $.02 must be paid.

If any member takes the laws into his own hands and interferes with the president or any other officers or walks up and down the meeting room or draws pictures on the boards a fine of $.02 will be paid.

Any one who is spoken to 3 times about order will be put out for that meeting.

Amendment I. No member will be allowed to go on a stranger's roof, or a fine of $.03 will be asked.

Why not on a stranger's roof? Because flying kites, up there the boys run across and interfere with the neighbor's pigeons, which is apt to make him wroth. So you see it is all in the interests of "domestic tranquillity and the common defence." They are not meaningless phrases, those big words, they are the boy's ideas of self-government, of a real democracy, struggling through in our sight. And suppose he does walk on rhetorical stilts, he has precedent and will show it to you. A nation learned to walk on them. Who shall say they are not good enough for him?

But to return to what I was speaking about: with the women to lead, the school has even turned the tables on the jail and invaded it bodily. For now nearly five years the Public Education Association has kept school in the Tombs, for the boys locked up there awaiting trial. Of thirty-one pupils on this school register, when I examined it one day, twelve were charged with burglary, four with highway robbery, and three with murder. That was the gang run to earth at last. Better late than never. The windows of their prison overlooked the spot where the gallows used to stand that cut short many a career such as they pursued. They were soberly attentive to their studies, which were of a severely practical turn. Their teacher, Mr. David Willard, who was a resident of the university settlement in its old Delancey Street home has his own sound view of how to head off the hangman. Daily and nightly he gathers about him, in the house on Chrystie Street

where he makes his home, half the boys and girls of the neighborhood, whom he meets as their friend, on equal terms. Mr. Willard, though a young man, is one of the most unique personages in the city. He is now one of the probation officers, under the new law which seeks to save the young offender rather than to wreak vengeance upon him, and his influence for good is great. The house in Chrystie Street is known far and wide as "the Children's House." They have their clubs there, and their games, of which Willard is the heart and soul. "I never saw anything remarkable in him," said one of his old college professors to me; "if anything, he was rather a dull student." It seems, then, that even colleges are not always institutions for "discovering aptitude." It was reserved for Chrystie Street in Willard's case.

Once a week another teacher comes to the Tombs school, and tells the boys of our city's history, its famous buildings and great men, trying so to arouse their interest as a first step toward a citizen's pride. This one also is sent by a club of women, the City History Club, which in five years has done strange things among the children. It sprang from the proposition of Mrs. Robert Abbe that the man and the citizen has his birth in the boy, and that to love a thing one must know it first. The half-dozen classes that were started for the study of our city's history have swelled into many scores of times that number, with a small army of pupils. The pregnant fact was noted early by the teachers, that the immigrant boy easily outstrips in interest for his adopted home the native, who perchance turns up his nose at him, and later very likely complains of the "unscrupulousness" of the Jew, who forged ahead of him in business as well.

The classes meet in settlement, school, or church to hear about the deeds of the fathers, and, when they have listened and read, go with their teachers and see for themselves the church where Washington worshipped, the graves where the great dead lie, the fields where they fought and bled. And when the little Italian asks, with shining eyes, "Which side were we on?" who can doubt that the lesson has sunk into a heart that will thenceforward beat more loyally for the city of his home? We have not any too much pride in our city, the best of us, and that is why we let it be run by every scalawag boss who comes along to rob us. In all the land there is no more historic building than Fraunces' Tavern, where Washington bade good-by to his officers; but though the very Chamber of Commerce was organized there, the appeal of patriotic women has not availed to save it to the people as a great relic of the past. The last time I was in it a waiter, busy with a lot of longshoremen who were eating their lunch and drinking their beer in the "Long Room," had hung his dirty apron on a plaster bust of the Father of his Country that stood upon the counter about where he probably sat at the historic feast. My angry remonstrance brought only an uncomprehending stare for reply.



Superintendent C. B. J. Snyder, who builds our Beautiful Schools.

But in spite of the dullards, the new life I spoke of, the new sense of responsibility of our citizenship, is stirring. The People's Institute draws nightly audiences to the great hall of the Cooper Institute for the discussion of present problems and social topics —audiences largely made up of workingmen more or less connected with the labor movement. The "People's Club," an outgrowth of the Institute, offers a home for the lonely wage-earner, man or woman,

and more accept its offer every year. It has now nearly four hundred members, one fourth of them women. Every night its rooms at 241 East Fourteenth Street are filled. Classes for study and recreation are organized right along. The People's University Extension Society invades the home, the nursery, the kindergarten, the club, wherever it can, with help and counsel to mothers with little children, to young men and to old. In a hundred ways those who but yesterday neither knew nor cared how the other half lived are reaching out and touching the people's life. The social settlements labor unceasingly, and where there was one a dozen years ago there are forty. Down on the lower East Side, the Educational Alliance conducts from the Hebrew Institute an energetic campaign among the Jewish immigrants that reaches many thousands of souls, two-thirds of them children, every day in the week. More than threescore clubs hold meetings in the building on Saturday and Sunday. Under the same roof the Baron Hirsch Fund teaches the children of refugee Jews the first elements of American citizenship, love for our language and our flag, and passes them on to the public schools within six months of their landing, the best material they receive from anywhere.

So the boy is being got ready for dealing, in the years that are to come, with the other but not more difficult problems of setting his house to rights, and ridding it of the political gang which now misrepresents him and us. And justice to Jacob is being evolved. Not yet without obstruction and dragging of feet. The excellent home library plan that proved so wholesome in the poor quarters of Boston has only lately caught on in New York, because of difficulty in securing the visitors upon

whom the plan depends for its success.[40] The same want has kept the boys' club from reaching the development that would apply the real test to it as a barrier against the slum. There are fifteen clubs for every Winifred Buck that is in sight. From the City History Club, the Charity Organization Society, from everywhere, comes the same complaint. The hardest thing in the world to give is still one's self. But it is all the time getting to be easier. There are daily more women and men who, thinking of the boy, can say, and do, with my friend of the college settlement, when an opportunity to enter a larger field was offered her, "No, I am content to stay here, to be ready for Johnnie when he wants me."

Justice for the boy, and for his father. An itinerant Jewish glazier, crying his wares, was beckoned into a stable by the foreman, and bidden to replace a lot of broken panes, enough nearly to exhaust his stock. When, after working half the day, he asked for his pay, he was driven from the place with jeers and vile words. Raging and impotent, he went back to his poor tenement, cursing a world in which there was no justice for a poor man. If he had next been found ranting with anarchists against the social order, would you have blamed him? He found instead, in the Legal Aid Society, a champion that pleaded his cause and compelled the stableman to pay him his wages. For a hundred thousand such—more shame to us—this society has meant all that freedom promised: justice to the poor man. It too has earned a place among the forces that are working out through the new education the brighter day, for it has taught the lesson which all the citizens of a free state need most to learn—respect for law.[Back to Contents]

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE BAND BEGINS TO PLAY

"Nothing in this world of ours is settled until it is settled right." From the moment we began the fight for the children's play there was but one ending to that battle; but it did seem sometimes a long way off, never farther than when, just four months ago, the particular phase of it that had seemed to promise most was officially stamped as nonsense. The playgrounds on top of the big schoolhouses, which were to be the neighborhood roof-gardens of our fond imaginings, were "of little use," said the school committee that had them in charge. The people wouldn't go there. So, then, let them be given up. And a school commissioner with whom I argued the case on the way home responded indulgently that some of my notions "were regarded as Utopian," however sincerely held.

Let me see, that was in May. The resolution I speak of had passed the Committee on Care of Buildings on April 18.[41] To-day is the 20th of August, and I have just come home from an evening spent on one of those identical school-roofs under the electric lamps, a veritable fairyland of delight. The music and the song and laughter of three thousand happy children ring in my ears yet. It was a long, laborious journey up all the flights of stairs to that roof, for I am not as young as I was and sometimes scant of breath; but none sweeter did I ever take save the one under the wild-rose hedge I told of in "The Making of an American" when I went to claim my bride. Ah! brethren, what are we that we should ever give up,

or doubt the justice of His fight who bade us let the little ones come unto Him and to clear the briers and thorns, that choked the path, from their way?

Seven years we hacked away at the briers in that path. It is so long since the state made it law that a playground should go with every public school, five since as secretary of the Small Parks Committee I pleaded with the Board of Education to give the roof playground to the neighborhood after school hours. I remember that the question was asked who would keep order, and the answer, "The police will be glad to." I recalled without trouble the time when they had to establish patrol posts on the tenement roofs in defence against the roughs whom the street had trained to rebellion against law and order. But I was a police reporter; they were not. They didn't understand. The playschool came; the indoor playgrounds were thrown open evenings under the pressure they brought in their train. And at that point we took a day off, as it were, to congratulate one another on how wondrous smart and progressive we had been. The machinery we had started we let be, to run itself.

It ran into the old rut. The janitor got it in tow, and presently we heard from the "play centres" that "the children didn't avail themselves" of their privileges. On the roof playground the janitor had turned the key. The Committee on Care of Buildings spoke his mind: "They were of little use; too hot in summer and too cold in winter." We were invited to quit our fooling and resume business at the old stand of the three R's, and let it go with that. That was what schools were for. It takes time, you see, to grow an idea, as to grow a colt or a boy, to its full size.

President Burlingham, who in his day drew the bill that made it lawful to use the schools for neighborhood purposes other than the worship of those same three R's, went around with me one night to see what ailed the children who would not play.

In the Mulberry Bend school the janitor had carefully removed the gymnastic apparatus the boys were aching for, and substituted four tables, around which they sat playing cards under the eye of a policeman. They were "educational" cards, with pictures of Europe and Asia and Africa and America on, but it required only half a minute's observation to tell us that they were gambling—betting on which educational card would turn up next. What the city had provided was a course in scientific gambling with the policeman to see that it was done right. And over at Market and Monroe streets, where they have an acre or more of splendid asphalted floor—such a ball room!—and a matchless yard, the best in the city, twoscore little girls were pitifully cooped up in a corner, being *taught* something, while outside a hundred clamored to get in, making periodic rushes at the door, only to encounter there a janitor's assistant with a big club and a roar like a bull to frighten them away. "Orders," he told us. The yard was dark and dismal. That was the school by the way, whence the report came that they "hadn't availed themselves" of the opportunity to play.

It helped, when that story was told. There is nothing in our day like the facts, and they came out that time. There was the roof-garden on the Educational Alliance Building with its average of more than five thousand a day, young and old, last summer (a total of 344,424 for the season), in flat contradiction of the claim that the children "wouldn't

go up on the roof." Not, surely, if it was only to encounter a janitor with a club there. But a brass band now? There were a few professional shivers at that, but our experience with the one we set playing in the park on Sunday, years ago, came to the rescue. When it had played its last piece to end and there burst forth as with one voice from the mighty throng, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow!" some doubts were set at rest for all time. They were never sensible, but after that they were silly.

So the janitor was bidden bring out his key. Electric lights were strung. "We will save the money somewhere else," said Mayor Low. The experiment was made with five schools, all on the crowded East Side.

I was at dinner with friends at the University Settlement, directly across from which, on the other corner, is one of the great new schools, No. 20, I think. We had got to the salad when through the open window there came a yell of exultation and triumph that made me fairly jump in my chair. Below in the street a mighty mob of children and mothers had been for half an hour besieging the door of the schoolhouse. The yell signalized the opening of it by the policeman in charge. Up the stairs surged the multitude. We could see them racing, climbing, toiling, according to their years, for the goal above where the band was tuning up. One little fellow with a trousers leg and a half, and a pair of suspenders and an undershirt as his only other garments, labored up the long flight, carrying his baby brother on his back. I watched them go clear up, catching glimpses of them at every turn, and then I went up after.

I found them in a corner, propped against the wall, a look of the serenest bliss on their faces as they drank it all in. It was *their* show at last. The band was playing "Alabama," and fifteen hundred boys and girls were dancing, hopping, prancing to the tune, circling about and about while they sang and kept time to the music. When the chorus was reached, every voice was raised to its shrillest pitch: "Way—down—yonder—in—the—cornfield." And for once in my life the suggestion of the fields and the woods did not seem hopelessly out of place in the Tenth Ward crowds. Baby in its tired mother's lap looked on wide-eyed, out of the sweep of the human current.

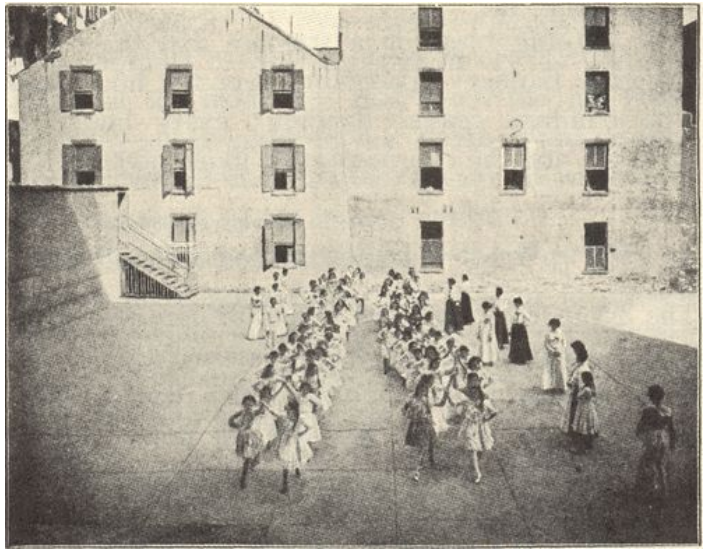
The band ceased playing, and the boys took up some game, dodging hither and thither in pursuit of a ball. How they did it will ever be a mystery to me. There did not seem to be room for another child, but they managed as if they had it all to themselves. There was no disorder; no one was hurt, or even knocked down, unless in the game, and that *was* the game, so it was as it should be. Right in the middle of it, the strains of "Sunday Afternoon," all East Side children's favorite, burst forth, and out of the seeming confusion came rhythmic order as the whole body of children moved, singing, along the floor.

Down below, the deserted street—deserted for once in the day—had grown strangely still. The policeman nodded contentedly: "good business, indeed." This was a kind of roof patrol he could appreciate. Nothing to do; less for to-morrow, for here they were not planning raids on the grocer's stock. They were happy, and when children are happy, they are safe, and so are the rest of us. It is the policeman's philosophy, and it is worth taking serious note of.

A warning blast on a trumpet and the "Star-spangled Banner" floated out over the house-tops. The children ceased dancing: every boy's cap came off, and the chorus swelled loud and clear:

> "—in triumph shall wave
> O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave."

The light shone upon the thousand upturned faces. Scarce one in a hundred of them all that did not bear silent witness to persecution which had driven a whole people over the sea, without home, without flag. And now—my eyes filled with tears. I said it: I am getting old and silly.



The Fellows and Papa and Mamma shall be invited in yet.

It was so at the still bigger school at Hester and Orchard streets. At the biggest of them all, and the

finest, the same No. 177 where the janitor's assistant "shooed" the children away with his club, the once dismal yard had been festooned with electric lamps that turned night into day, and about the band-stand danced nearly three thousand boys and girls to the strains of "Money Musk," glad to be alive and there. A ball-room forsooth! And it is going to be better still; for once the ice has been broken, there are new kinks coming in this dancing programme that is the dear dissipation of the East Side. What is to hinder the girls, when the long winter days come, from inviting in the fellows, and papa and mamma, for a real dance that shall take the wind out of the sails of the dance-halls? Nothing in all the world. Nor even will there be anything to stop Superintendent Maxwell from taking a turn himself, as he said he would, or me either, if I haven't danced in thirty years. I just dare him to try.

The man in charge of the ball-room at No. 177—I shall flatly refuse to call it a yard—said that he didn't believe in any other rule than order, and nearly took my breath away, for just then I had a vision of the club in the doorway; but it was only a vision. The club was not there. As he said it, he mounted the band-stand and waved the crowd to order with his speaking-trumpet.

"A young lady has just lost her gold watch on the floor," he said. "It is here under your feet. Bring it to me, the one who finds it." There was a curious movement of the crowd, as if every unit in it turned once about itself and bowed, and presently a shout of discovery went up. A little girl with a poor shawl pinned about her throat came forward with the watch. The manager waved his trumpet at me with a bright smile.

"You see it works."

The entire crowd fell in behind him in an ecstatic cake-walk, expressive of its joy and satisfaction, and so they went, around and around.

On that very corner, just across the way, a dozen years ago, I gave a stockbroker a good blowing up for hammering his cellar door full of envious nails to prevent the children using it as a slide. It was all the playground they had.



The "Slide" that was the Children's only Playground once.

On the way home I stopped at the first of all the public schools to acquire a roof playground, to see how they did it there. The janitor had been vanquished, but the pedagogue was in charge, and he had organized the life out of it all. The children sat around listless, and made little or no attempt to

dance. A harassed teacher was vainly trying to form the girls into ranks for exercises of some kind. They held up their hands in desperate endeavor to get her ear, only to have them struck down impatiently, or to be summarily put out if they tried again. They did not want to exercise. They wanted to play. I tried to voice their grievance to the "doctor" who presided.

"Not at all," he said decisively; "there must be system, system!"

"Tommyrot!" said my Chicago friend at my elbow, and I felt like saying "thank you!" I don't know but I did. They have good sense in Chicago. Jane Addams is there.

The doctor resumed his efforts to teach the boys something, having explained to me that downstairs, where they are when it rains, there were seven distinct echoes to bother the band. Two girls "spieled" in the corner, a kind of dancing that is not favored in the playground. There had been none of that at the other places. The policeman eyed the show with a frown.

So there was a fly in our ointment, after all. But for all that, the janitor is downed, his day dead. This of all things at last has been "settled right," and the path cleared for the children's feet, not in New York only, but everywhere and for all time. I, too, am glad to be alive in the time that saw it done.[Back to Contents]

## CHAPTER XV

## "NEIGHBOR" THE PASSWORD

Truly, we live in a wonderful time. Here have I been trying to bring up to date this account of the battle with the slum, and in the doing of it have been compelled, not once, but half a dozen times, to go back and wipe out what I had written because it no longer applied. The ink was not dry on the page that pleaded for the helpless ones who have to leave the hospital before they are fit to take up their battle with the world, so as to make room for others in instant need—one of the saddest of sights that has wrung the heart of the philanthropist these many years—when I read in my paper of the four million dollar gift to build a convalescents' home at once. I would rather be in that man's shoes than be the Czar of all the Russias. I would rather be blessed by the grateful heart of man or woman, who but just now was without hope, than have all the diamonds in the Kimberley mines. Yes, ours is the greatest of all times. Since I started putting these pages in shape for the printer, the Child Labor Committee and the Tuberculosis Committee have been formed to put up bars against the slum where it roamed unrestrained; the Tenement House Department has been organized and got under way, and the knell of the double-decker and the twenty-five-foot lot has been sounded. Two hundred tenements are going up to-day under the new law, that are in all respects model buildings, as good as the City and Suburban Home Company's houses, though built for revenue only. All over the greater city the libraries are rising which, when Mr. Carnegie's munificent plan has been worked out to the full, are to make, with the noble central edifice in Bryant Park, the greatest free

library system of any day, with a princely fortune to back it.[42] New bridges are spanning our rivers, tunnels are being bored, engineers are blasting a way for the city out of its bonds on crowded Manhattan, devotion and high principle rule once more at the City Hall, Cuba is free, Tammany is out; the boy is coming into his rights; the toughs of Hell's Kitchen have taken to farming on the site of Stryker's Lane, demolished and gone.

And here upon my table lies a letter from the head-worker of the University Settlement, which the postman brought half an hour ago, that lets more daylight in, it seems to me, than all the rest. He has been thinking, he writes, of how to yoke the public school and the social settlement together, and the conviction that comes to everybody who thinks to solve problems, has come to him, too, that the way to do a thing is to do it. So he proposes, since they need another house over at the West Side branch, to acquire it by annexing the public school and turning "all the force and power that is in the branch into the bare walls of the school, there to develop a social spirit and an enthusiasm" among young and old that shall make of the school truly the neighborhood house and soul. And he asks us all to fall in.

I say it lets daylight in, because we have all felt for some time that something like this was bound to come, only how was not clear yet. Here is this immense need of a tenement house population of more than two million souls: something to take the place, as far as anything can, of the home that isn't there, a place to meet other than the saloon; a place for the young to do their courting—there is no room for it in the tenement, and the street is not the place for it, yet it has got to be done; a place to make their

elders feel that they are men and women, something else than mere rent-paying units. Why, it was this very need that gave birth to the social settlement among us, and we see now that with the old machinery it does not supply it and never can. "I can reach the people of just about two blocks about me here," said this same head worker of the same settlement to me an evening or two ago, "and that is all." But there are hundreds of blocks filled with hungry minds and souls. A hundred settlements would be needed where there is one.

The churches could not meet the need. They ought to and some day they will, when we build the church down-town and the mission up-town. But now they can't. There are not enough of them, for one thing. They do try; for only the other day, when I went to tell the Methodist ministers of it, and of how they ought to back up the effort to have the public school thrown open on Sundays for concerts, lectures, and the like, after the first shock of surprise they pulled themselves together manfully and said that they would do it. They saw with me that it is a question, not of damaging the Lord's Day, but of wresting it from the devil, who has had it all this while over there on the East Side, and on the West Side too. All along the swarming streets with no church in sight, but a saloon on every corner, stand the big schoolhouses with their spacious halls, empty and silent and grim, waiting to have the soul breathed into them that alone can make their teaching effective for good citizenship. They belong to the people. Why should they not be used by the people Sunday and week-day and day and night, for whatever will serve their ends—if the janitor has a fit?

Now here come the social settlements with their plan of doing it. What claim have they to stand in the gap?

This one, that they are there now, though they do not fill it. The gap has been too much for them. They need the help of those they came to succor quite as much as *they* need them. I have no desire to find fault with any one who wants to help his neighbor. God forbid! I am not even a settlement worker. But when I read, as I did yesterday, a summing up of the meaning of settlements by three or four residents in such houses, and see education, reform politics, local improvements, legislation, characterized as the aim and objects of settlement work, I am afraid somebody is on the wrong track. Those things are good, provided they spring naturally from the intellectual life that moves in and about the settlement house; indeed, unless they do, something has quite decidedly miscarried there. But they are not the object. When I pick up a report of one settlement and another, and find them filled with little essays on the people and their ways and manners, as if the settlement were same kind of a laboratory where they prepare human specimens for inspection and classification,—stick them on pins like bugs and hold them up and twirl them so as to let us have a good look,—then I know that somebody has wandered away off, and that *he knows he has*, for all he is making a brave show trying to persuade himself and us that it was worth the money. No use going into that farther. The fact is that we have all been groping. We saw the need and started to fill it, and in the strange surroundings we lost our bearings and the password. We got to be sociological instead of neighborly. It is not the same thing.



A Cooking Lesson in Vacation School: the Best Temperance Sermon.

Here is the lost password: "neighbor". That is all there is to it. If a settlement isn't the neighbor of those it would reach, it is nothing at all. "A place," said the sub-warden of Toynbee Hall in the discussion I spoke of, and set it on even keel in an instant, "a place of good will rather than of good works." That is it. We had become strangers, had drifted apart, and the settlement came to introduce us to one another again, as it were, to remind us that we were neighbors. And because that was the one thing above all that was wanted, it became an instant success where it was not converted into a social experiment station; and even that could not kill it. If any one doubts that I have the right password, let him look for the proof in the organization this past month of a new "coöperative social settlement," to be carried on "in conjunction and association with the people in the neighborhood." Not a new idea at all,

only a fresh grip taken on the old one. It is sound enough and strong enough to set itself right if we will only let it. Only last week Dr. Elliot of the Hudson Guild over in West Twenty-sixth Street told me of his boys' and their fathers' subscribing their savings with the hope of owning the guild house themselves. They had never let go their grip on the idea over there. They are of Felix Adler's flock.

But take now the elements as we have them: this great and terrible longing for neighborliness where the home feeling is gone with the home; the five hundred school buildings in the metropolis that have already successfully been put to neighborhood use. It was nothing else that Dr. Leipziger did when he began his evening lectures in the schools to grown audiences a dozen years ago, and proudly pointed to a record of twenty-two thousand in attendance for the season. Last winter nearly a million workingmen and their wives attended over three thousand lectures.[43] Dr. Leipziger is now the strong advocate of opening the schools on the Sabbath, as a kind of Sunday opening we can all join in. Of course he is; he has seen what it means. These factors, the need, the means, and then the settlement that is there to put the two together, as its own great opportunity—has it not a good claim?

Experimenting with the school? Well, what of it? *They* can stand it. What else have we been doing the last half-dozen years or more, and what splendid results have we not to show for it? It is the spirit that calls every innovation frills, and boasts that we have got the finest schools in the world which blocks the way to progress. It cropped out at a meeting of settlement workers and schoolmen that had for its purpose a better understanding. In the meeting one

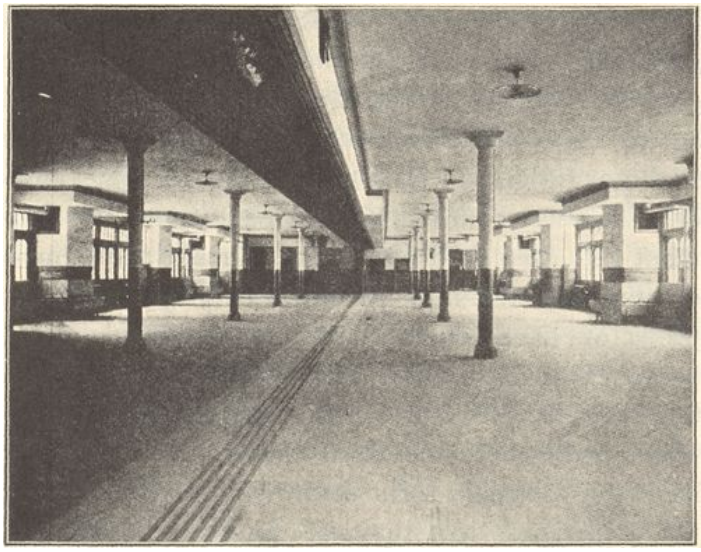
gray-haired teacher arose and said that the schools as they are were good enough for his father, and therefore they were good enough for him. That teacher's place is on the shelf that has been provided now for those who have done good work in a day that is past. "Vaudeville," sneered the last Tammany mayor, when the East Side asked for a playground for the children. "Vaudeville for the masses killed Rome." The masses responded by killing him politically. My father was a teacher, and it is because he was a good one and taught me that when growth ceases decay begins, that I am never going to be satisfied, no matter how good the schools get to be. I want them ever closer to the people's life, because upon that does that very life depend. Turn back to what I said about the slum tenant and see what it means: in the slum only 4.97 per cent of native parentage. All but five in a hundred had either come over the sea, or else their parents had. Nearly half (46.65) were ignorant, illiterate; for the whole city the percentage of illiteracy was only 7.69. Turn to the reformatory showing: of ten thousand and odd prisoners 66.55 utterly illiterate, or able to read and write only with difficulty. Do you see how the whole battle with the slum is fought out in and around the public school? For in ignorance selfishness finds its opportunity, and the two together make the slum.

The mere teaching is only a part of it. The school itself is a bigger—the meeting there of rich and poor. Out of the public school comes, must come if we are to last, the real democracy that has our hope in keeping. I wish it were in my power to compel every father to send his boy to the public school; I would do it, and so perchance bring the school up to the top notch where it was lacking. The President of the

United States to-day sets a splendid example to us all in letting his boys mingle with those who are to be their fellow-citizens by and by. It is precisely in the sundering of our society into classes that have little in common, *that are no longer neighbors*, that our peril lives. A people cannot work together for the good of the state if they are not on speaking terms. In the gap the slum grows up. That was one reason why I hailed with a shout the proposition of Mr. Schwab, the steel trust millionnaire, to take a regiment of boys down to Staten Island on an excursion every day in summer. Let me see, I haven't told about that, I think. He had bought a large property down there, all beach and lake and field and woodland, and proposed to build a steamer with room for a thousand or two, and then take them down with a band of music on board, and give them a swim, a romp, and a jolly good time. As soon as he spoke to me about it, I said: Yes! and hitch it to the public school somehow; make it part of the curriculum. No more nature study out of a barrel! Take the whole school, teachers and all, and let them do their own gathering of specimens. So the children shall be under efficient control, and so the tired teacher shall get a chance too. But more than all, so it may befall that the boys themselves shall come to know one another better and that more of them shall get together; for what boy does not want a jolly good romp, and why should he not be Mr. Schwab's guest for the day, if he does count his dollars by millions?

The working plan the Board of Education can be trusted to provide. I think it will do it gladly, once it understands. Indeed, why should it not? No one thinks of surrendering the schools, but simply of enlisting the young enthusiasm that is looking for

employment, and of a way of turning it to use, while the board is constantly calling for just that priceless personal element which money cannot buy and without which the schools will never reach their highest development. Precedents there are in plenty. If not, we can make them. New York is the metropolis. In Toledo the Park Commissioners take the public school boys sleigh-riding in winter. Our Park Commissioner is ploughing up land for them to learn farming and gardening. It is all experimenting, and let us be glad we have got to that, if we do blunder once and again. The laboratory study, the bug business, we shall get rid of, and we shall get rid of some antediluvian ways that hamper our educational development yet. We shall find a way to make the schools centres of distribution in our library system as its projectors have hoped. Just now it cannot be done, because it takes about a year for a book to pass the ten or twelve different kinds of censorship our sectarian zeal has erected about the school. We shall have the assembly halls thrown open, not only for Dr. Leipziger's lectures and Sunday concerts (already one permit has been granted for the latter), but for trades-union meetings, and for political meetings, if I have my way. Until we consider our politics quite good enough to be made welcome in the school, they won't be good enough for it. The day we do let them in, the saloon will lose its grip, and not much before. When the fathers and mothers meet under the school roof as in their neighborhood house, and the children have their games, their clubs, and their dances there—when the school, in short, takes the place in the life of the people in the crowded quarters which the saloon now monopolizes, there will no longer be a saloon question in politics; and that day the slum is beaten.



Such a Ball-room!

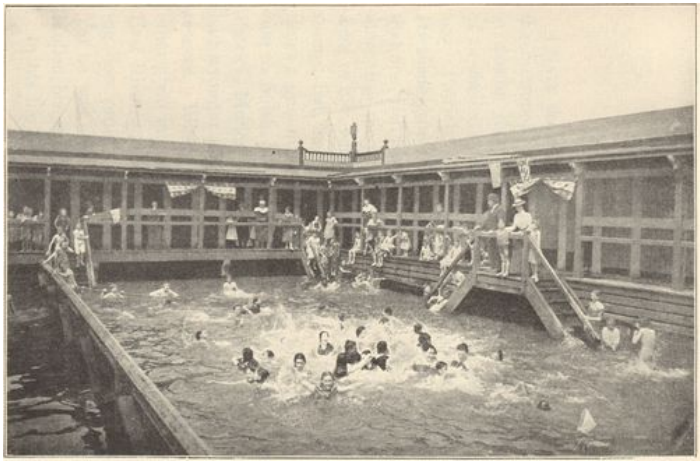
Very likely I shall not find many to agree with me on this question of political meetings. Non-partisan let them be then. So we shall more readily find our way out of the delusion that national politics have any place in municipal elections or affairs, a notion that has delayed the day of decency too long. We shall grow, along with the schools, and by and by our party politics will be clean enough to sit in the school seats too. And oh! by the way, as to those seats, is there any special virtue in the "dead-line" of straight rows that have come down to us from the time of the Egyptians or farther back still? No. I would not lay impious hand on any hallowed tradition, educational or otherwise. But is it that? And why is it? It would be so much easier to make the school the people's hall and the boys' club, if those seats could be moved around in human fashion; they might come naturally into human

shape in the doing of it. But, as I said, I wouldn't for the world—not for the world. Only, why is the deadline hallowed?

I am willing to leave it to the Board. We are singularly fortunate in having just now a mayor who will listen, a Board of Education that will act, and a superintendent of school buildings who can and will build schools to meet neighborhood needs—if we will make them plain. The last time I dropped into his office I found him busy, between tiffs with contractors, sketching an underground story for the schoolhouse, like the great hall of the Cooper Institute, that should at the same time serve the purpose of an assembly hall, and put the roof garden one story nearer the street. That was his answer to the cry of elevators. "We do not need municipal boys' club houses," said Mayor Low in vetoing the bill to build them last winter, "we have the schools." True! Then let us have them used, and if the classroom is not the best kind of place for them, the experience of the settlements will show us what kind is. They carry on no end of such clubs. And let the Board of Education trustily leave the rest to Superintendent Snyder, who knows. Isn't it enough to make a man believe the millennium has come, to find that there is at last some one who knows? Not necessarily all at once.

In a copy of *Charities* which just now came in (did I not say that it goes that way all the time?) I read that the Chicago Small Parks Commission has recommended nine neighborhood parks at a cost of a million dollars,—wise City of the Winds! we waited till we had to pay a million for each park,—but that the playgrounds had been left to the Board of Education, which body was "not certain whether

school funds may be spent for playgrounds apart from buildings." However, they are going to provide seventy-five school yards big enough to romp in, and the other trouble will be got over. In Boston they are planning neighborhood entertainment as a proper function of the school. Here we shall find for both school and settlement their proper places with one swoop. The kindergarten, manual training, and the cooking school, all experiments in their day, cried out as fads by some, have brought common sense in their train. When it rules the public school in our cities—I said it before—we can put off our armor; the battle with the slum will be over.[Back to Contents]



Teaching the Girls to Swim: Part of the Public School Course.

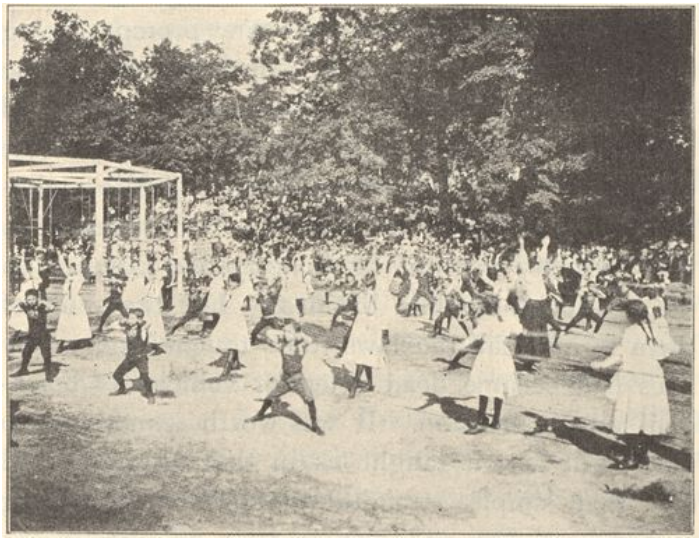
## CHAPTER XVI

### REFORM BY HUMANE TOUCH

I have sketched in outline the gains achieved in the metropolis since its conscience awoke. Now, in closing this account, I am reminded of the story of an old Irishman who died here a couple of years ago. Patrick Mullen was an honest blacksmith. He made guns for a living. He made them so well that one with his name on it was worth a good deal more than the market price of guns. Other makers went to him with offers of money for the use of his stamp; but they never went twice. When sometimes a gun of very superior make was brought to him to finish, he would stamp it P. Mullen, never Patrick Mullen. Only to that which he himself had wrought did he give his honest name without reserve. When he died, judges and bishops and other great men crowded to his modest home by the East River, and wrote letters to the newspapers telling how proud they had been to call him friend. Yet he was, and remained to the end, plain Patrick Mullen, blacksmith and gun-maker.

In his life he supplied the answer to the sigh of dreamers in all days: when will the millennium come? It will come when every man is a Patrick Mullen at his own trade; not merely a P. Mullen, but a Patrick Mullen. The millennium of municipal politics, when there shall be no slum to fight, will come when every citizen does his whole duty as a citizen, not before. As long as he "despises politics," and deputizes another to do it for him, whether that other wears the stamp of a Croker or of a Platt,—it matters little which,—we shall have the slum, and be put periodically to the trouble and the shame of draining it in the public sight. A citizen's duty is one thing that cannot be farmed out safely; and the slum is not limited by the rookeries of Mulberry or Ludlow streets. It has long roots that feed on the selfishness

and dulness of Fifth Avenue quite as greedily as on the squalor of the Sixth Ward. The two are not nearly so far apart as they look.



Athletic Meets in Crotona Park.

I am not saying this because it is anything new, but because we have had, within the memory of us all, an illustration of its truth in municipal politics. Waring and Roosevelt were the Patrick Mullens of the reform administration which Tammany replaced with her insolent platform, "To hell with reform!" It was not an ideal administration, but it can be said of it, at least, that it was up to the times it served. It made compromises with spoils politics, and they were wretched failures. It took Waring and Roosevelt on the other plan, on which they insisted, of divorcing politics from the public business, and they let in more light than even my small parks over on the East Side. For they showed us where we stood and what was the matter with us. We believed in

Waring when he demonstrated the success of his plan for cleaning the streets; not before. When Roosevelt announced his programme, of enforcing the excise law because it *was* law, a howl arose that would have frightened a less resolute man from his purpose. But he went right on doing the duty he was sworn to do. And when, at the end of three months of clamor and abuse, we saw the spectacle of the saloon keepers formally resolving to help the police instead of hindering them; of the prison ward in Bellevue Hospital standing empty for three days at a time, an astonishing and unprecedented thing, which the warden could only attribute to the "prompt closing of the saloon at one A.M."; and of the police force recovering its lost self-respect,—we had found out more and greater things than whether the excise law was a good or a bad law. We understood what Roosevelt meant when he insisted upon the "primary virtues" of honesty and courage in the conduct of public business. For the want of them in us, half the laws that touched our daily lives had became dead letters or vehicles of blackmail and oppression. It was worth something to have that lesson taught us in that way; to find out that simple, straightforward, honest dealing as between man and man is after all effective in politics as in gun-making. Perhaps we have not mastered the lesson yet. But we have not discharged the teacher, either.

Courage, indeed! There were times during that stormy spell when it seemed as if we had grown wholly and hopelessly flabby as a people. All the outcry against the programme of order did not come from the lawless and the disorderly, by any means. Ordinarily decent, conservative citizens joined in counselling moderation and virtual compromise with

the lawbreakers—it was nothing else—to "avoid trouble." The old love of fair play had been whittled down by the jack-knife of all-pervading expediency to an anæmic desire to "hold the scales even," which is a favorite modern device of the devil for paralyzing action in men. You cannot hold the scales even in a moral issue. It inevitably results in the triumph of evil, which asks nothing better than the even chance to which it is not entitled. When the trouble in the Police Board had reached a point where it seemed impossible not to understand that Roosevelt and his side were fighting a cold and treacherous conspiracy against the cause of good government, we had the spectacle of a Christian Endeavor Society inviting the man who had hatched the plot, the bitter and relentless enemy whom the mayor had summoned to resign, and afterward did his best to remove as a fatal obstacle to reform,—inviting this man to come before it and speak of Christian citizenship! It was a sight to make the bosses hug themselves with glee. For Christian citizenship is their nightmare, and nothing is so cheering to them as evidence that those who profess it have no sense.

Apart from the moral bearings of it, what this question of enforcement of law means in the life of the poor was illustrated by testimony given before the Police Board under oath. A captain was on trial for allowing the policy swindle to go unchecked in his precinct. Policy is a kind of penny lottery, with alleged daily drawings which never take place. The whole thing is a pestilent fraud, which is allowed to exist only because it pays heavy blackmail to the police and the politicians. Expert witnesses testified that eight policy shops in the Twenty-first Ward,

which they had visited, did a business averaging about thirty-two dollars a day each. The Twenty-first is a poor Irish tenement ward. The policy sharks were getting two hundred and fifty dollars or more a day of the hard-earned wages of those poor people, in sums of from one and two cents to a quarter, without making any return for it. The thing would seem incredible were it not too sadly familiar. The saloon keeper got his share of what was left, and rewarded his customer by posing as the "friend of the poor man" whenever his business was under scrutiny; I have yet in my office the record of a single week during the hottest of the fight between Roosevelt and the saloons, as showing of what kind that friendship is. It embraces the destruction of eight homes by the demon of drunkenness; the suicide of four wives, the murder of two others by drunken husbands, the killing of a policeman in the street, and the torture of an aged woman by her rascal son, who "used to be a good boy till he took to liquor, when he became a perfect devil." In that rôle he finally beat her to death for giving shelter to some evicted fellow-tenants who else would have had to sleep in the street. Nice friendly turn, wasn't it?

And yet there was something to be said for the saloon keeper. He gave the man the refuge from his tenement which he needed. I say needed, purposely. There has been a good deal of talk in our day about the saloon as a social necessity. About all there is to that is that the saloon is there, and the necessity too. Man is a social animal, whether he lives in a tenement or in a palace. But the palace has resources; the tenement has not. It is a good place to get away from at all times. The saloon is cheery and bright, and never far away. The man craving human

companionship finds it there. He finds, too, in the saloon keeper one who understands his wants much better than the reformer who talks civil service in the meetings. "Civil service" to him and his kind means yet a contrivance for keeping them out of a job. The saloon keeper knows the boss, if he is not himself the boss or his lieutenant, and can steer him to the man who will spend all day at the City Hall, if need be, to get a job for a friend, and all night pulling wires to keep him in it, if trouble is brewing. Mr. Beecher used to say, when pleading for bright hymn tunes, that he didn't want the devil to have the monopoly of all the good music in the world. The saloon has had the monopoly up to date of all the cheer in the tenements. If its owner has made it pan out to his own advantage and the boss's, we at least have no just cause of complaint. We let him have the field all to himself.

It is good to know that the day is coming when he will have a rival. Model saloons may never be more than a dream in New York, but even now the first of a number of "social halls" is being planned by Miss Lillian Wald of the Nurses' Settlement and her co-workers that shall give the East Side the chance to eat and dance and make merry without the stigma of the bar upon it all. The first of the buildings will be opened within a year.

As to this boss, of whom we hear so much, what manner of man is he? That depends on how you look at him. I have one in mind, a district boss, whom you would accept instantly as a type if I were to mention his name, which I shall not do for a reason which I fear will shock you: he and I are friends. In his private capacity I have real regard for him. As a politician and a boss I have none at all. I am aware

that this is taking low ground in a discussion of this kind, but perhaps the reader will better understand the relations of his "district" to him, if I let him into mine. There is no political bond between us, of either district or party, just the reverse. It is purely personal. He was once a police justice,—at that time he kept a saloon,—and I have known few with more common sense, which happens to be the one quality especially needed in that office. Up to the point where politics came in I could depend upon him entirely. At that point he let me know bluntly that he was in the habit of running his district to suit himself. The way he did it brought him under the just accusation of being guilty of every kind of rascality known to politics. When next our paths would cross each other, it would very likely be on some errand of mercy, to which his feet were always swift. I recall the distress of a dear and gentle lady at whose table I once took his part. She could not believe that there was any good in him; what he did must be done for effect. Some time after that she wrote, asking me to look after an East Side family that was in great trouble. It was during the severe cold spell of the winter of 1898, and there was need of haste. I went over at once; but although I had lost no time, I found my friend the boss ahead of me. It was a real pleasure to me to be able to report to my correspondent that he had seen to their comfort, and to add that it was unpolitical charity altogether. The family was that of a Jewish widow with a lot of little children. He is a Roman Catholic. There was not even a potential vote in the house, the children being all girls. They were not in his district, to boot; and as for effect, he was rather shamefaced at my catching him at it. I do not believe that a soul has ever heard of the case from him to this day.

My friend is a Tammany boss, and I shall not be accused of partiality for him on that account. During that same cold spell a politician of the other camp came into my office and gave me a hundred dollars to spend as I saw fit among the poor. His district was miles up-town, and he was most unwilling to disclose his identity, stipulating in the end that no one but I should know where the money came from. He was not seeking notoriety. The plight of the suffering had appealed to him, and he wanted to help where he could, that was all.

Now, I have not the least desire to glorify the boss in this. He is not glorious to me. He is simply human. Often enough he is a coarse and brutal fellow, in his morals as in his politics. Again, he may have some very engaging personal traits that bind his friends to him with the closest of ties. The poor man sees the friend, the charity, the power that is able and ready to help him in need; is it any wonder that he overlooks the source of this power, this plenty,—that he forgets the robbery in the robber who is "good to the poor"? Anyhow, if anybody got robbed, it was "the rich." With the present ethical standards of the slum, it is easy to construct a scheme of social justice out of it that is very comforting all round, even to the boss himself, though he is in need of no sympathy or excuse. "Politics," he will tell me in his philosophic moods, "is a game for profit. The city foots the bills." Patriotism means to him working for the ticket that shall bring more profit.

"I regard," he says, lighting his cigar, "a repeater as a shade off a murderer, but you are obliged to admit that in my trade he is a necessary evil." I am not obliged to do anything of the kind, but I can understand his way of looking at it. He simply has no

political conscience. He has gratitude, loyalty to a friend,—that is part of his stock in trade,—fighting blood, plenty of it, all the good qualities of the savage; nothing more. And a savage he is, politically, with no soul above the dross. He would not rob a neighbor for the world; but he will steal from the city—though he does not call it by that name—without a tremor, and count it a good mark. When I tell him that, he waves his hand toward Wall Street as representative of the business community, and toward the office of his neighbor, the padrone, as representative of the railroads, and says with a laugh, "Don't they all do it?"

The boss believes in himself. It is one of his strong points. And he has experience to back him. In the fall of 1894 we shook off boss rule in New York, and set up housekeeping for ourselves. We kept it up three years, and then went back to the old style. I should judge that we did it because we were tired of too much virtue. Perhaps we were not built to hold such a lot at once. Besides, it is much easier to be ruled than to rule. That fall, after the election, when I was concerned about what would become of my small parks, of the Health Department in which I took such just pride, and of a dozen other things, I received one unvarying reply to my anxious question, or rather two. If it was the Health Department, I was told: "Go to Platt. He is the only man who can do it. He is a sensible man, and will see that it is protected." If small parks, it was: "Go to Croker. He will not allow the work to be stopped." A playgrounds bill was to be presented in the legislature, and everybody advised: "Go to Platt. He won't object, it is popular." And so on. My advisers were not politicians. They were business men, but recently honestly interested in

reform. I was talking one day, with a gentleman of very wide reputation as a philanthropist, about the unhappy lot of the old fire-engine horses,—which, after lives of toil that deserve a better fate, are sold for a song to drag out a weary existence hauling some huckster's cart around,—and wishing that they might be pensioned off to live out their years on a farm, with enough to eat and a chance to roll in the grass. He was much interested, and promptly gave me this advice: "I tell you what you do. You go and see Croker. He likes horses." No wonder the boss believes in himself. He would be less than human if he did not. And he is very human.

I had voted on the day of the Greater New York election,—the Tammany election, as we learned to call it afterward,—in my home out in the Borough of Queens, and went over to the depot to catch the train for the city. On the platform were half a dozen of my neighbors, all business men, all "friends of reform." Some of them were just down from breakfast. One I remember as introducing a resolution, in a meeting we had held, about the discourtesy of local politicians. He looked surprised when reminded that it was election day. "Why, is it to-day?" he said. "They didn't send any carriage," said another regretfully. "I don't see what's the use," said the third; "the roads are just as bad as when we began talking about it." (We had been trying to mend them.) The fourth yawned and said: "I don't care. I have my business to attend to." And they took the train, which meant that they lost their votes. The Tammany captain was busy hauling his voters by the cart-load to the polling place. Over there stood a reform candidate who had been defeated in the primary, and puffed out his chest. "The politicians are afraid

of me," he said. They slapped him on the back, as they went by, and told him that he was a devil of a fellow.

So Tammany came back. And four long years we swore at it. But I am afraid we swore at the wrong fellow. The real Tammany is not the conscienceless rascal that plunders our treasury and fattens on our substance. That one is a mere counterfeit. It is the voter who waits for a carriage to take him to the polls; the man who "doesn't see what's the use"; the business man who says "business is business," and has no time to waste on voting; the citizen who "will wait to see how the cat jumps, because he doesn't want to throw his vote away"; the cowardly American who "doesn't want to antagonize" anybody; the fool who "washes his hands of politics." These are the real Tammany, the men after the boss's own heart. For every one whose vote he buys, there are two of these who give him theirs for nothing. We shall get rid of him when these withdraw their support, when they become citizens of the Patrick Mullen stamp, as faithful at the polling place as he was at the forge; not before.

There is as much work for reform at the top as at the bottom. The man in the slum votes according to his light, and the boss holds the candle. But the boss is in no real sense a leader. He follows instead, always as far behind the moral sentiment of the community as he thinks is safe. He has heard it said that a community will not be any better than its citizens, and that it will be just as good as they are, and he applies the saying to himself. He is no worse a boss than the town deserves. I can conceive of his taking credit to himself as some kind of a moral instrument by which the virtue of the community

may be graded, though that is most unlikely. He does not bother himself with the morals of anything. But right here is his Achilles heel. The man has no conscience. He cannot tell the signs of it in others. It always comes upon him unawares. Reform to him simply means the "outs" fighting to get in. The real thing he will always underestimate. Witness Richard Croker in the last election offering Bishop Potter, after his crushing letter to the mayor, to join him in purifying the city, and, when politely refused, setting up an "inquiry" of his own. The conclusion is irresistible that he thought the bishop either a fool or a politician playing for points. Such a man is not the power he seems. He is formidable only in proportion to the amount of shaking it takes to rouse the community's conscience.

The boss is like the measles, a distemper of a self-governing people's infancy. When we shall have come of age politically, he will have no terrors for us. Meanwhile, being charged with the business of governing, which we left to him because we were too busy making money, he follows the track laid out for him, and makes the business pan out all that is in it. He fights when we want to discharge him. Of course he does; no man likes to give up a good job. He will fight or bargain, as he sees his way clear. He will give us small parks, play piers, new schools, anything we ask, to keep his place, while trying to find out "the price" of this conscience which he does not understand. Even to the half of his kingdom he will give, to be "in" on the new deal. He has done it before, and there is no reason that he can see why it should not be done again. And he will appeal to the people whom he is plundering to trust him because they know him.

Odd as it sounds, this is where he has his real hold. I have shown why this is so. To the poor people of his district the boss is a friend in need. He is one of them. He does not want to reform them; far from it. No doubt it is very ungrateful of them, but the poor people have no desire to be reformed. They do not think they need to be. They consider their moral standards quite as high as those of the rich, and resent being told that they are mistaken. The reformer comes to them from another world to tell them these things, and goes his way. The boss lives among them. He helped John to a job on the pipes in their hard winter, and got Mike on the force. They know him as a good neighbor, and trust him to their harm. He drags their standard ever farther down. The question for those who are trying to help them is how to make them transfer their allegiance, and trust their real friends instead.

It ought not be a difficult question to answer. Any teacher could do it. He knows, if he knows anything, that the way to get and keep the children's confidence is to trust them, and let them know that they are trusted. They will almost always come up to the demand thus made upon them. Preaching to them does little good; preaching at them still less. Men, whether rich or poor, are much like children. The good in them is just as good, and the bad, in view of their enlarged opportunities for mischief, not so much worse, all considered. A vigorous optimism, a stout belief in one's fellow-man, is better equipment in a campaign for civic virtue than stacks of tracts and arguments, economic and moral. There is good bottom, even in the slum, for that kind of an anchor to get a grip on. Some years ago I went to see a boxing match there had been much talk about. The

hall was jammed with a rough and noisy crowd, hotly intent upon its favorite. His opponent, who hailed, I think, from somewhere in Delaware, was greeted with hostile demonstrations as a "foreigner." But as the battle wore on, and he was seen to be fair and manly, while the New Yorker struck one foul blow after another, the attitude of the crowd changed rapidly from enthusiastic approval of the favorite to scorn and contempt; and in the last round, when he knocked the Delawarean over with a foul blow, the audience rose in a body and yelled to have the fight given to the "foreigner," until my blood tingled with pride. For the decision would leave it practically without a cent. It had staked all it had on the New Yorker. "He is a good man," I heard on all sides, while the once favorite sneaked away without a friend. "Good" meant fair and manly to that crowd. I thought, as I went to the office the next morning, that it ought to be easy to appeal to such a people with measures that were fair and just, if we could only get on common ground. But the only hint I got from my reform paper was an editorial denunciation of the brutality of boxing, on the same page that had an enthusiastic review of the college football season. I do not suppose it did any harm, for the paper was probably not read by one of the men it had set out to reform. But suppose it had been, how much would it have appealed to them? Exactly the qualities of robust manliness which football is supposed to encourage in college students had been evoked by the trial of strength and skill which they had witnessed. As to the brutality, they knew that fifty young men are maimed or killed at football to one who fares ill in a boxing match. Would it seem to them common sense, or cant and humbug?

That is what it comes down to in the end: common sense and common honesty. Common sense to steer us clear of the "sociology" reef that would make our cause ridiculous, on Fifth Avenue and in East Broadway. I have no quarrel with the man who would do things by system and in order; but the man who would reduce men and women and children to mere items in his infallible system and classify and sub-classify them until they are as dried up as his theories, that man I will fight till I die. One throb of a human heart is worth a whole book of his stuff. Common honesty to keep us afloat at all. If we worship as success mere money-getting, closing our eyes to the means, let us at least say it like the man who told me to-day that "after all, one has to admire Bill Devery; he's got the dough," Devery was Tammany's police chief. The man is entitled to his opinion, but if it gets hitched to the reform cart by mistake, the load is going to be spilled. It has been, more than once.

A saving sense of humor might have avoided some of those pitfalls. I am seriously of the opinion that a professional humorist ought to be attached to every reform movement, to keep it from making itself ridiculous by either too great solemnity or too much conceit. As it is, the enemy sometimes employs him with effect. Failing the adoption of that plan, I would recommend a decree of banishment against photographers, press-clippings men, and the rest of the congratulatory staff. Why should the fact that a citizen has done a citizen's duty deserve to be celebrated in print and picture, as if something extraordinary had happened? The smoke of battle had not cleared away after the victory of reform in the fall of 1894, before the citizens' committee and

all the little sub-committees rushed pell-mell to the photographer's to get themselves on record as the men who did it. The spectacle might have inspired in the humorist the advice to get two sets made, while they were about it, one to serve by and by as an exhibit of the men who didn't; and, as the event proved, he would have been right.

But it is easy to find fault, and on that tack we get no farther. Those men did a great work, and they did it well. They built from the bottom and they built the foundation broad and strong. Good schools, better homes, and a chance for the boy are good bricks to build with in such a structure as we are rearing. They last. Just now we are laying another course; more than one, I hope. But even if it were different, we need not despair. Let the enemy come back once more, it will not be to stay. It may be that, like Moses and his followers, we of the present day shall see the promised land only from afar and with the eye of faith, because of our sins; that to a younger and sturdier to-morrow it shall be given to blaze the path of civic righteousness that was our dream. I like to think that it is so, and that that is the meaning of the coming of men like Roosevelt and Waring at this time with their simple appeal to the reason of honest men. Unless I greatly err in reading the signs of the times, it is indeed so, and the day of the boss and of the slum is drawing to an end. Our faith has felt the new impulse; rather, I should say, it has given it. The social movements, and that which we call politics, are but a reflection of what the people honestly believe, a chart of their aims and aspirations. Charity in our day no longer means alms, but justice. The social settlements are substituting vital touch for the machine charity that reaped a crop of hate and

beggary. Charity organization—"conscience born of love" some one has well called it—is substituting its methods in high and low places for the senseless old ways. Its champions are oftener found standing with organized labor for legislation to correct the people's wrongs, and when the two stand together nothing can resist them. Through its teaching we are learning that our responsibility as citizens for a law does not cease with its enactment, but rather begins there. We are growing, in other words, to the stature of real citizenship. We are emerging from the kind of barbarism that dragged children to the jail and thrust them in among hardened criminals there, and that sat by helpless and saw the foundlings die in the infant hospital at the rate—really there was no rate; they practically all died, every one that was not immediately removed to a home and a mother. For four years now a joint committee of the State Charities' Aid Association and the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor has taken them off the city's hands and adopted them out, and in every hundred now eighty-nine live and grow up! After all, not even a Jersey cow can take the place of a mother with a baby. And we are building a children's court that shall put an end to the other outrage, for boys taken there are let off on probation, to give them the chance under a different teaching from the slum's, which it denied them till now.



Flag-drill in the "King's Garden." The Playground at the Jacob A. Riis House.

We have learned that we cannot pass off checks for human sympathy in settlement of our brotherhood arrears. The Church, which once stood by indifferent, or uncomprehending, is hastening to enter the life of the people. I have told of how, in the memory of men yet living, one church, moving up-town away from the crowd, left its old Mulberry Street home to be converted into tenements that justly earned the name of "dens of death" in the Health Department's records, while another became the foulest lodging house in an unclean city, and of how it was a church corporation that owned the worst underground dive down-town in those bad old days, and turned a deaf ear to all remonstrances. The Church was "angling for souls." But souls in this world live in bodies endowed with reason. The results of that kind of fishing were empty pews and cold hearts, and the

conscience-stricken cry that went up, "What shall we do to lay hold of this great multitude that has slipped from us?"

The years have passed and brought the answer. To-day we see churches of every denomination uniting in a systematic canvass of the city to get at the facts of the people's life of which they had ceased to be a part, pleading for parks, playgrounds, kindergartens, libraries, clubs, and better homes. There is a new and hearty sound to the word "brother" that is full of hope. The cry has been answered. The gap in the social body, between rich and poor, is no longer widening. We are certainly coming closer together. A dozen years ago, when the King's Daughters lighted a Christmas tree in Gotham Court, the children ran screaming from Santa Claus as from a "bogey man." Here lately the boys in the Hebrew Institute's schools nearly broke the bank laying in supplies to do him honor. I do not mean that the Jews are deserting to join the Christian Church. They are doing that which is better,—they are embracing its spirit; and they and we are the better for it.

"The more I know of the Other Half," writes a friend to me, "the more I feel the great gulf that is fixed between us, and the more profoundly I grieve that this is the best that Christian civilization has as yet been able to do toward a true social system." Let my friend take heart. She herself has been busy in my sight all these years binding up the wounds. If that be the most a Christian civilization has been able to do for the neighbor till now, who shall say that it is not also the greatest? "This do and thou shalt live," said the Lord of him who showed mercy. That was the mark of the brotherhood. No, the gulf is not widening. It is only that we have taken

soundings and know it, and in the doing of it we have come to know one another. The rest we may confidently leave with Him who knows it all.

God knows we waited long enough; and how close we were to one another all the while without knowing it! Two or three years ago at Christmas a clergyman, who lives out of town and has a houseful of children, asked me if I could not find for them a poor family in the city with children of about the same ages, whom they might visit and befriend. He worked every day in the office of a foreign mission in Fifth Avenue, and knew little of the life that moved about him in the city. I picked out a Hungarian widow in an East Side tenement, whose brave struggle to keep her little flock together had enlisted my sympathy and strong admiration. She was a cleaner in an office building; not until all the arrangements had been made did it occur to me to ask where. Then it turned out that she was scrubbing floors in the missionary society's house, right at my friend's door. They had passed one another every day, each in need of the other, and each as far from the other as if oceans separated them instead of a doorstep four inches wide.

Looking back over the years that lie behind with their work, and forward to those that are coming, I see only cause for hope. As I write these last lines in a far-distant land, in the city of my birth, the children are playing under my window, and calling to one another with glad cries in my sweet mother-tongue, even as we did in the long ago. Life and the world are before them, bright with the promise of morning. So to me seem the skies at home. Not lightly do I say it, for I have known the toil of rough-hewing it on the pioneer line that turns men's hair

gray; but I have seen also the reward of the toil. New York is the youngest of the world's great cities, barely yet out of knickerbockers. It may be that our century will yet see it as the greatest of them all. The task that is set it, the problem it has to solve and which it may not shirk, is the problem of civilization, of human progress, of a people's fitness for self-government, that is on trial among us. We shall solve it by the world-old formula of human sympathy, of humane touch. Somewhere in these pages I have told of the woman in Chicago who accounted herself the happiest woman alive because she had at last obtained a playground for her poor neighbors' children. "I have lived here for years," she said to me, "and struggled with principalities and powers, and have made up my mind that the most and the best I can do is to live right here with my people and smile with them,—keep smiling; weep when I must, but smile as long as I possibly can." And the tears shone in her gentle old eyes as she said it. When we have learned to smile and weep with the poor, we shall have mastered our problem. Then the slum will have lost its grip and the boss his job.

Until then, while they are in possession, our business is to hold taut and take in slack right along, never letting go for a moment.

And now, having shown you the dark side of the city, which, after all, I love, with its great memories, its high courage, and its bright skies, as I love the little Danish town where my cradle stood, let me, before I close this account of the struggle with evil, show you also its good heart by telling you "the unnecessary story of Mrs. Ben Wah and her parrot." Perchance it may help you to grasp better the

meaning of the Battle with the Slum. It is for such as she and for such as "Jim," whose story I told before, that we are fighting.[Back to Contents]

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE UNNECESSARY STORY OF MRS. BEN WAH AND HER PARROT

Mrs. Ben Wah was dying. Word came up from the district office of the Charity Organization Society to tell me of it. Would I come and see her before I went away? Mrs. Ben Wah was an old charge of mine, the French Canadian widow of an Iroquois Indian, whom, years before, I had unearthed in a Hudson Street tenement. I was just then making ready for a voyage across the ocean to the old home to see my own mother, and the thought of the aged woman who laid away her children long ago by the cold camp-fires of her tribe in Canadian forests was a call not to be resisted. I went at once.

The signs of illness were there in a notice tacked up on the wall, warning everybody to keep away when her attic should be still, until her friends could come from the charity office. It was a notion she had, Mrs. McCutcheon, the district visitor, explained, that would not let her rest till her "paper" was made out. For her, born in the wilderness, death had no such terror as prying eyes.

"Them police fellows," she said, with the least

touch of resentment in her gentle voice, "they might take my things and sell them to buy cigars to smoke." I suspect it was the cigar that grated harshly. It was ever to her a vulgar slur on her beloved pipe. In truth, the mere idea of Mrs. Ben Wah smoking a cigar rouses in me impatient resentment. Without her pipe she was not herself. I see her yet, stuffing it with approving forefinger, on the Christmas day when I had found her with tobacco pouch empty, and pocket to boot, and nodding the quaint comment from her corner, "It's no disgrace to be poor, but it's sometimes very inconvenient."



Mrs. Ben Wah.

There was something in the little attic room that spoke of the coming change louder than the warning paper. A half-finished mat, with its bundle of rags put carefully aside; the thirsty potato-vine on the fire-escape, which reached appealingly from its soap-box toward the window, as if in wondering search for the hands that had tended it so faithfully,—bore silent testimony that Mrs. Ben Wah's work-day was over at last. It had been a long day—how long no one may ever know. "The winter of the big snow," or "the year when deer was scarce" on the Gatineau, is not as good a guide to time-reckoning in the towns as in the woods, and Mrs. Ben Wah knew no other. Her thoughts dwelt among the memories of the past as she sat slowly nodding her turbaned head, idle for once. The very head-dress, arranged and smoothed with unusual care, was "notice," proceeding from a primitive human impulse. Before the great mystery she "was ashamed and covered her head."

The charity visitor told me what I had half guessed. Beyond the fact that she was tired and had made up her mind to die, nothing ailed Mrs. Ben Wah. But at her age, the doctor had said, it was enough; she would have her way. In faith, she was failing day by day. All that could be done was to make her last days as easy as might be. I talked to her of my travels, of the great salt water upon which I should journey many days; but her thoughts were in the lonely woods, and she did not understand. I told her of beautiful France, the language of which she spoke with a singularly sweet accent, and asked her if there was not something I might bring back to her to make her happy. As I talked on, a reminiscent smile came into her eyes and lingered there. It was evidently something that pleased her. By slow

degrees we dragged the bashful confession out of her that there was yet one wish she had in this life.

Once upon a time, long, long ago, when, as a young woman, she had gone about peddling beads, she had seen a bird, such a splendid bird, big and green and beautiful, with a red turban, and that could talk. Talk! As she recalled the glorious apparition, she became quite her old self again, and reached for her neglected pipe with trembling hands. If she could ever see that bird again—but she guessed it was long since gone. She was a young woman then, and now she was old, so old. She settled back in her chair, and let the half-lighted pipe go out.

"Poor old soul!" said Mrs. McCutcheon, patting the wrinkled hand in her lap. Her lips framed the word "parrot" across the room to me, and I nodded back. When we went out together it was settled between us that Mrs. Ben Wah was to be doctored according to her own prescription, if it broke the rules of every school of medicine.

I went straight back to the office and wrote in my newspaper that Mrs. Ben Wah was sick and needed a parrot, a green one with a red tuft, and that she must have it right away. I told of her lonely life, and of how, on a Christmas Eve, years ago, I had first met her at the door of the Charity Organization Society, laboring up the stairs with a big bundle done up in blue cheese-cloth, which she left in the office with the message that it was for those who were poorer than she. They were opening it when I came in. It contained a lot of little garments of blanket stuff, as they used to make them for the pappooses among her people in the far North. It was the very next day

that I found her in her attic, penniless and without even the comfort of her pipe. Like the widow of old, she had cast her mite into the treasury, even all she had.

All this I told in my paper, and how she whose whole life had been kindness to others was now in need—in need of a companion to share her lonely life, of something with a voice, which would not come in and go away again, and leave her. And I begged that any one who had a green parrot with a red tuft would send it in at once.

New York is a good town to live in. It has a heart. It no sooner knew that Mrs. Ben Wah wanted a parrot than it hustled about to supply one at once. The morning mail brought stacks of letters, with offers of money to buy a parrot. They came from lawyers, business men, and bank presidents, men who pore over dry ledgers and drive sharp bargains on 'Change, and are never supposed to give a thought to lonely widows pining away in poor attics. While they were being sorted, a poor little tramp song-bird flew in through the open window of the Charities Building in great haste, apparently in search of Mrs. McCutcheon's room. Its feathers were ruffled and its bangs awry, as if it had not had time to make its morning toilet, it had come in such haste to see if it would do. Though it could not talk, it might at least sing to the sick old woman—sing of the silent forests with the silver lakes deep in their bosom, where the young bucks trailed the moose and the panther, and where she listened at the lodge door for their coming; and the song might bring back the smile to her wan lips. But though it was nearly green and had tousled top, it was not a parrot, and it would not do. The young women who write in the big books in the

office caught it and put it in a cage to sing to them instead. In the midst of the commotion came the parrot itself, big and green, in a "stunning" cage. It was an amiable bird, despite its splendid get-up, and cocked its crimson head one side to have it scratched through the bars, and held up one claw, as if to shake hands.

How to get it to Mrs. Ben Wah's without the shock killing her was the problem that next presented itself. Mrs. McCutcheon solved it by doing the cage up carefully in newspaper and taking it along herself. All the way down the bird passed muffled comments on the Metropolitan Railway service and on its captivity, to the considerable embarrassment of its keeper; but they reached the Beach Street tenement and Mrs. Ben Wah's attic at last. There Mrs. McCutcheon stowed it carefully away in a corner, while she busied herself about her aged friend.

She was working slowly down through an address which she had designed to break the thing gently and by degrees, when the parrot, extending a feeler on its own hook, said "K-r-r-a-a!" behind its paper screen.

Mrs. Ben Wah sat up straight and looked fixedly at the corner. Seeing the big bundle there, she went over and peered into it. She caught a quick breath and stared, wide-eyed.

"Where you get that bird?" she demanded of Mrs. McCutcheon, faintly.

"Oh, that is Mr. Riis's bird," said that lady, sparring for time; "a friend gave it to him—"

"Where you take him?" Mrs. Ben Wah gasped, her hand pressed against her feeble old heart.

Her friend saw, and gave right up.

"I am not going to take it anywhere," she said. "I brought it for you. This is to be its home, and you are to be its mother, grandma, and its friend. You are to be always together from now on—always, and have a good time." With that she tore the paper from the cage.

The parrot, after all, made the speech of the occasion. He considered the garret; the potato-field on the fire-escape, through which the sunlight came in, making a cheerful streak on the floor; Mrs. Ben Wah and her turban; and his late carrier: then he climbed upon his stick, turned a somersault, and said, "Here we are," or words to that effect. Thereupon he held his head over to be scratched by Mrs. Ben Wah in token of a compact of friendship then and there made.

Joy, after all, does not kill. Mrs. Ben Wah wept long and silently, big, happy tears of gratitude. Then she wiped them away, and went about her household cares as of old. The prescription had worked. The next day the "notice" vanished from the wall of the room, where there were now two voices for one.

I came back from Europe to find my old friend with a lighter step and a lighter heart than in many a day. The parrot had learned to speak Canadian French to the extent of demanding his crackers and water in the lingo of the *habitant*. Whether he will yet stretch his linguistic acquirements to the learning of Iroquois I shall not say. It is at least possible. The

two are inseparable. The last time I went to see them, no one answered my knock on the door-jamb. I raised the curtain that serves for a door, and looked in. Mrs. Ben Wah was asleep upon the bed. Perched upon her shoulder was the parrot, no longer constrained by the bars of a cage, with his head tucked snugly in her neck, asleep too. So I left them, and so I like to remember them always, comrades true.

It happened that when I was in Chicago last spring I told their story to a friend, a woman. "Oh, write it!" she said. "You must!" And when I asked why, she replied, with feminine logic: "Because it is so unnecessary. The barrel of flour doesn't stick out all over it."

Now I have done as she bade me. Perhaps she was right. Women know these things best. Like my own city, they have hearts, and will understand the unnecessary story of Mrs. Ben Wah and her parrot.
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**Footnote 1:** The draft riots of 1863.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 2:** "The experiment has been long tried on a large scale, with a dreadful success, affording the demonstration that if, from early infancy, you allow human beings to *live* like brutes, you can degrade them down to their level, leaving them scarcely more intellect, and no feelings and affections proper to human hearts."—*Report on the Health of British Towns.*[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 3:** Satire III, Juvenal.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 4:** Satire III, Juvenal.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 5:** Report of Select Committee of Assembly. New York, 1857.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 6:** York Health Department Report, 1866, Appendix A, p. 6.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 7:** Report of Board of Health, New York, 1869, p. 346.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 8:** Council of Hygiene's Report, 1866. [Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 9:** Health Department Report, 1870, p. 111.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 10:** They had "health wardens" in the old days, and the Council of Hygiene tells of the efficient way two of them fought the smallpox. One stood at the foot of the stairs and yelled to those minding a patient in the next story to "put pieces of camphor about the clothes of the sick and occasionally throw a piece on the hot stove." The other summoned the occupants of a smallpox smitten tenement to the hall

door and cautioned them to say nothing about it to any one, or he would send them all to the pest-house! [Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 11:** The Adler Tenement House Committee of 1884. It was the first citizens' commission. The legislative inquiry of 1856 was conducted by a Select Committee of the Assembly. [Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 12:** The Small Parks law of 1887 allowed the expenditure of a million dollars a year for the making of neighborhood parks; but only as payment for work done or property taken. If not used in any one year, that year's appropriation was lost. [Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 13:** The first school census was taken in 1895 by order of the legislature. It showed that there were 50,069 children of school age in New York City out of school and unemployed. The number had been variously estimated from 5000 to 150,000. [Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 14:** 1898, when Roosevelt was elected Governor after a fierce fight with Tammany. [Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 15:** Up to that time I wrote of Tammany as "she"; but I dropped it then as an outrage upon the sex. "It" it is and will remain hereafter. I am ashamed of ever having put the stigma on the name of woman. [Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 16:** Report of Tenement House Commission, 1900. [Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 17:** Tenement house census of 1900: Manhattan and the Bronx boroughs (the old city),

46,993 tenements, with a population of 1,701,643. The United States census of the two boroughs gave them a population of 2,050,600. In the Greater New York there are 82,000 tenements, and two-thirds of our nearly four millions of people live in them.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 18:** Police census of 1900, block bounded by Canal, Hester, Eldridge, and Forsyth streets: size 375 × 200, population 2969, rate per acre 1724. Block bounded by Stanton, Houston, Attorney, and Ridge streets: size 200 × 300, population 2609, rate per acre 1894.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 19:** There is an advanced outpost of blacks as far up as One Hundred and Forty-fifth Street, but the main body lingers yet among the sixties.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 20:** That was, however, a reduction of 236 since 1898, when the census showed 2379 rear houses.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 21:** Report of Gilder Tenement House Commission, 1894.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 22:** "Municipal Government in Continental Europe," by Albert Shaw.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 23:** Report of the Tenement House Committee of 1900. The secretary of that body said: "Well might those maps earn for New York the title of the City of the Living Death."[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 24:** Report of Tenement House Commission of 1900.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 25:** "The Making of an American."[Back to

Main Text]

**Footnote 26:** Since reading this proof I have been over and verified my diagnosis. The trouble must have been with me. The soup and the mutton and the pie had each its proper savor, and the cook is all right. So is the lunch. There is no fifty-cent lunch in the city that I know of which is better.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 27:** Superintendent Maxwell in *Municipal Affairs*, December, 1900.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 28:** According to the register of the United Hebrew Charities, between October 1, 1884, and June 1, 1902, the number was 539,067, and it is again on the increase. The year 1902 will probably show an increase in this class of immigration over 1901 of quite 15,000.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 29:** The following is the declaration of principles of the National Consumers' League:—

SEC. 1. That the interests of the community demand that all workers shall receive fair living wages, and that goods shall be produced under sanitary conditions.

SEC. 2. That the responsibility for some of the worst evils from which producers suffer rests with the consumers who seek the cheapest markets regardless how cheapness is brought about.

SEC. 3. That it is, therefore, the duty of consumers to find out under what conditions the articles they purchase are produced and distributed, and insist that these conditions shall be wholesome, and consistent with a respectable existence on the part of the workers.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 30:** The following is from the New York *Herald* of April 8, 1902: One of the strangest sandwich complications so far recorded occurred in a saloon in Columbia Street, Brooklyn, on Sunday. A boy rushed into the Amity Street police station at noon, declaring that two men in the saloon were killing each other. Two policemen ran to the place, and found the bartender and a customer pummelling each other on the floor. When the men had been separated the police learned that the trouble had arisen from the attempt of the customer to eat the sandwich which had been served with his drink. The barkeeper objected, and, finding remonstrance in vain, resorted to physical force to rescue the sandwich from the clutches of the hungry stranger. The police restored the sandwich to the bartender and made no arrests.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 31:** In the first Greater New York election.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 32:** "Year-Book of Elmira State Reformatory," 1901. The statistics deal with 10,538 prisoners received there in twenty-seven years. The social stratum whence they came is sufficiently indicated by the statement that 15.96 per cent were illiterates, and 47.59 percent were able to read and write with difficulty; 32.39 per cent had an ordinary common school education; 4.06 per cent came out of high schools or colleges.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 33:** Mrs. A. A. Anderson.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 34:** June 26, 1901.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 35:** The name bestowed upon it by the older toughs before the fact, not after.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 36:** To be sure, it did nothing else. When the people asked for $5000 to fit up one playground. Mayor Van Wyck replied with a sneer that "Vaudeville destroyed Rome."[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 37:** Up to June, 1902.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 38:** After two attempts that were not shining successes, the politicians at Albany and New York calmly dropped the matter, and for four years ignored the law. The Superintendent of Schools is at this writing (June, 1902) preparing to have the police take the child census, without which it is hard to see how he can know the extent of the problem he is wrestling with. Half-day classes are a fair index of the number of those anxious to get in; but they tell us nothing of the dangerous class who shun the schools.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 39:** On May 31, 1902, there were 10,036 class teachers in elementary schools in the Greater New York, exclusive of principals and the non-teaching staffs, and of the high school teachers. With these, the total number was 11,570, with a register of 445,964 pupils.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 40:** The managers of the New York Public Library have found a way, and have maintained twenty-seven home libraries during the past year (1901): little cases of from fifteen to forty books entrusted to the care of some family in the tenement. Miss Adeline E. Brown, who is in charge of the work, reports a growing enthusiasm for it. The librarian calls weekly. "We come very near to the needs of these families," she writes, "the visit meaning more to them than the books. In nearly every case we allow the books to be given out at any

time by the child who glories in the honor of being librarian. In one wretched tenement, on the far East Side, we are told that the case of books is taken down into the yard on Sunday afternoon, and neighbors and lodgers have the use of them." It is satisfactory to know that the biggest of the home libraries is within stone's throw of Corlear's Hook, which the "Hook Gang" terrorized with rapine and murder within my recollection.

Miss Brown adds that "the girls prefer bookcases with doors of glass, as they like to scrub it with sapolio, but the boys are more interested in the lock and key."[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 41:** On the day it was published the newspapers reported the killing in the streets of three children by trucks.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 42:** The Astor, Lenox, and Tilden foundations represent a total of some seven millions of dollars. The great central library, erected by the city, is to cost five millions, and the fifty branches for which the city gives the sites and Andrew Carnegie the buildings, $5,200,000. The city's contribution for maintenance will be over half a million yearly.[Back to Main Text]

**Footnote 43:** The first year's record was 186 lectures and 22,149 hearers. Last winter (1901-1902) there were 3172 lectures in over 100 places, and the total attendance was 928,251. This winter there will be 115 centres. It is satisfactory to know that churches and church houses fall in with the plan more and more where there are no schools to serve as halls.[Back to Main Text]

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BATTLE WITH THE SLUM ***

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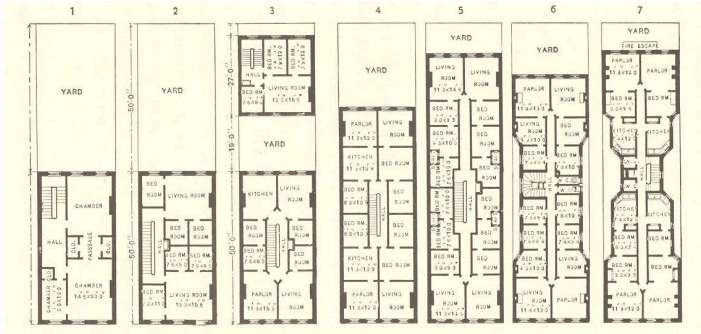
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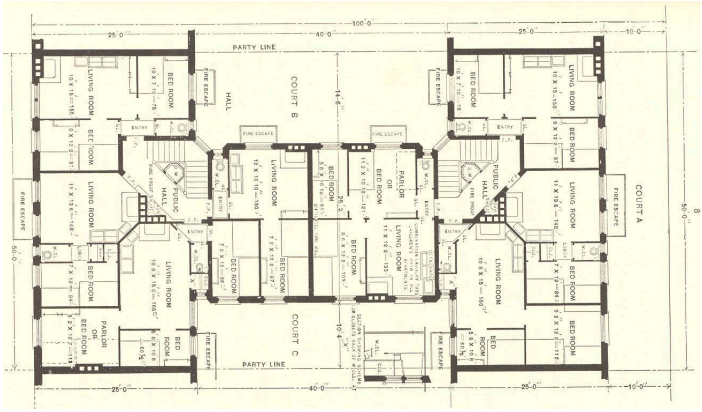
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