

JACOB AUGUST RIIS

THE CHILDREN OF THE
POOR

Jacob August Riis

The Children of the Poor

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PREFACE

To my little ones, who, as I lay down my pen, come rushing in from the autumn fields, their hands filled with flowers “for the poor children,” I inscribe this book. May the love that shines in their eager eyes never grow cold within them; then they shall yet grow up to give a helping hand in working out this problem which so plagues the world to-day. As to their father’s share, it has been a very small and simple one, and now it is done. Other hands may carry forward the work. My aim has been to gather the facts for them to build upon. I said it in “How the Other Half Lives,” and now, in sending this volume to the printer, I can add nothing. The two books are one. Each supplements the other. Ours is an age of facts. It wants facts, not theories, and facts I have endeavored to set down in these pages. The reader may differ with me as to the application of them. He may be right and I wrong. But we shall not quarrel as to the facts themselves, I think. A false prophet in our day could do less harm than a careless reporter. That name I hope I shall not deserve.

To lay aside a work that has been so long a part of one’s life, is like losing a friend. But for the one lost I have gained many. They have been much to me. The friendship and counsel of Dr. Roger S. Tracy, of the Bureau of Vital Statistics, have lightened my labors as nothing else could save the presence and the sympathy of the best and dearest friend of all, my wife. To Major Willard Bullard, the most efficient chief of the Sanitary Police; Rabbi Adolph M. Radin; Mr. A. S. Solomons, of the Baron de Hirsch Relief Committee; Dr. Annie Sturges Daniel; Mr. L. W. Holste, of the Children’s Aid Society; Colonel George T. Balch, of the Board of Education; Mr. A. S. Fairchild, and to Dr. Max L. Margolis, my thanks are due and here given. Jew and Gentile, we have sought the truth together. Our reward must be in the consciousness that we have sought it faithfully and according to our light.

J. A. R.

Richmond Hill, Long Island,
October 1, 1892.

CHAPTER I. THE PROBLEM OF THE CHILDREN

THE problem of the children is the problem of the State. As we mould the children of the toiling masses in our cities, so we shape the destiny of the State which they will rule in their turn, taking the reins from our hands. In proportion as we neglect or pass them by, the blame for bad government to come rests upon us. The cities long since held the balance of power; their dominion will be absolute soon unless the near future finds some way of scattering the population which the era of steam-power and industrial development has crowded together in the great centres of that energy. At the beginning of the century the urban population of the United States was 3.97 per cent. of the whole, or not quite one in twenty-five. To-day it is 29.12 per cent., or nearly one in three. In the lifetime of those who were babies in arms when the first gun was fired upon Fort Sumter it has all but doubled. A million and a quarter live to-day in the tenements of the American metropolis. Clearly, there is reason for the sharp attention given at last to the life and the doings of the other half, too long unconsidered. Philanthropy we call it sometimes with patronizing airs. Better call it self-defence.

In New York there is all the more reason because it is the open door through which pours in a practically unrestricted immigration, unfamiliar with and unattuned to our institutions; the dumping-ground where it rids itself of its burden of helplessness and incapacity, leaving the procession of the strong and the able free to move on. This sediment forms the body of our poor, the contingent that lives, always from hand to mouth, with no provision and no means of providing for the morrow. In the first generation it pre-empted our slums;¹ in the second, its worst elements, reinforced by the influences that prevail there, develop the tough, who confronts society with the claim that the world owes him a living and that he will collect it in his own way. His plan is a practical application of the spirit of our free institutions as his opportunities have enabled him to grasp it.

Thus it comes about that here in New York to seek the children of the poor one must go among those who, if they did not themselves come over the sea, can rarely count back another generation born on American soil. Not that there is far to go. Any tenement district will furnish its own tribe, or medley of many tribes. Nor is it by any means certain that the children when found will own their alien descent. Indeed, as a preliminary to gaining their confidence, to hint at such a thing would be a bad blunder. The ragged Avenue B boy, whose father at his age had barely heard, in his corner of the Fatherland, of America as a place where the streets were paved with nuggets of gold and roast pigeons flew into mouths opening wide with wonder, would, it is safe to bet, be as prompt to resent the insinuation that he was a "Dutchman," as would the little "Mick" the Teuton's sore taunt. Even the son of the immigrant Jew in his virtual isolation strains impatiently at the fetters of race and faith, while the Italian takes abuse philosophically only when in the minority and bides his time until he too shall be able to prove his title by calling those who came after him names. However, to quarrel with the one or the other on that ground would be useless. It is the logic of the lad's evolution, the way of patriotism in the slums. His sincerity need not be questioned.

Many other things about him may be, and justly are, but not that. It is perfectly transparent. His badness is as spontaneous as his goodness, and for the moment all there is of the child. Whichever streak happens to prevail, it is in full possession; if the bad is on top more frequently than the other, it is his misfortune rather than his design. He is as ready to give his only cent to a hungrier boy than he if it is settled that he can "lick" him, and that he is therefore not a rival, as he is to join him in torturing

¹ It is, nevertheless, true that while immigration peoples our slums, it also keeps them from stagnation. The working of the strong instinct to better themselves, that brought the crowds here, forces layer after layer of this population up to make room for the new crowds coming in at the bottom, and thus a circulation is kept up that does more than any sanitary law to render the slums harmless. Even the useless sediment is kept from rotting by being constantly stirred.

an unoffending cat for the common cheer. The penny and the cat, the charity and the cruelty, are both pregnant facts in the life that surrounds him, and of which he is to be the coming exponent. In after years, when he is arrested by the officers of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals for beating his horse, the episode adds but to his confusion of mind in which a single impression stands out clear and lasting, viz., that somehow he got the worst of it as usual. But for the punishment, the whole proceeding must seem ludicrous to him. As it is he submits without comprehending. *He* had to take the hard knocks always; why should not his horse?

In other words, the child is a creature of environment, of opportunity, as children are everywhere. And the environment here has been bad, as it was and is in the lands across the sea that sent him to us. Our slums have fairly rivalled, and in some respects outdone, the older ones after which they patterned. Still, there is a difference, the difference between the old slum and the new. The hopelessness, the sullen submission of life in East London as we have seen it portrayed, has no counterpart here; neither has the child born in the gutter and predestined by the order of society, from which there is no appeal, to die there. We have our Lost Tenth to fill the trench in the Potter's Field; quite as many wrecks at the finish, perhaps, but the start seems fairer in the promise. Even on the slums the doctrine of liberty has set its stamp. To be sure, for the want of the schooling to decipher it properly, they spell it license there, and the slip makes trouble. The tough and his scheme of levying tribute are the result. But the police settle that with him, and when it comes to a choice, the tough is to be preferred to the born pauper any day. The one has the making of something in him, unpromising as he looks; seen in a certain light he may even be considered a hopeful symptom. The other is just so much dead loss. The tough is not born: he is made. The all-important point is the one at which the manufacture can be stopped.

So rapid and great are the changes in American cities, that no slum has yet had a chance here to grow old enough to distil its deadliest poison. New York has been no exception. But we cannot always go at so fast a pace. There is evidence enough in the crystallization of the varying elements of the population along certain lines, no longer as uncertain as they were, that we are slowing up already. Any observer of the poor in this city is familiar with the appearance among them of that most distressing and most dangerous symptom, the home-feeling for the slum that opposes all efforts at betterment with dull indifference. Pauperism seems to have grown faster of late than even the efforts put forth to check it. We have witnessed this past winter a dozen times the spectacle of beggars extorting money by threats or violence without the excuse which a season of exceptional distress or hardship might have furnished. Further, the raid in the last Legislature upon the structure of law built up in a generation to regulate and keep the tenements within safe limits, shows that fresh danger threatens in the alliance of the slum with politics. Only the strongest public sentiment, kept always up to the point of prompt action, avails to ward off this peril. But public sentiment soon wearies of such watch-duty, as instanced on this occasion, when several bills radically remodelling the tenement-house law and repealing some of its most beneficent provisions, had passed both houses and were in the hands of the Governor before a voice was raised against them, or anyone beside the politicians and their backers seemed even to have heard of them. And this hardly five years after a special commission of distinguished citizens had sat an entire winter under authority of the State considering the tenement-house problem, and as the result of its labors had secured as vital the enactment of the very law against which the raid seemed to be chiefly directed!

The tenement and the saloon, with the street that does not always divide them, form the environment that is to make or unmake the child. The influence of each of the three is bad. Together they have power to overcome the strongest resistance. But the child born under their evil spell has none such to offer. The testimony of all to whom has fallen the task of undoing as much of the harm done by them as may be, from the priest of the parish school to the chaplain of the penitentiary, agrees upon this point, that even the tough, with all his desperation, is weak rather than vicious. He promises well, he even means well; he is as downright sincere in his repentance as he was in his

wrong-doing; but it doesn't prevent him from doing the very same evil deed over again the minute he is rid of restraint. He would rather be a saint than a sinner; but somehow he doesn't keep in the *rôle* of saint, while the police help perpetuate the memory of his wickedness. After all, he is not so very different from the rest of us. Perhaps that, with a remorseful review of the chances he has had, may help to make a fellow-feeling for him in us.

That is what he needs. The facts clearly indicate that from the environment little improvement in the child is to be expected. There has been progress in the way of building the tenements of late years, but they swarm with greater crowds than ever—good reason why they challenge the pernicious activity of the politician; and the old rookeries disappear slowly. In the relation of the saloon to the child there has been no visible improvement, and the street is still his refuge. It is, then, his opportunities outside that must be improved if relief is to come. We have the choice of hailing him man and brother or of being slugged and robbed by him. It ought not to be a hard choice, despite the tatters and the dirt, for which our past neglect is in great part to blame. Plenty of evidence will be found in these pages to show that it has been made in the right spirit already, and that it has proved a wise choice. No investment gives a better return to-day on the capital put out than work among the children of the poor.

A single fact will show what is meant by that. Within the lifetime of the Children's Aid Society, in the thirty years between 1860 and 1890, while the population of this city was doubled, the commitments of girls and women for vagrancy fell off from 5,880 to 1,980, while the commitments of girl thieves fell between 1865 and 1890 from 1 in 743 to 1 in 7,500.² Stealing and vagrancy among boys has decreased too; if not so fast, yet at a gratifying rate.

Enough has been written and said about the children of the poor and their sufferings to make many a bigger book than this. From some of it one might almost be led to believe that one-half of the children are worked like slaves from toddling infancy, while the other half wander homeless and helpless about the streets. Their miseries are great enough without inventing any that do not exist. There is no such host of child outcasts in New York as that. Thanks to the unwearied efforts of the children's societies in the last generation, what there is is decreasing, if anything. As for the little toilers, they will receive attention further on. There are enough of them, but as a whole they are anything but a repining lot. They suffer less, to their own knowledge, from their wretched life than the community suffers for letting them live it, though it, too, sees the truth but in glimpses. If the question were put to a vote of the children to-morrow, whether they would take the old life with its drawbacks, its occasional starvation, and its everyday kicks and hard knocks; or the good clothes, the plentiful grub, and warm bed, with all the restraints of civilized society and the "Sunday-school racket" of the other boy thrown in, I have as little doubt that the street would carry the day by a practically unanimous vote as I have that there are people still to be found—too many of them—who would indorse the choice with a sigh of relief and dismiss the subject, if it could be dismissed that way; which, happily, it cannot.

The immediate duty which the community has to perform for its own protection is to school the children first of all into good Americans, and next into useful citizens. As a community it has not attended to this duty as it should; but private effort has stepped in and is making up for its neglect with encouraging success. The outlook that was gloomy from the point of view of the tenement, brightens when seen from this angle, however toilsome the road yet ahead. The inpouring of alien races no longer darkens it. The problems that seemed so perplexing in the light of freshly-formed prejudices against this or that immigrant, yield to this simple solution that discovers all alarm to have been groundless. Yesterday it was the swarthy Italian, to-day the Russian Jew, that excited our distrust. To-morrow it may be the Arab or the Greek. All alike they have taken, or are taking, their places in the ranks of our social phalanx, pushing upward from the bottom with steady effort, as I believe they

² Report of committing magistrates. See Annual Report of Children's Aid Society, 1891.

will continue to do unless failure to provide them with proper homes arrests the process. And in the general advance the children, thus firmly grasped, are seen to be a powerful moving force. The one immigrant who does not keep step, who, having fallen out of the ranks, has been ordered to the rear, is the Chinaman, who brought neither wife nor children to push him ahead. He left them behind that he might not become an American, and by the standard he himself set up he has been judged.

CHAPTER II. THE ITALIAN SLUM CHILDREN

WHO and where are the slum children of New York to-day? That depends on what is understood by the term. The moralist might seek them in Hell's Kitchen, in Battle Row, and in the tenements, east and west, where the descendants of the poorest Irish immigrants live. They are the ones, as I have before tried to show, upon whom the tenement and the saloon set their stamp soonest and deepest. The observer of physical facts merely would doubtless pick out the Italian ragamuffins first, and from his standpoint he would be right. Irish poverty is not picturesque in the New World, whatever it may have been in the Old. Italian poverty is. The worst old rookeries fall everywhere in this city to the share of the immigrants from Southern Italy, who are content to occupy them, partly, perhaps, because they are no worse than the hovels they left behind, but mainly because they are tricked or bullied into putting up with them by their smarter countrymen who turn their helplessness and ignorance to good account. Wherever the invasion of some old home section by the tide of business has left ramshackle tenements falling into hopeless decay, as in the old "Africa," in the Bend, and in many other places in the down-town wards, the Italian sweater landlord is ready with his offer of a lease to bridge over the interregnum, a lease that takes no account of repairs or of the improvements the owner sought to avoid. The crowds to make it profitable to him are never wanting. The bait he holds out is a job at the ash-dump with which he connects at the other end of the line. The house, the job, and the man as he comes to them fit in well together, and the copartnership has given the Italian a character which, I am satisfied from close observation of him, he does not wholly deserve. At all events, his wife does not. Dirty as *he* seems and is in the old rags that harmonize so well with his surroundings, there is that about her which suggests not only the capacity for better things, but a willingness to be clean and to look decent, if cause can be shown. It may be a bright kerchief, a bit of old-fashioned jewelry, or the neatly smoothed and braided hair of the wrinkled old hag who presides over the stale bread counter. Even in the worst dens occupied by these people, provided that they had not occupied them too long, I have found this trait crop out in the careful scrubbing of some piece of oil-cloth rescued from the dump and laid as a mat in front of the family bed; or in a bit of fringe on the sheet or quilt, ragged and black with age though it was, that showed what a fruitful soil proper training and decent housing would have found there.

I have in mind one Italian "flat" among many, a half underground hole in a South Fifth Avenue yard, reached by odd passage-ways through a tumbledown tenement that was always full of bad smells and scoting rats. Across the foul and slippery yard, down three steps made of charred timbers from some worse wreck, was this "flat," where five children slept with their elders. How many of those there were I never knew. There were three big family beds, and they nearly filled the room, leaving only patches of the mud floor visible. The walls were absolutely black with age and smoke. The plaster had fallen off in patches and there was green mould on the ceiling. And yet, with it all, with the swarm of squirming youngsters that were as black as the floor they rolled upon, there was evidence of a desperate, if hopeless, groping after order, even neatness. The beds were made up as nicely as they could be with the old quilts and pieces of carpet that served for covering. In Poverty Gap, where an Italian would be stoned as likely as not, there would have been a heap of dirty straw instead of beds, and the artistic arrangement of tallow-dips stuck in the necks of bottles about the newspaper cut of a saint on the corner shelf would have been missing altogether, fervent though the personal regard might be of Poverty Gap for the saint. The bottles would have been the only part of the exhibition sure to be seen there.

I am satisfied that this instinct inhabits not only the more aristocratic Genoese, but his fellow countryman from the southern hills as well, little as they resemble each other or agree in most things.

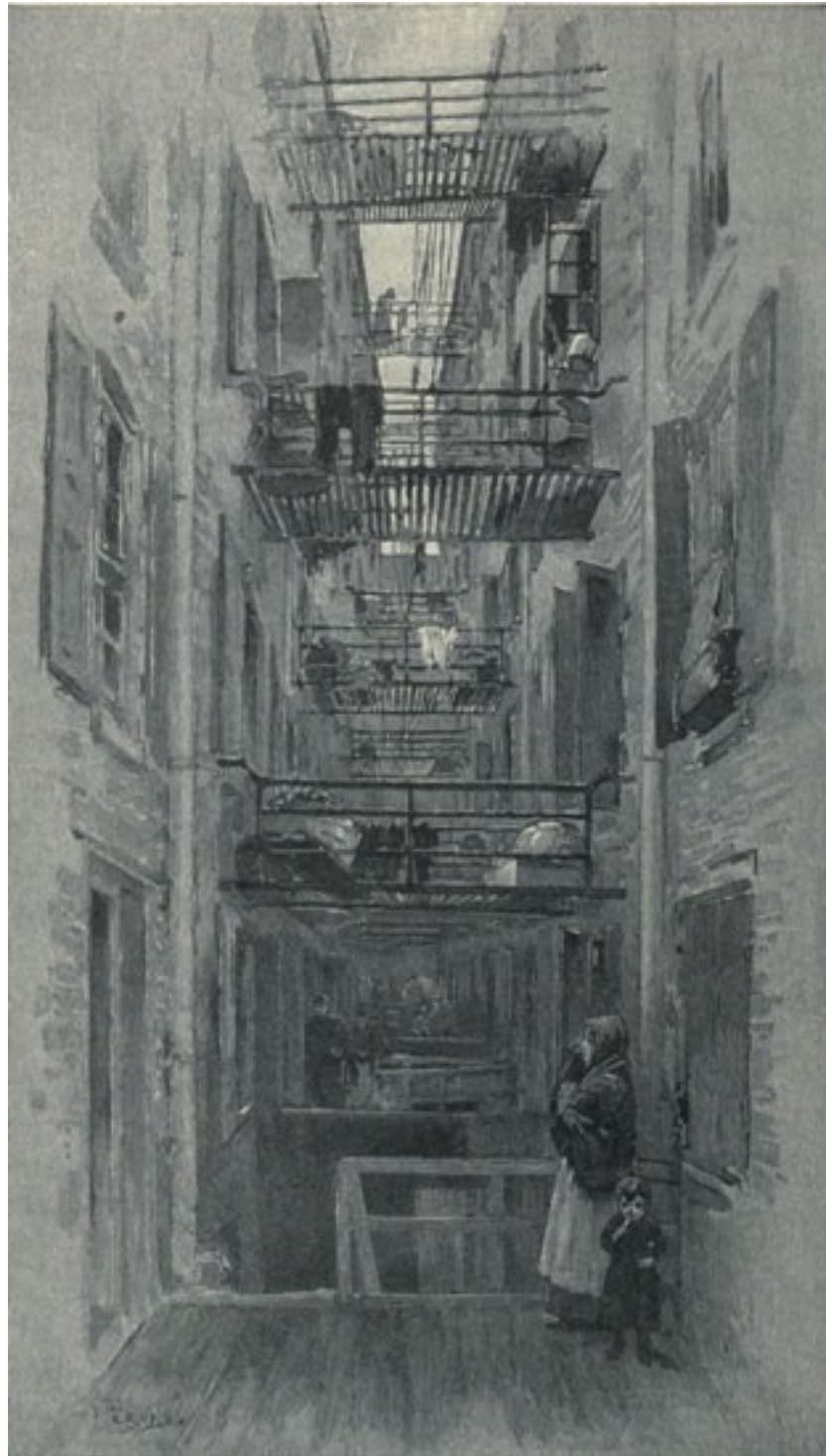
But the Neapolitan especially does not often get a chance to prove it. He is so altogether uninviting an object when he presents himself, fresh from the steamer, that he falls naturally the victim of the slum tenement, which in his keep becomes, despite the vigilance of the sanitary police, easily enough the convenient depot and half-way house between the garbage-dump and the bone-factory. Starting thus below the bottom, as it were, he has an up-hill journey before him if he is to work out of the slums, and the promise, to put it mildly, is not good. He does it all the same, or, if not he, his boy. It is not an Italian sediment that breeds the tough. Parental authority has a strong enough grip on the lad in Mulberry Street to make him work, and that is his salvation. "In seventeen years," said the teacher of the oldest Italian ragged school in the city that, day and night, takes in quite six hundred, "I have seen my boys work up into decent mechanics and useful citizens almost to a man, and of my girls only two I know of have gone astray." I had observed the process often enough myself to know that she was right. It is to be remembered, furthermore, that her school is in the very heart of the Five Points district, and takes in always the worst and the dirtiest crowds of children.

Within a year there has been, through some caprice of immigration, a distinct descent in the quality of the children, viewed from even the standard of cleanliness that prevails at the Five Points. Perhaps the exodus from Italy has worked farther south, where there seems to be an unusual supply of mud. Perhaps the rivalry of steamship lines has brought it about. At any rate, the testimony is positive that the children that came to the schools after last vacation, and have kept coming since, were the worst seen here since the influx began. I have watched with satisfaction, since this became apparent, some of the bad old tenements, which the newcomers always sought in droves, disappear to make room for great factory buildings. But there are enough left. The cleaning out of a Mulberry Street block left one lop-sided old rear tenement that had long since been shut in on three sides by buildings four stories higher than itself, and forgotten by all the world save the miserable wretches who burrowed in that dark and dismal pit at the bottom of a narrow alley. Now, when the fourth structure goes up against its very windows, it will stand there in the heart of the block, a survival of the unfittest, that, in all its disheartening dreariness, bears testimony, nevertheless, to the beneficent activity of the best Board of Health New York has ever had—the onward sweep of business. It will wipe that last remnant out also, even if the law lack the power to reach it.

Shoals of Italian children lived in that rookery, and in those the workmen tore down, in the actual physical atmosphere of the dump. Not a gun-shot away there is a block of tenements, known as the Mott Street Barracks, in which still greater shoals are—I was going to say housed, but that would have been a mistake. Happily they are that very rarely, except when they are asleep, and not then if they can help it. Out on the street they may be found tumbling in the dirt, or up on the roof lying stark-naked, blinking in the sun—content with life as they find it. If they are not a very cleanly crew, they are at least as clean as the frame they are set in, though it must be allowed that something has been done of late years to redeem the buildings from the reproach of a bad past. The combination of a Jew for a landlord and a saloon-keeper—Italian, of course—for a lessee, was not propitious; but the buildings happen to be directly under the windows of the Health Board, and something, I suppose, was due to appearances. The authorities did all that could be done, short of tearing down the tenement, but though comparatively clean, and not nearly as crowded as it was, it is still the old slum. It is an instructive instance of what can and cannot be done with the tenements into which we invite these dirty strangers to teach them American ways and the self-respect of future citizens and voters. There are five buildings—that is, five front and four rear houses, the latter a story higher than those on the street; that is because the rear houses were built last, to "accommodate" this very Italian immigration that could be made to pay for anything. Chiefly Irish had lived there before, but they moved out then. There were 360 tenants in the Barracks when the police census was taken in 1888, and 40 of them were babies. How many were romping children I do not know. The "yard" they had to play in is just 5 feet 10 inches wide, and a dozen steps below the street-level. The closets of all the buildings are in the cellar of the rear houses and open upon this "yard," where it is always dark

and damp as in a dungeon. Its foul stench reaches even the top floor, but so also does the sun at mid-day, and that is a luxury that counts as an extra in the contract with the landlord. The rent is nearly one-half higher near the top than it is on the street-level. Nine dollars above, six and a half below, for one room with windows, two without, and with barely space for a bed in each. But water-pipes have been put in lately, under orders from the Health Department, and the rents have doubtless been raised. "No windows" means no ventilation. The rear building backs up against the tenement on the next street; a space a foot wide separates them, but an attempt to ventilate the bed-rooms by windows on that was a failure.

When the health officers got through with the Barracks in time for the police census of 1891, the 360 tenants had been whittled down to 238, of whom 47 were babies under five years. Persistent effort had succeeded in establishing a standard of cleanliness that was a very great improvement upon the condition prevailing in 1888. But still, as I have said, the slum remained and will remain as long as that rear tenement stands. In the four years fifty-one funerals had gone out from the Barracks. The white hearse alone had made thirty-five trips carrying baby coffins. This was the way the two standards showed up in the death returns at the Bureau of Vital Statistics: in 1888 the adult death-rate, in a population of 320 over five years old, was 15.62 per 1,000; the baby death-rate, 325.00 per 1,000, or nearly one-third in a total of 40. As a matter of fact 13 of the 40 had died that year. The adult death-rate for the entire tenement population of more than a million souls was that year 12.81, and the baby death-rate 88.38. Last year, in 1891, the case stood thus: Total population, 238, including 47 babies. Adult death-rate per 1,000, 20.94; child death-rate (under five years) per 1,000, 106.38. General adult death-rate for 1891 in the tenements, 14.25; general child death-rate for 1891 in the tenements, 86.67. It should be added that the reduced baby death-rate of the Barracks, high as it was, was probably much lower than it can be successfully maintained. The year before, in 1890, when practically the same improved conditions prevailed, it was twice as high. Twice as many babies died.



THE MOTT STREET BARRACKS.

I have referred to some of the typical Italian tenements at some length to illustrate the conditions under which their children grow up and absorb the impressions that are to shape their lives as men and women. Is it to be marvelled at, if the first impression of them is sometimes not favorable? I recall, not without amusement, one of the early experiences of a committee with which I was trying to relieve some of the child misery in the East Side tenements by providing an outing for the very poorest of the little ones, who might otherwise have been overlooked. In our anxiety to make our little charges as presentable as possible, it seems we had succeeded so well as to arouse a suspicion in our friends at the other end of the line that something was wrong, either with us or with the poor of which

the patrician youngsters in new frocks and with clean faces, that came to them, were representatives. They wrote to us that they were in the field for the “slum children,” and slum children they wanted. It happened that their letter came just as we had before us two little lads from the Mulberry Street Bend, ragged, dirty, unkempt, and altogether a sight to see. Our wardrobe was running low, and we were at our wits’ end how to make these come up to our standard. We sat looking at each other after we had heard the letter read, all thinking the same thing, until the most courageous said it: “Send them as they are.” Well, we did, and waited rather breathlessly for the verdict. It came, with the children, in a note by return train, that said: “Not *that* kind, please!” And after that we were allowed to have things our own way.

The two little fellows were Italians. In justice to our frightened friends, it should be said that it was not their nationality, but their rags, to which they objected; but not very many seasons have passed since the crowding of the black-eyed brigade of “guinnies,” as they were contemptuously dubbed, in ever-increasing numbers, into the ragged schools and the kindergartens, was watched with regret and alarm by the teachers, as by many others who had no better cause. The event proved that the children were the real teachers. They had a more valuable lesson to impart than they came to learn, and it has been a salutary one. To-day they are gladly welcomed. Their sunny temper, which no hovel is dreary enough, no hardship has power to cloud, has made them universal favorites, and the discovery has been made by their teachers that as the crowds pressed harder their school-rooms have marvellously expanded, until they embrace within their walls an unsuspected multitude, even many a slum tenement itself, cellar, “stoop,” attic, and all. Every lesson of cleanliness, of order, and of English taught at the school is reflected into some wretched home, and rehearsed there as far as the limited opportunities will allow. No demonstration with soap and water upon a dirty little face but widens the sphere of these chief promoters of education in the slums. “By ’m by,” said poor crippled Pietro to me, with a sober look, as he labored away on his writing lesson, holding down the paper with his maimed hand, “I learn t’ make an Englis’ letter; maybe my fadder he learn too.” I had my doubts of the father. He sat watching Pietro with a pride in the achievement that was clearly proportionate to the struggle it cost, and mirrored in his own face every grimace and contortion the progress of education caused the boy. “Si! si!” he nodded, eagerly. “Pietro he good a boy; make Englis’, Englis’!” and he made a flourish with his clay-pipe, as if he too were making the English letter that was the object of their common veneration.

Perhaps it is as much his growing and well-founded distrust of the middle-man, whose unresisting victim he has heretofore been, and his need of some other joint to connect him with the English-speaking world that surrounds him, as any personal interest in book-learning, that impels the illiterate Italian to bring his boy to school early and see that he attends it. Greed has something to do with it too. In their anxiety to lay hold of the child, the charity schools have fallen into a way of bidding for him with clothes, shoes, and other bait that is never lost on Mulberry Street. Even sectarian scruples yield to such an argument, and the parochial school, where they get nothing but on the contrary are expected to contribute, gets left.

In a few charity schools where the children are boarded they have discovered this, and frown upon Italian children unless there is the best of evidence that the father is really unable to pay for their keep and not simply unwilling. But whatever his motive, the effect is to demonstrate in a striking way the truth of the observation that real reform of poverty and ignorance must begin with the children. In his case, at all events, the seed thus sown bears some fruit in the present as well as in the coming generation of toilers. The little ones, with their new standards and new ambitions, become in a very real sense missionaries of the slums, whose work of regeneration begins with their parents. They are continually fetched away from school by the mother or father to act as interpreters or go-betweens in all the affairs of daily life, to be conscientiously returned within the hour stipulated by the teacher, who offers no objection to this sort of interruption, knowing it to be the best condition of her own success. One cannot help the hope that the office of trust with which the children are thus invested

may, in some measure, help to mitigate their home-hardships. From their birth they have little else, though Italian parents are rarely cruel in the sense of abusing their offspring.

It is the home itself that constitutes their chief hardship. It is only when his years offer the boy an opportunity of escape to the street, that a ray of sunlight falls into his life. In his backyard or in his alley it seldom finds him out. Thenceforward most of his time is spent there, until the school and the shop claim him, but not in idleness. His mother toiled, while she bore him at her breast, under burdens heavy enough to break a man's back. She lets him out of her arms only to share her labor. How well he does it anyone may see for himself by watching the children that swarm where an old house is being torn down, lugging upon their heads loads of kindling wood twice their own size and sometimes larger than that. They come, as crows scenting carrion, from every side at the first blow of the axe. Their odd old-mannish or old-womanish appearance, due more to their grotesque rags than to anything in the children themselves, betrays their race even without their chatter. Be there ever so many children of other nationalities nearer by—the wood-gatherers are nearly all Italians. There are still a lot of girls among them who drag as big loads as their brothers, but since the sewing machine found its way, with the sweater's mortgage, into the Italian slums also, little Antonia has been robbed to a large extent even of this poor freedom, and has taken her place among the wage-earners when not on the school-bench. Once taken, the place is hers to keep for good. Sickness, unless it be mortal, is no excuse from the drudgery of the tenement. When, recently, one little Italian girl, hardly yet in her teens, stayed away from her class in the Mott Street Industrial School so long that her teacher went to her home to look her up, she found the child in a high fever, in bed, sewing on coats, with swollen eyes, though barely able to sit up.

But neither poverty nor hard knocks has power to discourage the child of Italy. His nickname he pockets with a grin that has in it no thought of the dagger and the revenge that come to solace his after years. Only the prospect of immediate punishment eclipses his spirits for the moment. While the teacher of the sick little girl was telling me her pitiful story in the Mott Street school, a characteristic group appeared on the stairway. Three little Italian culprits in the grasp of Nellie, the tall and slender Irish girl who was the mentor of her class for the day. They had been arrested “fur fightin” she briefly explained as she dragged them by the collar toward the principal, who just then appeared to inquire the cause of the rumpus, and thrust them forward to receive sentence. The three, none of whom was over eight years old, evidently felt that they were in the power of an enemy from whom no mercy was to be expected, and made no appeal for any. One scowled defiance. He was evidently the injured party.

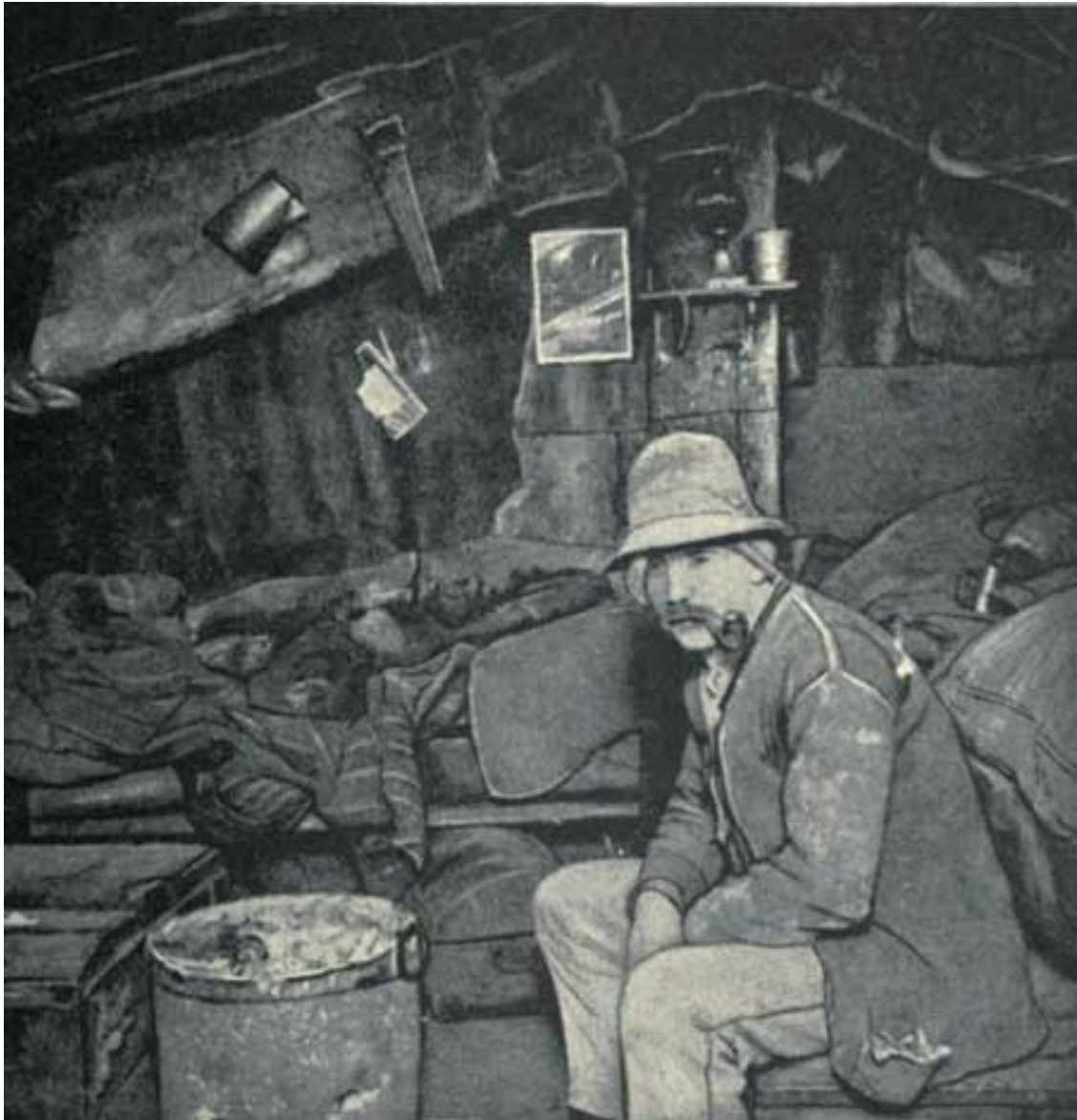
“He hit-a me a clip on de jaw,” he said in his defence, in the dialect of Mott Street with a slight touch of “the Bend.” The aggressor, a heavy browed little ruffian, hung back with a dreary howl, knuckling his eyes with a pair of fists that were nearly black. The third and youngest was in a state of bewilderment that was most ludicrous. He only knew that he had received a kick on the back and had struck out in self-defence, when he was seized and dragged away a prisoner. He was so dirty—school had only just begun and there had been no time for the regular inspection—that he was sentenced on the spot to be taken down and washed, while the other two were led away to the principal's desk. All three went out howling.

I said that the Italians do not often abuse their children downright. The padrone has had his day; the last was convicted seven years ago, and an end has been put to the business of selling children into a slavery that meant outrage, starvation, and death; but poverty and ignorance are fearful allies in the homes of the poor against defenceless childhood, even without the child-beating fiend. Two cases which I encountered in the East Side tenements, in the summer of 1891, show how the combination works at its worst. Without a doubt they are typical of very many, though I hope that few come quite up to their standard. The one was the case of little Carmen, who last March died in the New York Hospital, where she had lain five long months, the special care of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. One of the summer corps doctors found her in a Mott Street tenement,

within stone-throw of the Health Department office, suffering from a wasting disease that could only be combated by the most careful nursing. He put her case into the hands of the King's Daughters' Committee that followed in the steps of the doctor, and it was then that I saw her. She lay in a little back room, up two flights and giving upon a narrow yard where it was always twilight. The room was filthy and close, and entirely devoid of furniture, with the exception of a rickety stool, a slop pail, and a rusty old stove, one end of which was propped up with bricks. Carmen's bed was a board laid across the top of a barrel and a trunk set on end. I could not describe, if I would, the condition of the child when she was raised from the mess of straw and rags in which she lay. The sight unnerved even the nurse, who had seen little else than such scenes all summer. Loathsome bedsores had attacked the wasted little body, and in truth Carmen was more dead than alive. But when, shocked and disgusted, we made preparations for her removal with all speed to the hospital, the parents objected and refused to let us take her away. They had to be taken into court and forced to surrender the child under warrant of law, though it was clearly the little sufferer's only chance for life, and only the slenderest of chances at that.

Carmen was the victim of the stubborn ignorance that dreads the hospital and the doctor above the discomfort of the dirt and darkness and suffering that are its every-day attendants. Her parents were no worse than the Monroe Street mother who refused to let the health officer vaccinate her baby, because her crippled boy, with one leg an inch shorter than the other, had "caught it"—the lame leg, that is to say—from his vaccination. She knew it was so, and with ignorance of that stamp there is no other argument than force. But another element entered into the case of a sick Essex Street baby. The tenement would not let it recover from a bad attack of scarlet fever, and the parents would not let it be taken to the country or to the sea-shore, despite all efforts and entreaties. When their motive came out at last, it proved to be a mercenary one. They were behind with the rent, and as long as they had a sick child in the house the landlord could not put them out. Sick, the baby was to them a source of income, at all events a bar to expense, and in that way so much capital. Well, or away, it would put them at the mercy of the rent-collector at once. So they chose to let it suffer. The parents were Jews, a fact that emphasizes the share borne by desperate poverty in the transaction, for the family tie is notoriously strong among their people.

No doubt Mott Street echoed with the blare of brass bands when poor little Carmen was carried from her bed of long suffering to her grave in Calvary. Scarce a day passes now in these tenements that does not see some little child, not rarely a new-born babe, carried to the grave in solemn state, preceded by a band playing mournful dirges and followed by a host with trailing banners, from some wretched home that barely sheltered it alive. No suspicion of the ludicrous incongruity of the show disturbs the paraders. It seems as if, but one remove from the dump, an insane passion for pomp and display, perhaps a natural reaction from the ash-barrel, lies in wait for this Italian, to which he falls a helpless victim. Not content with his own national and religious holidays and those he finds awaiting him here, he has invented or introduced a system of his own, a sort of communal celebration of proprietary saints, as it were, that has taken Mulberry Street by storm. As I understand it, the townsmen of some Italian village, when there is a sufficient number of them within reach, club together to celebrate its patron saint, and hire a band and set up a gorgeous altar in a convenient back yard. The fire-escapes overlooking it are draped with flags and transformed into reserved-seat galleries with the taste these people display under the most adverse circumstances. Crowds come and go, parading at intervals in gorgeous uniforms around the block. Admission is by the saloon-door, which nearly always holds the key to the situation, the saloonist who prompts the sudden attack of devotion being frequently a namesake of the saint and willing to go shares on the principle that he takes the profit and the saint the glory.



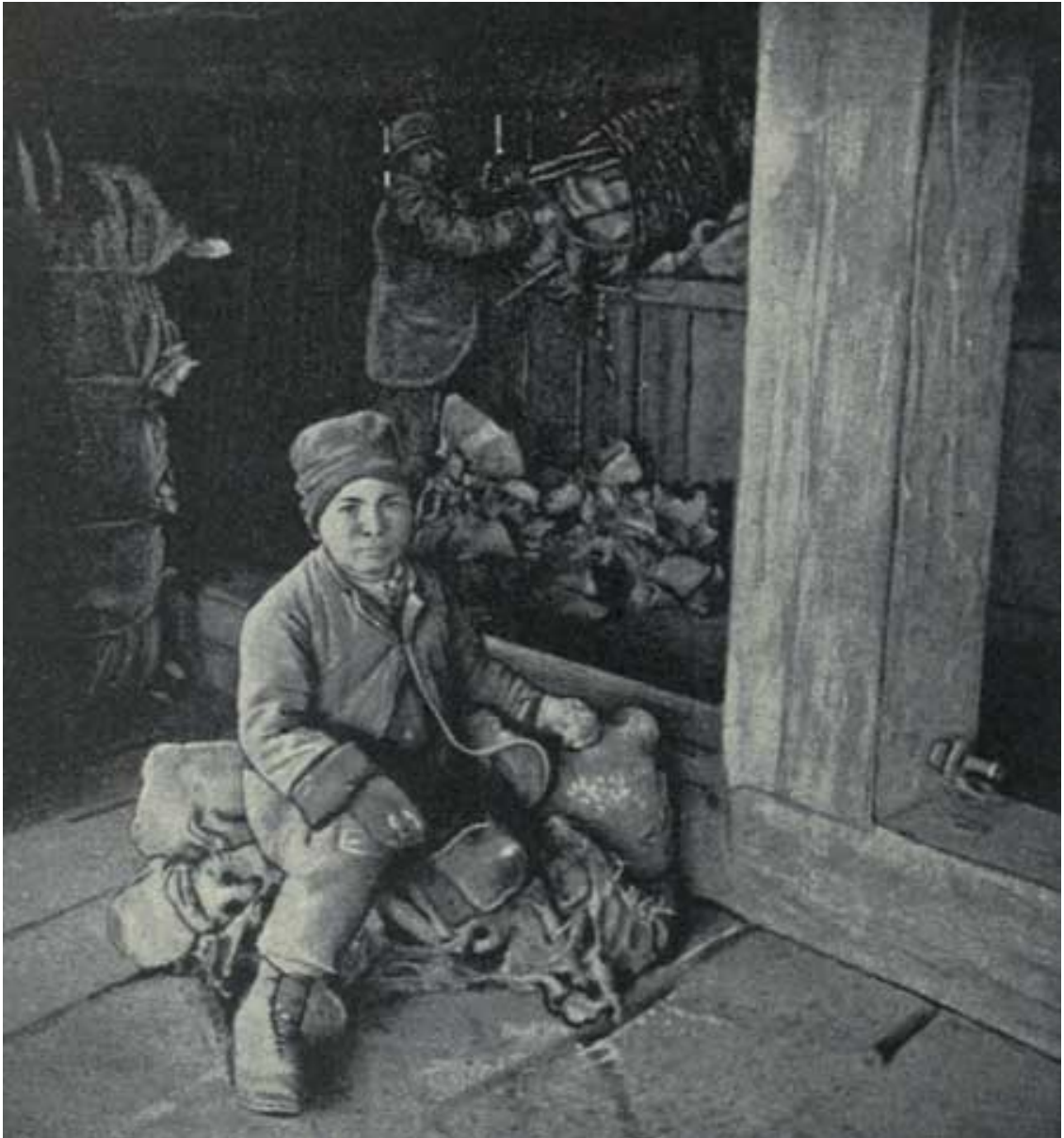
AN ITALIAN HOME UNDER A DUMP.

The partnership lasts as long as there is any profit in it, sometimes the better part of the week, during which time all work stops. If the feast panned out well, the next block is liable to be the scene of a rival celebration before the first is fairly ended. As the supply of Italian villages represented in New York is practically as inexhaustible as that of the saloons, there is no reason why Mulberry Street may not become a perennial picnic ground long before the scheme to make a park of one end of it gets under way. From the standpoint of the children there can be no objection to this, but from that of the police there is. They found themselves called upon to interfere in such a four days' celebration of St. Rocco last year, when his votaries strung cannon fire-crackers along the street the whole length of the block and set them all off at once. It was at just such a feast, in honor of the same saint, that a dozen Italians were killed a week later at Newark in the explosion of their fireworks.

It goes without saying that the children enter into this sort of thing with all the enthusiasm of their little souls. The politician watches it attentively, alert for some handle to catch his new allies by and effect their "organization." If it is a new experience for him to find the saloon put to such use, he betrays no surprise. It is his vantage ground, and whether it serve as the political bait for the Irishman, or as the religious initiative of the Italian, is of less account than that its patrons, young and old, in the end fall into his trap. Conclusive proof that the Italian has been led into camp came to me on last

St. Patrick's Day through the assurance of a certain popular clergyman, that he had observed, on a walk through the city, a number of hand-organs draped in green, evidently for the occasion.

This dump of which I have spoken as furnishing the background of the social life of Mulberry Street, has lately challenged attention as a slum annex to the Bend, with fresh horrors in store for defenceless childhood. To satisfy myself upon this point I made a personal inspection of the dumps along both rivers last winter and found the Italian crews at work there making their home in every instance among the refuse they picked from the scows. The dumps are wooden bridges raised above the level of the piers upon which they are built to allow the discharge of the carts directly into the scows moored under them. Under each bridge a cabin had been built of old boards, oil-cloth, and the like, that had found its way down on the carts; an old milk-can had been made into a fireplace without the ceremony of providing stove-pipe or draught, and here, flanked by mountains of refuse, slept the crews of from half a dozen to three times that number of men, secure from the police, who had grown tired of driving them from dump to dump and had finally let them alone. There were women at some of them, and at four dumps, three on the North River and one on the East Side, I found boys who ought to have been at school, picking bones and sorting rags. They said that they slept there, and as the men did, why should they not? It was their home. They were children of the dump, literally. All of them except one were Italians. That one was a little homeless Jew who had drifted down at first to pick cinders. Now that his mother was dead and his father in a hospital, he had become a sort of fixture there, it seemed, having made the acquaintance of the other lads.



A CHILD OF THE DUMP.

Two boys whom I found at the West Nineteenth Street dumps sorting bones were as bright lads as I had seen anywhere. One was nine years old and the other twelve. Filthy and ragged, they fitted well into their environment—even the pig I had encountered at one of the East River dumps was much the more respectable, as to appearance, of the lot—but were entirely undaunted by it. They scarcely remembered anything but the dump. Neither could read, of course. Further down the river I came upon one seemingly not over fifteen, who assured me that he was twenty-one. I thought it possible when I took a closer look at him. The dump had stunted him. He did not even know what a letter was. He had been there five years, and garbage limited his mental as well as his physical horizon.

Enough has been said to show that the lot of the poor child of the Mulberry Street Bend, or of Little Italy, is not a happy one, courageously and uncomplainingly, even joyously, though it be borne. The stories of two little lads from the region of Crosby Street always stand to me as typical of their kind. One I knew all about from personal observation and acquaintance; the other I give as I have it from his teachers in the Mott Street Industrial School, where he was a pupil in spells. It was the death of little Giuseppe that brought me to his home, a dismal den in a rear tenement down a dark and forbidding alley. I have seldom seen a worse place. There was no trace there of a striving for better

things—the tenement had stamped that out—nothing but darkness and filth and misery. From this hole Giuseppe had come to the school a mass of rags, but with that jovial gleam in his brown eyes that made him an instant favorite with the teachers as well as with the boys. One of them especially, little Mike, became attached to him, and a year after his cruel death shed tears yet, when reminded of it. Giuseppe had not been long at the school when he was sent to an Elizabeth Street tenement for a little absentee. He brought her, shivering in even worse rags than his own; it was a cold winter day.

“This girl is very poor,” he said, presenting her to the teacher, with a pitying look. It was only then that he learned that she had no mother. His own had often stood between the harsh father and him when he came home with unsold evening papers. Giuseppe fished his only penny out of his pocket—his capital for the afternoon’s trade. “I would like to give her that,” he said. After that he brought her pennies regularly from his day’s sale, and took many a thrashing for it. He undertook the general supervision of the child’s education, and saw to it that she came to school every day. Giuseppe was twelve years old.

There came an evening when business had been very bad, so bad that he thought a bed in the street healthier for him than the Crosby Street alley. With three other lads in similar straits he crawled into the iron chute that ventilated the basement of the Post-office on the Mail Street side and snuggled down on the grating. They were all asleep, when fire broke out in the cellar. The three climbed out, but Giuseppe, whose feet were wrapped in a mail-bag, was too late. He was burned to death.

The little girl still goes to the Mott Street school. She is too young to understand, and marvels why Giuseppe comes no more with his pennies. Mike cries for his friend. When, some months ago, I found myself in the Crosby Street alley, and went up to talk to Giuseppe’s parents, they would answer no questions before I had replied to one of theirs. It was thus interpreted to me by a girl from the basement, who had come in out of curiosity:

“Are youse goin’ to give us any money?” Poor Giuseppe!



PIETRO LEARNING TO MAKE AN ENGLIS' LETTER.

My other little friend was Pietro, of whom I spoke before. Perhaps of all the little life-stories of poor Italian children I have come across in the course of years—and they are many and sad, most of them—none comes nearer to the hard every-day fact of those dreary tenements than his, exceptional as was his own heavy misfortune and its effect upon the boy. I met him first in the Mulberry Street police-station, where he was interpreting the defence in a shooting case, having come in with the crowd from Jersey Street, where the thing had happened at his own door. With his rags, his dirty bare feet, and his shock of tousled hair, he seemed to fit in so entirely there of all places, and took so naturally to the ways of the police-station, that he might have escaped my notice altogether but for his maimed hand and his oddly grave yet eager face, which no smile ever crossed despite his thirteen years. Of both, his story, when I afterward came to know it, gave me full explanation. He was the oldest son of a laborer, not “borned here” as the rest of his sisters and brothers. There were four of them, six in the family besides himself, as he put it: “2 sisters, 2 broders, 1 fader, 1 modder,” subsisting on an unsteady maximum income of \$9 a week, the rent taking always the earnings of one week in four. The home thus dearly paid for was a wretched room with a dark alcove for a bed-chamber, in one of the vile old barracks that until very recently preserved to Jersey Street the memory of its former bad eminence as among the worst of the city’s slums. Pietro had gone to the Sisters’ school, blacking boots in a haphazard sort of way in his off-hours, until the year before, upon his mastering the alphabet, his education was considered to have sufficiently advanced to warrant his graduating into the ranks of the family wage-earners, that were sadly in need of recruiting. A steady job of “shinin’” was found for him in an Eighth Ward saloon, and that afternoon, just before Christmas, he came home from school and putting his books away on the shelf for the next in order to use, ran across Broadway full of joyous anticipation of his new dignity in an independent job. He

did not see the street-car until it was fairly upon him, and then it was too late. They thought he was killed, but he was only crippled for life. When, after many months, he came out of the hospital, where the company had paid his board and posed as doing a generous thing, his bright smile was gone; his “shining” was at an end, and with it his career as it had been marked out for him. He must needs take up something new, and he was bending all his energies, when I met him, toward learning to make the “Englis’ letter” with a degree of proficiency that would justify the hope of his doing something somewhere at sometime to make up for what he had lost. It was a far-off possibility yet. With the same end in view, probably, he was taking nightly writing-lessons in his mother-tongue from one of the perambulating schoolmasters who circulate in the Italian colony, peddling education cheap in lots to suit. In his sober, submissive way he was content with the prospect. It had its compensations. The boys who used to worry him, now let him alone. “When they see this,” he said, holding up his scarred and misshapen arm, “they don’t strike me no more.” Then there was his fourteen months old baby brother who was beginning to walk, and could almost “make a letter.” Pietro was much concerned about his education, anxious evidently that he should one day take his place. “I take him to school sometime,” he said, piloting him across the floor and talking softly to the child in his own melodious Italian. I watched his grave, unchanging face.

“Pietro,” I said, with a sudden yearning to know, “did you ever laugh?”

The boy glanced from the baby to me with a wistful look.

“I did wonst,” he said, quietly, and went on his way. And I would gladly have forgotten that I ever asked the question; even as Pietro had forgotten his laugh.

CHAPTER III. IN THE GREAT EAST SIDE TREADMILL

IF the sightseer finds less to engage his interest in Jewtown than in the Bend, outside of the clamoring crowds in the Chasir—the Pig-market—he will discover enough to enlist his sympathies, provided he did not leave them behind when he crossed the Bowery. The loss is his own then. There is that in the desolation of child-life in those teeming hives to make the shrivelled heart ache with compassion for its kind and throb with a new life of pain, enough to dispel some prejudices that are as old as our faith, and sometimes, I fear, a good deal stronger. The Russian exile adds to the offence of being an alien and a disturber of economic balances the worse one of being a Jew. Let those who cannot forgive this damaging fact possess their souls in patience. There is some evidence that the welcome he has received in those East Side tenements has done more than centuries of persecution could toward making him forget it himself.

The Italian who comes here gravitates naturally to the oldest and most dilapidated tenements in search of cheap rents, which he doesn't find. The Jew has another plan, characteristic of the man. He seeks out the biggest ones and makes the rent come within his means by taking in boarders, "sweating" his flat to the point of police intervention. That that point is a long way beyond human decency, let alone comfort, an instance from Ludlow Street, that came to my notice while writing this, quite clearly demonstrates. The offender was a tailor, who lived with his wife, two children, and two boarders in two rooms on the top floor. [It is always the top floor; in fifteen years of active service as a police reporter I have had to climb to the top floor five times for every one my business was further down, irrespective of where the tenement was or what kind of people lived in it. Crime, suicide, and police business generally seem to bear the same relation to the stairs in a tenement that they bear to poverty itself. The more stairs the more trouble. The deepest poverty is at home in the attic.] But this tailor; with his immediate household, including the boarders, he occupied the larger of the two rooms. The other, a bedroom eight feet square, he sublet to a second tailor and his wife; which couple, following his example as their opportunities allowed, divided the bedroom in two by hanging a curtain in the middle, took one-half for themselves and let the other half to still another tailor with a wife and child. A midnight inspection by the sanitary police was followed by the arrest of the housekeeper and the original tailor, and they were fined or warned in the police-court, I forget which. It doesn't much matter. That the real point was missed was shown by the appearance of the owner of the house, a woman, at Sanitary Headquarters, on the day following, with the charge against the policeman that he was robbing her of her tenants.

The story of inhuman packing of human swarms, of bitter poverty, of landlord greed, of sweater slavery, of darkness and squalor and misery, which these tenements have to tell, is equalled, I suppose, nowhere in a civilized land. Despite the prevalence of the boarder, who is usually a married man, come over alone the better to be able to prepare the way for the family, the census³ shows that fifty-four per cent. of the entire population of immigrant Jews were children, or under age. Every steamer has added to their number since, and judging from the sights one sees daily in the office of the United Hebrew Charities, and from the general appearance of Ludlow Street, the proportion of children has suffered no decrease. Let the reader who would know for himself what they are like, and what their chances are, take that street some evening from Hester Street down and observe what he sees going on there. Not that it is the only place where he can find them. The census I spoke of embraced forty-five streets in the Seventh, Tenth, and Thirteenth Wards. But at that end of Ludlow Street the tenements

³ The census referred to in this chapter was taken for a special purpose, by a committee of prominent Hebrews, in August, 1890, and was very searching.

are taller and the crowds always denser than anywhere else. Let him watch the little pedlars hawking their shoe-strings, their matches, and their penny paper-pads, with the restless energy that seems so strangely out of proportion to the reward it reaps; the half-grown children staggering under heavy bundles of clothes from the sweater's shop; the ragamuffins at their fretful play, play yet, discouraged though it be by the nasty surroundings—thank goodness, every year brings its Passover with the scrubbing brigade to Ludlow Street, and the dirt is shifted from the houses to the streets once anyhow; if it does find its way back, something may be lost on the way—the crowding, the pushing for elbow-room, the wails of bruised babies that keep falling down-stairs, or rolling off the stoop, and the raids of angry mothers swooping down upon their offspring and distributing thumps right and left to pay for the bruises, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Whose eye, whose tooth, is of less account in Jewtown than that the capital put out bears lawful interest in kind. What kind of interest may society some day expect to reap from Ghettos like these, where even the sunny temper of childhood is soured by want and woe, or smothered in filth? It is a long time since I have heard a good honest laugh, a child's gleeful shout, in Ludlow Street. Angry cries, jeers, enough. They are as much part of the place as the dirty pavements; but joyous, honest laughs, like soap and water, are at a premium there.

But children laugh because they are happy. They are not happy in Ludlow Street. Nobody is except the landlord. Why should they be? Born to toil and trouble, they claim their heritage early and part with it late. There is even less time than there is room for play in Jewtown, good reason why the quality of the play is poor. There is work for the weakest hands, a step for the smallest feet in the vast tread-mill of these East Side homes. A thing is worth there what it will bring. All other considerations, ambitions, desires, yield to that. Education pays as an investment, and therefore the child is sent to school. The moment his immediate value as a worker overbalances the gain in prospect by keeping him at his books, he goes to the shop. The testimony of Jewish observers, who have had quite unusual opportunities for judging, is that the average age at which these children leave school for good is rather below twelve than beyond it, by which time their work at home, helping their parents, has qualified them to earn wages that will more than pay for their keep. They are certainly on the safe side in their reckoning, if the children are not. The legal age for shop employment is fourteen. On my visits among the homes, workshops, and evening schools of Jewtown, I was always struck by the number of diminutive wage-earners who were invariably “just fourteen.” It was clearly not the child which the tenement had dwarfed in their case, but the memory or the moral sense of the parents.

If, indeed, the shop were an exchange for the home; if the child quit the one upon entering the other, there might be little objection to make; but too often they are two names for the same thing; where they are not, the shop is probably preferable, bad as that may be. When, in the midnight hour, the noise of the sewing-machine was stilled at last, I have gone the rounds of Ludlow and Hester and Essex Streets among the poorest of the Russian Jews, with the sanitary police, and counted often four, five, and even six of the little ones in a single bed, sometimes a shake-down on the hard floor, often a pile of half-finished clothing brought home from the sweater, in the stuffy rooms of their tenements. In one I visited very lately, the only bed was occupied by the entire family lying lengthwise and crosswise, literally in layers, three children at the feet, all except a boy of ten or twelve, for whom there was no room. He slept with his clothes on to keep him warm, in a pile of rags just inside the door. It seemed to me impossible that families of children could be raised at all in such dens as I had my daily and nightly walks in. And yet the vital statistics and all close observation agree in allotting to these Jews even an unusual degree of good health. The records of the Sanitary Bureau show that while the Italians have the highest death-rate, the mortality in the lower part of the Tenth Ward, of which Ludlow Street is the heart and type, is the lowest in the city. Even the baby death-rate is very low. But for the fact that the ravages of diphtheria, croup, and measles run up the record in the houses occupied entirely by tailors—in other words, in the sweater district, where contagion always runs

riot⁴—the Tenth Ward would seem to be the healthiest spot in the city, as well as the dirtiest and the most crowded. The temperate habits of the Jew and his freedom from enfeebling vices generally must account for this, along with his marvellous vitality. I cannot now recall ever having known a Jewish drunkard. On the other hand, I have never come across a Prohibitionist among them. The absence of the one renders the other superfluous.



“SLEPT IN THAT CELLAR FOUR YEARS.”

It was only last winter I had occasion to visit repeatedly a double tenement at the lower end of Ludlow Street, which the police census showed to contain 297 tenants, 45 of whom were under five

⁴ Dr. Roger S. Tracy's report of the vital statistics for 1891 shows that, while the general death-rate of the city was 25.96 per 1,000 of the population—that of adults (over five years) 17.13, and the baby death-rate (under five years) 93.21—in the Italian settlement in the west half of the Fourteenth Ward the record stood as follows: general death-rate, 33.52; adult death-rate, 16.29; and baby death-rate, 150.52. In the Italian section of the Fourth Ward it stood: general death-rate, 34.88; adult death-rate, 21.29; baby death-rate 119.02. In the sweaters district in the lower part of the Tenth Ward the general death rate was 16.23; the adult death rate, 7.59; and the baby death rate 61.15. Dr. Tracy adds: “The death-rate from phthisis was highest in houses entirely occupied by cigarmakers (Bohemians), and lowest in those entirely occupied by tailors. On the other hand, the death-rates from diphtheria and croup and measles were highest in houses entirely occupied by tailors.”

years of age, not counting 3 pedlars who slept in the mouldy cellar, where the water was ankle deep on the mud floor. The feeblest ray of daylight never found its way down there, the hatches having been carefully covered with rags and matting; but freshets often did. Sometimes the water rose to the height of a foot, and never quite soaked away in the driest season. It was an awful place, and by the light of my candle the three, with their unkempt beards and hair and sallow faces, looked more like hideous ghosts than living men. Yet they had slept there among and upon decaying fruit and wreckage of all sorts from the tenement for over three years, according to their own and the housekeeper's statements. There had been four. One was then in the hospital, but not because of any ill effect the cellar had had upon him. He had been run over in the street and was making the most of his vacation, charging it up to the owner of the wagon, whom he was getting ready to sue for breaking his leg. Up-stairs, especially in the rear tenement, I found the scene from the cellar repeated with variations. In one room a family of seven, including the oldest daughter, a young woman of eighteen, and her brother, a year older than she, slept in a common bed made on the floor of the kitchen, and manifested scarcely any concern at our appearance. A complaint to the Board of Health resulted in an overhauling that showed the tenement to be unusually bad even for that bad spot; but when we came to look up its record, from the standpoint of the vital statistics, we discovered that not only had there not been a single death in the house during the whole year, but on the third floor lived a woman over a hundred years old, who had been there a long time. I was never more surprised in my life, and while we laughed at it, I confess it came nearer to upsetting my faith in the value of statistics than anything I had seen till then. And yet I had met with similar experiences, if not quite so striking, often enough to convince me that poverty and want beget their own power to resist the evil influences of their worst surroundings. I was at a loss how to put this plainly to the good people who often asked wonderingly why the children of the poor one saw in the street seemed generally such a thriving lot, until a slip of Mrs. Partington's discriminating tongue did it for me: "Manured to the soil." That is it. In so far as it does not merely seem so—one does not see the sick and suffering—that puts it right.

Whatever the effect upon the physical health of the children, it cannot be otherwise, of course, than that such conditions should corrupt their morals. I have the authority of a distinguished rabbi, whose field and daily walk are among the poorest of his people, to support me in the statement that the moral tone of the young girls is distinctly lower than it was. The entire absence of privacy in their homes and the foul contact of the sweaters' shops, where men and women work side by side from morning till night, scarcely half clad in the hot summer weather, does for the girls what the street completes in the boy. But for the patriarchal family life of the Jew that is his strongest virtue, their ruin would long since have been complete. It is that which pilots him safely through shoals upon which the Gentile would have been inevitably wrecked. It is that which keeps the almshouse from casting its shadow over Ludlow Street to add to its gloom. It is the one quality which redeems, and on the Sabbath eve when he gathers his household about his board, scant though the fare be, dignifies the darkest slum of Jewtown.

How strong is this attachment to home and kindred that makes the Jew cling to the humblest hearth and gather his children and his children's children about it, though grinding poverty leave them only a bare crust to share, I saw in the case of little Jette Brodsky, who strayed away from her own door, looking for her papa. They were strangers and ignorant and poor, so that weeks went by before they could make their loss known and get a hearing, and meanwhile Jette, who had been picked up and taken to Police Headquarters, had been hidden away in an asylum, given another name when nobody came to claim her, and had been quite forgotten. But in the two years that passed before she was found at last, her empty chair stood ever by her father's, at the family board, and no Sabbath eve but heard his prayer for the restoration of their lost one. It happened once that I came in on a Friday evening at the breaking of bread, just as the four candles upon the table had been lit with the Sabbath blessing upon the home and all it sheltered. Their light fell on little else than empty plates and anxious faces; but in the patriarchal host who arose and bade the guest welcome with a dignity

a king might have envied I recognized with difficulty the humble pedlar I had known only from the street and from the police office, where he hardly ventured beyond the door.

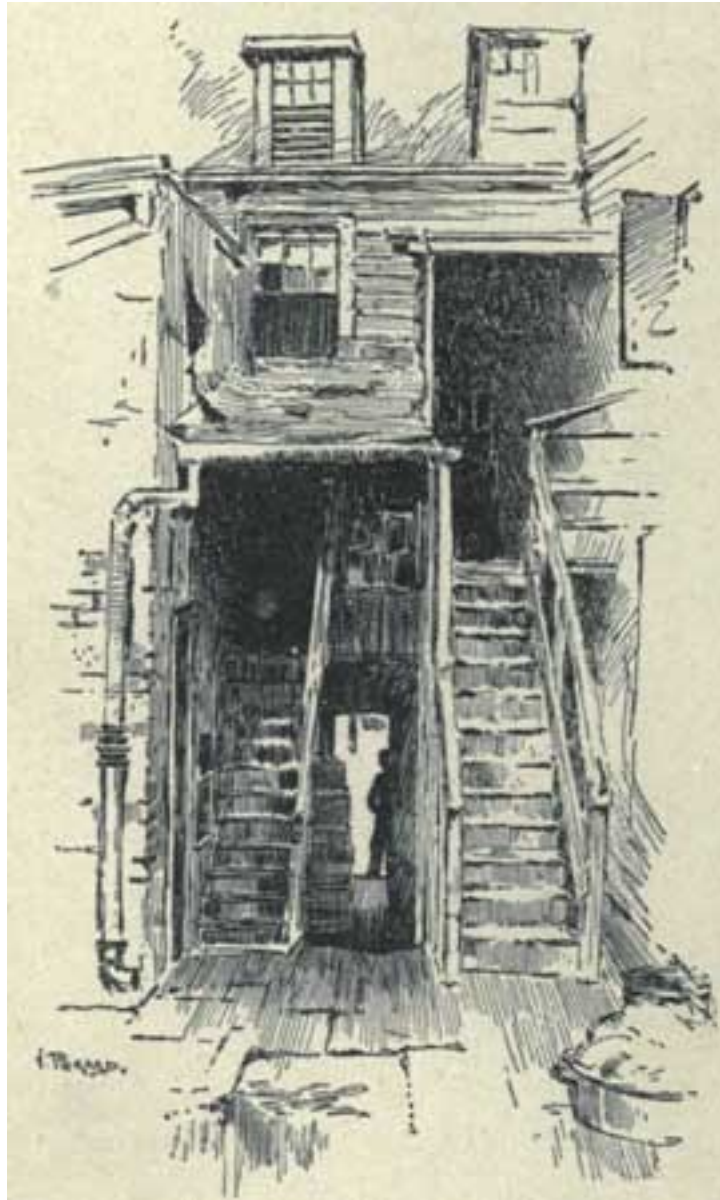
But the tenement that has power to turn purest gold to dross digs a pit for the Jew even through this virtue that has been his shield against its power for evil. In its atmosphere it turns too often to a curse by helping to crowd his lodgings, already overflowing, beyond the point of official forbearance. Then follow orders to “reduce” the number of tenants that mean increased rent, which the family cannot pay, or the breaking up of the home. An appeal to avert such a calamity came to the Board of Health recently from one of the refugee tenements. The tenant was a man with a houseful of children, too full for the official scale as applied to the flat, and his plea was backed by the influence of his only friend in need—the family undertaker. There was something so cruelly suggestive in the idea that the laugh it raised died without an echo.

The census of the sweaters’ district gave a total of 23,405 children under six years, and 21,285 between six and fourteen, in a population of something over a hundred and eleven thousand Russian, Polish, and Roumanian Jews in the three wards mentioned; 15,567 are set down as “children over fourteen.” According to the record, scarce one-third of the heads of families had become naturalized citizens, though the average of their stay in the United States was between nine and ten years. The very language of our country was to them a strange tongue, understood and spoken by only 15,837 of the fifty thousand and odd adults enumerated. Seven thousand of the rest spoke only German, five thousand Russian, and over twenty-one thousand, could only make themselves understood to each other, never to the world around them, in the strange jargon that passes for Hebrew on the East Side, but is really a mixture of a dozen known dialects and tongues and of some that were never known or heard anywhere else. In the census it is down as just what it is—jargon, and nothing else.

Here, then, are conditions as unfavorable to the satisfactory, even safe, development of child life in the chief American city as could well be imagined; more unfavorable even than with the Bohemians, who have at least their faith in common with us, if safety lies in the merging through the rising generation of the discordant elements into a common harmony. A community set apart, set sharply against the rest in every clashing interest, social and industrial; foreign in language, in faith, and in tradition; repaying dislike with distrust; expanding under the new relief from oppression in the unpopular qualities of greed and contentiousness fostered by ages of tyranny unresistingly borne. Clearly, if ever there was need of moulding any material for the citizenship that awaits it, it is with this; and if ever trouble might be expected to beset the effort, it might be looked for here. But it is not so. The record shows that of the sixty thousand children, including the fifteen thousand young men and women over fourteen who earn a large share of the money that pays for rent and food, and the twenty-three thousand toddlers under six years, fully one-third go to school. Deducting the two extremes, little more than a thousand children of between six and fourteen years, that is, of school age, were put down as receiving no instruction at the time the census was taken; but it is not at all likely that this condition was permanent in the case of the greater number of these. The poorest Hebrew knows—the poorer he is, the better he knows it—that knowledge is power, and power as the means of getting on in the world that has spurned him so long is what his soul yearns for. He lets no opportunity slip to obtain it. Day and night schools are crowded by his children, who are everywhere forging ahead of their Christian school-fellows, taking more than their share of prizes and promotions. Every synagogue, every second rear tenement or dark back yard, has its school and its school-master with his scourge to intercept those who might otherwise escape. In the census there are put down 251 Jewish teachers as living in these tenements, a large number of whom conduct such schools, so that, as the children form always more than one-half of the population in the Jewish quarter, the evidence is after all that even here, with the tremendous inpour of a destitute, ignorant people, and with the undoubted employment of child labor on a large scale, the cause of progress along the safe line is holding its own.



A SYNAGOGUE SCHOOL IN A HESTER STREET TENEMENT.



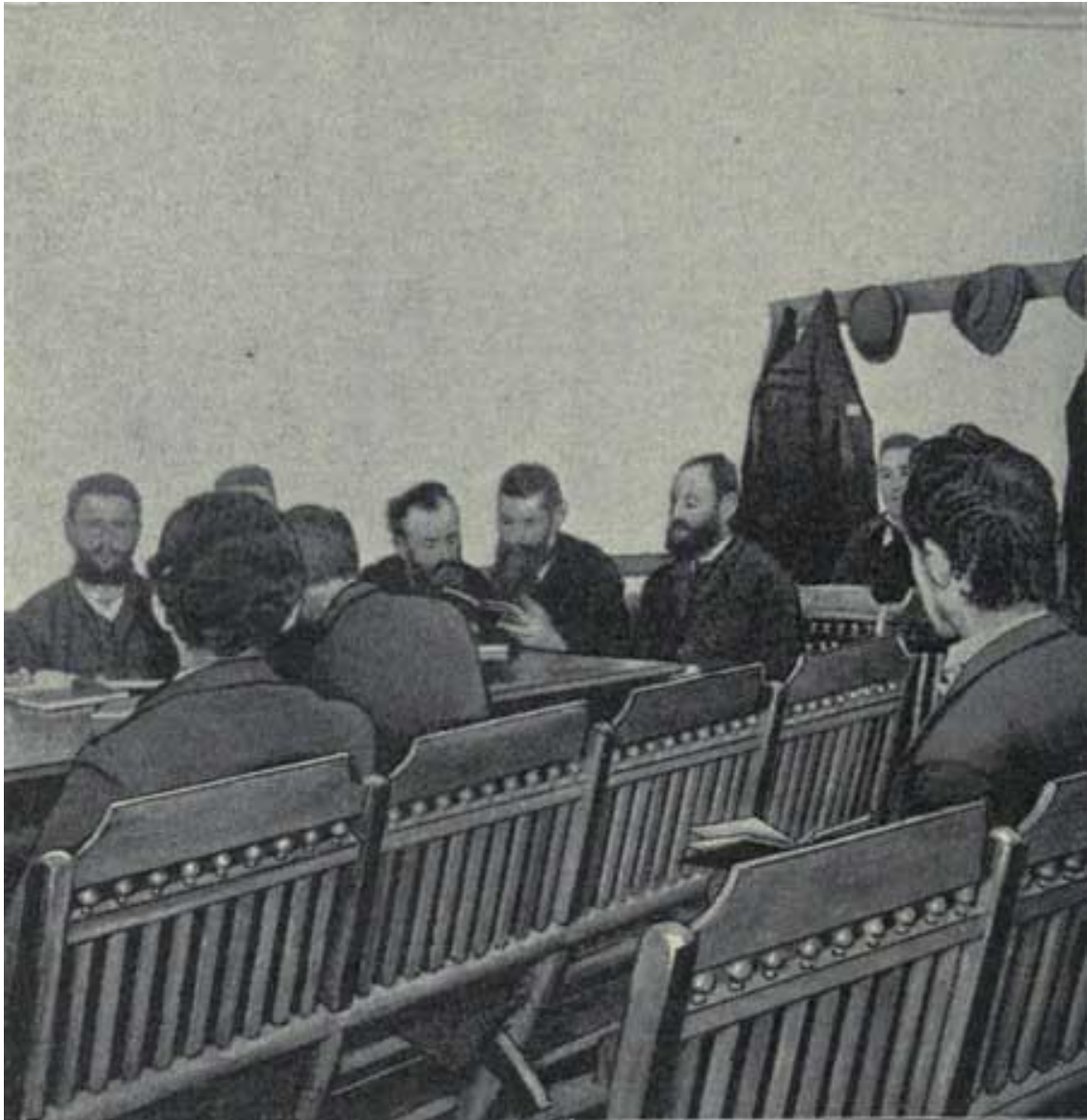
THE BACKSTAIRS TO LEARNING.
(ENTRANCE TO A TALMUD SCHOOL IN HESTER STREET.)

It is true that these tenement schools that absorb several thousand children are not what they might be from a sanitary point of view. It is also true that heretofore nothing but Hebrew and the Talmud have been taught there. But to the one evil the health authorities have recently been aroused; of the other, the wise and patriotic men who are managing the Baron de Hirsch charity are making a useful handle by gathering the teachers in and setting them to learn English. Their new knowledge will soon be reflected in their teaching, and the Hebrew schools become primary classes in the system of public education. The school in a Hester Street tenement that is shown in the picture is a fair specimen of its kind—by no means one of the worst—and so is the back yard behind it, that serves as the children's play-ground, with its dirty mud-puddles, its slop-barrels and broken flags, and its foul tenement-house surroundings. Both fall in well with the home-lives and environment of the unhappy little wretches whose daily horizon they limit. They get there the first instruction they receive in the only tongues with which the teachers are familiar, Hebrew and the Jargon, in the only studies which they are competent to teach, the Talmud and the Prophets. Until they are six years old they are under the "Melammed's" rod all day; after that only in the interval between public school and supper. It is

practically the only religious instruction the poorest Jewish children receive, but it is claimed by some of their rabbis that they had better have none at all. The daily transition, they say, from the bright and, by comparison, æsthetically beautiful public school-room to these dark and inhospitable dens, with which the faith that has brought so many miseries upon their race comes to be inseparably associated in the child's mind as he grows up, tends to reflections that breed indifference, if not infidelity, in the young. It would not be strange if this were so. If the schools, through this process, also help pave the way for the acceptance of the Messiah heretofore rejected, which I greatly doubt, it may be said to be the only instance in which the East Side tenement has done its tenants a good Christian turn.

There is no more remarkable class in any school than that of these Melammedim,⁵ that may be seen in session any week day forenoon, save on Saturday, of course, in the Hebrew Institute in East Broadway. Old bearded men struggling through the intricacies of the first reader, "a cow, a cat," and all the rest of childish learning, with a rapt attention and a concentration of energy as if they were devoting themselves to the most heroic of tasks, which, indeed, they are, for the good that may come of it cannot easily be overestimated. As an educational measure it may be said to be getting down to first principles with a vengeance. When the reader has been mastered, brief courses in the history of the United States, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution follow. The test of proficiency in the pupil is his ability to translate the books of the Old Testament, with which he is familiar, of course, from Hebrew into English, and *vice versa*. The Melammed is rarely a dull scholar. No one knows better than he, to whom it has come only in the evening of his hard life, the value of the boon that is offered him. One of the odd group that was deep in the lesson of the day had five children at home, whom he had struggled to bring up on an income of ten dollars a week. The oldest, a bright boy who had graduated with honor, despite the patch on his trousers, from the public school, was ambitious to go to college, and the father had saved and pinched in a thousand ways to gratify his desire. One of the managers of the Institute who knew how the family were starving on half rations, had offered the father, a short time before, to get the boy employment in a store at three dollars a week. It was a tremendous temptation, for the money was badly needed at home. But the old man put it resolutely away from him. "No," he said, "I must send him to college. He shall have the chance that was denied his father." And he was as good as his word. And so was the lad, a worthy son of a worthy father. When I met him he had already proved himself a long way the best student in his class.

⁵ Meaning "teachers."



CLASS OF MELAMMEDIM LEARNING ENGLISH.

In other class-rooms in the great building, which is devoted entirely to the cause of Americanizing the young Russian immigrants, hundreds of children get daily their first lessons in English and in patriotism in simultaneous doses. The two are inseparable in the beneficent plan of their instructors. Their effort is to lay hold of the children of the new-comers at once; tender years are no barrier. For the toddlers there are kindergarten classes, with play the street has had no chance to soil. And while playing they learn to speak the strange new tongue and to love the pretty flag with the stars that is everywhere in sight. The night school gathers in as many as can be corralled of those who are big enough, if not old enough, to work. The ease and rapidity with which they learn is equalled only by their good behavior and close attention while in school. There is no whispering and no rioting at these desks, no trial of strength with the teacher, as in the Italian ragged schools, where the question who is boss has always to be settled before the business of the school can proceed. These children come to learn. Even from the Christian schools in the district that gather in their share comes the same testimony. All the disturbance they report was made by their elders, outside the school, in the street. In the Hebrew Institute the average of absence for all causes was, during the first year, less than eight per cent. of the registered attendance, and in nearly every case sickness furnished a valid excuse. In a year and a half the principal had only been called upon three times to reprove an

obstreperous pupil, in a total of 1,500. While I was visiting one of the day classes a little girl who had come from Moscow only two months before presented herself with her green vaccination card from the steamer. She understood already perfectly the questions put to her and was able to answer most of them in English. Boys of eight and nine years who had come over as many months before, knowing only the jargon of their native village, read to me whole pages from the reader with almost perfect accent, and did sums on the blackboard that would have done credit to the average boy of twelve in our public schools. Figuring is always their strong point. They would not be Jews if it was not.

In the evening classes the girls of “fourteen” flourished, as everywhere in Jewtown. There were many who were much older, and some who were a long way yet from that safe goal. One sober-faced little girl, who wore a medal for faithful attendance and who could not have been much over ten, if as old as that, said that she “went out dressmaking” and so helped her mother. Another, who was even smaller and had been here just three weeks, yet understood what was said to her, explained in broken German that she was learning to work at “Blumen” in a Grand Street shop, and would soon be able to earn wages that would help support the family of four children, of whom she was the oldest. The girl who sat in the seat with her was from a Hester Street tenement. Her clothes showed that she was very poor. She read very fluently on demand a story about a big dog that tried to run away, or something, “when he had a chance.” When she came to translate what she had read into German, which many of the Russian children understand, she got along until she reached the word “chance.” There she stopped, bewildered. It was the one idea of which her brief life had no embodiment, the thing it had altogether missed.

The Declaration of Independence half the children knew by heart before they had gone over it twice. To help them along it is printed in the school-books with a Hebrew translation and another in Jargon, a “Jewish-German,” in parallel columns and the explanatory notes in Hebrew. The Constitution of the United States is treated in the same manner, but it is too hard, or too wearisome, for the children. They “hate” it, says the teacher, while the Declaration of Independence takes their fancy at sight. They understand it in their own practical way, and the spirit of the immortal document suffers no loss from the annotations of Ludlow Street, if its dignity is sometimes slightly rumpled.

“When,” said the teacher to one of the pupils, a little working-girl from an Essex Street sweater’s shop, “the Americans could no longer put up with the abuse of the English who governed the colonies, what occurred then?”

“A strike!” responded the girl, promptly. She had found it here on coming and evidently thought it a national institution upon which the whole scheme of our government was founded.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

A DECLARATION BY THE REPRESENTATIVES
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
IN CONGRESS ASSEMBLED.

ENGLISH.

WHEN, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident—that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the

קריאת דרור.

גלוי דעת באי כ הארצות
הברית באסיפתם
בקונגרים.

HEBREW.

בהשתלשלות קורות האדם, אם ימצאו בני עם לנחון להם לנתק את מוסדות המדינות שחברו אותם לעם אחר, להיות עומדים, כתוך אדירי ממשלום התבל, במצב מיוחד ושווה, אשר זכו לפי חוקות הטבע וחקי אלהי הטבע, הנה רגש הכבוד לדעות בני האדם מחייבם להודיע את הסיבות שהכריחם להפרידה.

מאמינים אנחנו שהדברים האמיתיים האלה אינם צריכים ראיה—שכל בני אדם נוצרו בצלם אחד, ושרכשו מיוצרים זכויות ידועות לקנן עולם, ובכללן הם חיים, הרוח ודרישת אשרם; ולהגן על הזכויות האלה נוסדו ממשלות בארץ, והעז והכח בא להן ברצון בני בני האדם אשר עילתם ימשולו; ובכל עת אשר סדר הממשלה ישהית ויפריע את התכלית הזאת, וזו הרשות בידי בני העם

<p>„דעקלער יישאן אַך אינדעפענדענס“ איינע ערקלערונג דער רעפרעזענטאנטען פאן דיע פער אייניגטע שטאאטען, אלס זיא ווארען פערזאמעל אין קאנגרעס.</p>	<p>הערות. NOTES. —</p>
<p>JEWISH-GERMAN.</p>	<p>HEBREW.</p>
<p>ווען אין פערלויף דער עראייניגטע איין פאלק פיר נעטיג פירדעט אופצולעזען דיא פאליטישע בענדער וועלכע האבען זיין פארקניפט מיט איינען אנדערן פאלק, אונד אנצונעהמען דיא זעלבסטשטענדיגע אונד גלייכע שטעללונג צווישען דיא גראסמעכטיגע רעגירונגען דער וועלט, צו וועלכער גלייכהייט זיין זינד בערעכט טינט לויט דאס געזעץ פאן דיא נאטור אונד דאס געזעץ פאן נאטט, זא פערלאנגט דיא אכטונג צו דיא מיינונג פאן מענשען, דאס זיין זאללען אנגעבען דיע אירזאכען וועלכע האבען זיין געצוואונגען צו דיזער טרענונג.</p>	<p>לפני המרידה היו מושבות אנגליה הנחשבות עתה לארצות הברית. תחת שלש הנהגות שונות: מדינות הכלך (פראווינץ או ראיאל), מדינות הזכות (משארטער) ומדינות אדונים (פראפריי- עטאר).</p>
<p>ווי גלויבען דאס קיינער קאן דיזע וואהרע גירודזאטצען אומשטויסען: — דאס אללע מעג שען זינד גלייך געבארען, דאס דער בעזעפפער האט זיין מיט געוויסע אייגענע רעכטען פער שאפט, אונד צו דיזע געהערען: לעבען, פריי הייט, אונד דאס שטרעבען גליקליך צו זיין; דאס אום דיזע רעכטע צו זיכערן זינד צווישען דיא פעלקער רעגירונגען אנגעשטעלט וועלכע ערהאלטען איהרע מאכט אונד קראפט פאן דען פאלק אויף וועלכע זיין רעגירען: דאס ווען אירגענד וועלכע האנדלונגען דער רעגירונג וואלען דיזע גירודזאטצען שארען טוהן, האט דאס פאלק דאס רעכט, דיזעלכע צו ענדערן</p>	<p>מדינות המלך היו המושבות אשר החנהו תחת ההיגה הפריטית של מלכת בריטניה, ועליהן נחשבו נוהמפסיר, ניוורק, נודזער זי, ווירדיניה, קארולינה הצפונית והדרומית ווארדיי.</p> <p>מדינות הזכות היו תחת השגחת הכלכות ולהן זכויות מיוחדות, עליהן נחשבו מאד סאטשועטס, קאנעקטיקוט ווארדיאילאנד.</p>

It was curious to find the low voices of the children, particularly the girls, an impediment to instruction in this school. They could sometimes hardly be heard for the noise in the street, when the heat made it necessary to have the windows open. But shrillness is not characteristic even of the Pig-market when it is noisiest and most crowded. Some of the children had sweet singing voices. One especially, a boy with straight red hair and a freckled face, chanted in a plaintive minor key the One Hundred and Thirtieth Psalm, "Out of the depths" etc., and the harsh gutturals of the Hebrew became sweet harmony until the sad strain brought tears to our eyes.

The dirt of Ludlow Street is all-pervading and the children do not escape it. Rather, it seems to have a special affinity for them, or they for the dirt. The duty of imparting the fundamental lesson

of cleanliness devolves upon a special school officer, a matron, who makes the round of the classes every morning with her alphabet: a cake of soap, a sponge, and a pitcher of water, and picks out those who need to be washed. One little fellow expressed his disapproval of this programme in the first English composition he wrote, as follows:

Indians.

*Indians do not want to wash
because they like not water. I
wish I was a Indian.*

Despite this hint, the lesson is enforced upon the children, but there is no evidence that it bears fruit in their homes to any noticeable extent, as is the case with the Italians I spoke of. The homes are too hopeless, the grind too unceasing. The managers know it and have little hope of the older immigrants. It is toward getting hold of their children that they bend every effort, and with a success that shows how easily these children can be moulded for good or for bad. Nor do they let go their grasp of them until the job is finished. The United Hebrew Charities maintain trade-schools for those who show aptness for such work, and a very creditable showing they make. The public school receives all those who graduate from what might be called the American primary in East Broadway.

The smoky torches on many hucksters' carts threw their uncertain yellow light over Hester Street as I watched the children troop homeward from school one night. Eight little pedlers hawking their wares had stopped under the lamp on the corner to bargain with each other for want of cash customers. They were engaged in a desperate but vain attempt to cheat one of their number who was deaf and dumb. I bought a quire of note-paper of the mute for a cent and instantly the whole crew beset me in a fierce rivalry, to which I put a hasty end by buying out the little mute's poor stock—ten cents covered it all—and after he had counted out the quires, gave it back to him. At this act of unheard-of generosity the seven, who had remained to witness the transfer, stood speechless. As I went my way, with a sudden common impulse they kissed their hands at me, all rivalry forgotten in their admiration, and kept kissing, bowing, and salaaming until I was out of sight. "Not bad children," I mused as I went along, "good stuff in them, whatever their faults." I thought of the poor boy's stock, of the cheapness of it, and then it occurred to me that he had charged me just twice as much for the paper I gave him back as for the penny quire I bought. But when I went back to give him a piece of my mind the boys were gone.

CHAPTER IV. TONY AND HIS TRIBE

I HAVE a little friend somewhere in Mott Street whose picture comes up before me. I wish I could show it to the reader, but to photograph Tony is one of the unattained ambitions of my life. He is one of the whimsical birds one sees when he hasn't got a gun, and then never long enough in one place to give one a chance to get it. A ragged coat three sizes at least too large for the boy, though it has evidently been cropped to meet his case, hitched by its one button across a bare brown breast; one sleeve patched on the under side with a piece of sole-leather that sticks out straight, refusing to be reconciled; trousers that boasted a seat once, but probably not while Tony has worn them; two left boots tied on with packing twine, bare legs in them the color of the leather, heel and toe showing through; a shock of sunburnt hair struggling through the rent in the old straw hat; two frank, laughing eyes under its broken brim—that is Tony.

He stood over the gutter the day I met him, reaching for a handful of mud with which to “paste” another hoodlum who was shouting defiance from across the street. He did not see me, and when my hand touched his shoulder his whole little body shrank with a convulsive shudder, as from an expected blow. Quick as a flash he dodged, and turning, out of reach, confronted the unknown enemy, gripping tight his handful of mud. I had a bunch of white pinks which a young lady had given me half an hour before for one of my little friends. “They are yours,” I said, and held them out to him, “take them.”

Doubt, delight, and utter bewilderment struggled in the boy's face. He said not one word, but when he had brought his mind to believe that it really was so, clutched the flowers with one eager, grimy fist, held them close against his bare breast, and, shielding them with the other, ran as fast as his legs could carry him down the street. Not far; fifty feet away he stopped short, looked back, hesitated a moment, then turned on his track as fast as he had come. He brought up directly in front of me, a picture a painter would have loved, ragamuffin that he was, with the flowers held so tightly against his brown skin, scraped out with one foot and made one of the funniest little bows.

“Thank you,” he said. Then he was off. Down the street I saw squads of children like himself running out to meet him. He darted past and through them all, never stopping, but pointing back my way, and in a minute there bore down upon me a crowd of little ones, running breathless with desperate entreaty: “Oh, mister! give *me* a flower.” Hot tears of grief and envy—human passions are much the same in rags and in silks—fell when they saw I had no more. But by that time Tony was safe.

And where did he run so fast? For whom did he shield the “posy” so eagerly, so faithfully, that ragged little wretch that was all mud and patches? I found out afterward when I met him giving his sister a ride in a dismantled tomato-crate, likely enough “hooked” at the grocer's. It was for his mother. In the dark hovel he called home, to the level of which all it sheltered had long since sunk through the brutal indifference of a drunken father, my lady's pinks blossomed, and, long after they were withered and yellow, still stood in their cracked jar, visible token of something that had entered Tony's life and tenement with sweetening touch that day for the first time. Alas! for the last, too, perhaps. I saw Tony off and on for a while and then he was as suddenly lost as he was found, with all that belonged to him. Moved away—put out, probably—and, except the assurance that they were still somewhere in Mott Street, even the saloon could give me no clue to them.

I gained Tony's confidence, almost, in the time I knew him. There was a little misunderstanding between us that had still left a trace of embarrassment when Tony disappeared. It was when I asked him one day, while we were not yet “solid,” if he ever went to school. He said “sometimes,” and backed off. I am afraid Tony lied that time. The evidence was against him. It was different with little Katie, my nine-year-old housekeeper of the sober look. Her I met in the Fifty-second Street Industrial School, where she picked up such crumbs of learning as were for her in the intervals of

her housework. The serious responsibilities of life had come early to Katie. On the top floor of a tenement in West Forty-ninth Street she was keeping house for her older sister and two brothers, all of whom worked in the hammock factory, earning from \$4.50 to \$1.50 a week. They had moved together when their mother died and the father brought home another wife. Their combined income was something like \$9.50 a week, and the simple furniture was bought on instalments. But it was all clean, if poor. Katie did the cleaning and the cooking of the plain kind. They did not run much to fancy cooking, I guess. She scrubbed and swept and went to school, all as a matter of course, and ran the house generally, with an occasional lift from the neighbors in the tenement, who were, if anything, poorer than they. The picture shows what a sober, patient, sturdy little thing she was, with that dull life wearing on her day by day. At the school they loved her for her quiet, gentle ways. She got right up when asked and stood for her picture without a question and without a smile.



“I SCRUBS.”—KATIE, WHO KEEPS HOUSE IN WEST FORTY-NINTH STREET.

“What kind of work do you do?” I asked, thinking to interest her while I made ready.

“I scrubs,” she replied, promptly, and her look guaranteed that what she scrubbed came out clean.

Katie was one of the little mothers whose work never ends. Very early the cross of her sex had been laid upon the little shoulders that bore it so stoutly. Tony's, as likely as not, would never begin. There were ear-marks upon the boy that warranted the suspicion. They were the ear-marks of the street to which his care and education had been left. The only work of which it heartily approves is that done by other people. I came upon Tony once under circumstances that foreshadowed his career with tolerable distinctness. He was at the head of a gang of little shavers like himself, none over eight or nine, who were swaggering around in a ring, in the middle of the street, rigged out in war-paint and hen-feathers, shouting as they went: "Whoop! We are the Houston Streeters." They meant no harm and they were not doing any just then. It was all in the future, but it was there, and no mistake. The game which they were then rehearsing was one in which the policeman who stood idly swinging his club on the corner would one day take a hand, and not always the winning one.

The fortunes of Tony and Katie, simple and soon told as they are, encompass as between the covers of a book the whole story of the children of the poor, the story of the bad their lives struggle vainly to conquer, and the story of the good that crops out in spite of it. Sickness, that always finds the poor unprepared and soon leaves them the choice of beggary or starvation, hard times, the death of the bread-winner, or the part played by the growler in the poverty of the home, may vary the theme for the elders; for the children it is the same sad story, with little variation, and that rarely of a kind to improve. Happily for their peace of mind, they are the least concerned about it. In New York, at least, the poor children are not the stunted repining lot we have heard of as being hatched in cities abroad. Stunted in body perhaps. It was said of Napoleon that he shortened the average stature of the Frenchman one inch by getting all the tall men killed in his wars. The tenement has done that for New York. Only the other day one of the best known clergymen in the city, who tries to attract the boys to his church on the East Side by a very practical interest in them, and succeeds admirably in doing it, told me that the drill-master of his cadet corps was in despair because he could barely find two or three among half a hundred lads verging on manhood, over five feet six inches high. It is queer what different ways there are of looking at a thing. My medical friend finds in the fact that poverty stunts the body what he is pleased to call a beautiful provision of nature to prevent unnecessary suffering: there is less for the poverty to pinch then. It is self-defence, he says, and he claims that the consensus of learned professional opinion is with him. Yet, when this shortened sufferer steals a loaf of bread to make the pinching bear less hard on what is left, he is called a thief, thrown into jail, and frowned upon by the community that just now saw in his case a beautiful illustration of the operation of natural laws for the defence of the man.

Stunted morally, yes! It could not well be otherwise. But stunted in spirits—never! As for repining, there is no such word in his vocabulary. He accepts life as it comes to him and gets out of it what he can. If that is not much, he is not justly to blame for not giving back more to the community of which by and by he will be a responsible member. The kind of the soil determines the quality of the crop. The tenement is his soil and it pervades and shapes his young life. It is the tenement that gives up the child to the street in tender years to find there the home it denied him. Its exorbitant rents rob him of the schooling that is his one chance to elude its grasp, by compelling his enrolment in the army of wage-earners before he has learned to read. Its alliance with the saloon guides his baby feet along the well-beaten track of the growler that completes his ruin. Its power to pervert and corrupt has always to be considered, its point of view always to be taken to get the perspective in dealing with the poor, or the cart will seem to be forever getting before the horse in a way not to be understood. We had a girl once at our house in the country who left us suddenly after a brief stay and went back to her old tenement life, because "all the green hurt her eyes so." She meant just what she said, though she did not know herself what ailed her. It was the slum that had its fatal grip upon her. She longed for its noise, its bustle, and its crowds, and laid it all to the green grass and the trees that were new to her as steady company.

From this tenement the street offered, until the kindergarten came not long ago, the one escape, does yet for the great mass of children—a Hobson’s choice, for it is hard to say which is the most corrupting. The opportunities rampant in the one are a sad commentary on the sure defilement of the other. What could be expected of a standard of decency like this one, of a household of tenants who assured me that Mrs. M—, at that moment under arrest for half clubbing her husband to death, was “a very good, a very decent, woman indeed, and if she did get full, he (the husband) was not much.” Or of the rule of good conduct laid down by a young girl, found beaten and senseless in the street up in the Annexed District last autumn: “Them was two of the fellers from Frog Hollow,” she said, resentfully, when I asked who struck her; “them toughs don’t know how to behave themselves when they see a lady in liquor.”

Hers was the standard of the street, the other’s that of the tenement. Together they stamp the child’s life with the vicious touch which is sometimes only the caricature of the virtues of a better soil. Under the rough burr lie undeveloped qualities of good and of usefulness, rather, perhaps, of the capacity for them, that crop out in constant exhibitions of loyalty, of gratitude, and true-heartedness, a never-ending source of encouragement and delight to those who have made their cause their own and have in their true sympathy the key to the best that is in the children. The testimony of a teacher for twenty-five years in one of the ragged schools, who has seen the shanty neighborhood that surrounded her at the start give place to mile-long rows of big tenements, leaves no room for doubt as to the influence the change has had upon the children. With the disappearance of the shanties—homesteads in effect, however humble—and the coming of the tenement crowds, there has been a distinct descent in the scale of refinement among the children, if one may use the term. The crowds and the loss of home privacy, with the increased importance of the street as a factor, account for it. The general tone has been lowered, while at the same time, by reason of the greater rescue-efforts put forward, the original amount of ignorance has been reduced. The big loafer of the old day, who could neither read nor write, has been eliminated to a large extent, and his loss is our gain. The tough who has taken his place is able at least to spell his way through “The Bandits’ Cave,” the pattern exploits of Jesse James and his band, and the newspaper accounts of the latest raid in which he had a hand. Perhaps that explains why he is more dangerous than the old loafer. The transition period is always critical, and a little learning is proverbially a dangerous thing. It may be that in the day to come, when we shall have got the grip of our compulsory school law in good earnest, there will be an educational standard even for the tough, by which time he will, I think, have ceased to exist from sheer disgust, if for no other reason. At present he is in no immediate danger of extinction from such a source. It is not how much book-learning the boy can get, but how little he can get along with, and that is very little indeed. He knows how to make a little go a long way, however, and to serve on occasion a very practical purpose; as, for instance, when I read recently on the wall of the church next to my office in Mulberry Street this observation, chalked in an awkward hand half the length of the wall: “Mary McGee is engagd to the feller in the alley.” Quite apt, I should think, to make Mary show her colors and to provoke the fight with the rival “feller” for which the writer was evidently spoiling. I shall get back, farther on, to the question of the children’s schooling. It is so beset by lies ordinarily as to be seldom answered as promptly and as honestly as in the case of a little fellow whom I found in front of St. George’s Church, engaged in the æsthetic occupation of pelting the Friends’ Seminary across the way with mud. There were two of them, and when I asked them the question that estranged Tony, the wicked one dug his fists deep down in the pockets of his blue-jeans trousers and shook his head gloomily. He couldn’t read; didn’t know how; never did.

“He?” said the other, who could, “he? He don’t learn nothing. He throws stones.” The wicked one nodded. It was the extent of his education.

But if the three R’s suffer neglect among the children of the poor, their lessons in the three D’s—Dirt, Discomfort, and Disease—that form the striking features of their environment, are early and thorough enough. The two latter, at least, are synonymous terms, if dirt and discomfort are not.

Any dispensary doctor knows of scores of cases of ulceration of the eye that are due to the frequent rubbing of dirty faces with dirty little hands. Worse filth diseases than that find a fertile soil in the tenements, as the health officers learn when typhus and small-pox break out. It is not the desperate diet of ignorant mothers, who feed their month-old babies with sausage, beer, and Limburger cheese, that alone accounts for the great infant mortality among the poor in the tenements. The dirt and the darkness in their homes contribute their full share, and the landlord is more to blame than the mother. He holds the key to the situation which her ignorance fails to grasp, and it is he who is responsible for much of the unfounded and unnecessary prejudice against foreigners, who come here willing enough to fall in with the ways of the country that are shown to them. The way he shows them is not the way of decency. I am convinced that the really injurious foreigners in this community, outside of the walking delegate's tribe, are the foreign landlords of two kinds: those who, born in poverty abroad, have come up through tenement-house life to the ownership of tenement property, with all the bad traditions of such a career; and the absentee landlords of native birth who live and spend their rents away from home, without knowing or caring what the condition of their property is, so the income from it suffer no diminution. There are honorable exceptions to the first class, but few enough to the latter to make them hardly worth mentioning.

To a good many of the children, or rather to their parents, this latter statement and the experience that warrants it must have a sadly familiar sound. The Irish element is still an important factor in New York's tenements, though it is yielding one stronghold after another to the Italian foe. It lost its grip on the Five Points and the Bend long ago, and at this writing the time seems not far distant when it must vacate for good also that classic ground of the Kerryman, Cherry Hill. It is Irish only by descent, however; the children are Americans, as they will not fail to convince the doubter. A school census of this district, the Fourth Ward, taken last winter, discovered 2,016 children between the ages of five and fourteen years. No less than 1,706 of them were put down as native born, but only one-fourth, or 519, had American parents. Of the others 572 had Irish and 536 Italian parents. Uptown, in many of the poor tenement localities, in Poverty Gap, in Battle Row, and in Hell's Kitchen, in short, wherever the gang flourishes, the Celt is still supreme and seasons the lump enough to give it his own peculiar flavor, easily discovered through its "native" guise in the story of the children of the poor.

The case of one Irish family that exhibits a shoal which lies always close to the track of ignorant poverty is even now running in my mind, vainly demanding a practical solution. I may say that I have inherited it from professional philanthropists, who have struggled with it for more than half a dozen years without finding the way out they sought.

There were five children when they began, depending on a mother who had about given up the struggle as useless. The father was a loafer. When I took them the children numbered ten, and the struggle was long since over. The family bore the pauper stamp, and the mother's tears, by a transition imperceptible probably to herself, had become its stock in trade. Two of the children were working, earning all the money that came in; those that were not lay about in the room, watching the charity visitor in a way and with an intentness that betrayed their interest in the mother's appeal. It required very little experience to make the prediction that, shortly, ten pauper families would carry on the campaign of the one against society, if those children lived to grow up. And they were not to blame, of course. I scarcely know which was most to be condemned, when we tried to break the family up by throwing it on the street as a necessary step to getting possession of the children—the politician who tripped us up with his influence in the court, or the landlord who had all those years made the poverty on the second floor pan out a golden interest. It was the outrageous rent for the filthy den that had been the most effective argument with sympathizing visitors. Their pity had represented to him, as nearly as I could make out, for eight long years, a capital of \$2,600 invested at six per cent., payable monthly. The idea of moving was preposterous; for what other landlord would take in a homeless family with ten children and no income?

Children anywhere suffer little discomfort from mere dirt. As an ingredient of mud-pies it may be said to be not unwholesome. Play with the dirt is better than none without it. In the tenements the children and the dirt are sworn and loyal friends. In his early raids upon the established order of society, the gutter backs the boy up to the best of its ability, with more or less exasperating success. In the hot summer days, when he tries to sneak into the free baths with every fresh batch, twenty times a day, wretched little repeater that he is, it comes to his rescue against the policeman at the door. Fresh mud smeared on the face serves as a ticket of admission which no one can refuse. At least so he thinks, but in his anxiety he generally overdoes it and arouses the suspicion of the policeman, who, remembering that he was once a boy himself, feels of his hair and reads his title there. When it is a mission that is to be raided, or a “dutch” grocer’s shop, or a parade of the rival gang from the next block, the gutter furnishes ammunition that is always handy. Dirt is a great leveller;⁶ it is no respecter of persons or principles, and neither is the boy where it abounds. In proportion as it accumulates such raids increase, the Fresh Air Funds lose their grip, the saloon flourishes, and turbulence grows. Down from the Fourth Ward, where there is not much else, this wail came recently from a Baptist Mission Church: “The Temple stands in a hard spot and neighborhood. The past week we had to have arrested two fellows for throwing stones into the house and causing annoyance. On George Washington’s Birthday we had not put a flag over the door on Henry Street half an hour before it was stolen. When they neither respect the house of prayer or the Stars and Stripes one can feel young America is in a bad state.” The pastor added that it was a comfort to him to know that the “fellows” were Catholics; but I think he was hardly quite fair to them there. Religious enthusiasm very likely had something to do with it, but it was not the moving cause. The dirt was; in other words: the slum.

Such diversions are among the few and simple joys of the street child’s life, Not all it affords, but all the street has to offer. The Fresh Air Funds, the free excursions, and the many charities that year by year reach farther down among the poor for their children have done and are doing a great work in setting up new standards, ideals, and ambitions in the domain of the street. One result is seen in the effort of the poorest mothers to make their little ones presentable when there is anything to arouse their maternal pride. But all these things must and do come from the outside. Other resources than the sturdy independence that is its heritage the street has none. Rightly used, that in itself is the greatest of all. Chief among its native entertainments is that crowning joy, the parade of the circus when it comes to town in the spring. For many hours after that has passed, as after every public show that costs nothing, the matron’s room at Police Headquarters is crowded with youngsters who have followed it miles and miles from home, devouring its splendors with hungry eyes until the last elephant, the last soldier, or the last policeman vanished from sight and the child comes back to earth again and to the knowledge that he is lost.

If the delights of his life are few, its sorrows do not sit heavily upon him either. He is in too close and constant touch with misery, with death itself, to mind it much. To find a family of children living, sleeping, and eating in the room where father or mother lies dead, without seeming to be in any special distress about it, is no unusual experience. But if they do not weigh upon him, the cares of home leave their mark; and it is a bad mark. All the darkness, all the drudgery is there. All the freedom is in the street; all the brightness in the saloon to which he early finds his way. And as he grows in years and wisdom, if not in grace, he gets his first lessons in spelling and in respect for the law from the card behind the bar, with the big black letters: “No liquor sold here to children.” His opportunities for studying it while the barkeeper fills his growler are unlimited and unrestricted.

⁶ Even as I am writing a transformation is being worked in some of the filthiest streets on the East Side by a combination of new asphalt pavements with a greatly improved street cleaning service that promises great things. Some of the worst streets have within a few weeks become as clean as I have not seen them in twenty years, and as they probably never were since they were made. The unwonted brightness of the surroundings is already visibly reflected in the persons and dress of the tenants, notably the children. They take to it gladly, giving the lie to the old assertion that they are pigs and would rather live like pigs.

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