

# JACOB AUGUST RIIS

THE BATTLE WITH THE  
SLUM

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**The Battle with the Slum**

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# Jacob A. Riis

## The Battle with the Slum

### PREFACE

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

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

J. A. R.

Richmond Hill,  
August 27, 1902.

## WHAT THE FIGHT IS ABOUT

The slum is as old as civilization. Civilization implies a race to get ahead. In a race there are usually some who for one cause or another cannot keep up, or are thrust out from among their fellows. They fall behind, and when they have been left far in the rear they lose hope and ambition, and give up. Thenceforward, if left to their own resources, they are the victims, not the masters, of their environment; and it is a bad master. They drag one another always farther down. The bad environment becomes the heredity of the next generation. Then, given the crowd, you have the slum ready-made.

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

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

So the battle began. Three times since the war that absorbed the nation's energies and attention had the slum confronted us in New York with its challenge. In the darkest days of the great struggle it was the treacherous mob;<sup>1</sup> later on, the threat of the cholera, which found swine foraging in the

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<sup>1</sup> The draft riots of 1863.

streets as the only scavengers, and a swarming host, but little above the hog in its appetites and in the quality of the shelter afforded it, peopling the back alleys. Still later, the mob, caught looting the city's treasury with its idol, the thief Tweed, at its head, drunk with power and plunder, had insolently defied the outraged community to do its worst. There were meetings and protests. The rascals were turned out for a season; the arch-chief died in jail. I see him now, going through the gloomy portals of the Tombs, whither, as a newspaper reporter, I had gone with him, his stubborn head held high as ever. I asked myself more than once, at the time when the vile prison was torn down, whether the comic clamor to have the ugly old gates preserved and set up in Central Park had anything to do with the memory of the "martyred" thief, or whether it was in joyful celebration of the fact that others had escaped. His name is even now one to conjure with in the Sixth Ward. He never "squealed," and he was "so good to the poor"—evidence that the slum is not laid by the heels by merely destroying Five Points and the Mulberry Bend. There are other fights to be fought in that war, other victories to be won, and it is slow work. It was nearly ten years after the Great Robbery before decency got a good upper grip. That was when the civic conscience awoke in 1879.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hence, I say, in the battle with the slum we win or we perish. There is no middle way. We shall win, for we are not letting things be the way our fathers did. But it will be a running fight, and it is not going to be won in two years, or in ten, or in twenty. For all that, we must keep on fighting, content if in our time we avert the punishment that waits upon the third and the fourth generation of those who forget the brotherhood. As a man does in dealing with his brother so it is the way of God that his children shall reap, that through toil and tears we may make out the lesson which sums up all the commandments and alone can make the earth fit for the kingdom that is to come.



## CHAPTER I

### BATTLING AGAINST HEAVY ODDS

The slum I speak of is our own. We made it, but let us be glad we have no patent on the manufacture. It is not, as one wrote with soul quite too patriotic to let the Old World into competition on any terms, "the offspring of the American factory system." Not that, thank goodness! It comes much nearer to being a slice of original sin which makes right of might whenever the chance offers. When to-day we clamor for air and light and water as man's natural rights because necessary to his being, we are merely following in the track Hippocrates trod twenty-five centuries ago. How like the slums of Rome were to those of New York any one may learn from Juvenal's Satires and Gibbon's description of Rome under Augustus. "I must live in a place where there are no fires, no nightly alarms," cries the poet, apostle of commuters. "Already is Ucalegon shouting for water, already is he removing his chattels; the third story in the house you live in is already in a blaze. You know nothing about it. For if the alarm begin from the bottom of the stairs, he will be the last to be burned whom a single tile protects from the rain where the tame pigeons lay their eggs." (Clearly they had no air-shafts in the Roman tenements!) "Codrus had a bed too small for his Procula; six little jugs, the ornament of his sideboard, and a little can, besides, beneath it.... What a height it is from the lofty roofs from which a potsherd tumbles on your brains. How often cracked and chipped earthenware falls from the windows.... Pray and bear about with you the miserable wish that they may be contented with throwing down only what the broad basins have held.... If you can tear yourself away from the games in the circus, you can buy a capital house at Sora, or Fabrateria, or Frasinio, for the price at which you are now hiring your dark hole for one year. There you will have your little garden ... live there enamoured of the pitchfork.... It is something to be able in any spot to have made oneself proprietor even of a single lizard.... None but the wealthy can sleep in Rome."<sup>3</sup>

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

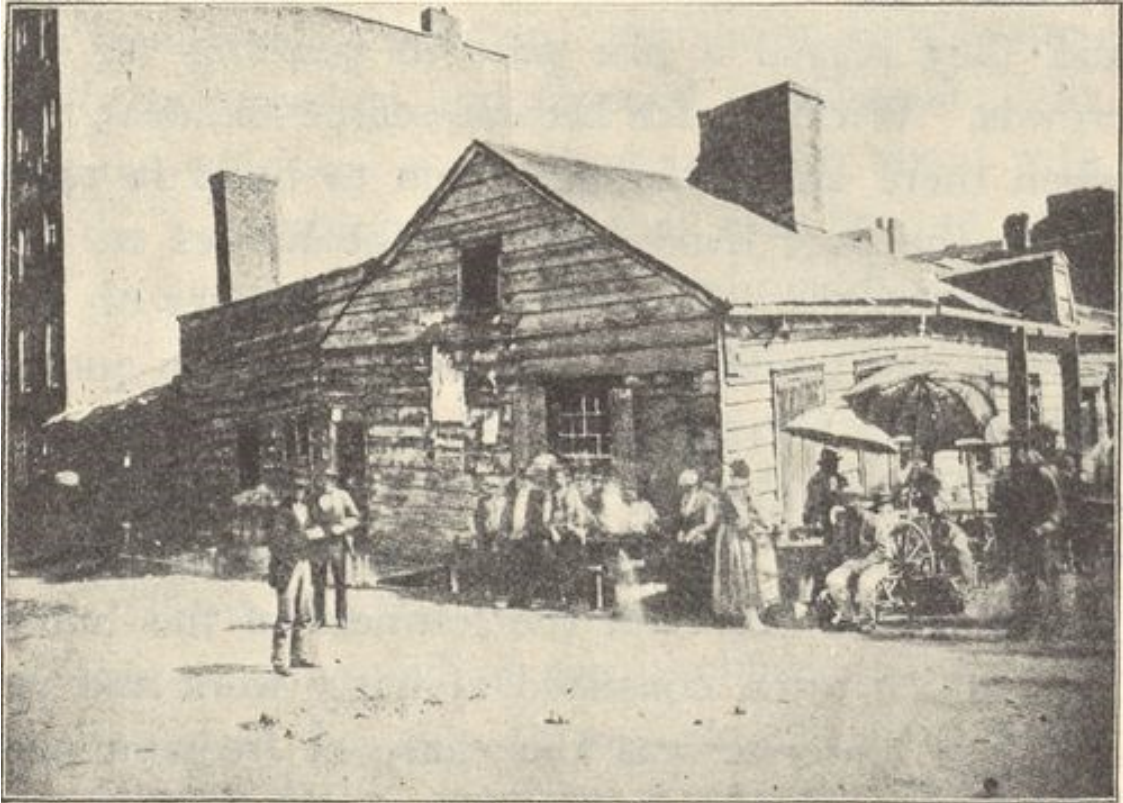
Rome had its walls, as New York has its rivers, and they played a like part in penning up the crowds. Within space became scarce and dear, and when there was no longer room to build in rows where the poor lived, they put the houses on top of one another. That is the first chapter of the story of the tenement everywhere. Gibbon quotes the architect Vitruvius, who lived in the Augustan age, as complaining of "the common though inconvenient practice of raising houses to a considerable height in the air. But the loftiness of the buildings, which often consisted of hasty work and insufficient material, was the cause of frequent and fatal accidents, and it was repeatedly enacted by Augustus as well as by Nero that the height of private dwellings should not exceed the measure of seventy feet above the ground."

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

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<sup>3</sup> Satire III, Juvenal.

<sup>4</sup> Satire III, Juvenal.



One of the Five Points Fifty Years ago.

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

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

Those days came vividly back to me last winter, when in a Wisconsin country town I was rehearsing the story of the long fight, and pointing out its meaning to us all. In the audience sat a sturdy, white-haired, old farmer who followed the recital with keen interest, losing no word. When he

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<sup>5</sup> Report of Select Committee of Assembly. New York, 1857.

<sup>6</sup> York Health Department Report, 1866, Appendix A, p. 6.

saw this picture of one of the Five Points, he spoke out loud: "Yes! that is right. I was there." It turned out that he and his sister had borne a hand in the attack upon that stronghold of the slum by the forces of decency, in 1849 and 1850, which ended in the wiping out of the city's worst disgrace. It was the first pitched battle in the fight. Soon after he had come west and taken homestead land; but the daily repetition during a lifetime of the message to men, which the woods and the fields and God's open sky have in keeping, had not dulled his ears to it, and after fifty years his interest in his brothers in the great city was as keen as ever, his sympathies as quick. He had driven twenty miles across the frozen prairie to hear my story. It is his kind who win such battles, and a few of them go a long way.

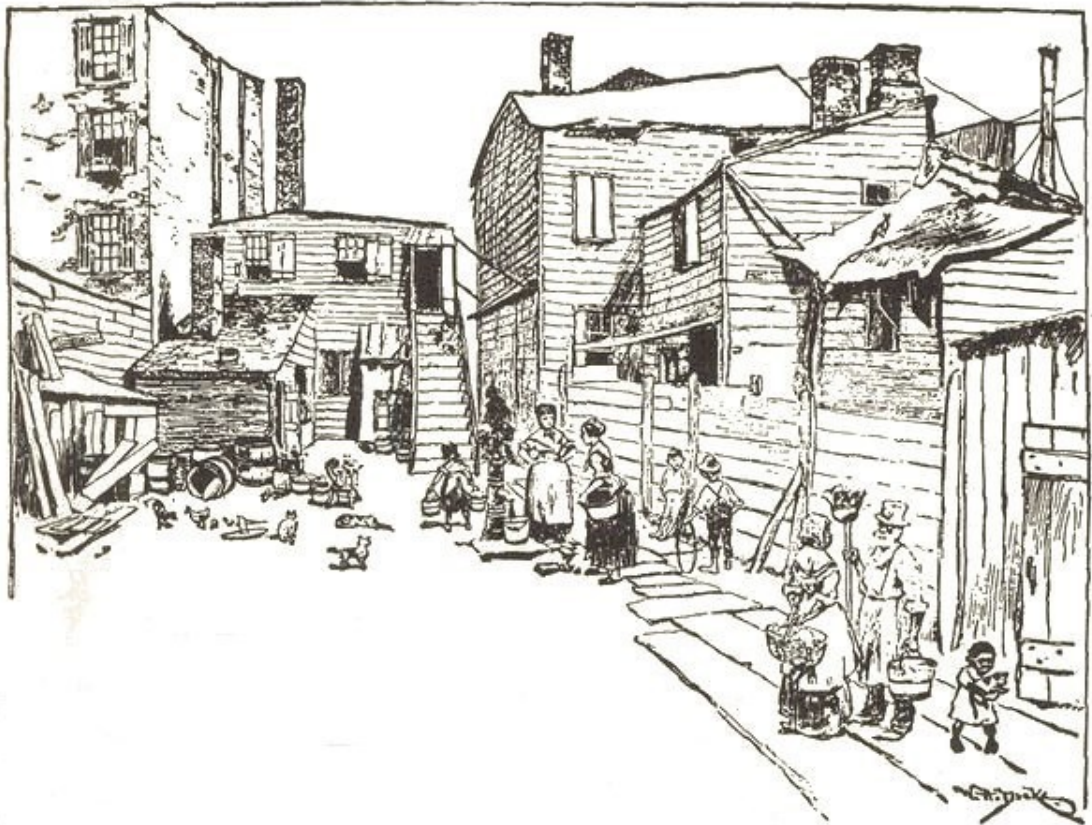


The "Old Church" Tenement.



A handful of Methodist women made the Five Points decent. To understand what that meant, look at the "dens of death" in Baxter Street, which were part of it, "houses," says the health inspector,<sup>7</sup> "into which the sunlight never enters ... that are dark, damp, and dismal throughout all the days of the year, and for which it is no exaggeration to say that the money paid to the owners as rent is literally the 'price of blood.'" It took us twenty-four years after that to register the conviction in the form of law that that was good cause for the destruction of a tenement in cold blood; but we got rid of some at that time in a fit of anger. The mortality officially registered in those "dens of death" was 17.5 per cent of their population. We think now that the death-rate of New York is yet too high at 19 or 20 in a thousand of the living.

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



An Old Wooster Street Court.

The sketches of the Fourth Ward and Wooster Street barracks are reproduced from an old report of the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor. They rightly made out, those early missionaries, that the improvement must begin with the people's homes, or not at all, and allowed no indifference on the part of the public to turn them from their path. It is worth the while of Chicago and the other Western cities that are growing with such joyful metropolitan ambitions, to

<sup>7</sup> Report of Board of Health, New York, 1869, p. 346.

notice that their slums look to-day very much as New York's did then. In fifty years how will it be? "The offspring of municipal neglect" the Assembly Committee of 1857 called our "tenement-house" system. "Forgetfulness of the poor" was the way a citizens' council put it. It comes to the same thing. Whether seen from the point of view of the citizen, the philanthropist, or the Christian, the slum is the poorest investment a city can make, and once made it is not easily unmade. In a Mississippi river town, when pleading for the turning over to the people's use of some vacant land on the river-shore that would make a fine breathing space, I was told that by and by they would consider it. Just now it was too valuable for factory purposes. When the city had grown opulent, in say twenty-five years, they would be willing to hand it over. Fatal delusion! Men do not grow that kind of sense as they grow rich. The land will be always "too valuable." When we in New York were scandalized at last into making a park of the Mulberry Bend, it cost us a million and a half, and it had made the slum a fixture, not to be dislodged. No! the way to fight the slum is to head it off. It is like fighting a fire. Chasing it up is hard and doubtful work; the chances are that you will not overtake it till the house is burned down.



A Fourth Ward Colony in the Bad Old Days.

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

"Not only," it ran, "does filth, overcrowding, lack of privacy and domesticity, lack of ventilation and lighting, and absence of supervision and of sanitary regulation still characterize the greater number of the tenements; but they are built to a greater height in stories; there are more rear houses built back to back with other buildings, correspondingly situated on parallel streets; the courts and alleys are more greedily encroached upon and narrowed into unventilated, unlighted, damp, and well-like holes between the many-storied front and rear tenements; and more fever-breeding wynds and

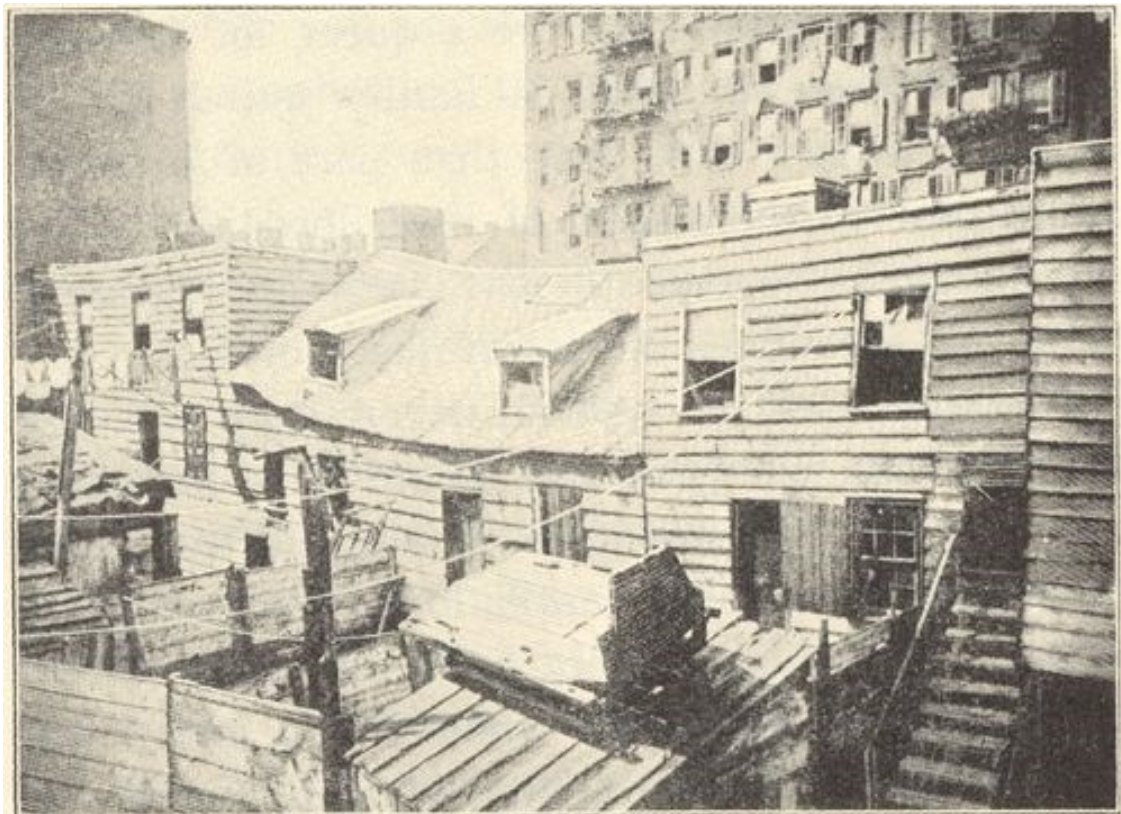


*culs-de-sac* are created as the demand for the humble homes of the laboring poor increases."<sup>8</sup> The Council, which was composed of sixteen of New York's most distinguished physicians, declared that by ordinary sanitary management the city's death-rate should be reduced thirty per cent. Its judgment has been more than borne out. In the thirty-five years that have passed since, it has in fact been reduced over fifty per cent.

Men and women were found living in cellars deep down under the ground. One or two of those holes are left still in Park Street near the Five Points Mission, but they have not been used as living-rooms for a generation. In cellars near the river the tide rose and fell, compelling the tenants "to keep the children in bed till ebb-tide." The plumber had come upon the field, but his coming brought no relief. His was not a case of conscience. "Untrapped soil pipes opened into every floor and poisoned the tenants."

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

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



Dens of Death.

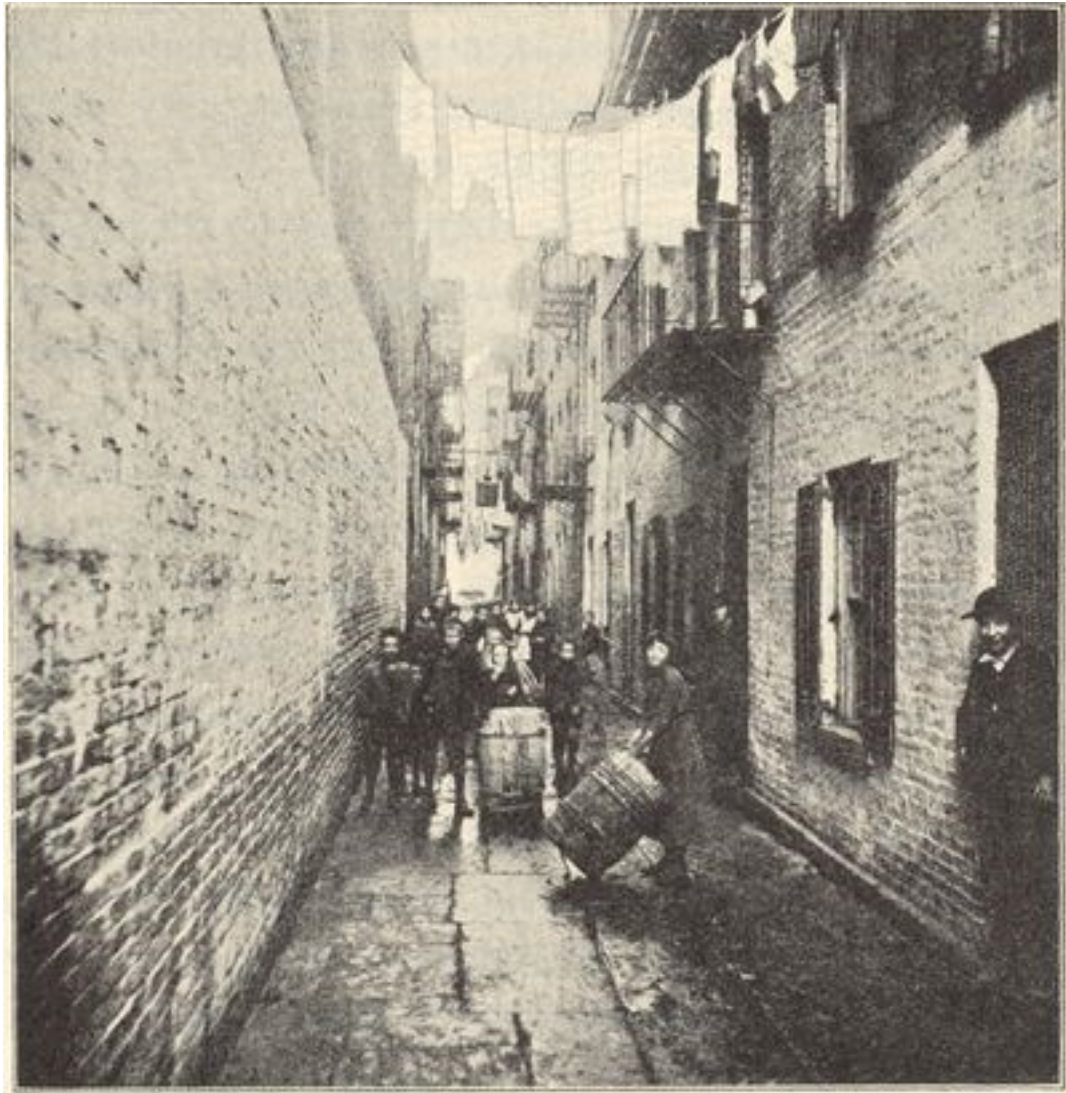
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<sup>8</sup> Council of Hygiene's Report, 1866.

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

Twenty cases of typhoid fever from a single house in one year was the record that had gone unconsidered. Bedrooms in tenements were dark closets, utterly without ventilation. There couldn't be any. The houses were built like huge square boxes, covering nearly the whole of the lot. Some light came in at the ends, but the middle was always black. Forty thousand windows, cut by order of the Health Board that first year, gave us a daylight view of the slum: "damp and rotten and dark, walls and banisters sticky with constant moisture." Think of living babies in such hell-holes; and make a note of it, you in the young cities who can still head off the slum where we have to wrestle with it for our sins. Put a brand upon the murderer who would smother babies in dark holes and bedrooms. He is nothing else. Forbid the putting of a house five stories high, or six, on a twenty-five foot lot, unless at least thirty-five per cent of the lot be reserved for sunlight and air. Forbid it absolutely, if you can. It is the devil's job, and you will have to pay his dues in the end, depend on it.

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



Gotham Court.

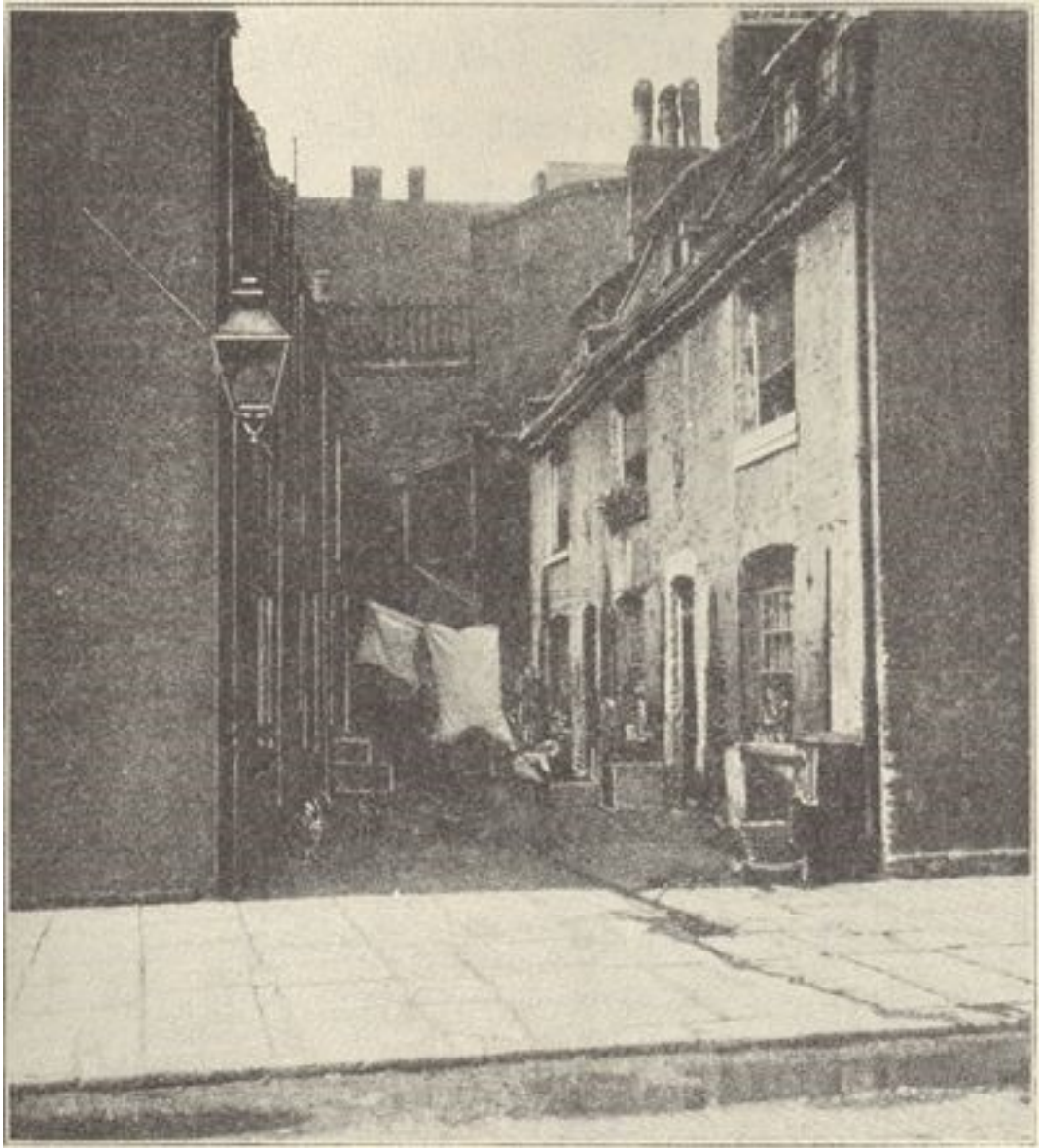
By which I do not mean that we are not getting anywhere; for we are. Look at Gotham Court, described in the health reports of the sixties as a "packing-box tenement" of the hopeless back-to-back type, which meant that there was no ventilation and could be none. The stench from the "horribly foul cellars" with their "infernal system of sewerage" must needs poison the tenants all the way up to the fifth story. I knew the court well, knew the gang that made its headquarters with the rats in the cellar, terrorizing the helpless tenants; knew the well-worn rut of the dead-wagon and the ambulance to the gate, for the tenants died there like flies in all seasons, and a tenth of its population was always in the hospital. I knew the story of how it had been built by a Quaker with good intentions, but without good sense, for the purpose of rescuing people from the awful cellar-holes they burrowed in around there,—this within fifty-one years of the death of George Washington, who lived just across the street on the crest of Cherry Hill when he was President,—and how in a score of years from the time it was built it had come to earn the official description, "a nuisance which, from its very magnitude, is assumed to be unremovable and irremediable."<sup>9</sup> That was at that time. But I have lived to see it taken in hand three times, once by the landlord under compulsion of the Board of Health, once by Christian men bent upon proving what could be done on their plan with the worst tenement house. And a good deal was accomplished. The mortality was brought below the general death-rate

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<sup>9</sup> Health Department Report, 1870, p. 111.



of the city, and the condition of the living was made by comparison tolerable. Only the best was bad in that spot, on account of the good Quaker's poor sense, and the third time the court was taken in hand it was by the authorities, who destroyed it, as they should have done a generation before. Oh, yes, we are getting there; but that sort of thing takes time.



Green Dragon Yard, London.

Going through Whitechapel, London, about the time we were making ready to deal with Gotham Court as it deserved, I photographed Green Dragon yard as typical of what I saw about me. Compare the court and the yard and see the difference between our slum problem and that of Old World cities. Gotham Court contained 142 families when I made a canvass of it in the old days, comprising over 700 persons, not counting the vagrants who infested the cellars. The population of Green Dragon Yard was greater than the sight of it would lead you to expect, for in Whitechapel one-room flats were the rule; but with its utmost crowding it came nowhere near the court. Sullen discontent was the badge of it. Gotham Court was in an active state of warfare at all hours, for its population was evenly divided between Irish and Italians, with only two German families, who caught it from both sides. But there was hope in that, for they were on the move; before the court was torn down, one-third of its tenants were Greeks. Their slum over yonder is dead, black, given over to

smoky chimneys and bad draughts, with red-eyed and hopeless men and women forever blowing the bellows on ineffectual fires. Ours is alive if it *is* with fighting. There is yeast in it, and bright skies without, if not within. I don't believe there is a bellows to be had in New York. Our slum, with its greater crowd, has more urgent need of sharp attention, chiefly because of the overflow of theirs which it receives. But after all, even that represents what still had courage and manhood enough to make it want to get away and do better. We shall "get there" if we don't give up. It sometimes seems to me that *their* only hope is to get here.



Flagged Hallway in the "Big Flat."

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

Slowly, with many setbacks, we battled our way into the light. A Board of Health had come with the cholera panic in 1866. The swine that ran at large in the streets, practically the only scavengers,

were banished. The cholera and the yellow fever that had ravaged the city by turns never came back. The smallpox went its way, too,<sup>10</sup> and was heard of again only once as an epidemic, till people had forgotten what it was like,—enough to make them listen to the anti-vaccination cranks,—and politics had the health department by the throat again and held the gate open. We acquired tenement house laws, and the process of education that had begun with the foraging ground of the swine was extended step by step to the citizen's home. Short steps and cautious were they. Every obstacle which the landlord's cunning and the perversion of the machinery of the law to serve his interests could devise was thrown in the way. It was a new doctrine to that day that any power should intervene between him and the tenants who represented his income, and it was held to be a hardship if not downright robbery. The builder took the same view. Every tenement house plan was the subject of hot debate between the Health Board and the builder, or his architect. The smallest air-shaft had to be wrung out of him, as it were, by main strength. The church itself was too often on the side of the enemy, where its material interests were involved. Trinity, the wealthiest church corporation in the land, was in constant opposition as a tenement house landlord, and finally, to save a few hundred dollars, came near upsetting the whole structure of tenement law that had been built up in the interest of the toilers and of the city's safety with such infinite pains. The courts were reluctant. Courts in such matters record rather than lead the state of the public mind, and now that the immediate danger of an epidemic was over, the public mind had a hard time grasping the fact that bettering the housing of the poor was simple protection for the community. When suit was brought against a bad landlord, judges demanded that the department must prove not only that a certain state of soil saturation, for instance, was dangerous to health, but that some one had been actually made sick by that specified nuisance. Fat-boilers, slaughter-house men, and keepers of other nuisances made common cause against the new decency, and with these obstacles in front, the Sanitarians found the enemy constantly recruited from the rear. With the immense immigration that poured in after the Civil War, the evil with which they were struggling grew enormously. Economic problems other than the old one of rent came to vex us. The sweater moved into the East Side tenements. Child-labor grew and swelled.

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

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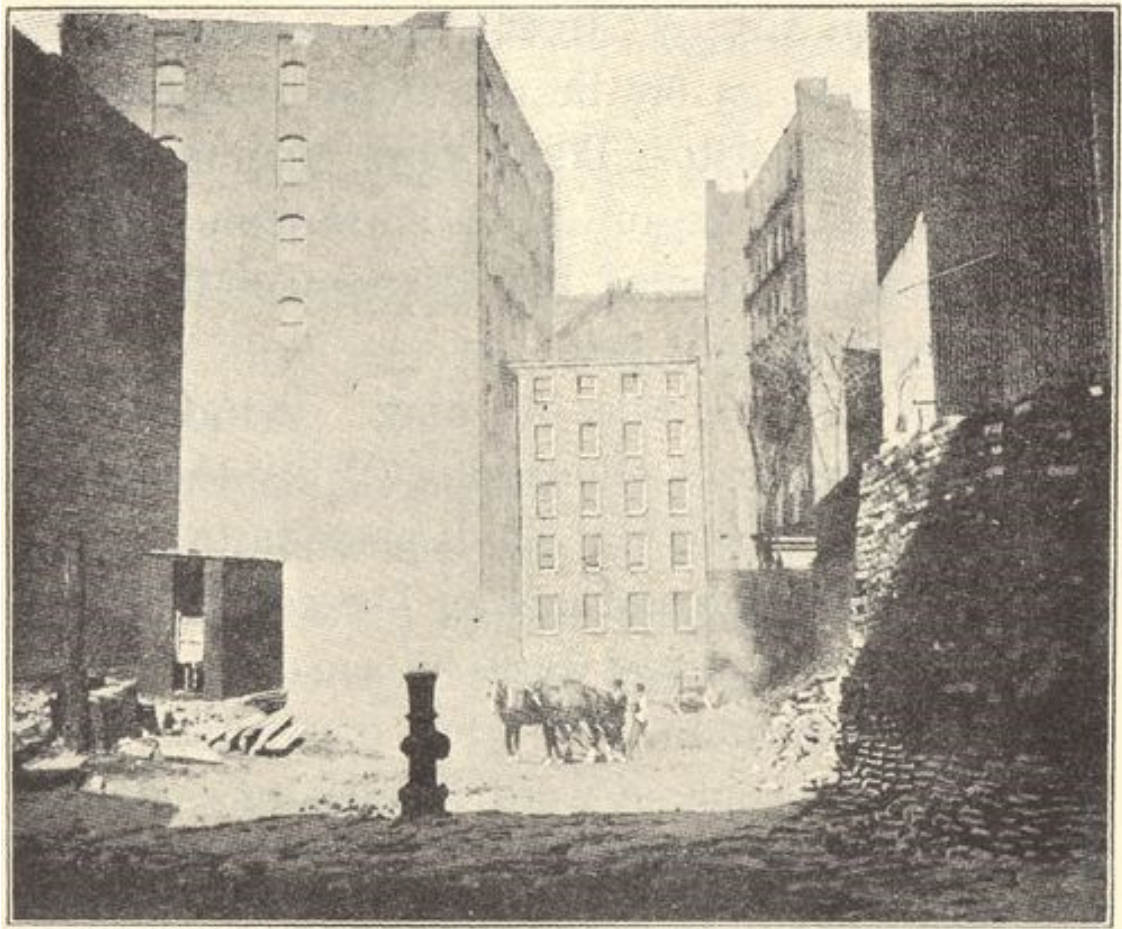
<sup>10</sup> They had "health wardens" in the old days, and the Council of Hygiene tells of the efficient way two of them fought the smallpox. One stood at the foot of the stairs and yelled to those minding a patient in the next story to "put pieces of camphor about the clothes of the sick and occasionally throw a piece on the hot stove." The other summoned the occupants of a smallpox smitten tenement to the hall door and cautioned them to say nothing about it to any one, or he would send them all to the pest-house!





Jersey Street Rookeries.

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



The Survival of the Unfittest.

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

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

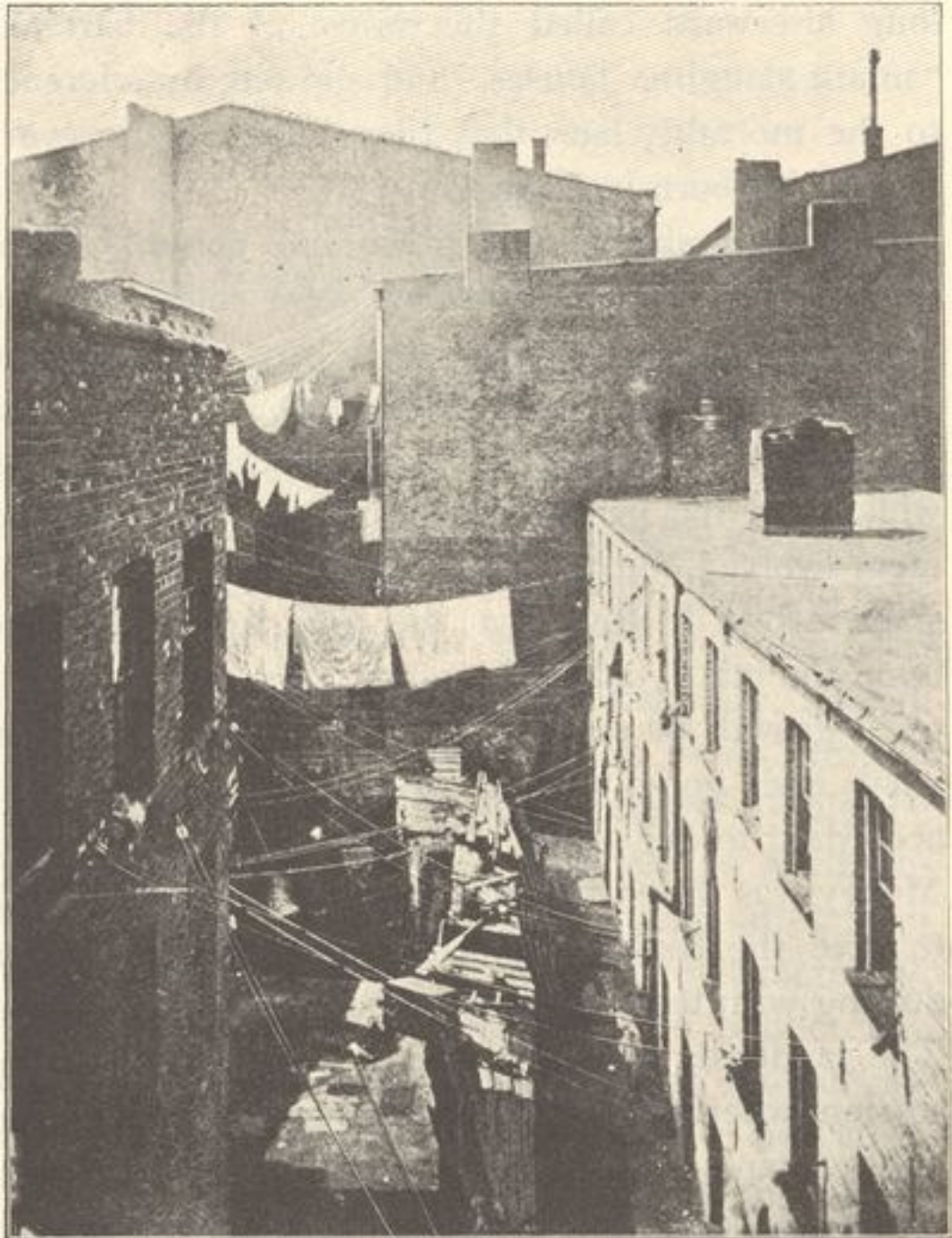
We haven't reached the millennium yet. But let us be glad. A hundred years ago they hanged a woman on Tyburn Hill for stealing a loaf of bread. To-day we destroy the den that helped make her a thief.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THE OUTWORKS OF THE SLUM TAKEN**

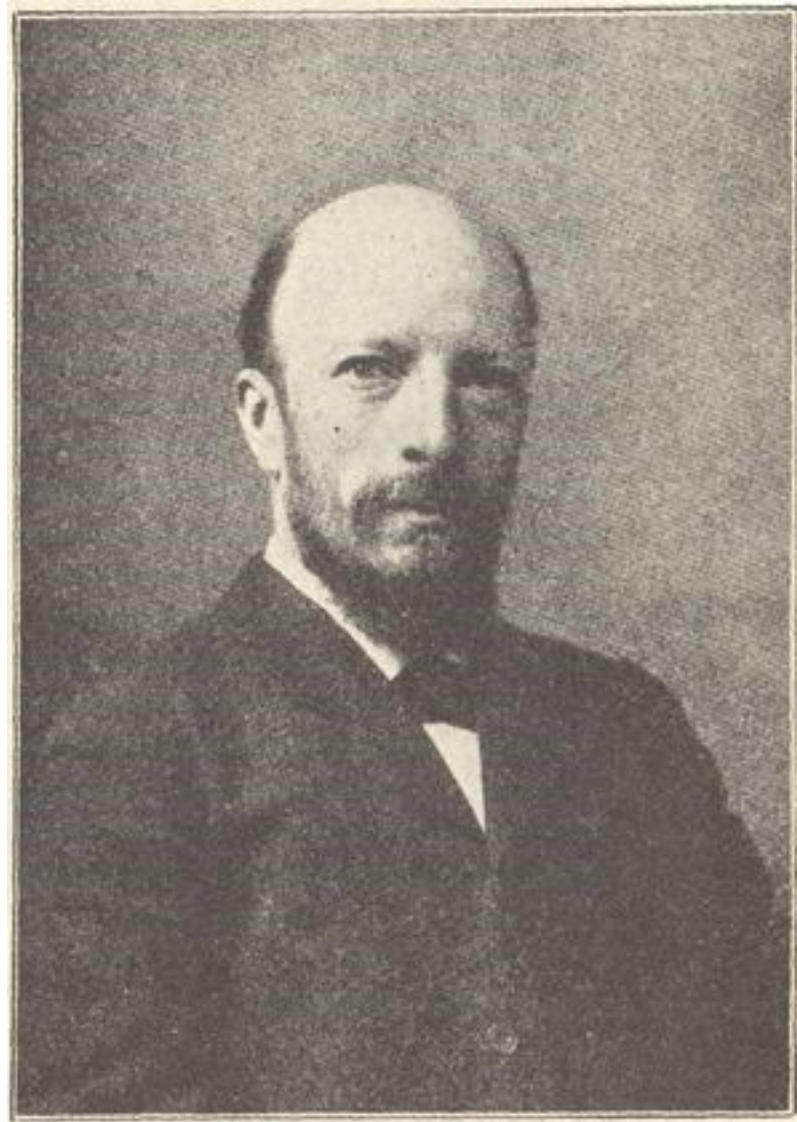
I said that we got our grip when the civic conscience awoke in 1879. In that year the slum was arraigned in the churches. The sad and shameful story was told of how it grew and was fostered by avarice that saw in the homeless crowds from over the sea only a chance for business, and exploited them to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





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





Professor Felix Adler.

The story shocked the town into action. Plans for a better kind of tenement were called for, and a premium was put on every ray of light and breath of air that could be let into it. It was not much, for the plans clung to the twenty-five-foot lot which was the primal curse, and the type of tenement evolved, the double-decker of the "dumb-bell" shape, while it seemed at the time a great advance upon the black, old packing-box kind, came with the great growth of our city to be a worse peril than what had gone before. But what we got was according to our sense. At least the will was there. Money was raised to build model houses, and a bill to give the health authorities summary powers in dealing with tenements was sent to the legislature. The landlords held it up until the last day of the session, when it was forced through by an angered public opinion, shorn of its most significant clause, which proposed the licensing of tenements and so their control and effective repression. However, the landlords had received a real set-back. Many of them got rid of their property, which in a large number of cases they had never seen, and tried to forget the source of their ill-gotten wealth. Light and air did find their way into the tenements in a half-hearted fashion, and we began to count the tenants as "souls." That is another of our milestones in the history of New York. They were never reckoned so before; no one ever thought of them as "souls." So, restored to human fellowship, in

the twilight of the air-shaft that had penetrated to their dens, the first Tenement House Committee<sup>11</sup> was able to make them out "better than the houses" they lived in, and a long step forward was taken. The Mulberry Bend, the wicked core of the "bloody Sixth Ward," was marked for destruction, and all slumdom held its breath to see it go. With that gone, it seemed as if the old days must be gone too, never to return. There would not be another Mulberry Bend. As long as it stood, there was yet a chance. The slum had backing, as it were.

What was it like? says a man at my elbow, who never saw it. Like nothing I ever saw before, or hope ever to see again. A crooked three-acre lot built over with rotten structures that harbored the very dregs of humanity. Ordinary enough to look at from the street, but pierced by a maze of foul alleys, in the depths of which skulked the tramp and the outcast thief with loathsome wrecks that had once laid claim to the name of woman. Every foot of it reeked with incest and murder. Bandits' Roost, Bottle Alley, were names synonymous with robbery and red-handed outrage. By night, in its worst days, I have gone poking about their shuddering haunts with a policeman on the beat, and come away in a ferment of anger and disgust that would keep me awake far into the morning hours planning means of its destruction. That was what it was like. Thank God, we shall never see another such!



A Cellar Dive in the Bend.

That was the exhibit that urged us on. But the civic conscience was not very robust yet, and required many and protracted naps. It slumbered fitfully eight long years, waking up now and then with a start, while the Bend lay stewing in its slime. I wondered often, in those years of delay, if it was just plain stupidity that kept the politicians from spending the money which the law had put within their grasp; for with every year that passed, a million dollars that could have been used for small park

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<sup>11</sup> The Adler Tenement House Committee of 1884. It was the first citizens' commission. The legislative inquiry of 1856 was conducted by a Select Committee of the Assembly.

purposes was lost.<sup>12</sup> But they were wiser than I. I understood when I saw the changes which letting in the sunshine worked. They were not of the kind that made for their good. We had all believed it, but they knew it all along. At the same time, they lost none of the chances that offered. They helped the landlords in the Bend, who considered themselves greatly aggrieved because their property was thereafter to front on a park instead of a pigsty, to transfer the whole assessment of half a million dollars for park benefit to the city. They undid in less than six weeks what it had taken considerably more than six years to do; but the park was cheap at the price. We could afford to pay all it cost to wake us up. When finally, upon the wave of wrath excited by the Parkhurst and Lexow disclosures, reform came with a shock that dislodged Tammany, it found us wide awake, and, it must be admitted, not a little astonished at our sudden access of righteousness.

The battle went against the slum in the three years that followed, until it found backing in the "odium of reform" that became the issue in the municipal organization of the greater city. Tammany made notes. The cry meant that we were tired of too much virtue. Of what was done, how it was done, and why, during those years, I shall have occasion to speak further in these pages. Here I wish to measure the stretch we have come since I wrote "How the Other Half Lives," thirteen years ago. Some of it we came plodding, and some at full speed; some of it in the face of every obstacle that could be thrown in our way, wresting victory from defeat at every step; some of it with the enemy on the run. Take it all together, it is a long way. Much of it will not have to be travelled over again. The engine of municipal progress once started as it has been in New York, may slip many a cog with Tammany as the engineer; it may even be stopped for a season; but it can never be made to work backward. Even Tammany knows that, and gropes desperately for a new hold, a certificate of character. In the last election (1901) she laid loud claim to having built many new schools, though she had done little more than to carry out the plans of the previous reform administration, where they could not be upset. As a matter of fact we had fallen behind again, sadly. But even the claim was significant.

How long we strove for those schools, to no purpose! Our arguments, our anger, the anxious pleading of philanthropists who saw the young on the East Side going to ruin, the warning year after year of the superintendent of schools that the compulsory education law was but an empty mockery where it was most needed, the knocking of uncounted thousands of children for whom there was no room,—uncounted in sober fact; there was not even a way of finding out how many were adrift,<sup>13</sup>—brought only the response that the tax rate must be kept down. Kept down it was. "Waste" was successfully averted at the spigot; at the bung hole it went on unchecked. In a swarming population like that you must have either schools or jails, and the jails waxed fat with the overflow. The East Side, that had been orderly, became a hotbed of child crime. And when, in answer to the charge made by a legislative committee (1895) that the father forced his child into the shop, on a perjured age certificate, to labor when he ought to have been at play, that father, bent and heavy-eyed with unceasing toil, flung back the charge with the bitter reproach that we gave him no other choice, that it was either the street or the shop for his boy, and that perjury for him was cheaper than the ruin of the child, we were mute. What, indeed, was there to say? The crime was ours, not his. That was seven years ago. Once since then have we been where we could count the months to the time when every child that knocked should find a seat in our schools; but Tammany came back. Once again, now, we are catching up. Yesterday Mayor Low's reform government voted six millions of dollars for new schools. The school census law that was forgotten almost as soon as made (the census was to be taken once in two years, but was taken only twice) is to be enforced again so that we know where we stand. In that most crowded neighborhood in all the world, where the superintendent lately pleaded in vain for three new schools, half a dozen have been built, the finest in this or any other land,—great,

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<sup>12</sup> The Small Parks law of 1887 allowed the expenditure of a million dollars a year for the making of neighborhood parks; but only as payment for work done or property taken. If not used in any one year, that year's appropriation was lost.

<sup>13</sup> The first school census was taken in 1895 by order of the legislature. It showed that there were 50,069 children of school age in New York City out of school and unemployed. The number had been variously estimated from 5000 to 150,000.



light, and airy structures, with playgrounds on the roof; and all over the city the like are going up. The briefest of our laws, every word of which is like the blow of a hammer driving the nails home in the coffin of the bad old days, says that never one shall be built without its playground.

And not for the child's use only. The band shall play there yet and neighbor meet neighbor in such social contact as the slum has never known to its undoing. Even as I write this the band is tuning up and the children dancing to its strains with shouts of joy. The president of the board of education and members of the board lead in the revolt against the old. Clergymen applaud the opening of the school buildings on Sunday for concerts, lectures, and neighborhood meetings. Common sense is having its day. The streets are cleaned.

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

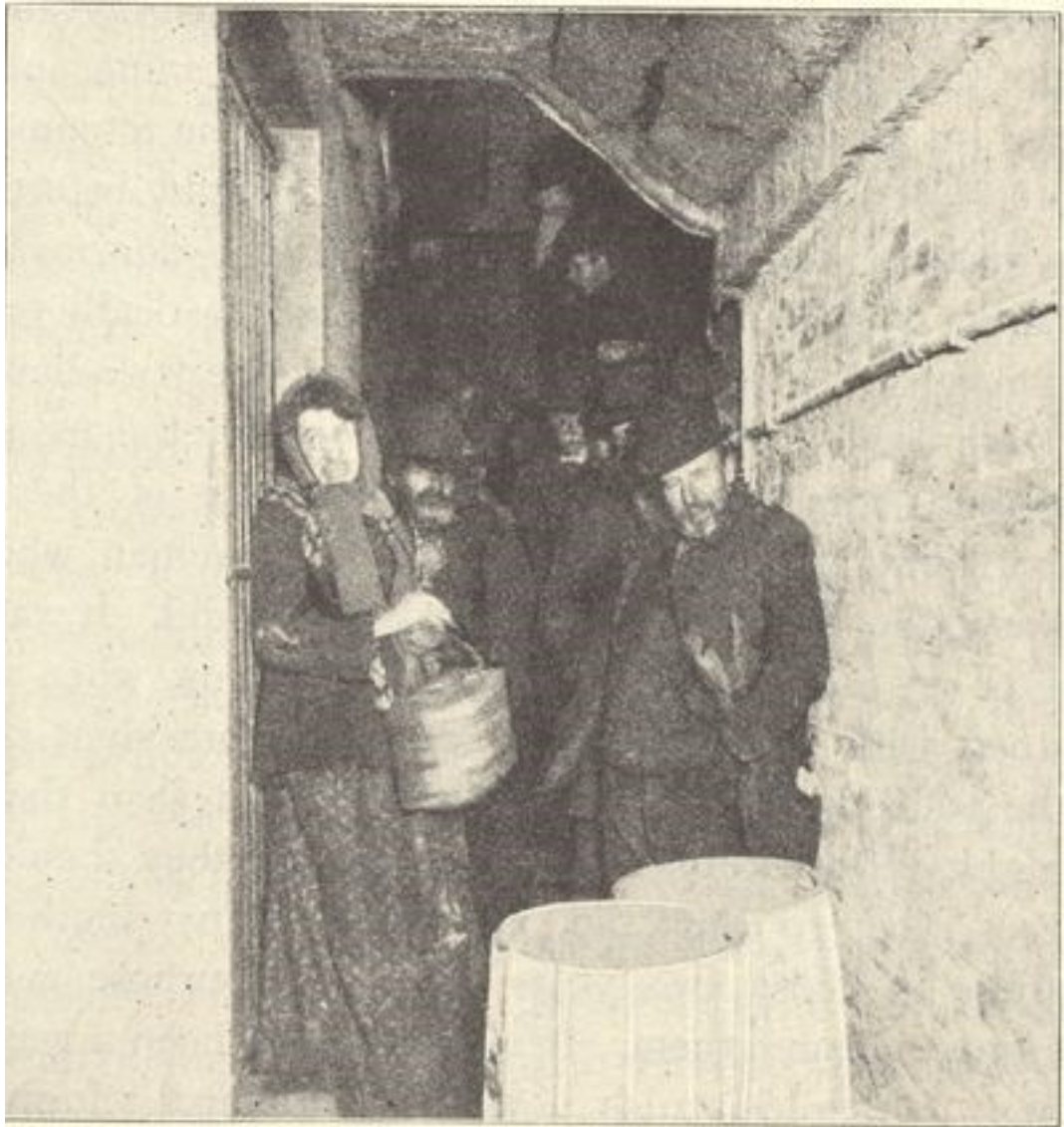


It costs a Dollar a Month to sleep in these Sheds.

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

Social halls for the older people's play are coming where the saloon has had a monopoly of the cheer too long. The labor unions and the reformers work together to put an end to sweating and child-labor. The gospel of less law and more enforcement acquired standing while Theodore Roosevelt sat in the governor's chair rehearsing to us Jefferson's forgotten lesson that "the whole art and science of government consists in being honest." With a back door to every ordinance that touched the lives of the people, if indeed the whole thing was not the subject of open ridicule or the vehicle of official blackmail, it seemed as if we had provided a perfect municipal machinery for bringing the law into contempt with the young, and so for wrecking citizenship by the shortest cut.

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



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

Time and education must solve that, like so many other problems which the slum has thrust upon us. They are the forces upon which, when we have gone as far as our present supply of steam will carry us, we must always fall back; and this we may do with confidence so long as we keep stirring, if it is only marking time, when that is all that can be done. It is in the retrospect that one sees how far we have come, after all, and from that gathers courage for the rest of the way. Thirty-two years have passed since I slept in a police station lodging house, a lonely lad, and was robbed, beaten, and thrown out for protesting; and when the vagrant cur that had joined its homelessness to mine, and had sat all night at the door waiting for me to come out,—it had been clubbed away the night before,—snarled and showed its teeth at the doorman, raging and impotent I saw it beaten to death on the step. I little dreamed then that the friendless beast, dead, should prove the undoing of the monstrous wrong done by the maintenance of these evil holes to every helpless man and woman who was without shelter in New York; but it did. It was after an inspection of the lodging rooms, when I stood with Theodore Roosevelt, then president of the police board, in the one where I had slept that night, and told him of it, that he swore they should go. And go they did, as did so many another abuse in those two years of honest purpose and effort. I hated them. It may not have been a very high motive to furnish power for municipal reform; but we had tried every other way, and none of them worked. Arbitration is good, but there are times when it becomes necessary to knock a man



down and arbitrate sitting on him, and this was such a time. It was what we started out to do with the rear tenements, the worst of the slum barracks, and it would have been better had we kept on that track. I have always maintained that we made a false move when we stopped to discuss damages with the landlord, or to hear his side of it at all. His share in it was our grievance; it blocked the mortality records with its burden of human woe. The damage was all ours, the profit all his. If there are damages to collect, he should foot the bill, not we. Vested rights are to be protected, but, as I have said, no man has a right to be protected in killing his neighbor.



Night in Gotham Court.

However, they are down, the worst of them. The community has asserted its right to destroy tenements that destroy life, and for that cause. We bought the slum off in the Mulberry Bend at its own figure. On the rear tenements we set the price, and set it low. It was a long step. Bottle Alley is gone, and Bandits' Roost. Bone Alley, Thieves' Alley, and Kerosene Row,—they are all gone. Hell's Kitchen and Poverty Gap have acquired standards of decency; Poverty Gap has risen even to the height of neckties. The time is fresh in my recollection when a different kind of necktie was its pride; when the boy-murderer—he was barely nineteen—who wore it on the gallows took leave of the captain of detectives with the cheerful invitation to "come over to the wake. They'll have a hell of a time." And the event fully redeemed the promise. The whole Gap turned out to do the dead bully honor. I have not heard from the Gap, and hardly from Hell's Kitchen, in five years. The last news from the Kitchen was when the thin wedge of a column of negroes, in their up-town migration, tried to squeeze in, and provoked a race war; but that in fairness should not be laid up against it. In certain local aspects it might be accounted a sacred duty; as much so as to get drunk and provoke a fight on the anniversary of the battle of the Boyne. But on the whole the Kitchen has grown orderly. The gang rarely beats a policeman nowadays, and it has not killed one in a long while.

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

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





A Mulberry Bend Alley.

Flushed with the success of many victories, we challenged the slum to a fight to the finish in 1897, and bade it come on. It came on. On our side fought the bravest and best. The man who marshalled the citizen forces for their candidate had been foremost in building homes, in erecting baths for the people, in directing the self-sacrificing labors of the oldest and worthiest of the agencies for improving the condition of the poor. With him battled men who had given lives of patient study and effort to the cause of helping their fellow-men. Shoulder to shoulder with them stood the thoughtful workingman from the East Side tenement. The slum, too, marshalled its forces. Tammany produced its notes. It pointed to the increased tax rate, showed what it had cost to build schools and parks and to clean house, and called it criminal recklessness. The issue was made sharp and clear. The war cry of the slum was characteristic: "To hell with reform!" We all remember the result. Politics interfered, and turned victory into defeat. We were beaten. I shall never forget that election night. I walked home through the Bowery in the midnight hour, and saw it gorging itself, like a starved wolf, upon the promise of the morrow. Drunken men and women sat in every doorway, howling ribald songs and curses. Hard faces I had not seen for years showed themselves about the dives. The mob made merry after its fashion. The old days were coming back. Reform was dead, and decency with it.



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

A year later, I passed that same way on the night of election.<sup>14</sup> The scene was strangely changed. The street was unusually quiet for such a time. Men stood in groups about the saloons, and talked

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<sup>14</sup> 1898, when Roosevelt was elected Governor after a fierce fight with Tammany.

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

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

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

Some years ago, the United States government conducted an inquiry into the slums of great cities. To its staff of experts was attached a chemist, who gathered and isolated a lot of bacilli with fearsome Latin names, in the tenements where he went. Among those he labelled were the *Staphylococcus pyogenes albus*, the *Micrococcus fervidosus*, the *Saccharomyces rosaceus*, and the *Bacillus buccalis fortuitis*. I made a note of the names at the time, because of the dread with which they inspired me. But I searched the collection in vain for the real bacillus of the slum. It escaped science, to be, identified by human sympathy and a conscience-stricken community with that of ordinary human selfishness. The antitoxin has been found, and it is applied successfully. Since justice has replaced charity on the prescription the patient is improving. And the improvement is not confined to him; it

is general. Conscience is not a local issue in our day. A few years ago, a United States senator sought reelection on the platform that the decalogue and the golden rule were glittering generalities that had no place in politics, and lost. We have not quite reached the millennium yet, but since then a man was governor in the Empire State, elected on the pledge that he would rule by the ten commandments. These are facts that mean much or little, according to the way one looks at them. The significant thing is that they are facts, and that, in spite of slipping and sliding, the world moves forward, not backward. The poor we shall have always with us, but the slum we need not have. These two do not rightfully belong together. Their present partnership is at once poverty's worst hardship and our worst blunder.

## CHAPTER III

### THE DEVIL'S MONEY

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

If ever inhuman robbery deserved the name, that which caused the downfall of Tammany surely did. Drunk with the power and plunder of four long unchallenged years, during which the honest name of democracy was pilloried in the sight of all men as the active partner of blackmail and the brothel, the monstrous malignity reached a point at last where it was no longer to be borne. Then came the crash. The pillory lied. Tammany is no more a political organization than it is the benevolent concern it is innocently supposed to be by some people who never learn. It neither knows nor cares for principles. "Koch?" said its President of the Health Department when mention was made in his hearing of the authority of the great German doctor, "who is that man Koch you are talking about?" And he was typical of the rest. His function was to collect the political revenue of the department, and the city was overrun with smallpox for the first time in thirty years. The police force, of whom Roosevelt had made heroes, became the tools of robbers. Robbery is the business of Tammany. For that, and for that only, is it organized. Politics are merely the convenient pretence. I do not mean that every Tammany man is a thief. Probably the great majority of its adherents honestly believe that it stands for something worth fighting for,—for personal freedom, for the people's cause,—and their delusion is the opportunity of scoundrels. They have never understood its organization or read its history.

For a hundred years that has been an almost unbroken record of fraud and speculation. Its very founder, William Mooney, was charged with being a deserter from the patriot army to the British forces. He was later on removed from office as superintendent of the almshouse for swindling the city. Aaron Burr plotted treason within its councils. The briefest survey of the administration of the metropolis from his day down to that of Tweed shows a score of its conspicuous leaders removed, indicted, or tried, for default, bribe-taking, or theft; and the fewest were punished. The civic history of New York to the present day is one long struggle to free itself from its blighting grip. Its people's parties, its committees of seventy, were ever emergency measures to that end, but they succeeded only for a season. There have been decent Tammany mayors, but not for long. There have been attempts to reform the organization from within, but they have been failures. You cannot reform an "organized appetite" except by reforming it away. And then there would be nothing left of the organization.

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

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

Civil service reform was thrown to the winds; the city departments were openly parcelled out among the district leaders: a \$2000 office to one,—two \$1000 to another to even up. That is the secret of the "organization" which politicians admire. It does make a strong body. How it served the city in one department, the smallpox epidemic bore witness. That department, the pride of the city and its mainstay in days of danger, was wrecked. The first duty of the new president, when the four years were over and Tammany out again, was to remove more than a hundred and fifty useless employees. Their only function had been to draw the salaries which the city paid. The streets that had been clean became dirty—the "voter" was back "behind the broom"—and they swarmed once more with children for whom there was no room in school. Officials who drew big salaries starved the inmates of the almshouse on weak tea and dry bread, and Bellevue, the poor people's hospital, became a public scandal. In one night there were five drunken fights, one of them between two of the attendants who dropped the corpse they were carrying to the morgue and fought over it. The tenements were plunged back into the foulness of their worst day; the inspectors were answerable, not to the Health Board, but to the district leader, and the landlord who stood well with him thumbed his nose at them and at their orders to clean up. The neighborhood parks, acquired at such heavy sacrifice, lay waste. Tammany took no step toward improving them. One it did take up at Fort George; and though the property only cost the city \$600,000, the bills for taking it were \$127,467. That is the true Tammany style. In the Seward Park, where the need of relief was greatest, Tammany election district captains built booths, rent free, for the sale of dry goods and fish. That was "their share." Wealthy corporations were made to pay heavily for "peace"; timid storekeepers were blackmailed. One, a Jew, told his story: he was ordered to pay five dollars a week for privilege of keeping open Sundays. He paid, and they asked ten. When he refused, he was told that it would be the worse for him. He closed up. The very next week he was sued for a hundred dollars by a man of whom he had never borrowed anything. He did not defend the suit, and it went against him. In three days the sheriff was in his store. He knew the hopelessness of it then, and went out and mortgaged his store and paid the bill. The next week another man sued him for a hundred dollars he did not owe. He went and threw himself on his mercy, and the man let him off for the costs.

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

It is difficult to approach calmly what is left of the diabolical recital. The police, set once more to collecting blackmail from saloon keepers, gambling hells, policy shops, and houses of ill fame, under a chief who on a policeman's pay became in a few short years fairly bloated with wealth, sank to the level of their occupation or into helpless or hopeless compliance with the apparently inevitable. The East Side, where the home struggled against such heavy odds, became a sinkhole of undreamt-of corruption. The tenements were overrun with lewd women who paid the police for protection and received it. Back of them the politician who controlled all and took the profits. This newspaper arraignment published in January, 1901, tells the bald truth:

"Imagine, if you can, a section of the city territory completely dominated by one man, without whose permission neither legitimate nor illegitimate business can be conducted; where illegitimate business is encouraged and legitimate business discouraged; where the respectable residents have to fasten their doors and windows



summer nights and sit in their rooms with asphyxiating air and one hundred degrees temperature, rather than try to catch the faint whiff of breeze in their natural breathing places—the stoops of their homes; where naked women dance by night in the streets, and unsexed men prowl like vultures through the darkness on "business" not only permitted, but encouraged, by the police; where the education of infants begins with the knowledge of prostitution and the training of little girls is training in the arts of Phryne; where American girls brought up with the refinements of American homes are imported from small towns up-state, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Jersey, and kept as virtually prisoners as if they were locked up behind jail bars until they have lost all semblance of womanhood; where small boys are taught to solicit for the women of disorderly houses; where there is an organized society of young men whose sole business in life is to corrupt young girls and turn them over to bawdy houses; where men walking with their wives along the street are openly insulted; where children that have adult diseases are the chief patrons of the hospitals and dispensaries; where it is the rule, rather than the exception, that murder, rape, robbery, and theft go unpunished—in short, where the premium of the most awful forms of vice is the profit of the politicians.

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

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

"The corrupt system, whose infamous details have been steadily uncovered to our increasing horror and humiliation, was brazenly ignored by those who were fattening on its spoils; and the world was presented with the astounding spectacle of a great municipality whose civic mechanism was largely employed in trading in the bodies and souls of the innocent and defenceless. What has been published in this connection is but the merest hint of what exists—and exists, most appalling of all, as the evidence has come to me under the seal of confidence in overwhelming volume and force to demonstrate—under a system of terrorism which compels its victims to recognize that to denounce it means the utter ruin, so far as all their worldly interests are concerned, of those who dare to do so. This infamous organization for making merchandise of girls and boys, and defenceless men and women, has adroitly sought to obscure a situation concerning which all honest people are entirely clear, by saying that vice cannot be wholly suppressed. Nobody has made upon the authorities of New York any such grotesque demand. All that our citizens have asked is that the government of the city shall not be employed to protect a trade in vice, which is carried on for the benefit of a political organization. The case is entirely clear. No Mephistophelian cunning can obscure it, and I thank God that there is abundant evidence that the end of such a condition of things is not far off."

It was, indeed, coming. But Tammany, gorged with power and the lust of it, neither saw nor heeded. At a meeting of young men on the East Side, one of them, responding to an address by Felix Adler, drew such a heart-rending picture of the conditions prevailing there that the echoes of the meeting found its way into the farthest places: "Now you go," he said, "to your quiet home in a decent street where no harm comes to you or your wife or children in the night, for it is their home.

And we—we go with our high resolves, the noble ambitions you have stirred, to our tenements where evil lurks in the darkness at every step, where innocence is murdered in babyhood, where mothers bemoan the birth of a daughter as the last misfortune, where virtue is sold into a worse slavery than ever our fathers knew, and our sisters betrayed by paid panders; where the name of home is as a bitter mockery, for alas! we have none. These are the standards to which we go from here." And then followed the whole amazing story of damning conspiracy between power and vice in those tenements before which a whole city stood aghast.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>15</sup> Up to that time I wrote of Tammany as "she"; but I dropped it then as an outrage upon the sex. "It" it is and will remain hereafter. I am ashamed of ever having put the stigma on the name of woman.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **THE BLIGHT OF THE DOUBLE-DECKER**

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



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

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

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

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

Yes, it did, she said. Once every summer, for a little while, it came over the houses. She knew the month and the exact hour of the day when its rays shone into their home, and just the reach of its slant on the wall. They had lived there six years. In June the sun was due. A haunting fear that the baby would ask how long it was till June—it was February then—took possession of me, and I hastened to change the subject. Warsaw was their old home. They kept a little store there, and were young and happy. Oh, it was a fine city, with parks and squares, and bridges over the beautiful river,—and grass and flowers and birds and soldiers, put in the girl breathlessly. She remembered. But the children kept coming, and they went across the sea to give them a better chance. Father made fifteen dollars a week, much money; but there were long seasons when there was no work. She, the mother, was never very well here,—she hadn't any strength; and the baby! She glanced at his grave white face, and took him in her arms. The picture of the two, and of the pale-faced girl longing back to the fields and the sunlight, in their prison of gloom and gray walls, haunts me yet. I have not had the courage to go back since. I recalled the report of an English army surgeon, which I read years ago, on the many more soldiers that died—were killed would be more correct—in barracks into which the sun never shone than in those that were open to the light. They have yet two months to the sun in Stanton Street.

The capmaker's case is the case of the nineteenth century of civilization against the metropolis of America. The home, the family, are the rallying points of civilization. The greatness of a city is to be measured, not by its balance sheets of exports and imports, not by its fleet of merchantmen, or by its miles of paved streets, nor even by its colleges, its art museums, its schools of learning, but by its homes. New York has all these, but its people live in tenements where "all the conditions which surround childhood, youth, and womanhood make for unrighteousness."<sup>16</sup> This still, after forty years of battling, during which we have gone on piling layer upon layer of human beings and calling *that* home! The 15,309 tenements the Council of Hygiene found in 1864 have become 47,000, and their population of 495,592 has swelled into nearly a million and three-quarters.<sup>17</sup> There were four flights of stairs at most in the old days. Now they build tenements six and seven stories high, and the street has become a mere runway. It cannot take up the crowds for which it was never meant. Go look at those East Side streets on a summer evening or on any fair Sunday when, at all events, some of the workers are at home, and see what they are like. In 1880 the average number of persons to each dwelling in New York, counting them all in, the rich and the poor, was 16.37; in 1890 it was 18.52; in 1900, according to the United States census, the average in the old city was 20.4. It all means that there are so many more and so much bigger tenements, and four families to the floor where there were two before. Statistics are not my hobby. I like to get their human story out of them. Anybody who wants them can get the figures in the census books. But as an instance of the unchecked drift—unchecked as yet—look at this record of the Tenth Ward, the "most crowded spot in the world."

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<sup>16</sup> Report of Tenement House Commission, 1900.

<sup>17</sup> Tenement house census of 1900: Manhattan and the Bronx boroughs (the old city), 46,993 tenements, with a population of 1,701,643. The United States census of the two boroughs gave them a population of 2,050,600. In the Greater New York there are 82,000 tenements, and two-thirds of our nearly four millions of people live in them.

In 1880, when it had not yet attained to that bad eminence, it contained 47,554 persons, or 432.3 to the acre. In 1890 the census showed a population of 57,596, which was 522 to the acre. The police census of 1895 found 70,168 persons living in 1514 houses, which was 643.08 to the acre. The Health Department's census for the first half of 1898 gave a total of 82,175 persons living in 1201 tenements, with 313 inhabited buildings yet to be heard from. This is the process of doubling up,—literally, since the cause and the vehicle of it all is the double-decker tenement,—which in the year 1900 had crowded a single block in that ward at the rate of 1724 persons per acre, and one in the Eleventh Ward at the rate of 1894.<sup>18</sup> It goes on not in the Tenth Ward or on the East Side only, but throughout the city. When, in 1897, it was proposed to lay out a small park in the Twenty-second Ward, up on the far West Side, it was shown that five blocks in that section, between Forty-ninth and Sixty-second streets and Ninth and Eleventh avenues, had a population of more than 3000 each. The block between Sixty-first and Sixty-second streets and Tenth and Eleventh avenues harbored 4254 when the police made a count in 1900, which meant 1158 persons to the acre.

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

Nor is it going to help us any to charge it all to the tenant "who *will* herd." He herds because he has no other chance; because it puts money into some one's pockets to let him. We never yet have passed a law for his relief that was not attacked in the same or the next legislature in the interest of the tenement-house builder. Commission after commission has pointed out that the tenants are "better than the houses they live in"; that they "respond quickly to improved conditions." Those are not honest answers. The man who talks that way is a fool, or worse.

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

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

<sup>18</sup> Police census of 1900, block bounded by Canal, Hester, Eldridge, and Forsyth streets: size 375 × 200, population 2969, rate per acre 1724. Block bounded by Stanton, Houston, Attorney, and Ridge streets: size 200 × 300, population 2609, rate per acre 1894.

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

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

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

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

The fire of which I speak was a "cruller fire," if I remember rightly, which is to say that it broke out in the basement bakeshop, where they were boiling crullers (doughnuts) in fat, at 4 A.M., with a hundred tenants asleep in the house above them. The fat went into the fire, and the rest followed. I suppose that I had to do with a hundred such fires, as a police reporter, before, under the protest of the Gilder Tenement House Commission and the Good Government Clubs, the boiling of fat in tenement bakeshops was forbidden. The Chief of the Fire Department, in his testimony before the commission, said that "tenements are erected mainly with a view of returning a large income for the amount of capital invested. It is only after a fire in which great loss of life occurs that any interest whatever is taken in the safety of the occupants." The Superintendent of Buildings, after such a fire in March, 1896, said that there were thousands of tenement firetraps in the city. My reporter's notebook



bears witness to the correctness of his statement, and it has many blank leaves that are waiting to be put to that use yet. The reckoning for eleven years showed that, of 35,844 fires in New York, 53.18 per cent were in tenement houses, though they were only a little more than 31 per cent of all the buildings, and that 177 occupants were killed, 523 maimed, and 625 rescued by the firemen. Their rescue cost the lives of three of these brave men, and 453 were injured in the effort. And when all that is said, not the half is told. A fire in the night in one of those human beehives, with its terror and woe, is one of the things that live in the recollection ever after as a terrible nightmare. The fire-chief thought that every tenement house should be fireproof, but he warned the commission that such a proposition would "meet with strong opposition from the different interests, should legislation be requested." He was right. It is purely a question of the builder's profits. Up to date we have rescued the first floor from him. That must be fireproof. We shall get the whole structure yet if we pull long enough and hard enough, as we will.

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

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

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

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

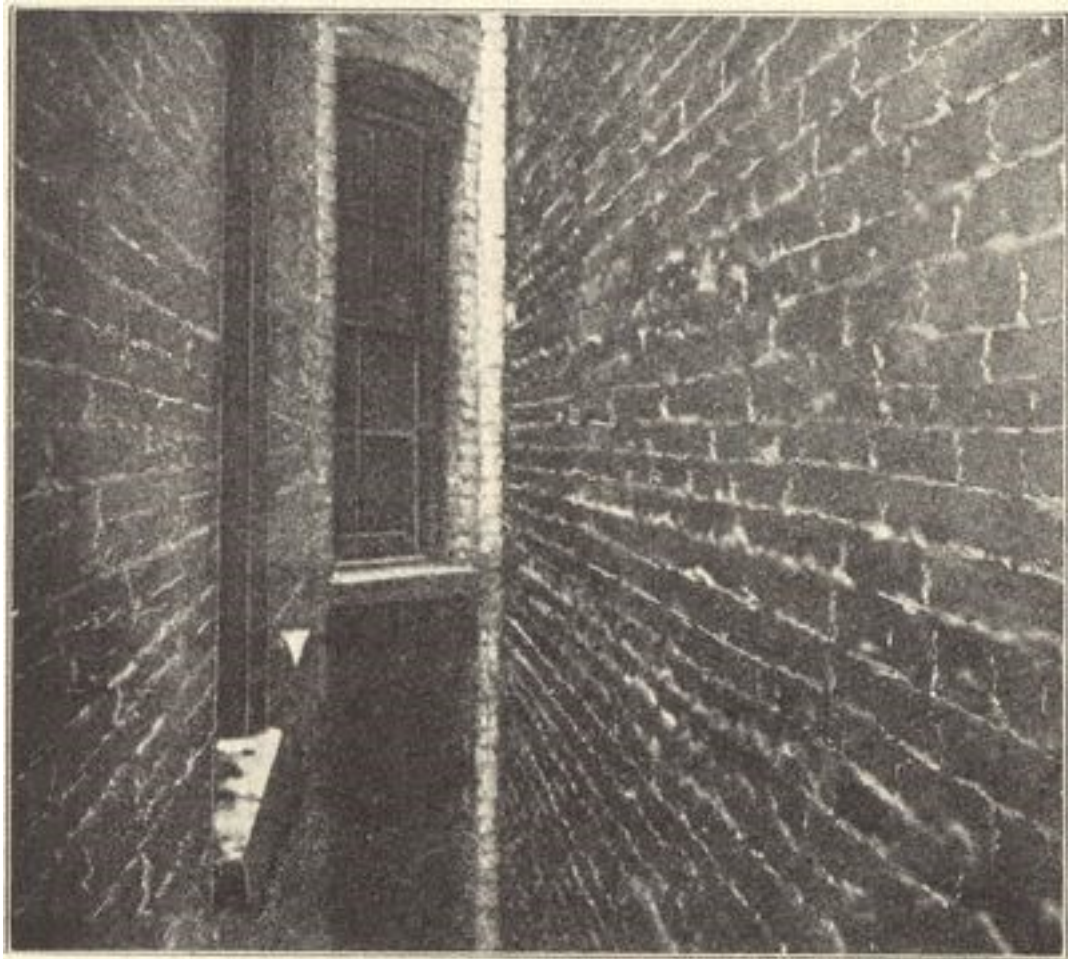
The policeman said he did.

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

"I lit a match," said the policeman.

Four families live on these floors, with heaven knows how many children. It was here the police commissioners were requested, in sober earnest, some years ago, by a committee of very practical

woman philanthropists, to have the children tagged, as they do in Japan, I am told, so as to save the policeman wear and tear in taking them back and forth between the Eldridge Street police station and headquarters, when they got lost. If tagged, they could be assorted at once and taken to their homes. Incidentally, the city would save the expense of many meals. It was shrewdly suspected that the little ones were lost on purpose in a good many cases, as a way of getting them fed at the public expense.



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

That the children preferred the excitement of the police station, and the distinction of a trip in charge of a brass-buttoned guardian, to the Ludlow Street flat is easy enough to understand. A more unlovely existence than that in one of these tenements it would be hard to imagine. Everywhere is the stench of the kerosene stove that is forever burning, serving for cooking, heating, and ironing alike, until the last atom of oxygen is burned out of the close air. Oil is cheaper than coal. The air shaft is too busy carrying up smells from below to bring any air down, even if it is not hung full of washing in every story, as it ordinarily is. Enterprising tenants turn it to use as a refrigerator as well. There is at least a draught of air, such as it is. When fire breaks out, this draught makes of the air shaft a flue through which the fire roars fiercely to the roof, so transforming what was meant for the good of the tenants into their greatest peril. The stuffy rooms bring to mind this denunciation of the tenement builder of fifty years ago by an angry writer, "He measures the height of his ceilings by the shortest of the people, and by thin partitions divides the interior into as narrow spaces as the leanest carpenter can work in." Most decidedly, there is not room to swing the proverbial cat in any one of them. In one I helped the children, last holiday, to set up a Christmas tree, so that a glimpse of something that

was not utterly sordid and mean might for once enter their lives. Three weeks after, I found the tree standing yet in the corner. It was very cold, and there was no fire in the room. "We were going to burn it," said the little woman, whose husband was then in the insane asylum, "and then I couldn't. It looked so kind o' cheery-like there in the corner." My tree had borne the fruit I wished.

It remained for the New York slum landlord to assess the exact value of a ray of sunlight,—upon the tenant, of course. Here are two back-to-back rear tenements, with dark bedrooms on the south. The flat on the north gives upon a neighbor's yard, and a hole two feet square has been knocked in the wall, letting in air and sunlight; little enough of the latter, but what there is is carefully computed in the lease. Six dollars for this flat, six and a half for the one with the hole in the wall. Six dollars a year per ray. In half a dozen houses in this block have I found the same rate maintained. The modern tenement on the corner goes higher: for four front rooms, "where the sun comes right in your face," seventeen dollars; for the rear flat of three rooms, larger and better every other way, but always dark, like the capmaker's, eleven dollars. From the landlord's point of view, this last is probably a concession. But he is a landlord with a heart. His house is as good a one as can be built on a twenty-five-foot lot. The man who owns the corner building in Orchard Street, with the two adjoining tenements, has no heart. In the depth of last winter I found a family of poor Jews living in a coop under his stairs, an abandoned piece of hallway, in which their baby was born, and for which he made them pay eight dollars a month. It was the most outrageous case of landlord robbery I had ever come across, and it gave me sincere pleasure to assist the sanitary policeman in curtailing his profits by even this much. The hall is not now occupied.

The Jews under the stairs had two children. The shoemaker in the cellar next door had three. They were fighting and snarling like so many dogs over the coarse food on the table before them, when we looked in. The baby, it seems, was the cause of the row. He wanted it all. He was a very dirty and a very fierce baby, and the other two children were no match for him. The shoemaker grunted fretfully at his last, "Ach, he is all de time hungry!" At the sight of the policeman, the young imp set up such a howl that we beat a hasty retreat. The cellar "flat" was undoubtedly in violation of law, but it was allowed to pass. In the main hall, on the ground floor, we counted seventeen children. The facts of life here suspend ordinary landlord prejudices to a certain extent. Occasionally it is the tenant who suspends them. The policeman laughed as he told me of the case of a mother who coveted a flat into which she well knew her family would not be admitted; the landlord was particular. She knocked, with a troubled face, alone. Yes, the flat was to let; had she any children? The woman heaved a sigh. "Six, but they are all in Greenwood." The landlord's heart was touched by such woe. He let her have the flat. By night he was amazed to find a flock of half a dozen robust youngsters domiciled under his roof. They had indeed been in Greenwood; but they had come back from the cemetery to stay. And stay they did, the rent being paid.

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

It was the boast of New York, till a few years ago, that at least that worst of tenement depravities, the one-room house, too familiar in the English slums, was practically unknown here. It is not so any longer. The evil began in the old houses in Orchard and Allen streets, a bad neighborhood, infested by

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

"What does he work at?" snorted the policeman, restraining himself with an effort from kicking the fellow.

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

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

The old houses began it, as they began all the tenement mischief that has come upon New York. But the opportunity that was made by the tenant's need was not one to be neglected. In some of the newer tenements, with their smaller rooms, the lodger is by this time provided for in the plan, with a special entrance from the hall. "Lodger" comes, by an easy transition, to stand for "family." One winter's night I went with the sanitary police on their midnight inspection through a row of Elizabeth Street tenements which I had known since they were built, seventeen or eighteen years ago. That is the neighborhood in which the recent Italian immigrants crowd. In the house which we selected for examination, in all respects the type of the rest, we found forty-three families where there should have been sixteen. Upon each floor were four flats, and in each flat three rooms that measured respectively  $14 \times 11$ ,  $7 \times 11$ , and  $7 \times 8\frac{1}{2}$  feet. In only one flat did we find a single family. In three there were two to each. In the other twelve each room had its own family living and sleeping there. They cooked, I suppose, at the one stove in the kitchen, which was the largest room. In one big bed we counted six persons, the parents and four children. Two of them lay crosswise at the foot of the bed, or there would not have been room. A curtain was hung before the bed in each of the two smaller rooms, leaving a passageway from the hall to the room with the windows. The rent for the front flats was twelve dollars; for that in the rear ten dollars. The social distinctions going with the advantage of location were rigidly observed, I suppose. The three steps across a tenement hall, from the front to "the back," are often a longer road than from Ludlow Street to Fifth Avenue.

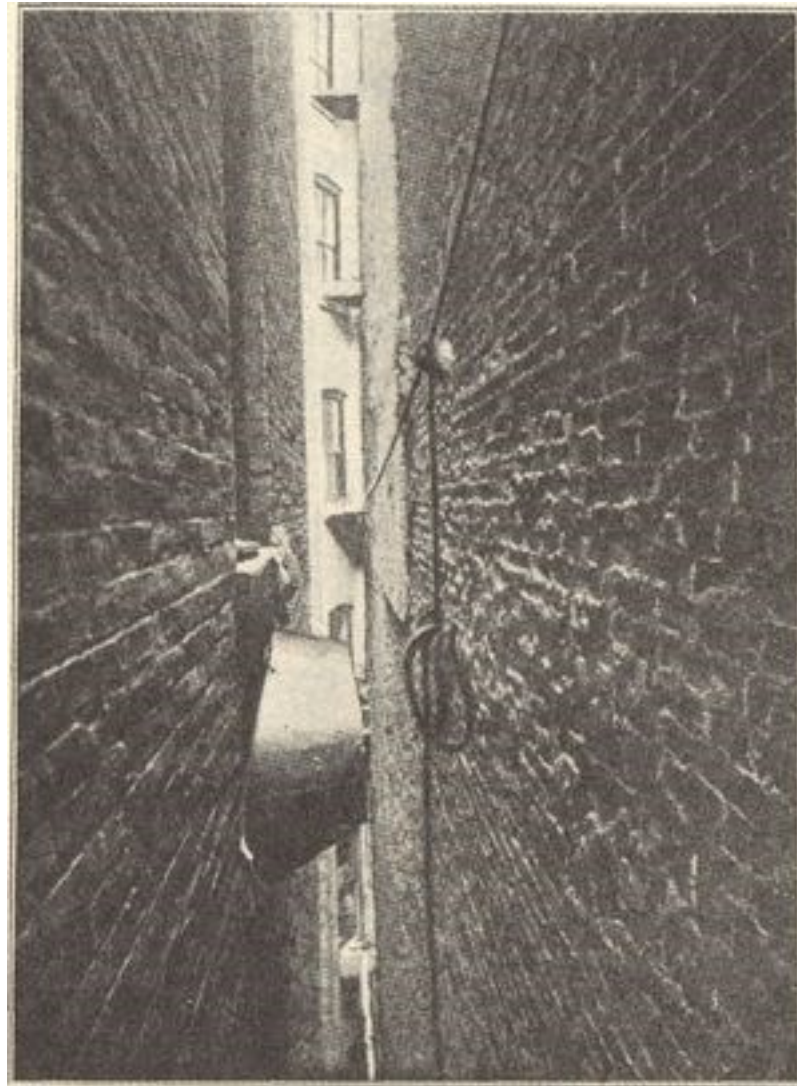
They were sweaters' tenements. But I shall keep that end of the story until I come to speak of the tenants. The houses I have in mind now. They were Astor leasehold property, and I had seen them built upon the improved plan of 1879, with air shafts and all that. There had not been water in the tenements for a month then, we were told by the one tenant who spoke English that could be understood. The cold snap had locked the pipes. Fitly enough, the lessee was an undertaker, an Italian

himself, who combined with his business of housing his people above and below the ground also that of the padrone, to let no profit slip. He had not taken the trouble to make many or recent repairs. The buildings had made a fair start; they promised well. But the promise had not been kept. In their premature decay they were distinctly as bad as the worst. I had the curiosity to seek out the agent, the middleman, and ask him why they were so. He shrugged his shoulders. With such tenants nothing could be done, he said. I have always held that Italians are most manageable, and that, with all the surface indications to the contrary, they are really inclined to cleanliness, if cause can be shown, and I told him so. He changed the subject diplomatically. No doubt it was with him simply a question of the rent. They might crowd and carry on as they pleased, once that was paid; and they did. It used to be the joke of Elizabeth Street that when the midnight police came, the tenants would keep them waiting outside, pretending to search for the key, until the surplus population of men had time to climb down the fire-escape. When the police were gone they came back. We surprised them all in bed.

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

This double-decker was thus described by the Tenement House Commission of 1894: "It is the one hopeless form of tenement construction. It cannot be well ventilated, it cannot be well lighted; it is not safe in case of fire. It is built on a lot 25 feet wide by 100 or less in depth, with apartments for four families in each story. This necessitates the occupation of from 86 to 90 per cent of the lot's depth. The stairway, made in the centre of the house, and the necessary walls and partitions reduce the width of the middle rooms (which serve as bedrooms for at least two people each) to 9 feet each at the most, and a narrow light and air shaft, now legally required in the centre of each side wall, still further lessens the floor space of these middle rooms. Direct light is only possible for the rooms at the front and rear. The middle rooms must borrow what light they can from dark hallways, the shallow shafts, and the rear rooms. Their air must pass through other rooms or the tiny shafts, and cannot but be contaminated before it reaches them. A five-story house of this character contains apartments for eighteen or twenty families, a population frequently amounting to 100 people, and sometimes increased by boarders or lodgers to 150 or more."





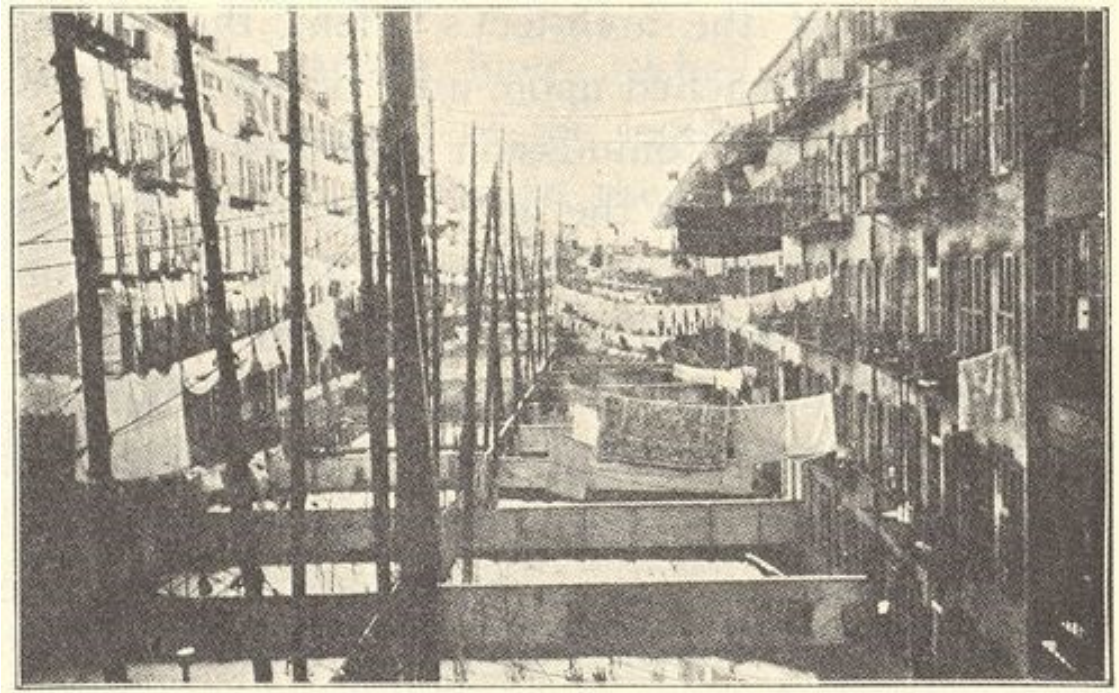
The only Bath-Tub in the Block: it hangs in the Air Shaft.

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

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

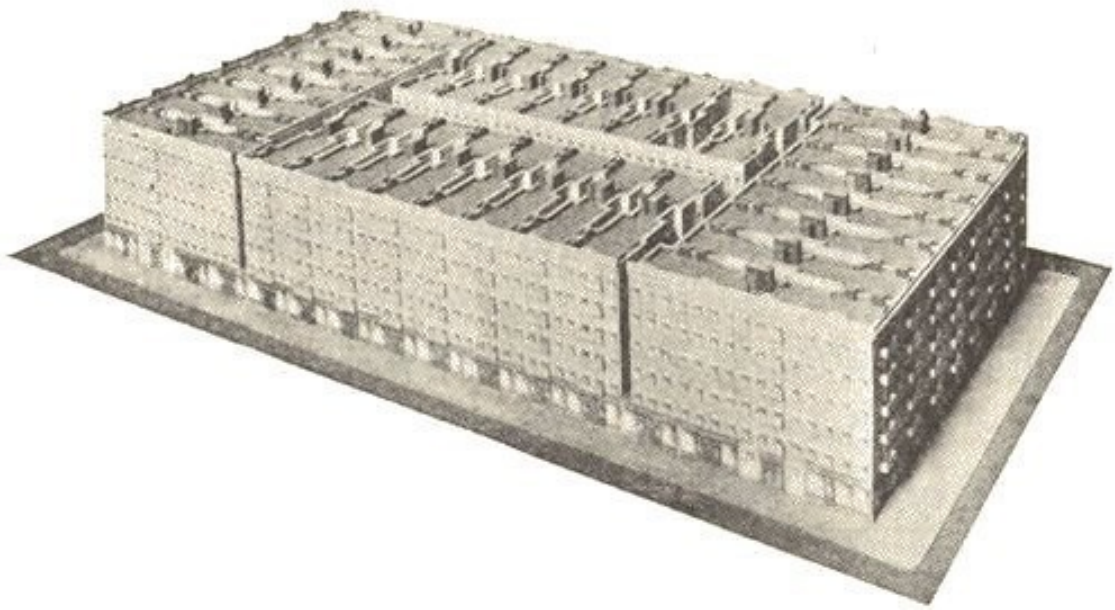
But the motive is not so obscure, after all. It is the same old one of profit without conscience. It took from the Health Department the supervision of the light, ventilation, and plumbing of the tenements, which by right belonged there, and put it in charge of a compliant Building Department, "for the convenience of architects and their clients, and the saving of time and expense to them." For

the convenience of the architect's client, the builder, the lot was encroached upon, until of one big block which the Gilder Commission measured only 7 per cent was left open to the air; 93 per cent of it was covered with brick and mortar. Rear tenements, to the number of nearly 100, have been condemned as "slaughter-houses," with good reason, but this block was built practically solid. The average of space covered in 34 tenement blocks was shown to be 78.13 per cent. The law allowed only 65. The "discretion" that penned tenants in a burning tenement with stairs of wood for the builder's "convenience" cut down the chance of life of their babies unmoved. Sunlight and air mean just that, where three thousand human beings are packed into a single block. That was why the matter was given into the charge of the health officials, when politics was yet kept out of their work.



The Old Style of Tenements, with Yards.

Of such kind are the interests that oppose betterment of the worker's hard lot in New York, that dictated the appointment by Tammany of a commission composed of builders to revise its code of tenement laws, and that sneered at the "laughable results of the Gilder Tenement House Commission." Those results made for the health and happiness and safety of a million and a half of souls, and were accounted, on every humane ground, the longest step forward that had been taken by this community. For the old absentee landlord, who did not know what mischief was afoot, we have got the speculative builder, who does know, but does not care, so long as he gets his pound of flesh. Half of the just laws that have been passed for the relief of the people he has paralyzed with his treacherous discretion clause, carefully nursed in the school of practical politics to which he gives faithful adherence. The thing has been the curse of our city from the day when the earliest struggle toward better things began. Among the first manifestations of that was the prohibition of soap factories below Grand Street by the Act of 1797, which created a Board of Health with police powers. The act was passed in February, to take effect in July; but long before that time the same legislature had amended it by giving the authorities discretion in the matter. And the biggest soap factory of them all is down there to this day, and is even now stirring up a rumpus among the latest immigrants, the Syrians, who have settled about it. No doubt it is all a question of political education; but is not a hundred years enough to settle this much, that compromise is out of place where the lives of the people are at stake, and that it is time our years of "discretion" were numbered?



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

At last there comes for the answer an emphatic yes. This year the law has killed the discretionary clause and spoken out plainly. No more stairs of wood; no more encroachment on the tenants' sunlight; and here, set in its frame of swarming tenements, is a wide, open space, yet to be a real park, with flowers and grass and birds to gladden the hearts of those to whom such things have been as tales that are told, all these dreary years, and with a playground in which the children of yonder big school may roam at will, undismayed by landlord or policeman. Not all the forces of reaction can put back the barracks that were torn down as one of the "laughable results" of that very Tenement House Commission's work, or restore to the undertaker his profits from Bone Alley of horrid memory. It was the tenant's turn to laugh, that time. Half a dozen blocks away, among even denser swarms, is another such plot, where there will be football and a skating pond before another season. They are breaking ground to-day. Seven years of official red tape have we had since the plans were first made, and it isn't all unwound yet; but it will be speedily now, and we shall hear the story of those parks and rejoice that the day of reckoning is coming for the builder without a soul. Till then let him deck the fronts of his tenements with bravery of plate glass and brass to hide the darkness within. He has done his worst.

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