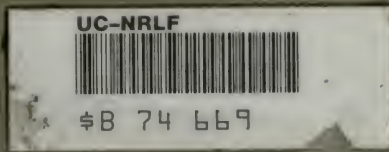


H D  
7304  
N5  
V4  
MAIN



# Tenement House Reform

in

## New York, 1834-1900

Prepared for

The Tenement House Commission  
of 1900

303m  
V487

By

Lawrence Veiller, Secretary



1900  
T.C.

# Tenement House Reform

in

New York, 1834=1900

Prepared for

The Tenement House Commission

of 1900

303m  
V427

By

Lawrence Veiller, Secretary



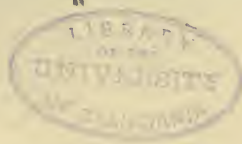
TENEMENT HOUSE REFORM IN  
NEW YORK, 1834-1900.

PREPARED FOR

The Tenement House Commission of 1900

BY

LAWRENCE VEILLER, Secretary,



---

COPYRIGHT MAY, 1900, BY LAWRENCE VEILLER.

---

NEW YORK:  
THE EVENING POST JOB PRINTING HOUSE, 156 FULTON STREET,  
(EVENING POST BUILDING.)

1900.

HD 7304  
.N5 V4

## TABLE OF CONTENTS.

---

	PAGE.
The First Legislative Commission—1856.....	8
Neglect and Greed the Real Cause of Bad Conditions.....	10
Licensing of Tenement Houses Urged.....	12
The Movement of 1864—Council of Hygiene.....	14
The First Tenement House Law—1867.....	17
The Movement of 1879—Mr. White's Model Tenements.....	21
The New Tenement House Law—1879.....	25
The Tenement House Competition 1879—The "Dumb-Bell" Plan.....	26
— The Second Legislative Commission—1884.....	28
The Law Amended in 1887.....	31
The Work of Jacob A. Riis.....	31
The Third Legislative Commission—1894.....	32
The Tenement House Act of 1895.....	35
The Model Tenement Competition of 1896—The City & Suburban Homes Company.....	36
The Movement of 1899—Charity Organization Society.....	38
The Tenement House Exhibition of 1900.....	41
Poverty and Disease.....	44
The Model Tenement Competition of 1900.....	46

105 EAST 22D STREET, NEW YORK CITY,  
MAY 8, 1900.

Mr. ROBERT W. de FOREST, *Chairman*,  
Tenement House Commission.

DEAR SIR,—In accordance with the resolution of the Tenement House Commission, of April 26th, I beg to transmit herewith a history of the movement for tenement house reform in New York.

Respectfully submitted,

LAWRENCE VEILLER,  
*Secretary*,  
Tenement House Commission.



1834-1900.

## TENEMENT HOUSE REFORM IN NEW YORK.

[The movement for housing reform in New York dates back as far as 1834, when Gerrett Forbes, the City Inspector of the Board of Health, in his annual report giving the record of burials or deaths, called attention to the condition of the tenement houses at that time.

[The first attempt, however, to give any comprehensive idea of the condition of the dwellings of the poorer classes in New York City was not made until 1842, when Dr. John H. Griscom, the City Inspector of the Board of Health, called attention to the existing conditions.] Prior to this time, the City Inspector had contented himself with simply reporting the various statistics available as to the number of deaths occurring during the year, their causes, and the ages of the people among whom the deaths occurred, with a few brief remarks explanatory of the statistics. [Dr. Griscom, however, in addition to this formal report submitted a pamphlet of eighteen printed pages entitled "A Brief View of the Sanitary Condition of the City." In it he calls attention to the great increase of population in the city in 1810 and again in 1838, by a horde of ignorant immigrants who arrived here generally penniless, and who brought with them disease and misery. To this sudden increase of the city's population and the subsequent herding of these people in large numbers in the poorer quarters of the city was largely due the beginning of bad housing conditions in New York.

[Dr. Griscom's report dwells upon the crowded condition, and the insufficient ventilation of a great number of the dwellings in the city, also the fact that a large part of the population lived in cellars and basements, and in courts and alleys, he pointing out that there were then 1,459 cellars being used as places of residence by 7,196 persons, and

that there were as many as 6,618 different families living in courts or rear buildings. The grave moral evils resulting from the indiscriminate mingling of the sexes in the same room are dwelt upon, as well as the fact that the causes of uncleanliness, poverty and sickness were not so much to be found in the "innate depravity" of the people as in the environment in which they were compelled to live.]

He urged that the City Legislature should prohibit the use of cellars as dwellings, and that the owner or lessee of every tenement house should be required to keep the outdoor and indoor premises free and clean from everything likely to prove injurious to health, and that an immediate stop should be put to the practice of crowding so many human beings in such limited spaces, arguing that if there were any propriety in the law requiring ocean vessels to carry only a certain number of people, there was equal propriety in requiring that only a certain number of persons should occupy houses of this kind; and that, if a law regulating the construction of buildings in reference to fire was justifiable, one respecting the protection of the inmates from the influences of badly arranged houses and apartments should be enacted.

In 1846 the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, a charitable society organized in 1843, took up the question of the housing of the poor people of the city, maintaining that bad housing was the main cause of most of the poverty and sickness that existed.

In 1853 they appointed a special committee "to inquire into the sanitary condition of the laboring classes, and the practicability of devising measures for the comfort and healthfulness of their habitations." This Committee rendered a report of thirty-two printed pages in the fall of 1853, which was published in the annual report of the Association for that year. The state of affairs disclosed by their investigations was one which called for prompt and effective remedies, and its effect on the public mind should have been great, for it brought to light the gravest social evils.

The Committee, after making an examination of most of the tenement houses in all the different wards of the city, came to the conclusion that "the dwellings of the industrious class in New York were not adapted to the wants of human beings nor compatible with the health or social or moral improvement of the occupants."

Among the evils which, in their opinion, were responsible for the prevalence of bad conditions were the following:

1. The crowded condition of the dwellings in which the poor were compelled to live.
2. Too great density of population in certain districts.
3. Neglect of ventilation—a prevailing cause of ill-health.

Nothing contained in the report of this Committee is of greater value than the demonstration of the principle that "*the number of persons on a given area of soil cannot be increased beyond a certain limit without endangering health.*"

Considerable attention was paid to underground dwellings by the Committee, it being pointed out that in 1850 there were 18,456 persons crowded together in 3,742 cellars, which "were always damp, badly ventilated, generally filthy, and beds of pestilence and disease." As a remedy for all these evils the Committee recommended that capitalists and owners of real estate should build model tenements; and also called attention to the necessity for legislative intervention, stating that "these crying evils cannot be remedied or essentially diminished without special legislative action. Pure air, light and water being indispensable to health and life, if tenements are so badly constructed as to preclude a proper supply of these essential elements, the law should interpose for the protection of the sufferers, and either close up such dwellings or cause them to be so remodeled as to be fit for human habitation."

In the following year the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor made a sociological study of tene-

ment conditions in the Eleventh Ward of the city, reporting the number of inhabitants, the number of families, and the number of houses occupied by one, five, ten and twenty families respectively, also the distribution of nationality at that time.

In the following year they organized a company to build a model tenement known as the "Workmen's Home Association" This Company erected a large building in Mott street, which unfortunately was not "model," in many respects, and later became one of the worst tenement houses the city has ever seen.

#### THE FIRST LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION. 1856.

One result of the disclosures made by this Association in 1853 was the appointment by the State Legislature in 1856 of a committee of their own members "to make an examination of the manner in which tenant houses are constructed in the City of New York, and report the same to the Legislature, and also what legislation, if any, is requisite and necessary in order to remedy the evils and offer full protection to the lives and health of the occupants of such buildings.") This Committee, consisting of five members of the Assembly, Mr. A. J. H. Duganne, John M. Reed, Eli Curtis, William J. Shea and Samuel Brevoort, visited New York City on March 14th and again on March 25th of that year, spending altogether seven days in a personal inspection of some of the best known tenant houses in the city.

In their report to the Legislature made on April 4, 1856, they stated that in the brief time allowed them for the investigation they had been able to do no more than glance at evils of such magnitude as to imperatively demand a thorough and searching scrutiny, and asked that their Committee be continued throughout the summer so that they might make a more thorough examination of the evils disclosed by their brief investigation, stating that the examination they had made had convinced them that the evils to be remedied were of a serious nature requiring the

attention of the State Legislature, and demanding such action at the hands of the Assembly as would secure their ultimate removal. They further stated that "partial returns made up hurriedly by the captains of the police for the use of the Committee show that in twenty-two districts there are over 1,200 tenement houses of the very lowest description occupied by no less than ten families each. In some of these, as many as 70 different families reside, and into a few over 100 families are crowded. In one building, 112 families are residing, some of them numbering 8 and 10 members, occupying one close unventilated apartment, and others huddle indiscriminately in damp foul cellars, to breath the air of which is to inhale disease. Here, in its very worst aspect are to be seen the horrors of such a mode of living. Here are to be found drunken and diseased men and women lying in the midst of their impurity and filth; idiotic and crippled children suffering from neglect and ill treatment, girls just springing into womanhood living indiscriminately in the same apartment with men of all ages and of all colors; babes left so destitute of care and nourishment as to be fitted only for a jail or hospital in after years if they escape the blessing of an early grave."

In many localities the Committee found many of the apartments so destitute even of light as to render it an impossibility to read a newspaper, even though at noon time. Further, "in the houses visited by the Committee sights were presented to them alike startling and painful to behold. Young faces haggard with want and sickness and bearing that peculiar look of premature old age imparted by early sin gazed at them from every corner; misery and vice in their most repulsive features met them at every step. Scarcely an apartment was free from sickness and disease, and the blighting curse of drunkenness had fallen upon almost every family. Here and there might be found, it is true, some attempt at cleanliness, some display of a love of home, some evidences of industry and sobriety with their natural accompaniments of cheerfulness and good health." "But these," the Com-

mittee say, "in some instances were families that had not long been inhabitants of the neighborhood in which they lived, *the demoralization and ruin apparent all around had not had time to do their work on them.* [It is to be feared the miasmal air will creep into their existence undermining the sturdy constitutions and prostrating its victims on a bed of sickness; health failing them, want will follow, and then must come crowding rapidly upon them neglect of home, neglect of children, uncleanness, drunkenness and crime."] }

### NEGLECT AND GREED THE REAL CAUSE OF BAD CONDITIONS.

The Committee says: "*This is no fancy sketch, no picture of the imagination. It is a stern reality, enacted every day amid luxury and wealth, the natural and fearful result of the rapacity of the landlord in every crowded city unrestrained by conscience, and wholly unchecked by legislation.*"

[These words, written forty-four years ago, sum up the causes of all our bad conditions in New York City to-day. The overcrowding, the poverty, the disease, the crime and vice, met with in New York in 1900, products of our tenement house system, have not come to us because of the narrow shape of Manhattan Island or of the lack of rapid transit, as has been claimed by superficial students of the subject for many years, but because of the primary neglect of the habitations of the poor of this city at a period when they could have been cared for in time.]

Had the Committee done nothing else beyond making this statement of the conditions of that time, our debt to them would have been very great.

After setting forth in most striking language the conditions found by them in their very brief inspection of the tenant houses of New York City, and urging upon the Legislature the importance of continuing the work throughout the summer, so that a proper and well-considered

ered plan of reform might be matured, the Committee pointed out that "to the wretched condition of the poor of New York can be traced an enormous proportion of the burdens imposed upon the property holders of the city, and upon the State at large, for the support of paupers and criminals. From the foul atmosphere of the tenement houses spring the infectious diseases that so frequently spread through the city, sweeping away their thousands of victims, and not confining their depredations to the class in which they originate, but penetrating into the localities occupied by the wealthy, and rendering desolate many a household. Hundreds upon hundreds of paupers pour into the hospitals stricken by disease contracted in those hot-beds of pestilence, the tenement houses, and from them drunkenness mainly receives its victims, for what will sooner drive a man to the intoxicating cup than the absence of all attraction and all comforts from his home?" "It is no idle assertion to say that a reform by which the condition of the homes of the poor could be improved would remove a large proportion of the criminals from our prisons and the paupers from our almshouses."

The practical results which the Committee hoped to secure through legislative action, and to which they stated their inquiries would be directed through the summer, were:

1. Ventilation and cleanliness in tenement houses so that the public health might be protected, the spread of infectious diseases checked, and the expenses of the public hospitals and almshouses decreased.

2. An enactment against the renting of underground apartments or cellars as tenements.

3. Regulations as to the building of halls and stairways in houses occupied by more than three families, so as to insure easy egress in case of fire.

4. The prevention of prostitution and incest, by providing that only a sufficient number of rooms, or a room properly divided into separate apartments, should be rented to families; and by prohibiting subletting.

{5. The prevention of drunkenness by providing to every man a clean and comfortable home.}

It is extremely instructive to find that the Committee had become so interested in the tenement house question, that, notwithstanding the failure of the Legislature to continue their work throughout the summer, the members of the Committee, of their own accord, upon their own responsibility and at their own personal expense, decided to continue this work, rendering to the next Legislature, in March, 1857, their report and conclusions. This document constitutes the report of the first legislative commission of inquiry on this subject in America. Nothing that has been written since that time has been of greater value, nor have any later investigations of a similar kind been more efficient, nor have they developed much further information or knowledge, on the whole, upon this subject.

#### LICENSING OF TENEMENT HOUSES URGED.

If space allowed me I would quote at great length from this document because the conclusions reached by the Commission are so sound, the descriptions of the conditions they discovered are so able, and the whole paper couched in language that is not only forcible but convincing. Accompanying their report, they submitted to the Legislature a bill entitled "An Act to Improve the Condition of the Laboring Poor Residing in Tenant Houses in the City of New York, to Establish a Board of Home Commissioners in said City, and for other Purposes." The bill provided for a Board of Commissioners to consist of three citizens of New York who "should have power at any time between sunrise and sunset to visit, or cause to be visited, any tenant house ordinarily used as a common dwelling or lodging for three or more families transiently occupying the same; and also to have power to enter and inspect, and properly examine all rooms, courts, alleys, yards and cellars used for such transient tenancy as aforesaid." If in the opinion of such Board, or any two of the Commissioners, after personal inspection, any



such tenant house, rooms or premises was found to be unfit for the purpose of residence by reason of dampness, darkness, dirt, filthiness or too low ceilings, ill ventilation, being underground, or any other good cause, the Commission was authorized to serve a notice upon the owner, agent, or lessee of the property, directing the premises to be put in proper order and condition within a specified time. And it was further provided that such house, rooms or premises should be deemed to be untenable and forbidden to be occupied for dwelling or lodging purposes until such directions or orders of said Commissioners be complied with. The Commissioners were further required to keep registered lists of the different tenant houses in each ward, of the number of tenants and lodgers occupying each of said houses, designating the age, sex, color and occupation or employment of each person; also the number of children between the ages of six and fourteen not in attendance on any school, and of the occupation of such children, and the Commissioners were empowered to examine witnesses upon oath in reference to this matter. They were further empowered to keep a record of all lottery or policy shops, grocery stores, liquor stores, etc., etc.

Among their other powers, they were authorized to direct and compel the owner, agent, lessee or keeper of any tenant house to thoroughly cleanse all the rooms, passages, stairs, floors, windows, doors, walls, ceilings, etc., to the satisfaction of the Commission; and the owners, or lessees of tenant houses were prohibited from sub-letting any part of their premises except with the consent of the Board of Home Commissioners. No compensation was to be paid to the Commissioners for their services, but their expenses were to be paid, and they were to be provided with a proper clerical force, and were required to render a report to the Legislature each year as to the work accomplished by them.

This carefully thought-out scheme for a permanent body whose sole duty should be the care and regulation of

the tenant houses of the city, here enunciated for the first time, was unfortunately not adopted by the Legislature. There has never been made any recommendation, which would have so reached the root of the whole problem as this proposition of the Assembly Investigation Committee of 1856. It was, in effect, a provision for the licensing or strict sanitary control of the tenement houses.

Since this report was made forty-three years have elapsed. Conditions in many respects are the same in New York City as they were in 1857, only the extent of them has increased tenfold. I believe that the real solution of the tenement house problem will be found in the licensing of tenement houses, and predict that until that step is taken, we can expect little real benefit to result.

Interest in this question aroused spasmodically every ten years and then allowed to flag is not calculated to secure beneficial results or much progress toward improved conditions. The subject is sufficiently large and difficult to require the constant and continuous thought and study of the best minds.

Although the labors of this Commission did not produce immediate results, the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, which had waged its fight for better tenements since 1846, did not give up the battle. From 1857 to 1864 they continued their campaign of education, from time to time calling the attention of the community to the condition of affairs, petitioning both the Legislature and the Common Council to enact laws and ordinances to remedy the evil conditions which had been growing steadily worse year by year.

#### THE MOVEMENT OF 1864—THE COUNCIL OF HYGIENE.

Not, however, till the first fruits of thirty years of municipal neglect had been gathered in the terrible "draft riots" of 1863, did the community become aroused to the dangers of the evils which surrounded them. When in

those troublous times, during our Civil War, the tenements poured forth the mobs that held fearful sway in the city, during the outbreak of violence in the month of July, then, for the first time, did the general public realize what it meant to permit human beings to be reared under the conditions which had so long prevailed in the tenement houses in New York City.]

Mr. N. P. Willis, a leading journalist, writing at that time, thus describes the impression made upon him by the sight of these persons. "The high brick blocks of closely packed houses where the mobs originated seemed to be literally hives of sickness and vice. It was wonderful to see and difficult to believe that so much misery, disease and wretchedness could be huddled together and hidden by high walls, unvisited and unthought of so near our own abodes. Lewd but pale and sickly young women, scarcely decent in their ragged attire, were impudent, and scattered everywhere in the courts. What numbers of these poorer classes are deformed, what numbers are made hideous by self-neglect and infirmity! Alas, human faces look so hideous with hope and self-respect all gone, and familiar forms and features are made so frightful by sin, squalor and debasement! To walk the streets as we walked them in those hours of conflagration and riot was like witnessing the day of judgment, with every wicked thing revealed, every sin and sorrow blazingly glared upon, every hidden abomination laid before hell's expectant fire."

Heeding this warning, some few months later in the spring of 1864, the leading citizens of New York formed themselves into what was known as the "Citizens' Association" for the purpose of taking steps to improve the sanitary condition of the city. The alarmingly high death rate of New York at that time (there being one death in every 35 of the inhabitants) became a subject of the most careful thought and investigation. Accordingly, the Citizens' Association formed a sub-committee known as the Council of Hygiene and Public Health, which included

the leading physicians of the city at that time. This Council of Hygiene organized in the month of April in the year 1864, and at once determined to undertake a complete and thorough sanitary investigation of the entire city. The city, which at that time was coincident with Manhattan Island, was divided into 29 districts; an experienced physician was appointed as sanitary inspector in each ward, and during a period of nine months the most thorough, complete and scientific sanitary inspection ever made of any city was made of the City of New York. This investigation embraced a description of the character of the soil throughout each district, the number of buildings, the purposes for which they were used, whether business buildings, churches, schools, dwellings or tenement houses, etc.; whether built of brick, stone, iron or wood; the character of the streets, how paved, whether provided with sewers, etc. The "tenant houses" were a subject of special investigation in every district; the most notorious ones were fully described, not only as to their construction, but as to the character of the people living in them, the sickness prevailing in them, the death rate of them, etc., including nearly every conceivable detail. In addition to these investigations there were recorded the number of vacant lots, the number of liquor stores, brothels, stores for the sale of food, the number of stables, the influence of stables upon disease, the prevalence of preventable diseases in the districts, infantile diseases and mortality, and the excessive crowding of houses upon the lots. Never was a piece of social or sanitary work better done.

In addition to these detailed reports, the Council of Hygiene had prepared for them a map showing the nature of the soil throughout the entire city, as well as the underground streams and water-courses. This monumental work of General Egbert L. Viele has been of incalculable value to the city. There was also presented a map of the entire Fourth Ward showing the exact arrangement of every building in each block throughout the Ward, giving

the amount of land occupied, the shape of the building, the height in stories, the number of families occupying it, the number of persons, also whether certain contagious diseases had prevailed there during that year, and indicating also the location of the different liquor stores in each neighborhood. Thanks to the foresight of Dr. Ezra R. Pulling, Inspector of this District, we thus have to-day a means of comparing conditions as they were in 1864 with conditions as they exist now in 1900. Besides these maps and diagrams, the report published by the Council of Hygiene contains a number of photographs showing some of the worst tenement conditions at that time, and also some of the other sanitary evils which then existed. This report constitutes a volume of more than 360 pages, and is unquestionably the most comprehensive and valuable study of this kind that has ever been made.

#### THE FIRST TENEMENT HOUSE LAW—1867.

As a result of the disclosures made by the Council of Hygiene in 1865 came the first legislative action in regard to tenement houses in this country. The first step was the establishment of the Metropolitan Board of Health in 1866, and one year later, in 1867, the enactment of the tenement house law. (This act after defining a tenement house as "Any house, building, or portion thereof which is rented, leased, let, or hired out to be occupied, or is occupied, as the home or residence of more than three families living independently of one another, and doing their own cooking upon the premises, or by more than two families upon a floor, so living and cooking and having a common right in the halls, stairways, yards, water closets or privies, or some of them," provided that no building should be used as a tenement house unless every sleeping room had a ventilator or transom window of an area of 3 square feet over the door connecting with the adjoining room or with the outer air; that every such house should be provided with a proper fire escape to be approved by the Building Inspector; that the roof over the main hall should

be provided with a proper ventilator; and that it should be kept in good repair and not allowed to leak, and that all stairs should be provided with proper banisters; also that every house should be provided with good and sufficient water-closets or privies, and that there should not be less than 1 to every 20 occupants, and that where there was a sewer in the street in front of such a house, the privies or closets should be connected with the sewer; that no cesspool should be allowed in connection with a tenement house unless where it was unavoidable; that the yards of all new tenement houses should be graded and drained, and connected with the sewer; that no basement or cellar rooms should be occupied without a permit from the Board of Health, and that, even then, such rooms should not be occupied unless 7 feet in height from the floor to the ceiling, and also 1 foot of the height above the surface of the ground adjoining the same, nor unless there was an open area properly drained, 2 feet 6 inches wide, extending along the front of the room, nor unless the room had an external window opening of at least 9 square feet. It was further provided that no underground room should be occupied for sleeping purposes without a written permit from the Board of Health. All tenement houses were also required to be provided with proper receptacles for garbage and other refuse, and the storage of combustible material was prohibited, as was the keeping of animals, except dogs and cats. All tenements were further required to be kept free from the accumulation of dirt and filth and garbage at all times. The name and address of the owner of every tenement house was also required to be posted in a conspicuous place in each building. The health officers were to have free access to such buildings at all times, and the Board of Health was authorized to have vacated buildings that were unfit for habitation by reason of being infected with disease or likely to cause sickness among the occupants, or dangerous from want of repair. The law further provided that where there was a front and rear building to be erected



on the same lot, there should be a clear, open space between the buildings if they were one story high, of 10 feet; 15 feet, if they were two stories high; 20 feet, if they were three stories high; and 25 feet, if they were more than three stories high; also that at the rear of every new tenement house there should be a clear open space of 10 feet between it and any other building, but, unfortunately, discretion was given to the Board of Health to modify these requirements as to the amount of space when they saw fit. The law also provided that every habitable room should be at least 8 feet high, except rooms in attics, and that every habitable room should have at least one window connected with the external air, or, over the door a ventilator leading into the hall, or into another room having connection with the external air; also that the total area of windows in every room communicating with the external air should be at least one-tenth of the superficial area of the room; also that every habitable room of a less area than 100 square feet which did not communicate directly with the external air and did not have an open fire place should be provided with a separate ventilating flue. Every new tenement house was required also to have a chimney or open fire place running through every floor of the building, and for each set of rooms. New tenements were also required to have proper receptacles for ashes and rubbish, and running water was to be furnished at one or more places in the house or in the yard. Cellars were required to be cemented so as to be water tight, and the halls on each floor were required to be so arranged as to open directly to the outer air. A violation of the act was made a misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of not less than \$10 or more than \$100, or by imprisonment for not more than ten days for each day that the violation continued, or by both such fine and imprisonment, in the discretion of the Court.

The Board of Health was also given power to make further regulations as to cellars and as to ventilation.

During the same year an important amendment to the

existing building laws of the city was passed, and in it were requirements relating to tenement houses. These concerned themselves chiefly with the method of construction of such buildings with regard to dangers from fire. Among other things, it was provided that no front and rear tenements should be erected on the same lot unless they were both fireproof throughout; also, that every building of such a character should be provided with a proper fire escape; that the hall partitions from cellar to roof should be built of brick not less than 12 inches thick; that the floor beams should be of iron, and that the stairs should be fireproof. It was further required that where the first floor of such a building was used for business purposes of any kind, the first floor should be constructed fireproof, with iron beams and brick flooring, and that all coal bins and wood bins in the cellars of such houses should be built of fireproof material.

It will be seen from this summary of the provisions of the law that, while many important questions had been provided for, the framers of the law had unfortunately lost sight of the main feature of the tenement house problem, *i. e.*, they had not enacted a provision restricting the percentage of the lot permitted to be occupied by such buildings. This was a most serious defect in the law, as was also the careless phrasing of the provision requiring a space of 10 feet to be left at the rear of tenement houses. The law was so worded that this space was to be left between the rear of a new tenement house and any other building; the result was that, where there was no building in existence immediately behind the lot owned by the tenement house builder, he could build his building up to the entire lot limit. Not until twelve years later, in 1879, was this defect in the law remedied, by providing that there should be a space of 10 feet between the rear of every new tenement house and the rear line of the lot upon which the tenement was built.

When one considers that there were, in 1867, 15,000 tenement houses erected before the passage of any tene-



ment house law, without regard to the safety or health of the occupants, one begins to realize the magnitude of the task which confronted the newly organized Board of Health. The reports of the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor for the following five years show a decided improvement in the tenement houses of the city, especially in regard to cellar dwellings and to the general sanitary condition of buildings, the Sanitary Police being able to enforce greater cleanliness than had heretofore existed. While the new law had remedied certain defects, and had to a certain extent improved existing tenement houses, yet it soon became evident that it did not meet the conditions in such a way as to secure good types of buildings among those newly erected.

In 1871 we find the following statement in the report of the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor for that year: "The tenant house system might be indefinitely enlarged upon but space forbids. Though greatly improved in late years, it is still the disgrace and curse of the city, that half of the inhabitants live in this class of houses, from which proceeds three-fifths of the crime and three-fourths of the mortality. If we would abate these evils, the wretched domiciliary conditions of the occupants of these tenements must be improved."

#### THE MOVEMENT OF 1879—MR. WHITE'S MODEL TENEMENTS.

Between this time and 1877 little attention was given to the tenement house problem, except in the regular work of the Board of Health and the city Building Department.

In 1877 Mr. Alfred T. White, of Brooklyn, having seen the model tenements of Sir Sidney Waterlow's Industrial Dwellings Company in London, became imbued with the idea that the best way in which he could benefit the working people of New York City, or of his own City of Brooklyn, was by providing them with decent, comfortable homes. He accordingly built his well-known

“Home Buildings” in Brooklyn upon plans similar to those of the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company of London, and one year later, directly opposite, built an entire block of similar model tenements, with a large park or court-yard in the center. From the time they were built these tenements have always been a success, both socially and financially. (Wide publicity was given to this extraordinarily successful experiment of Mr. White’s, the result being that great interest was stimulated in the tenement-house problem.) It was well that such interest was aroused at this time, as the public attention had been allowed to flag during the previous ten years. Mr. White lectured before the Social Science Association, sermons were preached in the different churches upon the subject, and the public press gave the greatest amount of attention to this important topic.

The educational work undertaken by the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor in 1846, and carried on so successfully by them until 1871, was now taken up by another charitable society, namely, the State Charities Aid Association, formed in 1873. This Society, through its Standing Committee, “On the Elevation of the Poor in Their Homes,” in 1877, again called attention to the need of reform, and leading architects of the city were asked to send in plans for improved tenement houses, so that the best intelligence of the community might be got to work upon the problem. It appears that at this time there were in New York City 25,000 tenement houses, and that the excessive mortality and sickness in the city at that time was held to be mainly due to the defective system of tenement-house life.

On the 6th of December a conference of those interested in the subject was called by this Society, at which Mr. Alfred T. White described to them the very successful results accomplished by his model tenements in Brooklyn, which had earned  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent., net, during the first year of their existence; also the successful results accomplished in London by the different model tenement house com-

panies there were presented. At the meeting a Special Committee was appointed to "Consider the question of improved houses for the poor in New York City, with authority to secure the incorporation of a company under the best legal advice to erect such houses." This Committee rendered a report in April, 1878, stating that they had not found it desirable to recommend the building of model tenements at that time, but that they did recommend a thorough investigation and discussion of existing tenements, hoping that something might be done toward reforming them, and believing that it was much to be desired that public opinion should be enlightened as to the evils and dangers resulting to the whole city from the existence of many of the present tenements, and the urgent need of a more rigid enforcement of the laws already existing concerning them, and, further, a more thorough legislation that might up-root the evil, instead of merely repressing its growth.

This Committee held frequent meetings and made personal inspection of many of the tenement houses in the city, employing a special agent to make a detailed examination of certain typical tenement houses.

In January of the following year, a sub-committee was appointed to induce the clergy of the city to take up the question of tenement house reform and to preach on this subject on a Sunday to be agreed upon. The Sunday of February 23, 1879, was set aside as "Tenement House Sunday," and the leading ministers of the city delivered addresses upon the evils of the tenement house system and the necessity for reform. It was decided by the State Charities Aid Association that a large public meeting of all classes was desirable to bring home to the community the importance of this subject. Accordingly such a meeting was held in Cooper Union on February 28th, many of New York's leading citizens being present and speaking. At this meeting Mayor Cooper, who presided, appointed a sub-committee of nine members, known as the "Mayor's Committee," for the purpose of devising measures to carry

tenement house reform into effect.) The following gentlemen were members of this Committee: Messrs. D. Willis James, Frederick W. Stevens, W. W. Astor, Cornelius Vanderbilt, R. T. Auchmuty, James Gallatin, Henry E. Pellew, F. D. Tappen and C. P. Daly.

The Committee rendered its report about one month later, making it public on March 25th. They proposed two plans, one charitable, the other commercial, recommending the formation of a company to build model tenement houses upon a business basis, similar to the tenements so successfully built and managed by Mr. Alfred T. White, in Brooklyn. They further recommended radical changes in the existing tenement house law, and it is extremely interesting to find that they strongly urged a provision calling for the licensing of tenement houses, the very same provision which had been so eloquently urged by the First Legislative Investigating Commission in 1856, twenty-three years previously. This important and desirable clause, however, was stricken out by the Legislature, and real tenement house reform was again postponed indefinitely.

As a result of the recommendations of the Committee of Nine, the Improved Dwellings Association was formed with a capital of \$300,000. Mr. W. Bayard Cutting was elected President of this Association, and Mr. Samuel D. Babcock, Treasurer. The Association was strictly a commercial enterprise, but with dividends limited to 5 per cent. Several lots of land were purchased on First avenue from 71st to 72d streets and an excellent group of buildings, somewhat similar in plan to Mr. White's Brooklyn buildings, was erected. These are still in good condition to-day, twenty-one years later, and have paid in all that time, regularly 5 per cent. dividends, besides reserving a slight amount for a depreciation fund. The Committee of Nine also recommended the formation of a permanent society to carry on the work of tenement house reform, and the New York Sanitary Reform Society was thus incorporated with Mr. James Gallatin as president.

### THE NEW TENEMENT HOUSE LAW—1879.

Of greater importance, however, than either of these steps were the changes in the tenement-house law accomplished as a result of this agitation. For the first time the percentage of lot permitted to be occupied by a new tenement house was limited, the new law requiring that no new tenement house should occupy more than 65 per centum of the lot. Unfortunately, however, a clause was inserted giving the Board of Health permission *in special cases* to modify this provision. Had not this unfortunate discretionary clause been inserted, there would have resulted real reform in the character of the tenement houses erected in this city. The result of the discretionary clause, was, as it has always been in New York—it practically nullified the whole effect of the law, and in a few years the Board of Health was found to be permitting new tenements to occupy as much as 85, and even 90, per centum of the lot.

The new law also remedied the defect of the former, in reference to the amount of space to be left at the rear of a tenement house, putting it into clear, legal verbiage. At the same time, the act established thirty sanitary policemen under the supervision of the Board of Health, and created a tenement house fund of \$10,000 to be appropriated annually and to be spent by the Board of Health for the sanitary inspection of tenement houses. The law also wisely provided that no room in a tenement house should be used for sleeping, unless it had at least one window of a size of 12 square feet opening directly on the public street or yard, but again, unfortunately, the Board of Health was given discretionary power in this respect, it being added, "unless sufficient light and ventilation shall be otherwise provided in a manner approved by the Board of Health," the result of which, was to practically nullify this provision. The other main features of the law of 1867 were re-enacted.

Coincident with this agitation for tenement house reform started by the State Charities Aid Association in

1877 was a similar movement carried on by the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, which, in 1878, took up again the work that it had abandoned in 1871; in a series of admirable reports and pamphlets, calling attention to the great importance of reform in the dwellings of the poor, nor did it confine itself to this additional work of describing existing conditions, but started also a more active personal inspection of the tenement houses of the city, sending complaints to the Board of Health of violations of the law, and doing everything in its power to compel the authorities to secure the proper enforcement of the statutes.

This work they continued off and on from 1878 until 1884, the time of the next large agitation for tenement house reform.

### THE TENEMENT HOUSE COMPETITION, 1879—THE "DUMB-BELL" PLAN.

In December of 1878, Mr. Henry O. Meyer, at that time the proprietor of the newspaper known as the *Sanitary Engineer*, and who was much interested in this movement, in connection with Messrs. D. Willis James, F. B. Thurber, Henry E. Pellew and Robert Gordon, offered prizes of \$500 for the best architectural designs for a tenement house on an ordinary city lot, 25 feet wide by 100 feet deep. A special programme setting forth the conditions of this architectural competition was printed in the *Sanitary Engineer*, and the following gentlemen were appointed a jury of award to determine the merits of the different plans: Mr. R. S. Hatfield, architect; Prof. Charles F. Chandler, President of the Board of Health; Rev. John Hall, Rev. Henry C. Potter and Robert Hoe.

No less than 190 architects from all parts of the United States, and even from Canada and Great Britain, sent in plans in competition. These plans, numbering 206, were placed on free exhibition and attracted wide-spread interest. Many of the plans were reproduced in the papers

at that time, and the *Sanitary Engineer*, the journal which had inaugurated the competition and had authorized the prizes, printed an elaborate series of articles, reproducing the ten leading plans and describing the merits of each in detail. The first prize was awarded to Mr. James E. Ware, and from this time dates the introduction into the tenement house system of New York City of what is known as the "double decker dumb-bell tenement" so-called because of the shape of the outline of the building, which in the middle tapers in, very much like the handle of a dumb-bell.

This is the type of tenement house which to-day is the curse of our city. Many people have pointed out that what was considered a model tenement in 1879 is in 1900 considered one of the worst types of tenement houses ever constructed. Had these people studied more thoroughly the movement for tenement house reform, they would have found that in 1879 there was almost universal condemnation of the award of the prize to this type of building. In this connection, it is not inappropriate to quote part of an editorial from the *New York Times*, dated March 16th, 1879. "The prizes offered by a committee of gentlemen appointed by the proprietor of the *Sanitary Engineer* have been conferred upon the designers of tenement house plans. The limitations of the designs by the architects were the shape of the lots, and cheapness of construction; they were required to plan a cheap house or houses with air and light in the rooms, on a lot 25 feet broad, enclosed between other houses and 100 feet deep. If the prize plans are the best offered, which we hardly believe, they merely demonstrate that the problem is insoluble. The three which have received the highest prizes offer a very slightly better arrangement than hundreds of tenement houses now do. They are simply double houses, front and rear, with the space between occupied by halls and water-closets. They have all the disadvantages of double houses, which have so often called forth sanitary censure and even adverse legislation. The only access to air,

apart from the front, is through the courts in the small spaces between the houses. To add to their ill effects each suite on the second story has apparently that old nuisance, a dark bedroom, which, under the present arrangement, is a prolific source of fever and disease. The only advantages offered apparently over the old system are in the fireproof stairways, more privacy of halls and the ventilation of water-closets. *But it may be fairly said that if one of our crowded wards were built up after any one of these prize designs, the evils of our present tenement house system would be increased tenfold."*

How true this prophecy of 1879 was, we to-day fully realize, for we are reaping the evils of that system of the prize plan of 1879, built all over the crowded wards of this city; and, in truth, the evils that threatened the city in 1879 *have* been increased tenfold. It is this plan which has produced a system of tenement houses unknown to any other city, which has produced the evil of the "air shaft," a product solely of New York, and one which makes our housing conditions the worst in the world.

After this movement of 1879 had accomplished a change in the existing law and the building of two model tenements, those interested in the problem apparently relaxed their efforts, feeling that what they had sought to accomplish had been accomplished. Nothing of importance was done in this movement from that year until 1884, except that the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor still continued its inspection of existing tenement houses, and its system of sending complaints to the Board of Health, trying to spur that body into a more energetic enforcement of the laws.

## SECOND LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION—1884.

In 1884, Professor Felix Adler, of the Society for Ethical Culture, delivered a series of lectures upon the terrible condition of the tenement houses at that time; his own work and the work of members of his society



among the poor in the city, having given him an insight into the wretched condition of their dwellings. This series of lectures created great interest in the public press, and the community became thoroughly aroused to the necessity for reform in this direction. Accordingly, a bill was introduced in the Legislature and passed on June 2, 1884, appointing a Commission "to examine and to investigate and inquire into the character and condition of tenement houses, lodging houses and cellars in the City of New York." This Commission was composed of the following gentlemen: Alexander Shaler, Joseph W. Drexel, S. O. Vanderpoel, Felix Adler, Oswald Ottendorfer, Moreau Morris, Anthony Reichardt, Joseph J. O'Donohue, Abbot Hodgman, Charles F. Wingate and William P. Esterbrook.

The Commission made an investigation of a number of the tenement houses in New York, from June of that year until the following January, making in its report to the Legislature twenty distinct recommendations. These included:

The abolition of all privy vaults; a change in the law extending the requirements for new tenement houses to all old buildings, altered to be used as tenement houses; that water should be supplied upon each floor of every tenement house; that every tenement house occupied by eight families or more should have a janitor residing upon the premises; that all cellars should be concreted; that rooms and halls in all new tenement houses should have direct light, and communication with the external air; that the definition of a tenement house should be so amended as to include all houses occupied by three families or more; that the misuse of water closets by the tenants should be deemed a misdemeanor; that the Board of Health be required to make a semi-annual inspection of all the tenement houses in the city; that the number of sanitary policemen should be increased from thirty to forty, and their duties limited entirely to the inspection of tenement and lodging houses; that the

name and address of the owner of every tenement house should be filed in the Department of Health; that there be set aside a special fund for the use of the Board of Health; that a registrar of statistics for the Board of Health be appointed; that the Board of Health be required to make an annual report of its work to the Mayor; and that a permanent Tenement House Commission, composed of the Mayor and the Heads of the Department of Health, Public Works, Buildings and Street Cleaning, be appointed to meet once each year to consider the desirability of change in the tenement house laws; also that certain streets in the city be opened up so as to do away with Mulberry Bend, a notorious "slum" district; and that free public baths be established by the city throughout the tenement house districts; and that electric lights be placed in all streets of such quarters.

The Commission published a report of some 235 pages containing not only these recommendations, with the reasons for them, but also the results of a sanitary inspection of nearly 1,000 tenement houses carried on under their direction.

The Commission, however, did not take up the larger phases of the problem, believing that the time allowed them for such a study was not sufficient, and believing that the Legislature would appoint a further commission to undertake this work.

It is greatly to be regretted that the Commission of 1884 did not make a more thorough study of the tenement house question and of existing conditions. They gave almost no attention to the buildings erected since 1879, but contented themselves with the examination of old types of tenement houses.

During the same year, the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor took advantage of the increased public interest in the subject and published in their annual report, in a somewhat popular form, a detailed description of some of the worst tenement houses in the city, illustrating these with pictures.

### THE LAW AMENDED IN 1887.

The recommendations made by the Tenement House Commission of 1884 to the Legislature did not, however, result in legislation until 1887, when the Tenement House Law was amended in several important particulars, the main change being the increasing of the number of sanitary police from 30 to 45; 15 of these to spend their time in the inspection of tenement houses exclusively. The new law also provided for a permanent Tenement House Commission, to meet once in each year to discuss the needs of tenement houses; the Commission to be composed of the Mayor and the Heads of the Departments of Health, Public Works and Street Cleaning. The law also provided that, in all tenement houses where there was more than one family on a floor and the halls did not open directly to the outer air, such buildings should not be used. Among the other changes accomplished was a provision that there should be one water closet for every fifteen occupants, instead of one for every twenty occupants, as under the previous law. Also, the owners of all tenement houses were required to file their names and addresses annually in the Board of Health, and the Board of Health was required to make a regular semi-annual inspection of every tenement house in the city. Probably the most important feature of the law was the extending of the provision in relation to new tenement houses, as to the percentage of lot permitted to be occupied to all old buildings that might be altered to be used as tenement houses.

From 1884 until 1894 nothing was done in the movement for tenement-house reform beyond the usual work of the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor in sending complaints of sanitary abuses in certain tenement houses to the Board of Health for their attention.

### THE WORK OF JACOB A. RIIS.

Any record of the movement for tenement-house reform in New York, which left out of account the work of Mr. Jacob A. Riis, would be sadly defective. For over

twenty years Mr. Riis has continually waged his "battle with the slum." Beginning in 1880 as a newspaper reporter stationed at Police Headquarters, his work led him frequently into the tenement house districts where he gained an intimate knowledge of the conditions. Since that time Mr. Riis has continuously urged the necessity of tenement house reform, and of the betterment of all the conditions of life for the working people of this city. His articles in the magazines and newspapers, especially his well-known books "How the Other Half Lives," "The Children of the Poor," and "A Ten Years' War," have probably done more to educate the general public on this question than the writings of any other person. To his active efforts are due the tearing down of the worst slum New York City ever saw, the old "Mulberry Bend," and also the destruction of a number of unsanitary rear tenements. It was the active influence of Mr. Riis and his work more than anything else which led to the appointment of the Tenement House Commission of 1894.

### THE THIRD LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION—1894.

In 1894 one of the New York newspapers, the *Press*, printed a series of articles upon the condition of the tenements, and caused to be introduced in the Legislature a bill authorizing the Governor to appoint a commission to inquire into all the phases of the tenement house problem. Through the efforts of the *Press* this bill became a law, and the following Commissioners were appointed: Richard Watson Gilder, Chairman; W. D'H. Washington, Cyrus Edson, Roger Foster, Solomon Moses, George B. Post and John P. Schuchman, Edward Marshall, the City Editor of the *Press*, through whose efforts this legislation had been accomplished, being appointed Secretary and executive officer of the Commission. The Commission organized in May of that year and entered upon an active and vigorous investigation of the tenement houses of the city throughout the summer and fall, giving especial attention to cellar

dwellings, examining in all 8,441 houses. The Commission published in 1895 a voluminous and elaborate report of some 650 pages showing the results of their investigation. The report touches upon the questions of immigration, density of population, overcrowding, different types of tenement house plans, questions of fire-proof construction, death rates, etc., pays especial attention to those tenement houses known as rear tenements, *i. e.*, buildings built on the rear of the lot behind a front tenement house, with an intervening courtyard of about 25 feet between; also the subordinate public questions of the need of public parks in tenement neighborhoods, the need of dock parks or recreation piers, the need of public baths, the questions of rentals, of improved tenement houses erected by philanthropic or quasi-philanthropic societies, the work of the previous Commission appointed in 1884, the evils of prostitution in tenement houses, questions of plumbing and sanitation; and paid special attention to the great danger arising from tenement fires, making minute examination of the fires that occurred while the Commission was in existence, and taking a great deal of testimony on this subject, and on other subjects connected with the different phases of the tenement house problem. The report contains a number of illustrations of different types of tenement house plans, also photographs of certain bad tenement conditions found by the Commission, as well as many interesting maps and charts.

The Commission made to the Legislature the following recommendations :

1. That the law be perfected so as to give to the Board of Health unquestioned power to condemn and destroy tenement houses unfit for human habitation.

2. That the percentage of lot allowed to be covered by new tenement houses be limited to 70 per cent. ; also that no more air shafts be covered over by the roof. That the first floor of all new tenement houses should be fireproof and contain no openings to the cellar ; that every water closet should have a window to the outer air, and that the

floor of all water closet compartments should be made watertight.

3. That certain dangerous trades be prohibited in tenement houses so as to prevent danger from fire, the Commission having found that a great many tenement-house fires were caused by the boiling of fat in basements.

4. That the ceilings of all habitable basements should be at least 2 feet above the ground.

5. That no wall paper should be permitted in tenement houses.

6. That all dark hallways should be lighted by artificial light.

7. That at least 400 cubic feet of air should be provided for every adult, and 200 cubic feet of air for every child under twelve years.

8. That the use of tenement houses for lodging houses or stables, or for storage of rags, should be prohibited.

9. That the discretionary powers of the Board of Health should be limited.

10. That the law in reference to the filing of the owner's name in the Board of Health should be perfected.

11. That the number of sanitary inspectors of the Board of Health should be increased by fifteen, and increasing the number of sanitary police by five.

12. That not less than two small parks should be laid out within three years in certain districts of the lower East side.

13. That no school buildings should be erected unless the same were provided with a proper out-door playground.

14. Urging the adoption of rapid transit facilities.

15. The establishment by the city of free fully equipped public baths all the year around.

16. The establishment by the city of drinking fountains and public lavatories in tenement-house districts.

17. That the system of lighting the streets by electricity be extended to the tenement-house districts as rapidly as possible.

18. That the streets in the tenement-house districts be paved with asphalt.

19. That a thorough inquiry be made as to the sanitary condition of some of the public schools in the city, and the sufficiency of school accommodations in certain districts. Also that the Kindergarten system be largely increased.

20. Making the punishment for prostitution in the tenement houses more severe.

21. Abolishing the permanent Tenement House Board, composed of the Mayor and heads of the five city departments, appointed under the Act of 1887.

#### THE TENEMENT HOUSE ACT OF 1895.

As a result of the work of this Commission, the Legislature passed a new tenement house law in 1895, which included among its provisions some of the changes recommended by the Commission. A great number of them, however, were not adopted, the changes in the law being a slightly increased security against fire in the construction of new tenement houses, and a most unfortunate change in the portion of the law in relation to the percentage of lot permitted to be occupied. The law, since 1891, limited the amount to 65 per centum of the lot, and had given the Building Department no discretion whatsoever to increase this amount; the Tenement House Commission, unfortunately, not being familiar with the law, believed that the Building Department possessed such discretion, because they found them exercising it; the result was that they inserted in the new law a clause that the Commissioners of Buildings might permit as much as 75 per cent. of the lot to be occupied in special cases, the result of which has been that every case has become "a special case," and all new tenement houses are permitted to occupy 75 per cent. of the lot.)

The recommendations of the Commission for the establishment of two small parks for the lower East side were

adopted, and the parks are now in existence, to the great gain of the city. Also the clause requiring the establishment of a suitable playground in all new public schools was adopted, as were the recommendations for a system of recreation piers along the river. The city now possesses five of these piers.

(While the Commission's labors did not result in any great improvement in the character of the tenement houses erected in New York City, yet the collection of facts presented in their report did most certainly succeed in creating an interest in this most important subject.)

#### THE MODEL TENEMENT COMPETITION OF 1896.— THE CITY AND SUBURBAN HOMES COMPANY.

The following year, in 1896, the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, through its Department of Dwellings, called on March 3d and 4th a series of conferences to consider the advisability of building improved tenement houses in New York. As a result of these conferences, the City and Suburban Homes Company was formed for the purpose of building model tenement houses in New York as a business investment. Many leading men of the city became stockholders of this company, and the work of building model tenements was a few months later begun under the leadership of Dr. E. R. L. Gould, who some years previously had conducted for the Department of Labor of the United States Government a comprehensive inquiry into the question of the housing of the working people in different parts of Europe.

A special architectural competition was held for the best type of tenement house plans, and an excellent type of building was finally chosen. One million dollars was subscribed as the capital of the new enterprise, and a splendid group of buildings was erected at 217 to 233 West 68th street and 214 to 220 West 69th street. There are two sets of buildings, one back of the other, with an open





court-yard 20 feet wide and about 150 feet long between them. One group of buildings occupies a space 225 feet long by 100 feet deep, equivalent to nine city lots, and the other building occupies a space 200 feet long by 100 feet deep, equivalent to eight ordinary city lots. The buildings are divided into a number of apartments containing two rooms, three rooms, four rooms and five rooms, and are so arranged that every room has direct light and air either from the street or yard, or from large open court-yards facing the street, of a width of 18 feet and of a depth of 60 feet, or upon a large court-yard in the center, of an area of 529 square feet. The amount of space occupied by halls and stairs and partitions is minimized, thus securing a larger area available for floor space. The buildings were designed by Mr. Ernest Flagg, the well-known New York architect, who has given much thought to the study of scientific tenement house plans, and the buildings illustrate most admirably his contention that the secret of tenement house planning lies in constructing a building more of the shape of a square, than of a long parallelogram. Every apartment is a home in itself; every room has quiet, good light and air and good ventilation; the staircases and stair walls of the buildings are entirely fire-proof; the halls and stairways are well lighted and steam-heated; in the two houses are nine separate entrances from the street and every entrance has two stairways and two dumb waiters; the partitions between the different dwellings are deafened; every apartment is supplied with its own private water-closet, and most of the apartments have a small private hall; the buildings are furnished with most modern conveniences, such as stationary wash-tubs and sinks in the kitchen, hot water, gas ranges, wood and coal closets, and laundries and bathrooms on the first floor. All rents are payable weekly. The rents are about the same as the rents of ordinary tenement houses in the same neighborhood and average for two rooms \$6.80 a month; for three rooms, \$11.40 a month; for four rooms, \$14.60 a month. The buildings are occupied by the better class of

working people, respectable mechanics, letter carriers, railroad employés, coachmen, policemen, etc., the Company preferring to cater to the best element among the workingmen.

The enterprise has been a distinct success, both from a social and financial point of view, the profit on these buildings having been a little over 5 per cent. during the first year.

The Company has also built a number of small houses in the suburbs for persons of small salaries who desire to have homes of their own rather than to live in the city. It has also, during the past year, completed a second group of buildings at First avenue, 64th and 65th streets, similar in plan to the first buildings, except that a few slight improvements have been made in the interior arrangement.

A third group of buildings is now being planned and will be shortly erected, and there is every reason to believe that the Company will extend its operation for some time to come by erecting new buildings in different parts of the city.

### THE MOVEMENT OF 1899—THE CHARITY ORGANIZATION SOCIETY.

In the spring of 1898, the writer, having for a number of years been impressed with the belief that bad tenement house conditions were the cause of most of the problems in our modern cities, presented to the Charity Organization Society of the City of New York, of which he was a member, a plan for the formation of a society which should continually seek to improve the condition of the tenement houses :

1. By securing wise remedial legislation in reference to new buildings, and by preventing the enactment of bad legislation.
2. By securing the enforcement of existing laws in relation to tenement houses.

3. By stimulating the building of model tenement houses on a large scale, and

4. By gradually improving old bad tenements in the city by altering them to suit the needs of the tenants.

Some few months later the Charity Organization Society decided to take up this work, and a standing committee of the Society, known as the "Tenement House Committee of the Charity Organization Society," was formed for that purpose. The Committee was composed of the following gentlemen: Mr. Frederick W. Holls, Chairman; Felix Adler, Constant A. Andrews, Robert W. de Forest, Edward T. Devine, John Vinton Dahlgren, Ernest Flagg, Richard Watson Gilder, George B. Post, Jacob A. Riis and I. N. Phelps Stokes. The writer has had the privilege of acting as Secretary and Executive officer of this Committee since its existence.

(The members of the Committee devoted themselves during the first six months to the work of framing a series of tenement house ordinances, which should be supplemental to the existing tenement house laws, embodied in the Greater New York Charter.) As they had been advised that it was not within the power of the local authorities to enact ordinances which should conflict with the provisions of the existing law, the Committee were necessarily obliged to limit themselves to only such recommendations. They accordingly submitted to the Municipal Building Code Commission a series of fifteen tenement house ordinances, with a statement setting forth the reasons for them, and the advantages to be gained thereby.

The proposed ordinances provided that in all new tenement houses no air shaft should be less than 6 feet wide in any part, nor less than 150 square feet in superficial area; that no new tenement house should exceed six stories in height unless it was fireproof; that all living rooms in tenement houses should contain at least 600 cubic feet of air space; that for every new tenement house containing twenty families or more, there should be provided at least one bath tub or shower bath in a separate apartment for

the use of the tenants, and where there were more than twenty families in any such house, there should be provided additional bath tubs; that every tenement house thereafter erected or altered, four stories or more in height, should have the first story made fireproof; that the walls of all tenement houses thereafter erected should be carried up 3 feet 6 inches above the roof on all four sides, so that the roof might be used as a playground; that no wooden building of any kind whatever should be placed on the same lot with a tenement house within the fire-limits of the city; that it should be mandatory upon the Corporation Counsel or his assistant to immediately file a *lis pendens* in the County Clerk's office upon receipt from the Department of Buildings for prosecution of every violation of the tenement house laws, ordinances or regulations; that in every new tenement house the stairway connecting the cellar with the first floor should *not* be located in whole or in part underneath the stairs leading from the first story to the upper stories; that no closet should be constructed underneath any staircase in any tenement house; that every new tenement house and every existing tenement house in which the halls were not light enough in the daytime on all floors to permit an ordinary person to easily read without aid of artificial light, should have every door leading from the public halls to rooms provided with ground glass panels of an area of not less than 6 square feet; that in every new tenement house all interior shafts should be fireproof and provided with fireproof self-closing doors to all openings. It was also asked that the following provisions of the existing building laws be continued in effect, viz., that the bulkhead doors of all tenement houses should at no time be locked, but might be fastened on the inside with a hook or bolt; that in all tenement houses where wooden stud partitions rest over each other, the space between the studs should be filled in solid with fireproof material to prevent the spread of fire from floor to floor; that the cellar floor of every tenement house should be concreted with concrete not less than 3 inches thick; and

that where a kitchen range or stove was placed within 12 inches of a wooden stud partition the woodwork should be cut away and filled in with fireproof material.

These ordinances were printed in a small pamphlet, made public in June, 1899, and attracted widespread comment in the daily newspapers in this city, and in fact all over the country. The criticisms were uniformly favorable. These recommendations were also officially approved by the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, by the Architectural League of New York City, by the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, the Children's Aid Society, the University Settlement, the College Settlement, the Nurses' Settlement, and by most of the prominent citizens of this city, including many of the heads of the City Departments.

None of these recommendations was adopted by the municipal authorities.

Being convinced that no real progress in tenement house reform was to be made unless the whole community was aroused to a knowledge of existing conditions, the Tenement House Committee set itself to work to prepare for the public such a statement of tenement house needs that the most unconcerned could no longer neglect taking action looking toward the amelioration of the living conditions of the working people in New York.

### THE TENEMENT HOUSE EXHIBITION OF 1900.

With this end in view a plan for a tenement house exhibition was prepared in the fall of 1899, and the Committee devoted its entire time from then until the beginning of the present year in preparing this work. The Exhibition was held in New York City in a large building on Fifth avenue for a period of two weeks, and in that brief time was viewed by over ten thousand persons of all classes, from the millionaire to the poorest, unskilled laborer.

The Exhibition included five models, over 1,000 photographs, over 100 maps, and many charts, diagrams and tables of statistics. It was most comprehensive in its scope, including a study of tenement house conditions in New York City at the present time, a study of model tenements in America and throughout Europe, a study of suburban tenements and working people's cottages both in America and Europe, model lodging houses and hotels for workingmen in America and Europe, and a series of studies of public parks, playgrounds, libraries, baths, cooking schools, etc. The Exhibition also included in its study of existing conditions in New York exhibits showing density of population, death rates prevailing in tenement districts, the distribution of nationality in the city, charts showing overcrowding, dangers from fire, health conditions, etc.

During the second week of the Exhibition, a series of conferences was held every evening, with leading specialists discussing such different phases of the tenement house problem as "The Exhibition and Its Meaning," "Model Tenements," "Improving Tenements by Personal Influence," "The Tenements and Poverty," "The Tenements and Tuberculosis," "The People Who Live in Tenements," "The Duty of the City to the Tenement Dweller," "The Tenement House Problem and the Way Out," etc.

This exhibition was the first tenement house exhibition ever held, and marks a distinct step in advance in the treatment of the tenement house problem. Perhaps one of the most interesting features of it was the cardboard model of an entire block of tenement houses in the City of New York. To those unfamiliar with the state of affairs in this city, the conditions here presented are almost beyond belief. The block chosen was one on the East side of New York, being the block bounded by Chrystie, Forsyth, Canal and Bayard streets, comprising an area of 200 feet by 400 feet, or eighty thousand (80,000) square feet. Nearly every bit of the land was covered with tall tenement houses six stories high. This block on January

1, 1900, contained 39 different tenement houses having 605 different apartments or sets of rooms, and housing 2,781 persons; of these 2,315 were over 5 years of age and 466 under 5 years. In the block there were 263 two-room apartments, 179 three-room apartments, 105 four-room apartments, 21 five-room apartments, making a total of 1,588 rooms. There were only 264 water closets, and not one bath in the entire block, and only 40 apartments were supplied with hot water. The block contained 441 dark rooms having no ventilation to the outer air whatsoever, and no light or air except that derived from other rooms, and there were 635 rooms in the block getting their sole light and air from dark, narrow "air shafts." During the past five years there have been recorded 32 cases of tuberculosis from the block, and during the past year 13 cases of diphtheria. The records of the Charity Organization Society and the United Hebrew Charities show that during a period of five years 660 different families living in the block have applied for charity. The rentals derived from this block amount to \$113,964 a year. If this were an exceptional case and these conditions limited simply to one part of the city, the question would be serious enough, but when one considers that the block thus shown was selected merely as characteristic of the conditions throughout the City of New York, and that nearly every block is similar, one begins to realize the terrible extent of the problem.

The exhibition showed step by step the different changes that have taken place in New York's tenement houses since the early days, and all the evils of the present tenement house system were thoroughly exhibited, special emphasis being laid upon the terrible evils of the dark unventilated "air shafts" which are the chief characteristics of the present type of buildings, and which have been most aptly characterized as "culture tubes on a gigantic scale."

The sunlight almost never penetrates below the top of the fifth floor in these shafts. Bringing up children in such darkness and amidst filthy odors, insures its inevitable re-

sult: Twenty-five million dollars are annually expended for charity in the State of New York. It is a simple matter to investigate the records of our reformatories, hospitals, dispensaries, and institutions of similar kind, to find out what proportion of the patients and inmates come from tenement houses. In New York, we know that nearly all are tenement house dwellers. - We also know that most of our criminals are young men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, and that the majority of them come from large cities, the breeding places of vice and crime.

### POVERTY AND DISEASE.

Another striking feature of the tenement house exhibition was the series of poverty and disease maps showing the extent of poverty and disease in the tenement districts of the city. These maps showed on a large scale each block in the tenement house district, indicating which buildings were tenement houses, and which, business buildings, or used for other purposes. They gave the street number of each building, the height in stories, also the amount of land covered, the shape of the building and the small amount of land left vacant for light and air. The maps were arranged in two parallel series, one of "poverty" maps, the other "disease" maps. Upon the "poverty" maps were stamped black dots, each of which indicated that five different families from the building had applied for charity to one of the leading charitable societies in the city within a definite period of time. It seems beyond belief, yet it is a fact, that there was hardly one tenement house in the entire city that did not contain a number of these dots, and many contained as many as 15 of them, indicating that 75 different families had applied for charity from that house. Similarly on the "disease" maps, which were placed directly below the "poverty" maps, district by district, so that a comparative study of them might be made, there were stamped black dots, each indicating that from that house there had been reported to the



Board of Health one case of tuberculosis within the past five years. While these dots did not cover the buildings to the same extent as they were covered in the "poverty" maps, it was appalling to note the extent of this disease; nearly every tenement house had one dot on it, and many had three and four, and there were some houses that contained as many as twelve; other colored dots indicated the prevalence of typhoid fever, diphtheria, etc. The maps also contained upon each block a statement of the number of people living there, so that the student thus had opportunity of weighing all the conditions that helped to produce the epidemics of poverty and disease. The maps as they appeared in the exhibition might well earn for New York City the title of the City of Living Death.

The exhibition was planned and developed to prove to the community the fact that in New York City the workman is housed worse than in any other city of the civilized world, notwithstanding the fact that he pays more money for such accommodations than is paid elsewhere, being compelled to give more than one-fourth of his income for rent. That this was conclusively proved, no one who saw the exhibition could doubt. Photographs illustrating the worst housing conditions and typical housing conditions in over fifty different large American cities were exhibited, and there was no city in the United States where the workingman was not infinitely better off in this respect than he was in New York.

The exhibit of model tenements included photographs, architectural plans and tables of statistics from the very many model tenement companies in London, also exhibits of the work carried on, both by private corporations and by the municipality in Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Salford, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Paris, Rouen, Lyons, Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig, Copenhagen, and other European cities. The tables of statistics were most complete, giving nearly every item of interest connected with such enterprises, from the size of the rooms to the character of the tenants and the amount of profit upon the investment.

The study of model lodging houses showed the development of the lodging house in New York City from the worst type of lodging in the police stations up to the more recent and admirable municipal lodging house and Mills Hotels; similar work carried on in London, Southampton, Manchester, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Copenhagen was also shown, as were the very large number of places where employers and private companies had built model small houses for workingmen in suburban districts.

### THE MODEL TENEMENT COMPETITION OF 1900.

In connection with this exhibition, the Tenement House Committee of the Charity Organization Society authorized an architectural competition for the best plans of model tenements, upon lots of a size 25 feet wide by 100 feet deep; 50 feet wide by 100 feet deep; 75 feet wide by 100 feet deep, and 100 feet wide by 100 feet deep, under conditions applicable only to the City of New York at the present time. Over one hundred and seventy different architects took part in this competition, and the result was that many excellent plans were submitted. Four prizes were awarded, the first being a prize of \$500, which was awarded to Mr. R. Thomas Short, a New York architect. The object of this competition was to arouse interest among architects in the scientific planning of tenement houses, the Committee feeling that a large part of the solution of the tenement house problem lay in this direction.

The exhibition contained many other interesting and instructive features, and created the most widespread interest.

Such has been the history of the different movements for housing reform in New York from 1834 to the present time.

LIST OF BOOKS IMPORTANT TO A PROPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE TENEMENT HOUSE PROBLEM IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK.

CHRONOLOGICALLY ARRANGED.

1842. Annual Report of the Interments in the City and County of New York for the Year 1842, With Remarks Thereon, and a Brief View of the Sanitary Condition of the City. Presented to the Common Council by John H. Griscom, M. D., City Inspector. New York, James Van Norden, Printer to the Board of Assistant Aldermen, 1843. Document No. 59. (Library, Academy of Medicine, 17 West 43d Street.)
1853. First Report of a Committee on the Sanitary Condition of the Laboring Classes in the City of New York, with Remedial Suggestions. New York, John F. Trow, Printer, 1853. Pamphlet, 32 pages. (Published in Annual Report of the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor for 1853.)
1857. Report of the Select Committee Appointed to Examine into the Condition of Tenant Houses in New York and Brooklyn, March 9, 1857. Assembly Document No. 205, 54 pages. (State Library, Albany, N. Y.)
1857. An Act to Improve the Condition of the Laboring Poor Residing in Tenant Houses in the City of New York; To Establish a Board of Home Commissioners in said City, and for Other Purposes. Assembly Bill No. 568. (State Library, Albany, N. Y.)
1865. Report of the Council of Hygiene and Public Health of the Citizens' Association of New York upon the Sanitary Condition of the City. D. Appleton & Co. 360 pages. A number of maps, diagrams and illustrations.
1867. Report Relative to the Condition of Tenement Houses in the Cities of New York and Brooklyn. Assembly Document No. 156, 34 pages. (State Library, Albany, N. Y.)
1884. Report of the Tenement House Commission of the State of New York, February 17, 1885. Senate Document No. 36. 235 pages. (State Library, Albany, N. Y.)
1887. The Tenement House Problem in New York, January 16, 1888. Senate Document No. 16. 52 pages.

1890. "How The Other Half Lives." By Jacob A. Riis. Charles Scribner's Sons. 1890. 304 pages—many illustrations.
1893. "Poor in Great Cities." Charles Scribner's Sons. 1895. 400 pages—many illustrations.
1893. The Housing of the Poor in American Cities. By Marcus T. Reynolds. American Economic Association. Volume 8. Nos. 2 and 3. 132 pages.
1894. Report of the Tenement House Committee, as Authorized by Chapter 479 of the Laws of 1894. Assembly Document No. 37. 650 pages—many illustrations, maps, charts and diagrams. (State Library, Albany, N. Y.)
1895. The Housing of the Working People. By E. R. L. Gould. Eighth Special Report of the Commissioner of Labor, Washington, D. C. 461 pages—many illustrations.
1899. A Ten Years' War—An account of the battle with the slums in New York. By Jacob A. Riis. Houghton, Mifflin & Co. 267 pages. Illustrated.



U. C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES



C058306641

RETURN TO the circulation desk of any  
University of California Library  
or to the  
NORTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY  
Bldg. 400, Richmond Field Station  
University of California  
Richmond, CA 94804-4698

---

ALL BOOKS MAY BE RECALLED AFTER 7 DAYS

- 2-month loans may be renewed by calling (510) 642-6753
- 1-year loans may be recharged by bringing books to NRLF
- Renewals and recharges may be made 4 days prior to due date.

---

DUE AS STAMPED BELOW

---

MAR 24 2000

---

RETURNED

---

JUL 21 1999

---

SENT ON ILL

---

SEP 24 2003

---

U. C. BERKELEY

---

---

---

