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HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES:

STUDIES AMONG THE TENEMENTS.

By Jacob A. Riis.

NEW YORK alone, of the great cities of the world, has grown up with the century. The village of a hundred years ago is the metropolis of to-day. So fast a pace is not without its perils; in the haste to become great, our city has lost opportunities for healthy growth that have passed not to return. Lessons in home-building that would have been worth the learning have been lost on us. Other cities that took time to think have profited by them, and have left to New York the evil inheritance of the tenement, the Frankenstein of our city civilization. We are retracing our steps too late, and endeavoring to unlearn the pennywise ways of the past by tearing down to make elbow-room and breathing space for the pent-up crowds. What would have been easy at the start is a costly and unsatisfactory expedient now; ground has been lost that cannot be regained.

It was in the old historic homes downtown that the tenement was born of ignorance and nursed in greed. The years that have brought to these houses unhonored age have not effaced the stain. Step by step it has followed them uptown, poverty and wretchedness moving in as the children of fairer fortune moved out, and the vicious progeny far and fast outgrowing its parent in ugliness. But where its cradle stood, the tenement has yet left its foulest stamp.* Long ago its encroachment upon the lower wards that were the New York of a hundred years ago, gave to the home of the Knickerbockers the name and fame of the worst wards in the city.

Turn but a dozen steps from the rush and roar of the Elevated Railroad, where it dives under the Brooklyn Bridge at Franklin Square, and with its din echoing yet in your ears you have turned the corner from prosperity to poverty. You stand upon the domain of the tenement. In the shadow of the great stone abutments, linger about the old houses the worst traditions of half a century. Down the winding slope of Cherry Street—proud and fashionable Cherry Hill that was—their broad steps, sloping roofs, and dormer windows (solid comfort stamped by the builder in every one of their generous lines) are easily made out; all the more easily for the contrast with the ugly barracks that elbow them right and left. These never had other design than to shelter, at as little outlay as possible, the great-

* The discovery made at a recent census of the tenements, that as the buildings grew taller the death-rate fell, surprised most people. The reason is plain: The biggest tenements have been built in the last ten or fifteen years of sanitary reform rule, and have been brought, in all but the crowding, under its laws. The old houses, that from private dwellings were made into tenements, in defiance of every moral and physical law, can be improved by no device short of demolition. They will ever remain the worst.

est crowds out of which rent could be wrung, for in the wake of the discovery that money could be coined out of human misery, or, as it was less offensively put, that "tenements were good property," came a viler creation of man's greed, a ton these have no place. The old garden gate long since went to decay and fell from its hinges. The arched gateway is there still, but it leads no longer to a garden. In its place has come a dark and nameless alley, shut in by high

At the Cradle of the Tenement.—Doorway of an old fashionable dwelling on Cherry Hill.

before the public conscience awoke to the wrong that can never again be undone, and of which we must be always paying the penalty. Like ghosts of a departed day, the old houses linger; but their glory is gone. This one, with its shabby front and poorly patched roof, who shall tell what glowing firesides, what happy children it once owned? Heavy feet, often with unsteady step, for the pot-house is next door, have worn away the brown-stone steps since; the broken columns at the door have rotted away at the base. Of the handsome cornice barely a trace is left. Dirt and desolation reign in the wide hallway, and danger lurks on the rickety stairs. Rough pine boards fence off the roomy fireplaces; where coal is bought by the pail at the rate of twelve dollars brick walls, cheerless as the lives of those they shelter. A horde of dirty children play on the broken flags about the dripping hydrant, the only thing in the alley that thinks enough of its chance to make the most of it: it is the best it can do. These are the children of the tenements, the growing generation of the slums. From the great highway overhead, along which throbs the life-tide of two great cities, one might drop a pebble into half a dozen such alleys.

One yawns just across the street; not very broadly, but it is not to blame. The builder of the old gateway had no thought of its ever becoming a public thoroughfare. But inside it widens; a man might fall across it, with nice judgment, and not touch wall on either side with head or feet. No sound of chil-

dren's romping feet makes this old alley ring. Morning and evening it echoes with the gentle, groping tap of the blind man's staff as he feels his way to the street. Sunless and joyless though it be, Blind Man's Alley has that which its compeers of the slum vainly yearn for. It has a pay-day. Once a year sunlight shines into the lives of the blind beggars who for many seasons have made it and the surrounding tenements their home. In June, when the Superintendent of Outdoor Poor distributes the twenty thousand dollars annually allowed the poor blind by the city, in half-hearted recognition of its failure to otherwise provide for them, Blind-Man's Alley takes a vacation and goes to "see" Mr. Blake. Even the blind landlord, who, after making a fortune out of the Alley and its poverty-stricken tenants, has in extreme old age, with singular appropriateness, grown blind himself, rejoices, for much of the money goes into his coffers.*

Double-alley, Gotham Court.

* In the interval between the preparation of this article and its publication the health officers have wrought a wellnigh miraculous change in this alley by compelling the landlord, against loud and bitter protests, to clean and

In the Home of an Italian Rag-picker, Jersey Street.

From their perch up among the rafters Mrs. Gallagher's blind boarders might hear, did they listen, the tramp of the policeman always on duty in Gotham Court, half a stone's throw away. His beat, though it takes in but a small portion of a single block, is quite as lively as most larger patrol-rounds. There are few streets in the city where the crowd is as dense. A single big tenement, cut in halves lengthwise by a dividing wall with barred openings on the stairs, so that the tenants on either side may see but cannot get at each other, makes the "Court." Alleys, one wider by a couple of feet than the other, whence the distinction Single and Double Alley, skirt the barracks on either side. There are rooms for one hundred and forty-two families in the Court, which, with the ordinary New York average of four and a half to the family, gives a larger population than that of many a thriving country town that spreads itself over a square mile of land. It is claimed that this number has recently been reduced. The cosmopolitan character of lower New York, as well as the constant need of the policeman and the use of the iron bars, were well illustrated by the statement of the agent at one of my visits, that there were one hundred Irish, thirty-eight Italian, and two German families in the Court. It was an eminently Irish suggestion that the two German families were to blame for the necessity of police surveillance; but a Chinaman whom I questioned as he hurried past the iron gate of the alley was evidently of a different opinion, though he prudently hesitated to express it. The whole building is a fair instance of the bad after-thought of the age that followed immediately upon the adoption of the tenement as a means of solving the problems presented by the sudden rapid growth of the city; just how bad the last great cholera epidemic taught the community, when the death-

repair the worst of its old tenements. The process apparently destroyed the home-feeling of the alley, for many of its blind tenants moved away and have not returned since.

rate rose in Gotham Court to the unprecedented height of one hundred and ninety-five in a thousand. There are plenty like it throughout the lower wards, with and without alleys.

Of the sort of answer that would come from these tenements to the vexed question, "Is life worth living?" were they heard at all in the discussion, the following, cut from the last report of the Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor, a long name for a weary task, contains a suggestion:

"In the depth of winter, the attention of the Association was called to a Protestant family living in a garret in a miserable tenement on Cherry Street. The family's condition was most deplorable. The man, his wife, and three small children shivering in one room, through the roof of which the pitiless winds of winter whistled. The room was almost barren of furniture, the parents slept on the floor, the elder children in boxes, and the baby was swung in an old shawl attached to the rafters by cords by way of a hammock. The father, a seaman, had been obliged to give up that calling because he was in consumption, and was unable to provide either bread or fire for his little ones."

Perhaps this may be put down as an exceptional case; but one that came to my notice some months ago, in a Seventh Ward tenement, was typical enough to escape that reproach. There were nine in the family: husband, wife, an aged grandmother, and six children; honest, hard-working Germans, scrupulously neat, but poor! All nine lived in two rooms, one about ten feet square that served as parlor, bedroom, and eating-room, the other a small hall-room made into a kitchen. The rent was seven dollars and a half, more than a week's wages for the husband and father. That day the mother had thrown herself out of the window, and was carried up from the street dead. She was "discouraged," said some of the other women from the tenement, who had come in to look after the children while a messenger carried the news to the father at the shop. They went stolidly about their task, although they were evidently not without feeling for the dead woman. No doubt she was wrong in not taking life philosophically, as the four families a city missionary found housekeeping in the four corners of one room. They got along well enough together until one of the families took a

A "Black-and-tan Dive," in Thompson Street.

boarder and made trouble. But then, the philosophy of the slums is too apt to be of the kind that readily recognizes the saloon, always handy, as the refuge from every trouble, and shapes its practice according to the discovery.

Poverty in a West Twenty-eighth Street Tenement—An English Coal-heaver's Home.*

There is a standing quarrel between the professional—I mean now the official—sanitarian and the unsalaried agitator for sanitary reform, over the question of overcrowded tenements. The one puts the number a little vaguely at four or five hundred, while the other asserts that there are thirty-two thousand, the whole number of houses classed as tenements at last year's census, taking no account of the better kind of flats. It depends on the angle from which one sees it, which is right. At best the term overcrowding is a relative one, and the scale of official measurement conveniently sliding. Under the pressure of the Italian influx of the last few years the standard of breathing space required for an adult by the health officers has been cut down from six to four hundred cubic feet. The "needs of the situation" is their plea, and no more perfect argument could be advanced for the reformer's position.

It is upon "The Bend," in Mulberry Street, that this Italian blight has fallen chiefly. It is here the sanitary policeman locates the bulk of his Four Hundred, and the reformer gives up the task in despair. Where Mulberry Street crooks like an elbow, within hail of the old depravity of the Five Points, are the miserable homes of the ragpickers. The law of kaleidoscopic change that rules life in the lower strata of our city long since put the swarthy, stunted emi-

* Suspicions of murder, in the case of a woman who was found dead, covered with bruises, after a day's running fight with her husband, in which the beer-jug had been the bone of contention, brought me to this house, a ramshackle tenement on the tail-end of a lot over near the North River docks. The family in the picture lived above the rooms where the dead woman lay on a bed of straw, overrun by rats, and had been uninterested witnesses of the affray that was an every-day occurrence in the house. A patched and shaky stairway led up to their one bare and miserable room, in comparison with which a white-washed prison-cell seemed a real palace. A heap of old rags, in which the baby slept serenely, served as the common sleeping-bunk of father, mother, and children—two bright and pretty girls, singularly out of keeping even in their clean, if coarse, dresses, with their surroundings. The father, a slow-going, honest English coal-heaver, earned on the average five dollars a week, "when work was fairly brisk," at the docks. But there were long seasons when it was very "slack," he said doubtfully. Yet the prospect did not seem to discourage them. The mother, a pleasant-faced woman, was cheerful, even light-hearted. Her smile seemed the most sadly hopeless of all in the utter wretchedness of the place, cheery though it was meant to be, and really was. It seemed doomed to certain disappointment—the one thing there that was yet to know a greater depth of misery.

Prayer-time in the Nursery—Five Points House of Industry.

grant from southern Italy in exclusive possession of this field, just as his black-eyed boy has monopolized the boot-black's trade, the Chinaman the laundry, and the negro the razor for purposes of honest industry as well as anatomical research. Here is the back alley in its foulest development—naturally enough, for there is scarcely a lot that has not two, three, or four tenements upon it, swarming with unwholesome crowds. What squalor and degradation inhabit no word of English—upon such scenes as the one presented in the picture. It was photographed by flash-light on just such a visit. In a room not thirteen feet either way slept twelve men and women, two or three in bunks set in a sort of alcove, the rest on the floor. A kerosene lamp burned dimly in the fearful atmosphere, probably to guide other and later arrivals to their "beds," for it was only just past midnight. A baby's fretful wail came from

Lodgers in a Crowded Bayard Street Tenement—"Five cents a spot."

these dens the health officers know. Through the long summer days their carts patrol The Bend, scattering disinfectants in streets and lanes, in sinks and cellars, and hidden hovels where the tramp burrows. From midnight till far into the small hours of the morning the policeman's thundering rap on closed doors is heard, with his stern command, "*Apri port'!*" on his rounds gathering evidence of illegal overcrowding. The doors are opened unwillingly enough—but the order means business and the tenant knows it even if he understands an adjoining hall-room, where, in the semi-darkness, three recumbent figures could be made out. The "apartment" was one of three in two adjoining buildings we had found, within half an hour, similarly crowded. Most of the men were lodgers, who slept there for five cents a spot.

Another room on the top floor, that had been examined a few nights before, was comparatively empty. There were only four persons in it, two men, an old woman, and a young girl. The landlord opened the door with alacrity, and ex-

An All-night Two-cent Restaurant, in "The Bend."

hibited with a proud sweep of his hand the sacrifice he had made of his personal interests to satisfy the law. Our visit had been anticipated. The policeman's back was probably no sooner turned than the room was reopened for business.

Of the vast homeless crowds the census takes no account. It is their instinct to shun the light, and they cannot be coralled in one place long enough to be counted. But the houses can, and the last count showed that in "The Bend district," between Broadway and the Bowery and Canal and Chatham Streets, in a total of nearly four thousand four hundred "apartments," only nine were for the moment vacant. West of Broadway, in the old "Africa" that receives the overflow from The Bend and is rapidly changing its character (the colored population moving uptown before the tide of Italian immigration and the onward march of business—an odd co-partnership), the notice "standing-room only" is up. Not a single vacant room was found there. The problem of the children becomes, in these swarms, to the last degree perplexing. It is not unusual to find half a hundred in a single tenement. I have counted as many as one hundred and thirty-six in two adjoining houses in Crosby Street.

There was a big tenement in the Sixth Ward, now happily in process of being appropriated by the beneficent spirit of business that blots out so many foul spots in New York—it figured not long

In a Chinese Joint.

ago in the official reports as "an out-and-out hog-pen"—that had a record of one hundred and two arrests in four years among its four hundred and seventy-eight tenants, fifty-seven of them for drunken and disorderly conduct. I do not know how many children there were in it, but the inspector reported that he found only seven in the whole house who owned that they went to school. The rest gathered all the instruction they received running for beer for their elders. Some of them claimed the "flat" as their home as a mere matter of form. They slept in the streets at night. The official came upon a little party of four drinking beer out of the cover of a milk-can in the hallway. They were of the seven good boys, and proved their claim to the title by offering him some.

Helping hands are held out on every side for the rescue of these forlorn ones, but the need of help only grows with the effort. The mission houses at the Five Points have cared, and still care, for their thousands with food and raiment, as well as much-needed instruction. It is one of the most touching sights in the world to see a score of babies, rescued from homes of brutality and desolation where drunken curses took the place of blessings, saying their prayers in the nursery of the Five Points House of Industry at bedtime. Too often their white night-gowns hide tortured little bodies and limbs cruelly bruised by inhuman hands. The Children's Aid So-

The Old Clo'e's Man—In the Jewish Quarter.

ciety and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children conduct an ever-active campaign against the depraving influences of the slums, but neither these nor the truant officer can prevent ever-increasing herds of the boys and girls from growing up, to all intents and purposes, young savages, to recruit the army of paupers and criminals. The graduating-school is near at hand in the cheap lodging-houses with which the locality abounds.

A Market Scene in the Jewish Quarter.

The step from these to trampdom, that owns the tenements in The Bend as its proper home, is short and easy. One of the justices on the Police Court bench recently summed up his long experience as a committing magistrate in this statement: "The ten-cent lodging-houses more than counterbalance the good done by the free reading-room, lectures, and all other agencies of reform. Such lodging-houses have caused more destitution, more beggary and crime than any other agency I know of!" Reading-rooms and lectures are not indigenous to the soil of Mulberry Street; but the ten-cent and seven-cent lodging-houses, usually different grades of one and the same abomination, abound. The briefest examination of any one of them will, in most cases, more than justify the harsh judgment of the magistrate. Some sort of an apology for a bed, with mattress and blanket, represents the aristocratic purchase of the tramp who, by a lucky stroke of beggary, has exchanged the chance of an empty box or ash-barrel for shelter on the quality floor of one of these "hotels." A strip of canvas, strung between rough timbers, without covering of any kind, does for the couch of the seven-cent lodger who prefers the questionable comfort of a red-hot stove close to his elbow to the revelry of the stale-beer dive. It is not the most secure perch in the world. Uneasy sleepers roll off at intervals, but they have not far to fall to the next tier of bunks, and the commotion that ensues is speedily quieted by the boss and his club. On cold

winter-nights, when every bunk had its tenant, I have stood in such a lodging-room more than once, and listening to the snoring of the sleepers like the regular strokes of an engine, and the slow creaking of the beams under their restless weight, imagined myself on shipboard and experiencced the very real nausea of sea-sickness. The one thing that did not favor the deception was the air. Its character could not be mistaken.

I have spoken of the stale-beer dive. As a thief never owns to his calling, however devoid of moral scruples, preferring to style himself a speculator, so this real home-product of the slums is known about The Bend by the more dignified name of the two-cent restaurant. A deep cellar, sometimes giving on the street, more frequently on a back alley, in which doctored beer is sold, and likely a cup of "coffee" and a roll for two cents. The beer is fresh from the barrels put on the sidewalk by saloon-keepers to simmer in the sun until collected by the brewer's cart, and is touched up with drugs to put a froth on it. The privilege to sit all night in a chair, or sleep on a table or in a barrel, goes with each purchase. Generally an Italian, sometimes a negro, occasionally a woman, "runs" the dive. Men and women, alike homeless and hopeless in their utter wretchedness, mingle there together. In one such dive in Bandits' Roost—a notorious Mulberry Street alley—I once, on the occasion of a police raid, counted forty-two "customers." The room was hardly five steps across, and indescribably foul. On a heap of dirty straw in the corner lay a mother and her new-born babe. But if they have nothing else to call their own, even tramps have a "pull"—about election time at all events. They have votes, and votes that are for sale cheap for cash. The sergeant who locked the dreary crowd up predicted that the men, at least, would not stay long on the island. More than once (he said it as if it were the most natural thing in the world) he had sent up one tramp twice in twenty-four hours for six months at a time.

One particularly ragged and disreputable representative of his tribe sat smoking his pipe on the wreck of a ladder with such evident philosophic contentment in the busy labor of a score of ragpickers all about him, that I bade him sit for a picture, offering him ten cents for the job. He accepted the offer with hardly a nod, and sat patiently watching me from his perch until I got ready for work. Then he calmly took his pipe out of his mouth and put it in his pocket, stolidly declaring that it was not included in the contract, and that it was worth a quarter to have it go in the picture. And I had to give in. The man, scarce ten seconds employed at honest labor, even at sitting down, at which he was an undoubted expert, had gone on strike. He knew his rights and the value of "work," and was not to be cheated out of either.

A Tramp's Nest in Ludlow Street.

That pure womanhood should blossom in such an atmosphere of moral decay is one of the unfathomable mysteries of life. And yet it is not an uncommon thing to find sweet and innocent girls, singularly untouched by the evil around them, true wives and faithful mothers, literally "like jewels in a swine's snout," in these infamous barracks. It is the experience of all who have intelligently observed this side of life in a great city,

Street Arabs in Sleeping Quarters.

not to be explained but thankfully accepted as the one gleam of hope in an otherwise hopeless desert.

Unhappily it is more than overbalanced by the account on the other side of the ledger. Out of the tenements of The Bend and its feeders come the white slaves of the Chinese dens of vice and their infernal drug, that have infused into the "Bloody Sixth" Ward of old a subtler poison than ever the stale-beer dives knew, or the "sudden death" of the Old Brewery. There are houses, dozens of them, in Mott and Pell Streets that are literally jammed, from the "joint" in the cellar to the attic, with these hapless victims of a passion which, once acquired, demands the sacrifice of every instinct of decency to its insatiate desire. There is a church in Mott Street, at the entrance to Chinatown, that stands as a barrier between it and the tenements beyond. Its young men have waged unceasing war upon the monstrous wickedness for years, but with very little real result. I have in mind a house in Pell Street that has been raided no end of times by the police, and its population emptied upon the island, or into the reformatories, yet is to-day honeycombed with scores of the conventional households of the Chinese quarter: the men worshippers of Joss; the women all white, girls nearly always of tender age, worshipping nothing save the pipe that has enslaved them body and soul. Easily tempted from homes that have no claim to the name, they rarely or never return. Mott Street gives up its victims only to the Charity Hospital or the Potter's Field. Of the depth of their fall no one is more thoroughly aware than these girls themselves; no one less concerned about it. The calmness with which they discuss it, while insisting illogically upon the fiction of a marriage that deceives no one, is disheartening. Their misery is peculiarly fond of company, and an amount of visiting goes on in these households that makes it extremely difficult for the stranger to untangle them. I came across a company of them, "hitting the pipe" together, on a tour through their dens one night with the police captain of the precinct. The girls knew him, called him by name, offered him a pipe, and chatted with him about the incidents of their acquaintance, how many times he had "sent them up," and their chances of "lasting" much longer. There was no shade of regret in their voices, nothing but utter indifference and surrender. One thing about them was conspicuous: their scrupulous neatness. It is the distinguishing mark of Chinatown, outwardly and physically.

It is not altogether by chance the Chinaman has chosen the laundry as his distinctive field. He is by nature as clean as the cat, which he resembles in his traits of cruel cunning and savage fury when aroused to wrath. In his

domestic circle he rules with a rod of iron. A specimen of celestial logic in this line came home to me with a personal application one evening when I attempted, with a policeman, to stop a Chinaman whom we found beating his white "wife" with a broom-handle in a Mott Street cellar. He was angry at our interference, and declared vehemently that she was "bad."

"S'ppose your wifee bad, you no lickee her?" he asked, as if there could be no appeal from such a common-sense proposition as that. My assurance that I did not, that such a thing could not occur to me, struck him dumb with amazement. He eyed me a while in stupid silence, poked the linen in his tub, stole another look, and made up his mind. A gleam of intelligence shone in his eye, and pity and contempt struggled in his voice. "Then, I guess, she lickee you," he said.

New York, for the asking, an Italian, a German, French, African, Spanish, Scandinavian, Russian, Jewish, and Chinese colony. Even the Arab who peddles "holy earth" from the Battery as a direct importation from Jerusalem has his exclusive preserves at the lower end of Washington Street. The one thing you shall vainly ask for in the chief city of America is a distinctive American community. There is none; certainly not among the tenements. No need of asking here on the east side where we are. The jargon of the street, the signs of the sidewalk, the manner and dress of the people, betray their race at every step. Men with queer skull-caps, venerable beard, and the outlandish long-skirted kaftan of the Russian Jew, elbow the ugliest and the handsomest women in the land. The contrast is startling. The old women are hags; the young, houries. Wives

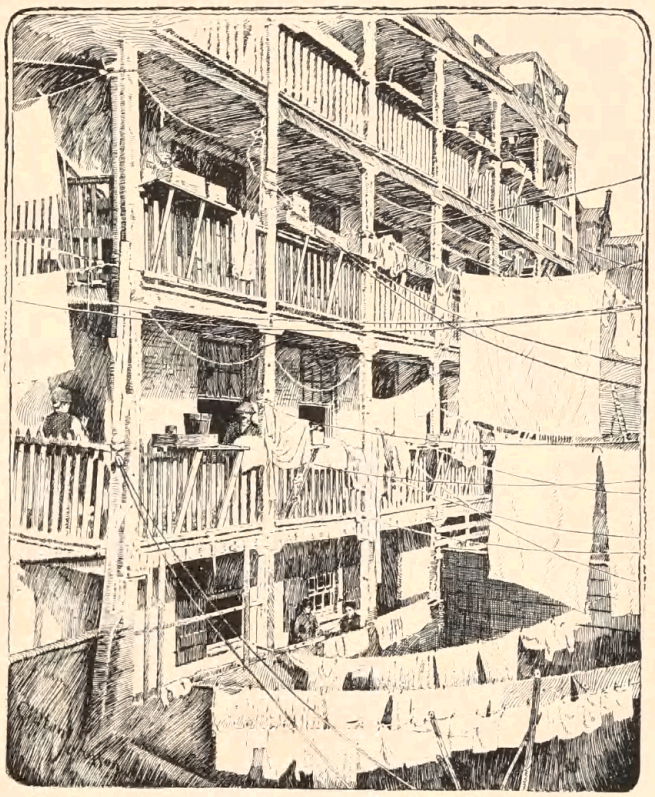
Hunting River Thieves.

The tenements grow taller and the gaps in their ranks close up rapidly as we cross the Bowery, and, leaving Chinatown and the Italians behind, invade the Hebrew quarter. One may find in

and mothers at sixteen, at thirty they are old. So thoroughly has the chosen people crowded out the Gentiles in the Tenth Ward, that when a great Jewish holiday came around last year, all but

seventy-five of the seventeen hundred pupils in a public school in the district stayed home to celebrate.

It is said that nowhere in the world are so many people crowded together on a square mile as here. The average five-story tenement adds a story or two to its stature in Ludlow Street, and an extra building on the rear lot, and yet the sign "To Let" is the rarest of all there. Here is one seven stories high. The sanitary policeman will tell you that it contains thirty-six families, but the term has a widely different meaning here and on the avenues. In this house, where a case of small-pox was reported, there were fifty-eight babies, and thirty-eight children that were over five years of age. In Essex Street two small rooms in a six-story tenement were made to hold a "family" of father and mother, twelve children, and six boarders. The boarder plays as important a part in the domestic economy of Jewtown as the lodger in the Mulberry Street Bend. These are samples of the packing of the population that has run up the record of this square mile to two hundred and ninety thousand souls, while the densest crowding of Old London is stated to be one hundred and seventy thousand to the square mile. Even the alley is crowded out. Through dark hallways and filthy cellars, crowded, as is every foot of the street, with half-naked children, the settlements in the rear are reached. Thieves know how to find them when pursued by the police, and the tramps that sneak in on chilly nights to fight for the warm spot in the yard over some baker's oven. There is such a tramps' roost in the rear of a tenement near the lower end of Ludlow Street that is never without its tenants in winter. By a judicious practice of flopping over at intervals, and thus warming one side at a time, and with an empty box to put the feet in, it is possible to keep reasonably comfortable there even on rainy nights. In summer this yard is the only one in the neighborhood that does not do duty as a public dormitory.



An Old Rear tenement in Roosevelt Street.

It is in hot weather, when life in-doors is wellnigh unbearable with cooking, sleeping, and working all crowded into the small room together—for especially in these East-side tenements much of the work that keeps the family is done at home—that the tenement expands, reckless of all restraint. Then a strange and picturesque life moves upon the flat roofs. In the day and early evening mothers air their babies there, the boys fly their kites from the house-tops, undismayed by police regulations, and the

young men and girls court and pass the growler. In the stifling July nights, when the big barracks are like fiery furnaces, their very walls giving out absorbed heat, men and women lie in restless, sweltering rows, panting for air and sleep. Then every truck in the street, every crowded fire-escape, becomes a bedroom, infinitely preferable to any

Coffee at One Cent.

the house affords. A cooling shower on such a night is hailed as a heaven-sent blessing in a hundred thousand homes.

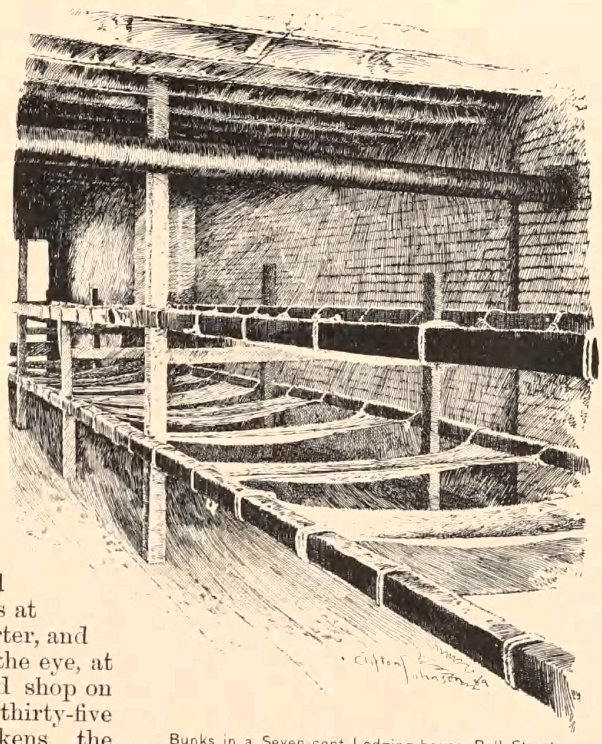
Life in the tenements in July and August spells death to an army of little ones whom the doctor's skill is powerless to save. When the white badge of mourning flutters from every second door, sleepless mothers walk the streets in the gray of the early dawn, trying to stir a cooling breeze to fan the brow of the sick baby. There is no sadder sight than this patient devotion striving against fearfully hopeless odds. Fifty "summer doctors," especially trained to this work, are then sent into the tenements by the Board of Health, with free advice and free medicine for the poor. Fresh-air excursions run daily out of New York on land and on water; but despite all efforts the grave-diggers in Calvary work overtime, and little coffins are stacked mountain-high on the deck of the Charity Commissioners' boat when it makes its semi-weekly trips to the city cemetery.

Within a few years the police captured on the East side a band of firebugs who made a business of setting fire to tenements for the insurance on their furniture. There has, unfortunately, been too much evidence in the past year that another such conspiracy is on foot again. The danger to which these fiends expose their fellow-tenants is appalling. A fire-panic at night in a tenement, by no means among the rare experiences in New York, with the surging, half-smothered crowds on stairs and fire-escapes, the frantic mothers and crying children, the wild struggle to save the little that is their all, is a horror that has few parallels in human experience.

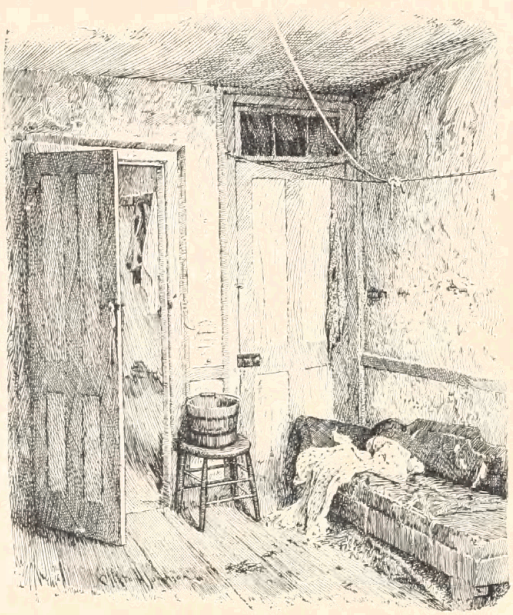
I cannot think without a shudder of one such scene in a First-Avenue tenement. It was in the middle of the night. The fire had swept up with sudden fury from a restaurant on the street floor, cutting off escape. Men and women threw themselves from the windows, or were carried down senseless by the firemen. Thirteen half-clad, apparently

lifeless bodies were laid on the floor of an adjoining coal-office, and the ambulance surgeons worked over them with sleeves rolled up to the elbows. A half-grown girl with a baby in her arms walked about among the dead and dying with a stunned, vacant look, singing in a low, scared voice to the child. One of the doctors took her arm to lead her out, and patted the cheek of the baby. It was cold. The baby had been smothered with its father and mother; but the girl, her sister, did not know it. Her reason had fled.

Thursday night and Friday morning are bargain days in the Pigmarket. Then is the time to study the ways of this peculiar people to the best advantage. A common pulse beats in the quarters of the Polish Jews and in the Mulberry Bend, though they have little else in common. Friday brings out all the latent color and picturesqueness of the Italians, as it does of these Orientals. The crowds and the common poverty are the bonds of sympathy between them. The Pigmarket is in Hester Street, extending either way from Ludlow Street, and up and down the side-streets, two or three blocks, as the state of trade demands. The name was given to it probably in derision, for pork is the one ware that is not on sale in the Pigmarket. There is scarcely anything else that can be hawked from a wagon that is not to be found, and at ridiculously low prices. Bandannas and tin-cups at two cents, peaches at a cent a quart, hats for a quarter, and spectacles, warranted to suit the eye, at the optician's, who has opened shop on a Hester Street doorstep, for thirty-five cents. Frowsy-looking chickens, the great staple of the market, and choice cuts of meat at prices the Avenues never dreamed of. And the crowds that jostle each other at the wagons and about the sidewalk shops, where a gutter-plank on two ash-barrels does duty for a counter! —pushing, struggling, screaming, and shouting in foreign tongues, a veritable Babel of confusion. An English word falls upon the ear almost with a sense of shock, as something unexpected and strange. In the midst of it all there is a sudden wild scattering, a hustling of things from the street into dark cellars, into backyards and by-ways, a slamming and locking of doors hidden under the improvised shelves and counters. The health officer's cart is coming down the street, preceded and followed by stalwart policemen who shovel up with scant ceremony the eatables, musty bread, rotten fish, and stale vegetables, indifferent to the curses that are showered on them from stoops and windows, and carry them off to the dump. In the wake of their wagon, as it makes its way to the East River after the raid, follow a line of despoiled hucksters shouting defiance from a safe distance. Their clamor dies away with the noise of the market. The endless panorama of the tenements, rows upon rows, between stony streets, stretches to the north, to



Bunks in a Seven-cent Lodging-house, Pell Street.



In the Region of Hell's Kitchen—Room in the West Thirty-eighth Street Barracks, with its entire furniture.

the south, and to the west as far as the eye reaches.

The tenement that was born in the old homes of wealth and luxury, nurtured in greed and avarice in Jewtown and The Bend, reaches uptown its third and last stage of development, a new baptism, under the tardy restraint of laws designed for the protection of the community as well as the helpless tenant. An aroused public conscience stood sponsor to the new order of things. Not that all the tenements above Fourteenth Street are good, or even better than those we have seen. There is Hell's Kitchen and Murderer's Row in the region of West-side slaughter-houses and three-cent whiskey, representatives of a class that breed the typical "tough" to perfection. There is Little Italy in Harlem, a miniature copy of The Bend, and in a fair way of becoming its rival in corruption. Of such as these there is no dearth. Tenements quite as bad as the worst are too numerous above Fourteenth Street, and it is a grave question whether all the improvements made under the sanitary regulations of recent years deserve the name. But one tremendous factor for evil in the lives of the poor has been taken by the throat, and something has unquestionably been done, where that was possible, to lift those lives out of the rut where they were equally beyond the reach of hope and of ambition. It is no longer lawful to construct barracks to cover the whole of a lot. Air and sunlight have a legal claim, and the day of the rear tenement is past. Last year a hundred thousand people burrowed in these inhuman dens; but some have been torn down since. Their number will decrease steadily until they shall have become a bad tradition of a heedless past. The dark, unventilated bedroom is going with them, and the open sewer. The day is not far distant when the greatest of all evils that now curses life in the tenements—the dearth of water in the hot summer days—will also have been remedied, and a long step taken toward the moral and physical redemption of their tenants.

These are the bright spots in the dreary picture; bright only by com-

The Trench in the Potter's Field.

parison. They are sad makeshifts, many of them, and there is no disguising the fact that it is making the best of a bad job; but even that is something. There is so little of relief, so little that is grateful, in the whole subject that one cannot afford to let any of the brightness go to waste. Perhaps of all the disheartening experiences of those who have devoted lives of unselfish thought and effort, and their number is not so small as often supposed, to the lifting of this great load, the indifference of those they would help is the most puzzling. They will not be helped. Dragged by main force out of their misery, they slip back again on the first opportunity, seemingly content only in the old rut. The explanation was supplied by two women of my acquaintance, in an Elizabeth Street tenement, whom the city missionaries had taken from their wretched hovel and provided with work and a decent home somewhere in New Jersey. In three weeks they were back, saying that they preferred their dark rear room to the stumps out in the country. But to me the oldest, the mother, who had struggled along with her daughter making cloaks at half a dollar apiece, twelve long years, since the daughter's husband was killed in a street accident and the city took the children, made the bitter confession: "We do get so kind o' downhearted living this way, that we have to be where something is going on, or we just can't stand it." And there was sadder pathos to me in her words than in the whole long story of their struggle with poverty; for unconsciously she voiced the sufferings of thousands, misjudged by a happier world, deemed vicious because they are human and unfortunate.

Weak tea with a dry crust is not a diet to nurse moral strength. Yet how much better might the fare be expected to be in the family of this "widow with seven children, very energetic and prudent"—I quote again from the report of the Society for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor—whose "eldest girl was employed as a learner in a tailor's shop at small wages, and one boy had a place as 'cash' in a store. There were two other little boys who sold papers and sometimes earned one dollar. The mother finishes pantaloons and can do three pairs in a day, thus earning thirty-nine cents. Here is a family of eight persons with rent to pay and an income of less than six dollars a week."

And yet she was better off in point of pay than this Sixth Street mother, who "had just brought home four pairs of pants to finish, at seven cents a pair. She was required to put the canvas in the bottom, basting and sewing three times around; to put the linings in the waistbands; to tack three pockets, three corners to each; to put on two stays and eight buttons, and make six button-holes; to put the buckle on the back strap and sew on the ticket, all for seven cents." Better off than the "church-going mother of six children," and with a husband sick to death, who to support the family made shirts, averaging an income of one dollar and twenty cents a week, while her oldest girl, aged thirteen, was "employed down-town cutting out Hamburg edging at one dollar and a half a week—two and a half cents per hour for ten hours of steady labor—making the total income of the family two dollars and seventy cents per week." Specimen wages of the tenements these, seemingly inconsistent with the charge of improvidence so often laid at the door of the poor.

But the connection on second thought is not obscure. There is nothing in the prospect of a sharp, unceasing battle for the bare necessaries of life, to encourage looking ahead, everything to discourage the effort. Improvidence and wastefulness are natural results. The instalment plan secures to the tenant who lives from hand to mouth his few comforts; the evil day of reckoning is put off till a to-morrow that may never come. When it does come, with failure to pay and the loss of hard-earned dollars, it simply adds another hardship to a life measured from the cradle by such incidents. The children soon catch the spirit of this sort of thing. I remember once calling at the home of a poor washer-woman, living in an East-side tenement, and finding the door locked. Some children in the hallway stopped their play and eyed me attentively while I knocked. The biggest girl volunteered the information

that Mrs. Smith was out; but while I was thinking of how I was to get a message to her, the child put a question of her own: "Are you the spring man or the clock man?" When I assured her that I was neither one nor the other, but had brought work for her mother, Mrs. Smith speedily appeared.

Out of such conditions is developed logically the "tough," and the perverse philosophy that persuades him that the world that gave him poverty and ignorance for his portion "owes him a living." Sooner or later—he has not generally long to wait—society, against which his hand is raised from the cradle, compels him to earn it on Blackwell's Island or at Sing Sing. His apprenticeship is brief, but thorough. The saloon, too often the only cheerful, bright, and comfortable spot in the block, receives him with open doors. From the moment he, almost a baby, for the first time carries the "growler" for beer, he is never out of its reach. It is less than a year since the Excise Board deemed it prudent to make the rule that no three corners of any street-crossing should thenceforward be licensed for rum-selling. And the saloon is the only thing that takes kindly to him. Honest play is interdicted in the streets. The policeman arrests the ball-tossers, and there is no room in the back-yard. In one of these I read this ominous notice the other day: "*All boys caught in this yard will be delt with accorden to law.*"

Along the water-fronts, in the holes of the dock-rats, and on the avenues the young tough finds plenty of kindred spirits. Every corner has its "gang," not always on the best of terms with the rivals in the next block, but all with a common programme: defiance of law and order, and with a common ambition: to get "pinched," *i.e.*, arrested, so as to pose as heroes before their fellows. As I have said, their ambition is early gratified. The New York tough has some of the qualities that would go toward making a hero under different training and social conditions. He has ready wit and a certain innate sense of fair play. There is no meanness in his make-up, but an intense love of show and applause that carries him to any length of bravado. I have a very vivid recollection of seeing one of his tribe, a robber and murderer before he was nineteen, go to the gallows unmoved, all fear of the rope overcome, as it seemed, by the secret, exultant pride of being the centre of a first-class show, shortly to be followed by that acme of tenement-life bliss, a big funeral.

Bad as he was, he was more sinned against than sinning. No toadstool was ever less justly to blame for not having grown up a spotless rose in its swamp, than he for being a tough. It is manifest that all effort to reclaim his kind must begin with the conditions of life against which his very existence is a protest. That this is now well understood is evidence that even the tough has not lived in vain. Most of the rescue work among the tenements is planned upon these lines. The model tenement, the neighborhood guilds, the children's friends, the free reading-rooms, the flower missions, the fresh-air excursions—all aim at the same object. It is a fight in which eternal vigilance is truly the price of the liberty and preservation of the state even more than of the individual.

One free excursion awaits young and old whom bitter poverty has denied the poor privilege of the choice of the home in death they were denied in life, the ride up the Sound to the Potter's Field, charitably styled the City Cemetery. But even there they do not escape their fate. In the common trench of the Poor Burying Ground they lie packed three stories deep, shoulder to shoulder, crowded in death as they were in life, to "save space;" for even on that desert island the ground is not for the exclusive possession of those who cannot afford to pay for it. There is an odd coincidence in this, that year by year the lives that are begun in the gutter, the little nameless waifs whom the police pick up and the city adopts as its wards, are balanced by the even more forlorn lives that are ended in the river. I do not know how or why it happens, or that it is more than a mere coincidence. But there it is. Year by year the balance is struck—a few more, a few less—substantially the same when the record is closed.