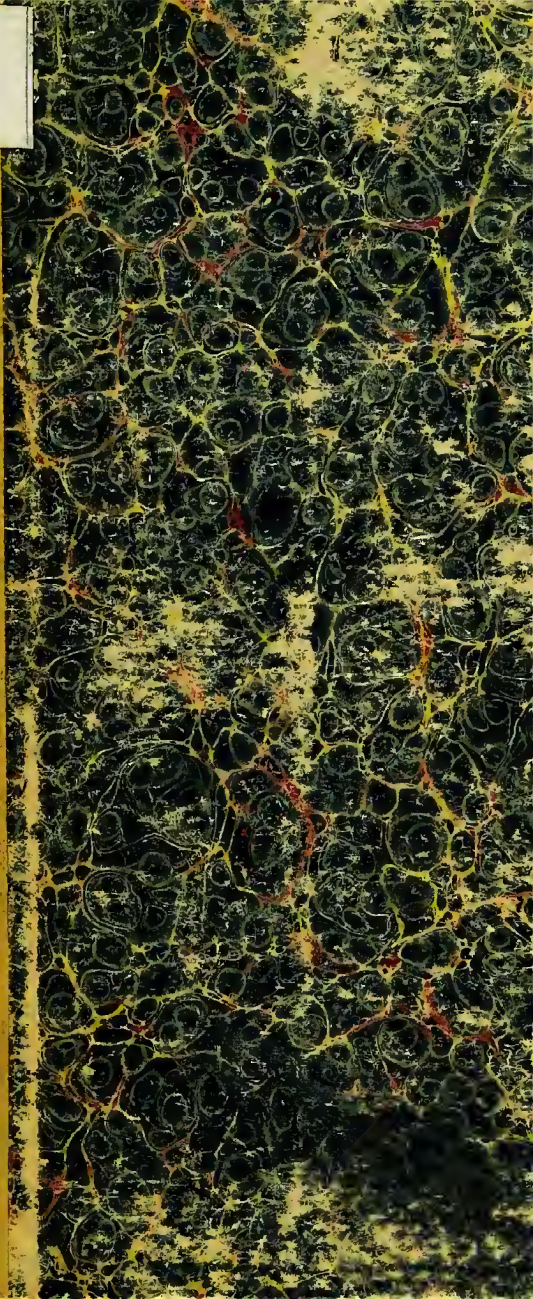


BACON—What Bad Housing Means to the Community.

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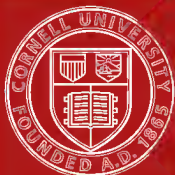
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THE
HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF BOSTON
FROM 1630 TO 1880

BY
JOHN H. COOPER
AND
JOHN W. COOPER
EDITED BY
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What Bad Housing Means to the Community

By

Albion Fellows Bacon

With a Prefatory Note by

Lawrence Veiller

Secretary of the National Housing Association

Published for free distribution

American Unitarian Association

25 Beacon Street, Boston

A.354813

PREFATORY NOTE.

No one is better qualified by experience or by spiritual insight than Mrs. Bacon to set forth the significance of bad housing conditions and what it all means to the community. Single handed and almost unaided she fought the adverse interests in the Indiana legislature, and, at the first attempt, succeeded in passing a tenement house law for the state of Indiana; a law, which not only has done much to mitigate the evil conditions discovered in her investigations in that state, but also has acted as an inspiration to social workers throughout the country.

I can add little to what she has to say with regard to the far-reaching influences of bad housing conditions. The community has been awakened as never before to an appreciation of the evil effects of adverse environment. But as yet, the sentiment thus aroused has not been translated into action. Mrs. Bacon points the way that is to be followed. What she urges is all easily practicable, if people but care enough about it to devote to this effort at prevention, a tithe of the energy that is now expended in administering palliatives.

LAWRENCE VEILLER

Housing

What Bad Housing Means to the Community

Within the last few years we have awakened to the fact that every one of our states has a Housing Problem.

We have learned that our working people, as a rule, are poorly housed. We have been startled by the realization that, in most of our states, the poor have apparently no legal right to sunlight, air and water, and that in many of our cities only those who can afford to pay for these commodities get them.

We have discovered that what we have always thought were just old houses, where poor folks lived, were really slums.

We have seen that many of our wealthy people are building the kind of houses that eventually make the worst kind of slums. We have learned, too, that slums are not a matter of size; that they are not dependent, even, on congestion—only made worse by it, just as disease is always more dangerous when congestion occurs.

The old misconception that only great cities could have slums is passing away. We have come

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to see that just as London and Berlin, New York and Chicago, each has its distinct type of slums, so has Boston, Cincinnati, Louisville, Indianapolis, St. Louis, San Francisco, Milwaukee, and the smaller towns of all our states. Even in our villages we find types which would be a disgrace to a crowded city.

Only a few of the States have recognized the fact that they have a Housing Problem. Nevertheless, the same problem exists in every state of the Union. If there is any difference in the slums of different sections of the country it is no more than the difference in language of those sections—just dialects, different pronunciations of poverty, neglect, wretchedness.

WHAT IS BAD HOUSING?

Any condition of housing that, in itself, tends to impair the physical or moral health of the tenant, is bad housing.

Any condition of housing which is unsafe or unsanitary, or in any way unfit for living or home-making, is bad-housing.

Any condition of housing which is damaging to the community, is bad housing.

These conditions are to be found, in varying degrees, in all grades of dwellings, from the expensive but unsanitary flat, well kept and uncrowded, to the most wretched and abandoned hovels, filthy and overcrowded, which are called slums.

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Go through the dwellings of the poor, in the cities, and you will find that most of them come under all the definitions of bad housing. Their most common evil is the lack of water, drainage and sewerage. Many houses have no city water; in some cities there are cisterns, but these are generally uncovered and polluted by trash as well as by seep water from the undrained yard vaults. In many cases from eight to ten families have to depend on one cistern. In one of our cities twenty families in one tenement have to carry all their water from a fountain a square away. The yards, being undrained, are sodden and foul smelling, the old suds and dishwater standing in slimy pools covered with scum. Typhoid, chills and fever result from these conditions. Many of the houses are built level with the street and have a tiny back yard, piled up with ashes, garbage and rubbish, there being no receptacle provided for it and in most places no provision for its removal. Decaying outbuildings stand on the rear of the yard. The filthy yard closet and its accompanying vault, generally a cess-pool, fills the air of the neighborhood with stifling odors, spreads contagion by means of swarms of flies, and seeps through its crevices into the soil.

The house itself is often decayed to a degree of danger from collapse or fire. Dilapidation is the rule, although this is not considered one of the cardinal evils. But an old house is like an old sinner—

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so much meaner the older it gets. With each generation of tenants come successive strata of dirt, and countless generations of germs that gather in the loose cracks of the woodwork and the broken plastering. The stairways are rickety and unsafe. Many of the houses are low and damp, often built flat on the ground, so that mud from the yard washes over the floor when it rains. Few of the houses are properly ventilated. Even in villages we find rooms without windows. In some towns the poor live over warehouses and stores, the middle room (used for sleeping) being totally dark and unventilated. Many of the new tenements have windowless rooms. Cellars are unknown in some towns, but in others are sometimes used for dwellings, and are generally damp and filthy.

The rear tenement, on the alley, is one of the worst evils, for the reason that stables and vaults are also on the alleys, the latter often being full of filthy refuse. In some of these dwellings old cesspools are under the floor of the living room. Garbage barrels, against the windows, require them to be closed. Some families share a stable with horses or mules. In one city, where hundreds of rear tenements have been built recently, they are crowded against the yard closets of the front building. These being in bad condition, the doors and windows of the rear tenement have to be kept closed. In these places also there are no sewer connections and the

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yard sinks are always overflowing. In another town, houses of five rooms, or even less, have from ten to twenty boarders (a day shift and a night shift of workmen), often among them a consumptive. Here it is common to find holes dug in the ground for garbage.

In one place seventeen men, one woman and two children live in two rooms. Next door fifteen persons live in two rooms. Five men cook, eat and sleep in one room which has no outer door or window. In the same building, nine men live in two rooms, one of which is dark. In a closet of this room, six feet long and thirty inches wide, was found a man sleeping, with the door locked.

Some tenements are built for a number of families, but often a dwelling of eight or ten rooms will be taken by as many families. As but one cistern and one yard closet has been originally provided, this is used by all the tenants—men, women and children—in common. The stairway and hall, often narrow and dark, also have common use. In many cities the slums are not confined to one quarter, but are scattered in spots over the city, sometimes in rows or blocks, or even in single tenements, besides being over or in the rear of warehouses or stores.

The scarcity of good houses makes it necessary that many workingmen's families, whom manufacturing calls to our cities, shall take any house they can find. This very often brings them into a slum

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neighborhood and sometimes into the same tenement with families whose habits are a menace to their own family.

WHAT BAD HOUSING MEANS TO THE TENANT

The physical consequences of bad housing are the ones most plainly seen. There are always cases of sickness in the tenements. One wonders, breathing that foul air, how any one can be well in such places. In the dark, damp rooms of the poor germs of disease live and multiply, lacking air and sunlight to destroy them. Tuberculosis is fearfully prevalent for this reason. Rheumatism and colds, with all their train of troubles, are caused by the dampness of the old houses, flat on the ground. Typhoid, chills and fever are caused by impure water and lack of drainage.

Overcrowding brings serious physical results. These have been clearly demonstrated in a startling way by a "congestion chart," which shows that children reared in a one-room dwelling are smaller than children of the same age and sex reared in a two or three-room dwelling, the weight and height both increasing with each added room. Prof. Patten declares that "It is the environment of the poor that inflates the death rate, and dwarfs them below the stature of a man." Miss Harriet Fulmer, superintendent of the Visiting Nurses' Association of Chicago says: "Two-thirds of the delinquent children

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come from homes where dirty, illy ventilated rooms predominate; two-thirds of the physically ill children from the same; one-third of the shiftless mothers from the same; two-thirds of the deserting fathers from the same. In a study of fifty backward children in an ungraded school of a large city, forty-three of these children occupied homes that it should have been the business of the State to see did not exist."

Horsfall notes the deterioration of the English townspeople, under the influence of bad housing, and says that "Out of 11,000 men from Manchester, only 1,000 were physically fit to enter the army," and quotes a German author, who says that "The men of Manchester are a degenerate race." Hunter lays great stress on sanitary housing as one thing necessary to keep a man in good working condition. One English author boldly says: "Poverty is largely due to bad housing. Put an applicant for relief under better housing conditions and his health will in most cases much improve, enabling him to earn more and taking him off the hands of the charitable."

Those who deal with the problems of charity can testify that this is true.

The moral effect of bad housing is not at first so apparent as the physical. It should require no argument, however, when overcrowding is involved. When people are "herded together like cattle"

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there can be no privacy, that prime essential of the home. If a number of persons of low standards of different sexes and ages all live together in one room, it is almost bound to result in vice. So it is when a number of families have to use the same yard, yard closet, hall and stairs, especially when the latter are dark.

When a family of ten, living in three rooms, takes in boarders, modesty and morality are apt to be crowded out. Even with only one room to a family boarders are sometimes taken and visitors are frequent. At the St. Louis National Charities Conference, Jane Addams spoke on "Bad Housing as a Social Deterrent." She pointed out the fact that if a house were so crowded or so uninviting that a girl had no fit place to invite her men friends, she met them on the streets or at the dance halls. It is no wonder that boys and men—and girls and women too—fly from their dreary homes after a day of toil in the grimy shops. Their gray lives cry out against the gray walls for color and brightness, and they go out into the brilliant streets or to the inviting saloons to find cheer.

In this day we cannot disregard the psychological view. Dr. Charles Gilbert Davis says: "Everything that makes an impression on any of these five senses is a suggestion, and leaves its impress on the soul. If this be true, then how important a part environment plays in the development of man." How

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can there be a thought of beauty in the mind of a child whose vision is bounded by bare walls, enclosing ash heaps and garbage piles, loathsome out-buildings, marks of ruin and decay, filth and grime? Shut in among surroundings which sear the mind by reiterated suggestions of evil, whose hideous ugliness warps the soul away from ideals of truth and beauty and purity, what hope is there for the child? The dependence of the mental on the physical health argues badly for the dwarfing effect of the slum on the mind. To say nothing of the defectives and degenerates found there, the irritability and weakness caused by disease must be remembered in considering causes of crime. The heads of reformatories, and of all of our institutions for the care of delinquent and defective children, testify to the effect of environment in producing criminals. Probation officers do the same. The records show that the slums have their part in filling our reformatories.

“The most pitiful victim of modern city life is not the slum child who dies, but the slum child who lives. Every time a baby dies the nation loses a prospective citizen, but *in every slum child who lives the nation has a probable consumptive and a possible criminal.*”

WHAT BAD HOUSING MEANS TO THE COMMUNITY

Bad housing affects the entire community, touch-

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ing the individual, the family, the neighborhood, and corrupting the social and civic life of the whole city. It is the cancer that sends its poison to the finger tips of the social body. It is the rotten foundation upon which the civic temple unsafely rests. The direct effects of bad housing upon the tenant bring a large part of the community under its shadow. It is the effect upon the individuals who are not tenants but neighbors, or citizens of the same town, that we wish to show.

Go to the schools to learn the danger of bad housing—not to study it from the professors, but from the children sitting side by side, your child, with the child from the slums. With his daily lessons your child takes in a lesson in foul language, vile habits, low standards. Both visualized and repeated, these make a lasting impression. Nor is this all. From the drinking cup or other contact, your child is in danger of contracting the most loathsome diseases. There is still more to fear. An inky current sweeps from the slums to your very door and is tracked into your homes by those who enter as carriers or servants. The germs of disease are brought into your homes in food stuffs and clothing that pass through the slums in process of making. On the streets, in crowded public buildings, your wife and daughters touch elbows with those who are sooty enough, morally, to rub off.

The effect of the slum is apparent in its own

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neighborhood. Slums being often scattered, the poison is scattered in so many districts. We may find a row of the worst kind of houses at the rear of a fine residence block, or a single wretched tenement set among neat and well-built houses. In the factory district the better class of workmen's cottages have squalid shacks or tenements interspersed among them, so that they are beset on all sides with the annoying sights and sounds and the unwholesome conditions of filth, with the disease-spreading swarms of flies which the thrifty workingman's wife would banish from her own neat premises. The loathsome cesspools and decaying garbage of one neglected house are enough to poison the air and spread contagion to a whole neighborhood. In the same way may moral contagion be spread from one center of vice.

The neighborhood is interested directly in the buildings erected in a city, on account of their influence on the ventilation of the blocks and the streets. On sultry July nights, when the heavy odors of the vaults and foul alleys pervade the block, the tall buildings, covering the entire corner lots, shut off all the air supply from the tenants of the inner lots, who are in a position to appreciate the need of "block ventilation." The injury done by crowding tall buildings together goes still farther and poisons the arteries of the whole city. Notice how the air, so fresh and pure in the suburbs, where

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houses are scattered, grows denser, fouler and more smoke-laden, block by block, till, where tall, close rows of buildings line both sides of the streets, the air is heavy and stale. In some districts the odor of leather, fish, fruit or beer seems never to be changed unless a gale blows. Dead, vault-like air issues from the doors of the business houses. Yet here an army of employes spend their working hours, the employers doomed to the same prison-like air. Overhead, in the offices, our lawyers, architects and men of all professions breathe the unwholesome fumes of the street. In other rear or upstairs rooms, families live, work, sleep. Children play in the pent rooms, babies wail through miserable summers, when the heat rises from the shed roofs and walls, and no air seems to enter at the window, because the tall rows of buildings prevent the ventilation of the street itself.

The influence of the slum on civic life is a sadly familiar story. "You can't let people live like pigs and expect them to make good citizens," says Jacob Riis. Neither can you expect them to make good public officials. The slime of the gutter is too often on our city politics, and the dead weight of the slum hangs about the neck of all civic progress.

WHAT BAD HOUSING MEANS TO THE STATE

"The two greatest assets of a nation are the land and the people." Other countries, realizing this,

protect both land and people by their housing regulations. They find that "land sweating" does not pay, neither does "the practice of crowding the poor onto dear land and leaving the cheap land vacant." Preventing this, they save money as well as lives.

The appropriations required by tenement commissions, when the evil is allowed to grow so that a large corps is required to handle it, are a small part of the expense of slums. When it becomes necessary, in order to save human lives, to tear out the buildings of a whole slum area, involving millions of dollars, the public begins to realize the costliness of slums.

To determine what bad housing means to the State we must remember what it means to the citizen and the community. Then we must consider that "the slum is the enemy of the home," and "the home is the key to good citizenship." Crime and disease, defectiveness, delinquency and dependency, are traced to the slum. The cost of these to the State has often been emphasized. The expensive processes of the law and the maintenance of costly institutions are both included in the estimate. This does not include, however, the loss of citizens, by death from disease or crime. Many of these are adults—workers, producers, part of the State's industrial capital. The inefficiency of the workingman, from sickness, reducing his earning power and

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causing the dependency of his family, must also be counted. Now, sum it all up and see what is the loss to the State on account of bad housing.

There is a loss of property, a loss in property values, a loss in the expense of crime and dependency, a loss in the expense of disease and in the death of citizens, a loss in the efficiency of the workman, a loss in homes, a loss in citizenship.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THESE CONDITIONS?

The citizen, the architect or builder, and the landlord are responsible for these conditions. This does not include the models of each class; only those who build or rent or allow objectionable buildings.

The responsibility of the landlord is a new thought in this part of the country. We are just beginning to understand that "a man has just as much right to kill another man in the street with an ax as he has to kill him with a house." We are learning that to collect rent from our old death-traps of tenements is really to take blood money. It has been the custom to blame the poor for their surroundings, on the ground that they are shiftless and dirty. But how can they be clean without water or drains, or any provision for ashes or garbage? How much bathing or washing would any of us do if we had to bring every drop of water we used from a fountain two squares away, carry it up two flights of stairs, heat it on a broken stove, and bathe in a wash basin?

We cannot blame the architects of today for the mistakes in our old houses. They were the blunders of the old builders, whose victims fill our graveyards. We are tempted to smile sometimes as we explore their musty rooms and note the elaborate pains with which they avoided proper ventilation, the ingenuity they displayed in making houses inconvenient and uncomfortable, and their lofty disregard for sanitation. But alas, while it would enrich comedy, it is engrossed by tragedy. The architect of this day knows better than to make such mistakes. He knows that every room which human beings occupy must be supplied with sunlight and air. If he deliberately plans the administering of fatal doses of carbonic acid gas, it is as bad as it would be for a doctor to deliberately prescribe fatal doses of laudanum. The fee involved, the "convenience" or greed of his client, does not lessen one whit the responsibility of the architect.

The responsibility of the landlord for the condition of the dwellings he rents is recognized by the laws of England and Europe, as well as by all the tenement laws of our country.

It is fully recognized in the case of the higher class of tenants, who demand necessary repairs and the correction of unsanitary conditions. But in too many cases where the lowest class of houses are rented the responsibility of the landlord is evaded, and advantage is taken of the tenant's ignorance of

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the laws protecting him. "Don't send the health officer, because we'll get turned right out in the street if he comes and makes trouble," has been the appeal of tenants whose cisterns were polluted, and whose cellars were half full of water, causing illness of the family.

Yet the owners of these houses know very well what is necessary for the sanitation of a dwelling, as is shown by their careful provision for their own homes.

The tenant of the lowest class houses pays very much more for what he receives than does the tenant of the better houses. Yet "the greed of the landlords and their desire for large profits on their investments" makes them slow to make any repairs, even to maintain their own property. "What's the use? We get the rent just the same."

The Housing Problem takes in not only the "multiple dwelling," or tenement, but the single or detached dwelling, in which only one family lives. Hundreds of our poor live in wretched shacks or hovels. Thousands of families of self-respecting workingmen live in dingy, dreary blocks or rows of houses, flimsy and cheaply made, like pens or boxes, with no thought of comfort, convenience, or even sanitation. Such dwellings constitute a very serious part of the housing problem.

It may be thought that the homes of the wealthy should not be taken into the problem, but this must

be done for two reasons: First, the health of every citizen is of importance to the State; second, it has been seen that, as cities grow, the business section encroaches on the residence section. As newer districts become fashionable for residence, families of wealth move out, and their mansions are deserted. These are eventually taken by the poor and become the city's worst slums. This is one reason why it is a matter of great concern that the rich, who can afford lawns and gardens, should not crowd their flats together, and should not build rooms that never can have windows. We have already noticed this change of residence districts in many cities. Some of the fine old homes have been taken for that worst kind of tenement, in which each family occupies only one room. In this the cook stove, cupboard, table, wash tub, beds for from four to ten people, occupy nearly all but the standing room of the family. This is called "room overcrowding" and is common in every locality.

In the villages we find incipient slum conditions, or what may be called the slum nucleus. This may be any old house in a village, unsanitary and out of repair. As it goes from bad to worse, it draws a lower and lower class of tenants, till at last it is abandoned to an abandoned family. Relatives and friends overflow the house, and settle in other neglected shacks—and a slum quarter is begun. As the towns grow, the poor increase. More houses fall

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into decay and are left to the poor, and the slums multiply by sure arithmetic.

The responsibility of the citizen lays upon him the obligation to know the conditions of his own community, and to do all in his power to prevent the evils that threaten his home, his community, his State. The majority of the people are in utter ignorance of the slums of their own town and are not even aware that they exist. This was repeatedly shown during an investigation into the housing conditions of one of our states. Even those who take part in charity work, as a rule, do not visit the homes of the poor, but leave that to be done by the Charities Secretary. If our citizens would only learn the truth about slum conditions, they would not tolerate their existence.

“No housing evils are necessary; none need be tolerated. Where they exist they are always a reflection upon the intelligence, right-mindedness and moral tone of the community.”

“HEAD OFF THE SLUMS”

In many states the mania prevails for building flats that cover the entire lot, every one building in his own interest, in selfish disregard of what the effect would be if every other builder chose to do the same. This practice is absurd where land is cheap and plentiful, in towns so small that one can easily walk from the center to the suburbs. Yet, with pas-

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ture lands and fields almost in sight of the public square, grasping landlords erect stores on 25-foot lots, covering the entire depth, make apartments above, with the middle room dark, and rent them to the workingman's family. Rows of tiny coops are crowded into the dusty, smoky heart of town, and children shut up in them with no place to play but the gutters or alleys.

In larger cities other serious problems are arising. The rear tenements are increasing daily. "Block ventilation" and "street ventilation," now unknown terms, will some day be unknown things. Mr. Edward T. Hartman was right when he said: "We are making slums ten times faster than we can unmake them."

The example of our great cities has been a warning to all to "Head off the slums." The fact that fifty years ago the slums of New York were very like those of many of our cities today, should make us stop and consider what conditions will exist among us in fifty years more. Our cities are growing rapidly. We must realize that slums grow as rapidly as any other part of a town, and that the poor increase in undue proportion, especially when they are imported, as they often are, for industrial reasons.

It is the part of good statesmanship to foresee the dangers and forestall the evils that are as sure to overtake us as they have overtaken all the coun-

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tries of the old world. Every nation of Europe has been compelled to make laws restricting housing evils. We Americans have been slow to enact this kind of legislation, although our very spirit of American freedom has led us to a greater disregard of our neighbors' rights, and a larger encroachment on their light, air and view than custom would allow anywhere else.

It will be contended by many States that they do not need tenement laws, because they have not the crowded conditions of New York and Chicago.

And shall we wait till we have congestion, and then send for a leech? Shall we delay till we are sick unto death with the disease, and then take anti-toxin? Shall we stupidly go on building houses that in ten or twenty years tenement house commissions will be pulling down? Let us prevent the congestion, the lesion, the paralysis. Now, before our cities are overgrown, while real estate is not yet more valuable than people, let us make laws that will prevent the future sacrifice of human life to the greed or ignorance of those who build and buy, laws that require safe and decent houses for every citizen, however poor.

NOT TENEMENTS, BUT HOMES!

In this great country we have vast reaches of primeval forest, unmeasured miles of mountains, plains and prairies, where only an occasional cabin

stands. We have unbuilt wastes where the hermit has no neighbor. Unpeopled hills stand lonely, overlooking the straggling hamlets of the wide valleys. We have room for every one, room and to spare.

Many of our farms, even in the middle states, are so large that the owners cannot properly cultivate them, and these are not far distant from the towns. Yet in these selfsame towns dwelling houses are squeezed so close together that the human beings packed into them can get neither sunlight nor air.

There is not a state in the Union, east or west, which has not land conditions that would afford plenty of space, without crowding, to every one of its town dwellers. In the suburbs of our cities there is room for every working man to have his house and garden, and the remaining land would be all the more valuable.

We can understand why congestion exists in New York City, and why many serious housing evils have taken root in all of our larger centres. But it is more shocking to know that in cities of 100,000,—of 50,000 or even less, there are hundreds of wretched dwellings, not fit for homes, where little children are growing up under the shadow of gloomy walls, shut in amid foul odors, to the slime of sodden yards, where never a flower could grow, nor even a blade of grass.

Ruskin laments that in six thousand years of

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building we have not yet learned how to house our poor.

And what is the glory of our architecture, if the poor must hide in dens and holes?

What is our boast of greatness and strength, if the weakest are not cared for?

What is our pride in mental achievement, if the thought of the people tolerates filth and degradation?

What is our advantage in wealth if poverty and crime threaten our treasuries?

Let us wipe out the shame of our cities, and take away the reproach of the poor. Let us make this a nation, not of tenements, but of homes!

SOCIAL SERVICE BULLETIN

(For the first twenty-four issues, see front cover)

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