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NEW YORK (CITY) TENEMENT HOUSE
COMMISSION

REPORT OF TENEMENT HOUSE COM-
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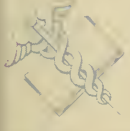
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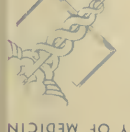
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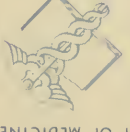


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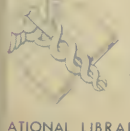
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New York City Tenement House Commission



REPORT OF TENEMENT HOUSE COMMISSION.

TO THE LEGISLATURE :

The TENEMENT HOUSE COMMISSION, appointed by chap. 448 of the Laws of 1884, respectfully reports as follows :

The Commission met on the 11th day of June, 1884, and organized by the election of J. W. Drexel as Chairman, and Dr. Moreau Morris as Secretary. An executive committee was then appointed to supervise the inspection of tenement houses during the summer, which was made by inspectors employed by the Commission.

On the 16th day of June, 1884, the whole Commission again met, and has continued to meet until the present time, at least once a week, for the purpose of taking testimony and considering recommendations to be made by the Commission. On the 12th day of November Mr. Otten-dorfer resigned from the Commission and Mr. Charles S. Fairchild was elected in his place; the latter met with the Commission for the first time on the 17th day of December, 1884.

The Commission submits herewith the report of Mr. Owen, the chief of the inspectors employed by it; the careful attention of the Legislature is called to this report.

The Commission also submits certain preliminary recommendations, which it believes should receive the immediate attention of the Legislature.

The reasons which have led the Commission to advise that these recommendations be made a part of the law

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concerning tenement houses in the City of New York, so far as may be practicable, are as follows, briefly stated :

1ST.—PRIVY VAULTS.

An Act to abolish all privy vaults within the city limits on or before January 1st, 1887, upon all property contiguous to such streets or avenues where sewers are laid.

The Sanitary Inspectors of the Health Department generally agree that privy vaults are in themselves a menace to the public health; that they are dangerous when even twenty feet distant from windows, and they seldom, if ever, can be placed that distance from the windows of a tenement dwelling; that they are always liable to leak into cellars and areas, create offensive odors, and that they tend to spread zymotic diseases. Ground saturation from this source produces miasmatic poisoning. The inspectors generally agree that all privy vaults should be abolished when the street is sewered. School sinks are better than vaults, but water-closets are better than either.

Nearly all of the inspectors know where water-closets have been introduced in tenement houses, and they believe that properly located and supervised water-closets are practicable even in the worst houses.

2ND.—EXTENDING TENEMENT HOUSES.

That section 661 of chapter 410 of the Consolidation Act of July, 1882, be amended by the insertion of the words, "nor shall any tenement or lodging house be altered or extended," after the words, "an ordinary city lot," in that section, and in section 662, after the words, "but in all houses erected," insert the words, "altered, extended."

No new house can be lawfully built which shall cover more than sixty-five per cent of the lot upon which it stands, but the officers of the Board of Health are of the opinion that the law does not prohibit the extension of houses built before its passage, so that they may cover even the whole lot upon which they stand.

3D.—WATER SUPPLY.

That there shall be adequate water supply for domestic purposes on each story that is inhabited or intended to be occupied by any family, either by the Croton pressure or by tanks in the upper part of the building.

The reasons for this are obvious. We may add that nearly all of the inspectors agree that the sanitary condition of houses freely supplied with water on each floor is better than that of houses not so supplied.

4TH.—AMENDMENT OF SEC. 664, CHAP. 410, LAWS OF 1882.

That section 664 be amended by the insertion of the word "eight" instead of "ten" in the clause reading, "Whenever there shall be more than 'ten' families living in any tenement house," &c.

So that every house designed for eight families or more shall have a janitor.

It is generally conceded that the benefit derived from having a good janitor living in a tenement house is great, and we think it well to extend this benefit to a still larger number of tenement houses, which would be the effect of this amendment, if adopted.

5TH.—CELLARS TO BE CONCRETED, &C.

That section 663 of the Consolidation Act be amended to read, "That all cellars of tenement houses and lodging houses, where they are located over filled-in ground, or over sandy ground, or ground on which water does lie, shall be covered with concrete, laid over not less than three inches thick, of small broken stone, so as to effectually prevent evaporation or dampness," in place of the words, "It shall have the floor of the cellar properly cemented so as to be water-tight."

The reason for this is to shut out not only dampness but also ground air, which the experiments of Pettenkoffer and sanitary experts have shown to be very detrimental to health. Ground air is laden with germs of dis-

ease which have been elaborated in the soil and are drawn by changes of temperature through the whole house. The concrete over a layer of broken stones would, it is believed, effectually seal up this ground air. The expense to the owner of a tenement house in thus protecting his tenant from the invasion of disease from below would not be too great. The estimate is between \$100 and \$200 per house.

6TH.—LIGHT AND VENTILATION FOR ALL HALLS AND INNER ROOMS.

That all inner rooms and hall-ways in tenement houses erected after or prior to the Laws of 1879, shall have direct light and communication with the external air, by such means as the Board of Health may direct.

Many of the hall-ways and inner rooms of tenement houses are wholly dark and without proper means of ventilation. Whole families are sometimes obliged to live in such rooms. The absence of fresh air and of sunlight blights the health of those who thus suffer, especially the women and children, they being more constantly at home than the men. This difficulty relates more especially to houses built before the enactment of the present tenement-house law. It is one of the gravest evils connected with the tenement-house problem which this Commission has encountered. Light and air shafts should be put in where they do not already exist, or sky-lights of sufficient size be placed in the roof above hall-ways; where these means are not practicable some other should be taken under the direction of the Board of Health, and such as it may deem suitable for the exigencies of a particular case.

7TH.—HOUSE CONTAINING THREE OR MORE FAMILIES TO BE A TENEMENT HOUSE.

The act defining a tenement house be so amended as to read, "That the occupancy of any house by three or more families," instead of "more than by three families," &c.

It will be found in the report of the Chief Inspector

that some of the worst houses found by his inspection contained but three families.

8TH.—THAT MISUSE OF WATER CLOSETS, &C., BY
TENANTS SHALL BE MADE A MISDEMEANOR.

The resolution of Commissioner A. Reichardt, referred to the Special Committee, to wit: That a law be passed imposing a fine or imprisonment, or both, upon any person convicted of the offense of throwing filth, urine or foecal matter into any waste water sink or waste water pipe in any house, and the offense of keeping any filth, urine or foecal matter in their apartments, or upon their premises, for such length of time as to create a nuisance, was adopted.

Such a law would help the owners of tenement houses and the officers of the Board of Health in maintaining sanitary conditions in tenement houses.

9TH.—TWO REGULAR HOUSE-TO-HOUSE INSPECTIONS BY
BOARD OF HEALTH EACH YEAR.

That the Board of Health be required to make a house-to-house inspection twice in each year of all tenements and lodging houses in the city.

There are many tenement houses which are not visited at all by inspectors. The Commission believe that at least two regular house-to-house inspections each year are necessary for proper control. Of course, this inspection would be in addition to that now made upon complaints, &c., and there would always be houses which should be inspected much more often than twice a year; such houses the inspectors would soon learn to know.

10TH.—INCREASE OF NUMBER OF SANITARY POLICEMEN TO
FORTY, AND CONFINEMENT OF THEIR DUTIES TO TENE-
MENT AND LODGING HOUSES.

That the Sanitary Police force be increased from thirty, the present number, to forty, whose sole duties shall be the inspection of tenement and lodging houses.

The object of this is to secure the inspection provided for in the preceding recommendation.

The Commission finds that the sanitary police force at present is needed and used for duties other than those strictly connected with tenement houses. The Commission believes that the time of the fifteen sanitary inspectors and of forty other men in aid of their work would be fully occupied if semi-annual house-to-house inspection was thoroughly done; but they also believe that this force of fifty-five men, once trained for this work and properly organized, could do it, as well as make all extra inspections needed in ordinary times. This, if done, would secure a control and supervision of tenement and lodging houses such as has not yet been known in New York City, but which the Commission believes to be needed for the well being of the city.

11TH.—SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT UPON ALL ORDERS OF BOARD OF HEALTH.

That the Sanitary Inspectors or the Sanitary Police shall make a supplemental report upon all orders of the Board of Health within a specified time, say four weeks after such orders have been issued, to ascertain whether the orders of the Board are still complied with, in reference to cellars, lodging houses and over-crowding of tenement houses.

The following not infrequently occurs: A cellar (for example) will be ordered to be cleared. The inspector reports that the order has been obeyed. A week after the same cellar is again occupied. This provision is designed to secure watchfulness over those places against which it has been found necessary to take action that the orders of the Board of Health in regard to the same may continue to be obeyed.

12TH.—REGISTRATION OF OWNERS AND STATISTICS OF HOUSES. THE OBJECT OF THIS IS :

That every person or owner having the control of or interest in any tenement house shall file in the Health Department a notice of his or her name and address, and also a description of the property, by street, number, or

otherwise, and also the number of apartments in such house, the number of rooms in each apartment, the number of persons occupying each suite of apartments, and the trades or occupations carried on therein, and every person claiming to have an interest in any tenement or lodging house may file their names and addresses in the Health Department.

(a.) To secure accurate statistics of tenement houses.

The Commission has found itself greatly hampered by the difficulty of getting accurate tenement-house statistics.

The information which this Commission needs should always be in the possession of Government in an available form. The owner of a tenement house can easily keep the Government informed upon the points noted with slight expense either to himself or to Government. To correct any evil connected with a tenement house it is necessary to easily and quickly get all the facts concerning such house.

(b.) To enable all persons to receive copies of all notices and orders of the Board of Health affecting tenement houses which they own or in which they claim to have an interest.

13TH.—POSTING AND MAILING NOTICES AND ORDERS OF THE BOARD OF HEALTH.

All notices and orders of the Board of Health in relation to a tenement or lodging house shall be served by posting in some conspicuous place on the house a copy of the notice or order, each time for doing the thing in relation to which said notice or order was issued. The posting made in accordance with the section shall be sufficient service for all purposes.

The Board of Health shall cause a copy of such notice or order to be mailed on the same date that it is posted on the house to the name and address of each person who has filed a notice that he or she is, or claims to be, the owner of, or has control of, or is interested in, the property in respect to which the order or notice of the Board of Health was issued, but a failure to mail such copy shall not invalidate any proceedings taken or any rights acquired under or in consequence of said notice or order of the Board of Health.

The Board is often unable to execute its orders because the proper person to serve with notice, as required by law,

cannot be found, and in consequence life, health and morality suffer. It is proposed that simply posting a notice on the property affected shall be sufficient notice to the owner. But it is also made the duty of the Board of Health to mail a copy of the same to every person who has filed his name and address with the Board.

This provision would, if made law, enable the Board speedily, economically and easily to execute its orders, and to effect a legal lien upon the property in relation to which expense had been incurred by the Board. At the same time, it would be in the power of not only the owner of the property, but also of every other person who might claim an interest in the same to get the right to receive through the mail a copy of every notice of the Board of Health affecting his property. Except in cases of great emergency, he could always receive his notice in time himself to execute the order, or to make such representations to the Board as he wished.

The only contingency would be the rare and improbable one of failure in the mails ; this is so slight that it should not weigh against the general good. If the owner of a tenement house does not think it worth his while to keep the Board of Health constantly informed of his name and address, then the fault is his own if he suffers damage by reason of the orders of the Board. Filing his name and address, and giving the statistics, is made compulsory upon the owner or person having control of tenement-house property, but filing name and address is optional with other persons, and is for their protection, if they wish to avail themselves of the privilege. Should the owner or person having control fail to obey this provision, the Board of Health *may* collect by suit a fine of \$10 a day for each day of neglect, under the same general provision of law by which it may now collect the same penalty from owners who fail to post their names and addresses upon the tenement houses which they own.

See Sec. 665, Chap. 410, Laws of 1882.

14TH.—FUND TO EXECUTE ORDERS OF BOARD OF HEALTH.

That a law be passed directing the Board of Apportionment to set aside a sufficient fund to enable the Board of Health to execute its own orders in case of necessity, the amount to be stated by the Board of Health in their annual estimates for expenditures.

This is to enable the Board to speedily execute its orders in cases deemed important by it, where the owner fails for any reason to do so himself.

This fund may, and always should, be reimbursed for any payments made from it by making the same a lien upon the premises for the repair of which the payment was made, or in some of the other ways, as is provided in existing laws.

If this be done it will be seen that this provision would not ever permanently diminish the funds of the city ; it would, in fact, never be an expense to the city.

15TH.—STATISTICIAN.

That the Board of Health shall appoint a special statistician or registrar, whose duties shall be to prepare the statistics of the Board upon special subjects, and make semi-annual reports upon the same to the State Board of Health.

The object of this is to keep always available the statistics affecting tenement houses, and also that there may be some one who is studying to learn what deductions should be made from such statistics.

16TH.—ANNUAL REPORT OF BOARD OF HEALTH.

That the Board of Health shall be required to make an annual report of all its work to the Mayor of the City of New York.

In support of this recommendation, it is only necessary to say, that for nine years past no annual report of the Board has been published. It is plainly in the general interest that the whole work of so important a department should be spread before the public at least once a year.

17TH.—ANNUAL MEETING OF MAYOR AND OTHERS.

That the Mayor and delegates to be selected by the Departments of Health, Public Works, Bureau of Buildings and Street Cleaning, be required to meet annually, between the 15th and 30th days of November of each year, for the purpose of recommending such improvements in the laws, or the execution of the laws, as may be deemed necessary.

This is designed to secure the regular meeting of a body which shall consider the subject of tenement-house life in our city in its larger aspects ; shall discuss and think about the needs of the city in this regard. That such needs will constantly come in new forms as the city grows, and that they will merit the greater consideration of our best officials and citizens, no one can doubt. It is believed that it may be made most useful, to bring to bear upon this subject, from time to time, the minds of some men in addition to those who live in the daily routine of that department of the government especially devoted to it.

As this Commission was appointed, not only to point out defects in law, but also to investigate and consider the evils of tenement-house life in New York City generally, the following three recommendations have been added, to be carried out by the proper departments of the city government.

18TH.—OPENING OF LEONARD STREET TO PELL.

That the opening of Leonard street through to Pell street, as has been recommended in former years, be carried out.

The object of this is to cut a thoroughfare through the so-called "Bend," one of the plague spots of the city. Many of the houses along Baxter and Mulberry streets in this direction are nests of moral and physical disease. In two blocks of the Bend have occurred over 630 deaths during a period of three and a half years. Some of the lowest stale beer shops and places of ill-fame exist in this quarter. The continuation of Leonard street through to Pell would break the backbone of the Bend. The policy

of dividing the old Five Points district into small blocks has proved to be so beneficial that its application to the Bend must, it is believed, produce most salutary results. More than forty years ago the cutting of a thoroughfare from Leonard street to the Bowery was recommended, had this been done at the time, much misery would have been spared to the unfortunate people who inhabit this section, and the city saved a crying disgrace.

19TH.—FREE WINTER BATHS.

That the city establish free winter baths throughout the tenement-house districts of the city.

Very cheap baths have recently been established in the poorer quarters of London with great success. We already have free Summer baths which have proved a blessing; during three months of 1883 more than 2,000,000 baths were taken in those establishments. Free Winter baths would greatly enhance the cleanliness of the tenement house population; would lessen the danger of filth diseases, and would be one safeguard against the spread of epidemics.

20TH.—ELECTRIC LIGHTS.

That electric lights be placed in the streets of the tenement-house districts.

The electric light in the tenement-house district would add to the safety of the streets and to the convenience of the inhabitants. The effect of light in banishing crime cannot be too highly estimated. The electric light has already been placed in some of the streets of the wealthier residence quarters of the city, but the poor need and will appreciate its benefits even more than the rich.

In conclusion, the Tenement House Commission would say that the larger aspects of the subject have not been touched by it. For this, time has not been sufficient, and

probably the scope of the act creating the Commission was too limited.

The Commission has devoted itself to the consideration of the immediately pressing needs, and has made its recommendations upon these alone. The Commission has worked as faithfully as the other duties of its members would permit, yet many of the statistics gathered and much of the evidence taken is not yet available for transmission to the Legislature. The Commission, therefore, asks a continuation of its existence for four weeks, to enable it to report more fully, but in the meantime it earnestly urges upon the Legislature for immediate action the recommendations herein made.

Respectfully,

J. W. DREXEL,
Chairman.

MOREAU MORRIS, M. D.,
Secretary.



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