

CONDITIONS IN TENEMENTS

State Commission Hears Further Testimony and Suggestions.

Airshafts, Fire-Escapes, and Bathtubs— A Church Association Discusses the Most Thickly Populated Block.

Airshafts were the one evil concerning which all witnesses agreed, in testifying before the public hearing of the Tenement House Commission of the State of New York at the Charities Building last night. About a dozen witnesses were examined, and nearly all of them are or have been tenement dwellers.

Their testimony was that respectable families generally keep their windows opening into the airshaft permanently closed, for when they are left open they let in sounds which are offensive to polite ears, and vermin and dirt from other apartments, and are fatal to privacy.

Another thing brought out was that not one had ever seen a sanitary inspector in a tenement unless he had been brought there on a specific complaint. In such cases it was admitted that reforms generally followed, but so also did dispossession notices served by the landlord on tenants whom he suspected of inviting official attention.

Saloons in tenements were not an un-mixed evil, it was said, for when they crept in there was generally a substantial reduction in rent. Some objected to improved fire escapes on the ground that they would make burglary easier.

Opinions were divided, too, about the desirability of compelling landlords to institute bathing facilities in every tenement.

Robert W. De Forest, the Chairman, presided, and many questions were put by I. N. Phelps Stokes and Paul D. Cravath. Ex-Fire Chief Hugh Bonner paid close attention, but the veteran fire fighter did not find it necessary to ask any questions.

Miss Agnes Daly, who has lived for more than two years in an east side tenement where she has been engaged in settlement work, was the first witness. She preferred to do her neighborhood visiting by night, she said, for in the daytime the halls were so dark that she was apt to step on children and run into grown folk.

She had found the airshaft impracticable and confessed that she had found the fire-escape necessary for storage purposes, and at last had had to follow the example of other tenants and take a lodger to keep down the rent. She urged roof playgrounds for the children and bathing facilities.

Henry Moscovitz of 95 Forsyth Street had lived in fourteen tenements in the last seventeen years, all on the lower east side. He had never seen a bathtub in one of these houses, and only once, twelve years ago, in Essex Street, did he remember a house where a dark hall had been lighted in the daytime. He denounced as a falsehood statements that where bathtubs are put in the people use them for coal storage.

"They all buy coal by the pailful," he said. Tenement children are lacking in delicacy of feeling shown by those brought up in little separate homes, he affirmed, and patriarchal family government is waning among the Hebrews through the evil influence of the tenement life.

The Rev. Gaylord S. White of 112 Columbia Street, Brooklyn, told of tenement conditions in that borough, which are as in Manhattan, and made a bitter protest against cobblestone pavements which cannot be kept clean, and the practice of driving cattle and sheep through the streets to the foul-smelling slaughter houses.

Frank Tucker, General Agent of the Society for Improving the Condition of the Poor, named legislation, co-operation of capital, and transit facilities as the solution of present conditions.

Mrs. J. A. Miller, for twelve years a tenement dweller, was asked why she didn't move to Brooklyn, and said the transportation facilities were such that her husband could not get to his work with certainty.

Edward T. Devine, General Secretary of the Charity Organization Society, said he favored compulsory bathing facilities in every tenement apartment, lighted hallways, and many other improvements.

The Church Association for the Advancement of the Interests of Labor met in St. Michael's Parish House, 225 West Ninety-ninth Street, last night to discuss the condition of the block of the city lying on Sixty-first and Sixty-second Streets between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues, said to be the most thickly populated block in the world.

Secretary Josiah C. Pumpelly stated that the block, which is inhabited chiefly by colored people, has 2,639 rooms in its tenements, and only 1,189 of those rooms had access to the outer air.

Francis J. Clay Moran, Chairman of the Sweatshop Association, declared that in the block there are, in some instances, twelve and fourteen persons in one room only big enough for two. This, he declared, is terribly dangerous to health and the morals of the block itself and of the neighborhood.

The Rev. Dr. Peters, who presided, declared the block a menace to the health and morals of the community, particularly as plague spots generally spread.

A resolution was passed which empowered the appointment of a committee to wait upon the Tenement House Commission and Board of Health with reference to the granting of immediately needed improvements in the block.