

LIVING ISSUES FOR PULPIT TREATMENT.

The Tenement House Evil.

It bred worms.—Ex. xvi:20.

"SOME 16,000 children under five die every year in New York—just twice the normal mortality for a large city," are the opening words of a little pamphlet just issued by the Sanitary Protective League of New York city. "Last summer 4,119 were carried off, and nearly a thousand in a single week. . . . Viewed rightly this would be called simply massacre. The deaths from diphtheria have doubled in four years, from 1884 to 1887, and *one-half the patients taken succumb*. If cholera were as frequent and fatal the city would be deserted in a panic."

This fearful condition of affairs, which is but a surface symptom of the disease which is spreading throughout all the larger American cities, more notably in New York, the Sanitary Protective League most justly lays at the door of the tenement house system, which it characterizes as a "*constant menace to public safety*," "inviting pestilence" and "destroying morals."

The New York State Bureau of Labor Statistics for 1885 estimated the tenement house population of New York city in 1883 at over a million inhabitants. Since then the evil has greatly increased. As to overcrowding, it was estimated that 18,996 tenement houses accommodated fifty persons each, and not a few contained three times as many. "Against such a mass of misery," says the report, "it is impossible for individuals, however tenacious of purpose, to struggle. It is in such conditions and surroundings that young girls are brought up, in which decency and womanly reserve cannot be maintained, and then we ask why so many fall away from virtue."

Recent investigations by the New York daily press reveal the fact that

many of these tenement houses are at present overcrowded to a fearful extent, often as many as two or three persons occupying space which the law says must be reserved for a single individual. The Italian tenement houses offer the worst examples of overcrowding and its fearful results. The Labor Commissioner thus describes them:

"I have seen a family of six and even eight people living in the customary front and 'inside' rooms. Where they all slept was a mystery, but that a portion of them were obliged to sleep on the floor seemed the only explanation. The temperature of these rooms is excessive, and while the smell of sewer gas is in itself obnoxious, it becomes simply refreshing when compared with the stifling fumes that seem to permeate every nook and corner of these dilapidated tenements. They cook, eat and sleep in the same room—men, women and children together. Refuse of every description makes the floors damp and slimy, and the puny, half-naked children crawl or slide about in it."

Of such conditions are born, to a large extent, the unwholesome, immoral and anarchistic tendencies which not only curse our feverish modern city life, but in a government like ours reach out to react with fearful results upon the whole nation.

A feature which still further complicates the tenement house problem is the fact that in very many instances the owners of the buildings upon whom ordinarily some responsibility for such a destructive condition of affairs could be fixed, are in many cases entirely unknown, the property being managed by some irresponsible agent of an "estate."

Could a municipality owning and operating its own system of model tenements do worse?