

Northern Messenger

Lillie Pover

VOLUME XXIII, No. 27.

MONTREAL AND NEW YORK, JULY 2, 1897.

30 Cts. Per. An. Post-Paid.

Chicago Commons.

BY JOHN PALMER GAVIT, A RESIDENT OF THE COMMONS.

(Union Gospel News.)

Now, Professor, before we let you have the lease of the house, two or three things must be thoroughly understood. For one thing, you cannot use it for a saloon.

'I have no idea of using it for a saloon.'

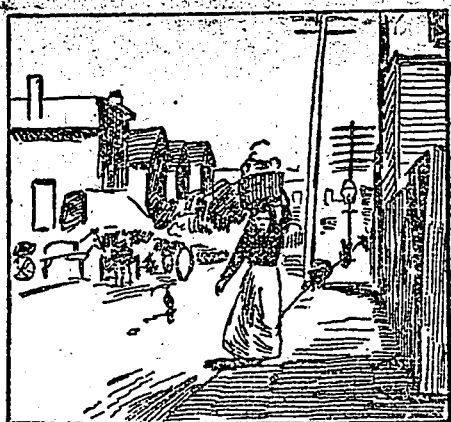
'Nor for a dance hall.'

'That is not my plan.'

'Nor for a gambling-house.'

'I do not intend to run a gambling-house.'

Professor Graham Taylor of Chicago Theological Seminary, was trying to secure the lease of an old house in the Seventeenth Ward of Chicago, and the two young men who had the control of the leasing were naturally suspicious. They knew that when a man was ready to pay \$150 a month for a house in the densely crowded industrial district, he was probably not doing it 'for fun.' They knew that even at that rent a property like theirs would net the tenant a handsome profit if used for any of the tabooed purposes. They did not know that their visitor was a minister, and a



CLOTHING GOING TO THE SWEAT SHOP.

trainer of ministers. Anybody can be a 'professor' in Chicago nowadays, and they could not tell from the inscrutable countenance of the tall man in black clothing who wanted to rent the house, whether he was a professor of legerdemain, veterinary surgery, the tonsorial art, or the banjo.

At any rate, whoever he was, he must be made to understand that there were limits of propriety beyond which he would not be permitted to go. Even his assurance that neither saloon, dance-hall, nor gambling-house was in mind, left them still doubtful. Possibly some new and unforeseen form of irregularity was contemplated. At that time the house was used as a boarding-house for German men, and the rear wing was a densely packed Italian tenement house, with a stable underneath, where the Italian peddlers kept their horses and defied sanitation.

'Well, what are you going to do in that house?'

'Going to live in it.'

'Going to what?'

'Going to live in it.'



CARRYING THE WASHING HOME.

'Well, but what do you expect to get for it?'

'Nothing.'

'Oh, that's all right, of course, but I mean, what is there in it for you—what will you get to pay for your living in such a neighborhood when you don't have to?'

And then the Professor explained that with some friends he purposed to move into that house and live there, just as he was living at that time on West Munroe street, with all that living meant. To share the life of that neighborhood, its joys and comforts, its dangers and discomforts, its civic and social privileges and duties and responsibilities; to establish there a home of live and hearty folks, with keen enjoyment of life and of the delights and activities of life; to be neighbors in the neighborhood, to extend the right hand of fellowship and fellow-citizenship to the Irishman who lived on one side, the German butcher on the corner, the Scandinavian grocer across the street, and the Italian pedler in the rear—in short, again, to live there, with all that living would mean or ever had meant, anywhere. This was the purpose for which the old house was wanted.

The brothers looked at the Professor, and at each other, long and intently.

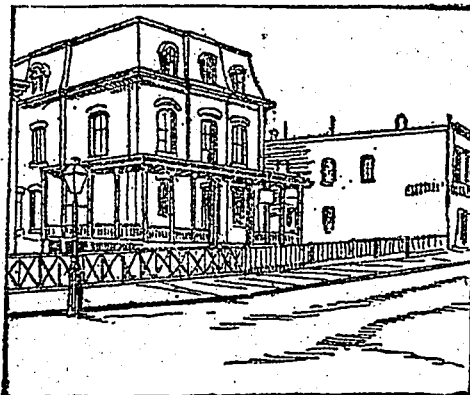
'Do you mean to say, that while you can live on West Monroe street, within a stone's throw of Ashland Boulevard, you are coming of your own free will to live among the Dagoes here on North Union street?'

'That is it, exactly.'

'Who is going to pay you?'

'Nobody.'

'But what do you expect to make out of it?—these people are all too poor to make it pay—how are you going to get your money back?'



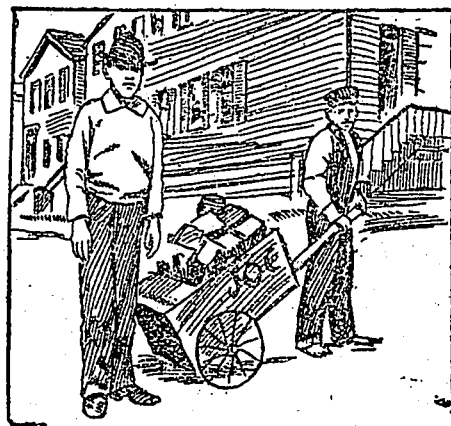
CHICAGO COMMONS — THE SETTLEMENT AND ITS SURROUNDINGS.

'We don't expect to get it back—don't want to get it back. We would have to pay rent somewhere, and live somewhere. We choose to pay our rent and live here.'

'My goodness!' exclaimed one of the brothers, as soon as he could recover his breath. 'I suppose there are such folks, brother, but this is the first one of 'em I ever saw!'

And so the house was rented, and in October of 1894 the pioneers of the group moved in. At first, after a season of sharing occupancy even with the German boarders only the front part of the house was occupied by the new comers, and through the glass doors which separated the front from the rear, the dark-skinned Italian men, women and children peered at the strange folks who could live if they chose, in the fairyland of the boulevard, and who, willingly, lived in this dingy place. It was not long, however, before the work that grew up in the house required all the available rooms, and the Italians were displaced, in some cases at the cost of the payment by Professor Taylor of their advance rent in some other place.

An Augean task was the cleaning of that old house. Built in the sixties for a family mansion, it had been one of the palaces of the West Side, but a checkered history of degeneration had marked it in every part. It had been a temporary office building for the Northwestern Railway after the great fire of 1871. That was when the great rear frame addition was erected. Later, it was the quarters of 'Altenheim,' the German Old People's Home. And it deteriorated, socially and materially, until the beginning of the present era, the old house and the neighborhood falling together out of caste and out of repair with accelerating degeneracy. Giant rats scuttled about the floors, roaches scaled the walls and mot-



WHERE AND HOW THE STREET PAVEMENTS GO.

tled the uneven boards, which creaked under the tread, and by night various other vermin stalked the rooms and disputed the sway of the Teuton and the Roman.

These, however, are things of the past. Disinfectants, soap and water, paint, plumbing, saws, hammers, nails, paper and a general invasion of overhaulers, made the place habitable, and the thirty people who live in the old house to-day and with activities of many kinds tax the forty-six rooms to their utmost, are as healthy and happy and cleanly a group as one would ask to find.

At first, the neighborhood fought shy. It was inconceivable to them that such peo-