

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02455-6 - Homes of the London Poor
Octavia Hill
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE LIBRARY COLLECTION

Books of enduring scholarly value

History

The books reissued in this series include accounts of historical events and movements by eye-witnesses and contemporaries, as well as landmark studies that assembled significant source materials or developed new historiographical methods. The series includes work in social, political and military history on a wide range of periods and regions, giving modern scholars ready access to influential publications of the past.

Homes of the London Poor

Octavia Hill (1838–1912) is today best remembered as a founder of the National Trust. However, her involvement in education and social reform, and particularly housing, was a large part of her work. Shocked at the poverty and overcrowding she found in London slums, she began to acquire and improve properties which would offer their tenants dignity and self-respect. She organised a team of volunteer 'district visitors' to help the residents, and especially children, to achieve a better quality of life, particularly through the provision of recreational amenities. These articles, dating from 1866 to 1875, show the development of her thinking on achieving reforms by a mixture of legislation and charity. As the number of properties and helpers grew considerably, she argued that the personal involvement of volunteers achieved more than a larger bureaucracy could. Her work, which was internationally recognised, led to the development of housing associations.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02455-6 - Homes of the London Poor
Octavia Hill
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press has long been a pioneer in the reissuing of out-of-print titles from its own backlist, producing digital reprints of books that are still sought after by scholars and students but could not be reprinted economically using traditional technology. The Cambridge Library Collection extends this activity to a wider range of books which are still of importance to researchers and professionals, either for the source material they contain, or as landmarks in the history of their academic discipline.

Drawing from the world-renowned collections in the Cambridge University Library, and guided by the advice of experts in each subject area, Cambridge University Press is using state-of-the-art scanning machines in its own Printing House to capture the content of each book selected for inclusion. The files are processed to give a consistently clear, crisp image, and the books finished to the high quality standard for which the Press is recognised around the world. The latest print-on-demand technology ensures that the books will remain available indefinitely, and that orders for single or multiple copies can quickly be supplied.

The Cambridge Library Collection will bring back to life books of enduring scholarly value (including out-of-copyright works originally issued by other publishers) across a wide range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and in science and technology.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02455-6 - Homes of the London Poor
Octavia Hill
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Homes of the London Poor

OCTAVIA HILL



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02455-6 - Homes of the London Poor
Octavia Hill
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo, Mexico City

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108024556

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2010

This edition first published 1875

This digitally printed version 2010

ISBN 978-1-108-02455-6 Paperback

This book reproduces the text of the original edition. The content and language reflect the beliefs, practices and terminology of their time, and have not been updated.

Cambridge University Press wishes to make clear that the book, unless originally published by Cambridge, is not being republished by, in association or collaboration with, or with the endorsement or approval of, the original publisher or its successors in title.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02455-6 - Homes of the London Poor
Octavia Hill
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

HOMES OF THE LONDON POOR.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02455-6 - Homes of the London Poor
Octavia Hill
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

HOMES
OF
THE LONDON POOR.

BY
OCTAVIA HILL.

London :
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1875.
[All Rights reserved.]

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02455-6 - Homes of the London Poor
Octavia Hill
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS,
CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-02455-6 - Homes of the London Poor
 Octavia Hill
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
PREFACE	I
I.	
COTTAGE PROPERTY IN LONDON	13
<i>(Fortnightly Review, November, 1866.)</i>	
II.	
FOUR YEARS' MANAGEMENT OF A LONDON COURT	33
<i>(Macmillan's Magazine, July, 1869.)</i>	
III.	
LANDLORDS AND TENANTS IN LONDON	67
<i>(Macmillan's Magazine, October, 1871.)</i>	

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
IV.	
THE WORK OF VOLUNTEERS IN THE ORGANISATION OF CHARITY	108

(Macmillan's Magazine, October, 1872.)

V.

CO - OPERATION OF VOLUNTEERS AND POOR - LAW OFFICIALS	143
--	-----

(Report to Local Government Board, January, 1874.)

VI.

WHY THE ARTISANS DWELLINGS BILL WAS WANTED .	162
--	-----

(Macmillan's Magazine, June, 1874.)

VII.

SPACE FOR THE PEOPLE	196
--------------------------------	-----

(Macmillan's Magazine, August, 1875.)

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02455-6 - Homes of the London Poor
Octavia Hill
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PREFACE.

IN reprinting at this time articles describing any scheme for improving the dwellings of the poor, the first thought which suggests itself is, how the question is likely to be affected by the Artisans Dwellings Bill, which is before the Houses of Parliament, more especially as one of the articles in this book was written in the earnest hope and expectation that some such measure would shortly be brought before the Legislature.

Two principal objections have been made to the Bill. First, the costliness of its procedure. Everyone must desire to see this reduced to the minimum; but where compulsory powers are taken under any Act, many safeguards are,

B

2 *HOMES OF THE LONDON POOR.*

I believe, required, and these imply expensive processes. One can only hope that in this case they will be reduced as far as possible. But there has been a good deal said about the impropriety of supplying a large class of the people with a necessary of life, such as lodging, at a price which is not remunerative.

I enter more deeply, perhaps, than most of the objectors themselves into the full weight of this objection, and most heartily hope that whatever is done in building for the people may be done on a thoroughly sound commercial principle. I do not think it would help them the least in the long run to adopt any other principle; in fact, I believe it would be highly injurious to them.

But let it be distinctly understood that under this Bill two separate processes are contemplated. They come, indeed, under one scheme, and are entrusted in a measure to the same agents; but they are distinctly two. There is the clearing away of old accumulated nuisances

PREFACE.

3

which ought never to have been allowed to grow up at all—courts built narrower than Building Acts would now allow; houses with no through ventilation, or built on damp soil or without good foundation. Clearing away old abuses cannot pay, except in the sense in which all reform pays. Abolition of slavery didn't pay; the nation had to pay for it. Happy if by mere payment in money it could efface so great a wrong! So it must be with these courts and alleys. It cannot be remunerative in *£ s. d.* to remove them, neither can you fairly throw the cost on the individual owner; the community—the dulled conscience of which, the ignorance of which, allowed them to grow up—must pay for removing them. But, once cleared, the buildings erected ought to be remunerative; and I earnestly hope no short-sighted benevolence will ever deceive our legislators into losing sight of this.

The second main objection raised to the Bill has been that it is not compulsory enough.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02455-6 - Homes of the London Poor
Octavia Hill
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

4 *HOMES OF THE LONDON POOR.*

As far as that section of the country which calls itself Liberal is concerned, that seems to me a very strange complaint. I have always thought that Conservatives and Liberals worthy of the name, equally bent on achieving the good thing, and having got rid of any hankering to conserve what was evil or care for freedom to do wrong, were divided one from another as to the means, the one believing that government from above marshalled the people on right ways, which they grew to love by following; the other having longer patience, and caring to wait till, by gradual teaching, the people chose voluntarily the right way, and believing that the advances willingly and intelligently made were never lost, and were themselves better training.

At any rate, here we have an “enabling” Bill, as someone well called it. It will put it in our power collectively to clear the foul places away if we wish. Let it be distinctly understood we had not got this power before

Mr. Cross's Bill. There are courts beyond courts of the worst kind, in the East-end especially, where there isn't a vestige of a title which would warrant any society or individual in erecting a substantial building. This Bill will render such sites available by giving a secure title to the purchasers under the Act. There are courts and courts in all parts of London from which the owners are reaping large profits, and which they simply wouldn't sell; there are whole plots which would be available for building for the poor, if one owner did not refuse to sell. The Bill enables you (collectively, mind) to take such.

Now, what is our duty, as this power is not vested in a central enlightened individual? Surely it is for us, when we have the Act, to move all to desire to carry it out heartily; not to grudge the taxes it will cost—they will return to us fourfold, I think, and certainly no portion of our income will be better spent—to elect to the vestries, and through them to the

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02455-6 - Homes of the London Poor
Octavia Hill
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

6 *HOMES OF THE LONDON POOR.*

Metropolitan Board of Works, or to the Town Councils of our various neighbourhoods, men who will try heartily to make the Bill work; to see that men who care for sanitary reform are elected as medical officers, especially to the Metropolitan Board of Works; to master the provisions of the Bill, and see them enforced; to know the spots where it should come into force; to see that public opinion brings it to bear on them; and to devise suitable schemes of reform for bad neighbourhoods, bearing in mind the special needs of the locality; to lay aside every selfish, nay, every personal, consideration, and with single hearts to desire, and with united will to resolve, that the Act shall improve off the face of the earth the foul buildings unworthy to be tenanted by men.

Now, having long thought all this about the Bill, of course I can't have failed to ask myself what my small efforts are henceforth to be if these my best hopes should be realised for the Bill. Might I then retire and watch over

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02455-6 - Homes of the London Poor
Octavia Hill
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PREFACE.

7

some small group of tenants, as I did in 1866, and leave the larger work to statesmen and town councillors and vestrymen? Why reprint, now of all times, these sketches of tiny schemes and small personal endeavour? The answer comes clearly enough. "There will be no retreat for you yet, even if all outside buildings were put to rights to-morrow. It would simplify your work; it would not do away with the need of it."

The people's homes are bad, partly because they are badly built and arranged; they are tenfold worse because their habits and lives are what they are. Transplant them to-morrow to healthy and commodious homes and they would pollute and destroy them. There needs, and will need for some time, a reformatory work which will demand that loving zeal of individuals which cannot be had for money, and cannot be legislated for by Parliament. The heart of the English nation will supply it—individual, reverent, firm, and

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02455-6 - Homes of the London Poor
Octavia Hill
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

8 *HOMES OF THE LONDON POOR.*

wise. It may and should be organised, but cannot be created.

The following papers show a little what is needed in these courts, to help the inhabitants to be fit for far better ones ; and, whether in new buildings or in old, some such teaching will be needed among the lowest classes, till they have learnt to be other than they are. The need of voluntary work, the absolute necessity of its being organised, is dealt with in one of the following papers; the way in which official bodies, such as the Board of Guardians, can make use of it when once organised, is definitely described in the Report to the Local Government Board of 1874.*

In the management of the houses, and in that of the districts described in the following papers, it will be noticed that a visitor is set over a small court or block of buildings, and that she is asked to do the work there,

* The titles of the various papers reprinted have been altered.

PREFACE.

9

whether it be collecting rents, reporting to guardians, visiting for the School Board, collection of savings, or any other requisite duty, yet that the personal influence which she exercises is not prominently brought before herself or the poor. Thus it has seemed to me that if in a given district any of this definite work becomes gradually unnecessary—as, for instance, out-relief from guardians ought to do—the supervision would die down, and give place insensibly to the simple intercourse with one another that seems natural to neighbours. But this is looking forward into future years.

One glance back, and I have done. The conduct of this work and its extension have been for some years in my hands, and that of newer friends. I would not for a moment undervalue their help; and it matters little to the public who does a thing, so that it is the right thing to do; but it matters somewhat to anyone who gets an undue share of notice from the success of a work, which, small as it

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02455-6 - Homes of the London Poor
Octavia Hill
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

10 *HOMES OF THE LONDON POOR.*

is, has grown far beyond her faintest dreams, to remind the public of one to whom it owes its realisation. This undertaking may be estimated very variously ; but anyone who thinks it worth notice should remember distinctly that it might have remained always a mere vision of what I should like to have done, powerless for good, had it not been for the perception of Mr. Ruskin, who alone believed the scheme could be worked, and for his generosity in giving freely and fully all the money spent in the first two courts. It is true it has paid him since—quite true ; but he risked upwards of £3,000 in the experiment, when not many men would have trusted that the undertaking would succeed. And, moreover, while he assured me that his money was entirely, fully, and freely given for the good of the cause, and if it was sunk, would never be regretted by him, yet he foretold that the work would spread if I could make it pay, and urged me therefore to try—a foresight and practical wisdom far

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02455-6 - Homes of the London Poor
Octavia Hill
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PREFACE.

II

beyond mine at the time. I remember well smiling supreme amazement, and saying, "Who will ever hear or know? The important thing is to make it a good thing, realising, as far as may be, your ideal and mine." But, happily for the scheme, I had gratitude and obedience enough to try heartily to fulfil his ideal on this point; succeeded, and in succeeding learnt how much better a footing the self-supporting one was for the tenants, as well as how right he had been as to the extension of the work itself.

May, 1875.