A War on Philadelphia’s Slums: Walter Vrooman and the Conference of Moral Workers, 1893

"If the old adage, 'A man's home is his castle,' was ever proved," wrote Harry P. Mawson, "it is in the Quaker City." In 1893 the citizens of Philadelphia took great pride in the fact that they lived in a "City of Homes." There was excellent reason for this display of civic pride, but its overemphasis tended to obscure the plight of the foreign born who were then arriving in the city in ever-increasing numbers. The Anglo-Saxon temper of the period commanded those in positions of prominence to generalize on what was "best" in society and to dismiss the foreign element and its life as a temporary blight which was not part of the real order of things. There were those who stated that any system, however virtuous, was bound to work to the disadvantage of some, and with this doctrine of negligible injustice, they were quick to ignore the living conditions of the Russian and Polish Jews, the Irish, Italians, and American Negroes in Philadelphia’s fourth ward. In November, 1892, Walter Vrooman, a contentious Christian Socialist, invaded Philadelphia.

2 The City of Philadelphia as it appears in the year 1893, 85–87.
3 Walter Vrooman left his Kansas home at the age of thirteen to make his own way in the world. He spent the years 1883–1884 peddling "Lightning Cleansing Compound" in Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming and Nebraska. In the summer of 1884 he joined the Slayton Lyceum Bureau, Chicago, and lectured with great success on phrenology in Nebraska, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and Kentucky. The summer of 1886 found him in Chicago where he witnessed the streetcar riots. He gave up the lecture halls for the sake of "Christ and humanity" and entered the market squares of the nation as an itinerant labor agitator. He won great fame as the "boy orator from Kansas." His travels took him to New York City where in 1887 he joined forces with the Socialists against Henry George at the Syracuse Convention of the United Labor Party. In 1890 he turned up in New York again as a reporter for the New York World. For two years he agitated unsuccessfully for parks and playgrounds for the city’s children. His most lasting accomplishment was founding Ruskin Hall, a college for workers, in Oxford, England, in 1899 with the assistance of Charles A. Beard.
His untiring efforts on behalf of the slum population forced the better citizens to remember those whom, heretofore, they had preferred to forget.

Vrooman went first to the University Settlement House on Alaska Street in one of the vilest sections of the city. Here the population was dense, and poverty prevailed. He believed in camping out on the field of battle. His was to be no onslaught based on idle speculations and theories, pieced together in warm and remote headquarters. He knew from firsthand experience the state of those who lived, worked, and died in the slums. Daily sidewalk chats with street scrapers, sewer cleaners, rag and bone collectors, and victims of the sweaters’ dens about life and labor in a slum district filled his sensitive soul with revulsion and provided him with all the evidence he needed to champion the cause of these, the neglected and degraded of society. That so many of God’s children should be “crowded into filthy tenements like sardines in a box” was more than he could permit without raising his voice in protest.

Early in January, 1893, several Christian ladies had established the University Settlement House in the heart of the city where the streaming tide of wretchedness ebbed and flowed in narrow alleys and damp, unwholesome, half-concealed thoroughfares. Numbered among its advisers were Professor Simon Patten of the University of Pennsylvania, Reverend Henry Weston, President of the Crozer Theological Seminary, Rabbi Joseph Krauskopf of the Temple Keneseth Israel, and many of Philadelphia’s leading ministers. They hoped to bridge the chasm between rich and poor by bringing “the young and educated into practical relation with the lower orders of society, so as to develop a common sympathy.” They reasoned that interested students from the University of Pennsylvania might be aroused to exertions which would have a benevolent and uplifting influence, once they were exposed to the squalor, sin, and Sodom endured by America’s unfortunates. The Board of Advisers little dreamed that from their Settlement House would emanate the inspiration for raising an army of righteousness pledged to rid Philadelphia of its slums.

4 The North American (Philadelphia), Mar. 27, 1893.
Charles W. Caryl was called to the post of resident manager of the Alaska Street Settlement. His record of several years in Boston as a missionary under the Reverend Edward E. Hale and as an active participant in the Wendell Phillips Union convinced the Settlement’s advisers that he was eminently well prepared to guide the colonial fortunes of the young and educated in darkest Philadelphia. The thirty-five-year-old Caryl made a most impressive manager. He was tall and slender, with dreamy eyes, a towering forehead, majestic “burnside” whiskers, and a red moustache. Had the Board probed beneath this striking exterior they would have discovered a latent instability which might have prevented Caryl’s appointment. His religious history was most erratic. At various moments in his career he had enthusiastically adopted the Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic, and Theosophist faiths. In the ensuing months as resident manager of the Settlement House he was to add Spiritualism to his list of conversions. Fairies, witches, and genii of all descriptions were to make a picnic ground of his imagination.

Vrooman and Caryl became fast friends. The only quality they had in common was their earnestness, but with Caryl it was ethereal, romantic, and weird, while with Vrooman it was definite, clear, and methodical. In their back room quarters on the third floor of the old-fashioned frame building which housed the Settlement they conspired to set in motion a crusade which would tear down the “hundreds of shells and shanties . . . teeming with human flesh, but unfit for human habitation.”

Vrooman canvassed Philadelphia’s religious and humanitarian leaders, and sampled their moral fervor to see whether they were ready for action in behalf of humanity. The Reverend Frank M. Goodchild, a leading Baptist minister, was informed that the profit motive was creating vast gardens for the cultivation of cholera germs in Philadelphia. Goodchild was so aroused by the force and power of Vrooman’s appeal with its vivid pictures of rotten tenements, dirty streets, sweaters’ dens, and the appalling cost in human life, that he invited Vrooman to address the Baptist Ministerial Conference to be held in the Spruce Street Baptist Church on February 6, 1893. Vrooman warmly accepted the invitation for it seemed to him the quickest means of getting the desired project under way.

6 The North American, Mar. 27, 1893.
The Baptist Ministerial Conference was Vrooman’s first public appearance in Philadelphia. He made the most of the occasion. On the announcement sent out to advertise the meeting he was billed as Reverend Walter Vrooman. He knew this to be untrue, but he did nothing to right the false impression, preferring to capture the Baptist citadel from within, as one of their own order. Capture it he did and with ease. To his complete amazement he was elected chairman of the conference. He presided with great force and dignity. His keynote address hypnotized those already predisposed to follow and lulled into submission those who raised objections. The brilliance and persuasiveness of his argument, thoroughly drenched as it was in moral fervor, swept all before it. The gathering was informed that he had never seen a place where philanthropic work was carried on so quietly. If they should decide to follow him, he would put an end to this silence in behalf of humanity. “The pestilence that walketh in darkness has plenty of chance to walk in this city,” he began. The dreaded cholera could not be stamped out by wasting time arguing over abstract questions. He called for concerted action against “the saloon power, the thieving power, the gamblers. . . . We must organize a raid on the thieves, follow them to their dark and gloomy dens and clean them out.”

The problem raised by Vrooman before the Baptist ministers was how to make the war on evil as effective and scientific as the war on human life. He invited cohesion on a promise of liberty of conscience. He sought to speed and sustain an influence, not to establish an institution with a new dogma. To achieve this end he submitted a set of resolutions to the assembled pastors for their approval. The ministers, persuaded by the fire of his words, unanimously passed the resolutions which expressed approval of all efforts toward a union of Philadelphia’s moral forces, and invited all the religious denominations, labor organizations, temperance societies, and reform clubs to select a committee of three “to act as members of a central conference which shall attempt to arrange a program in which the majority of earnest people can unite for aggressive action against the slums.”

7 Examiner (New York), Feb. 23, 1893.
8 Public Ledger (Philadelphia), Feb. 7, 1893.
9 For the full texts of the resolutions passed and the circulars sent out to the various denominations, see Diana Hirschler, “Union in Philadelphia,” Arena, IX (May, 1894), 549–550.
Each committee of three was to attend a monthly meeting and be the connecting link between the wishes of the Central Conference and the field activities of its parent organization. This was a smashing victory for Vrooman. One denominational pillbox in God’s perimeter defense had been taken with little struggle.

Not all the individual ministers Vrooman talked with during this period of organization responded as did Goodchild. Some were quick to inform him that he was wasting his time, that the system was more powerful than any individual or combination of individuals, and still others preferred to discuss points of dogma and leave worldly matters alone. For their timidity and spinelessness he had nothing but contempt. Soon the circulars sent out by the Baptist Ministerial Conference to the other religious denominations, calling upon them to join in the united effort, began to bear fruit. Overriding minority objections, the Methodists, Presbyterians, Ethical Culturists, Unitarians, and Temple Keneseth Israel chose their delegates to the Central Conference and endorsed the new movement. The religious forces of Philadelphia apparently desired to accomplish in concert what they had been unable to do individually.

Vrooman journeyed to City Hall and established contact with the Board of Health. Major Moses Veale, health officer, welcomed Vrooman’s suggestions on how to organize public sentiment behind the health department. Veale quickly joined the group and volunteered his time and energy to help assist in the drive against unsanitary conditions. The fact that Vrooman coupled the saloon power with organized brigandage won for the movement the solid backing of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and the Catholic Temperance Union. His frequent condemnation of the slums and the sweating system added the Knights of Labor, the Workers Union for the Elevation of Labor, the Municipal League, and the Hebrew Young Women’s Union to the ranks. All the charitable agencies in Philadelphia listened to Vrooman explain his plan of action, and all expressed their eagerness to help. Not until he had consolidated “the majority of sincere Philadelphians into a solid phalanx”\(^\text{10}\) did he publicly announce the new crusade.

The Conference of Moral Workers, “a powerful tidal wave, undisturbed by factional bickerings,” was officially inaugurated in the

\(^{10}\) The North American, Mar. 28, 1893.
North Broad Street Presbyterian Church on the evening of March 24, 1893. Major Veale spoke to the large gathering. He bitterly complained that the hands of his sanitation department were tied by slender appropriations. He hoped that something might be accomplished through the constant pressure of an organized, enlightened public opinion. Vrooman delivered the major address of the evening. Philadelphians learned for the first time that their "sweaters' dens . . . so degraded and destructive of human life" were rivaled by no city in the world. Friends of justice and the public good were called upon to use the ballot and their patronage to "secure control of Philadelphia and make it in fact what it now is only in name, the City of Brotherly Love."\(^\text{11}\)

For almost a month nightly public mass meetings were held in the city, always before large audiences. Petitions condemning the sweating system were circulated, and each signer contributed a penny to swell the Conference's war chest for aggressive action before the City Council. Oratory was the order of the day. Crowds were told again and again how some people were born in foul conditions, underfed and overworked while children, and for the remainder of their broken lives crammed into ulcerous hovels. The profitable custom of turning homes into factories, subjecting helpless women and children to the avarice of dollar-minded masters, was revealed in all its horror. The requirements of bread alone made it mandatory for such families to participate in their own physical, mental, and spiritual destruction. To expect human beings, so treated, to chant gaily "root, hog, or die" in the accepted manner was cynicism with a sneer. This was the story which was repeatedly broadcast throughout the city. What had begun in a College Settlement in an obscure section had grown to such proportions that all Philadelphia had virtually become the Settlement House. Its smug foundations were rocked by the steady blasts of passionate rhetoric from an army of reformers.

Vrooman spoke with a zeal that was terribly effective. He set his tables squarely on human ground and invited as his guests all who hungered and hoped for humanity. He informed the assembled representatives of the Labor League's fifteen thousand members that the frightful conditions of life in the city's slums were a "sign of national-blood-poisoning," and since they were undermining the

\(^{11}\) Ibid., Mar. 27, 1893.
nating nation’s health, “they must be abolished.” Y Young Catholics were informed that the sweating system was the enemy of all, and that all should organize “without regard to color, class or creed” for its destruction. Asserting his belief that “the interests men have in com-
mon are far more important than the things that divide us,” Vrooman urged in place of “a rivalry of talk, of argument, of narrating historical incidents, of expounding theories and speculations,” a rivalry of good works which would classify as best the church that “does the most for the people.”

Vrooman was not the only speaker during this four-week period of spiritual glow. The Reverend McConnell delivered “a fearless and sagacious sermon” in St. Stephen’s Protestant Episcopal Church. It was his impression that “if it be true that ‘cleanliness is next to Godliness’ then Philadelphia is farther away from God than any city in Christendom.” Thomas Walker, former city councilman, saw an opportunity to make political hay at the expense of Philadelphia’s ruling politicians. He charged that the city was “controlled by the most vicious elements in society,” and called for “a general uprising against the almighty dollar.” Four hundred and fifty-three ministers who had joined the Conference of Moral Workers added their nightly bit to the general enthusiasm. Board of Health officials, labor leaders, and even Vrooman’s younger brother Hiram, fresh from Baltimore’s Swedenborgian Church, helped to swell the harmonics of a rising social consciousness in one long, continuous verbal assault on the slums and the sweating system.

The North American gave the new movement daily coverage on its front page with quotations from speeches and statements of prominent enlistees in Vrooman’s crusade. The Reverend Frank M. Goodchild, pastor of the Spruce Street Baptist Church, believed the move-
ment to be the instrument whereby “the all-consuming faith of the primitive church can be revived in our city.” The Reverend John F. Mauer, pastor of St. Paul’s Church in Westmoreland, gave this “first evidence of the universal authority of intelligence and brotherhood” two years in which to transform the city completely. Mauer saw

12 Ibid., Mar. 28, 1893.
13 Ibid., Mar. 31, 1893.
14 Philadelphia Inquirer, Apr. 24, 1893.
15 The North American, Apr. 6, 1893.
“God’s hand now at work in our midst.”  

Joseph D. Murphy, editor of the Catholic Times, viewed this attempt to unite all well-meaning people on the common basis of humanity as an altogether worthy one. To save women from the sweaters, children from overwork, and to secure decent homes for the poor were fundamental reforms, deserving the “support of all whatever be their religious affiliations.”  

Frederick H. Fleury, representative of the typographical union in the Labor League, could not see the remote “possibility of failure” in this “marriage of the church and organized labor.” Only breath-taking promises of universal joy delimited the imaginations of those who supported the new movement with statements in the public journals.

The North American also included interviews with workers as part of its daily diet. Those who purchased the paper read front-page stories of life in the slums, recorded with grim accuracy. Twenty people jammed into a nine-by-twelve room, cutting garments hours on end with insufficient light and ventilation, the reeking foulness of alleys with their accumulated debris and filth, and one privy well for a whole section of tenements provided a vivid picture of wretchedness and added substance to the verbal assaults. One interview told of little Lunda Baselda, a seventeen-year-old immigrant from Italy, who with her sister Dulerotta, lived and earned her bread in a “foul, unfurnished attic.” When asked how life in America compared with her life in sunny Italy, she replied, “Me thinka me get more, but me get nota so much.”  

The reporters for The North American kept nothing in reserve. Their stories of human beings, robbed of their humanness, recorded a festering swamp infinitely more horrible and destructive than anyone dreamed possible.

The total effect of this fountain of verbiage was to elicit from the poorer people common sympathy with a vengeance. The full force of the moral attack struck consternation in the ranks of those who derived material gain from things as they were. Vrooman’s war on the slums, once in motion, threatened the foundations of their society. For them the day of judgment had arrived. The question

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16 Ibid., Mar. 25, 1893.
17 Journal of the Knights of Labor (Philadelphia), Apr. 6, 1893.
18 The North American, Mar. 27, 1893.
19 Ibid., Mar. 25, 1893.
which agitated the minds of all was whether Vrooman would be able to translate the white heat of a furious moral revival into practical reform. There were those who prayed for failure. They prepared to defend the pillars of society, as they saw them, from the wrath of an aroused people.

At this critical juncture, with Philadelphia divided, no one would have entertained the suggestion that the Conference of Moral Workers would shortly disintegrate from within.

Vrooman had found a kindred spirit in Joseph Krauskopf, the forceful rabbi of the Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel. Where the former worked out of sheer desperation with no hope of making people happy, but only striving to lessen their misery, the latter was not so obsessed and haunted by the specter of human wretchedness that he was unable to see and formulate plans to increase human joy. Their association throughout Vrooman’s stay in Philadelphia was most fruitful for Vrooman. It blunted his extreme views and tempered his scorching analysis of slum life—in its vividness it seemed too formidable an enemy—with rays of hope. Krauskopf had long been in the field agitating for concrete help and assistance for his coreligionists, recent arrivals in America, who made up a sizable proportion of the slum population. When Vrooman first arrived in Philadelphia he learned from his neighbors of the efforts Krauskopf had been making in their behalf. On January 8, 1893, he was drawn to the Temple Keneseth Israel where he listened to a discourse on “Model Dwellings for the Poor.”

It was Krauskopf’s view that true charity was that which “saves from death,” or that which “rescues from physical or industrial or moral ruin.” He had warm praise for all Federal attempts to stay the introduction of cholera into the country by its rigorous quarantine of the nation’s ports. However, there was a weak spot in such exertions. They reminded him of a general “who strongly fortifies the city-gates and walls against the enemy, and yet leaves his powder-magazine open and unprotected.” In its great haste to keep the dreaded pest out, he argued, the nation may have forgotten “that its germ may already have found lodging place within our slums.” He traced the origin and growth of these leprous rookeries and showed

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20 Joseph Krauskopf, “Model Dwellings for the Poor,” *Sunday Lectures before the Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel*, Series 6 (Jan. 8, 1893), 127-137.
them to be gifts of man's avarice, indifference, and inhumanity. We have proceeded, he continued, as though a line could be drawn between slum districts and well-to-do quarters, telling "the polluted atmosphere that this far it may go, and no further." He spoke of the Model Dwelling Movement and cited examples of how London, Birmingham, Mülhausen, Le Havre, Florence, Boston, and New York had replaced some of their filthy barracks with decent dwellings. He pleaded for financial aid so that Philadelphia might take similar steps, lest the contagion spread from alley to avenue, from human sty to palace. Krauskopf and Vrooman were as one in their attitude toward the demoralizing tenements. An editorial in a Jewish weekly expressed wonder "not that the evils are so great, but that they have not more largely made themselves felt." Vrooman's agitation had supplied this deficiency; Krauskopf now furnished the practical program.

Early in February, 1893, Krauskopf began a campaign for wholesome housing to replace the sheds occupied by the poor people. He offered Philadelphia's wealthy an opportunity for investment which promised a net income of four to six per cent, greater immunity from infectious diseases, and physical and moral health to the sufferers. Since further procrastination on a question of public health and safety was hazardous, he delivered a forceful sermon to his congregation on the virtues of giving, and goaded them into supporting his project. "Not the possession of wealth, but the being possessed by it" was condemned as evil. If looked upon as a means to a good end, wealth was "a life dispensing elixir"; regarded as an end in itself, it was "a heart-hardening, soul-withering, conscience-slaying poison."

A housing rally was held in the Temple Keneseth Israel on the evening of February 19, 1893, to boost the proposition. Felix Adler, Ethical Culturist and director of the active New York Tenement House Building Company, was on hand to extol the virtues of the Model Dwelling Movement. He blamed the modern industrial system and its social structure for compelling the poor "to remain in the

21 Jewish Exponent (Philadelphia), Jan. 13, 1893.
23 Jewish Exponent, Feb. 24, 1893.
status of barbarians.” Vrooman, sitting on the platform, heard Adler remark that “what we need is the scourge of the preacher.” Alfred T. White, architect and builder of the Riverside Dwellings in Brooklyn, sent a letter of encouragement which was read to the large gathering. A member of Philadelphia’s Beneficent Building Association voiced the only criticism of the evening. He could not see the need for Model Dwellings, and doubted that the experiment would in any way redeem and enoble the denizens of the slum areas. Caryl, who represented the University Settlement, and Krauskopf quickly dismissed these objections. The Beneficent Building Association had been in existence twenty-five years, but the slums had grown steadily. Krauskopf then related how he had tried unsuccessfully to whip up sentiment for his scheme by focusing the public’s attention on the scourge of cholera. The men with money would not be stampeded out of fright, even for their own safety. Unable to appeal to their sense of self-preservation, he charged Philadelphia’s conservatives with hindering the destruction of the slums, and he sketched the alternatives which confronted them. It was a violent outburst, conceived in a moment of bitterness and disappointment, but it also expressed his hope that Philadelphians of means would yet see the folly of their blind indifference. He declared:

You can manage, if you chose, to let your brother rot in the filth of the slums. You can help murder his wife and little ones in the pestiferous atmosphere of your filth-reeking 4th ward. . . . You may escape the pangs of conscience . . . by shutting yourself out from the sight and sound of the miseries of the poor behind the enveloping clouds of your imported Havanah, or behind some spicy Parisian romance. But when the misery of these people, passing the point of endurance, will drive them forth into the highways and byways with club and firebrand in hand, and change your Havanah smoke into the blinding smoke of your ruined prosperity; when fatal disease, having taken root in their filth, will . . . enter your home and lay low your wife and little ones, you may then send forth the query of despair: “If God is just why did He bring this suffering upon me,” and receive as answer, wherewith to heel a lacerated heart, your own words: “We have managed so long without eradicating the slums, we will manage still longer without it.”

On March 20, 1893, Krauskopf joined forces with Vrooman’s Conference of Moral Workers. His plans for tenement house reform were submitted to the Central Conference and were turned over to a
committee for study. Their report was issued on April 12, 1893, at the height of Vrooman's moral revival. The immediate formation of an organization to be known as the "Model Dwelling Association of Philadelphia" was recommended. The capital of the new venture was fixed at one hundred thousand dollars, divided into shares of fifty dollars each. The Association planned to acquire property in the poorest neighborhoods and construct buildings thereon, where each family might have two or three rooms to dwell in with the best sanitary arrangements possible as to drainage, ventilation, and light. Rooms were to rent for fifty cents a week, thus placing a comfortable home within the means of the laborer who earned from one to two dollars per day. Laws respecting sewers, street cleaning, removal of garbage, and parks and breathing spaces for the congested districts were to become the objects of agitation in the public forums and the state legislature. The Association proposed itself as a watchdog to see that such laws, when in existence, were rigidly enforced. Circulars were mailed by the Central Conference to its membership announcing a meeting to be held on April 17, 1893, to raise funds with which to erect a model tenement house. Backed by the enthusiasm engendered by Vrooman's moral upsurge, the prospects loomed bright for success.

The meeting took place as scheduled in Philadelphia's Association Hall. When Krauskopf rose to speak he looked around for the seven hundred ministers to whom circulars were sent, but saw only a handful. The organization had been gutted overnight. One of Philadelphia's leading Presbyterian ministers found it impossible to work alongside a Jew. A wealthy parishioner who offered him a sizable contribution for the model tenement fund was told to "dispose of her money in some other way." Many members of the Conference withdrew because of its endorsement of Rabbi Krauskopf's housing program. In protest Vrooman resigned as secretary of the Central Conference. His moral bubble had been pricked by a thorn of bigotry in the hands of a few of the good Christian fathers of the "City of Brotherly Love."

There were other factors in the dissolution of the Conference. Those ministers who had enlisted against their better judgment, be-

24 The North American, Apr. 12, 1893; see also Jewish Exponent, Apr. 14, 1893.
25 Hirschler, 551.
ing swept along by the general moral excitement, had written letters of inquiry to ministers in New York City. Replies indicated that Vrooman was not a minister, but a reporter, visionary, and agitator, and that his reform activities there had made prominent ministers an object of ridicule. Some who were not devoured by the acid of anti-Semitism fled the movement on this score.

A Presbyterian weekly in its editorial, "Sensationalism in the Pulpit," opened another door for escape. The editorial asserted that the current fad by which ministers “try anything which will excite notice, or secure applause and recognition, or cause one to be ‘run after,’ or to get into the papers” had cast discredit upon Christianity. That ministers, “called of God to preach the Gospel,” should take their themes from the secular press had destroyed the “life, power, and glory of many a pulpit.” The editorial banned popular feeling and sentiment as a source of spiritual inspiration and called for “a return to plain . . . unadulterated Bible preaching.” Christians were urged not to lose their better judgment under popular pressure, and not to believe they have the greatest preacher “because he figures so extensively in the newspaper.” The press was asked to help discourage pulpit sensationalism “by not giving so much publicity to the men who court its favors and pander to the passing whims of the community.”

The Philadelphia Press responded with a feature story in its Sunday edition on the state of the city’s housing. The story claimed with unrestrained, patriotic ardor that the skilled workmen, “the American bone and sinew of this pre-eminently American city,” were “better housed and clothed and cared for . . . than any others of their class in any country of the world.” It readily admitted that the city had its slums, “dark and wretched enough,” but the population there comprised those who “in the social scale and the mental scale as well stand usually at the lowest of all.” Their investigation revealed these people to be “alien in tongue, in manners, in morals, in aspirations.” Although it did contain a short, forthright statement of Krauskopf’s tenement house program, buried at the end, the long article was frankly nativistic in tone. The Philadelphia Press risked

26 True Story Paper (Baltimore), Sept. 1, 1895.
27 The Presbyterian, Apr. 19, 1893.
28 Philadelphia Press, Apr. 21, 1893.
no opinion as to whether cholera was also alien in character, and, as a consequence, not a fit subject for discussion in this "pre-eminently American city."

The North American, which had been a pillar of strength to the movement, now switched to the attack. Idlers were condemned to work or starve.\footnote{29 See The North American, Apr. 15, 1893.} Soup kitchens, "the chief function of which is to graduate paupers and make poorer classes more dependent," were condemned as undermining self-respect and manhood. Houses of Industry, where unfortunate men could always find shelter and food for the asking, were subjected to ridicule.\footnote{30 See Ibid., Apr. 17, 1893.} The hum of industry had long since been replaced by the "yawns and gobblings of the lazy good for nothings who gather . . . from night to night to sleep off the effects of the day's dissipation." The North American capped its infamy with an attack on Vrooman.\footnote{31 See Ibid., Apr. 21, 1893; see also Evening Item (Philadelphia), Apr. 21, 1893, and the Philadelphia Times, Apr. 22, 1893.} It printed an outrageous story from Caryl, who had suddenly disappeared. The fact that Vrooman and the few who remained in the movement were actively supporting the Pants-Makers Union in its strike against overcrowded and unsanitary working conditions might have helped to alter The North American's attitude toward the movement.

Caryl had been relieved of his duties as resident manager of the University Settlement House owing to his peculiar religious outbursts. He had formed a habit of remaining locked in his room, holding "conversations with departed friends" in "spiritual ecstasy." He had adopted a mode of living, the expense of which was but one dollar a week, his room costing him fifty cents and his meals, principally of raw oatmeal and wheat, costing him twenty cents a week. He had broken with Vrooman over the question of Vrooman's eating habits. Caryl declared that Vrooman was not sufficiently ripe to be useful in the Conference of Moral Workers because "he persisted in eating meat," which, as Caryl expressed it, "was making of his stomach a grave yard for dead animals." Caryl had represented the Settlement House on the board of directors of the Model Dwelling Association of Philadelphia, but had been asked to resign from that body because he continued to commune with departed spirits. The
very evening he was ousted from the group he arrived back at the Settlement House raving about a "desperate Anarchistic scheme for driving the wealthy people out of Philadelphia and establishing a poor man's utopia." The scheme involved spreading disease throughout the families of the rich "by introducing the cholera germ into their water supply." The impression was that Caryl, frightened at the prospect of revolution, had run away. Such was the abuse heaped upon Vrooman for daring to champion the cause of all by extending a helping hand to the dispossessed. This weird tale not only succeeded in discrediting Vrooman, but it dissipated the dividing line between slum district and the rest of the city, and jolted Philadelphia's conservatives out of their indifference. Dishonor thus became honorable, and character assassination was gilded with the name of Justice.

Rabbi Krauskopf had informed his congregation that "unless much is done, and very soon, nothing short of a miracle will be able to save us from a most horrible calamity." That miracle had occurred. Multitudes who swarmed the gutters and alleyways of the city's dark quarter had grown conscious of their strength and aware of their interests through the tireless, educational efforts of Walter Vrooman. He had voiced the aspirations of the forgotten and had made their misery his, and through publicity had sorely wounded Philadelphia's conscience. The many patient workers who for years had striven to add a few crumbs of comfort to the poor had seen their wasteful, individual efforts converted into an organized force. The smug had been rudely shaken from their lethargy by the specter of death and revolution at the hands of a band of anarchists. A united Philadelphia struck quickly and decisively to protect its health and safety. Pressure was brought to bear on the City Council. Agitation produced the necessary appropriations, and the city began a program of rehabilitation in the slum district. During the summer and fall of 1893, $417,574.50 was expended on resurfacing 8.94 miles of alleys and thoroughfares in the poor areas. Sewers, inlets, and water and gas mains were also constructed where none had been before. The rutted, cobblestone surfaces which had permitted foulness to stand undrained, a breeding ground for disease, were replaced by sheet asphalt and cement paving. This was the "most advanced sanitary improvement in the city," for now it was possible to keep the alleys

"free from filth." They were flushed and disinfected every day. The residents' habit of throwing into the roadways the offal from their homes was checked. Garbage cans and receptacles for household waste were placed in convenient places throughout the section. Competent police were on hand to instruct the people in their use and to enforce Health Department directives. The Annual Report of the Health Department stated that "the reconstruction of these streets . . . will certainly have a marked influence upon the local health, and, indeed upon the health of the whole city." Dr. Frances Van Gasken remarked before Philadelphia's Civic Club that "in 1894 there were 63 less deaths than in 1893 in the 4th ward, and 72 less in the 5th ward. This decrease," the doctor continued, "is attributed to the improvement in the streets." It was a great triumph for Vrooman and his moral pyrotechnics.

Vrooman left Philadelphia for Baltimore long before the reconstruction of the streets in the fourth ward had been completed. His was a restless spirit always searching for new causes to champion and new localities to jolt out of their complacency. He had stirred Philadelphia to its foundation, He had hoped to tear down the slums and replace them with adequate housing. He failed in this venture, but was content that alleys were becoming well-paved roads. Tenement house reform had to wait until the formation of the Octavia Hill Association in 1895. Several successful strikes by unions in the garment industry, while not obliterating the sweating system, softened some of its harshness. Unionization and success in this agitation went hand in hand, but it was a long and needlessly painful road. So far as their health was concerned, however, the people of Philadelphia had temporarily shelved the doctrine of negligible injustice and had discovered one area in which the interests men had in common far outweighed the interests that divided them.

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34 Ibid., 105.
35 Frances Van Gasken, Tenement Houses in Philadelphia, an address delivered before a meeting of the department of social science of the Civic Club of Philadelphia, Mar. 2, 1895.