

THE HOUSING QUESTION

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The Housing Question by Alfred Smith

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ALFRED SMITH

**THE HOUSING
QUESTION**

The Housing Question

BY

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LATE CHAIRMAN HOUSING COMMITTEE, LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL



LONDON

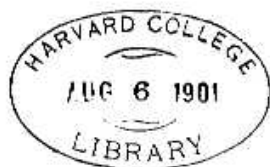
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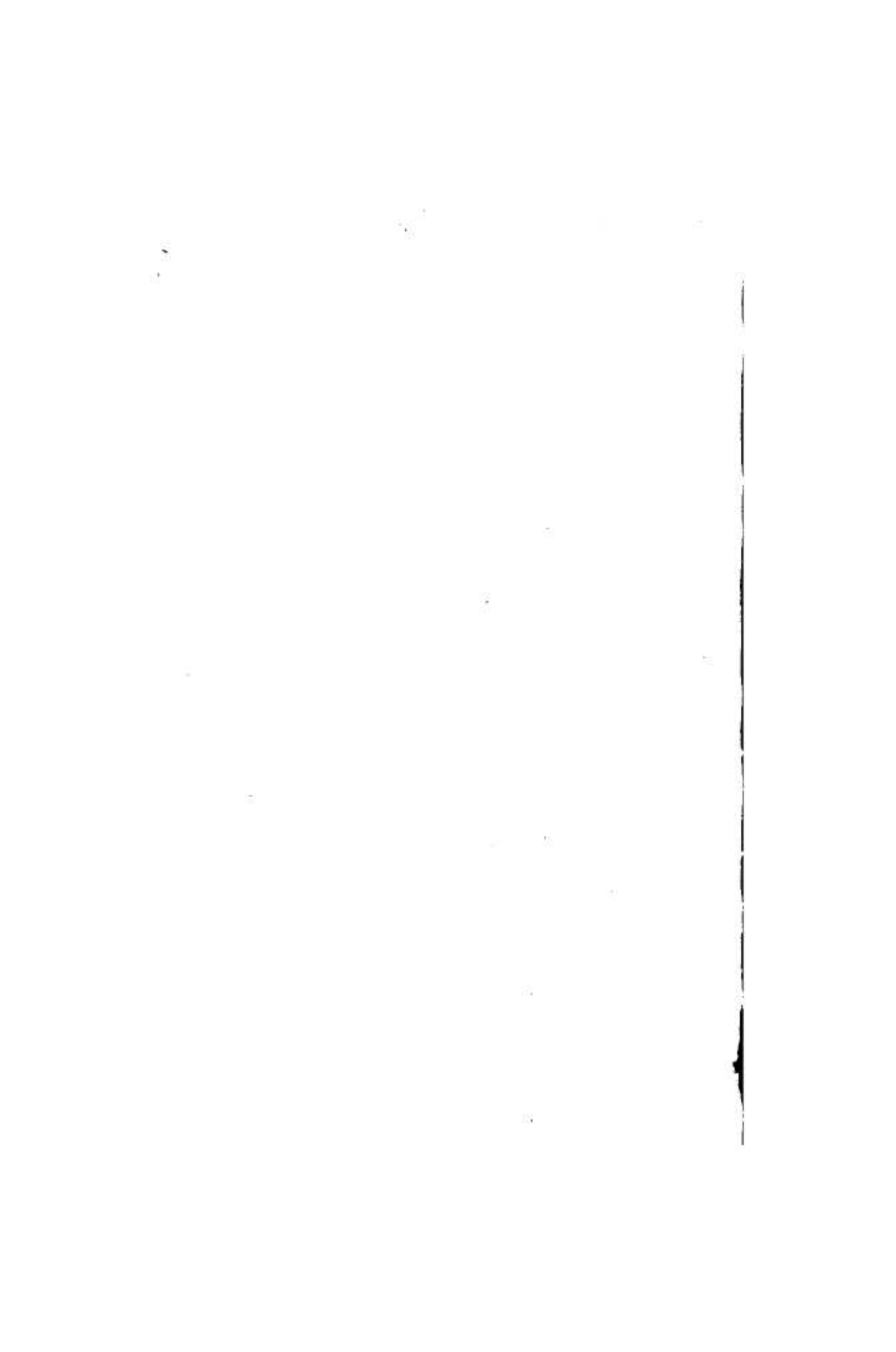
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THE HOUSING QUESTION

(IN LONDON)

OF all social reforms, none is of greater importance or surrounded with greater difficulties than the present movement for the better housing of the working people. Overcrowding, with its deplorable evils, is everywhere prevalent. Rents have become exorbitant. The utter want of proper dwellings, where the common comforts and decencies of life are possible, is everywhere felt. The question is—how to provide adequate and healthy accommodation for a vast and increasing number of labouring people within easy reach of their work, and at a rent within their means.

OVERCROWDING IN LONDON

In regard to this lack of accommodation, and to the overcrowding existing in our midst, it is well to bear in mind the vastness of the population dwelling on a comparatively small area, and the rapid growth of that population during the present century. In 1801 London numbered 959,000 persons. In 1896 the population had risen to 4,433,000, a number greater than that of Scotland, which is more than 250 times larger in area, and but slightly less than that of Ireland, which is nearly 270 times larger. At the last general census in 1891¹ there were 747,000 male workers and 266,000 female workers, or 1,013,000 in all.

¹ The number of *workers* shown by census returns, 1891, was 1,013,077. Assuming the ratio constant, the number based on population of 1899 would be about 1,085,000, or an increase of about 72,000.

Now, as most of these people must dwell near or within reach of their occupations, and as, on the other hand, the development of commercial undertakings requires more and more space, and also a larger number of workers, the competition for dwelling accommodation near the commercial centres is greatly increased. Resulting from this intense competition for room, rents rise by leaps and bounds, and overcrowding with all its evils ensues. Of the extent of this overcrowding, some idea may be gathered from the following table compiled from the census of 1891.*

' Population in 1891 (Census)	- - -	4,211,743
Population in 1899 (Equalisation of Rates Act Census)	- - -	4,514,856

Assuming that proportion of persons living under overcrowded condition remains the same, as shown by census returns of 1891, the number of persons living under such conditions in 1899 would be about 890,000, as against 830,000 in 1891, or an increase of 60,000.