

**THE SOCIAL EVIL, WITH SPECIAL  
REFERENCE TO CONDITIONS EXISTING  
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK; A REPORT  
PREPARED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF  
THE COMMITTEE OF FIFTEEN**

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**VARIOUS**

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# THE SOCIAL EVIL

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A REPORT PREPARED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF  
THE COMMITTEE OF FIFTEEN

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## PREFACE

In the fall of 1900, the city of New York was startled by discoveries in regard to the spread of the Social Evil in certain districts, and as to the extent of flagrant offences against public morality and common decency. A meeting of citizens was held at the Chamber of Commerce in November, as a result of which the Committee of Fifteen was called into existence. The objects which the Committee of Fifteen undertook to accomplish were thereupon stated as follows:

(1) To institute a searching inquiry, uninfluenced by partisan considerations, into the causes of the present alarming increase of gambling and the Social Evil in this city, and to collect such evidence as shall establish the connection between existing conditions and those who, in the last analysis, are responsible for these conditions.

(2) To publish the results of such investigations in order to put our fellow-citizens in pos-

session of facts, and to enable them to adopt such corrective measures as may be needed.

(3) To promote such legislation as shall render it less difficult to reach offenders, and as shall put an end to the shifting and division of responsibility in the local administration of the laws relating to vice and crime, to the end that public officers and their subordinates may be held to a strict accountability for their acts.

(4) To suggest and promote the provision of more wholesome conditions and surroundings, in order to lessen the allurements and incentives to vice and crime.

During the winter and spring of 1901 the Committee devoted its attention chiefly to the first object. Its corps of investigators collected a mass of information and evidence, a part of which was utilized in bringing some of the offenders to justice, and in exposing the notorious "cadet" system. The Committee also co-operated with the framers of the new Tenement House Bill in securing its enactment into law. As a result of this law and of the facts collected by the Committee, it became possible to take measures for the eradication of prostitution from the tenement houses.

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The overthrow of the control of the municipal administration by Tammany Hall and the success of the Reform movement in the municipal campaign of 1901 (a campaign in which the information supplied by the Committee of Fifteen constituted a very important factor) rendered it possible for the Committee to abandon any further work of a police nature or having to do with the supervision of public morals.

The third object of the Committee, however, was to promote satisfactory legislation on the subject of the Social Evil. In order to make intelligent preparation for its recommendations, a sub-committee was appointed to make a study of the history of regulation and its application to present conditions in New York. The sub-committee was fortunate in securing for this work the services of Mr. Alvin S. Johnson, at the time University Fellow in Economics at Columbia University, and now Instructor in Economics at Bryn-Mawr College. The investigation contained in Part I. is almost entirely the work of Mr. Johnson, to whom the thanks of the Committee are due. It is believed not only that the report constitutes a valuable scientific contribution to the