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HOUSING ESTATE MANAGEMENT BY WOMEN

(Being an account of the development
of the work initiated by Octavia Hill)

Pamphlet

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HOUSING ESTATE MANAGEMENT BY WOMEN.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

During the post-war years there has been a growing sense of public responsibility for social well-being. Together with the development of education, public health services and cultural facilities and the betterment of industrial conditions, has grown up a realisation that the proper housing of its people is a primary necessity to the community. Before the war sporadic and local efforts had been made to deal with the problem, but it was only in 1919, when the cessation of building for five years had resulted in a serious housing shortage, that the provision of houses on a large scale by local authorities was initiated and Dr. Addison's Housing Act of 1919 gave the impetus to a great wave of building. "Homes for Heroes" were rushed up in large numbers regardless of high costs and the dearth of materials of good quality. Mr. Chamberlain's Housing Act, which followed in 1923, was chiefly designed to assist the provision of houses for sale and to encourage private enterprise. Mr. Wheatley's Act of 1924 aimed at bringing down prices and by limiting the amount of the Government subsidy increased the responsibility of the local authorities. Mr. Greenwood's Act of 1930 gave the first real stimulus to the attack on the problem of slum clearance by providing a generous subsidy and by simplifying the procedure; it was not, however, until about two years later that a nation-wide drive was made to clear the slums within five years. The Act of 1935 made the first onslaught upon the twin problem of overcrowding, and also simplified the financial provisions of the earlier Acts and provided for the pooling of subsidies and of rents.

This branch of municipal activity has thus become a service, not only of great magnitude, but of far-reaching social importance.

Besides the activities of the local authorities, private enterprise has provided large numbers of houses and an endeavour was made to stimulate its efforts by facilitating the aid given by the building societies and the guarantees of the municipalities.

Mention must also be made of the housing associations (formerly known as public utility societies), of which more will be said later. Aided partly by subscriptions and partly by capital subscribed at low rates of interest, these societies have done much valuable pioneer work, chiefly in the direction of reconditioning of old property and the provision of houses at low rents; by co-operation with local authorities they can obtain assistance through subsidies and in acquisition of land.

Some idea of the magnitude of housing activities since the war can be gained from the following figures of houses completed between November 1918, and April 1937:—

By private enterprise without state assistance	1,971,851
" " " with " "	423,769
„ local authorities	954,071
Total	<u>3,349,691</u>

When the public conscience was first aroused to the necessities of the housing problem, attention was concentrated chiefly upon the provision of houses. As time went on, experience showed the importance of good lay-out, design and construction. The town-planner and the architect were increasingly called in to make the new estates pleasing to the eye, greater variety was introduced and provision made for additional amenities such as open spaces, shops, places of amusement, etc., to serve the new communities. But what is not yet fully realised, though recognition of it is growing, is that merely to provide houses and estates and put people into them is not enough. In the first place, the houses, if they are to serve their purpose, must be properly maintained, and in the second place, the people themselves, with all the human and social problems which they present, are the most

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important factor in determining the ultimate success or failure of any housing project. Important as is the clearing of slums and the building of houses, the transference of families to the houses and the subsequent management of the estates are yet more vital if the fullest advantage is to be derived by both landlords and tenants from the expenditure incurred. Moreover, the gains cannot be measured in material terms alone, but must take into account also moral and spiritual values.

The object of this pamphlet is to demonstrate the importance of the contribution which trained management by women on the lines initiated by Octavia Hill can bring to the permanent solution of the problems of housing.

2. HISTORICAL SURVEY.

Octavia Hill, working among the people in the early sixties, perceived how often his duties towards his tenants were neglected by the landlord of working-class property and how the terrible housing conditions which resulted frustrated efforts at social improvement. She realised the power for good which a landlord or his agent might have over the lives of his tenants and the need for the quickening spirit of human sympathy and friendship in the relationship between them. She suggested to John Ruskin, whose friend and pupil she was, that she herself might become such an agent, and in 1864 Ruskin bought three tenement houses in Paradise Place, Marylebone, which were in a terrible condition of neglect and dirt, and each room occupied by a family living in conditions of extreme poverty and degradation. He handed over the management of them to Miss Hill, so that she might put her principles to the test. She not only converted these dwellings into clean, sanitary homes and brought new happiness and order into the lives of the tenants, but she also made the venture pay. Her work was a demonstration of a new and revolutionary spirit which was beginning to manifest itself in this, as in other fields. She showed that humane and sympathetic dealing, combined with a wise discipline, and the provision of the necessities for decent living and recreation, are not only factors in the regeneration and education of working people, but are also sound business because they bring increased "returns" in material as well as moral ways. Her experiment soon became more widely known and she was called on to manage increasing numbers of properties and also to advise in the building of dwellings for the people.

Where other systems of management failed, hers survived because it was based upon fundamentally right and abiding principles. For the same reason it proved itself adaptable to changing circumstances and has fitted in, with alterations only of outward forms, to the widely differing conditions of to-day. When she died in 1912, she directly controlled over 2,000 tenancies and a number of women managers trained in her system were at work, not only in England and Scotland, but in Sweden, Holland and the United States.

After her death the work continued its gradual extension. During the war trained women were sent to manage Muniton housing estates at various provincial centres. The next big step forward occurred in 1916, when the Commissioners of Woods and Forests (later the Commissioners of Crown Lands) placed a house in Holborn under the management of an Octavia Hill worker. Her success with this and another difficult house led to 2,000 tenancies of the Cumberland Market Estate being handed over to the same management as the leases fell in. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who had entrusted the management of four of their working-class estates in London to Miss Hill herself, continued to add to the property in the charge of Octavia Hill managers as the falling-in of leases gave them full control of their estates. The first large housing association to be formed was the Improved Tenements Association, founded in 1900 for the reconditioning of four houses in Kensington under Miss Hill's management; these by 1935 had increased to nearly 800 tenancies. The success of the St. Pancras House Improvement Society, Ltd., formed in 1924, gave the lead to a number of housing associations since inaugurated in London and other parts of the country to build or recondition property and manage it on Octavia Hill lines (see Appendix 2).

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Local Authorities.

In these fields and in management for private owners and trusts the growth of the work has thus been considerable and still continues. But it is in another direction that the latest and most rapid development has taken place. As already outlined in the Introduction, the local authorities have found themselves, since the war, the landlords of many thousands of working-class houses, and have been called on to shoulder the tremendous tasks of slum clearance and the abatement of overcrowding. With the growth of responsibility, and the experience, sometimes hardly bought, of ownership, the realisation has grown that enlightened management of municipal estates is essential to obtain full value from all that has been spent on their making. The recognition of the contribution that trained women can make in this field is steadily gaining ground. In 1921 the first local authority to appoint a woman manager for its council houses was the Amersham Rural District Council. In 1927 the Borough of Chesterfield, in appointing a trained woman, gave the lead to a series of municipal appointments, including a number in important towns and in some of the principal London Boroughs (see Appendix 3). In 1934 the Municipality of Cape Town appointed a trained woman to introduce the Octavia Hill system in South Africa and take charge of their estates. A similar appointment was made by the Municipality of East London in 1937.

Moyne Committee.

In 1933 a Departmental Committee under the Chairmanship of Lord Moyne issued its report, which dealt chiefly with reconditioning and with the means to be taken to secure a further supply of houses without public charge through housing associations or similar bodies. In this report, after describing the causes leading to the large amount of deteriorating property throughout the country and the neglect of repairs by landlords, the Committee stated that: "We are as much impressed by the need for improved management as for an improved standard of repairs. As is well known, this was the view taken by Miss Octavia Hill and her fellow pioneers when they first approached the problem some seventy years ago." The Committee also expressed the importance attached by them to the employment of properly trained house property managers and emphasised the desirability of employing women for this work, owing to their special aptitude for it and the assistance they are able to give to the housewife. Their final recommendations as to the acquisition, repair and management of working-class houses by local authorities in co-operation with housing associations or House Management Commissioners included the declaration that: "In all cases management should be based on the Octavia Hill System and wherever practicable women housing estate managers should be employed." The report of this Committee formed the basis for an important part of the Housing Act, 1935. In Memorandum A on this Act the Minister of Health drew the attention of local authorities to the importance of employing trained housing estate managers in connection with their housing estates and referred to the successful results achieved by the Octavia Hill System and to the advocacy of the System in the Moyne Report.

The increasing importance attached by the Ministry of Health to the question of management is shown by the setting-up of a Sub-Committee on Management under the Central Housing Advisory Committee.

3. PRINCIPLES AND SCOPE OF THE WORK.

The inspiration of Octavia Hill's work was the principle that business and social welfare are not independent spheres of activity, but that all business and industry, if rightly regarded, should be for the service of the community. She applied this particularly to housing, because she perceived that, of all commodities, the supply of living accommodation to the poor could not be regarded primarily as a profit-making business without disastrous effects on health, morality and civic life; conversely she saw that wise and sympathetic management of property, resulting in careful maintenance and the enlistment

of the tenants' co-operation, were sounder business in the long run than a policy of "quick returns" from extortionate rents and neglect of repairs. She knew, too, the importance of a rigorous discipline in dealing with people who had not yet fully mastered the difficult art of living in a modern community. While herself setting a valuable example of honouring her word, and of business-like accuracy and system in her duties, she insisted upon the punctual payment of rent at definite times, and inculcated habits of regularity and of self-control in holding and managing money.

Since her time there has grown up a general acceptance of the principle that those who are too poor to bargain freely must be provided with living accommodation at the public expense, and the interests of those so provided are safeguarded to some extent by the State and the local authorities. But though Octavia Hill did not base her practice upon the conditions of to-day, her principles are still applicable and not least to municipal housing estates.

The basis of her system was a sympathetic and friendly relationship between the tenant and the manager, upon which all efforts to help the tenants or improve their surroundings should be built. This relationship should be established by frequent personal contact through which the manager can gain an intimate individual knowledge of the tenants and their circumstances. The knowledge thus obtained is essential in planning the allocation of accommodation to the tenants, and in guiding them to make the best use of it. When the landlord does his part in the way of repairs and improvements, and gives thought to decoration, the great majority of tenants respond and do their share in making better homes. But to those brought up in slum conditions this is not always an automatic or immediate result, and here the manager can strongly influence the upward tendency by friendly criticism and individual treatment.

The gifts of imaginative sympathy, understanding and judgment, which this work demands, may not be the special prerogative of either sex, though it is difficult to deny that they are held to a wider extent by women. But in addition to this, the manager's dealings are very largely with the woman of the house in the latter's capacity of housewife, wife and mother, and the manager's visit to the home is often the occasion, not only for the payment of rent, but for discussions on household and family matters. There are obvious practical reasons why it is easier for a woman manager to enter the house than for a man. Clearly she has here a strong advantage and she is more willingly and fittingly admitted to confidence.

It is, of course, of supreme importance that the women selected to do this work should be of suitable personality and temperament; a condescending or dictatorial approach to the tenants may engender hostility instead of respect, while a sentimental or partisan outlook may do untold harm. But personality is not enough; Octavia Hill's system would never have survived had not her followers been able to prove their practical efficiency, and to submit their work to the test, not only of the social reformer, but of the hard-headed business man. Thus the training of a woman property manager has from the outset demanded a strenuous technical course, and to-day she has obtained a recognised professional status.

The "Octavia Hill System" is sometimes spoken of as though it were a hard and fast code of rules for carrying out the details of property management by a certain fixed method, and could be learnt from a text-book or a correspondence course by anyone who had a mind to it. Such a conception is utterly false. The System, if it must be so called, is a living tradition in which mere details of technique are unimportant and elastic; as Octavia Hill herself said: "It is the spirit, not the dead form, which should be perpetuated."

Rent Collection.

To most people the work of collecting rents appears to be a sordid occupation, or at best a matter of dreary routine. Where the Octavia Hill method is adopted, rent collection is interesting and highly skilled and it forms the basis of the entire work of

management. The weekly visits for collection give the woman manager the opportunity to build up the personal relationship with her tenants upon which all her efforts on their behalf are founded, and she gains access to the house upon a business footing, without appearing to be an officious intruder. These visits are also used for enquiries regarding repairs and defects, and inspection of these can be made the occasion for unobtrusive observation of such matters as cleanliness, utilisation of bedroom space, etc. It is most important that ample time should be available, and it is a false economy to compel the collector to get round as many houses as possible in a given time. For rough guidance, 300 to 350 tenancies is the approximate number from which an Octavia Hill manager should be required to collect if she undertakes the full management, but this number should be varied if administrative work is considerable or if properties are scattered or require much attention to repairs.

The rent collector's aim is to create a sense of responsibility in the tenant and to help him to realise that the landlord's obligation to carry out repairs and decorations is balanced by his own obligation to pay regularly the rent out of which those repairs must be paid for, and to take care of the property so as to keep them to a minimum. On municipal estates this sense of responsibility is often difficult to awaken. There is a fairly general idea that a Corporation can afford to lose money and a very insufficient grasp of the fact that the tenants themselves, as members of the community, are part-owners of the houses they occupy and that a failure in their obligations will recoil upon themselves. It is of the utmost importance that large arrears of rent should be prevented. Unless this is done there will follow a general slackening of effort among the less conscientious and careless tenants will benefit at the expense of others, whose circumstances may be no less difficult than their own.

The enforcement of notices to quit, though necessary against a small minority of quite hopeless tenants, who regard landlords as their natural prey, is an admission of failure, if widely used; on municipal estates in particular, it only lays up trouble for the future, as the tenants evicted often find refuge in dwellings which later become part of a slum clearance scheme and the problem of rehousing them again faces the manager. To turn a family out of their home when alternative accommodation is so scarce and often so unsatisfactory is a serious matter and may inflict untold harm, especially to the health and welfare of the children, for whose sake the house was probably allotted in the first place. The issuing of Notices to Quit may, however, be a salutary means of inducing regular payment and need not necessarily be followed by enforcement. Where Court proceedings become unavoidable, the manager should have as large a share as possible in carrying them through promptly and in seeing that due weight is given to all the circumstances of the case. Often, where proceedings are taken, a possession order can be suspended or adjourned for so long as the payment of arrears, as ordered by the judge or magistrate, is kept up, and this proves a valuable method of getting the defaulter into a regular habit of payment without inflicting unfair hardship.

Any industrial depression creates great difficulties in connection with arrears, but this makes it all the more important that the manager should discriminate between different classes of arrears and make the fullest investigation into the reason for the debt. She must discover whether the excuse of unemployment, illness or other misfortune is genuine and then decide whether it is wisest to press for payment or wait until matters improve. She must distinguish those who are genuinely unable to pay from those who are merely bad managers and live in a muddle and never have anything laid by for such obvious necessities as clothes and boots for the children, invariably spending every week's income as soon as, and often before, it is received. Sometimes, if the family fortunes seem unlikely to improve, it may be wisest to arrange a transfer to cheaper accommodation, but unless the arrears can be cleared before the move, it is important that the obligation to pay off the original debt should not be lost sight of and this should be made a condition of the exchange.

Through the investigation of arrears, the manager finds many practical ways of serving her tenants. She can put them in touch with relief agencies, convalescent homes, clinics, and charitable institutions of all sorts, or act as intermediary between them and Unemploy-

ment or Public Assistance officials, insurance agents or doctors. Even when practical help is not possible she may, merely by showing friendliness and sympathy and a readiness to "stand by," be able to give new courage and hope to some who are lonely or "down on their luck."

Selection and Placing of Tenants.

The scope of this work varies very much on different estates. A manager may take over all the tenants and only create new tenancies as vacancies occur or she may start with a new cottage estate or block of flats and select tenants from a list supplied to her by the owner or municipality or she may have full control of the acceptance of applications.

The importance of careful selection and placing of tenants cannot be over-emphasised; it is one of the chief factors in preventing a recurrence of slum conditions. A carefully thought-out approach to the future tenant in the preliminary discussions with him as applicant can do much to create the right relationship. The important point to realise is that housing needs cannot be fully met by building a collection of houses in a field and mechanically transferring people to them. The questions involved are very individual and each application requires a careful consideration with a view to allocating as nearly as possible the right house from the point of view of income, place of work, size of family and general standard. These will be ascertained from visits to the applicant and personal contact with him will be established before he becomes a tenant.

Need must be the first consideration. An essential principle of the Octavia Hill system, however, is that tenants should be placed in dwellings at rents which are within their capacity to pay, and the greatest care must be taken in applying this principle if management is to yield the best results from the point of view of both landlord and tenant.

The placing of the individual tenant is another matter of great importance, involving careful grouping of tenants of similar standard. If the groups are not too large it is possible to avoid the practical disadvantages of placing tenants of too varied a standard in immediate proximity, or, on the other hand, large blocks of "difficult" tenants calculated to react unfavourably on each other in the mass. A proper application of scientific principles of selection and placing makes it possible to house tenants of very varied social classes on the same estate and develop a community spirit among them.

The whole question of selection and placing is of particular importance in slum clearance, and as this work is mainly, though not exclusively, dealt with under the municipal authorities, further details will be found in the section on "Municipal Estates."

Maintenance of Property.

The property manager is responsible for the upkeep of the estate. This may range from the maintenance of new houses, involving only the repair of day-to-day defects, replacements and periodical re-decoration, to the care of old property, which may include extensive structural repairs or complete reconditioning. A comprehensive knowledge of building construction, materials, plumbing and sanitary work will be required, and some acquaintance with the principles of architecture and design. Judgment will be needed to decide whether the cheapest form of construction or decoration is the most economic in the long run, and careful attention paid to considerations of utility and convenience as well as appearance. In all this the tenants' co-operation should be sought, and their requirements studied; they should be urged to report defects promptly, which they are often reluctant to do for fear of "complaining," and encouraged to take a delight in the care of their homes. Prompt attention to repairs engenders contentment, just as neglect of them leads to dissatisfaction and to rapid deterioration of habits as well as houses.

While not stinting money on necessary maintenance, the manager must keep a careful check on expenditure, and keep it within the limits of percentage set aside from income. The amount of control she will have may vary widely, as may the methods used for

carrying out repairs. On privately owned or housing association property she may have complete discretion as to repairs; this may involve having a full staff of men under her, with supervision and planning of their work, payment of their wages, and ordering of materials. On municipal estates, it is more common for repairs to be carried out by a separate Works or Maintenance Department, or else by outside contractors, and the manager's responsibility will be limited to ordering and inspection of repairs, and checking of the invoices or lists of work completed. She must be able to draw up specifications and obtain tenders, and she will always endeavour to maintain a high standard of workmanship and materials.

Accounts.

Accountancy is an important branch of the manager's work. Under local authorities the financial department generally carries out the greater part of the account keeping connected with capital expenditure, income from rent and rates, maintenance, income tax and other outgoings, and bank balances. But the manager should keep herself closely acquainted with the financial position, especially as regards maintenance funds, and should have a working knowledge of housing subsidies, loans and the monetary provisions of the various Housing Acts.

On private or housing association estates she may have entire control of all accounts, and must submit quarterly or monthly statements of income and expenditure to the owners. She must deal with the payment of rates, taxes and insurance, and keep a petty cash account for office expenses. She may need a knowledge of valuation to enable her to appeal against assessments, claims for voids have to be made, and if repairs are heavy she may have to prepare a "maintenance claim."

Rent collection books or their equivalent must be accurately kept, and tenants' rent-books carefully checked. Unless a system of collection, such as "Duplicate Posting," is in force, which automatically shows each tenant's arrears weekly, collection books are "proved" by a method adapted by Miss Hill herself, which ensures accuracy and shows every individual's arrears at a glance.

In all her book-keeping, whatever its scope, the woman manager will make it her aim to be accurate, competent and business-like.

Records, Reports and Committee Work.

The careful keeping of records is important for continuity and efficiency in the work and for statistical purposes. A card index of all tenancies is usually indispensable, and the record will contain the number in family, the ages and sex of children, the tenant's occupation and approximate income, and any other relevant details of the family history. This information enables a check to be kept on overcrowding and sub-letting, and should be fairly frequently revised and brought up to date. A still fuller record may also be kept of all dealings with each tenant, in connection with such matters as arrears, observance of tenancy conditions, complaints, disputes, etc.

Records of repairs and expenditure on individual houses or groups of houses may also be kept, or records of work done under various headings, such as plumbing, carpentry, decoration, disinfections, etc.

A card file of applicants for houses is almost always needed, and it must be periodically revised so that it may remain a "live register"; it should contain the fullest possible details as to present accommodation and circumstances, reasons for applying for a house and all other knowledge that can be gleaned from outside sources or from dealings with the applicant or visits to his home.

Correspondence, indexing and filing play a normal part in office work, but an Octavia Hill manager has also opportunities for research into such matters as the relation between unemployment and rent arrears, or the volume and variation of the demand for new housing accommodation.

The manager generally makes a full report on her work annually and a short report quarterly or for each meeting of her Committee. In municipal work the manager usually attends the meetings of the Housing or Estates Committee, where it will be her function to advise on such matters as the calculation of rents and rent rebates, future housing needs and further improvement in existing schemes, and to supply financial and social data to assist the Committee in arriving at a sound policy. Whether in committee or in private conversations with councillors or other officials she may often be able to make useful suggestions for future design, lay-out or construction, based on her personal knowledge of the tenants' needs, or to assist in furthering schemes for social welfare or amenities.

Miscellaneous Activities.

A summary of the chief branches of the work has been given, but no manager's work is confined within this range. Personal relations with the tenants involve her in many ways and give her endless opportunities for service to individuals or to communities. Besides being called on to give advice, and to mediate in disputes, she may have to help convey a sick child to hospital, give evidence in a court, obtain a warm coat for a needy mother, take part in the judging of a garden competition, or serve on the committee of a social club.

An extract from "A Day of a Housing Estate Manager," written by a woman manager administering over 2,000 municipal houses, describes how "the rent collector in the course of her morning may examine a defective stove or roof, adjust a quarrel between neighbours over an attempt to get Pittsburg on the wireless in the small hours, deal with a complaint about a neighbour's bad language, give advice about the cleaning of baths, stoves or coppers, or how to get the oven hot in a new type of stove, or she may even be called in to deal with a matrimonial dispute or to assist a tenant in getting rid of an unwanted or unauthorised lodger." She goes on to describe the work in the office and relates how "a typical day includes any or all of the following incidents: a visit from an official of the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society to consult about a tenant coming out of prison, a conversation with the Blind Visitor about the circumstances of an applicant for a house, or with the Health Visitor about a case of overcrowding, an interview with the Secretary of the Council of Social Service, a discussion with the N.S.P.C.C. Inspector about the best way to deal with a difficult case, a visit from the Secretary of the Gardens Society to discuss a matter of business or to arrange for the audit of the Society's accounts, the Estate Manager being the Honorary Auditor to the Society, and last, but most frequent, a visit from an irate applicant for a house, who thinks he has been kept waiting too long." A woman manager may find herself in some odd places—a public house to trace a late tenant owing money, a manhole, a furniture van, a slum house, a civic procession, a home for lost dogs, a police station, the platform of a public meeting. But it is all in the day's work, and makes the woman manager's life rich in variety and human interest, beside enabling her to be of use to all sorts and conditions of men and women, and to be a link between them.

4. MUNICIPAL ESTATES.

The foregoing pages have already indicated the magnitude of the housing activity undertaken by local authorities since the war, and something has been said of the work done by women managers employed by them. But this development of Octavia Hill work is of such importance that a fuller account of it must be given.

Local authorities are becoming increasingly aware that housing must be regarded not only as a trading concern, but also as a form of social administration, and that its social aspect is their only justification for spending large sums of public money on housing schemes. As the statutory bodies for housing they are under the obligation to house all who are in genuine need; in the last resort it is difficult, if not impossible, for them to refuse to house even the dregs of the population. In the absence of special reformatory settlements for these "undesirables," such as are found in Holland, they must be allowed to occupy

municipal dwellings. This being so, it follows that the officials upon whom is laid the duty of carrying out these schemes must be trained social workers as well as technical experts. The Octavia Hill woman housing manager has the advantage of a training which includes both the social and technical aspects, and local authorities in growing numbers are realising the value of the services she can give.

One of the main principles underlying the woman manager's work is *co-ordination*. She endeavours to bring the whole of her work into one harmonious whole, to relate all her multifarious activities to one another, in such a way that the human element vitalises the business side of the work, while efficient practical technique gives a backbone to the social element. She also tries to be a connecting link between her tenants and her employers, enabling the former to realise their responsibilities as citizens and ratepayers, and their share in self-government, and helping them to see themselves as co-operators with their landlords, the local authorities, not antagonists to them, in the great cause of social betterment.

She can be a valuable link, also, between the other departments of the local authority, whose work touches housing, and she can co-operate with social agencies outside, and with officials of other public bodies.

The fullest co-ordination of all the manager's activities can only be achieved if all that constitutes her sphere of work is organised within one housing department. The growth of housing enterprise as a new branch of municipal activity has led in many instances to the duties comprised in management being split up between the departments already existing, such as the Treasurer's, Town Clerk's, Surveyor's, Public Health, etc. The inevitable consequence is overlapping, red tape and a lower standard of efficiency. There is no one official in charge of all the work of management, and the rent-collector, who is generally the person most in direct contact with the tenants, has no responsibility or voice in the selection or placing of the tenants, nor in the carrying out of repairs. Often public-spirited councillors shoulder more than their share of the details of administration. But the woman manager working in a properly constituted housing department, visits the applicants for houses, selects the tenants, places them in their new homes and often assists at their removal, thereafter sees them week by week when she collects their rent, and herself attends to their complaints and supervises all repairs, thus keeping in close touch with them from beginning to end and making herself responsible for all that concerns them. Only thus, by unification in one department, and direct responsibility to the Housing Committee, can the manager do her best work. It enables her to tackle the whole problem in a radical way, for she is as much concerned with the prevention as with the cure of slums, and will endeavour to foster the community spirit, and develop a higher social sense on the estates. In all such efforts towards the enrichment of communal life that she may make or help with, it is of inestimable value that she, who is in constant daily touch with the lives of the people, should also have direct contact with "the powers that be" in the persons of the local council and other leaders of public life in the district; and in this, as in many other ways, she can do much to interpret one to the other and bring them closer together.

Slum Clearance.

One of the most important branches of the work in municipalities is that of slum clearance. Much of what has already been said on municipal housing can be stressed yet more when applied to the clearance of slums and the rehousing of the dwellers in slums.

Where there is a slum clearance scheme, and the area marked out for demolition has been acquired by the local authority, the best plan from every point of view is to give the manager charge of the area before demolition begins, so that she can get to know the tenants thoroughly and carry out the entire work of transference to the new houses or flats with the fullest knowledge of each family's characteristics and needs. Where the area is not acquired, or where closing or demolition orders are made for individual houses or parts of houses without acquisition, the manager will make it her business to visit the tenants to be displaced and build up a close personal relationship with them before transference begins. Where an area has to be cleared and there is little or no other

accommodation available, the obligation to rehouse 100% of the tenants is almost overwhelming. Thus there is practically no selecting to be done, but the *placing* of the tenants becomes of supreme importance. A haphazard allocation of houses may result in constant friction between neighbours and a steady deterioration of standards, and improvement can then be achieved only by elimination of the worst elements; but under the Octavia Hill System 100% rehousing is successful, because it is carried out scientifically and is based upon a study of individuals and of their reaction upon one another. Although plans may be upset to some extent by the slowness of operations and the necessity of giving priority to urgent cases, yet it is still possible to carry out a well-considered scheme of "grading" and to assist the rehoused tenant to improve his standard by placing him among neighbours who are congenial, and will be helpful to him without being unduly superior. The important point is to create the right attitude in the prospective tenant by using the psychological moment of the transfer to the best advantage. A friendly approach can do a good deal to remove the feeling of compulsion and to make the tenant feel that his own wishes and needs are being studied.

Much can also be done by trained managers to prevent the transfer of vermin from old houses to new and to instruct the tenant in methods of preventing their re-introduction. Many municipalities employ the process of fumigation of tenants' belongings with cyanide or other poisonous gas, introduced into the furniture vans during the removal to the new houses. The woman manager can do much to overcome any reluctance on the part of the tenants to submit to this process, and to persuade them of its great benefit to their health and comfort. It is generally her job to arrange the programme of removals and fumigations, and to supervise the actual loading of the fumigation vans at the slum house, making sure that no possession, however treasured, is allowed to escape.

When the tenant from the slum has arrived on the new estate, the manager's personal interest, based on encouragement rather than criticism, and her tactful advice about the treatment of some of the fittings in the new houses, will do much to enable the tenant to adapt himself to his new environment and help him not to slip back into old habits.

Differential Rents.

There is also the vexed question of rents in both slum clearance and ordinary municipal housing. It is essential that the re-housed tenant should be placed in a house at a rent which he can afford to pay. Under the Housing Act of 1930 a number of local authorities are now using the additional subsidy to operate scales of differential rents based on income and size of family. Hitherto, the majority of these schemes have applied only to slum clearance, but it is clear that the problem of high rents affects many other municipal tenants and that a different basis of treatment for slum clearance is not permanently justifiable. The consolidation of subsidies under the Housing Act of 1935 increases the possibility of unification of rent administration with assistance to all needy tenants.

In any case, the successful working of rent rebates necessitates very detailed knowledge of the tenants' circumstances and the employment of skilled managers who can gain their confidence, convince them that the variations in rents are fair and explain the objects and basis of the scheme. Where such methods have not been employed and tenants have merely become suspicious of a "means test," great administrative difficulties have been encountered by authorities and schemes of rent rebates in some cases have even had to be abandoned.

By far the best way of administering differential rents is to employ trained women managers, when it will be found that the major difficulties disappear. The Octavia Hill system is peculiarly adapted to the efficient administration of rent rebates. It is based on a friendly relationship between management and tenants, personal individual knowledge of the tenants and their needs, and the employment of trained collectors who see the tenants each week. The women collectors thus keep in intimate touch with the housewives and remain familiar with changes in family circumstances (recorded in carefully kept files) without inquisitorial inquiries. The periodical revision of rebates can thus be put through with the minimum amount of difficulty.

In addition, no rent scale can be operated with absolute rigidity. Discretionary power to deal with tenants with varying incomes and in emergency circumstances, and with special needs and difficulties, must be exercised in certain cases. It is clear that trained officials with wide social knowledge and powers of judgment are needed for work of this kind.

The whole question constitutes a new branch of housing administration. Matters of policy requiring immediate or future decision in the light of experience are continually emerging, *e.g.*, treatment of children's earnings, relations with Unemployment Assistance and Public Assistance authorities, treatment of short-time workers and lodgers, type of scale suited to the needs of the particular area, etc. No scheme can be regarded as static and it must be constantly observed and judiciously guided if it is not to run into difficulties. Officials are needed who are in close touch with the tenants and with public opinion on the estates, and at the same time competent to report on the progress of the scheme, and to make recommendations to the Committee for the future as experience is accumulated.

Overcrowding.

The woman manager's detailed personal knowledge of her tenants and their families is of the greatest value in preventing overcrowding. She will realise when a family is outgrowing its accommodation, and she will keep an eye open for the unauthorised lodger. At the same time, she will know of cases where a family has dwindled and bedroom space is being "wasted," and she will often be able, by judicious transfers and exchanges, to adjust accommodation to requirements.

The Housing Act of 1935 has introduced a definite standard of overcrowding, though admittedly a low one, and landlords who permit overcrowding in their property are subject to penalties. Local authorities are being called upon to build houses with a greater number of bedrooms than those previously provided, in order to accommodate the large families. The abatement of overcrowding will throw a further burden upon housing officials, and constant vigilance will be needed to ensure that overcrowding does not recur. The transfer of overcrowded families to larger houses will involve many problems, such as capacity to pay the rent demanded, and possibly the adjustment of the rent to means, under schemes of rent differentiation or rent pooling, as provided for in the 1930 and 1935 Acts. Here the woman manager should play a valuable part, as her intimate personal knowledge of her tenants makes her aware of changes in the size of their families, and enables her to advise upon such matters as the types and sizes of houses most required, the best situation for the houses and the rents that are within the capacity of the families requiring the houses.

5. NON-MUNICIPAL HOUSES.

Besides local authorities, Octavia Hill managers are employed by:—

1. Companies, Trusts, Private Landlords (including solicitors who have charge of estates).
2. Housing Associations.

1. There are many owners of houses or small estates which are not ripe for development and which at the same time would be very unsatisfactory if not well administered. If these houses or cottages are not overcrowded and are kept in good repair, they fulfil a very useful purpose. Rents can be kept low and there may be good gardens. Many such small estates are found in London.

2. Housing Associations are now springing up everywhere, and almost always employ Octavia Hill managers. These associations may be engaged in:—

- (i) putting houses into thorough repair in accordance with the bye-laws;
- (ii) reconditioning or adaptation of houses, such as turning large old tenement houses into well-equipped flats, converting "back-to-back" houses into "through" houses, or reconstructing old cottages and giving them additional amenities, such as wash-houses, larders, etc.;
- (iii) the erection of new cottages or flats.

These associations usually work in close co-operation with the municipal authorities, who may buy land for them to build on, and enlist their help in rehousing tenants displaced by slum clearance schemes. The advantage of having some of this work done by housing associations is that a voluntary association is in a better position to experiment than a council, and it can be, and often is, a pioneer. Its work can be more personal, especially in the initial stages, and it can cater for needs which a council, owing to its limitations, is unable to meet. Such associations have done and are doing most valuable work in housing the poorest tenants, in rehousing 100% of the displaced population on or near the site of the cleared area, and in demonstrating that such enterprise can be made to show a steady return on the money invested.

In some instances, the employment of an Octavia Hill worker by a housing association has led to her employment by the local authority on certain estates in the same neighbourhood.

A full list of companies, trusts, and housing associations employing Octavia Hill managers, and statistics relating to their work will be found in the Appendix.

6. TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS.

Practical training for Octavia Hill work is undertaken by the Society of Women Housing Managers at a cost, including entrance fee to the Society, of twenty guineas. In addition, students have to meet lecture and examination fees, which vary according to the examination taken. Applications for training should be made in person in London, to the Secretary, though in certain cases students can be interviewed in the provinces. All candidates for training are interviewed by the Training Committee of the Society or members appointed by them, before being accepted as students. After acceptance for training, they are placed in offices under a responsible woman manager, and exchanges or transfers of students are arranged during training in order that all the different aspects of the work on various estates may be thoroughly learnt by practical experience. It is regarded as essential that students should work in at least two offices and, wherever possible, that one should be municipal and one non-municipal. The length of training is from eighteen months to two years; young students, *i.e.*, those under twenty years of age, are usually required to take at least three years' training. The first three months are probationary and this period may be extended at the discretion of the Training Committee. Students must have had a good general education and must be prepared to qualify on the theoretical side by taking either:—

- (1) the Women House Property Managers' Certificate of the Chartered Surveyors' Institution; or
- (2) the Professional Examinations of the Chartered Surveyors' Institution; or
- (3) a B.Sc. degree in Estate Management.

In special circumstances an alternative technical examination will be accepted, such as the Sanitary Science Certificate of the Royal Sanitary Institute, or other technical qualification considered suitable by the Training Committee.

Holders of special qualifications, such as certain university degrees, may not be asked to take any further examinations, but must supplement such qualifications with an agreed technical course and practical work.

Municipal Training Schemes.

Training is also arranged by certain local authorities, and, since the County Borough of Rotherham was the first to institute a definite training scheme, it may be of value to describe it as an example of the schemes which are being started locally.

Under the Rotherham Scheme both graduates and non-graduates are accepted and some payment is often made after the first six months. Students work for one of the examina-

tions specified in the Scheme of the Society of Women Housing Managers. In addition, non-graduates who take only the Women House Property Managers' Certificate are encouraged to sit for the Diploma in Public Administration at Sheffield University. The Scheme is worked by co-operation between the Estate Manager's and the Engineer's Departments, for the provision of further technical experience, and students are also exchanged with those of the Society of Women Housing Managers in order to provide further training in a different type of office. Further particulars may be obtained from the Town Clerk, Rotherham.

Examination Subjects.

A list of subjects for the Women House Property Managers' Certificate is a useful indication of examination requirements:—

- (1) Central and Local Government (Outline of).
- (2) Construction of Buildings.
- (3) Dilapidations (Measurement and Valuation of).
- (4) Draughtsmanship.
- (5) Economics (Elements of).
- (6) Estate Accounts.
- (7) Fixtures and Dilapidations (Law of).
- (8) Landlord and Tenant.
- (9) Local and Imperial Taxation and Tithe Rent Charge.
- (10) Report.
- (11) Sanitation as applied to houses.

The mixture of legal and scientific subjects is attractive to some students and difficult for others. The same person cannot, as a rule, shine at valuations, mathematical subjects, drawing plans, grasping legal points, and writing good reports, and some candidates will find it necessary to take longer over the course than others. A university degree course in Economics, Commerce or Law will help; some Science degrees and a History degree make an interesting background; Languages and Literature naturally do not cover the same ground. From a purely educational standpoint, it is a great advantage to have a university degree; from the point of view of tackling the syllabus for the Women House Property Managers' Certificate, it is unnecessary.

The B.Sc. Household and Social Science Degree of London University is accepted by the Chartered Surveyors' Institution as bearing sufficiently upon their profession to enable the holder to take the Special Degree Holders' Examination of the Institution.

As to prospects, so long as there is a shortage of trained women estate managers, suitable candidates will have excellent opportunities, provided that they are willing to go to any part of the country. The future of the profession depends, of course, upon the number of local authorities and other landlords who decide upon the policy of employing women. The minimum salary for a qualified junior assistant is £180 per annum, rising to about £200 or £210 per annum. Salaries for experienced assistants vary from £200 to £350. Managers' posts again command salaries which vary according to the conditions of employment and the responsibility involved; the minimum salary is £250 and the maximum at present from £350 to £450.

Personality counts for much in all professions; it is of supreme importance in Octavia Hill work. It is no use for anyone who has not a real love of people to embark on this career. Success depends upon establishing the right contacts, on gaining respect without aloofness or condescension.

The work requires vision and attention to detail, grasp of broad principles combined with administrative ability. It requires patience, good temper and a sense of humour. Good health is essential, for rent-collecting in bad weather sometimes calls for considerable endurance and work may take a manager into a stuffy unwholesome room and then out on to a windy roof top; in the course of her experience she encounters all sorts of infectious disease and poisonous smells. On the other hand, she has the advantage of being much in the open air instead of being always shut in an office.

Aspirants for managers' posts must be able to take responsibility, be ready to tackle unexpected difficulties and at times to face public misunderstanding and criticism.

The work is a vocation for those who see in it an opportunity for social service and who are temperamentally suited for experimental and pioneer effort.

7. CONCLUSION.

The financial advantages of Octavia Hill administration may be demonstrated by means of figures showing reduction of rent arrears, economy in maintenance, and so on, but this is only half the picture. The other half, namely that of social progress, is impossible to represent in statistical terms. Something of it may be apparent to anyone who visits an estate some time after it has been taken over by trained women managers, but much more is invisible and intangible, and is expressed in such ways as the attitude of the tenants towards their landlords, in their desire for improved standards of living, in their relations with one another and their sense of community, and in all that is implied by the word "atmosphere."

The local authorities have tremendous tasks yet before them in the clearance of the slums and the abatement of overcrowding, tasks whose fulfilment is causing nothing less than a revolution in the lives of the people. The material cost is enormous and for this reason alone it is the duty of these authorities to consolidate and make permanent the great benefits that are resulting from their efforts. True and lasting benefit in the sense of enabling the tenants to raise their standards of life to, or keep them up to, the improved level of their material surroundings, can only be insured by sympathetic and expert management which takes account of the human element.

The work of the housing associations, too, will be of increasing value in covering the fields not touched by municipal schemes, and in demonstrating the success of voluntary enterprise.

Whether working-class houses are publicly or privately owned, there is an essential need for the best kind of management, and it behoves all who are in any way responsible for their administration to consider the contribution which women managers trained in Octavia Hill principles can give.

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