

# FLYNT JOSIAH

NOTES OF AN  
ITINERANT  
POLICEMAN

**Josiah Flynt**  
**Notes of an Itinerant Policeman**

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# Josiah Flynt

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# Itinerant Policeman

### NOTE

A number of the chapters in this book have appeared as separate papers in the *Independent*, *Harper's Weekly*, the *Critic*, *Munsey's Magazine*, and in publications connected with McClure's Syndicate; but much of the material is new, and all of the articles have been revised before being republished.

# INTRODUCTORY

For a number of years it had been a wish of mine to have an experience as a police officer, to come in contact with tramps and criminals, as a representative of the law. Not that I bore these people any personal grudge, or desired to carry out any pet policy in dealing with them; but I had learned to know them pretty intimately as companions in lodging-houses and at camp-fires, and had observed them rather carefully as prisoners in jails, and I was anxious to supplement this knowledge of them with an inquiry in regard to the impression they make on the man whose business it is to keep an official watch over them while they are in the open. I desired also to learn more concerning the professional offender than it had been possible for me to find about him in tramp life. If one has the courage to go and live with professional criminals as one of them, he can become even more intimate with them than in a police force, but it is very difficult to associate with their class long and not be compelled to take an active part in their criminal enterprises, and my interest in them was not so great that I was prepared to do this. I merely wanted to know how strong they are as a class, in which sections of the country they are the most numerous, whether they have peculiar characteristics differentiating them in public thoroughfares from other types of outlaws, how they live, and what is the general attitude toward them of our police and prison authorities. Partial

answers to these questions I had been able to get in Hoboland, but I was anxious to fill them out and get any new facts that would throw light on the general situation.

During the spring and summer of last year (1899) it was possible for me to have a police officer's experience. The chief of a large railroad police force gave me a position as a patrolman, and, in company of two other officers, I was put on a "beat" extending over two thousand miles of railroad property. The work we were given to do was somewhat of an innovation, but it afforded me an excellent opportunity to secure the information I desired. For two months and a half, which was the extent of my connection with the undertaking and with the force, we had to travel over the property, protecting picnic trains, big excursions, passengers travelling to and from towns where circuses were exhibiting, and the ordinary scheduled traffic, whenever there was reason to believe that pickpockets and other thieves were likely to put in an appearance.

Early in the spring wandering bands of thieves start out on tours of the railroads. They follow up circuses and picnics, and make it a point to attend all big gatherings, such as county fairs, races, conclaves, and congresses. Their main "graft," or business, is pocket-picking, but in a well-equipped "mob" there are also burglars, sneak-thieves, and professional gamblers. The pickpockets and gamblers operate, when they can, on passenger trains, and they have become so numerous and troublesome in a number of States that railroad companies are compelled to

furnish their own protection for their patrons.

This protection, on the road for which I worked, has generally been provided for by the stationary members of the force, and more or less satisfactorily, but last year the chief wanted to experiment with "a flying squadron" of officers, so to speak, who were to go all over the property and assist the stationary men as emergency required, and we three were chosen for this work. In this way it was possible for me to come in contact with a large variety of offenders, to make comparisons, and to see how extensively criminals travel. It was also easy for me to get an insight into the workings of different police organisations along the line, and to inspect carefully lock-ups, jails, workhouses and penitentiaries.

In the following chapters I have tried to give an account of my finding in the police business, to bring out the facts about the man who makes his living and keeps up a bank account by professional thieving, to tell the truth in regard to "the unknown thief" in official life who makes it possible for the known thief to prey upon the public, and to describe some of the tramps and out-of-works who wander up and down the country on the railroads. There is much more to be said concerning these matters than will be found in this little book, but there are a great many persons who have no means of finding out anything about any one of them, and it is to such that my remarks are addressed. Until the general public takes an interest in making police life cleaner and in eliminating the professional offender and the dishonest public

servant from the problems which crime in this country brings up for solution, very little can be accomplished by the police reformer or the penologist.

# CHAPTER I

## WHO CONSTITUTE OUR CRIMINAL CLASSES?

The first duty of a policeman, no matter what kind of a police force he belongs to, is to inform himself in regard to the people in his bailiwick who are likely to give him trouble. In a municipal force an officer can only be required to know thoroughly the situation on his particular beat; if he can inform himself about other districts as well, he is so much more valuable to the department, but he is not expected to do much more than get acquainted with the people under his immediate surveillance. In a railroad police force it is different, and it is required of the officer that he study carefully the criminal situation in all the towns and villages on the division on which he is stationed. Some divisions are longer than others, but the average railroad policeman's beat is not less than sixty miles, and in some cases nearly two hundred. Mine, as I have stated, was over two thousand miles long, and it took in five different States and nearly all the large cities in the middle West. I was, consequently, in a position to acquaint myself pretty thoroughly with the criminal classes in one of the most populous and representative parts of the country. Offenders differ, of course, in different localities, and one is not justified in drawing

sweeping conclusions concerning all of them from the study of a single type, but my work was of such a nature that, in the course of my investigations, I encountered, indoors and out, the most frequent offenders with whom the policeman and penologist have to deal. It would take a large book merely to classify and describe the different types, but there is a general analysis that can be made without any great sacrifice of fact, and it is this I desire to attempt in this chapter.

There are six distinct categories of offenders in the United States to which may be assigned, as they are apprehended and classified, the great majority of our lawbreakers. They are: the occasional or petty offender, the tramp, the "backwoods" criminal, the professional criminal, the "unknown" thief, and what, for want of a better name, I call the diseased or irresponsible criminal. All of these different types are to be found on the railroads, and the railroad police officer must know them when he sees them.

The largest class is that of the petty offenders, and it is in this category that are found the majority of the criminally inclined foreigners who have emigrated to our shores. It is a popular notion that Europe has sent us a great many very desperate evil-doers, and we are inclined to excuse the increase of crime in the country on the ground that we have neglected to regulate immigration; but the facts are that we have ourselves evolved as cruel and cunning criminals as any that Europe may have foisted upon us, and that the foreigners' offences are generally of

a minor character, and, in a number of instances, the result of a misunderstanding of the requirements of law in this country, rather than of wilful evil-doing. I hold no brief for the strangers in our midst in this connection; it would be very consoling, indeed, to know that we ourselves are so upright and honest that we are incapable of committing crimes, and, this being proved, a comparatively easy task to lessen the amount of crime; but there is no evidence to show that this is the case. The majority of the men, women, and children that I found in jails, workhouses, and penitentiaries, on my recent travels, were born and brought up in this country, and they admitted the fact on being arrested. If the reader desires more particular information concerning this question, the annual police reports of our large cities will be found useful; I have examined a number of them, and they substantiate my own personal finding. In some communities the proportion of foreign offenders to the general foreign population is greater than that of native offenders to the general native population, but I doubt whether this will be found to be the case throughout the country; and even where it is, I think there is an explanation to be given which does not necessarily excuse the crimes committed, but, in my opinion, does tone down a little the reproach of wilfulness. The average foreigner who comes to the United States looks upon the journey as an escape; he is henceforth released, he thinks, – and we ourselves have often helped to make him think so, – from the stiff rule of law and order in vogue in his own land. He comes to us ignorant of our

laws, and with but little more appreciation of our institutions than that he fancies he is for evermore "a free man." In a great many cases he interprets "free" to mean an independence which would be impossible in any civilised country, and then begins a series of petty offences against our laws which land him, from time to time, in the lock-up, and, on occasions, in jail. Theft is a crime in this country as well as elsewhere, and we can make no distinction in our courts between the foreigner and native, but I have known foreigners to pilfer things which they thought they were justified in taking in this "liberal land;" they considered them common property. Some never get over the false notions they have of our customs and institutions, and develop into what may be termed occasional petty thieves; they steal whenever the opportunity seems favourable. It is this class of offenders, consisting of both natives and foreigners, that is found most frequently in our police courts and corrective institutions.

I have put the tramp next to the occasional offender in numerical importance, and I believe this to be his place in a general census of the criminal population, but it is thought by some that his class is the most numerous of all. Doubtless one of the reasons why he is considered so strong is that he is to be found in every town and village in the country. It must be remembered, however, that he is continually in transit, thanks to the railroads, and is now in one town and to-morrow in another. In both, however, he is considered by the public to represent two distinct individuals, and is included in the tramp census of

each community. In this way the same man may figure a dozen times, in the course of a winter, in the enumeration of a town's vagabonds, but as a member of the tramp population he can rightfully be counted but once. It is furthermore to be remarked concerning this class that a great many wanderers are included in it who are not actual vagabonds. The word tramp in the United States is made to cover practically every traveller of the road, and yet there are thousands who have no membership in the real tramp fraternity. Some are genuine seekers of work, others are adventuresome youths who pay their way as far as food and lodging are concerned, and still others are simple gipsy folk. The genuine tramp is a being by himself, known in this country as the "hobo." The experienced railroad police officer can pick him out of a general gathering of roadsters nearly every time, and the man himself is equally expert in discovering amateur roadsters. I will describe one of the first men I learned to know in Hoboland; he is typical of the majority of the successful tramps that I met during my experience as a police officer.

His name was "Whitey," – St. Louis Whitey, – and I fell in with him on the railroad, as is the case in almost all hobo acquaintances. He was sitting on a pile of ties when I first saw him. "On the road, Jack?" he said, in a hoarse, rasping voice, sizing me up with sharp gray eyes in that all-embracing glance which hoboes so soon acquire. They judge a man in this one glimpse as well as most people can in a week's companionship. I smiled and nodded my head. "Bound West?"

"Yes."

"The through freight comes through here pretty soon. I'm goin' West, too. This is a good place to catch freights." I sat down beside him on the ties, and we exchanged comments on the weather, the friendliness of the railroad we were on, the towns we expected to pass through, some of the tramps we had met, and other "road" matters, taking mental notes of each other as we talked. I noticed his voice, how he was dressed, where he seemed to have been, the kind of tramps he spoke most about, how he judged whether a town was "good" or not, whether he bragged, and other little things necessary to know in forming an opinion of all such men; he observed me from the same view-point. This is the hobo's way of getting acquainted, of finding out if he can "pal" with a man. There are no letters of introduction explaining these things; each person must discover them for himself, and a man is accepted entirely on the impression that he makes. A few men have great names that serve as recommendations at "hang-outs," but they must make their friends entirely on their merits.

Merely as a hobo there was nothing very peculiar about "Whitey." He looked to be about forty years old, and knew American tramp life in all its phases. His face was weather-beaten and scarred, and his hands were tattooed. He dressed fairly well, had read considerably, mainly in jails, wrote a good hand, knew the rudiments of grammar, and almost always had money in his pockets. He made no pretensions to be anything but a hobo, but the average person would hardly have taken him

for this. He might have passed in the street as a sailor, and on railroads he was often taken for a brakeman. I did not learn his history before becoming a tramp, – it is not considered good form to ask questions about this part of a man's life, – but from remarks that he dropped from time to time I inferred that he had once been a mechanic. He was well informed about the construction of engines, and could talk with machinists like one of their own kind. He had been a tramp about eight years when I first met him, and had learned how to make it pay. He begged for a thing, if it was possible to be begged, until he got it, and he ate his three meals a day, "set downs" he called them, as regularly as the time for them came around. I was with him for two weeks, and he lived during this time as well as a man does with \$1,500 a year. His philosophy declared that what other people eat and wear he could also eat and wear if he presented himself at the right moment and in the right way, and he made it his business to study human nature. While I travelled with him he begged for everything, from a needle to a suit of clothes, and did not hesitate to ask a theatre manager for free tickets to a play for both of us, which he got.

What made him a tramp, an inhabitant of Hoboland, was that he had given up the last shred of hope of ever amounting to anything in decent society. Every plan that he made to "get on" pertained exclusively to his narrow tramp world, and I cannot recall hearing him even envy any one in a respected position. I tried several times to sound him concerning a possible return

to respectable living, and tentatively suggested work which I thought he could do, but I might as well have proposed a flying trip. "It's over with me," was his invariable reply. His fits of drunkenness – they came, he told me, every six weeks or so – had incapacitated him for steady employment, and he did not intend to give any more employers the privilege of discharging him. He had no particular grudge against society, he admitted that he was his own worst enemy; but, as it was impossible for him to live in society respectably, he deemed it not unwise to get all he could out of it as a tramp. "I'm goin' to hell anyhow," he said, "and I might as well go in style as in rags." Being considerably younger than he, he once barely suggested that perhaps I would better try to "brace up," but it was in no sense of the word an earnest appeal. Indeed, he seemed later to regret the remark, for it is out of order to make such suggestions to tramps. If they want to reform, the idea is that they can do it by themselves without any hints from friends.

As a man, separate from his business, "Whitey" was what most persons would call a good fellow. He was modest, always willing to do a favour, and everybody seemed to like him. During our companionship we never had a quarrel, and he helped me through many a strait. I have seen him once again since the first meeting. He was not quite so well dressed as formerly, and his health seemed to be breaking up, but he was the same good fellow. In late years I have not been able to get news of him beyond the rumour that he was dying of consumption in Mexico.

The menace of the tramp class to the country seems to me to consist mainly in the example they set to the casual working man, – the man who is looking around for an excuse to quit work, – and in the fact that they frequently recruit their ranks with young boys. It is also to be said of them that they are often in evidence at strikes, and take part in the most violent demonstrations. As trespassers on railroads they are notorious; they are a constant source of trouble to the railroad police officer. Strictly speaking, the majority of them cannot be called criminals, although a great many of them are discouraged criminals, but in the chapter dealing with "The Lake Shore Push" it will be seen how ferocious some of them become.

The next largest class is composed of what I call backwoods criminals. Scattered over the country, in nearly every State of the Union, are to be found districts where people live practically without the pale of the law. These places are not so frequent in the East as in the West, in the North as in the South, but they exist in New England as well as in Western States. They are generally situated far away from any railroad, and the inhabitants seldom come in touch with the outside world. The offenders are mainly Americans, but of a degenerated type. They resemble Americans in looks, and have certain American mental characteristics, but otherwise they are a deteriorated collection of people who commit the most heinous offences in the criminal calendar without realising that they are doing anything reprehensible. I have encountered these miniature "Whitechapels" mainly on my

excursions in tramp life, but I had to be on the lookout for them during the police experience. In one of the States which my "beat" traversed, I was told by my chief that there was a number of such communities, and that they turned out more criminals to the population in a year than the average large city. One day, while travelling in a "caboose" with a native of the State in question, I asked him how it came that it tolerated such nests of crime, but he was too loyal to admit their existence. "We used to have a lot of them," he explained, "but we've cleaned them up. You see, when we discovered natural gas, it boomed everything, and we've been building railroads and schools all over. No; you won't find those eyesores any more; we're as moral a State to-day as any in the Union." It was a pardonable pride that the man took in his State, but he was mistaken about the matter in question. There are communities not over a hundred and fifty miles from his own town where serious crimes are committed every day, and no court ever hears of them because they are not considered crimes by the people who take part in them. Not that these people are fundamentally deficient in moral attributes, or unequal to instruction as to the law of Mine and Thine, but they are so out of touch with the world that they have forgotten, if indeed they ever knew, that the things they do are criminal.

It is impossible at present to get trustworthy statistics in regard to this class, because no one knows all of its haunts, but if it were possible, and the entire story about it were told, there would be less hue and cry about the evil that the foreigners among us

do. I refer to the class without advancing any statistics, because it came within my province as a police officer to keep track of it, and because it had attracted my attention as an observer of tramp life; but it is well worth the serious consideration of the criminologist.

The professional criminal, or the habitual offender, as he is called by some, comes next in numerical strength, but first of all, in my opinion, in importance. I consider him the most important because he frankly admits that he makes a business of crime, and is prepared to suffer any consequences that his offences may bring upon him. It is he who makes crime a constant temptation to the occasional offender, and it is also he with whom we have the most trouble in our criminal courts; he is almost as hard to convict as the man with "political influence." On my "beat" he was more in evidence, in the open at least, than any of the other offenders mentioned, except the tramp, but, as I stated, the warm months are the time when he comes out of his hiding-places, and it was natural that I should see a good deal of him.

My fifth category is made up of what a friend calls "the unknown thief," whom he considers the most dangerous and despicable of all. He means, by the unknown thief, the man in official life, or in any position which permits of it, who protects, for the sake of compensation, the known thief. "If you will catch the unknown thief," he has frequently said to me, "I will contract to apprehend and convict the known," and he believes that until we make a crusade against the former, the latter is bound to

flourish in spite of all our efforts. He sees no use, for instance, in spending weeks and sometimes months in trying to capture some well-known criminal, as long as it is possible for the man to buy his freedom back again, and it is his firm belief that this kind of bargaining is going on every day.

Although there was no doubt that the unknown thief was to be located on any "beat," if looked for, my instructions were not to disturb him unless he seriously disturbed me, and as he made no effort to interfere with my work I merely made a note of his case when we met, and doubtless he also "sized me up" from his point of view. How strong his class is, compared with the others, must remain a matter of conjecture, but I have put his class fourth in my description because it is the quality of his offences, rather than their quantity, which makes his presence in the criminal world so significant. There are those who believe that he is to be found in every town and village in the United States, if enough money is offered him as bait, but I have not sufficient data to prove, or to make me believe, such a statement. The league between him and the known thief – the man whose photograph is in the "rogue's gallery" – is so close, however, that I have devoted special chapters to both offenders.

Of the last category, the man whom I have called the irresponsible criminal, there is not much of interest or value that I have to report. While acting as police officer I practically never encountered him in the open, and the few members of his class that I saw in prisons seemed to me to have become

irresponsible largely during their imprisonment. Perhaps I take a wrong view of the matter, but I cannot get over the belief that the majority of offenders, particularly those who are ranked as "professionals," are *compos mentis* as far as the law need require. In every department of the prisons that I visited, men were to be seen who gave the impression of being at least queer, but they formed but a very small part of the prison population, and may very possibly have been shamming the eccentricities which seemed to indicate that they were on the border line of insanity. For this reason, and, as I say, because I met none in the open, it has seemed fair to put this class last.

The foregoing classification is naturally not meant as a scientific description in the sense that the professional criminologist would take up the matter. I have merely tried to explain how the criminal situation in the United States seems to the man whose business it is to keep an official watch over it. I may have overlooked, in my classification, offenders that some of my brother officers would have included, but it stands for the general impression I got of the criminal world while in their company. To attempt to estimate the numerical strength of these classes as a whole would land one in a bewildering bog of guesses. It is only recently that we have made any serious effort to keep a record of offenders shut up in penal institutions, of crimes which have been detected and of offenders who have been punished, and it is a fact well known in police circles that there is a great deal of crime which is never ferreted out. There is

consequently very little use in trying to calculate the number of the entire criminal population. The most that I can say in regard to the question is that never before has this population seemed to me to be so large, but I ought to admit that not until my recent experience have I had such an advantageous point of view from which to make observations.

## CHAPTER II

# THE PROFESSIONAL CRIMINAL

In appearance and manner the professional criminal has not changed much in the last decade. I knew him first over ten years ago, when making my earliest studies of tramp life. I saw him again five years ago, while on a short trip in Hoboland, and we have met recently on the railroads; and he looks just about as he did when we first got acquainted.

Ordinarily he would not be noticed in mixed company by others than those accustomed to his ways. He is not like the tramp, whom practically any one can pick out in a crowd. He dresses well, can often carry himself like a gentleman, and generally has a snug sum of money in his pockets. It is his face, voice, and habits of companionship that mark him for what he is. Not that there is necessarily that in his countenance which Lombroso would have us believe signifies that he is a degenerate, congenitally deformed or insane, but rather that the life he leads gives him a look which the trained observer knows as "the mug of a crook." He can no more change this look after reaching manhood than can a genuinely honest man, who has never been in prison, acquire it. I had learned to know it, and had become practised in discovering it, long before I became a policeman. It took me years to reach the stage when in merely looking

hurriedly at a criminal something instinctively pronounced him a thief, but such a time certainly comes to him who sojourns much in criminal environment. There are, of course, certain special features and wrinkles that one looks for, and that help in the general summing up, but after awhile these are not thought of in judging a man, at least not consciously, and the observer bases his opinion on instinctive feeling. Given the stylish clothes to which I have referred, a hard face, suspicious eyes which seem to take in everything, a loitering walk, a peculiar guttural cough, given by way of signal, and called the thief's cough, and a habit of lingering about places where a "sporty" constituency is usually to be found, and there is pretty conclusive evidence that a professional thief is in view. All of this evidence is not always at hand; sometimes there is only the cough to go by, but, the circumstances being suspicious, any one of them is sufficient to make an expert observer look quickly and prick up his ears.

In New York City, for instance, there are streets in which professional thieves can be met by the dozen, if one understands how to identify them, and it is only necessary to pass a few words and they can be drawn into conversation. Some are dressed better than others, – there are a great many ups and downs in the profession, – and some look less typical than the more experienced men, – it takes time for the life to leave its traces, – but there they stand, the young and old, the clever and the stupid, for any one who knows how to scrape acquaintance with them. They are the most difficult people in the world to learn to know

well until one has mastered their freemasonry, and then they are but little more fearful of approach than is the tramp.

I devote a special chapter to their class, because I believe that they are the least understood of all offenders, and also, as I stated in the last chapter, because I consider them the real crux of the problem of crime in this country. The petty offender is comparatively easy to discourage, the backwoods criminal will disappear as our country develops, the born criminal, the man who says that he cannot help committing crimes, can be shut up indefinitely, but the professional criminal, thanks to his own cleverness and the league he and the unknown thief have entered into, baffles both the criminologist and the penologist, and he probably does more financial harm to the country than all the other offenders put together. He is the man that we must apprehend and punish before crime in the United States will fail to be attractive, and at the present moment it is its attractiveness which helps to make our criminal statistics so alarming.

I have placed him fourth in numerical strength in my general classification, and I believe this to be a correct estimate of the number of those who really make their living by professional thieving. If those are to be included who would like to succeed as professional thieves and fail, and drop down sooner or later into the occasional criminal's class, or into the tramp's class, the position I have given the so-called successful "professional" would have to be changed; but it has seemed best to confine the class to those who are rated successful, and on this basis I doubt

whether an actual census taking, if it were possible, would prove them to be more numerous than I have indicated. Seeing and hearing so much of them on my travels, I made every effort to secure trustworthy statistics in regard to their number, and as the majority of them are known to the police, it seemed reasonable to suppose that, if I passed around enough among different police organisations, I ought to get satisfactory figures, but the fact of the matter is that the police themselves can only make guesses concerning the general situation, and I am unable to do any better.

When putting queries concerning the number of the offenders in question, my informants wanted me to differentiate and ask them about particular kinds of professionals before they would reply. One very well informed detective, for instance, said: "Do you mean the whole push, or just the A Number One guns? If you mean the push, why you're safe in saying that there are 100,000 in the whole country, but the most of 'em are a pretty poor lot. If you mean the really good people, 10,000 will take 'em all in."

The cities which were reported to have turned out the greatest number were New York, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburg, Buffalo, Detroit, Cleveland, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and San Francisco. Chicago was given the palm for being, at the present moment, the main stronghold of habitual criminals. Nearly every photograph I saw of a young offender was said to represent one of Chicago's hopefuls, and the pictures of the old men were generally described as the likenesses of New York

City "talent." Chicago's lead in the number of "professionals" was explained by one man on the ground that it is a Mecca and Medina "for young fellows who have got into some scrape in the East. They go to Chicago, get in with the push, and then start out on the road. The older men train them."

A question that I was continually putting to myself when meeting the "professional" was: What made him choose such a career? He is intelligent, agreeable to talk to, pleasant as a travelling companion, and among his kind a fairly good fellow, and why did he not put these abilities and talents to a better use? To understand him well I believe that one must make his acquaintance while he is still living at home, as a boy, in some city "slum." He does not always come from a slum, but, as a rule, this is where he begins his criminal career. In every quarter of this character there is a criminal atmosphere. The criminologists have not given this fact sufficient prominence in their writings. They make some mention of it, but it is seldom given its true significance in their books. The best-born lad in the world can go wrong if forced to live in this corrupt environment. Not that he is necessarily taught to commit crimes, or urged to, although this sometimes happens; they become spontaneous actions on his part. The very air he breathes frequently incites him to criminal deeds, and practice makes him skilful and expert. In another environment, in nine cases out of ten, he could be trained to take an interest in upright living; in this one he follows the lines of least resistance, and becomes a thief.

Let me describe the childhood of a criminal boy who will serve as a type for thousands.

He was born in one of the slums of New York, not far from the Bowery, and within a stone's throw of the clock of Cooper Institute, and the white spire of Grace Church. From the very start he was what is called an unwelcome child. Not that there was any particular dislike toward him personally, but his parents had all they could do, and more too, to care for the half dozen other children who had come to them, and, when he appeared, there was hardly any room in the house left. He grew up with the sense of want always present, and when he got into the street with the other children of the neighbourhood, it became even more oppressive. Pretty soon he learned from the example of his playmates that begging sometimes helps to quiet a boy's hunger, and that pilfering from the grocer's sidewalk display makes the dinner at home more substantial. These are bits of slum philosophy that every child living in slums learns to appreciate sooner or later. The lad in question was no exception. He was soon initiated into the clique, and played his own part in these miniature bread riots. He did not appreciate their criminal significance. All he knew was that his stomach was empty and that he wanted the things he saw in the shops and streets. He was like a baby who sees a pretty colour gleaming on the carpet, and, without counting the cost or pains, creeps after it. He knew nothing of the law of Mine and Thine, except as the thing desired was held fast in the fist of its owner. Not that he was deformed

in his moral nature, or naturally lacking in moral power, but this nature and power had never been trained. Like his body, they had been neglected and forgotten, and it is no surprise that they failed to develop. Had somebody taken him out of his "slum" environment, and taught him how to be respectable and honest, his talents might have been put to good uses, but luck, as he calls circumstances, was against him, and he had to stay in low life.

In this life there is, as a rule, but one ideal for a boy, and that is successful thieving. He sees men, to be sure, who find gambling more profitable, as well as safer, and still others humble enough to content themselves with simple begging, but as a lad truly ambitious and anxious to get on rapidly, he must join the "crook's" fraternity. There is also a fascination about crime which appeals to him. Men describe it differently, but they all agree that it has a great deal to do in making criminals. My own idea is that it lies in the excitement of trying to elude justice. I know from experience as an amateur tramp that there is a great deal of satisfaction in slipping away from a policeman just as he is on the point of catching you, and I can easily understand how much greater the pleasure must be to a man, who, in thus dodging the officer, escapes not simply a few days in a county jail, but long years in a penitentiary. It is the most exciting business in the world, and for men equal to its vicissitudes it must have great attractions.

In time it interested the boy I am describing. At first he thieved because it was the only way he knew to still his hunger, but as

he grew older the idea of gain developed, and he threw himself body and soul into the thief's career. He had been brought up in crime, taught to regard it as a profitable field of labour, full of exciting chase and often splendid capture, and naturally it was the activity that appealed to him. He knew that he had certain abilities for criminal enterprises, that there was a possibility of making them pay, and he determined to trust to luck. The reader may exclaim here: "But this boy must have been a phenomenon. No lad wilfully chooses such a career so young." He was in all respects an average slum boy in his ambitions and maturity, and if he seems extraordinary to the reader, the only explanation I can give is that low life develops its characters with unusual rapidity. Outcast boys are in business and struggling for a place in the world long before the respectable boy has even had a glimpse of it. This comes of competition. They must either jump into the fray or die. The child in them is killed long before it has had a chance to expand, and the man develops with hothouse haste. It is abnormal, but it is true, and it all goes to show how the boy in question was registered so early in the criminal calendar. He had to make his living, he had to choose a business, and his precocity, if I may call it that, was simply the result of being forced so early into the "swim." He ought to have been a frolicsome child, fond of ball and marbles, but he had but little time for such amusements. Money was what he wanted, and he rushed pell-mell in search of it. I will leave him in the company of hardened tramps and criminals, into which he soon drifted, and among

whom he made a name for himself.

The resolution to be a "professional" comes later with some lads than with others. Until well on into their teens, and sometimes even into their twenties, there are those who merely drift, stealing when they can and managing otherwise when they can't. Finally they are arrested, convicted, and sent to state prison. Here there is the same criminal atmosphere that they were accustomed to in the open, only more of it. Go where they will in their world, they cannot escape it. In prison they form acquaintances and make contracts against the day when they will be free again. They are eventually turned loose. What are they to do? The "job," of course, that they have talked about with a "pal" in the "stir" (penitentiary). They do it, and get away with two or three thousand. This decides them. They know of more deals, and so do their cronies, and they agree to undertake them and divide the plunder. So it goes on for years, and finally they have "records;" they are recognised among their fellows and in police circles as clever "guns;" they have arrived at distinction.

Only one who has been in the criminal world can realise how easy it is for a boy to develop on these lines. He who studies prison specimens only, and neglects to make their acquaintance while they are still young and unhardened, naturally comes to look upon them as weird and uncanny creatures, to be accounted for only on the ground that they are freaks of nature; but they are really the result of man's own social system. If there were no slums in this country, no criminal atmosphere, and no unknown

thieves to protect the known, there would be comparatively few professional offenders. The trouble at present is that when a boy gets into this atmosphere, once learns to enjoy criminal companionship and practice, he is as unhappy without them as is the cigarette fiend without his cigarette. Violent measures are necessary to effect any changes, and there comes a time when nothing avails.

Before closing this chapter it seems appropriate to refer to some of the peculiar characteristics of professional offenders. The most that can be attempted in the space of one chapter is a short account of a few of their traits as a class, but an interesting book might be written on this subject.

A peculiar caste feeling or pride is one of the most noteworthy characteristics of professional offenders. They believe that, in ostracising them from decent company, the polite world meant that they should live their lives in absolute exile, that they should be denied all human companionship, and in finding it for themselves among their kind, in creating a world of their own with laws, manners, and customs, free of every other and answerable only to itself, they feel that they have outwitted the larger world, beaten it at its own game, as it were. Their attitude to society may be likened to that of the boy who has been thrown out of his home for some misdemeanour and who has "got on" without paternal help and advice; they think that they have "done" society, as the boy often thinks that he has "done" his father, and the thought makes them vain. Individually, they

frequently regret the deeds which lost them their respectability, and a number, if they could, would like to live cleaner lives, but, collectively, their new citizenship and position give them a conceit such as few human beings of the respectable sort ever enjoy. Watch them at a hang-out camp-fire gathering! They sit there like Indian chiefs, proud of their freedom and scornful of all other society, poking fun at its follies, picking flaws in its morality, and imaginatively regenerating it with their own suggestions and reforms. At the bottom of their hearts they know that theirs is a low world, boasting nothing that can compare with the one which they criticise and carp at, and that they are justly exiled; but the fact that they have succeeded alone and unaided in making it their own puffs them up with a pride which will not allow them to judge impartially.

I remember talking with a Western criminal in regard to this matter, and taking him to task for his loose and careless criticism, as I considered it. He had tossed off bold judgments on all manner of inconsistencies and immoralities which he claimed that he had found in respectable society, and took his own world as a standard of comparison. Generosity was a virtue which he thought much more prevalent in his class. He listened to my objections, and seemed to accept some of the points made, but he closed the argument with a passionate appeal to what he would have called my class pride. "But think how we've fooled 'em, Cigarette," he exclaimed. "Why, even when they put us in prison we've still got our gang, just the same, our crowd, – that's what

tickles me. I s'pose they are better'n I am, – I'll be better when I'm dead, – but they ain't any smarter'n I am. They wanted me to go off in the woods somewhere 'n' chew up my soul all alone, 'n' I've fooled 'em, – we all have! That's what I'm kickin' for, that they give in 'n' say, 'You ain't such Rubes as we thought you were.' If one uv 'em 'ud jus' come to me 'n' say: 'Jack, it's a fact, we can't ring in the solitary confinement act on you. – d'you know, I believe I'd reform jus' to be square with 'im. What I want 'em to do is to 'fess up that I ain't beholden to 'em for cump'y, for my gang, 'n' that they ain't any smarter'n I am in findin' a gang. I'm jus' as big a man in my crowd as they are in theirs, 'n' nothin' that they can do'll make me any smaller. Ain't that right, eh?" And I had to confess that from his point of view it was.

Respectable, law-abiding people never realise what a comfort this caste feeling is to thousands of men. I have met even educated men to whom it has been a consolation. They have never been able to define exactly the compensation it affords them, indeed they have often been ashamed to admit the fact, but it has remained, nevertheless. I think the man I have just quoted enunciates it as clearly as it is possible to be set forth in words. His joy consisted in discovering that he was just as "smart," just as full of resource, just as equal to a trying situation, even in his disgrace and downfall, as the man who shunned his company, who wanted him banished or sent to prison; he had revenged himself, so to speak, on his avengers, a gratification which is more or less dear to all human beings.

Personal liberty and freedom in contra-distinction to class liberty and freedom also count for a good deal in the outcast's life. Besides being independent of other people, he is also more or less independent of his own people, so far as laws and commands are concerned. He tolerates no king, president, or parliament, and resents with vigour any infringements upon his privileges, either from society or his own organisation. In fact, he leaves the organisation and lives by himself alone, if he feels that its unwritten, but at times rather strict, laws bear too heavily upon him. There are men who live absolutely apart from the crowd, shunning all society, except that which supports them. They are often called "cranks" by their less thoroughgoing companions, and would probably impress every one as a little crotchety and peculiar, but their action is the logical outcome of the life. The tendency of this life is to make a man dislike the slightest conventionalism, and to live up to his disliking is the consistent conduct of every man in it. He hates veneer about him in every particular and only as he throws off every vestige of it does he enjoy to the full his world.

In a lodging-house in Chicago, some years ago, I met a tramp who was a good example of the liberty-loving professional offenders. We awoke in the morning a little earlier than the rest, and, as it was not yet time to get up, fell to talking and "declaring ourselves," as tramps do under such circumstances. After we had exchanged the usual cut and dried remarks which even hobo society cannot do entirely without, he said to me,

suddenly, and utterly without connection with what had gone before: "Don't you love this sort o' life?" at the same time looking at me enthusiastically, almost as if inspired. I confessed that it had certain attractive features, and showed, for the sake of drawing him out, an enthusiasm of my own. "I don't see," he went on, "how I have ever lived differently. I was brought up on a farm, but, my goodness, I wouldn't trade this life if you'd give me all the land in the wild West. Why, I can do just as I please now – exactly. When I want to go anywhere, I get on a train and go, and no one has the right to ask me any questions. That's what I call liberty, – I want to go just where I please," and he brought out the words with an emphasis that could not have been stronger had he been stating his religious convictions.

I have often been asked whether tramps and criminals have class divisions and distinctions like those in society proper. "Are there aristocrats and middle class people, for instance," a number of persons have said to me, "and does position count for much?" Most certainly there are these distinctions, and they constitute one of the most notable features of the life. There is just as much chance to climb high and fall low, in the outcast world, there are just as many prizes and praises to win, as in the larger world surrounding it, and the investigator will find, if he observes carefully enough, the identical little jealousies, criticisms, and quarrels that prevail in "polite society."

A man acquires position in pretty much the same way that it is acquired elsewhere, – he either works hard for it, or it is

granted him by common consent on account of his superior native endowment. There is as little jumping into fame in this world as in any other; one must prove his ability to do certain things well, have a record of preparation consistent with his achievements, before he can take any very high place in the social order. The criminal enjoys, as a rule, the highest position; he is the aristocrat of the entire community. Everybody looks up to him, his presence is desired at "hang-out" gatherings, boys delight to shake his hand, and men repeat his remarks like the wise sayings of a prophet. He feels his importance, works for it, and tries to live up to it, just as determinedly as aristocrats in other spheres of activity, and if he loses it and falls from grace, the disappointment is correspondingly keen.

The tramp may be said to belong to the middle class of the outcast world, and, like other middle class people, he often finds life a little nicer in a class socially above him. He enjoys associating with criminals, being able to quote them on matters of interest to the "hang-out," and giving the impression that he is *au courant* with their business. If he can do all this well it makes him so much the more important among his fellows. His own particular class, however, also has advantages and attractions, and there are men who seek his company nearly as much as he seeks the criminals. There is an upper middle class as well as a lower, and the line of separation is sharply drawn. The "old stagers," the men who have been years "on the road," and know it "down to the ground," as they say, constitute the upper middle class.

They can dictate somewhat to the tramps not so experienced as they are, and their opinions are always listened to first. If they say, for instance, that a certain town is "hostile," unfriendly to beggars, the statement is accepted on its face, unless some one has absolute evidence to the contrary, and even then the under class man makes his demurrer very modestly. I have never succeeded in getting as far as this during my tramp experiences, and had to remain content in the lower division, but even there I had a significance denied to men less experienced than I was. A newcomer, for instance, a "tenderfoot," was expected to show me deference, and if I happened in at a "hang-out," where only newcomers were present, I was cock of the walk. Even these "tenderfeet" have a class pride, too, for at the bottom of all this social arrangement there are men and women who have been turned out of every class, the outcast of the outcasts. They are called "tomato-can-stiffs" and "barrel dossers" by the people above them, terms which indicate that they have reached the last pitch of degradation. They realise their disgrace nearly as much as their counterparts who have been turned out of respectable society, and often look with longing upon the positions they once enjoyed, but their lot is not entirely without its consolations, as I learned one day in talking with one of them. "Well, at any rate," he said, "I ain't got to keep thinkin' all the while 't I'm goin' to fall and lose my posish the way you have to. There's no place for me to fall to, I've come to the end o' my rope. You've got to keep lookin' out fer yerself ev'ry step you take – keep worryin' about

gettin' on, 'n' I don't have them worries any more, 'n' it's a big relief, I tell you. You feel the way you do when you get out o' prison." This thought is a little fanciful, and not entirely sincere, but I can nevertheless appreciate the man's point of view, for, with all the independence and liberty of this world, there is, just as he said, considerable worry about holding one's place, and I can imagine a time when it would be pleasant to be relieved of it all.

The financial profits in a professional offender's career are not easy to determine, but they must be taken into consideration in all accounts of his life, no matter how short. I saw more of the pickpocket, during my police experience, than of any other professional thief, and it was possible for me to learn considerable in regard to his winnings.

# CHAPTER III

## THE BUSINESS OF PICKING POCKETS

Next to the tramp, who is more of a nuisance on American railroads, however, than a criminal offender, the pickpocket is the most troublesome man that a railroad police officer has to deal with. He has made a study of the different methods by which passengers on trains can be relieved of their pocketbooks, and unless he is carefully watched he can give a railroad a very bad name. The same is true of a circus, in the wake of which light-fingered gentry are generally to be found. Circuses, like railroads, hire policemen to protect their properties and patrons, and there are certain "shows" which one can attend and feel comparatively safe; but in spite of the detectives which they employ, many of them are exactly what the owner of a circus called them in my presence – "shake-downs." Everybody is to be "shaken down" who is "green" enough to let the pickpockets get at him, and, if pocketbooks are lost, the proprietor will not be held responsible.

A railroad company, on the other hand, is severely criticised, and justly, if pickpockets are much in evidence on its trains, and as they are the most numerous of all habitual offenders, the railroad police officer is kept very busy during the summer

season.

The origin of the pickpocket takes one too far back in history to be explained in detail here, but the probability is that his natural history is contemporaneous with that of the pocket. When pockets were sewed into our clothes, and we began to put valuables into them, the pickpocket's career was opened up; to-day he is one of the most expert criminal specialists. In the United States he has frequently begun life as a newsboy, who, if he is dishonest, soon learns how to take change from the "fob" pocket of men's coats. If he becomes skilled at this kind of "grafting," and attracts the attention of some older member of the pickpocket's guild, he is instructed in the other branches of the art, or trade, as one pleases; I call it a business. An apt pupil can become an adept before he is in his teens; indeed, some of the most successful pickpockets in the country to-day are young boys. There are a number of reasons why so many criminals make pocket-picking a specialty. In the first place, it brings in hard cash, which does not have to be pawned or sold, and which it is very difficult to identify. The "leather," or pocketbook, is "weeded" (the money is taken out) and then thrown away, and unless some one has actually seen the pickpocket take it he cannot be convicted. Another reason is that it requires no implements or tools other than those with which nature has provided us. Two nimble fingers are all that is necessary after the victim has once been "framed up," and the ease with which victims are found constitutes still another

attraction of the profession. We all think we take great care of our pocketbooks in crowded thoroughfares, and on street cars, but the most careful persons are "marks" for the pickpocket, if he has reason to believe that the plunder will pay him for the necessary preparations. It is usually the unwary farmer from the country who makes the easiest victim, but there are knowing detectives who have been relieved of their purses.

A fourth reason, and the main one, is that a practised hand at the business takes in a great deal of money. Twenty-five dollars a "touch" is not considered a phenomenal record if there is much money in the crowd in which the pickpocket is working, and five or six touches in a day frequently only pay expenses. An "A Number One grafter" is after hundreds and thousands, and it is the ambition of every man in the business to be this kind of pickpocket.

Some men operate on the "single-handed" basis; they travel alone, arrange their own "frame-ups" (personally corner their victims), and keep all the profits. There are a few well-known successful pickpockets of this order, and they are rated high among their fellows, but the more general custom is for what is called a "mob" of men to travel together, one known as the "tool" doing the actual picking, and the others attending to the "stalling." A stall is the confederate of the pickpocket, who bumps up against people, or arranges them in such a way that the pickpocket can get at their pockets. Practically any one who will take a short course of instruction can learn how to stall, but

there are naturally some who are more expert than others. A tool who hires his stalls and makes no division of spoils with them will sometimes have to pay as much as \$5 a day for skilled men. When he divides what he gets, each man in the mob may get an equal share or not, according to a prearranged agreement, but the tool is the man who does the most work.

Of first-class tools, men who are known to be successful, there are probably not more than 1,500 in the United States. Practically every professional offender has a "go" at pocket-picking some time in his career, but there are comparatively few who make a success of it as actual pickpockets; the stalls are numberless. Among the 1,500 there are some women and a fair portion of young boys, but the majority are men anywhere from twenty to sixty years old. The total number of the successful and unsuccessful is thirty, forty, or fifty thousand, as one likes. All that is actually known is that there is an army of them, and one can only make guesses as to their real strength.

It is an interesting sight to see a mob of pickpockets at work. It equals football in exercise and tactics, and fencing in cunning and quickness. At the railroad station one of the favourite methods is for the mob to mix with the crowd, pushing and tugging on and near the steps of the coaches. It was my duty to watch carefully on all such occasions, and I was finally rewarded by seeing some pickpockets at work. We were three officers strong at the time, and we had concentrated at the middle of the train, where the pushing was worst. One of the officers was a man who has made

a lifelong study of grafts and grafters. He and I were standing close together in the crowd, and suddenly I saw him dart like a flash toward the steps of one of the cars. I closed in also, as best I could, and there on the steps were two big stalls blocking the way, one of them saying to the people in front of him: "Excuse me, but I have left my valise in this car." His confederate was near by, also pushing. Between the two was the tool and his victim, and my companion had slipped in among them just in time to shove his arm in between the tool's arm and the victim's pocket, and the "leather" was saved.

In the aisle of a car, when the passengers are getting out, another popular procedure is for one stall to get in front of the victim, another one behind him, and the tool places himself so that he can get his hand into the man's pocket. The stall behind pushes, and the one in front turns around angrily, blocking the way meanwhile, and says to the innocent passenger: "Stop your pushing, will you? Have you no manners?" The man makes profuse apologies, but the pushing continues until the two stalls hear the tool give the thief's cough or make a noise with his lips such as goes with a kiss, which is a signal to them that the leather has come up, and is safely landed; it has been passed in lightning fashion to a confederate in the rear; the tool never keeps it if he can help it. On reaching the station platform the front stall begs pardon for the harsh words he has spoken to the passenger, and in the language of the story-teller, all ends happily.

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