

# FLYNT JOSIAH

TRAMPING WITH  
TRAMPS: STUDIES AND  
SKETCHES OF  
VAGABOND LIFE

**Josiah Flynt**  
**Tramping with Tramps: Studies  
and Sketches of Vagabond Life**

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Tramping with Tramps: Studies and Sketches of Vagabond Life:*

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**Josiah Flynt**  
**Tramping with Tramps:**  
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**of Vagabond Life**  
  
**TO**  
**MY MOTHER**

*Embassy of the United States of America,  
Berlin, April 19, 1899.*

Dear Mr. Flynt:

Your letter of March 27 and accompanying articles have greatly interested me.

As you know, I consider the problems furnished by crime in the United States as of the most pressing importance. We are allowing a great and powerful criminal class to be developed, and while crime is held carefully in check in most European countries, and in them is steadily decreasing, with us it is more and more flourishing, increases from year to year, and in various ways asserts its power in society.

So well is this coming to be known by the criminal

classes of Europe that it is perfectly well understood here that they look upon the United States as a "happy hunting-ground," and more and more seek it, to the detriment of our country and of all that we hold most dear in it.

It seems to me that the publication of these articles in book form will be of great value, as well as of fascinating interest to very many people.

*Yours faithfully,*

*Andrew D. White.*

Mr. Josiah Flynt.

# AUTHOR'S NOTE

During my university studies in Berlin I saw my fellow-students working in scientific laboratories to discover the minutest parasitic forms of life, and later publishing their discoveries in book form as valuable contributions to knowledge. In writing on what I have learned concerning human parasites by an experience that may be called scientific in so far as it deals with the subject on its own ground and in its peculiar conditions and environment, I seem to myself to be doing similar work with a like purpose. This is my apology, if apology be necessary, for a book which attempts to give a picture of the tramp world, with incidental reference to causes and occasional suggestion of remedies.

A majority of the papers in this volume have appeared in the "Century Magazine." Thanks are due to Houghton, Mifflin & Co. for permission to reprint "The Children of the Road" and "Old Boston Mary," published in the "Atlantic Monthly"; to Harper & Brothers for similar permission in regard to the papers entitled "Jamie the Kid" and "Club Life among Outcasts," published in "Harper's Monthly Magazine," and "What the Tramp Eats and Wears" and "One Night on the 'Q'," which appeared in "Harper's Weekly." To the Forum Publishing Company I am indebted for permission to reprint from the "Forum" the paper called "The Criminal in the Open."

*Josiah Flynt.*



# **PART I**

## **STUDIES**

### **I**

#### **THE CRIMINAL IN THE OPEN**

Up to the present time the criminal has been studied exclusively behind prison-bars, after he has been caught, tried, and convicted. Out of durance he is his own master, and is naturally averse to being measured and experimented upon by scientists; hence the criminologist has been forced to await the almost certain vicissitudes which bring him once more inside a prison-cell. Here he has been subjected to the most minute examinations; and there exists a bulky literature on the results which these examinations have brought to light. We have volumes, for instance, about the criminal's body, skull, and face, his whimsical and obscene writings on prison-walls, the effect of various kinds of diet on his deportment, the workings of delicate instruments, placed on his wrists, to test the beat of his pulse under various conditions, the stories he has been persuaded to tell about his life, his maunderings when under the influence of hypnotism, and numerous things, anthropological and psychological, which have been noted down, compared, and

classified.

Out of this mass of information, gathered in great part by prison doctors and other prison officials, the conclusion has been drawn that the criminal is a more or less degenerate human being. There are differences of opinion in regard to the degree of his degeneracy; but all investigators agree upon the main fact, while some go so far as to claim that he is abnormally deficient in mental and moral aptitudes, and, in a large number of instances, should be in an insane asylum rather than in a penitentiary. Human justice recoils from a severe treatment of the man who, though an outbreking sinner, bears evidence of being sinned against as well as sinning; and yet, before we can safely fall in with this view, we must carefully consider the theory on which it is based, and its claims to a scientific foundation.

The first question with which to begin a scientific investigation of this sort is, it seems to me, this: "Where may we hope to find the criminal in his most natural state of body and mind – in confinement, a balked and disappointed man, or in the open, faring forth on his plundering errands, seeking whom and what he may devour?" That he should be studied when undergoing punishment goes without saying; but I claim that imprisonment should be considered rather as an incident in his existence than its normal sphere, and that, because it has not been so regarded, we have to-day a distorted view of the criminal and an illogical tendency in penology.

It is now more than a decade since I became acquainted with

tramps. My purpose in seeking them out was to learn about their life; and I soon saw that, to know it well, I must become joined to it and be part and parcel of its various manifestations. At different times during this period, – some of them lengthening out into months, – I have lived intimately with the vagabonds of both England and the United States. In the tramp class, or so near it that the separation is almost imperceptible, are to be found any number of criminals associating freely, either for purposes of business or sociability, with their less ambitious brethren. In nearly every large city of the two countries mentioned I know something about them, and in not a few instances I have succeeded in becoming well acquainted with notorious members of their class. My desire is to tell of the impression they make on one who studies them in their own habitat, that I may be able to show how different is the outdoor criminal from his convicted brother shut in behind prison-bars.

## I

I must first note the species of criminal that I have met in the open. Lombroso and other investigators classify the cases they have studied as political, instinctive, occasional, habitual, and professional; but, so far as my finding is concerned, only one class is of any great importance – the professional. That there are also instinctive criminals, as well as occasional, I am well aware; but they form a very small part of that outcast world that I know

best, and cannot be taken as definitely representative of it. It is the man who wilfully and knowingly makes a business of crime or is experimenting with it from commercial motives that I have found in largest numbers "on the road"; and it is he, I believe, who appears oftenest in our criminal courts. To be sure, he tries to make out that he is not a wilful offender, and often succeeds in convincing a jury that he is not; but this is due to his cleverness and trained abilities.

Contrary to a more or less popular opinion, I must also say that the criminals I am acquainted with are not such because they are unable to keep body and soul together in any other way. The people who go into crime for this reason are far less numerous than is generally supposed. It is true that they come, as a rule, from the poverty-stricken districts of our large cities, and that the standard of life in these districts, particularly for families, is pitifully low; but a single person can live in them far more easily than the philanthropists think. The necessities of life, for instance, can be had by simply begging; and this is the way they are found by the majority of people who are not willing to work for them. The criminal, however, wants the luxuries of life as well; he seeks gold and the most expensive pleasures that gold can buy; and to get them he preys upon those who have it. He thinks that if all goes well he may become an aristocrat; and having so little to lose and so much to gain, he deliberately takes his chances.

I must say furthermore that those criminals who are known

to me are not, as is also popularly supposed, the scum of their environment. On the contrary, they are above their environment, and are often gifted with talents which would enable them to do well in any class, could they only be brought to realize its responsibilities and to take advantage of its opportunities. The notion that the criminal is the lowest type of his class in society arises from a false conception of that class and of the people who compose it. According to my experience, they are mainly paupers; and they have been such so long, and are so obtuse and unaccustomed to anything better, even in the United States, that they seldom make any serious effort to get out of their low condition. Indeed, I think it can be said that the majority of them are practically as happy and contented in their squalor and poverty as is the aristocrat in his palace. In Whitechapel as well as in the worst parts of New York, for example, I have met entire families who could not be persuaded to exchange places with the rich, provided the exchange carried with it the duties and manners which wealth presupposes; they even pity the rich, and express wonder at their contentment "in such a strait-jacket life."

In this same class, however, there are some who are born with ambitions, and who have energy enough to try to fulfil them. These break away from class conditions; but, unfortunately, the ladder of respectable business has no foothold in their environment. No one of their acquaintance has gone springing up its rounds in tempting promotions; and although the city missionary tells them that there are those who thus succeed,

they will not believe him – or, rather, they prefer to believe the, to them, far more probable stories of success which they read in the "Police Gazette" and the "Criminal Calendar." Most of them know perfectly well that the success thus portrayed is the result of law-breaking, and that they will be punished if caught trying to achieve it; but it is a choice between the miserable slum, which they hate, and possible wealth, which they covet, and they determine to run the risk.

Not all of these ambitious ones are endowed with an equal amount of energy. Some are capable only of tramp life, which, despite its many trials and vicissitudes, is more attractive than the life they seek to escape. Those with greater energy go into crime proper; and they may be called, mentally as well as physically, the aristocracy of their class. This is my analysis of the majority of the criminal men and women I have encountered in the open, and I believe it will hold good throughout their entire class.

Concerning their nationalities, I must say that most of them are indigenous to the countries in which they live. In this country it is often said that foreigners are the main offenders, and a great deal has been written about the dumping of European criminals on American shores; but the main offenders, in the open at least, are natives, and are generally of Irish-American parentage. In England, unmixed blood is a little more noticeable. Ireland is said to be the least criminal land in all Europe, and this may be the case so far as local crime is concerned; but more criminals trace their ancestry back to that country than

to any other where English is spoken. Indeed, in America it is considered something quite out of the ordinary if the criminal cannot attach himself somehow or other to the "Emerald Isle"; and nothing has hindered me more in my intercourse with him than the fact that my own connection with it is very slight.

In regard to the ages of the criminals I have met, it is difficult to write definitely; but the average, I think, is between twenty-five and thirty years. The sex is predominantly masculine. For every female criminal I have found twenty males; and the proportion in the United States is even higher. It cannot, however, be inferred that the women of the same original environment are less ambitious than the men; but they take to the street, instead of to crime, to satisfy their love of high living, and they hope to find there the same prizes that their brothers are seeking by plunder. It is a mistake to say that all these women are driven to the street by the pangs of hunger. A great many are no doubt thus impelled; but I believe there are multitudes who are there merely to satisfy their ambitious and luxurious tastes.

As the degeneration of the criminal is said by the criminologists to be physical, mental, and moral, I shall take up the subject, as it pertains to the criminals I have studied, from these different points of view.

## II

It has of course been impossible for me, a fellow-traveler with

tramps and but a casual observer of criminals, to conduct my investigations as scientific observers of prison specimens have done. I have not been permitted, for instance, to measure their skulls; neither have I been able to weigh them, to inspect their teeth and palates, nor even to test their pulse under excitement. It has been possible for me, however, to study their countenances, to get acquainted with their type, as it is called, and to compare it, as I have seen it in the open day, with its pictorial representation in books and pamphlets. As a rule, these pictures are very different from the type that I know. Only in a few cases have they ever approximated to the truth; and why artists have given us such as their models is more than I can understand. In New York I once showed a criminal one of these caricatures and asked what he thought of it. He replied, "Why, I wouldn't be found dead lookin' like that!" – a sentiment which I consider both justified and representative. The trouble is that writers about crime have usually picked out as illustrations for their books the very worst specimens possible; and the public has been led to consider these as true representatives of the entire class. A retreating forehead, for example, and the most depraved expressions of the eyes and mouth are to-day considered typical stigmata of the criminal's face. The majority of those that I am acquainted with, particularly those under thirty years of age, if well dressed, could pass muster in almost any class of society; and I doubt very much whether an uninitiated observer would be able to pick them out for what they are. After thirty years of age, and sometimes



even younger, they do acquire a peculiar look; but, instead of calling it a criminal look, in the sense that the instinctive offender is criminal, I should describe it as that of a long resident in a penitentiary. Prison life, if taken in large doses and often enough, will give the most moral men in the world prison features; and it is no wonder that men who make a business of crime and are so much in prison possess them. Even men who are busied in the detection of crime have more or less similar facial characteristics. I have never met a detective who had been long in the service that did not have some features or habits common to the criminals he was engaged in hunting down; and I know several detectives who have been taken for criminals by criminals, simply because of their looks.

In regard to other abnormalities, such as absence of hair on the face, remarkable eyesight, length of certain fingers, insensibility to pain, unusual development of the lower jaw, high cheek-bones, fixed eyes, projecting ears, and stooping shoulders, which are said to differentiate the criminal from the ordinary human being, I can only report that I have not found them to be any more noticeable in the criminal class than among normal people. In the majority of cases the criminal can grow a beard, and is glad that he can do so. Without this ability to change his looks he would be greatly handicapped in his business; and, as I know him, he usually has a beard once in two years. It has been said that his habit of tattooing is evidence of his obtuseness to pain; but it is not easy to see why. At the worst, it is not a trying ordeal; and the

little suffering that it does occasion is as much felt by the criminal as by any one else. Moreover, those that I know are not so prone to be tattooed as is reported. Indeed, it is considered a mistake to have marks on the body, for they naturally aid detection.

On all these questions of the senses, criminologists have relied altogether on what the criminal himself has told them. They give him something to taste or smell, or prick him with a needle, and his reply is noted down as scientific evidence. How do they know that he has not some object in view in telling them what he does? He may want to appear degenerated or queer, or is perhaps simply mischievous and says the first thing that comes into his head. Until instruments have been invented which can discover the truth quite independently of the criminal's personal testimony, nothing really positive can be known concerning whatever freaks of the senses may have been wrought in the criminal's organization.

The general health of the criminal is good. Up to twenty-five years of age he is as hardy and vigorous as the average person. Although he comes from the slums, he gets somehow a very fair constitution; and if he would only take care of it, he might live to a good old age. When he nears his thirtieth year, however, his strength and vigor begin to fail him. By that time he has served a number of terms in prison, and it is this existence that drags him down. In the open he seems able to endure a great deal and still keep his health; but behind the bars, care for him as the penologists will, he weakens and withers

away. This side of his life has scarcely received the attention it deserves from investigators who find the criminal diseased. That he becomes diseased must be readily admitted; but, as a rule, it is only after society has shut him up in its penal institutions. Stand, for instance, at the doors of one of these institutions when a ten-year convict is released, and see how he looks. I once did this; and a worse wreck of a formerly strong man I have never encountered – a being ruined in both body and mind, a victim of passions which in the open he would have abhorred.

There is no better proof that it is the prison, and not his life and business, that makes the criminal diseased than that furnished by tramps. These men live almost entirely in the open, and, as a general rule, have a harder life than a criminal; yet they are about the healthiest people in the world. In the United States it is one of their superstitions that they simply cannot die, like other men, of disease, but have to be killed. This is what happens to a great many of them. They fall from freight-trains at night, or are found starved to death, locked fast in a box-car on some distant side-track.

### III

Finding the criminal diseased and abnormal physically, it is only natural that investigators should have found him equally abnormal in mind; but this, too, I have not discovered.

Lack of will-power, for example, is one of the first

delinquencies noted in criminology; and yet out of prison and in the open, the will is one of the criminal's strongest points. Most of them have enough of it, at least while they are young, to satisfy any one; and could they but be brought to use it in honest industry, they might become the most successful people in the world. The trouble is that they will do the things which society considers and punishes as crime. They think that they can "get on" faster in their profession than in any other; and they bend every energy to achieve their ambition. Because this ambition is so flatly contradictory to what is upright and honest, it is common, not only among criminologists, but with the general public as well, to speak of the criminal as one weak of will. I think this is one of the greatest mistakes in psychology. Napoleon I, for instance, was instrumental, directly or indirectly, in the deaths of nearly two million people, and was one of the most unscrupulously ambitious human beings that have ever lived; yet his passes for one of the strongest wills the world has known. The unimperial criminal, on the other hand, if he be unsuccessful, is catalogued by prison psychologists as a pathological specimen simply because he wills to do wrong.

This strange classification is doubtless to be accounted for on the ground that the criminal in prison has been taken to be the natural criminal. Behind the bars he does indeed become somewhat volatile, and finds it hard to concentrate his mind; but this is due to imprisonment and its harassing trials rather than to innate deficiency. The strongest of wills would deteriorate under

such conditions, and perhaps even more rapidly than that of the criminal who, from the very nature of his trade, expects and plans for a certain amount of exile.

The charge of impatience, which is so often brought against him, may be explained in the same way; and the tramps are again good illustrations. As a class they are the most patient people imaginable, and are able to endure pleasantly any amount of ruffling circumstances. Where, for example, is there a calmer and more stoical human being than the American "hobo," waiting through rain or shine at the railway watering-tank for the freight-train that shall carry him farther on the road? He will stay there for days, if necessary, rather than pay the regular fare on the passenger-trains; and nothing arouses his scorn more than the dilettante, or "gay-cat," as he calls him, who gives up waiting and buys a regulation ticket. The criminal, after a certain age, often lacks this ability to hang on; but his nerves and general equipoise have been disturbed by imprisonment. Even the tramp is a less patient person in county jails than he is in the open; but his stay there is so short, and the confinement, compared with that in convict prisons, is so much easier to bear, that he soon recuperates. I can write from personal experience on this point; for, as an American tramp, I have had to take my share of jail life, and I have never been so nervous and impatient as when undergoing it. In the open, on the other hand, I have never been so healthy and under control. If a few days' confinement can have such an effect upon an absolutely voluntary prisoner,

what must be the effect of years of this sort of life upon the man who hates prison as he does poison, and is not sure that when he is released an officer may not be waiting to read him a warrant for another arrest? Criminologists who believe in the innate nervous weakness of the criminal would do well to test their own nerves during even voluntary residence in prison-cells in order to estimate their power to disturb a natural equilibrium.

It is also said that the criminal is more or less an epileptic. Lombroso makes a great deal of this supposition; and there are other students of the subject who go quite as far as he does. I have never met a pure epileptic criminal on the road, and I cannot recall having heard the subject discussed by tramps or criminals in any way that would lead me to believe the disorder at all common among them. Among tramps a favorite trick is to feign epilepsy; and I have seen it done with a fidelity to the "real thing" that was remarkable. Whether or not criminals also feign in prison, I am not prepared to say; but if they are as clever as tramps at it, I can well believe that they might deceive even the very elect among specialists.

I have also failed to find insanity common among criminals. Among those under twenty-five years of age, I have never known one clear case; and the few cases that I have known after that period have been men who have had long sentences in prison, and whose confinement, I have no doubt, has had much to do with their mental derangement.

There is no better evidence of the criminal's ability to reason

than the fact that, the minute he is convinced that crime does not pay, he gives it up. Even at the start he is not sure that it will pay; but, as I have said, having so little to lose and so much to gain, he takes his chances. After a time, long or short according to his success, he generally comes to the conclusion that it does not pay, or at least that he lacks the wit to make it successful; and he drops it, becoming what I call a discouraged criminal. There is a difference of opinion among criminals as to how much imprisonment is necessary to convince a man that he is not getting his fair share of the prizes of his profession; but, so far as I have been able to make inquiries, I should say that between ten and fifteen years are enough to frighten the average man out of the business. Some stick to it with even twenty years spent behind the bars; but they are generally those who have been uncommonly successful in making large catches, and have risked "just one more job" in order to win the "great stake" that is to make them rich.

The main reason why the criminal is afraid to go beyond the fifteen-year limit is that, after that time, unless he be an uncommonly clever man, he is likely to get what is called "the shivers" – one of the weirdest disorders to which the human body ever yields. Men describe it differently; but, by all accounts, the victim is possessed by such a terror of capture that each member of his body is in a constant tremor. Instances have been known where, owing to a sudden attack of this shivering palsy, he has had to quit a "job" that was almost finished. If these fits once

become customary the man is unqualified for any kind of work ever after, and usually ends his life in the lowest class of the outcasts' world – the "tomato-can tramp class."

It is interesting to note where criminals draw the dividing-line between success and failure. Generally speaking, they consider a man fairly successful if between imprisonments he gets a "vacation," as they call it, of eight or ten months, and is lucky enough during this period to make sufficient "hauls" to compensate him for the almost inevitable punishment that follows. The understanding, of course, in all this is that he gets the benefit, either in carousals or more practical investments, of the money he has been lucky enough to win. As a rule, however, the plunder usually goes in debauches, and very quickly, too; but the criminal always hopes to recoup himself by a great stake which is to be put away in safety. If he be a man of average criminal wit and experience, particularly the latter, he can frequently secure the vacation of eight months for a number of years. But the more confinement he suffers the more reckless he becomes, and the less able to think carefully; and there are a great many men who soon find that even six months is the most that they can count on. This time, however, is not enough, as a rule, for the hauls necessary to offset the expected term in prison; and the criminal is usually clever enough to get out of the business. He then bids good-by to his more tenacious brethren and joins the tramp class, where he is made welcome by others who have joined it before him. He becomes a tramp because it



is the career that comes nearest to the one he hoped to do well in. Besides affording considerable amusement, it also permits the discouraged man to keep track of the comrades whom he used to know in the higher walks of outlawry; and this is an attraction not to be overlooked.

It is usual to classify the criminal according to the crimes he commits. One classification, for example, makes murderers the least intelligent; vagabonds, sexual offenders, and highwaymen a little more so; while the fraudulent class, pickpockets and burglars, are accounted the most gifted of all. I think this a fair division and one that will generally hold good; but I have found that criminals who commit crimes against property, or the fraudulent class, are far and away in the majority. Their native intelligence will compare favorably with that of the average run of people; and I have been unable to discover any mental defects until they have been a long time in prison. Nearly all of them can read and write very well indeed; and there are many who have read far more than the ordinary business man. I have met men, very low-born men too, who, while in prison, have read through more volumes of philosophy and history than even the usual college student can boast in his reading; and they have been able to converse very wisely on these subjects. These same men have acquired the rudiments of their studies in reformatory and industrial institutions, and have succeeded in continuing them in the libraries of penitentiaries. I know one criminal who in his prison-cell informed himself about a branch of chemistry simply

for purposes of business: he was thought at the time to be more or less crazy.

Prison officials are often deceived by criminals in regard to their acquirements in learning. In many prisons, diligence and progress in study earn as much promotion as general good conduct does; and as the average prisoner has every reason to desire the benefits which promotions bring with them, he tries after a fashion to progress. But what is this fashion? Very frequently this: On his arrival at the prison, instead of telling the truth to the officials who quiz him about his abilities, he says that he does not even know the alphabet, and is consequently given very light mental work. He is thus able to advance rapidly, and his teachers pride themselves on his quickness to learn and their ability to teach. Ere long he gets into a better class, and so on until he has enjoyed all the benefits which precocity can earn. There are other men who profess ignorance in order to appear simple and unknowing, and thus create the impression that they are not so guilty as they are taken to be. Many times and in many cases the criminal is a little cleverer than the people who are examining him; and one cannot set a high value on statistics concerning his intelligence. If the student of criminology could and would eavesdrop for a while at some "hang-out" in the open, and hear the criminal's own account of the way he is investigated, he might learn "foxier" methods of dealing with his subject.

One other fact belongs properly to this division: The professional criminal is not, in his own class, the revolutionary

creature that he seems when preying upon the classes above him. His attitude toward society in general is without doubt disrespectful and anarchistic, and it is usually immaterial to him what happens to society as such, so long as he can make a "stake"; but in his own environment he is one of the most conservative of human beings. There is no class, for instance, where old age and mature opinion receive more respect and carry more weight; and, as a general thing, the young men in it – the radical element – are expected to take a back seat. At a hang-out gathering they must always show deference to the older men, and nothing is so severely judged as "freshness" on their part.

I think this is a characteristic of the criminal that might be turned to good account if he should ever be won over to respectable living: in affairs of the State, provided he had a fair share of this world's goods, he would be found invariably on the conservative rather than on the radical side.

## IV

I come now to the question of the criminal's moral responsibility. Can he be held definitely answerable for his evil-doing, or is he morally insane and unable to distinguish between right and wrong? The instinctive criminal must be irresponsible, and his treatment should be such as we give to insane people. As I know him, he cannot help his criminal actions; it is in him to do them; and the only merciful thing is to put him where he

at least cannot continue his depredations on society, and where, if cure be possible, he may be in the hands of specialists best fitted to help him. But, as I said at the outset, he is not the sort of criminal that I have found in largest numbers in the open. It is the commercial criminal that predominates there; and, as a rule, he can be held responsible for his evil-doing.

It is often said that his lack of remorse for his crimes proves him to be morally incompetent; but this opinion is founded on insufficient knowledge of his life. He has two systems of morality: one for his business, and the other for the hang-out. The first is this: "Society admits that the quarrel with me is over after I have served out my sentence; and I, naturally enough, take the same view of the matter. It is simply one of take and pay. I take something from society and give in exchange so many years of my life. If I come out ahead, so much the better for me; if society comes out ahead, so much the worse for me, and there is no use in whimpering over the transaction." So long as he remains in the business he thinks it only fair to "stick up for it"; and he dislikes and will not associate with men who denounce it in public.

This is his attitude toward the world at large. He puts on a bold front, and, as he himself says, "nerves" the thing through. In the bosom of his hang-out, however, – and this is where we ought to study his ethics, – he is a very different man. His code of morals there will compare favorably with that of any class of society; and there is no class in which fair dealing is more seriously preached, and unfair dealing more severely condemned.

The average criminal will stand by a fellow-craftsman through thick and thin; and the only human being he will not tolerate is the one who turns traitor. The remorse of this traitor when brought to bay by his former brethren I have never seen exceeded anywhere. It was my fate some years ago, while living with tramps, to be lodged in a jail where one of the prisoners was a "State's evidence" witness. He had been released from prison by promising to tell tales on an old man, – who was supposed to be the main culprit in the crime in question, – and was lodging in the jail until the trial was over. Unfortunately for him, some of the prisoners had known him prior to this episode in his career; and they sent him to Coventry so completely that his life in the jail became unbearable, and he almost died ere he could give his testimony. At night we could hear him groaning in his sleep as if he were undergoing the most fearful torture, and in the daytime he slunk around the corridors like a whipped dog. He lived to give his evidence in the trial, and was released from durance; but a few days later he was found dead by his own hand. When the inmates of the jail heard of his fate they relented a little in their hatred of him; but the final opinion was that suicide was the best solution of the problem.

It is thought by criminologists that the good fellowship of the criminal is due to self-preservation and the fear that each man will hang separately if all do not hang together. They maintain that his good feeling is not genuine and spontaneous emotion, and that it is immaterial what happens to a "pal" so long as he himself

succeeds. This is not my experience in his company. He has never had the slightest intimation that I would return favors that he did me; and in the majority of instances he has had every reason to know that it was not in my power to show him the friendliness he wanted. Yet he has treated me with an altruism that even a Tolstoi might admire. At the hang-out I have been hospitably entertained on all occasions; and I have never met a criminal there who would not have given me money or seen me through a squabble, had I needed his assistance and he was able to give it. This same comradeship is noticeable in all his relations with men who are in the least connected with his life and business; and it is a notorious fact that he will "divvy" his last meal with a pal. To have to refuse the request of one of his fellows, or to do him an unkindness, is as much regretted by the criminal as by any one else; and I have never known him to tell me a lie or to cheat me or to make fun of me behind my back.

There are also some things in his relations with the outside world which, in his heart of hearts, he regrets and repents of as much as he does the misdeeds in his own world. He always feels bad, for instance, when he takes money from the poor. It sometimes happens in his raids that he makes mistakes and gets into the wrong house, or has been deceived about the wealth of his victims; and if he discovers that he has robbed a poor man, or one who cannot conveniently bear the loss, he is ashamed and never enjoys the plunder thus won. He is too near the poor, in both birth and sentiment, not to feel remorse for such an

action; and I have known him to send back money after he has discovered that the person from whom he took it needed it more than he.

The taking of life is another deed that he regrets far more than he has been given credit for. One thinks of the criminal as the man who has no respect for life, as one who takes it without any twitchings of conscience; but this is not the general rule. The business criminal never takes a life, if he can help it; and when he does, he expects, in court, to receive the death-penalty. Indeed, he believes, as a rule, that murder deserves capital punishment; and I have often heard him express wonder at the lightness of the penalties which murderers receive.

At the hang-out a favorite topic of discussion is, which penalty is preferable – life-imprisonment or death. The consensus of opinion has generally run in favor of life-imprisonment, even with no hope of pardon; but I have never heard a whimper against the justice of the death-sentence.

It is also true that the majority of criminals regret finding a man in their class who has once belonged to a better one. They are invariably sorry that he has lost caste, no matter what the circumstances have been that have brought him low, and are more likely to help him back to decent society, providing he shows repentance and willingness to do better, than they are to help themselves.

Philanthropists might learn a great deal of charity from the criminal. His idea is that it is better to keep a member of a

respectable class of society from falling than it is to raise some one in a lower class to a higher one – a philosophy which I think very sound.

One more regret which nearly all criminals of the class I am considering have experienced at one time or another in their lives, is that circumstances have led them into a criminal career. Their remorse may be only for a moment, and an exaggerated indifference often follows it; but while it lasts it is genuine and sincere. I have never known a criminal well who has not confessed to me something of this sort; and he has often capped it with a further confidence – his sorrow that it was now too late to try anything else.

## V

Such, in hurried and transitory outline, is the impression the criminal has made upon me in the open day. The mistakes which criminologists have made in regard to his case seem to me to be these: They have failed to take note of the fearful effects of confinement upon his health; they have allowed themselves to be deceived by him in regard to his intelligence; and they have judged of his moral status simply from his "faked" attitude toward the world at large, failing to take into account his ethics among his fellows. I believe, too, that they are on the wrong track in their studies of the criminal's skull. They have examined it in all manner of ways with an ever-varying result;



for each investigator comes to a different conclusion. Far better for criminology to study the criminal's *milieu*; and until this is done thoroughly and conscientiously, he cannot be reasonably apprehended and scientifically treated.

So far as our present knowledge of his case can help us, he himself teaches what ought to be done with him. I have written of the discouraged criminal – the man who has given up crime because he has discovered that it was not worth the pains it cost him. Punishment, or expiatory discipline, if you please, has brought him to this conclusion. Here is good penology for us. If a man does wrong, wilfully and knowingly, he must be disciplined till he learns that society will not tolerate such conduct. The discouraged criminal is one who has been thus instructed. Now that he is a tramp, the same principle must be applied to him again: make him a discouraged vagabond. Such is the treatment which society must bring to bear on the deliberate law-breaker.

If I have studied the criminal to any purpose, it is with the resulting conviction that he is physically, mentally, and morally responsible; and that, though unhappy in his birth and environment, the very energy which has enabled him to get away from his poverty is the "promise and potency" of a better life. And human hope looks forward to a day when, in the regeneration of his class, he shall be born into better things than crime.

# II

## THE CHILDREN OF THE ROAD

### I

The real "road" is variously named and variously described. By the "ambulanter" it is called Gipsyland, by the tramp Hoboland; the fallen woman thinks it is the street, the thief, that it means stealing and the penitentiary; even the little boy who reads dime novels and fights hitching-posts for desperados believes momentarily that he too is on the real road. All these are indeed branches of the main line. The road proper, or "the turf," as the people who toil along its stretches sometimes prefer to call it, is low life in general. It winds its way through dark alleys and courts to dives and slums, and wherever criminals, hoboes, outcast women, stray and truant children congregate; but it never leads to the smiling windows and doorways of a happy home, except for plunder and crime. There is not a town in the land that it does not touch, and there are but few hamlets that have not sent out at least one adventurer to explore its twists and turnings.

The travelers, as I have said, are of all kinds, conditions, and ages: some old and crippled, some still in their prime, and others just beginning life. To watch in thought the long and motley procession marching along is to see a panorama of all

the sins, sorrows, and accidents known to human experience. Year after year they trudge on and on, and always on, seeking a goal which they never seem to find. Occasionally they halt for a while at some half-way house, where they have heard that there is a resting-place of their desire; but it invariably proves disappointing, and the tramp, tramp, tramp begins afresh. Young and old, man and woman, boy and girl, all go on together; and as one dies or wearies of the march, another steps into his heel-tracks, and the ranks close up as solidly as ever.

The children of the road have always been to me its most pitiful investiture, and I have more than once had dreams and plans that looked to the rescue of these prematurely outcast beings. It needs skilled philanthropists and penologists, however, for such a work, and I must content myself with contributing experiences and facts which may perhaps aid in the formation of theory, and thus throw light upon the practical social tasks that are before us.

There are four distinct ways by which boys and girls get upon the road: some are born there, some are driven there, others are enticed there, and still others go there voluntarily.

Of those who are born on the road, perhaps the least known are the children of the ambulanter. The name is a tramp invention, and not popular among the ambulanter themselves. They prefer to be called gipsies, and try at times, especially when compelled by law to give some account of themselves, to trace their origin to Egypt; but the most of them, I fear,

are degenerated Americans. How they have become so is a question which permits of much conjecture, and in giving my own explanation I do not want it to be taken as applicable to the entire class. I know only about fifty families, and not more than half of these at all familiarly; but those whom I do know seem to me to be the victims of a pure and simple laziness handed down from generation to generation until it has become a chronic family disease. From what they have told me confidentially about their natural history, I picture their forefathers as harmless village "do-nothings," who lounged in corner groceries, hung about taverns, and followed the fire-engine and the circus. The second generation was probably too numerous for the home parish, and, inheriting the talent for loafing, started out to find roomier lounges. It must have wandered far and long, for upon the third generation, the one that I know, the love of roaming descended to such a degree that all North America is none too large for it. Go where one will, in the most dismal woods, the darkest lanes, or on the widest prairies, there the ambulanter may be found tenting with his large and unkempt family. He comes and goes as his restless spirit dictates, and the horse and wagon carry him from State to State.

It is in Illinois that I know his family best. Cavalier John, as he proudly called himself, I remember particularly. He gave me shelter one night in his wagon, as I was toiling along the highway south of Ottawa, and we became such good friends that I traveled with his caravan for three days. And what a caravan it was! A

negro wife, five little mulattoes, a deformed white girl, three starved dogs, a sore-eyed cat, a blasphemous parrot, a squeaking squirrel, a bony horse, and a canvas-topped wagon, and all were headed "Texas way." John came from Maine originally, but he had picked up his wife in the West, and it was through their united efforts in trickery and clever trading that they had acquired their outfit. So far as I could learn, neither of them had ever done an honest stroke of business. The children ranged from three years to fourteen, and the deformed girl was nearly twenty. John found her among some other ambulanterers in Ohio, and, thinking that he might make money out of her physical monstrosities as "side-shows," cruelly traded off an old fox for her. She ought to have been in an insane asylum, and I hope John has put her there long ago. The other "kidlets," as they were nicknamed, were as deformed morally as was the adopted girl physically. They had to beg in every town and village they came to, and at night their father took the two oldest with him in his raids on the hen-roosts. It was at town and county fairs, however, that they were the most profitable. Three knew how to pick pockets, and the two youngest gave acrobatic exhibitions. None of them had ever been in school, none could read or write, and the only language they spoke was the one of their class. I have never been able to learn it well, but it is a mixture of Rom and tramp dialects with a dash of English slang.

On the journey we met another caravan, bound West by way of Chicago. There were two families, and the children

numbered sixteen; the oldest ranging from fifteen to twenty, and the youngest had just appeared. We camped together in a wood for a night and a day, and seldom have I sojourned in such company. John had given me a place with him in the wagon, but now the woman with the babe was given the wagon, and John and I slept, or tried to, "in the open." In the other wagon, both sexes, young and old, were crowded into a space not much larger than the ordinary omnibus, and the vermin would have made sleep impossible to any other order of beings. The next day, being Sunday, was given over to play and revel, and the poor horses had a respite from their sorrows. The children invented a queer sort of game, something like "shinny," and used a dried-up cat's head as block. They kicked, pounded, scratched, and cursed one another; but when the play was over all was well again, and the block was tucked away in the wagon for further use. Late at night the journeys were taken up once more, one caravan moving on toward Dakota, and the other toward the Gulf.

"Salawakkee!"<sup>1</sup> cried John, as he drove away; and the strangers cried back, "Chalamu!"<sup>2</sup>

I wonder what has become of that little baby for whom I sat the night out? It is over ten years ago now, and he has probably long since been compelled to play his part in crime, and scratch and fight as his older brothers and sisters did on that autumn Sunday morning. Certainly there is nowhere in the world a more

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<sup>1</sup> So long.

<sup>2</sup> Live well.

ferocious set of children than these of the ambulanter. From morning till night it is one continual snap and bite, and the depraved fathers and mothers look on and grin. They have not the faintest ideal of home, and their only outlook in life is some day to have a "rig" of their own and prowl throughout the land, seeking whom they may devour. To tame them is a task requiring almost divine patience. I should not know how to get at them. They laugh at tenderness, never say "Thank you," and obey their parents only when driven with boot and whip. I wish that I could suggest some gentle method by which they could be rescued from the road and made good men and women. It always seems harsh to apply strict law to delinquents so young and practically innocent, but it is the only remedy I can offer. They must be put under stiff rule and order, and trained strictly and long. Although lacking gipsy blood, they have acquired gipsy character, and it will take generations to get it out of them. Just how many children are born on the road is a question which even the ambulanter would find difficult to answer. They are scattered so widely and in such out-of-the-way places that a census is almost impossible. In the families that I have met there have never been less than four children. Gipsy Sam once told me that he believed there were at least two hundred ambulanter families in the United States, but this will strike every one as a low estimate; however, if this is true, and each family has as many boys and girls as those that I have met, then there must be at least a thousand of their kind.

Another kind of ragamuffin, also born on the road, and

in many ways akin to the ambulanter, although wanting such classification, is the one found so often in those families which every community supports, but relegates to its uttermost boundary-lines. They are known as "the McCarthys," "the Night-Hawks," or "the Holy Frights," as the case may be. I have found no town in the United States of twenty thousand inhabitants without some such little Whitechapel in its vicinity, and, like the famous original, it is often considered dangerous to enter unarmed. Speaking generally, there is a great deal of fiction afloat concerning these tabooed families, a number of them being simply poor or lazy people whom the boys of the vicinity have exaggerated into gangs of desperados. There are, however, some that are really very bad, and I have found them even in new little villages. They are not exactly out-and-out criminals whom the police can get hold of, but moral lepers who by public consent have been sentenced to live without the pale of civilization.

Some years ago I had occasion to visit one of these miniature Whitechapels. It was situated in a piece of woods not far from St. Paul, Minnesota, and belonged by right of appropriation to three families who were called "the Stansons." A tramp friend of mine had been taken sick in their camp, and I was in duty bound to go out to see him. I managed to find the settlement all right, but was stopped about a hundred yards from the log shanties by a bushy-bearded man, barefooted and clad only in trousers, who asked my errand. My story evidently satisfied him, for he led the way to the largest of the shanties, where I found my



friend. He was lying in the middle of the floor on some straw, the only furniture in the room being a shaky table and a three-legged chair. All about him, some even lying in the straw beside him, were half-clothed children of both sexes, playing "craps" and eating hunks of bread well daubed with molasses. I counted nine in that shanty alone, and about as many again in the other two. They belonged severally to six women who were apportioned after Mormon custom to three men. The tramp told me in his dialect that they really were Mormons and came from Utah. He was passing by their "hang-out," as he called it, when taken ill, and they hospitably lodged him. He said they had not been there long, having come up the river from Des Moines, Iowa, where they had also had a camp; but long enough, I discovered on my return to St. Paul, to acquire a reputation among the city lads for all kinds of "toughness." I suppose they were "tough" when considered from certain viewpoints, but, as the tramp said, it was the silliest kind he had known. They were not thieves, and only luke-warm beggars, but they did seem to love their outlandish existence. The children interested me especially, for they all spoke a queer jargon which they themselves had invented. It was something like the well-known "pig Latin" that all sorts of children like to play with, but much more complicated and difficult to understand. And, except the very youngest, who naturally cried a little, they were the jolliest children I have ever seen in such terrible circumstances. The mothers were the main breadwinners, and while I was there one of them started off to

town on a begging trip, with a batch of children as "guy." The men sat around, smoked, and talked about the woods. The tramp told me later, however, that they occasionally raided a hen-roost. Since my visit to the Stansons I have seen three of the children in different places: one, a cripple, was begging at the World's Fair; another was knocking about the Bowery; and the third, a girl, was traveling with an ambulanter in the Mohawk valley.

Not all of these families are like the Stansons. A number are simply rough-and-tumble people who haunt the outskirts of provincial towns, and live partly by pilfering and partly from the municipal fund for the poor. Somehow or other the children always dodge the school commissioners, and grow up, I am sorry to say, very much like their usually unmarried parents. On the other hand, there are several well-known organized bands, and they thrive mainly, I think, in the South and West. Near New Orleans there used to be, and for aught I know they are still there, "the Jim Jams" and "the Rincheros"; near Cairo, Illinois, "the River Rats"; near Chicago, "the Dippers"; and not far from New York, in the Ramapo Mountains, I knew of "the Sliders," but they have since moved on to new fields. Each of these families, or collection of families, had its full quota of children. Very often the public becomes so enraged at their petty thefts that an investigation is ordered, and then there is a sudden packing of traps and quick departure to a different neighborhood, where a new name is invented. But the family itself never dies out entirely.

There are a few children who are born in Hoboland. Now and then, as one travels along the railway lines, he will come to a hastily improvised camp, where a pale, haggard woman is lying, and beside her a puny infant, scarcely clothed, blinking with eyes of wonder upon the new world about him. I know of no sadder sight than this in all trampdom. Not even the accident of motherhood can make the woman anything but unhuman, and the child, if he lives, grows up in a world which I believe is unequaled for certain forms of wickedness. Fortunately, his little body usually tires of the life ere he comes to realize what it is, and his soul wanders back to regions of innocence, unsoiled and unscarred.

I wonder whether there are still men in Hoboland who remember that interesting little fellow called "the Cheyenne Baby"? Surely there are some who have not forgotten his grotesque vocabulary, and his utterly overpowering way of using it. There are different stories concerning his origin, and they vary in truthfulness, I have heard, as one travels southward from the Northern Pacific to Santa Fé. I give the one told in Colorado. It may be only a "ghost-story," and it may be true; all that I know is that it is not impossible. According to its teaching, his mother was once respectable and belonged to the politest society in the Indian Territory. When quite a young girl she carelessly fell in love with a handsome Indian chief, and, much to the disgust of her friends, married him and went away into his camp. It must have been a wild life that she led there, for within a year she was

separated from him and living with another Indian. It is the same pitiful story for the next five years; she was knocked about from tent to tent and camp to camp. Her enemies say that she liked that kind of life, but her friends know better, and claim that she was ashamed to go home. However it was, she went over to the cow-boys after a while, and it was then that the baby was born, and she met the man, whoever he was, that introduced her into Hoboland. She appeared one night at a hang-out near Denver, and there was something so peculiarly forlorn about her that the men took pity on her and pressed her to stay. This she did, and for some time traveled with the hoboes throughout the districts lying between Cheyenne and Santa Fé. The boy became a sort of "mascot," and was probably the only child in Hoboland who was ever taught to be really good. The mother had stipulated with the men that they should never teach him anything bad, and the idea struck them as so comical that they fell in with it. Though they swore continually in his presence, they invariably gave him some respectable version of the conversation; and while about the only words he knew were curses, he was made to believe they signified the nicest things in the world. He died just as unknowing as he had lived, but it was a cruel death. He and his mother, together with some companions, were caught one night in a wreck on the Union Pacific, and all that the survivors could find of him to bury was his right arm. But that was bravely honored, and, unless the coyotes have torn down the wooden slab, the grave can still be found on the prairies.

I cannot leave this division of my theme without saying something about that large army of unfathered children who, to my mind, are just as much born on the road as the less known types. True, many of them are handed over at birth to some family to support, but the great majority of these families are not one whit better than the ambulanter. They train the orphans put into their care, in sin and crime, quite as carefully as the hobo does his beggar boy. These are the children who make up the main body of the class I have been considering, and it seems to me that they increase from year to year. At present the only legitimate career for them is that of the outcast, and into it they go. Few, indeed, succeed in gaining a foothold in polite society. Their little lives form the border-land of my second class, the children driven to the road.

## II

Concerning the children who are forced upon the road there is a great deal to be said, but much of this talk should be directed against the popular belief that their number is legion. Socialists particularly think that hundreds upon hundreds of boys and girls are compelled by hunger to beg and steal for a living. In England I once heard a labor agitator declare that there are a million of these juvenile "victims of capital" in the United States alone. I do not know where the man got his information, but if my finding counts for anything it is deplorably unsound. I cannot claim to

have studied the subject as carefully as is necessary to know it absolutely, but in most of our large cities I have given it close attention, and never have I found anything like the state of affairs which even the general public believes to exist. For every child forced by starvation to resort to the road I have met ten who were born there, and nearly the same number who were enticed there. In saying this, however, I do not want to draw emphasis or sympathy away from that certainly existing class of children who really have been driven into outlawry. But it is an injustice to our sober poor to say that they exist in those large numbers that are so often quoted. Not long ago I made it my special business for a while to look into the condition of some of these compulsory little vagabonds in New York city. I picked out those children whom one sees so often pilfering slyly from the groceryman's sidewalk display. It is an old, old trick. The youngsters divide themselves into "watchers" and "snatchers"; the former keeping an eye on the police as well as the owners of the things coveted, and the latter grabbing when the wink is given. The crime itself is not a heavy one according to the calendar, but it is only a step from this to picking pockets, and only a half-step farther to highway robbery. I chose this particular class because I had often noticed the members of it in my walks through the city, and it had seemed to me the least necessary of all. Then, too, there was something in the pinched faces that made me anxious to know the children personally on grounds of charity. The great majority of youthful travelers on the road are comparatively well fed, to

say the least, and, much as one pities their fate, he will seldom have cause to weep over their starved condition. But here was something different, and I fancied that I was to get a glimpse into the life of those people to whom the socialist points when asked for living examples of human woe caused by inhuman capitalists.

It was not hard to "get in" with the children. Finding that I was willing to play with them at their games in the alleys and on top of their rickety tenement-houses, they edged up to me rather cordially, and we were soon "pals." There was nothing very new in their life, but I was struck with the great interest they took in their petty thefts. In the midst of the most boisterous play they would gladly stop if some one suggested a clever plan by which even a can of preserves could be "swiped," as they called it, and the next instant they were trying to carry it to a finish. They were not what I could call instinctive criminals – far from it; but a long intimacy with the practices of outlawry, though small in their way, had so deadened their moral sense that sneak-thieving came to them almost as naturally as it does to the kleptomaniac. Even in their games they cheated whenever it was possible, and it seemed to me that the main fun was seeing how cleverly and yet boldly they could do so without being detected. I recall distinctly one afternoon when we were playing "Hi spy." A little fellow called Jamie took me aside, and in the most friendly way advised me not to be so "goody-goody." I had been very unlucky in getting caught, and he said that it was because I gave in too quickly.

"When ye hear yer name," he continued, "jus' lie low, 'cause like as not the catcher ain't seen ye, 'n' if he has he can't prove it; so ye 'r' all right anyhow. Ye'll always be 'It' if ye don't do something like that; 'n' there ain't no fun in that, is there?" he added, winking his left eye in a truly professional manner.

So much for their native endowment. Their accomplishment in thieving, I have no doubt, kept them often from going hungry, notwithstanding the fact that there was honest industry at home, generally that of the mother, while the father's earnings went almost bodily into the publican's till.

I found it much more difficult to make friends with the parents, but succeeded in several cases – that is, with the mother; the father I usually found drunk at the saloon. I shall not try to give an account of the squalor and sorrow that I encountered; this has been done in other places by far more able pens than mine; but I cannot forbear making a note of one little woman whom I saw sewing her very life away, and thinking all the while that she was really supporting her hungry children. I shall never forget the picture she made as she sat there by the alley window, driving the needle with lightning-like rapidity through the cloth – a veritable Madonna of the Needle. Her good cheer was something stupendous. Not once did she murmur, and when her brute of a husband returned, insanely intoxicated, she took care of him as if he were the best man in the world. I was careful that she did not hear from me about the tricks of her wayward children. Some day, however, I fear that one of them will be



missing, and when she goes to the police station to make inquiries I should rather not confront her. The main reason why hungry boys and girls are found upon the road is drunken fathers.

There are also children who, instead of being forced to steal, are sent out into the streets by their parents to beg. From morning till night they trudge along the busy thoroughfares, dodging with cat-like agility the lumbering wagons that bear down upon them, and accosting every person whom their trained eyes find at all likely to listen to their appeals. Late at night, if perchance they have had the necessary luck during the day, they crawl back to their hovels and hand over the winnings to their heavy-eyed fathers. Or, as often happens, if the day has been unsuccessful and the pennies are not numerous enough to satisfy their cruel masters, they take refuge in some box or barrel, and pray to the beggar's Providence that the next day will go better.

They come, as a rule, from our foreign population. I have never found one with American-born parents, and in many instances the children themselves have emigrated from Europe, usually from Italy. There is no doubt that they have to beg to live; but when one looks a little further into their cases, a lazy or dissipated parent is usually the one to blame. Then, too, mendicancy is not considered disgraceful among many of our immigrants, and they send their children into the streets of our cities quite as freely as they do at home. They also are mainly at fault for that awful institution which some of our large towns support, where babies are rented to grown-up beggars to excite the sympathy of the

passers-by. I looked into one of these places in San Francisco, while traveling with the hoboes, and it was the very counterpart of an African slave-market. A French-Canadian woman, old enough to be the great-grandmother of all her wares, kept it. She rented the babies from poverty-stricken mothers, and re-rented them at a profit to the begging women of the town. There were two customers in the place when I entered, and the old wretch was trying in true peddler style to bring out the good points of four little bits of humanity cuddled together on a plank bed.

"Oh, he's just the kind you want," she said to one of the women; "never cries, and" – leaning over, she whispered in a Shylock voice – "he don't eat hardly anything; *half a bottle o' milk does him the whole day.*"

The woman was satisfied, and, paying her deposit of two dollars, took the sickly thing in her arms and went out into the town. The other could find nothing that suited her, but promised to return the next day, when a "new batch" was expected.

Such are the main avenues by which boys and girls are driven to the road in the United States. Hunger, I candidly admit, is the whip in many instances, but the wielder of it is more often than not the drunken father or mother. It is the hunger that comes of selfish indulgence, and not of ill adjusted labor conditions.

### III

Of my third class, those who are enticed to the road, – and

their number is legion, – I have been able to discover three different types. The old roadster knows them all. Wherever he goes they cross his path, and beg him to stop awhile and tell them of his travels. They seem to realize that they have been swindled – that the road is, after all, only a tantalizing delusion; but they cannot understand why it appeals to so many of their elders, and it is in the hope that these will in the end put them on the right track for the fun they are seeking that they hail them, and cry, "What cheer?" It is a pitiful call, this, and even the "old stager" winces at times on hearing it; but he cannot bring himself to go back on "the profession," and quickly conquering his emotion, he gives the tiny traveler fresh directions. The boy starts out anew, hoping against experience that he is at last on the right route, and plods on eagerly until stopped again at some troublesome cross-road where he does not know which turn to take. Once more he asks for directions, once more receives them, and so the ceaseless trudge goes on. It is mainly at the cross-roads that I have learned to know these children. Notwithstanding my alien position, they have hailed me too, and inquired for sign-posts. I have seldom been able to help them, even in the way that I most desired, but surely there are others who can.

The children of this third class that one meets oftenest are what the older travelers call "worshipers of the tough." They have somehow got the idea that cow-boy swagger and the criminal's lingo are the main features of a manly man, and having an abnormal desire to realize their ideal as quickly as possible, they

go forth to acquire them. The hunt soon lures them to the road, and up and down its length they scamper, with faces so eager and intent that one is seldom at a loss to know what they are seeking. There are different explanations of the charm that this wild life has for them. A great many people believe that it is purely and simply the work of the devil on their evil-bent natures; others, that it is the result of bad training; and still others, that it is one form of the mimicry with which every child is endowed in larger or smaller degree. I favor the last opinion. In the bottom of their hearts they are no worse than the average boy and girl, but they have been unfortunate enough to see a picture or hear a story of some famous rascal, and it has lodged in their brains, until the temptation to "go and do likewise" has come upon them with such overwhelming force that they simply cannot resist. Each one has some particular pattern continually before his eyes, and only as he approaches it does he feel that he is becoming tough. Now it is "Blinkey Morgan" that fascinates him, and, despite his terrible end, he strives to be like him; then it is "Wild Bill," whoever he may be; and not unfrequently it is a character that has existed only in dime novels, or not even so substantially as that.

I remember well a little fellow, about thirteen years old, who appeared in Indian-scout attire one night at a hang-out near McCook, Nebraska. He dropped in while the tramps were cooking their coffee, and seldom has there been such a laugh on the "Q" railroad as they gave on seeing him. It was impolite, and they begged his pardon later, but even his guardian angel

would have smiled. He was dressed from head to foot in leather clothes each piece made by himself, he said, and at his belt hung an enormous revolver, which some one had been careful enough to make useless by taking out an important screw. It was in the hope of finding one at the camp that he visited it, but the men made so much of him that he remained until his story was told. It was not remarkably new, for all that he wanted was a chance to shoot Indians, but his hero was a little unusual, — Kalamazoo Chickamauga, he called him. When asked who he was and where he had lived, all that the youngster could say was that he had dreamed about him! I saw him again a week or so later, not far from Denver, tramping along over the railroad-ties with long strides far beyond his measure, and he hoped to be at "Deadtown," as he miscalled Deadwood, in a few days. He had not yet found a screw for his "gun," but he was sure that "Buffalo Charley" would give him one.

Of course this is a unique case, in a way, for one does not meet many lads in such an outfit, but there are scores of others just as sincere and fully as innocent. If one could only get hold of them ere they reach the road, nearly all could be brought to reason. They are the most impressionable children in the world, and there must be a way by which this very quality may be turned to their advantage. What this way shall be can be determined only by those who know well the needs of each child, but there is one suggestion I cannot forbear making. Let everything possible be done to keep these sensitive boys and girls, but particularly the

former, from familiarity with crime. Do not thrust desperadoism upon them from the shop-windows through the picture-covered dime novels and the flaring faces of the "Police Gazette." It is just such teaching by suggestion that starts many an honest but romantic boy off to the road, when a little cautious legislation might save him years of foolish wandering, and the State the expense of housing him in its reformatories later on. I write with feeling at this point, for I know from personal experience what tantalizing thoughts a dime novel will awaken in such a boy's mind. One of these thoughts will play more havoc with his youth than can be made good in his manhood, and lucky is he whom it does not lure on and on until the return path is forever lost.

Something like these children in temperament, but totally different in most other respects, are those lads that one meets so often on our railroads, drifting about for a month or so from town to town, seldom stopping in any of them over a day, and then suddenly disappearing, no one knows where, to appear again, later, on another railroad, frequently enough a thousand miles distant. Occasionally they are missed from the road for over a year, and there is absolutely no news of their whereabouts; but just as they are almost forgotten they come forward once more, make a few journeys on the freight-trains, and vanish again. There are cases on record where they have kept this up for years, some of them coming and going with such regularity that their appearances may be calculated exactly. Out West, not very long ago, there was a little chap who "showed up" in this way, to use

the expression that the brakemen applied to him, every six weeks for three years, but this was all that was known concerning him. When asked who he was and where he belonged, he gave such evasive answers that it was impossible to come to any trustworthy conclusion about him. He would have nothing to do with the people he met, and I have heard that he always rode alone in the box-cars. In this last respect he was a notable exception, for, as a rule, these little nomads take great pleasure in talking with strangers, but they are careful not to say too much about themselves. They ask questions principally, and skip from one subject to another with a butterfly rapidity, but manage to pick up a great deal of knowledge of the road.

The tramps' theory of them is that they are possessed of the "railroad fever" and I am inclined to agree with them, but I accept the expression in its broader sense of *Wanderlust*. They want to get out into the world, and at stated periods the desire is so strong and the road so handy that they simply cannot resist the temptation to explore it. A few weeks usually suffice to cool their ardor, and then they run home quite as summarily as they left, but they stay only until the next runaway mood seizes them. I have been successful in getting really well acquainted with several of these interesting wanderers, and in each case this has been the situation. They do not want to be tough, and many of them could not be if they tried; but they have a passion for seeing things on their own hook, and if the mood for a "trip" comes, it seems to them the most natural thing in the world to indulge it. If they

had the means they would ride on Pullman cars and imagine themselves princes, but lacking the wherewithal, they take to the road.

I knew in New York State a boy of this sort who had as comfortable a home as a child could wish, but he was cursed with this strange *Wanderlust*, and throughout his boyhood there was hardly a month that he did not run away. The queerest things enticed him to go. Sometimes the whistle of a railway-engine was enough to make him wild with unrest, and again the sight of the tame but to him fascinating village street was sufficient to set him planning his route of travel. In every escapade it was his imagination that stampeded him. Many a time, when he was in the most docile of moods, some fanciful thought of the world at large, and what it held in waiting for him, would dance across his brain, and before he could analyze it, or detect the swindle, he was scampering off for the railroad station. Now it was a wish to go West and play trapper and scout, and then it was the dream of American boyhood, – a life cramped but struggling, and emerging in glorious success as candidate for the Presidency. Garfield's biography, I remember, once started him on such a journey, and it took years to get the notion out of his head that simply living and striving as Garfield did was sure to bring the same results. Frequently his wanderings ended several hundred miles from home, but much oftener in some distracting vagabond's hang-out in a neighboring city. Fortunately the fever burned itself out ere he had learned to like the road for its



own sake, and he lived to wonder how he had harbored or indulged such insane impulses. A large number of these truants, however, have no good homes and indulgent parents to return to, and after a while the repeated punishment seems to them so unjust and cruel that there comes a trip which never ends. The *Wanderlust* becomes chronic, and mainly because it was not treated properly in its intermittent stage. There is no use in whipping these children; they are not to blame; all that one can do is to busy their imaginations in wholesome ways, watch them carefully, and, if they must wander, direct their wanderings. In many cases this is possible, for the fever breaks out among children of the best birth as well as among those of the lowest; and in these instances, at least, the parents have much to answer for if the children reach the road. I look upon this fever as quite as much of a disease as the craze to steal which is found now and then in some child's character, and it deserves the same careful treatment. Punishment only aggravates it, and develops in the boy a feeling of hatred for all about him. I firmly believe that some day this trouble in so many boys' lives will be pathologically treated by medical men, and the sooner that day comes the better will it be for many unfortunate children.

It is a different story that I have to tell of the children decoyed into Hoboland. True, they also are, in a measure, seized with this same *Wanderlust*, and without this it would be impossible for the tramp to influence them as he does; but, on the other hand, without him to excite and direct this passion, very few

of them would ever reach trampdom. He happens along at their very weakest moments, and, perceiving his advantage, cruelly fires their imagination with tales of adventure and travel, and before they discover their danger he has them in his clutches. It is really one of the wonders of the world, the power that this ugly, dissipated, tattered man has over the children he meets. In no other country that I have visited is there anything like it. He stops at a town for a few hours, collects the likely boys about him at his hang-out, picks out the one that he thinks will serve him best, and then begins systematically to fascinate him. If he understands the art well (and it is a carefully studied art), he can almost always get the one he wants. Often enough his choice is some well-bred child, unaccustomed, outside his dreams, to any such life, but the man knows so perfectly how to piece out those dreams and make them seducingly real that in a moment of enthusiasm the youngster gives himself up to the bewitching influence and allows the wretch to lead him away. As a rule, however, his victims are the children of the poor, for they are the easiest to approach. A few hours of careful tactics, provided they are in the mood, and he has one of them riding away with him, not merely in the box-car of a freight-train, but on the through train to Hoboland.

Watch him at his preliminary work. He is seated on the top of an ash-barrel in a filthy back alley. A crowd of gamins gaze up at him with admiring eyes. When he tells his ghost-stories, each one thinks that he is being talked to just as much as the rest,

and yet somehow, little by little, there is a favorite who is getting more and more than his share of the winks and smiles; soon the most exciting parts of the stories are gradually devoted to him alone, but in such an artful way that he himself fails to notice it at first. It is not long, however, before he feels his importance. He begins to wink, too, but just as slyly as his charmer, and his little mouth curls into a return smile when the others are not looking. "I'm his favorite, I am," he thinks. "He'll take me with him, he will, and show me things."

He is what the hobo calls "peetrified," which means, as much as anything else, hypnotized. The stories that he has heard amount to very little in themselves, but the way they are told, the happy-go-lucky manner, the subtle partiality, the winning voice, and the sensitiveness of the boy's nature to things of wonder, all combine to turn his head. Then his own parents cannot control him as can this slouching wizard.

In Hoboland the boy's life may be likened to that of a voluntary slave. He is forced to do exactly what his "jocker" commands, and disobedience, wilful or innocent, brings down upon him a most cruel wrath. Besides being kicked, slapped, and generally maltreated, he is also loaned, traded, and even sold, if his master sees money in the bargain. There are, of course, exceptions, for I have myself known some jockers to be almost as kind as fathers to their boys, but they are such rarities that one can never count upon them. When a lad enters trampdom he must be prepared for all kinds of brutal treatment, and the

sooner he forgets home gentleness the better will it be for him. In payment for all this suffering and rough handling, he is told throughout his apprenticeship that some day he too will be able to "snare" a boy, and make him beg and slave for him as he has slaved for others. This is the one reward that tramps hold out to their "prushuns," and the little fellows cherish it so long that, when their emancipation finally comes, nearly all start off to do the very same thing that was done to them when they were children.

West of the Mississippi River there is a regular gang of these "ex-kids," as they are termed in the vernacular, and all are supposed to be looking for revenge. Until they get it there is still something of the prushun about them which makes them unwelcome in the old stager class. So they prowl about the community from place to place, looking eagerly for some weak lad whom they can decoy and show to the fraternity as evidence of their full membership. They never seem to realize what an awful thing they are doing. If you remonstrate with them, they reply: "W'y, you don't think we've been slavin' all this while fer nothing do you? It's our turn to play jocker now," and, with a fiendish look in their eyes, they turn and stalk away. Ten years and more of tramp life have killed their better natures, and all that they can think of is vengeance, unscrupulous and sure. In this way the number of boys in Hoboland is always kept up to a certain standard. Every year a number are graduated from the prushun class, and go out into the world immediately to find

younger children to take the places they have left. In time these do the same thing, and so on, until to-day there is no line of outlawry so sure of recruits as vagabondage. Each beggar is a propagandist, and his brethren expect of him at least one convert.

## IV

There is not much that I can say of the children who go to the road voluntarily. I am sure that there are such, for I have traveled with them, but it has been impossible for me to get into their life intimately enough to speak of it intelligently. Even the men constantly in their company can say but little about them. When asked for an explanation, they shake their heads and call them "little devils"; but why they are so, what it is that they are seeking, and where they come from, are questions to which they are unable to give any satisfactory replies. I know about twenty, all told, and, as far as I have been successful in observing them, they seem to me to belong to that class of children which the criminologist Lombroso finds morally delinquent at birth. Certainly it would be hard to account for their abnormal criminal sense on any other ground. They take to the road as to their normal element, and are on it but a short time ere they know almost as much as the oldest travelers. Their minds seem bent toward crime and vagabondage, and their intuitive powers almost uncanny. To hear them talk makes one think, if he shuts his eyes, that he is in the presence of trained criminal artists, and I have

sometimes imagined that they were not children, but dwarfed men born out of due time. They undertake successfully some of the most dangerous robberies in the world, and come off scot-free, so that old and experienced thieves simply stare and wonder. The temptation is to think that they are accidents, but they recur so frequently as to demand a theory of origin and existence. They are, I do not doubt, the product of criminal breeding, and are just as much admired in the criminal world as are the feats of some *Wunderkind*, for instance, among musicians. Watch the scene in an outcasts' den when one of these queer little creatures comes in, and you may see the very same thing that goes on in the "artist's box" at some concert where a prodigy is performing. The people swarm around him, pet him, make him laugh and talk, till the proprietor finds him a valuable drawing card for the establishment. The child himself seldom realizes his importance, and, when off duty, plays at games in keeping with his age. The instant business is suggested, however, his countenance assumes a most serious air, and it is then that one wonders whether he is not, after all, some skilful old soul traveling back through life in a fresh young body. Indeed, there is so much in his case that appeals to my sense of wonder that I simply cannot study him for what he is; but there are those who can do this, and I promise them a most interesting field of observation. I know enough about it to believe that if it can be thoroughly explored there will be a great change in the punishment of criminals. These boys have in them in largest measure what the entire body

of moral delinquents possesses in some degree; and when these baffling characteristics have been definitely analyzed and placed, penology will start on a fresh course.

It may be worth while to say what I can about their physical appearance. The most of them have seemed to me to have fairly well-formed bodies, but something out of the ordinary in their eyes, and in a few cases in the entire face. Sometimes the left eye has drooped very noticeably, and one boy that I recall had something akin to a description I once heard of the "evil eye." It was a gipsy who explained it to me; and if he was right, that a "little curtain," capable of falling over the eyeball at will, is the main curiosity, then this boy had the evil eye. He could throw a film over his eye in the most distressing fashion, and delighted in the power to do so; indeed, it was his main way of teasing people. He knew that it was not a pleasant sight, and if he had a petty grudge to gratify, he chose this very effective torment. Concerning the faces, it is difficult to explain just what was the matter. They were not exactly deformed, but there was a peculiar depravity about them that one could but notice instantly. At times I fancied that it was in the arrangement of features rather than acquired expression of the life; but there were cases where the effects of evil environment and cruel abuse were plain to see. I have sometimes taken the pains to look up the parents of a child who thus interested me, but I could not discover any similar depravity in their countenances. There was depravity there, to be sure, but of a different kind. I believe that the parents of

these children, and especially the mothers, could tell a great deal concerning them, and the theorists in criminology will never be thoroughly equipped for their work till all this evidence has been heard.

The foregoing is but a partial summary of several years' experience with the children of the road. It is far from being what I should like to write about them, but perhaps enough has been said to forestate the problem as it appears to one who has traveled with these children and learned to know them "in the open." Surely there is kindness and ingenuity enough in the world to devise a plan or a system by which they may be snatched from the road and restored to their better selves. Surely, too, these little epitomes of *Wanderlust*, and even of crime, are not to baffle philanthropy and science forever. I feel sure that, whatever may be the answer to the thousand questions which center in this problem, one thing can be done, and done at once. Wherever law is able to deal with these children, let it be done on the basis of an intelligent classification. In punishing them for their misdemeanors and crimes, let them not be tumbled indiscriminately into massive reform institutions, officered by political appointment and managed with an eye to the immediate interests of the taxpayer instead of the welfare of the inmates. The one practical resource that lies nearest to our hand as philanthropic sociologists is the reform of the reformatories. We may not hope to reach in many generations the last sources of juvenile crime, but we are deserving of a far worse punishment



than these moral delinquents if, being well born and well bred, we do not set ourselves resolutely to the bettering of penal conditions once imposed.

First of all, we must have a humane and scientific separation of the inmates in all these reformatories. Sex, age, height, and weight are not the only things to be taken into consideration when dealing with erring children. Birth, temperament, habits, education, and experience are questions of far more vital importance, and it is no unreasonable demand upon the State that careful attention to each of these points be required in the scheme of such institutions. Put an ambulanter's child with a simple runaway boy, and there will be two ambulanter's; associate a youngster with the passion to be tough with a companion innately criminal, and the latter will be the leader. The law of the survival of the fittest is just as operative in low life as in any other. In such spheres the worst natures are the fittest, and the partially good must yield to them unless zealously defended by outside help. It is suicidal to put them together, and wherever this is done, especially among children, there need be no surprise if criminals, and not citizens, are developed.

Second, the management of reformatories should be in scientific hands; and just here I am constrained to plead for the training of young men and women for the rare usefulness that awaits them in such institutions. It is to these places that the children I have been describing will have to go, and, with all respect to the officials now in charge, I believe that there

are apt and gifted young men and women in this country who could bring to them invaluable assistance, if they could only be persuaded to train for it and to offer it. I do not know why it is, but for some reason these institutions do not yet appeal to any large number of students who intend taking service in the ranks of reform. The university settlement attracts many, and this is one of the finest manifestations of the universal brotherhood which is to be. Meanwhile, there is a moral hospital service to be carried on in penal and reformatory houses. Shall it be done by raw, untrained hands, by selfish quacks, or by careful, scientific students! Must the moral nurse and physician be chosen for his ability to control votes, or to treat his patients with skilled attention and consideration? If the treatment of physical disease offers attractions that call thousands upon thousands of young men and women into the nursing and medical professions, here is a field even more fascinating to the student, and so full of opportunity and interesting employment that it will be a matter of wonder if the supply does not speedily exceed the demand.

There is one thing more. Reformatories, planned, officered, and conducted according to the principles of scientific philanthropy, should be stationed, not at the end of the road, but at the junction of all by-paths that leads into it.

# III

## CLUB LIFE AMONG OUTCASTS

### I

One of the first noticeable features of low life is its gregariousness. To be alone, except in a few cases where a certain morbidity and peculiar fondness for isolation prevail, is almost the worst punishment that can befall the outcast. There is a variety of causes for this, but I think the main one is the desire to feel that although he is forbidden the privileges and rights of a polite society, he can nevertheless identify himself with just as definite and exclusive a community as the one he has been turned out of.

His specialty in crime and rowdyism determines the particular form and direction of his social life. If he is a tramp he wants to know his partners, and the same instinct prevails in all other fields of outlawry. In time, and as he comes to see that his world is a large one, – so large, in fact, that he can never understand it all, – he chooses as he can those particular "pals" with whom he can get on the easiest. Out of this choice there develops what I call the outcast's club. He himself calls it a gang, and his clubhouse a "hang-out." It is of such clubs that I want to write in this chapter. I do not pretend to know all of them. Far from it! And

some of those that I know are too vile for description; but the various kinds that I can describe, I have chosen those which are the most representative.

## II

Low life as I know it in America is composed of three distinct classes, and they are called, in outcasts' slang, the "Kids," the "Natives," and the "Old Bucks." The Kids, as their name suggests, are boys and girls, the Natives are the middle-aged outcasts, and the Old Bucks are the superannuated. Each of these classes has clubs corresponding in character and purpose to the age of the members.

The clubs of the Kids are composed mainly of mischievous children and instinctively criminal children. As a rule, they are organized by boys alone, but I have known girls also to take part in their proceedings. The lads are usually between ten and fifteen years old. Sometimes they live at home with their parents, if they have any, and sometimes in lodging-houses. They get their living, such as it is, by rag-picking, selling newspapers, blacking boots, and doing odd errands fitted to their strength. None of them, not even the criminally inclined, are able to steal enough to support themselves.

To illustrate, I shall take two clubs which I knew, one in Chicago, and one in Cincinnati. The Chicago club belonged exclusively to a set of lads on the North Side who called

themselves the "Wildcats." The most of them were homeless little fellows who lived in that district as newsboys and boot-blacks. They numbered about twenty, and although they had no officially elected leader, a little fellow called Fraxy was nevertheless a recognized "president," and was supposed to know more about the city and certain tricks than the rest, and I think it was he who started the club. He was an attractive lad, capable of exercising considerable influence over his companions, and I can easily understand how he persuaded them to form the club. For personality counts for as much in low life as it does in "high life," and little Fraxy had a remarkably magnetic one. He drew boys to him wherever he went, and before going to Chicago had organized a similar club in Toledo, Ohio.

The club-house of the Wildcats was a little cave which they had dug in a cabbage-field on the outskirts of the city. Here they gathered nearly every night in the week to smoke cigarettes, read dime novels or hear them read, tell tales, crack jokes, and plan their mischievous raids on the neighboring districts. The cave contained a brickwork stove, some benches, some old pots and cans, one or two obscene pictures, and an old shoe-box, in which were stored from time to time various things to eat.

The youngest boy was ten and the oldest fourteen, and as I remember them they were not especially bad boys. I have often sat with them and listened to their stories and jokes, and although they could swear, and a few could drink like drunkards, the most of them had hearts still kind. But they were intensely

mischievous. The more nuisances they could commit the happier they were; and the odd part of it all was that their misdemeanors never brought them the slightest profit, and were remarkable for nothing but their wantonness. I remember particularly one night when they stoned an old church simply because Fraxy had suggested it as sport. They left their cave about nine o'clock and went to a stone-pile near at hand, where they filled their pockets full of rocks. Then they started off pell-mell for the church, the windows of which they "peppered 'n' salted" till they looked like "'skeeter-nettin's," as Fraxy said. The moment they had finished they scampered into town and brought up at various lodging-houses.

They never thieved or begged while I knew them, and not one of them had what could be called a criminal habit. They were simply full of boyishness, and having no homes, no parents, no friends, no refined instincts, it is no wonder that they worked off their animal spirits in pranks of this sort. Sometimes they used to take their girl friends out to the cave, too, and enlist them for a while in the same mischievous work that I have described; but they always treated them kindly, and spoke of them as their "dear little kidsy-widsies." The girls helped to make the cave more homelike, and the lads appreciated every decoration and knickknack given them.

Every city has clubs like this. They are a natural consequence of slum life, and to better them it is first necessary to better the slums themselves. Sunday-school lessons will not accomplish

this; reading-rooms will not accomplish it; gymnasiums will not accomplish it; and nothing that I know of will accomplish it except personal contact with some man or boy who is willing to live among them and show them, as he alone can, a better life. There are many young men in the world who have remarkable ability, I believe, for just such work, if they would only go into it. By this I do not necessarily mean joining some organization or "settlement"; I mean that the would-be helper shall live his own individual life among these people, learn to understand their whims and passions, and try to be of use to them as a personal friend. If he is especially adapted to dealing with boys, he has only to take up his residence in any slum in any city, and he will find plenty to do. But whatever he does, he must not let them think that he is among them as a reformer.

### III

The club in Cincinnati was of a different kind. It is true that it consisted of young boys, and that some of them were boot-blacks and newsboys, but in other respects they were different. Their club name was the "Sneakers," and their hang-out was an old deserted house-boat, which lay stranded on the river-bank about a mile or so out of town. Some of them had homes, but the majority lived in lodging-houses or on the boat. When I first knew them they had been organized about three months, and a few of them had already been caught and sent to the reform

school. Their business was stealing, pure and simple. Old metals were the things they looked for chiefly, because they were the handiest to get at. They had had no training in picking pockets or "sly work" of any particular sort, but they did know some untenanted houses, and these they entered and cut away the lead pipes to sell to dealers in such wares. Sometimes they also broke into engine-houses, and, if possible, unscrewed the brass-work on the engines, and I have even known them to take the wheels off wagons to get the tires. Their boat was their storehouse until the excitement over the theft had subsided, and then they persuaded some tramp or town "tough" to dispose of their goods. They never made very much profit, but enough to keep up interest in further crimes.

I became acquainted with them through an old vagabond in Cincinnati who helped them now and then. He took me out to see them one night, and I had a good opportunity to learn what their club was made of. Most of the lads were over fourteen years of age, and two had already been twice in reform schools in different States. These two were the leaders, and mainly, I think, on account of certain tough airs which they "put on." They talked criminal slang, and had an all-wise tone that was greatly liked by the other boys. They were all saturated with criminal ideas, and their faces gave evidence of crooked characteristics. How they came to club together is probably best explained by the older vagabond. I asked him how he accounted for such an organization, and he replied:



"Got it in 'em, I guess. It's the only reason I know. Some kids always is that way. The devil's born in 'em."

I think that is true, and I still consider it the best explanation of the Sneakers. They were criminals by instinct, and such boys, just as mischievous boys, drift together and combine plots and schemes. I know of other boys of the same type who, instead of stealing, burn barns and outhouses. Young as they are, their moral obliquity is so definitely developed that they do such things passionately. They like to see the blaze, and yet when asked wherein the fun lies, they cannot tell.

How to reform such boys is a question which, I think, has never been settled satisfactorily. For one, I do not believe that they can ever be helped by any clubs organized for their improvement. They have no interest in such things, and none can be awakened strong enough to kill their interest in criminal practices. They are mentally maimed, and practically belong in an insane asylum. In saying this I do not wish to be understood as paying tribute to the "fad" of some philanthropic circles, which regard the criminal as either diseased or delinquent – as born lacking in mental and moral aptitudes, or perverted through no fault of his own. Without any attempt to tone down the reproach of criminality, or to account for the facts by heredity or environment, it still remains true that in thousands of cases there is as direct evidence of insanity in a boy's crimes and misdemeanors as in a man's, and I firmly believe that a more scientific century will institute medical treatment of juvenile

crime, and found reform schools where the cure of insanity will be as much an object as moral instruction and character-building.

## IV

Club life among the Natives, – the older outcasts, – although in many respects quite different from that of the Kids, is in some ways strikingly similar. There are, for instance, young rowdies and roughs whose main pleasures are mischief and petty misdemeanors, just as among the young boys in Chicago. But in place of breaking church windows and turning over horse-blocks, they join what are called "scrappin' gangs," and spend most of their time in fighting hostile clubs of the same order. They are not clever enough as yet to become successful criminals; they are too brutal and impolite to do profitable begging, and as rowdyism is about the only thing they can take part in, their associations become pugilistic clubs.

How these originated is an open question even among the rowdies themselves. My own explanation of their origin is this: Every community, if it is at all complex and varied, has different sets of outcasts and ne'er-do-wells, just as it has varieties of respectable people. In time these different sets appropriate, often quite accidentally, territories of their own. One set, for example, will live mainly on the east side of a city, and another set on the west side. After some residence in their distinct quarters, local prejudices and habits are formed, and, what is more to the

point, a local patriotism grows. The east-sider thinks his hang-outs and dives are the best, and the west-sider thinks the same of his. Out of this conceit there comes invariably a class hatred, which grows, and finally develops into the "scrappin' gangs," the purpose of which is to defend the pride of each separate district. In New York I know of over half a dozen of these pugnacious organizations, and they fight for as many different territories. I have seen in one club young and old of both sexes joined together to defend their "kentry," as they called the street or series of streets in which they lived. The majority of the real fighters, however, are powerful fellows between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two. Sometimes they live at home, and a few pretend to do some work, but most of them are loafers, who spend their time in drinking, gambling, and petty thieving. They usually sleep in old tenements and cheap lodging-houses, and in the daytime they are either in the streets or at some dive supported mainly by their patronage.

I knew such a place in the city of New York, on the East Side, and not far from the Brooklyn Bridge. It was kept by an Irishman, and he had no customers other than those belonging to a "scrappin' gang" called the "Rappers." There were two rooms – one fronting on the street, and used as a bar-room; the other, in the rear, was the gambling-and "practisin'" – room. Here they came every night, played cards, drank stale beer, and exercised themselves in fisticuffing and "scrappin'." I visited them one night, and saw some of their movements, as they called

the various triangles and circles which they formed as strategic guards when attacking the hostile gangs of the West Side. One of them they nicknamed the "V gag," and prided themselves on its efficiency. It was simply a triangle which they formed to charge the better into the ranks of their enemies, and it reminded me strongly of football tactics.

That same night they were to scuffle with a West-Side gang called the "Ducks," as one of their members had been insulted by one of the Duck gang. Battle was to be joined in a certain alley not far from Eighth Avenue, and they started out, their pockets full of stones, in companies of two and three, to meet later in the alley. I accompanied the leader, a fellow called the "slugger," and reached the alley about eleven o'clock. He wanted me to give my assistance, but I told him that I could play war correspondent much better, and so was excused from action. And it was action indeed. They had hardly reached the battle-ground before the Ducks were upon them, and rocks flew and fists punched in a most terrific manner. Noses bled, coats were torn, hats were lost, and black eyes became the fashion. This went on for about fifteen minutes, and the battle was over. The Rappers were defeated fairly and squarely, but, as the slugger said, when we were all at the hang-out again, "we mought 'a' licked 'em ef we'd 'a' had 'em over here."

Such is the "scrappin' gang." Every large city supports one or two, and London has a score of them. They make some of its districts uninhabitable for respectable persons, and woe to the

man who tries to interfere with them. As their members die or grow old, younger fellows come forward, often enough out of the very boys' clubs I have described, and take the place of the departed heroes. This is what rowdies call life.

Like the famous *Studenten-Corps* in Germany, they need some sort of rough excitement, and the bloodier it is the happier they are. They have so much heart in them that no ordinary exercise relieves it, and they institute these foolish fighting clubs. It is possible that some sweet-natured philanthropist might go among them and accomplish wonders. In London the Salvation Army has done some splendid work with these same rowdies, and I know personally several who are to-day respectable working-men. But as for organizing polite clubs among them on any large scale, I think it impossible.

## V

Among the other Natives, club life, as a rule, centers around the saloon, where they gather to exchange news bulletins and meet their cronies. There are varieties of these saloons, corresponding to the varieties of outcasts, and in Chicago there are over twenty, each one of which is supported by a different clique and species; but these are not exactly clubs. The saloons are meeting-places more than anything else, or a sort of post-office. In the main they are very much like any other saloon, except that their *clientèle* comes principally from the outcasts'

world; and about all the life they afford is a boisterous joviality, which seldom takes definite shape. It is proper to say right here that criminal outcasts, as a rule, never form clubs so marked in individuality as the "scrappin' gang." The thief, the burglar, the pickpocket, and other "professionals," although gregarious and friendly enough, do not organize simply for the sake of sociability. When they combine it is more for the sake of business than anything else, and whatever social life they seem to need is furnished them at the saloon or some private hang-out. This is also true to a great extent of all the Natives who have passed their thirtieth year. At that age they are usually so sobered, and have seen so much of the world, that they cannot get much pleasure out of the clubs that the younger men enjoy. The "scrappin' gang" no more appeals to them as a pastime or a source of happiness than it does to an old rounder. They feel happier in simply sitting on a bench in a saloon and talking over old times or planning new adventures. Whatever excitement remains for them in life is found mainly in carousals. Of these I have seen a goodly number, but I must confess that after all they are only too similar to carousals in high life, the only noticeable difference being their greater frequency. They occur just about four times as often as anywhere else, because the outcast, and especially the criminal, is intensely emotional; he can never live very long without some kind of excitement, and the older he grows the more alluring become his drinking-bouts. When his opportunities in this direction are shut off by jail-walls, he

improvises something else, which often takes organized form; but it must be remembered that such organizations are purely makeshifts, and that the members would rather sit in some low concert-hall or saloon and have an old-time drinking-bout, if circumstances were only favorable.

## VI

The most interesting of these impromptu clubs is the one called in the vernacular the "Kangaroo Court." It is found almost entirely in county jails, in which petty offenders and persons awaiting trial are confined. During the day the prisoners are allowed the freedom of a large hall, and at night they lodge in cells, the locks of which are sometimes fastened and sometimes not. The hall contains tables, benches, daily papers, and, in some instances, stoves and kitchen utensils. The prisoners walk about, jump, and play various games. After a while these games become tiresome, and the "Kangaroo Court" is formed. It consists of all the prisoners, and the officers are elected by them. The positions they fill are the "judgeship," the "searchership," the "spankership," and general "juryship." To illustrate the duties of these various officials, I shall give a personal experience in a county jail in New York State. It was my first encounter with the "Kangaroo Court."

I had been arrested for sleeping in an empty box-car. The watchman found me and lodged me in the station-house, where I

spent a most gloomy night wondering what my punishment would be. Early in the morning I was brought before the "squire." He asked me what my name might be, and I replied that "it might be Billy Rice."

"What are you doing around here, Billy?" he queried further.

"Looking for work, your Honor."

"Thirty days," he thundered at me, and I was led away to the jail proper.

I had three companions at the time, and after we had passed the sheriff and his clerk, who had noted down all the facts, imaginary and otherwise, that we had cared to give him about our family histories, we were ushered pell-mell into the large hall. Surrounded in a twinkling by the other prisoners, we were asked to explain our general principles and misdemeanors. This over, and a few salutations exchanged, a tall and lanky rogue cried out in a loud voice:

"The Kangru will now k'lect."

There were about twenty present, and they soon planted themselves about us in a most solemn manner. Some rested on their haunches, others lounged against the walls, and still others sat quietly on the flagstones. As soon as entire quiet had been reached, the tall fellow, who, by the way, was the judge, instructed a half-grown companion, whom he nicknamed the "searcher," to bring his charges against the newcomers. He approached us solemnly and in a most conventional manner, and said:



"Priz'ners, you is charged with havin' boodle in yer pockets. Wha' does you plead – guilty or not guilty?"

I was the first in line, and pleaded not guilty.

"Are you willin' to be searched?" asked the judge.

"I am, your Honor," I replied.

Then the searcher inspected all my pockets, the lining of my coat, the leather band inside my hat, my shoes and socks, and finding nothing in the shape of money, declared that I was guiltless.

"You are discharged," said the judge, and the jury-men ratified the decision with a grunt.

A young fellow, a vagrant by profession, was the next case. He pleaded not guilty, and allowed himself to be searched. But unfortunately he had forgotten a solitary cent which was in his vest pocket. It was quickly confiscated, and he was remanded for trial on the charge of contempt of the "Kangru." The next victim pleaded guilty to the possession of thirty-six cents, and was relieved of half. The last man, the guiltiest of all, although he pleaded innocence, was found out, and his three dollars were taken away from him instanter; he, too, was charged with contempt of court. His case came up soon after the preliminaries were over, and he was sentenced by the judge to walk the length of the corridor one hundred and three times each day of his confinement, besides washing all the dishes used at dinner for a week.

After all the trials were over, the confiscated money was

handed to the genuine turnkey, with instructions that it be invested in tobacco. Later in the day the tobacco was brought into the jail and equally divided among all the prisoners.

The next day I, with the other late arrivals, was initiated as a member of the "Kangaroo Court." It was a very simple proceeding. I had to promise that I would always do my share of the necessary cleaning and washing, and also be honest and fair in judging the cases which might come up for trial.

Since then I have had opportunities of studying other "Kangaroo Courts," which have all been very much like the one I have described. They are both socialistic and autocratic, and at times they are very funny. But wherever they are they command the respect of jail-birds, and if a prisoner insults the court he is punished very severely. Moreover, it avails him nothing to complain to the authorities. He has too many against him, and the best thing he can do is to become one of them as soon as possible.

Other clubs of this same impromptu character are simple makeshifts, which last sometimes a week, and sometimes but a day, if a more substantial amusement can be found to take their place. One, of which I was a member, existed for six hours only. It was organized to pass the time until a train came along to carry the men into a neighboring city. They selected a king and some princes, and called the club the "Royal Plush." Every half-hour a new king was chosen, in order to give as many members as possible the privileges which these offices carried with them.

They were not especially valuable, but nevertheless novel enough to be entertaining. The king, for instance, had the right to order any one to fill his pipe or bring him a drink of water, while the princes were permitted to call the commoners all sorts of names as long as their official dignity lasted. So far as I know, they have never met since that afternoon camp on the prairies of Nebraska; and if they are comfortably seated in some favorite saloon, I can safely say that not one of them would care to exchange places with any half-hour king.

A little experience I had some time ago in New York will show how well posted the Natives are regarding these favorite saloons. I was calling on an old friend at a saloon in Third Avenue at the time. After I had told him of my plan to visit certain Western cities, and had mentioned some of them, he said:

"Well, you wan' ter drop in at the Half in State Street when you strike Chi [Chicago]; 'n' doan' forget Red's place in Denver, 'n' Dutch Mary's in Omaha. They'll treat you square. Jes left Mary's place 'bout a week ago, 'n' never had a better time. Happy all the while, 'n' one day nearly tasted meself, felt so good. There's nothin' like knowin' such places, you know. 'F you get into a strange town, takes you a ter'ble while to find yer fun 'less yer posted. But you'll be all right at Red's 'n' Mary's, dead sure."

So the stranger is helped along in low life, and the Natives take just as much pride in passing him on to other friends and other clubs as does the high-life club-man. It gives them a feeling of importance, which is one of their main gratifications.

## VII

Of the Old Bucks, – the superannuated outcasts, – and their club life, there is very little to say. Walk into any low dive in any city where they congregate, and you can see the whole affair. They sit there on the benches in tattered clothes, and rest their chins on crooked sticks or in their hands, and glare at one another with bloodshot eyes. Between drinks they discuss old times, old pals, old winnings, and then wonder what the new times amount to. And now and then, when in the mood, they throw a little crude thought on politics into the air. I have heard them discuss home rule, free trade, the Eastern question, and at the same time crack a joke on a hungry mosquito. A bit of wit, nasty or otherwise, will double them up in an instant, and then they cough and scramble to get their equilibrium again.

Late at night, when they can sit no longer on the whittled benches, and the bartender orders them home, they crawl away to musty lodging-houses and lie down in miserable bunks. The next morning they are on hand again at the same saloon, with the same old jokes and the same old laughs. They keep track of their younger pals if they can, and do their best to hold together their close relationships, and as one of their number tumbles down and dies, they remember his good points, and call for another beer. The Natives help them along now and then, and even the boys give them a dime on special occasions. But as they never need

very much, and as low life is often the only one they know, they find it not very difficult to pick their way on to the end. If you pity them they are likely to laugh at you, and I have even known them to ask a city missionary if he would not take a drink with them.

To think of enticing such men into decent clubs is absurd, the only respectable place they ever enter is a reading-room – and then not to read. No, indeed! Watch them in Cooper Union. Half the time their newspapers are upside down and they are dozing. One eye is always on the alert, and the minute they think you are watching they grip the newspaper afresh, fairly pawing the print with their greasy fingers in their eagerness to carry out the rôle they have assumed. One day, in such a place, I scraped acquaintance with one of them, and, as if to show that it was the literary attraction which brought him there, he suddenly asked me in a most confidential tone what I thought of Tennyson. Of course I thought a good deal of him, and said so, but I had hardly finished before the old fellow querulously remarked:

"Don' cher think the best thing he ever did was that air 'Charge of the Seventeen Hundred'?"

## VIII

I have already said that, so far as the older outcasts are concerned, there is but little chance of helping them by respectable clubs; they are too fixed in their ways, and the best method of handling them is to destroy their own clubs and

punish the members. The "scrappin' gang," for example, should be treated with severe law, whenever and wherever it shows its bloody hand, and if such a course were adopted and followed it would accomplish more good than any other conceivable method. The same treatment must be applied to the associations of other Natives, for the more widely they are separated and thus prevented from concourse the better will it be. It is their gregariousness which makes it so difficult to treat with them successfully, and until they can be dealt with separately, man for man, and in a prison-cell if necessary, not much can be accomplished. The evils in low life are contagious, and to be treated scientifically they must be quarantined and prevented from spreading. Break up its gangs. Begin at their beginnings. For let two outcasts have even but a little influence over a weak human being, and there are three outcasts; give them a few more similar chances, and there will be a gang.

I would not have any word of mine lessen the growing interest in man's fellow-man, or discourage by so much as a pen-stroke the brotherly influences on the "fallen brother" which are embodied in neighborhood guilds and college settlements of the present, but I am deeply convinced that there is a work these organizations cannot, must not, do. That work must be done by law and government. Vice must be punished, and the vicious sequestered. Public spirit and citizenship duly appreciated and exercised must precede philanthropy in the slums. Government, municipal and State, must be a John the Baptist, preparing the

way and making the paths straight, ere the embodied love of man and love of God can walk safely and effectively therein.

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