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MY MONKS OF  
VAGABONDIA

Andress Floyd

**My Monks of Vagabondia**

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# Andress Floyd

## My Monks of Vagabondia

### Introductory

My Monks of Vagabondia comprises Fact-stories selected from the old files of the Self Master Magazine. I wish to present the defeated man, as he really is, to the reader who cannot fail to appreciate the humor and tragedy that makes up his wayward life. The bond of sympathy should be awakened between us and the so-called prodigal.

A wider publicity should be given to the unique but practical uplift work that I have founded and carried on for the past five years among these weaker brothers.

The stories explain in part the methods and plans of the Family of Self Masters.

It is – we believe – the only book in which a writer has received his facts for his stories direct from a life-experience with outcast men.

Not alone that, but the volume is printed, bound and illustrated by the unexpected guests – the Itinerant Monks of whom the tales are told, and who make their home in our so-called Monastery.

The day approaches when broken men shall have beautiful, though simple, homes of their own making, modeled after the group idea of The Self Master Colony. They will be established outside of the different cities of the world, and opened hospitably to all men who come in their hour of need or weakness, seeking Self Mastery and the peace that accompanies it.

The proceeds from the sale of these stories go toward the purchase and installation of much needed equipment for the Printshop and Bindery. With this equipment the men can work out their own independence, industrially and socially.

When a man has lived months and years enslaved by some vicious habit – self-destructive and careless of consequences – his sub-conscious mind is a sensitive matrix on which the sordid history is deeply engraved. The certain change can come only as the man learns values and respects them by a right life.

The sub-conscious self takes on a complete reformation slowly. An evil habit does not gain mastery over the man upon the instant nor once in control is its grip broken by any feeble affirmation or miraculous phenomenon.

The hope comes when one turns one's thought from the destructive to the constructive, and lives in the sight of the new born faith until wisdom lifts the darkened veil and freedom follows as its rightful legacy.

The Self Master Colony offers an open door to the disheartened man during the period of his awakening to his real strength and helps him with its constant care and sympathy back to his true self.

*ANDRESS FLOYD.*

## A JOURNEY TO OUR MONASTERY

*If any pilgrim monk come from distant parts to dwell with us, and will be content with the customs which he finds in the place, and do not perchance by his lavishness disturb the Monastery, he shall be received.*

– *Saint Benedict.*

### A Journey to our Monastery

The man had walked the entire distance from New York to the Self Master Family. In truth, he had walked more than the entire distance, for once or twice he had lost his way – as many a man has done in other walks of Life. Painfully he had retraced his steps to the right road. The mistakes had told heavily upon his failing strength. They had made him just that much more weary with it all. No doubt mistakes are wonderfully educational; they make men wiser, and therefore better, for in the final analysis wisdom and goodness are synonymous.

He complained bitterly at the hardness of his lot and found little comfort in the thought that he might reach the Colony too late for the evening meal.

His friend who had met him walking aimlessly up and down Broadway assured him that there was always a coffee pot boiling on the old-fashioned cook stove in the boys' kitchen – that the Colony House never locked its doors.

To a man who feels that every door in the world is locked against him there is comfort in the thought that there is really one place where he may find a welcome. His friend had said that there would be no questions asked him on his arrival – no investigation.

“No investigation,” he muttered aloud, “thank God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a ‘down-and-out’ man to convince Professional Charity that he is really hungry. I think they would have given me a ‘hand-out’ when they investigated me the last time if I could have told them what town my mother was born in.”

He smiled with weak cynicism at the folly of his thoughts, and then became suddenly serious, for on the side hill in front of a large colonial house, worked out in white stone, were the words “The Self Masters.” He stopped and studied the quiet, home-like scene from the road. All these weary miles he had come to ask food and shelter, and now his courage seemed to fail him. He sat down by the road side and leisurely took his pipe from his pocket. Then he prepared tobacco with the utmost care, filled the pipe and lighted it.

“THE SELF MASTERS”

he spelled out the letters on the sign; “What the h – ll is that? – Self Master – Self Mastery – Self Control. Old Man, if you had ever had any of that Self Control in your make-up you would not be a Knight of the Dusty Road!.. You had better go back to the East Side where you know the land; where no man cares whether you live decently or not – if you can buy.”

Then the sound of a piano and male voices came to him and awakened him to a new train of thought. “It is a Monastery – a Monastery of Vagabondia,” he said, “and why not? why shouldn't a man, even a homeless man, have his Monastery, if you please, where he can forget his past and live cleanly? If he only lives cleanly for a day and falls... It's something to remember – a day he doesn't have to be ashamed of. Who knows but that in the one day of unselfish living a man is more truly his real self than he is in all the other days of his vicious years.

“Throughout his long life Moses was the leader of his people, but it was in that day that he talked with God – face to face – that his countenance did shine like the sun. It was not when he slew the Egyptian, and, frightened, buried him in the sand; it was when he stood in the presence of

Divinity – that Moses was Moses. When the drunkard is in his sober mind, when the liar is speaking the truth, when the thief is giving honest measure, when the murderer is kind to his fellow, then, and only then, is the true Self finding expression.”

He drew heavily at his pipe and then smilingly said, “My pipe has gone out!” He knocked out the ashes into his hand and scattered them to the wind, gravely, as if it were some religious ceremony. Then he dusted his shoes and clothes, and straightening himself up to his full height, he marched bravely up to the front door of the house...

... A black crow, belated in his home-going, left his corn-thieving, and, rising, flew across the sky to his eyrie in the pines.

## MARY AND THE BABY

*“And a little child shall lead them.”*  
– *Isaiah.*

### Mary and the Baby

Resolved, that old fashioned cow’s milk is better for Our Baby, than any prepared food.”

The debate on the above subject will start at seven o’clock next Thursday evening. The Conservatives of our Colony will speak in favor of cow’s milk as a baby’s food. The Progressives will speak in favor of prepared food.

The parliamentary rules governing the debate will be the same as govern a “catch-as-catch-can” wrestling match.

No slugging will be permitted until forensic effort has proven ineffective. When further argument has become useless, the three-ounce boxing gloves, recently donated to us, may be used to force a decision. In fact, several of the boys who talk but little, are practising with the gloves, so that they may become factors in the final settlement of the problem.

On the other hand, the literary coterie is in deep study. One boy is reading up reference books on the subject whenever he can find the time. Still another blindfolds himself and opens the Bible at random, looking for spiritual guidance on the subject of infant diet. Of course the Court of Final Appeal will be Her Ladyship – The Baby Herself.

She already knows a great deal about crackers and breakfast foods, and she is far too clever not to have her own opinion on the dietary properties of milk and its substitutes.

And now it may be in point to tell how we came to have a ten-months-old baby at our Colony.

We are ostensibly a young men’s colony – men and boys trying to get to their feet and become independent and self-supporting. But if anyone comes to us hungry, we like to give them something more edible than a card to a professional charity.

Had Hunger delayed her coming another week, Our Baby and her mother might have been driven to ask food and shelter on Christmas Eve. As it was, they came to us on December 19th, at ten o’clock in the evening. They had no place in which to sleep except the local police station, and that is not the place for a little baby – even strong men weaken in the chill of its hospitality.

So, on their arrival, the boys who were retiring for the night, held a conference. Our supply of beds and bedding did not even equal the demand made upon it by the boys themselves. But that did not cause them to hesitate, and all agreed that they must not turn the newcomers away. One boy immediately gave up his blanket, the second his comforter, the third his bed. In that way the mother and baby were made comfortable for the night, little realizing that they were taking anything away from those who had nothing to spare. But homeless men are quickly sympathetic, for what they know of hunger and cold is not altogether hearsay.

On the next day we undertook to make more permanent provision for the Baby and Mary, her mother. We began to look around for beds. We asked two of the kind-hearted clergymen if they could obtain a bed for our new arrivals. One of them phoned me later in the day to ask me what town the poor people were from, and when I informed him, he said "The woman should have applied to the charity association of the city from which they came. If the case was worthy, aid would be given."

Worthy or unworthy, we didn’t feel like sending the Baby away. She was teething and fretful, and a teething, fretful baby may not be as worthy as one who grins and bears it.

The other minister said, “The wonderful work the Church was doing, had not so much to do with the poor in this life, as in the hereafter.” Now in truth, while the mother was discouraged and

didn't care anything about life as far as she herself was concerned, she had ambition for her child, so she could not qualify and ask assistance under these conditions.

The boys themselves made two wooden beds, and fitted up a room for the Baby, while the mother in turn helped the young men in the kitchen.

The Baby has grown strong and well. She likes her big brothers with all their noise and horseplay, and they like their Baby. To see rough homeless men sing lullabies to an infant-in-arms, congratulating themselves when she falls asleep soothed by the monotonous humming of some cradle song that they themselves thought they had forgotten long ago, might renew one's faith in the kindly humanity that lives in every heart.

Has not Christ said, "And whosoever shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me."

#### THE BABY'S FATHER

Now, this Baby has a father. He has lived in Russia and came to America to earn money. One of his older brothers was already located in New York State, and from his letters sent over the sea, it was plain that the opportunities for wealth in the States were most promising.

The older brother had grown rich – very rich – working on the railroad. He never earned less than nine dollars a week, and now that he spoke English, he earned twelve.

Such stories of easily acquired wealth lured John, as we call him, to leave his Fatherland with his wife and child. But unfortunately for John and his family, they reached America during the recent panic. Thousands of workmen were idle. In New York, John could find no work. Even the rich brother only worked part of the time, and having wife and children of his own, had nothing to divide with John and his family. So John drifted away seeking employment.

The few dollars that he brought with him became exhausted, and although he studied English evenings, he spoke it brokenly. One of the boys at the Colony said he talked in "kindlewood."

While he was seeking employment, no word came to the wife and child. Some said John would never come back. But Mary believed in him. She said that he had always loved the baby and he knew that she herself could work. But at times even she doubted when weeks followed weeks and no word came.

Once when one of the boys was going to New York, she called him aside quietly, and said, "You will see John in New York, I think... Big man, light hair ... tell him come home, see Baby... I want him."

But John was not seen in New York.

It was not until a few days ago that he returned. He had traveled through New York State and on to Massachusetts. No work – everywhere no work! Sometimes he had walked. Sometimes he had jumped a freight. All to no purpose. He had wanted to write good news to Mary, and he had no good news to write. Always bad news. He was a failure. He had wished he might end it all, but the thought of the Baby had made him continue the search for employment.

Finally, one day, a rich man in Montclair needed a gardener. This man was rich – not rich like his brother – but had houses and acres of splendid farm. He would pay two dollars a day wages to a man willing to work. It seemed too good to believe. He would hurry back to his Baby and Mary. They must know the good news.

So he came and told Mary he had a job, and a little home for her and the Baby. They would be rich like his brother.

So Mary went with John and they took their Baby, all tied up in shawls.

That was yesterday – Monday – so there will be no argument Thursday on "Whether or not old-fashioned cow's milk is better for babies than prepared foods."

Because we homeless men have lost Our Baby.

One of the boys asked the Chairman – another boy – if they would have the Debate, now that the Baby was gone?

“To hell with it,” replied the Presiding Officer.

The above is a true story, and to The Self Master Colony, all a part of the day’s work.

## MY PROBLEM WITH SLIPPERY JIM

*“When a boy goes to prison, a citizen dies.”*  
– *Jacob Riis*

### My Problem with Slippery Jim

“My razor went yesterday for a beef stew,” the young dare-devil told me. “Not that I am one of those collar-and-necktie-rounders,” he continued, “who seek to give out the impression that they are gentlemen in distress, telling you of their Southern family and a squandered fortune when, in fact, they have never been further South than Coney Island... But when a fellow decides to sell his razor he is about to commit an act that severs the jugular vein of his respectability.

“He may have, only the moment before, shaven and groomed himself with the utmost care, still he is nearly ready to join the ranks of the down-and-outs. A man may sell his other belongings – his clothes included – and yet preserve a suggestion at least of his *sang-froid*. But when the razor goes – ”

“Then he can get a free shave at the Barbers’ School,” I suggested.

“That only helps for a day or two,” he went on. “Better throw up your hands at once and have it over. What man half ill with worry cares to listen to some ambitious pupil say, ‘Teacher, shall I shave the right side of his face up, or shave it down?’ – and, ‘Teacher, how do you shave the upper lip without cutting it?’ and, ‘Teacher, if I do cut it, shall I disinfect it with carbolic or peroxide before I put on the new skin?’ – No Barbers’ School for me. It is better to turn philosopher on the instant – the old philosophers and prophets grew long beards... Talk about getting next to Nature in about three days after a man has sold his razor, Nature will get next to him, and if he is not as beardless as an American Indian, he will be convinced when he sees himself in a mirror, of the truth of the Darwinian theory.”

“In Russia,” I said, “the beard is the patriarch’s badge of sanctity.”

“So it is in Jersey and several other States,” he replied. “Many a so-called hobo with two weeks’ growth of beard on his face may be at heart only a conscientious respecter of the law – for it is a misdemeanor in New Jersey to carry a razor. It is legally declared to be a concealed weapon. Many a poor rascal against whom a charge of vagrancy could not be maintained has found it so much the worse for him, and has been forced to go to prison for carrying concealed weapons in the form of a razor. So you see in Jersey, as well as in Russia, a beard may be only proof of honor... The cleanly shaven man who knocks at your side door and wins the unsuspecting wife’s confidence with that time-worn platitude of Vagabondia, ‘Lady, all I want is work,’ may have a weapon concealed upon his person, while the unshaven wanderer, the sight of whom makes the women folks bolt doors, may be a homeless fellow who really wants work, and would rather be unkempt in appearance than chance a prison-term for carrying a razor.”

“So you have sold your razor?” I asked.

“Not because I am trying to compete with your Russian patriarch in sanctity. I sold it because I’m desperate.”

“Then you were not afraid of the misdemeanor charge?”

He replied with a laugh that I did not like, and I felt quickly to see if my watch was still in my possession.

“I don’t want your watch,” he said, “but it isn’t the fear of doing time that holds me back. I know what my friend wrote about me. I have made up my mind to play square. You may not believe it. You have heard too many mission testimonies to believe much in them. But if I live right – it isn’t because my heart is softened, my heart is cold and hard as a paving block.”

“Your friend wrote that you weren’t such a bad fellow.”

“Don’t believe him. In Elmira they have a scheme of percentage, and if a man gets above a certain percent he can win his freedom. In the four years I was there I was safely within the required percentage – all I had to do was to continue my good behavior. I was within a few days of freedom. Did you ever sense hatred – pure hatred? Shylock felt it when he refused to accept money to cancel Antonio’s bond; when he would not listen to threats or entreaties, but only muttered, ‘I’ll have my pound of carrion flesh.’ I know what he felt. In the night, after weeks and weeks of patient study and labor – after months of good conduct, when I played their game and won the chance of freedom. In the night, without reason, I jumped from my bed and battered at the bars and yelled and cursed at them all, until they put me in the dungeon and took from me my high percent. I lost a year that time.”

“Do the prison bars still hold you,” I asked him.

“What do you mean?”

“You act like a mad man when you talk of the past. Some men can never throw off the thought of their imprisonment. It rules their life. They think only of prison and the crimes that follow such thinking. There is no hope for them. Can’t you see it is your ideals that enslave or make you free? Can’t you see you are free?”

“It’s mighty hard,” he said, “but I want to forget. My friend sent me to you. He said you knew the path to freedom, and would help me. Days and days I have waited for you to come to me. My father would not have me at home, my friends left me, my money grew less and less – my clothes went, my razor – everything. And still you did not come. Sometimes I’d meet a boy that told me of your work. Sometimes I would doubt all I had heard, and then I would become indifferent – mutter a prayer or plan a crime. At last the letter came. I knew I was being put to the test, and I sought to be firm. Oh, God, such a test! What is it holds a man? I was hungry, yet I knew how to steal; I needed money, and I knew where I could rob with reasonable safety. What is it holds a man like me? At times I have thought it was my belief in you.”

“You mean our Colony held out a hope to you.”

“Yes,” he said.

“I am afraid to take you into my Family,” I told him.

“For fear I’ll steal from you?” he said, coldly.

“No, not that; I fear you cannot leave your prison thoughts behind you when you enter the Colony.”

“If you help me,” he said, thoughtfully, “I think I can begin anew.”

“Will you promise never to speak to me or anyone of your past life?”

“I will not speak of it again.”

“Then you may go to the entrance gate with me, and there I will decide if I can take you in.”

We talked on the way to the farm about many things – for he had read and traveled much. We made no mention of the Family or its work, but as we came near the Colony House I stopped.

“Tell me,” I said, “did they teach you a trade at Elmira?”

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