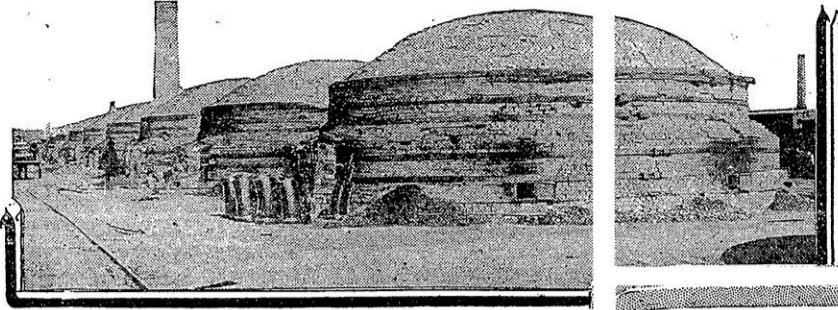


WHAT A RICH MAN LEARNED IN LIVING WITH HOBOES

Edwin A. Brown of Denver Tells of His Experiences as a Tramp and Suggests Radical Measures for Helping Homeless Human Beings.



The Kilns in Denver Where Hoboes Sleep After the Fires Are Drawn. They Go Out Later and Are Easy Prey to Pneumonia.

ONE night last November a police reporter in Houston, Texas, chanced to recognize the author of this article and rescued him from the local jail.

At first the police captain, who had had Mr. Brown committed to the institution, was inclined to laugh at the newspaper man's statement that the man, who was apparently a dirty tramp, an outcast, was in reality a wealthy man of Denver, Col., who was spending years studying the lives and conditions of the great hobo body of homeless men in the United States by going among them, living with them, and sharing their every hardship and disadvantage.

The thing that had landed him in jail was going to a ten-cent lodging house and asking for a bed, saying, at the same time, that he had no money with which to pay for it.

The policeman, not knowing that his prisoner could have drawn a valid draft for several hundred thousand on his bankers, treated him with the usual cruelty of the law. The practical researcher was literally pitched into the cell from which he was rescued some time later purely by the newspaper man's chance recognition.

In the following article the author delivers straight from the shoulder the significant facts that he has gathered, interwoven with the interesting color and philosophy of the habitually homeless man, concluding with some rather radical suggestions for the alleviation of general class conditions.

UNDER THE SHELF OF LIFE.

By Edwin A. Brown.

HE was climbing the hill that leads up from the railway yards on the lakefront in Cleveland to the center of town. His feet slipped in the freezing slush; at times the terrific power of the wind pouring in from the black face of Lake Erie caught his thin body and hurled it ahead till he clutched at post or railing to steady him in his weakness. I was passing from the battle with the icy torrent and the climbing of the hill myself, but I hurried ahead and drew up to his side. He never turned to look at me nor paid me the slightest heed. Why should he? Could he expect to find a friend in me? Was there anything in the proximity of a chance fellow pedestrian to stir him out of the wretchedness of his senses, the abyss of his misery?

I saw that his summer-weight coat was jammed close at the throat and fastened at the waist with a nail. He had on two pairs of trousers, the outer one so ragged that it showed that the under one was equally so. One shoe might have been a number seven and the other a number nine. His face was swathed with a dirty bandage wrapped under the chin and over the crown. By the arc light overhead I could see on the hand that clutched his broken hat brim that his raw knuckles were great blue scars in the purple and white of the chilled flesh.

"Hello, Bill! What's the matter?" I said. He barely turned his eyes toward me and repeated as if from a mental list one of his miseries:

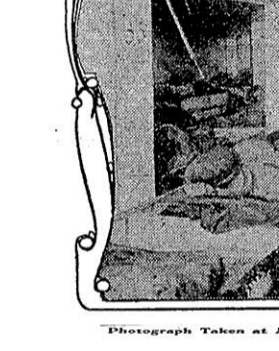
"I got three ulcerated teeth on the left side; the ice cuts and freezes my feet where the bottoms stick out every step I take; my chest is all choked up and hurts something fierce; I haven't had anything to eat since yesterday at 2 o'clock—I couldn't even parhandle a dime to-night, so I got to 'carry the banner' till day-break to keep from freezing to death. I got to keep going somehow till I can get in some place, or do something, for I'm about all in."

Now what happened to this particular man before I met him or what I did for him afterward to make the next few days easier and save his life matters no more than a timely straw in the whirlpool of Niagara. What does matter is that he is but one of many thousands I have met and talked with who were quite as badly off or certain to become so under the inevitable conditions of hunger, sickness, bad weather, homelessness, and general inability to cope with aggregated misfortune. Searching carefully I have but dipped below the surface. Traveling from one end of the country to the other I have encountered a few only, compared with the vast army that habitually roam the land, the pariahs of the nation, the pitiful, hopeless outcasts of our modern social scheme. They form a great entity of lost possibilities. They present a mighty problem that the consensus of the decent public mind cannot longer evade. It isn't the individual misery of the poor devil struggling up the Cleveland hill that matters—it is the tremendous, tremendous parasitical growth on the desirably clean and healthy body politic that is of imperative concern! What is America going to do with its army of wanderers?

From the maritime provinces of Canada to the fire-infested coasts of Southern California; from the cruel pines of Portland, Ore., to the refuse-strewn sand yards of Jacksonville, Fla., I have gone in and through, over and among the institutions and methods by which State and municipality endeavor to cope with the conditions and I pronounce them most emphatically a complete and sweeping failure. The most that is done in any locality is to alleviate the sufferings of the homeless for a few hours—in some instances a few days—and the least that is done is to allow them to die like lepers without the wall. The usual thing is to treat them as something lower than criminals and lodge them in jails until they can be passed on to the next community—a continuous circulating burden.

For instance, let us take the manner in which the City of Portland, one of the great growing towns on the Pacific Coast, filled with a population noted for its broad generosity, handles the addressless man. In Portland Commons I find what is termed in his vernacular a "free flop." It is a low, broad, reeking room where every newcomer leaves an added taint. Its aspect is that of rough timber shoring up the ceiling, at the same time supporting two levels of board troughs of a size sufficient to contain a 6 by 2 bag of straw. The rule is first come first served. Therefore, no matter if a blizzard be blowing, the man who hopes to get a bed must line up at the door and wait. Of course, the worse the weather the greater the necessity of getting into line early. Admitted, the shivering wretches pass into the inner space of superheated, devitalized air and, scrambling over others, throw themselves on the straw bags according to the number of the trough that matches the number of their registration. They rip off their coats, and if the place be crowded they swelter. A man does not need to be a doctor to understand how this leads to various acute congestions. When the troughs are filled as many of the waiting line as can be crowded into the standing

space are allowed within the doors and the remainder are barred out into the night to shift for themselves. On a bad night the outcast who is at some distance from the "free flop" at nightfall makes no effort to get there, knowing that it will be useless. Yet Portland fulfills her duty admirably to the tramp. As hangars on to these two classes will be found an informal nature, the homeless who happen to be in Denver and vicinity are permitted to enter the kilns at dark, take the places that are of a softness prepared for bricks, and enjoy to the utmost the slowly waning warmth. The temperature of a fresh kiln is almost unbearable, but if there is snow, rain, or sleet abroad, and if the cool kilns are full the late comers enter even the hottest gladly. With the coming of morning they are driven forth into the weather with every pore open, and the net result is that a man who has spent a day or more to leave the kilns in the morning, is picked up in the city streets before the day is over, and die of pneumonia within forty-eight hours in the charity ward of some of the hospitals. It was the minor mention in a Denver paper that twenty tramps had died, in one week, from this disease which drew my attention to the first place to conditions as they existed at home, and set me on my wanderings to seek their comparatives throughout the land.



Photograph Taken at Midnight in Portland Commons.

My idea of the tramp was that he was such by preference, a conception due to the humorous cartoons in the papers, stage representations of "Weary Willys," and various fantastic newspaper and magazine articles on tramp customs, life, sign language, etc. I went first directly to the kilns and spent a night with the men, moving out with them at day-break, and to my astonishment nearly all of them had a common destination, the principal cluster of employment offices of the city.

That day and often, often since, I have seen men huddled before the offices in the bitterest weather, their pockets and stomachs empty, few of them handsomely clad, but all of them eager to take on any sort of work, no matter how heavy it might be or what the wages, just so that they could win for themselves the necessities of life. Men such as these are worth saving. Their integral value would pay the Nation for a concerted effort at their redemption. In brief, I have convinced myself at firsthand that nine out of every ten of the vast army of wanderers can and will work ably and steadily for their living if they can find and keep the work. It is the tenth man who makes the hardships for the others trebly severe by alienating sympathy from them. He belongs in one of three classes, first and largest that of the real tramp, who will not work, travels on bumpers, blind baggage, or on air tanks under Pullman cars; begs from door to door, lives in camps with a fair degree of comfort, and has an organized camaraderie of vagabondage, with picturesque nick-

names for well-known followers of the "hammer," certain unwritten laws of conduct, for every fellow in the ragged outfit, and a most interesting collection of ideographic signs, which are chalked up on barns, gateposts, sidewalks, freight cars, etc., that are rife with professional information to the adept. Then there is the yegg, who, in addition to being a tramp and enjoying all the advantages of the freemasonry, is a predatory, murderous criminal, carrying a complete set of burglar tools, in his hat perhaps; roving for years from place to place, stealing much but destroying more. As hangars on to these two classes will be found an informal nature, the homeless who happen to be in Denver and vicinity are permitted to enter the kilns at dark, take the places that are of a softness prepared for bricks, and enjoy to the utmost the slowly waning warmth. The temperature of a fresh kiln is almost unbearable, but if there is snow, rain, or sleet abroad, and if the cool kilns are full the late comers enter even the hottest gladly. With the coming of morning they are driven forth into the weather with every pore open, and the net result is that a man who has spent a day or more to leave the kilns in the morning, is picked up in the city streets before the day is over, and die of pneumonia within forty-eight hours in the charity ward of some of the hospitals. It was the minor mention in a Denver paper that twenty tramps had died, in one week, from this disease which drew my attention to the first place to conditions as they existed at home, and set me on my wanderings to seek their comparatives throughout the land.

There are many times when the homeless must creep in anywhere that shelter is to be found. Usually the places left open are spots too repulsive to reveal to the eyes of decent society. I have gone after midnight into stables in out-of-the-way places in the cities, and half-buried in the dung heaps, where the decay makes warmth and there is a certain softness, I have found clusters of miserable human beings. Is it any wonder that death and disease are rife among them? Once I discovered a boy and his beautiful dog,

this legion. Inasmuch as the addressless man escapes the census taker and the local statistician, no absolute figures can be advanced, but testing the municipal lodging house records, the railroad detectives' reports, the commitments for vagrancy in one hundred and ten large cities, I feel safe in saying that from November to March of every year the number of absolutely homeless wanderers in the United States is never less than 400,000, and in hard times will increase quickly to more than 1,000,000.

There are four grand seasonable movements that affect the large body of those experienced in the homeless life—westward to the grain regions in July and August to help harvest the crops; to the

Sick Boy Tramp with His Dog on Guard Outside a Stable.



Four Men Found in an Open Corner of Caisson Work.



this season, first, because in such a seething centre of change and opportunities the wanderer feels that he may have one opportunity to slip into a berth; second, because the displacement of Officer Forbes and the Mendicancy Squad permits "panhandling," or begging everywhere openly; third, because the metropolis, which falls so far short of other cities in various divisions of municipal government, thanks to political graft, leads the world in the care of the homeless. The Emergency Home, the "free flop," the Municipal Lodging House, at Twenty-fifth Street and the East River, is more sani-

to be found in San Francisco only. The "Wayfarers' Lodge" or the Lombard Street Woodyard of Philadelphia is noted for the meagre fare served the men and for the poor treatment given them compared with the demands made upon them. In the Hawkins Street Woodyard in Boston kindness and mercy have been aborted. There is extreme roughness and brutality. The police and others make the office a place to loaf and find constant amusement in harassing the unfortunates who are driven to take shelter there. The City Lodging House of Washington, the capital of the country, is quite directly

both tramps, lying in such a bed. They had been there three days and nights undisturbed, the boy too ill with pneumonia to get out where he could get help, the dog sticking close by his side. In a wreck last year on the Cincinnati, Hamilton & Dayton four tramps were killed in a smashed lumber car, and the coroner was gravely puzzled because two of them gave evidences of having been dead some time before they were crushed by the shifting timbers. Investigation showed that they had been frozen at least two days previous while they slept in the Detroit yards; the bodies were hauled into another State and two other men perished with the already dead without knowing of their proximity.

One need only go about any large city at night looking keenly into dark corners to find the wretches. Crouched in some doorway, with a narrow sill for a bed, huddled over some grate like that behind the Flatiron Building in New York, where warmth ascends, crowded in among piles of goods boxes left overnight on the street before wholesale houses, burrowed under the straw and refuse that fill the basins of park fountains in the Winter time anywhere that the policeman is likely to leave them undisturbed, there they will be found. I took one picture of four men whom I discovered in a corner of caisson work. A sleety gale whirled around them, but it was the best shelter they could find. One night I went into the Portland Jail, where a large section that could not get into the commons had sought refuge. One among them was an old man with his feet so badly frozen that he was in perfect agony. He groaned all through the night, and in the flashlight that I took pain to clearly depict on his face. In the morning, when the miserable corps was ushered out, they tried to make him put on his shoes and walk, but he could not. Believing he was shamming, he was pitched into the gutter, picked up by a kind-hearted settlement worker, and sent to a hospital, where he died soon after from gangrene.

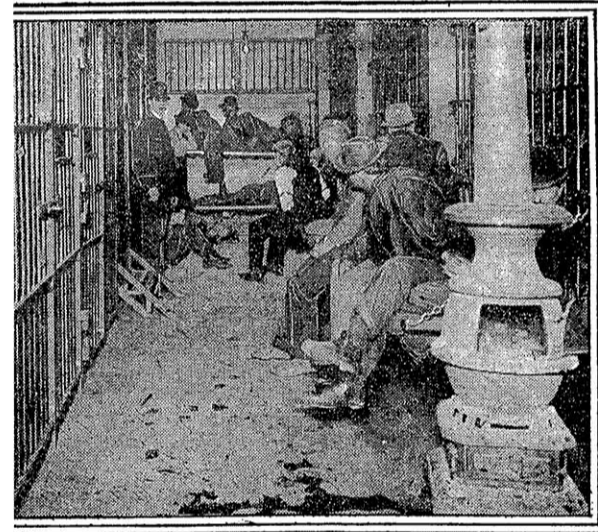
There is no end to the tales I might tell, but enough. If what I have said has brought conviction, then it is time that earnestly, emphatically I urge the only remedy. For the criminals and the depraved, houses with bars if you will. For the incapacitated asylums and hospitals, also. But for the honest, willing working-man without work or a home, something more merciful than free lodging houses from which he would move on. The question of what that something should be is not a very difficult one to answer.

Permit the relation of an average story, the story of John Darley, whom I met in Pueblo. It was a night of piercing cold and he passed me reeling, staggering, and plunging on. He was one mass of rags and his toes protruded from his shoes. I noticed his fine clean face and hurried after him.

"Hey, where are you going?" I said. "I am trying to keep from freezing," he replied. In a little while he had eaten his fill in a near-by restaurant and was regaining the use of his faculties. This is the account he gave me of the circumstances that brought him to the state in which I found him.

"My name is John Darley. I am a plasterer by trade, and come from a town close to Boston. Work got dull and I thought I would try the West. I worked and beat my way and got rather seedy before I reached St. Louis. Then I found that there were two men for every job, and I had to keep on the hammer to get back to my home. I could not stand it and see if I could not find work. A month ago I realized that it was so ragged and dirty that I had no chance of getting a decent job. I would have got one place washing dishes in a cheap restaurant, but when the boss looked at me he chased me out. Then I grew so weak and sick that I could not get a job. I could not have held it. I think that when a man gets started down he comes to a point which is like a shelf in his life, and when he slips over the edge of that he cannot get back by himself. He must have help and quite a bit of it. I never took a drink, have never smoked, sworn, or gambled, and never took a cent that was not mine, yet here I am not of age yet and clean down and out. I have had a grammar school education and have plenty of good references, but can never get back up. I can never climb over the edge of the shelf until somebody gives me a boost and a good strong one. I had five or ten dollars in money handed me it would not do the trick. I need a week's rest and good food. I need a complete outfit of clothes and then a job. Nearly every fellow of the hundreds I have talked the matter over with is in just the same fix that I am. We are so far down that pan-handled meals, stray quarters and dimes, one or two nights free lodging, an odd job with a day or two of work at cheap wages, leave us mighty soon just where we were. Try my best, and I tell you I have tried like the devil, I can't get started up. The older fellows get discouraged and don't try, they don't take any care at all of themselves and drink anything and everything they can get hold of. I suppose I will come to that, too. The only chance I have is to find the man who will give me my boost."

Fortunately, John Darley got his boost, and he proved that he deserved it. Now, ten times more than has been said would not put the matter any clearer and stronger than the foregoing. Private charity cannot be depended upon to boost the half million Americans who are under the shelf of life over the edge to a foothold in society. A big public movement must do it. The method is to give the wanderer just what John Darley knew he had to have, a chance to get strong, clothes to keep him warm and hold up his sense of decency, and a job that will buy him a roof and food. If he fails to go on then a well—he belongs in the hopeless tenth.



Jail Crowded Beyond Its Capacity During a Blizzard.

lake region later to harvest hops, grapes, and apples; southward to escape the cold weather if possible late in November, and northward into the Middle and Atlantic States when Spring construction work begins. The South is most inhospitable for the chain gangs and convict labor camps are everywhere, and an able-bodied tramp is welcomed in the South, given three to six months in the chain gang or labor camp, and many is the wreck I have seen drift slowly northward in the Spring after months of terrible suffering and abuse.

Knowing this, the homeless are prone to stay North in the bad-weather regions in the winter season of little work, and that is the time when the wave of suffering reaches its height, when the poor fellows die by tens of thousands, and alleviation and reform are most needed.

New York is the strongest lodestone at-

tary, is better conducted, has more of the quality of mercy that is not strained than any similar institution in the world. This is not my opinion alone. It is the verdict of the army of the homeless which has marched through it. Good as it is it is not enough. It is a temporization. It does not give the wayfarer a free home or a chance to earn a home; it gives him a decent night's lodging, but he must move on. It is excellent but only a makeshift, nevertheless.

As to the other great cities, I have seen the homeless by the dozen beaten, cuffed, and kicked by the San Francisco police, dumped into the city prison or "hold-over" in the region of the institution called "The Tanks," mixed with the port's very dregs, the "wine bums" from the Barbary Coast reeking with vermin and half insane from drinking the so-called five-cent "wine" concoction that is

administered by the National Government, and as such is a National disgrace. The building, the interior, the sanitary conditions, the rules for admission, the conduct of the men in charge, and treatment accorded the nightly inmates are of a nature that causes the place to be shunned by every homeless man who has heard its reputation among his fellows. Dayton dumps its unfortunates into cells in an old police station so vile that it is famous. Toledo now has what is known as a tramp station under way, one of the many improvements inaugurated by Mayor Brand Whitlock, and its success or failure as a redemption effort of a permanent nature will be demonstrated during this Winter. St. Louis lodges the bulk of her unusually large quota of the floating dependents in cells at police headquarters, and so far as the rest of the country is concerned, with a few exceptions, jails, calabos, work-houses, etc., take the place of any true, humane alleviation, to say nothing of wise sociological treatment.

There are times when I wish I could forget the things I have seen, the tales I have heard among the homeless. I got to thinking of them and grow bitter against my own kind, unless I apply a little of the gentle philosophy of which Buddha was an early exponent and Tolstoy one of the latest.

One night, when the temperature was down around zero in Chicago, I was hurrying through a market square when I noticed an odd heap in a wagon directly under a cluster of powerful electric lamps. Going closer, I saw that a shelterless young fellow was making the wagon bed his sleeping place, a tarpaulin his pillow, a dirty horse blanket his cover. Just as I had finished making a time exposure to get a real picture of his situation, two policemen, one with a patrolman, hove into view and would the sleeper. In a moment more I would have awakened the lad and found him a bed, but they drove me away with curses, shook the boy, and because he was stupefied with the cold, was on the verge of freezing to death, and could not scramble out, they dragged him out, dumped him on the cobblestones, kicked him, and beat him with their night sticks.

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