

## CHAPTER II

### METHOD OF THIS INVESTIGATION

ONE of the district offices of the Chicago Bureau of Charities\* is located within half a dozen blocks of the heart of the lodging house section of the lower South Side, and during the four years in which the writer was connected with the society (from 1900 to 1903 inclusive) practically all applications of homeless men to the main office of the Bureau or to any of the South Side offices were referred to that district.

When the office was first opened in the neighborhood a great many men applied out of curiosity to see what they could get and how far they could deceive the workers in charge. These men belonged to the class which makes a business of living at the expense of the public. Keen questioning by trained workers almost immediately disclosed this fact and such men soon ceased to come in any considerable number, although a few applied during every month of the year. That this class of men had thus "sampled" the office and

\* Since this study was undertaken the Chicago Bureau of Charities and the Chicago Relief and Aid Society have amalgamated under the name of the United Charities of Chicago, but for the sake of clearness, the original title is here used throughout. Homeless men are now interviewed and aided at the main office of the society and not at the Central District office above mentioned.

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had come to respect and avoid it on account of the strict investigation of their stories, was learned afterward from certain of the men themselves. Something in the manner of the interviews, however, led these "rounders" and impostors to recognize that the spirit of the office was one of sympathy and helpfulness for real need, and this first "sampling" was soon followed by applications from men of another sort whose stories were true, whose needs were real, and who were of a far more helpable type than the earlier applicants.

These men were frequently referred to the office by men who had themselves been helped, but almost as frequently by those to whom material aid had been refused. Sometimes the sender was identified, but more often the applicant could only say, "A man in the lodging house sent me," or "A fellow told me you helped men if they were sick or anything." In one instance a young boy made the following statement: "The fellow who sent me told me not to lie to you. He said that you would not hold it against me—that you might help me anyway if I needed it, but that you'd find the lie out and I'd be ashamed that I had done it." No single fact gave the district workers a better opportunity to know these men and the conditions under which they lived than that the men themselves felt kindly toward the office and referred to it other men who were really helpable.

The Bureau of Charities made and still makes a

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special effort to help unemployed men find work, and on this account still a third class of applicants came to the district office,—men who asked nothing but employment, who were capable of self-support, and who were neither dependents nor vagrants. Such men frequently had some slight mental, physical, or temperamental handicap. Sometimes they were immigrants unacquainted with the language; sometimes strangers without city references or knowledge of how to go about finding the work they were able to do. Perfectly able-bodied men, capable of finding work for themselves, did not often apply; on the few occasions when they did, no special effort was made to help them, as the employment department of a charity office differs from an ordinary employment agency, and its reason for being is only that it may assist men to find work who might otherwise become applicants for relief.

The Bureau of Charities for a number of years had an arrangement with the Western and Central Passenger Associations by which persons whose cases were investigated and recommended by the Bureau might secure railroad transportation at half rates. It was very difficult to secure such transportation otherwise than through the recommendation of the Bureau, and the railroad offices and depots, the police and city departments, and many other agencies that received appeals for passes or half rates, referred the applicants direct to the Bureau office.

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Through all these ways, as well as from ministers and private individuals all over the city and through personal applications from the men themselves, large numbers of homeless men of many types came to the attention of the office in the course of a year, and opportunity for acquaintance with, and study of, this class was greater than would ordinarily be the case.\*

In almost every instance when a homeless man applied for aid, an investigation was made, not merely to learn the truth or falsity of his story, but also to find out how best to help him back into normal social and industrial relations. Theoretically, an investigation was made in every case referred to the Bureau of Charities. Practically, no investigation beyond the original interview was made in a certain percentage of the cases of homeless men. For example, a man applied for half-rate transportation to St. Louis and admitted upon being questioned that he was able-bodied; that he had had no one but himself to support; that he had held a good position, paying \$2.50 a day, up to the previous day, and that he had left it voluntarily. Manifestly, his was not a case to receive charitable assistance. His request was refused and no investigation made. Another instance, also representative of a type, was that of a man who asked to be sent to Colorado because he had

\* In the Central District office from 20 to 25 per cent of all applications were those of homeless men. In the 11 other districts of the Bureau the percentage of homeless applicants during the same period was only 2 to 3 per cent.

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tuberculosis. He admitted that he had no money; that he had neither friends nor relatives in Colorado able to assist him, nor any elsewhere who would send him money for living expenses. He was, moreover, too ill to be self-supporting there. Under the circumstances, it would have been cruel rather than kind to have granted his request and to have shipped a sick and penniless man to a community upon which he had no claim and which would promptly have shipped him back. Other forms of assistance were offered and every effort made to make the man understand why his request was denied, but he refused other help and withdrew his application. He had not given enough information to enable the office to make an investigation, and he never returned. Necessarily, his case was dropped.

Another type of case which was not investigated was that of men who applied only for work at a time when the office was overwhelmed with serious calls for aid of all sorts from families in the district. Such men were questioned, their statements recorded, and they were given suggestions as to places where they might apply for employment. They were also asked to return if they did not find it or were in real need, but in the stress of more important work, the statements they made about themselves, while recorded, were not always verified. All such cases and any others which, for similar reasons, were not investigated, have been omitted from this study. The thou-

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sand cases have otherwise been taken just as they stand in the files and entirely without special selection.

But even in the "investigated" cases the amount of information secured varies greatly. Reasons for this variation lie in the fact that not all the interviews with the men were taken by agents of equal ability and training, nor had the interviewers exactly similar ideas of what kind of information was important to secure for the records. But what one might have wished to know in regard to a man and what one was able to learn were often found to be two very different things. It was not always possible to get all the information desired without needlessly offending and alienating the applicant. When a man asked only to be directed to a place where he might work for his lodging and when he seemed to be decent and self-respecting, the agent was hardly justified in asking him a series of minute questions as to his past history, his schooling, the age at which he began work, etc. Such facts and many others were secured in hundreds of cases where the men were known to the office for several months or years, but there were others in which the investigation had to be confined to one or two work references, and the knowledge gained of such men was comparatively slight.

In other instances the men gave false references or addresses, and about all that could be learned regarding them was that their stories were not true.

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TABLE I.—GENERAL DATA CONCERNING 1000 HOMELESS MEN

A. AGES, BY GROUPS		B. NATIVITY*	
10 to 14.....	19	American (including 41 Negroes).....	625
15 to 19.....	98	German.....	92
20 to 24.....	129	English.....	66
25 to 29.....	104	Irish.....	61
30 to 39.....	200	Canadian.....	25
40 to 49.....	185	Scandinavian.....	24
50 to 59.....	118	Other.....	74
60 to 69.....	85	Not known.....	33
70 or over.....	47		
Not known.....	15		
Total.....	1000	Total.....	1000

  

C. CONJUGAL CONDITION		D. AMOUNT OF EDUCATION	
Single.....	740	Illiterate.....	52
Married.....	78	Common school.....	872
Widowed.....	116	College.....	51
Divorced.....	15	Education not known.....	25
Separated.....	49		
Not known.....	2	Total.....	1000
Total.....	1000		

A few of the men were too ill and some too old or too insane to answer questions intelligently. It is to be regretted that the item "not known" must appear so frequently in the statistical tables of this study, but the fact should be borne in mind that both interviews and investigations were originally made, not for future statistical purposes, but with the idea of learning the points in each case essential to a knowledge of how best to help the particular applicant; from a statistical standpoint, therefore,

\* The parents of 558 of the 1000 men were American; of 406, foreign born; and of 36, not known. Of the 625 men born in America, the parents of 558 were American, and of 55, foreign born; of 3 the parentage was mixed, and of 9, not known.

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the records from which the tables have been made up were frequently found wanting.

As will be seen by the accompanying table, 625 of the one thousand men (584 white and 41 colored), were born in America; 342 were foreign born,\* and of 33 the birthplace was not known. Nineteen out of the thousand were between ten and fourteen years of age; 98 between fifteen and nineteen; the largest number in any one group being the 129 young men between the ages of twenty and twenty-four. Among the aged, nine were between eighty and ninety-five.†

In noting the nationality, the ages, and the conjugal condition of the men, their own statements have been taken. In doing this we have run the same risk as do the makers of the United States Census; namely, that certain of the men may not have told the truth on these points. But as the instances would probably be rare in which they would have had any reason for misrepresenting their ages or nationality, and as such items are usually not absolutely verified in similar tables, that risk has been of necessity ignored.

Regarding their conjugal condition, it is probable that there were some instances in which married

\* The birth places of the foreign born men were as follows: Canada, 25; England, 66; Ireland, 61; Scotland, 8; Wales, 3; Scandinavia, 24; Denmark, 3; Holland, 7; France, 12; Switzerland, 1; Germany, 92; Austria, 6; Hungary, 3; Russia, 5; Poland, 5; Roumania, 4; Italy, 8; India, 3; West Indies, 2; Greece, Syria, Persia, and Transvaal, each 1.

† For additional data concerning the 1000 men, see Appendix A, Tables 1 and 2, p. 277.



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men who had deserted their families claimed to be single, and a few single men who, in order to use a pitiful story for begging purposes, claimed to be married. But it was, as a rule, comparatively easy for the Bureau's agent to verify or disprove these statements, and it is unlikely that any considerable number of such errors are listed among the cases tabulated in this study. A letter to a relative or even to an employer in the home town was almost sure to bring out the existence of a family if the man had one; and the familiarity of the agents with the fact that men past thirty sometimes misrepresent their conjugal state led the interviewers usually to ask, "Where is your wife?" or "How much of a family have you?" rather than "Are you married?" or "Have you a family?" In this way men were sometimes led to admit the existence of families which otherwise they might have failed to mention. Classified by conjugal condition, the number in each group was as follows:\*

Single	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	740
Married	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	78
Widowed	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	116
Divorced	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	15
Separated	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	49
Not known	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	2
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Total	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1000

In cases where the man was in friendly touch with his wife and family, expecting soon to return,

\* For table giving conjugal condition of the men classified by age groups, see Appendix A, Table 1, page 277.

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had been, married, owned to having 256 living children, of whom 144 were under sixteen.

Two facts regarding the conjugal condition of these men are, perhaps, noteworthy. One is the great predominance of single men, due in part to the large number of young men in the thousand studied. The other fact of interest is that among this thousand men the widowers are nearly four times as numerous as among the male population at large.\* It is the writer's belief that, while this percentage of difference would be found to be somewhat less in a study of men in lodging houses instead of among men who are applicants for charity, the number of widowers per thousand would still be found greater than among the general population. A large number of the men dated their vagrancy from the deaths of their wives and the breaking up of their homes which followed.

Merely as a matter of interest,—for the item probably has no intrinsic value,—the number of instances in which the stories told by the men were found to be true or false has been recorded. In 126 cases we were unable to prove or disprove

\* POPULATION FIGURES (CENSUS OF 1900)

		<i>Per cent</i>
Single.....	23,666,836	60.6
Married.....	14,003,798	35.9
Widowed.....	1,182,292	3.0
Divorced.....	84,903	.2
Not known.....	121,412	.3
Aggregate men.....	39,059,241	100.0

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the men's initial stories, either because through age or for some other reason they were unable to give definite references, or because the persons to whom we were referred had moved and could not be found or else did not reply to letters. Excluding the 126 whose stories could not be verified, of the remaining 874 cases the stories of 703 were found to be true, and 171 false.\* Expressed in percentages, the stories of the one thousand men were mainly true in 70 per cent of the cases; mainly or wholly false in 17 per cent; and could not be verified in the remaining 13 per cent.

These figures do not mean as much as would appear at first glance. The fact that his initial story could not be verified rarely meant that we knew nothing about the applicant; for sometimes his case was dealt with by the office continuously for several months or even years, and enough was learned of his character to enable us to judge pretty clearly as to the truth or falsity of his first statements. For similar reasons the fact that the man's first story was false does not imply that falsehood has been mingled with truth in the items classified in the tables accompanying this study. Upon investigation, some facts in regard to a man's life could usually be learned.

For example, a lad of seventeen who claimed

\* In addition to the explanation of this statement given by the author it should be added that unskilful questioning would have elicited a very different result. The 703 men whose statements were in the main true, were helped to tell the truth by an intelligent and sympathetic inquiry.—Editor.

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to be an orphan came to the office one day and asked to be given employment upon a farm in the country. He said that he had always lived in the country and did not like the city; that he was used to farming and had come to the city out of curiosity two weeks before but now wished to go back. This was the lad's story; but from a man friendly to the office who was living in the same lodging house, we learned that this boy was a runaway from a good home in Chicago. We soon learned further that both his parents were living; that he had been born and brought up in Chicago, and, with the exception of attendance at an occasional Sunday school picnic, had never seen the country in his life—and, of course, had had no experience on a farm. Every word of the boy's story was false and yet there are few cases among those tabulated in this study upon which more complete information of all sorts was obtained. The boy is now twenty-three years old, is a confirmed vagrant, and still occasionally comes to the attention of the Bureau.

It would be pleasant to be able to record that all the original stories found to be true meant that the men who told them were really truthful; but the courts long ago took cognizance of the fact that there is "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth"; too much, therefore, must not be credited to the accounts of the men whose initial statements were "true." They were frequently led to tell the exact truth in order that

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they might be more likely to receive help after their stories had been investigated, but such truth by no means meant the whole truth, as the following story will indicate:

A man came to the office on crutches, which he used on account of a recently broken leg. He told us the story of the accident, how and where it had occurred, and gave the name of the hospital in which he had been treated. These statements were found to be exactly true. He gave the names of three firms for which he had worked and of one personal friend, as references. All these spoke well of him. He also referred us to his record as a soldier, which we found to be excellent. After all these points had been verified, probably almost any one would agree that this case might be considered "investigated" and that the agent knew the man well enough to deal intelligently with his problem. The case looked simple. Here, apparently, was an honest workman temporarily unable to support himself on account of an accident which he could not have foreseen nor avoided. That out of good wages he had not saved enough to carry himself through a rainy day was a point against him, but in this respect he was not different from hundreds of other strong, young fellows, with only themselves to support, who go on from year to year spending all they earn. Light work which he could do seated and which would enable him to earn his living until he could discard the crutches and return to his trade, would undoubtedly be the

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only aid required in order to reinstate him in a position of self-support.

But what were the facts with which at this point we were not acquainted? This man had neglected to tell us that he was a periodic drinker of long standing; that during his drinking spells he had several times stolen money,—though at other times he was honest; that he had served a term in the penitentiary for the last offense of the sort and that a warrant for his arrest was even then in the hands of the sheriff of an Illinois town. He had also neglected to mention that he had been married; that his wife was now dead, but that he had a little child dependent upon him who was in the care of his mother. He had further failed to give the names of certain employers, friends, and relatives whose statements regarding him would necessarily have been quite different in character from those of the few persons whom the agents of the Bureau had been permitted to interview.

The experience with this case was one of a number which taught the district workers that as a source of real information in regard to an applicant, "work references," though necessary, are of less value than relatives. An interview with a single near relative is far more enlightening and helpful.

The length of time that men were known to the office,\* like the truth or falsity of their statements,

\* One day, 194 men; 2 days, 49; 2 days to 1 week, 143; 1 week to 1 month, 192; 1 month to 6 months, 163; 6 months to 1 year, 58.

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is very likely to mislead the reader who is not familiar with all the facts. A man may be entered as known to the office five or six years and yet the information in regard to him may be very meager. This is especially true of professional beggars who are repeatedly reported to the office by people from whom they beg, but about whom little can be learned; and of tramps who drop in once or twice a year for several years, but never give much information about themselves. On the other hand, acquaintance with some of the men was continuous for long periods. A few have been known from the early days of the Bureau to the present time. In one instance a lad who first came to its attention at the age of seven as a younger child in a dependent family, is now known to the Bureau as a confirmed vagrant of eighteen, although there is but slight record of him during the interval. As a general rule, more was known of men who are entered as "known to the office" during several months or years, than of those who applied but once or twice. This, however, was by no means always true. Code telegrams\* to and from charity organization societies of other cities were frequently used in the investigation of cases requiring immediate action, and considerable information was sometimes secured about a man

1 year to 2 years, 55; 2 years to 10 years, 141; over 10 years, 5. Total, 1000. For length of time the men were in the city before making application to the Bureau, see Appendix A, Table 2, p. 277.

\* See footnote on Transportation Code, in Chapter XI, Interstate Migration of Paupers and Dependents, p. 208.

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within a few hours' time and his case finally disposed of in less than a day. There are a few instances of men who applied but once at the office, but who made statements which enabled the agents to trace the whole history of their lives. These facts must be kept in mind by the reader or he will be liable both to overestimate the importance of the truth or falsity of a man's statements and to underestimate the value of statistics based upon the study of men who were known to the office but a short time.

No place in which to enter the amount of the applicant's education was specified upon the record cards of the Bureau, and this information was not always asked for. The items have therefore been made up from our general knowledge of the men after our investigations, and may be summarized as follows:

Illiterate . . . . .	52
Common School . . . . .	872
College . . . . .	51
Education not known . . . . .	25
Total . . . . .	1000

Any man able to read and write has been entered as having had a common school education, except such as are known to have had college training besides.\* In the majority of cases the knowledge obtained of the amount of education

\* For facts of interest about the college men in this group, see Appendix A, Table 3, p. 278.



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was not accurate enough to make possible a separation of high school from common school, although in 35 instances the men are known to have had high school training and the actual number of such men is probably much greater. My personal impression from acquaintance with the 872 men whose cases were entered under "common school" is that a large proportion of them had had but a slight amount of schooling. This impression is based upon the histories of the men, the ages at which they went to work or began to wander, and upon other facts which bore direct relation to the amount of their schooling. Only 52 of the men were known to be illiterate; that is, unable to read or write even in their own languages. Of these, 26 were of foreign birth. The feeble-minded in the group, of whom there were 20, have, of course, increased the number of illiterates. The 25 recorded as "not known" were probably illiterate, but lacking definite knowledge, I have not so entered them.