

CHAPTER V

INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENTS IN RELATION TO VAGRANCY

THE promptness with which vagrants in lodging houses take advantage of any occurrence which will furnish them with a new or popular story to use in appealing for help, is a matter for surprise even to persons familiar with the class. Most of these men are well informed about current events and many of them are inveterate newspaper readers. They are quick to notice and to make use of any item which suggests a new form of appeal.

After every great calamity, such as the Galveston flood, the Baltimore fire, or the San Francisco earthquake, alleged "victims" make their appearance in various parts of the country. When the Klondike region was much in the minds of people, unfortunate Klondikers appeared in large numbers. After the Iroquois Theatre fire in Chicago, "stranded actors" who had never stood behind the footlights, applied for aid. Similarly, any much discussed subject in newspapers or magazines is immediately seized upon and utilized. After the appearance of the statement attributed to Dr.

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Osler that men over sixty should be chloroformed, there was a marked increase for a few weeks in the number of men past that age who applied to the Bureau of Charities, and many of them referred to Dr. Osler's alleged dictum. Likewise, the campaign against tuberculosis which has been given so much publicity in newspapers and magazines has caused many a sound-lunged vagrant to claim to be afflicted with the White Plague. This is an especially popular disease among those who appeal for special transportation rates to the West. In the same way the numerous articles which have appeared in recent years upon the prevalence of industrial accidents in the United States and their alleged importance as a cause of vagrancy, have led many tramp-cripples to use stories of industrial accidents as a ground for special appeals for help.

Such stories have apparently proved far more effective in soliciting sympathy and aid than would the recital of the mere facts regarding their accidents. So quick are these men to follow suggestion in the stories they tell that every claim of an industrial accident made by a homeless man should be thoroughly investigated. Otherwise statistics on the relation between such accidents and vagrancy, from whatever source they may come, cannot be relied upon as accurate.

Fifty-five out of the 254 crippled or maimed men in this thousand claimed to have met with injuries while at work and connected with that work.

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Assuming that these 55 were what they claimed to be,—victims of work accidents,—it is evident that about four out of five crippled vagrants came to their injuries elsewhere than at work. But this proportion of 55 to 254 cannot be accepted because the claims of these 55 men are not sustained by the facts. In 28 out of the 55 cases every effort was made to ascertain the truth of the men's statements about the accidents. Of these 28, in only six cases were we able to prove that such accidents had actually occurred. Of the remaining 22, in two instances we lacked sufficient data to prove the men's stories: in four cases letters were unanswered; two men gave false addresses; 12 were entirely unknown to the companies where they claimed to have worked; while in one instance an employer knew the man but no such accident as claimed had occurred at the foundry mentioned, and in still another the accident had occurred as stated, but the man was a trespasser and not an employe.*

In the investigations we did not depend entirely upon the statements made by employers but attempted to prove the truth of the claims of the men in many other ways. The following stories will perhaps show more plainly than can readily be described, both the methods of investigation used and the types of stories which were told by

* With regard to the general statements made by the 28 men whose cases were investigated, these were found to be true in 13 cases, false in 11 cases, and the statements of 4 of the men could not be verified.

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the 22 men whose claims were either proved to be false or whose histories showed that the accidents did not occur as claimed.

E. M., a man of forty, claimed to have been an engineer on the ——— Railroad and to have lost his left arm in a collision occurring at a certain time and place in the state of Washington. By his prompt action in emergency he said that he had saved the lives of 63 people. He said that he was a member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and "well known to railroad men." He stated that the railroad company had done nothing for him, and that he was suing it for large damages, the case being then in the hands of a "prominent lawyer" in St. Paul, whose name he gave us. He also gave us the name of the physician in Spokane who had amputated his arm.

Statement by statement this detailed story was disproved. There had never been an accident on the ——— Railroad at the place mentioned; neither had there been one anywhere on the line in the month and year mentioned. The man's name was not registered as an engineer, nor as an employe in any capacity, in any division of the railroad. Neither could we learn that he was a member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. The physician said to have treated him in Spokane was unknown in that city, nor was there a lawyer, prominent or otherwise, of the name he had given, listed in the St. Paul directory; and no such suit was then pending. The man was

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a peddler of small notions who probably used peddling as a screen for begging. His apparent familiarity with cities all through the Northwest led us to suspect that he was a confirmed tramp, and that he had lost his arm in the course of his travels.

A second man, aged twenty-three, asked the office to furnish his meals for the next ten days at some restaurant, after which he felt sure that an injury to his right leg would be sufficiently healed to allow him to return to work, when he would repay all that had been advanced. This man had a straightforward way of talking and appeared to be quite honest in his story, which was to the effect that he had been hurt while in the employ of the ——— Elevated Railroad, some months before. He claimed that the company had done nothing for him, he having even paid his own way in the hospital until his money gave out. He said that he had entered suit against the company and that his lawyer, a man of the name of ——— in the Monadnock Block, thought the prospect of winning it was good.

There chanced to be a lawyer in the Monadnock Block of the name mentioned, but he knew nothing of this man and had no case for any client against the elevated road. He suggested that the case might be in the hands of his brother, who also was a lawyer, and who had offices in the Unity Building. This gentleman knew nothing of the case, nor did another of the same name in another

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building, nor was his case known to the only other lawyer of that name in Chicago, who was also interviewed. Further investigation proved that no such suit had been brought against the ——— Elevated Company, and at the hospital we learned that the man had been a charity- and not a pay-patient, and that far from suffering from the results of an accident, he was temporarily crippled by a syphilitic ulcer on his leg! The man himself admitted this later and owned that he had been a rover for ten years and had never worked anywhere.

A third man claimed to have met with an accident while in the employ of a certain railway, but we found that he had been injured while "lying asleep drunk on the tracks." Another, who claimed to have lost a leg and an arm in a stone quarry accident, described the quarry at his first call as in Montana and a year later as in New Hampshire. Every reference or clue that he gave in each interview was carefully followed up, but beyond ascertaining that he was a confirmed tramp, nothing very definite could be learned regarding him, and in this case, as in a number of other alleged work-accident cases, tramping injuries were strongly suspected.*

It is much to be regretted that out of the 55 men who claimed to be suffering from injuries received

* In 13 cases, or very nearly a fourth of those where work-accidents were claimed, the histories of the men, as revealed by investigation, strongly indicated that they had met with their injuries on the railroads while tramping.

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while at work, an attempt to verify their statements concerning the accidents was made in only half the cases (28 out of 55). These were almost all cases in which the accident was of comparatively recent occurrence, and where the truth as to its exact nature, the damages received, and other matters concerning it, were felt to bear sufficient relation to the man's present problem, and to the treatment of his case, to warrant careful investigation of the accident itself. When the injuries which crippled him had been received from ten to twenty or more years before,—and when, perhaps, he frankly admitted the receipt of damages which were now exhausted, or the promise of life employment, all claim to which he had forfeited by his own acts,—a man's statements on these points were accepted, and only matters more recently and vitally connected with his case were investigated. It is probable that in almost every instance where a man claimed to have met with such an accident the agent who first interviewed him questioned him regarding it, and especially asked whether the fault was his own and whether he had received damages; but not appreciating the possible statistical value of his statements on these points, the agent made no record of them.

Almost the only test, therefore, which we have of the truth of the claims made by the remainder (27 out of 55) that they were crippled by work-accidents, is that of the truth or falsity of their general statements upon other matters. These

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were found to be true in 19 instances, false in four, and they could not be verified in the remaining four. Undoubtedly, certain of the 19 men whose statements in regard to recent matters were true, told the truth about their injuries, but it will not do to jump to the conclusion that all of them did so and that 19 more should, therefore, be added to our total of six proved industrial accident cases; for this test, as explained in an earlier chapter, is a most uncertain one, and it may be shown to be practically worthless in this case because we found upon investigation that three of these 19 men had never had any work records at all, but had been tramps and beggars from boyhood. A more thorough investigation in other cases might have proved a similar lack.

However, in addition to the six men whose accident stories were found to be true, there were 20 cases out of the 55 in which investigation proved that the men had been bona fide workmen of such good character and habits (and our own further acquaintance with them tended to corroborate their apparent truthfulness in all matters), that they should perhaps be given the benefit of the doubt about their stories of injuries and counted with the six.* If these probable but not proved cases are counted with the verified ones, it makes a total of 26 cases out of the thousand homeless men, or 2.6 per cent, who had been injured while

* For occupations before and after injuries of 55 men who claimed industrial accidents, see Appendix A, Table 11, p. 286.

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at work. If the six proved cases only are taken it appears that but .6 per cent out of the thousand met with such accidents. Of the 254 crippled and maimed in the thousand, the percentage of actual industrial accidents must lie between 2.3 per cent and 10.3 per cent.*

If a careful study of the cases of a number of men who have met with industrial accidents were to be made, it would probably show that a large proportion of such accidents are occurring to married men whose families succeed in caring for them during the period of their disabilities, thus preventing them from drifting into the vagrant class. When in such cases standards of living are lowered, and the earnings of children taken out of school must be resorted to, the indirect results may be revealed only in later years in the undermined vitality of these children. Yet this indirect result may be far more serious than the direct one. And such a study would probably also show that so long as they are able in any way to support themselves, unmarried workingmen who meet with industrial accidents will continue to be just what they were before they suffered such injuries—workers, not idlers or parasites; for, as illustrated by the study of individual cases in the previous

* The group of crippled and maimed homeless men considered in this study is numerically small, but proportionally it is large, since it is almost certain that there is a larger percentage of cripples and defective of all sorts among this particular thousand cases than would be found in any thousand, chosen at random from among homeless men in general, not all of whom had asked charity.

TABLE V.—GENERAL DATA CONCERNING 55 MEN CLAIMING INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENTS

Condition	A. NUMBER INJURED, BY CONDITION			B. AMOUNT OF SELF-SUPPORT BEFORE AND AFTER INJURY		
	Injured	Off	Total	Self-supporting	Before	After
Hand or arm.....	16	8	24	Entirely.....	27	11
Leg or hip.....	6	8	14	Partly.....	3	10
Foot or ankle.....	3	1	4	Not at all.....	5	32
Eyes.....	1	(blind) 2	3	Not known.....	20	2
Other defects.....			5	Total.....	55	55
Double defects.....			5			
Total.....			55			

C. AMOUNT OF SELF-SUPPORT BEFORE AND AFTER INJURY.—By CONDITION

Condition	Total	SELF-SUPPORTING BEFORE INJURY			SELF-SUPPORTING AFTER INJURY		
		Entirely	Partly	Not at All	Entirely	Partly	Not at All
Injury to							
Hand or arm.....	24	9	1	3	2	5	16
Leg or hip.....	14	8	1	1	4	2	8
Foot or ankle.....	4	3	2	..	2
Eyes.....	3	2	2	1
Other defects.....	5	2	1	1	1	1	2
Double defects.....	5	3	2	..	3
Total.....	55	27	3	5	11	10	32
							2

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chapter, the mere fact that he is temporarily or even permanently crippled does not usually lead a man to change his whole mode of life and become a tramp and a beggar.* Even when his handicap is very great he will generally struggle hard to maintain his independence and will not become a vagrant, unless the seeds of degeneracy have merely been lying dormant within him awaiting some favorable opportunity for growth,—or unless ignorance, incompetency, ill-health, or some other additional handicap exists, which, together with his injury, makes self-support practically unattainable.†

The stories of two men, with whom we were dealing at the same time, will further illustrate this. One was the man referred to on page 74, who claimed to have been hurt while in the employ of a certain railroad company but who was, in fact, run over and injured while intoxicated and asleep on the tracks. This man, who was thirty-five

* An inquiry into the drink, tramping, and begging habits, before and after injury, of the men who claimed industrial accidents, resulted in the following summary:

Sixteen men drank to excess after becoming crippled; of these, 7 had drunk to excess before; 5 had not, and the previous habits of 4 in this regard are not known.

Fifteen men were tramps after being crippled; of these, 7 had been tramps before; 3 had not, and the previous habits of 5 in this regard are not known.

Twenty-three men begged after becoming crippled; of these, 3 had been beggars before; 5 had not, and the previous habits of 15 in this regard are not known.

† For general and detailed data concerning amount of self-support before and after injury of the 55 men who claimed industrial accidents, and of the 32 permanently crippled, see Table V and Appendix A, Tables 11-13, pp. 286-288.

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years of age and unmarried, had a record of fourteen years' employment in one place as an iron worker. He left this position one day of his own accord, and started West; the accident occurred soon after. We learned from his employers that the man had been in the habit of drinking occasionally, but never enough to interfere with his work. His record upon the whole was so favorable, that, ignoring his initial falsehood in regard to his injuries, we offered to help him secure an artificial leg; to supply his actual needs until he should become familiar with its use; and to assist him to find work when he should be able to take it again. All this was to be conditioned upon his stopping the practice of begging which he had taken up in the few weeks since his dismissal from the hospital. He promised to do this and further co-operated by giving us the names of friends who might be willing to contribute toward the purchase of the artificial leg.

Letters had been written, and other steps taken in his behalf, when one day, about a week later, he came to the office and announced that he had changed his mind about the matter of begging and did not think it right, under the circumstances, to let us continue to make efforts to raise the money to buy him a leg, or to assist him in any way. There was some odd streak of honesty in this man which made him ashamed to deceive us, who had voluntarily offered to befriend him, even though at the same time he frankly confessed his

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intention to deceive the general public and live thereafter by begging.

"I could get a leg for myself if I wanted one," he said. "I have this peg leg, and I could get work enough any time, without any help from you folks, to earn one of the other sort, if I wanted to, but I don't. You've treated me white, so I thought it wouldn't be honest not to tell you, but there's no use pretending that I'm going to give up drinking, the way I promised you, and go back to work, for I'm not. I like to travel and I can get a living without working. I know you don't like the way I'll get it, but I've made up my mind; I'm done with work. There's no use of your trying to argue with me, for I know what I'm going to do, but you treated me white so I thought I ought to let you know,"—and he stumped out of the office without giving me a moment's opportunity to "argue."

He was apparently as good as his word, for within a week he was reported to the office as begging. We gave his name and description to the police, but they did not find him, and as he was not reported again it is probable that he left the city, to continue his begging elsewhere, telling a pathetic story of an industrial accident and of its blighting influence upon his career.

The other man, aged forty-nine and also single, had learned the trade of a cooper in his youth, but the loss of his right thumb, which occurred while he was at work, prevented his further use of cooper's tools, and he abandoned the trade and

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became a sailor and a pilot on the lakes. He had spent his summers upon the vessels and had made Chicago his winter headquarters for twenty-five consecutive years, when a second industrial accident resulted in the loss of his right leg. Almost as soon as he was discharged from the hospital, this hitherto self-supporting man began to sell pencils and to beg from door to door in Chicago, asking for money with which to purchase an artificial leg. As has been stated in another chapter, this is a favorite story with crippled professional beggars, and from this man's general appearance, as well as from the fact that he took to begging so promptly after he left the hospital, it looked as though he had entered the class of parasites by choice, without any effort toward independence. This seemed the more likely as he did not at once come to the office when referred to it by a citizen.

But he proved to be one of the hundreds of men whom it would have been most unfair to judge by appearances without a hearing and an investigation of his story. When seen and questioned he frankly admitted the begging, but said that he had taken to it only as a last resort, after he had found that no one was willing to employ him while he was using crutches. He said that the thought of being continuously dependent, and of perhaps ending his days in the poorhouse, was so unbearable to him, that he had determined to secure an artificial leg for himself, somehow and at once, even at the temporary loss of his self-

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respect while begging from door to door. We looked up this man's record and found it excellent, and within a few days—before we had taken steps to secure a leg for him—had the good fortune to find easy work for him. One of his employers immediately took a great interest in the man, and in addition to making a small initial payment himself towards the purchase of a leg, became responsible to the firm manufacturing it for the payment of the remainder of its cost. This enabled the cripple to secure the leg at once, and to pay for it himself, a little at a time, out of his earnings. In this way a habit of saving was for the first time established in the man, and after the leg was fully paid for he started an account in a savings bank, and has added something to it every month during the past six years.*

While one must admit that many cripples are not as successful as this one, either in finding employment or in re-establishing their industrial independence, one thing seems to be clear from the story of this man's life: if, handicapped by the loss of a limb, he was able to meet all his expenses and still save several hundred dollars in a few years' time out of his very small salary as a watchman, he might have saved a much larger amount

* It is of interest to note that this man, who now has several hundred dollars in the bank, has himself become a small contributor to the Bureau of Charities, and also that on one occasion he helped a fellow-cripple to secure an artificial leg by going with him to the shop where his own had been purchased, and guaranteeing the full payment, just as his employer had done for him.

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against the day of possible disability, if he had chosen to do so during the twenty-five or more years in which he had earned a much larger income.

Eight of the 26 men* who had probably suffered industrial accidents, admitted that these had been caused by their own carelessness or disobedience of orders, and that they had no right under the law to claim damages. Ten men admitted having received damages for their injuries,—six for permanent, and four for temporary injuries. Two men complained that lawyers had received the larger share of the money paid to them; and the damages received from his employers by a third man were absurdly small considering the nature of his injuries. Two men who told of promises of life positions, both admitted that they had by their own acts forfeited any claims to them. Seventeen of the 26 men who in all probability had actually suffered industrial accidents, had received permanent injuries. Every one of these men whose work history we knew had been fully self-supporting prior to his accident, and all but three of the 17 were still, after the accidents, in the main self-supporting.

A brief digest, giving some interesting facts in regard to these 17 permanently injured men, will be found in the Appendix.† A German baker had accepted \$100 in settlement from the company employing him at the time of his accident, because there was some question as to whose fault it was

* See page 76.

† See Appendix A, Table 14, p. 289.

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that both his hands were caught in a dough roller and so badly crushed that the bones of the right hand had to be removed. Another man, a German of Russian parentage, who was unfamiliar with English and rather ignorant, said that after his accident he had signed, without understanding its contents, a paper releasing the mining company from responsibility. His statement could not be verified. This man seemed so anxious to be self-supporting that special efforts were made to find employment for him as watchman or time-keeper. He was sent in all to 35 different firms of contractors, not one of whom could give him immediate employment; when one firm, later, sent word that they had a \$12 a week position for him, the man had become discouraged by his many failures to secure work, had given up the attempt, and disappeared. Every effort was made to find him, but without success. This case is cited to show how extremely difficult it is for a man like this one who had an additional handicap in his ignorance of English, to secure work for himself after so disabling an accident as the loss of an arm. It is not to be wondered at that such men take to begging; they must do so in order to maintain life outside of almshouses, and if non-resident they are not even admitted to these. It should, however, be noted that of the three men in this list of the permanently injured, known to be chronically dependent, two were so as much because of excessive drinking as because of their physical handicaps.

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It should be recognized that additional handicaps like ignorance, drink, or other causes of dependence must be counted upon as likely to force into the vagrant class a certain percentage of all men with small or irregular incomes who meet with accidents; and students of these problems must discover the means of withdrawing from the road, not only the men who deliberately choose vagrancy, but also those who slip down into it because of their moral weaknesses, or because of additional mental or physical handicaps. For these men, as well as for the immediate help of all cripples, it would be well if, in every community, there were some such agency as the Bureau for the Handicapped in New York City, which is maintained by the Charity Organization Society and which is doing a valuable work by securing for handicapped men the right sort of employment before they have been forced, from the lack of it, into chronic dependence and vagrancy.

Such methods of alleviating unnecessary suffering and of assisting men to become independent seem to be the most practical ones which can be put into immediate effect in American cities, pending the time when better laws of various sorts shall reduce the total number of our crippled and maimed, and shall provide other than philanthropic resources for the care of those who are likely still to be crippled by unpreventable accidents. For, however much may have been said in this and the preceding chapter which would tend to prove

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that even when a man is handicapped his personality and the strength of his desire for independence will have much to do with his ultimate attainment of it, it is certain that men who are permanently crippled or maimed to any serious extent are at a terrible disadvantage in the matter of finding employment; and that many undergo great suffering, both mental and physical, before they secure it, or before, failing to secure it, they sink into chronic dependence.

It is not within the province of this study to discuss even briefly the various methods for safeguarding machinery or for otherwise lessening the risks of accidents in various trades and occupations, which have been suggested or put into practice in parts of this country and in Europe; nor can the several plans for indemnity in cases of accident, nor of industrial insurance and the pensioning of injured men, be here considered. The aim in this chapter has been only to assist in throwing a clearer light upon the relation between industrial accidents and vagrancy, and to show how after all the personal equation enters into and must be considered in this as in every other phase of the problem of the vagrant.