

CHAPTER XI

THE INTER-STATE MIGRATION OF PAUPERS AND DEPENDENTS*

OF the many requests of many sorts which were made by homeless men who applied to the Bureau of Charities for aid, no single one was more frequently repeated than that for free or half-rate transportation to some other point. Tuberculous men asked to be sent to the health resorts of the West, or to be returned from them to relatives or friends in the East. Old soldiers asked transportation to soldiers' homes in other states where they thought they would be more contented. Young boys asked to be sent to their homes or to mythical uncles in the far West, who would start them up in business. "Out-of-works" asked half rates to Minneapolis, St. Louis, or Pittsburgh, sure that plenty of work could be found in other cities when it was scarce in Chicago. Insane men asked tickets to Washington in order that they might make important complaints to the President; while innumerable tramp-paupers, who had for years been aimlessly drifting about the country

* See also *The Homeless Man and Organized Charity*, by the author, in *The Survey*, Vol. XXI, p. 125.

HOMELESS MEN

at the expense of the public, begged for "a charity ticket to anywhere," being desirous only to keep moving and quite indifferent as to whether they went north or south, east or west.

The fact that thousands and tens of thousands of boys, unemployed workmen, tramps and vagrants are stealing rides on the railroads and traveling about the country without personal expense is one with which all are familiar, but that a second very large army of wanderers is traveling from Maine to California, and back again, with its transportation paid out of charity funds, is a fact which is probably not so well known.

The most striking differences which exist between the two armies of wanderers, are, first, that the "paid for" group includes hundreds if not thousands of women and children, while among those who beat their way women are so rare as to be almost unknown; and second, that although among the men who are traveling on charity tickets are some capable of self-support, the great majority are old, crippled, defective, or for some other reason chronically dependent, while in the other group the majority of men are young and able-bodied, and when dependent at all are as often so from choice as from necessity.

A most interesting chapter might be written about the tramp-women and the tramp-families on the road, figures as familiar to charity workers as men tramps, and whose restoration to normal living presents even more serious and difficult

INTER-STATE MIGRATION OF PAUPERS

problems. But in this study the evils of the "passing on" system can be considered only as they relate to homeless men, although attention need scarcely be called to the fact that since the welfare of large numbers of children is involved in the cases of women and of families, all that may be said of the unfortunate results of the practice among men, applies with even greater force to its other victims.

A generally recognized principle of relief is that each community should bear the burden of the care of its own dependents. Laws regulating the voluntary passage, or the transfer by other people, of dependents from one county to another within a state, exist in the majority of states in the Union, and laws providing for the return of persons who are found to be insane or dependent after they have drifted or been sent across state lines, but before they have become legal residents of the new states, are upon the statute books of Massachusetts, New York, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Colorado, California, and a few other states. The need for such laws has not yet, however, been generally recognized, and as a result certain states which are on the main lines of travel, and which have not yet so protected themselves, have been heavy sufferers from the unregulated migration of dependents from one section of the country to another; and a few large cities have become veritable dumping grounds for the dependents of all the surrounding country.

HOMELESS MEN

Chicago, especially on account of the non-resident dependents thrust upon her for care, has been afflicted with an enormous burden of expense. Unless there is a state law which empowers it to return dependents who are unwilling to go, doing this perhaps at the expense of the railroad which brought them into the state, a city cannot rid itself of this burden. It may return dependents to their homes or send them on to their destinations elsewhere, if they are willing to go, but if unwilling, it cannot compel them to leave. Dependent persons are not permitted to starve on the streets in America, and, under the laws existing in most states, they must be cared for either by public or private charity wherever they may elect to remain.

In 1902 a large family of paupers came from Pennsylvania to Chicago. The man was blind, the woman crippled, and there were seven children, the oldest of whom was feeble-minded. The next child was only ten, so that it would be four years before he would be legally able by work to contribute to their support. In the meantime the entire family would have to be supported by charity. We ascertained that these people had never in their history been self-supporting. They had received public and private aid for fifteen years in the city from which they came, and they had been aided to reach Chicago by the poor relief agents of their own county and of a chain of counties extending across the three states through which they had passed on their way to Chicago.

INTER-STATE MIGRATION OF PAUPERS

In spite of our definite knowledge of these facts, we were unable to return this family to Pennsylvania, for the simple reason that they refused to go. This one family has cost the public and private charities of Chicago, at a conservative estimate, not less than \$9,000 or \$10,000 since their arrival, and the amount is probably much larger, for they are professional beggars and have doubtless secured by begging more than the actual cost of their support.

The Central District of the Bureau of Charities, at the time I was connected with it, covered more than 20 square miles of city territory, some parts of which were very densely populated, but one-half of all the cases dealt with in the district office were those of non-residents. This was largely due to the fact that the Central District, as it was then defined, included the central portion of the city in which are most of the railroad stations, hotels, and cheap lodging houses. While more non-residents came to the Central District office than to any one of the 11 other district offices of the Bureau, no district entirely escaped the problem of their care and two other districts dealt with large numbers of them. In 1902 it was discovered that three-fourths* of the population of the Cook County hospital, almshouse, insane asylum, and

* This proportion has since been considerably reduced because the county commissioners have instituted the plan of returning to their legal residences all non-resident insane and a few non-resident dependents of other sorts when they are willing to go and can furnish their home addresses.

HOMELESS MEN

infirmaries, were non-residents. It may readily be seen from these facts how serious, from the economic side alone, is this problem of the unrestricted migration of dependents.

There are a great many cases where the granting of charitable transportation to an applicant who requests it not only does no wrong to the community to which he is sent, but is by far the best and most economical method of caring for the man himself. If, to save an old man from the necessity of entering the local poorhouse, the authorities in his native county send him, after an exchange of letters, to a relative in another state who is willing and able to care for him, the old man is helped, local taxpayers are legitimately relieved of expense, and no wrong is done to the community which receives the man. Similarly, if the friends and relatives of a consumptive, whose disease is not far advanced, are willing and able to pay his way to a western city, and to guarantee the expense of his care so long as he remains there, or until he recovers and is able to support himself, no complaint will come from the western community, nor from the states through which the man has passed on his way thither. Runaway lads; men who have met with crippling accidents away from their homes and wish to be returned to them; men who have definite promises of employment in other cities and are dependent where they are,—all these and many others are manifestly greatly assisted by being sent to the places to which they

INTER-STATE MIGRATION OF PAUPERS

wish to go, and if they are sent clear through to their destinations, after the facts in regard to their means of support upon arrival have been ascertained from reliable sources, no possible wrong will have been done to any one.

The "if" clause in the last sentence is, however, a very important one, and upon the failure of private citizens and public authorities to abide by its simple provisions, hangs much of the suffering and wrong connected with the system of sending dependents about the country as it is at present generally practiced. Just what the system referred to is, and how and why it causes suffering and degradation, as well as an enormous waste of charitable funds, can perhaps best be illustrated by the stories of a few of the men whose cases have been considered in this study. The ones chosen have been selected almost at random from among more than one hundred of the same sort, and they are by no means extreme or unusual.

A man of seventy-five lived, after his wife's death, with a daughter in New York state. Feeling that her brothers should share the cost of the old man's care, she one day sent him to the home of one of his sons in Michigan. He was unwelcome there and was soon sent to another son in the same state. This man, too, decided that his father was a burden, and the two sons together hit upon the plan of sending him to a distant cousin in Chicago. The old man, miserably unhappy where he was, readily consented to go, but the sons, being short

HOMELESS MEN

of money, paid their father's fare only to a nearby city, and told him to apply for help on reaching there, to the Masons to whose order he belonged. The Masons assisted him to a second city; Masons there to another, and so on until he reached Muskegon, Michigan, where some one shipped him by boat to Chicago. He arrived with but 12 cents in his pocket and not the least idea where his cousin lived or whether or not he would receive him. Some friendly stranger at the dock brought the old man to the Bureau of Charities office. There he admitted, when we questioned him, that he had not seen nor heard from his cousin in thirty years. He was not even certain that he lived in Chicago, but had "heard so." He also admitted that it was quite possible that his relative was no longer living, as he was somewhat older than himself and "never was very strong." It need hardly be stated that we failed to find this cousin in Chicago. We took care of the old man for fifteen days while we corresponded with the Masons, his sons, and his daughter, and at the end of that time, being unable to secure a promise of care for him from either of his sons, we sent the old man back to New York state, his legal residence, to live with his daughter who agreed to receive him.* The cost of his care during the fortnight he had remained in Chicago, of a ticket to

*One of the Masonic Homes in New York state would probably have received this man if his daughter had been unable to care for him.

INTER-STATE MIGRATION OF PAUPERS

his destination, and of his expenses en route, were all necessarily met by private charity.

One bitter December day a feeble, tottering, almost maudlin old man, who gave his age as ninety-four, was brought to us by the police. "Somebody," "somewhere," had bought him a ticket and put him on a train for Chicago. That was all he could tell us except that he had been traveling around for a long time and had been to "lots of places." Everybody had been good to him, he said, and had given him food and clothing and railway tickets. When we tried to question him he told a confused and disconnected story of having once had \$3,000 which he had lost, and of brothers in Cincinnati, and daughters and sons living in a couple of Illinois cities. Every clue of any sort which he gave us we attempted to trace. We learned that he had wandered into and out of the Springfield, Illinois, Associated Charities office; that public authorities in Springfield had sent him to Joliet, upon his own statement that he had a daughter there; that Joliet or some other city must have shipped him back to Springfield again, for he had been found there a few weeks later asking to be sent to Peoria. Whether this was done we could not learn. Alton, Illinois, knew him, and one or two other communities had assisted him. We finally found in a small village in Illinois, a brother-in-law of the old man, who was unable to take care of him, but who gave us the addresses of his Cincinnati

HOMELESS MEN

relatives. These, when appealed to, claimed also to be unable to care for him. No one of them knew where his sons or daughters lived, nor why, nor how long the old man had been wandering about uncared for. He was not a resident of Cook County, but as we could not learn where he really belonged, the only thing that could be done for him was to place him in the poorhouse at Dunning, which we did six weeks after his arrival in Chicago, the cost of his care in the interval having been met by private charity through the agency of the Bureau of Charities.

It is a common custom for charity ticket travelers to secure letters from physicians, ministers, or others, addressed "To whom it may concern," and requesting aid for the applicants. A young epileptic, a resident of Chicago, was referred to us one day by a local county official, to whom he had applied for transportation. The man wished to go to New York City and pulled out of his pocket two letters from Chicago physicians, which testified that he was "worthy" and unfortunate, and commended him to the charitable for aid. The letters were addressed "To whom it may concern," but the man said he intended to show them particularly to county commissioners along the way so that they would pass him along without question. His only reason for wishing to go to New York proved to be that he expected a cousin from Germany upon a boat which would arrive the following week and wanted to be there to meet

INTER-STATE MIGRATION OF PAUPERS

him. Since we found that this young fellow averaged at least one epileptic seizure a day, even when under no special excitement or strain, it was probably fortunate that we succeeded in persuading him to give up the trip to New York on our promise to write asking someone in that city to look out for the immigrant cousin. One of the physicians who had given him a letter for begging purposes had done so without learning the man's real reason for wishing to go to New York. The other said that he had written it out of charity, because the man had asked him to and had shown him his colleague's letter. He knew nothing of the man nor of the frequent seizures which would have made the long, uncertain journey exceedingly dangerous.

One of the most pitiful and tragic examples of the sufferings caused by the "passing on" system which ever came to the attention of the Bureau of Charities, was that of another epileptic, a lad of twenty, who had been raised in an orphanage in Virginia. After leaving the institution he went to work but soon met with an accident which fractured his skull and caused epilepsy. He was operated upon, but the attacks still continued with great frequency and the boy was no longer able to be self-supporting. His only relative was an uncle in the state of Washington, and local charity officials advised him to go to him and started the lad off on his journey across the continent, with a ticket only to the nearest large city. Even before

HOMELESS MEN

he reached it, however, he had a seizure and was put off the train at a little town along the line of the railway. The people there cared for him a few days and then raised money to pay his way to New York City. At Newark, New Jersey, he was again put off the train and was taken to a hospital. He remained there for some little time and then some one gave him a ticket to Buffalo, but again he was put off the train before reaching his destination. This happened over and over again, and when he finally reached Chicago he gave us a list of not less than 16 or 18 cities and towns in which he had been harbored and given medical and other relief, as well as transportation. The transportation furnished to him had generally been towards the west, but sometimes it was north or south, or even for short distances back towards the east. A great many people had apparently taken an interest in his case. He had been a patient in private as well as in public hospitals, and in Columbus, Ohio, had been again operated upon. A physician in that city had given him a ticket to Chicago, but epileptic seizures while he was crossing Indiana had caused train officials to drop him off and he had received from county authorities in that state the aid which finally enabled him to reach Chicago.

The Bureau of Charities wrote to the Virginia city from which he had started, and to every city and town that the boy claimed to have stopped in while on his way westward. We learned that all

INTER-STATE MIGRATION OF PAUPERS

of his statements were true and incidentally, that not one of the many persons who had contributed money to enable the lad to continue to travel at such pitiful cost, had written to see whether the uncle in the western city would be willing to receive and care for his epileptic nephew when he should complete the long journey. The Bureau of Charities took care of this boy until his uncle was heard from. During his stay in Chicago he was again placed in a hospital for care. After his dismissal he seemed much improved and since the uncle wrote agreeing to care for the lad if he could be sent to him, the Bureau purchased a ticket clear through to his destination and in addition arranged with the railway company that the boy was under no circumstances to be put off the train. Food for the trip was also given him so that he need not even leave the train for a meal along the way, and a telegram was sent notifying his uncle to meet the boy on his arrival. But in spite of all our precautions he never reached Washington. Somewhere on the plains he was put off the train and when next we heard of him he was being shipped from county to county *eastward* through Kansas. He died a few weeks later in an epileptic attack while on a train somewhere in Missouri.

Similar stories might be told of many of the consumptives who are sent by their friends to that promised land of health "The West," but who, as non-resident dependents, are expelled from the western states and sent back again toward the east.

HOMELESS MEN

As an example of the pauperization which in many cases results from the indiscriminate granting of charity tickets, the following case may be cited. A man of eighty-six came to the office one day asking transportation to Pittsburgh. He said that he had no relatives or friends in Pittsburgh, but thought he would be better off there than in Chicago. Upon investigation we found that this man had once been a self-respecting laborer, who had raised a family and had owned a home of his own. The home had long since been lost and the children scattered, and when age began to interfere with his ready employment, he had begun the practice of going from one city to another in the hope of bettering his condition. He could not recall and we could not find out how many years he had been on the road, but his complete pauperization and the strength of the hold which the habit of wandering had upon him, even at eighty-six, showed that he must have been traveling for a long period of years. He said that he had never stolen a ride in his life but had traveled with his way paid by charity, all over America and part of Mexico. He had letters on his person showing that he had been in New Orleans the previous winter; from there he had traveled county by county, or from one large city to another, to Cincinnati. The mayor of Cincinnati had furnished him a ticket to Chicago and the man asked us to send him to Pittsburgh. Hundreds, possibly thousands of charitably intentioned individuals,

INTER-STATE MIGRATION OF PAUPERS

of private charitable agencies, and of public officials, must have furnished the money to pay the fares of this restless old mendicant, solely upon his own claim that he would be better off elsewhere. We refused to send him to Pittsburgh and finally succeeded in finding two of his grown and married children in Iowa, but the old man enjoyed traveling and did not wish to be sent to them. He said that if we did not care to pay his way to Pittsburgh he "reckoned" that he could get there somehow.

Our refusal to grant transportation in cases where there was no good reason for sending men elsewhere, never seemed to trouble professional charity tramps of this type. I do not recall an instance in which our failure to recommend one of them for charity rates delayed an applicant for more than a few days, if he really wished to leave the city. Ministers, church societies, or private individuals, always stood ready to give money for transportation.

One sturdy beggar, almost all of whose readily secured income was spent for whiskey, came from San Francisco to Chicago on charity tickets, and asked us to send him on to Philadelphia. We refused, and offered him well paid work instead, but he declined it and a few weeks later came to the office and boasted that he had begged from clergymen in the city enough to pay his full fare to Philadelphia. There was no reason for doubting his story, since two clergymen of whom he had

HOMELESS MEN

asked aid had telephoned the office about the man, and one of the two had urged us to send him East because he "could not find employment in Chicago" and would "undoubtedly be better off in Philadelphia."

In another case a man who had also come from California, and who was blind in one eye and paralyzed, asked us to send him to Rochester, New York. He claimed that a wealthy brother of his had died there leaving him a large legacy, but that he had not received it and must go at once to look after his interests.

We found that this man had been almost a year in making the trip from Los Angeles to Chicago. He was very dirty, indecently ragged, scarcely able to get about, and altogether not in any condition to be sent on, even if it were necessary. We told him that we would write to the Rochester Charity Organization Society, asking them to look up the facts in regard to his legacy, and to let us know if it would be necessary for him to go on to that city. We also promised him that if they advised that he should be helped to reach there, we would pay his fare all the way to his destination, which would in the end save him much more time than he would gain by going on without waiting for a reply to our letter. We offered, in the meantime, to fit him out with clean and decent clothing; to give him an opportunity for baths and medical care, both of which he needed; and also promised to meet the expenses of his care in Chicago, until

INTER-STATE MIGRATION OF PAUPERS

we heard from Rochester. He agreed to the plan, but when the reply to our letter came it stated that the man's brother, far from being wealthy, had died in poverty, leaving nothing for the care of his own family. The Rochester society advised us not to send the man, as he would at once be dependent upon public or private charity. We told him this, and while we refused, under the circumstances, to send him East to certain dependence, we offered instead to send him back to his sister in Los Angeles, with whom we had corresponded, and who was willing and able to care for him. In five days he could have been in Los Angeles, where he could have remained in comparative comfort for the rest of his life, but he refused both our offer and our advice, and said he would secure help elsewhere and push on to Rochester. He reached there four weeks later and has ever since been an inmate of the local almshouse. New York had to accept this man, who was "passed on" to her for care, because he was in such wretched physical condition upon his arrival that he could not have been sent back to California without danger to life.

A deformed cripple in a wheel chair arrived at the Grand Central Station in Chicago one day. He had spent the previous night in an Indiana town, from which the authorities had shipped him to Chicago, telling him to apply for admission to the poorhouse there, upon his arrival. This man had with him a number of printed slips

HOMELESS MEN

for begging purposes, which set forth that he was "a born cripple of God, worthy of help from all charitable people." He told us that he had been traveling ever since his childhood and claimed never to have lived in any place long enough to acquire legal residence. We tried to trace his most recent wanderings, in the hope of learning something about him which might help us to decide where he really belonged, but we could not. He may have been born in some poorhouse, of a mother who had herself been a "passed on" pauper. Such cases, and they are not rare, apparently belong to no particular state for care. What shall be done with them? Even when they belong to no particular state, cannot some method be devised that shall be less cruel and pauperizing to the unfortunate dependents, and that shall involve less waste of public and private charitable resources than does the present one of merely keeping them forever on the move from county to county and from state to state?

What shall constitute legal residence in a county or state? Under what circumstances may a dependent from one community be shipped to another? By what method shall such transfer be made? How can states regulate or control the private as well as the public granting of transportation to paupers or dependents who wish to go to communities upon which they have no claim? It is the almost unanimous opinion of social workers and others who have given thought and

INTER-STATE MIGRATION OF PAUPERS

attention to the problem that these are questions which cannot be satisfactorily answered by state legislation. No two states will pass identical laws, and unless the laws on this subject are uniform in all states, certain ones will still be imposed upon by others, and many of the evils of the present system will still persist. Undoubtedly, what is needed is a federal law, if possible under the constitution, which shall regulate the inter-state migration of paupers and dependents. Penalties should be imposed for sending dependents from one state to another, except where they have a residence or have friends who will be responsible for their care, or where they will have immediate paying employment. This law should declare what shall constitute proof on these points, as well as what constitutes legal residence in a state, and federal officers should be designated to decide the questions arising under the law.

In the meantime, until the need for such a law has been more generally recognized throughout the country, and until it has been passed and put into effect, individual states should protect themselves by passing laws excluding non-resident dependents; and citizens may do much to lessen the evil by refusing to contribute towards the purchase of railroad tickets for any applicant until they have assurance from the point of destination that the person who asks transportation will be cared for there; and also by refusing to contribute to any charity society which sends unfortunates

HOMELESS MEN

about the country without investigation and without purpose.

NOTE.—Over four hundred organizations and agencies of various sorts, including poor relief agents, mayors of cities, charity organization and relief societies, Jewish charities, institutions for dependents, have within the last few years entered into a voluntary contract to abide by the set of rules approved by a committee of the National Conference of Charities and Correction entitled "Rules Governing the Issuance of Charity Transportation." This contract binds the signers not to furnish transportation to any applicant until they have received proof that the applicant will have care or employment at his destination or (in the case of poor relief officials) that he has legal residence at destination. Also that transportation in any such case shall be given *through to destination*. The signers may write or wire (a telegraphic code has been prepared) to each other in order to obtain the necessary proof. Disputes between signers are referred for decision to a committee of the Executive Committee of the National Conference. Societies or officials interested in this matter and those who may wish to have the benefit of this agreement, should write to the Charity Organization Department, Russell Sage Foundation, 105 East 22nd Street, New York City, which is acting as agent for the Transportation Committee of the National Conference of Charities and Correction.