

### CHAPTER XIII

#### HOMELESS, VAGRANT, AND RUNAWAY BOYS

A week rarely passed during the four years the writer was connected with the Chicago Bureau of Charities in which there was not an appeal for help from some vagrant, homeless, or runaway boy, and at certain seasons of the year there were often several such appeals in a week. It was an unwritten rule of the office that the case of one of these wandering boys must always have right of way over any other work that might be in hand. He was interviewed with special tactfulness lest his suspicions be aroused. Very few questions were asked of him; he was allowed to tell his story in his own way and no surprise was expressed at the remarkable statements sometimes made (as for instance, when an unusually small boy of ten claimed to have been fully self-supporting for six years). The usual rules of the office were set aside and the boy was invited into the private rooms where he helped the stenographer file her letters and became the friend and general assistant of the superintendent and all the visitors. No

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TABLE XI.—GENERAL DATA CONCERNING 117 HOMELESS, VAGRANT, AND RUNAWAY BOYS

A. AGES		B. NATIVITY	
10 years.....	2	American * (including 5	
12 years.....	4	Negroes).....	101
13 years.....	5	German.....	4
14 years.....	8	Other.....	11
15 years.....	7	Not known.....	1
16 years.....	19		
17 years.....	31	Total.....	117
18 years.....	19	* The parents of 82 of the	
19 years.....	22	American boys were American	
Total.....	117	(including 5 Negroes); 7, Ger-	
		man; 9, others; 1, mixed; and	
		2, not known.	
C. OCCUPATIONS		D. PHYSICAL AND MENTAL	
		CONDITION	
Skilled work.....	9	Good.....	77
Unskilled *.....	57	Defective.....	40
Never worked †.....	8	Blind (partly), 2; deaf	
In school.....	21	(entirely,* 2; partly, 1),	
Not known.....	22	3; crippled (tempora-	
Total.....	117	rily, 1; permanently, 8),	
* Farm hands, 10; hotel boys,		9; epileptic,† 3; feeble-	
9; newsboys, 8; messengers, 3;		minded,‡ 3; ill (tem-	
office boys, 3; laborers, 6;		porarily, cause not	
factory hands, 3; odd jobs, 5;		known), 2; convales-	
other work, 10.		cent, 5; heart disease,	
		1; tuberculosis, 12.	
† These were older boys, six-		Total.....	117
teen to nineteen years of age.		* One was syphilitic also.	
Two of them were illiterate, one		† One was crippled also, one	
of the two having no school rec-		was feeble-minded and the third	
ord though born in Chicago.		had been locked into a freight-	
		car when beating his way in	
		winter and had had his feet	
		frozen.	
		‡ Epileptic also in one case.	

effort was made to force his confidence, but the informal friendliness with which he was treated usually won it within a day or two, after which the

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better qualities in the lad could be appealed to; and with the office to act as intermediary, to lessen the difficulties and misunderstandings which he thought lay before him if he returned unannounced to his home, it was generally possible to bring about a reconciliation and to return the boy who was a runaway to his parents or guardians within a few days or a week. Lads who were not runaways were, as a rule, less difficult to reach and deal with, since a majority of them asked in the first interview to be sent home and gave all the information about themselves which we needed. Some others, however, wished to remain in Chicago and asked us for work, and in these cases we frequently found it necessary, after investigating their circumstances, to advise the boys to abandon this idea and go back to their homes instead. If they refused to do this, as they sometimes did, the responsibility of the office for the boy's welfare at once became great, and as much tact and patience was required in dealing with such lads as with runaways.

The boys that came to the office were from all sections of the country and even from Canada, and in a few cases from Europe. More boys came from Cincinnati and St. Louis—the two largest cities within a radius of a few hundred miles of Chicago—than from any other cities, but the ease with which they could travel, without cost, on the railroads,\* brought us applications from boys

\* For discussion of this subject, see Chapter XII, pp. 231-238.

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whose homes were as far east and west as Boston and San Francisco and as far south as New Orleans.

Out of the group of a thousand homeless men there were in all 117 boys under twenty years of age.\* Only 19 of these lads were under fifteen years of age; but 98 were from fifteen to nineteen, and it is notable that of this latter number considerably more than half were sixteen and seventeen years of age, these being apparently the years in a boy's life when he is most likely to be restless and ready to wander away from home if he is not kept interested and happy in it.

Perhaps the most striking and singular fact disclosed by a study of the histories of these 117 lads is that although all of them were nominally "homeless" very few of them were actually so. When closely questioned only 20 boys even claimed to be without homes, and our investigations proved that the statements of 13 of these were false in this regard, and that those of two others were probably false, since all the names and addresses which they gave us were fictitious and we could learn but little concerning them. Sixty-three boys out of the 117 had run away from their homes; nine more were probably runaways; and, as before stated, only 20 in all the group even claimed to be homeless, and but five of these really were so. Even in these latter cases we were able to find relatives or friends willing to receive and care

\* See Table XI, p. 240.

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for two of the boys, leaving a total of but three boys who had in fact no homes of any sort to which they might have returned had they wished to do so.\*

If then, as seems to be proved by this study, the majority of boys on the road and in city lodging houses are not actually homeless, it is of interest to try to discover whether there is anything unusual about them or about the homes or environments from which they come that can account for their vagrancy or their unwillingness to remain at home. Many questions on these two points occur to the mind, but in the limits of a single chapter only a few of them can be answered or discussed.

The nationality of the boys was mainly American. Only 15 had been born abroad, four in Germany and 11 in other countries. Only 17 of the 101 who were born on American soil were known to have foreign parents. In two cases the parentage was not learned but in the remaining 82 cases, or 70 per cent of the whole number, it was known to be American.

In answer to the question as to whether the boys came from the cities or the country, we found that 24 of the 117 boys (20 per cent) were from Chicago homes, usually from the poorer neighborhoods; but even omitting the resident boys, the table shows that 48,† or a majority of the remaining 93, were city

\* One of these three was an orphan whose history we could not trace; the other two had both been born in poorhouses and had been abandoned by their pauper mothers.

† See footnote to Table 27, Appendix A, p. 304.

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boys.\* It is perhaps worth noting that of the 63 boys who had run away from their homes, 38 per cent were from the country or from small towns, while of the 54 boys who had left their homes with the knowledge and consent of their parents but 29 per cent had come from rural communities. Apparently the desire of the boy belonging to the small town or country to see the great city leads him to break over parental authority and run away from home in more cases than does the city boy's dream of adventure.

The character of the homes from which the 117 boys came has been noted.† In 28 instances we were unable to learn the whereabouts of or else knew too little about the boys' homes to judge as to their character, but of the remaining 89 boys we found that only 12 came from "poor" homes in the sense that they were degraded and immoral as well as destitute. Twenty-seven came from homes that might be called medium in character, homes where the neighborhood environment was not always good and where lack of means and occasionally the ignorance of parents kept the children from the fullest opportunities for education and development. But in these homes the children were not unloved, and the boys were trained and cared for as well as are the sons in the average American home where the income ranges

\* For information as to whether boys came from city, town or country, character of homes, and family relations, see Appendix A, Table 27A-C, pp. 304-305.

† See Appendix A, Table 27B, p. 305.

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from \$75 to \$100 a month. Forty-three boys, or almost one-half of the 89, came from what I have designated as "good" homes. All these terms are relative, but in this classification a home is counted as "good" when the neighborhood environment is good, when the family income is sufficient to insure the children's physical well-being, and when the parents are moral and intelligent people who love their children and endeavor to give them the best education and the best opportunities for normal development that they can command.

The existence of a "cruel stepmother" is not infrequently mentioned by a vagrant boy as his excuse for leaving home. Only 10 boys in this group were found upon investigation to have stepmothers, and of these but one was "cruel." The harshness of this woman, a Bohemian, had been in fact the cause of the lad's running away, and recent investigation proves that he and another stepson in the same family are still upon the road. Three of the boys who had stepmothers told us that they were happy at home, that their stepmothers were "very good" to them, and that they had run away for entirely other reasons. In the six other cases a lack of sympathy between the boys and their stepmothers apparently had had something to do with the desire of the lads to leave home; no "cruelty," however, had existed in any of these cases.

But while stepmothers may, in the popular mind, too frequently have been charged with

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cruelty and personally blamed for the vagrancy of boys, it is a fact which may or may not be significant that less than one-half of the vagrant and runaway boys here listed had both parents living and in normal family relations. It is quite possible that the lack of love and guidance of one or the other own parent which a broken home implies, may have had more to do with the desire of certain of these boys to leave their homes than they themselves realized or than we were able to discover.

All but two of the 25 boys listed as "full orphans"\* were over seventeen years of age and in most instances they had been in orphanages or in the care of societies which place children in private homes for care or adoption. Twelve had run away from such homes or institutions; 13 had set out to find work with the knowledge and consent of their guardians.

It is to be regretted that no light can be thrown by this study upon the extent to which child labor must be considered as a cause of vagrancy.† The question as to the age at which they began work was not often asked of the men who applied; and among these boys we lack information in 36 instances out of the total of 66 who worked.‡ Of the 30 boys whose age at beginning work we know, 10, or one-third, had been employed under fourteen,—four as newsboys, three on farms,

\* See Appendix A, Table 27C, p. 305.

† For note on Child Labor see Chapter VIII, p. 136.

‡ See Table XI, p. 240.



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and three as hotel boys; but in none of these 10 cases could we trace a clear connection between the youthful ages at which the boys began to work and their vagrancy. The nature of their employment as newsboys, messenger boys, bell boys, etc., occupations which give little or no training for men's work, and which frequently threw them into bad company, was, in a few cases out of the 66, apparently directly responsible for vagrant habits.

Records of the occupations of the boys\* show that very few of them were employed in lines of work in which they received training of value. Nine only were learning trades. Fifty-seven were employed at unskilled work. Eight boys, although they had not been in school for many years, had never done any sort of work. One of these ran away from his home in Chicago when only seven years of age and succeeded in reaching Buffalo before he was taken in charge and sent back.† All of these eight boys who had never done any form of work were confirmed tramps and vagrants at the time of their applications to the office. Twenty-one boys were in school up to the time that they left home, and probably a number of the 22 whose school record is listed as "not known" were also school boys.

Although a number of the boys under twenty who applied to the Bureau of Charities had been

\* See Table XI, p. 240.

† This boy has spent almost all of his life since that date as a tramp, wandering all over America and Europe.

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on the road for some time when we knew them, and still others had come from homes in which they had received but little care and training, a surprisingly small proportion of them were really "bad." Only six in the group of 117 seemed to have had marked criminal tendencies, although 11 had been in jail for more or less trifling offenses,\* and several had been pronounced "incorrigible" by parents or guardians. However, a careful study of a number of these boys after an interval of from five to eight years during which most of them have grown to manhood, justifies a strong faith in the good inherent even in many so-called incorrigible or criminally inclined boys if they can be given a fair chance to overcome bad habits in a changed environment. Among those found at the present time, 15 have been listed as "doing well."† These include several remarkable instances of boys apparently fated to be tramps or criminals who have entirely reformed and have become the pride of their parents. One case of this sort is especially striking:

A Chicago boy of seventeen, American born of

\* Four of the 117 boys had been in orphanages; 10 in homes for dependent children; 4 in poorhouses; and 19 in newsboys' or working boys' lodging houses. Two had been confined in parental schools; 4 in state reform or industrial schools; and 11 in jails or houses of correction. Seven had been placed out, indentured, or adopted from institutions, and 2 had been placed out by some unknown agency. Fifty-nine had never been inmates of charitable or correctional institutions. Information is lacking on the points mentioned above in 26 cases which makes it seem probable that several of the figures should be greater. A number of boys had been inmates of two or more correctional or charitable institutions.

† For information concerning after career of the boys, see page 263.

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foreign parents, left home because his sisters "picked at him" on account of his laziness and bad habits. He went down to the levee district where he became the pupil of a negro Fagin who had six or eight boys in his training. This man knocked the boy down and kicked him brutally about the face and head one day because he suspected him of not turning over the full amount of a certain theft. According to the boy's story, he was then locked in a room and left without food or care until the following day, when he succeeded in getting out and was referred by a "man in the lodging house" to the Bureau office. When he came to us this boy was the most miserable looking of all the miserable creatures who had ever applied to us for help. His shaggy, uncut hair was matted with blood and dirt, his face was a mass of bruises partly covered by a dirty bandage, his clothing was torn and filthy, and the poor lad was faint and trembling with hunger. Food, surgical treatment, and a bath were instant needs; the only question was, which should be furnished first. We took care of this boy and had him at the office daily for a week. Everyone grew fond of him and he was helpful and gentlemanly and seemed pathetically grateful for the consideration and friendliness with which he was treated. He asked to be sent to the country to live on a farm. His parents were consulted and approved the plan, and arrangements were completed to send him the following day, when,—given an instant's oppor-

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tunity in conjunction with the temptation,—he broke open a desk, robbed the office of \$11 and a small penknife, and fled. Careful search with the assistance of the police and of three or four lodging house men who offered their services, failed to find the boy in his old haunts, and as he did not return to his home all hope of reclaiming him was abandoned. The parents of this boy have been visited recently and it has been learned that at the time of his disappearance he went to Omaha where he at once applied for and received work. He did well and was several times advanced. At the end of two years he wrote to his parents. He kept in touch with them for three years more, when he returned to Chicago where he is now at home working steadily and giving to his mother, who is very proud of his success, part of each week's pay.

Of the 117 boys considered in this study, 62 asked only for transportation; 34 asked only for work.\* With the exception of a few boys of a degraded type who were already beggars when they first came to our attention, almost all were independent in spirit and anxious to be self-supporting. The following reasons for coming to Chicago given by the 54 non-runaway boys are indicative of their general character:

\* Of the 63 runaway boys, 30 asked for transportation; 22, for work; 7, for food, lodging or other aid; and 4 made no request. (These latter were reported by citizens.) Of the 54 non-runaway boys, 32 asked for transportation; 12, for work; 8, for food, lodging, or other aid; and 2 made no request. Several of the boys made requests in addition to the one listed.

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For work.....	24
To join the navy*.....	6
On way east or west to relatives.....	7
To beg.....	3
For medical treatment.....	1
Had none†.....	2
Gave none, or none recorded.....	6
Chicago residents.....	5
Total .....	54

These statements tend to prove that while certain of them may later have become chronic vagrants from inability to find employment or from the evil associations of the road itself, few set out without definite and legitimate objectives.

While the boys who leave their homes with the permission of parents or guardians do so from much the same motives as those which lead boys to run away without such permission, the reasons which these latter give for running away cannot be included because in a large proportion of cases they were found not to be the actual reasons. The mere fact that they had run away and did not wish their parents to know their whereabouts led these boys to tell fictitious stories far more often than was the case with the other lads.‡

In other respects than that of truthfulness, there

\* Each of these boys failed to pass the preliminary examinations and was returned by the Bureau to his home.

† Feeble-minded and epileptic boys shipped into Chicago by public officials of other cities in order to be rid of them.

‡ The reasons why these boys ran away are given later in the chapter (p. 264) but they represent the writer's opinion after thorough acquaintance with the boys and investigation of their cases, and only in part the boys' own statements.

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were fairly marked differences between the non-runaway and the runaway boys in the group, and it has seemed worth while for a better picture of the latter group to consider them and certain of their characteristics separately.

On the average the boys who have run away from their homes are much younger than the others who may be found on the road or in lodging houses.\* The records show that 52 boys, or over 82 per cent of the runaways, were under eighteen, while but 24 boys, or 44 per cent of the other group, were under that age. This difference in age would alone account for the undoubted fact that few runaway boys are actually capable of self-support and that many of them are therefore in danger of becoming bona fide tramps unless they are removed from the road. Then, too, the younger the boy the less likely is he to be settled in his habits or responsible in his actions. Often he is still a dreamer and a romancer at seventeen, although he may have attained almost the stature of a man. He is erratic and changeable, a creature of moods and impulses. One who deals with grown men and women who are mentally normal can usually count with a fair degree of confidence upon their actions under specific circumstances. Self-preservation, love of family, the desire for personal liberty

\* The ages of the 63 runaways were: 10 years, 1; 12 years, 3; 13 years, 4; 14 years, 8; 15 years, 4; 16 years, 16; 17 years, 16; 18 years, 7; and 19 years, 4. Twenty had been in school; 39, at work (only 2 of these were under fourteen); 3 had had no occupation, and the occupation of 1 was not known.

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and other natural instincts and desires may be trusted to restrain them from certain actions under certain conditions. But with boys—especially with the type of boy who runs away from his home—it is different. One can never be sure that a given stimulus will produce the expected reaction. Tell a young boy that he will be arrested if he commits a certain offense and he may do it at once out of a mere childish curiosity to see the inside of a jail or from a desire to have a ride in the patrol wagon. Similarly, some chance word, some picture or story, or even some sound, like the whistle of a distant engine on the railroad, may act as the suggestion which leads the boy to run away from his home.

To attempt, in the case of every lad who runs away, to give a definite reason for his action, would be impossible. The boys themselves cannot tell. Some vague instinct to wander, inherited perhaps from past ages of the race, appears in a number of cases to be the only reason for their setting out. In others a mere impulse leads them away. In still others there seems to be nothing as definite as impulse; chance alone sets them to wandering. But once he is on the road, who can possibly foretell what a boy will do? A mistaken sense of honor, hurt pride, a passing whim, or simple curiosity may lead him to do things from which we should have expected that all his natural instincts as well as his home training would have withheld him.

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For example, a Chicago boy of ten went down town after school one day with two boys who lived near him, brothers, nine and thirteen years old. One of them had a quarter which admitted the trio to a vaudeville show and supplied them with candy. After leaving the show they wandered about the streets for several hours. The two brothers then went home, but their ten-year-old neighbor refused to go with them. Toward midnight he strayed into a State Street lodging house where he was allowed to remain over night. He wandered about the down town streets for the next three days, returning each night to the lodging house where he told the clerk that he was an orphan and worked at one of the large dry goods stores. The fourth morning, one of the older lodgers at the house, a man well known at the Central District office of the Bureau, brought us word that the boy was there and an agent was sent from the Bureau to look him up. He found that the clerk of the lodging house had that morning turned the boy over to a woman officer of a popular and well-known religious organization. This woman was seen late in the day and said that she had placed the child for care and adoption in a good family home in the city. This had been done without any attempt to verify the boy's statement that he was a homeless orphan. This story is told less to illustrate the irresponsible way in which the cases of children are sometimes disposed of than to show the boy's strange acquiescence in



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the plan. Having had experience with this singular trick of young boys, and suspecting that this one's story was false, the agent of the Bureau went to the police department to see if a lost boy fitting the description of this child had been reported and learned that he was the only son of well-to-do parents who were living within two miles of the foster home in which the boy had been placed and who had been searching for him in great anxiety ever since the night of his disappearance. Why had this boy who had been perfectly happy in his own home allowed himself to be placed in a less desirable home among strangers rather than admit that he was not the orphan he had claimed to be? Was it all a game which he considered still unfinished?

A twelve-year-old lad went even further without confessing the truth about himself. His home was in a city in Iowa. A blind beggar with a hand organ and a monkey came along the street one day and the boy followed, remaining with him until evening, when the beggar camped on the outskirts of the city to eat his supper. He shared his food with the boy and then invited the more-than-willing lad to accompany him in his travels. This arrangement continued several months or until, somewhere in Indiana, the beggar got into a drunken row and was arrested. The boy told us that he gave the police his home address, but whether or not he did so the authorities shipped him back only as far as

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Chicago. There he gravitated to the Newsboys' Home, which is in the same block with the Central District office of the Bureau of Charities, and one of the newsboys advised him to apply to us for transportation to his home. We wrote at once to the charity organization society of the Iowa city asking them to see if the boy's story was true and to notify his parents of his whereabouts and request them to send the amount required for his fare home. In three days, replies were received verifying his story, but in that short interval the lad was picked up by the police and taken to the Juvenile Court. He had been advised by the boys at the Newsboys' Home to tell the matron there that he was an orphan; therefore, he told the same story to the judge. After a cross-questioning which failed to shake the lad's story, he was pronounced a "dependent child" and sent to the Farm School at Glenwood, Illinois, where, after considerable difficulty, he was traced by the Bureau's agent who secured an order for his release from the Juvenile Court and sent him home.

In another case a boy allowed himself to be given by the Juvenile Court into the custody of a child-placing society, which sent him to a country home 200 miles away, only to discover, eight months later, by a confession from the boy himself, that he was a runaway from a good home of his own in Ohio. Instances like these are not unusual or rare, as anyone accustomed to dealing with vagrant or runaway boys can testify.

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Wanderlust, "spring fever," or "restlessness" as the boys themselves termed it,—a desire to travel and see the world, to break the monotony of endless school days by new experiences and adventures (and perchance to make a fortune!), was found to be the underlying reason why 37 at least of the 63 boys here listed as runaways left their homes. Frequently some occurrence at school or at home was the immediate or more apparent cause. For instance, one boy could give no better excuse for leaving an excellent home than that a new teacher did not read stories Friday afternoons as her predecessor had done. Another had been set back in school and a third was "tired of going to school." In each instance in which boys claimed to have had difficulties with their stepmothers or other members of their families, when the boys were sent back to their homes they set out again within a few days or weeks, indicating that restlessness rather than the reason which they mentioned may have been the underlying cause of their leaving home.

With some boys wanderlust is little more than an acute attack of spring fever.\* With others it is an intermittent fever returning at intervals during a period of several years after which they recover. With a few it is a disease which becomes chronic and the runaway boy develops at maturity into the confirmed tramp.

\* Fifteen boys out of 37 whose wandering was due to this cause left home only in the spring or early summer months. A group of 8 more left within three to six weeks after school opened in the fall. The other 14 left at various times during the other months of the year.

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Of the 37 wanderlust cases, I have attempted to trace 22 at the present time. The families of six had moved and could not be found. Of the 16 boys who could be found 11 have given up wandering and are doing well. Five have become tramps. Of the 11 who today are at home or doing well elsewhere, five were such persistent runaways at the time we knew them that it was a grave question whether it was worth while to send them home to their parents again. One had run away three times and had been on the road off and on for two and a half years, and the others had similar records. Eight of the 11 who have turned out well came from good homes. Of the remaining three, two came from medium homes. The third came from a distinctly bad home; environment and training were bad and the family has been on the records of the local charity organization society for a number of years. In spite of these facts this boy, who is now twenty-one, did not remain a tramp, and on the whole has turned out fairly well. He is at work most of the time and has no vicious habits. Of the five who are still tramps one ran away first at seven years of age, another at eleven, a third is said by his family to be a "born wanderer," and the fourth ran away first at the age of sixteen but has never been at home for over a month at a time in the five years since.

The fifth boy's case is somewhat peculiar. He first ran away at the age of seventeen. Previous to this time he had been a rather wilful but not

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otherwise bad boy. He came of good family and had an excellent home. His own mother was dead, but his stepmother had not, so far as we could learn, been unkind to the boy. He had finished the grammar grades and one year in the high school and was rather a favorite with his teachers. His training, his home, his neighborhood environment, and, so far as an onlooker could judge, every influence surrounding this boy was good, and yet from the day he first ran away he steadily degenerated until, in spite of all the efforts made by friends and family to reclaim him, he became what he still is—a tramp and a street beggar. Fortunately, such cases while not rare are not frequent enough to warrant any one in giving up his faith in the accepted valuation of good home surroundings and training. As an offset to this case is the following:

This boy, one of the 11 wanderers who are now doing well, was well-behaved up to the age of fifteen when he ran away. It was a case of spring fever, from which he recovered in a week or two and returned to his home. The taste of freedom, however, had unsettled him, and after distressing his parents greatly for a few months by disobedience and unruliness, he again ran away. This time he stayed longer and his father's efforts to trace him failed. After a while the boy came home again, but after his second trip he was still more changed for the worse. He became defiant of all rule and spent his time upon the streets,

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often staying out until late at night. He smoked considerably and once or twice even drank to excess. When September came the boy refused to go back to school and his father whipped him. He ran away a third time. His mother's grief and anxiety over his loss soon began to affect her health and the boy's father spent two months going from one eastern city to another in a vain attempt to find him. Late the following March, this lad, hungry, dirty, and ragged, came into the Central District office of the Bureau of Charities and asked for work. He had beaten his way West but was unable to find work enough in Chicago to enable him to live. He admitted that he was a runaway but was unwilling to go home, although he agreed to let us write to his parents and tell them where he was. During the week or ten days following his application we kept the boy at the office as much as possible, employing him at odd jobs and gradually winning his confidence. His father telegraphed asking us to send him home in care of the conductor, and the lad finally gave us a reluctant promise to return to his home, but he seemed to dread meeting his parents. The following day a man friendly to the office, who lived in the lodging house where we had placed the boy, told us that he had heard this lad with another, with whom also the office was dealing at the time, planning to beat their way West the next day. I sent for the two boys on some pretext and had talks with each of them separately. In this talk

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the eastern boy's real objection to going home came out. His clothing was shabby and the boys in his home neighborhood would know that he had not succeeded and he was not willing to let them see him come back "looking like a tramp." The promise to purchase a complete new outfit for him settled that difficulty. It was harder to draw out of the boy what his other objection was, but it finally came. "When I get home they will be glad to see me—especially mother—and they won't say anything; but after I've been home for a while they will begin to throw it up to me that I ran away, and the first time I do anything a little bit out of the way my father will try to put me in a reform school, and I'll never stand that. I'll run away for good if they try it. Now I've had a hard time since I left home, and I am older and have learned a lot, and if I go home this time I will stop all nonsense and try to do right. I'm a lot changed, but of course they won't know that, and I can't tell them, and they won't understand, and I know if they don't and if my father threatens to whip me or to send me to a reform school or anything like that, I will just *have* to run away again, so I thought perhaps I had better not go home at all." I promised to write to his father and to explain things so that he would "understand." The boy was put upon his honor not to run away, and after the purchase of a new suit, shoes, and a cap, his ticket was secured the following day and he was sent home. Four days later

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we received a touchingly grateful letter from his father saying that the boy had arrived safely and seemed to be much changed for the better so that he hoped the family would have no further worry about him. Seven years later, in answer to a recent letter, his father reports that from a wild, unmanageable boy, this lad has developed into a fine man. He went back to school for a while and then to work as an apprentice to learn the machinist trade, attending night school in order to continue his studies. He is now earning \$2.75 a day and has a number of men working under him. He has bought himself a piano and is taking music lessons. He has taken several courses in a correspondence school and reads and studies constantly. His father writes: "We have not had a moment's anxiety regarding him since the day of his return and he is a pride and comfort to us both."

Cases like this convince one that an attempt to reinstate the boys should be made in every instance, no matter how little hope of success there may appear to be at the time it is made.

The result of attempts to trace the after-careers of 59 of the 117 homeless, vagrant, and runaway boys, at a period of from five to eight years after the dates of their applications to the Bureau of Charities, may be summarized as follows:\*

\* Most of the recent investigations of these cases were made by charity organization societies in cities and towns all over the country who very kindly lent their services in these and many other cases where re-investigation was requested.



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Unable to find boys' families . . . . .	21	} 27
No replies to letter . . . . .	4	
Boys' whereabouts not known to relatives. . . . .	2	
Doing well . . . . .	15	} 23
Doing fairly well . . . . .	4*	
Doing well when last heard from . . . . .	4†	
Still tramping or begging . . . . .	4	} 6
In state training school . . . . .	1	
In poorhouse . . . . .	1	
In institution for feeble-minded . . . . .	1	
Dead . . . . .	2	
		<hr/>
Total . . . . .	59	
Cases not looked up . . . . .	58	
		<hr/>
Total . . . . .	117	

The cases of 58 were not looked up. For various reasons some of the boys gave false addresses at time of application. Some were lost track of then; some died. In others the writer hesitated to reopen cases where no new application had been made.

It has been shown that out of a total of 30 who could be traced today, 23, or almost 77 per cent of the number traced, have turned out well, and of the few known to be still wandering only two are markedly degenerate, and there may yet be chances of reform in the cases of the others. In one instance we returned a boy to his home three times and the last time he stayed there and is

\* Two weak mentally. Two at home but not yet steadily employed.

† One, 1 year ago; two, 2 years ago; and one, 3 years ago.

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today working with his father and doing well. In another case a boy began running away at nine years and kept it up until he was eighteen, at which time he suddenly decided that he was tired of wandering and went to work. He is today the owner of a good-sized ranch in the West where his love of freedom and an outdoor life is apparently satisfied without his childish desire to wander.

The probable\* reasons why the runaway boys left their homes may be stated as: Wanderlust, 37; difficulties with parents, step-parents or guardians, 5; difficulties with brothers or sisters, 9; mere impulse, 7; had to work too hard, 1; too little known of cases to judge, 4.

Therefore we see that 22 of the runaway boys left their homes for other reasons than wanderlust alone, although even in these cases it may have been present in a lesser degree. Difficulties with parents, step-parents, brothers, sisters, or other members of the family were given as causes in 14 instances, three of which we were unable to verify. Of the five boys who had difficulties with their parents or guardians, one ran away because his uncle with whom he lived scolded him for being lazy. Another left home because his parents objected to certain of his companions and he considered it "none of their business" whom he went with. A twelve-year-old left because he was unjustly punished by his father who had

\* Author's opinion after investigation, not the boys' statements, which often differed greatly from the above reasons.

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promised not to whip him for a certain offense and then had changed his mind and done so. "It was not the first time he had lied to me," the boy said, "but I will never give him a chance to again." The fourth came from a very poor home where he had an indifferent stepmother and a more indifferent father who was brutally harsh in his dealings with his sons. This boy had tuberculosis but was considered only lazy by his father who beat him cruelly when the disease incapacitated him for work. He died soon after he came to our attention.

The fifth boy claimed that his father had turned him out of his home, but as we were unable to verify this or any other statement that he made and as the boy seemed refined and well cared for, his story in regard to mistreatment was almost unquestionably false.

A majority of the boys who ran away from home on account of difficulties with members of their families did not have complaints to make of their parents, but rather of older brothers and sisters. "My sisters are always picking at me," said one boy. "My older brother is too mean to live with," said another. "They never let a fellow alone," said a third.

One very fine lad ran away for the rather unusual reason that his father insisted that he apologize for some offense to a younger brother. This carefully-reared boy of sixteen left his home on this trivial excuse and his parents had no idea

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of his whereabouts for three months. Our letter to his home was answered by a telegram saying that both parents were en route to Chicago and asking us to hold the boy. He had not returned to the office as he had been requested to do, and when they arrived he had again dropped out of sight like the proverbial needle in a haystack. In this instance, as in a number of others, when we wished to find a lost man or boy, we called not for the help of the police but for the willing services of one or two of the lodging house men whom we had known for some time and with whom we were in friendly touch. By noon we had a clue and at nine o'clock that evening the boy walked into his parents' room at the hotel. He has remained at home since that escapade and today is doing well.

Probably nothing is more surprising to one who works with runaway and vagrant boys than their strange indifference to the claims of their parents upon them. In every instance, without exception, where we notified parents that we had their sons in our care, the letter from the Bureau of Charities was the first word of any kind received from the boy. That their parents loved them and would suffer and grieve over their loss seemed never to occur to the lads. The boy mentioned above admitted reluctantly that his mother "might worry some" over his three months' silence. But, although he had long before gotten over his pique because of the "injustice" of his father's request,

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he refused to consider going home or even writing to his mother because—why?—because the new suit, the new overcoat, and a beautiful gold watch which had been given him as a sixteenth birthday present, had all been sold or pawned for food in the course of his wanderings, and he would not go home until he had earned enough to redeem his watch and go back as well-dressed as he had started out. Truly, a boy's pride is a thing to be reckoned with!

As before stated, the large majority of the boys who applied to the Bureau were independent in spirit and anxious to be self-supporting. That they were not able to be so was ever a matter of surprise to them. Employers, as a rule, are not anxious to give work to unattached and homeless boys who can give neither school nor home references and who are generally more or less shabby in appearance. The occasional boy who is able to overcome such objections and secure the coveted employment is surprised to find how inadequate are the \$3.00 or \$4.00 or \$5.00 he may earn to cover all his weekly expenses of food, lodging, car fare, clothing and incidentals. With the realization that it is not going to be an easy matter to "make his fortune," the boy becomes somewhat discouraged, but with his discouragement there is liable to come an access of stubborn pride—a renewed determination never to return home until he can prove to the brother who has abused him or to the sister who has treated him

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with contempt that he has made a mark in the world.

Just at this point in his career, the runaway boy,—and the one who leaves home with permission as well, if he is under eighteen,—is in the greatest danger of drifting into tramp life. For in nine cases out of ten he cannot accomplish self-support in spite of his praiseworthy determination to do so, and failing to succeed in one city he strikes out for another; failing there, he goes on to another, and so he continues, month after month, in ever increasing danger from the evil influences of the road itself and of the older men who travel it who, as a rule, have no scruples against teaching these lads to beg and doing whatever else they can to injure them morally.

Taking the cases of the 117 boys as a whole and recalling also the many other "homeless" boys we knew well at the Bureau office but who are not included among the thousand cases, I should say that investigation did not show that their homes, or their schools, or their work environment were sufficiently abnormal in character or unsatisfactory even to the boys themselves, to account for their desire to tramp or to strike out for the cities to seek employment and independence. There were isolated instances of abuse at home; there were numerous cases of temporary misunderstanding and lack of the sympathy and appreciation of his peculiar trials which the boy at adolescence needs; there were, undoubtedly, cases

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in which distaste for school had much to do with the temptation to wander; there were other instances where the nature of a boy's employment predisposed him toward idleness and vagrancy; but in the great majority of the cases we dealt with it was the spirit of restlessness and longing for change which seems to be common to almost all youths in their teens, that more than anything else was responsible for their presence upon the road and in the lodging houses. Doubtless thousands of boys who do not leave their homes experience the same desires, dream the same dreams, but are less venturesome in spirit or are held by habit or by better developed powers of judgment and foresight than are possessed by those who yield to these vagrant instincts.

If the fact were more generally recognized that boys in their natural development from childhood to manhood very generally experience this desire to wander, which if indulged may lead to disastrous consequences, ways of counteracting it by means of directed travel or of work or amusements of special interest to them and adapted to their needs could, and in many cases would be devised by parents and teachers. But it is only quite recently that the need for manual training in the schools, for boys' clubs, for directed games in city playgrounds, and for various other means of reaching and interesting lads in their teens has been realized by any considerable number of persons, and in too many neighborhoods the

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adolescent boy is still, perhaps, the least considered individual in the whole community.\*

A preventive measure of an entirely different character which would act as a great deterrent to boys who take to the road, would be the closing of the railroads to trespassers. Even among the boys who came to Chicago to seek work, with their parents' permission, it was exceptional for us to find one who had paid railroad fare to reach the city. Almost invariably they had stolen their way. If stealing their way could be made absolutely impossible it is certain that fewer lads would even be tempted to "tramp" and fewer still would in the end become vagrants through association on the railroads with older wanderers.†

And that a great many boys, both runaways and boys who have left their homes with the consent of their parents, do degenerate into tramps after a short experience on the road and in the great cities, is a fact which, unfortunately, cannot be questioned. The mere fact that 117 boys are found in a group of a thousand homeless men shows that the proportion of youths who are wandering is very high. A similar or greater proportion of boys under twenty will be found

\* An interesting and even nearer approach to filling the specific needs of the really adventurous boy may be found in the summer road trip of a boys' club, which contains elements not present even in the club camp. The possibilities in the Boy Scout and similar movements should also be carefully considered.—Editor.

† The question of the practicability of closing the railroads to trespassers is discussed in Chapter XII, Confirmed Wanderers or "Tramps," pages 231 to 238.



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listed in any municipal lodging house or way-fayers' lodge where statistics regarding the ages of applicants are kept. And in this connection it should be remembered that young American lads are by nature independent in spirit and it is probable that the percentage of those who apply to charity organizations or institutions of any kind for aid is small in comparison with the total number who are traveling about the country. A surprisingly large number of older tramps and homeless men whom we knew at the office, confessed that they had entered the life as runaways and had never communicated with their parents in the interval since leaving home. One man brought or sent to us at different times not fewer than six young lads who had drifted into the lodging house where he stayed, because he said they were "nice little chaps" and he hated to see them go the way he had gone.

Various railroad companies in their reports regarding the extent of trespassing on their lines comment especially upon the large number of young boys to be found among the tramps. One line in the central West claims that 75 per cent of all trespassers on the road are boys "traveling about to see the country." This percentage is not substantiated by figures and is probably an exaggeration, but if even one-half, or one-fourth, or only one-tenth of the so-called tramps upon the railroads are in fact mere boys, it constitutes another very strong reason for doing everything

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possible to close the railroads to them as well as to all other classes of wanderers.

In all the large cities and in many of the small cities of the country there are charity organization societies or associated charities which will gladly take up any "boy case" that may be reported to them. In places where no such societies exist to which the homeless boy who asks aid at the door, or who applies to a citizen for employment, can be sent, the Young Men's Christian Association might, perhaps, undertake the task of investigating the boy's story and of helping to get him back to his home. If the Young Men's Christian Association has no branch in the town the services of some particular individual who is specially interested in boys and is tactful in dealing with them, could undoubtedly be enlisted.

Charity organization societies throughout the country would be glad to co-operate with any organization or individual who undertakes the work of investigating the stories of these boys. As a general rule, much more satisfactory results will be reached if correspondence is opened with such societies, which can send an agent to call upon a boy's relatives or friends, than will be the case if letters are written direct to the parents of the boy. For not only do the boys frequently give false addresses, causing letters to go astray or to be returned unanswered,—a difficulty which the agent of a charity organization or similar society may be able to overcome by reference to a local directory or by inquiries

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of principals of the public schools of a city,—but the trained agent of a society of this sort, after a call at the boy's home and a talk with his parents, will be able to report to the inquirer a number of facts about the character of that home, the neighborhood environment, the attitude of the parents toward the child, and many other matters which may be invaluable to him in his effort to understand and deal in the best possible manner with the boy himself.

However much the individual citizen and the social agency may hesitate to deal with the adult wanderer, however much they may disclaim responsibility, they cannot avoid making an intelligent effort to open the way for the wandering boy to retrace his steps toward home. The runaway boy constitutes one of the sources of vagrancy but slightly affected by economic causes. The closing of the railways and adequate provision for juvenile recreation will be effective preventives, but before and after these have been accomplished the boy who has actually broken away must receive wise and thorough-going attention. As we have seen, these boys are still young enough to be easily influenced for good as well as for evil. If, as our experience at the Bureau of Charities apparently demonstrated, many, if reached in time, could readily be persuaded to return to their homes, every individual and agency that comes in touch with these lads in whatever capacity, should endeavor to bring about their reinstatement before it is too late.