

## HOMELESS AT NIGHT.

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HERE is a familiar ring about the words "Homeless at Night" which has perhaps tended to soften down the awful import of the phrase. We have so constantly found this and similar expressions, followed by a small troop of notes of exclamation, in the first sentences of many of our letters, which on close inspection prove only to be carefully lithographed circulars. We receive so many of them, and other appeals on behalf of the hungry, that we almost begin to wonder how it is we are not confronted at night with armies of homeless and hungry. Where are they all gone to whom we have been so frequently and so piteously implored to help, and how is it we do not stumble over them at every corner? A great deal of harm is done every year by these sensational appeals, and in more ways than one. They imply that it is useless to expect that a bare statement of facts, however painful they may be, is not sufficient to unloose the purse-strings of the benevolent, but that access must be had to his love of sensation. This love of sensation is perhaps only the natural outcome of living at the rate we do, but is none the less to be regretted.

What do these words "Homeless at Night" really mean? for they can be translated in many different ways, and have different degrees of misery and hopelessness. They are simple words, but have a volume in them sometimes of more tragedy and deeper than one person in a hundred has any conception of.

The largest class of men to whom the words apply is undoubtedly the loafing class, and on their shoulders the words sit lightest, and for them have an import insignificant, in comparison with many others. The main components of a genuine loafer are innate laziness, and absence of any good example or strength of character. They will generally add themselves absence of opportunity. The men who form this class do not join it till they are some twenty-five or thirty years of age, for even with them a certain amount of drifting has to be gone through. They drift, however, very easily; perhaps at the beginning they make a few spasmodic efforts to swim upstream, but lack of character makes each succeeding effort more distasteful, and as the success attending each trial gradually diminishes, the efforts themselves die away and an easy downward drift is all that remains before them. One gets accustomed to anything, and the steps downward from the comfortable home that even they did something to keep together are easy ones. There are no healthy jerks to remind them that they are going down, and force them out of sheer astonishment to look up; all goes smoothly through the succeeding stages of cheaper and cheaper lodging houses till the loafer finds himself at length in his natural goal,—the refuge or workhouse, without any feeling of surprise. By the time he has reached his destination his degradation has become so natural to him that it would require a power more than human to rouse in him any sense of the responsibilities or ambitions of life. His is a pitiable case from the political economist's or social reformer's point of view, but not from the philanthropist's, for the latter knows his degradation sits lightly on him, his position brings no humiliation, familiarity has brought its usual contempt, and he has no fear of the failure of his anticipations, for he has none. He is a sorry

object, but before we extend him the full force of our sympathy we should look around and find out if there are not others more deserving of it.

The criminal class is, of course, also very largely represented in the casual wards and refuges; and can be divided into those who have become hardened and callous and have long since decided that respectability and self-respect were not worth the trouble of fighting for, and those who have made and still are making honest attempts to free themselves from the prison taint that is so evident on them and shuts to them so many doors. The former have already mapped out for themselves the remainder of their lives here; it is to alternate between the cell and the casual ward or shelter. They have a preference for the shelter, and the cell ranks higher with them as a temporary resting place than the casual ward. If it were possible to give them in this position the most complete individual attention and supervision, many of the younger might still be made into useful citizens. It is an absence of grit and self-reliance that has brought them to their present position, not sheer laziness. A dulled and worn-out conscience that has spoken so often in vain is also a silent and unwilling assistant.

If these men could once be brought to see the dignity of real work for its own sake, and the degradation of crime, there would be some ground to hope that there was yet reclamation possible to them. They do not hate work for work's sake any more than they practise crime for crime's sake; they do not work because they find work hard to get and hard to keep, and are insensible to the real good that it brings with it, in contradistinction to the lesser good in the shape of material necessities which is all they can appreciate as the result of work. They do not commit crime for the mere pleasure of doing so but because of the easiness of it, and the fact that moral slackness has dulled in them all sense of the degradation of crime. Show them conclusively, distinctly, so that they cannot longer shut their eyes to it, what work means, and there is hope for them. While life lasts it is worth our while to try and help the man who is only ignorant of the real good of work and the real evil of crime, but it is a very different matter with those who can be credited with no such ignorance. Though even their case is not hopeless, yet the task of their reformation is one that only the most sanguine will undertake with any real hope of success.

The last class of men who are to be found in the ranks of the "Homeless at Night," though the smallest, is yet by far the most pitiable, and the most deserving of all the best energies we can direct towards setting them on their feet again, and helping them to find their proper place in the world. They are the men who have come down through no fault of their own. This class is confidently supposed by many to exist only in the imagination of the Utopian philanthropists who look forward to a future era when prisons, workhouses, and refuges will have ceased to exist in consequence of the extinction of their several tenants. There will be no use for these resorts when pickaxes wield themselves, when the supply of work is in excess of the demand for it, when labour comes easier than leisure, when drunkenness is a myth, when sin is unknown, and unselfishness the keynote of society, but till then they will stand and there will be tenants for them. There *is* such a class of men, and all who have any real experience of the homeless will admit it;—a small class it may be, but most certainly a very considerable one. What do the words "Homeless at Night" convey to one of them? They tell of a dearly cherished home perhaps, in former days the very focus of the man's life, and the outward and visible sign that he at least knew and fully appreciated the real dignity of labour, for those four walls protected far more than his dearly loved home circle, and the hundred and one little comforts that made up the more material portion of the enjoyment he had in life.



HOPELESSNESS.

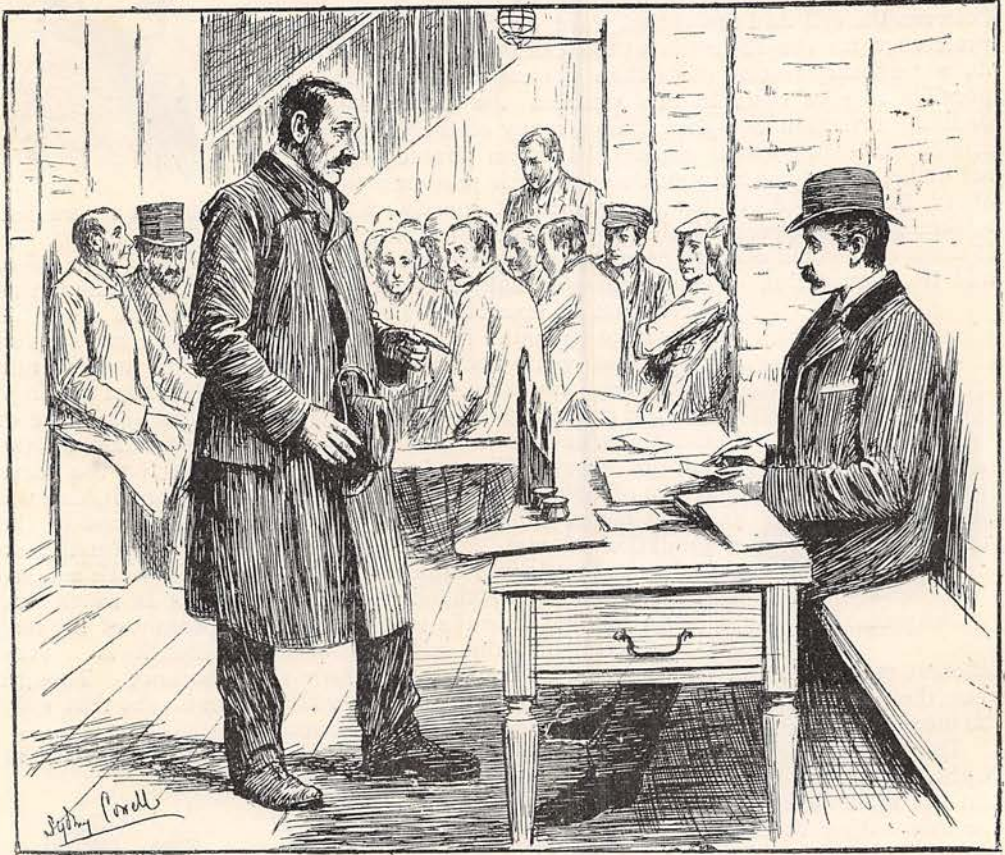


DRIFTING DOWNWARDS.



A DOUBTFUL OBJECT OF PITY.

The picture must be carefully inspected to see what it really represented to him. Self-denial is responsible for the bright surroundings, the cheerful aspect, the warm hearth and the many smaller appurtenances that go to make up the comfortable home. Self-reliance perhaps here first became an actual quality in his existence, as the outcome of the reliance of others on him. The respect of others for him, shown by many an unintentional action and expression, fostered and encouraged the self-respect, without which he might never have dared to undertake to build the beautiful fabric of his life. The weight of responsibilities increasing year by year, so far from becoming irksome, here gave birth to the dignity of manhood that grows so luxuriantly in the



SHAKING THE SIEVE.

well-ordered home ; and lastly over all is apparent the great love that makes every little sacrifice a joy in exact ratio as it gives joy to others, and knits so firmly into one harmonious whole the beautiful fabric which, come what may in the future, is a possession that no misfortune or reverse can tear from him.

It is not so rare as one would like to believe, that we come across the case of a man who has once collected round him all that makes the home life beautiful being met with in the lowest stage of poverty. An accident happens to him and he is taken to the hospital with a fractured limb, and learns later that the only way to save his life is to remove the limb. The result of this is a long irksome illness, leaving him unfit to carry on his previous calling, the club money at length stops, and he leaves the hospital with a future before him that only the most sanguine will view without feelings of the saddest misgiving. At thirty-five years of age, maimed, crippled, and almost penniless, he begins sorrowfully to look out for an opening in a new calling, to enable him to find bread for the wife and four children whose wan, anxious faces already show that they have had their share in his suffering. The dear home, of which every board seems to have a friendly familiar face, is changed for a single room at

half the rent, and most of the furniture is disposed of. Day after day the weary search for employment goes on. The weakness consequent on his long illness, the scanty diet, and, far worse, the gnawing canker in his heart, make the task each day a harder one, and at length he is brought face to face with the appalling conviction that the longer he is out of work the harder it is to get work, and the less fitted he is to undertake it should it be forthcoming. At last, in despair, the single room he has come down to is given up, the wife and children are sent to the friends that in this class of lire are always so ready to bear another's burdens if possible, and he himself turns his face towards the refuge or the shelter, crushing down in his heart the suggestion that will assert itself, as to whether the Embankment with the river running by would not be more welcome. Can a human heart hold more of sorrow than his does as he knocks at the small door under the cruelly glaring gas-lamp, whose very brightness seems to taunt him, and shines more luridly because the darkest corner in the earth would be all too light for him to hide his sorrow in? Can any loneliness be more terrible than his when for the first time in his life he has to herd on equal terms with the gaol-bird, the loafer, the spend-thrift, and the criminal?

There are many such cases to be met with any night in London, and they are easily recognizable by the marked consciousness of shame and the palpable misery of their position, in contradistinction to the brazen stare of the habitual loafer who is merely doing his round of refuges between his visits to Holloway and Wormwood Scrubbs. If in every hundred of "Homeless at Night" there were only ten such, or only five, or even only one, it would be far more than worth while to sift carefully through all the hundred to find him, and then to do all that lies in one's power to set him on his feet again. That there are so few comparatively is no excuse for us to sit with folded hands and murmur gentle remonstrances about the survival of the fittest, placidly implying that it is only the fittest that will and ought to survive. When in all our refuges, workhouses, and shelters, there remains no single case such as I have described it will be quite soon enough to think whether it is wasted labour or not to try and reinstate those who in the struggle for life have gone to the wall, no matter if they were to blame or not.

Facts have generally a great deal more weight than the most powerful argument, so perhaps a short "object lesson" may be an assistance to those whose minds are still full of doubt as to whether, in order to find and help a genuine unemployed, it is worth while to be deceived over and over again by the plausible "ne'er-do-weel." A rough glance at the memorandum book of one who has spent a certain amount of time and trouble in shaking the sieve is probably the easiest and most effective object lesson we can have.

The first case that crops up is A. H.—a burly young carman of some twenty summers; the size of his limbs, coupled with a peculiarly slouching gait, tell you he is a country-bred lad. Strong as a cart-horse, and about as cumbersome, he says he has been driving a van for one of the large railway contractors; while getting a



APPLICANTS FOR SHELTER.

meal one day a parcel was "borrowed" from his van, and he had to make it good. This, considering he had paid a boy 2*d.* to mind the van, he thought unjust, and left. The particulars as he gave them proved to be correct, and he was found a place as horse-keeper in a livery yard in the West End. After a few hours work he decamped and has never been heard of since.

T. K. was formerly in a cavalry regiment, leaving at his time with "Good" discharge. How he got it is a mystery, for a more unwilling worker was rarely seen. A similar situation was found for him, but his slowness and hang-dog appearance caused him to be shunted to make room for some one more active and not working so "grudgingly and of necessity;" a perfectly respectable and steady man nevertheless, and his own enemy in the main.

H. H. was an Irishman, and was formerly in the band of a line regiment. His sole accomplishment, and hitherto his only occupation, was playing a euphonium. His discharge was "Very good," so endeavours were made to meet with first a benevolent person who would supply him with a euphonium, and then some one with a vacancy for a euphonium player. Both were eventually found, the former being a kind-hearted Frenchwoman who was always ready to wheedle out of her husband—an English band-instrument maker—a second-hand instrument for a needy musician, when she had learnt that in all probability it would mean a living for him, and would not go to the pawnshop. A situation was then found for him after some trouble in the orchestra of a South London Temperance Music Hall. On the night when H. H. should have made his *début* in the said orchestra, his place was empty, and nothing was heard of him for a week, when he was traced to a hospital, where he was discovered with the still lingering signs of two most perfect black eyes and a damaged cranium. He attributed his condition to garroting, but investigation proved it to be the result of a drunken brawl in a Westminster slum. A distinct failure he was considered at the time—three years ago—but as he has lately reappeared, having been a teetotaller since then, hopes are entertained of his being eventually permanently helped.

A. P. was a "handy-man," or in other words a Jack-of-all-Trades, and master of none. He had several good characters from previous employers, and consequently was sent off with a letter of introduction to a large employer of labour in the City. This gentleman was unable to give him work, which he so regretted that in an unfortunate moment he gave A. P. ten shillings to reconcile him to his disappointment. That night A. P. and two or three others from the same shelter were locked up, drunk and disorderly.

C. C. is a brighter case altogether. Formerly in a crack cavalry regiment, which he left with discharge "Very good," he is now resplendent in gold lace, giving complete satisfaction as a hallporter at one of the big blocks of flats in the West End.

T. B.'s was a strange case. His particular vice,—fortunately a rare one,—was polygamy. It was not discovered till he had been in the refuge some time, as his numerous weddings had followed so rapidly one after another, that they seemed too improbable to be true. He was evidently a gentleman by birth and education, and had references from a large chemical house, which were verified, and endeavours made to procure him a suitable situation in a similar house. While the search was being made proofs came to hand of three marriages in almost as many years, sufficiently conclusive to induce the management to pass him on. There was also a strong suspicion of a fourth marriage. He had been educated at Eton,—at least there had been some one of his name there at exactly the time he stated, but it was impossible to carry the identification any further.

These cases have been taken quite by chance from the same source, and are merely samples of the many hundreds that pass in and out of the doors of this particular shelter every winter. Were the proportion of good cases but half or a quarter of what it is even in this handful of cases, there would still be a more than sufficient reason for any who have qualms of conscience in the matter to put them once and for all aside, and to admit that there is good to be done among the "Homeless at Night."