

## CHAPTER VIII

### OCCUPATIONS OF THE MEN

**I**T is difficult to make any satisfactory classification of the trades and occupations of the men under consideration. In America probably more than in any country in the world men frequently shift from one form of employment to another. The pioneer spirit which has not yet worn itself out; the development of the resources of the country; combinations in trade, and many other changing industrial and social conditions, are continually leading men to abandon one form of work and take up another. This is true in all fields of work and in all classes of society. The man who inherits his father's business, trade, or profession, and follows it to the end of his life as so many men in older countries do, is the great exception in America. Mr. Roosevelt, who has been cowboy, writer, police commissioner, assistant secretary of the navy, soldier, governor, president, hunter, editor, and has not yet reached the end of his career, is not unlike thousands of other Americans in his versatility and in the diversity of the occupations which he has followed. When to the various positions which an ambitious

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and useful man is quite likely to hold in the course of his working years must be added several others which he takes up because he is no longer ambitious and useful, and because drink and misfortune have thrust him down, it will readily be seen that to list but a single one of his many occupations as *the* trade or business of the man, will be unsatisfactory if not actually misleading.\* For example, among these homeless men, one was born on a farm and as a boy helped his father about the place as (1) farmhand; when older he went into the village and learned the trade of (2) harnessmaker; about this time he fell under the spell of an evangelist who persuaded him to abandon his trade and enter the ministry. He did so and for six or eight years was (3) a country preacher; he then began to doubt his call to this profession and soon afterward left it and went to a nearby city where he studied law. He was admitted to the bar and became a successful (4) lawyer. During this period he held several political positions, (5) politician, including that of county attorney. He began to drink heavily, and at fifty-eight had lost standing and friends and was completely "down and out." He again sought employment in the trade of his youth, but finally sank to (6) casual labor and begging. Under what occupation shall this man be listed?

Another man was first a farmer, then a car-

\* For a digest of the occupations of 91 men skilled or partly skilled in more than one line of work, see Appendix A, Table 19, p. 293.

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penter, then a lawyer and politician and for several terms a member of the legislature of an eastern state. When a little past forty he went into the wholesale liquor business, at which he made a moderate fortune. The drink habit, however, later unfitted him for business and from this and other causes he lost his money. Finally, when almost penniless, he went to another city, determined to make a fresh start. Here his age and his appearance were against him in the search for clerical work and he turned his hand to anything he could find to do, including carpentry and work in a foundry. Finding such work too heavy he finally drifted down into complete and continuous dependence. When asked his business this man answered that he was "a carpenter by trade,"—but how insignificant a part of his industrial career had been devoted to his trade. A third man had been a teacher, a farmer, a horse dealer, a banker, a casual laborer, and finally a beggar. Still another had been a teacher of Latin and Greek in a high school, a hotel clerk, a church sexton, and a dish-washer in cheap restaurants. Fifteen distinct lines of work are represented in the industrial histories of these four men, and they have held a total of at least 21 different positions. But their careers, as may be seen by reference to the digest in Appendix A, are by no means unusual or extreme.

To list men by the trades of their youth would often, as has been shown, be to ignore the occupa-

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tions of the years of their greatest industrial efficiency. To list them by their recent or last occupations would be even more to misrepresent their training and ability, since a very large proportion of these men had been gradually deteriorating for a number of years previous to their applications to the Bureau, and their "end-of-the-line" occupations were very different from those which they had followed ten years earlier.\* But to decide which of the several occupations of the years of their prime should be considered the chief one has, in some cases, presented a puzzling problem to the enumerator and one which the man's own statement about his life's work did not always help to solve.

Take, for example, the case of the third man mentioned above, the farmer, horse dealer, and banker who finally became a chronic dependent. Wearing a dirty broadcloth frock coat, and with tears rolling down his unshaven cheeks, this man assured me that his business was banking and that he could not get started again because he lacked capital; but after talking with him, and after writing in his behalf to persons who had known him for some time, I entered his occupation as horse dealer. In his earlier years as a farmer he had taken an

\* We learned by experience that degenerate or unfortunate business or professional men, clerks and salesmen almost invariably take to canvassing or seek employment with the addressing companies, when they can no longer work in their own lines, while the final occupations of artisans or laborers are likely to be peddling, odd jobs, or dish-washing in cheap restaurants.

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interest in stock breeding and had finally specialized in horse raising. During the course of a number of years he had accumulated a considerable fortune by the sale of fine animals. At about the age of fifty he had invested his savings toward the establishment of a bank in a small western town, a man whom he knew but slightly being the real banker. When a year or two later this partner absconded, leaving him an unmerited burden of debt and disgrace, the man was unable to endure the obloquy and came to Chicago where no one knew him, to make a fresh start. He had never before lived in a city, knew little of clerical work, and had not been an active laborer in a great many years. He had no money. The result was inevitable. We made every possible effort to save the man, but failed. He would not return to the little city where he was known and might possibly, through friends, have found employment; and in Chicago he was a hopeless misfit. Hence, the apparent anomaly of a banker among homeless men applicants for charity.

We always made an effort to learn from applicants the names of former employers and the length of their service with them; and when men were in distress because of illness or misfortune, or when they were dependent because of old age, we were generally able by appealing to former long-time employers to secure help for them. In one or two instances small pensions for the remainder of life were contributed. In others,

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life positions at easy work were provided; and in still others, lump sums were given which tided applicants over their periods of distress without the necessity of appeals to strangers.

There were cases, however, in which the men had really forgotten how long they had been employed and others in which they overstated their periods of legitimate work, not with the intention to deceive, but only with a pitiful and laudable desire to impress the interviewer with the fact that they had once known better days, and had not always been the hopeless and homeless dependents they now were.

In other ways also the men tried to represent themselves as more valuable or important industrially than the facts would warrant. A drug clerk with some knowledge of medicine would claim to be a doctor; a machinist's helper would claim to be a machinist; a fireman would pose as an engineer. If we were able to investigate the man's history at all, it was usually not difficult to discover and correct these deceptions. But they occurred so frequently that statistics in regard to the occupations and trades of homeless men cannot be depended upon as accurate unless the statements of the men have been verified.

Following is the occupational grouping of the one thousand men as compiled from our records:\*

\* For detailed lists of the different occupations or professions of the men included in the above groups, see Appendix A, Table 20, pp. 295-298.

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(a) Professional . . . . .	62
(b) Business . . . . .	33
(c) Clerical workers and salesmen . . . . .	114
(d) In skilled trades . . . . .	213
(e) In partly skilled trades . . . . .	109
(f) Miscellaneous . . . . .	7
(g) In unskilled occupations . . . . .	334
(h) No work record . . . . .	68
(i) Work record not known . . . . .	60
Total . . . . .	<hr/> 1000

In addition to the personal and subjective reasons for the variety of occupations of many of the men under discussion, there were causes of more wide-sweeping and general effect.

The sudden and enormous increase in the numbers of unemployed and wandering men in the country which is always coincident with trade depressions like that in 1907-8, leaves no doubt that the causes for much of this increase of unemployed men and this variety of occupation are industrial. In many parts of the West, for instance, there are numerous small and growing business enterprises, both mercantile and manufacturing, and we are told that during periods of financial crises a large number of these enterprises fail, thus tending to throw out of employment men who have passed the prime of life. It is often difficult for such men to reinstate themselves and it is particularly so during hard times. It is not strange, therefore, that a certain proportion of them must seek casual labor which often means that they must leave their homes. These tempo-

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rary separations from families are for some men the first steps toward vagrancy.

Since it is well known that each business depression results in the permanent as well as in the temporary augmentation of the vagrant population; and since, also, even in normal times certain industrial evils are responsible for the creation of a certain proportion of vagrants each year, it could probably be shown that the vagrancy of many of the men on the road today, as well as the descent of others to casual labor, was in the beginning due to an industrial cause.\*

As we have seen, there were few bona fide victims of industrial accidents, but one industrial cause of vagrancy which we frequently noted was the effect upon very good men of the high speed pressure under which they are so often required to work. We knew a number of homeless men who were very fair workmen but who found it impossible to work in factories or in other places where they felt themselves driven and under pressure. For example, a young Russian who was frequently out of work was given a position of some responsibility at the Municipal Lodging House one winter and surprised all who knew him by filling it remarkably well. When removed

\* In regard to child labor as a cause of vagrancy I can give no figures, for not all nor even any large proportion of the men were questioned as to the age at which they began work. In the few instances (some 100 or more) where the question was asked, we did not find that the men had, as a rule, been employed unduly early in life. This, however, is such negative testimony and involves such a small group that it is quite worthless.



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from it and placed in regular work outside of the institution he failed within a fortnight and was again upon the streets. The superintendent of the lodging house asked him why it was that he worked so well in the one place and so poorly in the other, and he gave this reply: "You let me do my work my own way. You do not say 'Hurry up, there, hurry up'! I cannot hurry—it makes me sick, so I leave. But I like to work here—can I come back?" This man was not slow in his movements, nor dull mentally. At the lodging house he worked rapidly and required little or no supervision. Some of the time he had five or six helpers working under his direction; yet today he is in danger of becoming a vagrant in spite of his proved possibilities for usefulness, largely because he cannot keep up with the pace of modern industry. That a great many older men drop out for the same reason long before their years of real usefulness are over, is well known to all students of industrial problems, and we had many such cases among our homeless men applicants.

The occupations of 60 men were not known. Some of these were applicants who were ill or insane, or very old, and were not questioned as to their trades. But at least a third of them were men who mentioned trades which we proved by investigation they had never followed but whose real trades we did not discover. Seventeen were

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chronic beggars, among whom it is probable that a number had no work histories to record.

These facts and others have been taken into account in making up the lists of the trades and occupations of the thousand men, and I have endeavored in each instance when a man had had several occupations, to enter as his chief one, that which he had followed during his best and most productive working years. The only exceptions to this rule have been made in some half dozen cases where men had been engaged both in a profession and in a business, or both in a trade and in a business, between which, in point of the time devoted to each, it was difficult to make a choice. In these cases the professions and the trades have been listed and the business ignored.