CHAPTER X

CHRONIC BEGGARS

UNDER the denomination of chronic beggars I have endeavored to include all the men, and only those, who were found upon investigation to be deriving practically their entire support from the general public by begging and imposture. Other men in the thousand begged in times of unusual stress; some few, especially among the old or the crippled, begged frequently but only for a part of their support, continuing to earn the remainder by their own efforts. Some others, who did not beg from the public direct, asked aid more or less frequently from charity societies, while still others lived mainly, or entirely, upon the bounty of relatives. Since, therefore, all of the thousand applied for some form of charitable aid at some time in their careers, it has seemed best to limit the study of the beggars in the group to the 135 men in whom the habit of street or house-to-house begging was well established before the date of their first application to the Bureau of Charities, or in whom it became so soon afterwards.*

At first glance, it may appear that the differences

* For number and kinds of applications of the 1000 homeless men and the 135 chronic beggars, see Appendix A, Table 21, p. 299.

between these particular men and the others are slight, and of degree rather than of kind, and this is in some cases true. However, not only were there some men in the group who were not beggars in any sense of the word, but we found in dealing with applicants of all sorts that so long as a man still made an effort to earn even a part of his own support, or so long as he still had too much pride to ask aid of strangers, a foundation of self-respect remained upon which to base a hope and an effort for his complete restoration to independence. But public begging on the streets and from door to door seems to have so degrading an effect upon character that only in rare instances can a man who has indulged in it for any length of time be reclaimed and brought back to normal social relations. This appears to be true whether the man first resorts to such begging from choice or from what he considers, and what really may, at the moment, have been necessity.

Beggars have long been popularly supposed to be of only two types, men who beg from "choice" and are "unworthy," and men who beg from "necessity" and are "worthy." That a thousand cumulative influences of heredity, environment, and training may have led to the "choice" on the part of the "unworthy" man, and that thriftlessness, self-indulgence and vice may at bottom have been responsible for the misfortunes of the so-called "worthy" man, are facts which have often neither been realized nor taken into consideration.

The words necessity and choice are relative and variable in their meanings. The necessity of a man who is physically weak or mentally dull would not be the necessity of a strong man, while the choice of a life of vagrancy by one whose parents were paupers and who is himself uneducated and untrained, cannot fairly be compared with a similar choice upon the part of a man who, well-born and reared, had been given every incentive and opportunity for living an upright and useful life. Compare, for example, the following cases:

A lad who was a member of a tramp family became paralyzed when five years old. Both of his parents begged and they used his pitiful condition as part of their stock in trade. Very early in life he himself was taught to beg and to exhibit his shrivelled leg to compel pity. He was never sent to school, never trained for any business but begging. This lad had an unusually bright mind, as well as a sunny disposition and other attributes which, if he could have received different training, might have assured him an honorable and useful position in life in spite of his physical handicap. But at seventeen, his age when he first came to the attention of the Bureau, he was, and today at the age of thirty-three he still is, a most accomplished and successful beggar, and one who refuses to consider any other means of securing a living although he has several times been offered opportunities to do so.

The second man, an ex-minister, was well born,

carefully reared and educated, and had for a number of years held the respect of the congregations which he served, but he entered upon a disgraceful career of vice and imposture when his children were almost grown. There may have been, in fact it can hardly be doubted that there were, objective as well as subjective reasons for this man's degeneration. They are not, however, readily discoverable, and few would question the conclusion that in any case his moral responsibility for his mode of life when he became a chronic impostor and beggar at forty, was immeasurably greater than that of the crippled pauper who was taught to beg at five or six.

This particular man was in sound health, but we found in a number of other cases where men of good family "chose" to be mendicants, that inherited tendencies toward degeneration and the possession of weak bodies accounted at least in part for their profligacy. For example: A young fellow of twenty-seven came into the office one afternoon and spread out on the desk before me a letter of recommendation which had been refolded so many times that it was worn to tatters. Hastily fitting the parts together he read it with great rapidity, apparently knowing it by heart, and then produced an affidavit from a notary in St. Paul testifying that the letter was genuine. Having done this, he asked for money with which to purchase a ticket to his home in the East. He had been referred to the office by an Episcopal

clergyman and we found upon investigation that he had begged of almost every clergyman of that denomination in Chicago. He had also approached a number of prominent laymen. From these sources he had already received two railroad tickets and a considerable sum of money. Further investigation disclosed a very black record of begging, imposture, dishonesty, vice, and the use of drugs. But on going somewhat deeper into the case we learned that the youth's father, a man of means and of good family, had been a morphine eater and had died from the effects of the drug when his son was a baby, and that his mother, although long since recovered, was at the time of the boy's birth "a physical and mental wreck" because of the trouble she was having with her husband. The boy had been a weakling from birth and had taken to the use of morphine when in his teens.

In several other similar cases we traced histories of frail health and moral perversion back to the infancies of the men.

If, for the reasons indicated, it is difficult to decide how far men may be held personally responsible for their choice of mendicancy, it is at least equally hard to say what shall constitute the necessity under which they may be excused for begging. There are persons who believe that any man who is physically handicapped has a legitimate excuse for begging. Others feel that the amount of the handicap should decide the ques-

tion. Both classes overlook the fact that while a man may be necessarily dependent because of a handicap, he need not therefore necessarily beg. As was shown in earlier chapters, a number of crippled men begged who had resources which made their doing so wholly unnecessary. There are other persons who hold that no man ever begs from necessity since the taxes of the people pay for a poorhouse where any one who has neither friends nor money will receive care if he asks for it. These persons perhaps do not know that in Chicago at least—and the same rule holds in many other communities—indigent strangers are not eligible for public aid until they have lived six months in the county and have established "legal residence."

The number of such strangers, however, most likely is not so large but that the private charities of the city could readily furnish the aid they need if they would apply to these organizations instead of begging. And while one can imagine circumstances where a stranger might possibly be forced to beg, if he needed instant help, it is certainly true that generally speaking no man begs on the streets of Chicago from objective necessity while the poorhouse stands ready to receive him, or private charity has not yet shown itself unable or unwilling to assist him.

Subjective "necessity," however, accounts for the begging of a number of men, for to many, life in a poorhouse would mean the endurance of

mental suffering far worse than the disgrace of begging. Such a one was a certain refined old blind man whom Chicagoans will recall as having begged for a number of years at the corner of Twelfth Street and Wabash Avenue and who is included among the beggars listed in this chapter. From his own point of view at least this man unquestionably begged solely from necessity. He had no relatives or friends able to help him, was totally blind, and being past seventy was not eligible for admission to the state's school nor to any home for the blind. Twice, on the advice of different persons, he went out to the poorhouse at Dunning and tried to accustom himself to the hard conditions there and to the enforced association with the degraded and diseased wrecks of men about him. But everything within him shrank from the life, and feeling that he could not endure it he returned to his begging stand where business men said "Good morning" as they dropped change into his cup and where kind hearted women occasionally sympathized and chatted with him. He begged, but no one who knew him could believe that he did so from a true choice, any more than it was from choice that he finally died after all in the dreaded poorhouse. He was never a willing dependent, and if he could have been pensioned or cared for in some way that would have spared him the necessity of begging he would undoubtedly have abandoned the habit.*

* See Chapter VII, p. 112. Homeless Old Men.

But shall we, on the score of subjective necessity, excuse the mendicancy of another blind old man of seventy-three who persisted in begging and tramping about the country, although he had both a son and a daughter willing and able to care for him, who felt deeply disgraced by their father's vagrant habits? It may appear that this man begged by deliberate choice and should have been made to feel the force of the law if he continued his mendicancy, but in spite of the apparent differences between them, this beggar was in fact no more truly parasitic by nature than the one just described. He was a simple, kindly, somewhat childish old man, against whom the most serious moral delinquencies which could in fairness be charged were that he had a very natural desire to travel about the world after having spent a lifetime in a single county, and that a harmless vanity and love of attention led him to crave and to seek the interest which centered upon him whenever, white-headed, penniless, and blind, he appeared in a new community and asked aid to reach another. An inordinate desire for sympathy and attention seemed to be the only reason for the begging habits of several other men of the thousand who apparently begged from "necessity."

The psychology of begging is subtle and complex, and is as yet but little understood even by persons who come into the closest and most frequent touch with mendicants, but it is probable

TABLE IX.—GENERAL DATA CONCERNING 135 CHRONIC BEGGARS

A. Ages, by Groups		B. Conjugal Condition	
12 to 19	9	Single	101
20 to 29	33	Married	2
30 to 39	25	Widowed	22
40 to 49	27	Divorced	1
50 to 59	20	Separated	7
60 to 69	14	Not known	2
70 to 79	5		
86 and 94	2	Total	135
Total	135		

C. Nativity		D. Previous Occupations	
American (including Negro)	68	Professional men	11
German	14	College students	2
English	14	Skilled workers	25
Irish	15	Partly skilled	23
Canadian	6	Unskilled	38
Scandinavian	4	No work record	19
Italian	3	Not known	17
Other	4		
Not known	7	Total	135
Total	135		

that few begin to beg by definite choice, and equally few, if any, in America, have become chronic beggars solely because of compelling, objective necessity.

In considering the 135 chronic beggars here listed no effort has been made to classify them by causes of mendicancy. Some facts about the group as a whole are presented briefly, and in the following pages a few common types of beggars, classified according to their marked characteristics and their attitude toward society, are described and discussed.

The men have been divided into four classes as follows:

CLASS I. Anti-social men who consider society their prey	48
CLASS II. Beggars who have drifted into the habit	44
CLASS III. Beggars with personal and social handicaps	11
CLASS IV. Accidental Beggars	18
Miscellaneous	6
Men too little known to classify	8
Total	135

There were eight college men among the 135, and 103 who had had a common school education; 21 were illiterate and the amount of education of three was unknown. The information obtained with regard to their ages, nativity, conjugal condition, and previous occupations, has been summarized in Table IX. The following additional facts may be of interest: Thirty-eight of the men drank to excess, seven took drugs, 46 were "tramps," and 18 had criminal tendencies. Eight had been in jails, four had been in penitentiaries, 10 had been in houses of correction, two had been in reform schools, two had been in drink cures, two had been in homes for the blind, two had been in orphanages. More knowledge of the men would undoubtedly have increased many of the figures given.*

* For information concerning the physical and mental condition of these men, see Appendix A, Table 22, p. 300.

CLASS I

ANTI-SOCIAL MEN WHO CONSIDER SOCIETY THEIR PREY

Of chronic beggars who were distinctly anti-social when they came to our attention, if not actually criminal, there seem to have been at least 48 among the 135 men listed; there may have been more.* Each of these men had or could have had other means of support, but begged by preference. Some had near relatives able and willing to support them; others by their own admissions, could have supported themselves; and still others, while seriously handicapped physically, were offered opportunities for self-support and refused them. All made a business or profession of begging and 18 were criminal as well as mendicant.

Most of these men seemed to have entered the "profession" young. Their average age was thirty-four and one-half years; 66 per cent were under forty years of age and 43 per cent under thirty. Eight had no work record at all and others had had very little legitimate employment and that some time previous to our acquaintance with them. A number of them were crippled or maimed, but several of these are known to have met with accidents while tramping or to have been

* The figures as to the number of men in each particular group described in this chapter represent the writer's best judgment, based upon study of all available information regarding the men and personal acquaintance with a large proportion of them. Fuller knowledge of facts, in certain doubtful cases, might have led to a different decision as to classification. The figures here given are therefore presented as approximately rather than as absolutely exact.

injured after, and not before, they became mendicants.*

Mentally, these 48 men represented a rather higher average of ability than was the case with the remainder of the chronic beggars. Sixteen of their number were well educated and had come from good families; five were college men; 10 others had been to high schools. The stories they told were ingenious and plausible and the men often showed pride in the originality and success of their own particular methods of imposture. One man told me his method and said: "I have been at this business for seven years and that story works the best of any I have tried yet. It is original with me and is worth good money." Then he added, as if suddenly mistrusting the wisdom of having confided it to me, "I hope you won't let any one else get onto it."

That many of the men consider imposture a business, if not quite a legitimate business, is evidenced by the way in which they refer to it. A persistent begging-letter writer, who was twice caught and sent to the penitentiary by the secretary of the charity organization society of an eastern city, said frankly when he was offered an opportunity to take legitimate employment upon his discharge, "I am quite satisfied with my present employment. It is easy, it pays well, and I'm my own boss. If I want to lay off for a few days

* The stories of several of these maimed beggars are given in Chapter IV, p. 44. The Crippled and Maimed.

or go on a spree there's no one to kick about it, and I can't see but that it's just as good a business as any other." When warned that it was prohibited by law and that he would be arrested again if he continued in it, he admitted this but said that that was a chance he must look out for, adding, "There are risks of some sort in most any line."

Several men held that their business was legitimate because they used no coercion. "I don't hold a man up with a gun," said one beggar. "He doesn't have to give to me if he doesn't want to, and if he wants to, I don't see that it's anybody's business but his and mine." Why the charity organization societies or the police departments should try to protect the interests of citizens who are so "easy" as to be taken in by beggars is a matter which these men often claimed not to understand.

The men who pretended to defend their mendicancy were few, however, in comparison with those who admitted its illegitimacy but regarded the possibility of arrest as one of the accepted risks of the business. "But you've no right to help the police," one man said. "If they can't get me of their own accord, it isn't fair for you to butt in and give me away." Disapproval of having the charity organization society report descriptions and facts regarding beggars to the police was not infrequently expressed in one way or another, not only by these men but by others, and while it never deterred us from doing so when such a course seemed necessary or best, it did lead us, for

the sake of our influence with the lodging house applicants, to take such action only as a last resort and when all other efforts to persuade the men to abandon begging had failed.

It is difficult to state just how many criminals there may have been among these 48 anti-social beggars, since it was often only after a man had "operated" in several cities that we were able, by correspondence, to discover that he was of this type. We know, however, that 10 men had served sentences other than for vagrancy, and that at least 18 had marked criminal tendencies. If all the facts could have been secured, it is probable that both these figures would have been greater.* Seven of the 18 men of known criminal tendencies were of foreign birth and had had criminal records both in Europe and in America. Among these one case may be interesting to cite, that of a Norwegian by birth, who has since died in an eastern penitentiary. We have since found upon investigation that this man, who was asking aid in Chicago in 1903–4, had a criminal record in this country and Europe which included among other offenses: bigamy, securing money from women under promise of marriage, defrauding a life insurance company, swindling several hotels and a lodge, receiving money under false pretenses, robbery, burglary, attempting to dispose of the body of a dead

* I have not counted as criminals the petty thieves in the group. We found that there were a good many homeless men who would not scruple to steal a hat, an umbrella, or an overcoat if it was handy to do so, but who would not hold up a citizen nor break into a residence.

infant, perjury when acting as a witness, and blackmail. His career was a long, continuous chain of crimes for several of which he had served terms in American and European prisons. But the significant thing about this man's history was that during all the years in which he was securing large sums of money by the methods referred to, he was at the same time constantly adding smaller amounts to his income by clever begging. His favorite method was to represent himself as almost starving in a strange city and to implore money for transportation to his family and to certain employment in some other city. He was frail and delicate in appearance and in spite of his true character he preserved to the end of his career an innocent and almost boyish expression which served him well in his "profession."

Another criminal beggar was a ne'er-do-well son of a fine Southern family, who shortly after his graduation from college killed a man in a drunken quarrel in a saloon. Because of his condition when the shooting occurred he was sentenced for manslaughter instead of murder and served but a few years in a penitentiary. While there his record was excellent, but immediately upon his discharge he took up "refined" begging and imposture as a profession and is still making a good living at it. Another criminal beggar now serving time in a New York penitentiary was a very well educated German who was known to the charity organization societies of

several cities under eight different aliases. Another man, also an educated German, was referred to the Chicago Bureau of Charities under two different names and was later found by the New York Charity Organization Society to be operating under not fewer than twelve aliases. This man was later arrested by the New York society, but since his release has again been reported as begging both in New York and in other cities. There is little question but that an indeterminate penitentiary sentence was the only form of "assistance" which would have served to check the illegal careers of most of these criminal beggars, and other deterrent and reformative methods of treatment were as certainly needed by others of the parasitic group who were not so distinctly criminal but who were, nevertheless, anti-social in their tendencies and habits.

Lack of space prohibits detailed account of the attempts made by the Bureau to reinstate these parasitic beggars. There were a few of them who were reported to the office by citizens a number of times and from all parts of the city, but where they lived we never knew. They invariably gave false addresses and although in some instances we learned a good deal regarding them we were of course unable to influence them in any way. Twenty-one men of the 48 came to the office on their own initiative or when referred by citizens, but frankly declined to co-operate in any plans which might render them self-supporting. We

took out warrants for the arrest of seven of these, only four of whom were found by the police. When brought into court citizens from whom they had begged refused to prosecute two of the men; the third man was dismissed with a warning, and the fourth was fined.

The results of arrest were rather more satisfactory in certain other cases which were brought into court but which do not happen to be among the particular thousand under consideration.

Upon the whole, however, recourse to the law did not seem to be as effective a method of forcing these men to cease begging in Chicago as was a rather wide publication of their descriptions and stories in the newspapers, and sending letters of warning against them to pastors and other citizens. These measures usually led the men to leave the city, which relieved Chicago of their presence but as certainly inflicted them upon some other community, so that nothing of permanent value was accomplished by such action.

For 19 of the 48 parasites (40 per cent) many efforts looking toward reform were made, no one of which at the end of from five to eight years afterwards has proved to be of lasting success. Two drug-users were cured in institutions and for a short time thereafter ceased public begging. Recent investigation, however, shows that both have since relapsed. Of other cases in which treatment was for a time apparently successful, the most typical, probably, are those of two

blind beggars, one of whom has been known to the office seven and one-half years and the other ten, and for each of whom several hundred dollars and a great amount of time and effort have been spent. One of the two, through the Bureau's assistance, was taught a trade and furnished the material and machinery with which to work at it, making him entirely capable of earning his own living, but he sold the machinery and returned to begging. Almost as much was done for the other, but both today are again parasitic beggars.

When a sufficient amount of effort has been spent to make a beggar self-supporting and it is proved beyond reasonable doubt that he is determined to prey upon the community, I do not believe that it pays to waste further time or money in constructive work; deterrent and reformative measures should then be adopted, whether the man is physically handicapped or not. His influence is distinctly bad and he ought to be segregated, but whether he should be placed in a penitentiary, a reform school, a hospital, or on a farm colony must depend, in each individual case, upon the facts which careful investigation brings to light as to the nature and cause of his parasitism.

CLASS II

BEGGARS WHO HAVE DRIFTED INTO THE HABIT

There is another type of beggar which from experience with occasional as well as with chronic

beggars, I believe to be the commonest type of all, although in the group of 135 discussed in this chapter they appear to be somewhat less numerous than the more active and dangerous beggars just described. These are men who have once—perhaps for a number of years—been fully self-supporting and self-respecting citizens, who are not now criminal nor anti-social in spirit but who, from the combination of many causes, both social and individual, have gradually and almost unconsciously drifted into the habit of begging.

That most of these men did not in the beginning possess strong characters, sound bodies, and well-trained minds, need hardly be stated. Many of them had never been very efficient or industrious, but neither had they in the beginning been idlers nor dependents. The records show that their first appeals to charity were infrequent and not resorted to when work or other means of support were readily available. But many of them seem to have held no very strong convictions against begging—a fact which may have been partly due to long association in lodging houses with men who lived by their wits. When, therefore, under the stress of some temporary necessity—illness, accident, lack of employment, or any other unanticipated misfortune—they crossed the line and discovered the ease with which they could live by begging, few of them probably again put forth quite the same amount of effort to maintain their independence. If, at the time they made their

first appeals for charitable aid, alms had been refused and the particular sort of help which they really needed offered in its stead, there is little question but that many of them would gladly have accepted it and been saved from much later suffering and degradation. For the initial needs which lead men of this type to beg are in many cases trifling: a few dollars are stolen from them at a lodging house and for lack of these a man comes to want before he can find employment; a trunk is held for storage, and not being able to redeem it a man lacking proper clothing cannot take a place at his accustomed work, and in unaccustomed work he perhaps suffers some temporary injury which still further handicaps him.

Behind these relatively trifling misfortunes which the men present as excuses for begging lie the undeniable facts that they had made no provision for the future when they were earning comfortable wages; that they had perhaps given up good positions when they held them without sufficient reasons for doing so, and that indulgence in drink and vice in very many cases accounted for their inability to carry themselves over small emergencies like those mentioned. Nevertheless, they did not in these respects differ much from other workmen who did not become beggars, and study of their records shows that the deterioration of many was so gradual that probably if at any time during a number of consecutive years they had received more intelligent help just

when they needed it or could have been withdrawn from the lodging house environment, their further degeneration might have been prevented and they perhaps could have been brought back into normal relations with society.

There were at least 44 of these degenerate-workmen beggars among the chronic beggars under discussion and most of them had remained on the borderline for years, working when work was plentiful and begging when it was not. The natural tendency in every case, however, had been for the work periods to grow shorter and those of willing dependence longer until the man's character, health, and efficiency were so far impaired by his manner of life that he could no longer be self-supporting if he would.* The habit of begging did not, in any of these cases, become *chronic* until after drink, drugs, disease, accident, or age had seriously handicapped the man. At the time of their application to the Bureau only 10 of the 44 could be considered as in sound physical condition and of these, six were over fifty-three years of age. Nineteen of the 44 (or 43 per cent) were habitual drunkards. This is a higher percentage of drunkenness than was found among other types of beggars or among homeless men in general. That these men had taken to mendicancy rather late in life is evidenced in part by the fact that their average age is forty-seven. That long residence in cheap lodging houses had contributed to

* See Chapter IX, p. 139. Seasonal and Casual Labor.

the demoralization of a majority of them is probable, since 48 per cent had spent an average of eight years in the district. Thirty-four per cent had been in Chicago less than a year, but of these, several had lived for some time in the cheap lodging houses of other cities. We have no record of the length of time 8 per cent of the men had lived in the lodging houses, but in the remaining five cases (10 per cent) the men had been in Chicago for over twenty years and had undoubtedly spent a number of them in the lodging house district.

In the matter of education these men did not rank high. None had been to college; only three had been to high school, and six (possibly eight) were wholly illiterate, being unable to read or write even in their own languages.

Data concerning the lines of work they had followed during the periods of their greatest industrial efficiency show that comparatively few had been highly skilled workers. Fifteen were skilled, four partly skilled, and 25 wholly unskilled.*

For the most degraded among these ex-workmen beggars, there was very little that we could do except to place them in hospitals or asylums when such action was necessary. Two of the men in this group went insane and one died of delirium tremens during our acquaintance with them, and eight of the most hideously besotted and diseased men of the whole thousand were among this par-

* For list of occupations of these men, see Appendix A, Table 23, p. 300.

ticular group of beggars all of whom had once been self-respecting workingmen.

For the men who were not so degraded, however, we made many efforts at reclamation, all finally unsuccessful. Work was offered to almost every man; some refused it, others took it, but the result in the end was the same. Much more than employment was needed to save them from further demoralization, and the remedies which were needed we were unable to furnish. We could not cut off their source of income,—the indiscriminate relief furnished by charitable citizens,—for too many people continue to believe that such relief is necessary to prevent suffering; we could not send the men to compulsory labor colonies where they could be kept until work habits were re-established, for the state provides none. We could not send the habitual drunkards among them to colonies or institutions where they might be cured of their habit, for none exist in Illinois which can, by law, hold men against their wills, and none of these men would go voluntarily. We could not forcibly remove them from the city lodging house district, and lastly, we were not able in any one of these particular cases to gain a sufficient influence over the men, or to put them in the way of being influenced enough by others, to persuade them to abandon permanently their habits of mendicancy, vice, and drink.

The greatest single difference between these degenerate-workmen beggars and the criminal and

parasitic group from which in spite of some common characteristics I have separated them, is that as before stated, these men, during a period of several years at least, might have been brought back to right relations with society had it been possible to apply the constructive remedies needed to check their degeneration. In other words, society appears to have been at least as responsible as the men themselves for their final downfall, whereas some peculiar and perhaps inherent twist of character deformed the men of the other group and made their complete restoration to social health and usefulness doubtful almost from the beginning.

CLASS III

BEGGARS WITH PERSONAL AND SOCIAL HANDICAPS

A third common type of city beggar is one whose personal and social development is subnormal. Glancing at causes, in passing, merely to give a clearer picture of the type referred to: he is the boy, or the man grown from the boy, whose childhood has been neglected and who in consequence reaches manhood without the equipment necessary for fighting the battle of life. In many cases he has grown up in the poorer sections of a large city, popularly known as its "slums." He has had little if any schooling. We found a number of such boys and men to be unable to read or write and few of them had passed the third or fourth grade in school.

At about fifteen this boy, who later becomes a mendicant, usually spends a year or two on the road as a tramp, after which he settles down in the lodging house section of his own or some other large city and drifts into the habit of chronic begging. The keener witted boys of this neglected type often develop into criminals or actively parasitic beggars like those first described, but the lads to whom I now refer are generally slightly below normal physically or mentally and for this or for other reasons they do not actively take up arms against society. Sometimes they are persistent in their begging, but usually are apathetic and dull and not at all individual or clever in their methods of gaining a living by mendicancy.

Of the 11 boys or men of this type who are listed among these 135 chronic beggars, only two had work records of any kind; one of these for a short time had been a messenger boy and the other a newsboy—both lines of work in which they received no training to fit them for later usefulness. But while none of these men had ever been self-supporting, none seemed to beg from a desire to live at the expense of the public; rather they begged because they did not know how to find a living in any other way. The stories of our efforts in behalf of two or three of these "city-bred drifters" may be of interest.*

* For brief digests of the cases of the 11 men in this class, see Appendix A, Table 24, p. 301.

T. P. left school at about the third grade; between fourteen and fifteen years of age worked irregularly as a messenger boy, but by the time he was nineteen had tramped all over America and had twice been to Europe and back. He was a decent looking fellow, able-bodied and of average mentality. He did not seem vicious nor was he even especially lazy; he was simply untrained. We sent him to several places for employment. In one he found the work too heavy and from the others he was dismissed as incapable. He soon wandered onto the road again and has not for several years applied to the Bureau. There is little question but that this boy, who at twenty-one (his age when we last saw him) was still willing to work, might have developed into a useful citizen, instead of a tramp, if during his childhood and adolescence he could have received the sort of care, education, and industrial training needed to fit him for life.

The second story is that of a boy, also born in a large city, who when his own home was for some reason broken up, was placed in an immense institution for children. He remained there for a long period during which he received little or no individual training. Shortly after he left the institution this lad met with an accident through which he lost one leg. We endeavored to help him by securing an artificial leg. His record in the interval between his dismissal from the orphanage and his accident was not unfavorable to him and we hoped by prompt assistance and

friendly supervision to save the boy from becoming a vagrant. It was not until after he had sold the leg and gone to begging again that we learned what perhaps we should have discovered earlier—that he was too undeveloped mentally, too lacking in the habit of independent thought and action because of the long years he had spent under direction, to be able to care for himself even when given an amount of assistance which would have been sufficient to rehabilitate the average man who is not immoral. He did not beg because of his lameness,—with the artificial leg he had learned to walk without a limp,—nor did he deliberately choose to be dependent upon others. His mental incapacity to grapple with the problem of his own support alone seemed to account for his choice of the line of least resistance.

Orphanage graduates and former wards of various institutions for children are sometimes found among homeless men, as might be expected from the fact of their homelessness, and I do not recall one among those with whom I became acquainted whose capacity for independence when he entered the larger world had not been seriously affected by the fact that personal initiative had remained practically undeveloped during the long period of his stay in a large institution.

The third man's story is also typical and is presented because it shows how useless is the method society at present employs in the hope of reforming beggars of this type. This man was

thirty-six at the time he was referred to the Bureau. He was perfectly sound physically and apparently of average intelligence. He did not drink to excess but was illiterate and had had no work record whatever. At the time he came to us he had been dismissed from the Bridewell,* after serving his third successive term for vagrancy. He asked only for work. We sent him to several positions for temporary employment; he took each of them and did fairly well for a man so untrained and so lazy by temperament. We watched him for several weeks, furnishing him a new job as soon as the last was completed, but it was not possible by such haphazard and unscientific efforts to fan into a living flame the faint spark of a desire for independence which the man for a short time had displayed. From one job to which he was sent he did not return to report and we never saw him again. He probably decided that an occasional short term in a house of correction was pleasanter to endure than work every day of the year, and willingly slipped back into his old mode of life.

Punishment by imprisonment is not what is needed for vagrants of this type, of whom there are perhaps several thousands in America, but rather commitment to compulsory labor colonies like those of Belgium and Switzerland, where habits of industry may be inculcated in men who have never worked or who have long been idle,

*The Chicago House of Correction.

and where untrained men may receive training which will fit them for self-support upon their dismissal.

CLASS IV

ACCIDENTAL BEGGARS

One more quite distinct type of beggar who appears upon the streets of every city may be briefly discussed. This is the man who takes to begging from what would generally be termed "necessity,"—certainly in each case either from misfortune for which he himself was not personally responsible, or from a compelling subjective necessity. Of such men there are far fewer who become chronic beggars than who follow begging for but a short time; and both relatively and absolutely the total number of such beggars is much smaller than is popularly supposed. All of these men have once been fully self-supporting but they differ from the "degenerate workmen" in that they have not degenerated in character and thus drifted into begging, but in every case have maintained independence until because of age or some other unavoidable handicap they were no longer able to support themselves. If they refuse to go to a poorhouse where they might receive care without the need of publicly begging for it, such refusals are usually based upon the best instincts of the men. They feel themselves to be, and are, above the grade of the class of men

who at present drift into poorhouses to end their days, and they will not associate with them. In short, they are men who might be called "accidental" beggars, using the word much as the criminologist does when he describes a certain type of criminal as an "accidental criminal."

Eighteen men were of this type. So far as we could discover from personal acquaintance with the men themselves, or by means of conversation or correspondence with others who knew them well, no one of the 18 was parasitic in spirit. Their average age was fifty-seven, ten years greater than that of the degenerate-workmen beggars and twenty-five years greater than that of the men in the criminal and anti-social group. A few of these men had dropped almost directly from self-support into beggary, but more of them had suffered during a period of several years while ill health or old age had rendered them increasingly unable to live without charitable aid, but during which they had not relinquished their desire to be self-supporting.

Although only one man in this group was physically in good condition—and he was seventy-five years of age—six of the 18 asked for work also when they were referred to us for material aid.*

The digests in Appendix A give a few further facts about this group and show what we did or tried to do in their behalf. It will be noted that in several cases we did nothing which per-

* For brief digests of the cases of 16 men in Class IV, see Appendix A, Table 25, p. 302.

manently helped the men (in every case some temporary aid was furnished); the reasons for this were partly that we had no way of holding them and therefore sometimes lost track of men whom we should have been glad to aid further; and partly that we found ourselves quite unable to secure the sort of institutional care, or the money to supply adequate continuous aid outside of institutions, which was needed in certain of these cases as well as in many others. A society whose work is supported entirely by private contributions can go no further in helping its applicants than the resources of the community and the contributions of its supporters and friends will permit.

Within the four classes described, I have included all but 14 of the 135 beggars. The 14 not included were men whose characteristics, like those of the blind man who begged from a desire for sympathy, were rather unusual and were not found in any large proportion of beggars; or they were men about whom we knew too little to attempt to classify them, although they were reported to the office frequently so that it is fair to include them among "chronic" beggars.

To summarize, the four main types of beggars described in this chapter are: First, the anti-social men who consider society their prey. These are men of a rather high average mentality who practice imposture as a business and refuse oppor-

tunities for self-support when they are offered. Second, beggars who have drifted into the habit. These are men of weaker mentality who are easily influenced for or against better ways of living by their surroundings. They do not make begging a profession and do not generally become chronic beggars until drink or disease handicaps them. Third, beggars with personal and social handicaps. These men are socially subnormal, even though they are not necessarily mentally or physically subnormal. They are undeveloped or underdeveloped and cannot, if they would, compete successfully with men who have had normal opportunities. Lastly, there are the "accidental" beggars,—the men whose social relations were normal until age, accident, or disease put it beyond their power to maintain those relations and who then became beggars either from ignorance or from choice.

Enough has probably been said in the preceding pages to demonstrate that the chronic beggars in our cities have been recruited from environments and types of homes too various; have taken to begging for reasons too widely differing; are men whose natural abilities, training, physical and mental conditions and moral standards are too diverse in character and unequal in amount, for it to be practicable for lawmakers or social workers to attempt to consider and deal with them all "as a class."

No single correctional law, no one inflexible

method of treatment can be applied with success to all. Medical care is needed for some; special industrial training for others; material aid alone for a certain small group, and a number of different forms of correctional and reformatory treatment in institutions and in colonies for still others. Here, as frequently before, the plea must be made for the consideration of the individual man upon the basis of his individual merits and needs as these shall be discovered through intelligent, thorough, and sympathetic investigation of his history.

The task of re-building or of building up for the first time, self-respect and habits of industry in men who have become chronic beggars, is at best a difficult one. No matter how much time, effort, and money we may expend, and no matter how drastic may be our laws or how well equipped our penitentiaries, the effort, unless it is undertaken with at least a fair knowledge of the facts as to a man's physical condition, his abilities, temperament, training, and habits, will prove to be hopeless.