gender, a concern that resulted in the New Woman theme in the 1890s and went on, in the suffragist movement, to the political enfranchise-
ment of women. Perhaps the best novel on the New Woman theme is Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*. The most well known feminist story of the
period is Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper,” a
brilliant evocation of emotional pathology and misguided, destructive
attempts to treat it. Mary Wilkins Freeman’s “The Revolt of ‘Mother’”
captures a moment of female assertion with both humor and sensitivity.
Edith Wharton’s “The Other Two” concerns a distinctly “modern” sub-
ject, the divorced and remarried woman. Jewett’s “Miss Tempy’s Watch-
ers” deals with the more gentle issue of “communities of women,” using
psychological transformation, rather than physical event, for the climax.
Willa Cather’s “A Wagner Matinée” similarly focuses on another sen-
sitive matter that emerges in this era, the essence of the aesthetic sen-
sibility, the importance of art in human existence.

Ethnic and racial topics were also an important part of Realism, for
few subjects seemed so central to the melting pot of America as the
definition of the values of various groups as a precursor to the assimili-
ation of them into one symbiotic society. With vast numbers of im-
migrants from a broad range of backgrounds, with differing languages,
religions, and customs, the expanding nation presented an unlimited
number of possibilities for stories in this vein. Charles W. Chesnutt’s
“The Wife of His Youth” utilizes African-American issues in a typically
Realistic manner, presenting the protagonist at an intense moment of
ethical crisis, when a decision will forever change the course of his life.
Zitkala-Sä’s “The Trial Path” uses a Native American legend to illus-
trate the process of justice among the Lakota people. Alice Dunbar-
Nelson, an African-American writer from New Orleans, unites racial
and regional concerns in “Sister Josepha,” and Abraham Cahan, the
first important Jewish writer in American fiction, gives expression to his
background in “A Providential Match.” These are only a sample of the
varied subjects that Realistic writers addressed in their stories, but their
work brought the fruition of the short story in American literary history.

By the 1890s the central concept of Realism was well established in
American literature, and its basic principles were to dominate fiction for
the next century, but there also evolved two related movements with
somewhat different fundamental assumptions: Naturalism and Impres-
sionism. Naturalism was not, as is often assumed, simply a more pes-
simistic form of Realism. Indeed, the underlying ideas of the nature of
human life, the extent to which people are responsible for their actions,
the method of presenting narratives, the kinds of characters used, the
handling of plot, the presentation of images, the tone, the genre, and
even the style of Naturalism differed from Realism in important ways.
If Realism had its origins in painting, Naturalism can be thought to have evolved from science, specifically from a book by a French physician, Claude Bernard, entitled *An Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*, which presented the startling idea that medical treatment should involve an assessment of the cause of a condition as a basis for curing the patient. Illness was not, in Bernard’s view, a matter of divine will, and heavenly intervention was not a preferred therapy, an attitude that proved controversial. The duty of a physician was to establish the physiological etiology of a pathological phenomenon, alter the causative agent, and cure the patient. Émile Zola, impressed by this thinking, applied the same logic to the role of a novelist in *The Experimental Novel* (1880). The obligation of a novel was to portray social pathology, analyzing its causative forces, and, by suggesting ways of altering these factors, improve society. Naturalism was, unabashedly, a reformist movement.

Beginning in the 1890s in America, Naturalistic fiction was very effective in achieving these ends, and, through alliance with the Populist movement, with governmental agencies seeking to improve conditions in the cities and on the farms, and later with Socialism, the Naturalists were able to influence the direction of American society. They were also informed by developments in psychology, political philosophy, and science, particularly by Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* in 1859, which contributed to Naturalistic thinking not only the idea that homo sapiens are related to the lower forms of animals but that people are capable of an atavistic regression to a savage state, that modern behavior can be the product of biologically determined forces, that there is nothing transcendent in human life. Life is a struggle for survival in which not the fittest but the most ruthless prevail.

Out of these ideas developed the dominant theme in Naturalism of pessimistic Determinism, the notion that characters are the victims of the Promethean forces of heredity, society, and a hostile nature, powers outside the control of the protagonists and for which they are thus not to be held responsible. In this sense individuality, crucial in Realism, is deemphasized in Naturalism, since personal attributes make little difference in a character driven by overwhelming external forces or internal biological necessities. The plots of Naturalism thus tend to exhibit the expression of Deterministic power; there is little ethical struggle within a character since personal choice makes no difference. Naturalistic fiction is normally set in a hostile environment, in urban slums, in rural poverty, in the jungle, or the arctic. The characters tend to be uneducated, representative, lower-class “types” of some oppressed group, most often uncomprehending of the forces that impel them toward tragedy, unable to grasp the situation or articulate a protest. Such characters
could not narrate their own stories, of course, since they have no knowledge of the powers that drive them to ruin; Naturalistic narrators are nearly always omniscient voices, in possession of the long causative history of the situation, able to have access to the minds of all of the characters, able to see into the future as well as the past. Such narrators tend to be intrusive, commenting directly on the meaning of the events presented, analyzing the responsibility for the destructive circumstances. As a reform movement, Naturalism was not noted for artistic effects or stylistic grace; but animal and jungle images, figures drawn from war, metaphors from prehistoric savagery, and dominant symbols of obsessive characters traits (lust, greed, hatred, revenge) emphasize the underlying themes.

These ideas produced some great novels, among them Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie*, Frank Norris’s *McTeague*, Jack London’s *The Sea-Wolf*, John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, and, in 1940, Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, perhaps the last great novel in this tradition. Because an analysis of causative forces tends to be ponderous, the short story was not the normal genre for Naturalism, although there were powerful stories produced in the mode. One of the most frequently cited is Norris’s “A Deal in Wheat,” which well illustrates the theme of economic determinism, as greed in the grain market ruins the life of a farmer and his family. Hamlin Garland’s “Under the Lion’s Paw” develops a related theme, the exploitation of tenant farmers in the uncontrolled economy of the late nineteenth century. Social injustice is also the theme of Stephen Crane’s “An Experiment in Misery” and “The Men in the Storm,” both Bowery tales of urban poverty and despair. London’s “To Build a Fire” illustrates the hostility of nature, life as a struggle for survival, and “The Law of Life” reveals the tragic acceptance of death. In “The Lynching of Jube Benson,” Paul Lawrence Dunbar, an important early African-American writer, and John M. Oskison, who wrote from a Native American perspective, both present Naturalistic ideas functioning in minority cultures, and Dreiser’s “The Second Choice” explores the restricted options available to lower-class women of the time.

Literary Impressionism, as did Realism, had it origins in painting, although it quickly found expression in music and literature. The term was first used to describe a Parisian art exhibit in 1874, one displaying paintings by Cézanne, Degas, Pissaro, and Renoir, and which featured Claude Monet’s *Impression, Sunrise*, which gave a name to the new movement. Within three years a new art journal was founded, *The Impressionist*, which signaled public acceptance of the still controversial new methodology. Although there was no ideological or artistic homogeneity among the thirty painters originally identified with the term,
"The Men in the Storm" was first published in *Arena* magazine in 1894, part of Crane's growing body of naturalistic work about urban poverty in the Bowery, a subject that had the year before been the subject of his first novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. This story is significant for its portrayal of the desperation of the impoverished men who wait in a storm for a "charitable house" to open for the evening. It depicts not only the hopelessness of poverty but the hostility of nature as well, for the snow beats on the men with "stinging flakes" that cut "like knives and needles." The story makes clear, however, that the men themselves are not degraded creatures, for they are "strong, healthy, clear-skinned fellows." Rather, they have been reduced to abject humiliation in society, and they are left "trying to perceive where they had failed, what they had lacked, to be thus vanquished in the race." It is a profound inquiry, one that was consistent with the aims of the reformist magazine in which the story appeared, and one that has sustained critical attention for more than a century.

* * *

At about three o'clock of the February afternoon, the blizzard began to swirl great clouds of snow along the streets, sweeping it down from the roofs and up from the pavements until the faces of pedestrians tingled and burned as from a thousand needle-prickings. Those on the walks huddled their necks closely in the collars of their coats and went along stooping like a race of aged people. The drivers of vehicles hurried their horses furiously on their way. They were made more cruel by the exposure of their positions, aloft on high seats. The street cars, bound up-town, went slowly, the horses slipping and straining in the spongy brown mass that lay between the rails. The drivers, muffled to the eyes, stood erect and facing the wind, models of grim philosophy. Overhead the trains rumbled and roared, and the dark structure of the elevated railroad, stretching over the avenue, dripped little streams and drops of water upon the mud and snow beneath it.

All the clatter of the street was softened by the masses that lay upon the cobbles until, even to one who looked from a window, it became important music, a melody of life made necessary to the ear by the
dreariness of the pitiless beat and sweep of the storm. Occasionally one could see black figures of men busily shovelling the white drifts from the walks. The sounds from their labor created new recollections of rural experiences which every man manages to have in a measure. Later, the immense windows of the shops became aglow with light, throwing great beams of orange and yellow upon the pavement. They were infinitely cheerful, yet in a way they accented the force and discomfort of the storm, and gave a meaning to the pace of the people and the vehicles, scores of pedestrians and drivers, wretched with cold faces, necks and feet, speeding for scores of unknown doors and entrances, scattering to an infinite variety of shelters, to places which the imagination made warm with the familiar colors of home.

There was an absolute expression of hot dinners in the pace of the people. If one dared to speculate upon the destination of those who came trooping, he lost himself in a maze of social calculations; he might fling a handful of sand and attempt to follow the flight of each particular grain. But as to the suggestion of hot dinners, he was in firm lines of thought, for it was upon every hurrying face. It is a matter of tradition; it is from the tales of childhood. It comes forth with every storm.

However, in a certain part of a dark West-side street, there was a collection of men to whom these things were as if they were not. In this street was located a charitable house where for five cents the homeless of the city could get a bed at night and, in the morning, coffee and bread.

During the afternoon of the storm, the whirling snows acted as drivers, as men with whips, and at half-past three, the walk before the closed doors of the house was covered with wanderers of the street, waiting. For some distance on either side of the place they could be seen lurking in doorways and behind projecting parts of buildings, gathering in close bunches in an effort to get warm. A covered wagon drawn up near the curb sheltered a dozen of them. Under the stairs that led to the elevated railway station, there were six or eight, their hands stuffed deep in their pockets, their shoulders stooped, jiggling their feet. Others always could be seen coming, a strange procession, some slouching along with the characteristic hopeless gait of professional strays, some coming with hesitating steps wearing the air of men to whom this sort of thing was new.

It was an afternoon of incredible length. The snow, blowing in twisting clouds, sought out the men in their meager hiding-places and skilfully beat in among them, drenching their persons with showers of fine, stinging flakes. They crowded together, muttering, and fumbling in their pockets to get their red, inflamed wrists covered by the cloth.
Newcomers usually halted at one of the groups and addressed a question, perhaps much as a matter of form, "Is it open yet?"

Those who had been waiting inclined to take the questioner seriously and become contemptuous. "No; do yeh think we’d be standin' here?"

The gathering swelled in numbers steadily and persistently. One could always see them coming, trudging slowly through the storm.

Finally, the little snow plains in the street began to assume a leaden hue from the shadows of evening. The buildings upreared gloomily save where various windows became brilliant figures of light that made shimmers and splashes of yellow on the snow. A street lamp on the curb struggled to illuminate, but it was reduced to impotent blindness by the swift gusts of sleet crusting its panes.

In this half-darkness, the men began to come from their shelter places and mass in front of the doors of charity. They were of all types, but the nationalities were mostly American, German and Irish. Many were strong, healthy, clear-skinned fellows with that stamp of countenance which is not frequently seen upon seekers after charity. There were men of undoubted patience, industry and temperance, who in time of ill-fortune, do not habitually turn to rail at the state of society, snarling at the arrogance of the rich and bemoaning the cowardice of the poor, but who at these times are apt to wear a sudden and singular meekness, as if they saw the world's progress marching from them and were trying to perceive where they had failed, what they had lacked, to be thus vanquished in the race. Then there were others of the shifting, Bowery lodging-house element who were used to paying ten cents for a place to sleep, but who now came here because it was cheaper.

But they were all mixed in one mass so thoroughly that one could not have discerned the different elements but for the fact that the laboring men, for the most part, remained silent and impassive in the blizzard, their eyes fixed on the windows of the house, statues of patience.

The sidewalk soon became completely blocked by the bodies of the men. They pressed close to one another like sheep in a winter's gale, keeping one another warm by the heat of their bodies. The snow came down upon this compressed group of men until, directly from above, it might have appeared like a heap of snow-covered merchandise, if it were not for the fact that the crowd swayed gently with a unanimous, rhythmical motion. It was wonderful to see how the snow lay upon the heads and shoulders of these men, in little ridges an inch thick perhaps in places, the flakes steadily adding drop and drop, precisely as they fall upon the unresisting grass of the fields. The feet of the men were all wet and cold and the wish to warm them accounted for the slow, gentle,
rhythmic motion. Occasionally some man whose ears or nose tingled acutely from the cold winds would wriggle down until his head was protected by the shoulders of his companions.

There was a continuous murmuring discussion as to the probability of the doors being speedily opened. They persistently lifted their eyes toward the windows. One could hear little combats of opinion.

"There's a light in th' winder!"
"Naw; it's a reflection f'm across th' way."
"Well, didn't I see 'em lite it?"
"You did?"
"I did!"
"Well, then, that settles it!"

As the time approached when they expected to be allowed to enter, the men crowded to the doors in an unspeakable crush, jamming and wedging in a way that it seemed would crack bones. They surged heavily against the building in a powerful wave of pushing shoulders. Once a rumor flitted among all the tossing heads.

"They can't open th' doors! Th' fellers er smack up ag'in 'em."

Then a dull roar of rage came from the men on the outskirts; but all the time they strained and pushed until it appeared to be impossible for those that they cried out against to do anything but be crushed to pulp.

"Ah, git away f'm th' door!"
"Git outa that!"
"Throw 'em out!"
"Kill 'em!"
"Say, fellers, now, what th' 'ell? Give 'em a chanct t' open th' door!"

"Yeh damned pigs, give 'em a chanct t' open th' door!"

Men in the outskirts of the crowd occasionally yelled when a boot-heel of one of frantic trampling feet crushed on their freezing extremities.

"Git off me feet, yeh clumsy tarrier!"
"Say, don't stand on me feet! Walk on th' ground!"

A man near the doors suddenly shouted: "O-o-oh! Le' me out—le' me out!" And another, a man of infinite valor, once twisted his head so as to half face those who were pushing behind him. "Quit yer shovin', yeh"—and he delivered a volley of the most powerful and singular invective straight into the faces of the men behind him. It was as if he was hammering the noses of them with curses of triple brass. His face, red with rage, could be seen; upon it, an expression of sublime disregard of consequences. But nobody cared to reply to his imprecations; it was too cold. Many of them snickered and all continued to push.

In occasional pauses of the crowd's movement the men had oppor-
tunity to make jokes; usually grim things, and no doubt very uncouth. Nevertheless, they are notable—one does not expect to find the quality of humor in a heap of old clothes under a snowdrift.

The winds seemed to grow fiercer as time wore on. Some of the gusts of snow that came down on the close collection of heads cut like knives and needles, and the men huddled, and swore, not like dark assassins, but in a sort of an American fashion, grimly and desperately, it is true, but yet with a wondrous under-effect, indefinable and mystic, as if there was some kind of humor in this catastrophe, in this situation in a night of snow-laden winds.

Once, the window of the huge dry-goods shop across the street furnished material for a few moments of forgetfulness. In the brilliantly-lighted space appeared the figure of a man. He was rather stout and very well clothed. His whiskers were fashioned charmingly after those of the Prince of Wales. He stood in an attitude of magnificent reflection. He slowly stroked his moustache with a certain grandeur of manner, and looked down at the snow-encrusted mob. From below, there was denoted a supreme complacency in him. It seemed that the sight operated inversely, and enabled him to more clearly regard his own environment, delightful relatively.

One of the mob chanced to turn his head and perceive the figure in the window. "Hello, lookit 'is whiskers," he said genially.

Many of the men turned then, and a shout went up. They called to him in all strange keys. They addressed him in every manner, from familiar and cordial greetings to carefully-worded advice concerning changes in his personal appearance. The man presently fled, and the mob chuckled ferociously like ogres who had just devoured something.

They turned then to serious business. Often they addressed the stolid front of the house.

"Oh, let us in fer Gawd's sake!"
"Let us in or we'll all drop dead!"
"Say, what's th' use o' keepin' all us poor Indians out in th' cold?"
And always some one was saying, "Keep off me feet."

The crushing of the crowd grew terrific toward the last. The men, in keen pain from the blasts, began almost to fight. With the pitiless whirl of snow upon them, the battle for shelter was going to the strong. It became known that the basement door at the foot of a little steep flight of stairs was the one to be opened, and they jostled and heaved in this direction like laboring fiends. One could hear them panting and groaning in their fierce exertion.

Usually some one in the front ranks was protesting to those in the rear: "O—o—ow! Oh, say, now, fellers, let up, will yeh? Do yeh wanta kill somebody?"
A policeman arrived and went into the midst of them, scolding and berating, occasionally threatening, but using no force but that of his hands and shoulders against these men who were only struggling to get in out of the storm. His decisive tones rang out sharply: "Stop that pushin’ back there! Come, boys, don’t push! Stop that! Here, you, quit yer shovin’! Cheese that!"

When the door below was opened, a thick stream of men forced a way down the stairs, which were of an extraordinary narrowness and seemed only wide enough for one at a time. Yet they somehow went down almost three abreast. It was a difficult and painful operation. The crowd was like a turbulent water forcing itself through one tiny outlet. The men in the rear, excited by the success of the others, made frantic exertions, for it seemed that this large band would more than fill the quarters and that many would be left upon the pavements. It would be disastrous to be of the last, and accordingly men with the snow biting their faces, writhed and twisted with their might. One expected that from the tremendous pressure, the narrow passage to the basement door would be so choked and clogged with human limbs and bodies that movement would be impossible. Once indeed the crowd was forced to stop, and a cry went along that a man had been injured at the foot of the stairs. But presently the slow movement began again, and the policeman fought at the top of the flight to ease the pressure on those who were going down.

A reddish light from a window fell upon the faces of the men when they, in turn, arrived at the last three steps and were about to enter. One could then note a change of expression that had come over their features. As they thus stood upon the threshold of their hopes, they looked suddenly content and complacent. The fire had passed from their eyes and the snarl had vanished from their lips. The very force of the crowd in the rear, which had previously vexed them, was regarded from another point of view, for it now made it inevitable that they should go through the little doors into the place that was cheery and warm with light.

The tossing crowd on the sidewalk grew smaller and smaller. The snow beat with merciless persistence upon the bowed heads of those who waited. The wind drove it up from the pavements in frantic forms of winding white, and it seethed in circles about the huddled forms, passing in, one by one, three by three, out of the storm.
rob another man, damn ye!” he grated through his teeth, a look of pitiless ferocity in his accusing eyes.

Butler shrank and quivered, expecting the blow; stood, held hypnotized by the eyes of the man he had a moment before despised—a man transformed into an avenging demon. But in the deadly hush between the lift of the weapon and its fall there came a gush of faint, childish laughter and then across the range of his vision, far away and dim, he saw the sun-bright head of his baby girl, as, with the pretty, tottering run of a two-year-old, she moved across the grass of the dooryard. His hands relaxed; the fork fell to the ground; his head lowered.

“Make out y’r deed an’ mor’gage, an’ git off’n my land, an’ don’t ye never cross my line agin; if y’ do, I’ll kill ye.”

Butler backed away from the man in wild haste, and climbing into his buggy with trembling limbs drove off down the road, leaving Haskins seated dumbly on the sunny pile of sheaves, his head sunk into his hands.

THEODORE DREISER

Curious Shifts of the Poor

“Curious Shifts of the Poor” was published in Demorest’s magazine in November 1899. Dreiser later recognized the atmospheric appropriateness of the piece to the decline of George Hurstwood in Sister Carrie and worked these sketches into the final chapters of that novel. The unperturbed tone of this story contributes to the sense of poverty and misery as a sociological curiosity and controls the fierce indignation the author reserves for the final paragraphs. The poor are anonymous, almost ghostly figures who appear at the street corner and disappear into flop houses for the night. The self-appointed soldier of charity approaches his business without passion or pity, sure of his duty and of Providence, but he is as misguided as any other figure in the tale. The elegance of carriages and clubs, enthusiastic theatergoers and wealthy loungers, contrasts sharply with the vacant faces and the stupid silences of the “flotsam and jetsam of society.” However, Dreiser’s inventory of extremes is not intended to elicit pity so much as it is to expose the ignorance and error of a complacent city, proud of its progress and improvements and indifferent to its poor.
At the hour when Broadway assumes its most interesting aspect, a peculiar individual takes his stand at the corner of Twenty-sixth street. It is the hour when the theatres are just beginning to receive their patrons. Fire signs, announcing the night’s amusements, blaze on every hand. Cabs and carriages, their lamps gleaming like yellow eyes, patter by. Couples and parties of three and four are freely mingled in the common crowd which passes by in a thick stream, laughing and jesting. On Fifth avenue are loungers, a few wealthy strollers, a gentleman in evening dress with a lady at his side, some clubmen, passing from one smoking room to another. Across the way the great hotels, the Hoffman House and the Fifth Avenue, show a hundred gleaming windows, their cafés and billiard rooms filled with a pleasure-loving throng. All about, the night has a feeling of pleasure and exhilaration, the curious enthusiasm of a great city, bent upon finding joy in a thousand different ways.

In the midst of this lightsome atmosphere a short, stocky-built soldier, in a great cape-overcoat and soft felt hat, takes his stand at the corner. For a while he is alone, gazing like any idler upon an ever-fascinating scene. A policeman passes, saluting him as Captain, in a friendly way. An urchin, who has seen him there before, stops and gazes. To all others he is nothing out of the ordinary save in dress, a stranger, whistling for his own amusement.

As the first half hour wanes, certain characters appear. Here and there in the passing crowd one may see now and then a loiterer, edging interestingly near. A slouchy figure crosses the opposite corner and glances furtively in his direction. Another comes down Fifth avenue to the corner of Twenty-sixth street, takes a general survey and hobbles off again. Two or three noticeable Bowery types edge along the Fifth avenue side of Madison Square, but do not venture over. The soldier in his cape-overcoat walks a line of ten feet at his corner, to and fro, whistling.

As nine o’clock approaches, some of the hubbub of the earlier hour passes. On Broadway the crowd is neither so thick nor so gay. There are fewer cabs passing. The atmosphere of the hotels is not so youthful. The air, too, is colder. On every hand move curious figures, watchers and peepers without an imaginary circle, which they are afraid to enter—dozens in all. Presently, with the arrival of a keener sense of cold, one figure comes forward. It crosses Broadway from out the shadow of Twenty-sixth street, and, in a halting, circuitous way, arrives close to the waiting figure. There is something shamefaced, a diffident air about the movement, as if the intention were to conceal any idea of stopping until the very last moment. Then, suddenly, close to the soldier comes the
halt. The Captain looks in recognition, but there is no especial greeting. The newcomer nods slightly, and murmurs something, like one who waits for gifts. The other simply motions toward the edge of the walk.

"Stand over there."

The spell is broken. Even while the soldier resumes his short, solemn walk, other figures shuffle forward. They do not so much as greet the leader, but join the one, shuffling and hitching and scraping their feet.

"Cold, isn’t it?"

"I don’t like winter."

"Looks as though it might snow."

The motley company has increased to ten. One or two know each other and converse. Others stand off a few feet, not wishing to be in the crowd, and yet not counted out. They are peevish, crusty, silent, eying nothing in particular, and moving their feet. The soldier, counting sufficient to begin, comes forward.

"Beds, eh, all of you?"

There is a general shuffle and murmur of approval.

"Well, line up here. I’ll see what I can do. I haven’t a cent myself."

They fall into a sort of broken, ragged line. One sees now some of the chief characteristics by contrast. There is a wooden leg in the line. Hats are all drooping, a collection that would ill become a second-hand Hester street basement collection. Trousers are all warped and frayed at the bottom, and coats worn and faded. In the glare of the street lights, some of the faces look dry and chalky. Others are red with blotches, and puffed in the cheeks and under the eyes. One or two are raw-boned and remind one of railroad hands. A few spectators come near, drawn by the seemingly conferring group, then more and more, and quickly there is a pushing, gaping crowd. Someone in the line begins to talk.

"Silence!” exclaims the Captain. "Now, then, gentlemen, these men are without beds. They have got to have some place to sleep to-night. They can’t lie out in the street. I need twelve cents to put one to bed. Who will give it to me?"

No reply.

"Well, we’ll have to wait here, boys, until someone does. Twelve cents isn’t so very much for one man.”

"Here is fifteen,” exclaims a young man, who is peering forward with strained eyes. "It’s all I can afford.”

"All right; now I have fifteen. Step out of the line,” and seizing the one at the end of the line nearest him by the shoulder, the Captain marches him off a little way and stands him up alone.

Coming back, he resumes his place before the little line and begins again.

"I have three cents here. These men must be put to bed somehow.
There are,” counting, “one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve men. Nine cents more will put the next man to bed, give him a good, comfortable bed for the night. I go right along and look after that myself. Who will give me nine cents?”

One of the watchers, this time a middle-aged man, hands in a five-cent piece.

“Good. Now I have eight cents. Four more will give this man a bed. Come, gentlemen, we are going very slow this evening. You all have good beds. How about these?”

“Here you are,” remarked a bystander, putting a coin into his hand.

“That,” says the Captain, looking at the coin, “pays for two beds for two men and leaves five for the next one. Who will give seven cents more?”

On the one hand the little line of those whose beds are secure is growing, but on the other the bedless waxes long. Silently the queer drift of poverty washes in, and they take their places at the foot of the line unnoticed. Ever and anon the Captain counts and announces the number remaining. Its growth neither dismays nor interests him. He does not even speak of it. His concern is wholly over the next man, and the securing of twelve cents. Strangers, gazing out of mere curiosity, find their sympathies enlisted, and pay into the hands of the Captain dimes and quarters, as he states in a short, brusque, unaffected way, the predicament of the men.

In the line of men whose beds are secure, a relaxed air is apparent. The strain of uncertainty being removed, there is moderate good feeling, and some leaning toward sociability. Those nearest one another begin to talk. Politics, religion, the state of the government, some newspaper sensations, and the more notorious facts of the world find mouth-pieces and auditors here. Vague and rambling are the discussions. Cracked and husky voices pronounce forcibly on odd things. There are squints and leers and dull ox-like stares from those who are too dull or too weary to converse.

Standing tells. In the course of time the earliest arrivals become weary and uneasy. There is a constant shifting from one foot to the other, a leaning out and looking back to see how many more must be provided for before the company can march away. Comments are made and crude wishes for the urging forward of things.

“Huh! There’s a lot back there yet.”

“Yes, must be over a hundred to-night.”

“Look at the guy in the cab.”

“Captain’s a great fellow, ain’t he?”

A cab has stopped. Some gentleman in evening dress reaches out a bill to the Captain, who takes it with simple thanks, and turns away to
his line. There is a general craning of necks as the jewel in the broad white shirt-front sparkles and the cab moves off. Even the crowd gapes in awe.

"That fixes up nine men for the night," says the Captain, counting out as many of the line near him. "Line up over there. Now, then, there are only seven. I need twelve cents."

Money comes slow. In the course of time the crowd thins out to a meagre handful. Fifth avenue, save for an occasional cab or foot-passenger, is bare. Broadway is thinly peopled with pedestrians. Only now and then a stranger passing notices the small group, hands out a coin and goes away, unheeding.

The Captain is stolid and determined. He talks on, very slowly, uttering the fewest words, and with a certain assurance, as though he could not fail.

"Come, I can’t stay out here all night. These men are getting tired and cold. Someone give me four cents."

There comes a time when he says nothing at all. Money is handed him, and for each twelve cents he singles out a man and puts him in the other line. Then he walks up and down as before, looking at the ground.

The theatres let out. Fire signs disappear. A clock strikes eleven. Another half hour, and he is down to the last two men.

A lady in opera cape and rustling silk skirt comes down Fifth avenue, supported by her escort. The latter glances at the line and comes over. There is a bill in his fingers.

"Here you are," he says.

"Thanks," says the Captain. "Now we have some for to-morrow night."

The last two are lined up. The soldier walks along, studying his line and counting.

"One hundred and thirty-seven," he exclaims, when he reaches the head.

"Now, boys, line up there. Steady now, we’ll be off in a minute."

He places himself at the head and calls out, "Forward, march!" and away they go.

Across Fifth avenue, through Madison Square, by the winding path, east on Twenty-third street, and down Third avenue trudges the long, serpentine company.

Below Tenth street is a lodging house, and here the queer, ragamuffin line brings up, while the Captain enters in to arrange. In a few minutes the deal is consummated, and the line marches slowly in, each being provided with a key as the Captain looks on. When the last one has disappeared up the dingy stairway, he comes out, muffles his great coat
closer in the cold air, pulls down his slouch brim, and tramps, a solitary, silent figure, into the night.

Such is the Captain’s idea of his duty to his fellow man. He is a strange man, with a strange bias. Utter confidence in Providence, perfectly sure that he deals direct with God, he takes this means of fulfilling his own destiny.

Outside the door of what was once a row of red brick family dwellings, in Fifteenth street, but what is now a mission or convent house of the Sisters of Mercy, hangs a plain wooden contribution box, on which is painted the statement that every noon a meal is given free to all those who apply and ask for aid. This simple announcement is modest in the extreme, covering, as it does, a charity so broad. Unless one were looking up this matter in particular, he could stand at Sixth avenue and Fifteenth street for days, around the noon hour, and never notice that, out of the vast crowd that surges along that busy thoroughfare, there turned out, every few seconds, some weather-beaten, heavy-footed specimen of humanity, gaunt in countenance, and dilapidated in the matter of clothes. The fact is true, however, and the colder the day the more apparent it becomes. Space and lack of culinary room compels an arrangement which permits of only twenty-five or thirty eating at one time, so that a line has to be formed outside, and an orderly entrance effected.

One such line formed on a January day last year. It was peculiarly cold. Already, at eleven in the morning, several shambled forward out of Sixth avenue, their thin clothes flapping and fluttering in the wind, and leaned up against the iron fence. One came up from the west out of Seventh avenue and stopped close to the door, nearer than all the others. Those who had been waiting before him, but farther away, now drew near, and by a certain stolidity of demeanor, no words being spoken, indicated that they were first. The newcomer looked sullenly along the line and then moved out, taking his place at the foot. When order had been restored, the animal feeling of opposition relaxed.

“Must be pretty near noon,” ventured one.
“It is,” said another; “I’ve been waitin’ nearly an hour.”
“Gee, but it’s cold.”

The line was growing rapidly. Those at the head evidently congratulated themselves upon not having long to wait. There was much jerking of heads and looking down the line.

“It don’t matter much how near you get to the front, so long as you’re in the first twenty-five. You all go in together,” commented one of the first twenty-five.
“This here Single Tax is the thing. There ain’t goin’ to be no order till it comes,” said another, discussing that broader topic.

At last the door opened and the motherly Sister looked out. Slowly the line moved up, and one by one thirty men passed in. Then she interposed a stout arm and the line halted with six men on the steps. In this position they waited. After a while one of the earliest to go in came out, and then another. Every time one came out the line moved up. And this continued until two o’clock, when the last hungry dependent crossed the threshold, and the door was closed.

It was a winter evening. Already at four o’clock, the sombre hue of night was thickening the air. A heavy snow was falling—a fine, picking, whipping snow, borne forward by a swift wind in long, thin lines. The street was bedded with it, six inches of cold, soft carpet, churned brown by the crush of teams and the feet of men. Along the Bowery, men slouched through it with collars up and hats pulled over their ears.

Before a dirty four-story building gathered a crowd of men. It began with the approach of two or three, who hung about the closed wooden doors, and beat their feet to keep them warm. They made no effort to go in, but shifted ruefully about, digging their hands deep in their pockets, and leering at the crowd and the increasing lamps. There were old men with grizzled beards and sunken eyes; men who were comparatively young, but shrunken by disease; men who were middle-aged.

With the growth of the crowd about the door came a murmur. It was not conversation, but a running comment directed at anyone in general. It contained oaths and slang phrases.

“I wisht they’d hurry up.”

“Look at the copper watchin’.”

“Maybe it ain’t winter, nuther.”

“I wisht I was with Otis.”

Now a sharper lash of wind cut down, and they huddled closer. There was no anger, no threatening words. It was all sullen endurance, unlightened by either wit or good fellowship.

A carriage went jingling by with some reclining figure in it. One of the members nearest the door saw it.

“Look at the bloke ridin’.”

“He ain’t so cold.”

“Eh! Eh! Eh!” yelled another, the carriage having long since passed out of hearing.

Little by little the night crept on. Along the walk a crowd turned out on its way home. Still the men hung around the door, unwavering.

“Ain’t they ever goin’ to open up?” queried a hoarse voice suggestively.
This seemed to renew general interest in the closed door, and many gazed in that direction. They looked at it as dumb brutes look, as dogs paw and whine and study the knob. They shifted and blinked and muttered, now a curse, now a comment. Still they waited, and still the snow whirled and cut them.

A glimmer appeared through the transom overhead, where someone was lighting the gas. It sent a thrill of possibility through the watcher. On the old hats and peaked shoulders snow was piling. It gathered in little heaps and curves, and no one brushed it off. In the center of the crowd the warmth and steam melted it, and water trickled off hat-rims and down noses which the owners could not reach to scratch. On the outer rim the piles remained unmelted. Those who could not get in the center lowered their heads to the weather and bent their forms.

At last the bars grated inside and the crowd pricked up its ears. There was someone who called, “Slow up there now!” and then the door opened. It was push and jam for a minute, with grim, beast silence to prove its quality, and then the crowd lessened. It melted inward like logs floating, and disappeared. There were wet hats and shoulders, a cold, shrunken, disgruntled mass, pouring in between bleak walls. It was just six o’clock, and there was supper in every hurrying pedestrian’s face.

“Do you sell anything to eat here?” questioned one of the grizzled old carpet-slippers who opened the door.

“No; nothin’ but beds.”

The waiting throng had been housed.

For nearly a quarter of a century Fleischman, the caterer, has given a loaf of bread to anyone who will come for it to the rear door of his restaurant, on the corner of Broadway and Ninth street, at midnight. Every night, during twenty-three years, about three hundred men have formed in line, and, at the appointed time, marched past the doorway, picked their loaf from a great box placed just outside, and vanished again into the night. From the beginning to the present time there has been little change in the character or number of these men. There are two or three figures that have grown familiar to those who have seen this little procession pass year after year. Two of them have missed scarcely a night in fifteen years. There are about forty, more or less, regular callers. The remainder of the line is formed of strangers every night.

The line is not allowed to form before eleven o’clock. At this hour, perhaps a single figure shambles around the corner and halts on the edge of the sidewalk. Other figures appear and fall in behind. They come almost entirely one at a time. Haste is seldom manifest in their ap-
proach. Figures appear from every direction, limping slowly, slouching stupidly, or standing with assumed or real indifference, until the end of the line is reached, when they take their places and wait.

Most of those in the line are over thirty. There is seldom one under twenty. A low murmur of conversation is heard, but for the most part the men stand in stupid, unbroken silence. Here and there are two or three talkative ones, and if you pass close enough you will hear every topic of the times discussed or referred to, except those which are supposed to interest the poor. Wretchedness, poverty, hunger and distress are never mentioned. The possibilities of a match between prize-ring favorites, the day's evidence in the latest murder trial, the chance of war in Africa, the latest improvements in automobiles, the prosperity or depression of some other portion of the world, or the mistakes of the Government, from Washington to the campaign in Manila. These, or others like them, are the topics of whatever conversation is held. It is for the most part a rambling, disconnected conversation.

"Wait until Dreyfus gets out of prison," said one to his little black-eyed neighbor one night, "and you'll see them guys fallin' on his neck."

"Maybe they will and maybe they won't," the other muttered. "You needn't think, just because you see dagoes selling violets on Broadway, that the spring is here."

The passing of a Broadway car awakens a vague idea of progress, and some one remarks: "They'll have them things running by liquid air before we know it."

"I've driv mule cars by here myself," replies another.

A few moments before twelve a great box of bread is pushed outside the door, and exactly on the hour a portly round-faced German takes his position by it, and calls "Ready." The whole line at once, like a well-drilled company of regulars, moves swiftly, in good marching time, diagonally across the sidewalk to the inner edge and pushes, with only the noise of tramping feet, past the box. Each man reaches for a loaf, and, breaking line, wanders off by himself. Most of them do not even glance at their bread, but put it indifferently under their coats or in their pockets.

In the great sea of men here are these little eddies of driftwood, a hundred nightly in Madison Square, 300 outside a bakery at midnight, crowds without the lodging-houses in stormy weather, and all this day after day. These are the poor in body and in spirit. The lack of houses and lands and fine clothing is nothing. Many have these and are equally wretched. The cause of misery lies elsewhere. The attitude of pity which the world thinks proper to hold toward poverty is misplaced—a result of the failure to see and to realize. Poverty of worldly goods is not in
itself pitiful. A sickly body, an ignorant mind, a narrow spirit, brutal impulses and perverted appetites are the pitiful things. The adding of material riches to one thus afflicted would not remove him from out the pitiful. On the other hand, there are so-called poor people in every community among its ornaments. There is no pity for them, but rather love and honor. They are rich in wisdom and influence.

The individuals composing this driftwood are no more miserable than others. Most of them would be far more uncomfortable if compelled to lead respectable lives. They cannot be benefited by money. There may be a class of poor for whom a little money judiciously expended would result in good, but these are the lifeless flotsam and jetsam of society without vitality to ever revive. Few among them would survive a month if they should come suddenly into the possession of a fortune.

Their parade before us should not appeal to our pity, but should awaken us to what we are—for society is no better than its poorest type. They expose what is present, though better concealed, everywhere. They are the few skeletons of the sunlight—types of these with which society’s closets are full. Civilization, in spite of its rapid progress, is still in profound ignorance of the things essential to a healthy, happy and prosperous life. Ignorance and error are everywhere manifest in the miseries and sufferings of men. Wealth may create an illusion, or modify a ghastly appearance of ignorance and error, but it cannot change the effect. The result is as real in the mansions of Fifth avenue as in the midnight throng outside a baker’s door.

The livid-faced dyspeptic who rides from his club to his apartments and pauses on the way to hand his dollar to the Captain should awaken the same pity as the shivering applicant for a free bed whom his dollar aids—pity for the ignorance and error that cause the distress of the world.

JACK LONDON

The Law of Life

“The Law of Life” was published in McClure’s Magazine in March 1901 and was later included in the collection Children of the Frost (1902). London’s Darwinian premises for this tale are explicit: “Nature was not kindly to the flesh. She had no concern for that concrete thing called the individual. Her interest lay in the species, the race.” The task of life